

Selected Pen Portraits of Prominent and Interesting Residents of Axminster

Some further information is available in 'Notes on Axminster' by Major W H Wilkin, which gathers in one place submissions made by him to the Exeter Diocesan Architectural and Archaeological Society (on Axminster Church, in 1932) and to the Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art (on various subjects, from 1933 to 1936). These latter submissions includes two sets of notes on 'Some Axminster Worthies', covering William Buckland, John Cranch, James Davidson, Nancy Dawson, Zachary James Edwards, Matthew Liddon, William Newbery, John Prince, George Pulman, James Small, Stephen and Micaiah Towgood, Thomas Whitty and David Willmott, several of whom are covered by the Dictionary of National Biography (see the introductory text to this selection) or by the notes below. Major Wilkins' Notes are accessible in Axminster library.

There are also notes on William Buckland, John Churchill, William Henry Duffield, George Pulman, Frank Rowe, Jack Sansom, Emily Sheppard, Thomas Wakley and Thomas Nicholas Webber in 'The Book of Axminster with Kilmington' by Les Berry and Gerald Gosling (2003, Halsgrove).

Arthur Bidwell (1844 to 1935)

Arthur Bidwell was born in East London in 1844 to Thomas and Susan Bidwell, the younger brother of James Bidwell (see below). His father died in 1850, and based on the evidence of the 1891 census, Susan had been born at Burton Bradstock in Dorset. On 26 August 1865 Arthur married Jane Maria Jop at St John's, Hackney.

In 1881 Arthur, Jane Maria and their family were living in Walthamstow, where Arthur and his brother James had a brush-making business which, according to later reports, had been founded in 1839 in Hoxton by his father. Arthur and Jane Maria had six children, but only three survived to adulthood: Henry James, Percival and Minnie. In the early 1880s they moved their business out of London, to Ottery St Mary, where (in 1891) the family lived on Mill Street. The business was then moved to Axminster, and following the death of Arthur's brother James (see below), in 1912 it was converted to a Limited Company.

When Arthur and Jane Maria moved to Axminster they lived at Mount House, Castle Hill. Jane Maria died in 1906, but Arthur lived to the age of 90. He died on 10 February 1935 at Lyme Regis, at which time his two sons were still running the business in Axminster.

James Bidwell (c.1842 to 1910)

James Bidwell was born in East London in about 1842 to Thomas and Susan Bidwell, the older brother of Arthur Bidwell (see above). On 5 April 1866 James married Lucy Cloake at Heathfield, Sussex. Despite being married in Sussex, she was the daughter of Thomas Cloake, a tailor in East London.

In 1881 James, Lucy and their family were living in Stoke Newington in East London, near the family brush-making business. They had at least three children: Walter, Edgar and Mary. In 1891, like James' brother Arthur (see above), they were living on Mill Street, Ottery St

Mary. By 1901 James and Lucy had moved to Colyton, and their children had all left home. James died in 1910, and Lucy moved to Seaton.

James Boon (c.1819 to 1887)

James Boon moved his textile business to Axminster when his family's long-standing premises in Uplyme were burned down in 1866 (see the Lyme Regis Museum website for some information on their Uplyme textile works). He took over the Town Mill at Axminster, where he was in business as a wool stapler and miller for several years, as well as renting farms and selling farm machinery. The 1881 census shows him as employing 30 men and 5 boys there. He had been widowed by 1881, and died in 1887.

William Edwin Pitfield Chapple (1863 to 1927)

William Edwin Pitfield Chapple was born at Axminster in 1862, the eldest child of Edwin Chapple, a local bank manager, and his wife Sarah (née Bussell).

He became a lawyer, and lived all his life in his parents' former home, The Shrubbery, West Street. He remained unmarried, and lived with his younger sisters, also unmarried. Something of his character can be observed from their return for the 1911 census. In answer to the question about their ages, the answer is "10 years older than last time". He died on 17 August 1932 at Seaton, but still described as 'of The Shrubbery'.

For 16 years in the 1890s and 1900s he was Chairman of Axminster Parish Council, and Chief Officer of the Axminster Fire Brigade, in which he took a strong, even a proprietorial, interest, to the extent that when he lost his seat on the Council in 1909 he reclaimed the Fire Brigade's uniforms and hose, on the grounds that he had paid for them out of his own pocket. The story is recounted in full in Chapter 13 of 'The Book of Axminster with Kilmington' by Les Berry and Gerald Gosling.

