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The Batch, Nailsea (M. J. Tozer Collection)



LOCAL HISTORY
GOSSIP - NEWS - RESEARCH

Price

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Wraxall Boys' School Log Books Part 3

compiled by Phyllis Horman

January 9th. 1871. "Began school after the Christmas holidays with only 26 attendance owing to unfavourable weather - frost and snow".

I was surprised to read "Taught a new school song "Try again", if it is the song I think it is "If at first you don't succeed then try, try, try again", we learnt that at Nailsea Senior school in the early 1940's - still going strong about 70 years on!

During February there were several boys absent through sickness, mainly colds. There were occasions over the years of course, when new boys were admitted but "aged 10 unable to read monosyllables" or "unable to read his letters", seems very sad. A very good report on March 8th. "Diocesan Examination by Rev. De Moleyn. Children assembled 1pm. turned out very wet, kept several away, only 41 present. These were examined in Religious knowledge and Scripture Geography in addition to the ordinary subjects. With two exceptions every question asked in the upper classes was answered by the class. The sums given "catches". 5 boys presented for the Writing prize". On March 27th. which seemed to include the 28th. as well, "Admitted John Rew and H. Thorne. Provided every boy in the school with a Spelling book for Home lesson and adopted the method of having the words learnt, written from dictation instead of being spelt orally. Geography learnt to be also written instead of said and mistakes in spelling corrected", so they had homework even then. April 13th. was rather a special day, "The Bishop of the diocese came in with Mr. Vaughan - examined their Drawing and Writing which he commended. Heard them sing, told Mr. Vaughan that a Harmonium would be a great help", and it duly arrived on October 13th.

There followed weekly exams during April and May and during these one boy, John Sawyer, left for a private school, Mr. Kemp's, which I believe was at Long Ashton. The school did not seem to recognise Whit Monday as a holiday until later, but there were not many boys who attended on that day. As usual, during June, July and August, there was the haymaking which kept some of the boys away, but that happened every year. A new lesson was added in August, "Gave the first class a lesson in Botany on the Borage tribe of plants in which they were much interested". Then - September 18th. to the 29th. "School closed on account of the illness of the Master", followed by "In making my last entry in this Log I may be allowed to express a hope that my labours in this school may not have been altogether fruitless and to express a hope that God's blessing may rest upon those that follow". M. Colchester.

On October 2nd. "Mr. George Tidcombe takes charge of Wraxall Boys school and commences his duties this day. 37 boys present". Although I think the

other masters did their very best and worked hard with and for the boys, I see a great difference with Mr. Tidcombe. He was at the school for over 30 years and I feel that his influence on the school and the pupils, made the Boys school a really good place for education, especially as it was only a small country school. He had two monitors who were paid and their work was usually with the infants, but later this was cut to just one. Sometimes though, I feel some of the lessons were a little too advanced for the age group. October 27th. "Rev. E. Vaughan examined 1st. and 2nd. classes in Scripture this morning. Subjects. Judges - Othniel, Elud, Shamgar, Deborah and Barak, Gideon. Matthew - Sermon on the Mount, Miracles in chap. 8, Parables in chap. 13. Written examination to classes 1 and 2 in Arithmetic and Dictation, according to standards". The 1st. and 2nd. classes would be the two above the infants, so the boys would only be about eight years I would suppose. Also Mr. Tidcombe started a night school at 6d. per week, but to begin with no one was interested even though he dropped the price to 4d. but later on some of the boys became interested. During November several were absent with colds and measles and this continued through December. The Christmas holiday of one week started on December 22nd.

1872 January 1st. "Re-assembling of the school after the Christmas holiday. Nearly all the sick ones returned". Nothing of great importance happened during January except that the afternoon school began at 1-30 until 3-30, probably for the winter months, and the Rev. Barry H.M. Inspector, called to take the size of the schoolroom. February 14th. was Ash Wednesday, so the boys went to church from 11 to 12 and this was reckoned as Religious Instruction to bring them within the "Act". February 27th. "Thanksgiving Day for the recovery of HRH Prince of Wales - children assembled at 10, taken to church at 11. Cake and wine after on the Parsonage lawn. Holiday in the afternoon". I'm most surprised at the wine, I can only hope it was for the adults only! March was mainly concerned with various annual exams besides the weekly ones. Mr. Tidcombe believed in the cane for some misdeeds, March 25th. "F. Reed and H. Pyke punished by a stripe of the cane on each hand for playing truant on Friday previous".

On May 16th. there was the inspection by HMI Rev. Barry. Children assembled at 12 o'clock and dismissed at 2pm. The report came back on June 17th. "Boys school. The boys are in very fair order and the fourth and fifth standards are making very fair progress in attainment, but the Arithmetic of the first and the Spelling of the second and third standards want attention". School Staff. George Tidcombe, Certificated Teacher, First Class. Grant per head on average attendance 12s 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. Presented for the Exam 27. Passes for Reading 22. Passes in Writing 14. Passes in Arithmetic 56 at 4s. Passes in Geography 5 at 3s. Average 42 at 6s. Under 7, 5 at 8s". July 15th. "No school today. The children treated to a tea at Tynesfield on the occasion of the marriage of Mr. Antony Gibbs". The Harvest (Summer) holiday started from August 9th. and

the new term commenced on September 2nd. with several boys still absent - probably helping with the late haymaking and harvesting. September 18th. "Master absent during part of the morning to officiate as organist at the church on the occasion of a wedding, consequently less than two hours secular instruction. Ergo, attendance not marked in registers". The night school opened again on October 14th. 3 nights a week on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 7 to 8-30pm, only three boys attended but on the 23rd. another boy arrived. The Christmas holiday began on December 20th.

School began for the new year on January 6th. 1873 and on the 13th. the Master was absent part of the morning through sickness. There was heavy snow on the 24th. of February when the school was closed, it was still snowing the next day but on the 26th. there was a rapid thaw. The usual exams had started and seemed to go on for weeks. On May 5th. "Master absent through illness. School taken by Mrs. Tidcombe. Rewards of clothes etc. given out to the Sunday scholars after 4 o'clock this afternoon". It doesn't state that Mrs. Tidcombe had been a teacher and considering that they had a little family of their own, I admire her for taking over during her husband's absence but he was back at school within a day or so. July 22nd. "Received the Cards from the Dept. of Science and Art for the boys who showed proficiency in the Drawing Examination in March last". There was also the Inspector's Report which included "A good, well taught school, with several very intelligent boys, the best groups 1 and 2 showing very creditably, but the few infants and those of group 2 (= standard 2) comparatively failed. Good knowledge of Prayer Book and Morning Service; moderate understanding of Catechism in which the repetition was very good in older groups". Yet another holiday on August 7th. on the marriage of Miss E. Vaughan, school assembled at 3 and marched to the Parsonage to tea.

