

## Archive Report: 2016-2017

It has been an *'if only'* year. The members of the group are pioneers breaking new ground by tackling a task to which there is no real template and a constantly changing number of documents. We are not complaining, as there have been many positive and encouraging rewards to all the hard work achieved. But *'if only'* we had realised that too much detail would seriously slow up the task perhaps we would have opted for a more sketchy approach.

This attention to detail has resulted in the team becoming very well informed about most aspects of the history of our church. Rather like an expert quiz team there is always someone who can find the answer to virtually any question posed. Naturally even a simple answer always engenders further research!

*'if only'* we had realised that we would have to interleave so many additions, edits and changes into our computer database perhaps we could have devised a simpler way of inserting new data. Archives always expand as work progresses and kindly people search their attics, garages, and storage units more assiduously.

*'if only'* I could have fully foreseen the interest the content of the archives would engender in the classifying team, even in some cases to the extent of wooing them away from the cataloguing task in hand.

### **Visit of a Geneva State Archivist**

There is no universal template for classifying an archive and ours has been handed on from person to person rather like a baton in a relay race. Relying on what our forebears thought it necessary to conserve, what has not been lost by accident, spring cleaning, fire, moving house, leaky roofs etc. (I hasten to say that none of those things have happened since well before I took them over) makes survival haphazard and uncomfortably selective.

We are about to find out if we have erred too much on the side of caution as a member of staff from the Geneva State Archives is due to come and discuss our progress and hopefully let us order more suitable boxes and files in which to lodge our ever expanding body of documents. We have completely used up our original acquisition of special acid free boxes, paper folders and plastic files which I bought when I first took charge.

Let us hope there will not be too many *'if only'* suggestions during the forthcoming consultation session!

### **Report of the Committee Sites and Monuments**

We noticed recently that Mme Courtiau published her report on the church and its fittings, which the Department of Sites and Monuments mandated her to carry out, in November 2016. Initially she made many visits to study the archives at Bernex when we were first embarking on the cataloguing. Team members, especially Alan Downing, supplied her with unpublished research. She was also welcomed to the church itself to freely photograph whatever she wished. Incidentally there is a print-out of this report in the Church Office if anyone would like to borrow it. This will prove useful as we prepare our plans for the church renovation and also when we produce a detailed monograph on the monumental plaques and possibly undertake a long overdue new History of HTC.

### **Enquiries**

During the past year we have had a very satisfying interaction with enquirers. Manel Kumarakulasinghe has taken a keen interest for many years in one of our former chaplains, Rev. Walter Senior, and had always intended to write an article about him. Before setting finger to keyboard she joined us to glean further facts about his time here in Geneva. It was his last post in what had been a very distinguished career mainly spent in Sri Lanka. She subsequently made a visit to her native land and discovered even more material. It is now probable that she will publish a book about him. As a taster of her far-ranging research we look forward to reading an article she and Jane Brooks have prepared for the HTC Newsletter.

Last December the church secretary forwarded an email inquiry from 'Tim' (Tim Willasey-Wilsey, Visiting Fellow of War Studies at King's College, London) who had discovered a reference when trawling the net to a document cited in my HTC exhibition catalogue of 2003/4<sup>1</sup> about an ancestor of his, Thomas Sangster Ramsay, With the help of our new classification system I researched the subject in depth and sent scans and photocopies off to him. By a bizarre coincidence my husband's birthday present to me that same month included a small pamphlet entitled *'Un Anglais prisonnier à Verdun 1803-1814'*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ge.ch/archives/expositions/exposition-2004-geneve-cite-daccueil>

--Thomas Sangster Ramsay had been one of those prisoners. This slender work corroborated all the facts in chapter 2 of Tim's book on his family history of which he had kindly sent me a copy. His and our research dovetailed perfectly to give a complete picture of the sad fates of Thomas Sangster Ramsay, his father and the guardian angels, M and Mme Berger, who had supported him so loyally financially, practically and emotionally in both France and Geneva. A very encouraging result for our team.

I have been in frequent contact with Diane Conrad, the curator of the current exhibition at Pontresina in the Grisons entitled '*19<sup>th</sup> century British Visitors and their church in Pontresina*'. The contacts related to historical facts, as our churches have much in common. The two buildings are of similar size, both are dedicated to the Holy Trinity, both have (or had!) a rich congregation and both installed stained glass windows made by Mayer of Munich. You will possibly be hearing more of the windows as Mayer's collection of their own blueprints, previously thought to have been destroyed by the RAF during the Second World War<sup>2</sup> have recently been discovered in the firm's United States office. We are attempting to find out if ours are among them. However, the comparison of our churches ends there as Pontresina's was pulled down in 1975! If you happen to be in the Grisons this summer go and visit this exhibition which closes on 21 October at the Alpine Museum in Pontresina (open 15.30 – 18.00).

