

## **William Hill Knight (1814-1895) – Architect of Cheltenham**

by Brian Torode (Copyright Cheltenham Local History Society)



**William Hill Knight** (*thanks to Ron Hankey*)

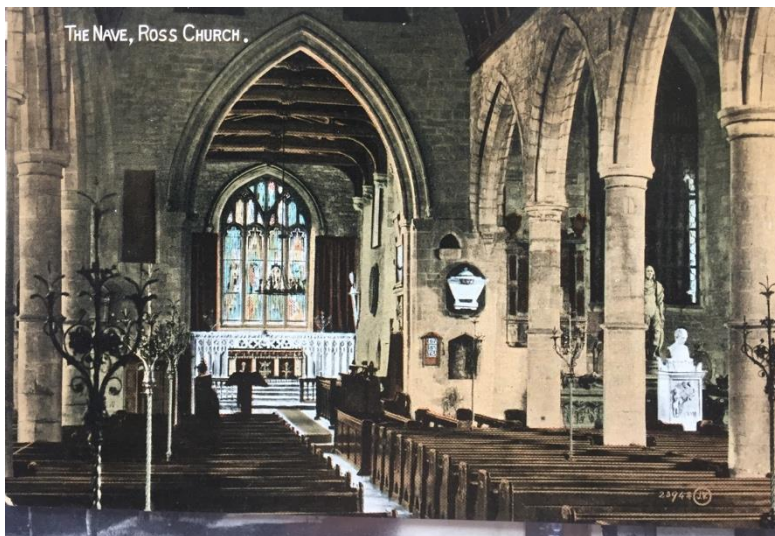
Before starting on this introduction to William Hill Knight, I must express my sincere thanks to Mike Grindley who has been most industrious in his recording of any reference to Knight during his regular search of the local press archives. He has helped me to place the various buildings in which Knight lived and also brought to my attention various snippets of information which might well have passed me by.

My interest in William Hill Knight began in 1987 when I had just started researching the history and development of the Hebrew Community in Cheltenham. The name William Hill Knight occurred frequently in the Community's archive and reference to the relevant Pevsner edition of *The Buildings of England* credited him with the building of the Synagogue.



**Cheltenham Synagogue**

Who was Knight, from where did he originate, what other buildings did he design in Cheltenham and further afield? What is known about his life and work in this area of the country? These were the questions which immediately sprang to mind. However, the synagogue and the Jewish Community was the focus of my research at that particular time, and I was strict in devoting myself to that alone. It was only about four years ago, when pursuing my research on another architect John Middleton, that Knight's name reappeared and I started to make random notes about references to him as and when they cropped up. Quite unexpectedly, correspondence with a friend of mine in Scotland who is researching railway architects in the North of England, made reference to Mr Chatters of Cheltenham. Mr Chatters had been a pupil of John Middleton, and had left that practice to join William Hill Knight as partner in the firm of Knight and Chatters, so I decided to devote some time to this man Knight and although I have not given him the time and energy that I have given to Middleton, nevertheless I have been able to discover some interesting information about the man, who like John Middleton adopted Cheltenham as his home.



William Hill Knight was born in Ross on Wye in 1814 and was baptised in the parish church there on 16<sup>th</sup> March. His father was a local mason, and his mother's family name was Hill, a name given as a second name to William and his brother Thomas. William had at least three brothers and one sister.

When or why William moved to Cheltenham is unclear but we do know that on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1835 he married Matilda Hastings, in St Mary's Parish Church, Cheltenham. They were married by Charles Herbert the curate, by Licence which had been sworn the previous day, before the Rev AB Evans. The witnesses were W Crook and an Eliza Manly(?) In the September 1839 revision of those eligible to vote, William Hill Knight's name was 'retained'.

Both William and his wife were just 21 years of age. We know from later Census details that Matilda was born in Cheltenham, that her mother was named Hester, who in 1851 was the widow of a builder. One rather irritating piece of misleading information appears in the *Cheltenham Journal* of 24<sup>th</sup> August 1835: 'On Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> August, married at Hasfield in this County, Mr Knight to Matilda, daughter of Mr Hastings, Builder of this town.' There is no record in the Parish Registers of Hasfield of any such marriage having taken place.

Builders in Cheltenham in the early part of the 1800s were many, and the name Hastings was fairly common. One 1820s *Directory* lists a Mr William Hastings, Victualler and also a Mr William Hastings, builder, both (probably the same person) at 215 High Street while the 1830 *Pigot's Directory* names William Hastings, builder of 316 High Street. Both or neither may be references to Matilda's father.

Where the Knight's first set up home is not known. The address given for the death of their first child, Emily Matilda in July 1838 was 14, Portland Square although this may have been Portland Terrace according to a letter in the Jewish archives. Emily was only one and a half years old and in the announcement her father is styled 'architect'. Other correspondence between William and clients at this time is headed 14 Portland Terrace. Within a short while however, they must have moved to North Place for there at number 12, in March 1840, their daughter Augusta Matilda was born followed by their son William Hastings Knight in 1842. Again, the father is styled 'architect'.

It would appear that our William Hill Knight was not the only member of his family to move to Cheltenham. By 1841 his brother Thomas Hill Knight, was an accountant/clerk to Mr Haines the Cheltenham builder, who had a depot just off Winchcombe Place, near Portland Square. Thomas was then living at 8, Beaufort Buildings, now number 2, Portland Square, with his wife Elizabeth aged 20. They had married in June of that year. Ten years later, Sarah Knight, a sister had joined Thomas and Elizabeth who by then had moved to 7, Portland Terrace. By 1851, according to that year's census, William had living with him, his wife, their two children, his mother and his mother in law. There was also a servant from Ross and two guests.



**Matilda Hastings and her 2 Grand daughters Gussey (on left) Ada (in the middle) - W.J. Suter Studio - Royal House – Cheltenham** (thanks to Ron Hankey)

From 1847 William and Matilda's address was 41 St George's Place and he is styled 'architect'. He is described in the 1861 Census as head of the household comprising his wife, daughter, one servant and three lodgers. Not far away at Old Farm, St George's Place lived William Nash Skillicorne great grandson of the founder of the Spa. Old Farm was on the site currently occupied by Chelsea Square and formerly Shaftesbury Hall. It had been built pre 1740 and was home to the Mason family, and later the Skillicornes. In the *1853 Directory* it is listed as Old Farm, 38 St George's Place. It was advertised for sale in 1857 'A genteel Villa residence' or as a building plot. The house was described as having four sitting rooms, four best bedrooms, servants' apartments, offices, a kitchen garden, and two acres of land. There were also three adjoining cottages included in the sale and the whole was to be sold in one, or up to nine, lots. The property did not sell immediately and Knight presumably bought only the main house in which he lived until 1867, at about which time the property was again sold, demolished and the whole site re-developed.

During his time at Old Farm, William's brother Thomas died in Wolverhampton, and William himself was an unsuccessful candidate for election as Borough Surveyor in 1862; his daughter Augusta married a Mr Andrew Hingston of Liverpool at St Luke's Church, and his son William Hastings died in Texas USA aged 27.

