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Berkshire Local History Association

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The Association would like to express their thanks to all those who helped by assisting with the various stages of producing this issue of the journal.

Cover illustrations

Front: Fitzharris House shortly before demolition in 1951 (National Monuments Record)

Back: Wokingham church, from a drawing by W. A. Delamotte, 1832 (Wokingham History Group)

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The Legend of Jack of Newbury

David Peacock

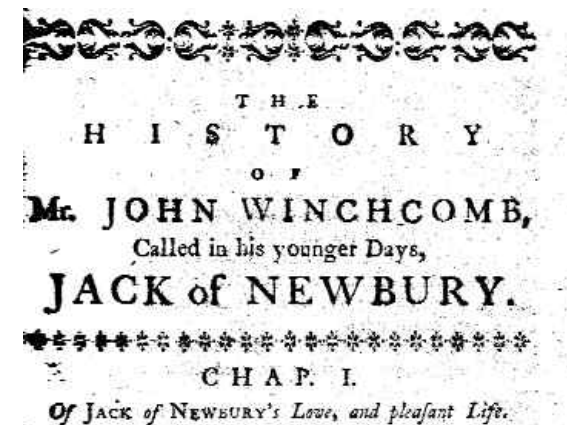
Introduction

During the sixteenth century the English economy was heavily dependent on the production of woollen cloth. It was the most important English industry: some experts have estimated that woollen cloth accounted for 90 per cent of English exports.¹ In the middle of the sixteenth century Jack of Newbury or John Winchcombe II (c.1489-1557) was the leading figure in this most important industry.

For centuries since then Jack of Newbury has been the subject of legend. It is as if future generations took a figure like Bill Gates and turned him into a pantomime character along the lines of Dick Whittington.

The Pleasant Historie of Jack of Newberie

The legend is based around an account by Thomas Deloney, which first appeared about forty years after the death of Jack of Newbury, proving an instant bestseller. *The Pleasant Historie of Jack of Newberie* went through at least 10 editions in 30 years. Deloney was a storyteller, and although a contemporary of Shakespeare he was appealing to a less discriminating market. In compiling his story he made no attempt to carry out serious



First page of the eighteenth-century edition of Deloney's Pleasant History of Jack of Newbury (1780)

historical research. He was an entertainer, not an historian. He unashamedly stole from other authors, invented scenes and dialogue, and borrowed historical details from other recent publications.

Deloney described King Henry VIII and Queen Katharine touring Winchcombe's works in Newbury and being impressed by the sheer scale of the enterprise. He included a poem which used colourful language to describe the processes involved in the making of woollen cloth, and the numbers of people employed by Jack of Newbury:

Within one roome being large and long
 There stood two hundred Loomes full strong:
 Two hundred men the truth is so,
 Wrought in these Loomes all in a row.
 By euery one a pretty boy
 Sate making quilts with mickle ioy.
 And in another place hard by,
 An hundred women merily
 Were carding hard with ioyfull cheere,
 Who singing sate with voices cleere.
 And in a chamber close beside,
 Two hundred maidens did abide
 In petticoats of Stammell red
 And milke-white kerchers on their head:
 Their smockesleeues like to winter snow
 That on the Westerne mountains flow
 And each sleeue with a silken band
 Was featly tied at the hand.
 These pretty maids did neuer lin
 But in that place all day did spin:
 And spinning so with voices meet
 Like Nightingals they sung full sweet.
 Then to another roome came they,
 Where children were in poore aray
 And euery one sate picking wool,
 The finest from the course to cull:
 The number was seuen score and ten,
 The children of poore silly men:
 And these their labours to requite
 Had euery one a penny at night
 Beside their meat and drinke all day
 Which was to them a wondrous stay.

Within another place likewise
 Full fifty proper men he spies
 And these were Shearemen euery one
 Whose skill and cunning there was showne;
 And hard by them there did remaine
 Full fourscore Rowers taking paine.
 A Dye-house likewise had he then
 Wherein he kept full forty men;
 And likewise in his fulling Mill
 Full twenty persons kept he still.

According to Deloney's poem Jack employed over 1,040 people, an unheard of figure for the woollen cloth industry in the sixteenth century. Even Deloney seemed to regard this figure as unrealistic: the full title of the *Pleasant Historie...* states instead that '...hee set continually fiue hundred poore people at worke...'² In the *Pleasant Historie...* Deloney also gave different figures for the number of looms in Jack's 'factory', quoting 200 (in his poem) and 100. This is at a time when 10 to 20 looms would represent a very substantial workshop. And Deloney's poem states that two hundred spinners were working in Jack's premises, along with the weavers.

Historians have assumed that most of the cloth exported from England during the Tudor period was exported undyed, to be finished overseas where there was a high level of expertise. However it can now be shown that the thousands of cloths produced each year by Jack of Newbury were dyed in Newbury; and the sheer scale of production and range of colours produced indicates that this dyehouse would have been a substantial concern.³

Jack of Newbury or John Winchcombe II was also a regional figure in the cloth industry, organising a petition from at least 80 clothiers across four counties, which is the basis for Deloney's account of a national clothiers' petition. He was England's leading clothier in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, a figure of national importance.⁴ He organised and co-ordinated the many stages involved in the production of cloth in the Newbury area, and then arranged for thousands of cloths to be taken to London each year before being exported to Antwerp and from there across Europe and the Middle East. In the international cloth market at Antwerp, his cloths were considered of the finest type and the standard by which the quality of other cloths was judged.⁵

The development of the Legend

In the seventeenth century Thomas Fuller included Jack of Newbury in his

History of the Worthies of England, which followed more than 13 editions of Deloney's *Pleasant Historie...* and drew on Deloney while adding some extra details:

'John Winscombe, commonly called Jack of Newberry, was the most considerable Clothier (without fancy or fiction) England ever beheld. His looms were his lands, whereof he kept one hundred in his house, each managed by a man and a boy. In the expedition to Flodden-field against King James of Scotland he marched with an hundred of his own men (as well armed, and better clothed, than any)...

'He feasted King Henry the Eighth and his first Queen Katharine at his own house, extant at Newberry at this day, but divided into many tenements. Well may his house now make sixteen Clothiers houses, whose wealth would amount to six hundred of their estates. He built the Church of Newberry from the Pulpit Westward to the Tower inclusively; and died about the year 1520...'⁶

It is this second paragraph which first wrongly linked Jack of Newbury with John Winchcombe I (who died in 1520), rather than his son John Winchcombe II (d.1557) who was the intended subject of Deloney's work. This father and son were both known as John Smallwood alias Winchcombe, they were both clothiers and they both came from Newbury. Distinguishing between them is complicated enough and is not helped by the contemporary use of the terms John Winchcombe the elder and John Winchcombe the younger to distinguish between them. Because there was a third generation John Winchcombe, John Winchcombe III (d.1574), the name John Winchcombe the elder began as a reference to John Winchcombe I and then after his death in 1520 transferred to John Winchcombe II. Fuller was writing over 100 years after the death of John Winchcombe II, and is unlikely to have had access to the evidence necessary to disentangle the different generations of John Winchcombe the elder. And it is Fuller who would be followed by later historians.

Details from Fuller were incorporated into an edition of Deloney's *Pleasant Historie...* published in Newbury in 1780, which made significant changes to the original text.⁷ A paragraph was added on the final page:

'Mr Winchcomb lived many years an ornament to society, and a great promoter of the Cloathing branch. He built the tower, with all the western part of Newbury church, and died February 15, 1519, as appears by his epitaph still remaining in the church.'

