

The Devon Historian, Volume no. 73, Autumn 2006

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Reviews

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# The Devon Historian

Autumn 2006

73

Journal of the Devon History Society

*Hail Barnstaple! The bless'd abode  
Where Charity her sails have spread,  
To shelter from the scourging rod  
Of famine, and the want of bread.*

From Thomas Billinger, 'On the Establishment of a Publick Kitchen In Barnstaple, for Supplying the Poor with Soup', undated.

*See the poor they begin to rear up their head,  
By the curs'd importation they've plenty of bread;  
For I stood in great hopes to deprive them of breath,  
And by fraud and extortion to starve them to death.*

From Billinger, 'Dialogue between A wealthy Farmer, and a Barnstaple Publican, On the Conduct of the Bakers', 1800.

*The helpless orphan, and the aged too,  
Owe their nakedness - hunger -- all to you.  
Then on ye Farmers let their curse remain,  
And on your offspring fix the bloody stain.*

From Billinger, 'To the farmers RICHES and PLENTY; to the Public STARVATION', 1801



BARNSTAPLE QUAY, DEVON.

Engraved by John Wilson, England.

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*Cover illustration and text: front, John Wilson, 'Barnstaple Quay, Devon', c. 1820 (Somers Cocks Catalogue 0059A; reproduced with kind permission of Devon Library and Information Services from the collections held in the Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter); back, Christie 2006, op. cit.).*

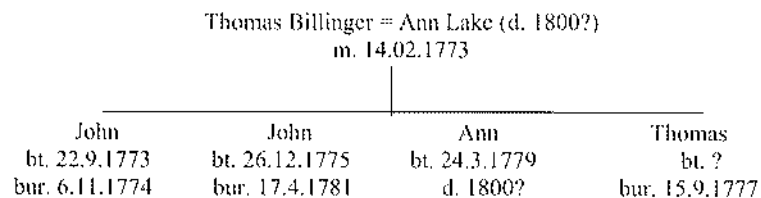
## Thomas Billinger and his broadside poems

Peter Christie

This article examines a small collection of broadside poems written by one Thomas Billinger and preserved amongst the collections of the North Devon Athenaeum.<sup>1</sup> Dating from around 1800 there are 15 productions bearing Billinger's name. Another four unsigned poems are filed with the group, but internal evidence suggests only two of them can be attributed to Billinger. Each is printed on a single sided thin sheet of paper measuring between 10"x4" and 12"x5".

This is not the first time the poet has been noticed by bibliographers. J.R. Chanter in his *Sketches of the literary history of Barnstaple* notes the following: 'Tom Billinger was for many years, in the early part of the present century, a well-known character in the town. He had a facility for scribbling poetry and lampoons and writing songs on any persons and on any subject, and used to chant and sell his songs and productions through the streets. He died about 1811'.<sup>2</sup>

The name Billinger is rare in North Devon, and reference to the parish registers of St. Peter's in Barnstaple shows only one Billinger family.<sup>3</sup> A Thomas Billinger married Ann Lake in February 1773, and four children are recorded starting with John, baptised seven months after his parents married. A possible family tree is set out below:



Two Anns are recorded as being buried in 1800 – one on 6 April and another on 14 July; they are probably mother and daughter, but which is which is unclear. No Thomas is buried 'about 1811', though one is recorded as being buried on 5 April 1803, who could be the poet; certainly none of the extant poems post date 1801.

Two other references to the family have been located. Amongst the Barnstaple parish records is a very fragile apprenticeship indenture for Ann Billinger dated 1793 when she was bound to one George Thorne.<sup>4</sup> The other reference is to Thomas the poet. In 1806 J. Avery of Barnstaple printed 'The Dapiad' (he was also the printer of 14 of Billinger's works).<sup>5</sup> This was described as a 'Mock Heroic Poem in Six Cantos', and was written by John Randall who was a clerk in the Barnstaple Custom House. His long production was a burlesque on Pope's 'Dunciad' and a satire on a character called 'Dap' who, according to Chanter, was a Mr. Oram, another employee in the Barnstaple Customs House -

who got his nickname from his habit of carrying a large walking stick and banging it down heavily as he walked.

In the first 'Canto' Billinger appears, being described thus:

First Billinger – whose Frame tho' small  
Deformed and Deaf; contained a soul  
Aspiring, great and wise:  
'Gainst Herculean Dap, did dare  
Provoke a sanguinary War  
And to the combat flies.

A few verses later Oram denounces Billinger as 'You ugly elf', and proceeds to beat the smaller man with his walking stick – the fight having been provoked by an argument over the price of some second hand shoes Oram sold to Billinger. From these scanty references it seems clear that Billinger was physically disabled in several ways and a man whose family predeceased him. This disability perhaps suggests a reason why he turned to hawking poems – perhaps he could not carry out physically demanding work?

What of the poems themselves? The 17 poems identified as being by Billinger fall into four rough groups; those on local events (5), skits on unidentified local events (6), those on national events (3) and those of a very generalised nature (3).

Two in the first group were written following the death of a local person. Thus the 'Monody On the Death of William Barbor Esq. Major Commandant of the Fremington Volunteers' followed the passing of its subject who, according to the Fremington parish register, was buried on 12 July 1800.<sup>6</sup> Barbor was clearly of some local note, not only acting as commander of his local volunteer unit but also having served as Sheriff of Devon in 1793. In nine 4 line verses Billinger invokes comparisons with Alexander the Great, Hector and Caesar and at one point has a reference to Revolutionary France:

When hostile legions threaten'd Britain's land,  
And regicides infested Devon's coast;  
March'd at the head of his renowned band,  
To meet his king and country's deadly foes.

A similar poem was 'A Tribute to the Memory of the amiable Mrs. Palmer, Who departed this life, July 3d 1801. Aged 24'. Dated July 14 1801 it is a fairly typical listing of its subject's virtues and a homily on the assuredness of an afterlife. Mrs. Palmer must have been a particular beauty or of some standing in the community if Billinger was to have sold many of these.

Another local occurrence was celebrated in a piece entitled 'An Address to the Hampshire Regiment of Militia, Now Quartered in Barnstaple.' During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars the militia regiments did home duty freeing up regular troops for fighting overseas, and many such regiments were stationed away from their homes. Billinger clearly knew his prospective market to judge from lines such as:

While Hampshire's valiant and illustrious band  
A bright example set for all the land;  
Their noble acts have gain'd immortal fame  
And future ages will record their name.

The parish register of St. Peter's, Barnstaple records three marriages between local girls and members of the 'North Hants Militia' in June 1800, which points to when this piece was printed.

The last poem recording a local event is also undated. Its title is self explanatory 'On the Establishment of a Publick Kitchen In Barnstaple, for Supplying the Poor with Soup.' It begins:

Hail Barnstaple! The bless'd abode  
Where Charity her sails have spread,  
To shelter from the scourging rod  
Of famine, and the want of bread.

Presumably Billinger was hoping to sell copies to those funding the kitchen who wished to have a lasting record of their charity. Other than these it is hard to envisage who might wish to be reminded of the poverty then existing and which is so clearly identified in Billinger's verses.

Another poem in this 'local' group records '...the safe Return of that gallant British HERO, Sir Edward Pellew'. This gentleman was a naval hero of the Napoleonic Wars who successfully stood as M.P. for Barnstaple in 1802, thus making the poem the latest in the Athenaeum collection. Sadly it is a fairly pedestrian effort as just one verse shows:

Ye sons of Barnstaple rejoice,  
In Tuneful accents raise your voice;  
Let freedom sound the trump of fame,  
And all revere Sir EDWARD's name.

Six other poems take the form of satirical 'skits' on local events. The subjects must have been well known to Billinger's contemporaries, but today it is impossible to discover what he was referring to. One, dated 26 August 1800, features a 'Dialogue between A wealthy Farmer, and a Barnstaple Publican, On the Conduet of the Bakers', which has *A Wealthy farmer near old Baram Town* coming to market and trying unsuccessfully to buy some bread. When he asks the publican why all the baker's shops are closed he is told:

Our dark combination I'll tell you is broke,  
And our plots lately formed will vanish like smoak.  
See the poor they begin to rear up their head,  
By the curs'd importation they've plenty of bread;  
For I stood in great hopes to deprive them of breath,  
And by fraud and extortion to starve them to death.

Internal evidence dates this to late 1798.

The other three 'skits' concern a farmer's two unmarried daughters living 'Within six miles of Barnstaple', the theft of some boiled beef by a 'Captain Cryer' in Barnstaple, and a 32 line poem extolling the virtues of locally made earthenware cooking pots which includes the intriguing couplet:

A neighbouring 'squire has now a curious pan,  
Was made when Cromwell rul'd Britannia's land.

Sadly Billinger could not offer much in comparison:

I'll show two ancient vessels when you call,  
One crock, a chamber-pot, and that is all.

The third category of Billinger's poems are those concerning national events. All deal with military heroes and presumably sold to the patriotic amongst the population. The first in the group dates from late 1797, and is entitled 'The Battavians Overthrown, And the British Tars Triumphant': the Battavians are the Dutch, and the poem celebrates the Battle of Camperdown on 7 October 1797. Its flavour is given by the first six lines:

Ye British hearts rejoice and sing,  
That love your Country and your king,  
In spite of all Battavian art,  
Brave DUNCAN made the Mynheers smart.

Chorus – He'll fight our foes where'er they roam  
Britannia cried my Son strike home.

The second is 'A New Song On the safe Return of Admiral Lord Nelson, To his native Country'. Although undated it begins, 'Welcome immortal Hero of the Nile', which would place it sometime after the Battle of the Nile, occurring on 1 August 1798. The third was written on May 29 1801 to mark the death of Sir Ralph Abercrombie, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in Egypt. Billinger compares him to Wolfe dying on the battlefield at Quebec reckoning, in the final verse:

And tho' his mortal frame with foreign dust  
Incorporates, till the great morn arise;  
Then Abercrombie, number'd with the just,  
Shall meet his Saviour in the azure skies.

The last group consist of three 'general' poems, two of which are 'The Beauties of Summer' and 'Ode for New Year 1800' - and are fairly anaemic. The third, which is unsigned but was printed by J. Avery and dated 26 March 1801, is titled 'To the Farmers RICHES and PLENTY; To the PUBLIC STARVATION'. No place or personal names are given, but it is still a powerful denunciation of

*The insulting Farmer* who deliberately holds back produce in order to push the price higher. The poem contains some striking language viz:

The helpless orphan, and the aged too,  
Owe their nakedness – hunger – all to you.  
Then on ye Farmers let their curse remain,  
And on your offspring fix the bloody stain.

Add this to the other anti-farmer polemics and it is clear that the poet did not like farmers!

#### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Librarian of the North Devon Museum Les Franklin for his help in making the poems of Billinger available to me for study.

