



**FRODSHAM AND DISTRICT
HISTORY SOCIETY**

JOURNAL



**Issue No.44
December 2014**

Editor: Kath Gee, assisted by Sheila Holroyd

Journal of
FRODSHAM AND DISTRICT HISTORY SOCIETY

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Front cover picture:

Some of the cast of Theatre in the Quarter's production ***Over by Christmas*** performed on Frodsham Station on Friday, 19th September, 2014. (Part of the Imperial War Museum's First World War Centenary Project.)
Photograph by Kath Gee

HISTORY SOCIETY NEWS

President: Mrs Joan Douglas

Officers:

Mr Brian Dykes*, Chairman; Dr Kath Gee, Hon. Sec.; Mrs Deborah Coker*, Hon. Treasurer.

Committee:

Mrs Margaret Dodd, Membership Secretary; Mr Andrew Faraday*; Mrs Maggie Jones; Mr Brian Keeble; Mrs Pam Keeble; Mrs Dilys O'Neil; Mrs Beryl Wainwright; Mrs Betty Wakefield; Programme Secretary; Mr Tony Wakefield.

* Denotes newly elected members at AGM 2014

Welcome to this 2014 edition of our History Society Journal. I am privileged to have been asked to be your Chairman following on from Betty Wakefield, who has done an admirable job for three years and still organises our speaker programme and, with husband Tony, hosts our committee meetings, for which we are very grateful. A few of you may know I was born in Frodsham, at the Rock Nursing Home run by our centenarian Honorary Member, John Miller's aunt and mother!

It has been a year of change: our long-time President, Sir Alan Waterworth, decided to retire in the summer and we warmly welcome Joan Douglas as our new President. The Society continues to grow in membership and has an excellent speaker programme that is well attended. We thank all those who help to manage membership and refreshments at our meetings, but, we do need more members to participate in the overall running of the Society. A new editor for the Journal is essential if it is to continue beyond the 2014 issue. We thank Kath Gee and Sheila Holroyd for keeping it alive for yet another year, but this really is their last. Deborah Coker is not only our new Treasurer but, with Beryl Wainwright, also shares the role of temporary Membership Secretary. Andrew Faraday has also joined the Committee and we are grateful to him for initiating the updating of our Constitution - we shall be seeking its approval at the next AGM.

Our Archivist, Kath Hewitt, has had a most interesting and busy year. Kath has dealt with enquires from many parts of Britain and has assembled five separate local exhibitions displaying original World War I artefacts from the Archive and friends; all exceptionally well received. One of the most striking exhibits was the nurse's uniform which originally belonged to Elsie Davies of Brook House, Main Street. Elsie can be seen in her nurse's uniform on page 24. Some of Elsie's ancestors farmed a large portion of Frodsham Marsh and at the time of one of the great spring tides they lost a very large flock of sheep.

Two Tide Stones on marshland behind the Old Hall Hotel in Main Street mark inundations in 1802 and 1862 – before the Manchester Ship Canal was constructed. Members of the Society and visitors attending a Cheshire Local History Association Quarterly Meeting saw the Tide Stones when Kath Gee hosted a Main Street and 'behind the scenes' walk on July 8th. We also thank Kath for organising our June visit to Lord Langford's home in NE Wales. We had an excellent guided tour of his diverse collection of historical items and were free to explore the lovely landscaped grounds surrounding Bodrhyddan Hall.

Three of our committee members, Pam and Brian Keeble and Beryl Wainwright, continue to develop the website: www.frodshamhistoricimages.co.uk and other members represent the Society at a range of local events, for instance: Kath Gee & Sheila Holroyd jointly led a Victorian Heritage Walk around Castle Park as part of the Frodsham Festival of Walks, Kath Gee and Kath Hewitt both displayed History Society items at St Laurence Church Heritage Weekend, and, Kath Hewitt and Dilys O'Neill both participated in the Gallery 3 Opening Event at Castle Park Arts Centre.

Brian Dykes

COLONEL HENRY HERVEY ASTON 1761-1798

Sheila Holroyd

Hervey Aston, one of the Astons of Aston Hall, near Frodsham, was charming, handsome, athletic, brave, arrogant and rich. He was an all-round sportsman and a friend of the Duke of York and the Prince of Wales. He joined the Foot Guards in 1789, but retired from active soldiering in 1794 when he inherited Aston and several other estates. In 1791 he had married the beautiful Harriet Shepherd, daughter of the Ninth Viscount Irwin of Temple Newsam. It was a love match. He rejoined the army when war broke out with France after the French Revolution, rose rapidly to the rank of colonel, and took his regiment to India.

On December 16th, 1798, Hervey Aston fought a duel with another officer. Neither man was wounded. The following day, December 17th, he fought another duel, this time with a Major Allen. He was fatally wounded by a pistol bullet in his right side and died on December 23rd. During the last five days his friend, Arthur Wellesley, later the Duke of Wellington, was constantly by his side.

Now Robert Latter has written a biography of this colourful figure, and has named Howard Talbot as his co-author. Howard was a founding member and former Vice President of our History Society who sadly died on 11th November, 2012. Howard was a direct descendant of Hervey Aston.



Howard Talbot

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STAPLETON COTTON, FIRST VISCOUNT COMBERMERE 1773 -1865

Arthur Smith

Stapleton Cotton spent a large part of his adult life serving as an army officer. In the Peninsular War he rose to be General Officer Commanding the cavalry under the Duke of Wellington. Born on 14th November 1773 at the family home of Lleweni Hall in Denbighshire, North Wales, he was the second son and fifth child of Sir Robert Salisbury Cotton and his wife, Frances, daughter of Colonel James Russell Stapleton of Bodrhyddan, Denbighshire. In 1776 the family took up residence at Combermere Abbey, Whitchurch, Shropshire, and at the age of eight Stapleton Cotton attended Audlem Grammar School. Unfortunately this turned out to be a poor start in life as his education there was totally inadequate.



Combermere Abbey from a drawing by Mary, Viscountess Combermere.

After three years at Audlem, Cotton was sent to Westminster School, which was not far from his father's house in Berkeley Square. Here his education became more rigorous and he made sound progress. He had many distinguished contemporaries at the school, some of whom remained life-long friends. At the age of sixteen he left Westminster School and was sent to Norwood House in Bayswater – a private military academy kept by Major Reynolds of the Shropshire militia. But regrettably it is said he learned little more there than how to clean his musket and equipment.

On 26th February 1790 Sir Robert obtained a second lieutenancy without purchase for him in the 23rd Regiment of Foot or Royal Welsh Fusiliers. In 1791 Cotton joined the regiment in Dublin where he served until 1793 when he was appointed captain by purchase in the 6th Dragoon Guards. At this stage in his career he served his regiment during the campaigns of the Duke of York in Flanders, where he was the only English officer in an Irish regiment, which almost certainly made life a little difficult for him.

Another concern at this time was the frequent drinking and duelling amongst the officers but his temperate habits and placid ways kept him out of trouble. He embarked with his regiment in August 1793 and joined the Duke of York's army just after the siege of Dunkirk. He took part in the campaigns in northern France and the following year he was present at Premont and at the cavalry battle at Le Cateau. Later in the year he was promoted to lieutenant colonel in the newly formed 25th Light Dragoons – then known as Gywn's Hussars. The regiment was quartered at

Margate and Ramsgate, but shortly moved to Weymouth to attend on George III during his stay there. It is said during this time he became a great favourite of the king. In 1796 he went with his regiment to the Cape arriving in July. A few months later they sailed to Madras where, in 1799, he commanded his troops in the campaign against Tippoo Sahib, Sultan of Mysore. At the siege of Seringapatam he probably became acquainted for the first time with Colonel Arthur Wellesley (the future Duke of Wellington).

In 1800 his elder brother died and consequently his father arranged for him to move to another regiment based in England. Accordingly he joined the 16th Light Dragoons on the coast of Kent. Shortly after his return to Shropshire, he met Lady Anna Pelham-Clinton. They fell in love and, on 1 March 1801, they were married. In the next few years they had three children.

