



FRODSHAM AND DISTRICT HISTORY SOCIETY

JOURNAL



**Issue No.55
December 2025**

**Compilers: Kath Gee, Sue Lorimer, Fiona Barry
and Kate Birkenhead**

**Journal of
FRODSHAM AND DISTRICT HISTORY SOCIETY
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CONTENTS**

	Page
CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION – Sue Lorimer	2
VISIT OF KING GEORGE V 1925 – Editors	3
CLARK'S CHILDREN'S PLEASURE FIELDS HELSBY – Peter Clark	6
HARRIET SHAW WEAVER: HER FORMATIVE YEARS IN FRODSHAM – Charles Ryder	8
THE MERSEY FLAT DARES BURY – Sue Lorimer	12
WELL BORING! – Sue Lorimer & Malcolm Verity	13
ELSIE GREENING – Betty Williams	17
HISTORY OF FRODSHAM MUSIC & ARTS CLUB – Anthony Barker & Kath Gee	18
“WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR, DADDY?” – Fiona Barry & Sue Lorimer	20
ARCHIVE REPORT – Gill Baxter	22
OUT AND ABOUT IN THE COMMUNITY – Various contributors	24
THE NEW CHESTER ARCHIVES	32
PROGRAMME OF SPEAKERS 2026	Back cover

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We are very grateful to Heather, a member of our society, who is employed by Cheshire Archives and Local Studies (CALS). Heather has very speedily met our requests for electronic copies of FD and FDN images now displayed on the Cheshire Image Bank and needed to illustrate and enhance articles in this year's journal.

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Officers: Sue Lorimer, Chairman; Kath Gee, Secretary; Peter Connor, Treasurer.

Committee: Gill Baxter, Archivist; Fiona Barry, Archive Project Manager; Fran Miller & John Davies, Programme Secretaries; Margaret Dodd, Membership Secretary; Kate Birkenhead, Minute Secretary; David Fletcher; Peter Rolfe; Frank Whitfield.

This year Frodsham hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons; Mike Amesbury, MP for Runcorn and Helsby, disgraced himself, triggering a by-election. And the rest is history. Well at least everybody can now place Helsby on a map!

A hundred years ago we were in the papers again, this time celebrating the visit of King George V to Frodsham, a far more positive image for the town. Photographs of the occasion and a brief report of the visit can be found in this Journal.

The Nation has been commemorating 80 years since the end of WW2. Fiona and a small band of volunteers have been doing more research in order to reissue 'Frodsham in the War Years' first printed 30 years ago. It has been a huge undertaking and thanks must go to all concerned.

Three other important anniversaries are being celebrated in 2025:

The Stockton and Darlington Railway. The S&DR became the world's first standard-gauge, steam-hauled public railway when it opened in 1825. 27th September 2025 marks its bicentenary, and **Railway 200** is a year-long, nationwide campaign to celebrate 200 years of the modern railway. Members of our History Society committee contributed to a local railway walk included in the Frodsham Festival of Walks this year.

The International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts held in Paris, from April 29 to November 8, 1925. (Originally the event was scheduled to end on October 25, but since it was visited by over 16 million people by the end of October, it was extended for two more weeks.) It was designed by the French government to highlight the new modern style of architecture, interior decoration, furniture, glass, jewellery and other decorative arts in Europe and throughout the world that we call **Art Deco**.

The Met Office set up by Captain Robert Fitzroy in 1934 in response to disasters at sea, was initially known as 'Weather Shipping' and broadcast by telegraphy. The BBC took over its delivery to provide maritime safety information for UK waters and called it the **Shipping Forecast**, on 4th July 1925.

A big thank you to the contributors to this year's Journal and I hope you all find something to capture your interest. And a special thank you to Dr. Kath Gee, who has been compiling our Journal since 2009, that is 17 years! Under her leadership the Journal has maintained its high standard and is a truly professional publication. A new team will take over the production next year and we wish them every success. Kath will be a hard act to follow!

I would also like to thank all the members of the committee for their support during the year and we are grateful to Main Street Community Church for allowing us to use their premises for our monthly meetings.

Sue Lorimer

Front cover picture: King George is accompanied by Sir William Bromley-Davenport, Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire; James Illidge, Chairman of the Parish Council; and Major J.G. Ashton, the main organiser of the visit to Frodsham, 8th July 1925.

VISIT OF KING GEORGE V 1925

Editors

King George V was in the North West of England to visit the Royal Agricultural Society Show in Chester on 8th July and was the guest of Lord Derby of Knowsley.

Fortunately, the weather that day was fine, as the children eagerly waited for the arrival of the King, scheduled for 11.22 am. They had been in place since 10.45 am as the arrangements for the day had been painstakingly organised by a committee of representatives from Frodsham and the surrounding villages. See programme for the King's visit to Frodsham at the end of this article.

FD04956B Excited children and scouts awaiting the King's arrival.

It was estimated that 2,000 children from local villages and 200 ex-servicemen were present as well as local well-wishers, who were charged for seats on the stands erected on both sides of Main Street by Messrs. Davies, Gleave and Illidge, all local builders. The General Committee requested that flags and bunting be displayed along Main Street, but not across the road, and that people refrained from cheering during the singing of the National Anthem by the children.



To compliment the main event there were to be free shows at the Grand Cinema, Church Street for the children, followed by a tea at Mersey View. Once the King had passed through Frodsham on his return to Knowsley, a Grand Open-Air Concert was planned for 7pm, given by the Crosfield Perfection Soap Works Band. All timed to perfection!



FDN0300 King George inspecting the Guides.

King George V left Knowsley Hall at 10.25am accompanied by Lord and Lady Derby and Sir William Bromley-Davenport, Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire. The King paused his journey at Widnes, then travelled across the newly painted Transporter Bridge to make another brief stop in Runcorn. On reaching Frodsham the King alighted at the Town Hall and was

received by the Chairman of the Parish Council, James Illidge, and Major J.G. Ashton, the main organiser of this event. King George inspected the Girl Guide, Boy Scouts, and Ex- Servicemen.

During the King's brief visit he paused and spoke to a boy, John Foster, who was wearing his late father's WW1 medals. When the crowd noticed this kind gesture they gave an extra cheer.

The children from Frodsham and Frodsham Lordship were given souvenirs of the King's visit and commemorative mugs were available to purchase. The sale of the mugs provided an income of £17 14 shillings and 3 pence.



Image Courtesy of Paul Greenwood.

The accounts for the day's festivities, now held by Cheshire Records Office, show that the total cost of the day in 1925 was £194.00, equivalent to over £10,000 today.

As the King was due to travel through the centre of Helsby without stopping, that village did not join in with the Frodsham celebrations. But Chester Road was bedecked with garlands and school children and ex-servicemen assembled by the War Memorial in Helsby in order to see the King, and the employees of BICC lined the road at the other end of the village. After several false alarms the King's cortege came into view. Although he raised his hat in greeting, his car did not even slow down, much to the disappointment of the waiting children.

The Scotsman 9th July 1925 and Widnes and Runcorn Chronicle 11th July 1925, both refer to the fact that this was the first visit of a King to Frodsham since James II. This visit cannot be confirmed at present, but James II did give a speech in Chester 27th August 1687, on 'Toleration' during a Progress through the West of England. So, he was in the vicinity then. The Progress is detailed in the Diary of Sir Willoughby Aston held in Liverpool Records Office, but this has yet to be explored.

An even briefer Royal visit occurred on 25th March 1914, when the Royal Train carrying King George V and Queen Mary passed through Frodsham en route to Chester for a visit to Chester Royal Infirmary. The train slowed down to about three miles an hour allowing the employees of Messrs. Kydd and Kydd a good view of the Royal couple. The King and Queen then passed the cheering school children gathered on the north platform, numbering about a thousand.

The Royal couple then moved to the other side of the carriage so that they could view the decorations on Church Street and the crowds assembled on the school playground, Overton Hill and the Parish Church.

FDN0582 Children waiting to see the Royal Train depart 25th March 1914. Note the sign for Hancock butchers in the background.



His
Majesty



King
George V.

VISIT TO FRODSHAM

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8th, 1925.

Townships of Frodsham and Frodsham Lordship.

JAMES ILLIDGE, Esq., J.P., *Chairman.*

J. C. CRAGG, Esq., *Vice-Chairman.*

The Parish Councils of the above-named Townships having co-operated with Representatives duly appointed by the Councils or Parish Meetings of the following Townships: Alvanley, Kingsley, Kingswood, Manley, Norley, and Newton-by-Frodsham, are pleased to inform the Inhabitants as follows:

HIS MAJESTY THE KING

Will, on the 8th July, 1925, in travelling from Knowsley Park to the Royal Show, Chester, break his journey at 11-22 a.m. in the Main Street, Frodsham, opposite the Town Hall, and will be graciously pleased to alight from his Car whilst the Children, approximately 2000, from the Elementary and Private Schools of the above-mentioned Townships are singing the National Anthem.

His Majesty

Will be received by the Chairman of the Joint Councils, who will be presented to His Majesty by the Lord Lieutenant.

The School Children will assemble opposite the Town Hall in their respective places at 10-45 a.m.

Grand Stands will be erected with reserved seats thereon, two on the North side of Main Street, and one on South side, at the following prices: 4/-, 3/-, 2/-, 1/- Plan of same can be inspected and Tickets obtained from the Hon. Secretary, Mr. J. GEO. ASTON, Main Street, Frodsham, Tel. No. 60, between the hours of 10 a.m. to 12 noon, and 1 to 5 p.m., from 2nd to 6th July, excluding Sunday. No tickets will be sold after the 6th, or seats reserved, and the inhabitants of all the Townships are particularly requested to avail themselves of booking early, as the number of reserved seats is limited.

