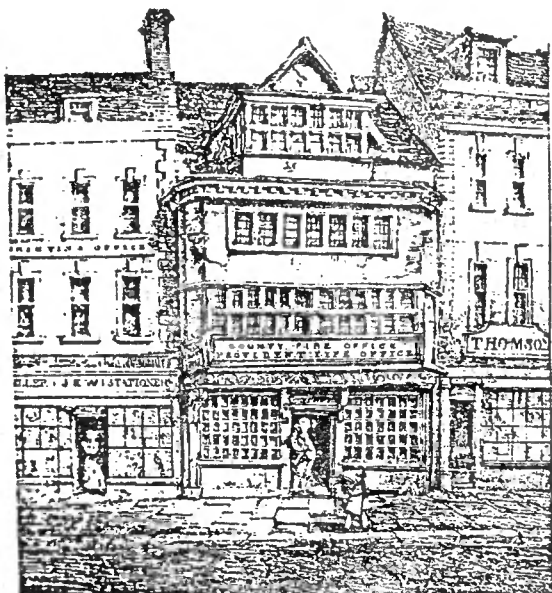


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GLOUCESTER OLD BANK.
with Jemmy Wood at the door

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EDITORIAL

The two major articles on George Whitefield and Jemmy Wood are both the work of V1th Formers at King's School and part of their 'A' level history project. We welcome these examples of young, amateur historians researching well known personalities.

It is good to also welcome Dr. Ruffell with his long established interest in local history, into print on the Court Rolls of Upton St. Leonards, since these provide valuable insights into customary rights of ordinary people in Elizabethan times.

The year 1983 commemorates the quincentenary of the grant by Richard III of a charter to Gloucester giving it the status of a City with a Mayor, though the title 'mayor' seems to have crept into some of the earlier Corporation records from the thirteenth century. Besides, 1983 is the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, a useful anniversary for some local historian to consider writing our history!

BRYAN JERRARD.

THE COURT ROLLS OF UPTON ST. LEONARDS

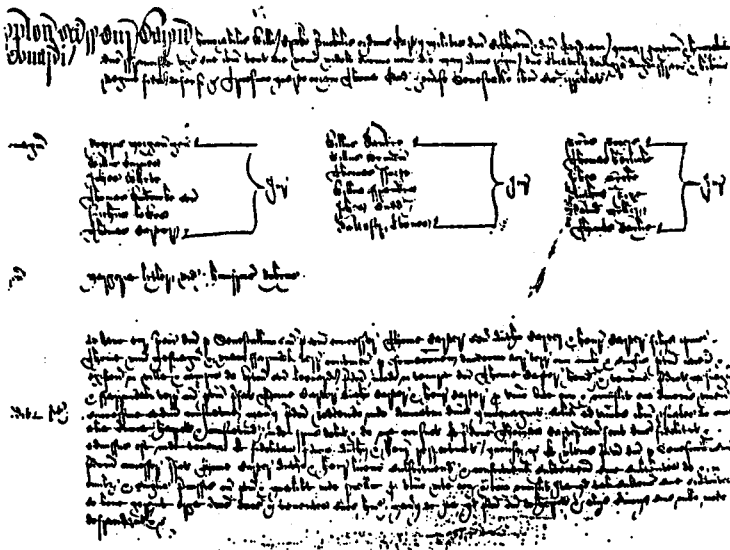
Upton St. Leonards, a village now partly submerged in the city of Gloucester, is noteworthy because it was one of the last villages in England to be enclosed. It preserved its open fields, Court Leet, Court Baron and View of Frankpledge until inclosure in 1897. Less well known are records relating to the village dating back more than three hundred and fifty years. There are the parish registers which began in 1539, the Court Rolls of Upton St. Leonards, 1591—1594, and continuing with some breaks till the inclosure, the survey of the Manor of 1589, all in the County Record Office, and the Court Rolls of the Manor of Bullens, 1598—1706 in the Gloucester City Library.

The first group of the Upton Rolls are dated March, May and September 1591 March, May and July 1592, April 1593 and January 1594. (1) The gap is most probably due to the plague, as the roll of January 1594 opens with a long list of essoins (absentees) and the statement that they are:

'excused their appearance at this Court by reason of the pestilence'.

In the City of Gloucester a special rate was levied to help plague victims.

The rolls are literally rolls of parchment, sewn together at the top, rolled tightly and tied with ribbons. As parchment was a valuable material the sheets are written on both sides. Some of the sheets are somewhat blackened by their long rest in the Upton parish chest until they were handed over to the Record Office



at some date between 1937 and 1951. They are not easy to read, but some of the inner sheets are in much better condition. The script is the rather difficult 'Secretary's Hand' in abbreviated medieval Latin.

Each roll begins with an impressive verbal fanfare:
 'Court Baron of the Honourable William Broke, right honourable Order of the Garter, Knight, Lord Cobham, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, and the Honourable Frances, his wife, held on Monday, namely XXIX day of March in the thirty third year of the reign, 1591, of our Queen Elizabeth, by the Grace of God, Queen of England, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith etc. before Thomas Good, gent, of the same (place) thus enrolled'.

After the introduction there follow the name of the jurors, the number of which could vary from court to court. In the 1591 January court there were fourteen jurors, in the May court seventeen. Next are listed the names of the essoins (those excused from attendance), and after the names of those who were fined for non-attendance. At the January 1591 court these included 'Henry Berkeley . . . and William Lygon, Knight and heir of Richard Pates, lately deceased . . .' who were each fined sixpence. The proceedings closed with the names of two offerers whose duty it was to fix the penalties.

Many of the presentments show that, in theory at least, some customary rules were still supposed to be observed:

' . . . no customary tenant . . . may cut down any maherium (timber) growing on the customary lands without permission of the Lord . . . '

Note that, although the rolls were in Latin, certain words were translated so that there could be no misunderstanding. It would seem that this rule was still in force because we have a record of permission actually being given. When Thomas Carter was ordered to repair his dilapidated barn, timber was to be provided by the bailiff. It was also stipulated that:

'... if any customary tenant of this Manor after two fines given in open court of this Manor does not sufficiently emend or repair his tenement . . . and has a third fine given in respect thereof immediately after the above mentioned third offence, if he does not sufficiently emend and repair the same . . . and so continue in the same default, the same tenement shall revert into the hands of the lord'.

George Burrell, for paying no rent and allowing his tenement to fall into decay had his holding taken into possession by the bailiff.

