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## Lecture Notes for a Talk entitled 'Cheltenham Cemetery and its Inhabitants'

by Brian Torode (copyright Cheltenham Local History Society)



(The illustrations will be loaded in due course – editor)

### (Begin with Benjamin's 'Graveyards')

**Burials prior to 1864:** Everyone used to have right of burial in their own parish- or in other parishes if they could afford a donation! – but Cheltenham's Parish Churchyard was nearly full by 1830, so 10 acres of land were bought at the lower end of the High Street and laid out 1830-31. The Greek Chapel design was by Charles Paul of Paul & Sons and cost £600. By 1850s this Old Ground was almost at capacity level and a new site was desperately needed.

The 1852 Burial Act permitted non-commercial public cemeteries as opposed to Parish (Church) burials, although about seven commercial enterprise public cemeteries had been permitted since 1837 in fact. In Cheltenham, several sites were available or were offered for sale to the Town Commissioners in 1860 including Hesters Way, Hatherley, Leckhampton, a site off the Gloucester Road, and Bouncers Lane. But the most controversial site was that in the Park. 'How dare they!' was the response of the elite in that part of the town. 'Already well-known residents are putting their houses up for sale for fear of the proposals being

agreed.’ On the other hand, one of the main objections to Hesters Way and Hatherley was the fact that it would be distressing and not a good advert for the town, to constantly see hearses passing through the town centre as they would inevitably have to do. Another objection was the cost to the poor of having to pay for out of town funerals – sometimes bodies of the poor had to be kept five weeks before burial in order to raise the necessary funds.

Eventually Bouncers Lane was decided upon – 18 acres to start with, but five were later sold on as being too clayey. The competition for an original design in 1862 was won by WH Knight- out of 30 entries. Work began immediately and took two years. By November 1864 the Chapels were finished and first burial took place. 13,000 spaces were available allowing up to 39,000 burials.

The area to be used was divided into two – Anglican, and Non-conformist and RC, with two Chapels one for ‘CofE’ and one for ‘the others’, connected by a covered walkway. The tower and spire is 105 feet high and originally had a 7 cwt bell. The total cost of the enterprise was £4,300, including Lodge, boundary walls and gates.

In 1983 English Heritage acclaimed it as the finest Victorian Cemetery Building in England.

The Cremation Society was founded in 1874 – and the first Crematorium was opened at Woking in 1879, but first cremation did not take place until 1885.

The Cheltenham crematorium was built and first used in 1938 and the Chapel for cremation services was modernised in 1995.

The site now covers just over 65 acres and all the buildings and boundary walls etc are Grade II listed.

### **The architect: William Hill Knight**

William Hill Knight was born in Ross on Wye in 1814. His middle name Hill was this mother’s family name. By 1835 he was working in Cheltenham and had married Matilda Hastings of which marriage there were two daughters and one son, William Hill Knight Junior. It would seem that on arrival in Cheltenham, Knight first worked for Rowland Paul, before setting up in business on his own.

In 1837 he had prepared designs for Cheltenham Synagogue while still working with Rowland Paul, but soon branched out on his own, designing the new Grammar School in the High Street, Cheltenham College Baths and Lodge, and two College Boarding houses. However, his most prestigious works in Cheltenham are undoubtedly the Cheltenham Library and the original buildings for Dean Close School. Knight died at Clevedon in 1895, while recuperating after an illness.

W H Knight, and some of his other Cheltenham works.

His Grave

His House

Synagogue

College Baths

Boys' Orphanage

Public Library

**Variety of architectural monuments**

Steeple

Rock and Shields

Tree and Anchor

Angel

Many angels

Raised and railed table tomb

Urn on Plinth

Celtic Cross I

Celtic Cross ii

Thomas Pates – campanologist.



## **Burials significant to Cheltenham History**

### **John Middleton - architect**

John Middleton born York 1820 and apprenticed to one of the most prolific and respected architects in the north east of England – James Pigott Pritchett. Middleton married the boss' daughter and moved to Darlington to set up his own practice c 1844. There was one son of the marriage – John Henry who became more famous even than his father, but in a different profession. The Middletons moved to Cheltenham in 1859, settling first in St George's Road and then in a custom built and designed house, Westholme behind Christ Church, where they lived until a month prior to his death in 1885.

