

1. Francis Barber c1742-1801

Former slave, valet, secretary and schoolmaster



Francis Barber was born on the Bathurst sugar plantation in Jamaica. As a Gold Coast Coromanti slave he was known as "Quashey". The date of his birth is unknown but likely to have been between 1735 and 1742. In 1749 Colonel Richard Bathurst sold the Orange River slave plantation and took Quashey to England as a favourite slave. There is speculation that he may even have been his son. Once in England where the legal status of enslaved people brought into the Kingdom was unclear, Bathurst had the boy baptised as Francis Barber. Bathurst then sent Francis to a village school in Barton, north Yorkshire close to Darlington. Two years later Bathurst's son, Dr Richard Bathurst who was a close friend of Samuel Johnson, on learning of the distress caused to the doctor by the sudden death of his wife "Tetty" in March 1752, sent Francis south to be valet to his friend.

In 1755 Colonel Richard Bathurst, by now residing in the Close at Lincoln Cathedral, died. His will not only contained the bequest of his estates in Jamaica to his friend Peter Sely, but included the following clause. "Also I give to Ffrancis Barber a negroe whom I brought from Jamaica aforesaid into England his freedom and twelve pounds". The remainder of his estate was left to his son Dr Richard Bathurst. The younger Bathurst had been born in Jamaica in 1722 on his father's estate but matriculated at Peterhouse, Cambridge being awarded his MB in 1745. In London he further studied medicine and became acquainted with Johnson. Johnson, who was vehemently opposed to slavery, wrote of him "My dear friend, Dr Bathurst declared he was glad that his father had left his affairs in total ruin, because, having no estate, he was not under the temptation of having slaves". Dr Richard Bathurst became an essayist,

but returned to the West Indies where he died of fever in 1762 whilst taking part in the siege of Havana.



In London Dr Johnson treated Francis like a son, calling him “Frank”; his duties were light, preparing refreshment, answering the door, serving at table and looking after Hodge, Johnson’s beloved cat. In 1755 on learning of his emancipation, he left Dr Johnson’s Gough Square home to become an apothecary’s assistant in Cheapside. Later in 1758 Francis joined the Navy, and Johnson, using his influential friend Tobias Smollett, procured his release. In 1760 back at Gough Square, with Johnson basking in the success of his recently published dictionary, Francis was now in a privileged position. Johnson ever keen to enhance his servant’s position in life, arranged for him to attend the Grammar School at Bishop’s Stortford, a once eminent educational establishment, and then under the direction of

Rev Joseph Clapp of Windhill House. Now in his, thirties Francis must have been a curious figure to the much younger pupils at the school and to the residents of the small market town.

It is not clear when Francis first arrived in Bishop’s Stortford, but it may have been as early as 1767. The historic site of the Grammar School was the corner of Wheat Hill (High Street) & Church Street, where a building very similar to Thaxted’s Guild House had stood, probably since the 15th Century. Known as the Market House it had been renovated in the 1690s with the schoolrooms being atop the open arched ground floor where traders were based. The famous library was on the opposite side of Wheat Hill close to where the police station would later be built. The Rev Clapp died suddenly in December 1767. In 1768 the condition of the Grammar School House was described as being a public nuisance and it was later demolished in 1770. Mrs Clapp saved the school by giving the boys accommodation and also holding lessons under the Rev Fowler at Windhill House until her death in 1781. It is evident that Francis Barber was staying with her in 1769 from the receipt book of John Phillips, the latter, for a new hat that he had purchased for 8s and 6d, with the line “Mr Barber at



Mrs Clapp's". During the five years he spent at the school Francis was not permitted to return to London for the holidays. Samuel Boswell, writing in his *Life of Dr Johnson*, stated "His sincere regard for Francis Barber, his faithful negro servant, made him so desirous of his further improvement, that he now placed him at a school at Bishop Stortford, in Hertfordshire. This humane attention does Johnson's heart much honour." During his time in Bishop's Stortford, Johnson corresponded frequently with Francis, on one occasion writing: "You can never be wise unless you love reading". One letter, dated 28 May 1768, reads: "Dear Francis, I have been very much out of order. I am glad to hear that you are well, and design to come soon to see you. I would have you stay at Mrs Clapp's for the present, till I can determine what we shall do. Be a good boy. My compliments to Mrs Clapp and to Mr Fowler. I am, Yours affectionately, Sam. Johnson". Francis Barber stayed with Mrs Clapp until 1772 when he returned to Dr Johnson. It is believed that the cost of his education was £300, which equates to £40,000 today. It is thought that the famous portrait of Francis Barber reproduced above was painted at this time and may have been the work of Sir Joshua Reynolds, the close friend of Dr Johnson.

Back in London with his benefactor Francis' life took a different turn. He married Betsy Ball on 28 January 1773 at St Dunstan's, Fleet Street. At Gough Square they produced three surviving children; their son being named Samuel. Dr Johnson died aged 75 on the 13 December 1784 and was buried in Westminster Abbey on the 20 December. His will was executed by his friends Sir Joshua Reynolds, Sir John Hawkins and Dr William Scott. After some legacies and debts had been paid, the bulk of the estate was left to the wife of Francis Barber and an annuity to Francis of £70. When Boswell came to write his "Life of Johnson" published in 1791, he relied heavily on Francis Barber's recollections, particularly the period before 1753 when Boswell came to know Johnson.

In 1786 following Dr Johnson's advice given whilst alive, the Barber family left London for Lichfield, Samuel Johnson's birthplace and where he had property. Francis spent his time "fishing, cultivating a few potatoes, and a little reading". The money from the trust set up to provide the annuity did not last and Francis was compelled to sell off his collection of Johnson memorabilia. He later set up a school at Burntwood, a small village near Lichfield, where he became the country's first black headmaster. Francis and Betsy Barber were the targets of insults particularly from some of Johnson's friends and biographers, Hawkins and Hester Piozzi, who were critical of Barber's marriage to a white woman. In Lichfield he was elected a "Dozener" by his neighbours. Illness overtook Francis and in a state of near destitution Francis was admitted to the infirmary in Stafford, where he died on the 13 January 1801 following an unsuccessful operation, having been in the hospital for a month. He was later buried in Stafford. His family remained in the Lichfield area where his descendants live today.

On 29th March 2023, a plaque commemorating Francis Barber and his remarkable life was unveiled by his four times great-grandchildren, Cedric and Sandra Barber. The ceremony took place at the Cruck House in Stowe Street, Lichfield where the plaque will be mounted on a wall which Barber and his family would have seen as they passed by every day.

FRANCIS BARBER

c 1742 – 1801

**One of Britain's first Black schoolmasters,
for many years the friend and servant of
Samuel Johnson, who made him his heir.**

Lived on Stowe Street 1786 – 93

and was an elected

local official.”

