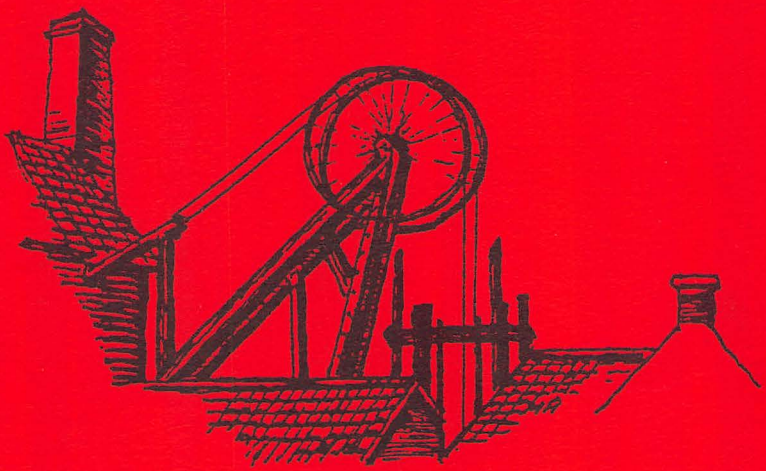
NORTH WANSDYKE

PAST

AND

PRESENT



Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society

No. 5, 1993

North Wansdyke

Past and Present

Journal of Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society

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Stanton Prior

Barbara J. Lowe and Elizabeth White

Part 2

(Part 1 of the article on Stanton Prior, published in North Wansdyke Past and Present, *no. 4, concentrated on the development of the village. Part 2 is concerned with the history of the manor and the people who held it.)*

In many villages there was no distinction between the village and the manor. However, sometimes the village might be more than the manor, as was Saltford, or part of a large manor incorporating several villages as was Keynsham. In Stanton Prior the manor does not seem to have included all the land in the village. There was a small amount of land which seems to have been outside the manor and independently owned.

The land was granted by King Edgar in 965, part to his faithful decurion Aelfsige, and part to Aescwig, Prior of St Peter's, Bath. By the time of Domesday Book (1085) St Peter's held the whole manor. The village paid tax on 3 hides of land. The Lord's desmesne was ½ hide, and the villagers farmed 2 hides, leaving ½ hide unassigned. Medieval records show that there were 2 freemen farming in Stanton Prior in 1258. Were they farming the ½ hide outside the manor's control? Medieval freemen did not have to remain in the village. Villeins and serfs were tied to the land, though one might occasionally be given freedom, as was John of Priston in 1258 by Prior Thomas, "to go elsewhere to better himself". This independent holding survived down the centuries. When Joseph Langton bought the manor of Stanton Prior in 1723 there was one farm which was not included.

The manor remained in the hands of the Abbey until the Dissolution of the monasteries in 1539. Many deeds have been preserved, so that the descent of the manor through various hands can be traced over a long period.

By 1200 Stanton Prior was held from the Abbey by the Cherem *(Cherm or Chermpe)* family. Many variants of the family name are recorded, and it seems possible that it was a branch of the family who held Wilmington *(Champeneys or Champenes)*. In addition to Stanton Prior they had land at Marksbury, Englishcombe, Priston, Wilmington, Eckweek (near Peasedown), and Wellow.

Some of the rents for these were in kind rather than cash. For example, Sybil, widow of Robert Cherm of Stanton Prior, held all her tenements in Englishcombe for the rent of 1 pair of gloves and 6½ quarters of good clean corn. In 1338 William Cherm (Sybil's son) leased a piece of land at Eckweek for an annual rent of 3 yards of good cloth and 1 pound of cumin (a reminder how valuable spices were). The Cherms were also granted the right of free warren in Stanton Prior in 1277. So they probably had a conyger (rabbit warren) or a fenced park for rearing deer. The Cherms also had the right of advowson (presenting a candidate as Rector) to the churches of Stanton Prior and Priston. They did not always have this right, so it seems that it was at times leased to different people, probably to raise extra money.

The deeds, by which leases were renewed and land exchanged, show that the signings of these deeds were great social occasions, when many gathered to witness publicly the transfer of land tenancy. The land grants made by William Cherm in 1312 were witnessed by many local worthies, including John de St Lo, John Champeneys of Wilmington, Thomas of Compton, John le Balun of Dunkerton, and Thomas de Cumb Hawaye.

By the mid 14th century the Cherm family found difficulty in securing male heirs. In 1361 the holder was a widow, Joan Criste. She was the granddaughter of William Cherm. She had married Richard Criste of Bristol. When she transferred her lease to her cousin Henry de Forde it included lands in Marksbury, Englishcombe, Eckweek, Wellow, and Bristol, as well as the manor of Stanton Prior. The deed was witnessed by the Mayor of Bristol, Robert Cheddre. It seems likely that such a wealthy woman would have lived in Bristol, her husband's home. We do not know if she ever lived at Stanton Prior. It is more likely that a steward was employed to manage the estate. In 1312 the Steward of Stanton Prior was named Walter de Everdun (or *Deverdene*). She would have had to go to Stanton Prior for the transfer of the land. Feudal law insisted on the public transfer of land, to prevent a tenant escaping from any duties of conditions. Later lawyers found all sorts of ingenious means of avoiding this condition.

