
Somerset Snippets

The Newsletter of the Friends of Somerset Archives

Issue 7

October 2006

We have reached the last quarter of the year and, for many of us, with the holidays over and our gardens put to bed for the winter we can look forward to spending more time on our research and transcription. I made a resolution to set every Wednesday aside for my family history, but, here we are in October and so far I haven't looked at a fiche, opened a book or logged into Ancestry! I almost envy those of you for whom using the archives is a profession. The two courses I attended at our Record Office have whetted my appetite – now I just have to make the effort to get to Taunton. I am a little disappointed as, following the death of my elderly aunt last week I am the now “the older generation” and so far no one has plied me with gin and asked me for my memoirs!

I didn't make the Friends' Treasure Hunt, but with Ann's graphic account I am sorry I missed it. As usual we have new acquisitions at the Record Office and forthcoming events planned by the Friends. We would like to list all archives in Somerset and Somerset records in other locations – so send me articles or information about those you have visited and what you have found and we can include them in our next news letter.

The Editor

The Stevens Cox Collection

Did you know that the Somerset Record Offices receives no money from the tax payer to purchase documents? All documents and collections are given, loaned or bought from donations given for the purpose. Most of you will know that a very important collection, that of Stevens Cox, is now on the market and the Record Office has the opportunity to purchase this large Somerset collection.

Highlights of the collection include medieval deeds, a letter to Richard Whiting the last Abbot of Glastonbury, correspondence and accounts of several important county families, an overseers' account book for Selworthy, Joshua Toulmin's own manuscript of his History of Taunton along with many broadsheets, family photographs and postcards.

The Record Office is making applications to several funding bodies to raise the £84,450

needed, but the Record Office must also contribute a large proportion of this money itself. All donations in the next few months will go towards purchasing this collection.

The Friends of Somerset Archives have committed £500 toward the purchase of this important collection, whilst this does not sound a lot compared with the whole amount it is a large proportion of our funds. If you can afford to make a personal donation to the Record Office (please contact the SRO) that will be greatly received. If not the more members that we have, the more that we can afford to give. So if you know someone who visits the Record Office, has an interest or connection with Somerset who is not a member of the Friends of Somerset Archives, try to persuade them to join. The greater number of members, the more that we can do to help not only in a monetary way, but also in a practical one.

Mendip Adventure - Treasure Hunt



On a dull September afternoon eight car loads of intrepid Treasure Hunters complete with one 'hunting dog' (Labrador) assembled outside St. Andrew's Church, Cheddar.

Bernard welcomed everybody and then issued the question sheets commenting, 'You must all do the first question first and the last question last but you can do the others in whatever order you like' - nervous titters greeted this remark.

Unfortunately, whilst waiting for everybody to arrive, somebody had locked the church, which meant that we were unable to gain access to answer four of the questions in that section.

Most groups, having eventually located the answers available for clue 1 outside the church, moved off smartly but some of us were still searching the area for the elusive answers.

Of course! Cheddar W.I. planted a tree in the church yard to commemorate their 40th Anniversary, there it was with its plaque, all the time, not in the surrounding streets as some thought!

Having worked out the answer to No. 2 as Charterhouse (did you know that it was renowned for its many Roman lead mines in the area?) we drove off up the magnificent Cheddar Gorge passing on the way the Edelweiss Café which we guessed was an answer we had mistakenly been looking for around the church!

Following the map Bernard had supplied of the area, we navigated ourselves across moor land, passed somewhere called Velvet Bottom – how did it get that name we wondered – to the chapel of St. Hughes. A very unprepossessing low building but on entering, what a delight greeted our eyes. My overall memory is of a beautifully carved, entirely wooden building – well worth a second visit.

To our surprise, Bernard, who we had left at the Cheddar Church, shepherding the last car, had already arrived and was taking a picture!

Unfortunately, no time to linger and enjoy the cup of tea kindly offered to us by the custodian – must press on to the next clue.

Clue 3 'Did this crossing get the chop?' & 3a 'Disaster hit the town in the 1970's'

Which way to go now? Those of you who know the area will know that the town was Axbridge but to us strangers it was not that easy. Did you know that the disaster was an air crash in Switzerland in which 13 wives and mothers of the Axbridge W.I.