By the end of the sixteenth century many of the duties and services owed to the Lord of the Manor had fallen into disuse and the Upton court rolls are largely concerned with the inheritance of property. Many tenants had no written deeds for their tenements; their title depended on tradition and the memories of the court jury who would remember what had been the custom 'time out of mind'. When a tenant died his holding was handed on to his widow or son with the agreement of the court. The heriot was the fine paid to the lord:

'... there fell to the Lord of the Manor two oxen for heriot on the death of Richard Bonde.

Others paid '... one cow, the best beast, valued at 40s.'

and '... a gelding value 40s 8d.'

but usually a beast was not specified and the heriot was commuted to a money payment.

It is not known whether Lord Cobham or his wife ever visited their manor at Upton and the villagers may have seen little of his steward or 'senescallus' Thomas Good, who presided at the courts baron. The actual carrying out of the court's decisions was probably left to the bailiff. There is no reference to other traditional officers such as the hayward or the reeve. The names of the jurors do not vary greatly from court to court, and it would seem that the larger landholders must in this way have exercised a great deal of power.

Other presentments ordered that:

'... every tenant whatsoever . . . must pay to the Lord annually at the Feast S. Michael the Archangel (29 September) for every pig, one year old and over, one penny, and for every pig less than one year, one half penny . . .'

Tenants were also obliged to ring their pigs and to yoke them from February till the end of harvest — presumably the yoke was to prevent the pigs from pushing their way through gaps in hedges.

Tenants were also to '... repair at their own charge the Manor enclosures as often as it was necessary . . .'

'Houses of customary tenants to have roofs repaired before Michaelmas. Fine for each offence 3s 4d.

'No inhabitant to erect a stank (Lat. "stagnum") for fishing in the Sudbrooke without licence . . . offenders fine 3s 4d.'

In addition we have cases where individual tenants were presented for specific offences. Thus John Bonde (one of the family after which Bondend, Upton, is named) and Humphrey Roberts 'blocked the *via ingalem* (the yokeway) between Brimps (on Upton Hill) and Okeley to the serious inconvenience of the tenants . . .' They were ordered to open them up before 29 August 'under penalty for each one of them Xs'.

A year later Humphrey was given a month to pay a fine of 3s 4d, for 'ploughing two baulkes called head furrows in the way called a "wayneway" in the Rye Crofte' (then within the Manor of Upton), and at the next court the fine was enforced.

There is only one instance of 'ceremonial readers', payments of religious origin, but payable to the manor.

'Certain tenants on Good Friday owe "land egges" to the Lord of the Manor according to the names on the list'.

Although we have references to pigs, to hedges and to ditches, it is rather surprising that no mention is made of the cultivation of crops to be grown in the various fields, of the turning out of cattle into fields or the regulation of Sneedhams Green Common.

There is a curious entry in the rolls of September 1591, where it states that Robert Awfield, gent, informed the Court that John Pritchard, gent, had 'a certain booke called a register book pertaining to the two manors'.

The second Manor is Bullens, which also formed part of the parish of Upton, for in the Bullens roll of May 1605 we read:

'... the Church Wardens of the parish Church of Upton... do hold freely of the lord of the manor certain lands callyd parishe lands. And do pay therefore yerely IVs... Theyre ancient rente is a pound of cumin for which there hath been iiiis payd aforesaid'.

This entry shows how the two manors had become interlinked through their common connection with one ecclesiastical parish. Other links were through tenants holding land in both.

JOHN V. RUFFELL.

(The writer would like to acknowledge the help given in reading the rolls by Mrs M. Richards and Mr D. Smith of the County Archives).

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JEMMY WOOD, BANKER AND MILLIONAIRE OF GLOUCESTER

Jemmy and his Wealth

'Mr Wood is possessed of immense wealth having a vast landed property, nearly a million sterling in the different funds and is certainly one of the richest commoners in England'.

This reference from the *Gloucester Journal* to Jemmy Wood, the celebrated and eccentric millionaire, shows how important Wood had become and his status in both Gloucester and the rest of England.

James Wood was a descendant from the old family of Woods, living at Brookthorpe Court, near Gloucester. He was born on the 7 October 1756 and lived for eighty years until his death in late April 1836, after a short illness. At the age of 12, James or 'Jemmy' as he was commonly known, joined as a pupil of King's School, Gloucester. Here he received most of his education before leaving school to go into the family bank. The Gloucester Old Bank as it was known

was established by Jemmy's grandfather in 1716. It was one of the oldest private banks in England, more recent than that of Thomas Smith's Bank in Nottingham and Childs of London. From boyhood Jemmy, like his father Richard, had a strong affection for money. The family motto for the Wood's of Gloucester was the 'Penny and the Posy'. This is a reference to when a young girl brought Jemmy some posies as a gift. Jemmy's father told his son to give the girl a penny. Jemmy promptly refused saying that the penny would last for ever whilst the posy would be dead within a week. Such an anecdote shows Jemmy's affinity towards money and its accumulation.

The Bank displayed a sign indicating 'The Old Bank' and was situated in Westgate Street, Gloucester. This street was the centre of commercial activity in the City with the market opposite the bank. Besides being a bank, the old fashioned over-hanging house was a shop. It was described by the Institute of Bankers as 'a bank amongst the pins and needles, tapes and cotton of a drapery and haberdashery shop'. (1) Drapery and haberdashery were displayed for sale, although 'almost everything that any person might be inclined to purchase from the mousetrap to the supply of a merchants' shipping order'(2) could be found in the shop. Jemmy Wood became owner of the bank as a result of a legacy of his father. Jemmy realised the potential of his bank in its key position in the city. Wood soon became a well-known character with the people of Gloucester. He would sit in a high-backed settle, at the rear of the shop, and would never light a candle till the last glimmer had gone from the sky at dusk. When he did not sit in the shop, he could be seen standing at the door to his bank in his faded yellow waistcoat. From here he was able to survey business activity in Gloucester and attract customers. With him in the bank worked two clerks, Mr Osbourne and Mr Surman who were to be two of the executors of the alleged Will of the late Jemmy Wood in the court case after his death in 1836.

He was 'extremely careless of his personal appearance, but prospered through strict attention to petty detail'.(3) He was undoubtedly a shrewd man, never speculating in risky undertakings and had few pleasure pursuits although he did like to take long walks in the countryside surrounding the city of Gloucester. He knew he was able to look after his own money and was unaware of his careless personal appearance. He told one of his clerks that in Gloucester everyone knew him and so it was not necessary to study his appearance; and in London, where he sometimes traded, he knew no-one and so it was unnecessary to buy new clothes. His autograph was prolific, skilful and sinuous.

