

Founder's Day Special



Sarah, Duchess of Somerset

1631-1692

THE COLLEGE



BULLETIN

October 2012

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FOUNDER'S DAY SPECIAL

This issue of the College Newsletter is to commemorate our Benefactress, Sarah, Duchess of Somerset, who lived in the 17th century. We hope that as many residents as possible will join the congregation when we remember the Duchess on Founder's Day, this year Sunday 21st October, at 3pm in the Chapel. The service will be followed by tea in the College Boardroom. All welcome. We owe it to the Duchess to give thanks for her generous gift to women down through the ages – for having made it possible that we may live in this glorious setting amongst friends and supported in our older age by the care of Trustees, headed by the present Duke of Somerset and, on the executive committee, Mrs Anne Oliver. By our Steward, Mrs Jennifer Parker; Chaplains, Revd. John and Revd. Sandy Railton; Warden Mrs Emma Holborow and Emma's husband David (Ginge to us all).

This special newsletter comes from an idea by Raine Cully, Raine thought it would be nice if, around the date of Founder's Day, residents could be given the opportunity to write about their own cottages and how they find life here at The College.

Many, many thanks to those residents who have taken part in this project.

THE COLLEGE

The Duchess of Somerset's Hospital has been standing at Froxfield since just before the start of the 18th century. The first widows moved here in 1695.

It was three quarters of a century later, that funds allowed for a further 20 cottages to be built. On the 14th June 1773 those widows living at numbers 9 to 16, were ordered to move into the new buildings, making way for further redevelopment on the east side.

If you walk to the car park and look at the backs of cottages 30 and 31, you will see quite plainly the difference in colour of the bricks. Numbers 1 to 30 are in a light shade and from numbers 31 to 50 the bricks are a dark red.

The building has been popularly known as 'The College' since 1728, where the name appeared for the first time in the Church Register with regard to the burial of a widow, replacing the old word 'Hospital' which was becoming linked with medical hospitals.

Here's an interesting piece of history: After the English Civil War the Tudor Manor, Wolfhall, was demolished. Owned by the Seymour family and where Henry VIII visited Lady Jane Seymour, the greater part of that manor was used to re-build Tottenham House at Great Bedwyn. It is known that some of the Wolfhall bricks were brought over to Froxfield to be used in the building of The College.

Film Star Visit

Miss Celia Johnson, who starred in the famous film, 'Brief Encounter' with Trevor Howard, visited The College in the mid-1970s. Incidentally, resident Susan Lytton's late husband was a stand-in for Trevor Howard. Susan lives at No. 22.

One Wedding and A Christening

We don't know exactly when, but at one time the daughter of Mrs Barbara Aird (then at No. 34), held her wedding reception here. In September 2008 Pat Baverstock, No. 36, saw her new grandchild christened in The College Chapel.

Link with Marlborough College

During the last decade of the 20th C, boys and girls from Marlborough College came to assist the ladies with light gardening and to play table games, cards, scrabble. They also read to partially-sighted residents.

FROM THE MINUTE BOOKS

1769

Ordered that the garden wall of the Hospital towards the East side near the WOOD YARD be raised and the ground on the outside lowered. The widows severally informed that if any of them shall be instrumental towards injuring or destroying the said wall for the future, the offender/s will be punished for the same.

1785

It was decided that pots may be put on the tops of chimneys of such of the poor widows' houses as are smoky, at the direction of the Steward. The expense thereof being in the whole not more than six shillings a tenement.

1937 – Electricity Installed

It was reported that the electric light installation was completed. Switched on, 7th May, 1937. A number of letters of thanks and appreciation received from the residents.

July 1937

Report received from Messrs J. Woolbridge & Son, stating almost the whole of the guttering around the Hospital requires attention. They recommend Asbestos guttering, which never rots. Ordered that the doors, window frames and pediments be painted by James Pickett at the Estimate given by him amounting to £5.13s.3d.

1938

An application from Mrs Spicer to have an electric iron was considered, but the Trustees decided electric irons be not permitted at the Hospital.

THE DUCHESS

Our Benefactress, Sarah, Duchess Dowager of Somerset, was born in 1631, the younger daughter of Edward Alston, a wealthy physician, who rose to become President of The College of Physicians in 1655 – and later knighted.

