

## **Thornfield, Sheffield Road, Chesterfield**

### **Introduction**

- 1 This note has been prepared by Chesterfield & District Civic Society to assist Chesterfield Borough Council in determining a planning application (CHE/17/00237/OUT) by the East Midlands Chamber of Commerce to demolish the existing buildings at their former offices on Canal Wharf, Chesterfield, and redevelop the site for housing. Most of the present buildings on the site are modern, but the offices incorporate a former private house, Thornfield, which may be deemed to have sufficient historic interest to warrant an amendment to the present proposal to enable this property to be retained.

### **Thornfield: an outline history**

- 2 Thornfield was built, at some date in the early nineteenth century which has yet to be established, by Joseph Gratton (*c.*1775–1842), who has some claim to be among the more interesting figures in the Chesterfield of his day. He was born at Carr House, Wingerworth, and appears to have begun his working life as a mercer and draper with a shop on the north side of the Market Place.<sup>1</sup> In 1802 he was appointed agent to the Chesterfield Canal Company and went to live near the head of the canal in Stonegravels. He retained this position until at least 1839, when he was presented with a silver tea service costing 100 guineas, made by Wilkinson of Sheffield. The set comprised a tea-kettle, stand and lamp (for keeping the water hot), coffee- and

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<sup>1</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 20 Jan. 1877.

teapots, a sugar basin and cream ewer. The kettle was inscribed: ‘This Silver Tea Service was presented to Mr Joseph Gratton, by the Chesterfield Canal Company, the 9th May 1839, in testimony of the high sense entertained by them of his zeal, fidelity and unremitting attention, as their agent, for upwards of thirty years’. The newspaper report of the presentation gives his exact period of service as 37 years, which (in the absence of any canal company committee minutes) fixes the date of his appointment.<sup>2</sup>

3 His work for the canal company was by no means Gratton’s only achievement. He was said, some years after his death, to have been responsible for the introduction of both gas and water into Chesterfield. He designed the gasworks (on Chatsworth Road, near the junction with Foljambe Road, on the site now occupied by Aldi), which was built over a period of nine months in 1826 under his supervision, and for which he was thanked with a public dinner.<sup>3</sup> More generally, he seems to have been a self-taught polymath. He was described as a ‘good practical mechanic’, the best experimental chemist in the town and a competent electrician, who spoke French fluently and was a good performer on the violin. He was an excellent maker of fireworks and gave shows in the Market Place.<sup>4</sup> He may have retired from business soon after the presentation in 1839, since when he was enumerated in the 1841 census

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<sup>2</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 11 May 1839; the decision to make the gift was reported in the issue on 29 Dec. 1838. It would be nice to trace the present whereabouts of what appears to have been a magnificent piece of tableware, which must always have been worth far more than its scrap value and should be easy enough to identify from the inscription.

<sup>3</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 21 Nov. 1874.

<sup>4</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 20 Jan. 1877.

he returned himself as ‘Independent’.<sup>5</sup> A month after the census was taken, he sold by auction a ‘large collection of mechanical, electrical and philosophical apparatus’, together with a library of works on those subjects and a copy of William Smith’s pioneer geological map of England (measuring 6 ft by 8 ft, on rollers).<sup>6</sup>

4 Gratton also, like many such men in this period, was allowed to practise privately alongside his work for the canal company. Apart from his involvement in the gas and water schemes of the 1820s, he built up a considerable portfolio of residential and commercial property in Chesterfield, including a large malthouse on Sheffield Road (on the site now occupied by Malthouse Court) and the house behind on Newbold Road (i.e. St Helen’s House, later owned by the Girls’ High School, now a mosque).<sup>7</sup> He must also have bought property between the canal wharf at the end of Wharf Lane and Sheffield Road (which then lay just outside the borough in Newbold township) and it was here that he built Thornfield. The house was certainly in existence by 1838<sup>8</sup> and Gratton presumably remained there until his death in October 1842.<sup>9</sup>

5 Joseph Gratton married a lady named Betty Barker (her maiden name and the date of

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<sup>5</sup> TNA, HO 107/194/7, f. 21v.

<sup>6</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 29 May 1841.

<sup>7</sup> The Chesterfield tithe award of 1849 schedules all Gratton’s property, then said to be in the hands of his executors (more accurately administrators, since he died intestate).

<sup>8</sup> When ‘Mr Gratton of Thornfield’ was put on a committee to make plans to celebrate Queen Victoria’s coronation in Chesterfield (*Derb. Courier*, 26 May 1838).

