Cheltenham Local History Society

JOURNAL 37 ~ 2021

CHELTENHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY *meets between September and May, usually on the third Tuesday of the month, at 7.30 p.m. in the Municipal Offices, Cheltenham. Additional morning meetings take place at St Luke's Hall, Cheltenham. There are also summer visits to sites of historical interest. Details of the current programme can be found on the Society's website:* **www.cheltlocalhistory.org.uk.**

MEMBERSHIP OF THE SOCIETY *includes receipt of the Journal and three Newsletters which give details of meetings and other activities. Further information regarding the Cheltenham Local History Society can be obtained from the Membership Secretary, the Newsletter and Journal Editors and the Society's website.*

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BACK ISSUES OF THE CLHS JOURNALS, CHRONOLOGIES and OTHER PUBLICATIONS *are available at events hosted or attended by the Society and from Sally Self, projects.clhs@btinternet.com (phone 01242 243714). For information on PRICES and ORDER FORMS see the Society's website or phone Sally Self.*

JOURNAL SUBMISSIONS *Articles and other contributions appropriate to the Society's interests are welcomed for possible publication in the* ***Journal*** *and* ***Newsletter*** *and should be submitted to the appropriate Editor (see above). There is a* ***Style and Copyright Guide*** *available online or on request to aid authors who wish to submit articles to the Journal.*

Submission deadline for articles and images for Journal 38 is 30 November 2021

FRONT COVER: ***Bill May with a loaded lorry heading for the market, early 1920s (Courtesy of Barbara Parker, Swindon Village Collection VII, p.71).***

See article by Sally Self on Market Gardening, pages 17-28

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Introduction

JULIE COURTENAY, Journal Editor

Welcome to Journal 37 and one which I hope all members will enjoy. I was slightly concerned that this year's issue would be a rather slim one, anticipating that it would be hit by the impact of coronavirus. However, I should have trusted to the determination of local history researchers! The essential writing-up of research findings was one activity that could and did flourish during the periods of lockdown and restrictions that were so much part of everyone's life in 2020. My thanks to our authors who made every effort to prepare their articles and references so carefully for this issue, thereby making the task of editing such a pleasure.

This year's edition features a number of local personalities – some previously more well-known than others - but who all now have a light shone on their lives in the town. We read about entertainers like the Seward family who for several generations toured Cheltenham and the South West with their renowned shows, featuring puppets among other attractions. In his article author Peter Clifford shares an interesting early 19th century image of 'Sadler's Wells House' theatre in St George's Place, the original painting being held in Australia.

The life of Cheltonian Miss Theodora Flower Mills is explored through her writings. Better known until now for her activism as a suffragist, this study draws on her published work – especially her regular letters to the local newspapers as well as her novels and poetry – to reveal the varied interests and causes she pursued during the decades after winning the vote.

Some characters featured in this issue may have preferred their affairs not to have hit the headlines of their time – but the fact that their exploits were the subject of libel cases reported with some relish by the press has provided our authors with plenty of material. Mark Davies disentangles the career of Samuel Griffith (of *Griffith's New Historical Description of Cheltenham* fame); and the 'scandalous' exploits of Jane Barker and the Earl Fitzhardinge are recounted by Alan Munden, who came across this episode during his wider ongoing research into Cheltenham's clergymen.

On a different theme, a couple of articles take an in-depth look at two local trades that have since disappeared from the town. Sally Self's piece on the extensive market gardens that once covered the Kingsditch area is based on research undertaken as part of the current Victoria County History of Cheltenham and its surrounding parishes. And on the other side of town, Eric Miller concludes his detailed survey of brickmaking and potteries in Leckhampton.

If you are researching an aspect of local history, please consider writing it up for publication in the Journal. All articles – long or short – are very welcome to be considered for the 2022 issue and should be sent to me at editor.clhs@gmail.com before the end of November deadline.

Mr Seward's Ingenious Exhibition of the Fantoccini at Cheltenham: the talented Seward family – musicians, actors, acrobats, dancers, puppeteers, painters

PETER CLIFFORD

THE NAMES THAT COME MOST READILY TO MIND when we think about the early history of Cheltenham theatres are probably those of the actress Sarah Siddons and the Irish theatre manager John Boles Watson. But for a period of at least 40 years, at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, one rather forgotten family played a prominent role in providing entertainment to visitors to the spa: the Sewards. Their part in Cheltenham life at this period has been somewhat overlooked. This article attempts to rectify that neglect.[1]

The first record we have of Samuel Seward (II)[2] and his family performing in Cheltenham comes from a handbill, dated July 1788, held by the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C.,[3] which advertises two pantomimes – *Enchantment* and *Harlequin's Whim* – which were to be given by 'Seaward's company',[4] with 'Seward' [*sic* – probably Samuel himself] in the lead role as Harlequin, and a 'J. Seaward' [*sic*][5] as Pantaloon. These performances were to take place at 'the Theatrical booth in the coachway leading to the Spa' in Cheltenham. Other entertainments offered by the Sewards were to include 'Tumbling by Messrs. Seawards, juniors' and a hornpipe played by 'Master Seaward'.[6]

Brief though it may be, this handbill is revealing, and tells us quite a lot about Samuel and his family.

Firstly, it is clear, just from this one advertisement, that this was very much a family enterprise, with older and younger members all playing their part, not just as actors, but as acrobats and musicians too. As we shall see, various members of the family had other talents with which to make their contributions as well.

Secondly, we can also surmise with some justification that Samuel was a canny businessman, with his finger firmly on the nation's pulse, ready to travel wherever there might be a crowd to entertain. This date – July 1788 – was, of course, a highly significant one in Cheltenham's history, for it was in this month that the ailing King George III and his retinue arrived in the town, hoping the spa waters would cure him of his malady. The presence of the royal family 'made Cheltenham for a few short weeks the focus of the fashionable world',[7] boosting its fortunes and increasing the number of visitors who flocked to the spa. Samuel had spotted an opportunity and lost no time in pursuing it. Whether or not this was the family's first visit to the town, or just the first for which some record has survived, we cannot say, of course. Since Samuel is known to have acted for the theatrical manager John Boles Watson,[8] it would not be surprising if he brought his family company to Cheltenham as early as 1772, around which date Watson had taken over the old malt house in Coffee House Yard as a theatre.[9]

In addition, the description of their performance space – 'the Theatrical booth in the coachway leading to the Spa' – suggests that they were not yet using a permanent, fixed theatre building

at this time, although they may already have been performing in what is now St George's Place, since 'The Coach Road' was one of its former names.[10] The Sewards appear to have been travelling showmen of one kind or another for at least a couple of generations by this date, and earned a living by entertaining the public at fairs and events across the south of England. It seems likely they had some kind of mobile stage which travelled with them, and in fact we will later see a description of just such paraphernalia in use by another showman who learnt his trade from the Sewards.

Lastly, it is interesting to note the different types of entertainments Seward's Company had to offer. The playbill mentions two dramatic performances, both seemingly in the style of the *Commedia dell'arte,* and almost certainly with Samuel Seward himself playing the role of Harlequin, for which he was renowned; plus 'tumbling' (which we can safely take to mean acrobatic tricks of various kinds); and a 'hornpipe' (probably to be interpreted as a dance, accompanied by music played on a brass or wind instrument of some kind). Although the playbill does not mention puppets, it seems unlikely that marionettes would not have featured in some form or another, given that this was the kind of show for which the Sewards were probably best known.

It should be no surprise that music is mentioned here, for many of the Sewards appear to have thought of themselves first and foremost as musicians – in particular, trumpeters. An Abraham Seward (I), 'musician', was admitted as a Burgess of the City of Bristol, by purchase, on 28 November 1745.[11] Being a burgess gave Abraham the right to vote in parliamentary elections, and two poll books relating to the 1754 elections in Bristol record,[12] on the one hand, an Abraham *Seward*, 'musician', of Temple parish in the city; and, on the other, an Abraham *Seaward,* 'puppet shew-man', also of Temple parish. Despite the variation in spelling and profession, these were surely one and the same man, skilled in both arts.

These two skills were not, of course, unconnected. Puppet performances were traditionally announced by means of trumpets and drums,[13] and no doubt the Sewards carried on that custom. But there is reason to believe that the Sewards were more than mere fairground players. Like the puppet showman Harry Rowe, who 'held the post of Trumpeter to the High Sheriff of Yorkshire, and twice every year for forty-five years attended the Assizes in this capacity',[14] it would seem that two brothers, Abraham (I) and Samuel (I) Seward, served as trumpeters to the High Sheriff of Cornwall, and were employed in a ceremonial capacity at Bodmin and Launceston Assizes in 1745 and 1746.[15] We can probably assume that this was Abraham (I), the Bristol musician and puppeteer, plying his trade across the West Country.

Given their itinerant lifestyle, constructing the family tree of the Sewards is no easy matter. Baptisms, marriages and burials can be hard to find, and sometimes crop up in surprising places. Denning[16] states confidently that Samuel (II) 'was a native of Bristol', but there is no evidence he was born in that city. He was said to be aged 73 when he died in 1810, which suggests a date of birth around 1737. No baptism of a Samuel Seward in any Bristol church around this date has been found, but there are possible baptisms in London (1734),[17] Somerset (1735)[18] and Cornwall (1742).[19]

Wherever he was born, and whoever his parents were, in later years Samuel (II) considered himself both a Bristolian and a musician. Evans[20] mentions a letter, dated 22 August 1821, sent from Stapleton, Bristol, by one C.J. Harford[21] to the editor of *Felix Farley's Journal*, and which was subsequently reproduced in numerous newspapers.[22] It recalled an encounter by Harford in Moscow in 1786 with a Mr. Maddox, a fellow Bristolian to whom he was introduced, and who enquired: 'Pray Sir... is the St James Fair still kept up? And is old Seward the trumpeter alive?' Mr Harford assured Mr Maddox that he 'had seen old Seward trumpeting before the

Sheriffs the March preceding'. It sounds as if this 'old Seward' was serving the Sheriffs of Bristol in very much the same capacity as Samuel (I) and Abraham (I) had served the Sheriff of Cornwall 40 years earlier. When he wrote his will in 1799, Samuel (II) described himself as 'Samuel Seward, of the City of Bristol, Trumpeter', probably proud of his role in civic life.[23] In turn, when that Samuel's son of the same name, Samuel Seward (III) wrote his will in 1828, he referred to himself as 'Samuel Seward of Cheltenham in the County of Gloucester Musician'.[24]

By all accounts, Samuel (II) was a fine instrumentalist, and a popular figure in Bristol. Evans praises his skill, calling him a 'neatly made little showman' and 'old Seward, of Fair memory, in whose hands the sound of the trumpet produced its first impression upon the musical hearts of many a wight of the writer's standing.'[25]

However, though they thought of themselves primarily as musicians, the Sewards had many other talents and were prepared to travel widely to ply their trade. A puppet showman named 'Seward' was active in London in the early 1740s and was described as the 'Manager of *Punch's Opera*' in the capital in 1745.[26] This may not have been either of the brothers Abraham (I) or Samuel (I),[27] but it is hard to think he would not have been a relation of some kind. A puppeteer named Seward was also recorded as having performed in Bristol in 1743, and, as Harford's letter suggests, performances by the Sewards were a regular feature at Bristol St James' Fair, where in 1761 'Seward's Grand Performance' was one of the attractions, and included 'Drolls',[28] 'Wire Dancing' and puppets, and, in 1765, tumbling and 'rope-dancing' were on offer.[29] Exactly which members of the Seward family these various advertisements refer to it is impossible to know for sure, but, in a sense, it does not really matter: this was a family enterprise where everyone was expected to play some part or other, whether as actor, puppeteer, musician, acrobat or dancer, and where as one generation passed, the next would take up the reins.

The Seward family were still itinerant entertainers when they visited Cheltenham in 1788, and it seems likely they did not establish any permanent base in the town for some years afterwards. They certainly had not stopped touring, as the following year they were back in that other fashionable West of England spa resort, Bath, where 'SEWARD'S EXHIBITION' could be seen, 'consisting of the Droll Humours of Mr. PUNCH and his Merry Family; being the richest and best Puppet-Show in the kingdom. With TUMBLING, SINGING, DANCING, &c.'[30]

We do not know for sure when Samuel Seward (II) established his theatre in the former dwelling houses known later as Nos. 27-28, and eventually as Nos. 67-69, St George's Place, Cheltenham. Seward gave the buildings the rather pretentious name Sadler's Wells House. A drawing of the theatre by James Winston, first published in 1802,[31] shows this name painted on the facade with a notice reading 'Fantoccini Exhibition' beneath (see image on following page). By the time the buildings were demolished in the early 2000s, this latter sign had disappeared, but the name of the theatre could still be read on what by then was an interior wall (see images at end of article). The Historic England listing description for the building states that Seward converted the property in 1795;[32] another source suggests that this occurred around 1799.[33] The truth is, exactly when the buildings first became a theatre is not known, but we can assume it had happened by 1800, when the theatre was listed in Shenton's *Cheltenham Directory*.[34]

It is worth spending a moment to consider the meaning of that word *fantoccini* which might not be familiar to the modern reader. It was a word of Italian origin[35] used to describe 'jointed puppets operated from above by rods and/or strings', and which was largely superseded by the term *marionettes* from the second half of the 19th century onwards.[36] Samuel Seward (II) may

well have been something of an innovator in their use: one expert in the history of puppetry credits him with being the first man in England to employ *fantoccini* operated purely by means of strings, as opposed to the more cumbersome rods or wires.[37]

However, despite starting to perform in a fixed venue in Cheltenham sometime in the mid- to late-1790s, the signs are that the Sewards did not even then immediately restrict their performances to Cheltenham, or cease touring altogether, if indeed they ever did. A 'Seward' was exhibiting a puppet show at St Bartholomew's Fair in London from 1796 to 1812.[38] In the spring of 1799, 'Mr Seward' - probably Samuel (II) - was acting Harlequin and other roles for Watson's Company at the newly opened Cirencester Theatre, and on 13 May 1799, a benefit concert was held on his behalf.[39] On 20 May 1801, the *Hereford Journal* advertised that Harlequin would be played there by 'Mr Seward, from Astley's Amphitheatre, who is engaged for Four Nights only'.[40] Even as late as 1803 we are told that 'Mr. Seward has for several years visited Cheltenham with his Sadler's Wells in miniature',[41] which suggests he was not a permanent resident. It may have been the case that the theatre was usually only open during 'the season', that is, the months between June and September that attracted the vast majority of visitors to the town.[42] The rest of the year, the Sewards would most likely have continued to tour the country as they had done for at least half a century by this date.

Drawing by James Winston of Samuel Seward's 'Sadlers Wells House' in St. George's Place, Cheltenham, showing a notice reading 'Fantoccini Exhibition'. No. 13 from his collection 'Watercolour drawings of theatres and other buildings in towns of the south of England: the original drawings for James Winston's Theatric Tourist', 1805, 1802.

Pencil note at the bottom reads '*Seward's Puppet Shew*'.

(Courtesy of the State Library of New South Wales, David Scott Mitchell Collection, ref. PXB 13, IE8603225, https://digital.sl.nsw.gov.au/)

We can get an idea of the kind of entertainment provided at Sadler's Wells House from a number of contemporary descriptions. Dibdin's *Guide* informs the visitor of the delights of Watson's Cheltenham Theatre, but goes on to mention that a different kind of entertainment was also available, appealing particularly, no doubt, to the less high-brow visitors and their children:

> *As a species of dramatic entertainment, we must not forget Mr. Seward's exhibition of the Fantoccini, with all the merriment of pantomimic achievements. ... The whole apparatus is well got up, and affords a pleasing variety to the more serious and just representation of human nature on Mr. Watson's theatre. The scenery is neat, and painted by his sons.*[43]

Sadler's Wells House did not just attract the less fashionable visitor, however. *The Globe* of 24 November 1809 noted that: 'On Friday evening, Lady Suffolk, the Hon. Mrs Moore, and a fashionable party, visited Mr Seward's ingenious exhibition of the Fantoccini at Cheltenham, and were very highly gratified.'

The travelling actor, Samuel William Ryley, first published his memoirs in 1808, and describes how he visited Seward's theatre after performing in Cheltenham (precise date unclear):

> *In the evening, by way of frolic, we went to the celebrated puppet shew conducted by old Seward, well known formerly for his agility as an Harlequin, and his ingenuity in managing his company of wood and wire performers. The piece performed that evening was called Whittington and his Cat ... A real, legitimate puppet shew ... here the ancient school appeared in all its original glory and splendour, and Mr. Punch was introduced with great effect.*[44]

During the 1840s, the social historian Henry Mayhew published a series of newspaper articles documenting the lives of working people in London, later collected under the title *London Labour and the London Poor*. Amongst those he interviewed was an unnamed 'Fantoccini Man', who performed in 'a large roomy show upon wheels, about four times as capacious as those used for the performance of Punch and Judy'. We can reasonably assume that the kind of mobile theatre space described there would have been similar to that used by the Sewards, and it seems possible that the wagon depicted outside the theatre in Winston's drawing was the vehicle the Sewards used for this purpose.

This 'fantoccini man' explained how he had learnt his trade from one 'Seawood':

> *At this time I had been playing in the orchestra with some travelling comedians, and Mr. Seawood,*[45] *the master, used among other things to exhibit the dancing figures. He had a proscenium fitted up so that he could open a twenty-foot theatre, almost large enough for living persons. He had the splendidest figures ever introduced into this country. He was an artist as well, splendid scene and transparent painter; indeed, he's worked for some of the first noblemen in Cheltenham, doing up their drawing-rooms. His figures worked their eyes and mouths by mechanism; according to what they had to say, they looked and moved their eyes and mouths according; and females, if they was singing, heaved their bosoms like Christians, the same as life. He had a Turk who did the tightrope without anybody being seen. He always performed different pieces, and had a regular wardrobe with him – beautiful dresses – and he'd dress 'em up to their parts, and then paint their faces up with distemper, which dries in an hour. ... I had helped Mr. Seawood to manage the figures, and I knew something about them ... The only figures they told me he had – and it was true – was a sailor, and a Turk, and a clown, and what we calls a Polander, that's a man that tosses the pole.*[46]

On 21 July 1810, some 15 years or so after establishing his theatre in St George's Place, Samuel Seward (II) died, and was buried at St Mary's, Cheltenham on 23 July 1810.[47] His death was announced in the *Cheltenham Chronicle* on 26 July 1810: 'On Saturday last died here, Mr Samuel Seward, aged 73 – He has for many years exhibited his Fantoccini, and other performances, at this place. The night preceding his demise he played Harlequin, with his accustomed activity! He has left considerable property in houses, &c.'

The news was repeated widely in other newspapers over the following days, including in the *Gentleman's Magazine,*[48] the London press,[49] and even as far afield as Dublin,[50] though some notices claimed that he was 'nearly 80', probably exaggerating his age for journalistic effect.

When Samuel had written his will back in 1799, he had named his wife Elizabeth as his executrix, and she was duly sworn as such on 27 July 1810, but, in the event, she outlived him by only a few months (the burial of Elizabeth Seward at St Mary's, on 11 January 1811, appears two pages after that of her husband in the same register). Samuel's eldest child, daughter Elizabeth, and her second husband Thomas Tyrrell of Bristol, 'blue maker',[51] took over administration of his estate. The will does not specifically mention any property in Cheltenham, but simply leaves all his messuages etc. 'in the City of Bristol or elsewhere' to his wife Elizabeth. After her death, his estate was to be divided equally between his eight surviving children and a niece, Mary Seward.[52]

It was probably because of this latter clause, and the need to distribute the estate, that a notice in the *Cheltenham Chronicle* of 26 September 1811 advertised the sale by auction 'To Comedians and Others' of 'ALL that Freehold brick-built MESSUAGE or TENEMENT, together with the THEATRE adjoining the same, situated in St George's-place, in the Carriage Road leading to the Spa, and for many years last past in the possession of the late Proprietor, Mr. Samuel Seward, deceased, and by him used as a place of Public Amusement.'

Whether this auction actually took place is doubtful. This is the only notice of the sale that has come to light, and, as we shall see, the theatre appears to have remained in the family's possession for nearly another 20 years after this time. Perhaps it was 'disposed of in the mean time by Private Contract', an eventuality the advertisement had anticipated, and purchased from Samuel's estate by one of his sons, probably either Abraham (III) or Samuel (III). So, to continue the history of the theatre building, and of the Seward family of entertainers, we must now proceed to consider the lives of these two men.

Abraham[53] had been baptized at Bath Abbey on 31 January 1773.[54] His father, Samuel Seward (II) had married his mother, Elizabeth Hart, at Temple church in Bristol on 19 November 1761.[55] Abraham was the sixth of 13 known children. Every member of the Seward family seems to have been expected to act on the stage, operate marionettes, perform acrobatic tricks, provide musical accompaniment, and so on, as required, but Abraham's specialism, for which he gained quite a considerable reputation in his lifetime, was as a scene painter, and as a painter more generally too. He was probably the 'Seaward' who in 1796 was engaged to paint scenery for a performance of *The Magician of the Rocks* at Astley's Amphitheatre, Westminster Bridge, and then a few years later in 1800, as 'Seward', appeared on the roster of the Birmingham Company, listed as a scene painter 'from the Circus Royal, London'.[56] We can follow Abraham's movements to some extent from life events recorded in parish registers, which seem to mirror what Highfill tells us of his career, suggesting that Abraham and his family spent time in London before moving to the Midlands. He may have been the Abraham Seward, 'gentleman', who married Mary Flanningham, by licence, at St Martin's in the Fields, on 10 October 1795.[57] A son, George, was baptized in Cheltenham on 7 August 1796,[58] then two children, Sarah and Abraham, at St Margaret's, Westminster on 23 September 1798.[59] These two children may well have been the Abraham Seward, aged 2, buried at Old Swinford, near

Stourbridge, on 1 October 1799,[60] and the Sarah Seward, daughter of Abraham Seward, buried at St Peter's, Wolverhampton on 29 December 1800.[61] Two further children, sons James and Joseph,[62] were baptized together in that same church on 1 January 1804.[63] By 1799, several Midland theatres that were on John Boles Watson's circuit, including those in Stourbridge and Wolverhampton, had been taken over by the same manager, Robert Hoy, and it seems likely that Abraham had left the capital to paint scenery for them.[64]

On 10 June 1805, the *Gloucester Journal* announced the opening of Watson's Cheltenham New Theatre in Cambray, praising the simple elegance of the new building, but also commenting: 'Nor need the Cheltenham Theatre yield to any other, for beautiful scenery, which is the work of the younger Seward, and allowed to be executed in a most masterly manner.'

The *Cheltenham Chronicle* of 21 June 1810 also praised his work, for the theatre and elsewhere:

> *We will not compare small things to great, but we feel a desire to bring into public notice the ingenious exhibitions of Mr Seward, whose Puppets excited applause, many years before our Theatre assumed its present elegant form. Mr. Seward's industrious efforts are deserving of encouragement; and the talents of his son, as a painter, have often been admired in the scenery of our Theatre, while the artist is almost unknown. There are some specimens of Mr. Seward's pencil in Lady Mary Lindsay Crawford's villa, in that of the Hon. Miss Monson, and some others, that evince talents of no mean cast; and the drawing forth of which, would reflect credit on the patronage of any liberal admirer of the Fine Arts.*

Following his father's death, it is possible that it was Abraham who took over the running of the theatre initially. He may also have already been short of money, for the *Cheltenham Chronicle* of 18 October 1810, advertised a series of performances to be held 'For the Benefit of Mr. Abraham Seward, Scene Painter (here and at the Theatre-Royal) and Performer' to include 'A Selection of the most new and popular airs, duetts, trios, & quartets, on the much improved Harmonized Glasses to conclude with Fantoccini Figures and a Comic Pantomine ... with new Scenery – and which has been for several Weeks preparing under the direction of Mr. A. Seward'.

