

FROWDE THE PROUD — THE CLOWN EVANGELIST

By Dr. John M. Turner

Nearly one hundred years ago, there died in Gloucester a most remarkable man, a respected gentleman landowner, a Freemason, strictly religious, holding a Bishop's Licence to preach, and a Major in the 1st Corps of the Gloucestershire Artillery Volunteers. The same man was also a clown blessed with such a sense of fun that he could reduce an audience to tears of uncontrollable laughter. In his day, as a circus clown, he was one of the most clever and versatile ever known, also a mimic and a contortionist! He had won a host of friends across the nation, and it was said that he had made not a single enemy in the course of his long and unusual career. His name was James Henry Frowde who, when he died in 1899, was approaching the biblically allotted span. The story of his remarkable life, much of it spent in Gloucestershire, is full of contrast and eccentricity.

EARLY DAYS

James Henry Frowde was of an old Devonshire family, a descendant of the 'Kingston and Ringmore Frowdes who paid taxes to the King', the name possibly of Norse origin. He was born on 17 April 1831, at Portsea, on his father James's thirty-first birthday, and baptised at Kingston parish church, at the same font and by the same clergyman as Charles Dickens. His father had married Georgiana Margaretta Hengler, at Lambeth, on 10 April 1830 (1). His mother was the eldest child of Henry Michael Hengler, known throughout the land as a wonderful tight rope artist, and Dublin-born Jane née Pilsworth. Georgiana, born in Lambeth in 1808, was the eldest sister of the well-known Victorian circus proprietor Charles Hengler, whose family also came to have strong links with Gloucestershire (2). As a child 'only seven years of age' she had appeared, with her father, at Bannister's Olympic Circus, in Hull, in 1816, performing on the tight rope (3). It is not known how and when she met her husband James Frowde.

James Henry was the first-born of James and Georgiana Frowde's children, with George, Eliza and William following in quick succession. Their mother died tragically young, aged just twenty-nine. Her death, when James Henry was only six, made a

vivid and lasting impression on him, and caused him great distress. Many years later, writing for his own children, he recalled hanging around his mother's bedroom door, knowing that she was very ill, longing to go in but being taken away. Shortly afterwards he and his brother George, aged only five, were combed and washed and allowed to see their mother, who was sitting-up in bed.

'She knew her race was run, knew her children would soon be motherless. Who can say what thoughts illumined her eyes and gave power to her tongue' (4).

Looking pale, and angel-like, she asked for the Bible and read them Jesus's invitation to children. Not long after they had left the room, she died. James remembered being allowed to take his mother's cold hand in his own, crying, and being told "She is an angel now" (4). Such was the reality of death, at home, in Victorian times. Georgiana Frowde was buried on 13 September 1837, in Mile End Cemetery, Portsea, in her father-in-law John Frowde's grave.

James junior's father remarried, to Catherine Branscombe, of Kingsbridge, within the year.

'Father brought a lady with him, and by-and-by I was presented to her. I was much impressed by her statelyness.

She kissed me, but when told she was my mother . . . nothing so chilled my blood or stayed my heart' (4).

James and his brother George went to school together and remembered being at school when the hulk of the "Royal George" was blown up at Spithead. The master at this school was too fond of the cane for the brothers' liking and their father removed them to another, where they had a conscientious but kindly master (4). It can be said that they received a liberal education.

Life at home was strict, with full religious observances, and Sunday was the Lord's Day. All that could be done was done on Saturdays.

When James was ten years old, he ran away from his strict home, taking only his Bible and a small picture of a dog (5). No doubt he was quickly found and returned, but relationships with a step-mother, and now a half-sister Charlotte and half-brother Henry, could not have been ideal. His upbringing by his step-mother was indeed quite puritanical.

JAMES' LIFE IS CHANGED

In 1846, when James was aged just fifteen, an incident took place which changed the course of his life. Hengler's Circus came to town. A large wooden building was erected in Waterworks Lane, Portsmouth, with the Hengler name in raised gold letters on a blue ground. Some time earlier James' brother George must have joined the circus company, for it was he who introduced him to their mother's parents, Henry Michael and Jane Hengler. He was much struck with his grandfather's appearance. He was also introduced to his uncle Charles Hengler, uncles-by-Marriage William Powell and Richard Beacham, 'and three of the prettiest aunts one could wish for' (4). Young James spent a good deal of time with his new-found relations.

