

# The Life and Times of Burton Folk

In the past two issues of the Journal we looked at life on the Burton Estate at the time of the Great Exhibition of 1851.

We now move forward 9 years to see how much life has changed in just a few years –

## Lord William Monson – the 6<sup>th</sup> Lord Monson of Burton.

Born 1796 in Madras, he inherited the title in 1841 from his cousin Frederick who died aged 31 without issue. He found the Burton Estate dilapidated, the Hall almost derelict and the farms and buildings starved of investment and maintenance for almost 30 years. He also inherited Gatton Park, a magnificent but unfinished Italian style residence in Surrey, on which the 5<sup>th</sup> Lord had lavished huge sums of money, funded by the sale of 12,500 acres of his Lincolnshire estates. On his death, Frederick left all that he could to his dotting mother and nothing to his estranged wife, leaving the estate with huge debts.

A family man who enjoyed antiquarian pursuits, William Monson married Eliza Larken in 1828, the daughter of a family friend who had served with his father in India. They had 8 children but not all survived to adulthood. He had little experience in running the estate, so he relied much upon advisers to administer his affairs. Firm but fair with his tenants, he gained their respect and managed to put the estate finances in order. He renovated Burton Hall as his main residence, and let Gatton Park first to his Aunt, Lady Warwick, and then to Hugh McCalmont Cairns, MP., the Solicitor General in Palmerston's Government. By 1860 the estate was in good order and profitable, but a prudent man, he would often question the smallest household bill if the charge seemed unreasonable!

## The Reverend Edmund Larken – Rector of Burton

As the eldest son of a prosperous East India Company tea trader, Edmund was educated at Oxford and was first appointed to holy orders as Rector of Horbling in Lincolnshire. When the living in Burton became vacant in 1843, Lord Monson who owned the patronage, offered this appointment to his brother-in-law. The salary of around £500 was a comfortable living, worth in the region of £100,000 today. Larken was an enigma. He came from a prosperous upper class background, but he held radical views that set him apart from the deeply conservative Cathedral Establishment. He was an Evangelical Socialist, and was once described as a "Communist" by one of Monson's legal advisers, and as a "warm hearted, zealous philanthropist" in another report. Intriguingly he was also in contact with Matilda Hays, one of the most avant-garde feminists of her day.

His pastoral duties in Burton were not demanding but his influence locally was immense. He founded the Penitent Females Home in Lincoln; he supported the Cooperative Movement for workers; was President of the Mechanics Institute providing adult education in Lincoln; and he would preach many sermons on a Sunday - two in Burton, at the Lincoln prison, the Girls Home, the Asylum and at the Barracks where he was Chaplain to Lincolnshire Militia. He was a keen cricketer, founding the Burton Cricket Club, yet he still had the time and energy to be the political agent for the Hon William Monson, and secretary for the Liberal Party in North Lincolnshire. He was well connected with all the landed and business families in Lincolnshire, and adept at obtaining donations for his pet projects. Although he was held in high esteem, his radical views meant that throughout his life he was overlooked for more senior and lucrative

## David Middleton – Burton Estate Manager

David Middleton was first appointed as steward to Lord Monson in 1843 to oversee the renovations to the Hall and to administer the estate. He was scrupulously honest, loyal, dedicated to his task and kept his master fully informed of estate matters almost daily by letter. He had a strong moral code and was intolerant of any "mischief" in the village. It was an inspired appointment, and the ultimate prosperity of the estate had much to do with his management. He was ambitious, which led to his appointment as land agent for all of the Monson Lincolnshire Estates covering some 8000 acres in Burton, South Carlton and Croft near Skegness.

## William Ford - The Estate Gardener.

Ford was appointed as head gardener in 1851 at the outrageous salary (according to Middleton) of 21/- a week with free coal. He had moved from Sudbrook Hall where he learned his trade as a gardener to the Ellison family. The relationship between Middleton and Ford was often strained, and Middleton was suspicious that Ford was selling produce to make a little extra.