After Mr. Tidcombe had been at the school for a short while, he stopped writing a report every day (as the others had done) and wrote approximately once a week unless something of importance had occurred, so at times it was rather boring with just "Rev. E.P. Vaughan took 1st. and 2nd. classes in Scripture." for two or three weeks following. On November 5th. some of the bigger boys were found guilty of driving Mr. Newton's cows and the next day they were "punished for yesterday's misdeeds", November 18th. "Smith and Wilkins warned about playing truant. Battle punished for flinging stones and Smallman, Bolwell, Ball and Chard warned about teasing W. Urch". It would seem that the older boys were getting restless during December, quite probably they were getting near to school leaving age and felt they had nothing more to learn. December 2nd. notes were sent to the parents of Wilkins and Smith of Charlton about staying away from school, three days later some boys stayed away during the afternoon to go to Mr. Baker's sale,

but the following Monday those who were absent on the previous Friday (Baker's sale) stayed in over playtime for the whole week.

All was well by Christmas Eve, the school was dismissed at 3-30pm. and some of the boys were employed during the afternoon in decorating the school for Christmas.

1874, school commenced after the Christmas holiday with ordinary numbers present. On January 26th. "W. Vowles, S. Horler, F. Reed, J. Stokes sent home by order of Rev. E.P. Vaughan for not coming on Sunday. Parents warned that children on the Free List must come on Sundays or pay for themselves". So the weeks rolled on and February 18th. was Ash Wednesday with church at 11am. and a holiday in the afternoon. The seasonal weather seemed just as erratic as today, March 9th. was rather snowy in the morning, so a smaller attendance than usual. The various exams were taking place - I can't remember having so many in my school days! On March 30th. "Willie Nichols died this morning at 3am. aged 6 1/2 years. Admitted to this school May 12th. 1873", no mention of any illness or any epidemics about. Another holiday on June 11th. when there was a meeting of the Bath and West of England Society at Clifton, the Master and some of the elder boys being treated to the show by Rev. E.P. Vaughan.

June 24th. "Received cheque from Rev. E.P. Vaughan for share of Government Grant", July 2nd. "Visit from Mr. Cambridge, Relieving Officer, concerning the payments for pauper children by the Guardians", and July 9th. "Received sheet from the Relieving Officer to enter attendance of pauper children and charge 1/4d. (one farthing) per attendance"; on July 31st. the school broke up for Summer holiday of three weeks.

Back to school again on August 24th. and then the weather changed! September 1st. was a very wet and stormy day, on the 30th. S. and J. Rew (Samuel and John) and J. Stokes were spoken to about coming to school more clean and tidy and on October 2nd. "Very wet and stormy day, no school in consequence of the weather". At the end of November seven of the little boys were away with Whooping Cough and potatoes were still being picked up during November. The weather changed from rain to snow by the 16th. and 17th. of December, and December 24th. "Some of the boys employed in the afternoon getting holly for dressing up the school for Christmas. Breaking up for the Christmas holiday".

January 4th. 1875 and back to school again. On the 7th, Mr. Cambridge the Relieving Officer called to pay the last quarters fees for the pauper children; I understand that Cambridge Batch was named after this man or his family. It was rather nice to read that on January 12th. an old scholar, H. Griffin, visited the school, and on the 14th. F. Wilkins was in trouble again, Rev. Vaughan

caught him throwing stones. The weather in late January was very stormy and by February 25th. "Very snowy day - smaller attendance than usual". A very busy March, the 3rd. was the Diocesan Examination conducted by the Rev. Michell, with 42 boys present and a half holiday in the afternoon. The 5th. was the Drawing Examination conducted by Rev. EP. Vaughan and Mr. R. Newton, from 10 to 11-30am. Presented in Freehand - 19. Geometry - 8. Model - 10, all first grade, then on the 19th. "Holiday in consequence of Confirmation at the church". On April 9th. the morning school was from 9-30 to 11-30 for Secular Instruction and as it was Tithe Day, the afternoon was holiday. It was also the day of the funeral of W. Gibbs esq. of Tyntesfield. Within a few days potato planting had begun and as usual some boys were absent.

The Report of the Diocesan Examination on March 3rd. was reasonably good, the summary for the school in general reads - ~ Knowledge - Good. Discipline of Tone - Good. Repetition - V. Good. The younger boys did well enough in repetition, but should have been more ready to answer in Scripture. The upper groups answered very creditably, with accurate but rather too rapid repetition of Catechism and Scripture". W. Michell. Diocesan Inspector of Schools. The weather in May was very wet at times, which resulted in small attendances. Another "red letter day" for the boys on June 7th, as there was a holiday to enable the Master to take some of the boys to the Zoological Gardens, Clifton - a treat by Rev. E.P. Vaughan. The Report of the Annual Inspection which took place on May 27th. "The school is in very fair order making very fair progress in attainments. The Arithmetic however, wants some attendance". School Staff, George Tidcombe, Cert. Teacher 1st. Class. Frank Walters, Paid Monitor, and on July 2nd. the result of the Drawing Examination, Satisfactory - 12 at 1/-. Proficient - 4 at 2/-. Excellent - 1 at 3/-. It was also the breaking up of school for three weeks Summer holiday.

They were back at school on July 26th. and everything sailed along easily until August 17th. which was Clevedon Flower Show - several boys absent, August 23rd. was Nausea Fete and Gala, some boys away in the afternoon, and mid September and into the beginning of October was time for potato picking again. On October 11th. it had been settled what verses to have for repetition to the Inspector. Sixth standard - The Spanish Armada and burial of Sir John Moore, Fourth and Fifth standards - Chevy Chase. The next day the 1st. class boys were engaged in writing out their verses and Mr. and Mrs. White from Bourton called to enquire about their boy Charles and to know how he was getting on. More excitement on November 12th. "Library Tea Entertainment in the evening. Some boys employed in placing stools for the Magic Lantern Entertainment". The weather at the beginning of December had turned very cold, changing to snow, and many boys were away with bad colds, and on December 24th. the breaking up for the Christmas holiday of two weeks.

