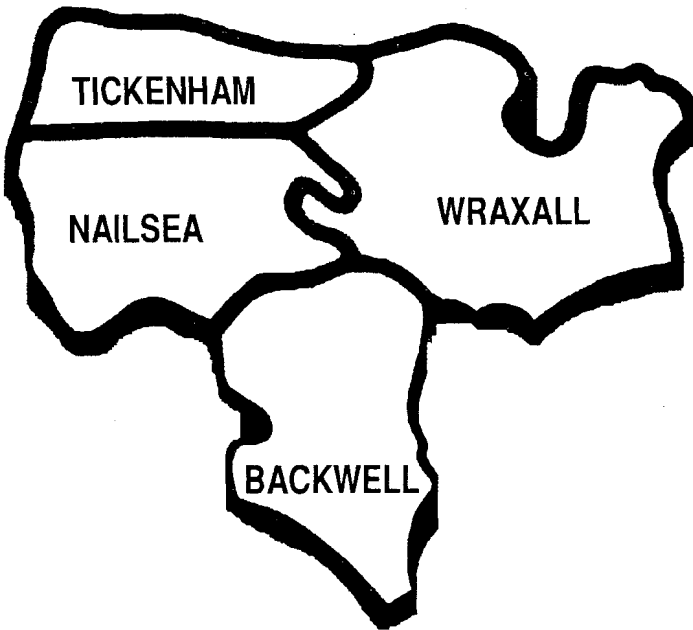


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Who was Richard Baber of Backwell, Clockmaker?

By Norma Knight

The question was first asked some years ago by Mr B. J. Greenhill in one of his Occasional Papers for the Nailsea and District Local History Society. He reported having seen a 7ft long case clock in Wraxall inscribed "Richard Baber of Backwell", and had heard of another at Kingston Seymour. Recently the University of Bristol raised the subject again. There is in the Library at the University a late 18th century long case clock, newly refurbished and restored and bearing the name of Richard Baber of Backwell. It is not clear whether this is a third Baber clock or one of those previously mentioned which has changed hands in the intervening years. There appears to be no mention of Richard Baber in any of the standard lists of clockmakers.

The Baber family is long established in Bristol and North Somerset. The first surviving mention in Backwell is of Frances Baber, baptised 24 March 1559 and buried on 7 April of the same year. One branch was connected with the Tynte family. Edward Baber was a Serjeant-at-Law in Bristol who bought an estate at Nempnett which his descendant, another Edward sold to Sir Haswell Tynte in the early 18th century. There are references to other Babers, such as Samuel, William, John and George but a Richard does not appear until 1730 when one was a tenant of Mizzeymead farm, part of the Tynte estate in Nailsea. However by reason of age, it seems unlikely that he was the same as the Richard Baber who was living in Backwell in 1749 and later.

Evidence from leases and parish records show that Richard Baber of Backwell, yeoman, was married by 1749 and had a son also called Richard. His wife was Elizabeth (Betty) Hellier, daughter of

John Hellier, tenant of an estate formerly held by the Willyn or Willings family, which comprised a messuage, garden, orchard, 30 acres of land, meadow and pasture at Downside, also 44 acres of pasture and arable land called Oatfield Tynings.

In 1749 John Hellier leased another 4 acres of meadow or pasture, called Witchfields, which was situated in Church Town, Backwell. In the next few years Richard and Betty had other children: Dinah in 1749, William in 1752 and Mary in 1755. Betty died in 1765. By that date Richard was paying the Land tax on the estate, John Hellier being described in 1757 as of Cleeve in the parish of Yatton. In 1776 the boundary of the manor of Backwell was said to run "down to late Willings now Richard Baber's". By 1787 the Downside part of the holding (28 acres) was in the hands of

Mary Baber, Richard's daughter, who died about Christmas 1790. The lease then expired and passed to the Foord family. The farm is now known as Combe Head Farm. There is no evidence to show that Richard Baber Senior was other than a farmer who paid church and poor rates and occasionally participated in Vestry Meetings.

