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LOCAL HISTORY  
SOCIETY**



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# CONTENTS

<b>Editorial</b>	...	...	...	...	...	1
<b>Joseph Priestley and the Wilkinsons</b>						
by Diana Clarke	...	...	...	...		2
<b>The Clock and Watch Makers of Broseley</b>						
by Vin Callcut	...	...	...	...		22
<b>The Barge ‘William’</b>						
by Nick Cullis	...	...	...	...		29
<b>Broseley and the Baldwin family</b>						
by Mike Kaiser	....	...	...	...		31
<b>Pear Tree Cottage, Jackfield</b>						
by Bob Patient	....	...	...	...		32
<b>The Leopard at Benthall</b>						
by Norman Wyke	....	...	...	...		34

## EDITORIAL

### **Broseley Local History Society**

The Society was originally formed as the Wilkinson Society in 1972 and was renamed in 1997 to reflect its main purpose:

‘the research, preservation and promotion of Broseley’s unique heritage’.

Meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month beginning at 7.30 pm, at Broseley Social Club; and annual events include a summer outing, an autumn walk and a winter dinner. Members receive a quarterly newsletter and an annual journal. The Society’s collection of artefacts is at present stored at the IGMT Tile Museum at Jackfield, with some items on display at Broseley Cemetery Chapel.

The Society has a web site which contains information about Broseley, copies of the newsletter and articles from previous journals. This can be found at *www.broseley.org.uk*

### **The Journal**

The journal is published annually. The six articles in this issue represent the ongoing research and reminiscences of Society members and others, and we are grateful to individual contributors. Our thanks also to Steve Dewhirst for design and typesetting.

Contributions for the next issue would be welcome and should be sent to the editor, Neil Clarke, Cranleigh, Little Wenlock, TF6 5BH.

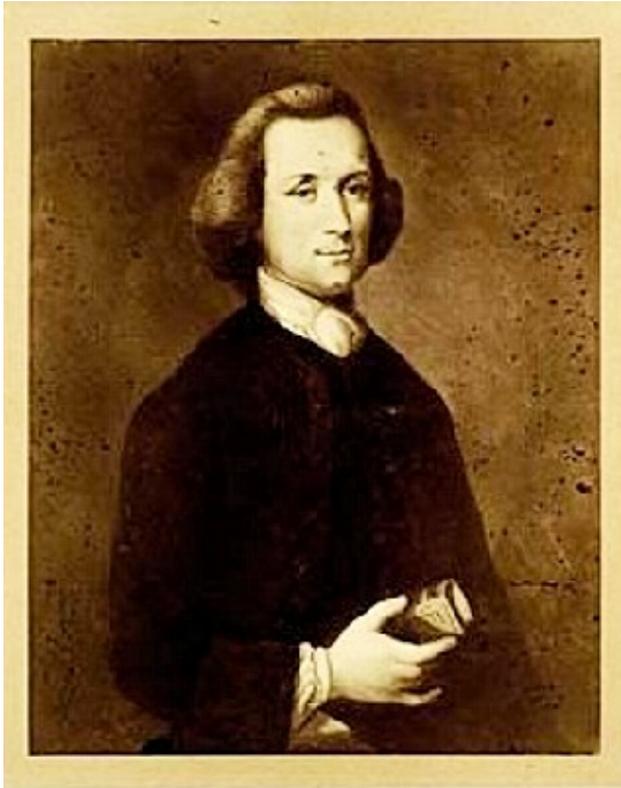
## Joseph Priestley and the Wilkinsons

by Diana Clarke

*This is an edited version of the Annual Wilkinson Lecture given on 7 March 2012.*

**M**y aim in this paper is to consider the nature of the relationships that existed between the Priestley family and the Wilkinsons, and to present what my researches so far have revealed about the personalities of the people involved.

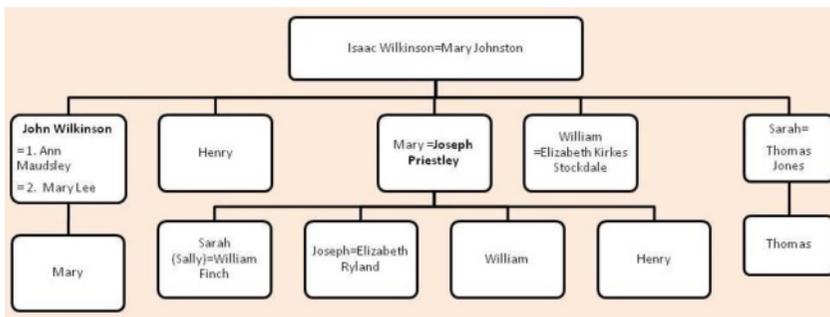
The two prominent figures that lie at the heart of this story are Joseph Priestley and John Wilkinson. Joseph Priestley, born in 1733, was a highly influential intellectual, a member of the Lunar Society, a scientist in many disciplines notable for his discovery of oxygen,



*Portrait of Joseph Priestley c1763. Artist unknown*

philosopher, educationalist, preacher and prolific writer on science, education and religion. He held radical views which led to his Birmingham home and laboratory being burned down in riots in 1791, escaping to London, and ultimately emigrating to America. John Wilkinson, born in 1728, was an ironmaster extraordinaire, entrepreneur, innovator, pioneer of precision boring, partner in the iron bridge project, and builder of the first iron boat. He was the founder of a massive iron-making enterprise which earned him the title of ‘Iron-mad Wilkinson’ and enabled him to raise his status to establish himself as an eighteenth-century landed gentleman at the extensive Castle Head Estate in Cumbria.

Both men were able to make loyal friends and vitriolic enemies in equal measure. At their worst, John could be hot-headed, confrontational and devious, while Joseph could be selfish, pedantic



*Family Tree - Joseph Priestley and the Wilkinsons*

and tactless in the extreme. At their best these giants of the British Enlightenment rightly won the applause of many

**Isaac Wilkinson**

The story begins with Isaac Wilkinson, father of John, William and Mary Wilkinson. Isaac began as a pot founder at Backbarrow in that part of North Lancashire now in Cumbria; and he had talent and aspirations. Having moved south to the Wrexham area from Cumbria in 1753, Isaac and his wife, Mary, as Dissenters, attended the Presbyterian Church in Chester Street, Wrexham. England had long been a country with a strong and rising middle class, with the appetite and ability to raise their status in society through commercial enterprise. Isaac’s shared these aspirations for himself, and he achieved a level of business success which contributed to a rise from

pot founder to gentleman – an acquired status which continued to be recognised even when his fortunes wavered. One aspect of his ambition would be to give his children, especially his boys, the best education he could find and afford. At the same time it needed to be an education that would prepare them well for a future in industry and trade. In the early 1740s, Isaac sent John to the prestigious Dissenting Academy of Dr. Caleb Rotheram at Kendal. John's time at the academy led to a 5-year apprenticeship with a Liverpool merchant; and after a short time as a merchant ironmonger at Kendal, he took up a management role at Bersham Ironworks.

By 1758 Isaac was again looking for a school, this time for his son William, now 14 years old. Despite his erratic book-keeping and intermittent financial failures, Isaac was doing well. A War Ministry commission to supply arms during the Seven Years war was proving lucrative and Isaac could afford a good school. He would have been looking for a dissenting school because in his eyes it would impart an appropriate set of values, but also because dissenters were technically barred from mainstream schooling. The school he chose was being set up at Nantwich in Cheshire by brilliant Dissenter, Dr Joseph Priestley. Isaac would undoubtedly have heard something of Priestley's growing reputation as a leading intellectual, educator and scientist, and on Isaac's application, William was accepted as a pupil. He got to know Priestley well during his five years as a student.

