

Friday Nights: Me, Sprigg and Whicher

I know Elton John said it was Saturday, and that the so-called “Rumble in the Jungle” in Zaire took place on a Saturday, but the experience of my youth was that the real “rumble in the jungle” was dance night at the local swimming baths every winter Friday night. Elton, Saturday might have been alright for fighting, but Friday was much better/worse. You needed mates around you then! In that period of life marked by uncertainty and angst, they needed to be pretty formidable mates too. I gave up and watched it all from the stage.

Today, Emsworth Auctions, held on the first Friday night of the month provides me with a more gentle but regular reminder of dancehall days. Now I’m in lumbering old age, my Friday nights of rumbling in the jungle have ‘morphed’ to rumbling in the jumble. Nevertheless the auction has its own competitive edge. There have been more than one or two occasions there over the years when the bidding got a bit lively and the heart rate has topped 70 and when, with a confidence born of old age, I’ve stuck in there.

One such night occurred just a few months ago. Readers of Echo will have come across Arti Fact and in particular his/her description of a map of Hayling Island by Charles Lewis and held by the Emsworth Museum. The excitement at the auction on this particular Friday night was over a Charles Lewis 1833 map of Emsworth, Havant and Bedhampton that, to be honest, had seen better days and neither was I entirely convinced of its originality. The one thing that drove me on was a label to the reverse stating its use as the exhibit marked H.G. Sg referred to in the affidavit of Herbert Guildford Sprigg in the High Court case of Sprigg versus the

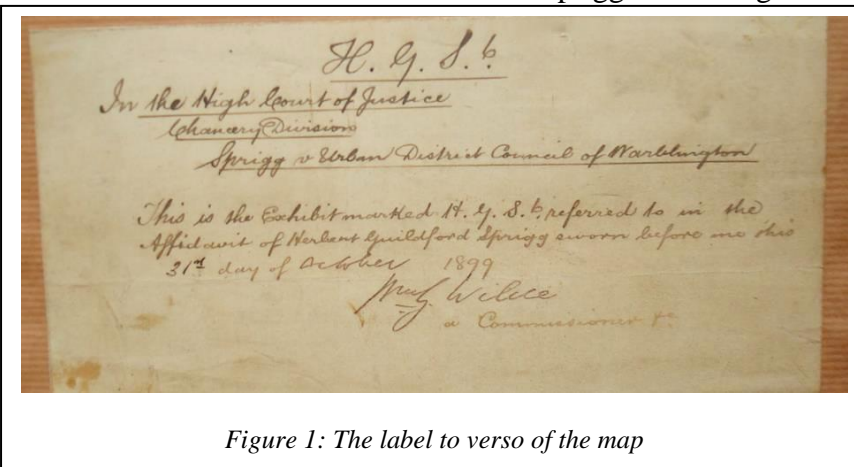


Figure 1: The label to verso of the map

Urban District Council of Warblington in 1899 (see Figure 1). All my other well-developed alerts in connection with buying any map or print under glass were sounding warnings. Needless to say I prevailed, a Friday night position I was not usually accustomed to in my youth.

I had not heard of H G Sprigg but was soon able to find a news article entitled EMSWORTH CIVIL WAR from the Hampshire Telegraph of 4.09.1899 (see Figure 2) that shed a little light. You will notice that the sworn statement by Sprigg refers to the Urban District Council of Warblington, while the newspaper report refers to Emsworth District Council. At this point you might fancy a little flutter as to whom, Sprigg or the newspaper, might be correct in the designation of the Council except that this is not currently possible in Emsworth. I don’t know, all the fuss about the closing of North Street and not a word about the closing of the Bookie! But back to where I was. We will agree that the defendants in the legal action will be referred to as the UDC. “Emsworth Civil War” indeed, sounded like it might be an interesting interlude but there the news trail ended, my investigation limited by my inability to use the search package. It was not until a little later and an occasion when I was idling around the Museum (a frequent happening) that I came upon the booklet *The Parish Church of St James*,

Emsworth, Hampshire. The First Hundred Years by Norman Simmonds, 1980. It turns out that H Guildford Sprigg was the Rector of St James Church at the time of the writ, but why

