

Eminent Cheltonians Commemorated at Leckhampton

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Introduction

LECKHAMPTON WAS AN ISOLATED SPOT until the age of the motor car. However, at its church of St Peter there are memorials to many 19th-century and early 20th-century Cheltonians, some of them of national renown. Though much the same might be said of the churches at Charlton Kings¹, Swindon Village and Prestbury, the collection at Leckhampton is unusually rich and is a revealing reflection of the social history of Cheltenham. Some of the names mentioned in this article are well known, but the achievements, misfortunes and tragedies of others, now all but forgotten, deserve to be retold: ‘the world knows nothing of its greatest men’².

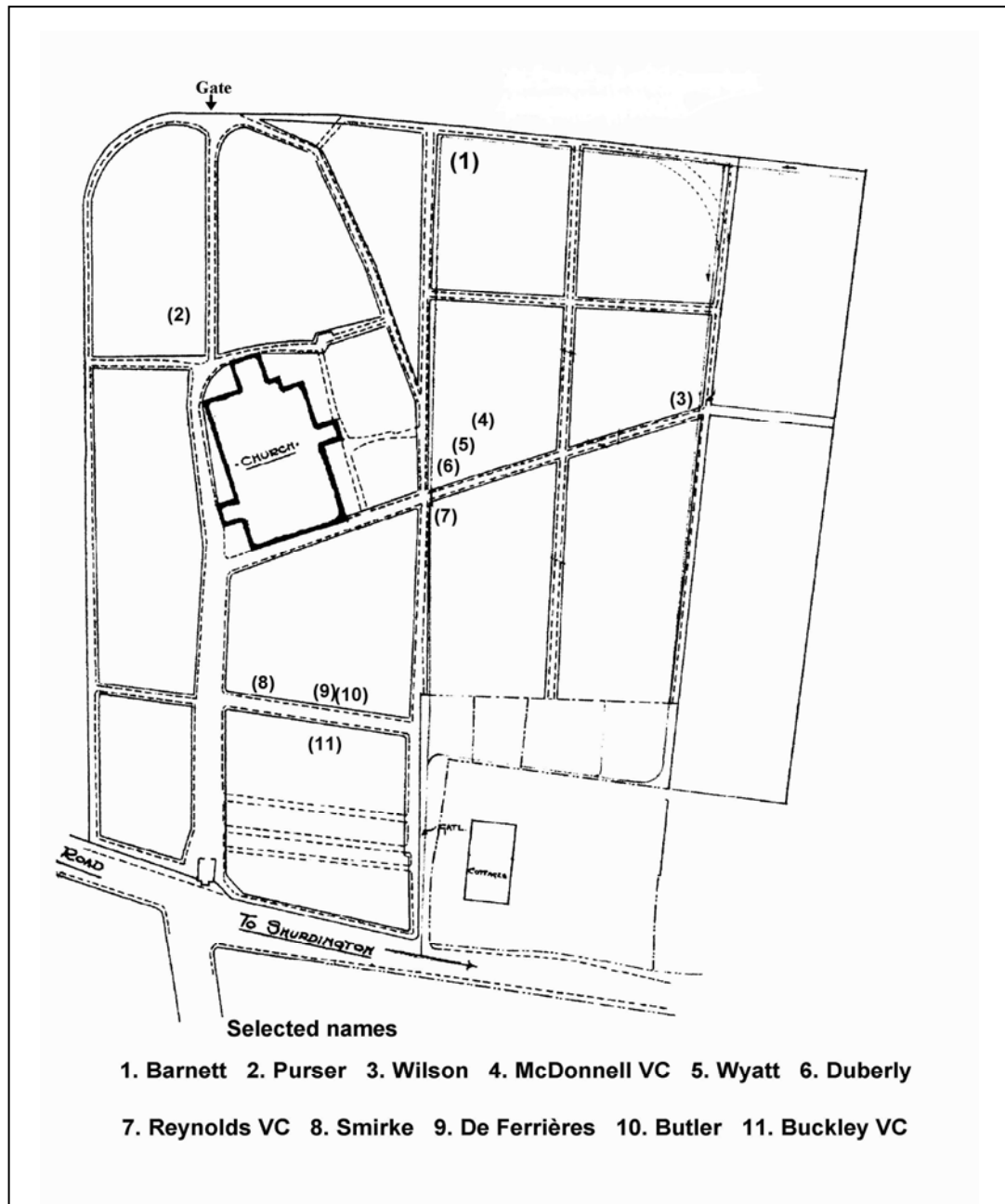
Not all of these ‘Cheltonians’ were actually born in Cheltenham. Some had settled in the area on retirement, perhaps having served in the Indian Army or East India Company.³ Others were ‘birds of passage’, again perhaps with empire connections and renting a house in between tours abroad. Many would have known each other, if not already from their past careers then at least as members of Cheltenham’s fashionable society. A few of their names are listed in the *Cheltenham Looker-On* as attending hunt balls, and certain of the gentlemen belonged to the New Club. Their activities and achievements were sometimes reported in the local press, and occasionally in a national newspaper, and a few remain ‘eminent’ to this day by being listed in the *Dictionary of National Biography* or similar compendiums.

Some of the gentry, professional men and the more prosperous tradespeople lived in the parish itself, in the large detached villas that sprang up beside Leckhampton Road and in The Park area. Others had been residents of Cheltenham but, as subscription lists suggest, worshipped at Leckhampton, or may have chosen Leckhampton as their final resting place simply because there was no space left in the graveyards of the town churches where they were parishioners. In a number of cases the dead person also has a memorial in the church where he worshipped or in whose parish he lived, notably at Christ Church⁴. Furthermore, even after the municipal cemetery in Bouncers Lane was opened in 1864 the middle classes may have been reluctant to be buried there.