Stapleton Cotton attained the rank of Colonel on 1st January 1800 and became a major general on 30th October 1805. For a time he commanded a cavalry brigade at Weymouth under the Duke of Cumberland.



Colonel Cotton in his twenty seventh year

In addition to his military duties, Cotton found time to become engaged in politics. In 1806 he was elected MP for Newark and retained that position until 1814. Perhaps to some extent he was following a family tradition in this move, as his father had been MP for Cheshire for forty years. In 1807 probably the gravest event of his 34 years occurred – his wife died of consumption.

The Peninsular War

One of main causes of the Peninsular War was Napoleon's decision to issue the Berlin Decrees, whereby Continental nations were forbidden to trade with Britain. When Spain and Portugal flouted these orders, Napoleon sent an army under General Jounot to bring these governments to heel. In 1808 the British despatched troops to Spain under Sir John Moore. Major General Cotton and his cavalry regiment were sent out to Portugal to assist in this campaign. He set out early in December 1808,

sailing from Falmouth in command of a brigade of the 14th and 16th regiments of the Light Dragoons. The brigade served on the Portuguese frontier during Moore's campaign in Spain and afterwards in the north of Portugal. Eventually Moore's troops were defeated and forced to retreat to Corunna.

Wellesley

Three months later the British government sent another force, this time commanded by Sir Arthur Wellesley. His strategy was to keep the French forces divided and only to engage in action when there was a good chance of success. Although it was not the ideal plan, Wellesley felt he had no alternative but to divide his army to guard the Portuguese frontier with Spain in three different places. He placed Hill in the south with 20,000 men guarding the road from Badajoz to Lisbon. In the centre he put Beresford with his Portuguese troops to protect the route through the Tagus valley, whilst he himself took the northerly sector that he considered to be the likeliest approach of the French invader through Almeida or Ciudad Rodrigo.

Until the arrival of General Payne, Cotton commanded the allied cavalry. The first notable engagement in which he participated was the battle of Talavera, where he commanded a brigade of Light Dragoons. In the late summer of 1809 Wellington joined with Spanish troops under General Cuesta and moved across southern Spain close to the River Tagus. There at Talavera he met French forces under Marshal Jourdan and King Joseph. On the night of 27th/28th July the French launched their attack continuing into the day but during the following night the French withdrew. After a hard fought battle, Wellington with twenty thousand troops had outmatched a force of double that number. But his Spanish ally had proved very unreliable and he decided that in future he would manage without their assistance. The scale of this conflict is revealed by the figures for mortality – the British lost 17,000 troops and the French 45,000.

The Lines of Torres Vedras

After Talavera, Sir Arthur Wellesley, or more correctly Lord Wellington, (as he had been given the honour of a peerage) decided to spend some time examining the hills of Torres Vedras. He concluded that as the frontier of Portugal was so open, his best defensive plan would be to fortify the hills to the north east of Lisbon. So in the autumn of 1809 he set his engineers to work on a whole series of fortifications to make this area into an impregnable barrier.

During the winter months Wellington had kept his army quartered just inside the Portuguese frontier and now he had news of the approach of a large body of French troops under Marshal Massena – probably the ablest of all Napoleon's commanders. Some time ago Wellington had chosen the Busaco Ridge, a long hill rising to 1800 feet in places, south of Almeida as his main defensive position. It was now 27th September when 60,000 Frenchmen faced 50,000 Allies half of whom were Portuguese.

He placed his five infantry divisions of Hill, Leith, Picton, Spencer and Crauford from the south to the north of the ridge. Despite their experience at Vimeiro and Talavera the French attacked in column of 40 men wide and 40 to 60 deep and were quickly mown down by the 'rolling fire' of the British line. By evening the enemy had been driven back from the ridge, 23 out of 27 French battalions had been repulsed by five British divisions and seven Portuguese battalions. The following day Wellington withdrew on the next stage of his carefully devised plan and headed seventy miles south to the Lines of Torres Vedras. These fortifications were so formidable that Massena never tried to invest them but retreated in the face of Wellington's counter attacks.

After the battle Cotton received news of the death of his father and, in January 1810, he obtained leave to return to England. Shortly after his return he attended the Houses of Parliament where he received considerable praise for his part in the battle of Talavera. However it should be remembered that cavalry seldom played a conspicuous part in the battles of the Peninsular War. The main reasons for this were the relative paucity in the number of horses and the nature of the battlefields. With a few exceptions it was chiefly the infantry who won the great and decisive actions. Throughout the war the Duke of Wellington was chary about his cavalry engaging in conflicts as he was well aware of the difficulty of replacing any losses.

In late January 1810 he returned home to Combermere Abbey. He was now not only a baronet with a large estate but a man of fashion and welcomed in society. Undoubtedly at this time he must have been tempted to remain at home and enjoy his position in society. Yet his qualifications and experience were not always appreciated owing to his youthful appearance and his modesty. A man of moderate stature, slightly but strongly built and very active, he was widely recognised as an excellent horseman. At the same time he loved to be splendidly dressed. His uniform and horse trappings were said to be worth at least 500 guineas. Such was his reputation for fine clothes that he became known as the "Lion d'Or."

Cotton rejoined Wellington's army in the spring of 1810 and was appointed to command the first division and then, after a few months, the whole of the allied cavalry (with the rank of lieutenant general). He attained the same rank in the British army in 1812. A slow voyage made him three days late for the battle of Vitoria, but he commanded the allied cavalry throughout the ensuing campaigns in Spain and in southern France until the peace in 1814. These campaigns included action in the Pyrenees, at Orthez and at Toulouse.

Some of his main achievements in command of the cavalry were:

(i) Covering the retreat from Almeida to the lines of Torres Vedras from July to September 1810. During this action not one baggage wagon was lost.

(ii) The successful action at Llerena on April 11 1812.

(iii) His action at Castrejon, near Salamanca on 18th July 1812, when with Anson's brigade of cavalry and the 4th and Light Divisions, he held Marmont's entire army at bay and defeated plans that would have jeopardised the entire British army.

(iv) His services at the battle of Salamanca where he was second in command under Lord Wellington. He led the charge of Marchant and Anson's heavy brigades. Wellington wrote that he commanded the cavalry very well and better than some who might be supposed cleverer than he.

His Military Reputation

Sir Charles Oman, former Professor of Modern History at Oxford, states that Cotton was in high command throughout Wellington's campaign in the Peninsula (1809 – 1814). However, in his opinion, he was hardly up to his position though he earned his chief's tolerance by strict obedience to orders, which was more to Wellington's liking than any show of initiative or military genius.

Later C W C Oman declares that Wellington preferred blind obedience in his subordinates, which explains his commissioning of the cavalry arm to Stapleton Cotton, who was, he says, "a mediocre personage." (page46). Professor Oman goes on to maintain that Wellington did not make greater use of his massed cavalry between 1809 and 1814 because he did not have an officer of proved ability in chief

command of his cavalry. Stapleton Cotton, who served so long in that capacity, was “not a man of mark.” (page104).

At the end of the Peninsular War in 1814 five of Wellington’s generals were honoured with peerages. They were Beresford, Hill, Graham, Hope and Stapleton Cotton. However Sir Charles Oman states the official reason for the omission of Sir Thomas Picton was that he had not had a distinct command. He adds that whilst this was true of the first three in the list, it was not true of Hope or Cotton, “whose independent commands” he maintains, “had been little more than nominal.”(page 138).*

In the months leading up to the Battle of Waterloo, Cotton had written to the Duke offering his services as cavalry commander but the Prince Regent had promised this important position to Lord Uxbridge. Wellington’s only objection to the appointment was that he had worked with Lord Combermere in India and in the Peninsular War, but never with Lord Uxbridge. However he did not press the point so his long serving cavalry officer took no part in the Waterloo campaign.