St. Hugh's Church at Charterhouse

were killed? Not the reservoir flooding or an earthquake (!?) as some people thought.

Having eventually, in desperation, opened the envelope Bernard had kindly provided to find the next destination, Shipham (This is probably where Pig Robinson emigrated from), we back-tracked to the churchyard there for the answers to those clues.

Unfortunately, we were sure Clue 5 took us back to Cheddar but wrong, since we couldn't locate the answers – wrong parking place, no Aveline's Hole and no plaque! However, we shot back to St. Andrews Church to see if it was open for evening service but once again, no such luck.

We worked out the last clue – 'Over the hurdles to the place with the famous sheep fair etc'. was Priddy, so off up the Gorge again, stopping to check Gough's cave to see if there was mention of the founder's name from Clue 1. Shut. Time was running out so pressing on, we arrived at the church and located the answers there and in the churchyard to the clues for question 6. At last, we made our way to the Green to be welcomed by just about everybody else sat quaffing their pints. They had arrived ages before but never mind, we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves even if we did get lost once or twice. We went places we have never been before but certainly would go again to have a closer look at. The winners of the prize of a bottle of wine and box of chocolates was the Skidmore family from Cheddar.

Many thanks for Bernard for all his hard work working out the route and producing such excellent clues. This will be a hard act to follow for our outing next year!

Anne Leamon



The Winners!

Courses at the Somerset Record Office

Many of you will have been fortunate enough to take part in the courses laid on by the staff of the Record Office. I was fortunate enough to gain a place on two this summer. In July I attended "Sources for Rural History" led by the very knowledgeable Janet Tall. This was of great benefit to me as seven eighths of my ancestors originated from the Somerset countryside and it was helpful to discover varied sources for information

Janet's presentation covered the shape of the land, land ownership, agriculture and the wider rural society. She referred to the first two volumes of the Victoria County History, and various other books on farming from the eighteenth century. Janet also pointed us to the many maps and plans of estates and land ownership, the enclosure maps and tithe awards; it was interesting to note that there were three copies of the latter, one for the commissioners, one for the diocese and one for the parish – each having subtle differences. Details of land ownership appear in collections of family papers and manorial records. Janet mentioned the local farming practice of renting out herds of cows and leasing land for three lives. Land tax assessments are held for the whole county from 1781 to 1832. Parish rate books also give details of land ownership.

With reference to agricultural practices Janet pointed to the many working documents of individual farms. The Royal Commission of 1867 on the employment provides much detail in the interviews with women and children. I subsequently found an interview with an ancestor when a small boy, when he described the hardship of picking stones and bird scaring, and told of how he had to miss school for the harvest. Janet also referred to many other documents, memoirs and studies which supply background information to the rural economy and practices of Somerset. I

can highly recommend this interesting and informative presentation.

Also in July I attended the course entitled "How to Research Your House History" led by Sue Berry, supported ably by her team. Sue explained that architectural evidence was not sufficient for dating a house and also that the naming of houses is relatively recent. She also said that documents give more information about the inhabitants than about the house. Sue went on to list various sources for house research such as illustrations, architects plans, sale catalogues, maps, surveys and building control plans. Besides the well known OS maps there are those of parish tithe and private estates. Sue explained that estate papers such as court rolls and books, rentals, deeds, account books, and indentures are also of great help. Sue reminded us that, although probate records are very helpful, sadly, most of those for Somerset were destroyed in the war, only some from between 1630 and 130 for South West Somerset remaining. There are often more records for properties with a specific use, such as hotels and inns. After Sue's talk we were given tours of the Record Office and then set the task of researching specific properties. This was an excellent course, of value to anyone who is interested in the history of certain buildings.

Both courses were top class, but I think that both our excellent Record Office Staff and our wonderful Somerset documents would benefit from having proper accommodation for doing such presentations. There are forthcoming courses one a house history day on 16th October and also a palaeography day on 4 November, but both are fully subscribed. We look forward to more of these excellent events next year.

