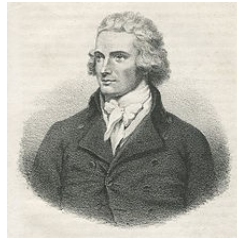
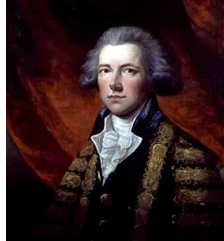


WILLIAM 1796 – HUBERT MAJOR 1893

1796

King George III is on the throne and William Pitt the younger is his Prime Minister. The Revolutionary conflict in France continues and Spain declares war on Britain. Mungo Park becomes the first man to reach the River Niger in Africa: Robert Burns dies in Scotland



In England there are riots over the price of bread and Queen Charlotte is hit by a stone whilst leaving a theatre.

And a baby boy is born in Stanbridge, Bedfordshire. His proud parents, Richard and Elizabeth, name their first-born son William. There is nothing special about William, no silver spoons to be found in his mouth: he is just an ordinary boy untouched by the events of the world he has been born into. Though he may never have known it, William would have been able to have traced his line back six generations: his father, Richard, was the son of John who was the son of Thomas. Thomas' father was Joseph and his father was also Thomas, son of another Thomas. And before him was John Tearle, born in 1610. All of these had been born in Stanbridge.

Even today Stanbridge is a tiny village, the beautiful Saxon church of St John's dominating the village green, surrounded by fields. These fields would have been worked by the villagers, eking out a living, working from sunrise to sunset – kin to caint or “can see to can't see” - almost every day of their lives.

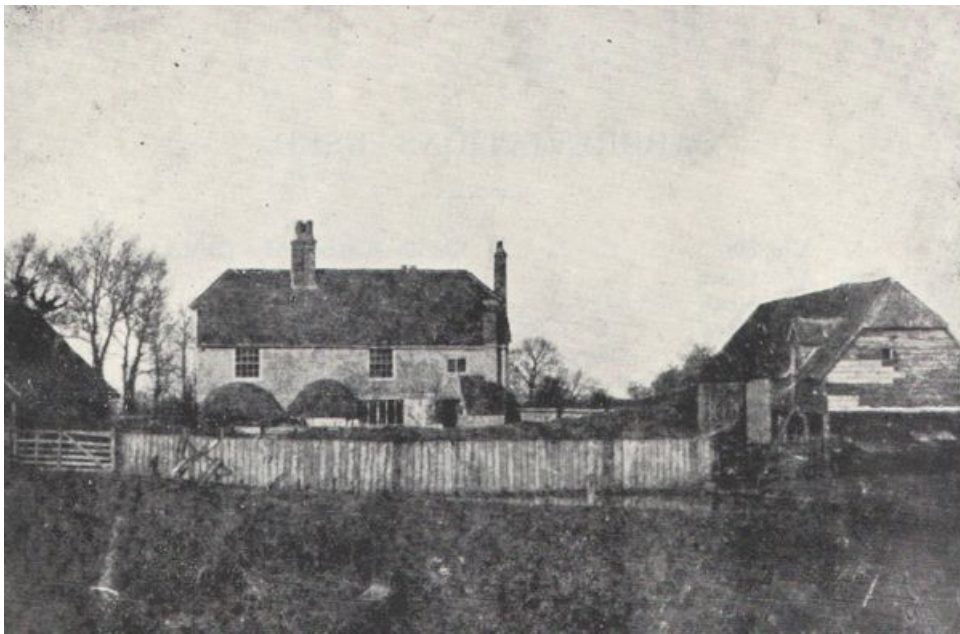
Life, then, would have been hard for young William. There were other Tearle families in Stanbridge, all of them agricultural labourers. Some relief from the daily grind could well have been the regular fairs that were held at Toddington, a slightly larger village a mere six miles as the crow flies from Stanbridge. Nowadays we would simply cross the A5 and the M1 to make the journey, but in the early 1800s, Watling Street was a simple turnpike road under 'modernisation' by Thomas Telford to provide a direct route from London to Dublin via Holyhead. For Ireland had now joined what had become the United Kingdom by virtue of the Act of Union of 1801. Soon, stage and mail coaches would use this new road. Perhaps William would walk to Toddington, or perhaps there would be a 'family outing' using a cart – who knows. We cannot state specifically that William even went to such a fair, but my supposition is that he did, probably on more than one occasion, for surely it would have been at such a social event that he met young Kitty Fossey? Kitty was three years older than William and in January 1824, when he was 28 and she was 31, the pair were married.