#### Notes and references

1. North Devon Athenaeum Box 35/3g.
2. Chanter 1866, 40.
3. North Devon Record Office Parish registers/St. Peter's, Barnstaple.
4. NDRO TD146/A75/15.
5. Randall 1806.
6. NDRO Parish registers/Fremington.

#### Bibliography

- Chanter, J.R. (1866) *Sketches of the literary history of Barnstaple*. Barnstaple: E.J. Arnold.
- Randall, J. (1806) *The Dapiad: a mock heroic poem, in six cantos*, London: J. Avery.

Peter Christie is teaches at North Devon College. He has published 10 books on North Devon, and for 20 years has produced a weekly column on local history for the *North Devon Journal* and the old *Bideford Gazette*. He is currently a town and district councillor and has been Mayor of Bideford twice.

## Devon extracts from 'a fruit grower's diary'

### Anthony Greeustreet

The October 1935 number of *The Countryman* magazine stated 'We have the pleasure of publishing at a time of year when attention is particularly drawn to orchards and fruit the first instalment of a fruit grower's diary'. So began a regular feature in the magazine which was to run for over sixty instalments well into the 1950s.<sup>1</sup> It was written by Raymond Bush a well-known writer on horticulture, particularly fruit, who had himself been a substantial fruit grower.<sup>2</sup> His contributions appeared under the title 'A Fruit Grower's Diary' and were drawn largely from observations made in the course of his extensive horticulture-based travels throughout Britain.

Bush had many friends in Devon whom he often visited (including a retired West African prospector who lived nine hundred feet above sea level on Brent Moor – and who, in the 1930s, had 'solved the servant problem by having coloured maids'). These visits mainly resulted in remarks on the current state of the fruit and horticulture industries; but they also produced many wider observations on contemporary life in rural Devon between the 1930s and 1950s.

When his diary began the fortunes of the Devon cider apple industry were in decline. In September 1935 Bush noted that 'The small cider manufacturers are meeting increasing difficulty in selling their barrel cider which is usually taken by the inns at 1s. 2d. to 1s. 4d. a gallon. These inns are bought up by the brewers and cider is no longer offered. One friend in Devon tells me that he still has a large stock of 1933 cider unsold, in addition to thousands of gallons last year'. He recorded in September 1939 that the large crop of cider apples had driven their price down to a very low figure of £3 10s. a ton; but a year later he noted that (presumably as a result of war-time conditions) it had risen to a satisfactory £6 2s. 6d. a ton. After the war the decline evidently resumed, and on 26 October 1950 he wrote 'Devon must jettison 20,000 tons of unwanted apples, yet a Kent farmer gives each of 24 cows 60lbs of chopped up cull apples and pears daily. Devon is also a great cattle country, but its farmers do not seem to have heard how to change cider into milk'.

Bush was keenly interested in new initiatives to improve the fortunes of the cider apple industry. On 11 November 1935 he visited the new offices and works at Dartington Hall: 'Outside their cider mill piles of coloured apples drenched in morning dew looked very fine.' He visited Dartington again in August 1936 and March 1937, and inspected the juice extract plant at the cider mill and the new 16,000 gallon containers full of pure unfermented apple juice ready for bottling. He found the taste of the juice, filtered from the crushed fruit, to be 'pure apple and one of the pleasantest drinks I know'. Even in the difficult post-war conditions Bush remained an enthusiast of Devon orchards: on 17 October 1948 he visited 'a lovely fruit farm site, planted mainly to cider varieties, on the steep 400-foot

banks of the Dart estuary at Cornworthy. Six lime-sulphur sprays a year are needed to control seab. Cider fruit so tended does well...'.

Bush also noted the fortunes of Devon's horticulture industry. On 25 August 1936 he observed that 'anemones are already in bloom though the market will have none of them. Gladioli are unsaleable and boxes of these remain unpacked until empties are wanted'. Things were better in March 1937 when he visited the daffodil fields: 'The variety of King Alfred was in pick and making good prices. This flower, the posthumous triumph of an Exeter grower, flowered for the first time nine years after his death... The Devon growers have struck it lucky with the early Easter, for the Cornish blooms are nearly over, and the Lincolnshire not yet ready'. By contrast, he noted on 10 February 1939 that 'Devon, which supplies 80 per cent of London's violets has had the worst season for this flower for 14 years'. After the war the fortunes of the industry improved and in March 1951 Bush wrote 'The cult of the anemone has been built up very rapidly since the war and now... Devon has 300 acres planted to this crop. The yield varies from one to three thousand bunches an acre, and the return to the grower is about 5s. 3d. per dozen bunches. You were probably asked to pay 2s. for one bunch'.

The diary records many examples of war-time and post-war shortages of food and consequent price rises. On 28 June 1940 he noted that at Stoke Gabriel 16 villagers 'are licensed under a charter granted by King John to net salmon. At 15 a net, and salmon at 3s. a pound or over, and all the week from Monday till noon Friday as available time, Stoke Gabriel should not do too badly'. On 6 October 1948 'On the strength of a boyhood acquaintance, persuaded an ancient fisherman to unpack his London consignment and pick me out the four best lobsters. His price, fresh, 4s. per pound; London price, stale from 7s. to 10s.'. The difference in prices in Devon and London was often noted: on 18 October 1947 walnuts were 6d. a pound in Devon, but on 11 November 'they were selling in London at 4s. 6d.'. Post-war food austerity was also remarked on. On 26 October 1947 Bush wrote 'In a Totnes shop window a sign in large letters offered "Devonshire Cream sent by Post to All Parts of the Country". At the foot of the bill in very small type was "Soon. We Hope"'. In the same year he noted that at his home, 'in a milk producing district' on the Surrey/Sussex borders, the daily milk ration was one third of a pint per head: 'This is a wretched ration for a milk-lover who regrets boyhood days in Devon fifty years ago when a dish of cream and a quart of new milk were gladly provided for supper'.

Bush described himself 'as a general scavenger of any knowledge, useful or otherwise, which has to do with horticulture': hence his typical 1947 note that 'On the close-cropped cliffs near Dartmouth magnificent crops of mushrooms are found. The land is heavily grazed by rabbits which are useful bringers of mushrooms'. However, his comments on contemporary life ranged well outside the horticultural field. Thus, in 1939 he deplored that Widecombe was already disfigured by an 'Uncle Tom Cobbley rash'. Moreover, his diary entries are infused with a certain humour: on 30 May 1951, while temporarily stranded at Honiton he looked round the Art Pottery 'which welcomes visitors. Here you may see the unusual sight of six young women painting pots in complete silence'.

### Acknowledgement

The help of Mr J.S. Creasey, B.A., M.A., Librarian and Information Officer of the Rural History Centre, University of Reading, in providing access to the Centre's collection of copies of *The Countryman* is gratefully acknowledged.

### Notes and references

1. 1935-51; *The Countryman* 12, 1 to 44, 2.
2. Raymond Bush was born in 1885 and was educated at Rugby School. After a career in journalism he took up commercial fruit growing from 1915 until 1935. Thereafter he was engaged in advisory work on fruit growing and served on a number of the industry's research committees. His books include two Penguin Handbooks *Soft fruit growing* (1942) and *Tree fruit growing* (1943), and a Pelican *Frost and the fruit grower* (1945). In about 1960 he retired to Jamaica. The date of his death is not known. Hon. Sec., Old Rugbeian Society, *pers. comm.*, 21 January 2002; Lindley Library, Royal Horticultural Society, *pers. comm.*, 5 February 2002.

Anthony Greenstreet was born in Saltash and educated in Plymouth, Tavistock and Sherborne, and at Cambridge University (where he read history). He worked for 40 years for employers' organisations in India and Britain, latterly with the Engineering Employers' Federation, London. His main retirement hobby is writing, particularly on Westcountry historical topics.

## Montague Wigzell: Victorian artist and inventor

Gill Selley

### Exeter School of Art

After the success of the 1851 Exhibition, the government decided that in order to improve the design and ornamentation of manufactured goods in the country there was a need for instruction in the basics of design and drawing. Consequently schools of art were established in various cities to encourage artisans to learn the fundamentals of drawing, perspective and architecture. In 1854 a school of art was set up at Friars Green in Exeter with encouragement from the government's Department of Art, the Society of Arts in London and literary societies, all under the watchful eye of Sir Stafford Northcott, who became its first president.<sup>1</sup> A young man of 23 was sent down to Exeter as its first headmaster, on the recommendation of Mr Redgrave, superintendent of all the schools of art in the country. This man, rejoicing in the splendid name of Montague Wigzell, had been trained by Mr Redgrave as an artist at Marlborough House.<sup>2</sup>

Montague Wigzell, the son of Eustace and Elizabeth, was born in the City of London about 1831. The Wigzell family were to be found mainly in London, Surrey, Kent and Sussex. Montague's mother was born in Perthshire, and Atwood, his brother, married and had a daughter born in Aberdeen. Another brother, Eustace, lived in Greenwich. A distant relative, also called Eustace, was a marine engineer there at one time, and was later employed by the Russian government at its works at Ekaterinberg - he was also a partner in the firm of Polliit & Wigzell in Yorkshire, and an inventor of marine equipment.<sup>3</sup>

Montague settled his mother, sister, brother Atwood, sister-in-law and two nieces first in a house in Mount Radford and later in Friars Green. Atwood was described in the 1861 Exeter census as an engineer, but there is no information as to whether he was actually working at that time, or what other income there was apart from Montague's salary. The account books for the school of art show that Montague was paid a salary that varied each year according to the number of pupils - over his six-year residence at the school he earned on average about £173 a year, the sum rising from £127 in his first year to £190 in his last.<sup>4</sup> Throughout his time with the school Sir Stafford Northcott was its president, ably supported by a management committee that included William Kennaway (wine and spirit merchant, whose wife and daughter were pupils), W. Spreat (the engraver), H.S. Ellis (goldsmith and silversmith), John Treadwin (jeweller and clockmaker) as well as more than 20 other Exeter gentlemen and businessmen.<sup>5</sup> Charles Wescombe, who later became a newspaper proprietor and died in debt, was the first secretary and a most enthusiastic supporter of the school.