Shortly after closing in Portsmouth, Hengler's Circus sold up and James' uncle Charles went to work for his wife's uncle William Cooke, one of the most prestigious circus proprietors in the land. James' brother George returned home to Portsea. Interestingly, it is known that one George Frowde, described by the press as 'The Modern Hercules', appeared at Hengler's Circus in Edinburgh, in 1863 (6). Surely this was James' pugilistic brother.

Within a year of joining William Cooke's company, as baggage master, Charles Hengler started his own company and opened "Hengler's Circus" on 5 July 1847 in Stafford (7). It was Charles' brother Edward who had been the proprietor of the earlier company, of the same name, but the twin companies seem to have merged. After Stafford, Charles Hengler's company travelled to Stamford, Newark, Leicester, then Leeds for the winter.

ON THE ROAD WITH UNCLE CHARLES

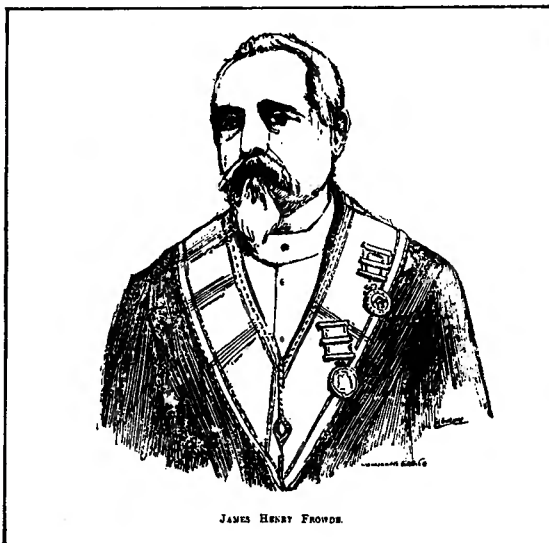
Young James Frowde took refuge with his uncle Charles Hengler, when the company was in Stamford. He was told that he could stay, but must earn his keep cleaning out the stables and animals' quarters (5). This must have been sometime during September 1847. He also made himself useful making checks, counting tickets and doing various other jobs (4). Unknown to his uncle, one of the clowns taught James all he knew, until he became better than his teacher. When the clown fell ill, James was allowed to take his place in the ring. From that day he became celebrated and well-known (5). The principal clown at the time was Mr. Swan (4), who, with his partner Stonette; —

'... will enliven each performance with their generous budget of droll sayings and doings' (7).

James Frowde was very impressed, by the standards demanded by his uncle Charles;

'The governor was very particular at this early stage; everything said or done before the public had to be decent and in good order. So it was with dress and behaviour in private life. He was always particular to get the most decent people he could' (4).

On leaving Stamford, for their next venue in Newark, James found himself on horseback for the first time ever. In Newark, Dick Turpin was regarded as a hero, and the circus put on a piece of that name. Traditionally, it was from a rear window of the King's Head there, that Dick Turpin had emerged when his pursuers entered the front of the house. According to the story, the ostler, in league with him, had Black Bess at hand. Although the circus company at Newark had many horses, none was black and trained to play the part of Black Bess feigning lameness then death. In the end, an



Gloucester Journal 2 September, 1899

apology was offered to the public that '... because of an accident to Black Bess the part will played by the highly-trained horse Wellington'. Less scrupulous proprietors would have 'blacked' a horse. According to James, this finished a bad season in Newark (4).

The day-long ride to Leicester was undertaken by James with a lighter heart than when he rode to Newark, for his riding skills had improved. It was at the Amphitheatre in Leicester that James Frowde first appeared on a stage. He played as a supernumerary in a spectacular Chinese fête scene. A fresh black colt, of about sixteen hands, had been purchased in Newark, to be trained for the part of Black Bess in 'Dick Turpin's Ride to York'. But although trained to jump over gates and feign lameness, the horse just would not learn to die! Again a ruse was necessary, and a life-sized model was made and clothed in black calico. As Black Bess was being led the last mile to York, the curtain came down. The model was positioned precisely, and in the next scenes Dick Turpin, in an agony of grief, was mourning 'The best mare that man ever crossed. ... I have killed her'. And so, for a short time Black Bess was a success (4).