### **Team Activities**

Christine Damary came initially to carry out research on the pattern of services at Holy Trinity as part of her verger's course. Yes - even vergers have to have a paper qualification nowadays. To our delight she has become enthused with the archives and is now engaged in classifying all the odd papers and publications that are constantly coming to light. She is about to launch into listing and identifying all the photographs HTC has accumulated over the years.

Now would be an excellent time to hand Christine any photographs and small brochures of HTC events that you may have discovered when spring cleaning and were about to consign to the recycling bin. Furthermore you may be able to help her identify some of those

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<sup>2</sup> Valerie Offord '*Sleuthing in Mornex*' HTC Newsletter 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition no 317 June 2003.

already in our collection. Perhaps we should hold a reminiscence evening – it could prove fun to take time to look back at all the occasions still in our collective memory.

Paul Kunz is still doggedly co-ordinating all the computer work – an immense time consuming task for which we can but express thanks and admiration for his meticulous work. Pierre Laravoire, Paul's hardworking right hand man (literally true) reports back to council on our progress and activities.

Alan Downing is, at this very moment (not literally true!), keeping an expert eye for the church council on the practical phase of the clock and tower project he instigated. (Incidentally the Sites and Monument Committee was alerted to the presence of and the importance of renovating the historic public clocks in the canton by the HTC tower and clock project and is now considering mandating a survey of them all – a strange twist of fate.) Alan is a man of many talents not the least being his diplomacy and succinct writing skills. He is currently indexing articles from the HTC Newsletter.

Jenny Buffle's work on the organ and choir records has and is proving invaluable. During the course of this past year many more documents were found in the organ loft so she is sifting through those as well. Yvette Milosevic cheerfully and swiftly works on any complicated task we allot her with efficiency and insight. Kilian Anheuser, in spite of his demanding full time job, is always ready to give advice and an encouraging hand. When he has a moment he intends to put the digitized parish registers from 1835 online.

As to me I flit bumblebee-like from inquiry to inquiry, discovering more documents to classify and seemingly raising more problems than solutions. The last few months I have noticed my team works well on autopilot, achieves more actual work and drinks more tea when I am absent! I am indebted to them for their hard work and dedication.

### **The coming year**

We hope to conclude our classification/cataloguing work and to put the bulk of it on the HTC website. As to the digitisation of original records that could continue if we feel so inclined as only a minimum has been carried out to date. It would certainly cut down the number of times documents are handled and, when our Archives are

deposited at the Geneva State Archives, an online resource will avoid form filling, and the restrictive hours for visits there.

Shortly it should be feasible to make a start using our archives, first in preparing a brochure on the monumental plaques and, as mentioned above, hopefully producing a new History of HTC:

## **Conclusion**

We are all aware that spouses are mumbling '*if only*' they would finish the task. For our part '*If only*' we had realised how much time and work it would involve perhaps we would never embarked on it!

However, now that light is beginning to emerge at the end of the very long tunnel and the community is about to undertake an extensive renovation project, we are fairly confident our work will prove to have been worthwhile and useful.

*Valerie Offord, Hon. Archivist. April 2017.*

### **Articles based on our Archives 2016-1017**

#### **HTC Newsletter**

Christine Damary '*Holy Trinity wall plaques: did you know...?*' No. 451 Dec, 2016/Jan. 2017.

Jane Brooks (abridged from Press Release) '*19<sup>th</sup> century British Visitors and their church in Pontresina*' being an exhibition in Pontresina 2017 curated by Diane Conrad. No. 453 March 2017.

Alan Downing 'Last Hurdle for Holy Trinity's clock' No. 454 April 2017

Tim Willasey-Wilsey '*The trials and tribulations of Susanna Richardson's only son*' (chapter 2 of his forthcoming book on his ancestors the Ramsay family) .

#### **Note**

*If you have any records or photographs you would like to consult or hand in for classification and safekeeping please contact either*

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*The present working group members are Kilian Anheuser, Jenny Buffle, Christine Damary, Alan Downing, Paul Kunz, Pierre Laravoire, Yvette Milosevic and Valerie Offord.*

***New members will be more than welcome to join us.***