1867/68 saw a move to St James' Square, where in the 1871 Census at number 4, in William's absence, his wife was in charge, living with their grand daughter, a servant and two guests.

William and Matilda continued to live at number 4 St James' Square until their respective deaths.

Up to the 1881 Census, William described himself as architect. In 1891 he is described as architect/surveyor, a combination of skills which he had used throughout his career. It is interesting also to note that from the time of his move to St James' Square he is included in local *Annales* under the lists of Resident Gentry.

William's wife, Matilda died February 15<sup>th</sup> 1892 aged 77. She was buried in the grave in which William himself was to be buried just three years later, following his death in Clevedon on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1895. Since the death of Matilda, William had experienced failing health and was being attended by his doctor Dr Hobarth who had seen him just six weeks prior to his death. He had suffered a stroke shortly after his wife's death and had suffered from depression. Recently he had, in the words of his grand daughter, become a broken man although his mind was unaffected. At the Inquest held at the Rock and Pier Hotel, Clevedon, this grand daughter, Augusta Emily Knight, who could only have been the daughter of William's son, Thomas who had died in 1867, was the chief witness. She would have been one-year-old at the time of her father's death. She said that she had lived with her grandfather since she was three years old and this is borne out in the Census returns. She had last seen him on the Monday, the day before he died, at the Clevedon Hydropathic Institute where he was seeking a cure for his eczema. He was excited at her having come from Cheltenham to see him. He had been in Clevedon for a week and in addition to his eczema suffered from diabetes. The proprietor of the Institute said that William had arrived on 12<sup>th</sup> August, for a course in the baths, which gave him much benefit. He had last seen him on Tuesday at 6.30 pm when he was lying across one of the beds at the Baths, and his breathing was laboured and there was little pulse. Death took place before the doctor could get there. Prior to seeing him across the bed, the proprietor said that he had seen him just a quarter of an hour previously when he appeared very cheerful. No doctor was able to give a death certificate and the Inquest recorded a verdict of cardiac syncope.

His body was brought back to Cheltenham on August 24<sup>th</sup> for burial in the vault alongside his wife, and only yards from the Cheltenham Cemetery Chapels which he had designed and seen completed just thirty years previously.

The *Cheltenham Echo* report of his death provides scant information about Knight's early days in Cheltenham. '*He had been connected with Cheltenham throughout his long life, and in his younger days had worked in the offices of Mr Thomas Haines, Builder, on the site now occupied by AC & S Billings. This was in Winchcombe Street near to Pitville Gates.*' His natural abilities, taste and skill in designing soon became apparent and in course of time he practised on his own account as an architect. He had a successful career and there are many monuments to his talents in this town and in the neighbourhood. Amongst his achievements are the improvement to the Colonnade itself when more or less dingy shops were superseded by the present handsome elevation. Twelve years ago he was joined by Mr Chatters. They practised at number 4, The Colonnade until moving to 110 High Street opposite the Plough Hotel, in August 1891. His natural abilities and taste and skill in design soon disclosed themselves and in course of time, he began practice on his own account as an architect.' The *Gloucester*

*Journal* in its report of his death, confirms this detail about his early years in Cheltenham: “He commenced his career in a builder’s office and afterwards struck out on his own account.”

So, where do we stand with Knight’s early career as a surveyor, architect? What is his earliest known commission and what is his legacy to the town which he adopted as his home?

*The Echo* suggestion that he worked for Thomas Haines is quite probable. Haines and Son was a well established firm of builders in Cheltenham at the time and Knight may have begun his career there as an apprentice, perhaps moving on to become foreman, quantity surveyor, estimator and even designer of minor contracts, before branching out on his own but strangely, there is no reference to the local firm of R Paul and Son.

In April 1835, Rowland Paul a local architect/builder invoiced the Jewish Committee for drawing plans and an elevation for the synagogue intended to be built on land near the Infants’ School The fee was paid and endorsed R Paul & Son £5.4.0 on April 29<sup>th</sup> 1835. These plans were obviously not acceptable for eighteen months later, December 1836, Knight aged 22, signed for payment to James Ball, for excavating the ground inside the site for the proposed synagogue. In 1837, Knight authorised payment to local contractors for estimates for brickwork and slating. Further work was authorised by Knight throughout 1838 and 1839 the year in which the Synagogue was opened. The final Synagogue account settled in September 1839 for making drawings, specifications, estimates, and superintendence of the work on the new synagogue and the new building at the burial ground, are signed and approved by WH Knight. The Synagogue contract may therefore well have been Knight’s first major contract in the town, and it is also safe to assume that Knight at the time was working with Rowland Paul and the synagogue contract was delegated to him. The *1858 Directory of British Architects* lists Paul and Knight of Cheltenham, and this is repeated in *Hunts Directory* for the same year. A local press report for 1858 of a meeting of the Town Commissioners, refers to street widening and land purchase near the St James’ Railway Station. This is accompanied by a copy of the proposed scheme sent to the Commissioners, by Messrs Paul and Knight and signed jointly by them. A post-script to this report adds that the plan for this proposal which had been sent in by Messrs A Paul and Knight was accompanied by a memorial in support signed by the Chairman of the board of magistrates and several of the junior Justices. Further research on this lead remains to be done.

However, returning to the construction of the Synagogue for which much more archive material is available than for most of Knight’s other works, we know that September 1835 saw negotiations started for the purchase of a plot of land on which to build. At the time, the Hebrew Community was meeting in rented accommodation on the corner of St George’s Place and Manchester Walk. A year later, 1836, the Chief Rabbi paid a visit to Cheltenham to inspect the new site on which Knight had already authorised excavation work to commence, and on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> July 1837 between six and seven in the morning, the first stone was laid, for the new Synagogue for members of the Hebrew persuasion, from the designs of Mr WH Knight. ‘The congregation was numerous and respectable.’

The actual building must have been completed by December 1838 for in that year the President of the Jewish Community gave notice to the owner of the St George’s Place premises that they would be vacating his premises from 25<sup>th</sup> December. Presumably they began to use the synagogue immediately but the actual consecration did not take place until 14<sup>th</sup> May 1839.

It had cost between £1400 and £1500 to complete. Most of the contractors were local men such as Mr Hastings the builder and carpenter (Knight's father in law perhaps), Mr Dangerfield the bricklayer; William Clifford the plasterer and slater, Joseph Baker the mason and Thomas Goodingham the signwriter. Nicholas Adam was the maker of the elegant dome which still lights the building and which cost a mere £15.10.0.

