

*Mutual Improvement in Uppingham*  
*1860-1940*



*Vivian Anthony*



With thanks for comments from Sarah Ross (Chair), Nick Townsend and Hilary Crowden from ULHSG  
And to Ros Anthony for all her support and advice,

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**Abbreviations**

AGM – Annual General Meeting  
 GJ – Grantham Journal  
 LC – Leicestershire Chronicle  
 MIS – Mutual Improvement Society  
 RMF – Rutland Music Festival  
 RSA – Rural Sanitary Authority  
 RT – Rutland Times  
 SM – Stamford Mercury  
 UAOS – Uppingham Amateur Operatic Society  
 UCS – Uppingham Choral Society  
 ULHSG – Uppingham Local History Study Group

## Victorian Virtues

'Mutual Improvement' emerged as a movement in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While people in Britain had enjoyed social gatherings from the earliest days, the availability of more time and wealth made it possible for town and village folk to take advantage of the many hostelries, which were at their most numerous in the C18th. In Uppingham alone there were 24 or more hostelries.<sup>1</sup> The other centres of social life were the churches and, with the growth of non-conformity, there were more of these than ever<sup>2</sup>. Competition between the churches resulted in the setting up all sorts of ancillary groups to attract and retain members. As the fruits of the Industrial and Agrarian Revolutions infiltrated society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these activities expanded rapidly. While working life was often physically hard and intensive, people had more time and money to spend on social activities.

The philosophy of life was changing: a new work/life ethic was in evidence and social historians, like Tawney<sup>3</sup> have speculated whether this was the product of Puritanism or Capitalism. Desire for personal improvement became stronger and, encouraged by such characters as Walter Bagehot, Anthony Trollope and Samuel Smiles, movements developed in society to encourage and assist those who were driven by such ambition. Professor Asa Briggs<sup>4</sup> argued *Self-help was one of the favourite mid-Victorian virtues'. It is better morally and economically to rely on yourself and not to depend on others. The progressive development of society ultimately depended not on collective action or on parliamentary legislation but on the prevalence of practices of self-help.* From these origins the mutual improvement movement emerged and societies, based on people working together to gain the greatest benefit, were established throughout the country. Almost every town in the North and the Midlands had a society.

Rutland was by no means first in the movement for mutual improvement, which had been spreading in London and the North as early as the first quarter of the century. Nor did Uppingham, follow the same mutual improvement pattern as that found in more urban settings. It was much less a working class movement than one driven by tradesmen, shopkeepers and schoolmasters. In other places the movement was dominated

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<sup>1</sup> R P Jarrett in Peter Lane's Notes, ULHSG and in Rutland Record No 20, 2000

<sup>2</sup> The principal nonconformist churches in Uppingham were Congregational, Methodist and Baptist.

<sup>3</sup> R H Tawney – Religion and the Rise of Capitalism

<sup>4</sup> Asa Briggs – Victorian People – Odham's Press, 1954

by nonconformists – in Uppingham: Congregational/Independent, Wesleyan Methodist, Baptist (Strict and General) and Plymouth Brethren – but in this town Parish Church members were the more active early in the cause. Where nationally there was heavy emphasis on political discussion, often driven by Chartists, Owenites and Trade Unionists, in Uppingham it was on education and general learning. Brigg's claim that "*mutual improvement was of the people not for the people*" was less clear cut in Uppingham, where it was driven by the efforts of the town's leading personalities. Whatever the enthusiasm to improve their education, few formal opportunities for adult learning had existed in Uppingham before 1859, when a Book Club, which had originally been formed in 1830, was converted into a Night School.