The task of establishing who is buried at Leckhampton and in which plot has been greatly helped by a survey of the churchyard carried out in 1914 by the architect Leonard Barnard (mentioned again below), who marked and numbered individual plots and the associated names on a detailed plan.⁵ Although the Cotswold stone of many of the graves is badly eroded and the inscriptions are difficult to read, Julian Rawes on behalf of the Gloucestershire Family History Society has recorded meticulously the wording on about 600 graves, which include the majority of the significant Victorian burials⁶, and I and others have added to this work. The inscriptions sometimes also mention a person’s occupation, place of origin and

address, which help towards further research in press articles, gazetteers and the internet. Certain of the graves are marked on the plan reproduced below.

This article mentions in bold type, with their dates, a selection of names that are likely to be of most interest. There is no room here to do more than sketch in the salient details of their lives, but in due course it is intended to publish a much more comprehensive list in book form.



Plan of churchyard – St Peter's, Leckhampton

Lords of the Manor

Members of the Norwood and Trye families, as lords of the manor of Leckhampton, have their memorials in what is now the Lady Chapel of the church. Several of them had influence beyond their own neighbourhood, such as William and Henry Norwood and a father and son both named Charles Brandon Trye.

William Norwood (1548-1634) was also lord of the manor of Cheltenham from 1589 to c.1616 through his marriage to Elizabeth Lygon of Madresfield Court, and as such he took an active part in Cheltenham borough administration. His grandson **Colonel Henry Norwood** (1614-1689) fought on the Royalist side during the Civil War. After the beheading of Charles I he went to America to help establish the colony of New England, where the exiled King Charles II appointed him Treasurer of Virginia. He took part in the expedition that led to the capture of New Amsterdam (now New York) and was later appointed as Lieutenant-Governor of Tangier; his attitude at that time drew a disapproving comment from Samuel Pepys in his *Diary*. After returning to Gloucestershire in 1669 he was elected as one of the MPs for Gloucester and was later its mayor.



William Norwood.
Detail from portrait by
Cornelius Jansen.
CAGM.



C.B. Trye
Courtesy of
Leckhampton LHS

There is a small memorial plaque to **Charles Brandon Trye, FRS**, (1757-1811), the first of the Trye family to be lord of the manor of Leckhampton. He is buried near the family's main seat at Hardwicke Court and is also commemorated with an imposing monument in Gloucester Cathedral. He was Senior Surgeon at Gloucester Infirmary and supported Dr Edward Jenner in his work on smallpox vaccination. He saw the commercial potential of the Leckhampton quarries in supplying stone for Cheltenham's early 19th-century building boom, to be delivered via an extension to the Gloucester and Cheltenham Tramroad.

A stained-glass window commemorates his second son, **The Reverend Charles Brandon Trye II** (1806-1884), who as well as being lord of the manor was Rector of Leckhampton for 53 years from 1830. He had the village school built, twice enlarged the church, was a magistrate, served on the Cheltenham Board of Guardians, and was Chairman of the Leckhampton Local Board. He was a founder of Cheltenham College, and he and his brother provided the land on which the 'daughter' church of St Philip and St James was built.⁷

A Cotton King and Queen

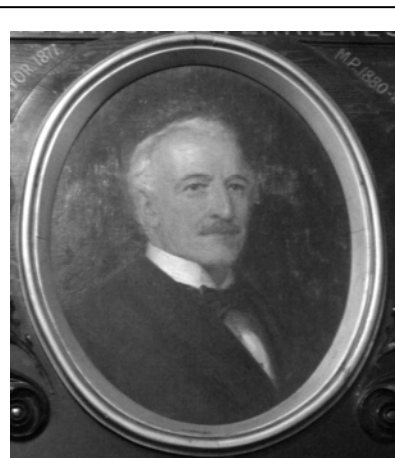
John Hargreaves (1842-1900) was the tenant of Leckhampton Court from about 1872 and was able to buy it in 1894 when the estate was put up for sale. He and his wife, née **Edith Platt** (1849-1882), took an active part in the social life of Cheltenham and the county. They were prominent at the hunt balls, and senior military men and aristocrats were among their guests at the Court (and, so it is reported, the future King Edward VII when Prince of Wales). John Hargreaves was an officer in the Gloucestershire Yeomanry and a member of Cheltenham's New Club. More significantly, each came from an important Lancashire family. The Hargreaves had made their money chiefly as carriers for the cotton trade, but Platt Brothers (Edith's father and uncle) employed 7000 people in Oldham and were the largest manufacturers in the world of cotton spinning and weaving equipment, which they exported throughout Europe. They were generous benefactors to their local communities, not only in Oldham but also at Llanfairfechan, where they built a country mansion, the railway station that served it and a church.⁸

The Last Beat of Drake's Drum

Sir Francis Henry Drake (d.1839, aged 83) is commemorated by a memorial tablet in the Lady Chapel. Surmounted with a representation of the *Golden Hind*, it claims that he was the 'last surviving male descendant of the great circumnavigator'. On the other hand, according to *Burke's Peerage*, an uncle of same name had been the last baronet, and though Leckhampton's Sir Francis assumed the title on his uncle's death, the legitimacy of this claim is doubtful, as his father's marriage, in Newfoundland, was not officially recognised. He evidently felt himself morally entitled to the baronetcy, however. His name lives on in Drake House, which he built as his home. (It was lived in more recently by **Sir Charles Irving**, MP for Cheltenham 1974-1992, who can legitimately be included in this article, for after his death in 1995 his cremated remains were dropped from the air over Leckhampton Hill.)

