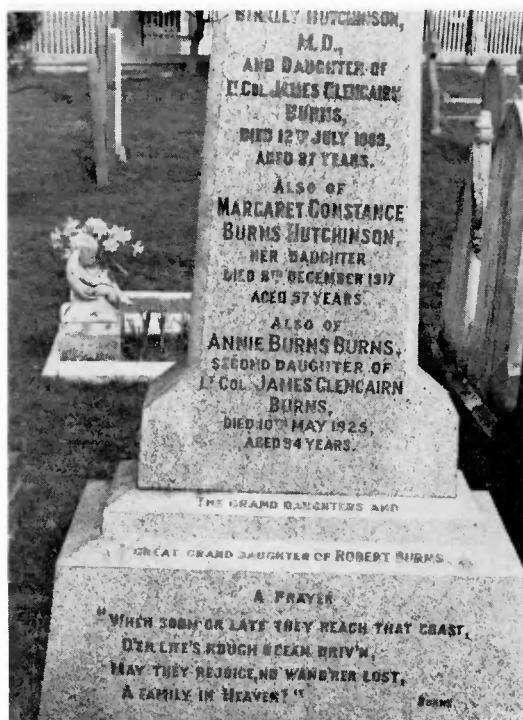


Local History Bulletin

SPRING 1981 — No. 43



Part of the Burns Memorial at Charlton Kings

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EDITORIAL

There is no doubt that the first edition of our "Newsletter", edited by Dr. Steven Blake, created a lot of interest in local history circles. We received some very favourable comments and some valuable constructive criticism plus, I am pleased to say, a number of new subscribers to the Bulletin.

Dr. Blake and myself hope that you find our second Newsletter of interest. All comments gratefully received.

I am also very pleased that Miss Tina Pulford responded to my request for information on the Robert Burns Cheltenham Connection and I hope that you will enjoy reading her article, the very first she has ever written for publication.

G. J. STOCKHAM, Editor.

THE GLOUCESTER INFIRMARY, WESTGATE STREET

ANOTHER BUILDING OF note in this City to fall to the redeveloper's axe was the former "Crown & Sceptre Inn", in Westgate St., during 1963, to make way for the present Westgate Flats. No. 122, Westgate St., had by that time become a Common Lodging house, as had the Duke of Norfolk's lodgings nearby, so little sentiment was attached.

The Alehouse Licences first mention the Crown & Sceptre in 1682, and it was licenced for the last time in 1744. (It continued to be described "formerly known as the Crown & Sceptre" until at least 1905 in the Title deeds.) According to advertisements in the *Gloucester Journal*, it was "a very commodious and well accustomed house," with large cellars, "large stall stables" with good hay and corn, and all other conveniences. It was felt to be so suitable that John Woodman, licensee, "received orders from Thomas & William Waldens, Scythmen, that they intend to meet and put up at his house as usual and at no other place in the city."

The period for which the building was renowned was August 1755 to July 1761, when it became known as "The Gloucester Infirmary". It was being used for the "immediate reception of Patients" whilst a 'New Building' was being erected in the Talbot Ground near the South Gate. The New Infirmary was officially opened on 18th July, 1761.

The Gloucester Infirmary was officially opened on 14th August, 1755, after Mr Benjamin Hyett generously offered to lend the Inn for 3 years rent free. The Inn had belonged to the Hyett family since 1700, who also at that time owned "a house and garden adjoining Gloucester Castle known as Maribon Park." They are a well-known Gloucestershire family even today, both in the City and County. From c. 1673 members of the family occupied key positions in Gloucester: Justice of the peace, Sheriff, Constable of Gloucester Castle; Charles Hyett (Benjamin's father) represented the City in Parliament from 1722-1727. It was Charles who was responsible for the building of Painswick house in 1733, built on the site of a farm house called "The Herrings".

From a book written in 1907 on the 'Hyetts of Painswick', we read that, "On a pane of glass in one of the windows at Painswick House the words 'Ben & Francis Hyett, 1744' apparently scratched with a diamond ring, may still be seen". It commemorates the wedding of Benjamin to Francis, only daughter of Sir Thomas Snell, a London merchant.

'The Gloucester Infirmary, supported by voluntary contributions', read a plaque over the doorway on Westgate St. It possessed 40 beds over 3 wards. One amusing entry in the Minute books of the Weekly Board meetings reads: "Mr Roberts is to prevent the Dust and Water from falling through the floor of the Upper to the Lower Ward." There was a "Brewhouse, Laundry, Apothecary's shop, Laboratory, Surgery and Store Room, and was all Brick and tiled except a small part of the dwelling house." The "Casement of the windows in the Upper Long Ward next to the Lane (Archdeacon Lane) were to open inwards with wire lattice on the outside." Was this to prevent the Patients from 'escaping', or their relatives from stealing them away?

"... this Infirmary will receive such patients as come properly recommended and upon examination shall appear fit objects as far as the accommodation of the House will admit . . . It is desired . . . that Patients may be sent as clean as possible."

It soon suffered from overcrowding, for by February 1758 appeals appeared in the *Gloucester Journal* that subscribers recommend no more women patients until further notice, which did not come until April of that year.

When the Infirmary first opened in 1755 Mrs Hester Partridge was appointed matron, at £20 per annum. The nurses, one for each ward, received £4, rising to £4. 10s. by 1759, by which time a porter was receiving 4 guineas. Imagine today's nurse being ranked almost equal in pay to a porter!