By the time he retired his legal practice was a partnership with Richard John Measures, who in turn went into partnership with Daniel Scott Rowe, practising as Chapple, Measures & Rowe.

James Coate (1814 to 1907)

Although James Coate moved his brush-making business from East London to Axminster, he had actually been born in Membury, to Thomas and Mary Coate, and was baptised there on 20 November 1814. He moved to London, and set up his company in Bow in 1847. On 31 March 1859 he married Fanny Martin (née Tapper) a widow, like him originally from Devon. They did not have any children.

The 1861 census shows him as a master brush-maker. In 1883 he moved his business to Axminster (and to a second factory at Nimmer Mills, South Chard), and he and Fanny lived at Lea Combe House, Axminster until her death in 1902 and his in 1907. The business was variously known as Messrs Coate & Co and The London Brush Works.

Georgiana Emily Conybeare (Craven) (1852 to 1920)

Emily Conybeare was born at Kew on 4 February 1852 to John Charles Conybeare, a barrister, and his wife Katherine Mary. Her father was the second son of William Daniel Conybeare, the former vicar of Axminster, and the younger brother of his successor (William John Conybeare). She was the second of their three daughters, and of their seven children.

Although she did not actually live in Axminster, she was the moving force behind the establishment and initial financing of Axminster's first hospital. In June 1886 she obtained the lease of the former carpet factory on Silver Street, converted it into a hospital and engaged a Matron, a Nurse and other domestic staff. She personally paid the rent (of £25 a year) for many years, plus the full running costs in the first year, and a contribution of £100 a year for the next 9 years (which met roughly half of the operating costs over that period, even though it was by then under public control).

She travelled and lived for a while in both Canada and the Cape Colony (South Africa), and was a strong advocate of young women settling in the colonies, not just young men. She was active in supporting women's education and independence through clubs and societies.

On 14 January 1896, aged almost 44, she married Arthur Henry Craven in London. Although the Conybeare family's financial interest in Axminster ended in 1897 when their ownership of the Manor of Prestaller reverted to the Church Commissioners, she retained a personal interest, and on 18 July 1912 she opened the new Axminster Hospital on Chard Road at the invitation of the Management Committee. As an active proponent of women's independence she welcomed the fact that Axminster Hospital was among the first in the country to have women on its Committee.

She died on 31 October 1920 at Brogewood, Biddenden, Kent, and was survived by her husband.

Much of the information above comes from 'William Daniel Conybeare (1787-1857): His Family and Axminster' (Christopher Powell, 2008. A copy can be found in Axminster library).

Edwin Henry Dawkins (1851 to 1914) and his son Edwin Howard

Edwin Henry Dawkins was born at Romsey (Hampshire) in 1851. On 19 April 1879 he married Kate Matilda Phippen, a farmer's daughter, at Wotton Fitzpaine (though later census returns show that she had been born at Smallridge), and they settled in Axminster where they developed a draper's shop. The 1881 census gives their address as Market Place, but the section of street between Market Square / Castle Hill and the George Hotel was subsequently known as Victoria Place, which is where all subsequent records of the shop show it to have been. Their only child, Edwin Howard, was born in 1882.

The shop was initially a draper's, and in 1881 the only non-family employee was Mary Rendell. By 1891 the scope had expanded to include groceries and an ironmongery department, and Edwin's brother George was working in the grocery department. They subsequently dropped the food, and concentrated on furnishings, clothing, footwear and haberdashery, becoming Axminster's largest shop.

As the shop prospered, the family moved out, and in about 1909 Edwin and Kate and went to live at 'Brooklyn' (now the Kerrington House Hotel) on Musbury Road. Edwin Henry Dawkins died there on 13 February 1914.

Edwin Howard Dawkins married Elsie Bodley Towell in 1907, and by 1911 they were living on King Edward Road with their two surviving children, Edwin Herbert Haswell (born on 22 May 1908) and Cuthbert Howard (born in late 1910). Elsie died in the Sherborne district in 1922 aged just 38, and Edwin Howard died at Weymouth on 30 August 1925 after suffering a stroke the year before.

Nancy Dawson (c.1730 to 1767)

Nancy Dawson may have been born at Coaxdon, near Weycroft, and she is reported (by James Davidson, generally the most reliable of sources) to have been a barmaid at The George in her youth.

