

LOCAL HISTORY IN WINCHCOMBE (Ten Years of the Gloucester Street History Group)

By Rob White

December 2000 marked the tenth anniversary of the Gloucester Street History Group (GSHG), which was formed following a series of lectures about the history of Winchcombe by Bryan Jerrard in the autumn of 1990. Our first few years were documented in an earlier article¹ so the focus of this paper is the second five years.



GLOUCESTER STREET HISTORY
GROUP, WINCHCOMBE

Although there have been some membership changes, nevertheless the nucleus of the group has mainly stayed the same. We now have a core of seven members who regularly attend the bi-monthly meetings, which are held in various locations in the Winchcombe Area.

Although our initial focus was Gloucester Street, over the years it has gradually evolved into a broad interest in finding out what life was like in bygone times in the adjacent parishes of Winchcombe and Sudeley.

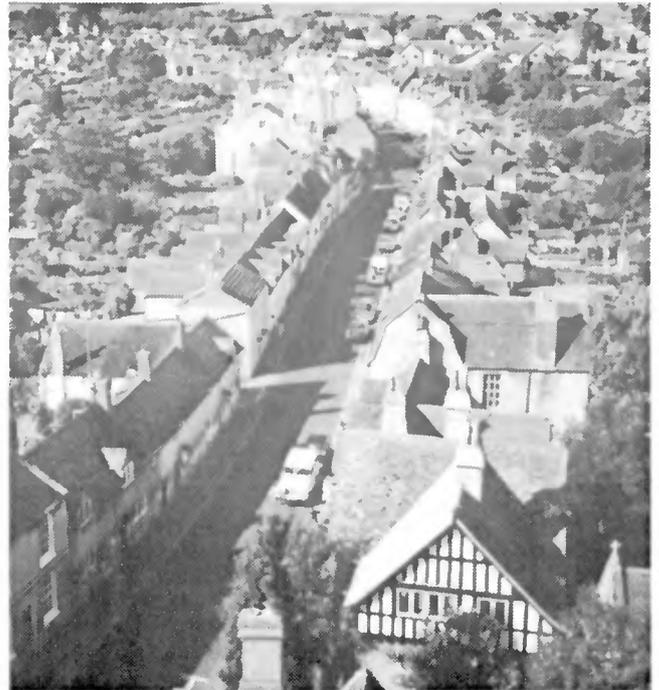
WINCHCOMBE MONUMENTAL INSCRIPTION SURVEY

Perhaps the most significant event has been the publication of our Monumental Inscription survey. This was several years in the making and has incorporated details from surveys done in previous centuries (including Bigland) as well as our own field survey of the churchyard. The memorials inside the church were also recorded, and maps were prepared indicating the location of each (internal and external) memorial stone. The survey was recorded as an Access database, containing over 200 pages, and because of its vast size only two copies have been printed, which were presented to St Peter's church and Winchcombe museum.

BERT BUTLER

Although our main period of interest is 1750 to 1920 we were delighted by the stories, in books and on tapes, of Bert Butler (1906-1998), a well-known Winchcombe raconteur. Bert started his working life as a gardener at Sudeley Castle in

1919, and after plying his trade at stately homes in different parts of the country he finished his working life at Postlip Paper Mill. From the 1950s he wrote² and broadcast on BBC radio on a variety of local topics, from the sound of boots on Winchcombe streets, to the poverty suffered by the poorer members of the parish in the years after the Great War. But perhaps best of all was his revelation of the three great blessings for Winchcombe in the 1920s: the creation of the Womens Institute; the arrival of electricity, and the new-fangled radio / crystal sets which gave access to a whole new world - as well as helping to provide the right time!



View of Gloucester Street from Church Tower

RESEARCH AND WRITING

In recent years more items of interest have become available in Gloucestershire Record Office, for example, a large cache of documents deposited in 1997 after the death of a retired Winchcombe solicitor, Jack Smith Wood which, amongst other things, included wills plus a quantity of 18th and 19th century title deeds for several Winchcombe properties.

Other items, such as lists of Winchcombe residents in the 1522 Military Survey and the 1630s Easter Book, have been chanced upon, and various documents, including the Land Tax

Assessments (1776-1832), have now been made available in Gloucestershire Record Office on microfiche, thus making them more accessible for research purposes.