Mayor, MP and Benefactor

Baron Charles Conrad Adolphus du Bois de Ferrieres (1823-1908) was born in the Netherlands, but his mother was English; the surname de Ferrieres was of French Huguenot origin. He lived in England from infancy and spent 50 years in Cheltenham, at Bays Hill House (now demolished, where George III stayed during his visit to the town). He was naturalised in 1867. He was made Cheltenham's second Mayor in 1877 and was its Liberal MP from 1880 to 1885. He was a member of the Board of Guardians for 36 years and was a leading Freemason. His obituary notice stated that there was 'scarcely a society or charitable institution in the town that [had] not benefited from his support'. He is best remembered for his gift to the town of the Art Gallery and paintings from his father's collection.



Baron de Ferrieres. Portrait in Cheltenham Art Gallery. By permission of Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum

He encouraged the Gordon Boys' Brigade, always employing one of the lads to ride on the box seat of his carriage. He made gifts to various churches in the town and county, especially of stained-glass windows, to be found in Cheltenham Parish Church, Gloucester Cathedral, Cheltenham College Chapel and Chepstow Parish Church.⁹ He is buried at Leckhampton alongside his father, the first baron, who died at Bays Hill House during a visit in 1864.

At Leckhampton there are in all five stained-glass windows in his or his father's memory. Considering that the baron was childless, it is of note that the subject of one of them is 'Suffer the little children to come unto me'. They all incorporate his initials and a Masonic emblem.

Antarctic Hero



Dr Edward Wilson.
Chelt Art Gallery & Museum.

The memorial to **Dr Edward Adrian ('Ted') Wilson** (1872-1912) is probably the one most visited in the whole churchyard. His tragic and heroic death, together with Captain Scott and three other companions on their return from the South Pole, is the stuff of legend and has been described in numerous books.¹⁰ He is truly a 'local boy', as during his teens his parents bought The Crippetts, then a farm, for his mother to pursue her interest in breeding cattle and rearing poultry, on which she was a noted authority. In its surroundings he was free to develop his precocious love of nature and his skill in painting and drawing, which he later exercised on Scott's Antarctic expeditions of 1901-04 and 1910-13, when he was Chief Scientist. Examples of his watercolours and other memorabilia are displayed in Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum.

Ted Wilson is commemorated on a granite cross on his parents' grave. His father, **Edward Thomas Wilson** (1832-1918) was also a doctor, a general practitioner and consultant at Cheltenham General Hospital and a founder of the Delancey Hospital. The epitaph reads 'He went about doing good'.

Russian Connections

Ted Wilson's mother (1841-1930) was born in Russia as **Mary Agnes Wishaw**. The Wishaws were one of several interrelated Anglo-Russian trading families that flourished in St Petersburg before the Revolution. Her father, **Bernhard Wishaw** (1779-1868), and various relatives resettled in Cheltenham during the late 19th century, and several of them were buried in Leckhampton Churchyard.

Bernhard Wishaw was an imposing figure, six feet tall, with a red beard but no moustache or whiskers. He was a senior partner of the firm Hills and Wishaw, by far the oldest in St Petersburg, and when he entered the Exchange there, everyone in the building would bow with great respect. He came to Cheltenham in about 1851 and at first lived at Keynsham House. His son **Bernard** (without an 'h') **Wishaw** (1821-

1900), one of Mary Agnes's seven older brothers, knew Tsar Nicholas II and often walked with him on the quays in St Petersburg.¹¹

Bernhard Whishaw's sister **Elizabeth** (1787-1866) and his brother-in-law, **James Yeames** (1779-1864) came to live at Acomb House (now demolished) in Charlton Kings. James Yeames had been HM Consul-General at Odessa and was an uncle of Sir William Frederick Yeames RA (also born in Russia), the painter of 'And when did you last see your father?'¹². (Edward Wilson and he were distant cousins and may have inherited their artistic talent from a common ancestor.)

Military graves

There are many military graves, among which there are at least 30 generals and seven admirals, but pride of place goes to three holders of the Victoria Cross:

Captain Cecil William Buckley, Royal Navy, in the Crimean War. In 1856, then a lieutenant, he volunteered with two others to make a commando-style landing on a beach controlled by the Russian army. Despite considerable opposition, they managed to set fire to corn stores and ammunition dumps and destroy enemy equipment. All three were awarded the VC. Five days later Lieutenant Buckley took part in another such raid. He died in Madeira in 1872 and is commemorated on the grave of his widow at Leckhampton.

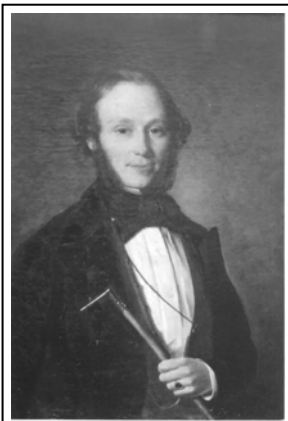
William Fraser McDonnell¹³, during the Indian Mutiny. He was a member of the Bengal Civil Service and one of only five civilians to hold the award. In July 1857 he and 35 troops were escaping from rebel attack in a boat that had been sabotaged and was without oars. Under incessant fire, he climbed out to free the rudder and guided the boat across the river to safety. He afterwards remained in India for a time and was Judge of the High Court in Calcutta from 1874 to 1876. He retired to Cheltenham, also his birthplace, where he died in 1894.

