

## A CANADIAN MYSTERY

In November 2012, St. Mary's Church here in Chaddesden was given an intriguing puzzle to solve. The parishioners of another similarly-named church, St. Mary the Virgin, Oak Bay, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, celebrated their centenary in October 2011, and while sorting through their archives had discovered an ancient key about seven-and-half inches long. Attached to the key was a typewritten label and you can imagine their surprise when they read the wording on it and discovered that the key had come from Chaddesden Parish Church, Derby, England. Naturally they wanted to know more about the key – was it as old as it looked, and what was the connection between Chaddesden and their part of British Columbia? Might the fact that Oak Bay has a road called Wilmot Place leading to an early twentieth-century property by the name of Wilmot House have anything to do with it?



Map showing the location of Oak Bay, Canada

Looking at the photograph of their key I was able to confirm that it was probably mid- to late-Victorian in date and certainly bore a close resemblance to one of our old church keys, although the bit was of a different pattern. As a further point of similarity their key, just like ours, unscrewed half way down its length – this was probably a feature intended to simplify the manufacturing process.



Two photographs of the key found at Oak Bay, Canada. Note how it can be unscrewed.

The next part of the mystery was to explain how the key had travelled many thousands of miles from Chaddesden to Oak Bay, which is located on the southern tip of Vancouver Island, and is said to be "more English than England". Here I was able to suggest a couple of possible connections. First of all, the Wilmot family's Chaddesden estate was sold in 1918, the very same year in which its owner Sir Ralph Henry Sacheverel Wilmot (6th Baronet) died leaving two young sons, Sir Arthur Ralph Wilmot (7th Baronet) and Henry Frederick Wilmot, and a daughter Ada Snowdrop Wilmot. In 1946 Henry Frederick married Patricia Wall, the daughter of Thomas Wall of Nelson, British Columbia, which is only some 270 miles away from Oak Bay. As a young boy, Henry Frederick had certainly lived at Chaddesden, for the 1911 Census records him (aged 3 months), his older brother and sister and their mother all living with Miss Constance Wilmot at Chaddesden Hall. Perhaps someone gave Henry Frederick Wilmot an old obsolete church key as a memento in 1918, when he was seven or eight years old and watching his family's possessions at Chaddesden being packed away. Years later in Canada could he have visited Oak Bay, attracted by the fact that it had a road and a house which bore his family's name?

Secondly, there is also the chance that the key might have made its way to Canada in the possession of the daughter of a former Vicar of Chaddesden, Rev. Edward William Northey (1832–1914). Rev. Northey ministered at Chaddesden between 1872–1879, after which he succeeded his father as the owner of Woodcote Park, Epsom, Surrey – a large country mansion. One of Northey's daughters, Florence Isabel, married Frank Richardson in 1889 and died in British Columbia in 1941. Maybe she visited Oak Bay after hearing about Wilmot Place and Wilmot House.

Both Henry Frederick Wilmot and Florence Isabel Northey were therefore in Canada at different periods in time and either might conceivably have presented the key to the church at Oak Bay, but what – if anything – is the significance of Wilmot Place and Wilmot House in this Canadian community? Unfortunately, despite the fact that the Wilmots of Chaddesden and Osmaston-by-Derby as well as the related families of Wilmot-Horton and Eardley Wilmot were all actively involved in spreading British influence across the globe in Victorian times, I can't help feeling that the presence of the Wilmot names in Oak Bay, British Columbia, is simply coincidental and may ultimately prove to owe nothing to the Derbyshire families. There are certainly some notable Canadians called Wilmot with no obvious English connection, for example, Samuel Wilmot (1822–1899), the farmer, fish expert and politician, who researched the fisheries of British Columbia in the early 1890s. However, Montague Wilmot (1716–1766), Governor of Nova Scotia, was actually the grandson of Robert and Elizabeth Wilmot of Osmaston-by-Derby, but of course Nova Scotia and British Columbia are a considerable distance apart.

One final thought which occurred to me as I looked at the photograph of the Canadian key was the fact that the label mentions 1347 A.D., the date of the earliest documentary reference to our church. Now, before our church's 600th anniversary in 1947 references to this date are few and far between, but afterwards it tends to be mentioned more frequently, so perhaps the key was given to the church at Oak Bay sometime after 1947.

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### POSTSCRIPT

Since first writing this article in 2012, many more Oak Bay archives have been placed online. It now seems that Wilmot House was built in the same year as St. Mary's Church at Oak Bay – 1911. Architect Samuel Maclure designed the house for a gentleman by the name of J. D. Pemberton junr and it later passed into the possession of Lawrence M. Earle. Thus far I have not discovered any connection between either of these two individuals and the Wilmot family of Chaddesden. When Wilmot House in Oak Bay was first constructed it lay at the north end of a long driveway which was later developed for residential use and named Wilmot Place. Somewhat ironically, although Wilmot House still survives to the present-day, its address has been changed to that of an adjacent road, so it is now known as 2157 Cubbon Drive.

Peter Cholerton, 2022



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