Isaac's choice for the education of his sons highlights an issue which impacted on many of the major players in the development of the British Enlightenment and the early Industrial Revolution. Isaac and Mary raised their children as Presbyterians, Priestley's background was Calvinist. Priestley's esoteric and uncompromising version of dissenting theology had done him few favours in his previous post as a minister at Needham Market in Suffolk. Isaac, however, appears to have been undeterred, and this is an illustration of how dissenters of varying shades of belief came to act as a cohesive social group in a prevailing climate of discrimination against all non-Anglicans. This discrimination had been embodied in the Test and Corporation Acts of 1661 and 1673 which effectively debarred Dissenters, Roman Catholics and Jews from public schools and universities, from taking up civil or military office, and from becoming MPs, the test being an obligation to sign up to the 39 Articles of the Church of England. Although by the eighteenth century not rigidly adhered to in all respects, the Acts remained a continuing affront to people of dissent

and a powerful barrier to personal progress. Dissenters of all persuasions, including a very outspoken Joseph Priestley, came together to bring many bills to Parliament for repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. But so entrenched were the prejudices that repeal would have to wait until 1829 for Roman Catholics, 1838 for Dissenters, and 1840 for Jews.

The position of Dissenters, then, was the background to Isaac's choice for the schooling of his sons. The answer of Dissenting groups to their exclusion was to set up their own schools and academies for which they developed their own curriculum; a move that was of supreme importance in the history of progressive Enlightenment thinking, and of the technologies that drove the Industrial Revolution. Traditional Establishment schools and universities were offering a syllabus based mainly on the classics and humanities. Dissenting education offered a much wider curriculum, adding modern languages to the syllabus, and putting an emphasis on mathematics and science. A leading proponent of the new curriculum was Joseph Priestley, Minister at the Presbyterian Church in Hospital Street, Nantwich and founding teacher of the school.



*The Old School Nantwich*

Priestley's writings show his adoption of progressive ideas, his personal dedication to quality teaching and his high expectations of his pupils. All of this would have given William an educational advantage which must have helped him to become one of the most successful men of his time. Of prime importance for a boy from William's background, already having an awareness of

experimental technology from his father, would have been the introduction of hands-on science to the curriculum, a trend not found in mainstream schooling. Priestley says proudly:

*At Nantwich my school enabled me to purchase a few books and some philosophical instruments, as a small air pump, an electrical*

*machine, etc... These I taught my scholars in the highest class to keep in order, and make use of, and by entertaining their parents and friends with experiments, in which the scholars were generally the operators . . . I considerably extended the reputation of my school (Memoirs).*

### **William Wilkinson**

William went on to fulfil Isaac's wishes for advancement and to become a credit to Priestley's endeavours. After success in the management of Bersham Ironworks during the 1770s, William moved to France at the invitation of the French government some time during 1776. There he helped set up state ironworks and cannon foundries first at L'Indret, near Nantes, and later at Le Creusot in Burgundy; and went on to act as an iron-making consultant in Germany and Scandinavia, making himself a very wealthy man in the process. The pot founder's son was accepted into the highest levels of French society, including the royal circle at Versailles. Arthur Young, Secretary of the Board of Agriculture made some well-known comments during his travels in France in 1788 and 1789 which testify to the driving combination of scientific endeavour, radical ideals, and sheer energy that typified the Wilkinson-Priestley circle:

*To Montcenis,. . . It is the seat of one Mons. Weelkainsong's establishments for casting and boring cannon. . . The French say, that this active Englishman is brother-in-law of Dr. Priestly, and therefore a friend of mankind; and that he taught them to bore cannon, in order to give liberty to America (quoted by Dawson).*

William Wilkinson valued a lasting association with Priestley, and the respect he always felt for Priestley can be seen in his suggestion to his brother John that the fierce quarrel they had in 1794 about ownership issues at Bersham Ironworks could be resolved without further costly legislation if Priestley (by then living in America) were asked to act as mediator. That the hot-headed John refused and the proposal abandoned does not negate the evidence of William's regard for Priestley. Maybe, too, William's broader education enabled him to take what appears to have been a more measured approach to the quarrel than John, and to favour conciliation. Whereas John, by his own admission quickly moved to anger, was so incensed that when arbitration was eventually agreed upon, he sat in a separate room, still seething, had his meals brought to him separately, and refused to join the hearings – and, indeed, despite John being championed by William

Reynolds, the respected owner of Ketley Ironworks, the arbitrators largely came out in William's favour.

William Wilkinson continued to take an interest in the Priestley family. William and Priestley corresponded and Priestley sent him copies of his publications. Indeed, William was helping the Priestley family financially, especially his two nephews, Joseph and William, providing them with money and taking an interest in their welfare and future opportunities. He actively encouraged Joseph junior in his ambition for a mercantile career, sponsoring him in a visit to see the ironworks at Montcenis, and then taking him on to Geneva. The quarrel between John and William Wilkinson split the Wilkinson family and meant that Joseph Priestley lost hope of further assistance from William for his sons.

Returning to Isaac Wilkinson: although William Wilkinson had left school to work with his father and brother at Bersham, it seems that a continuing friendship between Isaac and Joseph Priestley had become well established. Even after Isaac had handed over the management of Bersham to his sons and had been pursuing interests in South Wales, Priestley, now working at Warrington Dissenting Academy, spent time in Isaac's company in Bristol. In his Memoirs, Priestley records one visit when he spent most of a two month vacation with Isaac in Bristol.

Joseph Priestley had moved from Nantwich to Warrington Academy as Tutor in Belles Lettres (modern languages) in 1761. As always, an imaginative educational innovator, he delivered courses not only in languages, but in Anatomy and Astronomy, was 'the first to give formal instruction in Modern History', and delivered a Science curriculum that was 'entirely new in secondary education'. Here he taught many people who became successful after leaving the Academy. Typical of these were members of the Aikin family. Among the tutors at the Academy was John Aikin senior and among the students were his children, John and Anna Laetitia. Both went on to become eminent in their own fields, especially Anna, who was later known as the author Anna Laetitia Barbauld.

Dissenters of this time held a general belief in education for girls, which was advanced for a time when the education of females was often discounted as harmful to their health. So there were places for girls at Nantwich and Warrington. Anna, reflecting later on her days at Warrington Academy says:

*I have often thought with envy of that society. Neither Oxford nor Cambridge could boast of brighter names in literature or science, than several of these dissenting tutors – humbly content in an obscure town, on a scanty pittance to cultivate in themselves and communicate to a rising generation, those mental habits which are their own exceeding reward (Memoir of Mrs Barbold, 1874).*

### **Mary Wilkinson**

Changing attitudes to female education help our understanding of the next Wilkinson individual to enter this story - daughter of Isaac, sister of John and William and the woman who was to become Joseph Priestley's wife. Through his prior acquaintance with Isaac and



*Mary Wilkinson*  
by Carl F. von Breda (1793)

William Wilkinson, Priestley was to meet what I believe to be the two most influential people affecting the course of his life, Mary and John Wilkinson. Priestley and Mary married in Wrexham Parish Church in 1762. Mary was 19 years old, Priestley was 29. Priestley had gained additional income and a house as a Minister in Warrington, which put him in a position to marry. This marriage brought the Wilkinsons and Joseph Priestley closer together since there was now kinship involved. That Mary was the glue that held the Priestley family together is substantiated by Joseph Priestley in his Memoirs. He writes:

*In the second year I married a daughter of Mr Isaac Wilkinson, an ironmaster near Wrexham in Wales, with whose family I had become acquainted, in consequence of having*

*the youngest son, William, at my school at Nantwich. This proved to be a very suitable and happy connexion, my wife being a woman of excellent understanding, much improved by reading, of great fortitude and strength of mind, and of a temper in the highest degree affectionate and generous; feeling strongly for others, and little for herself. Also greatly excelling in everything relating to household*

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*affairs, she entirely relieved me of all concern of that kind, which allowed me to give all my time to the prosecution of my studies, and the other duties of my station.*

So Priestley tells us that Mary had sterling qualities as a family-orientated woman, and an efficient organiser, but more interestingly, Priestley gives us a clue to a more rounded view of Mary's personality. As a 'woman of excellent understanding much improved by reading', Mary can be viewed as a woman of intelligence, sufficiently educated to have a strong interest in reading and intellectual development. The history of her marriage to a brilliant but volatile and uncompromising man shows a woman of deep and devoted affections, with tremendous fortitude and courage in the face of many disappointments, hardships, bouts of ill-health and some very dangerous situations. Few of Mary's letters survive, but a later reference to her suggests that 'she wrote the best letter of her time with a most dainty and incisive pen'. This comment is undoubtedly an exaggeration, but one of her surviving letters, written on the Priestley's arrival in America in 1794, shows her to be a very competent writer with a capacity for sharp observation, a dash of humour, and a surprising level of optimism against the odds; that is, being ousted from her home, forced into emigration to a foreign country, and suffering a prolonged bout of chronic sea-sickness in stormy seas.

