

Local Influence & Loyalties

For two centuries, the Beckett Estate and the Barringtons, were a major employer for people living in the immediate vicinity surrounding. If we look back at the estate disbursement book for the thirty years it covered in the latter part of the 18th century, it can be seen that every local family must have had some connection. It would follow therefore that events such as deaths, marriages and tragedies concerning some people in particular would warrant more interest than normal from the Barringtons.

The libel case that was heard at the Berkshire Assizes on March 7, 1878, was not particularly unusual. However, it did cause considerable interest in the local area because the person bringing the case (the Plaintiff) was William Warren, who was Under-Agent to the Barrington Estate, and the Defendant was George William Butler, former tenant farmer of Broad Leaze Farm belonging to the estate. (See aerial photo below of farm).

George Butler had occupied the farm for about 10 years and was given notice to quit in 1877. In preparation for his leaving, he decided to sell the crops that were growing in his fields and instructed local auctioneers in Swindon accordingly. On seeing one of the advertisements announcing the sale of the crops, William Warren immediately informed his office in London, as he knew that selling the crops before leaving was in direct contravention of Butler's tenancy agreement and against county tradition. The head agent, William Carlisle, immediately sought an injunction at the Chancery Court which was granted. The injunction was served on George Butler a day or so later which prevented him from selling his crops. Butler was, understandably, incensed with this legal intervention, and in a fit of indignation wrote a letter directly to Lord Barrington. Some of the points he made in the letter seemed justified but his undoing was making accusations that, without proof, could be considered libellous. Included in his letter he quoted, '*His books are a fabrication of falsehoods and lies from beginning to end...*'

To accuse a man in the trusted position as that of William Warren without good evidence was foolish. Warren could not allow his reputation to be tarnished as it would probably have ended his career. He therefore wasted no time in bringing a lawsuit against George Butler for libel, seeking satisfaction and damage payment.

The proceedings in the court that day were quite straightforward and the arguments for both parties were ably put by their respective lawyers. Fortunately, however, as is often the case with legal proceedings, quite a few names of local people occurred which are of interest to us.

The libellous words quoted by George Butler in his letter, apparently came from the mouth of a local man called Thomas Hill. The newspaper reported, *'Mr George William Butler, defendant, now living at Longcott, said - I remember Thomas Hill in the employ of Lord Barrington. He was rough carpenter. Hill assisted as agent. He heard of Hill being discharged six or seven years ago. He had called at the Crown Inn, Shrivenham, kept by Stevens. Hill was at the Inn; there was a room full of people. Hill, naturally annoyed at being discharged, mentioned the very words stated in Butler's letter. Warren's affairs were very much discussed at the time and created a wonderful sensation in the neighbourhood.'* Naturally, Thomas Hill's character came under scrutiny. The fact that he was the parish clerk caused some amusement in the court room when it was stated that, *'he was in a respectable position.'* Much laughter ensued when a witness re-iterated that he was, *'parish clerk.'*

George Butler really stood no chance of being found innocent and the jury took only minutes to return a verdict for the Plaintiff with a recommendation for £100 to be awarded in damages. In 1878, that amount of money must have inflicted considerable pain.



A Barrington 'Society Wedding' was reported by the Swindon Advertiser in the edition dated November 16, 1878. However, events at the time caused it to be a low-key affair as the article explains, *'On Tuesday last the marriage of the Hon Augusta Ann Barrington, sister of Viscount Barrington, with William Dalrymple Maclagan, Bishop of Litchfield, was solemnised in St Andrew's Church, Shrivenham, (photo below) in a quiet manner. Considerable interest was shown in the event by the villagers, with whom the bride has always been a great favourite; but a death having occurred in the family within a recent date the ceremony was carried out with as little outside show as possible. The only attempt at decoration inside the curious old church was*

the arranging of a few flowers and mosses round the altar, and the erection of a covered passageway from the entrance to the churchyard to the church doors outside. The officiating clergymen were the Hon and Rev Robert Liddell, vicar of St Paul's, Wilton-place, uncle of the bride, and the Rev G.W. Murray, vicar of Shrivenham. The wedding party arrived in four carriages, and consisted of the following ladies and gentlemen:- The Dowager Viscountess Barrington, mother of the bride, Viscount and Viscountess Barrington, the Hon Florence Barrington, the Hon Mr Barrington, the Hon W. Barrington, the Hon E. Barrington, the Earl and Countess of Normanton, Lady Beatrice Agat, the Earl of Craven, Lady Mary Craven (daughter of the Earl of Craven), Mr and the Hon Mrs A. Sartoris, Mr and the Hon Mrs Palk, Professor Maclagan, Mr C.F.D. Maclagan, and Mr Carlyle.' The article goes on to describe what everyone was wearing in great detail and the huge list of expensive wedding presents.