Grace Rubery

For Sale

Norris's 1725 to 1727. Indexed and filmed by Paul Mansfield. A full facsimile of the original with an index on one CD for £4.00 post free to the U.K. and £4.60 overseas. Please make cheques payable to The Friends of Somerset Archives

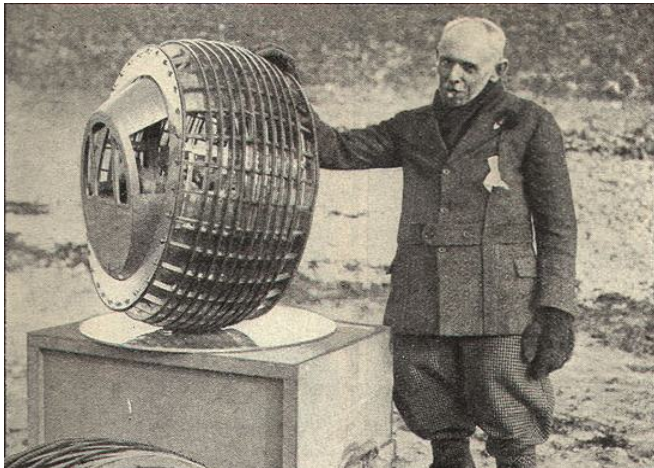
Available from, The Cottage, Manor Terrace, Paignton, Devon TQ3 3RQ.

All of the costs for this production were donated by Paul Mansfield

Dr. Purves Taunton's Local Inventor

Dr John Archibald Purves was born in Taunton in 1870 and gained a doctorate at Edinburgh University. He remained in Scotland until 1902, gaining experience with electricity undertakings, when he moved to Devon and together with his brother, set up the Paignton Electric Light and Power Company in 1908. He also set himself up as a consultant at 82 Queen Street, Exeter as the Western Electricity Corporation, with the intention of promoting hydro-electric schemes on Dartmoor.

He moved to Chilliswood, just outside Taunton in 1930 and in 1932, invented the Dynasphere. His workshop was in what was known as The Chapel, since demolished.



Dr J H Purves, the inventor, with a model of the Dynasphere. Note the enclosed cabin. This picture is from as American magazine 'Popular Science' in 1932

Dr Purves claimed that the use of one wheel instead of four gave great economy of power. By using one wheel instead of four it required only half the horsepower to do the same work and that there was an absence of all jolts. Future versions were intended to be steered by using machinery to move the cabin to one side, tilting the wheel.

The Dynasphere appeared on cigarette cards and an article was written for the Meccano Magazine in February 1935 with a picture of the Dynasphere on the front cover.

Capable of rolling along roads, or over fields and wild country, as easily as a ball runs along a smooth surface, cross country journeys could be made with ease. The dynasphere of course was in the

experimental stage, but it was thought to possess so many advantages that it was envisaged that gigantic wheels would soon be seen running along our highways in as large numbers as motor cars do to-day.

The engine, transmission and bodywork formed a unit that travelled on rails inside a spherical metal cage. When the engine was in action, this unit tried to climb up the side of the cage, which was made to revolve by its weight, and thus the great wheel was impelled along the road as readily as if it were driven directly by the engine.

Steering was simple but effective. The driver simply slid his seat transferring the weight from side to side causing the wheel to tilt and run on hoops of differing diameters. The movement of the rails tilted the great roller and caused it to turn to left or right, the unit within the vehicle meanwhile remaining upright. Eddy Withers of the Experimental Department of Douglas Motors used it in trial runs at Brooklands Race Track. He executed some remarkably sharp turns by leaning out on one side of the dynasphere in order to increase the effect of his movement of the steering gear. He often drove it on the frozen surface of a pond which provided the ideal testing ground. On one occasion he ran off the ice onto some adjoining marshland. The wheel promptly fell over and deposited him in a bed of vile smelling green slime!



The Dynasphere on Brean Sands. The son of the inventor is at the controls

Speeds of 30 m.p.h. could be obtained with the experimental model already built using a 2½ h.p. air-cooled engine, but much higher speeds were envisaged with specially designed dynaspheres.

The sphere moved backwards and forwards easily and as it simply rolled along the ground, there was practically no wear and the cost of maintenance was thought to be very low. It was claimed that 'the dynasphere could achieve all that is asked of passenger-carrying vehicles and may prove invaluable for work in under-developed countries'. Of course, a big selling point was that no costly roads would need to be developed for its use as it could just roll along over any ground. It was originally designed by Dr Purves with North Pole expeditions in mind, where it would have crossed ground that otherwise would have proved difficult for any other form of motorised transport. It was thought, however, locally, when seen driving across the countryside, to be some new form of tank.



