



## Chesterfield & District Local History Society

### NEWSLETTER April 2022

**May 16th**

#### **2000 Years in the Hope Valley**

Colin Merrony

Archaeological research around the Hope Valley.

**June 20th**

#### **Roods, Rods and Perches**

Alan Foster FRICS, Senior Partner at W.T. Parker

Reminiscences of a Chesterfield Auctioneer and Estate Agent.

Meetings are held at the St Thomas Centre, Chatsworth Road commencing at 7:30pm.  
Members free, visitors £3

### Chesterfield and District Local History Society 2022 AGM

#### Chairwoman's Report

2019 had been a year of progress. If I'd known what was to come I would have resigned there and then. The meeting in March was cancelled because of the Covid pandemic and later we learned that we could no longer use the United Reformed Church for our meetings as there are problems with the roof there. We were able to move the meetings to St Thomas Centre but we have had to change the evening to Monday. Whilst this has been better for some people, for others it is less convenient.

We were able to hold meetings in September, October and November 2021 although the audiences were smaller than usual. We also deferred the AGM 2022 to March.

#### Treasurer's Report

There is £1327.13 in the bank.

The committee was elected as follows: Chairman David McPhie, Vice Chairwoman Janet Murphy; Treasurer Janine Le Mire; Secretary Chris Thomason; Membership Secretary Brian Dick; Charlotte Mitchell and Amanda Brassington

Full details of the Chairwoman's and the Treasurer's reports are available to members on request.



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## Saint Helen's House, Newbold Road

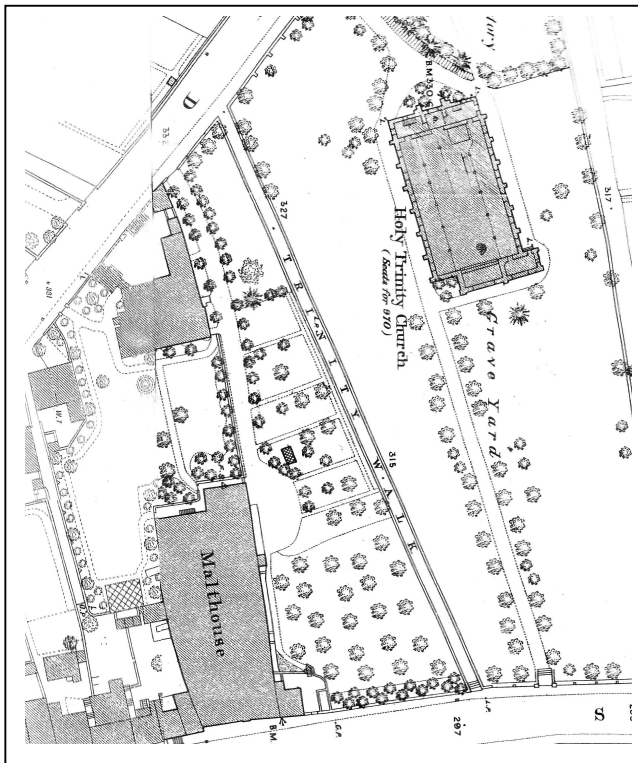


In 1804 Joseph Gratton declared that he was giving up his business as a grocer. In 1809 he was operating as a maltster on the section of Holywell Street, which later was renamed Sheffield Road. The plot of land stretched from Newbold Road where there was a house later known as St Helen's House to the malt house on Holywell Street.

Malting is the process in which cereal grain is converted into malt by soaking it in water, allowing it to sprout and then drying it to stop further growth. The malt is used in brewing, Celia Fiennes found the local ale the best ale in the country. Although she saw a great deal of corn being sold on the market, Chesterfield is in an area where the rearing of cattle and sheep predominates and there was a need to import grain. The opening of Chesterfield Canal in 1777 made easier the import of grain from East Anglia. Joseph Gratton evidently took advantage of this as in 1839 he was presented a silver tea service as a token of the esteem in which he was held by the proprietors of the canal after his connection with them lasting 37 years.

Unfortunately, when he died in 1846 Gratton left no will and it took some time to sort out his affairs. At the time of the tithe award of 1849, the executors for the Gratton family retained the house but the malt house was operated by William Burkitt (or Birkett), who also operated one on Vicar Lane, the property of Richard Dixon. Burkitt may have taken over the operation of Gratton's malt house in 1846 as in that year his eldest son, another William, was sent to King's Lynn, Norfolk, to take over the management his father's grain shipping business there. Half a dozen vessels carried grain to the Trent and then on to Chesterfield maltings and Yorkshire markets, bringing Yorkshire and Derbyshire coals as back cargoes to Lynn.

In 1850, William junior went Germany to begin exporting corn and oil cakes to Hamburg and the lower Baltic ports. He further extended the business by exporting oil cakes to Marseilles. Further progress was made in 1853, when he went to North America and opened connections at York, Philadelphia and Baltimore.



