



NEWSLETTER October 2023

November 20th

**Spital Cemetery – From Gray's
Elegy to Churchill's Hysteria**

Andy Miles



Meetings are held at the St Thomas' Centre, Chatsworth Road, Chesterfield S40 3AW
starting at 7:30pm Members free, Visitors £3

Tapton House and George Yeldham Wilkinson

Think of Tapton House and most people are aware of George Stephenson and the Markham family but fewer know about of George Yeldham Ricketts, later known as George Yeldham Wilkinson and his part in the history of the estate.

Isaac Wilkinson was the fifth of the ninth children born to Richard Wilkinson and his wife Hannah. The wealth of Richard and his uncles John and Isaac came from their involvement in the lead industry. The family were prominent as financiers and shareholders in lead mines as well as owning smelting mills and exporting the lead. Their wealth enabled Isaac to become one of the earliest bankers in Chesterfield. His cousin



Tapton House as it was originally built before it was extended about 1811. Courtesy Philip Cousins

Allwood was the treasurer of the Chesterfield Canal Company and, after his health deteriorated, Isaac was appointed to the committee. When Richard died he left the family home in the centre of Chesterfield to his wife Hannah with the wish that it pass to Isaac on her death. She died in 1808. Isaac had already moved to a newly built property at Tapton in 1794, where he could overlook the new canal.

He expanded the estate as neighbouring properties became available. Ann died in 1827 and Isaac in July 1831. They had no children and when he died he made bequests to every member of the Wilkinson family; his wife's two sisters and there were bequests

to the poor of Chesterfield and Tapton. He also left money to the poor of Leamington Priors, Warwickshire, a village which grew into Leamington Spa, after the development of its saline springs in the 19th century, and which Isaac frequently visited. After bequests to Elder Yard Chapel the residue of his personal estate and his real estate which included Tapton House was left to George Yeldham Ricketts.

George was born in Madras. He was the son of Gilbert Ricketts who died in 1817, when George was just seven-years-old. Despite having family in India, it was decided that George should be sent to England to live with Isaac Wilkinson, as he was a distant connection of Isaac's wife Ann. In 1830 George married Emily Malonek at Leamington Priors. Their first child, another George, was born at Tapton in Sep 1831 and a daughter Emily in Leamington in October 1835.

The amount of money he received from Isaac was said to be about £100,000 provided he changed his name to Wilkinson. Unfortunately he had a lavish and expensive lifestyle. He was invited to become Deputy Lieutenant of Derbyshire. He became President of Chesterfield Cricket Club, and was involved on the Chesterfield Races both as an official and also an owner of horses. These gave opportunities for gambling although there is no indication that he did so. In October 1831 he sold Isaac's house in Leamington, the site being described as being suitable for building. In 1835 he sold the family home which stood at the junction of Packers Row and the High Street to a Mr Rotherham who wanted to demolish part of the property to allow the construction of a new street from High Street eastwards before curving to connect with the junction between Cavendish Street and Knifesmithgate. This became Burlington Street and the remaining part of the property eventually made way for Swallow's.

In February 1837 another daughter was born at Tapton (Maria Louise) and, in the November, Tapton House was offered to let. The following March an inventory was taken when George Stephenson signed the lease. Possibly he didn't want much of the expensive furnishings, which had originally been supplied by Gillows, and George Wilkinson was able to offer them for sale before George Stephenson moved in.

If Stephenson didn't like the furniture of the house, he would have been happy with its surroundings with the extensive pleasure grounds, hot walls which provided shelter for fruit trees, a 78 foot pinery a 140 foot vinery and hot houses where he experimented with growing straight cucumbers. As he reduced his workload he was able to enjoy a friendly rivalry with Joseph Paxton, one time gardener for the Duke of Devonshire. In the valley below he could see the work was proceeding on the North Midland Railway which opened in 1840. He took a mineral lease on land from Sarah Sheppard Bell and her sister to operate Tapton Colliery.

George Yeldham and Emily moved to Leamington, where Emily's family lived, and where a son William Devereux died in 1840. The family travelled to the continent frequently, their movements being reported in the fashionable arrivals/departures section of the press. A son, Augustus Frederick, was born in 1841 in Belgium, as was John Campbell, born in 1844; a thirteen-month-old daughter, Sarah Catherine, died at Boulogne summer in 1851. Clearly he was still spending money.

George Stephenson died in 1848 and Robert Stephenson continued with the lease, although he could have spent little time there, until 1851 when the lease now for 14 years passed to Miss Mary Pocock and Miss Grace Walker who had established an 'ESTABLISHMENT for the EDUCATION of YOUNG LADIES in every department of ENGLISH and CONTINENTAL LITERATURE' which opened in October 1850. A year later there were six staff (including a music governess) and 28 students of whom 24 girls were aged between 10 and 20, together two girls aged eight years and two boys, the sons of the housekeeper, who was Grace's sister. By 1861 there were 28 scholars, including the two boys and the staff included a Professor of Music and a Professor of Singing.

All seemed well but George Yeldham's profligacy was catching up with him. In 1859 he was proclaimed an outlaw. This was a process dating back to medieval times in which proclamations of outlawry in civil cases generally related to bankruptcy.

