

The Friends of Somerset Archives

Newsletter (number 3: September 2005)

Welcome to this the third newsletter for the Friends of Somerset Archives, currently on circulation to 81 full and 8 life members. Our membership is still growing but we still need more members, so please spread the word. My thanks go to the contributors to this edition but if you have any interesting piece of news relating to Somerset records please let me know. This can include new catalogues of papers, indexes or news of collections made accessible for the first time, either through cataloguing or items that have undergone conservation. There are literally thousands of Somerset documents waiting to be catalogued in record offices around the country and in these days of on-line catalogues it is often difficult to know when they have been updated.

STANDING ORDERS. Please, please, please fill in the details of your standing order as this will help not only the membership secretary and the treasurer but yourself. It will give the society officers more time to plan events and projects rather than chase people up for membership fees. Please do it as soon as possible. Details are enclosed with this newsletter.

If anyone has any ideas for speakers or places to visit please, or is interested in serving on the committee as Events Secretary, can they let the secretary know as we like to have a wide variety of subject matter at our events. Similarly are members interested in meeting up more often to work on projects, perhaps on a regular basis, either weekly or fortnightly? Please let me know if you are so I can arrange something. Adrian Webb, Hon. Editor

Friends' Day Out at Nether Stowey

A report on the first day for members of the Friends of Somerset Archives by Beryl Bletcher



Above. The Friends outside Coleridge's Cottage at Nether Stowey. In addition to this group is our chairman who was taking the photographs for this report. Staff from the Somerset Record Office joined the event which was a resounding success.

On June 4th The Friends met at Nether Stowey to follow in the foot steps of one of England's most famous poets **Samuel Taylor Coleridge**. We were most fortunate to have as our guide Tom Mayberry who is the Chairman of the Friends of Coleridge Society. We gathered in the village hall for coffee where Tom gave us a talk supported by a slide show of the life and times of Samuel who was born on 21st October 1772 in Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire the tenth son of the vicar.

When at the age of eight his father died he was sent away to the London Bluecoat School at Christ's Hospital, after this he went on to Cambridge, to become a philosopher, poet, Unitarian preacher and even spent a short spell in the Light Dragoons. In 1794 whilst walking with Robert Southey in the Quantocks they met a

local tanner Tom Poole from Nether Stowey. When visiting Tom's home Sam fell in love with the beautiful area of the Quantock hills. In 1796 he decided to rent a small cottage for himself, his wife Sarah and their son David Hartley.

When he lived in Nether Stowey he spent much of his spare time in the company of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, they walked together through the beautiful country deep in conversation. The Wordsworths had rented a house near by for a year. With their like minds a deep friendship formed. It was during this year that he wrote some of his most famous poems, *The Ancient Mariner*, *Frost at Midnight* and *Kubla Khan*. Collaborating with the Wordsworths to publish a book of poems called *Lyrical Ballads*.

We followed the lecture by a visit to the cottage in Lime Street, which has been sympathetically restored by the National Trust. With the help of Tom's description we were able to visualise the small rooms filled with the friends of Samuel and Sarah. The sitting room where the sleeping baby in his cradle by the fire, as the frost covered the cold streets outside inspired Samuel to composed the poem the *Frost at Midnight*.

A delicious lunch at the Inn opposite aptly named the Ancient Mariner set us up for a walk around Nether Stowey, little of which had changed since the time when Samuel lived there. Coleridge left Nether Stowey in 1800 to join the Wordsworths in their beloved Lake District.

We were all very grateful to Tom for sharing his extensive knowledge of Samuel Taylor Coleridge with us and making it such an interesting day. I was so fascinated about the life of Samuel that I went home and searched out his poems as my only one I remembered from my school days was the *Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*. Also big thank you to Bernard for all his organisational skills which made this day a memorable occasion.



Left: 'Orator' Mayberry outside Tom Poole's cottage at Nether Stowey. Below: The fire mark spotted by David Hawkings at Nether Stowey. Photos by Anne Leamon.