Advertisements for the sale of The Infirmary began appearing in the *Journal* from 14th August, 1760, but not until 1771 do we find records that John Pitt leased the property. On 3rd October, 1799 the Corporation sold the Inn to Pitt. He was an Attorney at the King's Bench, and also stood for the City in Parliamentary elections opposing the Duke of Norfolk and the Corporation in 1780. In 1789 Pitt won a seat by one vote, and as a result Gloucester Tories formed a True Blue Club which met each year in early February to celebrate the Anniversary of his victory over the Corporation.

John Pitt was Gloucester's largest private landlord, and was reputed never to have raised his rents. He died in 1805.

In 1839 Thomas Bayliss, grocer, was in residence, followed in 1847 by a hardware dealer, William Brown Wells. In 1859 George Kent, baker, was

followed in 1876 by the Grocery branch of the Co-op. Stores. In 1891 Joseph Mills, bicycle and tricycle manufacturers, followed by James Wheeler, furniture broker (who offered accommodation for travellers) 1893-1905. By 1910 it had become a common lodging house, and its past sunk into obscurity. It has taken local historians painstaking research to fathom out the exact whereabouts of The Gloucester Infirmary, Westgate Street.

MISS BARBARA DRAKE.

CORRUPT ELECTIONEERING AT GLOUCESTER, 1880 — A POSTSCRIPT

THE ELECTION OF 1880 in Gloucester so well described by K. P. Chappel in the *Local History Bulletin*(1) was not the only example of corruption in Gloucestershire in that year. Indeed, of the 28 petitions heard after the General Election three were from the County which thus maintained its record of corruption established by the remarkable series of five elections and three petitions in Stroud in 1874/5. Perhaps the politicians of Stroud had learnt greater discretion from these experiences for a petition lodged in 1880 was withdrawn, but two others from Cheltenham and Tewkesbury were brought to trial in June.

In Cheltenham, the Liberal victor by the narrow margin of 21 votes was the Baron de Ferrières, a wealthy local gentleman of Dutch family who had emerged as the Liberal leader during controversy surrounding the chartering of the borough in 1875.(2) He had defeated the sitting member, J. T. Agg Gardner, whose victory in 1874 had marked the end of the Liberal ascendancy in Cheltenham associated with the patronage of the Whig Berkeley family. The Conservative petition claimed that the Baron was an alien and thus not qualified to sit, and that there had been widespread Liberal corruption and treating.(3)

The petition, lodged on April 26th, was heard in Cheltenham on June 2nd—4th. The alien accusation was easily dealt with since the Baron had been naturalised by a private Act of Parliament in 1867 which gave him full British citizenship, so the petitioners concentrated on the question of corruption, particularly in the North Ward though a few cases were alleged in the South. The North Ward was traditionally the field for intense party activity in both municipal and parliamentary elections. In 'the fighting North' and the South 'the larger number of the poorer population lived'(4) and, since the previous November's municipal elections, the leading local Liberals including Councillor J. S. Lenthall, a draper, and Isaac Solomon, a pawnbroker had been busy in the North Ward 'Keeping it warm'. Money, and tickets for free coal and bread had been distributed, and the Conservatives listed some 80 cases in their petition. The Liberals replied however that most had been genuine charity provided from a borough fund set up on a non party basis with, in fact, a Conservative treasurer. The petition judges made it clear that they did not want to inhibit charity and would not consider cases before the election campaign proper started with the dissolution of Parliament on March 8th, while several other cases were excluded because of muddle in the petition over the dates on which they occurred.

During the campaign itself the Liberals made considerable use of public houses as headquarters. Mr Hooper, landlord of the 'Royal Oak' in the High Street, had been invited to a private dinner party with the Baron and other Liberals in February, and had agreed to let his rooms to the Liberals. Speeches were made from the flat roof of the 'Royal Oak' during the campaign, and free beer was served in the bar. On one occasion, March 12th, the Baron had come in and, it was said, ordered the landlord's wife 'not to stop the taps' before going with his supporters into the private rooms for a meal, and being let out by the back door long after the pub had closed. The evidence seemed fairly conclusive but unfortunately for the Conservatives they had to prove the direct responsibility of the Baron and his agents, and Mr Hooper turned out to be an ineffective witness. He had submitted to the Liberals a bill for beer and hire of rooms for £317 16s. 4d. after the election but they refused to pay denying that beer had been ordered. The court asked him to produce his books, but the detailed record had been 'lost'. Later Mr Hooper changed his story and said he had given it to a Conservative who was looking for evidence for the petition. As he did not know the man's name, the judges were disinclined to take his evidence very seriously.

Consequently it became clear to the Conservatives that although they had proved that much free beer had been distributed, they could not establish the responsibility of the Baron or his agents. Since they had also failed to prove that the charitable gifts were corrupt, they had no choice but to withdraw the petition, and the Baron went into the witness box to deny the allegation that he had ordered beer to flow, swearing that on the contrary he had insisted on an honest campaign.

The case provides an interesting picture of electioneering in 1880, and although no evidence was heard about the activities of the Conservatives, against whom the Liberals made counter charges of corruption, enough was said to show that both sides used similar methods. Both made heavy use of public houses as headquarters, and large amounts of free beer were distributed, though at whose expense is not shown. Each party hired a band which paraded all day in the streets, the Conservatives playing "The Bonnets of Blue" while the Liberal march was "Old Dan Tucker"; they played no other tunes! At the various party headquarters the players and followers were refreshed with free beer. The parties employed large numbers of men paying generously for simple jobs such as canvassing, distributing leaflets, bill posting, and even watching to see that the opposition did not cover or remove posters.(5) For the casual workers and seasonally unemployed in the working class North Ward and the South Ward(6) the election at the end of the winter must have provided a welcome source of income, particularly if the anticipation of a campaign had influenced the charitable work in preceding months. The Liberal organisation seems to have been good, with local committees organising systematic canvassing prior to and during the campaign, finding out where voters lived, making contact and explaining the Baron's virtues to win votes. The agent, Mr Chesshyre, was experienced and effective. He had handled the campaign carefully and his care to avoid direct association with any dubious practices paid off in the successful defence of the seat.

