

# Friends of the Doncaster Mansion House

## Newsletter No. 3 Spring 2024

We are very sad to report that since our last newsletter Bobbie Roberts, our chair, died in February this year, and our previous chair, Colin Jeynes, died in November 2023. Both made a huge contribution to the work of the Friends, and will be very much missed. A more detailed tribute to them both is on page 2.



We are very pleased that we have been able to welcome three new trustees to the board, Major Adrian Hunt DL, the senior Deputy Lieutenant for Doncaster who is involved with a wide number of local charities, Dr Brian Barber, the former Doncaster archivist who has a wealth of knowledge about the Mansion House and Doncaster, and Kevin Finnegan, one of our volunteer guides.

Recent visitors will have noticed that some of the chandeliers are sparkling particularly brightly, including the converted gasolier in the Salon, pictured left.. The Council have commissioned a company to give them all a thorough overhaul and clean, and a future issue will include an interview with a representative of the company. As well as improving the appearance, the clean is necessary for fire safety.

### Forthcoming Mansion House Open Days – all 10.30 – 2.00

Friday 28<sup>th</sup> June  
Friday 26<sup>th</sup> July  
Friday 30<sup>th</sup> August  
Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> September  
Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September  
Friday 25<sup>th</sup> October  
Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> November  
Friday 13<sup>th</sup> December

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## **Bobbie Roberts**

Bobbie had been awarded an MBE and the Freedom of the City. She was well known in Doncaster for her work with the Deaf Trust and more recently Firefly, but she also had time to support the Friends of the Mansion House and was one of our original trustees when we changed from being a community group to a registered charity in January 2017. She was always an interested and committed trustee and used her sterling powers of persuasion to run several very successful raffles which were particularly helpful during Covid to maintain an income for the Friends.

Following Colin Jeynes' resignation in December 2023 she took over as chair and was instrumental in working with the Council to restart the regular Open Days. She always had a keen interest in encouraging young people, and she managed to persuade the Lions and the Frenchgate

Management to donate money to the Friends to add to our pot of designated financial support for transport for school visits. She loved to welcome new people into the Mansion House and was a fervent advocate for the Friends. We will very much miss her energy and dedication.

## **Colin Jeynes**

Colin was also one of our original trustees, and like Bobbie was involved with many other organisations in the city including the Doncaster Youth Jazz Association and the Rotary Club of Doncaster, as well as chairing the Doncaster Strategic Partnership. He was one of our volunteer tour guides and could add to our stories of events in the Mansion House from his time as Chief Executive of Doncaster Council from 1979 to 1993. When Ven Bob Fitzharris stood down as our first chair, Colin took over and served until December 2023, keeping the momentum going during Covid when so many organisations faced difficulties. He resigned because he hoped to spend much more time travelling, and it is very sad that that pleasure was curtailed. He was a very generous and enthusiastic supporter of the Friends who will also be sorely missed.



## Recent and Forthcoming Events at The Mansion House

The Mansion House has hosted a variety of events this year, including the annual Mayor Making meeting which welcomed Councillor Julie Grace as Civic Mayor for 24-25. There have been regular citizenship ceremonies, the Civic Mayor Award to the late John Holt, former vice Lord Lieutenant, and the Freedom of the City was bestowed on Lord Kirkham. There are also of course many weddings held in the Priory Suite and the Great Kitchen.

### Steampunk

The Mansion House was one of the venues for Doncaster's Annual Steampunk Day, and we welcomed over 520 visitors. Impossible to define in a sentence, Steampunk blends 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics and technology with science fiction, with technological progress based on the steam engine. The visitors wore some amazing costumes, and tea drinking competitions were held in the ballroom upstairs.



### National Honours Committee

On 14<sup>th</sup> March the national Community and Voluntary Service Honours Committee met in Doncaster for the first time, and this was followed by an event hosted by the Lord Lieutenant for South Yorkshire, Dame Hilary Chapman, at the Mansion House. Invited representatives of local voluntary organisations heard presentations from people who had received honours or who had nominated others, and current committee members talked about what they looked for in a successful nomination. The aim was to encourage more nominations from Doncaster and nearby areas, since there had only been one award for a Doncaster person in the last list.