The town had been less backward in providing for young people. Uppingham School had been founded by Archdeacon Johnson in 1584, but it had become less a school for the town boys and more for a boarder clientele from a much wider catchment. In line with country-wide developments, the Parish Church opened a National School in 1811 and, somewhat later, Revd John Green, Minister of the Congregational Church, opened a British School<sup>5</sup>. The Parish Church and the Nonconformists competed to attract the young to their Sunday Schools<sup>6</sup>; but it was the shopkeepers and tradesmen who took the lead as far as adults were concerned, and they were to remain prominent in the movement throughout the century. The prophet who helped to spread the gospel for mutual improvement was Samuel Smiles, through his book 'Self-Help' published in 1859.<sup>7</sup>



Revd John Green

Uppingham caught the enthusiasm for these Victorian virtues of education and personal improvement. It was the same people who had started the Night School –

<sup>5</sup> British Schools were established by Protestant non-conformist, non-denominational bodies, founded by the Society for Promoting the Lancastrian System for the Education of the Poor, formed in 1808.

<sup>6</sup> Sunday Schools were educating 1.5 million pupils in 1879

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Smiles – Self Help, John Murray 1859

Messrs Chandler (shopkeeper), Ellery (Excise Officer), Miles (Solicitor's Clerk) and White (Ironmonger) – who helped to bring the Mutual Improvement Society (MIS) into existence in Uppingham.



The Church of St Peter & St Paul Uppingham

The intellectual climate in the town was propitious for the development of mutual improvement. Uppingham School was expanding dramatically under Edward Thring, and more and more well-educated schoolmasters were taking up residence in or building large houses in the town. During the century the parish population rose from 1,393 (1891) to 3,550 (1891). The prosperity of the tradesmen was increasing as the community benefited from the fruits

of economic growth. While agriculture remained at the heart of Uppingham, the farmers played little part in the MIS. However, they contributed out of their growing prosperity to the funding of essential developments. More people were taking interest in the issues which appeared in the newspapers, local and national; and townsfolk were well supplied by the booksellers and printers in the town. Stimulus came from competition between the churches, not least the response of the High Church movement to the growth of the nonconformism. Increasingly, people from the surrounding villages were taking advantage of the facilities Uppingham had to offer for recreation and other social activity. Unlike other small towns, Uppingham enjoyed freedom from the restrictive influence of a resident aristocracy or powerful business. Lord Gainsborough was lord of the manor but, along with gentry in the county, he had little direct involvement in town affairs, though they contributed to funding some significant projects. Instead, the town would benefit from the leadership of some of the most powerful professionals in its 19<sup>th</sup> century history.

## Wales and Thring

The year 1860 proved momentous for Uppingham: Chancellor Revd William Wales had arrived the previous year and was proceeding with ‘all guns blazing’. He had not only begun on the restoration of the Parish Church, but he was seeking a site for a larger and better National School and ways to increase the influence of the Church in the town. He began working with that early group of influential citizens to establish the MIS and to find a suitable site for its (suitable) premises. Fundraising on a considerable scale (would be) was needed to finance all these projects. With Samuel Smiles’ book *Self Help* published the previous September, this



Chancellor William Wales



Headmaster Edward Thring

was the year when his message of ‘*industry, perseverance and self-culture*’ was spreading through the country. Edward Thring had been headmaster of the Grammar School since 1853 and was a strong advocate for a society which would provide educational opportunities for the townsfolk. He was of course heavily engaged in all that was needed to build his school. As it grew from 43 to 300 pupils, he needed more houses, classrooms, a chapel and a gymnasium. Nevertheless, he willingly agreed to the Old Schoolroom<sup>8</sup> being used for the early meetings of the new MIS. He also encouraged his schoolmasters to play a full part in

establishing the society. He set a good example himself by volunteering to give lectures and by chairing meetings. Revd William Wales was another enthusiast and he agreed to become President of the Society. Uppingham was fortunate to have its two most powerful and ambitious citizens at the head of ‘mutual improvement’. Both became ex-officio trustees of the Society. It was inevitable that they would not always to see eye-to-eye but on matters relating to the improvement of the townsfolk, they often cooperated.