She soon left for the bright lights of London, and was a dancer at Sadler's Wells, Covent Garden and Drury Lane. In 1759 the hornpipe that she danced in the 'Beggar's Opera' became much celebrated. She used to visit friends and relatives in Axminster, where her metropolitan ways were much remarked on, and she used to dance for the amusement of her friends in the local inns. A Mrs Burch told James Davidson that she had seen Nancy Dawson dance a minuet at the Dolphin Inn in petticoats trimmed with silver lace.

She retired from the stage in 1763 and died at Haverstock Hill on 26 May 1767. Her public reputation was as a beautiful and graceful dancer, but with a shrewish temper and a heartless, mercenary and immoral approach to life.

The information above comes from 'Notes on Axminster' by Major W H Wilkin (1933), which can be found in Axminster library.

William Henry (Harry) Dutfield (1908 to 1999)

Harry Dutfield was born in Glasgow on 12 December 1908, and raised in Kidderminster. His father was from 1909 the head Wilton designer for Bond Worth of Stourport. Harry was keen on both sport and fishing from an early age. He was also practical, and in 1925 he solved the problem of making a reversible carpet (or rug) design, a challenge which had eluded his father for years. He left school and started making and selling rugs on his own account. At 18 he took on his first premises in Kidderminster, but they burned down (at very much the same time that he was suffering from appendicitis). His insurance had run out a couple of days earlier, but Royal Insurance agreed to pay his claim if he agreed to stick with them when he got re-established, which he did.

By 1928 he was back in business with a small factory, and a partner, Ken Quayle. They sold most of their reversible rugs through one London outlet, but in 1929 they changed to making Axminster carpets. By the time he was 21, Harry Dutfield and his partner had about 12 men working for them, and were running two 12-hour shifts every day. In 1934 Harry's father joined him, when his former employers refused to allow him to provide free designs to Harry, who was emerging as a rival.

In 1936, after learning that Axminster carpets were no longer made in Axminster, he wrote to the Town Council, and on receiving an encouraging reply came down to Axminster, enlisted R J Luff and S O Gill as investors, and set about building a new factory near the station on a field belonging to Mr Luff with easy access to the railway sidings via which he could move goods in and out. He himself moved to Axminster in February 1937, and lodged with Mrs Phippen at Gloucester House, Castle Hill. The first carpet was completed by Coronation

Day, and was displayed in the window of Potter's store in West Street. In the beginning there were 3-4 staff from Kidderminster and about 12 local employees. In 1938 Harry married Iris Huxter from Wootton Fitzpaine.

For much of World War II the factory was not allowed to make carpets, but made pumps and aircraft parts. When Shand's factory was re-located to Axminster they initially took some of the space within the carpet factory.

After the war Harry's daughter and son were born, and the factory reverted to making carpets to domestic and export sale. As their workforce returned, the carpet factory supported a self-build scheme for employees, which was the origin of about 20 bungalows at Dragon's Mead.

In 1950 Harry started a new venture spinning yarn at Buckfast, and in 1959 he got involved in a project to build and run a new carpet factory in Christchurch, New Zealand, which was sold in 1968 when it was well-established. Travelling between England and New Zealand allowed Harry to stop off in Fiji, where he indulged his passion for big game fishing, as well as selling a lot of carpets to hotels there.

Much of the information above comes from his own memoir written in about 1984, 'Harry Dutfield: Carpet Manufacturer and Fisherman, 1908 to 19??'. He died on 21 May 1999.

In 1984 Simon Dutfield, Harry's son became joint Managing Director, and he was subsequently followed into the business by his son, Josh.

Zachary James Edwards (1799 to 1880)

Zachary Edwards was born on 19 July 1799, the son of a Chard lawyer (Charles Edwards) who in 1796 had purchased an interest in the Manor of Combyne from the Petre estate. He (Zachary) was installed as rector of Combyne after a protracted legal tussle (recounted in Major W H Wilkins' 1833 notes in 'Notes on Axminster').

He was a graduate of Wadham College, Oxford, and on 16 April 1833 had married Charlotte Andrews of Yeovil, by whom he had four sons. He chose to live in Axminster rather than Combyne, and it was his observations during his commute to work which provided the raw material for the book for which he is remembered: 'The Ferns of the Axe' (1862).