On 18th June 1814 Lord Combermere married Caroline Greville, daughter of Captain William Fulke Greville. They had three children:
Wellington Henry Stapleton-Cotton (2nd Viscount Combermere)
Lady Caroline Stapleton-Cotton
Lady Meliora Emily Anna Maria Cotton

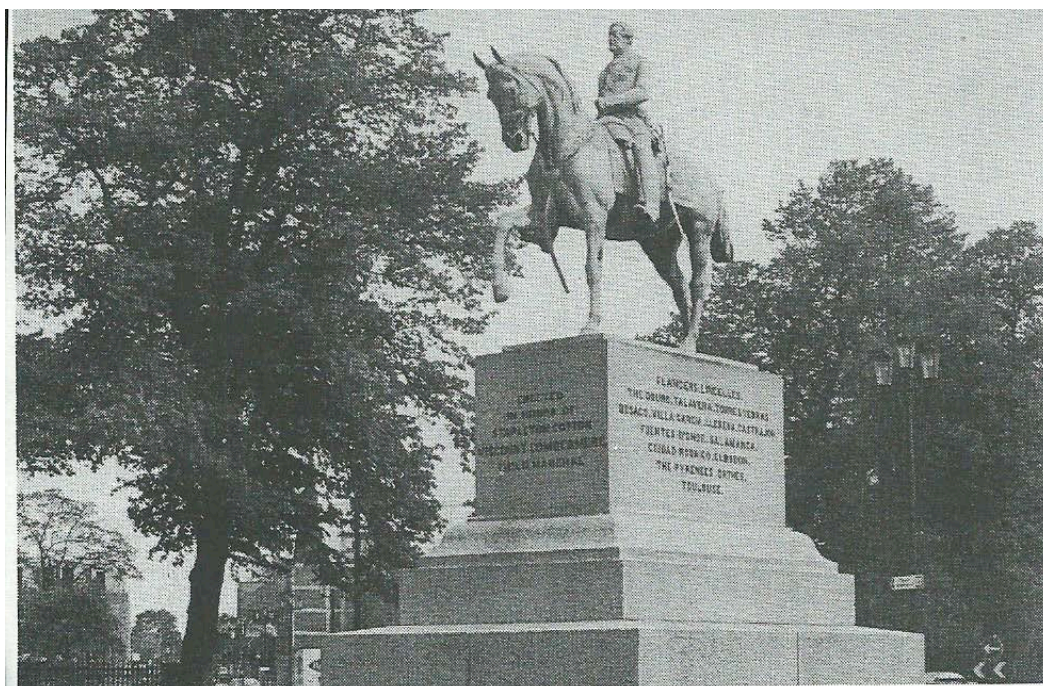
In 1817 he was appointed governor of Barbados and commander in chief of the Leeward Islands. He held these posts until June 1820. From 1822 to 1825 he was commander in chief in Ireland. It was during this time that his second wife, Caroline died in 1824. When this commission ended the directors of the East India Company, who governed a large part of India on behalf of the British government, selected him on the advice of Wellington to be their new commander in chief. The main task given to him was to send his troops to lay siege to Bhuratpur – a fort which for years had been deemed impregnable. After a short time his well organised attacking forces were successful and the great Jat fortress was destroyed. He served in India for the customary five years and returned home in 1830. For his service in India he was created Viscount Combermere.



Lord Combermere, victor of Bhuratpur

In 1838 he married for a third time. His bride was Mary Woolley by whom he had no children but who was a staunch companion during his later years.

He spent his retirement carrying out his parliamentary and social duties. A typical Tory landowner of the time, he opposed Catholic emancipation, the Reform Bill of 1832, repeal of the Corn Laws and other reforms. On Wellington's death in 1852 he was made Constable of the Tower of London and in 1855 he became a field marshal. Suffering from a severe cold, he died at Colchester House, Clifton, in February 1865 at the age of 92. He was buried in the family vault at St Margaret's Church, Wrenbury, in south Cheshire. Of the Cotton memorials in the church, perhaps the most impressive one of Viscount Combermere is on the south side, carved by William Theed of London.



The equestrian statue of Viscount Combermere which stands in front of the Law Courts, near the Grosvenor Bridge in Chester.

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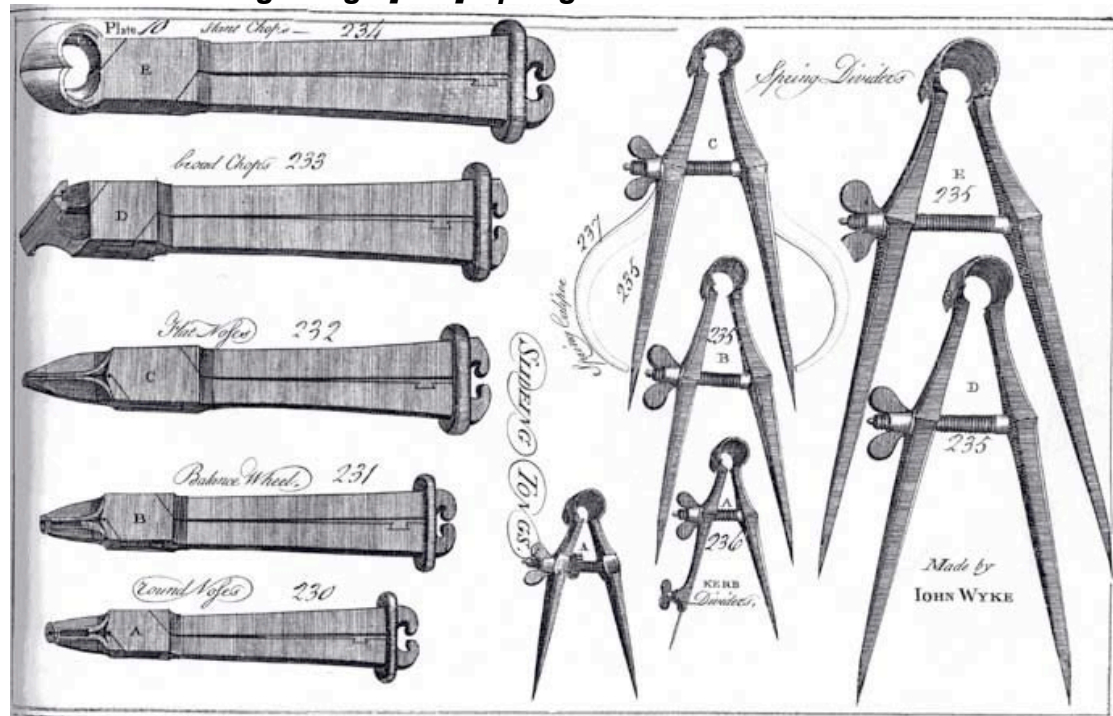
STUBS, TOOLMAKERS

Sheila Holroyd

To the people of Frodsham, Joseph Stubs is the man who in the 1840s refurbished what we now call Castle Park House and employed Edward Kemp to remodel the gardens. But Stubs only retired to spend the last years of his life in Frodsham after a very busy life in Warrington, working with his brothers John and William to develop the tool-making firm founded in 1777 by his father, Peter Stubs. Peter was a busy man, as he was also an innkeeper, a brewer and a malt maker, as well as the father of eighteen children!

The family tool-making firm flourished and survived in private hands until the 1960s. We wish to thank the Davistown Museum, Center for the Study of Early Tools, in Maine, USA, for permission to reproduce these illustrations which show the type of tools which the firm would have produced in its early days.

Plate 10: *Sliding Tongs [and] Spring Dividers*



Tools 230 to 237

Sliding tongs were used to hold small parts in such a way that they could be handled in different positions for filing, etc., but unlike pliers in that the work was clamped in the jaws. Clamping was done by sliding the collar or "thimble" down the arms with the work in place; the small dovetail slot which appears in the lower arm, near the thimble in each tool, was for securing the spring between the arms to open them. The arms of sliding tongs are flat, and the whole tool could be held in a bench vise if necessary.

230. *round Noses*: With jaws cut away on both faces and a slot to hold wheel arbors.

231. *Balance wheel*: Jaws with one face cut away to accommodate the pallets of a balance verge.

232. *Flat Noses*: With flat jaws to hold flat items.

233. *broad Chops*: See no. 232.

234. *Slant Chops*: See no. 232.