This paragraph links Jack of Newbury with the brass to John Winchcombe I which still survives in St Nicolas' Church in Newbury, a seemingly incontrovertible piece of evidence which wrongly identifies Jack historically as John Winchcombe I, and not John Winchcombe II.⁸ But the authors were building on Fuller's reference, and were not quoting from Deloney's original text.

The legend of Jack of Newbury grew in popularity during the seventeenth century. Jack appeared as a character in major London events staged to celebrate the inauguration of a new Lord Mayor. The Worshipful Company of Clothworkers included him as a central character in their 'Triumph' of 1662, when Jack of Newbury speech is recorded in the accompanying programme:

In the glad Triumphs that attend this day
Let famous Jack of Newbury lead the way
As fittest for the place, since he did give
An Essence to the Trade, and made it live...⁹

Jack of Newbury played a similar role in the Clothworkers Triumph of 1694:

Amongst Your prouder Train in this great Day
Here's Jack of Newbury does his homage pay
'Tis time, My Lord, I am but a homely Guest
Plain Jack, an honest Clothier of the West.¹⁰

As one indication of Jack's widespread popularity, a number of inns were named after him: at least two in London, one in Newbury, and others at Reading and Binfield in Berkshire and in Norwich.¹¹ The sole surviving example is the *Jack O'Newbury* in Terrace Road North at Binfield.

The importance of Jack of Newbury as a figure of popular fiction did not diminish in the eighteenth century, when short books were published for popular consumption. These Chap Books were normally heavily abridged versions of Deloney's *Pleasant Historie...*, with alterations and additions, and tend to be based on the more personal elements of Deloney's story.

The story provided the theme for an opera, *Jack of Newbury, an Opera in Three Acts...* which appeared in 1795.¹² The composer was James Hook and the opera was performed in honour of the wedding of the Prince of Wales (the future King George IV) and Princess Caroline of Brunswick. In the eighteenth century a prizewinning racehorse was named Jack of Newbury in the nineteenth century. Jack of Newbury became the name for

a steam locomotive and in the twentieth century Jack O'Newbury was even adopted as the name of a Newbury dry cleaners.¹³

Local histories have taken limited information about Jack of Newbury and developed it on the slenderest of bases. For example, it has become the received wisdom that John Winchcombe I came from Winchcombe in Gloucestershire, even though this is not stated by Deloney in the *Pleasant Historie*.... The view was put forward in 1859 by Charles Kingsley, Christian Socialist and author of *The Water Babies*.

'...The rev. Charles Kingsley of Eversley expressed an opinion that "Jack of Newbury" was not a Berkshire man, but an apprentice named John Smalwoode, of Winchcombe in Gloucestershire, who had brought from that place to Newbury the woollen trade; and that Winchcombe was not his surname, being only attached to Smalwoode to shew the place whence he had come...'.¹⁴

This suggestion was repeated by Newbury antiquary Henry Godwin in his *Worthies of Newbury*. From Godwin, it was taken up by Newbury historian Walter Money who played an important role in making this the accepted view. In his *Popular History of Newbury* he wrote '...it is probable that on his becoming a person of importance, he dropped, as was frequently done, his proper patronymic and assumed the name of his birthplace, Winchcombe, in Gloucestershire, a town also once known for its extensive clothing trade...'.¹⁵ The story of a Winchcombe origin is perpetuated by several modern writers, but after reviewing the claims it is clear that there is currently no evidence available to indicate that John Winchcombe I originated there. Nor is there any evidence for a related tale that John Winchcombe ran away from a monastery in Winchcombe.

Deloney's story that Newbury men led by Jack of Newbury were called up (as reserves) for the Scottish campaign which included the Battle of Flodden was later turned into a story of the prowess of Newbury men in the battle itself. A poem published in the 1839 *History of Newbury and its Environs* begins:¹⁶

'Come Archers learne the nevvs I telle
To the Honour of your Arte
The Scottyshe Kinge at Flodden felle
Bye the poynte of an Englyshe Dart
Though Fyre and Pyke dyd Wond'rous thynges
More wonders styлле dyd wee
And ev'ry Tonngue wythe rapture syng
Of the Laddes of Newberrie...'



Lost carving associated with Jack of Newbury, from E W Gray, attr., *History of Newbury and its Environs* (1839)

Godwin, in his *Worthies of Newbury*, blended Deloney and the spirit of this poem to state 'In the expedition to Flodden field against James, King of Scotland, he [Jack of Newbury] marched with one hundred of his own men (as well armed and better clothed than any)...'. This was reinforced by Walter Money in his 1887 *History of Newbury*, and his later *Popular History of Newbury*. However, even Deloney had made it clear that Jack of Newbury did not take part in the Battle of Flodden. That has not stopped some modern authors from claiming the opposite. In the 1990 edition of *The Story of Newbury*, for example, 'A contemporary poem tells how the lads of Newbury distinguished themselves at the Battle of Flodden in 1513, and there appears to be no doubt that this was the case...'.¹⁷

The Jack of Newbury legend has been based essentially on Deloney's work. Local histories have rewritten or used verbatim large sections of Deloney's work, often adding embellishment of their own. All of them have repeated unquestioningly Fuller's identification of Jack of Newbury with John Winchcombe I. This has led to a lack of research into John Winchcombe II and a consequent lack of appreciation of his importance.

Without supporting evidence for the connection between John Winchcombe I and Jack of Newbury, Jack was reduced by historians to a legendary character, a work of fiction, of no historic consequence.

As A F Pollard wrote in the original *Dictionary of National Biography*, the stories 'of his having led 100 or 250 men, equipped at his own expense, to the Battle of Flodden Field; of his having entertained Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon and refused a knighthood; of the doings of William Sommers ... and other courtiers at Winchcombe's house, are unsupported by

contemporary evidence, and are probably as apocryphal as the legends which gathered round Richard Whittington ...'¹⁸

Now the identification of John Winchcombe II as the basis for Jack of Newbury puts him on a firm historical footing, even if it is sometimes difficult to tease the history from the fictions added as the legend has grown.

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- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 268-277.
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- 7 This edition was 'Printed for and by J Willis on the bridge' in Newbury.
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Dr John Lempriere kicks over the traces: distinguished lexicographer and notorious headmaster

Nigel Hammond

The Revd Dr John Lempriere (1765-1824), son of Charles Lempriere of St Helier, Solicitor General of Jersey, was a distinguished classical scholar and distinctive schoolmaster who developed an unappealing track record. Passing as a boy from Reading School (1782-83) to Winchester College (1783-86), in order to find greater competition, he entered Pembroke College, Oxford (1786), as a scholar. While still an undergraduate, Lempriere was ordained and also appointed to teach at Reading School (1788-90) by his former headmaster, Dr Richard Valpy, a fellow Jersey and Pembroke man. Lempriere's career continued successively as headmaster at Bolton (1790-92), Abingdon (1792-1809) and Exeter (1809-19), each headship accompanied by difficulty and ending in acrimony. Ultimately Lempriere purchased two Devonshire patronages and appointed himself Rector of Meeth (1811-24) and Rector of Newton St Petrock (1823-24).



Remarkably early in his teaching career, while an assistant master at Reading School, Lempriere published his world-famous *Classical Dictionary*, which became the standard reference in mythology and classical history. He also produced an annotated translation of Herodotus. Both were no mean achievements in academic precociousness for a young man who was but twenty-three years of age and had yet to take his degree.