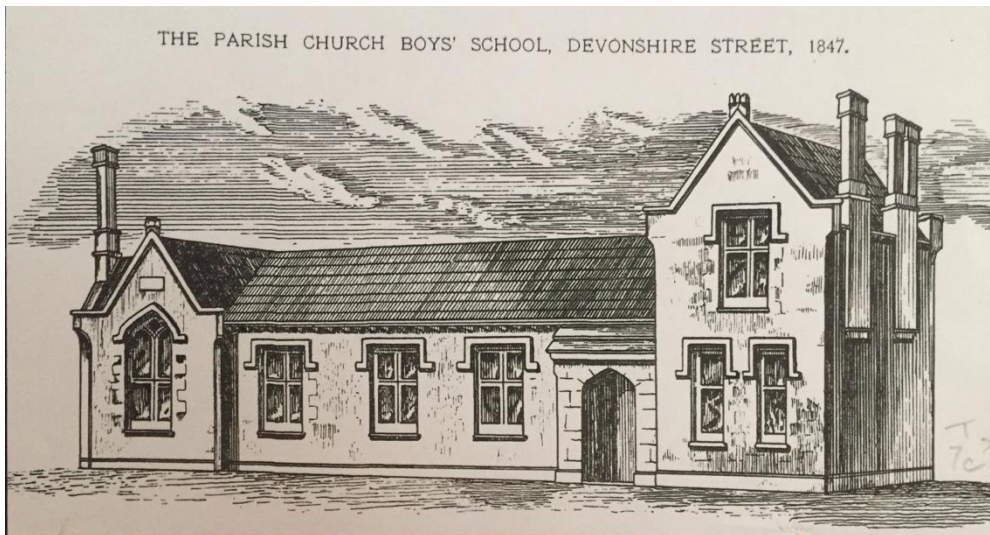
Many donations were received for the erection of the building and we know the internal furnishing came from a synagogue in Leadenhall Street, London, in 1837. It is the oldest Ashkenazi furniture still extant in the UK and dates from c1771.

Sadly, we do not have any information as to whether Knight was invited to the ceremonies, but I am sure that he looked on from a distance if not actually there. His professional fees were for £27.10.06. The Synagogue is Grade II\* Listed.

We do not have as great an archive on work done by Knight as we have for some other local architects, Middleton in particular, but his range of known work follows the pattern of most local, provincial architects of the period and even of today. There were large and small contracts, contracts for organisations and for individuals and many of his Cheltenham designs are still part of the townscape today.

In the early part of the 1800s education was, by and large, the responsibility of the Church. Since 1821, the Church of England provided education through the National Schools which it endeavoured to set up in every parish. The non-conformists provided their education through the British Schools. Several schools were built by Knight in Cheltenham and at places like Badgeworth, Ashchurch, Winchcombe, and Chedworth. In Cheltenham the Devonshire Street Charity School and St Paul's School are two examples of his early design the former dating from 1846 and the latter from 1848.

From 1729 the room which was above the north porch of the parish church of St Mary, housed the parish Charity School and was used for that purpose until 1847, when the school was transferred to the purpose built premises in Devonshire Street. The porch school was seriously overcrowded and an appeal was launched to raise funds for a new school. Knight was awarded the design contract and Mr Thomas Haines, who had built St Peter's Church and St Paul's College was given the building contract. The laying of the foundation stone took place on June 24<sup>th</sup> 1847 when after Divine Service in the Parish Church, and a lecture on the past and present state of education in this country, a procession of clergy and members of the committee and subscribers made its way to the site in Devonshire Street. The boys, forty or so in number, were decorated with blue sashes and carried bouquets of flowers and flags. The first stone was laid by the Reverend Francis Close. After prayers, the National Anthem and a Psalm, the children were treated to buns. The school and master's house was ready for occupation on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1847, having taken just six months to build. The site consisted of one large room 40x30 feet with space in the playground for a further room should need arise. A corridor cum cloakroom separated the room from the master's house which consisted of a large room 14x12 feet with three bedrooms and a closet and space for a further room if needed. (*GRO D2186/25*)



The school at Winchcombe is a little later, 1857. However the one which survived longest as a school is probably St James' School in Great Norwood Street, converted to domestic accommodation in 1985.

St James' School came about as a result of State Aid to the National Society, first awarded in 1861, when payment was allocated according to results. Parishes were therefore keen to build schools and St James was built a short distance away from the basic schoolroom which already existed in the Parish. The old building was demolished and a 'pile of buildings was erected to extend from Union Street to Bath Street providing rooms for Boys, Girls and Infants.' Knight's plans '*our talented townsman*' were praised for reflecting much credit on the architect's 'taste and appreciation of the ecclesiastical style which he has adopted internally and externally in the construction of this great ornament in the neighbourhood.' It was considered a beautiful and conveniently arranged edifice. The foundation stone was laid in February 1864 by the Reverend RT Lancaster and the completed building was opened in October the following year by the Reverend WG Chamberlain. The cost, (£2,000) 'as large as it was, has been met.' In style it is an H plan gothic revival building, and the good design quality of this otherwise conventionally planned school has contributed to its Grade II listing.

Another school which began under similar provision was the former St Mark's School in Roman Road, much later called Red Roofs. (*GRO 29.03.86 D4532/6.*) Originally it was for the infants of the parish and completed in 1887 to Knight's design shortly after Mr Chatters had joined him. The Reverend GP Griffiths, the long serving Vicar of St Mark's and its founder, was responsible for providing all the schools in the parish – one near the Level Crossing in Alstone Lane, and one at Hatherley Both of these have now been demolished. They were not to Knight's design but were to the designs of John Middleton.





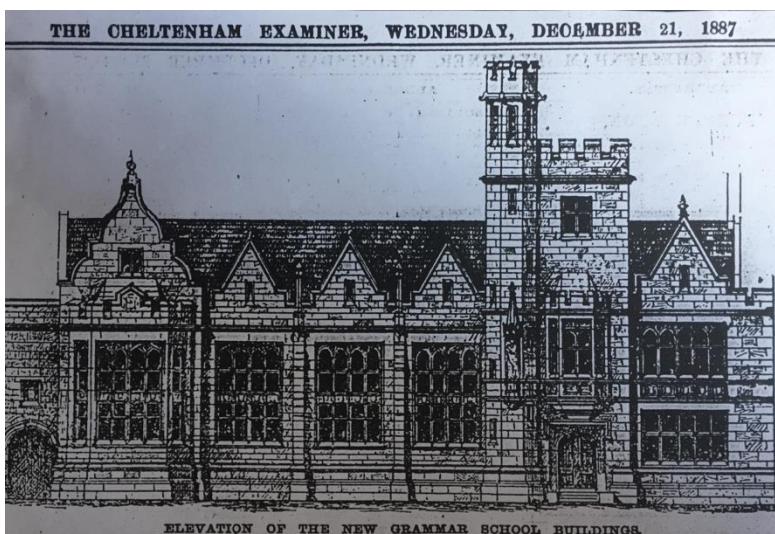
**St Mark's School**

On a much grander scale was the school built as a memorial to the former Incumbent of Cheltenham, Francis Close who had been transferred to Carlisle as Dean at the end of 1856. He had done much for education in the town. Dean Close Memorial School was the town's third Public School and its origin was firmly rooted in the 'Clerical and Lay Association for the maintenance of Evangelical Principles'. The Committee advertised for a building site and one soon was offered for sale by a member of the well known Winterbotham family, near the evangelical St Mark's Church.





