
NOTES & QUERIES

FOR
SOMERSET AND DORSET

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*"Attempt the end, and never stand to doubt;
Nothing's so hard, but search will find it out".*

HERRICK

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33. THE MYSTERY OF MELLIFONT ABBEY, WOOKEY. Among the unanswered questions about the Peirs family¹ is who was responsible for the re-building of Wookey Rectory and who re-named it Mellifont Abbey.

The rectory had been added to and modified many times. The rector of Wookey had been the sub-dean of Wells Cathedral since the twelfth century, but there is no record of his ever living at Wookey. In 1432 Bishop Bubwith 'sequestered the rectory on account of the dilapidated state of the church owing to the neglect of the sub-dean', but no house is specifically mentioned. The first reference to a lease was in 1533, to John French, chapman, of Norton Canons. There is no mention of a house there (as distinct from the vicarage which was on a different site), until 1548 when the rectory house and lands were leased to the Godwyn family, and they retained them for over 150 years. As part of a church terrier we have a description of the property in 1634, still held by the Godwins. It contained a hall, parlour, kitchen, buttery, scullery, pantry and brewhouse with chambers over them as well as a coal house, two stables, a malthouse with loft over, and various outbuildings. However, although any evidence of an early medieval house has been lost, a late medieval roof in a two-storey range was noted by John Winstone to have been incorporated in the later re-building.² It may also have included parts of the medieval church house which earlier adjoined it.

At some time in the eighteenth century the rectory was virtually re-built, incorporating various features from an earlier building such as an oriel window and a number of corbelled heads and gargoyles. These may have originated in the former bishop's palace next door; they also resemble other such features in Wells. Pevsner described the rectory as 'an early 19th century Gothic house, a little of a folly', but it is clear that it was re-built well before 1800 from a description of the house when it was let in that year.³ William Phelps, who rented and lived at Mellifont Abbey himself from 1817-24, wrote in his *History of Somersetshire* in 1835: 'It was built about 1730 by Colonel Peirs who held the manorial rectory of Wookey and other estates adjoining.' This was clearly a reference to William (4), M.P. for Wells who was a colonel in the militia; however the rectory of Wookey was not a manorial estate, and there is no evidence that it was held by William (4).

A lease of 22 Feb 1682 from the sub-dean to Joseph Godwin and his wife Eleanor for their lives and that of their son Richard was quoted in an undated draft conveyance between Joseph Godwin (1), Richard Hicks of Wells (2) and Thomas Peirs of Wells, gent. Above 'Hicks' is written 'William Peirs', and the document continues, after quoting the lease above, 'Joseph and Eleanor grant and agree to and with the said Thomas Peirs that they will release ... the rectory and premises ... to the said William Peirs and his heirs during the natural lives of Joseph, Eleanor and their son Richard.' However it ends: 'In trust nevertheless for the said Thomas Peirs and his heirs' and directs that William Peirs and his heirs should at the request of Thomas, or his heirs, surrender the premises to the subdean 'to the intent that the same may be regranted to the said Thomas and his heirs for such lives as he may nominate.'⁴ It is probable that this agreement referred to William (3), 1662-87 and his brother Thomas (1), 1663-86, as by his will in April 1686 Thomas left £100 to his wife to purchase a life in the rectory for his unborn child, if a son. This child was Thomas (3) who married Penelope Maltravers in 1709. Their five children all predeceased him and his wife, and were buried at Wookey between 1720 and 1742. Penelope was also buried there, in 1752. Thomas, who was a captain in the militia and died in 1753, paid the rates for the rectory lands throughout the period. His cousin William Ekins Peirs succeeded him at the rectory, and he was also assigned the lease of the adjacent manor house in 1758 and negotiated the transfer of $\frac{3}{4}$ acre of land from the manor house to the rectory. On his death in 1765 his heir was his sister Lady Elizabeth Bertie. She bought the manor house in 1769, selling it on the next year; and she held the rectory until her own death in 1781, when she was buried at Wookey.

The re-building of the rectory could be attributed to any one of four Peirs. Thomas (3) and his family lived there and he had the means. William Ekins had access to the manor house material, some of which may well have been used in the re-building, and he took land from it for the rectory; he also had a Wookey estate manager of whom he thought highly, and there is a reference to his brickworks in the church documents. Lady Elizabeth had the same opportunities and estate manager, and had ample funds; she had two daughters to bring up, and in view of her daughter Augusta's marriage to Lord Burghersh in

1758, along with her connections to the aristocratic Berties, perhaps she had family expectations to keep up. The fourth candidate is William (4), supported by Phelps and, as shown earlier, something of a wheeler-dealer. However, his holdings are well documented, and there is no evidence that he leased the rectory or ever lived there.

Local conservation architect John Winstone, the present owner of Court Farm, Wookey, in a talk to Wookey Local History Group in February 1998 suggested an intriguing architectural link between the rectory, Bradley House and Oatlands near Weybridge in Surrey. This was one of the houses of Henry Clinton, 7th Earl of Lincoln whose wife was sister of the Duke of Newcastle⁵ and who was a known friend of William Peirs (4). The Lincolns were re-modelling Oatlands and must have been aware of the new medieval sources used in the designs of Sir John Vanbrugh shown in one of his houses, Claremont, which the Duke and Duchess of Newcastle had bought. Vanbrugh died in 1726, and any influence on Oatlands, which William Peirs visited, was thought by Mr Winstone to have been incidental rather than actual design work. Nevertheless he describes 'Gothic' features believed to have featured at Oatlands, citing a sketch of Georgian Oatlands by another modern historian, J.W. Lindus Forge R.I.B.A.; and points out similarities with the re-built rectory at Wookey where there were '... the eight bays with offset centerpiece, the battlements, the corner buttresses and the arched windows'. He points out the unusual use of brickwork and the Gothic window heads over 12-pane sashes, and Georgian brickwork blocked out in imitation of medieval work, suggesting it was an early essay in the first Gothic revival of Vanbrugh.

The extent of the building work at Bradley undertaken by William Peirs is not recorded, but much of the visible building today is of his period. It is a stone house, of an unusual plan, being an irregular octagon, with the character of a lodge. Some of the landscape work recorded by Cannon remains and clearly indicates Oatlands influence on him. The canal, at least one avenue and a walled garden with lodge are all early 18th century, while the modern water stairs are probably an accurate replica of the original. However, the grounds of the Wookey rectory were not suited to such ambitious landscaping.

If William (4) was also the instigator of the re-building of the

Wookey rectory it would have had to have been done well before 1750 and the court case, (Phelps' date of about 1730 would fit) and this would make it an exceptionally early and interesting example of this type of architecture. However, other members of the family might well have been aware of the influences brought to bear on the design at Oatlands and at Bradley, as all four candidates would have knowledge of the other family estates, and of William (4)'s architectural interests. He would be well known (as cousin and father) to the other three; living until 1764.

The re-naming of the re-built rectory as Mellifont Abbey is another puzzle. The first reference met so far was in 1800 when the Salmon family were lessees, but it was the Peirs and Berties who had the closest connections with Ireland where the eponymous Abbey is situated, while the Salmons, who had built themselves another house in Wookey on previously rectorial land, showed little interest in the rectory. Perhaps an earlier reference to the new name will in due course be found.⁶

1. *SDNQ*, XXXV (2001), 3-10.
2. John Winstone was commissioned by the owner, Paul Wright, to make a full study of the building in connection with a planning application.
3. *Bath Chronicle* 8 April 1800; thanks to Penny Stokes for drawing this to my attention. The dimensions and details given prove the re-building to have been completed earlier.
4. SRO DD/SAS c795 SE 3.
5. Peirs' was also acquainted with Newcastle: BL 32689 Newcastle Papers 1V, 84.
6. I am indebted to John Winstone B.Sc., B.Arch, R.I.B.A. for allowing his work on, and interpretation of, the architecture of Mellifont Abbey to be used, and for permission to draw from his talk to Wookey Local History Group. Other debts and sources were recorded in the previous article on the Peirs family. For other information on the rectory and its later history see *The Parish of Wookey*, Joan Hasler and Brian Luker 1997, ISBN 0 9530166 0 9.

JOAN HASLER

34. THE DIARY OF MARY LEIR. The compiler of this artless diary, Mary Leir, was the daughter of a wealthy Warminster grocer, John Shore, by his wife Jane Kington, heir to Jaggards, a handsome Cromwellian house which still stands near Corsham, Wilts. Mary was born in 1742, married in 1764 and died at the age of 87 in 1829. Her husband was the Revd. Thomas Leir (1738-1812), member of a clerical family of Devon origin who provided incumbents for Charlton Musgrove, Somerset, from 1617 to 1914, and Ditchheat, near Shepton Mallet, from 1699 to 1917. Thomas held both livings from 1781 when his father died, one brother having died young and another

two being insane. Mary Leir came into Jaggards on the death of her brother in 1777. When Richard Macie died (as mentioned in the diary) in 1761, the Shores also inherited Weston, near Bath, Macie having been married to Mary's great aunt Anne. Later some of her grandchildren used Macie as a second name.

The diaries are not without charm but although notable for their brief and laconic entries, as a family chronicle they have some genealogical and social significance. The peregrinations from house to house, the visits and entertainments at spas and seaside resorts, the illnesses and schooling of the children, and the general pre-occupations of this country gentle woman, make the document of some general interest.

Little is revealed in the diary about Mary Leir as a person. However, a letter that she wrote to her tiresome eldest son, Thomas, of Jaggards and Weston, who was constantly fretting about money matters, reveals common sense and a mordant wit:

After my Death, Then you will have a good addition, be not afraid. I am much on the decline, you may not wait long. Therefore keep up your Spirits . . . you see the wrong side of things & write such things as are never thought of . . . Pray take some Medicine, take a ride on Lansdown every morning. Do not vex about trifles.¹

Not all those mentioned in the narrative can be identified. The Methuen family loom large. Elizabeth Leir, Mary's mother-in-law, was the daughter of Paul Methuen, the great clothier of Bradford-on-Avon. Her sister, Gratiana, married Revd. John Rogers, Vicar of Warminster. His son, Revd. J.M. Rogers, married Mary Prowse, one of the co-heirs to the Berkeley Estate, near Frome; visits to Berkeley House were frequent. The Frekes also appear because Thomas Leir was the grandson of Mary Freke, of Hinton St. Mary, Dorset. Mr. Maby was Revd. C.L. Maby, Rector of Wheathill, and husband of Thomas Leir's sister, Elizabeth. Visits to Rushall, Wilts, were to Mr. Leir's uncle, Revd. Edward Poore. Balsam was the Leir dower house, rented, at Wincanton.

We can perhaps infer that Mary Shore was living at the Macies until 1761. She then went to live with Aunt Alsop. The reason why she did not live with her father is not revealed. Aunt Alsop² may have provided polish and access to suitors. John Shore married again and we may deduce stepmother problems. Mary mentions her half-sister Charlotte but not her stepmother Mary,

who died in 1787, or half-brother William who lived until 1789.

The varied schools are interesting. Mr. Huntingford's was, of course Lord Weymouth Grammar School at Warminster. Richard, Mary Leir's brother, went to Katherine, Lady Berkeley's Grammar School at Wotton, founded in 1384. It is now housing the building of 1726 which John Shore knew. Mary erected a monument to her brother in St. Denys' church, Warminster, and also to her mother, Jane Kington, who died on 9 Mar 1749; John was 27 when he died. The name is spelt Shoar which she did 'as a tribute of respect to an affectionate mother and beloved brother'.³

This diary was made available by Mrs. J. Tait (née Leir), of Bovey Tracey, Devon. It is proposed to publish it in three parts. The text has been slightly modernised for ease of reading, contractions spelt out and some punctuation included.

Account of former times

The year 1761. Mr. Macie died on Friday the 27 March 1761. Came to live with my Aunt Alsop at Mr. Harfords 27 April 1761. Came home to Warminster from Bath June 4 1761. My brother went to school to Mr. Glysol at Wotton under Edge 30 June 1761. Came to Wotton under Edge to see my brother who was ill, 20 September 1761. Came to Bath from Wotton under Edge 17 October. I came home to Warminster. November 5: Came with my Aunt Alsop to Bath.

The year 1762. Lived with my Aunt Alsop in Bath. June 17: I came to Warminster. August 2: Brother went to Wotton under Edge School as Parlour Boarder.

The year 1763. Lived with my Aunt Alsop in bath. June 13: came with my Aunt Alsop to Warminster. August 26: the first time I saw Mr. Leir who came to drink tea at my fathers. December 25: my brother came home.