The *Chronicle* also noted:

> *We would press on the notice of the Public the performances announced at the Sadlers Wells Theatre, for Wednesday next, for the benefit of Mr. Abraham Seward, of whose talents we have before had occasion to speak, and which the Public at large are not unacquainted with, from the decoration of the Theatre, Sheldon's Hotel, and several private Houses in this neighbourhood.* (See image, back cover)

This was the era of the wild Romantic genius, exemplified by Lord Byron, and there are hints that Abraham conformed to this stereotype. This anecdote, recounted nearly 30 years after Abraham's death, is no doubt embellished, but, as we shall see, there are reasons to think it could contain a kernel of truth:

> *There are two very good delineations of the old west gate and bridge in Gloucester. The one is at the dining-room at the Fleece Hotel, the other on the staircase of the Upper George Tavern, both in Westgate-street. They were both painted by an artist named Seward, a remarkably clever fellow, who also executed some very beautiful scenery for the old Cheltenham Theatre, now destroyed, when it was at the zenith of its fame, under the patronage of Colonel Berkeley (the late Earl Fitzhardinge) and his brothers. Seward was a most eccentric fellow. On one occasion he was ordered to paint*

> *a scene of a wood for a drama in which the Colonel was to make his appearance as a dramatic amateur. But the colours could not be readily procured, and the noble amateur, on the morning before the performance, found nothing but blank canvas, and Seward with equally blank looks. The Colonel was much annoyed, and did not hesitate to express his displeasure in rather strong language. Seward, not daring to retort, in a fit of passion, dashed his brush full of paint at the canvas. The green pigment trickled down in something of the shape of slender tree stems, and Seward immediately caught the idea, and that evening a scene such as the Cheltenham Theatre had never witnessed excited universal applause. Seward also painted many scenes for the old Gloucester Theatre.*[65]

That Abraham was an unconventional, perhaps troubled man, is also evidenced by two incidents from a few years later which landed him in gaol. On 2 July 1817, Abraham Seward, aged 45, was committed to the House of Correction in Northleach, for want of sureties for his appearance at Trinity Quarter Sessions, 'being charged on the oath of John Cossens, high constable of the town of Cheltenham, with having conducted himself yesterday in a riotous and disorderly manner in the public streets of Cheltenham; and also with having, at the same time and place violently assaulted the said John Cossens in the due execution of his duty'.[66] Two years later, on 27 May 1819, he was back in Northleach Prison, this time charged with being 'an idle and disorderly person, for that he hath for some time past refused to maintain his wife and children, and hath run away and absented himself from, and left his wife and children chargeable to the parish of Cheltenham'.[67]

What happened to him after this is unknown, as the last 18 years of Abraham's life are a complete mystery. Nothing more is heard of him until his death was briefly noted in the local press in 1837: 'Last week, in Gloucester Infirmary, Mr. Abraham Seward, formerly of Cheltenham, who, as a provincial theatrical scene painter, had, for many years, enjoyed great eminence.' [68] Curiously, no corresponding death certificate or burial record has so far been located. One wonders if he died in 'reduced circumstances', estranged from his family, perhaps?

Turning now to Abraham's younger brother, Samuel Seward (III), he was his parents' youngest child, baptized at Temple church in Bristol on 15 March 1788. His career is hard to trace with any confidence, but there is reason to believe that it was he who was the prime mover in the family's business affairs after the death of his father, Samuel Seward (II), in 1810 – especially, perhaps, after Abraham (III)'s troubles a few years later. Most, if not all, references after 1810 to 'Seward's Fantoccini' or 'Seward's Exhibition', as the travelling show was known, would probably be to this man, Samuel Seward (III). And there can be no doubt that he became the owner of the theatre premises in St George's Place, Cheltenham at some point after 1811, as it was the main legacy mentioned in his will, though exactly when and how he acquired it, and from whom, is uncertain.

The will of Samuel Seward (III), musician, of Cheltenham, was proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury on 29 April 1834,[69] but this document had been written nearly six years previously, on 1 May 1828. In it, he left his entire estate, including 'All that my messuage and tenement, lands, hereditaments and premises and my Theatre adjoining thereto with their respective Appurtenances situate lying and being in St. George's Place Cheltenham', to his mistress, Eliza Jones of Bath, who was also to be his executrix, and after her death to his two illegitimate sons by her, Edward[70] Seward Jones and George Seward Jones. It seems very likely he was the Samuel Seward (III), aged 40, buried at Crewkerne, Somerset on 21 September 1828, less than five months after he wrote this will; the parish register notes that the man in question was 'A travelling Showman'.[71] Why it took nearly six years for probate to be

completed is unknown, but it is not hard to imagine that there could have been some kind of dispute over the will, or at least complications in disposing of the theatre building.

So, it seems probable that it was largely Samuel who kept the family business going, both at Sadler's Wells House, and on the road, after his father's death. He appears to have travelled extensively and missed no opportunity to go wherever a crowd was likely to assemble and need entertaining.

On 4 January 1816, the *Cheltenham Chronicle* advertised 'Seward's Wonderful Exhibition', which was to be seen at Sadler's Wells House, St George's Place, Cheltenham, and it is worth reproducing the notice here, as it gives an excellent impression of the variety of entertainments on offer. We can reasonably assume that the same puppets formed part of the travelling show, and would have been accompanied by similar musical and acrobatic delights, as well as *tableaux vivants*.

SEWARD's Wonderful Exhibition

Being an astonishing display of posturing and tumbling by the youngest Performers that ever attempted. Mr. PHILLIPS[72] *will perform feats of agility and manly activity, in his peculiar manner of balancing his pupil; and his pleasing tricks with the CHILD of PROMISE ~ The Royal English FANTOCCINI of moving figures, being a pleasing recreation, ~ A laughable figure of Mother Shipton, who will dance a jig, display an attitude curiously expressive of an old woman, whose spirits are roused by music; she will take a candle and light her pipe, and smoke very naturally, without any apparent assistance. ~ A humorous figure of an Italian Scaramouch, who will exhibit several comic antics. ~ A curious figure of an enchanted Turk, that dances on the stage, and changes into six different figures; with several other mechanical figures quite different to any ever before exhibited. ~ To which will be introduced,*

Slack Rope Vaulting, by the celebrated Master Gray,

who has had the applause of every spectator. ~ Between the acts, HORNPIPE DANCING and SINGING. ~ The whole to conclude with a grand view of the MAIN OCEAN, where varieties of the watery element is introduced in a surprising manner, viz. all kinds of fish and fowl, sporting and playing in and on the surface of the water, as natural as life. Also Neptune, king of the sea, drawn in his chariot by sea horse, with tritons and mermaids attending him. Likewise a representation of a GRAND BATTLE, shewing the engagement between the English and French men of war; with the ships burning, sinking, and taking.

A few years later, again at Sadler's Wells House, the show advertised in the *Chronicle* on 8 July 1819 was very similar, but this notice highlights another of the family's talents, namely that of designing and building mechanical automata: 'The Performance to Commence with the AUTOMATON, or Rope Dancing Figure. This Figure is the sole Invention of Mr. Seward, and is entirely actuated by Machinery contained in the Trunk of the Body, and goes through different evolutions of Vaulting and Tumbling in a manner truly astonishing'. Also on the bill at this time were the figures recalled by the unnamed 'Fantoccini Man' interviewed by Mayhew some decades later: 'BEN, the SAILOR, who shews the true gesture of a British Tar, takes off his Hat, and puts it on again, in a most surprising manner, and dances a Hornpipe as natural as life. The Figure of a POLANDER, who will exhibit various Feats with his Spontoon.'[73]

The following November, 'Sewards's Royal English and Italian Fantoccini Figures' were to be seen in Bath.[74] The following April, the same show was on offer at the Black Horse Inn, St Clements, Oxford,[75] and then, at Christmas 1820, in Bath again, with possibly catastrophic results. On the night of 22 December 1820, the Kingston (or Lower) Assembly Rooms, Bath were totally destroyed by fire. The *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser* of 25 December 1820, reproducing a report from the *Bath Herald* of 23 December 1820, described how the 'conflagration must have been increased by a large quantity of oil ... which was deposited in one of the rooms near the spot where it is supposed the fire originated, being a small space used as a dressing-room to the Private Theatre, where Mr. Seward had that evening exhibited his Fantoccini; but this is mere conjecture.' In June 1821, Seward's Exhibition was in Cornwall, at Truro Whitsuntide Fair;[76] a few years later, in 1827, they could be seen at Coventry fair.[77]

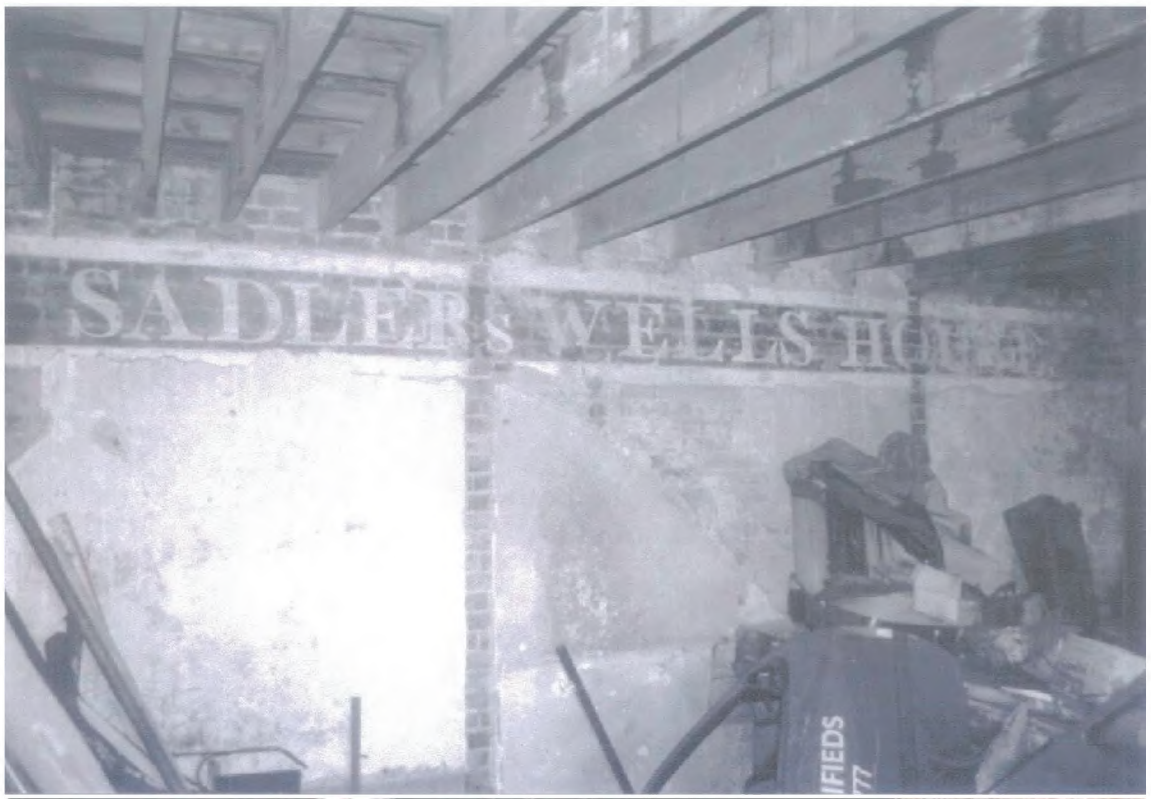
Performances did not always go without a hitch. The *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal* 12 March 1819 notes that 'Two men ... belonging to Seward's Exhibition, have been admitted to Lynn Gaol on a charge of robbing their employers of money taken at the door to the amount of £40.' And in 1827, Seward's Exhibition was entertaining the crowds at Tewkesbury Races,[78] on which occasion some member of the family (probably Samuel) seems to have got involved in an altercation: on 20 September 1827, one 'Seward a Showman', was confined to Tewkesbury Gaol, 'for assaulting Mr John Moore at the Races'. He was released upon payment of a fine of 7s 6d.[79]

The last time we find Seward's show advertised is in the spring of 1828, at which date he was already in Somerset, where he appears to have died the following autumn. The *Taunton Courier and Western Advertiser* of 26 March 1828 mentioned that 'Seward's Mechanical Exhibition' had set up on the Castle Green ahead of the assizes and attracted large crowds.

Although Samuel clearly retained ownership of the theatre building until he died, by 1821 it was being referred to as 'The Minor Theatre (late Sadler's Wells), Bottom of St George's-Place, Cheltenham',[80] and this change of name could perhaps indicate that somebody else had already taken over the running of the theatre by this date. Ten years later, in 1831, it was known as the New Clarence Theatre, and was briefly and unsuccessfully managed by one Mr. Belmont.[81] After that time, it was occupied by a variety of businesses before becoming a motor garage in the 1920s.[82]

The family's days as touring entertainers came to an end with Samuel's death but the puppets themselves continued in use for some time afterwards, perhaps sold by Samuel's executrix Eliza Jones: in 1838, Joseph Rebecqui was in Bristol, advertising his 'Mechanico-Dramatic Theatre of Variety', comprising 'the best series now existing in the British Dominions of FANTOCCINI or MARIONETTES, and AUTOMATA or ANDROIDES; including the entire collection once possessed by the celebrated SEWARD, well known in this city'.[83]

The Sewards' years of entertaining visitors to Cheltenham, and crowds across the south of England were clearly over. Although the descendants of Samuel (II) continued to live in the town, they were now earning their living, in the main, not as painters of theatrical scenery and decorators of the mansions of the rich and fashionable, but as mundane house painters, plumbers, glaziers etc., and by 1841 many of them were reduced to living in Elm Street and the other slums off the Tewkesbury Road. By 1892, a Seward was appointed by the Cheltenham Board of Guardians as their preferred 'plumber and painter' for repairs to the workhouse.[84] This was probably one of Abraham (III)'s grandsons: his aspirations to being a serious artist, and the glory days of his father's puppet show a hundred years earlier, were by then, no doubt, just a distant memory.



Top: The former façade of Seward's theatre in St George's Place, by then an internal wall, shortly before demolition.

Bottom: We can get an impression of how 'intimate' performances at Seward's theatre must have been from this photograph of the former auditorium, taken shortly before demolition.

Analytical Survey by K.A. Rodwell (November 2001) attached to Cheltenham Borough Council planning application 00/01236/LBC (Courtesy of R. Ladenburg, ALP Architects).

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[1] Samuel Seward was the author's five times great-grandfather.
[2] Numeric suffixes denoting the generation have been used to distinguish between individuals of the same name.
[3] The Folger Library cannot currently locate this item, but Highfill's summary of it is no doubt accurate.
[4] Highfill (see bibliography above) seems to imply that the playbill (original not seen) uses the spellings *Seward* and *Seaward* inconsistently.
[5] Identity unknown. Samuel had a son named John, baptized in Bristol in 1775, and another son James was christened there in 1780. But the character of Pantaloon was that of an elderly man - an unlikely role for a 13-year-old, let alone an 8-year-old.
[6] Highfill, Burnim, & Langhans, 1991, p.270.
[7] Hart, 1965, p.138.
[8] Denning & Ranger, 1993, p.42.
[9] Hembry, 1990, p.184.
[10] Hodsdon, J., *An Historical Gazetteer of Cheltenham* (Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 2003) https://www.bgas.org.uk/publications/cheltgaz.html
[11] Bristol & Avon Family History Society CD-ROM *Index to the Bristol Burgess Books Volumes 1 to 21, 1557-1995.*
[12] Ancestry UK, *Poll Books and Electoral Registers 1538-1893* https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/2410/ Original data: London Metropolitan Archives and Guildhall Library.
[13] Speaight, 1955, p.70.
[14] Speaight, 1955, p.154.

[15] Kresen Kernow (formerly Cornwall Archives) ref. T/1816; T/1825; T/1834; T/1846.
[16] Denning & Ranger, 1993, p.48.
[17] Samuel son of Samuel & Sarah Seward, St Botolph's, Bishopsgate, 21 May 1734. Ancestry *London, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1538-1812*
https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1624/; Original data: London Metropolitan Archives ref. P69/GIS/A/002/MS06419/015.
[18] Samuel, son of Michael Seward, St John's, Yeovil, 22 February 1735. Ancestry *Somerset, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1531-1812;*
https://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=60856; Original data: Somerset Heritage Centre ref. D\P\yeo.j/2/1/2.
[19] Samuel, son of Samuel & Ann Seward, Mevagissey, 30 January 1742. FindMyPast *Cornwall Baptisms;* https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-Records/cornwall-baptisms; Original data: Cornwall Family History Society.
[20] Evans, 1824, p.319.
[21] Charles Joseph Harford (1764-1830) was at one time a prominent member of the Society of Merchant Venturers.
[22] e.g. *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 30 August 1821.
[23] Ancestry *Gloucestershire, England, Wills and Inventories, 1541-1858*
https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/4294/ Original data: Gloucestershire Archives ref.Will/1811/45.
[24] Ancestry *England & Wales, Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills, 1384-1858;* Original data: The National Archives, Kew, ref. PROB 11/1830/363.
[25] Evans, 1824, p.319.
[26] Highfill, Burnim, & Langhans, 1991.
[27] Rosenfeld, 1960, p.73, suggests the Seward in question was named *James*.
[28] OED: droll, *n* ... 1. A funny or waggish fellow; a merry-andrew, buffoon, jester, humorist. †2. a. A comic or farcical composition or representation; a farce; an enacted piece of buffoonery; a puppet-show. Obsolete.
[29] Highfill, Burnim, & Langhans, 1991, p.269.
[30] *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette,* 29 October-26 November 1789.
[31] No. 13 from his collection '*Watercolour drawings of theatres and other buildings in towns of the south of England: the original drawings for James Winston's Theatric Tourist*', 1805, 1802. State Library of New South Wales, David Scott Mitchell Collection, ref. PXB 13, IE8603225
https://digital.sl.nsw.gov.au/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=FL8603309
[32] https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1381134
[33] Elder, 2019, states that the theatre was founded 11 years after George III's visit of 1788.
[34] Shenton, 1800.
[35] Italian plural of *fantoccino*, diminutive of *fantoccio* 'puppet'.
[36] *World Encyclopaedia of Puppetry Arts* https://wepa.unima.org/en/fantoccini/
[37] Speaight, 1983, p.66.
[38] Speaight, 1955, p.323.
[39] Denning & Ranger, 1993, p.42.
[40] Highfill (p.270) mentions a 'Seaward' who worked as a scene painter for Astley's Amphitheatre (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astley%27s_Amphitheatre) in 1796, but he seems likely to be have been Abraham (III). The man who played Harlequin was probably Samuel (II), though Abraham (II) may also have acted on stage.
[41] Dibdin, 1803, p.54.
[42] Davies, 1843, p.13.
[43] Dibdin, 1803, pp.54-55.
[44] Ryley, 1817, p.184.
[45] Clearly this is a reference to some member of the Seward family, with the name misheard or spelled phonetically.
[46] Mayhew, 1861, pp.60-63.
[47] Ancestry *Gloucestershire, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1538-1813*
https://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=4732; Original data: Gloucestershire Archives ref. P78/1 IN 1/55.
[48] *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. LXXX, July 1810.
[49] e.g. *London Pilot*, 27 July 1810.
[50] *Saunders's News-Letter*, Dublin, 7 August 1810.
[51] i.e. a manufacturer of Bristol blue glass.
[52] Of whom nothing else is known.
[53] The author's four times great-grandfather.

[54] Ancestry *Somerset, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1531-1812;* https://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=60856; Original data: Somerset Heritage Centre ref. D\P\ba.ab/2/1/2.
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[56] Highfill, Burnim, & Langhans, 1991, p.270.
[57] FindMyPast *Westminster Marriages* https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-Records/westminster-marriages.
[58] Ancestry *Gloucestershire, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1538-1813* https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/4732/; Original data: Gloucestershire Archives ref. P78/1 IN 1/6.
[59] FindMyPast *Westminster Baptisms* https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-Records/westminster-baptisms.
[60] FindMyPast: *National Burial Index For England & Wales*; https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/national-burial-index-for-england-and-wales.
[61] FindMyPast *Staffordshire Burials* https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-Records/staffordshire-burials
[62] The author's three times great-grandfather.
[63] FindMyPast *Staffordshire Baptisms* https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-Records/staffordshire-baptisms.
[64] Denning & Ranger, 1993, p.221.
[65] *Gloucester Journal,* 16 August 1862.
[66] Ancestry *Gloucestershire, England, Prison Records, 1728-1914* https://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=60895; Original data Gloucestershire Archives: Gloucester Gaol Calendar ref. Q/SG/2.
[67] Ancestry *Gloucestershire, England, Prison Records, 1728-1914* https://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=60895; Original data Gloucestershire Archives: Register of prisoners tried at Quarter Sessions ref. Q/Gc/7/2; Gloucester Gaol Calendar ref. Q/SG/2.
[68] Death notices in the *Cheltenham Journal and Gloucestershire Fashionable Weekly Gazette,* 25 September 1837. See also *Cheltenham Chronicle,* 28 September 1837 and *Bristol Mercury,* 30 September 1837.
[69] Ancestry *England & Wales, Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills, 1384-1858* https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/5111/; Original data: The National Archives, Kew ref. PROB 11/1830/363.
[70] Probably an error for *Edmund*. George and Edmund, sons of Samuel and Eliza Seward, baptized at St Paul's, Bristol on 25 November 1827 (Bristol & Avon FHS Baptism Indexes).
[71] Ancestry *Somerset, England, Church of England Burials, 1813-1914* https://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=60859; Original Data: Somerset Heritage Centre ref. D\P\crew/2/1/14
[72] Perhaps the William Phillips who married Mary Ann Seward (daughter of Samuel (II)) at St Mary's, Cheltenham on 15 April 1811. The entries for their children in the baptisms register of St Mary's describe William as a "Player".
[73] OED: *spontoon,* n. *... A species of half-pike or halberd carried by infantry officers in the 18th century.*
[74] *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette,* 18 November 1819.
[75] *Oxford Journal,* 22 April 1820.
[76] *Royal Cornwall Gazette,* 16 June 1821.
[77] *Coventry Herald,* 15 June 1827.
[78] *Cheltenham Journal and Gloucestershire Fashionable Weekly Gazette,* 24 September 1827.
[79] Ancestry *Gloucestershire, England, Prison Records, 1728-1914* https://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=60895; Original data: Gloucestershire Archives: Tewkesbury Gaol register ref. TBR/A13/1.
[80] *Cheltenham Chronicle,* 11 January 1821.
[81] Playbill now held by The Wilson, Cheltenham, quoted in the *Cheltenham Examiner,* 17 April 1913.
[82] Rodwell, 2001, p.2.
[83] *Bristol Mercury & Daily Post,* 7 April 1838.
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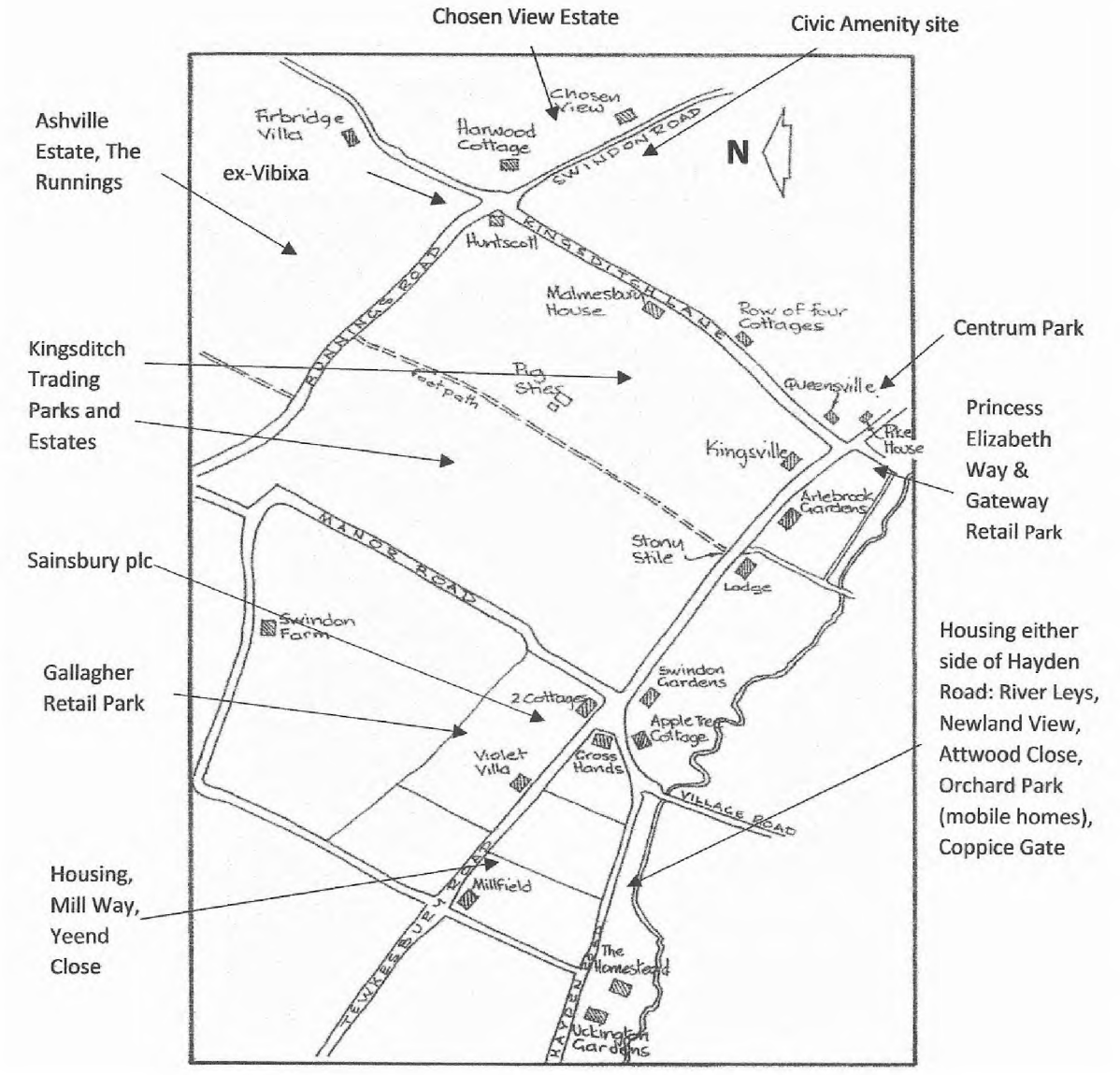
'An Acre of Violets' – The Market Gardens of Kingsditch and Neighbourhood'

SALLY SELF



Plan of Kingsditch market gardens and modern trading estates.

