

AROUND KEYNSHAM & SALTFORD PAST AND PRESENT



THE JOURNAL OF THE KEYNSHAM & SALTFORD
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY
SERIES 3. NO.2 2021

KEYNSHAM & SALTFORD
PAST & PRESENT

Contents; -

| | |
|---|------|
| Notes from the Chairman..... | P.3 |
| All Beer and Skittles..... | P.5 |
| . | |
| Keynsham Celebrities 1911..... | P.10 |
| A Prequel to the ‘Sad Case of Ann Mortimer’..... | P.14 |
| Keynsham Abbey and Marshfield..... | P.19 |
| The Polysulphin Horse Ferry..... | P.21 |
| The Trials of a Keynsham Clergyman..... | P.25 |
| The Somerset Salmon Fishery District..... | P.35 |
| The Curious Suicide of a Keynsham Blacksmith..... | P.37 |
| Witchcraft at Keynsham..... | P.42 |
| Images of Keynsham..... | P.50 |

Journal Edited & Produced by Brian Vowles.

Published by the Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society.

Copyright © 2021; the individual authors and Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the publishers and copyright holders.

Cover illustration;

Dr Willett in his pony & trap stops to speak to a villager on the High Street.

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

NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

When I wrote the introduction to last year's journal in June 2020, I was hopeful that we would be able to run our usual programme of talks through the autumn and winter. How wrong I was! As all members are aware, the coronavirus pandemic required our summer programme to be cancelled, followed by all meetings from the AGM through to April. Technology, together with sterling efforts by members of the committee and others, meant that we were able to maintain links, send out lots of old photographs and offer our monthly presentations virtually to those connected to the internet. I am conscious that this was a second-best solution; we have some members not able to access the internet and others who do not find Zoom meetings accessible or enjoyable. Nonetheless, many people, socially isolated at home, appreciated our efforts and I am grateful to all those who enabled us to do it.

During the pandemic, some aspects of our activities have continued. Our book on Keynsham & Saltford 1945-2020 was completed and published, and we timed this right for the pre-Christmas sales season, with more than 500 copies sold so far. This was sufficient to recoup the Society's financial outlay. The book brings back memories for many who grew up locally, but it also makes a useful contribution to the record of recent local history, featuring many aspects of local life that might otherwise have been lost to future generations. Producing it relied on a great deal of effort in researching and writing by a committed group of Society members and others. The project was conceived in 2015, so it also took perseverance and patience from the contributors – I think they can be proud of the finished publication.

Looking forward, we are hoping that the next year will see a return to some sort of normality, so unless coronavirus throws us another curveball, we will be holding our Annual General Meeting in September, followed by a full series of talks at St Dunstan's through the next season.

Some of our members have made good use of the various periods of lockdown to carry out new research on various topics. Promoting the study and recording of local history is, in our constitution, the first object of the Society and I am always pleased when we can support and publish such work. The research on the Witches Marks found in a cottage at Steel Mills is an example of this, and it is described in these pages. We also include reports on research and discoveries on the horse ferry at the former Polysulphin factory at the end of Broadmead Lane, and thoughts on the possible connection between Keynsham Abbey and Marshfield. Stories of several local personalities are included. One whose name has become forgotten is Gwendolen Wills of the tobacco family; she was a remarkable lady who made many contributions to local life in the first half of the twentieth century. Our editor puts a great deal of time into researching old accounts and reports of life in the area and a prequel to the 'Sad Case of Ann Mortimer' that appeared in our 1995 journal has been investigated

I look forward to seeing everyone again in person and to a more normal year of activities. We have recruited some new members through the pandemic; if you are one, then I look forward to meeting you and hope you will be able to play a full part in the life of the Society.



Richard Dyson, Chairman

All Beer and Skittles

By Brian Vowles

There is no doubt that the game of skittles has been one of the most popular sports in England since medieval times and the game of skittles seems to us today still to be an innocuous traditional past time played through the generations. At one time almost every pub or inn boasted at least one alley and sometimes even two - such was the popularity of the game.

But it comes as a surprise then to find that, in the wake of the rise of the temperance movement in the nineteenth century, skittling was regarded with such distaste, an evil occupation that must be stamped out. Maybe it was deemed to be a waste of the working man's time and money when he could be spending his limited earnings on nobler activities and self-betterment. In fact, just having a skittle alley in a pub was enough to give the magistrates a reason to refuse to grant a licence to sell ale.

The Bristol Mercury reported on Saturday 28 August 1869 the results of a hearing into the granting of a licence to an unnamed pub...

“At the Keynsham petty session, yesterday, before Messrs. J.S. Lean, Harford Lyne, F.L. Popham, and J.C. Ireland, in the case of Robert Stewart, the Superintendent said there was a skittle alley on the premises. The learned chairman – “So, then, this house is the habitual resort of bad characters”. The applicant ventured to demur to such a strong interpretation being put upon the possession of a skittle alley. The Chairman – “you admit to having a skittle alley”.

The applicant did admit to this, but urged that the game of skittles in itself was just a simple amusement and he pleaded that he might keep it open for "*respectable people*" to have a quiet game.

Mr. Harford Lyne concurred in this view of the game of skittles but the Superintendent of Police called their worships' attention to the fact that men played for beer at these skittle alleys and one of the learned magistrates then, addressing the applicant, said, "*You had far better do away with it.*" The applicant replied that he could not do so, as the skittle alley belonged to the owner of the premises and he dared not pull it down. The applicant was then told that he should lock up the ball and pins, and on his promising his best to carry out the magistrates' wish, the bench took a favourable view of his application - but he was cautioned that the police were going to watch the alleys!

On 25th September 1869 the Keynsham Magistrates triumphantly declared that they had suppressed the game in their district. The beer house keepers, whose applications had been suspended on the grounds of having skittle alleys in use on their premises, were granted their certificates only when proving to the satisfaction of the court that they had permanently closed the alleys within their establishment.

In the case of one Robert Williams, licensee of the Royal Oak (now the Wine Bar), the magistrates, while granting his certificate, hoped that he had given up his alley all together. A Police Sergeant Williams testified that there was a lot of skittle playing in the neighbourhood when he first came there, but it had much improved since; and significantly there had been no skittle playing since the last magistrates meeting.

P.S. Williams went on to say that, whilst he didn't mean to say that every person playing skittles was a person of bad character, he had seen poachers in their midst and men who had been convicted of a felony had been seen on the applicant's premises. Although, he agreed that there had not been so much of it during the last few months (possibly because indoor skittles tended to be a winter game). Robert Williams assured the magistrates that he had done away with his skittle alley altogether and Thomas Robert Smith of the Wheatsheaf in Temple Street had his certificate granted on similar terms. Henry Ollis of the Jolly Sailor, Saltford who had not duly served his notice at the last meeting, had his certificate granted. On the other hand Joseph Longman of Keynsham found it more difficult as at one time he had his certificate suspended on the grounds that he was convicted of being drunk.

When he reapplied he assured the magistrates that it was four or five years since that charge had been brought against him but one of the magistrates remarked that it was not half as long ago as that, but as it was the only conviction against him the certificate was granted.

On 16th July 1870 the Bristol Mercury ran the following article...

