Washington Green Library

Past and Present

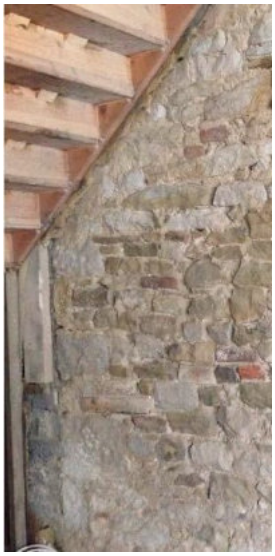
On a sunny day in November 2021 Ernie Guy, a member of Washington History Society, and his wife Carol, visited The Green Tearoom in Washington Village for a toastie and coffee. They had visited the tearoom back in August, and sat at an outside table, but on this occasion they decided to eat inside, upstairs. It was the first time that Ernie had been in the building for 70 years; he had last called there as a schoolboy back in the 1950s when the building was a public library. It was a long walk to get there for Ernie in those days. As a child he lived in the "prefabs" at Usworth Green (now Sulgrave Village), and the journey to the library took him through Usworth Park, past the Gardeners Club, through the Stile Inn fields with grazing horses, and past a farm, which brought him out by the Police House in Washington Village, next door to the library.

Outside members of the Village In Bloom gardening group were tidying up the flower beds, and staff from Gentoo housing authority were planting bedding plants around the War Memorial.

This pleasant experience prompted Ernie to investigate the history of the library building.

The Village Grocer and Fruitier

The building which now houses the Green Tea room has had a number of previous tenants and uses, but it is not known when it was built, though a row of buildings are shown on Ordnance Survey maps from 1857 onwards.



It has a brick-built frontage which is different from the stone-built buildings around it, such as the Cross Keys pub, but this appearance is misleading. Closer examination of old black and white photos of the building when it was a shop in the early 1900s, show that the sides of the building are built of stone. When it was being converted to a tearoom, original stone walls were exposed.

It is likely therefore that the brick frontage was built when the building first became a shop. The next-door Cross Keys was first licensed in 1827. Photographs show the building in the early 1900s with the same frontage.

The 1851 Census shows that a building on the site was occupied by Alice Charlton, a 57 year old widow, her daughter aged 8 and two lodgers. Alice was running a laundry.

First name(s)	Last name	Relationship	Marital status	Sex	Age	Birth year	Occupation	Birth place
Alice	**Charlton**	**Head**	**Widow**	**Female**	**57**	**1794**	**Laundress**	**Birtley, Northumberland, England**
Alice	Charlton	Grand daughter	-	Female	8	1843	Scholar	Washington, Durham, England
Thomas	Carton	Lodger	Widower	Male	63	1788	Lab	Fleet, Lincolnshire, England
Samuel	Cleland	Lodger	Unmarried	Male	25	1826	Lab	Ireland

By the time of the 1861 Census the occupants were the Stokoe family. The head of the, family William Stokoe, aged 35, is shown as a blacksmith, and his wife E.. (name not given) is listed as grocer, presumably running the shop. Seven children are also listed, as well as an 18 year-old house servant.

1861 England, Wales & Scotland Census

Grocers Shop, Washington, Chester Le Street, Durham, England

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Household members (10 people) Copy to clipboard

First name(s)	Last name	Relationship	Marital status	Sex	Age	Birth year	Occupation	Birth place
William	**Stokoe**	**Head**	**Married**	**Male**	**35**	**1826**	**Blacksmith**	**Hartley, Northumberland, England**
E	Stokoe	Wife	Married	Female	36	1825	Grocer	Scalby, Cumberland, England
W	Stokoe	Son	Unmarried	Male	13	1848	Labourer	Birtley, Durham, England
R	Stokoe	Son	Unmarried	Male	11	1850	Labourer	Birtley, Durham, England
E	Stokoe	Daughter	Unmarried	Female	9	1852	Scholar	Washington, Durham, England
M	Stokoe	Daughter	Unmarried	Female	7	1854	Scholar	Washington, Durham, England
T	Stokoe	Son	Unmarried	Male	5	1856	Scholar	Washington, Durham, England
J	Stokoe	Son	Unmarried	Male	2	1859	-	Washington, Durham, England
H	Stokoe	Daughter	Unmarried	Female	1	1860	-	Washington, Durham, England
E	Malabar	Servant	Unmarried	Female	18	1843	House servant	Shiney Row, Durham, England

The 1871 Census shows that the building was occupied by the Stoker family, with 35 year Matthew listed as a grocer. The entry is barely legible, but the fact that the Police House and Commercial Hotel (now The Washington Arms) are shown nearby proves that we have the correct building.