Amongst his Cheltenham works were five gothic churches, the Ladies' College, part of the Gentlemen's College, St Hilda's College in Western Road and Delancey Hospital.

Middleton died in February 1885 while supervising the building of a mansion in Newcastle Emlyn, Cardiganshire, and his body was brought back to Cheltenham for burial in this most unassuming of graves.

*House*

*Grave*

*Grave Inscription*

## **Admiral Christian – Chief Constable**

Admiral Henry Christian MRVO (1829-1916) was Gloucestershire's second Chief Constable and served from 1865-1910. He was a very stern and strict disciplinarian. He introduced cycle patrols in 1896 and in order to make sure that his officers were doing their rounds efficiently he introduced a system of clocking in at various strategic pre-determined town addresses. The latter part of his term of office was fairly uneventful, but it was during this period that the 'telephone system' was upgraded and introduced into some of the outlying stations. The Admiral lived in the Park and was a loyal worshipper at and supporter of St Stephen's Church. The War memorial in the church bears the names of two of his sons, and at least one daughter was married there.

*Grave*

## **A H Kirwan - MC**

Andrew Hyacinth Kirwan was the last of Cheltenham's Masters of the Ceremonies, the first – Simeon Moreau – having assumed office in 1780. Kirwan was elected MC in 1835 and served in that capacity until his retirement in 1872. He was born in County Galway of Irish stock in 1798 but had lived in Cheltenham for some considerable time. He was presented with a commission in the Galway Militia at the age of 15 and retired with the rank of Captain in 1828 at which point he made Cheltenham his home – his mother had been living here for some time. In 1835 was elected Master of the Ceremonies for Cheltenham. His role required him to welcome visitors, and preside over balls at the Assembly Rooms in the High Street. He was in fact the longest serving of all of Cheltenham's MCs filling that post from 1835 to the year of his death in 1872. After his death, the post was not continued being considered to be 'no longer necessary.' His death was as a result of cancer of the face, caused by a bite from his favourite parrot.

He was admired for his gentlemanly and conciliatory manner and had the ability to bring together people of every rank and religious and political persuasion. As the popularity of Public Balls declined in favour of private parties and excursions towards the middle of the 1800s, so Kirwan's role became less and less in demand and in 1872 he retired on health grounds at the age of 74. Within six weeks he had died at his Promenade home as a result of cancer of the face caused by a pet parrot bite. He was much loved, of noble form, cheering voice and polished courtesy.

*House*

*Grave.*

## **W Davies - hotelier**

Queen's Hotel Proprietor and Town Commissioner.

*Grave*

### **Henry William Chatters - architect**

Henry Chatters was a local architect and at one time, Chairman of the Cheltenham and Gloucester Building Society. He was a Member of the RIBA and was living at the time of his death in 1931, aged 79, at Strathfield, Old Bath Road. He began his career in the practice of John Middleton, but moved to join William Hill Knight in 1883 and formed the partnership of Knight and Chatters of the Promenade. He designed many buildings in Cheltenham and worked with Knight on Dean Close School, Naunton Park School, the former Technical High School recently demolished in Gloucester Road, and many private houses in Eldorado Road. He was an active member of Salem Baptist Church from where he was buried. For many years he was architect to St Paul's College. He retired in 1920 having practised for over 37 years.

*Sample of work*

*Grave*

### **W G Brown - sculptor**

Mr William Giles Brown was a Tivoli resident and initially worked from his home in Tivoli Street where his father James had his stone carving yard at the back of the house. James was born in 1794 in Painswick and after marrying Margaret, they had three children, Sara, Susan and **William Giles, born 1828**. William followed in his father's trade and was involved with him in carving the caryatides in Montpellier. They later moved to live in Malvern Road where William died May 1<sup>st</sup> aged 98 in 1926. In his will he made bequests to Cheltenham General Hospital, Cambray Baptist Church and Spurgeon's Tabernacle.

