

# Signpost



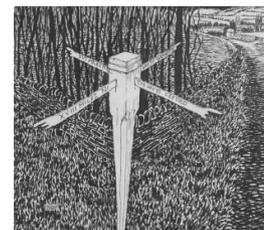
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*Bringing local history to life*



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## From the Editor

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The first few months of this year were hard for everyone, but it has been marvellous for some of us to have history interests and query correspondence which we could continue to research during this period. The BBC TV *Country File* programme, filmed on a freezing but blue skyed February morning in Lockdown and showing the Church and town looking lovely in those arial shots, kept me busy for a week or two before it and Michael Smedley's research into the brass lectern in St James's Church was also one of the results from this period. Nicholas Woodward continues to analyse Campden data and statistics and draws interesting conclusions in his article *Chipping Campden in Crisis: 1741*. Christopher Hotten finds some fascinating connections between the famous Axel Munthe and Broadway, while Jennifer Fox has brought a new light to the Hiron family from an item in the CCHS archives. So once again, thanks to the authors for these fascinating articles, which contribute to our bank of knowledge of Campden and its locality. This Signpost will be entered onto our website in a few months' time for more people than just our members to read. My thanks to you all. Please keep your articles coming - they are valuable, well read and valued.

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**Front cover illustration:** The Baptist Hicks eagle lectern in St James's Church. See Michael Smedley's article on page 16.

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## Correspondence

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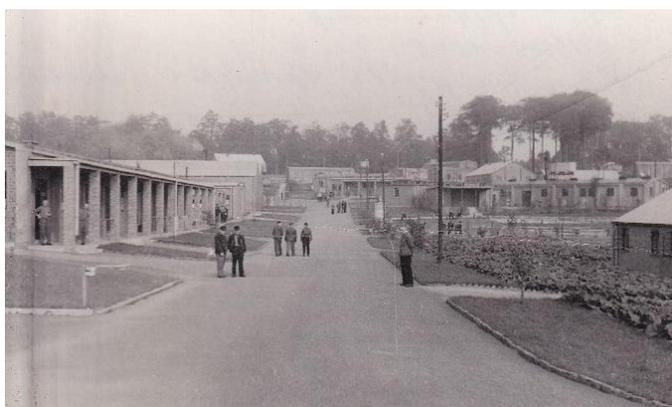
Queries and correspondence emails have been flowing strongly during the first half of this year – no time to get bored in the Editor’s house! We have had more enquiries than usual about properties and their past histories; for instance the **Kings Arms Hotel** (query ref. 21.045) in the Square which used to be called Ardley House before 1933 when it was a private residence, **The Castle** in Station Road (query ref. 21.011), **The White House** on Paxford Road (query ref. 21.025), **Peacock House** in Lower High St (query ref. 21.028), **Gardeners Farmhouse** in Aston Subedge (query ref. 21.021) and **Hidcote House** (query ref. 21.016), all of which must be a result of the recent property boom or more time on people’s hands.

You may have seen a newspaper notification on the Court page in May 2021 that **Mr Robert John Baptist Noel**, Lancaster Herald of Arms, was appointed Norroy and Ulster King of Arms in succession to Mr Timothy Hugh Stewart Duke, who had been appointed Clarenceux King of Arms in succession to Mr Patric Laurence Dickinson who was retiring. You may remember, Robert, the younger son of Gerard and Adele Noel, gave CADHAS a fascinating talk in October 1997 on his work as Bluemantle Pursuivant in the College of Arms and recently authored an article for Signpost 12, Spring 2020 about the Heralds’ Visit to Campden in 1683.

We have also received some photos from the family of **Alfred Uhlmann**, who was a POW friend of Klaus Behr, whose diaries



CCHS translated in 2010. A couple of these photos (see left, above and below) give us new views of Springhill camp 185, different to the current muddy dilapidated buildings that are there today.



Another enquirer (Query Ref. 20.047) sent transcriptions of moving letters, some in poor English, written from 1948 until 1962 between the enquirer’s grandparents, **Andrew and Kathleen Horne**, and **Georg Haupt**, 541915, a Romanian Prisoner of War, who had worked in their garden in Moreton-in-Marsh with another POW Michael Arz, while imprisoned at Bourton-on-the-Hill POW Camp No. 157. Several letters from POW Camp No. 186, Fornham Park, Bury St Edmunds, where Georg and

Michael were awaiting their repatriation, express their gratitude for the Horne family’s kindness, the happy times they had with them in their home, working in their garden and ask after all members of the family, ‘grandmother’, ‘the old man’, ‘three sisters’, Tom and his wife and baby, the children Bridgit and Jim. ‘1948, I don’t know whether you felt how happy I was at the time when I was permitted to come to you daily, be sure I felt in your house as content and happy as in my own home and with my own family. You helped me to bear my sufferings as a POW for which I am most thankful to you, for

*you understood that the man doesn't live on food and drink only but also needs psychical nourishment and satisfaction. All this I found in your house by the good understanding which you showed me as no one else before since I had to part from my family five years ago.'* There are several letters of thanks for parting gifts of a jacket and pair of trousers and a watch, also for sending cigarettes, blankets and other parcels when they are back home. Settled in Krefeld, near Dusseldorf a letter dated August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1948 describes the actual return journey: *'From Camp 2 we went by rail June 9<sup>th</sup> 1948 by way of Leicester to Harwich and in 8 hours' voyage we came to Holland in the harbour of Hooul (?) and June 20<sup>th</sup> 1948 we got our papers in Munster and was free. The voyage was nice, the sea calm, and the sky bright. All my things in rucksack and pockets, I have brought along well because I had your certificates which you furnished me.'* From the correspondence it seems they needed a letter to prove that what they had with them – e.g. the jacket and trousers, were genuine gifts and therefore theirs. The same letter describes *'The life here in Germany I have me imagined more difficult and more wretched, like it is in reality, especially since the reform of standard now is to get all here, even coffee too, but so expensive all that a worker nothing can allow himself, victuals are sufficient too, rationed on food tickets of course, fat and butter only are very few and meat not at all, so that I must recall very often the sufficient table at Mr Horne'*. Georg's wife and family are still in Romania: *'September 1948: My wife writes me despaired letters so that I'm in thoughts always at her. However, I can help from here with nothing, the last news of my family is that the two younger children are ill of typhus and Anny has lost her work, because all German industries in Rumania are taken away.'*

*'24<sup>th</sup> December 1948: The last year has gone by very quickly, since I had the happiness of keeping Christmas a year ago in your home and the circle of your dear family. Yet I thought myself unhappy because I was a POW in a strange country, and it was always my great desire to be free. And now I have been free for six months and am keeping Christmas, but it is a Christmas whose sadness is indescribable and today I wish a thousand times that I were with you in England, with the dear good Mr and Mrs Horne, where I was always so gladly welcomed and had your confidence and felt at home. Silent night, holy night, we sang a year ago tonight in your house, with my friend Michael and then with you altogether, and afterwards there came the distribution of Christmas presents and there was dancing, and I carried your dear good old mother to the schoolroom and with Michael brought her down again, and I shall remember forever how happy you all made me – a prisoner. Today, dear family Horne, all is different with me, quite sad and lonely. I sit silent and alone in my room and my thoughts are with you all and my dear family at home: there is nothing to cheer me save that I can write to you and my family, otherwise this Christmas Eve would be too tedious and intolerable. I have a tiny little Christmas tree in a flowerpot, so as to have something green in my room, for I like green. There is no decoration on my little tree but four candles and two pictures, one of my dear family, the other of you from the summer of 1947, with you and Mrs Horne, Michael and myself on it, which I always keep in honour and is a lasting memory.'*

*'15<sup>th</sup> December 1949: I often think of you all, and your house and garden where I worked with joy and was happy in those days. ... How are the roses that we planted together? Have they all thriven? And the strawberry bed that I made and planted? Did you have a good crop of fruit and other things? And I am much interested in the paths: have the stones worked out of the cement and have the paths sunk a little?'*

Other letters in 1950 explain that at last Georg has managed to get his family out of Romania to be with him in Germany and there are grateful letters from them all - his wife Anna, daughters Anni and Susi and a son Gunther - thanking them for the most welcome parcels of clothes sent from the Hornes. The correspondence carries on each Christmas, until 1962 with different news each year - the death of Anni from consumption, a serious motorbike accident of Gunther, marriage of Susi and births of her 2 sons and daughter, finally the purchase of a house, Georg's coronary heart illness and then appendicitis, but always the letters remember the happy times he had in the Horne's garden.

The full collection of these transcribed letters can be found on CCHS website in History/Campden in Wartime section [www.chippingcampdenhistory.org.uk](http://www.chippingcampdenhistory.org.uk)

## The Story of Axel Munthe and Broadway, Worcestershire

Christopher Hotten

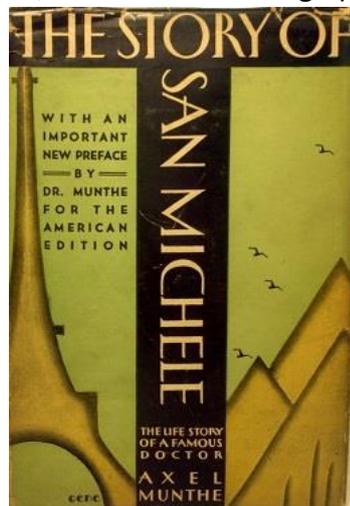
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Many famous people have washed up in Broadway over the years, among them the Swedish medical doctor and psychiatrist Axel Munthe, who was personal physician to Queen Victoria of Sweden from 1892.

Axel Munthe enjoyed international fame and celebrity throughout much of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was on intimate terms with the regal, the rich and the celebrated of his generation. Women found him irresistibly attractive and showered him with love letters and proposals of marriage. He was the original 'Marmite' man; loved or despised with equal passion. Queen Victoria of Sweden and his second wife Hilda eventually found him both attractive and repellent and shared their opinions of him in a lengthy correspondence.

