

Somerset Snippets

The Newsletter of the Friends of Somerset Archives

Issue 6 - July 2006

From the Editor

Thank you for your responses to the first letter which I edited and produced. If you don't tell me, (and send me articles) I won't know what you want contained in the letter. I invite both positive and negative criticism—although I hope for more of the former! I had a struggle with technology in producing my first letter — a steep learning curve - but hopefully I will get it right this time.

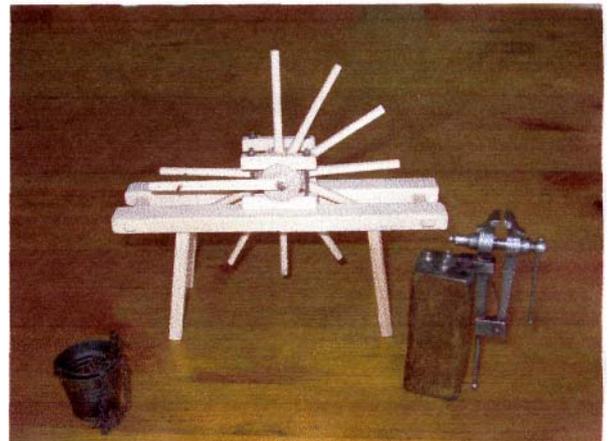
The Friends have had a busy time since our last letter. We have had two excellent presentations, one given by on Andrew Cross at Fyne Court and one at the CRO by Robert Dunning on Records and have been able to support the staff at the County Records' Office at Taunton when they held their Open Day.

We were saddened to hear of the death of Kerry James at such a young age. For many years she has put up a brave fight against cancer. In spite of her illness Kerry continued to work for the Weston Family History Society as well as coaching the Weston Junior rugby team. The world of family history will be a darker place without her enthusiasm and bubbling personality.

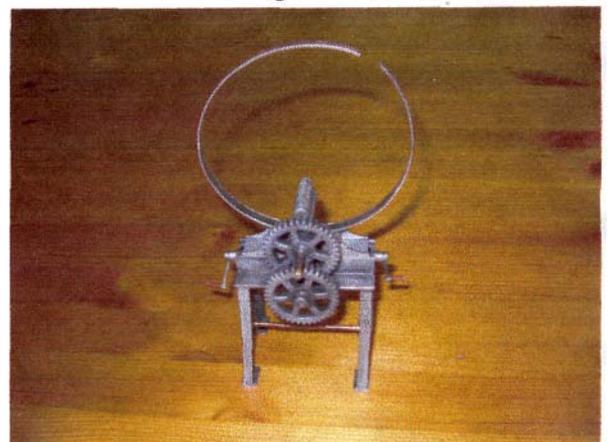
My local U3A Family History Group also had an open afternoon on 16th June and it was fascinating to see the various approaches which had been taken. Few had chosen to research their own family history, selecting instead such subjects as a specific area of Weston-super-Mare, local undertakers and studies of individuals. The range of documents which had been used illustrated what a wealth of information is available in Somerset. I illustrated the part which my family had played in High Ham. My mother once said that, one side of the blanket or the other, she was related to everyone in the village except for the Lord of the Manor, the Vicar and the Schoolmaster. My research into my family, focussing on the latter part of the 19th Century, showed a preacher, wheelwright and undertaker, blacksmith, postmistress, farmer, village nurse, soldier and pioneer, baker, publican and policeman. I illustrated these with old photographs, Parish Chest documents, census and tithe records and some figures from my 1/12 scale model of Wheelwright's Cottage, Post Office and workshop. It is amazing where genealogical research can lead one!



anvil block and tools



making a wheel



rim bender

Open Day at the County Record's Office



The Staff had worked hard to prepare a superb display, clearing the fiche room of readers in order to lay out some of their very special documents and texts. In the document room displays had been set up to show various aspects of local history and young people had the chance to register as an apprentice and to follow a picture trail which featured various historical portraits and all who entered won a prize. Tours of the storage area took place and visitors were also able to see conservators at work.

