

AROUND KEYNSHAM & SALTFORD PAST AND PRESENT



THE JOURNAL OF KEYNSHAM & SALTFORD LOCAL
HISTORY SOCIETY

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KEYNSHAM & SALTFORD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

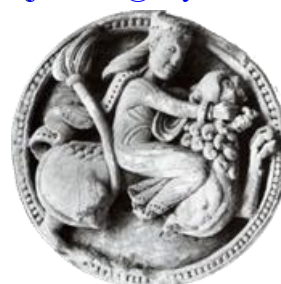
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The Society was formed in 1965 as a non-profit making voluntary organisation concerned with researching and recording the history of the Keynsham and Saltford area. Since 1965 the Society has amassed a large archive of photographs, documents, maps and transcripts from primary sources and newspaper articles.

Membership of the Society is open to everyone who is interested in local history. Monthly meetings are held at St. Dunstan's Catholic Church Hall, Bristol Road, Keynsham from September to April, normally on the third Monday and commencing at 7.30pm.

Details of any of the Society's publications including past journals can be obtained from the society's website; www.keysalthist.org.uk

Editorial communications should be sent to Paul Benn (journal@keysalthist.org.uk).



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Cover illustration; – “Kena” Manufacturing Co. letter heading - 1912.

AROUND KEYNSHAM & SALTORD PAST & PRESENT

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Notes from the Chairman

It does not seem very long since I wrote the preface to our journal in the Society's fiftieth year, in 2015. Now, we have reached our diamond jubilee, and this issue starts with a brief account of the Society's story and achievements. We have not held any great celebrations to mark the latest milestone, but the very fact that the Society is still alive and flourishing is a testament to the enthusiasm and commitment of all those who have contributed to running and supporting it through the years.

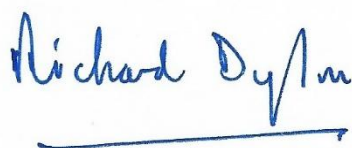
There is no doubt that local history is a subject that appeals to many people, often more so as they reach middle age and begin to look back with a longer view at changes over their own life and before. Whilst we know the interest is there, the challenge we have is to find willing and energetic volunteers to put in the effort to keep things running. Of course, in our case we need some who also have the interest and enthusiasm to research, write and speak about local history to inform and entertain others both among our membership and in the wider population.

It is a pleasure, therefore, to note that our committee has been strengthened over the last year by some new blood to replace stalwarts who are stepping down. We are very grateful to all those who contributed so much to our success over the last few years.

As well as our usual activities, committee members have been working hard on longer-term projects. Andy Williams has put many hours into developing a new and improved website and we are very appreciative of his efforts. Our aim is to make this a valuable source of information on the history of the area, for use by everyone, and with some extra features available to members. Besides our own initiatives, there are several projects underway in Keynsham, albeit at an early stage, that will improve awareness of local history and I hope lead to better access to some of the many artefacts from the town's history. The committee will be contributing where we can, to work at St John's Parish Church and by the local authority, to make the most of these.

In reading the draft of this issue, I was delighted at the variety of the contributions. Along with a follow-up on the Keynsham ammonites, we have the archaeology of Keynsham Abbey and the Roman altar stone from Compton Dando. From the twentieth century, a new chapter in the story of 53 Keynsham High Street, a gruesome murder trial which centred on Keynsham and finally an account of the life a young Royal Marine from the town.

There is of course always much more to research, and many memories that are not recorded, so if you would like to add to next year's issue, please contact Paul, our editor.



Richard Dyson

60 YEARS OLD - Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society's Anniversary

By Richard Dyson

Early Years

The year 1965 was the height of the "Swinging Sixties", with British pop music and culture sweeping the world. Here in Keynsham, some worried that the main thing swinging was the wrecker's ball: the biggest changes the town had ever seen were underway. The bypass was under construction and the modernist town hall at the top of Bath Hill was opened.

The extent of demolition and building led a group of local residents to realize that there was very little of Keynsham and Saltford's history that had been recorded. They resolved to do something about it and in early 1965 informal meetings were held to discuss setting up a society. In July the first

meeting attracted 26 people and October saw Charles Browne elected as chairman and several study groups set up.

It was an ambitious project. The groups covered Prehistory and the Romans, Genealogy, Industry, Arts & Crafts, Inns & Alehouses, Domestic Architecture and Communications. Each group enlisted friends and others to join, with one acting as secretary. Research then started.

Archives at Taunton, Bristol and Bath were accessed as were church records, property deeds and brewery archives. An appeal was made to residents to search for old maps, photographs - or anything that could throw light on Keynsham and Saltford's past.



Fig.1 Queen's Silver Jubilee visit. The Society marked event with an exhibition (8 Aug 1977).

The individual groups met to discuss progress, gathering in members' houses or at the site of their research, when discoveries would be recorded by the secretary. With commendable thoroughness, the Inns & Alehouses group, led by Eric Linfield, decided at their first meeting, in the Crown at Saltford, that they would meet each month at a different public house, of which there were twelve in 1967.

It was fortuitous that Bristol University's Department of Extramural Studies ran a six-week course about that time on "Local History Sources". This gave useful direction, but research takes time and many of the group were still in full-time work. In 1967 it was realised that the findings needed to be published and a series of newsletters was produced with a view to encouraging others to use it for future publication. In an age before computers, each newsletter required editing, typing and duplicating: they were sold for 1s [5p].



Fig 2. 50th Anniversary of the opening of the Great Western Railway marked by members of the Society and the Keynsham Civic Society in period costume (31 August 1990).

As time went on, books were published and exhibitions staged, usually in the Fear Hall

over a weekend. These were very popular, with visitors poring over photographs and recognizing relatives for whom they could supply names and stories. Barbara Lowe's work on uncovering the Abbey site in conjunction with Bristol Folk House, was coming to the attention of the wider world; in 1984 the Hayward Gallery in London hosted an exhibition entitled "English Romanesque Art 1066-1200" and requested the Abbey bosses be included.

Artefacts were also being acquired, along with a set of 25 inch to 1 mile Ordnance Survey maps and the purchase of copies of maps of old Keynsham from the Huntingdon Library in California. A toll board from the turnpike toll-house at the Twerton Fork came into our possession and was displayed at the Bath Postal Museum. The society bought material from the Bowden Estate and was given documents on Keynsham Manor and old title maps.

Eventually the archives filled a room at the home of archivist Margaret Whitehead and it is only in the last few years that these have been transferred to the Bath Record Office and comprehensively catalogued.

Membership and Subscriptions

Subscriptions were initiated in 1967 at an annual rate of 7/6d [37.5p] for adults and 5/- [25p] for juniors. In the following year the Society had 23 paid-up members. 1971 saw subscriptions change to decimal currency at adults 50p and juniors 25p.

By 1980 membership had risen to 60. Meetings were held at the Ellsbridge House Adult Education Centre but overcrowding led to a move to St Dunstan's a few years later.

Inflation led to a steady rise in subscriptions and in 1987 these were set at £3 single and £4 for couples. Numbers continued to increase and in 1989 had reached almost one hundred. Membership settled at about this level and a category of honorary life membership was introduced to benefit these who had shown special commitment to the Society.

By 2003 the paid-up total of 112 led to a move from St Dunstan's to larger premises at the Fear Hall in 2004, and this was the Society's home until 2011. Another move became necessary, and meetings were then held upstairs at the Victoria Methodist Church's Key Centre, until 2015, when we returned to St Dunstan's Hall, now modernized and improved.

Subscriptions were increased to £15/£25 in 2016 and have remained at that level. The covid pandemic of 2020 forced meetings, including the AGM, to be held on-line via Zoom and no subscription was levied that September, although many members made a donation. Membership numbers have fluctuated between about 140 and 160 over the last few years and we have not recruited actively to avoid overcrowding our meetings.



Fig 3. Society exhibition in 2002 to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee

Exhibitions and Publications

One of the ways in which the Society has connected with residents is through the staging of exhibitions to mark significant occasions. Preparation of these took an enormous effort, often by a few of the committee. Records show exhibitions on the following occasions:

1977 – Queen's Silver Jubilee – Library.

1981 – Keynsham 1851 - Library.

1990 – 150th anniversary of the Great Western Railway - Library - photos lent by Russell Leitch.

2000 – Keynsham Heritage 2000 - staged jointly with the Keynsham Heritage Trust - St John's Church and hall.

2002 – Queen's Golden Jubilee

2005 – The Society's 40th Anniversary - Fear Hall.

2010 – Remembering Somerdale - Fear Hall.

2023 – Saltford Brass Mill and the Keynsham Abbey Working Group - MakeSpace.

The Society's annual journal was first published in 1987, made possible by word-processors and printing improvements. Apart from a few gaps in the early years, it has been issued to members every year since and provides a record of local research on a huge variety of history and archaeology topics.

Various pamphlets and books were published but it was in 1990 that the most comprehensive history, entitled "Keynsham & Saltford – Life & Work in Times Past 1539-1945" was completed. This remains the best guide written on the history of the area.

Key Personalities

The Society's success over sixty years is due to a sustained enthusiasm and huge commitment by many individuals over the years. There is not space to mention them all but many of the founders served on the committee for many years and in 1978 the committee comprised Charles Browne, Eric Linfield, Sue Trude, Frank Millard, Bob Milner, Mr Sims, Joan Day, Mary Fairclough, Barbara Lowe, and John Dunford.

Mary Fairclough was a talented artist and illustrator, as well as a historian, and her map of Keynsham, painted for the Children's Library in 1946, can be seen on the first floor of today's library building.

It is to Barbara Lowe that we owe much of our knowledge of Keynsham Abbey and she wrote and published several books. In July 1978 the committee congratulated her on her authoritative book "Decorated Medieval Floor Tiles of Somerset".

Prominent in later years were Elizabeth White, Len Coggins, John Dunford and Margaret Whitehead, who were all on the committee in 1991. It was Elizabeth White who masterminded production of the 1539-1945 history referred to above, although many others contributed.

Saltford Brass Mill

Joan Day was one of the founder members of the Society. Industrial archaeology was her passion and the brass industry her special focus. It was Joan who realized the importance and uniqueness of Saltford Mill and she was determined that it should survive for posterity. Today the Brass Mill Project stands on its own feet as a society, but in the early years Joan worked very

much with and through the Local History Society. Reports on progress were made at committee meetings and the AGM. In 1976 the site was thoroughly surveyed and volunteers soon began clearance work prior to restoration work in 1995 by English Heritage.

Recent Years

Jon Gibbons, now the Society's President, had for many years wanted to see a memorial to the victims of the 1968 Flood using the old County Bridge Stone, or "abbot's chair" as a centre piece. Early in 2014 the Society decided to try and make this happen. The stone belonged to B&NES Council and to site it in the Memorial Park would also require working with the Council. Funds would have to be raised. We had great support from Keynsham Town Council but nevertheless this proved one of those projects that would never have been started if one knew how difficult it would be. After many meetings, several hundred emails and a successful campaign to raise £10,600, the approach of the 50th anniversary concentrated minds and the memorial was unveiled on a very hot day on 10 July 2018.



Fig 4. Cllr Karen Walker, Chair of B&NES Council, unveils the Flood Memorial on 10 July 2018 (photo by Don Ogg).

2014 saw the 100th anniversary of the start of World War 1, so a special two-part edition of the Journal was produced by editor Brian Vowles. At the AGM, I took over from Dennis Hill as Chairman and several new committee members were appointed. To mark fifty years since the founding of the Society, it was decided to produce a new set of walks leaflets and a book that would bring up to date the previous comprehensive history which ran to 1945. This was to be in an accessible format and aimed at local residents rather than history enthusiasts.

The walks leaflets replaced a set issued about twenty years before and were produced to a high standard, with the layout and production led by Liz Walker. The book proved to be a longer project. A team of willing volunteers soon started research and drafted pieces; we had many meetings to thrash out structure, format and content. Maintaining momentum proved to be a challenge, with a major interruption being the work on the Flood Memorial. However, the approach of 2020, marking seventy years since end of World War 2, prompted a renewed effort and in late 2019 we had done sufficient to approach a publisher. We selected Bristol Books, and they appointed a book designer. Then, the covid pandemic struck. Face-to-face meetings stopped but shielding did allow total concentration on the project, so the book went to press in September. The intended launch event wasn't possible, but we purchased 600 copies and succeed in selling them over the next year, making a comfortable surplus for the Society.

In 2019, Joan Day died and left the Society a significant legacy. It was decided to use this to promote awareness of the local brass

industry and a working group, including Tony Coverdale from the Brass Mill Project, was set up. What started as a set of walks leaflets grew into a book combining trail guides around brass industry sites with a history of the industry. This was published in 2023 with the title Brass Tracks.



Fig 5. Society members visit Bristol Docks in July 2017.

Conclusion

This brief account has of necessity focussed on the memorable events and achievements of the last sixty years. But alongside these the Society has provided its members with a regular programme of interesting talks and lectures and a summer programme of visits to venues of historical interest. Activities such as talks to other groups, newspaper articles and displays have promoted interest in and knowledge of local history in Saltford and Keynsham. All this, plus the background work in membership, treasurer and publicity, is due to the unstinting efforts of many committee members and others. New volunteers have recently joined the committee, and we look forward to their contribution to take the Society into the future.

(Note- Information on the early years of the Society is taken from the article by Sue Trude published in the 2015 Journal.)

Mr Cox's Controversial Keynsham Abbey Excavations

By Paul Benn

Keynsham Abbey was founded in 1166 by William, Earl of Gloucester. It was rich and powerful and was the final resting place for many important people including Jasper Tudor, Duke of Bedford, uncle of Henry VII. The abbey church was a large and ornate building, around 230 feet long. For comparison Bath Abbey is 220 feet long.

Following the dissolution, in 1539, the site was sold to Sir Thomas Bridges who set about dismantling the buildings. Large amounts of abbey stone were used for the repair of bridges, building local houses and constructing a new tower for St John's church after the old one collapsed in 1632.

The Bridges family also constructed a large mansion next to St John's church. It eventually passed down to James Brydges, Duke of Chandos, but they didn't live there as the Duchess found it too draughty. When

it was sold in 1775 the purchaser was requested to demolish the mansion (Chandos House) and level the site. The coach house was exempted from the sale. By 1791 there was no sign of either the mansion or the abbey.

Then in 1865 Mr Cox rediscovered the abbey church while building some houses. Most of the press coverage at the time praised him for his attempts to protect the abbey but there were others who were concerned that he was destroying it so that he could use the stone for his houses. A 1991 report on the abbey was also critical of his actions.

The following article discusses both views and leaves it up to the reader to decide whether he tried to protect or destroy what was left of the abbey.

