



**FRODSHAM AND DISTRICT
HISTORY SOCIETY**

JOURNAL



Issue No.43
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Journal of
FRODSHAM AND DISTRICT HISTORY SOCIETY

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Front cover picture:

Dr Ellison, the Medical Officer, the Matron and a group of nurses at the Frodsham hospital during the First World War. On the left is Minnie May Duncalf whose life is described by Suzanne Parry in *A Wartime Romance*. The picture is from: Arthur Smith (2001) *From Battlefield to Blighty – Frodsham Auxiliary Military Hospital 1915-1919* (Image enhanced by John Hughes, F&DPS).

HISTORY SOCIETY NEWS

Welcome to this 2013 edition of our History Society Journal

President: Sir Alan Waterworth K.C.V.O

Vice president: Mrs Joan Douglas

Officers:

Mrs E Wakefield, Hon. Chairman

Dr K Gee, Hon. Secretary

Mr A Wakefield, Hon. Treasurer

Mrs M Dodd, Membership Secretary

Committee:

Mrs B Wainwright

Mrs M Jones

Mr B Keeble

Mrs P Keeble

Mrs D O'Neill

Mr B Dykes

Mrs D Coker

Mr A Faraday

This year we elected a new committee member, Mrs Deborah Coker, at the AGM and since then we have co-opted Mr Andrew Faraday to the committee. Mrs Margaret Dodd has become Membership Secretary in place of Mrs Beryl Wainwright who has retired from this position. We thank Beryl for her work in this capacity and are pleased that she is continuing to serve as a committee member and as part of the Image Archive Team.

For this year's outdoor meeting in June, members travelled by coach to Peover Hall which is a most interesting 'lived in' house with Grade I listed stables and a pleasant garden where we enjoyed cream teas at the end of the visit. We thank Kath Gee for organising this, also for all the work that she does throughout the year as Secretary of the Society.

Our Archivist, Kath Hewitt, has been very busy again this year (see Archival News). We are very grateful to Kath for all that she does in managing and publicising the archival collection and in dealing with a wide range of interesting enquiries.

I am delighted that the Image Archive Team, led by Pam and Brian Keeble and Maurice Richardson, has achieved its mammoth task of uploading all the original historic images – some 7,500 in total – that were first catalogued with the help of an HLF grant gained by our former secretary, Pam Hall. However, the Image Archive Project is far from finished because we have many recently donated images that need adding - some from a family that emigrated to Australia! Members with access to the World Wide Web can help by browsing online historic photographs of areas they know and sending further information about specific images directly to the Image Archive Team via the website:
www.frodshamhistoricimages.co.uk.

Arthur Smith, who was the first Secretary of the Society over 30 years ago, has recently moved to Dorset with his wife Kay and we wish them well in their new home. We are grateful to Arthur for all that he has done for the Society over the years, including compiling this Journal. We are pleased that he found time to edit part of the Journal before handing it over to the capable hands of sub-editors Kath Gee and Sheila Holroyd for completion.

I shall be handing over to a new Chairman at the 2014 AGM but will continue as Bookings Secretary for a while longer. I thank the officers and committee members for their support during my time in office. I also thank the ordinary members without whom the Society would not exist.

I am very pleased to be handing over the Chairmanship at a time when we are settled and made very welcome in our venue and when membership numbers are steadily increasing and the Society is thriving – long may this continue.

Betty Wakefield

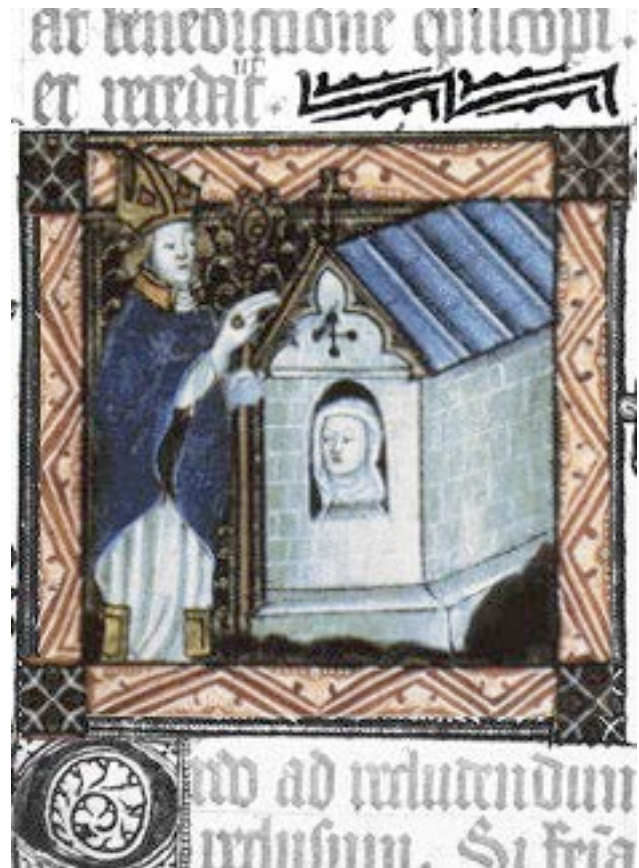
WIMARK, THE ANCHORESS OF FRODSHAM

Pauline Lowrie

How many people have heard of the anchoress of Frodsham? In medieval England life was short, often hard and uncertain. Religious feelings were high. Everyone had an unquestioning belief in God and the prospect of heaven or hell after death was a part of everyone's thinking. Many people were moved to give up their lives in total commitment to God in the community of a monastery. However, this was not the only way to devote one's life to God in the Middle Ages. There were also solitary religious people like hermits, anchorites and anchoresses.

Hermits differed from anchorites and anchoresses in that they could leave their selected place of hermitage, while anchorites and anchoresses were required to live the rest of their lives in a walled-up cell. The anchorage or anchorholds were similar to hermitages, but rather than living alone in forests or caves the anchoress lived within a community. The anchorhold was often attached to the wall of a church. Considerable numbers of women decided to live by themselves in a life of contemplation. These women were known as anchoresses - not because they were anchored to a church, but because of a Greek word, *anachorein*, meaning "to go apart". In the twelfth to the thirteenth century there were 92 anchoresses in England (and only 20 anchorites).

It is important to remember that life was very harsh in England, including Cheshire, in medieval times. Only the stronger and more powerful members of society could feel secure. The rest of society was at risk if they had any possessions, no matter how small, or if they caused offence, whether deliberate or not. We imagine that wealthy and powerful people had a relatively comfortable life in these times, but this was not true for many women. Women had few or no rights, whether they were of noble or low birth. There were many wars in medieval times and diseases were prevalent: life could be short, resulting in many young widows and heirs whose estates were of interest to the Crown. Women who inherited significant estates were 'within the gift of the King'. During the reign of Henry III, for example, such women were freely sold in marriage to the highest bidder or offered in marriage to the King's friends. Lists of ladies, boys and girls in such circumstances were advertised among the influential.



In times like these it may be that women who felt themselves at risk, and maybe had strong religious fervour and conviction, may have envied the security of those who elected to retire from the irreligious brutality of life in medieval society.

The earliest reference to an anchoress, or female recluse, in Frodsham dates from 1240. The pipe rolls for the period 19th December 1240 to Christmas 1242 mention alms of 1d a day being paid to the anchoress.

A woman could not simply decide to become an anchoress for religious fervour or other reasons. The decision was irreversible once it was made, so the Church went to great lengths to spell out what the decision entailed. The Church only considered applicants whose credentials were impeccable. This was a long process: they examined the motives and antecedents of the applicant and needed acceptable referees to back them up. The Bishop was the final authority. There is no surviving record of the licensing of the anchoress of Frodsham, but there is no reason to believe that it was not stringent.

- The actual physical enclosure of the anchoress was preceded by a lengthy church service. After this, there was a ceremony normally conducted by the Bishop, outside the cell of the anchoress, which was then walled up. These proceedings gave the anchoress a last chance to reconsider if she wished. The ceremony was similar to the rites of burial and it was made clear that the anchoress was entering what was, in effect, her tomb. Thereafter she was considered dead to the world and given the last rites. Bishop Meuland was the Bishop at the time when the Frodsham anchoress was licensed.

The Bishop had to ensure that an anchoress had enough resources to sustain her. The anchorite's cell was located either in the churchyard, or under the church, or attached to it. In the case of Frodsham, the cell is probably under the present chancel that was later extended and remodelled. JP Dodd believed the cell coincides with what is now thought to be the former charnel house. It is possible that the use of the cell as a charnel house followed some time after the death of the anchoress in 1279-80 and at a time when the religious significance of the cell had passed from local memory. However, the east wall of the chancel is rather later than the thirteenth century so it seems more probable that the cell may lie at the church end of this charnel house, the latter having been constructed when the chancel was extended.

Although Wimark's cell was sheltered from contact with the corrupting world, the anchoress would have been able to listen to, and join in with, church services taking place overhead. She would have had at least one daily visitor to bring her the necessary provisions, bought with her 1d. Some anchoresses had a servant maid but there is no record of this at Frodsham. She would also have had visits from her appointed father confessor, with whom she could communicate in time of emergency.

It was likely that, on the floor of her cell, there will have been a stone coffin lid to remind her of her death. The cell itself would have been built out of timber or stone. In fact it will have been more like a small house than a cell. It may have had a window through the church wall looking into the chancel so that she could see the altar and receive the sacrament. There was another window looking to the outside

world through which she could talk to visitors - this was usually curtained so that her concentration on prayer should not be disturbed.



A close-up view of what is possibly the blocked-up window of the anchoress' cell, with a metal pin top left that might have been the hinge for a shutter.