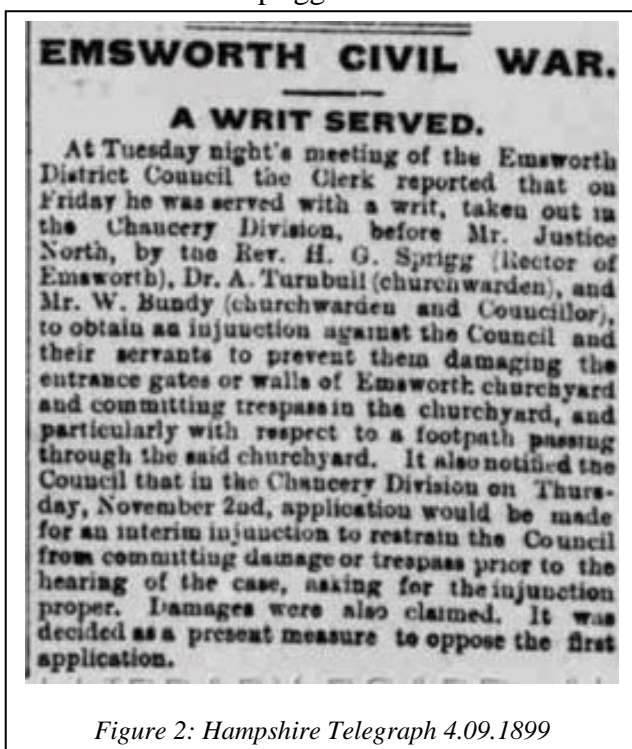


Figure 2: Hampshire Telegraph 4.09.1899

would the Church take the UDC to court? The Simmonds article gives a deliciously dry and wry account of the entire episode and I would urge anyone to read it directly, as my subsequent paraphrasing does the thing no justice at all.

It was clear that the Rev H Guildford Sprigg was a high achiever and a free spirit in the church even before his induction to St James on 1 February 1893. His arrival in Emsworth immediately confirmed his standing as a man of great intellect and formidable resolve, so much so that few parishioners thought he would remain Rector of Emsworth for any length of time. Indeed all bets on the subject were off, although as things turned out it was not until January 1920 that the Rev Sprigg actually did retire from office. In fact one earlier attempt at resigning the Emsworth Rectorship in 1913 was thwarted by a

petition signed by 900 parishioners urging him to reconsider his decision.

One particular incident that endeared him to parishioners, if not the common man and lovers of underdogs everywhere, concerned the Church's dispute with the UDC as to the right of use of the church path increasingly being used as a short cut for, amongst other things, accessing the railway station. The Church had no truck with foot passengers using the path in this way but the growing use by other traffic, if not checked, could forfeit the Church's ownership of the path thereby hindering planning permissions on certain extensions to the southern aspects of the building that it had had in mind for some little time.

Until 1881 the Church practice had been to lock the Churchyard gates at night, but since then things had lapsed. A Church Council meeting in July 1899 chaired by Rev Sprigg decided to lock the gates symbolically for one day. Sometime before a stone stile had been erected to assist the passage of pedestrians through the churchyard on occasions when the gates were locked. The UDC was informed simply as a matter of courtesy as the Church Council thought the matter to be entirely uncontentious. The UDC, however, thought differently and in a number of increasingly heavy-handed and authoritarian responses that were reliant on some degree of bluff, wrote at one point that the Rector and churchwardens were not empowered to close such a churchyard path and that it would instruct the Council Surveyor to break the lock and its workmen to demolish the stile. Someone should have warned the UDC of the formidable nature of the Rev Sprigg's resolve in such matters, for knowing well his ground, and after a short exchange of letters he called the UDC's bluff by taking the case to the High Court. As well as the rector knew his ground so the parishioners knew him and again all bets were off as to who would be the victor in this particular conflict. The UDC, ignoring the mounting costs falling on the ratepayers, blindly blundered on and decided to contest the case, only to be persuaded on the High Court 'steps' that they had no case. The minutes of a subsequent UDC meeting record the basis of the UDC withdrawal as being on the advice of

the Clerk to the Court that the Judge was certainly not favourably impressed with the action they were taking, and neither was their Counsel!

Quite at which point my Friday night acquisition was used in the above proceedings is not clear, although that it was used as an exhibit is the claim on its reverse. The question of how it came to be used is perhaps more interesting, for just after I had taken charge of my map I noticed on the front a list headed The Property of Geo Whicher, Esq. (see Figure 3).

Comparing the map with specimens elsewhere showed this not to be present on any other map and on closer inspection I was able to see that it was a manuscript addition. Most people in the locality of Emsworth and Havant are familiar with the name Whicher's Gate. The map in my possession shows that the land on the other side of the gate to the Havant Thicket belongs to Geo Whicher, as indeed do a number of other adjoining land parcels and properties, including the Staunton Arms. All these things lead me to conclude that the map was once the private property of one George Whicher, or else his land agent, and that this George is the Whicher of Whicher's Gate.

