

**Totley History Group Meeting  
At Totley Library  
Wednesday, 22 January 2020**

**Present:**

56 People

Items of Interest

Our next meeting is about the old town hall, past, present and future by Valerie Bayliss.

Speaker Tonight

Our speaker tonight is Dick Shepley who talked to us about The Shepleys of Woodthorpe Hall.

Dick's grandparents, George and Emma Shepley, moved to the hall in 1926. They had 4 sons, Seymour, Rex, Frank and Douglas and a daughter Jeanne. A fifth son Peter had died as a child. They were attracted to the area as George was a co director of 2 companies in Sheffield, one of these still exists today. He also loved cricket and rugby and the hall is close to Abbeydale Sports Club. They paid £3,484 for the hall and Dick still has the receipt! The house at this time was a farmyard and was a tenanted farm. Before the Shepleys arrived the ground floor was where the cattle lived, some windows were blocked up and only part of it was habitable. The Shepleys restored it to be all habitable and put in central heating that is still used to this day.

The Holmesfield Park Wood belonged to the Duke of Rutland and in 1920 there was a big sale and it was sold to a timber merchant who wanted to cut the trees down. His grandfather complained to the authorities and he purchased it and planted it up, this wood is mentioned in the Domesday Book

Tragedy first struck the Shepley family in the early months of the war. Early in 1939 Jeanne had set off on an adventurous journey travelling by land and sea to India. On the outbreak of war Jeanne was determined to return home as soon as possible and she sailed on the SS Yorkshire from Rangoon. The ship arrived safely in Gibraltar and on 13 October 1939 it sailed for England as part of an unescorted merchant convoy. On 17 October the ship was off the coast of France when it was struck by a torpedo and sank with the loss of 25 crew and 33 passengers, one of whom was Jeanne Shepley who was last seen helping other passengers to the lifeboats.

On 31 May 1940 the Shepley family sustained a second loss when Rex was shot down and killed whilst flying his Westland Lysander. He had been undertaking a series of missions to drop essential supplies to the troops who were grimly defending the port of Calais as the British Expeditionary Force were being rescued from the beaches of Dunkirk.

In the early summer of 1940 Douglas Shepley had married Frances "Bidy" Linscott, a young nurse from Sidcup in Kent. Douglas was a Spitfire pilot in 152 Squadron stationed at Warmwell in Dorset and was one of "The Few" who fought in the Battle of Britain. On 12 August the squadron was scrambled to defend Ventnor radar station on the Isle of Wight. Pilot Officer Douglas Shepley was last seen pursuing enemy raiders and was shot down over the English Channel, south of the island. His body was never recovered. Bidy married a Canadian soldier at the end of the war and lived in Canada, Dick kept in touch with her and received a telephone message in early 2019 saying it was her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday and had he any memorabilia he could send, Dick was so delighted about this he went to Canada and attended the party and reminisced with Bidy about all the family which she could still recall.

Devastated as the family were after losing three of their

children, in the first year of the war they decided to do something positive. Emily and her daughter-in-law Biddy set about raising £5,700 (over £300,000 in today's terms) to buy a new Spitfire. The people of north Derbyshire and south Yorkshire rallied round magnificently organising whist drives, concerts, dances and various other events. There were collections in local cinemas, pubs, theatres and shops and within 15 weeks the money had been raised.

The Shepley was first flown on 1 August 1941 and was issued to 602 (City of Glasgow) Squadron on 16 August. Shepley moved on to a Polish squadron and then to a New Zealand squadron before eventually becoming the personal aircraft of Group Captain Victor Beamish DSO DFC AFC, the Station Commander at RAF Kenley in Surrey in 1941. Sadly he too was shot down over the English Channel on 28 March 1942.

Dick's parents moved to the hall in 1963 on the death of Dick's grandparents, his parents had 5 children Seymour was his father. Seymour had 5 children, Dick moved to Woodthorpe in 1987 as the eldest living son and began to look after the hall, the first job was reroofing the hall.

In 1978 a Nottinghamshire brewery, Hardys and Hansons, built a new public house on Mickley Lane. A competition was held to find a suitable name and the brewery chose that suggested by Seymour Shepley of Woodthorpe Hall, which lies a few hundred yards away in the parish of Holmesfield.

Woodthorpe Hall today hosts up to 8 weddings a year and produces cider, which can be found for sale at The Chatsworth Shop.

Dick was thanked for a very enjoyable and interesting talk.

#### Meeting Dates for 2020

26 February The Old Town Hall, Past, Present and Future,

Valerie Bayliss

25 March The History and Residents of Zion Graveyard,  
Attercliffe, Penny Rea

22 April AGM then The History of Stained Glass, Ann  
Beedham