



St Helens Townships Family History Society

Founder And President-Richard Waring

www.sthelenstownshipsfhs.org.uk

email:townshipsfhs@googlemail.com

July 2011
NEWSLETTER
No.14

COMMITTEE Chair:Margaret Crosbie, Vice Chair:Tom McKenna, Secretary/Treasurer: Pauline Hurst,
Programme Secretary: Geoff Hall

Welcome to our Summer Newsletter,

I hope you are all enjoying the "lovely weather". This is the time for visiting long lost relatives and renewing friendships, and adding the missing twigs and branches on your family tree. Your Society has been having a busy time so read on for the details

OSCAR Winners?

Well perhaps I exaggerate a little but after being beaten last year it felt like winning an Oscar I am referring to the St Helens Cultural Awards presentation held in St Helens Town Hall back on 26th February. Our Society won the Heritage award against stiff competition, the picture shows the reaction of our committee members—pleased or what?



Visit to Christ Church Eccleston

Our monthly meeting for May was billed as a visit to a local church and was originally planned for the Parish Church but due to unforeseen circumstances this had to be moved to Christ Church in Eccleston. The switch of venues gave Ted Forsyth (our guide for the evening) only 3 weeks to research and prepare for our visit.

Firstly Ted took us round the outside of the Church and pointed out some interesting features of the Church - not least the weather vane which is in

the shape of a Griffin which was made by our President, Richard Waring, and some gravestones of famous local people. The Church was built by the local squire Samuel Taylor around 1836 and took 3 years to build. The sandstone for the Church was brought to the site by horse drawn cart from what later became the aviary at Taylor Park then a quarry owned by Samuel Taylor.

We then went inside the Church again Ted had some interesting facts to pass on to us. The carved open pea pod on the pulpit this was the manufacturers mark to show that it had been paid for in full. The altar table that had been cut down to fit the space so that the front legs are carved while the back legs are plain. The Church was designed to hold a congregation of 600 people. I think it would have been rather cosy if they all turned up to the same service.

On a personal note this visit gave me the chance to visit the Church where my mother and father married in 1947 and where my mother's parents and her younger brother are buried.

I'm sure that all of who attended found the visit very interesting and would like to thank Ted for his efforts. *Steve Spencer*

Thank you Steve, it is a great help when a member provides a short record of a meeting, if there is anyone else who would like to report on any of the Society activities or write an article, their input would be very welcome — Editor Peter



Another fascinating article this time from Elizabeth one of our talented members

WHAT'S IN A NAME ?

My maternal Grandfather, George Shewell (b.1870 - d.1947) was born in St.Helens and worked as a carpenter at Cannington Shaw's glassworks. In 1898 he married and moved to Kirkdale, Liverpool where some relatives were living. He used to say that all the Shewells on Merseyside were related. George also talked about Shewell cousins who lived in Birmingham.

Shewell is not a common surname and I have found it difficult to find out its origins and etymology. What I have observed is how it occurs in areas associated with glassmaking. From the 13th to the 16th centuries glass making in England was mainly in the hands of German speaking glass makers from the Rhineland area. This was in an age when a man could be known by his trade, or the tools of his trade, such as *schunen* - stoker or *schaufel* - shovel.

In an alien environment these could be misheard, misunderstood and eventually misspelled.

As Chaucer observed, common English spoken in one county varied from that spoken in another and George would have readily agreed. He spoke with a soft Lancashire accent and pronounced "Shewell" as "Schooul" not "Shew-well". When the First World War broke out George and his family had just moved to a new address. Their new Scouser neighbours, who had joined in the anti-German furor, mistook this tall, blond, blue-eyed newcomer who "talked funny" for a German and decided to "smoke out them Huns!" Fortunately another neighbour informed George of the threat and he told the police who put a guard on the house.

In the 14th century the glassmakers moved away from the Surrey/Sussex Weald, where charcoal had been readily available but where the depleted woodlands threatened ship building. They went to London, where coal was increasingly being used in the home and in industry. In 1601 they were joined by Protestant refugee glassmakers, from the Rhineland, who would have learned English with a Cockney accent.

They were joined by French Huguenot refugee glassmakers who arrived in the 17th century. They settled in Staffordshire, where Stourbridge became an important centre for glass making. During the 18th century improved transport by road and the discovery of making coke for furnaces helped to establish glassmaking in places such as Newcastle, Glamorgan and North Norfolk, where I discovered a pharmacy run by "George Shewell MPS" not far from Kings Lynn.

In the North West, during the 19th century, St.Helens became the hub of British glass making. However, the glass makers worked long hours in poor conditions. I remember George telling me about a certain Shewell who established a branch of a glass workers' trade union, possibly at Cannington Shaw's glass kiln.

George also told me about Colonel Frederick George Shewell who was born, in 1815, at Gosden near Woking, in Surrey, where glass was made. During the Crimean war he commanded the 8th Hussars, one of the regiments that made up the now famous Light Brigade.

Colonel Shewell was a stern officer who believed in firm discipline but he cared about his soldiers. Unlike Lord Cardigan, who led the Light Brigade "into the valley of death" and made no attempt to find out what had happened to his soldiers after the battle.

However, when Colonel Shewell heard about the attack, in spite of being ill, he hastened to lead his regiment in the charge. After the carnage that followed there were only about seventy men who survived. Surrounded by 300 Russians retreat was the only option. Colonel Shewell rallied his men, turned around and led the charge scattering the enemy and leaving a gap through which they all galloped back to the British lines. He remained in the Crimea where he took command of the Light Brigade replacing Lord Cardigan. In April 1856 *Brigadier-General* Shewell returned home with his regiment. He was awarded the Crimea Medal and our French allies made him a Knight of the Legion of Honour. Sadly, the war had taken its toll of his health and six months later this brave gentleman died at his home in Gosden.

