



Repton Village History Group Newsletter

Spring 2025



<https://reptonvillage.org.uk/repton-village-history-group/>

Membership matters:

- Meetings are usually on the third Tuesdays of alternate months starting in January and with visits in the summer months. Meetings are at 7.00pm in the URC Schoolroom on Pinfold lane. However the March meeting is actually on April 15th and the speaker will be talking about the Stoneywell National Trust property.
- The group's AGM is on 20th May and it would be good to have a couple more volunteers to join the committee to keep things going. We are very grateful to Elaine and Chris who have been long standing committee members and even longer members of the group. Unfortunately they have had to stand down.
- Sadly, circumstances mean that Andy is now finding it difficult to find time to research items for these newsletters. Many items were the result of research for family history and other enquiries coming in via the website, but we no longer get these. Consequently, he is standing back but with much gratitude to those who have contributed - especially Charles - and hopes that someone will take it on in his stead.

The Village Green of Newton Solney

In the last issue Tim provided a reflection on Newton Solney's "village green" – the grassy triangle at the junction of Burton Road and Bretby Lane. He included a photograph of 4 lads meeting there and at the recent exhibition in the Repton School Gallery discovered that they were James Collier, Roland Taylor, John Taylor and George Astle.



Recipes and Reputations

An article from Shelagh Wain – you may remember Shelagh gave us an excellent talk on early eating arrangements and foods.

In the 21st century we are used to celebrities and minor royalty using their 'lifestyle' to create a positive image, but the link between recipes and reputation goes back much further.

In the mid-seventeenth century, when reputations rose and fell steeply during the Civil War and after, two very different cookery books were published. The first, published in 1656, is called *'The Queens's Closet Opened, the pearl of practice, accurate, physical and chirurgical receipts by the most experienced persons of the times, many whereof were held in esteem when she pleased to descend to private recreation.'* The frontispiece is an engraved portrait of Queen Henrietta Maria, by then the widow of Charles II. There follows 'The Epistle', signed by the compiler of the book, one 'W.M.', almost certainly her private secretary, Walter Montague. It is full of praise for its subject. The book is in two parts: the second is headed *'A queen's delight, or the art of preserving, conserving and candying; as also, a right knowledge of perfumes, and distilling the most excellent waters.'*

Henrietta Maria had always had a PR problem in England. Not only was she a Catholic herself, she was seen as having too much influence over her husband. The book's title deliberately echoes an earlier, scandalous publication: 'The King's Cabinet opened', which contained private letters between the monarch and his wife, showing her dominant role and active support of English and French Catholics. The 'Queen's Closet' is designed to show her as a dutiful wife, occupied in the care of her household.

The kitchens of the aristocracy were still the preserve of men in the seventeenth century, but the Lady of the house presided over the 'still-room'. There, with the help of her maids, she would distil cordials and 'waters', especially rosewater. She would also be involved in the preservation of fruits, flowers and herbs by drying, candying or preserving in syrups. Her final responsibility was the preparation of home remedies for common ailments. As the title suggests, all these duties were covered in the book, suggesting that the widowed Queen was a good 'English Hus-wife' (which was actually the title of a book published by Gervaise Markham in the early seventeenth century).

The book was very popular, and ran through many editions; the tone of the introductory 'Epistle' is even more adulatory in the Restoration years.

In sharp contrast is the second book, published in 1664 and now on display in the Crowell Museum in Huntingdon: *'The Court and Kitchen of Elizabeth, commonly called Joan Cromwell, the Wife of the Late Usurper'*. This book also has an extensive introduction, 22 pages long in modern type, but this time consisting of a series of propaganda essays against the regime during the Commonwealth, and the Cromwell's in particular. The title itself is revealing: 'Joan' was not a name used by Elizabeth Cromwell but it was commonly used to denote a prostitute. The tone of bitter mockery is maintained throughout. The writer admits that Cromwell never indulges in luxury or excess, but attributes this to 'the sordid frugality of his wife'.

The 102 recipes which follow seem to be genuine, and representative of dishes which might have been cooked in a middle-class household rather than a royal court. Elizabeth is presented as lowly person *'a hundred times fitter for a barn than a palace'*. The clear implication is that the Cromwell's were, as the title of the book suggests, usurpers, unfit to rule. There is also a hint of snobbery in the recipes themselves. One is for a dish of eels, which the Cromwell's, living in the Fenland area, would certainly have eaten. However, by this date the aristocracy did not. There is also a recipe for a Citron pudding, which is parsimonious with the orange flavouring - oranges cost 1 shilling each, which made them a luxury at a time when 1 shilling was almost the weekly spend per person on food and drink.

