

Ranmoor Society News

January 2013

Subscriptions Now Due!

Subscriptions for 2013 are unchanged from last year. They are now due, and you will find a subscription form attached to this newsletter. Please note that our Membership Secretary has changed. Carolyn Feely is standing down after five years, for which we thank her warmly. Peter Marrison is to take over, and it is to him that you should return the forms and your cheques.

If you are happy to let us have your email address, please take care in printing this on the form. As you know, it is very easy to make mistakes in transcribing them onto a database. We will only make use of addresses occasionally, but they will enable us to communicate last-minute information to you between newsletters. We will never pass this detail on to any other party.

A Local Treasure

Ranmoor Society member, Drummond Gillespie, has drawn our attention to the existence of a local treasure hidden away in Nether Green. Hallam Methodist Church possesses an organ which people from across the country come to see and on which many leading recitalists have played.

It was built by "Father" Henry Willis, who had already in 1855 built the ground-breaking St. George's Hall organ in Liverpool. He was to go on to build many of the finest organs in the country, including Canterbury, St Paul's and Durham cathedrals and that in the Royal Albert Hall. He also built large organs in private residences including Windsor Castle and Blenheim Palace.

Sadly very few Father Willis organs have survived, since most were built for churches and clients who could afford to "improve" them according to changes of taste. Some of these alterations were justified, but all too often organs suffered unsympathetic tonal changes. The Cathedral organ in Truro is the only one to remain tonally unscathed. The organ at Nether Green is the earliest sizable Father Willis organ in the country to remain as Willis left it - including the key and stop action - and has been awarded the rare distinction of a Grade 1 Historic Organ Certificate by the British Institute of Organ Studies.

The organ was first installed in the Methodist New Connexion Chapel at the top of Westbourne Road, which opened in 1863. It was a gift from

Mark Firth a strong supporter of New Connexion Methodism. Although the church was bombed in 1942, most fortunately the organ survived. It was then that the congregation merged with the congregation at Nether Green.

When it became clear that the organ was likely to be destroyed, Henry Willis III, grandson of the builder, was so concerned about his grandfather's organ that he offered to either buy it for a very generous figure or move it, without alteration, for a very low figure. It was decided to accept his offer to transfer the organ to Nether Green, even though this meant removing the existing organ and choir stalls to make room for it.

No organ could be more appreciated by its congregation than the Hallam Organ. Apart from its tone, one of the organ's endearing features is its modesty and lack of display. Few people realise that the organ is considerably deeper than its width, or appreciate that hidden away are pipes taller than a double-deck bus whilst some are only one inch tall. On a rough calculation it possesses at least 1,800 pipes – about a fifth of the 10,000 or so of the Royal Albert Hall and Liverpool Cathedral, the largest organs in the country.

Recent recitalists have included Francis Jackson of York Minster and Simon Lindley, conductor of the Sheffield Bach Choir. Coincidentally Simon has recently discovered that his grandparents went down the aisle to the 'Hallam Organ' when they were married during the First World War.

The organ celebrates its 150th anniversary in 2013 – an important part of our heritage.

AGM January 15th 2013 7.30pm

Thank you for supporting the Ranmoor Society during 2012. We were again heartened to see that all our meetings were well attended.

The 2013 programme starts, as usual, with the Annual General Meeting which our constitution obliges us to hold. We try to ensure that the official business is brisk and short, but we would like to hear from as many of you as possible on how we may change and improve things in the future. We hope that you will be able to come, perhaps contribute, and take a glass of wine or non-alcoholic drink with us. Reg Hobson will then give us a short talk on:

Hathersage and the Bronte Connection

We look forward to seeing you there.

Postscript to Death in Newquay

Remembered a Century On

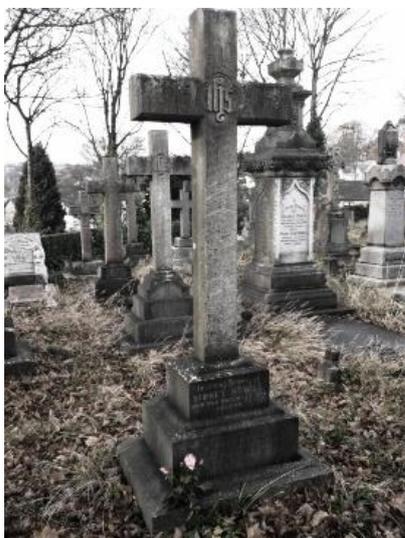
In our Newsletter of May 2011 we ran the story of Marian Nowill's mysterious death in November 1912, which had made both the national and international papers of the time. She and her husband Sidney lived in Sandygate House, 94 Ivy Park Road.

In November she was staying in a Newquay hotel, with her mother, when she disappeared after failing to return from a cliff walk with a male friend of some years who was staying at the same hotel. The papers took a prurient interest in the story when it later transpired that, after an apparent argument on the cliffs, the male friend, a retired Singapore solicitor, had committed suicide. Later still, it emerged that he had left her a large sum of money. The story generated further interest when Marian's body was found at the bottom of a cliff nine days later. She was buried in Fulwood Church.

The truth of her death was never publicly established. Her husband maintained that nothing "of an improper nature" had taken place and refused to accept the male friend's legacy.

A Centenary Postscript

One hundred years later, the lady now living in Marian's previous home in Ashbourne learned of her story via our newsletter, and contacted the Ranmoor Society with a view to commemorating the unhappy death. We helped her to find Marian's grave in Fulwood churchyard, where she was able to place some flowers from her and Marian's Ashbourne garden as a poignant memorial to a sad sequence of events.



Ranmoor Parish Hall

The Victorian parishioners who gave their money to finance the Parish Room in the 1880s would be disappointed to learn of its predicament today. Offered for auction this November, at a guide price of £300,000, there were no takers.

They might have been amused to notice that local newspapers have recently confused their Parish Hall with the current Parish Centre. The latter had previously been known as *West Lea*, when it was the home of John Bingham, senior director of the renowned cutlery firm Walker & Hall, the man who donated an area of land he owned in Ecclesall that we know as Bingham Park. After Sir John died in 1923, *West Lea* was presented by his son to the Anglican Commissioners and it served as St John's vicarage until the late 1970s.

The idea of the Parish Hall, at the bottom of Ranmoor Road, ever being "*the family home of one of Sheffield's most illustrious industrialists and benefactors*", as the *Sheffield Telegraph* article had it, would have struck them, as us, as ridiculous!

However, in the intervening years this rather unassuming building has served the local community steadfastly and well. After the relatively new St John's Church burnt down on New Year's Day 1887, it was ready to accommodate the services for 18 months until the new larger church was opened in September 1888. Then during the First World War it was converted to classrooms for the Ranmoor Council School when that temporarily became a military hospital. It was, at times, home of Ranmoor's Mutual Improvement Society, of the Men's Club (there was a snooker table in the cellar), and a venue for generations of cub and brownie packs. Many of us will also remember its transformation to polling station where we would regularly cast our democratic vote. Latterly a dance and children's play centre, it now awaits, rather forlornly, a new entrepreneur and assignment.

"Offering a stunning opportunity to purchase a Victorian parish hall in the heart of the sought after conservation area of Ranmoor...the hall, now offers further potential and redevelopment for various uses including residential, commercial, office space or as a private dwelling subject to the necessary planning consents and regulations".

Ranmoor Society Committee 2013

Chairman	Anthony Riddle	230 1114
Secretary	Gerald Eveleigh	230 1992
Treasurer	Gill Battye	230 1596
Archive	Peter Warr	230 9174
Planning	David Barber	230 4717
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