The local firm of Knight and Chatters was awarded the contract and the foundation stone was laid on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1884 by the Mayor of Cheltenham George Parsonage, who was handed the customary trowel by Mr WH Knight. Knight had been engaged and instructed to erect when there were sufficient funds, a portion of the intended building to accommodate 70 boys with power to extend the provision if needed, up to a cost of £10,100. The school was to be built on a nine-acre site. The first stage of the building, that which today runs north – south along Shelburne Road, culminating in the entrance tower, was opened in May 1886. This provided schoolrooms and a Master’s residence and accommodation for 50 boarders. When the school opened however there were only three day boys and nine boarders. Teaching accommodation consisted of 2 large and several smaller classrooms, a gym and a carpenter’s shop. Local press reports commented on the ‘Elizabethan, effectively and economically treated red brick building’ and named Mr D Jones of Gloucester the builder. Later critics have commented on ‘the functionless helm tower and the quasi domestic gables’ which are nevertheless hallmarks of the period. The *Cheltenham Examiner* reported, ‘throughout the institution, the most ample provisions are made for the health, comfort and convenience of the INMATES.’(sic) The heating system could yield a temperature of 55-65 degrees in winter! by an ingenious introduction of fresh air through special ducts.



Another major project for which Knight was responsible, and one which was sadly demolished in the mid 1960s was the Grammar School in Cheltenham's High Street. The original school was an ancient foundation dating from the Elizabethan era and although it had had its ups and downs through the ages, and had at times had great difficulty in maintaining numbers, its site in the High Street was a familiar part of Victorian Cheltenham. The school took on a new lease of life in the 1840s. Under new management the numbers were so large that the neighbouring Yearsley's Boarding House was purchased to provide additional accommodation and a new schoolroom was built at the rear of the original building. The school prospered so well that in 1881 a scheme was adopted by which Corpus Christi College Oxford, relinquished complete control over the school, and a more representative Governing Body was formed, to include Borough Council members, parents and magistrates. Discussions were immediately focused on the suitability of the current building and whether expansion should be on the same site in new buildings or on another site if one could be found. A new site was found near to Christ Church but the Charity Commissioners withheld their consent, and the land was eventually sold to the Ladies College for use as a playing field. The Governors therefore decided to demolish every part of the current building and to build on the same site an enlarged and more modern Grammar School. The 1886 advertisement inviting designs for a new building, was met with an immediate response from over seventy local and national architects. The chosen design was that of a London architect and was decided upon by the Charity Commissioners. However, the Governors and the people of Cheltenham were not as impressed as the Commissioners seem to have been and many were of the opinion that local talent should have been used. Knight had submitted two designs in fact, but the *Cheltenham Examiner* reported that they had not been considered seriously due to some misunderstanding as to the eventual costs. The Governors re-examined Knight's drawings and with the approval of the Commissioners, the two designs were amalgamated to produce one design which was accepted. The foundation stone of the new building was laid with all due Masonic ceremony. Brother William Knight, and Brother T Collins representing the builders, were very prominent in the proceedings. This was, according to the *Examiner*, the first public function at which the Freemasons had played an important role, since the foundation of Pitville Pump Room sixty years earlier. *'The day was bright and sunny and the site was guarded by the local Volunteer Engineers contingent in their scarlet uniforms. The Provincial Grand Master of the Masons, Major Michael Hicks-Beach was led into the enclosure by the Masonic Bretheren in order of ceremonial procession and the representatives of the clergy and the University of Oxford in their academic gowns and hoods added to the colour of the proceedings.'*



The opening ceremony took place less than two years later and although the local press described its appearance as appropriate to the tradition of the school and an ornament to the High Street, later opinions were not so flattering. I quote Arthur Bell's *Tudor Foundation*:

'The school was confined to a narrow site in the High Street, the stone faced, gothic style building adjacent to ordinary shop fronts and brewery offices seeming somewhat incongruous. Yet buttresses, turreted tower and all, it conveyed an earnestness and quasi religious feeling which appealed to some and aroused an animus in others. Its interior was dark and depressing, and few would regret the disappearance of such formalism.... It is hard to look at such a building and reflect that it was designed in a period when the bursting vitality of the late Romantic period had done so much to inspire the world.'



Classes were held before the building was completed, and that was much later than expected. In May 1889 a statue of Richard Pate was erected over the main doorway providing some tangible reminder of the school's past history. The plan of the building was an inverted F with a frontage onto the High Street of 117 feet and the front of the building was set back from the street to a depth of 12 feet. The tower was 56 feet high. Rooms included a board room, committee rooms, library, large assembly hall capable of accommodating 300, two floors of classrooms, dining room, kitchens, chemistry and art rooms. The Examiner emphasised the

wonderful amount of light which the windows allowed to enter the building – in sharp contrast to Bell’s later description. The warm air piped heating was considered to be very efficient – like the Dean Close system no doubt!

The local press enthused over the design, and compared Knight’s result to the taste and skill which he was at the same time showing in the, as yet, unfinished Public Library.

Other educational work completed by Knight centred on the Gentlemen’s College for which he was responsible for four contracts. The earliest was in 1862 when Knight attended a meeting of the College Council and submitted plans for a proposed alteration to the College main buildings for the purposes of providing a Junior Department. The planned work would cost in the region of £1,470. Various suggestions were made, including the Principal’s that a new Junior Building might be started. Council voted and the motion was carried, that the Principal had power to develop the Junior Department, but not to start a new building. Knight was then commissioned to adapt part of the main College to provide for junior pupils and this was done by converting the current Drawing school room. However, by 1864 this was totally unsuitable, and Knight was engaged to make alterations to provide better ventilation and acoustics. By 1865, things were still unsatisfactory and a decision was taken to adopt the Headmaster’s earlier suggestion and to proceed with a new building – to the plans of Mr John Middleton. Knight and John Middleton were contemporaries in Cheltenham from 1859 and although their work differed in its focus, Middleton being particularly interested in ecclesiastical architecture, their paths must have crossed on many occasions. Both Knight and Middleton were Freemasons, and Knight, Middleton and his son John Henry, were members of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society. On one occasion c1879, the Society held its Summer Conference in Cheltenham and Knight had prepared to lead an excursion to, and present a paper on, Elkstone Church and its architectural development. Due to illness he was unable to be present and the paper was read by one of the other members. When published, Knight’s description of the tympanum at the church was challenged quite vigorously by the young John Henry Middleton.