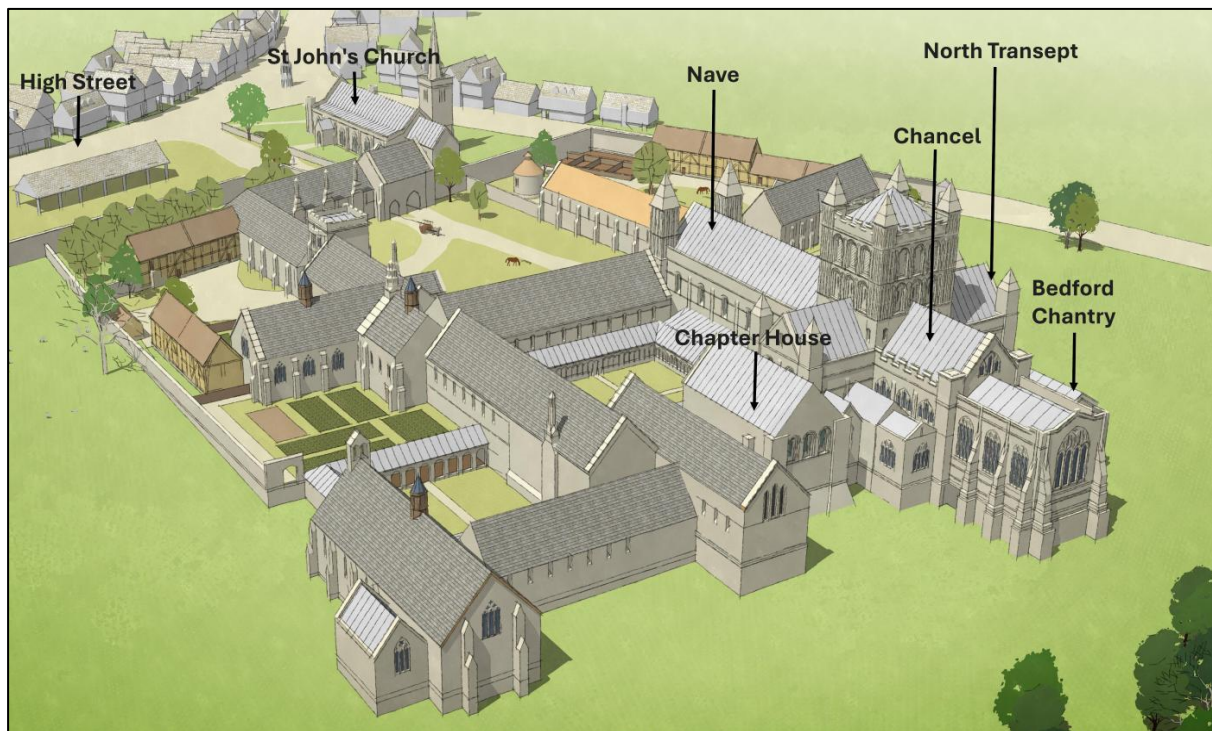


Fig. 1 Digital recreation of Keynsham Abbey (by David Martyn – annotated by Paul Benn)

Park Farm

By the 1800s the area once occupied by the abbey was called Park Farm. On 27 May 1858 the farm was advertised for sale and described as possessing ‘... *singular advantages as Building Sites, being accessible by an intended road of 30 feet width, having also a south aspect & commanding the most charming & extensive views of the adjoining country*’.

The sale was held at the Lamb and Lark Hotel on 10 June 1858 and Mr Richard Barrel Cox (1822 - 1892), a local Keynsham gardener/farmer, purchased a 2½ acre lot next to St John’s church for £720. The lot included a ‘...*Dwelling House [Park Farm] near the railway bridge, the well-known large barn, the stables...*’.

Referring to the 1841 map (fig. 2), Mr Cox would have been aware of roughly where

Chandos House was located as an old painting of the mansion hung on a wall in The Lamb and Lark hotel. However, he wouldn’t have known the location of the abbey church and it is possible that he assumed that all the abbey walls had been removed by the Bridges and subsequent site levelling.

The building in between the farm and the church is the ‘large barn’ referred to above. It was originally the Chandos House coach house. It does not appear on the 1888 map which ties in with its destruction in 1860.

The location of the mound, referred to later, is approximate. It was created from material from the abbey buildings that could not be reused such as carvings and roof ribs and was about 8 to 12 feet above the original abbey floor.

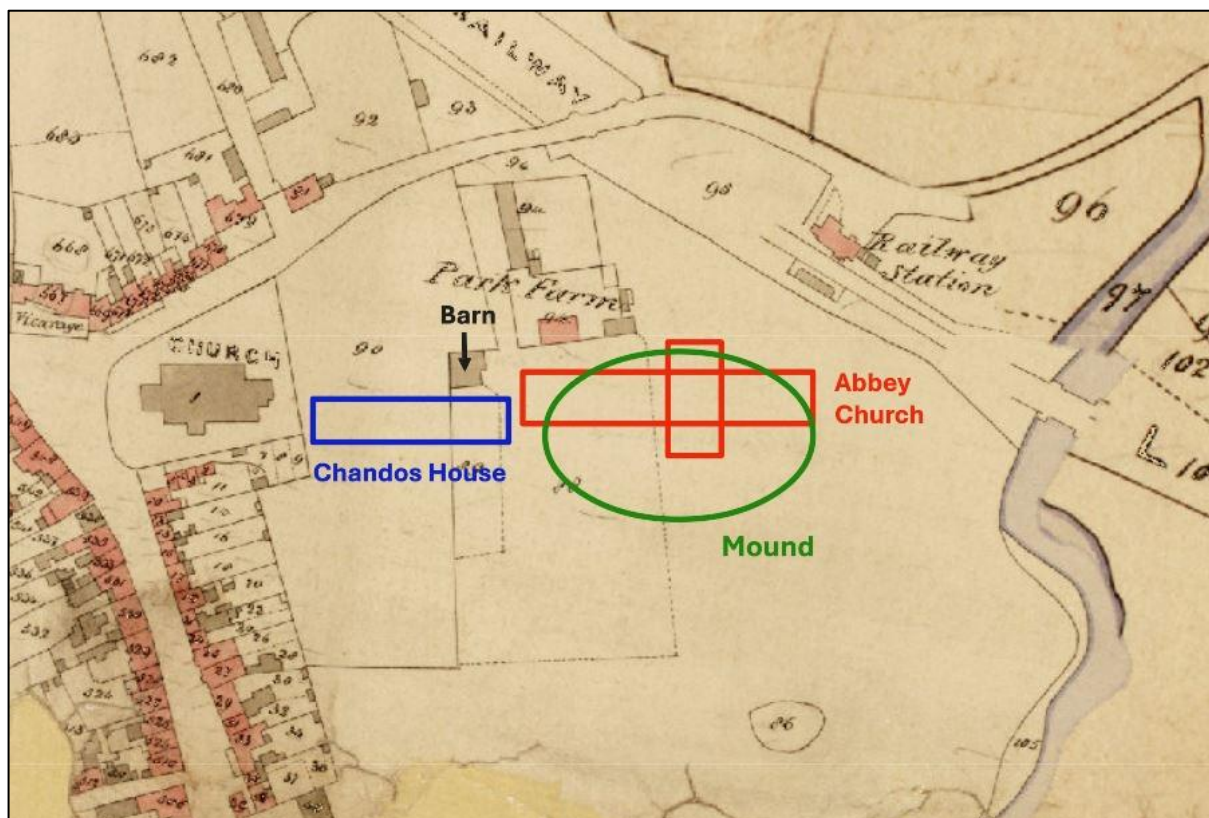


Fig. 2 1841 Keynsham tythe map of Park Farm with the location of Chandos House, the abbey church and the approximate area of the Mound.

The Renaissance Barn

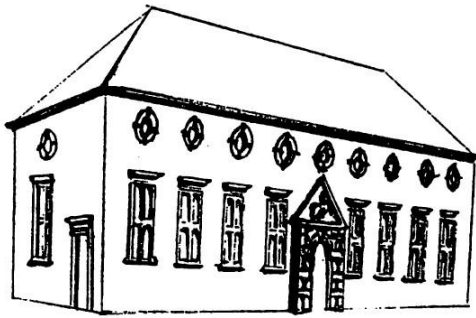


Fig. 3 Sketch of Chandos House coach house, subsequently called the Renaissance or large barn. (Drawing by Barbara J. Lowe from a photograph of a painting by Buckler in Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society Library at Taunton.)

Before starting on the groundworks for the new villas he intended to construct Mr Cox dismantled the old barn. The Western Daily Press reported what he discovered in an article it published on 30 May 1865, a few years after the event.

'Now, the first discovery, as far we can learn, was made some years ago on taking down old Renaissance barn attached to the mansion. It was found that on taking down the wall a large quantity of the building stone had evidently belonged to an earlier structure; among the various fragments brought to light were some interesting late Norman arch, and jamb mouldings, carved surface work, transitional capitals of a very fine though severe character and fragments of some very powerful mouldings of First Pointed or Early English character. These, or the greater part of them, Mr Cox, the present proprietor of the land carefully removed to his garden, which is also on the site of the monastery, and there they are now preserved.'

It is very likely that some of these fragments were incorporated into the entrance arch to

Park House on Station Road which Mr Cox built using the stones surrounding the entrance to the barn/coach house.

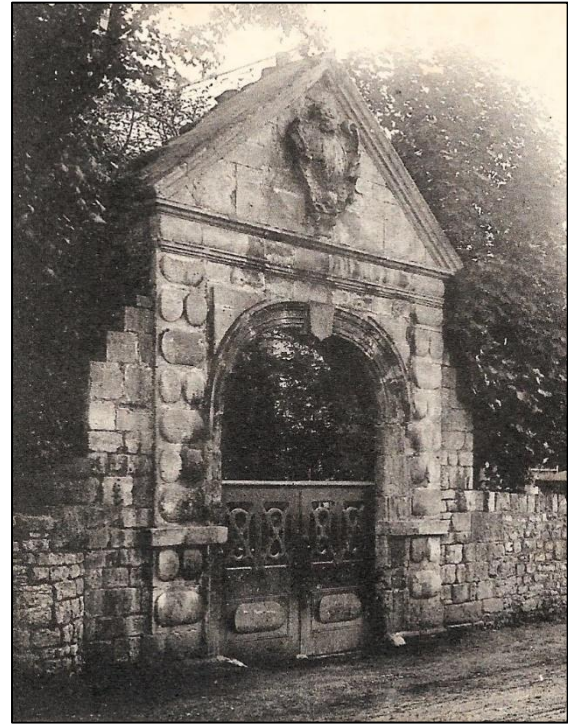


Fig. 4 Entrance arch to Park House which incorporates various carved stonework from the abbey. (Image from a 1910 postcard, author's collection.)

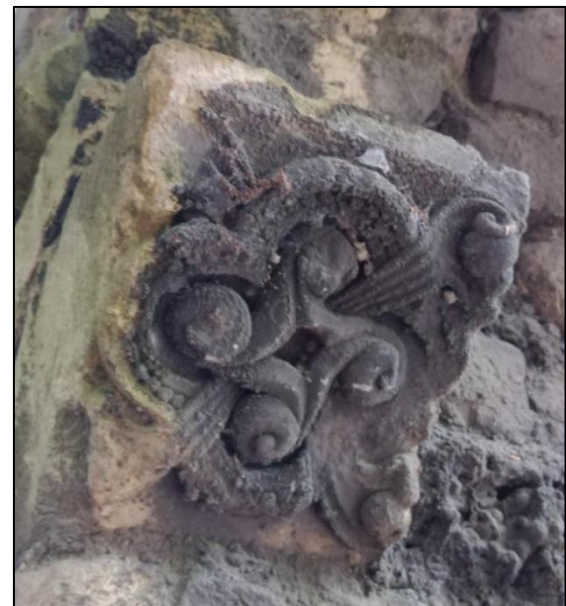


Fig. 5 Carving incorporated into the Park House arch by Mr Cox. Although originating from the Chapter House it was probably found when the barn was destroyed.

The first villa

After constructing a new road, called The Park, building work commenced in 1862 on the first house named Chandos Villa (later renamed to Abbotsford), which Mr Cox built for himself. The Building and Architectural Review reported that:

‘The foundation stone of a house about to be erected for Mr Richard Barrell Cox, of this place, was laid on Wednesday week, amid some rejoicing. A gentleman from London, a member of the Archaeological Society, performed the ceremony, and christened the future building ‘Chandos Villa.’ The foundation stone formed a portion of the ruins of Chandos House, formerly the seat of the Duke of Chandos and Buckingham. The proprietor of the proposed villa entertained a number of friends on the occasion, and also liberally provided for the workmen. Mr Sheppard, at

present employed in the restoration of Keynsham Church, is the builder.’



Fig. 6 Old photo showing the entrance to The Park from Station Road

The fact that Mr Cox requested that a member of the Archaeological Society be in attendance at the start of works implies that he had an interest in the history of the site. Though of course it also ensured some free promotion. Mr Sheppard was a stonemason who had been employed on the restoration of St John's Church since 1861.

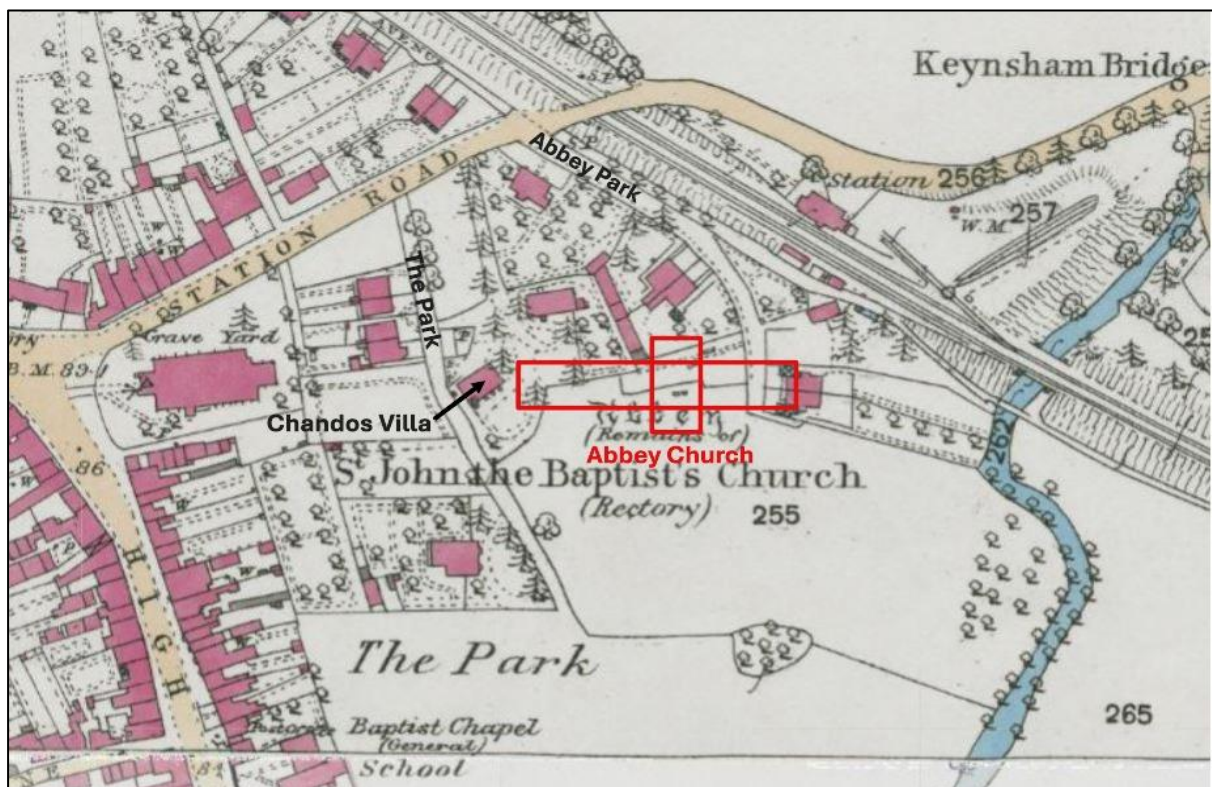


Fig. 7 1888 map of Park Farm area showing Mr Cox's Victorian villas on The Park and Abbey Park with the approximate position of the abbey church shown in red.