The year 1764. January 24: my brother went to Wotton under Edge. May 16: my brother went to Oxford. July 1: came with my aunt to Bath. 17: went with my aunt & Mr. Leir to Bristol in business about settlements [*sic*]. September: came to Tormarten to visit Mrs. Bliss. 8: came back to Bath. September 21: my brother came home. November 5: my brother went to Oxford. 29: was married. Breakfasted with Mr. Rogers & came with my Aunt Alsop to Ditcheat [to meet her mother-in-law Mrs. Leir]. December 10: came to live at Charlton Musgrove, my Aunt Alsop with us.

The year 1765. January 16: my brother came. 26: my brother went away. June 12: came to visit my father at Warminster. October 17: my first son Thomas was born.

The year 1766. May 28: my son Thomas was christened. September 23 or 24: Mr. Kington of Jaggards died. October 2: my sister Charlotte died. 14: came to visit my brother at Jaggards with my son. 21: Mr. Leir came, he return'd 31 October. November 16: I returned with my son from Jaggards. December 28:

I went with my brother to Warminster.

The year 1767. March 12: my second son John was born.

The year 1768. February 1: came to Warminster with Mr. Leir & our children. March 14: return'd home. September 10: my sone William was born.

The year 1769. June 13: came to Warminster. 13: return'd home.

The year 1770. January 2: went to Warminster. 13: return'd home. Mrs. Freke & Miss Gold [Gould]. June 9: my son Paul born this day. September 28: my son Paul christened.

The year 1771. April 10: came to Warminster. 18: came home. December 3: my brother died this day.

The year 1772. January 17: son Richard was born this day. March 11: came to bath. 12: went to live at Jaggards. April 6: son Thomas went to his first school. May 16: came to Warminster. 30: returned to Charlton. December 24: all our family went to live at Jaggards.

The year 1773. March 1: went to Warminster. 6: returned to Jaggards. April 18: my eldest daughter Mary born. 31: christened my daughter. July 6: came to Warminster. 17: returned home.

The year 1774. June 6: John & William went to school at Box. 20: went to Rushall. 25: return'd home. December 30: my eldest daughter died on this day.

The year 1775. November [sic] Maria was born this day.

The year 1776. April 10: Maria was christened. November 25: came to Warminster with Mr. Leir, John & Maria. December 17: came home.

The year 1777. January 8: my father died; came with Mr. Leir to Warminster. 10: returned home. March 24: went to Tormarten with Mr. Leir & John. July 18: Elizabeth my third daughter born this day.

September 17: Elizabeth was christened.

The year 1778. September 21: went to Rushall with Mr. Leir & John. 25: came home.

The year 1779. May 8: Charles was born. July 28: Charles was christened. August 3: son John went to school to Mr. Greaves.

The year 1780. February 7: my Aunt Alsop died. 12: my Aunt Alsop buried at Littleton. September 30: went with Maria on visit to Miss Rogers. October 16: came home.

The year 1781. Richard went to London to a school to be cured of stammering. May 3: came with Maria to Rodden [near Frome]. 4: came to Ditchat. 5: came to Cheddon [Fitzpaine] on a visit to Mrs. Warre. 15: came to Ditchat. 18: came to Roundhill [a house near Wincanton]. 24: came through Bath home to Jaggards. July 31: Maria went a day scholar to Mr. Delason at Corsham School. August 23: Mr. Leir's father died this day. 28: Mr. Leir the elder was buried. October 3: Mr. Leir went on his journey to take possession of his livings; Mr. John Poore with hime to Oxford, Cambridge, etc. 20: Mr. Leir came home. December 21: Richard came from stammering school. The year 1782. January 21: John & William went to school to Mr. Huntingford's at Warminster. February 27: Mrs. Warre & her daughter came on a vist to me.

Mrs. Warre & daughter went away. April 11: Mrs. Maby, Mr. Leir's sister, died this day. 22: Mrs. Maby was buried. June 7: came to Ditchat. 12: came home to Jaggards. July: Mr. Angier came and brought Richard home. 10: Thomas came from Winchester. September 17: went to Russhall with Mr. Leir. 24: came home.

The year 1783. January 28: William & Paul went to school in Warminster. March 4: Mr. Rogers [Rector of Berkley] was married to Miss Prowse. 17: came to Ditchat with Mr. Leir, Richard & Eliza. 25: came home. April 28: Thomas returned to Claverton. June 5: made a visit to Berkely & came on to Ditchat, Mrs. Leir died at Balsam this day [her daughter-in-law]. 10: Mrs. Leir was buried. August 31: came home. To Jaggards. December 26: Mr. Leir & all the boys from school came home.

1. 'The Priory, Ditchat, Somerset', *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society*, new series 24, pp.109-110.
2. Aunt Alsop is mentioned in a deed of 1794 in which William Leir acknowledges the receipt of a sum left to him in her will. She is described as Mrs. Mary Alsop, widow, of Jaggards. She is likely to have been Jane Kington's sister.
3. J.J. Daniell *The History of Warminster* (London, 1879), p.199.

MICHAEL McGARVIE

35. ROBERT GAMBIER AT STINSFORD. Robert Gambier, a naval captain on half pay, first came to Stinsford in 1818. Until a posting or suitable position offered he sought the help of his rich aunt Margaret Morton Pitt, (née Gambier) the wife of William Morton Pitt of Kingston Maurward. Robert had a young wife, a baby daughter and another child imminent. It was decided that the young Gambier family should live in a cottage at Upper Bockhampton which, as Margaret Pitt's friend and neighbour Lady Susan O'Brien commented, 'may be called living on love and bread and butter and what happier thing? None in the world!'.

Born in 1791 at Watlingbury in Kent where his influential great uncle Lord Barham lived, Robert was the fifth child and second son of Samuel Gambier (1752-1813) and Jane Mathew (1765-1853); Robert had thirteen siblings. The family 'did not long reside in one place, flitting from London to Kent and then again to London and Hertfordshire,' Sarah Heath, (née Gambier), the family historian, tells us. In spite of so many moves and fourteen children in twenty seven years Jane Gambier survived her husband for forty years. Her son Robert joined the Navy when he was very young.¹

He had distinguished naval forebears and connections. Great Uncle James (1723-1789) was present at the capture of

Louisbourg in 1758, at Guadaloupe in 1759 and also at Quibera Bay. He was the Commander in Chief on the North America Station 1770-1773, and a Commander at Jamaica in 1783-4. Rather surprisingly, he held strong Temperance principles. While stationed at Halifax, Nova Scotia he destroyed liquor shops and impressed the sutlers, which involved him in law-suits and forced him to claim Admiralty protection for two years. Finally he became Vice-Admiral of the Red and died in 1789. He is buried in Bath Abbey next to his sister, Susanna Cornish.²

Susanna's husband, Samuel Cornish, also had a fine naval career. He commanded the *Guernsey* during the War of Austrian Succession (1743-49), became Rear-Admiral of the White in 1759, took Manilla and the Philippines in 1762, and retired as Vice-Admiral in 1765. He was much admired by his brother-in-law, John Gambier, the grandfather of our Robert, who called two of his sons Cornish and married his daughter Mary to Sir Samuel's nephew who also became an Admiral. His sister, Margaret, married Sir Charles Middleton of Wateringbury, Kent, yet another naval man: Controller in 1778, First Sea Lord in 1794, and First Lord of the Admiralty in the year of Trafalgar. In 1805 he was created Lord Barham. He too was a Temperance man. His wife, our Robert's great aunt was an accomplished artist, a friend of Dr Johnson and of Hannah More and one of the earliest active opponents of the Slave Trade.³ It was in this household that Robert's aunt, Margaret Pitt, spent much of her childhood.

However, the best known of Robert's naval relations was his uncle, Sir James Gambier (1756-1833). He commanded the *Defence* of 74 guns at the battle off Cape Ushant (1794), and in 1807 he commanded a secret and successful expedition against the Danes to prevent them joining forces with Napoleon, for which he was made Lord Gambier of Iwer. In 1809 he was accused by his fellow commander Lord Cochrane of cowardice and demanded a court martial to clear his name.⁴ On this subject he received a long, detailed and most interesting letter of advice from his brother-in-law Morton Pitt, with whom he was evidently in close contact at the time. Morton Pitt wrote to the Admiral 'you have been extremely ill-treated, your reputation hazarded, your purse put to an enormous charge, as the only means of rescuing your character from ignominy'.⁵ Lord Gambier was finally acquitted with honour, and presented with

a naval baton, a personal gift of William IV, such gifts being very rare. Gambier also invented a new sort of ship made of straight timber, useful when curved was in short supply,⁶ and a new signalling code.⁷ Like others among his relations he was a Temperance man, and very religious; he set himself 'to combat the many evils and abuses to which the sailor's life was exposed in those hard-swearing hard drinking days, and became President of the British and Foreign Sailors' Society.'⁸ Morton Pitt with his immense wealth was likewise a devoted worker for the underprivileged. That the impecunious young Gambiers should seek a haven on the Stinsford estate was natural enough.

Robert took part in many sea-fights during the Napoleonic wars. He was serving in the *Bellerophon* on 15 July 1815 when Napoleon surrendered to Captain Maitland. When the ship arrived at Plymouth, General Sir Thomas Gore-Brown, Commander of the garrison, boarded her to salute the fallen Emperor. Somewhat surprisingly his daughters are said to have accompanied him, and within the year Caroline Gore-Brown was married to Captain Gambier.⁹

At Stinsford the young Gambiers, on account of their unusually good looks, good spirits, good singing voices and general obligingness, added to the liveliness of the numerous dinner and card parties at Kingston Maurward and at Stinsford House, the home of Lady Susan O'Brien. Although an old lady in her late seventies at the time, it is evident from Lady Susan's Journal that she found the company of Robert and Caroline particularly agreeable. Moreover Robert played a valuable part in the community and was relied upon in times of crisis. For example, when the Reverend William Floyer, who had been an intimate friend of his chief parishioners and was beloved by all the parish for his generosity, died on 29 August 1819, Robert Gambier called on Lady Susan 'to consult with me about writing to William Floyer (the son) at Malta or Naples to prevent any sudden return to England. As he is a proper judge he will say what is right for him to do.' Three years later this unfortunate William trying out a new boat in dangerous weather was drowned off Portland. 'a catastrophe so dreadful could hardly be imagined,' writes Lady Susan, 'all my neighbours feel for the loss of the poor mother.' Captain Gambier went to Weymouth to find out the full circumstances; 'poor William had been dressing himself to go smart into Weymouth;' aged

only nineteen he had during his brief service, 'received great praise and was returning with a high character.' His body was found and brought to Stinsford and the funeral was held on the 22 July. William's brother John aged fifteen, and his sister Elizabeth aged thirteen walked as chief mourners, and Captain Gambier with Charles Strangways, Mr Pitt, a fellow midshipman, and two cousins attended. Dr England performed the ceremony with his 'usual dignity and propriety.' William's memorial is in the south wall of Stinsford church, very near to the O'Briens' and next to his father's. Mrs Gambier and Lady Susan watched the procession from a window of Stinsford House which overlooks the church.

It was not only on sad occasions that Robert Gambier's behaviour was appreciated. On 22 February, just a month after the birth of his third daughter he went to drink tea in the evening with Lady Susan, and entertained her by telling her about the people he had met on his Mediterranean cruises. For example William Bankes, heir to nearby Kingston Lacy, and Byron's Cambridge contemporary and friend had been on his ship, and was 'a most agreeable and delightful companion.' Apparently he was 'adored at Milan and all over Italy and in every place respected and esteemed being an excellent good man in all his dealings.' He certainly spent a fortune; most of Kingston Lacy's rich decor, furniture and fine pictures still on view to-day were of his acquisition. Gambier's account of Queen Caroline also interested Lady Susan; he told her that everywhere in Europe he heard of the Queen's disgraceful behaviour. At Naples she danced with Murat, the French soldier whom Napoleon had made king of that city, and 'was so in love that when he took another partner she burst into tears and made quite a scene.' She entered Paris on horseback, 'wearing satin trousers, all over spangles, magnificent boots and a short Turkish tunic and an immense turban covered in jewels. The Duke received her as grandly as he could. He wondered that she should not be in England but she told him that her husband did not like women that were not fat and old and that she was not yet fat enough and old enough to please him. When she was she would return.' Having been on the *Bellerophon* at the time of Napoleon's surrender, Captain Gambier could describe him to Lady Susan; he had 'manners to gain him both friends and admirers, a very engaging smile and often great civility;' he was 'very curious

and inquisitive about the people on the boats who had come to see him.' One of these was Lady Hipposley of Ston Easton; 'the boats round the ship were so thick and close that they covered the water; hers could not come any nearer; she stood up and stepped from one to another over forty or fifty boats to get near enough to see him well.....'! Gambier's description of Napoleon's companions are also of interest. He tells Lady Susan that Bertrand was 'an amiable man with a good figure and remarkably pleasing and gentlemanlike manners who had shown a steady and good character in remaining so long attached to his old Master in Misfortune.' Madame Bertrand was 'a very agreeable woman who spoke English very well being herself a Colonist...she is thought clever and was anything in the political way to be done on St. Helena would be very capable of conducting any intrigue that might be in contemplation....she continually tried to sift from the officers what is to be done with them.....'

