

Winster Local History Group

Newsletter 33

February 2006

Next Meetings

Monday 20 March at 7.30 in the Burton Institute. Life in the Darkness, by John Jones, photographer and member of Wirksworth Mines Research Group.

Monday 24 April. Meet 7.30 at the Market House for guided tours (in groups) of some of Winster's notable buildings.

Monday 19 June. Guided walk round Parwich. Details later.

Matthew Henry Frost Cantrell, Surgeon, of Winster

[This fascinating account is by Mrs Cynthia Carmichael of Liverpool, a descendant of Dr Cantrell. Mrs Carmichael came to Winster recently and was shown around The Old House on Main Street, which was formerly the doctor's surgery, by Gwen McManus, the present occupant. Gwen kindly passed the account on to the History Group. Much of the material derives from anecdotes communicated by word of mouth from one generation of the family to another, so verification of all details has not been possible.]

Matthew Henry Frost Cantrell was born in 1830 at Calver. His father, William Cantrell, born in 1800, was the son of William Cantrell, who was the schoolmaster in Kniveton, and Sarah Fox, a lawyer's daughter from Bakewell. The schoolmaster had lost his hand in the Shrove Tuesday football game in Ashbourne.

The younger William's brother, who was named John Hall Cantrell, was born about 1804 and became a draper in Ashbourne. In 1844 he was found dead in the snow after his horse had fallen on the ice, and he was buried in the family grave in Kniveton. When his mother, Sarah, came to be buried in the same grave some years later it was discovered that it must have been a case of hypothermia, and that he had struggled and got out of the coffin but had not managed to get out of the grave. I have his simple wooden cashbox, with his name written inside, which was later used by my grandfather and my mother.

His brother William, after a row with his older sister, ran away from home and joined a travelling bookseller. He travelled all over England, then worked for a surgeon called Edward Hennessy, who suggested that he should study medicine. So William went to London, where he qualified in 1822.

He then returned to Derbyshire and first hired two rooms in the Red Lion pub in Kniveton. When Squire Wright of Bradbourne was injured in a hunting accident the young doctor looked after him. Then in May 1825 he married the squire's daughter,

Millicent, who sadly died in March 1826, following the birth of their son, William, who also did not survive.

In 1829 he married Elizabeth Frost in Bakewell. Elizabeth was the daughter of Matthew Henry Frost, who was the Land Agent to the Earl of Newborough. There is a large memorial to her parents on the right-hand side of Hassop church. Elizabeth lived up to her surname and was always cold towards Matthew, her only child. William was by then practising in Wirksworth.

At the age of eight young Matthew was sent to a seminary in Belgium, for his mother desired him to be a Catholic priest. But he soon realised that he could not lead a celibate life. He trained as a mining engineer, for the family owned lead mines in Derbyshire, but those mines became flooded. He went to London and fell in love with the writer Eliza Lynn, but she would not marry a Catholic. Instead she married a woodcarver called Linton, who lived at Brantwood on Lake Coniston. (The house was later sold to John Ruskin, the critic, and is now open to the public.) Eliza's elder stepson became mentally ill while studying at Oxford, and Matthew went to Brantwood to look after him. He then decided that he would follow his father into medicine, and so went to study in London.

Besides studying medicine he was very interested in literature and mixed with the literary set. In particular he was friendly with William Makepeace Thackeray and Charles Dickens. My Canadian cousins say he was also friendly with the poet Longfellow.

In London he met Jane Miles, the daughter of an agricultural labourer from Kingsdon in Somerset, and married her. Their first two daughters, Amelia and Ellen, were born in London in 1863 and 1864, while he was still a student. His third daughter, Hope Elizabeth, was born in Cromford in 1866. The family then moved to Winster, where Matthew set up in practice on Main Street, in what is now called The Old House.

He had built up such debts while a student that he never managed to get free of them. It is said that he drove his wife to distraction. For instance, when he met a poor man without a coat he gave him his own, even though he had not yet paid his tailor for it. And he was often paid in kind with eggs, a chicken or corn.

My grandfather, another William Cantrell, was born in Winster on 18th June 1869. He always referred to his birthday as being on the Battle of Waterloo Day; so, just as we still celebrate Trafalgar Day, at that time they also celebrated Waterloo Day.

Shortly after their arrival in Winster a man cut off his nose when using his scythe, and came to the doctor's house holding his nose in one hand. Jane did not like the look of him without his nose, and, as her husband was not due back for some hours (and not of course having a mobile phone), she washed his nose in salt water and put it back on with sticking plaster. When my mother, Dr Hilda Cantrell, was doing a locum in Winster for Dr Fletcher in the mid-1920s, the man came to the surgery to show my mother what a good job her grandmother had done!