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Image

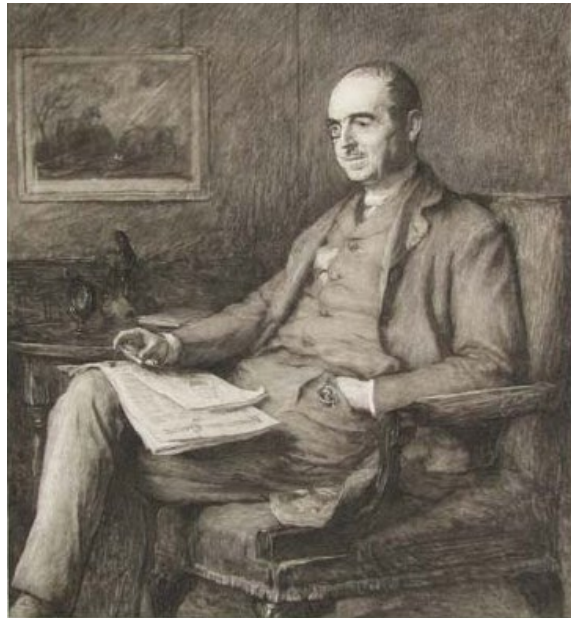
Portrait thought to be of Joseph Barber, and attributed by some to Sir Joshua Reynolds

TD Howard-Smith
August 2024

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2. Sir Walter Gilbey Bt. 1831-1914

Wine and Spirit Merchant, Horse Breeder and Philanthropist



Walter Gilbey was born on 2 May 1831 at 11, Windhill, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire to Henry Gilbey (1790–1842) and Elizabeth nee Bailey (1794-1869). Henry Gilbey had been the landlord of the Bell at Stansted, but following the economic crisis after 1815 at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, he turned to owning stage coaches. The mercantile classes had become more mobile in those years than before, and the stage coach business was proving to be lucrative. Bishop's Stortford's growth following the opening of the River Stort Navigation in 1769 had led to an influx of people, particularly from the new middle class. Coaches ran from London to Cambridge via Hockerill and were available for very many other places such as Walden, Thaxted, Dunmow, Ware and Hertford. Henry started a new service from the George Inn in Bishop's Stortford to the Bull at Aldgate, at the edge of the City of London in 1824. Coaches would run daily in summer and every other day in winter. At the same time, he moved his already large family to the Links in Windhill, where the coach departed for the George. He drove the coach himself from time to time. He battled through a snowstorm on one famous occasion in 1836 which was immortalised in a poem.



It was at The Links that Walter Gilbey was born, but the swift construction of the Northern and Eastern Railway, which had already reached Spellbrook by 1839, forced Henry to reconsider his chosen line of work. He decided to take up inn-keeping again, and this time at Hockerill close to where passengers would be arriving at the new terminus. By 1841 he was running the Red Lion at Hockerill and with his older brother, Daniel, who had been the proprietor of the White Bear at Stansted, he and his family had started a new life. Walter by this time was attending the old Grammar School in the High Street, but regularly visited his sister Caroline, who had married James Blyth, grocer of Chelmsford in 1839. Walter left the Grammar School which had fallen on difficult times and completed the last four years of his education at Chelmsford Grammar School, a period which left him with bitter memories of the "ill-usage" he suffered there, a sentiment he retained to the end of his life.

In September 1842 his father Henry died whilst on a visit to his daughter Caroline at Chelmsford. He was only 52. His widow was left with little or no wealth and seven children to look after but continued to run the Red Lion until 1852 when she married Robert Percival, the former owner and landlord of the Crown at Hockerill. After leaving school, Walter had a number of jobs, working for a surveyor at Tring and later became a Parliamentary Agent's clerk in Westminster. With his brothers Henry and Alfred both of whom were already engaged in the wine trade, the three brothers lodged with their sister Emily Thomas in Westminster, who by then was recently widowed with a small child to bring up. After two years in the Crimea with his brother Alfred, where they worked in the Army pay department, the brothers returned to London in 1856, where on their wine merchant brother Henry's advice and with his financial support, they leased a couple of cellars in Berwick Street on the corner of Oxford Street in early 1857 and started to import wine. They concentrated on Rhenish wine from the Cape in South Africa which attracted very light import duties compared to other wines. By advertising widely across the entire country W. & A. Gilbey proved to be hugely successful and later by selling by the bottle rather than by the case, they soon broke into an as yet untapped mass market. By using railways to deliver their products around the country and allowing customers to pick up orders at local railway stations, with empty bottles returned the same way and with an extensive network of agents of grocers and chemists exclusively selling their products country-wide, they became extremely successful within a very short period. In 1858 they opened branches in Dublin and Edinburgh. From the beginning, fortified wines and spirits were also part of the Gilbey range of products with London Gin being an early own brand. By 1859 they claimed to be the largest wine and spirits importer in the country supplying 15,000 customers. In 1860 the Chancellor of the Exchequer, William Gladstone, reduced the duty on French wine to the same level as colonial wines. From this moment the brothers were able to trade profitably in French wine. In 1865 their older brother Henry joined the business as a partner. In 1867 the three brothers secured the nearby Pantheon theatre and concert hall in Oxford Street for their headquarters.

Privately Walter's life had also changed. In 1858 Walter married Ellen Parish (1832-1896). She was the daughter of John Parish, and was brought up at the White Horse Inn in North Street where her father was landlord. Doubtless with both families being in the innkeeping trade, Walter and Ellen were already well acquainted. They married on 3 November 1858 at

St James, Piccadilly. Initially they lived in Oxford Street, where their first son Walter was born, but later moved to Upper Bedford Place where Arthur, Tresham, Sebastian and Maud Gilbey were all born. In 1866 they left London for Stansted, where Walter had taken out a lease on Hargrave House. Walter and Ellen's final four children were born here, and it was also here that Walter developed his passion for country pursuits with livestock and equine breeding being his main interests. In 1871 he took first prize at the Royal Agricultural Show at Wolverhampton where his cows won first and third prizes and the same success was repeated every year until 1874, when the lease on Hargrave House lapsed for rebuilding purposes, and he sold his herd. In 1868 Walter purchased the Manor of Stortford along with 950 acres of land. After the Hargrave House lease had lapsed, he moved to Brighton for a few years before returning at the end of the 1870s to the area, this time to Elsenham Hall, where he could indulge his love of livestock and now in particular horse breeding, taking First Prize in 1881 for stallions under 4 years with "Spark", a shire horse which was twice champion at the Agricultural Hall in London.

The business too prospered greatly during this period. In 1875 the brothers purchased Chateau Loudenne, a wine producing estate in St-Yzans-de Medoc, Bordeaux, France, an old but bountiful chateau estate, which the brothers anglicised by adding a park. Chateau Loudenne was awarded in 1887 the gold medal for the best cultivated vineyard in the claret producing districts by the French government. In 1887, in order to secure a supply of malt whisky for their blends, the brothers purchased the Glen Spey Distillery. In 1879 Alfred passed away and Walter's older brother Henry died in 1893, at which time the partnership was dissolved and a limited company formed with Walter as Chairman. The partnership and later the board of W & A Gilbey comprised many members of the Gilbey family. Apart from the three Gilbey brothers, the brothers' nephews James and Henry Blyth, sons of his sister Caroline Gilbey, were directors The brothers' cousin on their mother's side, Henry Grinling; and the two husbands of the Gilbey's youngest sisters Charlotte and Fanny, Henry and Charles Gold were also added to the Board. It truly was a family business. The Gilbey business continued to grow and remained in family hands until 1962 when a merger with United Wine Traders created International Distillers and Vintners, and today forms the spirits division of Diageo.