In 1870 he resigned the living at Combyne and moved to Misterton (Somerset) as vicar until his death there on 1 September 1880.

William Forward (1844 to 1908) and his two sons

William Forward was born at Salway Ash near Bridport, the son of Charles and Mary Forward. He qualified as a solicitor in 1867 and set up in practice in Axminster. On 22 September 1870 he married Maria Eliza Clarkson in the St Pancras district of London, and they had two sons: William Graham in 1877 and Cecil in 1879. The family lived at The Elms on Lyme Road until after William's death in 1908. Maria lived on until 1 April 1944.

Both sons qualified as solicitors and both joined their father's practice, but only William Graham stayed. He had served as a Major in the Devonshire Regiment in World War I, and did not marry. He acted as the Registrar and High Bailiff for Axminster County Court in the 1920s and 1930s. After he died (in 1948) the legal practice was run by his partner, William

Donnithorne, and in the 1950s it was known as William Forward, Son, Donnithorne & Milford. Since 1971 it has been known as Milford & Dormer, and remains in the original offices of William Forward on Silver Street.

Cecil left the family partnership, set up almost next door in competition, and did a lot of work for the local Councils. He married Harriet Dunstan in Brixton, South London on 1 June 1907, and they had a son, Alan, in 1913. He acted as Clerk to the local Magistrates' Court, to both Axminster Urban and Rural District Councils, and to the Guardians' Committee (of the Workhouse). He was also the Superintendent Registrar for Axminster District until responsibility for registrations passed to Honiton. In the 1930s he joined forces with John Beviss and Bruce Beckingsale to form Beviss & Beckingsale, whose successors still practise under that name in the Silver Street offices where Cecil Forward lived from the 1920s, and where the practice which he started was based. He died in 1952.

Arthur Benjamin Gage (1895 to 1950)

Arthur Benjamin Gage was born in 1895, the son of John and Ellen Selina Gage (see below). Following the death in quick succession of his father and his grandfather when he was just coming up to 20, he joined Messrs R&C Snell, and played an active role with them as a local auctioneer and land agent.

He married Beatrice Larcombe in 1925 and they had a son and a daughter and lived at Terrace Lodge, Lyme Road. When the Devon County Show was held at Axminster in May 1939 Arthur was the chairman of the local organising committee. He died on 1 May 1950.

Benjamin Gage (c.1828 to 1915) and his two sons

Benjamin Gage was born in about 1828, the son of Joseph and Ann Gage of Great Trill, Axminster. On 26 March 1851 he married Mary Jane Rockett at All Saints, the daughter of James Rockett, a local farmer. At the time of the census a few weeks later Benjamin was farming on his own account at Marsh Farm, Kilmington, and he remained there for many years. As well as a farmer, he was a well-known local auctioneer, specialising in livestock.

Benjamin and Mary Jane had at least six daughters and two sons, Charles Benjamin (1862 to 1932) and John (1867 to 1914). Quite soon after Mary Jane's death in 1880 he was re-married to Annie Emmens, who was originally from Colchester, Essex. They left Marsh Farm, and lived at Sisterhood Farm, Axminster (in 1881) and later at Alma Villa and then on Willhaye Lane.

Both sons became auctioneers. Charles Benjamin married Helena Hammett in 1884 but was not in business with his father. John married Ellen Selina Badham at Bristol on 29 January 1889 and was in partnership with his father as B&J Gage.

Their business included the selling of livestock at auction in Axminster, and when the law prompted local authorities to close down town-centre street markets in favour of dedicated sites B&J Gage obtained a licence from the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries (in 1910), and negotiated with both the Knight family (as owners of the market rights) and Messrs R&C Snell (as fellow auctioneers and likely successors to the Knights) to move the selling of livestock to a site off South Street. A conveyance to this effect was signed on 11 May 1911.

Then in early 1914 John Gage was shot dead in his office. The inquest returned an open verdict. His father Benjamin died the following year, on 28 April 1915. His executors included

Charles Snell rather than his surviving son Charles Benjamin. Ellen Selina Gage, John's widow signed a further agreement regarding the market house, market toll rights and dues on 23 July 1914, the other parties being Robert Snell, Henry Knight (senior and junior) and Axminster Rural District Council.

John and Ellen Selina Gage had three sons, including Arthur Benjamin (see above).