235A-E. *Spring Dividers*: Multipurpose tools for marking out. Made of steel with a steel hinge spring. All adjusted by means of a wing nut, and no. 235A has a small locking nut inside the left arm for making sure that the measurement is not disturbed.

236. *Kerb Dividers*: With one point adjustable, used for marking out a watch slide, or curb, and general fine work.

237. *Spring Caliper*: Like no. 235, with a spring hinge used to take outside measurements.

MAIL ROBBERS – SLATER WAS MISTAKEN

Susan Lorimer

No wonder Bill Hawkin could find little corroborative evidence for George Slater's story of Lowndes, the mail robber who was gibbeted on Helsby Hill. (See: History Society Journal, Autumn 1991, Issue 12) Slater got the date wrong!

Slater relates in his "Chronicles" the story of Lowndes, who robbed the Frodsham post boy, John Stanton, in Dunham-on-the-Hill in 1795. He states that Lowndes was tried and executed three years later.

The trial was in fact held in Chester on 18th April 1791, before the Honourable Edward Bearcroft, Chief Justice of Chester. William Lowndes, alias William Henry Clarke (plus five other aliases) was indicted on four charges of mail robbery, including the one at Dunham on 29th June 1789. He was actually tried for robbing James Arthur, who carried the mail from Warrington to Northwich, at Great Budworth on 11th March 1788. Lowndes, who was armed with a pistol and a stake with a nail through the end, got away with the post boy's horse and the letters. The evidence against Lowndes was overwhelming and he was found guilty. He was executed at Boughton on 21st April 1791 and his body gibbeted on Helsby Hill.

William Lowndes had been so notorious a mail robber that he was given the nickname "the Postmaster". His trial and execution was reported far and wide, from Oxford to Scotland. The prosecution cost the Government more than £1500, but Lowndes left property in excess of £2000.

In January 1867 there was an article in the Chester Chronicle about the death of Mary Stanton, the widow of John Stanton, the Frodsham post boy. It reported that the Dunham robbery took place in 1795 and that Lowndes was executed in 1798. This was probably the original source for Slater's article.

William Lowndes was born in Smallwood, near Congleton, in 1759. He was married with a daughter, Alice, and earned his living as a weaver and part-time dancing teacher. He then deserted his family and bigamously married Amy Clarke from Derbyshire. They had two children. William embarked on a life of crime which took them all over the country, and Amy obviously condoned and supported his actions. It was Amy who tried on numerous occasions to free William from Chester Gaol, where he was imprisoned prior to his trial. She tried to smuggle saws and files into the prison, provided laudanum to drug the turn-key, who later died, and bribed the girl who took in food for the prisoners to take in a parcel containing a pistol. All these attempts were unsuccessful and William was executed. No doubt it was Amy and friends who removed the body from the gibbet in the dead of night.

The life of a post-boy was obviously hazardous. On 6th April 1796 Thomas Brown and James Price robbed a 15-year old mail boy. He fled to a toll gate opposite the Shrewsbury Arms and raised the alarm. Thomas and James were caught in Birmingham, executed on 30th April 1796, and hung in chains at Trafford Green. They remained there until 1820. When the bodies were removed, there was a robin's nest inside the skull of James Price. Now that's gory!

BETSY DUNCALF 1830-1913

Suzanne Parry

Betsy Duncalf, daughter of James and Hannah, was born in 1830 in the village of Kingsley, near Frodsham, Cheshire. Her baptism is recorded in the parish register of Frodsham church, there being no church in Kingsley at that time. By 1841 the family had moved to Norley, the next village to Kingsley, on the edge of Delamere Forest. Betsy spent most of her life in either of these two villages, although she was elsewhere in 1861; no trace of her being found in the Frodsham area in that census. In December 1850 Betsy was married at the parish church in Norley to her second cousin, John Duncalf, and in 1851 was living in Kingsley with her new husband's family.

Two daughters were born to Betsy and John in the next three years – Susannah, in 1852 and Emma in 1853, both baptised at Kingsley. Sadly, in the August of 1852, John died. Betsy remained a widow for the rest of her life but in 1861 she gave birth to a son, whom she named Edwin Shallcross Duncalf. This choice of name would seem to infer that the father of her child was named Shallcross and this is proved to be correct, as Edwin named Joshua Shallcross, a butcher, as his father when he married for the second time.

In 1871 Betsy was back in Norley, acting as housekeeper for her father, together with her son Edwin, at that time a scholar. Still in Norley in 1881, she is now described as a domestic servant. Her father, aged 79 and a farmer, is still the head of the house and Betsy's son Edwin is described as a wheelwright's apprentice. It is interesting to note that in the 1841 census for Kingsley, living next door to Thomas Shallcross with a son Joshua aged six, was another Thomas Shallcross, who was a wheelwright – possibly a cousin to his neighbour? It seems likely that Edwin's apprenticeship was the result of paternal interest properly shown by the Shallcross family.

Betsy must have moved back to Kingsley after 1881, possibly after her father's death in 1884. She lived there with her brother Tom who had remained a bachelor. Tom died in 1912 and Betsy in 1913. Betsy, John, and Tom are buried in the same grave in Norley churchyard.



From this brief resume of Betsy's life, it would seem that she was just an ordinary woman but she made a deep enough impression on one man for him to write a poem about her. That man was Billy Gibson 1887-1975, the miller at Kingsley Mill; local and county councillor, local historian and writer. The poem was sent to the author by Bill Duncalf, the youngest son of Edwin by his second wife.

BETSY'S HILL

By ALDERMAN W.A.GIBSON, OBE, JP

Some men have been famous for winning a war.
And some have been famous for breaking the law.
But the lady I wish to refer to today
Was famous for neither. But yet in a way,

Well known to the public. She left her good name,
On a hill we shall find in an old country lane.
Her surname was Duncalf. She lived with Old Tom,
Who ne'er had a mate, nor a wife, nor a chum.

Was shy and thought women were best left alone.
Cared only for Betsy, his own flesh and bone.
And both set example to the neighbours around,
In that neither were customed to prick nor to wound.

Or pry, poke, or question, the business of folk,
Ne'er sought an occasion their friends to provoke
Except when another trod on their old toes.
When both were as fluent as water that flows.

Th'old lady kept cows, and they helped to keep her,
Some pigs she had too, and a friendly old cur.
And a grand flock of fowl which laid plenty of eggs.
While Tom worked i'the garden, tho' stiff on his legs.

Her place could be seen from 'The Old Water Mill.
From where she got corn, her meal and a bill,
To feed cows and calves, her pigs and hens too.
And oft put the meal in a boiler to stew,

To make it go further. A much cheaper way,
For making pigs fat and persuading fowl lay
Than feeding it dry. Which some neighbours denied,
And one went so far as to say Betsy lied.

But Betsy, outspoken, would tell them to go
To where it was hot. We'll call it So-So.
And mind their own business and she would mind hers,
And Tom would support her in language as terse.

I remember her teasman, Frank Lyon by name.
His nickname was Doodle. It answered the same.
Who always would ask what was weight of the load,
We wanted him take up that old cindered road.

He swore there was frost, or a downfall of rain,
He'd never get up, 'twas too great a strain.
Was sure to get stuck, or his horse jib and stop,
When he got near old Betsy's, not far from the top.

But Frank always went, and came back with a smile,
The light in his eye could be seen for a mile.
For Betsy was kind and oft gave him a tip,
And a drink which was often much more than a sip.

And he called her a lady. A 'None Such', he said.
Was sure that her sort were all just 'about dead'.
Now he's dead, and she's dead, and Tom's gone as well.
All laid in their graves. For each 'tolled the bell'.

But the name o'th old lady lives with us all yet.
One those who once knew her will never forget.
For always, on passing, they see her form still,
Standing by her old gate, which is on Betsy's Hill.

Reproduced from The Duncalf Dossier, Vol 1, No 9, May, 1991, by kind permission
of Anne Cole, of the Duncalf One Name Study.