Over the next few years, James Frowde was encouraged by his uncle Charles to develop his clown act. The circus, visited Leeds, Derby, Birmingham, Windsor, Brighton, Lewes, the Isle of Man, York, and other venues until in mid-1850, they arrived at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. On a visit by Hengler's Circus Royal to West Hartlepool, in October, Mr. Frowde was billed as 'A Man of Many Forms', a reference to his skills as a contortionist. James was then aged just nineteen. At Sunderland, the following month, Hengler's playbills referred to the athletics of the Ethair Family and Mr. Frowde (8). The year 1850 saw the death of James' father, who was buried at Abney Park, London (1), leaving James an orphan. The bonds to his circus uncles were thus strengthened.

The clowns at Hengler's Roman Amphitheatre, in Exeter during February 1852, were Boswell, Frowde (a contortionist) and Lewis (9).

GLOUCESTERSHIRE ATTRACTIONS

At Gloucester, during the visit of Hengler's Colossal Hippodrome and National Circus in August 1852, after a tour of the south west, the rival clowns were Messrs Frowde and Eugene. By this time Jim Frowde had become the main attraction at Hengler's and enjoyed immense popularity. This was the first known visit of James Frowde to the county where he later chose to live, from about 1861 until his death in Gloucester nearly forty years later. At Norwich in April 1853, Frowde was first teamed with Funny Franks, in a 'Great Sham Fight', the bills referring to this in verse. He also featured in a grand equestrian spectacle entitled 'The Great Steeplechase; or, England's Harvest Home' (10). At the end of September 1853, the company opened in a new pavilion in Sheffield, with Messrs Frowde and Franks billed as the Drolls of the Circle. James Frowde also played a part in a Grand Military Spectacle called 'Kaffir War; or, The Cattle Stealers' (11). At this time Messrs Frowde and Franks were prominently billed playing parts in the equestrian pantomime 'Bold Robin Hood and the Pretty White Horse; or, Harlequin and the Enchanted Princess of Sherwood Forest' (12). During a visit to Cheltenham, on May 24 and 25, 1854, the posters proclaimed that:—

'Mynheer Frowde, the Great Clown and Contortionist, Will, during the Evening's Entertainments, Drive His Stud of Real Cats! Several Times Round the Circle, Here We Go, Gallop and Trot, Tibby, Tabby, Toddle and Tot' (13).

Jim Frowde was always much appreciated by Cheltenham audiences.

Venues later in the year included Malvern, Tewkesbury, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Monmouth, the south west of England, then Exeter for the winter.

Early 1855 saw a seven week engagement in Gloucester. Mynheer Frowde was appearing at the top of Hengler's playbills by then, 'assisted by Eugene and Ferdinand, the inimitable grotesques'. Frowde also played in 'The Red Man of the Gaunt Mountain, with the Smallest Horse and the Russian Bear' (13). After touring Devon, his county of birth and later Yorkshire, the 1855-6 winter season was held in Cheltenham, opening there on 29 October. One of the seasonal attractions was a Grand Conundrum Competition. Members of the public were invited to submit conundrums, with answers, for reading to the patrons of the circus on the Grand Conundrum Night, when the best would be selected according to the applause. The big night for this event in Cheltenham was Christmas Eve 1855. James Frowde was involved in the competition, but this brought him little pleasure. This is revealed in a letter he wrote to the 'Era' in the New Year, viz; —

The Conundrums at Hengler's Circus, Cheltenham. To the Editor of the Era.

'Sir, I wish to place briefly before you the facts relative to my decision with regard to the conundrums submitted to the public at Hengler's Circus on December 24 . . . a few of the best were selected by the audience . . . they referred to the patron of the evening, who declined to decide and begged to transfer the matter to myself . . . at last I went forward . . . As I am but young in my profession, and naturally anxious to sustain my character for probity . . . I can but say I picked the best not the newest' (15).