People were assured that the process was not difficult or complicated, and some key messages were that it was important to give information about the impact of the work a nominee had carried out, and to secure the necessary letters of support.

The website link is <https://www.gov.uk/honours/nominate-someone-in-the-uk>



### Heritage Week 2024

This year we will be participating in Heritage Open Days, a national festival of history and culture. The theme for 2024 is 'Routes, Networks and Connections.' It runs from 6<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> September, and we will have a special Open Day on 7<sup>th</sup> September. Our AGM will be held on the afternoon of on Friday, 6<sup>th</sup> September at the Mansion House. Our speaker is Jim Watt, Professor of English and Director of the Centre for 18<sup>th</sup> Century Studies at the University of York. The title of his talk, linking in with the national theme is 'The eighteenth-century discovery of Britain and Ireland.'

The picture shows Turner's painting of Tintern Abbey, a popular tourist destination at the time.

## The First Duke of Sussex and Doncaster Mansion House

Augustus Frederick was born in Buckingham Palace on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 1773, the ninth child and sixth son of King George III and Charlotte. As he was sixth in line of succession, with very little chance of ever occupying the throne, Augustus had to find a role for himself in the world.

After being tutored at home he attended Gottingen University from the summer of 1786. As he suffered from asthma, he was the only one of George's sons who didn't serve in the army or navy, although during the Napoleonic Wars he was commandant of a volunteer regiment with the rank of lieutenant colonel.

When in England his home was in Kensington Palace, but he spent a great deal of his time abroad. It was while he was abroad that his relationship with his father came under strain.

Augustus had met Lady Augusta Murray (2nd daughter of the Earl of Dunbar) and the couple married in Rome at the Hotel Sarmiento on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1793. According to the Royal Marriage Act of 1772, those in line of succession (up to and including the sixth in line) had to seek the approval of the King before taking such a step and no approval had been sought by Augustus. He was reminded of this and brought back to England in the autumn. However, the couple compounded the problem by renewing their marriage vows in St George's, Hanover Square on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 1793, once again not seeking royal permission.

The relationship between father and son was under strain.

The authorities moved into action and the marriage was annulled in 1794, but the couple still lived together -in Berlin now -and had their first born (named in full after his father). The couple returned to live in England in 1800 and then separated, but a daughter was born to them the following year.

Things changed in 1801. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 1801, Augustus Frederick was made 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Sussex and was awarded £20,000 per year. His wife was not recognised, as the marriage had been annulled, but she received £2,000 per annum to maintain both herself and her two children, both of whom were regarded as illegitimate.

The Duke of Sussex's connection with Doncaster occurred in September 1822. Horse racing in Doncaster, and in particular the St Leger, annually attracted many of the nobility and country house parties were held in the district, providing bases for those of means who wished to enjoy the week's racing.

Michael Angelo Taylor MP was living at Cantley Hall in September 1822, and a number of his well-connected friends and acquaintances, including the Duke of Sussex, joined him there for the September races. Doncaster Corporation, always keen to establish a royal connection, decided to make the Duke of Sussex a Freeman of Doncaster. At their invitation,



Augustus Frederick decided that he would like the official presentation to take place at Cantley Hall, rather than the Mansion House. Accordingly, on the Tuesday morning on the week of the September races, three carriages, each pulled by four horses, left the Mansion House, transporting the mayor, Edwood Chorley MD, and other members of the Corporation to Cantley Hall, arriving there around twelve noon. The group included the mayor and three senior councillors, three other councillors, two magistrates, the mace bearer and two sergeants of the mace.

At the ceremony in Cantley Hall, held early in the afternoon, the Duke of Sussex was presented with an Address and the Freedom of Doncaster, together with a gold box, valued at fifty guineas. The Duke of Sussex attended the races on three days during the week, and also attended the Wednesday evening assembly held in the Mansion House. The Doncaster Gazette of the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 1822 reported that he wore a plain blue coat and his star and garter awards.