Wraxall Sunday School in the twenties.

by Doris Christie.

From an early age we attended Sunday School, the teachers being Miss Russell assisted by a young lady of the village, Miss Gladys Shipton.

The Sunday School started about 2 o'clock and the children gathered together outside the library awaiting the arrival of Miss Russell, who unlocked and took us inside.

The register was called, and on the first Sunday after Christmas the children were given a book, known to us as a 'ticket book". Each week we received a coloured, religious stamp, which we were to stick in the book in the appropriate place. The older children were also given a small note book.

The older girls then went into the church, where Miss Russell would give us a certain chapter and verse in the bible which, before the following Sunday, we had to look up, copy into the note book and learn. For this, we received one mark for writing it, and another mark if we learnt it. These marks then went toward our chances of a prize at the end of the year. That business settled, Miss Russell would tell one of the bible stories and question us about it and offer a prayer, sometimes a prayer for the various village topics, or maybe a local person who was experiencing some difficulties. I remember there was serious flooding in the Rhondda Valley in South Wales. Quite a lot of the Welsh children were sent to Wraxall. Miss Russell led us in a prayer for the childrens parents.

Once a month the Rector held a childrens service during Sunday School, and it was during this service any baptisms were held. This was the one occasion when we were allowed to kneel up on the seat to watch what was going on. We were always told to show great respect in church, so this was a great novelty. 'We had to listen carefully (my sister and I) as when we returned home, mother had three questions for us. 1. Were there any christenings? 2. What names were the babies given, and - 3. What hymns were sung. After tea, dad took his mandolin down (which was kept hanging on the wall) and while he played the hymns, mother and us children joined in the singing.

Early in the year the church held an "Egg and Flower" service, the proceeds going to the Bristol Childrens Hospital. Although held during our Sunday School time, everyone was welcome.

The annual trip was held in August - always to Weston, although I do remember once going to Bristol zoo, although I suppose the seaside was more popular.

As Christmas drew near, that meant prize giving for good attendance and best marks. The older children received a really nice story book, the little ones were judged on good attendance and received books. The rest of the children didn't go home empty handed, they had a religious picture for hanging on the wall.

Our year ended with a lovely party, held in the library. This was usually held on the last Saturday of the year.

Theodore Baker and Family

By Phyllis Horman

The following notes were prepared by Phyllis Horman in connection with the proposed Nailsea pageant for 2000.

Theodore was a son of Alfred and Mary (Alfred classed as a labourer) bapt. 15th Sept. 1861. On the 1861 Nailsea Census both Alfred and Mary are classed as born in Tickenham.

On the 1871 Census Alfred is classed as born in Tickenham, Mary wasn't at home on the day the Census was taken, Theodore was 9 years old, (other children mentioned). On the 1881 Census Alfred was born Tickenham, Mary born Horfield Glos. and Theodore, the only one still at home, 19 years, born Nailsea. In each case the family were living at Jacklands. On the 1861 Census Alfred was still a labourer, but '71 and '81 he was a haulier.

Theodore was married at Christ Church 3 April 1885

Theodore John Baker Bac.F.A.

Ch. Ch. Parish

father, Alfred, overseer

Harriet Jane Derrick Spin. F.A.

Ch. Ch. Parish

father, William, contractor

One child was baptised at Holy Trinity.

14 June 1891

Edith Jane

d of. Theo. John & Harriet Jane N. Traveller(Comm?)

Four children baptised at Christ Ch.

5 March 1893

May Dorothy d. of Theo. John & Harriet Jane Agent

25 April 1895 Frank Theodore
s. of Theo. John & Harriet Jane Silver St. Comm. Agent

28 Aug. 1898 Winifred Grace
d. of Theo. John & Harriet Grace Gen. Store Keeper

24 Nov. 1901 Arthur Edwin
s. of Theo. John & Harriet Jane London Hs. Gen. Store Keeper

Theodore and Harriet were buried at Christ Church -
Theodore John Baker 61 yrs.(died at) 38 Englishcombe Rd. Bath 2 Feb. 1923
Harriet Jane Baker 67 yrs.(died at) 38 Englishcombe Rd. Bath 30 July 1929

I can find no baptism of W.J. (on plaque in Christ Church) at Holy Trinity, Christ Church, Nailsea Methodist, Nailsea Ebenezer, Wraxall or Jickenham, and can find no baptism of Amy Rebecca Collet in any of the parishes mentioned.

On trying to see if any relatives might still be around, I looked for marriages for the children of Theo. and Harriet and could find only one, at Christ Church -

12 th September 1911	
Samuel George Jones Bac. 26 yrs.	Clerk father Walter School Master
Amy Rebecca Collet Baker Spin.	23 yrs father Theo John Grocer.

So Amy was born c. 1888

According to Cis Weeks of Wraxall (born Nailsea) Theodore's shop was the one that is now Bird's T.V. shop in the High street. Cis and her parents lived in one of the houses which adjoined the shop. I worked in the same shop from 1943 - 1946, in my teens, it was then a grocery store belonging to Mrs. E. Dodderell and was known as Manchester House.

From what my mother told me, before Mr. and Mrs. Dodderell married, they ran the shop between them, one side being groceries the other drapery. Presumably they bought the shop from Theodore?

Cis Weeks also said, in her younger days there were still 2 sisters and a brother alive (does she mean still at home?) and that May Dorothy was a school teacher at Wraxall.

Has anyone heard of 'Ginger' Nailsea?

By Peter Wright

Late in October I received a telephone call in which I was told that my number had been given as someone who might be able to help with an enquiry about the MERCHANT / MERCHANT family.

He was asking about an ancestor, one WILLIAM MERCHANT (possibly MERCHANT)

While I have to confess that much of the family history does not relate to Nailsea or Backwell I found it intriguing and hope that our readers find it so.

The following details are extracted from his letter

He provides a list showing his connection with William Marchant and the two people that he assumes were William's parents James Merchant and Sarah Merchant..

Also enclosed is a copy of the birth certificate of William Marchant's son William, showing William Marchant junior's birth on the 1st September 1863.