HERITAGE BLUE PLAQUES FOR CASTLE PARK

Kath Gee

During 2014 the Frodsham & District History Society Committee has supported the acquisition of heritage blue plaques for the three key restored buildings in Castle Park. The Society has match funded financial awards from two local grant sources, namely: a Frodsham Community Grant funded by Cllrs. Andrew Dawson and Lynn Riley, awarded on 25th April, and a Frodsham Town Council Grant awarded on 24th June. The plaques will be similar in size and design to the existing 27 cast aluminium plaques in the town centre, but, the Castle Park plaques will be zinc etched with the same traditional mid-blue background.

Each plaque outlines the age and original purpose of the building which is no longer obvious to many of our Park visitors. Hopefully, when you receive the Journal the plaques will be in place!

My thanks go to the respective Trusts for permission to erect the plaques and to the two grant awarding authorities for their support.

BRADSHAW'S FRODSHAM

A snapshot of local history in Victorian times

Kath Gee

The idea of writing this article came to me on Christmas Day 2013 when browsing a gift I had given my husband – a facsimile copy of *Bradshaw's Descriptive Railway Hand-Book of Great Britain and Ireland (1863)*. The contents of this handbook were originally published in four separate sections – between 1845 and 1853. By the 1860s the British railway network was reaching its zenith and tourism based on railway journeys was developing apace. *Bradshaw's Handbook*, as the 1863 compilation had become known, reflects this period of growth and development.

Many of you will have watched Michael Portillo's *Great British Railway Journeys* television series that have been shown since 2010. In each set of programmes Michael Portillo makes a modern journey with his *Bradshaw's Handbook* as a guide and with en route stopovers at hotels and places of interest mentioned in the *Handbook*. Sadly, Portillo did not stop at Frodsham when he journeyed on our rail line. However, the series brought the rare and original *Handbook* to the attention of the general public and an enterprising publisher – Old House Books & Maps – began producing facsimile copies in 2012.

Who was Bradshaw?

George Bradshaw was born on 29 July, 1801, at Windsor Bridge, Pendleton, Salford, Lancashire. Although his parents were far from wealthy, when he was young they enabled him to take lessons from a minister with an interest in philosophy. On leaving school George was apprenticed to an engraver in Manchester, and in 1820 he set up his own engraving business in Belfast, but returned to Manchester in 1822 and set up as an engraver and printer, principally of maps and then railway timetables as demand for them developed. He joined the Society of Friends (the Quakers) and gave a considerable part of his time to philanthropic work as his business prospered. Bradshaw is best known for developing the most successful and longest published series of combined railway timetables and guides. He married on 15 May, 1839, and went on to have two children. While touring Norway he contracted cholera and died on 6th September, 1853, aged 52. He is buried in the cemetery adjoining the cathedral in Oslo. His publishing company continued to prosper until railway nationalisation contributed to its demise in 1961. The continuance of the publishing company explains why the now popular *Bradshaw's Handbook (1863)* appeared 10 years after George Bradshaw's death.



George Bradshaw by Richard Evans, 1841,
from [Wikipedia](#)

Bradshaw's guide to Frodsham

I am especially fascinated by Bradshaw's contemporary descriptions of early Victorian places and particularly wish to bring his account of Frodsham to your attention. The Chester to Warrington line through Frodsham opened to the public on the 18th December, 1850. Frodsham features as a few succinct lines in Section II of *Bradshaw's Handbook*, which is some 112 pages long, and subtitled: *Bradshaw's Tours through the counties of Berks, Buckingham, Wilts, Dorset, Devon, Cornwall, Somerset, Gloucester, the South Wales districts, Oxford, Warwick, Salop, Chester, Flint, Carnarvon, Anglesea, and through Ireland*. Bradshaw's Frodsham is recorded thus:

Telegraph station at Warrington (1).
HOTEL – Bear's Paw (2).
MARKET DAY – Saturday.
FAIRS – May 15th and August 21st.

This place is situated in a pretty spot under Overton Hill. It has a fine old Norman church (from which there is a good view) (3), grammar school (4), graving dock (5), an old castle (6) given by Edward I to Llewellyn's brother David, for the betrayal of which he was executed. It [the castle] was burnt in 1642. It [Frodsham] has a population of 2,837 (7), employed in the salt works (8). Here died T. Hough, aged 141 years (9); and its inhabitants are celebrated for their longevity.

Author's explanation and critique of Bradshaw's text

(1) The development of the Telegraph was co-incident with the growth of the railway network. Telegraph stations were essential to railway communication before the telephone superseded it.

(2) The Bear's Paw, built 1632, was already old, but had been modernised with 'Georgian-style' windows that were restored to their present form by Douglas & Minshull in 1903-04. The old coaching inn took advantage of the railway by adding 'and Railway Hotel' to its name.

(3) The Norman church, the Parish Church of St Laurence, occupies an elevated site & its tower is a prominent landmark in Frodsham. After Bradshaw's time the Church was extensively & sympathetically restored by a respected firm of Victorian church architects, Bodley & Garner in 1880-82.

(4) The grammar school, or Free School, was founded c.1660 and set in the southwest corner of the churchyard at the place where Church Walk meets Church Road. The school moved to a new larger building in School Lane, Overton, in 1824. That site is now occupied by Frodsham Church of England Primary School, but the Grammar School foundation plaque can still be seen set in the exterior wall.

(5) The graving dock is now the site of the Weaver Sailing Club on the right bank of the River Weaver.

(6) The old castle preceded a private residence called Park Place which existed in Bradshaw's time. The fortified manor house / 'small castle' had burnt down in 1654 (*sic*) and remained a ruin for about a century until Daniel Ashley had Park Place built on the derelict site. Park Place was reconstructed and extended for Joseph Stubs in the early 1850s and renamed Castle Park House by Edward Abbott Wright when he acquired ownership in 1861.

(7) Bradshaw's figure for the population of Frodsham in the mid-nineteenth century seems inflated. The 1851 census records a total of 2179 persons in Frodsham Ancient [Ecclesiastical] Parish (FAP). The Ancient Parish comprised the townships of Frodsham, Frodsham Lordship, Helsby, Alvanley, Manley, Newton, Kinsley and most of Norley. It also included the hamlets of Bradley, Overton, Netherton and Woodhouses. So, Frodsham Ancient Parish was an extensive area with many small settlements. Separate, smaller Civil Parishes came into being in 1866. Frodsham Civil Parish included Frodsham Bridge, Newtown, Frodsham Marsh, Marsh Green and Snidley Moor. Frodsham Lordship was a separate, larger Civil Parish until the two were amalgamated in 1936.

(8) Bradshaw's statement '*employed in salt works*' is misleading. A salt works existed on the left bank of the River Weaver, downstream from Frodsham Bridge, throughout the nineteenth century, but the number of employees is not known. William Hawkin's analysis of Frodsham's 1851 census data conveys a diverse range of employment at this time. For instance, there were 13 farms in Frodsham Township & 28 in Frodsham Lordship; almost half of them employing apprentices, and presumably, seasonal labour. There were 33 railway workers including an engine driver, stoker, a porter and many labourers. There were also 569 scholars attending local schools – many of them as boarders. Numerous grocers, butchers and bakers; 22 dressmakers, 14 tailors plus coopers, clergy, lawyers, doctors, teachers, innkeepers and a beekeeper were included, but, no salt works employees...

(9) The death of T. Hough, aged 141 years, is surely an error or an exaggeration, though it is pleasing to note our reputation for longevity!

The selection of features Bradshaw included in his brief description of Frodsham suggests it is based on what he saw & heard when travelling through on the train. It begs the question as to which other features of early Victorian Frodsham might he have mentioned? Notwithstanding Bradshaw's brevity and imprecision in describing Frodsham, we really must commend him for putting Frodsham into the first national guide for tourists travelling by rail.

A brief history of the growth of the railway in Frodsham

Kath Gee

Construction of the railway line was started in 1846 & by early 1847 work was underway on the Sutton tunnel. After some delays & changes, the public opening of the line from Chester to Warrington Junction took place on 18th December 1850.

By 1890 the traffic handled at Frodsham had outgrown the facilities – the station was in need of a longer, wider platform & a larger goods yard. The substantially built station comprising a booking office, waiting room & living accommodation for the stationmaster was moved *en bloc* to create space. How this was done is described in Frodsham Local History Journal Issue 33 (Autumn 2003).