The Liberals were not so fortunate in the borough of Tewkesbury where

there was a very hard fought contest between the Liberal sitting member, Captain W. E. Price, and his Conservative opponent, J. Fowler, another local man. It was believed that only 38 voters had failed to poll, and Captain Price scraped in by nine votes.(7) The Conservative petition alleged bribery and treating, and concentrated on four main points all involving the activities of Mr Ebenezer Lugg, a local baker well known as a leading member of the local Liberal Association.(8) At Christmas 1879 and again during the election campaign 'charitable gifts' of meat and bread had been distributed many of them by Mr Lugg, and free drinks had been available at several pubs. Secondly, just as the campaign opened, the Liberal Association held its annual supper on March 1st to which hundreds of voters were invited. Mr Lugg arranged for the transport of distant voters and large numbers accepted the offer of a free meal while those who could not attend were given free food supplies the next day. Thirdly, Mr Lugg had taken a house in Bredon Norton a neighbouring village to which several voters were taken on the eve of poll. They were liberally provided with drink and food, while their boots and hats were taken so they could not leave. Next morning they were taken to vote, still intoxicated. The Liberals said that they had simply been helping and protecting timid voters from the ferocity of Conservative canvassing!

The fourth main point in the Conservative case concerned five voters who had gone to live and work in Bristol in Mr Ashley's Boot and Shoe factory. Mr Lugg had visited them and taken them to a pub, the Surrey Vaults, where he bought drinks and offered their expenses for the journey to Tewkesbury to vote. According to Mr C. Jones they were visited twice. Each time Mr Lugg bought drinks; the first time he gave Jones a half sovereign, and the second time a sovereign for expenses (the return rail fare was 9s.) Jones went to Tewkesbury and before voting called on Mr Lugg who paid him five sovereigns and burnt an I.O.U. 'for £3 or £4'. The other Bristol voters had refused to give evidence but other witnesses had received smaller sums of money; one had been given a new pair of boots. The price of a vote in Tewkesbury seems thus to have been far higher than in Cheltenham or Gloucester where 2/6 or 5/- was a more usual sum!

The first day of the hearing, June 17th, was devoted to the evidence on these points, and the following day the defence had to say that Mr Lugg would not be put in the witness box, leaving the clear inference that he could not deny the evidence. The case now turned on the question of agency and the defence to argue that Mr Lugg was merely a public spirited citizen interested in elections who had attended meetings out of interest and accompanied the Liberal candidate and canvassers because he knew his way about the town. Hardly surprisingly the judges found this argument unconvincing, holding that Mr Lugg was clearly an agent for Captain Price who was consequently unseated.

Local comment was predictable. The Conservatives rejoiced at a Liberal defeat, while the Liberal *Gloucester Journal* deplored 'the feeble character of the defence' claiming that the Conservatives had been guilty of far worse corruption. It is interesting to note that the Tewkesbury judges accepted evidence about activities during the previous winter, and were sceptical about Liberal arguments that gifts to voters were genuine charity, while in Cheltenham the judges had insisted on limiting evidence to the period of the campaign and

declared that they were anxious not to inhibit charitable work. But even apart from the cases on the rather hazy border between charity and bribery, there was incontrovertible evidence of considerable corruption in Tewkesbury involving large sums of money. Although only a few cases were proved many others were listed in the petition, and it is not unlikely that Liberal counter charges against the Conservatives were equally well founded. Certainly the judges made severe comments on 'systematic corruption' and voters who 'sold their consciences, betrayed their own honesty and their constitutional rights' and the local press expected there would be a Commission as in Gloucester. Surprisingly however, one was not set up, and instead the writ was moved for a bye election which resulted in a Liberal victory with an increased majority.(9)

The extent of the survival of corrupt practices after 1880 and the stringent Corrupt Practices Act of 1883 is difficult to assess. Certainly as Chappel notes(10) the Act made corruption more hazardous for candidates and O'Leary points out that the number of election petitions steadily declined after 1880.(11) I have however argued elsewhere that evidence suggests the survival locally of corrupt practices on a significant scale in Gloucester and possibly Cheltenham up to 1914.(12) For example many people involved in the 1910 General Elections in Gloucester said both publicly and privately that there had been corruption, while the successful Liberal candidate for Cheltenham in December 1910 was unseated because of the illegal actions of his agent who was responsible for a good deal of treating and possibly indirect bribery. In Tewkesbury however, corruption seems to have declined, for while regular Borough Council elections may have generated some free beer, the voters of the borough were swamped in the new parliamentary constituency of North Gloucestershire of which Tewkesbury became part in 1885. It was moreover an absolutely safe Conservative seat not even contested in 1886, 1895 or 1900; clearly neither side had any incentive to spend money bribing electors.

After 1914 the first world war did much to disrupt local relationships, local political organisations, and perhaps local habits. In 1918 the Reform Act brought manhood suffrage and votes for most women over 30, roughly trebling the electorate. So while in Gloucester in 1910 it is just possible to envisage effective bribery in an electorate of 8,475, bribery of the 25,006 voters of 1918 was simply not practicable; consequently, instead of the local bribery we find that modern parties offer lower taxes, higher pensions, higher living standards and so on, promises amounting to bribery on a national scale.