So much did Lady Susan enjoy their company that the whole Gambier family sometimes stayed with her for several weeks. 'They are pleasant, cheerful, and good-humoured people' she writes, 'their children enlivened the house and seemed like a family about me. Their situation is so like my own when I lived at Winterslow [1771-1773 with her cousin Ste Fox] so poor so attached, so anxious to live and enjoy the friendship of richer relations all makes them to me very interesting people.' On 20 August 1820 she invited William Bankes to meet them and noted that 'the pleasure they had in meeting after being so much together in Greece and Italy was pleasing and amusing....'

Throughout 1820 she saw them constantly and when Dr England christened their children at Stinsford she stood proxy for their great aunt Mrs Lascelles Iremonger, and the vicar's widow, Mrs Floyer, stood proxy for another aunt. The eldest of these children, born 6 Jan 1819 was christened Adeline Jane Pitt, the Pitt being after her great aunt Margaret of Kingston Maurward, and the younger born 18 Jan 1820 was named Georgina Mary Floyer, after the vicar and his wife, a nice sign of appreciation of the kindness that the Gambiers had received at Stinsford. On the appointment of Mr Floyer's successor, Edward Murray, brother-in-law of Lord Ilchester, and when her house at West Stafford was ready for her, Mrs Floyer had to leave the vicarage. The Gambiers showed another sign of

appreciation by arranging for a model of her beloved vicarage to be made just as it was when she had lived in it before it was altered by the Murrays. 'A Swede who is singularly ingenious came from Weymouth to make it.' Lady Susan would like to have had one made of Stinsford; if she succeeded, and it miraculously exists, it might help to explain that architecturally extraordinary house.

Early in 1821 Captain Gambier was appointed to the Preventive service, the organization to prevent smuggling, and it was thought necessary that the family live in the vicinity of Bridport; they returned to visit Stinsford as often as they could but as Lady Susan wrote to her niece Eliza Fielding, 'The Captain's duty is so hard and constant that he can hardly ever be absent.' She felt very sorry for them, 'doing everything they can and yet so pinched; everything they feel I have felt except the office and even that to some degree as the office once given to O'Brien was one he neither could nor would execute but three children will not allow of giving it up detestable as it is.'⁹

Two years later the Gambiers were posted to Portugal. Lady Susan much regretted their departure for she had greatly enjoyed their company; she describes them at this time: 'A lively pleasant little woman devoted to her husband and children and he equally so to them – a more amiable, a more honourable young man can not be: I call him my grand son and have quite a grandma's attachment and regard for him. How glad I should be to be of any use to them but I have no Admiralty friends nor indeed any Treasury ones...' On 7 Feb 1824 the Gambiers' only son Charles Gore Gambier was born; his mother died tragically young in Malta three years later; Lady Susan O'Brien outlived her by six months dying on 9 August aged eighty-four. Captain Gambier had visited her only a few weeks before her death. In her will she left most of her estate to her younger brother Charles Redlynch Fox-Strangways as William O'Brien had wished, and small legacies to her servants. To Robert Gambier she left £100 'which in his present circumstances may be useful and acceptable to him.'¹⁰ He never married again but he must have made good arrangements for his children for they survived to late middle age. Like his distinguished forebears he became an Admiral and commanded the Mediterranean fleet.

In his retirement in London he became, like his younger brother Frederick, 'a warm supporter of the Irvingite hierarchy,'

and the Catholic Apostolic Church.¹¹ The avowed aim of Edward Irving, a charismatic preacher and a friend of Coleridge, was 'teaching imaginative men, and political men and scientific men who bear the world in hand, and he did not attempt to win their attention to abstract or worn out theological arguments but discussed the opinions, the poetry, the politics and the manners and the customs of the times.'¹² Both the Irvingite hierarchy and the Catholic Apostolic Church were complex and rich with symbolism. It is indicative of Captain Gambier's nature that he was drawn to such a community. He died in Onslow Square in 1872, aged eighty-one.

1 Sarah Heath (née Gambier), *The Story of the Gambier Family*, unpublished manuscript.

2 *Ibid.*, 23.

3 *Ibid.*, 21.

4 *Ibid.*, 29. Captain Frederick Marryat (author of *The Children of the New Forest*, *Masterman Ready* and many other classic novels) served under Lord Cochrane on the famous *Imperieuse*, successful in many a battle against the French. 'I never knew anyone so careful of the lives of his ship's company as Lord Cochrane,' he tells us, 'or anyone who calculated so closely the risks attending any expedition. Many of the most brilliant achievements were performed without the loss of a single life so well did he calculate the chances; and one half the merit of what he did accomplish has never been awarded him...' Florence Marryat. *Life and Letters of Captain Marryat*. Richard Bentley. 1872. Vol. I. p.28.

At a time where there was so much recrimination and accusation among senior naval officers this midshipman's view is surely significant.

5 Georgina, Lady Chatterton (ed), *Memorials Personal and Historical of Admiral Gambier* (Hurst & Blackett, 1861), II, 330. Morton Pitt to Lord Gambier. Georgina Chatterton was the only daughter of Mrs Lascelles Iremonger, the sister of Margaret Morton Pitt.

6 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, 245.

7 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, 340.

8 Heath, as above, 29.

9 Captain Marryat, a year younger than Robert Gambier joined the navy at the same time and wrote in 1822, a most interesting letter to the Admiralty on how to combat smuggling along the hundred miles of coast between Portsmouth and Start Point, of which Portland is the centre. In suggesting how to tackle this huge problem in which the men of Weymouth and Portland, and the farmers of the hinterland were particularly active, Marryat describes their methods in detail. It appears that the smugglers held all the cards and that to catch them was indeed difficult but according to Marryat the Preventive System could be much more effectively organized. Florence Marryat. *Life and Letters of Captain Marryat*. Richard Bentley. 1872. Vol. I. p.28.

10 Public Record Office, PROB 11/1732/605, Will of Lady Susan O'Brien.

11 Heath, as above, 41.

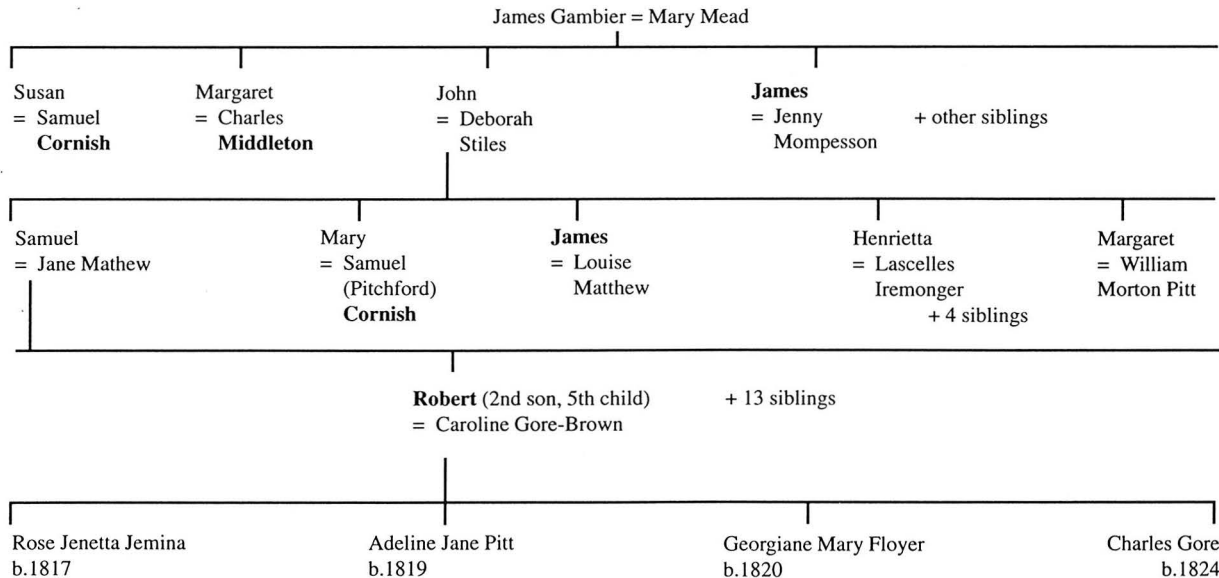
12 Edward Irving in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1911 ed.) Unsigned.

Unless otherwise stated, quotations are from British Library Mss 51360, Lady Susan's Journal.

I am most grateful to Major M. G. Gambier, the present historian of the Gambier family for help with family trees, and for lending me the unpublished *Story of the Gambier Family* by Sarah Heath.

SUSAN RANDS

OUTLINE FAMILY TREE SHOWING PEOPLE MENTIONED IN THE TEXT



bold = Admirals

36. AGNES COX AND HER DILEMMA. One entry in an estreat of c. 1600¹ opens a window on a human dilemma.

Agnes Cox 3 payre of Coopples, 30 rafters, syxe syde tymbers & one somer. *greatlie decayed*

Should sympathy be felt for Agnes Cox whose house was 'greatlie decayed' and who needed a considerable amount of timber for the repairs to her house? Was the decay of the house a case of wilful neglect or the force of circumstance?

From a series of rentals and surveys of Norton St. Philip it is possible to trace part of Agnes's life and the tenure of the house she was inhabiting in 1600.² A survey of Norton St. Philip made 17 Aug 1565 for Queen Elizabeth recorded that on 1 June 1553 a copyhold agreement had been made with John Cox, his wife and his son John for a tenement lying on the east side of South Street (the present High Street), with a garden and curtilage, one and half acres of pasture and two separate acres of arable land in Norton's North Field. The entry in the survey ended with 'On payment of rent annually 7s, the onus to repair to be the burden of them all.' The Coxes were one of only three sets of copyholders who had this requirement recorded in the survey.³ A rental made on 29 Mar 1571 recorded that the annual rent of 'John Cockes laborer' was 7s.⁴ A Parliamentary survey made in 1652 shows that a new copyhold agreement had been made for the Cox tenement in June 1590 for 'John Cockes, Agnes his wife & Flower Cockes their sonne'.⁵ By 1599 the 'rent role . . . dewe at Michaelmas' for the half year did not show the name John Cox but recorded that Agnes Cox paid 3s 6d.⁶ From a survey made by John Hercy (on behalf of King James on 10 Mar 1606) we find that the Cox tenement included a house of six bays, a barn of 3 bays, 2 acres 'in the common field in le Northfeeld' and one close of pasture, all for the annual rent of 7s.⁷

From these records we can deduce that Agnes had been made a widow at some time after 1590, and that the Cox house was in need of repair even as early as 1565. Agnes had married into a labouring family and since the death of her husband she must have had to fend for herself and her young son Flower.⁸ As Norton St. Philip was a cloth-producing town we might surmise that she earned some money from spinning, as most women did at that time.

Timber for building had always been a precious commodity, particularly in the manor of Norton St. Philip which had little woodland and the use, by manorial tenants, of what timber there was available was governed by the customs of the manor. In 1566 these 'auncient Customs of the Manor of Phillips Norton by the affirmacion of the whole homage' included:

Item the custome is that uppon presentment of any decaye of any Messuage or tenement in raynginge or great timber, the tenaunt ought to have timber assigned for the reparacion of the decayes by the Stewards, Surveyor or baylyf and rodes for watell and stone for walles.⁹

In other words Agnes could not obtain the necessary timber for the repairs to her house, not even from trees on her own land, without permission from the manorial officials.

The distinction between 'timber' and 'wood' was clear: timber was of large cross-sectional dimension and obtained from large trees specifically felled for the purpose of building, while wood was of smaller size obtained from hedgerows and coppiced stools and used for fuel, tools and, in the present context, the 'rodes' or rods for 'wattle and daub'. Further light is thrown on the use of timber and wood in Norton St. Philip in 1652 when the Parliamentary surveyors noted:

The Copie holders are to have Competent boots by Assignment & are nott to Fell Timber groweing uppon their landes without Licence.

and there is little wood uppon most of their Copie holdes over and above what will suffice for Bootes, some haveing none att all.¹⁰

The comments made that there was little wood on most of the copyholders lands over and above what was sufficient for 'bootes' or botes, and that some copyholders had none at all, put them in an unenviable position with regard to their manorial obligation for the repair and upkeep of their houses. Whilst they had the right to take firebote, cartbote, ploughbote etc., in practice there was little or no wood or timber for use as housebote. In 1606, at the time of John Hercy's survey, a list was made of timber and trees growing on the copyholders' land. The list showed that 'Agnesse Cox' had just '17 saplines' growing on her land, most probably in the hedges of her close of pasture,¹¹ but saplings were not of sufficient size to supply timber. We can see from the estreat of c.1600 that whilst some copyholders were allowed to use timber from their own land, Agnes was not included.