In 1881 and 1891 the building was occupied by John Robinson Dixon, a grocer, wife Isabella and family.

By 1901 the building was occupied by the Ross family: John Ross aged 49 the proprietor of a general dealers shop, his wife Elizabeth, two sons, a daughter, and a

1871 England, Wales & Scotland Census

Village, Washington, Chester Le Street, Durham, England

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Household members (5 people) — Copy to clipboard

First name(s)	Last name	Relationship	Marital status	Sex	Age	Birth year	Occupation	Birth place
Annie	**Stoker**	**Head**	**-**	**Female**	**19**	**1852**	**-**	**Durham, England**
John A	Stoker	Brother	-	Male	17	1854	-	Durham, England
Matthew	Stoker	Uncle	-	Male	36	1835	-	Durham, England
Edward M	Stoker	Cousin	-	Male	5	1866	-	Durham, England
Jane	Stoker	Cousin	-	Female	3	1868	-	Durham, England

1881 England, Wales & Scotland Census

Shop & House, Washington, Chester Le Street, Durham, England

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Household members (7 people) — Copy to clipboard

First name(s)	Last name	Relationship	Marital status	Sex	Age	Birth year	Occupation	Birth place
John Robinson	**Dixon**	**Head**	**Married**	**Male**	**36**	**1845**	**Grocer**	**Rainton, Durham, England**
Isabella	Dixon	Wife	Married	Female	32	1849	-	Usworth, Durham, England
Mary Jane	Dixon	Daughter	Single	Female	9	1872	Scholar	Newburn, Northumberland, England
Isabella	Dixon	Daughter	Single	Female	6	1875	Scholar	Haswell, Durham, England
Sarah	Dixon	Daughter	Single	Female	3	1878	-	Haswell, Durham, England
John Joseph	Dixon	Son	Single	Male	1	1880	-	Washington, Durham, England
Mary Hannah	Markay	Servant	Single	Female	18	1863	Gen servant	Haswell, Durham, England

domestic servant.

The 1911 Census shows that the building was now a fruiterers shop, run by 45 years

1891 England, Wales & Scotland Census

Grocers Shop, Commercial Place, Washington, Chester Le Street, Durham, England

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Household members (8 people) — Copy to clipboard

First name(s)	Last name	Relationship	Marital status	Sex	Age	Birth year	Occupation	Birth place
John R	**Dixon**	**Head**	**Married**	**Male**	**46**	**1845**	**Grocer**	**Rainton, Durham, England**
Isabella	Dixon	Wife	Married	Female	42	1849	-	Usworth, Durham, England
Isabella	Dixon	Daughter	-	Female	16	1875	Apprentice grocer	Haswell, Durham, England
Sarah	Dixon	Daughter	-	Female	13	1878	Scholar	Haswell, Durham, England
John Joseph	Dixon	Son	-	Male	11	1880	Scholar	Washington, Durham, England
Lucy	Dixon	Daughter	-	Female	7	1884	Scholar	Washington, Durham, England
George	Dixon	Son	-	Male	4	1887	-	Washington, Durham, England
Elizabeth M	Dixon	Daughter	-	Female	2	1889	-	Washington, Durham, England

old George Milburn Dawson and his wife Elizabeth Jane. The couple had seven children of whom four were still at school. Ten years earlier George had been a horse keeper in a coal mine.

1901 England, Wales & Scotland Census

3, The Green, Washington, Chester Le Street, Durham, England

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Household members (6 people) — Copy to clipboard

First name(s)	Last name	Relationship	Marital status	Sex	Age	Birth year	Occupation	Birth place
John	**Ross**	**Head**	**Married**	**Male**	**49**	**1852**	**General dealer grocer etc**	**Durham, England**
Elizabeth	Ross	Wife	Married	Female	50	1851	-	Great Chilton, Durham, England
John W	Ross	Son	Single	Male	17	1884	Apprentice mason	Durham, England
Thomas H	Ross	Son	Single	Male	15	1886	Apprentice painter	Durham, England
Sarah S	Ross	Daughter	Single	Female	12	1889	-	Durham, England
Dinna	Low	Servant	Single	Female	14	1887	Servant (domestic)	Washington, Durham, England

No census form was completed for the building (No 5 The Green) in 1921 which suggests that the shop might not have residents at that time. The neighbour in No 4 was out of work house joiner James Smith". Number 6 on the other side was the police house occupied by Police Sergeant James Nicholas Howard and his family.