Independently in 1861 Sarah Sheppard Bell and her sister Elizabeth took the executors of the late Robert Stephenson, who had died in 1859, to court to recover £450, a year and a half's mineral rent, due from Tapton Colliery.

There's no way of knowing how many people locally knew about the proclamation of outlawry but the Bell's case received widespread publicity and either George Yeldham or more likely his solicitor realised that the transfer of the lease from Robert Stephenson to the Misses Pocock and Walker had been carried out without George Yeldham receiving written notification.

The only person whom proclaimed George Yeldham an outlaw, and who can be positively identified, was the Revd. William Cator Randolph. In 1863 he took George Yeldham Wilkinson to the Chancery Court. Randolph and another were the plaintiffs and Wilkinson and 18 others were the defendants. Without obtaining a copy of the case (National Archives 16/161/R60 1863) it is impossible to know the details of the case, but among the others were the Bell sisters, so the 18 were probably owed money by Wilkinson.

The failure to notify George Yeldham of the change in lease meant that he could evict the unfortunate Misses Pocock and Walker. In August 1865 a quantity of household and scholastic furniture was offered for sale, together with seven pianos, twenty bed chambers and a quantity single beds suitable for schools, two archery targets and a quantity of popular school books. It appears that the ladies no longer intended to continue running a school but, as Miss Pocock was 60, perhaps that was not so surprising.

On the 31st day of October, 1865, 'The Capital MANSION HOUSE, called Tapton House, beautifully situate in Finely Timbered and Park like Grounds, within one mile of the Railway (First class) Station at Chesterfield, with Coachhome. Stables, Lawn, Offices, Pleasure Grounds, most Luxuriant Gardens, Hot and Green Houses, Pineries'. Although offered annually it was not until January 1873 when the Markham family moved into the property where Rosa Markham been at the school with her sister for two years.

Sarah Sheppard Bell went to court again in 1871 when the defendants included George and his family and 1874 when some of the family, but not George, were included so presumably the £10,000 Charles Markham had paid had gone to pay off some if not all of George's debts.

His son George Lawrence took the name of Ricketts instead of Wilkinson thus having the rather unwieldy name George Yeldham Ricketts Ricketts a week before his marriage. He divorced his wife in 1865. Augustus joined the Madras Army.

In 1871 George senior's wife was living at a lodging house in Brighton with George Ricketts junior, who had divorced his wife in 1865; her daughter Emily; and son John who was on leave from the Royal Navy. Curiously also living in the lodging house were Edmund Ricketts and his wife Sarah although they do not appear to be related.



A much later photograph by the late Alec Jackson who was a student there.

The property was rather neglected when the Markhams took it over and it took much hard work to bring the grounds back to their attractive state. Charles Paxton served on the Town Council from 1895 until 1920. Perhaps the fact that he had no children was on his mind in 1925 when he gave the Tapton Estate to the Chesterfield Corporation. He was aware that there was a demand for land for housing to the east of Chesterfield. However he expressed the wish the pleasure

grounds be open to the public and not be built over. If he had not stipulated this would the grounds have been sold for development and the park covered with housing?

Violet Markham was responsible for organising the Settlement which organised child and welfare clinics before such things had been thought of. She was co-opted onto the education committee for many years. She was the first woman elected to the council in 1925 and Mayor two years later. It was during this time that Tapton House was opened as a school which it remained until it closed in 1991 in common with other schools following the reorganisation of secondary education in the town.

For additional information about the people living at Tapton House see 'A History of Tapton House' by Len Thompson.

George Hall 1853 – 1913

George Hall and his elder brother John were born in Chesterfield, were educated at Chesterfield Grammar School and served apprenticeships at Oliver's Victoria Foundry. John started as an engineer's clerk, and went on to become Secretary of Sheepbridge Coal and Iron and Coal Company, After his apprenticeship, and aged 22 years George went to Clay Cross to take up a position as foundry manager and foreman of the pattern shop.¹ He married Ann Fisher in 1886 and three children (two boys and one girl) were born in quick succession. In 11th October 1890 he had become an associate member of the Chesterfield and Midland Association of Mechanical Engineers ². He had been at Clay Cross for 14 years and had a young family yet by the date of the 1891 census he was in or, on his way to India to erect furnaces, pattern shops, and blast furnaces. It must have been a lucrative appointment to tempt him, and probably came from one of the Institution of Engineers, possibly Charles Markham, who had just taken over William Oliver or Cuthbert John Oliver, nephew of William Oliver. After six years he returned to England and took up the position of foundry manager and pattern shop foreman at the Sheepbridge Coal and Iron Company's Works until he retired in 1907. He enjoyed recounting his few exciting and interesting adventures experiences in in India, but unfortunately no one wrote them down. ⁱ

¹ Derbyshire Times 27th December 1913

² Derbyshire Times 11th October 1890

TWO MORE EVENTS FOR YOU

October 31st 7:30 -10:30pm

Venue: Hidden Knight

At the corner of Soresby St and Rose Hill

A 60s Coffee House Experience

Music from the 60s to the 90s

Coffee, drinks, bar snacks

Admission Free

November 2nd 10am

Venue: Chesterfield Library

The History of Bryan Donkin Ltd

A Parable of British Engineering

Martin Sanderson on behalf Bryan

Donkin Archive Trust

Admission Free