All his wealth earned him little respect in the City, and his reputation as a miser was renowned. However, during his life he became a member of the City Corporation in 1808 and then a sheriff in 1811, being re-elected in 1813. Despite being made an Alderman in 1820, his unpopularity with the Corporation was illustrated by the fact that he never became Mayor. His vast wealth did not only consist of his bank and shop, but a substantial amount of his wealth was in property. He had many farms around the county of Gloucestershire and visited his tenant farmers on a regular basis. On one such occasion he took a pheasant and a bottle of wine for dinner. When he arrived at the farm, he told a lad to cook the pheasant and not to touch the wine. After looking the farm over he found that the lad had been tempted and eaten the bird — then drank the wine thinking it poison because he was afraid of Jemmy Wood's anger. Jemmy beat the boy thoroughly with his stick as a result.

Jemmy Wood also owned an ironmonger's shop in the city. Antony Ellis, a cousin of Jemmy, was said to be a partner in the ownership of the Old Bank. Both Ellis and Wood entered into a secret pact in which if one died, the other would inherit all his wealth. When Ellis died, Jemmy therefore inherited Ellis's ironmongery shop and other wealth. It is believed that a ton of old copper coins was found in an old chest in the ironmongery shop by Jemmy. This is said to have helped Jemmy to accumulate his wealth. Another commercial interest of Jemmy was as an undertaker. He would always treat his customers with extreme reverence and is reputed to have shed tears at individuals' funerals.

Jemmy never married; his two sisters died when he was young and he had the reputation of being lonely. He claimed to be in love once, but the lady in question married another. He would never endear himself to people of the city unless there was personal gain. When Jemmy commissioned a silver cup, for example, the silversmith was wary until Jemmy produced some money with which to pay.

Jemmy's Banking System

Wood was renowned for his multifarious and devious financial dealings. Nowadays, his banking system and financial operations seem strange banking but were accepted because of the strength of tradition the bank held with the people of Gloucester.

Jemmy advanced money to people at high rates of interest. He did not allow more than $2\frac{1}{2}\%$ per annum for money placed in deposit. He would not allow interest upon a fragment of a year. Any sum of money which was deposited in his bank and was withdrawn before the expiration day of a year resulted in Jemmy not allowing a farthing upon the principal. Being, in the early days, the only reliable bank in the city, people were willing to accept his conditions of banking despite the fact that Wood was obviously making an enormous profit. His dealings with the Bank of England in London were limited, as Wood rarely trusted anyone else with his money. When he wanted to transport money to London for deposit he would never carry it himself as he thought this was too risky. Often he would wait until a Mr Husbands, who owned a clothier's business at the Cross in Gloucester, travelled to London. Wood found postage costly and the transmission from one post office to another dangerous. Wood asked Mr Husbands to carry his money for him to London, so putting the emphasis of security on Mr Husbands.

The importance of Jemmy Wood as a banker of Gloucester was illustrated by the decision by the Government to appoint Wood as the representative of the state lottery in Gloucester during the Napoleonic Wars. He was first licensed to sell lottery tickets in 1803. In this way the Government financed much of the military action in the war against France. Not surprisingly, Jemmy made money out of the scheme as well, by means of a large commission.

Another financial operation of Wood was to issue his own bank notes. Used on a local scale the £1 and guinea notes were common after 1813. Once, a £46 draft was issued, and a £10 note, with his signature. Jemmy had a curious way of raising money. Being a man of high morals, he was a militiaman (who were popular in the Napoleonic Wars for the defence of the country). A parish meeting of St. Mary de Grace in September 1794 at the Fleece Hotel, decided to allow a nine weeks rate of $\frac{1}{2}p$ in the pound for the maintenance of Fred Dalby

— Jemmy's substitute in the militia.(4) Between 1795 and 1804 there were subsequent increases in the maintenance, which became expensive to the ratepayer. In this way, Jemmy was able to remain in the militia by way of a substitute whose expense was funded by Wood, who probably took a share out of the increased maintenance.

However, not all transactions went the way Jemmy wanted. On one occasion, a man staying at the Fleece Hotel had eleven £1 notes and wanted to change ten for a £10 note. At first Jemmy refused and when he did agree he refused to accept that he had under-charged the visitor. As a result he lost out by £1. His shrewd intellect at economic survival was illustrated in 1825 by the 'bank panic' which swept the country. At the time there was considerable economic depression. At about the same time as the 'panic' Jemmy inherited the wealth of Antony Ellis, his cousin who owned the valuable ironmongery shop. Jemmy also sold much of his land in order to stabilise his bank. In the reign of Charles II Jemmy's great-grandfather had purchased some high quality lands at £5 an acre. Jemmy began to sell off this land at an enormous profit. Indeed, the 'panic' went to Jemmy's advantage. A rival bank in the city, Robert Morris's, failed to recover from the slump. Other banks such as that of Fundal Evans, Sir James Jelf and Merrot Stephens as well as Turners, all collapsed in the panic of 1825, weakened by previous panics in the preceding years to 1825. A poem of the time illustrates Wood's survival against the odds:

A mercer of the name of Wood
A man whose character was good
And though his son and grandson
Have uniformly stood alone
without a partner to support
Their credit never have been hurt
whilst Fundal Evans and Sir James Jelf
Have long since tumbled off the shelf
Poor Merrot Stephens after failed
and narrowly escaped being jailed
Turner and Morris cannot pay
Their notes without two years delay
In awful times the name of Wood
Firm as a rock has always stood.

As a result, Jemmy prospered from the trade lost by Morris and others and owned the only successful bank in the mid-1820's. Thus his control of banking facilities in the city enhanced his profits and his reputation.

Jemmy's death and the mystery of the Will

James Wood died on Wednesday, 20 April 1836 after a short illness developed on the Friday of the previous week. He was eighty years old and died the wealthiest commoner in England, but as he was unmarried and had no close family, he left no direct heir to inherit the fortune of nearly one million pounds.