So who was George Whicher or rather which Whicher is this, as there seem to be a number of candidates around that time? In the early 1800s

THE PROPERTY OF		GEO. WHICHER, ESQ.	
1	Homestead & Small Garden	0	0 25
2	Private Road	0	1 0
3	Little Orchard	0	1 18
4	Garden	0	0 38
5	Great Orchard	1	1 1
6	Long Common	2	3 0
7	Barn Field & Rick Yard	4	2 30
8	Leech Pond Piece	2	3 35
9	Tier Piece	1	0 20
10	Wrights & Vokes Piece	1	1 8
11	Four Acres	4	0 0
12	Proutings Piece	3	0 18
13	Harmans Piece	1	2 18
14	Lower Proutings Piece	1	1 22
15	Upper Island Field	2	2 0
16	Lower Do	1	2 0
17	King Head Paddock	0	3 18
18	Staunton Arms & Paddock	1	1 24
Total Statute		34	7 2

Figure 3: George Whicher's properties as marked on the map

there are two strands of the Whicher family living and working in Emsworth. Both strands emanate from the same paternal source, Thomas Whicher, who was baptized in April 1715 in Westbourne and was buried in 1781 in Stoughton.

Thomas married Elizabeth Collins on 21.07.1761 at Aldingbourne, a marriage that produced two children, the eldest being George (we will call him George I), baptized at Stoughton on 10.04.1766. Elizabeth died and was buried at Stoughton on 21.12.1771 and so on 4.10.1773 Thomas married Elizabeth's sister Joanna, a fairly common practice at the time. This marriage produced four children, the third born being Henry, baptized at Stoughton on 10.5.1778. It is George I and Henry who forged business interests in Emsworth in the 18th and 19th centuries, George I in brewing and Henry in butchery.

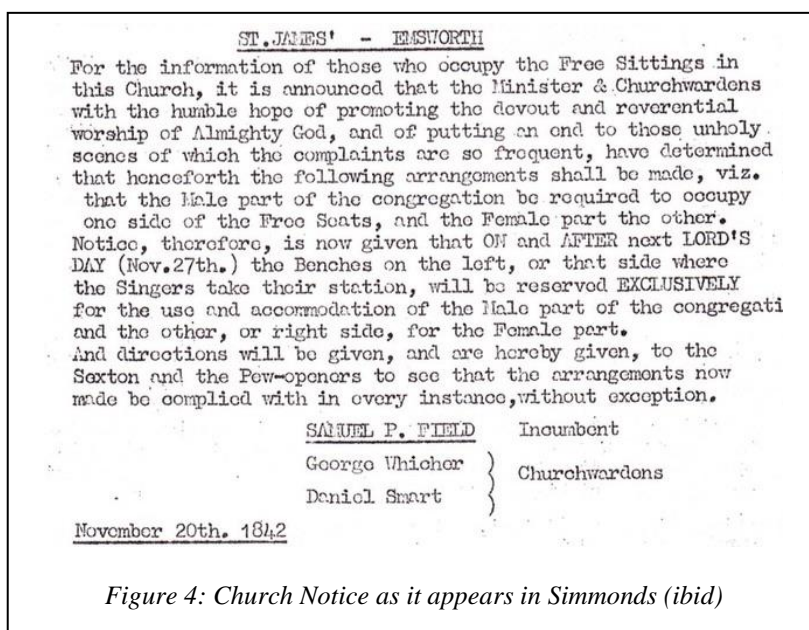
George I's marriage to Olive Mower in 1788 produced eight children, only the third born being male. This child, named George (denoted George II), was born 19.02.1794. Incidentally the second child, Sarah, born in 1792 died aged one while the fourth child, also named Sarah, lived to the age of 101! What of George II? Well he died aged 14 and that rules him out of contention as the Whicher of Whicher's Gate and as the previous owner of my map. The confusion surrounding George Whicher arises because Henry Whicher (George I's half brother) married Hannah Miller in 1801 and produced at least eleven children, the third of whom was born in 1808 and named George (denoted George III).

By 1793 George I was doing exceedingly well as a brewer and maltster, having started his own business around 1788. George III was also a successful businessman, becoming a master butcher by the time of the 1851 census. This success comes a little late to credit Whicher's Gate to him (born 1808) because it begins to appear on local maps at the beginning of the 19th century. In fact the initial Ordnance Survey map of 1810 is the earliest map I have found so far that marks Whicher's Gate. George III would also appear to be a little young to have amassed the considerable portfolio shown on my map of 1833.

