

Archival News 2017

This has been another busy year for the archive service with increasing numbers of interesting, tantalising and unexpected enquiries and donations, too many to list in this report.

Every so often serendipity plays its part.

An interesting press cutting was donated recording the sale of a tea caddy made in 1760 by George Cooper, woodworker, from the mulberry tree which grew in Shakespeare's garden and cut down by the Reverend Francis Gastrell of Frodsham.

Recently, there was a television repeat of 'Time Team's' excavation of Shakespeare's house 'New Place' in Stratford upon Avon. Inevitably, Francis Gastrell's part in the story was enthusiastically re-told by Tony Robinson, and soon I was about to have something of a surprise.

In 1971 the deeds of our land and Victorian house in Fluin Lane, were deposited in the Midland Bank. Forty-seven years later, when HSBC, as it became, closed its doors we had to retrieve everything and looked at the contents of the box more closely.

The earliest deed revealed that on October 3rd 1768, The Reverend Frances Gastrell of the Lordship of Frodsham, along with Corbett Costard of Frodsham, Gentleman, and Robert Wainwright Ashley of Frodsham, Gentleman, sold our land together with its cottage, garden and small croft in the Short Furlong in the Town Field of Frodsham, to John Jones, Yeoman of Bellair, Kingsley, for the sum of sixty one pounds and nineteen shillings. The property was to be rented and occupied by William Eaton farmer, and John Jones was responsible for the collection of the rent of seven shillings and eight pence per year to King George III. The beautifully hand written deed is signed and sealed by the Reverend Francis Gastrell, Costard and Ashley.

Francis Gastrell, the wealthy Vicar and Clerk of St Laurence Parish Church, married to Jane, daughter of Sir Thomas Aston, Bart. in Aston Chapel 1752, is remembered for buying Shakespeare's house, 'New Place' in Stratford upon Avon and out of spite, cutting down Shakespeare's tree in 1756. Later he demolished New Place itself, thwarting the town's authorities over non-payment of taxes, and the annoying 'tourists'. He made a very hasty retreat from Stratford as a result. Francis died on 5th April, 1772 and Jane on 30th October, 1791. Both are buried in Frodsham. This brief account is recorded fully in the National Archives and Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust's Archives.

Whilst original deeds are on my mind -

The Town Council is in the midst of moving from Castle Park House to other premises and has taken the opportunity to sift through volumes of past papers, maps and reports recording Frodsham's changing face over many years. In view of this, I was asked if the archives would accept some of them into its safe keeping.

Many of these papers are gems of information about pathways, fields, trees, land ownership, rights of way, the marshes, the ship canal, official reports into buildings, and maps covering Frodsham, Helsby, Ince and Elton.

The original deeds, referring to lands given to the Parish Council to establish the Memorial Field, the War Memorial commemorating the Fallen of WW1 (and WW2) and the approach walk on Overton Hill, were given by leading members of the public by 1924 and are most interesting. Every aspect of the area's development is recorded with its agreements and controversies - fascinating records.

The Archive's collection of donated photographs / slides grows steadily with superb black and white views of the Runcorn / Widnes Transporter Bridge, the Weaver Navigation, River Weaver boats, old Frodsham and the Helter Skelter in the process of being demolished. Photographs of the various Archive and WW1 Exhibitions, including the construction of the Somme Commemoration Poppy Cascade mounted in the Health Centre last year, are all on the Archive website's 'Photo Collections' for you to browse.

Having watched the new bridge being built over the River Mersey it was interesting to listen to Councillor Liam Jones who has been working on the construction as a CAD engineer apprentice. I was able to add his written experiences to the file which also contains original accounts by men who worked on the Viaduct repairs in 1938, and the construction of the M56 J11-14 opened in 1971.

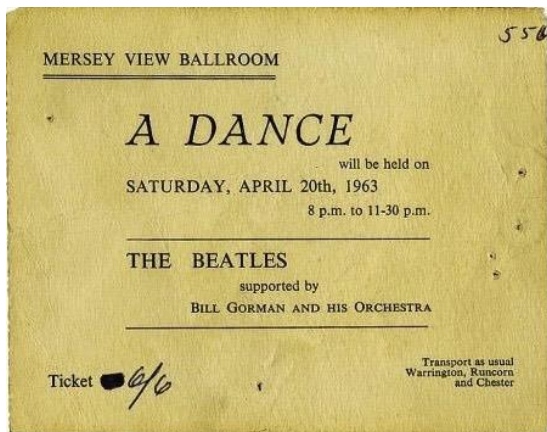
The usefulness of our large archives was made very clear when I was able to provide material for three very interesting projects which, when completed, their reports will be an invaluable addition to the archives. Many years ago, Mrs Dorothy Smith began gathering information about the history of Frodsham shops and their owners and passed this information to Sue Lorimer who began to research further afield. From the archives, I gathered 37 files, our "Old Frodsham" photographic books, and other sources for Sue, who spent time in the archive room extracting useful information for the Frodsham Shops Project - reported elsewhere in the Journal.