Footnotes

- (1) K. P. Chappel, 'Corrupt Electioneering at Gloucester, 1880'. *Local History Bulletin* 42 (Augumn 1980), p. 8-15.
- (2) The result of the election which took place on March 31st was de Ferrieres 2,318, Agg Gardner 2,297.
- (3) The following account of the case is taken from reports in the *Cheltenham Examiner* 28 Apl. and 9 June 1880; *Cheltenham Mercury* and *Cheltenham Express*, 5 June 1880.
- (4) Quotations from the speech of E. Clarke, Counsel for the petitioners, *Cheltenham Examiner*, 9 June 1880.

- (5) George Roberts was paid 5/- a day "to see that the other side's bill stickers did not paste over our bills".
- (6) Although evidence concentrated on the North ward a few cases listed in the petition were from the South ward which also had some working class voters.
- (7) W. E. Price 350; J. Fowler 341. Polling was on 31st March.
- (8) The following account is taken from the *Gloucester Journal*, 19 June 1980. The *Gloucestershire Chronicle* carried an identical report on the same date, the *Cheltenham Examiner* on 23 June.
- (9) Bye election, 12 July 1880. R. B. Martin 380; J. A. Fowler, 298.
- (10) K. P. Chappel, *loc. cit.*, p. 13.
- (11) C. O'Leary *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections 1868-1914* (Oxford 1962), Chs VI, VII, *passim*.
- (12) J. R. Howe 'Corruption in British Elections in the Early Twentieth Century' *Midland History* (1980), p. 63-76.

JOHN HOWE.

WHO'S WHO AT TEWKESBURY MANOR, 600—1300

TODAY, TEWKESBURY IS a bustling little market town with little to remind us of its origin or the people who were once lord of the manor there.

As early as the sixteenth century, a crown official noted its "three streates yn the Town meating at the Market Crosse," whilst in the twelfth century, so pastoral and fertile was the land surrounding Tewkesbury that William of Malmesbury wrote of the "public highways shaded and adorned with trees loaded with fruit." Now, most of the buildings along the main High Street are seventeenth and eighteenth century half-timber work, but buildings remaining of early Norman origin include the Old Mill, King John's Bridge (extensively restored in the twentieth century) and Tewkesbury Abbey. Yet Tewkesbury's earliest history abounds with legends concerning its founders and the famous names who once resided there, men who were important not only in the history of Tewkesbury but in the history of England.

The derivation of the town's name is uncertain, but tradition has ascribed its origin to Theocur, a recluse, who is said to have erected a chapel and fixed his residence on the site of Tewkesbury at about the end of the seventh century. This seems likely as we know that the Saxons called the town Deotitbyrg, i.e. Theotisbyrg (the town belonging to Theot.) In Domesday Book, 1086, the name was recorded as "Teodeschesberie," while by 1125 in the Chronicles of the Abbey it is recorded as "Theokusburia."

The Chronicle of Tewkesbury recalls that a church was built there by Theoc in the latter part of the seventh century and like Deerhurst, the town probably originated as a religious settlement which attracted people and led to the growth of a village. The Chronicle goes on to record that two noble Saxon brothers, Oddo and Doddo were joint lords of the manor in the early eighth century and founded a palace there. There appears to be some confusion in the legend and it is more likely to have been a certain Dodda who lived at Tewkesbury, whilst Oddo has probably been confused with Odda, Earl of Devon, who lived in the eleventh century.(1)

There is no more reliable information until the manor comes into the possession of Hugh, Earl of the Mercians who was buried in the abbey in 812.

For nearly two centuries nothing further is recorded. This was the period of Danish attacks and at the same time, the quarrels of the Saxon kingdoms kept the country in constant instability. However, in 930(2), a certain knight said to be descended from Edward the Elder and known as Haylward Snaw was lord of Tewkesbury. Little is known of him, but by 980 he and his wife, Algiva, had founded an abbey at Cranbourne in Dorset of which Tewkesbury was made a cell.

According to tradition, when Haylward died he was succeeded by his son Alfgar and his grandson, Brictric.

Tewkesbury was the capital manor of Brictric's estates and his importance is seen in that he also held lands in Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Somerset. Tradition had it that Brictric, being a man of some note, was sent as an ambassador to Baldwin, Earl of Flanders, where his daughter Maud, requested Brictric's hand in marriage. His refusal angered her so much that when she married William the Conqueror, she "stirred up the kings wrath"(3) and Brictric's estates were confiscated and granted to Queen Maud and he is said to have died in prison at Winchester.

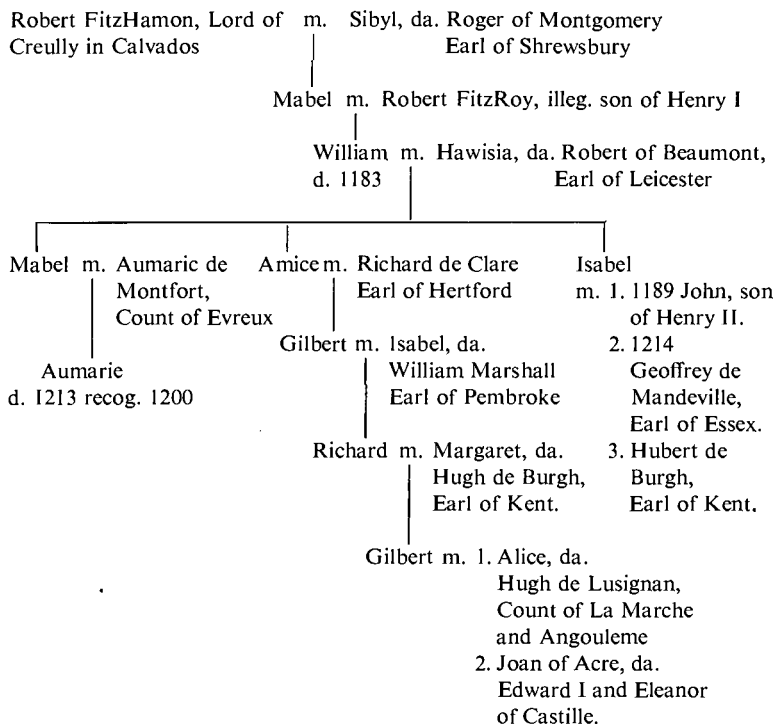
On Maud's death in 1083 her estates reverted to the crown. In the reign of William II (1087-1100), Tewkesbury and all Brictric's other estates in Gloucestershire were granted to Robert FitzHamon, who was Lord of Creully and second cousin to William.