In all 218 people visited and all were amazed at the range of items held by the CRO. Many expressed the wish that the Open Day becomes an annual event. We offer a warm welcome to the 2 visitors who visited our stand and were so impressed that they joined the Friends!



Guardians indenture seal stamps

Long Sutton C17 Charter



Tom welcomes Mayor Chris Handley

Jenny tells the class what to write on their slates



Getting to Know You : Esther Ormrod—Archivist Somerset CRO

What led you to become an archivist?

I think it is more a question of how I fell into the job! I graduated without a clue about what to do next and spent a year working as a full-time volunteer with Barnado's, then did a variety of other jobs before applying for a position as an archive assistant at the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research in York I always knew I wanted to work in history somehow but it just took me a while to work out how.

Training - what and where?

Postgraduate Diploma in Archive Administration, taken as a correspondence course over 4 years through the Society of Archivists whilst working at the Borthwick Institute.

Who has most inspired you during your career?

I can't name one particular person, but generally I am inspired by people with the enthusiasm to share their knowledge and make archives accessible, and who enjoy the job and have other interests. The person who has helped me most to progress in a particular direction would be Professor David Smith (Director of the BIHR, retired), who taught me a huge amount about palaeography and diplomatic with incredible patience! Unfortunately he didn't teach me everything he knows, and he retired before I could pickle his brain, if retirement means writing volume III of Heads of Religious Houses, building a house in Romania, and still lecturing.



Esther displaying documents at the Open Day

Why Somerset?

The archivist (North Somerset) post was advertised just as I was about to take the final exams; the spec was broad giving good experience of all aspects of a County Record Office. I had also been down to Taunton the previous year to watch Yorkshire play Somerset, and yes, the fact that there was a County Cricket Ground did encourage me to accept the post!

What task do you most enjoy during your working day?

Clocking out. Only joking, although after a busy day it does feel good! It's difficult as every day is different, but the aspects of the job I enjoy most are giving talks to groups, and teaching the palaeography class with Sue Berry.

What piece of archival history would you most like to find?

Proof that I am the heiress to an unclaimed fortune and I can now afford a holiday home in South Africa! Failing that, an undiscovered copy of Hamlet in Shakespeare's hand, with his research notes, and an alternative ending.

What has been your most exciting discovery so far?

Probably an early parish register of Yeovilton, always presumed lost, that turned up in the post with no letter or contact details. There have been several interesting items rather than exciting such as a collection of love letters between a couple who were separated when he went to London to earn enough to marry her, very sweet and touching but also informative about London social and working life.

If you were not an archivist what else would you be?

If I'd started singing properly at an earlier age I would have liked to have taken that further, but I'm too lazy and don't do enough practice!

For what - or how would you most like to be remembered?

As not being dead yet!

What document would you like archivists of the future to find when researching your life?

A really interesting will full of odd bequests to make people wonder....

Esther was born and educated in York and now lives in Taunton. Her hobbies include singing and reading, and she enjoys watching cricket.

Somerset Away

On 23rd June we were treated to a very interesting talk by Dr Robert Dunning. He reminisced about the interesting and unlikely places other than our Record Office he has visited in order to look at Somerset records.

He first described a visit to Fairfield House where, in the archive room, the documents were spread all over the floor. He discovered important documents J there as well as finding the family tiara! Bob also described how the Prinny family records, which included a sixteenth century lease wrapped around a fourteenth century deed showing the Somerton community, had been brought to him in the boot of a car.

Robert also tracked down a batch of medieval documents detailing the history of Crewkerne Grammar School to a cupboard in a derelict staffroom in an old school building. Commenting on storage conditions, he reminded us that, as late as the 1960's, the CRO used to have a leaking roof and an open coal fire in the middle of the room.

In the PRO archival material from the fourteenth century exchequer provided much information about the dissolved monasteries. This was contained in 40 un-indexed volumes and contained deeds for Yeovil and Martock which had been given to foreign monasteries. Also found was a copy of a bill sent by Catherine of Aragon whilst on a pilgrimage which detailed all the pubs she had stopped at on her trip.