The chapel before demolition in 1970s where it is thought Dr Purves' work-shop existed. When the property was purchased in 1950, remains of the Dynasphere were found in this building.

One eye-witness stated:

"As a lad I lived in Weston-super-Mare. One day in the 1930s I went to the beach and saw a man trying to drive a huge wheel across the sands. It wasn't very successful and wobbled about... I have always wondered what it was or whether I imagined it." (BBC)

Although the Dynasphere was capable of rolling along roads, over fields and wild country it disappeared. During a trial at Brooklands race track it was reported to have knocked someone over, probably due to its inadequate steering capabilities. It was also very difficult to see where you were going as you had to look through the open metal work as it revolved in front of you and in wet weather you were liable to be showered with mud.

A Churchmans cigarette card apparently showing the Dynosphere, with a woman driver.

One careful lady owner



Local rumour had it that one day Dr Purves was driving the wheel down the long steep drive from the house and when attempting to break at the corner, instead of him sitting still the wheel stopped and he revolved around inside! Hence the possible demise of the Dynasphere.

Anne Leamon

Friends Forthcoming Events

| | |
|--|--|
| 2006 | |
| Thurs. 7 th Dec - | Records of the Somerset Light Infantry by Liz Grant at the Somerset Record Office 7.30 pm |
| 2007 | |
| Sat. Jan. 13 th - | AGM, quiz and social gathering at Chilliswood 7.30 pm |
| March (date and venue to be announced) - | Oral Archives by Ann Heeley |
| May (date and venue to be announced) - | The Bridgwater and Taunton Canal by Tony Haskell at the S.R.O. 7.30 pm |
| July | To be announced |
| Sat. Sept 8 th | Trull with Tom Mayberry A walk around Trull, finishing at Chilliswood. |
| Wed Oct 31 st | The Shadow of the Workhouse by Pat Hase on at the S.R.O 7.30 pm |
| Nov | Non-Conformist Somerset with Talya Begwell and Esther Omerod at the S.R.O. 7.30 pm |

Getting to Know You: Rob Browning - Strong room controller.



Job Description: “I’m the fetch and carry man, ensuring that students get the correct documents and that they’re returned safe.”

What led you to work at SRO?

Temporary placement through Somerset Staffing that led to a permanent position.

Who has most inspired you during your career?

Captain James Cook, now there’s a bloke who kept a cool head in a crisis!

Why Somerset?

Family moved here from London over 30 years ago.

What task do you most enjoy during your working day?

Knowing everything is back in its correct place at the end of the day.

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

Something controversial that turns conventional thinking on its head so I can write a best seller like *The Da Vinci Code*!

What has given you the greatest sense of satisfaction in your job so far?

Knowing that the students find the facts they are looking for. Also getting value for money by collecting the new storage boxes

If you were not at SRO where would you be and what would you be doing?

If money no object – travelling with my partner Jehane.

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

For being approachable, considerate, and efficient.

What document would you like a record office of the future to hold for people researching your life?

Not sure about this one, too many skeletons rattling in the cupboard!

New Accessions

Parish records and transcripts

Additional parish records for Dodington, East Coker, East Quantoxhead, Holford, Kilve, Lullington, Penselwood, Stowey, Stanton Drew, Stoke St. Gregory, Stringston, Taunton St. James, Taunton St. Mary, Thorne St. Margaret and Wraxall.

Digitally enhanced photographs of Freshford parish register D\P\fresh/2/1/2, 1705-1744.

Images, transcripts and index of South Stoke churchwardens’ accounts, 1777-1893.

List of graves and tombstone inscriptions from Stanton Drew parish church.

Catholic and nonconformist records

Records of Hope Baptist Church, Highbridge, 1826-1992.

Records of various churches in the South Petherton and Crewkerne Methodist Circuit, including four baptism registers, 1838-1998.

Transcript of baptisms from St. Benedict’s (Roman Catholic) Church, Stratton on the Fosse, 1818-1915.

