

CLHS Newsletter

APRIL 2021



Dear Member

Issued 26th March - You have not missed an edition – this Newsletter concerns the programme in April onwards hence more appropriately an April newsletter.

1. Programme

Wednesday 14th April – zoom presentation at 7pm ('doors open' 6:55 pm)

West Dean: Downland Village to Royal Playground, Hilary Sloan

Zoom Meeting ID: **841 9036 2116**

Passcode: **CLHS0421**

Wednesday 12th May – zoom presentation.

History of Art in Chichester Cathedral Anne Scicluna

Joining details will be circulated in the May Newsletter.

By the time we reach our June meeting – 9th June – lockdown arrangements will have eased, subject to all the caveats about the virus and vaccination, and it may be possible to meet 'for real' at New Park but with social distancing protocols still in place.

By July, if all goes to plan, all legal limits to social contact will have been removed, our summer visit, 'An evening stroll around Georgian Midhurst' led by Alan on 21st July might, just might, happen. We will keep you informed.

Next Newsletter: 30th April 2021

2. Happy Lady Day – 25th March

Philip Robinson

The most important of the "quarter days" in medieval England was named in recognition of that moment when the angel Gabriel told Mary "*thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son*". In the secular world it was a day when farm tenancies were changed, labourers hired, fires no longer lit in houses and leases paid by the affluent for a house in London to enable participation in 'the season'. It marked the start of the New Year until 1752.

Europe had used the calendar introduced by Julius Caesar (Julian) but by the end of the sixteenth century the gap between it and the solar calendar, annually 11 and a half minutes, had grown so noticeable that an adjustment was required. Pope Gregory XIII made that correction in 1582, (Gregorian) declaring that September 2nd would be followed by September 12th. But 1582 was too close in memory to Henry VIII's break

from Rome and England didn't follow until 1752. A year was still 365 days, Lady Day would still be 25th March, but annual contracts would need another 10 days to compensate for the adjustment, thus ending on 4th April, the new contract year starting on the 5th. However, as 1800 in the Julian Calendar was a leap year, but not in the Gregorian, a further adjustment was made and additional day was added to make the new contract year, and now tax year, start on 6th April.

3. Monica's Husband

Terry Carlyse

Those of you who were able to sign into Zoom and listen to the lecture on *A Lavant House Upstairs Downstairs* might be interested to learn that Monica Grimmer's husband, Harold, had also written about his past which enabled him to be a very prolific contributor to the 'Life Story Library' section of the *Past Times Project* (<https://www.pasttimesproject.co.uk/index.php>). Harold was born in Arundel, one of 6 children, but his family moved to Chichester when he was aged only 2. Thus, he produced several items specifically relating to Chichester including one about his half-brother working on re-roofing the cathedral before the war, one concerning Sunday Walks from Chichester, a description of the other inhabitants of Alexandra Road at the time his family lived there, his father's experience of organising evacuation placements *and* a brief reference to meeting Monica. Well worth a quick browse!

4 Ebenezer Prior – Philanthropist and Reformer

Alan H J Green



Ebenezer Prior cutting an imposing, if rather severe, figure in his mayoral robes in 1895

(Anne Scicluna collection)

A prominent figure in Victorian Chichester was Ebenezer Prior, whose Dickensian name immediately commands attention. As is well known he traded as a woolstapler and fellmonger and much has been written about his Chichester business. Here I want to explore the nature of a man who made his mark on the city not only by his business activity but by his energetic and reforming zeal.

Born in Chichester in 1848 into a woolstapling family, he served, *inter (multa) alia* as a Justice of the Peace, a Poor Law Guardian, Manager of the Lancastrian Voluntary Schools, a councillor, and mayor of the city. As a councillor, when the great debate over Chichester's sewerage system – or rather lack of it – was raging, he was a vociferous 'Drainer' when so many of his fellow councillors could not see the need for sewers. In 1895, when he was elected mayor, Ebenezer Prior caught the attention of *Chichester News and Reviews*, and a four-page article therein presented a fulsome portrait of him and his business.

