

ASHLEY HOUSE AND THE ESTATE OF ISABELLA FRANCES ASHLEY 1845 – 1924

Various Contributors

Isn't the internet wonderful? You can now sit in front of a computer in relative comfort and delve into history. With the help of census returns, birth, marriage and death records and newspapers online, the mysteries that have been elusive for generations can be unraveled. For example 'Ashley House' was thought to have been built by the attorney, Robert Wainwright Ashley, son of Daniel of Park Place. Records now show that this Robert Wainwright was an attorney, but he died in 1786, before Ashley House was built. He inherited Park Place from his father and continued to live there. Park Place passed to Robert's son Daniel, 1769-1841, and as he had no issue, to Daniel's brother, Rev Thomas Ashley 1771-1851, Rector of West Shefford, Berkshire. So why was Ashley house so named?

Thanks to information available online and from local sources, we have been able to piece together something of the real story of Ashley House and its inhabitants.

The 'Ashley' of Ashley House comes, albeit by a complicated route, from another branch of the family, from Robert's brother, Francis 1752-1819, also a solicitor, with a practice in Frodsham. Francis and his wife Margaret had 10 children. Their unmarried daughters, Mary b.1786, Margaret b.1789 and Elizabeth b.1795, appear in the 1841 census for West Derby, Liverpool and Mary and Margaret died in the Liverpool area in 1847 and 1852 respectively. Another single daughter, Frances b.1791, died in Wavertree in 1845. Elizabeth died in Frodsham in 1871. Sons Francis b.1793, Thomas b.1797, Robert Wainwright b.1800 and William b.1805 also lived in Liverpool, where they were merchants and shipbrokers. Only their eldest son, Daniel b.1788, remained in Frodsham and continued the family firm of solicitors. In 1841 Ellen, the youngest daughter b.1803, married one of the wealthiest men in Frodsham, John Rigby Pickering, corn merchant of Frodsham Bridge (see last year's journal). It is thought that in 1845-46 they built a grand new house in Main Street (Ashley House) and moved there from the Mill House at Frodsham Bridge.

The new Cheshire Tithe Maps online website enables the user to see who owned an individual plot of land circa 1846 at the click of a mouse. However it is not totally accurate and the original Tithe Maps always need to be consulted. Ashley House stands on what was Tithe plot 200, owned and occupied by John Rigby Pickering. The 1841 census shows that Daniel Ashley, solicitor, was living in the same part of Main Street. The Land Tax Assessments for 1823 and 1825 show that Daniel Ashley Junior did own a house and land but do not specify where. At that time he was married to his first wife, Mary, nee Urmson. Mary died in 1827. Their children both died aged 18: Sarah in Everton in 1839 and George in Torquay in 1842.

In 1843, Daniel married Isabella Caddy, daughter of Henry Caddy of Egremont, Cumbria and granddaughter of Captain Joseph Borrowdale who lived at what is now 77 Main Street. They moved next door to Joseph Borrowdale, to what we now know as The Old Hall. It is doubtful that Daniel left the grandeur of Ashley House to buy a smaller, older house so it is thought that John Rigby Pickering bought Daniel's old house, demolished it and erected his new home on the plot.

The 1851 census shows John Rigby Pickering on Main Street and he remains there until his death in 1880. At the time of the 1861 census Ellen's siblings, Elizabeth and Robert, were living with them, but Robert was only visiting as he had returned to Liverpool by the 1871 census. He died in Liverpool in 1878 but was buried in Frodsham. John and Ellen did not have children so in his will of 1873 John left his estate to his wife for her lifetime and following her death to her nieces Mary Ellen Ashley b.1844 and Isabella Frances b.1845, the daughters of Daniel, with his second wife Isabella. Ellen Pickering died in 1885 and the estate then passed to the Misses Ashley, hence the name 'Ashley House'.



FDN0245 Ashley House (left) c.1850

Mary Ellen Ashley died in 1899. In her will, made in 1879 when she was living at Five Crosses, she left her estate to her sister Isabella. On the 1881 census, Mary Ellen lived with her mother Isabella (Caddy) Ashley at Oaken Dale, Overton. This was also known as 'Oak in the Dale' and was where Oakdale Avenue is now. Isabella continued to live at Ashley House until her death in September 1924.

