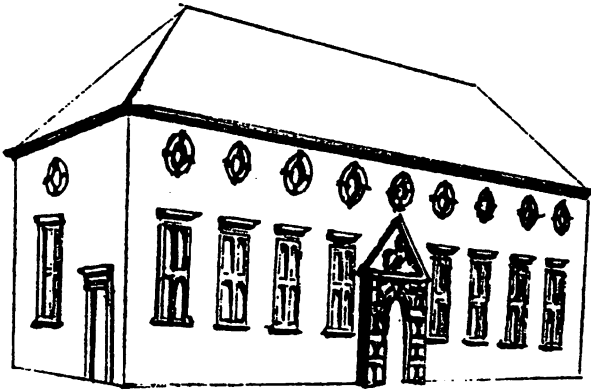


NORTH WANSDYKE
PAST
AND
PRESENT



Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society

No. 7, 1995

North Wansdyke

Past and Present

Journal of Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society

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Cover illustration: drawing by Barbara J. Lowe from a photograph of a painting by Buckler in Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society Library at Taunton, showing the coach house of Abbey House, Keynsham.

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The demise of Keynsham's Great House

Barbara J. Lowe

Continuing more than 30 years research, both physical and documentary, into the history, buildings and subsequent fate of Keynsham Abbey, I am attempting a little retrospective detective work by searching Wills, Probate Inventories, Leases, Releases, Sale Particulars etc., in the hope of gleaning snippets of information. Unfortunately, many old Somerset and Devon Wills and Inventories were lost in the Second World War, but some of those which survived for Keynsham have revealed interesting facts.

I began by researching the 'superb and elegant seat',¹ called 'Keynsham Abbey', reputedly built to the east of Keynsham Parish Church by the Bridges family from the remains of the Abbey. (Sir Thomas Bridges bought the Abbey site and remains for £922. 2s. 2½d. in 1551.)²

Whilst the by-pass was being cut through Keynsham Memorial Park during 1961-6, I and fellow volunteers from Bristol Folk House Archaeological Society succeeded in surveying and recording various foundation walls exposed during the work. (No plans of the abbey then existed and we still have no knowledge of the complete abbey complex.) An investigative excavation in the garden of 'Abbotsford', one of the houses demolished for the road, revealed some foundation walling of the Bridges mansion, incorporating 29ft of an east wall, the south-east corner and 13ft of the south wall, all 3ft 4in wide. Built into the south wall was a beautifully carved Romanesque stone which once formed part of a frieze around the abbey's chapter house (fig. 1). Subsequently, after the west end of the abbey church had been located, this walling was found to lie roughly parallel to, and 15ft west of it (plan 1).

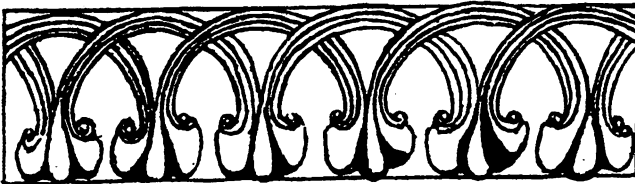
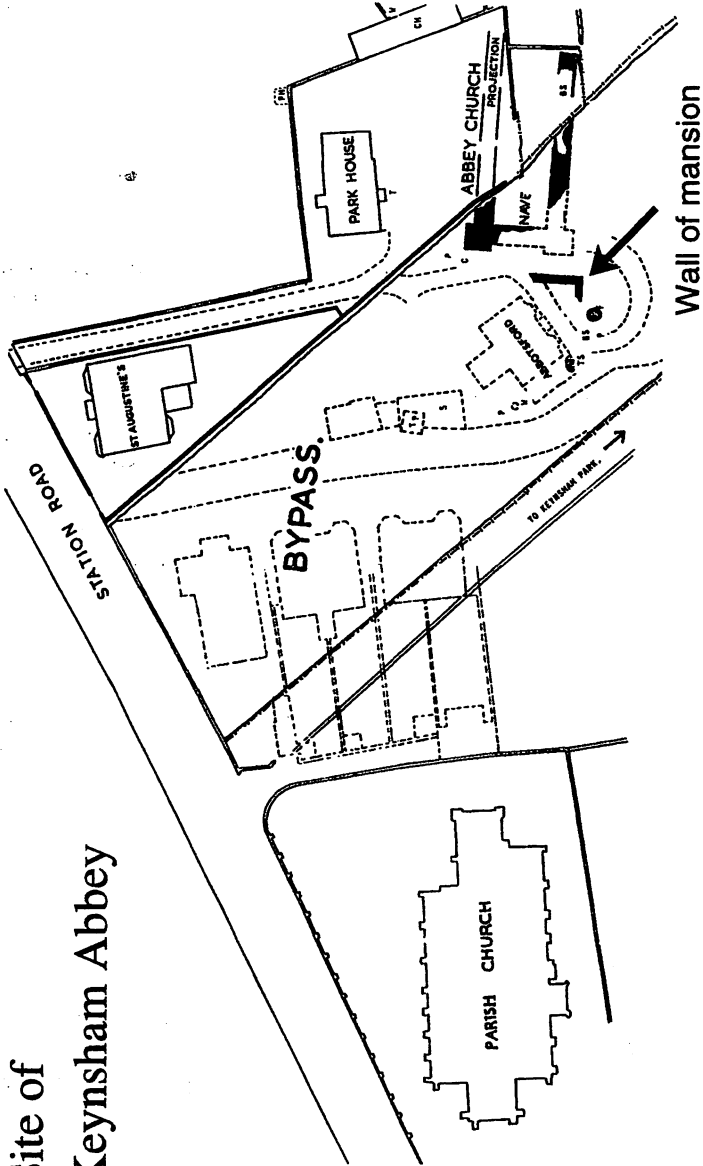


Fig. 1. Part of Chapter House frieze: 54.6 x 31 x 15.2cm.

Site of Keynsham Abbey



A Deed of Settlement of 1672, drawn up by a later Sir Thomas Bridges preparatory to the marriage of his son, Harry, to Lady Diana Holles, refers to the 'Old Hall of the Capital Messuage' and the new buildings on its east side. It is therefore highly likely that the foundation walling located south of 'Abbotsford' was part of that new extension. Various buildings of the abbey remained intact after the Dissolution and were leased out. (Only the cloister and church roofs were stripped of lead.) It is reasonable to assume that the 'Old Hall' was one of the abbey buildings, perhaps an Abbot's Lodging. In fact, its position tallies with the lodging of Abbot Walter Bekyngsfield who was retired in 1455 and granted his 'dwelling in the court of the monastery near the great door into the Conventual Church'.³ Keynsham had a Great Hall as early as 1316 wherein Richard de Rodney was knighted. This was an extremely important occasion. Richard Rodney of Backwell was then Commissioner for sea walls and dykes for Somerset. Almaric de Valence, Earl of Pembroke invested the sword, Lord Maurice de Berkeley invested the right spur, and Lord Bartholomew Badlesmere, Warden of Bristol Castle, the left spur.⁴ There is also a reference to 'a certain High Chamber' in the abbey in which the Composition regarding Keynsham Vicarage was sealed on 20th November 1404.⁵ It is unlikely that this early hall survived 400 years but, during the late 19th century a tiled pavement dating from 1290, was found *in situ*,⁶ 62 ft west of the abbey church, well within the area covered by the Bridges Mansion, so it is just possible.