But to return to earlier days, while at Warrington, Mary met Anna Laetitia Aikin, who was referred to earlier. Both aged 19, they established a lifelong friendship based, one suspects, on mutual liking, but also on common literary and philosophical interests. Mary's friendship with Anna is important in the sense that it puts Mary in the context of a determinedly intellectual circle of women, centred on the outspoken figure of Lady Elizabeth Montagu and the Bluestocking Society, which Anna was to join as a member in 1774. Not all of them could be as forthright as Montagu, but all were contributing to a growing movement of intelligent women which led to a flourishing of the Society. Even if, like Mary, they would not actually join (and, of course, Priestley would never have approved), this female answer to the more male-dominated philosophical and literary societies inhabited by men like Joseph Priestley, Erasmus Darwin and Dr Johnson was influencing the ways in which women were regarding themselves and their social and intellectual status.



*Bowood House. (Wiltshire County Council)*

It appears, then that Isaac Wilkinson and more probably his wife, Mary, had ensured that their daughter Mary was educated, probably by Mary Wilkinson senior, who was herself a strong personality, and, it is said converted Isaac from Anglican to Presbyterian. All this is speculation, but what is certain is that alongside her excellent housekeeping skills Mary Priestley did actually have the ‘excellent understanding much improved by reading’ of her husband’s description. She could obviously hold her own in cultured circles like that of the Lunar Society, and was undoubtedly a more interesting companion to Priestley than he gives her credit for. Over the years she was required to entertain at her house a large range of eminent persons who were associates of Priestley, such as Benjamin Franklin, one of the founding fathers of America, and other members of the Priestley circle including fellow members of the Royal Society. She was also expected to know how to cope in elevated, even aristocratic, social circles such as that surrounding Lord Shelburne, of Bowood House, Wiltshire, who employed Priestley between 1772 and 1780 as his librarian and personal adviser.

Priestley worried about what Mary was taking on by marrying him:

*I can sincerely say, I never knew what it was to be anxious on my own account; but I cannot help confessing I began to feel a good deal on the account of another person. The hazard of bringing another person into difficulties which she cannot have any idea or prospect of, affects one at times very sensibly (Memoirs).*

However, perhaps Priestley should have been more concerned about what he was to take on in marrying Mary. Mary comes across as a Wilkinson through and through. Like her father and brothers, she had a mind of her own and once it was made up there was no way that Priestley could deter her. As an example, during Priestley's employment with Lord Shelburne, the Priestley family were rather inadequately housed at nearby Calne. This was the time when in his laboratory at Bowood, and funded by Shelburne, Priestley made his important discovery of oxygen. Part of Priestley's contract, however, was to spend the season at Shelburne's town house in London. This meant Mary was left behind with four children, Sarah (always called Sally), Joseph, William, and a baby, Harry, born in 1777. Probably increasingly bored and tired, Mary showed she'd had enough and upped and left for Leeds, eventually bringing back two female companions, sisters called Mary and Elizabeth Sewell, which led to a major accommodation crisis in the cramped house in Calne. By 1779 Mary had virtually left Priestley, taking Sally and Harry to Leeds, leaving Priestley to become in his own words 'a widower'. Mary only returned to Calne a year later to pack up their goods to leave permanently with him. She even wrote a furious letter when Lord Shelburne and Priestley had negotiated a raise in Priestley's salary and improvements to the housing situation without consulting her - she not wanting further obligation to Shelburne - and Priestley had to climb down.

Again, when the riots of 1791 in Birmingham left Dissenters in danger, especially the Priestley family, Mary insisted on staying behind to care for her pregnant daughter Sally while Priestley fled to London, only joining Priestley in London when she was satisfied about Sally's health. At the same time, with Wilkinson determination and decisiveness, Mary was adamant about the impossibility of accepting John and Mary Wilkinson's offer of a stay at Castle Head. Because of her reluctance, and despite a persuasive letter from John's wife to Mary Priestley, and his own eagerness for a break there, Priestley had to postpone the visit. Priestley, of course, really couldn't understand why she didn't feel able to nurse Sally at Dudley, move from their current home at Clapton, furnish a new house at Hackney, and prepare for a holiday and a long journey - all at the same time! Priestley lamented,

*After our sad disaster at Birmingham. . . I had set my heart, perhaps too much, on a month's quiet at Castlehead with my wife, . . . but I find*

*that notwithstanding Mrs Wilkinson's kind letter, which gave her great pleasure, and I thought would have removed every difficulty, I find she is so situated between the condition of Sally and our furnishing a house at Hackney . . . that she cannot go far this year* (Letters).

So Mary Priestley was no submissive eighteenth-century wife and was not cowed by her famous husband. Priestley knew that his continued success owed in no small measure to Mary's willingness and capacity to run the household virtually single-handed. And not to forget her contributions to science - putting up happily with keeping mice warm on the mantelpiece and providing laundry tubs for experiments!

### **John Wilkinson**

After an uneasy end to Priestley's employment with Lord Shelburne at Bowood in 1780, it was John Wilkinson to the rescue. So John now enters our story. John persuaded his brother-in-law to move to Birmingham, and became the man responsible for opening up a new and exciting chapter which Priestley regarded as the pinnacle of his life. It was through Priestley's association with Isaac, then William and then Mary that he met John, and a close association began that was to endure until Priestley's death in America in 1804.

[In 1780, John Wilkinson was a highly successful ironmaster and



*John Wilkinson after Lemuel Francis Abbot c1795 (IGMT)*

entrepreneur, and was well on the way to achieving the trappings of gentility that Isaac had dreamt of for his family. By this time he had built up flourishing ironworks at Bersham, New Willey, Bradley, and Snedshill. He had also acquired and was developing his landed estate at Castle Head. Not only did John Wilkinson encourage the Birmingham move, he also offered money and provided a house for the Priestley family at Fairhill in Birmingham.

From this time onwards John Wilkinson's financial support was crucial to the welfare of the

Priestley family. Priestley acknowledged in his Memoirs that he owed a huge debt of gratitude to both Wilkinson brothers, but especially to John, who met the needs of the Priestley family with stunning generosity. Priestley, after typically bemoaning the fact that he 'received little fortune with the ironmaster's daughter', goes on to say 'I found a great resource in her two brothers who had become wealthy, especially the elder of them' (Memoirs). It was, therefore, thanks to John Wilkinson that Priestley was able to settle his family in a city where he could worship freely; and in 1780 he was sufficiently welcomed there to gain an elected position he loved as Junior Minister of the New Meeting in Moor Street, Birmingham, the building unfortunately later to be destroyed by rioters in 1791.

Thanks to John, Priestley was able to take advantage of the flourishing social and intellectual life of this vibrant up-and-coming commercial and industrial city. In Birmingham, Priestley met many lifelong friends, like-minded people, often of dissenting background, and he and his family could enjoy a circle that his wife Mary also found congenial, especially after her relative isolation at Calne

By facilitating the move to Birmingham, John Wilkinson had also created a platform for a development of international importance, when Joseph Priestley, by then a famous scientist, writer and philosopher and Fellow of the Royal Society, joined the distinguished Lunar Society of Birmingham and allied his formidable talents and intelligence to that of a dazzling roll call of eminent and extraordinarily innovative people. These were the people at the cutting edge of the British Enlightenment. Besides Priestley, Lunar members included Erasmus Darwin, Josiah Wedgwood, William Small, Matthew Boulton, James Watt, William Withering, James Keir, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, John Whitehurst, Thomas Day and Samuel Galton. The influence of their ideas spread far beyond the core membership: stretching as far as France, where similar ideas were being considered by men like the political and educational philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau and the chemist Antoine Lavoiser; and to America, amazingly through close links with the founding fathers themselves, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.

