

Archival News 2012

As one door closes another one opens, sometimes with surprising results. This year has been one of searches, coincidences, detection, red herrings and odd requests. Of the thirty enquiries dealt with between January and September, only a few of the most interesting or curious are recorded below.

Cllr. Allen Wales and Mr. Ken Crouch are continuing to collate the names and details of Frodsham's fallen in two world wars from the various War Memorials in Frodsham and their on-going research will be added to the archives. Last year's enquiries regarding the two World Wars, struck chords in many people's memories both sad and humorous.

More stories emerged of wartime experiences, about Italian POWs (+3 photographs) who worked on Peel Hall Farm, Worrall's Farm and on the marshes; of Irish land-girls billeted in the half built Helsby High School, and of the disgraced British soldiers being marched through Frodsham to the Drill Hall. All snippets of information now recorded.

A copy of a letter sent home by a serving Frodsham soldier to his family in 1944/5, during a brief moment of rest, vividly recounts his Division's push through Belgium, the liberation of villages and towns and their next advance to Berlin.

Mrs. Draper of St Helens donated a suitcase full of Frodsham press-cuttings, photograph albums, a photo copy of a German Bomber's aerial map of Runcorn detailing areas to avoid bombing (ICI) and the WW2 Army Service records of a family member from his draft in 1939 to his demob in 1945. The final document is his letter of application for a gardener's job in Castle Park.

Keith and Mary Helsby donated the war time record of Keith's father and a copy of his certificate 'With Pride' awarded to 'Leslie Helsby'. Several other local wartime documents and Christmas cards have been given to the archive, adding to a growing file.

Dr. Allan Richardson of Rainhill Historical Society got in touch regarding a letter he had received from Yvonne Stephens (nee Aston) in Australia. It recalls his visit there eight years ago when he had conversed with her brother about Frodsham. Yvonne included a photograph of King George V's visit to Frodsham in 1925 showing her ancestor, John George Aston, the 'Mayor' of Frodsham.

Beryl Wainwright and I met Allan and were able to identify J. G. Aston as Clerk to the Council, rather than Mayor. Through emails, Yvonne asked for further family information which I was able to find, including when a John Aston was the licensee of the Bull's Head from 1871 to 1877.

From her letter it seemed that the 'family' home might have been a Dunham Hall and Google Earth showed that the house was just a short distance from The Wheatsheaf hostelry in Dunham Hill. I found it empty, built in 1676 and now part of a farm. The present owner had no record of the Astons in his family papers, so maybe the Astons had been servants.

Photographs of the Hall, St Laurence Church and the Bull's Head were emailed to Australia to add to Yvonne's records. She and her brother intended to visit Wales and Cheshire later in the year. So ended a long 'detective' enquiry but curiously, Dr Richardson remained adamant that he had *never* met Yvonne's brother in Australia!

Philip Jenkins of Devon made contact seeking details of family graves and especially their memorial inscriptions in St. Laurence's church yard. The Library had all the information I required on microfiche but I was defeated by weather and long grass when trying to find the last two graves to trace 'missing' children. Once again, long emails were exchanged and

such absorbing local family history details were gathered which, coincidentally, touched on my father's family in Cheshire and Yorkshire.

After much investigation, Lance Yates had a potentially exciting theory that there might be a Titanic connection with 'Beechlands' in Howey Lane. Did the very wealthy Liverpool businessman Alfred Rowe and his wife live there before the ship and he went down? However, Sue Davy and the present owners looked into the deeds which showed that it was his elder brother's widow who had bought the house and moved to Frodsham from Liverpool in 1919.

Sometimes, enquiries can lead down wrong and amusing alleyways. Glyn Bowen of Telford wanted to know if a pewter tankard, engraved with '*The Frodsham Cup* 1892, various military insignia and the name '*Sergeant F. S. Franklin*', belonged to someone in Frodsham. I contacted the Curator of Chester's Military Museum, Major T. E. Pickering but even he was baffled.

Eventually he reported that the sergeant probably belonged to the 3rd Voluntary Battalion of the Rifle Volunteer Corps, raised in mid Cheshire in 1859, and the Cup would have been awarded as a prize for a musketry competition. All Major Pickering's detailed information was emailed to Glyn who soon replied with a

'bombshell'. He had traced Sergeant Franklin to a Bedfordshire Regiment and had discovered that The Cup had nothing to do with either Frodsham or a musketry competition, it was just someone's name and had been in the *Bedford Omnibus Society's* possession for years! So ended a puzzling but enjoyable red herring.