There is no record of whether Agnes obtained the necessary

timber for her repairs, or whether she might have had to pay for it. Times for Agnes were hard and in the 1590's prices had risen considerably, due in part to bad harvests. In another estreat of the following year Agnes was not only described as a widow but also as a pauper. At the manor court of Norton St. Philip, held on 15 April 1601, she and twelve other copyholders failed to attend the court and were fined 4d 'because they and every of them ar tennants to this Courte and have made defalte therefore they ar amersed as appeareth severally uppon their heads'. Agnes's fine of 4d was a relative trifle compared with what she experienced at the next court held on 5 October 1601. She had supplemented her income by under-letting and was arraigned:

because she hath taken in Thomas Hellier as an undertennant sithence the last Courte, and hath not put in security accordinge to the order made at the same Courte, therefore she hath forfeited the paine of 40s as aforesaid.

The taking in of under-tenants by copyholders was not allowed except by agreement by the homage at the twice-yearly court. Agnes had been warned at the previous court that if she persisted in under-letting she would have to pay a fine of 40s. This fine was duly imposed and represented nearly six years' rent for Agnes.

The houses on the east side of Norton's South Street were all built on plots which had been laid out with a uniform width of two perches, when the new planned town of Norton was established by the Carthusian monks, shortly after they had transferred their abbey to nearby Hinton Charterhouse in 1332. The 1606 survey described the house as having six bays and there is ample proof that the bays in a house did not necessarily mean all of them were in the main range of the house. Even if Agnes's house occupied the whole width of the plot it would seem likely that there would have been no more than three, or at the most, four bays. There is evidence that some of the medieval houses in Norton St. Philip were of cruck construction, implying the couples (or the principles of the roof-trusses) of Agnes's house might have been true crucks.¹³ With three pairs of 'cooples', 30 rafters, six side timbers and one 'somer' or bearing beam, or wall plate, being needed for essential repairs, the indications are that the whole of the roof and perhaps the weather-side of the house, which faced the street, were in need

of major repair. That was Agnes's dilemma.

John and Agnes Cox had taken the copyhold possession of a house in 1590, which even as early as 1565 was in need of repair. Existing on John's wage as a probable labourer (like his father before him) supplemented perhaps by earnings from spinning, major repairs to the house must have been put off from year to year until Agnes, in her widowhood, found it even more difficult to cope with replacing the decaying timbers. The presentment to the manorial court in 1600 of all the timber that Agnes would need for the repairs, perhaps drove her to take in Thomas Hellier as an under-tenant and landed her in deep financial trouble. Maybe it is not too fanciful to suggest that Agnes's house was the original one that had been built some two and a half centuries earlier and had not been well looked after.¹⁴ The decay that Agnes had to contend with was not her fault but that of previous tenants.

1. PRO LR 11/78/906B.
2. The Cox house can be identified from manorial surveys, the 1839 Tithe Map and Ordnance Survey maps as the forerunner of Grafton House, High Street, Norton St. Philip.
3. Cambridge University Library. Ee.3.32.
4. PRO SC 12/32/5.
5. Bodleian Library, Craven Manuscripts Volume 13. Agnes's son was called by the unusual Christian name of Flower after the surname of John Flower, the principal leaseholder in Norton St. Philip.
6. *Idem*.
7. *Ibid.* p. 181.
8. The age of Flower Cox was stated to be 50 in 1638 (SRO DD/RG 36) and 55 in 1652 (Bodleian Library, Craven Manuscripts Volume 13). The latter age cannot be correct since he was named as the third copyholder in the agreement dated June 1590. We must assume that Flower was born ca. 1588.
9. Cambridge University Library. Ee.3.32. The 'rayngeing', as distinct from the 'great timber', quoted in the ancient customs of 1566 was probably the intermediate timbers placed between the main timber frames of a house.
10. Bodleian Library, Craven Manuscripts Volume 13.
11. PRO LR 2/202 p. 165.
12. PRO LR 11/32/449.
13. E. H. D. Williams, Reports on houses in Norton St. Philip, 1974 – 1986. RCHME Swindon.
14. This suggestion puts the possible date for the original building of Agnes Cox's house before that of Cmdr. Williams who suggested 'a date of c.1500 for the earliest part of this complex building', *Ibid.* No. 6 High Street. April 1980.

COLIN BRETT

37. WAS THOMAS RACKETT GUILTY OF ABSENTEEISM? Twenty years after Rackett's death, William Shipp, the editor of the third edition of Hutchins' *History of Dorset*, wrote that the Reverend Thomas Rackett of Spetisbury had had some 'undeserved odium' attached to his reputation. It is unusual to find such a comment because Hutchins and his editors always strove to be most circumspect in their accounts of worthy individuals and leading families. Eccentricities that were not harmful to the reputation are sometimes mentioned, but there are no hints of past scandals or suggestions of shame. So, what was this 'odium', and why was it remembered so long after Rackett's death?

Thomas Rackett was extremely fortunate: the parishes of Spetisbury and Charlton Marshall provided him with one of the best church livings in Dorset. He received about £750 per annum and had, in addition, a splendid Rectory near the church with an extensive garden in which he delighted in growing many rare and exotic plants. He used his time and wealth wisely by following many scholarly pursuits and when he died in November 1840 it was widely acknowledged that he was a keen and well informed follower of science, an antiquarian of considerable distinction and a discerning collector of coins, seals and artefacts.

The 'odium' referred to by Shipp began in early November 1828, when Rackett received a letter from his newly appointed Bishop which said that 'there is great Complaint amongst your Parishioners... that you are never at home... your Curate lives at Blandford... there is no Church school in the Parish, and... many converts are made to the Nunnery & Catholic Chapel'. Somewhat ominously, the Bishop added that 'by your parochial return there was some doubt as to residence'. While Rackett must have been astonished to hear that there was such a complaint made against him, he sat down immediately to pen a lengthy reply to all the charges. Though his reply was courteous, as befitting a clergyman replying to his Bishop, the aggrieved tone and sense of indignation could not be disguised. 'Never at Home?': with the exception of a few days... I have not even dined out of my Rectorial house more than four times during the last six months'. Certainly, the Curate lived at Blandford but, clearly, the Bishop did not know how close Blandford was to Spetisbury so Rackett pointed out that Blandford was only a

mile and a half away from Charlton Marshall. The influence of the Catholic nuns was a minor problem and that was explained away by saying that it extended only to their servants and a few who, through employment, 'had been induced to join them'.

Comprehensive though it appeared to be, Rackett's reply lacked, perhaps, a certain candour. Blandford was close to the parish of Charlton Marshall but most parishioners had to travel to Spetisbury to attend services. Though he admitted the existence of the Catholic school, and a Meeting House where non-conformist children were taught, he dealt at too much length on the foundation of the school – by a previous incumbent, Dr. Soper – and did not detail the present work of the school except to say, somewhat obliquely, that fifty children in the parish learned their Catechism. He dismissed any account of non-residence by explaining that he rarely dined out. He admitted only one period of non-residence when he was 'detained' for a length period out of his parish 'owing to the illness of a part of my family... in Lincolnshire'.

The correspondence was probably not regarded as significant for there were many occasions when bishops dealt with matters of residence. This particular complaint was by a person upon whom the Bishop could 'not altogether... depend', so its pursuit was probably routine. Certainly nothing about the enquiry impressed itself upon the Bishop's mind because, when the matter again surfaced, four months later, he clearly had no recollection of it. When he took his seat in the House of Lords on Thursday, 19 March, 1829, as the Chamber debated the Catholic emancipation bill, he had no reason to remember one enquiry that he had made months earlier from the incumbent of Spetisbury. After presenting a petition from the clergymen of Gloucestershire – a quite routine matter – he ended with a general observation that he hoped the Chamber would continue to guarantee the security of the established church. He was followed by the Marquis of Lansdowne and he, to everyone's surprise, pointed out that security was better served by clergymen who took their duty of residence seriously. He went on to instance 'some highly culpable conduct' on the part of one clergyman in Dorset who had been resident in London for thirty years and in whose parish – Spetisbury – there was a flourishing Catholic nunnery occupied by Catholic ladies 'remarkable for their zeal'. Before sitting down, he added that

the parish was, he believed, in the diocese of the very bishop who had asked for security for the church.

The Bishop, politically inexperienced and new to the House of Lords, was taken by surprise and could only mumble a conciliatory reply in the most general terms. He stumbled over his words, admitting the greater part of his time was occupied in promoting the residence of clergymen in their livings. Had he countered the accusation with vigour and a forthright statement that no parish in his diocese lacked a resident clergyman, then the matter might not have had the same impact on the House. Instead, in a subdued and barely audible voice he gave a faltering reply and left the House with the impression that non-residence was endemic in his and every diocese. By that time the debate had roused and alerted everyone and, when the Earl of Guildford stood to complain that Lansdowne had made a most unfair and unjust attack upon the clergy in general founded upon a particular instance of neglect, Lansdowne – with the Chamber now hanging on his every word – coolly denied it. He added that had he intended to attack the church in general, then he would have done so, ‘even in the presence of so powerful an advocate of the clergy as the noble earl is’. The peers, now roused by this barbed exchange, openly showed their support for Lansdowne.

It was Rackett’s misfortune that this public example of non-residence had been raised in a parliamentary debate about a bill which was being closely followed by every leading newspaper. Whether Roman Catholics serving under a Protestant crown should enjoy the right to vote and become J.Ps and M.Ps was an issue bitterly opposed by many Englishmen. But in 1800, when Ireland united with Great Britain to create the ‘United Kingdom’, Parliament found itself responsible for seven million Irish people, the majority of whom were Roman Catholic. If the government refused to grant the same rights to Catholic subjects under the Crown, then civil war in Ireland was inevitable. Newspaper accounts should have reflected the excitement of the time but the bill, as it passed through the Lords, made poor reading, with lengthy petitions and querulous debating. Only when Lansdowne’s rapier thrust exposed the smugness of the established church and its failure to protect its parishioners against indifferent clerics and encroaching Catholicism, did the journalists have a focus of

interest. Newspaper readers would not be roused by solemn, and sometimes pompous, declarations of loyalty to the established church, but they would react with shock or savage glee to the news than an eminent peer of the realm had uncovered such a gross example of clerical neglect. On Friday, 20 March, 1829, every reader of *The Times* was offered the debate in full, together with a verbatim account of Lansdowne's speech and the bishop's reply.

Within days, other journalists took up the story and everyone knew about the clergyman who had been receiving a handsome income from his parish yet had neglected it for thirty years. While Rackett had not been named, his parish had and no one could fail to hear the news for it was carried in *The Times*, *Morning Herald* and *Courier*. Every reader, even those far removed from Dorset, relished the discomfiture of the non-resident clergyman, and every faithful church supporter in England would be outraged.

Within hours of the debate ending, the Bishop had written a letter to Rackett with clear instructions to reply to his questions by return of post. His language was direct and he wanted to know 'how far you are at present Resident there and what has been the Average Residence that you have maintained for the past three or four years'. At the same time that Rackett received that letter, he also received one from his old friend in London, Mr. Beltz of the Herald's College, giving him a brief account of the accusation and urging – with the words clearly underlined – to send a letter to his Bishop *from the Rectory House* to explain the real facts. He pointed out that, when Lansdowne made his accusation, the Bishop did not appear to be able to give any satisfactory explanation. In fact, the entire House was left in no doubt that they were hearing of a clergyman who neglected his clerical duties.

On Saturday, 21 March, immediately upon reading the newspaper accounts of the debate, Rackett sat at his desk and wrote a lengthy letter to his bishop. He had 'resided in my Rectorial house at Spetisbury every year during the last 40 years'; his Curate has 'always resided a mile and a half from my parish', and 'out of 108 families, only five are connected with the Convent'. Indeed, 'had the Marquis inquired from his most respectable friend, Mr. Oakden of More Crichel, his information would have been more accurate and his censure

less severe'. Rackett's letter appeared to answer every point made by the Marquis of Lansdowne. To the Bishop's credit, he acknowledged Rackett's letter immediately, accepted the accuracy of his answers, and was of the opinion that 'the Marquis greatly misrepresented your case'. But, if Rackett felt relieved after reading the Bishop's letter, perhaps it was tempered by the knowledge that his reply to the Bishop, though substantially correct, certainly glossed over some points. To tell the Bishop that he had resided in his Rectory every year was not to say that he had been in constant residence or that any stay in his Rectory had been prolonged. Significantly, despite the emphasis which had been placed on Catholicism, and knowing that every church parish experienced the steady growth of non-conformity, he gave no further details about the church school. Finally, though only a minor point, to say that his Curate lived only a mile and a half away was a slight exaggeration. On the face of it, Rackett's letter was a full reply to his Bishop, but a closer examination of it shows that he was being very careful in his choice of words.