There will be free reserved seats for some of the Aged and Infirm People, who are requested to send in their names and addresses to the Hon. Secretary not later than Monday afternoon, 6th July.

The Ex-Service Men will march to their allotted space on the North side of Main Street, opposite the Town Hall, and the Boy Scouts and Cubs, and Girl Guides, Local Members of St. John Ambulance Brigade, and the District Nurses, will also be present, and allotted spaces provided for them.

The Inhabitants are requested to assemble early and to avoid, as far as they possibly can, encroaching on the various allotted spaces. They are also asked by the General Committee to Display Flags and Bunting, especially those residing in Main Street, who are also, at the request of Lord DERBY, asked to refrain from displaying streamers across the road.

They are also particularly requested not to cheer after His Majesty has alighted, in order that the singing of the National Anthem by the Children may in no way be interrupted.

The Tradespeople and all other Employers are asked to favourably consider declaring the 8th of July a General Holiday, so that their Employees may have an opportunity of being present.

His Majesty

Will return from Chester for Knowsley and will arrive at Frodsham at 5-58 p.m. going through Main Street in a Car with Glass sides as slowly as possible.

By the kind permission of the Directors of the Grand Cinema, Frodsham, Free Shows will be given during the Afternoon of the 8th July to all Children attending the Elementary Schools.

God Save The King.

CLARK'S CHILDREN'S PLEASURE FIELDS, HELSBY

Peter Clark

We often hear today that children spend far too much time indoors on computer games. What did they entertain themselves with before such games were invented?

Let me take you back to the early part of the 20th century.

A parcel of land on Alvanley Road, Helsby, was used for Sunday school treats, and children enjoyed picnics and races. The fields, along with the adjoining house and outbuildings were bought by a man whose name was John Thomas Clark. He was born in West Felton, Shropshire in 1879. After serving an apprenticeship as a grocer in Ellesmere, Salop, he sought work on the Wirral. In 1914 he moved to Rockfield Stores on Collier Square, Helsby, where he managed the grocer's shop and bakery.

Listed Alvanley House and pillar box today SL

In 1920 we find John Thomas moving to Alvanley House, with a shop attached, this being the aforementioned house with adjoining fields, and the seeds of an idea were formed. What if these fields could be further developed beyond simple picnics and races? What would children enjoy?



Two home-made wooden slides were installed initially. These were great fun, but the users were often the victims of painful splinters!

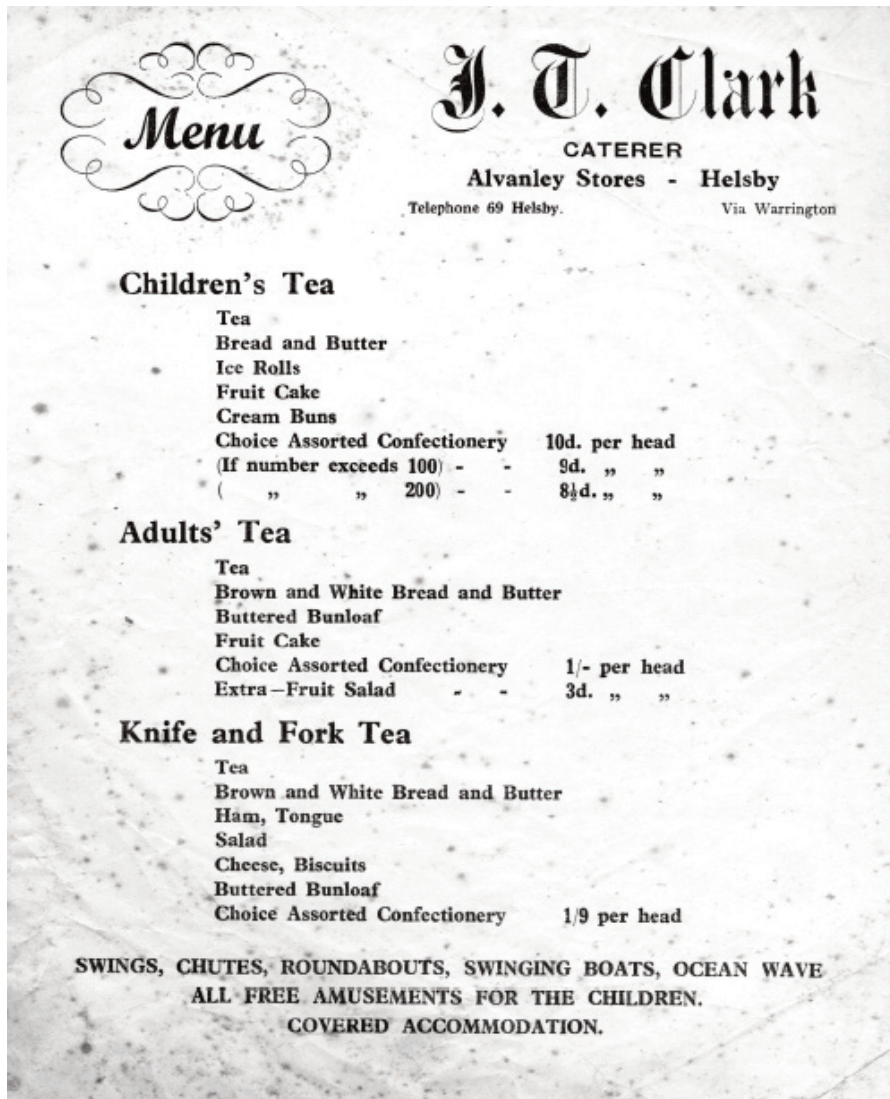


The 1940s saw the arrival of further equipment made by a company called Wicksteed, who are incidentally still going. The original slides were replaced by more up-to-date ones.

Various roundabouts, swings and swinging boats were added to enhance the experience.

Afternoon teas for both children and adults were served in the tea-rooms, large wooden buildings containing tables with benches to sit on. A kitchen was situated in the middle, with a large table for food preparation, and a big water boiler. Many local people were employed to help run the enterprise.

Further items installed at the pleasure grounds included a sandpit, seesaw and latterly a concrete paddling/boating pool.



Included in the admission price of 6d was access to the tuck shop. This was a large corrugated building housing many slot machines including an electric shock machine! You could also try your hand at winning a Woodbine ciggy, or set in motion the Laughing Sailor, and many other penny Allwin machines.

In the tuck shop you could buy sweets, pop, with a penny back on the bottle, along with Smith's crisps with a twist of salt.

If we move outside again, the garden of Alvanley House was opened for teas served from the cafe. And many a curious child fell into the fish pond and had to be dried out!

John Thomas Clark also ran the shop attached to Alvanley House, which later incorporated a sub post-office.

Another branch of the Clark's businesses was in catering for various events such as weddings. Wedding receptions were often held in marquees in the garden of Alvanley House.

We can see that lots of fun, games and entertainment occurred in this small area of the village, and many happy memories were made. But, with JT's death in 1963, and the diversification into other businesses such as a corn merchant's, meant the dwindling of the pleasure grounds. The land was built on in the 1970s, and is now known as The Paddock, a development of detached family houses.

Perhaps children of today are more sophisticated in their search for entertainment, or perhaps they would still enjoy the fun of times gone by. What do you think?

HARRIET SHAW WEAVER; HER FORMATIVE YEARS IN FRODSHAM

Charles Ryder

Harriet Shaw Weaver (1876-1961) was born at East Bank, Bridge Lane, Frodsham on 1st September 1876, and was christened on 20th October 1876 at St. Laurence's Church, Overton. She was the daughter of Frederic Poynton Weaver a local GP and Mary Berry Wright who was the daughter of Edward Abbott Wright, mill owner and business man of Castle Park, Frodsham.

In a long and varied life Harriet Shaw Weaver was a magazine editor, a noted feminist, suffragist and political activist. But foremost she will be remembered as the supporter, promoter and benefactor of James Joyce. James Joyce is regarded as one of the most important literary figures of the twentieth century. Yet if it was not for the financial and literary safety-net of Harriet Shaw Weaver this innovative genius of modern fiction may have struggled to survive let alone write.

The exhaustive biography of Harriet Weaver is the excellent 'Dear Miss Weaver' written by her god-daughter Jane Lidderdale and Mary Nicholson. Yet for all of its 455 pages only 6 are devoted to her time in Frodsham as her family left for London in 1892 when she was 15. It would seem pertinent to examine a little more closely those formative years. Additionally, it has puzzled writers and academics as to why Harriet Shaw Weaver should become not just a Marxian feminist but the stalwart and determined patron of James Joyce at a time when he was little known or regarded. I believe that a scrutiny of her educational upbringing in Frodsham and the influences upon her may offer a clue to her extraordinary insights and acumen. For it is in those early years that the crucial developments occur, 'In good settings, children can receive additional nurturing and educational support alongside the family environment, where they receive high-quality education...there can be significant cognitive, personal, social and emotional development.' (1)

Lidderdale and Nicholson state that she was brought up in a religious (Low Anglican), strict and yet a 'warm and close and affectionate family' (2). Her father as noted was a GP, the son of a Chester surgeon and apothecary who moved to Frodsham in 1863. Though a man of rigid Victorian conventions taking family prayers twice a day, he also loved poetry and 'would recite it' (2) to his children. Similarly, her mother Mary was a typical upper middleclass woman with fixed habits which included reading to her children every night. Thus, we can see that Harriet was enveloped from the start in classic English literature.