By the early 1900s expansion had been achieved. Frodsham goods yard was a hive of activity exporting cattle, potatoes, cheese, milk & other agricultural commodities. There was also a commuter service to Liverpool via the Halton Curve from 1872 and the station catered for numerous day-trippers visiting Mersey View.

PADGATE INDUSTRIAL SCHOOLS, GREEN LANE, PADGATE, WARRINGTON

Doris MacDougall

My paternal grandfather was born in 1886. For some reason unknown to myself and my family, he and four of his siblings were placed in Padgate Cottage Home, Warrington, and spent their childhood there as inmates. In researching my family history, I have discovered that he was one of twelve children born to my great grandparents. Of the twelve, eight survived beyond the 1911 census. One was brought up by his grandparents and the two youngest were brought up by their parents in Nottingham, where they had made their home, and the remaining five grew up in the Padgate Cottage Homes.

Previous to the Cottage Home system, families who fell on hard times often found the only answer to their poverty was to enter the workhouse, where the men, women and children were split up and made to work for their food and lodging. Some workhouses were grim. People had no belongings and had to give up their own clothes to wear the workhouse uniform. There was no privacy, food was basic, inmates slept in dormitories. The women did laundry and other menial tasks and the men broke stones into tiny pieces for road surfacing, etc. Children were removed from their parents. Workhouses had a schoolroom and they were expected to educate workhouse children for three hours a day. After 1844 it was required that pauper children should be taught to read and write their own names.

On the 1881 census of Warrington Workhouse, 160 children aged from three months to thirteen years are listed out of a total of 395 inmates. A Board of Guardians, funded by the ratepayers, was responsible for running the workhouse, and it was felt that pauper children, orphans, and children who had found themselves homeless on the street through no fault of their own, should be educated away from the workhouse in a Cottage Home or Industrial School. At the laying of the foundation stone for Padgate Cottage Homes on January 20th, 1881, it was stated that the school would be erected at a distance from the workhouse so that it would in no way taint with pauperism those who were educated at the Homes. The main aim was not so much to impart knowledge as to impart the power of acquiring it and to supply inmates with the proper tools and requisite skills with which they must be left to carve out their own futures. It was hoped that if children acquired this knowledge it would do away with hereditary pauperism and enable them to earn their own living without being a burden on the ratepayers.

A description of the homes by the Warrington Board of Guardians

The Padgate Cottage Homes have accommodation for 200 children. A hundred girls are accommodated in two buildings, or 'homes', with 50 children in each. There is similar accommodation for the boys. Each of the four homes is two storeys in height. On the ground floor are a kitchen, a dining room, workroom, pantries, bathroom and lavatories, with two private sitting rooms for the officers living in the home. Upstairs there are three dormitories and bedrooms for the resident officers.

The school and classrooms are on the south side, the surgery, offices, stores and laundry on the north side, with piggeries, stable and outbuildings behind the laundry.

Each of the Homes for girls is managed by a foster mother, each of the Homes for boys by a married couple, the wife acting as the foster mother while the husband in the first home was a tailor and in the second home a shoemaker. A married couple live in the porter's lodge, the husband acting as farm bailiff as there are thirteen acres of land

to be looked after. Some of the boys are taught farm and garden work and others are taught tailoring and shoemaking. The elder girls are instructed in washing, cookery and housework generally. Girls were trained so that they could go into domestic service and a large number of the boys went into the armed forces.

The school also had its own band. Some boys went on into army bands, and my own grandfather became a military drummer boy on leaving the Cottage Home. At the age of fourteen he was in India with his regiment.

The children all wore the same clothes, the older girls making and mending all the frocks and underclothing.

In the tailor's and shoemaker's shops the boys were taught the rudiments of both those trades and all the boys' suits and all the boots and shoes worn by the children were made there and all repairs carried out.

Fruit and vegetables were grown for the use of the Homes.

The medical officer visited the Homes weekly. The boys were put through military drill regularly and there was musical drill for the girls. The children did have holidays from schoolwork, though they remained on the premises at Christmas, Easter and Midsummer.

An extract in 1894 from 'Children under the Poor Law', a report from Padgate Cottage Homes, says there is a good demand for both boys and girls when ready to leave. The boys go out to general trades and the girls to domestic service. None go to the mill.

AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER IN FRODSHAM



This portrait of an Australian soldier carved in sandstone belongs to the F&DHS Archive. It has been displayed at several local World War I exhibitions in 2014. Around the edge is the inscription:

“OVERTON HOSP. WOUNDED 1914-1918 AUSTRALIAN”

This gentleman was one of the 3435 patients treated at Frodsham Auxiliary Military Hospital during the First World War

HOW IT ALL STARTED

Mersey Power Cottages – now the Cottage Tea Shop

Anon

When Grandma moved her family of eight children into the Mersey Power Cottages, Main Street, Frodsham, around 1908, little did she think that the business that she started would still be going in 2014. Times were hard in the early years of the twentieth century, but chip shops were doing well in the towns. With a coal-fired range and a few bags of potatoes, and after striking a deal with the butcher for the supply of dripping, the chip shop in Main Street was born. Grandma had two more babies while the older children all helped with the peeling of potatoes, and each night the whole place was cleared and scrubbed, from the brown floor tiles to the white wooden counter top. The shop did well, and soon Grandma added a dining room.

On Saturday nights people queued for a table and market days were also very busy too. Grandma brewed pots of tea for the market traders and anyone else who asked. The First World War came and men and boys were called up, including Grandma's two eldest sons. She thought the business would have to close, but she carried on, and one day a man from the Army called on her. Could she feed about sixty men the next evening? "Well, I'll do my best," she replied. All the girls were set to peeling potatoes, slicing bread and frying eggs. Sixty weary soldiers marched into Frodsham, sat on the ground outside the shop in Main Street, and were waited on like kings by the girls of the family and a lot of friends. My aunt, aged about sixteen at the time, received a proposal of marriage the next Valentine's Day. Quite a few of those boys wrote to the family after the war or came to visit.

The shop carried on after the war, though of course the family started marrying and leaving home, leaving my aunt and my mother to help Grandma. These two young ladies worked all day, one at the jam factory in Sandfields, and the other at the wire works in Helsby, then came home and helped Grandma in the shop. The family was well known and made a lot of nice friends.

Bank Holidays were very busy, as people came from Liverpool and Manchester on the trains to Mersey View for the day and, of course, ended the day at the chip shop. Bus trips to Chester from all over the place used to stop in Frodsham on the way home. Everyone worked hard, but they all remembered it as happy times. The shop was quite a meeting-place. Grandma always had someone visiting and would help if there was trouble. No-one ever went away without help.

In 1930 Grandma was taken ill and, sadly, the shop had to be sold. All this happened before my time, and all the Hayes family are now gone. But the chip shop is still going on as The Cottage Tea Shop. Grandma is most probably smiling up there with a cuppa and a chip butty!

Mersey Power Cottages were built in 1628 as a row of 3 oak-framed thatched cottages which later became small shops. Grandma let the end shop to Mrs Holland, which she used as a vegetable and flower shop in the early days, later as a sweet shop. The other two properties in combination formed the chip shop and family living quarters. Now it is all split into small shops again.

FROM THE ARCHIVES 2014

Kath Hewitt

It is a strange old world when events overtake the familiar pattern of things. I usually give you an account of the many varied enquiries from the UK and abroad, and indeed, this year has been just as interesting, very busy, intriguing and unexpected.

The centenary of the First World War has focused our minds on our own families who fought in the Great War. Frodsham is commemorating this event and the History Society is making its own contribution. So I decided to change the format of my report and begin with one of two articles from the Archives, giving a clearer picture of the war time experiences of Frodsham people.

In the 1992 Journal of the Frodsham & District Local History Group (as it was called then), the late Bill Hawkin, a past chairman of the society, wrote of Frodsham's link with the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915. I feel sure that members will find this article very interesting.