Sarah seems to have spent a happy childhood with her sister, Mary, but the family nevertheless lived through one of the most turbulent centuries in history – including the English Civil War, the Plague and the Great Fire of London.

Sarah was to marry three times. She knew tragedy through her first marriage to George Grimston, son of The Keeper of the Rolls. George and Sarah had two children who both died in infancy. George himself died when the Plague came to London in 1665, leaving her a widow at the age of 34.

After four years of widowhood, Sarah became engaged to Henry Hare, later Lord Coleraine. However, her family persuaded Sarah to break the engagement and become Lord John Seymour's bride instead. Lord John was the younger brother of the Duke of Somerset. On her wedding day Sarah's father gave her ten thousand pounds, making her a wealthy woman in her own right. Lord John became Duke of Somerset in 1671 on the death of his brother. The Duke, himself, died four years later. Sarah immediately applied for, and was finally granted, a Royal Warrant to retain her title for all time, whether or not she married again.

In fact Sarah did marry, for the third and last time, Lord Coleraine, in 1680. During this last marriage, with the encouragement of her husband, Sarah displayed great generosity. She was persuaded by Lord Coleraine, a Governor of Tottenham Grammar School in Middlesex to remember the school in her Will, which she did. She also endowed, St John's College, Cambridge (in memory of her father who was educated there) and others, including the Green Coat Hospital, Westminster; the Poor of St Margaret's, Westminster; Brasenose College, Oxford and the Broadtown Charity. Sarah was generous to innumerable charities and people during her lifetime and revered by many.

THE TRUSTEES

In her Will, the Duchess charged Lord Delamere, Sir Samuel Grimston and Sir William Gregory with building the Hospital. However, before it came into being, Lord Delamere had died and Sir Samuel Grimston, Sarah's ex-brother-in-law from her first marriage, had refused the duties of Trustee. This left only Sir William Gregory to carry out her wishes – which he did, but later died.

After his death the Master of the Rolls decided nine Trustees were needed. Those appointed were:

Alexander Popham of Littlecote
Edward Seymour of Easton
Francis Stonehouse of Great Bedwyn
Francis Goddard of Standen
Lovelace Bigg of Chilton
Samuel Whitebrook of Chilton Lodge
Thomas Fettiplace of Fernham
John Hippisley of Lambourn
John Blandy of Inglewood.

Later, the Master of the Rolls ruled the Hospital should have 12 Trustees, which ruling has survived to today. Our Trustees in 2012 are:

His Grace The Duke of Somerset
Mrs Ginny Ayers
The Hon. Spencer Canning
Mr Christopher Cooke
Mrs Mary DuCroz
Mrs Henrietta Geary
Mr Martin Gibson
Mrs Judith Hiller, MBE
Ms Alexandra Jackson-Kay
Mr Richard Nocton
Mrs Anne Oliver
Mrs Anna Pearson-Gregory

LORD LONG

When Viscount Long of Wraxhall joined the Trustees in the first quarter of the 20th century, he proved to be a kind man who with the support of his fellow Trustees, did much for the comfort of the residents. Lord Long's concern for the widows can be seen by the following excerpt from a letter he sent to Mr Gwillim, Solicitor to the Trustees:

"I ascertained today beyond doubt, that the extreme quiet, even dullness of the place, preys upon the spirits of the old ladies and the cost of transport by taxi renders it impossible for them to indulge in them, except on very rare occasions. I would be glad if you would communicate with some of the proprietors of garages in Marlborough, Devizes, Hungerford, etc., and find out what they would charge to supply a charabanc two or three days a week to take the old ladies on excursions."

He obtained an architect's report, which recommended opening up the windows at the back of some of the cottages and erecting a verandah with glass in the roof opposite every window. Unfortunately for us, living here in the 21st century, the idea of verandahs was turned down. These days, as a listed building, there is no chance at all that the College will ever have the benefit of verandahs.

The next move was to install baths with the agreement of all but one Trustee, Mr Farmer, who said he had heard it stated definitely that many of the old ladies would be too infirm to take these baths, or unwilling to do so.

Mr Farmer had his way, because Lord Long died in 1924 so the scheme was put on the back burner for many years. It was not until the 1970s that bathrooms were installed in every cottage.

MORE FROM THE MINUTES

1732

It is ordered that our Steward, Mr Franklin, do as soon as can be, admonish the widows belonging to the said Hospital to remove their children and all inmates from the same.

