



Chesterfield & District Local History Society

NEWSLETTER October/November 2022

Our next meetings

October 17th

Chesterfield in the 1970s

Philip Cousins

Take a walk around Chesterfield town centre in the 1970s. (Replaces our planned talk)

November 21st

French Prisoners of War

Marjorie Dunn

French prisoners of war were paroled in Chesterfield between 1803 and 1814

Meetings are held at the St Thomas Centre, Chatsworth Road. Doors open 7pm, for a start at 7.30pm. Members free, visitors £3. Light refreshments are available before and after the meeting.

Broadmoor to New Tupton

Andy Miles

Buried in Spital Cemetery are the bodies of Annie Churchill aged nine months, Catherine Churchill aged four years and Edward Churchill aged two years all of whom died on 16 July 1912.

Edward and Mary Churchill had married in 1900 and were living in Long Court Yard off High Street, Chesterfield in 1911; the yard where Edward's father Michael had brought up his family, Michael having emigrated from County Mayo in Ireland. By 1911 Edward and Mary had had seven children, one of whom had died. In 1912 they had been at 9 Angel Yard for 15 months. Mary Churchill had given birth to another child, and so they had seven living children.



Edward Churchill, their father, was a miner at the Grassmoor Tupton Pit. At the inquest into his children's deaths Mr Churchill said that he had not had regular work and that he supported his family by means of strike pay and relief pay. He had been drawing 16s 6d a week. (82.5 pence per week, in 2022 terms the

equivalent of £104.10). Edward Churchill said he had given his wife all the money and that she was a careful, hard-working woman and did not neglect her children. He had woken his wife at four o'clock in the morning in order that she could prepare a meal for him. He did not require her to do so, but she made it a rule. He left the house at 5:20 to catch the 'mail' to work.

The *Derbyshire Courier* 16 July 1912 described what happened.

This morning, whilst half of Chesterfield was asleep, a tragic affair was enacted in a little house in Angel Yard, and the word of another terrible crime in the town shocked the inhabitants ere many had breakfasted.

At 9 Angel Yard, between the hours of 5 and 6, Mrs Churchill, the wife of Edward Churchill, apparently in a moment of madness – for there is evidence that the poor woman was not in her senses about the time – got out of bed, and with a razor cut the throat of her baby girl, Annie, nine months old. So severe was the wound, that the child is now dead.

Two other children, Katie aged four, and Edward aged three, were also wounded by the insane mother, who seems to have turned the weapon on herself, inflicting slight injury."

Neighbours heard of an act of heroism on the part of little Julia Churchill, aged ten, the second child in the family. She slept in the next room to that in which were her mother and the baby, and with her were her brother Edward aged three and her sister Katie, aged four.

"My mama came into our room." she told neighbours, "and cut Katie's and Edward's throats". She said, 'Shall I do them all?' and then I got up and took the razor out of her hand, and ran up into the attic with it."

In the attic slept the two other children and there is little doubt that bit for the heroic action of this little girl of ten, which seemed to divert the mother's mind from its fell design, great damage would have been done.

Soon after the news had reached the police, Chief Constable Kilpatrick came on the scene, and spoke for some time with the stricken woman, in a very kindly and sympathetic way. He could see at once that something was amiss with her, and he had no hesitation in informing our representative this morning that the woman was demented.

Notwithstanding the woman's condition she was committed for trial to the Crown Court for murder.

The *Derbyshire Courier* 31 August 1912 contained an editorial comment

An esteemed correspondent feels strongly it would be far better if she was not committed for trial. Doubtless there are legal gentlemen who would be willing to give a little assistance in this matter, but naturally they cannot act without instructions. The most feasible course seems to be that Mr Churchill, the husband of the poor woman, might approach some of the members of the legal profession – or some member of that profession might volunteer a little assistance to the husband – so that, on his instructions, steps could be taken to obviate the possibility of any hardship on Mrs Churchill."