The British Library Lambeth Palace and the Duchy of Cornwall also hold records pertaining to Somerset. Dr. Dunning found a 1778 map of Stoke sub Hampden showing the strips in open fields - there is a copy of this document at the CRO. Many wealthy families in other areas have acquired deeds for Somerset properties by marriage e.g. Norwich. Nearer to home, papers pertaining to Exmoor are held in Cornwall and Dorset record offices, a book of maps, including one of Stogursey is deposited in the Wiltshire Record's Office.

Mr R Arundel, when told he needed to deposit his archives at a records office, built his own at the end of his garden, where the records were kept in un-numbered boxes on the floor. They are now in the possession of the Devon and Cornwall records offices. In the seventeenth century Pitney and Long Sutton were held by titled nobility, such as the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth. The Marquis of Northampton stored records about Yeovil in what used to be a stable. In the library at Longleat there was what was claimed to be a Saxon Charter. Dr. Dunning turned this over and found it had been executed on wallpaper.

The university colleges hold many records: Christchurch has papers concerning Bathford and Midsummer Norton, Balliol has some for West Huntspill and Worcester College has those for High Ham church, of which the college was a patron. At Winchester the records, including surveys of estates are kept in a filthy tower with I unglazed windows.

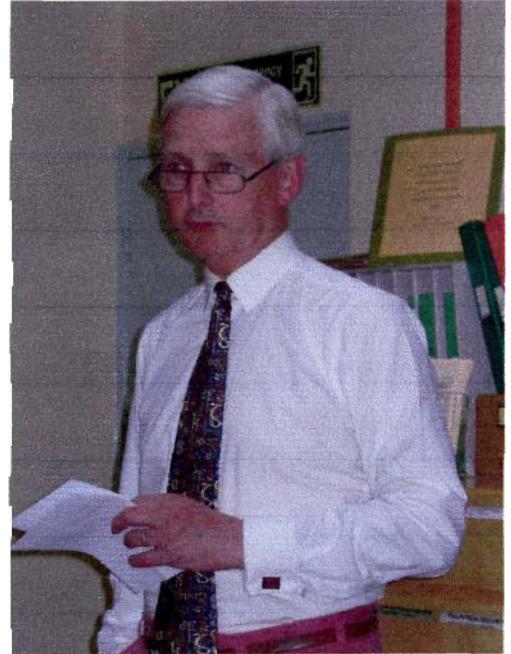
Overseas a collector in Guernsey holds records of Ilchester: James Steven Cox, a book collector held medieval deeds concerning the Monmouth Rebellion - there is a list in the CRO. French archives hold deeds of some of the dissolved abbeys whose lands I were given to French religious foundations.

Many documents have made their way to the I USA. The New York Public

Library hold documents about the Monmouth rebels who were transported to Carolina. In California there are two huge deposits from the Grenville family of Stowe who held property I in North Cadbury.

Every minute of Robert's talk was interesting j and we were all fascinated to discover where we might find some records out of county. We are grateful for the work Bob has done for the Somerset archives.

p.s. The Stevens Cox collection is now up for sale and the Friends are anxious to help raise the £70,000 needed to keep these documents in Somerset.



Andrew Crosse—The Wizard of the Quantocks.

Once we had discovered that Fyne Court existed only as a small range of buildings in the National Trust Nature Reserve, the main house having been destroyed in a fire in 1894, we had no trouble in finding the location! And this proved to be well worthwhile. John Porter's presentation gave me a whole new perspective on the scientific developments of the 19th century. John's material was interesting and he was able to speak with passion as Andrew Crosse was a prominent member of his family tree, in fact his third cousin, five times removed.. It was particularly poignant that we met in the part of the home once occupied by Andrew Crosse where the scientist had carried out many of his experiments. Sadly the 1,600 feet of wire which Andrew had caused to be strung around the trees to collect electricity from the atmosphere had been removed by mistake when preparing to open the grounds again. Fyne Court had been the ancestral home of



Fyne Court as it was before the fire of 1894

Andrew Crosse, born in 1784, for generations and Andrew took his first steps towards becoming a scientist when, at school, he created—and let off—some fireworks. At age twelve he went to a lecture on electricity and this really caught his imagination. In the course of doing his experiments, Andrew managed to electrocute himself twice in one week. His electrical equipment was used to aid those suffering from paralysis and rheumatism with great success. It is no wonder that the locals referred to him as the "thunder and lightning man".