*Home*

*Grave*

### **Charles Sturt – Surveyor-General**

Charles Sturt was born in Bengal 28<sup>th</sup> April 1795. He later served as an Army Officer in Spain, France and Ireland. By 1839 he had been promoted to Surveyor General of South Australia where he did much work exploring and mapping the interior of the continent. He returned to England in 1853 and for a time lived in Tivoli Road. He then moved to a larger property in Clarence Square where he died in 1869, just before his knighthood had been conferred. Her

Majesty Queen Victoria was so impressed by the esteem in which Charles was held, and by the pioneering work he had done in Australia that she took the unprecedented step of allowing his widow to assume the title Dame in his honour. After his death, Dame Sturt moved to live with her son at St John's Lodge Tivoli, and on her death, she was buried alongside her husband.

*House*

*Plaque*

*Grave*

### **Dr Morton Brown - cleric**

Dr Morton Brown was the Minister of the long demolished Highbury Congregational Chapel which was on the site now occupied by the Odeon Cinema. Dr Morton Brown was born in Scotland in 1813 where he was prepared for a law career, but later transferred to Ministry. One of his fellow students was later to become Archbishop Tait of Canterbury. Brown moved to an appointment in Poole before coming to Cheltenham with his new wife in 1843. He was at that time a young Minister aged 30. He ministered from Grosvenor Street Chapel, and soon made a name for himself as a promoter of the rights of the working classes.

He opened chapels in many of the surrounding villages, he pioneered early closing for shop workers, the shortening of working hours for employees in shops and industry, he was co-founder of the Literary and Philosophical Institute and built up a Sunday School for the lower classes of 668 pupils. He raised the money to cover most of the cost of Gas Green Chapel, the Working men's Institute in Bath Road and in 1850 was responsible for the building and move to the Congregational Chapel on the site of the present closed Odeon Cinema. He died while on holiday at Bridport and his body was interred in Cheltenham. His funeral was attended by the largest course of people ever known in the town. He was a friend of John Middleton and many professionals in the town.

The present Highbury Church contains a wall memorial to his memory which was erected by John Middleton. The monument we see here is in its second location. The grave of Dr Morton Brown was not seen to full advantage in its original position at the Cemetery and so was moved in order that the many who would wish to pay their respects might do so in a more convenient position. John Middleton was responsible for the railings which surrounded the monument but these have long been removed. The details on the monument itself provide an adequate summary of Morton Brown's achievements.

*Grave i*

*Grave ii inscription.*

### **William Nash Skillicorne (1807 – 1887) - Mayor**

The great grandson of Henry Skillicorne, the Founder of the Spa, William descended from a family long established in Cheltenham, probably since 1710. The family owned much land in the town and William inherited the whole of the Bayshill Estate selling it some time later for upwards of £50,000.

He was a staunch Liberal in politics, a magistrate for many years and one of the original six Aldermen of the town. His claim to remembrance however is that he was elected the first Mayor of Cheltenham in 1876.

### **William Nash Skillicorne (1861-1915) - Mayor**

Mayor William Skillicorne JP born 1861, died tragically as the result of a motoring accident to the vehicle in which he had been travelling in 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1915. William was unmarried and the last of the long and distinguished line of Skillicornes. Like his illustrious father, William Nash Skillicorne, was very involved with the social and charitable life of Cheltenham. He had first entered Cheltenham Town Council in 1888, became Alderman in 1897 and served twice as Mayor- 1905-1907 and 1913 until his death in 1915. He was great great grandson of Henry Skillicorne the developer of the Spa in 1738.

*House + Plaque.*

*Grave*

### **James Elroy Flecker - poet**

James Elroy Flecker was the son of the first headmaster of Dean Close School. James – who had been christened Herman Elroy decided he wanted to be called James, but in later life preferred to be called Roy – was born in London in 1884, just before his father took over as headmaster. James was educated at Dean Close. On leaving school he enrolled in the Consular Service and travelled widely. He had an insatiable interest in reading and writing poetry and earned a well deserved reputation as a novelist, poet and playwright He was a close friend of WWI poet, Rupert Brooke. James was married and died in Davos of TB at an early age. His body was brought back to England in a British Destroyer and then on to Cheltenham. A memorial plaque to his memory is in Dean Close chapel.

