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Cover illustration: a view, by Aylwin Sampson, of the 'Clarence Street Palazzo' - the late 19th century electricity sub-station and one-time Electric Light Office which is such a prominent feature of Clarence Street.

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(Artwork by Aylwin Sampson)



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Three properties of Cirencester Abbey in the Cheltenham area

By comparing the evidence from the Cirencester Abbey Cartulary ¹ with that from certain papers of the Essex Estate in Cheltenham and other documentary evidence it is possible to identify, with some degree of certainty, the location of three properties of the Abbey.

The first part of the Domesday entry for Cheltenham reads: "King Edward held Cheltenham. There were 8½ hides. 1½ hides belong to the church; Reinbald holds them" ². Reinbald or Regenbald was designated "my priest" in documents by both Edward the Confessor and William I. He was probably one of the trusted royal clerks and was well rewarded for his services by both monarchs. ³ He held land in at least 16 other places, much of it around Cirencester, as well as the Glebe land of Cheltenham. In 1183 Henry I made a grant of Reinbald's property to the newly-founded St Mary's Abbey of Cirencester. The surviving charter confirming Henry I's grant of Reinbald's land may not be an original document, but an "improved copy". However there is no doubt that the lands held by Reinbald at Cheltenham in 1086 (and possibly in the time of King Edward) passed into the possession of Cirencester Abbey. The Abbey held "the Church of Cheltenham, with the land thereof and the mill, and the chapels and all other appurtenances to the said church belonging". ⁴ Cirencester Abbey was responsible for the church at Cheltenham and the priests who served it and received the tithes of the "villages, fields and parishes and hamlets of Cheltenham and Charlton Kings", also the produce or service and rents of the Glebe lands inherited from Reinbald.

At the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539 the church and Glebe lands of Cheltenham, together with the responsibility for providing a priest to serve the church returned to the hands of the king. This was a valuable property and was exploited by the crown through various leases, for example to Sir Henry Jerningham from 1560 to about 1590. ⁵ In 1598 it was leased to Sir Francis Bacon for 40 years, together with the Chapel at Charlton Kings, "with all the lands, houses, meadows, pastures, rents, all services, all views of frankpledge, courts leet, fines, heriots, mortuaries and reliefs, all tithes of fruit and grain, all profits and all royalties" on a payment of £ 75. 13s. 4d a year to the Crown, with an obligation to support two priests and two deacons to celebrate divine service in the said Church and Chapel. ⁶ Much trouble was caused by Bacon's sub-letting of the Glebe or Rectory estate to the Higgs family, but that is another story.

Before Sir Francis Bacon's lease had expired the impropriation of the Rectory was granted to Sir Baptist Hicks by James I in 1612 as a recognition of the financial help he had received from that wealthy merchant. Sir Baptist became responsible for paying the stipends of the incumbents of Cheltenham and Charlton Kings from the profits of the Rectory lands, otherwise the land was his to dispose of as he wished. In her History of Cheltenham Mrs G. Hart, following Rudder, states that the property concerned in the grant "must, in the main part, have been that property - - originally bestowed on Cirencester Abbey by Henry I,

the nucleus of which was the land recorded in Domesday Book as belonging to Reinbald - - - -. A detailed inventory is given in the Rectory Survey of 1632". This Rectory Survey is "A True Survey Particular and Terrier of All the Glebe Lands, Messuages and Rents belonging and now enjoyed with the Rectory of Cheltenham in the County of Glos, parcell of the inheritance of the right worthy the Lady taken and measured by the statute perch of 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ foot in November 1632".⁷ The acreage of the lands described is greater than the approximately 120 acres of Reinbald's 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ hides, but this can be accounted for by gifts of land to the Abbey in the Middle Ages, one of which can be identified as will be shown below.

Sir Baptist Hicks' younger daughter Mary's first husband was a Sir Charles Morrison and their daughter Elizabeth married Arthur Capel, Baron Hadham, taking the Rectory lands of Cheltenham with her into his family. Arthur Capel, a royalist was beheaded in 1648, but his son, a second Arthur, was created Earl of Essex by Charles II in 1661. Although some of the Rectory land was sold during the 18th century, notably to the De la Beres, most of it remained intact until its sale in 1800 when Joseph Pitt acquired the estate with an eye to development. Before this sale a detailed plan was made of the Rectory estate at a scale of about 1 furlong (220 yards) to an inch which shows the scattered pieces of land in the common fields in correct relationship to each other.⁸ By comparing the various sources discussed above it is possible to identify three separate possessions of Cirencester Abbey. The question of the original Domesday holding will be discussed in a forthcoming study of the field systems of Cheltenham.