Market garden map, courtesy of Peter Allen © 2002

Introduction

Cheltenham has been written about from the viewpoints of a market town well known for its malting and brewing, its mineral springs and famous visitors and as a centre for education, tourism and shopping. In the 20th century it made headlines as the controversial headquarters for Government communications and now in the 21st century as a £400M 'first ever' cyber park, but never for its market gardens. This article sets out a brief history of market gardening in Kingsditch and its immediate neighbourhood and explores what several previously little publicised sources can add. The area, once agricultural, is now a densely packed commercial estate: the last link to its rural past, the remaining fields of Swindon Farm, are about to disappear under numerous new houses (see plan, previous page).

Research has been taking place, since 2019, into the Kingsditch trading estate and the results will form part of the economic history section of the history of Swindon parish which will, in turn, become part of the *Victoria County History of Gloucestershire*, Vol. XV: Cheltenham and surrounding parishes – locally referred to as Cheltenham's 'Big Red Book'.

Kingsditch and its vicinity

The area of research is bounded by the Birmingham to Bristol railway line to the east, the Tewkesbury Road and/or the river Chelt to the south, the Swindon/Uckington parish boundary to the west and Wyman's Brook to the north. For many centuries, the manor of Swindon and part of the manor of Cheltenham dominated the area.

The land was held, pre-conquest, by Stigand,[1] and administered by the monastery of St Oswald's of Gloucester as an 'external' manor.[2] Domesday notes, post-conquest, that the manor increased in value from £3 to £4 10s and, it is believed, that this points to an increase in arable land with a decrease in wooded areas.[3] During the following centuries the land was cultivated in a mix of open fields and small enclosures.[4] A glebe terrier of 1828[5] records a tithe consisting of corn, rye, hay, beasts, milch cows and calves, sheep, lambs and fleeces, indicating pastoral farming. Field names associated with crops and animals also indicate farming practices.[6] The majority of the strips lay on a north-south axis, where the 'ridge and furrow' cultivation aided the drainage of the low-lying, marshy fields into Wyman's Brook and river Chelt.[7]

This article explores, and attempts to give reasons for, the change from mixed farming to mainly market gardening, and looks at demographic and economic considerations and the area's suitability to grow market garden crops. One factor is the growth of Cheltenham's population from the 1790s.[8] Secondly, from the middle of the 17th century there was a marked change in diet initiated by the well-off which spread to the middle classes and increased the demand for vegetables and fruit. Cheltenham's social make-up, consisting of the affluent and well-informed, probably increased the demand for fresh produce. It is also believed that fluctuating prices affected the poorer sections of the population leaving them unable to afford meat and grain products[9] – Cheltenham had a large population of labourers and servants.

Market gardens in context

The market garden, as an area dedicated to the intensive growing of fruit and vegetables, for sale to a community, is a relatively new concept. The first gardens were mostly in London with, in 1605, the formation of the Gardeners Company and the Fruiterers Company. Centred on

Wandsworth, Battersea and Bermondsey they made use of night soil and street sweepings to achieve excellent crops.[10] The expansion of the city, with better communications, led to the gardens moving outwards, many into areas of Bedfordshire, where the acreage of market gardens increased by 106% between 1885 and 1896.[11] An even larger increase of 142% was noted in the Vale of Evesham. Here land converted from pasture to intensive cropping could increase in rental value from £5 to £10 an acre. Most of the holdings were small, averaging 4.6 acres, with a median value of 2.5 acres.[12] Most Kingsditch gardens were of a similar size.

Locally, prior to the 19th century, Cheltenham's burgage plots would have satisfied the needs of many. The plots to the north of the High Street stretched to the Back Road (now St Margaret's Road and Albion Street), some 220yds long.[13] Used as gardens and for fruit trees, one contained three roods (¾ acre).[14] In the tithings, references to 'homestead', 'home piece' and 'garden ground' are numerous in manor court rolls, with cherry, apple and pear orchards also mentioned.[15]

An Act in 1589 had stipulated that new cottages should have four acres of land to provide food for the family.[16] This was widely abused. John Stubbe, in his Memorandum Book, seems to refer to an extreme case in Charlton Kings in the early 1600s: 'there have been already built & converted to cottages 60 or thereabouts within the memory of man … [and they] do take up and keep some more part of their grounds in several'.[17]

The town had a weekly market from 1223, with a fruit market being recorded in 1595.[18] A 'new' market house was built in 1823 where 'market people, basket women and porters' sold green groceries and other [local] produce.[19] Goding refers to country carriers bringing 'corn, fish, butter and vegetables' to the town, though he also mentions the 'repeated efforts made by the visitors to obtain supplies from the distance' owing to 'imperfect modes of transit'.[20]

The suitability of the local soil was noted by John Prinn, in the last decade of the 17th century: '[the] soile is sandy and very naturall for carrets, cabbages and Turnips, insomuch that the whole neighbourhood for sundry miles round it is annually furnished with these three from this Towne …'.[21]

The gardens of Kingsditch

The earliest detailed research, using local records, was carried out by Col. R M. Grazebrook in the 1960s.[22] His analysis of the 1839 tithe map and apportionment[23] indicated that the majority of Kingsditch was pasture with small areas of orchard and arable.[24] The apportionment only records gardens for the village houses. The 'orchards' could have provided three crops: the fruit, grazing for sheep and horses and parcels of hand-dug ground for crops. Later evidence supports this.[25]

Early town maps, annuaires and directories do not cover Swindon. The Old Town Survey of 1855-7 includes only the eastern part of Tewkesbury Road.[26] Ordnance Survey maps clarify land usage, though the symbol for orchards and market gardens are identical. The first edition, between 1873-84, indicates that orchards and gardens were mainly adjacent to Tewkesbury and Manor Roads, while by the turn of the century the area had expanded either side of Kingsditch Lane, up to and beyond Manor Road and south of Tewkesbury Road.[27]

Lack of evidence, prior to the 1840s, does not preclude the existence of gardens, though evidence from further afield indicates that other gardening areas, Bedfordshire and the Vale of Evesham, developed earlier.[28]

Census returns for 1841, and those following, record house names that became familiar as market gardens.[29] The first one mentioned is Harwood (*c.*1839), followed by Arlebrook (1851), Queensville (1861), and in the last decades of the 19th century, Kingsville, Huntscott, Chosen View, The Hollies, Violet Villa, Swindon Gardens and Furbridge, all north of Tewkesbury Road, with to the south, The Ark, The Moors, a second Swindon Gardens and the *Cross Hands*.[30] This expansion, post-1860, marks a peak in gardening which carried through to the first decades of the 20th century. Late arrivals were Malmesbury House and Millfield and probably Riviera Gardens. Apparently, some garden grounds were growing crops prior to the building of the houses.

A national survey of land use in the early 1930s recorded that Kingsditch and the adjacent areas south of Tewkesbury Road were mainly cultivated as orchards, though as previously mentioned orchards could produce three 'crops'. Also, the survey's categories are broad – orchard, arable or meadow/permanent pasture, with arable defined as any agriculture including horticulture. Huntscott is the only garden named, with Clarke's Bedlam Ground designated as arable.[31]

During the 19th and 20th centuries, Swindon Farm, of around 60 acres, was central to the area.[32] It was (and just continues to be) a farm not a market garden but had *c.*12 acres of orchards in the late 19th century.[33] Around the 1920s-30s its apple orchards contained 'poor varieties only useful for cider making', and one field, Clarke's Bedlam Ground, grew blocks of wheat, oats, potatoes, swede, turnips and kale, with strips leased to locals to grow their own produce.[34]

The Kingsditch gardens were of a variable size: Millfield had only a third of an acre, Huntscott, four, The Hollies, nine and a half and the Dando garden was larger with 11 acres.[35] Some increase in size was noted in a survey of 1950/51 which found that a 'typical holding' was between 10 and 20 acres, with 'all types of vegetables grown … between apple and plum trees'; these were 'originally sent to the local market but were now sold to wholesalers'.[36] Average size of holdings in gardening counties, until mechanisation arrived, was small: hand cultivation precluded areas much above twelve areas.[37] The size of the local gardens was not static. Economic circumstances led to expansion and contractions leading to more land being rented, sublet or purchased and returned to garden ground.[38]

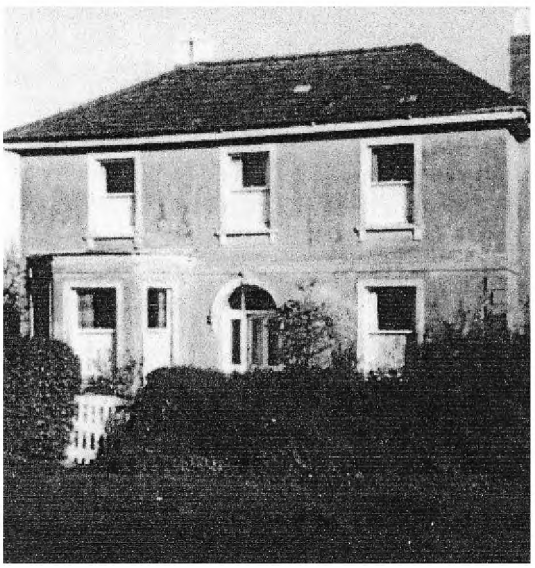
Violet Villa may be a 'typical' garden, but lack of contemporary evidence makes it hard to draw conclusions, though later evidence points to it being so.[39] Between 1890 and 1908, the owner of the Villa, Sir J.T. Agg Gardner, was in dispute with his tenants the Smiths. Two valuations with other court documents give details.[40] They recorded that the Villa grew plums (1003 trees), damsons (529), pears (307) and cherries, with gooseberry and other soft fruit, nut bushes, 33 patches of potatoes, celery and 'an acre of violets'. Land and crops were valued at £759, though by 1908 the orchards were in poor condition and it was recommended that approximately 40% should be removed. There was a detached house with work sheds, storerooms and a heated greenhouse. Nearly 250ft of hose and the sinking of three wells indicate that crops could be irrigated. There is no mention of horsepower, so presumably all work was carried out using hand tools. Claim and counterclaim indicate that the violet field was previously pasture but was being used as gardening ground, attracting a claim for

compensation of £500.[41] Agg Gardner also claimed that the land had not been manured, though the presence of two heaps of manure would indicate otherwise.

Seizing an early crop was important. Violet Villa had a heated greenhouse and cloches were widely used. Bill Attwood covering seedlings on his garden

(*Courtesy of Ernie Attwood, SV Coll VII, p.93)*

The Kingsditch houses, mostly built in the second half of the 19th century, show a marked similarity – detached, two storey, with a central front entrance, two reception rooms, built of brick, often rendered, and with tiled roofs. The style, and the numbers built, suggest a prosperous period when profits were high and building costs relatively low.[42] The style continued into the 20th century when Tom Carey, market gardener and builder, erected Malmesbury on his land.[43] Earlier buildings were (and some still are) timber-framed, with daub and wattle infill and thatched roofs.[44] Some terraced cottage accommodation, such as the row on Kingsditch Lane, consisted of two-up and two-down with one outdoor toilet and a single tap over a pump, for six families. These were later condemned on the grounds of polluted water and the people rehoused in The Moors council houses.[45]



Violet Villa. The 'typical' turn of the century market garden house

(Courtesy of Lucy Staff, SV Coll VII, p.87)

Mr Humphries at Uckington Gardens. The older market gardening houses were timber framed, with daub and wattle infill

(*Courtesy of Eileen Allen)*

The gardeners

Early census returns must be used with caution as each one used different occupational categories: market gardeners were included with all gardeners or with agricultural labourers. In 1831, there were 23 of 45 families in the parish (51%) chiefly engaged in agriculture. Seven of the 23 (30%) were classed as 'owners' employing 23 labourers,[46] with the other two-thirds renting from landlords such as Agg Gardner,[47] Swindon Manor or the church.[48] The 1851 census for Cheltenham Borough records nearly 1000 agricultural labourers and 547 gardeners. Gardening families that can be traced to Kingsditch include the Smiths (several), and also the Cosnetts, Bakers and Youngs.

Names multiply in the second half of the century, with some persisting into the 20th century: the Smiths (1851-1941) at Swindon Gardens, The Moors and Violet Villa; the Cook family (1861-1960s) at Swindon Gardens and Chosen View; the Holes (1881-1911) with Huntscott and Harwood; the Sindreys and Mays (1905-1962) at Kingsville;[49] Leachs, Burroughs and Hulberts (1939-2020) at Swindon Farm.[50] Other traceable names include the Yeends, gardeners and publicans at the *Cross Hands* inn and the Slatters at Arlebrook Gardens and The Lodge. Many of the families intermarried.[51]

Further information comes from twentieth century sources.[52] Gardening families in 1911 numbered seven with a further three noted as farmers who had extensive orchards and grew vegetables; there were 16 gardens in and around Kingsditch in 1914[53] and 13 in the register of 1939.[54] While the gardens were important during the Second World War, its conclusion brought increasing pressures which started the decline. Men who had been retained in gardening had aged, others returning from the war had wider horizons, the back-breaking work became less rewarding and council pressure to increase the allocation of land for 'industrial use' all took a toll.

Initially soil preparation was done by hand, with some input for ploughing and harrowing by horsepower. This was followed by hand sowing, planting out, weeding and harvesting, employing the owner/tenant, with a small number of employees and family members. Horse cultivation continued into the 1940s and 50s, making use of one or two carthorses, with a pony for lighter tasks.[55] Evidence indicates that fruit trees, often aging and in excessive numbers,[56] were replaced by a widening selection of market crops. These belonged to the brassica and root families for winter harvesting and salad crops, flowers and bedding plants for the summer.[57] Young plants were 'brought forward' under glass from around the 1900s, but initially greenhouses were small. The attitude of 'growing a little bit of everything' saw the gardeners through the Depression, though with demand decreasing some crops had to be dumped.[58] The intensive cropping demanded fertilizers. Gone were the stable sweepings, but in their place were spent hops from Cheltenham Original Brewery, wool shoddy from Birmingham, and fish-based fertilizers from the Humber Fertilizer Company.[59]

There was some movement of families into the area from within Gloucestershire and further afield between the 1850s and 1910, at the height of the gardening expansion. The Smiths came from the Midlands; the Hulberts from around Tetbury; the Cosnetts from Pershore (Worcs); the Bakers from Wotton-under-Edge; the Wellans and Slatters from within the county; the Holes from Wootton Courtney (Somerset); and the Stanleys from Evesham (Worcs).[60]

Back-breaking work planting leeks in often wet and muddy fields in Arlebrook Gardens.

(Courtesy of Dawn Hulbert, SV Coll VII, p.75)

Horses were widely used up to the 1930s. Mechanisation was introduced as a result of the availability, after World War II, of reconditioned and repurposed vehicles.

(Courtesy of Dawn Hulbert/Gloucestershire Echo)

George Hulbert driving Swindon farm's first tractor, 1940s.

(Courtesy of Dawn Hulbert, SV Coll VI, p.66)

The Mays on their Trusty rotavator with Douglas Equipment factory in the background. It sums up the advance of factories into the productive garden of Kingsville.

(Courtesy of Sue Brasher)

The role of women was considerable. Apart from child-rearing and household duties, they were actively involved in garden work. Widows, often with the help of older family members, took over the running of gardens: Lucy Hole at Huntscott, Emma Smith at the Cross Hands and Matilda Burroughs at Swindon Farm.[61] Generally much of the planting and weeding was considered women's work; nursery work, involving cut flowers and bedding plants, was deemed particularly suitable for women's hands.[62]

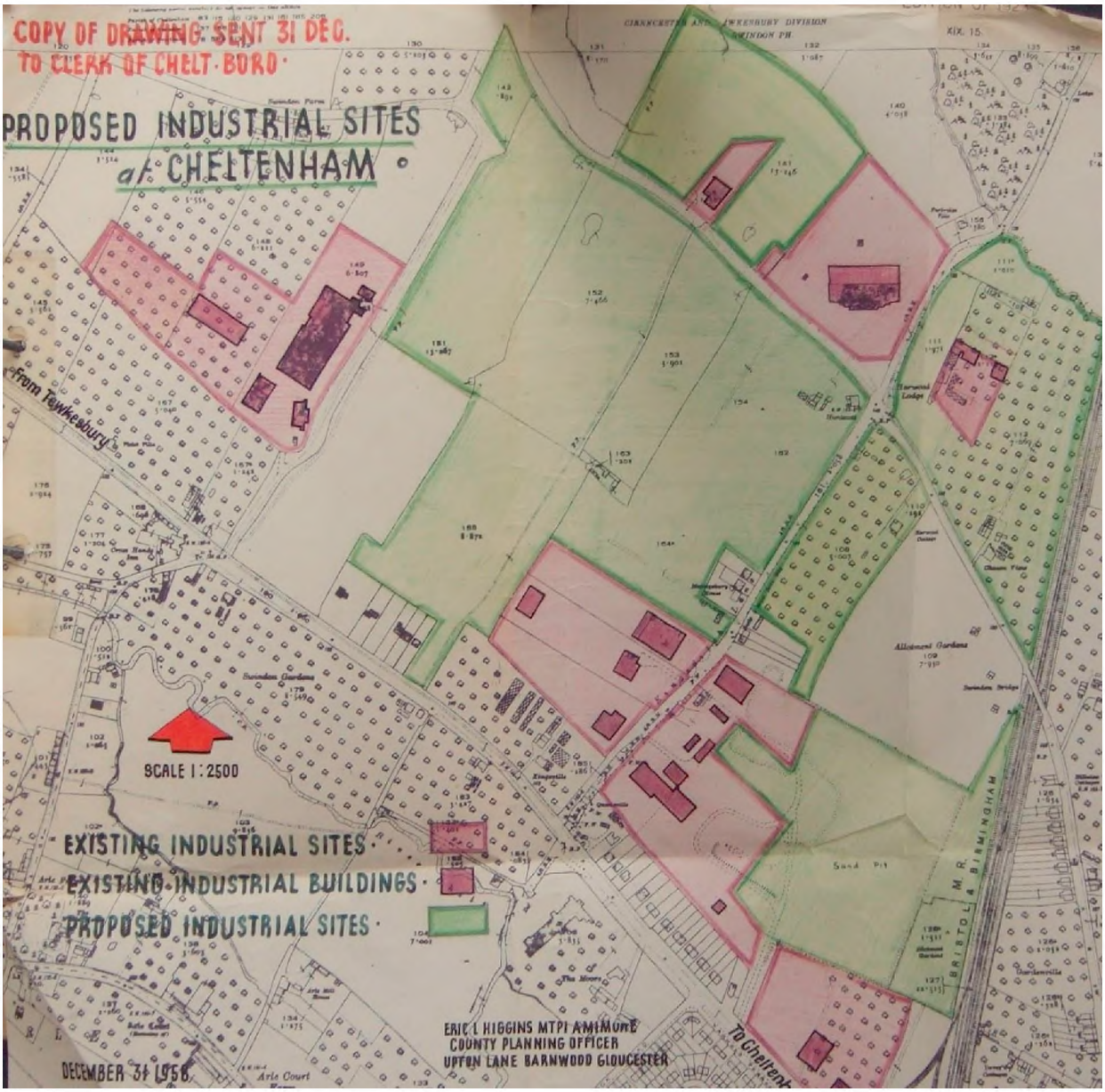
The dawn to dusk work was not well rewarded. A Huntscott wages book for 1920 to 1923 gives details of wages and hours.[63] Apart from Jim Hole, there were two full-time employees, who worked between 35 and 50 hours a week for 10d (4p) an hour, with paid overtime.[64] Digging was at piece-work rates, reckoned at between half a chain and two and a half chains in a week (10m to 50m). There was also Mrs Goodall who worked between 30 and 35 hours a week at 6d (2.5p) an hour. Family help consisted of son, Bill and daughters, Jessie and Nancy. Following the Agriculture Act 1920 wages rose modestly, but with food prices falling – potatoes per cwt dropped from 8s (40p) in 1928 to 5s (25p) in 1938 – the Act was repealed, wages fell and continued to fall.[65] Bill Hole, the son, was paid per week £2 10s (£2.50) in April 1920, rising in 1921 to £2 14s (£2.70) but dropping in 1922 to £1 13s 4d (£1.66½).

Between the two wars, mechanisation appeared. Produce previously taken to market by horse and cart began to be transported by lorry – two fine examples were in use in the 1920s (and see image, front cover). Tractors probably appeared later, in the 1940s, using second-hand reconditioned vehicles. Certainly by the 1950s a Fordson on steel wheels was used on Swindon Farm;[66] as was a potato planter, purchased for £40 in 1957.[67] It is likely that cultivators were common from that time, being cheap to run and handy for the restricted spaces.

Twentieth century marketing used both new and old methods. Len Stanley 'went out all day with his lorry selling his produce, wholesale generally, but he also worked in the evenings … his wife who had been in the shop all day collected [the pony] at night and Len would lead the horse round … selling from the back of his wagon'.[68]

Albert Humphreys traded in a similar way; Maud Price had a little car and took the produce to the local Fine Fare and Colonial shops. Some crops went straight into family-owned shops, many on the High Street, one proudly announcing they were 'specialists in choice fruit and early vegetables'.[69] Nationally, the formation of Marketing Boards, run as cooperatives, went some way to alleviate the worst of the Depression. Locally, the Mays and the Wilcoxes helped set up the Gloucestershire Marketing Society. In 1934 they gained permission for a covered market on Gloucester Road,[70] which dealt with large quantities of locally produced crops, and where, in the early morning, horses, carts and hand trucks clogged up the neighbouring streets.[71]

The end of the Second World War saw the beginning of the rapid change from horticulture to industry and later to retail trading. In 1931 Cheltenham Borough Council had plans for parts of Kingsditch to be allocated for 'industrial use', the intention being to move 'noxious and non-complying' businesses away from the centre.[72] The hurried (and unwelcome) arrival of a (wartime) 'shadow' factory at Swindon Farm opened the way for this to happen,[73] and a Borough Council map of 1958 (see next page) shows the decreasing garden ground and the expansion of industrial sites.[74] Violet Villa, at one time earmarked for the extraction of sand,[75] and Kingsville managed to hold out into the 1960s, partly by diversifying away from garden crops,[76] but industrial manufacturing and retail outlets finally saw the demise of all the gardens.



This map of 1958 clearly shows the demise of market gardening and the steady infiltration of industry. Areas: pink - already industrial sites or buildings; green – proposed industrial sites.

(*Courtesy of Gloucestershire Archives. Ref. K193/47/SPD/A1/5: Development Plan and Survey First Review 1951-56 Industry and Employment*)

Finale

Gone is the 'acre of violets', gone are the dahlias, pansies, leeks and lettuce! In their place are acres of rectangular concrete, steel buildings and car parks. The hard life in wet and muddy fields has given way to equally demanding work on factory floors, in offices and shops.