Meanwhile Richard Baber junior married Mary Burns on 10 July 1769 and their daughter Mary was born in the following year. In 1771 he was described as a labourer of Cleeve when he acquired the lease of the 4 acres of Witchfields, at which time there was no mention of a house. However, by 1787 a survey described him as tenant of a house, garden and outhouses called Witchfields. In December 1791 the lease was renewed and he apparently remained there for the rest of his life, playing a modest part in parish affairs. He died on 7 May 1818, his daughter Mary having predeceased him in 1810, but his wife survived until 1826. His house no longer remains but a modern house stands near the site.

The Backwell records have so far failed to identify him as a clockmaker, but from Long Ashton there is some evidence of his interest in and skill with clocks. On 14 July 1806 the Churchwardens of Long Ashton paid 3s.6d for "a horse and cart to convey the Church Clock to Babor's of Backwell and the same back after t'was repaired". In October the next year they paid Richard Baber £4.14.6d for repairing the clock and again on 29 March 1808 a further 10s.6d for repairing and cleaning it. After that it seems not to have needed his further attention. Backwell did not have a church clock but possibly other parishes in the area may have done so and may have made use of his talents.

Acknowledgements

Leases of property in the manor of Backwell are held at Longleat and quotes or reference to them are by permission of the Marquess of Bath. Parish records for both Backwell and Long Ashton are held at the Somerset Record Office, Taunton. I am grateful to Ruth Poole of Long Ashton for bringing the Long Ashton reference to my notice.

Nailsea Tannery

By Trevor Bowen

Part I. Historical background and the Tanning process

In 1985 during the construction of two houses in the Kingshill area of Nailsea the builders chanced upon the remains of the 19th century tannery. That such a business once existed had been established by the late B.J. Greenhill, but its precise location and layout within the grounds of Nailsea House, off Watery Lane, had been a matter for conjecture. Now the stones and brick lined pits central to the process of converting animal hides into leather had been exposed by a mechanical digger.

Little documentary evidence for the tannery has so far come to light. Census returns reveal that eight persons were employed there in 1841; 12 in 1851; 6 in 1861; none in 1871; and only 2 in 1881. Tantalisingly brief references appear in the Vestry records:-

- 1700 Ralph Vigar for lether for ye bells, 1s 6d
- 1711 Tablet in Holy Trinity Church to Ralph Vigar
- 1785 Mr Baddily for Tanyard Rates
- 1785 It is agreed this 26th day of Dec 1785 at a Vestry to put out Mary Hicks to the estate of Mr Wm Baddily, The Tanyard
- 1789 The Rev Baddily for Tanyard rates
- 1805 Received of Mr Davis in lieu of an apprentice for the Tanyard £8-0-0
- 1839 J.F. Cox occ Tanyard and Bldg. Ignatius Davis owner
- 1843 At a Vestry meeting held on January 11th it was agreed that MrJohn Brown should make a new survey of Messrs Cox tanyard and the Nailsea Coal works...

In "The Book of Nailsea Court", Nathaniel Wade the owner of the court, is said to have owned a tannery in Nailsea in 1695. A Major of Trained Bands, Wade took part in the 1685 Monmouth Rebellion, escaped the Bloody Assizes and later became Town Clerk of Bristol. John Morgan's notes on the Wesleyan Chapel at Kingshill, has one Charles Tucker - tanner of Nailsea House - recorded as a chapel steward in 1864. Local newspaper reports are more descriptive:-

1847 Samuel Parsons a man employed at the Tan works of Mr Cox of Nailsea had part of his arm cut off by the saw of a bark mill. On being conveyed to the Bristol Infirmary., immediate amputation was found necessary. We understand the poor man is going on favourably.

1852 On New Year's Eve, S.F. Cox gave the Society of Tanners in his employ a good old English supper at the Butchers Arms Inn served up in the worthy host Denton's excellent style.

1859 "The Successful Merchant" by W. Arthur

"When only 5 years old, his (Samuel Budgett) parents again removed fixing this time at Nailsea ... Besides a terrible accident in a tanpit, where he was hardly rescued from drowning ... we then lived in a large and respectable house, belonging to the late James Davis Esq., of Bristol, having large entrance gates on the left hand of a long yard opposite the house door. On the right hand was a very nice cherry orchard, on the left hand, going from the cherry orchard to the alcove, was a flight of steps leading to the kitchen garden, at the bottom of which was a bathing pond

The above extracts and quotations are taken from the notes of B.J. Greenhill. Was Samuel Budgett describing Nailsea House?