She was not allowed to leave her cell, but some anchoresses had a room adjoining it where her maid would have lived, and cooked for her, collected water and attended to the fire. She was not meant to live a hard ascetic life, but one without luxury or disturbance. In the case of Frodsham, there is no record of a servant maid living with her, but there would have been a maid who visited her daily. Her maid could go and visit people in the village and bring back news of importance. The local priest would have cared for her spiritually. She would have had books to read: the psalms, the offices and books on contemplation and writing materials.

It is possible that the Frodsham anchoress had a manuscript copy of the text for the solitary religious, the *Ancrene Riwe* or *Ancrene Wisse* (Rule for Nuns). Understandably, in her solitary life, despite her reliance on prayer, the anchoress would have had periods of melancholy, self-pity and visions of the devil in the form of the Tempter, as well as visions of Christ and his angels. The *Ancrene Riwe* told her how to cope with these events and gave her prayers to say at appropriate times.

There was no required dress for an anchoress but in winter a pilch (a triangular piece of material) or a thick garment to keep out the cold would have been her likely clothing. In summer she probably wore a kirtle with mantle, black headdress, wimple, cape or veil. The one stipulation was that the dress had to be plain. She would have lived in extreme poverty, eating chiefly vegetarian food. The life of an anchoress would be spent in prayer and contemplation. Other solitary pursuits were also followed, especially embroidery and writing. The anchoress would also receive people who would seek her advice on both practical and religious matters. The anchoress would offer prayers for these people and pray with them. Some people have speculated that there were actually two anchoresses at Frodsham. The grant of alms of 30s 4d per annum disappears from the records for a few years. It is

mentioned again at Michaelmas 1274, when the anchoress is named as Wimark and receives 30s 4d per annum in the accounts for Michaelmas 1274 to Michaelmas 1275. The grant continues the following year. In the accounts for Michaelmas 1277 to Michaelmas 1278 she is recorded as Wymarkie anacorage de Frodsham. There is further mention of her in the accounts up to Michaelmas 1280. The payment terminates with the statement in the accounts of King Edward for 1279-80 'Paid to the recluse of Frodsham as an alms of 1d a day, 1 mark and not more because she died.'

There seem to be two possibilities:

- The anchoress, Wimark, was enclosed at Frodsham until she died, aged 60 or more.
- There were two anchoresses, one taking up residence just a few years after the death of the first.

The first possibility is feasible. There are other recorded examples of long service, such as Dame Julian of Norwich (although she was later). Julian of Norwich was in her 31st year in May 1373 and was still alive in 1413, aged 71.

So who was the anchoress of Frodsham? She must have been a person of significance as her cell was constructed long after the original church was built. This would have been at a large financial cost. Also, she received payment of royal alms lasting from the reign of Henry III into the reign of his successor, Edward I.

Dodd speculates that Wimarkie owned lands in Frodsham demesne, or that this land may have been subject to some kind of rental charge to support the anchoress's expenses. The Arrentation Roll of about 1346 mentions land described as Wymarke's Furlong rented at 5s 7½ d. (Dodd notes that this, in itself, is interesting as she had been dead some 66 years, yet her name persisted.) At the time, the church lay within the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield. The bishop himself had to be personally responsible for the anchoress.

Two documents have been found, dating to the time of Bishop Meuland (1258 – 1296) referring to Wimark:

- Quitclaim from Wymarc, daughter of Richard Tanner (Tannator) of Bauquell (Bakewell, Derbyshire) in her free widow's right....to the Dean and Chapter of Lichfield and the church of Bauquell, of a third part of her toft which she holds of that church and its village, lying towards the east adjoining the toft of John the clerk with a house built thereon.
- Quitclaim from Thomas, son and heir of Wymarc, widow of Adam Mercer (Mercator) of Bauquell of all his right in the toft which his mother held of the Dean and Chapter of Lichfield...the which toft lies between the toft of John the clerk and that of Mathew le Sureis.

It seems likely that this is Wimark, who became anchoress of Frodsham. As a widow with land she would have been under pressure to re-marry (and disinherit her son). She probably found this distasteful. She may have approached the Bishop for permission to become a solitary religious. Bakewell was also under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield at this time. She abandoned worldly interests so it would not have mattered that her cell was far from her worldly home.

Dodd ends his account of Wimark, anchoress of Frodsham, with one last interesting piece of speculation: it is possible that Wimark's bones still lie in the cell, behind the bricked-up aperture that may lead to the remains of her cell.

Source:

J.P. Dodd, The Anchoress of Frodsham 1240 – 1280, in Cheshire History, autumn 1981, No 8, p30-51

The medieval illustration – Enclosure of an Anchoress – can be found at a number of sites online, e.g.

http://www.historyfish.net/anchorites/clay_anchorites_eight.html

<http://www.umilta.net/pontifical.html>

Frodsham Grammar School was housed in the brick building next to St Laurence's Church.

St James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post (London, England), Saturday, May 27, 1780); Issue 2997

**FRIDSHAM SCHOOL, CHESHIRE
A PLACE DISTINGUISHED FOR THE SALUBRITY OF THE AIR AND THE
DELIGHTFULNESS OF ITS SITUATION**

Young gentlemen are boarded and instructed in the languages, ancient and modern, in the whole circle of the mathematics, geography, and in polite literature, on the most reasonable terms. In which school the languages are communicated on a new plan, in so expeditious a mode and the path leading to the acquisition of them is rendered so plain and obvious, that youth by the co-operation of tolerable natural parts and moderate application may be enabled to write and converse with grammatical precision and idiomatic elegance, particularly in the learned languages, in half the time that is usually spent in schools in a partial attainment of them. And to obviate all suspicions even in Idea of this open and avowed profession being in the least illusive, undeniably specific security will, if required, be given for the punctual performance of the engagements herein holden forth to the public. In the above school public weekly lectures are regularly delivered on the following subjects, viz. religion and morality, philology, criticism, anatomy and jurisprudence.

Letters addressed to the Rev. Mr Harrison will be duly attended to.

N.B. Mr Harrison is at present in town, where he intends to stay for a few days, and who will be ready to give every necessary explanation to any interested enquirer, and may be met with at Mr Warburton's, N0.15, Drury Lane. Further information upon his leaving town may be had by personal applications to the said Mr Warburton; or to Messrs William and Thomas Bell, at Old Lloyd's Coffee House, Lombard Street.

THE BEAUCLERK'S OF KINGSLEY

Colin Myles Wilson

If you were born on Merseyside more than fifty years ago, it is more than likely that you know the story of the Ghost of Speke Hall. The reason is that until 1976 the Hall was administered by the local authority, and as such was an excursion opportunity for primary school children that cost the authority nothing. And what makes a day out for children more exciting than infanticide, suicide, and a few ghosts? For those who are too young or had the misfortune to have been born outside Merseyside, here is the story.

A young mother once lived at Speke Hall with her infant son. Driven to despair by her husband's drinking, profligacy, gambling and affairs, she threw the baby into the moat from the Tapestry Bedroom window. She then fled downstairs where she killed herself with one of the swords that still hang over the fireplace in the Great Hall. It is her ghost that now haunts the north range. However, the story owes more than a little to the imagination of the council employees of the 1950s and 60s.

The facts are these. The young mother was Mary Beauclerk (nee Norris), her husband was Sidney Norris and her son, Topham. There is no doubt that Sidney was unsatisfactory as a husband. His father had been one of the many illegitimate sons of Charles II, and his mother was Nell Gwynn, the actress, and Sidney was made Duke of St Alban's. Sidney himself was regarded by his contemporaries as a fortune-hunter. As early as 1727 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu described him as 'Nell Gwyn in person, with the sex altered,' paying court to the Duchess of Cleveland, who was aged 63.

'Her children banished, age forgot,
Lord Sidney is her care.
And what is much a happier lot,
Has hopes to be her heir.'

Sidney was also said to have paid court to the elderly Lady Betty Germain, but that the Duke of Dorset 'dissuaded her', and she gave Lord Sidney £1,000 to be off.

He married Mary Norris, the daughter and heiress of Thomas Norris, MP, in 1736, and in 1737 gained the estates of Richard Topham. After his death in 1747, Mary and her eight-year old son Topham came to live at Peel Hall, Kingsley. It may be that on Sidney's death they had lost his properties in London and Windsor, but it is not known why she did not return to Speke or to Aston, where her parents lived, but she seems to have lodged with the Plumb family, and as Peel Hall was just across the Weaver from Aston they may have been old childhood friends.

The original Peel Hall had burnt down in the 1660s and the present house dates from 1840, so Mary and Topham must have lived in an intermediate one. At the time there was a water-filled moat lined with a stone wall, and two stone bridges. These are still extant and listed. The moat and some Tudor walls are all that are left of the older properties.



Peel Hall, Kingsley



Another view of Peel Hall

A 1747 entry in the eighteenth century Pew Rolls for St Laurence Church, Frodsham, reads:

‘Fourth Rank of Seats Lying on the North Side
Pew No 4 Lady Sidney Beauclerk’

The pews were probably box pews running the length of the nave and facing inwards.

The Baptistry Registers also give:

‘1763 Aug 5 John son of Samuel & Ann Plumb of Kingsley
1765 Oct 1st Thomas son of Samuel & Ann Plumb of Kingsley’

Mary died on 20 November 1766, aged 68, but Topham went on to have more adventures. He had already fathered three girls – Anne (born c.1764), and twins, Elisabeth and Mary Day (born 1766) – by Lady Diana Spencer, the daughter of Charles Spencer, 3rd Duke of Marlborough. She was already married to Lord Bolingbroke. It was Diana’s uncle, John Spencer, who was the ancestor of Lady Diana Spencer, who married Charles, Prince of Wales, in 1981.



Topham Beauclerk

Lord Bolingbroke was a notoriously unfaithful husband but when Diana strayed, her whole world was turned upside down. It was Lord Bolingbroke who sued for divorce by Act of Parliament in 1768. Topham married Diana within days, on 12 March. They went on to have a fourth child, Charles George Beauclerk in 1774.