Major Douglas Reynolds, Royal Field Artillery, during the First World War. The son and grandson of army officers, he was a professional soldier and had fought in the Boer War and served in India. He won his award for two separate acts of courage, in August and September 1914, for rescuing an artillery piece under heavy fire and single-handedly silencing an enemy battery. Subsequently he was twice injured and died from the effects of gas poisoning in February 1916, aged 34. He was also made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour. He is commemorated on his father's grave and his name is on the war memorial in Christ Church, Cheltenham.¹⁴

Planters and Pioneers

In an article in *Journal 9*, James Toomey described the lives of three indigo planters who retired and lived as neighbours in Cheltenham, all of whom died within the space of twelve months and were buried almost next to each other. These were **James Cox** (1820-1892), **David Russell Crawford** (1810-1892) and **George Nevile Wyatt** (d.1891 aged 73). James Cox was sent to India to help at his uncle's plantation at the age of 15 and returned 25 years later, having made his fortune. In 1884 he moved with his family to Cheltenham, where he bought Thirlestaine Hall (now the headquarters of the Chelsea Building Society), close to the home of David Russell Crawford.

George Nevile Wyatt and his wife **Augusta Warren Wyatt** (d.1905 aged 81) lived at Lake House in Thirlestaine Road (now owned by Cheltenham College and renamed Southwood House).¹⁵ George Nevile Wyatt had been a churchwarden at St Luke's, Cheltenham, but in 1884 their daughter Annie married the Reverend William Clifford Aston, a son of the Vicar of St Luke's. In 1894 the patronage of the living at Leckhampton was up for sale, and was bought by Mrs Wyatt (by then a widow). When there was a vacancy in 1895 she was thus in a position to arrange the appointment of her son-in-law as the incumbent. This act of nepotism was perhaps forgivable, as Clifford Aston brought energy and good fellowship to the village. He is best remembered for inspiring the building of the Parish Hall as a centre of its social life.¹⁶



Henry Godfrey,
aged 26.
Courtesy of
Tony Warner.

Next to the grave of John Hargreaves lies a fellow member of the New Club, **Henry Godfrey, JP** (1824-1882), of Karenza (a building now renamed 'Lake House', owned by Cheltenham College). He came to live in Cheltenham in 1864 and had moved to Clare Villa by 1870¹⁷, renaming it Karenza in honour of his Cornish-born wife. Reports in the *Looker-On*¹⁸ state that he was appointed as a Justice of the Peace in 1875, that he was churchwarden first at St James's and then St Luke's, where he was also choir master over a period of ten years, and that he gave part of the garden of Karenza as a site for St Luke's mission room (the first Emmanuel church, in Naunton Parade). Not even in his obituary is there any mention of his earlier life. He was born in India but educated in England. He sailed to Australia at the age of 18 and, with very little previous agricultural experience went on to establish a sheep station of 64,000

acres and was later involved in lucrative gold trading. He left letters, diaries and art work that gave an invaluable picture of pioneering life at that time; these are deposited in the Victorian State Library in Melbourne. His wife, née **Mary Polwehle**, died as recently as 1931, aged 96. (I am grateful to Tony Warner, a descendant of Henry Godfrey living in Australia, for this additional and unexpected information. I was pleased to be able to pinpoint the grave for him when he visited Leckhampton recently.)

Three Architects...

John Middleton had already built St Mark's when he was commissioned in 1865 to enlarge St Peter's, Leckhampton. In due course, as head of a busy architects' practice, he designed four more churches in the town and others further afield, as well as private houses.¹⁹ Though the medieval origins of the church are still evident, the tag 'if you seek my monument, look around you' can be applied to him, especially as a sympathetic carving of a bearded man's head, which serves as a label stop in the porch, is generally reckoned to represent Middleton.

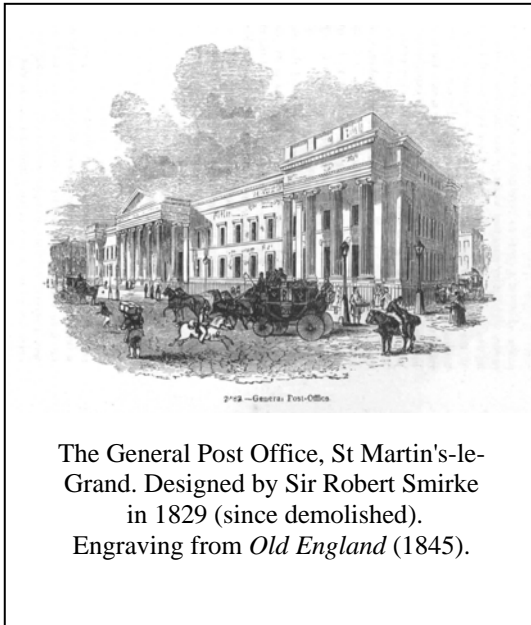


John Middleton.
Carving in porch of
Leckhampton Church.
Photo by Eric Miller.

Leonard William Barnard (d.1951 aged 80) of The Bittams (burnt down in 1937), in Crippetts Lane. He was the son of the noted local historian Major Robert Cary Barnard, for whom John Middleton had designed Bartlow (now demolished owing to subsidence) on Leckhampton Hill. He was also an uncle of the artist, the late **Major Tom Barnard**, of The Giffards, opposite the church. Leonard Barnard volunteered to fight in the Boer War as a member of the Artists' Rifles, and his letters home made graphic reading.²⁰ He became the senior partner of Middleton's old practice and designed buildings at The Ladies' College and Cheltenham College and War Memorials including the one at Leckhampton. He also designed the pulpit for Leckhampton Church in 1913, ornamented with beautifully carved figures of angels playing musical instruments.



Leonard Barnard.
Detail from photo of
Leckhampton Church Lads'
Brigade, 1910.
Courtesy of Mrs Joyce Barrett



The General Post Office, St Martin's-le-Grand. Designed by Sir Robert Smirke in 1829 (since demolished).
Engraving from *Old England* (1845).

