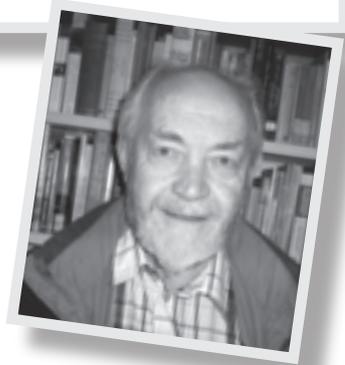


The Butcher, the Baker; origins of the Land Society

by **Bob Hakewill**



Who were the leaders of the Market Harborough Liberal, Industrial and Provident Freehold Land and Building Society, more usually referred to as the Land Society, that revolutionised Market Harborough?

The Chair was Augustus Hobbs who, in an 1877 Land Society deed, styled himself Law Student and was 33 year old. Within two years he was replaced as chair by T. Scarborough. Augustus was in Rothwell in 1861, the son of Mary Ann or Marion Hobbs. In the 1871 census he was living with his mother on Coventry Rd. His older brother, George, was a painter with a business on High Street which was beside Hobbs Yard. Augustus chaired the Liberal Working Men's Association which had just started to meet in The New Hall. Augustus had purchased property in Great Bowden which gave rise to a number of complaints about encroachment. He was managing clerk for the solicitor Mr W. E. Cave. A public falling out was well reported in the local press in April 1884, after which Augustus Hobbs sold up

and moved out from the yard off High St. and can be found in Caerleon & Newport in the 1891 & 1901 censuses.

The Secretary was George Godbehear Gardiner, of 8 Nelson St., who came from Kibworth Beauchamp where his parents were staunch supporters of the Independent Chapel on the Main Road in Kibworth Harcourt. His older brother, John T. Gardiner, was the resident Harborough agent for Prudential Insurance Company's Industrial and Ordinary Branch business. George started as a tailor, then went on to found the shop on Nelson St to provide New Harborough with its local bread and groceries. This shop was later to be taken over by one son-in-law; A S Hodby. George's business on the tailoring front was well supported by his daughters who were all dressmakers. George was a wheeler dealer and at one time bought The Manor House from the Wartnaby family. This would have been looked at with askance by the more conservative folk of late Victorian Harborough.

Another of the leaders was John Muncaster who was in Harborough in 1877 but by the 1880 deed had returned to Gosforth in Cumbria where he was born. His title of commercial clerk disguised the fact that he worked for and at the Bone Mills (Glue factory) on Gallow Hill. In the 1871 census he is listed as a clerk but in the 1881 census he is back there as a foreman and the other foreman living on site is William Cotes who rescued the Baptist congregation and went on to live in Hollybank, by the canal basin. Cotes has a family but Muncaster is unmarried.



Fox family grocery shop

By comparison with the above, the father and son partnership of Peter and William Falkner is less interesting but more enduring. The workshop of William was taken down piece by piece from the Feoffees property on High Street and rebuilt inside the Museum. They were boot makers, not shoemakers. They were descended from Harris Falkner who was first recorded in Terry's Yard, off Sheepmarket, about 1850.

Less easy to follow was the Fox family of cabinet makers. The Fox name is so deeply engrained in the local psyche that the county teams use it to identify themselves. The Charles James Fox we are looking at was a cabinet maker when he signed the deed. In the 1871 census, he was an underbarman at a spirit vault where his father was the barman. They were living at home over the family grocery shop run by his mother on the corner of Bowden Lane and High Street. In the other trade directories of the time it is C.J Fox senior who is the grocer, not Maria his wife. The Fox family was started on or near this site by John Fox who was the partner of the Rev George Gill whose Harborough Academy was such a national success from its founding by the Rev. Doddridge, minister at the Independent Chapel. The shop continued in the Fox family until it was removed to make way for sheltered accommodation. The Heritage Collection has many photographs of the corner shop front and of the pillar box which protected the front from marauding coaches cutting the corner into Bowden Lane.

Joseph Smith, in both deeds, is from Great then Little Bowden. He did not feature in any of the sources for the period from 1791 through to 1841. As a well-sinker in 1877 and 1880 he was recorded as the contractor for sewers and roads constructed on the Land Society sites around the district. Which branch of the Smith family he was from we have not yet discovered.

Another who came and went was Thomas J Swingler, printer of Lubenham, from the Thomas Swingler family there. By the 1877 deed he had already joined the flight from the land to the big cities. In his case, by 1880, he is found in Southwark, south London, still as a printer. Coming home to see family would have meant a bus ride to the north London terminus, a train to Harborough, then a change to Lubenham. In the 1881 census he is in Caernavon.

These were the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker of the famous nursery rhyme much derided by the Tory hierarchy. It was they who signed the first deed for the Land Society.

SOURCES

Deposited Records of the Market Harborough Liberal, Industrial and Provident Freehold Land and Building Society Ltd. Two deeds, DE3049/124 & 126 dated 11 April 1877 and 22 Nov 1880 respectively. These are the first two signed by the infant Society.

Rate books for assessing the Parish Rate, Poor Law Assessment lists, Fines book for the Lord of the Manor, all in photocopy form at the Harborough Museum.

Congregational Tales, Four generations in Market Harborough, 2008 Richard Pickering, editor.

Trade Directories from 1792 through to 1888 all in photocopy form either in the Library or the Museum. Separate sheets for the villages may be kept.

Market Harborough Advertiser on microfilm at Harborough Library Local Studies.

Census records photocopied in the Museum and/or Library Local Studies or on line.