## John Evens - farmer

John Evens was a tenant farmer and lived at the Manor House. Born in North Carlton, his family had farmed in Burton since 1815. In 1850 he and other farmers on the estate were almost bankrupted in the agricultural depression that followed the repeal of the Corn Laws. The prosperity of farming has always been subject to cycles, but in 1860 the market had again recovered from the 1850 low. Evens, John Farrow (Burton Fen Farm) and John Allison who each farmed over 400 acres in the parish were enjoying a period of prosperity, with money to invest in the new farm machinery manufactured locally at the Clayton and Shuttleworth works.

## Mary Graves – farmer

Today the fortunes of Mary Graves would be related as an everyday story of country folk typified by the Grundy family in "The Archers". The tenant of Burton Cliff farm, she farmed 300 acres of land assisted by a nephew and niece and 4 farm hands. Invariably late in paying her rent, heavily in debt and beset with family problems, she struggled to make a living. However, she was a survivor and for 20 years as a tenant she managed to keep the bailiffs at bay, but now, aged 59, her luck and energy were running out.

Life had changed greatly in the village in the 9 years since the great exhibition of 1851. The railways had revolutionised travel, cutting travel time between cities from days to hours and affordable even to farm workers who could now take day excursions to the coast. There was still poverty, but on the estate agricultural workers were paid a modest but living wage and many families kept a pig to provide meat. As the estate finances improved there was money available to rebuild the cottages on the hillside.



The grounds of the Hall were immaculately kept as were the farms of Farrow and Evens who employed George Stamp and James Dawson as their groundkeepers. Charles Thistlewood, who now resided at Hathow Farm (Odder), also a groundkeeper, employed 5 labourers and 4 boys to assist him. Two miles away in the city there were great contrasts – the opulence of the uphill Cathedral area, and the downhill slum areas where families of 8 were crowded into a single room with no sanitation. Vagrants and beggars roamed the streets, and beer halls and brothels abounded.

Farming was again prosperous and the cost of wheat had risen considerably since the depression that followed the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. The “High Farmers” in the parish, John Evens, John Farrow and John Allison, had introduced modern farming methods of crop rotation and increased the yield by using fertiliser from the artificial manure works that had been established by Doughty close to the Fosdyke at **Burton Lane End**. Middleton, who was now the land agent for Lord Monson, reported that the smell from the works was worrying as it wafted out across the fields towards the Hall, carried on a westerly wind.

The cold wet lands on Burton Fen still flooded in the winter, but drainage had been improved and the fields could be cultivated with modern machinery. Not all were pleased with the progress. The Burton Hunt under the eccentric Master, **Lord Henry Bentinck**, the 4<sup>th</sup> son of the Duke of Portland, still hunted across the county, and the introduction of cultivated land with fences and hedges created problems for the hunt that now had to negotiate with an increasingly vociferous farming lobby.

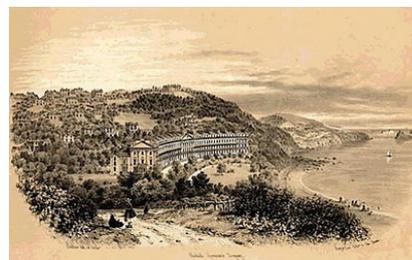
The introduction of more productive farming methods meant that each farm had reduced its workforce by around 25% since 1851. John Evens, living at the Manor House, now employed 7 men against 9 in 1851, but he also could afford a governess to look after and educate his 3 young children. John Allison, regarded as being one of the most progressive farmers, had cut his workforce from 14 to 7 men.

Although many farms were prospering, **Mary Greaves (58)** at Burton Cliff farm was struggling to survive. She had reduced her workforce from 9 to 4 men, but was still unable to pay the rent due on Lady Day (25<sup>th</sup> March). She was responsible for her niece, Elizabeth Graves, and a nephew Thomas, regarded as a ne’er-do-well, who ended his days in the Lincoln Asylum. Sadly Elizabeth Graves committed suicide in 1862 by taking strychnine. There was much sympathy for her plight. Monson was reluctant to send in the bailiffs, and Evens helped by offering to cultivate some of her land on the ridge. However, Middleton felt that it would be kinder to evict her, and he calculated that once her debts were paid she would have capital of £500 remaining. Perhaps he had an ulterior motive as he had always wanted to farm, and he asked Lord Monson if he could take on the tenancy. Monson declined, no doubt on the grounds that he was of greater value to him as his land agent.