Edith May, who met him in 1885, wrote of him, 'His personality was certainly picturesque, picturesque to influence all the males of the party against him and all the females in his favour... I think he is just vain and likes to make people fond of him.' Her friend Maude White was so infatuated with him that she taught herself Swedish and helped translate his early writings, in particular 'Letters from a Mourning City', into English.<sup>1</sup> Axel recognised his magnetic attraction to his female patients: 'I have discovered the secret and it is simply that I have a certain ability to lead people and they submit themselves, almost unconsciously to my will ... sometimes it almost seems to me to be demonic.'<sup>2</sup> At a time when women, whether married or single, were unused to unchaperoned contact with a man, the very direct approach of Axel Munthe acted like an aphrodisiac.

The star that was Axel Munthe has waned with the passage of time and he is best remembered, if at all, for his semi-autobiographical memoir 'The Story of San Michele' which was an international best-seller after its publication in May 1929 and remains one of the ten best-selling books of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At its heart is Munthe's lifelong affinity with the island of Capri, which he first visited as a young man of 19 in 1876<sup>3</sup> and where he was to restore and reside in a villa which he named San Michele after the adjacent and also ruined chapel of San Michele. The book is notable as much for what Munthe omitted, as what he included: he says nothing of his two marriages or his children. Indeed, he described himself as single. Nor does he mention the time he spent in England.



Axel Munthe died in February 1949 aged 91 almost exactly 6 months before my birth. It was only after I moved to Broadway in 2014 that I discovered how, for a brief time, Axel's life intersected with my own.

Axel's father was a pharmacist and had his own chemist shop. The Stockholm branch of the family owned Beateborg, a manor house outside the capital, at which Jenny Lind, the renowned opera singer, was a frequent guest. Axel shared her passion for music and had lifelong interests in sailing and the protection of wildlife.<sup>4</sup> In 1876 he contracted tuberculosis and enrolled at the medical faculty in Montpellier, France where the climate was conducive to his recovery. Between 1877 and spring 1880 he was in Paris where he completed his doctoral thesis on 'Bleeding from the Womb after childbirth'. At much the same time,

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<sup>1</sup> 'Axel Munthe The Road to San Michele', Bengt Jangfeldt 2008, p55

<sup>2</sup> 'Axel Munthe', p165

<sup>3</sup> 'Axel Munthe', p15

<sup>4</sup> 'Axel Munthe', p11

Axel had fallen hopelessly in love with Sigrid von Mecklenburg an older, married woman with children and the first of the 'impossible' loves, which were to be a feature of his life. In his misery he met and rapidly married Ultima Hornberg in Paris on the 24<sup>th</sup> November 1880.<sup>5</sup> The marriage was a disaster. According to Axel, the union was never consummated. He gave various explanations: that he remained in love with Sigrid; that he had had syphilis and did not wish to infect Ultima; that he was impotent. Where the truth lay is impossible to say since, 'his ambition is to appear in a favourable light [such] that he tells everyone a different version of the same story.'<sup>6</sup> The couple were divorced in March 1888.

Meanwhile, in 1881 Axel spent much of his time on Capri. In March there was a typhus epidemic. Axel worked as a volunteer doctor giving his services free of charge. He contracted the disease himself but recovered. In the Spring of 1889, there was an outbreak of smallpox on Capri. Again, he treated its victims without charge. He became and remained a hero to the local population. In October 1889 Axel left Capri and moved to Rome where he intended to establish himself as a doctor. He took a house hard by the Spanish Steps where Keats had lived with his friend Joseph Severn for three months before dying of consumption in February 1821 and Axel rapidly built a highly successful practice among the rich and titled foreigners living in and visiting Rome.<sup>7</sup>

It was in May 1891 that, at home on Capri, Axel first encountered Crown Princess [later Queen] Victoria of Sweden and Norway. She invited him to breakfast and for a medical consultation. She was married to Crown Prince Gustav, which was and remained an unhappy marriage. Their relationship became close, probably intimate and lifelong. In 1903 his position was formalised when he was appointed 'physician in ordinary' to Victoria and was required to spend more time with her wherever she might be. It was for Axel Munthe, another impossible relationship and the inference is compelling that the absence of complete commitment was precisely what he wanted. The relationship was eventually tolerated by the Prince, as it gave him the freedom to do as he wished and kept his wife happy.

In June 1895 Axel bought a ruined house on a hill in Anacapri [the village on the hill overlooking Capri] and the adjoining chapel of San Michele which was to become the Villa San Michele. Renovation works were not complete until 1899. One of the first visitors in October 1897 was Oscar Wilde in company with his friend Lord Alfred Douglas. Wilde was very recently released from a two-year prison sentence for gross indecency. Axel was unconcerned by Wilde's difficulties. Of Axel, Wilde wrote, 'he is a great connoisseur of Greek things. He is a wonderful personality.'<sup>8</sup>

The first person to visit and comment upon the completed Villa San Michele was the American author Henry James who was Axel's guest on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 1899. This happened to be the *fiesta di sant' Antonio*, 'the greatest day in the year for Anacapri'<sup>9</sup> and, as the procession passed Villa San Michele, Henry James looked down from his bedroom window shaking with laughter, in his pyjamas.<sup>10</sup> Axel had met Henry James that spring in Rome and had invited him to the Villa. Of the Villa, James wrote that it was 'a creation of the most fantastic beauty, poetry and inutility I have ever seen clustered together.' He admired Axel's 'unnatural simplicity.'<sup>11</sup>

It was in 1907 that the events took place that were to bring Axel Munthe to the village of Broadway in Worcestershire. Axel described what had occurred with typical matter of factness in a letter to Baroness Ebba Akerheilm. He said he had been trying in vain for two years to find someone to be with him and who could read to him and 'after long indecision [I have] accepted the generous offer

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<sup>5</sup> 'Axel Munthe', p22

<sup>6</sup> 'Axel Munthe', p91

<sup>7</sup> 'Axel Munthe', p120

<sup>8</sup> 'Axel Munthe' p156

<sup>9</sup> 'The Story of San Michele', Axel Munthe p338

<sup>10</sup> 'The Story of San Michele' p343

<sup>11</sup> 'Axel Munthe' p157

made to me by a good woman ... to marry me and help me. Since I lost my eye, she has learnt Swedish in order to help me. I have taken a house in England from September and shall begin my new life ... I was married in London a month ago. She is clever and good and a lady.' Thus, did Axel describe the English aristocrat Hilda Pennington-Mellor who became his second wife.

**Right: A young Hilda Pennington Mellor**

The Pennington-Mellors were wealthy. Their money came from cotton plantations in Egypt and merchant ships trading between Brazil and England. They were part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century jet set. When Hilda had done the Grand Tour, it was from the comfort of the family's own railway carriage. They owned an imposing Tudor style house in Biarritz.<sup>12</sup> Hilda adored Axel and was prepared to marry him on his terms. He made it clear to her that he was only prepared to spend half of each year with her. Her response was to write, 'I want to be near you even for a small, tiny bit each day.'<sup>13</sup> Her parents were appalled at the prospect of the marriage. Axel's reputation as a womaniser was well known and he was 50 and Hilda only 31. 'Hilda's parents, though sophisticated and liberal minded were aghast at her choice ... but Hilda was determined to marry Axel.'<sup>14</sup>



They married on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 1907 in bizarre circumstances. Axel arrived in London by train at 10am from Baden Baden [where he had been with an unwell Princess Victoria] on the morning of the ceremony and returned, alone, that same afternoon. The ceremony took place at a parish church near Hyde Park Terrace - a small and unannounced event. The Pennington-Mellors were clearly embarrassed by the whole affair. It was not until the 17<sup>th</sup> July that a small advertisement appeared in the Times publicising the marriage,<sup>15</sup> by which time Hilda and Axel were safely out of England and honeymooning in Scandinavia. When they returned it was to live at 31 St James Place in the heart of London which belonged to Hilda's aunt.<sup>16</sup> However, the 'house in England' to which Axel had referred in his letter to Baroness Akerheim was in Broadway. Axel's biographer, Bengt Jangfeldt, states baldly, '*... the Munthes also had another home in England, the Malt House in the village of Broadway in the Cotswolds.*'<sup>17</sup> He says nothing of how or why they came to Broadway or what they did while they were here. His only other mention of Broadway is to record the fact that Munthe sold the Malt House in 1927, it having been rented out for many years.<sup>18</sup>

There is a compelling inference that it must have been Henry James who recommended Broadway to Axel. I have already noted James' visit to Capri some years before. In 1914 James described Axel in a letter he wrote to Compton McKenzie as 'my old admirable friend...' <sup>19</sup> and when, during the First

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<sup>12</sup> 'Axel Munthe', p201

<sup>13</sup> 'Axel Munthe', p202

<sup>14</sup> "Sweet is War to them that know it not', Malcom Munthe, p187

<sup>15</sup> 'Axel Munthe', p202

<sup>16</sup> 'Axel Munthe', p204

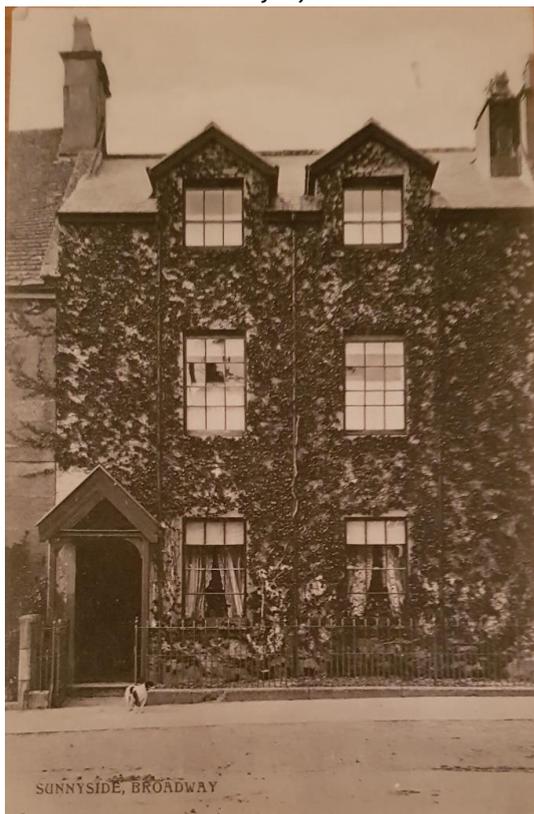
<sup>17</sup> 'Axel Munthe', p205

<sup>18</sup> 'Axel Munthe', p256

<sup>19</sup> 'Axel Munthe', p269

World War, Axel contemplated applying for British citizenship, James, who had himself been naturalised, offered to sponsor Axel.<sup>20</sup> They were clearly on good terms in 1907.

