

1 Queen Street/2 King Street — Unusual House — Unusual 'Finds'

It was indeed fortunate for the Trust that in 1985, five years before he was due to retire, that George Cassedy visited Emsworth and saw the "For Sale" sign on the property on the corner of King and Queen Streets. It was still two separate homes and both were in a poor state of repair. The unoccupied King Street house had a bathroom but the Queen Street part, with its long-term tenant, lacked inside facilities. George decided to purchase the house – the two properties were being sold as one item. Very soon afterwards the tenant, Mr Gale, moved out.

George spent his early years in the local area. Born in Southampton, he and his family came to Portsmouth when his father got a job in the city. During WW11 when their home was bombed they were billeted in Hambledon. After the war George attended a Technical College, joined the Sea Scouts, and took up an apprenticeship as a shipwright in Portsmouth Dockyard. As a young married man he went to live in Leigh Park and his younger daughter was born in the Northlands Maternity Hospital in Emsworth. He acquired and re-built a sailing dinghy and taught his two daughters to sail at Hayling Island. When George got a job as a sound recording engineer with the BBC the family moved away from the area and settled in London.

Although George has owned the property for over 25 years he has never lived in it but in 1991 when he retired, with more time to spare, he set to with great enthusiasm to learn as much as he could about the house, its history, the way it was built and its previous occupants. He decided this was a project well worth taking on and his aim was to gain whatever knowledge he could from the restoration work he needed to do and pass it on to others with similar interests. This led him to have many discussions with David Rudkin, Strahan Soames, Roy and Sheila Morgan and others who were actively involved with the history of Emsworth.

His widow Emily says that initially there was no thought of 'finding' anything in the house but an infestation of dry rot meant the complete removal of wooden floors and partitions and some plasterwork. It was whilst this was being done that a well, constructed of South Downs chalk blocks, was found under the kitchen floorboards. When it was excavated it was found to have been filled in with material that was probably brought up from the foreshore – the top layer was very fine silvery sand but as they dug deeper the grains became grit, then gravel, then small pebbles and finally large pebbles. The well with all the rubble removed now contains "grey" water – and Emily says it can be used for 'flushing'.

However, important items were found later when the joists were exposed in a bedroom. Here they located one complete tricorne hat and the remains of another one – both probably from 1790/1810. George and Emily arranged for them to be refurbished by the Textile Department of the V & A and they are at present on loan to Emsworth Museum and on display for everyone to see. It is very unusual for a small museum to have an original tricorne hat and we have two and are extremely pleased to have them. Another discovery was a child's leather shoe, of the same date, found squashed flat under a window sill. George carefully treated the leather with applications of dubbin and then returned it to where he found it. I understand that in

the past shoes have often been placed by windows or doors (where people enter a building) as good luck symbols and to ward off evil.

When the fireplace in the parlour downstairs was being cleared several stems and bits of clay pipe were found. It is easy to imagine an elderly gentleman sitting warming himself by the fire on a cold winter night and peacefully smoking his clay pipe until it broke. As it was no longer of use it was discarded into the hearth. There are no markings on the pieces that came from the house – I wonder if they were made in the clay pipe works at the bottom of Queen Street.

Next time you are walking past the house look at the decorative cast-iron window fenders on the ground floor window sills. Often seen on older style properties they are very useful now for making sure that window box plant holders don't fall.

There are two items in the museum that George was instrumental in obtaining but that didn't come from the Queen Street/King Street house. They are the lion garden seat and a grandfather clock. George frequently visited the museum and was concerned that there were very few chairs for visitors to sit on to admire the displays. He decided that he would like to rectify this and thought that a traditional garden bench would be ideal. He sourced a cast-iron one and with the help of Philip Dridge (Weldrite, Station Garage) and Jack Barrett had it completely rebuilt. It is still in the main room of the museum – a comfortable place for visitors to rest. George was also responsible for negotiations that eventually led to Mrs Peggy MacDonald's family loaning the grandfather clock that stands beside the door of the museum's Main Room. The clock was made by Joseph Collins, an Emsworth clockmaker, who had lived in North Street.

As a well travelled sound engineer with the BBC George visited many parts of the world. He was a member of the BBC team that went to America and filmed what is probably the last interview with P G Wodehouse – another link with Emsworth. Locally George used his skills to record interviews with David Rudkin and Norman Boutell, and these can be found with the oral history recordings in the museum's Archive Room.

Written by Dorothy Bone from information provided by Emily Cassedy



*Child's leather shoe
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under a window sill*