VILLAGE CHARACTERS

During the time when Sir Frederick was the Squire and Lord of the Manor at Ampney Crucis Park, life was very much different than that of today. The village was largely self sufficient - the Park employed a large staff indoors and out. The indoor staff included a butler (a Mr Hayward) who lived at the house opposite the old nurse's cottage, a lady's maid and companion (a Miss Jones), cook, parlour maid, kitchenmaid etc.

The Park had its own dairy herd and dairy supplying the big house with milk, cream and cheese as well as buttermilk. My father-in-law worked as chauffeur/gardener/handyman for Sir Frederick and lived in one of the tied cottages belonging to the Estate - his wages in 1960 consisted of £10.00 per week and included all the wood he could collect, a pint of milk daily, a pound of butter every so often and the use of one of the cars now and again to take the family or some of the indoor staff for an outing, perhaps to the cinema.

Sir Frederick owned most of the village except for the six council houses at Durncourt as well as farms and land at Driffield and Harnhill. The Old Farm was part of the estate and most of the farmworkers lived in the houses alongside this area - these are now all privately owned. Dudley Estate was an extension to the farm and used for various purposes connected to the farm. The estate yard was sited where Mr Charlie Jefferies has his office, including the surrounding houses - wood, rolls of paper, paint, machinery etc was stored in the buildings. When tenants living in the cottages needed their houses decorating they asked for what they needed and were given these out of supplies in the estate yard. Rents were usually paid half yearly formerly in a room at one of the houses which is now "Stone Gables" and later at "The Crown" now renamed "The Crown of Crucis". At one time all the newlywed village girls started their married life at the little house at 52 Hilcot End. We, ourselves carried on this tradition - this tiny house consisted of "one up, one down" and when we went there in 1949 there was no electric light, no water indoors and no indoor toilet just a small brick shed way down the garden. The rent was three shillings a week which included rates! Milk was brought around the villages on a horse and cart with a churn on the back - the milkman had measures for half pints, pints, quarts and you took out your can for what you wanted. Miss Bridgeman and her brother had a farm at what is now "Birch House" and you had to go round and collect your milk from there.

The village had its own cobbler, a Mr Fred Bartlett who lived on the hill in "Cobblers Cottage" with his mother. Mrs Bartlett was a character herself. There is a tale that when the six council houses at Durncourt was first built Mrs Bartlett and another woman volunteered to scrub out after the builders had finished. These houses possessed of all luxuries a bath, which were not yet installed in any of the village houses. They had to light the copper for hot water so when they had finished their work Mrs Bartlett decided to have a "quick dip". She was really enjoying this luxury when the other lady yelled out to her that two council employees were coming up the path to inspect the house so Mrs "B" had to jump out wringing wet and pull on her dress. I was not told whether the council men noticed anything untoward!

Fred Bartlett had a little shed up the garden path complete with a little stove for heating in cold weather where he did his shoe repairing. Fred had a fund of stories about village life and was sadly missed when he gave up his business and retired to the Pleydells. He died in 1990.

At one time, the village had its own blacksmith - the forge was situated next to the "Old Post Office". The blacksmith was Mr Billy Edwards, the father of Mr Jack Edwards who has recently died. The Post Office, next door was run by a relative.

Every year Lady Cripps gave a party in the village hall for all children of school age, including the Cirencester Grammar School pupils from the village. The indoor staff from the Park provided all the goodies and a present was bought individually for each child. There was always a conjurer, magician or some entertainer and Father Christmas always arrived on cue to present each child with his or her gift. In those days, if you were lucky enough to "pass" for the Grammar School then, as Ampney Crucis was three miles from the school the prospective pupils were given a free bicycle. The pupils that went into the "top class" were taught, amongst other things gardening, beekeeping etc. The school had its own hens and bees as well as a School Garden - this was where the Car Park for Durncourt is now and was a lovely place with its own paths, pond with a weeping willow and beautiful flowers all planted and lovingly tended by the pupils of Ampney Crucis School. Each class had its own patch of garden - these were in the land now owned by Mr Fisher of "Ridge Barn" Each class tried to outdo the other with their crops of peas, beans, potatoes, lettuce etc which were harvested when ready. This helped the pupils when they grew up, married and dug and planted their own gardens. (In those days most people grew their own vegetables as there were no supermarkets).