Franklin had toured the Midlands, knew the Lunar members well, was much admired by Darwin and had worked on clock manufacture with Whitehurst. He had been a very close friend of Joseph Priestley since

1765, sharing a mutual interest in electricity. Thomas Jefferson, one-time pupil of Lunar member, William Small at Williamsburg (and destined to become third President of the United States of America) became Priestley's patron in America after 1794 and was greatly influenced by Priestley's radical philosophy.

John Wilkinson was at times a guest at Lunar Society meetings, and he was one of their circle, visiting the Priestleys and the Watts whenever his busy schedule would allow, and maintaining close business terms with Wedgwood and Boulton & Watt. There can be no doubt that alongside his entrepreneurship, his unstinting support for Priestley made a significant personal contribution to the important legacy of the Enlightenment. But John did not stop there. He extended his support to the Priestley boys, Joseph junior and William, especially Joseph, the elder of the two. Joseph Priestley was continually worrying about his boys' future. However, Joseph junior's fortunes seemed to be settled when in 1787 his uncle, John Wilkinson, having lost his daughter in 1786 and having no male heir, adopted Joseph junior as his heir, and apprenticed him to the iron trade at Bradley.

During Joseph junior's 4-year apprenticeship at Bradley with his uncle, he appears to have become quite knowledgeable about the iron industry and skilled at administration and book-keeping, and John was training him well and with a broad sweep. It is recorded that between 1789 and 1790, while Joseph junior was undertaking further training at Bersham, he had been sent a letter from John enclosing an invitation by Mr Thomas Williams to see and learn about the Parys Copper Mine on Anglesey and the copper works at Holywell. Joseph junior's hopes were for a managerial position at Bradley, near to his Birmingham home. All appeared to be going well for young Joseph and satisfactorily for Joseph senior. Then things began to fall apart. At the end of the four years, John Wilkinson offered Joseph junior a post at Bersham rather than Bradley and on an income of £40 a year. Joseph junior wrote to his uncle, turning down this offer, and giving his reasons. He wanted to stay around Birmingham because socially it had everything to offer him and Bersham had nothing. At the same time, he had fallen for Samuel Ryland's daughter, Elizabeth, and wanted eventually to get married, insisting that £40 a year would not be enough to live on as a married man. Joseph did have a point. Though doubtless overestimating his own skills and social status, young Joseph did come to his employment with John with useful

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experience that he had gained from his Uncle William in France, and from time spent in the counting houses of Priestley's friends, Samuel Vaughan in London and William Russell in Birmingham. He had also, while working at Bradley, proved his competence by putting in place a social insurance scheme in which his uncle and father had collaborated, which enabled Bradley workers to save towards a pension, provide themselves with sickness cover and educate their children in a school built at Bradley.

However, John Wilkinson was characteristically obdurate. It was take it or leave it, no negotiation. As with his dealings with his father and his brother, it does seem that financially John Wilkinson had been taking advantage of Joseph Priestley's anxiety for his son, and that Joseph junior had been working for him for four years with little remuneration. Granted, the Priestley family owed much to Wilkinson's generosity, but one can understand Joseph junior's point of view. This was the nearest thing to a rift that ever came between John Wilkinson and Joseph Priestley, who, torn between conflicting loyalties, wrote a letter to Wilkinson which was half apologetic and half, to his credit, in defence of his son.

One interesting fact comes out here in that Priestley asked an acquaintance to intercede on behalf of his son with the Reynoldses of Ketley. They were looking for a manager and Priestley senior lost no time in telling Wilkinson that they were offering £400 a year. However, the Reynoldses were not interested in Joseph junior, and he found a job in Manchester and married Elizabeth Ryland in 1792. Strangely enough, many years later, some evidence emerges that although his apprenticeship to the iron trade did not satisfy his career prospects, Joseph junior's training under John was thorough and he never completely lost interest in the business. Living back in England after a long stay in America, he contacted his cousin, Thomas Jones Wilkinson, then a partner in the running of Bersham, for confirmation of the wisdom of an investment in the Varteg Ironworks, near Blaenavon; and the investment proved a good one.

Surprisingly, despite Joseph junior's refusal of his offer, John Wilkinson appears to have borne no lasting acrimony, and assuring Joseph junior of a reference, he offered his younger brother William Priestley the opportunity, if he wished, 'to slip into Joe's place at Bradley' (Letters). This, incidentally, was an offer which was overtaken by events and never able to be taken up. The next we hear about William Priestley is that he was living in France in 1793 as a

French citizen, and was instrumental in helping his Uncle John to redeem in France a quantity of French money called assignats he had bought in a moment of misplaced optimism in the French situation. Parliament made the assignats illegal tender in England, and their withdrawal by the French Assembly was imminent because they featured the King's head. Ironically, Louis XVI had been beheaded by January 1793.

John's relative tolerance in relation to the Priestleys seems out of character in someone who was notoriously short-tempered. John had earned something of a reputation as a hard man, according to many comments. In 1800 Lord Dundonald called him 'One of the most hard-hearted, malevolent old scoundrels that ever existed in Britain' (quoted in J.Wilk.Soc.,1984). I think in their dealings with the Priestley family we get a glimpse into a more mellow side of both the Wilkinson brothers than is usually portrayed. John, the 'malevolent old scoundrel' and 'wicked Will' show in this context a magnanimity and kindness that belie the labels - none more than in their responsiveness to the situation of Sally Priestley Finch, eldest child and only daughter of Joseph Priestley and Mary Wilkinson, who now makes her appearance into this drama.

Sally in 1786 had made an unfortunate marriage in financial terms to William Finch, a nail ironmonger and merchant at Dudley, twice declared bankrupt. Sally was described as Dr. Priestley's 'amiable daughter, having much vivacity of mind and gentleness of manner' (Memoir of Mrs Barbold, 1874). Sally was beloved by her father in a very special way. She was spirited, a Wilkinson quality inherited from her mother, well-educated and talented, a harpsichord player and a lively member of the Birmingham social circle. One story is told that, as a child, Sally decided to help out by cleaning her father's laboratory. 'In the process, she very carefully washed out all the bottles for him' (Uglow) - which meant Mary having to smooth things over with Joseph on Sally's behalf.

Despite her stoicism over her husband's failures, having seven children in her 18 years of marriage accompanied by financial hardship meant Sally did finally fall on desperate times. It seems she and her uncle William Wilkinson had kept in touch, even during the Wilkinson quarrel, because in 1797 Priestley wrote to John Wilkinson:

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*From your brother I hear nothing, but he allows my daughter £25 per annum for the education of her son, William, and by that means he is sent to school (Letters).*

This assistance was offered in spite of the fact that William Finch had owed money to William Wilkinson and had taken a long time to repay him. Similarly, William Finch had sent John Wilkinson some very abusive letters, yet John had also stepped into the breach to help Sally. Priestley acknowledged that, especially in the circumstances, John's generosity had touched him deeply: 'Your kindness to my daughter affects me in a particular manner' (Letters).

### **Mutual benefit**

John Wilkinson cut off his relationship with his father and brother and anyone else who upset him, so why was he so long-suffering with Joseph Priestley? Priestley could be irritating, often making ill-concealed demands for money which look on the face of it astoundingly discourteous, yet which were usually met. An example of this interchange appears in a tactless letter from Priestley to



*Attack on Priestley's house during the Birmingham riots of 1791*

Wilkinson in 1791 in which Priestley informs him that a position has been found for Joseph junior in Manchester and he says,

*As I must on this account, immediately advance what money I can raise and shall want the £600 which I have in your hands, I shall be glad to know when it will be convenient to you for me to draw on your bank for it* (Letters).

The end of the letter endorsed in John Wilkinson's handwriting says, *Mr Priestley's letter – abt £600*. The matter had obviously been put into the hands of Cornelius Reynolds, John's agent at Broseley, to whom Priestley replied, 'I received the bill you sent for £640 and return Mr Wilkinson's receipt' (Letters). Despite everything, John had apparently not only sent the money but slipped in an extra £40.