Throughout the 14th and 15th centuries the Ford family held Stanton Prior, but it seems likely that the link became increasingly tenuous. They probably became non-resident. The Manor House decayed. By 1520 the manor was back in the hands of the Abbey and had a new tenant, John Richmond. The Richmond *(Richman, Richeman)* family were to hold the manor for 200 years, beginning

as leaseholders and ending as freeholders. In 1520 John Richmond leased from the Abbey the manor of Stanton Prior, the site of the old manor house, a dove cote, and the lands and rights, including the right to have cattle on the common called Bury Lease. He also held Lower Farm, which was worked by his son. After the Dissolution of Bath Abbey, John found his tenure of Stanton Prior under threat. At the Dissolution John Horner of Mells ("Little Jack Horner") obtained the lands held by the Abbey, and John Richmond found he had a new Lord. From the Horners the lands passed to the Eringtons. They granted the manor and advowson of Stanton Prior to William Rosewell *(Rosewall)* of Dunkerton in 1553. All the while John Richmond was the sitting tenant. John Richmond tried to buy out William Rosewell. He paid William £100 to have the reversion of the lease come to his eldest son, but having received the money William Rosewell refused to assign his rights. John took him to the Court of Chancery, but not until 1599 did William Rosewell alienate his rights to William Richmond (John's grandson). The bitterness between the two families was still evident fifty years later.

While these legal wrangles continued the Richmonds farmed their land, and very profitably, too. They came increasingly to dominate Stanton Prior. They appointed the Rector, sometimes himself a Richmond, to the post. They were church wardens and overseers of the Poor. In 1631 William Richmond was cited in the Knighthood Compositions as one of the yeomen who was wealthy enough to be knighted, and who had omitted to receive the honour and was fined for the omission. (This was one of Charles I's ingenious methods of making money during the eleven years of his personal rule without Parliament, 1629-1640.)

The Richmond wills show the level of influence these yeoman farmers had achieved. John, who died in 1509, left his children silver spoons, 2 each: they, in turn, left them to their children. He left iron bound wains (wagons), ropes and yokes for 12 oxen. He had oxen hired out to other farmers, including Thomas Holbyn of Keynsham. (Thomas Holbyn founded one of the Keynsham Charities.) John's wife received ½ of all the household goods (the other ½ went to two other sons) and enough "lake and lamske" (fine linen material) to array her children. She was his second wife and had three small children. His grown-up sons also had material for "hose". He also bequeathed large amounts of malt: a bushel to the churches of Stanton Prior, Priston, Newton St Loe, Marksbury, Farmborough, Compton Dando, and Corston. Was this to provide the basis of a "church ale", that favourite means of raising money for the church? Does the

quantity of malt he bequeathed show there was a malting in Stanton Prior as early as the mid 16th century? From his will John seems to have been a generous man: even his farm boy received a lamb.

It was quite common in the 15th and 17th century to leave bequests of clothing. In 1546 William Richmond (John's son) was left in the will of his friend Nicholas Derell of Marksbury 2 coats, 2 doublets, 2 pairs of hose, 2 shirts, 2 caps, and 6s 8d. John Richmond (another of John's sons) left his friend at Farmborough his second best things, including a harrow, a pan and platter, a tableboard, and "the crocke with the broken mouth" (an indication that even damaged household goods were valued).

The Richmonds, like so many 16th and 17th century land holders, became involved in many lawsuits, and much incidental information is revealed about everyday life in the court records of these cases. For example, William Richmond (John's son) had a lengthy dispute with Richard Brokeman in 1602. He was a Burnett man recently tenanting Stanton Prior land. They fell out over the right to cut grass and pasture cattle in Cox's Lane. It is an indication of how valuable grazing was that a dispute over verge-side grazing went to Chancery. Former servants of William were recalled to give evidence that they had pastured oxen there, and had also "shrowded" (lopped) the trees. This William Richmond had a mentally defective son, unable to look after himself or handle money, so special arrangements were made in the will for him to be looked after.

The conflict between Richmonds and Rosewells surfaced again in 1649. William Richmond (John's grandson) married twice. His second wife was Rebecca Rosewell. In his will he left her a £10 annuity, but the wardship of his children was in the hands of his brother John. Neither Rebecca nor her blood and kinship were to have anything to do with the wardship. If Rebecca opposed John her annuity was to cease. John was to educate and bring up the children "such as are fit for it as scholars, and to apprentice the others". He did allow Rebecca "the free use and occupation during her life of my best feather bed and the furniture thereunto belonging, and after her decease I give the same unto my son Jerome".

In his lifetime William had been a querulous man. He was in conflict with the law over non-payment of Poor Rate, over the supposed 13 pregnant serving maids (see *North Wansdyke Past and Present*, no.4), and over the maintenance of the church. He even was taken to law by his brother who was owed £65. He

must have had some change of heart towards the end. He left money for the roof and walls of the chancel to be wainscotted as far west as the steps that go to the Communion Table.