That Kingsditch and its immediate surroundings changed is clear, but the reason for the timing of the transformation from farming to gardening is less certain. Why was the increase in the

number of market gardens long delayed, when the population[77] of the town rose from *c.*3,000 in 1801 to *c.*35,000 in 1851? One possibility is that the roads between Cheltenham and the already well-developed Vale gardens around Evesham and Pershore were mostly turnpiked by 1825.[78] A steady inflow of fresh products may have made locally grown crops uneconomical while farming was lucrative. However, as agriculture became less profitable in the post-Napoleonic years, and as the profits made by Vale gardeners rose,[79] it is likely that a local opportunity was recognised. One wonders if the expansion of the educational establishments and the encouragement of tourists and shoppers also played a significant part.

This picture of delayed development may also be distorted by the lack of early evidence, which was addressed in the second half of the century as national statistics and maps became available. In Cheltenham, the numbers employed in agriculture (including horticulture) increased between 1840 and 1860 – the sharp rise, plotted against the small national increase, is significant,[80] but unfortunately, Borough and county returns give little information specific to Kingsditch.

Other factors could be that Swindon families, unable to finance large holdings, were well able to purchase small parcels from the local farmers,[81] for whom crops had become less lucrative. Further, gardening needed little equipment and could be worked by hand using family labour.[82] Also, understanding of soil composition and ways to improve productivity advanced from the mid-19th century,[83] and John Prinn's 'sandy soil' may have been given new consideration.

By the 20th century personal views and photographic evidence of gardening life appear. These may be subjective, but the reminiscences featured in the Swindon Village Society History Project Collections are seldom pessimistic and camera images show proud ownership of 'modern' advances. Gardening was at the mercy of the weather, crop prices and probably many aching backs, but there was a ready acceptance of the circumstances. Even the change from horticulture to commerce was accepted as inevitable with the area already hosting the gas works, the abattoir, the destructor site and an asphalt factory. What was once the rural backwater became, and is, one of the busiest areas of the town.

Acknowledgements
I am greatly indebted to Eileen Allen, Swindon Village Society History Project for much of the research used in this article; also to Dr John Chandler for his suggestions of several sources and his comments on the article. Other contributions and information have been generously given by the following: Peter Barlow, Martin and Nicholas Boothman, Sue Brasher, Hazel Luxton, Barbara Parker, Oliver Pointer, Jill Waller and Jim Wilkie, National Vintage Tractor and Engine Club. Photographs are individually acknowledged.

For further information on the Swindon/Kingsditch area I recommend the Swindon Village Society History Project Collections I to VII. Please contact projects.clhs@btinternet.com for further details.

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[1] Stigand was an Anglo-Saxon churchman who became Archbishop of Canterbury.
[2] Heighway, C. and Bryant, R., *Golden Minster, the Anglo-Saxon minster and later medieval priory of St Oswald at Gloucester* (1990), p.40, quoting Hase (1988), p.51-4. It is believed it was administered by a canon, rather than being under direct monastic control.
[3] The meaning of 'Swindon' is understood to be 'the hill where swine are kept'.
[4] Gloucestershire Historic Environment Record, nos. 50484, 50485, 51098
[5] Gloucestershire Archives (GA), GDR/V5/297T

[6] Rawes,B., 'The Fields and Field Names of the Hundred of Cheltenham. Part 2: the Parish of Swindon', *Cheltenham Local History Society Journal,* 7 (CLHS, 1989). Names include Barley, Long Barley and Ploughed and The Runnings, for grazing cattle.
[7] GA, GDR/T1/175, tithe map and apportionment, 1839.
[8] Population 3076 (census 1801); 35,051 (census 1851); 41,923 (census 1871)
[9] Thirsk, J., ed. *The Agrarian History of England and Wales,* Vol. 4 (CUP, 1967), p.508.
[10] Webber, R., 'London's Market Gardens', *History Today*, Issue 12 (December, 1973). Battersea asparagus was especially prized.
[11] Beavington, F., 'The Development of Market Gardening in Bedfordshire, 1799-1939', *The Agricultural History Review,* Vol. 23, No. 1 (1975), pp.23-47. The highest concentration was around Sandy in the valleys of the Ivel and Ouse.
[12] Martin, J. M., 'The Social and Economic Origins of the Vale of Evesham Market Gardening Industry', *The Agricultural Review*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (1985), pp.41-50. Prior to 1840s it is believed that orchards were more dominant.
[13] GA, Q/RI/40. Copy maps used, D855/E9. See also Craven, A. and Hartland, B., *Cheltenham Before The Spa* (VCH, 2019), pp.21-22; Greet, C. and Hodsdon J., *'The Town and Tithing Plan of c.1800'* (CLHS, 2013), maps, pp. 37, 40-1.
[14] Hodsdon, J., ed. *Cheltenham Manor Court Books 1692*-1803, GRS 24 (Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 2010), p.180.
[15] Hodsdon (2010).
[16] 31 Eliz c. 7 (1589). The legislation was aimed at stemming the rising numbers of the poor.
[17] GA, D855/68, f28. 'Several' (separate) as opposed to 'common' land.
[18] Craven, A. and Hartland, B., *Cheltenham Before The Spa* (VCH, 2019), pp. 89-90.
[19] Griffith's *New Historical Description of Cheltenham and Its Vicinity* (1826). Accessed via Google.
[20] Goding, J., *Norman's History of Cheltenham* (1863), p.273.
[21] Hodsdon (2010), p.xxxii. John Prinn, under-steward of the Manor from 1692.
[22] GA, D3571 (Grazebrook).
[23] GA, GDR/T1/175. Swindon 1839. Map available at http://www.kypwest.org.uk; apportionment available at https://ww3.gloucestershire.gov.uk/GROTithe/TitheSearch.aspx
[24] Orchards included Long Orchard, Carthorse Orchard, and parts of Furzen Hill; arable included Ploughed Piece, Swindon Field, Bedlam Green and Bedlam Piece.
[25] In the 1950s it is noted that 'all types of vegetables are grown frequently between apple and plum trees (GA, CBR/C5/4/3/1/1, p. 26). Oral memories also support this, see Swindon Village Collections (SV Coll.) VI and VII.
[26] The Old Town Survey, 1855-7, was principally drawn up for the purpose of installing a new system of sewers following cholera outbreaks.
[27] Maps accessed via Know Your Place http://www.kypwest.org.uk/ and National Library of Scotland https://maps.nls.uk/
[28] Martin, J. M., (1985), pp.43-4; Beavington, F., (1975), p.24.
[29] Census 1841-1911; GA, D2025/box98/bundle1; GA, DA21/710/6; OS maps.
[30] The inn was run by the Yeend family who had a market garden to the west of the inn.
[31] Land Use Survey, 1930-1938, https://digimap.edina.ac.uk/
[32] Probably part of the estate of the Clarke's of Alstone, see Frith, B., *Bigland's Gloucestershire Collection*, Vol.3 (N-T), (BGAS, 1992), p.1232. Field names include Clarke's Lower Ground and Clarke's Bedlam Piece. The size of Swindon farm varied considerably, being 94.5 acres in 1927 (SV Coll. VI, p.54).
[33] Around 20% of its fields, OS map 1873-1884.
[34] SV Coll. VI, p.65 and SV Coll. VII, p.74.
[35] Census, 1881, 1891; *Gloucestershire Echo*, 7 June 1932; SV Coll. VII, p.93.
[36] GA, CBR/C5/4/3/1/1.
[37] Beavington, F., (1975), p.25, p.29; Martin, J. M., (1985), pp.48-9.
[38] Violet Villa, c.1890 rented an acre for £40 pa to grow violets. Also GA, D2025/box786/bundle6 and SV Coll. VII, pp.73-4, p.94.
[39] *Cheltenham Chronicle* and *Gloucestershire Echo*, June 1932: sale advertisement. The Hollies had 1,300 fruit trees and 'bush plants' on its 9.5 acres.
[40] GA, D2025/Box786/Bundle6.
[41] Landlords (not necessarily tenants) believed that intensive market gardening robbed the soil. The claims for compensation were finally taken to arbitration by The Board of Trade. The Smiths received £295, Agg Gardner nothing but his rent of £43 and both paid their legal costs.
[42] Examples would include Kingsville, SV Coll. VII, p.69, Huntscott, SV Coll. VII, p.73, Millfield, SV Coll. VII, p.91 and Violet Villa, SV Coll. VII, p.87.

[43] GA, DA21/716/6 (1911).
[44] A thatched cottage, Uckington Gardens, was demolished and replaced 1910-12 (SV Coll. VI, p.22-3). Bedlam Mill/Farm has been dated to the 17th century or earlier.
[45] SV Coll. VII, p.75-76, 78. The row of cottages was condemned 10 May 1937, GA, CBR/C2/1/2/34. Two even older cottages were on the corner of Manor and Tewkesbury Roads, (Smiths, Swindon Gardens), GA, D4858/2/4/1964/6.
[46] Later in the century, two owner-occupiers were the Adcocks at Queensville and the Slatters at Arlebrook.
[47] Sir James Tynte Agg Gardner owned Swindon Farm and Violet Villa, 1880s-90s, as part of the John Gardner estate (GA, D2025/Box788/bundle13, 1837-1894).
[48] The Smiths at Swindon Gardens (north) rented their land from the church, and it was part of the charitable Walwyn Trust.
[49] Kingsville became the biggest gardens west of Kingditch Lane renting 'all the Manor land' east of Manor Road (SV Coll. VII, p.68).
[50] Census, 1841-1911, electoral register 1939.
[51] *Gloucestershire Echo*, 15 February and *Cheltenham Chronicle,* 22 February, 1941, double wedding of Cook and Cooke families. For further details of family relationships, see SV Coll. VI and VII.
[52] Census, 1911, Kelly's Directory, 1914, electoral register, 1939.
[53] Kelly 1914.
[54] Electoral Register 1939.
[55] SV Coll. VI, p.65.
[56] GA, D2025/Box786/bundle.
[57] SV Coll. VII, pp.81-2, 92.
[58] SV Coll. VII, p.74, Wilcox at Arlebrook Gardens.
[59] SV Coll. VII, p.82, p.90.
[60] SV Coll. VII, pp.64-72.
[61] SV Coll, VII, p.53, p.65, p.70.
[62] SV Coll. VII. p.96
[63] Wages book April 1920 to March 1923, on loan to Swindon Village Society by Barbara Parker, daughter of Bill Hole of Huntscott.
[64] Overtime rate was only a little over the basic rate.
[65] Agriculture Act, December 1920. The Act was repealed June 1921. National wages fell by as much as 40% during the Depression.
[66] SV Coll. VI, pp.57, 66, 70, a Fordson Super Major. Jim Wilkie (National Vintage Tractor and Engine Club) added further information - manufactured prior to 1924, used steel wheels to save on tyres. widely used on market gardens.
[67] SV Coll. VI, p.65, p.70. Previously they were planted and harvested by hand.
[68] SV Coll. VII, p.74.
[69] Kelly, 1914 - Dovey, The Ark, Tewkesbury Road at 331 High Street; Hole, Huntscott at 293 High Street; Sindrey, fruiters and greengrocers, at 303 High Street; Barretts, at 384d High Street, 77 Upper Bath Road and 18 and 19 Suffolk Parade; SV Coll. VII, p.72; Stanleys, 'The Evesham Shop', Lower High Street.
[70] GA, CBR/C5/6/1/2/9, plan no. 3806.
[71] SV Coll. VII, p.89. GMS later moved to Alstone Lane, with a retail section known as Four Seasons.
[72] GA, D12400/10, pp.605-6, Cheltenham and District Joint Town Planning Scheme Map 28 May 1931.
[73] SV Coll. VI, p.54.
[74] GA, K193/47.
[75] GA, D3571, orange folder, loose papers and maps.
[76] Both became nurseries for a time (oral memory, Sue Brasher).
[77] www.visionofbritain.org.uk, population, Borough of Cheltenham, accessed October 2020. Visitors also swelled these numbers, especially during the summer season.
[78] Cossens, A., 'The Tewkesbury and Cheltenham Roads', *Gloucestershire Society for Industrial Archaeology, Journal,* 1998, pp.40-60; 5 Geo.4 c.cxl (1824) Evesham and Cheltenham Turnpike Roads Act.
[79] Martin, J. M., (1985), p.42-3.
[80] www.visionofbritain.org.uk, agriculture, Borough of Cheltenham, accessed October 2020.
[81] Apart from Swindon Farm already mentioned, there were the small farms of Bedlam and The Moores, each with less than 12 acres.
[82] At the start of the 20th century, children per family ranged between 2 and 7.
[83] Agricultural colleges and experimental stations were set up as early as 1834. https://www.rothamsted.ac.uk/, accessed October 2020.

Theodora Mills – a voice to be heard

ADRIAN COURTENAY

RESEARCHERS USING THE LOCAL CHELTENHAM PRESS may well have noticed the name Theodora Mills appearing in the pages of many editions throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Even the briefest of searches of the British Newspaper Archive produces a list of over fifty references, not only where Theodora's suffrage exploits feature in the *Gloucestershire Echo's* '25 Years Ago' but also as a regular contributor to the letters pages opining on a number of contemporary issues. Born in Leckhampton in 1874, Theodora spent almost her entire life in Cheltenham and in every sense was an active and articulate citizen of the community. Her support for, and active leadership in, the women's suffrage movement has been well documented elsewhere and there are a number of excellent books on the subject. The theme of this article is, instead, to trace the career of a prominent suffragist once the vote had been won.

Theodora's family home was 'Lowmandale' (now called Vine Court) in the Leckhampton Road. Originally from Liverpool, her father Charles Frederick Mills first took up residence at 18 High Street, Cheltenham – two doors from the Royal Hotel – where he traded as a local wine merchant. In 1871 Charles married Ruth Flower, Theodora's mother. Theodora had four step-brothers from her father's first marriage and one brother (Gilbert Osmond) from this second marriage. Charles' business prospered and by the 1871 census the family were living in Lowmandale – for a time also known as Osmond Villa, presumably named after his son.

Lowmandale (now Vine Court), Leckhampton Road in 2020 *(photo by the author)*

Charles died in 1895 but Lowmandale remained the family home for Theodora and Ruth. From the time of her mother's death in 1922, with the exception of a live-in servant, Theodora seems to have resided there on her own until 1949 when she took in the Oliver family as lodgers. Mrs Oliver nursed Theodora until she had to move into Lypiatt Lawn Nursing Home where she died in 1958. However, her life had not been a solitary one as she was an active member of a number of communities within the town – not least the Bayshill Unitarian Church.

Local author Sue Jones, although referring to Theodora as 'a considerable figure in Cheltenham women's suffrage, not fiery but stubbornly persistent'[1] also admits that 'it is difficult to gain an insight into Miss Mills' character.'[2] Such a judgment is made all the more difficult with an absence of any surviving papers or diaries. Theodora did publish a collection of poems entitled *Sincerity* but as is ever the case with works of literature, it is problematic as to know how to regard them as historical evidence. This article is an attempt to build up a picture of Theodora as she appeared in and through the pages of the local press and works of literature.

A clear and obvious starting point for an historian hoping to gain an appreciation of her life might be Theodora's obituary in 1958 as it appeared in the *Gloucestershire Echo*.[3] However, the announcement of Theodora's death is, to say the least, an understated effort, placed as it was on page eight, between advertisements for '*Steradent*' stain remover for false teeth and 'the latest American sensation' which was apparently neither an engagement ring nor an eternity ring but a 'going steady' ring for £4 10s 0d. In surroundings that could hardly be less appropriate the unnamed article summed up Theodora's life in a short column of a few sentences. It started by mentioning that she was a regular contributor to the letters pages and that she 'was as forthright in her writings as she was in her utterances'. As an example they quote her telling one of their staff some twenty years previously that as an elderly cyclist in Cheltenham's traffic, she would soon be passing on a few things for her obituary (a promise that sadly was not fulfilled!). The article also recalled that Theodora had worked for the women's suffrage alongside Mrs Swiney in her earlier days and that she herself had received a presentation for her work from the then town's MP, Sir James Agg Gardner. Because of his support for women's suffrage, she in turn had supported him in the 1911 by-election, despite the fact that his party's sympathies were violently opposed to hers (Theodora became an active supporter of the Labour Party). Her obituary concludes with a reference to her family originally coming from Liverpool and that they worshiped at the Bayshill Unitarian Church. It signs off by telling us that her chief hobby was gardening until it was curtailed by her advancing years.

Readers of the local press accustomed to seeing Theodora's name appearing rather more prominently and persistently over the previous decades might wonder why her passing did not get more notice.[4] A simple answer may be that having lived into her eighties and spending her last days in the Lypiatt Lawn Nursing Home, she had simply passed from view, forgotten, and with her exploits as a leading suffragist no longer remembered. After the death of her mother in 1922 Theodora had no immediate family around her – her brother Gilbert having married and moved away from the town by 1901. Also, as Theodora herself records, many of her suffragist friends and associates had long-since passed on – not least Mrs Frances Swiney (1922) and Harriet McIlquham (1910). A less attractive suggestion is that since she had often been a thorn in their side, the Press were demonstrating an uncharitable side of their nature by showing a deliberate negligence of her passing.

If this were so, then it would be in marked contrast to the generosity with which Theodora's letters often ensured that the contributions of others who died before her did not go unrecorded. Maybe a little surprisingly, a number of those she wrote about in this way were men. One tribute that in particular stands out is that to Mr George Bradfield, a free-lance journalist who died in January 1941. She wrote, 'he gave us [the women's suffrage movement] some of our best local support and I remember with gratitude his consistent zeal'. She also recalled that he was highly efficient as 'a voice' at meetings and one particular occasion when, with devastating effect, one of his interruptions made the audience laugh and the platform squirm. The speaker was arguing that women had never done much in the world since it was men who produced everything, when there rang out the strong tones of Mr Bradfield pointing out – 'who produced the men?'[5]

Similar examples are found at both ends of the social spectrum. In Theodora's piece on Mr Fred Caudle, a shoe manufacturer in the Bath Road, she credited him with being 'an ardent champion of women in their struggle for political rights'. She wrote, 'at a time when most men were either openly or secretly the enemies of women in this respect, his support was a thing for which one could never cease to feel gratitude… I for one shall always honour the name of Mr Fred Caudle.'[6] She also criticises the Press for not giving mention of the important and enthusiastic help that Lord Dickinson gave to the women's suffrage movement in the critical years between 1906 and 1914 stating that 'none of us who worked in those days can possibly forget, and I hope you will allow me to record his service when we needed every ounce of help we could get.'[7] As a final example of her generosity of spirit, Theodora also wrote that a point often forgotten about Sir George Bernard Shaw was that he was an active feminist, who was 'on our side in the often bitter struggle. Let us not forget to be grateful now.'[8]

Many tributes of a more personal kind can be found in Theodora's references to her former friends and colleagues in the women's suffrage movement. Of Mrs Charlotte Despard (founder of the Women's Freedom League who spoke at Cheltenham on a number of occasions) she says that she was not only a suffrage leader 'but a great humanitarian and philanthropist, living for many years in the slums of London, where she was loved and reverenced as a queen'.[9] She also took the editor of the *Echo* to task for omitting to mention that Miss Grace Hadow (leader of the Cirencester suffragists) had made an important contribution to the work done for women's suffrage and 'besides her being a good and clever woman, she was a charming one, and I feel grateful to our common cause, as in so many cases, for having effected the introduction.'[10] One of Theodora's most touching tributes was to her friend and associate Mrs Rosa Frances Swiney – not on the occasion of her death but at a presentation to her in 1920.[11] The piece entitled 'A Cheltenham Leader of the Women's Movement' is a lengthy and comprehensive one that gives a full and generous appraisal of Mrs Swiney's work and leaves the reader in no doubt of her status and importance. Finally, readers will not have failed to notice the annual 'In Memoriam' messages placed in the *Echo* since her mother's death in 1922 – Ruth was clearly ever-present in the thoughts of her devoted and dutiful daughter.

If Theodora's public utterances in the Press show her to be kind-hearted and generous, there are also times when they show her to be waspish and fully prepared to take others to task. Whilst some of Theodora's public correction of others could be said to verge on pedantry, most of it came from a spirited defence of those things she held dear. An example of the former was her correcting an ambiguity of the editor of the *Chronicle* by pointing out that Miss Barbara Thomas was not the first lady minister in the Unitarian Church, but that it was an office held

some 20 years previously by a Miss Gertrud Petzold.[12] Another such example was her rather precise (yet justified) corrections of the *Echo's* review of her collection of poems entitled *Sincerity*.[13]

One of her most frequent targets, though, was Dr Headlam, the Bishop of Gloucester (1923-45). A typical fulsome and combative example was her response to his attack on the Unitarians. She corrected the Bishop's misconceptions by producing a long list of great men and women who were Unitarians and by pointing out how large the movement had become. With heavy irony she said that she was glad of the Bishop's remarks as it had given her the opportunity to publicly correct his ignorance and to make it clear that 'modernist clergy have lighted a candle in England which the Bishop of Gloucester's little extinguisher will never put out'.[14] Theodora took another swipe at the Bishop when she exposed his hypocrisy in refusing to attend one of her own women's suffrage meetings on the grounds that the Church must remain neutral in political controversy and then, within a few days, chairing a meeting of the local Conservative Women's Suffrage Society.[15]

A rare image of Theodora Mills, here pictured (back row) on the steps of Bayshill Unitarian Church at the induction of the Rev. Barbara Thomas (front row) in 1923.

(*Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucestershire Graphic)*

On a similar note, Theodora took issue with the lecturer who, during a talk on Rupert Brook and the Brownings in Cheltenham Art Gallery, sneered because some of their poems ended with a reference to 'the Deity'. Theodora pointed out that the Brownings were deeply religious and those that mocked them were simply bowing to the fact that religion had become 'unfashionable'. However, she also bemoaned that in some cases religion had become 'fashionable religion', that is, lacking in the genuine article. Again, with a sense of understated irony, she mused with some lines of Elizabeth Browning's own verse that 'fortunately for humanity however, the existence of the Supreme Being does not depend upon our belief in it, for:

> *Earth's crammed with heaven,*
> *And every common bush afire with God,*
> *But only he who sees takes off his shoes;*
> *The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.*[16]

Theodora was prepared to speak out firmly for other causes dear to her – most notably, the movement for female suffrage. A sustained correspondence took place in the press in 1937 when a number of writers (men) blamed women for the nation's high unemployment rate, being a result of their emancipation. Theodora's rebuttal to a Mr Ansell is a robust one – captioned as it was with 'Women as public enemy number one'.[17] It shows a good understanding of the present state of affairs – stating the war and its resulting trade slump as being a much more likely cause for the nation's unemployment rates. When Mr Ansell, in a second letter, tried to argue that his case had been deliberately misinterpreted by Theodora, and that he had in fact been a supporter of the women's suffrage movement, Theodora stated her surprise at this, claiming (somewhat waspishly) that 'I am immensely interested to hear this, and it is a pity none of us suspected it at the time'.[18]

Another issue Theodora spoke out on was in support of prohibition. She rejoiced that an out-of-date order that canteen girls should be 'moderate drinkers, but not teetotallers' had been rescinded and recorded that this happened mainly due to the efforts of the British Women's Total Abstinence Union of which she was an active member.[19] Unfortunately though, on this occasion it was Theodora who found herself branded a hypocrite, with a Mr John Brain pointing out that she was the owner of a public house herself – No 3 Montpellier Street.[20]

Other causes Theodora supported included an end to the cruel sport of stag hunting on Exmoor[21] and the plan to dig a shelter on Leckhampton Hill to protect against air raids.[22] Theodora became a committed member of the Peace Movement in the 1920s and 1930s arguing strongly for responsible diplomacy and against the inevitability of conflict. She argued passionately that human nature could be changed for the good and that having substituted brains for brawn in many things already, 'surely we can substitute them when the prize is life and the alternative race suicide'.[23]

There were occasions when Theodora's expressing of her opinion in the forthright manner in which she often did, must have made her seem at least controversial, and at most at odds, with many of her contemporaries. In 1922 she took to task a Mrs Coombe-Tennant who had referred to the defeated Germans as 'naughty children' and instead argued that they should now be given a seat at the table 'if we wish to do justice, and incidentally, save Europe – and ourselves – from ruin'.[24] Writing two years later she pointedly blamed Lloyd George and Clemenceau (whom she called 'unscrupulous personalities') rather than Wilson for 'tricking Germany into surrender on the strength of the fourteen points and then making no attempt to incorporate those points in the Treaty' as 'absolutely indefensible from an ethical standard'.[25] She argued that to blame Wilson for the 'failure' of 1919 was like blaming Christ for the Cross at the crucifixion. Even closer to the edge were her remarks in 1924 that the English nurse Edith Cavell, shot by the Germans as a spy, was not executed unjustly, on the grounds that Britain would have done the same to any German woman helping German prisoners escape. She quoted a young English soldier in her letter as saying, 'What on earth is all the fuss about Nurse Cavell? Why, we shoot Belgian women at sight if they are suspected of tampering with the enemy, without a trial. I've shot dozens myself.' [26] Although the editor of the paper included Theodora's letter she was clearly squeamish about it, hoping that the soldier's story was a fabrication and also pointing out that although martial law had been applied to Cavell's execution, many felt that doing so was offensive to the moral sense of everybody both outside and inside of Germany.[27]

Theodora was a life-long pacifist[28] and served first as vice-President and then President of the Cheltenham branch of the Women's International League for Peace, often attending national conferences on its behalf and giving addresses to its members.[29] However, one is also left a little bemused at the prioritisation Theodora gave to certain issues when she wrote in criticism of the League of Nations that many peace-loving humanitarian women, like her, could not fully support the League as it had identified itself with vivisection and 'spends its time making experiments on living animals'.[30] On a more practical level she also offered the advice from her own experience that the best way to avoid a houseful of flies 'whirling under the chandelier in every sitting-room and over the bed-heads in the bed room' was to become non-flesh eaters. Theodora's own family had done this and thereafter 'scarcely one of these insects was to be seen'.[31]

The overwhelming tenor of Theodora's correspondence to the Press is that of a genuine and passionate campaigner wishing to do good in the world. If there is a lighter side to Theodora that might bring to mind for some readers a certain 'Mrs Trellis of North Wales', it can perhaps be found in her reaction to modern fashion when she wrote:

> *It is a pity that we cannot have some more or less fixed standards of beauty and decorum...Semi-nude is now the fashion....These remarks are occasioned by my having seen during the past few weeks three costumes which were a perfect scandal to any shop window, and, strange to say, in one of the very few shops where a really beautiful, as distinct from fashionable, dress is sometimes displayed....Women certainly do wear such things, for I have myself seen them in broad daylight in the streets of this town, but if a reputable firm has to make them for its customers, one would think self-respect would lead it to keep them out of the windows, instead of showing them as if they were something to be proud of. ...One hopes the very ugly phase of licence, self-indulgence, and sensuality through which we are passing will not be a long one.*[32]

However, in reply to this complaint, a Dorothea Fytes pointed out the rather 'prurient curiosity' of Theodora's examination of shop windows and that most of the clothes displayed on the wax models would be worn with decorous undergarments!