The Weaver household was clearly a busy one. When Harriet was aged four she was the youngest of 7 children; 3 sisters, Mary, Annie and herself, and 4 brothers, Edward, Frederick, Alfred and Harold who themselves were a part of a wider extended family including their cousin Andrew 'Sandy' Irvine who died with George Mallory on Everest in 1924. As befitted their status in this period the Weavers had a modest staff; Elizabeth Webster a cook from Alvanley, Elizabeth Bowen a housemaid from Yorkshire and Hannah Owen a nurse from Chester. Typically, they also had a boarder, Lloyd MB Jones a GP from Carmarthenshire who doubtlessly assisted Frederic in his practice. Ten years later in 1891, just before they moved to London, Alfred then aged 16 had left home (he went on to become a Barrister) but all the other children remained with the addition of Emily who was born in 1882. There had been a change of staff with Hannah Owen moving role from nurse to ironing-maid, the cook

was now Mary Whittingham from Market Drayton, and Margaret Salisbury from Dalton-in-Furness who was their housemaid.



FD01192 The Board of East Bank Hen Company 1886, Harriet, Harold & Maude. Harriet, aged 10, was the treasurer.

Selling eggs to their mother was how the younger children earned their pocket money.

One of the most important persons in Harriet's early year is not listed as a member of the Weaver household in the 1881 census, although she was in the paid employment of the family. This was Harriet's governess Marion Jane Spooner who was Harriet's educator from the age of 10 until she was 18. So, who was Marion Spooner, and how did she contribute to Harriet Shaw Weaver's future?

First it is worth noting the importance of the governess in Victorian households. Typically, boys in the Weaver family were funded to go to school and university but not the girls. The boys' fees were paid for by their maternal grandfather Edward Abbott Wright. It was felt that girls were destined to inherit and/or make 'good' marriages so a formal education was seen as unnecessary or even unwise. This frustrated Harriet who aspired to attend university. Nevertheless, the girls' education was not entirely neglected and a governess was hired, 'during the 19th century...for the English middle classes...governessing became a normal method of educating middle class girls.' (3)

Marion Jane Spooner joined the household when the Weavers moved to London. She was known affectionately as 'Birdie', left when Harriet reached 18 but remained a friend. Marion was born in 1863 at Hill Farm, Shuttington, Warwickshire. Her father John Spooner was a well-to-do farmer and her mother was Jane Spooner. She had two brothers and a sister. It is interesting to note that in 1841 the Spooner girls too had a governess; Ellen Jarvis from Banbury. It appears that in the years between 1871 and 1881 Marion Spooner's father died. The consequent change in her life was not uncommon, 'since no lady would become a governess unless forced to do so it is safe to assume that her family had suffered some form of financial catastrophe (such as) the untimely death of a father'. (3) This appears to be precisely what occurred as by 1881 her mother was a widow, and Marion was 18 and a pupil (along with her sister Fanny) at The College, King Street, Wellington. This college, also known as The Hiatt Ladies College was founded in 1847 by Elizabeth Hiatt. It is difficult to ascertain precisely what subjects were taught and under what educational ethos but doubtlessly they were the same as at similar colleges founded in the same period such as Queen's College (1849) and Bedford College (1849). The latter 'had a more subversive intention' (3), and was managed by women; as was Hiatt College during Marion's time there. Their curriculum, within the parameters of the day, was progressive. Lidderdale declares with certainty that Marion Spooner was 'a good linguist and very musical with pronounced liberal views. (2) Marion Spooner would have been instructed in, and consequently instructed Harriet in reading, history, arithmetic, Italian, German, French and natural philosophy. It is

likely that Marion Spooner as a liberal governess followed the precepts set out only 20 years previously by Emily Davies, that young people should be 'awake to responsibilities, sensitive in conscience, quickly responsive to all kindling influences, (and) is a sign that education has, so far, done good work.' (4)

Thus around 1886 Marion Spooner had become governess to Harriet Weaver, and latterly to her sister Emily between 1892 and 1894. Initially being non-resident in the household Marion lived during this period at Holly Bank, a row of Victorian red brick houses set back off Church Street. She was a boarder with Robert and Mary Andrews a contractor's clerk from Frodsham. They had a son and a daughter, a servant Eva Bazely from Frodsham, and Thomas Grime also a lodger. We can imagine Marion setting off each morning for her job at East Bank, following the path across the open fields to Fluin Lane, and down Bridge Lane to the waiting Harriet. The place of a governess within middle-class Victorian households had always been fraught with ambiguities, considered often '...only as a kind of upper servant, who has more work than the menial ones.' (5). Working inordinately long hours they were often distrusted by the other servants yet not quite of the same social standing as the Weavers: a form of class purgatory. However, Marion Spooner seemed to have had an excellent even affectionate relationship with her charges, especially Harriet, hence the longevity of her tenure. We do not know to what extent Harriet Weaver's parents had control over the educational input of Marion, certainly later on 'her family heard little about her literary or her political life.' (3) but it does appear that they did have some impact as her biographer says that Harriet read certain texts in secret away from the disapproving gaze of her mother. But, perhaps it was not so much the individual subject tuition and clandestine books she read that helped establish Harriet Weaver's later interests and attitudes but the ethical and moral context in which she and Marion Spooner spent long hours and days together. 'Whatever contributes to make us compassionate and resolute, is of the utmost consequence.' (5) But it is clear that Harriet Weaver was a natural rebel stimulated and given relatively free-rein by the liberal views of her governess, her parents love of poetry and her own nature combined to establish in her formative years her unique character, and set her off on her trajectory towards a political and literary life.



FDN1856 Harriet Shaw Weaver 1907.

Harriet Shaw Weaver's appearance often seems to betray something of her character. She was captured by celebrities of the day; photographed by Man Ray and drawn by Wyndham Lewis. In all of these portraits she appears with a Victorian formality, hair drawn back into a severe bun, her thin lips with only a hint of a smile. She looks self-conscious and uncomfortable. Unquestioningly she was private and reserved, she hated to offend or be a part of discord. She was sensitive with an 'aversion to extravagance'. (6) She was described by T.S.Eliot as 'a funny little spinster, but quite nice' before adding somewhat patronisingly 'and I believe quite intelligent.' (7)

Yet this respectable and often lonely young woman became the editor of the literary magazine *The Egoist*, and through their annals became the publisher of the novels of James Joyce. Not only did she manage the magazine successfully, and here we perhaps can see the influence of the business acumen of Edward Abbott Wright, but she promoted James

Joyce whom she chose 'out of all the indigent writers she knew' (8) thus demonstrating a penetrating insight into literary genius.

I contend that much of Harriet Shaw Weaver's character was formed in the years before Edward Abbott Wright's inheritance allowed the Weaver's to leave Frodsham. Harriet's liberal views, literary insights, determination, business astuteness and her generosity already in evidence. However, though she remained living in London for the rest of her life (though dying in Saffron Walden) her connection with Frodsham was far from over. She herself described Frodsham as 'an overgrown village...on a flat stretch of land at the foot of a ridge of hills halfway between Chester and Warrington.' (8) She was as self-effacing about her birth place as she was about herself. We can see from her letters that she often returned to Frodsham. For instance, in October 1916 she wrote to James Joyce, 'Please reply to me to c/o Miss Wright, Frodsham...where I go on Thursday next week' (8). It is evident that she was staying with her aunts Harriet and Emily who following the death of Edward Abbott Wright in 1891 remained living in Castle Park. It is noteworthy that she finds it unnecessary to quote the full address as the Wrights were such prominent people in the area. Again, she writes in May 1920 'I go...to my aunts in Frodsham where I shall probably remain until I get back to London about June 21st' (8). Typical of her care and compassion she was staying there to assist her aunt following an operation. Harriet Weaver's connections with Frodsham remained until her aunt Harriet Wright died in 1931, and Castle Park was presented to Runcorn Rural District Council.

Harriet Shaw Weaver was always a private person wishing her deeds to remain in the shadows, and that need for privacy and anonymity has seemingly contributed to her reputation and accomplishments being relatively overlooked. But to those that knew her, and now know of her she is acclaimed as an important suffragist, feminist and philanthropist whose foresight in editing *The Egoist* and supporting and publishing James Joyce, even before she knew just how significant he was to become, shows an incredible foresight well beyond her time. Not only did she move in illustrious cultural circles she was a major source of influence that echoes down to today. Frodsham is justifiably proud of her achievements, and the significant role it played in her life.

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number4 Summer 1982

THE MERSEY FLAT 'DARES'BURY'

Sue Lorimer

The 'Daresbury' is thought to be the only known example of a Mersey Flat built prior to 1840. She lies submerged in a small disused dock towards the west end of Sutton Lock, on the River Weaver. The site was designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument (1417593) in March 2014.

Between 1792 and 1796, 'Daresbury' was used by the Weaver Navigation Trust to transport coal and she was converted to a floating derrick in the mid-19th century. Repairs were carried out in 1926 and 1934 and she was still afloat in 1956. However, in 1985, 'Daresbury' was moved to Sutton Locks and sunk, joining the graveyard of other craft sunk in these redundant locks.

The image on the right show how the large disused Sutton Lock appeared in 1965, (F&DHS archives).



That is not the end of the story. In 1986, there were plans to recover and restore the vessel and move her to the National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port.



The limited edition 'Daresbury Plate' (left) designed and manufactured by Wedgewood, was sold to raise funds for the venture. It also commemorates the father of Lewis Carroll, the Rev. Dodgson, who established a floating church for barge people. However, a later evaluation found the task of raising the 'Daresbury' too difficult and the plans were abandoned.