When my grandfather was about three years old Dr William Cantrell came to stay when he was very ill. He and Matthew had both been friendly with the man who was

to become Cardinal Newman. At that time a Roman Catholic bishop, the cardinal came to the house to give his old friend the last rites. Jane, being a Protestant and having had her children brought up as Anglicans, removed them upstairs, so they would not be contaminated by Popish practices! My grandfather escaped and looked over the staircase. He was fascinated by the procession and the small boys swinging the thurible and the smell of the incense. He went downstairs and, as the Cardinal knelt at the bedside, removed his lovely red hat and put it on his head and danced round the bed shouting “Look Grandpapa, I’ve got the hat!” The old doctor said “We’ve got Dick Turpin in the family” and laughed so much that he felt better and lived another three years. [There is a problem with the dating here, because Newman was not created cardinal until 1879.]

My grandfather also told of how he had been taken the following year by his mother to visit Florence Nightingale. He had been warned he must not get himself dirty, but when he was in the drawing room he looked down and saw that his shoes were dusty. Out came his pocket handkerchief, just as the afternoon tea arrived. He dropped his hanky and then, horror of horrors, the great lady saw it on the floor and rang for the maid to remove the ‘duster’. Young William did not dare to admit to it being his handkerchief and watched it being removed in great style by the haughty maid. He also remembered that was the first time he had marmalade instead of jam, and he did not like it.

In 1871 Paul was born and then, in 1875, Henry Hall Cantrell. The 1871 Census shows the following:

Market Street, Winster

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>M/ F</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Born</i>
Matthew Henry Frost Cantrell	Head	Married	45	M	MRCS London LRCP Edinburgh	Calver Derbyshire
Jane Cantrell	Wife	Married	38	F		Kingsdon Somerset
Amelia	Daughter		8	F	Scholar	London
Ellen	Daughter		7	F	Scholar	London
Elizabeth Hope	Daughter		3	F	Scholar	Cromford
William	Son		18 mths	M		Winster
Paul Frost	Son		6 mths	M		Winster
Mary Eliza ELCE	Governess	Unmarried	21	F	Governess	Crich
Mary Mellor	Servant	Unmarried	28	F	General Servant	Littleton
John Alsop	Servant	Unmarried	28	M	General Servant	Brassington

At about this time there was trouble, I think, with the village water supply and Matthew invited his friend Charles Dickens to stay, and he gave penny readings (that is, the audience paid one penny to listen to him), and this helped to raise the money for a new water supply.

Most years the family would make the long train journey to Somerset to visit Jane's family. In May 1876 Jane, now 41, had her seventh child, Rose. As was the custom, she kept to her bed for a month. My grandfather, now seven, went into her room to ask where his clean shirt was. Jane pointed to the chest of drawers, said that it was in the top drawer, and fell back dead. Such was her popularity with the villagers, they went to the Via Gellia and picked violets to line her grave.

After Jane's death the Frost relations moved in and had all the children re-baptised as Catholics. Baby Rose died a year later. Nelly (Ellen), who was about twelve when her mother died, said that bringing up the baby was left mainly to her and to Milly (Amelia), and they did not know how to do it. In 1881 Paul died at the age of ten of typhus.

My grandfather became a weekly boarder at a school in Matlock, but after having rheumatic fever he found the walk to and from school beyond him, especially in the Derbyshire winters, so he did not have much schooling. Later on, though, he became a keen mile runner, holding a cork in each hand and wearing very brief running drawers! He also earned pocket money by growing medicinal herbs in the garden for his father to use to treat his patients. In one of his medical books is the following treatment for diarrhoea: 'Soak paper in milk and then give it to the patient.' Matthew had written in the margin that he had not believed it at first, but had tried it and found it very effective.

As I said earlier, Matthew was not a man to live a celibate life, and after Jane's death he is reputed to have fathered twins. Then in about 1887 he got the sixteen-year-old maid, Sarah Costello, into trouble. He was now 57. The priest tried to persuade him not to marry, but he did. George was born in 1887, followed by May and then Mary in 1894, by which time both Hope and William had children. The children of the first marriage had been kind to Sarah as a servant, but having a stepmother several years younger than themselves did not meet with their approval, so they moved to Buxton. Nelly was for many years the manageress of the Leewood Hotel. Milly married and went to Canada. Hope married and lived in Duffield, in a house that had belonged to the Strutt family. William, my grandfather, was apprenticed to the drapery trade at Milligans of Buxton, which at that time was one of the top stores in the country. His brother Henry joined him there and later had his own draper's shop, Hall Cantrell's, in Spring Gardens in Buxton.

Matthew then became ill and sold his practice to Dr Fletcher. He and Sarah and the children came to live with my grandparents in Liverpool for a while, but when his health improved he bought a practice in Longnor. His marriage broke up and Sarah went to Canada to start a new life, but the three younger children stayed with him.

He died in 1915 and was brought back to Winster to be buried with Jane, Rose and Paul in a plot near the gate to Dr Fletcher's house [Bank House, West Bank].