



Chesterfield & District Local History Society

## NEWSLETTER May 2023

**June 19<sup>th</sup>**

**Derbyshire Historic Buildings  
Trust**

**Peter Milner**

The Trust and the restoration of  
Wingfield Station

**July 17<sup>th</sup>**

**Life in a noble household**

**Philip Riden**

The Earls of Devonshire in the seventeenth  
century

Meetings are held at the St Thomas' Centre, Chatsworth Road, Chesterfield S40 3AW  
starting at 7:30pm Members free, Visitors £3

## Chesterfield and District Family History Society Fair 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023 10am – 4pm St Thomas' Centre

Dena Fanshaw, from CADFHS tells us that this showcase event is for us all, as family history, social, local history and heritage are all part and parcel of our town and this event is the showcase for us all.

## Cestrefeld Journal Issue number 8 2023

The Journal will be available at the meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> May and the CADFHS Fair on 20<sup>th</sup> May. The price is £3 for members and £7 for non-members.

## Ford's History of Chesterfield?

Ford's 1839 published 'History of Chesterfield' is well-known. Of some 504 pages, it is still a valid and quoted source of Chesterfield's history. It also contains some now well-known illustrations of the town and its buildings.

Here we briefly look at Ford and his history. Originally published as a blog for the Derbyshire Victoria County History Trust you can find the much fuller account at <https://derbyshirevch.org/2023/04/>

Before the 1839 History of Chesterfield book Thomas Ford was possibly best known as the printer and publisher of 'Figaro in Chesterfield', in the early 1830s. This was published from Ford's then offices in New Square. Figaro... was a mixture of newspaper and pamphlet, but spent most of its time in what could be scathing attacks on its enemies, of which there were seemingly many.



*Ford's later business was in the brick building near to the top of Irongate. In 1841 it was sold to the Gallimore Brothers.*

The 1839 History of Chesterfield that Ford published was nominally a revised second edition of the Rev George Hall's history of 1823, which comprised just over 140 pages. Hall's history was printed by Thomas Ford's father – John Ford (d. 1830, aged 68). Thomas Ford had followed in father as a printer, bookseller and stationer. When he announced the new history Thomas was based in Irongate.

Ford had originally intended to republish Hall's history in parts, with additional information, but went much further and included new illustrations. He started publishing the edition, in 21 parts, from March 1837 until early 1839. In the spring of the latter year, they were drawn together in a book described as 'newly published'. A cloth and board edition of the complete history cost 20 shillings.

In May 1839 the plates were made separately available for framing. They were ascribed to the names C [Charles] and W [William] Radclyffe. They were son and father of an originally Birmingham based business.

For some years it has been believed that Ford did not actually write the history, though he may obviously have contributed to it. Ford is not named as the author on the book's title page. It appears that historical material in this book was mostly (if not entirely) written by Robert Wallace, Unitarian minister, who had succeeded George Kendrick (1814-1815) and before Kendrick a Thomas Astley (1773 – 1813). This assertion first seems to appear in the Derbyshire Courier newspaper in 1877. A history of Elder Yard Unitarian Chapel, published in 1967, also claims Wallace wrote the majority of the book. But the book is now well-known as 'Ford's History of Chesterfield'. Ford would have known Wallace as he was presumably a worshipper at Elder Yard Unitarian Chapel. Wallace had arrived in Chesterfield from Manchester College, York in September 1815. During his time as minister (until 1840) at the Elder Yard Chapel he made many improvements there.

This does not mean to say that Ford was not interested in collecting material for the book or that he did not contribute. For example, he wrote a letter to the Derbyshire Courier in 1838 inquiring about the potential loan to him of a copy of the Gentleman's Magazine, describing a seal found near 'the Broad Oak' in about 1798. If one refers to the Ford history this seal is actually illustrated.

Ford's completed history was published in two different sized editions, but the same printing blocks and plates were used in both editions. It is not known how many of each edition were published, or the print-run of the parts.

Thomas Ford sold his printing business, at Irongate in the Shambles, at auction, in early March 1841. By June 1841 C Gallimore is advertising his takeover of the former Ford business at the shop

in Irongate. There's more about the Gallimore enterprise and subsequent printers occupying the shop in the full VCH blog.

Thomas Ford was living in London by the 1851 census with his wife, daughter and two sons. He died there on the 28 November 1859, aged 58. He had been pursuing his former business – in 1854 he was publishing books and pamphlets from his premises in Gloucester Street, Queen Square. We do not know why he moved to London and exactly when – but further research may reveal this.

Ford apparently fell on somewhat hard-times before his death. An appeal was published in the Derbyshire Times of 24 September 1859 for contributions to him. An unfitting end to someone who had contributed, at the least with Robert Wallace, and certainly printed, what is still regarded as an important source for the history of Chesterfield.