On 14 September 1912 it reported

As a result of the note published in this column suggesting that something should be done to assist in the defence of Mrs Churchill, who, while in a demented state ended the lives of her three children, I am glad to say that there has been a response from the legal profession. A firm of solicitors in town have expressed their willingness to conduct the legal part of the defence free of expense to her husband, provided the subscriptions are forthcoming to defray the cost of the counsel and medical practitioners whose services are necessary. Now that the legal gentlemen have taken the lead, I trust that subscriptions will be the forthcoming and the 'Courier' will be glad to receive contributions.

The *Derbyshire Courier* may have received contributions, but they have not recorded the fact.

The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 1 November 1912 reported

Mary Churchill presented a pathetic picture when she appeared in the dock charged with the murder of her three young children on July 12th 1912 at Chesterfield. Though apparently utterly incapable of appreciating her position she wept nearly all the time. Mr Ryland Adkins M.P., who prosecuted, at once called Dr C A Greave, the medical officer of Derby Prison, who expressed the opinion that Churchill was insane and not capable of defending herself or instructing counsel to do so. His Lordship, observing that the law never tried people who were incapable of understanding evidence, ordered that the prisoner should be kept in strict custody until His Majesty's pleasure should be known.

In the UK Calendar of Prisons Mary Churchill is described as “*Insane on Arraignment*”.

An entry in the Admission Book indicates that Mary Churchill entered Broadmoor on 18 November 1912 and left on 16 July 1917.

In the meantime, Edward Churchill at the age of 38 decided to volunteer for service in World War One. He signed his Attestation on 23 August 1915. Then, in July 1916, his sisters received news of his death. “*He was killed almost instantly*” wrote a companion, Private H Biggin “*by a shell which burst and killed our officer and two other poor fellows. His comrades take it very hard, as he was a good and brave soldier, who died doing his duty, and gave all for his King and country.*”

It seems that, after the murders, some of the children were, perhaps temporarily, fostered. Julia who had taken the razor from her mother hand was fostered in Grimsby but died in February 1915 a few days after her 12th birthday.

The remaining three children lived in the Chesterfield area for the rest of their lives, as did Mary herself. In 1921 Mary and her children, John, Francis and Ellen were living Wright's Row in New Tupton, probably as housekeeper to Mr Thomas Lowe an elderly miner. In 1939 Mary Churchill was with living her married daughter Ellen in Tupton. When she died in December 1950 her family put the following notice in the *Derbyshire Times*.

“The Sons and Daughter and Grandson of Mrs Mary Churchill, New Tupton, thank relatives and friends for sympathy and floral tributes during their sad bereavement.”