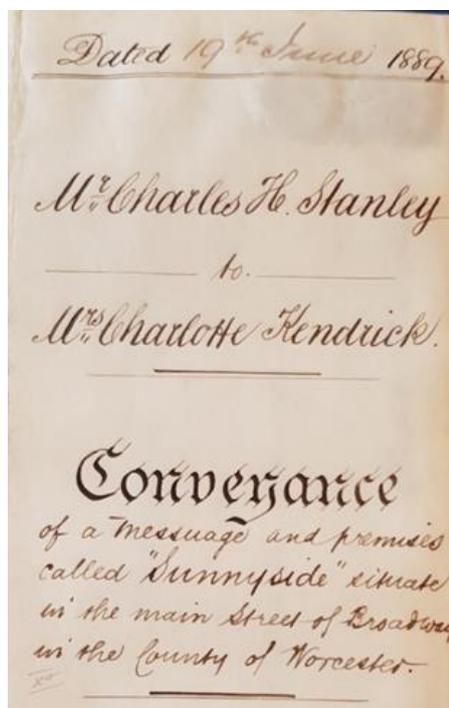
The association of Henry James with the ‘Artists Colony’ in Broadway is well known. In 1889 he described Broadway as, ‘a very old English village, lying amongst its meadows and hedges, in the very heart of the country, in the hollow of the green hills of Worcestershire ... the perfection of the old English rural tradition.’<sup>21</sup> More importantly, it had been to Broadway that James had come to write. In 1886 Gosse, a member of the colony, wrote, ‘... in the morning Henry James and I would write, while Abbey and Millet painted on the floor below, and Sargent and Parsons tilted their easels just outside. ... Henry James was the only sedate one of all – benign, indulgent but grave, and not often unbending beyond a genial chuckle.’<sup>22</sup> Broadway as somewhere to write would have appealed to Axel. In the ‘Story of San Michele’ he claims that in June 1899 Henry James encouraged him to write the memoir that he had long contemplated.<sup>23</sup>



The arrival of Axel and Hilda in Broadway is described by Sid Knight in his autobiographical account of his childhood in Broadway published in 1960 after Sid had emigrated to Southern Africa.<sup>24</sup> As a schoolboy Sid had a part time job at a boarding house then called ‘Sunnyside’ on what is now the upper High Street (and now my home).

**Left: A postcard of ‘Sunnyside’ posted in September 1908 and written by Charlotte Kendrick.**

The house was run by Mrs Charlotte Kendrick, ‘a gentle and kind lady’ who paid Sid a shilling a week. A general servant, Daisy, looked after the place and “received the usual pay of the time, £6 per year, “live in”.’ Mrs Kendrick had bought Sunnyside in 1889 and lived there until her



death in 1913.

This was the house which I was to buy in July 2014. By then it had lost the name Sunnyside. Some years later a previous owner presented me with a bundle of historic conveyances from which I discovered the earlier name and associated it with Sid Knight’s account which I had previously read.

**Right: Conveyance of ‘Sunnyside’ to Charlotte Kendrick**

<sup>20</sup> ‘Axel Munthe’, p226

<sup>21</sup> [Frank Millet Archives - Cotswold Holiday Cottages at The Manor House, Broadway \(broadwaymanor.co.uk\)](http://broadwaymanor.co.uk)

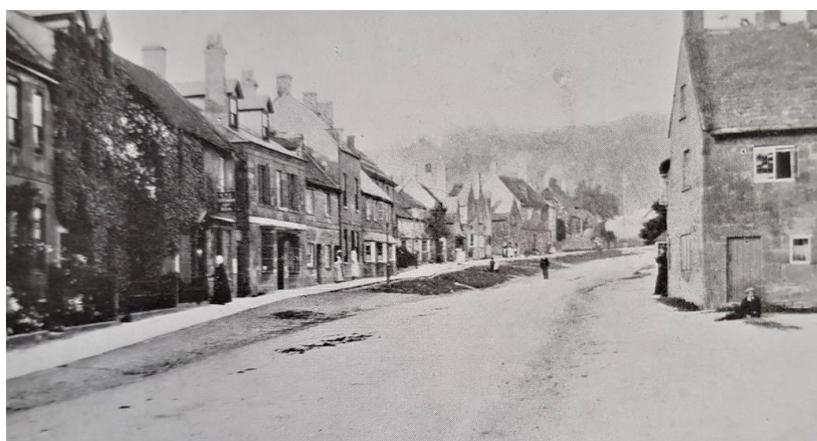
<sup>22</sup> [The Broadway Group of Artists in the Cotswolds](#)

<sup>23</sup> ‘Axel Munthe’, p268

<sup>24</sup> ‘Cotswold Lad’, Sid Knight, 1960

Sid takes up the story of Dr. Munthe's arrival. 'Presently the rumbling of wheels disturbed the quiet of the High Street as into view lumbered the station fly owned by the Lygon Arms Hotel, the top piled high with luggage bearing railway and hotel labels from all over Europe. The horse drawn four-wheeler came to a sedate halt alongside the grass verge and two imposing figures alighted. One was a woman who to my boyish mind was of unbelievable beauty and charm ... followed by a tall, well-built man, a menacing figure in black. ... A black Homburg shaded his black spade beard, and down his face ran a deep scar (which) rumour said was caused by a falling chimney pot in Stockholm one dark, windy night. ... The strange man, who was addressed by everybody as "Doctor" dominated the scene as he gave instructions to my father, who after finishing his postal round that afternoon had just emerged from the back of the house.'<sup>25</sup> Sid Knight gives no date for this 'one lovely sunny afternoon a few years before the first world war', but there is a strong inference that it was in the late summer of 1907 that Axel and Hilda came to Broadway. He describes how Axel arrived with a 'hay box' which was keeping hot a chicken stew that he had brought with him on the train from Paddington!

**Right: 'Sunnyside' is the ivy clad building second up on the left hand side of the road.**



After a short period of days or a couple of weeks lodging at Sunnyside, Sid relates that he and his father helped them and the luggage move into the Malt House towards the top of the High Street 'a few houses down the street from the home of the accomplished California-born actress, Mary Anderson,

who was a great friend of his. I helped Dad unpack the heavy crates of furniture that came down from London.'<sup>26</sup> Sid worked as houseboy for the Munthes when work was slack at Sunnyside: 'Every morning I had to clean the doctor's boots ... with some evil smelling liquid blacking that must have been the same as Charles Dickens packed in his young days at the blacking factory.' According to Sid, his cousin Ada was cook to Axel and Hilda for many years and travelled all over Europe with them. Mary Anderson recorded the Munthes living in the Malt House before WW1 in her second volume of memoirs.

**Right: The Malt House, High Street, Broadway**

At the top of Fish Hill between Broadway and Chipping Campden was Willersey Hill Farmhouse which prior to the WW1 was occupied by the Cotterell family; Axel Munthe was a regular visitor to the Cotterells prior to the War.<sup>27</sup> Later the bed and breakfast farmhouse was bought by the Danish Sorenson



<sup>25</sup> 'Cotswold Lad', p39

<sup>26</sup> 'Cotswold Lad', p41

<sup>27</sup> 'Evesham Journal', 28<sup>th</sup> August 2012

family in 1977 and became the Dormy House Hotel.

Axel and Hilda commuted between their various homes in London, Broadway, Capri, Biarritz and Sweden. Both their sons, Peter born on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1908 and Malcolm on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 1910 were delivered in London. At the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 Axel and his family were in Sweden. Sweden was officially neutral but public opinion was strongly pro-German. Axel was pro-British and so in September the family moved to London and Axel abandoned his post with Queen Victoria for the duration of the War.<sup>28</sup> He gave distinguished service to the Allied cause: in 1914 he worked as an anaesthetist with an ambulance in France. In 1915 and 1916 he spent a total of 9 months at the front as a field Doctor for the French Red Cross and was present at battles at Verdun, the Somme and Arras.<sup>29</sup> During the war Axel, Hilda and their sons spent time together between his periods of service. They wintered on Capri and also visited England and Biarritz. However, by the end of the War the marriage was under considerable strain. He was to claim that they had not had sex since before the war, that she was jealous and accused every woman he met of being his mistress. In particular she complained of what she believed were his inappropriate relationships with various servant girls and female companions on Capri. In February 1919 Hilda left him for good and took the boys with her. Axel said he would keep aloof from the boys: 'They do not care the least for me so they will not mind in the least.' It was however agreed that there would be no divorce.



Confirmation of the separation comes from Sid Knight who recalled that towards the end of WW1, his father, the village postman, was sweeping his yard when an 'elegant, richly attired lady leading a little boy, stopped and called out to him - "You probably won't remember me but for sentimental reasons I have just come for the day to have a look at the dear old village and its happy memories. I am Mrs Axel Munthe, although (her eyes filling with tears) we are now separated." ' The boy was likely her younger son Malcolm who was to play a heroic part in WW2.