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<sup>8</sup> Thring and the Schoolmasters had acquired the Old Schoolroom when the Governors disposed of it

## Founding the Society

Early discussions about setting-up a society occurred in 1860, but it was not until 26<sup>th</sup> February 1861 that the first formal meeting was held, and this was in the Old Grammar School building. From the start the town's leading tradesmen were involved; William Compton, churchwarden of the Parish Church, wine merchant and owner of the



Vaults, was in the chair for the early meetings when the nature of the MIS and the rules of the Society were determined. The initial programme was to consist of lectures, reading of essays, discussion, and classes. They planned to open a Reading Room and to build up a Library of suitable books and magazines. Classes would be offered on a wide range of subjects – music (singing), elocution, drawing, science, and history. Other groups would be set up later for science, horticulture, and town Improvements – iron frame benches were to be made and installed around the town and footpaths to be



*Iron Bench on Leicester Road*

improved. Charles White was elected Treasurer and Mr Ellery Secretary, and he was also one of the early speakers – on *Cotton: Cultivation, Supply and Manufacture*.

From the start the activities of MIS were of an educational nature and the schoolmasters contributed greatly in the early days: Revd John Skrine\* took the elocution classes; that fine artist Charles Rossiter\* taught drawing, Mr Schlottmann\* offered Science classes and members of the school's music department took music classes. With the arrival of Paul David, appointed by Thring in 1862, this developed into by far the most high-profile activity of the MIS for the rest of the century. Though he was no musician, Thring realised the potential benefit of music to the people of Uppingham and, with this in mind, he organised several concerts in aid of the MIS. The origins of the Uppingham Choral Society (UCS) can be traced back to these early MIS classes and concerts in 1861<sup>9</sup>. Not all the lectures were

<sup>9</sup> Vivian Anthony – Golden Ages; Music and Musicians in Uppingham Town: A History, ULHSG 2020



given by the schoolmasters: Captain Ricketts<sup>10</sup> spoke about 'Navigation', printer John Hawthorn about the 'Battle of Hastings' and the Parish Church curate, Revd Samuel Rosenthal, played his part. Flint's talk was on 'Egyptian History', Secretary Ellery on 'The British Constitution' and Thring's first lecture was on 'Rome'. The President William Wales gave the inaugural address on 17 September 1861. Thomas Bell, doctor to School and Town, became a member at the same meeting.

A group continued work on benches. A new schoolmaster, Revd Theophilus Rowe, who would soon be a leading personality at the School and later Headmaster of Tonbridge School, was an admirer of Charles Darwin, whose '*Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*' had just been published (1859). When Rowe gave a lecture explaining Darwin's *Theory of Evolution*, a major row broke out. True to character, Wales was furious at this exposition of a theory which ran counter to church teaching at the time, and he refused to attend other lectures of the Society. Equilibrium was restored when, with Wales in the chair on 26 July, the rules were amended. The objectives were redefined as *Religious, Moral and Intellectual Improvement via lectures & classes for instruction*. No lectures contradicting Christianity were to be allowed. Members clearly wanted to keep Wales on board and at the AGM and they proposed a vote of thanks to their President for *aid given the society by his own valuable personal contributions in conducting the business of the society, and also for the assistance in obtaining several of the lecturers*.

