

WHILTON LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Orphaned and fatherless of Whilton

Whilton Local History Society met on 15th March 2012 to hear the stories of four fatherless children over the centuries.

Felicia de Whelton was the granddaughter of William, lord of Whilton Manor. She was born in 1264 or 1265, during Simon de Montfort's rebellion, in which her father and grandfather were involved. After her father's death, when she was still a toddler, feudal regulations allowed her overlord, Joan de Stuteville to remove her and control her upbringing.

As a long and bitter legal dispute over the right to Whilton Manor developed, Felicia and her mother Joyce came to be on different sides. Over many years a variety of legal methods were used to promote different interpretations and great sums of money were expended on lawyers, while the descendants of William de Whelton went to law against each other.

The first part of Felicia's life was overshadowed by this dispute, as her guardians fought her case for her in many courts from Rockingham to London. Possession of Whilton changed several times as courts gave different rulings, and Felicia herself may have come and gone in Whilton. She was about 20 when a major ruling gave her possession and sometime in that year she made the decision to marry Philip de Montgomery. Felicia and Philip were confirmed as lord and lady of Whilton Manor; the land descending in the female line.

Felicia and Philip had a daughter, Anne, who became heir to Whilton, but after her mother's second marriage, Anne lost her rights to Whilton, because Felicia and her new husband William de Nevill had a son, James, who inherited because he was male. We heard, however, that in the long run it was Anne's heirs who inherited Whilton, and held it until the seventeenth century.

The next fatherless child was **Elizabeth Langton**, brought up at Muscott in the late seventeenth century and who was well provided for in her father's will. She married Richard Freeman, lord of Whilton Manor in 1709, and bore him eight children, besides being step-mother to the four he already had. One of Elizabeth's children was the eccentric Rev Langton Freeman, who, after his death in 1783, was sealed up in his summer house in the garden of the modern Manor House.

William or **Billy Adams**, a real orphan, would have been known to Elizabeth Freeman, but he was only four when he left Whilton to be cared for in Long Buckby after the deaths of both his parents in 1735 and 1736. We traced his sad and short life until he was 19 and brought back for burial at Whilton. He had been a sickly child in Whilton, with treatments from the apothecary for colic, coughs and a sore throat. Nothing much worked for Billy, and perhaps his own attitude to work and inclination to overspend did not help either. As a younger son, he was expected to make his own way in life, and although his guardians did their best, apprenticing him to a grocer in London, they could not prevent him stealing from his employer, and filling his pockets with luxury tea, which he sold in the streets. Later he tried to become an apprentice to a buckle and stud maker in Birmingham, but had a very poor work record there, being frequently too ill to work, and coming back to his guardian in Brockhall to recover, besides running up debts with the perriwig maker and hat dresser. Finally his illness got worse, despite treatment with ass's milk. On 4th November 1750 the Whilton parish register recorded the burial of "William Adams an apprentice at Birmingham".

Our last fatherless child was **Edward Tarry** of Chapel Brampton, born in about 1832. His mother Ann was from Whilton, and after his father died, he seems to have spent some of his childhood in Whilton, with his uncle John Dunkley, a man of doubtful and violent reputation. Edward became a farm labourer in Chapel Brampton. In the 1850s he left this country and appears to have joined the Gold Rush to Australia, where he eventually married Sophie, another emigrant from Chapel Brampton. Conditions in Melbourne in the 1850s, despite or because of the huge amounts of gold, were described by one English visitor as a "very hell on

earth". Perhaps this, combined with the inheritance of his uncle's Whilton house, was the reason for the couple leaving Melbourne and returning to England.

By 1866 Edward and Sophie Tarry had moved into his uncle's house, which we call today "The Old Cottage". Edward described himself as a grazier or a farmer, but the only land he owned was the field now known as Tarry's Orchard. His income came from fattening stock for market. There was no sign of a gold digger's fortune.

The couple now put Australia behind them and became part of Whilton village life, Edward serving on the Parish Vestry and later the Parish Council. The entry in the 1881 census of Edward Tarry, farmer, aged 49, born in Chapel Brampton and his wife, Sophie, aged 50, born in Chapel Brampton, suggests a quiet middle aged farming couple, but it belies the wide ranging experiences of their youth.