The first three Richmonds all produced large healthy families, not all of whom could get their living from the family farms. William Richmond (John's son) had nine children, including weak-minded John. One son inherited the family estate, one became a priest, and one, Edward, was apprenticed to a Bristol merchant, Alderman Mr Francis Knight. In 1616 Edward was admitted as a mercer and freeman of the City of Bristol. In the next four years he made a considerable amount of money, some of it by dealing in tobacco. He died unmarried in Lisbon, in 1620, at the age of 35. His body was brought home and buried in St Nicholas Church, Bristol. He left money to all his brothers and sisters and a £10 gold ring to his mother.

The fourth generation William Richmond, born in 1632, did not come into his estates until 1651, during the Commonwealth. His devotion to King Charles' cause nearly ruined him. He was forced to go to live on a small inherited estate at "Bath Easton", where four of his five children were born. During these years he suffered imprisonment for his royalist sympathies. If, as he said in a Chancery Suit of 1675, he had "faithfully served in the late unhappy and unnatural wars" then he must have been a soldier in his teens, because Charles was executed when William was 17. His chief persecutor was Richard Cottle of Bradford, who informed the authorities that William was a dangerous man. Cottle forced William to hand over money to secure his freedom. At one point Cottle forced William to grant a 99-year lease on a cottage William owned in exchange for his freedom.

It was in this William's time that the links between the Richmonds and Stanton Prior began to loosen. He did not live there for much of the time. His brother Francis did, but died in 1691 childless. He had been active in the village, serving as church warden and overseer of the poor. Francis left money in his will to his cousin William Richmond who lived at Saltford, dying there in 1743 at the age of 94. Another William of Stanton Prior's brother was Jerome. He became a clothier in Wiltshire, finally moving back to Bath Easton in old age. So while the Richmond presence in Stanton Prior declined other branches of the family settled elsewhere and flourished, spreading eventually to New England, Maryland, and Virginia.

The sixth generation of Richmonds of Stanton Prior ended in 1717 when William Richmond died of small pox at Conygers in Chewton Keynsham. He was a wealthy man and left bequests totalling £606. The end of Stanton Prior as an independent manor came in 1723 when Joseph Langton bought it. It became just part of the Langton Estate. They did not, then, own all the village. Poplar Farm, owned in John Richmond's time by the Vannan (Vaughan) family was by the 19th century owned by the Coates family. In 1874 James Coates went bankrupt and sold the farm to William Gore Langton, who thus received the last independent common rights on the Bury, which he promptly extinguished. It was planted with trees and became a pheasant preserve.

So Stanton Prior became a complete estate village entirely owned by the Gore Langtons. Thus it remained until 1940 when, on the death of Earl Temple, it was sold. It was bought by the Duchy of Cornwall in whose hands it has been ever since. So the Prince of Wales is the latest Lord of the Manor of Stanton Prior, successor to Prior Aescwig, William Cherem, Henry de Forde, William Richmond, and Joseph Langton, and all the many unknowns who have farmed their land and held court at Stanton Prior over the last thousand years.

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A Miner at Pensford nearly 80 Years Ago

Michael C. Fitter, RKC Cert.Ed.

The oral history in this article is based on information supplied by Mr Penney, in two interviews at his home in February 1993, with Mr Michael Fitter.

Gilbert Penney, the fifth of the six children of John and Ellen (née Gill) Penney, was born at Belluton, near Pensford, on 17 September 1899. Gilbert now takes up the story:

Around 1914 we moved to 'The Poplars', Pensford. It is on the hillside on the left hand side of the main road, as you drive towards Wells. There is still one poplar there. Dad was a builder and when I left school at thirteen, I went and helped him putting in kerbs. This might have been in preparation for starting to tarmac the roads round here.

Up to that time on the side roads, loads of large pieces of lias stone from Charlton Quarry would be dropped by horse and cart in heaps. The stone breakers with their hammers would sit at the road side plying their skills. Water was sprayed on the stone spread across the lane before a layer of gravel was added. A steam roller, probably from Trowbridge, then rolled it flat. But in the summer, wagon wheels would grind the stone into white powder, which the wind blew on to the hedges, till they looked as if it had been snowing. When it rained, the water mixed with the powder to make a form of lime, like mortar. Two men with a small machine with flaps would draw the mixture to the road side, where farmers collected it for their fields. The main roads were not much better.

Now father knew the manager of the Bromley and the Broad Oak, Pensford, collieries, a Mr Sparks, so in 1914 when I reached the advanced age of fifteen, he gave me a job at the Bromley Pit.

The two pits, which were about a mile apart, were connected by a small-gauge dramway about 15 inches wide, which pulled some forty drams from one pit to the other by wires attached to an engine at each pit.

I shall never forget the first day I went to Bromley. It was a dark winter's morning and I knew nothing about the wires. As I walked along the track I could hear the engines start up and suddenly I heard the sound of a wagon coming straight at me. I jumped over the bank to get out of its way, only to find that empty trucks from the opposite direction were coming at me. In the darkness I was very frightened.