Abbey Park

It wasn't until 1864 that his labourers started to prepare the building plots on Abbey Park. They soon came upon buried walls but were at that point unaware of their significance. The 30 May 1865 Western Daily Press newspaper article takes up the next part of the story:

'... labourers employed on the building lots, which are now being staked off, requiring rubble, began to dig upon the mound which falls in a direct line east of the church. They had not, however, proceeded far before they became aware of having penetrated a rather novel quarry. It was here that the owner, with a zeal most praiseworthy, stepped in and directed the excavation, which, so far as it has gone, has proved to be of peculiar interest.'

This news article was the first time Mr Cox was praised for protecting the abbey

remains, but this is a suitable place to discuss some of the criticism of his actions.

Mr Cox later admitted that he had already removed stone from the north and west of the abbey church but his story was that he did not realise that these buried piles of rock were abbey foundations. Should he have, or was it only when a tiled floor was uncovered that it was obviously the abbey? Any foundations he found of the west end of the abbey church would have been unearthed during the construction of Chandos Villa and the close proximity of the old mansion, Chandos House, would have made identification difficult.

On 2 March 1865, the first organisation to express interest in Mr Cox's discoveries was, rather surprisingly, not an antiquarian society but the Bristol Society of Architects. They were initially interested in taking plaster casts of the carved abbey stonework to add to their library of shapes

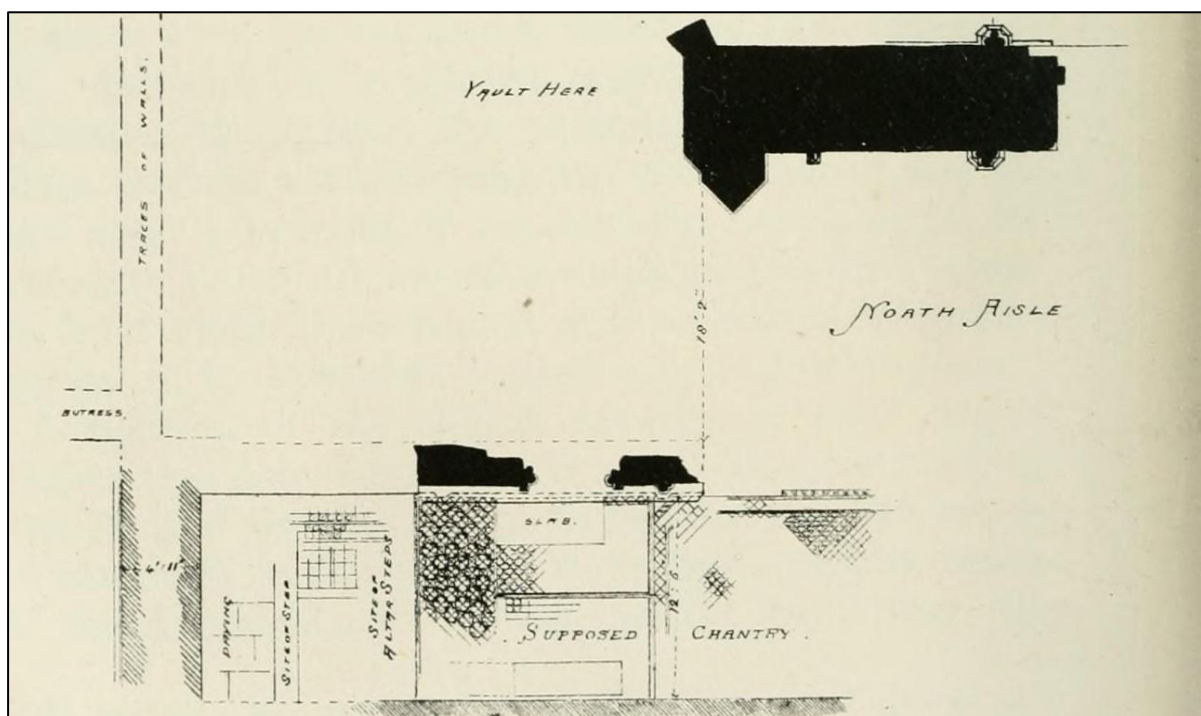


Fig. 8 Sketch of tiled floor, doorway and pier uncovered under the mound by Mr Cox's builders. (Journal of the British Archaeological Association, 1875, E. P. L. Brock.) The pier, top right in black, is still visible in the garden of No.3 Abbey Park.

for use in the popular Gothic Revival period of architecture.

But following their visit to the site they were clearly impressed with the quality of what they observed and decided to involve themselves in the preservation of the material uncovered. The Western Daily Press reported their visit.

'All the rest of the work hitherto exposed, including all the broken fragments of window tracery and shrine or tabernacle work, belongs, with one or two insignificant exceptions, to the reign of the first Edward, and is certainly among the very finest work of its time, both as regards design and execution. The vaulting ribs are particularly good in section; indeed, the detail shows evidence of unusual refinement.'

They also praised Mr Cox for his efforts.

'It is only right to add that Cox, the owner, has done everything in his power to preserve every fragment. We trust he will continue to act in the same wise spirit of conservation, and that his architect will second him in the good work. So choice a bit of Edwardian art as this ruined chapel should on no account be lost. A rental of a few pounds, and the cost of a wooden shed, are all that stand between it and destruction. The Bristol Society of Architects have most kindly offered to do all they can towards its maintenance. They have freely undertaken to classify and arrange the broken and scattered fragments, to give the necessary drawings for a suitable protection or shed, and finally to subscribe in money towards its erection. We sincerely trust the efforts of the Bristol Society will meet with every encouragement from Mr Cox, and from everyone interested

in the preservation of medieval art. We hear that the honorary secretary, Mr C. J. Phipps, of 5, Paragon, Bath, has promised to receive subscriptions.'

However, this interest was short lived and nothing seems to have come of this offer of help.

The next organisation to get involved was the Bath Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club who visited the site, on 23 May 1865. They were disappointed to find that the public were stealing historical items and were particularly incensed to find that a local had removed a scull from an important grave and made it into a tobacco box. They appealed to the public by writing an article in the Western Daily Press:

'I trust all persons will refrain from removing even the smallest portion of the relics, as the proprietor of the land, who is clearing the soil and rubbish, is endeavouring to retain as much of the remains as possible in situ, and I feel sure he would much regret being compelled to close the site to the public, or to carry out his determination to prosecute any person that may be discovered taking away any portion of the antiquities.'



Fig. 9 Carving incorporated into the Park House arch by Mr Cox. Probably originally from the Bedford chantry chapel.

Irvine's Abbey Plan

On 16 October 1865 the Society of Antiquaries decided to involve itself in the abbey's protection and gave £5 to Rev. H. M. Scarth, M.A., their local representative, to temporarily protect the uncovered tiled floor and to procure the services of Mr Irvine to sketch a plan of the nave and chapel.

James Thomas Irvine came to Bath in the 1860s to supervise the improvements to Bath Abbey, including the construction of the fan vaulting in the nave, working for Sir George Gilbert Scott.

He drew the first plan of Keynsham's abbey church, drawing the structures and floor that Mr Cox had unearthed. This plan is about 2m by 1m and is held in the Bath Archives.

It shows the location of the nave, chancel, north transept and chantry chapels. The location of the presumed tomb of Jasper Tudor is also clearly marked between the chancel and chapel.

An article that Mr Irvine sent to The Taunton Courier stated that:

'The whole of the remains are most carefully preserved by the proprietor, Mr. Cox, who has kept those formerly found in his garden. Mr. Cox has also laid open some very ancient foundations short distance from the Abbey church. The excavations up to the present time seem to have been over the site of the north transept, the north of the choir, and a very rich later chapel to the north of the same.'



Fig. 10 Irvine's plan of Keynsham Abbey – the coloured section in the middle is the pier which still exists in the garden of No.3 Abbey Park. To the right of the pier is a vault which is the presumed location of Jasper Tudor's tomb. (Bath Record Office)

The Excavators

Mr Cox's builders uncovered the area illustrated in Mr Irvine's plan. They worked the site from the north stopping at the south wall of the chancel as spoil from the dig had been piled up to the south of this wall to a depth of 12 feet.

After 1865 it seems that Mr Cox granted permission for various interested gentlemen to carry out further digs. One such person was Charles Davis FSA, who was working on the redevelopment of the Roman Baths at the time. An article printed by the British Archaeological Society reported that:

'Mr. C. E. Davis, of Bath, told me that during some excavations he was making last year or the year before within the ruins, he came upon a stone coffin, the lid of which he opened, and saw the remains of an abbot or some high dignitary of the monastery within, with what appeared to him to be a coil of gold tissue about the neck,—but which he in no way molested and closed

again as speedily as could be, not feeling he had any right or authority at the time to disturb the remains of the occupant of the cist or coffin, which might have been those of William of Gloucester himself. Mr. Davis contented himself with marking the spot, so that he might be able at some future time to make a farther investigation of so interesting a find.'

Frustratingly the article does not go on to say whether this coffin was investigated further.

Mr Loftus Brock was also interested in excavating the site, writing to Mr Irvine that *'I propose to have a part of the site opened at my own expense if Mr Cox will permit me.'* It is unclear whether he went ahead or not. More on Mr Brock later.

Another person known to have carried out excavations on this site is Mr Roland Paul FSA, whose sketches of Keynsham Abbey are held by the South West Heritage Trust.



Fig. 11 Aerial photo of Keynsham taken in 1920s. The horizontal line of hedge in the area highlighted clearly identifies the edge of Mr Cox's dig which was in the area just above it.

The British Archaeological Society

On 7 August 1874 a large group from the British Archaeological Society visited the site during its annual conference, which was being held in Bristol. The visit was reported in the *Western Morning News*.

'Today's was the most numerously attended excursion the Association had had. About a hundred and fifty ladies and gentlemen started by special train soon after nine o'clock. The first stoppage was made at Keynsham Abbey, the ruins of which were only discovered a few years ago during some excavation.'

The *Western Daily Press* gave a more detailed account of the visit.

'Starting at early hour in the morning from the Great Western Station, Temple Meads, they proceeded in the first instance to Keynsham, where fine field research had been opened to them by the enterprise of Mr Cox, who, in erecting some houses on land of his own, had disclosed the remains of the Abbey. Much of what was found in excavating was peculiarly fine, and the members of the association were in ecstasies at more than one relic submitted to their critical notice.'

The party, in the course of their research, had to pass over land in the occupation of J. H. Clifton and Mr Cox, and both these gentlemen accorded the utmost freedom to the association in tracing the remains of the old building.

He [Mr Phillipps] suggested whether or not they could not have the remains of the pavement at Keynsham removed to Bristol and put together as a memorial to the Abbey.'

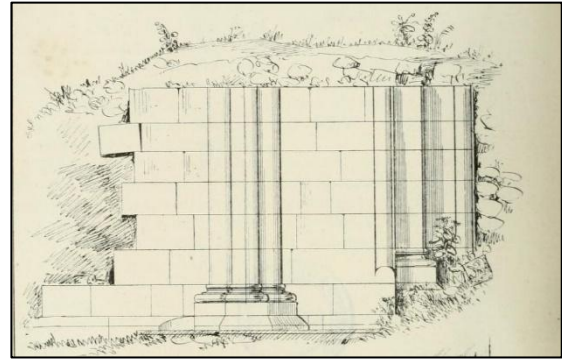


Fig. 12 Drawing of southern wall of chancel with spoil heap behind. (Journal of the British Archaeological Association, 1875, sketch by E. P. L. Brock.) This wall is now considerably lower which could be due to reduction by Victorian builders but could also be due to inaccurate drawing as Brock hadn't actually seen the site but used Irvine's rough sketches.

During the following year Mr Loftus Brock FSA published a detailed article about the abbey in the *British Archaeological Society Journal* in which he illustrated an abbey plan, based on Mr Irvine's version. In this article he states that:

'The principal of the sculptured stones are preserved in the garden of Mr. Cox's house. I know of no more interesting study than the beautiful fragments there arranged as rockwork. They are of admirable workmanship and of great beauty and should be preserved in some more fitting place.'

At the end of the article he adds:

'In conclusion, much praise is due to Mr. Cox, not only for his courtesy in permitting ready access to be had to the remains and to his garden, but also for his desire to preserve them. He has promised me that all stone found in position shall be carefully retained, and only the loose and fallen blocks removed for the building works now in progress.'

However, not all the dig reports were positive. The Bath Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club wrote:

'It is to be much regretted that some competent person does not watch these interesting remains which are from time to time discovered, and which the requirements of a needy speculative builder are turning into practical use for building purposes.'

This criticism stems from Mr Cox recycling most of the large inscribed ledger stones, which was standard practice in this era. He also sold the two best stones to the club which they recorded had been *'rescued from destruction'*. It is therefore ironic that these items have now been lost.

There were also other critics of Mr Cox's dig. A local resident, who seems unaware of the visit by the British Archaeological Society, wrote to the Weston Mercury on 15 November 1879.

'The beautiful old ruin of Keynsham Abbey is again being reduced, more stones being wanted to build a something, perhaps a pigsty. Should the Archaeological Society ever go to inspect the spot they will think what is now going on there is vandalism indeed. It seems a great pity such property should ever fall into the hands of people who have not souls to appreciate these remnants of antiquity.'

However, the Bath Chronicle printed a reply to the above just five days later.

"St. Keyna" writes to contemporary in reference to the ruins of Keynsham Abbey, "that the owner of the ruins has spared neither time nor trouble in preserving them; it is true that some loose rubbish and stones are being cleared away, but this will bring

the outlines and architectural specimens into bolder relief."

This more positive appraisal of Mr Cox's management of the site is backed up in a later article published in the Saturday Times and Mirror on 6 October 1883.

'Much credit is due to Mr Cox, the owner of the site of the Abbey, for the intelligent interest he has taken in the excavation and preservation of the interesting remains of the Abbey.'