Wisely, Rackett was not going to let the matter rest in the Bishop's hands. He lost no time in writing to his two oldest friends in London: Charles Hatchett, the scientist, and Dr. Maton, the physician, both of whom had accompanied Rackett on a tour of the west country when they were younger and who had corresponded, and occasionally met, ever since. To Hatchett he confided that he had asked an old friend to approach the Marquis and make clear 'the want of foundation ... of the charges so gravely and heavily brought against me'. That old friend was undoubtedly Dr. Maton who, as physician to the Royal Household, had the means of introducing himself to Lord Lansdowne. Maton, however, wrote back immediately with a request of the greatest urgency because he wanted certain answers before the debate resumed in the House on the following Monday. Significantly, he asked Rackett, 'have you not always pass'd *some* part of the year at your Rectory ever since you have had the Living?' He carefully underlined that word and it seems curious that he should frame the question in that way because it implied that he knew that Rackett spent a considerable part of each year out of his parish, so he wanted him to emphasise that, despite absences, he did put in an appearance. He did not reveal his reason for asking such a

question but it was possible that he was thinking of approaching the Bishop of Llandaff – whose family still had connections with Dorset – so that he could plead Rackett's case personally.

No one, other than Lansdowne himself, knew the identity of the informant. The Bishop had not been told and he was puzzled why Lansdowne had raised the matter in the House instead of approaching him personally. Unfortunately, that simply revealed the Bishop's inexperience as a politician. Perhaps Lansdowne knew that the complaint had been made to the Bishop some four months earlier and the informer was dissatisfied with the Bishop's reply, so now he had written to the Marquis of Lansdowne. Lansdowne could have handled the matter as a private one between him and the Bishop but, by raising the matter before the House, he was acting as a defender of Protestantism against the encroachment of Catholicism. The information laid against Rackett was the perfect vehicle for making this point. Although curiosity must have prompted many to enquire about the identity of the informant, Lansdowne refused to answer even, at one stage, from a direct question from the Bishop of Llandaff. Only once did Lansdowne refer to his informant and then only as 'a gentleman'. The first complaint to the Bishop was from someone upon whom he 'could not wholly rely'; the complaint to Lansdowne might well have been from a different informer. It is fully possible that the Bishop's reluctance to deal with the matter when it was first raised led directly to it being raised again by, perhaps, a more influential person.

If Rackett was to clear his name he needed more support in the House of Lords. His friends realised that and Beltz tried to enlist the help of the Duke of Hamilton, but all he would do was to listen to a reading of Rackett's letter to the Bishop and promise that he would consider it. In the event he chose to do nothing. Mrs. Rackett, incensed that her husband's reputation should be so besmirched, tried to gain the support of Lady Davis in Bath. She drafted a letter – which was signed 'A Friend to Justice' – which she intended to place in several different newspapers. She hoped that Lady Davis would be able to use her influence to persuade the editors to publish the letter. Written in suppressed fury, the letter was too strongly worded an attack on Lansdowne – now welcomed everywhere for his forthright stand against Catholicism – for any editor to consider it. She

accused him of making 'unfounded charges without due enquiry' and of 'false aspersions against a Protestant priest'. His charges were 'so base' that 'his own Character will... sink in the estimation of even his friends by such conduct as he has most unwarrantably pursued'. She also attempted to discredit the complainant by suggesting that the 'Malignant informer' might well be a Catholic. Lady Davis did not lend her support. Indeed, as the agitation of Rackett's family and friends increased and the correspondence grew, it became evident that no one outside that tight circle was prepared to support Rackett's cause.

The debate on the Catholic emancipation bill continued in the House of Lords on Monday, 30 March. Beltz, knowing how crucial the debate would be to his friend's reputation, was dismayed because he found that 'the Chamber... has never been so full'. Everyone was attending because they expected that the debate would, at some stage, become quite interesting. Dry petitions and pompous pronouncements by Churchmen had now been enlivened by a situation in which the Bishops were at bay. The House stirred with interest as the Marquis of Lansdowne rose to refer once more to the 'non-residence of the clergyman in question'. He wished to correct his earlier statement that the clergyman had been absent from his parish for thirty years. On further enquiry he had learned that the clergyman 'had been partially absent for 12 years, and for five years of that time – from 1823 to 1828 – had been wholly so'. He sat to a general murmur of approval and many shook their heads in disbelief that a clergyman could be so lax in his duties. He was followed by the Bishop of Bristol. This time, because he was better informed, he was able to give a more spirited response. The clergyman, he said, 'was the oldest incumbent in the diocese... and he was not absent more than the time allowed... without the leave of the Bishop... and at all times during his absence there was a resident Curate'. But Lansdowne was too shrewd a politician to let the matter rest there. As soon as the Bishop resumed his seat, he stood, surveyed the crowded chamber and bleakly added that, from the information that he had received, he felt sure that 'the non residence of the clergyman had been greater than it ought'. With the peers voicing their full support, Lansdowne passed on to present various petitions. The damage had been done and the Bishop was left in a deeply troubled state. What information did

Lansdowne possess which made him so sure of his ground?

Up to this time the Bishop had been prepared to accept Rackett's explanations and it was upon those that he had based his reply to the House. Now, however, with Lansdowne still not prepared to withdraw his accusation, the Bishop began to suspect that the answers from Spetisbury may not have been the full truth. Lansdowne's source seemed to be someone who was remarkably well informed about the affairs of the parish. Immediately after the debate he sat at his desk and wrote a firm letter to Rackett. What was the extent of his non-residence? How could he, for example, describe himself as resident in 1826 and 1827 when, by his own admission in his letter of 22 March, he said that he had been absent from his parish for eight months? Rackett's reply to the Bishop was not preserved among his papers so we do not know what he said but, from the ensuing correspondence, it is clear that the Bishop was still not satisfied because, in Rackett's next letter, he pleaded that 'I have never intended any prevarication'. He went on to say that 'I have been resident on an average of upwards of 7 months in each year'. Even in this reply, after being accused of prevarication, Rackett squirmed away from a direct answer about his residence and concentrated instead on explaining his position by calculating averages.

In all this correspondence, it is surprising that the Bishop became personally involved at such an early stage because the routine administration of the county was the responsibility of the Archdeacon. Bristol by itself was too small to survive as a separate diocese so Dorset was transferred from Sarum to Bristol and this arrangement continued until 1836. This distance between Bristol and Dorset made the See difficult to supervise and so the church administration of the county was largely handled by the Archdeacon and the church court at Blandford. At this time the Archdeacon was Dr. William England, Rector of West Stafford but, surprisingly, there was no correspondence between Dr. England and Thomas Rackett. Perhaps the newly appointed Bishop, Robert Gray, felt that he had to involve himself personally in the affairs of the diocese otherwise he might never have the opportunity of impressing the Archbishop and being appointed to a more lucrative and influential position. Having few endowments, the diocese of Bristol was one of the poorest in England so most bishops regarded it as no more than

a stepping stone on the way to something more rewarding. Gray's predecessor, John Kaye, had remained there for seven years before his translation to Lincoln. John Luxmoore stayed only one year before moving to Hereford and George Pelham four years before Exeter. Gray, the present holder of the office, had to prove his worth as an administrator if he was to receive a wealthier appointment and that, perhaps, motivated him to become involved from the beginning.

Was it possible that Rackett did spend a great deal of his time in London? Travelling from Spetisbury to London would not have been difficult: a coach from Blandford went daily to Salisbury and from there the stage coaches regularly ran to London. From his correspondence we know that many of his letters originated in London and that friends frequently wrote to his London addresses. He sent letters from Otterden Place, Upper Gower Street and Bedford Square and, for many years, he owned a house in King Street. London would prove a great attraction for a man of his interests because he would meet scholars and scientists with whom he corresponded and where, as a member, he was able to attend lectures at the Linnaean and Royal Society.

It would not have been difficult for Rackett to spend some time away from his parish. The Church did not make excessive demands upon the incumbents: Holy Communion had to be held three times each year and although the holding of regular Sunday services was encouraged, it was known that in many parishes the services were infrequent, with gaps of several weeks between. Most incumbents relied upon curates to conduct services and other church ceremonies and only occasionally officiated themselves. According to the parish registers, which cover all ceremonies in which the officiating minister had to sign his name, from 1780 to 1837 Rackett was responsible for 28% of the christenings and almost 30% of all marriages and the reading of banns. While that is to be expected, what is surprising – and suspicious – are the lengthy and continuous periods when his signature does not appear. Discounting 1837 to 1840 when he suffered a 'paralytic stroke', in the fifty-seven years prior to that his name is absent from the registers for fifteen of those years. During those years when his name does appear, there are still long and continuous gaps of anything up to ten and eleven months in any one year. In fact, in one of

Rackett's letters to the Bishop, he grudgingly replied to a specific request for details of non-residence by saying that in 1826 he was absent for seven months and in 1827 for eight months. A glance at the parish registers for those dates confirms that his name was not recorded as officiating in any service or ceremony for approximately that length of time. If we assume that the absence of his signature means that he was absent from the parish, then he was away from Spetisbury for considerable periods of time; seven consecutive months in 1824, ten in 1823, eight in 1822, eleven in 1821 and so on. Without detailing every period of absence we may note that his name does not appear once on the registers between 1805 and 1810 and, in 1811, his name is not seen for ten consecutive months. If his prolonged absences are to be explained as periods when he visited London, then we must conclude that the complaints laid against him, although perhaps inaccurate in some details, were justified.

The identity of the complainants was never revealed; the Bishop did not name the parishioner, nor did the Marquis name the gentleman. Despite the best efforts of his friends, only one suggested that he had some idea who the complainant was. In April 1829, John Knowles wrote from London to say that 'I think I can trace the Marquis' informant', but presumably he failed because there was no further correspondence on that point. Rackett's daughter, Dorothea, could not understand her father's unwillingness to do everything he could to uncover the informers. Four months after the debate, she wrote to her grandparents that her father should write to the Bishop and demand a name. A month later – clearly having raised the matter with her father, and finding no response – she wrote again saying 'I still think it wrong of Papa not to have demanded his name'. There are many possible explanations why Thomas Rackett did not make any attempt to discover the name of the parishioner. It was possible that he had already guessed his name. To reveal the name publicly would have been to divide his parishioners and destroy what harmony existed within his parishes. Another explanation, of course, may be that Rackett knew that the complaints were justified and that the wisest course would be to let the matter rest.

Correspondence upon which this article is based may be found in the Dorset Record Office, under D/RAC, Bundles 66, 81, 85 & 113.

GLANVILLE J. DAVIES

38. SEATING FOR METHODISTS IN ST. PETER'S CHURCH FRESHFORD IN 1798. Within the earliest extant churchwardens' account book of St. Peter, Freshford, Somerset for the years 1778-1832 is a detailed seating plan of the church. The plan is embellished with a caption, 'The Ground Plan of Freshford Church with the Right of Seats therein as settled by a Vestry held for such purposes in the year of our Lord 1798. John Joyce & Thomas Joyce Churchwardens.'¹

The arrangement of the seating on this ground floor plan is quite predictable in relation to the socio-economic hierarchy of the village at that time. The residents of the major houses have pews at the front of the nave and further back are pews for their servants as well as for tenants of smaller houses. Exactly parallel to the nave is a wider north aisle (spelt 'Isle') with 18 more pews. A gallery ran along the side of the aisle with access from an external staircase. A further, gallery across the back of both north aisle and nave, held more residents as well as the singers. The pew in the distant north west corner of the north aisle (number one) was allocated as follows, 'This belongs to Shaston Meeting House.'

Shaston Meeting House was the name given to the newly opened Methodist Chapel in the hamlet of Sharpstone in Freshford, sometimes abbreviated to Shaston. John Wesley had opened this chapel on 15 Mar. 1782 as he described in his Journal 'I opened the new house at Freshford'; he had visited Freshford on six previous occasions from 1764 to this final visit in 1782.² Prior to the opening of the New House meetings took place in a converted cottage which was described in the land tax assessment of 1766 as 'ye Methodiss House'. Relationships between the parish church and the Methodists were not entirely cordial as demonstrated by John Wesley's remarkable Journal entry for 25 Sept 1767.

