

Wirral Archives Service News

Issue 1 / December 2010

Welcome to the first edition of the Wirral Archives newsletter.

THE QUARTERLY newsletter is part of our mission to improve access to the many thousands of historical records we hold, including family, local, maritime and industrial history archives, some of which date back to the 15th Century.

We hope the newsletters will help demonstrate the breadth of this fantastic resource and encourage you to use it, whatever your interest.

The life of Emma (Lady) Hamilton

IN OCTOBER, our Archivist William Meredith gave a talk on Emma Hamilton, at the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight.

The gallery holds a portrait of Lady Hamilton as a Bacchante by Marie Louise Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. (A bacchante was a priestess of Bacchus, the Greek god of wine).

At the time this portrait was painted, around 1790-91, Emma was the wife of the British ambassador to Naples (Mount Vesuvius can be seen in the background!). Emma Hamilton was born Emily Lyon in Ness, the daughter of Henry Lyon, the village blacksmith and Mary Kidd.

She was baptised in Neston parish church in April 1765. Her father died before she was a year old, forcing his widow to work as a dressmaker and domestic servant. Emily was brought up by her maternal grandmother in Hawarden in Flintshire. Her mother eventually moved to London with Emily. By around 1780 Emma - as she was then known - was working for a Dr Graham at a medical establishment.

At this time Emma became the mistress of Sir Harry Fetherstonhaugh, of Up Park in Sussex, and through him met Charles Francis Greville, a younger son of the Earl of Warwick, by whom she had a daughter, also called Emma (later Emma Carew).

In 1784 Greville's uncle, Sir William Hamilton, the British envoy to Naples, came home on leave and met Emma.

At this time Emma, who suffered from a nervous rash, collected the two and a half year old Emma from her great-grandmother at Hawarden, and went on a seaside holiday at Parkgate, lodging 'in the house of a Laidy whose husband is at sea'. She spent the days bathing, playing



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with Little Emma, and writing to Greville:

Greville sent Sir William a picture of Emma painted by George Romney, and mentioned how he had improved her character and manners. Sir William admired her, and said that she was 'better than anything in nature' - she went to Naples in 1786 and he married her in 1791, giving her the title of Lady Hamilton.

Emma's artistic poses, or 'Attitudes', soon became famous in Naples, and she met Nelson there in 1793. They became lovers and back in England Emma gave birth to Nelson's daughter Horatia in 1801. Nelson lived openly with Emma, Sir William and Emma's mother in Wimbledon, which fascinated and scandalised the public.

Sir William died in 1803, and in 1805 Nelson was killed during the Battle of Trafalgar. Emma fell into debt but was ignored by the British government. She died in poverty in Calais in 1815.

Recent Acquisitions: Leaflets from the 1945 General Election

WIRRAL Archives has acquired three election leaflets for the Wirral constituency for the General Election of 1945.

The leaflets for the main parties were sent to local armed forces personnel soldiers, who were on duty overseas.

The Liberal candidate was Brigadier Eric Dorman-Smith. He had been born in Ireland and went on to join the British Army. He was sacked from the army before the end of the war, but some saw him as an outstanding, if unorthodox, commander.

The Labour candidate was Lois Bulley, the daughter of Arthur Bulley, a wealthy Liverpool cotton broker and the creator of Ness Gardens. She joined the Labour Party in 1930 (and the Communist Party as well in 1936, in order to oppose Franco) and became a district councillor and then a county councillor for Neston and later for Bebington. She campaigned about the unemployed, social deprivation, and women's and children's rights.

The winner of the election was the Conservative candidate, Brigadier Selwyn Lloyd, with 42,544 votes (51% of the total). He later became Minister for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Secretary, and Chancellor of the Exchequer. He was later Speaker of the House of Commons, and finished his career as Baron Selwyn-Lloyd of Wirral.

Miss Bulley was in second place with 25,919 votes (31%), although the Labour Party won the election - she went on to support the newly formed National Health Service. In 1948 she gave the house and Botanic Gardens at Ness to Liverpool University.