*Grave I*

*Grave ii*



### **Sir Charles Darling - Governor**

Sir Charles was the son of a former governor of Barbados, but was himself born in Nova Scotia in 1809. He later became aide de camp his more famous uncle, Sir Ralph Darling, who also retired to Cheltenham having been Governor of New South Wales.

Sir Charles had served as Lt Governor or Governor in many places of the Empire, his most recent appointment before death having been Governor of Victoria. He was made KCB for public service and retired on a pension of £1500 per annum. He died at his home, 10 Lansdown Terrace aged 61 on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1870 and was survived by his widow – his third wife.

*Grave*

### **Edward Billings - builder**

One of the town's most respected and long established tradesmen. His work brought honour to himself and credit to the community. He was senior partner in the family firm and of his achievements, the repair to the spire of the Parish church, the erection of the Cemetery Chapels and the County Court Building in Regent Street are his most well-known. He died in April 1871 aged 74.

*Grave*

### **F. F. Wheeler - teacher**

Mr Wheeler was Head Master of the Parish (Devonshire Street) School from 1865 until his death in 1906. He had refused all offers of promotion, including that of Assistant Inspector of Schools, and the Headship of several larger schools outside Cheltenham. *House*

*Grave*

### **John Brend Winterbotham - solicitor**

John Brend Winterbotham was a son of the famous non-conformist, William Winterbotham, and a solicitor of over 40 years in Cheltenham as well as an extensive land owner. He was one of the original 30 Town Commissioners and a staunch Liberal in politics. He died 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1881

## **Clara Winterbotham – Mayor**

Clara Winterbotham, the daughter of John's son, James, was born 1880. She was Cheltenham's first Lady Mayor in 1921 at the age of 41. She was an Honorary Freeman of the Town and died in 1967. Clara is buried in the same grave as her grandfather.

*Grave.*

*House.*

## **Alfred Miles – tradesman and local historian**

Alfred Miles was the well-known Cheltenham Cycle Manufacturer and Tradesman. Miles was born in 1853. For thirty years he was a member of the Cheltenham Chamber of Commerce and described in his obituary as one of the last generation in Cheltenham who knew how, and was willing, to give of their best for town and county. He passed away in full mental health, with his hand still in the harness of his History of Cheltenham. His funeral took place from Wesley Chapel only two days after his death, on 14th March 1932. He was aged 79. He is perhaps best known to Local History researchers for his manuscript volumes of Cheltenham History – mainly copied from newspapers and deeds.

*House*

## **Rev C Bell - cleric**

The Rev Charles Dent Bell was Rector of Cheltenham from 1872 – 1895. During his incumbency, St Matthew's Church was completed – in 1879 – the Parish Church was restored and he was one of the promoters of the establishment of Dean Close School. One of his less well received proposals however was that St Matthew's become the Parish Church of Cheltenham and that the ancient St Mary's should become a Chapel of Ease. There was so much opposition that he was forced to withdraw his plans – how history is repeated. He retired and moved away from Cheltenham, but both he and his wife had their wishes to be buried in Cheltenham honoured. He died on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1898. Both St Mary's and St Matthews were heavily draped in black for his funeral and the Town Council attended in state.

## **George Stevens - jockey**

Born in 1833 George's life was short, exciting but with a tragic end. He was a contemporary of Adam Lindsay Gordon, Tom Pickernell and Tom Oliver – all well known to students of horse racing history. He was trained by Tom Oliver who ran stables at Prestbury and during his short career, George rode five Grand National Winners, 1856, 1863, 1864, 1869 and 1870. In 1871,

just after his most recent win the horse he was exercising on Cleeve Hill bolted down the hill and George was killed in the stampede. He was just 38 years old and his grave records his short but brilliant career.