Back in Elsenham, where he created a stud farm, Walter became the founder and President of the Shire Horse Society, and later President of the Royal Agricultural Society. In 1888 he published a brochure entitled "The Old English War Horse, or the Great Horse as it appears at intervals in contemporary coins and pictures during the centuries of its development into the Shire Horse." In

1889 he started his own fruit growing business and in 1893 he added a jam factory on the Elsenham estate. In 1895 he gave land in Rye Street to aid the construction of the town's first hospital. From 1890 he purchased large amounts of land east of the railway line in

Bishop's Stortford to create the Hockerill Park estate. A baronetcy was conferred on Walter by Queen Victoria in June 1893, in recognition of his services to horse breeding and agriculture. At this time his company was paying over £1m per annum in excise duty to the Exchequer. A half day's holiday was declared in Bishop's Stortford to celebrate the honour, and 250 guests sat down to dinner in the Great Hall in South Street with the great man. During the after-dinner speeches Sir Walter said " It was over 60 years since I first saw the light in Bishop Stortford, and my heart has retained an unwavering allegiance to my native town. One of my greatest joys has been realised when I was able to come back after an absence of some years, and make my home amid the scenes where my childhood was spent, and among associations which would be ever dear to me". At the same time Sir Walter gave a tea and entertainment party to 1,400 aged poor and children of the town, in keeping with his philanthropic spirit. During his time at Elsenham he was made a JP for both Hertfordshire and Essex and Deputy Lieutenant of Essex.

It should be noted that Sir Walter was no stranger to royalty. The Prince of Wales was a



frequent visitor to Elsenham Hall to discuss equine matters with Sir Walter. Locally Sir Walter was involved in numerous other ventures, the Working Men's Club, the steam laundry in Bishop's Stortford, the Gas and Light Company, and the Golf Club, He also purchased the River Stort Navigation in 1898 just to ensure its survival, as no owner had ever been able to turn it into a profitable concern. In 1905 he paid for the erection of the first two blocks of alms houses in South Street, known as Kings Cottages. The other three blocks paid for by the Vander Meulen family, however the Gilbey Trust maintains to this day the whole of these alms houses and is one of Sir Walter's most enduring legacies. He made the ownership of the market rights and tolls, as Lord of the Manor, over to the Urban District

Council in 1908.



In November 1896 he wife Ellen, after being unwell for some period of time, died whilst at Brighton aged 63. Her funeral at St Michael's in Bishop's Stortford three days later was well attended with 100 mourners coming by a special train from London. As Lord of the Manor of Elsenham, Sir Walter was ever mindful of his duties. He gave land for the cemetery and built the lych-gate at its entrance. He also built the original Village Hall and presented a canopied water pump house in the High Street as a memorial to his wife later in the year that she died, over the communal village well.

Horses and their welfare would continue to be a prevailing interest in his life. Sir Walter had at various times occupied the Presidential chair of the Shire Horse Society, the Hackney Horse Society, the Polo Pony Society, the Shetland Pony Society, the Smithfield Club, the Hunters' Improvement Society and the Essex Agricultural Society. Sir Walter wrote many other books on his favourite subjects about twenty volumes in all came from his pen and

were published by Messrs. Vinton & Co., London. Among these were his large works on "Animal Painters (three volumes), " Life of 'George Stubbs." "Farm Live Stock 100 Years Ago," " The Royal Family and Agriculture." He continued to exhibit especially in Europe, where he exhibited at Hamburg and Brussels in 1884, 1886 and 1897. In recognition the King of the Belgians made him a Chevalier of the Order of Leopold.

He was the instigator of the Elsenham to Thaxted branch line which opened in 1913, but



before he died, he had come to the conclusion he should leave Elsenham Hall, which he leased despite owning 3000 acres of nearby land. He devised a plan for a new grand home on the edge of Bishop's Stortford close to Great Havers. He purchased land and planned a new house at Cox's Farm at the top of Havers Lane, with drives approaching from three directions. Lodge houses

were built and one avenue was laid out, which exists today and is known as The Firs. The outbreak of World War One followed by Sir Walter's death in November 1914 brought any future construction work to a halt. All that remains is one of the gate houses at 52 Thorley Lane.

Sir Walter died 12th November 1914 at Elsenham Hall aged 83. He had been unwell for some time before his death, with newspapers giving day by day updates on his health. As might be imagined his funeral was a huge affair and the press devoted many column inches to reporting it in the greatest detail. His funeral was held at St Michael's four days later and the attendance list comprised the great and the good from London, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire and Essex. His coffin was made from timbers from the Elsenham estate and fabricated by his workers. It was reported that the first message of condolence received at Elsenham Hall was from the King. He was laid to rest at the cemetery in the town next to his wife. His estate was valued at £425,000 gross, and his son Henry Walter on his death inherited his baronetcy and from that point was known as Sir Walter Gilbey in honour of his late father.

William Gladstone said this to Sir Walter shortly before his own death in 1894:-"I may truly say that I have, always regarded the proceedings of your firm with a peculiar interest. You have been, as far as I am able to form an opinion, in an eminent sense, and in a degree with which no one can compete, the openers of the wine trade. The process has, I trust, been satisfactory to yourselves. It has certainly been one highly beneficial to the country, and you stand outside and above the rank of ordinary commercial houses"

His legacy was at the time of his death to be seen and felt by all within the Bishop's Stortford and Elsenham area. Today it is less so but there are many reminders of the great man. The Hockerill Park estate we know as Warwick Road and the adjoining avenues, the Almshouses, Kings Cottages, the Firs, and many more. The name lives on in the roads Gilbey Avenue in Stortford and Gilbey Crescent in Stansted, the Gilbey Trust, with a Gilbey on the board still maintains the fabric of the Kings Cottages. He was a man of his time, a force in the wine trade and a sympathetic and charitable benefactor in his home town.

Images

Henry Gilbey

The Links, Windhill in the 19th C

Elsenham Hall

Sir Walter in Half Acres / The Chantry

Ellen Gilbey

The gate and lodge at Thorley Lane,

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3. Mrs Tresham Gilbey (nee Annie Barker) 1865-1941. She was one of the first women magistrates in the country, and was active in local societies

Mrs Gilbey had the distinction of being one of the first women in the country to be appointed a Justice of the Peace (J.P.), after an initial batch of seven in Dec 1919, following the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act. She served as a magistrate in Bishop's Stortford from August 1920 until her death and for many years was the only woman magistrate in this area. She joined her husband on the bench – he had been a J.P. since about 1902. Her father was also a J.P. and, at the time of his death in 1914, chairman of the bench. In 1920, the Magistrates Court was next to the old police station, on Church Street, before moving to the new police building at the corner of Windhill and Basbow Lane, in 1933.

Mrs Gilbey was also a pillar of the local community, active in many societies, including chair of the local Nursing Association, local secretary for the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, founding President of the Women's branch of the British Legion, President of the Women's Hockey Club and President of the Women's Liberal Association. She was also active in committees for St Michael's Church, the local rural deanery and the diocese, and served on the management committees for Hockerill Teacher Training College and St Michael's School.