Montague Wigzell was very successful and popular during his tenure as headmaster, both with the president and the management committee of the school, who lavished praise on him for his achievements,<sup>6</sup> and also with the students, who presented him with a silver inkstand and a gold pencil case for 'his unremitting

attentions to them'.<sup>7</sup> Thomas Acland, who became a student at the school, declared that 'a more kind, gentle and patient teacher he never met with in his life'.<sup>8</sup> The annual soirees and displays of work by Montague's pupils were attended by eminent Exeter citizens, and descriptions of the exhibits and speeches were fully reported in the newspapers. Montague's sister Eliza was one of the students and won prizes in various categories of drawing.<sup>9</sup>

### Wigzell's Patent Spiral Fluted Nail Company

Montague resigned his post as headmaster in 1861 and was succeeded by a Mr Birkmyer of the Kensington Department.<sup>10</sup> The Wigzell family moved to Topsham, where Montague rented Reka Dom House on the Strand. He and his brother were appointed as managers and engineers for Wigzell's Patent Spiral Fluted Nail Company, which was registered on 12 July 1861 with a capital of £15,000 at £10 per share. The provisional directors were named as John Follett and John Holman of Topsham, and Henry Hooper (builder), William Kennaway (wine and spirit merchant), William Kendall, and James Carrall Wilcocks (linen draper), all from Exeter. The company secretary was advertised as Charles Wescombe (newspaper proprietor), but when the factory was established the office was held by John Patch Harrison, the landlord of the Globe in Topsham. Montague offered the patent right in the nails and the drawings of the machines to the company for the sum of £3,500, and a royalty of 6d. per cwt of nails manufactured. The company had sole power to grant licences for manufacturing the nails, with one half of the royalties, paid by licensees, to belong to the company and the other half to Montague. It was calculated that with the number of machines in use, the manufactory could make up to 50 tons of nails each week - the annual profit was estimated to be about £4,000. The advertised prospectus and application for shares in the company quotes several businessmen who gave testimony to the value of the invention, including four architects and a surveyor from Exeter, four builders from Exeter, a railway engineer from Dawlish, an iron manufacturer from Southwark and two manufacturers from Greenwich. It would appear, from these testimonies, that Montague and Atwood had been manufacturing the nails for a little while, but had only just patented the invention.<sup>11</sup>

The company took out a 21-year lease, at a rent of £75 per annum, on premises owned by John Holman, described as 'newly erected, and consisting of very commodious stores and warehouses, with offices and other conveniences, a yard and waterside premises, affording facilities for the importation of iron and export of nails'. They also purchased two new powerful steam engines as well as the machinery already on the premises, which was adapted for the use of the manufactory.<sup>12</sup> This raises the question as to what this machinery was being used for before the company took it over. Is it possible that the Wigzell brothers were tenants of the premises and were manufacturing there before the lease? It is difficult to know how much of the whole premises was leased to the company, since it seemed to include buildings, sheds and cellars on both sides of the road. The specifications for the various types of nails, bolts and spikes and the

machinery for making them were quite complex, and skilled staff would have been required to carry out the work. It is assumed that there would have been a foreman too, so possibly he was housed in another part of the premises. There is no record of the number of staff employed by the company, though there is an isolated mention of a nightwatchman. The company was ambitious in its forecast of the numbers and types of nails it could produce, but there are no records of outward transactions, apart from a consignment of sheathing nails to a firm in Sydney in 1862 (noted in the liquidation report).<sup>13</sup> A delivery of one ton of copper to the firm appears in the Topsham Port Dues for 1862-3, as well as four shipments of coal.<sup>14</sup> Though the specifications for the inventions mention the use of other metals - iron (noted in the prospectus) and brass, steel and copper (in a bankruptcy examination) - it is not possible to know how much money was spent on basic materials. No records exist of transactions to or from the company by rail. The consignment of sheathing nails to Australia would have been transported either by rail or ship to the port of Plymouth or London. There is very little evidence as to whether the business produced sufficient nails to make a profit.

By 1864 it was apparent that the company was in difficulty, and in August a special resolution was passed at an extraordinary general meeting in Topsham. It was resolved that 'this Company' be immediately wound up voluntarily according to the Act and that Mr John Patch Harrison be appointed Liquidator'.<sup>15</sup> The liquidator's report was presented at a general meeting of the company in September 1865, and Harrison wrote to the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies informing him that the shareholders had been given a final account of the manner in which the property of the company had been disposed of, and that the Company had been wound up.<sup>16</sup> The shares were worthless - no one had made any money from the venture and some had lost not inconsiderable sums.

Montague himself was declared bankrupt in 1866, and on his discharge his household goods were advertised for auction at his premises at Reka Dom. At the same time the contents of the manufactory were auctioned at the Railway Quay; they included a small steam engine, a punching machine, carpenters' benches, a drilling lever, large vice tools, a lathe wheel, two ship's stoves, moulders' patterns, timmen's blocks and tools, a candle machine, a quantity of the best composite and tallow, plaited and twisted candle wick, lot of old brass, patent cork carpeting, a chimney cowl, two wheels, sundry ventilators, and so forth.<sup>17</sup> Some of these items seem to have had no bearing on the making of spiral fluted nails; it was simply that Montague Wigzell was a compulsive inventor and some of his other patents were also being manufactured in Topsham. Between 1859 and 1864 he had patented nine inventions - six of them connected with nails, bolts and spikes and the machines for making them for use in the building and shipbuilding industries. These inventions were described on the patents as 'an Improved Form of Nail or Driving Article': 'an Improvement in the Form of Iron, Steel, Brass, Copper, and other Metallic Alloy for Making Nails, Spikes, Bolts, Screws, and other similar Driving Articles, both Plain and Twisted'; 'a Machine or Apparatus for Twisting Ordinary Nails and all other similar Driving Articles of a Parallel or Tapered Form, and of a Plain, Fluted, Grooved, or Indented Section throughout or

in Part'; 'Improvements in Machinery or Apparatus to be used in Moulding and Casting Twisted Nails, Spiral Fluted Nails, Bolts, and Screws for Sheathing Vessels, Shipbuilding, Building, and other Purposes'; and 'Improvements in the Form of Bolts and other Fastenings for Shipbuilding and other Purposes'. In 1860, together with his brother Eustace, he had patented a gun battery described in the patent as 'an Improved Form of Land Battery for Coast and other Fortifications' - the advantages of the invention, it was claimed, were that firstly the gun was set on a turntable, and secondly that the small openings for the gun would protect the gunners from the effect of rifle shot. In 1862 Montague's invention for a candle-making machine was patented, described as 'Improvements in Machinery or Apparatus and Method to be used in the Manufacture of every Description of Candles, Tapers, and other Lights'.<sup>18</sup> The following year he patented his invention for a double ventilator. *The Western Times* of April 1864 describes it as:

a simple and ingenious double acting ventilator for close carriages, lecture halls, stables etc. These are being used on the Railways, and by a great many of the leading carriage builders and private gentlemen, who bear testimony to their efficiency. It is to be hoped that so useful an invention will be applied to all our public vehicles where fresh air without draught is so much needed, especially in Railway carriages in which better ventilation would lessen the fatigues of a long journey. The same ingenious mechanist has also invented a marine ventilator for the purpose of purifying the air in the cabins and forecables of the ships, which must prove one of the greatest comforts a mariner can enjoy, especially for those who trade in hot climates.<sup>19</sup>

Topsham Museum owns one of these ventilators, which was made by Montague Wigzell's Patent Ventilator Company, presumably at Topsham. It is a rather tough-looking piece of leaf-shaped zinc that possibly had an attachment at one time to turn it into a double ventilator. On both sides of the metal is inscribed 'Wigzell's Patent Ventilator Company'. The above bankruptcy inventory shows evidence of the candle-making machine and the ventilators.

In 1868 the local newspapers announced that 'a meeting of creditors of Montague Wigzell, late manager of the Spiral Fluted Nail Company and now manufacturer of the patent double acting ventilator, who was adjudged bankrupt on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1866, will be held on December 1<sup>st</sup>'.<sup>20</sup> Since Montague had left Devon that year, it is possible that these ventilators were now being manufactured at the Greenwich works, where, according to evidence in his bankruptcy examination, amongst his assets were seven ventilators - it is likely that Atwood and other members of his family were engaged in the manufacture too. At Montague's bankruptcy examination the company's total deficit was shown to be £1,116 3s. 10d., and the assets £185. The auction of his furniture and stock-in-trade had raised £121 10s. There appears to have been a dispute between Wigzell and John Patch Harrison concerning melting pots, sand, nails, brass, zinc and copper, which were held by Harrison. The machinery that was purchased by the company at £421 13s. 7d., was sold for only £236. 1s. One bad debt noted was the consignment of sheathing nails sent out to the company in Sydney, which had apparently collapsed.<sup>21</sup>



### **Croydon School of Art**

In the census of 1861 for Devon, the Wigzell family is recorded as living in Exeter, but Montague was absent from home. In the census for Croydon in Surrey, which showed him to be staying with a friend called Henry Dwight, he describes himself as an artist. This friend had a young sister called Emma, whom Montague married in Croydon in 1877 - a daughter was born to them in 1880. What his connection with Croydon was, apart from his friendship with Henry Dwight, is not known (though his ancestors originally came from Sanderstead, adjoining Croydon); but after his bankruptcy he returned there, this time without his extended family in tow - their whereabouts are unknown. In 1868 he was instrumental in setting up a school of art in Croydon, and was appointed its first headmaster.<sup>22</sup> His inventions continued, and whilst there he patented special 'improved School of Art Drawing Boards' that were shown in the 'International Exhibition of 1873'.<sup>23</sup> Here too he was highly praised by the management committee of the school in its annual report of 1869:

the hearty thanks of all who are interested in the School are due to Mr Montague Wigzell, the Head Master, to whose abilities and untiring zeal the credit of those results must be mainly attributed. By such qualities, combined with much tact and kindness, he has obtained a popularity amongst his pupils which augurs well for the future of the School.<sup>24</sup>

Whether he spent the rest of his days teaching in Croydon is not recorded, but he ended his life in Sussex, dying in 1894 at the age of 63.

### **Supporters of Montague Wigzell and his inventions**

How did Montague Wigzell manage to persuade so many eminent citizens of Exeter and Topsham to risk money in his venture? The company papers list 55 shareholders, ten of them from Topsham, 33 from Exeter, seven from other parts of Devon and five from outside the county. The largest shareholder, with 250 shares, was Edward Burton Penny from Topsham, who appears to have persuaded five of his relatives to invest. It is noticeable that the shareholders were professional men, merchants or businessmen - no shares were bought by the landed gentry.<sup>25</sup> There are some links between the original directors, the shareholders and Montague, including connections with the school of art, freemasonry and nonconformity; but the most probable explanation for the support was that Montague was a charismatic young man who won people over with his charm and enthusiasm. The importance of the spiral fluted nails in shipbuilding, the premises on the quay and the newly built railway close at hand made Topsham an ideal place to set up the manufactory; additionally the premises belonged to John Holman (one of the directors), who had let them to the company on a 21-year lease.<sup>26</sup>

John Holman had bought the premises from Robert Davey in 1859, when they were described as 'all that quay or wharf known as Renell's or Cox's Quay, with landing place, yards, shed, cellar and loft over, extending nearly 200 feet next the

water and 116 feet next the public road and adjoining the premises' - the other premises listed in the document appear to be what is now called the Nail House.<sup>27</sup> Richard Holman, one of John's sons, who lived in Streatham and was described as a ship owner, inherited the premises in 1885, when they were occupied by the Langdale Manure Company; and held them until his death in 1898, when they were sold to George Hurdle, a coal merchant. Hurdle died in 1917, and three years later his trustees sold the premises to Hugh Wilson Holman (son of Richard), who converted them in 1921 into the house called Wixells.<sup>28</sup> He died in 1931 in his residence in South Kensington, leaving the residue of his estate (valued at £50,837), after a few bequests, in trust for the children of Lillie Piesse from Australia (wife of Arnold Edmund Piesse) - a close friend who had nursed him in his latter days. Hugh's brother attempted unsuccessfully to have the will declared invalid on the grounds of unsound mind, but this was disputed and the terms of the 1930 will stood.<sup>29</sup> As executor and trustee, Lillie Piesse sold Wixells in 1937 to the Exeter City librarian, Harry Tapley-Soper, who appears to have already been living in the property.<sup>30</sup>