Brigadier Dorman-Smith came third with 14,302 votes (17% of the total). His falling out with the British Army led him to become disillusioned with Britain, and he returned to Ireland, changing his name to O'Gowan, and later becoming a military adviser to the IRA during their border campaign of the 1950s.

Friends Group News

Get more out of Wirral Archives - join the Friends!

BECOMING a Friend of Wirral Archives provides a great opportunity to meet other local and family historians, discuss your interests and pick up a few tips.

Friends can also enjoy special access to documents from the archive when working on volunteer projects, as well as receiving invitations to a range of workshops, talks and events.

To join the Friends simply send us your contact information - our contact details are at the end of this newsletter -

and tell us you would like to become a Friend of the Archive Service. You can also let us know if you have any particular research interests, if you have any ideas for research projects, or if you would like us to see if any other Friends are interested in helping you with your research.

The next meeting of the Friends Group is at 2pm on Friday 25th March 2011 in the lower ground floor conference room, which is next to the Wirral Archives search room.

User Group Forum meeting

WE HAVE also established a forum for our users to let us know their thoughts and comments.

The forum will meet twice a year - in April and October. The next meeting will be at 2pm on Friday 15th April 2011 in the lower ground floor conference room. Everyone's welcome.

Latest Exhibition: 'The Victorians'

OUR NEW exhibition, The Victorians, runs from the end of December until February 2011.

The exhibition has been prepared by the Greasby branch of the University of the Third Age. Thank you and well done to all of those involved.

Upcoming Workshops

OUR POPULAR series of free Saturday morning workshops continues through the winter.

Each workshop provides an introduction to a local history topic with an opportunity to see and handle documents from the archive. Our next workshops are:

- 8 January 2011: An Introduction to Family History
- 5 February 2011: Cammell Laird Shipbuilders
- 12 March 2011: Women of Wirral
- 2 April 2011: Early Wirral - from the Romans to the Normans

The workshops run 10am - 12noon. Contact us to book a place.

Future Exhibitions

OUR NEXT exhibition will run from March to May 2011 and will investigate 'the Alabama and the American Civil War' to mark the 150th anniversary of the outbreak of the war.

Also in March 2011, an exhibition on Women of Wirral (and also a Saturday morning workshop) will mark 100 years of International Women's Day.

We have added an exhibition display case to our search room, which used to belong to the Archbishop of Canterbury and reside in Lambeth Palace. We think it provides a fitting setting for our displays and hope you will agree!



Awesome Objects

The oldest item in the Archives

OF THE TENS of thousands of items in our archive, the oldest is a charter written in Latin and on parchment, in Wallasey on Tuesday 17th May 1457.

At that time Wallasey, then known as Kyrkeby Waley, was a small village around St Hilary's Church. The charter states that John Melles, a 'gentlyman', has granted to one John Barker his 'tenement' with garden in Wallasey - the charter identifies this as the one lying between the tenement of the Prior of 'Byrkehed' to the north and that of Henry Letherlond to the south - as well as two little closes of land.

This grant is a little unusual in that money does not change hands. Instead John Barker receives this new land in exchange ('in excambio') for a tenement of his own, this one lying between the land of Richard Smyth to the west and John Melles to the east. In other words it John Melles now has two tenements right next to each other - perhaps he wanted to expand.

At this time the Wars of the Roses had begun and the north of England was undergoing a period of violence and unrest, but at least in Wallasey life was going on as usual.

A picture from the past



Elbel Francis dressed as 'Snow' for the 1892 Mayor of Birkenhead's Fancy Dress Ball, which was held every year in Birkenhead Town Hall.

New Research Service

WIRRAL Archives has launched a research service for enquirers who cannot visit in person.

The service can pursue any family or local history research into the archives, including any library books we hold. The charge is £20 per hour, up to a maximum of five hours. Please contact us for more information or to request an 'Application for Research' form

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