“THE KEYNSHAM POLICE AND THE GAME OF SKITTLES”. “Some time ago the Keynsham police gained not a little notoriety by attempting to entirely suppress the game of skittles in their district, not only in the small public houses but at the principal inns. Yesterday an application was made to transfer the license of the Lamb and Lark Hotel, the principal inn in Keynsham, from Thomas Carey to Daniel Skuse. The necessary notices having been proved to have been served, it

appeared that the new landlord and a friend, the relative of his wife, had on the previous night played a friendly game of skittles for a supper between them and that others had enjoyed the invigorating recreation afforded by the old English game at this well-known hostelry. This, in the eyes of the rural police was a "heinous offence", and P.S. Williams rising, reminded their worships of the action taken relative to the game of skittles a short time ago in that district, and the cautions against skittles which they had administered when the licenses were issued. This game of skittles, he understood, had recently been played at the Lamb and Lark Hotel. Their worships, having deliberated, the chairman (Mr Ireland) told Mr Skuse they had to inform him that there was an act recently passed against "playing or betting by way of wagering in any place of public resort."

The publican protested "*But must I not allow the game of*



skittles to be played at all? I allow no betting, and I allow none but respectable persons to enter the place to play. I played with a relative of my wife's for a supper."

The Chairman was reluctant to give an opinion on the matter but Mr Skuse sought clarification "*But I should like to know, if I allow no betting, and no beer in the alley except what is paid for when wanted by any person, whether I cannot allow the game to be played? I only played for a supper with my wife's relative."*

Daniel Skuse did not last long after this case as he died on November 23rd 1873 at the Lamb and Lark, aged 59. His widow Betsey carried on the business.

However, the zealous P.S Williams informed the Bench that it had been decided that “*playing for money or money’s worth was gambling*”. Mr Ireland then warned the landlord that he had better not allow them to play for money or money’s worth but the landlord retorted that the question was “*was there to be no playing at all?* The Chairman concluded (probably much to P.S.Williams’ frustration) that they could not prevent him allowing playing there and the licence was then transferred without any special conditions as to there being “*no skittles allowed.*”

But the game of skittles survived, became respectable and flourished. When a new Liberal club was opened on Bath Hill at Keynsham on 30th October 1894, despite it not having an alcohol licence, one of its attractions was a ‘splendid’ skittle alley, 72ft. by 12ft., and matches were played against many other organisations. Not to be outdone the Constitutional Club, which did have a licence, when it opened in 1904 voted to install its own alley and there in 1931 a Mr. B.J. Ollis made a record score for the alley of 64.

By the early years of the twentieth century skittling became very popular; one or even two skittle alleys were to be found in most public houses and inns and numerous leagues arose to promote competition between them. Unfortunately today as life styles change, with the daily closing of pubs (many of historic origin) the numbers of those playing the sport are declining with many young people, attracted instead by the razz-a-ma-tazz of the imported automated American ten pin bowling industry instead.

Will the ancient sport survive the changes in our leisure activities in the twenty-first century?

Keynsham Celebrities 1911

by Brian Vowles

In the archives of the Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society there is a letter sent to a Mrs Matthews sometime in the 1940s/50s, by 81 year-old Annie Barnes which refers to a photograph of a pair of people dressed in an anachronistic style already out of date at the turn of the century.

But who were these people for whom life was very different from that which we experience today?

Compton Dunds

Dear Mrs Matthews

Just a line to say how much I liked the photo of old Jim & Sis, Bees. They was born at Compton up top Hill called Robins Hill in a very small & small house over 800 years old with only 2 rooms, one up & down so mother died when they was quite young so they sleep in the there bed like baby, in a cot together there father took milk to Bristol every day by Waggon horse that is over 50 year ago for I was a friend of the family then

There photo was taken at Keynsham 40 years ago outside Old Bromsey meat shop then they are dress in their Sunday dress for that was only what they wear when they went out together Sis was very fond of Bones for making Soup then so near to Bones shop the photo taken you may have Reade in the same paper Mrs Armet Remember, the Price of Coal that Mr Jones, Godfrey then was got for 2¹/₂ small 1¹/₂ half stone 6¹/₂ all large cut then no stones it was coal then so I hope that will give a little news of Past Mrs Mathew I am over 81 year cannot get about now your truly
Annie Barnes

The couple, referred to as Jim and Sis Bees, are caught in their Sunday best on Bristol Road and the letter maintains that they were born in an 800 year-old two-up-two down cottage at the top of Robin's Hill in Compton Dando.



Jim & Sis Bees from Compton Dando

It adds that their mother died when they were quite young; but on investigation it appears that Elizabeth died early in 1898 and was buried at St Mary's, Compton Dando, on 16 February so at the time Jim was in fact 37 and Sarah 34!

It also adds that they slept together in a cot presumably because of the lack of space in the tiny cottage.

The Parish Register of St Mary's Church Compton Dando records that Jim was baptised 'William James' on 11 November 1860, the son of a labourer James Bees and his wife

Elizabeth, and his sister Sarah four years later on 18 December 1864. At the time their father was a shepherd probably working for Edward Harding at Green Farm.

James is recorded in 1861 as being 6 months old and 1871 finds the family still in Compton Dando with James now aged 10 and Sarah 6.

In 1881 the parents are at 'Fox Hole' in the village with daughter Sarah but James aged 20 is working away as a labourer at Staunton Lane, Whitchurch and boarding with a Thomas Constable and his wife.

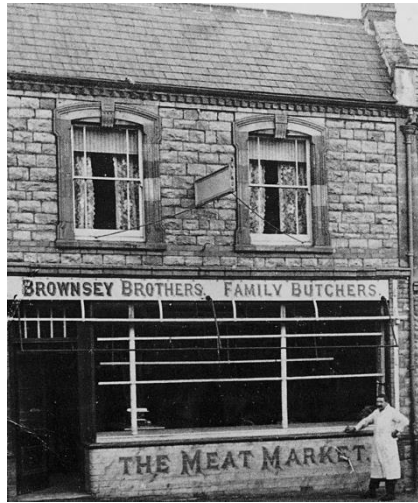
The 1891 census records the couple back living with their parents, James aged 67 and Elizabeth aged 69, on Robin's Hill, Compton Dando. He is referred to as 'William' aged 30, an agricultural worker and Sarah aged 26. Eight years later their mother Elizabeth died early in 1898 and was buried at the village church, St Mary's, on 16 February.

In 1901 he is named as William J Bees aged 40 living in "Foxes Hole" next to New Farm employed as an "ordinary agricultural worker" born in Compton Dando and his sister Sarah is 36. Their father is recorded as James Bees aged 77, a shepherd, by then a widower and also born in Compton Dando although the letter quoted states that he drove a wagon to Bristol every day delivering milk. However he died five years later and was also buried at St Mary's in April 1905 aged 81.

Presumably theirs was a tied cottage and his death would have made them homeless. So by 1911 James Bees and his sister Sarah have moved into a property in Bath Street (now Bristol Road), Keynsham. He is aged 50 and an agricultural

worker and Sarah aged 46. Both remain single and the caption on their photograph has made them 'Keynsham Celebrities 1911'. The letter also refers to Sarah's liking for soup made with bones bought from Brownsey Brothers butcher's shop on Bath Hill.

