Chapter 17
People

This section of the book is dedicated to some of the people whose lives have had a significant impact on the life of the village. This could have been because they held a valuable role in the village or something important happened to them or that they were an integral part of village life. We particularly chose people who are no longer in the public limelight and there is no order of preference in the listing.

Rev. Canon John (Wheldon) Williams,

Following WW2, a period of rapid expansion occurred in Upton and the population increased enormously. The opportunity for the Church to be at the centre of the new community presented itself, and with it came the ideal leader – indeed, as quoted in The Story of the Church of the Holy Ascension, Upton-by-Chester by Jim Wheldon 1987, *'cometh the hour, cometh the man'*. He arrived with his wife Mary, a much loved member of the parish for so many years, and two little daughters, Ann and Shan. They were soon established happily at the centre of things.



Born in Tregarth, Wales in 1909 Wheldon was 1 of 10 children. He left school at 14 and went to work in the slate quarry at Penrhyn before going on to study Theology at St David's college, Lampeter. Following ordination at Bangor Cathedral in 1937 he served as curate in Blaenau Ffestiniog, Llandudno and Nantwich before becoming Vicar of the Parish of Upton in 1946.

As Vicar he took part with zest in all parish activities. He gave the impression of thoroughly enjoying what he was involved in and in this way drew his parishioners together into a thriving church family. He could be seen driving in Chester, catching sight of a member of his flock and waving happily regardless of other traffic! Nothing seemed to disconcert him, even the swallow that attended Evensong and swooped perilously over the pulpit during the sermon, or the time New Year was rung in by a member of the choir whose surplice became entangled with the bell rope so the bell gave a resounding 'ping' rather than its cracked but fuller note.

The spiritual life of the church thrived throughout Wheldon's ministry. He visited each of his parishioners regularly and if anyone was not in when he called he would leave a note and call back. He had his own way of personalising services such as weddings, by speaking to one or two of the wedding guests and complementing them on their hat or outfit which made them feel particularly special. When he noticed a newcomer in his Sunday congregations he would take the time to speak to them making them feel welcome. All these personal touches made him a very popular minister as can be judged by the memorial windows to him in the south transept of the church.

Wheldon established a men's group which met, among other places, at the Men's Institute, now Guide Headquarters, and indeed he was instrumental in helping the Guides to achieve their goal of having their own meeting place after years of meeting at St Mary's School. He revived the traditional involvement of the Vicar with the Upton Dramatic Society and he and Mary would be made very welcome at the annual dinner. He encouraged young people and supported their activities. He was central in organising the events to celebrate the Church's centenary (see chapter 13).

In 1948, the Vicar became a Territorial Army Chaplain and was appointed Officiating Chaplain to the Forces for duty at The Dale Camp in 1949, thus cementing the Parish connection with The Dale. In 1961 he was made Rural Dean of Chester.

He was always ready to help out in other areas and other churches and denominations and 'volunteered' his Readers from time to time as well. He was instrumental in forming the Chester Council of Churches. On December 18th 1965 he was installed as a Canon of Chester Cathedral.

He had a phenomenal knowledge of the newly developing areas in the parish and was able, at times, to help the postman or others seeking out a new resident. During those post war years he kept pigs, as his family had during his childhood. One pair of pigs was called Dot and Dash and another pair were David and Jonathan although it is said that he never ate bacon.

His love of his native Wales led him to relax in remote places. He especially enjoyed fishing and it was while doing this favourite pastime on Conway Lake that his life ended unexpectedly on the 24th July 1969 aged just 59. So many people attended his funeral at Upton Parish Church that some had to stand outside in the pouring rain.

Despite the fact that he must often have been in great pain from progressively developing arthritis, as Jim Wheldon said "*He never allowed it to interfere with his single-minded devotion to his Lord, his Church and his parish".*

The curates who were under him during his ministry found him a strict, no-nonsense man who set them up in good stead for when they gained their own parish, as Perris Williams would confirm. He worked with Wheldon as curate in the 1960s, *"We would hold staff meetings on a Monday morning and Wheldon would give me a list of households to be visited during the week. If there were any left unvisited by the next staff meeting Wheldon would want to know why, as he considered pastoral contact with parishioners most important".*

"Anything that is good in my ministry of 40 years can be attributed to Wheldon Williams".



