

Scissors Paper Stone

Blog 15:

Scissors Paper Stone 2025: The Year Ahead



Picture Sheffield – ref: u02070, © Carol Burgess

When we look at the portrait of this Sheffield household, it brings home the fact that for every wealthy householder there are a crew of men and women who makes his lifestyle possible. Picture Sheffield think this is a portrait of George Senior and his dependents, who lived in Northumberland Avenue, probably in the first decade of the twentieth century when a man of his station (a steel manufacturer) would have had both a car and a carriage. It is most unusual to be able to discover such complete cast of home-makers.

We can identify George alongside his wife but many questions remain unanswered. I presumed that the hand above the master's shoulder was that of the young man who might be his son but in fact it is the hand of a woman, surely a senior servant with her assured air and elegant apron. And who is the young man behind Mrs Senior, his hair luxuriant and curly? A suit slightly too crumpled to be worn by a son? A gardener in Sunday best or a junior groom? From their uniforms we can guess the identities of some of the staff circling the family: the chauffeur, a groom, housekeeper, nanny and 'tweenie' (always the youngest of the female staff who ran up and down between floors at the bidding of the housekeeper in the basement). The maid on the left with the rather frothy apron and bib might be a nursemaid, her costume not business-like enough for a kitchen. But the closer one looks the more questions are raised. Answers welcome.

The marriage registers of St John's in the late nineteenth century record that 85% of the weddings were between men and women who were not wealthy, but who served the needs of families who were: grooms, gardeners, carpenters, shopkeepers, dressmakers. They were men and women with a wide range of skills.

Last year, the Scissors Paper Stone team explored the lives of the people who created the fabric of our church: stone masons, donors, artists and craftsmen. In 2025 an ever-growing team of researchers are going to find

out what they can about the men and women who supported the domestic and social life of those men and women who rented pew seats at St John's. We are starting with two invaluable lists: one of all the men and women who could afford to rent a sitting from 1889-1891 and one of all the marriages in the first decade of the church's life.

We were extremely fortunate in 2024 to draw on the expertise of many distinguished local historians. In 2025 even more have volunteered their time and talents. You will see from our calendar that our events will take various forms: a walking talk round the Ranmoor shops, a display of the kinds of cookery books used in Ranmoor's mansions, talks by leading experts in the history of this area and a two-week exhibition in which local artists respond to the social mix that made up our shifting and varied community. Dan Eaton and I are offering history workshops to history students and primary school children. We will all seek to understand the way different kinds of groups related to others of a different status: craftsmen to wealthy manufacturers, seamstresses to embroiderers, housekeepers to mistresses of the house.

If you would like to share your own family's history with the project do get in touch with me. I am also looking for volunteers to welcome visitors to the church during the art exhibition in June and to provide refreshments. Cake always has the power to make us welcome in a church which, however beautiful, can even in summer be sometimes dark and cold.

Every two weeks our team will share our findings in the blog posts which you can find on the church website. Type in 'Scissors Paper Stone St John's Ranmoor' and you will reach us, or you can scan the QR code to be taken straight there. We are delighted to begin 2025 with a sequence of blogs from the noted Sheffield cultural historian, Val Hewson. Our next blog will be her introduction to the people involved in the building and consecration of 'Ranmoor's lost church' in 1879. Enjoy!



Mary Grover
6th January 2025