One of the subjects on the curriculum was "Mental Arithmetic" and most children could add up in their heads - there were no calculators and the currency was not so easy with farthings, halfpennies etc. We were all taught our tables and my own earliest recollection is of chanting together our tables with the rest of the class (up to twelve times then!).

There were so many characters in the village in those times - no television - so entertainment was devised amongst ourselves. Each village had its own group of entertainers - these went to other villages who reciprocated! One of the most colourful village characters was Frank Barnes - the first husband of Mrs Kath Mundy. Frank was for many years the village undertaker and an outstanding carpenter.

Frank was born at "Tudor House", Cherington in 1909 and was the youngest in a family of seven. His father was employed as estate carpenter at Toddington Manor and also numbered amongst his responsibilities the duties of gravedigger, undertaker, sexton, bellringer, sidesman at the church. He did everything except take the services!

Frank's father moved to Ampney Crucis in 1918 and Sir Frederick Cripps who was then the owner of Ampney Park gave him a four-wheeler horse carriage covered at the front and back with the back portion able to be lowered. This vehicle was used by Mr Barnes for transporting his tools whilst working at Ampney Park and around the estate. He still earned out the duties of gravedigger, undertaker, wheelwright and carpenter for anyone who required his services. Frank's father apprenticed Frank in all these trades until Frank was called up at the start of the second World War when he joined the RAF to work as a carpenter on aircraft. After his initial training he served most his time at RAF Wymeswold in Leicestershire and RAF Abingdon. Frank was also a member of the Royal Observer Corps as were many other men from the village. Frank's father's horse and cart was housed in a shed on the site of "Davene", the family house of the Broadhurst family. His workshop was on the land where Frank's son Andrew built his house naming it "The Old Workshop". These two houses are situated at the top of School Lane in Ampney Crucis. Andrew still has his father's old carpentry tools and his saw horse.

Frank was well known for his practical jokes and this anecdote was related to me by one of his friends. One day Frank had an unfortunate accident and killed one of Mr Ernie Holder's hens. Mr Holder had a smallholding below the junction of the "Butchers Arms" lane and in those days chickens were all free range! Frank went in to tell Ernie about the mishap who said: "Oh dear and she had just a started laying!" Frank came back, quick as a flash "Oh, yes, she is still a laying - laying dead in the middle of the road!" This was typical of Frank's dry sense of humour.

In Frank's younger days Cirencester did not have a maternity hospital and all the maternity cases requiring hospital treatment went to Tetbury and as Frank possessed a car he was often called upon to be taxi driver to Tetbury. Bob Sterry the other taxi driver in the village was scared that a child would be born in his car. In his later years, Frank was not a great lover of television and instead, spent a great deal of his leisure time making scale model farm waggons (2 inches to the foot) - no metrics then! One of his superb models was a South Midlands spindle-sided bow wagon which he constructed in the winter of 1972. This was on show at many events in Ampney Crucis and Mrs Barnes (now Mrs Mundy) has this displayed in pride of place in her lounge for all to admire.

Frank met his wife when Fred Bartlett, the disabled shoemaker who lived in Cobblers Cottage, asked him to collect 'a bend of leather' from Osborne's Shoe Shop in Cirencester. Osborne's was sited where Ashleys the Wool Shop, now ply their trade. Frank was served by Kath Osborne - he had found the girl of his dreams! He came into the shop to buy shoe polish some two or three times every week until he had plucked up enough courage to ask her out. They courted (a lovely old-fashioned word!) for about four years before being married and Kath told me that some years later when she was spring cleaning the house in School Lane she found dozens of tins of shoe polish bought by Frank from her father's shop. Frank was one of the original village characters.

OLD VILLAGE CHARACTERS

THE DAY FAMILY

John Day and his wife lived at No. 2 Durncourt Cottages during the early part of their married life (see photo), they later moved to Hunts Hill, now the home of Mr & Mrs McKenzie who run "Delamere" (a bed and breakfast). John's claim to fame was that his marriage banns were called at the same time as Sir Frederick & Lady Cripps, the Squire of Ampney Park. Mrs Day is said to have remarked that 'It's not often that rich and poor are pulled out together at the same time'. John Day was noted for his violin playing hence the nick name 'Fiddler Day'. John's violin was dated 1730 and he was offered a lot of money if he would sell it but he refused. John used to play the banjo, the mandolin, guitar, concertina and even a tin whistle which he called 'Joe'. In his younger days he used to sit under the 'Pound Tree' in the middle of the village with his mates and play and sing for hours. He was leader of the Ampney Crucis band consisting of Mabel Wigmore, Kitty Stevens, Robert Sterry and himself.

