

BULLETIN ISSUE NO. 13 – JUNE/JULY 2024



Mahalia Theodore Webb R.M.S.

Welcome

Ladies & Gents,

Welcome to this edition of the *HistoryFare Bulletin*. Apologies, for the lateness in issuing this edition as May has been an extremely busy month, with talks, history tours museum projects and personal family commitments.

I hope you are continuing to enjoy these bulletins, and if you have any snippets of local history, or even suggestions for topics to include in future bulletins, please do send them in.

As always, I would just like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support, and I look forward to seeing you at a HistoryFare event soon.

Brian

Next Monthly Meeting



Our next monthly meeting will be on **Thursday, 1st August 2024** at the Melton Mowbray Royal Air Forces Association Tornado Club, Asfordby Road, Melton Mowbray, LE13 0HR at 20:00Hrs.

Our guest speaker will be Phil Watson who will be talking to us about 2nd Lieutenant Charles Garstin who was Melton's first casualty of the Great War, killed on 24th August 1914 aged 20, whilst serving with the 9th Lancers.

Admission Cost £3 - Seats are to be reserved via the following link: <https://historyfare.co.uk/events/meltons-first-casualty-of-the-great-war-charles-garstin-a-much-loved-son/>

or via email: meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com

Raffle



Many thanks to those of you who have supported the monthly raffles by donating prizes for use the draws, they have all been gratefully appreciated.

If you would like to donate prizes to future raffles, biscuits, chocolates, wine, beer etc are all acceptable proving they are in date! Books and partwork etc will also be accepted.

As a result of you raffle entries and donations, so far in 2024, we have raised £241.80 split between the following charities:

Commemorative Air Force - £40

Mission to Seafarers - £42

RAF Association Wings Appeal - £159.80

Thank you for your generosity.

Mahalia Theodore Webb R.M.S.

When we talk about famous artists connected to Melton Mowbray, the two that immediately spring to mind are John Ferneley and Sir Francis Grant (See Bulletin No 8 January 2024 for Sir Francis Grant).

For some unknown reason, not a lot of people know anything about the lady in the photo on the front cover, Mahalia Theodore Webb, otherwise known as Dora.

She began painting at the age of fourteen and became the pupil and protégé of Alyn Williams the celebrated miniaturist and founder member and President of The Royal Society of Miniature Painters, Sculptors and Gravers (R.M.S.).

Dora was born in Stamford in 1886 and her parents were Morpeth Webb and Florence Sophia Cousins.

By the time of the 1901 Census, the family, Morpeth, Florence, Dora (14), Cecilia (13) and John (8), had moved from Stamford and were now living at 60 Burton Road, Melton Mowbray. Morpeth was an architectural draughtsman/surveyor, originally from Hoxton London, and Florence who was originally from Grantham was a “teacher of painting artist”.



Dora (seated) and Cecilia

By the time of the 1911 census, the family were still at 60 Burton Road and now Dora was listed with an occupation of “Artist – Miniature Painter”.

During the First World War, Dora's sister Cecilia, was a VAD Nurse working at the Wicklow Lodge VAD military hospital just up the road from where the family lived on Burton Road in Melton Mowbray. More information about Cecilia, and her wonderful autograph book, can be seen in the book “A Moment in Time – Wicklow Lodge Military Hospital Melton Mowbray 1914 – 1919” by my good friend Derek Simmonds.

Returning back to Dora, she was one of the Leicester artists that had paintings displayed at the United artist's Exhibition at Burlington House in aid of the Duke of Gloucester's' Red Cross and St. John fund on several occasions.

If any of you have been to Windsor Castle you might have seen the Queen Mary Dolls House, that was commissioned by Princess Marie Louise, the cousin of King George V, for his wife Queen Mary. Princess Maria had the idea to give her a 'miniature' present with a difference and commissioned a fabulous dolls house.

The dolls house was to be a showcase for British artists and craftsmen and took 1500 artisans three years to complete. The house itself - a grandiose four storey structure with working lights and plumbing was designed by the great architect Sir Edwin Lutyens and was built on a scale of 1:12. It was finished in 1924.



Queen Mary's Dolls House



Amongst the top artists, miniature painter Mahala Theodora 'Dora' Webb received ten commissions, including a 3.9. x 2.7 cm (approx 1" x 1.1/2") portrait of Edward, Prince of Wales.

For the 1940 exhibition she submitted two pieces of work, one of which struck a topical note in portraying a lovely child surrounded by toys and holding a gas mask. It was titled "Our War Aims – Peace and Security for the Child". Her other contribution that as equally meritorious was a biblical study involving children.

In 1943, she exhibited again at Burlington House and her painting was described as what is for a miniature, a novel subject: "Britain's Front Line 1940."

Dora also spoke to local groups about her work and in July 1940, she spoke to the members of the Saxby and Stapleford Women's Institute during which she exhibited a number of her works including one of the Duke of Windsor, when as Prince of Wales, he hunted from Melton Mowbray.