Edward Burton Penny, the major shareholder in the company, came to Topsham in about 1845 and settled at Mount Howe, where he was described as an unmarried retired merchant. By 1866 he had moved into Altamira, which he had built for his own use, and where he lived with his widowed mother and two cousins, the Misses Clemenia and Jane Sims (also shareholders). Penny was a theosophist and translated works by early French writers on the subject. He left his large collection of books to the Young Men's Improvement Society Library in Topsham and to the Royal Albert Museum - part of this collection is now in the Devon Record Office and the West Country Studies Library. Edward had evidently spent time in Australia; one of the Trustees of his will was an Australian who was entrusted with managing and selling his properties out there. Penny's estate in England alone was valued at £30,000. He married some time after he had settled in Topsham, but as there were no children of the marriage his estate was left, after his wife's death, to his 40 nephews and nieces and various cousins - all of them named in his will! A newspaper article paid tribute to him saying that his death 'would be greatly felt by the poor of the town, to whom he was a munificent benefactor'. Penny was the originator of the ragged school in Topsham and a supporter of and yearly subscriber to the Volunteer Rifle Corps; he had bought a house for the use of the White Street Free School, to which he was the principal subscriber; in 1870 he built a new hall in the centre of the town of Topsham, at the back of which was a soup kitchen where he delivered soup three times a week to the poor; additionally he was a subscriber of £1 a week to the Benevolent Society.<sup>31</sup> It is difficult to know why he and his family invested so much in the nail company, unless it was that his business connections were in shipping, railways or building and he could see the value of the invention. The investments listed in his will were in Canada, New Brunswick and the Cape of Good Hope, and railway companies in Bombay, Bengal and France.

The long-suffering company secretary, John Patch Harrison, came from a family of landlords. His grandfather Richard (who married Eleanor Swale, whose

father ran the Salutation Inn) and father John Swale Harrison both ran the Globe Inn in Topsham. John became secretary of the Spiral Fluted Nail Company when it was registered in 1861, and was appointed the official liquidator when the company went into receivership in 1864, presenting his final report in September 1865. The position had obviously caused him a lot of work and worry, in that much of the equipment was difficult to sell and the sale did not bring in much money. There had been a robbery at the works in which the lead guttering was stripped from the roof; three weeks later the company suffered another robbery. There was also the bad debt from the consignment of sheathing nails sent to the Sydney firm that had gone into receivership. Wigzell himself had brought an action against the company's trustees for breach of contract and claimed £1,000 - a cross-action was brought against him in turn, and a lot of time and trouble was caused as the case had to be held at the Court of Exchequer in London. The matter was eventually settled out of court and Wigzell was paid a small sum by the company, but the costs of the case had to be met by the shareholders. At the time of the final report there were still items of machinery, drawings and patterns to be disposed of.<sup>32</sup>

Harrison combined his company secretarial duties with his occupation not only as landlord of the Globe, but also as an officer for the Inland Revenue, brewer, wine and spirit merchant, importer of Cornish and Welsh slates, coal merchant and dealer in artificial manure. A few years later he added the office of secretary of the Topsham Gas Company to his other duties.<sup>33</sup> In 1882 he offered the Globe for sale, stating that he was retiring, after 33 years, as a consequence of ill health - not surprising after the amount of work he was undertaking.<sup>34</sup> He and his family moved to Oxford Terrace in Exeter, where he died intestate ten years later - his personal estate at administration was declared as £145 10s.

Why did the Patent Spiral Fluted Nail Company fail? Were the investors mesmerised by Montague's enthusiasm and ideals, and were the expectations of success too high? Was the management of the works ineffective or the workmanship shoddy? It has been suggested that the nails were not strong enough for the use intended or that the workmanship was inadequate. When copper sheathing for ships was invented in the late eighteenth century, it was found that iron nails corroded the copper, so the alternative was to make copper nails. It was then found that these copper nails tended to fall out, so the invention of the spiral fluted nails would seem to have been the answer. However, another reason suggested for the failure of Montague's invention is that the problem had already been solved by shipbuilders themselves, who twisted the nail before finally hammering it home. Whatever the reason, the conclusion seems to be that Montague Wigzell was a very good teacher of drawing and painting, but a very poor manufacturer of nails.

#### Notes and references

1. *Exeter Flying Post*, August 1854.
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9. *Woolmers*, 29 March 1856.
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11. *Exeter Flying Post*, 3 July 1861.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Deeds held by Mr and Mrs Lambert of Wixells in Topsham.
14. DRO 71/76, Topsham port dues.
15. Topsham Museum, Liquidator's report.
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18. These inventions, with specifications, are held at the Patent Office in Wales. The invention of a gun battery may have arisen from the fact that Montague's father was, until his marriage, an officer in the East India Company, and his maternal grandfather was a brigadier in the Royal Artillery.
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## Devon House of Mercy, 1863-1940

Lisa Spurrier

The Community of St John Baptist (CSJB) was established in 1852 in Clewer, near Windsor, in Berkshire, as an Anglican religious community for women.<sup>1</sup> Its initial mission was work rehabilitating 'fallen women' at the House of Mercy that had been founded in the same parish in 1849. The sisters were to extend this aspect of their work to many other parts of the country, including Devon<sup>2</sup>; and also ventured into other fields including education, children's homes and the care of the sick.<sup>3</sup>

The Community also had an interest in healthcare, particularly work with the convalescent or chronically ill,<sup>4</sup> and ran three convalescent homes in Torquay (one of which was in fact for patients with advanced phthisis - tuberculosis - who were not expected to recover) from 1866 to 1959. These were initially run in connection with the House of Mercy,<sup>5</sup> but later managed independently by sisters sent from Clewer specifically for that purpose. The vicar of Bovey Tracey, and his brother the 11th Earl of Devon, always closely associated with the Devon work of the sisters, were among the trustees of at least one endowment of the homes in 1875.<sup>6</sup> Many of the records of the Community have recently been deposited at Berkshire Record Office, including material relating to Devon House of Mercy in Bovey Tracey.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 1: the Devon House of Mercy, entrance front (source: Spurrier 2004)

### Establishing the House of Mercy

Devon House of Mercy was founded by the Hon. Revd Charles Leslie Courtenay (1816-1888), vicar of Bovey Tracey and younger son of the 10<sup>th</sup> Earl of Devon,

who invited the Clewer Sisters to run it<sup>8</sup> 'for the reception & reformation of fallen women'.<sup>9</sup> It was to become one of the most important branches of the Community.<sup>10</sup> In May 1863,<sup>11</sup> a remote farmhouse called Chapple Farm, situated on the way to Hey Tor, was taken as an initial home for the work<sup>12</sup>, with three sisters, led by Sister Bertha,<sup>13</sup> and 20 'penitents'.<sup>14</sup> The permanent House of Mercy building, with accommodation for 72 penitents and eight sisters,<sup>15</sup> was designed in 1865 by the well-known architect Henry Woodyer (see fig. 1), who had also designed the Clewer House of Mercy.<sup>16</sup> Woodyer designed very few other buildings in Devon.<sup>17</sup> The House of Mercy was situated a short distance from Bovey Tracey village.<sup>18</sup> It was felt that the rural situation and 'the beauty of natural surroundings' were helpful in inspiring a wish to reform in the 'poor women whose lives have been passed in the midst of the degrading and depressing surroundings of the slums of our great towns'.<sup>19</sup> The Earl of Devon presided at the opening ceremony.<sup>20</sup>

This was not the first attempt to reclaim prostitutes in Devon. An early history of the House of Mercy noted, 'Good Work of this kind was already being done in Plymouth, but it was felt, especially in presence of the overwhelming mass and depth of Sin, in the Three Towns [Plymouth, Devonport and Stonehouse], that some additional effort was especially needed in the Western Counties'.<sup>21</sup> The Revd George Rundle Prynne, vicar of Plymouth St Peter, had begun working with fallen women in Plymouth in 1857; and in 1859 the Revd George Mason, curate at Devonport St Stephen, started a small Refuge, and the two men proposed to build a House of Mercy for the three towns. It was this that is said to have inspired Courtenay in his invitation to the Clewer Sisters, the latter's parish of Bovey Tracey appearing to be a more suitable location. The Refuge in Devonport continued to be run by the Society of the Holy Trinity, a sisterhood founded in the town in 1848 along much the same lines as the CSJB;<sup>22</sup> women admitted there might go on to Bovey Tracey or another House of Mercy.

The Devon House of Mercy was from the beginning financially independent of the mother-house at Clewer. All the latter provided was the time (and clothing) of the sisters, who as members of a religious order did not receive any salary, and the costs of their travel to and from Clewer.<sup>23</sup> The sisters carried out the day-to-day work with the penitents, but oversight of management matters was vested in a Council of ten clergy and ten laymen, as was the practice with other Houses of Mercy run by the Community.<sup>24</sup> Other clergymen filled the posts of Warden and Sub-warden.<sup>25</sup> The Bishop of Exeter was official Visitor of the Institution.<sup>26</sup>

### Penitents admitted

The statutes specified that 'the object of the said Institution' was 'the reception and protection of fallen women, with a view to their reformation and ultimate safe establishment, either in some respectable calling by which to earn a livelihood, or otherwise'.<sup>27</sup> They came from a variety of backgrounds. In 1866, the earliest year for which an annual report survives, 20 penitents were resident in the temporary building. Half of these were aged between 18 and 21, seven under 18 and three

over 21. Half had been living with their families before admission to the House, seven were in domestic service (mainly in farmhouses), one had worked in a factory, one as a dressmaker, and one as a 'tailoress'.<sup>28</sup> In 1881 it was noted that 'Girls varying in age, of different occupations and of none, the "Sinner of the City" and the fallen one of the Village, the seduced and the *entrapped*, all help to fill the House'. One thing that the sisters noticed many of the girls had in common was that over three quarters had lost at least one parent in childhood.<sup>29</sup>