By 1878 Mr Cox had now purchased all the area now known as Keynsham Park and on 25 July of this year he provided the land for the construction of the Drill Hall on Bath Road. In 1881 he moved to Tortworth House, 92 Queens Road, Clifton, and died in 1892.

It is difficult to determine exactly how much of the abbey Mr Cox uncovered and it is likely that others carried out excavations in other areas. The plan published in the 1875 article shows that the south aisle was the southern extent of his dig, but this was later disputed by a report on the twentieth century dig.

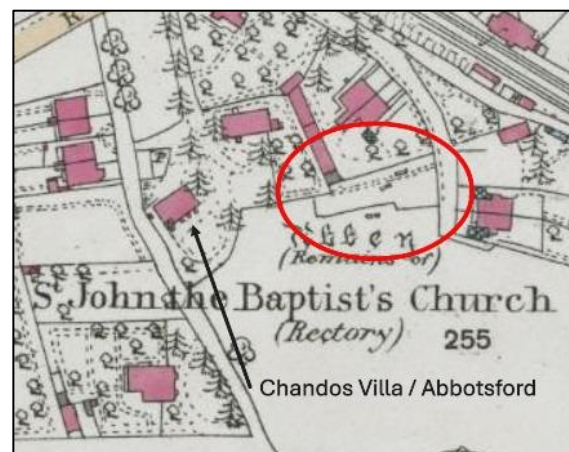


Fig. 13 1888 OS map with fenced off area of abbey church remains highlighted.

Twentieth Century

What happened after all this interest in the abbey? No hut to protect the intricately carved artefacts, no removal of the beautiful floor to the Bristol Museum. In a now fenced off area all that was left visible was a seat, the chapel pier base, the south chancel wall and a collection of carved stonework in Chandos Villa garden.

In 1949 Mr Cox's grandson sold the site to the Keynsham Urban District Council for use as a Memorial Park. They then sold the fenced off area with the abbey remains to the owners of 3, Abbey Park.

Mr Mervyn Samuel, the new owner of Chandos Villa or Abbotsford as it was now called, was as enthusiastic about protecting the collection of carved abbey stones as Mr Cox had been. During the 1950s he carefully assembled all the stonework from the walls and rockeries in his garden and offered them to the Urban District Council. However, due to the lack of a museum to house these beautiful artifacts they were left in the garden.

Much worse was on the horizon. In 1961 Abbotsford and the surrounding garden were acquired for construction of the Keynsham by-pass. Mr Samuel immediately contacted the Bristol Folk House Archaeological Society as he believed that the abbey site might be under his house and also because he was concerned about the protection of all the material he had collected.

Thankfully Fry's came to the rescue and helped move the stonework into their small museum and store. When this museum was closed some of the stonework was moved to the council store under the old town hall.

Sadly some of these artifacts were lost in this period.

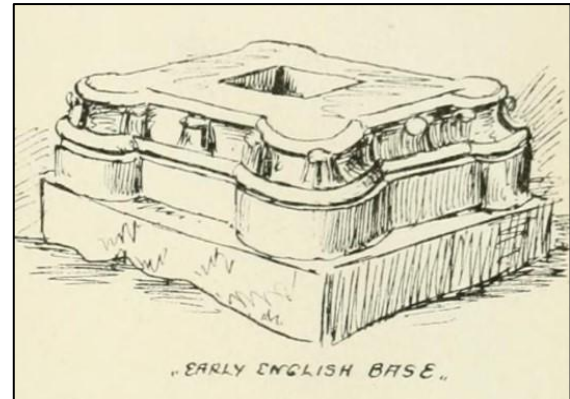


Fig. 14 Sketch of Keynsham Abbey cross base. (Journal of the British Archaeological Association, 1875, by E. P. L. Brock.)

One important object that Mr Cox discovered, and Mr Samuel later looked after was a thirteenth century cross base which once supported a very large churchyard cross. But they would probably be disappointed to know that rather than end up in a museum this item now sits unprotected without any description next to the junction of Station Road and Somerdale Road.

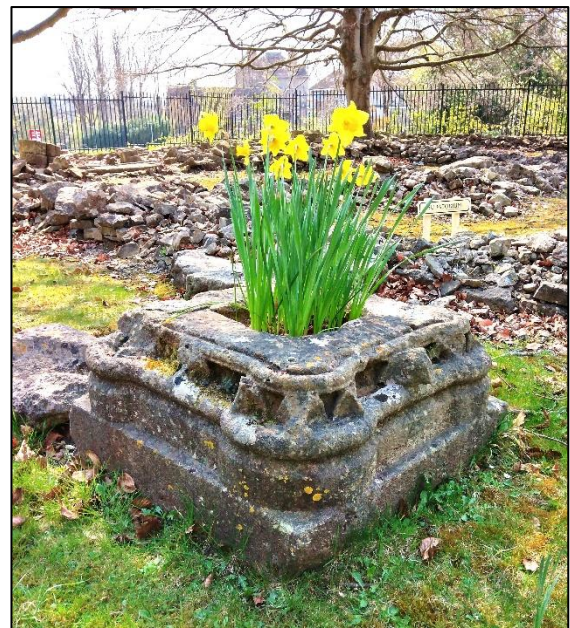


Fig. 15 Keynsham Abbey cross base located next to Somerdale Road. (2025)

The Keynsham by-pass cut right through the abbey precinct but volunteers from the Bristol Folk House Archaeological Society obtained permission to follow the diggers to record what was unearthed. They later cleared what was left of the mound and published their findings in various reports.

The 1991 report titled “Keynsham Excavations 1961–1991” stated that: *‘Brock makes clear that the builders were removing walls as their work progressed and despite receiving an undertaking by Richard Cox that certain walls would be preserved, it seems clear that the destruction continued.’* Considering Mr Cox’s record of protecting carved stonework and the scrutiny of the site, is this likely?

This report also stated that; *‘Study of those elements known to have been unearthed during the Victorian building works confirms that their excavations must have been more extensive than indicated in*

Brock’s report.’ However, this conclusion is partly based on the assumption that the carved items in the Park House entrance arch were found in the chapter house rather than the Renaissance Barn.

It is difficult to know how much of the abbey Mr Cox did destroy as the northern side of the abbey church is situated in private gardens or under the road. However, the damage is arguably negligible compared to that inflicted by the Bridges and the by-pass.

More importantly, he didn’t build on the main abbey buildings. It is also worth mentioning that when the abbey precinct was advertised for sale in 1858 the original plan was to continue the road called The Park down the valley to join up with Bath Hill. It is down to Mr Cox and his family, who owned all this land, that this area was left undeveloped, allowing the creation of the Memorial Park.

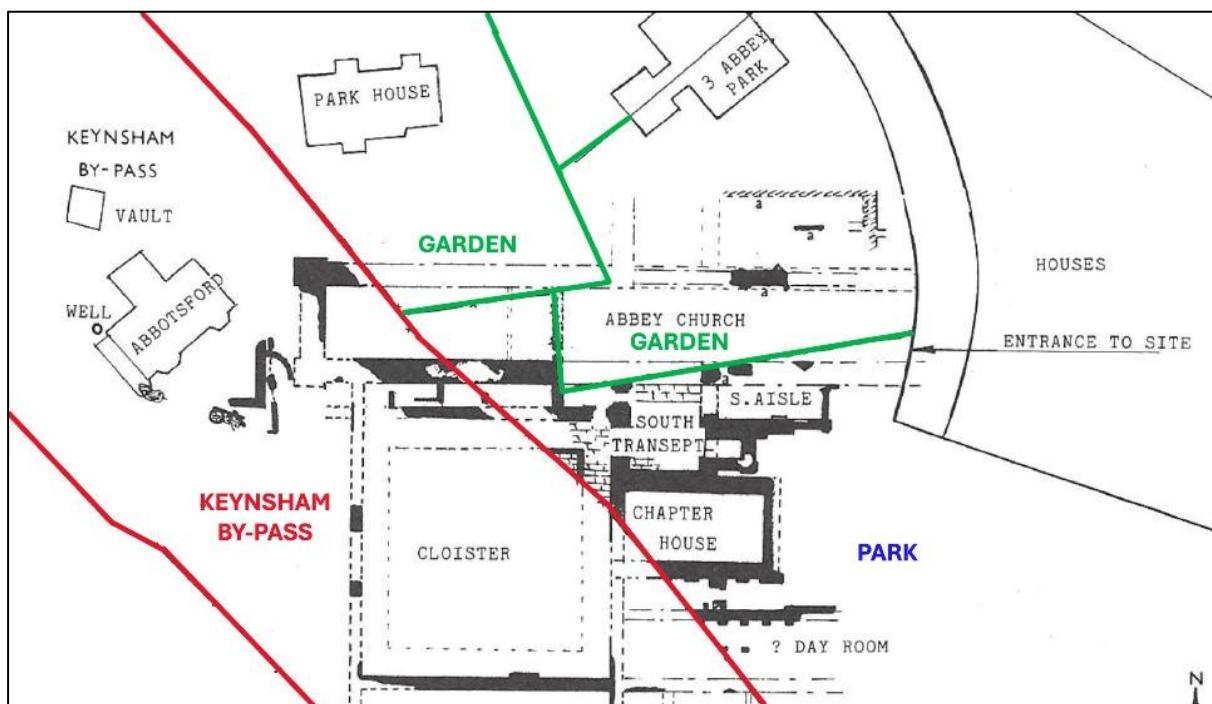


Fig. 16 Plan of Keynsham Abbey showing observed foundations and area destroyed by the by-pass. (Bristol History & Archaeology Society) – The superimposed green boundaries show the garden areas which were not included in the 20th century dig.

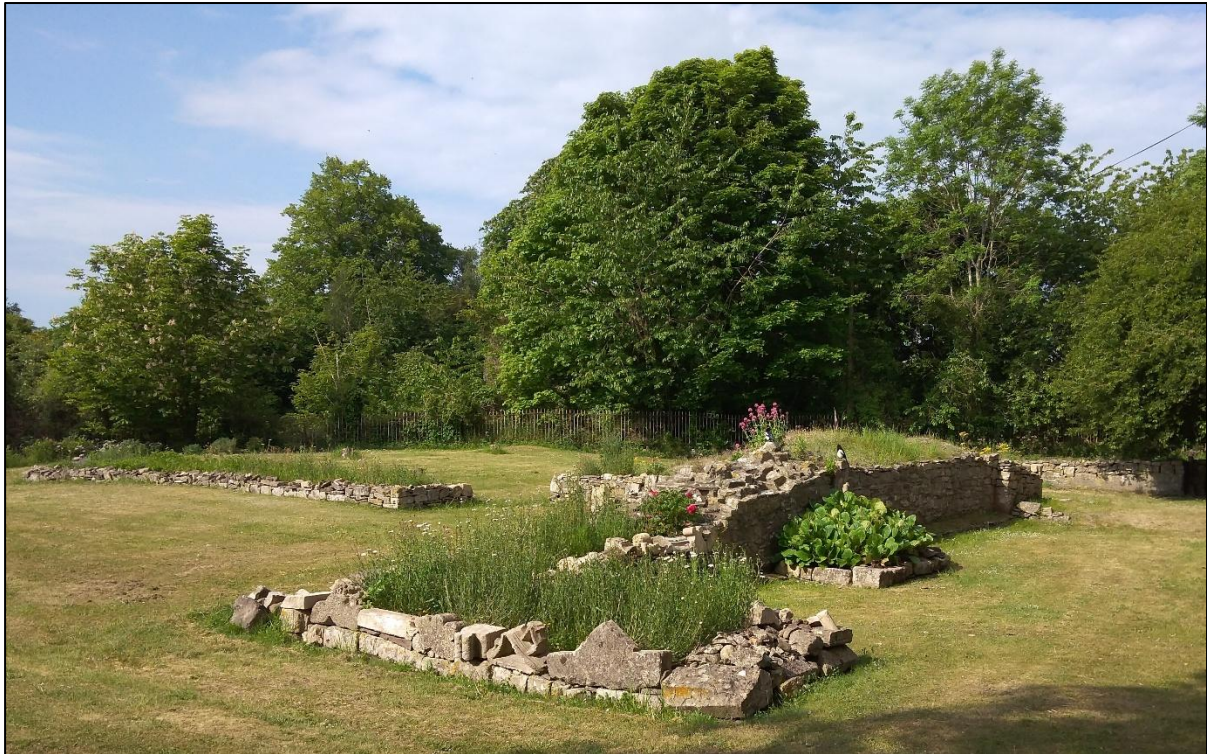


Fig. 17 Keynsham Abbey site - 2025

What remains of the abbey church and chapter house walls, discovered in the more recent excavations, can still be seen in a fenced off area of the park at the end of Abbey Park. The only remaining pier is in the garden of No.3 Abbey Park.

The carved stonework is spread over many sites including:

- the fenced abbey site
- besides Somerdale Road
- in Keynsham library (window display)
- in the Roman Baths store (2200 abbey artifacts are stored here)
- on top of the wall by St.John's Church vicarage
- in the Park House entrance arch
- in the wall of the house opposite the Park House arch
- a ceiling boss in the Crown pub on Bristol Road
- many other local walls.



Fig. 18 Abbey stonework next to Somerdale Road .

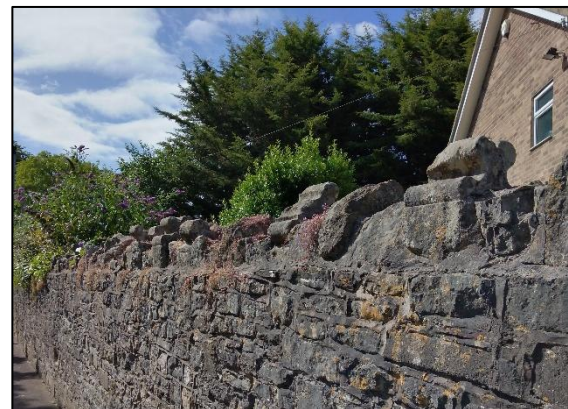


Fig. 19 Abbey stonework next to vicarage.

Mr Caddy and the “Kena” Manufacturing Co.

By Sue Tatford



Fig. 1 “Kena” Manufacturing Co. letter heading - 1910.

The “Kena” Manufacturing Co. was located at 53 High Street in Keynsham, where the Halifax was until recently, from 1910 until about 1917. Looking at the map below (Fig.3) it would appear that it was in Back Lane, but originally there had been a bridge across the lane connecting the two parts of the premises.

The company made ‘*Springs of all descriptions made under patent process of*

high-tempered steel wire.’ Their products included: an emergency grip for motorists, a skipping rope and physical developer combination, a chest expander, a puncture proof motor and cycle tyre, a music leaf turner and binder, a spring mattress, a camp and army folding bed, flexible electric wires and cables, a gas lighter for bye pass and a gas lighter for ordinary burner. ‘*Also, any other possible production of the Coiling Machine and Appliance*’



Fig. 2 “Kena” Manufacturing Co. letter heading – 1912.

They held the following patents:

No. 26437 - Coiling Machine & appliance.