In the well-known description of Cheltenham at the end of the 17th century by John Prinn⁹ we read: "Anciently within this towne was a Priory, which is now the house let by the Lord Capell (i.e. the Earl of Essex) to the person who farms his Tythes". The Essex map of 1799-1800 shows 'The Farm' standing near the corner of what is now Cambray Place. It can be seen that the main building lies back from the Street a little and has various outbuildings to east and west. 'The garden next the Street' had a frontage to the High Street of 104 ft. 4 in. and was divided into four lots (for sale as building plots) with a 10 ft. wide path next to the private gated road which later became Cambray Place. These plots ended at what is now Bath Terrace and were approximately 180 ft. long. It is therefore possible to locate the Farm buildings very precisely to the east of these four properties, lying some 20 ft. back from the Strand (SO 95132225) and now under the back premises of Messrs Lawleys and Woodhouses - Nos 100 to 106 High St.

In the 1632 Survey the Rectory buildings were described thus: "A fair parsonage house accomodated with necessary outhouses, with a large great barn, a cowhouse, an oxhouse, a wainhouse, a stable having before it a fair court with a large pool in it together with a garden and a little orchard on the back parts of it, the whole site containing one acre. One other large orchard with three fishponds in it called the Moores adjoining to the Rectory house containing 2 acres 3 rods 10 perch". It can be seen that the Rectory (which seems not to have been lived in by the Rector) had a number of the appurtenances of a monastic grange such as the fishponds and large barn for tithes.

That Cirencester Abbey had a grange at Cheltenham is shown by an entry in the cartulary which grants a pension to Thomas of the Mill of Cheltenham of food and drink and a stipend appropriate to his service of the Abbey, for life. He may receive a certain quantity of corn at the abbot's granary at Cheltenham and one load of fodder to be received at the abbey's grange -

this in return for the surrender of the mill and close adjoining and $10\frac{1}{2}$ acres of land which Thomas has held of the Abbey for life. The grant is dated 8 July 1304. ¹⁰ The 1632 description of the Rectory shows what the grange had become at that date. Prinn also mentions a 'subordinate' manor of Cambray and there seems little doubt that this Manor was Lord Essex's Farm and that here we have the Cheltenham Grange of Cirencester Abbey from which the Cheltenham/Charlton Kings estate was managed and where the abbot (or more likely his prior) held his court.

The second property owned by Cirencester Abbey for which I would like to suggest a location is the land concerned in several entries in the Cartulary in Naunton. ¹¹ For example in a quitclaim of the late 13th century Matilda, sister of the late John of Ewyas, widow, gives up all right in a moiety of a messuage and one virgate of land (approx. 20 acres) in Naunton to Robert of Crudwell (no. 476). It is highly likely that this messuage and virgate is the property called Naunton Meese in the 1632 survey. The land was scattered in the common fields of Naunton, Sandford and Westall tything, with some on the western borders in Charlton Kings. The house, Naunton Meese, was already a ruin at that date. It consisted of "one little close heretofore the site of the said messuage on which the house thereof stood which is long since demolished containing 1 acre, 1 rod, 4 perches." The Essex lands in Naunton had been sold by 1799, some having been bought by J. De la Bere in 1779. The map of the Gallipot and Westall Farms of the De la Bere estate, surveyed in 1765 and copied, with additions by H.S. Merrett in the 1820s or 30s ¹² shows a field called Naunton Close lying on the west side of a road to Moorend. Although this map gives insufficient detail to be certain of the exact location in the greatly changed street layout, it seems that Naunton Close lay between Churchill Road, Mead Road and Naunton Lane, just to the north of the old Leckhampton Railway Station, on the area covered by the Leckhampton Saw Mills and Brick Works at the time of the earliest 6 inch Ordnance Survey map (1884). Support for the possibility that Naunton Meese lay here (SO 949202) is given in a communication to the Archaeological Institute in 1854 by Jabez Allies, the Worcestershire antiquary. ¹³ He states that various relics, of dates ranging from the Roman and Anglo-Saxon to Medieval had been found at Naunton Close - - "Mr Thackwell's Pottery", having been dug out of the clay he used in his works. "Some had been purchased by Mr Jenkins of Leckhampton, who deals in antiquities. They included an iron trident (probably a fishing spear) two iron keys, a small iron adze, a circular piece of iron, perforated in centre, use unknown, also pottery of red, white and grey, including several handles with the outer faces decorated with a hollow and rudely ornamented with punctures, one had small knobs in the hollow. There were no bronze objects. Portions of foundations of a building of stone were discovered at one part on the border of the present excavations". The pottery and iron artefacts, from the slight description given, appear to be of medieval date and the possibility must be considered that the stone foundations represent the remains of the house of Naunton Meese.