The tone of Diana's life changed. Her divorce automatically meant the surrender of her position as one of the Queen's ladies in waiting and alienated her from much of her family. Her Oxford-educated husband had no government office, no prosperous career. He was what was called a wit and a dandy, a sort of social gadfly who entertained himself and others with his brilliance and charm, hobnobbing with the well-known writers and actors of his day. His closest friends were Horace Walpole, Samuel Johnson and Edmund Burke.

Topham, whose grandfather, as said before, was an illegitimate son of King Charles II, turned out to be ill-tempered at home and Lady Diana's life was once again miserable. Walpole wrote of him that he 'was remarkably filthy in his person, which generated vermin'. Some biographies claim she gave up all the privileges she was born to because of love. If so, it must have been disillusioning to see that love turn sour.

Lady Diana turned to art as her outlet and became a fairly well-known illustrator, perhaps most remembered for her designs used by Josiah Wedgwood in his bas-reliefs.

When Topham died at his house in Clapham, aged 41, Diana found herself in straitened circumstances. She moved to a smaller house in Richmond, retiring from the social scene, but earned an income with illustrations for periodicals and other published material, including works by Horace Walpole and John Dryden.

Mary Norris seems to have left Speke on her marriage in 1736 and for 60 years the Hall was at the mercy of squatters. Her grandson, Charles George, reached 21 in 1795 and promptly sold the Speke estate to ship owner Richard Watt for £75,000.

In 1808 Diana died and her son died on Christmas Day 1846, by which time the Watt's restoration of Speke Hall was well under way and the connection with Kingsley came to an end. But that is another story.

LIVERPOOL MERCURY (Liverpool, England), Friday, April 26, 1816; Issue 252

A TRIFLING ERROR

At the parish church of Frodsham, was recently interred a coffin, the breastplate of which contains the following inscription:-

RICHARD NORCOTT,
DIED MARCH 15TH, 1816
AGED 505 YEARS.

The deceased's age, in reality, was fifty-five, but the joiner who painted the plate, knowing that 50 was fifty, concluded that 505 would express fifty-five. Although the funeral was attended by a number of respectable farmers, yet the mistake was not discovered until the service had been performed, when the sexton, about to fill the grave, discovering the error, communicated it to several of the deceased's friends, but it was then too late, and the number remains unaltered.

SOLDIERS FROM OVERSEAS AT THE FRODSHAM HOSPITAL 1915-1919

Arthur R Smith

The First World War started in August 1914. At first many people believed that the troops would be home by Christmas but it soon became obvious that this would not be true. At the same time, with the development of the machine gun, it quickly became clear that there were going to be thousands of casualties and that the existing military hospitals would not be sufficient. As a result by early 1915 a large number of towns had established auxiliary military hospitals staffed mainly by volunteers.

In Frodsham a Management Committee was formed and after a few meetings they made an arrangement with Mrs Parker Hoose, the owner of the Bellemonte Picnic Grounds, to use the roller-skating rink as the home of the Frodsham Auxiliary Military Hospital. The maple floor of the rink was regarded as ideal for hospital purposes but other work such as improvements to the heating system had to be carried out. Nevertheless the hall was soon ready and the hospital opened in March 1915 with 30 beds. But soon the Board were able to have an additional building constructed and by December there were 80 patients in the hospital. In August 1917 orders were given for another new building to be erected and that made a total accommodation of 160 beds.



The interior of the 30-bed Auxiliary Military Hospital in 1915

During this time the doctors and nurses treated many hundreds of wounded soldiers, most of whom were British but some were from other parts of the Empire. Unfortunately it is impossible to give exact figures because no registers of any sort have survived but we do know from other evidence that some of the wounded were from Australian and Canadian regiments. Miss Mary Gold tells the remarkable story of how two of her Australian relatives came to be patients at the hospital. An ancestor of hers, Samuel Moreton, emigrated to Melbourne in 1853.

He had intended to take up farming but managed to set himself up in the far more lucrative trade of selling boots to gold diggers. A few years later he married and eventually he had five sons and two daughters. Three of the sons fought in the Gallipoli campaign. After a time at the battlefield, one was killed and the other two were wounded and sent to a military hospital in Manchester.

On hearing of their arrival in Manchester, John Davies cycled from Frodsham to Manchester, found the boys and asked for them to be transferred to Frodsham where their relatives could visit them much more easily. Their names were Ewart and Victor Moreton. The request was granted and they were duly moved to the hospital at Bellefonte, Overton. The photograph below shows these two brothers on a visit to some of their relatives who lived at The Cottage, Fluin Lane, Frodsham.



The Milner family with some of their relatives at 'The Cottage,' Fluin Lane, Frodsham, in 1915. The man standing at the rear of the group is Ralph Mottram Milner. The people sitting down are from left to right: Samuel Moreton, Ewart Moreton, Andreus.....Victor Moreton, Alice Moreton Davies (Ralph's sister in law) and Emily Jane Milner (Ralph's wife).

The Milners had two sons who were Paul Ross, schoolmaster, and Sylvanus Mottram, surgeon. P R Milner lived at 9a Sidwood Parade, Bridge Road, Wembley Park, London. Sylvanus Mottram Milner lived at 3 Parkfield Road, Didsbury, Manchester. Ralph M Milner died on the 9th August 1939 and Emily Jane Milner died on the 15th February 1941.

Probably the best record that we have of the Frodsham Auxiliary Military Hospital is the album of photographs that Dorothea Urmson compiled whilst she was serving as a nurse there during the First World War. Amongst the many images of British servicemen are a few of soldiers from the British Empire. A number of Australian soldiers can be seen – recognisable by their distinctive caps – and men from Canada are also mentioned in other records. One of the photographs showing Australian patients at Bellefonte is included below:



*Two Australian soldiers – Privates Tranter and O'Rorke
photographed near the main entrance to the hospital.
(Image enhanced by John Hughes, F&DPS)*

One other unique piece of evidence of the presence of Australian patients at the hospital is a small slab of sandstone on which one wounded soldier had carved in outline a picture of himself. Around the edge of the portrait is the inscription: "OVERTON HOSP WOUNDED 1914 – 18 AUSTRALIA." Unfortunately the maker of this unusual record did not include his name or his regiment. (This remarkable piece of carving was donated to the History Society by Mr Price of Bellemonte Road, Frodsham, and is now stored in the Archives Room at Castle Park House.)

One of the Canadian patients at the hospital was Pte Fred Lewis. Fred was born in London, the son of a Thames river worker. He had an unhappy childhood and emigrated to Canada with a friend and his family at the age of about 14 years. He worked until the war broke out and then joined the Canadian Army. After a while he was posted to France and, like so many others, he was wounded. By chance he was sent to convalesce at the Frodsham hospital. During his stay he was invited to have tea with the Lawless family – the well-known Frodsham bakers. There he was introduced to Elsie Lloyd who was in service with the family and through her he met Annie, her sister. This marked the start of their courtship. After a time Fred returned to his regiment but continued to write to Annie. After the war he went back to Canada, found a job, bought a house and sent for Annie to join him. She sailed alone to Montreal and they married in London, Ontario, in 1920.

A Letter from a Canadian Patient

"I was glad to be alive. The ambulance trains were a hundred per cent comfort and a great contrast compared to the agony ride along the Albert Road three weeks ago. In fact I enjoyed this trip so much that I was almost sorry when we reached our destination, which was Chester, in the county of Cheshire, and incidentally one of the oldest towns in England. Parts of the wall, which once surrounded it, are still standing. It also contains several very old churches. Ten of us were eventually carried on stretchers and deposited on the station platform, where we waited in a

drizzling rain for fifteen or twenty minutes. Here the people asked me all kinds of questions – where I was hit, how old I was, where my home was and others too numerous to mention. It won't be long now though, for the motor ambulance arrived, and once more I was freighted to some unknown destination. “What a life of uncertainty. Where to now?” I thought.

Half an hour's ride brought us to the hospital which was an old skating rink before the war and located on the top of a hill, in a small "Burg" called Frodsham, also in Cheshire. It was not long before the nurse (a cute little blond) had me washed, ironed, dried and between the sheets. Almost too good to be true. Then cocoa and something to eat for the other part of me. It was a grand and glorious feeling, I'll tell the universe. I can't say whether I slept very much the first night or not. I have a faint recollection of someone holding my hand or perhaps that was only a dream. There were other nights though when it was no dream. But 'nuf' said about that.

When morning arrived I discovered that my new home was much better than a lot of others I had been in. The ward was very well lighted with oodles of windows. It contained fifty beds and all of them were occupied. This was a V.A.D. Hospital and maintained by the people of the village who supplied all the eatables. The nurses gave their services "Free Gratis". A great deal of credit was due them for the good work they did during those doubtful and trying days. I, for one, shall never forget the attention given me at Frodsham Hospital during the five months that I was a patient there.

It was only now that I learned the true nature of my wound, which was not so serious as I had at first thought, but painful nevertheless, especially when being dressed, which was done twice a day. Two months or more had elapsed before I was acquainted with the exact location of my wound, and by that time I was well on the road to recovery.

A good many concerts were given, which afforded us many pleasant hours. It was in hospital, after becoming an up-patient, that I learned to play billiards. I am reminded at this time of a very amusing though painful incident that occurred the first day that I got up. I was going down to the main dining room when one of the boys (evidently glad of the event) slapped me on the back with a glad-to-see-you-up-sort-of-feeling. The result was another knockout. However, after a few minutes I was none the worse for the unexpected outburst of enthusiasm on behalf of a fellow patient.

I had been up about two weeks, when I decided, with the aid of a walking stick, to venture forth into the village which was a mile and a half from the hospital. It was downhill most of the way which made the going comparatively easy.