Now that banks and building societies are returning house deeds, other valuable resources have become available. The deeds of one of the Brookstone Cottages on Main Street have recently come to light. The documents contained a copy of the sales brochure of 1925, for Isabella's Estate and details of John Rigby Pickering's will.

At the time of her death Isabella's property had changed little from that inherited from John Rigby Pickering. Her executors put the estate up for sale in 1925. One of the executors was Frances Cotton Perryn, wife of Richard George Henry Perryn of Trafford Hall. Frances was the daughter of Isabella's brother Henry, listed as a 14 year-old student at Chester College in 1861, but, who with another brother, Francis, had emigrated to America in 1868. Frances was therefore born at Yates Centre (Kansas), but came back to England to marry into the Perryn family, wealthy landowners with much property in Frodsham. Henry Ashley remained in Kansas until he died in 1913.

The 1925 sales brochure advertised 'Ashley House' with stabling for three horses, coach house, shippon for six cows, pig sty, workshop, greenhouse and gardens. This was bought by Edward Greenway, a veterinary surgeon with a practice at his home Prospect House, Church Street. Edward was the son of Arthur Greenway of Bowling Alley Farm, Alvanley, and had originally joined the practice of Alexander Bate of West Bank, Main Street in 1909. The 1939 register shows Edward Greenway and his wife Violet living at Ashley House with their daughter, son and Edward's sister, Eveline.

Thomas Thomson became Edward's assistant in the 1950s and in the early 1960's Edward's son, Edward Douglas (Ted), a well-known amateur rider, joined as partner. Edward Greenway died in 1962, and in 1969 Thomas Thomson bought the house and practice with his business partner Peter Vaudrey Coveney. Over the years the main house was used to accommodate on-call vets and had been split into a number of flatlets. Ashcofts bought the



veterinary business in 1985. The house became Grade II listed in December 1985. In 1999 Ashley House was put up for auction. Professor Tim Wheeler and his wife Marilyn fell in love with it and have been restoring it to its original splendour ever since, including replacing part of the banister rail lost during previous renovations’.

FDN1946 Ashley House c.1995

In addition to Ashley House, the will of John Rigby Pickering included ‘4 houses’ adjacent to his house, shown on the 1846 Tithe Map as belonging to Rev Thomas Ashley. John Rigby Pickering probably bought these houses when Rev Ashley’s estate was sold following his death in 1851. Sometime between 1873 and the sale in 1925 these 4 cottages were extended as the sale brochure refers to ‘Three attractive pebble-dashed cottages’ and ‘Three old-fashioned Cottages’. These cottages are now known as ‘Brookstone Cottages’. It is thought that the right hand cottage, number 57 Main Street, was formerly a barn. The beams in the cottages show scorch marks and holes in strange places, suggesting that they could have been taken from an earlier property, giving rise to the story that the cottages were constructed from material from the ruined Frodsham Castle!



FDN2678 & FD00005 Brookstone Cottages c. early 20th century

At the auction in 1925, Lot 2, the three pebble-dashed cottages 53, 55, 57 Main Street (FD00005), were bought by Miss Ellen Pollard of Holly Bank, daughter of John Pollard the school master. In 1930 she sold them to her sister Annie Elizabeth, who on her death in 1945 left them in trust to her remaining siblings and their families. The properties remained in the Pollard family until they were sold in 1964. John Ellams, son of Thomas Newport Ellams 1874-1901, of the Horse and Jockey, Helsby, and later the Whalebone Inn, Frodsham, bought No 57. Members of the Ellams family have occupied each of the three cottages at one time or another, over the years.

Lot 4 in the brochure was a house and shop and Lot 5 two brick houses. These houses, thought to date back to the 18th century, are shown on the Tithe map as plot 171, owned by Edward Moss, miller, Lower Bridge Street, Chester. His son, another Edward, inherited the mill, but both he and his wife died in 1852, leaving two young daughters. The will of John Rigby Pickering listed a house and cottage, occupied at that time by John Rimmer. (This is now 50 Main Street, ‘Presentations’ and the house next door, recently converted into one

dwelling). John Rimmer, a grocer and flour dealer, had traded from there since c.1850 and his wife Ann carried on the business following his death in 1885, specialising in confectionery. On the 1861 census, they are shown living at the premises, with John's mother, Rebecca, described as a housekeeper, living next door.