"This is the proof that the person I am searching for is William Marchant, a publican by profession, living at that time in Maughan Street, Penarth. The fact that he is shown to be a publican on this official document supports to some extent the family legend that I will detail below.

A copy of William Marchant's death certificate of the 13th February 1865 in Penarth shows that he was a publican by profession. It shows him to be 46 years old at death, which means he must have been born around 1818/1819 if the age was correct (which it often was not in those days!)"

In addition to the items mentioned above Adrian includes a page showing what census information I have managed to unearth to date. He says "It is unfortunately very meagre, but it does provide valuable information and again supports the family legend detailed below.

The 1861 census again confirms that he was in Inn Keeper, but even more importantly it shows that he was born in Backwell, Somerset. His age is given as 42, which would again mean he was born around 1818/1819."

"His youngest son William (my great great grandfather), was born in 1863, so does not appear on this census. You can see from the census that his wife was from Lancashire, that the eldest child was born around 1847 in Lancashire. The next child was born two years later in Cheadle, Staffs, and the third child

5 years later in Cardiff before the family moved on to Risca then finally to Penarth where they settled down until William Marchant died in 1865.

So it would appear that William Marchant was born in Backwell and lived and worked in Nailsea until he was about 25 or 30 years old, then moved around an awful lot.

This is all of the information that I can prove with official documentation to date."

(Editor While I can find no trace of any family members called MERCHANT / MARCHANT in the 1828 Poor Law Rate for Nailsea (See Jenny Wheeler's book) I did find one mention in the 1841 census where there is a William Merchant Coalminer aged 20 mentioned presumably a lodger in the cottage where we find four members of the SPEAR family and four of the GIBBS family and, presumably, another lodger George Warfield.)

Adrian goes on to say "Now we come to the family legend: This is the story given to me by elderly aunts on the Marchant side of the family. They all knew William Marchant (junior) personally and swear this is true story as he told it before he committed a form of suicide by drinking a pint of whiskey straight down.

(I just have to interject this note here before continuing. One of my elderly aunts says she was present as a young woman when this took place and swears that this is true, and these are her words:

"William Marchant junior was a tall, strong, upright, hard-working and proud man. All his life he had worked hard and looked after his family. As he got older, he had more and more trouble with his knee, and it got to the stage that he could no longer walk without severe pain. On the 16th July 1933 he came back home from a walk and told everyone that he was in so much pain from his knee that he could no longer walk, and if he could no longer walk there was no point in living any more. Having made this statement, he poured himself a pint of whiskey, sat in favourite armchair in the living room, said goodbye and drank the pint of whiskey straight down. The shock killed him on the spot."

Now I have to tell you that before I heard this story I had obtained William Marchant junior's death certificate – which I attach as number 5 – and I was puzzled upon receipt of his death certificate that the second cause of death was given as OSTO-ARTHRITIS OF KNEE !!! Upon reading this, I asked myself why on earth this would be entered onto a death certificate as a cause of death. People do not die from arthritis of the knee. However, once I heard the story of his death from my elderly aunt, it became quite clear why the doctor

had put the knee down as a cause of death. What a beautiful and tragic story, and isn't it wonderful that the death certificate has such a strange entry confirming the story!)

To continue with the family legend, this is the story as they remember it from the mouth of William Marchant, son of William Marchant:

William Marchant junior was a baby (born 1863) when his father William Marchant died in 1865, but as he grew up his mother and uncles and aunts told him stories about his father. They told him that his father William Marchant was a powerful, red-haired man who was born in Nailsea in Somerset. That he used to own or run an inn in Nailsea called The Ring of Bells, and that the family owned or ran a large transportation business. They also told him that his father was known as "Ginger Nailsea" and that he was a boxer of great prowess who used to take on all comers at fairs for a purse and never lost a fight. He was apparently a man of means and very well set up. At some point in time he captured the heart of a beautiful blue-eyed blond-haired Lancashire lass, who he married. (Note: no one knew the name of the beautiful blue-eyed blond-haired Lancashire lass, but I later found out that he did indeed marry Martha Waddilove from Radcliffe St. Mary's in Lancashire. I have not been able to find the marriage to date). This Lancashire lass of course was William Marchant junior's mother.

Shortly after his father died in 1865, his mother remarried (or lived with another man – I have found no record of a second marriage yet). The stepfather was a bad, mean man who drank up the family fortune and beat the mother and the children unmercifully.

One night, when William Marchant junior was just 16, he and his two older brothers decided to pay their evil stepfather back for the way he had treated the family and they lay in wait for him one dark night. They waylaid him and gave him such a severe beating that they thought they had killed him. Afraid of being caught and hung for murder, all three boys ran away to sea that night from Cardiff docks and were not seen again on these shores for many years.

However, the stepfather had not died, and somehow word was gotten to the three boys that it was all right for them to return.

William Marchant junior returned from his adventures at sea, but the other two brothers had emigrated to Australia where they had set up a thriving business and they never returned.

That is the legend, and strangely enough it is backed up by several facts:

The death certificate of William Marchant shows that he was a publican by profession.

The 1861 Penarth census shows his profession as innkeeper.

The legend was definite that he married a "blue-eyed blond-haired Lancashire lass. Martha Waddilove / Wadelove was indeed from Lancashire, as proved by the census for 1861.

The family's later life certainly indicates they had lost their wealth somehow. From innkeepers with a large transport business they became dockworkers and labourers.

The three boys that waylaid their stepfather – William, Mark and Harry – cannot be found in the country in the 1881 census except for Mark, who was found in the 1881 census as a stoker aboard HMS Warrior at Portland, supporting the legend that the three boys ran away to sea.

If this did occur when William was 16, then as he was born in 1863, it would have been around 1879 when they waylaid their stepfather and ran away to sea.

The fact that William and Harry were not in the country for the 1881 census, and Mark was found aboard HMS Warrior, would seem to support the legend.

I have located two Marchant lines in Australia that link back to my line and am in the process of trying to get more supporting information.

Given the fact that several of the other family legends turned out to be true after the fact, and given the circumstantial supporting evidence, I am inclined to think that these events happened in some form.

If this legend is true, then I would hope that such a colourful character as William "Ginger Nailsea" Marchant would have been recorded somewhere in the historical records of Nailsea and Backwell. The following comes to mind:

The legend claims he was born in Nailsea, not Backwell. This could however be because they are very close together and Nailsea would be an easier recognised location than Backwell, and the 1861 census certainly shows his place of birth as Backwell.