The first Sir Thomas Bridges may have resided in the 'Old Hall' from time to time, but the first known reference to the Capital Messuage occurred in 1587 when Henry, son of Sir Thomas, died and willed its use to his wife Ann for her lifetime.

The last reference to it was contained in the *Bath Journal* of 15th April 1775 when the mansion was offered for auction as building material – 'Materials of the Abbey House at Keynsham, consisting of freestone, iron, glass, timber, bricks and lead, of which last article there is supposed to be near 30 tons. The whole to be taken down, removed and the ground where the house stood to be cleared and levelled at the expense of the purchaser, before 5th April 1776. The Home Park, gardens and orchard to be let and entered upon immediately'. Excluded from the sale, reserved for the seller, were all the iron grates, coppers, boilers, pictures, coats of arms carved in stone and wood in the front of the house; and the tapestry, gilt-leather hangings and clock in the large Hall, also the stables, coach-house and all out offices. Edward Rosser, a builder from Bristol, purchased the materials of the house and is reputed to have built

a number of corbel heads, including that of 'Jack the Painter', into a new warehouse in Quay Street.⁷

An earlier reference of October 1772 relates that Payne of Bridgwater was asked to visit Keynsham and make an exact drawing of the chimney piece in the Hall there, reputed to be one of the finest in England.⁸ (Was he of the same family as Anthony Payne of Bridgwater, who had a warrant to strip the lead from Keynsham Abbey after the Dissolution and craftily used it to steal the lead from Barlinch Priory?)⁹

All this tells us quite a lot about the mansion, but no painting of it seems to have survived. There are, however, several rather different descriptions of it. Pococke¹⁰ 1750-51, saw a large house with four fronts and no improvements about it. Ferner¹¹ 1759, saw a big old square building of dressed stone ornamented with several life size stone statues.

In Bath Reference Library is a painting by William N. Hardwick of a large un-named house in Keynsham, which no-one here can recognise. There is a very faint possibility that it could represent the eastern wing of the Abbey House, but Hardwick lived from 1829 to 1864, long after the house had gone. He could, of course, have copied an earlier painting, but it is unlikely (fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Drawn from a photograph of the original painting by Hardwick.

A painting reputed to have come from the house and to represent it, once hung in the Lamb and Lark Inn, but had disappeared before 1875. The picture was described from memory in 1875, as 'situated at the east end of the Parish Church and between it and the site of the Abbey. The building joined the churchyard by a broad flight of steps which remained until the house was demolished. It was a long 2-storey building of plain

architecture having 2 rows of square sash windows, a central and 2 end gables with roofs of different slopes, round windows in the pediments and in front a formal row of cut box trees.'¹²

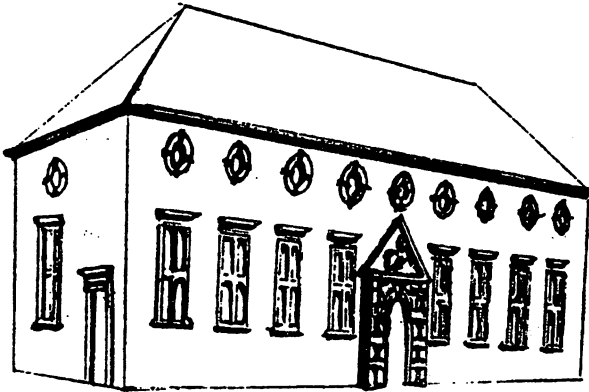


Fig. 3. Drawn from a photograph of the original drawing by Buckler.

In Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society Library at Taunton is a drawing by Buckler of the coach-house of the Abbey House (fig. 3). This coach-house was excluded from the 1776 sale and the 1828 drawing shows a long, single storied building with one row of square sash windows, four on either side of the central doorway, and nine round windows under the eaves, situated east of the church and at right angles to it. This coach-house burned down c.1835, but the doorway still survives as the so-called 'Norman Arch' in Station Road. Richard Cox, the builder of the Victorian villas in that area, lived in 'Park House' and re-erected the doorway (not quite accurately) to form an impressive gateway to the drive shared by 'Park House' and 'Abbotsford'. Possibly, this coach-house was the building described, inaccurately from memory, in 1875, and not the Abbey House, although the coach-house could have echoed the architecture of the house.

This seems to be all the information we have of the outside of the Abbey House, but some knowledge of the interior may be gleaned from (a) the Settlement of 26th Oct. 1672¹³ and (b) the Inventory of 20th May 1707,¹⁴ following the death of Sir Thomas Bridges. As follows:

(a) 'As for concerning those parcels of the New Buildings of said capitall messuage of Keynsham, vizt the new kitchen, pastery and larder with the two chambers over the kitchen, the new Dining Room,

the new chamber on the East side of the same capital message and the stable in the outward Barton belonging to the same message...to the use of Dame Anna Bridges for her widowhood only'.

(b) 'In ye greate parlour

18 wrought chairs and 4 family portraits.

In ye little parlour

8 old chairs, 4 old stools, 1 easy chair with a cushion, 1 oval table and 1 square table.

In ye Hall

1 old shuffle board table, 1 other table, 1 square table and 8 old cane chairs.

In ye kitchen

1 pair of old racks, a crane, a tank, an iron boiler and 3 spits.

In Sir Thomas's chamber

1 bed and furniture, 1 oval table, 1 small table, 2 chairs, 2 stools, 2 old cossard, 2 pair old chest of drawers much decayed.

In ye drawing room

1 old silk bed, 1 easy chair and 1 looking glass table and stand.

In chamber West of Dining room

1 old bleu bed of chince, 2 little tables

In one upper room

an old bed and a set of old curtains

In the other upper room

an old bed and old pewter and brasse.'