Left: Axel Munthe by Feodora or Helena Gleichen.

In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the ancient Manor House of Hellens at Much Markle in Herefordshire was owned by a painter Lady Helena Gleichen, whose sister Lady Feodora was a sculptress and her married sister Lady Valda a musician.<sup>30</sup> Lady Helena met Axel Munthe in 1904 and it may well have been through her that her cousin Hilda Pennington-Mellor was introduced to Axel and it was Lady Feodora who drew this portrait of Axel which was used for the frontispiece of *The Story of San Michele*.

With the end of the marriage, Axel's connections with the Cotswolds were severed. The balance of his extraordinary life can be discovered by reading my full account published on the CCHS website.

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'*Cotswold Lad*', Sid Knight, published Phoenix House London 1960

'*Hellens, The Story of a Herefordshire Manor*', Malcolm Munthe, published Pennington Mellor Charitable Trust 1991

'*Sweet is War To Them That Know It Not*', Malcolm Munthe, published Baring and Rogerson Books May 2000

'*The Story of San Michele*', Axel Munthe, published by John Murray London 84<sup>th</sup> printing 1975

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<sup>28</sup> 'Axel Munthe', p224

<sup>29</sup> 'Axel Munthe', p225

<sup>30</sup> 'Hellens, the story of a Herefordshire Manor', Malcom Munthe, 1991 p107

## Chipping Campden in Crisis: 1741

Nicholas Woodward

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One of the characteristics of death rates in the past is that they were extremely volatile. Indeed, in some periods, often labelled by historians as mortality crises, death rates could be more than twice the normal (or expected) level. Such mortality crises were quite frequent in medieval and early modern times, although they seem to have become less common after the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Their significance seems to have varied geographically too. Some parishes seem to have been particularly susceptible. For example, parishes at low altitudes were particularly at risk, as were market towns with high population densities where inhabitants were exposed to a range of airborne diseases, contaminated water supplies, public nuisances and to vermin and disease-carrying insects.

In this note we shall look at two issues. First, using the burial register, we consider whether – and when – Chipping Campden experienced mortality crises in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup> From this it emerges that there was one year – 1741 – when there was a particularly severe crisis. Secondly, we will consider the most likely cause of this crisis.

To measure the incidence of (annual) mortality crises, we have followed the approach suggested by Roger Schofield.<sup>3</sup> He used moving averages to measure the underlying – or expected – number of burials. He then compared the number of actual burials with those expected. A crisis was then defined as a year when the mortality ratio – the number of burials relative to the expected number – exceeded a specific figure. The number two has been the most popular benchmark, although there is nothing sacrosanct about this figure; it is arbitrary.

In Figure 1 (see over) we have plotted both the number and the expected number of burials, having measured the latter with an eleven-year moving average. The graph suggests that, in-line with the national pattern, the period of greatest volatility occurred in the first half of the eighteenth century, after which major fluctuations became less pronounced. Even so, there were some years when the level of excess mortality was quite high, viz., 1729, 1741, 1769, 1786, 1848 and 1869. To see whether these warrant the description crisis years, we have calculated the mortality ratio. As Table 1 shows, however, if we adopt the standard definition of a crisis as a year with a mortality ratio of two or

**Table 1 Highest Mortality Ratios by year**

1741	2.67
1848	1.90
1892	1.90
1769	1.88
1869	1.81
1786	1.73
1729	1.69

more, only one year qualifies: 1741. At that time there were roughly 45 burials a year in Chipping Campden. Yet in 1741 there were 127. Obviously, this must have been a year of considerable distress.

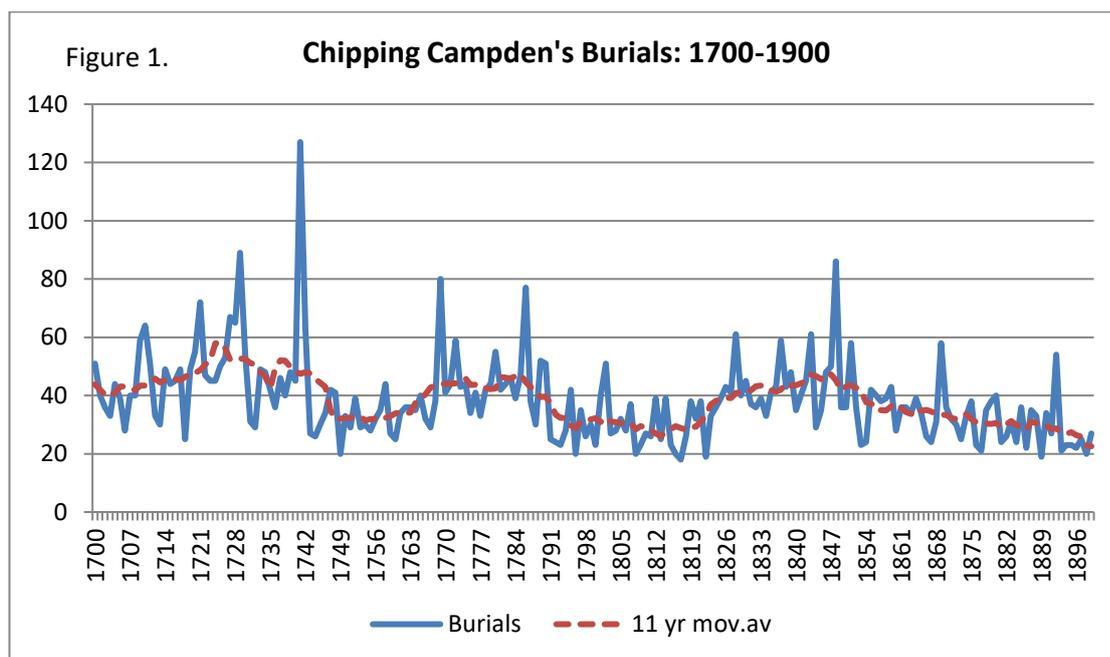
If we adopt a less stringent definition of a crisis, say a mortality ratio of 1.75, certain other years qualify (Table 1), viz. 1848, 1769 and 1869, while 1786 and 1729 just fall-short. 1892 qualifies too, but it is doubtful whether we can realistically describe this as a crisis year. By the 1890s the underlying number of annual deaths had fallen to roughly 29, so it would have taken only a modest increase in the deaths to push the ratio over the benchmark figure. That is what happened in 1892 when there was a minor flu epidemic in the first quarter of the year.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Hatcher, 'Mortality in the fifteenth-century: some new evidence', *Economic History Review*, 39, 1986, 19-32; B Harvey *Living and Dying, 1100-1540: The Monastic Experience*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, it is likely that there were crises before this. However, although the first burials were registered in 1616, it is evident that there are periods during the seventeenth-century when they were grossly under-recorded.

<sup>3</sup> R.S. Schofield, 'Crisis Mortality', *Local Population Studies*, 9, 1972, 10-21



Was Chipping Campden particularly prone to mortality crises? To answer this question, we have compared the incidence of crises in Campden with that in the six other Gloucestershire market towns that were used in the *Population History of England*.<sup>4</sup> The results are shown in Table 2 for the years between 1700 and 1830. The Table suggests that experience varied quite considerably. Certain towns – Fairford, Minchinhampton and Wooton-under-Edge – experienced virtually no crises, while others, most notably Tetbury and Winchcombe, could be described as crisis-prone. Campden, however, along with Stroud, occupies the middle ground.

Table 2 also shows that five of the seven parishes experienced above expected mortality in 1741. However, this excess mortality was generally quite modest. In only two parishes – Chipping Campden and Winchcombe - was 1741 a year of crisis. The Table also underlines the severity of Chipping Campden's mortality in 1741. It shows that only one market town – Stroud (in 1712) – experienced a more serious crisis at any time over the period covered by the comparisons.

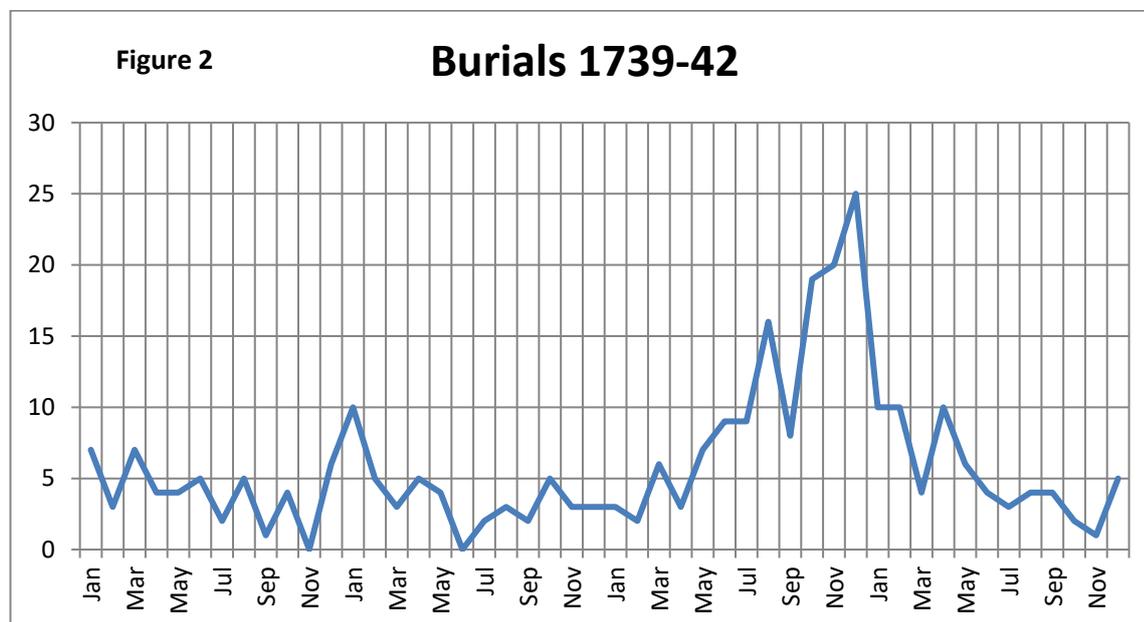
**Table 2 Incidence of Mortality Crises and Selected Mortality Ratios, 1700-1830: Gloucestershire Market Towns**

\*A major crisis is defined as one when the annual mortality ratio rises above 2. A minor crisis is one where the ratio is between 1.75 and 2.