### **John Brown - cleric**

The Reverend John Brown was from 1827 and for 30, years the curate – actually Priest in Charge in modern terms – at Holy Trinity Church. He was born in Cork in 1796 and served his first appointment in Castle Bromwich before coming to Cheltenham. He was an extremely popular minister at a time when Trinity and St Mary's were the only two Anglican churches in the town- at least for the start of his ministry. He used a lot of his personal wealth to finance several parish projects and even paid the choir out of his own money. So impressed were the congregation by his generosity that they raised over £1500 to buy him a house in which to live – East Heyes in Pittville. He refused several offers of preferment and when he died in 1857, thousands lined the streets for his funeral- extensively reported in the Cheltenham Examiner. He was originally interred on the west side of the church but at some time later was re-interred here in Bouncer's Lane.

### **William Gyde – property owner**

William Gyde (1778-1867) was a grocer in the High Street he owned a considerable amount of property in the town, having lived here for 70 years. He had a great deal to do with the purchase and sale of such property to the extent of thousands of pounds (his own words) and he was, responsible for building Gyde's Terrace, now Grosvenor Street early in 1800. He was a very forceful personality, a Town Commissioner from 1806 and an active Liberal in the town. At the time of his death aged 88 he was the oldest magistrate in the County and was living at Sherborne Villa, Sherborne Place. His son, WH Gyde was a local solicitor.

### **George Parsonage - Mayor**

Not generally well-known but no doubt familiar to members of the Council, George Parsonage was Chairman of the Board of Town Commissioners and High Bailiff of the Manor of Cheltenham. He was a staunch Conservative and worked tirelessly to bring about Cheltenham's Charter of Incorporation. He became Cheltenham's fourth Mayor in 1882, and held that Office for five successive years. He died 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1891.

## **Henry Davies - journalist**

Henry Davies was born in 1804 in Wales – in Bridgend. He followed a career as a journalist, publisher and Librarian, mainly in Cheltenham where he settled in 1830 at the invitation of Pearson Thompson. He was editor of the Cheltenham Looker-On from 1833 for upwards of 57 years. He also ran a circulating library and bookshop from his premises in Montpellier. He also produced each year, a Cheltenham Annuaire and a number of local guide books. He was very involved in the affairs of his adopted town, a staunch Conservative and supported Charles Schreiber in his election campaign. Henry lived in Tivoli, the site of his former house now occupied by the incorrectly named Tivoli Circus.

## **The Marshall Family - ironworkers**

The locally and nationally well-known firm of R. E. & C. Marshall was established in the town by 1822 when Richard Ede Marshall was born at 5, Constitution Place near Old Well Walk, now occupied by part of the Promenade, opposite to Imperial Gardens. The grave we see here is the family grave. The founder of the firm, Richard 1<sup>st</sup> was succeeded by his son Richard II who was succeeded by his two sons Richard III and Christopher. Richard IV was born in 1856 and was responsible for the ironwork of the Chancel Screen in SS Philip and James Church, Leckhampton.

## **H. H. Martyn – architectural carver**

A well restored grave to H. H. Martyn and his wife, Amelia. He died in 1937 aged 95.

Herbert Henry Martin grew up in Worcester where he joined the established stone and wood carver R L Boulton. When Boulton moved to Cheltenham, Martyn came with him but later formed a partnership with E. A. Emms a local stonemason. In 1888 he founded his own business – H. H. Martyn, Architectural Carvers in premises on the corner of College Road and the High Street. His work soon became sought after both on land and sea – from Cathedrals to The House of Commons, from Buckingham Palace to War Memorials, from Churches to ocean going liners. Having experienced a poor childhood, himself, he was very involved in social and educational work amongst the poorer classes in Cheltenham.

## **Robert Aloysius Wilkinson O.S.B. - monk**

Born in Warrington in 1837, Father Wilkinson as he became, served the Catholic Church in Cheltenham from 1866, only nine years after the opening of St Gregory's to which he was attached. He became Rector in 1873 and immediately set about completing the new Church which at the time was separated from its tower. His work was achieved by 1877 when Saint Gregory's was consecrated.