The third property lay on the Charlton Kings side of its boundary with Cheltenham on the western slopes of Battledown Hill. The 1632 Survey describes as pasture in severall (i.e. land belonging to the Rectory over which there were no common rights) "one leasowe called Home Baddlston of 12 acres, 3 rods, 4 perch; one leasowe called Old Baddlston of 38 acres, 12 perch and one close at Rodwaie Lane commonly called Kowell Acre of 2 acres". This area is shown on the Essex map and is of approximately the same size. The Furzen Ground (12 acres, 1 rod, 3 perch) corresponds to Home Baddlston. The other three pieces may correspond to Old Baddlston and Kowell Acre - some consolidation of the holding accounting for the extra $5\frac{1}{2}$ acres in 1799. In the Cirencester Cartulary ¹⁴ we find that in the mid 13th century Water Hawlf gave an assart of his land to the canons of

Cirencester which lay "infra Rodeweie versus orientum juxta regiam viam". Rodeweie was the ancient road which ran down Aggs Hill and passed to the north of Cheltenham until it joined the Tewkesbury Road at the Cross Hands. A full account of its route has been given by Nigel Cox¹⁵ and was at one time the chief road to the mid-Cotswolds and London. Michael Greet has pointed out that it passes two fields named Roadways on the Charlton Kings Tithe Map.¹⁶

From the evidence studied it is not clear if the Battledown fields were all the gift of Walter Hawlf, or if Kowell Acre actually lies near this part of Rodwaie lane. (There is a possibility that it corresponds to Lot 15 in the Essex sale, an enclosure of just over 2 acres named Close Ends, which butts on to the south side of the Rodwaie in the St Pauls area). However if the total acreage of the Battledown fields (55 acres, 3 rods, 20 perch) is deducted from 224 acres, 3 rods, 8 perch of the 1632 survey, it begins to bring the total nearer to the approximate 180 acres (1½ hides) of Reinbald's Domesday holding. Future work may further refine the evidence and identify more of the original Domesday land.¹⁷

Barbara Rawes

1. The Cartulary of Cirencester Abbey, Vol II, ed. C.D. Ross, (1964); Vol III ed. M.Devine, (1977).
2. Domesday Book, 15 Gloucestershire, ed. J.S. Moore, (1982).
3. For a full discussion by a modern scholar of the evidence about Reinbald and his position see "The Collegiate Church at Cirencester, A Critical Examination of the Historical Evidence" by Babette Evans, in The Archaeology and History of Cirencester, ed. A. McWhirr, BAR Report 30, (1976), 46-59.
4. From confirmation by Edward III of the Foundation Charter of Henry I as given by W. St Clair Baddeley in A History of Cirencester, (1924), p.96.
5. Cheltenham Parish Church, Its Architecture and Its History, J. Sawyer, (1903), p.102.
6. Ibid.
7. Presented to Gloucestershire County Library by the Dowager Countess of Essex in 1922. Gloucestershire Collection no. 6107.
8. British Museum additional manuscript no. 43063.
9. G.R.O. 855/M12. Cheltenham Court Book, 1692-98.
10. Cirencester Cartulary III/481.
11. Cirencester Cartulary III nos. 473, 475, 476, 479. All probably late 13th century.
12. G.R.O. photocopy no. 117.
13. Archaeological Journal XI, (1854), p.292.
14. Cirencester Cartulary II/428.
15. Glevensis 14, (1980), 21-2.
16. Charlton Kings Local History Society Bulletin 9, (1983), p.49.
17. I am grateful for advice from a number of people on the sources for this article. In particular I should like to thank Dr Steven Blake and Michael Greet. I am also grateful to Leighton Bishop for help in transcribing parts of the Rectory Survey of 1632 and to my husband Bernard for his advice.



Population figures for the Cheltenham area 1548-1801: a summary

The size of Cheltenham's population in the past is a matter of interest, and also of importance, for the local historian. The problem, in making a study of this, is not the collection of relevant information, but its interpretation. At different times between 1548 and 1801 (the date of the first civil census) a number of surveys of all, or of part of, the population in the Cheltenham area were made for various administrative purposes. For example, the Church of England periodically needed to establish the number of church families or communicants belonging to it. Those figures which reflect only part of the population need to be increased to produce an approximation of the actual population. This is done by use of a multiplier, but the result may be perhaps 15% too high, or too low. More data, if available, would permit a more accurate computation but the figures tabulated here are all of those that have been found to date (mainly in the GRO or local publications). It is also noted that some of the figures seem suspect eg. the 40 families indicated for Charlton Kings in 1650 seems much too low a figure.

Source: Condensed from my notes in Charlton Kings Local History Society Research Bulletin 10 (Autumn 1983).