The Historic England listing records that 'Daresbury' was built in 1772 by Samuel Edwards. Samuel Edwards, shipbuilder of Northwich, died in 1789 and his effects were claimed by his son, Richard Edwards, shipbuilder of Frodsham. Richard was baptised on 6th April 1748 at Witton-cum-Twambrooks, a chapelry of Great Budworth. His father was recorded as a ships carpenter.

Richard had a son, George, baptised at Witton on 10th March 1773. George originally worked as a ships carpenter in Warrington but later moved to Frodsham, where he became a partner in the shipbuilding company Messrs. Hayes, Urmson and Edwards, based at Frodsham Bridge, c.1816. So, where was 'Daresbury' actually built? Was it in Northwich or is there a remote possibility that she was built in Frodsham? In which case she has come home!

I have been unable to find a current image of 'Daresbury' but you can see part of it in its resting place in Sutton Lock at [www.foxesaflloatyoutube156 youtube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=156)

This youtube also shows interesting footage of the Sutton Weaver Swing Bridge.

See also 'From Ship builders to Cotton Manufacturers: Edwards of Frodsham,' F&DHS Journal 47

WELL BORING!

A Frodsham man and the development of Timmins well sinking dynasty

Sue Lorimer and Malcolm Verity

Netherton House - Image courtesy of R&DHS, Arthur Timmins Archive- copyright.

Our picture shows two people and their dog, standing proudly in front of their home. But where, and who are they? Frodsham folk will probably recognise the imposing building as Netherton House, in Howey Lane, and perhaps recall the private school opened there by Mr. and Mrs. Crampton in 1951. However, the building is much older than that. It is



now divided into two dwellings, and the lady resident in one of them has very kindly given us access to the deeds. These show that the house was built in 1893, for Thomas Dorning Timmins, on a plot of land leased from the Marquis of Cholmondeley. Thomas had moved to Frodsham in 1886, to Holly Bank, Church Street. It seems certain that our picture shows Thomas and his wife, Elizabeth, but it must date from later than 1893, as the house is covered in ivy.

The Timmins name immediately rang a bell with Sue Lorimer. She has done extensive research into the company of that name, which, over many years from its base in Runcorn, brought great public benefit, not only for the development of Frodsham and the surrounding area, but nationally. In a quest to understand the methods used 150 years ago in a successful local engineering business, Malcolm Verity has looked into the technical aspects of the business.

The dynasty was founded when Ebenezer Timmins came to Runcorn in 1851, at the age of 27, and took over the existing Bridgewater Foundry at Delph Bridge. Despite his relative youth, Ebenezer had already acquired more than ten years of practical engineering experience, initially under his father, a colliery engineer in the Black Country and then, aged just 17, at Nottingham under Thomas Hawksley, the pre-eminent water engineer. In 1831, at the age of 24, Hawksley had completed the Trent Bridge Waterworks. This was Britain's first water supply system to work at high pressure, which prevented contamination getting into the pipe network. It led to Hawksley being commissioned on many other water supply projects across the country, including Liverpool, Sheffield, Leicester, Leeds, Derby, Darlington, Oxford, Cambridge, Sunderland, Wakefield and Northampton.

With towns and villages everywhere demanding a water supply, one might think that Ebenezer saw opportunities for himself. But, to further broaden his experience he moved on from Hawksley to take a position as deputy colliery engineer at Worsley, in the mines of the Bridgewater estates. In 1848, while working there, he married Martha Dorning. Their first child, Walter, was born at Worsley in 1850, their second, Thomas Dorning, in 1851. Five more were to follow, including one daughter.



E. Timmins & Sons, Bridgewater Foundry, Runcorn Image courtesy of R&DHS, Arthur Timmins Archive- copyright.

At the Bridgewater Foundry Ebenezer initially produced colliery equipment for the Bridgewater Estate, but he was clearly keen to grow the business, as shown by this 1854 *Staffordshire Advertiser* advertisement:

As the reputation of the foundry grew, it attracted business from other colliery companies, and the premises had to be progressively enlarged. Today the main entrance shows the date 1861 and an extension inside the works, 1897. As a marketing ruse Ebenezer started claiming 1827

as the company's establishment date. While this might have been true for the foundry itself, it did not apply to his company. By 1860 Ebenezer had brought in his younger brother, John, to assist in the firm.

CANAL COMPANIES, COAL PROPRIETORS,
and Others requiring any description of IRON CASTINGS,
can be supplied on very reasonable terms by
E. TIMMINS,
BRIDGEWATER FOUNDRY, RUNCORN.
Canal close to the Works, and has good convenience for
shipping heavy castings.
List of Prices forwarded on application.



The Runcorn Improvement Act had been passed in 1852, to introduce better paving, lighting, cleaning, and any measures to improve the towns of Runcorn and Halton. Ebenezer served on this Commission as the representative of the Bridgewater Navigation Company for nearly 20 years and later as the people's representative on the Board.

From the 1860's onwards the company built a number of gas works, for example at Widnes, Runcorn, Ditton, Winsford, Leigh and Stretford.

One of the first streetlamps in Runcorn which was cast in 1866. It stands close to Holy Trinity Church where Ebenezer Timmin's funeral took place in 1890.

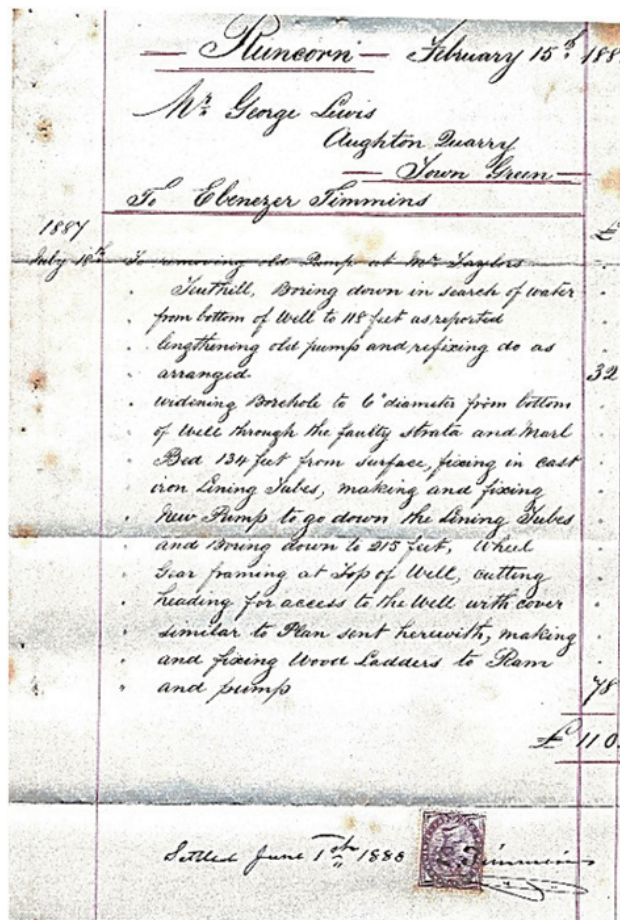
In the course of time Ebenezer was able to call on more family help in the shape of his sons, five of whom would ultimately join the business and became directors. Perhaps surprisingly, in view of Ebenezer's experience with Hawksley, it was only when his sons started joining the business that it branched out into constructing artesian wells and boreholes. This was a logical development, as each borehole was lined with a cast iron pipe, which could be made in the foundry. In 1879 we find Ebenezer advising on the Frodsham water scheme, and in 1881 he became a director of the Runcorn West & Halton Waterworks Company.

The Mersey Railway opened in 1886, with the platforms at Hamilton Square, Birkenhead, 103 feet below street level. Three hydraulic lifts were provided for passengers, with the lifting rams sunk into boreholes in the sandstone bedrock. Timmins won the contract to construct these, which they did using what was described as a "jumping" (presumably percussion) technique.

Similar boreholes at James Street were sunk by Mather & Platt, using a rotary boring approach. In 1888 the company of E. Timmins was also responsible for connecting a water supply to Marshville, a temporary village of navies on Frodsham Marsh, housing Manchester Ship Canal workers.

Ebenezer's sons seem to have followed the same pathway as Ebenezer himself, joining the family business at an early age and progressively "learning by doing". Thus, in the 1871 census we find Walter (aged 21) employed as a mechanical engineer and Thomas D. (20) as a pattern maker, a highly skilled manual job which required both the ability to read engineering drawings and a knowledge of casting techniques. After the death of Ebenezer in 1890, the company had to be restructured, with Walter becoming the first Managing Director. When Walter died in 1911, he was evidently as highly regarded as his father had been. Presumably Charles (born 1857) also joined after completing his schooling. As for Francis, the 1881 census shows him, then aged just 16, employed as a draughtsman. He went on to become company secretary. An exception to this approach was Arthur, born in 1858, who from 1878 gained valuable experience with the Bridgewater Navigation Company before joining his father in the family business in 1881. When Arthur died in 1940, he had served the company for almost sixty years, the last 16 of them as Director and General Manager.

The concept of the Manchester Ship Canal was put before Parliament in 1882, and the Act was passed in 1885. Charles joined his father in making exploratory borings which helped establish the proposed route of the canal, which, when opened in 1894, was the largest canal constructed in the world. Ebenezer served on the Ship Canal Board for a number of years where his experience was invaluable. Charles was a keen amateur photographer, who was successful in photographic competitions countrywide. His photographs of the building of the Manchester Ship Canal were used by its designer, Sir Edward Leader Williams, in his lectures.



In 1894 E. Timmins & Sons put forward a proposal for a £3,200 water supply system for Helsby, which was accepted. In 1895 a borehole had been sunk to 804 feet for Flowers Brewery in Stratford-on-Avon. The same year saw the start of a project to bring water to Gainsborough. Unfortunately, an accident in 1897 saw the heavy percussion tool, plus 500 feet of rope, lost in the borehole. After an interval of 22 months the company returned to recover the tool and complete the borehole to a depth of 1515 ft., then thought to be the deepest well in the world.