Robert had been a prominent follower and supporter of William II and Tewkesbury was probably given to him as a reward for his loyalty. His eldest daughter, Mabel married King Henry I's illegitimate son Robert FitzRoy who was created Earl of Gloucester in 1121-2. According to tradition he gained his title because "this gentille damyselle seide . . . that hitt were not fittyng to mary suche a man that bore no name but only Robert."(2).

Robert FitzHamon was succeeded by his son-in-law, Robert FitzRoy in 1107. In marrying Mabel, Robert FitzRoy became one of England's most extensive land owners and ranked amongst his father's councillors. Also, he was the chief supporter of the Empress Matilda (his half-sister) against Stephen. William, his eldest son, succeeded him but died in 1183. William had only three daughters and Tewkesbury returned to the crown. The king retained possession of the manor until 1189 when Richard I finally gave William's third daughter, Isabel, in marriage to his younger brother John, Count of Mortain, the future king of England. Thus John became Earl of Gloucester and Lord of Tewkesbury. In arranging this marriage the king by-passed the hereditary claims of Aumarie, son of Mabel, William's eldest daughter.

Isabel bore John no children and his attentions drifted. It is probable that a formal separation had occurred by 1193, when John swore to King Philip Augustus of France that he would marry his sister, Isabel of Angoulême.(5) A divorce was arranged by 1199, the matter being easily accomplished because the marriage had been opposed by the Archbishop of Canterbury as being consanguineous, their being related in the third degree. Thus in 1200 John married Isabel of Angoulême but retained his former wife and her lands, including Tewkesbury in his possession.

The Earls of Gloucester



At this point, John chose to recognise as Earl of Gloucester Mabel's son Aumaric. However, despite his title he had little power or influence and when he died in 1213, John sold Isabel and her lands to Geoffrey de Mandeville, Earl of Essex for 20,000 marks (the highest sum an heiress in medieval England is known to have fetched). Thus Geoffrey de Mandeville became Lord of Tewkesbury and fifth Earl of Gloucester. When he died in 1216 Isabel and the Earldom, including Tewkesbury passed to her next husband Hubert de Burgh, Earl of Kent. Isabel died in 1217 and since Hubert's claim to her land was only through marriage, he had to return them to the crown.

William's sole remaining daughter was Amice who had married Richard de Clare. As Isabel had no issue, Tewkesbury and the earldom passed to the de Clare family the Earls of Hertford. They now took on the additional title of Earl of Gloucester and continued as Lords of Tewkesbury until the fourteenth century.

Richard de Clare and his son Gilbert are found as signatories on Magna Carta and the latter's grandson, also Gilbert, opposed the king and siding with Simon de Montfort, was one of the leaders who drew up the "Provisions of

Oxford." In 1290 this latter Gilbert surrendered all his lands, including Tewkesbury, to the king in order to marry his second wife Joan d'Acre, daughter of Edward I. He received them back again on condition they should descend to any heir Joan had by another husband if they had no children. He died in 1295 leaving a son Gilbert and several daughters.

Throughout Saxon times the manor of Tewkesbury seems to have remained with the Earls of Mercia until taken by the crown after 1066. From the reign of William II the manor was leased to the FitzHamon family, Earls of Gloucester until the twelfth century when for a short while Tewkesbury passed successively by marriage to Prince John, the Earl of Essex and the Earl of Kent. Finally it passed to the de Clares who held it for the remainder of the century.

Of the manor house there is now no trace, but Domesday Book records the existence of a "hall." This was probably the building used by Robert FitzHamon as his place of residence. With the death of Henry I in 1135 a fierce struggle began between Stephen and Matilda in contention for the throne. Robert FitzHamon took the side of Matilda and as her leading supporter, his estates were centres for destruction. An extract from North's "Handbook to Tewkesbury" gives particulars of the "narrative of a monk who was an eye witness." The monk says that in 1139 the Earl of Worcester "with a great multitude of armed men set upon Tewkesbury and burnt the magnificent house of Robert, Earl of Gloucester." Excavations at the Vineyards in 1826 revealed a quantity of rubbish and mortar, many painted bricks together with a quantity of stone. The building was found to have been destroyed by fire. This then, may have been the Gloucester's residence though no traces now remain.

It is unlikely that Robert or his son William attempted a reconstruction, but Prince John, as Earl of Gloucester was a frequent visitor to Tewkesbury. Since so much local tradition is connected with him it may be that he began the reconstruction which by the time of the de Clares, made Tewkesbury once more the favourite residence of the Earls of Gloucester. This later manorial residence appears to have been at a place called Holme Castle. There are no traces of it, but literary texts indicate that until the fourteenth century a place of considerable importance was maintained here by the earls.