He was a man of strong Christian belief and morals and a member of the Calvinist Providence Chapel in Chapel Street where he was a trustee, as had been his father before him, and in 1880 became the Sunday School Superintendent. In his tireless activity he exuded Protestant Work Ethic in train loads.

Two causes in particular fired his zeal: abstinence and upholding the principles of the Reformation.

Ebenezer the Rechabite [A person who abstains from alcoholic drink, *Old Testament Jeremiah* Chp. xxxv verses. 5 and 6 Philip Robinson from Oxford Dictionary]

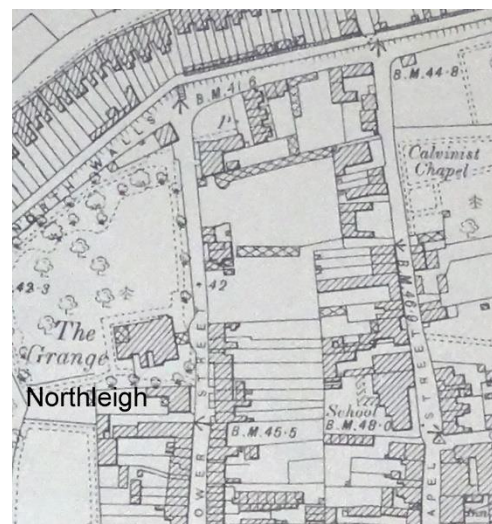
Chichester in the late 19th century had a particular problem with hardship resulting from excessive drinking in its myriad pubs, and some of Prior's employees had fallen under the influence of the 'demon drink' which caused him great concern being a total abstainer. As President of the Total Abstinence Society, he gave evidence to the Royal Commission on Liquor Laws in 1897. A lengthy report in the *Chichester Observer* of 14 April that year, under the headline '*Remarkable Evidence by Mr Prior – The State of Chichester*', detailed how, when giving his evidence in the Lords, he had presented the problems in Chichester and told how some of his men had also been found indulging in illegal gaming at four of the pubs in the city. He pointed out that in 1889 102 licences had been granted, equating to one for every 79 of the population, and there had been 90 apprehensions for drunkenness leading to 87 convictions. Asked whether he would do away with all sales of intoxicating liquors Prior replied " *I cannot go as far as that. I believe such a strong reaction would take place that at present it would be a mistake.*" He went on to opine that the problem lay in the sheer number of licences being so freely granted by magistrates.

Ebenezer Prior inherited the family business and by 1889 employed 40 men. Perhaps unusually for the era, he was a caring employer, and this extended to moral and material welfare outside work. To counter their daytime drinking he provided on his premises a room set aside for the men to brew up a cup of tea whenever they wanted one – perhaps the earliest example of a staff room in a Chichester business.

When the East Walls Brewery closed in 1889 part of the premises was acquired by Priors to become their centre of operations, occasioning a certain irony by moving into a former brewery ; perhaps Ebenezer thought that by so doing he was purging its evil past!

At the end of the 19th century Ebenezer Prior transferred all production to the top end of Tower Street adjoining a large house named *Northleigh*, and then used the East Walls site as a store. He lived at Northleigh, where he raised a family of 11 children over the course of 15 years : as Philip Robinson has observed, his abstinence obviously didn't apply between the bedsheets!

A detail from the 1896 1:2500-scale OS shewing Tower Street with **Northleigh**, Ebenezer Prior's house, marked. The industrial buildings are to the south and west of the house.



By the end of the century the business had expanded such that larger premises were required, and these were found at the other end of the Tower Street when the Lancastrian School for Boys moved to Orchard Street in 1911. Ebenezer Prior bought the school buildings and also the adjacent pub, *The Fighting Cocks*, demolishing the latter in order to build new premises. It must have been deeply satisfying for him to be able to expunge one of the sources of alcoholic menace.

Although a strict Calvinist he had an ecumenical outlook and joined the Chichester branch of the Church of England Temperance Society and was elected to their committee in October 1898.