Michael Greet

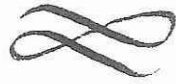
ACTUAL FIGURES

<u>DATE</u>	<u>Cheltenham</u>	<u>Charlton Kings</u>	<u>Prestbury</u>	<u>Leck-hampton</u>	<u>Swindon</u>	<u>Type of Survey</u>	<u>Multiplier</u>
1548	600	310/300	-	-	-	Communicants	1.67
1551	526	315	160	102	60	"	"
1563	164	103	54	20	16	Households	4.5
1603	800/3/2	310	300/-/-	94/-/-	40/-/-	Communicants/ Recusants/ Non-Communicants	1.67
1608	164	75	-	27	22	Fit, adult men	3.5
	Arle 23						
	Alstone 26						
	Westal/ Sandford 15						
1650	c350	c40	c60	c40	c140 people	Families	4.5
1676	1068/4/97	188/-/12	177/-/10	90/1/-	53/-/-	Communicants/ Papists/ Dissenters	1.67 over 16
1712	1500	550	445	120	90	Atkyns <u>History</u>	

<u>DATE</u>	<u>Cheltenham</u>	<u>Charlton Kings</u>	<u>Prestbury</u>	<u>Leck-hampton</u>	<u>Swindon</u>	<u>Type of Survey</u>	<u>Multiplier</u>
1735	c2000	700		120		Inhabitants	
1779	1433	c458	4-500	142	105	Rudder's <u>History</u>	
1801	3076	730	485	225	116	1801 Census	

ASSESSED FIGURES

1548	1002	517	-	-	-)	
1551	878	526	267	170	100)	
1563	738	463	243	90	72)	Multiplied
1603	1336	517	501	155	66)	up from
1608	798	262	-	94	77)	the figures
	(aggregate))	given above.
1650	1575	180	270	180	c140 (actual))	
1676	1783+168	313+20	295+16	150+1	88+0)	



Henry Merrett's plan of Cheltenham, 1834

One of the finest maps of Cheltenham to be produced during the 19th century was Henry Merrett's 1834 Plan of Cheltenham and its Vicinity, which still forms an invaluable source for anyone interested in the early topography of the town. The map measures 100 x 60 cms. (height x width) and covers the entire town from Pittville in the north to The Park in the south and from the boundary with Charlton Kings in the east to Tewkesbury Road in the west. The town's post-inclosure fields are shown in detail, as are all its domestic and public buildings, including proposed developments in such rapidly-expanding areas as Pittville and Lansdown. This article outlines the background to the map's production and provides some information on Merrett himself.¹

The earliest reference to Merrett and his map is to be found in the Cheltenham Chronicle for January 24th 1833, in which it was announced that Henry Sperring Merrett, 'architect, land and timber surveyor, property draughtsman etc' was about to publish 'a new plan of Cheltenham'. How long Merrett had lived in Cheltenham, and where he had come from are unknown, although the Chronicle noted on August 7th 1834 that Merrett had been "extensively engaged in Ireland and Liverpool as an architect and surveyor". The fact that the publication of Merrett's map was announced as imminent a full eighteen months before its

eventual appearance was probably an attempt on Merrett's part to forestall a rival cartographer, for during January 1833, the Chronicle also announced a proposed map of Cheltenham by the Painswick architect Charles Baker, who had a Cheltenham office at 4 Bath Street; there is, however, no evidence that Baker's map was ever produced.

According to the Chronicle, Merrett's map was to be "executed in the most superior style of engraving, from actual survey, comprising all the intended improvements and other introductions, that will make it highly useful and interesting". Subscription lists were opened at the various Pump Rooms and Libraries by March 1833 and within six months the draft of the map was completed. On September 5th 1833, Merrett announced in the Chronicle that "any ladies or gentlemen wishing to make alterations or improvements to their property, Henry Sperring Merrett will feel obliged by their submitting the same for insertion, previous to the plan being sent to the engravers". Clearly, Merrett was concerned with the accuracy of his map and this was reflected in an editorial comment in the same issue of the Chronicle, which noted that the map was "one of the most exquisite specimens of drawing that has ever been submitted to our notice: the fidelity of the plan is such that all the minutiae have been strictly attended to and all the intersections of property, however intricate, are clearly shown".

The map was engraved, from Merrett's survey, by James Neele and Co. of London, and was published on July 14th 1834. It was dedicated, by permission, to Lord Sherborne, the Lord of the Manor of Cheltenham, and sold for fifteen shillings on paper or one guinea on cloth, the latter contained in a case with the words MERRETT'S PLAN OF CHELTENHAM in gold leaf on the front.² The new map was clearly well received, both by the local press and by the Town Commissioners, who purchased two copies for their official use and who subsequently presented Merrett with a silver snuff box engraved with the inscription -

'Presented to Henry Sperring Merrett, Architect and Surveyor,
by the Commissioners of Cheltenham, in testimony of their approbation
of the talent and science displayed by him in his plan of the town.'³

The map may not, however, have been an unqualified financial success for Merrett. In his own words, it had been "an arduous and expensive undertaking", and on December 6th 1834, the Cheltenham Free Press noted that the map "has not received the success which it so richly deserves", mainly due to what the paper termed 'the dirty and pitiful dishonesty' of a number of the subscribers who refused to honour their pledge to purchase a copy on publication. Certainly Merrett was left with surplus copies of the plan, which he periodically advertised for sale during his remaining years in Cheltenham.