Parish	Major Crisis*	Minor Crisis	Mortality Ratio 1741	Highest Mortality Ratio
Chipping Campden	1	2	2.67	2.67
Fairford	0	0	1.27	1.64
Minchinhampton	0	1	1.22	1.78
Stroud	1	0	0.65	2.75
Tetbury	3	4	1.23	2.18
Winchcombe	2	3	2.15	2.15
Wooton-under-Edge	0	0	0.85	1.12

<sup>4</sup> This data is available on a CD-ROM issued by *Local Population Studies*

From the burial register, it is also evident that the 1741 crisis was a fairly long-drawn out process. Figure 2 shows the monthly incidence of deaths. It is evident that the level of mortality was already above the expected level in the summer of 1741. It then accelerated in the autumn, peaking at 25 in the December. After this the number of deaths fell quite quickly, although it was not until the summer of 1742 that mortality had returned to more usual levels.



The burial register at this time also allows us to determine the importance of infant and child fatalities. Table 3 records this information for the years between 1740 and 1742 by quarter. Overall, it suggests that infant and child burials accounted for 38 per cent of the total.

However, there are two periods when they were more important than this. The first is in the third quarter of all three years. This is almost certainly attributable to gastric infections, the consequence of higher temperatures and a poor environment. The second occurs during the fourth quarter of 1741 – the peak quarter of the mortality crisis – when they accounted for 64 per cent of all deaths. Clearly, whatever caused the crisis seriously affected the young.

**Table 3. Incidence of Burials by Quarter: Chipping Campden**

Year/Quarter	Infants & Children	Total	% Infants & Children
1740.1	3	18	16.7
1740.2	2	9	22.2
1740.3	4	7	57.1
1740.4	1	11	9.1
1741.1	5	11	45.5
1741.2	3	19	15.8
1741.3	13	33	39.4
1741.4	41	64	64.1
1742.1	9	24	37.5
1742.2	4	20	20.0
1742.3	5	11	45.5
1742.4	1	8	12.5

The foregoing suggests that Campden's mortality crisis of 1741 was quite unusual. But what caused it? To answer this, it would be ideal to have at our disposal some primary sources that highlighted what contemporaries thought at the time. Unfortunately, we have failed to uncover any useful documents. As a result, we have to approach the question indirectly by combining our knowledge of disease with the pattern of burials.

We can immediately narrow down the search by eliminating certain diseases. For example, there were diseases that had not yet emerged. Cholera, which was the cause of a number of local crises in the nineteenth-century, is a case in point. There were also some major epidemic diseases, most notably sweating sickness and bubonic plague, which had died out by the 1740s. There were certain diseases which by the eighteenth century had become less virulent. Measles is generally cited as an example.<sup>5</sup> Mention should also be made of tuberculosis. Respiratory TB, in particular, was one of the major contagious killers in history, and we can probably assume it was a major cause of death in Chipping Campden.<sup>6</sup> However, because there was a long and variable lapse between contagion and death, the disease was endemic rather than epidemic in nature.

This leaves us with four possibilities: typhus, influenza, dysentery/gastro-enteritis and smallpox. However, the first three diseases cannot explain crucial features of the crisis as we know it. For example, typhus deaths tended to be concentrated amongst adults. Yet as we have seen, in the 1741 crisis the main victims were infants and children (Table 3). Similarly, influenza is a highly infectious disease and would be expected to have effected mortality crises in a large number of parishes. However, this does not seem to have happened (Table 2). Dysentery/ Gastro-enteritis do not fit the profile either. These diseases are a product of a poor environment and high temperatures and they tended to strike in the summer and early autumn. But the mortality in Campden was at its highest in December 1741 and remained quite high in the winter of 1742 (Figure 2).

Smallpox, however, is a different matter. Indeed, in the view advanced here, it is the most likely cause of the crisis. Smallpox was a viral infection with flu-like symptoms – headache, aching, fever and vomiting - accompanied by a rash. The latter developed into sores which later scabbed-over leading to pock-marking. The disease was highly contagious and was spread from person-to-person, although smallpox epidemics were long drawn affairs. It had a fairly high fatality rate too – believed to be about 30 per cent. Anyone surviving the disease, however, enjoyed immunity against the disease for life. It included some high-profile victims. For example, Elizabeth I, Abraham Lincoln and Stalin survived the disease. Charles, Duke of Cambridge and son of James II, however, was not so lucky and died as a child.

Although the last case in Britain, outside of the laboratory, occurred in 1966 and the disease was officially eradicated in 1980, it was a big killer in the eighteenth-century. Even so, its importance declined as the century progressed. In large part this was due to the introduction and improvement of inoculation techniques (i.e. deliberate infection with the virus) and with the introduction of Jenner's vaccination techniques (i.e. infection with cowpox) from 1796. As the virus was sensitive to climatic conditions, the disease was most likely to thrive in dry years,<sup>7</sup> and it favoured the summer and autumn months.<sup>8</sup> The disease tended to be endemic in the cities because people were continuously exposed to the virus. Outside densely populated areas, however, such exposure was more likely to be sporadic and, as a result, there could be a build-up of susceptible people,

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<sup>5</sup> A.Dyer 'Epidemics of measles in a seventeenth-century English town, *Local Population Studies*, 34, 1985, 35-45.

<sup>6</sup> The extent of this should not be exaggerated. TB rates were exceptionally high amongst manual workers. However, the reports of the Registrar General suggest that they were relatively low amongst farmworkers, the most important occupational group in Campden.

<sup>7</sup> H. Nishiura, 'Smallpox and Season: Reanalysis of Historical Data, *Interdisciplinary Perspective on Disease*, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2009/591935>

<sup>8</sup> As the virus mutated, however, there was a change in the seasonal incidence of the disease with a shift towards the autumn and winter in the second half of the eighteenth-century. O. Krylova and DJD Earn 'Patterns of Smallpox in London, England over three centuries'. *bioRxiv*, <https://doi.org/10.1101/771220>

particularly amongst the young, so that the disease would flare-up into epidemic proportions when a carrier entered the settlement.<sup>9</sup>

Does the evidence support the idea that the crisis was primarily due to smallpox? Unfortunately, no documentary evidence has been uncovered. The burial register makes some references to smallpox in the 1830s, and the disease is mentioned on quite a few occasions in the vestry minutes in the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> There is even a reference to a mass smallpox vaccination programme in the 1830s.<sup>11</sup> However, both sources are silent about the cause of the death in 1741. Nevertheless, both the conditions and the distribution of the fatalities suggest that the crisis was caused by smallpox. In the years prior to 1741 there had been a low number of burials which might well be indicative of a build-up of a susceptible population. The years immediately before the crisis were also ones of harvest failure. At such times population mobility levels tended to be high which, in turn, increased the likelihood that a carrier might enter the parish at the crucial time. In addition, 1741 was a mild year and, apart from September, a dry one too. These were the conditions under which smallpox could thrive. Finally, the subsequent crisis was a long-drawn out affair, concentrated into the autumn months and it disproportionately affected the young. These are all features of a smallpox epidemic.

Although one can never be dogmatic about such issues, it seems, therefore, that there is a high probability that the main cause of the crisis of 1741 was smallpox. This is not to claim that extraordinary number of deaths in 1741 was due entirely to a smallpox epidemic. A number of other factors may have exacerbated the mortality. Food prices had been high in 1739 and 1740, and it is well-established that, following a period of high food prices, mortality tended to rise, presumably because a decline in the nutritional status of the population increased their susceptibility to a range of diseases.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the summer of 1741 was a warm one, and this came on top of a relatively mild spring. This, coupled with Chipping Campden's poor environmental conditions, may have increased the incidence of those gastric diseases that tended to thrive in the second and third quarters of the year.

The outcome would seem to be that when historians finally construct a timeline for Chipping Campden, one of the entries for 1741 might read: a year of exceptional mortality, thought to have been the outcome of a severe smallpox epidemic, possibly exacerbated by harvest failure in previous years coupled with a warm spring and summer.

### **Did you know?**

Until 1885 cremations were illegal - a municipal cemetery or churchyard had to be used for a burial. The first crematorium was at Woking. Before the Burial Acts of 1852 (London) and 1853, most people were buried in their parish churchyards or in cemeteries of nonconformist chapels. But by mid-19th cent. overcrowded churchyards were becoming a health hazard and the Burial Act enabled local authorities to acquire land for the purpose of burials. The many municipal cemeteries which were created at that time were managed by burial boards, elected by vestries. These responsibilities were passed to district and parish authorities by the Local Government Act of 1984. Burial registers and lists of grave-lots are normally kept in a superintendent's office at the larger public or privately owned cemeteries. The registers for cemeteries which were established before 1837 are kept in the Public Record Office.

**Local History Companion, Stephen Friar, 2001, pub Sutton ISBN0-7509-2722-4**

<sup>9</sup> S.R. Duncan, S. Scott and C.J. Duncan, 'Smallpox epidemics in cities in Britain', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 25, 1994, 255-71

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Vestry Minutes, 8 April, 1755.

<sup>11</sup> Vestry Minutes, 29 May, 1833.

