



Friends of Smithills Hall



Patron: The Duke of Norfolk President: Sir William Goring Bt.
Smithills Hall*Smithills Dean Road* Bolton*Lancashire*BL1 7NP
Tel (01204) 338722 Registered Charity No. 1038507

www.friendsofsmithillshall.co.uk



FRIENDS BULLETIN No. 30

Autumn 2017

Friends of Smithills Hall Executive Committee

Chairman: David Williams **Vice Chairman:** Joan Sheppard **Secretary:** Margaret Koppens **Treasurer:** Wendy Edwards
Members: Ann Marie Elliott-Clark, Ruth Ellison, Dorothy Lee, Barrie Wallwork-Waddington, Elaine Fletcher-Cowan, Joan Thursby

Editor: David Williams email: dewilliamz@hotmail.com or enquiries@friendsofsmithillshall.co.uk

Delicious autumn! My very soul is wedded to it, and if I were a bird I would fly about the earth seeking the successive autumns.

George Eliot
(Mary Anne Evans: 1819 – 1880)

Welcome to this autumn edition of the Friends' Bulletin.

This edition includes:-

- **George Marsh the Bolton Martyr**
Part 1
- **West Wing reopens**
Report
- **Heritage Day**
Report
- **Dates for your diary**

George Marsh - the Bolton Martyr

by David Williams

The story of George Marsh and his journey to martyrdom is likely to be well known to most readers.

George was a farmer who lived in Deane, Bolton. Born in 1515 his father was Richard Marsh (born 1495, and who died in 1525 at Marton in Kent). Records on Richard's wife provide different identities for his mother – most common is Lady Isabel Seymour (also born in Marton), although others are recorded include Mary, Ann and Agnes! George reputedly had three children; daughter Syselie (sounds like Cicely) who was born in 1548 in Eccles, Lancashire and who died in 1593, and two sons Robert born in Bolton (1545-1595) and Giles (c1549-1620).¹

I do not know George's wife's name but believe that her maiden name was probably Hurst. One of Marsh's follower was brother-in-law Geoffrey Hurst, of Shakerley (a suburb of Tyldesley) and a nail maker, was also imprisoned at Lancaster but was saved from execution by Queen Mary's death.

I would like to pick up his story from the time George was in Lancaster Gaol where he spent nearly a year. He read his bible and prayed with townfolk gathered outside his window until George Cotes; the Catholic Bishop of Chester intervened. Sympathisers offered support and priests tried to convert him. When statutes against heresy were enacted by parliament Marsh was taken to the gaol at Northgate, Chester.

Foxes Book of Martyrs (1563) says he was 'kept in close prison by George Cotes within his straight prison in Chester within the precinct of the Bishop's house about the space of four months, not permitting him to have relief and comfort of his friends but giving charge unto the porter to mark who they were that asked for him, and to signify, their names unto him the said Bishop'. Foxes' book continues 'Within a few days of his coming to Chester, the Bishop sent for him into his hall, nobody being present but they twain. And then he asked him certain questions concerning the sacrament, who made

such answers as where with the Bishop seemed to be content'; it notes that 'Much other talk he had with him to submit himself to the universal church of Rome and when he saw he could not prevail he sent him to prison again'.

During his time in prison he was visited in prison by 'one Massey a fatherly old man, one Wench the schoolmaster, one Henman the Bishop's Chaplain, and the Archdeacon with many more.' The book recounts that after 'the said Bishop [Cotes] had taken his pleasure in punishing this his prisoner, and often reviling him, giving taunts and odious names of heretic, he caused him to be brought forth into a chapel in the Cathedral Church of Chester, called Our Lady Chapel.'

He stood trial under Bishop Cotes² in the Lady Chapel (South Tower), Consistory Court of Chester Cathedral



The accused's seat

If you visit Chester Cathedral you can visit this court which is unlike any court room we have today. The accused sits on a chair perched on the far right corner on the top of a partition, facing the court officials (see photograph above). The public could view proceedings from the outside of the partition.