<sup>9</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 15 Oct. 1842.

the marriage have not been traced)<sup>10</sup> and the couple had several children, of whom only two appear to have survived to adulthood. A son, also named Joseph, became a solicitor in Chesterfield,<sup>11</sup> and a daughter, Anna Sarah never married. She was at home with her parents in 1841<sup>12</sup> and in later years lived with the Misses Claughton at Hasland House.<sup>13</sup> She died in 1882.<sup>14</sup> Her brother Joseph was in business for a period ending in 1842 with William and Henry Claughton as wine and spirits merchants.<sup>15</sup>

6 Joseph Gratton died intestate and it was only in 1847 that his son Joseph obtained letters of administration. His father was then found to have left relatively modest personal estate of £300,<sup>16</sup> although, on the evidence of the Chesterfield tithe award of 1849, his real property would have been worth a considerable sum. His widow Betty died in May 1850. She was then living at Hasland (possibly with the Claughtons) and was said to be ‘formerly of Thornfield’.<sup>17</sup> In the years immediately following Mrs

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<sup>10</sup> In 1882 she was described as a niece of John Taylor, a shopkeeper who occupied the premises on High Street that later became T.P. Wood’s wine stores (*Derb. Times*, 8 April 1882).

<sup>11</sup> His father’s death notice describes Joseph senior as the father of Joseph Gratton the solicitor (*Derb. Courier*, 15 Oct. 1842).

<sup>12</sup> She was living with her parents (and two servants) at Thornfield on census night, when her age was given as between 35 and 39 (TNA, HO 107/194/7, f. 21v.).

<sup>13</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 20 Jan. 1877.

<sup>14</sup> *Derb. Times*, 8 April 1882.

<sup>15</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 2 April 1842.

<sup>16</sup> TNA, IR 27/129; Lichfield Record Office, Admon, 23 July 1847. Joseph’s mother and sister renounced their claim to be joint administratrixes.

<sup>17</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 4 May 1850.

Gratton's death (and possibly before) Thornfield was let to John Champion and his wife, who left in 1854.<sup>18</sup> In 1856 the house was sold, when it was described as a 'substantially erected mansion', then in the occupation of Henry Hopkinson, with pleasure grounds and garden, an approach road (from Sheffield Road), and extensive and well-planned outbuildings. The sale included five cottages and land nearby, on which a brick and tiles works was established.<sup>19</sup> The mansion, cottages and land amounted to 4½ acres, all of which was freehold; and other land, some it designated as building land, adjoining was offered on a 2,000-year lease.<sup>20</sup> Thornfield House was said to have been built by the late owner regardless of cost and contained 'every convenience for a gentleman's residence'. The sale also included a close of freehold land near Thornfield, to be sold in ten building plots.<sup>21</sup>

7 The purchaser, either at the auction or afterwards, was Joseph Shipton, who was in residence at Thornfield by February 1859.<sup>22</sup> Shipton was admitted as a solicitor in 1838 or 1839 and practised for a time at Stroud. He moved to Chesterfield in 1844 to enter the office of John Charge, the clerk of the peace for the county, at 23 West Bars

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<sup>18</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 24 Dec. 1853 (Mrs Champion of Thornfield mentioned as a subscriber to a Bible charity); *Derb. Times*, 2 Sept. 1854 (birth of a son to Mrs Champion), 28 Oct. 1854 (contents sale by John Champion, who was moving to new residence).

<sup>19</sup> The 'Stonegravels Brickyard' was advertised to let, either on a lease or from year to year, in 1842, when applications were to be directed to Joseph Gratton, Saltergate (*Derb. Courier*, 26 March 1842), i.e. presumably the younger Joseph.

<sup>20</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 2 Aug. 1856. A leasehold house built on one of these parcels, on the south side of the entrance drive to Thornfield, was offered for sale in 1896 for the residue of the term of 2,000 years (*Derb. Times*, 28 March 1896).

<sup>21</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 2 Aug. 1856.