Jacob Osbourne and John Surman, the two clerks who worked for Wood, were present at his death as was Anne Nicholls, the housekeeper, and her niece, Maria. However, none of these people stayed with the body and this became

an important point when considering the validity of the Will. In the old man's bedroom there was a variety of bureaux and it was in one such bureau that a sealed envelope was found by the clerks. In the envelope were two separate papers, referred to later in Court as Paper A and Paper B. At first, the clerks were not sure that the papers were a Will, as they did not appear to be in Jemmy's handwriting. Both papers were placed back in the box where they had come from. The next day, the papers had disappeared and no-one knew where. Meanwhile, in London, two friends of Jemmy had learnt of his death and travelled to Gloucester. They were John Chadbourn and Alderman Wood. Both were distinguished men. Alderman Wood had been known as 'the Champion of Queen Caroline' since he had supported her cause and advised her to come to London after her separation from George IV. The Queen trusted him and entered London in June 1820, at which time George IV described him as "That beast Wood". Later Wood was made Baronet by Queen Victoria.

On arrival back in London, Chadbourn and Wood presented two papers to Thomas Helps of London, Jemmy Wood's solicitor. The first paper said:

'Instructions for the Will of me James Wood, Esq., of Gloucester. I request my friends Alderman Wood, M.P. of London, John Chadbourn of Gloucester, Jacob Osbourne of Gloucester and John S. Surman of Gloucester to be my executors. I appoint these executors accordingly and I desire that they will take possession of and retain to themselves all my ready monies, securities and personal estate subject to the payment of my just debts or such legacies as I may hereafter direct and with respect to my real estate. I shall dispose of the same to such persons and in such parts as I shall by any willing endorse herein directly witness by my hand, the 2nd day of December, 1834'.

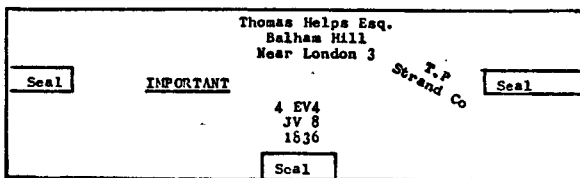
Whilst the second paper said:

'I James Wood do declare this to be my Will for disposing of my estates as directed by my instructions. I declare my wish that my executors shall have all my property which I may not dispose of and that my estate real and personal shall go amongst them and their heirs in equal proportions subject to my debts and to any legacies or bequests of my part thereof of any which I may hereafter make in witness whereof I have to this my last Will set my hand this 3rd of December 1834.

James Wood.'

Despite the detailed instructions these two papers gave to his executors, there was no information, as stated in the papers, where the legacies were that Wood had left. But there was indication of where his money and estates should go, so they were not full Wills and also neither was witnessed which was essential for a Will to be proved. Each sheet was deficient in itself.

On 8 July 1836, Thomas Helps received by post the two papers, Paper A and Paper B which disappeared from the house of Jemmy Wood on the night of his death. Both sheets were written separately and enclosed in the envelope with another paper, known as Paper C. Paper A was a complicated sheet indicating the address of Helps.



Paper B was more detailed and appeared to be a Codicil to a Will. It stated:

£140,000 to Corporation at Gloucester plus £60,000
 £50,000 to Mr Philpotts
 £10,000 to Mr George Counsell
 £30,000 to Mr Thomas Helps
 £20,000 to Elizabeth Goodlake
 £14,000 to Samuel Wood of Mile End (plus £6,000 for his family)
 £20,000 to Thomas Wood of Chelsea
 Remainder to the executors

July 1835

On the same paper it mentioned 'the same purposes I have named'. This was a reference to information already naming the legatees, which did not exist or appear to exist. The other paper, known as C, was written in pencil. It said:

'The enclosed is a paper saved out of many burnt by parties I could hang. They pretend it is not J. Woods hand, many will swear to it. They want to swindle me — let the rest know'.

So although Alderman Wood had taken out proceedings for Probate, these three papers A, B and C arrived at Mr Helps office in Balham Hill. The Codicil was partly burnt and indicated a conspiracy. Now the Court of Probate refused to proceed and each side engaged lawyers to fight the case for the next five years. The case received a Judicial hearing before the Privy Council in 1838. The case involved various people including John Chadbourn, Samuel and Thomas Wood, Henry Hooper Wilton of Gloucester and Elizabeth Goodlake and Edward Hitchings.

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|------------|
| Litigants: Sir Matthew Wood Bart John Chadbourn Esq. Jacob Osbourne Esq. | } | Appellants |
| Thomas Helps Esq. Samuel Wood, Thomas Wood Henry Hooper Wilton (Glos. Corporation) | } | Adherents |

The judicial hearing was long and detailed. It was discovered that anyone could have entered the house and taken Paper A and Paper B and added Paper C, then sent it to Helps in London. Possibly, Paper C was found nearby to

Paper A and B, or possibly it was a forgery. Thomas Helps said he received the Codicil together with the paper with a London postmark of the Strand. Both clerks and a J. Dobson-Adams claimed that the Paper C was in Jemmy's handwriting but Papers A and B were not. They produced evidence of bills and receipts to prove this was so. It was said by the clerks and Jemmy's housekeeper that they never believed there was a Will.

Various people appeared contesting both Wills saying they were to have the fortune. George Worrall, a member of the Gloucester Corporation, claimed that Jemmy had told him he would leave him his fortune and the same story was held by Samuel and Thomas Wood. The Executors were aware that, at the least, both Papers A and B had to be wafered together to constitute a legal document. It was argued that the intention of the testator was apparent and that the device of wafering together should not invalidate their claim. The Executors brought forty witnesses to try and prove Jemmy hated the Corporation as much as charities. The Codicil was argued over and twenty-five witnesses were brought by the respondents. An important point to arise was the confession by Mr Chadbourn that he burnt papers in Jemmy's house soon after the old man had died. He claimed that he had been burning lottery tickets but it lays open many possibilities. Clearly he could have been burning the Codicil which somehow was not fully burnt and found its way to Help's office in London by an individual unknown. This point went against the claims of the Executors.

However, in 1841, Lord Lyndhurst ruled against the Executors, overruling the previous court. As a result the gains of the Executors were diminished by £250,000. The judgement at the Privy Council considered the same evidence which had been heard before, by the same witnesses. The Council now believed the Codicil genuine and should be proved; however it could not be done until the main body of the Will, giving precise details of the legacies, was found. Important information on Jemmy's attitude helped to reach this verdict. It had been said that the Codicil (Paper B) was in Jemmy's own hand. People claimed that he made several Wills depending on his feeling at the time; one Will leaving to relations in the city of Gloucester and others to found a hospital, and all testifying as to his 'talk' of leaving money to good works and the poor, after the death of his sister Mary Willey. It was also said he would leave money for the ship canal to further the advancement of the city of Gloucester.