1. FRODSHAM & THE LUSITANIA

W R Hawkin

At ten minutes after two on a sunny afternoon on 7th of May 1915, the great Cunard liner *Lusitania* was inward bound on the last stage of her voyage from New York to Liverpool. She was just off the Old Head of Kinsale in Southern Ireland when a torpedo from the German submarine U 20 hit her starboard side. Over half of the people on board perished, men, women and children, many of whom were Americans and included several well known people. It became the one incident which, more than any other, eventually resulted in the USA becoming involved in the First World War.

<p>NOTICE!</p> <p>TRAVELLERS intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles, that, in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or of any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travellers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.</p> <p>IMPERIAL GERMAN EMBASSY, WASHINGTON, D. C., APRIL 22, 1915.</p>	<p>CUNARD</p>  <p>EUROPE VIA LIVERPOOL LUSITANIA</p> <p>Fastest and Largest Steamer now in Atlantic Service Sails</p> <p>SATURDAY, MAY 1, 10 A. M.</p> <p>Transylvania - Fri., May 7, 5 P.M. Orduna, - - - Tues., May 18, 10 A.M. Tuscania, - - - Fri., May 21, 5 P.M. LUSITANIA, - Sat., May 29, 10 A.M. Transylvania, - Fri., June 4, 5 P.M.</p> <p>Gibraltar—Genoa—Naples—Piraeus S.S. Carpathia, Thur., May 13, Noon</p> <p>ROUND THE WORLD TOURS Through bookings to all principal Ports of the World. Company's Office, 21-24 State St., N. Y.</p>
<p>RUSSIAN AMERICAN LINE Only direct line to RUSSIA</p> 	

On the morning of May 1st 1915, this Cunard advertisement appeared in New York newspapers. To its left is the ominous warning inserted by the Imperial German Embassy.

“What”, you may say, “is the connection with Frodsham?”

The following account, from the Warrington Guardian of 15th May 1915 answers the question.

A vivid account of the tragic happenings during the last few moments of the *Lusitania* was given to our representative by Mr George Hutchinson, the chief Electrical Engineer on the liner. Mr Hutchinson, who was interviewed at his parents' home, Manor House Farm, Frodsham, showed signs of his terrible experiences. His left leg is bruised but he is recovering from the shock and exposure.

“I was in my room at the time we were struck”, said Mr Hutchinson, “preparing my list in readiness for reaching Liverpool. Then there was a bang and I feared that the ship was doomed. I rushed to the alleyway and met the Chief Engineer. Then I rushed below deck to see to the dynamos and by this time the water tight doors had been closed. When I got down, the lights failed and knowing nothing could be done with the dynamo, I hurried on deck to render what assistance I could. I got a life belt and dashed to the wireless cabin to see that the operator was getting his current. For some minutes I remained with him and left him when he received an answer from Queenstown (Cobh). The ship was now listing very badly and I returned to my room. When I came out of it, I again met the Chief Engineer and he said, “Come in, Hutch. Come down and see what we can do.” I replied “Perhaps we will all be below shortly.” I shook him by the hand and said, “Goodbye old chap. I think it is everyone for himself now.”

This was in the last few minutes, and asking him to follow, I slid on my back down the side of the ship and felt many of the rivets! The force with which I went down was such that I went to some considerable depth in the water, and when I rose to the surface, the huge propellers were up in the air over my head. Some debris fell and knocked me under the water again. When I came to the top a second time the *Queen of the Atlantic* had disappeared below the seas. It was a beautiful sunny day and the water was calm and it was owing to these conditions that so many were saved. The water, however, was very cold but it could have been worse.

The first woman I met in the water was struggling desperately to keep herself afloat and I gave her my lifebelt, but what became of her I could not say, although I don't think she was saved because she was nearly dead then. There was a man shouting for help. His lifebelt was not properly adjusted, in fact he had not got his head through it. I went to his assistance and he shouted, “I am Vanderbilt” (Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt the multi-millionaire). I was treading water and it was extremely difficult for me to give him help. I did all I could to save him, but I had no lifebelt. He went despite my efforts. I was with him for quite a long while. Swimming about for some time I came across many in their last moments and eventually I was lucky enough to get a plank – one of those I had seen many a time on board.”

Whilst on this plank, Mr Hutchison said he saved two men and two women and was eventually picked up on a collapsible boat and later transferred to the trawler *Brock*, after being in the water for four hours.

“On the *Brock*,” he continued, “We found that a doctor was amongst the survivors and he gave much assistance. I felt fit and was able to give help to that gentleman. Amongst his ministrations he was able to set the leg of a ten-year-old boy named Freddie Hook, but I don't know to what place he was going. The Chief Engineer's shirts were brought out and these I tore to make bandages. The Captain of the trawler, Captain Carmel, knew me, we having met when he crossed the Atlantic in our ship.

When we landed at Queenstown, a large crowd had gathered and cheered us, I was introduced to the Lord Mayor of Cork and met Miss Ballantyne of Glasgow, whose life I had been instrumental in saving, and we kept together until we reached Liverpool. Great kindness was shown to us.

We went to Kingston (Dun Laoghaire) and reached Holyhead about 12.30 on the following morning. Whilst there, a lady who was very much upset, came to us and said to me, "Do you know anything about Grace Hutchison? I see there is a G. Hutchison amongst the saved." When I stated that I knew nothing about the lady and that my name was George Hutchison and it would be myself who was reported saved, she fell back in a faint and was caught by one of those around. She had a fur coat over her arm which she said belonged to her daughter.

Two of the company's officials visited me and did all they could to make things comfortable and just as we were about to leave the refreshment group, a person came along and said that Mrs Hutchison had sent the fur coat and I placed it on Miss Ballantine.

When we arrived at Lime Street Station, Liverpool at 6 o'clock, we met Dr Belhue, who had sailed in the *Lusitania* in January. He took me to the St. George Hotel and later, when I was taken to the hospital in Knotty Ash, I was attended to by three other doctors, then afterwards had a bath and some breakfast. Arriving at Widnes shortly after three o'clock, I walked to the Transporter Bridge and met my mother waiting for me in a pony and trap. I played the man until I reached Runcorn and then I played the child – I broke down."

George Hutchison had worked for the Northwich Electricity Supply Company before going to sea, but after the loss of the *Lusitania*, he seems to have "swallowed the anchor" and joined the army. He died of pneumonia in the Military Hospital, Catthays Barracks, Cardiff in June 1919 at the age of 31, a Lance Corporal in the 4th Cheshire Regiment.

2. ELSIE MORETON DAVIES 1893-1973

Kath Hewitt

Some years ago, a small brown and square case was donated to the archives by Mr and Mrs Berthels of Frodsham, who had been given it when their friend, Miss Davies, died in the early 1970s. Inside I found an almost complete WW1 nurse's uniform, photographs and certificates. I folded the uniform in acid free tissue paper, stored it away and filed the documents. It seemed too 'fragile' to remain in its small case and needed expert care, but all the museums I contacted had neither the space nor the funds to store or display it. So it remained, until almost 2 years ago when Cllr. Allen Wales called a meeting to discuss Frodsham's First World War memorials to the Fallen. I mentioned Miss Davies's uniform and it seemed probable that it would form part of future commemorations. There had to be a story and gradually one emerged.

Elsie Moreton Davies was a member of a well-known Frodsham family – J. G. Davies & Co. Builders and Contractors since 1840 – whose yard and home were at the junction of Fountain Lane and Main Street. There were five sons – Donald, Herbert, and triplets – Algernon, Bertrand, Colin and one daughter, Elsie, the eldest. The family home, the 3-storey Brook House, built about 1830 in the late Georgian style and listed Grade 2, stands empty and neglected today. Containing a warren of rooms, its walls and windows now cracking, faded net curtains with an air of mystery and sadness which children might weave stories around. Over the last hundred years the house has changed from a comfortable well-to-do home to varying business premises.



The family of John Gifford Davies of Brook House, Main Street, Frodsham. Left to right: Don, Algernon, Elsie, Herbert, Colin and Bert with their mother, Edith Ellen sitting in the foreground.