William Reginald Hayman (1842 to 1899)

William Reginald Hayman was the second son of Philip Charles and Anne Hayman. Philip Hayman was an Axminster-born doctor and surgeon who practised in Axminster in the mid-19th century.

William Reginald Hayman left Axminster as a young man, and in 1858 he emigrated to Australia, where he became a pastoralist at Lake Wallace in western Victoria. He either went there with one of his uncles, or joined him. Once there he took a close interest in the welfare of the Aboriginal population, and among other things encouraged them to take up cricket. One thing led to another, and in 1868 he brought an Aboriginal cricket team on a tour of England, from May to October, and acted as the team's manager. This was actually the first Australian cricket team to play in England, and it played 47 matches, the first and last matches being at The Oval. During their tour team members also gave displays of their traditional skills of boomerang and spear throwing.

On 18 October 1868, the day after their final 3-day match at The Oval, they left London for what was described as a 'brief holiday' in Devon, though whether they came to Axminster has not been established. The main party sailed from Plymouth for Australia on 26 October, but William Hayman stayed on for a while, and on 29 October 1868 he donated several Aboriginal artefacts to Exeter's newly-opened RAMM museum.

Much of the information above comes from the website of the British Museum, and the tour, which was quite controversial at the time, is widely referred to in Australian historical records.

George Heal (1843 to 1909)

George Heal was born in 1843 at Paulton, near Midsomer Norton to John Heal, a coal weigher, and his wife Elizabeth. In the 1860s George moved to Axminster, where in 1868 he married Tryphena Harvey. By 1871 they were running the Green Dragon Inn and the first two of their 15 children had been born. As well as the Green Dragon, George ran a foundry just over the road, and by 1881 he was employing eight men and a boy there. The 1891 census describes him as a millwright and engineer. He died in 1909, followed 10 years later by Tryphena, who ran both the Green Dragon and the foundry after his death.

Henry Knight junior (1805 to 1894) and his family

Henry Knight junior, Lord of the Manor of Axminster, was the eldest son of a father of the same name and his wife Mary, and a grandson of John Knight (c.1734 to 1801: see below).

He was born on 14 March 1805 and was educated at Stonyhurst (the Catholic school) from 1816 to 1824. In the late 1840s he married Mary Barns, daughter of Amos Barns of Tillworth,

Hawkchurch, and they had three sons (see below) and four daughters. By 1861 the family had moved to Cloakham House. They subsequently moved back into Axminster itself, living at Terrace Lodge. In 1871 Henry Knight junior was in sole possession of all of the remaining Manor lands, and Lord of the Manor following the resolution of legal actions started by his uncle William Knight (see below under John Knight). He died in 1894.

Henry Knight junior's eldest son (also called Henry, 1849 to 1917) joined the Army, became a Major in the Royal Artillery, married a wife called Eileen, had one child, and split his time between London and Ireland. His son Henry (1878 to 1947), the last male Knight from this family, became a barrister in London. Major Knight and his son gradually sold off their land and property in Axminster. In 1911 they disposed of the remaining Manorial rights (which were connected to the market), and in 1916 the formal title of Lord of the Manor was sold to Charles Snell.

Henry Knight junior's second son, William Henry Barns Knight (1853 to 1923), was a solicitor who lived at Hilary House and practised law in Axminster. He married but did not have children. His younger brother, Alexander John Henry Knight (1856 to 1931), was a land agent and auctioneer who married and moved away from Axminster, and did not have children.

John Knight (c.1734 to 1801) and his family

The Knight family was strongly Catholic. In 1763 John Knight moved from Cannington, near Bridgwater to Axminster to work for Lord Petre, the then Lord of the Manor of Axminster, and another Catholic. John Knight lived at Hilary House, Lyme Road. He died on 24 June 1801 and has a memorial tablet in Axminster parish church (there being no Catholic church in Axminster at that time).

John Knight had at least two sons: William (1762 to 1839) and Henry senior (1779 to 1858). William was Steward of parts of the Petre estate, and when Lord Petre sold his land holdings at Axminster in 1824 William was the co-purchaser, with James Alexander Frampton. For various reasons the partners became embroiled in litigation, which outlasted both of them before being resolved in favour of William's nephew Henry Knight junior (see above). William died on 3 December 1839 according to a tablet in Axminster church. Although he married (his wife was Sarah, who died aged 94 on 19 January 1851) he did not have any surviving children.