Ebenezer the Calvinist Reformer

A split that was besetting Chichester Diocese in the 19th century was the rise of ritualism inspired by the Church of Rome : Anglo-Catholicism as it became known. Driven by the liturgical ideas of the Oxford Movement, Roman Catholic ritualism was creeping into some to Anglican churches, especially in the new ones being built in Brighton to serve the rapidly expanding town. When Bishop Durnford brought a prosecution against John Purchas, vicar of St James's in Brighton, for ritualism in 1868, the case was lampooned by *Punch*.

Purchas had judgement served upon him, but it did nothing to stem the tide of Anglo-Catholicism across the diocese. At the cathedral itself, churchmanship was steadily rising under Deans Pigou and Randall, the latter being a keen ritualist; this was proving unpopular and incurred the wrath and indignation of Ebenezer Prior as was reported by the *Chichester Observer* in April 1898.

Prior was President of the Chichester Lodge of the National Protestant League which campaigned for upholding the Protestant tradition within the Church of England, and he called a meeting in Selsey for the purpose of '*exposing the Ritualistic practices of the Church of England, and of upholding the principles of the Reformation*' in Chichester Cathedral and the diocese. In his address Prior cited the fact that the Three Hours Devotion on Good Friday 1898 had been led by one Revd F W Puller of the Cowley Fathers, a member of the English Church Union and Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament. Describing the Cowley Fathers as "*a very extreme body*" he denounced them for promoting "*the abominable confessional*" as one of their ideals.

Ebenezer Prior expressed the hope that by force of public opinion they might make it impossible for statesmen to appoint to high positions in the church, men who belonged to such societies and encourage MPs to pass the Church Discipline Bill. Poor Prior's efforts proved in vain, Chichester Cathedral continued to ascend the candle in the 20th century and Chichester Diocese had the highest number of Anglo-Catholic churches in England. Not only that, but a theological college had also been founded in Chichester in 1839, with very close ties to the Cathedral, which promulgated Anglo-Catholic teaching right up to its closure in 1994.

Envoi

After Ebenezer Prior died in 1927 the business was continued by his son and lasted until the early 1970s. Northleigh had been demolished under the 1960s clearances of Tower Street, and this was followed after closure by the woolstapling buildings. As such nothing now remains of the Prior Empire to serve as a souvenir of its singular proprietor and there is nowhere even to put up a blue plaque to him.

I had fondly imagined that the City Council named *Prior Place* in Swanfield after Ebenezer, but Anne Scicluna's excellent new book on Chichester's street names has disabused me of this – it was actually after Jim Prior, a 20th century greengrocer! How wrong can you be?

5 Census past and census to come

Philip Robinson

The 2021 Census has been completed and it may be the last. The Government has taken the view that a decennial census is too blunt to capture the changing population movements of contemporary society.

In January next year the 1921 Census will be released; Findmypast has been awarded the contract by the National Archives.

That census was taken on 19th June, later than the customary March/April date because of a strike by coal miners, initially supported by railway and other transport workers. In addition to the questions asked in 1911, the 1921 census included more detail on the nature of employment and counted, for the first time, divorced individuals.

The special importance of the publication of the 1921 Census for local historians is that this will be the last census to be released until 2052.

On Saturday 19th December 1942 all the census returns of 1931 were destroyed in a mysterious fire in a secure and guarded warehouse in Hayes, Middlesex. The fire was not the result of enemy action. In 1941 a census wasn't taken.

As war approached the government decided to introduce a national identity card and decided that the National Registration Day would be Friday September 29th 1939. As for a census, the head of the household had to record all those who spent the night in the house, their age and birthday, marital status, including divorce, occupation and whether a member of "Naval, Military or Air Force Reserves, or Auxiliary Forces or of Civil Defence Services or Reserves". The 1939 Register is a partial compensation for the loss of a census in 1941, though with many names redacted as the individual listed was still alive.

The release of the 1921 Census, and the additional information it contains, will allow further exploration of the Shippam Manufacturing Company and its impact on Chichester. Bassil Shippam appeared in the 1911 Census, he was eleven. His full name was Charles Percival Bassil Shippam; Bassil was the maiden name of his maternal grandmother, Rosetta, daughter of Sarah and John Bassil, a cooper from Saffron Walden. Not many people know that.