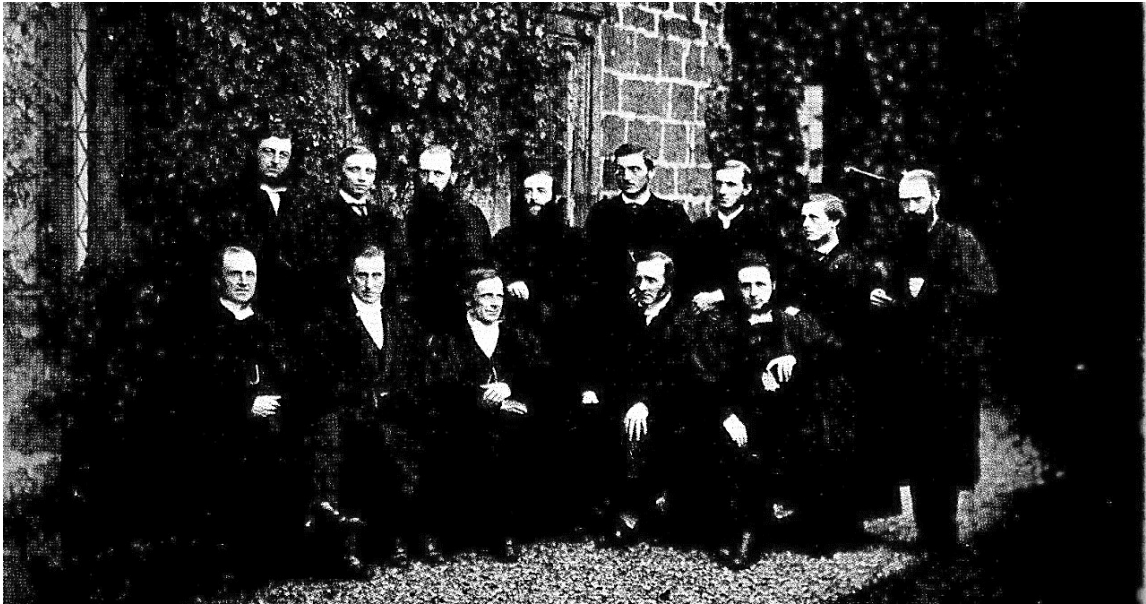
### **Early Days.**

For the 1862-3 season MIS members elected as their officers: William Wales as President, Revd T B Brown and W Compton as vice Presidents, W Miles\* as Secretary, Charles White as Treasurer, Townshend as Librarian and for the committee Guy, Hawthorn, Freeston, Seaton, Rosenthal, Roget, Hart, Thorpe, Reeve, Hopkins, Halford, Edgson – most of them from the town. MIS activity in those early months was remarkable: the classes were soon running effectively, and the programme of lectures was impressive. Wales had invited Biggs, Boys, Thring, Rowe\*, Witt\*, and Candler\* to give lectures (most of them ordained schoolmasters) and he persuaded the committee that Mr Charles of London should be invite invited despite his fee of 4 guineas. Thring lectured on 'The History of Painting',

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<sup>10</sup> The Ricketts family owned an estate in Beaumont Leys

Brown on 'The British Navy', Richeard on 'China' and Rowe on 'Mille of Uppingham'. When Miles resigned as Secretary for reason of ill-health, Dr Thomas Bell was elected and remained in post for decades.



**Thring and his Schoolmasters 1866**

W Campbell, C E Cornish, G H Mullins. B H Williams, W Miles, Walter Earle, H Candler, A H Pritchard William Earle. R J Hodgkinson, Edward Thring, W Witt, T B Rowe

It was reported at the 1862 AGM that there were 115 members. Townshend was congratulated on the success of the Library, the stock of which had increased by 154 volumes and 121 of these had been presented. Wales had given 22 of these, Thring 11 and 6 came from Rooper. The committee purchased 54 books, including two by Smiles (two *Lives of Eminent Engineers*) and six volumes of Charles Dickens. The purchases were partly financed from the proceeds of another 'Thring Concert' which had raised £16 after expenses of £13.12s. Much of the considerable talent on display at these concerts came from among the schoolmasters and their families, encouraged as they were by their headmaster. The townsfolk also played a part, and they were given a lead by Chancellor Wales, who often chaired the events, though he does not appear to have had much direct involvement in the music.

## **A Home for the MIS**

Such was the success of the early activities of the Society that its leading members argued that they could not go on in temporary accommodation. It was hard just to find venues for the music. *The Stamford Mercury (SM)*<sup>11</sup> confirmed that concerts and other activities were

being held in various places in the town, and yet performers were coming from all over England and further afield. So, the search began for land which could be purchased so that purpose-built premises could be built. Serious fundraising would be needed to pay for the land and the building.<sup>12</sup> The School Magazine<sup>13</sup> reported that proceeds from a concert given by the School on 25 May 1862 were given in aid of a building for the MIS.