Some were Devon girls, but a substantial proportion had come from other parts of the country, including Berkshire, Cornwall, Edinburgh, London, Norfolk and Wales.<sup>30</sup> Some were initially admitted to other Houses of Mercy and transferred to Devon. Demand within the county for the opportunities afforded by the House of Mercy was such that the Committee of the House of Mercy was able to state in 1866 that 'the number of poor girls within the County who would willingly avail themselves of a means of escape from a life of sin and shame is so large' that even when the permanent building had been erected 'the aggregate accommodation within the County will still be altogether inadequate to the demand'.<sup>31</sup> In 1881, only a tiny minority of those seeking admission could be accommodated.<sup>32</sup> In the same year, the 1881 census reveals details of 72 inmates. Their ages ranged from 16 to 28, although most were under 21, with almost half being aged 17 or 18. None had ever been married. 27 of the girls resident in 1881 were Devon-born, with a further nine from Cornwall. Six came from as far away as Scotland, one from Wales, and two from Manchester. The remainder had been born in various parts of the southern counties, from Wiltshire to Suffolk, including eleven born in London. Although birthplaces may not indicate the place where the penitent was living immediately before her admission to the House of Mercy, it gives some indication of the range.<sup>33</sup> It was claimed to be 'one of the very best conducted Houses of Mercy in the whole of England'.<sup>34</sup>

Admission was free for 'the poor girls when, as not unfrequently [*sic*] happens, they come from a distance; and worn and weary and travel-stained, present themselves at the door piteously crying to be taken in'. Other young women were referred by 'kind-hearted persons who take a particular interest in their case', and who paid the usual entrance fee of £5-10. Some women, described as 'a very numerous class', were sent from 'a particular Ward of Public Hospitals' (presumably that for the treatment of venereal disease), many being referred by the Royal Albert Hospital, Devonport.<sup>35</sup> In 1866 of the nine girls then resident who came from 'the great garrison and sea-port towns' of Devon, namely the 'Three Towns', eight had been sent by the Royal Albert Hospital,<sup>36</sup> which continued to be a regular source of penitents.<sup>37</sup> In 1881 nine of the 72 inmates had been born in Plymouth, and most may have been admitted by the same means; they were aged between 16 and 19.<sup>38</sup> Urgent cases were never refused admission.<sup>39</sup> No woman was refused admission to Devon House of Mercy on the grounds of poor health, although this was sometimes a restriction at other institutions of the same kind.

The penitents were normally accepted for a term of two years.<sup>40</sup> A few women stayed longer, and after five years they might choose to take religious

vows and remain in the House permanently as a 'Magdalene'; one of the original penitents of 1863 was still a Magdalene there when she died in 1912.<sup>41</sup> They might leave after a shorter period at their own wish, but the sisters refused to expel any inmate, no matter how bad her behaviour. In 1881 they noted: 'It is not thought well, neither kind nor charitable, to brand a poor girl through life with the stigma of having been dismissed from a Penitentiary. What hope can there be for such an one?' In some cases, a girl not doing well at Bovey Tracey might be transferred to one of the other Houses of Mercy connected with the Community.<sup>42</sup>

### **Life for penitents in the House of Mercy**

In 1881 discipline was described as 'strict, but it is tempered with love'. Indeed, the Community claimed 'The whole internal management is purely a work of Love - of Love for the Souls of sinners springing out of and based upon a love of Christ'. The penitents rose daily at 6am and went to bed at 9pm. They spent eleven hours a day 'in work and instruction', taking part in washing, needlework, cooking, house cleaning and so forth.<sup>43</sup> Although it was highly structured, the regime at Bovey Tracey appears to have been less strict than at some of the other houses run by the Community.<sup>44</sup> One-to-one religious instruction was at the heart of the redemptive work. Each sister was allotted a certain number of penitents as her special pupils.<sup>45</sup> In 1881 there were ten sisters at the House, including German-born Bertha Foertsch von Thynau, 31, the Sister in charge. The others ranged in age from 29 to 45.<sup>46</sup>

The House of Mercy took in laundry and needlework from the neighbourhood, which were carried out by the penitents,<sup>47</sup> under the supervision of a laundry matron.<sup>48</sup> There was also a cook and a nurse.<sup>49</sup> These women were probably paid a salary. The profits helped to support the work of the House financially.<sup>50</sup> In addition, it afforded training that it was expected would prove useful to the girls, as most of those who left the House went on to respectable jobs in domestic service.<sup>51</sup> A small farm was attached to the House, and provided food. Other financial support derived from well-wishers from all over Devon who regularly subscribed to the House.<sup>52</sup>

In 1878 a cottage was built in the grounds of the House of Mercy to act as an infirmary for sick penitents, and as a probationers' ward for newly-arrived applicants.<sup>53</sup> By the 1920s this cottage was also proving useful as a holiday home for 'old girls', who clearly remembered the House of Mercy and their time there with some affection.<sup>54</sup> In 1866, when several of the earliest penitents had completed their time at the House of Mercy, all those who had left to go into service were reportedly doing well, with the exception of one illiterate girl, with whom contact had been lost.<sup>55</sup>

It is unfortunate that only the last admission register (1913-1939) survives, as it contains a wealth of information about the background of the penitents: names, ages, often the names and addresses of relatives, the person or organisation that had sent her, and details of her fate on departure. Because of the personal nature of the information, and the specific nature of the House of Mercy, the register is not

yet available for research.<sup>56</sup> Census returns may also provide personal information on the inmates.

The parish of Bovey Tracey also benefited from the sisters' presence by the work done at the Mission House in Fore Street, where two sisters lived and worked from *circa* 1879 to 1922.<sup>57</sup> The Revd H.B. Hyde, vicar at the time this work was given up in 1922, viewed the decision to do so 'with consternation',<sup>58</sup> and wrote in the parish magazine of March 1922 that the sisters had 'been the vital heart of the pastoral activities of the parish'.<sup>59</sup> The withdrawal was due to a reduction in the number of sisters in the Community. Some indication of the uses of the building, and the work done by the sisters, may be gleaned from the inventory drawn up in 1922, which notes an oratory with 12 chairs, a mission room containing a piano (said to be in poor condition) and a cupboard which held the 'parish lending things', and there was a harmonium in the sitting room. There were four bedrooms, one of which contained three beds. The house had a garden with four 'good apple trees' and gooseberries, raspberries and currants.<sup>60</sup> The sisters may have had little time to spare for upkeep - when the vicar leased the house from the Community in 1922 he noted that the garden was 'choked with weed', and the house was in poor repair, to the extent that none of the gas fittings worked.<sup>61</sup> The building was sold in 1931.<sup>62</sup> Although not stated in the records, it seems likely that the involvement of the sisters with parishioners through this work may have helped to reduce opposition to the presence of former prostitutes, some from out of Devon, in Bovey Tracey.



Figure 2: the Devon House of Mercy, rear (source: Spurrier 2004)

#### Decline and closure

By the 1920s, girls under sixteen were not admitted to the House of Mercy.<sup>63</sup> By the late 1930s fewer candidates were presenting themselves, and it was decided to

reduce the two-year stay required, as it was believed that this was deterring women.<sup>64</sup> Attempts were made to modernise conditions, including the fitting of the laundry with electrical machinery in 1934.<sup>65</sup> War conditions increased costs,<sup>66</sup> and in January 1940 the House of Mercy closed.<sup>67</sup> The penitents and sisters were dispersed to other houses run by the Community. The Magdalenes went variously to the Community's mother house at Clewer and to Houses of Mercy at Salisbury and Littlemore (Oxfordshire).<sup>68</sup> The building was requisitioned by the army, and damaged by a landmine during the war. It was subsequently converted into flats (see fig. 2).<sup>69</sup>

#### Notes and references

1. For a general history of the Community, see Bonham 1989.
2. They also had branches in India and the United States, the latter of which is still flourishing.
3. Bonham, *op cit.*, *passim*.
4. Berkshire Record Office D/EX 1675, catalogue.
5. BRO D/EX 1675/10/3/1, Licence for worship at St Raphael's Convalescent Home, Torquay, 1866.
6. BRO D/EX 1675/10/5/2/2, Declaration of trust, endowment of beds by Matilda Blanche Gibbs, 1875.
7. BRO D/EX 1675.
8. Bonham, *op cit.*, 26.
9. BRO D/EX 1675/1/2/11/2, 1866 annual report.
10. Bonham, *op cit.*, 26.
11. BRO D/EX 1675/1/2/11/2.
12. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/15, CSJB file on the Devon House of Mercy.
13. Elliott and Pritchard 2002, 107.
14. Bonham, *op cit.*, 26.
15. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/8, History of the House of Mercy.
16. BRO D/EX 1/12/11, CSJB file on the Devon House of Mercy.
17. Elliott and Pritchard, *op cit.*, 107.
18. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/7, History of the House of Mercy.
19. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/8.
20. BRO D/EX 1/12/11, CSJB file on the Devon House of Mercy.
21. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/8.
22. Kelway and Prynne, 1905.
23. BRO D/EX 1/12/11, Statutes.
24. Spurrier 2004.
25. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/7.
26. BRO D/EX 1675/1/2/11/2.
27. BRO D/EX 1/12/11, Statutes.
28. BRO D/EX 1675/1/2/11/2.
29. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/7.
30. BRO D/EX 1675/1/2/11/2.

31. *Ibid.*
32. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/7.
33. Index of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints 1999, 1881 census.
34. Kelway and Prynne, *op cit.*
35. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/7.
36. BRO D/EX 1675/1/2/11/2
37. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/7.
38. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.
39. Kelway and Prynne, *op cit.*
40. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/7.
41. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/8,15, CSJB file on the Devon House of Mercy. She is not, however, identifiable in the 1881 census return for the house, unless she was the cook, nurse or laundry matron.
42. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/7.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Bonham, *op cit.*, 126.
45. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/8.
46. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.
47. BRO D/EX 1/12/11, CSJB file on the Devon House of Mercy.
48. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.
49. *Ibid.*
50. BRO D/EX 1/12/11, CSJB file on the Devon House of Mercy.
51. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/7.
52. BRO D/EX 1/12/11, CSJB file on the Devon House of Mercy.
53. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/7.
54. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/41, SJB file on the Devon House of Mercy ( )
55. BRO D/EX 1675/1/2/11/2.
56. BRO D/EX 1675/9/1/1, Admission register, 1913-1939.
57. BRO D/EX 1675/1/2/12, CSJB file on the Mission House.
58. BRO D/EX 1675/1/2/12/6.
59. BRO D/EX 1675/1/2/12/10.
60. BRO D/EX 1675/1/2/12/4-5.
61. BRO D/EX 1675/1/2/12/35.
62. BRO D/EX 1675, catalogue.
63. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/26.
64. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/63-4, CSJB file on the Devon House of Mercy.
65. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/47, CSJB file on the Devon House of Mercy.
66. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/73, CSJB file on the Devon House of Mercy.
67. BRO D/EX 1/12/11/81, CSJB file on the Devon House of Mercy.
68. Bonham, *op cit.*, 126.
69. *Ibid.*

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## Acrimony in a market town: the Revd Christopher Clarkson, Rector of Holsworthy 1858-69

Michael Weller

The Reverend Christopher Clarkson came to have the cure of souls at Holsworthy in April 1858.<sup>1</sup> However, by the last week of May 1863, after more than three years of strife with parishioners and leading to fifteen or more mentions in the *Exeter Flying Post*, the elderly cleric was finally in front of the Bishop of Exeter, for the solicitor Arscott Coham Esq.<sup>2</sup> had formally brought the case of the rector's alleged shortcomings to his Lordship's attention.<sup>3</sup>

The newspaper had more than once drawn the public's attention to 'the neglect of the...rector...in not having properly discharged the functions of his office...' The formal complaint alleged that the clergyman had held no service on 'Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, or in the Holy Week...'<sup>4</sup> nor on Ascension Day, nor indeed had there been any celebration of Holy Communion since Christmas. It seems that in answer to this complaint the Reverend Mr Clarkson said that he had been unwell whilst staying at Coppystone in Holy Week, and stated that business engagements had forced his absence on other occasions. The bishop was not impressed by the excuses, telling him that 'A clergyman could have no business that would justify him absenting himself from the church...' unless he could provide a 'substitute'. Mr Coham then told the bishop that the parishioners would be satisfied if Mr Clarkson would employ a curate. In front of the bishop the rector assented to the suggestion. Yet this promise had been given and broken more than once before.