Report sent in from Beryl Bletcher

The fire mark. . . During our tour of Nether Stowey a Sun Fire mark attached to an old building was noticed by David Hawkings. He sent in the following informative report. This is a lead plaque in the shape of a sun about 5½ inches across with a number embossed on it. This type of fire mark was issued from 1710 onwards and the number represents the policy relating to that building. The Sun kept a copy of all the policies from its beginning in 1710 until 1863 and the ledgers are held in the Guildhall Library, London, although some volumes are missing (about 6% of the total amount of information) Between 1710 and 1863 over two million policies were issued providing cover on property of all descriptions, e.g. industrial, banks, ships, gaols, shops, workhouses, railways, churches, throughout England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. The policy for the building in Nether Stowey, number 597735, reads:-

16 March 1792 Stephen Lee of Stowey in the county of Somerset, currier.

On his House and Offices adjoining situated as aforesaid in the tenure of Joseph Billing, shopkeeper	
Stone and tiled not exceeding three hundred pounds	£300
[Agent] Beamon [Premium] 6/-	Duty 4/6

The very next policy, number 597736 is also dated 16 March 1792

Ann Lee at the Rose and Crown at Stowey in the county of Somerset, Innholder.

On her household goods in her now dwelling house only situated as aforesaid,	
Stone and Thatched not exceeding one hundred pounds	£100
Utensils and Stock therein only, not exceeding one hundred pounds	£100
[Agent] Beamon [Premium] 10/-	Duty 3/-

NEWS FROM OUR LATEST MEETING

21st Century Vision for Somerset County Museum

Ideas for the development of Taunton Castle to bring the museum into the 21st century were outlined at a meeting on Thursday 14th July in the Museum by Tom Mayberry, Head of Heritage in Somerset. Present were members of the Friends of Somerset Museum, Somerset Architectural and Natural History Society, Friends of the Rural Life Museum and Friends of Somerset Archives.

Tom explained that the lease by Somerset County Council of Taunton Castle expires in 2007 and the necessity of negotiating a new lease with SCC as soon as possible to enable a Heritage Lottery application, which is being prepared for submission in 2005/6 to fund necessary improvements to the Museum, to go forward.

A Strategic plan has been drawn up which includes – audience/business development, conservation and learning. The vision for a 21st century museum is based upon

1. Excellent collections care
2. A centre for outreach and research
3. Learning is at the heart of what we want to achieve

Tom explained that he and Steve Minnitt with colleagues had visited Museums and Record Offices throughout the country looking at buildings, displays of artefacts, conservation areas, public attractions and facilities etc. Probably the most important factor which needs to be considered is the location of any museum. They had looked at excellent buildings with good facilities for staff and public alike but which had been sited in the wrong areas and thus attracted few visitors. Somerset on the other hand has Taunton Castle, with its amazing historical connections, in the centre of Taunton, with handy car parks and pedestrian access. The Taunton Castle site is an ideal location, as has been proved by the large increase in visitor numbers since allowing free access.

Things need to be looked at with new eyes and he appealed to all the Friends to give their full support to the Heritage Service in this attempt to look forward for Somerset.

Report sent in from Anne Leamon.

NEW ACCESSIONS AT OBRIDGE ROAD

April

Additional parish council documents from Blagdon Parish Council.

A\BKE, M/1649 – additional material for Bishop Fox's Community School, 1940-2000.

A\CKU, M/1651 – Records of Avalon Furniture Ltd, 1960s-1980s.

A\BER, M/1654 – 1:10,000 OS maps for the historic county, 1980-1990.

DD\WI, M/1656 – Log books for Nynhead WI, 1977-2005.

A\BFW, M/1663 – additional material for Trinity CE VA Primary School, Taunton, 1884-1988.

May

Additional parish material from North Perrott.

Additional parish council documents for Portbury Parish Council.

A\CAI, M/1669 – Records of St Andrews Conservation Trust, 2002.

DD\TOR, M/1673 and M/1682 – additional Henley family records, 16th cent.-20th cent.

A\CLE, M/1680 – Quinquennial Inspections for various Somerset parishes, 1950s-1970s.

DD\XCOE, M/1683 – Annotated copy tithe maps of North Petherton, 1970s.

A\ARQ, M/1688 – additional material for Taunton St Andre's CofE VC School, 1989-2002.

June

Additional parish material from Heathfield, Langport, Pitney.

Additional parish council documents for Combe St Nicholas.

D\Hwls, M/1690 – additional records of the Mendip Primary Care Trust, 19th-20th cents.

