# Cheltenham Local History Society Journal

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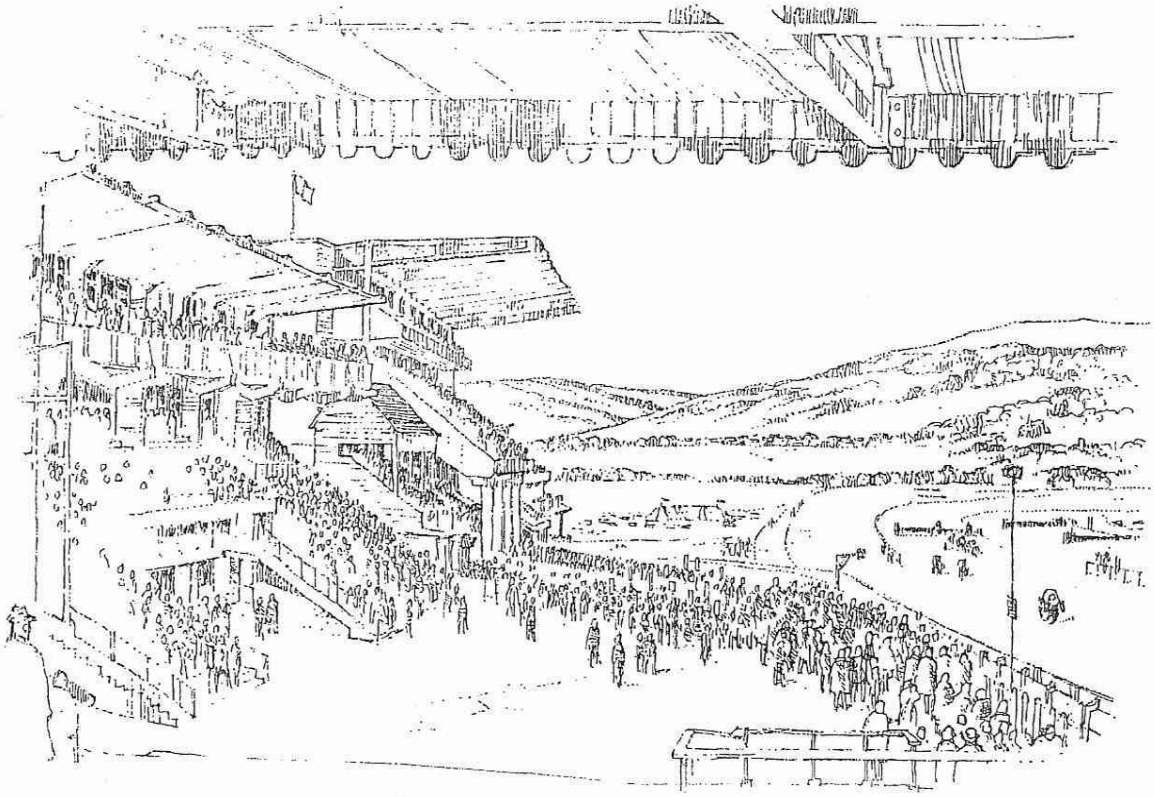
## Contents

Cover Illustration: a view, by Aylwin Sampson, of the Victoria Stores at the corner of Fairview Road and Victoria Place. This, and the adjoining houses, were once known as 'Seabright Terrace' and were built by Messrs. Urch and Seabright in 1836-8.



Artwork by Aylwin Sampson.



Cheltenham Racecourse, which occupies the site of Prestbury Park Farm, the early history of which is discussed by Beryl Elliott on pages 1 - 3.

# Prestbury Park Farm

Cheltenham's racecourse takes its name from the medieval deer park of Prestbury. The deer park was established and flourished at the period when the bishops of Hereford had a country residence at the moated site in Spring Lane (1); it was in disrepair in the 16th century and ceased to exist as such by about 1600 (2). In the 200 years or more between deer park and racecourse the continuity of the old name was maintained by Prestbury Park Farm.

'Prestbury Park' is marked on the O.S. 1:25000 First Series as a group of buildings at SO 958250 near the present site of the riding school for the disabled, but the farmhouse had already been derelict for some years when it was finally destroyed by fire in 1982. In the 17th and 18th centuries however, it provided a series of tenant farmers with a comfortable living and even a degree of prestige. Something of its history can be recovered from the estate papers of the Craven family in Gloucestershire Record Office (3). The Cravens, based successively in Berkshire and Warwickshire, were lords of the manor of Prestbury and owned the land in and around the park; as well as deeds and land transfer documents, some of the surveys prepared by their local agents have survived.

The fossilised outline of the deer park shows up clearly in the field boundaries of the 1841 Tithe Map (4). It extends in an oval west from the manor site almost as far as the boundary with Swindon, over 2 km west to east and 1 km north to south at its widest point. The nucleus of Prestbury Park Farm seems to have been the western two-thirds of this area; that is, the whole of the park west of the small stream which flows across it from the southern boundary at SO 958243. This identification is suggested by a survey of Craven lands in 1623 which lists fields individually but gives 'The Park' as a single unit of 291 acres of pasture land (5). The names of fields not in the park can be compared with those named in later surveys and in the Tithe Map to establish the outside bounds, and the acreage quoted fits well.

The name of the tenant in 1623 is not recorded, but before the end of the century the park was leased by 'John Loringe of Prestbury Park gentleman' (6). His social status is hard to fix exactly; gentleman though he considers himself, his bequests include 'all my Stock of Cattle of all kindes and my Implements ... of husbandry'. Again, he implies that Prestbury Park is his residence but he left a house in Swindon. John's wife Abigail continued to run the Park after his death; in 1700 she was leasing three or four more pasture fields from Lord Craven and also 100 acres of arable adjoining her land in the south-west of the parish, bringing her total holding to close on 500 acres (7).

In 1761 the current tenant appears as executor of a will (8) - 'John Cox of the park in the parish of Prestbury Gentleman' - but nothing more has come to light about him.

Only a few years later, in 1768, a comprehensive survey was drawn up of all Lord Craven's Gloucestershire estates (9). For his land in Prestbury, as elsewhere, it lists acreage and rent of every field, and is accompanied by a detailed plan. 'Prestbury Park Farm' - here described as a farm for the first time - appears as a large complex of farm buildings, with yard, gardens, orchards and ponds, set on the west bank of the stream, at or very near the 20th century site. It was served by a road leaving Hyde Lane just north-east of Hyde Farm, passing west of the farmhouse and continuing east to reach Prestbury Village in Spring Lane, next to the manor site. Another road went south-west from the house to cross Swindon Lane close to the present St. Nicolas church; the Swindon Lane end of this track can still be seen as the drive to the east of 'Oakley'. The old park area was divided up into hedged fields, with copses dotted here and there. The field names

suggest that it was still mainly pasture - for example, Upper and Lower Cow Pasture, Yearling's Park, Ewe Pen. The arable seems still to have been concentrated in the area of former common fields outside the park in the south-west.

The tenant in 1768 was James Wells; two 18th-century vicars of Prestbury were named Welles or Wells, but whether they were related to James has not yet emerged. At the time of the survey he had just taken over two more groups of fields and his farm now extended from the boundary with Swindon to Spring Lane, and south as far as Wyman's Brook, 567 acres altogether.

The end of the 18th century was possibly the high point of the farm's fortunes. Prestbury Park appears on Isaac Taylor's 1777 Map of Gloucestershire as an isolated house linked by its own road with Prestbury Village. Not very long after this, however, decline seems to have set in.

In the early 1820s the Park Farm was split up and leased in four separate parcels (10), the house itself with 153 acres going to a Cheltenham butcher, James Brookes. The recent construction of the modern Evesham Road in 1810 had split the estate in two, but the farm had probably become run-down before then. Brookes' lease provided for 'the messuage and buildings having first been put into good and tenantable repair' at the land-owner's expense. The 'repairs' may have entailed considerable rebuilding; the shell of the farmhouse which remained in the 1970s did not look very old and was architecturally undistinguished.

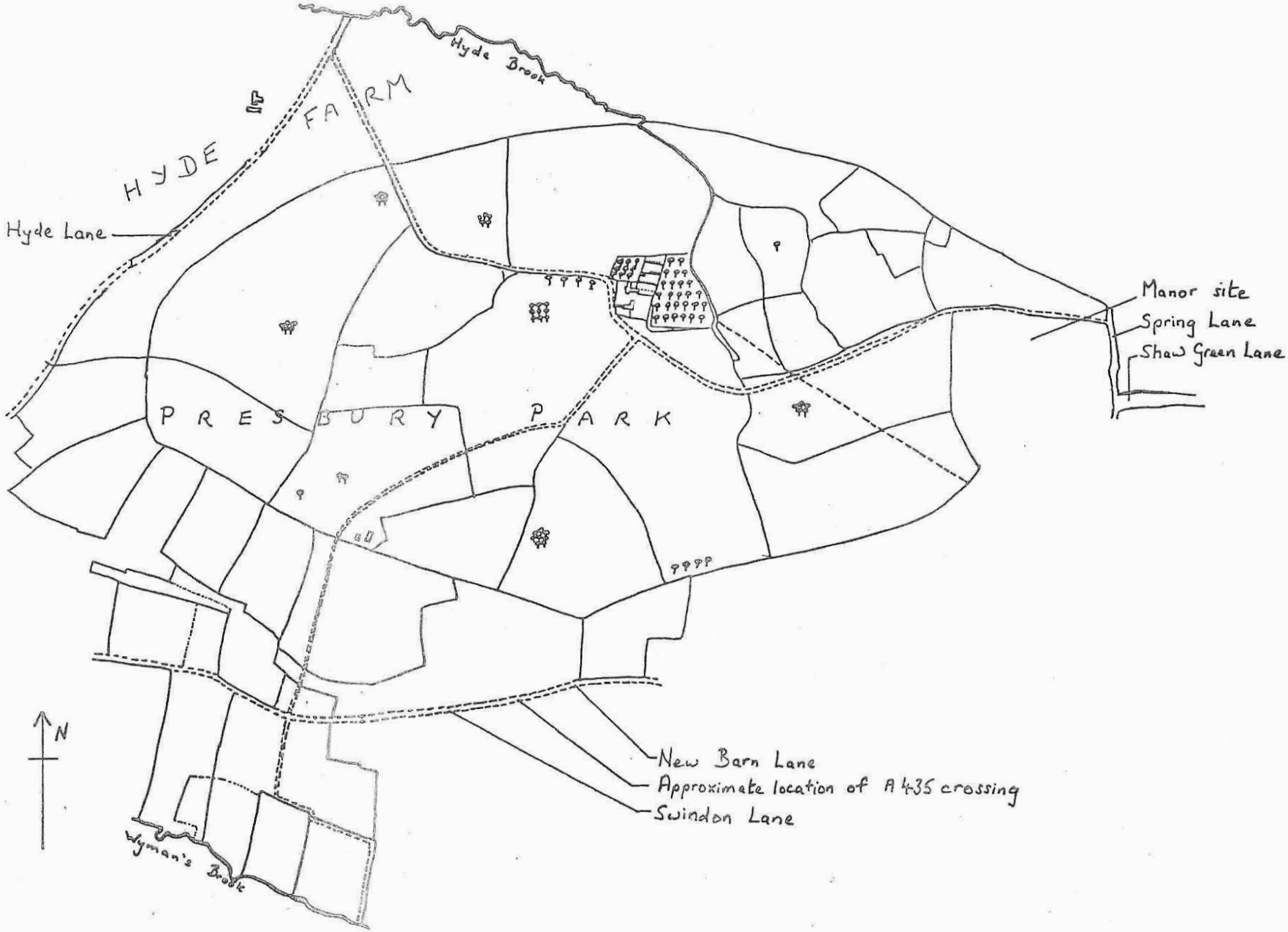
The park fields west of Evesham Road were leased in 1824 by John Nash Belcher, a more educated man than Brookes to judge by their signatures. He was to build a farmhouse and to repair 'in the most substantial manner' the existing barn and other buildings. His enterprise apparently prospered and Hunting Butts Farm still exists, though its connection with the park has been forgotten; its name was taken from that of the big field south of the farmhouse.

Of the remaining land, the fields nearest Prestbury village were leased in 1821 by Moses Yearsley, a Cheltenham victualler, and the rest by a Prestbury yeoman, Thomas Robinson. Neither holding had any substantial buildings and they seemed destined for an uneventful future. In 1823 however, Robinson signed an agreement with John David Kelly, 'secretary and agent ... of the gentlemen forming the committee for the purpose of erecting a Grand Stand for the Cheltenham Races'. The committee thereby acquired the use of three fields for one week in every year, in either June or July. They would be entitled to the income from 'Booths, etc.' except that the farmer might erect a booth to charge for carriages, at the rate of one shilling for a four-wheeled carriage and six pence for a two-wheeler. Provision was made for the agreement to lapse if the races were to 'drop' or be discontinued.

