

224 is the newsletter of the Deddington & District History Society. During our season we meet at 7.30 on the second Wednesday of the month, normally at Deddington's Windmill Centre. Membership is £9/16 pa singles/ couples or £2.50 at the door for visitors, who are equally welcome. The editor actively encourages contributions to be sent to 1 South Newington Road, Barford St Michael OX15 0RJ. Email editor.224@nehoc.co.uk

William Cotton Risley, vicar and diarist

We are indebted to the Banbury Historical Society and to Geoffrey Smedley-Stevenson for permission to quote from their forthcoming two-volume selection from the Risley Diaries. Readers of the Deddington News will be familiar with our member Buffy Heywood's extracts, published over the years. Here we quote just a very small part of Mr Smedley-Stevenson's introduction.

Anglican clergymen in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were well placed to compile the day-to-day accounts we term diaries. Their immediacy, and often commonplace importance, contrast with the sometimes overblown memoir recalled in old age such as that of George Herbert, the Banbury shoemaker. The diaries of James Woodforde, John Skinner and Francis Kilvert are perhaps the best known of the genre, although there are also those of William Cole in Buckinghamshire, Francis Witts in Gloucestershire, William Holland in Somerset, and Benjamin Newton in north Yorkshire.

The well-known trio mentioned form, with William Cotton Risley, a quartet with an uncanny continuum of diary-writing: Woodforde from 1758 to 1802, Skinner from 1803 to 1834, Risley from 1835 to 1869, and Kilvert from 1870 to 1879. It is a true accident, for the only common features of the diarists are links between Woodforde and Risley, both young sub-wardens of New College, Oxford; Woodforde moreover briefly served a curacy in 1763 for a Cotton ancestor of Risley at the Oxfordshire parish of Newton Purcell. The four diarists' locations, social backgrounds, temperaments, political activity, pastoral experiences and family circumstances differ widely.

Whether William Cotton Risley

contemplated that his diaries would survive to be read by generations long after the extinction of his direct descendants is unclear, but their actions have rendered this possible. He never set down his reasons or objects in keeping such a record, though he religiously excluded the duty of diarising during holiday periods, and was prevented on occasion by accident or ill-health. His eldest son, Holford, sought briefly to emulate his father's habit at the age of twelve, and indeed wrote down some reasons for so doing, but after two weeks or so he gave up the effort. The true diary, Simon Brett would have us believe, is written in the heat of the moment or very soon after the event, is by nature uneven,

often pedestrian and dull, yet almost all are relieved at some point by changes of mood, which lead their writer to enter the world of 'universal human experiences, of birth, death, love, illness, hypochondria, wealth, poverty, joy, anger or depression'. To be candid, the first month's entries are not encouraging, though his comments focus on the poor of the parish of Souldern where he served as resident curate, and to the wider

2006 programme

11 January John Wilson, 'Did your grandmother give you one of these?'

8 February Tim Marshall, 'Fardon's, the Deddington clock-makers'

8 March Film *Twenty-four square miles* with a commentary by Graham Nottingham and Colin Cohen and also the 1992 update by Central TV (Exceptionally this meeting will be in St Peter's Church)

12 April Angela Davis, 'Happy families? Kinship, courtship and change in 20th Century Britain: an oral history approach'

10 May Martin Sirot-Smith 'Sulgrave Manor'

14 June Visit to Sulgrave Manor

members of his family. His greatest consolation as the year 1835 came to an end was to win 13 shillings at cards from the local MP at his seat at Aynhoe Park.

The first diary, up to March 1836, was written into quite a small pocket-book and mixed with lists of accounts, beneficiaries and trees (a special passion of his) going back over several years. There are 39 surviving diary volumes, and 14 breaks between them. The diaries cover a span of 400 months over 33 years, the last entry being written two months before his death. The gaps account for almost a quarter of this span, 97 months in all, without including the holiday silences. It is thus important to seek to establish whether the gaps are the result of Risley's circumstances and preoccupations, or the result of subsequent casual, or deliberate, censoring loss, as is the case with the larger part of the Kilvert diaries.