In 1828 Henry Knight senior, a land agent by profession, founded the Catholic Church in Axminster. He and his wife Mary had two sons (Henry junior: see above) and James Alexander Knight (c.1815 to 1881). They also had three daughters, including Sarah Ann, who married Sir John Haggerston in 1851. Henry Knight senior died in 1858.

James Alexander Knight lived at The Lawn and sat as a magistrate at Axminster, but although he married, he did not have any children.

Matthew Liddon (1792 to 1869)

Matthew Liddon was the third son of John Bunter Liddon, an Axminster tanner, and his wife Mary (née Hill). Matthew was baptised at Axminster on 25 April 1792, and joined the Navy in May 1804, in the middle of the Napoleonic wars.

He served in the Caribbean, South America and the Mediterranean before he was 20, and in 1810 was mentioned in despatches following a skirmish off Calabria. On 3 May 1811 he was made a Lieutenant.

He then served with distinction in North America, before being appointed second-in-command of an Arctic expedition sent to look for the North-West Passage, and the expedition's leader, Edward Parry, named a gulf after Liddon. It was many years before others made better progress through the North-West Passage.

In 1827 Matthew Liddon, by then a Commander, married Ann Bilke of Blackfriars, but formerly of Weycroft. After a few years in Hampshire they moved to Colyton in 1832, where Ann died in 1849. They had four sons and six daughters. Matthew was promoted to Captain on 1 April 1856, and died at Clifton (Bristol) on 31 August 1869.

The information above comes from 'Notes on Axminster' by Major W H Wilkin (1933), which can be found in Axminster library.

Rawlin Mallock (1771 to 1854)

Rawlin Mallock was born in 1771, the son of Richard and Susan Mallock. He was a lawyer in Axminster, and was responsible for building Hill House. He also purchased the former carpet factory for £800 on 31 August 1836 following the bankruptcy of Samuel Ramson Whitty in 1835 (see below).

In 1796 he married Charlotte Sobey, and they had three sons and a daughter. Two of their sons (James and John Adolphus) were surgeons, and the other (Thomas) was a Naval Officer. After Charlotte's death he was re-married to Sarah Williamson of Westwater.

Litigation regarding his estate went on for at least 10 years after his death on 23 October 1854.

Abraham Skinner Newbery junior (1885 to 1972)

Abraham Skinner Newbery was born on 20 January 1885, the son of a father of the same name and his wife Martha (née Thomas). They had married in 1872, and they lived at West House on West Street, Axminster. The family included one older brother (Charles) and one younger one (Isaac).

Abraham Skinner Newbery junior married Elizabeth Margaret Newman of Misterton in 1917. They had a daughter the following year, and their son Robert (Bob), who many years later was elected Axminster's first Mayor, was born in 1920. They lived at Newenham House, King Edward Road, and Margaret died in 1953.

Abraham Skinner Newbery junior was well known in local farming circles. As well as running a dairying business involving milk collection and processing and farming at Hunthay, he was active as a cattle dealer, organising large-scale shipments of cattle by rail, notably to Sussex. At one time he was the President of the Devon Cattle Breed Society, and has a stand named after him at the Devon County Showground near Exeter. He was also a staunch conservative, and active in local affairs.

Abraham died in March 1972, and is buried at Misterton.

William Newbery (1808 to 1887)

William Newbery was born at Axminster on 2 December 1808, the eldest son of Solomon Newbery, an Axminster grocer, and his first wife Sarah (née Drower). He was a keen angler, and a noted wit and raconteur, and for many years was a close friend of George Pulman (see below).

William Newbery became an accomplished landscape artist who specialised in painting local views, mainly in water colours. Examples of his work can be found hanging in Ford Abbey, and he contributed several illustrations (and many amusing anecdotes) to the third and fourth editions of George Pulman's 'The Book of the Axe'. In 'Notes on Axminster' (1934) Major W H Wilkin reports that the quality of his output varied considerably, and hints that sometimes his social life impacted adversely on the quality of his art.

He should not be confused or conflated with William Newbery (1787 to 1838) of Heathfield in Sussex, who also painted landscapes, and was a friend of Constable and Turner.

'Our' William Newbery did not marry. In his latter years he lodged on South Street with the Trott family, and he died at Axminster on 6 March 1887.