BERYL ELLIOTT

Notes:

1. Excavated by Helen O'Neil; see T.B.G.A.S. 75 (1956), 5-13.
2. V.C.H. (Glos) 8, 67-81.
3. G.R.O. D 184.
4. G.R.O. P 254/SD/2
5. G.R.O. D 184/M24.
6. Will of John Loringe 1694 G.R.O.
7. G.R.O. D 184/M24; marginal notes of 1700.
8. G.R.O. D 184/T77, referring to the will of George Newman.
9. G.R.O. D 184/P1.
10. G.R.O. D 184/T79.




Prestbury Park Farm in 1768: a sketch based on an estate map made for Lord Craven (G.R.O. D184/P1).

# King George III at Cheltenham in 1788

Amongst the Auckland Papers in the British Library (Add.MS 34428) are two letters referring to the visit of George III to Cheltenham in 1788. The letters, which were included in Volume 2 of the Journal and Correspondence of William Lord Auckland, published in 1862, were written to Lord Auckland (then William Eden) by Anthony Storer. They are transcribed here for their local interest.

Anthony Storer (London) to William Eden (Madrid), 8 August 1788

'... Besides the election which has engaged our attention for these three weeks, we have had another great event to talk about - I mean His Majesty's voyage to Cheltenham. His suite is not quite so numerous, as his most Christian Majesty's is to Fontainbleau. The Queen will dine with her Equerries now, tho at first coming into this Country, German etiquette prevented her from sitting at table with much greater Personages than either Mr. Digby or Mr. Gwyn. The latter of these two Gentlemen likes a good dinner, which however he is not in the way of getting, the whole time he remains at Cheltenham, His Majesty sitting a very little time at Table, and eating very sparingly hinders the poor Equerry, who is help't last, from taking the quantity of food necessary to appease his appetite. There is nothing, however minute, and unimportant it may be, which His Majesty does at Cheltenham, but what the newspapers report to us daily, so that we know now more, how he passes his time, than if he were living at Buckingham House. He eats cherries, it is found out, like other men, but walks further than most ...' (Add.MS 34428 ff.134-5).

Anthony Storer (Andover) to William Eden (Madrid), 9 October 1788

'... You may easily conceive that His Majesty's voyage to Cheltenham has occasioned as a great fund for conversation. His graciousness has been prodigiously commended ...' (Add.MS 34428 f.220).

William Eden (1744-1814) was a barrister and a Member of Parliament 1774-93. He was a Lord of Trade 1776-82, led the Special Commercial Mission to France 1785-88, and was Ambassador to Spain 1788-89 and Ambassador to the United Provinces 1789-93. He was raised to the Irish peerage in 1789 and was created 1st Baron Auckland in 1793. He was President of the Board of Trade 1806-7.

Anthony Storer (1746-1799), the writer of the two letters, was the son of a West Indian merchant. He was a Member of Parliament 1774-84, where he supported Lord North. He was a Lord of Trade 1781-82 and Secretary at the British Embassy at Paris 1783-84. Although 'highly bilious in health', Storer was, in the words of John Nichols, 'the Coryphaeus of fashion... He was the best dancer, the best skaiter (sic), of his time; and beat all his competitors in gymnastic honours. He excelled too as a Musician, and a Disputant, and very early as a Latin poet'. For more than a decade 'he led the dancing world at balls and assemblies'. (John Nichols, Literary anecdotes of the eighteenth century 9, 508-10. London 1815).

GRAEME T. POWELL
Australian Joint Copying
Project Officer

King George III

# Cavendish House: an outline history

An advertisement in a Cheltenham newspaper of 1818 spoke of the 'wonderful increase in the prosperity of Cheltenham. It is computed that one hundred and seventy-nine houses are now building, or in carcass, and the means of accommodation are proportionally great, especially for Ladies Dress, as there are at present upwards of seventy Dress Makers, and other marchands des modes ...'(1). In the same year it was reported 'never within our recollection, has Cheltenham appeared so gay, so brisk, so animated, as in the present season' (2).

Two men who were to figure prominently as 'marchands des modes' were William Debenham, descendant of a family which can trace its ancestors back to the 12th century, and Thomas Clark, originally in partnership with a man called Flint in London's Wigmore Street (3). Little is known of Clark at this stage, other than his being an ambitious man who did much to improve the Wigmore Street shop. In 1813, looking for capital, he was introduced to William Debenham, than a young man of 21 years of age, who offered Clark £500 to invest in a partnership. An indenture signed on Christmas Day 1813 created that partnership and the small shop in Wigmore Street, established in 1778, passing into the control of Flint and Clark, c. 1792, became Clark and Debenham. The business in London flourished and the two men began to look outside the city to further their trade. It was usual for wealthier families to travel to London to shop for themselves and also their friends, but long tedious journeys were becoming less acceptable. Cheltenham had become a fashionable spa, and Clark and Debenham saw the potential for good business in the now 'brisk and animated town'.

Although many improvements were taking place along the Sherborne Walks and Drives (later to become the Promenade) from 1818 onwards, there is little evidence of any building on the east side of the Promenade before 1820. The land was originally owned by the Lord of the Manor, Lord Sherborne, and developed by Thomas Henney, a Cheltenham solicitor, who later became a Town Commissioner. He was the man responsible, together with Samuel Harward, for the Promenade as it is today. The Parish Rate Books of 1820 show money paid by Thomas Henney for '2 plots of building land, a large garden, a house and garden and brick land' (4). Minutes of the Paving Commissioners of 13 October 1823 show that an order was given for gas lamps - 'two between Mr. Henney's houses at the bottom of the Promenade, and the Crescent on the right hand side near the footpath' (5).

The first advertisement found for Clark and Debenham is in the Gloucestershire and Cheltenham Herald, 1826, in which they announced the opening of a 'New Establishment' at 3 Promenade, 'with a choice selection of Silks, Muslins, Shawls, Handkerchiefs, Gauzes, Ribands, Gloves, Lace, Hose and Fancy Articles of English and Foreign Manufacture' (6). Two months later, in the Cheltenham Chronicle, 24 October 1826, they advertised 'superb cashmeres, shawls and French merinos' and that they 'have just received from Paris an assortment of novelties for the present season, which they are selling on the same, low terms as at their establishment, Cavendish House, London'.

William Debenham, the younger man, had served his apprenticeship with the Nottingham hosiery manufacturers, I. and R. Morley. His wealth of experience in the world of textiles proved invaluable when buying, both in England and Europe. Deep mourning was becoming increasingly fashionable among the wealthy, and it was usual for mourning dress to be worn for up to a year after the death of a close relative. Black was also worn when mourning the death of a public figure. The sale of silk mourning crape was very profitable. Clark and Debenham sought this business and it was to be one of their most lucrative decisions. Trade cards of the period promised 'Silks, Cashmeres, Muslins, etc' and 'family mourning, funerals conducted in the most careful manner, at moderate prices' (7).

Business continued until 1837 when Clark retired. An announcement of the dissolution of their partnership was made in the Cheltenham Looker On, 15 April 1837. In the same advertisement, Debenham, Pooley and Smith announced that they 'continue the Business both in London and Cheltenham having made Extensive Purchase in SILKS, MUSLINS, SHAWLS, HOSIERY, LACE etc'. William Pooley and John Smith were said to be 'two of Debenham's faithful retainers' (8). The partnership filled a necessary gap until such time when Debenham's sons William and Frank could be trained to take over.

In a marriage settlement document drawn up for Thomas Henney in favour of his daughter Mary Anne, it was stated that on 24 June 1836, 3 Promenade Rooms and 1 Promenade Villas were 'demised by Thomas Henney to William Debenham, William Pooley and John Smith for a term of twelve years' (9). Appendix 2 shows where, according to that document, the business was situated. Building Certificates show that between January 1836 and November 1836, two houses built for Thomas Henney were passed by Richard Billings, the Town Surveyor and one in August 1836 for Clark and Debenham - all three described as 'situate in East Promenade' (10).

It would appear that although the dissolution of partnership between Clark and Debenham was not announced until 1837, preparations were already in hand for the new partnership.

In December 1844, Debenham, Pooley and Smith announced the opening of another room, 'to further extend their premises'. Advertisements of the day show the graceful living of the period. One addressed 'specifically to the nobility and gentry' boasted of their special arrangements made to show 'the effect of every

The facade of Cavendish House in the mid-19th century and in 1985

colour by Candle Light' which would be an advantage to ladies wishing to know what their evening dresses would look like in the candle-lit ballrooms (11).

The management of provincial branches was given to Clement Freebody, the brother of Debenham's wife, Caroline. The 1841 and 1851 census returns show him as the head of the business, living on the premises; by 1861, a man of 46 years of age, he was married and living at 6 Ormond Terrace.

Pooley and Smith retired in 1851; an announcement of the dissolution of their partnership was made in the Cheltenham Examiner, 26 March 1851. Debenham then took his son, William, and Clement Freebody into partnership. The new trade name was Debenham, Son and Freebody, although for many years the shop had traded under the name of Cavendish House, so called after the London shop which was close to Cavendish Square. An advertisement in the Cheltenham Examiner, 5 November 1851 announced that extensive alteration and addition had been made to their premises. Increasing business in Cheltenham and the continuing expansion of Cavendish House brought the need for staff increases. Men and women from all over the country sought employment in Cheltenham. Provision was made for staff to live on the premises. Appendix 3 shows numbers of living-in staff registered according to the census returns of 1841-1881 (12). Among the staff in 1851 was a George Freebody, aged 14, born in Hurley, Berkshire, as was Clement. A relative possibly, who, it is interesting to note, was not an apprentice as one would expect of someone his age, but a draper and silk mercer.

The business continued under Debenham and Freebody until 1876. An advertisement in the Cheltenham Examiner, 5 July 1876, announced the retirement of the senior partner, presumably a Freebody, as the business then became Debenham and Hewitt. The 1861 census shows a George E. Hewitt as an assistant aged 21. It is more than likely he is the same Hewitt, who by 1883 had assumed sole control of the company.

Throughout July 1883, Debenham and Hewitt announced the beginning of their 'Special Sale', later in the month adding 'Further Reductions to induce an entire Clearance of Stock'. On 1 August 1883 an advertisement announced the 'First deliveries of New Goods'. On this date the name of Debenham and Hewitt was replaced by Cavendish House Limited. It can only be assumed that when a private limited company was formed, with George Hewitt as its chairman, Debenham and Freebody relinquished their interests in Cheltenham. Frank Debenham remained a shareholder but gradually disposed of his shares.

The store now had a frontage measuring 142 feet, and premises in Regent Street which were used as workshops. In a commercial directory, Where to buy at Cheltenham (c.1891), it is reported that 'The Furnishing Department is under the personal management of one of the Directors, Mr. A. C. Nicholls, a gentleman who has a wide experience in the general commercial world and a special knowledge of artistic furnishings. The works in Regent Street employ a large number of skilled workmen, and contain stocks of well-seasoned and thoroughly dry timber suitable for the manufacture of furniture' (13).

Extensions were carried out in 1891. An announcement in the Cheltenham Examiner, 8 July 1891 reported that the Directors 'were determined upon considerable alterations in the premises with a view to the further development and satisfactory working of the business'. When the alterations were completed, Mrs. Talbot Coke, an established writer of the late 19th century, was invited to Cheltenham and shown around Cavendish House. When she returned to London, she wrote an article

entitled A Day in Cheltenham (14) in which she described the Furnishing Departments, 'curtains at 1/9 the yard, as well as two or three guineas, and curtains we could live with at 18/6, yet also those at £8.8s and upwards'. Mrs. Coke also went into great detail describing the frontage of the store:

'My readers must imagine large plate-glass windows, with, as it were, a frieze of artistically designed and richly coloured glass, the beauty of which was enhanced by the leaded part being thickly gilded. This glass frieze, sub-divided into quaint shaped panels, runs along the top of all the windows but one - of which more hereafter, each window being divided from its neighbour by rich massive, hand carved pillars of solid mahogany'. The one large plate-glass window had, in place of the frieze, 'a mass of magnificent carving, whence fall long drooping 'swags' of carved flowers in the Empire style'. Mrs. Coke continued, 'My wonderment is complete on learning that the improvements were designed by one of the Directors, and carried out, carved work, leaded glass and all, by the employees of the Company'. The manager of the store in 1881, Mr. C. Williams, now a co-director, was thought to be the man largely responsible for the extensive modernisation in 1891 and quite possibly for its design.

A long established silk mercery business at Brunswick House (3 Promenade Villas) was purchased in 1903. An advertisement in the Cheltenham Examiner, 8 July 1903 announced 'Extraordinary Reductions in the price of Cavendish House stock and the whole of Brunswick House stock to be sold out to expedite alteration of premises'. One week later Brunswick House Show Rooms were re-opened. A further purchase of premises comprising a gentlemen's outfitters and an adjoining shop, Crichtons, a pianoforte and music shop was made in 1920. Regent Mews, the site of which is the present Food Hall was purchased in 1928 and the new extensions were opened in 1931. The Gloucestershire Echo, 25 November 1931 reported 'Cavendish House new extension occupies the site of the old Riding School - a popular rendezvous in the spacious days of the Georges'. The article continues, 'The foundation of a building of this magnitude presented a problem not hitherto experienced in Cheltenham. A trial hole dug on to the site revealed a sub-soil of gravel and sand containing such a volume of water that the construction of a deep-level basement was impossible by ordinary building methods'.

