

Muniment Room

After the popularity of visits to the Muniment Room during the Flower Festival in the church last autumn, it was decided to revive the Muniment Room Society. At the first meeting I mentioned that when we had Homestead rebuilt in Coopers Lane we were given new deeds from the Land Registry – these are a scrap of computerised text on a sheet of A4! When I asked what to do with the old deeds I was told ‘whatever you want to do’!

As I was brought up in the village in the original Homestead cottage, which was bequeathed to my father by his grandfather, the old deeds have both a sentimental and historical value to me, and possibly to others in the village interested in local history.

Following discussion within our newly revived group, we felt that we should ask and encourage people who are either rebuilding or altering their properties in the village to retain their original deeds for future reference as documents of possible historical interest. Many of the former local authority houses in the village are now very different to when they were built, so we would be pleased if any original documents and photographs of any changed properties could be retained and referred to by us in the near future.

We are hoping to hold an exhibition of such memorabilia at some time in the

future and if you feel you have anything of interest to us then we would like to hear from you - please contact Avril Biggins (nee Garwood) in the first instance, by telephoning 322565.

NEWS from the Muniment Room

A meeting was held in October with a view to reviving the Muniment Room Society.

A dozen interested people attended and amongst the suggestions and offers of help forthcoming was that we should keep the people of Dedham informed about this valuable resource. Mark Lockett has kindly started the ball rolling by contributing the following biography of the founder of the Muniment Room.

Dedham in history

Gerard Rendall is something of a forgotten figure today. This should not be the case. His achievements were many and varied and Dedham owes him a debt of gratitude. Rendall left a portrait of the village as he remembered it as a child in the 1850s.... “the Christmas festival was kept with all time-honoured celebrations, when the church was decked with berried holly, wreaths, the hall with mistletoe, the board with roast turkey and plumb pudding set-on-fire, to be followed by snapdragon and the Christmas tree. In summertime I learned to blackberry, to fish, to row, to swim and in winter to slide and skate and dance”.

Perhaps it is not surprising that he chose to spend his retirement in the village



.Educated at Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge, Rendall was elected to a fellowship in 1875. He was Gladstone Professor of Classics and Ancient History at University College, Liverpool, from 1880 to 1897 and was first principal of the college. In 1891 he was appointed Vice Chancellor of Victoria (Manchester) University, serving until 1895. He was ordained deacon in 1898 and priest in 1899. Between 1897 and his retirement in 1911 Rendall was headmaster of Charchouse. In 1898 Macmillan published his translation of 'the Mediations of Marcus Aurelius' including an introductory study of stoicism. He continued to publish throughout his life.

Rendall acquired Dedham House in 1909 and almost immediately began to enter into village life. He also left his mark on the wider community of Essex. He became an honorary canon of Chelmsford Cathedral and a governor of Colchester Royal Grammar School. In April 1922 he joined the council of the Essex Archaeological Society. He was a member of three Dedham Trusts and for two decades was Chairman of the Lecture Trust. During the First World War he organised a canteen for soldiers at the Village Club (now the Duchy Barn). He also formed a detachment of St Johns Ambulance of which he was the first commandant. Rendalls wife, Ellen Fanny, who he had married in 1887 was also a keen supporter of the village caused.

In 1937 Rendall published a short book on local topography and a learned, if slight, volume on feudal and early modern Dedham. He was the author of a number of scholarly essays and several pamphlets with a Dedham theme. He accumulated a considerable archive of books, papers, other records and memorabilia relating to Dedham. Towards the end of his life he determined to bequeath this collection to the village. He had the room above the north porch of the church converted into a muniment room. The bookcases, panelling and furniture were all designed by architect Marshall Sisson and built by Heals. The archive remains accessible to scholars and to local people interested in the history of Dedham and its endeavours.

Mark Lockett