So it's easy to see how Joseph Priestley benefitted from his association with John Wilkinson, especially Wilkinson's patronage. It's less obvious to see how John Wilkinson benefitted from his association with Priestley and why he was so generous to Priestley and not always towards others. Priestley, however, had access to a wide circle of eminent acquaintances, not only in scientific, but also in the political arena. He was on dining terms with influential politicians like the radical Whigs, Charles James Fox and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Such connections presented John with possible commercial openings and, perhaps more importantly for the Wilkinson aspirations, social opportunities.

But apart from self-interest, I believe that John Wilkinson and Joseph Priestley formed a true and lasting friendship. It was a friendship that was to deepen after the 1791 Birmingham Riots when rioters looted and burned down Priestley's house and laboratory, and he lost everything. Despite John Wilkinson's wry comment on Priestley that he 'could make nothing of the fellow' (Chaloner, quoting John Randall, *The Wilkinsons*), he read many of Priestley's publications; and he would see something in Priestley's view of the inevitability of human progress in an unfettered climate of religious, political and civil liberty that would match his own ideas. It was an ideology that endowed unconstrained industrial enterprise with a noble purpose, and would provide a philosophical focus for Wilkinson's belief in small government and free trade which promised to open up his trading activities. Wilkinson himself put it bluntly: 'manufacture and commerce will flourish best where King and Country interfere least' (quoted by Chaloner).

Joseph Priestley and his family were always among those favoured with an open invitation to stay at Castle Head. At his time of great turmoil in the aftermath of the Birmingham Riots, Priestley longed for the friendly company of John and Mary Wilkinson, writing with a touch of nostalgia to John:

*You were so obliging as to give me an invitation to any of your houses in the present unsettled state of my affairs . . . I shall be happy . . . to spend a month or six weeks at Castle-Head, especially as I understand that you are there yourself. I shall never forget how agreeably I passed my time there before, and what satisfaction I had in composing several of my works in your wren's nest* (Letters).

In the threatening climate of suspicion after the riots, Priestley found himself shunned by many who were afraid to associate with him. On a public level, there were many vicious contemporary cartoons which show just how dangerous the authorities considered Priestley to be. On a more personal level Priestley describes his proposed itinerary to travel from London to visit Castle Head, staying with his friends Galton and Wedgwood en route, writing,

*I had proposed to go by Manchester, but I find by a letter I received from Joseph that my friends are afraid to receive me. Thus the chased deer is avoided by all the herd* (Letters).

This last remark shows a Priestley unusually worn down by events and in desperate need of his friends; and although John Wilkinson could have been forgiven for distancing himself from Priestley at this stage, and it would have been in character to do so in order to protect his own interests, he did the opposite. John did vow never to visit Birmingham ever again, and was pragmatic enough to avoid visiting Priestley in London. But despite possible danger to himself by association with Priestley, he instantly responded, as did other sympathizers, to the dire needs of his friend, for which later letters constantly include messages of gratitude from Priestley. Priestley records:

*Besides congratulatory letters I received much pecuniary assistance from various persons and bodies of men, which more than compensated for my pecuniary losses . . . But my brother-in-law, John Wilkinson . . . was the most generous on the occasion. Without any solicitation, he immediately sent me five hundred pounds, which he had deposited in the French funds, and until that be productive, he allows me two hundred pounds per annum* (Memoirs).

I am certain that John Wilkinson also needed to be sure of his friends at this time. The vitriolic quarrel with his brother, William, was driving the family apart. Mary, their sister, had to choose between these two members of this dysfunctional family, as she had been forced to choose between her father and John when they were feuding, and it took its toll. John must have been reassured by her unwavering devotion to him, and, of course, Priestley's. On her death in 1796, Priestley wrote to John:

*She always warmly took your part and would never believe your father's account of your using him ill. To your brother William she had the affection of a mother but his behaviour to her on his return from France shocked her in such a manner as I cannot describe and she never recovered it (Letters).*

John was also having business problems, which came to a head around 1795 when James Watt junior had been informed by a revengeful William Wilkinson that John had been selling pirate versions of Watt's steam engines and keeping the royalties for himself. Boulton & Watt pursued John for the royalties, John had to pay them £4,425, and this led to a complete rift with Boulton and Watt, his friends and primary business partners. From 1791 onwards John also felt as threatened by the English political climate as his brother-in-law. In a letter to James Watt he described the strenuous fortifications he had made to protect his property, and pronounced:

*Church and King as a watchword has been very near bursting out into a burning flame in this town. There is more safety in a gun well-manned than will be found in careless justice (B&W Collection).*

The continuation of the correspondence between Priestley and Wilkinson at this time shows the power of the friendship, as well as the courage of Wilkinson, because anyone writing to or receiving communications from a radical like Priestley was, in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the subsequent war, liable to suspicion. As the French Revolution developed, popular feeling in England turned against anyone who had shown sympathy with it, and stronger laws were applied against those who had voiced revolutionary ideas. Correspondence could be intercepted and regarded as inflammatory. But it seems that to Wilkinson as well as to Priestley the letters were worth the possible risks, and that both looked forward to receiving them; so much so that in 1800 Wilkinson appears to have chastised

Priestley for not corresponding more frequently, while Priestley was attempting to protect him by holding back. Priestley wrote:

*My not writing to you more frequently than I have done, of which you seem to complain, has been owing to nothing but my unwillingness to give you unnecessary trouble* (Letters).

Although there was little opportunity for Priestley and Wilkinson to meet again in person, especially after Priestley's flight to America in 1794, regular correspondence continued right up to Priestley's death in 1804, and Wilkinson was still supplied with Priestley's publications. Priestley had written to Wilkinson in June 1793,

*As the return I can make for all your kindness to me is to present you with my publications, I have prepared a set of them, all bound in a uniform manner, to be presented when you come to town* (Letters).

So, in spite of insuperable geographical separation, and the difficulties posed by a fledgling transatlantic postal service, the friendship between John Wilkinson and Joseph Priestley still flourished, and its legacy gives us a glimpse into the lives and personalities of these important Enlightenment figures and their families.

### Sources

- Birmingham Reference Library: Priestley Collection, Boulton & Watt Collection
- Warrington Reference Library: Priestley Letters (copy, with notes by W. H. Chaloner, in IGMT library)
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## The Clock and Watch Makers of Broseley

by Vin Callcut

There is little information published on the clockmakers who were living and working in Broseley during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries when clocks and watches were hand made by craftsmen. Their marked products may still occasionally be found and can make just an important contribution to the décor of a home as ever. Many horological books contain useful snippets of background information on makers but often they repeat the facts originally quoted elsewhere. The family names commonly found are Blakeway, Hartshorne (with or without the last 'e') and Onions, but there are also others. It is sometimes said that a clockmaker living not too far away might have given the Broseley town name to a clock to suit local residents, although he did not actually live here permanently.

The books of basic facts are those on clockmakers by Baillie (covering 1632-1825),<sup>1</sup> Loomes (1825-1880)<sup>2</sup> and Elliott (Shropshire Clockmakers).<sup>3</sup> The trade directories of that time that have been seen to date do not give much useful information.<sup>4</sup> They might now be usefully supplemented by the work of ancestry and census research.<sup>5</sup> Any further available information will be welcome and added to my web site ([oldcopper.org](http://oldcopper.org)), with acknowledgements.

### The Blakeway Dynasty

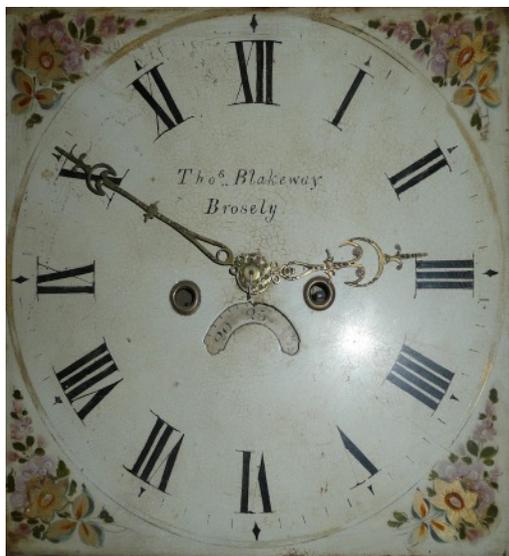
Each skilled clockmaker must have completed a long apprenticeship with a master and then either stayed with that business or moved elsewhere to meet a need for clocks. A good example are members of the Blakeway family.