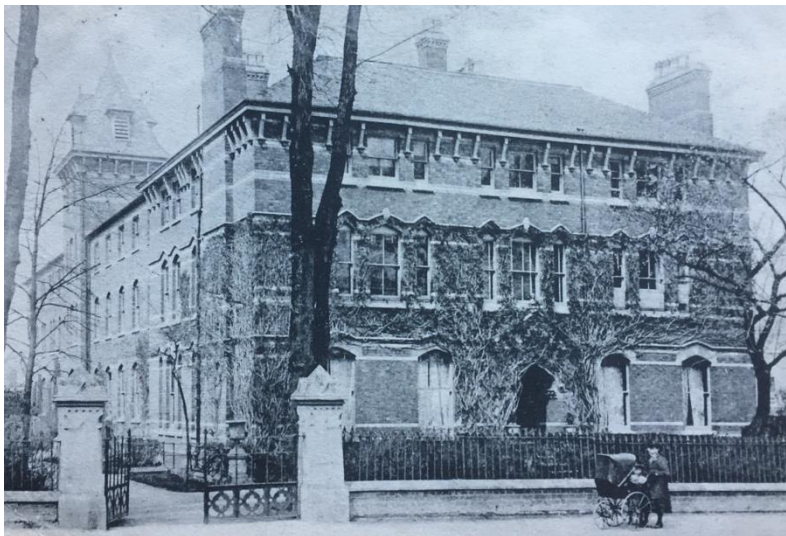
Under the Principalship of Dr Barry in the 1850s/60s the question of College boarding houses was given a priority. Prior to his appointment boarders were housed as paying guests in the homes of the staff. Through Dr Barry’s initiative a limited liability company was formed for the erection of official boarding houses much to the consternation of the owners of private houses who saw their extra income being eroded. It was eventually agreed that private houses could exist alongside the official ones for some time. By 1866 four new houses were ready for occupation all designed by Knight – three for the College Boarding House Company and one, Hazlewell for a Housemaster Samuel Green, which would be run as a private house. Those for the Boarding House Company were Christowe, and Teighmore (now Newick House) in Sandford Road, and Leconfield in College Road, as was Hazlewell. There were conflicting comments about the artistic merits of these houses, the Company ones being described as ‘architectural abortions, with little or no taste nor comeliness, and the longer they are looked at the less they are admired. Fortunately for the artistic pretensions of the town, they do not occupy prominent situations.’ (CLO) However Hazlewell is distinctive in that it does not have

the institutional appearance of the others. All had the same plan – master’s house at the front and common rooms, dormitories etc, at the rear. The average capacity of these houses was 45 boys, and each house cost in the region of £4,000.



**Hazlewood**

Hazlewell was described in the *Examiner* as a commodious and imposing building, and the best looking of the four.



**Leconfield**

In 1879 Knight was also given the contract for the carpentry shops on the south side of the College Field, east of the pavilion. It was intended to provide practical work for the boys in construction and carpentry and included in the furnishings were carpentry benches, vice benches, five turning lathes a smith’s shop and an anvil. The whole cost £1,400. But perhaps his greatest contribution to the College buildings is the former College Baths in Keynsham Road, which are listed Grade II.



**Workshops to the left of the Pavilion**

The Baths when built were the largest attached to any school and were ready for use in 1880. Knight had been given the contract for these and the porter's lodge attached to them and the whole complex cost £8,418. The baths' plans were laid before the directors in 1878 and the plans for the porter's lodge are dated 1880. The whole project is constructed of white brick with some stone work in High Victorian style. They are recognised as a very good example of their type with the architectural treatment skilfully related to the functional requirements. The bath was 80 feet long by 40 feet wide and the depth ranged from 3 feet six inches to seven feet. The bath capacity was 100,000 gallons. There was also a warm bath and fifty dressing cubicles lined with white tiles. There were also towel and drying rooms. The water temperature was maintained at 60 degrees but when being pumped in, the water reached a temperature of 70 degrees. The baths were emptied at regular intervals and each day 33,000 gallons of fresh water was used. The floor tiles and the cast iron coat hooks in the cubicles were an artistic feature regularly commented upon. In 2002 the Baths are used by the East Gloucestershire National Health Trust for its Records Department. Knight's plans are at the Gloucester Record Office D4532, and were signed by him in Cheltenham in 1880. AC and S Billings were the building contractors, the building certificates being issued for each stage of the work between 1880 – 1884.



**Baths, Cheltenham College**



**Former Baths**

Before looking at the two buildings for which Knight will probably be best remembered, two other contracts which had or have 'educational' connections are worth considering. The earliest is the building now used as Dowty House, sheltered accommodation in St Margaret's Road. The provision of a Boys Orphan Asylum – a boys orphanage - had been considered in Cheltenham for several years in the 1850s. Land had been given to the town by a Miss Cook, at the back of the old Market and it was decided to use this on which to build the required orphanage. Plans were invited and those submitted by Knight were selected. The buildings are of brick with stone dressings and blue brick trim. The *Cheltenham Examiner* was relieved that at last a decision to proceed had been made, the need having been one of long standing. 'From what we have seen of the drawings we think we may congratulate Mr Knight on having succeeded in adding to our public buildings one which will be a credit to the town. The building in gothic design, will be surmounted by an ornamental stone turret. The work has already commenced and has been entrusted to Messrs E Billings and Son of this town, by whom the cemetery buildings were erected, and the laying of the foundation stone will take place during the ensuing month.' (March 1865) The *Cheltenham Looker On* was far less enthusiastic in its description of the building on its completion. In July 1866 it reported that the building had just been completed, but that no one attended the completion ceremony except the secretary. 'The project was an absolute waste of money.' The orphanage eventually opened in February 1867.





**Ullenwood Manor**

The other contract referred to above, was for a mansion to be built for Sarah Hampson, the daughter of a Lancashire cotton manufacturer, William Hall. He had had the mansion which is now Seven Springs House and used as Sanford School, built in 1858 and twenty years later engaged Knight to design the property which we know as Ullenwood Manor for his daughter. It is a rather stark and dramatic building in the gothic/jacobean style, but has been much enlarged since it was originally built. The oriel windows are features of Knight's other houses at Winchcombe and Staunton. The entrance lodges are more interesting than the house with their shaped gables and round decorated chimneys. Unfortunately the history leaflet produced by the Star Centre has confused the dates of the building of Seven Springs House with those for Ullenwood Manor.



Of the remaining three Knight buildings in Cheltenham, the earliest and one most familiar to the majority of Cheltonians, is the Cemetery complex in Bouncer's Lane. The Burial Ground at the lower end of Cheltenham High Street – now Churchill Gardens – was almost at capacity level by 1860. The Improvement Commissioners began to consider sites for a new ground. Various possible sites were available, one of which was a twenty-five acre site at The Park owned by Mr Billings, and sites at Hester's Way, Leckhampton Hill, Warden Hill and Prestbury. The latter, in Bouncers Lane was deemed most suitable and after negotiating a purchase price with the owner, the Reverend John de la Bere of Prestbury, 18 acres were purchased, of which 5 acres were later to be found unsuitable being of very heavy clay. The thirteen usable acres were considered sufficient until 1930, 'when Cheltonians of the time would have to provide further space but that would be their problem.' The five unsuitable acres were in the event sold off. The architectural journal, *The Builder* of July 1862 reported that thirty designs had been received for the new cemetery and six had been shortlisted. Voting was in favour of the design of WH Knight of Cheltenham and the second choice was for the Gloucester firm of Medland and Maberley. By November, Knight was inviting tenders for building, fencing, and hedging of the site, and plans and specifications of the proposed contract were available for inspection and application, from Knight's office at Old Farm,. Cheltenham. Work took two years. By November 1864 the chapels were finished and the first burial took place on 29<sup>th</sup> November, of Thomas Smith of Cheltenham, Plumber, aged 65. In his grave was also later buried his widow Margareta who died in 1878.



THE CEMETERY, CHELTENHAM.  
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BURROW'S ROYAL SERIES. NO. 24.