For an idea of the layout and operation of a tannery within the period 1695 to 1881, we must look beyond the village to the evidence of contemporary tan yards. These must be of the oak bark variety, where hides - of bulls, cows, and horses - from the surrounding area were converted into heavy leather by lengthy immersion in a mixture of ground oak bark and cold water. Apart from the 1847 newspaper report, it was evident from the pits uncovered in 1985 that tannin liquor - the result of mixing bark and water - had stained the stone and brick walls.

One such tannery at Rhaeadr in old Radnorshire had been dismantled stone by stone in the mid 1960s and re-erected at the Welsh Folk Museum, St Fagans near Cardiff. Its present appearance complete with tools equipment and leather is representative of the 1890s and therefore suits our purpose.

Unfortunately only two working oak bark tan yards survive today, vegetable tanning having been replaced by mineral tanning at the end of the 19th century.

One is at Grampound near Truro (J. Croggon and Son) the other at Colyton in South Devon (J. & F.J. Baker & Co). These have been in existence in excess of 200 and 300 years respectively for the supply of high class leather for orthopaedic appliances and bespoke footwear.

With unguarded pits, neither is open to visitors for reasons of safety, and the Writer is grateful to both owners for allowing him to ask questions, take photographs, but most of all to experience the distinctive atmosphere of these last remaining tan yards.

A further descriptive source of reference is "Work in Bristol". A copy is in the Bristol Reference Library. It was published in 1883. In it the author recounts his visit to the Avonside Tannery of P & S Evans & Co claimed to be the largest in the South West.

The layout of a tannery was usually "L" shaped or three sided around a working yard containing many pits. The buildings would be of stone if that were the local material, with the process areas probably surmounted at first floor level by timber weather-boarding or vertical slats to ensure an adequate circulation of air. There would be an office, weighing room for the receipt of hides, and a cool room or cellar for the storage of hides.

WATER PIT.... In the absence of running water such as a stream, the hides were well washed here to remove salt preservatives or traces of blood. Prior to this washing, dogs may have been used to bite off fats and flesh still adhering to the hides; also to guard the premises, kill vermin and provide excreta for use in a later process.

LIME PITS... By immersion in slaked lime of increasing strengths, the epidermis and fats remaining on the true skin were loosened, a process that took from one to six weeks.

BEAM HOUSE. ...Here was carried out one of the most unpleasant and unhealthy tasks - the other was grinding bark. Skins were thrown over a beam and all traces of flesh removed from the inner surface, and hair plus roots from the outer. The former was often sold for glue; the latter to plasterers, stonemasons, upholsterers and manufacturers of cheap clothing, blankets and felt.

PLASTERING PITS....These contained a mixture of warm water and hen, pigeon and dog excreta. This removed all traces of lime from the previous process.

ROUNDING....The large hides, each comprising varying qualities of skin, had to be cut up into "butts" prior to tanning.

LEACHING PITS....As previously described, the oak bark was finely ground mixed with water and allowed to stand for 6 to 8 weeks.

SUSPENDER PITS.. ..Butts hung vertically were moved daily from pit to pit through increasing strengths of liquor.

FLOATER PITS... The butts were laid flat and moved 2 or 3 times daily, again through increasing strengths of liquor over a 6 to 8 week period.

LAYER PITS.. .Similar to floater pits, but the butts were laid flat between alternating 1 inch layers of ground bark. This process took up to 18 months.

DRYING.. ..The butts were dried in near darkness in a well ventilated loft; not too fast, not too slow.

CURRYING....By law the trade of currying- the process of cleaning reducing in thickness and softening the leather by the impregnation of oils and fats could not be carried out within the tannery confines until the mid 1850s.

Oak bark leather, as distinct from the modern chrome liquor process completed in 8 to 9 hours for sheepskin, is evenly tanned, hard wearing, firm but flexible, moulds and sews easily and does not cause skin irritations. Direct from the tan yard it could be used for boot soles; but for boot uppers and harness it required the expert attention of the currier. Despite a flourishing boot and shoe trade in Nailsea throughout the 19th century and no doubt earlier, no trade of currier is mentioned in the 1841-1881 census returns, unless the enumerator has mistakenly recorded a "carrier" in error.