This only gives ten rooms and there is no mention of furniture in the dining room. However, Sir Thomas's Will lists some 78 pieces of silver, including '2 large basons and 12 broad rimmed plates engraved with the arms of Sir Thomas and Lady Anna (nee Rodney) with their crests on the brims; 2 large and 4 smaller dishes bearing both their arms and Sir Thomas s crest on the brims; 1 large kettle and ladle, a pair of candlesticks, large salt, pair of rings and a large salver with both their arms on the sides; socketts for the candlesticks with both their crests; 12 narrow brimmed plates bearing both their arms on the brims; 4 scallop brimmed fruit dishes bearing both their arms and Sir Thomas's crest in the middle; a skillett and cover bearing Sir Thomas's arms only; a deep bason with spread eagle and E. B. on; 4 small dishes with gilt brims bearing Sir Thomas's mother's (née Speke) arms on the brims; 1 gilt bowl, 1 gilt tankard and 2 flaggons without arms'. This silver Sir Thomas left to his son, Harry, for his lifetime only. All his wife's silver, which included 'a chamber pot, coffee pot, candlesticks, snuffer and case, 3 salvers, all the cutlery' he left to be divided between his two daughters. They also had

the four portraits by Sadler, of himself, his wife and her two sisters. (Poor Harry seems to have been left without cutlery or the chamber pot!)

The new kitchen possibly was detached because a sale description of c.1809 of 'Park House', built near the site of the Abbey House, relates that a large part of it had then been rebuilt and that the back kitchen was part of the 'ancient building, detached'. The former mansion's large stables of twelve bays were then used as a barn and for farm stabling. The large stone carthouse was still there and the old pigeon house had become a lumber shed. 'Park House' also had a brewhouse and a large underground tank of water in addition to a well, which may date from the mansion or even the abbey (plan 1).

Sir Thomas's spartan furnishings are perhaps surprising for so rich a gentleman, but he was a widower aged 90 years when he died. A gentleman of those days spent much time travelling and would take his essential furnishings about with him.

Sir Thomas's son Harry, who died in 1728, had even fewer personal possessions. He was 60 when his father died and had been married 35 years. Where had he lived all his married life? (This is still being researched by Elizabeth White, Margaret Whitehead, and I.) Sir Thomas had set up a Trust fund and entailed his estates to heirs male, so although Harry had a good income during his lifetime he had no legal male heir, so most property went to his nephew George after his death.

Unfortunately no rooms are mentioned in Harry's Inventory but his effects included: 'Linen and wool wearing apparel, one feather bed and bolster, 2 old blankets and one quilt, 1 pair of andirons, 1 iron fire pan and tongs with brass heads, 2 old table boards and 6 old chairs, a parcel of books, 9 pairs of old sheets and a single one, 16 old table cloths, 7 old towels and 5 small napkins and 7 other pieces of linen'.

Outdoors, whereas Sir Thomas had 'an old gelding, an old coach mare, 2 coach mares, 2 black three year old colts, 1 two year old colt, 1 old bay mare, 5 oxen, 3 milch cows and a bull, one mow of smutty wheat, a load of beans, 1 old waggon, an old putt and the plough harness, 2 tons of washt hay, 15 sheep and 4 lambs', all Harry had was 'one mow of hay in the Barton, a parcel of cud hay, a mow and a shear of hay in dry leaze'. Why had Harry so little? Firstly, most of his income was for his life only. Secondly, in 1725 he sold the reversion of his property to his illegitimate son, James, for the remainder of the 99 years lease from 1672.

Harry died at Avington in Hampshire after ten days illness. The account of his funeral expenses is salutary. It includes the funeral at Winchester, the shroud, lead and other coffins,* the rings, mourning for his

man and maid servant to attend his coffin from Avington to Keynsham and wear afterwards, the hearse and coach, the gloves and hatbands, the Sexton and Clerks fees to inter him at Keynsham, carrying the hatchmead to and from Bristol, painting the 20 escutcheons, cutting letters in, polishing and laying down the stone on the deceased, setting up a marble monument, inscription, painting and carriage.

What have we learned about the Abbey House? It lay east of the parish church and 15 ft west of the ruins of the abbey church, set in a home park of about 18 acres (now Keynsham Memorial Park and bisected by the by-pass). There was a useful but not extensive garden with a small ornamental fishpond near the house, two courtyards, coach-house, stables, brewhouse, pigeonhouse and orchard.

The Old Hall was probably a former abbey building with hall and solar on the first floor with low ceilinged offices and storage space below. This building was extended eastwards before 1672 to give a large building more than 50 ft square. The Hearth Tax returns record 19 hearths in 1664-5. There were coats of arms in stone and wood at the front of the house and several statues of life size.

The Old Hall was dominated by a large, elegant, elaborate fireplace and tapestry and gilt-leather hangings decorated the walls. Furnishings included a clock, 1 large table, 2 smaller ones and 8 cane chairs. The two parlours probably adjoined the Hall, the larger one containing the four Sadler portraits and 18 wrought chairs, the smaller, 2 tables, 8 chairs, 4 stools and one easy chair with a cushion. In addition there were 3 main bedrooms, a grand dining room and two attic rooms over the kitchen. There may have been an elegant oak staircase. This seems small for a reputed mansion, but the hall, dining room and great parlour would be very large rooms.

Further light is thrown by artefacts recovered from the site during rescue excavation. Part of a stone balustrade, a stone pineapple (for hospitality), two glass bottle seals bearing the arms of Harry impaling those of Elizabeth Freeman, portions of Bristol Delftware plates (made in Brislington), and 'feathered and combed' slipware dishes (made in Donyatt) as well as masses of fragments of clay tobacco pipes, give some idea of their life- style. Also, in the Guildhall in Bath are four portraits, not the ones which hung in the parlour, but of James Bridges, Harry, and

* It was customary for a gentleman to be buried in linen within a rough wooden coffin which was then encased in thin lead, all within a stouter lead coffin covered by a substantial wooden one on which brass name plate and rings were fixed.

their wives. In the Victoria & Albert Museum is a 2ft 6in by 3ft 6in portion of Elizabethan balustrade in oak which came from an old house in Keynsham, maybe the Bridges Mansion.

After Harry's death, Keynsham's Great House began its gradual decline. It was lived in from time to time. G. F. Handel is reputed to have visited the Duke of Chandos there in 1751, and in August 1759 Anne, Duchess of Caernarvon, died there. On May 28th 1763 the house was advertised for sale in Felix Farley's *Bristol Journal* and on 4th January 1766, in the same *Journal*, Letitia Jones announced that she was removing her Ladies Boarding School from Brislington to 'Keynsham Abbey'.

The buildings of the abbey, some of which had been re-used for small industries over the years - bell founding in the chapter house, lime kilns in the cloister, and quarrying stone - gradually disappeared. Now the Old Hall, stables and outbuildings too have gone.

The sale of 1775 tolled the knell of Keynsham's great abbey and the Bridges family. Some remains of the Abbey may be seen at the north-east corner of Memorial Park, and although the Council owns the site, volunteers from Bristol Folk House Archaeological Society continue to maintain it. In order to preserve existing foundations and delineate those robbed out in antiquity, false dry walling has been constructed above them and planted with mediaeval herbs.