Thomas Blakeway of Rushbury (1724-1805) was brother to Charles Blakeway, clockmaker of Albrighton. He was a maker of turret clocks and examples are quoted made for churches in 1765, 1775, 1784 and 1794 and subsequent maintenance. He had a son, John, who continued the business in Rushbury and another, Thomas who worked in Wenlock. The village of Rushbury lies in Apedale below the ridge of Wenlock Edge. In 1796 Thomas

married his cousin Priscilla who was the daughter of Charles Blakeway of Albrighton.

Charles Blakeway of Albrighton (1749-1809), clockmaker son of Thomas and Hannah Blakeway of Rushbury, was brother to Thomas Blakeway, Jr. of Rushbury. He married Elizabeth Barney of Albrighton in 1770 and had two children, both girls. A listing for a Charles Blakeway in Shifnal in 1789 probably covers the same individual. There was also a Thomas Blakeway of Kinfare (aka Kinver), Staffordshire, near Stourbridge. Thomas Blakeway of Much Wenlock (1765-1795) was the son of Thomas and Ethelreda Blakeway of Rushbury and is mentioned as a clockmaker in 1789.

Thomas Blakeway of Broseley (Loomes, 1836-1850) is a further development of the Blakeway family. The 1841 census return lists him as aged 65 so the dates given must be his working years, and the British Museum records him as both clock and watchmaker, with working years as 1776-1850 and based in



*Clock by Thomas Blakeway of Broseley*

High Street, Broseley. Clocks made by him do surface very occasionally.

In the Coach House of Delbury Hall, Diddlebury near Craven Arms, the original clock in the clock tower, made by Thomas Blakeway of Rushbury in 1753, still accurately chimes the hours. An 18<sup>th</sup> century longcase cottage clock by Thomas Blakeway of Wellington sold recently on eBay.

### **The Hartshornes**

The family name is said by some to have come from the village of



*An example of long case clock  
by William Harsthorne*

Hartshorne in the Midlands but could surely have been assembled during past centuries anywhere that had a forest and deer. The name has certainly been around Broseley since Elizabethan times. The Hartshorne Village website records that: ‘The Hartshornes were a branch of the Derbyshire family taking their name from the unique Derby place name, they were long settled in Benthall, Salop and later at Broseley.’

An archived Bamford auction advertisement reads ‘Pocket watch by Thomas Hartshorne who was born at Polesworth 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1780, son of William Hartshorne and Dorothy Bolton, his wife who was a Polesworth girl. (Polesworth is at the northern tip of Warwickshire and is only four miles from Tamworth). He was apprenticed, probably to his father who was an Albrighton (Salop) watchmaker (working 1783-1794) and set up at Coleshill 1801. He married in 1810 and signed watches from both Coleshill and at Polesworth. There was a Richard Hartshorne working as a watch maker in Broseley 1782/1789 and a James making steel watch chains at Birmingham 1784-1791; both were probably close kin.’

William Hartshorne of Broseley was recorded as being apprenticed to a John Baddeley clock maker at Albrighton, Salop, 2nd February



*Dial from a long case clock by William Hartshorne*

1783 for 7 years at a premium of £12. Baillie records him as in Broseley 1793 as a watchmaker.

Loomes has three 'Hartshornes' listed for the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but none in Broseley, only an Edmund in London 1869-81, Thomas in Coleshill 1835 and a William in London in 1875. When other advertisements for long case clocks say the 'style was influenced by Hartshorne', it is not easy to know to which Hartshorne they are referring!

Baillie reports that a watch had been seen marked as made by William Hogshorne, presumably a spelling error somewhere.

In the BLHS Newsletter for November 2007, Steve Dewhirst reported seeing on eBay a doctor's watch was made by William Hartshorne of Broseley around 1790. Still keeping reasonable time, it is a fine example of a working doctor's pair case watch. The watch has a sweep second hand and a stop slider enabling the doctor to take his patient's pulse. Interestingly, it also has the name of a previous owner, B C Roberts Broseley, engraved on the inside along with the case maker's mark.

On 5<sup>th</sup> May 2011 an antique long case clock dating from 1800 - 1827 was sold unnoticed on eBay amongst the furniture. It had a painted dial with the name 'WILLIAM HARTSHORNE,



*Dial from a long case clock by William Onions*

BROSELEY' and an 8 day movement that chimed on the hour. A presentation plate on the inside of the door said "This clock was presented by the employees of the Madeley Wood Iron Company, Shropshire to Edward Smith and Mary Taylor on their marriage May 8th 1827."

A Hartshorne clock was seen (November 2011) on a website for sale in Canada; another Hartshorne long case clock was

recently sold from a dealers near Swindon; and also one was re-imported back to Shropshire after being fully restored in Poznan, Poland.

### **Hinksman of Madeley and Broseley**

Loomes also lists an unknown 'Hinksman' in Madeley c1750.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2008 , a mid to late 18th century oak longcase clock by Hinksman of Broseley, was sold at the Royal Jersey Showground in the Channel Islands. Another has been seen in Gwynedd, Wales. This also has a 30-hour movement and just the hour hand.

### **Onions of Broseley**

James Hurdley has records of a Peter Onions in Broseley c1760 and W. Onions in 1790. Baillie has no record for Broseley but records the surname 'Onion' being used by a Thomas in London

1702, John Clarkson in London 1762, John in Stockport 1785 and a John in Manchester 1794-1800. Loomes lists a Peter Onions in Broseley c1760.

A long case clock with face inscribed 'Onions' Broseley dated 1790 is illustrated in 'The Grandfather Clock' by Ernest L. Edwards in 1971. Another is known in Broseley, and there is a recently restored 8-day case clock by W. Onions in Telford.

According to Miss S. Barker of Dawley, 'the maker, W. Onions of Broseley, was a brother of a distinguished figure in the Shropshire iron trade of the last century - the late Mr. Thomas Onions of Stirchley. Their father, Peter Onions of Broseley, in conjunction with the father of the late Doctor Cranage, invented, as a smelter of iron at the 'Dale, a process of puddling, which, according to Mr. Randall, completely revolutionised the iron-making world. Mr. T. Onions died at Stirchley, May 1873, aged eighty-six. His brother, William, the presumed maker of the clock, was about four years his junior. Beginning life as a clock-maker, he eventually entered the detective service and was for some years resident in Paris. His later years were spent in Staffordshire, where he died some time in the Sixties'.<sup>6</sup>

### **Reynolds**

Elliott lists a David Reynolds – 'David Reynolds clock and watchmaker of Broseley was charged in 1842 with feloniously stealing one screw spanner, value 5/-, the property of William Barker'.<sup>7</sup> He is not listed by Loomes although the list does include 34 others with that surname elsewhere.

### **Acknowledgements**

My sincere thanks for help given by Broseley Library, Steve Dewhirst, James Hurdley, Melinda Evans, Miss M Gibbons of The Clock Shop in Bridgnorth Antiques Centre, Mr J. B. Lawson.