The ages given in the census and on the death certificate indicate he should have been born in 1818 or 1819, but the only William Marchant I have been able to find born in Backwell around that time is the baptism of one William Marchant on the 6th April 1817, son of James and Sarah MERCHANT.

Is this my ancestor, or was there another William Marchant born in 1818 or 1819 in Backwell that I have not yet found?

A powerful red-haired pugilist who took on all comers at the fair would surely have been remembered and recorded somewhere. Such events would surely have been written up in local newspapers or journals. Anyone writing a local history would surely have mentioned such a colourful character who was a pugilist, a publican and who ran a transport business. This is my hope.

If he did indeed own or run a transport business, this would have been recorded in trade and business journals of the time. (*Unlikely in the Nailsea area see Editor's note at end*)

If he did indeed run or own the Ring of Bells in Nailsea, then again this would have been recorded in trade or business journals of the time.

If the legend is true, then they must have been a quite well off family and it would be surprising if they had not owned property, horses, carts etc. Are there any land or property records for that time in Nailsea and Backwell?

If the businesses were inherited rather than started up by William Marchant, then there may well be wills concerning the family.

William Marchant was born in Backwell around 1817 to 1819, but the first solid evidence we have is the birth of his daughter in 1847 in Lancashire. Was he still in Nailsea/Backwell at the time of the 1841 census when he would have been about 22 to 24 years old?

Are there any useful earlier census or surveys in which he might appear at a younger age? You mentioned on the telephone an 1828 census or survey. He would only have been around 9 to 11 years old then, so he would most probably have still been living with his parents.

You can probably think of many more possibilities, as you are so familiar with the records available.

Well, I have ended up writing much more than I thought I would when I started the letter. Please excuse me if I have been long-winded. I only hope that the legend proves to be true to whatever extent and that this colourful character really did exist as the legend tells. Wouldn't that be marvellous! I appreciate very much your listening to me and requesting me to supply you with this information, and I will be very grateful for any help you might be able to give me in this matter. If you need any funds to cover photocopies, census extracts, books, your time or anything else, please do let me know and

I will immediately forward you a cheque. And if I do manage to get to Nailsea in the future, I owe you a drink at the Ring of Bells!"

Editor - Can anyone suggest where we may find information that will help the research? It is unlikely that there would have been a large transport business connected to the time spent at the Ring o'Bells or I am sure that there would be some evidence of it in the records. It is possible that one of the carriers that we know existed in Nailsea later in the 19th century may have started from the Ring O'Bells but I have no details at present. Who were the early beer house proprietors?

There are no MERCHANT / MARCHANT listed as Landowners or Occupiers in the 1865 Valuation List of Nailsea or the 1828 Poor Law List (see Jenny Wheeler's book available from the Society.

I have found an entry in the 1841 census which shows a William Merchant aged 20 Coal Miner living with the Spear and Gibbs families apparently as a lodger. One other lodger ? is George Warfield age 30 coal miner.

Bubbles blowing in Towerhouse Wood

Carbon dioxide emissions from a pond in North Somerset

By Terence A. Smith

Towerhouse Wood.

Less than 1 km to the north of Nailsea, set on the side of a south-facing hill, this piece of ancient woodland (ST475719), occupying about 6 hectares (16.5 acres), was purchased in 1992 by the Woodland Trust with financial assistance from The Countryside Commission, Nailsea Town Council, Wraxall and Failand Parish Council and with generous donations contributed by local residents. It is now a part of the 'Forest of Avon', the Community Forest that surrounds Bristol.

Adjacent to the wood to the south are the remains of a Mesolithic camp (ST475718), first excavated in 1956 (Proc. Som. Arch. Soc. 104, 106), and more recently by the Archaeology Department of the University of Bristol, revealing many worked flints. This was a transit camp, used by our ancestors about 6000 years ago, then subsisting on fish and wild fowl.

The 15th Century Tower House giving the Wood its name, is at Birdcombe Court. An Iron Age bronze torque was found in the vicinity (ST479719) in the 19th Century. Not far to the south are the remains of a Roman-Period villa (ST479716), which featured under floor heating and a mosaic floor (Proc. Som. Arch. Soc. 105, 37).

The wood is well known for its veteran oak trees, probably 400 to 500 years old, one of which collapsed recently, probably due to the water-saturated soil that could no longer hold the weight of the leaning trunk. Other trees include the small-leaved lime, which is an indicator of ancient woodland. In the north east corner is a coast redwood, and other North American trees have been planted to the north of the main footpath. Another feature of the wood are the carpets of spring flowers; bluebells, wood anemones, wild garlic and orchids. Four different species of bat are found in these woods and 36 species of birds have been identified.

The pond in the south-west Corner of Towerhouse Wood (ST473717), near Nailsea, North Somerset, owned by The Woodland Trust, produces bubbles of gas in large quantities (Figure 1), though it appears that nobody has hitherto tried to find out the nature of the gas, or proposed any explanation for its formation here.

This pond (about 5 metres in diameter) is one of several along a stretch of a stream fed principally by springs, eventually flowing into the river Land Yeo. Some gas bubbles are produced in the stream itself and at least one other

pond in this stream shows gas production, though not with the same intensity as the area in question.

The wood is situated on a south-facing hillside, with Carboniferous Limestone (Clifton Down Limestone) above and Triassic Mercian Mudstone below. A fault line is marked on the geological survey map at a position very close to the pond. Coal deposits are confined to the south of this fault. Since the pond was in close proximity to the Nailsea coal measures, it seemed possible that the gas was derived from methane. Samples of the gas were collected on 16/3/1997 and sent for analysis by British Gas (GHG product code 97/453).