But James or 'Jim' did not survive long at this address and his sudden death on Bath Hill was subject to an inquest as is necessary in these circumstances -



Brownsey Brothers Butchery shop
on Bath Hill

Western Daily Press reported on Wednesday 1 July 1914... *"Keynsham. An inquest was held yesterday, at the Police Court, by Dr. Samuel Craddock (Coroner for the Northern Division of Somerset) upon the body of Williams James Bees, a farm labourer, aged 54 years, of Bath Hill, Keynsham, who was found dead in bed Sunday afternoon last. Dr. William Peache Taylor, of Station Road, Keynsham, stated that the deceased suffered from disease of the heart. The jury returned verdict in accordance with the medical evidence. The jury gave their fees to the sister."*

William James Bees was buried in Keynsham Cemetery on 1 July 1914 aged 54 but his sister Sarah survived him until her interment on 10 October 1923 aged 60.

A Prequel to the ‘Sad Case of Ann Mortimer’

by Brian Vowles

In our 1995 journal Elizabeth White wrote an interesting article about the strange sad case of Ann Mortimer which took place in May 1860 the details of which are still available to read on our website www.keysalthist.org.uk.

Briefly, she was the daughter of the Brass Mills manager Richard Mortimer and was charged with the manslaughter of her new born child. She was sent for trial at the Assizes held at Wells on 8th August 1863 and found not guilty. Elizabeth posed some 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 that 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?

Further to this tale I have unearthed details from four years previously involving this young lady who was betrayed by a 20 year-old man from the village already engaged to someone else!

The Morning Post printed on Tuesday 1 November 1859 reported...

“EXTRAORDINARY CHARGE OF ROBBERY. On Friday (29 October), at the County Constabulary Police station,

Keynsham (before Messrs. J.C.C. Ireland, H. Lyne, R. Ricketts, and H.C. Mynors), Edward Brewer, respectable-looking young man, was brought up on remand with stealing, on the 9th inst., a cash-box containing a large sum of money and other articles from the house of Mr. Richard Mortimer, resident manager of the Keynsham brass mills. Mr. G. L. King, of Bristol, appeared on behalf of the prosecution; the prisoner was defended by Mr. Dene, also of Bristol."

Miss Anne Mortimer, a delicate-looking young lady, with a profusion of auburn ringlets then gave her account of the affair: *"I am the daughter of Mr. Edward (?) Mortimer, of Keynsham; I have been acquainted for 12 or 13 months with the prisoner at the bar, Edward Brewer during the greater part of that time he was living Keynsham; I recollect his leaving Keynsham on the 3rd October. I had seen him in the afternoon and evening of the previous day he told me he was going to leave Keynsham and go to Weymouth for two or three days. He told me that if I would take my father's money-box he would marry me and take me out of the*



Annie Mortimer

country. He told me to take the box and all; I was in the family way, and expected shortly to be confined". She then went on to tell of the prisoner's repeated solicitations to her and her final consent to assist him to rob the house.

"On Sunday night I went upstairs alone and undid the shutters of the window from which Edward Brewer took the money; the window looked towards the railway; I then went into my father's room and got the money; it was in a cash-box, which was not open. I then put it on the window sill; I unfastened the window before I took the box ; I saw Edward Brewer waiting outside pushed the window open ; when I put the box on the sill the prisoner took it away ; he did not speak to me at the window; I saw him again directly afterwards at the garden gate he went out of the garden by the rails we pulled down ; he said he could not break the box, but would send me a Post-office order on Tuesday morning for £2, in the name of Mary Brown, to the General Post Office, Bristol; asked how I could come there when he had taken from me every halfpenny I had in the world? How I could go to Bristol to get the Post-Office order when he had taken away all my money from me. He had taken 5s. 6d. from me when he first met me that evening; he took it out of my pocket without asking me for it; in answer my question, he put his hand in his pocket and gave me 1s.; with that he wished me good bye, and I have not seen or heard from him since."

A letter from Miss Mortimer to the prisoner was read. It was written in most loving strain, and expressed her readiness to elope with him. But she went on to allege that *"the night of the robbery the prisoner threatened to blow my brains out; I felt timid at the time, and thought he would carry his threat into execution if I did not rob my father. Since the 9th of October I have been confined of a child; the prisoner is the father of that*

child; I did not think that Brewer would have blown my brains out on the 9th of October, but that he would wait for good opportunity when he said that I knew what I had to expect, I understood him to mean that he would blow my brains out; he was not armed that I was aware of.” He asked her to write to him, and address the letter to Miss E. Bolton, St. John's Wood, Hampstead. Three days later she was confined to have her child.

A Sergeant Scholar stated that he was stationed at Keynsham, and on 16 October he went to London with a warrant, and apprehended the prisoner on the following day at St. John's Wood. The officer charged Brewer with stealing the cash-box of Mr. Mortimer, and on searching the prisoner he found a gold eye-glass, which Mr Mortimer afterwards identified as his property. In a carpet-bag in a linen bag in Brewer's room he found an old shilling of 1691, a gold wedding ring marked A. W., a cornelian stone seal, a pearl handled penknife, two small keys, a small green stone, a silver watch-guard swivel, a tooth, and a second gold ring.

The prisoner was then committed for trial. An application was made for bail and the Magistrates set bail for the prisoner in £400, and two sureties of £200 each. Later found guilty at the Taunton assizes he was sentenced to twelve months in Taunton Gaol.

However this was not the end of it as further details of Brewer's activities came to light when evidence emerged of another offence. At the Somerset Assizes on 28 March 1860 Edward Brewer was indicted for another burglary at Keynsham and stealing money and jewellery.

Coincidentally he was courting the same Miss E Bolton the servant of Miss Copeland, whose house was broken into in October 1858. The house was properly locked up (but conveniently a window was propped open with a pebble.- sound familiar?) but the next morning it was discovered that several rings which had been placed on the dressing-room table on the previous night were missing, and it was evident that the house had been broken into during the night. The burglar must have used a ladder in order to gain entry into the house, and he must have been acquainted with the premises.

No suspicion was attached to anyone until about 12 months after the burglary when the prisoner went to a watchmaker's to have something done to his watch.

Mr. Player, watchmaker, of Reading, said the prisoner came his shop on the morning of the 13th October and purchased a watch, for which he gave £3 10s. and an old Geneva watch, and requested him to engrave upon it, "E. Bolton, 1859." He came again for it in the evening, and showed him four rings which he said belonged to his grandmother, and wanted 25s. for them. Presumably Mr Player relayed his suspicions to the police which instigated their investigation and with his damning evidence, the prisoner was found guilty, and sentenced to three years' penal servitude.

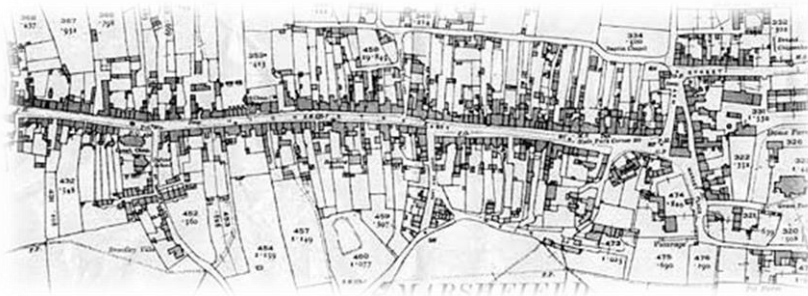
He served 12 months at Taunton Gaol in solitary (except for Chapel, School & exercise) and on 29 January 1861 he was sent to Millbank Prison (the site of the present Tate Gallery) for 24 days. On 22 February 1861 he was removed to Portsmouth Prison for 18 months 28 days before he was discharged on licence on 18 September 1862 to his aunt, Mary Porter at Knowle Bristol.