On reaching the village the first thing I spied was a "Tea Room" which I entered and partook of a little nourishment and a much needed rest. The return trip was not quite so easy, for the half mile hill proved to be quite an obstacle which retarded my progress and wind pressure considerable. However, I arrived back none the worse for the experience, with a severe reprimand from the nurse for going too far.

I must say that the days from then on went altogether too fast to suit me. There was one other Canadian there besides myself. I think there was too much fuss made over us by the nurses, two of them in particular.

Many pleasant hours the four of us spent together, roaming the nearby woods, etc. In fact it was beginning to get serious with me. A case of love at first sight, but on second thoughts... I took another look."

Unfortunately we do not know the identity of the soldier who wrote this letter or have any information about his regiment.

Between March 1915 and September 1919, 3435 wounded soldiers were treated at the Frodsham Auxiliary Military Hospital at Bellemonte. Most of these men were from British regiments but, as we have seen, a number were Australian or Canadian soldiers. With the one or two exceptions where serious wounds proved fatal, all were well treated and restored to good health by the Medical Officers and the largely volunteer nursing staff. All those who worked in the hospital – the doctors, the nurses and the administrative staff – deserve recognition for their outstanding contribution to the relief of suffering among these wounded men in this terrible war.

For more detailed information see "From Battlefield to Blighty – Frodsham Auxiliary Military Hospital 1915 – 1919" by Arthur R Smith. Published by Avid Publications 2001.

THE WORLD (London, England), Monday, October 5, 1789; Issue 859

A few days ago the following accident happened at Frodsham, near Chester. A young gentleman named Wilbraham, of Staffordshire, having been for some time paying honourable addresses to a lady near Frodsham, and being thought a suitable match, was entertained by her family, and invited to spend some of the courting time at their house. The gentleman and his future brother-in-law took their guns, and agreed to dine in a tent that was to be set up at the brow of a neighbouring hill, where they were to be joined by the rest of the family at the usual hour. After an agreeable repast, a proposal was made to have a dance on the sod. The company stood up, and for some minutes beat the ground with nimble feet, till the skirt of the young gentleman's coat, laying hold of the trigger of his gun, which rested in an inclining posture against the tent, the piece went off, and lodged the contents in the breast of the young lady's maid, who was preparing the apparatus for tea within. The sudden explosion put an end to the dance, and on entering the tent, the poor girl was found with little signs of life on the floor, one of her arms extended, and the other on the fatal wound. The unfortunate patient was carried home, and attended by an eminent surgeon, but expired in a few hours. The young lady has been so affected at this shocking catastrophe, as to be deprived of her reason, and is now a melancholy instance of the mutability of human affairs.

A WARTIME ROMANCE

Suzanne Parry

Tom

Thomas Bell Shepherd (Tom) was born on 26th July 1894 in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, the eldest son of Thomas Bell Shepherd (Senior) and Elizabeth Frazer. His parents, both of Panden Bank, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, married on June 18th 1877, as soon as TBS Senior had completed his seven-year-long apprenticeship as a slater. In the 1911 census the family was living at 154, Shield Street, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. TBS Snr is listed as a 'Foreman Slater' and Tom is a 16 year-old 'Art Student'. His younger brother, Richard, 14, is a schoolboy.

In 1915, aged 21, and passing his medical 'A1', Tom joined the 3rd Battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers as: Private Shepherd, TB, 15018, his occupation noted as 'Artist & Designer'. He later transferred to the 1st Platoon of the Machine Gun Corps, (otherwise known as 'The Suicide Squad'), where in 1916, he fought on the Western Front in the Battle of the Somme. It was amid this wholesale slaughter that a shell burst caused the injuries that brought him back to "Blighty" and thence to the Frodsham Auxiliary Military Hospital, which was set up in 1915. It was during his time at the FAMH, that he met a local volunteer nurse, Minnie May Duncalf. Tall, fair, handsome and dashing in uniform, he was soon smitten by petite Nurse Duncalf with her blue eyes and dark hair. Thrown together by a world torn apart by war, their courtship was played out in the wards and grounds of the hospital, on walks round Overton and Helsby Hills while Tom recovered and then by letter whilst they were posted around the country.



Minnie May Duncalf, on the right, with two of her colleagues at the Frodsham Auxiliary Military Hospital.

Listed below are Tom's Service Records:

On 4th January 1918, Tom was transferred to the Royal Flying Corps at Oxford.

5th January Incoming Authority Confirming (66.5-1-18)

14th March 1918 Outgoing Authority (66.11-4-18) for posting from Oxford to Armament School (Air Gunner?)

(The Royal Naval Air Service was the air arm of the Royal Navy until 1st April 1918 when it merged with the British Army's Royal Flying Corps to form a new service: the Royal Air Force.)

11th April 1918 Outgoing Authority (2S of A 11-4-18 for transfer from Oxford to Number 2 School of Aviation)

14th May 1918 Posted to Roehampton Airship Section as a Flight Cadet.

17th July 1918 London Gazette – 1st October. The under-mentioned flight cadets are granted temporary commissions as 2nd Lts: Thomas Bell Shepherd

1st October 1918 Confirmation of Commission as 2nd Lieutenant Authority 11563

2nd November 1918 Transferred to R.A.F.

3rd November Airship Station Howden - Posted to Airship Station Howden where he trained as a pilot flying airships (C Star Blimps) Airship Station Longside

26th February 1919 posted from Airship Station Longside to 'Collect Station' Edinburgh Castle

28th February 1919 Transferred to unemployment list.

Minnie

Minnie May's father was one James Duncalf, who came from an old Kingsley farming family. At the age of 15, it is said he had walked from Norley to Birkenhead to better his prospects. This he certainly did, as by 1881, he was resident in Chestnut Grove, Birkenhead, had achieved the status of 'Gentleman', employing a 'general domestic servant' and his occupation was given as 'Book-keeper'.

Minnie May Duncalf was born on 11th January 1893, at 12, Glover Street, Birkenhead, the second of four daughters from James's third marriage, in 1891, to Louisa Pickering of Poulton, Pulford, Cheshire. A farmer's daughter, Louisa was, at 35, many years younger than James, 58 and twice widowed. Her family, it is hinted, were not best pleased with this turn of events but evidently Louisa followed her heart and the wedding went ahead, at St Mary's Church, Pulford, with two of Louisa's brothers and a sister-in-law in attendance.

In retirement James returned with his wife and young daughters to Blake Lees, Kingsley, where he died in 1910, aged 77 years and was able to bequeath the sum of £6782 to his family. He had done well – a far cry from his humble beginnings as a 'farm servant'.

Louisa, widowed at 57 and quite the lady, now had four teenaged daughters to care

for alone. The 1911 census has her as 'Head of the Household', living on private means, in a farmhouse in Hollow Lane, near Blake Lees Methodist Chapel. At this time Minnie is aged 18 and, like her elder sister, Louise Anna (19), is listed as 'Helper in the House & Dairy'. Younger sister Edith Constance was 16 and a Confectioner's Apprentice. At 14, the youngest, Florence Ivy, was still at school.

At some point after the FAMH was set up, both Minnie and Louise decided that they would leave the familiarity and comfort of the house and dairy to help the war effort by nursing the returning wounded. It must have been a rude awakening to those young ladies, gently brought up, to have to cope with the sometimes shockingly injured men. What must their mother have made of two of her daughters donning uniforms and training as nurses? One would hope and trust they were a source of great pride to her. She died in 1928, aged 72 years and is buried with James in the churchyard of St John the Evangelist, Kingsley.



Minnie Duncalf, seated in the centre, with some of the wounded soldiers from Frodsham Auxiliary Military Hospital

Minnie and Tom married by 'Sherriff's Warrant', on 1st February, 1919 at 13, Bridge Street, Aberdeen.* Minnie May, (Hospital Nurse, aged 26) was based at Queen's Park Military Hospital, Blackburn, Lancashire, and Thomas Bell, (Second Lieutenant, R.A.F. aged 24) was residing at the Royal Naval Station, Longside, near Peterhead, Aberdeenshire. They had eloped. Like her headstrong mother before her, Minnie had married a man she loved but about whom her family perhaps had reservations. No relatives are listed as witnesses on the marriage certificate, only those of Tom's fellow officers in the RAF. Their fathers have both notably risen further in the world: TB Shepherd Snr is now listed as a 'Building Contractor' and James Duncalf as 'Dock Manager' (deceased). However Louisa must have accepted the situation and made peace with the Shepherds, as in the early 1920s, when TBS Senior was in his 60s and in Kingsley, whether to visit his son and family, or to help Louisa out at Blake Lees, he climbed a ladder and fixed the slates on her roof!

After the war, the couple returned to Kingsley to set up home. On October 30th, 1920,

their daughter Peggy was born. My father, Thomas Christopher (Chris) arrived in 1927 and was born in Studley House, Mill Lane, Kingsley, which Louisa, at that time owned. Back in civvie-street, Tom decided to keep any artistic pursuit as a hobby and set up as a 'Motor Proprietor', running a local bus service in the area. Little is known of this exploit, except that it failed and Tom took his family back to his home in the northeast; Newcastle, then Whitley Bay. Thereafter, they moved around again during the Second World War, when Tom was an R.A.F. instructor (civilian), living at Burtonwood, Warrington and Blackpool, later retiring to Cheshire, where they settled in Upton, Chester. Here my parents met and married and my grandparents died; firstly Minnie in 1963, a few weeks before my birth and Tom ten years later. They are buried together in the graveyard of the Church of the Holy Ascension. Tom had suffered pain from the shrapnel in his legs for the better part of 60 years...