She was born Annie Sarah Barker in Bayswater, London, in 1865, the only daughter of John Barker and his wife Ann. Her father, later a baronet, was a pioneer of the modern department store, as founder of Barkers of Kensington. In 1886, she married Tresham Gilbey, third son of Sir Walter Gilbey, at St Jude's Church, South Kensington. By 1890, the family had moved from London to Bishop's Stortford where the Gilbeys lived with Annie's parents at their house, The Grange, Rye Street. In 1906, after the death of her mother in 1903, they moved to Dane O'Coys Road, where a new house, Whitehall, had been built for them by Sir John. She would live there for the rest of her life. Annie had previously rejected in 1904, a first house built for them, Dane House, at the top of Hadham Road, and never lived there.

Mrs Gilbey presented an open-air swimming pool to the town, in memory of her father, to replace river bathing. This was opened in 1924. It was situated at the back of what is now Jackson Square, about where the car park now is. It remained in use until the original Grange Paddocks pool opened, in the early 1970's.

Mrs Gilbey died in September 1941 and was buried in Bishops Stortford Cemetery. She was survived by her husband who died in 1947 and is buried alongside her. They had no children.

Although frequently appearing alongside her husband who was also active in local society, and always referred to as "Mrs Tresham Gilbey", as was the manner of the day, or, as "the daughter of the late Sir John Barker", Mrs Gilbey was a substantial figure in her own right. Together they formed one of the town's first power couples.

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MARRIED FIFTY YEARS: MR.
AND MRS. TRESHAM GILBEY

Chris Connell

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4. George Edward Pritchett 1824-1912

Noted architect designing and renovating many churches in the local area. Also, a respected local antiquarian and electrical engineer. Designed the "Old Post Office" in 1890.

George Edward Pritchett (1824-1912) was an architect practising in Bishop's Stortford from about 1846, specialising in designing new churches and restoring / extending existing churches, mainly in the Gothic style. Examples of new churches include the original All Saints church at Hockerill (since burnt down), the Cemetery chapels and lodge, St Thomas' Church, Perry Green and, perhaps the best example, St James' Church, High Wych and associated school, vicarage and mission church at Allen's Green. Restorations and extensions include St. Mary's Church, Therfield, St Giles' Church, Great Hallingbury, St Mary's Church, Little Hallingbury, and Holy Trinity Church, Hatfield Heath. He was also responsible for designing many of the new village schools in the local area, including Great and Little Hallingbury, Rickling Green, Farnham and Ugley. He also designed several buildings in the centre of Bishop's Stortford, including the old Post Office, Market Square (now Saffron Building Society), the revived High School, High St (now a hairdresser's salon) and Hawke's brewery office, North Street (now Edwards Interiors), as well as his own home, Oak Hall, Chantry Road and Hargrave House, Stansted Mountfitchet. Although he maintained an office in the City of London, most of his commissions were in the local area. In several instances, he was overlooked in favour of more recognised architects, more active regionally, suggesting perhaps a reputation as a competent rather than an exceptional architect.

Pritchett was a noted local antiquarian and historian, being appointed a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and contributing several papers to the Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society. These including drawings he had done, reflecting a talented artist.

He was also a self-taught technophile, an Associate of the Institute of Electrical Engineers, interested in heating and ventilating apparatus, early telephony and x-rays, and the holder of six patents. He installed the first domestic and business lighting in the town, at his home and the brewery office on North Street, respectively.

Pritchett was born at The Charterhouse, Islington where his father was reader. The Charterhouse was a charitable foundation established in 1611 by Thomas Sutton on the site of an old Carthusian monastery and included alms houses / hospital as well as a school and chapel. The family moved to Little Hallingbury in 1835 when his father was appointed rector, so beginning a long association with the area. He also maintained a life-long association with The Charterhouse, having attend school there for a year and then being appointed surveyor for their estates in Essex and adjoining counties.

Although Pritchett was active across of number of diverse fields, there is no evidence of any formal education or training beyond a year at Charterhouse School aged 10 and a short period as an apprentice to a builder in Cambridge aged about 17. It is thus perhaps remarkable that he was able to excel across a diverse range fields, receiving professional recognition in each.

Chris Connell, 12 Sep 2024

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5. Baron Thomas Dimsdale 1712-1800. Eminent Physician, Inoculator, Banker and Politician



Thomas Dimsdale was born in Theydon Gernon, Essex to a family of medical doctors. Initially trained by his father, he later studied at Kings College London, and the University of Aberdeen. He took a particular interest in inoculation against smallpox. Smallpox was a very dangerous disease which killed large numbers of people, in many epidemics, and could lead to blindness and scarring in those who survived it. Estimates are that 500,000 Europeans died from it in the 18th century. Inoculation involved giving patients a mild form of small pox by introducing matter from the skin of an infected person, a relatively successful procedure.

In 1767, Thomas Dimsdale published a treatise: “The present method of inoculating for the smallpox.” This treatise was widely read, translated into several languages, and may have come to the attention of Empress Catherine of Russia who was very interested in modernising medicine in her realm. Thomas Dinsdale was invited to travel to St Petersburg to treat the Empress and her court. His experiences in Russia have been the subject of a recent book by Lucy Ward. *The Empress and the English Doctor*. (Oneworld 2022) . In 1796, Dr Edward Jenner discovered a vaccine for smallpox using cowpox which completely replaced inoculation against smallpox which has since been eradicated.

The Dimsdale family had other connections with Bishop’s Stortford. Thomas’s grandfather, Robert, a surgeon, was a resident. He had been the companion of William Penn in America but returned to practice in Bishop’s Stortford in 1689. Robert died in 1713. Elizabeth’s father, Joseph, also a surgeon, and a resident of the town, died aged 36 when Elizabeth was 12 years old. Growing up, she became part of Thomas’s household. She married Thomas in 1779, after the death of his second wife.

According to local historian, Violet Sparrow, Thomas Dimsdale “was an old boy of the Grammar School. He returned to Stortford to rescue books and portraits from the old Grammar School during its rebuilding over the market at the corner of High Street and Church Street.”

Thomas Dimsdale: Banker and Member of Parliament

By about 1761 Thomas Dimsdale had entered into the private banking partnership of Dimsdale, Archer & Byde in Cornhill, London. In 1774 he was one of two partners who broke away and reformed the partnership as Staples, Baron Dimsdale, Son & Co.

Dimsdale himself retired from the bank around 1776. His sons succeeded him, and the bank remained a Dimsdale family enterprise for generations until eventually, in 1891, it merged with Prescott, Cave, Buxton, Loder & Co to form what became Prescott's Bank

Political career

Thomas Dimsdale was elected to Parliament as the member for Hertford in 1780. In his 10 years as an MP, he is only known to have made one speech, in June 1783. He was re-elected in 1784, but did not stand in 1790, and was succeeded by his son.