The area to be used by the Established Church of England had been consecrated by Bishop Ellicott of Gloucester on 19<sup>th</sup> of the month although the site was to be shared between the Established Church, Non-Conformists and Roman Catholics. The two areas were separated by the central driveway. Two chapels were provided, one for the C of E and one for the others, and these were connected by a central narthex. The tower and spire are 105 feet high and at the time of opening they contained a 7 cwt bell. There was provision for 13,000 spaces allowing for up to 39,000 burials. At that time cremations were unheard of. The first cremations were negotiated by Queen Victoria's surgeon Sir Henry Thompson in 1874 when he founded the Cremation Society although the first crematorium was not opened until 1878 at Woking. It was not used however for five years and only three cremations actually took place in England in the whole of 1885. However this practice soon became accepted and by the turn of the century, cremation was a well established means of disposing of the dead.



*Norman Mays 1883 Guide to Cheltenham* describes the Cemetery:

'There is a gothic chapel built in 1863 by Mr Knight for Churchmen and a similar expensive one for Dissenters, which seems to a non prejudiced man, to be a similar folly to that related of Sir Isaac Newton, who caused a large hole to be made in his door for his cat and a smaller one for the kittens when obviously the larger hole would have sufficed. The most prominent tomb is

a granite column with letters in gold erected to an unfortunate jockey- George Stevens who had died in 1871.'

*The Builder's* description of the new cemetery heaped praise on the architect emphasising how the original estimate had been exceeded by only a few pounds, which included the Lodge and the boundary walls and gates, reflecting no slight praise on Mr Knight's experience and care.

*The Examiner* also praised Mr Billings the builder, who had carried out the minutest details of the architect's plans, and the work was well supervised by Mr Wall the clerk of works. The building was described as being of chaste and elegant design. This was supported by the 1983 English Heritage Listing description, which said that, '**despite the 20<sup>th</sup> century additions to the rear, this survives as the finest Victorian Cemetery Chapel in England, enhanced by its parkland setting.**'

The buildings are in the early decorated style of architecture. The inner gates are of cast iron, and the railings have fleur de lys cappings. The square stone gate piers support enriched iron double gates.

The 1864 superintendent's lodge also by Knight is in Tudor gothic style with fish scale roof tiles and decorated ridge tiles. The external, road-side walls, piers gates and railings date from 1864 also. There are panels of iron railings with leaf enrichment at intervals. The central piers are taller than the end piers, and enclose iron double gates by Marshall of Cheltenham.

All the furnishings were supplied by Urch and Seabright, 16 Gloucester Place, Cheltenham, at a cost of £74. These included chairs, hassocks, blinds, candlesticks, desk, etc. for which Knight approved payment in December 1864, while Billings' work on the grounds including gravel, stone, path laying etc, was approved for payment by Knight in February 1865.

This leaves just two other public buildings in Cheltenham to consider and we shall look at these in reverse date order.

The entrance to the Promenade from the High Street was known as the Colonnade and before Knight's time it was a very narrow and decidedly unattractive access to what was fast becoming Cheltenham's main shopping area. The original Colonnade had been built about 1819 but this had been replaced by 1850. For much of the following thirty years there had been talk of widening the road and making access from the High Street easier and safer. This would of necessity involve the demolition of many of the existing shops on both sides of the narrow roadway. Plans for the Colonnade improvement were drawn up as early as 1877 but there was a lengthy battle over compulsory purchase and liaison committees and compensation for the owners of the properties already lining the street. One of the first new buildings to grace this part of Cheltenham was the one on the east corner with the High Street, now the HSBC premises. It was erected in 1881 by the Worcester City and County Bank, working with the Corporation as part of the Colonnade widening scheme. The plans were drawn up by Knight as the first phase of the present terrace which now stretches to County Court Row. When opened in the first week of January 1882 it was described by the *Cheltenham Examiner* as 'the finest piece of street architecture in Cheltenham. Its elevation is incomparably superior to any edifice public or private in Cheltenham, reflecting great credit

on Mr WH Knight by whose design and under whose personal supervision it has been completed. It is a bold imposing building of which the town may be proud, a model which the Corporation could do well to adopt when carrying out the intended Colonnade improvement scheme.'



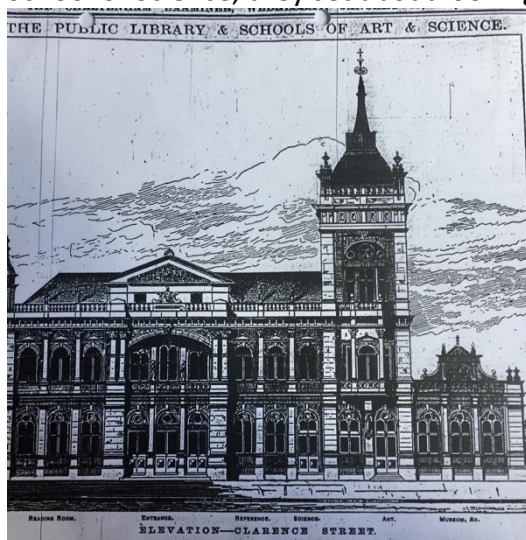
The style of architecture is Italian/Elizabethan, some might say florid French Renaissance. The design in many ways anticipates the heavy Edwardian architecture that is still to be seen in many towns today. There are in fact two sets of plans in the archive, one by WH Knight dated 1880, and another stamped Knight and Chatters. Knight's is the one that was accepted. Built of Bath stone, the site provided the Banking hall as well as the neighbouring Manager's house. The exterior decorations are worth mentioning – Aberdeen granite columns on the main doorway. Beneath the oriel window above this door are the arms of the town and above the oriel are the Royal Arms. Water was supplied to the building from a large cistern from which rainfall on the roof was stored and filtered. The heating, gas, and water installation was all by Marshall of Cheltenham.

The properties on the same side of the road, adjoining the manager's house, were not developed at the same time. After lengthy compulsory purchase orders were made, demolition was announced in 1889 and in May of that year WH Knight was appointed

arbitrator between the corporation and the owners. Everything was finalised by the middle of the year. However the rest of the terrace has date medallions bearing the legend **WS** 1890 and although they follow the style set by Knight for the Bank, I have not been able to find evidence to say that this terrace was to his design, apart from the *Echo* report of the death of Knight, where amongst his work in the town, there is the following statement: 'He had designed and carried out the erection of the Bank at the corner of the Colonnade and also the improvements in the Colonnade itself.'

The building of a Free Public Library for Cheltenham was something which had been considered since the 1850s. This was achieved after much opposition, in 1883 with the opening of a Library in temporary premises in Liverpool Place and a Librarian was appointed. Once established however, there was the continuing search for a suitable site on which to build a permanent Library.

In 1884 the School of Art had purchased a site in the Promenade and had pressed the corporation to use part of the site for a Library, thus creating a dual purpose building. This was not to the Library Committee's liking and after talks with the Fine Arts Committee and the School of Science, they set about looking for their own premises. Opposite St Matthew's



Church was a block of old cottages extending from Bedford Buildings to St George's Place, on the market for £3,500. On December 10<sup>th</sup> 1884, the Corporation agreed to purchase this site for the purpose of building a Free Public Library. This together with the cost of the actual building, Jubilee Tower, parapet, furnishings, heating and gas fittings amounted to about £15,200, part raised by a penny rate and part by private loan or donations. This meant that at this particular period, there were three appeals running in the town for public buildings – the Library, the School of Art and the School of Science.