Emily Kathleen (Emmy) Sheppard (1894 to 1983)

Emily Kathleen (Emmy) Sheppard was born in 1894, the younger of two daughters of Sydney and Caroline Sheppard (who were originally from Bere Regis and Milverton respectively, but had moved to Axminster in about 1890). Sydney was a grocer's assistant in Axminster in both 1891 and 1901, but by 1911 he was managing a grocer's shop in his own name on South Street.

Emmy Sheppard worked as secretary to the Dawkins family, and later became the company secretary. After the Dawkins family sold their interest in the business to a Mr Burrough she continued to work there, and in 1943 she became the major shareholder. She ran the shop (still under the name Edwin Dawkins & Son) for 30 years, until in May 1973 the Dawkins shop and stock were bought by Frederick Baker of Trinity Square (though their business only lasted a further 4 years).

Emmy Sheppard was active in local affairs, most notably as President of the Axminster Carnival organising committee. She died in 1983.

Charles Snell (1872 to 1965)

Charles Snell was a younger brother of Robert Snell (see below for the family background); 18 years his junior, and the sixth of seven sons in the family. In the early 1900s he joined Robert in the firm of Messrs R&C Snell.

Charles married Elizabeth Sarah Sutton in 1898, and they lived for many years at Newenham House, Axminster, looking straight across the Axe valley at his brother's house at Summerleaze. Charles and Elizabeth had two sons and two daughters. In 1916 Charles bought from the last Henry Knight (see above) the title of Lord of the Manor of Axminster, which he held for 49 years.

His older son, John Sutton Snell, became an auctioneer in his own right, while his younger brother Richard (Dick) joined the family firm, and lived at Coryton Park, Kilmington.

Charles was living at Combe, Kilmington when he died in 1965.

Robert Snell (1854 to 1931)

Robert Snell was born in 1854, the third son of John Snell of Kilmington Farm (1824 to 1879) and his wife Anne (née Harris). John Snell had been born in Dalwood, the youngest in a large family. When he was growing up his father William farmed at Whitchurch Canonorum, Dorset, and it was there that John met and married Anne Harris, whose father also farmed at Whitchurch. They were married on 14 April 1853.

Robert married Joanna White Seward in 1883. They had two daughters and lived for many years at Summerleaze Farm, Kilmington. He trained as a surveyor and specialised in advising landlords and tenants on rental values and the residual values when incoming tenants took over from outgoing ones. When his younger brother Charles (see above) joined him in business, they established the firm of Messrs R&C Snell based in Axminster. In due course this merged with the business of B&J Gage, and became the pre-eminent auctioneering and estate agency business in Axminster, with branches in other nearby towns, including Bridport and Yeovil. Much of their business was based on the weekly livestock market at Axminster.

When Robert died in 1931 his executor was Arthur Benjamin Gage (see above), with whom he had worked for many years.

Francis Thornhill Swain (1855 to 1932)

Francis Thornhill Swain was born in 1855, the son of Reuben and Anne Swain of Yeatlands Farm, Axminster. He had an older brother (Frederick) and two younger sisters. At the time of the 1881 census the family was farming 200 acres based on Yeatlands, and Frederick had taken over the nearby farm of Welland.

In 1885 Francis Thornhill Swain married Elizabeth Mary Madge from Gittisham, and in 1891 they were farming at Tolcis, adjacent to Yeatlands. They had three daughters and two sons, one of whom did not survive to adulthood, having been disabled from infancy. Tolcis had a quarry as well as an historic farm, and Francis' attention was increasingly focused on the quarry. By 1901 the census return describes his as running the quarry, with the farm under the management of others.

Over the years Francis was responsible for developing the quarry at Tolcis into a fully commercial enterprise, supplying Blue Lias limestone and the top layer of the underlying Penarth Group (Triassic) rock. The rock which was sold had a range of potential uses, as buildings stone for walls and dwellings, as well as for cement manufacture, bricks, tiles and agricultural lime. In 1907 he joined the Freemasons in Axminster, which counted amongst its members a number of builders, solicitors and other useful contacts.

By the time of the 1911 census his son (Thornhill Madge Swain) had gone to work for a firm of builder's merchants in Bideford, and in due course Francis became a director of the Devon Trading Co (HQ in Barnstaple). There was a steady stream of lorries between the quarry, and the railway sidings at Axminster.

He died on 28 August 1932, still described as a resident of Tolcis House, and was survived by Elizabeth Mary.