While visiting his parents in Jersey, Lempriere was invited to preach (1789) and showed early signs of being a single-minded controversialist. His sermon, unwisely political, went down badly: his words were loudly booed. At that time, tempers were running high in the Channel Islands.

France was verging on revolution, and the upshot, according to the *Jersey Gazette*, was an angry crowd throwing clods of earth and chasing Lempriere from the church along the street. His ill-judged words were that night the cause of an effigy of himself being burned: he was lucky to escape

with his life and return unscathed to England.

Lempriere took his degree (1790) and became headmaster of Bolton School, but was forced to resign within two years. Resignation resulted from the 'extremely impudent and atrocious behaviour' of boys, and of the headmaster administering 'unmerciful public floggings.' The school trustees reacted strongly and limited Lempriere's power of corporal punishment: they had their new rules painted on a board and ordered that it hang in the schoolroom, as a constant reminder. Humiliated, Lempriere resigned in 1792.

Against such an unpromising background Lempriere came back to southern pastures. But the auguries were not good. At Bolton Lempriere had certainly experienced difficulties of judgement, discipline, boy-management and gubernatorial relationships. At Abingdon he immediately breached school ordinances by coupling his headship in plurality with the curacy of Radley. On paper his academic credentials and classical scholarship were in no doubt. Whilst at Abingdon he produced a second and enlarged edition of the *Classical Dictionary*, published his *Universal Biography* (1808) and found time to take the degrees of BD (1801) and DD (1803), but, in the context of his headmastership, he has been seen as lazy, confrontational and financially self-seeking.

Unexpectedly, the Tesdale ushership (second mastership) fell vacant in 1792. Appointed was Lempriere's former colleague at Reading School, the Revd William Smith, well recommended by Dr Valpy. In tandem with Smith, Lempriere may have felt he had the prospect of a comfortable headship and 'relaxed into a life of contemplative leisure' with teaching increasingly divested on Smith. But as Lempriere's family grew larger, the number of schoolboys decreased.

John married Lucy Willince of Abingdon about 1792 and they had ten children during their seventeen-year stay at Abingdon: John Francis (1793), Francis Drocus (1794), Louisa (1797), Susan (1799), Everard (1800), Augusta (1801), Caroline (1803), Jane (1804), Helier (1806) and Catherine (1807), [Charles (1819), born at Exeter]. Of them three died in infancy: John Francis (1793), Helier (1806) and Jane (1807): they have memorials in St Nicholas' church, Abingdon. His first wife died in December 1811 and is commemorated on John's memorial in Meeth churchyard. *The Salisbury & Winchester Journal* reported Lempriere's second marriage (1813) at Caversham, to Elizabeth, the youngest daughter of John Deane of Reading. She died at Shaldon (1821) and similarly is commemorated in Meeth churchyard. Two years later Lempriere took his third wife, the daughter of a naval officer, and retired with her to Meeth rectory.

Abingdon parishioners complained to the Bishop of Salisbury (1796)

that, to serve Radley, Lempriere was missing weekday evening and Sunday duty at St Nicholas' church where he was reader. Christ's Hospital of Abingdon and the Corporation consequently withdrew Lempriere's stipend, whereupon the headmaster retaliated by closing St Nicholas' church. In the meantime, fortuitously preferred as vicar of neighbouring St Helen's, Abingdon (1800), Lempriere picked a quarrel with Christ's Hospital. With regularity Christ's Hospital had nominated preachers for three endowed sermons at major festivals. The arrangement had progressed without demur, but from 1808 Lempriere objected to Christ's Hospital selecting preachers in his church.

Christ's Hospital governors chose the Revd Robert Wintle (1773-1848), an Old Abingdonian, vicar of Culham, prebendary of St Paul's and rector of Compton Beauchamp, to preach on Palm Sunday. But Lempriere declared his intention to object to any preaching appointment made by the governors. The governors instructed that Dr Lempriere be given written notice that Thomas Mayott, the sermon's donor, had given the vicar thirteen shillings and four pence for preaching in the morning with the intent that the vicar should permit the afternoon sermon to be preached by their nominee. Wintle was also appointed to preach on the afternoon of Easter Day and Christ's Hospital sent a copy of these appointments to Dr Lempriere.

But Lempriere had his way. In compromise it was decided that Wintle be requested to apply to Dr Lempriere for permission to preach the



afternoon sermons in St Helen's church. But by 1809 a frustrated Christ's Hospital took a harder line. Giving notice of the Easter preacher, they required a prompt response from Lempriere, at the same time deciding, for the moment, to pay nothing to Lempriere for his morning sermon, 'in case Dr Lempriere shall refuse Mr Wintle use of his pulpit.' By Christmas 1809 Lempriere had gone from Abingdon.

Both town and school breathed a collective sigh of relief. He had reduced Abingdon School to a shadow of its former size, discriminating against dayboys by locking them out from the schoolyard after hours, selling entry to boys from other schools to take advantage of closed scholarships at Pembroke College, Oxford, upsetting Christ's Hospital and making himself decidedly unpopular. Lempriere's enforced resignation was effected at midsummer 1809.

Appointed headmaster at Exeter School, Lempriere ran true to form. Repeatedly he conflicted with trustees over school management. Clearly his fame as a lexicographer and classical scholar exceeded his capability as a headmaster. At Exeter he proceeded to replace the Eton grammars with Dr Valpy's Reading School method of Latin teaching; he attempted to advance dayboy fees beyond levels set by governors; he wanted removal of day pupils, aiming to turn Exeter into a wholly boarding school. Lempriere was dismissed from the headship in late-1818, but refused to vacate the school until forced out in mid-1819, after his appointed successor had taken over Exeter School 'in exile,' temporarily functioning elsewhere in the city.

Retiring to Shaldon, Lempriere became rector of Meeth, latterly in plurality with Newton St Petrock, by purchasing the patronages of the parishes. He collapsed and died from a fit of apoplexy in Southampton Street, Strand, London, and was buried at Meeth (1824).

John Lempriere died a wealthy man. In his will he left £3,000 to each of nine surviving children. Among considerable investments, shares in the Wiltshire & Berkshire canal company were divided similarly. His two livings he granted to Pembroke College, charging the college with filling them with Lempriere family members.

Consequently, of John's sons, the Revd Francis Drocus Lempriere became rector of Newton St Petrock (1824-68), remaining patron of the living until after 1873. The Revd Everard Lempriere (1800-86) succeeded his father as rector of Meeth (1824-86), holding the incumbency for sixty-two years until his death. John Lempriere is buried in Meeth churchyard under a substantial table-top tomb upon which are listed fast-fading details of his family.

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Personal investigation of Lempriere memorials at Abingdon, Meeth and Newton St Petrock.

Illustrations:

Page 11. Portrait of Dr Lempriere at Pembroke College, Oxford. [There is a second portrait, presented by his son, Dr Charles Lempriere, a Fellow of the College, at St John's, Oxford.]

Page 13 Abingdon School (1793), drawn by J. Smith, one of Lempriere's pupils.