No. 18185 - Skipping appliance and Physical Exercising Device.

No. 18186 - Puncture Proof Bands for Pneumatic Tyres.

No. 20790 - Improvements in Flexible Electric Wires or Cables.

In December 1910 this Agreement was drawn up:

‘AN AGREEMENT Made this 29th day of December 1910 BETWEEN

Sydney Charles Caddy, of Rookhill, Keynsham, as the proprietor of the “Kena” Manufacturing Company at the date mentioned above, whose premises are situated at High St, Keynsham, and Albert Edward Garton Stone & James Garton Stone of 80 Redcliffe St, Bristol

Whereas the said Sydney Charles Caddy being in need of capital to further work and

develop certain inventions and productions of them so as to place on the market in connection with the said “Kena” Manufacturing Company, the said Albert Edward & James Garton Stone have jointly agreed to advance to the said Sydney Charles Caddy the sum of Six Hundred Pounds for such purpose upon the terms and conditions hereinafter contained.

No.1 The said Albert Edward & James Garton Stone have already advanced the said Sydney Charles Caddy the sum of Two Hundred Pounds and immediately this agreement is signed satisfactorily to all concerned will advance the remaining Four Hundred Pounds, the whole of such sum to be used partly in the purchase of Machinery and Stock and partly as working capital in connection with the said “Kena” Manufacturing Company, the receipt of the whole amount acknowledged by signing this agreement and will be considered satisfactory to all concerned.

No.2 The said Sydney Charles Caddy will keep proper books of Account wherein shall

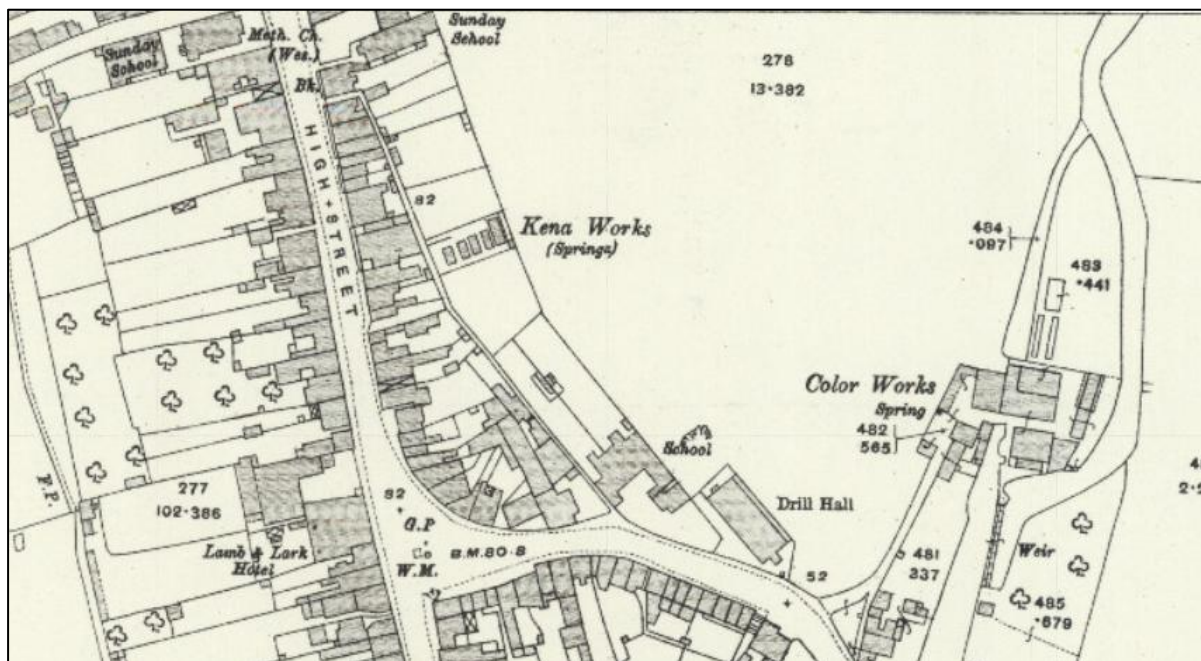


Fig. 3 1921 OS map with Kena Works in the centre.

be entered all receipts and payments in connection with the said "Kena" Manufacturing Company and as soon as possible after the 30 June and the 31 December in each year the said Sydney Charles Caddy will have the said Books of Accounts audited by a competent Accountant who shall certify the amount of Profit which shall have been made in respect of the Inventions of the said Sydney Charles Caddy particulars of which are set out in the Schedule hereunder written.

No.3 The said Albert Edward & James Garton Stone for jointly advancing the said Sydney Charles Caddy the amount mentioned to receive jointly One Third Shares of the Nett Profit less 5% Commission to be deducted to be paid to Mr T.E. Weight as part payment for his services of the working of the said "Kena" Manufacturing Company and jointly One Third Share in the English & Foreign Patent rights of certain Inventions of the

said Sydney Charles Caddy particulars of which are set out in the schedule hereunder written.

The Nett Profit after being declared at each audit to be distributed as follows: -

Commission to Mr T.E. Weight as part of his Employment remuneration - 5%

Balance for distribution to Partners Sydney Charles Caddy, Albert Edward Garton Stone & James Garton Stone - 95%

To Mr Sydney Charles Caddy as active Partner & Inventor - $63 \frac{1}{3}^{\text{rd}}$ % of the 95%:
- $\frac{2}{3}^{\text{rd}}$ Share

To Mr Albert Edward Garton Stone & Mr James Garton Stone $31 \frac{2}{3}^{\text{rd}}$ % of the 95%:
- $\frac{1}{3}^{\text{rd}}$ Share

Patentees and Manufacturers of the Kena Specialities.

- Empire Skipping Rope & Physical Developer Combination.
- Chest Expanders with Grip Handles.
- The Positive Puncture Proof Motor & Cycle Tyre.
- Music Leaf Turner and Binder.
- Patent Wire Spring Mattresses.
- Camp and Army Folding Spring Bed.
- Improved Flexible Electric Wires & Cables.
- Improved Gas Lighter for Bye Pass.
- Improved Gas Lighter for Ordinary Burner, &c., &c., &c.
- Springs of all descriptions made under Patent Process of High-Tempered Steel Wire.

TELEGRAMS: "KENA. KEYNSHAM."

TRADE MARK

TELEPHONE: NO. 2 KEYNSHAM.

THE "KENA" MANUFACTURING CO.,

EMPIRE WORKS,

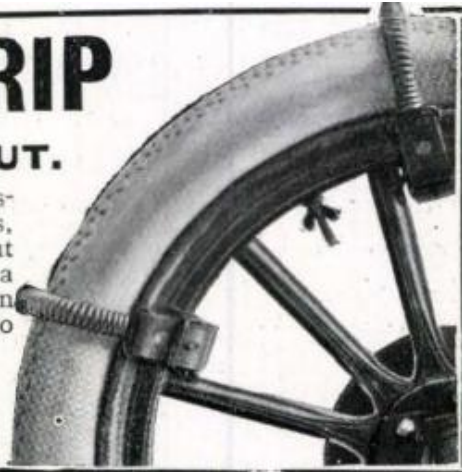
HIGH STREET, KEYNSHAM,

NR. BRISTOL.

OFFICES & WORKS: KEYNSHAM.

PRESENTED BY MR.

Fig. 4 Business Card listing the items made by "Kena" Manufacturing Co.



"Kena" EMERGENCY GRIP

WILL GET YOU OUT OF THE RUT.

Don't be hung up by the roadside. Travel over grassland to the Golf Links, Racecourse, Army Manœuvres, Shooting Expeditions, Snowfields and the like, without skidding troubles. They are attached and removed in a few minutes; always effective; cost much less than chain grips; fit any tyre. Specially constructed to "give" to the resiliency of the tyre. Sold in sets of 10.

Size "A" 700's to 910's ..	30/-
" "B" 760's .. 915's ..	32/6
" "C" 820's .. 920's ..	35/-

KENA, Ltd., Spring Specialists, Keynsham, Bristol.

Fig. 5 Advert for "Kena" Emergency Grips - Country Life, 1913.

"Kena" Emergency Grip

On 29 April 1913 the following advert appeared in the Daily Express.

'NEW MOTORING DEVICE - TYRE GRIPS FOR USE ON GRASS OR MUDDY GROUND

A really useful accessory for the use of country motorists has been perfected in the shape of an emergency tyre grip. Every motorist knows the tiresome results of a heavy car driven over soft wet grass.

The wheels sink into the ground and revolve without obtaining sufficient grip to drive

the car forward or back. At point-to-point or other race meetings, where cars have to be driven across grass, this is constantly happening, and the new emergency grips are designed to overcome the difficulty.

They consist of five closely coiled shapes to fit over the tread of the tyre, and fastened round the wheel rim by powerful straps. When the five grips are in position the wheel has an almost unlimited gripping power, and the grips can be put on while the wheel is actually held in a mud hole. The grips are only intended to be put on when the car is stuck. They are being produced by Kena Limited, Keynsham, Bristol.'



Motorists, Get Out of the Rut

Don't be hung up by the roadside. Travel over grassland to the Golf Links, Racecourse, Army Manœuvres, Shooting Expeditions, Snowfields and the like, without skidding troubles. The

"Kena" Emergency GRIPS

are attached and removed in a few minutes; always effective; cost much less than chain grips; fit any tyre. Specially constructed to "give" to the resiliency of the tyre. Sold in sets of 10.

Size "A" 700's to 910's ..	30/-
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KENA, Ltd., Spring Specialists, Keynsham, Bristol

Fig. 6 Advert for "Kena" Emergency Grips - Country Life, 1913.

The Empire Skipping Rope



Fig. 7 Man using the skipping rope as a developer.

On 16 February 1911 the following article appeared in Pearsons Weekly.

‘Skipping Rope & Developer

The Empire Skipping Rope & Developer, made by the Kena Manufacturing Company of Keynsham, near Bristol, is so simple a contrivance for attaining such important results that one wonders why someone has not thought of it before. It is made of a length of spiral spring of special design which imparts to it qualities not associated with ordinary spiral springs. It is flexible to the last degree & is practically unbreakable. Not only is it an ideal skipper, but an ingenious arrangement of the handles permits of its being converted into

a chest expander. It is made in 3 lengths, childrens’, ladies’ and athletes’, sold respectively for 6½d, 1s 3d, & 2s boxed complete.’



Fig. 8 Lid of skipping rope box.



Fig. 9 Contents of skipping rope box.

However, the company didn't last long, probably due to problems obtaining steel during the Great War, and by 1918 the factory was empty and up for sale.

The London Gazette of 4 March 1921 reported the following:

'In the Matter of KENA Limited & in the Matter of the Companies (Consolidation) Act 1908, Notice is hereby given, that by an Order made 26 March 1920, upon the petition of Sydney Charles Caddy, of 205 Richmond Rd, Kingston-Upon-Thames, Surrey, a creditor & shareholder of the above named Company, & upon hearing Counsel for the petitioner & for the Registrar of Companies, & the petitioner by his Counsel undertaking to use his best endeavours to get the Company wound up, & by his Counsel undertaking that the returns in arrear shall be made up & forwarded forthwith to the Registrar of Companies, it was ordered that the name of

the said Kena Limited be restored to the Register of Companies in England and the said Company is to be deemed to have continued in existence as if its name had never been struck off. And it was ordered that the Registrar of Companies do advertise this Order in his official name in the London Gazette. And it was Ordered that the Petitioner do pay to the said Registrar his costs of this application to be taxed by the Taxing Master.'



Fig. 10 No. 53 High Street, Keynsham – 2025 – Halifax Building Society.



Fig. 11 1920s Keynsham High Street with No.53 on far right. Building in use by “The Throsper Factories”.

Mr Caddy

The owner was Sydney Charles Caddy. The first record found concerning him was in newspaper reports in November 1896 when the following was in The Cambria Daily Leader when it was reported that *'Sydney Charles Caddy, grocer, of Hazelwood Row, Cwmavon, came before the court, with liabilities of £361, the deficiency being £278 12s 10d. The debtor had previously compounded with his creditors & being unable to pay the instalments, was made a bankrupt'*.

A week later the South Wales Echo reported that *'Partnership Dissolved. Richard Morgan & Sydney C Caddy, trading as Morgan & Caddy at Talbot Square, Aberavon, grocers & provision merchants.'*

On 30 January 1901 he joined the 27th Company, 7th Battalion Imperial Yeomanry at Barnstaple, Devon. He stated that he was born at Uplyme near Axminster. Sydney's military record revealed that he spent 23 days from 30th January 1901 to 21 February 1901 in England, presumably being trained before going to South Africa on 2 February 1901. He spent 1 year 163 days there before returning to this country on 5 August 1901. He was awarded the South Africa Medal with 3 Clasps, having served in Belmont, Cape Colony, Orange Free State and the Transvaal.

The description of Sydney at his discharge was 28 years 2 months old, 5ft 7in tall, sallow complexion, grey eyes, black hair, with the trade of a grocer, intended place of residence being 29 Champernoune Terrace, Ilfracombe. Conduct & character were described as *'very good'*, and special qualifications for employment in civil life as *'nil'*.



Fig. 12 Imperial Yeoman, Boer War.
(Imperial War Museum – Wikimedia Commons)

Sometime after he left the army, he moved to Brislington as his daughter Lilian Evelyn was born there in 1904. By 1906 the family had moved to Martock and he had gone back to being a grocer. By 1908 they were living in Westbury, Bristol.

A 1910 Directory listed Caddy as a Commercial Traveller, The Backs (letters via Keynsham), Bitton, but by the end of 1910 they were at Rookhill House, Keynsham. The Fast Colour Eyelet factory at 53 High St had closed and it seems that Sydney had taken over the lease.

The 1911 Census recorded the following: Sydney Caddy, age 36, born 1875 in Littlehampton Hants, married 13 years, wire worker, wire bedsprings, motor tyre factory, employer. Elizabeth Caddy, wife, age 34 born Cwmavon, Glamorgan. [near Aberavon & Port Talbot] Children - William (12), Irene (10), Lilian (6), Sydney

(5), Olive (3), Grace (3). Servant - Ada Baker (19), born Marksbury.

By the 1921 Census the Caddy family had moved to 205 Richmond Rd, Kingston Upon Thames. Sydney Charles was 44 years old, had been born in at Broadwindsor, Dorset in 1877. He described himself as a Tyre Manufacturer with a workplace at 74 Eden St, Kingston, and was an employer. With him were his wife Elizabeth and son William Thomas Caddy, who was Secretary to Messrs S C Caddy & Co. Tyre Company. Also there, were Irene Violet, Lilian Evelyn, Olive Marion, Edith Grace and Iris Isabelle, who had been born in Keynsham in 1911.

December of 1925 saw Sydney Charles Caddy in court once again but this time as the victim of a financial agency fraud. He gave evidence that in the June he had wanted to raise capital to carry on his inventions. He had called on the defendant, John Charles Methven, of the Victor Agency. The Victor Agency had been described as *'expert & efficient in the registering & financing of Companies.'* Sydney had paid the defendant £87 14s 6d but his company had not been registered or had any money been forthcoming. This was reported in the Birmingham Daily Post of 31 December 1925.