Sir Robert Smirke RA (1781-1867). As Architect to the Board of Trade, he designed the British Museum, the Royal Mint, the General Post Office in St Martin's-le-Grand and other imposing public buildings. Locally, his work included the County Halls at Gloucester and Hereford, the Judge's Lodgings at Gloucester, Hardwicke Court, parts of Cirencester Park and, by contrast in Gothic style, Eastnor Castle. On his retirement he moved to Cheltenham where at first he lived at No 1, Italian Villas (now Lansdown Court); his address when he died was 20 Suffolk Square (later known as Bunwell).

Two of his brothers are commemorated at Leckhampton: **Thomas Smirke** (d.1870 aged 82), and **Sir Edward Smirke** (1795-1875), who had been noted staying with Sir Robert at Italian Villas in 1851. Sir Edward, a barrister, had been Attorney-General to the Prince of Wales, Recorder of Southampton and Vice-warden of the Stannaries of Cornwall and Devon.²¹

... and an Engineer and Polymath

A plaque in the Lady Chapel commemorates **George Backhouse Witts** (d.1912 aged 64) of Hill House. He was brought up at Upper Slaughter, where his father had been Rector, as had his grandfather the Rev. F.E. Witts, the



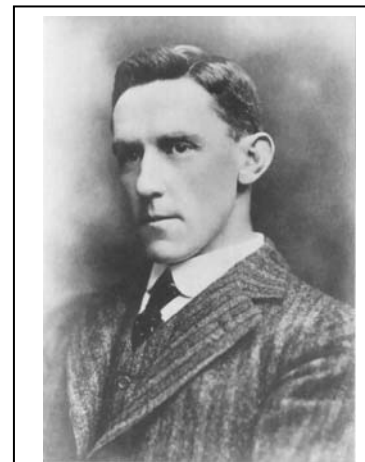
G.B. Witts.
Chelt. Looker-On
14 Sep 1912.

‘Country Parson’ whose diaries were edited by David Verey. He was a civil engineer by profession and designed and carried out the construction of the railway from Cheltenham to Bourton-on-the-Water. He was a man of great character and many interests and a friend of Dr Wilson, senior, and of Robert Cary Barnard. An enthusiastic archaeologist, he discovered 28 Stone Age skeletons in a long barrow at Buckholt Wood and published a handbook of archaeology for the county.²² He was Honorary Secretary of the Cotswold Hunt for 26 years, a JP and a member of the County Council. As Chairman of the Leckhampton Parish Council he was referred to as ‘the unofficial lord mayor of Leckhampton’. Once, he rounded off a lecture about the geology of Leckhampton Hill by singing ‘George Ridler’s Oven’ and other Gloucestershire ballads.

Doctors of Medicine

Dr Disney Launder Thorp (1805-1888) and his wife **Eleanor Thorp** (1814-1902) of Lypiatt Lodge are buried in a grave that retains its elaborate wrought iron railings. The doctor is also commemorated in two stained-glass windows, one of which illustrates the parable of the Good Samaritan. He was a Senior Fellow of Caius College, Cambridge, and President of Cheltenham Literary and Philosophical Institution from 1841 to 1844. His obituary refers to ‘the very many poor who had privately partaken of his bounty’ and also to ‘his devoted widow, animated by the same generous spirit’. She left money to provide coals and warm clothing ‘for the poor people in the parish of Leckhampton’ and also paid for the conversion of the Gordon Lamp from gas to electricity.²³

Harold Lloyd Davies (*d.*1920, aged 51), was a greatly respected general practitioner of the old school; the present-day surgery in Moorend Park Road ‘Lloyd Davies House’ is named in his memory. He worked in Delancey Hospital and, during the First World War, at the Leckhampton Court Red Cross Hospital. After dealing with many cases of sickness during the post-war influenza epidemic, he himself caught the disease and died of pneumonia. ‘Everybody knew him ... not only a physician, but a friend’ read his obituary in the Leckhampton parish magazine.



Dr Lloyd Davies
Courtesy of the
Leckhampton Surgery

Clergymen and Scholars

Among the numerous clergymen and their families the following names stand out for their other interests and achievements:

The Reverend Joseph Fenn (1819-1884), Vicar of Christ Church from 1859 and sometime Fellow of Trinity College Cambridge. He was active in the affairs of the town, for example supporting the establishment of a public library and campaigning for a better water supply. He helped found the church of St Stephen’s. The route of his funeral procession from Christ Church to Leckhampton was lined with hundreds of people, and clergy of all denominations attended.²⁴

The Reverend Joseph Esmond Riddle (1804-1859). From 1840 until his death he was the first priest-in-charge at St Philip and St James's Church, Leckhampton. After obtaining a first class degree in classics at Oxford, he taught Latin and brought out several Latin dictionaries. He wrote numerous books and religious tracts defending evangelical principles against the Tractarian movement. These included scripture readings, sermons and prayers, a guide to liturgy and a history of the Papacy, *Letters from an absent Godfather*, *Manual of Christian Antiquities*, and *Illustrations of Aristotle on Men and Manners from the Dramatic Works of Shakespeare*. A tablet in his own church refers to 'his simplicity of character, his integrity, and his kindness of heart'. His widow moved to Rose Cottage, in Moorend Road, and worshipped at St Peter's. She gave the original clock for the Leckhampton Parish Hall. In her 1871 Census return she said that her income was 'derived from dividends and profits of a copyright' – clearly, from her late husband's books.

