



ARNOLD'S NEWS

The Newsletter of Corsham Area Heritage

Spring 2015



SPRING FORWARD?

The AGM/Open Meeting held 25 February 2015 was always going to be a special event for the reasonably young group that is Corsham Area Heritage. We had decided that the meeting should be open-to-all, not simply for CAH Members only. We had cast a wide net inviting people to attend - using email, our website (www.corshamheritage.org.uk), word-of-mouth, and even coverage in an article in the 19 February edition of the Gazette & Herald. We received 14 formal apologies for absence ahead of the day! Gratifyingly, the number of attendees easily exceeded this. The Arnold House venue was only just big enough to hold them all.

The audience listened attentively to the "CAH's Review of 2014". It led into the fact that the organisation was dying on its feet. It badly needed New Blood. The result was that none of the officers, and none of the present Management Committee, were willing to offer themselves for re-election, without that essential ingredient becoming evident. They all had other activities to pursue. They would, of course, be delighted to assist that New Blood in every conceivable way, if only it stepped forward.

Some expressions of "willingness to serve" had been received ahead of the meeting - from those unable to be present on the day. Attendees received cards to complete, giving them the opportunity to do likewise.

One thought was forthcoming. Why not seek some form of collaboration with the Civic Society, it being another local group having an interest in Corsham's history? The Chairman stated he understood from the Civic Society's own Chairman that it too was facing uncertainty. Its present Chairman and Programme Organiser would both be standing down at its AGM on 15 May. If so, collaboration did not look to be an easy option.

Stop Press:

Some new information has just emerged. It is now understood that neither of the above two Civic Society "standings down" will take place. Perhaps a way forward can be found.

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Corsham Area Heritage's primary purpose is to research, celebrate & present the heritage of the Corsham Area to the people who reside there and those who visit the Area, whether they are here visiting friends or exploring what the Area has to offer.

Corsham Area, as defined by Wiltshire Council, comprises Corsham, Box, Colerne & Lacock.

WHERE OUR CMAS COLLABORATION LEADS US - by Peter Tapscott

As an accepted member of Wiltshire Council's "Conservation and Museums Advisory Service" (CMAS) group, we were invited to attend its meeting at the Calne Heritage Centre on 23 January 2015. We were 2 of some 35 persons present. It had been the agenda that had attracted us to the gathering - there was a presentation on the Wiltshire at War project to which we have been contributing and also one on something that was new to us. We were keen to learn about it.

County has embarked upon a "The Story of Wiltshire in 100 Objects" project, modelled on the BBC TV programme. The Wiltshire version has been underway for some months - but there was still time for the Corsham Area to figure in it. In short, we're now included in the project, on the basis of our quarrying industrial heritage. We have assembled a small collection of easily-transported hand tools and we're now writing 100-word descriptions for each of them. The item shown is a Lewis. We'll keep you updated on progress.



A STROLL IN THE PARK - NESTON THAT IS - by Kevin Gaskin

It's funny how different projects sometimes merge one with another. WW1 research into Corsham's history brought the Ammunition Dump at Ridge Quarry and the tramways across Neston into focus. The BRLSI exhibition at the Campus told us of the Neston memorial to John Hanning Speke, while the upcoming work to promote Corsham's quarrying heritage in the Story of Wiltshire in a 100 Objects project provides another opportunity to better appreciate the local geography. I mentioned this to Peter Tapscott. Immediately a walk was scheduled, a route planned - and a guide identified in Geoff Knapp.

Geoff lived and worked at Great Lypiatt Farm for over 75 years and still has clear memories of the tramway that passed through the 250-acre holding. It linked the Quarries to the sidings at Corsham Station. The tracks are long gone but with Geoff's guidance it is possible to identify where they had been and where freshly-hewn stone had been left to 'winter'.

On one fine morning in February, we met at the entrance to Geoff's farm - no longer worked by a tenant farmer, but with the land now managed by Neston Estate directly. Geoff hadn't been back for many years and it was interesting for him to see the old house and for us to share his memories of a building that dates back to the 1400s. It was the same building, but not the same home anymore. Outbuildings that Geoff had constructed remained - including an old covered barn built from ("liberated"?) rails that had once formed the tramway.

Geoff was disappointed that the Walnut trees that he had planted had not survived. He showed us the commanding view over Corsham, down to the where the Station used to be and took us along the route of the tramway from Great Lypiatt Farm, across the road to Rough Street, passing Little Lypiatt Farm, and over the land opposite the Old Well House, from where you see the impressive Ridge Farm and Ridge House. Stone was transported across this area from Spring and Ridge Quarries to Corsham sidings.

We ended up at the entrance to the old Ridge Quarry and went beyond to see across to Eastlays. This had to be the end point for this particular walk and even there Geoff was able to tell stories from his childhood when the stone mine and surrounding area was a place where children went to play. It was a fascinating few hours spent in good company and helpful to me in putting names and places into better context. We resolved to do it again.

THE OATLEY FURNITURE STORE - by Pat Whalley

Until Corsham's Newlands Road and the associated Precinct was built in the 1960s, Post Office Lane was a cul-de-sac off the High Street. It is believed that an actual Post Office was established in the early 1800s at the junction with the High Street (where the Jaipur restaurant now stands) and the first postmaster was the landlord of the Methuen Arms.



PREMISES OF CHARLES W. OATLEY, F.A.L.P.A., HIGH STREET CORSHAM.

By 1859 the Post Office became part of the premises belonging to James Bromley, a builder and ironmonger, and in 1871 the shop and Post Office was being run by Mrs Sarah Bromley - until the early 1890s, when Mr FJ Bryant became the postmaster for Corsham at 15 High Street. The Post Office moved to its present location in 1940.