Apart from the production of his map, little is known of Merrett's career in Cheltenham, except for a short period of nine months from June 8th 1835 to March 29th 1836, during which he served as architect and surveyor to the Pittville Estate, following the resignation of the estate's previous architect, Robert Stokes. In this capacity, Merrett was responsible for measuring and staking out plots of land for sale, for providing plans and elevations of at least some of the intended buildings at Pittville and for supervising the work of the many builders operating on the estate. A number of papers relating to Merrett's work at Pittville have survived and these would suggest that among the buildings that he designed was the Gothic Revival terrace on the west side of Clarence Square, although no actual building took place there until 1840-1.⁴ The papers also explain why Merrett's connexions with Pittville were so short-lived. In March 1836, Pitt's steward, Josiah Strachan, who managed the estate for him, died and Merrett approached Pitt's son Joseph in the hope of succeeding him. Pitt, however, felt that Merrett was unsuited to the task and appointed

another surveyor, Francis Dodd as estate agent, precipitating an angry meeting between Merrett and Pitt junior, at which Merrett resigned. Merrett subsequently brought a legal action against Joseph Pitt, claiming that he was owed almost £300; not until April 1838 was the case settled - in Pitt's favour - and by that time Merrett, perhaps disillusioned with Cheltenham, had left the town.

Merrett occupied several addresses during his stay in Cheltenham. In January and September 1833, he is recorded at 16 Portland Square, and in August 1834 at 16 North Place. In November 1834, he moved to 384 High Street, and from there to 6 Well Walk by July 1835. Finally, in September 1836, he moved to 15 Regent Street, where he lived until his departure from Cheltenham at the end of 1837. It was at 15 Regent Street that the whole of Merrett's household furniture - described as 'neat and respectable' - was offered for sale in December 1837, along with the copyright of his map, the plate on which it was engraved and the remaining stock of around thirty copies of the map itself. On that occasion, the map was described as available "mounted in Morocco backs and cases for Gentlemens' libraries; on cloth and rollers both coloured and plain for offices and halls; and a few plain sheets." 5

Apart from the final settlement of his dispute with Pitt in April 1838, no more is heard of Merrett and where he spent the rest of his life is not known. His map did, however, outlast his departure from Cheltenham, for in August 1838, John Lee, a local librarian announced that "having purchased the copyright and plate of Merrett's large map of Cheltenham (he) is enabled to offer the New Edition, just published with corrections at the reduced price of 7s. 6d. in sheets or 12s. 6d mounted on a roller".⁶ No copy of this edition is known and it may not, in fact, have been published, for in the following year, George Phillips Johnson, a local printer and engraver issued his 'revised and improved edition' of the plan, on which he was described as 'the sole proprietor of the copyright'.⁷ Johnson also included a reduced version of the map in the second edition of his New Historical and Pictorial Cheltenham and County of Gloucester Guide (1846) and was certainly in possession of the copyright of the map at the time of his death in August 1848, for the plate and copyright were included in the sale of Johnson's effects in January 1850.⁸ Whether or not they were sold - and, if so, to whom - is unknown, although there is certainly no evidence to suggest that any further editions of the map were produced.

One final - and very important - point is the extent to which Merrett's map may be relied upon for accuracy. Although the map provides a fine overall view of the town in 1834, it occasionally falls down on more detailed examination, and the inclusion of individual buildings should, wherever possible, be checked against other sources. Merrett had, in particular, a tendency to confuse existing and intended buildings. One example of this concerns the south side of Clarence Square, in which all nineteen houses are shown as complete by 1834, whereas from the evidence of title deeds, directories, census returns and other maps and plans it is clear that Nos 15-19 Clarence Square were not in fact built until after 1847. Even so, Merrett's map is a fine example of cartography, and as long as it is used with care, is a vital source for Cheltenham's building and architectural history.