*Sources used in this article and in the extended VCH blog are listed within that blog.*

## Elder Yard Chapel 1868

It is not generally known that 50 years ago Elder Yard Chapel enjoyed the distinction of having provided a gentleman who was the first person in Chesterfield to make a serious attempt to solve the problem of aerial flight. This was a Mr Piper a gentleman of means and good education and a Civil or Mining Engineer by profession. He conceived the idea of attempting to fly like a bird and for the purpose constructed a huge pair of wings. These were made of light bamboo rods crossed with canvas. By ingenious contrivance of knuckle joint hinges and levers the bottom end of these were connected to a light wooden frame which was made to strap to the body and Mr Piper's idea was to work the apparatus with the arms and legs. I suppose like a person in the act of swimming.

When all was completed the machine was conveyed to Donkey Racecourse Brockwell. A wooden platform attached to two long poles was provided from which the operator was to make his flight and a number of strong youths were engaged to assist in the send off.

Arrived at the place Mr Piper got into his wings and took his place on the platform which was then raised on the shoulders of the said young men who were instructed to proceed with it in the direction he proposed to fly increasing their rate of progress until they got into a good trot and then at a pre-arranged signal to raise the platform and give it a good thrust upwards when it was expected (or shall we say hope) that he would soar into the upper regions of space. But alas instead of going upwards he came down the force of gravitation being too great to be overcome by any exertion he could make.

After several more ineffectual attempts to soar and in order to save him from breaking his neck further attempts had to be abandoned. The machine was then carried forward to the Holme Farm and deposited in a barn where for some years afterwards it made a very comfortable resting place for James Crookes' fowls.

Mr Piper was a thorough gentleman and a good sportsman over the matter and having paid his assistants the party wended their way home, one of them no doubt a wiser though perhaps a sadder man.

P.S. The assistants were not sadder as they had a good Saturday's enjoyment and had been paid for it.

Footnotes: This account was written on a couple of sheets of paper which were found in a notebook belonging to Herbert Walter Turner (1857-1919), who was the secretary of the Rose Hill Congregational Church. The gentleman was Frederick Piper who was born in Sydney, New South Wales. His parents died when he was young so he and his sister Emma came to England and the care of their grandfather the Revd H.H. Piper, a Unitarian minister, who lived at Norton until about 1850. Frederick Piper was possibly a Unitarian which provides the link with Elder Yard (Unitarian) Chapel.

# Website updates

We've been making a few changes to our website over the last few weeks which should considerably improve the content we have on it.

Firstly, the Chronological History of Chesterfield has had something of a make-over with more information and illustrations added. It was during this revamp, however, that it became apparent that the whole page needed a radical rethink. Consequently a 'behind the scenes' exercise is happening to create entirely new pages which will address some of the short-comings. These include the single page now being too long, some incorrect and now poorly written information and a lack of content about industry.

The chronology was principally based on a chronicle of local events published in Ford's History of Chesterfield in 1839. The earlier 'facts' were then repeated in the series of yearly TP Wood's almanacs, which were finally published in late 1963. Since then, for example, the Roman fort has been found in Chesterfield and the multi-volume history of Chesterfield series, initiated by the late John Bestall and financed by the borough council, have been published onwards from 1974! We also aim for the content to be accurate – unlike that published on some other websites.

We hope that you'll not have to wait too long for the first of our new pages – which will cover the early history of the town up to about 1500.

Another important addition to the website is our Chairman's look at music in the town. David McPhie's 'Waltzing round the spire' takes a look at Chesterfield's popular music scene and the dance-bands and their venues of the 1920s up until the 1950s. We launched a preview page on 5 May, which included a link to download the late Geoff Sadler's 'The Rendezvous Dance Hall: a history' as a pdf. Thanks to David and to Derbyshire County Council we are able to publish this scanned version of the 1990 publication.

The plan is to progressively load David's work into perhaps four linked chapters; venues, the dance band leaders and musicians; Jazz, skiffle, country and rock 'n' roll and finally a look at the performance venues. Each section will also have a pdf of the text and the illustrations to download, which will mean that David's work can be printed out as a free book.

Have a look at the 'Waltzing round the spire' preview page at <http://www.cadlhs.org.uk/four-decades-of-dance-band-music-in-chesterfield-1920s-to-1950s/>.

You can also view the existing, part revised, chronology at <http://www.cadlhs.org.uk/chronological-history-of-chesterfield/>, but remember that this is not now being revised any further – with the start of a page revamp expected soon.

The committee hopes that these additions, plus regular postings on our website and Facebook pages meets with our member's approval and prove a useful addition to information on Chesterfield's history.

Philip Cousins

## Chesterfield Settlement

The next section of the story will be in the next Newsletter.