Not all the work done by Timmins was for councils and water and gas companies; they also undertook domestic projects, for instance in 1887, Timmins bored a new well for George Lewis of Teuthill House, Helsby. Fortunately, the paperwork was kept by the owners and is now housed at the Cheshire Record Office.

Left: Invoice for the borehole constructed at Teuthill House in 1887 from Ebenezer Timmins

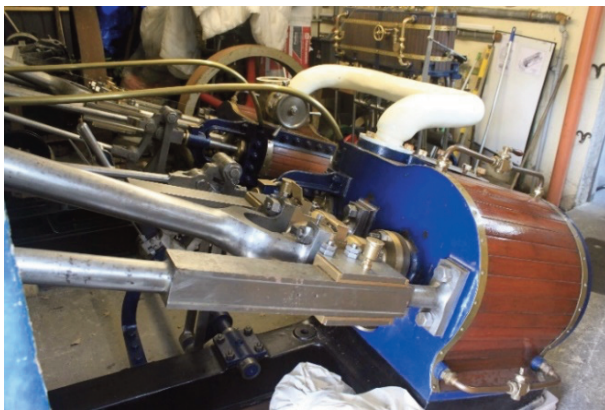
Ebenezer Timmins died at his home, Mill House, Runcorn on 5th October 1890. He had been in poor health for a few years and after getting soaked whilst supervising a boring operation in Northwich, he retired to bed and died during the night.

Advertisement placed by the Executors in the Runcorn Examiner, 31st December 1892, following the death of Ebenezer showing the broad range of services then provided.

Ebenezer Timmins was considered a most conscientious, just and considerate employer and was held in the highest esteem in the town. The social and religious welfare of the townspeople was his priority. He was a keen supporter and benefactor of Holy Trinity Church, Runcorn, manager of Trinity School and a trustee of the Liptrot Charity, distributed by the Parish Church.

**THE EXECUTORS OF THE LATE
E BENEZER TIMMINS,
ENGINEERS AND IRONFOUNDERS,
MAKERS OF CHEMICAL AND SOAP PLANT.
BRIDGEWATER FOUNDRY, RUNCORN.
ESTABLISHED 1827.
CONTRACTORS FOR GAS WORKS, WATER WORKS,
ARTESIAN WELLS, BRINE WELLS, AND
BORINGS FOR MINERALS.
BORING PLANT AND PUMPS.**

The Rev. Dr. Preston, vicar of Holy Trinity Church, described Ebenezer Timmins as a true philanthropist. 'He had a warm heart for the distressed, a ready hand to relieve the wanting, a generous disposition and a loving nature.' It was customary for the Foundry to pay half a man's wages to his wife on Friday lunchtimes, to ensure that the families were not left wanting. Ebenezer left a company enjoying an excellent reputation and employing some 200 skilled men. It was the largest private employer in Runcorn. A company of great distinction carrying the name 'E. Timmins' forward well into the 20th century. The company was building gas works and constructing artesian wells and boreholes all over Britain, many of them still in use today. The firm was still advertising a comprehensive range of services in the 1960s and in 1973 was involved in trial borings for a "new bridge". Truly a Timmins dynasty!



As an interesting aside, in 1900 the company built a two-cylinder compound steam engine and paddles for the yacht, *Firefly II*. With their experience of building pumps, this was fully within their capabilities. The engine is now in the hands of the Anson Engine Museum, at Poynton, where it is hoped to be back in steam in 2026.

A recent picture of the engine at Poynton. Note the quality of workmanship.

We have now taken a brief look at the achievements of the Ebenezer Timmins company. To complete the story, let us ask what became of our Frodsham resident, Thomas Dorning Timmins. Upon the death of Walter in 1911, Thomas succeeded him as Managing Director of the firm. He had evidently inherited his father's kindly disposition. In 1904 he had been appointed J.P. for Runcorn. His fellow magistrates remembered him as a tender-hearted magistrate, who was upset when he had to sentence anyone to prison.

During his time in Frodsham Thomas immersed himself in the life of the village. He was a founder member of the Cholmondeley Lodge of Freemasons and the Frodsham Conservative Club. He remained an active member of both organisations and acted as auditor for several local societies including Frodsham Horticultural and Agricultural Society. At St Lawrence Church, he served as churchwarden, sidesman and a lay representative. Thomas was a member of Frodsham Lordship Parish Council and as such was on the organising committee for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee Celebrations.



Thomas retired from the company in 1924 due to ill health and died on 2nd April 1926. More than fifty foundry employees attended his funeral at St. Lawrence, Frodsham. His wife, Elizabeth, left Netherton House to live with her daughter, Jane, and son-in-law, Charles Edward Linaker, in Sutton Weaver, until her death in 1931. Netherton House was then leased to Hannah Middleton Buchan and her daughter, Margaret, a music teacher. In 1950, it was bought by Norman and Enid Crampton, who started Netherton House School.

The grave of Thomas Dorning Timmins and his wife, Elizabeth, at St Lawrence Church, Frodsham.

ELSIE GREENING

Betty Williams

Addendum to Journal 54 2024 pp.6-10 THE GREENING FAMILY

Mrs Elsie Greening was our neighbour at the top of Carriage Drive, Frodsham, for most of the 1960s. She was a very 'grand' and interesting lady who told me about her earlier life during the times we spent together.

When Elsie was younger she was a very good pianist and won a scholarship to a prestigious music school in London, unfortunately I can no longer remember which one. Even more unfortunately Elsie's father would not allow her to take up the scholarship which she still felt sad about.

Her interest in cars and motoring was very well described in the 2024 article. When we knew Elsie Greening she drove a beautiful Rolls Royce Silver Cloud, almost certainly the only one in Frodsham.

If we had a party at our house we usually invited her. The first Bonfire Night party we held in our garden Elsie arrived wearing a mink coat! When I warned her of the danger of sparks she said "Oh, my dear, it's only my old one!"

Elsie Greening was a good neighbour and made a praiseworthy contribution to local life in many ways. She never boasted about the things she had done but revealed them almost by accident in our many conversations.

HISTORY OF FRODSHAM MUSIC & ARTS CLUB

Anthony Barker & Kath Gee

The Club was founded in October 1943 during WW2, when wartime transport difficulties made it virtually impossible to attend events in Liverpool or Manchester.

The first meetings were held in Frodsham Junior School in School Lane Overton.

An enthusiastic group of friends formed a committee and elected Dr Miles Weight Meyers, the vicar of St Laurence Church, as their first chairman. The title "Frodsham Music and Arts Club" was adopted at the 1947 AGM.

Concerts, lectures, illustrated talks etc. were held in various local schools until the Frodsham Community Centre opened in September 1969, since when the club has enjoyed their excellent facilities.

During the early post-war years many national and international personalities featured in the programmes. These included Anthony Hopkins (musical speaker and broadcaster), John Heddle Nash (baritone singer) and John Gough (pianist and teacher). In addition, there were performances by small groups of musicians from the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and Mozart Orchestras, and by students from The Royal Northern College and Chetham's School of Music in Manchester.

In the spring of 1997, the Club's then Honorary Treasurer, Mary Taylor, successfully applied to The Arts Council for a fixed grant of £5000, under the short-lived National Lottery "Arts for Everyone" scheme. This enabled The Club to engage the string players of The Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra to open the 1997-1998 season, in spectacular fashion with a gala concert. The hall was full to capacity. All the main rooms in the centre were in use and, as all the tickets had been sold in advance, a "Sold Out notice" was fixed to the front door. This was a magnificent event. It also bolstered the membership level, and relaunched the Club, as the purchase of the concert tickets also contributed to the annual membership fee, which was then £7.50.

See the Gala Concert Programme opposite.

For the last 20 years the chairman of the club has been Anthony Barker. Between 2000 and 2019, Anthony and his late wife Sue planned, and ran, several music holidays for club members, in the UK and various European countries, particularly the Salzburg area of Austria. They also organised monthly coach trips to nearby orchestral concerts, opera and ballet performances.

Over the years Anthony and his committee team have expanded the season from six to nine monthly events. Membership rose close to 300 at its peak.

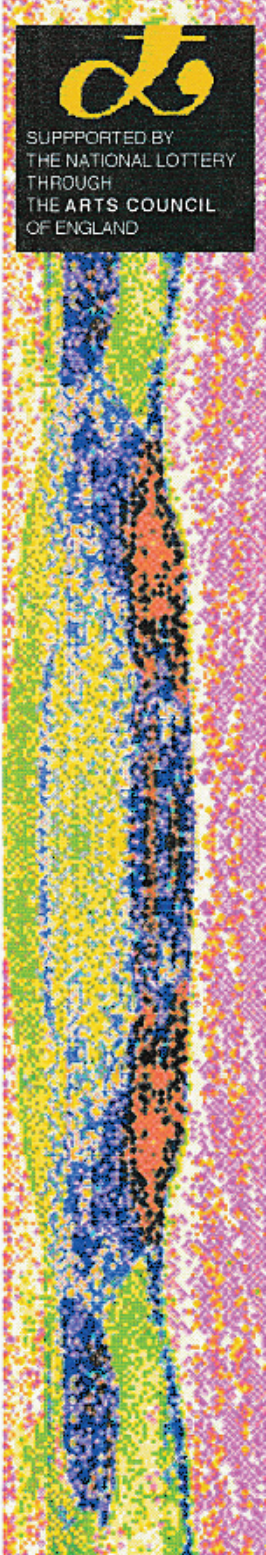
Presentations have been made by some international conductors and musicians, also by well-known classical celebrities, including Ian Buckle, pianist, and Jonathan Aasguard, cellist. Both play with the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, and the prestigious John Wilson Orchestra, and have appeared at The Proms.