Steven Blake

1. This account is largely based upon references in the various Cheltenham newspapers between 1833 and 1837, notably the Cheltenham Chronicle, Cheltenham Free Press and Cheltenham Journal. A photograph of the map is shown on page 68 of S. Blake and R. Beacham, The Book of Cheltenham (1982)

2. The Cheltenham Library Local Studies Collection has an original cased copy.
3. Quoted in Cheltenham Free Press May 14th 1836. Merrett's letter of thanks to the Commissioners, dated May 26th 1836 has survived amongst their papers (now at Gloucestershire Record Office) and reads thus:- "I beg most respectfully to return you my sincere thanks for the several marks of your kindness, particularly the very splendid silver snuff box, with engraved memorial thereon, which has been presented me by Mr. Williams as a testimonial of your approbation of my plan of this town. The honour you have conferred on me will ever be gratefully remembered, and afford me the most pleasing secret gratification in knowing my plan has proved to be worthy your notice, I remain Gentlemen, your obedient servant, H.S. Merrett".
4. G.R.O. D.1388 (Pitt Box 3)
5. Cheltenham Free Press December 16th 1837.
6. Cheltenham Free Press August 4th, 1838.
7. A copy of the 1839 edition of the map is contained in G.R.O. D.2025, maps.
8. Cheltenham Chronicle January 31st 1850.



*The Cheltenham Cottage Company*¹

In comparison with Britain's major industrial towns Cheltenham has never experienced a severe housing crisis. However, there have been occasions when insanitary conditions in some parts of the town, or a general shortage of low-cost accommodation have prompted both comment and a degree of action. For example, in the late 1840's attention was focused on the low standards of health and housing which prevailed in Cheltenham's working class areas, paralleling national concern as the Public Health Act of 1848 passed through Parliament.² Later, between 1918 and 1920, the campaign for "Homes fit for Heroes" coupled with a local shortage of dwellings contributed to the decision to construct the first council houses at St. Mark's.³

Between the successes of the public health movement of the mid-19th century and the serious intervention of local authorities in the provision of housing after the First World War, schemes for the improvement of existing properties and for the construction of new dwellings were guided by the principles of Victorian philanthropy.

In the sphere of housing, philanthropic capitalism was a product of London's slum problem and was designed to provide both better standards of working-class housing and a return on the investments of the housing companies' shareholders. "Five per cent philanthropy", as it came to be known, therefore avoided the odium of charity and appealed strongly to the benevolence of some elements of Victorian middle class society.⁴

Following the successes in London, provincial philanthropic housing companies were established, some of the earliest in the Gloucestershire area being the Bristol Industrial Dwellings Company and the Borough of Stroud Improved Dwellings Company. ⁵ These served as models for the Cheltenham Cottage Company, which in the summer of 1883 completed its 100th year of operation. After its formation in 1869, the Charity Organisation Society provided a framework for various attempts to ameliorate the problems of the urban poor. Following the twin precepts of relieving distress and detecting imposture, the C.O.S. expanded its activities outside London and it was the Cheltenham group which provided the impetus for the formation of the Cottage Company. In 1882 the C.O.S. formed a small committee to examine the viability of an improved dwellings company in Cheltenham, having been struck by the successes of similar organisations elsewhere. The committee, comprising of John Bowle Evans J.P., John Steel, Thomas Voile, the Reverend John Owen and Alderman Wilson, was augmented by other interested Cheltenham residents and inquiries were made as to the availability of land and the cost of building cottages which could be let for between three and four shillings a week. The committee considered sites in Devonshire and White Hart Streets and the purchase of the latter commenced in May 1882. At the same time they pursued the legal process of establishing the company under the guidance of William Horsley, who described himself as an accountant and auditor and of course established his own estate agency in Cheltenham.

The White Hart Street property had a frontage of 60 feet and included one existing cottage. The site was acquired by the company for £185 and Horsley suggested that five additional cottages could be built at a cost of £400 and let to produce a reasonable return on the total outlay. The tender to carry out the work which was accepted was for £485 from C.H. Channon of Montpellier Street and building started in August 1882. However, construction did not proceed smoothly and the company's viewing committee was disappointed with the poor standard of finish to the houses and in the light of the committee's report the directors expressed their general dissatisfaction with the way in which the work had been carried out and supervised by the company's architect. Improvements to the houses cost a further £65 and by June 1884 the six cottages in White Hart Street were let.

In the second half of 1882 the company was anxious to obtain additional land and a variety of locations, mainly in the working class districts of the town, were examined. An extensive plot in Millbrook Street was the only site to be found suitable and the purchase of this land for £1,000 was agreed in October 1882. The plot was large with a frontage to the street of 575 feet and a depth of 70 feet, providing sufficient space for 34 cottages. The tender from a Birmingham builder, George Taylor of Hockley, was accepted at £618 less than any local firm. Despite favourable reports received on Taylor's background, problems soon developed and the directors again regretted their choice of builder.

The company planned to build 24 four-roomed cottages with a 12 feet frontage and 10 slightly larger five-roomed houses at 15 feet wide, to be let at rents of 3/6d and 4/6d a week respectively. Work started in the summer of 1883, but by December criticisms were made of the builder's progress and intentions. Typical was the view of the chairman of the town's public health committee, who suggested that the builder "did the work in a flimsy, jerry way." ⁶ The company, however, managed to resolve its contractual problems with Taylor and by June 1884 the first of the Millbrook Street houses was let.