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The sad story of Annie Mortimer

Elizabeth White

It was 8.00am on the morning of Friday May 15th 1863 when Anne Mortimer (known as 'Annie') took to her rooms and locked the door. It was seven hours before her family and friends could gain admission. When she did not appear at luncheon her father, Richard Mortimer, manager of the Keynsham Brass Works, sent for the family physician to come to the house. The Brass Works manager had a fine house on the site of the works. It had been sadly overlooked by the embankment of the Great Western Railway line, built 20 years earlier, which cut the house off from the town, but, none the less, it was a solid and comfortable house for Richard Mortimer and his family. By 1863 he was a 67 year old widower, with four of his eight children, all unmarried daughters, living at home. Sarah aged 34, Mary aged 31, Anne aged 29, and Sarah aged 24, lived with their father, and their eldest brother, with his wife and child, lived next door.

When Mr Hutchins, the family physician arrived, he tried to get Anne to open the door, but she refused. Finally he threatened to send for workmen to break the door open. This had the desired effect, and the door was unbolted. One glance at the marks in the disordered room told the doctor all he needed to know.

Going into the room, he said 'You have had a child, Miss Mortimer. What have you done with it?' Without speaking, Anne pointed to the bed. It was there they found the baby, on the mattress and hidden by the bed clothes. It was a fine healthy boy, 8½ lb in weight, 21 inches long, and dead. The afterbirth was found in the water closet. The family's gravest fears were realised. Anne had denied being pregnant again but had produced her third illegitimate child.

Mr Hutchins had brought with him Mrs Sarah Wellington, a woman experienced in delivering babies. Between them they removed the body of the baby to another room and got Anne to bed, and cleaned up the room. The police were sent for, and the coroner informed.

The next morning, Saturday 16th May, the magistrates gathered round Anne's bedside, formally to remand her on bail, awaiting the coroner's inquest. To their great surprise she did not obtain bail. Her father did not stand bail for her. So the magistrates issued a warrant to keep her in safe custody at her father's house, under the surveillance of the police.

The same day, Saturday, a Coroner's Inquest was held at the Lamb

and Lark Hotel in the High Street, where a very respectable jury headed by Mr James Iles gathered before the Coroner, Mr Bruges Fry. The jurors were James Iles, the foreman, William Weekes, George Sheppard, Samuel Fear, John Cattle, Isaac Simmonds, William Clark, Henry Marshall, John Pocock, James Bray, and John Belsten.

After the usual preliminaries they went to view the body of the child, which they agreed was that of a very fine child, with no marks of violence upon it. The inquest was adjourned until a post mortem had been carried out. The jury was not satisfied that the post mortem was to have been carried out by Mr Hutchins, the family physician, and it was finally agreed that Mr Nash, Mr Hutchins' assistant, should carry out the post mortem, assisted by another doctor, James Foxwell of Bristol.

Rumours as to the cause of the child's death abounded. Until the resumed inquest Anne was kept under police guard in her father's house. When the church of St John the Baptist was reopened after two years of restoration on May 27th 1863 Richard Mortimer gave two brass offertory plates, but does not appear to have been present at the opening ceremony.

On Monday June 1st the inquest was resumed. The jury immediately complained that Anne was not present. There followed a legal wrangle as to the cause of her absence. Sergeant Schollar refused to bring her to court, saying that the magistrates had remanded her in police custody in her father's house, and that he could not bring her to court without their authority. The coroner said that neither he nor the jury wished her to be brought there to be given unnecessary pain, but that he wished her to be brought because he was desirous that no one should have an accusation made against him or her unless they were present to be confronted with their accusers. This was the first time in eleven years in which a prisoner's presence had been refused. One of the jurors thought she should be brought, and the coroner did not see why she shouldn't be. The magistrates clerk said that the coroner should not jump to the conclusion that the magistrates had given directions on that subject.

The doctor said he thought the inquest was adjourned to enable Anne Mortimer to be in a fit state to attend, and she was now well enough, and all the arrangements had been made.

The coroner said that it was intimated to him that it was Sergeant Schollar who would not bring her, saying 'The woman shall not be brought here'. Sergeant Schollar denied he had said this, but that she was under remand by the magistrates. The coroner said it was a matter of indifference to him what the magistrates did with her.

Eventually the jurors were sworn in, and the post mortem evidence produced. Mr Nash said the child was healthy and well matured. The

umbilical chord had been stretched and ruptured about 3 inches from the abdomen: no ligature had been applied, but as the blood vessels had contracted there had been no haemorrhage. There were no signs of violence on the child. The lungs were not fully expanded, though when removed and cut into 20 pieces they floated in water. All the organs of the body were healthy and all the mouth and air passages normal. There were, however, clots of blood in the brain, but no fractures of the skull, and the brain was healthy.

The coroner drew the conclusion that the child, in his opinion, was born alive, though breathing had not been fully established. He concluded that the mother had been confined in the upright position, that the labour was a quick one, that the child had been expelled from her whilst in that position either on to the floor, or into some utensil, and sustained a blow on the head, which caused its death. In certain cases a female, being hastily seized with pains of labour, would have no power without assistance to prevent the child from falling, and afterwards in all probability be too exhausted to use the exertion of opening the door. He favoured a verdict of found dead.

The jurors were not satisfied with this explanation. The foreman did not see what evidence the medical men had for the baby having been delivered as they suggested, unless they had been there. Mr Nash said he did not attribute the death to neglect, but to the circumstances attendant on a hasty delivery.

A juror asked 'Why should she shut the door and refuse to admit the doctor and the nurse?' He was reminded by the coroner that this was not a court where a prisoner was tried, but a court of enquiry into how the baby met his death.

He repeated his previous explanation and said in his judgement this would not amount to murder or manslaughter, but there would be a charge of concealment, over which this court had no jurisdiction.

Another juror said 'The baby was found on the bed, covered with clothes: a person who had the power to pick up a baby of that weight had the power to open the door'. A juryman commented 'If she had the strength to put the afterbirth in the water closet she had the strength to open the door'. Yet another added 'It's her third illegitimate child'.

The coroner then said that one thing might satisfy their minds. She would get as much punishment for concealment as she would for manslaughter, judging by the decisions he had heard. A juror said 'That's nothing to do with us'. The jurors still thought the woman should be brought to court. The coroner said she would not go unpunished; if she was likely to be set at liberty without further inquiry he would hesitate

before he concluded this inquest.