Thus in this early period, the overall impression is of the increasing importance of the families who took over the manor. However, after 1300 there were rapid changes of ownership and a tendency after the seventeenth century for the lower gentry to emerge as lords of the manor. This was all happening at a time when England was moving away from the medieval world, with the developing of towns and trade and increased freedom and importance of the less privileged sections of society. It all emphasizes how much Tewkesbury's development was bound up and reflected in the history of England itself.

- (1) *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* 1051. Also see W. G. Serale 'Anglo-Saxon Kings, Bishops and Nobles' Cambridge 1964.
- (2) *Tewkesbury Chronicle*.
- (3) *Chronicle of Tewkesbury*.
- (4) *Ibid*.
- (5) R. B. Patterson *Charters of the Earldom of Gloucester*, Oxford 1973.

CAROLYN ROSEMARY TIMMS

THE CHELTENHAM CONNECTION

ON 16th MAY, 1846 the two younger sons of the poet Robert Burns arrived in Cheltenham and stayed at 12, Montpellier Spa Buildings. They were Lt. Colonel W. N. Burns and Major J. G. Burns, and were accompanied by Miss Burns, a daughter of the latter, and by a Miss Page. On the 13th June the party returned to London. They must have been favourably impressed with the town, as on 19th September Major Burns and his two daughters moved into 4, Berkeley Street, Cheltenham and were joined on 24th October by Lt. Colonel Burns.(1) The brothers remained in Cheltenham until they died, the younger James Glencairn in 1865, the elder William Nicol in 1872.

Of the nine children born to the poet and his wife, Jean Amour, only three sons survived. In 1796 when Burns died, Robert, the eldest, was ten years of age; William Nicol was five and James Glencairn was two. There is no evidence that the two younger boys showed any poetical talent. Both were educated at Dumfries Grammar School and at Christ's Hospital, London. Jean Amour was kept from poverty by the help of friends of the poet, but the boys must have been aware of their mother's straightened circumstances. Robert was the only son to attend a University. The younger boys were appointed to cadetships in the East India Company in 1811, through the influence of Sir James Shaw.(2)

William Nicol served in the Seventh Madras Infantry Regiment, ending his career as Lt. Colonel. James Glencairn went into the Fifteenth Regiment of Bengal Native Infantry. He returned to Scotland in 1831 and when he returned to India in 1833, he was appointed Judge and Collector in Cahor, Eastern Bengal. He retired with the rank of Major. William Nicol married in India, but had no children.(3) James Glencairn married twice and one daughter survived from each marriage. The eldest, Sarah, born in India in 1821, was five days old when her mother died and was sent back to Scotland and lived with her paternal grandmother in Dumfries till the latter's death in 1834. A portrait "Bonnie Jean and Granddaughter" by Samuel Mackenzie, shows Sarah when about five years old. Annie was born in 1830 in India.(4)

It is not certain when the brothers left India, but certainly in 1839 both were in Ayrshire, where celebrations were held under the presidency of the Earl of Eglinton, to welcome them home.(5) They did not remain long in Scotland, but moved to London with their families. Since her grandmother's death, Sarah had lived with the family of Mr. McDiarmid, editor of the Dumfries Courier(6) and now, eighteen, she was reunited with her father and lived with him, her stepmother and her half-sister, Annie. Soon, however, both brothers were widowed. William Nicol's wife, Catherine, died in 1841. It was after this that the brothers evidently decided to move to Cheltenham. The town was a very popular place for retired Indian Army Officers and Civil Servants, and they may well have had friends there and been attracted by Cheltenham's reputation as a Spa and health centre.

The brothers visited Scotland fairly frequently and on one of those occasions, William Nicol bought the old family house in Mill Street, Dumfries.(7) It was the second house occupied by Robert Burns and his family when he settled in Dumfries as an Excise Officer and in which he died. He left the house to the Dumfries Education Society, and thanks to him, it is now a Burns Museum.(8)

In 1847 Sarah was married at the Parish Church, Cheltenham to Berkeley

Westropp Hutchison, M.D. (later spelt as Hutchinson). Dr. Hutchison did not practise in Cheltenham. In 1852 the couple set out for Australia with their three children. The voyage must have been a devastating experience for Sarah, as all three children died before they reached their destination. In Australia they had more children, of whom four survived.(9)

During their earlier years in Cheltenham, the brothers enthusiastically supported the succession of public social events which took place, particularly during the Christmas season. They belonged to the Imperial Club and with other members were very much involved with the famous Batchelors' Ball. Between 1849 and 1857 either one, or both of them, were on the Committee and both took their turn as Chairman. They, of course, attended the ball with Annie. She and her father once went in fancy dress, Annie as a Priestess of Isis. They attended other subscription balls also, but their names do not appear among the lists of guests reported in the *Cheltenham Looker-On* of the fashionable private balls and parties.(10)

James Glencairn must have been a man of considerable talent — from 1849 to 1857 he was a member of an amateur theatrical group, most of whose members were drawn from the Imperial Club, who became known as the Gentlemen's Amateur Theatrical Club. All the female parts were played by professional actresses. The performances took place, first in the Assembly Rooms and then in the Royal Wells Theatre and were in aid of a local charity. James Glencairn appeared as Sir Andy Macsarcasm in "Love-a-la-Mode"; Diggary in "All the World's a Stage"; Flail in "The Irish Taylor"; Sir Anthony Absolute in an abridged version of "The Rivals"; Snarl in "The Village Lawyer"; as the King of Little Britain in "Amerosa", a musical interlude, and as Viscount Leatherhead in "Who's Your Friend? or The Queensbury Fete". His acting was always singled out for particular praise, and when playing Viscount Leatherhead, he had his fashionable audience rocking with laughter. Not surprisingly, when the theatricals first started there was considerable disapproval.