So my Charles Lewis map, won on a Friday night, previously belonged to George I i.e. George Whicher born 1766, but how does that connect with the Rev Sprigg's spat with the UDC in 1899? Well, it turns out that George Whicher (no confusion now) was a big man in the church, St James' Church, Emsworth to be precise. Simmonds (ibid), notes that at the Vestry meeting of 23.04.1848:

A Resolution in the form of a unanimous tribute to the late Mr Whicher, the Minister's Warden from the first when the church was consecrated, in terms of high praise for his zeal, example and efficiency, and that these sentiments should be conveyed to his widow and family.

George Whicher had died and was buried in Warblington Churchyard on 24.02.1848. Obviously an able and principled man who was hit hard by the death in infancy of his second born child, Sarah, and his third born child, and only son, George II, if the arrangement of their graves in the Warblington churchyard is anything to go by. George Whicher would also appear to have possessed valuable people management skills as the Vestry minute and a certain church notice of 1842 might indicate (see Figure 4). The notice is sent from the Sexton but note that George Whicher is one of two people riding shotgun on the issue, having to implement the policy by facing up to miscreants. Valuable people management and negotiation skills indeed, born of working in the brewing trade no doubt.



It is probable that in his will George Whicher was generous to St James' Church having been its church warden since its beginning, and the Charles Lewis map may well have been part of the bequest. The map was thus used in the court case because it was in the Church's possession is the obvious explanation. But there is a 50 year gap between receiving the map and using it in the court

case. Easily enough time for the church to have forgotten its existence, and anyway where would it have been stored to make it so readily recalled and available after such a length of time? So, as I sit here writing on a Friday night, you would expect me to be a little contentious and to forward an alternative explanation, wouldn't you? And anyway I have an ulterior motive.

Recall Sarah Whicher, the survivor, destined to live 101 years. She married, in 1821, William Hipkin of Stoughton. William seems to have impressed Sarah's father, for George Whicher set up a joint business with William as coal merchants in the middle of the 1820s, called naturally enough Whicher and Hipkin. By 1829 the business was sufficiently well established to appear in White's Trade Directory and it traded successfully until the demise of William Hipkin in 1871. Evidence enough therefore to suggest that George Whicher treated William Hipkin as the son he didn't have. Additionally at the time of George's death in 1848, Sarah his fourth born child had become his eldest surviving child when the first born, Olive, died age 51 in 1841. It is quite possible therefore that the map was part of George Whicher's bequest to William and Sarah Hipkin. Sarah died in 1897 and so the map could well have been given to the church at this juncture. If that is indeed the case the map would have been relatively fresh in the minds of certain Vestry members when faced with the issue of rights of way over the St James' church path that resulted in the serving of the writ on UDC in 1899.

I have, as I said, another reason for leading you along this possible route of the map's progress from George Whicher to the Church of St James', and it's this. When moving to Emsworth a little while ago, the house that I jointly purchased with my partner was called *Bonheur*. It had carried this name at least since the 1920s but we didn't like it and so we took it down. A little further delving revealed that it had been called *Ipswich Cottage* in the 1901 census and *Hipwich Cottage* previously, the name it had carried since it was built around 1865. Ipswich is a misheard Hipwich and is the usual kind of George Walls made by census enumerators everywhere, but we had never any idea about the origin of the name Hipwich. Looking at my Friday night purchase I can now see that the land on which my house is built belonged to George Whicher in and around 1840, and most likely its ownership passed to Sarah and William Hipkin in George Whicher's will of 1848. It is not the biggest leap of credibility made in this article to suggest that Hipwich is a simple corruption of Hipkin and Whicher. But why not Whichip? Sarah remained a Hipkin all of her life after her marriage and is buried as a Hipkin. With both William and Sarah alive in 1865, and with Sarah's fidelity to her married name I guess Hipkin was always going to dominate. William's indebtedness to Sarah's father would explain the addition of George Whicher's name. I'm left wondering what input William and Sarah Hipkin actually did have in the naming of my house.

All bets are off on the subject of whether or not I'm feeling pleased with my winner's trophy from that Friday night at the Emsworth Auctions. More than pleased I should say. I am really excited to unwrap the stories it contains and to discover the answers it has given to a number of seemingly unrelated questions. Not least I am more than chuffed at meeting up with some pretty formidable characters, who have almost become mates over the time I have been researching my map. I tell you, with mates like Sprigg and Whicher around, riding shotgun on my life, things might have turned out differently. I could have waved goodbye to youthful uncertainty and angst. Hot wired and fully charged I could have negotiated a Friday night challenge anywhere and in whatever shape it came. So now, how do I recover my youth?

A Clive Pugh

Acknowledgements

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