Once again Sergeant Schollar was questioned as to why he would not allow the woman to be brought. He said he believed he would be disobeying an order, unless he had a magistrate's signature to do so. The coroner told him he was not justified in drawing that conclusion. The warrant was not issued to keep the woman from the court. The magistrates' clerk then explained the magistrates' predicament. When they went to her bedside they confidently expected she would find bail. When she failed to do so they had no option but to remand her in custody, which they made police surveillance in her father's house.

The jurors were still not satisfied with the medical evidence either. One questioned Mr Nash as to whether he believed if the woman had had proper attention the child would have lived. Mr Nash said he believed it would. The coroner said he had known married ladies have premature births and their babies sacrificed. He believed the evidence would not support a manslaughter verdict. A juror asked if Anne had been in the habit of shutting herself away for so many hours.

Another juror said she had had the pains of labour for a considerable time before she shut herself in the room. This was not mentioned by any other speaker, and the coroner retorted that he judged the case by the facts as they appeared before them.

The jury retired to consider their verdict. When they returned the foreman said that the child had been taken away by wilful neglect. The coroner said that amounted to murder, and that was at variance with the medical evidence.

A juror said 'The child was born alive. If there had been proper attendance it would have stayed alive, so the child's life must have been taken by neglect'. Dr Foxwell explained at great length that the charge of wilful infanticide could not be brought against the woman. She might have met with an accident that could happen to any woman.

The coroner requested the jury to amend their verdict, but the argument raged on. Dr Foxwell believed she was concealed at 9 o'clock in the morning, and when she knew the baby was dead she was frightened, and scarcely knew what she did with it. It was more concealment of birth than otherwise.

The coroner then asked the jury 'Will you not allow the circumstances of her life to have a tendency to her injury?' 'Oh, no', said James Iles, the foreman. The jurors were still unsatisfied with the verdict the coroner wanted.

The coroner said that as the afterbirth was in the closet the natural inference was that if the woman had intended to do wrong she would

have thrown the baby with it. Sergeant Schollar explained that the child would not pass through the closet. 'Or else it would have been there' said a juror. 'Not the slightest doubt about it' said another.

The jury then unanimously returned a verdict of manslaughter, and the coroner committed her to Taunton Gaol. As the coroner's warrant superseded the magistrates' warrant it was decided the woman should be brought to court. She was brought from her father's house in a carriage to the inn. She was very neatly and respectably dressed, but had few personal attractions.

After she was cautioned she said she had nothing to say. The coroner said he would be justified in granting her bail. Anne said her father was out of town, and so no bail could be obtained.

When she was admitted to Taunton Gaol she was described as 4 ft 11 in. tall, fair complexioned with brown hair, grey eyes, and a long face. She was clean and in good health, and having only an imperfect command of reading and writing, although at the trial she was said to be educated. Her age was given as 25, at variance with the census.

This case raises some interesting questions. Why were the coroner and the doctors trying to get a verdict different from the one the jurors wanted? Why were the jurors so unsympathetic to her? Why was no mention made of the man responsible? How was it a middle class girl of 29 had three illegitimate children? Where was her chaperone? Was she simple minded? If so, why had her father failed in his duty to care for her? What were the circumstances to which the coroner alluded, and the jury ignored? Who had exploited her?

She was tried on 8th August at Wells, at the Assizes, before the Lord Chief Justice Lord Erle. The verdict? Not Guilty.

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God's Acre

Margaret Whitehead

In *North Wansdyke Past and Present* No. 5 I wrote about the controversy which raged over the purchase of a piece of ground for a town cemetery, as the churchyard of St John's Parish Church, Keynsham, was full and was due to be closed. This prompted me to continue research into the use of the churchyard over its six hundred odd years history. I came up against so many blank walls that I almost gave up, but pertinacity won the day.

Sadly, due to the absence of early parish records, not very much can be gleaned before the mid eighteenth century. The General Vestry Minutes are extant from 1744 and the Church-Wardens Accounts from 1770. We must be eternally indebted to Canon Ellacombe of Bitton who transcribed the then still extant Churchwarden's Accounts of 1632-1639 for publication in the *Antiquarian Society Journal* in 1847. These list, in minute detail, the building of a new tower at the west end of the church after a violent storm caused the spire of the old tower situated at the east end of the north aisle to collapse and crash down onto part of the body of the church. As a result the churchyard soon resembled a builders yard.

There is strong evidence to support the theory that Keynsham had a Saxon church and attendant churchyard. The founding and building of Keynsham Abbey c.1170 would have resulted in an influx of people to swell the local population. The building of a parish church must have become necessary to relieve pressure on the use of that part of the abbey church accessible for worship by the village congregation.

While lacking a documented date for the foundation and building of St John's Church, architectural evidence suggests a mid to late thirteenth century date, and we know it was appropriated to Keynsham Abbey in 1292. At that date the building would have consisted of the chancel, nave and possibly the tower. Evidence in the 18th century, as we shall see later, suggests that local people continued to be buried in the old graveyard for some considerable time.

It is not known whether our churchyard was fenced or walled around at an early date but the peculiar anomalies of its present shape suggest a possible contraction in its area at some time. It is contrary to the normal churchyard plan, i.e., a larger area particularly to the south and east than to the north. Burial was preferred on these sides as it was believed that evil spirits lurked on the north side away from the sun and so this was

used for the burial of criminals, suicides, stillborn and unbaptised infants and strangers.

In mediaeval times tombs and monuments outside the church were rare. The rich and well-off could afford to be buried inside the church itself. Churchyard burials would have consisted of the deceased being buried in the ground wrapped in a shroud tied at the head and feet. This could have been of linen, wool or leather. An attempt to revive the dying wool trade in 1678 produced a law which decreed all burials were to be in woollen cloth or be fined £5. This law was not rescinded until 1814. Coffins of wood were sometimes used.

The arrival of the so-called Black Death (Bubonic Plague) in Somerset in 1348/9 considerably reduced the population and must have put tremendous pressure on all burial grounds. Keynsham did not escape, and the clergy were no less among the victims than their parishioners and the vicar of St John's died in December 1348. However, the people would not have lacked proper burial rites while the priests serving the Abbey were available, although they were suffering just as badly from the dreaded scourge.

The earliest documented burial so far known is found in a will dated 1532 of Thomas Abbot of Chewton who 'desired to be buried in the east (east) churchyard before the Holy Rode (Rood).' It was usual for a stone rood (crucifix) to be erected in the south-east part of the churchyard.

A Bath & Wells Diocesan Deposition of 1583 records that the upkeep of St John's Parish Church had ceased since the Dissolution of the Abbey in 1539, and uncovered a dispute between Whitchurch and Keynsham about burials. Since Whitchurch had procured a licence to bury in their own churchyard they had stopped travelling to Keynsham for that purpose and the income from this practice had ceased. John Harvey, a maltster, deposed that 'he was born in Kainsham and did know one Morgans wife of White church buried in the churchyard of Keynsham before the dissolution of the abbeyes and by report of other old (men) of the said parish of Kainsham the inhabitants did burye allwaies at Kainsham tyme out of minde.' This is a reminder of how important Keynsham was as the main centre for a wide area around it.