A meeting of the Corporation was convened on Friday, at the Town-Hall, by the Worshipful the Mayor, agreeably to the notice in our last, to ascertain from his Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex, whether he would be pleased to receive the Address and Freedom of the Borough by a Deputation at Cantley, or by the Body at the Mansion-House, when, the former being preferred by his Royal Highness, three carriages and four proceeded from the Mansion-House with the Deputation on Tuesday morning, consisting of the Worshipful the Mayor, Edward Chorley, Esq. George Walker and John Pearson, Esqrs. two of the Magistrates of the Borough, William Haigh, John Shepherd, and James Falconair, Esqrs. three of the senior Common Council, in their robes, attended by the Mace Bearer and two Sergeants at Mace, and arrived at Cantley about twelve o'clock, where the Deputation was most graciously received by his Royal Highness. The Freedom of the Borough was presented with a neat Gold Box of the value of Fifty Guineas. Lady Augusta Milbank, Lady Louisa Lambton, Mrs. Taylor, Miss Ferguson, Mark Milbank, Esq. M. P. John George Lambton, Esq. M. P. T. Crewey, Esq. M. P. George Baker, Esq. the Hon. Mr. Keppell, Edward Stevenson, Esq. the Hon. Mr. Gere, M. A. Taylor, Esq. M. P. &c. &c. were in attendance with the Royal Duke.

The Worshipful the Mayor then read the following address:—

To his Royal Highness Prince Augustus Frederick Duke of Sussex, Earl of Inverness in North Britain, and Baron Arklow in Ireland, Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter.

"Sir,—We, the Mayor, Aldermen, and Capital Burgesses of the Borough of Doncaster, feel not less gratified than honoured on this introduction into your presence. As an illustrious Member of the House of Brunswick we profess the deepest respect for your royal person, and as the brother of our Sovereign we most gladly offer to you our profound and dutiful obedience, and humbly solicit your Royal Highness's acceptance of the Freedom of our Ancient Borough.

"Under the sway of your Family, Sir, this kingdom has, for more than a century, been happily governed. Your Royal Father, the most excellent of Princes and of men, was the just object of the country's reverence, and we trust the mild and enlightened rule of our present Most Gracious Sovereign will fully compensate us the loss of a King, at once the friend and parent of his people; and in the pleasing anticipation that the Royal House of Brunswick may long govern these realms, with the increasing prosperity of a devoted and happy people, we beg most humbly to express our ardent wishes for the welfare of the Illustrious Individual to whom we have now the honour of presenting this Address."

After the death of his first wife the Duke of Sussex married again, on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1831, his second bride being Lady Cecilia Letitia Buggins (the surname was from her first marriage), the eldest daughter of the Earl of Arran. Once again, Augustus Frederick failed to seek the approval of the King and, as a result, the marriage was not recognised and so Cecilia had no title to her name.

The Duke of Sussex had many interests. In particular he spoke against slavery, the persecution of Jews and supported the idea of Catholic emancipation. He was very interested in biblical studies and Hebrew and built up a large library of theology manuscripts.

He held various prestigious posts, being President of the Society of Arts in 1816 and President of the Royal Society from 1830-1838.

In 1832, he started to go blind and was one of the first to undergo a cataract operation.

When Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837, she showed that he was in favour. As her uncle, the Duke of Sussex gave Victoria away on her marriage to Prince Albert in 1840 and in 1842 the Duke of Sussex was made Governor of Windsor Castle.

He died in Kensington Palace on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April 1843 of erysipelas, a deep skin infection. He had always made it clear that he wanted no state funeral, and accordingly was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1843, his grave being in front of the main chapel, opposite the tomb of his sister, Princess Sophia. His title died with him, as his children were regarded as illegitimate and, in any case, both died without issue.



He was Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England, the governing body of Freemasonry in England and Wales, from 1813 until 1843. According to Hatfield's Historical Notices of Doncaster, on his death the Doncaster Masons joined their brethren in Wakefield to do honour to his memory in a solemn service in Wakefield Parish Church.