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Thomas Dimsdale NatWest Heritage Group

Marie Rhodes

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6. John Laybank Glasscock (junior) 1852-1929

Antiquarian, Local Historian, Builder and Architect



John Laybank Glasscock is remembered firstly as a local and family historian and secondly as a builder and local politician. He was born on 6 May 1852 in South Street, Bishop's Stortford, the son of John Laybank Glasscock 1828-1896, builder. The name Glasscock has been associated with Bishop's Stortford since the 16th century, however this branch of the family originated in Fyfield, Essex in the 17th century. This fact was clearly known to John Laybank Glasscock, as he named his home in Grange Road, "Fyfield"

After three generations of Fyfield-born ancestors, Thomas Glasscock 1768-1838 was born in Sheering, Essex. He married Sarah Laybank 1772-1852 in Sheering in 1793 and shortly afterwards moved to Bishop's Stortford. They had a large family with their son Thomas being born in 1802. Thomas junior in time became a mason and slater living in South Street initially, and founding the Glasscock company in 1827 when he started to trade in timber, stone and slate from the Dells Wharf site off Dell Lane. He married Sarah Nottage in 1827 and they had four children baptised at Water Lane Independent. Their elder son was John Laybank Glasscock 1828-1895, who had a difficult start in life when he accidentally killed his younger brother, Thomas 1830-1850, with a pistol he had just purchased in the town. This event was reported nationally. Three years earlier his father Thomas had died at the age of 44, leaving John senior, at 18, the owner and manager of a building firm employing 60 people. After the shooting incident John married Jemima Armes of Kings Lynn in 1851. They only had one child, a son who they naturally called John Laybank Glasscock, in June 1852. The building side of his business thrived and in 1864 John senior leased new premises in the Causeway for that purpose that would be retained for many years.

The Glasscock family moved frequently over this period from Hockerill Street to Hadham Road and Rye Street, close to where their brickfields lay. The company also had brickfields at Collins Cross in later years. The company was, by 1871, employing over 90 men. With non-conformist parents it was therefore no surprise that young John Laybank Glasscock junior would be educated at the Bishop's Stortford Collegiate School in Maze Green Road, later known as the Non-conformist Grammar School (Bishop's Stortford College today), where he excelled both academically and athletically. After leaving school he joined his father in business in 1869. It should be noted that the similarly large building firm of Henry Glasscock

of Rye Street, active at this time, was in no way related to JL Glasscock and son, either through family or commercial connections.

On 4 October 1879 John Laybank Glasscock junior married Florence Mann in Lamorbey, Kent, and they set up home in Portland Road where their eldest son was born in 1880, not surprisingly named John Laybank Glasscock. He too would be educated at the Nonconformist Grammar School where he was awarded the Johns scholarship. In 1884 the business was renamed JL Glasscock and Son, and the premises in the Causeway were purchased, however from an early age John junior had developed a love of antiquarian learning and research and this would prove to be his most enduring achievement. In 1887 John senior, whilst on a shopping trip to London, was accidentally run over by a carriage and sustained serious injury to his arm which was later amputated. In 1889 John senior was nominated for the newly formed Hertfordshire County Council, having served on the local Board for many years, but his injury in 1887 precluded him from working. It was at this time that his son John took over the business. John senior died at his home in Grange Road in 1895, where his widow Jemima would continue to live until her death in 1918.

John junior's love of local history led from discovering Roman remains to his exhaustive research into the records of St Michael's, which he transcribed and published in January 1882. This book, published by Arthur Boardman, traced the history of the church through records from 1332-1881. What makes this publication so outstanding to local historians are the copious notes that he made, giving accurate historical facts to accompany the transcribed records. An example is his description of Betty Aynsworth's Reindeer Inn, frequented by Samuel Pepys who followed her from Cambridge, after her ejection there. Glasscock drew heavily on Pepys' diary to demonstrate to a genteel readership, what actually occurred at this establishment. The book also included monumental inscriptions and gravestone monuments. Between Glasscock's work and the later work of W B Gerish, both of whom were founder members of the East Herts Archaeology Society, the transcriptions can be studied today thanks to the indexing work of both men's works completed by the Hertfordshire Family History Society. The book led to John junior giving lectures on the subject of Stortford in the 17th and 18th centuries. Now a noted antiquarian, he lectured on famous Stortfordians and people associated with the town. These included John Norton, the founder of the most noted church in Boston, New England, John Dayne, the founder of the Dayne Scholarship at Harvard University, Lord Capel, of Civil War fame, Major-General Dennison, of the United States Army, Sir George Jackson, who made the river Stort navigable, and after whom Capt. Cook, the circumnavigator, who was a page boy in the service of Jackson's sister in Yorkshire, named Port Jackson in New South Wales and Port Jackson in New Zealand. He lectured on buildings such as the Black Lion Inn which his firm had restored in 1889, the White Horse Inn, The Grapes and the Boars Head Inn which were all of great antiquity. In these lectures he was assisted by George Pritchett the architect.

In the 1880s John junior and his family moved from Portland Road to a house in Grange Road which he named "Fyfield". He would remain in Grange Road for the rest of his life.

In 1895 the firm constructed an indoor swimming pool at the Non-Conformist Grammar School, the second such pool in the country. By now the firm were both architects and builders. One of their prominent buildings during this time was the new Baptist Chapel in Newtown Road in 1900, his father having restored the old chapel in 1869 cladding it in Portland cement. Other churches such as the rebuilding of St Mary's in Stansted Mountfitchet was completed in 1889 by the firm. They also won tenders for malting kilns for the major maltsters such as Taylors.



As the millennium changed John junior was increasingly involved in politics being elected chairman of the Bishop's Stortford Urban District Council from 1908-1910, and vice chairman for the following two years. He spent £1900 of ratepayers' money on acquiring the Castle site off the Causeway for the use of the town, from the Taylor family. His wife duly opened the grounds in April 1909. As the following decade progressed John junior became less enamoured of his building work and decided after the death of his wife Florence in 1911 that he would sell the company. In 1912 he sold the business to Daniel Robinson, a builder from Stansted and A G Edwards, an architect. He continued to work mainly for brewery companies, such as Benskins. The Glasscock building business continued without him and his son who had been involved also left to become a surveyor.



John junior remarried in August 1913, Josephine Adolphine Leonie Schaeffer, daughter of an American father and a French mother. Born in Le Havre she married Dr John Champ, and had emigrated to New South Wales. Upon her husband's death she returned to England and later joined her new husband at Grange Road. John junior was an inveterate newspaper letter writer, on such diverse subjects as Betty Aynsworth's complicity in a 1677 murder at Manuden, opposition to the proposed bridge to the War Memorial in 1921, He was active in the Bishop's Stortford Horticultural Society and the Bowling Club. He was a freemason of St Michael's lodge from 1889. He died 18 March 1929, at his home in Grange Road. His funeral took place on 22 March 1929 and was well attended. A monument to the Glasscock family erected in St Michael's Churchyard, commemorates his grandparents Thomas and Sarah, his uncle Thomas, and his father John Laybank Glasscock, but does not commemorate John junior. It was most unusual for a non-conformist to have such a prominent monument in the churchyard particularly after the new cemetery had been opened in 1855. His grave at the old cemetery has recently had the exclusive rights terminated in 2016

Images – John Laybank Glasscock (courtesy of Mike James)

Glasscock Monument St Michael's churchyard, Area K North West of the North Porch

Text sourced from Morning Chronicle, Herts & Essex Observer, Essex Newsmen, Chelmsford Chronicle and Hertford Mercury .