It seems that similar complaints were first given public voice at a parochial meeting held in mid-January of 1860, as the readers of the *Exeter Flying Post* would have noted on 1 February, when the paper pointed out that 'for some time past much dissatisfaction has been felt at the manner in which the rector...has conducted the services of the church, and great ill-feeling has been caused by the manner in which Mr Clarkson has treated his parishioners'. A further public meeting was announced, which a handbill declared was 'To take into consideration the spiritual destitution of the parish...and the means by which the nearly total desertion of the parish church may be averted'. This meeting was held on 26 January. Those who gathered heard, it seems, that one Dr Ash<sup>5</sup> and a Mr Frank Honey had, as a result of the previous public meeting, spoken with the rector on 21 January, when they had informed him that the parishioners were very dissatisfied with 'the manner in which he conducted the services - his departure from the rubric, and his omission of the sacred ordinances of the church, and his apparent infirmities'. After telling the rector that if he would not appoint a curate immediately to take the services on his behalf they would be forced to complain to the Bishop of Exeter, they succeeded in obtaining from him a

promise in writing that he would appoint a curate, although when they received the letter it did not say 'immediately' as they had requested, but agreed to 'procure one in the course of three months'. Furthermore it was not clear whether Christopher Clarkson intended to appoint a priest or an unpriested deacon as curate.<sup>6</sup>

The meeting of 26 January further heard that this response from the rector had not been thought sufficient. Indeed when Mr Honey wrote asking the Reverend Mr Clarkson to qualify his promise he received what may seem an understandably haughty reply pointing out that his 'appointing a curate at all, is entirely owing to the earnest recommendation of Miss Jane Meyrick<sup>7</sup>, whose father had one', and he further noted: 'is what I never anticipated doing until further advanced in life, being in robust health, and no incumbent in the neighbourhood at my age having one...I shall take care to appoint a highly respectable man, but I do not promise in the slightest degree that he shall be a priest; most likely he will not'.<sup>8</sup>

After this letter had been read out, a Mr John Parsons expressed the opinion 'that more good could be got by reading the Bible at home than by going to the church, as at present conducted (*sic*)', and suggested that the church be 'totally deserted' until such time as a curate might be got 'under whom it would be a pleasure to join in the worship of God, which was not the case at present'.

Clearly the rector had enemies but did he really have faults? The reverend gentleman had been a lifelong bachelor<sup>9</sup> until marrying at the age of sixty-two just a few weeks after his arrival at Holsworthy. His bride was thirty-nine year old Katherine Hooper, widow of Major Hooper of the 66<sup>th</sup> Regiment.<sup>10</sup> Whether it was Katherine or her husband who, during 1859, wanted the parsonage house rebuilt, the rectory altered and repair work carried out at the church, we cannot know, but it had led to the luckless cleric being the subject of an action 'to recover the sum of £5 8s. 7d.. for work, goods supplied, and loss of time',<sup>11</sup> brought at the Holsworthy County Court in the few days leading up to the first mentions in the press of his alleged inadequacies. It seems that one of the plaintiffs, Richard Chowen,<sup>12</sup> a builder, visited the parsonage house 'at least fifty times' submitting plans and estimates and thinking that the rector intended to have him undertake the task, and had even been to the stone quarry to select the materials. Then it seems that the rector decided that architect Mr Samuel Hooper of Hatherleigh, also a plaintiff in this action, was to undertake the building with the local man Frank Honey, who was having the plumbing and glazing work. At some point the rector seems to have abandoned the rebuilding of the parsonage and embarked on obtaining plans to alter the rectory, and at the same time repeatedly having Mr Hooper to examine the roof and pillars of the parish church. None of the proposed works were carried out in Christopher Clarkson's incumbency, and it can be readily understood that Messrs. Chowen and Hooper were rightly aggrieved. The judge M. Fortesque gave a verdict in their favour with costs; Mr Clarkson had already admitted that he owed them £1 8s. 1d., and paid it to the court. He had, however, denied any other debt and

for the most part receipt of plans, and seems to have claimed ignorance of actually employing either of the plaintiffs.

The case certainly tends to the view that the 'old gentleman' was difficult or at best forgetful. What is immediately interesting is the light that the matter sheds on subsequent events. Mr Honey, whilst a witness rather than a plaintiff, had clearly lost employment due to rector's erratic nature, and this may go some way to explain his willingness to be one of the ringleaders in this possible conspiracy against the rector?

The rector's 'enemies' had accepted his promise to obtain a curate within three months, thus for a while the columns of the *Exeter Flying Post* remained silent on the matter. In a letter to the newspaper published on 9 May 1860 a correspondent who signed himself as 'E.' alleged 'circumstances of a most unpleasant nature have occurred which demand explanation more imperatively than all that had transpired before',<sup>13</sup> and went on to ask whether, given that no curate had been forthcoming, it was the rector's intention to procure one. If he would not, the correspondent continued, further 'public exposure, and appeal to the bishop' would ensue.

The following week the newspaper published a lengthy letter defending the rector signed by 'A.B.', referring to him as 'a kind-hearted, affable, and charitable man', and suggesting that the meeting held in the previous January had not been of the parishioners 'but a meeting of some of the rabble of the town, and some children',<sup>14</sup> and that of twelve persons who signed the report of the meeting that had been forwarded to the press 'there were only six who can be called respectable (and four of those not on speaking terms with the rector)'; the correspondent also alleged that one had his name added without his consent. 'All the rest were uneducated men'.

'E.'s letter had, however, also provoked words of support from 'An Old Churchman', whose letter published in the same edition hails 'E.' as 'doing a great service to the town' However, a further letter from a gentleman who had been present at church on Sunday 13 May stated that 'the old gentleman's memory seems seriously defective', since he had gone to the vestry and removed his surplice before suddenly remembering that he had not taken the Communion service',<sup>15</sup> which, having remembered as he returned to preach from the pulpit, he then kept the worshippers waiting ten minutes before he was ready to go on.

It is perhaps not surprising that the Reverend Mr Clarkson should have been a little distracted since, on the previous Wednesday, he had apparently pushed his wife's maid down the stairs, and that 'kind-hearted, affable, and charitable rector (as he was now sarcastically described in yet another letter to the newspaper)',<sup>16</sup> no doubt looked forward with some trepidation to coming up in front of the magistrate!

The case was heard on Thursday 17 May, and according to the *Exeter Flying Post* published on 23 May, and from the evidence of one Mary Ann Lung (who happened to be at the door selling chickens), it appears that Mrs Clarkson's servant,

one Ann Smale, 'was going upstairs with a jar. Mr Clarkson pushed her violently down. She gave a screech. I did not hear what Mr Clarkson said to her, but I thought she would come to some damage...He pushed her violently once against the wall - the other time down the stairs (*sic*)'.

Mr White appearing for the defendant said rather that his client 'had merely pushed her gently to prevent her from going upstairs and disobeying his orders'.

Giving evidence in his own defence the unfortunate clergyman stated 'I did not push her at all'. He then criticised her character and described her as very violent! The victim's account of the assault suggests that the rector grabbed her by the shoulders, pushed her down two flights of stairs and into the kitchen. Anne stated that she did not actually fall down the stairs, but it looks as if she was *propelled* forcefully down the stairs and into the kitchen, after being roughly pushed against a wall.

The cause of the assault is clear enough. The Reverend Mr Clarkson did not like Ann Smale, his wife's servant, who he was said to have struck during the argument. The court heard that it was Mrs Clarkson who had employed the girl as a lady's maid, and it was Mrs Clarkson who always paid the girl her wages. Christopher Clarkson had told this servant to leave on 'two or three occasions',<sup>17</sup> as the girl told the magistrates 'but mistress told me to stay'. On the day of the assault Mrs Clarkson had at some time between eleven and noon requested a bottle<sup>18</sup> of hot water to be brought up from the kitchen, and presumably it was the frustration of finding the girl still on the premises and being openly defied in his own home that led the rector to then attempt to prevent the girl carrying out her duties. Whatever the facts, the magistrates after a short deliberation found the rector guilty of assault and fined the reverend defendant £3 plus costs, 'or in default seven days imprisonment in the House of Correction at Exeter'. Not surprisingly the fine was paid.

The rector's reliable but anonymous friend 'A.B.' wrote once again in his defence to the newspaper pointing out that the parish was astounded at the rector, 'who would not, if he could help it, kill a flea',<sup>19</sup> being convicted. Indeed A.B. stated 'The people would not have been more surprised if they had heard that the magistrates had sent him to prison for murder and highway robbery'. The facts, A.B. continued, were that the dismissed servant had been 'extremely insolent' to the rector's elderly maiden sister, who also lived at the rectory, and that this sister had often complained to Christopher Clarkson about her, and that he had been advised to turn the servant out of the house.

It appears that immediately after the assault the servant had finally agreed to leave the rectory, and had gone straightway to the White Hart Hotel where she told Mrs Chowen the publican's wife what had taken place. It was, according to A.B., Mrs Chowen that persuaded the girl to take out a summons against the rector; it was also Mrs Chowen, 'a woman who is remarkable for her deadly hatred to the rector's sister'. A.B. suggested, that 'is believed to be at the bottom of a good deal of the insult which, from time to time, assails the rector'. A.B. then informed the public



that Mr Clarkson had now lodged an appeal against his conviction to the Court of the Queen's Bench, and that the public at large should suspend their judgement until that court made its decision. He completed his missive by condemning the criticism of the rector having forgotten the Communion service on 13 May as 'a gross exaggeration'.

At this point the files of the *Exeter Flying Post* fall silent on the subject of the elderly clergyman until the jamming of the church bells by vandals that occurred in the first week of September 1862, which may have been instigated by his enemies. A few months earlier, at 'a sumptuous dinner'<sup>20</sup> held on the occasion of the Archdeacon's annual visitation, which interestingly took place at the White Hart Hotel, 'served up by Mr Chowen', some sarcastic remarks made at the rector's expense were reported by the paper, drawing attention to the poor state of repair of the parish church. The paper makes it clear that the archdeacon was intended to hear these comments.