In 1927 Sydney Charles Caddy was once again in the bankruptcy court. The London Gazette recorded 1 September 1927 as the date of filing the petition. He was now at *'30, Effingham Rd, Surbiton, Surrey & lately residing at 205 Richmond Rd, Kingston, Surrey, Gentleman.'* It was a creditors' petition. The date of the first meeting was 29 December 1927 at 12.30, held at Russell Square WC1. The Public

Examination was on 10 January 1928 at 2pm at The Court House, Kingston Surrey.

The 1939 Register revealed that the family had relocated yet again and were now living at Austenwood, Summerhill Lane, Cuckfield, Sussex. Sydney's birthday was given as 7 June 1876 and his occupation was given as General Manager of Case Hardening Works. His wife Elizabeth and daughters Olive & Iris were there along with son Sydney who was described as an office manager.

They would appear to have remained in the Sussex area until Sydney's death in 1950 when the following obituary was printed in the West Sussex Gazette. *'Haywards Heath. Obituary: Mr Sydney Charles Caddy (73) Vale Rd, an inventor, who served in the South African War during which he met Mr Winston Churchill.'*

He seems to have been quite a character who did not stay in one place for long. He did not appear to know where he was born as he recorded a different place whenever it was asked for, which made it difficult to trace his early life. The "Kena" Manufacturing Co. did not seem to be in existence for long. Did the men who loaned him money ever get it back?

Sydney's stay in Keynsham lasted for only a few years and he does not appear to have left much of a mark on the place. Did you know that skipping ropes were once made here?

Thanks to John Stone for donating documents and artifacts to the Society which triggered this research.

Murder or Manslaughter, the Trial of Mr Cooper's Son and Wife

By Annette Rothwell

When George William Cooper Snr's body was discovered buried five feet beneath the floorboards of his home in 1924, Keynsham Union Workhouse and Keynsham Police Court became hotspots for journalists.

There are over six hundred newspaper articles covering George William Cooper Snr's death. These give details of: the discovery of the body; the inquest held in Keynsham workhouse by a ninety year old coroner; the arrest of George Snr's wife, Louisa, and son, George William Cooper Jnr; the protracted police court summary trial held in a packed Keynsham Court before the magistrates; a second exhumation of the deceased's body; the question this exhumation raised in the House of Commons; and the evidence given in Keynsham Court by Sir Bernard Spilsbury, the most celebrated forensic pathologist of the time. The following account has been taken mainly from these newspaper articles and the accounts of the trial and inquest, but it also includes information from other records of the time.

BODY UNDER FLOOR.

A MAN'S DISAPPEARANCE.

WIDOW AND SON ARRESTED.

LONDON, January 31.

The disappearance in September last of a sexagenarian, George Cooper, an engineer's patternmaker, and a tenant of a modest villa at Brislington, a suburb of Bristol, had a sequel by the arrest last night of his widow and a married son, who were still living at the villa with the son's wife and two infant children. The police to-day dug up the floor and found the decomposed body of a man. The widow and son were remanded at the Police Court, the latter being charged with murder, and the former with being an accessory after the fact.

The above story appeared in an Australian newspaper called the Brisbane Courier on 2 Feb 1924.



Fig. 1 Keynsham Union Workhouse – 1924.

In 1923, George and Louisa Cooper had been renting Croyden House in Brislington for at least thirteen years. Living with them were their son, also called George William, their daughter-in-law Nora and their grandson, Wilfred. There was also a lodger, John Baker. George Snr and Jnr both worked as pattern makers at Sampson and Sons Engineers.

George and Louisa's marriage does not appear to have been a happy one. John Baker, Louisa, George Jnr and several of George Snr's friends all reported George Snr as having affairs with other women. Some of their accounts say that George Snr even brought women to the house to goad Louisa.

In August 1923 Louisa complained to Frank Sampson, her husband's employer, that George had been 'carrying on' with Mrs Goodman, the works cleaner. On 3 September, a very distressed Louisa again complained to Sampson about George Snr.

She said he was cruel to her and stayed at the works with Mrs Goodman on Saturday afternoons when everyone had gone home. Sampson said nothing to George Snr because George was quick tempered, surly, secretive and unable to take criticism. However, he gave Mrs Goodman notice on 4 September. George Snr did not come into work on the 5th but was in work on September 6th, the last day that Sampson saw him.

When George Jnr returned from work in the evening of September 6th George Snr was, according to George Jnr, in a temper. There were broken eggs and water on the floor, suggesting there had been some sort of fracas. George Jnr was the only other person in the house as Nora was spending her second pregnancy with her parents and apparently neither Louisa nor John Baker were at home, so we only have George Jnr's account of what happened next.



Fig. 2 Keynsham Police Station

He said his father was smashing crockery and shouting that all would be clear when Louisa returned. George Jnr warned his father not to touch his mother, but his father said that he would bring any woman he wanted into the house, including the one from South Street, he had more than one string to his bow. George Snr then threw a wrought iron ornament in the shape of a cow at George Jnr before going outside.

George Jnr began to play the piano. Hearing a footstep, he looked in the mirror above him and saw his father. His father then rushed at him and pulled a hatchet from his waistcoat. George Jnr grabbed his father's arm and fought with him. Eventually George Jnr got hold of the hatchet and, remembering all that had happened in the past, struck his father on the head '*in a moment of madness.*' His father fell to the floor and George Jnr delivered several more blows and killed him. George Jnr wrapped his father's head in a rag and hid his body in the chicken coop before nailing shut the door leading to the crime scene.

About a week later having bought tar and lime, he dug a deep hole under the floorboards of that same room and buried his father there. When his mother returned home, he told her he had killed his father. The pair told neighbours and Sampsons Engineers that George Snr had been violent and abusive and had gone away with a woman. Louisa repeated this story to the Poor Law Relief saying that her husband had left her destitute.

Four months later, in January 1924, George Jnr was overheard telling his uncle there had been several upsets since his father had gone but '*he will not be back as he (George Jnr) had put him where he cannot come back.*' This was reported to the police and

on 31 January 1924 Police Sergeant Joseph Gilbert Carter from Keynsham arrested George Jnr and Louisa. They admitted that George Snr was dead and that he had been buried under the floor boards the previous September. At this point both George and Louisa were claiming responsibility for the murder.

The following day the police began digging and four hours later George Snr's badly decomposed body was found five feet below the floor. The initial postmortem stated that the extensive damage to the skull was so great that they were unable to piece it together but that death was due to a fractured skull and this could have been caused by a hatchet, although they were unable to state categorically whether the injuries had occurred before or after death because the body was so badly decomposed.

The pair were taken to the police station '*in the picturesque little village of Keynsham where lots of villagers attended and chattered excitedly throughout.*' George Jnr was calm and composed whilst his mother was distraught and weeping throughout the brief initial proceedings.

Louisa was taken to Cardiff prison and George Jnr remained in Keynsham overnight so he could attend the inquest. This was held in Keynsham workhouse. George Blackburn, Louisa's brother, identified the body from the hair colour, waistcoat and total lack of teeth! Proceedings began with George Jnr's very lengthy statement being read to the coroner. Dr Samuel Craddock and Dr McClelland gave evidence about the cause of death. The inquest was then adjourned and the undertaker, Frederick West, drove George Snr's body at high speed to Brislington

Cemetery for a secret burial behind locked cemetery gates in order to keep sightseers away.

The day before the inquest was due to resume, there was an unexpected development. George Snr's body was exhumed again. One of the doctors was not happy with the cause of death. The body was too decomposed to say whether the injuries occurred before or after death leaving it open for the defence to claim that death was not due to the hatchet blow. The doctor demanded Sir Bernard Spilsbury be called from London to examine the body.

At the time Spilsbury was a well-known expert in forensic pathology and his attendance at the second postmortem, the inquest and police court fuelled media attention to Keynsham – Spilsbury was quite a celebrity. (More recently Spilsbury's work has been called into question for its scientific rigour and Spilsbury's expertise and competence has also been questioned.)

The defence lawyers complained that they had not been told about the exhumation in advance and that it had already begun when Dr Hadden Hall, for the defence, joined Spilsbury for the postmortem. Craddock, the coroner, denied any responsibility and blamed the confusion on the new Home Secretary! The matter was raised in the House of Commons the following day, 19 February, and Mr R.J. Davies, Under Secretary to the Home Office said it was not necessary to give the defence solicitor notice of an exhumation. It was argued that this was not treating the defence fairly and should be looked into. The defence drew further attention to this at the police summary court hearing.

THE VILLA MURDER CHARGE

George William Cooper arriving at Keynsham Police Court, where hearing of the charge against him and his mother, Louisa Cooper, of murdering his father was resumed yesterday. Inset, Mrs. Goodman, with whom the dead man is alleged to have carried on an intrigue.

The above text with a photo of Mr Cooper Jnr and Mrs Goodman appeared on the front page of the Daily Mirror on 23 February 1924.

The resumed inquest was not straightforward. Craddock's judgment was repeatedly questioned by the defence in what several newspapers called 'a procedure duel of electrical exchanges.'

Mr Watson, defence lawyer, was keen to cross examine witnesses. Craddock's response was that "the deceased was a wretch and immoral man" and "the accused had told lies for five months" but that the inquest's only purpose was to find a cause of death. After numerous exchanges Mr Watson had to accept that Craddock 'was master in his own court' but added that without this further detail the jury would find it difficult to decide whether the cause of death was murder or manslaughter. Craddock also tried to prevent Spilsbury's evidence being given, but the jury requested it.

Mr Watson also challenged the impartiality of Craddock's summing up. Craddock said, "the crime was thoroughly worked out in a methodical manner, Cooper had told lies and the truth had lain dormant for five months and whilst the accused says it was in self-defence the moment that he took the hatchet from his father then the danger had

gone. If the jury returns a verdict of murder being the cause of death, then the High Court could reduce this to manslaughter, but the High Court cannot change manslaughter to murder."

It is, therefore, not surprising that the jury returned a verdict of murder but added a rider that George Jnr had been '*subject to great provocation and did it in the heat of passion.*' The defence argued that this meant it was a manslaughter verdict, but yet again Craddock refused to countenance Mr Watson's objection.



Fig. 3 Eminent pathologist, Sir Bernard Spilsbury – c1925 – (Wikimedia Commons)

The police court in Keynsham was crowded every day with lots of women jostling for good positions in the courtroom. Many witnesses gave evidence and Mrs Goodman denied having an affair with George Snr, even threatening Louisa with legal action for slander. Spilsbury's evidence was detailed and gruesome. Whilst he accepted that some of the injuries to the skull could have been caused by the police being over vigorous in the exhumations at the house

and graveyard and that some of the blows may have occurred after death, he was clear that death was from a haemorrhage which any one of the blows could have caused.

The defence questioned police procedure because the statements from George Jnr and Louisa were taken in conjunction with one another. George Jnr repeatedly stated, "*I am not guilty, I am not guilty mother.*" Mr Watson's final words for the defence were, "*The dead man was a lascivious leper, an unrepentant profligate who boasted of his profligacy who showed cruelty in the satisfaction of his lust.*"

Both George and his mother were committed to trial at Somerset Assizes in Wells. Locals from Keynsham travelled to Wells in motor coaches for the trial which found George Cooper Jnr guilty of manslaughter, not murder, and Louisa guilty of being an accessory. Louisa was bound over, having served her sentence awaiting trial and George received seven years penal servitude.

VILLA CRIME VERDICTS.

The trial, at Somerset Assizes, Wells, of George William Cooper. of Brislington, for the murder of his father, whose body was found under a floor at their villa, ended yesterday with a verdict of "Manslaughter." ...

When the Judge asked Mrs. Cooper if she were willing to be bound over she replied "Yes, sir," bursting into tears, and added: "I don't know what I shall do. Try and forgive my son, sir."

Extract from an article in the Daily News (London) on 31 May 1924.

The Royal Cider Thinkers and the Keynsham Ammonite

By Paul Benn

A previous article introduced the story of Keynsham's famous fossils studied by the Royal Society in the 17th century. But how and why did this happen?

Bizarrely, the story starts with cider. War with France put a stop to wine importation and our grape vines perished in Britain's mini-ice age. However, our cool climate was perfect for apple growing and after Charles I declared that it was his favourite tippie, cider became the national drink.

Following the execution of Charles I in 1649 the puritan Parliamentarians took control and although they were against excessive drinking they continued promoting cider production. One member of Cromwell's new parliament tasked with improving the efficiency of apple growing was John Buckland MP who was a wealthy Somerset landowner and lived at Gournay Court in West Harptree, about 10 miles southeast of Keynsham. Readers may be familiar with this property as it is the residence of Sir Jacob Rees Mogg.

When Charles II was made king in 1660 a new parliament was created, and Buckland lost his position. As he was not involved in the execution of Charles I he was pardoned and he carried on experimenting with agricultural improvement. Like many wealthy families at the time, there were split loyalties as his wife was the sister of a prominent Royalist, Colonel Robert Phelips, who had been Colonel of Horse in the Royalist army during the Civil War and played an important part in the escape of Charles II after battle of Worcester in 1649.



Fig. 1 Portrait of Charles II by John Smith
Wikimedia Commons.

For this he was awarded the position of groom of the bedchamber to the king.

Another relative of Buckland was the Rev. Dr John Beale FRS who was chaplain to Charles II and rector of Yeovil. Beale was also recognised as the leading expert in cider making by the Royal Society, which had been created in 1660, with Charles II as its patron. The members of this society were tasked with performing scientific investigation with the aim of refilling the public purse after the expenditure on the recent civil war. The improvement of cider production occupied a considerable amount of the Society's time in the early years as improvements in glass bottle manufacture meant that cider could be kept for longer and sold at a good profit. When Beale was made a member in January 1663 he was charged with growing and distributing apple grafts to other society members to plant across the country.

While he was touring around the Mendips in early 1663, Beale called in on Buckland who gave him a letter for the Royal Society

about his cider experiments. More importantly for this article he also gave Beale an ammonite which he had found in Keynsham and asked for the Royal Society's view on what it was.

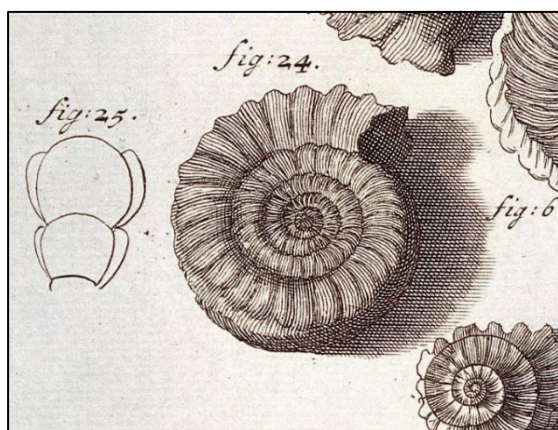


Fig. 2 Engraving of Ammonite fossil drawn by Hooke (fig. 24), Welcome Collection. Possibly the specimen referred to in Beale's letter as the original sketch had the text 'near Keynsham' next to it.