The Privy Council felt that although he was an old man, he was fit in mind and body. They thought the Codicil to the Will genuine, but inoperative because the main body of the will was missing. They thought he had made a will, because after talk with various people, he was encouraged to safeguard his business. Private banks were failing up and down the country, but if the depositors in Jemmy's bank knew he had made a Will, then they would feel their money was secure. He stated 'I have money after all my debts' so depositors knew their money was safe.

Also, the judgement stated that Paper C was possibly written at Jemmy's death. Just before he died, he may have written this, as he could trust no-one around him. Further proof that the Will was genuine was put forward. The Codicil indicated bad spelling, and Jemmy was always mis-spelling his words, so the Codicil was possibly written by him. Also he left Samuel Wood £6,000 for his family and Sam Wood had six children, thus this could be possible. Often in his lifetime he had remarked he would do a lot for 'old Gloucester'.

The mystery of the Will is flavoured by the various rewards offered by people in the case. The executors offered a one hundred guinea reward for information on Paper A and B in the local papers, the **Cheltenham Chronicle** and **Gloucester Advertiser**. The **Morning Advertiser** and **Morning Herald**, both national newspapers, had a £2,000 reward for any information issued by the executors. The City Corporation offered a £1,000 reward for any information on the persons who sent Papers A, B and C to Helps in London. A further £1,000 was offered to the person who could produce the rest of the Will. The legatees of the Will offered a £10,000 reward to be paid when the validity of the Codicil was established.

Despite the involved legal action, no final decision on who should have received the money could be made legally. The mystery of the Will is still with us and perhaps only Jemmy knows what actually happened. Finally, it was the Crown who profited from the miser Wood and his fortune.

ANDREW WOOD.

Notes:

- 1 **Journal of the Institute of Bankers**, March 1915.
- 2 **D. Robertson, The King's School, Gloucester.**
- 3 **C. H. Savery, Life and Anecdotes of J. Wood.**
- 4 Parish records of St. Mary de Grace.

Also Consulted

L. S. Presnell, **Country Banking in the Industrial Revolution.**

I. Gray, **J. Wood's Journal 1812-1815. Trans. B. & G.**

Gloucestershire Notes and Queries, Vol. 1, p. 116.

Gentleman's Magazine, Obituary 1836, vol. 6, p. 102.

T. Leighton, Extraordinary Facts of 1837.

Privy Council hearings and judgement 1838, 16 Aug. 1841.

GEORGE WHITEFIELD IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Ranking alongside the Wesleys, George Whitefield was perhaps one of the greatest evangelists of the eighteenth century. In this respect a study of his relationship with Gloucestershire is revealing in many ways. In particular it provides an insight into the evolution of his career as a preacher, his methods and also the kind of opposition he faced. Though a prolific traveller, who by the time of his death, is estimated to have addressed ten million people, Whitefield never lost interest in his home county. To an extent, what follows is necessarily a chronological guide with emphasis placed on the period 1737 to 1739 that of longest duration. Nevertheless this should not detract from the overall impression which can be examined in the conclusion.

George Whitefield was born on 16 December, 1714 at the Bell Inn, Gloucester, the second youngest of eight children. The evangelist found some significance in his birth place, 'My being born in an inn has often been of service to me . . . to follow the example of my dear Saviour who was born in a manger belonging to an inn.'

Not surprisingly the clerical tradition was in the family. Whitefield's great grandfather Samuel had been Rector of Rockhampton and of his seven children the eldest son took orders and two daughters married clergymen. However, Whitefield's father Thomas, like his father, had no leaning towards ordination and finally became apprenticed to a wine merchant in Bristol, where he met and married a tradesman's daughter, Elizabeth Edwards.

George was named by his father during the wave of Hanoverian loyalty that passed over England. Tragically, Thomas Whitefield died in 1716 and it was the mother who was really the dominant figure in George's early years. In a *Short account of God's dealings with the Rev. George Whitefield A.B. Late of Pembroke College* (1740) he himself gives a graphically detailed account of his early life, acknowledging serious defects in his character and behaviour. He also recognises his mother's devotion in trying to reconcile him to correct ways — 'My mother was very careful of my education and always kept me, in my tender years, from intermeddling in the least with the tavern business.'

Entering the Cathedral School at an early age, he developed an appetite for reading and acting Restoration plays, stimulated by the visits of players to the Bell Inn. At twelve he was moved to the Crypt Grammar School, where his talent was channelled into public speaking by Mr Bond, his schoolmaster. Gifted with 'good elocution and memory' he was commended for his speeches to the corporation during their annual visits. His qualities as an orator were already apparent.

The deteriorating family financial situation forced Whitefield to suspend his studies and plan for a tradesman's job, despite his mother's protests. She had married again in 1724 and, amidst marital strife, business had declined. During the marital turmoil of harsh realities there were rumblings of Whitefield's spiritual awakening. At times he was intoxicated by a desire to be holy and he became fascinated by the church. Despite occasional moral lapses he began to compose sermons and felt a new sense of purpose — 'A very strong impression was made upon my heart that I should preach' — and increasingly he considered that he would be called to draw water out of the wells for the refreshment of 'his spiritual Israel', rather than 'drawing wine for drunkards.'

The revelation that a servitor's post at Oxford would remove the financial burden involved in studying attracted the interest of both George and his mother. The latter appreciated the respectability in being a preacher and with the aid of an influential friend, she secured for her favourite son a place at Pembroke College. With fresh incentive Whitefield resumed his studies and at the same time his spiritual devotion was intensified. Before he went up in 1734, the eager youth was allowed to examine the dissenter Law's work *A serious call to a Devout and Holy life*.

The owner of the local bookshop, Gabriel Harris, the mayor's son, was destined to become a great friend.

Whitefield's experiences at Oxford, his familiarity with the Wesleys and the 'Bible Moths' are well documented and do not concern us here. Nevertheless, it is certainly valuable to note that, while he became converted to the Methodist Moral Crusade, he was already conscious of his spiritual gift while at Gloucester. Oxford consolidated his religious feeling and his reading of *The life of God in the Soul of Man*, a spiritual watershed, sent him into raptures. Indeed, enthusiastic letters to Gloucester prompted fears for his sanity and, in truth, his religious

devotion did eventually prove detrimental to his health. In May, 1735 he returned to Gloucester to recover. Unfortunately, his brother Richard, who now owned the Inn, had no spare room and George had no desire to stay with his shrewish sister-in-law. Eventually, Gabriel Harris's family offered their hospitality and, during his stay, Whitefield made a valuable friend in the form of Sampson Harris, Gabriel's elder brother and Vicar of Stonehouse.