Peter Vickery was able to draw information from 29 files to begin a history of Castle Park Arts Centre - a mammoth task. Frodsham and District Local History Group (now Society) was a very active founder member in 1981, regularly donating sums of money from plants, books and pamphlet sales in support of the Arts Centre. Our own minutes make interesting reading as plans progressed and developed between the fledgling committee and the new Arts Centre. Arthur Smith, who was very involved in the Centre's inception, is also collating his memories and documents. The Society remained there for over thirty years until moving to 'The Iron Church' in Main Street - the end of an era

Ian Lancaster borrowed Frodsham Players superb collection of production programmes, photograph albums and news paper articles. This archive is truly a social history from 1942 onwards and Ian is writing a 75th celebratory history of the company. His report is in this Journal.

Dafydd Rees, a visiting Welsh American, from Cape Cod, Massachusetts, emailed to say he was researching 'The Beatles' appearance at Mersey View in 1963, to complete a history of the group. After several emails and telephone calls, Dafydd met Gillian (Jill) Fell who had much to tell. Finally he met John Lawless, of Lawless Bakery, (whose family once owned Mersey View) and who was at that 1963 concert and so Dafydd had his full story. A copy of the Concert ticket is below. A lengthy but worth while detective story was completed.

It was interesting to learn that Dafydd's father was born in Bangor and his grandfather was the Principal of Bala Bangor Theological College in Bangor.



Billy Price of Ashville, Alabama, asked for information about his Frodsham Whitley ancestors. From the archive's Parish Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths, I noted entries from 1534 to the middle 1600s. From 'Ancestry' Heather Powling found that the family emigrated to the Isle of Wight in Virginia c1628. There was also a hint of a more interesting life story if it could be proved with more research. At one time a George Whitley lived at Norley Hall and according to Sue Lorimer, his family is buried in Alvanley graveyard - maybe of the same family? Heather and I are hoping for more information from Billy eventually.

Two satisfied Americans!

Gavin McGrath requested information about Victoria Hall in Chapel Lane, which now houses Kingsley Carpets. In very short space of time from various sources, I was able to piece together the following information.

The first Methodists in Frodsham worshipped in a barn in Church Street but in the early 1800s they built a chapel in what became known as Chapel Lane - later Fluin Lane, and the house standing close to the chapel was the minister's home. The chapel was used until 1873 when the new Trinity Methodist Church was built on High Street and Victoria Hall was converted into a silent cinema. On the 12th March, 1919 there was an advert in a local unidentifiable paper -

'Wanted. First class Cinema Pianist to open March 24. Apply, Miss R. Baker, Manageress, Cinema, Frodsham, near Warrington.'

It remained popular until the Grand Cinema was built in Church Street in 1923 with its newfangled 'Talkies'. The stage remained in Victoria Hall but for other purposes.

From then on, the Hall became Edgar Brereton's 'Fruit, Vegetables and Coal' depot, followed by Jeff Williams, a dairy milk man, and then sold to Rigby's Dairy business which remained there for a long time. Finally it became Kingsley Carpet and Curtain Shop and remains so until the present.

Gillian (Jill) Fell had seen an unknown photograph of her father, Gerald Abrams, in our 'Frodsham and Helsby' old photographs book and asked if she could obtain a personal copy. She had already searched through the Cheshire Image Bank website, our Archive website and contacted Chester Record Office without success. Eventually, Linda Clarke of Chester Record Office asked if I could help Gillian! Finally, I contacted two of the editors of the book, Norma Duncan and Arthur Smith, who suggested the possible donor in 1995 might have been retired teacher, Bill Bibby - and it was. Gillian telephoned Bill, who had once taught her at Frodsham High School, and was given his original photograph to copy for her personal use. My thanks to Norma, Arthur and Bill.

I am including part of Jill's reply because of its local interest.