In 1852 the brothers were at a meeting for the organisation of the Cheltenham Rifle Club.(12) All this social activity makes rather surprising the opinion of the author of "The Golden Decade of a Favoured Town," 1843-53, who writing in 1880 remembered them as "being retiring men, little known, except in a limited circle".(13) Goding, however, updating his history of Cheltenham in 1863, says that the "brothers' public patronage to dramatic literature at once proved their interest and taste for what is so justly calculated to refine and elevate society".(14)

In 1855 the brothers were awarded higher rank. William Nicol became a full Colonel and James Glencairn became a Lt. Colonel.

In 1859 on 25th January, a grand banquet was held at the Queen's Hotel to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Robert Burns. A toast was drunk to the surviving sons of the poet, but neither was able to be present, as they had been requested elsewhere, William Nicol in Glasgow and James Glencairn in Dumfries. Annie went to Edinburgh for the centenary. The toast to the brothers was "To the sons of the poet, who have long been resident among us, the tribute of respect paid by their personal friends and neighbours to the memory of their gifted Father cannot but attach them more than ever to the town they have selected for the evening of their days". The banquet, "attended by seventy or

eighty gentlemen, who sat down to an excellent dinner consisting of almost every delicacy in season, as well as haggis and other favourite Scotch dishes", demonstrates the popularity of Burns. Many toasts were drunk, among them one to the happiness of the celebrations of the centenary all the world over. There was the occasional song and although most gentlemen departed soon after eleven p.m., a few ardent spirits remained and continued their celebrations "à la Burns" until nearly 2 a.m.(15)

William Nicol Burns took some part in local affairs. He was an elected member of the General Hospital Board and a regular attendee at meetings. He was a trustee of the Savings Bank and sat on other charity committees.(16) The younger brother seems to have taken a part in public life. However, for some of this period Hindustani was taught at Cheltenham College and James Glencairn often accepted the appointment of Examiner in that language.(17)

In Berkeley Street, where the family lived, there was a school for boys. Berkeley Villa (now The Vineyard) and the house next door, number three, were used as a boarding house for pupils, boys of between nine and fifteen years. The Berkeley Villa Scholar Manual and Catalogue of the School Library of 1847, contains several volumes on India. Perhaps James Glencairn was able to use his knowledge of Hindustani in this School also. It was obviously considered useful for boys entering the Indian Army, or Civil Service, and experts in the language (which James Glencairn was) must have been comparatively rare.

During the latter part of his life James Glencairn had very poor health, and for a number of years was confined to a bath-chair.(18) In the July of 1865, the brothers visited Ilfracombe, hoping for an improvement in James Glencairn's health, to little avail, as he died on 25th November of that year at the age of seventy-one.(19)

In 1868 William Nicol and his household moved from 4 to 3 Berkeley Street, the house formerly occupied as a school boarding-house, the Berkeley Villa School having moved to the Pittville area.(20) Some time in or before 1865, Sarah Hutchinson and her children returned to Cheltenham. The census for 1871 shows that Sarah, then forty-nine, and three of her children, Robert fifteen, Violet eleven and Margaret ten, were living at 3 Berkeley Street, with Annie Burns their Aunt, and their Great-uncle William Nicol.(21)

In 1872 William Nicol Burns died at the age of eighty-one. Both brothers were buried in the Burns' mausoleum in Dumfries.

The houses in Berkeley Street contained several of the poet's possessions, presumably inherited from Robert, who had died in 1857. Their father's desk and grandfather clock were among these, and the famous portrait of Burns by Alexander Nasmyth.(22) This was bequeathed by William Nicol to the Scottish National Gallery. The brothers also possessed letters and manuscripts of their father's and in the 1860's, James Glencairn corresponded with Mr. James Ballantine, then secretary of the Edinburgh Burns Club, who suggested the foundation of a Burns Museum in Edinburgh. Letters to and from the poet and various manuscripts, including that of "The Kirk's Alarm", formed the nucleus of the collection.* A letter written by James Glencairn in July, 1865 from Compass Cottage, Ilfracombe, to James Ballantine is of interest because it indicates a warm and humorous person, and there is the implied suggestion

* Now in the National Library of Scotland.

that Burns was becoming quite an attraction in the Scottish tourist industry. The letter reads "There is a clever artist in Cheltenham, Mr Bartlett, who has made a capital photograph of the poet from Nasmyth's portrait. My Daughter, Mrs. Hutchinson, takes a great interest in him and wrote me about him since we came. He is anxious to know if the photographs are likely to sell at the Calton Hill Monument. I told her I would write to you as the best person who could give an opinion, and you will much oblige me by doing so and address to me above, for we shall be here till 29th inst. My brother and I (Mrs. H. is at Cheltenham and Annie in Ireland) came on 30th ulto., to this most lovely place, and we have comfortable lodgings close to the sea. I have been a great sufferer last winter from my old enemy, lumbago, and walk a very little and with pain and difficulty, but I am in other respects in very tolerable health. I can sleep well for eight or nine hours at a stretch without pain; in fact, I only suffer when the parts affected are touched; for a person at all times a small eater, I have a very tolerable appetite and a capital "Drinkitis" — a word I learnt in Glasgow last year! I hope the Monument is flourishing as well as you wish it and as well as it ought to do under your fostering care.* My brother joins me in kind regards to your circle and our friends in Auld Reekie".