During the summer George visited his brothers Andrew and James in Bristol. The latter, a sea captain, gave him four guineas. On his return to Gloucester he found that religion had aroused a general interest. The County was certainly in poor moral condition prone to lawlessness. Indeed, the Excise riots of 1734 had been so acute that troops had to be used and perhaps now there was a desire to reform. Confidence grew and in a letter to Wesley of 11 June, 1735 Whitefield announced that 'In a short time I trust we shall have a religious society.' Associated with the Wesleys, Whitefield had been visited by a Reverend Essolt, who was interested in the new approach. With popular enthusiasm and the support of two other clergymen, Whitefield's society at Gloucester became a reality. The idea of a chain of religious societies throughout England originated at the juncture in Whitefield's career; he had initiated a trend which was to characterise all his future visits to Gloucestershire.

The young undergraduate had attracted considerable attention in Gloucestershire over an amazingly short period. Not surprisingly, there were demands that he should be invested with a clergyman's powers and here he received valuable support from an unexpected source. At the time the Bishop of Gloucester was an ex-Oxford man, a Dr. Benson, and he included among his convictions an assertion that he would not ordain any man under the canonical age of twenty-three. Whitefield was only twenty. However, among his supporters numbered Lady Albina Selwyn of Matson, the mother of Gloucester's M.P. (1727—1749) Colonel John Selwyn. In many respects she may be viewed as the precursor of Whitefield's valuable aristocratic patronage as seen in Countess Huntingdon, for it was her influence which probably saved the day. In January 1736 the Bishop summoned the anxious Whitefield to his palace, where he announced he would ordain him, despite his age. Following a return to Oxford, this was accomplished on 20 June, 1736 and a jubilant Whitefield immediately took prayers at Gloucester Gaol.

His first sermon at his home church, St. Mary de Crypt, attracted a massive congregation, a mixture of religious and curious. Entitled 'The Necessities and Benefits of a Religious Society,' attention was drawn to the decay of morals in England. Summoning his oratorical prowess, he spoke eloquently, but amidst the congratulations there were complaints that fifteen had been driven 'mad.' According to Whitefield, Bishop Benson replied wryly 'I hope their madness lasts until next Sunday.'

There followed a period spent in London where, under the influence of Wesley's correspondence, Whitefield made the monumental decision to visit Oglethorpe's colony of Georgia. New fields were opening up and on New Year's Day he returned to Gloucester to tell his family of his decision. With the support of the friendly Bishop, he showed his determination and, succeeding with his mother, went on to Bristol to say his farewells to his brother Andrew and his sister Mrs Grevil (who owned a grocer's shop in Wine Street).

According to his custom, Whitefield attended church on the morning following his arrival in Bristol, in this case at St. John's. During the service he was recognised by the Parson and asked to preach — 'Having my notes with me I complied'. The same happened at St. Stephen's the following day and on both occasions he was successful. The congregation was spellbound and news of his forceful style spread rapidly among the citizens. Whitefield was taken aback by the reaction, as he told Gabriel Harris, 'The whole City seems to be alarmed, Churches are as full on weekdays as they used to be on Sundays.'

The interest aroused is certainly astonishing and even attracted the attention of the civic authorities. Following a summons, Whitefield preached before the Mayor and Corporation at St. Mary de Redcliffe and again the packed church was impressed by the passion of his words. The Mayor was overcome, even offering the preacher a post in Bristol. Despite this the young evangelist was unmoved from his Georgia mission, a fact which prompted the Mayor to pass the significant comment that if he wanted to convert Indians, he might go amongst the Kingswood colliers and find Indians enough there. The miners were certainly in need of spiritual reform but, for the time, Whitefield remained unmoved.

In mid-February, 1737 he returned to Oxford to complete his course in Latin and Greek and subsequently he went to London. Here he learnt the disappointing news that Oglethorpe's ship was not fit to sail. In the circumstances the apparent misfortune presented Whitefield with the welcome opportunity to consolidate his field preaching. At the time, Sampson Harris of St. Cyril's, Stonehouse, had business in London and after a short correspondence it was agreed that Whitefield should take charge of his parish in his absence. Delighted by the challenge, he set about his task with characteristic vigour. According to his journal, he found at Stonehouse 'A little sweet society of seeking souls who had heard me preach at an adjacent town (presumably Gloucester) and wrestled with God if it was His will to send me amongst them.' This evidence of a spontaneously organised society is positive indication of the deep popular support which Whitefield had attracted. During this period he travelled extensively and preached from the parsonage each night. On Sundays, he writes, 'Besides expounding the lessons, catechising and preaching, I repeated my sermons to the Society. Neither church nor house could contain the people that came.' Certainly he gained in spiritual intensity, as witnessed in a dramatic account of prayer during lightning. At the same time he gained a faithful servant, a yokel named Joe Husbands. It was a sad occasion when Harris returned, although Whitefield's powerful sermon on Ascension Day, 1737, was a fine farewell.

Invited to Bristol, there was an astonishing reception on 23 May; 'Multitudes came on foot and some in coaches, a mile without the City to see me.' Further news from Oglethorpe indicated a delay of at least eight weeks — time which Whitefield determined to put to good purpose in Bristol.

In the ensuing period he preached five times a week to swelling congregations of all denominations, even during the most oppressive heat spells. 'It is wonderful to see how people hung upon the rails of the organ loft, climbed upon the leads of the church and made the church itself so hot with their breath that the steam would fall from the pillars like drops of rain.' Also mentioned was the formation of 'a Private Society or two.' Whitefield was clearly ensuring that lively Christianity was taking a firm grip in Gloucestershire by anchoring his doctrine. Collections were made for the prisoners of Newgate and the poor of Georgia

(totalling £18.50p) although vast sums were offered to make Whitefield remain in England. He was equally undeterred, even when, after his final sermon on Sunday, 21 June, tearful men and women implored him to stay. Indeed, he was forced to leave Bristol at 3 a.m. on the Tuesday, in order to avoid being mobbed.