Keynsham Abbey and Marshfield

by William Evans

(William Evans has put forward this theory with regard to the layout of Keynsham's old High Street. Ed.)

Keynsham existed in Anglo-Saxon times: there is archaeological evidence for that, and it was mentioned in Domesday as having a fair. Its abbey was founded 1167-1172 by William Earl of Gloucester and one of the manors with which he endowed Keynsham Abbey was Marshfield in Gloucestershire.



Old Map of Marshfield

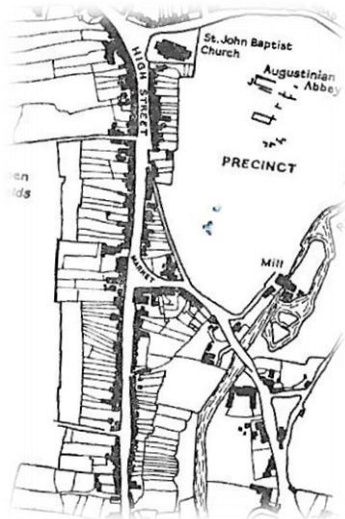
In 1234 Keynsham Abbey obtained a charter from Henry III for a market at Marshfield. There was later a fair there, chartered in 1462 by Edward IV. Keynsham Abbey did not just establish a market and fair at Marshfield, it established a new town as an economic venture. Marshfield was on a route between Bristol and Chippenham, so a town there had the potential to prosper, and its market had the potential to boost the abbey's income from stallages and tolls.

Marshfield was laid out with tenements, fronting on and at right angles to the high street. Many of the tenements can be traced today, as shown on Ordnance survey maps.

After initial objections from Bristol, and a re-grant of a charter in 1265, Marshfield was successful. In the lay subsidy of 1334 its assessment was £270, larger than those for Shepton Mallet, Wrington, Yate/Sodbury and even Bath. That made it the fourth most prosperous settlement in Gloucestershire, next after Bristol, Gloucester and Cirencester.

In 1303, nearly 70 years after the grant of its market charter for Marshfield, Keynsham abbey obtained another charter, this time for a market on its own doorstep. As at Marshfield, at Keynsham the abbey not only ran a market and fair, but also laid out plots along what is now the High Street and Temple Street. Right is a plan drawn about 1974 by Mick Aston when he was an archaeologist employed in Somerset County Council's planning department.

I would like to suggest that Keynsham abbey re-founded Keynsham as a new town with a market and fair because it was encouraged by the success of what it had done at Marshfield and that Marshfield was the model for medieval Keynsham.



Map of Keynsham
(property of the estate of
Mick Aston)

The Polysulphin Horse Ferry.

By Rick Staples

As President of Bristol Avon Sailing Club in Saltford I have spent a lot of time recently publishing a weekly newsletter for the members to keep them in touch with the club during lockdown. As part of my newsletter I have, each week, told them something of interest concerning the local area. In researching this I have read some of the journals of your society. The one I refer to here is from series 2, Journal number 8 of 2008. I read with great interest the section on James Pemberton starting on page 10. On page 15 it talks about access to the Polysulphin from North of the river. It states that there were horse ferries at Hanham and Saltford. This is correct but there was another horse ferry just downstream of Swinford lock. This is clearly shown on the O.S. map of 1844 to 1888.

In addition there was indeed a private ferry which operated at the Polysulphin to enable staff to travel between the offices and the factory. I have personal knowledge of this ferry boat because, after the 1968 flood, the wreck of the ferry boat was washed up onto the bank immediately downstream of the factory, it was upside down and connected to the wharf by a very heavy chain. At the time I was great friends of the Hoskins family who owned the White Hart public house and the Tea Gardens. Alan Hoskins had seen the wreck when walking the family dog so when the water had receded, he and I set about trying to recover it. We took a launch up to the site and attached a cable to the wreck and mounted a winch to a tree on the opposite bank. Regrettably on exerting a pull on the cable the wreck slipped down the bank and disappeared below the water, still attached to the chain. It was rectangular in construction with

matching sloping stem and stern. About 20 ft long 8ft wide and 3 ft deep. I suspect it remains in the same location on the bed of the river. Although constructed of heavy timbers these would have been completely waterlogged allowing it to sink without trace.

When I was involved with the Tea Gardens at Keynsham, Mr Hoskins the owner bought a steel landing craft which he moored just above the weir as a store. One winter this thing took on water and sank taking an expensive motor yacht called “Lubo” with it. The motor yacht was salvaged the same winter but the landing craft wasn’t. I presume that’s still sitting on the bottom! I wonder how many more wrecks are sitting on the river bed, dozens I wouldn’t wonder.



The Horse Ferry at Saltford

Going back to horse ferries, we have the remains of the Saltford horse ferry (Somerset side) right in front of the sailing club. In addition the Gloucestershire side of the ferry is immediately opposite. Several years ago I was sitting in one of our safety boats on the opposite bank and noticed a heavy chain attached to the base of an iron post disappearing into the river. I am convinced the chain has something to do with the ferry. The post it is connected to is in fact a piece of narrow

gauge railway line. There are two posts in exactly the right place to be part of the ferry. Attached is a photo taken in the big freeze of 1963. In the foreground you can see the two posts sticking straight up out of the bank. The photo was taken immediately opposite the sailing club in Farmer Padfield's field



Photo taken immediately opposite the sailing club in the winter of 1963.

When the local authority rebuilt the river bank in Mead Lane they had to excavate the bank to make room for their new posts. When they did this they uncovered some very large horizontal timbers which I believe are the remnants of a quay. The location of the timbers is immediately upstream of our top slipway. It is of course quite probable that a quay once existed there.

What I haven't mentioned is the Pottery Dump shown on a Google image just 250 metres southeast of the Dramway terminus. In other words a little further upstream from Avon Wharf.

As a lad of nine or ten this was a place of mystery to me and my friends. It was a large triangular mound about 8ft high and 100ft along each side. The reason I say mystery is because it constantly gave off the smell of burning and small plumes of smoke rose from various holes in the surface. If you climbed up on to the top of it, the ground was hot to the touch. It turns out it was the ash and debris from one or more of the pottery and glass works in the Kingswood area.

The location of the dump at the end of the Dramway leads me to think the Drams were used to deliver coal to the potteries and remove the waste but I have no proof of this. I expect we were dicing with a very unpleasant death by climbing on it but I'm pretty sure most of us went home each night!

We were fascinated not just because of the smoke, smell and heat but because a little digging would bring forth a multitude of crockery and glass dating back to Victorian times and before. Lemonade bottles with marbles as stoppers, medicine bottles, marmalade pots, you name it we found it.

As the years went by it got smaller and smaller until now it is just a mark in the grass. I know the local farmer and the people who ran the Tea Gardens by the Marina used to cart the ash away for use on the farm tracks but what happened to the pottery and glass I have no idea, it went in the river I wouldn't wonder.

The Trials of a Keynsham Clergyman

by Brian Vowles with research material kindly donated to the society by the American author and historian Anne Van Arsdall,

On Saturday 24 January 1808 the Rev. John Cockin, the curate of Keynsham, married a Miss Jones of Birmingham and a year later a son was baptised Thomas Oswald on 20 January 1809 in Keynsham Parish Church in Somerset by his parents, John and Louisa. On 29 October that year the curate preached at a service in St John's Parish Church on the occasion of George III jubilee celebrations.