I am very glad that the notes on clockmakers on the 'oldcopper.org' website have given rise to some interest and comment. That is just what is needed for us to be able to expand the very brief histories given in the books on clockmakers. I would welcome more that identify the Broseley clockmakers better and perhaps tell us where they lived.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> G H Baillie, *Watchmakers and Clockmakers of the World, Vol 1 (1632 – 1825)*, N A G Press, London, 1929, with 25,000 names and reprints with an extra 10,000 names.
- <sup>2</sup> Brian Loomes, *Watchmakers and Clockmakers of the World, Vol 2 (1825-1880)*, N A G Press, London, 1876 and later reprints with a further 35,000 names.
- <sup>3</sup> Douglas J. Elliott, *Shropshire Clock and Watchmakers*, Phillimore & Co Ltd, London and Chichester, 1979, includes useful alphabetical list of 550 Shropshire clock and watchmakers from the early 16<sup>th</sup> to the late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries with 19 excellent black and white plates. This is a splendid detailed study of clock and watchmaking in Shropshire.
- <sup>4</sup> 29 trade directories consulted (1822-1941), but scant references to clock-makers.
- <sup>5</sup> The censuses from 1801 to 1831 were concerned with numbers; names were not recorded until 1841. Some earlier forms of taxation returns can be useful (eg. 1694 marriage tax, land tax assessments 1780-1825).
- <sup>6</sup> It is more likely that William, the presumed clockmaker, was the son of Peter Onions who died at Merthyr Tydfil in 1798, and that ‘Thomas of Stirchley’ was the son of William – inf. ex. Pam Turner.
- <sup>7</sup> Elliott, p.111, quoting ‘Cal of Criminal Prisoners, 1 March 1842’.  
David Reynolds appears in the 1841 census (but not that of 1851) with his wife Susannah and children Bethuel and William. He was sentenced to three months’ imprisonment for the crime of larceny in 1842. By 1857 his wife Susannah had remarried and the marriage certificate recorded that she was a widow. So David Reynolds died sometime between 1842 and 1857 – inf. ex. Jan Webb (great x 3 granddaughter of Reynolds).

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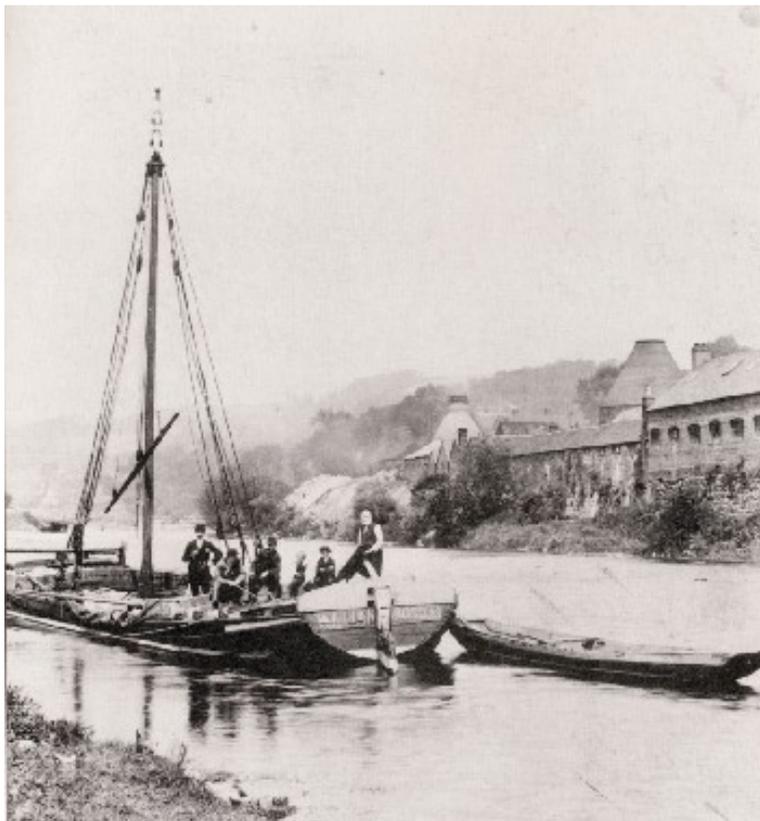
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## The Barge 'William'

by Nick Cullis

The well-known photograph of the barge *William*, taken in the late nineteenth century opposite Coalport China Works, probably shows Thomas Beard skipping the vessel<sup>1</sup>. But information has come to light which suggests we should not jump to conclusions about the history and ownership of the *William*.

One of my relatives, John Culliss, continued as a barge owner from Lloyd's Head, Jackfield, after his father's death in 1865. He was also landlord of the Black Swan at Jackfield.<sup>2</sup> By 1879 John described himself as a brick and tile merchant. Presumably, he used his barges to transport the goods and it is likely that his friend William Jones, a brick and tile manufacturer of Jackfield, also provided much of the merchandise. However, his business



was broken up after his death in 1880, and there is no evidence that any of his descendants worked on the river after this date.<sup>3</sup>

*The Wenlock Advertiser and Ludlow & Wenlock Express* of 9 April 1881 reported that a boat 'carrying 16 tons' and the well-built 65 ton barge William, together with all her tackle and fittings, both of which were moored at Lloyds Head in Jackfield, were to be sold at auction in Gloucester on instructions from the executors of the late Mr John Culliss. Thomas Beard, aged 63, was noted as the master of the William when it was berthed at Gloucester on census night of 3rd April 1881, and George Stephens, aged 15, was his bargeman, so presumably they were employed by the executors to transport it to its place of auction. *The Gloucester Citizen* of 20<sup>th</sup> April 1881 carried the following advertisement:

*Mr Rushton begs to announce that he is favoured with instructions from the executors of the late Mr John Culliss TO SELL BY AUCTION, on THURSDAY, April 21st, 1881, ALL that well-built BARGE, William, to carry 65 tons, together with all Tackle and Fittings belonging to her: also a very useful BOAT, to carry 16 tons. Sale to commence at 6 o'clock., LLANTHONY ROAD, GLOUCESTER.*

The William of Broseley was photographed around that time with a small boat attached to its stern against the background of the Coalport Chinaworks.<sup>4</sup> The picture may have been taken for the auction, or shortly afterwards, and it was later sold as a postcard declaring it to be "the last Shropshire sailing barge". Writing in 1980, Ron Miles noted that one of the small children in the picture was George Harrington, who was born in 1875/76, so this increases the likelihood that it was taken in 1881.<sup>5</sup>

I am not sure whether the *William* was sold to Thomas Beard, but whatever the origins of the photograph, the sale signalled the end of the Culliss connection with the Severn River trade, which had preceded it for at least 190 years.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Barrie Trinder, *Barges & Bargemen: a social history of the Upper Severn Navigation, 1660-1900*, Phillimore, 2005, pp.136-7; John Powell & Michael A. Vanns, *The Archive Photographs Series: South Telford, Chalford*, 1995, p.113.

<sup>2</sup> Trade Directories: Slater's 1868, Mercer & Crocker 1877, Kelly's 1879.

<sup>3</sup> John's widow died on 3 March 1881, and the census of that year recorded their eldest daughter as the inn keeper at the Black Swan.

<sup>4</sup> R. A. Barker, *Barges in Victorian Shropshire*, *Journal of the Wilkinson Society*, No.8, 1980, pp.8-11

<sup>5</sup> Correspondence in *Journal of the Wilkinson Society*, No.9, 1981, pp.18-19

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## Broseley and the Baldwin Family

by Mike Kaiser

**D**uring research into my wife's family, we discovered that Stanley Baldwin's grandfather, George Baldwin, who was born in 1789, was actually a Broseley man. Stanley Baldwin himself, MP for Bewdley and three times Prime Minister in the 1920s and 30s, died in 1947.

My mother-in-law, Christine Withers, was born in Wilden, near Kidderminster, a small town which was dominated by the Baldwin family iron and steel works. On the Wilden Estates website, it states *'Stourport Ironmaster, George Pearce Baldwin, took over the Wilden Iron and Tin Plate Co in 1840. George originated from Broseley in Shropshire and moved to Worcestershire at the turn of the 19th century. He had 12 children, the youngest of which, Alfred, was born on 4 June 1841, eight months after George died'*. Alfred was the father of Stanley Baldwin.

It is quite a coincidence that my mother-in-law, who ended her years in Broseley, should have lived in the town which had this connection with her birthplace. She had sisters in service at the Baldwin household and her father was first a groom and then chauffeur to the Baldwins when cars came in. It is also quite possible that George Baldwin as a young man learnt his trade from his father, who may have worked for John Wilkinson at Willey.



