

Report on 9th February 2024 Meeting

'A Tale of Two Wills'

Jenny Collis and Mary Gracie teamed up to present us with a wonderful story about Richard Harding Hesketh and Lady Jane Stanley, as told through the lens of their Wills. Ladies first. Lady Jane seems to be remembered for her straight-laced view of couples walking too close together in public, so she funded narrow pavements. Surely there was to her than that? Indeed there was, and her 26 page will, including three codicils and three more notes, reveals the strength of her loyalty to family, friends and servants, putting her money where her mouth was. Unless the family member ran off with and married an actress!! Her wish to be laid to rest at Great Budworth and not the family mausoleum in Ormskirk can be attributed to her not wishing her dust to be mingled with that of a low life hussey. But where did Lady Jane live before Knutsford? There were a number of tantalising loose ends that caused much discussion and speculation. Great stuff.

Next, the father of Richard Harding Watt, whose iconic Knutsford buildings do the town so much credit – Richard Harding Hethorn, of Melmerby Hall, Cumberland, whose domestic servant Zillah Watt bore him this remarkable son. Mary and Jenny revealed a likely Australian family connection, as R.H. Hethorn died there only a couple of weeks after his ship docked. The will shows his generosity to his son and to a lesser extent Zillah – who would benefit less well if she married! It explains how RHW could afford to travel and pour his ideas into such remarkable buildings. Again, there was much debate over the areas of mystery, the further questions that this remarkable document has raised. That's the buzz that we get from exploring the past though, isn't it? A great show, thank you, Mary and Jenny, who have most helpfully added four sides of A4 about their research methods and the 'ins and outs' of Will studies. I can forward these notes to any Ku3a member who asks for them.