So it can be seen that the traditional method of converting hides into leather is a labour intensive process, requiring the movement of hides and butts on a daily basis, as well as controlling the various strengths of tannin liquor and slaked lime. The entire process took in excess of 18 months. Many pits, each approximately 8 feet x 5 feet and 5 feet deep were needed. The Rhaeadr Tannery had 58 comprising 12 layer, 22 floater, 8 leaching, 8 suspender, 3 lime, 3 mastering, 1 water and 1 offal.

Today Croggins at Grampound have 81 pits but the Avonside Tannery in the 1880s had 600.

To be continued.. in part 2 Excavation, and a provisional reconstruction of the Nailsea Tannery.

The Bird in Hand

(Closed 1966)

This pub was built on part of the village green beside Kings Hill. The building is still there on the southern side of Watery Lane and is now called Tudor House adjacent to John Whiting's Cottage. Still visible are the walls of an earlier building that housed the pub in the 19th Century. The bricked up windows can be seen in the wall that surrounds the garden at the rear of Tudor House.

Greenhill attributed the date 1800 to this building but it seems unlikely as the only building on the village green at the time of enclosure (1813-1819) was John Whiting's Cottage.

A clue as to the age of the original building could lie in the newspaper report of an auction to be held at the Butchers Arms on Friday 9th December 1859.

"All that substantial and well built BEER HOUSE with Yard and Garden and Premises thereto adjoining situate at Nailsea known by the sign of the Bird in Hand and now in the occupation of Mr John Shepstone.

The above premises are well situated for business and in good repair and will be sold for the residue of a term of 1000 years (sic) computed from the 1st day of November 1837". (Presumably the lease ran from the time the land was purchased to build the beer house.)

In various directories dated from 1861 to 1875 a Mr John Shepstone is shown as a beer retailer and carrier and although we have no definite proof it seems likely that he was the carrier that operated from the Bird in Hand. For many years the

Summerell family were the licensees and their harvest Home decorations appear in the postcard inappropriately captioned "Butchers Arms".

Mr Pullan in his parish survey records a stone found on the site bearing the letter A over T C over 1803. There is no evidence to tie this in with any building on the site known to the Local History Society.

Granny Tucker who died some years ago and whose father helped build the second Bird in Hand said a bottle was placed in the chimney breast. The bottle contained the names of the men employed in the building. She remembered her father showing this to her when she was about 11 when she took a meal to him on the site.

The Bird in Hand was purchased by Courages in May 1912 for £1257. Two years later the adjoining cottages were sold. There is a record of repairs being carried out in September 1958 but in 1966 the pub was closed.

Henry Burgum of Bristol and Tickenham

By David Chappell

Part I. The Man

Henry Burgum was born at Littledean in 1739. In 1752 he left the Forest of Dean to take up an apprenticeship in Bristol with Alan Bright, a pewterer. This was for seven years, when from the age of 20 it is said that he "rose by his own industry"; indeed in 1764, a local newspaper reported that Henry Burgum, Pewterer and Worm Maker, was moving house, and went on to describe his wares. His business was successful and he went into partnership with George Catcott, the son of the Master of Bristol Grammar School.

In 1765, and now described as an eminent pewterer, he married Miss Betty Copner, "rich in every requisite that makes the honourable state amiable". That apparently included money. His standing in local society appears to have progressed in leaps and bounds, and within two years he had become Deputy Governor and Treasurer of the Corporation of the Poor, and President of the Grateful Society.

In 1767, he had his portrait painted by the Nailsea born artist John Simmons. It hangs in the Georgian House in Bristol, and it may give a clue to the vanity which was to lead to such distress later. He desperately sought acceptance from his more cultured peers. He emulated their pomposity and was rather too fond of his almost aristocratic status.

At about this time he met up with Thomas Chatterton, a young poet. Having found some ancient documents in St Mary Redcliffe, Chatterton, enthralled by their language and style, invented a mediaeval monk, named Thomas Rowley, and created

a series of historical poems alleged to have been written by the monk.

Chatterton approached Burgum and told him that he had found something in St Mary's called the "De Bergham Pedigree", which went back to the time of William the Conqueror. Poor Henry was completely taken in. But that was not all. Chatterton when only 17, in a fit of bitterness, produced a will in which he attacked and lampooned many of those who had assisted him, including Burgum who was mortified to discover his pedigree was a fake.