Far from being the shock-headed absent -minded professor, Andrew was a gentle sensitive man who loved the Quantock Hills. He was something of a philosopher and poet as well as a scientist and his social circle included Wordsworth, Coleridge, Faraday, Sir Humphry Davy and many other notables. And, of course, he was one of the many to visit the Great Exhibition in 1851. Andrew Crosse died at Fyne Court in 1855, 71 years after he had been born there.

Early in 1836 a bust was produced of Andrew, who was now 52



ANDREW CROSSE
THE POET,
THE PHILOSOPHICAL
INVESTIGATOR
OF HER LAWS
AND THE GREATEST
ELECTRICIAN
OF THE AGE
WHOSE DISCOVERIES HAVE
BEEN
APPLIED TO PURPOSES
HIGHLY
BENEFICIAL TO MANKIND
AND TO ALSO LED TO NEW
IDEAS
RELATIVE TO ANIMAL LIFE
AND TO THE FORMATION OF
VARIOUS
CRYSTALS
NEVER BEFORE MADE BY ART
OR FOUND IN NATURE

THIS BUST WAS TAKEN BY
J. T. CHADWICK
EXETER 1836

The Bust of Andrew Crosse with its Inscription

SRO notable Accessions for April 2006- June 2006

April 2006

Additional parish material from Stoke St Mary, Pitminster

Additional non-conformist material from Taunton United Reformed Church, Yeovil United Reformed Church

Additional parish council material from Kilmersdon Parish Council

D\RC\winc, M/1995, records of the Roman Catholic parish of St Luke and St Teresa, 1888

A\AGV, M/2017, Papers of the Dickinson family of Holford, 1903-c. 1960

DD\WI, M/2018, Records of the Kilve and District Women's Institute, 1942-1999

May 2006

Additional parish material from Ston Easton, Aller

Additional parish council material from Keinton Mandeville Parish Council

A\BPP, M/2029, Letter written by S T Coleridge, 1818

A\CPO, M/2032, Records of the Minehead and West Somerset Arts Society, 1963-2002

DD\WI, M/2033, Records of Stratton on the Fosse Women's Institute, 1988-2000

DD\EAV, M/2035, Records of the Glastonbury Festivals Ltd, 1979-2005

DDXAH, M/2040, Memorandum concerning the execution of two Monmouth Rebels, 1685

June 2006

Additional parish material from Spaxton, Kingston St Mary, Cheddon Fitzpaine, Stratton on Fosse, Chilcompton, Clevedon Christ Church

Additional parish council material from Paulton, North Petherton Town Council

Additional non-conformist records from Milton Baptist Church, Taunton United Reformed Church, Linden Road Methodist Church

A\AUF, M/2061, Records of the Soroptimist International of Taunton, 1978-1998

A\CPX, M/2062, Manuscript history of Somerset, c. 1730s

DD\SLI, M/2068, Somerset Light Infantry papers, 1908-1954

A\CMM, M/2075, Films of Somerset collected by Trilith, 1930s-1960s

Somerset Parish Register Digitisation Programme

We now have more details of this important project in which the Somerset Record Office is leading the way in England. Some of you may know of the venture that is being undertaken by the Latter Day Saints in partnership with various repositories throughout the world to digitise as many as possible surviving parish registers. There are a number of excellent reasons for partaking in this project the two most important being, conservation and availability.