Fitzharris Manor, Abingdon: from gentleman's residence to demolition

Dick Barnes

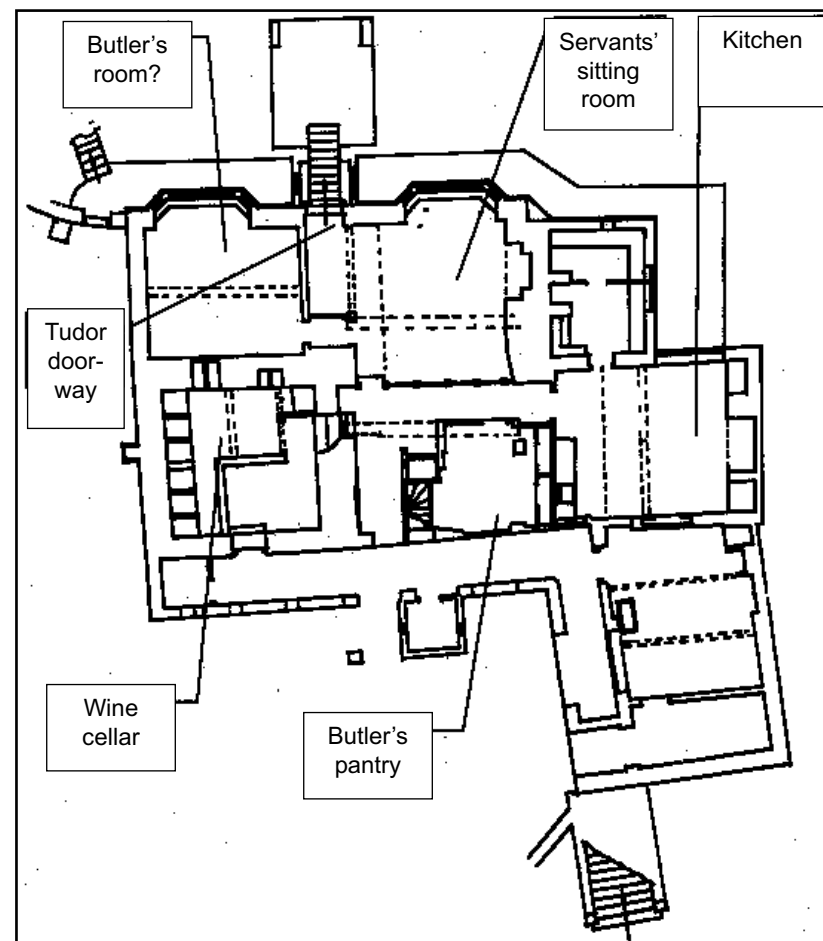
Fitzharris Manor House occupied a site on the northern edge of the historic centre of Abingdon, now engulfed by the post-war expansion of the town. The house was surrounded by ornamental grounds, together with paddocks, woodland and a stream. It was not an architectural gem, but contained features of interest, including the ground floor of an earlier Tudor house with front doorway and mullioned windows, and a later extension in Gothic Revival style. The estate also included farmland extending in an arc from the north to the west of the town. In successive sales of the property from 1874 to 1939 the farmland was lost to building development. The house and its immediate grounds were requisitioned in 1946 by a government department which developed the grounds for housing and allowed the house to fall into disrepair before demolishing it in 1953.¹

In 1929 local historian A. E. Preston published a history of Fitzharris from soon after the Norman Conquest up to the sale of the freehold by the Borough in 1862.² Recent work on the final years from the sale of the freehold to the demolition of the house has revealed much new material, particularly from detailed surveys of the house prior to demolition. There are various forms of the name, but the variant Fitzharris is used here for consistency with Preston and with the records of the house made by Ministry of Works. Abingdon was in the county of Berkshire throughout the period covered here, but was transferred to Oxfordshire in 1974.

Fitzharris was originally a property of Abingdon Abbey. It was held by one of the Norman knights performing military service on behalf of the abbey, who constructed a small motte and bailey strong-point by the Stert stream, and a nearby dwelling.³ In the middle of the thirteenth century the abbey purchased back the property from the knight's successor Hugh Fitz-Henry or Fitz-Harry, and it was farmed by a bailiff for the Kitchener. Then it was leased to tenants, at first by the abbey and later, after the dissolution of the abbey in 1538, by the Crown (briefly) and the new Borough of Abingdon. It was occupied by several generations of important local families, such as the Tesdales and the Bostocks.

In 1862 Thomas H. Graham inherited the leasehold from his father, purchased the freehold from the Borough, and put the property up for sale. The succession of occupiers after this concluded with the death of General

Sir Charles Corkran in 1939, in a shooting accident.⁴ The next purchaser of the estate undoubtedly intended to develop or resell the property for housing development, but the war started before he could do so. The property was requisitioned for the use of Crossways Private School for Girls evacuated from Keston in Kent.⁵ Much interesting information about life at Fitzharris is given in a biography of George Jones, who was the gardener for General Corkran and the school.⁶



Fitzharris Manor ground floor plan

A few early photographs exist, showing the house surrounded by lawns, ornamental gardens and paddocks. Internal and external photographs were

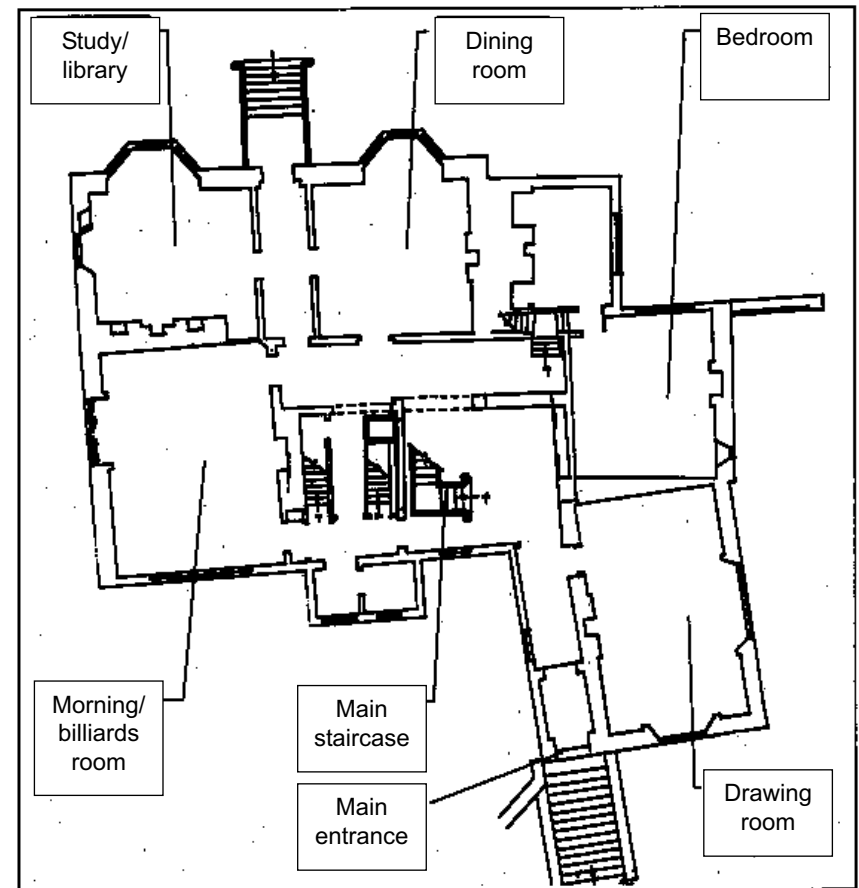
taken in 1942 by P. S. Spokes for the Berkshire Architectural Records Committee, and these show the interior of the house while it was still occupied and in reasonable condition.⁷ The Ministry of Works produced sets of record photographs in 1950, 1951, and 1953.⁸ Well over 40 of these photographs exist, some showing obscure architectural details. They also produced sets of architectural survey drawings in 1946 and 1951, with floor and roof plans, elevations, vertical sections, and profiles of the mouldings on Tudor woodwork and masonry.⁹

By combining information from photographs, floor plans, reports by Inspectors of Ancient Monuments, and descriptions in the particulars of sale (especially the 1939 sale) it is possible to identify the functions of the main rooms either directly or by a process of elimination. There are indications that in some cases the usage may have changed in the course of time. The ground floor was used as the servants' hall, kitchen, scullery, butler's pantry, and cellarage. The first floor had a panelled study/library, a dining room, and a room variously described as the morning room or billiards room. The drawing room was in the Gothic Revival east wing on this floor. The second floor had bedrooms (one panelled), and the third floor had servants' rooms in the attics.