An inverted stainless steel tray (about 30 cm x 50cm) with a metal tube in one corner was placed in the pond. All of the gas collected under the tray then passed into the metal tube. A 500 ml glass bottle with screw-top stopper was washed several times with pond water, and while still full and with the open end under water, inverted and placed over the tube to collect the gas. Great care was taken to prevent atmospheric contamination. When the bottle was filled, the open end was covered with aluminium foil and the cap screwed on while still under the water, leaving a small amount of water in the bottle to secure the seal. A second bottle was filled in the same way. The gas was produced at about 200 ml per minute per square metre. The bottles were transported, still in the sealed and inverted position to the analytical laboratory. The samples were subjected to gas chromatography using a thermal conductivity detector with a Porapak column. Gas eluted from the column was oxidised using a copper oxide furnace, oxidising any potential methane to carbon dioxide that was trapped cryogenically. Carbon dioxide bypassing the furnace was also trapped. Methane could not be found, and this was confirmed using a capillary column with a flame ionisation detector; nor could any higher homologues of aliphatic hydrocarbons or hydrogen sulphide be detected.

Analysis of the gas showed nitrogen 73.48%; oxygen 18.37%; carbon dioxide 8.15%. The ratio of nitrogen to oxygen was very similar to that of air (78.08% nitrogen and 20.95% oxygen), but the concentration of carbon dioxide was significantly higher than that normally found in air (0.033%). The possibility of sample leakage was unlikely, and if it did occur, would presumably lead to the gas showing a greater similarity in composition to that of air, and would therefore not account for the enhanced CO₂.

Carbon exists in Nature as two stable isotopes, carbon-12 and carbon-13. Biochemical processes that depend on carbon assimilation, for example photosynthesis, discriminate between these two forms and tend to utilize the lighter isotope, carbon-12, at the expense of the heavier isotope, carbon-13. The measure used to determine the depletion of carbon-13 depends on a technique known as mass spectrometry, which can very precisely separate the

isotopes and measure the amounts present, expressing the result ($\delta^{13}\text{C}$) as parts per billion (parts in 1000,000,000). The indexation standard is set by the value found in the carbonate deposited in a Jurassic belemnite. Depletion is noted as a negative value, hence atmospheric air now has a $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ value of -7‰ . Correspondingly carbonate rocks tend to have enhanced amounts of the heavier isotope ($\delta^{13}\text{C} +8\text{‰}$), probably because the biological processes have utilized the carbon-12 isotope, leaving a larger proportion of the carbon-13. Biogenic methane and natural gas normally has $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ of -40‰ to -70‰ . Bacterial oxidation would tend to enhance this depletion. Using mass spectrometry, the depletion of carbon-13 in the CO_2 in the pond gas was found to be -23.15‰ . This is within the range for bacterial samples (-20 to -30‰) (Fauré, 1986), indicating that the CO_2 is not derived from carbonate or methane.

The absence of methane or its higher homologues does not necessarily indicate that these gases are not formed initially in small concentrations, since any of these hydrocarbons could be oxidised by bacteria in passage through the substrate.

There was no evidence of a major flow of water in the pond, though the possibility of some up welling was likely. No springs were found in the vicinity of the pond. The bottom of the pond was of small rocks, and there was little evidence of organic matter. The bubbles appeared at irregular intervals from single origins with intervals of several minutes, over almost the entire surface of the pond. The pond has not been known to dry out in the six years during which it has been under observation, although the water level fluctuates about 25%. However, the rate of gas flow appears to be independent of the level of the water.

Ponds in other areas of the UK show similar phenomena (Gunn and Bottrell, 1997), though not with such high CO_2 concentrations as in the present case. It is only possible to speculate on the reason for the flow of gas emanating from this pond and for its enriched CO_2 .

Perhaps the most likely hypothesis is that the gas is compressed during flow of water through one or more caverns in the hillside, and is released when the water rises to the surface. (Stanton, 1982). This should imply that the gas flow would depend on an erratic flow of water, and would show as diminished gas production when the water flow is decreased. This does not appear to happen in this pond, since the gas flow appears to be independent of the water level.

Another possible explanation might arise if water flowing by gravity in an underground passage were to become heated, and was unable to re-equilibrate on rising to the surface. The gas expelled would in theory then contain a greater proportion of carbon dioxide. However, the maximum

proportion of CO₂ that could be accounted for by this hypothesis would be 2.9% (Parkes and Mellor, 1939).

The enhanced CO₂ might be explained by the bacterial decomposition of vegetation in the soil. The pond itself was almost devoid of growing plants, being shaded by trees. The rate of CO₂ production amounted to about 17 kg per year per square metre. There did not appear to be sufficient organic matter in the basin of the pond to provide this; nor would this theory account for the nitrogen and oxygen in the gas. It is possible that two mechanisms are operating, one for the latter gases and another for the CO₂. However if the CO₂ is produced by bacterial oxidation, it might seem strange that the oxygen / nitrogen ratio is not significantly lower than that of air, the calculated oxygen depletion being only 1.5%, which is insufficient to account for the enhanced CO₂.

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The author is very grateful to Dr Willie Stanton for his encouragement and for useful discussion. Thanks are also due to Dr Nigel Evans of British Gas, Loughborough for his interest and for providing the gas analysis. I am also grateful to Christopher M.G. Smith for his help in collecting the gas.

Publisher's note – Further information about the Land Yeo and nearby streams can be found in the Society's publications :-

Mills on the Land Yeo Mills on the Land Yeo – Further Discoveries
Who Made the Land Yeo? Boggie Meares and Queachy Fennes

An Editorial Miscellany (1)

Compiled by Peter Wright

I hope that sufficient readers will send items to the editor to enable an article similar to appear in each edition of Pennant. Can anyone suggest a better title?

Elephants

Those of you who have read previous articles in Pennant and also Jim Pullan's book about Brockley (possibly to be reprinted in the next year or so) will remember that a skull (of an elephant) now at Bristol Zoo was found near Brockley. It is thought that the elephant was brought to Brockley to help with the forestry there.

Imagine my surprise when I read in the Sunday Times (Nov 5th 2000) that in the village of Chartham in Kent there is an elephant house for sale.

Totally inconsequentially this brings to mind my mother telling me when we lived in Kent during the war that the railway line ran through several villages that led to porters calling out what appeared to be the words "Why Kill 'em and Cart 'em to Canterbury"

The article states that there is on sale (for £430,000) a conversion of two elephant stables and a nearby building thought to be a food store. The buildings date back to the mid 18th century and were built by the Colebrook family who lived at Chilham Castle.

It goes on to say that as senior members of the EIC (East India Company) it was easy for them to ship over an elephant to help clear the forest of oak trees.

The first stable was built about 1740 and the second about 1755. It is believed that there may have been as many as 4 elephants there at one time.