<sup>22</sup> *Derb. Times*, 12 Feb. 1859.

as managing clerk. Charge died in 1849 and Shipton succeeded to his practice. Later that year or early in 1850 he took John Hallewell into partnership and thus was founded the firm of Shipton Hallewell & Co. which still occupies the same premises on West Bars. Shipton was an active Conservative and held a number of public appointments, including the clerkship to the municipal charities and to the grammar school. He was mayor in 1859–61. He helped to administer the National (i.e. Church of England) schools in Chesterfield and supported the building of Christ Church, Stonegravels, near his home. He died aged 65 in April 1880,<sup>23</sup> and Thornfield was offered for sale by auction the following August, with gardens, pleasure grounds, a cottage, a lodge, stables, a coachhouse, outbuildings, a greenhouse, a vinery and an orchard house, standing in a total of 7¼ acres. The contents of the mansion were sold at the same time.<sup>24</sup>

8 The next owners and occupiers of Thornfield were John Kinder Swallow and his wife, who had taken up residence by October 1881.<sup>25</sup> Swallow, a native of Holmfirth in the West Riding, was born in 1822 and from about 1858 had a draper's business in Burlington Street. He died in June 1890<sup>26</sup> and his widow Frances about a year later, aged 65.<sup>27</sup> Swallows' drapery business survived for many years afterwards.

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<sup>23</sup> *Derb. Times*, 28 April 1880.

<sup>24</sup> *Derb. Times*, 16 June, 24 July, 28 Aug. 1880.

<sup>25</sup> *Derb. Times*, 22 Oct. 1881 (Mrs Swallow advertising for a cook-general).

<sup>26</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 7 June 1890.

<sup>27</sup> *Derb. Times*, 9 May 1891.

9 In July 1891 it was announced that Thornfield had been purchased from Swallow's executors by Joseph Edward Clayton,<sup>28</sup> the son of Joseph Clayton, the founder of the tanning business which continues under his name on Clayton Street (although the family ceased to be connected with the company in the 1920s).<sup>29</sup> Three years later Clayton tried (and failed) to sell (or let) Thornfield. The house, still approached by a carriage drive from Sheffield Road, then had an entrance hall, dining, drawing and breakfast rooms on the ground floor, with kitchen and other service rooms; and six bedrooms, a dressing room, bathroom and w.c. on the first floor (this total probably excludes servants' rooms). Outside there were well-stocked gardens, a conservatory, vinery, peach-house, fernery, and melon-, tomato- and cucumber-houses, as well as stabling and a carriage house. There was an entrance lodge on Sheffield Road and a gardener's house, and the estate extended to 7½ acres.<sup>30</sup>

10 After this unsuccessful attempt to dispose of the house, the Claytons stayed there for most of the rest of their lives, and before the First World War frequently hosted charity functions in the extensive gardens.<sup>31</sup> In 1912 Mrs Clayton (Elizabeth, the daughter of William Bradbury Robinson, the head of the large firm in Brampton

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<sup>28</sup> *Derb. Times*, 18 July 1891; Mrs Swallow's executors sold the contents of Thornfield in Sept. 1891 (*ibid.*, 29 Aug., 30 Sept.).

<sup>29</sup> See generally R.H. Bradshaw, *Joseph Clayton & Sons: 150 years of tanning in Chesterfield* (1990).

<sup>30</sup> *Derb. Times*, 3 March 1894 (advertisement for sale); *Derb. Courier*, 26 May 1894 (for sale or to let).

<sup>31</sup> Most of the references to Thornfield between 1894 and 1914 found in the local press are to events of this sort.

which bore his name)<sup>32</sup> opened the gardens to invalids every Wednesday during the summer.<sup>33</sup> Throughout this period J.E. Clayton was a member of the town council and was particularly concerned with education. He was for many years the grammar school ‘correspondent’, who dealt with the Charity Commission and later the Board of Education.<sup>34</sup> He was also a governor of both the grammar school and later the girls’ high school, and served on the old Chesterfield school board (the predecessor of the borough education committee) from 1888.<sup>35</sup>

- 11 In his address to voters for the council elections in 1910, Clayton urged the creation of a public park to serve North Ward, which included Stonegravels, following the borough boundary extension of that year.<sup>36</sup> He may not, however, have envisaged that the grounds of his own home should be used for this purpose. This was the recommendation of the estates and development committee of the council in 1914, but as a long-term ambition, rather than a plan to be put into effect at once.<sup>37</sup> By 1923

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<sup>32</sup> *Derb. Times*, 23 Aug. 1940, an obituary notice which points out that Elizabeth’s sister married J.E. Clayton’s brother, J. Morton Clayton. The Clayton brothers’ only sister married W. Hawksley Edmunds, the owner for many years of the *Derbyshire Times* (*Derb. Times*, 13 Dec. 1935). Both the Claytons and Edmundses were governors of the grammar school for many years, as well as holding a range of other public appointments between them. Chesterfield was a very small place in those days.

<sup>33</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 4 May 1912.