*The laws of marriage were quite different in England and Scotland. In Scotland, regular marriages did not have to take place within a church building; indeed, they were more likely to take place in private homes. It was both quicker and cheaper to have an 'irregular' marriage entered into the schedules by the registrar under the Sherriff's warrant than to go through the expense of banns and a 'regular' marriage ceremony.

Sources: *Marriage: The Law*, by kind permission of the School of Political Sciences, University of Glasgow.

And, with thanks to Anne Cole of The Duncalf One Name Study.

Before 1914 the last years of peace

The Social conditions

Words from the hymn “All things bright and beautiful” accepted as the natural order
“The rich man in his castle” “The poor man at his gate”



Aston Hall



Thomas and Hannah Chantler

A structured society The squire, the parson, the constable



E A Wright head of the
Castle Park family



Canon H B Blogg
Frodsham Rural Dean



Walter Lee
Frodsham constable

An ordered society



Castle Park Servants

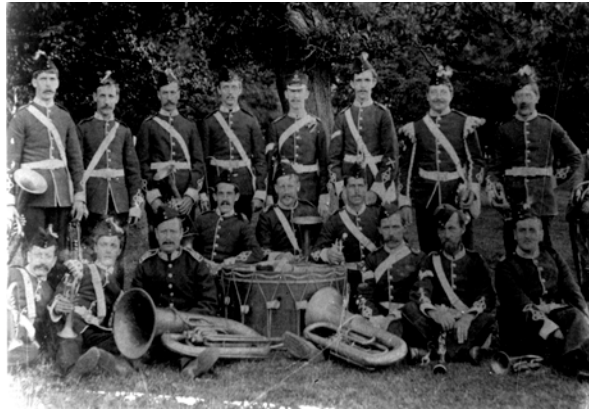


Frodsham Boys School

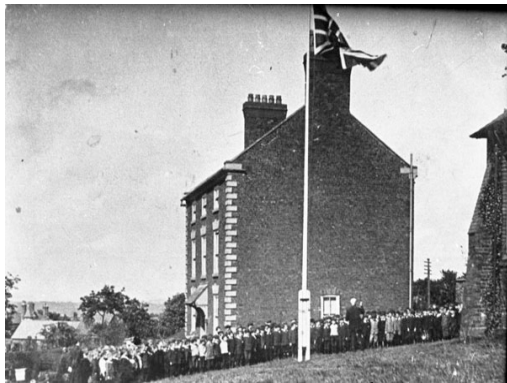
And times of Empire



Church Street School Volunteers



Frodsham Company Volunteers



Empire Day. Celebrated 24th May



Three Boer War Volunteers



George V Coronation



Another procession, the Workers Union Band

Pictures courtesy of FDHS Image Archive, www.frodshamhistoricimages.co.uk

TWO CLOCKS UNITE.....BUT NOT FOR LONG!

Castle Park Clock's Chiming Adventure

Dilys O'Neill

Consternation in Frodsham! Two clocks chiming at the same time! Perhaps you will say, "And so they should," but if you do you will be wrong – if the two clocks are the Castle Park clock and the Parish Church clock. These two clocks did not chime together for many years.

The reason is this. One day in the mid-nineteenth century, Edward Abbott Wright, the owner of Castle Park, went to catch a train at Frodsham Station. He missed the train and came back determined that this should not happen again, so he gave orders that the Castle Park stable clock should be put three minutes fast. This practice continued, even after Castle Park was gifted to Runcorn Rural District Council in 1933!

One night some time ago, however, at 11 pm the Castle Park clock struck eleven, then twelve, then thirteen, and so on. When it reached twenty o'clock local residents began to wonder what was the matter, and whether it was a new alarm for the fire engine. But no. After years of working, the clock's 'insides' had gone slightly askew and it wouldn't stop chiming.

It had been chiming for perhaps half-an-hour when a hero came on the scene and clambered up amidst the ivy in an attempt to stop the clock and the chiming, which by now had become somewhat monotonous. But the clock would not stop. It had so many chimes bottled up inside that it simply had to get rid of some. In the past, the timepiece had been known to stop merely because a few bits of ivy had scratched its face, but that night it simply went on chiming.

Deciding that the only sure way to make it stop was to get the keys, the hero descended from his precarious perch and went out into the night to search for them. The keys were located and at last the night air was still again, free from the chimes. But that was not the end of the story.

The following morning, the clock repairer arrived and put the clock in working order, but he was not aware that it should have been set three minutes fast. The clock was set at the right time and the result was that the Castle Park clock and the Parish Church clock were striking in unison for the first time in many years. However, instructions were given for the clock to be put forward three minutes as before, but for a few days Frodsham had been in agreement with Overton in the matter of time and had been a truly united parish.

Does anyone know when this happened?



The Clock above Castle Park stables, now Castle Park Arts Centre



St Laurence Parish Church Clock today

CLERICAL TALES

St Laurence Parish Church, Frodsham, and its Clergy

Heather Powling

Much has been written about the long and varied history of the parish church of St Laurence in Frodsham. We are fortunate that there are records of the clergy going right back to the early part of the twelfth century. The Norman parts of the church are known to date back to about 1170, and there are continuous records from that time to the present day. We are familiar with some of the colourful tales of its more recent past, but there are also some interesting stories relating to earlier periods. The stories can be found in William Beamont's 'Account of the Ancient Town of Frodsham in Cheshire' (1881) and are reproduced here thanks to the extensive research of the late James Harvey and Juliet O'Neill¹. This extract looks at the effect that the turbulent religious and political changes of the 16th and 17th centuries had upon a local, rural parish.

TUDOR AND STUART TIMES

At the end of the reign of Henry VIII and during the subsequent political upheavals of the brief reigns of his son Edward VI and Catholic Mary, the vicar of Frodsham was John Martin, M.A Oxford. The new 'owners' of the living, the Dean and Chapter of Christ Church College, Oxford, presented Dr Martin. The then Dean was a man of learning and had been one of the three tutors of the young Prince Edward, afterwards Edward VI. He had also been one of the twelve learned men associated with Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in compiling the first liturgy for the Church in England. Cranmer, as Henry VIII's Archbishop of Canterbury, had seen through his divorce from Katherine of Aragon, the break of the church in England from the papacy and the introduction of the first Book of Common Prayer in 1549.



The first Book of Common Prayer

There are, in fact, two Doctor Martins known in this period. We are not sure which of the learned Drs John Martin of the day our vicar was, but he may have been the Dr Martin who was involved in the prosecution of Archbishop Cranmer. Either way, Dr Martin retired from Frodsham during the reign of Queen Mary. He was, we know, deprived of all his appointments by the Catholic Queen and, in 1553, he left England for safer surroundings in Frankfort. After Mary's death he was able to return to this country and became associated with Archbishop Parker in the revision of Queen Elizabeth's Prayer Book². A portrait hangs in the library of Trinity Hall, Cambridge. The following inscription appears on his tomb.

¹ J G Harvey: A Compilation: 2000

² Wheatley on the Common Prayer, 46.

The Latin inscription on Dr John Martin's tomb with a translation below

Vita caduca, vale' salveto vita perennis,
Corpus terra tegit, spiritus alta petit,
In terra Christi gallus Christum resonabam
Da Christe, in coelis, te sine fine sonem.

Frail life, farewell; hail life which never ends;
Earth hides my corpse, my soul to heaven ascends,
Christ's cock on earth, I loved to sound his name;
May I in heaven forever do the same.

George Hough replaced John Martin in 1554. Dr Martin appears to have retired (or been removed) in favour of someone whose views were more in accordance with those of a Catholic Queen who hoped to rid the country of the heresies instituted by her father. So even a small rural living like Frodsham was prey to the political and religious traumas of the mid-Tudor years. Hough was presented to the living of Frodsham by George Vavasor, gentleman. He and his successor, Richard Smith, presented by Eliscus Hartoppe, were thus presented not by Christ Church Oxford, but by various gentlemen whose opinions coincided with those of the Queen and to whom the right to present had been given. Eliscus Hartoppe may have been one of the Hartopps of Rotherley, in Leicestershire³.

We believe that Richard Smith was one of the learned men who had preached vehemently against the two unfortunate bishops, Latimer and Ridley, at their trial in 1555.



The cruel punishment inflicted on Bishops Latimer and Ridley in the mid sixteenth century.

³ William Beaumont 'An Account of the Ancient Town of Frodsham' 1881



This picture shows images from a stained glass window of the two Oxford Martyrs (seen also with Archbishop Cranmer). They were tried for supporting the Church of England, and for their political support of Lady Jane Grey as heir to the throne after the death of Edward VI. They were put to death by the Catholic Queen Mary in 1555.

Cranmer from his prison, would have had to watch Dr. Smith, his former chaplain, preaching or more probably, haranguing the two unfortunate bishops⁴. There seems strong evidence that this was, indeed, the same person: We know that, given the nature of his appointment and that his last two books were printed in Paris and Louvain, the vicar thought it wise to retire on the accession of Queen Elizabeth.

Few of the vicars of Frodsham were local men. In 1587, in the reign of Elizabeth, Frodsham appears to have been served by a vicar who was, for once, a local man in the person of Thomas Dutton. Dutton is a Cheshire name and this vicar was probably a Frodsham man, for whom his friends had purchased the presentation. The only Thomas Dutton recorded at Oxford at this period matriculated in November 1577, aged 34 and is described as the son of a minister of the county of Chester.

Clearly a practical man, the vicar transferred the rights to the tithes of hemp, flax and beasts owed on lands in the town, ward and lordship of Helsby to Thomas Aston and his son John Aston of Aston Hall for a yearly rent of fifteen shillings – probably a more reliable form of income in 1603. The parish registers note in Dutton's time that 'the church of Frodsham was greatly injured shortly before the year 1589, and that it was then repaired by George Rutter, of Kingsley Hall, gentleman', whose family are said to have been descendents of the barons of Malpas, the Thorntons of Thornton-le-Moors. It must have been this vicar, also, who buried Thomas Hough aged 141 years on the 13 March, 1592, and Randle Wall, aged 103, the following day.