Later, in Derby, the local reporter detected several old faces in the company, including Frowde (16). In the same newspaper the following week, it was reported that; —

'Frowde, as clown, is what a Yankee would call 'a whole team and a horse to spare' (17).

Towards the end of the season there, when James was due to have a benefit performance, it was opined that; —

'On Thursday evening, Frowde . . . being a favourite of some standing in the town . . . will be honoured with a bumper' (18).

The prediction was correct. At his benefit, the building was packed in every part, ' . . . The cry was, still they come' (19). The circus closed on Saturday 26 March 1856. Frowde travelled with the company to Worcester, Gloucester, Dursley, Minchinhampton, Tetbury, Malmesbury, Hereford, Ross, Gloucester again in mid-July, Cambridge and other venues during the summer tenting season.

CLOWN AND BIBLE

For the 1856 Christmas season, the circus visited Chester, opening on 6 October. Here, Frowde's benefit night was fixed for Tuesday 2 December. The local newspaper was confident that the circus would again be overcrowded, and added; —

'Mr. Frowde has gained very many friends among our citizens, and, apart from being the "favourite" of the company, out of the ring he is much respected. The attendance on Tuesday will confirm our estimate, we have no doubt' (20).

Frowde's appearance in the ring was invariably greeted with acclamations and in private life his company was sought by the most respectable members of the community. While in Chester, several gentlemen presented him with a very valuable Bible. This was made the subject of an eulogistic paragraph in *Punch*, in which the recipient and the donors were equally complimented, the one for deserving such a testimonial, the others for their liberal appreciation of his conduct as a clown, Christian, and gentleman (21). The item in *Punch* read as follows; —

'A Christmas Box for a Good Clown. Of all the cases of benevolence ever recorded at this time of year, who can recollect one so truly seasonal as the following, related by the *Cheltenham Examiner*?

'Singular Testimonial to a Clown. It may interest some of our readers to learn the following: —Among the most prominent performers at Hengler's Circus, which has just closed at Chester, was Frowde, the mimic. We feel much pleased to hear that his conduct in private life has attracted so much honour and justice as his mimicry in the ring, for having been noticed as a constant attendant on Church services, three Clergymen of that ancient city have presented him with a very handsome Bible'. No doubt there are some people, in whose dictionary fun means sin, and laughter is defined to be the expression of wickedness, who may consider that a clown, as such, has no more business with a Bible than a toad has with a side pocket' (22).

After Chester, for the New Year, Frowde accompanied the circus to Bradford. It was commented that; —

'Mr. Frowde the jester, has already earned for himself a fair name and his lively sallies are ever received with hearty peals of laughter' (23).

Referring to the performance on 9 February in Bradford, the *Era* reported; —

'Mr. Frowde, the same evening, for the first time here appeared as the Red man; his contortions are unequalled by any living acrobat that we know. (24).

EVENTS IN LIVERPOOL

Opening in Liverpool, on 16 March 1857, for Hengler's first season there (but not the last!), Frowde was described as 'The Grimaldi of the Ring', to distinguish him from Joseph Grimaldi the father of clowns (Joey's!) who appeared in theatres but never in a circus. 'One of the Four Best Clowns in the World, of the Company'

(25). Charles Millward recalled many years later, how; —

'The leading clown of the company was Jim Frowde, one of the best Joey's of his day. I have always considered him second only to the great Wallett as an original wit and humorist. Frowde speedily became an enormous favourite, and his benefit was one of the great events of the season, and always a bumper. Being a good-looking young fellow, Jim had a host of female admirers, and he used to be daily inundated with love letters and souvenirs d'amour' (26).

During April 1857, Frowde also appeared in 'Poses du Manteau; or, The Spanish Girl', with Madame Bridges (27). A review the following month reported; —

'Mynheer Frowde has an inexhaustible budget of fun. (28).

It was also recalled by Charles Millward how; —

'First, Frowde the Proud, with his occasional covert sneer at the audience, used to dress as near the original jester style as possible. Jim declined to descend, as a rule, to the ordinary circus clown, or to disguise his face otherwise than with a little rouge. By the way, alluding to his success with the ladies, did not Jim first marry the daughter of a 'late Rev. —', and did not the wedding take place at St. John's Church and the lady die in childbed in the first year of their marriage?' (29).