Anthony has also arranged Club concerts with diverse choirs, bands, dancers and jazz musicians from farther afield, and the much appreciated and talented local trio of Daniel Axworthy, violinist, David Leslie, pianist, and Andrew Rudd, poet.

The Club was registered as a charity in 2017, and its wartime objectives were re worded to comply with the Charity Commission's requirements. They now read "to advance, improve, develop and

maintain public education in, and appreciation of, the art and science of music and the arts in all their aspects, by any means the trustees see fit, including through the presentation of public concerts and recitals”.

Suggestions for new performers at the club are always welcomed. The Club endeavours to be as self-supporting as possible, while trying to keep subscriptions to a minimum. There are no restrictions to membership and new members and guests are always welcome.





SUPPORTED BY
THE NATIONAL LOTTERY
THROUGH
THE ARTS COUNCIL
OF ENGLAND



Frodsham Music & Arts Club

GALA CONCERT

Strings of the
**Royal Liverpool
Philharmonic Orchestra**
Malcolm Stewart - Soloist and Conductor

Bach: Brandenburg Concerto No.3
Handel: Concerto grosso Op.6, No.12
Mozart: Eine kleine Nachtmusik K.525
Vivaldi: Four Seasons Op.8, Nos. 1-4

**Friday 19th September at
7:30pm**
Community Centre, Fluin Lane,
Frodsham

Tickets £5 from:

Alan R. Fozard, Estate Agent, Main Street, Frodsham
Edwards Grounds, Estate Agent, Church Street, Runcorn
Tourist Information Centre, Town Hall Square, Chester
DAN Office, Library, Witton Street, Northwich
Club Treasurer, Tel:- 01928 732306, or on the door.

Free Programme Licensed Bar

This gala concert in 1997 was a highlight in the Club's history

ARCHIVE REPORT 2025

Gill Baxter

In February I had a request for a grave number at St Laurence from a member of the Earlam family which I was happy to help with.

In May we were delighted to receive two boxes of notes of Arthur Smith's research for two of his books from Kay Smith this year. The notes provide more information about the individuals featured in his books, 'Brief Lives' and also about "William Charles Cotton..." We are working through these in our weekly cataloguing sessions, which we have been doing for five years. We always welcome new material to augment our knowledge and to interpret the history of our local town and surrounding villages.

In August 2024 I was contacted by Pam, a volunteer at the Catalyst Museum in Widnes. She had found, in her grandmother Elsie Gow's effects, a large illustrated Bible which had been given to her by someone from Frodsham. There is an inscription on the front page to:

Mr & Mrs Charles Morrey
On their wedding day
with every good wish from
Rev & Mrs H A Arnold

Prov 111. 5 & 6
Feb 13th 1896

It took a while to return the Bible to Alison Franks, great granddaughter of Frederick Morrey who founded Morrey's Nursery, Kelsall. The nursery closed on 4th May 2024 after 114 years of trading. I had a contact in Kelsall who helped me locate the family. The contact told me they were in South Africa enjoying a well-deserved holiday. Alison visited me and also brought with her an amazing Morrey family tree which extended back to the 16th century.



I emailed Pam who was pleased to hear that the Bible was reunited with the family.

Image: Gill and Alison with the bible and the family tree

In October I had an enquiry about a Veterinary Practice in Kingsway, Frodsham. John Dawson was living at a property in Kingsway but I don't think he ever practiced there. In 1963 a farmer took a pig to him for an operation and asked if he could observe the operation. Mr Dawson refused and he made a claim in Court against the farmer who paid 17 shillings and sixpence for the consultation and advice.

I discovered that on 13th February 1976 there had been a planning application for change of use for an Operating theatre and Dog recovery room at his veterinary practice in Greenway Road in Runcorn.

We have also found out that John Dawson joined the Runcorn Rotary Club in 1981, probably when he retired.

Also, in October, on Thursday 9th, I delivered a talk to the U3A Family History Group at Grappenhall Sports Centre about the “Fascinating Webb Family” in return for Tina Lawton’s pro bono talk to our society back in May. The Grappenhall group were very interested in our Journal and its contents. They, like us, research into topics that they find interesting, such as local families.



Gill delivering her talk to Grappenhall U3A Family History Group - and being questioned afterwards.

Our society has an exhibition cabinet in Frodsham Library currently displaying china souvenirs. We also mount displays at other venues in the town, including...



Marg Thoburn with Kate at 'Memory Day' in February, in Frodsham Methodist Church.



And, an exhibition of Coronation souvenirs in Frodsham Library.

Please do contact us at fdhsarchive@gmail.com if you think you have something you would like to donate to the archive.

“WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR, DADDY?”

by Sue Lorimer and Fiona Barry

The men returning from the Forces abroad had experienced extraordinary challenges, and made great sacrifices. Some never spoke of their exploits, while others recorded their stories for future generations.



Allen Tittle, who lived at 44 High Street, understandably chose to put his wartime experiences behind him, but his story was told after his death by a relative, Maurice Richardson, in Journal 39 in 2009. Allen, born in 1921 and a bricklayer by trade, joined the R.A.F. in the early years of the war, qualifying as a wireless operator in April 1943. In November 1943 he became a Leading Aircraftman. In 1944, he was serving with 617 Squadron (Dambusters) based at R.A.F. Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire. This elite squadron specialised in precision bombing and Allen took part in raids on installations in Germany, and U-Boats and enemy shipping, including on the attack on the battleship Tirpitz in Norway. Bombs used included the ‘Tallboy’ a new ‘earthquake bomb’ developed by Barnes Wallis the inventor of the famous ‘bouncing bomb.’

Allen Tittle, image courtesy of David Tittle

On a mission to attack U-Boats in Norway on 12th January 1945, Allen’s plane was hit and the crew parachuted out to land in snow near Bergen, where they were taken prisoner by the Germans. Allen’s flight log closed with the word ‘Missing’ but his diaries record his time as a Prisoner of War during the spring of 1945 first in Staleg III at Nurenberg, and then Staleg VIIA at Moosberg, with periods of solitary confinement and deprivation. No wonder he chose to forget! The last two pages of the diary tell of his release, his first proper meal in months and his arrival in Frodsham on 12th April 1945. Allen’s wartime diaries and flight log are held by F&DHS Archives.

Percy Griffiths of Frodsham kept a diary and recorded his wartime experiences. This is what he wrote on Sunday 28 January 1940:

“Tonight I had one of the worst experiences of my life. I had been on a weekend leave and I had to be back in camp at Padgate¹, by midnight. Late in the afternoon the weather turned nasty. Soon the roads were buried in deep snow and no vehicles could get through. So I set off at about 4-30pm to walk back to the camp – a journey of approximately 15 miles.

Well, I kept on walking for about one hour and 15 minutes. By this time, I had reached Preston Brook. As I started up the hill I got into real difficulty. There were snow drifts of anything between 5 and 10 feet deep. At the same time, it was going dark and a strong wind was blowing the snow into my face. Often I found myself up to my waist in snow. I kept getting out, falling over, getting up and falling down again. I was roasting hot from all the exertion and covered in sweat. And yet from the waist down I was wet through. I passed one motor car after another and a number of vans which were snowed-up. But I struggled on until I got free of the drifts. Sometimes I had to go over the snow on my hands and knees.

After a while I climbed on to some railings by the side of the road. I walked along hanging on to them until I came to a wall which was showing about 3 inches above a drift of snow. I walked on the top of the wall until I came to the end of it. I jumped off up to my waist in snow again. I was just

¹ RAF Padgate was a small base in Warrington providing training for air force recruits

about all in. My legs felt too tired. I did not know if I had any feet, they were so wet and cold but I carried on stumbling along until I got to Daresbury where I found more deep drifts. I was so worn out by then but I had to keep going.

Eventually I arrived in Warrington at about 8-15pm. But I still had about three miles to go to reach Padgate. So on I went. Every yard felt like 20 yards but I still carried on. At last I saw the lights of the camp. It was such a relief, I can tell you. I arrived at the gate at exactly 9pm and I was in bed by 9-10pm. I felt just like a block of ice. But I managed to do what I had set out to do but I wouldn't like to go through that experience again. Not for a thousand pounds. It was a terrible journey. Sometimes I thought I would be found frozen in the snow. Never again will I attempt anything like that. I will never forget what I went through that winter's evening".

Dennis Abbott of Helsby enlisted in January 1943 as a Telegraphist. He was serving as Senior Telegraph Operator on the destroyer, H.M.S. Bulldog off the coast of Guernsey, when on 9th May 1945, Major General Heine came aboard and signed the surrender documents leading to the liberation of the German occupied Channel Islands. Dennis would have been responsible for the communication between the parties. Such a memorable moment in history. Dennis was posthumously awarded an Arctic Star Medal in 2016.

Dennis Abbott, image courtesy of Colin Abbott.



Another Helsby resident had two lucky escapes. **Robert (Bob) Clark** was one of the soldiers evacuated from Dunkirk. Later, in 1943, he was serving as a corporal in the 1st Army Tank Brigade in the Western Desert, when he and about thirty other soldiers were captured by the enemy. They were held prisoner by German and Italian guards. Forty-eight hours later the guard was reduced to four and when one took some of the prisoners to look for water the other prisoners were able to overpower the remaining guards, completely turning the tables. Bob Clark and his party marched their prisoners through the night until they met up with troops of the 5th Indian Division and safety. Bob Clark went on to see action in Normandy and ended his military service as a sergeant.