The ground floor, with massive stone walls, fine Tudor west doorway, and mullioned bay-windows, was probably built during the tenancy of Thomas Tesdale 'of Fitzharris', who died in 1556. He was a man of substance who took part in dismantling the abbey church and so may have had access to this source of good building stone. In a subsequent remodelling of the house, the upper storeys were rebuilt but the ground floor of the Tudor house and much of the south wall at higher levels were retained. The new first floor then became the principal floor of the house, with a new west door and staircase down to the lawn. The installation of panelling and overmantels in two of the new rooms was probably carried out under Lionel Bostock, a prosperous and influential man who came to Fitzharris c.1580 and died in 1600.¹⁰ In both rooms the overmantels included the arms of Bostock (but the overmantels and some of the panelling were removed before 1946). Photographs c.1874 to 1912 show the bay windows enclosed in an elegant lattice-screened verandah. The main staircase was remodelled at some time, in contrast to the older and darker rooms of the house. The single storey east wing, with Gothic Revival doorway and windows, may have been added by William Bowles, a prosperous maltster, or more probably by his son, also William, who held the lease from 1796 to 1838. This east wing was added at a slight angle to the rest of the house, with a tapered party wall at the junction, perhaps to utilise existing foundations.

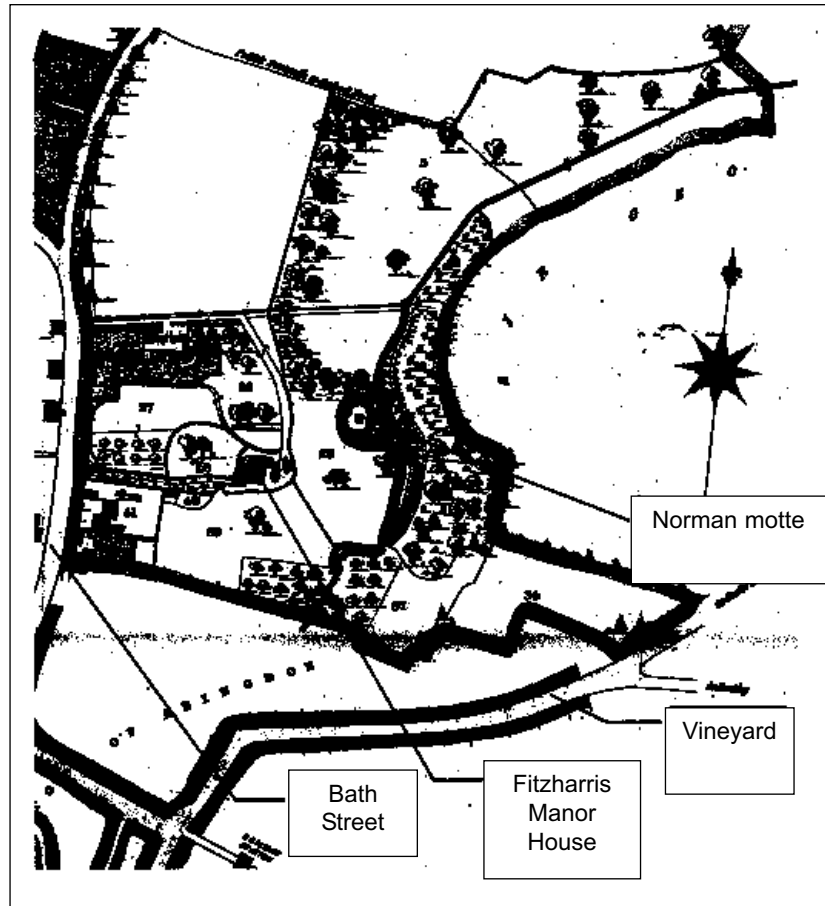
The particulars prepared for the sale in 1874 showed that the core of the

estate consisted of the substantial house surrounded by ornamental grounds and paddocks, together with outbuildings, a lodge, and another cottage.¹¹ The estate also included farmland extending in an arc from Northcourt Road in the north to Ock Mill in the west. The process of selling off valuable building land had already begun in Spring Gardens and on the north side of Faringdon Road. Adjacent to the house and its grounds the estate included Oliver's Farm. At auction in 1874, the house and 153 acres of land were bought-in at £2,200, and then sold privately. After the next sale in 1912 the house and its ornamental grounds remained much as before, but the



Fitzharris Manor first floor plan

agricultural estate had been much reduced in size, Oliver's Farm and all the western part of the estate having been sold.¹² By 1939 the estate had lost more land to the north, but still extended over the Stert stream to include a belt of woodland and part of the paddocks that gave access to Oxford Road.¹³ The house and 35 acres sold for £5,500. After requisitioning the property in 1946, the Ministry of Supply purchased the house and the



Detail from 1874 estate plan showing Fitzharris House with surrounding pleasure grounds and paddocks

remaining 28 acres to the west of the stream for £7,500.¹⁴

Soon after the school left, in 1946, the Ministry of Supply (MoS) used powers granted to it under a series of Acts which enabled it to take

possession of the property and to serve notice requiring the owner to treat for its sale. Critics were later to complain that these powers were intended for use in war-time rather than in post-war peace-time. The grounds were developed by the Ministry of Works (MoW) as a housing estate for senior staff working at the Atomic Energy Research Establishment (AERE), Harwell, a major research facility for the new civil nuclear power programme set up with great urgency immediately after the war by the Ministry of Supply.

In the short space of six months the site was acquired and surveyed, the layout agreed, four types of houses developed from MoW designs used elsewhere, and the building contract let. The first 20 houses were scheduled for completion in August 1947, and the complete estate of 140 houses by May 1948. The sale negotiations dragged on for more than two years and, after taking legal advice, the new housing was built before the land was conveyed to MoS. In view of the urgency of the building project it is hardly surprising that the future of Fitzharris House received little attention. The government ministries concerned claimed that no funds had been allocated to them for conservation or restoration of the house. It could not be protected by Listed Building status as it was Government property, although it was on a draft list of buildings of special architectural or historical interest. The house was used for a while by the building contractors for storing materials, and was then neglected and vandalised while a complex series of negotiations led to its demolition in 1953.¹⁵

The Ancient Monuments Division of the Ministry of Works had inspectors and surveyors able to recognise and safeguard features of historic or architectural value. Initially these inspectors advised, on the basis of previous routine visits, that Fitzharris contained little of interest and there was no particular reason to preserve it. Closer inspections in 1947 and 1948 led to new assessments. The following extracts from official documents may well have been derived from a missing report on Fitzharris written in 1947 by the Inspector of Ancient Monuments for England, Baillie Reynolds.¹⁶

'The house is of three stories with attics. The ground floor is largely unaltered, and has many features of sixteenth century date, including the original front door, two flanking windows, and many internal features - ceiling beams, door-cases and partitions. It is now a semi-basement owing to the raising of the ground level at the front, and the main entrance on the first floor is reached by a flight of steps built over the original door.'

