

Man's bid to peel back the veils of time and learn some family history

Why did they keep this Chronicle from 1815?

A DOORWAY into Essex's past has been opened by an American historian who discovered a copy of the Chronicle dating back almost 200 years among his family heirlooms.

Amateur genealogist Robert Thorpe, 54, of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, uncovered the July 14, 1815, issue of the Chelmsford Chronicle while moving home — prompting him to contact the newspaper of today.

Robert, a self-employed graphic designer, first took possession of the paper in 1987, when his mother, Paddy Bellamy Thorpe, returned to England following the death of her mother, Grace Thorogood Bellamy.

"While cleaning out Grandma's effects, Mom came across an old newspaper and brought it home to me," he said. "It seemed the proper thing to do as I am the family historian."

After sealing it in encapsulation material for posterity, Robert packed it away and forgot all about it until he came across it again recently.

By this time, technology had substantially moved on, and a quick e-mail to Essex County Council's communications department put him in touch with the Essex Chronicle newsdesk so that his story could be told.

Since finding the old Chronicle, Robert has attempted to piece to-

By Matt Adams

gether the story behind its preservation over the last 188 years, and in doing so has uncovered details of his family history.

Robert's father was an instrument mechanic in the US Army Air Corps stationed in Alconbury during the Second World War. His mother was a radar operator in the WAAF's who married him and moved to the United States after the war. All of his relatives on her side of the family remained in England and can be dated back to the beginning of the 19th century.

Grandmother

"My grandmother was the daughter of Frederick and Emily Munson Thorogood, who lived in Baddow Road," said Robert. "It was from this grandmother and presumably one of her parents that this newspaper originated."

"I know my great grandmother Emily's people came from the Felsted area, still close enough that they could have been the ones responsible for preserving the newspaper."

"The Munson and Thorogood families seem to have been fairly closely associated, marrying back and forth between generations, so Munson and Thorogood are the only surnames I can document as ancestors."



PAPER CHASE: Robert Thorpe is trying to find out more about this Chronicle edition from nearly two centuries ago.

"I have been looking through the paper for either of these two names, but have not come across them yet. I assume there is an article about one of my relatives in the paper. Why else would it have been preserved for nearly 200 years?"

Thanks to the assistance of Chelmsford resident Gloria Harris, who helped him locate his ancestors' graves, Robert has also established links between his relatives and other families called Masson,

Sorrell and Cooke, but has been unable to determine the exact relationship.

"I suspect that an earlier generation may have been responsible for saving the paper."

Generation

"My great, great grandfather, James Munson, Emily's father, was only born in 1815, and he is the oldest that I know of from this generation."

WORLD EVENTS IN 1815

- Defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo on June 18.
- Corn Laws passed in England, setting a standard cost for British corn before foreign corn could be imported duty-free. Rising cost of bread led to violent mob uprisings.
- David Stevenson born — Son of engineer Robert Stevenson (1772-1850), and uncle of author Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94).
- Battle of New Orleans. Outnumbered Americans kill 2,000 British but suffer fewer than 20 casualties.

CHRONICLE 14 JULY 1815

- AT this time, the Chronicle covered the counties of Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Middlesex and Kent.
- It was printed and published by Meggy, Chalk and Co of Chelmsford, and cost the sum of six and a half old pence.
- A reward of £50 was offered following the theft of 100lb of black amber grapes from the vinehouse of Mrs Tufnell, of Langley, in Great Waltham.



HOLD THE FRONT PAGE: Robert Thorpe and his wife, Karen, with the 1815 Chronicle.
mother, Paddy