The Reverend Edward Pryce Owen (d.1863 aged 76) of Bettws Hall, Montgomeryshire, and Roderic House, Suffolk Square. He had for eighteen years been Vicar of Wellington, Shropshire, but withdrew from the ministry to devote himself to painting and drawing. His obituary refers to his etchings 'in the style of Rembrandt' and the 300 paintings of his own and others collected during his travels in Italy. In 1881 his library and the choicest paintings were advertised for sale by Phillips in London. There were also thirteen folios of topographical sketches, 31 manuscript volumes of his own sermons and 76 of his father's, Archdeacon Hugh Owen, who was joint author of what is still the standard history of Shrewsbury.²⁵ In 1882 Roderic House was bought for use as a boarding house by Cheltenham Ladies' College.²⁶

Some Outstanding Women

Any list of intrepid Victorian women travellers would include **Frances ('Fanny') Duberly** (1829-1902). She is buried at Leckhampton in the same grave as her husband **Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Duberly** (1823-1890), who as a captain in the 8th Hussars was the Regimental Paymaster during the Crimean War and the Indian

Fanny Duberly on her horse 'Bobs', before Sebastopol, with Captain Henry Duberly. Photograph by Roger Fenton. By permission of the British Library (ADD.47218A f146)



Mutiny. She accompanied him throughout, being referred to as ‘the officers’ darling’, and wrote books about her experiences. A great horsewoman, she witnessed the Charge of the Light Brigade and was one of the first to ride into Sebastopol after the siege.²⁷ During the Mutiny she is reputed to have ridden over three thousand miles to visit cantonments. She and her husband eventually settled in Cheltenham, at St Clair in The Park, and Fanny’s obituary refers to her great circle of friends in the town.²⁸

Marian (Marianne, or Mary Anne) Burlton Bennett

(d.1867 aged 52), a daughter of Frind Cregoe Colmore of Moor End, Charlton Kings.²⁹ She was known in her youth as ‘the Belle of Cheltenham’ – very appropriately, to judge from the portrait reproduced here. In 1833 she is said to have eloped with William Antony Burlton Bennett³⁰ and married him at Coldstream. He was a cricketer, regarded as a very promising batsman, who played a number of games for the MCC and other notable teams of the period. While an undergraduate at Cambridge, he had reportedly fought a duel at Boulogne.³¹ Marian became the subject of a scandalous divorce case that came before the House of Lords in 1852. Using various assumed names, she had run away with another man. Her husband pursued her across France, Italy and Spain and back again before finding the two together in Horsham.³² The older of her two sons, **Captain William Frind Charles Burlton Bennett** (d.1876 aged 42), is buried in the same plot. A Captain W.C.J. Burlton Bennett, who was a tenant of Leckhampton Court in 1870-71³³ was possibly the younger son.

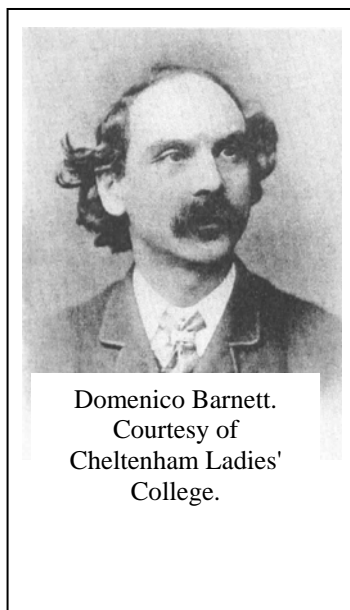


Marian Colmore, the Belle of Cheltenham. Detail from portrait miniature, CAGM.

A complete contrast is **Evangeline (‘Eva’) Butler** (1858-1864), the daughter of Josephine Butler, the social reformer, and the Reverend George Butler, then Vice-Principal of Cheltenham College. One day in August 1864 the couple were returning to their home at the Priory, London Road, when Eva ran to welcome them from the nursery, fell over the banisters and never recovered consciousness. This tragic experience lived with Josephine for the rest of her life and may well have inspired her campaigning ardour. Soon after the incident George Butler was appointed as Principal of Liverpool College, and it was in Liverpool that Josephine began her ministry among prostitutes and other exploited women, providing a shelter for them and campaigning against their degrading treatment under the Contagious Diseases Act. Eva’s grave is tended today by Beverley Grey, Josephine’s great-niece, who provided some insights into the Butlers’ family life in *Journal* 16.³⁴

Musicians, Father and Son

John Barnett (1802-1890), who spent fifty years as a singing master in Cheltenham, is described on his tombstone as ‘Father of English Opera’. He was born at Bedford, the son of a Prussian jeweller, and was a cousin of the German composer Meyerbeer. He composed many songs and ballads and directed musical farces at the Lyceum in London, where the Grand Romantic Opera *A Mountain Sylph* was first performed in 1834. Though regarded as his best work, it was parodied by Gilbert and Sullivan in *Iolanthe*.³⁵ In 1841 he moved to Cheltenham, where he established himself as a



teacher of singing, both at The Ladies' College and privately. He had many addresses but finally settled at Cotteswold, on the side of Leckhampton Hill.

John Barnett's wife was the daughter of the 'cellist Robert Lindley, a long-standing friend and colleague of the double bass virtuoso Domenico Dragonetti after whom their son **Domenico Dragonetti Joseph Barnett** (d.1912 aged 70) was named.³⁶ He was Professor of Music at The Ladies' College for 44 years until his death at Cliff Cottage, not far from Cotteswold. He studied at the Leipzig Conservatoire and was described as a brilliant musician and teacher who nevertheless 'found it hard to suffer fools gladly' and 'would tear his hair out and hurl music on the floor, in agony at his pupils' imperfections', while the clerk in the stationery office acted as a chaperone.³⁷

A Mercer and Churchwarden

Alexander Shirer (1801-1866), of South Court was head of the firm of Shirer and Macdougall, which advertised as hosiers, linen drapers, haberdashers, lacemen, silk mercers and tailors³⁸ and later became Shirers and Lances. In the 1851 Census Alexander Shirer and his two sons gave their occupation as 'mercet'. For many years a churchwarden at Leckhampton, he is commemorated in a stained-glass window, and another nearby is a memorial to his two daughters: Elizabeth, aged nine, and Margaret, who was only one day old. The window portrays St Elizabeth and St Margaret above the Raising of Jairus's daughter. Alexander Shirer was widowed twice, and the girls were daughters of his third wife.