The Ampney Crucis Band

The Day family were one of the oldest Ampney families, it is recorded in the 1851 census that a Charles Day, his wife Hanna and their five children lived in Ampney Crucis - the eldest boy John aged 12 years of age working as an agricultural labourer. Sadly, there are now no Day descendants living in Ampney Crucis at this present time, but grandchildren of 'Fiddler Day' are still living in the local area and a 'Donna Day' from Hamilton Ontario Canada, has made contact in an effort to trace her family tree.

Frank Day was a cousin of John's. Frank lost his leg in the Great War, and in the middle part of the century was a familiar sight sitting outside his cottage with his wooden leg watching the world go by. Lady Cripps, the Squire's Lady, is reputed to have ordered the withy bed to be planted by the Ampney Brook to grow withies so that Frank could weave baskets to fill in his time.

THOMAS GARDINER (1657 -1745)

THOMAS GARDINER was a gentleman and non-juror who lived alone for 50 years in Ampney Crucis.

In 1676 he was elected from Charter House School to All Saints College, Oxford. In 1689 he was required as a member of the University to Take the Oath to King William and Queen Mary — he refused to do this and had to resign his fellowship and retired to Ampney Crucis where the Pleydells lived. He eventually became tutor to Robert Pleydell, heir to Ampney Manor and Estate.

Robert Pleydell was greatly influenced by Thomas Gardiner who was credited with suggesting to Robert that he should erect a charity school in the village with an endowment of £80 per annum — for apprenticing yearly 2 boys or girls, for clothing and for instruction in writing, reading and christian knowledge.

Robert Pleydell died in 1719 aged 33 leaving a will containing the instructions in the previous paragraph — this to be paid for ever by an £80 rent charge for Ranbury Farm (about 132 acres) in the parish of Ampney St Peter. The details of this endowment can be seen in Ampney Crucis church on a marble monument to the memory of Robert Pleydell. £65.00 of this endowment went towards the maintenance of the master and mistress of the school, the clothing and instruction of poor boys and girls in reading, writing and the principles of Christian religion as taught in the Church of England. The other £15.00 to be paid towards apprenticing such poor boys and girls (as should be thought fit) to some trade or calling.

Farewell to Mary the Swan Lady

FAMILY and friends have been paying their final respects to a Cirencester woman who dedicated 23 years of her life to rescuing swans and other birds.

Rosemary Taylor, 73, died suddenly whilst watching television with her husband Ken at their home.

She was known to many for setting up the Cirencester-based Swan Rescue Service in 1975 with her husband.

Over the years they rescued and saved thousands of swans and other birds and in 1990 they were presented with a national award for their tireless work.

Mrs Taylor, who was nicknamed Mary the Swan Lady, was also a founder member of the Upper Thames Protection Society.

Mr Taylor said: "She first became aware of the dreadful danger to swans and other bird life caused by carelessly discarded fishing tackle in the summer of 1975.

"She caused quite a stir with the town council when she accused them of allowing the willow tree on the island in the lake to become adorned with so much fishing line and tackle that it looked like a Christmas tree. It was a terrible hazard to the swans.

"She was told that it would take four men and a boat but the boat had a hole in it so it would have to wait.

"She said the whole thing was a disgrace and persuaded me to leave work and go to the lake and do the job.

"It took us three hours but it was the start of the Swan Rescue Service.

"Afterwards relations with the local authority remained very friendly, as did the friendships with the local angling club."

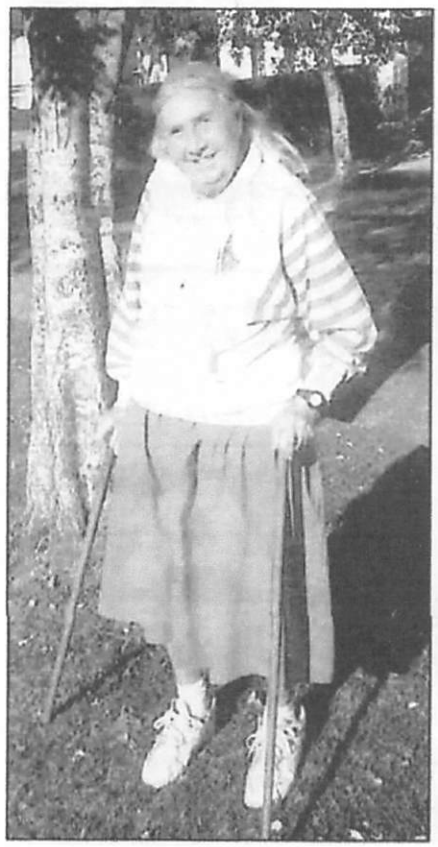
He added: "For Rosemary, swans and wildlife became a total commitment and devotion."