Wheldon and his wife Mary

John Ross O.B.E.



John was born in Hoole, in 1923 and educated, firstly at All Saints School, then in Chester. When he left education he was fortunate enough to find employment with British Rail in Chester. During his time with British Rail he was moved from Chester to Stoke-on-Trent and then to Liverpool, where he spent most of his career.

After learning to play the piano as a child John had organ lessons at Chester Cathedral under the tuition of Rowland Middleton. This led him to become organist at the Welsh Presbyterian Church in St Johns Street, Chester and then organist and Choirmaster at Upton's Holy Ascension Church.

When he was called up for his National Service, John joined the Air Force and while he was stationed in Sudan, he was able to play the organ in Khartoum Cathedral for the services that were held there.

In the early 1950s he had cause to be admitted into Chester Royal Infirmary, where he met his future wife, Hazel, who was nursing there at the time. Hazel always knew that if John wasn't in his sick bed, when he ought to have been, she would be able to find him 'chatting' to the nurses over a cup of tea in the kitchen area. During the time that they were courting, Hazel went to Edinburgh, for 18 months to train as a Midwife. On her return she told John she was thinking of going to Hong Kong to do her Queen Alexandra Nursing, John was a bit dismayed and said *"It's either Hong Kong or me",* so *"me"* won and they were married in 1954.

John had been choirmaster at the Parish Church since 1951 so the then incumbent Rev. Wheldon Williams was only too happy to perform the marriage ceremony for them. Following their marriage Hazel moved into John's house in Hoole but shortly after they moved to Upton, temporarily initially, but liked it so much they stayed and raised their family.

During his 40 years as choirmaster at Upton (1951 - 1991) he worked with three different incumbents, Rev Wheldon Williams, Rev Fred Lapham and Rev Glyn Conway.

In the early days the choir was men and women only, who met weekly for choir practice and for services on a Sunday. John would say affectionately *"I have a cock and hen choir"*, due to the lack of youngsters. Boys were admitted

to the choir for the first time in 1967, John and Hazel's elder son (Jeremy, born in 1960) was one of the first to enrol and his brother (Anthony, born 1965) joined as soon as he was old enough. All the boys were good at attending choir-practice with the adults on a Wednesday evening; at one time there were 16 boys in the group. Saturday morning was recreational time for the boys and a football team was formed and many a good game was played on the Westlea School playing field.

Anthems were sung on most Sundays and at Easter, special music - Stainer Olivet to Calvary or The Crucifixion was rendered; at Christmas, Bethlehem was appreciated by the congregation. Residents of Upton were also able to benefit from the talents of the choir with musical evenings, especially in the autumn, when a 'Harvest Home' was presented. It started in the Village Hall, production manager Mr H Ingham, but after the church hall was built in 1959 Jim Wheldon produced the plays for four years followed by 3 years by Gordon Jones, with John as musical director. These were light hearted and amusing evenings and were happy occasions. His church involvement also extended to the Mother Church of our diocese, the Cathedral, where he was chairman of the events committee, as part of the Cathedral appeal.

The field of education was important to John and he was on the governing body of the Upton schools. He was Chairman of Governors of Upton Manor School (now Upton Heath) and Upton High School, as well as being a governor of Chester College for a period of 10 years.

He served the local community as a Parish Councillor for Upton and was elected to Chester City Council for a period of 13 years (1973 - 86) during which time he became Sheriff of Chester (1978 - 9).

John retired from his career with British Rail in 1985, but continued with his many activities. These included being Magistrate for 29 years, Chairman for 5 of those years (1987 - 82); also serving with the Police Authority and Chester Police Forum. A member of the Health Authority for seven years – serving as Chairman for five of those. He was on the board of the Chester Mystery Plays, which are produced every five years in the city, as chairman from its formation in 1985 until his death. John enjoyed people and his connections and friendship of the members of the Chester Pitt Club, City Club, Merchants and Wealstone Lodge, and Rotary Club - President 1996 - 7 for which he received the Paul Harris Fellowship, the highest honour Rotary can bestow.

Although Hazel never managed to get John into the kitchen, cooking up exotic meals, he would gladly help her in the garden and they thoroughly enjoyed their 2 or 3 holidays each year. John was a keen Chester football supporter, and attended matches in his earlier days with Wheldon Williams. After being picked up, the two would travel to the Deva Stadium together, stopping on the way for a bracing Scotch from Wheldon Williams' hip flask - to keep the cold out. Latterly John took his sons to watch Chester play.