I was told that I could start work on the screens which separated the large from the small pieces of coal. The bigger lumps were put into wagons at Bromley, and the smaller pieces went into drams to Broad Oak into a washer. There the dirt fell to the bottom and the coal was sent to the Bristol iron works for smelting. Screening was very dirty work. As the drum turned and the small coal fell through, we below shovelled it into drams which were weighed in empty and out full. There was just work for a man and a boy - which was me. It was a two-mile walk to Bromley, where I had to be by six o'clock in the morning, then work all day, finish at five, and then walk back two miles. I was extremely exhausted when I got home.

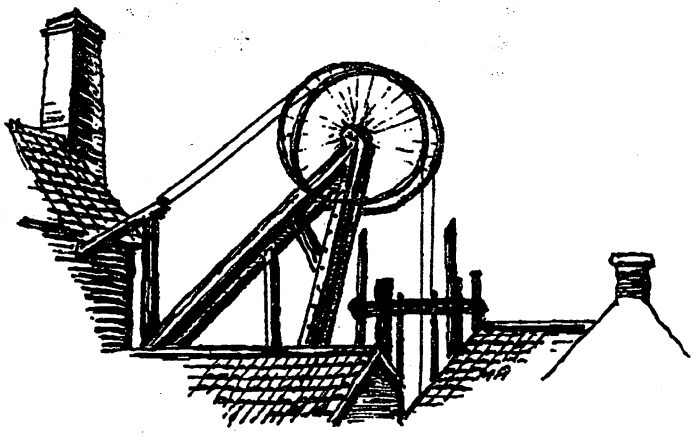
Sometime after the 1914 War started, I was transferred to Broad Oak where I worked from 6.00am till 2.00pm, or 2.00pm till 10.00pm. There was no night shift, though maintenance work went on through the night. A number of miners were conscripted, including my brother Leonard and my cousin Harry Gill. I think Leonard was in the Somerset Light Infantry; he was certainly injured, but both of them survived the terrible loss of life in the war. I was deferred from conscription by the firm for one year, but knew nothing about it until I saw my name in the paper. When the time came, the war was over.

During World War One a lot of men came to work at Broad Oak from Pensford and Clutton. In fact, practically all the local men had to work in the pit as their war service, like the 'Bevin Boys' after World War Two. Some had to give up good jobs to be in or on the mines. But in any case, other civilian jobs were folding up so they had to go to the pit to get work.

At Broad Oak I had to unhook groups of nine from the forty odd drams that went between the two collieries, and hook them to the wire rope which pulled them to the top of the gantry by an engine there. From there, the dramway sloped away slightly, and the trucks slowly coasted along the line, beyond the large engine House, till they were above the siding with the G.W.R. wagons below. After the nine drams had each emptied its cargo of a few hundred-weight of coal, they

circled round to beside where they had ascended the gantry, to be returned to Bromley. This went on all day. One had to be careful in hooking and unhooking. One man had his leg broken by drams.

I was at Broad Oak before production started there and just had to deal with wagons from Bromley. The trouble at Broad Oak was that there was water in the pit. Two pumps were used to draw out the water, using nine-inch pipes. The water sucked up ran down the hillside into the River Chew below. They were not pulling up coal for several years, but they were by the time of World War One. Then I had to contend with two lots of coal trucks. The Broad Oak pit was very deep and they did not work at the bottom of the shaft but took seams of coal from higher up. There they would branch out into many seams, none of them very thick. The seams went in all directions. One got as far as Hursley Hill, near Gibbets Lane. Another seam went towards Bromley, where they met the men coming from the opposite direction.



Pit-head gear. *Sketch by Michael Hutchings*

The cage to take men down the main shaft was some four or five feet across, with an iron or steel gate. It had guiding wire 'ropes' either side to prevent the cage bumping the sides. These ropes were attached to the head gears above the pit. Some cages had two or three decks; Broad Oak had three, each taking four men. There was also a large Engine House. On one sad occasion the engine failed and the cage dropped to the bottom of the shaft into the water, where several men were killed, including Mr Urch and Mr Hillier. That was at

Bromley. I think a cotter pin came out of the engine. On another occasion this cage 'ran away' at Broad Oak and men were injured, but I'm not sure about the details.

The cage that took the men down also took the drams up and down. In the Engine-Winding House the powerful engine had a large drum with wire wound round it that raised and lowered the cage some distance off. The drum had marks on it which indicated that the cage was fully down or up, so that drams could be pushed on or off it. Down the shaft the side passages at first were tall enough to walk along. There was another ventilation-cum-escape shaft of the same width, but this was not used.

With the narrow seams, the men had to lie on their sides or on their backs to use their pick axes and shovels. Then they had to prop the tunnels up as they went. We sent a lot of wood down to them. They also used wax candles and narrow green ones, which also came in drams from Bromley. They used old bowler hats with their rims removed, and attached a candle to the front of them. I was there when these were phased out and replaced with carbide filled acetylene lamps like those used on cycles.