Mrs Taylor was also a popular lollipop lady at Powell's School in Cirencester and was always on duty come rain or shine.

She was buried at Cirencester cemetery on Monday following a ceremony conducted by the Rev Derek Sawyer.

She is survived by her husband and son Julian.

I can remember Rosemary and her sister coming to visit old Mrs Edwards who lived in the old Post Office on the main London Road. They could have been related. Peggy Thompson.



• Rosemary Taylor

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

BY

JOSEPH STRATFORD,

Author of "Good and Great Men of Gloucestershire," "Wiltshire" and Its Worthies," &c., &c.

"Live well; how long or short, permit to heaven." - *Milton.*
"For live we how we can, yet die we must." - *Shakespeare.*
"But life shall live for evermore." – *Tennyson.*

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THOMAS GARDINER.

[1657—1745]

Among the non-jurors connected with this county was one whose strange history comes down to us from the pen of a Yorkshire clergyman. In "An Account of a Gentleman who lived fifty years alone at Amney, in Gloucestershire," the Rev Mr. Barnard records somec singular facts which he obtained during a visit to Ampney Crucis about 1742. This pleasant village lies about three miles east of Cirencester. The sparkling waters of the Amnis rise within its bounds, and, flowing southwards to join the Isis, give this parish, and three others through which they run, the common name of Ampney.[1] The distinctive apellation, Crucis, is derived from its ancieut Church of the holy Rood or Sanctæ Crucis, a picturesque building, described by Sir William Guise as "of transition Norman architecture, and probably originally built about 1200, its transepts being of a later period." A fine mediæval cross, carefully restored a few years ago, stands in the churchyard. Close to the church, and just within a gently undulating and well-timbered park, is Ampney House, a quaint old mansion of the Elizabethan age.

THOMAS GARDINER was born in London, of " a genteel family," about 1657. In 1676 he was elected from the Charter House School to All Souls College, Oxford, and allowed an exhibition of £20 a year towards his maintenance at the University. Here he appears to have been diligent and successful, obtaining a fellowship, and gaining a high repute for scholarship. The election in which lie was chosen was one of Such keen and brilliant competition that for many years after it was called the " Golden Election." he continued at Oxford till the Revolution; but when in 1689 he was required, as a member of the University, to take the oaths of allegiance to William and Mary, his non-juring principles led him to refuse. He therefore resigned his fellowship and retired to Ampney, where the Pleydell family, to whom he was nearly related, were residing at the Park.

Macaulay, in estimating the general character of the nonjuring clergy, makes great allowance for the trying situation in which they stood. Many of his remarks would apply to others of the party who found themselves " thrown on the world with nothing to eat and with nothing to do." Gardiner, and many more, as well as the evicted divines, were probably in this position. Some became domesticated as chaplains, tutors, and spiritual advisers in Jacobite families. While admitting that in situations of this kind meni of pure and exalted character may preserve their dignity, and more than repay, by their example and instruction, the benefits they receive, the historian is of opinion that "to a

person whose virtue is not high-toned this way of life is full of peril. If he is of a quiet disposition, he is in danger of becoming a servile, sensual, drowsy parasite. If he is of an active and aspiring nature, it may be feared that he will become expert in those bad arts by which, more easily than by faithful services, retainers make themselves agreeable or formidable." Gardiner seems to have been little likely to become either a droning sensualist or an artful schemer. Simple, sincere, and high-principled, it was evidently his highest aim to live in all good conscience before God and man.

