



Abigail Gawthorn 1757-1822

Diarist

Born Abigail Anna Frost she was educated at a Nottingham private school until she was 10 when she went to a boarding school in Clapham. On her return to Nottingham her social education continued with music lessons, riding, dancing and visits to fashionable resorts. She was herself wealthy having annuities of £6705 when she married Francis Gawthorn in 1783 whose father and grandfather had businesses including white lead works in Nottingham. They owned eighteen houses in Broad Marsh and Drury Hill and themselves had a handsome house Gawthorn House at 26 Low Pavement – at one time Jamie's. They had a son and a daughter. In 1789 her husband paid £20 to remove a building – a workhouse from St Peter's which was blocking their view of the Meadows from the back of their house. In 1791 her husband died and she took control of the family's white lead business and its money and property; and continued to live in Low Pavement. When her parents died in 1801 she received another large inheritance. The business continued and her son Francis was briefly in charge until it folded in 1808 due to more efficient methods of production being developed. In 1821 she sold a tract of land between North Gate and Beech Avenue in New Basford for building. There is a Gawthorne Street there which is apparently named after her albeit with a changed spelling. Described as a middleclass Tory Abigail started to write a diary in 1808 but she transcribed much earlier writings and recorded various events and happening in the lives of the professional classes for the period 1751–1810. In Low Pavement there was the 'Ladies Assembly' which was run by ladies but which was open to both genders but not the working class.

She records the threefold increase in Nottingham's population and the growth of the slum areas of the Narrow Marsh behind her fine Georgian house on Low Pavement. She describes flooding in the Broad Marsh in 1795 when the water was 3 foot deep and a stone bridge was washed away and 3 pigs drowned. Her diary documents the minutiae of home life with 13 references to dances, 43 to a Ball and Assemblies and there are also recordings of rioting, executions, funerals, illness and local scandals. The diaries were discovered in a bookshop in Norfolk and were bought by Notts Public Libraries and are now in the Archives and have been transcribed by Adrian Henstock and published by the Thoroton Society. She is buried in St Mary's church.