When I was there, there were no pit head baths; they only came later. On one occasion I was walking home from work, when I met the wife of one of our wealthier neighbours. I was so black that fortunately she did not even recognise me.

The best quality coal, for household use, was from number five pit at Bromley. The Broad Oak coal was not so good and was probably only for industrial use. There was no free coal for top (surface) workers, but underground men had a weekly load tipped outside their houses. The free coal was of mixed quality; some pieces were large and others small. The coal was brought and tipped by horse and cart. Some men used to do their own 'hauling' for themselves and for others. I'm not sure if they had to pay to have it carried for them. In any case, it used to be a shared cost.

You put the small coal on the fire and let it bake (melt into one piece), then broke it up. It didn't burn too badly and it certainly gave out a good heat. The wives used it to heat the copper clothes boilers in the wash-house. Every house had a coal heated 'boiler'. After the pit closed I used to build them. Old cottage grates with a bread oven beside them, and a swinging 'arm' to hold the kettle

or the stew-pot, happily burned free coal. Many houses round Publow and this area had thatched roofs, as this house had. The Popham family owned many properties in the area of Pensford, Clutton, Farnborough, Marksbury and Compton Dando. But in 1911 Mr Popham had to sell many of them because of his foolish 'speculation'. Those who bought them modernised the houses and removed the thatch off their roofs.

Yes, the lads used the guss and used to take it in their stride. It was all part of the day's work. The work below was hard and dangerous. When I left Broad Oak in 1921, as a single man I was paid £2.12.6 for a full week's work. But of course, there was a great feeling of camaraderie among the men. There were possibly one to two hundred of them, all from the local villages, who mostly came on cycles. Some worked on repairs through the night. Water was always the problem at Broad Oak On one occasion when water was being pumped out they accidentally drained the wells at Stanton Drew. That was serious as we all relied on the wells for water. Piped water did not come to Pensford until at least 1927. In my home here near Publow there was no piped water until 1937, nor electricity until 1957!

I was in the coal works from 15 5o 21. At Hunstrete the coal was just below the surface. That was 'open cast' mining. In the Forest of Dean there were 'drift mines' into the hillsides, but there was none of that here. To bring the drams from Bromley banks had to be built up in low-lying fields to level the railway. Drams also went down into the pits, where one of a small team of men scribbled their number in chalk on each full truck, which officials in the Booking Office duly recorded. The team's pay was based on this record. They were paid on a Saturday, when they would sit on a bank at the colliery and share the money out.

There were pit ponies at Bromley, but I can't remember any at Broad Oak The animals virtually lived underground, and only came up at holiday times. The men were very kind to them, as they liked their ponies.

Broad Oak colliery closed after the Second World War. They didn't fill the shaft, but simply capped it with concrete. The slag heaps were just left and nature took over.

> Thus concluded Gilbert Penney, the frail nonagenarian miner who is blessed with such a fine memory and a helpful nature. In Gilbert's wide garden with its old apple trees is a humbler building for just one horse and

one cart, built, of course, of local stone. An outside flight of wooden steps lead to the empty hay loft above the stable. This architectural gem, like the nearby well and its rustic pump, lies still and quiet. Like their owner's mining memories, they too belong to another age.

A short historical background

Bromley, possibly sunk in 1860, was the last pit in Somerset to use horses for pulling drams underground. Pensford and Bromley Collieries Ltd was formed in 1909 with the proposal that a new mine be sunk at Pensford. The dramway to Pensford gave access to the G.W.R., it being built in a straight line with 2ft 10in gauge lines, using high embankments and low cuttings. Trucks held over 7 cwt of coal. Pensford, one of Somerset's newest pits, was the first to have pit-head baths. The work-force fluctuated from 200 to nearly 500 in 1941. Of its two 14ft wide shafts, the south shaft was only 750ft deep; but the north shaft, the one used, attained the depth of 1,494ft. Geological faults caused seams to rise and fall, involving the expense of many haulage engines and pumps, which finally made the pit unviable. It closed in 1958, a year after Bromley's demise.

Hic Jacet

Margaret Whitehead

If you had been living in Keynsham during 1875/6 the one topic of conversation which was certain to evoke a response was the question of the site for a cemetery.

With a population of 2,245 a debate of this importance involved everyone. Whereas today when a controversy arises, such as the recent proposal to relocate a division of the Ministry of Defence in Keynsham, the heated debate is confined to a small concerned minority, leaving the vast majority indifferent to the outcome.

In April 1875 a report in the *Daily Post*, a national newspaper, engendered a spate of indignant letters from the combatants. The report on "An Indignation Meeting at Keynsham" informed readers that an open air meeting had been held the previous evening outside the Lamb and Lark Hotel in Keynsham. The report continued:

> . . . the bill convening the gathering stating that the object was "to give the inhabitants an opportunity of expressing their views as to the conduct of the vicar in refusing to bury a parishioner". About four hundred persons assembled, after a delay of nearly an hour. Mr H. WALTON, in moving that Mr Lloyd should take the chair, asked his hearers whether, as intelligent residents of the parish they would allow their feelings to be outraged as they had been by the vicar. It was a grievous pity that when the deceased had expressed a wish to be consigned to Christian burial in the churchyard, the vicar determined to refuse it. This was a disgrace not only to Keynsham but to the Church at large - a crying evil which demanded public exposure, and a public explanation and apology by the vicar (hear, hear). Thanks to the great condescension of a Dissenting body in the parish, the remains of their friend were at last peacefully committed to mother earth. This was not the first piece of arbitrary conduct in which the vicar had indulged; his idiosyncrasy seemed to be to differ from and disagree with his parishioners; nothing seemed to please him. But the vicar must be brought to book somehow or other (hear, hear).