In the 1995 New Years Honours List, John was awarded the O.B.E. for services to the community.

Sheila Garston

Although Sheila Margaret Nesta Garston was born in South Wales in 1924, Chester became her home when her family re-located here in the 1930s and she was educated at Chester City High School from 1935 - 1940. On leaving school Sheila found employment as a civil servant with the War Department, Command Secretariat, where she had an administrative roll. In 1946 she transferred to the Ministry of Labour where she stayed until she was married.



It was during this time that she met her husband, John. John had been invalided home from war duties in the Far East and spent time at Moston Hospital. He joined the local drama group in Upton and it was there that he first met Sheila, who was a particularly active member of the group either acting or producing as well as being Vice President of the Society. John and Sheila were married at Upton Parish Church (where Sheila was a choir member) in April 1952. The first house they moved into was The Lodge, at Backford Hall but they moved back to Upton where they settled and brought up their son Richard.

Sheila always had a keen interest in local government and joined Upton Parish Council in 1966, serving as chairman for part of that time. Running alongside that, she served on the Chester Rural District Council and the City Council where she was elected Mayor in May 1977.

The list of Sheila's involvement in local organisations is as long as it is varied; her sense of public duty is quite outstanding. She has been chairman of the board of governors, of most of the local schools; trustee and member of the Village Hall Management Committee; President of the women's section of Upton Royal British Legion; Vice President of the Chester District Scouts and Cheshire Forest Girl Guides Association; Member of the Upton-by-Chester Golf Club, where she also enjoyed being Lady Captain.

As well as these, Upton, commitments Sheila has also served as Director of Chester Race Company; as board member of MANWEB and the Local Electricity Consultative Council, the list is endless. On top of all this she managed to help with several fund raising projects locally, whether house-to-house collections or jumble sales Sheila did it with enthusiasm and dedication.

In her spare time (?) she enjoyed visiting the theatre, reading, amateur dramatics and golf.

Bob Clift

When he married in 1961 Bob Clift and his wife, Dorothy, made their home in Upton. He came from an army background his father serving in the Coldstream Guards for 34 years. Several of those years were as R.S.M. at Chester Castle, so it was natural for Bob and two of his three brothers to join the same regiment. He was able to draw on this background in the various activities he became involved in later in life.

Bob helped with the Marine Cadet Corps in Chester as well as the fund raising and opening of the Youth Club in Wealstone Lane. He also organised the local Scout Jumble Sales for some time, this was hard work but with dedicated helpers, it was always a good money raiser for the Scouts.

The Clift family were well known in the area for their cycling activities and many young people were introduced to cycle touring and hostelling through Bob's enthusiasm. He was called upon to appear on the North West Tonight television programme for an item on the dangers of cycling in certain parts of Chester. As Bob had cycled back and forth to work at Ellesmere Port for thirty two years, only being prevented by weather on one occasion, he was interviewed by Radio Merseyside, who gave him the title of 'Cyclist Extraordinaire'. Bob thought this was amusing, but did feel he must hold the title for having cycled the most times up Moston Hill.



In 1983 Cheshire County Council asked if he would devise a 'Cheshire Cycleway' route. In due course, after covering many miles by bicycle, he marked out the route. This started just outside Chester and continued for 100 miles through quiet lanes (crossing a number of main roads) to Macclesfield. Cheshire County Council, with a few minor changes, adopted the route and signposted it. Bob also devised a 'reliability ride' based on this route which attracted over 200 entries each year.

Bob died at the age of 56 following a short illness, but his legacy lives on. The reliability ride is named after him (the Bob Clift Memorial Ride, held annually) and still attracts many entries.

In 1990 Cheshire County Council extended the route with an option through Ellesmere Port and Neston. At a re-launch event at Tatton Park a presentation was made to Bob's wife Dorothy. It was inscribed Cheshire Cycleway in memory of Bob Clift and was a fitting tribute. A year before he died Bob planted daffodils at various sites around Upton, each spring they appear giving pleasure to local residents.