In May 1945, Dora was one of the 750 artists that were displaying nearly 1,400 painting at the Royal Academy in London. One of Dora's miniature's was the painting of Major John Pott MC and was classed as one of the best 30 in the exhibition, described as having vitality and conviction.

Major John Pott was OC 'A' Company 156 Battalion Parachute Regiment based in Melton Mowbray during 1944. During the summer of '44, Dora had completed a pastel portrait of him and commenced the painting of the miniature towards the end of the summer. Only one more sitting was needed to complete the painting and this was promised for the weekend of September 16th.



Major John Pott MC
by Dora Webb

However, Dora had to finish the painting without John as the weekend they had planned for the sitting was when 156 Battalion and the rest of the Paratroopers based in and around Melton Mowbray were confined to barracks as this was the start of the Arnhem landings as part of Operation Market Garden.

John was parachuted into Arnhem on the 18th September, flying from RAF Saltby, and after being wounded, was captured by the Germans and taken Prisoner of War.

In November 1947, Dora exhibited at another exhibition, this time her sister Cecilia also exhibited work and the exhibition was held at their home at 106 Burton Road in Melton Mowbray. The works displayed were in a variety of mediums and ranged from delicate miniatures to busts and concrete book ends.

Among the pieces of work being exhibited was the miniature of John Pott which had recently been exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1947.

The portrait of Major Pott is now in custody of the family with his son David being the current custodian.

Also on display as part of the Melton exhibition was a small bas-relief head of Miss S Ronald, mounted on a plaque, by Cecilia, which was also exhibited at the Paris Salon.

Another exhibit was a pastel portrait of their 83-year-old mother Florence who also exhibited her dolls and woodcuts.

Some 17th & 18th Century miniatures left for Dora by the late Alyn Williams, founder and President of the Royal Society of Miniature Painters were also displayed.



One of the dolls that Dora made is held in the collection of the Melton Mowbray Carnegie Museum. Dora also displayed original casts she had made of the Duke of Rutland Peacock Crest which was being made into a car mascot as a wedding present, and casts also of the Crown & Mitre heads of the staffs for Melton Parish Church wardens.

Dora passed away on 31st May 1973 at the War Memorial Hospital in Melton.

David Potts son Joel was the lead singer of the band Athlete and in 2009, shortly before the 65th anniversary, he released a song called Black Swan Song which is about his grandfather's Arnhem experience and his death in 2005.

Apparently, it was very well received and here are both the official video and another acoustic version shot on Lichtenbeek Hill where John Pott was wounded.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hv3JZpJTZQI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBJo9-1FMms>

When Joel went to Arnhem in 2009 with his father David, he also produced a moving documentary Black Swan Story which can be viewed here:

<https://vimeo.com/7475133>

Social Media

Keep up To Date by following HistoryFare on the following social media sites:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MeltonHistoryFare>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/farebrian/>

Twitter: HistoryFare @FareBrian

Website: <https://historyfare.co.uk/>

Email: meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com



Bosworth Battlefield Tour

As mentioned previously, I have arranged a guided tour of the Battle of Bosworth battlefield with historian and battlefield guide Ben Mayne. The tour will be on Saturday 10th August 2024, and Ben will take us on a tour of the key sites connected to the battle involving an approximate 8-mile walk and take about 5 hours. At the end of the tour, there would be an opportunity to visit the Bosworth Battlefield museum/visitor centre if people wish.

This would be a great day out to gain a better understanding of a 'local' battlefield within Leicestershire and as you are no doubt aware, Bosworth was the last significant battle of the Wars of the Roses and the last one where an English monarch was killed in battle.

The cost will be £10 per person and due to safety restrictions, walking on country roads etc, the tour would be limited to a maximum of 25 people, spaces would be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

If you would like to join us on this tour, then please email meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com to reserve your place.

Street Signs

In this edition of the bulletin, we take another look at street signs and the connections they have to Melton's history.

On the housing estate between the A606 Nottingham Road and Scalford Road are a group of streets that are all named after poets, playwrights and novelists, some of which will need no introduction to you.

Browning Close (Robert Browning); Burns Close (Rabbie Burns); Byron Way (Lord George Byron, 6th Baron Byron FRS); Dickens Drive (Charles Dickens); Galsworthy Crescent (John Galsworthy OM); Keats Close (John Keats); Kipling Drive (Rudyard Kipling); Milton Close (John Milton); Shelley Avenue (Percy Bysshe Shelley); Tennyson Way (Lord Alfred Tennyson FRS);



One of the above famous Poets remembered on the street signs has a connection to Melton, well actually several connections and that is Lord George Byron.

The first connection relates to the building opposite St Mary's Church known as the 'Melton Club' or the 'Old Club', but today we know it as Graham Coe Opticians.



On the side wall of the building is a blue plaque commemorating Beau Brummell, 'King of the Dandies' who resided at this property during his stays in Melton. George Bryan (Beau) Brummell was born in London 7 Jun 1778 to Jane and William Brummell (Private secretary to the PM Lord North).