Elizabeth Mary Rogers Ross BA Hons. Dip RS (Open)

Grand Military Fete at St Helens

January 1849

Major Sir John Gerard and Officers of the Lancashire Hussars held a military *fete* on a magnificent scale. The *fete* took place on Wednesday 10 January 1849 on the occasion of the formation of the Lancashire Regiment of Hussars which had been formed over the course of the previous four months at the sole expense of Sir John Gerard. It was a force of 160 men with equipment costing a very large sum of money.

The Town Hall was requisitioned for the celebrations together with the market square immediately in front. The Court Room inside the Town Hall, which was 65 foot in length and 37 foot wide, was repainted and sumptuously decorated with ten large mirrors, ornamented green and white drapes and bouquets of flowers. This was used as the ballroom. The gallery was used for the orchestra and the kettle drums of the newly formed regiment were handsomely displayed. The saloon was illuminated by wax candles arranged in front of the mirrors which lit the



ballroom magnificently. A passage had been made from the ballroom to the outside market square to form a pavilion. This had been covered over to form a supper room and was carpeted throughout. The main table seated 100 guests along with six further smaller tables seating 30 more guests per table. The supper room was decorated in a similar fashion to the ballroom and had eight gilt chandeliers suspended from the ceiling whilst the tables were adorned with silver candelabras and candles. The array of gold cups, plates and vases were all provided by Sir John Gerard and must have provided a spectacular display for the supper. A chef from London, Mr Gunter, cooked the supper at the Fleece Inn and was ably assisted by six cooks, two confectioners and forty waiters.



The carriages started to arrive at 9 o'clock with Sir Gerard and his wife being amongst the first to arrive. Many of the gentlemen wore military uniform and the ladies were said to be very elegantly dressed. Supper was at midnight and the dancing then continued until 5am the following morning. Afterwards duty officers had a chance to take supper. Sir John Gerard kindly consented to allow the Town Hall together with the supper room and pavilion to remain open until the following Saturday for the town people to view.

The above is a short account of the magnificent event that took place in St Helens and is from an article in the *Illustrated London News* of 20 January 1849. This page of the newspaper was found on an auction website and has been purchased and deposited at St Helens Archives library should you want to read the full event

Wow didn't they have a time of it " Supper at midnight and dancing till 5am"

What a difference today,

after our Thursday Town Hall meetings and our cups of tea, we have to be up and away by 9:00pm

Those unfamiliar with St. Helens Cemetery seeing large grassy areas, may wonder why, with so much unused space, St Helens Council found it necessary to create such a large new burial ground. The reason will in future, be obvious. The large empty areas contain many unmarked graves. These are the final resting places of thousands of people, many of them children, who's families were unable to afford to pay for a formal burial. In simple terms "paupers graves". Until now there has been no visual indication that these graves even existed. Many people when researching their family history have been shocked and saddened to find that their ancestors are interred in unmarked graves. "**The Friends of the Cemetery**" Group has embarked upon the task of providing memorial stones indicating the areas of these graves. Our picture shows the first memorial stone with members of the group— Ted Forsyth, Margaret Crosbie, (our chair) Pat and Ian Frazer. The plan is to eventually mark each of the seven areas with a similar memorial.



This time of year is usually a very busy time for our society. We have in the past been heavily involved with our stall at the St Helens Festival.

This year St Helens Council has decided to "REST" the event; with the consequence that we are less busy than usual in July. The Good news however is that St Helens Council is participating in the national "**Heritage Open Days**" event in September.

And our Society will be involved on **Saturday 10th and Sunday 11th of September**

We been allocated a room in the Town Hall for us to publicise ourselves and to provide a Family History Workshop.

Last year we succeeded in starting many people on the road to finding their ancestors and planting their family tree.

Our President, Richard Waring, (An accomplished military historian) will as before, provide a look-up service to those people who have an interest in their family's military history. This involves finding service and medal records.

This Request comes from one of our memberes, Ann Hilliard, who would appreciate any help you can give

Do you have Irish Ancestors who settled in Merseyside or are you Irish living in Merseyside?

They are looking for stories, photographs, documentation and memorabilia relevant to the Irish Community living in Merseyside over the past two hundred years.

The stories of the rich and famous have already been documented, we wish to gather the information on the ordinary or should we say EXTRAORDINARY people who left Ireland and settled in Liverpool and the surrounding Merseyside area

You may be currently researching your Family History or simply remember the stories whilst sitting on your Grandmothers knee we need your contribution.

The information gathered will be exhibited on the 22 October 2011 - Celebration Day which is part of the Liverpool Irish Festival however it is our intention to use this valuable archive as the basis for future talks, publications, exhibitions and events

If you are able to help or contribute information in any format please contact us by **31 July 2011**

E Mail - Ann Hilliard irishfamilyhistory21@yahoo.co.uk

Phone - Cathy Butterworth mobile:07949 025884

Post - Address Ann Hilliard C/O MDI 21 Hope Street Liverpool L1 9BQ

OUR next Town Hall meeting will be on Thursday 28th July with our own "star" speaker Pauline Hurst on

The History of

PRESCOT UNION WORKHOUSE - WHISTON

The talk is based on Pauline's comprehensive Book and CD on the subject **6:45 for 7:15 start** lets have a full house for Pauline

OUR August Town Hall meeting will take the form of a "**members evening**" Several of our talented Members will give a ten minute talk on their favourite family history topic. In the past these meetings have proved to be very lively and interesting. So if you have a tale to tell, just let one our committee members know and you can be a part of "**Township's Got Talent**"

If you have any comments, suggestions or articles for publication: send them to Peter via the Society email address.