It was in this year that New Holland was renamed Australia, The Vagrancy Act was passed and Wilkie Collins, author of the classic books *The Moonstone* and *The Woman In White* was born.

And so too, it would seem, was Sarah Tearle, daughter of William and Catherine, her birth being registered at Toddington on January 2nd, just 27 days *before* her parents were married.

By this time, William had no less than eleven siblings, so it was probably a relief to have left home to start a new life in Toddington. When exactly he made that move, we do not know.

Two more children, Moses and John, followed Sarah in 1827 and 1831 respectively. Ten years after the birth of John, William was working for William Martin, a farmer, at Lodge Farm, Long Lane, Toddington. Long Lane is also known as Tingrith Lane and the family appeared to be living there on the farm.



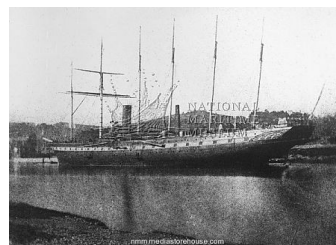
Lodge farm, 1860

Moses later married Amelia Cooper Cooper, daughter of the Lord of The Manor, William Dodge Cooper Cooper. The remarkable story of the Cooper Cooper family has been admirably told by Wendy Skelley of New Zealand and, apart from any references, need not be repeated here.

It is unfortunate that we do not know the dates of William's employment at Lodge farm, for an event occurred that must have caused a bit of a stir in the quiet community and it is quite possible that William was involved in the excitement! In 1836 the owner of the farm decided that he wanted a ditch dug between two fields for demarcation purposes. So he sent some of his labourers to complete the task. Whilst digging, one of them turned up a small object which was immediately taken to William Cooper Cooper at Toddington Park who promptly bought it. The object was a small bronze carving of an elephant sitting on its haunches – possibly a brooch - and experts believed it to be of Roman origin as Roman armour and weaponry had been found in the area some years before. Wouldn't it be wonderful to think that William might have been involved in the find and, as a very long shot, to think that he might actually have been the man who dug it up!

Contrary to the predictions of American preacher William Miller, the world did not end in 1843. Princess Alice, 3rd child of Queen Victoria was born.

Whilst the first wagon train set out with 1000 pioneers from Missouri heading for the north west of America on the Oregon Trail, Isambard Kingdom Brunel was launching The SS *Great Britain* from Bristol. Edgar Allen Poe published *A Tell Tale Heart* and Charles Dickens completed his novella *A Christmas Carol*. Coincidentally, this year also saw the first ever commercial Christmas Cards, printed by Sir Henry Cole.



In that year, 1843, Sarah gave birth to a son, Joseph. The father is, for the most part, unknown, however the name William Walker appears on Joseph's marriage certificate when he married Maria Major in 1866.

One wonders what the reaction from William and Catherine might have been to the news nine months earlier that Sarah was pregnant. Might Sarah have been bold enough a girl to have pointed out her own illegitimacy to them? And what happened to William Walker? We will never know the answers, but, personally and with hindsight I am rather glad that William did not 'do the decent thing' as Joseph kept the name Tearle throughout his life.

From an early age, Joseph worked. Straw Plaiting was a small cottage industry which could be done by anyone – local straw was cut and twisted into plaits and sold to the hatters of nearby Luton for a few pennies. Many families supplemented their income in this way and local children were sent to schools to teach them how to perform this task, often at the expense of other learning. Children as young as 3 could be seen with their little bundles of straw, for it was something that could be done very easily, standing, sitting or even walking.



Catherine Tearle nee Fossey died in 1854.

Two years later, Sarah Tearle married John Garner, she eking out a living as a laundress and John working as an agricultural labourer. Largely this was farm work and involved

being employed by a farmer, but it may not have been regular work in the sense that the labourer would be hired for a given period – a short term contract, if you like – with no guarantee of being taken on following the expiry of that contract. The census of 1861 declares that Joseph, aged 18, was also an agricultural labourer and it tells us that they were living at Parsonage End in Toddington. This was later renamed Parsons Lane and is shown below as it looked in 1923.