Fr Wilkinson was an excellent preacher, beloved by everyone, although his sermons were known frequently to last between three quarters of an hour to an hour. But they were never uninteresting!! He served Cheltenham for 34 years and died in retirement in January 1907, aged 89. He had been a Priest for 44 years.

### **Edward Healy Thompson - theologian**

Born in Oakham, in 1814, Edward became an Anglican Priest when he was old enough. However, in 1846 he converted to Roman Catholicism. In 1868 he came to Cheltenham with his wife and devoted himself to writing and translating academic and religious works.

He lived at Pery Lodge in St George's Road and after his death his widow continued to live there but in mourning and total seclusion. Edward died in 1891 aged 77 and left his extensive library to St Gregory's Church. His nephew Francis Thompson was the poet of 'Hound of Heaven' fame.

### **Elizabeth Forster - landowner**

After marriage Stuart and Elizabeth Forster purchased Postlip Hall and restored the medieval chapel there. Elizabeth had inherited £100,000 from her late father and was very generous to those in need. She and her husband split up in 1913 and she moved to a house next to the Rising Sun, named Petra. One day, a local Catholic Priest on his way to visit her, smelt burning. He peered through the drawing room window and saw flames leaping from the fireplace. He broke into the house, and found Mr Forster with her head against the bars of the grate, but the head was burnt to a cinder. Her torso was still on fire. This happened on Good Friday in 1915.

The Inquest decided that she had had a heart attack and collapsed as she tried to rise from her chair. It was thought that she was unconscious as she fell into the fire and suffered no pain.

### **Brian Jones – Rolling Stone**

Lewis Brian Hopkins Jones was born in 1942 in Cheltenham. He attended Dean Close and Cheltenham Grammar Schools. Brian had a promising future ahead of him but was rebellious and one of the 50s angry young men, adopting a flamboyant attitude and lifestyle. His first job was as a bus conductor, but he moved to London in 1961 and was founder member and lead guitarist with the Rolling Stones. His death at the age of 27 was caused by drowning in a swimming pool. He was buried in his home town reputedly in a lavish casket sent by Bob Dylan, and in a grave twelve feet deep to deter souvenir hunters. Mystery still surrounds the

manner of his death and pilgrims from all over the world gather at his grave on his anniversary.

### **Ron Summerfield – antique dealer**

Ron Summerfield was probably well known to most of you here today. He lived for 50 years in Cheltenham and was an obsessive collector of antiques – collector rather than seller. It is said that some of the interior walls of his house were only held up by the support of the antique furniture leaning against them.

His will left his fortune to support good causes in the town and since his death the Summerfield Trust has donated over £7 million to good causes, especially those connected with the Arts. He died in 1998 aged 73.

### **Interesting and puzzling inscriptions:**

**Sisters of Nazareth, *Grave***, dating from the time when they ran the orphanage in Bath Road, opposite the Gents College War Memorial.

**Charles Schreiber, *House***, was MP for Cheltenham 1865-1868. He was an obsessive traveller collecting ceramics from wherever he went and a large part of his collection is in the V&A in London. He lived in Pitville Lawn, in this impressive Roden House where **Hannah Davell, *Grave***, was the children's nurse, and obviously much loved as the erection of this stone testifies.

**Stephen Day, *Grave***, d 21 Jan 1901. His first wife had died 1873 and was buried in the Old Cemetery, Lower High Street. Stephen was survived by his second wife who died in 1910.

**Arthur John Irwin, *Grave***, giving a detailed biography, including the fact that he had been married at the Protestant Church in Catholic Ireland. He died 1928 and was a Knight Commander of the Crown of Siam.

**Baby Guppies, *Grave***, A sad start to married life

**Granley Lodge, *Grave***, Clarence Square, a servant – another instance of employers' commitment to their staff – aged only 16.

**Edward Mace, *Grave***, died 16<sup>th</sup> December 1878 as a result of train accident in Birmingham. Lived Magdala Cottage, Francis Street.

**Mr Richard Denley, *Grave***, mystery: died at Birdlip Cottages aged 92. Former builder of this town, but baptised James Gurrell.

**And this is where my presentation comes to a dead end.**