The store continued to expand, until in 1938 the floor space covered over 163,000 square feet. Modernisation was carried out from 1964. It was during excavations that remains of a passageway, road and houses were discovered. The general foreman of Bovis Ltd. spent six weeks exploring beneath Cavendish House (15).Evidence showed that the road ran parallel with the Promenade, and ran past the houses; this was said not to be Regent Street. Merrett's Map (2nd edn., 1839) shows the road which runs between the backs of houses in Regent Street and the Promenade. The marriage settlement document mentioned above also describes it. Indeed, a portion still remains at the goods delivery entrance in Regent Street.

In 1962 the store came under the control of the J. J. Allen Group of Bournemouth. While under their control extensive alterations to modernise the store took place. This was necessary following the years of additions and alterations to what were originally single properties. The reconstruction, giving a completely new facade was to cost in the region of £800,000. The work was to be completed in three phases; the first phase began in January 1964 and the third phase was completed in August 1966, ten weeks ahead of schedule, despite the repeated problem of the high water table.

In 1970 the Allen Group was acquired by the House of Fraser, but continued to trade as J. J. Allen. Re-organisation in 1972 severed connections with J. J. Allen. It was announced in the Gloucestershire Echo, 21 January 1973 that

Cavendish House was to become the 'Harrods of the West'. From 1 February 1972 the store became part of the Harrods Provincial Group, employing some 600 people. In July 1975 Cavendish House left the Harrods group and joined the House of Fraser (Midlands) Ltd. Change in structure in 1980 brought the store into the House of Fraser (Stores) Ltd., in whose hands it remained until 1985. Cavendish House has once again become part of a family business. The House of Fraser has been purchased by the Al-Fayed family - a name well-known in the international business world.

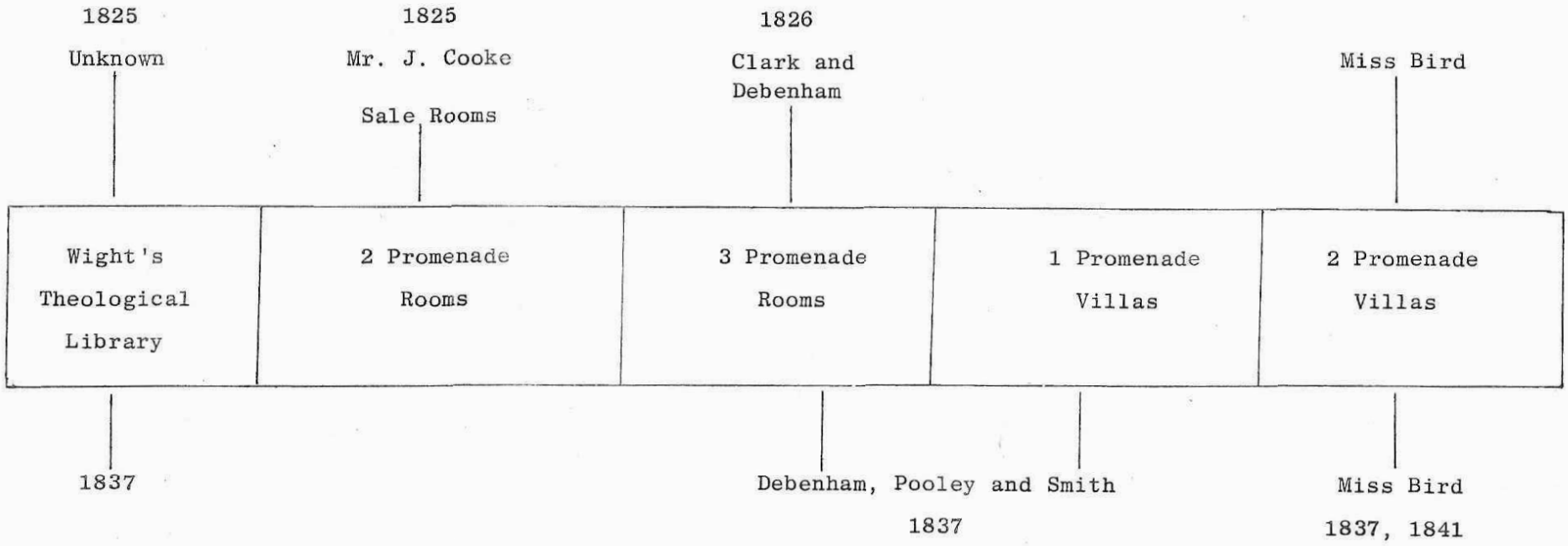
JUNE HAMBLETT

Notes:

1. Cheltenham Chronicle, 20 Aug. 1818.
2. Ibid., 8 Oct. 1818.
3. Maurice Corina, Fine Silks and Oak Counters (1978). Copy in Cheltenham Public Library.
4. G.R.O. P78 OV 1/1-12. Quoted by permission of Canon Hart and Cheltenham St. Mary's P.C.C.
5. G.R.O. D1685 Cheltenham Borough Records.
6. The advertisement is illustrated in S. Blake and R. Beacham, The Book of Cheltenham, 129.
7. Maurice Corina, Fine Silks and Oak Counters (1978).
8. Ibid.
9. G.R.O. D185 (VII)/2 (1832-1854).
10. G.R.O. D1685 Cheltenham Borough Records.
11. 'Store of History', in Cotswold Life August 1973. Author unknown, but thought to have been prepared by Cavendish House.
12. Microfilm copies in Cheltenham Public Library.
13. Copy in Cheltenham Public Library.
14. Ibid.
15. Gloucestershire Echo, 31 Jan. 1964.

I would like to thank the staff of the Cheltenham Reference Library and the Gloucestershire Record Office for their help.

## APPENDIX 1: DIAGRAM OF PREMISES, BASED ON CHELTENHAM NEWSPAPERS OF THE PERIOD




In 1851, 3 Promenade Villas was occupied by W. T. Smith, Silk Mercer (Brunswick House). The business was purchased by Cavendish House in 1903.

APPENDIX 2: PLAN ACCORDING TO ATTESTED COPY OF MARRIAGE SETTLEMENT BY THOMAS HENNEY ON THE MARRIAGE OF HIS DAUGHTER MARY ANNE HENNEY TO ANTHONY KINGTON BAKER, 8 MAY 1838

Road or passageway on the East of messuages or tenements.

Promenade on the West of messuages or tenements.

East

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| N. Wight<br>Bookseller | C. Norman<br>China Dealer<br><br>2 Promenade Rooms | Debenham,<br>Pooley and Smith<br><br>3 Promenade Rooms | Debenham,<br>Pooley and Smith<br><br>1 Promenade Villas | Miss Bird,<br>Milliner<br><br>2 Promenade Villas |

West

2 Promenade Rooms, bounded on the north by Wight's Bookshop and on the south by Debenham, Pooley and Smith.

3 Promenade Rooms and 1 Promenade Villas bounded on the north by Mr. Norman's china shop and on the south by premises occupied by Miss Bird, Milliner.

3 Promenade Rooms and 1 Promenade Villas were demised by Thomas Henney on 24 June 1836 to Debenham, Pooley and Smith for a term of 12 years.

## APPENDIX 3: CENSUS RETURNS 1841-1881

| Year | Head | Female Assistants | Male Assistants | Female Servants | Male Servants | Female Apprentices | Male Apprentices | House-Keeper | Clerks | Porters |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1841 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | - |
| 1851 | 1 | 10 | 15 | 2 | 4 | - | - | - | - | - |
| 1861 | - | 15 | 14 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 1 | - | 4 |
| 1871 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 1 Cook<br>2 House-Maids<br>1 Kitchen Maid | - | - | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 Drapers |
| 1881 | 1 | 48 | 33 | 1 Cook<br>4 House-Maids<br>1 Kitchen Maid | - | - | 8 | 1 | - | 1 House<br>4 Drapers |

1861 - Clement Freebody not living on premises, but at 6 Ormond Terrace.

1881 - The 33 male staff were living at Stamford House.

# Urch and Seabright of Fairview : cabinet makers and builders 1826 - 1885

Although 19th-century Cheltenham was not primarily a manufacturing town, it did have a number of locally important industries, notably coach and carriage building, and cabinet making. Inevitably, these concerns were concentrated in the town's three main artisan areas - the Lower High Street; 'South Town', adjoining Bath Road; and Fairview. This article outlines the history of one such concern - Messrs. Urch and Seabright of Fairview, who were initially cabinet makers, but who later broadened their activities to include house building, undertaking, and a house agency business (1).

According to later trade advertisements (Fig.2) the firm was established in 1826 by two men - John Urch and William Seabright, neither of whom was a native of Cheltenham. Seabright came from Winchcombe, where he was baptised as 'William Sebright' on 20 October 1789. In 1813 and 1824 (when his children Mary Ann and William were baptised, at Winchcombe and Cheltenham respectively) he was described as a carpenter. John Urch was from Westbury-sub-Mendip in Somerset, where he was baptised on 28 February 1802 (2). There is no reference to Urch in Cheltenham before 1826; in 1830 he was described as a carpenter and joiner, and his address was given as 16 Gloucester Place, which was also the earliest address at which the partnership is recorded (3).

Virtually nothing is known of the first ten years of the firm's history, although by 1836 it was clearly prospering, for in that year Seabright stated that he and Urch 'employ about 28 men altogether, joiners, cabinet makers and upholsterers' (4). The occasion for Seabright's statement was a Police Court appearance during the trial for intimidation of three of the firm's former employees, who had threatened two of their fellow workers with violence for refusing to join a strike over the introduction into the workshop of a man who 'could turn his hand to anything' and who thereby gave offence to the more specialist craftsmen. The trial took place on 16 June 1836 and resulted in the defendants being sentenced to ten days in the House of Correction at Northleach; an account of the trial forms an Appendix to this article.

By 1836, Urch and Seabright had also embarked on their career as builders, concentrating their activities on Fairview, and in particular on that part of Cheltenham Upper Field owned by James Fisher, a local property developer (5). Fisher had acquired a little over nine acres of land (Lot 109 in the 1806 Inclosure Award) from the assignees of the solicitor Theodore Gwinnett on 16 July 1819 and had begun its building development some years later with the sale of three lots of land, intended as part of a range of houses to be called 'Jersey Place', to one Samuel Nock, on 22 January 1828 (6). By then, Nock had in fact completed one house (now 138 Fairview Road), although he failed to build the other two; possibly the economic recession of the late-1820s curtailed his activities, as it almost certainly did Fisher's, the latter being perhaps more concerned to promote his fashionable Suffolk Square development than the less exclusive Jersey Place. Not, in fact, until 1835 onwards, when Urch and Seabright acquired a substantial tract of land from Fisher did building within the latter's Upper Field estate revive.

In all, Urch and Seabright acquired from Fisher a tract of land measuring 161 ft 3 ins north; 169 ft south; 223 ft 10 ins east; 227 ft west (Fig.3). The land was bounded on three sides by new roads, all constructed by Fisher. On the west was a 20 foot road now known as School Lane, and on the south and east were two 40 foot roads. That on the south, now part of Fairview Road, was known as Victoria Street, while that on the east was (and still is) known as Victoria Place. The earliest reference to Urch and Seabright's involvement with the land is their agreement to purchase its southern half (a block 116 ft 6 ins north; 169 ft south; 111 ft west; 110 ft 9 ins east) from Fisher on 7 May 1835. Exactly

URCH AND SEABRIGHT,

Cabinet Makers, Upholsterers,

*HOUSE AGENTS,*

BUILDERS, UNDERTAKERS,

AND

APPRAISERS,

16, GLOUCESTER PLACE,

CHELTENHAM.