The meeting continued with a statement from Mr John Ricketts, the undertaker involved and a member of the Baptist church. As the meeting drew to a close

Mr Walton moved:

That this meeting considers Mr Gray's proposal to bury Mr Cooper at Arno's-vale was only a specious way of getting out of a difficulty.

Mr SHEPPARD seconded the motion, which was carried almost unanimously, and a vote of thanks to the chairman terminated the proceedings.

Rev J. H. Gray, Vicar of St John's Parish Church, 1870-1894
Photo: © Barbara J. Lowe

The Vicar of Keynsham from 1870 to 1894 was the Rev. J. H. Gray. There is evidence to suggest he was at loggerheads with parishioners and townsfolk over various issues from time to time.

The next day a lengthy letter appeared from the vicar vindicating his actions and "giving a plain unqualified denial to the statement that I refused to allow the late Mr Cooper to be interred in my graveyard . . . "

The following extracts from the letter summarize the situation that was to lead to the General Vestry finally deciding to do something about selecting a site for a cemetery in Keynsham.

When I returned home on the Wednesday evening, March 31st, at half-past five, and ascertained upon satisfactory evidence that Mr Cooper had died of typhoid fever, I did feel very anxious to obtain the consent of his friends that he should be interred in a cemetery and not here. I knew from very painful experience what fear would seize many if such remains were laid in my overcrowded churchyard surrounded by a considerable population. Having had eight cases of typhoid fever in my own house within the first two years of my residence here, I may be more easily alarmed than most persons concerning it. Having been exempt through the goodness of God during the last two years, I was the more anxious to continue exempt, and I felt the less reluctance in making such a proposal, inasmuch as Mr Cooper had no ties with the parish. He had been only a short time resident among us. His friends had at first intended to have his remains conveyed to Glasgow, and there could not therefore be in his case the feelings

associated with a birthplace or with long residence. I therefore did propose to Mr W. R. Clark that he should obtain the widow's consent to her husband's interment in Arno's-vale Cemetery, and it was arranged, with Mrs Cooper's concurrence, that the interment should take place on Thursday, April 1st, at the Cemetery, and that I should officiate there in token of my respect for the memory of one whom I had regarded as an honourable and a Christian man.

Mr Clark expressed his own hearty concurrence in the wisdom of the step, and pledged himself to give his warm support if I would endeavour to close the churchyard. In my opinion my parishioners, instead of blaming me for my endeavours to protect them from infection, should praise me. Some of them exhibited such a fear of typhoid fever when it was in the Vicarage that they would not on any account come even to the door. I remained at home on the Thursday, prepared to go at any hour to the funeral, and at 11a.m. learned to my surprise from Mr. Clark, that arrangements had been completed for the interment in the Baptist Chapel yard here. I did not inquire, and do not know, what caused this change of plan . . .

You, Sir, and the public generally may not know that my churchyard is very small. There is about half an acre available for interments, and it is surrounded by houses; this churchyard has been used for 500 years, and is now used in a parish containing 2245 inhabitants. It should long since have been closed, and a cemetery provided for the parish. I have taken the opinion of a medical gentleman of eminence upon the condition of my churchyard, and have his permission to state that it ought not to be used any longer, and there are many that can testify that for some time past I have been taking steps to bring about this consummation, and hope that such may be the practical issue of the indignation meeting. If the speakers had vented their indignation upon the state of the churchyard as a place of interment for the dead, and joined in a memorial that it should be closed, I should have heartily concurred in the movement, even though the pecuniary loss to me would be considerable; so disinterested was I in Mr. Cooper's case, that I sacrificed five guineas.

The vicar continues with an expression of distress that any attempt could be made to alienate the affections of nonconformist parishioners, that he had always treated them kindly and impartially and given them the benefit of his various charitable activities etc.

He was all the more grieved because a "decided improvement has taken place in this parish of late years . . . there has also been a much blessed effort made during the past winter among the working men of this parish".

Mr. Gray concludes by stating "It is not my intention to notice any correspondence which arise upon this subject . . . I am, Sir, your obedient servant, J. H. Gray, M.A., Keynsham Vicarage, April 6th 1875.

However, the matter did not end there and the Vicar's letter elicited a derisory and sarcastic reply on April 8th from Mr. John Ricketts, the undertaker. The following extracts convey the antipathy that he felt.