The Hinde Family

The Hinde Family lived in Upton for many years. In 1901 Thomas Hinde and his wife Elinor lived in Flag Lane, from there they moved into a new house, 'The Mount' built by Thomas, on Long Lane. Some time after that Thomas built another house for the family, 'Northfield', on land adjacent to The Mount. It was from here that he ran his abattoir and the butchers' shops in Chester. The abattoir was situated just behind Northfield, also in this area was a large pond that Thomas frequently fished. The former children's home on Long Lane was built on land donated by Thomas.



Thomas & Elinor

Thomas' family consisted of three daughters and five sons. The first daughter, Dolly, married butcher Sid Horswell from Ellesmere Port; Ethel married Will Grey; the third daughter Evelyn never married.

The sons, William (Arthur), Tom, Stanley, Fred, and Frank all worked closely together. Tom and Stanley were butchers looking after the two shops in Newtown and Boughton while Frank, Fred and Arthur were cattle dealers. This would mean them travelling over a good part of the country buying cattle to bring back to Chester by train. From Chester station they would herd them back to Upton, to a field they rented from Sir Philip Grey Egerton, on the site that is now Kingsmead. To help with this mammoth task they enlisted the help of local boys by paying them 6^{d} each.

Arthur married Rose; Tom married Dorothy; Stanley married Miss Kershaw; Fred married Lou Morris whose father was the landlord of the Frog pub; Frank married Nellie. Arthur bought Upton Hall from Mr Ithell but left there in 1932 due to the repairs to the building becoming too great a burden (it was demolished in 1933). He had a house built opposite the Dale Camp called Bankfield and Arthur took the horse drinking troughs, that were at Upton Hall, with him to his new house. Arthur's nephew Jim remembers playing at Upton Hall as a child and investigating the underground passageways that would emerge near Bache Hall.

Tom lived over the butcher's shop in Newtown with his wife Dorothy, who was in service to the Duke of Westminster. When the family came along they moved to a house on the corner of Upton Lane and then to Church Lane where Tom bought a plot of land from Fred Owen. This was adjoining the 1st hole of the newly formed golf course (he also became a founder member). Later the Duke set Arthur & Dorothy up as steward & stewardess of the Palatine Club in Chester.

Mr William Dutton

Mr Dutton was educated at Sussex College Cambridge where he went up in 1920 with an open classical scholarship. To have obtained a first class classical degree and also to have ridden the winner of the Grand National is surely a unique achievement for a young man of twenty six. Mr Dutton could run as well as ride, for in his last year at University he was a prominent member of an extremely successful college cross country team and was awarded his athletic colours and ran more than once in the university hare and hounds team. He was also a successful amateur cross country rider.

Son of farmer Mr J D Dutton, William (Billie) was a fully qualified solicitor articled to his uncle's firm of Messrs Mason and Moore Dutton in Chester. In 1925 Billie won the foxhunters race, over the famous Aintree course, riding Upton Lad, a horse bred at Upton Grange by his father (from a mare originally owned by Mr Tyrer of Plas Newton). Upton Lad was also ridden by Billie in the 1927 Grand National.

The horse he rode to victory, Tipperary Tim (owned by Mr H S Kenyon) had won not more than half a dozen steeplechases at small Tipperary meetings. He went on to win The Grand National, at a starting price of 100 - 1, on Saturday 31st March 1928. Forty two horses started the race but only two made it to the finishing line.

Following the success of that race Mr Dutton was granted a licence to train and took over the tenancy of Hazel Slade, Hednesford.



Tipperary Tim with Rider William (Billie) Dutton, owner Mr Kenyon and others

Fred Owen

Creator and founder member of the Upton by Chester Golf Club, Fred Owen worked for Chester Council as Borough Surveyor, as did his father before him. He was married to Mary and had three children, Susan, Mary and Robert (Bob); following in his father's footsteps, Bob also became a surveyor.

Although he never golfed before creating the golf club, Fred was keen to learn and was a charismatic Upton resident throughout the 30s and 40s.

When Fred retired he moved to Bournemouth, but still had contact with Upton through his family, particularly his son Bob.



The Joseph Sisters

Mr & Mrs James Joseph and their family of five daughters, Doreen, Kathleen, Marjorie, Muriel and Alix, moved from Liverpool to Chester the 1920s when Alix, the youngest, was a baby. Sir Francis Joseph, Mr Joseph's elder brother was living at Alsager at that time.