Augustus Frederick became the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Sussex, when, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 1818, his great, great, great, great, great grandnephew, Prince Harry, was created the Duke of Sussex by his grandmother Elizabeth 2<sup>nd</sup> (a title which had been extinct for well over a century and a half).

The two royal dukes are not only joined by title, but there are also several other similarities between them as well: height (both a little over six feet); hair colour (both ginger haired); views (both held liberal opinions). Other similarities: both experienced uneasy relationships with principal family members; and both men were fathers of a boy and a girl.

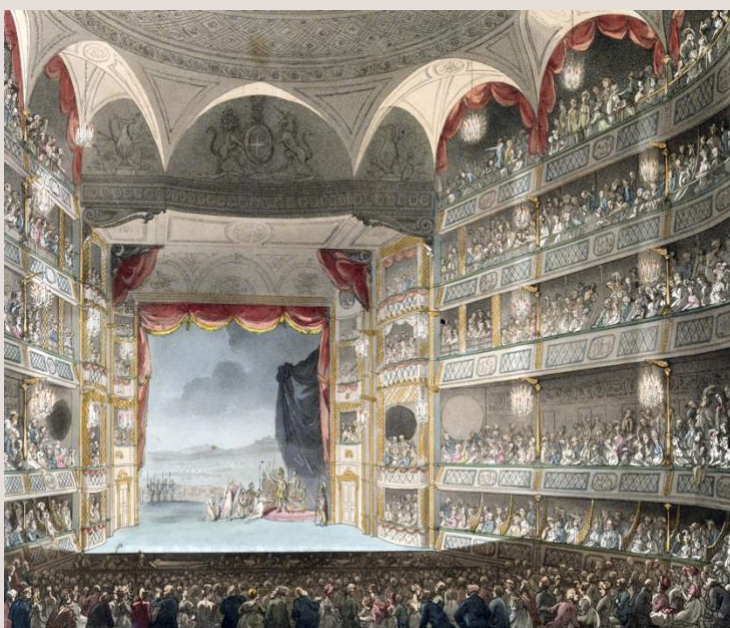
Yet only one Duke of Sussex has visited the Doncaster Mansion House.

Richard Cuell

### **The People in the Portraits 3, Sarah Siddons**

In the Drawing Room to the right of the fireplace is a copy of the Gainsborough portrait of actress Sarah Siddons, one of the most famous people of her day.

Sarah Siddons was born in Wales to an acting dynasty. Her grandfather managed a troupe of travelling actors with a very respectable reputation, and he bequeathed his company to her parents Sally, an actress and Roger Kemble an actor manager. Although she appeared on the stage at a young age, her parents were against Sarah becoming an actress, and also against her marriage to a young actor in their company, William Siddons. Their efforts to prevent both by sending her to work as a lady's companion were not effective, and after her marriage she and her husband started work for another travelling company, before rejoining her father's. She became very successful in the regions, but her London debut at the Drury Lane theatre, (pictured below in 1808) as Portia in the Merchant of Venice in 1775 was not a success. She was still weak from childbirth and was only used to the much smaller regional theatres. For the next six years she continued to work the provinces, until she was invited to return to Drury Lane in 1782, when her performance in Isabella by Southerne was a resounding success. She became nationally famous as a tragedienne, her most famous roles being Lady Macbeth and Isabella.



She carefully controlled her public image, and cultivated the role of wife and mother to avoid any hint of impropriety, regularly performing whilst visibly pregnant and it was this, as well as her acting ability, which helped to raise the status of actresses at the time.

She played Hamlet on many occasions, the first time in Worcester in 1775, but only in the provinces. The gender-blind casting of today's theatre is nothing new!

Her mother had ensured that she had attended school when they travelled, and her

experience as a companion meant that she was able to hold her own in society. She was invited to give private readings at Buckingham House, the London residence of the King and Queen.

Sarah's brother John Kemble became actor manager of the Drury Lane Theatre in 1788 but the finances were in the hand of Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Whilst Sheridan was a brilliant playwright, he caused them many problems financially and the siblings left in 1802 for the Covent Garden theatre.