The completion of the block of 34 cottages marked the end of the company's short-lived building operations. In November 1882 the directors had decided to acquire no additional land and in February 1904 they indicated that while the purchase of other cottages would be considered, the main short-term aim of the company was to pay off its debts which amounted to £1,210.



Given that the Cottage Company was an exercise in philanthropic capitalism it is perhaps surprising that debts should have been incurred, as the plan was to finance building operations from the shareholders' subscriptions. The initial backing was based on a nominal capital of £20,000 in 4,000 shares at £5 each. However, the number of shares issued fell far short of expectations and in its early stages the company experienced a severe shortage of funds. On registration in July 1882, 500 shares had been taken and by November a further 162 had been issued. £1 per share was payable on application and £1 on allotment, giving an initial capital base of only £1,424. In June 1883 the directors called in the remaining £3 per share.

The company's building operations put pressure on this meagre fund and the directors had to resort to bank loans and mortgages to complete their two schemes. The purchase of White Hart Street for £185, for example, was made with money advanced by William Horsley, the company secretary. Millbrook Street was financed by a loan from the County of Gloucester Bank for £1,000. By June 1884 the total debt to the bank was £2,556 and to clear the overdraft more formal financial arrangements were made, including a loan of £2,000 secured on the Millbrook Street property. As the mortgagees later called in their loans, the company's debts were taken over by Horsley. The shareholders represented a cross-section of enlightened Cheltenham residents. In addition to the original C.O.S. committee, supporters included the builder, Alfred Billings, John Shirer the draper, and Dorothea Beale, Principal of the Ladies' College. As company secretary, Horsley was involved with many subsequent share transfers, acquiring during his lifetime a total of 474 shares, 324 of which he held for a long term, thus giving him a major role in the decision-making of the company and adding to his influence as secretary and mortgagee. The shareholders had to wait some time before they saw a return on their investment as the company could not afford to pay a dividend until 1887. From then until 1906 shareholders received an annual payment of 3 or 3½%. In the 1890's the financial situation became much healthier and the directors established a reserve fund with which to reduce the size of the mortgage debt. For much of the early 20th century the dividend was 4% per annum.

From the late 1880's onwards, the affairs of the company were increasingly concerned with the day to day problems of managing the cottages, including maintenance, repairs and modernisation and the level of rents which, with a gradual increase in the supply of working class housing, were kept to their original level until 1903, when they rose by between 3d and 6d a week. In 1902, however, the company was confronted with a major setback as Horsley was served with notice from the Great Western Railway regarding the purchase of the six houses in White Hart Street to accommodate the Honeybourne branch line. The site was conveyed to the GWR in December 1903 for £775, which was used immediately to pay off a major part of the mortgage owed to Horsley. The six houses, together with most of the rest of White Hart Street, were demolished to make way for the railway, providing a small-scale example of the impact of new lines as they sliced through established urban residential areas.

In 1882 the formation of the Cheltenham Cottage Company had provoked a degree of criticism. Councillor Lenthall, a Liberal representing the North Ward, referred to it derisively as "coffee tavern philanthropy" which placed too much emphasis on "making it pay than the comfort of the people who would inhabit the houses." To this "Diogenes", writing in the Cheltenham Free Press, responded "when gentlemen whose lives testify to their unswerving devotion to the welfare of the masses are to be accused of starting schemes for the enrichment of their own private exchequer, it is quite time Mr. Lenthall is told he has overstepped the bounds of propriety and common decency." ⁷ More serious comments arose over the size of the houses. When the company negotiated for the purchase of Devonshire Street, the Corporation which owned the site refused to countenance cottages with a frontage of less than 15 feet, whereas the company proposed just 12 feet. However, only by building small houses could the company ensure that rents were sufficiently low, as "they aim at meeting the wants of a class nearly always overlooked by the construction of cottages....it is plain that a cottage which yields an adequate rent when the owner collects 2/6d weekly cannot possess all the advantages a higher rented one does." ⁸ As the Cheltenham Examiner went on to indicate, the only other way in which tenants could achieve a similarly low rent was for 2 or 3 families to live in a more expensive tenement leading inevitably to overcrowding. Certainly the rents charged by the company compared favourably with other houses of a similar class. Two four-roomed cottages in Russell Street, for example, which were jointly supplied with water from a pump, cost 3/6d a week in 1884, while 3/- a week in 1882 provided a similar house in Cleveland Street. The Cottage Company's houses had their own internal water supply. ⁹

In terms of the involvement of the shareholders, a philanthropic motive was strong. Initially the returns on their investments were low and not nearly as attractive as some other contemporary schemes. For example, in March 1883 the Queen's Hotel Cheltenham Ltd., was floated with an issue of 10,000 shares at £5 each. Advertisements suggested that an annual return of at least 8% could be expected, with an even higher figure resulting from "judicious expenditures in putting the Hotel into decorative repair and a new and energetic management." ¹⁰ Those with a more adventurous attitude towards investment could achieve a return of over 8% from foreign stocks and shares.

