

MINUTES OF THE 99th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL, AYNHO ON WEDNESDAY 27th SEPTEMBER 2017

Present: - Keith McClellan – In the Chair
Peter Cole – Secretary

1) Secretary's Report

Most of you know that the Aynho family that Peter is most interested in after the Cartwrights is the Seccull family. From 1690 until 1933, the senior man in all the Seccull families was always trained to follow his father as a stone mason.

In 1861 James Seccull, 21 year old son of John Seccull, and his cousin William, 24 year old son of William Seccull, another branch of the same family, emigrated to South Africa. William was a stone mason, and James was trained as a carpenter.

It was said that William took up with wine, women and song, and there was a downturn in economic conditions, so James decided to move on to Australia, where he arrived in 1866. Here he worked hard and became a successful builder.

In 2009 Peter inherited a copy of all the censuses of Aynho from 1840 to 1901. Almost as soon as he had announced this on-line, he was contacted by a Simon Smith from Melbourne, Australia, who was a direct descendant of James Seccull. A few months later he was emailed by a Patrick Seccull from Canberra, and he asked to be put in touch with Simon Smith. Simon visited him and his 90 year old grandmother, and they exchanged a lot of family information.

The upshot was that Simon Smith, who is a Professor at Victoria University, decided to write a book about the Seccull family, mainly in Australia. Chapter two is all about the Aynho Secculls, and Peter was happy to supply quite a lot of information about them.

About a month ago he was sent an advance copy of the book, which he received the day before it was to be launched in Australia, so he sent Simon an email that evening wishing him all the best for the launch.

He thanked Peter and said that he was hoping that perhaps he might be able to come over to England some time in 2018, and attend one of our meetings to launch the book in England.

If it comes to pass Peter will invite at least 20 English descendants of the Secculls in England to join us if they wish.

2) "A Public Library Pioneer" The man who changed your library bookshelves forever– by Keith McClellan

Keith said that this was the story of the life of his father Archibald William McClellan, and the permanent changes he had introduced to libraries.

He started off by outlining the origin of libraries in England. An Act in 1850 enabled Boroughs with over 10,000 inhabitants to charge ½ d in the £ on rates for the building and staffing of libraries, but not for the purchase of books. Each library had a catalogue of books held, but the public were not allowed to go near them. They would examine the list, and tell a librarian what they would like to borrow, and the librarian would go to the book room and select one book that he thought to be the most appropriate for that person. This system persisted for many years with only gradual improvements. Due to this art and humanities dominated, with very little attention given to science or technology. As recently as 1934 some libraries were still closed ones where librarians were choosing the best books.

Young Archie McClellan did well at school, but there was no money to send him to university, so in 1925 at the age of 16 he started work as a Junior Assistant at Tottenham Library, which was one of the open ones where he had been able to examine and choose his own books to borrow.

He continued to study to obtain his qualification to become an Associate of the Library Association, which he attained in 1929. He was a close friend of a younger member of his old school, Wally Preston, with whom he remained friends all his life. He became a Quaker and a Pacifist, and had a great interest in new technology such as radio, when he built his own crystal set.

Frustrated by a lack of promotion prospects, he moved to Poplar in 1930. He married Phyllis Howard in 1933, and moved again to Penge in 1936.

Here he transformed the Library and increased usage over 4 years, with a complete revision of stock, new titles and up to date editions. He introduced a display cabinet with a range of subjects. He worked well with staff, using their local knowledge. He also refitted and redecorated a children's section, and started story hours there.

In 1939 fearful of living in London due to the impending war he succeeded in getting a job as Manager of Chelmsford, a much bigger library. He arrived just 2 days before the War started. Owing to the increasing difficulties in travelling due to petrol rationing he immediately allowed more than one book per visit, and he salvaged some old books that were due for replacement. As more and more men were called up Archie took on several new jobs. He was made Curator of the nearby Museum, Information Officer, Casualty Officer, and Flying Officer for the local RAF cadets. As if that wasn't enough a year and two months after moving to Chelmsford their son (Keith) was born. Due to the relatively straight A12 road and the railway line to London which made a good flight path for German bombers, and the nearby Marconi Works, Chelmsford had more than its share of bombs, some very close to where they lived, but somehow they survived.

In late 1945 Archie learned that his first Manager, W J Bennett, who had taken him on at Tottenham 20 years earlier had decided to retire after 40 years there. He applied for the job and started back there on 3rd January 1946 and became Director of Libraries and Museum. He was granted leave to spend a day per week at Chelmsford until a replacement could be found there for him. There was lots of bomb damage, so repairs became a priority.

As soon as he could Mac, as he was now known, set about putting into practice all the ideas he had been planning over the years. He presented the Library and Public Buildings Committee with a seven-page Development Plan of his new ideas. This document was the first comprehensive expression of Mac's revolutionary ideas, which were to transform the Library service and dominate the rest of his life. He defined the function of a Library as: "To acquire and store books and printed material, and to organise the material in such ways as to enable any material to be readily available to users". So the reader, not the book, should be the priority of a Library. A wider range of books would be needed. There was a need to understand the requirements of readers. A Library should be more open-plan, and should shelve and label books in ways that the public could relate to. Librarians should be trained in becoming advisors in specific areas. A system should be developed to enable disabled or elderly people to have a delivery service to the door. Mobile libraries should visit schools regularly.

A grand scheme for all this was prepared by May 1950. He called this "Service in Depth". He did all he could to encourage the Reading Habit.

A mass observation survey was held to discover public reading habits, other interest and education levels, their view of public libraries, and the interests and abilities of the whole community. Mac's old friend Walter Preston helped with this.

Issue periods were extended and the fines system was changed to persuade people to return books rather than penalise them. Children were stimulated to visit, with special book weeks, and plenty of attractive pictures and posters. Essays from different ages were encouraged, and a Committee was set up to discuss and suggest ideas.

Technological innovations were made using a 2nd-hand postage franking machine, a key punch and verifier, a 38 column punch card counter sorter, a Rectophot Photostatic cabinet photocopier, a microfilm copier and reader and a Bindery-Printing establishment, which was greatly used to refurbish old books.

Early in 1950 the Library Association had produced a leaflet entitled "A Century of Public Library Service". Mac was asked by the BBC to give a talk on the radio about the Centenary.

The Bruce Castle Museum, of which Mac had been the Curator, had some interesting connections, and Mac worked closely with Mr C H Rock after he had returned from the War. The Museum had remained open, but had suffered war damage. It had contained a vast collection of all sorts of objects, and had been famous for having once been owned by Rowland Hill and included a lot of old Penny Black stamps.

As there was little space because rebuilding would take a long time due to funding problems, together they agreed that the Museum should concentrate on one or two themes attractively displayed which would interest schoolchildren and teachers such as local history, postal history and world history. At that time no other museum had such a world aspect. The Postal Collection was enhanced when the Post Office Workers Union presented an album of Postal Union Commemorative Stamps on behalf of the Union. This became a permanent exhibit in the collection. A significant contribution to the modernisation of the Museum was a gift by the Imperial Institute of 7 illuminated dioramas.

When he finally retired from Tottenham Mac gave lectures in universities around the country, and was appointed Reader at the College of Librarianship at Aberystwyth. He continued with his research and published two books. He retired to Trowbridge, his wife Phyl had a stroke and never returned home soon after celebrating their Golden Wedding, and Mac died in 1985.

3) Forthcoming Meetings

Wednesday 25th October - Our 100th Meeting – Celebrating Aynho's famous and infamous history