'I was desired to preach at Freshford, but the people durst not come to the house, because of the smallpox, of which Joseph Allen, an Israelite indeed, had died the day before. So they placed a table near the churchyard. But I had no sooner begun to speak than the bells began to ring, by the procurement of a neighbouring gentleman. However, it was labour lost, for my voice prevailed, and the people heard me distinctly. Nay, a person extremely deaf, who had been unable to hear a sermon for several years, told his neighbours with great joy, That he had heard and understood all, from the beginning to end.'³

Has the allocation of a pew in a parish church for the local

Methodist worshippers been recorded in other parishes? It certainly reflects John Wesley's intention of seeing his religious movement as remaining part of the Church of England. He was to the end of his days a member of the established church, but after his death in 1791 moves toward a separation soon occurred. The Plan of Pacification of 1795 allowed the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to be administered in any chapel if 'a majority of the trustees of that chapel and of the stewards and leaders belonging to that chapel allow it'. There was a proviso, however that 'nevertheless, it shall never be administered on those Sundays on which it is administered in the parish Church'.⁴

It is likely therefore that the Freshford Shaston Meeting House had by 1798 not accepted the Plan of Pacification, and retained a pew in the parish church for attendance for the three or four times yearly celebration of Holy Communion. A later, but less detailed seating plan of around 1830 gives no allocation to the Methodist Chapel and pew number one is allocated to 'Mrs Taylor's Servants'.⁵

There are two postscripts to this brief history which both demonstrate the mobility of village property. Firstly, when the wainscot around Freshford Post Office was being refurbished in the early 1990s, the removal of paint revealed a number of small labels including 'Mrs Taylor five sittings'; the wainscot had clearly been constructed from the former pews of Freshford Parish church. Secondly, after the closure of the Methodist Church in 1995, and prior to its recent conversion into a house, two wall memorials were removed for preservation. One of these had been previously removed from the Primitive Methodist Chapel in the village which closed in 1937. Permission was granted to re-erect these memorials within the parish church, and on Sunday 20 Jan 2002 a service of rededication took place in St Peter's Church, Freshford conducted by the rector, and with a sermon preached by the local Methodist minister.

1. S.R.O. D/P/fresh 4/1/1.

2. E. Rhys (ed.) *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley A.M.* J.M. Dent & Co, (London, 1906).

3. *Ibid.*

4. H. Bettenson and C. Maunder (eds.) *Documents of the Christian Church*, 3rd edn, (Oxford University Press, 1999).

5. S.R.O. D/P/ fresh 4/1/1.

38. SEASIDE MESMERISM: SERIOUS AND ENTERTAINING. Mesmerism was seen by a small number of 19th-century doctors as offering powerful therapeutic possibilities but, by most, it was considered a medical heresy. The mesmerist appeared able to influence the consciousness and behaviour of his subject by an effort of will, expressed by gaze and gesture, without necessarily any physical contact. This was clearly intriguing, and the serious minded saw it as a tool with which to probe the workings of the human mind. And later, for the less serious minded, mesmerism provided a source of cheap public entertainment. In the seaside resort of Weston-super-Mare, mesmerism was seen in all these guises.

The early Weston newspapers reflect a local interest in mesmerism. During the second half of 1845, nearly every issue of the *Westonian* carried a lengthy letter discussing mesmerism. Mesmerism was also demonstrated by many itinerant lecturers and 'performers' who visited resorts such as Weston, providing both instruction and entertainment.¹ By analogy with the intangible forces of magnetism and electricity, they sometimes referred to mesmerism as 'Animal Magnetism' or 'Electro-Biology'. Phrenology was also mentioned frequently, but is a subject that deserves separate consideration.

In the summer of 1846, E.T. Hicks who had been lecturing in Bristol, came to Weston to talk on mesmerism and phrenology. Little is reported of what he said but the *Westonian* concluded that he had 'fully succeeded ... in arousing attention and inquiry into this very mysterious practice'.² Two years later, the experienced William Davey and Somerset-born John Williams Jackson, were together on a tour of Devon and Somerset. They visited Burnham and Clevedon, and gave five lecture-demonstrations on mesmerism and phrenology at Weston Town Hall. Their first subject was a young woman from Newton Abbott, born deaf and dumb, who had 'to some extent obtained the use of speech by the agency of mesmerism'. Then a lad from Carlton Street in Weston 'was fixed immovably to the floor though in a waking state'. Their audiences were described as 'numerous and respectable', one lecture being attended by the lord of the manor, John Hugh Smyth Pigott, and his family.³

The medical aspects of mesmerism and its therapeutic use in nervous diseases were discussed by Henry Storer, M.D., during the summer of 1850 at the Town Hall in Weston.⁴ He presided

over the Bristol Mesmeric Institute in Park Street, Bristol, which had been founded in 1848 and had the controversial John Elliotson, F.R.S., as a nominal consulting physician. The *Gazette* reported large and highly respectable audiences for his lectures, including J.H. Smyth Pigott and Francis Hutchinson Synge as well as three medical men. Storer's first subject was shown to obey commands after waking which had been given to him while in the mesmeric state. Next he mesmerised a 13-year-old girl who had been blinded by lightning and cured by mesmerism, and claimed to demonstrate clairvoyance by her ability to read writing while her eyes were covered. Storer had promised to mesmerise members of the audience but ran out of time, because of the 'generally late attendance of the audience (a frequent fault in Weston)'. 'Some uncourteous remarks resulted', so Storer attempted to mesmerise six of them, with success in three - which seems to have satisfied the audience.

Weston was next visited by W. John Vernon, a well known lecturer-performer who had been involved with Chartism and had been imprisoned for sedition two years earlier.⁵ Even so, he attracted prominent individuals to his lectures in which he argued for mesmerism as a useful curative agent. It was accepted by the French Academy of Medicine, but lacked support in Britain because 'Medical men of course have no personal interest in advancing it'. Vernon had brought with him the 'Parisian somnambulist', Adolphe, and the most dramatic part of his demonstration was of apparent clairvoyance by this subject when mesmerised. On the first occasion, F.H. Synge and the surgeon, William Jones, came onto the platform. Synge blindfolded Adolphe to everyone's satisfaction and then proceeded to play cards with him. Adolphe appeared able to tell what cards were held by Synge even if he kept them under the table, to which Synge's reported comment was "Well, this is extraordinary". On other occasions those reportedly convinced by Adolphe's ability included F.W. Burroughs, a local solicitor, T.T. Knyfton of Uphill, Revd. J. Rowley and, again, F.H. Synge.

In 1851 and 1852, Storer returned to lecture on Electro-Biology and Mesmerism, again stressing the medical aspects and offering personal consultations for its application in nervous disease. His demonstrations were on children from Weston schools who held metal discs while Storer made various 'mesmeric passes'.⁶ E.T. Hicks also returned in 1852,

emphasising the possible electrical component in animal magnetism and demonstrating new procedures which he attributed to Dr Braid of Manchester (who also introduced the now familiar name of 'hypnotism' for the mesmeric phenomenon). Hicks explained that his powers were due to the electricity that pervaded all vital organisms, its flow being governed by the operator 'because of the resoluteness of his will'.⁷ Samuel D. Saunders, of Clifton, also visited Weston in 1852, not to lecture but to apply mesmerism therapeutically, though apparently on a small scale. He was not medically qualified, but announced that he was to spend a fortnight in the town seeing his patients who were there. He was also willing to take on a further two patients and might be consulted on conditions such as rheumatism, insanity, neuralgia, nervous debility, affections of the chest, tic doloieux and paralysis.⁸

Attending mesmeric performances was socially acceptable and not even taboo to the medical profession, but there were some who were concerned about its spiritual implications. A writer to the *Weston Gazette* in 1845 questioned 'whether it is lawful for a baptised man or woman thus to surrender his will to the will of another: and, further, I more than question the quarter from which this supernatural agency proceeds.' Charles Pooley, the Weston surgeon, had similar misgivings and published a pamphlet entitled *A Word on Mesmerism*. He conceded that mesmerism was 'an indisputable fact', but asked 'is it not trifling with a sacred trust to yield up our consciousness to the will of another?'⁹

Earlier lecturers attempted to deal seriously with their subject but, in the second half of the century, the demonstrations of the visiting performers tended increasingly towards pure entertainment. When 'Professor' Whitfield lectured on Electro-Biology at the Assembly Rooms in 1860 for example, the audience was 'delighted and surprised' by his powers, and there were 'shouts of laughter'. Subjects were 'made to exhibit, in excellent pantomime, their various trades and handicrafts', and one drank a glass of vinegar and water 'as if it were the choicest nectar'. Whitfield's popularity was evident when he brought a prosecution for assault against a member of his audience at Yeovil. The mesmerist had induced a young man to believe that a lawyer in the audience was a young woman with whom the mesmerised subject was deeply in love. The lawyer was so

annoyed that he assaulted Whitfield who brought a case against his assailant, presumably as a useful chance of publicity. When Whitfield won the case, a cheering mob pulled his carriage to the station without the aid of horses.¹⁰

In 1868, 'Professor' Stone, the 'American Electro-Biologist', gave 'entertainments' at the Assembly Rooms, described as 'Grand Fashionable Biological Sceances'. Similar performances were offered by Colvil Dyke in 1881, his 'extraordinary and laughter-provoking experiments' being reported under the title of 'Mesmeric Entertainment'. After initial success, Dyke had problems with the rowdier elements sitting in 'the Gods', and cancelled his final performance. And near the end of the century, Mr and Mrs Victor André performed at the Assembly Rooms during Whit week. They offered a 'Drawing-Room Entertainment of Refinement coupled with Artistic Ability, Science and Skill, providing Startling Revelations and Mesmeric Dream-Visions by Hypnotic Clairvoyance'.¹¹

Not all visitors were so intent on provoking laughter, and when a Mr Hume lectured - apparently more seriously - at Weston in 1872, Revd. Kilvert and his mother attended the lecture. He describes a typical mesmeric performance in which young men and lads, 'all apparently of the shopkeeper class', were mesmerised and made to perform various antics. Kilvert gives what seems to be a factual account of events which he accepts as genuine, and makes no comment on any spiritual or medical implications of mesmerism; but the next evening Kilvert preferred to visit Trinity Church to hear Mr Hunt preach.¹²

In greater contrast to the entertainers was the serious-minded Thomas Capern who was not medically qualified but practised curative mesmerism. He had been the superintendent of the Mesmeric Infirmary in London but, in 1861, he returned to the West Country and settled in Weston, living in Park Place from about 1864 until he died in 1876. In 1870 he published *Mesmeric Facts*, a curious jumble of case reports, testimonials, passages from newspapers and letters, in which he supplemented previous accounts in local newspapers, and gave detailed information about 32 patients he had treated in Weston. They included an omnibus conductor, a mason, a boatman, a fisherman and a cook, as well as two gardeners; but the patients' addresses covered both richer and poorer roads in the town, and two patients were members of a clergyman's family. The family's

cook was also a patient but, until finally surrendering because of the severity of her 'acute neuralgic pain in the head', she had strenuously objected to being treated by Capern because of the 'by no means unusual, but absurd, prejudice existing against mesmerism'. Needless to say, she was completely cured. Eight patients were visitors, six of whom were female; but they were not necessarily well-to-do. One woman came to Weston in the hope of a cure, but her husband ran out of money to keep her there.¹³

Capern claimed success in treating sufferers from skeletal pain due to conditions such as rheumatisms, sciatica or to injuries, but his contribution to the total medical care in Weston was, of course, small: it is suggested in *Mesmeric Facts* that he had cured 'upward of 50 patients' in one particular year. There was no one to carry on his practice when he died, but 18 years later, H Powell, who had been Capern's neighbour in Grove Place, wrote to the *Weston Mercury* saying that for 20 years he had been practising curative mesmerism 'privately'. He challenged the doctors to examine his results but apparently received no response. Mesmerism had lost its appeal to the medical profession.¹⁴

1. See, Terry M. Parssinen, 'Mesmeric performers', *Victorian Studies*, 1977, 21:87-104.
2. Brief reports in *Westonian*, 18 July, 1 Aug 1846.
3. Reports in the *Weston-super-Mare Gazette* (hereafter WG), 1 and 18 July 1848; *Brown's Weston Visitor*, 24 June, 10 and 24 July, 5 Aug 1848. For information about Jackson and Davey (and for many other aspects of mesmerism and of phrenology), see Roger Cooter, *Phrenology in the British Isles*, London, Scarecrow Press, 1989.
4. 'Lectures on Mesmerism, by Dr Storer, Bristol'. WG, 29 Jul 1850. For Storer, see also, P.S. Brown, 'Mesmerism, galvanism and quackery', *Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Journal*, 1983, xx:: 61-64; and H. Storer, *Mesmerism in Disease*, 2nd edn., London, Bailliere, 1845.
5. 'Mesmerism and Clairvoyance', WG, 21 Sep 1850. 'Mr W.J. Vernon', *Reynold's Political Instructor*, Vol 1, no.12, 26 Jan 1850, pp.89-90.
6. Announcements and reports of Storer's lecture, WG, 16 and 30 Aug 1851; 18 Sep, 2 Oct 1852.
7. Announcements & reports of Hicks' lectures, WG, 2 and 16 Oct 1852.
8. 'Medical Mesmerism', WG, 10 July 1852. For information on Saunders, see Brown, *op cit* note 4 above; and S.D. Saunders, *The Mesmeric Guide*, London, Bailliere, 1852.
9. Correspondence, WG, 14 Jun 1845; *Westonian*, July 1845. 'Religious Views on Mesmerism', WG, 13 Sep 1851. Charles Pooley, *A word on mesmerism*, London, Simpkin, Marshall & Co, nd.
10. Reports of Whitworth's lectures and 'Whitworth vs Downe', *Weston-super-Mare Chronicle*, 13 Sep, 4 and 11 Oct, 9 Nov 1860. *Weston-super-Mare Mercury* (hereafter WM) 6, 13 and 27 Oct 1860.
11. Adverts and reports, WG, 23 and 30 May, 6 Jun 1868. Adverts, WG, 8 Jan 1881: and WM, 23 May 1896. 'Mesmeric Entertainment', WM, 15 Jan 1881.
12. *Kilvert's Diary*, 1870-1879, ed William Plomer, London, Jonathon Cape, 1944, pp.197-199, entry for 3 Sep 1872.
13. Thomas Capern, *Mesmeric facts*, Weston-super-Mare, the author, 1870 (copy in Bristol

Central Library, Green Collection 6849). See also his *The mighty curative power of mesmerism*, London, Bailliere, 1851. His death is noticed in *WG*, 18 Nov 1876. For reports of cases, see 'Human Magnetism', *WM*, 21 Nov 1863; Correspondence, *WM*, 2 Jan 1869 and *WG*, 7 Mar 1874.

