WHEELS OF FORTUNE - THE SHUTTLEWORTH FAMILY OF THE BOWDENS AND MARKET HARBOROUGH

by Janice Morris

The Wheel of Fortune appeared in many medieval wall paintings, particularly those of the fourteenth century. The central figure was often Lady Fortune who had a double face and was not to be trusted.[1] In Albrecht Durer's illustration of the Wheel of Fortune it is aptly being turned by asses.

The wheel has been very important in the development of civilisations. Power from water wheels was harnessed by ancient communities. By medieval times the use of such power was extensive and continued to be so until other sources were developed during the Industrial Revolution. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century the fortunes of some members of the Shuttleworth family were associated with water mills in Ringstead, Northamptonshire, where I live, and Woodchester, Gloucestershire.

THE WOODFORD WATERMILL

The Woodford Watermill is situated on the River Nene between the Northamptonshire villages of Ringstead and Woodford. It is known locally as Willy Watt Mill, and although it lies within Woodford parish it is often associated with Ringstead. In its long history it has been used for various purposes, possibly indicative of economic changes. Letters from tenants to landlords suggest milling did not always produce a good income. The mill is currently being totally refurbished and when this is complete its water wheels will be generating electricity.

While reading Ringstead People by David Ball[2] I discovered that in the nineteenth century Woodford Mill was one of the mills owned by the Shuttleworth family of Great Bowden and Market Harborough. They owned another mill in Ringstead parish but that has long been demolished. David kindly loaned me his source material in order for me to piece together some of the family history.

Henry Shuttleworth (b1724-d1800) leased from Christ Church, Oxford, The Rectory and Parsonage, Mansion Place and the associated land, dovehouses and mills in Great Bowden in June 1757. Four years earlier he had married his second wife, Catherine Bletsoe, the daughter of Charles Bletsoe. They had eleven children[3]. Henry and Catherine's joint property included six watermills and a windmill, two of those being in Woodford and Ringstead.

In 1662 it was recorded in the Ringstead Hearth Tax that Mr Bletsoe (no first name given) had eight hearths. By 1674 he had ten hearths[4]. Most people had one or two, so it seems that Mr Bletsoe had a substantial property or properties. On 18 March, 1701 Charles Bletso (a misspelling?) was christened at Ringstead. His parents were John and Susanna. Susanna was buried at Ringstead in August 1702 and John in 1738.[5] It seems likely that they were Catherine's grandparents. In the April 1748 Higham Ferrers Hundred Poll Charles Bletsoe is listed as a freeholder of Ringstead and living at Great Bowden.[6] On the Shuttleworth memorial at the side of the altar in the church of St Peter and St Paul Great Bowden Charles Bletsoe is mentioned as being of Easton, Northamptonshire. Easton is later recorded as owned by the Shuttleworths.

Great Bowden Church

The connection of the Bletsoe family with Ringstead might explain how the Ringstead mills came into Shuttleworth ownership. Records show that Woodford Mill was owned by three generations of the family, Henry, his fourth son Nathaniel, born in 1762, and Nathaniel's only child Henry, born in 1793. One document in the Fisher and Saunders Collection (FS40/2) at Northamptonshire Record Office relates to the inclosure of Ringstead in 1838-9 and refers to Henry Shuttleworth as Lord of the Manor of Cotton (Ringstead Cotton), an ancient settlement between Ringstead and Raunds[7]. The mill there was owned by the family. The settlement and mill have long since disappeared. The family also owned property in Little Bowden. The Fisher and Sanders Collection has an inventory of Henry's property and goods at Great Bowden including livestock and dairy as well as details of the contents of each room in his house and indicate that he was a man of some means (FS40/13). Because of the date I think the Henry referred to is Nathaniel's son, not Nathaniel's oldest brother Henry who died in 1835.

Memorial to Nathaniel Shuttleworth

In 1829 the brother of the tenant of Woodford Mill asked Mr Shuttleworth not to expect his sister to pay for all the repairs carried out. This appears not to have met with a response and a threat of taking further action on the matter was necessary. The Mr Shuttleworth at this point is likely to have been Nathaniel as records show that in 1830 William Mitchell became his tenant at the mill.

Nathaniel was a surgeon apothecary. He had been apprenticed to Thomas Bloor a surgeon in Uppingham from 1781 to 1786.[8] In 1793 Nathaniel married Elizabeth Wartnaby of Market Harborough and they lived in the town. On his death on 10 August 1833 The Gentleman's Magazine described him in a brief obituary as 'a gentleman most highly respected for his integrity and general urbanity'. Elizabeth continued to live at 42 High Street, their son Henry lived at number 44. Between the two houses was the office of Wartnaby and Shuttleworth, solicitors. Henry had been a junior partner in the firm. When the partnership was dissolved in1832 William Wartnaby returned the offices to The Manor House.[9]

Henry married his cousin Elizabeth in 1821. She was the daughter of George Shuttleworth, Henry Shuttleworth senior's fifth son. As an only child Henry inherited all of Nathaniel's property, although from 1834 to 1835 Henry Shuttleworth Bellamy, Henry's cousin, was living at the mill.

A few years later Henry became the owner of The Priory, Woodchester, Gloucestershire. This was an imposing house dating from 1580 which had been altered in the eighteenth century and in 1830. He should have been set for a comfortable life but the Wheel of Fortune was turning against him. By 1839 Henry, now a father of eight children was declared bankrupt. Within a year both Elizabeth and Henry had died; Elizabeth in January and Henry in April 1840.

42, High Street, Market Harborough home of Nathaniel Shuttleworth who married Elizabeth Wartnaby. Their son Henry lived at No. 44. Between the two houses was the office of Wartnaby and Shuttleworth Solicitors.