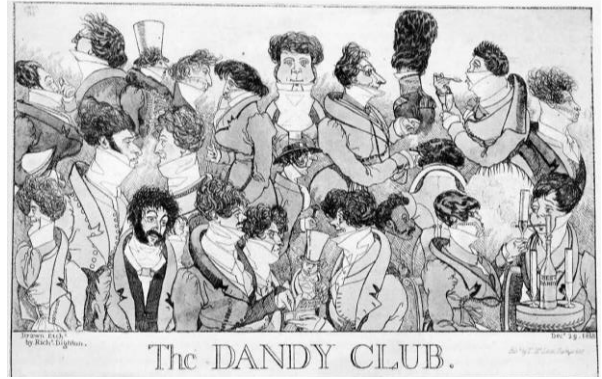
He joined the army in 1794 serving with the Tenth Royal Hussars (Prince of Wales Own) and left in 1797 when the Regt moved from London to Manchester.

Beau wasn't the only 'Dandy' to live at the Old Club. In 1814, the rate books list the Hon. Henry Augustus Berkley Carven as a rate payer. He was one of the first of the 'Dandy Club' and was known as 'Gambling Dandy'.

Other members of the 'Dandy Club' who stayed at the Old Club were 'Red Dandy' Rufus Lloyd, a highly gifted Irishman from County Tipperary who fought at Oporto and Talavera but went mad when staying at Belvoir Castle. 'Plebeian Dandy', Henry Manvers

Pierrepoint, 3rd son of the 1st Earl Manvers.
Another 'Dandy' was John Mills, known as 'Mosaic Dandy', due to his Hebrew appearance. He was a fine horseman and served in the Coldstream Guards.

In July 1813 he hosted a masquerade ball at Watiers Gentleman's Club in Piccadilly London with Lord Alvanley (who went on to own the 'New Club' now HSBC Bank on High Street in Melton), Henry Mildmay and Henry Pierrepoint.



Lord Byron dubbed this group of individuals as the 'Dandy Club'.



The second connection relates the Honourable Caroline Ponsonby, the daughter of Frederick Ponsonby, 3rd Earl of Bessborough and Baron of Sysonby. The Ponsonby family owned Sysonby Lodge at one point.

In 1805 she became known as Lady Caroline Lamb after her marriage to William Lamb, (Lord Melbourne), the future Prime Minister of Queen Victoria.

Between March and August 1812, Lady Caroline Lamb had an affair with Lord Byron. He was known for being bisexual and had many lovers. The affair with Lady Caroline was one of the most scandalous and famous of his liaisons that Byron was known for.

It is said that soon after meeting the poet, she coined the phrase "mad, bad, and dangerous to know" which became his lasting epitaph.

Her marriage to Lord Melbourne wasn't a happy relationship and just after the Battle of Waterloo where her brother Frederick Cavendish Ponsonby, a veteran of the Peninsular Wars, was wounded, she had an affair with the Duke of Wellington.

The 3rd connection between Byron and Melton Mowbray occurred after his death in Greece in 1824. His body was brought back to England for burial and as a poet he could have been buried in Westminster Abbey, but this was refused on morale grounds, most likely due to his sexuality.

Consequently, his body was returned to his hometown of Hucknall in Nottinghamshire to be buried in the Church of St Mary Magdalene. The funeral cortege left Westminster on Monday 12th July 1824 and made its way to Hucknall. On route, the funeral cortege had to stop off at various places for the horses to rest.

On Wednesday, it passed through Uppingham, and his body lay in state at the Crown Inn at Oakham that night.

The body was in a hearse, drawn by six horses and followed by three mourning coaches and six horses; the carriages were preceded by eight horsemen. At 9am, the cortege passed through Melton Mowbray and rested at the Swan Inn.

Following its departure from the Swan Inn, the cortege was making its way up Nottingham Street when a lady on horseback enquired as to the identity of the corpse and she was told that it was Lord Byron. That lady was none other than Lady Caroline Lamb who had for so long been infatuated with Byron.



The Swan Inn



The Manor House

What a coincidence that Lady Caroline was in Melton as the cortege passed through. She was here because her husband, Lord Melbourne, was the Lord of the Manor of Melton Mowbray and the couple were residing at the Manor House on Burton Street on the corner of Mill Street.

Warwick Lodge



Hamilton Lodge as it was originally known was built in 1902 by 2nd Lord Hamilton of Dalzell. He was Lord in Waiting to King Edward VII from 1905–1910 and King George V in 1910-11.

In 1911, the property was sold to Frances, Countess of Warwick from Warwick Castle, who changed the name to Warwick Lodge.

During WW2, thanks to Roxena Van Rensselaer who lived across the road at Mowbray Lodge, Warwick Lodge became a residential nursery home for homeless and orphaned children as a result of the blitz.

You can read more about the lodge's history in my latest Historic Melton article in the Melton Times: [Historic Melton: Warwick Lodge \(meltontimes.co.uk\)](http://meltontimes.co.uk)

Thank you for your support!

Till next time!

Please feel free to share this bulletin with whoever you think may be interested.

For any enquiries or to submit articles, please email Brian at meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com