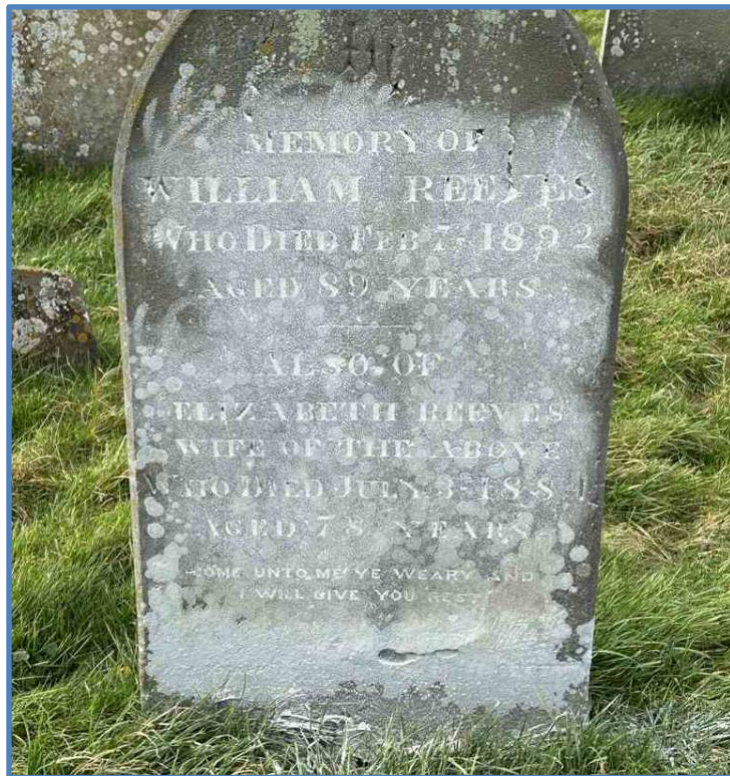
William Warren had been the estate Steward for many years, and upon the death of his wife, the Swindon Advertiser reported the funeral in its edition dated Saturday, August 28, 1886, 'On Monday afternoon the remains of Mrs Warren, wife of Mr W. Warren was interred in the parish churchyard. As Mr Warren is much respected, some 70 or 80 persons attended as a mark of esteem and followed in the rear of the members of the deceased's family, whilst a large concourse had assembled in the churchyard. The shops were closed and private houses had drawn blinds during the funeral. The coffin, which was made by Mr Chivers, was a most handsome one of polished oak and massive brass furniture. The coffin was literally covered with wreaths, crosses, etc., of a splendid character, the following ladies and gentlemen having forwarded the same: The Hon

Florence Barrington, wreath; Miss Jaycock, wreath; Mrs Honeybone, wreath; Mrs Gillett, wreath; Mr Meads, cross; Miss Smith, wreath; Miss Honeybone, wreath; and seven floral tributes from the family of the deceased.'

Only a few months earlier on February 20, a small article reported on the same family when it noted, *'The employees on the Beckett Estate presented Mr George Warren (under steward) with a handsome clock on Wednesday evening as a wedding present.'*

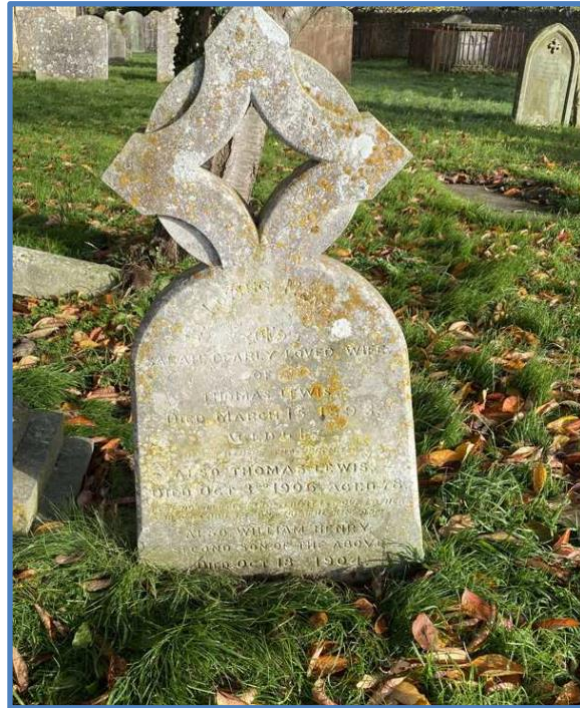
And when his turn came, William Warren received similar treatment when the Swindon Advertiser of Saturday, October 12, 1895, noted, *'The funeral took place here on Saturday last of Mr William Warren, an old and highly respected inhabitant of this village, who passed away at his residence here. Deceased had, until this last year or two, been farm steward on the Beckett Estate for many years but owing to an affliction he had to give up this office. Deceased was the son of a highly respected inhabitant of Shrivenham, Stephen Warren, and received a good education in the village. He acted as bailiff for many years under the late Mr George Ferris, at whose death he was appointed steward. Deceased was also bailiff for the Court of the Manor and Hundreds of Shrivenham. He was looked upon as a first-rate farmer and was a good friend to the labourers. Deceased was one of the earliest members of the local Court of Foresters, Court 'Vale of White Horse,' and was in his younger days the energetic secretary of the Court, of which he was afterwards one of the trustees. The funeral of deceased was attended by a large number of Foresters and others to show their last mark of respect.'*