> GENTLEMEN, - I have read with some surprise the letters of the Rev. J. H. Gray, the vicar of Keynsham, and his vulpine champion . . . [he *is* getting down to personalities!] Amongst the various statements of the vicar, he affirms that the spot chosen for the grave of the late Mr. Cooper was within forty yards of his own doors. In point of measurement his is inaccurate, but this is not very material. He, however, entirely omits to mention that the spot which his disinterestedness induced him to name as a convenient resting-place for the remains of the deceased was within ten yards of a row of cottages inhabited by several families . . .
>
> The vicar states that he "ascertained upon satisfactory evidence that Mr. Cooper had died of typhoid fever". I should like to hear whence this evidence was obtained, as the medical gentlemen who attended the deceased, and who are the only competent judges, certify that he did *not* die of that disease. . . I may mention however that certain proceedings in the County Court have been instituted against me by those engaged in the preparation of the grave, etc, and which proceedings will enable me to state on oath that which in a newspaper will be taken cum grano. [*Now* we are getting to the nitty gritty!] In conclusion, I forbear to criticise the autocratic tone of the vicar's epistle; but it may not be uninteresting to those who have only cursorily read it to know that the word "my" occurs no less than twenty-four times in this effusion.
>
> Trusting to your sense of justice to insert this communication, and that I may not have to trespass upon your space again.
> I am, Gentlemen, your obedient servant,
> JOHN RICKETTS, Undertaker, etc., Keynsham, April 8,1875.

This letter was followed by an anonymous writer from Cotham who while appreciating Mr. Gray's wish to close the churchyard thought the Wesleyans at Keynsham had a strong case against the vicar. There is no doubt the Baptists and Methodists were trying to settle old scores.

Baptist burial records show that a Thos. Cooper of Keynsham formerly of Glasgow was buried in April 1875.

I have to admit to feeling some sympathy for the vicar and his family; eight cases of typhoid in two years must have been distressing, and indicates that all was not well with the water supply in the town.

We now come to a General Vestry Meeting on July 12th when it was resolved:

> That in the opinion of the Ratepayers of the Parish of Keynsham the Churchyard of the Parish Church and the several other burial places connected with the Chapel situate in the said Parish are insufficient and dangerous to the Inhabitants of the said Parish.
>
> That a copy of the resolution be transmitted to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department.
>
> Moved an amendment that it is not time to close the Churchyard or the several burial places connected with the chapel there as it will have the effect of increasing the Taxes.
>
> Amendment carried.

Surprise, surprise! Although almost one hundred and twenty years separate the General Vestry from our present District Council, perhaps not so very much has changed!

The third burial ground in the town was at the Bethesda United Methodist Free Church in Temple Street (currently *Simply Carpets*). This was one of three of the various strands of Methodism in Keynsham. The church versus chapel divide was sharply defined well into this century.

However, the State now took a hand in the proceedings. On the 26th October 1875 in accordance with an Act of Parliament passed earlier in the reign of Queen Victoria, an Order in Council was made by the Court at Balmoral. This

Order prohibited with certain exceptions further burials in the graveyards of Keynsham Parish Church, the Baptist Chapel and the United Methodist Chapel. We next find the General Vestry Meeting of March 15th 1876 moving:

> That a burial ground shall be provided under the "Burials (beyond the Metropolis) Acts". Moved an amendment that a consideration of the question before the meeting be postponed for six months. Amendment on being put to the Meeting was lost and the original resolution carried. Members of a Burial Board were then appointed.

The new Board, consisting of a chairman and eight members was drawn from the "upper echelons" of Keynsham society.

Mr. John Score the Chairman owned the Tanyard in Stockwood Vale.

Mr. Harford Lyne J.P. was the Lord of the Manor of Keynsham residing in the Manor House, Manor Road.

Mr. Charles Harris Wood was a farmer of Rock Hill Farm, Wellsway.

Mr Alfred Wood (brother to the above) a farmer at Lodge Farm, now called Chandos Lodge, Durley Hill.

Mr. Thomas Read, yet another farmer, was in the New Barn Farm, Wellsway (now called Uplands Farm).

John Norman Brown. This is the only member of the Board of whom I can find no reference in Keynsham. However, he tendered an estimate for repairs to the Parish Church in 1861 from a Bristol business address, so obviously had connections here.

Mr. Charles Scears lived in Abbey Mead, The Park (descendants of his still live in the area).

Mr. Richard Barrell Cox resided in Chandos Villa, The Park, sadly demolished to make way for the bypass in 1961. He was the odd man out who disagreed with the rest.

They set to work and on November 1st produced a three page report of their activities which proceeded to cause ructions, to put it mildly. The report bristles with the names of important officials who were consulted, including Dr. Holland a representative of the Secretary of State who came to inspect the proposed site.

The Board had received only one reply from advertisements asking for tenders for the sale of a piece of land suitable for the establishment of a cemetery. This was from Mr. Arthur Clayfield Ireland, the Squire of Brislington Hall, and was situated in Charlton Bottom. This was not considered desirable.