In the following years up to 1825 John Cockin and his wife Louise had eight more children according to Keynsham Parish Church records, all baptised by their father. Curates in the nineteenth century were not well paid and that John Cockin was struggling financially is suggested by the fact that the Parish General Vestry initiated a subscription in 1821 to raise £30 per annum to be paid quarterly to the Reverend John Cockin for a supplemental Sunday service. In addition it appears that he also ran a school for boys.

Quite when the family left Keynsham is difficult to establish, but they were in Sydenham in 1841, the year in which John Cockin, became curate of Old Chapel, and he and his family were apparently already living in that area by 1835.

His son Thomas Oswald Cockayne went up to Cambridge in 1824, having been admitted as a sizar of St John's College on the 8th July (an undergraduate student who, having passed a certain examination, was exempted from paying college fees and charges) but nothing is known of his schooling

or of his preparation for university. There he enrolled under the name Cockayne, not Cockin, the form borne by his father. In 1828 he gained his BA degree, with a first-class showing in Mathematics (he took his MA in 1835). On the 7 April 1833 he was ordained a deacon and, following in his father's footsteps, was immediately appointed as curate of Keynsham Parish by the Vicar. On 10 October 1834, Cockayne was ordained a priest in the Palace of Wells. A letter preparatory to his ordination, signed by the vicars of Keynsham and Bedminster as well as by the Rector of Saltford, attests to Cockayne as a man who has 'lived piously, soberly and honestly', who has 'diligently applied himself to his studies' and who has not at any time 'held, written or taught anything contrary to the doctrine and discipline of the United Church of England and Ireland'.

Four days after his ordination as a priest, Cockayne married Janetta, the daughter of a local surgeon Mr Edwards and their first child, born in the following year, was baptised Florence Louisa by her father in Keynsham Parish Church (6 November 1835).

During this period Oswald Cockayne also taught locally at Tucker's Academy, a school run by the Rev. Thomas H. Tucker from 1832. The Bristol Times and Mirror announced on Saturday 6 October 1832 – "*KEYNSHAM SCHOOL. R. OSWALD COCKAYNE, M.A., of St. John's College, Cambridge, having succeeded to the conduct of the Establishment on the lamented death of the Rev. Mr. Tucker, will carry on the School on the same principles and terms as the late highly esteemed Head. He will be happy to explain his pretensions and his testimonials to his Friends. The course of Reading comprises the highest branches of Classical and Mathematical Literature*

pursued at the Universities. The Village is perfectly free from all epidemics and the situation of the House offers great advantages for effective precaution" (presumably referring to the scourge of cholera current at that time). This property, later known as the Grange, is now in 2020 being converted into apartments.

However it must have been an uncertain position as on 29 April 1837 the Bristol Mirror carried an advertisement for the sale of a house 'lately occupied by the Rev. J. O. Cockayne' that included 'a room lately used as a school room'. In the meantime, in a letter dated the 14 December 1836, Cockayne had applied for a position as a junior master at King's College School, London and on 20 January 1837 the Council of King's College appointed Cockayne as Assistant Master in the School. Cockayne performed his last baptism as Curate of Keynsham Parish Church on the 22 January 1837 and a new curate was in place within the week. He quickly departed for London without his family, returning to Keynsham to baptise his second child, Alice Eden, on the 25 March 1837 and he is last seen performing baptisms in Keynsham later that year on the 6 August and 13 August.

At the 1841 census his wife and children were still in Keynsham with Janetta's father but no records have been located as to where Oswald Cockayne was then living but ten years later aged 43 he and his family were to be found at 11 Howland Street, Saint Pancras.

Oswald Cockayne was to teach in King's College School on the Strand from 1837 to 1869, serving under John Major, its first Head Master, who was at the school from 1831 to 1866. Although a Junior Department within the College, the School



Thomas Oswald Cockayne (1807–1873) from the National Portrait Gallery

was almost immediately successful, and its pupils quickly outnumbered those in the College. By 1837 the School had grown from an original two classes to six; by 1845 there were over 500 pupils. His was a busy life. He was not only a school master by day and a writer in his spare time but for many of his years at the School he was a house master usefully supplementing his salary. In the 1851 census at 17, Montague Street, St Georges Bloomsbury, his household contained nine boarders and four servants.

By 1866, with almost thirty years of service, Cockayne's salary was still only £150 plus capitation fees, supplemented by the boarding fees (boarders paid twenty guineas per term plus one guinea for washing and one for the use of plate and linen).

But all was not well in the School. By 1865 enrolment had slipped from a high of just over 500 to 367 pupils, and there were worries about teaching and discipline. On 9 February 1866 the Council set up an investigative committee, which issued its report a little over a month later. One section was critical of Mr Cockayne's teaching methods. Cockayne responded to the criticism in a letter to the Council, but in its turn the Council, refused to respond. The 1866 investigation resulted not only in the censure of Cockayne but also in the abrupt dismissal of the Head Master of the School, Dr Major, after thirty-five years of service, and also in the resignation of Dr Jelf, Principal of the College. A surprisingly short time later the Rev. George Frederick Maclear, (an appointment to the Classical Division as recently as 1860 at the age of 27), was appointed as temporary Head Master and, after interviews in November, emerged as the new Head Master. Five days after Maclear's appointment the College Secretary's son was appointed an assistant Master.

Immediately after his temporary appointment and continuing into his permanent appointment, Maclear set about reorganising the School and reinvigorating the teaching staff with younger appointees. Determined to oust Cockayne in early November, 1869, Maclear approached the Principal of the College about certain trumped up allegations concerning him, requesting an investigation. Amongst these were two examples of *'indecent details connected with questionable allusions in Classical Authors'*. The first was Cockayne's explanation as to *'Why Paris did not want to go to the fight'* – *'Because of course Paris wished to lie all day in bed with Helen'*. The second was that Cockayne had said that *'Livia maintained her influence over the Emperor by offering him pretty girls'*. Examples such as these were, in the puritan climate of the age, enough to convince the Council that he was *'corrupting the morals of his pupils'* and on Saturday, 20 November 1869 the Council voted unanimously that he *'be dismissed from the office of Master in the School in accordance with the Committee's recommendations'*. Coincidentally within a matter of weeks, Mr C. H. Cunningham, son of the College Secretary, was promoted into Cockayne's position upon the recommendation of the Head Master. Now just over sixty years old, Cockayne was suddenly unemployed, without a pension, and being virtually unemployable, he would no longer be sanctioned by the School to house boarders. A position in another school would be most unlikely without a reference from King's and a church appointment was most unlikely given the circumstances surrounding his dismissal.

On top of these upheavals, Cockayne suffered a further personal blow when two months later his elder daughter, Florence Louisa died from cancer. For the remaining few years

of his life he continued to live at 13 Manor Park, Lee, with his wife, Janetta, and younger daughter, Alice Eden. In the 1871 census returns he is described as 'Author' and the four boys boarding in the household, aged 10 and 11, were very likely being prepared for entrance examinations. Alice Eden is described as a teacher. Although a prolific and much respected author of books principally relating to Anglo-Saxon literature, money was in short supply. In May 1872 he was in touch with Trübner and Co., booksellers based in 50 Paternoster Row, London, about selling his books but his finances did not improve.