Such moments of levity are few and far in the most part of Theodora's writings, and in the search for her 'voice' I would like to turn to a more personal and inward form of her writing – namely her poems. Although Theodora had established something of a reputation as a writer of songs and stories, it was not until 1929 that a 67-page anthology of poems, entitled *Sincerity* and priced at 2s 6d, appeared in print.[33] Reviewing the publication, the *Echo* noted that 'the writer seems perfectly at home in verse. Her command of a considerable variety of metres is facile [*sic*], for her verses flow freely and scan well and it is very seldom that she fails to express what she has to say with clearness and directness.'[34] Some of the poems had already appeared in print and one, *The Song of the Southland,* had even been set to music by the composer Florence Aylward.[35]

Theodora's anthology is divided into three distinct parts. The first is called 'Songs of Sorrow' and each of the 20 poems tackles the emotion of grief – usually expressed as mourning for a loved one, personal isolation or an expression of repentance. The *Echo* reviewer referred to them as 'in a minor key and suggesting painful experiences which have bent but not broken the brave spirit'.[36] A strong sense of personal loss is conveyed, and although Theodora does not

make it clear who the subject of the poems is, a strong candidate surely must be her late mother Ruth. In expressing her loss Theodora often turns to Nature, such as the early flowering of a crocus or the passing of the seasons – spring and summer inevitably turn into autumn and winter. However, Theodora's spirituality is strong and death is not seen as a finality as it can lead to an escape to a better place and an eventual reunion with loved ones.

The second set within the anthology is called 'Songs of Exile' and these 12 poems all touch on isolation and sense of alienation. In *All but one* Theodora writes:

So he has gone, and I am all alone
No other love to warm my life is found
The tree is shattered where my wine has grown
The vine still green lies crawling on the ground.

The last group entitled 'Stray Verse' is a more eclectic mixture in its themes. Linking to another of Theodora's interests some indicate that they are suggested by pieces of classical music, for instance, Beethoven's *Sonata Appassionata*. Others seem to be sparked by various sermons she has heard. The *Echo* reviewer again talked of her love of Nature and a strong musical sense in the words she has written. One can almost hear the accompanying melody to her *Lady love*:

My lady love is fair of face.
My lady love has witching grace
And clinging arms for soft embrace.
A thousand charms about her.
My lady love has every art:
To storm the strongest human heart.
I, more than all, have felt the smart.
Oh hard to live without her.

Some of the poems, however, have a heftier quality to them and if Theodora's own voice is to be heard within them, I would like to think it was at its truest in *Worth While.* Having posed the question 'was it worth it?' the poem ends with a rousing:

Yes, well worth while.
Better than all
To fall because your star has bid you fall, Led you in ways
Unknown and tortuous, far from the world's paradise;
To lie in dust
Yet hear the unforgettable "Thou must"
Of your own nature through the enshrouding grey
And still obey
Banished for ever from the wise world's smile,
To meet its coward "Yea" with your brave "Nay"
Its "Nay" with "Yea" and its false gods refuse; –
Yes, to gain all – all – and nought to lose, –
A thousand times worth while!

Whether waving suffragist banners in London and Cheltenham, campaigning for the peace movement, extolling the efficacy of vegetarianism or the evils of vivisection, or giving praise at her Bayshill Church, one feels that Theodora – in the words of the popular song – 'did it her way'.

As well as being a prolific letter writer Theodora also composed a number of longer prose works[37] – a letter to the *Echo* by a Mrs De Rossi defending Theodora's reputation stated that, 'she is a well-known authoress who knows what she writes about, and who has done a great deal of good in Cheltenham.'[38] Her novels consisted mainly of works for children. Three of these were published: *Four Sea Urchins* (1910), *Princess Lily of the Valley* (1920) and *Two from Town* (1932). Other unpublished adult novels were left in her will to the General Assembly of the Unitarian Church.[39] The tribute by 'Olive Branch' which appeared in the Echo shortly after Theodora's death said the following: 'She was forever writing and had several novels published in which she put many a good description of Cotswold country. Her children's stories are full of naturalness, had good sales and brightened the young on many a Christmas morn some thirty years ago.'[40]

These novels are problematic for the historian looking for the 'voice' of Theodora. They are not overtly autobiographical but there is no doubt that much of the author's experiences shape and steer their pages. It will come as no surprise to those unfamiliar with the stories that they invariably hinge round the exploits of feisty and determined young girls. Whilst not rebels as such, these young tomboys exhibit a determined attitude to achieve all they can – even if it means breaking the rules at times. Similarities between author and character are suggested when Theodora recalls such robust behaviour of her own, recollecting at an early suffrage meeting in Winchcombe 'having to stand on a three-legged chair propped against the railings, until a policeman politely told me not to obstruct. I do not know how I balanced it on the kerb afterwards, but all went well.'[41]

As Bill (Wilhelmina) says in *Four Sea Urchins,* 'it's sometimes righter to do wrong and wronger to do right' and gives no less of an example than Nelson disobeying signals at Copenhagen before going on to win a great victory for England. Young Bill (like Theodora) is an aspiring writer who has a number of short stories she hopes will be published some time. Bill has aspiration and determination – even during a history lesson with her friend Belle, she reminds her that 'Saxon women were just as brave as the men'. However, this is also tempered by a recognition that the educational and career path ahead of her will not be as full as that of her brother, who is destined for university and beyond. Such views are not surprising from someone who figured so prominently in the local suffrage movement.

However, it is less predictable that despite her young girls wanting to show their independence there is still a respect and fondness for the patriarchy – even when it gets things spectacularly wrong. In one scene early on in *Four Sea Urchins,* it is Bill's headstrong actions that gets her friend Toby into trouble with his father. Toby is admonished for his disobedience with a whipping from his father that sits very uncomfortably with modern readers. Even when the whipping is found to be undeserved, the author does not condemn this action but instead puts words of gratitude into the youngster's mouth as he is promised a conciliatory trip to London – 'Why, Toby would think that was almost worthwhile'. In point of fact Toby did; and that

night he went to bed 'with a sore back but a very light heart'. How close Bill comes to the real Theodora must be left as a matter for speculation.

A recurring theme in the novels is a genuine desire for reconciliation after the trauma of World War One. Unlike many of her contemporaries who wished to see Germany stand accused of war crimes and bled white for its actions, Theodora's attitude is one much more akin to what has been called Wilsonian idealism. In *Four Sea Urchins* Bill and her friends come to blows (literally) with a rough local lad who they found capturing butterflies. Having set up their 'League of Mercy – against all kinds of cruelty', they seize the boy's tin and release his captives with a shout of joy. However, shortly afterwards the children are given a 'tremendous lecture' by their father who admonishes them for fighting with the local lad and states that 'all kinds of fighting are wrong, whether it be between boys and boys, men and men or countries against countries as in wars.'[42] A marked attitude of reconciliation is also expressed in *Princess Lily of the Valley* when Ursula replies to Ray's sweeping claim that anything that is German 'can't be nice' with a reminder that 'many of the people are rather like us'.[43] Furthermore, the point is made with some emphasis that it was through the efforts of 'a kind, dear, old pet of a German doctor' that the eponymous heroine discovers that her shot-down airman husband is still alive.[44]

Cover design for one of Theodora's books for children *(author's collection)*

Such deliberate inclusions into the narrative of her novels must surely reflect a desire to reform and re-educate the mindset of a future generation away from the horrors of war whilst also reflecting much of Theodora's own thinking. Why else, for instance, would a prolonged discussion of Esperanto ('designed to make it easy for Nations to converse with each other and less likely to lead to squabbles') appear in *Two From Town*? [45] Whereas Theodora does not seem to have been an individual subscriber to the Cheltenham League of Nations Union, the Bayshill Unitarian Church was a corporate member.[46] The concluding remarks of the narrator in *Princess Lily* 'hoping and praying that peace and goodwill may last their lifetime' reflect much of the spirit and work of the LNU and indeed Theodora's own commitment to pacifism.[47]

On a lighter note, one can pick up a very distinctive resonance of Theodora's own voice in the novels when Dan (Bill's friend) encounters a number of fashionable ladies in evening dress in a hotel and wonders 'how such ladies walked about with such immensely long trains. He was

very glad his mother never wore such strange-looking things, and determined to see to it that Bill never did when she was grown-up.'[48]

An important voice of Theodora, but unfortunately one that we readers will never hear, is that of Theodora the musician. Music pervades her poetry and to a lesser extent is present in her novels, but by all accounts Theodora was also an active performer and composer herself. In 1908 she wrote to the headquarters of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies [NUWSS] extolling the power of song which 'with simple rousing words written to popular tunes (really written to them and carefully sung through by the writer during composition), form a welcome addition to the programme of every gathering', adding that 'the Cheltenham Branch secured these at the beginning of the present season and now frequently uses them at its monthly socials'.[49] Five of Theodora's songs were published by the NUWSS and one, *Rise up Women* (sung to the tune of John Brown's body), won an international competition held by the International Suffrage Alliance and was subsequently translated into several languages.[50]

Long after the heady days of the suffrage campaign Theodora continued her love of music, albeit in gentler surroundings. She was a regular performer at gatherings of the Bayshill Unitarian Church. At one of their Monday evening Sunday schools we are told that she sang solo songs and duets and that the evening 'proved a very social and enjoyable affair'.[51] Later that year at a social held by the Vegetarian Society, Theodora was reported contributing to its musical programme.[52] In 1928, despite being only in her early fifties, Theodora was described as one of the oldest members of the Bayshill Church and was presented with a clock.[53] There are no more accounts of her performing but instead she seems to have thrown herself into the role of host. The Bayshill Church was invited to hold its annual garden fete at Lowmandale – which it did regularly through the 1940s and 1950s.[54]

For the historian searching for the voice of their subject, sources can reveal as many contradictions as certainties. One of the last encounters we have of Theodora is in her will. Much of this confirms the generosity of spirit and character that is evident in her earlier writings. She left the manuscripts and typescripts of all her unpublished works to the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.[55] The Unitarian Church also received half her money which was split with the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection. Two smaller sums were bequeathed, one of £200 to the Peace Pledge Union and one of 10 guineas to her friend, Reginald Hailing of H. John Darter's bookshop in Suffolk Road, Cheltenham. However, the will also contains the unequivocal clause that neither her brother (Gilbert Osmond), nor any of his family, nor indeed anyone called 'Wootton' should be allowed to purchase or inherit Lowmandale, nor should they be allowed access to remove any furniture or effects. One can only wonder what family split took place to cause this.

In her touching tribute, 'Olive Branch' wrote of Theodora that she was, 'a very fluent letter writer to friends, she too kept for years commonplace books, which if in existence now would give a racy and graphic picture of Cheltenham in these periods. Her letters to the *Echo* were looked forward to by a large and varied section.'[56]

As such, this in part answers the question posed at the beginning of this article. The Press, publicly available sources, poetry and literature can indeed bring us closer to the authentic

voice of an individual but maybe not to the very heart of things. For that we need private letters, diaries and personal recollections. Fortunately, one such of these did turn up through an appeal to Leckhampton Local History Society members. The author was recently contacted by one of the Oliver family who lodged with Theodora at Lowmandale from 1949 to 1958 and who later became its owners. Although Susan Oliver was a very young child at the time, she had quite clear recollections of Theodora, especially her lovely garden which contained 'an unbelievable array of flowering shrubs and black and white grapes in a glasshouse and rare vegetables like Jerusalem artichokes'.[57] She remembered Theodora even in her eighties as being very active and walking around the house. However, she also recalled some more eccentric details such as Theodora resolutely persisting with a hay box for her cooking.

Despite these glimpses one is left pondering if in some tucked away places more personal sources remain which might bring us closer still to the indomitable Miss Mills. Fittingly, the last word should be left to her anonymous friend, 'Olive Branch':

> *In her early days, and until sickness came she led a very full and serviceable life. The garden claimed a good deal of her attention and at one time she earned considerable money by going out as a lady gardener and then giving every penny so gained to a needy cause.*

In the wider sense Theodora's life offers more than just a satisfaction for the inquisitive. Quite rightly, second-wave (and indeed third-wave) feminists are quick to remind us that the mere winning of the vote in 1918 and 1928 were only small steps on the path to equality. However, in Cheltenham at least, the decades of the 1920s and 1930s saw an emergence of a spirited and active group of women who continued to make their voices heard in new ways once the franchise had been gained and who remained active in finding new causes to champion and new ways to effect change in society.[58]

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[1] Jones, Sue, *Votes for Women, Cheltenham and the Cotswolds* (The History Press, 2018), p.46.
[2] Jones (2018), p.47.
[3] *Gloucestershire Echo*, 10 December 1958.
[4] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 15 December 1958. Fortuitously the *Echo* featured a letter written by 'Olive Branch' which provided a rather more fulsome tribute to Theodora and her work, which will be discussed later in this article.
[5] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 14 January 1941.
[6] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 7 November 1938.
[7] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 9 June 1943.
[8] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 7 November 1950.
[9] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 15 November 1939.
[10] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 29 January 1940.
[11] *Cheltenham Looker-on,* 7 February 1920.
[12] *Cheltenham Chronicle,* 24 November 1923.
[13] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 9 July 1929.
[14] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 6 June 1934.

[15] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 18 March 1943.
[16] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 31 January 1924.
[17] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 22 January 1937.
[18] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 27 January 1937.
[19] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 22 April 1942.
[20] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 9 July 1929.
[21] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 23 November 1928.
[22] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 19 January 1937.
[23] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 13 July 1929.
[24] *The Woman's Leader,* 29 September 1922. A journal published by the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship.
[25] *The Woman's Leader,* 15 February 1924.
[26] *The Woman's Leader,* 10 October 1924.
[27] *The Woman's Leader,* 10 October 1924.
[28] Theodora campaigned in the 1930s for disarmament and then in 1950s for a ban on nuclear weapons.
[29] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 21 January 1938.
[30] *The Woman's Leader,* 6 April 1923.
[31] *The Woman's Leader,* 27 April 1920.
[32] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 6 June 1923.
[33] Surviving copies of *Sincerity* are not easy to come by but readers can access a reference copy at the Gloucestershire Archives.
[34] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 6 July 1929.
[35] Florence Aylward (1862-1950) was an English composer. She began composing and performing at an early age and studied at the Guildhall School of Music. She published at least 150 songs and ballads.
[36] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 6 July 1929.
[37] In her Will drafted in 1946 Theodora gives her occupation as 'writer'.
[38] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 23 November 1928. Theodora had recently been attacked in the Press for her views on animal cruelty by a certain 'Stirrup-Cup' who had 'exceeded the limit of courtesy in his regrettable letter of November 22nd' and in vain had tried to make Theodora look ridiculous.
[39] Unfortunately attempts to locate these manuscripts (if indeed they have survived) have been unsuccessful.
[40] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 15 December 1958.
[41] *Gloucestershire Echo*, 5 October 1934. 'Doings at Winchcombe 25 years ago'.
[42] *Four Urchins*, p.134.
[43] *Princess Lily*, p.15.
[44] *Princess Lily*, p.148.
[45] *Two from Town*, p.99.
[46] Cheltenham LNU Annual Report 1932, held at Cheltenham Local Studies Library.
[47] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 16 March 1933 reports that Theodora was Vice-President and Press Secretary of the Cheltenham branch of the Women's International League for Peace.
[48] *Four Sea Urchins*, p.136.
[49] *The Women's Leader* 14 May 1908.
[50] Crawford, Elizabeth, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928* (UCL Press, 1999), p.416.
[51] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 5 February 1924.
[52] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 12 November 1924.
[53] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 11 February 1928.
[54] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 5 October 1938. 'The Women's League of the Bayshill Unitarian Church gathered in the garden of one of the members at Leckhampton, and tea was served.'
[55] Their possible location is Doctor Williams' Library in London, which is presently closed due to building work.
[56] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 15 December 1958.
[57] *Gloucestershire Echo,* 5 November 1935 mentions that Theodora served 'Grape tea' at a branch meeting of the WIL with 'home grown fruit'.
[58] See for example 'Clara Winterbotham: Cheltenham's First Lady' by Julie Courtenay in CLHS *Journal* **14** 1998, pp.2-10. I would also suggest Dorothea Jordan, Edith Geddes and the Rev. Barbara Thomas as being three other interesting subjects of study in this respect.

'Young Zamiel Gripeall': Controversial Cheltenham Newspaper Proprietor and Hotelier

MARK DAVIES

MOST NEWSPAPER PROPRIETORS WILL, SOONER OR LATER, have to offer a defence against claims of libel. It is less usual for the proprietor himself to be the plaintiff. This, however, was the situation in which Samuel Young Griffith (*c.*1790–1865), owner of the *Cheltenham Chronicle & Gloucestershire Advertiser*, found himself in 1828. The court case came as a result of the appearance in Cheltenham the previous year of an 82-page booklet called *Adventures of James Webb.*[1] It was published anonymously, but, as the libel case revealed, the author was an embittered former employee of the *Chronicle* called William Henry Halpin (1793–1848).

The controversy was unfortunate both for its author, who was imprisoned for his efforts, and perhaps briefly for the reputation of its main target, but was a fortuitous one in the sense of shedding a little light on Griffith's background and upbringing. It seems certain that Halpin allowed his resentment to get the better of him, with observations about Griffith's youth that seem exaggerated to the point of fantasy, but on the other hand there are many passages which do seem based on verifiable fact. In order to make an assessment, it will help to understand a little about Halpin's motives and his own background.

William Henry Halpin (1793–1848)

Halpin was from Portarlington in Ireland, and had moved to live in Cheltenham by 1820, the year that he published two collections of poems: *The Cheltenham Mail Bag,* under the pseudonym of 'Peter Quince the Younger', and *The Glenfall*, under his own name. He was employed at the *Chronicle* soon after,[2] as either an editor or editorial assistant, and went on to publish more collections of poems and/or translations between 1825 and 1827. It was the work he composed in 1826 which is key, however. Although it appears never to have been raised as an issue during his very public legal dispute with Griffith, later evidence shows that Halpin was the author of a book for which Griffith took all the credit: *Griffith's New Historical Description of Cheltenham.*[3] It is possible that Griffith had come to some financial agreement with Halpin about this work, and that this was the essence of an earlier courtroom confrontation between the two men.

In the summer of 1827 arbitration was needed to decide whether Halpin was entitled to the arrears of £52 3s 3d he claimed when dismissed from the *Chronicle.*[4] The jury unanimously decided that he was. Griffith had no doubt damaged his own cause by having slandered Mr Prince, a Cheltenham solicitor who had given an earlier out-of-court opinion in Halpin's favour: Griffith, 'irritated by this award, insulted Mr. Prince, applying to him the epithets of liar and scoundrel'.[5] For Halpin, the decision had clearly come too late to soothe his financial woes, as he had been obliged to announce to his creditors at the beginning of 1827 that he had already assigned all his real and personal estate and effects to two Cheltenham linen drapers.[6]

Clearly still thirsting for revenge, Halpin published his anonymous scathing attack on Griffith in September that year, and attempted to distance himself still further by citing the source (somewhat bafflingly: see below) as 'the documents of the late Miles Watkins Gent.'

Adventures of James Webb … with … his equally notorious Private Travelling Secretary

The booklet begins with what purports to be Miles Watkins' childhood in the village of Claverton, near Bath. Raised in the workhouse, 'Watkins' became friendly with the female supervisor's two sons. One was 'John Knox', a 'good humoured harmless fellow', that is, in reality, John Knight Griffith (*c.*1785–1813) also known as 'Jovial Jack'. The other, younger brother was 'Young Zamiel Gripeall' (i.e. Samuel Young Griffith), who, on the contrary, exhibited many unpleasant characteristics, including 'insatiable and unwarrantable greediness'.[7] The latter liked to exaggerate his parents' importance: promoting his deceased father, who was really only a corporal, to 'Paymaster's Sergeant' and claiming that his mother was a daughter of Beau Nash.[8]

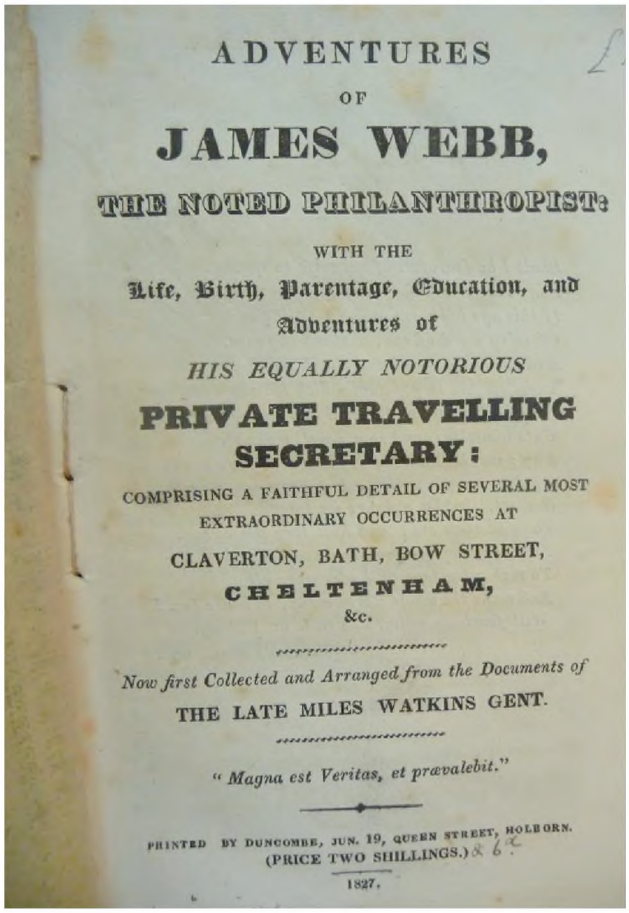
When their mother decided to move the family to Holloway, on the outskirts of Bath, she took 'Watkins' with her. Holloway was within the parish of Lyncombe-with-Widcombe, where her four known children had been baptised between 1785 and 1790.[9] It was notorious for its squalid lodging houses, frequented by 'a numerous tribe of travellers, who with the regularity of true fashionable felicity-hunters, pay their constant visits to the city of Bath during the gay and crouded [*sic*] seasons of winter and spring'.[10] The boys' mother took over one of these seedy establishments, known colloquially as the 'Beggar's Opera', and combined it with a pawnbroker's shop.