TD Howard-Smith

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7. Sir George Jackson, Bt. 1725-1822

Creator and Owner of the Stort Navigation

Admiralty Judge Advocate



Sir George Duckett (formerly Jackson), baronet, naval administrator and judge, was born 24 October 1725, in Yorkshire. He was the third son of George Jackson (1688–1758) of Hill House, Richmond, Yorkshire, and Hannah, daughter of William Ward of Guisborough, Yorkshire. George entered the Navy Office as clerk to the Clerk of the Acts in 1743. In 1755 he became chief clerk to the Clerk of the Acts and from 1758 to 1766 was Assistant Clerk of the Acts. On the recommendation of Prime Minister William Pitt, he was transferred to the Admiralty as Second Secretary to the Board and First Clerk of the Marine Department. In 1768 he was made Judge Advocate of the fleet, a position he held until his death, responsible for overseeing the legal work of the Navy and Courts Martial. He also served as a Member of Parliament for Weymouth and Melcombe Regis (1786–1788), and Colchester (1788-1796).



At the age of 19 in 1745, George married his cousin Mary Ward at St Benet's Paul's Wharf, London, and between them they had three daughters. His wife Mary Jackson died in 1754 in London. On 9th September 1775 at St Margarets, Westminster, George was married to Grace Neale, widow of Robert Neale of Shaw House Wilts. They had a son, George, born in 1777 and a daughter Esther, born in 1779. In June 1791 George Jackson was created a baronet, Sir George Jackson, Bt. of Hartham House. On 3rd February 1797, aged 72, he inherited the Hartham estate of his second wife's maternal uncle, Thomas Duckett, at Corsham, Wiltshire. However, under the terms of will, Sir George Jackson, Bt, had to assume the name and Arms of that family by

royal licence in order to secure the inheritance. From that time, he therefore became known as Sir George Duckett, Bt, of Hartham House Bt. His wife Grace died in 1798 at 15 Upper Grosvenor Street where he later died 15 December 1822 in his 98th year. In accordance with his wishes, he was buried at St Michel's. Bishops Stortford on 24 December 1822.



His greatest achievement was the creation of the **Stort Navigation**, a canalisation project requiring the construction of locks on the river Stort, as well as rerouting and dredging works. This was after an earlier attempt at raising the capital required to construct the Navigation had failed. Thomas Adderly's original scheme was formalised by Act of Parliament in 1759, but by 1763 it was evident the capital raising was not sufficient and the project faltered. A second Act was passed in 1766 giving the Commissioners 5 years to complete the project. Although the Commissioners still included Thomas

Adderly, three men assumed control of the project, George Jackson, Charles Dingley, and William Masterson. Work commenced on 24 September 1766 under the direction of Thomas Yeoman, with construction contracted to William Glyn and his son and their gangs of navvies. George Jackson appears to have been the driving force behind the project and under his leadership the work was swiftly completed.

In October 1769, a mere eight years after the first commercial canal in England, the Bridgewater, was opened, Thomas Adderly's brainchild, the River Stort Navigation was completed by George Jackson after just three years of construction. With a total length of 13.75 miles and built at an alleged cost of £100,000¹, the Navigation dredged, widened and in some places rerouted the original river, allowing commercial river traffic from London to reach Bishop's Stortford's Town Mill and the two new large adjacent basins, via Feildes Weir on the Lee. The construction of 15 locks on the Stort Navigation was the means by which river traffic could be raised 27.6 meters above the level of the River Lee. A further 16 locks on the Lee were constructed shortly after the Stort Navigation was completed and would allow even



larger vessels to transit the Lee to Limehouse.

It should also be noted that 50 bridges were either constructed or rebuilt to allow barges and their attendant towing horses to pass as stipulated under the Act. The major engineering work on the Navigation involved the complete re-routing of the Navigation away from the ancient river course at South Mill, Spellbrook, Hallingbury, Pishiobury, Hunsdon and Roydon. At other locations around the mills,

At other locations around the mills,

islands were created at Sawbridgeworth, Sheering, Harlow, Latton, Netteswell (Burnt Mill), Parndon and Roydon. All of the locks on the Stort were turf-sided except for Harlow Mill lock and Brick lock, which as the name suggests were constructed of brick. Oak, elm and white oak was used in the construction of the gates, as well as the lining of the lock chambers. Watertightness was ensured by “puddling”, the lining of the canalised sections of the Navigation and lock chambers with pounded clay, a local geological formation in great abundance in the Stort valley. The 15 locks were constructed to the same dimensions, 90 feet by 13 ½ feet, which would enable multiple barge movements. Each lock required a lock-keeper and lock-keepers’ cottages were constructed for this purpose. George Jackson was held in such high esteem that the Lock Keepers’ cottages displayed a badge or door plaque bearing his initials.

On 24 October 1769 the Navigation was officially opened when two barges laden with five hundred dignitaries arrived in Terminus Basin. They were followed by the first barge load of cargo, 19 tons of coal. There followed a celebratory party in North Street which was according to some reports attended by between 3,000 and 6,000 people. Newspaper reports of the time suggest the celebrations nearly got out of control but this was averted. Thomas Yeoman proclaimed *“Now the town of Bishops Stortford is open to all the ports of the world”*. Meanwhile George Jackson and his party of 100 retired to the George, where a ball was held that evening. The “Stort Dinner” would become an annual celebration hosted by Sir George Jackson and his heir Sir George Duckett, held at the George and after its completion in 1829 the Corn Exchange.



The next day the Navigation was open for business. George Jackson enjoyed his investment buying out his co-investors and building Wharf House next to Terminus basin where he could stay whilst visiting the town. The Navigation would always struggle to be profitable for its owner, whereas the millers, maltsters and barge-owners were able to make very large profits from the trade they brought to the Navigation and

the town. Commodities being carried upstream were principally coal, coke, lumber and timber, bricks and slate, iron and machinery. Goods being transported downstream were principally malt, wheat, barley, rye and beans, oats, meal and flour, as well as milling products such as oil cake. The new barges built specifically for the Stort trade were up to 70 feet in length and could carry 60 tons, whilst drawing only 2 feet of water. The Stort/Lee Navigations allowed for sailing barges as can be seen in the picture above.

The Stort Navigation was instrumental in attracting new wealth to the town. From the moment it opened for business new money streamed into the town. Maltings, breweries, iron foundries, timber yards and brick works proliferated, so much so that the town swiftly became the largest malting centre in the country. With the new industries came the middle-class professions of law and medicine which also prospered and grew. Labour required housing and so workers’ cottages built from local bricks made in Stortford’s now coal-fired brick kilns that had sprung up in the town. Newtown was rebuilt and became the main hub of workers’

accommodation. Slate, brick and imported timber would become the main construction material, and coal would become the fuel of choice for many.



In 1787 George Jackson purchased his fellow shareholders' shares and became sole shareholder. The Navigation was heavily mortgaged, but an inheritance allowed George Jackson to redeem his outstanding loans and was able to pass on the Navigation in its entirety on his death in 1822 to his son Sir George Duckett, Bt. In Bishop's Stortford, both his surnames are remembered. In Duckett's Wharf, a large housing and office development in South Street, and in the town's Jackson Square shopping centre, as well as a pub with the name Port Jackson. His name is also commemorated in the Antipodes as Cape Jackson in New Zealand and Port Jackson in New South Wales, Australia.