Humiliation by Chatterton was followed by attacks on his character by a rogue named James Thistlethwaite. Burgum began to neglect his business, and to pursue other interests, principally his love of music. He was eventually declared bankrupt in 1783. Three years later, having lost the use of his limbs through gout, he found himself in a debtors' prison in London, but was rescued by Bristol friends. In 1788, "The Messiah" was performed in Bristol for his benefit.

The following year he died at his home in Bristol, but was buried by the font in the church at Tickenham, where in better days he had owned a country "place" now again called Tickenham House, of which more later.

Acknowledgements

Detail supplied by Douglas Burgum of 26 Furze Platt Road, Maidenhead, Berks SL6 7NN.

Billy Pope

A Wraxall Man: Soldier of the Queen

By Phyllis Horman and David Youd

William "Billy" Pope was born c1822 the son of Robert and Sarah Pope of Wraxall. Robert was a gardener at Charlton House Wraxall and the family lived at West Hill. William was baptised on 15th June 1823, the same day as his, presumably older, brother Robert.

There were other children in the family and a sister, Mary Ann, younger than William, became great grandmother to Phyllis and David. Nothing is known of William's boyhood or his occupation in the period soon after he left school.

At the age of 21 years 4 months he enlisted in the 51st Light Infantry. His service number was 3356.

On 13th July 1843 Billy departed from Deptford as a guard on board the convict ship "Maitland". He was taken ill with what seems to have been typhoid fever and was put ashore at Simonstown in South Africa.

It was not until 22nd May 1844 that he obtained passage on the freight ship "Prince Albert" for Australia, disembarking at Perth on 14th August 1844. From there he took further passage in the supply schooner "Water Lilly" to Sydney and rejoined his regiment on 21st September 1844, in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) where, according to his discharge papers, William spent 2 yrs 8 mths

In August of 1846 part of the 51st sailed for Bengal(India) while the remainder followed in February 1847. It would seem that to account for his time in Van Diemen's Land, William moved in

1847 to India where he remained for 22 years; he fought in the 2nd Burmah War and later in the Indian Mutiny.

The second Burmah War of 1852/3 was similar to many wars fought at the time with a view to extending the British area of influence and trade.

Major-General H Godwin was in overall command of two Brigades of Infantry. One comprised the 18th Foot (Royal Irish); 80th Foot (Staffordshires); and 40th Bengal N.I. The other Brigade in which William was present comprised 51st Foot (K.O.L.I.); 5th Madras N.I.; 9th Madras N.I.; and 35th Madras N.I. In addition there were two companies of Madras Sappers and Miners.

William's papers mention an assault on the "White House Stockade". This was a rectangular brick walled enclosure, which had been further enclosed by a wooden stockade, the space between was filled with rammed earth. Within the enclosure stood a white house approached by a flight of steep steps and inside the house was a large statue of the Buddha. This attack was one of many fought in and around the main towns near Rangoon. The Burmese were sure that the attacking troops would suffer sickness and so were prepared to wait. Surprisingly the precautions taken by the British were successful and the amount of sickness was less than in the normal conditions in barracks.

On William's records it states that he received the Burmah War Medal but the troops that took part in the campaign were granted the India Medal of 1854 with the bar "Pegu". He was also entitled to prize money. One share was £50 at the first distribution, £13 at the second and £12 at the third. This was received in India.

Then in February 1854 the Regiment returned to Madras, and in April embarked for England and on their return gave the Burmese Bell to York Minster. 119 soldiers transferred out to the 43rd Light Infantry (later to become the first battalion of the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry) and remained in India. Amongst them was William.

On the 26th April 1855, at St George, Madras he married Delphina Ford, a widow whose maiden name was Broadie or Brody. While their ages were given as 27 and 20 respectively it seems more likely from other information that they were both in their 30s. Other dates given in the records do not tally but we do not have the information to correct them.

A son was born to them on the 17th March 1856, he was baptised two days later and named William. That so far, is all we know of the baby. Did he grow up, or having been only two days old when baptised was he weakly and died? There was also mention of a baby Robert Pope in records but no parents' names were mentioned. It is, however, a coincidence that William's father and brother were named Robert. There was also another baby Robert, older than William's brother Robert, who died in infancy.