Some years later the 'crafty, crabbed, selfish' Zamiel persuaded his malleable brother 'to run certain risks' in order to secure 'a share in the proprietary of a concern' in the adjoining county,[11] (i.e. the *Cheltenham Chronicle*, as the printer of which John Knight Griffith's name first appears in the issue of 31 January 1811). Those risks included deceits and forgeries about which 'Jack' knew nothing. His younger brother, meanwhile, had evolved into 'a close-fisted young man, who had earned his money hardly, and was resolved to hoard it with a miserly tenacity'.[12]

So much for Halpin's undoubtedly biased account of the upbringing of the 'sly, sullen, selfish, reserved, crafty, malicious, avaricious, hypocritical and revengeful' Zamiel.[13] When the narrative of *Adventures* proceeds to relate the Griffith brothers' time in Cheltenham, Halpin's assertions can be more accurately assessed because he included many quotations taken directly from the 'very intelligent, amusing, instructive, liberal, enlightened, and widely-circulated' *Cheltenham Chronicle* itself.[14]

In March 1813, as he later testified, Samuel Young Griffith made the acquaintance in Cheltenham of James Webb, 'a man of eccentric habits … who went about the country seeking objects of distress whom he might relieve'.[15] Despite the title, Webb himself (*c.*1786–?) does not enter Halpin's narrative until about half-way through. When he arrived in Cheltenham, staying at the *George Hotel*, he was already well-known nationally as the 'philanthropic Mr. Webb'.[16] He returned to Cheltenham for the season a few weeks later, again staying at the *George*.[17] It was then that he engaged Zamiel as his assistant, and it was in this role that he featured as Webb's 'notorious Private Travelling Secretary', as per the subtitle of Halpin's publication. His salary was £250 and his role was to locate and distribute funds to deserving recipients.

It was then that the contrived narrator – remember that the entire publication purports to be taken from the papers of Miles Watkins – became suspicious both of the motives for Webb's generosity and of Zamiel's honesty. Consequently, 'Watkins' decided to pay Webb a surprise visit at the *George*. Arriving unannounced, he found Webb 'so employed as to convince me that he was fitted to any thing in this world rather than a benefactor to youth'.[18] The clear implication of this comment is that he was engaged in a homosexual act, since the incident is subsequently shrugged off by Zamiel as 'a foolish habit the Philanthropist had acquired at school'. (Earlier on, in describing an incident in Bath, Zamiel's own homosexuality was also clearly implied.) Later in the narrative Webb's beneficiaries are summarised as 'boys, boys, boys, nothing but boys, boys, boys!!!' and 'well-trained young ruffians' who took particular pleasure in insulting Cheltenham's womenfolk.[19] 'Watkins' was offered a bribe of £100 to keep quiet about this 'awkward secret' but refused it.



ADVENTURES

OF

JAMES WEBB,

THE NOTED PHILANTHROPIST:

WITH THE

Life, Birth, Parentage, Education, and Adventures of

HIS EQUALLY NOTORIOUS

PRIVATE TRAVELLING SECRETARY:

COMPRISING A FAITHFUL DETAIL OF SEVERAL MOST EXTRAORDINARY OCCURRENCES AT

CLAVERTON, BATH, BOW STREET,

CHELTENHAM,

&c.

Now first Collected and Arranged from the Documents of

THE LATE MILES WATKINS GENT.

"Magna est Veritas, et prævalebit."

PRINTED BY DUNCOMBE, JUN. 19, QUEEN STREET, HOLBORN.

(PRICE TWO SHILLINGS.)

1827.

Title page of the *Adventures*

Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, reference Vet. A6 d.519

In November that year of 1813, Webb and Zamiel were in London, pursued by a 'motley group' of individuals, including 'Trapp, Flude, and Gibbs from Cheltenham'.[20] These people were all, by implication, aware of Webb's sexual orientation, so Zamiel persuaded him that he ought to leave the country to avoid a scandal (or worse: technically homosexuality was a capital crime until 1861). They travelled together to Dover and then to Calais, where Zamiel extorted large sums from his employer, by pretending that Miles Watkins was on their trail, and that the money was needed to buy his silence.

Miles Watkins of Cheltenham[21]

This is the point at which *Adventures* becomes especially mystifying. There were in reality two Cheltenham residents called Miles Watkins: father (*c.*1772–1844) and son (*c.*1796–1827). It was clearly the son whose memoir *Adventures* purports to be, given his age and that he is described as 'the late Miles Watkins' on the title page. Yet at the libel trial in 1828 it was the father, attending in person, who admitted having accompanied Samuel Young Griffith to Dover (again with apparent homosexual implications). Indeed, Miles Watkins senior was the main witness for the defence at the trial, where he contradicted some of Griffith's version of what had occurred at the Kent port.[22] To add still further intrigue, Watkins senior published an account of his life in 1841.[23] Here he stated that in 1814 he too had been employed as James Webb's secretary (therefore succeeding Griffith in the role). Despite that significant revelation,

there is little to be gained from further speculation about the confusing interrelationship between these individuals, and Samuel Young Griffith's subsequent rise to prominence can be traced through more reliable sources.

Samuel Young Griffith: newspaper proprietor, guidebook publisher and hotelier

The chronology of *Adventures of James Webb* concludes with the death of 'Jovial Jack' in 1818,[24] after which 'the cunning Gripeall played his cards so skilfully as to become the sole nominal proprietor'[25] of the *Cheltenham Chronicle.* It was probably on account of this influential position that Samuel Young Griffith was able to secure that very rare privilege, a place as a passenger in a hot-air balloon. This was on Tuesday 30 July 1822, when he accompanied the famous hot-air balloonist Charles Green on a journey from Cheltenham which almost cost both of them their lives (as described in the *CLHS Journal*, 2020).[26]

In the following year, 21 April 1823, Samuel Young Griffith married Sarah Naylor (1805–?), daughter of the landlord of the *Plough Hotel* (who always himself spelled his name 'Neyler') at St Mary's, Cheltenham. In the *General Cheltenham Guide* of 1815 and a second edition of 1818, both published by John Knight Griffith, the *Plough* is described as: 'Long frequented by the first families in the kingdom' and 'lately very much enlarged and improved' with a new 'commodious Coffee-Room'.[27] Prominently positioned in the High Street, the *Plough* was also a stopping point for coach services from all over the country. The marriage signalled Griffith's first step towards a new career in the hospitality trade, and notably with inns which catered for coaches.

The couple's first child was baptised Samuel Young Naylor Griffith at St Mary's on 2 August 1824 (where their next two sons, Joseph Carncross and Frederick Andrew Bell, were baptised, in 1825 and 1828 respectively), at which time Samuel senior was still designated as a printer. This was not only on account of his ownership of the *Chronicle* in 1826, but as we have seen, he printed a revised and expanded edition of his late brother's Cheltenham guidebook. He called it *Griffith's New Historical Description of Cheltenham and its Vicinity* though it should probably more rightly have been called *Halpin's.*

The Cheltenham horsewhipping incident

A few years prior to the deterioration in the relationship between Halpin and Griffith, it is worth considering briefly one occasion on which the two men presented a united front. It was an inglorious incident, and possibly significant in revealing hints of the character that Halpin tried to portray to the world. The sequence of events began with an account printed in the rival *Cheltenham Journal & Gloucestershire Fashionable Weekly Gazette* and subsequently in the London press under the heading of the 'Berkeley Hunt Ball Affair'. The Berkeley in question was William Fitzhardinge Berkeley (of Berkeley Castle), who was not the only one to take offence. Samuel Young Griffith had warned Jasper Tomsett Judge, the editor of the *Journal*, that 'he might injure all Cheltenham by driving fashionable persons out of it with these paragraphs'. [28] In fact, it was Judge himself who was injured, when Berkeley and two others attacked him with horsewhips on 14 March 1825.[29]

A few months later, Griffith felt inspired to follow suit. Judge had taken exception to some comment that Griffith had made about the case, and he responded by accusing Griffith indirectly of being among 'men, whose understandings are even somewhat below mediocrity' and a 'fawning parasite'.[30] Griffith consequently confronted Judge at the theatre in Cheltenham

on 28 June, accompanied by Halpin, who 'produced two horse-whips, offering one to each party: but on Mr. Judge declining the favour Mr. Griffith commenced his application of one of the whips to the shoulders and posteriors of Mr. Judge, which the persecuted Editor bore with Christian-like fortitude'.[31]

It is possible that Samuel Young Griffith won as many admirers as detractors after this performance – no newspaper editor wins universal approval, after all – and his printing and hotel prospects were generally on the ascendancy as the 1820s progressed. So it must have come as a bitter blow to find himself the subject of gossip and rumour following the publication of *Adventures of James Webb* in September 1827. Halpin had commissioned John Duncombe of Holborn to print 500 copies, almost half of which had been immediately dispatched to the following Cheltenham booksellers: Williams (100 copies), Bettison (50), Weller (50), Harper (25), and Miss Roberts (12). With particular malice, Halpin had also instructed him to send a copy direct to James Neyler, Griffith's father-in-law.[32]

Halpin was found guilty of libel at the trial held at Gloucester in August 1828.[33] The case was brought before the King's Bench in February 1829, however, on the basis of new affidavits. One affidavit was by the real, living Miles Watkins, which supposedly revealed 'particulars in the conduct of the prosecutor [i.e. Griffith], and reports afloat respecting him, which justified the insinuation contained in the libel'.[34] Other affidavits, however, portrayed Griffith's 'unsullied character' and 'highly honourable and upright conduct'.[35] Webb, whose evidence would presumably have been critical to one side or the other, was not summoned, having been declared a lunatic in 1823.[36] Halpin was sentenced to a year's imprisonment, but was granted the clemency of an early release in May 1829, on the basis of 'ill health (death imminent); wife and self destitute; good conduct in gaol'.[37] Griffith had twice objected to any such remission.

The Griffiths in Cheltenham and Oxford

Despite the considerable embarrassment of the Halpin libel case, there was no stopping Samuel and Sarah Griffith thereafter. In the 1830s they acquired the leases of two of Oxford's most prestigious coaching inns, the *Angel* and the *Star,*[38] and for the next two decades they divided their time between Oxford and Cheltenham. In Oxford it would seem that Griffith swiftly elevated himself to a position of particular local esteem. His survey of Oxford's inns in 1834 and 1835 was cited during Parliamentary Select Committee hearings into the railways in 1837 and 1838, for instance.[39] And on 10 July 1837 Oxford City Council voted that the 'thanks of this House to be given to Mr. Griffith for his great liberality in supplying Carriages and Horses to the Members of Council without making any charge on the occasion of proclaiming Her Majesty the Queen Victoria' on 23 June.[40]

Simultaneously, Griffith was sustaining his Cheltenham interests with the publication in 1838 of a lavish new (third) edition of *Griffith's History of Cheltenham.* This was dedicated to the new queen, permission having previously been sought from King William IV on 16 March 1835. By this date Griffith had relinquished his ownership of the *Cheltenham Chronicle*, although, as he told the king, 'the success of Cheltenham continues to be the object of my anxious solicitude'.[41] At the time he gave his address as Belmont House or Lodge in Cheltenham,[42] and yet the Oxford newspapers continued to claim him as their own, in terms such as 'the spirited proprietor of the Angel and Star Hotels'. That same year of 1838 saw the only baptism of any of the Griffiths' children away from Cheltenham, that of Julia Adelaide in Oxford, when Samuel did indeed give his address as the *Angel.*[43] Yet in the 1841 census Samuel and Sarah appear as resident owners of Cheltenham's *Queen's Hotel*, and later that year Samuel

was identified as the proprietor of the *George Hotel,*[44] a poignant choice in view of its associations with James Webb.

Three years after that, in 1844, Oxford opened its first railway station. Although Griffith clearly saw the opportunities that this new form of transport offered, having taken the lease on some refreshment rooms at Swindon Station in December 1844,[45] the demise of the coaching trade was inevitable, and with it a challenge to the viability of the inns in many of Britain's major towns and cities. Perhaps it was the need for hands-on attention in the face of this challenge which caused the Griffiths to move permanently to Oxford. By 1851 they were living at the *Star*, and still in 1861,[46] while still retaining the *Angel.* By 1858 they had expanded their Oxford interests still further with the acquisition of an establishment which is an Oxford favourite to this day, the *King's Arms* in Holywell.[47] It was here that Samuel Young Griffith met his death on 16 April 1865.[48] Clearly he was a man who had a sound head for business; we shall never truly know if he used that head in the many unscrupulous ways that William Henry Halpin would have the world believe, or if, on the contrary, he was actually the 'honourable and irreproachable' man of his attorney's portrayal. The metaphorical jury is out on the matter; the real juries of the time were probably to a large extent equally doubtful!

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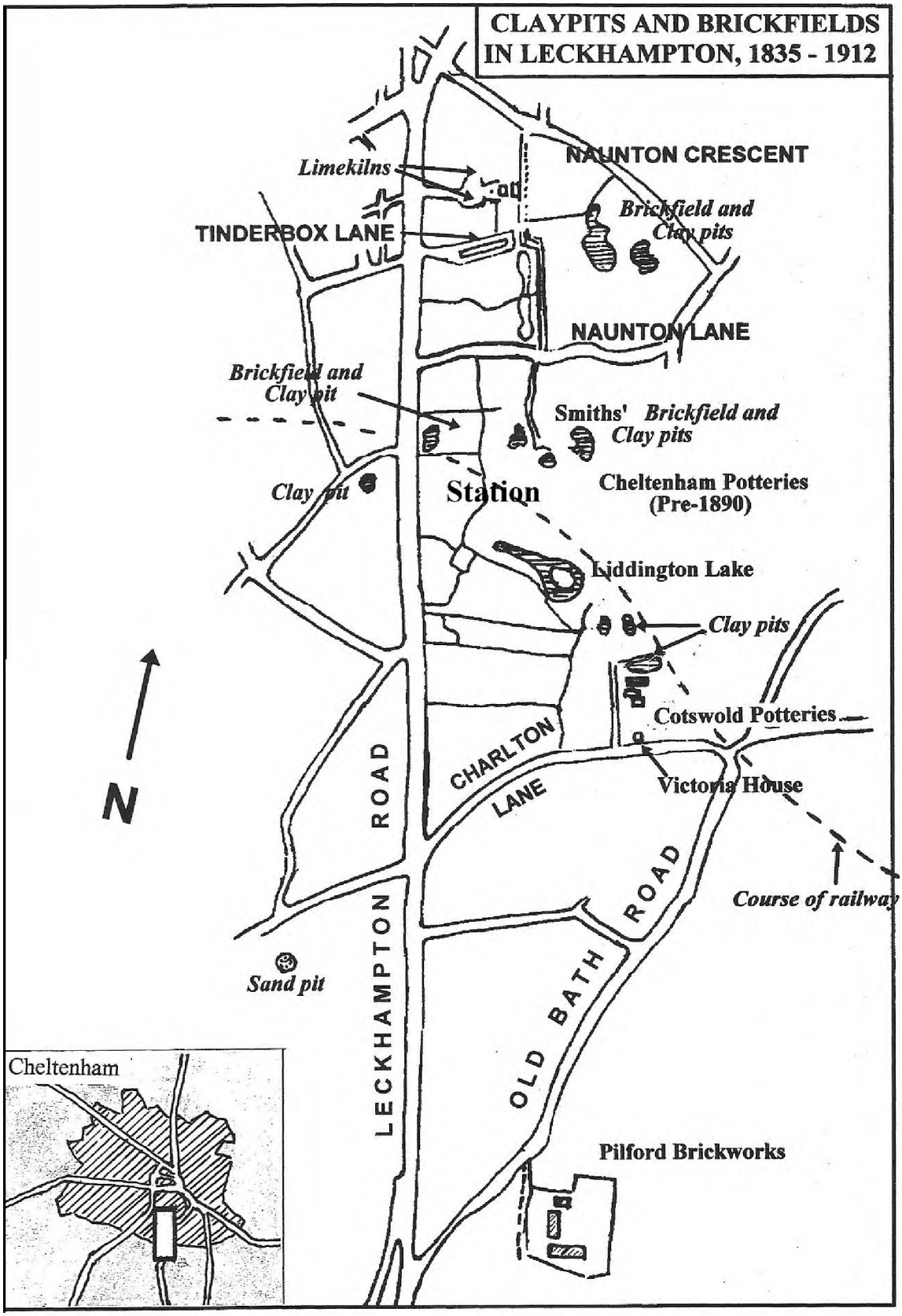
[1] *Adventures of James Webb, the noted Philanthropist ... with his equally notorious Private Travelling Secretary* (printed by [John] Duncombe junior, London), 1827.
[2] Halpin is said to have worked for Griffith for six and a half years (*Cheltenham Chronicle,* 21 August 1828) or eight years (*Cheltenham Chronicle,* 5 February 1829), having departed in May 1827.
[3] Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, Vol. 38, Case 1208: application for relief by Elizabeth Halpin, widow of William Henry Halpin, 1848. Among the 14 people who endorsed her claim was George Arthur Williams, of Williams's Library in Cheltenham, who stated, 'Without meaning anything offensive to Mr. G. it is notorious that he is quite incapable of writing such a work'. Williams had told another correspondent to the Fund that Halpin had written much of the book in his library, where he had 'lent him … books of local history from which he got his information'. Williams was the Cheltenham bookseller who ordered by far the most copies of *Adventures of James Webb.*
[4] *Cheltenham Journal & Gloucestershire Fashionable Weekly Gazette,* 25 June 1827.
[5] *Morning Chronicle,* 28 May 1827.
[6] *Cheltenham Journal,* 1 January 1827. The drapers were John Nicholson and John Witham.
[7] *Adventures of James Webb*, p.11, followed by several more long paragraphs, maligning his character.
[8] *Adventures of James Webb*, p.12. Grace's maiden name was indeed Nash, having married Samuel Griffith at Bath Abbey in 1770. He seems likely to be the Samuel Griffith who was buried at Walcot, Bath in 1796.
[9] Samuel and Grace Griffith's children baptised at Lyncombe-with-Widcombe, Bath, were: John Knight on 1 May 1785; Jane Susanna Matilda Night [*sic*] in 1787; and Samuel Young on 22 August 1790 (along with a presumably twin sister, Margaret Catherine). Samuel acquired or retained a freehold house in Holloway, Bath (electoral registers of 1832 and 1846, albeit by then resident in Oxford).
[10] Warner, Richard, *Excursions from Bath* (printed by R. Cruttwell, 1801), p.4, quoted at length within *Adventures.*
[11] *Adventures of James Webb*, p.20.
[12] *Adventures of James Webb*, p.35.
[13] *Adventures of James Webb*, p.13.
[14] *Adventures of James Webb*, p.38.
[15] *The Standard*, 20 August 1828.
[16] *Cheltenham Chronicle,* 1 April 1813. *Alumni Oxonienses 1715–1886* IV (Parker & Co, 1888) shows that James, son of Sir John Webb of Kensington, matriculated at St Mary Hall, Oxford on 15 November 1806, aged 20. In the *Chronicle* of 8 April 1813 he is identified as the oldest of three wealthy brothers, and in the issue of 8 July his lands, worth £12,000 a year, were said to be in Oxfordshire and Berkshire.
[17] *Cheltenham Chronicle,* 13 May 1813.
[18] *Adventures of James Webb*, p.45.

[19] *Adventures of James Webb*, pp.46, 50-52.
[20] *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 19 November 1813.
[21] My grateful thanks go to John Koncher for his generosity in sharing his research into both of the men named Miles Watkins (as a result of his interest in the Cheltenham 'Legend of Maud's Elm') and for his insights and opinions about the 'Young Zamiel Gripeall' libel case.
[22] *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 21 August 1828. The trial attracted national interest, and was reported, for instance, in *The Standard* and *Morning Chronicle* of 20 August 1828.
[23] *Sketch of the Life of Miles Watkins of Cheltenham* (printed by T. Willey, High Street, Cheltenham), 1841.
[24] John Knight Griffith was buried at St Mary's, Cheltenham on 27 April 1818, aged 34.
[25] *Adventures of James Webb*, p.72.
[26] See Davies, Mark, *King of all Balloons* 2nd edn (Amberley, 2018), pp.166–168.
[27] Griffith, J. K., *General Cheltenham Guide* (1815), p.151, and 2nd edn (1818), p.107–8.
[28] *Cheltenham Journal,* 8 August 1825.
[29] *Morning Chronicle,* 6 August 1825.
[30] *Hereford Journal,* 20 July 1825 (citing the *Morning Chronicle).*
[31] *Hereford Journal,* 6 July 1825 (citing the *Gloucester Journal*).
[32] *Cheltenham Chronicle,* 21 August 1828. The trial was also reported in numerous other regional and London newspapers, and despite all the insinuations Griffith himself felt sufficiently vindicated to publish a transcript: *The King on the Prosecution of S. Y. G. versus W. H. Halpin.*
[33] This was on 18 August 1828. Only the previous day Halpin was due to have been released from prison for another offence, having served three months as a debtor on account of his failure to pay the damages awarded against him in another libel case (*Cheltenham Journal*, 14 July 1828). His prosecutor in this earlier instance was another high-profile Cheltenham resident, Pearson Thompson, proprietor of Montpellier Spa, whom he had accused of a fraudulent use of public funds (*Cheltenham Chronicle,* 10 April 1828).
[34] *Cheltenham Journal,* 17 November 1828.
[35] *Cheltenham Chronicle,* 5 February 1829.
[36] *Morning Post,* 21 June 1823; *Times,* 2 June 1824.
[37] National Archives: HO 17/128/18 of 20 April 1829. Halpin's release was reported in the *Cheltenham Journal* of 8 June 1829. He defied the medical prognosis by living another two decades. He had married Elizabeth Prestage of Cheltenham at Hempstead (Gloucestershire) in August 1823, and had moved to Salisbury (Wiltshire) by 1841. He died in Dublin in 1848 (*Gentleman's Magazine*, July 1848 p.109), leaving his widow destitute.
[38] In 1830, on a reconveyance of the printing office lying behind numbers 119 and 120 High Street in Cheltenham, Griffith is described as 'late of Cheltenham, but now of Oxford, hotel keeper' (Gloucestershire Archives D2025/Box 42/bundle 3).
[39] *Victoria County History Oxfordshire* IV (Institute of Historical Research, 1979), p.212. Griffith's survey revealed the economic importance to Oxford of its coaching inns and other accommodation: Griffith alone employed 90–100 people. Amongst other earlier claims to fame, the *Angel* incorporated the first coffee house in England, opened in 1651 (*Victoria County History Oxfordshire* IV, p.439).
[40] Oxford City Council Book I for 1832–1843 (OCA1/1/A1/9).
[41] *Griffith's History of Cheltenham* (1838), p.xiv.
[42] *Oxford Chronicle & Reading Gazette,* 29 September 1838.
[43] She was presumably named after Queen Adelaide, wife of William IV, who was 'conveniently and comfortably accommodated' in the 'excellent' *Angel* in 1835 (*Encyclopaedia of Oxford* (Macmillan, 1988), p.18). When Margaret Graham made a balloon ascent from Oxford on 7 June 1837, in between two ascents from Cheltenham – see CLHS *Journal* **36** 2020 – she stayed at the *Angel* (*Jackson's Oxford Journal,* 3 June 1837).
[44] *Globe,* 7 August 1841.
[45] National Archives: RAIL252/174.
[46] *Encyclopaedia of Oxford* (Macmillan, 1988) p.18 & p.94.
[47] *Oxford Chronicle & Reading Gazette*, 22 January 1859.
[48] *Jackson's Oxford Journal,* 22 April 1865. Samuel's stated age was 74 when buried at Oxford's Holywell St Cross church on 21 April 1865. His oldest son, Cheltenham-born Samuel Young Naylor Griffith (1824–1902), was also living in Oxford at the time. He had studied at Oxford's Exeter College and returned to the city in 1860 as a curate and chaplain to the Oxford City Gaol. In 1877 he and his wife moved to Cumnor, a few miles to the west of Oxford, where he remained as the vicar until his death in 1902.