On Sunday 1 June 1873 he left his home, near Bristol, with the avowed intention of going to Hastings for the benefit his health but on Thursday 26 June the West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser carried a shocking story... *'ST. IVES. Suicide St. Ives. The inquest relative to the death of a man found at Carthew Point, near St. Ives, on Sunday last has been concluded after repeated adjournments. It will be remembered that deceased was discovered lying on the ground in an unfrequented spot, and on examination it was found that he had been shot through the head. A discharged pistol was also found in his left breast coat pocket. The evidence on the inquest went to show that deceased arrived Hodge's Western Hotel, St. Ives, on Sunday, the 1st inst. He slept at the hotel that night, and the boots of the hotel, who gave evidence, was called to identify deceased by his boots, which were of very peculiar make. Deceased was last seen alive on Monday evening, the 2nd inst, by Mr. William Bennetts. Deceased asked Mr. Bennetts several unimportant questions, such the names of the various kinds of herbs growing in the locality and Mr. Bennetts described him as a tall, upright, intelligent gentleman. They parted near the*

village of Ayr, the deceased going down towards the cliffs. Mr. Bennetts saw the deceased about half an hour afterwards in field, close to the place where was discovered.

It appears that deceased was observed by some boys on Sunday the 8th inst. but the boys thinking he was asleep threw stones at him and ran away. In the deceased's carpet-bag at the hotel were found night shirt, night cap, pocket handkerchief, scissors, brushes and combs, a lock of hair, and a pair of black kid gloves. He appears to have taken great pains to prevent identification, for the handkerchief and his carpet-bag had each a piece cut out of it (probably where the name was), and the name was also cut out of the high hat he wore. Having stated at the hotel that his luggage was at St. Ives road station, the inquest was adjourned to ascertain this was correct, and if so to examine the luggage.'

The adjourned inquest was held Friday afternoon. A young man named Monk stated that he had a long conversation with deceased on the 2nd instant. The deceased appeared to talk very rationally for some time, and enquired about the nature of the different kinds of herbs growing in the locality. Witness asked him where came from, and he replied, with a laugh, "From the moon." Mrs. Hodge, the landlady of the hotel, also spoke as to the deceased's manner, and described him being gentlemanly, and showing no signs of insanity. The jury, after deliberating, returned a verdict of "*Found dead, the cause of death being pistol shot, but by whom fired unknown.*" About week before the fatal occurrence his relatives were shocked to receive a letter from him bearing a Western postmark stating that he would never return home again. Their suspicions and fears were at once aroused, and they instituted a searching but

fruitless inquiry after him. Newspaper paragraphs, announcing the sad occurrence came to their attention, and induced them to extend their inquiries to St Ives, which ultimately led to the discovery of his fate. Coincidentally the Rev. J. B. Jones, vicar of St. Ives, who performed the last sad rites to deceased, was one of his pupils at King's College.

In 1881 his widow, 73 year-old Janetta and her daughter Alice were living at 7, Cliff Villas, Dovercourt, Tendring in Essex. Both were described as school teachers. On Saturday 11 August 1894 Bristol Mercury announced... *"DEATHS, Cockayne, - August 5, at Bromley, Kent, Janetta, widow of the Rev T. O. Cockayne, and daughter of the late R. Edwards, Esq, of Keynsham, aged 80.*

A further tragedy was reported by the Shepton Mallet Journal on Friday 2 April 1897 – *'KEYNSHAM An elderly maiden lady, Miss Alice Cockayne, who had been lodging at Mr. Wilkins's, confectioner, was burnt to death on Saturday. Just before seven the servant thought she heard moans as she was passing Miss Cockayne's door. A ladder was procured and Dr. Harrison, who happened to be passing the time, went up and looked through the 2 window, and saw the room was full of smoke. Upon smashing the window and getting into the room, he found the lady with her head on the fire grate, where she had fallen, supposedly, in fit. The police were once sent for, and the coroner has been communicated with. The deceased lady is daughter of the Rev. Mr. Cockayne, former curate of Keynsham.—*

On Monday evening the coroner for North Somerset (Mr. S. Craddock) held inquest at Keynsham on the body Alice Eden Cockayne, aged 60 years, who died Saturday. Allen

Sanger, servant, said that on Saturday morning, about nine o'clock, she took some breakfast up to the deceased, who was lying in bed, and in her usual condition, and about quarter of hour afterwards witness went again, and noticed nothing unusual. But about eleven o'clock, hearing some groans, she called Mrs. Wilkin's attention. They found deceased's bedroom door locked, and they called to Dr. Harrison, who was passing at the time, and he procured a ladder, smashed a window, and got into the room. Charles Harrison, surgeon, of Keynsham, said that on entering the bedroom, he found the deceased lying on the floor, with her head in the fire. She was burnt very badly, and she died about a quarter of hour afterwards. It appeared that the woman had had fit, and had fallen into the fire'. A verdict of "Accidental death was returned. .



Mr. Wilkins's Bakery in the High Street

The Somerset Salmon Fishery District.

By Brian Vowles

Anglers belonging to the K&SLHS may be interested in this article from the Illustrated Sporting News and Theatrical and Musical Review printed on Saturday 6 April 1867.

“An association has been formed, says the Dorset County Chronicle, for establishing a fishery district for the streams in this part of Somerset under the Salmon Fishery Act, 1865, to extend from the Avon Battery to the boundary of the county of Devon. The committee say that in the Avon, though heretofore a salmon river, have been barred out of their spawning beds by mill weirs. If placed under the Fishery Acts, 1861 and 1865, it is hoped that these might be remedied, and the waters, now almost entirely valueless, become productive of the best kinds of fish. Salmon exist in great numbers in the estuary of the Severn, at the mouth of the Avon. They have been observed lately, especially during the freshets, running up Avon as far as the tidal weir at the entrance of the New Cut, and are occasionally caught of considerable size.

They have been caught of late years at the brass mills at the mouth of the Chew, and at Keynsham weir, eleven miles up the river. There are two impassable weirs at this point, and others in the Chew, which, if made able for salmon, would open to them a considerable extent of breeding ground. There are several likely brooks above this point, and, indeed, most, if not all, the upper waters would be suitable if the weirs had proper fish-passes. Salmon have occasionally been taken as far up as Limpley Stoke, The only real impedimenta to the ascent of the salmon are the mill dams and navigation weirs, and under this

act these may be laddered without injury to the milling power. The principal object in view is the making the waters of the Avon, which are now of very little value, productive of salmon and the best kinds of fish."

Eels

Once eels were plentiful in the Chew.

The 1793 Guide to Bath by Ibbetson, Laporte & J Hassell recorded that...

"The River Chew is celebrated in this neighbourhood for producing great numbers of small eels, which it is the custom to boil, and make into cakes: the Spring of the year is the season for them; they have a peculiar flavour, and are accounted a great delicacy in the sister cities."

Cappers Topographical Dictionary 1808 ... *"at the spring of the year the river swarms with little eels about the size of goose quills which are caught by the inhabitants, and by an art they have caused them to scour off their skins when they look very white. They are then made into cakes or balls and fried."*

Often 4 cwt of eels were caught at the Colour Mill in one night – some as large as a tall man's leg. These delicacies were sold to a Bath fishmonger for 1s a lb and the wages of the mill's employees would sometimes be paid out of the money received for the eels that they themselves had collected! Now they are listed as critically endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. In the past it was common practice to take eels for the pot when their numbers were high. However, removal of eels for any purpose is no longer permitted. All eels caught on rod and line must be returned to the waterway, either immediately or in a competition after the weigh in has taken place.