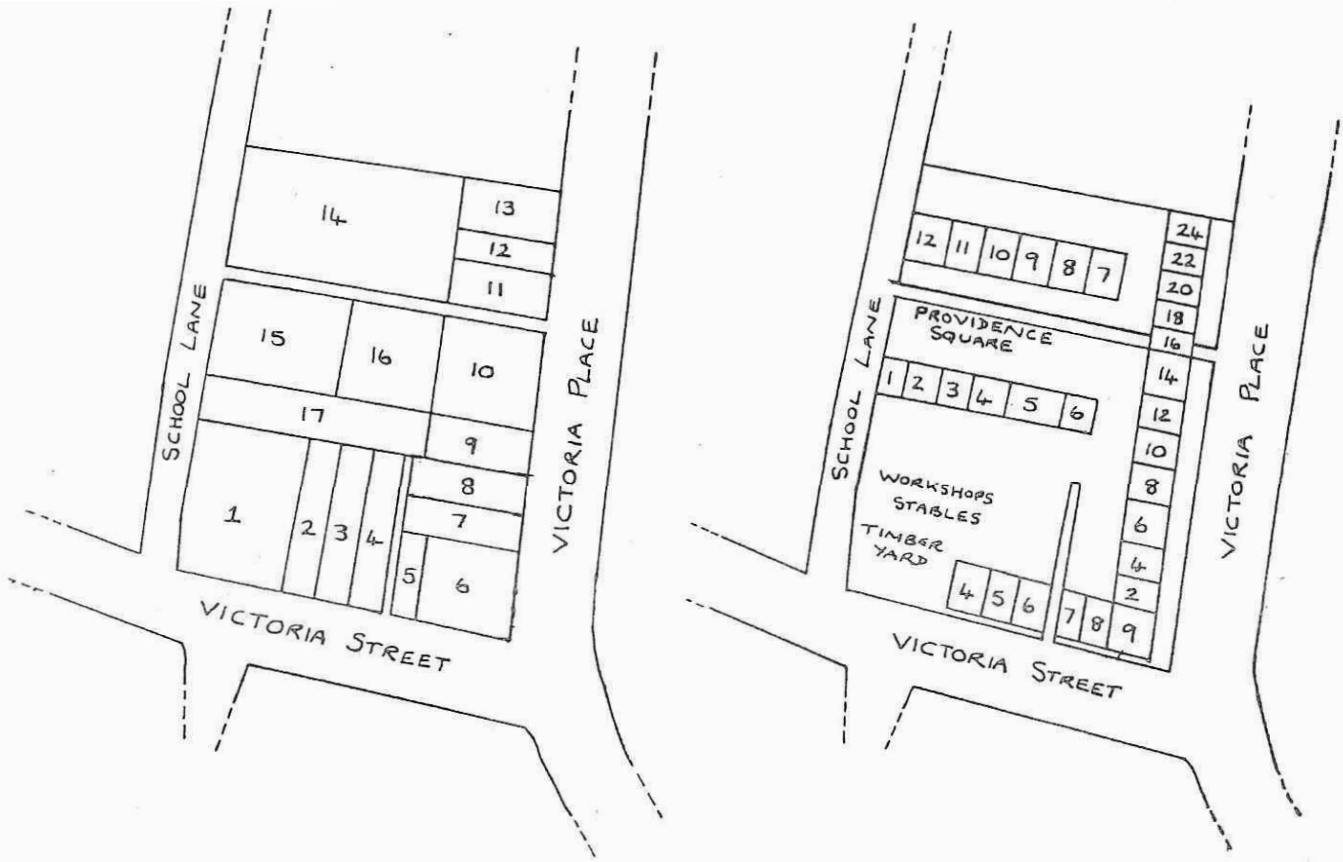
J. Urch's Residence, 72, Winchcomb Street.

Fig.1: An advertisement from Harper's 1857 Cheltenham Directory; reproduced by courtesy of Gloucestershire County Library.

when they agreed to purchase the northern half of the land is uncertain, but it must have been before 20 February 1836, the date of the earliest formal conveyance of land in the northern half of the building estate. The total purchase price appears to have been £1,130.

Urch and Seabright utilized their newly-acquired land for a combination of residential and manufacturing premises. At the corner of School Lane and Victoria Street they established workshops, stabling, and a timber yard, while the remainder of the land was set aside for houses, 30 of which were built between 1835 and 1840 (Fig.4). Eighteen of these formed part of a terrace which began on the north side of Victoria Street and continued into the west side of Victoria Place; it included, at the corner of the two streets, the fine bow-fronted house now occupied by the Victoria Stores. These houses are now 104-116 Fairview Road and 2-24 Victoria Place; their original names and numbering is, however, rather confusing. Victoria Place was also known, on occasion, as Field Street, or even as Upper Field Street, while the houses on the north side of Victoria Street (and, indeed, some of those in Victoria Place) were also known as Seabright Terrace. In addition, it is clear that the southern part of the timber yard, fronting Victoria Street, was also intended eventually for houses, as the westernmost house in Seabright Terrace (now 106 Fairview Road) was known from the time of its building as 4 Seabright Terrace. Nos.1-3, on the site of the timber yard (now 100-104 Fairview Road) were built sometime after 1885 (7). The remainder of the houses formed Providence Square, lying immediately to the north of the workshops and timber yard and comprising 12 small houses, six on either side of a narrow passageway connecting Victoria Place and School Lane.

Fig.2: An advertisement from the 1870-1 Royal Cheltenham Directory; reproduced by courtesy of Gloucestershire County Library.




Figs.3-4: Building plots and houses in Urch and Seabright's Fairview building estate: sketch plans based on evidence from the Manor Court Books and 1855-7 Old Town Survey.

Sixteen of these 30 houses were undoubtedly built by Urch and Seabright themselves, namely the whole of Providence Square, and Nos. 4, 8 and 9 Victoria Street and 2 Victoria Place (8). The remainder of the houses were the work of other builders, who arranged transfers of individual plots from Urch and Seabright, the builders paying their purchase monies to, and receiving legal title from Fisher, in part-payment of Urch and Seabright's own purchase money. The earliest of these sub-purchases was on 15 May 1835, when Seabright's son-in-law, a Prestbury carpenter named John Cull, acquired the site of 6 Victoria Street for £45. The exact dates of the various houses are difficult to ascertain as the building of a number of them clearly pre-dated (in one case by six years) the formal conveyance of the land by Fisher. All 30 do, however, appear to have been completed by 1840 at the latest. The details of the various conveyances are as follows; the plot numbers refer to Fig.3:

Plot 1 - 50 ft N & S; 91 ft E & W conveyed to Urch and Seabright for a part of £386 (see also Plots 6, 14, 16-17), 30 Jan. 1839. Land in use as a timber yard since 1836; later the site of 1-3 Victoria Street. (G.R.O. D855/12, 7).

Plot 2 - 17 ft N; 17 ft 8 ins S; 95 ft 6 ins E & W conveyed to Urch and Seabright for £60, 20 Feb. 1836. Site of 4 Victoria Street. (G.R.O. D855/10, 109).

Plot 3 - 17 ft 8 ins N & S; 110 ft E & W. conveyed to Samuel Paget, stonemason for £60, 20 Feb. 1836. Site of 5 Victoria Street. (G.R.O. D855/10, 111).

Plot 4 - 17 ft N & S; 68 ft E & W conveyed to John Cull for £45, 15 May 1835. Site of 6 Victoria Street. (G.R.O. D855/9, 521).

Plot 5 - 19 ft N & S; 50 ft E & W conveyed to William Meddings, bricklayer for £45, 6 Oct. 1836. Site of 7 Victoria Street. (G.R.O. D855/10, 335).

Plot 6 - 47 ft N & S; 50 ft 9 ins E & W conveyed to Urch and Seabright for a part of £386 (see also Plots 1, 14, 16-17), 30 Jan. 1839. Site of 8-9 Victoria Street and 2 Victoria Place. (G.R.O. D855/12, 7).

Plot 7 - 62 ft N & S; 20 ft E & W conveyed to John Neville, carpenter for £56, 6 Oct. 1836. Site of 4 Victoria Place. (G.R.O. D855/10, 331).

Plot 8 - 62 ft N & S; 20 ft E & W conveyed to Henry Neville, carpenter for £56, 6 Oct. 1836. Site of 6 Victoria Place. (G.R.O. D855/10, 333).

Plot 9 - 62 ft N & S; 20 ft E & W conveyed to Thomas Arundell, plasterer for £56, 6 Oct. 1836. Site of 8 Victoria Place. (G.R.O. D855/10, 329).

Plot 10 - 53 ft N & S; 57 ft E & W conveyed to William Charlwood, carpenter for £135, 2 Feb. 1837. Site of 10-14 Victoria Place. (G.R.O. D855/12, 448).

Plot 11 - 52 ft N & S; 26 ft E & W conveyed to William Charlwood for £52, 4 Mar. 1840. Site of 16-18 Victoria Place. (G.R.O. D855/12, 488).

Plot 12 - 52 ft N & S; 13 ft 4 ins E & W conveyed to William Randall, carpenter for £25, 18 July 1846. Site of 20 Victoria Place. (G.R.O. D855/17, 414).

Plot 13 - 48 ft 7 ins N & S; 26 ft 9 ins E & W conveyed to William Clifford for £ 9, 20 Dec. 1838. Site of 22-24 Victoria Place. (G.R.O. D855/11, 474).

Plot 14 - 112 ft 8 ins N & S; 72 ft E & W conveyed to Urch and Seabright for part of £386 (see also plots 1, 6, 16-17), 30 Jan. 1839. Site of 7-12 Providence Square. (G.R.O. D855/12, 7).

Plot 15 - 77 ft N & S; 44 ft E & W conveyed to Urch and Seabright for £95, 20 Feb. 1836. Site of 1-4 Providence Square. (G.R.O. D855/10, 108).

Plot 16 - 36 ft N & S; 44 ft E & W conveyed to Urch and Seabright for part of £386 (see also Plots 1, 6, 14, 17), 30 Jan. 1839. Site of 5-6 Providence Square. (G.R.O. D855/12, 7).

Plot 17 - 112 ft 8 ins N & S; 16 ft E; 20 ft W conveyed to Urch and Seabright for part of £386 (see also Plots, 1, 7, 14, 16), 30 Jan. 1839. Site of 'a set of smith's, cabinet maker's and other workshops'. (G.R.O. D855/12, 7).

The connection between Urch and Seabright's cabinet making and building activities was undoubtedly a close one and the Census Returns of 1841 onwards reveal that many of the occupants of the houses built or developed by the partners were employed in the woodworking or cabinet making trades. For example, in Providence Square, no less than 14 out of 19 working people recorded in 1841 were so engaged. Seven were described as cabinet makers, two as sawyers, two as upholsterers, and one each as a carpenter, carver, turner and french polisher (9). Although it cannot be proved that these men worked for Urch and Seabright, it is likely that they did so.

The extensive building operations undertaken by the partners between 1835 and 1840 would suggest that the firm's prosperity was assured. By the time of the 1851 Census, the partners employed 50 men, and in 1861 the workforce was only marginally less, at 35 men, 4 women and 6 boys. Following the establishment of the Victoria Street workshops, 16 Gloucester Place became solely the firm's furniture showroom and in subsequent years the partnership's activities widened still further. In Harper's 1857 Cheltenham Directory (Fig.1), Urch and Seabright are also listed

as house agents, undertakers, and appraisers, and in October 1865 they opened a second, far more central showroom, at 11a Promenade Villas, under the management of Urch's son, William Henry Urch. An advertisement for the Promenade Villas showroom appeared on the front page of the Cheltenham Examiner each week between 21 October 1865 and 22 April 1868, and it noted that the firm had 'an assortment of first class cabinet furniture of their own manufacture; also carpets, draperies, bedding, and general upholstery goods'. A further insight into the firm's products may be gained from an invoice issued to one of its customers, Mrs. Jefferies, in August 1848 (10). Amongst the goods supplied was an entire suite of at least 16 pieces of rosewood furniture, for £94 1s. The invoice is headed with an engraving of the firm's Gloucester Place showroom; part of it is reproduced here as Fig. 5.