On 13th September the same year, William Nicol wrote to Mr. Ballantine: "I enclose you as a curiosity the pedantic letter of the Earl of Buchan to the poet, to which there is a reply from the Bard in the second volume of Curries edition. His Lordship's condescension in beginning his letter "Mr. Burns" and ending "your well-wisher" is rather amusing these days. If you think it worth while, keep it; if not you can return it. You will observe there is a scrap of an old Scotch song in pencil in the poet's own handwriting on the opposite page. I have often heard my mother sing it when I was a little boy". The scrap of song was an early version of a verse of Bonnie Dundee."(23)

As well as being justifiably proud of their father, the brothers discredited the exaggerated accounts of the poet's dissipation and drunkenness contained in Dr. Currie's biography, which did a great deal of harm to his reputation. As an old lady, in 1894, Sarah wrote from Cheltenham to D. McNaught (the letters are reprinted in the Burns' Chronicle for 1894) saying "I was only twelve years old at my grandmother's death, consequently I have little recollection of incidents or anecdotes about my grandfather . . . My father often said it was disgraceful the statements made out by people who lived in the poet's time containing, as they did, so much falsehood and exaggeration of the events of his life".(24)

Although the brothers did not seek publicity, they lived in a comfortable, but modest style and were much respected. Numbers 3 and 4 Berkeley Street are quite large three-storey terrace houses. There were three resident servants. In 1851 one was a footman, but in 1861 and 1871 the three were women.(25) The census returns all show visitors staying in the house. In 1851 one of these was William McDiamid,(26) the Editor of a newspaper, who may well have been the son, or a relative of the Mr. McDiarmid in whose household Sarah lived after the death of her grandmother.

The half-sisters Sarah and Annie continued to live at 3 Berkeley Street until 1902 or 1903 when they moved to 7 Pittville Lawn (now Number 47). Sarah's

* Mr. Ballantine was supervising the repair of the Burns' Monument on Calton Hill, Edinburgh.

youngest daughter did not marry and stayed on in the household. In 1904 the sisters regretfully sold the family Bible in which the poet had entered the names of all his children, except for James Glencairn, the youngest. The Bible was sold by auction to a Mr. Quaritch, but was afterwards bought by Mr. Dunlop for the Burns Monument at Alloway. A letter from Miss Annie Burns to Mr. Dunlop was quoted in the *Cheltenham Looker-On*(26) expressing pleasure at the final resting place of the Bible and saying that it had been a great trial to part with such a relic. It seems probable therefore that the sisters had to sell the Bible for financial reasons.

The sisters lived for many years after the death of their uncle, and it is to be hoped that they and Margaret continued to pay visits and to entertain friends and relatives. Of Sarah's other children Annie was in Australia, Robert went to Canada and Violet married Georgd Hood Gowring, who became Principal of St. Bedes School, Eastbourne. Sarah was an invalid for many years before her death, but Annie served on some voluntary committees, and was Treasurer of the Ladies' Association for the care of Friendless Girls, who ran the Frances Owen Home, Cambray Villa, from at least 1900 till 1907.(27)

Sarah died on 12th July, 1909 at the age of eighty-seven. Margaret Burns Hutchinson died next on 15th December, 1917 at the age of fifty-seven, and Annie died on 10th May, 1925. She was ninety-four when she died and had lived in Cheltenham for nearly eighty years. The funeral services of the last two were held at All Saints Church, but all three women were buried in Charlton Kings Churchyard, where there is a memorial cross.

- (1) *Cheltenham Looker-On*, 1846.
- (2) Maurice Lindsay — *The Burns Encyclopaedia dia*, 3rd edition.
- (3) Robert Duncan — *The Story of the Edinburgh Burns' Relics*, 1910. The author, Hon. Sec. of the Edinburgh Burns' Club, provided few fresh facts.
- (4) *Cheltenham Looker-On*, 17 July, 1909, obit. of Sarah Burns Hutchinson.
- (5) *Cheltenham Examiner*, 25 Nov., 1865, obit. of Lt. Col. James Glencairn Burns.
- (6) *Cheltenham Looker-On*, obituary of Mrs Sarah Burns Hutchinson.
- (7) *Examiner*, 25 November, 1865, obituary of Lt. Col. J. G. Burns.
- (8) Miles, Vol. 5, p. 128. Newspaper cutting after the death of W. N. Burns.
- (9) *Cheltenham Looker-On*, obituary of Sarah Burns Hutchinson.
- (10) *Cheltenham Looker-On*, 1849, 1857.
- (11) *Ibid.*, 1849, 1859. (12) *Ibid.*, 1852.
- (13) Glover — *The Golden Decade of a Favoured Town*, 1843-53.
- (14) Goding — *Norman's History of Cheltenham*, 1863.
- (15) *Cheltenham Looker-On*, 29 January, 1859,
- (16) *Cheltenham Looker-On*, 28 February, 1872, obituary of W. N. Burns.
- (17) *Cheltenham Looker-On*, 25 November, 1865, obituary of J. G. Burns.
- (18) Obituary — J. G. Burns. (19) *Op cit.*, Robert Duncan.
- (20) *Cheltenham Looker-On*, 1868. (21) Census, 1871.
- (22) Miles, Vol. 5, p. 128 — no date. Newspaper cutting.
- (23) *Op. cit.*, Robert Duncan. (24) Maurice Lindsay.
- (25) Census Schedules 1851 — 1861 — 1871.
- (26) *Cheltenham Looker-On*, 17 to 31 December, 1904.
- (27) *Cheltenham Anniversaries*, 1900 to 1907.

TINA PULFORD.