" Bill also jogged my memory of something that I have heard of before but forgotten all about. There is a film that Bill (Bibby) did at school called 'The Coat.' My dad is in the film and not only that but part of it was filmed in our house at Prince Way!

I also found out that a man who took my photographs when I was a baby, Cyril Valentine, worked as a basket maker with my dad at Bibby's. He had a shop in Overton when I was at the junior school. All of the people mention in this paragraph were also Bell Ringers at the church in Frodsham and George and Norah rang at the Cathedral in Lincoln. While on holiday I would go to bell practice with them and I have rung the bells there. Dad was good at it and whenever we heard bells he would always count the number of bells ringing."

Judith Shore, a long time member of the History Society but now living in Wales, has researched her family's history and other local families, for many years. She has requested that her notes and research articles be placed in our archives for safe keeping. At the time of writing, the first large parcel has just arrived and waits to be read with anticipation and then recorded.

Two enquiries concerning houses in Helsby arrived almost on the same day. With Sue Lorimer's local knowledge, she was able to give Joanna Bunting the history of Heathercliffe Care Home on Old Chester Road.

Sue and Nick Smith jointly helped Paul with fascinating information about his property and former owners of 'Hill Rough House', Alvanley Road. All this information is now in the archives.

Flower Cottage update.

John Davies, of the Flower Cottage coat discovery, recently contacted me again about a WW1 Staffordshire Regiment Army cap badge and a spent bullet he had found earlier in Flower Cottage garden. Even more interesting, he had also discovered a tiny anchor hidden in the original chimney space. He describes the size of the anchor from point to point on base as 10 cm by 9.2 cm tall and the ring is 2.7 cm in circumference. He has shown the anchor to experienced iron workers who agree that the workmanship is 'very

good'. John's theory is that it may have had string attached to the ring, thrown down to a roof thatcher who would tie the next bundle to be pulled up.

The cottage may still reveal more as time



passes.

Mr. Geoffrey Boow, one of several visitors this year spending time in the archive room, donated a short history, and photographs of his well known family from 1923 onwards, plus a family WW2 Certificate and snaps of Volunteer Street where they lived in the 1960s. Photographs of a formal group of the Frodsham Oddfellows Society in full regalia, and one of a general outdoor gathering, some officers with regalia, are particularly



My Grandfather Samuel Smith is standing back left, guessing this would be the Frodsham Oddfellows Society.

interesting additions. I have included one photograph below. My thanks to Geoffrey.

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Finally, I thought that the following news article from an unknown newspaper c.1860s, would be a delightful end to my report. My grateful thanks to the 'Frodsham Memories' website for this addition to the archives. NB.The Viaduct was completed by 1850.

Temperance Demonstration at Frodsham.

"On Monday last, there was a great gathering of the friends of Temperance at Frodsham, from Liverpool, Manchester, Birkenhead and other neighbouring places. The day was most propitious. Several juvenile bands ascended the celebrated Overton Hills from whence they enjoyed one of the most magnificent and extensive views that can be commanded in any part of England, embracing the Rivers Mersey and Weaver, the splendid viaduct, bridges, and tunnel at Frodsham, the Welsh Mountains, Halton Castle, and Aston Hall, and numerous objects in many counties in Cheshire and Lancashire. The site chosen for the day was on the side of the hill towards Delamere Forest, in a field engaged for the purpose

of holding forth the principles of Temperance and enjoyment. Some 2,000 persons must have been present, and were addressed by some of the leading speakers on temperance. Sports of various kinds were carried on during the day. There was no lack of the good creatures which exhilarate and do not inebriate as numerous parties from the neighbourhood came with ample supplies. We cannot but think that those who availed themselves of this trip into one of the healthiest parts of Cheshire, were delighted and physically improved."



Contents of the Archives held in Castle Park House - September 2017

214 Books 655 Document files (each file may contain one A4 sheet or up to 100)
60 + Maps 15 Posters. 2,000+ slides /images Artefacts 135 Journals 1986 - 2016

Should you wish to visit the archive room please let me know, you would be very welcome. Pink hard-back Archive Files are available in Frodsham Public Library and at Reception in Castle Park House.

My thanks to Mrs Dorothy Smith, Nick Smith and Simon Longden for sharing their local knowledge and time. Also to Mrs Hazel Catt and Mrs. Jaque Bowe of Castle Park House who have passed on enquiries and promoted the Archives to visitors.

My very special thanks to Steve McEntee who has solved niggling website problems for me!

Kath Hewitt.

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The Archive Website - frodhistoryarchives.co.uk