A\BSK, M/1694- records relating to the Thorne and Pratt families of Minehead, 1930-2005.

DD\WI, M/1701 – WI scrapbooks, 1931-1991.

DD\V, M/1717 – additional Vernacular Building Reports.

Listing supplied by Liz Grant.

For Sale

Norris' Taunton Journal 1725 to 1727. Indexed and filmed by Paul Mansfield. A full facsimile of the original with an index on one cd-rom for £4.00 post free to the U.K. and £4.60 overseas. Please make cheques payable to The Friends of Somerset Archives. Available from 19 Kirke Grove, Taunton, Somerset, TA2 8SB. All of the costs for this production were donated by Paul Mansfield.

Projects by the Friends at the Somerset Record Office

Index to photographs in the Somerset Light Infantry collection.

Work is progressing on this project based on the collection held at Obridge Road. It may be possible for the photographs to be filmed and issued on cd-rom along with the index – this is being looked into.

Tithe apportionment transcripts.

Copies of the apportionments are made available on cd-rom allowing volunteers to work at home - there are many transcripts in preparation. If you are interested in helping please contact Robin Leamon. If we all help a little we will soon have achieved a great deal. The first parish to be completed is Chilton Trinity but there are currently 20 parishes being worked on and the demand for copies has exceeded our capability at present to provide them. Please be patient as we only have one volunteer doing the filming. IF YOU CAN HELP PLEASE LET ROBIN LEAMON KNOW A.S.A.P.

Forthcoming Events

Somerset Archives at Longleat House by Dr Kate Harris.

Please note that this has been cancelled due to factors beyond our control but a replacement trip has been arranged. Read on.

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Somerset Archives at Wells Cathedral by Ann Crawford. Saturday 15th October. Meet outside the Cathedral at 10.45 am. We will be split into two groups one group having a tour at 11.00 am with the second group being free to look at the interesting sites of this city, including the parish church of St. Cuthbert with its wonderful ceiling. Each tour will take about an hour and a half with the second one at 2.00 pm. If you would like to take lunch in the Cathedral's self service "Cloister Restaurant" serving a variety of home-cooked hot and cold food, cakes etc., we can reserve places for you. With this visit we are fairly limited to places and so please let Bernard Welchman know if you would like a place reserved for the tour and / or the Cloister Restaurant.

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Post-Christmas Social. Leamon House, 14 January 2006, 7.30. To celebrate the first year of the Friends of Somerset Archives an informal gathering is arranged at the Leamon family home. Contact the Chairman for details of how to get there.

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He left what? Venue Somerset Record Office, Taunton. Wednesday the 1st of March, 7.30. A talk by Jenny Porter, illustrated with replica artefacts, based on research into primary sources.

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Crosse Connections. Venue Fyne Court. Tuesday the 4th of May, 7.30. A talk by John Porter on Andrew Crosse the 'Wizard of the

Quantocks', scientific experiments and his family.

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Somerset Records Outside of Somerset. Venue Obridge Road. Friday the 23rd of June, 7.30. Continuing our annual theme of a lecture on Somerset records outside of Somerset we are privileged to have a talk by County Historian, Dr Robert Dunning, who has spent the last 30 years researching through collections of records all over the world looking for Somerset material.

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Treasure Hunt. Venue to be announced. Sunday the 3rd of September. Details to be announced.

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Visit to Devon Record Office. Venue Exeter. Saturday the 7th of October, 9.30-12.00. A behind the scenes visit to the record office at Exeter courtesy of the County Archivist. Also a talk on the UK Meteorological Archives held at Exeter. Details of how to get there can be found on their website http://www.devon.gov.uk/record_office.htm

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If you have any ideas for any visits, talks or activities please can you let the events secretary know, whose address is at the end.

Please note that non-members will be charged at £2.00 per event.

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Contact Details

Chairman : Mrs Anne Leamon, Chilliswood, Dipford Road, Trull, Taunton, TA3 7NT e-mail AnnLeamon@aol.com

Secretary ; Position vacant

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NEWSLETTER - Please note that this newsletter has been issued with the agreement of all of the committee who have the final say on all of the material published by the Friends.

***** Don't forget that this is not only a group supporting the Somerset County Record Office but also other record offices in the historic county and also we are interested in Somerset records that are outside the county and not so easily accessible *****