1748

The Trustees obtained a Ruling in Chancery that inmates of the Hospital could take 13 weeks' leave each year – a rule still in place today.

June 1782

Agreed that the Steward shall order Dinner for all the Trustees when the meetings are at the Castle Inn, Marlborough; and each Trustee is to pay four shillings for his Ordinary, though Absent.

The Trustees were generous when it came to paying for nurses to look after the very elderly and infirm. Some widows had nurses living with them.

1827

It is ordered that the Steward allow nurses at a shilling a week to three widows.

1938

The Steward was authorized to give permission for visitors to stay with residents for periods up to a fortnight.

1942

The Duke of Somerset, having been absent from Trustees' meetings for two years in consequence of his being on Military Service, therefore his seat became vacant. Unanimously re-elected.

1942

The Trustees granted permission for Mrs Smith to have her granddaughter, aged 9, to reside with her during the absence of the child's Mother on War Work.

LIST OF RECEIVERS (STEWARDS)

1 st	William Bailey	In	.....	1695
2 nd	Alexander Thistlthwaite		.....	1698
3 rd	Joseph Wall		.....	?
4 th	_____	Keilwaie	.....	1714
5 th	Joseph Walker		.....	1722
6 th	Thomas Franklyn		.....	1726
7 th	Charles Young		.....	1744
8 th	Samuel Martin		.....	1767
9 th	Samuel Hawkes		.....	1775
10 th	John Ward		.....	1785
11 th	Norman Merriman		.....	1829
12 th	Thos. B Merriman		.....	1840
13 th	Wm. C Merriman		.....	1867
14 th	Edwd. B Merriman		.....	1876
15 th	Edward Llewellyn Guillim		.....	1906
16 th	Nathaniel Sprawson		.....	1925
17 th	Henry D'izley Wolvey Astley		.....	1926
18 th	F K R Long		.....	1933
19 th	W H Neate (Acting)		.....	1939
20 th	F K R Long		.....	1940
			Resigned	3.3.41
21 st	J H Lawrence		March	1941
22 nd	L R Lawrence		.....	1946
23 rd	F K R Long		.....	1946
24 th	H White		.....	1960
25 th	A T Mortlock		.....	1969
26 th	A T Rix		.....	1982
27 th	A F Mason		.....	1990
28 th	R T Rowland		.....	1994
29 th	Mrs J Parker		.....	2000

The First Steward, or Receiver, William Bailey, Gentleman, was appointed in 1695 when the Hospital opened. He was employed to be the Trustees' 'Steward of all manors and Receiver of all rents, revenues and estates to the Hospital'. In some cases, the post was handed down from Father to Son. It was kept in the Merriman family for four generations.

FIRST FEMALE STEWARD

There were to be 27 more Stewards over 305 years before a female was appointed to the post. Mrs Jennifer Parker came to the College in the year 2000. Let us hope that now it's been proved a woman can do the job, more women Stewards will follow when Jennifer retires. She is a familiar figure around the College, especially on Mondays and Thursdays when residents can consult her about any particular concerns, or suggestions.

Jennifer writes: 'The definition of Steward in the dictionary is: A person employed to manage an estate or large house, passenger attendant or waitress on a ship, plane or train, or an official at a race meeting sometimes leading to a Stewards' Enquiry. I feel that I may fit all of these categories, and happy to do so but 'I cannot please all of the people all of the time.'

I became Steward for the Duchess of Somerset's Hospital at Froxfield in October 2000 and have enjoyed every minute....well nearly every minute. The job is extremely varied, dealing with the fabric of the building and the financial welfare of the residents, plus another million things.

I am at all times answerable to The Trustees and their decision is binding. Sometimes the decisions I make are not 'music' to some ears, but the College has to be run on economic terms and monies spent should be for the benefit of all.

Looking back through the archives the job still carries some of the original requirements, though I am pleased to say that I have never had to ask a resident and her children to 'move on' or ask someone to leave because they are living off 'ill-gotten gains'.

The Weekly Maintenance Charge is now paid by Standing Order, though when I started 12 years ago several of the residents had a 'rent book' and paid weekly in cash. I went home on Thursdays fully laden with cash in my bag!!! How times have changed.'

1732

It is ordered that our Steward, Mr Franklin, do forthwith order the Widow Dismore and the Widow Pridey to reside constantly at their respective habitations and to constantly attend at prayers.