The Green Washington Village, Washington, Durham, England

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Household members (9 people) — Copy to clipboard

First name(s)	Last name	Relationship to head	Marital status	Sex	Age	Birth year	Occupation	Birth place
George Milburn	**Dawson**	**Head**	**Married**	**Male**	**45**	**1866**	**Fruiterer**	**Durham Bishop Wearmouth**
Elizabeth Jane	Dawson	Wife	Married	Female	44	1867	-	Northumberland Gosforth
Joseph Henry	Dawson	Son	Single	Male	21	1890	Cartman	Durham Usworth
George Milburn	Dawson	Son	Single	Male	18	1893	Cartman	Durham Gateshead
Mary Eleanor	Dawson	Daughter	Single	Female	15	1896	-	Northumberland St Anthonys
Jane Anne	Dawson	Daughter	Single	Female	13	1898	School	Durham Usworth
Robert	Dawson	Son	Single	Male	11	1900	School	Durham Washington
Stephen John	Dawson	Son	Single	Male	9	1902	School	Durham Washington
Wilfred	Dawson	Son	-	Male	6	1905	School	Durham Washington

In 1924 George was still self-employed, but is recorded as a general cartman and the family was living round the corner in Spout Lane

The oldest photographs of the building show it as a general dealers shop, with signs on the west wall advertising Fry's Cocoa, and Cadbury's Cocoa. The Police House is next door with steps leading to the door.

The Building As a Public Library

Old copies of the Washington Parish Magazine,refer to the setting up of Washington Village Green Library. An entry in the October 1929 edition an entry stated that the Washington Urban District Council Library Committee was negotiating with the County Council's Clerk of the Peace and Librarian of for securing the the old village Police Station for that purpose. It had been built in 1867 as the population of Washington grew, but judged inadequate for the town of the 1920s.

It was hoped that a new library could be in operation by April 1930. Hours of opening were to be Mondays to Fridays 10am to 12 am, 4pm to 8 pm, and Saturdays 9am to 12 noon. Estimated annual maintenance expenditure was: salary of Librarian £150, rates, lighting, cleaning etc. £85.

However late in process the grocer's shop was purchased instead. At the last minute there was a dispute between the two councils about who should appoint the librarian, but this was resolved and **Norman Harrington** was appointed as thefirst librarian. In May 1930 it was opened by Councillor Haskett, Chairman of Washington UDC.

An entry for March 1931 noted that the library was to be fitted with glass-panelled doors at a cost of £8. The Washington District Association of the Nation Association of Teachers had presented 40 books to the library. Thirty one applications had been received for the post of Assistant librarian: Miss Vera Storey, aged 16, of 3 New Rows South, was appointed. During February 7,684 books were issued.

By 1933 the new library was flourishing, and had a total of 115,336 available books, and Norman Harrington was still the librarian.

When the mobile library service was started the lean to between the building and the Cross Keys was used as a garage.

The library committee has got to work. Information is being sought from the Clerk of the Peace for the county with regard to the tenure of the old Police Station, as this building is considered ideal for a central library.

Negotiations with the County Librarian are proceeding and it is hoped to commence the library on 1st April next. Tentative details are as follows:—Hours of opening, Mondays to Fridays 10 a.m. to 12, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Saturdays 9 to 12 noon. The estimated annual maintenance expenditure is:—Salary of Librarian £150; rates, lighting, cleaning, etc., £8.

An endeavour is to be made once more to meet Sunderland R.D.C. to carry on negotiations with the object of improving the dangerous road corner on the Urban boundary north.

WASHINGTON PARISH MAGAZINE OCT. 1929

The County Library Committee disapprove of the Washington Urban Council appointing a librarian, and state that the Local Library Committee is the properly constituted body for making such an appointment.

The chairman stated that if the Council had erred, they had erred in good faith as their sole object was to get the library commenced by 1st April.

Coun. Haskett spoke strongly in protest against the red tape regulations which, if adhered to, would mean the opening of the library being postponed for several months; further, the Council had been advised throughout by the County Librarian in all their actions. It was decided that a deputation wait upon the County Committee to clear up the matter.

The library is to be fitted with glass-panelled doors at a cost of £8. The Washington District Association of the National Union of Teachers has presented 40 volumes to the library.

31 applications were received for the post of assistant-librarian: Miss Vera Storey, aged 16, of 3, New Rows South, was appointed. During February, 7,684 books were issued.