Based on Crome's map of 1835, the 1884 OS map and L Richardson's survey 1902 – 1912

Potteries, Tiles and Brickmaking in Leckhampton (Part 2)

ERIC MILLER

THE PILFORD BRICKWORKS

Much of what follows is based on documents from the Norfolk Record Office,[1] giving details of an investigation of land at Lower Pilford, then held by Lady Walsingham, with a view to starting a brickworks there. The site was at the end of Pilford Road, off Old Bath Road, but today the casual observer will recognise only some uneven ground there.

1878-1879 – Surveying the Land at Lower Pilford

In the spring of 1878 samples of earth from the south end of the Lower Pilford land were sent by Mr G.W. Sadler (Architect and also Borough Surveyor of Cheltenham[2]) to Thomas, 6th Baron Walsingham, at Merton in Norfolk. Mr Sadler considered that the top two layers of earth would make good bricks, though there was not much depth before arriving at a layer of stones. At a depth of over 6 feet, he reported, was a 'hard slatey marl', which would make a strong brick if dug and weathered in the winter, and if it could be freed from lime wash.

Bricks were made at Merton from the Pilford earth samples, but they were of doubtful quality. A further examination of the site was made in March the following year. Henry Woods, Lord Walsingham's agent, accompanied by brickmaker George Hunt, went to Cheltenham and dug test holes further up the hill. At a depth of 8-9 feet they found remarkably good earth, very free from lime and iron stones, which was believed suitable for producing good bricks and drainpipes.

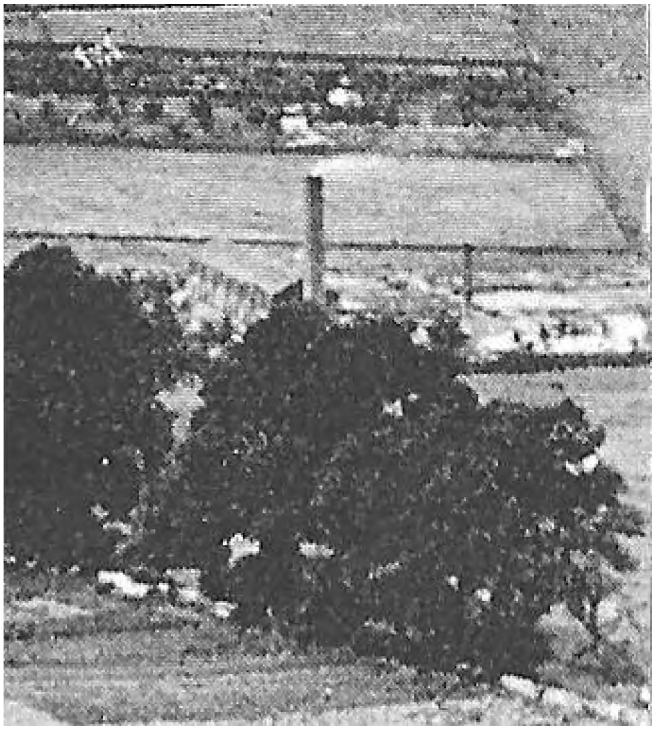
Three existing yards in the area were visited, including Thackwell's,[3] but the Lower Pilford site was favoured as offering clean, good and abundant earth, a supply of water from lands above and good sand in the field and within half a mile of the yard. In addition, it was near a public highway and carting to Cheltenham would be downhill, or on the level, all the way.

Hunt recommended that a few clamp bricks be made and burnt and that his son and two other Norfolk men should go to Cheltenham as early as possible to commence the work. They were to have their return railway fares and lodgings paid for, as well as fair weekly wages with overtime. If the bricks proved to be as good as hoped, an inexpensive kiln should be built, similar to one at a brickyard on the north of Cheltenham.[4] The difference in cost between that and a patent kiln would be 'something fabulous'.

The plant required for starting would be barrows, wheeling planks, spades, light earth picks, brick moulds, tables, brick boards, pails and some canvas covering for the brick holes. The men must have a rough board shed with a fireplace in it, in which to eat their meals and shelter during wet weather and when burning the clamps. It was estimated that about £300 would be required to start a brickyard in the manner suggested.

1879 - 1885 – Severe competition leads to losses

Brickmaking started at Pilford in 1879, with Mr G.W. Sadler as manager. His salary was based on the number of bricks sold, a shilling per thousand, for example, but in any case not less than £100 per year. By 1885 the yard was not paying its way. Competition from neighbouring brickmakers, who lowered their prices, led to a large fall in the quantity and value of ware sold and by the end of the year the yard was £795 in debt.



Distant view of the Pilford Brickworks

(Detail from panorama of Cheltenham from Leckhampton Hill, photographed by J Joyner c.1890)

This is believed to be the only extant photographic record of the brickworks

In December 1885 Lord Walsingham sent his cousin Reginald Astley to report on the state of the Pilford yard and compare it with other brickyards in the area. He concluded that the Battledown yard could make 60,000 bricks per week, pressed bricks selling at 35 shillings per thousand and common bricks at £1 per thousand. There were about 20 men and boys employed in making a wide range of products, including ornamental flowerpots and busts of people.

The Folly Lane yard worked by John Yeend and his two sons, aided by 'a lot of men and boys', could turn out up to 35,000 bricks per week, mostly common bricks, which sold in Cheltenham at £1 per thousand delivered. Yeend mentioned that 1,500 houses were unlet in Cheltenham at that time and added that there were formerly nine yards around Cheltenham whereas now he knew of only three.

After completing his survey of the opposition, Astley called on George Hunt at the Pilford yard but did not reveal his connection with Lord Walsingham. He had some difficulty in locating the yard and wrote:

> *I found out where it was from the people at Battledown. It did not appear to be at all known in Cheltenham. I asked two or three people, but none of them had ever heard of it, though one of them was a policeman and had been in Cheltenham seventeen years.*

George Hunt and three other men were working in the yard, busy making bricks, when Astley arrived. Hunt gave Astley the price of bricks as 35 shillings per thousand for pressed bricks, 24 shillings for common bricks for building and £1 per thousand for a less hard brick for walls, etc. A 4 horsepower engine supplied power for the yard: Astley judged the one at Battledown

to be at least four times as large. There was a large pile of bricks, some made two years previously, and Astley asked why they had not been sold. Hunt said it was because there had been talk of building cottages there.

1886 – A change in management considered; more money advanced

Following a meeting in London in March 1886, Lord Walsingham advanced £700 to Mr Sadler. Out of this, £362 was immediately paid to Mr Jordan[5] to settle an account for coal used for burning bricks, with the balance being used to reduce other outstanding accounts.

Trade improved in the early part of 1886, including an order for 120,000 pressed bricks for Cheltenham Workhouse. However, because of this commission it had not been possible to meet another order, for 15,000 pressed bricks and 40,000 common bricks. Lord Walsingham was annoyed that it was not possible to supply bricks to a potential customer and told Mr Sadler that he would rather send extra men and machinery from Norfolk, or even buy a new machine, than be obliged to refuse orders. On the other hand, by September 1886 sales had dropped to such a low level that closure of the yard was under consideration. In October George Hunt was instructed to reduce staff during the winter months just to keep the yard open.

The trading account for 1886-1887 showed a deficit. Sales totalled only £607, while the cost of coal alone was £292 and George Hunt's expenses for making and burning came to £379. Stock in hand was valued at £635. Eleven types of brick were listed and five sizes of pipe, ranging from 2 inches to 9 inches in diameter, the latter valued at 4d. each.

1888-1890 – Illness and death of George Hunt; threat of closure

George Hunt fell ill in June 1888. Although he was then aged 77, he still carried on supervising the brickyard, but much of the work appears to have been taken over by his sons William and James. In that month James reported sales to be a good deal better than for some time, with machine bricks selling as fast as they could be burnt, together with a good many of the old stock. Mr Jones of Gloucester was being supplied with 20,000 to 30,000 pressed bricks for building the Working Men's Institute at Charlton Kings.

A severe setback to the Walsingham family fortunes in the following month cast more uncertainty over the future of the brickyard. Because it had been operating at a loss, it had no more than an agricultural value and Lord Walsingham therefore decided to close it. However, Mr Sadler still hoped to make the business profitable and brickmaking was still in progress two months later.

George Hunt died in December 1890. His sons, under Mr Sadler's supervision, continued production and the premises were even extended in order to meet demand.

The final years

In 1893 the brickyard was bought by Councillor E. Lawrence (a coal merchant)[6] and Mr C. Williams, who pulled down the old kiln and installed other machinery, but without any improvement to the quality of the products. The Day Book kept by the builder John D. Bendall[7] shows that a chimney ordered by the new owners was erected by his firm in 1894. According to an estimate which he provided to E. Lawrence & Co, the chimney was to be '70 feet high, with a flue measuring 3 feet 10 inches square and the foundations excavated to a depth of 7 feet'. The quotation for the work was given as £47.10s.0d.

On Mr Lawrence's death in 1900 the property was transferred to B.W. Pearce & Co. Ltd, who may have attempted some improvements but dismantled the works in 1907.[8] (They had also shown an interest in amalgamating with Smith Brothers' brickyard – see below.)

A glimpse of the brickyard's end was offered by a member of the Leckhampton Women's Institute, who recalled the occasion of the demolition as having been quite an event, when the new electric trams brought a crowd to see the chimney fall.[9]

A contemporary assessment of quality of the Pilford Brickworks' product was that 'very good-coloured and regular-sized bricks were turned out, and also moulded bricks, tiles and drainpipes. The common bricks were not very successful, being commonly supposed to exude salt, and were always more or less damp, and were, for that reason, not very much used in house building work as the plaster and paper became discoloured.' The output was said never to have averaged more than a million bricks per year.[10]

An example of a common brick from the Pilford Brickyard. Its indifferent quality is self-evident. (*Author's collection*)

THE NAUNTON BRICKYARDS

In William Crome's Survey of the Parish of Leckhampton carried out in 1835 two adjacent plots on the eastern side of Leckhampton Road were identified as a brickfield and clay pit and part of a brickyard (see map on p.48). Both were owned by Samuel Page, but the latter was occupied by William Caudle and continued eastwards across the parish boundary. These plots are of particular interest in that they coincide with the site on which the railway station came to be built in 1875, and which was then known as 'Winning's Brickfield'.[11]

At some point therefore John Winning must have taken over the concern while William Caudle moved across Naunton Lane, to occupy other clay pits and a brickyard facing Naunton Crescent. Possibly this was the 'Naunton' Brickyard or Pottery first worked by Frederick Thackwell and then his son-in-law Thomas Hooper.[12] The depression left by one of the pits is still recognisable beside present-day Emmanuel Church.

William Caudle was listed as a brickmaker in Slater's Commercial Directories for 1858 and 1868; in the 1851 Census he described himself as a 'master brickmaker'.

Evidence for William Caudle's involvement is to be found in some correspondence sent in May 1865 between residents of Naunton Crescent and the Cheltenham Nuisance and Fire Brigade Committee.[13] Seven of them signed a joint complaint regarding the smells coming from nearby brick kilns, which belonged to Mr Caudle of Leckhampton, and asked 'your honourable board' to remove the nuisance. Another, George Clapton,[14] wrote separately, possibly as a landlord on behalf of his tenants, adding the allegation that the smoke and sulphur were injurious to his own health.

The Inspector of Nuisances followed up the complaints and reported to the Committee that the kilns had been erected for many years and were 'opersite' to the property and houses of the complainants and about 70 yards away from them. He found that the smoke and sulphur extended to and over the premises, when the wind was from the south, southeast and southwest. There were four kilns in a parallel position burnt one at a time. He conceded that the smoke was very disagreeable but how far it was injurious to health and contrary to law he was unable to determine. However, there is no evidence that the petition was taken any further or that William Caudle was forced to restrict the emission of fumes.

At the time of the complaints, only the north side of Naunton Crescent had been built upon, and the houses would have faced the brickfield. Another of the complainants was Thomas

Bendall, the well-sinker and ancestor of the Bendall dynasty in Leckhampton, who lived at Melita Cottage in Naunton Crescent.

At some stage the Naunton Brickyards must have been acquired by George Ward, who lived at the nearby Fairfield House.[15] He died intestate in April 1884 and his wife obtained letters of administration in September. Almost immediately she advertised the brickyards for sale by auction. The assets included 400,000 'capital' new bricks; the entire brickyard plant; a bay mare, 5 years old, 'excellent worker'; wagon and carts; a hay rick – 'very prime old hay (to go off), about 5 tons'; and a brick hut and furnace.[16] The outcome of the auction is not known, but no-one appears to have continued making bricks on the site.

SMITH BROTHERS (CHELTENHAM) LTD

The firm of Smith Brothers (Cheltenham) Limited was once well known throughout the Cheltenham area as timber merchants. In its heyday in the late 19th and early 20th centuries it maintained yards at Gloucester Docks and at Albion Street, Cheltenham, on the former Shackleford's yard, as well as in Leckhampton. The Leckhampton branch, which also incorporated a brick and tile works, was situated to the north of the railway station, extending as far as the present Mead Road Trading Estate. An oblique reference to the firm cropped up in an inquest report in May 1888,[17] concerning a body that had been found in a flooded clay pool on Smiths' premises. Possibly the first mention of Smith Brothers as brick and tile makers in a local directory was in 1892.[18]

Despite the name and the location, there was no direct family connection between Smith Brothers (Cornelius, Richard and Charles) and T.W. Smith and Sons, which occupied the Maida Vale estate and ceased trading in the early 1990s. It is possible that T.W. Smith bought the site after Smith Brothers had stopped making bricks there, while both firms afterwards remained in competition as timber merchants. T.W. Smith built the house called Maida Vale, after which the trading estate now takes its name, and also one called Maitland (now Hampton House Residential Home), north of Leckhampton railway station.[19]

In 1901 Benjamin W. Pearce and Sons (who had earlier taken over the Pilford Brickworks – see above) had plans to amalgamate with Smiths as a limited company. Pearces were builders' merchants, with timber yards at Regent Place in Swindon Road, cement stores at Gloucester Docks, interests in Bromyard and a brickyard and lime kiln at Folly Lane. The solicitors Williams and Payne approached Winterbotham and Gurney with a request for a valuation of the two businesses, to be called 'Smith and Pearce Limited'.

In July 1901 Bruton Knowles valued Smiths at £25,917. Brickmaking plant, kilns, etc came to £500 and the brickmaking stock in trade to £217. Pearce and Sons were valued at £15,318, brickmaking plant accounting for £2940 and stock £697.

In February 1902 a letter indicated that the brickmaking side of Smiths' business was 'at an end', and the intention was for Pearce and Sons to set up a company independently. In June a prospectus had been prepared for separating out the Pearces' portion of the business, which they proposed to float during the first week of July, but at the last moment negotiations were opened again for possibly joining it with the business of Smith Brothers.[20]

Smith Brothers' entries in the Cheltenham *Annuaire* described the firm as brick and tile manufacturers as well as timber merchants until 1905. In November the following year the company's brickyard and surroundings were advertised for sale freehold as a building estate. It comprised 18½ acres adjoining Leckhampton Station and with extensive frontages to Naunton Lane. Also included in the sale was Arolf Cottage, where Cornelius Smith had lived.[21]

Conclusion

Brickmaking had thus come to an end in Leckhampton by the early 1900s, after millions of bricks and thousands of pots and artefacts had been produced. The only remaining manufacturer in the whole of Cheltenham was the Battledown Brickworks, which continued until 1971. Today scarcely a trace remains of any of the workings, though the odd brick or flowerpot does occasionally turn up. Hopefully, these articles will enable readers to recognise any such relics of what was a truly local industry that made creative use of readily available raw materials.

The above article is a revised and updated version of one that appeared in the Leckhampton Local History Society's Research Bulletin No 2 (2001). It was written before the publication of David O'Connor's account of the Battledown Brickworks The Hole in the Ground. *The section on the Pilford Brickworks is based on research by Mr Robert C Hunt that featured also in a longer article in the Charlton Kings Local History Society Bulletin No 10 (Autumn 1983).*

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[1] Extracts from the Walsingham Collection in the WLS LX and LXVIII series.
[2] At this time the appointment was a part-time one – see *Cheltenham Examiner*, 11 June 1878 p.3 col 1.
[3] *Cheltenham Local History Society Journal* **36** (CLHS, 2020), pp.41 and 44.
[4] Though this was not identified, it was probably the brickworks at Folly Lane. See O'Connor, D., *The Hole in the Ground* (Charlton Kings LHS, 2002).
[5] H. Jordan & Co's office was at No 12, Promenade.
[6] *Cheltenham Examiner,* 6 December 1893, p.8 col 6. The company's office was at 383, High Street.
[7] Gloucestershire Archives (GA) D8532 (formerly in Leckhampton LHS 'Bendall Archive').
[8] A directors' report for 1905 refers to 'Additions at Pilford' (GA D2299/174).
[9] *Leckhampton: Our Village Within Living Memory* (Leckhampton W.I., 1959), circulated privately.
[10] Richardson, L. & Webb, R., 'Brickmaking in Gloucestershire,' *Proceedings of the Cotswold Natural Science Society* (1909-1910), Vol 1 Part 4 pp. 261-264. (Roland Webb would have been well informed, as he and his brother were also owners of the Battledown Brickworks, among their other interests.)
[11] See previous article in *CLHS Journal* **36**, p.44.
[12] See *CLHS Journal* **36**, p.43.
[13] GA CBR/B2/7/2/5.
[14] In the 1870 *Royal Directory* and in the 1881 Census his address is given as South View House, Naunton Crescent.
[15] George Ward had benefitted from the will of his former employer at Fairfield House, George Harvey, in 1881 and had made investments in property, presumably using the proceeds.
[16] *Cheltenham Examiner*, 12 November 1884, p.5 col 3.
[17] *Cheltenham Examiner*, 2 May 1888, p.6 col 5.
[18] *Cheltenham Annuaire*, 1892.
[19] On the authority of Mrs Maureen Mathias, grand-daughter of Thomas W. Smith.
[20] GA D2299/174.
[21] *Cheltenham Examiner*, 14 November 1906, p.5 col 3. (Arolf is 'flora' spelt backwards).

Was Jane Barker a 'Sabbath-breaker and adulteress'?

ALAN MUNDEN

ON 19 MARCH 1834 GEORGE ARTHUR BARKER AND JANE CLIFTON were married by licence in the church of St Michael Bedwardine, Worcester, where her father, John Clifton was the rector.[1] But since all of her family disapproved of the marriage none of them were present for the ceremony,[2] for as a music teacher and singer George was socially beneath them and unable to afford to keep a carriage and four horses. Twelve years later Jane was described as being a member 'of a respectable family, the wife of a member of the musical profession.'[3] George and Jane had a family of three children and in 1844 they moved to 2 Pittville Parade (now 10 Evesham Road), Cheltenham.[4]

When George was away and had singing commitments in London it is highly likely that it was then that Jane began a liaison with the rakish Lord Fitzhardinge[5] and she invited him to her house. When he was in Cheltenham he stayed a few minutes' walk away at German Cottage (on a site opposite St Margaret's Terrace in what is now St Margaret's Road). They both hunted with the hounds and on his visits to her he often wore his red frock coat. He came to her house once or twice a week where he remained alone with her (alone that is apart from her children and servants) and stayed until 11.00pm or midnight. And the purpose of his visits? Rather euphemistically it was said that he came 'to comfort and console her and to give and instruct her in the paths of morality and virtue.'[6] But clearly there was much more going on between them and it was rumoured in the town that she was one of his mistresses. Was George aware of the gossip and of Jane's intimate relationship with Lord Fitzhardinge? Whatever had happened between the couple she separated from her husband and in the autumn of 1844 she took their three young children with her to Acton Hall, near Dursley, which was only a few miles away from Berkeley Castle, the home of Lord Fitzhardinge. A year later Jane planned to return to Cheltenham but before she did so, she received two anonymous letters urging her to stay where she was. The first, which was undated, had the postmark of 12 October 1845:

> *Madam. It is rumoured that you propose residing in Cheltenham during the ensuing winter. It was thought, that after what occurred last year, that this outrage on common decency might be spared. Allow me to urge you to consider the step. I know that means will be taken to cause reflection should you come after this friendly warning. I am, yours faithfully, W. P.*[7]

The second was received on 24 October 1845:

> *Madam. I know not what effect my former friendly communication and warning may have had on you. However, I deem it right to repeat it, and I beg you to reconsider your intention of coming to reside in Cheltenham. Let the memory of your departed father and regard for your brother, both ministers of the holy gospel, have some weight with you. I hope you will pay some attention to the admonition of one who is personally unknown, but disposed in a friendly manner toward you. W. P.*[8]

Undeterred, Jane and her three children, the governess and two servants returned to 2 Pittville Parade on 3 November 1845.[9] Apart from what had been said in the two letters she hoped that after a year's absence the gossip about her might have subsided. However, within days of her return she received two envelopes containing religious tracts but this time without any anonymous letters. However, it was the wording on the envelopes that became the basis of the libel case. The first was addressed to 'Mrs Barker, under the protection of Lord Fitzhardinge', and the second, 'Mrs Barker, Sabbath breaker and adulteress'.[10] She felt affronted and believed that her name had been so tarnished that she could not live quietly in Cheltenham or elsewhere.

But who had sent the four envelopes and the two anonymous letters and what was their motive for doing so? Somehow or other the handwriting was identified as being that of an Evangelical clergyman, the Rev. Disney Robinson, who lived at 5 Pittville Parade, and although they were near-neighbours he had no previous contact with her. He and his wife had bought the property for £680 and moved to Cheltenham in 1844 and lived there until the mid-1850s. He was the vicar of the Yorkshire parish of St Peter, Woolley, 1833-68, and during his absence paid a succession of assistant curates to perform his parochial duties. He had a weak constitution believed to be a chronic lung condition and had been advised by his doctor to move to the south of England. He and his wife lived first in Cheltenham, then at Henbury Hill, near Bristol[11] and finally in Torquay. Robinson, like his two older brothers,[12] had been a student at St John's College, Cambridge (where in July 1824 it was reported that his shoes had been stolen, and the seventeen year-old thief, George Downing, sentenced to three months' hard labour).[13] On being ordained, Robinson was the curate of Holy Trinity and St Oswald, Finningley, near Doncaster 1828-33.[14] In January 1833 he became the incumbent of Woolley and in March he married Frances ('Fanny') Rebecca Hodgson, the only daughter of Robert Hodgson of Haigh Hall in the village of nearby Darton. Robert's son and heir, William Hodgson, who was ordained, officiated at his sister's wedding, and during the course of his ministerial career was the perpetual curate of St Peter, Cheltenham 1845-66. Both Evangelical families were well connected, and Frances became a wealthy widow after the death of her husband in 1869 and her brother in 1873.

More widely, Robinson used some of his fortune to secure the patronage of five Church of England livings: Holy Trinity, Leicester, Christ Church, Paignton and three in Wakefield – Holy Trinity, St Andrew and St Mary – all of which were transferred in 1883 to the larger patronage body, the Peache Trustees.[15] After his death Frances became a generous benefactor and paid for the erection of Christ Church, Wakefield and also contributed towards the endowment for two Evangelical theological colleges – Wycliffe Hall, Oxford and Ridley Hall, Cambridge. Ten years after his death she erected a tower at Ridley Hall in his memory that bore the inscription: 'The glory of the triune God, this tower was built as a widow's loving memorial the Rev. Disney Robinson MA, of St John's College, Cambridge, thirty-five years vicar of Woolley in the West Riding of Yorkshire, and late of Frogmore, Torquay, Devon, who died 17 September 1869.'[16] On her death in 1889 Frances left an estate of £46,500, the bulk of which went to a number of Evangelical agencies and good causes: £10,000 to support mission at home and overseas;[17] £5,000 to the Church Missionary Society; and £10,000 to the Church Pastoral Aid Society to support the employment of curates in West Yorkshire.[18]

How was it then, that a relatively wealthy and well-connected Evangelical clergyman with an impeccable reputation found himself in court and accused of libel? By the mid-1840s Cheltenham was a community polarised between the predominant Evangelical clergy and an assortment of influential laymen collectively referred to as the 'Lieutenant-General Close Brigade' and a much smaller group of pleasure-seeking hedonists associated with Lord Fitzhardinge. The Cheltenham Evangelicals were a powerful body led by the perpetual curate

of the parish church, the Rev. Francis Close 1826-56, whose numerous supporters were involved in charitable good works, who contributed financially to new places of worship, to the foundation and erection of schools for the poor and the middle-classes and in the promotion of Christian mission at home and overseas. Though not a beneficed clergyman in the town, Robinson would have been supportive of and involved in these various enterprises and concerns that found expression in Sunday worship and practical activism, the promotion of godly living, and in the strict observance of the Sabbath day.[19] He, and many other people in Cheltenham and across the denominational divide, would have been incensed by the immoral behaviour of the ungodly Lord Fitzhardinge and his paramour, Jane Barker.