The Josephs made their home at Bron-y-Garth, a large house set well back from Liverpool Road in spacious grounds covering the area where Garth Drive is now. Alix remembered the times when cattle would be driven up Liverpool Road to the market and the frantic rush to see that the big gate was closed. In their early years, life was much centred on the church and at various times all the girls were members of the choir, Alix for 50 years. Mrs Joseph and Kathleen (Kay) were both members of the PCC and at one time or another, the girls were members of Upton Dramatic Society.

Doreen, the eldest, trained as a nurse when war came, at the Southern Hospital, eventually becoming a District Nurse at Delamere until her retirement. Muriel, the only daughter to marry, did so soon after leaving school and went to live in Scotland, she had three sons. Marjorie trained as an almoner and worked in London. Kay remained at home and assisted Miss Sparling with Brownies; she celebrated 40 years as Brownie Guider in November 1969 and was 'in harness' till her death in 1973. The garden at Guide HQ was dedicated to her memory in 1974. She was a firm, no nonsense, much loved Brown Owl. Alix and Kay were the mainstay of Guiding in Upton for many years.



Alix trained as a Fröebel teacher and taught at Miss Giles' school and the Queens School Preparatory Department before opening her own school, Wakefield Grange, on Liverpool Road. She devoted much of her life to Guiding, as Brownie; Guide; Guide leader of the 1st Upton Company; District, then Divisional Commissioner for 10 years; County, Commonwealth and International Advisor; County Vice President and Chairman of the divisional Trefoil Guild. As guide leader Alix brought much fun to camping and as a friend put it *'Alix and her mallet were a formidable combination'*.

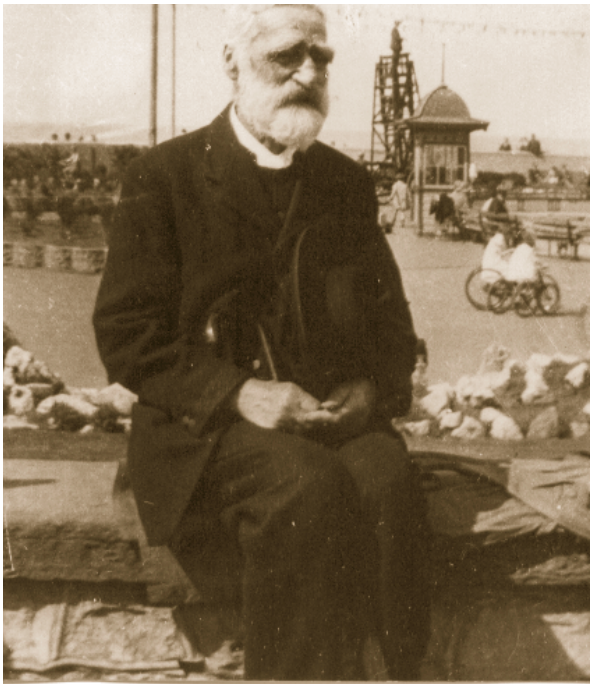
After Mr Joseph died the family left Bron-y-Garth, moving first to Eversley Park and finally to Upton Rise where the three remaining sisters retired and lived until the last, Alix, died in 2000.

Reverend Wilfred Sparling and Monica Sparling

Reverend Sparling became the first Vicar of the new Parish of Upton in 1882, preceding this he had been tutor to the Duke of Westminster's son.

He was a much loved minister and popular with his parishioners as he became more and more involved with village life. He introduced annual Sunday School Outings and in 1889 the distribution of Ascension Day buns to the children.

At the age of 65 he was reputed to have climbed the church steeple to fix the lightning conductor as there were no other volunteers.





Reverend Sparling's daughter Monica was also deeply involved with village life. It was she who started the first Brownie Pack and subsequently the Guide Troup in Upton in 1919.

The garden in front of the Village Hall is dedicated to her memory.

Ray Griffiths



Ray Griffiths, the elder of two brothers, was born in 1933 and spent his entire life in Upton. His Grandfather, Henry, lived in Flag Lane South and ran his wheelwright business on Long Lane in the late 1800s (see page 158). Henry's son Harry took over the business and carried on until he retired in 1950. Harry and his family lived on Long Lane, where son Ray and his friends would play football and cricket on the field behind the family home. This love of cricket continued when he later played for Crosville, Christleton and the Labour Party.