The Curious Suicide of a Keynsham Blacksmith

by Brian Vowles



The 1841 Tithe map detail of the area opposite the Talbot Inn (No.1621) and the New Inn (No.1389) shows that No. 1397 was the smith's shop run by James and John Fray but owned by William Fray who also owned the cottages where John Fray lived which should be marked 1398 and James in nearby 1402.

On Wednesday 19 April 1865 the inhabitants of Keynsham opened their copy of the Bristol Times and Mirror to learn of a shocking event that had taken place in their village. It appeared that an attempted murder and suicide had taken place the previous day involving two well respected members of their community.

The two men were brothers and blacksmiths who had, through years of hard work and frugal habits, built a good living and solid reputation working at their forge.

By 1865 the elder brother, James, had reached the venerable age of 72, and the younger brother John was verging on 70. Both were married and had families of grown children. James lived with his wife and daughter and had two married grown up sons, one of whom was living Birmingham, the other following his father's occupation at Keynsham. John lived close by with his married son and his child, a boy about nine years of age, and a housekeeper who had only come to reside with him on the previous Monday, to replace his wife, who had died suddenly five weeks previously. This may explain the subsequent events as witnesses testified that since that time he had been in a low, depressed state of mind.

On Tuesday morning they must have gone to the smithy, which was situated between their two residences at their usual time of about six o'clock. Shortly afterwards a young man named George Drury who was in his stable next door, heard them at work beating a hammer upon the anvil, as though one or both of them were welding a piece of iron. The striking ceased at about quarter-past six and he saw John Fray pull on his coat and hurry away down Poghams Lane leading to the river.

He thought little of this until he heard a low moaning sound coming from the smithy. At first he took no notice of it, as he imagined that it was the old man humming or singing at his work but as it continued, he went to see the cause of it. He was horrified to find James Fray lying upon his back near the anvil with blood pouring from a large wound in his head. Lying on the floor near him was a large sledge hammer. He ran across

the way to call Mr. A. Browning, the landlord of the Talbot, and the two returned together to the smithy. They lifted the old man, but he was completely unconscious, and Mr. Browning, leaving the haulier charge of the body, ran off to fetch a surgeon. But he had gone only few yards he was met by a boy named Phillips who blurted, "*We have found Mr. Fray in the River Chew with his throat cut.*"



Croxbottom Bridge, Dapps Hill.

When he arrived there, John Fray had already been got out of the river by a young man, Robert Ruddle despite his pleas not to rescue him and let him remain there. He had been standing on Croxbottom Bridge a distance of about 150 yards away when he saw Fray rushing down towards the river in a very excited state. When he stopped on the bridge, Fray told him to go away, but the lad stayed believing that something was amiss. The river is somewhat shallow at this particular spot and

Fray waded in. Drawing large pocket knife from his pocket, he deliberately slashed at his throat. He immediately fell, with his face down in the water, and when he was pulled out two severe gashes were found across his throat. He was immediately carried back up to his home and by coincidence, they reached the door of his cottage at the very same moment his brother was being brought into his house.

A Dr Lodge was called to John Fray, and sewed up his wounds, which were very serious and a Dr Naish was called to attend to James. Both men remained unconscious for several hours but when John came round he admitted his attempt at suicide, but offered no reason as to why he had done it. He just stated that he cut his own throat before jumping into the river and that whilst in the water he found that it was not deep enough to drown him so he then cut it a second time. During the afternoon, James frequently asked for his brother and wondered why he had not been to see him. At the time it was expected that neither men would survive and the matter was taken up by the police and the forge cordoned off.

Ten days later on 29 April 1865 John Fray after a continual decline in his condition following a second haemorrhage, died at twenty minutes past twelve in the afternoon. Earlier that morning Mr Lodge visited him and saw at a glance that his efforts to save him were in vain but, anxious to do all in his power to prolong his life, he administered about half a glass of brandy and water - a good portion of which passed into the dying man's stomach. This was the first time that anything had been successfully passed through his mouth, as on all previous occasions it had oozed through the self-inflicted wound in the throat. It had become apparent that his wounds had

prevented him from swallowing anything at all and his life had only been prolonged by the means of injections of beef tea and on the previous morning a quantity of milk was passed into his system in the same way. Other remedies were administered, but it was evident that had John Fray not been a man of an extremely strong constitution he must have died days ago from sheer exhaustion caused by lack of food and water. Although sensible up to the time of his death, he gave no explanation of the circumstances surrounding the attack.

An inquest was held on Saturday 6 May 1865 and a verdict of John's temporary insanity was returned. Meanwhile his brother James who was beginning to recover showed a reluctance to discuss the affair and what had sparked the attack remained a complete mystery.

Five years later, the 1871 census records James as a 78 year-old blacksmith still living with his wife, 62 year-old Elizabeth, and their 30 year-old unmarried dressmaker daughter Ellen and, having cheated death once, he did not meet his maker until 1876 aged 83.

N.B. – Although in this case a pocket knife was used, the horrifying method of male suicide by slitting one's own throat does seem to have been a common occurrence during the 19thC because the tool at hand, the open razor, was then widely used by most for shaving.

Footnote - On 28 July 1883 James Fray's cottage was put up for auction by his heirs being at the time in the occupation of a Mrs Veale.

Witchcraft at Keynsham

by Brian Vowles

In the vaults of the Somerset Heritage Centre lie documents Q/SR/2/108, 114, and 117 the Sessions rolls for Michaelmas 1607 and Epiphany 1608 which record examinations which took place at Keynsham on 12 September 1607.

The first witchcraft act in England was passed in 1542, and it defined witchcraft as a felony, a crime punishable by death and the forfeiture of the convicted felon's goods and chattels. It had been repealed five years later, but then restored under Elizabeth I in 1562. After her death she was succeeded by James IV of Scotland who then became James I of England.

James had become king as an infant in 1567 after his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, was forced to abdicate. She was eventually executed by Elizabeth I in 1587, with the young James associating the traumatic event with dark, satanic spirits, believing that it had been foretold by witches who had seen *"a bloody head dancing in the air."*



Suspected witches kneeling before King James, *Daemonologie* (1597)

When he himself nearly died at sea two years later in a voyage to claim his betrothed, Anne of Denmark, he blamed it on witches, and ordered a witch hunt upon his return to Scotland. James fanned his people's fears with his own book *Daemonologie* (1597 re-published in 1603 when James acceded to the English throne), in which he deployed his formidable powers of scholarship to catalogue the arcane spells and sorcery of witches, and the art of communicating with the dead. He called witchcraft "*high treason against God*", which justified all manner of torture and brutality. He therefore persuaded parliament to pass its 1604 Act against Witchcraft, which made it mandatory to hang someone convicted of being a witch whether or not they had caused any harm to others.

So, in 1607 with witchcraft and the work of Satan being held to be the cause of any misfortune, when the vicar of Keynsham Thomas Smith or Smithe, who had been appointed on 27 February the previous year, fell sick the physician asked to treat him refused and accused one Agnes Hatton of bewitching him. This prompted others to make similar accusations, and the unfortunate Agnes was committed for trial at the Somerset quarter sessions in 1607, The Records office index gives all the names of those involved. One of the witnesses was Katherine, the wife of John Arquell who testified that she has seen Agnes Hatton, suspected of concealing a pregnancy, '*stroke milk out of her breast, having no child for the space of eleven years since*'.