A Link with the National Trust

An inscription near the entrance to the National Trust property at Toys Hill, Kent, states that the ground was given in memory of Frederick Feeney, 'who ... is buried in the churchyard of Leckhampton near Cheltenham'. An adjoining piece of land was presented by Octavia Hill, the Trust's founder.³⁹ **Frederick Feeney** (1858-1897) was a son of John Frederick Feeney, a Protestant Irishman, one of the founders of the *Birmingham Post*. After his father's death he settled in Cheltenham, where he had been a pupil at the College, and devoted his considerable private means to 'useful social, philanthropic and religious work'. Though called to the bar in 1887, he did not practise other than as a JP. He was a member of the Cheltenham Board of Guardians and later the Borough Council, and at the time of his death was Deputy Mayor. Though he was a leading Conservative, he was popular with supporters of all parties. He was particularly concerned with the administration of Poor Law and took a deep personal interest in the welfare of workhouse boys as they went out into the world.⁴⁰ He was also a Freemason and a member of the New Club. He was commemorated by a stained-glass window at All Saints Church, where he had been a churchwarden, and at All Saints School the gymnasium was equipped in his memory.⁴¹

A Blacksmith

The inscription on the tombstone of **William Bushell** (*d.*1886 aged 80) reads ‘53 years blacksmith in this parish’. He lived and had his workshop in Norwood Terrace, Bath Road (since occupied by Garden Irrigation Supplies and other adjacent shops). In front was a weighing machine and behind his back yard ran the quarry tramroad (at least, until the rails were taken up in 1861). He was thus well placed to attend to the horses that pulled the wagons to and from the hill, among many others. His father, brother and three sons were all smiths.⁴²

The Oldest Man in England

Contemporary correspondence in *The Times*, headed ‘oldest man in England’, discussed the reputed age of **Richard Purser** (*d.*1868 aged 111). He had no birth certificate but, as proof of his age, he claimed to have been taken by his mother at the age of four to see ‘an illumination in honour of the coronation of George III’ (ie in 1760, which would have put him in his 112th year when he died). The *Cheltenham Examiner* reported that he worked as a labourer up to within a few weeks of his death, his scanty earnings being supplemented by an annual grant of £5 from the Crown and by ‘occasional gratuities from his wealthier neighbours, who sympathising with his great age felt pleasure in contributing to lightening his burden’.



Richard Purser, shortly before his death at the age of 111. Courtesy of C.W. Purser.

A Tale of Espionage and Murder

When you leave the church by the north door you cannot fail to notice the Byronic bust of the 19-year-old William Joseph Gale, illustrated below. Beneath it is the poignant inscription:

Died Near Nazareth, September 14th, 1877. He fell among Robbers.

What actually happened? And why is the incident commemorated in Leckhampton Church? None of the local newspapers made a mention, but an account appeared in *The Times* shortly afterwards, headed ‘Murder in Syria’.⁴³ The events occurred in Palestine when it was part of the Ottoman Empire, though European representatives were evidently able to act on their own authority. The story is both contemporary and Biblical, though sadly there was no Good Samaritan to come to the youth’s aid.

William Gale had been working on a farm run by a German colony at Haifa. (In modern terms, this could perhaps be compared with working on a Kibbutz while taking a gap year.) The British Consul-General at



William Joseph Gale. Sculpture in Leckhampton Church. Photo by Eric Miller.

Beirut, for whom he sometimes acted in a semi-official capacity, was anxious to obtain information about a band of marauding Bedouins, and William Gale undertook to find out all he could. He went to Nazareth and from there made his way to Tiberias and back, presumably gathering intelligence on the way. On his return to Haifa he became isolated from some muleteers who were accompanying him for that part of the journey and was not seen alive again.

An extensive search was made with the assistance of the Governor of Acre, involving the Consul-General, the Consul from Jerusalem and officers from a ship of the Royal Navy. Evidence that he had been murdered was found in a wood – a fragment of a shirt, his walking stick and a mutilated skull. Some Bedouins and inhabitants of the villages through which he might have passed were questioned and a judicial commission was set up. Circumstantial evidence pointed to one man who was known to possess a hatchet and had disappeared from his village, but those questioned refused to cooperate and the commission was dissolved without reaching any conclusion.

William Joseph Gale's connection with Leckhampton was at first a mystery but can perhaps be explained. His father was the artist William Gale (1823-1909), a Royal Academician who specialised in Biblical subjects. He was based in London and frequently moved address.⁴⁴ Of the few Gales listed in Cheltenham directories at that time, only one husband and wife had links with Leckhampton. These were John Gale (another retired planter from India) and his wife, of Oakfield, The Park. They are known to have worshipped at St Peter's, and John Gale was buried there in 1886; they could possibly have been related to William Joseph. Though the boy had not been a pupil at Cheltenham College (which would have been a distinct possibility), in 1878, the year after his death, his younger brother Benjamin was enrolled there. Further, in 1881 both Benjamin and a younger sister were living in Leckhampton, as lodgers at Cliff Cottage, Leckhampton (coincidentally, where the above-mentioned Domenico Barnett would live later).