1940

Mr Neate is appointed as Acting Steward in the absence of Mr F K R Long who is on Military Service.

ARE YOU IN A CLERGY COTTAGE OR A LAY COTTAGE?

Cottages were allocated to the widows as follows:

25 widows must come from Wiltshire, Somerset or Berkshire – 10 to be Clergy widows; 10 to be widows of men who had worked on her manors in Wiltshire, and five widows should be living in or near the cities of London and Westminster.

If you live in the following cottages you would have been the **widows of clergymen**, and would have arrived here from:

The Three Counties (Wiltshire, Berkshire, Somerset).

Numbers 1 3 4 5 8 9 10 11 12 and 19

The Cities of London and Westminster:

Numbers 2 6 7 15 and 17

From any County within 150 miles of London (except the above three counties:

Numbers 13 14 16 18 20

If you live in one of the following cottages, you would have been a Lay widow from:

The Manors (i.e. Froxfield, Fyfield, Huish, Milton, Shaw)

Numbers 30 32 34 35 36 37 39 40 41 44

The Three Counties: Wiltshire, Berkshire, Somerset:

Numbers 31 33 42 43 45 48

The Cities of London & Westminster:

Numbers 25 27 29 38 47

From Any County within 150 miles of London – except the three Counties:

Numbers 21 22 23 24 26 28 46 49 50

If you were in a clergy cottage you tended to receive slightly better concessions than if you were not. For example clergy widows were allowed to bring a companion, which is why some cottages are built side-by-side.

THE WIDOWS

Widows qualified for residence at the Hospital if their inheritance was worth less than £20 a year. From 1716 they were given an annual allowance of £6 a year and also received a cloth gown at Christmas, costing no more than £1.6.8d.

By 1908 the allowance had risen to £38 a year They benefited too with an allowance of wood from the coppice in Brewhouse Hill – Almshouse Copse – but in 1779 the coppice was leased. The widows were compensated with a rise in their allowance.

Two thirds of the widows employed women from the village to fetch their water, wood and coal. It may be because wood, or cash, was provided for heating the cottages all those years ago, that the Trustees are still responsible for our heating and hot water in the 21st century.

After the last 20 widows arrived in 1773, it was decided to give them money in lieu of the gowns – pensions increased to £10.10s. The granting of pensions continued into the late 1950s, when under a new scheme, residents could be charged. By 1986 residents were paying £21 a week towards helping maintain and improve the Hospital.

Minutes January 1943

No. 19. Mrs Gertrude Morgan, Clergy House. Allowance £42 p.a. Mrs Chandler's allowance reduced to £39 because she is now entitled to Old Age Pension.

Matron

In 1729 the Trustees nominated one of the widows as Matron, to report on the behaviour of the other widows, carry a white wand and receive £1 a year. The woman must have been highly popular with everyone! This situation lasted for about 50 years.

Widow Gibbs

Although residents are expected to live in harmony with each other, this has not always been the case. Take Widow Gibbs from Cottage 37 for instance: In November 1727, Grace Gibbs, who had already received a verbal warning from the Trustees, continued to 'live incontinently and was guilty of other disorders for which we gave our Steward a verbal order to suspend her pay 'till our next meeting and now, having received further information of her incontinence and disorderly way of living we order that she be forthwith expelled and turned out of her house in the said Hospital'. Some time later Widow Gibbs was finally re-admitted to the Hospital and apparently lived happily ever after, despite having her windows permanently barred up.

THE PORTER

The Porter lived in one of the houses, possibly No. 9, until circa 1850, when a house was built for him on the other side of the road opposite the gatehouse. Later, a bungalow was built for him in the College grounds. The house was sold.

21st October 1818

It was agreed to advance the porter's salary to £10.11s.

9th August 1820

The Trustees considered the applications and letters in favour of two persons applying to be employed as Carpenter. They preferred John Ackman, the porter, to do the carpenter's work at the Hospital.

4th July 1938

Appointment of Mr E V Hatter as Porter at a salary of £2 per week, plus the usual Chapel allowance.

The Warden

In the late 20th century, the porter's title was changed to that of Warden. This may have been when the first female porter was appointed. Our popular warden today, **Emma** and her husband 'Ginge', live with their two sons in the bungalow.