During the questioning of a tailor, Giles Carter of Keynsham, by Francis Baber on the 14 July 1607 he said that in the past five weeks the wife of Thomas Smithe of Keynsham came to his house to beg him to seek some help for her husband

Thomas Smithe who was very sick and likely to die. Whereupon he went to the physician who had examined Thomas Smithe who told him that he could not be helped as he was *'bewitched'*. Carter returned home and gave Thomas Smithe the opinion of the physician.. Agnes Hatton was the person suspected of this witchcraft and so to test her guilt he sent some of his servants to fetch thatch from her house to burn for a trial as he had heard that by burning the thatch of the house of any such *'lewd'* person, that person will come in its place. When this was done the said Agnes Hatton did come to Thomas Smithe's house although she had never been there before that time (probably to complain about his actions). Proof indeed! Later this was compounded by the evidence provided by a Richard Saunders.

At the questioning of Saunders of Keynsham by Francis Baber on 14 September 1607 he said that his wife had told him that William Batten had claimed that her deceased daughter had been bewitched by Agnes Hatton. She believed that it was because Hatton had recently been bitten on the leg by Batten's dog as he passed by her door and that an altercation had broken out between Hatton and her deceased daughter. On Sunday, 12 September, Julie Holbrooke did testify to him that one of the sons of the said Agnes Hatton did mention that *"there was a little thing that took a candle out of a candlestick and run it under the bed, and then gave it unto his mother"*. In a previous examination of a miller, William Rawlins of Keynsham by Francis Baber on 12 July 1607 he said that John Hatton the son of Agnes Hatton had told him that about some three years ago the candle standing up on something by the bed side was carried under the bed and the said candle continued alight and was taken by his said mother lighted.



A witch hanging in England in the 17th Century. Undated woodcut.

Sadly the marginal notes tell us that she was found guilty and no doubt paid for it with her life. The vicar was more fortunate as he survived the ‘evil spells’ and was still alive 18 years later. But was it the work of the devil rather than the weather when later that year the village was plagued with ‘terrific floods’ and frost from November to the following February?

The witness miller William Rawlins died on 11 October 1632 and William Batten on 30 June 1633 and both were buried in Keynsham Churchyard.

Sadly this was not an isolated incident as the persecution of witches continued for the next hundred years. In August 1612, King James ordered that the Pendle Witches (three generations of a family), should be marched through the streets of Lancaster all together and hanged.

In 1616, nine witches were hanged at Market Bosworth, Leicestershire, England, for causing epilepsy in a boy. From April 1661 to autumn 1662, 600 witches were discovered of whom 100 were executed. In America the infamous Salem witch trials began during the spring of 1692, after a group of young girls in Salem Village, Massachusetts, claimed to be possessed by the devil and accused several local women of witchcraft. A Jane Wenham was the last person in England to be convicted of witchcraft in 1712 although some of the more exotic religions in this country believe the crime still exists! How widespread was this belief in witchcraft? Society member Paul Benn has investigated this.

Witches' Marks in Keynsham ?

By Paul Benn

After attending a very interesting Keynsham and Saltford Local History Society meeting where Dr Jonathan Foyle explained the meaning of the images we often see in religious buildings, the owner of an old cottage in Steel Mills took



Figure 1

a closer look at an old 15th century inglenook fireplace lintel (Fig. 1) that is thought to have been recycled from an abbey property. But it wasn't the carvings on the lintel that were of interest. On closer inspection a capital M was just discernible scratched into the oak and there seemed to be no obvious way in which a candle could have caused the various scorch marks.

A website on Witches' Marks solved the puzzle. These ritual protection marks or apotropaic marks, to give them their proper name (which comes from the Greek word for averting evil), are often found in medieval houses and churches and even in the entrance to some caves such as Goatchurch cavern in the Mendips and were in common use from the early 1400s to the mid-1700s. They were carved or burnt into wooden lintels or walls close to openings such as doors, windows and fireplaces as protection against witchcraft or other evil spirits.



Figure 2



Figure 3

During this period belief in witchcraft and the supernatural was common, as illustrated by the case in 1607 of a poor Keynsham woman called Agnes Hatton who was accused of witchcraft by nine other residents for concealing a pregnancy. Protection was also thought to be given by hiding clothing, shoes and cats under floors or in fireplaces. Initially burn marks on both the inglenook fireplace lintel (Fig. 2) and on the 1st floor fireplace lintel (Fig. 3) were thought to be due to candles placed too close.

However, in 2001 historians carried out research that proved that this is not possible and that they could only have been made deliberately by holding a burning taper against the wood and then scrapping away the charcoal layer to make a deep flame shaped mark. Also, considering the quantity of flammable material in such houses naked flames would have been carefully controlled. Although these types of marks are most common on fireplace lintels they have also been found on roof timbers and even hidden beneath floors and are thought to be ritual protection against lightning and fire which were believed to be malevolent acts of witchcraft. They were probably made soon after the building was erected in a ritual such as All Hallows, Christmas or Candlemas, using blessed candles from the church.

Burn marks have also been observed on a lintel in the Ship Inn next to the blocked in door that once accessed the stable. A



Figure 4

second type of mark found on the main lintel (Fig. 4) is two upside down Vs overlapping which is called a Marian mark and is thought to represent Mary as the Virgin of Virgins and is an invocation to the Queen of Heaven to protect the building. This is the most common form of apotropaic graffiti and must have become a general good luck symbol as it continued to be used long after the Reformation into the 19th Century.

A third type of apotropaic symbol just about recognisable on the same lintel (Fig. 5) is the Scratched Mesh Demon Trap. These were employed to imprison demons due to their love of endless lines.

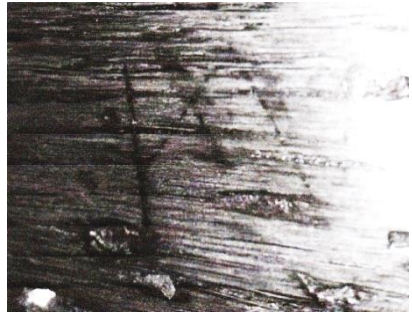


Figure 5

Below are examples of apotropaic marks that have been found in other old buildings.

One is the daisy wheel or hexafoil (Fig. 6),



The other is of overlapping or concentric circles (Fig. 7)



Figures 6 & 7

Images of Keynsham

By Tony Mitchell

Steps

Scraped by scores of Roman sandals

Smoothed and shaped by soles

Where the dead now rest

And saved mosaics recall

More vivid floors through library glass.

A few stones, all that's left

Of Catholic Keynsham's Abbey,

Destroyed by Luther's Reformation,

High on the hill

Above the Memorial Park

Remembering two great wars

That broke the British Empire.

Long ago, Monmouth came this way

With his pitchfork army, on a rain swept day

Drove off some royal dragoons, his only victory

Subsumed by Sedgemoor and Jeffrey's cruel story.

Rooks' raucous calls in high trees

Serenade the walking man

Early morning, chill and dull

Beside the swollen river

Before the duck-filled pond

Chew Valley sleeps in the summer light

Waving grass glitters like Saxon spears

At Stamford Bridge;

Ample green thighs luxuriate

Above a great bank of trees

Where the river disappears.

Kelston Round Hill, to some
the Tump

Or Hensbridge, Stallions
Place

Looms above the town

Pubescent frizz on swelling
Venus mound

Peeking round many a corner

Or brazen in full view

Down steep Dapps Hill

Towards Albert Mill

Old exit route to Wells,

And Wansdyke's enigmatic
pile;

Crosses the ancient bridge

Then climbs again

To Wellsway.

