

MEMBERS MEETING 3JULY 2007

“Tapton Grove, Brimington and some of the people who lived there” - A talk by Philip Cousins illustrated with slides.

Philip kindly stood in to give the talk at short notice when the scheduled talk “Family History Sources Before 1837” was cancelled.

Before he commenced his talk Philip explained that he was not a family historian but because of his interest in buildings he had discovered various families that had lived in Tapton Grove, some famous, some now forgotten.

Many people don't know where Tapton Grove is. An aerial photograph taken in 1945 by the RAF shows its position. It was isolated in 1945 but there has been some development in the area since. Despite its name “Tapton Grove” it is actually in Brimington. It is one of a group of Georgian houses that were built in the area when some of the gentry moved out of Chesterfield.

The house is an imposing north facing building. It is listed Grade II *and has a Grade 2 stable block and a large fishpond. The main entrance to the house is via Balmoak Lane at Tapton. It has a pair of imposing stone gateposts (also listed) near Tapton Hall Farm. This would have been the carriage road entrance for the gentlemen and ladies. There is another entrance from Grove Road off Brimington Common. The road branches to the right with impressive fishponds forming the boundary to the left.

The house stands at the rise on the hill of a winding road in a secluded spot created so that it looks out on the valley with views of Brimington. The house is now a nursing home and there is no public access to it, however, the present owners tolerate people coming to look at it. Enlargement of the air photograph taken in 1945 shows the stable block/coach house, rear portion of the main house, Swiss Cottage and Tapton Grove Farm (off Grove Road).

It is thought that the influential and wealthy family of Jebbs built the house but as history has generally ignored this family it is not known whether Avery or Joshua Jebb built Tapton Grove in the late 18c.

Joshua Jebb senior who was born in 1698 and died in 1797 was a man of property, an alderman and owner of Beetwell Hall. He was one of a number of the gentry who developed land and country seats like

Highfield Hall. Old Joshua was interviewed by the "Swan of Lichfield", Anna Seward when he was 98. The coat of arms of the Jebb family is quartered with a hawk and a hawk's bell.

A 1966 photograph of a sale catalogue of Tapton Grove shows the stable block/coach house, possible two sections to the house and a smaller house which became the "Gardener's Cottage" during or just after the last war.

Joshua Jebb junior was a merchant who went into in lead and moved into banking and made a lot of money. He had two sons, Samuel born in 1720 and Avery in 1732. Samuel purchased an estate in Walton in 1768 on which a house was later built known as Walton Lodge.

On the death of his father in 1797 Avery inherited Tapton Grove. Joshua paid for the tower at Brimington Chapel to be rebuilt in 1796. It is not known why the Jebbs chose the Tapton area to build their house when they lived at Walton. It is possible that they used the same architect Joseph Badger who was working at Renishaw but there is scope for more research as to when it was built. However, the words "A JEBB 1799" do appear over one of the doorways of the stable block.

Sadly the stable, although Grade 2 listed, is now in a state of some disrepair.

In 1811 Avery Jebb died and there was an auction of his estate over five days which included 1200 books, silver plate and Staffordshire tableware. The Jebbs were a family of some standing who married into gentry. Avery had a son Richard and a daughter Marianne. She married Godfrey Meynell of Meynell Langley in 1803.

The property was let to a Charles Wake in 1821. It was advertised in 1824 as being for let in 1825 but Wake was still there in 1829. He moved away in the 1830's. In 1833 Bernard Maynard Lucas, a Chesterfield solicitor, was living at Tapton Grove but he was more associated with Highfield Hall and later Hasland Hall.

By 1841 John Meynell was back at Tapton Grove with a pack of hounds. However, he predeceased his father in 1851 as a result of a railway accident.

The next owner of the property was John Firth. The Firths were steel makers. The 1861 census shows John as an architect. However, in 1856

he extended and expanded his business in Whittington and he was placed in control of Firth's puddle steel. The company manufactured rail carriages for India but in 1877 they closed.

In 1862, Richard George Coke a civil and mining engineer moved to Tapton Grove. The family interests were in the Pinxton collieries. At the age of 21 he went to Australia. He became an accomplished engineer and geologist and was a fellow of the Institute of Mechanical Engineers. In 1878 Tapton Grove was offered for sale by auction. The 1871 census shows that the family consisted of mother, father, six daughters, three sons, a governess, cook and four other servants.

Mansfeldt Foster Mills became the next owner, a name now forgotten. He purchased the house in 1878. He was born in Durham and was a director of the Sheffield Banking Company from 1870-1886 and was also a partner in the Chesterfield Brewery Company and the second largest shareholder. He was also involved in the preservation of Revolution House.

There is a grave at Brimington of Mill's and his wife Frances. It is in sight of Tapton Grove, obviously a chosen spot. Mills knew George Stephenson and it is fair to say that Mills was part of the community that would have entertained George at Tapton Grove. In return, Mills would have been entertained at Tapton House by George.

When Mr Mills died he had a simple funeral with a brewery dray for a hearse and an earth grave. £10 was given for the relief of the poor instead of an expensive funeral. The 1881 census shows Mills, his wife, three sons, a daughter, seven servants and a groom. The three sons had different careers.