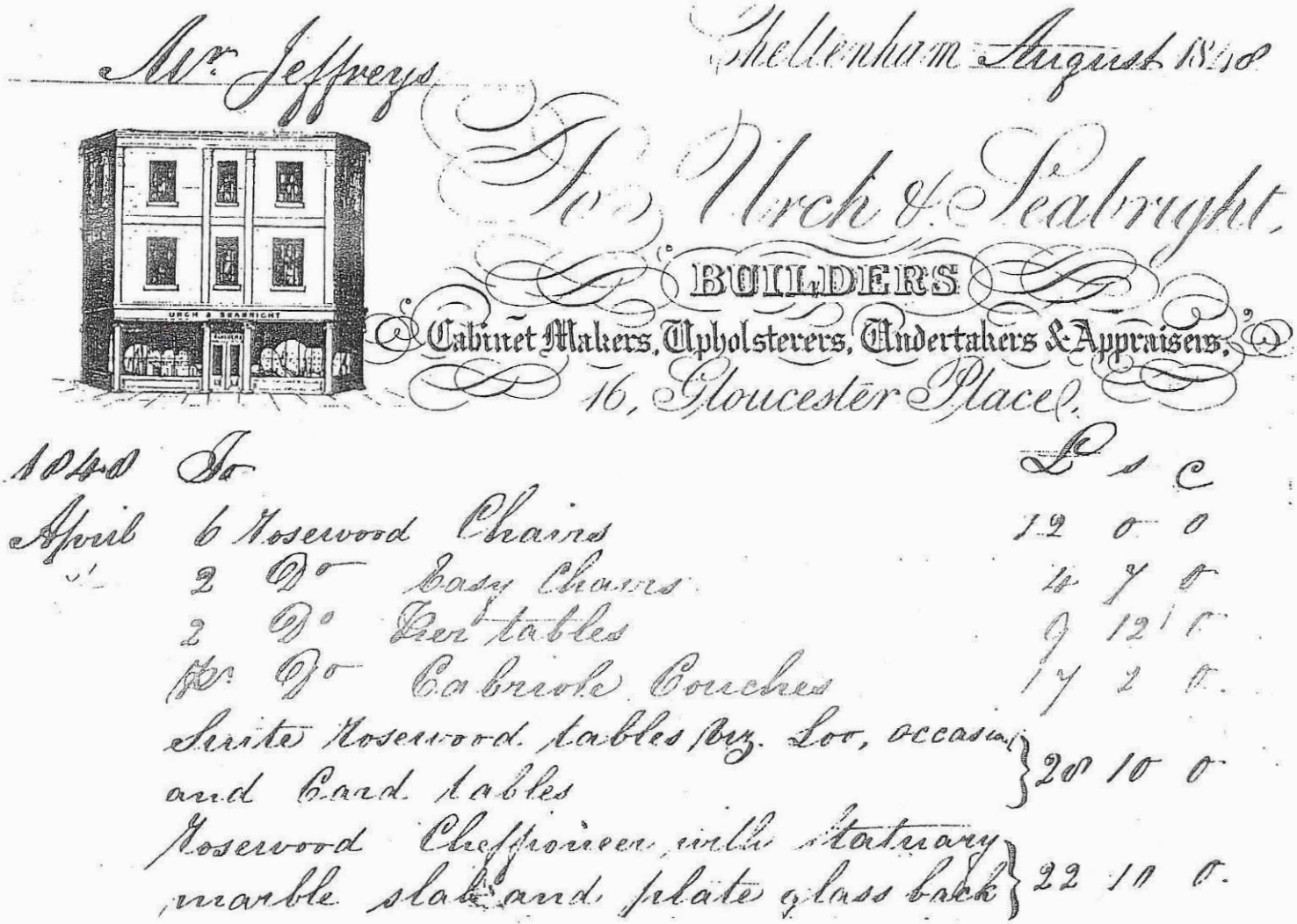
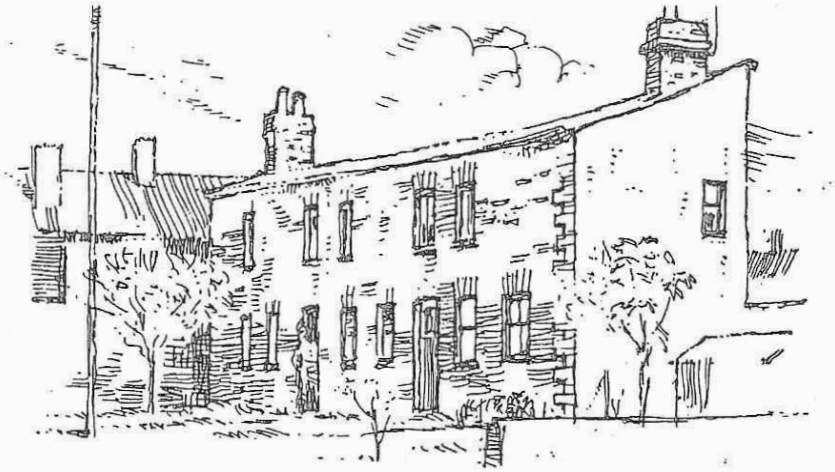



Fig.5: Part of an invoice issued by Urch and Seabright in 1848; reproduced by courtesy of Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museums.



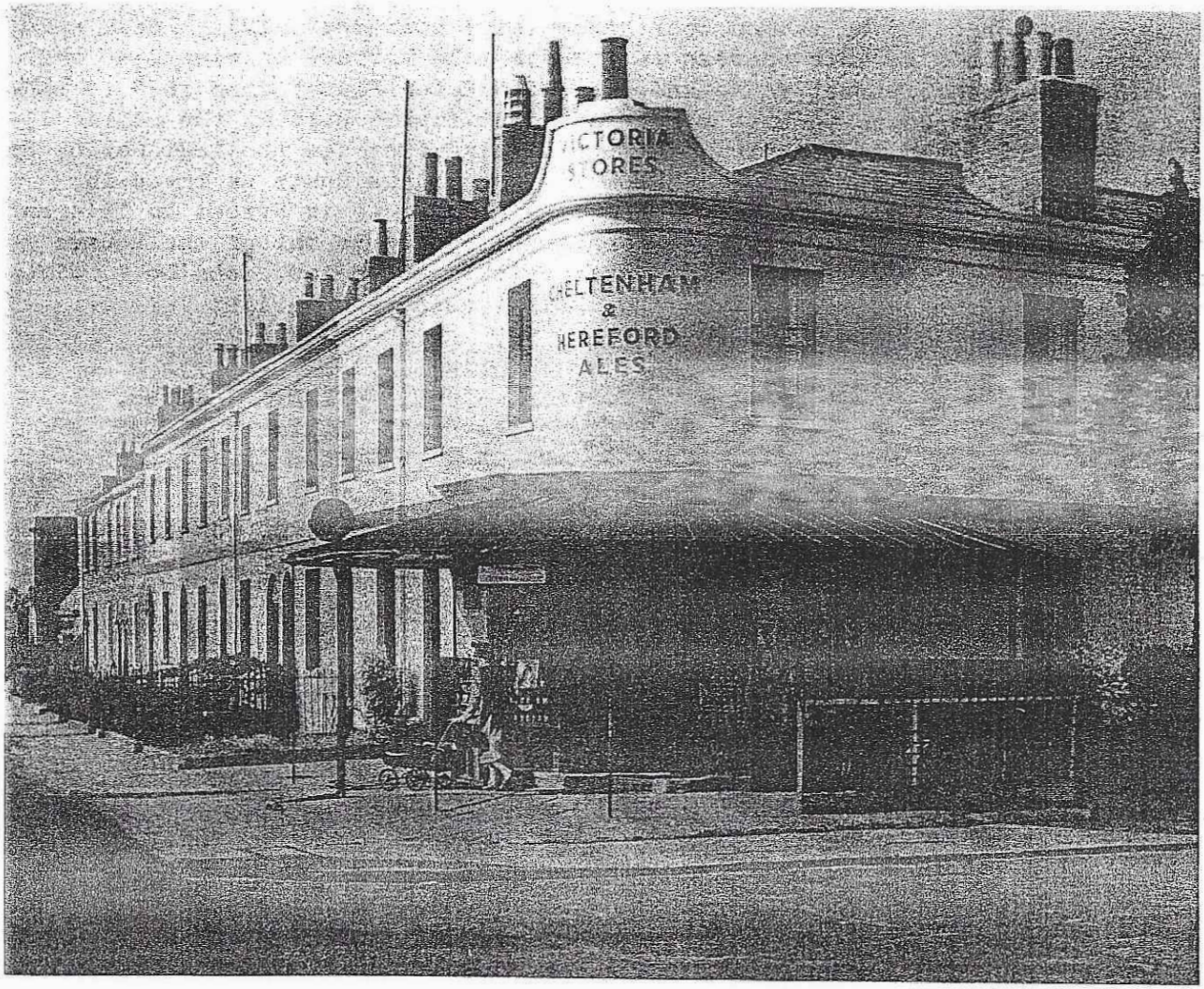
The surviving cottages in Providence Square

Both partners clearly became established figures within the town, particularly John Urch, who is listed in local directories as Parish Clerk at Holy Trinity Church between 1849 and 1869. He was also a member of the Town Commission between November 1855 and November 1869, representing East Ward as a Conservative and serving on the Street and Highway, and Cemetery Committees (11). However, although a regular attender at the Commissioners' meetings, he was - judging by the reports of meetings given in the local newspapers - one of the least vocal of their members, and as a moderate Tory even earned the respect of so staunch a Liberal as the surveyor Samuel Onley jnr., who remarked in 1864 that 'he knew not a more respectable and upright man' and in 1867 that Urch was a man 'to whom no earthly objection could be raised apart from (his) politics' (12). Local directories record Urch's private address as 8 Northfield Terrace between 1840 and 1845 and 72 Winchcomb Street (also known as 72 Sudeley Place) from 1846 to 1869. William Seabright appears to have played no identifiable part in the public life of the town. He lived in Fairview for much of his life; in the 1841 Census he is recorded at 16 Gloucester Place, but from 1844 until his death he lived in Victoria Street, being recorded in directories at 8 Victoria Street in 1844 and 1847 and at 6 Victoria Street from 1851 onwards. No.8 was one of the houses that the partners had built while No.6 was built by his son-in-law, John Cull. The houses in Victoria Street were, of course, also known as Seabright Terrace.

At some time between 1851 and 1861, William Seabright retired and was succeeded in the partnership by his son, William Seabright jnr. During the 1860s, the responsibilities of the business fell increasingly upon Seabright jnr. as Urch became old and sick. On 20 November 1867, the Cheltenham Examiner reported that Urch had only attended 15 Commissioners' meetings in the past year, 'having been considerably affected by a long and serious illness', and on 17 June 1861, the Examiner, in reporting that Urch had fallen headlong down the stairs at 72 Winchcomb Street noted that 'Mr. Urch is a very heavy man, of advanced age and ... has been further enfeebled by an attack of paralysis'.

Sadly, to Urch's deteriorating health must be added increasing financial problems, for, according to the Cheltenham Express, reporting Urch's situation on 27 October 1869, 'old age and great infirmities have not come alone; poverty and hopeless insolvency are in his case added to his other troubles'. Although the exact nature of his financial problems is unclear, they appear to have been unrelated to the partnership, and it may have been to save the joint assets of Messrs. Urch and Seabright that the partnership was formally dissolved on 2 July 1869 (13). Clearly, Urch was heavily in debt, and it was probably later in July that a writ was served on Urch which 'had it gone on would have swept off everything or else have forced bankruptcy' (14). The creditor in question - who is not named in the newspaper reports - agreed, however, with Urch's solicitor, Frederick Stroud, to withold the writ while Urch's affairs were sorted out. All Urch's possessions were sold, for £97, of which £90 was retained by Stroud on Urch's behalf. However,

in early October, a second creditor, a baker named Edward Green, also obtained a writ from the County Court demanding repayment of £15 owed to him for bread. Urch failed to pay and on 22 October, Green went once again to the Court to obtain Urch's committal to prison. Frederick Stroud claimed that Urch could not attend Court as he was 'in so sad a state, paralysed and otherwise afflicted, that he could not even get down stairs from his own room' (15), and stated that he was about to seek bankruptcy, and that Green would receive his share of Urch's estate along with the other creditors. The Court, however, found in Green's favour, and issued a warrant for Urch's arrest. Stroud thereupon left the Court, collected Urch from his sick-bed, and set out for Bristol to the Bankruptcy Court, only to be overtaken by the officers of the County Court, who served the warrant and took Urch to Gloucester Gaol, where he spent the next eight days in the Prison Hospital, until the Court of Bankruptcy accepted his petition and ordered his release, on 30 October (16). Two weeks later, on 15 November, he was declared Bankrupt. Urch clearly had few remaining assets and by 7 December his case was wound up and he was discharged, although how much his creditors received is unrecorded. What is clear, however, is that he was held in sufficient respect by his fellow-townsmen for a fund to be established to provide for him in his old age, and by February 1870, more than £200 had been raised for 'one who has heretofore filled an honourable position in the town, but who in the sunset of his days, under severe bodily affliction, has fallen upon evil days' (17).




Seabright Terrace, photographed in the early 1940s by Hugo van Wadenoyen; reproduced by courtesy of Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museums.

Following his discharge from bankruptcy, John Urch went into retirement, and at the time of the 1871 Census was living at Southam House, St. Philips (now 12 Grafton Road). In the Census, he was described as 'blind from paralysis', and it was at Southam House that he died, aged 70, on 3 March 1872 (18). He was buried at Holy Trinity Church six days later. His widow, Alethea, outlived him for less than a year; she died, also at Southam House, aged 59, on 25 June 1873. Two of their sons had followed similar careers to their father. The eldest, John Samuel Urch (baptised 2 December 1838) is listed in local directories as an auctioneer and estate agent between 1868 and 1879, with an office at 19 Colonnade from 1872 onwards. Urch's second son, William Henry Urch (baptised 3 April 1840), who had managed Urch and Seabright's Promenade Villas showroom between 1865 and 1869, advertised as an upholsterer, decorator, undertaker, valuer and house agent at 11 Portland Street, in the Cheltenham Examiner, 28 July 1869, but is neither listed in directories nor mentioned in local newspapers thereafter.

Within a year of Urch's death, William Seabright snr. was also dead. He died at 6 Victoria Street, aged 84, on 12 May 1874 and was also buried at Holy Trinity Church. His wife Mary had predeceased him, dying, also at 6 Victoria Street, aged 80, on 15 August 1865. At the time of the 1871 Census, John and Mary Ann Cull were also living at 6 Victoria Street, and it was there that Cull had died, of bronchitis, aged 64, on 5 February 1873, and there that Mary Ann lived until her death in 1891, deriving her income, according to the 1881 Census from 'rent of houses', presumably those left to her by her husband and father.