Local government records

26 boxes of building control plans for Taunton Rural District Council, Wellington Rural District Council and Wellington Urban District Council, many of which relate to the Wellington and Taunton District Council Planning Scheme, 1927-1966.

Electoral registers for Woodspring District Council, 1974-1989.

Misterton Parish Council records, 1892-1977.

Ruishton and Thornfalcon Parish Council records, including records of the cricket club, 1949-2000.

Sedgemoor District Council minute books, 1973-2003.

Business records

48 boxes of records from Clarke Willmott solicitors, mostly deeds and wills, 18th-20th century.

Administrative records of the Glastonbury Festivals Ltd., 1980s-2003.

School records

Records of West Huntspill Primary School, 19th-20th century.

Log Book of Wincanton Girls' Board School, 1871-1912.

Records of the Stockland Bristol school, 1903-1988.

Independent school inspection reports for Somerset, 1937-1974.

Clubs and societies' records

Records of the Taunton Deane Horticultural and Floricultural Society, 1970s-2006.

Records of The Welsh Society, Taunton, 1953-1993.

Records of the Norton Fitzwarren Village Club, 1945-1998.

Records from a large number of branches of the Somerset Federation of Women's Institutes, 1920s-2004.

Military records

Additional records of the Somerset Light Infantry, including letters from Lady Sale written during the 1st Afghan War, World War I muster roll for the 7th battalion and World War I casualty lists.

Charity records

Records of Taunton Town Charity, c.1801-1956.

IN A GOOD LIGHT: HOLIDAYS IN VICTORIAN SOMERSET WITH A CAMERA.



An exhibition and publication were opened and launched on 19th August 2006 at the Somerset Rural Life Museum, Glastonbury. The exhibition will run until 18th November and then move to Taunton Castle from 25th November until 17th March 2007.

The research about the photographer, Revd John George Derrick 1852 – 1905, was undertaken by members of the Friends of the Somerset Rural Life Museum, supported by the Museum Staff. A least fifty of the fascinating images of late Victorian Somerset are on show for the first time and more are printed in the accompanying book; the photographs were taken between 1887 and 1907.

Revd John Derrick was born and brought up in Somerset; he studied theology and in 1877 became a curate in Cheltenham where he met his wife Edith. The couple had three children born between 1887 and 1892. The family always took their holidays in Somerset; and it is through his third child, Freda, that his precious glass plate negatives were saved and are now at the Somerset County Museum. The images reflect the interest John Derrick had in scenes of Somerset landscape, agriculture, churches, craftsmen, village streets, local people and of course his family.

At the opening of the exhibition on Saturday 25th November at 3.00 pm an illustrated talk with readings from Freda Derrick's unpublished



memoirs will be given by Louise Clapp, Ann Heeley and Liz Snelgrove. Tea and cakes will be served.

The publication 'In a good Light: Holidays in Victorian Somerset with a Camera' will be available at £9.50, as well as nine images made into post cards and greetings cards will also be available to purchase.

For further information please contact Taunton Castle Tel: 01832 320200

Ann Heeley
(Pictures published with kind permission of the Somerset Record office)

Contacts

Chairman:

Mrs Anne Leamon, Chilliswood, Dipford Road, Trull, Taunton, TA3 7NT
Telephone 07775 563251 E-mail AnnLeamon@aol.com

Treasurer:

Mr David Hawkings.

Magazine Editor:

Mrs Grace Rubery, Rowans, 5 A Madam Lane, Worle, Weston-super-Mare BS22 6PJ
Telephone 01934517561 Email Grace@rowansworle.demon.co.uk

Membership & Events Secretary:

Mr Bernard Welchman, The Cottage, Manor Terrace, Paignton, South Devon, TQ3 3RQ
Telephone 01803 401371 E-mail b@bdwfh.com

Tithe Apportionment Project:

Mr Robin Leamon, Chilliswood, Dipford Road, Trull, Taunton, TA3 7NT
Telephone 07764 456218 E-mail robin.leamon@floramedia.co.uk

Web-master:

Mr Malcolm Daniels, 6, Middlemead, Stratton on the Fosse, Bath, BA3 4QH
E-mail: branchlines@clara.co.uk