The last male of the name and family of Pleydell was at this period an infant, having been born in 1687. To this child—Robert Pleydell—who was heir to the manor and estate at Ampney, Gardiner became tutor. So averse, however, was he to anything like a state of dependence, that instead of living with the family lie preferred to live alone. The Pleydells, knowing how frugally he fared, seldom having any meat dressed for himself, would occasionally send him some front their own table. To prevent the bestowment of such favours he would give the servant half-a-crown on these occasions, and also bid him ask his mistress if there were no poor people in the parish on whom she could bestow her charity.

In process of time Gardiner accompanied his pupil to the University of Oxford, and continued with him there and at Ampney till 1719. The relation of tutor and pupil had grown into that of mutual friends. The affection of Pleydell for his tutor had rendered him so susceptible to his influence that it would seem he not only received his peculiar religious views, but was prepared to follow him in the strange course of life which he was then contemplating and afterwards followed. This was prevented by the death of Pleydell at the age of thirty-two. His love for his native parish, and the Christian benevolence of his heart found expression in his will, by which a farm called Ranbury, of about 132 acres, in the adjoining parish of Ampney St. Peter, was bequeathed towards maintaining a schoolmaster, and also clothing six boys and six girls of the parish of Ampney Crucis. A rent charge of £80 a year is payable by time owner of time farm for this good purpose. There is a marble monument to the memory of the amiable testator inside time communion rails, on the north side of the church. He left two sisters, co-heiresses, one—Elizabeth, married Henry Rayner, LL.D., and the other, Charlotte Louisa, married Dawnay, son of Lord Viscount Downe.

Omi the death of Mr. Pleydell, and the removal of the family from Ampney, they gave Gardiner a little house near the park, distant from any other in the village. Here he dwelt entirely by himself for above sixteen years, when age amid infirmities, and the misfortune of breaking his leg, obliged him to have the attendance of a woman at certain hours of the day, during time remaining ten years of his life.[2]

This strangely solitary life was spent in studious pursuits, religious exercises, and charitable offices. He had come from Oxford with a very competent knowledge of the Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, amid Italian languages ; amid, during his University career, had pursued all branches of study that were then most cultivated. In his solitude much of this had been neglected, amid his attention almost entirely absorbed by mystical divinity.

Religious mysticism was much in the air, both in England amid other parts of Europe, during portions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Jacob Boehme, alias Teutonicus Philosophus, the unlettered shoemaker of Gorlitz, writing from 1612 till his death in 1624, sent forth a score of volumes mightily affecting religious thought in various quarters. He, doubtless, influenced John Saltmarsh, of Chigwell, the Puritan preacher, who in 1617 published the little volume "Sparkles of Glory," which Dr. Stoughton thinks influenced Penn and others of the early Friends. Molinos in Spain, Madame Guion in France, Swedenborg in Sweden, Jane Leade and William Law in England, and many others, were exerting a similar influenice through this period. Gardiner appears to have been a disciple of the German enthusiast whose work "Aurora" he had noted with his own hand, and whose principles he had methodised in order to make him better understood. To Boehmme's works he had added those of Thauler, Madame Bourignon, Jane Leade, and Peter Poiret. A treatise of the last named on the "Divine Economy" he had formally translated and published. With the writings of Plato amid Hierocles he was familiar, while from those of Dionysius, the Areopagite, he had transcribed large quotations in Greek. In support and illustration of his mysticism he had also collected a number of texts from time Septuagint, extending from Genesis to the Psalms, to which he hail prefixed the title " Expressions in holy Scripture, countenancing and explaining this heavenly-taught Philosophy and. Divinity." This was followed by a translation of another work entitled " Time Devout Christian, the Beloved of God."[3]

In addition to his beloved studies and times of religious contemplation he was, as long as he was able, a strict attendant at the parish church, not only frequenting the usual services, but being present at baptisms and funerals, and on other occasions. His critical observation was so keen and his disapprobation so openly expressed that he must have been a rather embarrassing hearer to officiating clergymen. He had studied the Scriptures and the Liturgy with such care and accuracy that not the least mistake could be made by a clergyman in any part of the service but he was sure to note it, and tell him of it. More than this, "if ever anything was said in a sermon which he either did not understand or approve, he always, before thee congregation, gave marks of his dislike." His conduct, in other respects, was most singular. Sometimes on entering time church porch he would fall down, and bowing his face to the ground continue there all the service time, saying " he was not worthy to enter into God's house in his present state." At other times, prostrating himself in this manner after morning service, he would so remain till the afternoon. In Lent he sometimes fasted till his strength was almost spent; and when he met with an accident by which his leg was broken, he refused for a long while to have the bone set, saying " he did not know but God had sent that affliction for his eternial good."