This sad afternote was indeed true. James had married Elizabeth, the youngest daughter of the Revd. Christopher Hayden, at St. John's, on 4 June 1857. She died in childbed in March 1858 (1).

Following his success at Hengler's first Grand Cirque Variete in Liverpool, James travelled with the company yet again to Chester, opening on 17 July 1857. Advertisements in the local press announced; —

'Wit, Humour and Philosophy, dispensed in the most precise manner, by the Inimitable Jester, Jim Frowde, whose local hits, pungent satire, and eccentric delineation, verify the saying that he is a wise man who well plays the Fool . . . Mr. Frowde stands 'number one' as the great performing Clown. To him also has been awarded the palm of virtue for his excellent *bon mots*, entirely chaste, Fun without Vulgarity' (30).

The short summer tour again included venues in Gloucestershire during August. As well as his role as clown and grotesque, James played equestrian parts.

James Frowde's young wife Elizabeth died, on 14 March 1858, whilst he was still at Hengler's, back in Liverpool. Elizabeth Frowde and her baby daughter were buried in a vault near the west door of St. John's Church there (1). In spite of the shock and his tragic loss, he travelled with the Company on its summer tour. In York, on 26 and 27 April, Frowde was the only one named of 'Three Great Clowns!!' mentioned in the advance publicity (31). Throughout the year, wherever the company went, local reviews singled out Frowde's merits. Back in Liverpool for the 1858-59 season, which must have been particularly difficult for him, James Frowde headed 'The Corps of Jesters' (32) and it was reported that; —

' . . . Mr. Frowde represents himself. He is the most laughter-provoking clown, the most astonishing of grotesques' (33).

All the reviews praised James Frowde and mentioned his name ahead of other clowns with the company. But for James this was not enough. He needed a change. Perhaps the association of Hengler's with Liverpool, and unhappy memories, prompted him to embark on a venture away from both.

When Hengler's Circus left Sheffield, on 17 June 1859, returning to Liverpool, James was not with them. He had left his uncle Charles Hengler's employ and set up on his own, with the assistance of, or in partnership with, another uncle, John Henderson.

FROWDE ON HIS OWN ACCOUNT

'Frowde's Cirque Modele' opened in Sheffield only weeks after leaving his uncle Charles' circus.

'On Monday evening last (11 July 1859), Mr. J. Frowde (who was so great a favourite as clown to Mr. Charles Hengler's troupe . . .) opened the spacious building in Duke Street, Sheffield, with a first class troupe of equestrians, etc. (34).

While Hengler's visited Cheltenham, Reading and the Medway towns, Frowde's company remained in Sheffield. The public was appreciative of James's efforts, and to mark this; —

' . . . Mr. Jim Frowde . . . was presented with a cane, beautifully mounted with a silver bust of himself, accompanied by a suitable inscription' (35).

Frowde's Circus in Sheffield closed on Wednesday 21 September. At this point, James seems to have handed over control to his uncle John Henderson, for 'Henderson's Cirque Variete' opened in Foregate Street, Chester, on Saturday 24 September 1859, with Mr. J. H. Frowde billed as clown. 'the universal favourite' (36).

In Chester, within a newly erected wooden building capable of seating 1,600 people, an entertainment seldom excelled was given to the delight of a crowded house. At this venue of previous successes; —

'The entrance of Frowde was a signal for a loud outburst of cheering, and he and Henderson were called before the house to bow their acknowledgements . . . Frowde continually evoked uncontrollable bursts of laughter' (37).

However, Hengler's Grand Cirque Variete was scheduled to appear at the Chester Linen Hall on October 5 and 6 and Charles Hengler found it necessary to declare in his advance publicity that he had no connection with any other place of amusement (36). It is difficult to discern the truth of the situation as Charles' young brother John M. Hengler was the Acting Manager of Henderson's Grand Cirque! Were the two companies coordinating their routes?

At Henderson's Circus, a new French scene, entitled 'The Sentinel and the Bear', with Mr. Frowde as the conscript sentinel, was pronounced a triumphant success (38). A special day performance was arranged for 15 October 1859, in honour of the Queen's visit to Chester, 'terminating at a quarter to four allowing ample time to meet the Royal Train' (39). The popular and irresistible Mr. J. H. Frowde was the star at every performance.