William, meanwhile, married for a second time. Four years after the death of Catherine, William and Elizabeth Ireland, a widow, were married at the Independent Chapel in nearby Hockliffe. Both had to make their mark as neither could read or write. No surprises that he was still a labourer and Elizabeth was a straw plaiter. They made their home in Dunstable Street and later on they would move to Prospect Place which is where, about 1873 and in his 70s, William died.

The next we hear of Joseph is from the 1871 census where he is living in Parsons End, though not with his mother Sarah and step-father John, but has a place of his own with his wife Lois nee Major, sons William aged 4 and Moses aged 1. William, or to give him his full name of William George Major Tearle, was born in April 1866 and appears to have been baptised some seven months before Joseph married Lois.

The Victorians had a lovely habit – if sometimes with rather bizarre results – of naming their children with an additional family surname from the maternal side's family – hence the name Major in both William George and my grandfather, Hubert. The Major family were an established Toddington family and Lois was a cousin of Maria Major who had married Joseph's uncle, John.

Somewhere along the line, Joseph's fortunes must have changed for in 1881 he is the inn-keeper at the New Inn, Toddington which stood at the junction of Dunstable Road and Luton Road. He and Lois also have 3 more children: Minnie 1872, Major 1874 and Louisa 1880. Quite when he took over – or, indeed, how he managed it – we do not know but, as we shall see, eventually almost all of the family was involved in the running of the Public House.

But Joseph died in 1886 at the age of 43.

William GM became a brewer's traveller and it would appear that Lois is running the pub though it is young Moses who is listed as the Innkeeper. Louisa will become a barmaid although Major was a butcher's assistant.



The New Inn in the early 1900s. This is how Hubert would have known it and it would not have changed much – if at all – from when Joseph took over. The chimneys immediately to the rear of the inn show where the brewery was.

In June 1892 William GM married Annie Briden. Just like the Majors, Annie came from a well established Toddington family. Their only son, Hubert Major, was born a year later in 1893.

In 1893, by odd coincidence, the actor Leslie Howard was born. He is best known for his portrayal of 'Ashley' in the film 'Gone With The Wind'. Leslie Howard was, of course, my father's name, the 'Howard' part coming from his mother, Daisy's, family! Also born that year was Wilfred Owen the English soldier and poet and Harold Lloyd, the American actor. Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky died in that year, as did the French dramatist, Guy de Maupassant. The Independent Labour Party was formed in England, William Ewart Gladstone was prime minister and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle 'killed off' his famous character Sherlock Holmes in a struggle with Professor Moriarty at the Reichstag Falls.

But if this was a happy family, it was not to last: William GM contracted TB and died at the tragically young age of 29. Hubert was only 2 years old and could never have really known his father.



A fair on Toddington Green in the 1900s

Hubert spoke very little of his life and we can only surmise what sort of a childhood he had. It appears he was raised more by his grandmother, Lois, than by his mother, but perhaps Annie was away much of the time, for it is known that she was a housekeeper for a gentleman who lived at Barton in the Clay. Hubert lived with Lois at the New Inn and it is said that he never again entered a pub in the whole of his adult life. This seems to speak volumes. At some stage, possibly quite early in his long life, he moved to Manchester for a couple of years or so for work, for he confided this to Maureen Williams nee Tearle once when he was staying with her and her family.

But he returned to the area – St Albans, to be precise – where he met and married Daisy Howard in 1913. As far as I am aware, Hubert worked for the Gas Board for the rest of his working life.



Hubert Tearle front row, extreme left. The inscription on the ball says: “St Albans – 1913 – Gasworks”
Within a year, Great Britain would be at war with Germany...

Hubert and Daisy would have 4 children: Leslie (my father) Douglas, Peter and Marjorie. Their lives are too recent to be dealt with here and so the narrative of my branch of the Toddington Tearles ends with Hubert.

TODDINGTON

Toddington today is probably best known as being a Service stop on the M1 Motorway. Sad, really, because it is a beautiful part of the countryside and has an interesting history. It was known in Roman times – as archaeological finds have proved. The Manor dates back to at least the 1560s when Queen Elizabeth visited Lord Cheney. The rebellious Duke of Monmouth conducted his affair with Elizabeth Wentworth at Toddington Manor. The legendary cricketer W G Grace used to visit the Manor and play the 'occasional' game of cricket on the Green and the actor Jack Wild – The artful Dodger in Lionel Bart's *Oliver* – is buried in the churchyard.