1857 saw the start of the Indian Mutiny. The 43rd were involved in a battle at Kirwi and had marched probably 950 miles to reach there and later, another 350 miles to a destination not known. In 1858 the regiment was employed against rebel forces in the hills and forests of the Jumna country.

During his service he had qualified for good conduct payments. In 1847/8 he received 1d per day (in amount but not in value equal to 3p per week). In 1852-55 he received 2d per day but lost 1d per day in December 1855 although he regained it in the following year. By December of 1860 the amount per day had

risen to 4d. His pay at that time would have been 7/6d per week (37p) but from this was deducted 1/10d for washing facilities, barrack charges and for renewal of kit and a further 3/6d per week for food. As can be seen the additional 2/4d good conduct pay was quite large in proportion to his other pay.

On 28th September 1863 at Fort William Calcutta, William Pope was discharged "in consequence of medical disability rendering him unfit for further service". The medical papers prior to his discharge state: "This man is worn out and has not sufficient bodily strength in him through the fatigues of field service aggravated through ague malaria" His discharge was confirmed at Horse Guards (London) on 26th January 1864.

On his discharge papers it states "His conduct has been very good and he is in the possession of four good conduct medals". He was also granted the Burmah War medal 1852-3(see note above) and the Indian Mutiny Medal 1857-8. At his discharge he was aged 42 1/2 years old, 5ft 7 3/4in tall and had a swarthy complexion, hazel eyes and dark brown hair. His trade, a labourer.

He was admitted as an Out Pensioner of Her Majesty's Royal Hospital at Chelsea on 27th January 1864, late of the 43rd Regiment of Foot, and received a pension of 1s per day.

Surprisingly, in view of his health on discharge, the India Office has records to show that William joined the Mounted Police in Madras after his discharge from the Army. The entry gives the following information:-

Uncovenanted Service In Government 1864; WILLIAM POPE; Age 42 years, Married, D/Appt 7 Jan 1864; Period In Govt Service 21 years; Residence in India 22 years. Salary 30 rupees per month. Trooper - Mounted Police.

The papers in the file dated 1869 tell of the police force being reorganised with a reduction in numbers, and one wonders if this is why William returned to England in either 1870 or 1871. After December of 1870 his pension, which was paid quarterly in arrears was to be paid at East London, presumably South Africa. This was where the 43rd Regiment was stationed before being transferred to Madras and the area where he had spent time recovering 20 odd years before.

On the census returns of Wraxall and Failand 1871 and 1881 he was living with his widowed Sister Mary Ann Rogers (nee Pope) at the White House Wraxall. It is a coincidence that William had fought at the "White House Stockade" during the Burmah war. It is not known when the cottage at Wraxall acquired its name, but it may only have been from the fact that the exterior was kept whitewashed. On the 1871 Census he was classed as a military pensioner, but on the 1881 Census he appears as an agricultural labourer. According to Phyllis's mother he came to live with his sister when she was widowed. He found work on the Tyntesfield Estate, gave his wages to his sister for upkeep of the home and the last of her children still living with her and kept his pension for his own use.

Peculiarly he never appeared to mention his wife after he came back home, in fact the family were uncertain whether he had ever married. So what happened to Delphina? In the register of St Peter's Church Madras is the following entry "Feb 2nd 1909 Delphina Pope aged 84 years a mission pensioner, died from debility. Signed by the convent chaplain A.M. Jeixeira."

So she had apparently remained in Madras in a hospice for poor old women entrusted to the Convent by the mission which partly defrayed the cost of support, shelter and clothing for its 25 inmates. The home was still in being in 1936. Why did she stay in

India? Had her marriage broken up? Was her physical or mental health too weak for her to travel to England? We just don't know.

William passed away in January of 1899 at the age of 78 years. He was buried at Wraxall, of course, where he began his life. He had served his Queen and Country well, had given the best years of his life to the Army and left the family proud to know that he was one of them. He was a man of Wraxall.

Acknowledgements

The information came primarily from Mrs Charlotte Anne Rew nec Youd (mother of Phyllis Horman) and aunt of David. William Pope, known as "Uncle Billy" was Mrs Rew's grandmother's brother. The discharge papers referred to were left to a cousin of the authors. David has spent considerable time at St Catherine's House, London, the India Office Library and the P.R.O. at Kew, adding much material to the information already known.