Politics, too, resulted in upheaval at the time of the Civil War and the Commonwealth. The vicar at the beginning of the Civil War was Rowland Heywood, described in Walker's 'Sufferings of the Clergy' as being 'harassed and persecuted and thereby driven from his living'. Vicar from 1632, Heywood actively looked after the parish charities. He presented a petition to the Commissioners for Pious Uses, in

⁴ Hook's Lives of the Archbishops

which he showed that several legacies amounting to more than £80 (a tidy sum in those days) had been left to the parish for pious uses, but that the money could not be used because the people who held it would neither pay the stock nor the interest due. In 1645 the opposition to Mr Heywood proved so strong that he was forced to retire from the living, and a new minister was imposed. Heywood continued to be vicar, however, despite all of this, until the time of the restoration of King Charles II, but eventually resigned in 1661. Having driven Rowland Heywood out, the parish acquired a Presbyterian vicar in Samuel Bowden (1645-49), when he too was removed for refusing to take an oath of loyalty to the Commonwealth. He was followed by James Cockayne (an Anabaptist), who held the living until the Restoration.

After the Restoration of Charles II, the parish was beset by arguments over the payments of tithes. The farmers, not unnaturally, were often reluctant to pay their tithes in cash or in kind and disputes often ensued as told by the poet William Cowper:

This priest he merry is and blithe
Three quarters of a year;
But oh! it cuts him like scythe,
When tithing time draws near.

He then is full of fright and fears,
As one at point to die;
And long before the day appears,
He heaves up many a sigh.

And then, speaking of the tithe-payers, he says:

One talks of mildew and of frost,
And one of storms of hail,
And one of pigs that he has lost
By maggots at the tail.

During the time of John Davies (presented to the living in 1661), there were a number of these disputes. There was also another dispute during Vicar Davis's time, in which the vicar could hardly help taking part. The story is recounted in the following extract from the Cheshire Sheaf:

‘The county parish of Frodsham had its ups and downs of religious controversy in the 17th century, like its more stirring and populous neighbours; but there it would appear that the old church was the bone of contention between the two great factions. The High Churchmen of Charles the First's days had lovingly placed their rostrum on the north side of the church. The Puritans, when they got possession, apparently for mere perverseness' sake, shifted it to the south side; and thus, when the ball rolled round once more, and ‘the King had got his own again’, the loyalty of the Frodshamers came hotly to the front, and the result, as recorded in the Bishop's Registrar's Books at Chester, was

‘An order for the removeing of ye Pulpit in ffordsham church, which appears to be the North Pillar. To the Vicar and Churchwardens of ffordsham in the County and

Diocese of Chester, George, L'd Bishop of Chester, sendeth Greetinge. Whereas the Pulpit of the Parish Church of ffrodsham aforesaid was, in the time of the late Rebellion, without any lawfull Authority remooved from its ancient place, where 'twas sett by order, unto another place never allowed nor approved of by the Ordinary. Therefore I the said Bishop doe require you, the said Vicar and Churchwardens, forthwith to remove, or cause to be removed, the sayd Pulpit from the Place where now it standeth without order, to the Place where it formerly stood by order, which appears to be the North Pillar. As you will answer the contrary. Given under my Hand and Seale, this 12th day of November in the yeare of our Lord God, 1664. Geo: Cestriens.'

And there is this certificate 'upon ye removal of ye Pulpit above said.'

'Wee, the Vicar and Churchwardens of the Parish Church of ffrodsham, Whose names are subscribed, In obedience to the order of the Lord Bishop of Chester, above written, Caused the Pulpit to be removed from the south Pillar of the church to the Place where it formerly stood fixed, at a Pillar on the North side of the middle Alley in the body of the said church, where anciently by order it stood. Witness our hands the fifth day of November 1665. J. Davis, Vic. Thomas Guest, Edward Johnson, Gard.'⁵

The present pulpit dates from the restoration of the church in 1882, but the problem of where the pulpit belonged was obviously not a new one.



View of the nave, showing the pulpit against the north pillar

Source:

www.frodshamhistoricimages.co.uk

Image FD07398

Whilst the ensuing period may have had less political drama than the Tudor and Stuart period, Frodsham continued to attract clergy who brought various sorts of controversies with them. But these were problems of a different sort and will merit discussion on another occasion. Suffice it for the present to see the church as an already important part of local life and one that has changed with successive waves of political, architectural and social change.

⁵ From 'The Cheshire Sheaf:

THE CHESTER CROSS
St. Luke's Church Dunham-on-the-Hill

Alan Pennell

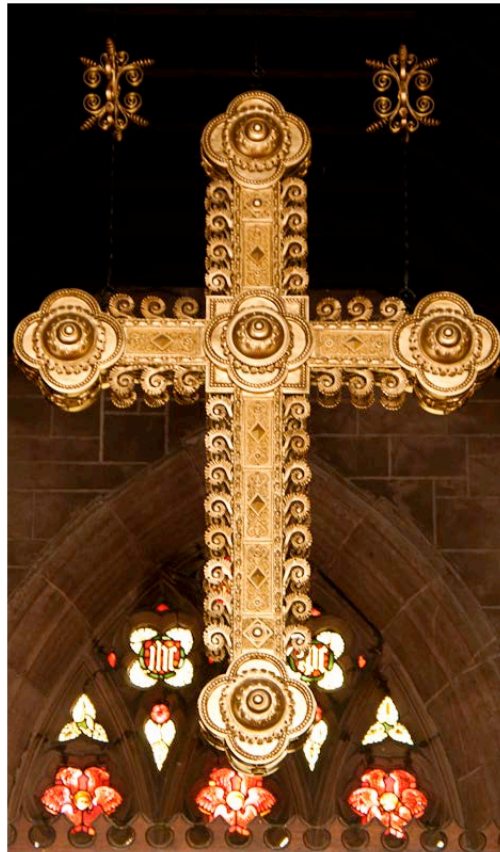
The cross, originally suspended above the choir stalls in Chester Cathedral, was described by Pevsner in his "Buildings of England - Cheshire" as "typical high Victorian style in its elaboration and its thick relief", and is now suspended in the chancel at St Luke's Church.

The cross was brought from Chester Cathedral to Dunham-on-the-Hill in 1921 by a local man, Mr Jim Blackburn, using his horse and cart. The cross had apparently lain for some years unused and unwanted in one of the crypts of the Cathedral. However, Rev. Dr Griffin, who was Vicar to St Luke's Church at that time, had observed it there. He enquired if the Cathedral authorities wanted the cross, and on being advised that it was no longer needed, he asked for and received permission to remove it from the Cathedral. It is believed that the family of his wife, originally Miss Nessie Brown of Browns of Chester, had originally commissioned the piece, and hence Rev. Dr Griffin's interest in preserving it. There does not appear to be any written record of this transaction, and the information concerning the matter has been gleaned from some of the older people of Dunham-on-the-Hill whose parents and relations had some involvement with these events in the 1920s.

In recent years it was felt that the cross would benefit from cleaning, and in 1997 serious attempts were made to find suitable craftsmen to carry out the work. The cross is attributed to "Skidmore of Meriden" and for the purpose of restoration, if possible by the maker, attempts were made to find out if Skidmore's was still in operation. However, it was subsequently learned that the firm no longer existed, all positive traces having been lost in the 1880s.

Following discussions with the diocesan architect, and the granting of a faculty from the diocese (giving the PCC necessary authority to carry out restoration) instructions were given to Mr. Philip N. Irvine of Southport to proceed with the work. The possibility of obtaining grant aid was investigated, and the PCC were grateful for the aid given by the Historic Cheshire Churches Preservation Trust, and also the Environmental Office at Cheshire County Council. The PCC is also grateful for and wishes to acknowledge all the many contributions and donations that have been given towards this restoration work.

The restoration work was labour intensive, as the cross comprises many individual parts, some 72 brass cusps, 40 brass filigree panels and eight quatrefoil decorations, all individually attached to the oak frame. All these pieces had to be dismantled, cleaned, burnished and reassembled to complete the job. The cross was removed from the church for restoration in January 1999. It was found on dismantling it that the lower adornments of the cross had suffered some corrosion, possibly due to the fact that St Luke's had in the past been lit by gas light. Following extensive cleaning and burnishing, the cross was gilded as it had been originally, and returned to St. Luke's in May of 1999.



The Chester Cathedral Cross that now hangs in St Luke's Church at Dunham-on-the-Hill. (Photograph provided by Professor Neville Ford).

We are aware from anecdotal sources that the great Victorian architect, George Gilbert Scott, father of Giles Gilbert Scott of Liverpool Anglican Cathedral fame, designed the cross. However, the following information concerning the maker has also been discovered. Francis Alfred Skidmore was born in London in 1816, the son of a gold and silversmith, who shortly afterwards moved with his family to Coventry. In 1850, after serving a jewellers' apprenticeship in his father's business in Cross Cheaping, young Francis set up in business at his own yard in West Orchard. As his reputation grew he built himself a factory in Alma Street, Coventry. At that time Coventry's ribbon industry was in terminal decline and Skidmore was applauded as an industrial saviour of the city when he started employing former weavers. Only perfection was ever good enough for Skidmore, and his association with Gilbert Scott led to commissions from powerful clients and secured for his work a role in one of the most prestigious projects of the age. Together Skidmore and Scott worked on a great centrepiece of Victorian Gothic art at the Albert Memorial in Hyde Park London. Skidmore was responsible for all the metal work, and in the way he set about this task it is possible to see the seeds of the business failure that was to cloud his final years. A former employee recalled him breaking up casting for the canopy time after time, regardless of cost, as they did not match up with the image in his mind's eye.