A further twist to this story is that at least from 1878 to 1881 the artist William Gale was living at 30 Osnaburgh Street, St Pancras. The Census return shows this to have been the home of the sculptor Thomas Brock (1847-1922) later *Sir* Thomas, knighted for the many important public monuments which he had produced. The grandest was the monument to Queen Victoria outside Buckingham Palace; locally, he carved the statue of Robert Raikes in Gloucester. He specialised in portrait busts, often with a romantic air about them – not unlike the one of William Joseph Gale, which is so life-like. Therefore, though there is no maker's mark visible on the statue, not even on the back, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Thomas Brock might have been asked by William Gale to produce this memorial to his son.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Family and military historians and other specialists will already be well aware of the details relating to the people in whom they are interested. However, the general reader must surely be surprised at the range of notables associated with little Leckhampton. The men and women featured above have now gained fresh posthumous glory and with the passage of time their lives can be seen in sharper focus. The fact that many of

them would not have reached pensionable age if they had lived in modern times is enough to put their busy lives into perspective.

The choice of subjects has been arbitrary and others might have proved equally deserving and revealing. Furthermore, the gentry among them were able to enjoy their richer lives only thanks to the many domestic servants and tradespeople that waited on them. Since a parish churchyard is a repository of the history of a whole community, they too deserve to be commemorated at a future opportunity.

¹ See O'Connor, D, *Lives Revisited*, 2005.

² Attributed to Sir Henry Taylor, 1800-1886.

³ In the 1851 Census of Cheltenham and its surroundings (enumeration districts 1972 and 1973) some 143 residents were recorded as having been born in India and 169 in the East Indies.

⁴ See Rudman, S, *Victorian Legacy*, 1998.

⁵ The original plans and accompanying list of names are held in the Gloucestershire Archives, P198/1 CW 3/25.

⁶ The inscriptions can be read on the Leckhampton LHS website <www.llhs.org.uk>.

⁷ For more detailed accounts of the Norwoods and Tryes see Hart, G, *A History of Cheltenham*, 1965, Moore-Scott, T, *The Manorial Estates of Leckhampton*, 2002 (article in *Gloucestershire History*) and Miller, E, *Leckhampton Court – Manor House to Hospice*, 2002.

⁸ See Eastham, R H, *Platts Textile Machinery Makers*, 1994; Williams-Ellis, E, *The Carrier's Tale*, 2004; and Miller, E, *The Hargreaves of Leckhampton Court* in *Leckhampton LHS Research Bulletin* No 3 (2004).

⁹ *Cheltenham Looker-On*, 21 March 1908.

¹⁰ See for example Seaver, G, *Edward Wilson of the Antarctic*, 1933, and Edward Wilson, *Nature Lover*, 1937, and Wilson, D M and Elder, D B, *Cheltenham in Antarctica*, 2000.

¹¹ According to his grandson James Whishaw, in *A History of the Whishaw Family*, 1935. See also its addendum by Lance Drayton (1997). The Leeds University Russian Archive includes papers relating to the family's life in St Petersburg and also its involvement in drilling for oil in the Crimea.

¹² It hangs in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

¹³ Some sources show the name spelt with 2 ns. Both McDonnell and McDonnell are carved on the family grave.

¹⁴ See Devereux, J and Sacker, G, *Leaving all that was Dear*, and Rudman, S, *Op Cit*.

¹⁵ Brian Torode points out that G N Wyatt bought Lake House from Mordaunt Ricketts, also a former indigo planter.

¹⁶ For more on the patronage see Miller, E, *The History of Leckhampton Church*, 2006.

¹⁷ *Annuaire* 1870.

¹⁸ 22 May 1872, 7 July 1875, 1 March 1882, 10 May 1882.

¹⁹ See Barnard, L W, *Ninety Years Past*, 1949, and a forthcoming book by Brian Torode.

²⁰ See Miller, E, *Leckhampton Yesteryear*, 1996.

²¹ *Dictionary of National Biography*. A stained-glass window in his memory at Truro Cathedral mentions the last of these appointments.

²² *TBGAS* Vol 35 Part I (1912)

²³ *Looker-On*, 10 June 1899.

²⁴ Rudman, S, *Op Cit* and *Looker-On* 6 July, 2 August and 15 November 1884.

²⁵ Correspondence with Mary Paget.

²⁶ *Looker-On*, 18 July 1863, 14 May 1881 and 22 April 1882.

²⁷ See also Robinson, J, *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travellers*.

²⁸ *Looker-On* 29 November 1902.

²⁹ See O'Connor, D, *Op Cit*.

³⁰ His second name is sometimes spelt with an 'h': Anthony. The surnames are sometimes hyphenated as Burlton-Bennett.

³¹ I am grateful to Howard Milton of Kent County Cricket Club and Catherine Malcolmson and Malcolm Underwood of St John's College, Cambridge, for some of these details.

³² *The Globe and Traveller*, 26 May 1852.

³³ *Royal Directory* and *Annuaire*.

³⁴ See also Wainwright, D, *Liverpool Gentlemen – a History of Liverpool College*, 1960. George Butler's name lives on as one of the houses at the College (where the author of this article was a pupil).

³⁵ *Oxford Companion to Music*, etc.

³⁶ Correspondence with David Lindley, a descendant.

³⁷ Clarke, A K, *A History of the Cheltenham Ladies' College*, 1953.

³⁸ *Rowe's Illustrated Cheltenham Guide*, 1850.

³⁹ *The Times*, 21 July 1898

⁴⁰ *Echo*, 25 March 1897

⁴¹ Johnstone, S P, *All Saints Church*, 1967

⁴² Census returns, Cheltenham directories and correspondence with Jim Gainsford of Sydney, Australia, a descendant of the Bushells.

⁴³ *The Times*, 9 November 1877 and 10 January 1878. I am indebted to the late Dr John Garrett, who drew these accounts to my attention in 1991.

⁴⁴ Johnson, J, and Gretnzer, A, *Dictionary of British Artists 1880-1940*.

⁴⁵ Alan Brooks, who wrote about Leckhampton Church in *The Buildings of England* series (Penguin, 2002), agrees that my suggestion is 'eminently plausible'.