The events of January 13 1632 have been well documented, and it is with the details of the Churchwardens Accounts we are now concerned. The value of these accounts cannot be overestimated. They list the names of all the workmen and people involved in any way and the cost of each item, however small.

The following extracts give an idea of the hive of activity engendered by the work involved.

'In the East churchyard eldernes [this must refer to elder bushes] were cut down and removed so that ploughs could pass; timber was stacked and scaffolding logs set up; the gutter in the churchyard was scoured; the masons workhouse was set up in the churchyard and covered with sheaves; a lime kiln was made and stone was quarried in the churchyard near Minchens [obviously referring to the inhabitant of an adjacent cottage]; the west end wall was taken down and stones dug from its foundations [this must refer to that portion of the west end of the church that had to be removed to enable the tower to be erected].' It must have taken some time before the churchyard returned to its original state after all the work had been completed.

Although the burial registers (now deposited in the Somerset Record Office) are extant from 1629, no notes were made as to where burial took place until an entry in 1710. Here is noted: 'Richard Pope. Was the first that was buried in the yeare and where the church stands'. From 1713 onwards it was noted whether burial was in the church or churchyard.

In 1722 an action was brought before the Lord Chancellor by Sir. Thomas Whitmore, Lord of the Manor, against Sir Harry Bridges on two counts. It is only the first which concerns us. This contained an impassioned plea on behalf of the parishioners 'to be quieted in the enjoyment of a peece of pasture ground containing abot Two Roods called the Churchyard lying in Keynsham in the County of Somerset & to restrain the Deft. [defendent] Bridges from committing Trespass therein by Digging Graves & causing dead bodyes to be bur'yd there. And to ascertain the place of sepulture for the parishioners of ye sd. parish. The sd. Deft. Bridges haveing of last yeare . . . the old Churchyard and place where the parishioners of the sd. parish ought of right to bury their dead for his own park and deprived them of yt . . . thereof.'

The outcome of this case is, as yet, unknown but if it is assumed that the 'old' churchyard refers to the burial ground used by the parishioners since before the building of St John's, and perhaps even before the Abbey, then the above entry in 1710 suggests that no general interment had taken place around the church prior to that date. Equally, this could imply that burial continued in the 'old' churchyard because of the lack of space to the south of the church.

The accusation against Sir. Harry Bridges is interesting. As owner of the mansion called Keynsham Abbey situated to the east of the church and all the demesne ground attached to it, he was therefore, technically, owner of any burial ground within its compass. The reference to him causing graves to be dug and burials made in this ground is intriguing, unless he had decided that in future he would have the final say in its use.

and the associated pecuniary advantages!

The churchyard was regarded in much the same way as a village green where the playing of games was concerned. We have records of an ongoing struggle by the Churchwardens and the General Vestry to prevent all forms of secular activity. One game they waged constant war against was called 'Fives'. This is not surprising as it consisted of bouncing a ball against the church walls between buttresses in lieu of the three sided court used in serious games. One of the largest annual bills among the Churchwardens Accounts each year was for glazing!

In 1747 they made a determined onslaught against trespassers as the following General Vestry Minute extracts show.

'20th April. Ordered that no horse & beast or gig be suffered to go in the churchyard on any instance whatsoever. And whosoever shall pound any horse etc., out of the said churchyard shall be indemnified by the churchwardens of the said parish for the time being 2s.6d (12½p) for every horse . . . etc.'

'30th October. Ordered that proper methods be taken to prevent the playing of fives and all other games in the churchyard and that the ways within the churchyard be forthwith paved at the sd parish's expense.'

'26th December. Ordered that the holes in the churchyard be stopped up that was dug for preventing fives playing and gaming in the churchyard and ordered that such as shall presume to play at any sort of game in the said churchyard for ye future be proceeded against at the expense of the Parish as the law directs. And that that part of the order of the 30th October last relating to the paving the churchways within the churchyard be confirmed.'

Less than a year later: '26th September 1748. Ordered that some proper and necessary method be used to prevent gaming, etc., in the churchyard.'

Fourteen year later! '17th November 1762. Ordered that the Churchwardens do use their utmost power by law or otherwise to prevent ye abominable practice of gaming in the churchyard at the expense of the parish.' After that—silence! We assume that persistence finally paid off.

An item among minutes in 1770 ordering the poor rate, says 'And it is agreed and ordered further that for the future all corps (corpses) that shall be brought into church in time of Divine Service shall be placed on the bench at the west end of the north aisle of the church.' This must have been a normal occurrence, perhaps the minister found it convenient to take burials immediately after the normal services.

No events are recorded until 1822 when road widening took place and this caused a lot of activity in the west end of the churchyard. The wall

was demolished to include the old road and an iron gate and rails ordered to be placed there on the most economical plan. The paths through the churchyard were to be stopped up now that it was no longer necessary for through traffic to use it. It had cost £16 to pave the drain around the church. This must refer to the cobbled area we see now around the church, which is a common feature in churchyards to keep damp at bay.

In April of that year it was 'further ordered that John Hollister and John Ollis be summonsed to attend the next Justiciary meeting to answer the complaint of the churchwardens for wilful damage to a monument in the churchyard'.

The Churchwardens paid James Cante 15/- (75p) for taking up the old road in the churchyard. Iron railing were placed around the wall enclosing the churchyard and the cost including setting up altogether was well over £100, which was a considerable sum.

In 1844 a gentleman by the name of Joseph Leech was writing a series of articles in the *Bristol Times* entitled 'Rural rides of the Bristol Churchgoer' and rode out to Keynsham in the October to attend the Sunday service at St John's. His rambling and fanciful discourse gives us a very unflattering picture of the churchyard. He describes picking his way over bunches of dock-leaves, nettles and fern, and the little mounds beneath which the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep'. He perched himself on the headstone of some estimable defunct at the east end of the burial ground, who departed this life, according to the stone-cutter, sincerely regretted by his family especially, and the parish of Keynsham generally, and studied an ambitious epitaph to a poetical chandler!

Another visit in the 1870's by 'The Church Rambler' is equally scathing about the churchyard. While commenting that the church had been admirably restored in 1862 he goes on to say that it struck him that the house of God is not treated with that reverent care which we expect. 'I walked round the churchyard and I was never in a worse kept one. There was no path round the church, but grass and nettles had been allowed to grow across the graves and everywhere else so that in some places I was literally knee deep in them.' He noted with surprise that on a handsome marble monument set up in 1876 was the following doggerel:

'Affliction sore long time I bore
Physicians were in vain
Till God did please that life should cease
And ease me of my pain.'