Queen Henrietta Maria was able to return to England after the Restoration, though she spent her final years in France, where she died in 1669. Elizabeth Cromwell was in a more difficult position. Though she was not imprisoned, she was publicly derided and accused of stealing royal property. She died in 1665, one year after the publication of the cookery book.

Censorship of the written word existed under both the Commonwealth and the Restoration. It is surprising, therefore, that *'The Queen's Closet'* was not banned, despite its reverence for the old order, whereas *'The Court and Kitchen'* is a naked work of propaganda. The former was very popular and ran into many editions right into the 1690's, long after the latter had been forgotten. Celebrity, it seems, beats virtue every time.

(The complete text of *'The Queen's Closet'* is available on the website of the University of Michigan. A copy of *'The Court and Kitchen'* can be bought online from the Cromwell Museum website).

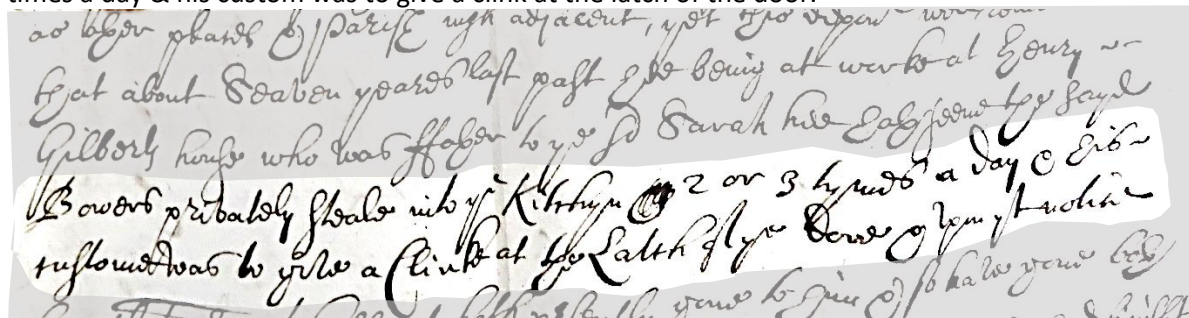
Scandal!! William Bower 1684...

An article from Charles's extensive research.

The following tale of sexual scandal comes from the records of the Lichfield Consistory Court, now held at Staffordshire History Centre. It centres on William Bowers, 2nd Usher at Repton School & Sarah Gilbert.

Sarah was born in February 1657, the daughter of Henry & Joan Gilbert, and never married. The Gilbert family had been in Repton since at least 1525 and Henry was a husbandman with arable strips in the open fields & common pastures and a homestead on what is now the High Street.

The Bower family were recent arrivals in Repton but were to make their mark in the 18th Century as the owners of an estate based on what is now Bower Hill including the Bulls Head Inn and properties on the High Street. William Bower became 2nd Usher at Repton School in 1667 and his sons with his wife Mary, Caldwell & William, were at Repton School from 1675. We don't know when William & Sarah's relationship started but it was clearly of longstanding by the time of the 1684 court case. William Cotton, a Repton tailor, stated in his deposition to the court that when he had been working at the Gilbert's house about 1677 'he had seen the said Bower privately steal into the kitchen two or three times a day & his custom was to give a clink at the latch of the door.'



as before phant of private with ad account, yet the owner was com-
at about seven years last past the being at work at Henry &
Gilberts house who was father to y^e said Sarah his daughter by y^e said
Bower privately stole into y^e kitchen 2 or 3 times a day & his
custom was to give a clink at the latch of y^e door of y^e kitchen

Henry Gilbert died in 1680 & Sarah continued to live with her mother Joan until the latter's death in August 1681 when she moved to Ticknall to live with her sister Ellen Beighton, wife of Joseph. By 1684 she was again pregnant & William moved her to the house of Abraham Smith, clerk, at Edlaston where a daughter was born. William then arranged for the wife of William Hood of Wyaston to nurse the child at 18d per week & it was at this time that proceedings at the ecclesiastical court commenced. The accusations against William & Sarah were contained in 15 Articles & a variety of witnesses or deponents were asked to give depositions as to their knowledge of the veracity of the Articles.