Ann Moncrieff, who was taking a course at Oxford University's Continuing Education Department, enquired if there was any evidence of Viking settlement in the Frodsham area and if any artefacts had been found. Relevant pages from Dr. Dodd's "*A History of Frodsham and Helsby*"

were scanned and emailed to her, plus contact names and numbers of Chester Record Office, the Grosvenor Museum and the archaeologist Dan Garner, which proved helpful. At the last moment before her course work had to be handed in, Alex Cowan of Runcorn Historical Society was able to send her evidence of an artefact found near the Runcorn Bridge and with her last excited email, Ann promised a copy of her work for the archives.

In 2005 Castle Park House was closed and all the formal photographs of past Chair Persons of Runcorn Rural District Council, (of which Frodsham was a part) which had graced the staircase, were donated to the History Society. However, as we had no storage facilities, they were sent to Northwich Salt Mine as recorded in the History Society's February minutes of 2005.

In 2012 I began a frustrating search to check on them. My emailed enquiry was kindly passed from pillar to post until they were finally located, not in a salt mine but in an unlit Vale Royal lock-up garage in Hartford, amongst old chairs, broken furniture, boxes of papers and rubbish and returned to Castle Park House.

The 1932 plaque donating the estate from the Abbott Wright grandchildren to 'Runcorn Rural District and the Parish of Frodsham' has been cleaned and mounted on the wall as you enter Castle Park House. All 55 large formal photographs from 1894 onwards are now stored in the basement ready to be shown again if needed.

A New Zealand lady made contact about the records of the Children's Home where her brother had lived for some years. I passed this on to Clare Hayes who was able to help with information.

A rather ghoulish enquiry was made by a gentleman wanting the 'history' of the mortuary in Kingswood (Crossley Hospital) which is now his home, but I was unable to help this time!

Archive material is proving useful to Mrs. Susan Lorimer of Helsby, who is researching prominent families in Helsby in the 18th and 19th centuries including the Haspell, Lewis, Burgess and Brandreth families and their links to Methodism in Helsby. I hope to report more on this detailed research next year.

I have gathered a collection of newspaper cuttings, photographs and local magazines celebrating the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympics of 2012. Several Frodsham people have participated including Mr. Joe Beswick, who had the honour to carry an Olympic Torch.

Gary Barlow OBE gathered children of the Commonwealth to sing for the Queen and also organised the Diamond Jubilee Concert outside Buckingham Palace. Daniel Craig, as James Bond, escorted the Queen in the Olympic Opening Ceremony in the helicopter adventure. He lived in the Ring o' Bells, Overton, for several years.

Dale Jennins, an architect involved in the design of the Olympic Stadium, was invited to join the Guard of Honour for the entry of Sir Steve Redgrave into the Arena at the Closing Ceremony. Catherine Prisk spent three hard months rehearsing as a volunteer drummer in the Opening Ceremony whilst continuing to work at the same time.

Kate Birkenhead, a cheerful Games Maker, said that those two weeks of looking after so many different people were the best of her life. In the Closing Ceremony Gary Barlow and *'TakeThat'* had the honour of performing the final song prior to the cauldron being extinguished. Congratulations to all of them!

Visitors have spent a good deal of time in the archive room and Alex Cowan, Runcorn Historical Society's archivist and I have exchanged visits which proved interesting and useful. Arthur Smith has very kindly donated many interesting and wide ranging documents, books and cuttings to the

archives. He also borrowed documents referring to St. Laurence Church for their History Weekend in September.

The CD of the 1938 cine films of the repairs to Frodsham viaduct has arrived from the North West Film Archive Manchester at last, but is short, only 4 minutes, and of disappointing quality. However, the film is an important addition to Frodsham's history.

Castle Park Arts Centre borrowed and exhibited over 80 photographs of the Estate and staff, taken in 1891, which are beautiful copies from the Abbott Wright family's own collection now held in the archives. As always, this was a very popular exhibition.

Thank you to everyone who has passed on information, donated books, memory voice tapes and documents this year, especially Mrs. Dorothy Smith, Mr. Nick Smith, Mrs. Jackie Bowe of Castle Park House, the ladies of Frodsham Library, Kim and Heidi of Castle Park Arts Centre and Mrs. Anne Pitt of the Town Council, who have contacted me about enquiries and been so helpful.

Paper copies of the full archive lists are available *in bright pink hard back files* in Frodsham Library and in Castle Park House Reception where you can peruse them at your leisure. CDs of the Archive Lists and Dr. Dodd's slides of Frodsham 1960 to 1980 are in the lower ground floor and also in Frodsham Library for viewing on their computers.

To bring you up to date, there are 189 books, 529 documents/files, 41 maps, 15 posters, slides, acquisitions, paintings, journals from 1986 to 2011 and Frodsham High School's closing exhibition showing 1940 to 2009 stored in Castle Park House. If you should wish to visit the archive room please contact me on using the "Contact" page on this website.