Even the confrontation at Barnstaple the following year seems to have altered nothing at least as far as obtaining a curate was concerned. No record of Christopher Clarkson being officially admonished can be found, and his critics forthwith it seems remained silent. Indeed had the rector failed to take baptisms, weddings and funerals his enemies would have had ample evidence to take to the bishop, but these offices for which, as cynics would point out, he received regular fees, he diligently performed. The sudden death of his wife at the age of 45 in June 1864,<sup>21</sup> however, effectively ended all performance of his parochial duties. Very shortly after this event Mr Clarkson did obtain a curate. Regretably no evidence survives to tell us whether or not this gentleman had been engaged *before* Mrs Clarkson's demise, or if the appointment was incident upon it. No doubt sad and dispirited the rector left Holsworthy for Plymouth,<sup>22</sup> where he died at what was then the ripe old age of 73 years in 1869. His last journey was to return to Holsworthy for his funeral, which was taken by the curate he had prevaricated against employing for so long, the Reverend George Wright Thornton.<sup>23</sup>

#### Notes and references

1. This was incident upon the death of the previous incumbent, the Reverend Roger Kingdon; died November 1857.
2. Arscott Bickford Courtenay Coham Esq. was, it seems, not only Clerk to the Magistrates, but also to The Commissioners of Taxes and to the Deputy Lieutenants of the County. It is *assumed* by the author that Arscott Coham was one of the churchwardens, which would explain his presence at the Barnstaple Visitation. Due to the paucity of pre-1870 sources extant for the parish of Holsworthy, it has regrettably not been possible at the time of writing to verify this fact.

3. Bishop of Exeter's Visitation held at Barnstaple was reported in the *Exeter Flying Post* on 3 June 1865.
4. *Exeter Flying Post*, 3 June 1863.
5. This is T. Linnington Ash, Physician and surgeon of Bodmin Street, Holsworthy; *Kellys Directory of Devon*, 1866.
6. Interestingly the Reverend gentleman's predecessor, Roger Kingdon, *did* have a curate, the Reverend N. Nosworthy.
7. *Kellys Directory*, 1856; the Holsworthy entry lists 'The Misses Meyrick'. These ladies were, it appears, the maiden daughters of a former incumbent, and would therefore have been well known to Christopher Clarkson. Miss Jane Meyrick was later to be commemorated by a stained glass window placed in the tower of Holsworthy church.
8. *Exeter Flying Post*, 8 February 1860.
9. Originally from Tynemouth (Northumberland), born *circa* 1796, the Reverend Mr Clarkson had also served parishes in Somerset and Suffolk.
10. Devon Record Office Marriage registers/Holsworthy, 28 June 1858.
11. This case is reported at some length in the *Exeter Flying Post*, 25 January 1860; it must be stated, however, that the style is slightly obtuse in places.
12. Richard Chowen, publican of The White Hart Hotel Holsworthy, was also a builder and cabinet maker; *Kellys*, *op.cit.*
13. *Exeter Flying Post*, 9 May 1860.
14. *Ibid.*, 16 May 1860.
15. *N.B.*, whilst nowadays an Anglican morning service would consist of either Holy Communion *or* Morning Prayer (Matins), *or* perhaps a family service not taken from the Prayer Book, in mid-Victorian churches the normal pattern of worship might have included full versions from the *Book of Common Prayer* of Matins, Litany, Ante-Communion and, at Christmas, Easter, Whitsun, possibly on Trinity Sunday and often at Michaelmas, the Communion itself. A sermon of no small length was also included. Abbreviated forms of worship were only introduced towards the close of the century.
16. *Exeter Flying Post*, 23 May 1860: in a letter printed immediately below the report of his court appearance.
17. The fact of Mr Clarkson having given the girl 'notice to quit' was also attested to by the rector's sister, Margaret, who as a maiden lady may also have been living at rectory.
18. We can probably infer that the word *bottle*, also referred to as a *jar* in the evidence, meant an earthenware hot water bottle used - as late as the 1950s - for warming a bed; possibly Mrs Clarkson was unwell, and thus confined to her room.
19. *Exeter Flying Post*, 23 May 1860.
20. *Ibid.*, 18 June 1862. The text is a little obtuse.

21. DRO Burial Registers/Holworthy, 23 June 1864.
22. He lived at 7 Hyde Park Terrace, Plymouth; John Vern, *Alumni Cantabrigienses, 1752-1900*, 1922.
23. Christopher Clarkson was buried on 23 October 1869; DRO Burial Registers/Holworthy. Thornton was to become the next rector and was responsible for many improvements to the church.

Michael Weller is a part-time teacher working within the field of the humanities. His principal research interest at present is the social history of the Church of England. He is currently also working on an anthology of West Country headstone epitaphs.

## Book reviews

**Harriet Bridle (2005) *Woody Bay*, revised edn, Caversham: Finial Publishing; ix + 213 pages, profusely illustrated, softcover, ISBN 1900467275, £9.95.**

This book is an expanded and updated version of that published in 1991 by Merlin Books. Its subject is a coastal hamlet in the north Devon parish of Martinhoe. Fortunately for the present residents and all who care about the more unspoiled parts of Devonshire, plans embarked upon in the late nineteenth century to turn Woody Bay into a high class holiday resort never came to fruition.

Although written and oral histories of Woody Bay form a considerable component of the book, this is not its sole thrust. The prime intention of the author is to present a 'feel' of the place and its people, past and present. What emerges is a wide-ranging labour of love. Looked at from various angles the book can be viewed as partly a history (social and natural), partly a guidebook, partly a bibliography, partly a condensed anthology of relevant prose and poetry, and partly a *Who's Who* of past and present residents and distinguished visitors. It is to the author's credit that she blends all into a coherent whole. It is perhaps inevitable that there will be some repetition in such a multi-faceted work. An extreme example is being told in consecutive paragraphs that the writer Malcolm Elwin lived in Woody Bay for five years. This, however, is a minor criticism of what is a readable and enjoyable book. Those wishing to delve deeper are provided with ample references, albeit mainly secondary sources, and suggestions for wider reading. Some present day local historians may find the book too parochial and too embedded in the present. On the other hand, it is 'time capsules' such as this that future generations of historians may well be grateful for.

This book is a noticeable improvement on the earlier version. The text has been expanded and brought up to date. There are substantially more illustrations and these now appear at the end of each chapter rather than being bundled together in the middle of the book. Last, but by no means least, an index has been added. Individuals and libraries already possessing the first edition need have no fear that they will be wasting their money buying this one.

*S. Bhanji*

**Jane Harrold and Richard Porter (2005) *Britannia Royal Naval College 1905-2005, a century of officer training at Dartmouth*, Dartmouth: Richard Webb; 208 pages, numerous illustrations, hardcover, ISBN 0953636135, £25.00.**

Down to the end of the Second World War the BRNC Dartmouth had developed as a public school with a RN ethos. Various pressures then lead to a careful examination of the Navy's perceived needs. This volume traces the changes in the ideas of Naval education that lead in 1953 to the abolition of entry at 13½ and a little later at 16½, leaving 18 as the earliest age to start at Dartmouth. The authors examine the type of education now given and likely to be required in future. They point out that the College is undergoing 'one of the most fundamental changes in its history. This time there are no questions in parliament, no public debate. The

armed services are no longer held in the same regard that they were one hundred or even fifty years ago which reflects Britain's changing position in the international system'.

While dealing separately with various aspects of life at the College the authors cover its history beginning with living on board the *Britannia* and *Hindustan*, the two old wooden battleships, that were the main accommodation until Sir Aston Webb's great building was completed in 1909. In September 1942 a German daylight bombing raid caused considerable damage but fortunately the cadets were still on holiday. Cadet training was moved to Eaton Hall where it remained until 1946 when Dartmouth again became available.

Inevitably Royal Visits and the lives of those Princes sent to Dartmouth are well documented. In fact the Dartmouth archives seem to have a wide range of College activities on record, especially photographic, that the compilers have been able to use most effectively. They do not set out to write a history of the College over the past hundred years but rather to give the reader an idea of life there. The volume will be attractive to former students - and their parents - but a sequel reporting on the progress of the reformed educational system drawn up in, say, five years time would be of great interest.

*Adrian Reed*

**Bill Ransom (2005) *A history of Hsington*, Chichester: Phillimore; ix + 102 pages, 15 b/w plates, 92 figures, softcover, ISBN 1860773516, £9.99.**

Readers of *The Devon Historian* will already know Bill Ransom from his scholarly articles in past issues of the journal on aspects of Hsington's history, particularly in relation to its manors and mining. Here he has brought together details of his previous research, together with much more material concerning the parish.

Lying on the south-eastern fringe of Dartmoor, Hsington is part moorland and part 'in-country'. Its acres include the prominent feature of Haytor Rocks (portrayed on the book's front cover) and also land that descends in altitude from this and other tors to its lowest level at Drumbridges roundabout on the busy A38 road. Hsington's prehistory dates back to the Neolithic Age, and there is recorded history covering around 1,000 years. The parish church of St Michael received its charter c. 1187.

Beginning his account with the parish's pre-history, Bill Ransom takes us through Saxon times, the manors, barton and demesne lands to the origin of the church (with its list of incumbents from 1255). Terriers and tithes, charities, education and administration bring the reader up to the late nineteenth century. The geology and the basis it has provided for mining for tin, lead and zinc, iron, and manganese - and for the quarrying of granite which has found its way to prestigious buildings in London and elsewhere - are considered, with, finally, some general noting of more modern issues.

A former government research scientist, Bill Ransom retired to Hsington in 1981. Already an established author and talented painter, he has also been a keen Dartmoor walker.

His attractive book will widen the knowledge of those wanting to know much more of this interesting parish.

*Helen Harris*

**Rosemary Smith (ed.) *The Lymptone story*, Lymptone: The Lymptone Society; 52 pages, numerous b/w and colour illustrations, softcover, ISBN 0950410225, £3.95.**

This book describes itself as 'a revised and updated edition with extra chapters and much new material'. To judge it is as a local history would be to do it a disservice, for this does not convey its range. The breadth and quality of the work is expressed most directly by some reproduction of the title of the various chapters with their authors: 'Geology' (DJC Laming), 'Geography' (Roger Kain), 'Archaeology' (Charlotte Coles), 'Historical Lymptone' (Rosemary Smith), 'Military history' (Ian Angus), 'The church' (Rosemary Smith), 'Gulliford' (Angela Coles), 'The natural environment' (Judie Horwood), 'Bird life' (Geoff Hackston and Mary Nightingale), 'Fishing' (Norman Mitchell, David Burton and Edgar Norton), 'Farming' (Rosemary Smith), 'The railway' (Angela Coles), 'Schooling' (Rosemary Smith), 'Social activities', and 'The Lymptone Society' (Rosemary Smith).