<sup>12</sup> R.D. Lee, 'Short-term variation: vital rates, prices and weather', in Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History of England*, 365-401

## The Baptist Hicks Eagle Lectern

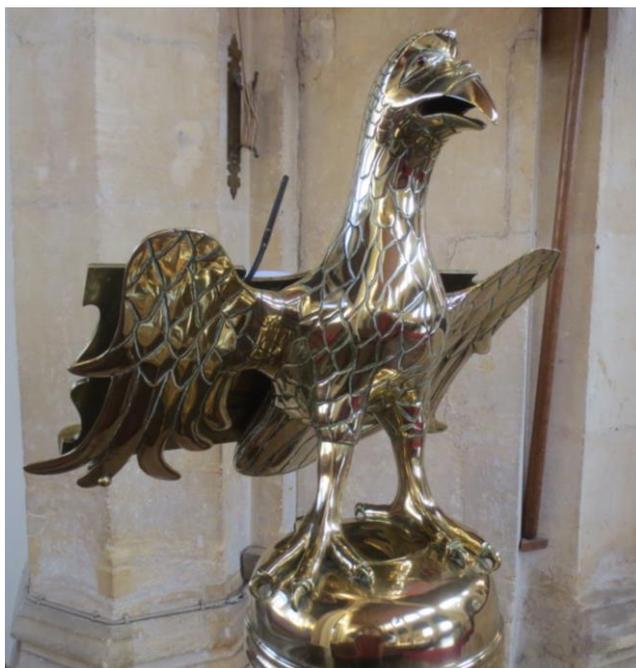
Michael Smedley

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This Lectern has been a fascination of mine since first seeing it with my parents about half a century ago. Lecterns of this form were made in quite a well-defined period, between 1470 and 1530. Opinions by scholars have varied as to where they were made. Certainly, Flanders is a strong possibility, as it was a brass making centre and foundries were well established there and in North Germany, supplying metal wares, for example alms dishes, all over Europe.

Charles C. Oman, keeper of the department of metalwork at the V&A, in 1930 published a fascinating article in the *Archaeological Journal*, volume 87, in which our lectern is listed of one of the 45 late medieval (strictly speaking early Modern to historians) brass lecterns in England known then to be extant (including some non-eagle). Numbers have fluctuated slightly since then – Oman admitted he had not visited all of them – one has since been dismissed as a 19th century copy. The number of Eagle lecterns of this date in England (Wales and Scotland) is thought to be about 40. From his studies he did however note certain basic models, which could be grouped stylistically, possibly indicating the same place of manufacture. The same wooden moulds were re-used, and plinths and feet also are distinguishable in groups.

Ours he puts in Series III (of IV) – the most prolific with 33 examples – possibly all from a single workshop over a considerable time – the 1470-1530 period. Within that series he then puts ours in Group III, and lists them as follows:



- 30 Croft, Lincolnshire
- 31 Wrexham
- 32 Woolpit, Suffolk
- 33 Cavendish, Suffolk
- 34 Upwell, Norfolk
- 35 Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire
- 36 Oxford, Corpus Christi College

Rather disparagingly he states: ‘A conventionalised bird from a poor model and very poorly finished’. Of course, finish can add detail and other models may have more detailed wings, feathers etc. or considered more ‘naturalistic’ as in series I or II, but this is perhaps a little subjective.

He notes a very large concentration of these lecterns extant in East Anglia. He also traces foundries in Norwich – the wonderfully named

Richard Brasyer for example, sheriff in 1495 and mayor in 1510, and the equally wonderfully named Reignold Chirche in Bury St Edmunds, recorded as in his will of 1498 being the second in succession to a prosperous firm of bellfounders. His son Thomas was charged to ‘clene the grete lectorn that I gave to Seynt Mary Chirche q’art’ly’. Other brasiers are noted in the area about this time in wills.

Another strong argument in the favour of East Anglian manufacture is the river transport system – the Ouse was navigable both for the import of raw materials from the Continent and moving the finished item. Transport however was good enough to enable access anywhere in the country, nevertheless these are very heavy items and the concentration still in the Eastern Counties is striking. Once in place they are likely not to travel far.

Marcus van der Meulen in his book of 2017, *The Brass Eagle Lecterns of England*, revises Oman's article in that a stronger hypothesis of manufacture in Belgium is mooted. Following the sacking of Dinant in 1466, which until then was the undoubted centre for brass foundries along with Tournai, the craftsmen were dispersed, many relocated to Middelburg, and sold their wares in Bruges. King Edward IV was exiled there and in 1471, the year he was restored, granted a certain Pieter Bladelin of Bruges a privilege for the sale of brass objects in England. Kings Lynn would be the port into which they would have arrived.

But did these dispersed craftsmen also find a home in England by the same route? Nothing is still known for certain. So, was it the raw materials that came in via Kings Lynn? Or the finished article? Oman's stylistic conclusions still indicate groups from individual foundries – wherever they might have been.

A very interesting speculation then follows about the 'lost period' of our lectern between 1618 when Baptist Hicks presented it, and the previous hundred years or so since it was made. He presumably brought it from London – although very few are noted there.



Van der Meulen notes that in 1581, St Christopher Le Stocks in the City of London sold off their brass eagle. A year later the Earl of Northumberland is noted as having purchased one for the Chapel at Petworth House, which can be dated to c.1500. At the time church wardens seem to have been selling off items seen to have been superfluous – so they were 'on the market' at the time or just before.

On the death of Sir Baptist Hicks in 1629 a list of charitable bequests includes 'brass falcon £26'. Whether this is a known cost or the figure of a 'preisir' or 'priser' (the precursor to an appraiser or valuer like me) is unknown. Other bequests on the list are certainly sums of money - such as the poor of Campden £500. But very probably it was the cost.

The oak pulpit was presented in 1612 – a very busy and presumably prosperous year for him as Campden House Kensington was started then, the Almshouses are traditionally dated to this year and Campden House itself 1612/1613.

So presumably the eagle must have somehow come to his attention a little later in 1618. This was a man clearly acquiring a vast fortune very rapidly. Then as now merchants would be buzzing around him like bees to a honeypot. Who knows – did he seek it out? Or did it seek him out via a third party? Maybe one of those church wardens – or a merchant who had supplied him with furnishings for his London and Country Houses?

But at this point it is worth noting the original placing and use of these lecterns within church buildings – and the volatile first century through which these lecterns survived.

In pre-reformation times a contemporary engraving shows a similar eagle lectern facing the altar, and a second lectern, a double-sided bookrest, in the centre of the choir, to hold the choir books. The eagle, the emblem of St John, was undoubtedly suitable for gospel lecterns, as the eagle was

once considered the only animal that could look into the sun, and therefore appropriate for carrying the message of the gospel of Christ, the Light of the World. Other scholars mention the eagle as a symbol of Christ himself. Whatever the exact use or symbolism, for the gospel or chants, its position was in the chancel. Originally it would only be glimpsed by the common man, positioned facing away from him towards the altar, firmly behind the rood screen, and he would have heard the bible and chants in Latin, mostly unintelligible to him.

The Protestant reformation of Martin Luther, traditionally dated to 1517, and of course the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII between 1536-1541, saw this status quo turned on its head. In 1539 the Great Bible was presented and a copy had to be displayed for all to consult. The lectern could easily be relocated in the nave for this use.

But much destruction and looting also took place and records exist that often the most valuable parts of monasteries were its metals – most easily released by burning or melting down (the whole building!).

Then of course the next threat was Oliver Cromwell and the Civil War 1642-51. His troops are known to have damaged eagle lecterns – again as idolatrous images.

Wherever our lectern was, it was spared. In the reformation, many records show that favourite items from ‘the old faith’ were hidden, buried, or otherwise rescued. Some lecterns are noted to have been rescued from lakes, where they had been pitched either by iconoclasts or hidden by Catholics. The Southwell Abbey eagle was retrieved from the lake of Newstead abbey by Lord Byron when he ordered it to be dredged. Cropredy’s lectern, noted by Oman as the same model as ours, was recovered from the River Cherwell, also in the 19th century. I have recently met a Cropredy resident who tells me their lectern came out of the river minus one of the lions’ feet, which was recast in bronze as the metal had patinated to such a dark colour in the river that it was mistaken as bronze. I look forward to going to have a look at this and other eagle lecterns as soon as everything is open up again!

Jill Wilson in her Civil War notes on the church for the CCHS concludes that St James’s escaped very lightly in the Civil War and a study of the General Accounts of the Church Wardens 1626-1907 confirms this. I quote ‘There was no siege so the Roundheads who seized the town had no particular venom to work off – and, notwithstanding Colonel Bard’s reputation – this would have been the Cavaliers’ parish church. (Also, you don’t foul your own nest!) In addition, much probably depended on the Vicar, William Bartholomew, and Lady Juliana’s steward, William Harrison to try and placate any potentially marauding troops’.

It does crop up in the church wardens accounts a few times – William Cale was paid 1 shilling and 8 pence for ‘mending eagle and finding brass’ in 1629 – so soon after it was presented. William Cale seems to have been a useful man as he did various other metal work – presumably a local blacksmith. Then again in 1636 Thomas Lucas was paid for ‘mending and scouring the brasse eagle and the standard of brasse’. In 1639 the eagle was ‘scoured again’. Records are sparse thereafter, fall off during the Commonwealth, but it would seem other treasures were soon back in place and not looted. 18th Century records are much less detailed with little mentioned, but from 1862 the parish clerk was to be responsible for cleaning and ‘no future charge was to be allowed’! Sarah Freeman was nevertheless ‘given a gratuity’ for cleaning the eagle in 1866.