14. Correspondence, *WM*, 3 Feb 1894.

P. S. BROWN
DOROTHY N. BROWN

BOOK REVIEWS

Dodge, Dr. A., *Freshford: the history of a Somerset village* (Freshford Publications, 2000, 280pp., illus., £10.00 or £12.00 by post from Freshford Publications, Quince Tree House, Freshford, Bath, BA2 7UH). This volume is arranged chronologically and as such the author has encompassed a great deal of information and assembled it in an easy to read fashion. Almost every aspect of Freshford's history has been covered from the earliest settlements, through the establishment of Woodwick, the Civil War, industrialisation and of course the 20th century. Amongst the many topics covered are those which inevitably are of interest to readers with interests in this corner of Somerset, including the early association with Bath, cloth production, bridge building and the influence the local magnates such as John Ashe had in neighbouring parishes. Dr. Dodge lets the reader into his unique knowledge of Freshford that he has accumulated over the last 35 years and he has clearly spread his net far and wide looking for material.

The particular strength of this volume can be found in the history of the 18th to 20th centuries, especially in the utilization of many private, and hitherto unpublished, papers and illustrations. Over two thirds of the book are devoted to this period which makes it of great value to social historians interested in the minutiae that Dr. Dodge has ably brought into print. With so much information crammed into this book the price of £10.00 makes it excellent value for money.

A. J. W.

Francis Austen and Bernard Jones, *The Language and Craft of William Barnes, English Poet and Philologist* (1801-1886) (Published by The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd., Lampeter, Ceredigion, Wales SA48 8LT, pp 267, £16.95p)

As long ago as 1959, in the *Dorset Yearbook*, Dr. Bernard

Jones made an appeal for information about the Dorset Poet, William Barnes, to the 'dwindling band' of those who had known him. In the forty-two years since then, Bernard Jones has continued to promote the work of Barnes in his teaching and writing. Perhaps, the greatest of his achievements in this time is his *Collected Poems* of Barnes, issued in two volumes by the Centaur Press of Southern Illinois in 1962, which remains the only 'complete' edition. Such a single-minded dedication to the work of one writer can have few rivals.

Bernard Jones and his wife, Frances Austin, have now brought out this linguistic study of Barnes's work. It comprises a brief life of the poet, chapters on the juvenilia and the Dorset Eclogues; a section on the technical features of the poet's language, prosody and figurative devices; another on what the author calls 'modes', together with a consideration of the poems in Standard English. To my knowledge, this is the first extended treatment of the language of Barnes's poems. The book, however, is not suited as an introduction to the poet for the layman or the tourist idly browsing in a Dorset bookshop. It is a scholar's book intended for scholars.

Unlike most dialect poets, Barnes was no mere homespun versifier, offering us the artless expression of an untutored mind. On the contrary, he was a scholar and a linguist, who read over seventy languages and brought his knowledge of their literatures to the shaping of his dialect poems. Thus his early Dorset Eclogues, such as *Father Come Home*, was modelled upon Virgil; he also translated Petrarch and fashioned poems along the lines of ancient Persian or Welsh measures. So artful was his patterning of the dialect that the acerbic critic Geoffrey Grigson argued that his writing was a 'learned perversity' and not 'spontaneous art' at all.

Curiously, in a whole book devoted to Barnes's poetic technique, Austin and Jones do not get involved in this major critical debate. Rather, they are concerned to provide a minute examination of the crafting of many of the five hundred or so dialect poems, patiently going through them and pointing out their linguistic features.

One complaint. The index does not list the poems. A reader searching for the authors' comments on a particular poem is obliged to look through the entire book to find them.

ALAN CHEDZOY

Richard Burleigh (*ed*), *William Barnes of Dorset*. (Published by the William Barnes Society, 2002, pp. 76, illus £3 from Dorset County Museum or local bookshops.) Available also from William Barnes Society, c/o Alberta Cottage, Higher Sea Lane, Charmouth, Bridport DT6 6BB, at £4. The William Barnes Society has produced this excellent little book in celebration of the bicentenary of one of Dorset's most remarkable men. Barnes was born in 1801, and the short articles contained in this issue celebrate his life as a scholar with a wide command of languages, an engraver whose skill is shown for the reader in a number of reproductions of his work, and a poet who wrote in the Dorset dialect. Andrew Motion, the Poet Laureate, in his Preface (surely 'Fore-say'), touches upon the different views of rural life given by Hardy and Barnes, and that is taken up by Alan Chedzoy in an article which makes some useful and penetrating observations. Douglas Ashdown gives the reader a succinct and well informed account of Barnes's life, and Laurence Keen reminds us that Barnes was an accomplished engraver who once toyed with the idea of setting up his own engraving business. Other contributors add further to our knowledge of Barnes's education in Dorset, his portrait, and his dealings with his publishers. Several poems written by William Barnes are reproduced, and a delightful poem by Alan Chedzoy, dedicated to Barnes, completes what must be one of the most attractive, well produced, scholarly, yet entertaining works which any reader could wish for.

G. J. D.

G. Stevens Cox (*ed*), *The Thomas Hardy Year Book*, numbers 32 (£9, 32 pp. illus), & 33 (£7.50, 60 pp. illus) available post free from the editor, White Cottage, rue de Carteret, Castel, Guernsey GY5 7YG. B. Jones (*ed*), *Fifty-seven Poems by Thomas Hardy*, limited print of 250 copies, available from the editor, Meldon House, The Red House, East Stour, Gillingham SP8 5JY.

For seventy years Frederick B. Adams collected books and manuscripts relating to Thomas Hardy. He was a discerning scholar-collector, and the material he amassed so carefully was sold at auction in November 2001. The items offered for sale have been carefully listed in volume 32, together with extensive

quotations and useful commentaries. There has been some painstaking research involved in this yearbook, and it is a valuable addition to the scholarship of Hardy's work. The items came from Hardy's private papers, his library, and his own publications. It is difficult to single out particular items of interest, for there are so many, but perhaps one might pause at *The Boys' Own Book* which fetched £2,800, but was a copy for which Hardy saved his pennies when he was twelve years old! One might also single out the *Oxford Book of English Verse* which so disappointed Hardy, or the correspondence surrounding the barrage of criticism after the publication of *Jude the Obscure*.

Volume 33, *Thomas Hardy auf Deutsch*, contains five contributions on Thomas Hardy, including an interesting one from Brigitte Brauch-Velhorn on 'The reception of Thomas Hardy in Germany'. Although most of Hardy's prose has been translated, incredibly, only about thirty poems, and of those only about a dozen have been published. A. Radford analyses Hardy's third, and much neglected novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, and he makes a strong argument for seeing more merit in this novel than critics have hitherto acknowledged. Knight, the central character, may have been based – rather unflatteringly – upon Horace Moule, son of the Rector of Fordington; and Hardy's knowledge of geology upon Mantell's *Wonders of Geology* which he had received as a gift. Hardy's poem 'During Wind and Rain' which many, including Hardy himself, considered the best he had ever written, is dealt with in Trevor Johnson's contribution.

In *Fifty-seven Poems by Thomas Hardy*, Professor Bernard Jones has reproduced poems that were first published in three books between 1911 and 1915 under the name Florence Emily Dugdale. She married Hardy in 1914, and the poems, all based on animals, were written for children. The short introduction makes a convincing case for attributing the poems to Thomas Hardy. Professor Jones is not the first to see the hand of Hardy in these poems, and he mentions some of the writers who have already argued the case for including some under Hardy's name. Given that Hardy had assisted other authors to the point of 'ghosting' their work, and that the style of many of the poems seems remarkably that of Thomas Hardy, one can only wonder why it has taken so long for scholars to recognize that these

poems are his, despite the claim to authorship of his wife. It is to be hoped that a slender volume of this kind, with a 'run' of so few copies, will not be ignored in the wider field of Hardy scholarship.

G. J. D.

NOTES

A NOTE ON DORSET ER FOR 'HE'. Some twenty years ago, John Eastwood published an unsentimental, but vivid and evocative account of his life as a working man in a remote Dorset agricultural and fishing community in the late 1940s and the 1950s, before the advent of electricity and piped water. Everything is authentic here, including his renderings of Dorset dialect, though some of his comments on the subject do not stand scrutiny. There is for instance his intimation that, as Dorset *er* and German *er* for 'he' happen to look the same, there must be some close and ancient relationship between the two forms.¹ There is not.

The confusion arises from the so-called rhoticity of westcountry speech. This means that, unlike in RP, *r* is generally pronounced where it is written, even in postvocalic positions, as in *beer* and *barn*. Sometimes, indeed, we even find *r* where it is not written and there is no apparent historical justification for its presence. This 'unhistorical' *r* can for instance occur in unstressed syllables containing a neutral vowel. Thus *china* and *banana* will often be pronounced with an audible *r* at the end, irrespective of whether the next word in the sentence begins with a vowel or consonant. This phenomenon has been dubbed 'hyper-rhoticity'.² If *rhoticity* means 'pronunciation of *r* wherever it is retained in conventional spelling', *hyper-rhoticity* means putting an *r* at the end of unstressed syllables where conventional spelling merely shows a vowel'.

The next point in our argument is that westcountry unstressed *he* can sound like the unstressed *a* in 'a boy'. To avoid confusion, and to indicate the relationship with *he*, some authors write '*a*', in which the apostrophe suggests the 'loss' of initial *h*. Thus Thomas Hardy writes: 'A do look at me as if 'a could see my thoughts running round like the works of a clock.' Note incidentally that his spelling *a'*, with the apostrophe following the vowel, indicates a form of the indefinite article

corresponding to standard *an*, but in which the *n* has been 'lost'. Compare his use of *a'* and *'a* in one and the same sentence: 'I knowed a' auctioneering feller once – a very friendly feller *'a* was too.'³

Having established that *he* can occur as *a* alias *'a* in Dorset, we also note that it can be subject to hyper-rhoticity as explained above. In other words, it will behave like the final syllable of *china* or *banana*, which it resembles in pronunciation, and will hence on occasion also resemble it in adopting *r*-colouring, even though conventional spelling provides no apparent historical justification for this.⁴ Thus Hardy makes Tess say, 'Why did *'er*?' for 'Why did he?', while John Eastwood writes '*er* is' and '*idden er*?' for 'he is' and 'isn't he?'.⁵

Sometimes this *'er* alias *er* is written with initial *h*, which helps to maintain the link with *he*. In effect, though, the resulting spelling contains the seeds of confusion. This is illustrated by the following rendering of a nineteenth-century utterance, which might appear to anticipate the feminism of a later epoch: 'The Lord hav' been good to I, han' her?'⁶ Whatever the theological implications, if any, the linguistic circumstances in neighbouring counties were as much as in Dorset.⁷ Thus even quite recently we find in Wiltshire 'Do *'er*?' for 'Does he' and 'Idn' *'er*?' for 'Isn't he?'.

Since in Wiltshire and elsewhere in the south-west 'she' as well as 'he' can be *'er* or *her*,⁸ there is in theory room for misunderstanding. A west Dorset example of *her* for 'she' is bound to be found in 'Her done it',⁹ while Sixpenny Handley on the edge of Cranborne Chase provides 'Her got married'.¹⁰ In practice, however, such potential ambiguity will, one assumes, seldom cause problems.