The School of Art was first to concede defeat and agreed to join forces with the Library Committee and put its resources into the new Library Building. In May 1887, the School of Science did likewise, thus providing the opportunity to have on one site, a Public Library with Schools of Art and Science all under one roof. WH Knight was one who had submitted plans for the proposed building and in January 1887, he laid before the Library Committee his detailed plans and elevations for the proposed building, with draft specifications. The overall plans were approved with the details of the specifications to be finalised by Knight with the assistance of the mayor. Tenders were to be immediately invited. The elevations were of two designs one more ornate than the other. The Committee left the elaboration of the details in abeyance, pending the result of a financial appeal. As a result of the decision made by the Schools of Art and Science, Knight was called back to advise on the possibility of incorporating them into the designs and he was instructed to work these into the plans.



The laying of the Foundation stone took place with full Masonic ceremonial in December 1887, to mark the occasion of Victoria's Jubilee. Sir Michael Hick-Beach, Provincial Grand Master gently tapped the stone, and it was lowered into place as he declared it well and truly laid. The plans were then handed to Mr Knight the architect, thus closing the ceremony. The Art School had its entrance under the Tower, and was completely cut off from that to the School of Science, just yards to the left. Originally the Schools of Art and Science occupied the first

floor. The Art School was accommodated in four large rooms at the back of the building facing north at their request; the Science School overlooked Clarence Street. The Free Library occupied the ground floor and basement. There was a reading room for papers capable of accommodating 250 people. The lending section of the library held 10,000 books but aims were for 60,000 volumes. The architect had taken care to obviate the loss of time and risk of accident which can occur when ladders are employed to reach the shelves by dispensing with them altogether. Instead, light, open ironwork balconies were designed to run along the shelves at suitable distances and these were approached by a spiral staircase. The reference library was on the right of the entrance.

The official opening was held on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1889. The procession to the Library for the opening by Sir Michael Hicks Beach, started from the Queen's Hotel and included in this procession was the architect and the builder of the library. The procession went from the hotel via the Promenade to Winchcombe Street, left to Evesham House where Sir Michael and the local MP joined the procession in the Mayor's carriage and then via Pittville Street and Clarence Street to the Library. The actual speeches of opening took place in the Reading Room after Sir Michael had been given a key with which to open the door and declare the Library, and Schools of Art and Science, OPEN.

Testimonials to Knight's achievement were as follows:

His most spectacular building with mixed classical and romantic feeling.

Great success as much in the inner structure as in its accommodation and smaller details. Handsome, substantial of character. The only regret is that it is not in a more prominent position.

It only remains to be added that this fine building, the appearance and arrangements of which have been highly commended by not a few persons specially qualified to judge, is the product of local talent, enterprise and workmanship. The architect was Mr Knight of whose skilful ability it will remain as a monument; And the contractors for both building and fittings were Messrs AC and S Billings Messrs Marshall of |Clarence Street have carried out the heating and lighting arrangements on the systems adopted by Mr Knight.

Knight's final recorded contract would seem to be at the east side of North Street where in 1890 he was responsible for converting a shop into a bank for the Wilts and Dorset Bank. The property was a very narrow one stretching from the present corner of Boots (which opened in 1927) along North Street to the junction with Albion Street. Its appearance can only be interpreted by looking at old postcards which give the impression that it was very similar in external to the Worcester City Bank on the opposite corner. His obituary in the *Echo*, says that this was his latest achievement, upon which he had been working at the time just prior to his death.





We have visited the known Cheltenham contributions of William Hill Knight, but before closing that aspect of his work, mention must be made of the shops in Montpellier Walk. *John Goding* in 1863 refers to new shops at the entrance to the Montpellier Walk which were opened for business in 1843. According to the late David Verey in *Buildings of England*, the shops were designed by WH Knight. However, no evidence to justify this comment has so far come to light. Alan Brooks in his recent updated version of *Buildings of England*, is more cautious when he says that the entrance to Montpellier Walk was begun 1843 by RW & C Jearrad though not completed c1860 probably by WH Knight. The buildings do indeed have something of the feel of his later work in the Colonnade although on a much smaller scale, but until further research comes up with proof, a question mark will continue to hang over these Montpellier attractions.

Outside of Cheltenham, we know of several of Knight's legacies – for example schools at Badgeworth, Winchcombe, Aschurch, Chedworth, Temple Guiting, Aldereton plus master's house, and Cainscross. Of the latter two, Alderton's school replaced one of 1856. Knight's was completed in 1877 and cost £1200. It was capable of taking 110 children. The Cainscross school also replaced an earlier one of 1837 and Knight's was opened in 1877. The School Log records the pupils moving in to the new school after the Whitsun holidays. The cost was £3000. The school's inspection report for October says that the new handsome building is an improvement on what existed before! Not overwhelming praise, but acceptable I think.

Several of his domestic buildings are also identifiable, as at Winchcombe, the Old Vicarage, (1845); Staunton Rectory, near Gloucester, (1854); Northleach old Vicarage (1873-5); the old Vicarage at Notgrove; a house at Gretton for Mr Fawdrey (1870); Ebley House near Stroud, and Woolstone Rectory.



Ecclesiastical architecture does not feature greatly in Knight's portfolio and locally all we can safely ascribe to him are an extension to the south aisle of Prestbury Church c1848; the former Congregational Chapel at Winchcomb; the rebuilt chancel of the church at Withington, and the restoration of St Margaret's church at Alderton. Beyond Gloucestershire, he rebuilt the parish church at Shenton in Leicestershire, and restored and enlarged St Andrew's at Morton on Lugg in Herefordshire. (1866). This church has been described in *Churches in Herefordshire* as 'a Victorian gem, competent, the spire crossing the south-west tower indicates the excellence within. The porch and tower are entirely new, also by WH Knight. The whitewash has been scraped from the walls and they are now relieved by appropriate scripture mottoes in missal printing.' Civic work in Winchcombe included rebuilding the Town Hall in 1853/5 by merging the old Town Hall and Booth Hall into one, and an extension and restoration to it in 1871.



William Hill Knight completed his last will and testament on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1890 and probate was granted in September 1895 a month after his death. Not an enormous estate – effects of only £1,021 12.1 (probably amounting to £50,000 in today's purchasing power) being left to Augusta Emily Knight, spinster, his grand daughter and only surviving executor, his wife having predeceased him.

The will stated that should his wife pre-decease him, then two fifths of his estate were to go to his daughter Augusta Hingston, a fifth to her daughter Ada Matilda and two fifths to his grand daughter Augusta Emily Knight, these shares for their independent use regardless of their marital state.