The portrait in the Mansion House, by an anonymous artist, was donated to the College of Art by the 19<sup>th</sup> century local banker Robert Stockil and later transferred to the Mansion House. The illustration on the left is the original, painted by Thomas Gainsborough in 1785, and now hanging in the National Gallery.



Unlike many of the Siddons portraits, it does not show her playing one of her famous parts but instead in contemporary dress, a blue striped wrapping robe, a beaver hat trimmed with ostrich feathers and a fox fur muff. It is said that Gainsborough had difficulty executing Mrs Siddons' face and is quoted as saying "Confound the nose, there's no end to it!" The one on the right is the Mansion House copy.

It is appropriate that we have her portrait because three of Sarah Siddons' latest performances took place at the Doncaster Theatre Royal, later called the Royal Opera House, which had been designed by William Lindley in 1776 and stood in the Market Place where the Market Top is now, until it was pulled down in 1900. Having the title 'royal' in the name meant that it was a patent theatre and had a licence to perform serious plays. Theatres without such a licence could theoretically only put on entertainments such as comedies and songs until the act ended in 1843.

Mrs Siddons came to Doncaster as part of the company managed by Tate Wilkinson, a former actor. The stamina of 18<sup>th</sup> century theatregoers and actors can be imagined from the programme for those performances. On 30<sup>th</sup> September 1811 she played Mrs Haller in 'The Stranger', followed by Lady Contest in the 1794 comedy 'The Wedding Day'. On October 1<sup>st</sup> she played Portia in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice. The audience were then entertained by a comic song, followed by a second play, Ella Rosenberg, a melodrama in two acts by Jack Kenney published in 1807, in which Mrs Siddons took the titular role. The following evening, Doncaster was treated to a performance of Hamlet, with Mrs Siddons as Ophelia followed by 'The Child of Nature', a comedy in 4 acts of 1788 by Elizabeth Inchbald.

Tickets for these marathons were three shillings for seat in a box, two shillings for one in the pit and one shilling for one in the gallery. Comparisons with costs today are always tenuous, but for context, a bricklayer might earn 22 shillings 6d a week at the time.

The posters also refer to a Mr Siddons, but this is not her husband, who died in 1808, but her son Henry. Sarah would have liked Henry to go into the church, but instead he followed the family tradition as an actor first in London, and then secured the licence for the Edinburgh theatre with the support of Sir Walter Scott. There are a number of recorded occasions where he played opposite his mother, but he died in 1815 and his wife and her brother took over the running of the Edinburgh theatre, strongly supported by Sarah Siddons.

Her final major performance was as Lady Macbeth in 1812, at which the audience were so affected by her acting that they refused to let the performance continue after the sleepwalking scene, and she then made an emotional farewell speech, to great applause. At her funeral in 1831 5000 people followed the cortège, and there are statues to her in Paddington Green and Westminster Abbey

I searched the Doncaster Gazette in hope of finding an article about the performances, but the paper's readers seemed more interested in an – almost literally - blow by blow account of a famous boxing match between Crib and Molyneux which took place in Nottinghamshire in the same week!

The Theatre Royal is pictured left, taken from Miller's History of Doncaster 1804, and on the right a photograph taken shortly before its demolition.

Jackie Gladden

Acknowledgements:- V & A The story of Theatre, Porter - The Progress of the Nation 1851, Dictionary of National Biography, Wikipedia, BBC website, Heritage Doncaster, Tom Beardsley photo collection.

Would you like to help us in our aims of conserving the Mansion House and its contents, increasing



opportunities for the public, and particularly schoolchildren, to visit, and providing educational resources about the Mansion House and its architect James Paine? Membership of the Friends costs Adults £10, Joint £15, Volunteers £5 Over 60s £7.50, Corporate £20 For this you receive our twice-yearly newsletter, updates about events at the Mansion House, and an invitation to our AGM and social afternoon. For information on membership, or volunteering, please contact the Secretary at [secretaryfodmh@gmail.com](mailto:secretaryfodmh@gmail.com)

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