At this point one can reflect on the almost phenomenal success Whitefield experienced in Gloucestershire, the credit being entirely due to his great oratorical powers and industry. Indeed, the established movement was to gather in momentum even during his absence. In July, requests from Gloucestershire prompted him to print his Bristol sermon *On the Nature and Necessity of our Regeneration or New Birth in Jesus*. Towards the end of 1737, he was able to record with satisfaction — ‘News comes from time to time of the springing up and increase of the seed sown in Bristol, Gloucester and elsewhere.’

1738 saw George Whitefield in Georgia, a formulative break in his development and one which impressed upon him the need to build an orphanage for the homeless children of that colony. He returned to England on 8 December, 1738.

At Oxford on 11 January, 1739 he was fully ordained a priest by Benson and son was in Bristol (14 February) after a brief period in London. The latter was important in that he had discussed with Wesley the viability of open air field preaching. Wesley was sceptical but, in the ensuing days, Whitefield was to make his idea very attractive.

The reception in Bristol was rapturous but beneath it, hostile forces were stirring. Already many were being denounced as enthusiasts and Whitefield’s reputation earned him that odium. The established church considered it was facing a threat to its sovereignty and went on the defensive accordingly, determined to use its influence among the upper classes—the prime ‘religious recruiting field received a letter proclaiming ‘I believe the Devil in hell is in you all.’ Gibb, the rector of St. Mary de Redcliffe, refused use of the pulpit referring Whitefield to the Chancellor, who pointed out that Whitefield’s teaching had given a ‘general dislike.’ The Dean proved equally non-committal. Rather incensed that he was not allowed to collect for his Georgian orphanage, the evangelist turned his attention to recently established religious societies.

1739 was to be the decisive year in his relationship with Gloucestershire, particularly with regard to the foundation of new societies and with Newgate Prison. The latter became an important focal point of his teaching, Whitefield having befriended the Governor. This continued until 12 March, when he found that the Sheriff had absolutely forbidden the Governor to allow him entrance and an official chaplain had been appointed. Opposition was hardening, but unwittingly provided Whitefield with an incentive to start his own societies.

On Saturday, 17 February, Whitefield and a wealthy patron, Seward, were invited to dinner by a dissenter living at Kingswood, several miles from Bristol. This was the centre of the mining community, notorious for its violence, promiscuity and general lack of respect for religion and property. In 1738 an Anglican minister named Morgan had courageously tried to preach there but to little effect. As matters developed, 17 February was a decisive point in George Whitefield’s career and the future of Methodism. Taking courage, he climbed to Hannam Mount and began to preach in the open air, a practice which, Southey observed ‘had not been seen in England since the dissolution of the monasteries.’ A crowd of some 200 gathered, listening to the words from the Sermon on the Mount. Though unfamiliar with it the colliers were captured by Whitefield’s words and

emotional scenes followed. Tears flowed on this remarkable occasion. Whitefield wrote afterwards 'I was never more acceptable to my Master than when I was standing to teach those hearers in the open fields.'

Between February and July, 1739 Whitefield accomplished a great deal, often using Bristol as a base for various expeditions into the county. Certainly, much was accomplished at Bristol itself and Kingswood received particular attention. In the period up until 1 April, he preached there on ten occasions. A survey of his congregation sizes (by his own estimate) gives a valuable indication of the increasing support he drew:

| | | | |
|------|----|----------|---------|
| 1739 | 2 | February | 2,000 |
| | 22 | February | 4—5,000 |
| | 25 | February | 10,000 |
| | 1 | March | 14,000 |
| | 18 | March | 20,000 |
| | 25 | March | 23,000 |

(When Whitefield commented 'I have reason to believe, by what I have heard, that my words have not altogether fallen on the ground. Some of the colliers I found much affected'.)

Opposition continued to plague Whitefield in Bristol, although immediately following his first Kingswood sermon, the pulpits of St. Werburghs, St. Philips, St. Thomas and St. Mary de Redcliffe were offered him. Again there were capacity congregations, but the official ecclesiastical authorities were clearly not in approval. On 20 February the Chancellor summoned Whitefield, and in the presence of a registrar, questioned why he had preached without a licence. Whitefield argued that this was an obsolete practice and called to mind an Irish clergyman who had preached for the Chancellor. The latter was incensed — 'I am resolved sir, if you preach or expound anywhere in this diocese till you have a licence, I will first suspend you and then excommunicate you.' After this all the churches were closed to the evangelist. In particular, there was deep seated criticism from the vicar of All Saints, Josiah Tucker, who considered Whitefield to be presumptuous. He even published a conversation with Whitefield aimed to ridicule in May, 1739 and a letter accusing him of having propagated blasphemous and enthusiastic notions which struck at the root of all religion!

Simultaneously, the *Gentleman's Magazine* published a loaded comment that Whitefield's teaching at Kingswood had made the miners indolent so possibly forcing up the price of coal. Whitefield appealed to Bishop Butler of Bristol about the Chancellor's decision and eventually he granted permission to collect for Georgia, while disputing Whitefield's doctrine. On 24 February Whitefield presented his letter to the Chancellor triumphantly, forcing the other to stand down apologetically.

From here on, Whitefield effectively concentrated all his attention on public speaking, collecting for the Georgian orphan house and attending to the religious societies. From his own evidence societies existed at Baldwin Street, St. Nicholas Street, Temple Street, Castle Street, Lawford's Gate, Baptists Mills and Fishponds and according to his accounts, Bristol donated a total of £208 between 18 February and 1 April. Certainly, the Methodist growth was stimulated by the arrival of John Wesley on 31 March, invited by Whitefield to consolidate the

hold. By all accounts the visit to Bristol was a milestone in Wesley's career, for not only did he perfect the 'ticket system', but he learned the value of open air preaching. On 12 April, 1739 he accompanied Whitefield to the Bowling Green and Kingswood to make his farewells. Great success had been achieved at Kingswood, for three days earlier he had been invited for dinner at Two Mile Hill by the colliers. Here he collected around £20 in cash and £40 in subscriptions towards the building of a Charity School. Wesley was impressed by Whitefield's daring method and also by his popularity. When taking his leave of the Baldwin Street Society, the yard was so crowded he had to climb up a ladder and so over the roof of an adjacent house before he could reach the door! Wesley subsequently agreed to make open air speeches to the societies and a satisfied Whitefield left a tearful Bristol on 3 April at 2 p.m. He arrived at Kingswood where a surprise entertainment had been prepared by the colliers. They wanted him to lay the first stone of their school which he accomplished with a beautiful prayer. The school was in fact completed under Wesley's direction in 1740. John Cennick, a disciple of Kinchin the Oxford Methodist, became the first headmaster. A remarkable man, he did much to consolidate Whitefield's work in Gloucestershire and it was undoubtedly his work which led to the erection of the Kingswood Tabernacle between March and December, 1741. It was opened in 1742, staffed by the Preachers' Association which Whitefield had provided for the purpose.