Towards the end of October, Frowde and Louis, in a mock duel act, were pronounced more laughable than ever (38). A night of particular fun at Henderson's Circus was promised for Wednesday November 30, the farewell night, and for the benefit of Mr. J. H. Frowde, 'comedian, posture master and equilibrist' (40). It must have been in Chester, on this occasion, that James' second wife Susan first saw him, at the circus (5).

In late February 1860, 'J. H. Frowde, the Merry Son of Momus', returned to Liverpool and reappeared at Hengler's Circus, ' . . . where the absurd pleasantries of Mr. Frowde are still highly relished' (41). But he was no longer a permanent member of the company and was anxious to move on. In September he announced; —

'Mr. Jim Frowde begs to thank the managers who responded to his advertisement in last week's *Era* and informs them that he is re-engaged with Mr. Henderson' (42).

John Henderson continued as an independent circus proprietor until his untimely death in 1867 (43), but although James Frowde was with him initially, in 1860, he later appeared at Cooke's Royal National Circus, as 'clown and popular grotesque', still touring the principal towns along the south coast at the end of October 1861 (44). But his second marriage was soon to change his life in more ways than one, for he virtually retired from circus life.

SULTAN'S TEAM OF SNOW-WHITE TURKISH HORSES

Together with other Carriages, Horses, Ponies, &c. &c.

The various Scenes of the Circus will follow in one continued stream, from beginning to end, with a dash here and there of the sparkling and Brilliant WIT of the two best CLOWNS of the day.

FUNNY FRANKS, the INIMITABLE GROTESQUE!

Will pour forth his BUDGET OF MIRTH, likewise

MYNHEER FROWDE, the great Clown & Contortionist,

Who will, during the Evening's Entertainments,

DRIVE HIS STUD OF REAL CATS!

SEVERAL TIMES ROUND THE CIRCLE.

Here we go, Gallop and Trot,

Tibby, Tabby, Toddle, and Tot.

The **SPLENDID BAND** will be found FULL and EFFICIENT:
LEADER, MR. SPRAKE.



Fragment of a Poster, 3315 Cheltenham Art Gallery (by Permission)

FROWDE IN CHELTENHAM

As mentioned above, the Cheltenham crowds in particular were always fond of Jim Frowde, and he was fond of Cheltenham. 'Such was the strength of their affection that it once took twelve policemen to see him safely to the railway station. On another occasion, when he returned after recovery from a slight accident, and was recognised in the stalls of the theatre, he was greeted with so much enthusiasm that the performance had to be stopped and he was forced to go on the stage and thank the audience for his reception' (45).

A recollection of Frowde included the following; —

'Frowde gave one of his last performances in the ring of a circus in Cheltenham, on which occasion he wore the costume of the old court jesters, with cap and bells complete, and with his face undisfigured with paint like the ordinary clowns. James Frowde loved the profession of his adoption, in which his rare natural talent enabled him to become famous' (45).

MARRIAGE AND RETIREMENT TO GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Widower James Frowde re-married, to Susan Mary, the daughter of the Revd. William Harrison, at the parish church in Leamington Spa, on 9 October 1861 (1). His presence at Cooke's later in the month (44), must have been due to a long-standing engagement.

After a long circus career, he soon exchanged it for the duties and pleasures of country life, purchasing three estates in the neighbourhood of Newent, Gloucestershire. The estates were those of the Hayes, Walden Court and Aylesmore (45). At the time he was aged just thirty. According to one of his granddaughters, when her grand-mother fell in love with James Frowde she was wealthy enough to enable him to retire, buy the estates in Gloucestershire, and enjoy life to the full as a flourishing agriculturist (4). It must have been about this time that James Frowde became a Freemason. His uncle Charles Hengler, who died in 1887, had become a Freemason in 1850, initiated as a member of the Palatine Lodge in Sunderland.

Sometime in the late 1860s, it was written that; —

'There is hardly any buffoon to be found now (at Hengler's) equal to one who used to belong to this circus, and whose name... was Frowde. People used to go three or four times a week merely to hear the wit and drollery of this gentleman, who is now, or was not many years ago, flourishing in Gloucestershire' (46).