The 1869 dissolution of partnership notice stated that William Seabright jnr. would 'carry on business as heretofore and hopes by attention to all orders entrusted to him to merit a further share of that patronage which has been bestowed on the late firm for the past 40 years' (19), and, indeed, he did so for at least the next 16 years. In the 1871 Census, in which he was described as a 'master builder, cabinet maker and upholsterer', living at 1 Sherborne Terrace, he is recorded as employing 25 men, 2 women and 1 boy, and he is listed at that address in directories until 1885, by which time he was 61 years old and may have retired, although a 'W. Seabright, builder' is listed at 1 Jersey Place, Hewlett Road, between 1887 and 1891. By 1892, however, Seabright had moved to Worcester, where he is recorded as living at Eastbourne House, 30 Tunnel Hill, in Kelly's 1892 Directory, and where he died, aged 75, on 18 October 1899 (20). He was described at the time of his death as a 'retired tradesman', and had been a widower for 24 years, his wife Matilda (the daughter of William Powell, a Cheltenham stonemason) having died at 1 Sherborne Terrace, aged 44, on 2 February 1875, 'after many years of heavy affliction'. Seabright's effects were valued at £160 and probate was granted to his son, William Powell Seabright (born c.1869), an auctioneer's clerk, also of Worcester.

STEVEN BLAKE

## Appendix

### Abbreviated Police Court report, from Cheltenham Free Press 18 June 1836

John Sweetland, Thom. Foyle and Wm. Cobden were brought up on a warrant, charging them with using threats and intimidation towards Wm. Stephens and Jas. Hanley, to force them to depart from the employment of Messrs. Urch and Sebright. Wm. Hughes and John Hodges, who have absconded, were included in the warrant.

Wm. Sebright examined - I am a cabinet maker in Cheltenham, John Urch is my partner. On the 11th and 13th June Wm. Stephens was a journeyman in my employ, and has been some time previously, and is so still. James Hanley is a journeyman in my employ and has been more than one month. John Sweetland, Thomas Foyle and Wm. Cobden, who are now in custody, have been in my employ, Cobden and Foyle about

three weeks; Sweetland above two months. They left our service last Saturday, without giving any previous notice. I paid them their wages on Saturday night, when they said they would not come any more. Mr. Urch told them they might come to their work or not, as they pleased ....

Wm. Stephens examined - ....on the 11th of this month ... Foyle, Cobden, Sweetland, Hodges and Hughes were down at the bottom of Sherborne-place, when we left work in the evening. One of them said ... those men that go back to work shall have some cold steel; those that wish to join them was to come off the pavement on to the road where they were. After hearing the threat, Hanley and me went over to them from the pavement to the road. Hodges said he should not leave his employment, and I told them I should not throw myself out of bread for such a simple thing as that, and likewise Hanley said the same. We went to Mr. Sebright at the corner; he asked me what the row was about. I told him some of the men had struck, but I, Hanley and Hodges was coming to work on Monday morning. Mr. Sebright told us to come in half an hour to receive our money, - we went in and received our wages. On Monday morning I went to work, worked on till breakfast time, went home and had my breakfast and went back again; Foyle and Hughes came up for the tools they had in the shop. Foyle said I was no man for coming back to work; he said I should have my head hit from my shoulders; I said I did not think it was in his power to do it. Hughes said if he can't do it, here's a bit of flesh that can - meaning himself; with that Foyle and Hughes left the shop .... In the evening they put their threats in execution by stopping me, and that was the cause of the assault which was tried here last Tuesday.(*)...They struck because a man ... who could turn his hand to anything, was put into the shop to work with us.

James Hanley examined - On Saturday afternoon, I was in the shop, and through this man being put on as a joiner, Foyle and Hughes asked me if I would not strike against him. I did not give any positive answer. When it was time to leave the work, they left the shop, and left me in it, as I had some glueing to do. When I had done, I left the shop and went to my tea. Hughes ... came to my lodgings ... he said I was very backward in coming forward, as he expected I should be one as would join the strike. I went with him as far as the corner of Sherborne Place, and there was the rest with him ... [There follows an account similar to that given by Stephens] ... I went to work Monday morning; I did not go back after breakfast, nor that day ... I did not go back on account of the threat that was put out on Saturday night; I was afraid I should meet with some bodily harm ...

Alexander Rice examined - I am foreman to Urch and Sebright. Hodges, Hughes, Sweetland, and Cobden came to our gates and desired Mr. Sebright to turn his old b------r of a foreman out, and they would give him something, or anyone else as was in the factory ... Foyle spoke the words. As Mr. Sebright and I was passing home about 7 o'clock in the evening, I suppose there were near 25 or 30 cabinet makers met together in Mr. Lineham's beerhouse; as Mr. Sebright and me was obliged to pass they called out to Mr. Sebright and me. Foyle called out Old Blacksmith B-----r come here, and I'll give you something, and a great deal more abusive language, more than my memory can retain; but if ever they should meet me out, they would give me a good serving out the first opportunity. Last Tuesday night the Constable and me was together, we went and waited for Hodges to come home. We were going to bring him away. I went to point Hodges out to the Constable. He told me he would have been happy to have come back ...

The prisoners were sentenced to 10 days' imprisonment in Northleach. They first expressed their intention of appealing against the conviction, but subsequently thanked the Magistrates for the patient consideration they had given the case and expressed themselves perfectly satisfied with the decision of the Bench.

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* On Tuesday, 14 June, Thomas Foyle had been fined 20 shillings and seven shillings and six pence costs for assaulting Stephens 'because he would not join .... in leaving the employment of Messrs. Urch and Sebright, the greater part of whose workmen had struck on account of a man being allowed to work in the shop they did not approve of'.

Notes:

1. Much of the background research into the history of Urch and Seabright was undertaken between April 1979 and July 1980 by Nigel Cox and Amanda Silk while employed at Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum on a Manpower Services Commission 'Special Temporary Employment Programme'. The present writer is indebted to them for their help, and to the MSC for funding the project, which was to explore various aspects of Fairview's past.
2. References to the baptism or burial of members of the Urch and Seabright families are taken from the Cheltenham and Winchcombe Parish Registers in G.R.O. or (for non-Gloucestershire parishes) the Mormon Index microfiche in Gloucester Library.
3. Pigot & Co., Gloucestershire Directory 1830, 359.
4. Cheltenham Free Press, 18 June 1836.
5. The following account of the building development of Urch and Seabright's Fairview estate is based on references taken from the Cheltenham Manor Court Books 1819-1846 (G.R.O. D855).
6. G.R.O. D855/M26, 364 (16 July 1819); D855/5, 145 (22 Jan. 1828).
7. They are not shown on the 1st edition of the 25 in O.S. Map, published in 1885.
8. Building certificates, issued by the Town Surveyor, for a total of 15 houses built by Urch and Seabright survive among the records of the Town Commissioners (G.R.O. CBR Box 7). They are for 5 houses and workshops 'in Fairview Field' (2 Apr. 1836; probably 1-4 Providence Square and 4 Victoria Street); 7 houses 'in Fairview Field' (7 July 1837 ; probably the remainder of Providence Square, although the number should in that case be 8 rather than 7); 3 houses 'in Victoria Place' (6 July 1838; probably 8-9 Victoria Street and 2 Victoria Place).
9. Microfilm of the 1841 Census Returns, held in Cheltenham Library; the 1851-71 Returns reveal a similar employment pattern within the area.
10. Now in Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum; Acc.No. 1972:142.
11. Cheltenham Town Commissioners' Minute Books 1855-62 (G.R.O. CBR); also reports in the various Cheltenham newspapers 1855-1869.
12. Cheltenham Examiner, 16 Nov. 1864; 27 Nov. 1867.
13. Cheltenham Examiner, 7 July 1869.
14. Cheltenham Express, 28 Oct. 1869. The following account of Urch's misfortunes is based on reports in the various local newspapers Oct.1869-Jan.1870.
15. Cheltenham Examiner, 27 Oct. 1869.
16. The Prison Governor's Daily Journal for 22 Oct. noted that Urch was 'both blind and paralytic and in such a very enfeebled state' that he was to be allowed daily visits from his wife and a special medical attendant (G.R.O. Q/Gc 3/13), while the prison surgeon ordered that he was to be permitted 1 gallon of 'cape' per day, to be sent up by the wine merchants, Dobells, an order confirmed by the Visiting Justices on 29 Oct., the day before Urch's release (G.R.O. Q/Gc 2/2).
17. Cheltenham Looker-On, 30 Oct. 1869 et.seq. The 'fund raising events' included a performance by the illusionists Maskelyne and Cooke at the Assembly Rooms on 22 Dec. 1869.
18. Death notices of members of the Urch and Seabright families were carried by the various local newspapers 1865-91.
19. Cheltenham Examiner, 7 July 1869.
20. Calendar of grants of Probate and Letters of Administration 1900 (copy in G.R.O.).

# Cheltenham's first photographers 1841 - 1856

The world's first photographic portrait studio was opened by Alexander Wolcott in New York in March 1840. Using a mirror camera (his own invention), Wolcott reduced exposure times from twenty minutes to between three and five minutes. For the first time portraiture was possible, if not very easy. Later in that year, Richard Beard, a London patent speculator, bought the right to use Wolcott's mirror camera. Realising the shortcomings of the process he engaged a well-known inventor, John Frederick Goddard, to accelerate the daguerreotype system. By December, Goddard had succeeded in reducing summer exposure times to between three seconds and two minutes. Beard was intent on making photographic portraiture a commercial success, and on 23 March 1841, when he opened the first public photographic studio in Europe (on the roof of the Royal Polytechnic Institution in London), public excitement was greater than he could possibly have expected. He charged one guinea for a $1\frac{1}{2}$ x 2 inch portrait (the largest allowed by the mirror camera) and average takings were £150 a day. In June, Beard bought Daguerre's patent rights for the daguerreotype in England, Wales and the Colonies. Eager to exploit his monopoly, he opened more studios, both in London and the provinces. Licences for professional studios in some towns and counties were also available (1).

Cheltenham was one of the towns for which Beard sold a licence. A Mr. Palmer acquired the permit and his studio opened on 13 September 1841. Two days before, the Cheltenham Looker-On had reported that 'a novel addition is about to be made to ... our favoured town in the form of a PHOTOGRAPHIC INSTITUTION - an appropriate building for which has just been created in the Imperial Nursery ... The valuable invention ... will, we have no doubt, create much interest in Cheltenham'. The 'valuable invention' was as popular as predicted; on 15 September the Cheltenham Examiner wrote that: 'On Monday ... a great many of our leading gentry honoured Mr. Palmer by sitting to his invisible artiste, and in all cases the sitters were presented with undeniable references to their personal identity'. The introduction of photography into Cheltenham coincided with an Exhibition of Works of Art and Science. Beard's associate, Goddard, gave a lecture on 18 September consisting of 'an explanation of the Daguerreotype and the Photographic method of taking likenesses' (2). It is likely that this aroused still more enthusiasm for the new device. Palmer advertised throughout 1842 and 1843 in the local newspapers. Each portrait (including a frame or morocco case) cost one guinea, as at Beard's first London studio. He stated that 'sunshine is not necessary' and that exposures were of only a few seconds (3). By the middle of 1843, Palmer's business was expanding, as he also photographed 'Villas and Mansions, and Buildings generally, and ... Paintings and Statuary' (4).

From 1844 to the end of 1849, there are no photographic advertisements in the Cheltenham Examiner, Cheltenham Free Press or Cheltenham Looker-On. However, the Cheltenham Annuaire contains a list of professors and teachers. Although Palmer is not mentioned at all, the artist Henry Marklove was teaching at the Photographic Institution in 1845 (5). It is likely that the Institution was under Marklove's control from 1844, although he may have been employed by Palmer. In March 1842, Beard had patented a method of colouring daguerreotypes - thus overcoming a frequent complaint by those used to coloured miniatures. Handcolouring was a delicate task, and an artist such as Marklove would have been more skilful at it than a photographer.

The history of the Cheltenham Photographic Institution becomes much clearer in October 1849:

> 'MR. RICHARD BEARD, Jun., of London, Son of the Patentee of Daguerreotype, having purchased the Licence originally granted by Mr. Beard ..., has altered and re-fitted the ... Institution, and will Re-Open it early in October' (6).

It is probable that Beard himself was not always in charge at his Cheltenham studio. During October and November his advertisements state that 'Portraits are taken daily ... under the superintendence of Mr. R. Beard, Jun. ...', but later advertisements list his other establishments in London and Liverpool. From these it is clear that he had taken over from his father (7).

Beard's advertisements do not appear after January 1850. Perhaps he found that he could make more profit by concentrating his efforts in larger towns and cities. However, Cheltenham Photographic Institution re-opened at the beginning of June 1850. Its new owner was Mr. Richard Low, an American, who at the time of the 1851 Census lived at 15 Regent Street, with his wife and year old son. His first advertisement was placed in the Cheltenham Free Press of 8 June:

'COLORED DAGUERREOTYPES

MR. LOW respectfully informs the Inhabitants of Cheltenham... that having purchased the Licence for this District, he is in possession of the PHOTOGRAPHIC INSTITUTION recently occupied by Mr. Beard, and that Daguerreotype Portraits are now taken (by a New Process which supersedes the necessity of bright weather) (8) ... Mr. L. being convinced, from 10 years' experience in the art, of 'small profits and quick returns', has regulated the prices, including beautiful Morocco Cases, from EIGHT SHILLINGS up, depending on the size, &c. Taken either SINGLE or in GROUPS ...., and warranted perfect or no sale. Ladies and Gentlemen are invited to ... examine a large and beautiful Collection of Specimens of the Art, and sit for theirs, if they choose, by way of experiment, free of cost.
Cheltenham, June 3, 1850'.

