

Winster Local History Group

Newsletter No. 20 May 2001

This is the last newsletter of the 2000/2001 season; members will be glad to know that we already have most of next winter's programme arranged. Here are the details. Unless otherwise stated, all meetings will be in the Burton Institute, Monday evenings, starting at 7.30pm.

25 September 2001. AGM and social evening.

15 October 2001. Helen Ullathorne (University of Sheffield Dept. of Archaeology)
'The Grouse Moors of the Peak District'

19 November 2001. Graham Barfield (Wirksworth and District History Society)
'A Transport Revolution: How the Cromford Canal and High Peak Railway expanded Local Industries'

25 February 2002. Professor John Tarn (University of Liverpool)
'The Vernacular Architecture of Derbyshire, and some Winster Buildings'

18 March 2002. (To be confirmed) Dr Lyn Willies (Peak District Mines Historical Society and Peak District Mining Museum)
'The Winster Miners' Strike of 1919'

22 April 2002. (To be confirmed) The Derwent Valley World Heritage Site Project.

17 June 2002. Meet at Bonsall. Peter Greaves (?Bonsall History Society)
A guided walk round Bonsall (followed by a pub visit?)

Censuses and the Buildings Group Project.

The daunting form for the 2001 census and the pain of filling in all the boxes will still be fresh in everyone's minds. Did you give the 'right' answer to every question? Don't worry --the information is used only for statistical purposes, and

individual returns are not available for 100 years, even to the Inland Revenue. But think how useful the data will be to anyone researching the family and local history of Winster 100 or 150 years from now (members of the venerable Society of Winster Historians?). In the Buildings Group we are hoping to use the 1841-1901 censuses, along with deeds, personal recollections, electoral rolls, and anything else that is useful, to find what we can about the history of individual properties, what they were used for (shops, pubs, police stations, forges etc.) who lived in them, and who owned them.

Except for 1941, there has been a census every ten years since 1801. Initially, there was so much opposition to government 'spying' that the Act of Parliament authorising the first census stipulated that the individual returns should be destroyed after the statistical data on population etc. had been extracted. This was indeed what happened for all four censuses up to 1831, and from them data on individual households and their occupants has survived only by accident. The first full set of census data to escape destruction was therefore that of 1841. Because of the 100-year rule, the most recent one accessible to researchers is that of 1891. The 1901 census will be opened on 1 January 2002.

As anyone who has tried it will tell you, 'census-foraging' can be a tedious business, and it's not always easy to identify a particular house or family. In Winster (and many other places) one of the main reasons for this is that, except for 'important' dwellings, houses are identified only by a 'schedule number' which has nothing to do with a conventional house number. (It's some sort of consolation to know that very few houses in Winster were or are numbered, and even if the house names were given, it wouldn't be much help, because they changed so often.) So we see identified the pubs, the big houses such as Oddo and Winster Hall, and the churches, but apart from them, it's like a jigsaw puzzle, and you have to look for bits that fit. The enumerator walked his way (it was nearly always a man) systematically along a street, but every now and then he ducked down a side road (e.g. Anson row off East Bank) or crossed over, or got to the end, crossed over and worked back down the other side. There are no breaks in the sequences of schedule numbers to indicate where these changes of course occurred.

A great help in this foraging is the existence of name indexes. The whole of the 1881 census has been transcribed and put on a set of CDs, and it's quite easy to find an individual (and hence a house) if you know some basic facts about him or her: approximate year of birth, county of birth, county of residence at the time of the census and etc. Quite a lot of the 1851 census has also been transcribed, and is available in book or microfiche form. For Winster, we also have an index to the 1891 census, which was transcribed in 1997 by Alison Gray. There is a national project under way to make available on the internet the whole of the 1901 census.