Both were named in his honour by his protégé, Captain James Cook, who set sail in the Endeavour in 1768 to chart the Southern Ocean. James Cook's father worked for the Jackson family in Yorkshire and James was employed as a stable boy. George Jackson encouraged James to join the Royal Navy which he did in 1743.

Although George Jackson rarely stayed at Wharf House, coming mainly to attend the annual "Stort Dinner", he had an abiding love of the town and his greatest wish was to be laid to rest here, and so it came to pass. He is remembered as being the creator and owner of what would be one of the most momentous causes of change in the town's fortunes and he, one of its greatest admirers.

The images used in this piece are:

1. Sir George Jackson c 1775
2. Hallingbury Mill River course diversion
3. Spellbrook Lock c 1900
4. Wharf House, Causeway c 1870
5. Map of the town centre 1894

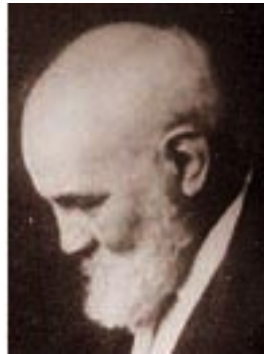
The text on the River Stort Navigation is taken from the author's current book (in process of being written) 1769 – The Year that changed Bishop's Stortford – TD Howard-Smith 2025

TD Howard-Smith

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8. Joseph Dorrington Day 1858-1937 Builder, Brickmaker and Monumental Mason



Joseph Dorrington Day was born in Gaston Green, Little Hallingbury on 2nd December 1858 to parents James and Emma Day. His father was a farmer later taking over Bursteads Farm in the hamlet, and his mother was the daughter of farmer Samuel Dorrington and his wife Sarah of Little Hallingbury. Joseph was the fourth of five children, his older brother George later turned to baking as well as farming and would go on to found the bakery in Knight Street in Sawbridgeworth. He was a JP and lived above the bakery. After passing away in 1917 the bakery would later be acquired by his cousin's son Ernest Dorrington in 1919. Dorringtons is still owned by the family and has 16 shops in the area.

With two elder brothers farming and baking, Joseph became an apprentice stone mason, living at Gaston Green and working under his master monumental stonemason Abraham Haselgrove in South Street, Bishop's Stortford. Abraham passed away aged 40 in 1881. By this time Joseph had finished his apprenticeship and worked under Abraham's wife who traded on, but by 1883 she had gone into business with Joseph, under the name Haselgrove and Day. This arrangement lasted until 1889 at which point Joseph was trading under his own name.



In December 1881, Joseph married Catherine Byars at the Independent Chapel in Hatfield Heath. They would go on to have five children. Joseph was a lifelong teetotaler and would promote abstinence from alcohol for his entire life. In 1887 he was elected chairman of the Total Abstinence Society, and in 1890 was appointed to the Vestry Board in the town overseeing burials for the poor. Early in his life he had

connections to the Quakers, creating a drinking fountain for the burial ground in Newtown Road in 1893 but was a Congregationalist and sustained a long relationship with the church in Water Lane becoming a deacon and later elder.

Joseph's early work was primarily linked to churches and monuments. He received special attention for the marble pulpit he carved for St Mary's Harlow in 1886. Many of the tombstones and monuments he created can still be seen in the old cemetery in Bishop's Stortford and the quality of this work remains undiminished. His work was varied creating six cottages in Barrells Down Road in 1895, a drinking fountain in Northgate End in 1898 and a marble dairy parlour for Daisy, the Countess of Warwick in 1906. In 1908 he won a contract to construct a new men's ward for the Union Workhouse Infirmary. By the 1890s he had started to make his own bricks initially owning brick grounds in Rye Street and later at Collins Cross. Building commissions followed as well as his own land development projects. Around 1900 he teamed up with draper Harry Laughner and between them they purchased the land that would become Maple Avenue off the Hadham Road. Many of these houses would be retained as leasehold properties, a common practice for the time. It was whilst constructing a series of lily ponds out of natural springs in the area that in 1909 Joseph's workers came across the skeletal remains of an ancient horse that created a national sensation in the press when it was suggested that the horse might be Palaeolithic. The skeleton was exhibited in the Natural History Museum, before being returned, with the modern view being that the remains are of an iron age or bronze age equine. Today the remains are back with the Bishop's Stortford Museum where their age is being ascertained for a possible mounted exhibit. Joseph retained ownership of the property where the bones were found until his death in 1937.

Joseph's stone work can still be seen around the town today. The stonework and exquisite carving on the front of Hawkes Brewery offices in North Street in 1889 are evident today on what is now Edwards Interiors. Joseph competed for and won large construction work tenders for the Hertfordshire & Essex High School for Girls in Warwick Road in 1910 and a new Boarding House for Bishop's Stortford College in 1913. Sadly, the old Post Office in South Street completed in 1921 was demolished in the 1990s. He worked with eminent local



architect George Pritchett F.S.A on a number of projects including St James Church, High Wych and the Hawkes Offices in North Street, now occupied by Edwards Interiors.

By 1903 Joseph had opened a branch office in Cambridge, where one of his sons would later be based. In a twist of fate, his employee, Frederick Argent, received a Humane Society medal for saving a drowning child from the river Cam. Two years later Joseph's son Arthur and his fiancée Violet Handscomb, daughter of fellow Stortford builder Albert Handscomb, were involved in a tragic accident on the river Cam when a passenger ferry overturned and

three people drowned including Arthur's fiancée. Further offices in Stansted were opened in 1905. Throughout his long life in Bishop's Stortford, home for the Day family was 100 South Street which Joseph built and which remains to this day. It was here that he had his workshop and yard, as well as the photographic laboratory he built for his daughter Daisy. Joseph's wife, Catharine died in 1926 and Joseph followed her in 1937.

The monumental masonry business of J Day and Son continues today under the same name although the ownership changed many years ago, and currently trades from Twyford Road.

Images

100 South Street

Hertfordshire & Essex High School for Girls

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9. Daisy Day F.R.P.S. 1888-1983 "The Cecil Beaton of Bishop's Stortford"



Daisy Day was born in South Street, Bishop's Stortford, at the home of her parents, monumental mason Joseph Dorrington Day 1859-1937 and his wife Catharine nee Byars 1858-1926. She was the second of five children that the couple would have. Her father would become one of the town's most prolific builders of large public and smaller private properties, as well as a large scale brickmaker.

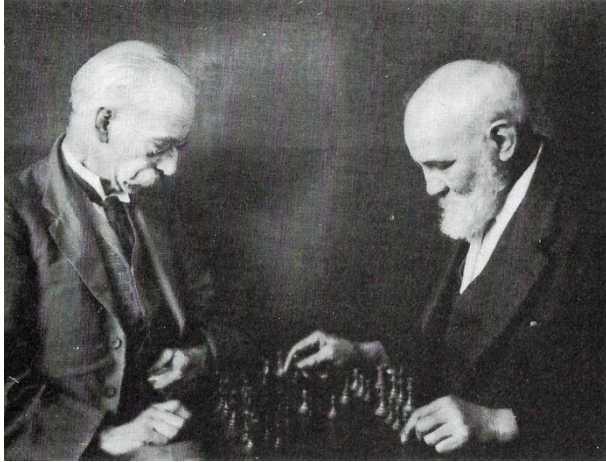


Daisy lived for over half her life at 100 South Street, the family home and also the site of her father's yard and business. Daisy studied Art at the Essex School of Art and exhibited her work on dinner table decorations and flower arranging in Stortford and Hertford in her twenties. In June 1913, Daisy won first prize for Gesso, in the Artistic Crafts section at the Hertfordshire Art Society Exhibition.