Risley as a countryman

Many clergymen of Risley's generation took an active interest in agricultural questions and in the countryside generally. In William's case, he left the hunting field to others (his bishop, Wilberforce, had no great affection for the hunting parson) but did shoot, and had a number of woods for sport, at Fritwell and Stoke Lyne, for instance. He also fished, in a

William Cotton Risley, reproduced by kind permission of the Oxfordshire Record Office, and his signature [Ms Oxf diocesan papers b 70]



quiet way with his children, in the ponds at Swerford or his own pools at Adderbury, or in the local brook when he persuaded the millers to open the sluice gates. His connection with agriculture led to active membership of the Banbury and Oxfordshire Agricultural Associations with their annual ploughing matches and shows. He also exhibited in the Deddington Horticultural Show, unless his gardener had, as on one occasion, caused some fleeting offence at that time of year.

He had a special regard for the management of woodlands, and a keen eye for quality: just before the diary begins he had spent £124 on the purchase of the

'Chesterton oak' whose wood was the source of many pieces of church and domestic furniture, and almost without question of the present front door of Deddington House. For a time, he farmed actively from the neighbouring Park Farm, though generally with the assistance of a bailiff or foreman, and with Elizabeth Sessions looking after a dairy there from which he sent butter for sale in Banbury and London. There were seven Harvest Homes (festival celebrated at the end of the harvest season, on the occasion of the harvest of the last sheaf of grain) for his labourers each autumn at Park Farm from 1839 to 1845, when his farming stock and implements were sold and his land rented out.

His land-owning responsibilities were very widely spread many of his wife's properties were at Priors Marston and Avon Dassett in Warwickshire, Moreton Pinckney in Northamptonshire, and Easington and Souldern in Oxfordshire. There was also Worcestershire property at Evenlode. John Barber assisted him until his death in 1854 at the Rent Day dinners at the Red Lion in Banbury twice a year. Risley also acquired land with the purchase of Deddington House, including the Park Farm just up New Street. He also took a lease with Christ Church on the land called Appletree Farm (the farmhouse in Satin Lane being in a fair state of ruin) and later leased Adderbury farms from New College.

On the death of Mrs Cotton in 1844, he also inherited three large Monmouthshire farms, and the advowson of the parish of Kemeys Inferior, property purchased in 1700 by the Lord family of Cottisford and passed down through the Cotton family. It was not unusual for a farmer to have a mix of freehold and tenanted land, and once Risley decided that farming on his own account at Park Farm was too much, he had to sub-let the leased lands to others in the township. It was through this web of tenancies that he became firm friends with Nathaniel Stilgoe, whose family had taken on Adderbury Grounds farm in 1830, and had long-standing Deddington links.

Landownership on such a scale brought with it political responsibilities, both on his own behalf, and with a responsibility for the behaviour of his tenant farmers. The diary reflects the period of operation of the first Reform Act to which Risley would have been instinctively opposed. Control of the voting system by interested, chiefly landed, groups had once been supported as offering 'virtual representation' to all, but was at war with the conflicting urban interests of the electors, for instance, of Banbury. That rural voters, either forty shilling freeholders or more substantial tenant farmers, were considered somewhat superior to their urban counterparts was reflected in the 1832 decision to maintain a single-member borough seat at Woodstock with the addition of many voters from nearby villages such as Tackley and Wootton. All of Risley's votes were public affairs, and where printed pollbooks materialised—usually in controver-

sial elections—can be traced. He personified this older system to the degree that he had votes in the ancient University of Oxford's seats, and in five counties, four in the Banburyshire area, and also in Monmouthshire. In the latter, where there were contests in 1847 and 1868, he was also approached to answer for his tenant's voting.

He was a staunch Conservative, and a keen supporter of its organisation in Banbury borough, where it enjoyed little success in the period. Chartism offended and alarmed him greatly, in particular when its impact spread out from the towns to the smaller places like Adderbury in 1838, though he could reckon that the Chartist votes in Banbury in 1841 may well have been peeled from the Conservative core, one example being the brewer Barnes Austin. He did waver from the faith on occasion, however: if a low Churchman like Lord Chandos were to carry the party banner in a contest with Gladstone for the University vote in 1859, or if a Dashwood arrived in opposition, as in the Oxfordshire by-election of 1862. He travelled to Towcester, or Brackley, and Southam, or Leamington, to vote, and, of course, used the hustings beneath Deddington Town Hall, but never took the trouble to cast his Worcestershire and Monmouthshire votes. That he took his duties seriously is shown when he divided some of his property to ensure two of his sons were also enfranchised.