By 1901 John Rimmer's wife Ann, nee Stead, had moved to Crosbie House, Main Street. Ann's sister, Mary, had been a servant for William Church at his school at Crosbie House in 1851, and Ann herself was listed as a servant on the 1841 census ten years earlier. In 1871 Mary lived as housekeeper for William Church junior, in Chorley, Macclesfield but the link to Crosbie House continued. John and Ann Rimmer's son, John Stead Rimmer, became a corn merchant and in 1888 owned Crosbie House, or at least part of it, where he lived with his Aunt Mary Stead. His success was short lived, however, as he died in 1892 aged only 35. The 1901 census shows that his mother, brothers and sisters lived at Crosbie House, although it appears that they continued to run the bakery business at the other end of Main Street until Ann's death in 1910.

From about 1911 Walter Stanley Lazenby, whose brother Arthur had another baker's shop on High Street, ran a bakery and confectioners shop at 50 Main Street. Messrs Lazenby catered for many of the large weddings and events in Frodsham. A newspaper article of 1914 says that an event at the Drill Hall was catered for by Arthur Lazenby and the brothers were still advertising in the 1923 trade directory. Born in Warrington, Walter had been a journeyman baker at Colne, Lancashire, before moving to Frodsham. Both Lazenby brothers emigrated to Canada - Arthur in 1923 and Walter followed in 1925, showing on the ship's passenger list that he was joining his brother.



The 1925 sale catalogue lists the house and shop with an outside bakehouse and oven. The tenant at that time was Mr R Summergill, grocer and general dealer. In the 1930s the shop was listed as a sweet shop run by Miss Lilian Riley (1936-39 trade directories). Later it was known as 'The Candy Box' and for a short period 'The Phone Box'. 'Presentations' moved there from No 44 about five years ago. The premises have been owned by Qy Yau (Tony of Yuet Ben) since 1989.

FDN1251 Shop at 50 Main St + adjacent cottages in the 1970s

One area not included in the sales brochure is the plot where Main Street Community Church now stands. The Tithe Map shows the land next to John Rigby Pickering's as Plot 201, owned by the Marquis of Cholmondeley, leased by Rev Thomas Ashley and occupied by Joseph Gorst, farmer. The church, originally St Dunstan's, was built in 1872 as a Chapel of Ease for the Parish Church of St. Laurence. It is thought that the land was gifted by the Marquis of Cholmondeley, but that John Rigby Pickering had bought the outstanding lease from the estate of Rev Ashley. The Church paid what appears to be a peppercorn rent to him for the land. The agreement continued under the Misses Ashley and it was stipulated in Isabella Ashley's will that it would continue at a rent of 5s a year. If the rent was not paid for 2 years then the trustees of her will had the power to repossess the land. The Church,

perhaps deliberately, defaulted, allowing them to purchase the land in 1976 from the then Trustee/owner, Frances Gavine Perryn, daughter of Frances Cotton Perryn.

In the 1870s a speedy build was required and it was decided that a prefabricated building would be the best option. These ecclesiastical buildings, known as 'Tin Tabernacles', were very popular at the time and many were exported abroad. St Dunstan's became fully licensed during the period that St Lawrence Church was closed for restoration 1880-82. In 1995 the church was 'rolled' closer to Ashley House to create Chapelfields.



The 'Iron Church' being moved 3 metres sideways in 1995

In July 2007 the church was renamed 'Main Street Community Church', but it is still affectionately known as the 'Iron' or 'Tin' Church. For further information visit their website mscc.org/history/

The sale of Isabella Ashley's estate came at a time of great change. The Great War had swept away much of the old order. Landed estates could no longer be run as they had been before the war and many were sold or divided. It is perhaps no coincidence that the last of the lands originally owned by the Ashley family in Main Street were dispersed. Richard George Henry Perryn also died in 1927 and his estate at Trafford Hall was sold to an industrialist. The last surviving daughter of Edward Abbott Wright of Castle Park died in 1931 and Castle Park, originally named Park Place, once owned and lived in by the Ashley family, was gifted to the Rural District Council of the day.

To return to our starting point: so much local and social history is now available to all through online websites. The authors have spent many happy hours researching local families and properties through Ancestry and Find My Past, though some of the inside stories have also come from local residents.

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Sources:

Ancestry.co.uk & Find My Past
Newspapers Online
Cheshire Image Bank
Tithe Maps Online
Wikipedia
Deeds of Ashley House and 57 Main Street