William & Sarah were reportedly seen together in other towns & villages and this from William Cotton, a Repton tailor, spotting the couple outside the Shire Hall in Derby, is a good example of this.

coming out of the Hall into the Hall Court this deponent and his wife did espy the arlate Bower & Sarah Gilbert with him whereupon this deponent's wife said to him look you where Bower & his woman are, & behold how he buys her apples & pears, cakes & other fruit knacks, but when this deponent & his wife

[coming out of the Hall into the Hall Court this deponent & his wife did espy the arlate Bower & Sarah Gilbert with him whereupon this deponent's wife said to him look you where Bower & his woman are, & behold how he buys her apples & pears, cakes & other fruit knacks]

The evidence on the number of children born of the relationship is unclear but there appear to have been at least two born in Repton. Sarah stayed at home as much as possible to conceal her pregnancies but, as the statement of John Newbold a baker neighbour indicates, her situation was common knowledge in the village.

within the hind chaire been delivered of several times, and is Arlate both before & after this deponent living the next door but one to his house in Repton and keeping a common Bakehouse & the said Sarah coming often thither with dough to be baked he hath observed her to be with child and hath heard of the women & townsfolk that have met her there take notice & talk of her being with child after she hath been gone and usually when it was grown so big that she could no longer hide it she would come through the fields and down this deponents backside with her dough before other people came and there would leave her dough and desire this deponent to mould it for her because she would not stay there till other neighbours came which accordingly this deponent hath done several times. And

[this deponent living the next door but one to his house in Repton & keeping a common bakehouse & the said Sarah coming often thither with dough to be baked he hath observed her to be with child and hath heard the rest of the women & townsfolk that have met her there take notice & talk of her being with child after she hath been gone and usually when it was grown so big that she could no longer hide it she would come through the fields and down this deponents backside with her dough before other people came and there would leave her dough and desire this deponent to mould it for her because she would not stay there till other neighbours came which accordingly this deponent hath done several times]

John Newbold also noted the presence of children's things in Sarah Gilbert's house.

And I the said deponent that he hath frequently seen the hedges about the chaire Sarah Gilbert's house hung with all sorts of children's Linens and observed in the house, a little chaire to peg a child in & gauds or baubles such as children play with and sometimes asked of the said Sarah whose they were and she commonly answered her sister Ellen -

[he hath frequently seen the hedges about the arlate Sarah Gilbert's house hung with all sorts of children's linens and observed in the house a little chair to peg a child in & gauds or baubles such as children play with & sometimes asked the said Sarah whose they were and she commonly answered her sister Ellen Beighton of Ticknall]

Sarah's explanation, claiming they belonged to a sister's child, did not convince the neighbours & village folk.

The court records say little about William's wife Mary but the following story related by Margaret Jackson of Repton in her deposition indicates that Mary was certainly not happy with the situation.

and begott her with one of the
 saw that the arlate Bowers wife told this deponent that once she
 watched her husband and the arlate Sarah Gilbert ~~go~~ out of the
 town together and forecasted to meet them as they were riding riding
 both upon one horse and took hold of the arlate Sarah's clothes and
 pulled her down from behind her husband the arlate William Bower and
 found that she the said Sarah had gotten the said Bower's fiddle in her
 coat, and the said Sarah running home Mrs Bowers told this deponent
 she pursued her and knocked at the door the said Sarah Gilbert's mother
 gave her the fiddle home with her
 Repetit Coram
 Signed
 Margaret Jackson

[save that the arlate Bower's wife told this deponent that once she watched her husband and the arlate Sarah Gilbert out of the town together and forecasted to meet them as they were riding both upon one horse and took hold of the arlate's Sarah's clothes and pulled her down from behind her husband the arlate William Bower and found that she the said Sarah had gotten the said Bower's fiddle in her coat, and the said Sarah running home Mrs Bowers told this deponent she pursued her and knocked at the door the said Sarah Gilbert's mother gave her the fiddle home with her]

Despite the 1684 court case & local scandal William both remained married to Mary until his death in 1702 and appears to have maintained his relationship with Sarah until her death in 1694. She died intestate and the administration was granted to William. William also appears to have maintained his position of 2nd Usher at Repton School until at least 1687 although the School at this time was in fairly desperate straits: in 1681 there were less than 30 pupils & he was the only active teacher.