'The original sixteenth-century building is of stone, but the extensive

alterations and extensions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries appear to have been carried out in brick with plaster rendering laid on laths. This plaster covers almost all the wall surfaces, and the condition of the walls behind it cannot be determined until it is removed. The plaster is in very bad condition; in many places it has parted from the wall, and it is generally cracked and bulged. ... Some of the original window openings are blocked with rubble and plastered on the exterior.

‘Inside, the house shows all the usual signs of dilapidation due to lack of maintenance and being left unoccupied, but there are no signs of structural defects. The plaster has fallen from the ceilings in one or two places where the water has penetrated, and in two rooms the panelling has been stripped from the walls leaving the brick and stonework exposed. This has revealed in the second-floor room a sixteenth-century blocked window with mullions and transoms, showing that the walls on the south side at least are original up to roof level.’

Some inspectors of ancient monuments felt that ‘This house is even better than we thought and should be preserved’. Their case for preservation on the basis of architectural and historical interest seemed to have little regard for cost, but MoW clearly regarded Fitzharris in relation to its already heavily committed budget for historic buildings. This led to a decision that it could be preserved only if the Ministry of Supply could find an income-generating use or, perhaps, a user who would be willing to take a repairing lease. The wide range of estimates of repair costs further confused the question. These were, however, for quite different standards of repair. The lowest estimates, around £6,500, were for dealing with defects such as leaking roofs, to prevent further deterioration. The highest estimate of £19,500 was based on a room-by-room survey of the costs of repair and redecoration to make the whole building suitable for use as offices, etc.¹⁷ The most promising suggestion for using the house was to re-house government offices from historic domestic buildings in the town centre. Others were for use as a social club for the residents or the British Legion, or to transfer it to the National Trust. Surprisingly, there is no record that use as flats, hotel or a nursing home was considered. No user emerged who would be willing to take over responsibility for the house.

The newly-formed Friends of Abingdon civic society drew attention to the state of Fitzharris house. Although MoW and MoS gave assurances that it would be preserved, some parts of these departments clearly realised that there was no firm commitment or funding for the restoration or maintenance of Fitzharris, and they had been making preparations for

demolition since 1950. In 1951 these assurances were withdrawn, and Fitzharris was the subject of Parliamentary Questions and of letters to *The Times* by Bodley’s Librarian, the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, the Friends of Abingdon, the Georgian Society, and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (for whom Lord Euston surveyed the house).¹⁸ Demolition work was postponed while the Minister of Works took further advice.¹⁹

In October 1952 a letter from Abingdon Borough Council stated that it would not want funds to be diverted to Fitzharris from the ongoing major restoration by MoW of the County Hall at Abingdon. This letter may have been intended as briefing, but it was published, and sealed the fate of Fitzharris by indicating that local opinion was divided on whether it should be preserved.²⁰ The Minister of Works (Mr David Eccles) announced to Parliament on 12 December 1952 that Fitzharris would be demolished. A contractor was chosen from tenders of around £1,732 and a provisional starting date of 23 March 1953 was announced. The contractor was to save architecturally interesting components, as listed by MoW. Photographs taken in April 1953 show that the main roofs had been removed, together with the previously blocked first-floor Tudor window, which may have been one of the items to be saved. The Friends of Abingdon accepted most of the saved items, but gradually disposed of them. A newspaper report records that on 4 May 1953 a workman was killed by a beam dropped from a first floor window.²¹

All that now marks Fitzharris Manor house is an explanatory plaque at the centre of the modern housing estate, in an open space formed from the ornamental lawns that surrounded the house. An early cost estimate for demolition was based on taking the walls down to two feet below the ‘present ground line’, filling in the semi-basement as required, and turfing the site.²² It is therefore possible that some ground floors and bases of walls were buried and might be revealed by geophysical survey. The eroded mound (motte) of the Norman strongpoint still exists nearby as a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and may still contain remnants of a later ice-house discovered in 1948.²³

Much of the cluster of outbuildings forming the stables, coach house, garages etc also remains. Various lengths of boundary wall can be found, together with two brick-built bridges that still span the Stert stream. Ock Mill still exists, although much modified as a restaurant. Some of the mature trees which enhance the estate date from before 1939, but many other trees and shrubs were planted by George Jones for the grounds department at AERE. The former farmlands are now occupied by housing, schools, and an extension to the town cemetery.

Was the demolition of Fitzharris House inevitable? A major turning point for the house came in 1946, with the urgent project to develop the surrounding grounds for housing. At that time the Ancient Monuments Board were advising that there was no particular reason to preserve Fitzharris, and this may well have resulted in there being no specific directives or funding for preservation.

By the time the inspectors changed their assessment, and local demands for preservation had built up, the house was deteriorating. The lowest estimates for limited essential repairs were comparable with the price paid for the house and 28 acres of land. The survey for putting the house into good structural and decorative order indicated a cost some four times greater. Even if a potential user had been found it is difficult to believe that additional government funding on this level would have been forthcoming. The Ministry of Works were undoubtedly right to reject ideas that Fitzharris, with no spectacular features, could become a viable public monument sustained by its visitor income. Despite assurances by Ministers, and the enthusiasm of Inspectors of Ancient Monuments, the Ministry of Works had been making contingency plans for demolition from at least 1950. The impressive press campaign really did no more than delay the end.

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Acknowledgements

Bromley Central Library
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 Oxford Record Office (ORO)

The Listed Churchyard Monuments at Wokingham

Barbara Young

In the old churchyard of All Saints in Wokingham, numerous once-remarkable ancient tombs are now marked merely by prostrate collapsed stone tablets. Of the ten conspicuous chest tombs still standing, just two are listed.

The statutory listing of buildings of special architectural or historic interest was initiated by the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act. Although new provisions were added by the Act of 1969, this register did not specifically include churchyard memorials until the late 1970s. Since then, 151 chest tombs in Berkshire 'which warrant every effort being made to preserve them' have received Grade II listing.

The majority of these memorials are spread across rural west Berkshire, where 86 stand in just 27 villages. Speen, with 16, has the most in a Berkshire churchyard. In the county town of Reading, three of the oldest graveyards (St Lawrence's, St Mary's and St Peter's) had 31 chest tombs listed in 1978. The remainder are in two eastern districts. Windsor and Maidenhead has eight, of which Hurley's late 17th-century Thomson tomb is the earliest example in east Berkshire. Wokingham has 26, of which half are in Hurst, while the town itself has only the two listed in 1987 at All Saints - the Mollony and Beaver memorials.

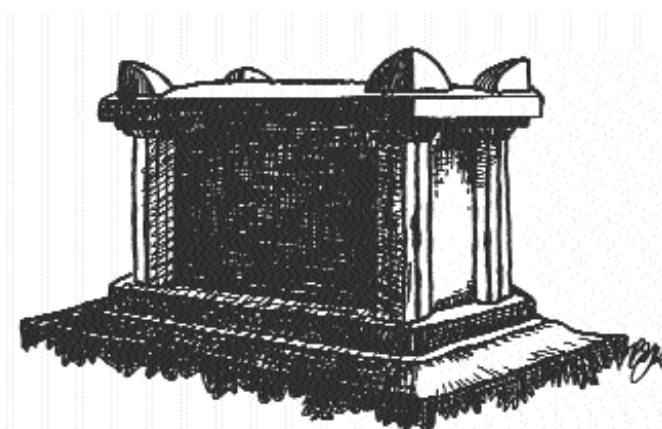
The Mollony Tomb

The Mollony memorial is a true chest tomb: a cist or rectangular stone box over a burial site. Although listed as a 'family tomb', it contains only the remains of 80-year-old Daniel Mollony. He was a land steward to Lord Braybrook, whose Billingbear estates he faithfully managed for nearly half a century.¹

When his widow, Elizabeth Mary, had this prominent tomb erected in 1839, its Greek revival style was very fashionable. The inscription was black on golden York stone, with white Portland 'Tuscan corner columns'. On a moulded stone base, it rose above the neighbouring headstones of her relatives.