Emma writes: I came to The College in October 2010, and on my first day at work met both the Duke and Duchess of Somerset. It was the day of the annual Trustees' meeting, which the Duke always attends. Found myself in the Chapel taking tea and cake with residents and the Duchess. What a great start to my new career as Warden of The Duchess of Somerset's Hospital.

My life in the years before arriving here seems to have been spent preparing for this job. After growing up in Flint, North Wales, I attended College in Kent to train as a chef, then moved to Devon to be with my parents. I saw an advertisement in The Lady magazine for a chef at the Royal Oak in Wootton Rivers and applied. It was when working at the Royal Oak that I met my husband, David – universally known as 'Ginge'.

While our two boys, Jake and Nathan, were small I worked nights in a care home at Marlborough. Later I changed to a day job at Marlborough Lodge Nursing Home, which I enjoyed and where I made fantastic friends and gained my NVQ certificates. In the meantime Ginge, employed two days a week for the past nine years

as gardener at The College, was told by the then warden, Anne, she had decided to retire. I applied for the position – and was accepted. Although at first I missed the old life, everyone here helped to make my job so much easier. I am sure previous wardens had a tougher life than I – if only having to wind the College clock, which is now electric, every day! The way I look at it is as if we all live in the same street and are good friends and neighbours.

THE CHAPLAINS

It was Willed that the role of Chaplain to the Hospital was to be a duty for the Rector of Huish.

The Curate was to have a salary of £10 per annum for reading prayers daily with the widows and preaching to them every Sunday and visiting the sick. When the income of the Hospital reached £300 per year or more, the Chaplain was to be paid £30 half-yearly.

About 1726, one Chaplain of the College was playing whist with three widows and, intent on their game, overlooked the closing hour for the gates. Finding himself locked in, he tried to get out through the window, but being plump, he stuck.

The incumbent of Huish, Revd. Charles Mayo, continued to serve the College, until his successor, the Revd. William Bleek, decided to make changes via a proxy, the Vicar of Froxfield.

During the Civil War Marlborough was a Parliamentary stronghold and this area saw great activity; the church plate of Wilton was looted. One of the Huish bells disappeared and, although the font at Huish survived, the miniature in the font was identified as a font lining. In 1812 the Rural Dean recorded that he ‘saw the ancient large carved font, in Marlborough at the back door of Mr John Ward, Steward to the Foxfield Trustees, serving as a cistern’. The loss of the font was serious since it is often the oldest thing in a church. The Huish font, apart from its intrinsic interest would have offered evidence of the Church’s age and may even have thrown light on the tradition of a previous Saxon structure. Efforts to trace it have been without result.

Although the Chaplaincy has been clearly understood as not being an appanage of the Froxfield living, which is an appointment of the Church Patronage Society, It remains a distinct appointment by the College Trustees.

In 1785 The Vicar of Froxfield, the Reverend Ludovic Evans, the 'Astronomer Parson' and a Member of the Royal Scientific Society, erected a sundial on the wall of No. 25. The sundial is described as 'being of beautiful workmanship and with exact Meridian figures and exact position on the Map of the Universe. Inscribed upon it is a motto in Greek 'What is Man?'

The history of the College shows that the Chaplain was an important personage to the residents. He was involved, not only in caring for our souls, but also in disciplining where necessary. The dreaded Matron always included the Chaplain in her reports on our activities.

Since the year 2000, we have seen both a female Steward and a female Chaplain – The Revd. Sandy Railton, who tends to our religious needs with her husband, The Revd. John Railton. Women in such positions were unimagined in the 17th century.

Many changes have taken place at the College over the past 25 years or so, not least the relaxing of rules on church attendance. No longer must we attend Chapel once every day and twice on Sundays.

One rule still endures: **'That each Widow behaves respectfully to the Trustees, The Chaplain, Steward and to each other'**. For 49 women trying to live together in peace and harmony, we do very well. But it is not such a tall order, is it – considering our comfortable little homes and so many caring people around us?

**PRAYER FOR THE DUCHESS OF
SOMERSET'S HOSPITAL**

Pour into the hearts of thy servants
O most merciful Saviour,
such loving kindness towards one another
that all our enmities and discord cease
Grant that we may truly live to serve Thee
as our benefactress SARAH would have desired.

In the name of Him who died for us.

Jesus Christ Our Lord.

Amen.