To take an example, I have been trying to trace the history of my own house (Buxton House on East Bank, just up the hill from the Bowling Green). The 1881 census identifies the Bowling Green by name, and we know that the Brittlebank family lived at the Headlands, two schedule numbers later -- the enumerator was evidently working up the hill. It's a fair bet that of the intervening schedule numbers, the first refers to Buxton House, and the second to the property which stood where the Headlands garage is today. Buxton House was occupied by the Gregory family, the head of which was George Gregory, a 37-year-old plumber and glazier. By 1891 occupation (and ownership?) had changed to the Buxton family, the head being William Buxton, a master joiner, aged 63. His daughter Sarah was the 29-year-old postlady ('letter carrier on OHMS'). George Gregory (now aged 47) and family had moved to the 'Market Place'.

This highlights how street names have changed over the years. The East End of what is now Main Street was known as East Winster, the area round the Market Hall was the Market Place, and the West End of Main Street was (in 1861) called Town Street. In 1841 West Bank was known (at least officially) as Oddo Hill. Unfortunately for the historian, about half the village has always been labelled East Bank, stretches such as The Flat not being separately identified. It would be a useful project to try to establish the entire 'street-name history'.

David Jones

Postscript: From the Parish Magazine, May 1901. Does it sound familiar?

'Winster Vicarage, May 1st 1901

My Dear Friends, At a meeting of the managers of the Day Schools held last month, an opinion was expressed that the financial position of these schools should be more widely understood in the parish. The requirements of the Board of Education increase apparently year by year and the funds at our disposal to meet these requirements have had a tendency to steadily decrease. The whole of the Government Grant is expended on the payment of the teaching staff, and the pence and the voluntary subscriptions are all that we have to pay for coal-cleaning-books-stationery-insurance-and the necessary apparatus. I may say that last year, for example, these cost over £28 and to meet this only £13 came in. We are therefore compelled to beg most earnestly for increased subscriptions.....'

Helping with enquiries: The Brittlebank Murder

Caroline Small, playwright for the proposed Winsters Community Play, writes about her researches in the Bagshaw Collection at the Sheffield Archive

Research often generates more questions than it answers and this was certainly true when I investigated the Bagshaw Collection as a source of material for the proposed Winsters Community Play. The Collection, kept at Sheffield Archives, belonged to solicitor Benjamin Bagshaw, whose family came from Foolow. Among the material is a little nugget of Winsters history: a collection of cuttings, handbills and ballads concerning William Cuddie's murder, which 'fatal occurrence' took place on West Bank in May 1821. Dr Cuddie was courting Mary Brittlebank, the daughter of his near neighbour (William Brittlebank of Oddo) much to the disapproval of her family. Following an incident in which Mary's brother (also called William) believed himself to have been insulted by Cuddie in front of his sister, William Jnr challenged the doctor to a duel. They met in Cuddie's garden and the doctor was mortally wounded by William's pistol shot. He died the following day. William absconded and was never seen again, while two of his brothers and a friend, Edmund Spencer, who had been present at the duel, were arrested and tried for 'wilful murder'. All three were acquitted but the fate of William Brittlebank has been the subject of speculation ever since.

The Collection includes a handbill printed a few days after the incident, which states 'The brother who fired the pistol made his escape but has since been apprehended at Liverpool.' However there is no evidence that William was ever caught. A poster offering £100 reward for his arrest mentions a supposed sighting in Manchester and a cutting from the Derby Mercury tells us 'the Bow Street officers were, on Friday week, in search of him at Brighton where, it had been reported, he was secreted'.

There is also a hand-written copy of a 'letter from Miss Brittlebank to Cuddie, found in the latter's pocket after death'. It includes the lines 'My eternal peace depends on you not seeing any of our family as they are quite bent on shooting. For Mercy's sake, keep out of their way.' If the letter is genuine, this image of the volatile Brittlebanks is further supported by a servant's statement. On finding Miss Brittlebank in tears the servant quotes Mary as saying she was afraid that her father would 'horsewhip her and shoot Cuddie'.

It is unfortunate that the hand-written material is neither dated nor attributed. It is fascinating, nonetheless, and contains rich pickings for a playwright!