35 births and 17 deaths occurred during the month; 14 cases of infectious diseases were

The library was small in comparison with today's libraries. The fiction and children's sections were located downstairs, and there was a reference library upstairs, along with the Librarian's office. A small back room on the ground floor served as staff room, and there was also a downstairs toilet. The outside appearance of the building has not changed substantially since 1930 apart from the installation of new doors, but the boarded -up lower sections of the windows have since been removed. New stained glass windows were installed in the upper part of the frontage following a design competition run by the library.

1949

1960s

1990s

1960s

1970s

Personal Recollections

A member of Washington History Society, **Elaine Naylor**, worked in the Village Library as a trainee Library Assistant from 1964 to 1970. At that time the Librarian was **Norman Shaw**, who Elaine remembers as a formal manager, but one who always defended his staff if there were problems with members of the public. She worked with several library assistants during her time at Washington, including Isobel King, Sheila Oxley, Dorothy Irving and Christine Napier. The building was open to the public from 10am to 7pm, but staff were required to start at 9am. The library was also open on Saturday mornings.

The library ground floor,
with gate to first floor

Elaine also manned the mobile library which served the outlying villages throughout the county. The driver, **Bill Maddison**, was a cheerful character who was very popular with the public. She remembers sleeping in one morning, and Bill knocked on her door to wake her on his way to do the rounds.

As a junior staff member of staff Elaine was required to stoke the boiler daily, which meant exiting the building, unlocking a side door, and going down dark steps into the cellar.

She remembers that the downstairs library shelves were metal, while the upstairs shelves were wooden. It was common for groups of school children to have introductory visits to the library to meet the staff, and for staff to read stories to pre-school children.

Elaine qualified as a Librarian in 1969. Despite stories of the building being haunted Elaine doesn't remember any ghostly incidents, and remembers the building as a pleasant place to work.

Yvonne Hann wrote to the History Society with her memories:-

"My first step into the Village Library was when I was aged 7 and was allowed (after passing my clean hands inspection) to join. The sight of all those books lined up in a warm but dark room was wonderful.

Then in 1968 I once again entered the building as a Library Assistant. It was still the same but the clean hands inspection was gone. As a young person I was unsure about my work life choices and undecided about a life filled with books. I could not see myself as a Librarian as every one of them that I had met had left a very negative impression on me. But Susan was there, and in the very short period of time I worked with her she rekindled my love of books and of the job itself, but more than anything it was the building that helped me. A building I loved and would have happily stayed for all my working life. I loved going down into the cellar to keep the coke burners operating and would imagine how the walled garden would once have looked.

The building itself had many incarnations over the years, from shop to library to cafe, so it gained a reputation as a haunted building. Some members of the public would not even venture upstairs alone, likewise some members of staff. For me the building was always warm and welcoming, maybe I'm the odd one out.

The Library operated a mobile library service, in it I visited places I that before were only names to me; Hebburn, Beamish, Pelton Fell, Burnmoor. This service continued until the day that Washington left Durham [County] to join Sunderland [Borough] in 1974.

I continued reading stories to pre-school children, though my stories or person, did not leave much of an impression on some, who can't remember them. I forgive you Nathan (future son in law); you were only 4 years old after all.

The Washington and East Boldon staff

But best of all were the friendships I made in that building, the members of the public who helped me and supported me, and some became lifelong friends.

When I was forced into leaving, after 22 years, when the library was made a part-time branch, no other building ever felt the same. Though I came to love being a library assistant, my love of books and working with people never changed, nor did the fact that I never wanted the responsibility of being a librarian. All in all I had a very good working life and one day I may even call into the building for a coffee".

The library closed its doors in 2014, having succumbed to funding cuts. At the same time the branch library at The Oval in Concord was closed. Library resources were now concentrated centrally in the much larger library in The Galleries, Washington.

The Green Tea Room

In 2014 the old library building was purchased from Sunderland City Council by Wayne and Kelly Kennedy, and converted into a tea room, florist and gift shop. At the same time the couple also bought the The Forge restaurant just across the village green (formerly The Blacksmiths Table).

The building is located in the ever improving centre of the Village, and is ideally placed for passing traffic and pedestrians.Washington Village won the "Best Village" title in the 2022 Northumbria in Bloom" competition. Having served the people of Washington for over 150 years it is now a key attraction for residents and visitors alike.

This apparently ordinary building has played an important role in the life of the town for more than a hundred years, and it looks set to continue to do so for both residents and visitors in the future. The History Society continues to research the story of this building and will grateful for contributions from readers.