In 1891 the premises were in the hands of Mrs Fry, a widow, and her son Charles, who was a butcher. This may have been the very butcher, who having offended the Vicar's wife, Mrs Dunlap-Dunlap, living at 40 High Street, with the smells emanating from the building opposite, caused a petition to be raised to have a new vicarage built elsewhere - resulting in the red brick building in Lacock Road being constructed in 1904, just down from St Patrick's School.

Sometime between 1900 and 1920 Mr Charles William Bond Oatley from Box came along, and established his business in the building. CW Oatley was born at Quarry Hill in Box in 1877. We can trace his family through Census right up to 1911 when he is recorded as living at Mount Pleasant, Quarry Hill with his wife and 2 persons. (We surmise that the 'persons' were servants.)

In 1901 CW is described as aged 24, and a 'house furnisher and upholsterer'. We have an advertisement for his shop, located at High Street, Corsham, as included in a 'Corsham Town Guide', dated 1920. The advertisement indicates that the business was established in 1895, CW would have been 18. (Perhaps it was initially set up by his father, or he was an eager young entrepreneur?) Other information shows that he later developed his business to include auctioneering and warehousing, so he had many strings to his bow.

Telegrams: "OATLEY, CORSHAM." Telephone: CORSHAM 65.
ESTABLISHED 1895.

CHARLES W. OATLEY
F.A.L.P.A.

**Auctioneer, House, Estate
and Insurance Agent**

Licensed Valuer for Probate and other purposes.
Inventories made and checked for Fire Insurance
purposes. Agent to the principal Fire Offices.
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Proprietor of the "CORSHAM AUCTION ROOMS."
Open at all times to receive FURNITURE and EFFECTS for
disposal in forthcoming Sales.

ANY QUANTITY OF FURNITURE BOUGHT FOR CASH

We know a little about the business. We know that an elderly lady who once lived in Box stored the contents of her home there when she was no longer able to keep house. She died in 1940, and her executors were instructed to "go to 'Oatley's' to remove the contents, and pass them on to a designated member of her family". From firsthand verbal advice we know that the building in Post Office Lane, for its time, reflected a new approach to display and construction. The doors apparently came from the original Harrods shop in London, being of high grade Walnut with Chrome handles - quite remarkable for a shop on Corsham's High Street.

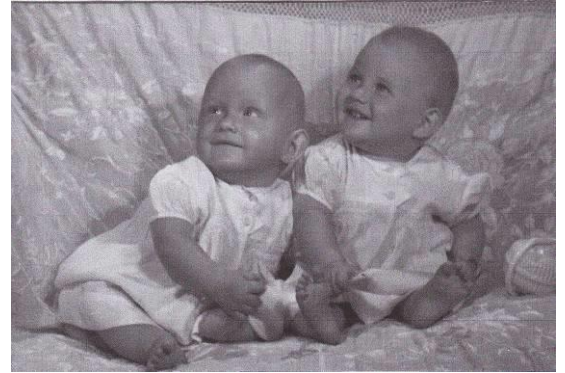
Just recently we heard from a 95 year-old lady whose uncle had worked in Oatley's during/after WW1. She remembered him bringing home lots of bits and pieces from the shop at a time when such things were difficult to come by.

CW died in 1950 and it is believed that the store in his name closed a short while after. The building then had several different uses, including a Co-operative furniture store and a coffee and shoe shop. In 1987 it was taken over by Mr Rahman and became the Jaipur Indian Restaurant.

CORSHAM MATERNITY HOME (contd) - by Pat Whalley

Another lady has come forward to offer her story - Miss Helen Black who has lived and worked in Aldershot, Hants since 1974, where she has pursued a career as a secretary in a Forces Charity.

Helen was born, with her twin brother John (see photo, circa 1947) at the Corsham Maternity Home on 21 December 1946. This was the bad winter of 46/47 when heavy snow fell. As it was so cold, the nurse wrapped the two babies in cotton wool and put them in a box in the airing cupboard! Being premature babies, mother and babies had to remain at the hospital until February 1947, when they were considered strong enough to leave.



Helen's father, Ian Black, was a police constable, and in 1943/4 had been sent to Corsham, because there were so many troops in Corsham the constabulary needed more officers. It was here he met his wife to be, Patty Jenkins, in 1945. Born in 1913, she had attended the Methuen School and the Council School (now The Pound), and had trained as a nurse. The little family settled in the prefabs at Ethelred Avenue, remaining there until 1949/50, when Ian was posted to Swindon. The family came back to Corsham regularly to visit Helen's grandfather who lived in Station Road.



Helen's grandparents were David John and Ada Jenkins (see photo left). David had been a wheelwright in London came to Corsham to open a new business. He bought the house and premises at 28 Station Road. At the time this consisted of an end terrace house and a large barn at the rear of the property, now converted into a house. At the side of the terrace there is a painted sign on the wall declaring "Maynard - Carriage Builder & Wheelwright" (see photo below). It was Mr Maynard who sold the business to Mr Jenkins in 1923. This remained the family home until David died in 1953.

A little adjunct to this story is of interest. David had an uncle, Robert George Jenkins, who was a Crimean War veteran, and came to live with David and his wife in his later years. He died in 1928, aged 95, and was given a Military Funeral in Corsham and it is thought that he would have been buried in Corsham Cemetery.

So Helen retained her strong connection to Corsham, and has more recently revived her interest by visiting friends in the town, a situation that will no doubt continue as more memories are revived.



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