A local tradition is that at midday on Shrove Tuesday, children run to the top of Conger Hill, place their ear to the ground to see if they can hear the witches frying their pancakes. As late as the 1970s, the village bells were rung to remind housewives to cook their pancakes. Indeed, there is a song entitled 'The Witch of Conger Hill'.

SOME VIEWS OF TODDINGTON – PAST AND PRESENT



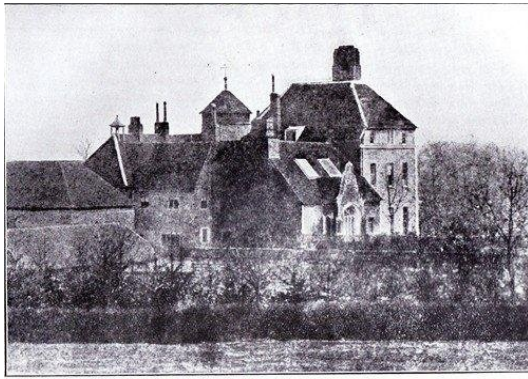
High Street, 1900s



The Village Green



The Village Pump – presented by William Dodge Cooper Cooper



THE MANOR HOUSE, ABOUT 1860.



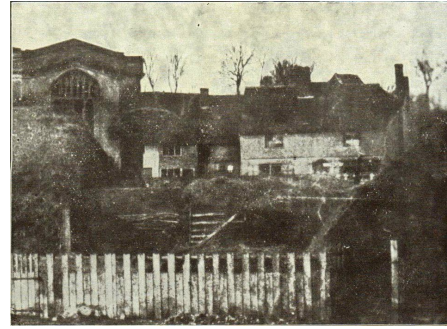
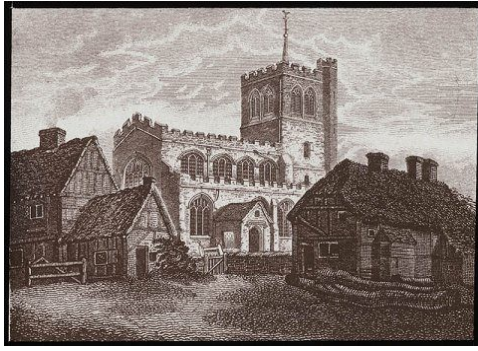
Toddington Manor.

In the second view, the grass is being cut. Then we see the magnificent fireplace and finally an historic woodcut of Apollo and The Muses, whose fascinating story I have reprinted below

" APOLLO AND THE MUSES"

Much of the handsome wood carving was dispersed around the neighbourhood, by order of Earl Strafford, some portions of which were recovered by Major Cooper Cooper, who published a small pamphlet printed by H.G.Fisher, of Woburn, from which the following is extracted:." The carving of 'Apollo and the Muses' formerly adorned one of the rooms of the Manor House, possibly the ' Gilded Chamber.' They were purchased by an ancestor of Sir Rich. T. Gilpin, having been sold by Earl Strafford, when he pulled down the major portion of the Manor about 1745. They were then fitted up at Hockliffe in a room called the ' Temple of the Muses,' and after the death of Colonel R. Gilpin in 1841 were removed to the Grange and placed in the entrance hall. Some three years after the death of Sir Rich.T. Gilpin they were sold by auction, along with other contents of the Grange, and this piece was purchased by Major Cooper Cooper. The myth of Apollo and the Muses is well known. The subject represents Apollo and the nine muses in concert, and is full of exquisite detail, the figures in high relief; The date is thought to be of the sixteenth century. It's measures 6 feet by 4 feet two inches, and weighs about two hundredweight."

(My grateful thanks to Phil Mead for this)



The Church in the 1800s and some cottages. The second picture was taken by William Cooper Cooper



The grounds and the Manor as they are today



As you can see, The New Inn still stands today in the guise of the Toddington Social and Sports Club. The Angel Inn still thrives across the road. The brewery behind is long gone, but otherwise it has changed little since Hubert's time

In compiling this short history I have drawn on the notes of Barbara Tearle, Ewart Tearle and Wendy Skelley all of whom have written about Toddington and the Tearle Family. Credit for so much of the research goes to them.

I would also like to express my extreme gratitude to Phil Mead - of Dudley, but definitely a 'Toddingtonian' -who officiates over the 'Toddington Village' page on Facebook. Not only has Phil and his team provided many of the photos above, he has also been most patient in answering – or researching – the many questions I have posed.

Richard Tearle Jan 2012