Beale wrote to the Royal Society's president, Viscount William Brouncker FRS, on 16 February 1663, enclosing Buckland's letter. Buckland's letter has been lost but the Royal Society still has Beale's letter. After discussing his travels around the Mendips, he introduces Buckland as the '*... (brother in law to Col. Phelips of the Bedchamber to his majesty) a person of unquestionable credit and of a deep judgement ...*'.

Following this glowing reference for Buckland highlighting the importance of any request from him, Beale then discusses the ammonite Buckland supplied.

'Also I have requested Mr Oldenburg to show your Lordship a fantastique stone, which was sent me by the same Mr Buckland. They are naturally bred or found in a village not far from those hills called Keynsham, bearing the figure of a serpent,

but always without a head. I do not offer this as any unparalleled miracle. For the humble Mr Boyle can testify, that there are living stones, the animal being adnated and affixed to the stone, as the oyster to his shell.

Beale then encouraged the Royal Society to study more fossils stating that their findings would '*adorn a pretty history.*'

Henry Oldenburg FRS was the first secretary of the Royal Society and managed all their correspondence. Robert Boyle FRS is best known for Boyle's Law and was their Curator of Experiments, he also invented a new cider press. It is interesting that Beale states that the ammonites are '*always without a head*' as this is the first contradiction of Joshua Childrey's observations of headed ammonites published in *Britannia Baconica* the previous year (1662), which was the subject of my article "Keynsham's Famous Snakestones" (2024 journal).

Beale's letter was read out to the Royal Society on 25 February 1663, and it was resolved to follow up by a visit the next summer '*... to view and observe the several things mentioned in the said letter.*' On this visit in 1664 Beale obtained more Keynsham fossils. Yet more were obtained by Hooke and his assistant in 1687 and one of them, a nautilus shell found in a field wall in Keynsham, was famously used to provide the first scientific proof that fossils were formed from living creatures.

But the most important Keynsham fossil is the ammonite provided by Buckland which started the Royal Society's interest in these specimens and laid the foundations of palaeontology.

The Roman Altar Stone at Compton Dando

By Richard Dyson

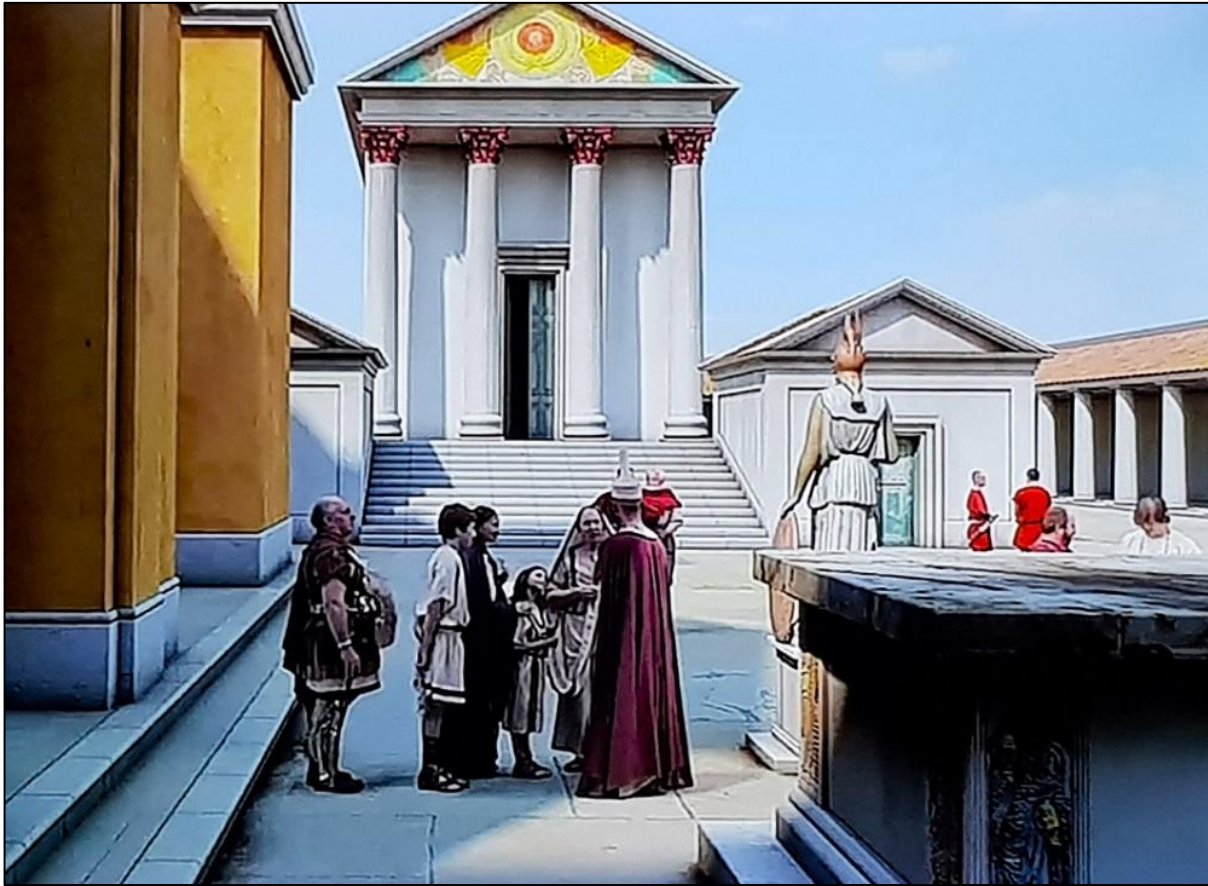


Fig. 1 Artist's impression of the courtyard of the Temple of Sulis Minerva, with the altar in the right foreground. (© The Roman Baths, Bath and North East Somerset Council)

The Story of the Stone

Visitors to the Roman Baths Museum in Bath walk along a suspended walkway above the Temple Courtyard, where Roman worshippers gathered to pray to the goddess Sulis Minerva and to make sacrifices at the great altar. Today, the altar we see is mainly a reconstruction, to show its size and shape, but three of the cornerstones are there. One of these stones is of particular interest to those living in the Chew valley and Compton Dando especially.

Overlooking the village, in a tranquil setting, stands the parish church of St Mary's. It was built in the fourteenth century and has been altered and extended

many times over the centuries. In one of these alterations the north-east buttress of the church acquired a unique carved stone: the corner piece of a Roman altar. This was first noted and described by the antiquarian



Fig. 2 St Mary's Church, Compton Dando

Reverend John Skinner in 1819. Today, this stone is one of those forming part of the great altar in the Roman Baths.



Fig. 3 The corner stone in its original position, shortly before removal

Exposed to the elements, on the corner of the buttress, the surface of the stone was gradually degrading and conservation specialists were concerned that the detail would be lost. There was also a view that it would be best returned to its presumed original setting in Bath. So, in 1997 the stone was cut out of its setting in the church and taken to the Roman Baths: although it was intended that it would be replaced by a facsimile, this never materialized.

The explanatory sign at the Baths acknowledges St Mary's as the owner of the stone and leaves no room for doubt that, after finding its way to Compton Dando and spending several hundred years there, the sculpted block has now been returned to its rightful home. But there is no proof that the

stone came from the temple of Sulis Minerva and not everyone believes that it did.

In 2002, the late Anthony Beeson, who was one of the country's leading authorities on Roman art and architecture, published a detailed paper in which he analysed the carvings on the stone and compared them with other statues and carvings of similar subjects. What follows is a summary of his work and conclusions.

Who was depicted by the carvings?

There is no dispute that the carving on the right-hand face is a sculpture of Apollo, but the other has never been firmly identified. Ideas on this deity's identity have ranged from Hercules to Mercury, but the consensus is that it is male, although too badly damaged to be identified with certainty. *'Careful study of the sculpture shows that in its right hand the deity holds a large dolphin, and in the other, a small shovel-shaped object on a thin curving stem, which is obviously a flower.'* The dolphin is not realistic, but this was common in classical art, where they were often elongated and wavy, like an eel. It was a popular inclusion, being a friend to sailors and beloved by them, and the deity most often portrayed as holding one is Neptune.

However, Neptune is almost always shown with a trident, which attribute is missing from the Compton Dando block. The flower with its bending stem can hardly be confused with the traditional trident. However, the most convincing evidence that this is not Neptune, is the fact that the figure sports a bun and curls at the nape of the neck. She is a goddess.

The bun has suffered a great deal of damage, which makes interpretation difficult. There is only one goddess to whom the dolphin was sacred and was commonly portrayed with, and this is Venus. This would also explain the nudity of the figure, as Venus was always depicted unclothed.

Although extremely rare, the image of Venus holding a dolphin in the manner of Neptune is not without parallel in Britain. Indeed, it occurs not too far away at Caerleon, in the form of a now lost relief adorning the top of a funerary offering table. As goddess of Spring and renewal, Venus was much involved with Roman funerary practices and hopes for an afterlife.

In the Compton Dando relief it is likely that her depiction has more to do with Venus's role as a marine deity than that her connection with the afterlife. As a sea-born goddess, Venus/Aphrodite was beloved of mariners and given various titles such as Aphrodite of the Good Sailing and Aphrodite of the Calm, and was invoked along with Neptune for a safe passage. The dolphin acts as a supporter on many of her statues and was itself a symbol of calm seas and fine weather. It is only the fact that Venus rather than Neptune holds the dolphin here that is at all noteworthy.

The flower was one of Venus's favourite attributes and was no doubt included here to clarify further her identity; both the lotus and the rose were often used with the goddess.

Venus's face has been hacked away by iconoclasts but it seems certain that originally she was portrayed in three-

quarter profile looking out to her right. The whole front of the face must have sheared off when attacked, and several grooves at the neck suggest that an axe was used. The bun has likewise been disfigured, but enough remains to show that, unlike the rest of the head, it was shown more in profile and very prominent to emphasize the sex of the deity. In addition, the broad hips of the figure are illustrative of femininity and fecundity.

The other decorated side of the block bears the most elaborate sculpture of Apollo to survive from Britannia.



Fig. 4 The cornerstone, as it is today.

(© The Roman Baths. Photo: Peter J Stone)

Because of the need to include the lyre in the composition his figure is portrayed on a smaller scale than that of Venus. He is heavily draped, with his head covered as if participating in a religious rite. His torso down to his groin is naked and,

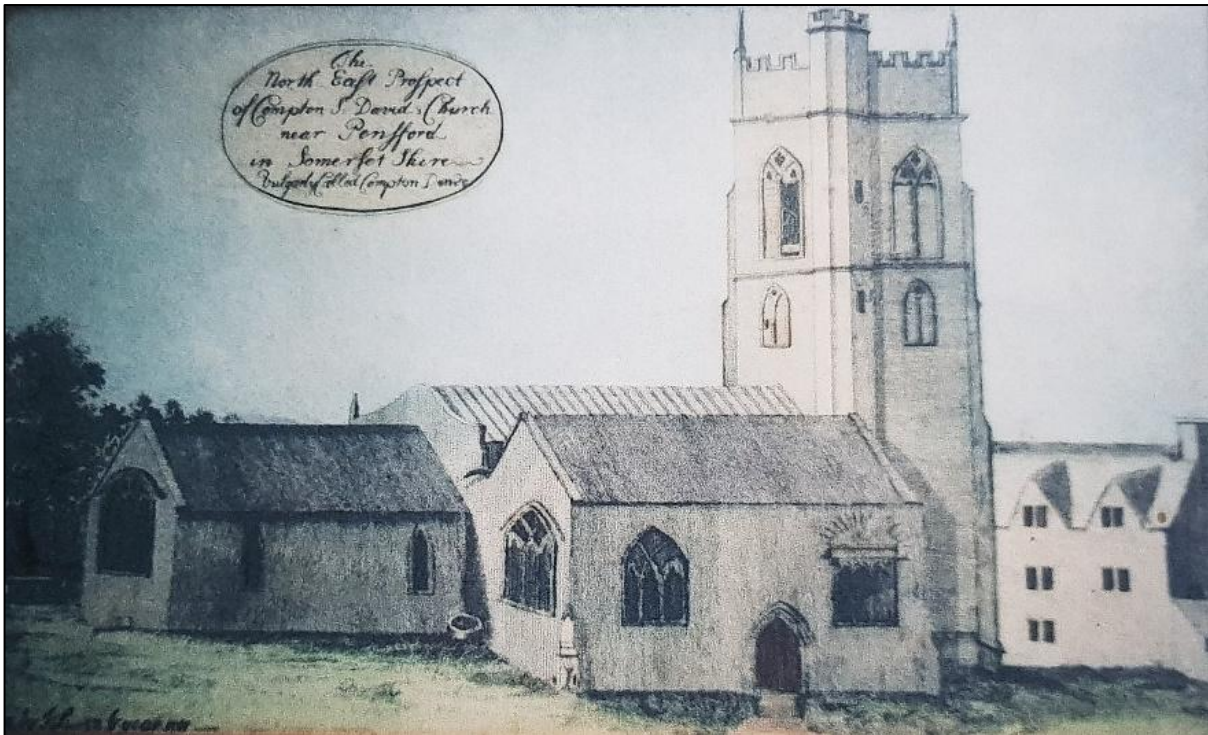


Fig. 5 St Mary's church drawn in 1717, with the cornerstone in the centre

although his face has gone, traces of the robe preserved on either side testify that he gazed out to his left. This image of Apollo derives from a sculpture now called the Cyrene Apollo, discovered in the Temple of Apollo at Cyrene and now in the British Museum.

Why was the stone built into the church?

Anthony Beeson suggests that this may have been the result of a misinterpretation of the identities of the carvings. It would have been easy to confuse Apollo with David and his lyre playing before Saul, and the naked Venus with Eve holding the apple. The tail and sinuous body of the dolphin perhaps suggested the serpent's head and winged body as he whispered temptations into her ear, as often shown in medieval art.

Whoever placed the block in the church considered it important that both

sculptures should be seen or it would not have been set at a corner. Damage to both deities may be the result of sixteenth and seventeenth century protestant iconoclasts, after it was in situ. That the block's placement at Compton Dando was medieval is supported by the fact that local antiquarians in the mid-eighteenth century had no knowledge of the date of its arrival.

Was the stone from the Temple of Sulis Minerva in Bath ?

Comparing the stone to the known corner blocks of the great altar, there are obvious similarities in size and in the idea of using two deities to enhance the corners. In the Middle Ages Compton Dando was owned by the cathedral priory of Bath which could have supplied stone robbed from the temple precinct. The iconography of the block is sophisticated and would not be out of place in a cosmopolitan resort such as Aquae Sulis.