Elsie Davies and her mother, Edith Ellen were V.A.D. nurses (Voluntary Aid Detachment) at the Frodsham Auxiliary Military Hospital 1915-1919 where 3,435 servicemen were nursed back to health including a number of Australian and Canadian patients. The hospital had taken over the three-year-old roller-skating rink behind the Belmonte Hotel below Overton Hill. Elsie was a member of the St. John Ambulance Association, part of the British Red Cross Society, and according to the 2 certificates in the archives, was qualified to render "First Aid to the Injured" in February 1917 and passed a course of "Instruction in Home Nursing" in 1918. On December 28th, 1917 Elsie, "V.A.D. No. 70 in the County of Cheshire" had served for 13 months, (2,688 hours) in her first year as a nurse and was thus recommended for the War Service Bar. On October 17th, 1918 after serving a further 2,496 hours she was recommended for a second War Service Bar.

From the Archives, a copy of *From Battlefield to Blighty*, written by Arthur R. Smith in 2001, has this to say about the Davies family and of Miss Mary Gold's two Australian relatives – Moreton brothers – recuperating in a Manchester military hospital. "On hearing of their arrival, John Gifford Davies cycled to Manchester, found the boys and asked for them to be transferred to Frodsham where their relatives could visit them. The request was granted and they were duly moved to the hospital at Overton. The Davies family had a further connection with the hospital. For a time both mother and daughter served there as volunteer nurses." The eldest of Elsie's triplet brothers, Algernon, was wounded in action with the Cheshire Regiment in West Flanders and sadly died there on the 27th October 1918. The North Porch of St. Laurence's Church was restored in his memory in 1928 and there is a commemorative plaque to Algernon inside the porch.

Recently I was given a Davies' family contact by Mrs Dorothy Smith and I eventually received a letter from Mr H. K[ieith] Davies who, until earlier this year still lived in Cheshire and whose father was Herbert Victor Davies, Elsie's brother. Keith returned regularly to Frodsham for a Runcorn school reunion, which he attended during WW2 and where he met his wife Kathleen. His daughter Kerry with whom he lives in

Penarth, Glamorgan has written down his memories for him. Kerry is Elsie's great niece and god daughter. He says his memory is not too good but he lists the many Davies and Moreton family connections – too numerous to mention here – and their lives after the war. He remembers:

“My grandmother Edith, when she was young and active, every year at Remembrance time, placed a wooden cross with a poppy attached in the grass around the small memorial where the car park at the side of the church now is, one for each and every one of those named on the memorial. It was a pretty and moving sight...

At the back of Brook House, where one of the Davies' yards used to be, and at the entrance to the joiners' work shop, there are 2 bricks in the wall on the right hand side (I think) of the entrance door – one containing the initials of my grandmother (EED) and the other for Auntie Elsie (EMD).

PS Elsie never worked or married after the 14-18 war – she just stayed at home for the rest of her life, eventually living by herself at Brook House.”

The story continues because Mrs Christine Thomas of Springbourne, as a young physiotherapist, remembers treating Elsie then almost 80. “This is the lady I met, I think in the early 1970s when she was still living at the same address as the one given in the 1911 census, Brook House, Fountain Lane, Main Street. I know that she lost some of her brothers in the 1914-18 war”. Chris remembers Miss Davies summoning her elderly maid with a small bell, who came down the stairs with great difficulty, to see what was wanted.

Kerry Davies recalls Elsie's maid, “Miss Jane Neild, affectionately known as Janey, who started work at Brook House when she was 15 and lived, stayed and worked there until well into her 80s. She was a lovely lady and we visited her on many occasions when eventually she had to move to a nursing home in Runcorn, which coincidentally was located opposite the original gateposts to Halton Lodge, which was my Granny's family, the Grices' home, for many years.”

Elsie's uniform and certificates, a sandstone slab on which an Australian patient had carved the outline of (maybe) his own head with bush hat, a 1919 Peace souvenir programme, gaiters, a triangular teaching bandage, an Officer's Etiquette book, photographs of the Military Hospital, cartoons and so on from the archives, have been part of larger WW1 exhibitions in the Library, the Community Centre, a History Society Speaker meeting, St Laurence Church Heritage weekend and the Town Council's exhibition in Castle Park Arts Centre. By the end of this year, Elsie Davies's 100-year-old voluntary nurse's uniform will be nervously washed and ironed once more and carefully folded back into its case.

My grateful thanks to Mr Arthur Smith who gave me permission to quote from his book and to reproduce the Davies's family photograph, to Mrs Dorothy Smith and Mr Nick Smith who always give me such knowledgeable information, to Mr Keith Davies and his daughter Kerry, who shared their memories of Auntie Elsie and to Mrs Chris Thomas who provided the final human touch to this young Frodsham nurse and who also researched the 1911 census to confirm details of the Davies family.

FROM THE E-NEWSLETTER OF OUR MP 11TH NOVEMBER, 2013

An input to the Parliamentary debate on First World War Commemoration

Graham Evans: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me this opportunity. I shall make a brief contribution.

I was born on Remembrance Day and I have always attended Remembrance Day services – those cold November mornings, the leaves falling on the ground, the sound of Elgar's "Nimrod" and the stories of my grandparents. That may explain my long-standing interest in military history. I believe that the only way we can shape a better future is by understanding and honouring those who have fallen for this country.

I have been struck by the respect and solemnity with which the public regard Remembrance Day and have been raising money for poppies across my constituency over the past few weekends, as have many Hon. Members. I ran the London marathon earlier this year, raising money for the Royal British Legion. I pay tribute to my constituents. We are raising money for the Todger Jones VC bronze statue. Todger Jones was a Cheshire Regiment lad who won his Victoria Cross at Morval on the Somme in 1916.

War is an inescapable truth and to leave any conflict saying that it is the last would be either naive or wilfully misleading, but what we can do is recognise the importance of what is done, ensure that the skills and requirements protect the armed forces as much as possible, and remember those who have made such sacrifices in our country's name. That is why I am so proud to speak today and take part in the commemoration service across Weaver Vale this weekend. Those who have fought for Britain may be gone, but they are always in our thoughts and in our memories.

We pay tribute to Tommy Atkins – Tommy Atkins, like Todger Jones and my grandfather, who, being a Manchester lad, wanted to join up in 1914 but was not old enough. The recruiting sergeant knew that he was not old enough so, along with his mates who were under age, he hot-footed it to Manchester Piccadilly station, got on the west coast line down to London Euston and joined up at the first recruiting office, which just happened to be the Middlesex Regiment. I make that same journey every Monday morning down to this place and I never fail to remember those brave Tommy Atkins' from all parts of the country who made the ultimate sacrifice.

The debate took place on 7th November, 2013, beginning 2.17 pm. Graham Evans spoke at 4.34 pm. The whole debate is recorded in Hansard which can be viewed online.



A boy went to war in 1914 and left his bike chained to a small tree. He never made it home, and his family left the bike by the tree in his memory. This is that tree today.

SHARE

this if it's one of the best monuments to our fallen soldiers that you have ever seen.

From the Internet

FRODSHAM & DISTRICT HISTORY SOCIETY

Programme of Meetings 2015

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

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| 5 January | The Tabley House Collection: Reflections of change in the Cheshire gentry
Clare Pye |
| 2 February | The history of Mather and Platt
Ken Bishop |
| 2 March | AGM + The Holcrofts of Vale Royal
Tony Bostock |
| 13 April | Booking forms available for June visit
The tragedy of Kirk O'Field: The murder of Darnley
Dr George Eccleston |
| 11 May | The Battle of Waterloo – a near run thing?
David Hearn |
| 3 June | Guided afternoon visit to newly opened Lion Salt Works, Marston,
Northwich. Details available in April.
Organised by Kath Gee |
| 7 September | The Cheshire Magna Carta in its 800th anniversary year
Professor Graeme White |
| 5 October | The lost halls of Wirral
Gavin Hunter |
| 2 November | Alan Turing – the man and his legacy
Neil Sheldon |
| 7 December | Of giants and duck-hunts – tales of the township of Hale
Ken Pye |

Betty Wakefield, the Programme Secretary, has arranged the talks listed above.