The second son Mansfeldt H Mills formed a partnership with R. G. Coke.

The third son William F. Mills was a solicitor.

The first son, Robert Fenwick Mills was at Tapton Grove in 1881 but not in 1891. In 1895 Tapton Grove was described as the seat of R. F. Mills. His first wife Frances died in 1893. There is a memorial window to her in Brimington Parish Church. They had five children and both sons were killed in WW1.

R. F. Mills was a successful business man and the Chairman and Managing Director of Chesterfield Brewery Company. He was involved

in many building schemes including the Spital Hotel, Gardener's Arms, Duckmanton Hotel and the Hollingwood.

Mills remarried, his second wife was named Alice. He died on 10 January 1928 and he too is buried within sight of Tapton Grove. His widow returned to Cirencester after his death and she died in 1943.

Mills became a director of Mansfield Brewery until it closed. He was a conservative county councillor and served as a school governor. He experimented with bacterial sewage treatment beds together with Dr. Barwise, the minister of health, who has a ward named after him at Chesterfield Royal Hospital. He was an enthusiastic sportsman and meteorologist. He was also a trustee of the Revolution House.

The 1966 house catalogue shows a picture of the house. The principal elevation has two storeys with five bays, the west front is longer of eight bays. It has a shallow hipped roof and a centre door with Doric columns and a pediment. Inside the hall is a corner fireplace with an Ashford black marble floor. There is now a massive extension at the rear to accommodate the nursing home. There are obvious similarities in design between Tapton Grove and Tapton House, particularly the top lit staircase and the door treatment.

The dining room has some nice plasterwork and a fireplace. Important decisions must have been made over the years in this room. For example when R. G. Coke and the Mills sons joined to form Coke & Mills, the mining engineering company. There are also pictures of the two formal panelled bedrooms.

In 1928 the contents of the house were sold and the house put up for auction. However, no bid was received for the house and in 1930 it was bought privately by J. C. Shentall.

A photograph of the rugby football club 1927-8 shows John Charles Shentall member of another well- known Chesterfield Business family.

One of the other Shentall's, Captain Jack Shentall, is remembered because his daughter, Susan, became famous when she was plucked from obscurity to play the role of Juliet in the 1950's film of Romeo and Juliet.

In 1936 the Shentalls purchased Crewe Cottage as a wedding present for their daughter and extended it. They also built nearby Tapton Grange.

John Charles (Charlie to distinguish him from his father) became the secretary and director of Shentall Ltd. When he died in 1942 there were 50 grocery shops in Sheffield, Rotherham, Nottingham and Chesterfield. These shops were eventually bought by Allied Bakeries who in turn became Fine Fare. John had two brothers Sir Ernest Shentall and Arthur Shentall. They each formed their own successful business.

On 20 February 1943 Tapton Grove was sold by auction. The man known locally as "Pink-eye Sharp" wanted to buy it, knock it down and sell the ground. Alternatively he proposed to cut all the timber down, sell it and then sell the house. Fortunately the house was saved when it was bought by F S. Short the owner of Pearson's.

Theo Pearson 3rd had married a Violet Mary Short. Her brother, Frederick Stanton Short, a qualified solicitor, became Pearson's Company Secretary. F. S. Short was married to Bessie the youngest of John Charles Shentall's daughters.

The pair lived at Crew Cottage from 1936 when they married. The Shentalls had bought Crew Cottage as a wedding present for their daughter and son in law. The Shorts modernised Tapton Grove and often Pearson's builders used to do work there. A swimming pool was added in 1956.

In 1966 the Shorts decided to sell up. The auction catalogue shows the house with 139 acres of land. At this time F. S. Short had bought another house at North Aston. The property was withdrawn from sale after no bid was made at auction. The Shorts moved to the Isle of Man in 1973 and the business passed to his son. F. S. Short died in 1979 and his wife died in 1983

Pearsons went into receivership in 1982 and their son Stephen died in 1990. The family ashes are interred next to the family plot of John Charles and Alice Mary Shentall in Brimington Cemetery.

In 1976 the fine contents of the house were sold. The house was sold to a "Chesterfield business man". It was opened as a nursing home in 1984 and in 1990 a 57-bed extension was added. It is still open as a

residential home. This change ended its long association with the business community.

The former head gardener's cottage in 1910 was for many years the home of W. R. Bloxham and his wife Pheobe. The cottage is over the border in Tapton and is now known as "Swiss Cottage"

Pictures of Tapton Grove taken in the spring of 1910 show banks of daffodils. The grounds of the house used to be thrown open on what was known locally as "Daffodil Sunday" for fund raising events. Red Cross days were also held there in the 1960's. Current pictures of the fishpond in springtime show that the daffodils survive.

Unfortunately Tapton Grove has had its tragedies, as a number of people have drowned and suicides have occurred in the fish -ponds.

Various descriptions of Tapton Grove from 1878-2003 show how the house and grounds have changed over the years under the tenure of its owners.

Philip concluded his talk by saying that Georgian houses like Tapton Grove with its succession of landed gentry and Chesterfield business owners are in danger of being forgotten. It is a worthy survivor for future generations. The talk illustrates that the number of occupants is not unique but that they tell a unique story.

A vote of thanks was given by Mick Llewellynn..