I made many attempts to trace descendants of WH Knight to no avail until just before Christmas 2002 when I received an email from someone in Devon who had discovered my interest via the Internet. The gentleman concerned turned out to be a great grand son of WHK but knew little about his great grandfather's history. I recently arranged to meet him in Cheltenham. I was able to take him to his great grandfather's grave and show him Knight's memorial that surrounds it. Unfortunately, we have not been able to trace any photographs of William Hill Knight. (Thanks to Ron Hankey making contact in September 2020 we now have photographs of William Hill Knight and his family.)

B E Torode. January 2003.

## **KNOWN WORKS OF WILLIAM HILL KNIGHT**

1837/39	Cheltenham Synagogue
1840	Badgeworth School
1842	Ashchurch School
1844	Cheltenham, Montpellier Walk?
1845	Winchcombe, The Old Vicarage
1846	Cheltenham, Devonshire Street Charity School and master's house
1848	Cheltenham, St Paul's School Prestbury Church, extension of South Aisle westwards
1853	Winchcombe, the Town Hall
1854	Staunton Rectory, near Corse, then Worcester Diocese
1857	Winchcombe Infants' School
1858	Cheltenham Street Development, Montpellier, (Paul & Knight)
1860/61	Shenton Church rebuilt, Leicestershire
1863	Northleach, the Vicarage, now Glebe House.
1863/4	Cheltenham Cemetery Chapels, inner piers and gates, Cemetery Lodge, main entrance, walls, piers, gates and railings.
1865	Cheltenham St James' School.
1865/6	Cheltenham Boys Orphan Asylum (Dowty House)
1865/67	Herefordshire, Morton in Lugg Church.
1865	Cheltenham College, Hazlewell House.

1869	Notgrove, Glos, Alteration and enlarge, The Vicarage (rebuild of 1810 house)
1870	Gretton, House for Mr Fawdrey
1870	Chedworth School and House
1871	Winchcombe, further work on Town Hall
1872	Temple Guiting School.
1873/79	Winchcombe, The Congregational Chapel (Christian Centre)
1874	Ebley, Ebley House, rebuilt. (Westward Road. No 235) Alderton, the school and master's house.
1875	Cainscross, The School
1877	Withington, rebuilt the Chancel.
1878	Coberley, Ullenwood Manor Cheltenham College Workshops, east of Gymnasium
1879	Cheltenham, College Baths and Lodge
1880	/82 Cheltenham, Worcester & City Bank
1884/86	Cheltenham, Dean Close School
1885/89	Cheltenham Grammar School.
1885/6	Cheltenham new Boys' School, St Mark's (Roman Road)
1887/89	Cheltenham Public Library
1889	Woolstone, the Old Rectory
1890/92	Alderton, restoration of Church of St Margaret, furnishings by WHK
1890	Cheltenham, Colonnade Improvement Cheltenham North Street, Wilts & Dorset Bank

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K766/6/15 and K751/5 Alderton.

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I am deeply indebted to the staff of the Cheltenham Reference Library and Gloucester Records Office for their help and patience and to Mike Grindley for his many contributions from the local (Cheltenham) contemporary newspapers.

## **WILLIAM HILL KNIGHT, VICTORIAN CHELTENHAM ARCHITECT**

**William Hill Knight** was born in Ross on Wye in 1814 and baptised in the parish church there on 16<sup>th</sup> March. His father was a local mason and his mother's family name was Hill, hence his middle name. William had three brothers and one sister. When exactly, or why William moved to Cheltenham is uncertain but on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1835 he **married Matilda Hastings** in Cheltenham Parish Church by Licence which had been sworn the previous day. Both William and his new wife were 21 years of age. Matilda's father was a builder in Cheltenham, probably the one listed at 215 High Street in 1820 and at 316 High Street in 1830. William and Matilda's **first child, Emily** was born in 1836 but died when only one and a half years old at **14, Portland Terrace**. Two other children were born at **12 North Place**, Augusta in 1840, and a son, William Hastings Knight, in 1842. On each occasion, the father is described as 'architect'.

Perhaps WHK's success in Cheltenham encouraged other members of his family to settle here – his brother and sister and his mother, by then a widow. By 1847 WHK had moved to **49, St**

**George's Place** but a further move occurred in 1857/8 when **he bought Old Farm** the former home of William Nash Skillicorne. He remained there until 1867 when he moved to his final home in **St James' Square**, from which time he is listed in the Annales amongst the '**resident gentry**.' William's wife Matilda died in 1892 subsequent to which WHK's health deteriorated and **he died in Clevedon**, on 20<sup>th</sup> **August 1895**. He had gone there to seek a cure at the Hydropathic Institute, for the persistent exzema from which he suffered. His body was brought back to Cheltenham for burial in the grave in which his wife's remains lay, almost on the threshold of the door to the Chapel which had been designed by him thirty years previously.

His obituary in the Cheltenham Examiner reported that in his early days in the town WHK had worked in the offices of **Mr Thomas Haines**, Builder, and in course of time, when his natural abilities and skill in designing became apparent he practised on his own account. Twelve years before his death he had taken into partnership, Mr Chatters, working as **Knight and Chatters**. Mr Chatters himself had been a pupil of John Middleton, WHK's contemporary but a relative newcomer to the town. However WHK was also connected with the local firm of **Rowland Paul**, architect, because in 1835 Paul provided designs for a synagogue to be built in the town, but they were rejected, and eighteen months later, WHK then aged 22, was signing payment certificates to contractors for work on the synagogue, and the designs were prepared and signed by him. However WHK was working with R Paul in 1858 on a street widening project near St James' Station and their correspondence is signed **Messrs Paul and Knight** which probably indicates that WHK gradually worked his way up the architectural ladder with R Paul until branching out on his own perhaps as late as 1860. Earlier projects were no doubt delegated to him by R Paul, but this has yet to be confirmed as little archive material has so far come to light.

WHK was responsible for large and small contracts, within Cheltenham and in the surrounding county, but his name has not become as familiar as that of some of his contemporaries. In Cheltenham examples of his work can be seen in the **Devonshire Street Charity School** and St Paul's School next to the church on St Paul's Road, both schools dating from 1846/47. A more impressive church school was built in St James' parish and has now been converted to domestic accommodation, while his school in Roman Road has been demolished. On a much grander scale is **Dean Close School** where the frontage along Shelburne Road culminating in the tall entrance tower, is WHK's original building of 1886. However his most well known building in the town was the **High Street Grammar School** now long demolished. He also designed some of the Cheltenham College Boarding houses – Hazlewell being the most satisfying architecturally, the former **Cheltenham College Baths** near the present fire station and the College workshops on the south side of College Field. Nearer the town centre, the present Dowty House, formerly the Boys' Orphan Asylum in St Margaret's Road, and the bank making the corner of the High Street and Promenade are also to his designs. But his town centre memorial must surely be the **Public Library** in Clarence Street, while further north, the **Cheltenham Cemetery** with its Chapels and Lodge, walls and grounds providing the most appropriate final resting place for their designer. The **English Heritage** Listing description concludes with this fitting tribute to the architect, William Hill Knight: "Despite the 20<sup>th</sup> century additions to the rear, this survives as the **finest Victorian Cemetery Chapel in England**, enhanced by its parkland setting