In February 1892, the Swindon Advertiser reported, *'On Monday morning another old inhabitant passed away in the person of Mr William Reeves, the oldest tenant on the Beckett Estate, familiarly known as "Grampy," from the ripe old age of 96 to which he had attained.'* (Photo of Memorial stone below). The reporter then goes on to inform the readers of current trends when it notes, *'As evidence of the fatal character of the prevailing epidemic, it may be mentioned that in the Shrivenham Registration District, during the months of October, November and December last there were only eight deaths recorded, the united ages being 254, whilst from the 1st Jan until the present time the number of deaths stands at sixteen, the united ages, making a total of 1080.'*



Some people were held in very high esteem and affection as the Swindon Advertiser notes in its edition dated March 25, 1893. 'On Saturday afternoon last, the remains of Mrs Sarah Lewis, wife of Thomas Lewis, who for nearly half a century has been a respected and trusted employee on the Beckett Estate, were interred in the parish churchyard, general sympathy being shewn on all sides. The deceased, who was an experienced nurse, was much esteemed; her knowledge, combined with an unostentatious manner, caused her services to be much sought after. The funeral cortege was met at the churchyard gate by the vicar Rev E.H. Hill, who read the funeral service in the church, and from thence finished the service at the graveside, where the hymns, "Just as I am," and "Jesu, lover of my soul," were impressively sung. Amongst the mourners besides the relatives of deceased, were the Hon W.B. and Mrs Barrington, Mr & Mrs H. Knapp, Mr & Mrs Larkins, Mr W. Wyatt, Mr E. Wyatt, Mr R. Hunt, Mrs Ford, Mrs New, Miss Johnson, etc. The deceased being a member of the Wesleyan church worshipping in the village, a number of ministers and others connected with that religious body, including Messrs Weston, Carter, Hiscox, Burt, Clapp, Smith etc, were present to show their sympathy and esteem. A number of floral contributions were placed upon the coffin, which was of polished elm with brass furniture. Wreaths, crosses, etc, were sent by the Hon Mrs Barrington, Miss Maggie Barrington, Mrs Powell, Mr Warren and family, "Bessie and Polly," etc. A noticeable feature amongst the floral tributes was a large, magnificent wreath of artificial flowers encased under a glass dome measuring fifty-two inches round, with an inscription, "With deepest sympathy from the sergeant-major, staff-sergeants, and sergeants of the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards," the same being entrusted to the care of

Sergeant Bayliss, of that company, to deposit upon the grave. This shews the respect in which Col. Sergeant Harry Lewis, third son of deceased, is held by that gallant body. Mr John Chivers was the undertaker.’ (Memorial stone below).



Then there were unfortunate accidents as the Swindon Advertiser reported on Saturday, April 28, 1888. *‘On Thursday, as Mr W. Cooper, coachman to the Hon Walter Barrington, was driving into Faringdon, the horse bolted, and becoming unmanageable, dashed on the pavement near the Advertiser office, wrecking the conveyance, and throwing Cooper (the only occupant) with great force to the ground, fortunately without injury, save the severe shaking. Under the care of Dr Nixon, he is doing well.’*

But a few years earlier, the same newspaper reported a happy event when it reported on June 25, 1892, *‘On the 15th inst a very pretty wedding was celebrated in Shrivenham parish church, by the vicar, Rev E.F. Hill, between Mr George William Godwin, of Abingdon (late of Watchfield), and Miss Anne Williams, of Shrivenham. The bride having been housemaid for many years to the Hon W.B. Barrington, of Dower House, Shrivenham, that gentleman “gave the bride away,” and the wedding breakfast, which was of a recherche character, was generously provided at Dower House, by the Hon Mrs Barrington. The bouquets were kindly given by Mrs Power. The bridesmaids were Miss Burt, Miss Godwin, Miss Brooks, and Miss Edwards. At the conclusion of breakfast Mr Godwin thanked the Hon Walter and Mrs Barrington for their generosity. The presents*

were numerous and useful, including a silver tea pot from the Hon W.B. and Mrs Barrington; Mr Shute Barrington, handsome clock; Mr Bernard, Mr Rupert and Miss Barrington, tea set; Master Percy Barrington, set of ware water bottles and packet of tea; Mrs Fitzgerald, pair of handsome brass candlesticks; Mrs Hope Brooke, sitting-room carpet, etc. In the evening a party of about 40 persons partook of an ample supper, after which (thanks to Mr R.W. Hedges), dancing took place in a field nearby.'