It cannot have been without regret that James Frowde exchanged one life for another, but James and Susan soon had a new joint interest, a family of their own. Their son James Charles William was born at Cheltenham, on 18 December 1862, and Michael Wilson at the Hayes, Newent, on 8 February 1864. Honora Mary Exmouth (Nora) was also born at the Hayes, on 16 June 1866, and Emma Langworthy (Emmie) at Southends, Newent, on 1 April 1868 (1).

It was in 1866 that James first occupied the Chair of the Zetland Masonic Lodge in Gloucester. In 1868 he was P.S.G.D., Hereford, and in 1874 he was Worshipful Master of the Eastnor Lodge, Ledbury, near to his Newent home (45).

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

Although James had left the circus and settled for farming pursuits and family life in Gloucestershire, his personality had not changed. He was still a clown at heart, with an irrepressible sense of fun and the absurd, yet with the strong religious conviction which he had held since childhood. His 'talking clown' experience, and his colloquial skills, seem to have equipped him for the role of preacher. In addition, it was said that few laymen had a more intimate knowledge of the scriptures. James soon had a mission-room erected at Walden Court, obtained the Bishop's licence as a lay reader, and regularly preached there, '... exhorting all sinners to repentance' (45). The contrast between his natural jollity and grave religious beliefs led many people to regard him as eccentric, if not shocking. It was said that; —

'He showed an extraordinary levity at times, in the free and easy way in which he treated sacred subjects. In his little chapel at Walden Court, which his domestics were solemnly required to attend, he often delivered good evangelical discourses, and wound up inviting the farmers and labourers to "eat, drink and be merry". Pipes were brought, the "admiral" was tapped, as in the Navy, and a comic song or two was joined in' (45).

On one occasion he had been preaching against swearing and had described its enormities in vigorous terms. But he had just had some grass mowed, and after the service when he saw some boys larking about in the middle of it, he forgot his recent admonitions and spoke out. Another story of Frowde's chapel tells how

'An opera company... visited Gloucester, and drove over to Walden Court Chapel, where Frowde conducted his service as usual. When the hymn was given out, Frowde leaned over the pulpit and exclaimed, "Now my boys, sing for your lives!"... and the locals listened with open mouths, for they had never heard such singing before' (45).

People in and around Gloucester soon came to see that the underlying features of Frowde's character were goodness of heart, a genial disposition, a light-hearted benevolence and an honest motive. James Frowde's versatility must have remained startling however.

'In one moment he could exhibit the fun, humour and facetiousness of the circus clown... and in the transition of a second he could assume the majestic air, the dignity and gravity of the sage, and descant reverently of ethics and Christian philosophy... One day he was a preacher, and his mouth was full of texts and homilies, and the next his seriousness was abated... (45).

People came to the conclusion that they could happily put up with Frowde, and found a fund of amusement in the stories told of him and his eccentricities. His joviality went a great way to establishing his popularity (45).

TOWARDS OLD AGE

James Frowde relinquished his farming pursuits in about 1892, left his estates in Newent, and went to live in Gloucester, first at Monument House and afterwards in College Green. He loved Gloucester Cathedral, and said that his main reason for moving to Gloucester was to be near it. He was a regular attendant at services there (45, 47).

Being one of the earliest members of the Zetland (No. 1005) Lodge, James Frowde had twice held the chair of Gloucester's Zetland Lodge, and now pursued his interest in Freemasonry to the full.

James was also a man with military instincts. He made many an after-dinner speech on the glories of a soldier's life in his characteristic style (45). He was much sought after as an after-dinner speaker (5). James was a keen member of the Gloucestershire Artillery Volunteers of which he had been Captain Commanding from 1878 until his retirement in 1892 (47). It was on his retirement that he was granted the title of Honorary Major, and he rejoiced in the title of Major Frowde.

THE END

Following the death of his wife in 1895, James took rooms next door to the Bishop Hooper House in Westgate Street. His landlady there was Mrs. Reeve. The summer of 1899 was unusually hot and although this caused him some distress, he still took regular exercise walking or on his tricycle, until about the end of July. His friends then heard that he was stricken with a serious illness. From then on he never left his rooms and it was there that he died, on the afternoon of Monday 28 August.