Fig. 6 The reconstruction of the altar in the temple precinct

However, it is possible that some sort of religious structure existed at Compton Dando itself, or that the stone was brought from Trajectus/Somerdale or the Durley Hill villa, which some now believe was a religious centre of some kind.

Despite the general similarity of the block to those from Bath there are differences between them. The Bath figures stand within square topped niches whereas those at Compton Dando are curved [see Fig.7]. Venus and Apollo are portrayed in three-quarter profile whereas the Bath deities all seem to be shown full face. Unless it has been severely cut back in medieval times the Compton Dando block does not have the bands of moulding at the base and along one side that the Bath pieces display. As for the deities themselves, there are no certain similarities in the carving of the figures to suggest that they were carved by the same sculptors for the same project.

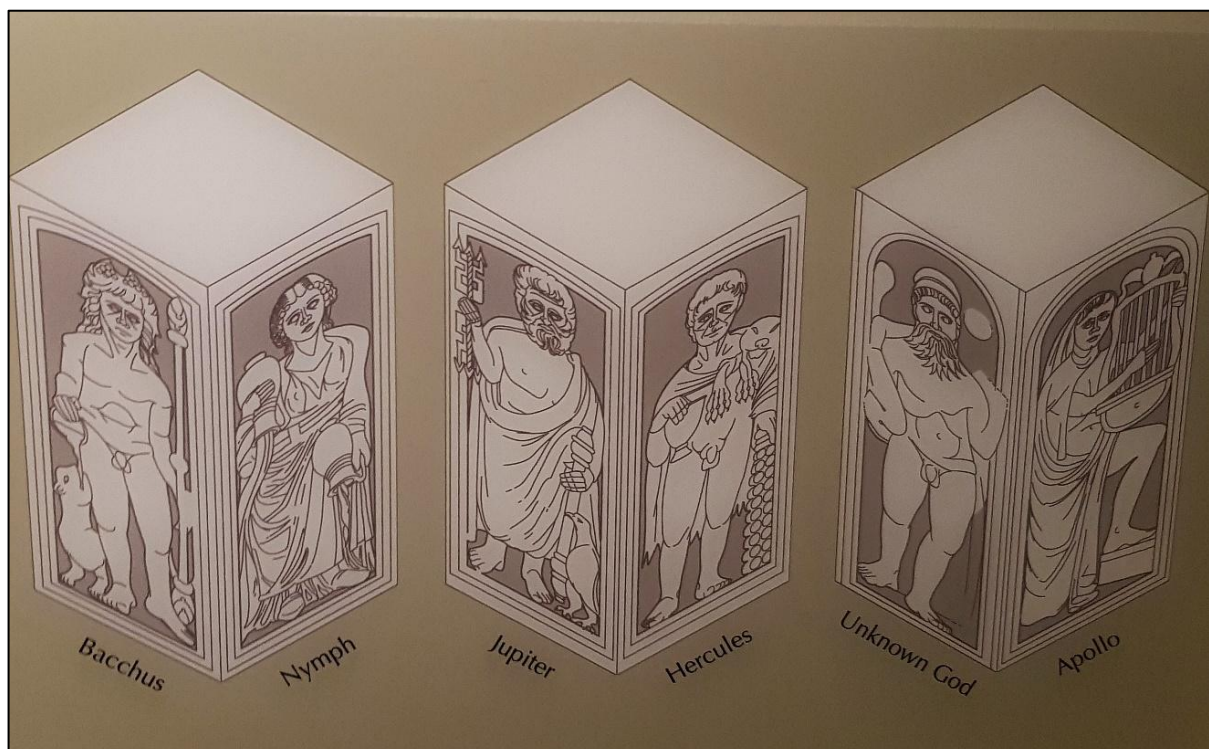


Fig. 7 Drawing comparing the three surviving cornerstones.
(© The Roman Baths, Bath and North East Somerset Council)

Beeson concludes that ‘*the somewhat unpalatable truth*’ therefore, is that there is a strong possibility that the Compton Dando stone did not originate from the altar in the Temple Precinct but is from another nearby Roman site. If, on the other hand, it did indeed come from Aquae Sulis and the area of the temple it may well have adorned a completely different monument from that to which it is popularly attributed.

One of the great perils of archaeological thinking is the natural tendency to interpret remains or finds to fit into a predetermined narrative. Perhaps the Compton Dando altar stone is an example of this: future discoveries may allow us to confirm its provenance with certainty.

Comment

Zofia Matyjaszkiewicz, Collections Manager at The Roman Baths & Pump Room, gives her view on the interpretation of the stone:

The stone from the church at Compton Dando is on loan to the Roman Baths museum and displayed in the Temple Courtyard as part of the interpretation of the Roman Altar. As highlighted in this article, the interpretation of archaeological finds depends on an object's original physical context and the current understanding of object uses and cultural meanings. Without full knowledge of where, when and how an object was used, the stories we tell must be based on the information we do have, and comparable examples across the Roman world. The Compton Dando stone is a great example of this, perhaps leaving us with more

questions than answers, from its original positioning and use, to the decline and abandonment of the Roman site itself. Our knowledge is constantly changing and growing over time as new research and discoveries bring different perspectives to existing interpretation, and it is important to incorporate this in the ongoing care and display of archaeological sites and objects.

Acknowledgement

The author is indebted to Zofia Matyjaszkiewicz, Collections Manager at The Roman Baths & Pump Room, for her co-operation and assistance in providing images and approvals.

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Another Lost Keynsham Lad - Marine William Hembrow

By Brian Vowles

Eighty years ago, as a small boy, I went to a house at the top of Gooseberry Lane on the Wellsway with my mother to visit her cousin for tea, a normal Sunday afternoon event (I had previously been a diminutive ‘page boy’ at her daughter’s wedding). Suddenly, there was a knock on the door which was followed by the sound of shocking wailing. Confused, we were ushered out of the house and I was a little peeved at missing my promised slice of cake.

This was the moment when the news arrived that Marine William Hembrow had been killed. He was the son of Kate and George Hembrow, also known as ‘Snowball’ on account of his blond hair. The couple had five children in all who were baptised at the Bethesda Methodist Chapel in Temple Street.

In August 1939 he and six others decided to volunteer for the Territorial Army and reported to the Gloucester Regiment’s T.A. Centre at Ashton Gate. He was only 16 at the time but initially the group were accepted because they had lied about their ages. However, he must have been deferred as he joined No.2 Company of the Keynsham Home Guard and, at the time of the blitz he was commended for his good work during the air raids. When he became old enough, he enrolled in the forces, not in the Glosters but in the more elite Royal

Marines and went on to take part in one of the Marines’ greatest actions of the war.

It was recognised that one of the reasons for the failure of Montgomery’s ‘Operation Market Garden’ in September 1944 was the fact that all supplies still had to be transported by truck from the invasion beaches in Normandy as the Germans still controlled the other channel ports. The vital port of Antwerp, in particular, could not yet be used because all shipping would have been annihilated by the formidable German coastal batteries on the island of Walcheren at the mouth of the River Scheldt. To overcome this threat a seaborne invasion force of Marine Commandos was assembled at Ostend to make an assault on the coast at Westkapelle.

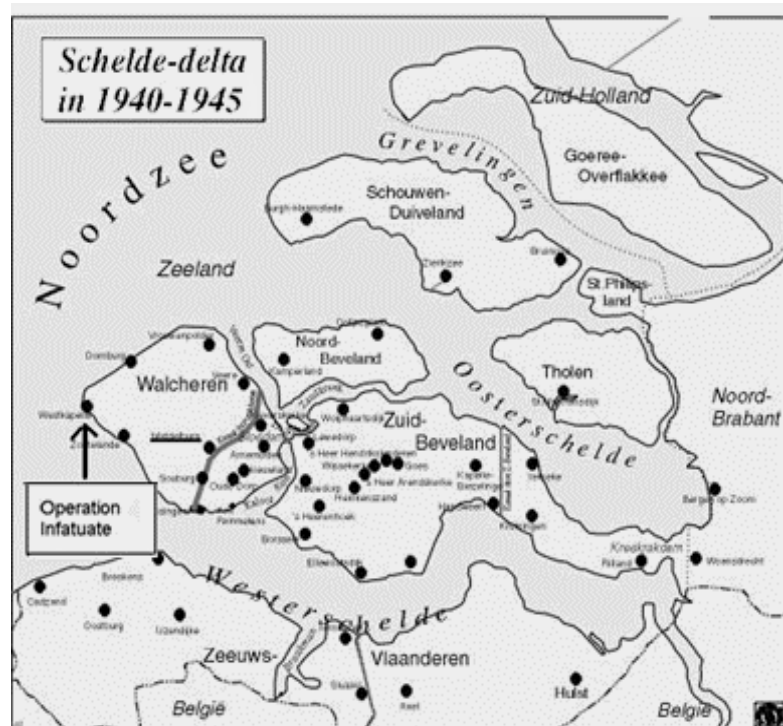


Fig. 1 “Operation Infatuate” - The assault on Westkapelle.
The dots mark the position of the German big guns.



Fig. 2 L.C.G. (M) 102 with Bill Hembrow manning the guns on manoeuvres prior to the Walcheren Operation.

The fleet sailed from Ostend at 03.15hrs on 1 November 1944 and by 09.30hrs they had reached the island and had started to bombard the defences with everything they had, including the 15-inch guns of H.M.S. *Warspite*. The original plan had been to plaster the enemy positions with bombs before the troops went in but, unfortunately,

due to foggy conditions in England the supporting aircraft could not get airborne.

However, it was ruled that the action must go ahead to coincide with the attack being made by the Canadians on the causeway at the other end of the island. At first the Germans held their fire but soon opened up on the landing craft as they made for the



Fig. 3 The sinking of L.C.G. (M) 101. Captain Peretz is the soldier in the water.



Fig. 4 The Marines memorial on Plymouth Hoe.

beaches. To draw the fire of these massive guns buried deep in their concrete bunkers, the two L.C.G. (M)'s (Landing Craft Guns (Medium)) attached to the force, Nos.101 and 102, closed in suicidally at 09.43hrs to beach their guns just nine hundred yards from the reinforced concrete casements and engaged them with their 17 pounders at point blank range. These two craft, each carrying a crew of 30 men, had been specially developed at great expense to give shore landings immediate artillery support by beaching and then flooding their ballast tanks to provide a secure footing for their guns. The men had been trained near Barmouth in North Wales and then at Studland Bay by a Captain Michael Peretz, who in spite of being 85 when I spoke to him on the telephone in June 2004 (this was just in time as Michael Peretz, died aged 93 in August 2010), remembered the operation

vividly and he told me that this was to be the first time that these craft had been used in action.

Within five minutes they were hit repeatedly by salvos from the shore batteries and were riddled with bullets from Spandau machineguns. (One of the survivors from No. 101 told me that it sounded like a swarm of bees around his gun turret). No.102 was immediately set ablaze from bow to stern and although her crew got the fire under control, she was hit time and time again. Ten minutes later No.101 managed to unbeach from this desperate position by pulling on its kedge anchor but sank a few hundred yards off the shore at 10.25hrs.

But No.102, unable to move, was not so lucky and she was last seen broken and burning on the sandbar. Bill Hembrow was on L.C.G.(M)102 and the only survivor to escape from the blazing craft, Marine Gerald Sweet tells of Bill's fate....

'Our ship went in on the southern flank at Westkapelle at 10.00am on November 1st, 1944. We engaged a pillbox and dealt with it. Then we engaged the enemy Radar station on the hill and finished that before drawing off the beach and proceeding south to beach again. At a range of 900 yards from the enemy gun positions we found we were tackling some of his heaviest guns of 105 mm calibre. We were on a sand bank 600 yards from the shore and as we fired, they replied. Their second hit got our communications, but our orders were to keep firing so we fired on, firing by lanyard because everything else was dead from the control room. We five Marines were in 'B' turret, and 'A' turret was firing too. Suddenly 'A' turret stopped and we saw

them carrying out a casualty. I don't remember it firing again.

We carried on for a while. Eventually they got our range so well we actually saw the shells coming towards us in a direct line. Someone said we ought to see if we could get fresh orders, so we opened the turret doors to have a look. Everything was ablaze and every officer had been killed. There were a few men alive on the quarter deck and then another shell hit us by the galley. Blood was running off the decks. I got two in the legs, several wounds in the arm, and one in the head, all on the left of the body. We five marines were all that were left of the company.

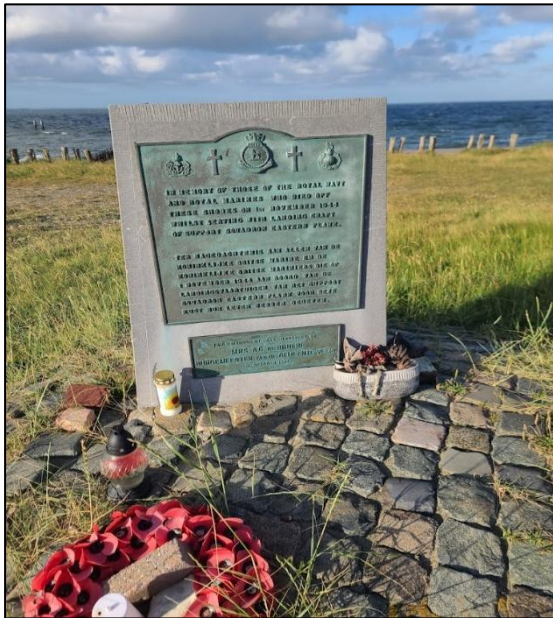


Fig. 5 The monument on the island of Walcheren

There seemed no future in waiting so we started to swim to the shore 600 yards away. Our lifebelts had been blown up and the laces were loose in our boots. Kicking them off we started to swim. We were under shell fire as we swam. Stuff kept dropping, and the time came when I looked around and found I was swimming alone. My four companions had been killed.'

Marine Sweet was discovered more dead than alive on the shoreline an hour later by a German soldier but the body of Bill Hembrow was never found as it was probably incinerated in the inferno. He was just 21 and is now commemorated on the Marines memorial on Plymouth Hoe.

The marine commandos overran the concrete gun emplacements by 11.40hrs and the rest of the island within the next two days. By their action the support group had bought time for the landings but with a heavy sacrifice. 17 out of the 25 craft taking part were either sunk or severely damaged and over 370 men were killed or wounded that day. The wreck of L.C.G. (M) 102 still lies below the waters close to Westkapelle where it provides a site of interest to local divers.

The action at Walcheren is today remembered as one of the highest achievements of the Royal Marine Corps and remains one of the most important of their major battle honours.

Today the site is a holiday destination for tourists. In November the wind howls in from the North Sea but in summer its quiet sandy beaches provide a haven for those seeking tranquillity from the hurly-burly of city life. Footpaths and cycle tracks follow the line of dykes that were smashed to allow the sea to flood the village of Westkapelle and monuments stand at the water's edge to commemorate the dead, both military and civilian, who perished in the conflict.

Each year the children of the village continue to gather to lay flowers on the stones watched by an ever-dwindling knot of old men who make the pilgrimage to remember their fallen comrades.