In aggregate terms the company's addition of 39 cottages to Cheltenham's housing stock was of minor importance, especially as its building operations coincided with a boom in the provision of working class dwellings. This, however, is to overlook the contribution of the company, which its supporters were anxious to underline, to the improvement of housing standards for those individuals who could otherwise only afford overcrowded, slum conditions. On several occasions in its recent history the company has considered selling off the

houses in Millbrook Street, as its role in the provision of dwellings has largely been taken over by the local authority and housing associations. However, 100 years on, it still retains a number of the Millbrook cottages and pursues an active interest in Cheltenham's housing scene.

Robert Homan

1. Except where indicated in the notes below this account is based on documents owned by the Cheltenham Cottage Company Ltd. I am extremely grateful to Mr. P.G.Jones, Secretary to the Cottage Company and Director of W.H.Horsley and Co. for making this material available for study.
2. Report by Edward Cresy to the General Board of Health.. an enquiry....into the sanitary condition of Cheltenham. 1849.
3. Homan R. "Cheltenham's Homes fit for Heroes", Local History Bulletin No.44, Autumn 1981.
4. Wohl A.S., The eternal slum: housing and social policy in Victorian London; 1977.
5. Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes. Minutes. Evidence of F.G. Barnett, Q6945 - 7225; c.4402 - 1, xxx, 1884-85: Cheltenham Examiner, 14 May 1884.
6. Cheltenham Examiner, 14 May 1884.
7. Cheltenham Free Press, 12 August 1882
8. Cheltenham Examiner, 16 August 1882
9. Cheltenham Free Press, 3 May 1884 and 15 July 1882.
10. Daily News, 19 March 1883.



The Clarence Street 'Palazzo'

At the junction of St. George's Place and that part of Clarence Street formerly known as Manchester Street stands a late nineteenth century terracotta building on a rusticated stone plinth. With its principal entrance blocked in, the building's unusual appearance causes a number of enquirers to call at the Public Library close by. The building, a copy of the Strozzi Palace of 1489 in Florence, is a survivor of the town's early electricity supply system.

An abortive attempt to supply electricity had been made by a public company in 1888-9, but it was left to the Borough Council to inaugurate the town's electricity system in 1895. The power plant was erected near Arle Road to the design of the Borough Surveyor and Engineer, Joseph Hall, and built by the local company of Malvern and Son. There seems to be no reason to doubt that Hall was also responsible for the design of the Clarence Street building, which acted as the chief distribution centre from which the current was sent to various underground sub-stations throughout the town. Work began in October 1894 and by April of the following year several business premises and Salem Baptist Chapel in Clarence Parade were illuminated. In May the contractors handed over to the Town Council and on May 16th the wife of Alderman Norman, chairman of the Borough Electric Lighting Committee, pulled a switch to inaugurate the new municipal undertaking, after which a celebratory dinner was held at the Plough Hotel. In August 1895 the Public Library became one of the first public buildings to be illuminated, and over the next few years the supply was gradually extended throughout the town.

In 1907 the Clarence Street sub-station was converted into the electricity offices which remained there until after the First World War. Part of the premises were later used as the Electricity Social Club but today the building has reverted to its original use as a sub-station.

A contemporary description of the works can be found in 'Cheltenham Electric Lighting' reprinted from the Electrical Engineer of May 17th 1895, (Cheltenham Library Local Studies Collection 63G62I.3). A photograph of the sub-station, decorated for the coronation of George V in 1911, may be seen on page 110 of S. Blake and R. Beacham, The Book of Cheltenham (1982).

Roger Beacham

Gravestones rediscovered

The recent discovery of two gravestones on the disused Honeybourne railway at Pittville caused a degree of interest and controversy in Cheltenham. The evidence available now suggests that the stones originated from the Old Parish Cemetery in the Lower High Street. In 1965 this was cleared by the Borough Council and under powers given by the Open Spaces Act of 1906 the gravestones were removed. Many were dumped at Folly Lane Tip, others found their way to the King George V Playing Field at St. Mark's, while some were used to build a wall in a small open space in St. Paul's.

One of the Pittville stones was from the grave of Samuel Harper, an important figure in 19th century Cheltenham. Harper was a Liberal and Radical activist, a publisher and the founder of two local newspapers, the Cheltenham Free Press and the Cheltenham Mercury. The other stone is from the grave of the Page family of Beulah House, Prestbury, of whom John Page was the last person to be buried in the Cemetery in 1929.

Robert Homan