Three months after Daniel's death, Mrs Mollony decided that she wanted to be buried in the adjacent grave and made her will accordingly. A year

later, she considered that Daniel's substantial tomb, now enclosed with hanging iron railings, was worthy of imitation: she added a codicil



instructing her executors to erect a similar tomb over her grave, in the family vault of her first husband. She also bequeathed £150 in 3% annuities to the vicar and churchwardens of Wokingham, entrusting them to 'apply the dividends thereof in the maintenance of both tombs forever. Any surplus was to be divided at Christmas equally between the old women in the almshouses near the church.'²

A few months before she died, aged 92, Mrs Mollony changed her mind. In another codicil, she revoked the legacy of variable annuities, preferring instead the security of a £50 tax-free gift to be used for the same purpose. Two months after her death in 1857, probate was granted and the executors invested the £50 in a Trustees account at the Wokingham Savings Bank.

Both tombs were well constructed and maintenance was infrequent. From 1889, after repairs costing £6 10s, the annual interest benefited the almswomen alone. By 1905, the Bank account held £79 19s 6d, and that Christmas £1 16s was distributed among the almswomen.³ This gift, locally called 'Stone Money', was still given in 1937.⁴

What became of the Mollony Charity is unknown. The Charity Commission has no records for it. However, the fate of a similar local charity suggests what happened to this entrusted legacy.⁵

In 1829, Mrs Sarah Yarnold bequeathed £1,800 to the Alderman and Burgesses of Wokingham upon trust to apply the interest in repairing the tomb of her late husband, Benjamin, in Ruscombe churchyard. The residue was to be divided between:

- ◆ four industrious deserving widows, not on parish relief, in Ruscombe
- ◆ four female servants of good character who had served one master or mistress for three years or more in Hurst or Wokingham
- ◆ four poor married women in child-bed in Hinton, Hurst
- ◆ four blind persons in Ruscombe

Although this tomb also needed little upkeep after repairs in 1833, the sexton still received an allowance of 10s a year for any necessary work. However, administration of the charities was not as straightforward. Often there were not enough, or indeed any, applicants from the small village of Ruscombe, so candidates in neighbouring parishes benefited. This solution had its problems; around 1860 there was an influx of blind persons into the parishes of Wokingham and Hurst, all hoping to become eligible for the gift.

Meanwhile, in August 1853, the Act for the Better Administration of Charitable Trusts appointed the first Charity Commissioners. They decided, thirteen years later, that the poor widow's charity applied only to Ruscombe parishioners. Over the next 30 years, expenses increased and income had fallen to an insufficient £38 by 1905, when the Commissioners again intervened. The 1888 Mortmain Act had redefined laws for charities and, subsequently, maintenance of a tomb was not considered a charitable purpose. A reduction in payments was demanded, starting with 'that to the sexton, which is illegal, the bequest for the repair of the tomb being void in law'.

Poor Elizabeth Mary Mollony and Sarah Yarnold! They believed that their gifts, given before the Charity Commission existed, would take care of their loved ones' tombs forever. Both widows, and doubtless a great many others, were betrayed by later legislation.

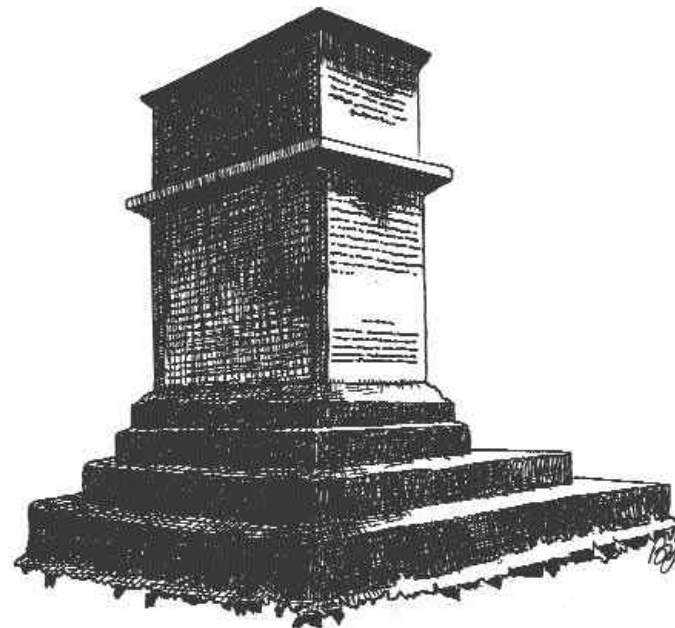
The Beaver Monument

A few yards nearer to the west door of All Saints, the Beaver monument is a late-18th century variation of a chest tomb; taller than its width, and on a three-stepped stone base increasing its height and magnitude, this 'pedestal tomb' is the only one listed in east Berkshire.

It is also one of only seven Portland stone chest tombs listed in east Berkshire. Together with two at St Mary's, Wargrave, and a group of four at St Mary's, Reading, all are of the same period. Portland stone has always been favoured by sculptors and masons. It is a pleasure to carve as it takes great detail, and it weathers better than most stones, becoming harder the longer it is exposed. Time has weathered the stone grey but originally the

Beaver monument, of pure white limestone with painted lettering, was impressive and outstanding.⁶

Then, however, it was not unique. Across the path stood a similar tomb, and the inspiration for Beaver's creation.⁷ All that now remains is a large plinth and a stone base with filled-in holes, two inches apart, for railings



around its perimeter. On top, head stones from other graves obscure its former prestigious prominence.

Elegant iron railings, two inches apart, also enclosed the Beaver tomb. Contrary to local legend, these were not removed in World War II. When brambles and weeds were 'working its ruin' in 1876, the railings were taken down to allow access for cleaning and not replaced.⁸ Some years later, the Mollony tomb also lost its rails. This is not unusual; in east Berkshire, only nine listed chest tombs retain their railings.

The Beaver tomb inscriptions certainly are unusual. On its west side, the dedication recorded in 1928 is as follows:⁹

Upper slab

Erected for a Lasting Remembrance
 Of one of the Best of women ...
 Boast of kindred ... who
 Deserved more than I can Say of her
 And for Whose Sake I have engaged
 Part of my Estate to Keep up
 This Monument in repair to the
 End of Time

Lower slab

Beneath this Stone lyeth the mortal part
 Of Her who once delighted every Heart
 How Good She was and what her virtues were
 Her Guardian Angel can alone declare
 The friend that now this little tribute pays
 Too exquisitely feels to speak Her praise
 The sweet remembrance of a Wife so just
 Affords him comfort though She sleeps in dust
 Eliz'th Wife of Benj'n Beaver
 In the 61st year of Her Age

Stop Youth

Take warning for here lyeth also the
 Remains of their beloved Nephew
 Thos. Leach who was lost July 14th 1761
 In swimming in the River Thames near
 Caversham Lock to the great sorrow of
 All who knew Him in the 16th Year of His Age

This dedication raises some curious questions:

- ◆ Why did Benjamin Beaver place the memorial to his beloved wife, Elizabeth, on the monument's west side? Facing the road, it is easily read by passing pedestrians; inside the churchyard, it is quite hidden from view.
- ◆ Why did he deliberately omit Elizabeth's date of death? There was ample space to include this, the main feature of memorials.