Besides Bristol, 1739 was a year in which Whitefield did much in the county. He usually travelled from the city, mostly in response to invitations from ordinary folk. In February he visited Elberton and Thornbury, both by invitation. In the latter he was refused the pulpit despite a gathering of 200. On 28 March he also attended a meeting at Publow by invitation and there were so many that the church was not large enough to hold them.

Following Bristol, Whitefield went on to Wales and then returned to Gloucester via Coleford. Staying on at his brother's inn, he addressed his religious Society on 9 April and initially was given the use of St. Michael's Church, but was refused the following day. According to his journals 'Some wealthy Demetrius, being offended at the greatness of the congregation and alleging it kept people from their business' forced 'the curate to prevent the use of the church, except on Sundays.' Consequently, Whitefield used his brother's field which in subsequent days held up to 3,000. At the same time he continued visiting the county. On 13 April he accepted an invitation to Chalford where he addressed 3,000. The following day he preached at Painswick, where he captured the interest of the local butcher, William Hogg. Hogg became a devoted servant and in later years did much to promote the Methodist cause in Gloucestershire. Also included in his itinerary was a visit to Stonehouse and by invitation to Oxenhall (near Newent), where he addressed 10,000. As the *Gloucester Journal* observes 'Great power has attended his preaching and many have been pricked in their hearts; great numbers have been strengthened in their Christian faith.' Whitefield also preached at Cheltenham, where the response was remarkable — 'Some were so filled with the Holy Ghost that they were almost unable to support themselves under it.' Indeed, it is rather surprising that no Religious Society was established here.

Returning from London on the 27 June, further visits were made to Cirencester, Gloucester, Stroud and Randwick. At Randwick the churchyard was so packed that a window had to be removed from behind the pulpit. Arriving at Tewkesbury

on Monday, 2 July Whitefield learned that the town bailiff was hostile. This was proved by the appearance of four constables, who tried to remove him. A lawyer friend showed that this was illegal as they did not hold a warrant; so Whitefield was allowed to preach. The next morning the evangelist confronted the angry bailiff, who hinted that a certain judge was against his cause and proceeded to threaten him. However the same evening the courageous preacher addressed some 6,000 in a borrowed field in the company of a self appointed guard of around 120 horsemen!

On 6 July Whitefield was again in Bristol where he was received as 'an angel of God' and then reunited with Wesley. Minor arguments over doctrine were already paving the way to the schism which eventually divided Methodism and Congregationalism, but in the meantime their co-operation led to the merging of the two leading societies in Bristol. Before making his farewell of the city, once more Whitefield addressed massive gatherings at the Bowling Green (10,000) Rose Green (20,000) and Kingswood. With Wesley he then moved to Gloucester on 14 July, again visiting Randwick, Hampton, Tetbury and Lechlade.

Whitefield was to return to his home county in subsequent years, in particular during March 1743. During a five day stay he visited Minchinhampton, Painswick, Ruscombe, Kings Stanley and Dursley. At Minchinhampton a certain Thomas Adams had formed his own society after hearing Whitefield in 1739. In fact, Adams was badly assaulted by a mob in July 1743 and Whitefield had taken up his cause, bringing a case against the ringleaders. Despite disinterested law officers, Whitefield won his suit on 31 March 1744. It proved a valuable publicity exercise and a grateful Adams eventually erected a Tabernacle at his new home Rodborough in 1749.

Further visits of only short duration ensued in 1750, 1753, 1755, 1756, 1767 and 1769. 1753 was significant in that a Tabernacle was raised in Penn Street in Bristol, to accommodate the society's needs. Countess Huntingdon apparently made a substantial contribution and the foundation stone was laid on 13 July, probably by Whitefield himself. The final visit came in May 1769, the year before Whitefield's death. It was a rewarding period for the evangelist, during which he made his 'Speeches of the Golden Seasons.' He preached at Chippenham Castle Coombe and Dursley (where a Tabernacle had been erected in 1764) in his characteristic open air style.

The Bible points out that a prophet receives little welcome at the town of his birth, but Whitefield's astonishing success arguably refutes this idea. There is no doubt that he was accepted by the people of Gloucestershire and in many respects he owes much to his home county. Here he had his spiritual awakening developed so much during his career. Lady Selwyn's help and the subsequent friendship of Bishop Benson gave his career momentum, but perhaps above all the confidence his listeners inspired in him was of paramount significance.

The year 1739 not only saw Whitefield initiate the Methodist tradition of appealing to the people in the open air, it was also a thoroughly rewarding experience to convert the heathen Kingswood colliers.

All in all Methodism was well received by the ordinary people of Gloucestershire and, after all, these were the ones who needed spiritual attention. Opposition, as elsewhere in the provinces was a manifestation of fear and misunderstanding. The clergy and judiciary were alarmed at the enthusiasm that Whitefield represented, considering that Methodism threatened the established order o

society. While often merely obstructive, many were concerned with their own affairs — people like the wealthy Demetrius — lacking genuine antipathy. Others were more offensive however. Whitefield noted that the Minchinhampton rioters were some 'of the baser sort, privately stirred up by those of Higher Rank.' In meeting such a challenge, the young evangelist displayed a definite sense of purpose and courage. Even death threats made at Cirencester did not perturb him.

Whitefield certainly worked prodigiously. He provided essentially a tangible impetus for a spiritual awakening which a morally frustrated people needed. Though he personally established many societies, more developed simultaneously. Usually he visited a town or village by invitation, rather than by design.

On his death he had many devoted followers within Gloucestershire. Preachers like William Hogg, Thomas Adams, John Cennick and Cornelius Winter were hardworking men whose industry ensured that Whitefield's teaching in Gloucestershire would not die.

For a man who travelled so widely, it is surprising that Whitefield found time to preserve his close links with his home county.

As he said at Rodborough, May 1769, 'It is good to go into the highways and hedges. Field preaching . . . preaching for ever.'

R. D. GEORGE.