[We know that William Bower was 2nd Usher in 1687 because that was the year that Thomas Walker, clearing hillocks in what is now the vicarage garden, unearthed the sarcophagus containing a 9ft giant in the Viking burial mound. Forty years later, Dr Degge recorded the event* and that "the head of the great skeleton was given to Mr Bowyer, master of the Free School". In fact Bowyer (Bower) was 2nd Usher and not Master. Actually, his son (also William) took over as 2nd Usher in that year so it could have been given to either of them.]

* From The Topographer 1790 Vol 111

Fire! Fire!.....

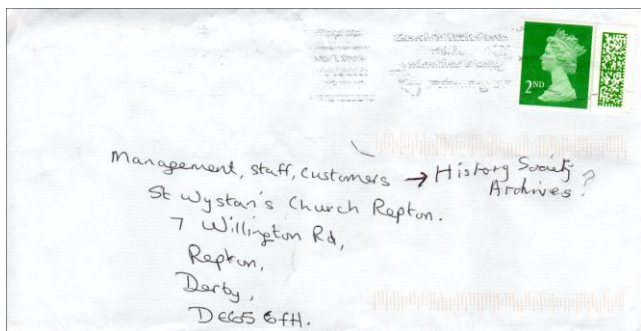
In the days when heating was by fires and lighting by candles and oil lamps, and roofs were more often of straw and when wood was the main structural material, fire was an ever present threat. In the article in the last newsletter on the area around Church End, the fire in 1895 at the Mugliston's house (now the Red House) was noted – probably ignited by a spark from a passing traction engine. Repton's brand new Fire Engine attended – and the hoses were long enough to reach the Old Trent for a water supply. It was it's first outing.

Another significant fire 5 years later, broke out at the other end of the village at The Hayes a large Harpur-Crewe house on Knight's Lane (across the road from the lake – "Crewe's Pond"). Mrs Bell was the resident and locally, Knights lane was known as Bell's Lane. The house had two wings and the upper story of one of them housed the servant's quarters. It was here on the servants staircase that, around midnight, the fire started. Mrs Bell's son urgently saddled a horse and, in 14 minutes, had galloped to Burton to raise the alarm. The three Burton brigades turned out and were joined by the Repton Brigade. One room was burned out and the roof destroyed. It was claimed that had the Repton Brigade arrived more promptly, much of the damage would have been prevented. It seems the Repton men had trouble finding the horses to pull their appliance and had hauled it most of the way themselves.



A curious letter.

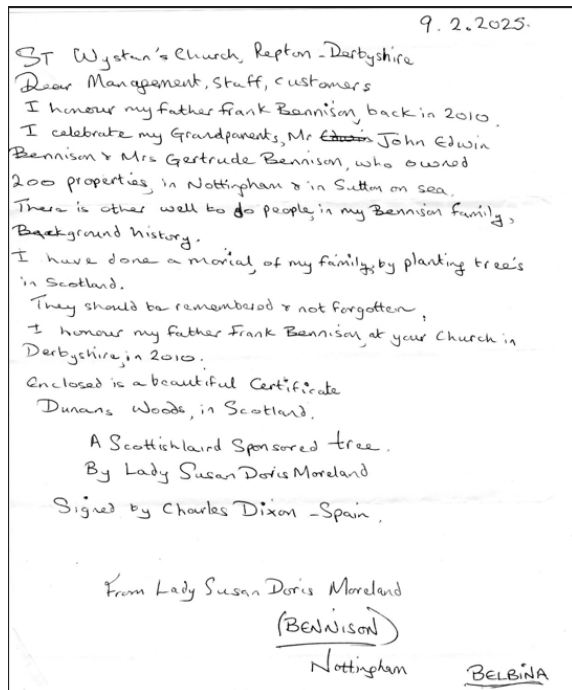
A curious letter arrived recently at the Vicarage addressed to Management, Staff, Customers and was passed over for the archive.



A curious beginning

Sadly, the post mark is illegible.

The enclosed letter is even more curious:



St Wystan's Church, Repton Derbyshire

Dear management, staff, customers

I honour my father Frank Bennison back in 2010

I celebrate my grandparents Mr John Edwin Bennison & Mrs Gertrude Bennison, who owned 200 properties in Nottingham & in Sutton on Sea.

There is other well to do people in my Bennison family.

Background History

I have done a morial of my family by planting trees in Scotland.