In declining some services which Mr. Barnard, in one of his visits to him, kindly proffered, Gardiner expressed his thanks, but said that a man who for fifty years had been resigned to the will of God had but little to do at his time of life ; and " thanked God he could meet death the next moment without concern."

His charities were extensive. During a great part of his life he was in receipt of an annuity which was regularly paid him from Wales, and which he chiefly employed in relieving the wants of others who resorted to him for help. Thieves as well as beggars profited by his eccentricity. He was repeatedly robbed by wretches who broke into his house while he was at church. On one of these occasions he lost £100, all time money he had, and which he had laid by for a particular charitable use. Yet, the only concern he expressed was that of pity for the miscreant who had committed the theft. At another time when word was brought to him, as he was going to church, that a man was robbing his house, he refused to send the key, being unwilling to have the rogue taken When on a third occasion of his house being plundered he lost his watch, the Pleydell family sent him another, which he kept but a day or two, anti then returned to the Steward, being unwilling to keep it lest " it might tempt people to be wicked." A small portion of his time was spent in weeding and keeping remarkably clean a little plot of ground adjoining his house, and which is still called "Gardiner's Park."

While in the prime of his life he never admitted any visitors but such as forced themselves upon him, and to these he expressed such signs of uneasiness that they soon withdrew. Mr. Barnard was an exception, and in the course of two short visits was able to obtain more information than any one else possessed. "That he had been an excellent scholar," says Mr.Barnard, " I make no doubt. Though for several years, perhaps, he had not heard the sound of Greek, yet he perfectly understood some parts of the Greek Testament, which I read to him; and if I made the least mistake in the pronunciation, Which I did to try him sometimes, he always observed it. Add to this he gave some ready answers to a question I put to him about difficult places." In answer to a questioni he said that he "believed the Church of England to be the most sound and pure church in the world, though he differed from it in a few things;" and he miaintained that the Bible was sufficient to teach all men their duty.

He was at this time about eighty-three years of age, and of his personal appearance Mr. Barnard says, "I found him almost sunk under the weight of age and poverty, but with a serene and cheerful countenance." "He seems to be (for I saw him sitting) a man of low stature, of a quick, piercing eye, a serene, open, reverend countenance, which is increased by the greyness of his hair and beard, the latter of which is grown to a great length."

During the last years of his life, his friends being dead and his income greatly redmed, his food was charitably supplied to him by the steward of Lord Downe, who had come into possession of the Ampney estate.[4] His death took place in 1745, at the age of 88. The Rev. J. Hinton Bluck, the present vicar of Ampney Crucis, who has obligingly supplied me with some of the facts in this narrative, says that the parish register contains an entry of his burial, but nothing more.

It is no wonder that such a character was an enigma to his neighbours, and that among the villagers he shuold be knownm as the *hermit,* the *Wizard,* the *Madman,* and the *Popish Priest.* Even the vicar of the parish did not know whether he was in Holy Orders or not: but Mr. Barnard found

that he had never been ordained. An acquaintance with his favourite authors will throw some light on the character and conduct of this amiable mystic. The marvel is that his disciplined and well furnished mind should, under such circumstances of hardship, have continued so long in captivity to his imagination. His life is an instance, and certainly a very striking one, of the strange ways in which earnest inquirers may be led by the many bewildering influences which often respond to their most heartfelt cry, "What is truth?"

NOTES.

1.—The other parishes are Ampney St. Peter, or Eastington; Ampney St. Mary, or Ashbrook; and Down Ampney, on the border of Wilts.

2.—I have corrected some dates and calculations in Mr. Barnard's account as being evidently erroneous.

3.—Among the strangest religious writers of the seventeenth century was one John (?) Tryon, of Bibury, whose early life was passed as a sheep boy on the Cotswold downs of his native parish. Migrating to London he engaged successfully in business as a hatter; and having become possessed of some peculiar religious notions, wrote a little work which even for those times was a most singular production. It is many years since I saw it, and its perusal then suggested that its author was insane; but perhaps he was some sort of mystic.

4. The annuity, which he is said to have received from Wales, might have some regular allowance from funds, contributed by the Boevey family and others, to aid needy non-jurors. As these benevolent patrons died off the supplies would fail.