It will be clear from all this that Dorset *er* and its variants are closely related to standard-English *he*. The latter goes back to Old English *he*, while German *er* goes back to the *er* of the Old High German, which diverges sharply from other West Germanic languages in having no initial *h*- at this point.¹¹ The absence of *h*- in High German *er* and the presence of *h*- in English *he* reflect the fact that the two words have different origins.¹² On the other hand, as already indicated, we may find close cognates of English *he* in other West Germanic languages. Examples are the *hij* of Dutch, and northern German *he*, which is indigenous north of a line drawn roughly north-eastwards

from Cologne.¹³ To our linguistic evidence we must thus add historical and geographical arguments against any suggestion of a link between Dorset *er* and High German *er*.

1. John Eastwood, *Life in a Dorset Village* (Bridport, 1982), p.80.
2. J. C. Wells, *Accents of English* (Cambridge, 1982), 2, 341-43; Arthur Hughes and Peter Trudgill, *English Accents and Dialects*, 2nd edn. (London, 1987), p.33; Malcolm Jones and Patrick Dillon, *Dialect in Wiltshire* (Trowbridge, 1987), pp. 22-23.
3. Thomas Hardy, *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872; rpt. London, 1974), part 2, chap. 5, p. 109 and part 1, chap 2, p. 41.
4. William Barnes, *A Glossary of the Dorset Dialect* (1886; rpt. St. Peter Port, 1970), p. 62; Martyn F. Wakelin, *English Dialects: An Introduction*, rev. edn. (London, 1977), p. 113.
5. Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891; rpt. London, 1957) phase 1, chap. 3, p. 29; Eastwood, p.80; cf. Martyn F. Wakelin, *The Southwest of England* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 1986), pp. 161-63.
6. Joseph Wright, *The English Dialect Dictionary* (1898-1905; rpt. London, 1970), 3, 143. Wright received this example from his Dorset correspondent C. V. Goddard.
7. Wright, 3, 143.
8. Jones and Dillon, p.27; Wakelin, *English Dialects*, p. 114.
9. Wright, 3, 143. Wright's authority here seems to have been E. H. Goddard, listed as a correspondent for north Wiltshire.
10. Wakelin, *The Southwest of England*, pp. 169-170.
11. Orrin W. Robinson, *Old English and Its Closest Relatives* (London, 1992), pp. 160 and 236-37.
12. R. Priesch and W. E. Collinson, *The German Language*, 6th rev. edn. (London, 1966), pp. 93-94.
13. For a relevant map, see Werner König, *dtv-Atlas zur deutschen Sprache* (Munich, 1978), p. 164.

J. B. SMITH

SOME ELIZABETHAN TIMBER BUILDING TERMS. Of the several records extant for the combined manorial court of Norton St. Philip and Hinton Charterhouse one is particularly interesting for throwing light on building terms used in the sixteenth century. The majority of the part estreat, which exists as two single sheets of paper, is given to the recording of timber that was allowed to be used by named copyholders for the maintenance of their houses in c.1600.¹

The estreat recorded the presentment by the homage of the court:

Item, wee present that the tenements of

Thomas Methwyn wantith two payre of Cupples, thirtye Rafters, one jambe. *The halfe tymber ys his owne*

Edward Hycks for his tenement, 20 rafters. *as above*

Rychard Love for his tenement, 2 lyntorns, one virse

John Colboorne 3 payre of doorns

John Arther one somer, 3 lyntorns John Wyngrove 2 syde tymbars, one virse, 2 doores & 2 payre of doorns

John Selwood 2 payre of doorns

John Davysson senior one payre of Cupples and 10 rafters

Jone Butcher one doore, 2 doorans & tymber for a payre of stayres.
as above

Rychard Tovyve for a stable one payre of Cupples, 2 syde tymbers & 12 rafters. *some smale Tymber*

Edward Thomas one payre of Cupples, syxe rafters & 3 payre of doorns. *as above*

Agnes Coxe 3 payre of Coopples, 30 rafters, syxe syde tymbers & one somer. *greatlie decayed*

Robert Yonge 2 somers & one payre of dorns. *as in the first*

Thomas Weadon 2 payre of doorns. *as above*

John Meryfeild one sommer, 2 halfe somers, syxe Jostes

Roger Newbery 2 syde tymbers & 12 rafters

John Butcher 4 syde tymbers & a ground sill for above. *as above*

John Pardice 2 syde tymbers & a vyrste

Robert Apprise 2 payre of Cupples, one tye beame, 24 Joystes, 10 hondred foot off boord. *as above*

John Davysson thyounger syxe payre of rafters & 2 tye beames. *as above*

Jone Freeman 1 first & 1 payre of Cupplers, 2 Dornes, & tymber for 1 window

Robert Clement 3 somers and Joystes & bordes for 2 field of houses

Margery Benett 1 wholle window of 4 Lyghtes, 2 Doores & 2 somers

William Popell 1 wholle window of 4 lyghtes, 1 somer & 1 first

Anthony Clark 2 Dornes & 1 dore and 5 Coomes for a window

Leave geven to John Jones to take 2 shrubb tres to repayre his stable, growinge upon his owne grounde.

The words in *italics* are marginal additions that were written in a second hand.

Besides the use of building terms that are still current, - rafter, jamb, door, joist, ground sill, tie beam, board and light - others are used that require some explanation.² 'Cupples, cupples, coopples, or cupplers' as in 'one payre of cupples' meant the pair of timbers used as the principals of a roof-truss; 'Doorns, doorans or dornes' as in '3 payre of doorns' were door-posts, the term 'durns' still being used as a dialectal word in Somerset; 'Lyntorns and vurses, vyrstes or firsts' were probably lintels and verge boards respectively; 'Somers or sommers' were horizontal bearing beams or wall plates; 'Field of houses' described a bay or the space between the major timber frames of a house; 'Coomes' (combs) were window sills.

1. PRO LR 11/78/906B. The Public Record Office is thanked for permission to quote the extract of the estreat.
2. I am indebted to John Dallimore for the explanation of some of the terms.

COLIN BRETT

ASSAULT ON A BAILIFF, 1565. Amongst a box of decaying court papers for the Infaring Division of the Manor of Taunton Deane, catalogued as dating between c.1600-c.1800, are the following articles for the grand jury to enquire into.¹ The poor bailiff, Jerome Horne, received an unjust attack from two men all because he was trying to do his duty and deliver a writ. A man of the same name petitioned the court in 1588 and was successful in his claim to prove that he had paid his debt to Edward Lancaster; similarly a namesake was involved in a case in the Court of Requests during the reign of Elizabeth.² Of note is the action of one Henry Femell who was later to serve as constable of the Borough of Taunton in 1568, 1573, 1579 and 1585.³ If this was the same Henry then he must have been seen as a reformed character by the time he was undertaking the office of constable.

Articles for the graund jurye to enqyre of as followethe

Imprimis the last daye of dessember and in the viijth yeare of your queens majesties raigne that nowe is in the Churche yearde of Marye Magedline of Taunton Jerome Horne Bailife of the mannor and libertie of Taunton by vertewe of warrant frome the Sherefe to him directede, dide atache and arest the boddye of one John Femell of Tawnton aforesaide.

Item at the which tyme the saide Jhon [*sic*] was rested in the saide Churche yerde by the said Bailife, the saide John saide to the saide Bailife stand further or else I will thruste my dagger in thie gutte and theire with all strivid with the saide Bailife with forse bothe in worde and deedes.

And with this came one Henry Femell of the towne aforesaid, and towck the said Bailife by the berde and with forse held the said bailife and with his hand havinge agreate ringe on his finger and other ringe also on the same hande somot ye said Bailife one the mouthe nosse and face with such forse yt the bloode came witheall to the saide bailifes great hurte.

Item in this tyme that the said Henrie used the said Bailife so theire came one Thomas Simons and with hym Petter Cabull his servant and a bidgelad of his and the said Thomas Simons set hands on the said bailife and demanded to see his proffes unto ye which the bailife answered hee should see theme a non and with this the saide bailife was ap.... sed and strokene by the said Petter Cabull with blowes minn... the said bailifes great hurtes.

Item in this tyme yt ye said Petter Cabull dide strive with ye saide Bailife, ye fore saide John Femell drewe his dagger on ye said bailife and with all said hime come I will make his gutts slyeat his helles, and theire withall offerede to strucke ye Bailife.

Witnes to be examynede of you the graunde jurye aforesaide are Simon Sanders, John Roper, Richard Morse, William Fowelles, John Alforde, Richarde Billinge, John Manninge, Richarde Edwards, Coliforde, Thomas Morse with divers others.

[*Annotated with the jury verdict*] We the Graund Jurye fynde by thothe of iiij deponents that thies men withinamed did withstand the bayliffe with violence frome serving the quenes majesties wrytt the chuchard of marye marlyn [*sic*].

1. S.R.O. DD/SP 34.
2. *Ibid* 22/33.
3. *Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society Proceedings*, 55, pp.56-57.

ADRIAN J. WEBB

QUERIES

WEST MONKTON CRICKET CLUB. I have been approached by the club secretary to establish their origins, which are a matter of dispute. It is thought the club first started in 1899, however all of the early records have been lost. If anyone can throw any light on this matter I would be grateful if they could contact me in order that I can pass on any information. Adrian J. Webb, 'Staverton', 19 Kirke Grove, Taunton, Somerset, TA2 8SB, e-mail adrian.j.webb@bigfoot.com. Tel: 01823 282267.

F SEAT CHAIRS. Roger Heaton of Galhampton queries an auctioneer's entry in a catalogue issued on 14 March 1786 which advertised the sale of the contents of a Parsonage house.

Thanks to the help of Dr. James Yorke, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, we may have an answer. Dr. Yorke suggests that 'F' is an abbreviation which might stand for 'French'. He points out that French stools were generally placed beneath windows. There is a reference also to 'French elbow chairs' in Robert Manwaring's *Cabinet and Chair-Maker's Real Friend and Companion* (1765). 'F', as an abbreviation, might therefore mean a comparatively richly upholstered chair. However, we must remember that the auctioneer may have devised his own abbreviation for a chair which had a full seat, or even, perhaps, one with a folding seat. (*Dorset Ed.*)

BEST PARLOUR. No. 9.

- 40 Wilton carpet
- 41 Sconce glass
- 42 Japanned tea-urn
- 43 Ditto tea-table
- 44 Two check festoon window curtains, lines,
hooks, &c.
- 45 Two window shutters and bars
- 46 Pair fenex globes
- 47 Six Walnut-tree chairs, F. seats
- 48 Two ditto armed and cushion
- 49 Mahogany voider
- 50 Ditto tea-tray
- 51 Iron rimmed fixed stove and tiles

LITTLE PARLOUR, No. 2.

- 40 Six walnut-tree F. seat chairs, stool and
cushion
- 41 Small wainscot square table, on frame
- 42 Dutch table, on castors
- 43 Ivery castle, framed and glazed

HALL CHAMBER. No. 3.

- 51 Bedstead, with check hangings
- 52 Feather-bed
- 53 Bolster and two pillows
- 54 Two blankets
- 55 Cotton counterpane
- 56 Festoon curtain, lines, &c.
- 57 Swinging glass
- 58 Japanned dressing drawers
- 59 Two walnut-tree F. seat stools
- 60 Deal closet, with sliding doors
- 61 Paper hangings

BURYING PLACES FOR SUICIDES. Suicide (*felo-de-se*) was forbidden by church and state. The dead person's possessions were confiscated, and the corpse was, by order of the Coroner, interred in the dead of night on a high road without benefit of any religious observance. Traditionally, the corpse had a stake driven through the heart. In 1823 (4 Geo IV c.52) the law was changed, and bodies of those who committed suicide were admitted into a churchyard or other place of burial, but were still denied any religious service.

In Somerset, between Shepton Mallet and Evercreech is a place called 'Cannard's Grave'; near Norton St. Philip, 'Tucker's Grave'; at Frome there was a spot that at one time was called 'Hellicar's Grave'; and outside Midsomer Norton on the road to Paulton there was once a site called 'Comber's Grave'.

Were these burial sites for suicides? Are there any such (local) names known in Dorset?

G. J. D.

Erratum

In the 'Cerne Abbas relic list' by Julian Luxford of King's College, Cambridge, which appeared in the March 2002 issue (Part 355, pp. 103-107), there were some printing errors. On page 104, line 30, the sentence should read 'At any rate, he copied it word for word ...', and on page 105, the letter 'q' was printed as 'g', so the first line should read 'Hee sunt reliquie'. I must point out that the errors are mine, not the author's.

Glanville J. Davies (*Dorset Editor*)

Dorset Editor's Note: I apologise to the author, Dr. R. Dunning, and to our subscribers, because the article on the Abbot of Glastonbury (Part 354, pp. 51-2, Sept 2001) was, by my oversight, reprinted in the following issue (Part 355, pp. 107-8, March 2002).

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