The Board then wrote to a Mr. Hemmings and Mr. Serle of "The Cameroons", Clay Lane (now Park Road) to ask if they were disposed to sell some land known as Gastons and Hawkeswell. A sub-committee of three was formed to make further investigations. In May they had an offer from Mrs. Skuse offering two acres in Charlton Lane at £200 an acre. As nothing had been heard from Messrs. Serle or Hemmings this offer was accepted. On June 16th a contract was signed with the express condition that the assent of H. M. Secretary of State's permission be obtained, plus the assent of the Vestry of the Parish. The Board then appointed an architect.

To quote the report: "At this juncture a conflict of opinion arose, on the part of certain Parishioners, as to the site selected by the Board. . ."

As a result the Board sought the approval of Dr. Holland who came and inspected the site. He listened to both sides and considered the geologists' reports and decided that the land could be thoroughly drained and approved the purchase.

However, this only made matters worse and on the 10th November the Ratepayers Committee distributed a printed letter to the ratepayers and inhabitants of Keynsham. On the same day Mr. Richard Barrell Cox also distributed a personal circular setting out his account of all that happened and detailing his appeals to the other members of the Board which had apparently fallen on deaf ears. The following are two short extracts from this circular including the final paragraph:

> I would here correct an error in the description of Mrs. Skuse's land; it is situated not in Charlton Lane, which lies in another direction altogether, but in a narrow out-of-the-way place, euphoniously designated "Clay" or Clayey" Lane...
>
> In conclusion, I may state that I have acted to the best of my ability in the discharge of my duty as one of your representatives, and in publishing this statement I only desire to put in possession of information omitted from the Board's "Report" and without which you could not form so correct an opinion on the conduct of myself and colleagues; for, after all, we are practically upon our trial in this matter.

I now set out the first paragraph of the ratepayers' committee memorial followed by an extract which comes to the nub of the whole matter and informs

us that the committee had employed their own geologist for an independent opinion.

> It must be satisfactory to the parishioners of Keynsham to find that the Burial Board have at last been compelled to emerge from the seclusion which they have maintained during the past nine months, and to publish what they term a "Report" of their proceedings. If this report had contained the *whole* truth, and not have been confined to partial statements, which are calculated to mislead, there would have been little to complain of; but when a public body omit many of the most material portions of their proceedings in giving an account of their stewardship to the ratepayers, it is high time that such proceedings should be scrutinized. It is therefore due to the inhabitants that a faithful statement should be laid before them, so that they may be impartial judges of the important questions which they will shortly have to determine...
>
> In his report Mr. Masters gives a variety of practical reasons for his opinion that the land could not be drained without incurring a vast and needless expense, and he adds: "The site is in the worst possible position in relation to the water supply of the town, and if the ground be used for burial purposes, the effect upon health will be, in all probability, serious, as no drainage or filtration will prevent static water from the burial ground percolating downwards, and following the joints of the rock, mixing with the sources of supply to the wells of the town".

This circular was reported on the next day in the *Bristol Mercury*, concluding with the latter half of the final paragraph as follows:

> The parishioners generally are for the reasons here given invited to second the efforts made by the Ratepayers' Committee, and to attend at the Vestry Meeting on Monday next and record their vote against an unnecessary expenditure of their money for a site so objectionable and fraught with consequences to serious.
>
> We are,
>
> Your faithful servants,
>
> THE RATEPAYERS' COMMITTEE.

The plea did not go unheard; about two hundred inhabitants turned up at 10a.m. on Monday 13th November to the meeting called for the purpose of sanctioning the purchase of the site. After some heated exchanges it was agreed to adjourn to the Drill Hall (on Bath Hill) at 7.30 that evening in order to accommodate the

large gathering. This was faithfully reported the next day in the *Times & Mirror*. Keynsham was certainly in the news!

At the adjourned meeting the proposition was lost on an amendment and the General Vestry Minutes record that a Poll was then demanded on the part of the Burial Board and fixed for the ensuing Wednesday. At the next Meeting on Thursday the results of the Poll were declared: the proposal was overturned by 241 votes.

Silence until 23rd February 1877 when the Vestry Meeting with the Rev. J. H. Gray in the chair, proposed that two acres of land on Bath Road be purchased at £250 an acre for the establishment of a cemetery. There was no seconder for this but it was then unanimously resolved that two and a half acres of Mr. Comer's on Durley Hill be purchased at £350 per acre.

At the Meeting on May 18th 1877 it was resolved to sanction the borrowing by the Keynsham Burial Board of £2,000 for providing forming and laying out the Keynsham cemetery and for building a chapel or chapels theron, such sum with interest to be charged upon and to be repayable out of the future poor rate.

A hand-written account of the expenses connected with the purchase are among the papers in my care. The site cost the princely sum of £875.

As a result of the above furore, Keynsham Cemetery was eventually sited in the middle of a very large Roman Villa built in the late third century. It is now thought, by the experts, that this villa was so richly adorned and elaborately built as to be classed as a palace. But that is another story.

In the next issue we hope to publish an account of what happened afterwards, when the grave diggers started "bumping through" the walls and precious mosaic floors of the villa.

Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society

Officers, 1993

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Chairman	Mr Eric Linfield
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