From the conservation point of view, whilst most record offices have their records on film, the quality does vary from excellent to appalling. We all know that a camera can only record what is front of it but modern technology makes it possible to enhance images and sometimes make them easier to read than the original. The improvements in this are continual and once the registers are filmed can be applied at any time in the future. The other conservation aspect is that there are still few Record Offices that only have one or two copies of their registers filmed and keep these in the same building as their original records. If disaster should strike and the building and contents was completely destroyed, everything would be lost. By partaking in this project the information will always be available in the form of images of the original registers.

Availability is the second consideration, from what I understand at the moment the idea is to make the images available at the Record Office and through all Family History Centres.

However, we all live in hope that they will eventually become available on the internet so that everyone will have access to the records either at home or a local library. Obviously this is a few years in the future but less than ten years ago I was told by the powers that be, at the PRO that there is no way that any document would be available on the internet. This has proved to be wrong and no doubt public pressure will prevail in the future to most archives.

The Friends of Somerset Archives have been asked to help in this project by indexing the parish registers. In order to make this index as accurate as possible special software has been developed which means that each register will be indexed by two different people and if their interpretation of an entry differs the software will inform them. Once this is completed random entries of each parish will be checked by a third person. This way we should have the most accurate index possible. We need volunteers to help with this indexing and so that everyone who wants to help can do, we will be starting with registers post 1813. What I envisage happening is that each volunteer will be sent a DVD of the original parish register, a copy of the software and instructions of how to enter the information. Once you have entered the relevant information on the database and return it to me to pass on to the next person.

If the incredible response that we have had to the tithe awards is anything to go on I am sure that this will be a huge success. At the moment it is thought that the disks will be ready to be dispatched in September or October. If you would like to help with this please contact me with the parish that you would like do and we will do our best to make sure that you get that particular place. However, we will be working on a first come, first served basis so the earlier you volunteer the more chance there is that you will be successful. I am sure that the Members of the Friends of Somerset Archives will rise to the challenge and put all other organisations to shame in our enthusiasm. Please contact me if you would like to be one of our volunteers.

Bernard Welchman

Forthcoming Events

TREASURE HUNT

Sunday 3rd September

Meet at the small parking place outside of St. Andrews Church (the Parish Church), Cheddar at 3.00 pm

This will be a fun afternoon for all of the family, working from clues you will visit various place in the Mendip area in order to answer various questions. These will be on various topics which will involve searching in the locality (not too much walking) for the answer. The trail will end at a local hostelry, hopefully after opening time. Whist this is not a race, there will be a prize for winner. Maps will also be provided.

If you do not have a car, or would like to share a car, please let Bernard know so that we can fix this up.

VISIT TO DEVON RECORD OFFICE

Saturday 7th October at the Devon Record Office

PLEASE NOTE THE NEW DETAILS

This is rare chance to see behind the scenes of the West Countries most modern record office and also learn about the which are held at Exeter.

Venue Devon Record Office

Schedule

10.15 Meet at the Devon Record Office
10.30 Talk by Ian MacGregor relating to the Meteorological Archives
12.00 Lunch - various places for food in the vicinity or bring some sandwiches and eat them in the refreshment room. Tea and Coffee is available from a vending machine priced 40p
1.30. Talk by the Devon County Archivist about the Record Office and a look behind the scenes.

WE ARE LIMITED TO 20 PEOPLE ON THIS VISIT, SO PLEASE BOOK WITH ME (Bernard Welchman) FIRST BEFORE ARRIVING THERE. WE WILL BE WORKING ON A FIRST COME FIRST SERVED BASIS. IF YOU HAVE ALREADY BOOKED PLEASE RE-CONFIRM THIS AS THE DETAILS HAVE CHANGED. THANK YOU

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July 2006

Dear Friends

I produced the enclosed letter when I was far from well and have realised that there are errors. I must also apologise for the quality of some of the printing as my printer developed a terminal fault My sincere apologies

Errata

page 5. Thanks offered to John Porter for an excellent presentation."Scientific Developments of the 19th century"

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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. Contributions to the newsletter or to the website on matters about any of these will be most welcome. * * *