Despite his willingness to discard work that showed the slightest imperfection Skidmore went on to enjoy two decades of astonishing success. Perhaps the highest accolade came at the Great International Exhibition in London in 1862, where his firm, Skidmores Art Manufacturers & Co. Ltd., was awarded a medal for workmanship and design.

However, his failings as a businessman could not be kept at bay. In 1876 he moved his factory to Meriden. Gas was not available there and all work had to be sent to Coventry or Birmingham for brazing. Amalgamation with a Birmingham firm followed, Skidmores Art Manufacturers and Constructive Iron Co. Ltd. Ill health and failing eyesight overtook him. In poor health he returned to Coventry to live in a terraced house in Eagle Street, sinking ever deeper into poverty. In 1894, two years before his death, a public subscription raised by the City's Mayor finally made life a little easier for this man, whose talent ought to have brought him lasting fame and fortune.

In Coventry his work survives in the gaslight standards (still in use for electric light) that he made for Holy Trinity Church and for St. Michael's (Hay Lane) Particular Baptist Church. Sadly the pulpit he designed for St Michael's, the project that remained closest to his heart, did not survive the destruction of the cathedral in the bombing of Coventry in 1940. His designs also included weather vanes, a finial cross for Holy Trinity Parish Schools opened in 1854.

Sir Giles Gilbert Scott paid handsome tribute to a craftsman, whose work he had used many times. He wrote: "The only man in the world to carry out my ideas was Skidmore of Coventry. And he has done so". Gilbert Scott died in 1878 and ended his life with a knighthood and all the honours a grateful nation could bestow. Francis Albert Skidmore died in 1896 virtually a pauper. Yet his skill with wrought iron, copper and bronze entitled him to a place among the great craftsmen of the nineteenth century. For more than a quarter of a century he was the country's leading specialist in decorative metal. We at Dunham-on-the-Hill and St Luke's believe it was right to make some sacrifice to ensure that the Skidmore Cross was restored to its former condition, and that Skidmore's craftsmanship, allied with the ideas of Giles Gilbert Scott, is there to be seen, and appreciated by all, now and in future generations.

The author consulted sources at:

City of Coventry Leisure Services, Archive Dept

Companies House, Birmingham

Public Record Office, Richmond

The author is also grateful for anecdotal assistance in preparing the original booklet in May 1999 and its successor in September 2011

AND FROM THE NORTH A GREAT ARMY CAME (PART II)

Ken Crouch

Remembering, lest we forget - Casualties and Memorials

The total number of Frodsham Great War deaths is subject to debate and estimates have altered over the years. The publication ‘Frodsham – The History of a Cheshire Town,’ published in 1987, suggests that 655 men from this town were involved with war service and that 102 men were killed. This would give a fatality rate of 15 %, which is higher than the 12 ½ per cent for the country in general. Furthermore, the number of casualties from Frodsham has grown from the 102 as suggested in the publication. More interest is being shown in all aspects of the Great War and as a consequence more information is becoming available. Recent figures of 137 have been quoted in the local press, but I believe that the actual figure stands at approximately 150. This would give a percentage of nearer 24%, which is more in keeping with figures for other towns throughout northwest of England.

Regardless of the numbers, such a large proportion killed out of a population of just over 3000 must have been devastating for the loved ones they left behind. I cannot imagine the dread that the people of this area must have faced as each and every knock on the door could be the telegraph boy bringing the “Death Telegram.” Some homes heard that knock two or three times during the war. Similarly one can imagine the fear of those who stood outside the Post Office as the weekly list of casualties was posted on Thursdays.

The British government at the time allowed the burial of the fallen where they died rather than bringing their bodies home for burial within the UK. With the vast numbers killed they, understandably, had no other choice. The knock-on effect of this was that many people would be unable to ever visit the graves of their loved ones. Of the Frodsham men who were killed or died during the four years of war 55 had no known grave and were commemorated on memorials in Europe and the Middle East. Outside of France and Flanders eight soldiers died in Iraq, two at Gallipoli, one in Egypt, one each in Poland and Germany and three died at sea, whilst 12 died on service in the UK.



Frank Antrobus' name on the Helles memorial, Gallipoli, Turkey. Twenty-year-old Frank, a soldier of the 6th Battalion South Lancashire Regiment, was killed at Anzac beach, six days after British troops landed there. He has no known grave.

Who was the first man killed? In 1915 the Parish Magazine stated that John Hoose had been the first Frodsham casualty, having died of wounds in April 1915. However, we now know the first Frodsham victim was Sam Burkhill of Five Crosses, Overton - a regular soldier who had enlisted at the beginning of 1913 into the 1st Cheshires. The regiment had formed part of the B.E.F (British Expeditionary Force) and was moved to France within a short time of war being declared. Six days after its arrival in France, the regiment had gone into battle against overwhelming German

forces. Due to a miscarriage of orders, the Cheshires had been overwhelmed by the advancing Germans and had suffered 57 soldiers killed.

Who was the last casualty? There are military graves in St.Laurence churchyard of soldiers who died after the 1918 peace settlement. Two graves are from just after the November 1918 Armistice. Also there are graves for each of the years 1919, 1920 and 1921. Of the 1918 burials, one was a Canadian infantryman, George McKay, who I suspect was a patient from the Auxiliary Military Hospital. He does not seem to have been associated with Frodsham apart from being a hospital patient. The other 1918 soldier was William Massey of Bradley who had served in the Cheshires, caught trench fever and had been drafted back to England because of his illness. William never fully recovered and died at his home as a result of complications arising from his medical condition.

John Bostock, who died 9th January 1919, was on a two-week furlough prior to his discharge from the army. He had been through the Prees Heath demobilization camp and, after only three days at home, he died of pneumonia. A Harding, another Frodsham soldier, was buried in February 1919. I am not aware of the cause of his death but when he died the local press was giving advice on avoiding the Spanish 'flu. There was a large increase in local deaths with 'flu at the time of his demise. George Hutchinson of Manor Farm died in June 1919 whilst he was at a military barracks in South Wales. He was buried with full military honours at Frodsham. The cause of his death is also believed to be Spanish 'flu. Yet another Frodsham soldier, W Gayter, was buried during April 1920 but the cause of death is unknown. A search of local newspapers from the period has failed so far to provide detailed information about these men, other than details of John Bostock's funeral.



The grave of Harold Wrench

The final burial considered to be within the Great War time-frame is that of Harold Wrench, a Canadian infantryman with the Manitoba regiment, a regiment known throughout Canada as the 'Canadian Scottish'. Harold had been born in Frodsham and lived with his parents in Overton. His father worked at Five Crosses, whilst Harold was a grocery assistant (1911 census). Between then and 1916 he emigrated to Canada where he lived in Saskatchewan until being drafted into the Army early in 1918. It seems that he had been wounded at some time, repatriated into England and was too ill for onward travel to Canada after the Armistice was signed. Others may have died after their demobilization as a result of injuries received during the war, but Harold Wrench was the last serving Frodsham soldier to have died within the Great War time-span. We must also remember those who survived the fighting and later died of problems brought on by the conflict. How many died in the years immediately after the Armistice was never recorded.

The Memorials

TRINITY MEMORIAL

(now situated at Frodsham Methodist Church, Five Crosses)



This is the smallest of the memorials in Frodsham. It bears the names of those members of the Trinity Methodist Church who gave their lives in the battles between 1914 and 1918. Among others it bears the name of Ralph Miller who died between the end of the war and 1921, no longer a soldier but remembered as such by the Church. The monument is badly eroded on the section that is in close proximity to the wall, which results in immense difficulties when researching some of the names. In many ways I look upon the Trinity memorial as the forgotten monument, many people being unaware of its existence. However, it is an important monument as it has names that are not listed on either the Hill or the St. Laurence memorials.

Trinity Church Memorial.

The damaged names are:

T. Larn... This was most likely Thomas Lardner, a Runcorn man who was living with his uncle and aunt in Frodsham during 1911. He is not recorded on the two other Frodsham monuments.

George.... Cannot make it out.

Herbert ... Possibly Ryder

Effic....Sax..- A double-barrelled name? Could this be a woman's name?

Allan Possibly Stevenson.

There was at one time a Great War Roll of Honour at Trinity Church, but many years ago it was sent to Manchester for safekeeping and so far, despite intensive searching, I have been unable to locate the missing Roll. So it seems that the missing names will remain unknown.

ST LAURENCE MEMORIAL



The idea of a war memorial to be placed within the grounds of St. Laurence Church was first suggested in May 1917. There was some local opposition to it, but in December 1917 the Parochial Church Council considered a scheme for a memorial in the churchyard and accepted a provisional design at that meeting. The cross, with the names of the fallen, was eventually unveiled on the 6th November 1921. Interestingly it contains nine names that do not occur on the Frodsham Hill memorial. They are:

A Hopley	James Bunt	William Moores
William Gladstone	Joseph Oakes	Walter Gould
Sam Roberts	E Higginson	Joseph Worrall

St Laurence Memorial

THE HILL MEMORIAL



The Frodsham Hill Memorial

Unlike the St. Laurence monument that was built using Church funds, the Frodsham Hill memorial was paid for from a public fund. A door-to-door collection was made throughout Frodsham and everyone was asked to donate. Strong views were expressed that the obelisk should only contain the names of Overton men but these seem to have been rejected quite quickly. The monument was dedicated two months earlier than that of St. Laurence on September 24th 1921.

Why and how the fallen were chosen for the respective memorials is not at all clear. Research has shown that Trinity Church listed members of its own Methodist congregation, whereas there is no similar evidence for those listed on the St Laurence memorial.