- ◆ Why was the blank verse epitaph inscribed on the upper face? Normally, it would follow the romantic rhyming lines on the lower slab. Was it a postscript added later?
- ◆ Why was the tribute to their nephew placed below Elizabeth's memorial, when he had died six years earlier? Did this replace an earlier headstone?

The inscription continues anti-clockwise around the lower slabs, with a story of six generations of the Beaver family from the time of King Charles I. It starts on the south side, the first face to be seen from the path in the churchyard, implying that this is the monument's main subject.

This tomb is extravagantly decorated, not with popular late 18th-century carving, but with its lower slabs completely covered by words. The cost of cutting some 4,000 letters was extremely expensive, and would take a good stonemason three months to complete.

Such expense was irrelevant to Benjamin Beaver. He wanted this illustrious family history recorded for posterity. To fit his saga on to three slabs, with a surface area less than three yards square, he ignored the ostentatious calligraphy in the pattern books then available to monumental masons. Instead, he chose the script of contemporary newspapers. Even this close-cut lettering, with minimal space in between, was inadequate. He had to resort to using contracted names, a device he used for writing up the overseers' accounts, and which is rarely found on tombstones.¹⁰ Even so, Benjamin did run out of space. His epilogue was too long and the last lines had to be inscribed at the bottom of the upper slab. Separated from the main text, these final words were important to him; was he still living at the time, overseeing his project, and demanding completion of the full text?

Benjamin's name appears but once, in his wife's memorial. His siblings are included, so why did he deliberately omit his own link to the distinguished ancestry recorded here?

This family chronicle has many faults. Over the years, weathering has eroded letters and dates, resulting in erroneous re-cutting. Other faults are simply due to enhancement by the storyteller. One example is 'Lord Thomas Howard, Earl of Berkshire, son of the Duke of Norfolk'. Born in 1619, Thomas was the son of Baron Howard of Charleton, Wiltshire, certainly not the Duke of Norfolk's son.¹¹ Many other statements are contradicted by documentary evidence, but these are part of another story.

The Beaver legend first appeared in print in 1869.¹² A posthumous article on the research notes of F. A. Carrington included an abstract of the

inscription which he had received from Rev. J. B. Deane, an early family historian who had discovered the 'great tomb at Wokingham'. Based on this transcript, and unaware of details missing from the west side, Carrington concluded that it was probably written about 1740.

More than fifty years later, in 1920, the antiquarian Rev. P. H. Ditchfield put his version, based on Carrington's article, into his latest book.¹³ Although he was rector of nearby Barkham, he, too, neglected to verify the full text on the monument.

The first accurate transcript appeared eight years later. In the local archaeological journal, Rev. B. Long debunked Carrington's dating with a Beaver family tree, compiled from parish registers, which suggested 1785 to be a more likely date. Rev. Long's research on Wokingham, published in 1937, also included his interpretation of 'A Dream of the Past'.

By 1939 this legend spread beyond local publications. In *The King's England*, Arthur Mee entitled his Wokingham section 'Thomas Beaver and Molly Mogg'.¹⁴ In 1963, Burgess's authoritative *English Churchyard Memorials* considered the Beaver tomb to be 'perhaps the greatest gift to genealogists'.¹⁵ More recently, family historians envied such a 'Monumental Treasure' when a transcript appeared in *The Family Tree Magazine*.¹⁶ Later local publications mention this Beaver fable; despite archive information being now so much more easily available, these are based on the above sources without any further investigation.

The following authors must also have seen the Beaver monument, yet no reference appears in:

- ◆ Lysons, *Magna Britannia* (1806)
- ◆ Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary of England* (1845)
- ◆ *Victoria County History of Berkshire* (1923)
- ◆ Murray, *Berkshire Architectural Guide* (1949)
- ◆ Pevsner, *The Buildings of England* (1966)¹⁷

While all describe interior church memorials, only Murray mentions 'some tombs of beauty' in 'a county that is not remarkable for its churchyard tombs'.

Conclusion

The Beaver monument is stable and in reasonable condition. Its exposed west side is more weathered than the other three sides, sheltered by yew trees. Parts of the inscription can still be read, but no thanks are due to its

author. In spite of his stated intention to engage 'part of my estate to keep up this monument', no such funds have ever been found.

However, it was cleaned and maintained over the years.¹⁸ Public subscription paid for the recutting of one side in July 1883 and another side seven months later, both at a cost of 9s per 100 letters. As funds dried up, further recutting in 1891 was done at the expense of Canon Sturges, the rector. Then, in 1907, restoration of the west side was possible following ten years of contributions by Mrs Sturges alone. The sexton, a 65-year-old bricklayer called James Maynard, charged £1 18s 6d for repairs before John Teakle, a stonemason who also ran the 'Red Lion' inn, recut the letters for £5 14s 4d. As normal, on each occasion of recutting, the old inscription was not erased beforehand.¹⁹

The Mollony tomb is not in good condition; its type of construction is vulnerable to instability. John Teakle last recut the inscription in July 1906 for 16s 8d.²⁰ Now it is hardly decipherable. Both this and Mrs Mollony's adjacent tomb have suffered from invasive ivy and stone decay, which have eroded to illegibility her precious memorial and heraldic shields.

The Wokingham monuments, like many similar churchyard memorials, appear to have been surveyed just once, for listing purposes, and then left to their elemental fate. Indeed, the majority of the county's listed chest tombs have had their identity weathered to illegibility. Too many also lay in ruins, hidden behind rusted railings and overwhelmed by unrestrained nature. Wild flowers, moss and ivy are a pretty background to the neat areas in the vicinity of most churches, but this is an illusion - these tombs are their fatal victims.

This article has evolved from research inspired by *Exploring English Churchyard Memorials*, which was based on evidence from the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England.²¹ This material is now held at the National Monuments Record (NMR), the public archive of English Heritage.

The NMR has inherited a major problem: its database information is taken from listing descriptions that have not been checked or revised since the tombs were first surveyed. Consequently, unchecked errors remain in names, dates and spelling. Over the years definitions have changed, without revision of earlier listings. Thus the identification of tomb types cannot be constant. Some examples are:

- ◆ The ten chest tombs at St Peter's, Caversham, were listed in 1978 as 'table tombs' and remain so defined
- ◆ Sunninghill's 'Francis' tomb is actually that of Lady Frances

Wentworth²²

- ◆ The 'Alfred Blayney' tomb at Hurst omits the surname Handasyd²³
- ◆ The Beaver tomb is listed as 'early C18', presumably after Carrington's conclusion, but cannot be prior to 1775

Such errors cannot be corrected by the NMR. Each listing description is a legal document. Consequently, only the Listing Branch can amend or revise a definition upon a request from an interested party, and a recommendation from English Heritage, their statutory advisor.

An application for revised listing of the Wokingham memorials is in progress. The Beaver monument, with its unique inscription, is worthy of Grade II*. The Mollony tomb merits, by association, the inclusion of his widow's Portland stone tomb. Their historical significance and contribution to the churchyard setting is remarkable. More important, revised status will facilitate fund-raising for necessary repairs to secure their future.

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David Cliffe

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