The Stables had wooden rafters where the mahoots, the boys, who looked after the elephants, slept.

While the stables were converted to a house for the gamekeeper in the mid 19th century a second batch of elephants was imported for tree clearing around 1875 when the property reverted to stables.

Bedminster Union Workhouse 1891

I seem to remember that the list I have was supplied by George Knox so thanks to him for the information.

There were a number of people listed who were born in one of 'our' parishes and it is possible that I have already provided a list for readers but all that I intend to mention here are two officers Martha Halle a widow whose occupation is Nurse. She is 50 and states that she was born in Nailsea. Harry Edbrock is a 28 year old blacksmith born in Wraxall.

John Whiting

I have a note that John Whiting was married May 1742 in Clutton (the day was indecipherable).

John Tilley – Glassblower etc.

A Mrs Sheila Baker from Sheffield telephoned me while she was staying with friends at Tickenham and subsequently sent some items which deserve a wider audience.

Her ggg grandfather was John Tilley; it seems likely that he had a son William who married a Sarah in Warwick in 1827.

In addition to some coloured prints of the items he had made she included the transcript of some items that may interest readers who should remember that the Brooks family had connections with glass businesses in USA and Australia.

Wonderful Mechanism

J Tilley Fancy Glass Blower from London respectfully informs the Ladies and Gentlemen and the Public in General that he will exhibit the whole art of Fancy Glass Blowing, Spinning and Reeling hot glass round a wheel with the astonishing velocity of a mile in less than two minutes.

Blowing glass to different degrees of Thinness and forming it into various articles such as Writing Pens, Smelling Bottles etc. He will blow a small Globe which will form nearly a vacuum and fall to the floor with apparent great weight.

The Hydro Pneumatic Fountain will be exhibited and a small glass man will ascend and descend in a bottle of water. Glass will be divided into some hundreds of parts in a second of time – the proportions of air will be explained, so far as it relates to the work. The experiments, in general are an introduction to pneumatics.

To be seen in a neat sitting room for a short time from 12 to 1 o'clock, from 4 to 5 and from 8 till 9. Admission 25 cents; children half price.

We the undersigned Justices of the Peace of the City and County of Schenectady(?) do hereby authorise and permit the above John Tilley to exhibit the Art of Glass Blowing etc as set forth and described in the above advertisement in the City of Schenectady – “ – Schenectady.

July 20 1820 NF Beck Thomas Mannary(?)

Philadelphia City Act

Be it remembered that on the first day of April in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twenty – a free white person of the age of 21 years and upwards being an alien who has arrived in the United States after the passing of the Act of Congress entitled “An Act to establish a uniform rule of naturalisation and to repeal the acts heretofore passed on that subject” passed on the 14th Day of April A.D. 1802 and who is desirous of being naturalized, did report himself to the Clerk of the Mayor’s Court for the City of Philadelphia in manner following, that is to say:

That the said John Tilley was born in the City of Bristol in England on or about the twenty eighth day of April in the year of our Lord One thousand seven hundred and fifty nine and is now about the age of forty nine years, that he was born a ?(member) of the British Nation and owed allegiance to the King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, that he migrated from Liverpool to the United States and arrived at the port of New York on or about the fifth day of August A. D. 1819 and that it is his intention to settle in the City of Philadelphia.

Signed John Tilley

Recorded the day and the year first above written
R Hutchinson (Clerk)

The following note is written below; I wonder if the signatory below is a descendant of the signatory above?

I certify that the above is a true copy of the original now remaining on record in my office –

In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal of the said Court, at the City aforesaid this first day of April A.D. 1920

Hutchinson

On another sheet of paper are copies of further notes:-

Died on 24th ultimo John Tilley a native of Great Britain in the ? year of his age.

The once celebrated glass blower exhibited in the City and elsewhere.

Another piece copied

March 28th 1818 Bought for Mr Tilley by his father John Tilley for Mr Thos Yandell to receive the interest and to give the (should 'the' be 'that') and subject principal to the said Mr Tilley when he shall be out of his time the sum of ten pounds in the three ?per cent Consols, it is in my name with my stock

Thos Yandell

Memories of a Nailsea Doctor's Wife

(from Mrs Gornall)

I came across a letter from Mrs Gornall which is dated April 28th. I believe this must have been 2000 but it might well have been earlier. In it she refers to being not surprised that I needed help and therefore it seems appropriate that I should use it following my resignation as Secretary to N&DLHS.

It is pertinent as she refers to the Thatcher family who were mentioned in a recent edition of Pennant. She goes on to say:-

"Mr Thatcher – a saintly man and to Miss Macmillan whom I remember well along with her sisters Miss Julie and Mrs Denton Gardner (? I may have misread this) and one other whose name I forget.

I was invited to tea once with these ladies of very ample proportions. The room was crammed with furniture, ornaments, bric-a-brac, cushions, hassocks, several coats and Miss Julie's tiny pet dog. I hardly knew where to step! It was straight out of a Victorian novel and I was so intrigued and so enormously fed I never expected to undergo an experience like it ----- nor did I."

She also mentions travelling (not too well) on the buses but rather than discuss human frailties and motion sickness I will home in on her comments about fares which were levied in a manner that I have never come across elsewhere.

Bus Fares

She says that

“from about 1926 you could buy a return ticket for 1s 3d. It was a red ticket with a mid-way perforation. Anyone could use the return half any day and in either direction.

We had a little box in which we put our spare “halves” and robbed it whenever need arose. How civilised we were! After all one ticket for one seat for an agreed distance – what does it matter in which direction or which adult uses it? Bureaucrats have far too good a time pushing us around these days.

Local Families

I remember “The Lawn” and old Mr and Mrs Armstrong – parents of Rachel who married Dr Reg White. They were stately people and terrified me as a child.

Mr Armstrong died before I was grown up but Mrs A was very kind to me as a new bride, and Rachel was always a friend.

The Tweedies (whose son was killed in 1934) were wonderful people, intensely interesting to talk to and unfailingly kind.

There must be someone who knows where all the children are or what happened to them. They had three or four lively daughters and several sons.
(Editor Can any reader help?)

Nailsea Court Connections!

Most readers will be aware by now that the Society will be producing a revised edition of Sylvia Hope Evans’ book of Nailsea Court. There will be many additions to it so even if you have a copy of the first edition you are advised to put your name down for the new book. An interesting item caught my eye when looking through the 1881 census.