Whatever condition it was in, by 1881 it seems it needed restoring. The Parochial Magazine of November 1881 records a visit by benefactors, Mrs Mary F. Hiron and her daughter from New South Wales, on the 9<sup>th</sup> October, bearing a cheque for £25 from Mrs Hiron’s son, Henry Heron Esq (sic) of Elthan, New South Wales, ‘towards the great work we have in hand in the restoration of our church’. The Hiron family appear to have been prominent Chipping Campden residents from the 17th century onwards – appearing often in church records. A William Hiron is noted as a church warden in 1626. The subject of another study I’m sure. A branch of the family clearly emigrated and prospered. Following the visit Mrs Hiron wrote ‘My dear Sir – My daughter and myself have decided with your

permission to get the lectern repaired and we have to request that you forward the lectern and stand to J W Singer and Son of Frome'. I need scarcely add, the Magazine continues, that the old eagle, nearly 270 years old (370-400 as it actually was then), has travelled to Frome where it will be repaired in the first style'.

The restoration of 1881 is recorded modestly as 'restored November 1881 by MFH' on the lower part of the pedestal. The glass eyes were certainly added then, but what else was 'refreshed' is unknown.

One other note to dispel a myth – is that coins were never meant to be inserted through the open beak as alms. Our model and others like it with a notably open beak were contemporaneously nicknamed 'Peter Pence's duck' rather disparagingly referring to its Catholic connotations. Any coins inserted would have fallen into the legs! A fascinating thought but any early coins thrust through the beak would presumably be found by the restorers in 1881 – a bonus perhaps?

It is simply open as when cast, a rod was inserted through the body to the tail, where a filled rectangular hole can be seen. The exact method of casting – whether by *cire perdue* (lost wax) – or casting in hard sand – is still in dispute amongst scholars. Whichever method was used, a carved eagle would form the shape in the mould, and a rod would still be needed through the mould to support the casting.

The wooden platform is noted as having been added in memory of Rebekah Grove, May 13, 1909, and the stone plinth.

We are lucky of course here in Chipping Campden to be steeped in history. As an antiques appraiser during my working life, the thought often occurs 'if only these items could speak, what a story they would tell'. Our eagle certainly has a story – some of it lost in the mists of time, but some recorded. And what is more this lectern was specifically made to speak from and has faithfully performed this function for over 500 years.

**2021-2022 CCHS Lecture Programme. Meetings are usually held in person in the Town Hall, at 7.30pm, but currently are being held by Zoom due to Covid restrictions.**

**Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2021:** *'New Insights into Chedworth Roman Villa with an introduction to Dorn Roman town.'* Dr. Nick Humphris, site guide at Chedworth.

**Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2021:** *'Farmsteads and Buildings – Recording the Past for the Future'*  
Dr. Alan Wadsworth, director, Worcestershire Farmsteads Project.

**Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021:** *'Green Man History Uncovered'*.  
Tim Healey, freelance writer, broadcaster and musician.

**Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021:** *'Scenes of Crime Executions in Georgian Gloucestershire'*  
Professor Steve Poole, Director of the Regional History Centre, UWE.

**Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> January 202:** *'Jane Austen, the Dashwoods and the Regency Cotswolds'*  
Dr. Allen Firth, former conservation officer for Stratford-on-Avon District Council.

**Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2022:** *'Recent Victoria County History research in and around Wychwood Forest'*. Simon Draper.

**Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2022:** *'Churches of the North Cotswolds'*  
Tim Bridges, Conservation Advisor, The Victorian Society.

**Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2022:** *'The Human Costs of the Civil War in Gloucestershire: War Victims and their Stories'*. Professor Andrew Hopper, Prof. of Local and Social History, Department for Continuing Education at the University of Oxford.

# I Never Saw Any Soldiering Till Now.

Jennifer Fox

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*This article was inspired by a co-incidence. A remarkable original letter was offered to the Society just two days after a copy of the same letter had been discovered in a box of family papers. The letter, written by Robert Hiron about the battle of Talavera in 1809 supported by information in his army record from the G. Powell archive and extensive reading about the Napoleonic Wars formed the basis of further research.*

Robert Hiron, youngest son of John Hiron of Chipping Campden, was buried in his hometown on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1819 aged 46. Two years earlier he had been discharged from the British Army “aged and worn out from length of service”. That service had lasted 23 years and 132 days during a period of constant war.<sup>1</sup>

Robert was born in 1774 in tumultuous times which must have affected Campden. Whilst armies fought the French in America and Canada, across Europe, the Cape, the Middle East and in the Caribbean, the effect of the war was devastating for many at home. Ever increasing taxes, high food prices and shortages, the Corn Laws, low wages, land enclosures and the general fear of invasion caused a rise in unrest, in poverty and destitution. Rural poverty was particularly marked and a writer at the time remarked that the “fortunes of the farmers rise and fall with the fortunes of the war.” The Relief of the Poor Act in 1782 reflected urban and rural poverty. Each community also had the onerous responsibility of providing a constant supply of “able-bodied” men for local militia and the army which reduced the effective workforce and caused hardship to families left behind. Enlistment in the army was regarded almost as a death sentence due to harsh conditions, floggings and disease. The notorious Recruiting Sergeants found it hard to persuade men to join; army pay was well below that of a day labourer’s pay. At this time, it is reported that the army comprised foreign mercenaries, conscripted prisoners, vagrants, vagabonds and the poorest of the poor.

In 1793 one year after the onset of the Napoleonic Wars, Robert a labourer aged 20, joined the army as a private. Why? Did he have a desire to run away and fight “Boney”, was he in dire poverty, did he fall foul of the Recruiting Officer?

He enlisted as a private in the 31<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Foot, which was raised to fight in the West Indies “the worst posting on earth”. It existed for only 12 months before, decimated by disease, any men still fit to fight were transferred to other regiments.

Robert then joined the 105<sup>th</sup> Foot raised for the same purpose. It went first to Ireland and gained notoriety when the men rioted on being ordered to Haiti. It was disbanded after suffering losses mainly due to fever and became known as one of the “ephemeral corps”. Its actions drew the public’s attention to the appalling death rate from yellow fever in the Caribbean. Robert’s service of 17 months with the 105<sup>th</sup> tallies with information on his discharge certificate of 17 months service in the West Indies. He was promoted to Corporal during his final three months.

Robert then spent 2 years with the 93<sup>rd</sup> Foot which was another of the ephemeral corps, having been raised to provide garrison troops in Haiti and again rendered unable to fight because of death and sickness. After three months, he was promoted to sergeant.

In 1797 Robert’s army records show he began 7 years’ service with the 81<sup>st</sup> Foot which was again involved in the Haitian Revolution and like other regiments before, suffered heavy losses due to yellow fever. It was then ordered to Guernsey to recover from its terrible losses. It defended Guernsey against the French and also served in Egypt and the Cape.

Records show that Robert had a second posting of 9 months in the West Indies with one of his regiments. He was also in Guernsey. There is no record of him being in Ireland, but it is highly likely.

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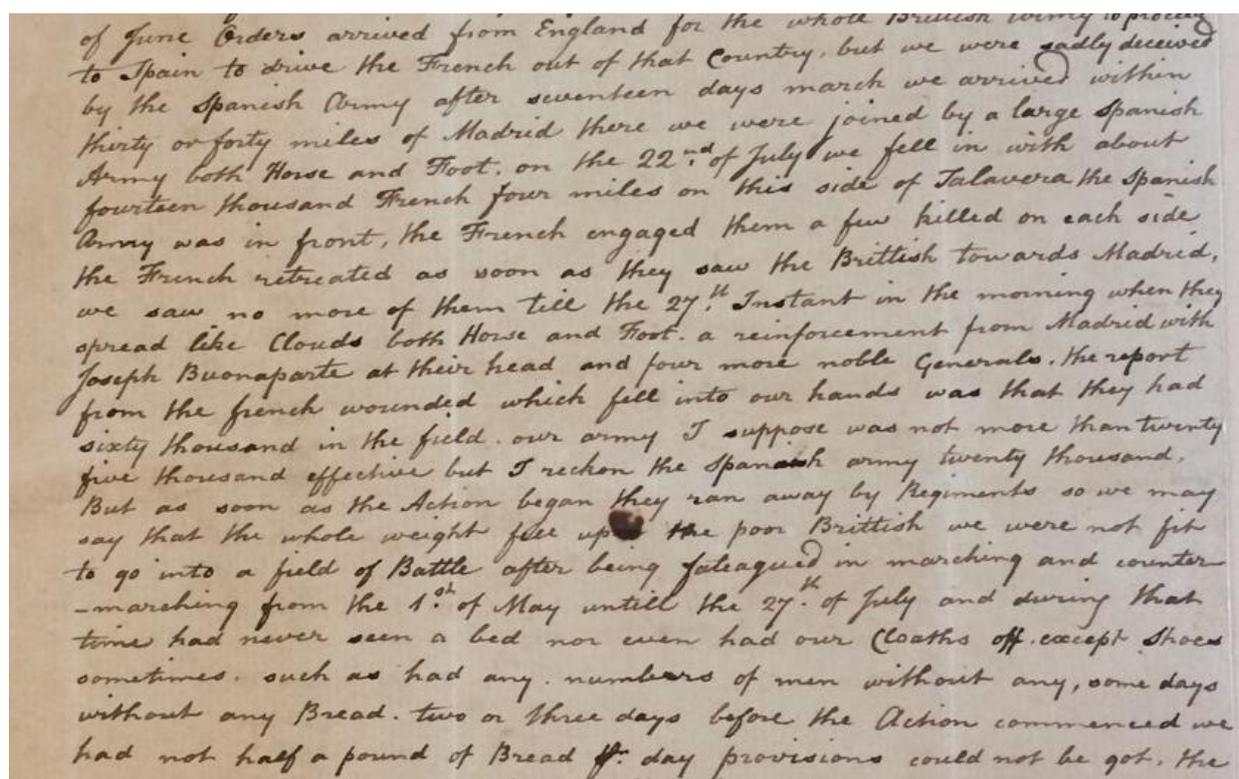
<sup>1</sup> Army Discharge Certificate 1817

In March 1805 after 12 years unbroken service, having achieved the rank of sergeant, Robert left the Army.