Foxes goes on to say that when Marsh was taken to court 'Before him [was] the said Bishop (at two of the clock in the afternoon), who was there placed in a chair for that purpose. And Dutton, Mayor of the said city, and other priests assisting him sat directly over against the said

¹ Other children are recorded without source

²Bishop Cotes died in 1556

Bishop'. At the trial 'the Chancellor laid unto his charge that he [George Marsh] had preached and openly published most blasphemously within the parishes of Deane, Eccles, Bolton, Bury and many other parishes within the Bishop's diocese, directly against the Pope's authority.'



The Court and Bishop's Chair

He was 'examined' and required to answer only 'yea' or 'nay'. After this they broke up and Marsh was returned to prison.

[to be continued]

West Wing Reopening

On Thursday 17th August 2017 the restored and refurbished West Wing of the Hall was formally reopened at a ceremony held in the Devey Room, named after the architect employed by Richard Henry Ainsworth to design and build the Wing. The work cost £500k.

The Wing also includes The Ainsworth Room a small kitchen, a refurbished toilet, the Entrance Hall (complete with new reception furniture) repairs to the first floor including the offices of the Halliwell Local History Society and a newly furnished staff room.

Julie Spencer, head of the Council's Libraries and Museums Service introduced proceedings

and welcomed guests including the Mayor of Bolton Councillor Roger Hayes, the Mayoress Jaleh Hayes, Councillor Clifford Morris Leader of the Council, Councillors representatives of SPIE the contractor (who sponsored the event), members of the Friends of Smithills Hall, members of Halliwell Local History Society, Council officers and representatives of the Press.

David Williams of the Friends thanked the Council for their investment and said they were investing in the past for the future. He talked briefly about what was known about the building of the West Wing and George Devey's involvement. A minimum cost of the work from 1874 to 1886 (£1,586) was at today's values, he thought, likely to be over £2.5 million.



The 'rediscovered' fireplace in the Devey Room

The Mayor of Bolton, Cllr Roger Hayes, said: "Smithills Hall is known as the jewel in the crown in Bolton's heritage so it is probably one of the nicest buildings in the town and it is very attractive to everyone living in this area.

"Every time we bring a bit more of it back in to use, it can be seen and appreciated, I think all the residents absolutely love it. They have done

a great job with this, it looks absolutely superb.”

Councillor Morris unveiled a plaque (see below) commemorating the occasion thanking all concerned for their efforts and praising the work of the Friends at the Hall.



The wording is “This plaque, unveiled by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Clifford Morris with the Mayor of Bolton Councillor Roger Hayes marks the reopening of the Devey Wing at Smithills Hall on 17th August 2017”.

A delicious buffet was provided by the Tea Room, ‘Poppins at Smithills Hall’, which is now open to the public seven days per week.

Heritage Day

National Heritage Day was celebrated on **Sunday 10th September** when the Hall was amongst the many interesting buildings around the country which opened their doors to visitors.

The Green Room (George Marsh’s room) was opened to visitors especially for this occasion. There was a steady stream of visitors throughout the afternoon who also had the opportunity to see the newly refurbished Devey Room.

Tours were given by the Friends of Smithills Hall to interested visitors.

Dates for Your Diary



Ghost Tours

The ever popular History with Ghosts tours of the Hall have now been arranged for **Thursday 19th October and 16th November** starting at 7pm. There is likely to be a further tour in February with the date yet to be arranged. The price for the tour is £8 and £7 for concessions. Bookings can be made through staff at the Hall, 01204 332377 (central switchboard) will connect you.

Memorial Wreath-Laying

The annual short wreath laying commemoration ceremony in Smithills Hall Chapel will be on **Friday 10th November** starting at 1045am. The Hall is closed on Armistice Day. Everyone is welcome.

Christmas Decorations

The Friends will be decorating the rooms at the Hall for Christmas on **Friday 24 November** starting at 10am. If you can lend a hand you will be made very welcome – just come along. Well worth a visit to see how the decorations bring the Hall to life.

Christmas Social

The annual members and friends Christmas Social will be on **Thursday 7th December**. The performer will be Joanne Halliwell who will again be entertaining us. Details will be sent to members in the post.

Christmas Carol Service

This year’s Friends Carol Service will be held in the Chapel on Wednesday 13th December starting at 7pm. Details will be posted to members.