It may be speculated that the ordering of this diverse content must have presented the editor and contributors with a challenge. It is not suggested here, though, that the internal arrangement ought to have been different, but certainly the insertion of a contents page would help orientate readers, and also enhance further what is a rich and very highly finished production.

The work is many things: geographical survey, local history, visitor guide, heritage record, and near-Millennial celebration. The production was supported by East Devon AONB Partnership, East Devon District Council's Grassroots Scheme, and The Community Council of Devon's Rural Initiatives Loan Fund, and these public initiatives should be very pleased with the end product. The volume is of course also fitting testament to the work of the editor and the work and sense of purpose of The Lymptone Society.

*Andrew Jackson*

**Gregg Wall (2005) *The book of South Brent*, Tiverton: Halsgrove; 160 pages, illustrated, hardcover, ISBN 184114407X, £19.99.**

This is another in the series about the villages and towns of this glorious county, and an enormous amount of research has gone into this volume to create the story of this important place on the Southern edge of Dartmoor that has been full of incident over the centuries. The strength of the river Avon has powered mills there: tin mining, slate quarrying, and mattress making have all contributed to South Brent's economy. Sadly all these have now gone, as has South Brent's importance as a railway station together with a junction for the now defunct line to Kingsbridge. Manufacturing seems to be history in many Devon settlements. The book is full of photographs of events, particularly the many theatrical performances given over the years.

Personally I found myself confused occasionally by the chapter arrangements, and would have preferred a general history followed by chapters on the various organisations that have formed such an important part of South Brent's community life.

This book will give much pleasure and enlightenment to all those who have connections with South Brent.

*Arnold Sayers*

**Trevor Yorke (2003) *Tracing the history of villages*, reprinted edn, Newbury: Countryside Books; 192 pages, 165 illustrations, softcover, ISBN 1853067121, £9.95.**

This is a splendid little book. For less than £10 one has in a single volume a rounded well-illustrated summary of what it says on the cover.

The first things that grab the attention of the reader are the numerous illustrations. Photographs, diagrams, sketches, maps, cartoons, population and time lines are all pressed into service to tell the story. There is even a guide to building your own cruck-framed cottage that really brings the process to life.

I like the way the author treats his topics. He gives all the elements decent coverage – field systems, agriculture, transport, domestic housing, religious buildings, castles, the people; and incidental features like ponds, follies, industrial sites, bridges and local monuments. These are all covered. And more.

The text happily balances the illustrations' captions, and the book is well structured from prehistoric times to the present day. The end of the book has a section on finding out more from libraries and record offices, and there is a glossary and a bibliography split into five subject topics. The index occupies only two pages, but is probably adequate. I did test it!

I know there are countless country dwellers curious to find out more about their neighbourhood. I cannot think of a more stimulating handbook to set them off finding about their surroundings.

*Brian le Messurier*

### Books received for information

Below are books either sent to the Society for information rather than for review, or that include some content on the practice of local history or on Devon that may be of interest and value to members, but insufficient in extent for a full review in this journal.

**Harold Fox (2004) *The evolution of the fishing village: landscape and society along the South Devon coast, 1086-1550*, reprinted edn; 208 pages, illustrations, £13.50. Available from H.S.A. Fox, Explorations, Centre for English Local History, Marc Fitch Historical Institute, 5 Salisbury Road, Leicester, LE1 7QR.**

### Correspondence from members and other information

The Hon. Editor is pleased to receive notices concerning museums, local societies and organisations, information about particular research projects, as well as notes, queries and correspondence from Society members. Such items can be reproduced in *The Devon Historian*, space permitting.

#### Query

Peter Daubney writes: 'I have been trying for some time to locate where the two enclosed photos may have been taken. They date from 1920 to 1924 and were taken on a trip from Exeter to Babbacombe or possibly to Seaton. The picture I would like to trace is of the farmhouse, and hope the village scene is from the same location, which may have been the outskirts of a town, as pavements appear in both pictures. Any information to Mr CP Daubney, 3 Alkham Close, Margate, Kent, CT9 3JP.





#### Addenda and erratum

Keith Orrell writes regarding his two papers on 'The "Great Sir Thomas" Acland and his Norwegian namesake' in volumes 71 (2005, 25-34) and 72 (2006, 15-23) of *The Devon Historian*.

I am pleased to report that the statue of Sir Thomas Acland, 10<sup>th</sup> Baronet, in Northernhay Gardens, Exeter (2006, 23) has now been repaired. Monsieur A. Lamotte, one of Acland's two companions on his trip (2005, 33), has now been identified as Alexander Lamotte (formerly De La Motte), a teacher of French at Blundell's School, Tiverton. He was very likely one of a considerable number of French prisoners of war from Napoleon's campaigns known to be garrisoned in Tiverton. Lamotte was clearly a man of some influence and independent means, and appears in the Land Tax Assessment as the owner of a house on the north side of Gold Street in Tiverton. He chose to remain in the town after the wars, and four of his sons (Alexander Gallye, Charles Eugene Gallye, Matthew Gallye and

Thomas Gallye) attended Blundell's School during the period 1825-39. Matthew Gallye was elected to a Sydney Scholarship to Cambridge in 1832, and subsequently obtained the degrees of BA (1836), MA (1839) and BD (1846), and was a cleric within the parish of Tiverton. Alexander Gallye became a surgeon and in 1856 was the medical officer for the western part of Tiverton. I am most grateful to Mike J. Sampson, the archivist at Blundell's School, for some of this information.

Charles Clement Adderley (born 1780), Acland's other travelling companion, was the father (*not* the son) of Charles Bowyer Adderley, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Norton (President of the Board of Health, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, and President of the Board of Trade in Lord Derby's Government). Charles died sadly in 1818, only 10 years after his Scandinavian trip with Acland, and his wife, Anna Maria, also died prematurely in 1827. Charles was a member of the Grillion's Club and there is a portrait of him displayed in The Study at Killerton House.

#### Old Plymouth Society

The following speakers are scheduled to give talks to the Old Plymouth Society in 2006:

- 21 Sep 2006 Peter Hall, 'Plymouth Argyle from 1886 'till today'.
- 19 Oct 2006 Hon. George Lopez, 'Maristow House and its surrounding area'.
- 16 Nov 2006 John Boulden, 'History of Plympton'.
- 07 Dec 2006 Piers Le Cheminet, 'Day to day running of Devon Air Ambulance'

Meetings are normally held in the Spurgeon Hall, Mutley Baptist Church, Plymouth, at 7.00 for 7.30pm start. For information on events please contact Mrs G Dixon (01752 227992). The Society's Hon. Secretary is Mrs D Mole, Old Plymouth Society, 625 Budshead Road, Whiteleigh, Plymouth, PL5 4DW; 01752 774316.

#### The Lustleigh Society

Speakers scheduled to give talks to The Lustleigh Society in 2006 include:

- 27 Sep 2006 Mr David Austin, 'History of the Austins – a family story'
  - 25 Oct 2006 South West Film and Television Archive, 'Archive film show'
- Entry by ticket only - £3.00 for Society members and children (16 years and below), £5.00 non-members

Unless otherwise stated meetings are normally held in the village hall at 8.00pm; refreshments from 7.30 pm. The Society's Programme Secretary is Mary Marsham, Cleavelands, Bovey Tracey, TQ13 9NG; 01752 774316; [mjm@cmfs.biz](mailto:mjm@cmfs.biz).

## Society reports and notices

### Membership and subscriptions

The Society is pleased to attract the membership of local history groups that are not yet affiliated members. The first year of membership for an affiliated society is £5.00. Existing affiliated societies are reminded to contact the Hon. Treasurer, whenever there is a change of contact and correspondence address: Dr Sadru Bhanji, 13 Elm Grove Road, Topsham, Devon, EX3 0EQ.

### Programme organisation

The Committee of the Society is seeking a new Programme Secretary, or help from a couple of individuals who may like to share the work associated with this position. The main responsibilities of the Programme Secretary are the organisation of the Annual Conference and AGM, and the Spring and Summer meetings of the Society. The Committee would also welcome the help of any affiliated societies that are able to host and organise one of the Society's Spring or Summer meetings.

Those interested in contributing to programme organisation are asked to approach the Hon. Secretary (01404 42002, [su3681@eclipse.co.uk](mailto:su3681@eclipse.co.uk)).

### Devon History Society website

The Society's website can be found at <http://www.devonhistorysociety.org.uk>. The website gives information on the following: the contents of the current and recent issues of *The Devon Historian*; programmes of forthcoming events; links to useful websites; and a message board for comments, queries and answers.

## The Devon Historian

Correspondence for the Hon. Editor and contributions for publication in the Society's journal should be sent to Dr Andrew Jackson, Hon. Editor, The Devon Historian, School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of Exeter, St Luke's Campus, Heavitree Road, Exeter, EX1 2LU, or by email to [A.J.H.Jackson@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:A.J.H.Jackson@exeter.ac.uk).

Books for review should be sent to Dr Sadru Bhanji, 13 Elm Grove Road, Topsham, Devon EX3 0EQ, who will invite the services of a reviewer. It is not the policy of the Society to receive unsolicited reviews.

The contents of articles and reviews reflect the views of their authors and not those of the Society.

### Notes for contributors

The Hon. Editor welcomes articles to be considered for publication in *The Devon Historian*. Normally, the length should be between 2,000 and 4,000 words (plus endnotes, references and bibliography), although much shorter pieces of suitable substance may also be acceptable. Pieces of more than 4,000 words can be reproduced in separate articles, or in exceptional circumstances printed in full.

It is preferred that articles are word-processed using double line spacing and page margins of 3cm, and submitted by email attachment in Word format. However, the editor will accept versions by post on disk, CDROM, as typed hardcopy, or in clear handwriting. Authors should ensure that the journal's style is adhered to on such matters as the restrained use of capital letters, initial single inverted commas, and the writing of the dates thus: 1 July 2005. Article layout conventions also need to be followed. Endnote numbers through the article and a corresponding list of notes and references at the end should give details of primary sources used, and indicate where books and other articles have been quoted, paraphrased or derived from. Bibliographies are required to list all books and journal articles that have been quoted, paraphrased, cited, or in some way have informed the content of the article. The format of references and bibliographies in this volume of the journal can be followed. Illustrative material can be submitted electronically in most formats, or as a good quality print or photocopy. Where relevant it is the responsibility of authors to ensure that copyright holders have granted formal permission for the reproduction of images.

The final format of articles is at the discretion of the Editor.

### Back issues

Current and back issues of *The Devon Historian* are available from Mr David Thomas, 112 Topsham Road, Exeter, EX2 4RW. Members may purchase available back issues at £3 each including postage and, when ordering, should state the issue number(s) or publication date(s) of the journal(s) required. Mr Thomas is always glad to receive copies of earlier numbers of *The Devon Historian* in good condition.