Norman Rogerson from Helsby joined the Lancashire Fusiliers in 1939 and was based in Winchester, when he was granted five days leave.

"I had a job to get to London because of snow, and a terrible journey to Crewe. This was on a Friday. When I arrived in Chester at 10pm the Military Transport Officer advised me to stay at the Y.M.C.A. for the night as all the roads were completely blocked and there were no trains. I ignored him and set off to walk in full military kit; gas mask, arms and ammunition. When I arrived home at 5am my parents could not believe I had managed to get through the blizzard. My uniform was all frozen and I had great difficulty removing it before being put to bed. The next morning, Ross Ridoch, the postmaster, asked our neighbour, Mr Millichamp, to deliver a telegram to me. The message said 'Return to Unit Immediately!' It was a struggle to get back to Winchester, from where I was put on a train to Liverpool docks. I sailed to Northern Ireland, joined a convoy and spent six weeks out at sea dodging U-boats."

Norman saw service in South Africa, Egypt, Libya, Palestine, Iraq, Persia, The Gulf, India and Burma. He ended up in Berlin and spent eleven months cut off by the Russians during the Berlin Blockade of 1948/49. He met his future wife in Berlin and finished the war as a Sergeant Major.

If any readers have stories of their relative's exploits that you are willing to have archived, please let us know. It is important to have these stories documented for future generations.

OUT & ABOUT IN THE COMMUNITY

Various authors & editors

1 Frodsham Festival of Walks 2025 – Fiona Barry & Sue Lorimer

History Society participated in two walks this year, one focusing on World War 2 (29 April), and the other on the Sutton Tunnel Incident (30 April).

The Aston World War II walk, led by Fiona Barry, was a pleasant circuit down to the River Weaver and back to Aston church. Society members were invited to visit the church which was especially opened for us by the churchwardens, who served refreshments and put on an exhibition for walkers and Society members to enjoy.

On 28 November 1940, the church received the full effects of a landmine landing close to the south east end of the church, which blew all the windows out of the building and caused much internal damage. After being unusable for the rest of the war, the church was carefully restored by Warrington architects Wright and Hamlyn, and reopened on 27 June 1950. Shrapnel damage is still visible on the south side of the building, and on some of the graves.



Walkers at Aston, image courtesy of Wynford Evans

The Sutton Tunnel Incident was commemorated during a walk linked to a celebration of the 200th anniversary of modern railways, (leading to it being included in @Railway 200 publicity). Sue Lorimer and Fiona Barry contributed to this railway-themed walk, led by Eamon Kilduff.

The aim of this talk was to show how dangerous early rail travel was by recounting the events that occurred in Sutton Tunnel, outside Frodsham, on Wednesday 30th April 1851.



Sue setting the scene at Frodsham station, image courtesy of Fiona Barry

Walkers congregated at Frodsham Station to catch the train to Runcorn East. Sue explained that the line, station and viaducts were built by the famous Chester contractor, Thomas Brassey, and described how the station house building and waiting rooms were physically moved in 1892 to facilitate the widening of the platform.

Strangely enough this walk was on the exact date that the disaster happened 174 years ago, but the weather then was not typical of April. It was cold and wet, and the rain had turned to sleet. It was the day of the Chester Cup at The Roodee and when the race was over thousands of racegoers crowded on to trains for their return journey home. A fully loaded train pulled by a locomotive called **Druid** got into difficulties in the mile-long Sutton Tunnel. Her wheels were unable to grip the track and she came to

a halt. Another locomotive, **No 16**, carrying 450 passengers came to her aide, but **No 16** also became stuck. There was no way of knowing that two trains were stationary in the tunnel and the Station Master at Frodsham allowed the next loaded train, **Albert**, to travel towards Sutton at 15-20 miles per hour.

The walkers boarded the train to travel the exact route taken in 1851, and to try to imagine the conditions that the tired race goers endured.

The experience at Frodsham was enriched by the knowledge of the subject supplied by local resident David Jackson, a keen railway enthusiast. Sadly, David passed away in September. We are grateful to him for his input that day, and his help to our Society over the years.

Fiona accompanied the walkers in the train, pointing out the Sutton Tunnel, and how dark it would have been for all the passengers, as there were no lights in the carriages. Third class passengers had no glass in the windows and so were extremely exposed to the noise when **Albert** crashed into the rear of **No 16**, which destroyed several carriages and derailed **Albert's** locomotive. It was dark and smoky, and those passengers who could walk started to make their way out of the tunnel, meaning that there were more than 1,000 people on the tracks in the tunnel just as another train was heard approaching from Warrington!



Fiona at Runcorn East station. Image courtesy of Chris Kimberley

After alighting at Runcorn East station, Fiona continued the story. The guard from **No 16** had walked on with a red light and stopped the approaching train on the viaduct. Two doctors were sent for. The first train, **Druid**, was able to pull away and continued with its load to the safety of Moore station. **No 16** was able to pull away with the undamaged carriages attached. Many people were left with no option but to walk on to Warrington, and those returning to Frodsham found the

injured had taken the few rooms that were available in local inns, and so they were forced to walk on to Chester.

On that night, five people were killed and between 30-40 injured, of whom four would later die. An extensive and thorough inquest opened just two days later, led by Captain Laffan, whose report was highly critical of the railway company. His recommendations were adopted and led to improved safety standards on rail travel, including the introduction of the block working system, to ensure that trains were separated not only by intervals of time but also by distance. Both the accident and the progress of the inquest was widely reported in every national newspaper, from The Sun in London to The North Wales Chronicle.

We are extremely grateful to Malcolm Verity, whose article ***It happened here – the Sutton Tunnel disaster***, published in the Merseyside Industrial Heritage Society Journal 7, provided much of the material for our two talks, which was much appreciated by the walkers.

2 VE Day Celebrations – Kath Gee

The 80th anniversary of VE Day was celebrated on 8 May by Frodsham Town Council with a programme of events, including a picnic in the Park at Castle Park, and a service on Frodsham Hill at sunset, followed by lighting of the VE Day 80 Beacon and lamps by Scouts and Guides.

Castle Park Arts Centre held a VE Day afternoon tea in their courtyard on Saturday 10 May, with music provided by local violinist Mansell Morgan, who played wartime tunes and encouraged singing and dancing. Frodsham Town Council purchased tickets for this celebration, and some History Society members benefited from this.



Celebrating VE Day at Castle Park Arts Centre. Image courtesy of Kath Gee

History Society's contribution towards the VE Day anniversary was to mount two exhibitions in local libraries.

Frodsham Library display cabinet and information. Image courtesy of Fiona Barry

Frodsham's display included a 1954 OS map of Frodsham, with cards for each of the soldiers who had died in action, detailing their name, regiment, home address and place of remembrance or burial. This attracted much attention and provided clear evidence that it had been a "World War": some Frodsham men are buried on the other side of the world in Japan, some perished at sea, and others died in Burma.

The display cabinet held war related memorabilia, a certificate of appreciation issued to those who fought, or their families, medals awarded in the conflict and an officer's swagger stick! Gill's replica rations helped show how little food was available.



VE display at Helsby Library. Image courtesy of Helen Neal

Sue Lorimer single handedly researched the lives of the 19 men who did not return to Helsby after World War 2. Her eye-catching display took pride of place in the entrance foyer of Helsby Community Centre, and also was used by Cheshire West and Chester Council to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the end of World War 2 on their facebook page.



The Church of St Michael, Shotwick. Image courtesy of Kath Gee

On Wednesday afternoon 18th June, 26 members travelled to Shotwick at the head of the Dee estuary, which was once an important crossing point into North Wales and a port with access to the Irish Sea. Our visit began at the historic church of St Michael where we were welcomed by Vanessa, one of our Shotwick hosts. Vanessa encouraged us to view key features of the church interior especially its box pews and the striking stained-glass window by a local artist, depicting the Archangel Michael.

Right: 1938 window depicting Archangel Michael with dragon-slaying sword, created by Trena Cox (1895-1980). Trena was born on the Wirral and worked in Chester for much of her life. Image courtesy of Kath Gee



We saw the projecting 11th century entrance to the church where arrows were sharpened for bow practice after the church service on Sundays, and the open base of the tower where the bell ringers stood. We were also offered the chance to climb to the top of the tower, which had outstanding views.



Left: On top of the tower with views to Burton church tower on the skyline. Image courtesy of Fiona Barry

Like the interior of St Michael's Church, the graveyard displayed some unique, listed heritage features, including tomb chests, a sundial and the north wall that separates the graveyard from the military road used by Edward I in the 13th century.

Jenny, the church warden, took two separate groups on short walks around the village where we saw some interesting working farms and estate cottages, a pub undergoing change of use, also the former Manor House and Vicarage, both now occupied by new residents.

Tea and homemade cakes were served in the church by parishioners throughout the afternoon.

This special occasion was enjoyed by all our participants and we warmly thank the parishioners for their kind hospitality.

4 Frodsham Festival in the Park – Fiona Barry



Committee members manning the History Stall at Festival in the Park, 6 July 2025. Image by Kath Gee.

The display on the History Society stand told the story of the last Royal visit to Frodsham, which was on 8 July 1925, almost exactly 100 years before. Although the visit was very short, many of the town's residents lined Main Street, waiting for a glimpse of the King. The ex-servicemen of the Great War were presented to his Majesty, and the Scouts, Guides, Brownies and Cubs were all inspected.