It is at this point that I took the story up for my last article in *North Wansdyke Past and Present* 6. We do not know how long the churchyard remained in this sad state, but keeping churchyards tidy while they are

full of gravestones and monuments is, and always has been, a perennial problem. There is evidence from leases in the 18th century which include 'feeding about the church' that animals were allowed to graze in our churchyard.

Once the cemetery was in use the only interments recorded in the burial register were in existing vaults or plots.

The end of the story took place in 1961 when Keynsham Urban District Council obtained a Faculty from the Chancellor of the Bath & Wells Diocese to clear St John's churchyard and lay it out with grass and flower beds.¹ Most of the gravestones were removed, a few being kept to use for a path around the church. Unfortunately these are laid with the inscription uppermost which has resulted in lamination of the pennant stone slabs by the weather, thereby removing the lettering. This, in my opinion, was very short-sighted, particularly from a personal point of view as a stone in the path to the east end of the church records the death of both my great grandparents and an infant daughter.

Recording of monumental inscriptions in churchyards is part of a national project by the Federation of Family History Societies and is a valuable contribution in the field of genealogy. While the burial register merely records the name of the deceased the inscription on a tombstone can tell us a lot more. Sadly, St John's churchyard was cleared some considerable time before this project began, and so we have lost a very valuable part of our social history.

Acknowledgements

I would like to record my grateful thanks to Mrs. Barbara Lowe for her valuable help, advice and information on the subject.

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Notes

1. All statutory measures were carried out by Keynsham Urban District Council in accordance with the Faculty, including recording of the names on each legible monument. Intensive research has not yet succeeded in running this list to earth but I hope to achieve this eventually.

The Keynsham Cemetery Bier

Michael C. Fitter

It was Thursday April 21 1994. At the agreed time of ten o'clock precisely, I joined Mr. Patrick Morris, the cemetery attendant, at Keynsham Cemetery. Two weeks earlier, whilst visiting the Glastonbury Rural Life Museum with my wife, I saw there what they listed as "The Deadcart, circa 1920", which came from Wincanton, I think. The hand-drawn bier had but one pair of wheels and was very basic.

It jogged my memory, and I recalled seeing one in the Keynsham Cemetery Chapel buildings some thirty years ago. A week later I met Patrick, who helpfully showed me the old bier hidden away against an inside wall, almost completely covered by planks, iron bars and sacks. It had never been used in all the 20 years that he had worked there. However, he kindly agreed to get it out in a few days time for me to have a proper look at it.

So there it stood, higher than the Wincanton bier, and more impressive. It was 37 inches to the base on which the coffins rested, with a further 6 inches to the top of the side rails. The base was 92 by 30 inches, with a bar outside it extending it to 39 inches. The base was wooden, the side frames being two inches by one and three-quarter inches thick.

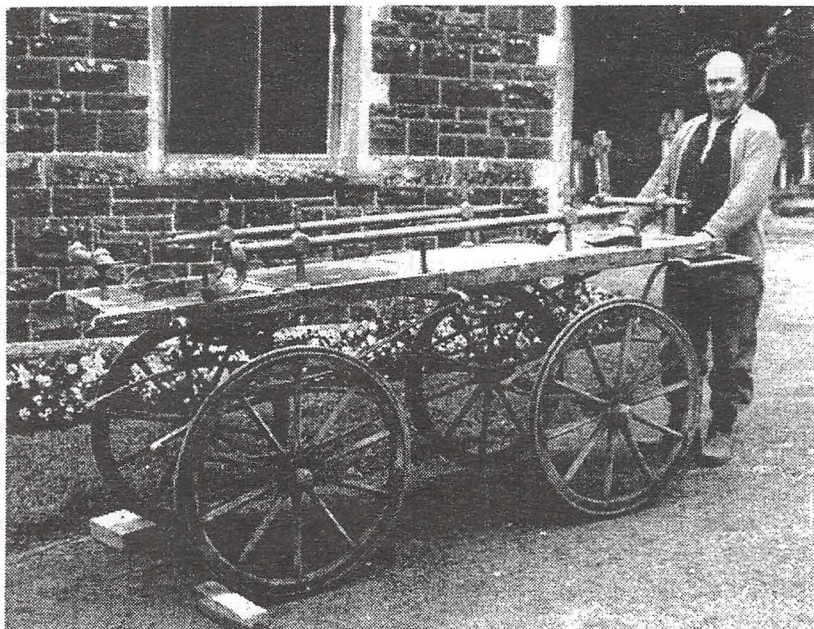
Along the base were three metal rollers to facilitate the movement of the coffin on the bier. However, to keep it still once it was in place, there were four thick leather belts, two on the left hand side and two on the right. These were attached to 4½ inch metal spikes on either side of the frame, and the belts met and were pulled tight by a buckle over the top of the coffin.

The four wheels, all the same size, had wooden spokes and a wooden circular frame, which supported an iron band into which was inserted a half-inch thick solid rubber tyre. As Patrick rubbed a metal hub cap, the inscription, 'Taylor and Craig, Melksham' was revealed. The front wheels, joined to an iron sub-frame with a metal handle for pulling, had a mechanism which enabled the wheels to make a 90 degree turn, thus giving the bier great manoeuvrability. When Patrick tried to turn it, the mechanism moved effortlessly as if it had been last used but yesterday.

The bier had no brakes, so we put two blocks of wood under the front wheels to hold it still on the slope beside the cemetery chapel. Four large metal springs supported the base, and when Patrick pushed down on them and then released the pressure, they responded instantly.

At both ends of the bier and on either side, six inches above the base, were long thick steel bars, which would have prevented a coffin from falling off. The bars were secured by wing nuts below the base, so that they could be removed to lift a coffin into place, and later remove it. Patrick suggested that the side bars could be removed for large people, in coffins more than 39 inches wide. Many are still like that today, he added.

Each of the four bars supported two identical finials in the shape of a Maltese cross, artistically decorated, and nearly 4 inches tall. These polished bars and the eight miniature crosses, would have given some semblance of quality and respect to those so impoverished that they had to walk behind the bier, through the town, to their loved one's final resting place. As Patrick commented, the wealthy would have had a black cortege, drawn by black horses sporting black plumes from the head harness.



Mr Bert Robe, a local octogenarian with an exceptional memory, faintly recalled seeing a party using the hand bier in the 1920s. He said, 'If it had been in the 1930s, I would definitely have remembered it. I think it could have been pulled by the undertaker. It would have been

used by people from Temple Street and Fairfield Terrace, who were decent and respectable hard working people, in employment, but on low incomes’.