Ray's education started at the village school of St. Mary's, then continued, from the age of 11, at Ellesmere Port. On leaving school he served his apprenticeship with The Crosville Bus Company, as an electrician, before completing National Service with peace keeping forces in Korea. In 1954 Ray met his wife-to-be, Kathleen, through a mutual friend; they were married in 1960 at Hoole and settled in Long Lane next door to Ray's parents. It was there that they raised their two sons Peter and Jeffrey. As an enthusiastic gardener, he won competitions for his displays of vegetables with the Horticultural Society

Ray's belief that *'It's people that matter most'* led him to join the Parish Council. He went on to join the Chester City Council, in 1980, as Upton Heath's first ever Labour Councillor. He was also an active Trade Unionist who was treasurer for many years and a Union delegate to the Constituency Party. He was re-elected in 1984 and 1988. A keen environmentalist, Ray served on the committee of Chester's Environmental Services, as chairman, as well as many others such as the Highways Sub-Committee, Housing and Personnel. Along with his many other campaigns he fought vigorously for the abolition of burial charges for stillborn babies and was successful in his quest.

In 1992 Ray decided not to seek City Council re-election, but stayed extremely active as a member of Upton Parish Council, serving as chairman from 1996-99. He had particular interest in play areas and amenities

Remembered for his sense of humour, colleagues appreciated the 'one liners' which would lighten meetings. Frequently his 'dead pan' deliverance would leave others wondering whether or not he was joking, he usually was. Ray holidayed in Britain but claimed he had travelled widely – which meant he had moved next door when he married.

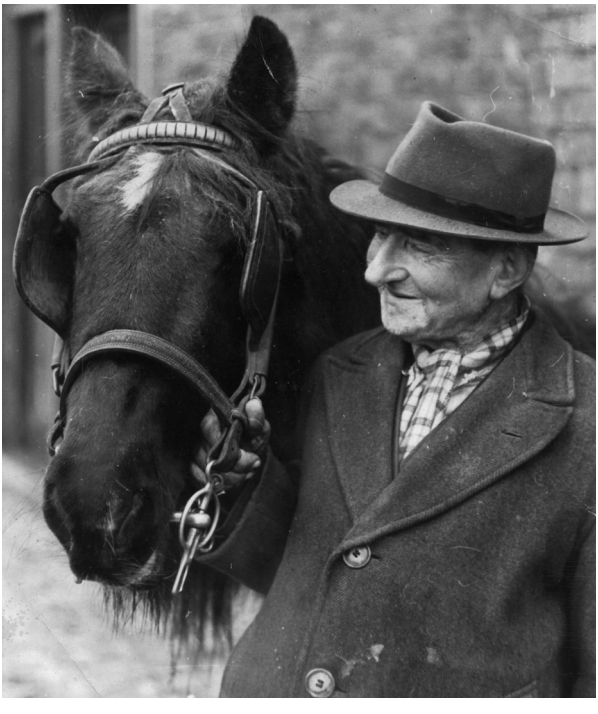
Arthur Godwin - milkman

Arthur Godwin was a colourful character known by most of the village as their milkman. He delivered the milk from the old post office / grocers shop opposite the Egerton Arms at the Bache, using a horse drawn cart until he retired in the 1950s.

Polly his horse was the love of his life; in frosty weather he would gently walk it up the hill to start his daily milk round. With the help of the newspaper boys he would push and pull the float up the hill so as not to put any undue strain on Polly. After Arthur's retirement Polly was taken on the usual round, just for the exercise.

Many tales are told of old Mr. Godwin - he was the delight of the local children but they also made fun of him - teasing him with practical jokes.

Although he is reputed to have never taken a day off during his full working life, it is said that each Sunday afternoon he would take the bus to Woodside, Birkenhead; cross the River Mersey by ferry and walk round Liverpool's Pier Head before re-crossing on the ferry and catching the bus back to Chester.



When Mr Godwin, and his horse Polly, gave up the local milk round in the early 1960s, the residents of Upton Park made a collection to buy him a wrist watch. This was presented to him at Hawthorns, the home of Bill and Joan Wilson.

Mr Godwin died in c1972.