

Scissors Paper Stone

Blog 29:

Welcome to Scissors Paper Stone 2026

This community history of St John's is now in its third year. Scissors Paper Stone was a response to our curiosity about the lives of the people who created the suburb of Ranmoor: its buildings and its communities.

In 2024 we started by exploring the lives of the stone masons who built the church, the stone they used to build it and the wealthy benefactors who funded it. Margaret Bennett's paintings brought together the fabric of the church with the landscape in which it is set and from which its materials were quarried. As she was planning her exhibition, we learned that our spire, which is part of the landscape of all who live around St John's is crumbling. Margaret and many others have used the Scissors Paper Stone events to help raise money to restore it. Our activities in the last two years have also raised awareness of the beauties of our building. I particularly enjoyed the visits of the children and teachers of St Marie's who tested out our children's trail. A high point was the silence that fell when the children put their heads on the chancel step and suddenly experienced a perspective foreign to most of us - the sun pouring through the usually invisible west window.

In 2025 we focused on lives lived in and around Ranmoor in its early days as a garden suburb. Margaret drew in artists from far beyond across this city and beyond to respond to the 'Unseen' of Ranmoor: the people on whose labour its wealth was created, the servants who disappeared into the basements and women whose craft skills enriched our environment. If we were lucky we discovered their names but sometimes their names were all we knew of them. Over the year we learned ways of finding out more. Alan Crutch and Keith Pitchforth have helped us use local wills to understand more about the relations between employers and servants.

During the last two years Sheffield's extraordinary local historians have shared the stories of men and women who have left records which are testimonies to their gifts and energy.

In the 2026 we continue our exploration of both the servants and their employers. This is leading to a greater understanding of networks holding a rather unstable society together. At the end of the nineteenth century, working class districts in industrial cities were in some ways more stable than newly created communities like Ranmoor. Many of our big mansions were abandoned by families by the 1920, only having existed as domestic residences for 50 to 60 years. Our talks in 2026 explore the networks that connected its residents and linked them with worlds beyond Ranmoor. Increasingly rich Ranmoor residents had houses in multiple places: some the seaside, some London, their business and professional connections leading them to places across the globe.

We have been hugely grateful to the Sheffield historians who have contributed to our project. In the past three years, Julie Banham, Jane Bartholomew, Sylvia Dunkley, Scott Engineering, Loveday Herridge, Val Hewson, Judith Pitchforth and Sue Roe have all shared their knowledge and original research to help us understand the origins of Ranmoor. Next year we are joined by Jenny Stephenson with her work on Ranmoor's medical networks and the stories that inspired our stained glass. Dan Eaton is designing material which helps children discover how war temporarily connected residents from diverse social groups. Thank you to all who have contributed to our programme.

Huge thanks to the refreshment team led by Janet Anker which has given our many visitors such a warm welcome. Without our clergy, church wardens, church secretary and verger nothing would have

happened at all. The flyers and posters designed by Sarah Beardsmore play a key role in attracting visitors from across the city.

And now for something completely different, so different that I am unable to publicise it fully. In September, Margaret Bennett and Val Hewson are going to reveal an undiscovered story about the appearance of our first church which burnt down. During the year they have travelled the country looking at churches from the decade in which our church was built. Their display and talks will be a revelation – the extent of which is a mystery to me too.

*Mary Grover
21 January 2026*