By 1852, Low was able to place an advertisement (9) that not only thanked Cheltenham for supporting him, but also introduced a new development of Daguerreotype Photography and explained why some Daguerreotypes were better than others. The advertisement is too long to quote in full, but a few sentences are particularly interesting:

'Electro Enamelled Daguerreotypes by a new Process.

MR. LOW tenders his acknowledgements to the ... Inhabitants generally of Cheltenham ... for the very flattering patronage with which he has been favoured since his arrival ..., and he hopes by adhering to his system of moderate charges, to merit a continuing of public favour. Having prosecuted this ... art ... thoroughly for the last 12 years, and having by careful ... study ascertained that the more highly electric the atmosphere, the more sensitive the Daguerreotype Plate becomes to the action of light, he has ... discovered a method of CONNECTING ELECTRICITY with the process of taking PHOTOGRAPHIC PICTURES whereby the silver tablet is rendered so very sensitive to the action of the chemical rays that he can now take the most exquisitely beautiful portraits instantaneously. [This] added to Mr. L.'s former knowledge of the Art ... enables him to produce perfect portraits ... in a few seconds either in rainy or clear weather ... [Inferior daguerreotypists], knowing their inability to compete before an enlightened community with Artistes of real talent are ready to work for half price, and that they may do so, use copper slightly electro-plated with silver and do not gild them with a solution of gold sufficiently strong to retain the impression, and by these means are enabled to realize as much, and frequently more profit, than many first-rate Artists ... Portraits taken in all kinds of weather, from 9 a.m. till sunset ... Cheltenham, March 29, 1852'.

Low's claim of instantaneous portraits is rather exaggerated, as in 1853 and 1854 (10), Low says that with 'the aid of electricity, the finest impressions are now taken in rainy and foggy weather in from 5 to 20 seconds - the same time as required in sunny days'.

Low's advertisements continued throughout 1854 and 1855. He claimed to have 'the largest and finest Collection of Photographic Portraits in England', which (in 1856) consisted of 'several hundred highly-finished Portraits, Groups and Stereoscopic Pictures, ... [embracing] most of the Resident Gentry of Cheltenham and the County' (11). In April 1856, Low introduced the 'Callotype' and 'Collodian' methods, while continuing to produce Daguerreotypes. He also began to colour Daguerreotypes, making them, according to a Cheltenham Examiner editorial, 'equal to the most elaborately finished paintings on ivory' (12).

On 29 October 1856, Low's last advertisement appeared in the Cheltenham Examiner. Both the Cheltenham Journal and the Cheltenham Examiner report what happened after this:

'Disappearance of a Photographic Artist

> Some excitement was occasioned in the town during the early part of last week, in consequence of the sudden disappearance from Cheltenham of Mr. Richard Low, a photographic artist, whose rooms in the centre of the Promenade must be known to every visitor to the town. On Thursday he took his departure by train for Liverpool, en route, it is presumed, for America, the place of his birth. Previous to his final leave-taking, he called upon several tradesmen and made extensive purchases, the latter not hesitating for a moment to supply a man whose credit hitherto had been of the highest character. Messrs. Martin and Baskett, silversmiths; Messrs. Shirer and Sons, drapers; Mr. Samuel, furrier; Mr. Isaacher, jeweller; and Messrs. Newman and Lance, drapers, are among the number of victims, the losses of whom, when combined, amount to a pretty considerable sum. The 'departure' becoming known, a meeting of tradesmen was convened, and a capture decided upon. For this purpose, an immediate telegraphic communication with a detective was commenced, and the detention of the fugitive relied upon, but owing to some mistake, as we hear, in the transmission of a subsequent message, the pursuit was abandoned' (13).

The Journal adds a few more details. It says that Low left by train on Tuesday, but agrees with the Examiner in other respects. It also says that 'the defaulter had a most successful business, and ... his pecuniary circumstances were in the most satisfactory condition ...' (14).

Low was never traced, and is never referred to again. In the light of this, his reference to 'quick returns' in his first advertisement takes on a new meaning! The Photographic Institution passed to a Mr. Pottinger, who remained there for over ten years, and more portrait studios opened in the next few years, the most important of which was the 'Atelier Photographique' of the Royal Old Wells. During the 1860s, most towns had at least one photographic studio, but Cheltenham is interesting in that the development of public photographic portraiture can be traced right back to its beginning in the 1840s.

SIMON FLETCHER

Notes:

1. For an explanation of the daguerreotype process and a general account of early photography, see H. and A. Gernsheim, A Concise History of Photography (1965).
2. Cheltenham Looker-On, 18 Sept. 1841.
3. Cheltenham Examiner, 21 Sept. 1842.

4. Cheltenham Examiner, 19 July 1843.
5. In 1843, Marklove's address was Priory Terrace; in 1844, 22 Pittville Street; and in 1850, 16 Priory Terrace. There are no references to him after this date.
6. Cheltenham Free Press, 13 Oct. 1849.
7. In June 1850, Beard senior was declared bankrupt after several lengthy lawsuits against infringers of his patent rights.
8. It is interesting to note that Palmer had been claiming this in 1842!
9. Cheltenham Examiner, 7 April 1852.
10. In the Cheltenham Looker-On.
11. Cheltenham Examiner, 16 April 1856.
12. May 1856.
13. Cheltenham Examiner, 5 Nov. 1856.
14. Cheltenham Journal, 1 Nov. 1856.

15 Regent Street

# The 'White Slaves of England': the early closing movement in Cheltenham in 1844

By the second quarter of the 19th century, Cheltenham had developed into a regional shopping centre of some importance and its shops offered one of the principal areas of employment in the town - yet this aspect of its history has been little studied. This article looks at the attempt in 1844 to achieve shorter opening hours for the town's shops. The resulting controversy sheds much light on the working conditions of Cheltenham's shopworkers, who were described by one contemporary newspaper as 'the white slaves of England' (1).

Figures from the 1851 Census suggest that there were more than 1,400 small shopworkers in the town, many of whom employed shop assistants who lived on the premises with their employers (2). Using the enumerators' returns, a study of the main commercial streets of the town (3), reveals over 200 assistants living on the premises; this figure does not include members of the shopkeeper's family, who are often described as shop assistants in the returns. This concept of 'living-in' followed naturally from the family structure of most businesses and the youth of those employed. The virtual absence of public transport, combined with the long working hours, made it very difficult to live far from one's place of work.

Many of the assistants left school with a 'mere knowledge of arithmetic, reading and a good business hand to fit them for the desk or the counter in some house of business' (4). They were young people with an average age of less than 24 years, yet they were expected to have had experience in their trade. An advertisement for a butcher's assistant, for example, states that he was expected to have had 'considerable experience in the trade', and to give 'unexceptionable references as to honesty, sobriety, civility and industry, and strict attention to business' as well as being 'tolerably well versed in accounts' (5). Conditions of employment could be harsh, and hours long - up to 17 hours a day in cramped conditions, breathing air fouled by the fumes of gas lighting, snatching meals when they could and being on their feet all the time in the shop, to create the appearance of brisk business. Not surprisingly, ill-health was often the result and, it was claimed, 'disease, debility and death' were not unusual consequences (6).

Drapers often started work soon after 6 am, cleaning and preparing the shop for the day ahead, while many shops did not close until ten or eleven at night and in some cases after midnight on Saturdays. Even then the draper's assistant might have had a further hour's work putting away articles displaced during the day. Indeed, as one irate correspondent pointed out in the Cheltenham Free Press, even after a voluntary early closing agreement in 1844, assistants in a large fancy shop 'were positively kept under lock and key, to unpack and arrange two large cases of goods after the shutters had been closed'. Grocers tended to remain open until nine or ten o'clock at night and until midnight on Saturdays. Conditions in druggists' shops were even worse, remaining open until 11.30 pm on weekdays, as well as opening on Sundays, shutting the assistants off 'from the public worship of their beneficient creator' (7).

In the early 19th century, the whole concept of shopping was different from today; self-service superstores with their rows of brightly packaged goods, bright lights and soothing music, had yet to come. Customers rarely browsed around a 19th-century shop; they tended to arrive with a specific purchase in mind and, if the shop assistant was doing his job properly, were unlikely to leave before parting with their money. As one Cheltenham shop-assistant wrote in 1851, following Shirer and Company's dismissal of a young man for incivility:

'It is very difficult to please both customer and employer, the one expecting every civil attention, the other expecting business to be done; and if a young man does not push the trade, he is not considered of sufficient ability to retain his situation; and for a young man to be up to the mark to satisfy the demands of some employers, he will have to bore away - to step before a lady - to introduce goods - and if he dare take the liberty, prevent her going out. I beg to remark that very few young men can do all that is required of them, by both customer and employer' (8).

Many goods were stored away in canisters, shelves and drawers and the assistant was expected to unpack a variety of goods to show to the customer, so that certain trades were more likely to employ assistants than others. More than two-thirds of the assistants were employed in drapers', grocers', butchers', bakers' or chemists' shops. The 65 drapers' establishments alone employed 98 assistants. Yet there were also significant differences within these categories, between the 17 drapers who employed no 'living-in' assistants and the larger stores with many employees. Typical of the latter were Debenham, Pooley and Smith's 'Cavendish House', with its 17 'drapers and silk mercers' and eight 'drapers and milliner's assistants', and Shirer and Company, who occupied several adjoining premises in Imperial Circus and provided board and lodging for 19 assistants, three apprentices, two porters and a clerk, as well as a home for William Debenham, his family and domestic servants. In these larger establishments the assistants lived together in dormitories under strict rules and regulations.

In the late 1830s, with the first stirrings of Victorian social conscience, an early-closing movement began to develop in many cities and towns. It was part of what one correspondent claimed was 'a great movement having for its object the amelioration of social existence for the masses', and had resulted, by 1844, in voluntary agreements operating in Liverpool, Birmingham, London, Bristol and elsewhere; this appears to have stimulated a campaign against the late hours in Cheltenham (9). A letter to the Free Press of 11 May 1844 reported the Metropolitan Drapers' Association's call for shorter hours and laid out the main arguments in favour of earlier closing. By staying open until ten or eleven at night the shopkeepers were 'injuring and debilitating to a permanent degree the health, constitution and mental facilities of their young men and apprentices - consequently bringing upon them premature old age and an early grave, and little hope of immortality thereafter'. This attempt to raise public concern met with a limited response, although a rival newspaper's editorial cautiously claimed that the request 'seemed reasonable enough' and went on to report the success of the movement in Lincoln (10). By 25 May, however, another writer was asking whether reform had been forgotten and appealed to tradesmen to call a public meeting and to follow the example of Liverpool and London. Of particular importance was the writer's attempt to goad the powerful and influential incumbent of Cheltenham, the Reverend Francis Close, into action with the words 'Ye closely devoted to religion, where is your concern for souls?' (11). Close was the evangelical incumbent of St. Mary's from 1826 to 1856, and throughout this period he dominated much of Cheltenham's temporal and spiritual life, so that his support was crucial in any attempt to agitate for social reform.

Later in the year there were newspaper reports of early closing successes in Bath and Oxford and of a forthcoming public meeting to deal with the 'uniform early closing of the drapers' shops', but no such meeting seems to have taken place (12). The emphasis of the campaign then shifted from improving the Assistants' welfare to the more pragmatic advantages of smaller gas bills, less shoplifting, greater family life and less chance of purchasing shoddy goods which early closing would

offer. Above all, however, they appealed to civic pride. One correspondent demanded to know why Cheltenham lagged behind the rest of the country; were her tradesmen more avaricious, or her assistants so borne down with 'the monotony of daily drudgery', or was it 'because your respected incumbent differs in his views of the matter from those of his clerical brethren?' (13).

By the beginning of November an 'Association for the Curtailment of the Hours of Business' had been formed. Its first meeting resulted in 30 to 40 initial members paying half-a-crown subscription each. Events then began to develop rapidly; by 16 November the Free Press was reporting a petition with over 200 signatures of the 'leading resident gentry, clergy and medical men', and by the 18th, Francis Close agreed to preside at a public meeting. This meeting, attended by up to 2,000 people, initially adopted a more radical solution than had been intended, with shops closing at 8 pm in summer and 7 pm in winter (14). By the first evening of the new system, these suggestions seem to have been modified, with drapers and other 'light trades' (i.e. fancy shops, silversmiths and jewellers) closing at 7 pm in winter, 8 pm in spring and autumn, and 9 pm in the summer. Chemists were to close at 9 pm throughout the year, 'guaranteeing that some responsible person shall be left in each establishment in case of urgent necessity', and grocers at 8 pm on weekdays since it was felt that for 'shops dealing in the prime necessaries of life, seven would be too early for the cessation of business' (15).