In addition, some old maps and plans³ of Winchcombe have been scrutinised which pre-date the 19th century Ordnance Survey. Notably Taylors 1777 map of Gloucestershire (indicating that the original name of Waterhatch Farm was French Farm), plus a 1783 plan of the manor of Sudeley, then belonging to Lord Rivers, showing all the field names in the parish. Another plan was of "*part of the demains (sic) of the Abbey of Winchcomb & Sudeley belonging to the Rt. Hon. Lord Frederick Montague*", and included Cosmore Lane, Town Lane, London Road, and Bowling Alley. None of these four street names exist today.

Although not primarily a research centre, Winchcombe museum has a number of recent acquisitions including pictures of the Old Mill (formerly at the bottom of Mill Lane and demolished in 1973), plus a raft of undated newspaper articles⁴ which are helping to shed more light on 19th century local events - especially as dates are attributed to them. One of these articles was about the father of John Oakey (a well-known local JP and author) who came to an untimely end in 1892 when he fell down a well in his Gloucester Street garden. Another long-term project was the transcribing of

MISSING MARRIAGES 1754 - 1812 (groom first)
Reeve / Curtis; Smith / Allen; Cull / Numan; Evans / Herbert; Barns / Tovey; Golden / Hervey; Merriman / Parker; Cooke / Hyett; Simons / Nap; Shipway / Wakefield; Payton / Timbrell; Sysum / Skinner; Greening / Jacksons; Tayler / Johnson; Stevens / Harvey; Trowton / Minchin?; Tovey / Mason; Jones / Townley; Harvey / Tandy; Kilby / Edwards; Clifford / Castle; Jones / Marshall; Staite / Woodford; Townley / Timbrell.

MISSING MARRIAGES 1813-37

Harrison / Tovey; Phillips / Staite; Aston / White; Taylor / Hopkins.

Winchcombe's (Hardwicke) marriages (1754-1837). This produced several items of interest, such as banns read for couples for whom no marriage has been found, (were they married elsewhere or did one party get cold feet?) It also led to the discovery of 24 Winchcombe marriages that are missing from the (pre. 1813) Phillimore printed register, and four that are not in the 1813-37 Gloucestershire Family History Society transcription. In addition, our interest in the

neighbouring parish of Sudeley Manor has led to the transcription of Sudeley's 18th century marriages⁵ - incorporating full (Hardwicke) details from 1754.

Many other fascinating nuggets have come to light. For example, Henry Hathaway was a Winchcombe convict transported to Australia in 1784 on the First Fleet⁶ In addition two Winchcombe men, Thomas Freeman and William Townley⁷ were hanged in Gloucester in 1788 and 1811 respectively for housebreaking and burglary. Although the idea of writing a book about Gloucester Street (or Winchcombe) had some appeal, in practice this would have been an immense undertaking. It became apparent that a more pragmatic approach would be to write about different facets of Winchcombe's history over the last 250 years. As a result, articles have been published by GSHG members about Winchcombe Railways (planned but not built)⁸ Winchcombe Museum⁹ The Plaisterers Arms¹⁰ Winchcombe Post Office¹¹ and The Poor of Winchcombe¹² Also, an original edition of the 1935 sale catalogue of Toddington Estate has been restored as well as some early 20th century photographs of Winchcombe¹³

Work is in progress on a variety of topics including Winchcombe's former railway station, local 19th century solicitors, former Winchcombe pubs, local 19th century census enumerators, and Winchcombe Abbey after the Reformation.

PROBLEMS

Issues which are difficult to resolve have sometimes been encountered. For example, in the month of October 1811 there was a peak of ten weddings held in Winchcombe parish church when the average was one or two per month at most. Although it is suspected that this nuptial peak might have a connection with soldiers returning from their regiments to marry their sweethearts - possibly with a link to the Napoleonic Wars - as yet we have found no hard evidence to support this.

In addition, references to "George Troughton

Geo. Troughton, Wicktorr

which lover" in late 18th century Court Leet documents¹⁴ and to "padlocks purchased for the Witches House", in the parish accounts for 1850¹⁵ has led to much head scratching. It is not yet

known whether these references have any links to the modern day Witch House in Gretton, a hamlet in Winchcombe parish.