By 1921 Daisy now a photographer had already become an employer with her photographic studio built for her by her father at 99 South Street. Her father was not keen on her chosen career but was generous in supporting her. She was a prolific photographer and was soon exhibiting first in South Street, and later at the Drill Hall in Market Square. She achieved great renown as a portrait photographer in the 1920s.

In September 1931 Daisy exhibited at the annual exhibition of British Photography at the Princes Gallery, Piccadilly. In September 1933 Daisy was awarded the bronze medal at the International Kunstphotographische Ausstellung in Luzern. She also had seven photographs in the Exhibition of Modern Portraiture at the Royal Institute Galleries, Piccadilly, including one in each of the sections "Typical British Girl," "Problem Pictures," and "Old Masters."

An Associate of the Royal Photographic Society, in January 1934 Daisy was elected Vice President of the Professional Photographers Association, the second lady to hold this office. In May 1936 she was elected a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society, in recognition of her many successes in the photographic world. She was one of the first women to be so



honoured. In September 1936 Daisy exhibited at the 1936 Exhibition of camera portraits in London. It was at this time that she became known locally as the Cecil Beaton of Bishop's Stortford, particularly after she had the Belgian Royal Family sit for her. She was in time made President of the Portrait Section of the Royal Photographic Society such was the esteem in which she was held. In 1948 her studio in South Street was taken over by Alan Little. In retirement she was a frequent judge for competitions

run by the Bishop's Stortford Camera Club. She moved to Sandle Road after the War and it was there that she lived until her death on the 9th May 1983, aged 95. In common with her father, she made generous bequests in her will to the United Reform Church, the Band of Hope, the Little Hallingbury Mission Hall and the Temperance Council for Christian Churches.

Images

Photographs by Daisy Day shown are from "Yesterdays Stortford" by Vi Sparrow 1981

1. Child Study
2. Chess Study of her father and friend Mr Carver

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Elsie May Barrett 1888-1947

First Lady Councillor and Chairman of Bishop's Stortford Urban District Council



Elsie May Barrett was the fourth daughter of Alfred Slapps Barrett and his wife Eliza Ann Dodd. Her mother was the daughter of Charles Dodd 1807-1880, a grocer and clothier of North Street, whose shop would eventually become the home of Holland and Barrett, which today is the premises of the HSBC bank. Charles' father, James Dodd 1774-1843, had occupied the same premises as grocer and clothier in North Street from the eighteenth century. Alfred's father Robert Barrett was a major china and glass dealer in Cambridge. Alfred trained in Cambridge as a grocer and in 1870 went into business with William Holland who was also working in Cambridge as a grocer. Together they set up in business in North Street, Bishop's Stortford, when Alfred Barrett married Elizabeth Dodd in 1877. By this time Charles Dodd had retired and sold his business to Alfred Barrett and William Holland. Alfred and Eliza would later set up home in Chantry Road where they would continue to live until their deaths in 1933.

Elsie May Barrett was born at their home "Chantry Villa" on 4 September 1888. Educated locally, she spent much of her early adult life abroad, in Germany, Hungary and France. She was at one time secretary to the Hon. Dorothy Paget, a well-known race-horse owner. In 1933 her father died and she purchased a plot of land in neighbouring Thornfield Road where she designed and constructed a contemporary home which would be her home with her sisters until her death in 1947.



Politically Elsie was a Liberal and a member of the Committee of Local Liberal Associations. In 1934 she first stood for election to the Bishop's Stortford Urban District Council, which was the authority responsible for setting rates and local governance. Elections were held triennially for a body of 15 councillors. which in that year was elected from a candidate list

of 24. In her open letter to the electorate, she mentioned she came from a family with a connection to the town dating back 150 years and would concentrate her efforts on the “working-class housing question and the enforcement of the Town Planning Act”. Her nomination as the first lady councillor was supported by a good selection of town worthies, such as Arthur Boardman, Ernest Duchesne, Mrs Gammie, H L Price (headmaster of the College), Mrs Sworder and H Stanley Tee. Duly elected, she was the first lady member of the council in Bishop’s Stortford, although the Herts and Essex Observer remarked “ a spice of novelty, so far as Bishop’s Stortford is concerned, is provided in the nomination of a lady candidate. The Sawbridgeworth Council has had two lady members for the past three years and each has done good service”. Elsie Barratt would go on to serve as councillor until just before her death in 1947. In 1940 she was elected vice chairman of the council. By convention the position of Chairman would fall to the Vice Chairman every two years but in Elsie’s case she was side- stepped both in 1942 and 1944, to the dismay of her fellow councillor, Stanley Tee. She eventually became the first lady Chairman in 1946, and also in that year became the first lady to be elected to Hertfordshire County Council, representing Bishop’s Stortford Western Division.

She did not live long enough to enjoy these positions. Following some months of illness, she did not seek re-election in 1947 to the Urban District Council, and died at her home in Thornfield Road on 28 March 1947, a few hours before the election. Her death also triggered a by-election for the County Council seat.

During her membership of the Council she served on most of the committees and in the early days of the War took a great interest in the British Restaurant, the communal feeding centre situated behind South Street, as well as the A.R.P. (Air Raid Precautions). She was a member of Bishop's Stortford Guardians Committee and took a great interest in the welfare of the old people at Haymeads. Whilst working with local children she was instrumental in the creation of the Bishop's Stortford Nursery School and was heavily involved of the East Herts Education Committee. She was connected with the Woman's Section of the Royal British Legion, treasurer of the Stortford branch for eight years and vice-chairman at the time of her death. She was instrumental in the formation of two Townswomen's Guilds, and for more than ten years she was the local representative of the Herts Society for the Blind. A life-long member of the Congregational Church, to which she left £500 in her will, she opened her house and garden at the disposal of many organisations of all denominations. During the war she entertained about 400 African-American soldiers and in 1945 entertained 400 returning Gurkha prisoners of war. In 1945 she received the degree of B.Sc. (Economics) from London University.

In her will she left £500 to the Bishop’s Stortford Urban District Council “for an object of lasting character”. In January 1952 the Bishop’s Stortford and District Blind People’s Club was renamed the “Elsie Barrett Club” and in due course the Club would meet regularly in the Elsie Barrett Room at the Markwell Pavilion in the Castle Gardens. Her funeral was heavily attended with mourners from across the social and political spectrum. She was a trailblazer for women’s representation in local politics at the highest level and achieved much in a relatively short life.

Images – No 4 Thornfield Road

Text sourced from Essex Newsman and Herts & Essex Observer.

T.D. Howard-Smith

January 2025

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