<sup>34</sup> This is apparent from several grammar school files among the records of both departments in the National Archives, although Mansfeld Heron Humble, a member of Shipton, Hallewell & Co., handled the more important correspondence as clerk to the governors.

<sup>35</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 30 Oct. 1920.

<sup>36</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 29 Oct. 1910.

<sup>37</sup> *Derb. Courier*, 11 Aug. 1914.



the suggestion had become definite council policy,<sup>38</sup> although the Claytons were still at Thornfield, and still hosting social events in the gardens, until at least 1928.<sup>39</sup> They later moved to 50 Cobden Road, where J.E. Clayton died in 1935, aged 75. A lengthy obituary in the *Derbyshire Times* referred to his 33 years' service on the town council, his long period as a governor of the two secondary schools, and as a great supporter of schoolboy football in the town, for which he presented the Clayton Challenge Shield.<sup>40</sup> His widow Elizabeth died in 1940, aged 83.<sup>41</sup>

- 12 By 1932, after the Claytons left Thornfield, the estate was bought by Chesterfield corporation. In a remarkable illustration of the scale on which municipal administration in a town the size of Chesterfield operated in these years, the house initially became the official residence of the manager of the corporation's transport undertaking.<sup>42</sup> Part of the land acquired with the house was used as the department's garage and workshops on Sheffield Road. Even more bizarrely, the chief officer in question, Richard Hoggard, and his wife continued the tradition of opening the gardens for charitable events.<sup>43</sup> In 1935 part of the land acquired with the house was

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<sup>38</sup> *Derb. Times*, 9 Oct. 1923.

<sup>39</sup> *Derb. Times*, 18 Aug. 1928.

<sup>40</sup> *Derb. Times*, 13 Dec. 1935. When Clayton's will was proved the following March., he was found to have left only £503 personal estate (Cal. Grants, 1936). The Clayton Challenge competition (for junior school football teams) continued to be competed for until at least the 1960s.

<sup>41</sup> *Derb. Times*, 23 Aug. 1940.

<sup>42</sup> *Derb. Times*, 2 July 1932.

<sup>43</sup> *Derb. Times*, 9 July 1932, 19 July 1935.

transferred from the transport committee to the housing committee of the corporation, to enable them to build houses for employees of the transport department, for which tenders were advertised two years later.<sup>44</sup> In 1950, presumably recognising that the circumstances of municipal transport managers had changed since the more spacious days of the 1930s, the corporation divided Thornfield into two separate dwellings.<sup>45</sup> At a later date, the transport department built a new garage and workshops on the opposite side of Sheffield Road. Either then or afterwards, the council disposed of the old garage and presumably also Thornfield, which later became the offices of the Chamber of Commerce.

### **Recommendation**

- 13 The committee of the Civic Society feels that, although Thornfield has no claim to be accorded statutory protection for its architectural merit, it is of some historical interest. It was built (and may well have been designed) by a man who not only stands out as one of the longest serving officers of the Chesterfield Canal Company but who clearly had a wide range of other interests and played a significant part in the development of the town in the first half of the nineteenth century. He was, moreover, a man whose achievements were recognised by his contemporaries.
  
- 14 Perhaps most important, Thornfield can claim to be the only building still standing in the town associated with the Chesterfield Canal, since the original warehouses at the

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<sup>44</sup> *Derb. Times*, 3 May 1935, 9 April 1937.

<sup>45</sup> *Derb. Times*, 3 March 1950.

terminal wharf were demolished when the Great Central Railway was built in the 1890s, and other buildings shown on maps down to the 1870s have also disappeared. As it is intended that the restored canal will form the centrepiece of a major redevelopment scheme on the northern edge of Chesterfield, we feel that it would be desirable to keep the last surviving building connected with the canal. We believe that it should be possible to devise a scheme for the redevelopment of the Chamber of Commerce site which allows for the building of a reasonable number of new houses and at the same time retains Thornfield. Not having seen the inside of the property, we cannot suggest whether it might be suitable for restoration to residential use, but we see no reason why it could not continue in commercial use. A parallel might be drawn with the former College of Art site at Penmore in Hasland, where Penmore House has been adapted to become offices, while good quality new houses have been built in its grounds.

- 15 If Thornfield is retained, the Civic Society would be interested in installing a blue plaque on the building to draw attention to its association with Joseph Gratton and with the Chesterfield Canal. We would probably suggest doing this in conjunction with the Chesterfield Canal Trust.

Philip Riden

Chairman, Chesterfield and District Civic Society

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