At No 2 Church Road Penarth are resident are Mary A Evans aged 47 born Bristol a widow. With her are Charles E Evans, age 22 born at sea as is his sister Sylvia H Evans aged 17 with a younger sister Edith J Evans aged 12 born in Maindy Newport. I was surprised at the next door neighbours at No 1 Church Road.

Here live the Greenhill family, father Frederick B and wife Agnes M with one son Frederick M aged 25 who was born in Sussex and three daughters. Agnes 22 b Roath Glamorgan, Florence 18 b Roath and Emily 16 b St Johns Wood Middlesex. Any connection with Basil Greenhill the Nailsea local historian

Dead or Alive! A Simple test

I was sent this from Australia several years ago and know that it was a 19th century suggestion

“You can tell if a supposed corpse is actually dead by the following simple test.

Remove the body’s footwear and socks. Light a candle and when it is burning well apply the flame to the tip of one of the large toes of the supposed corpse.

(To me there seems to be a practical problem. If its toes are pointing upwards how do you get to the tip? Never mind let us continue as instructed.)

A blister will arise immediately and if the person is dead it will be full of air and will burst if the flame is applied a few seconds longer.

If the person is not dead it will be full of matter and will not burst if the flame continues to be applied. *(At this point there could well be some danger to the holder of the candle especially if the coma is due to a surplus of XXXX!)*

The article goes on to say that the public can now put their mind at rest and that there should be no misgivings as to whether a friend or relative is actually dead before burial. The test should, of course, be applied before the undertaker is called.

Bucklands Batch

Work has been started on this main artery *(although if that is the right word “deep vein thrombosis” afflicted the roads before it became the scourge of air travellers)* joining Nailsea with Backwell and I have a series of photos as the work proceeds. These will be printed in a later edition of Pennant.

Why then am I writing these notes you may ask?

Well I have to confess that I have joined the authors whose pen ran away with them in the past.

Those of you with long memories may remember the book “Roads and Tracks of Old Nailsea” which I produced in 1984 and which on occasion I have promised to update. Time will tell and an update will one day be produced!

In this book I mentioned the wall on the Batch and I now quote at length from my own words.

"...a considerable amount of work was done in the Bucklands Batch area between 1843 and 1847. This no doubt followed the realisation that the Railway now provided the easiest route away for coal, one of Nailsea's main products. It seems that glass did not follow this route for another 10 years. The account book of the surveyor of Highways for May 1843 shows under the heading "Contract Work"

Henry Doggett £57.7.9d - lowering and widening Bucklands Batch and building 332½ perch of wall.

I went on to say that

"Henry Doggett lowered the road in the middle of the escarpment giving a more uniform slope. To do this support had to be given to the sides of the cutting and a wall built, 332½ perch in fact. The SOE Dictionary gives a number of definitions for the word "perch". While it is often used as a measurement of length i.e. 5½ yards (5.03m) it is also used as a solid measure for stone containing a lineal perch usually 18 inches wide by 12 inches thick. Obviously there is no wall in the area which approximates to a mile long so there is little doubt that the wall that cost the Parish just over £57 is that which can be seen today as one travels to or from the station."

I then go on to say that

"The original wall was pierced during the building of Bucklands Drive and the wall rebuilt to hold back the soil on both corners of the drive."

The photograph printed elsewhere in this issue supplied recently from the M J Tozer collection I believe disproves some of the information that I gave.

It now seems to me that it is not unlikely that Mr Doggett built a wall in the 1840s but I believe that the wall which we now see was in fact built by Mr Shepstone when he built the houses on the Batch early in the 20th century.

Does anyone have any information on this subject?

The Smith family of Backwell

Dick and Pauline Garlick of Warsash visited me last year and I was able to put them in touch with John Brain in Backwell who was able to show them where the Smith family lived.

I had suggested that I might expand on the information they supplied but as there has been a lengthy article in the August 2000 edition of The Greenwood Tree – The Somerset and Dorset Family History Society Journal I will hold the article for Pennant for a while until the dust subsides.

Depending on what other articles turn up I will probably aim for the May or September 2001 edition of this journal.

I have several laser copies of photographs that will add to the interest for those interested in Backwell families.

Hilary Clinton: family links in Bedminster

I recently saw an article in Malago (The Malago Society's Magazine) carrying the above title. It stated that one of Hilary's forebears was from Backwell. It appears that Benjamin Howell who was born in Pembroke about 1802 came to work in one of the Bristol shipyards before his marriage, in about 1825 to Harriet (maiden name unknown) who was born about 1803 at Backwell Somerset.

Can any of our Backwell researchers find a Harriet who might be the one? If so please tell the editor.

Local Comments on a National Scale

I recently wrote to the editor of Local History Magazine in connection with her request for comments on what readers wanted. Amongst the remarks I made I added the suggestions that Jenny Wheeler made when we were considering the future of the Society.

The following comment appears in the latest edition of the magazine.

"However, one respondent sent us a very thoughtful discussion with one of their society's younger members and we will be publishing her comments in a future issue".

Esso field on the Folly

Bid Wheeler wrote to me about eighteen months ago about a wartime emergency pipeline which went from Portishead docks to the tanks near Flax Bourton.

She found reference to it in "The Making of a Manor" by Denys Forest and says that she heard many years ago that ships were able to lay off Redcliffe Bay just below the Caravan site (*Editor Is that the one where there has been some recent redevelopment?*) where there are still camouflaged tanks to pump oil to Flax Bourton where the tanks are still near to the old station to provide a source of oil in case Bristol was attacked. The fuel then had an easy access to the rail network.

She understands that the pipeline ran through the col on Tickenham Ridge just to the east of Cadbury Camp.

Does anyone have any information on this subject that they can share with readers?

Local History

I was fortunate in seeing a comment in the Local paper that "A History of Weston in Gordano" was available for the price of the postage.

I wrote and obtained a handsome little booklet A5 landscape format that covers the history in very readable terms. It contains a number of illustrations including two in colour.

I am not in a position to judge the quality of the research but it does seem to include the results of many hours of investigation.

It was one of the village's Millenium Projects and those involved with its preparation deserve congratulations.

Apologies The cover of Pennant 27 included a picture of Wraxall Court. It was wrongly dated being much earlier than 1933.