They should be remembered and not forgotten

I honour my Father Frank Bennison at your church in Derbyshire in 2010

Enclosed is a beautiful certificate

Dunans Woods in Scotland

A Scottishlaird Sponsored tree

By Lady Susan Doris Moreland

Signed by Charles Dixon – Spain

From Lady Susan Doris Moreland

(Bennison)

Nottingham

BELBINA

There is no trace of a Lord Moreland or a credible Sir Moreland and with no dates or ages, it is difficult to find her in any records.

There is a tribute (Lymn & Co) from Susan Doris Moreland to an Irene (Peggy) Bennison who died aged 85 in March 2016 and was cremated in Nottingham:

“Memories of auntie peggy, I remember the good times, I remember her visits to sutton-on-sea, the place I was bought up as Susan Doris Bennison, I am auntie peggy youngest niece, we celebrate special time at the seaside, looking out to sea near the beach bar, she says the scenery was very beautiful, we went to my oldest sister Clare Towler wedding at a church in Sutton-on-sea, the reception was at the eagle hotel in mablethorpe, father and mother loved seeing auntie peggy, she always talked about the beautiful holidays abroad she went on, she lived for thoses beautiful holidays with my uncle norman Bennison. I send her special gifts for christmas every year since I was a child, gifts to my auntie , anytime.”

From this and her letter we can make a start on a family tree and add a little from on-line sources

John Edwin Bennison = Gertrude Musson

b 1886

1908

b 1887

d 1963

George John Frank = ?? Norman = Irene (Peggy)
d 2010? b 1931 d 2016

Clare=? Towler Susan Doris= Moreland
(perhaps)

- It is likely that Frank had a twin brother Harold.
- There is no record of Frank or his ashes being buried in at St Wystans nor the Monsom Lane cemetery.
- After the 1939 register there is little trace of the family.

It is unlikely that there is any Repton connection.

The envelope included a photocopy of a tree planting certificate in the name of Lady Susan Doris Moreland near Dunans Castle in Scotland (W3W: wager.diets.panel).

The display in the Art gallery.

In earlier days of the History group we had regular Archive meetings with displays of photographs and other memorabilia and a couple of really big displays – taking over the Village Hall for example for a weekend. There has been an ambition to do something similar since, but the effort is considerable. So the idea of a smaller exhibition in the School Art Gallery at the Cross worked really well. Visible to an extent through the windows and with a couple of open days, it was really well attended and much appreciated – particularly by those originating in the village or who had lived here for a long time. There were visitors from quite a distance who had come just for the exhibition and revisited places long remembered. Michael Brown (Brown's Farm and The Shakespeare pub) came back after the event for a lengthy chat in the Mapletree.

Fortunately, photographs used in earlier displays had been stored as sets and can be re-displayed fairly easily but much credit must go to Tim and Russell for putting the display together so well.

We are very grateful for the use of the gallery and for help from Repton School Staff – and pleased that Paul Stevens created a school display in one window.

Via Devana, Roman Forts and geophysics....

An update on the surveys reported in the 2022 summer and autumn newsletters.

On two occasions in late spring 2022, members of the history group visited the River Trent between Branston and the Trucklesholme reserve near Walton on Trent. The route of the Roman Road that ran from Colchester to Chester (named Via Devana by the antiquarians) is well established in Derbyshire but less so in Staffordshire. Landscape features provided a good clue that the road probably crossed the Trent at this point. So we carried out both grid and section surveys. Quarrying of gravel and infill with power station ash had taken place and our results suggested that it came much closer to the line of the road than thought. However one pseudo-section, close to the river bank, did show features that would be expected of a road.

Then, Dr Mark Knight was shown an aerial photo of the field just across the river showing vague rectangular crop marks. Field walking had revealed grey ware potsherds - potentially Roman. So in the autumn of 2022 a grid survey was carried out and low resistance features were found that aligned with the area of crop marks and extended the feature into the neighbouring field. Pseudo-sections were not successful – possibly due to ground currents from the nearby pylon.

The land was in the process of being sold and the new owner sought planning permission for a massive electrical battery connected to the grid. So, based on the survey results and the aerial photo, a team of commercial archaeologists opened up a number of exploratory trenches and have confirmed beyond any reasonable doubt that it is a Roman Camp. We wonder if it might have been associated with the construction of the crossing.

Comments and more information about Repton and its occupants are always welcomed.
For more information on the newsletter content or the History Group please contact us on

tjnorman4@yahoo.co.uk or visit our website:

<https://reptonvillage.org.uk/repton-village-history-group>