

## A family, linguistic and social history of Stratford all in one little book

I never cease to be surprised by the archive treasures that are still 'out there'. It's easy to assume that by now, most pre-19<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts will be in record offices, but a recent acquisition by the Birthplace Trust Record Office proves this to be wrong.

This new item is a small green leather-bound account book belonging to David Wesson, who farmed at Hill Farm, Old Stratford, (now Orchard Hill Farm) during the eighteenth century. The entries in the volume run from 1765 to 1801, the year in which David Wesson died, although they jump about in terms of chronology.

Wesson records sales of produce to numerous people both in the town of Stratford and the surrounding area. They include John Smith at the New Inn, Stratford, who regularly bought straw, oats and barley; Thomas Smith of Atherstone ('Addiston') buying oats and peas; Mr Fruin of 'the papr mill Near Little Aun' [Thomas Fruin of Little Alne, paper-maker] taking barley; 'Mr Jaxon preston paster' (a wonderful example of phonetic spelling). Wesson also sold livestock, Mr Tasker, butcher, having shoulder mutton, beef and pork, and Mr Wells, butcher, buying sheep, cows and calves. These were William Tasker, who had his premises in Wood Street, later High Street, and Thomas Wells, whose shop was sited in Henley Street.

Some pages also record Wesson's expenditure, so that among sums paid in 1771 we find payments for window tax and poor rate, 15 shillings for the Turnpike man, together with £6 for 'Jno schooling' and £13 for 'Salis schooling'. John Wesson was born in 1759 and Sarah (Sally) in about 1760, although we have not yet traced her baptism. She married twice: to William Hopkins in 1783 and William Greenway in 1794. In 1771 Wesson also spent £2 7s 4d for shoes ('shuse makin'), £1 2s 6d for hats and £9 on what at first glance appeared to be kippers, but on closer inspection is 'Rippers' or reapers at harvest time. A name which appears regularly throughout the book is that of Joseph Olorenshaw. This is not a Stratford surname, but the records reveal that David's wife was Mary Olorenshaw, and Joseph, his brother-in-law. David also had two other sons and a daughter, Robert Morell, Thomas and Mary, who married Robert Canning. In 1782 David Wesson recorded 'gave Jno in cash £200', which probably accounts for the meagre £1 1s left him in his father's will, when Robert got £200, Mary £180 and Thomas the residue. It is tempting to speculate that John was not entirely respectable!

The Wesson family occur in the Stratford parish registers from the seventeenth century, and the various branches of the family, mainly descended from the four sons of David's father Thomas, flourished in Stratford until the early twentieth century. Sadly, there are no Wessons, listed in Stratford in the 2005/6 telephone directory.

It would be easy to look at this small book, only 15 x 10 cm and dismiss it simply as rough accounts, but in this one volume we have information relevant for family history, social history and, given the idiosyncratic spelling, linguistic history – what more can you ask!



Accounting for the past ... Thomas Wells' account with David Wesson, received 1st Nov 1774

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*Living Archives* from the *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*

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