About our new masthead

This is based on the surveyor's sketch of 1831 for the one-inch Ordnance Survey.

From the Chair

As mentioned in our last issue, the Society was asked to help out with a family history day at the Deddington branch library. Accordingly, on 4 November Moira Byast organised a very successful workshop offering advice to all. So positive was the response that Rosemary Arnold, the librarian, is hoping that another joint venture can be arranged, perhaps on the subject of house history. Such activities are a great way for the Society to help with the dissemination of information and advice, and it raises our profile in the best possible way.

The Christmas social on 14 December was by general agreement the most enjoyable ever. Many thanks to Moira and to Sue Shattock, who were the prime movers with regard to Tudor entertainments and feasting respectively. Goodness only knows how we shall cap it next year. Any suggestions? Please!

We have a full programme lined up for the remainder of this year. We are well advanced with arranging speakers for next season, but as things stand we are still short of one or two speakers. We want to finalise the programme within the next month or two, so if anyone can recommend a sure-fire winner to us, please do so!

Finally, warm good wishes for the New Year to all our members. Thank you all for your support. Anyone still in need of a New Year's resolution might consider introducing a new member to the Society? What better way could there be to spend the second Wednesday of the month?

Chris Day

The Deddington family history group

The group has had several meetings and managed to answer a few queries from members..

On 4 November we held a successful Family History drop-in day at Deddington Library. Visitors kept us busy, some coming from as far afield as Witney.

As a follow up to this, we are going to hold a once a month drop in at Deddington Library, for History Society members, but also any other library user, who would like to start or further their family research. This will be on the sec-

wonder if there is any connection. The answer is I don't know, but a member of the family might find it a profitable line of research.

Wills can yield much information. A local will is that of Horatio Stevens of Middle Aston, dated 26 February 1681. The will makes his wife Ane the 'beneficiary of all that was allotted to her in a certaine writing betwixt me and the said Ane my now wife at or about the time of our marrying together and later, my wife Ane shall enjoy all the goods as were hers before her marriage with me according to the tenure of a writing afore-said, which writing bears date Oct

Extract from Horatio Stevens of Middle Aston's will, dated 26 February 1681

ond Thursday in the month, from 2-3 pm. I will be in the library to help with computer research and other queries that come up.

I am also researching Deddington families, by recording any snippet of information that I come across whilst engaged in other research. I hold on file information on some 500 Deddington surnames, dating from about 1600 onwards. These are by no means complete records, just information and its source so that any interested party can check it out for themselves.

From this, it is interesting to see that the Wells family, Richard whose will is dated 1615 and Thomas whose will is dated 1732, were tailors. If any one remembers Ticky Wells shop in the Market Place, then like me, you might

8th in the 12th year of the King' [1660]. So this looks like a second marriage, with the other heirs being offspring from the first marriage. He also leaves her the 'east portion of the house wherein I now dwell', whilst leaving the rest of the house to his eldest son Timothy. This ensured that his widow would have a roof over her head, but could it be the cause of future dissension? The will goes on to leave bequests to his other sons, Robert and Henry and to his daughter Elizabeth Smith, and to his grandchildren. The grandchildren are named as John, Timothy and Ane, the children of his son Timothy and Horatio, son of Henry.

There is a sum left to be divided between the three children of his son Robert and a sum to be di-

vided between the other children of my son Henry. It is obvious that he doesn't quite trust his son Timothy, because there is a clause in the will which gives the major inheritance to all the three sons equally should 'the said Timothy shall refuse to pay the remittances'.

For the family historian there is a rich seam of information here. Not only does it name the children of Horatio Stevens, but also gives the number and sometimes the name of the grandchildren. We know his daughter married someone called Smith and that he had been married at least twice. We also know that he was a tailor. His list of land and houses is quite large, so there was money in the family from somewhere.

The witnesses to the will are Dan Greenwood and Thomas ffox, who signed and Edward Badger who made his mark. Witnesses were often family friends or relatives who were not benefiting from the will.

There are several unanswered questions, but this illustrates the use that can be made of a will in researching family history.

I have no other information on the people named here. There are other entries which will appear in the full version of this article in the history section of Deddington OnLine.

Moir a Byast