Portraits by Francis Calcraft Turner (c.1772–1846) of the Rev. Disney Robinson and his wife Mrs Frances Rebecca Robinson, née Hodgson

(Courtesy of The Hepworth Wakefield)

The case of 'Barker *v* Robinson' was heard in three courts - the bail court in Cheltenham in April 1846, the assize court in Gloucester in August 1846 and in the Court of Chancery in London in January 1847. In the bail court Robinson was 'charged with an alleged libel published by him in the form of a direction to a letter, accusing the prosecutor of living in a state of concubinage and adultery with a person of high rank and station.'[20] Robinson pleaded not guilty and believed that he could establish his innocence and applied for the case to be heard before a jury. The proceedings in Gloucester evoked considerable interest throughout the area and from an early hour people (mostly men) queued to get into the courtroom. The two main players were Robinson, who was described as 'a clergyman of the Church of England, who had borne an excellent and irreplaceable character, which he had never forfeited except in this one transaction' and Barker, who was 'a married lady, of a most respectable family, the wife of a member of the musical profession and mother of three children.'[21] But while Robinson was present, Barker was absent from the proceedings. The case was heard before the Lord Chief Justice, Thomas Wilde, and presented by a legal team headed up by two QCs. Four people gave evidence: from Cheltenham, William Dykes a postman, and Barker's cook,

Elizabeth Mulloy; and from Wakefield, two men who positively identified Robinson's handwriting, Frederick Lumb, an attorney, and the Rev. Henry Dawson, the rector of Great Munden, Hertfordshire 1846-63, and who lived in Wakefield 1841-46 (and again in 1864-86).

In his defence Robinson claimed he had acted out of the best of motives. While he lived in Cheltenham he prepared young men for university admission and he believed that the scandal would 'corrupt the morals of his pupils and disturb the comfort of his wife.'[22] Against this it was argued that his action was based on rumour and as such was unbecoming in a clergyman. In any case, he should have gone to Lord Fitzhardinge directly and 'not to a defenceless woman'.[23] In his summing up, the judge was not particularly sympathetic. 'No fancied sense of duty or high-flown regard for the moral condition of society justified any man, much less a clergyman, in setting himself up as a secret censor of his neighbours, and publishing anonymous libels respecting them.'[24] The jury retired and returned 35 minutes later with a guilty verdict. Immediately, Robinson appealed to the Court of Chancery and after making the necessary apologies they were accepted, with costs awarded against him, and £50 was to be given to five nonconformist schools. Some of the recipients objected to this gift and two Wesleyan Methodist ministers in Cheltenham, William Burt and George C. Taylor, sent an open letter to Robinson:

> *Reverend and dear sir. Enclosed is the sum of £10, which we have much please in forwarding to you, on behalf of the Wesleyan body in Cheltenham, as an expression of our Christian sympathy, and in lieu of a similar sum we have recently received. We are, rev and dear sir, yours truly, W. Burt and G. C. Taylor, Wesleyan ministers.*[25]

Robinson refused to accept the £10 from them, and the whole matter seems then to have been soon forgotten. Disney and Frances Robinson continued to live at 5 Pittville Parade until in the mid-1850s they moved to Chesterfield House, Henbury Hill, Bristol. And what happened to Jane Barker? In 1851 Lord Fitzhardinge bought Cambray Villa, Clarence Road as his Cheltenham residence and home for Jane. After his death in 1857 he left her £20,000 in cash, an annuity of £1,000, German Cottage and also Acton Hall, on condition that she sold it to Sir Maurice Berkeley. In addition he gave each of her children £2,000, and for the two sons, a commission in the army for one and the prospect of a living in the church for the other.[26] At last, the clergyman's daughter from Worcester or, 'Mrs Potiphar Barker', as she was known, had more than enough income to buy her own carriage and horses.[27]

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[1] 'Married by licence' avoided the embarrassment of the rector having to read the banns of marriage of a union he and his family were against. His son was the Rev. George Hill Clifton, the rector of Ripple with Queenshill, Worcestershire 1838-80.

[2] Apart from the officiating clergyman (the Rev. George Williams) and the couple, the only witnesses to the marriage were the parish clerk and the town clerk.

[3] *Morning Post*, 13 August 1846.

[4] For information on the buildings and occupants of the houses in Pittville see: S. Blake, *Pittville 1824-1860: a scene of glorious magnificence* (Cheltenham, 1988), and the on-line edition 2018; and the comprehensive website: Pittville History Works (www.pittvillehistory.org.uk).

[5] William Berkeley, 1st Earl Fitzhardinge (1786-1857). He 'acquired an unsavoury reputation' - 'the king of Cheltenham' was regarded as 'an arrant blackguard' who was 'notorious for general worthlessness'. For a few months in 1810 he was the MP for Gloucestershire and later served as the Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire, 1836-57 (www.historyofparliament).

[6] *Morning Post,* 13 August 1846. The story of Jane's involvement with Earl Fitzhardinge was widely reported and the details vary from paper to paper.

[7] *The Examiner*, 15 August 1846. Do the initials 'WP' stand for Woolley Parsonage? In the printed reports the precise wording of the two letters is not always exactly the same and the days of the month also vary.

[8] *The Examiner*, 15 August 1846.

[9] How could Jane Barker afford to live in Cheltenham and to support her family, pay the governess, the servants and have her own carriage? Given the circumstances it is more than likely that Lord Fitzhardinge gave her the necessary financial assistance.
[10] *Morning Post*, 13 August 1846.
[11] At Hallen, in the parish of Henbury, Disney Robinson paid for the erection of an infant and Sunday school. An inscription read: 'To the glory of God. Of thine own have we given thee. 1 Ch. 29:14. AD 1864'. In 1882 Francis Robinson gave £500 to the 'Bristol Asylum or School of Industry for the Blind' (founded in 1793).
[12] Disney Robinson's two older brothers were also ordained. Hastings (1792-1866), a one-time curate of the Rev. Charles Simeon of Cambridge and later rector of Great Warley, near Brentwood, Essex 1827-66 (and who has an entry in the *ODNB*); and William Woolhouse (1801-1880) incumbent of Christ Church Chelsea 1845-65; and curate at Great Warley 1865-67.
[13] *Bury and Norwich Post*, 21 July 1824.
[14] In 1832 he published *The Christian's privilege, or words of comfort for his hours of sadness*; in 1833 a course of sermons on the Ten Commandments; and three anti-Roman Catholic publications (1829, 1836 and 1851).
[15] By 1931 the Peache Trustees were responsible for the patronage of 51 livings. As well as being involved with patronage, the Rev. Alfred Peache was the founder and benefactor of the Evangelical theological college, the London College of Divinity (from 1970 called St John's College, Nottingham and closed in 2020). The first principal (1863-84) was the Rev. Thomas Pownall Boultbee, previously the curate of Cheltenham parish church 1849-53 and the theological tutor of Cheltenham College 1853-63. See A. Munden, *The History of St John's College Nottingham* (Nottingham, 1995).
[16] Bullock, F.W.B., *The History of Ridley Hall Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1941), vol.1, p.158.
[17] The will of Frances Rebecca Robinson (31 July 1889).
[18] Bullock, p.158.
[19] David Bebbington has identified four Evangelical characteristics: conversionism, activism, Biblicism and crucicentrism. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London, 1989), pp.5-17. This evangelicalism was interdenominational and was found within the Church of England and nonconformity.
[20] *The Standard,* 29 April 1846.
[21] *Morning Post*, 13 August 1846.
[22] *Morning Post*, 13 August 1846.
[23] *Morning Post*, 13 August 1846.
[24] *The Standard*, 13 August 1846.
[25] *Bristol Mercury*, 17 April 1847.
[26] *Cheltenham Mercury*, 7 November 1857.
[27] According to Genesis 39:7-20, Potiphar's wife tried to seduce the handsome God-fearing Joseph.

Pittville Parade, where Jane Barker and the Robinsons were near-neighbours, shown on the Cheltenham Town Plan, 1855 (*Courtesy of Know Your Place West of England, www.kyp.org.uk*)

Recent Books, Articles and Webpages on the History of Cheltenham in 2020

STEVEN BLAKE

Baker, Norman, J., and Rees, Michelle, *The Court Rolls of the Manor of Prestbury 1726-1871*, published by Prestbury Local History Society, 2018, 183pp. £20.

Blake, Steven, 'The Perils of Speculation in 'Regency' Cheltenham: The Rise and Fall of the Honourable Miss Monson', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* **137** (2019), pp. 11-48. An account of the life and work of an aristocratic lady who built around 20 houses in Cheltenham, including St Margaret's Terrace, during the early 19th century.

Chatwin, Amina, *You've Got Me Thinking*, published by Reardon Publishing, Cheltenham, 2020. 176pp. £15. The autobiography of the late Amina Chatwin (1927-2016), edited and with additional biographical information, by Julian Rawes. Amina was a long-standing member of Cheltenham Local History Society and the author of *Cheltenham's Ornamental Ironwork* (1974).

Gale, Stephen (editor), *Leckhampton Local History Society Research Bulletin* **5** (2020). 56pp. £5. Articles on the history of Leckhampton by a number of authors, including 'Leckhampton's Stone Legacy' (Amy Woolacott), 'Rough Justice in 16th century Leckhampton' and 'Henry Knight's Will' [about the Lord of the Manor and complaints against him] (Eric Miller), 'The Moorend Grotto and its Occupants' (Eric Miller), 'Kidnappers Lane Market Gardens' (Keith J. Noyes), 'Memories of Leckhampton' (1) (Peter Lane) and (2) (Derek Webb), 'Dear chum, just a line to you…' [about early 20th-century postcards] (Anne Gale).

Hodsdon, James, 'Treasure Trove in Elizabethan Cheltenham', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* **137** (2019), pp. 250-1. A note on a 'pot of copper coin' found at Naunton in 1571/2.

MacInnes, Katherine, *Woman with the Iceberg Eyes: Oriana F. Wilson,* published by the History Press, Cheltenham, 2019. 320pp. £20. A biography of the wife of the Antarctic explorer, Edward Adrian Wilson.

Mann, Neela, 'The Mercers, the Masons and the Mariner', *Coin Collector* **5** (Autumn 2019), pp.46-9. 17th-century tokens issued by Quaker merchants in Cheltenham and Charlton Kings.

Markland, Jim, *Gamble and Greed. Oriental Navigators of Gloucestershire, their families and other stories*, published by the author, 2020. 197pp. £10. Many references to late 18th/19th-century Cheltenham residents, notably four Commanders of Indiaman, all buried in Cheltenham: Robert Hay, Charles Sheldon Timins, John Blanshard and William Layman.

Noel, Anthony F.G., *The Prestbury Post*, published by Prestbury Local History Society, 2019. 15pp. £3.

O'Connell, Christian, '"Poor, Proud and Pretty," Community History and the Challenge of Heritage in 'Darkest' Cheltenham', *International Journal of Regional and Local History* **15, part 1** (2020), pp. 48-69. An account of the University of Gloucestershire's Lower High Street history project.

Simpson, John (editor), *Managing Poverty: Cheltenham Settlement Examinations and Removal Orders, 1831-52* (Gloucestershire Record Series **34**), published by the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 2020. 459pp. £30. Transcriptions of 1,500 settlement examinations from records at Gloucestershire Archives, telling the stories of over 3,500 paupers, plus a comprehensive introduction to the subject.

Smith, Dave, 'Where there's a will…', *Token Corresponding Society Bulletin* **13, No. 1** (2019), pp. 17-21. An account of Thomas Cape (1798-1858), a woollen draper in Cheltenham High Street, *c.*1854 onwards, and his issue of a Crimean War token.

Wills, Jan (editor), 'Archaeological Review No. 43, 2018', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* **137** (2019), includes (p.280) notes on archaeological evaluation and excavation in Cheltenham (notably of a late Iron Age/early Roman enclosure at Elms Park, and at the former site of Monkscroft Primary School in Shelley Road, St Mark's, which revealed evidence of land use/occupation from prehistoric times onwards, and yielded fragments of 1st and 2nd-century pottery) and (p. 296) on a watching brief at Prestbury House in The Burgage, Prestbury, which revealed post-medieval pits.

Zaugg, Jurg & Zaugg, Nicola, Junior (in cooperation with Jill Waller and Ian Bishop), *Davis Velocipedes, Cheltenham*, 2020. 56pp. £25, including shipping from Switzerland (contact Jurg by email: ordinary.bicycle@bluewin.ch). Covers the history of early cycle manufacture in Cheltenham, drawing on research into Thomas Davis undertaken by Jill and technical details supplied by Ian, the local owner of a Davis penny-farthing.

New material is regularly added to the website of the **Pittville History Works** (www.pittvillehistory.org.uk), which has now completed a six and a half year project to collect the names and details of over 18,000 Pittville residents between 1837 and 1945, all of which are now available online. Several new articles have been added, including a collection of images of Pittville architecture and a GPS-guided architectural walk (both compiled by Andrea Creedon); a virtual heritage walk: 'Hidden Lives: botanists, buildings and bankruptcy' (including a number of locations elsewhere in Cheltenham, compiled by Desmond Marshall); a list of Pittville residents who supported women's suffrage; a number of new house histories and residents' biographies; and five image galleries with photographs of Pittville between 1890 and the 1940s, many of them from the *Cheltenham Chronicle*, captured by David Drinkwater.

Additional material is regularly added to the **South Town, Cheltenham Spa. 200 Years of Local Trading History** website (www.cheltenhamsouthtown.org), which is compiled by Stuart Manton. The site is well worth checking by anyone interested in the history of the Bath Road, Suffolks and Tivoli areas of the town.

Gloucestershire Archives: New Accessions for Cheltenham in 2020

JULIE COURTENAY

Despite periods during this year when the Archives Service was closed or running only a restricted service, new collections of records relating to Cheltenham continued to be donated or deposited (on long-term loan).

The following list is a guide only. As collections are processed, fuller details will become available via the Archives' online catalogue: https://ww3.gloucestershire.gov.uk/CalmView

All Saints, parish records: annual meeting of parishioners and annual parochial church meeting agendas, minutes, accounts and reports, October 2020 (**P78/2**, Accession 15383)

Baynham *see* **Hamlett**

Bethesda Chapel (Methodist): programme for play put on by Wesley Guild, 1933; year book, 1964-1965; photographs and press cuttings, c.1910-2000s (**D3418**, Acc.15286.1); various orders of service, 1992-1996 including 150th anniversary, 1996; gala concert programme, 1994 (**D7028**, Acc.15286.5); 'Bethesda Remembers' pamphlet giving details about the individuals commemorated on the chapel's war memorials, 2018 (**D13504**, Acc.15286.6)

Cheltenham Art Club: club magazines, 1959-1977; committee meeting minutes, 1948-1976; annual general meeting minutes, 1948-1970; Townsend tribune newsletter, 1992; paper on history of the club, n.d. (**D11487**, Acc.15353)

Cheltenham Auctioneers', Surveyors' and Estate Agents' Association: minutes, 1972-1991 (**D13953**, Acc.15284)

Cheltenham Freemasons, Lodge of St Paul: records include minutes, 1968-2005; committee minutes, 1967-2009; attendance register, 1968-2016; recollections of events leading up to and including the Consecration, with photograph and a Lodge history (1967)-2018 (**D15338**)

Cheltenham Magistrates Court: registers, 1991-1994 (**PS**, Acc.15429)

Deeds for various properties: draft lease of 7 Cambray Street, 1823; agreement to let 6 Berkeley Place, 1844; and draft agreement for purchase of building land in Circus Road, 1869 (**D15392**)

Dowty Group Limited: notes on installation, operation and maintenance for various electrically operated airscrews, 1940-1941; Rotol and British Messier 'Digest', 1954-1955; maintenance manual for Dowty Mining Equipment standard hydraulic prop, c.1950; records kept by Ray Horsfield of Dowty Mining Equipment, including drawings, company brochures and technical information, c.1960-1985; programme for 'The Beau Stratagem' performed by the Dowty Players, 1950; oral reminiscences of Cath Wain, 2019 (**D8347**, various accessions)

English Association of Male Voice Choir: poster for concert held in Cheltenham in aid of CLIC (Cancer and Leukaemia in Childhood), 1982 (**D10943**, Acc.15278)

Friends of Pittville: AGM papers, 2006-2018; executive committee/trustees' minutes, 2006-2019; secretary's papers, 2006-2008; Pump Room gates replacement proposal, 2006; papers concerning 2008 Pittville Park & Estate HLF bid by Cheltenham Borough Council, including condition survey and feedback on the bid's failure; papers of Pittville Gates Restoration Project, 2010-2015 (**D15293**)

Germany/Cheltenham links: records of a study visit for German teachers of English in 1996 (**D15360**)

Girl Guides, Battledown district: minutes, 2009-2015; posters and information relating to the centenary of the 11th Cheltenham guides, 2019; Battledown district history and census, 2020 (**D7107**, Acc.15302)

Gloucester Diocese: Diocesan Board of Education administrative files concerning appraisals of Church of England schools, including Christ Church, Cheltenham; Holy Apostles, Charlton Kings; St Mary's Infants & Junior, Prestbury; and St Mark's, Cheltenham, 1952-2014 (**GDR/A17/10**, Acc.15327); correspondence files relating to St James', St Paul's, Leckhampton and Prestbury Junior schools, 20th-21st cents (**GDR**, Acc.15427)

Gloucestershire County Council: Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, February 2020-October 2020 (**GCC**, Acc.15389)

Hamlett and Baynham families: papers compiled by Gwendoline Lane, family historian, c.1960-1990 (**D15242**)

Hattersley *see* **Paterson**

Highbury Congregational Chapel: Highbury News magazine, February-March, 1993 (**D12407,** Acc.15375.1)

McIntyre family: Cheltenham Union Workhouse, Essex Place, Superannuation Act form for Miss A McKinnell, 1896; mathematics school exercise book for James McIntyre, undated; James Alexander MacIntyre's enrolment award to the 4th Cheltenham Company Boys' Brigade, St Paul's Church, 1910 (**D15270**)

North, Elaine, local historian: papers collected by the late Elaine North relating primarily to Cheltenham, including photographs of events in town, 1940-c.1950; conveyance of four cottages in Coltham Field, Charlton Kings, 1863; poster and conditions of sales for shares in the County of Gloucester Bank, 1848; printed particulars of sale for 'The Lypiatts' building land in Cheltenham, 1915; printed certificate for an internal combustion engine starting device, 1904; certificate for change of name of Naunton Estates Ltd to Cheltenham Estates Ltd, 1934; legal documents regarding Court of Common Pleas, 1853 and 1881 (**D14900**, Acc.15254)

Paterson: letters between Catherine Mary Hattersley and her husband Robert W. Paterson (architect), with many references to domestic life in Cheltenham during the war, 1930s-1940s; Catherine's diary, 1979 (**D3867**, Acc. 15257)

Pearse *see* **Webber**

Portland Chapel (or **North Place Chapel**): title deeds to North Place Chapel, 1812-1985; documents regarding planning permission for North Place Chapel Manse, 1971-1989; deeds of trust and appointment of trustees of Golden Valley Independent Baptist Church, 1971-1976; documents concerning sale of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion chapel at Ebley, referred to in connection with the sale of the Manse, 1895-1976 (**D15252**)

St Christopher, Warden Hill, parish records: baptism register, 1968-2018; service registers, 2006-2018; accounts, 1959-1962; PCC papers, including references to the church building and extension, 1959-2005; parish magazines, 1993-1996 (**P198/2**, Acc.15240)

St Paul, parish records: licence for Robert William Mason to perform the office of stipendary curate, 1938; letters regarding the building of St Paul's, 1827-1830; parish magazines, 1874-2003; various postcards and photos of the church and churchyard, 1918-1933; newspaper cuttings on 'Procession of the Schools', 1836 and centenary celebrations, 1931; Flora Bowles's scrapbook, 1932-1983; various orders of service, 1836-1945; 150 year souvenir brochure, 1981; hymn tune book, 1823; miscellaneous documents regarding the history of the church, 1955-1978; sketch of church, c.2000 (**P78/10**, Acc.15283)

St Philip & St James, Leckhampton, parish records: PCC minutes, 1967-1968; pew report by the Reordering Project Board, with a photographic survey of the pews, January 2016 (**P198/2**, Accs. 15240, 15304)

St Stephen, parish records: PCC minutes, 1999-2013; PCC accounts, 1993-1996; annual parochial church meeting minutes, including vestry meeting minutes, 1993-2019; electoral rolls, 2011-2013; missions' account book, 1973-2006; valuation of brass and silver in the church, 1976; terriers and inventories for the church and vicarage, 1982-2010; papers relating to conversion of the Lady Chapel, 1991-2009, and other building work, 1999-2011; parish magazines, 1885-2016; programmes for 'Music at St Stephen's', 1987-1989; fundraising posters and programmes, c.1990-1998 (**P78/12**, Acc.15251)

Society of Friends (Quakers): Cheltenham Monthly Meeting minutes, 1967-2015; Cheltenham Preparative Meeting minutes, 1978-2014; monthly newsletters, 1991-2014; various flyers and publications; papers and correspondence about old meeting houses in Cheltenham, 1901-1903 (**D1340**, Accs.15263.1 and 15367)

Unwin, Geoffrey, of Arle Court, rugby player: copies of photographs and biographical information about Geoffrey (1902-1948), including a copy of his death notice in 1948 (**D15270**)

Vision 21 Gloucestershire (a community-led initiative for sustainable government): film titled 'Cheltenham in the Near Future,' 2019 (**D14684**, Acc.15234)

Webber, Joan Lucy (nee Pearse): wartime memories of Joan (aged 96) recorded as audio-video by her daughter at the Old Rectory Nursing Home in November 2019; with a summary transcript and a photograph of Joan taken in 1944 (**D15255**)

Wesley Church (Methodist), St George's Street: trustees treasurer's accounts, 1950-1972 (**D3418**, Acc.15286.1)

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CHELTENHAM.

Thursday, Oct. 18, 1810.

O comfortable streams! with eager lips,
And trembling hand, the languid thirsty quaff
New life in you! fresh vigour fills their veins.

ARMSTRONG on Health.

SADLER'S WELLS THEATRE,
CHELTENHAM.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF

MR. ABRAHAM SEWARD,

Scene Painter (here and at the Theatre-Royal) and Performer.

☞ Mr. S. most respectfully begs leave to acquaint the Nobility, Gentry, and Inhabitants of Cheltenham, that in consequence of the great applause which the merits of MASTER and MISS SMITH's Performance were greeted, with by a fashionable and numerous Audience, he has engaged them to Perform at his Benefit, which is the only emolument he derives for his services—therefore,

On Wednesday Evening next, September 24, 1810,
The following Novelties will be presented:

MISS SMITH
Will perform several admired pieces on the Piano-Forte, accompanied on the Violin by
MASTER SMITH.

A SELECTION OF THE MOST NEW AND POPULAR

AIRS, DUETTS, TRIOS, & QUARTETTS,

ON THE MUCH IMPROVED

HARMONIZED GLASSES.

TO CONCLUDE WITH

FANTOCCINI FIGURES,

AND A

COMIC PANTOMIME,

NEVER PERFORMED HERE,
With new Scenery—and which has been for several Weeks preparing under the direction of Mr. A. Seward.

Boxes, 3s.—Pit, 2s.—Gallery, 1s.
The Performance to begin precisely at 8 o'clock.

Advertisement in the *Cheltenham Chronicle,* 1810

See Peter Clifford's article on 'The Talented Seward Family', pp.3-16

Whimsical painting of a child by Theodora Mills

Miss Mills was a keen amateur artist among her other talents and interests. These are explored in 'Theodora Mills – a voice to be heard', pp.29-40

Image courtesy of Susan Oliver

Cheltenham Local History Society

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