Lady Emma Louisa Tulloch (1819 to 1903)

After the death of her husband, Lady Emma Louisa Tulloch bought Old Park. She subsequently gave the land and funds to allow both Woodbury school and chapel to be built, and she remained at Old Park until her death in 1903.

She had been born at Hull in 1819, the youngest daughter of Sir William Hyde Pearson and his wife Elizabeth Jane. In 1844 she married Alexander Murray Tulloch, a well-known reforming Army officer, and a pioneer of the use of medical statistics to demonstrate the debilitating effects of tropical diseases on European troops. He reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 1844, then Colonel in 1854 and Major General in 1859. Late in life he acted as a commissioner in the investigations into the Crimean war. He was created a KCB not long before his death in 1864.

Thomas Nicholas Webber (1814 to 1905)

Thomas Nicholas Webber was born at Exeter on 27 April 1814, and in 1843, when he was almost 30, he moved to Axminster, where for the next 60 years he played the organ in the Church. By the time he retired, Pulmans Weekly News of 24 February 1903 reckoned that made him the oldest organist in England.

Coincident to his move to Axminster he married the slightly older Catherine Jerrard of Axmouth, and they had at least three daughters and a son. Together they ran a school in Buckland House on South Street, Axminster where he taught music. Catherine died on 26 January 1888, but he lived until 17 June 1905.

Thomas Whitty senior (1713 to 1792)

There are conflicting opinions regarding the birth of Thomas Whitty. A child named Thomas was baptised at Axminster on 14 May 1713 to a father identified as Thomas Whitty, an Axminster tanner and mercer (who was indeed 'our' Thomas' father), and his own headstone gives his year of birth as 1713. If 'our' Thomas was born at Honiton in 1716 as some sources state, then that son must have died in infancy. Why the birth should be at Honiton rather than Axminster is also unclear. His mother was reportedly from the Braddock family of Lyme Regis, possibly called Sarah.

On 26 November 1739 he married Sarah Ramson, only daughter of Samuel Ramson of Axminster, to whom he had apparently been apprenticed in 1731. They had 12 children, of whom six survived to adulthood, including their eldest son Thomas (see below). (NB There is also some doubt regarding the correct spelling of Ransom, Ramson or Rampson. In his notes of 1934 Major W H Wilkin provides a credible argument in favour of Rampson as the correct spelling, though when his grandson wrote his will he used the spelling Ramson, which is the one adopted here.)

In 1755 Thomas established his carpet factory (see the section of this website devoted to him and his carpets for further information). Having written a memoir of his own life, dated 16 April 1790, he died on 13 August 1792, and was buried at the Congregational Church of Chard Street. His will was proved on 16 September 1793.

Thomas Whitty junior (1740 to 1799) and his two sons

Thomas Whitty, eldest son of Thomas Whitty senior (see above) was born in 1740. He worked with his father in the family carpet-making business. On 2 January 1772 he married Susanna Collier at Chardstock, and they had 11 children, including sons called Thomas and Samuel Ramson. Thomas Whitty junior only survived his father by 7 years, dying at the age of 59 in August 1799.

His sons Thomas (c.1775 to 1810) and Samuel Ramson (c.1784 to 1855) took over the running of the business, but the third Thomas (who married Susanna Daw of Newport, Hampshire on 28 October 1802) died aged just 34 (his will was not proved until 28 July 1810), leaving Samuel Ramson Whitty in sole charge of the family business.

In 1809 he formed a partnership with James Blatch of Winterbourne and Samuel Devenish of Codford St Mary (Wiltshire), who appears to have been his brother-in-law, to lease a fulling mill at Quidhampton (just outside Wilton, near Salisbury). Unfortunately this was not a success: it was alleged that the water supply proved inadequate just 3 years later, though other records show that the mill continued working thereafter.

On 16 April 1812 Samuel Ramson Whitty married Sarah Luck Conder at St John's, Hackney. Their son Thomas Ramson Whitty, who later moved to Nottingham, was born the following year.

The carpet factory fire, its rebuilding and Samuel Ramson Whitty's subsequent bankruptcy (in 1835) are dealt with in the section of this website devoted to carpet making. Sarah died on 2 February 1839, and Samuel Ramson Whitty worked as an insurance agent in Axminster for many years, before he in turn died on 11 April 1855.