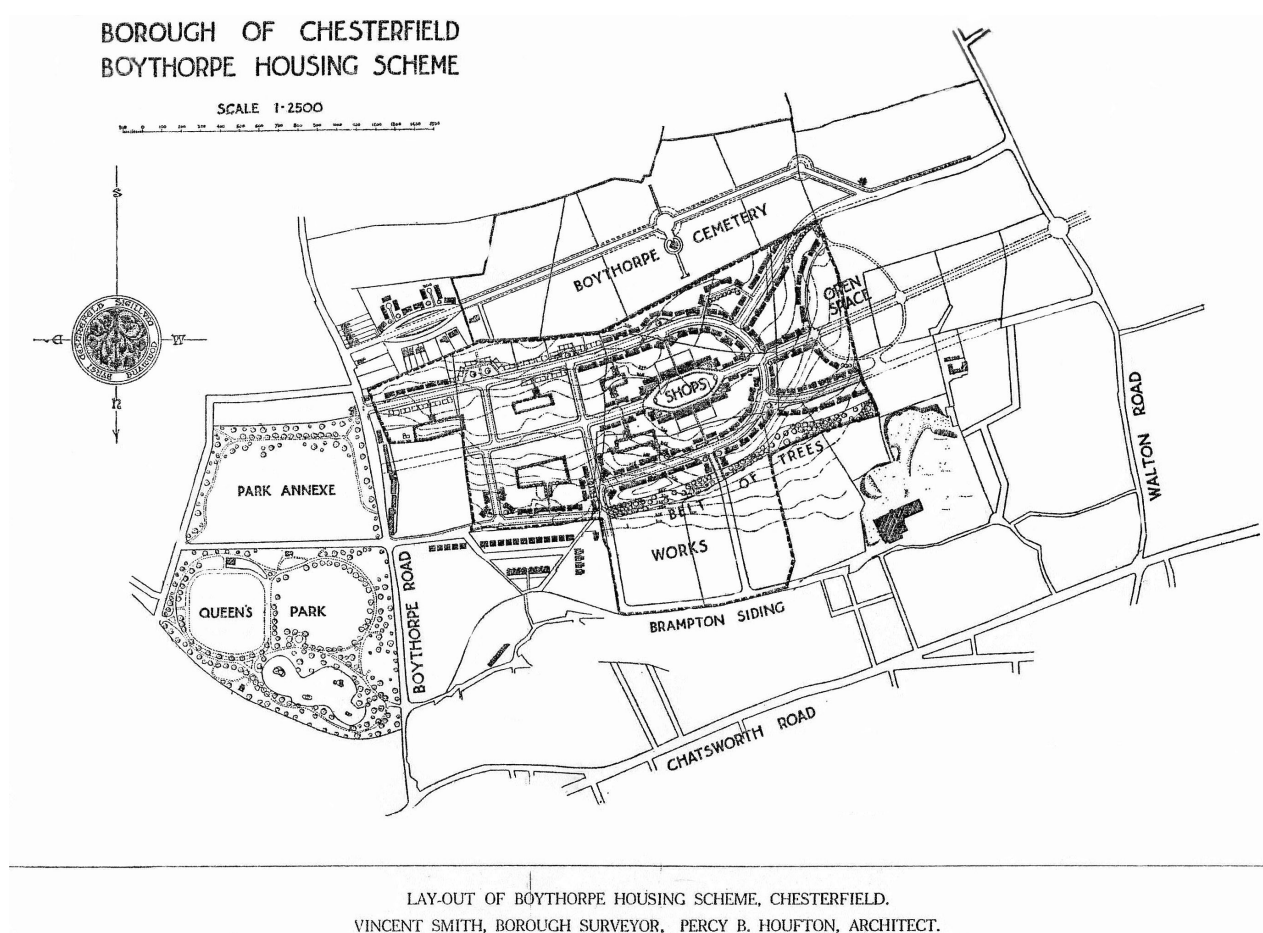
Mary was released from Broadmoor after less than five years and despite the fact that she no longer had a husband to care for her. Clearly she was thought to be recovered enough to be reunited with her family as she was living with them in 1921. So what had caused her to act as she did in 1912? Life was hard for Mary with eight children, one of whom had already died, and a constant worry about making ends meet, but the most likely reason is that she was suffering from post-natal depression after the birth of baby Annie – something which would be recognised today but was probably not recognised in 1912.

Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin

Between 1893 and 1895, Barry Parker, who designed the interior, and Raymond Unwin, who designed the building, collaborated in the building of the Church of St Andrew the Apostle at Barrow Hill. Both men were closely connected with Chesterfield. Parker's father was the manager of the branch of the Sheffield and Hallamshire Banking Company at 87 New Square (now the Grace Chapel) and the family lived at number 89 until 1891 when they moved to Buxton. Unwin began as an apprentice at Staveley Works before moving to Manchester and returning to Chesterfield in 1887 and the Staveley Coal and Iron Company as chief draughtsman, at first designing mining equipment, but then concentrating on the company's colliery housing. He married Parker's sister.

Sadly the church has now closed and the contents are being dispersed. Fortunately the font, lectern, sacristy chair, high altar, pulpit and one pew have been offered to the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Museum, which would mean that they would remain in the public domain.

In 1896 Parker and Unwin formed a partnership building single houses, although they only designed one in Chesterfield, now hidden from view and sadly much altered. Later they became involved in the Garden City movement which sought to provide houses which the working classes could afford to buy or rent. They planned Letchworth Garden City, where Percy Houfton was awarded £100 for designing the best cottage Houfton opened his own practice in Chesterfield in 1898, and became the consulting architect to the borough council. In 1914 the partnership between Parker and Unwin was dissolved with Unwin becoming more involved with town planning and housing standards which influenced the development of the Boythorpe estate on garden city lines.



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