Another octogenarian, Mr. Ron Headington, knew that the bier had been used by the Workhouse. Paupers, or unknown people who were ‘fished out of the river’, were taken to the Workhouse, identified if possible, then conveyed by bier to the cemetery.

Ron added, ‘My grandmother Sarah Headington, married John Headington, who died in 1918, and was one of the last people to have been buried at St John’s. Sarah, born in 1844, died in 1937 aged 93. She was one of the last people to have been conveyed by a black horse cortege, followed by other carriages, either horse or motor driven. The reason for her being taken by horse to St Johns and then to Durley Hill Cemetery, was that never in her life had she been in a car or a train but had always travelled by horse.’

When I discussed the subject of the bier with Mr. Jim Guyan, with his many years of experience as an undertaker, and his father before him, he recalled using it almost 40 years ago in Keynsham cemetery before they had a more modern one. He had even heard of it being towed behind a hearse to a local village, possibly Corston, for use there. In a few villages you cannot get a car to some of the houses, while some people were too heavy to carry.

Somewhere in the house he still has the invoice for the funeral in 1914 of his uncle Jack Guyan who drowned in the river at Chewton Keynsham. Jim said, ‘It was probably a “walking funeral”. Most were in those days. Then they used to have six bearers compared with today’s four. The bearers were then usually members of the family or friends.’

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Addendum

Research by Barbara J. Lowe in the *Burial Board Minutes* (Somerset County Record Office, Taunton) has found the entry of the purchase of the ‘Hand Cart’ on 16 August 1878 for £21. 16. 0d.

Local History Notes

This section is introduced for the first time, as a forum for shorter papers and notes which might not otherwise find publication.

Trades and Tradesmen in Bygone Days

Mr W. Sherer

The Wheelwright

Up to around 1925, when Keynsham was a Somerset village of around 3,000 inhabitants, some of the old rural crafts were still practised in the district. Then, horse power was still widely used on the farms and by some local tradesmen who delivered their goods around the surrounding countryside.

Wagons, carts and traps needed "running repairs" just as much as motors do today. The iron rims around the wheels needed renewing from time to time, and broken shafts were a common experience.

Mr Sherer's late father, H. W. Sherer, owned three horses, two carts and a trap. Like other horse owners in the area, he used to take his carts to be repaired by the late Mr Gallop, the local wheelwright, who had his repair yard next to the old forge at the top of Bath Hill.

Mr Gallop was a friendly gentleman and a real artist at his trade. He was a well-known wheelwright among the local horse fraternity. Of medium build, he had a ginger beard and with his brown overalls he always wore a bowler hat (these were used by many working men as they were waterproof). He lived on the Bristol Road in the row of small cottages, now all demolished, opposite and above St Dunstan's Roman Catholic church. He had one daughter, believed to have married and left the district. Mr Gallop died around 1925.

His site, in the yard of the New Inn, and next to the Pound, had no shelter from the rain. A good friend of the blacksmith, he used his furnace to heat up metal, though Mr Gallop had his own heavy hammers and anvil.

Hay Making

Hay was cut by horse-drawn mowing machines. Cutting usually began soon after dawn, as the grass cut easier with the dew on it. Also, it spared the horses working in the heat of the day.

There was no hay baling in those days. The hay was loaded on to wagons in the fields or scraped by "collectors" and brought to the mows. The mows were built on "straddles", branches taken from the hedges and odd bits of timber, to keep the mow from direct contact with the soil. The mows were either oblong or round. The mow maker had to be skilled at his job. He had to work out the dimensions of the ricks and when to start "roofing in".

Mr Sherer's father always engaged Charlie Gover to make his mows. He had no difficulty getting casual labour in the evenings. The locals, who had their jobs in the day, knew that he always laid on a plentiful supply of home-cured bacon sandwiches washed down with lashings of cider or tea.

Hay making was hard work, especially pitching the hay to the rick as it got higher, but it was quite a social occasion, when work was done, to sit partaking of the refreshments in the cool of the evening. It was fascinating to listen to middle-aged men relating their experiences which went back to the 1880s.

After the rick had "settled" it was thatched with straw. There was no need to burn straw in those days; it was always in demand for thatching or bedding.

The size of the mow was related to the size of the field. They had an 18 acre field and a 4 acre field, which are now covered by the Courtenay Road Estate.

More Hot Air!

Margaret Whitehead

In my article in North Wansdyke Past and Present No.5 I described the troubles which beset the setting-up of Keynsham Cemetery. The rate-payers were once more in revolt at the end of 1876, this time concerning the cost of lighting the public lamps by gas. Mr Ricketts is to the fore once again.

A report of a meeting appeared in the Times & Mirror in November:

"The Lighting of Keynsham. On Saturday a meeting of the rate-payers for this parish was held, to consider what steps should be taken towards lighting the town. A tender has been received from the Keynsham Gas Company, stating that they were willing to light 33 public lamps in Keynsham according to the terms of their last agree-

ment for one year, at £2 per lamp per annum, including the lighting and extinguishing the same. It was proposed that this tender be accepted, but Mr Tricks (the secretary of the Gas Company) said, in answer to an inquiry, that the tender was £8 5s. in excess of the sum two years ago. Mr Ricketts observed that there was a reduction in the price of coal, and gas could therefore be manufactured cheaper, and moved as an amendment that the tender be not accepted. The amendment was put and carried, when Mr Tricks announced that the lamps would not be lit after that night. The meeting was then adjourned till Wednesday next."

This was followed a week later by two letters which shed some light on the adjourned meeting:

"Gentlemen, I was much pleased, in attending the public meeting, on Wednesday evening last, for the purpose of voting a sum for lighting the public gas lamps, to see the chairman (Mr George S. Tricks) so determined to not to allow a large number of parties (who are not residing in the gas district) to take part in and disturb the meeting, as they have latterly done.

If the larger ratepayers of the parish allow themselves to be outvoted by the smaller ones, it follows that the former will shortly have no voice in parish matters. Yours truly, A Ratepayer."

"Gentlemen, I notice in your paper of the 30th ult. a report of a meeting of the ratepayers and inhabitants of this 'enlightened' parish, at which some noisy and confused discussion seems to have taken place in reference to the cost of lighting the public lamps.

It must be familiar to your readers that nothing can now be done for the public good in Keynsham without a broil; but in the present instance the opposition to the proposal submitted to the meeting was particularly vexatious, as the persons who made themselves conspicuous at the original and adjourned meetings cannot by any possibility have to contribute between them more than 10s. towards the lighting rate, and for this paltry sum they would have the other inhabitants sustain the annoyance of total darkness for another year.

"Tempus fugit", remarked one of those present. He should have said "Tempora mutantur" as regards Keynsham, which, from being a great rural village, is fast becoming a hotbed of disunion. Yours obediently, Hodge.

The above material comes from the archives of Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society.