From 1793, Robert had moved or was transferred from regiment to regiment continuously, so it is not known if he returned to Campden, but on leaving the 81<sup>st</sup> there was a nine-month period when he was not in service. Did he try to settle down in Campden? He was in the area because in December 1805 Sergeant Robert Hiron aged 31 was recruited back into the Army, enlisting in Birmingham and joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot as a private. The 2<sup>nd</sup> was a Warwickshire Regiment and raised specifically for the Spanish Peninsular War, so Robert would have known his likely fate. Why did an experienced sergeant start again at the bottom of the ladder? However, he worked his way up to sergeant over the next 2 years, a post he held for the next 19 years. Sometime after 1813 when it was created, he was rewarded with the rank of Colour Sergeant, a “prestigious attainment” granted to those who had displayed courage on the field of battle with responsibility for up to 400 men in action.

In 1809 there is direct evidence of his involvement in the Spanish Peninsular War in Robert’s own words, when he sends a letter to his “dear honoured father” in Campden from a hospital in Aloes on the Portuguese-Spanish border giving his account of the Battle of Talavera under Arthur Wellesley, later Duke of Wellington.

The style of the letter shows that Robert was an educated man. The grammar is correct with a good vocabulary and his writing whilst not an elegant script is well formed. It appears to be one of the regular letters to his father to assure him that he was safe and that he longed to be at home in Campden. He would have to wait another 8 years.



of June Orders arrived from England for the whole British Army to proceed to Spain to drive the French out of that Country, but we were sadly deceived by the Spanish Army after seventeen days march we arrived within thirty or forty miles of Madrid there we were joined by a large Spanish Army both Horse and Foot, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July we fell in with about fourteen thousand French four miles on this side of Talavera the Spanish Army was in front, the French engaged them a few killed on each side, the French retreated as soon as they saw the British towards Madrid, we saw no more of them till the 27<sup>th</sup> Instant in the morning when they spread like clouds both Horse and Foot, a reinforcement from Madrid with Joseph Buonaparte at their head and four more noble Generals, the report from the french wounded which fell into our hands was that they had sixty thousand in the field, our army I suppose was not more than twenty five thousand effective but I reckon the Spanish army twenty thousand, But as soon as the Action began they ran away by Regiments so we may say that the whole weight fell upon the poor British we were not fit to go into a field of Battle after being fatigued in marching and counter-marching from the 1<sup>st</sup> of May untill the 27<sup>th</sup> of July and during that time had never seen a bed nor even had our Cloaths off, except Shoes sometimes, such as had any numbers of men without any, some days without any Bread, two or three days before the Action commenced we had not half a pound of Bread ff. day provisions could not be got, the

He recounts how the regiment left Guernsey in a hurry and was force marched across Portugal and Spain for three months with little food or water, no change of clothes, no shelter and ‘some with no shoes.’ Despite their hunger and fatigue, they ‘kept the field’ on the day of the battle. They then spent three days burying the dead but had to leave the field for ‘want of provisions’. Back on the Portuguese border, the army was starving and Robert tells his father that he is very ill, as are his wife Elizabeth and un-named nephew. He makes five references to lack of bread in the letter and notes that the French went into battle with some biscuits whilst he had ‘only the smell of the dead’. The

letter reveals how shocked he was by the campaign despite being an experienced soldier of the line. He says 'I never saw soldiering till now. If I was once more at home, potatoes and salt would satisfy me as long as I should live.' It was not uncommon for wives to be with their husbands on campaigns, but who was Elizabeth? There is no record of a marriage in Campden or of her death, so probably not a local woman. Who was the nephew?

After Talavera the regiment was marched to and fro across Spain and Portugal and was finally withdrawn to Badajoz in Spain by Wellesley due to widespread starvation. The 24<sup>th</sup> entered a 12-month period of inactivity before they were once more deployed against the French, but battles continued across the Iberian Peninsula until 1814, when the final defeat of the French at Vitorio brought that war to an end.

The 24<sup>th</sup> Foot received no commendation for their part at Talavera as their Commander-in-Chief Lt. Colonel MacKenzie was killed, so no report was sent back to London and all the credit was given to the 48<sup>th</sup> Foot. This omission was pointed out to Wellesley, but his dispatches to London to rectify the omission were lost in transit. The 24<sup>th</sup> were eventually awarded Talavera battle honours in 1817, the year of Robert's discharge. The Talavera medal<sup>2</sup> was not awarded until in 1847, long after Robert's death.<sup>3</sup>

Robert Hiron, a labourer from a small town in the Cotswolds, spent twenty-five years involved in wars, campaigns, revolutions and upheaval. Presuming that he went where his regiment went, he had fought the French in Ireland, Guernsey, across Spain and Portugal, the Caribbean and probably in Egypt, led by some of the most famous commanders. He had survived long sea voyages, seen slaves in the Caribbean and had fought "bayonet to bayonet" in Spain. He was "worn out", but he had survived.

When Colour Sergeant Robert Hiron returned to Campden sometime after 1817, was he hailed a hero or just another sick and destitute old soldier?

#### Talking Local History Programme 2021-2022.

Meetings held at 7.30pm currently by Zoom, but normally in the Court Room, Old Police Station.

**Tuesday 26th October:** *Campden celebrates the Festival of Britain.* Photos and memories

**Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> November:** *The Hobbs Family, warts and all!* Richard Hobbs and Faith Quinn

**December:** No meeting

**Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> January:** *West End Terrace.* Tess Taylor

**Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February:** *Gabbs – a family of bakers.* David Gabb

**Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March:** *Sights and Smells of Campden.* Di Smith

**Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> April:** TBC

<sup>2</sup> The medal wasn't confined to Talavera but to the whole War with the French; see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military\\_General\\_Service\\_Medal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_General_Service_Medal)

<sup>3</sup> Talavera letter. *History of the Welsh Borders 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment.* Chapter 14. C.T. Atkinson 1937

## CCHS News and Activities

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When we produced 'Signpost' at this time last year we did not dream that we would still be worrying about 'social distancing'. The enthusiasm for recording all the advantages and disadvantages of lockdown was beginning to wane, and indeed since then there have been few offerings of videos or photographs that epitomise the worrying times. But CCHS has kept going. The monthly mailing has reached all those members on email; we have tried to keep others in touch with activities through regular publicity in the Bulletin. Our use of the Co-op window to highlight different aspects of the town activities with a historical context has proved popular and generated more information to add to our Archives. However, the social aspect of our monthly talks has been much missed.

Our active volunteers have been transcribing more documents and developing the cataloguing of the Archives, in response to the queries that have continued to be answered by Carol Jackson, our Query Co-ordinator, but we are falling behind in our use of social media to promote the society and gather people's memories of events. Our photos are regularly put on local social media pages by one volunteer, but we need more people to gather the feedback and local news. Could you do this? Similarly, suggestions and help with the development of the website would be very welcome.

Donations have continued to come in for the Archives: we have boxes of documents from two local organisations to sort and catalogue; photographs, sketches and letters have come in following the deaths of Campden people; one collection of photos initially got away, via a car boot sale and E-bay, before being rescued by a CCHS member. We were pleased to be offered the opportunity to digitise them for our Photo Library.

The talks programmes for 2021/22 is in place, with continuing uncertainty about whether we will be able to hold "live" meetings in the Town Hall. Ann Hettich has secured the agreement of speakers to use Zoom if necessary for the monthly talks and as we go to press the decision has been made to continue to "zoom" all the talks until the new year. The Coffee Morning Talks during the summer were popular and they provided a bridge into the change of name for the Family History Group. After some deliberation, the programme is now called 'Talking Local History'; the style is unchanged, the talks are given mainly by members on topics relevant to Campden and Campden people and the nature of local history research. We continue to put transcribed information in the Members' Section of the CCHS website, but many people are not sure how to make a start on researching the history of their family or their house, or an object found in their garden. 'Talking Local History' will hopefully provide encouragement to members to investigate their own interests.

**Right: St James's School pupils learning about the cartwash**

We were happy to be invited by St. James and Ebrington Federated School to help on a summer activity with their 9-10-year-olds, following our projects with them in recent years. The topic was centred around a question: 'What if the world ran out of



water?' and one aspect was the impact of water on the history of the locality. We found photos of sheep being washed in the Cam and sheared 100 years ago. The teacher used these for a class lesson which we participated in, including Campden's mills and their changed use over the centuries. Then we went for a walk to the Silk Mill and along the riverbank to 'Town Mill' (now a house) and Lady Juliana's Gateway. On a very hot summer's day the River Cam looked very inviting!

The teacher wrote afterwards, "Thank you so much for our brilliant, informative walk around Campden. It was so useful for me, and I know the children benefitted greatly from your knowledge and expertise. I'm asking the children to make booklets about the walk with the history they have learned."

## **Town Hall Project**

We have begun a significant project to research the history of the Town Hall. A great deal of interest was aroused by Judith's talk earlier this year and we realised that, although the Town Hall is a very familiar building to us all, we knew relatively little about its origins and history. It was as though we took it for granted – walking past it every day, yet never really seeing it, because it was so familiar.

With the active support of the Town Trust, including a significant financial contribution, we have raised funds to commission a professional archaeological survey of the building, including a dendrochronology report, which we hope will date the original timbers in the structure. We still await the final reports from this activity, but initial indications are that it will provide exciting and quite detailed information on the origins of the building.

We are also grateful for the financial support that we have been given by the Campden Conservation Trust Fund and by the Campden Society towards the costs of this work.

Building on this professional activity, we will now be continuing to research and trace the story of the Town Hall through the ages and one of the outcomes will be a CCHS publication telling and illustrating this story.