5 Frodsham Main Street Walk – Kate Birkenhead

Sue Lorimer and Kath Gee led the July walk visiting three of the oldest public houses in town: The Queen's Head, The Bear's Paw and The Golden Lion. Approximately 30 members of our Society attended the walk and they were fascinated by the history of these buildings.

The Queen's Head. This Grade II listed pub is thought to date from the 17th century and could be the oldest coaching inn in Frodsham. Originally it was known as the King's Head but the name was changed when Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837.

In 1809, this inn was advertised as having two good parlours, a bar, a commodious hall on the first floor, a room for 20 beds and a well-attended Bowling Green.

The inn was a posting house where horses could be rented; at the back of the inn there were stables for 23 horses. In 1818, the Mail Coach stopped here morning and evening to change horses. By 1822, it looked like the business had moved across the road to the Bear's Paw. In 1841, there were daily omnibus services from the Queen's Head to Chester and a carrier service to Chester on Tuesdays and Fridays. By 1850 they had stopped advertising as a posting house.



Rear of the Queen's Head, and the plaque on the first floor. Images by Kath Gee.

There were two coach houses at the back of the main building (see evidence in the brickwork). Above this is where the Frodsham Brotherly and Friendly Society was formed on 12th Jan 1813 (see plaque on the right). This was an early Friendly Society whose role was to pay out sickness and death benefits to its members with a great emphasis on the social side of the Society with marches, dinners, and much drinking!

The Queen's Head was also the Excise Office (Inland Revenue) from c1840 - c1900. After this period the Excise Office moved to the Post Office.

In June 1821, Mr Huband from the Theatre Royal, London, 'at his own considerable expense', erected a theatre at the rear of the King's Head, complete with boxes, a pit and a gallery. He put on performances of 'The Mock Doctor' featuring himself, and a Mr Kemp from the Minor Theatre, Manchester. The show ended with comic songs, a hornpipe by Master Watson from Sheffield and a farce entitled 'The Spoiled Child'.

Like most of the larger public houses this inn was used for auctions including hay and grain, houses and land, and from 1850s-1880s livestock. These livestock auctions were going on in the same period that other auctions were taking place at the Bear's Paw, so Frodsham was a thriving market town at that time.

One final revelation confirmed that the inn had once belonged to Messrs. Crosbie and Urmson, salt manufacturers of Frodsham Bridge. They bought the King's Head and some land on 27th June 1782, but sold the inn the following week to Mr John Blease. They were only interested in the land.

The Bear's Paw. According to the date on the lintel over the front door, the Bear's Paw was constructed in 1632. It was built on land owned by the Savage family of Rock Savage who were the Lords of the Manor of Frodsham. It is said that the Bear's Paw was originally called 'The Lion's Paw' as the Savages had a lion's paw on their Coat of Arms. The Savages fell out of favour around 1642 and that is when the inn changed its name to The Bear's Paw.



Front door lintel recording construction in 1632. Image taken by Kath Gee in 2008



Bear's Paw 1911 with Coronation decorations and stabling block far right. FD00739.

The Bear's Paw was a posting house where horses could be rented for any purpose including the delivery of mail. Pigot's Directory 1822 advertises the Royal Mail Coach to Manchester every morning at 6am and to Chester every evening at 4.30pm. When the inn was sold in 1824, it boasted stabling for 28 horses.

From about 1850 The Bear's Paw became the main staging post for coaches and mail delivery in Frodsham. Ellen Farrall, daughter of an earlier owner was listed as the actual post mistress from 1828 to about 1855. She probably ran the post office from the inn, but not necessarily, as she and her sister, Mary, did live nearby.

After the railway came to town, the Bear's Paw was advertised as the 'Bear's Paw and Railway Hotel'. This first appears in newspapers in 1853, and later in an advert for accommodation in 1896. It became 'Ye Olde Bear's Paw' around 1900, but changed its name to the Bear's Paw Hotel from 1903/4 onwards when it was renovated by Chester architects, Douglas and Minshall.

The Golden Lion. This public house is built on an original burgage plot, owned by the Lord of the Manor and rented out to Henry Torfote c.1361. He was from a respectable and influential family, being a Bailiff c.1351-1364.

By the end of the 18th century, the Golden Lion was owned by Thomas Lewis, a maltster, from Netherton. He was from a family of committed Methodists and in 1790 he lent them a barn behind the pub to use as a Chapel and Sunday School. The Frodsham Methodists built a new Chapel on Fluin Lane in 1803 and it is suggested that the site of that barn became the Cotton factory owned by Sam Mouldsdale, who lived next door.

In 1809 the owners of The Golden Lion put the inn up for auction. At that time, it had a lounge, tap room, kitchen at the rear, 4 bedrooms, 3 attic rooms and 2 cellars.



The Golden Lion in 2008, image courtesy of Kath Gee.

In the early hours of Sunday 30 March 1902, a disastrous fire started in Mr Hindley's boot and shoemaker's shop on Church Street. The heat of the fire caused an explosion in Mr Rothwell's (the tinsmith) premises, and blew the roof off, which destroyed the back wall of the Golden Lion. Later that year, the room at the rear of the building and the stables were built.

The Golden Lion is now owned by Samuel Smith's Brewery, which has a 'zero-tolerance' policy on many things. That is, not only to swearing and bad behaviour, and no electronic devices - so no phones, computers, cameras and electronic payments: cash only!!

6 Brian Dykes – Kath Gee

Brian was Chairman of F&DHS from 2014 to 2018. Vernon and I were invited to celebrate his 90th birthday at a splendid tea party in Barrow Village Hall in early August.

We met some of his friends from Barrow, Runcorn, Frodsham and Chester, including three of our near neighbours. Brian gave a short speech and cut the cake which had come from Devonshire Bakery, Frodsham; it served more than 100 guests!

Image by Kath Gee.



7 Down on the Farm – Kath Gee

Kate and Gill attended the Fair and Scarecrow Festival called 'Down on the Farm' in Frodsham Methodist Church on Saturday 27th September. They assembled and presented a map of farms in Frodsham in the 1940s and display boards showed information and images of farming activities from F&DHS Archives. Also on display was the 1940 map traced by the Home Guard, with road names, and the survey which contained details of houses, including whether they had cellars, what type of construction and materials were used, whether they had a town water supply or used a well, as well as the details of livestock kept by the farm. A steady flow of interested people kept them busy during the day.



Kate and Gill with the map of farms, and the display boards. Images by Kath Gee.

8 History Day – Fiona Barry

Image by Fiona Barry

The Cheshire Local History Association's annual 'History Day' conference was held at Tarporley Community Centre in 2025. Eleven F&DHS members made the journey to listen to talks on 'Moving Cheshire' - how transport changed the county. Alan Crosby talked about the uses of navigable rivers and the construction of canals had made. Keith Lawrence described how Roman roads were built on top of the existing road network, and brought us up to modern times with the motorway system. Mike Blackburn described the growth of the railway network to 21,500 miles by 1923. Colin Schroeder took us through early 20c flight up until World War 2.



Our display looked at the impact of railway tourism on Frodsham, the use of Crossville char-a-bancs to transport people around the countryside, local milestones on the Turnpike road, how railways enabled the development of BICC at Helsby, the building of the Manchester Ship Canal and its impact on Frodsham and the moving back of the station buildings at Frodsham in 1892, to enable a deeper platform. A number of delegates came to look at our display before the start and in the lunch interval.

THE NEW CHESTER ARCHIVES

Kath Gee, Fiona Barry & CALS blog 1.10.25

Cheshire Archives in Chester may be closed but behind the scenes staff are sorting, re-packaging and conserving collections ready for moving to new premises in Chester and Crewe.

Heritage Open Days 2025 provided an opportunity to hear about the new archive facilities under construction from Paul Newman, Archives and Local Studies Manager, and Tim Brown of Ellis Williams Architects. At Crewe Tim Brown explained how the building form had developed with the input of stakeholders, clients and planning officers. The site in Chester is situated on Lightfoot Street, Hoole, close to the railway station & bus station.

Whilst closed, staff have been busy updating the catalogue, adding hundreds of new, detailed descriptions for records that haven't been listed before. Methodism was strong in East Cheshire and the records from that part of the county are now all sorted and described.

Six principles have been developed for determining which collections will be held in Chester and which in Crewe. Any collections with high conservation requirements will be kept in Chester where the conservation department will be based. In addition, archivists are sorting through over 5,000 ordnance survey maps and sharing maps with the National Library of Scotland that are not yet available online.

The next stage is to check the packaging, update box labels and label the destination for all archive items - the colour code is as follows: Green sticker = heading to Crewe; Blue sticker = staying in Chester; Pink sticker = off to the Salt mine in Winsford.

The new archive buildings are due for handover in spring 2026. They will be stocked over the summer, and open to the public in early autumn 2026. Keep in touch with progress via [Cheshire Archives and Local Studies](#) - their blog, [facebook](#) and Instagram.



The new Chester Archive building, Lightfoot Street, October 2025. Image by Gordon Barry.

FRODSHAM & DISTRICT HISTORY SOCIETY

Programme of meetings 2026

2nd February	The Slave Ships of Neston and Parkgate Anthony Annakin-Smith
2nd March	AGM 7.15pm The Liverpool Overhead Railway David Hearn
13th April	Clocks and watch industry of Runcorn and surrounding area Peter Blackmore
11th May	Vintage advertisements to make you smile! Dominga Devitt
June visit	To be arranged
July walk	To be arranged
5th October	Hiking through history Josephine Gosling
2nd November	1st/5th Battalion Cheshire Regiment - square pegs for square holes? Allen Wales
7th December	The Great British Holiday from the 1930s to the 1960s Barry P. Humphreys

Programme Secretaries, Fran and John, have organised this speaker programme