Other problems result from several people with the same name being alive at the same time. For example, identifying the recipient of a charity garment by the name of William Parker in 1851 proved impossible after four men of the same name, between the ages of 31 and 70, were found to be living in Winchcombe parish in the 1851 census.

And whilst several of the older streets in Winchcombe have had more than one name over the centuries, two other 18th century streets have been encountered which thus far have proved impossible to locate: Schoolhouse Lane and School Lane¹⁶ (although its possible that they may be different references to the same street).

A NEW RESEARCH TOOL

The growth of the Internet in recent years has helped in two ways. First of all, it has made research easier with many new websites being of assistance to the local historian and genealogist. As well as generalist sites like the Public Record Office, Society of Genealogists, and Gloucestershire Family History, the GENUKI site for Gloucestershire

<http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/GLS/>, and especially Rosemary Parker's Winchcombe website

<http://pages.britishlibrary.net/winchcombe/index.html> have shown the kind of useful information that is available on-line.

Secondly, the Internet has made it so much easier, quicker, and cheaper to correspond - and exchange files - with people having similar interests, wherever in the world they might live.

THE FUTURE

As for the next five years, the formula will no doubt be more of the same, plus hopefully some unexpected finds. More parish register transcribing is in prospect and there are many more old documents about Winchcombe to delve into in Gloucestershire Record Office. Also, at the time of writing, the details of the 1901 census are eagerly awaited. Perhaps one day there might also be a Gloucester Street History Group website!

Finally, for anyone who may wonder what a local history society can offer that the extensive vaults

of the Gloucestershire Record Office cannot, I can only refer to the wealth of historical documents still in private hands, plus the irreplaceable knowledge of local residents. Many title deeds are held by property owners, particularly after their mortgage has been paid off, and the Gloucester Street History Group have often been able to use the information in local deeds, plus other records, to prepare individual house biographies for some Winchcombe properties. This is usually welcomed by the property owners, whilst the details in the title deeds would otherwise be unavailable to us.

But very often the best research tool is the information stored, not on paper, but in the memories of the older members of the community, who may be aware of local incidents that occurred before they were born, by virtue of things they remember being told by an earlier generation. Sadly, this valuable well of information is gradually becoming smaller as the years pass.

The Gloucester Street History Group (Winchcombe) comprises: Marion Allen, John Brooks, Barbara Edward, Tim Petchey, Alastair Robinson, Ruth Robinson, and Rob White. Any enquiries should be made to (E-Mail) rwwejw@talk21.com or to 14 Beech Avenue, Worcester, WR3 8PZ.

References

- 1 "Gloucester Street History Group (Winchcombe) - A Progress Report" by Rob White. Published in *Gloucestershire History* (1995).
- 2 Try *A Cotswold Ragbag*, published in 1984
- 3 All deposited in Gloucestershire Record Office (GRO).
- 4 Kindly donated by Teddy Adlard and Bob Milvain (grandsons of Edward Adlard, former owner of Postlip Mill).
- 5 GRO D2579 Box 26 - the original register (whereabouts unknown) having first been transcribed in 1894 by Thomas Webb, churchwarden.
- 6 *Transportees from Gloucestershire to Australia 1783-1842* Ed. Irene Wyatt (Bristol & Gloucs Arch Soc. 1988).
- 7 *Gloucester Journal*, 25 March 1811
- 8 *Winchcombe's Failed Railways* by Tim Petchey (Director of Winchcombe Railway Museum). Privately published (1997).
- 9 Winchcombe Folk & Police Museum: 1928-1999 by Barbara Edward (Curator of the Museum), in *Winchcombe: Our Home - Our Heritage*, by Winchcombe Project Group (2000).

- 10 "The Plaisterers Arms, Abbey Terrace, Winchcombe"
by Rob White, in *Gloucestershire Family History Society Journal* - June 2000.
- 11 "Winchcombe Post Office in the 19th century" by Rob
White, in *Gloucestershire Family History Society Journal* - June 2001.
- 12 "One Step from the Workhouse" by Rob White, Final
Project Report for Open University Course (DA301
Family & Community History). Published by OU on
CD-ROM (1997).
- 13 Both by Alastair Robinson.
- 14 GRO D2957 Box 27
- 15 GRO D1675 1/2
- 16 GRO D2202



A Horsefair in North Street, Wincoube, early 20th Century
Photograph restored by Alastair Robinson

[Image from front cover]