<http://www.gracesguide.co.uk>

## Pear Tree Cottage, Jackfield

by Bob Patient

In about 1946 my grandparents, Sid and Maud Patient, retired from Birmingham and moved to Pear Tree Cottage in Jackfield. This cottage was one of those severely damaged in the Jackfield slip in 1952 and was later demolished. Fortunately for them, they left to go back to the bright city lights in 1950 and I believe the cottage had another two owners before the 1952 slide. I was only born in 1953 and so missed ever seeing the cottage as it was, although I remember as a child on a day out there being shown the overgrown rubble where it had been.

My grandmother had always been good at organising things when they lived in Birmingham, running dances at halls and organising coach trips to the seaside. After moving to Jackfield she was quickly elected to organise any local events, while my grandfather's idea of a perfect day would have been fishing until the Half Moon pub close by opened. The two of them also looked after charabanc parties of fishermen which would turn up. Maud would then provide home cured bacon and egg breakfasts, despite food rationing still being imposed, while Sid would sell eels he had caught in the river overnight in straw filled sacks containing rancid meat as bait.



*Pear Tree Cottage, with its owner Sid Patient fishing on the river bank*



*The Half Moon pub, a little further along the bank, c. 1960. It was closed for some years but has been recently reopened*

They had various extensions built onto the unstable Pear Tree Cottage while they were there, as I remember my father saying that the side extension was primarily built as a buttress rather than as the toilet or washroom it was said to be. As to the cause of the subsidence, I believe it was mostly blamed on the fact that the high bank had historically been quite forested but for some reason most of the trees had been felled, destabilising the whole area. [Clay getting was also a contributory factor – Ed.]

Apparently the river flooding was an accepted way of life and the local villagers got together to keep a stock of whitewash. After floods had subsided and things had dried out, they would all rally round to repaint each other's houses. I remember my grandmother telling me how upset she had been on one occasion because as she stood high on the bank during one flood she saw a dog kennel, complete with a dog chained to it and standing on the roof, being swept downstream in the torrent.

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## The Leopard at Benthall: memories of an old pub and farm

by Norman Wyke

The impact of the great depression of the 1930s was felt even in rural Shropshire. The downturn in farming meant my family, my elderly parents, two older sisters and three older brothers, left our larger farm in Wall and headed east, to Benthall, in March 1939. We took ownership of Leo Farm, the house and 16 acres of land behind it. I was a young lad full of curiosity about our new surroundings and found out that the house used to be a public house called The Leopard. Mr Robert Gwynne, the old farmer who used to own the place, named it Leo Farm. He explained that his father, a tiler from Broseley Wood, had started to write "Leopard" in tiles on the front door step but got as far as LEO and ran out of room. So Mr Gwynne made the best of a bad job and changed its name to Leo Farm.

Sometime later I did some investigations into the history of the public house. The pub must have taken its name to reflect its location. The Leopard is an insignia for Benthall and you can see a rampant leopard carved in the oak staircase in Benthall Hall. I found that the Leopard only dropped its licence to sell beer in the early twentieth century. Almost all pubs brewed their own beer until relatively recently and I surmised that the Leopard probably got its malt for brewing beer from the Malt House at Barrow. You can still see the remains of it to the west of the churchyard. The Barrow Malt House must have been producing malt since at least 1750 as Tom Moody, the famous huntsman, had been an apprentice maltster at Barrow when Squire George Forester acquired him to work as a stable lad at Willey Hall. From there he set out on his illustrious career. The Malt House stopped production in the early twentieth century, probably due to increased competition from larger maltsters, who used mechanical means of production.

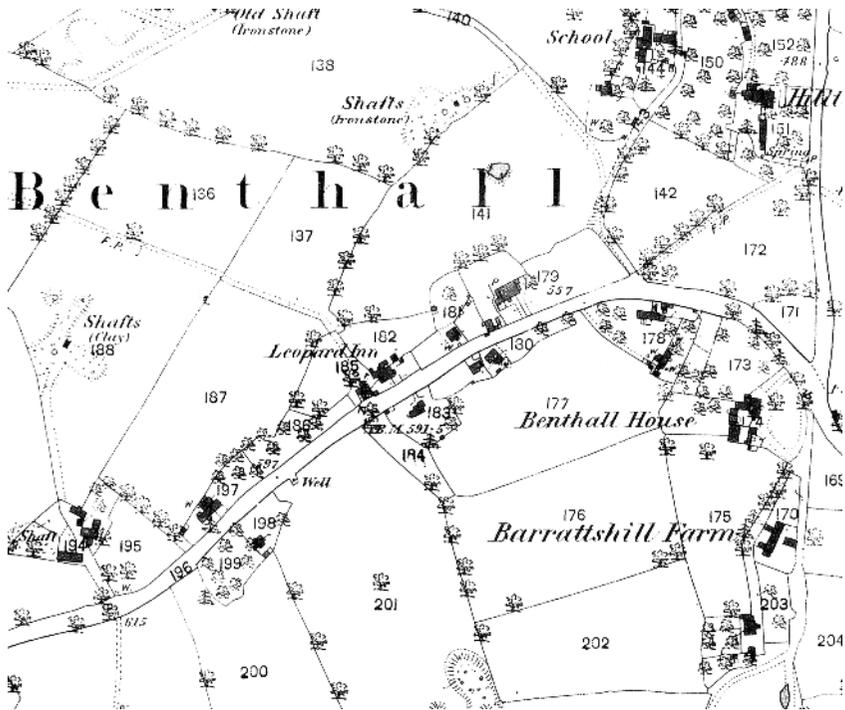
The last vestiges of the original public house remained when I lived there. It was a higgledy-piggledy house, centred around the entrance hall and upstairs landing. It had a domed roof and was built on different levels, probably added to over many years. Walls varied in thickness from two-foot sandstone to four-and-a-half inch brick. Our lounge was on the left of the entrance and sitting room. What must have been the beer parlour on the right sat on the long large cellar which had stored the beer. You entered the cellar through the large kitchen, two steps below the entrance hall. We lived mainly in the kitchen in the early years; it was warm from the Raeburn that mother cooked on. From the kitchen and down another five steps there was a pantry with 'setlas' for storing food - no fridges in



*The farmhouse at Leo farm formerly the Leopard*

those days. The bathroom, which must have been a relatively recent addition to the house, was directly off the kitchen. There was also a back kitchen which housed a furnace, outside chimney and large copper that was used for boiling washing and pig potatoes for pig feed during the war, but was originally for brewing beer. The back yard was higher than the kitchen; we went up two steps to it, to get to the well. This must have been used for water for brewing beer and domestic use. The two-seat toilet was outside, of course, beneath an old pear tree. Older readers will remember the large hole for adults and small one for children. I was able to use the large hole, being careful not to fall in.

After the war, with all my older siblings either emigrated or married, I stopped at home with my parents. Sylvia joined me in 1953 when we were married. When my father died in 1956, Sylvia and I wanted to modernise the house. We asked Mr Sharp, the Wenlock Borough Surveyor, if he could get us a grant to improve the old property. In the spirit of the times, he advised us that it would be better to build a new one; and this we did eventually in 1960. We agreed to sell the oak from the Leopard to Mr Motley from Much Wenlock to repair his properties. Arriving with two



*Benthal from the 1882 1:2500 OS map showing the Leopard Inn*

tractors and trailers and a JCB, his men proceeded to demolish the old Leopard. As they did so, there emerged the skeleton of a one-room cottage. The ancient oak uprights curved to form the roof, with cross beams for support and a hole in the roof probably to act as a chimney. The skeleton was filled with wattles and mortar. This structure embodied the entrance hall and upstairs landing of the Old Leopard. Mr Motley suggested that this may well have been a medieval wayfaring inn catering for pilgrims going to the monastery of St Milburga in Much Wenlock. However, we will never know whether this was true, as Mr Motley took the oak and I had the wattles for morning sticks. We were not as respectful of history in the 1960s - we looked forward to the bright new future of plenty that awaited us.

All that remains now of the old Leopard, whose original foundations may well have been laid over eleven centuries ago, are in the garden of the new house. The floor to the pantry, the LEO tiles, the back kitchen floor and the entrance to the cellar are all there and a feature of the garden of the present owners, Nigel and Linda. Times change.