By 1860 the Burton estate was in fine condition, thanks to the diligence of **David Middleton**. He received an annual salary of £200 and probably lived in Maud House. Middleton was responsible for the renovations at the Hall, collecting rents and the maintenance of the estate properties and cottages. He was a strong churchman and intolerant of the many dissidents in the village who support the Methodist cause.

In 1859 on the instructions of his lordship, he began the task of installing running water to the Hall, and to provide clean water for the tenants in the village. Two reservoirs were dug on the hillside, fed by the stream that rose by Spring Cottage. The water was then channelled through cast iron pipes to the Rectory and the Hall with 2 additional basins supplying drinking water to the village. The work took 2 years to complete, but in 1861 the Hall and the village were supplied with clean running water. The Hall was lit by oil lamps, and Rubin Trotter, a Lincoln Ironmonger, was employed to service the 50 or more lamps. Middleton, who was a very capable handyman, was not impressed with the standard of work and refused to pay the bill.

Both Middleton and William Ford the gardener wrote regularly to **Lord Monson**, who now aged 64 spent the winter with his family in Torquay at “Hendersyde”, a magnificent newly built Villa overlooking Tor Bay. The railway had made Torquay popular as a winter resort for the wealthy, and attracted royalty, leading families and Victorian celebrities escaping the fog and grime of the big cities. Torquay was described as ‘the most opulent, the handsomest and the most fashionable watering place in the British Isles’.



*Hesketh Crescent - Torquay 1850  
Hendersyde Villa would be on the the hill above*

The estate finances had improved greatly and his Lordship no longer had to provide annuities for his now deceased dowager relatives. His household was extensive with a staff of 11, including a butler, 2 footmen, a cook and several maids. Winters in Burton were harsh, and invited guests enjoying the winter sunshine were the two younger daughters of the Revd and Mrs Larken, and Fanny Larken (59), Lady Monson’s unmarried elder sister, who for some years, seems to have taken up permanent residence in the household. They lived in some style, and Lord Monson also owned the yacht “Zoe” moored in Torquay harbour. An enterprising gentleman, a Mr Dan Clegg, offered his painting of “The Adoration of the Magi” by Paul Verones, valued at £4000 guineas, in exchange for the yacht, but the offer was refused. A wise decision as no painting of this title is currently attributed to the painter!

Ford regularly sent produce from the gardens in Burton to Torquay by train - and on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1859 he wrote “The cold is severe. One sheep froze to death and we will begin to fill the Ice House on Monday.” On 23<sup>rd</sup> December he sent the remaining fruit from the store to arrive in time for Christmas – “every bunch of grapes, 4 pecks of apples and 3½ dozen pears”, and recorded that “there was 18° of frost up to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 28° (- 16C) on Sunday night followed by 2 days of snow with a sharp north wind penetrating into buildings and cottages. Ice on the ponds was 5 inches thick and they had collected 15 cart loads of ice.” On 24<sup>th</sup> December it rained on top of the frozen ground, followed by dense fog. Despite the weather, he informed his master on the 10<sup>th</sup> January that “Two



A huge circular structure part set into the ground, 30ft diameter and 25ft from floor to ceiling. Built of stone with a magnificent domed brick roof and insulated by a layer of soil. It is a 10ft drop from the door to bottom which would be filled with ice from the ponds.

**The entrance to the Ice House.**  
The entrance faces North

With great pride, Ford kept his lordship informed of his successes and failures throughout the year. He was enormously proud of the wide range of fruits and vegetables that he grew and exhibited in the local shows. He was up against stiff competition, particularly from Sudbrook Hall and the gardens of the Revd Bromhead JP in Lincoln. At the Lincolnshire Agricultural show in May, he exhibited pineapples, strawberries, seakale, broccoli, cauliflowers, early potatoes, carrots and salad. He modestly reported that he received 5 firsts, 2 seconds and 2 thirds.