All three monuments list men who were not born in the town, all list men who worked in the town but were not residents and the two larger monuments list names of those that had moved out of the town prior to the Great War. Two Canadian soldiers and a South African resident are also on the monument. One of the Canadian soldiers was Walter Gould who was born in Frodsham and emigrated to Canada before the war. Harold Wrench, another Canadian soldier, was also born in Frodsham. The South African was John Minshall, a Norley man, who had worked in Kydd's shop in Church Street. He had emigrated before the war, but as soon as hostilities had been declared, made his way to London and signed up as soon as he left his ship. I have heard many reasons why the lists of the fallen on the war memorials differ, but so far none have proved to be correct.

The search for the unrecorded fallen

For many years now I have been searching for those Frodsham men and women of the Great War who are not recorded on our local memorials. I must confess that I have tended to do my research in spasms, spending time, mainly during the winter's evenings and leaving it for many months before coming back to the search. Over the years it has become easier to trace and confirm or otherwise reject potential Frodsham casualties. The Internet has allowed evidence to be rooted out, where years ago it was impossible to find such information. Interest in the Great War has increased rapidly over the last few years and large numbers of records are being put onto the Web. Battalion war diaries are slowly being put onto the Internet whilst more and more personal diaries are also being published. The latter can be especially useful in finding what had befallen individual soldiers. The deaths of private soldiers were not

usually individually recorded especially as the war gained momentum, but diligent searching occasionally produces results. But a word of caution – whilst there have been many well researched books published a lot of what is on the Internet is badly researched and quite often wrong. Erroneous and incorrect information is readily accepted if it's on the Internet. Individuals are often made to 'fit the facts' and not vice versa – very little attempt is made to go back to original records. Ancestry.com caused great difficulties several years ago when it published erroneous war records, but luckily this seems to have been rectified recently.

Although my list of those killed does not include men from Kingsley, they are included on the dedications found on the Commonwealth War Graves site, as Kingsley was part of the Ancient Parish of Frodsham until 1936 when Frodsham Civil Parish came into being. Additionally, men volunteering from the Clifton and Rocksavage side of the River Weaver often gave their address as Frodsham. Similarly the man from New Pale farm who was killed classed himself as from Frodsham. Using similar criteria to those used at the time of preparing the memorials, I believe that there are approximately 43 people who were not listed on the monuments. And, the list could still grow as more records become available.

2014 is the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War. Perhaps a permanent display could be set up to give us all in Frodsham a better understanding not only of those who fought and those who died in this terrible conflict but also as an acknowledgement of all the men and women of Frodsham who helped to secure peace by their involvement.

Source:

Frank Latham (1987) *Frodsham – the history of a Cheshire town*

ARCHIVAL NEWS 2013

Kath Hewitt (Archivist)

This year the archives have been very well used again, with twenty-four of the many enquiries needing lengthy research. Most emails have been filed as they contained so much local history and interesting family information which might well have been lost.

In October 2012, Mr. & Mrs. Verity of Alvanley, researching the Port of Frodsham, spent a morning in Castle Park House borrowing books, documents, files and the 1938 viaduct CD, which proved fortuitous for the archives. Only Part 1 of a long article about the Port by Peter Swift, who had worked in the archive room, existed in the records but Malcolm Verity, (the Secretary of Merseyside Industrial Archaeology Society), knowing Peter, was able to provide the completed article on CD - a welcome donation from the author.

Mr. Herman Lenders of Great Budworth Heritage Society wanted to know how Frodsham had acquired its original Blue Plaques. There was no information in The Frodsham Society's newsletters, 'Interact', and as Vale Royal no longer exists, no one seemed to recall who had produced them. Eventually a CWAC Conservation and Design lady was contacted who said she would try to help Mr. Lenders' Society. Does anyone have any information about the old blue plaques?

Rachel Swallow, a visiting lecturer of Chester University, spent several hours during 2 days in the archive room researching Frodsham Castle and its landscape to establish its possible existence. This potentially exciting project with her supervisor, Professor Stewart Ainsworth of 'Time Team' fame, was to be a non-invasive archaeological survey of the park, eventually enlisting volunteer 'archaeologists' from the village. Several months of Rachel's work and planning ended suddenly when the project's funding was curtailed. It was pleasing to know that Rachel found Dr. Dodd's papers and records, 'a treasure store'.

Facts and photographs about the old Whalebone Inn were scanned and emailed to Mike Jones who had early memories of the building. A young school boy wished to know more about Frodsham shops and their characters for his school project. Mrs. Dorothy Smith agreed to meet him and gave him all the information he needed. One very pleased young person! There have been three local family enquiries to which the archives, Frodsham Library and Chester Record Office supplied most answers. Mr. Simon Longden was interested in the Gleeson and Kydd's Jam factory, and has recently donated a very interesting magazine article about Helsby and Longden's history. Mrs. Doreen Hough generously donated a beautiful love token card and written information about the Sandland family and the Harrison family who built one of the cottages on Main Street (blue plaque).

Lindy Knowles of Canada made contact again about her Corker grandparents' family's life in Gasworks Cottage, Green Field Lane. Yvonne Stephens of Australia continued last year's absorbing correspondence with her relatives and we were all intrigued when Ben Aston (16) of Runcorn, sent me very polite emails asking about The Aston family's history and the possibility of there being noble ancestors. He had read my last year's report on the

internet! Philip Jenkins of Devon made contact again with additional information and questions about his Noden, Done, Antrobus and Snelson connections. He states that if anyone recognises his name he is willing to share family knowledge. Information and photos were emailed to him.

Jamie Bruce Lockhart's (of the Abbott Wright Family) help has been sought again on two counts; one to check whether an old photograph recently found was of Harriet Shaw Weaver. It proved not to be but he emailed new delightful family photographs of Harriet which are now in the archive. Secondly, a letter was sent this September, from remaining family members, supporting the Frodsham residents' suggestion to develop the recreational ground at the corner of Fountain Lane and Prince Way as a Garden of Remembrance.

Gordon Liversedge's enquiry about the Newton Hall Estate 1947-1960, Springside Villa and its previous owners eventually led him to find he had several siblings unknown to him – a very happy outcome. The National Children's Home file is growing steadily and more information is in the pipeline for future reference, especially for enquiries from abroad.

Christine Storey of Carlton, near Poulton-le-Fylde, had a fascinating enquiry. She was researching local field names and found that one, Tween Mills, also had a reference to Tween Mills Field in Frodsham. I was asked for any information that might indicate where the two Frodsham mills might have been. When approached, Farmers Sam Williams and Geoffrey Warburton asked around but no one now remembers the name or exact site of the mills, which, according to the limited information on the Internet, were in the vicinity of Castle Park. Tween Mills Field – does anyone have any knowledge of its location?

There have been enquiries about who planted the walnut trees in Stapleton Court and when; the springs which flow under the houses at the top of Red Lane; the original cellars of Castle Park House; Frodsham Library asking if the building is listed; Fraser James, the hairdressers, wanting photographs of Railway House to decorate their new premises; land rights in Blue Bridge Lane, Frodsham; and the whereabouts of Don Bradman's pitch – a concrete cricket pitch in the Overton Conservation Area, provided by the 'People's Don Bradman Fund' in co-operation with National Playing Fields Association in 2005 – no longer in existence – but the plaque remains on the wall by the Church of St Laurence.

Ken Crouch is trying to trace a particular Methodist WW1 plaque from a photograph he has found – see Ken's article above. Councillor Allen Wales and I met Mrs Dilys O'Neill to discuss whether her detailed records of Frodsham's WW1 fallen soldiers could be published in a booklet, to be given to Frodsham school children next year. A letter has been donated by Mr. John Nield recounting a WW2 Frodsham soldier's horrifying experience entering Belsen in 1945 and his onward march.

Bob Heaton of Acton Bridge spent time in the archive room, researching The Black Horse and White Hart Inns on the River Weaver and the Edward Aston family 1731 and 1825. All the information I gleaned was passed on and Bob very kindly donated deeds and a River Weaver navigation map to the archives.

Richard Hewitt has given his talk 'From the Archives' again, making good use of Dr. Dodd's slides of Frodsham 1960 to 1980. He also took photographs of 'Lisroan' (the late Dr. Earlam's house in Fluin Lane) just before it was demolished and this made the front page of the 'Chester Chronicle'. The archives now have computer copies of Dr. Earlam's funeral address, a news report of the efforts to stop the demolition, and images of 'Lisroan' as it was, and as a shell .

It is with great sadness that I have recorded in the archives the career and death of Mr. Derek Walker of Frodsham, a retired Helsby High School teacher, a nationally known mountaineer, climber and a member of the History Society.

Finally, my thanks to Arthur Smith, Mrs Dorothy Smith, Nick Smith and everyone who has given me answers, passed on enquiries, donated books, documents, files, maps and unusual artefacts – I am ever grateful. As always, I invite anyone who is interested to visit the archive room and spend some time there.

Frodsham & District History Society

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2014

All indoor meetings are held on Monday evenings at Main Street Community Church, Frodsham
and start at 7.45pm

Membership £5.00 p.a. + £1.50 per meeting. Visitors £3.00

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 6 January | Dating your Victorian family photographs
(Bring your own photographs for dating)
Linda Clarke |
| 3 February | The history of traditional salt-making in the United Kingdom
Andrew Fielding |
| 3 March | AGM & The history of the walled garden at Norton Priory
Kathy Williams |
| 7 April | Booking forms available for June visit
A century of cable-making at Helsby
John Dakin |
| 12 May | Commemorating World War 1
Councillor Allen Wales |
| 4 June | Guided Wednesday afternoon visit to Bodrhyddan Hall, home of Lord Langford, near St Asaph – details available in April
Organised by Kath Gee |
| 1 September | Our ancient Egyptian Heritage
Geoffrey Johnson |
| 6 October | Victorian transport
Glynn D. Parry |
| 3 November | English place names
Anthony Poulton-Smith |
| 8 December | The magic of toys
Robert MacGregor |