In March 1873, Burkitt senior died, leaving his sons to carry on the business with William based at King's Lynn and Samuel based at Chesterfield. A year later they constructed the maltings at Langwith. Samuel retired to Stubbing Court. In 1897 William rode from Kings Lynn to Chesterfield on a little locomotive he had specially designed for use in his extensive works King's Lynn. He had lunch with his brother before returning home.

Samuel died in June, 1898. His only son, another William taking his place in the firm. When his uncle died in 1906 he was the sole proprietor of the firm. When he died in 1920 his effects were valued at £353,691 17s 9d. By comparison when his grandfather died his effects were valued at under £70,000. William was one of the wealthiest men in Chesterfield. He never married, abhorred publicity and most of his charitable giving was done quietly and often.

St Helen's House was bought by E.D. Swanwick for £2863 on behalf of Chesterfield Girls' High School. It was later transferred to Derbyshire County Council. Also included in the sale was the former orchard advertised as 1,136 square yards of building land, which provided access from the house to Sheffield Road. By coincidence East Bank, where the Chesterfield Girls' High School was opened, was adjacent to the opposite wall surrounding churchyard of Holy Trinity.

Additional accommodation was necessary because of the increasing number of students attending the school. The Lower School, the kindergarten, transition and forms 1, 2 and the Lower Third moved into St Helen's House. One notable difference for the children was that, unlike the Big School, there was no central heating! Even more important the roof leaked which was unfortunate for any members of staff who were accommodated there as they were unable to obtain accommodation in the town. The roof was repaired almost immediately but it was not until 1928 that central heating was installed. In 1939 there were four assistant mistresses and one domestic servant living there. In 1941 the last entrants to the kindergarten were admitted as following the 1944 Education Act the school would only take students from eleven to eighteen. In 1949 the VIth form moved from the main building to St Helen's House. The school, now named St Helena occupied St Helen's House until 1991 when the school closed.

Now occupied by the Chesterfield Muslim Association the building is no longer called St Helen's House merely 29. Newbold Road.

The malt house was not included in the sale in 1920 but at some stage it was purchased by C. Richardson of Derby. He converted it into a dance hall, retaining the outer walls and gutting the interior offering the contents for scrap in 1924. The architects for the conversion were Wilcockson and Cutts and the Rendezvous Dance Hall opened in 1925. Although it was hugely popular, the ballrooms at the Victoria and the Picture House which opened in 1930 must have had some effect on its popularity. Boxing was introduced in 1934 and wrestling in 1935. In 1937 a new manager George Jackson took over. He was a former roller hockey player and proficient skater and dancer. In February 1938 the Rendezvous re-opened as a skating rink. The Spire Rink Hockey Club was founded by Jackson in 1939 and the club inflicted some heavy defeats on other

local teams. Interest in skating was increasing and the future looked bright but inevitably the outbreak of war on brought skating to an end.<sup>1</sup>

During the war the building was used for a variety of purposes and it became the Stylax bedding factory before serving as a ware house until 1987. The building stood empty, was vandalised, gutted by fire



and damaged beyond repair. It was finally demolished 1995.

As St Helena School had closed in 1991 the frontage on Sheffield Road was acquired and the site became occupied by the Rutland Care Home, now the Riverdale Care Home. The entrance is named Malt House Court.

## Spring Cleaning 1903 Style

In 1901 powered vacuum cleaners using suction were developed by Hubert Cecil Booth in England and David T Kenney in America. The Vacuum Cleaner Co. Ltd obtained a patent for improvements relating to the extraction of dust from carpets and other materials. The local agent for the manufacture of the equipment was Messrs Bryan, Donkin, and Clench, largely through the efforts of Mr F Clench.<sup>2</sup>

The Derbyshire Times 3 January 1903 described the equipment;

A vacuum is established by means of an air pump operated on a portable truck, and dust from the carpets and upholsteries drawn by suction through an indiarubber tube to a filter attached to the truck, where it is collected and deposited. The truck remains outside the house. All that brought in is a quantity of flexible tubing and this can be passed through the door or in at the windows. At the end of the tube a nozzle, which passed over the articles to be cleaned, and so effective is the invention that every particle of dust is removed, and the carpets and upholstery have a renewed freshness which they never obtain with the old system of operation. In future carpets need not be taken up, furniture need not be relegated to the garden, curtains can remain up, and yet all can be cleaned, and cleaned more effectually than by an army of charwomen, for the dust will be removed outside the dwelling and destroyed.

Already it had been used at Buckingham Palace, Marlborough House, by the Railway companies, and the leading London hotels. Locally Messrs Eyre and Sons, have obtained the local and district rights, for cleaning in large parts off Derbyshire and some parts of Nottinghamshire installed two machines so as to be ready for spring-cleaning. In the past the heavier carpets at Chatsworth had been taken up and sent Manchester or elsewhere to be cleaned a somewhat cumbersome process.

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<sup>1</sup> For more details of the Rendevous Dance Hall see *Aspects of Chesterfield* edited by Geoff Sadler.

<sup>2</sup> For more information about Mr Clench see *Cestrefeld Journal* 2018.