The funeral service was held at St. Mary de Lode's church, with Masonic brethren in attendance. The vicar and Chaplain of the Zetland Lodge officiated. The interment was at Gloucester Cemetery, reached by Westgate, Eastgate and Barton Streets. The cortege consisted of an open hearse and three carriages containing the chief mourners — James' children, Charles and his wife Dora, Michael, Nora and Emmie Frowde, with some close friends. Of the Hengler family, only the Hawkins of Staunton were present. An additional eight carriages carried the Masonic brethren and some other friends. James Frowde was laid to rest beside his beloved Susan (45). The administration of James Frowde's estate, granted to his eldest son, showed his effects to have been valued at just over £115.

EPILOGUE

James Frowde left behind him many papers relating to his public career, in the care of his son Charles (45). The first part of his autobiography was published (4) but the family's permission to publish later parts was withdrawn (48). The Hengler family, also at nearby Newent, probably objected to Frowde's recollections of his time spent with them being broadcast to the wide world. The present whereabouts of James Frowde's papers, including the rest of his autobiography, is unknown. Fortunately for us the first part was published.

SOURCES:

- (1) Hoopell, Rev. R. E., **Devonshire Association, Reports and Transactions**, 24, 441-457 (1892). See also **Devon Notes and Queries**, 2, 124 (1903).
- (2) **Gloucestershire History**, 3, 4-5 (1989).
- (3) Playbill, dated 22 October 1816, E. A. Dawes Collection.
- (4) **Gloucester Journal**, 9 September 1899.
- (5) Letter from Molly Frowde to Geoffrey Sterne, dated 1 October 1976. In the possession of Barbara Robinson.
- (6) **The Scotsman**, 20 May 1863.
- (7) **Stamford Mercury**, 3 September 1847.
- (8) **Era**, 17 November 1850.
- (9) "Bay", World's fair, November 1938.
- (10) "A.A.", **ibid**, 8 July 1939.
- (11) Playbill, British Library.
- (12) **Chester Chronicle**, 11 March 1854.
- (13) Poster, Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museums Collection, item 3115.
- (14) Playbill, E. 15.
- (15) **Era**, 6 January 1857, p.10, c.3.
- (16) **Derby Mercury**, 16 January 1856.
- (17) **ibid**, 23 January 1856.
- (18) **ibid**, 27 February 1856.
- (19) **ibid**, 5 March 1856.
- (20) **Chester Chronicle**, 29 November 1856.
- (21) Frost, T., **Circus Life and Circus Celebrities**, Chatto and Windus, (London, 1881).
- (22) **Punch**, 3 January 1857.
- (23) **Era**, 4 January 1857.
- (24) **ibid**, 15 February 1857.
- (25) **Liverpool Alblon**, 16 March 1857.
- (26) **Liverpool Citizen**, 12 September 1888.
- (27) **Liverpool Daily Post**, 25 April 1857.
- (28) **Liverpool Alblon**, 4 May 1857.
- (29) **Liverpool Citizen**, 26 September 1888.
- (30) **Chester Chronicle**, 11 July 1857.
- (31) **Yorkshire Gazette**, 24 April 1858.
- (32) **Liverpool Daily Post**, 14 October 1858.
- (33) **Liverpool Journal**, 18 December 1858.
- (34) **Era**, 17 July 1857.
- (35) **ibid**, 31 July 1859.
- (36) **Chester Chronicle**, 1 October 1859.
- (37) **Era**, 2 October 1859.
- (38) **ibid**, 8 October 1859.
- (39) **ibid**, 28 October 1859.
- (40) **ibid**, 26 November 1859.
- (41) **Liverpool Alblon**, 16 April 1860.
- (42) **Era**, 16 September 1860.
- (43) Turner, J. M., 'King Pole' . . .
- (44) **Era**, 3 November 1861.
- (45) **Gloucester Journal**, 2 September 1899.
- (46) Undated cutting, found with Guy Little Collection of photographs, Theatre Museum.
- (47) **Illustrated London News**, 2 September 1899.
- (48) **Gloucester Journal**, 16 September 1899.