In 1840 Henry Freestone, a Market Harborough leather merchant and currier, wrote in his diary that "that a considerable property belonging to Mr Henry Shuttleworth was sold at auction, at the Angel Hotel. He commented "The Shuttleworth family were among the most respected and leading residents in the town. As a solicitor Mr Henry held a large practice, but speculative enterprises turned out adversely and so brought ruin".[10]

One factor in Henry's financial difficulties was an investment as a partner in Lightpill Mill, a pin mill near Woodchester in the Frome Valley on the outskirts of Stroud. There were numerous mills along this steep valley in the nineteenth century, most produced cloth but some produced pins. Today Lightpill Mill is surrounded by a trading estate just off the A46 and is a Grade II listed building.

In their account of the Frogmarsh Mill, Woodchester, Paterson and Mills[11] say that pin making developed in the Painswick area in the nineteenth century mostly in redundant cloth mills. Lemuel Wright in 1824 had patented a machine for making solid-headed pins. The machine was later installed by Daniel Foot Taylor in Lightpill Mill. He eventually became bankrupt and the businessmen who took on Frogmarsh Mill were beset by disputes over partnership. It would seem that running a mill was not always a good business investment.

Lightpill Mill, near Woodchester in the Frome Valley

Woodchester Manor

In January 1840, four months before Henry died, Mr. Taylor brought a case against him for non -payment of an award of £10,000 made by Gloucester Assizes. Henry had agreed to buy a share of a pin patent machinery, the business and lease of a certain mill together with an estate (probably The Priory Woodchester) in Gloucesterhire. Henry and Mr Taylor had applied for an extension of the patent for five years in May 1838. The Court ruled that despite Henry having been declared bankrupt in 1839 he was liable to pay the debt in full and also that he was to pay all debts he owed to Joseph Wartnaby senior.[12]

There were other Court cases after Henry's death relating to his financial transactions when he was a solicitor. It was obvious Henry had accumulated considerable debts. In 1843 in the Court of Chancery a case was brought by Mr. Wilkin against Mr Taylor, Henry's partner in the pin mill. Henry had taken out a £4000 loan with Mr. Wilkin. Due to Henry's bankruptcy and death Mr. Wilkin could not recover the debt and asked the Court to make the executors of Mr. Taylor's estate responsible for the repayment of the loan. The Court refused his application.[13]

When Henry died his youngest child Nathaniel Edmond was aged six and his eldest Henry Charles seventeen. Augusta and Catherine Digby went to Adelaide in 1848 and were followed in 1850 by Edward Bletsoe, Robert and Nathaniel Edmond. In 1851 Georgina was a teacher in Norfolk.

Woodchester Old Church

We visited Woodchester to see if we could find the graves of Henry and Elizabeth, whose deaths are recorded in the Woodchester Parish Records and to locate the Lightpill Mill. The Priory was situated next to the old church. That church is now in ruins but there are still headstones and tombs in the former churchyard. The history society in the village have recorded the names that are visible on them, but there are no Shuttleworths, neither are there any in the present churchyard. Further research is needed to find out what happened to the orphaned children in the years between their parents' deaths and their arrival in Australia.

References

1 'English Wall Paintings of the Fourteenth Century' (1955) Tristram E.W., Routledge Kegan Paul.

2 'Ringstead People: The Lives of some Nineteenth Century People from a Northamptonshire Village,'Ball, David (2011) Chapter 12 'Papermakers: William Mitchell and Others' and http://ringstead-squarespace.com/ringstead-people/tag/Mitchell

3 'Shuttleworth Family of Great Bowden,' Reid, Elizabeth.

4 Rushden Research Group, www.rushdenheritage.co.uk/Villages/hearth tax74Ringstead html

5 Rushden Research Group, www.rushdenheritage.co.uk/Villages/registers/ringc1691-1720htlm

6 Rushden Research Group, www.rushdenheritage.co.uk/1748-poll htlm

7 'Fisher and Sanders Collection,' Northamptonshire Record Office F.S 40 1-13. 'Little Bowden Assessment Book 1838,' Fisher Sanders and Co. were chartered surveyors and land agents in Market Harborough

8 Information supplied by The Friends of The Worshipful Society of Apothecaries, Blackfriars Lane, London.

9 'Wartnaby's,' Tillotson, John (2003) The Harborough Historian Vol. 22, pp. 3-5.

10 Information supplied by Bob Hakewill. Mr Freestone's diary was published in the Market Harborough Advertiser, 7th January, 1896.

11 'Cloths, Pins and Leather - An Examination of Frogmarsh Mill, Woodchester,' Paterson, Nigel and Mills, Stephen, Gloucesterhire Society for Industrial Archaeology (1997) pp 3 -13. The mill was referred to as Light Pool Mill in a number of documents, Lightpill in others.

12 'New cases in the Court of Common Pleas,' Bingham, Peregrine (1841)

13 'Reported cases argued and determined in English Courts,' Vol. 40

Photograph of Lightpill Mill courtesy of Chris Allen www.geograph.org.uk Textile Mill Engines

My thanks to the congregation of St Peter and St Paul, Great Bowden who have been welcoming and helpful when we visited the church during my research for this article and my article about wall paintings in Leicestershire churches. Thanks also to the members of the congregation of St Mary's Church, Woodchester for their interest and assistance.

Note

In the mid-twentieth century there was a tearoom at Woodford Mill. It had been closed for many years, but as part of the refurbishment of the mill a new tearoom has opened with holiday accommodation above. Visitors can see both of the water wheels from inside the tearoom. The millstones have been incorporated into various parts of the building.