

ANYONE walking into Faringdon Library in recent months will have noticed large paintings of two early 19th century gentlemen hanging high up on the wall. They are the portraits of Daniel Bennett (1760-1826) and his son William (1790-1844). The family owned and lived at Faringdon House for more than 100 years up until the early part of the last century when it was bought by Lord Berners. The portraits used to hang upstairs in the Corn Exchange, prior to its refurbishment, and were donated to the town at some point and are on permanent loan to the library. The portrait painter is unknown, but there is another twist to the story.

In September, Myra Stanbury, curator of the Department of Maritime Archaeology in Fremantle, Western Australia, who was on holiday in the area, but was doing some research walked into Faringdon Library and asked library manager David Turner whether he knew anything about the Bennett family and he immediately pointed to the portraits. She was astounded to see them hanging there as she is undertaking research on the family because they ran a shipping

company from Rotherhithe in London, and one of their ships, named Lively, sank on a coral reef 300 kilometres west of the port of Broome,

Western Australia in 1829. The wreckage was found in 1979 at Mermaid Atoll, Rowley Shoals and an early inspection of the wreck indi-

cated an early European whaler. In the portrait of William he is holding a copy of the shipping newspaper Lloyd's List in his hands.

Much exploration and research has gone into piecing together the story of the Lively and the South Sea firm behind it by Myra and her colleagues. Daniel Bennett founded and ran a very successful company, joined by William later on, which at its peak had 50 ships in 1821 and traded mostly in the whaling, sealing and East Indian trade. A special exhibition featuring significant items from Commonwealth countries will be open in time for the Queen's visit to the Commonwealth Head of Government Meeting held in Perth at the end of October. Perhaps the story of the Lively and its connection to Faringdon through the Bennetts will be featured in it. The library hopes to have the published document for reference and lending when completed.

Daniel died in 1826, aged 66, leaving behind a substantial fortune with William inheriting the house and title Lord of the Manor of Faringdon. In 1836 William was appointed High Sheriff of Berkshire. He died at Faringdon House in 1844

aged 53, after a protracted illness, and the house remained in the family until 1919.

Bennett Road in Faringdon commemorates the family name in the town.