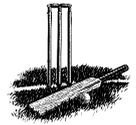
On his Lordships instructions the prize vegetables were delivered to the Rectory. In the July show he exhibited plants, cut flowers, gooseberries, strawberries and vegetables. In an earlier letter he reported that the frost on 31<sup>st</sup> March had destroyed the apricots which were "as large as sparrows eggs" The walled garden supported fruit of all kinds – plums, cherries, and grapes, and the orchard walk would have been a fine sight in the spring. There were plans to build a peach house in the walled garden, and he planted many new trees in Burton Park, replacing those that had been uprooted in the recent storms. Unusually William Ford was unmarried, and at the age of 31, living alone in the Garden House, he must have been a very eligible bachelor to catch the eye of every maiden in the village.

In May the advanced party arrived to prepare the Hall for his lordship's return from Torquay. Ann Burrell, who had been housekeeper for his Lordship for over 20 years, and his butler, George Young, were tasked with opening up the house and receiving all the trunks and cases that arrived by rail. Young made an inventory of the contents of the cellar, which included 22 bottles of port, 12 brandy, 8 amontillado sherry, 40 bottles of red wines, 17 bottles of vintage champagne, whiskey, Gilbys gin, and vintage port.

There was always great excitement heralding the return of Lord and Lady Monson for it gave a life and purpose to the estate on which so many people depended. But there would be no lavish parties as his income, although substantial, did not compare with his neighbours like the Amcotts, Jarvis, Ellison, Anderson and Lord Yarborough.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> May 1860, the Reverend Larken was at cricket practice in the park. The Burton Club had gone from strength to strength, and now employed a professional bowler at a guinea a week to act as groundsman and play in matches such as the needle game against Lincoln on 15<sup>th</sup> June.

As the club Secretary and Treasurer he was adept at extracting the annual subscriptions from an impressive list of club members. He would be unlikely to play in the Lincoln match, but the Hon William Monson (now MP for Reigate) and Debonnaire Monson who had both represented the County at cricket, were expected to play. Now aged 50 and Rector of Burton for 17 years, his career was at a crossroads.



He was ambitious and he had set his sights on becoming the Dean of Lincoln in place of John Ward who was now seriously ill. He had strong backing from many of the influential county families who respected his evangelical zeal and would support his view that the Church hierarchy was out of touch with its worshippers. The church attendance figures for Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> March 1851 were revealing when 205 people attended morning service in the Cathedral against 508 at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel on the Waterside. There was no evening service, but 674 attended the Wesleyan church. The Dean and chapter dithered for a decade on whether or not to introduce an evening service and to provide lighting.

However, he was up against strong opposition from the High Church lobby and the all important patronage was held by the Crown. He probably regarded himself as an outsider, for he also applied for the vacant living at Sutterton, a wealthy parish with an income for the incumbent of £1000. Patronage was all important, and he had the support of Lord Yarborough and Lord Monson who had written a glowing reference. Unfortunately, the appointment was again in the hands of the Prime Minister Lord Palmerston but at least he headed a Liberal government.

He was to be disappointed in both. A letter from Lord Palmerston to Lord Monson informed him he had granted the Sutterton living to a Reverend Moore and he had chosen Thomas Garnier as the new Dean, who was the son of the Dean of Winchester. Garnier had recently been appointed by Palmerston as



*Lord Palmerston  
Prime Minister 1859 - 1865*

Dean of Ripon but with 12 children, he found the accommodation unsuitable. Palmerston, no doubt owing some political favours to a strong liberal family, agreed the transfer.

Such matter were far above the heads of the majority of the villagers, such as George Brown, the woodman, and his 7 children; Samuel Cooling and his family; John Cooling the gamekeeper; Daniel Ormsby and his wife Rebecca; and the impoverished inhabitants of the almshouses who lived on a few shillings a week from parish funds and the gift of blue cloth for their aprons. Nor would it bother Robert Cottam the miller who was also a local Methodist preacher. Their families had lived in the village and served his Lordship for centuries. It was the scheme of things.

*epc*

Sources:  
*The Monson Papers - Lincolnshire Archive office*  
*Victorian Lincoln - Sir Francis Hill*  
*Burton by Lincoln - Philip Race*  
*Rural Society and Government in 19thC Lincolnshire - RJ Olney*  
*Oxford Dictionary of National biography - oxforddnb.com*  
*Ancestry.co.uk - UK census records online*