Compliance with the new system was not universal and those who failed to adopt it met fierce opposition. On the first evening a mob gathered outside Fox the draper's 'Waterloo House' and 'testified their disapprobation of the conduct of the proprietor by a continued series of groans and hisses'. On the following evenings one of his windows was broken, as were two windows of Mr. Price's mercery establishment, and a number of premises in 'the lower part of the town' suffered a similar fate (16). Many felt 'that it was the shopmen who instigated these disturbances'. Indeed, one of the offending tradesmen, Dan Gibbon the chemist, appealed to the magistrates for police protection, claiming that the violence was caused by 'a mob consisting principally of boys, backed and encouraged by the tradesmen's assistants'. These allegations were energetically denied by the Assistants' Committee, who placed an advertisement in the Cheltenham newspapers quoting the superintendant of police's complete rejection of all Gibbon's complaints. These had apparently included the suggestion that the assistants were spending their new found leisure time in beer houses and brothels and the assistants refuted this 'unless Mr. Gibbon from his own personal habits can adduce something in the shape of proof ...' (17).

The increased leisure time which the shorter hours afforded raised the problem of how shop assistants might employ their free time. It was the very real fear of the more substantial sections of the community that they might spend it in beer-shops and in dissolute company. At certain times of the evening it was claimed 'vice walks openly abroad and lays her temptations and traps and pit-falls at the corner of every street' (18). Consequently, attempts were made to provide some form of 'rational society, rational converse and rational amusement'. In 1839 the Church of England Reading Association had been instituted by Francis Close in order to counteract the attractions of the Chartist influenced Mechanics' Institute. By changing the society's Anglican constitution, Close now hoped to appeal to the newly emancipated assistants. Although its Committee was to remain Anglican, the Association was opened to Dissenters and church men alike and it moved into more commodious premises; the reading room, library, lectures and classes were available to anyone for the not unsubstantial subscription of six shillings per annum (19). Despite these reforms a rival institute was formed with the intention of supplying 'information for the intellectual improvement of all classes, especially those engaged in commercial, professional or mechanical pursuits. Party

politics and controversial diversity will be carefully excluded from all discussions and lectures'. More than 200 people enrolled at the initial meeting of this latter institution, and these were 'principally young men engaged in the various trading establishments in the town'. Other attempts to 'provide the pleasures of social intercourse away from the fearful temptations exposed in every town and to compete with the coarser attractions of vicious amusement' included weekly evening classes lasting two hours for which a fee of one shilling a week was charged (20).

The original movement foundered on the avarice of those few tradesmen like Fox and Gibbon who refused to adopt the new hours; 'locust vampires of trade', as one contemporary described them, with 'their souls in their tills' (21). Perhaps failure was inevitable from the beginning because the assistants refused to press for parliamentary legislation or to strike, since industrial action was regarded as a labourer's tactic and so beneath their dignity. They were forced, therefore, to rely upon voluntary early-closing agreements, which were likely to be 'frustrated by a few petty-minded tradesmen', as had happened with an earlier agreement in 1839 which only the ironmongers had observed (22). Yet such problems had been anticipated in a letter to the Cheltenham Chronicle in August 1844 which warned that 'a mean & selfish minority would probably stand aloof, in the base hope of gaining an undue advantage over their neighbours' and suggested a remedy: 'they must be forwarded to Coventry & kept there in terror until they yield to fear what they refuse to principle' (23). Because of their long hours of work, the assistants were unable to organise themselves and inevitably depended upon benevolent shopkeepers for leadership. Significantly, the delegation to the magistrates asking for a public meeting in November 1844 was led by Messrs. Shirer, Martin and Yates, three of the most respected Cheltenham tradesmen (24). These were the very people urged to take action in the early correspondence in the newspapers: 'We trust some public spirited individuals from the ranks of our intelligent tradesmen will take up the subject'. Only later were the assistants urged to take 'prompt & judicious measures' on their own account and by then the opportunity had been lost (25).

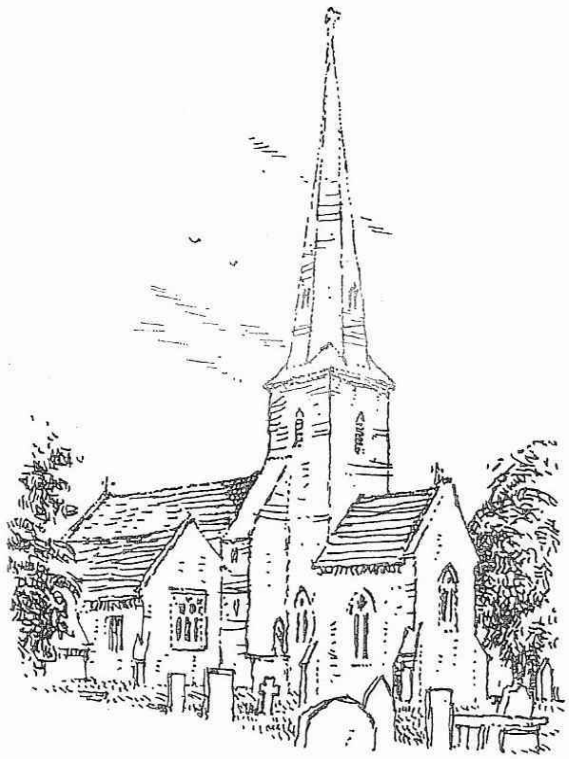
Support for shorter hours evaporated very quickly following initial difficulties. Cheltenham society soon turned its back on the assistants and looked for new causes, and the terrible winter of 1844-5 soon supplied a new object for their concern, namely the starving poor. Perhaps Alexander Macdougall had been right when he had warned that he 'thought they had gone too far and might endanger the success of the whole'(26). The movement had perhaps been harmed by the tendency of some of its leaders to press the case of early closing beyond what was practicable in the circumstances of the time. Shorter hours for drapers had spread to include other categories of shops including grocers and chemists, and some even tried to include seamstresses and milliners. The successful curtailment of hours was not to be achieved for many years, for even by 1890 only the better-class shops would close at 7 pm, with early closing on Wednesdays at 5 pm (27).

JOHN ROLES

Notes:

1. Cheltenham Free Press, 23 Nov. 1844.
2. O. Ashton, Radicalism and Chartism in Gloucestershire 1832-1847 (unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Birmingham, 1980).
3. Namely High Street, Winchcomb Street, Pittville Street, The Promenade, The Colonnade, and Montpellier.
4. C.F.P., 2 Nov. 1844.
5. C.F.P., 27 July 1839.
6. Cheltenham Journal, 25 Nov. 1844.
7. C.F.P., 7 Dec. 1844; 16 Nov. 1844; 11 May 1844.

8. Cheltenham Examiner, 8 Oct. 1851.
9. Cheltenham Chronicle, 2 Nov. 1844.
10. C.J., 13 May 1844; 20 May 1844.
11. C.F.P., 25 May 1825.
12. C.C., 1 Aug. 1844; 8 Aug. 1844; 22 Aug. 1844; C.J., 19 Aug. 1844.
13. C.F.P., 19 Oct. 1844.
14. C.F.P., 2 Nov. 1844; 16 Nov. 1844; C.J., 18 Nov. 1844; 25 Nov. 1844.
15. C.E., 4 Dec. 1844.
16. C.J., 9 Dec. 1844.
17. Ibid; C.E., 11 Dec. 1844.
18. C.E., 27 Nov. 1844.
19. C.J., 16 Dec. 1844.
20. C.C., 19 Dec. 1844; Cheltenham Looker-On, 30 Nov. 1844; C.F.P., 21 Dec. 1844.
21. C.E., 30 Oct. 1844.
22. C.F.P., 11 May 1844.
23. C.C., 22 Aug. 1844.
24. C.F.P., 23 Nov. 1844.
25. C.C., 1 Aug. 1844; 8 Aug. 1844.
26. C.E., 27 Nov. 1844.
27. G. Hart, A History of Cheltenham, 320.



Leckhampton Church: the historical value of its parish magazines is discussed by Eric Miller in his article Parish Magazines as a source of local history.

# Parish magazines as a source of local history

Parish magazines, which began to appear in the latter half of the 19th century, should not be neglected by students of local history in search of source material. With the passage of time the notices, reports, articles and even advertisements can take on an added significance. Accounts of past customs and records of events which may be found (though sometimes less conveniently) in other places are often accompanied by comments upon those happenings, which reflect the attitudes and reactions of parishioners. Such entries put flesh on the bare bones of diocesan records and PCC minutes, and a collection of magazines can offer a unique view of the religious and social life of a community.

In the case of the parish of St. Peter, Leckhampton, the first magazine was produced in 1888, and a few copies of the earliest issues, in a delicate condition, are preserved in Cheltenham Public Library. The Rector of Leckhampton has in his possession bound copies from more recent years, but the collection is by no means complete: the missing years are 1901-1917, 1938-1946 and 1956-1966.

In 1900 the parish magazines carried accounts of Leonard Barnard's experiences in the Boer War as a volunteer in the Artists' Rifles, and George Yeatmen also sent a letter from the front. On their return the two were given a ceremonial welcome in the Parish Hall. Also present were 20 boys of the Church Lads' Brigade from Camberwell, whose Commanding Officer Leonard Barnard was. They spent the night on straw and blankets in the school-room and next morning marched up Leckhampton Hill to breakfast at Bartlow, the Barnards' home.

Leonard Barnard was later to write a booklet on Leckhampton church. His father R. C. Barnard was an enthusiastic local historian who contributed articles based on a study of parish registers, some of which were later collected and published separately as Records of Leckhampton.

In 1929 there appeared in serial form 'The Bridale of Alice Bredone, a Legend of Leckhampton Church'. In this mock medieval yarn (reprinted from The Cheltenham Album of 100 years previous) a cowled monk interrupts the wedding of Sir John Gifford and Alice, who 'bridal and burial formed but the same day's ceremony'!

A most exciting discovery for contemporary historians came to light in the pages of the magazines for 1925. A series of articles by Capt. J. H. Trye (later to become Mayor of Cheltenham, and a member of the last great family to own Leckhampton Court) reproduced a transcript of the 1691 Court Roll of Leckhampton's second manor, which identified all its lands. That manor [probably called Broadwell (1)] stood in the field behind the Rectory until the 19th century. Local historians have long been puzzled over exactly what lands belonged to it, and this documentary find should corroborate evidence to be found on the ground and in maps, (for example the fields named in Croome's survey of 1835).

There are reminders of the way in which the name of the village was evidently pronounced by some people until relatively recently. The pantomime put on by the Leckhampton Players in 1922 was reported to have 'gladdened the hearts of the folks of Lackington'. One of the Rector's letters in the same year urged parishioners not to be 'lacking in love of God and gratitude to our pious forefathers; Leckhampton need not be Lacking-ton ... in these things'. As recently as 1932 it was reported that a former headmaster of Leckhampton School, on retiring to Kingston-on-Thames, named his house there 'Leckington'. 16th and 17th century records also show the spellings Lekynton and Lekanton, and in the Gloucestershire Record Office there is a poster giving notice of a perambulation of the 'Parish of Leckhampton, otherwise Lackington'. Yet there is no etymological excuse for this popular usage (which suggests that the stress fell on the first syllable):

most authorities agree that the name (Lechantone in the Domesday Book) derives from Leac-ham-tun - homestead where leeks (vegetables) are grown (2).

Several entries relate to the re-hanging and re-quartering of the bells in 1899, when their condition prevented them from being rung for Queen Victoria's 80th Anniversary. The Rector took the opportunity of quoting their inscriptions. That given for the then second bell was 'Robert Jones, Rector, Anno Dom: 1688'. When this bell, now the fourth following the casting of two new trebles in 1904, was itself recast in that same year, it was given the wrong date 1788 owing to a clerical error only recently discovered. Robert Jones was Rector from 1654 to 1707. In all, five bells had been cast in 1688 as a gift of Henry Norwood. As further evidence, the old tenor, now in Cheltenham Museum, bears the inscription 'We Ware All Cast by Abra Rudhall 1688' and the coat of arms of James II.

The installation of the new organ in 1936 is well chronicled. It was a gift of Mr. Salsbury of Sandfield House and his two daughters, one of whom, Dr. Janet Salsbury, had been mentioned in the magazine of October 1910 as having been the first woman to gain the degree of Doctor of Music at Durham University. The opening concert, at which the performer was Stanley Roper, Organist at the Chapels Royal, was nearly cancelled because of 'difficulties with the Diocesan Advisory Committee' about the casing. Diocesan records show that the work had at first been undertaken without a Faculty - not the first time that Leckhampton had failed to apply for one. It was not until the following year that the matter was settled and the instrument could be dedicated. The then Rector, Archdeacon Sears, reproduced the opening programme and the instrument's full specification, demonstrating his belief in the parish magazine's value as a historical record. He held the view that 'there should be, in every parish which has a magazine, bound copies of this record of parish events, to which reference can be made. I know from experience elsewhere how useful such volumes can be'.

It is thanks to Archdeacon Sears that we have a uniformly bound set of magazines for the years 1918 to 1937, and we must echo his sentiments and applaud his initiative. These will be studied further, but what also remains to be done is to find the missing issues.

ERIC MILLER

Notes:

1. See Barbara Rawes, 'The Hundred of Cheltenham and its boundaries', Cheltenham Local History Society Journal 2 (1984), and Eve Andrew and Eric Brewin, Leckhampton through the ages.
2. See for example A. H. Smith, The Place Names of Gloucestershire.