Many different ideas were considered for the location of an MIS building. Thring offered the Old School to the MIS officers on 12 May 1862 for the sum of £700, saying that he would reduce this 'by £100-150 if the School was successful'. The Old School building was already being used temporarily, with the headmaster's permission, for some lectures and classes. It was also used as a Reading Room though permission had been temporarily withdrawn in October when Thring found some damage to the



*The Old School Room*

premises. Nevertheless, he again allowed its use as a Reading Room and added, he would accept £600 for its purchase by the MIS. Wales offered use of the Church room for committee meetings and the British School offered facilities for lectures.

By 1863 things were hotting-up: it was first reported that Mr Allen's house, grounds and materials was to be gifted to the MIS trustees; then Mr Stafford *offered a very eligible site for the erection of a lecture hall and library for £140*; and Henry Noel, of the Gainsborough family, followed with the offer of the possible rental of *Lord Gainsborough's property attached to Miss Adam's House in the Market place, or its purchase for £620*. The committee had some hard-headed businessmen and they resolved to offer just £550. At the April AGM, held at the Grammar School, it was agreed that land on the corner of Spring Back Way (then South Lane) and London Road (then Scale Hill) would be the most suitable and that it should be purchased for not more than £200. Mr Mould, a farmer and churchwarden, was willing to sell the site for £250 and pointed out that there was a cottage

<sup>11</sup> Local Newspapers are the source for much of the information about MIS activities,

<sup>12</sup> The school archives contain various documents which relate to the founding of MIS and its close links with the school 13  
Vol II No 9 May 1864 pp 189-90]

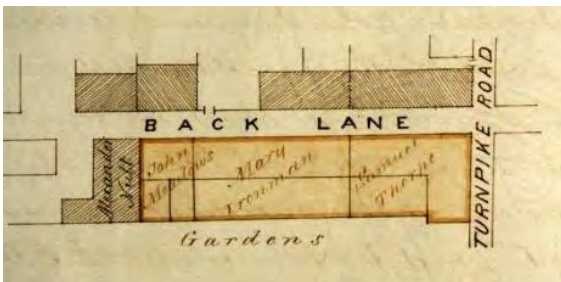


*Building Site for MIS*



*Site for MIS*

(hovel) on the land which, he said, could be sold for £50. The photos show the land was derelict and needed clearing of old huts and hovels. It was in stark contrast to the new School Chapel (1863) and Schoolroom seen in the background. The site was well-placed and in easy reach for most townsfolk. Both the MIS building and a new National School would be just a little way from Wales's Rectory and Thring's Headmaster's House. The committee asked William Sheild, a respected solicitor, to handle the business, but it was Henry Brown, as the Steward of Rectory Manor, who executed the conveyance<sup>11</sup>. Mary



*Plan of Site*

Ironman, the tenant of the cottage (hovel), was given notice to quit but granted a short 3-month lease while the building was being planned. The London architect, Henry Parsons, who had undertaken the restoration of the Parish Church,

was asked to draw up a rough sketch and estimates for the cost of the building, without charge; and a Northampton surveyor, Mr Low, estimated the cost of a suitable building in brick or stone at £1050. A special meeting was called on 20<sup>th</sup> October to examine the drawings for the new building. John Hawthorn purchased the site and conveyed it to Wales, as President of the Society. The land, as the map of manorial properties shows, was part of Rectory Manor. The Trust was set up on 10 July 1860. Subscriptions were sought to help pay for the new building to be held in trust by 12 trustees. conveyed it to Wales, as President of the Society. The local aristocracy and gentry responded: Henry Noel contributed £10, Heathcote £10, Fludyer £5, Fydell £5. Debentures

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix for Conveyance File

were offered, valued at £2.10s each, and 15 people bought a total of 60 and this raised £150. Initial subscriptions amounted to £170, and donations added another £350. Thring

so,



*Sketch of MIS and National School*

organised another concert, which brought the total to £371 but finance remained an issue. Even the business was completed by a London solicitor, Robert Stafford, in 1866 and the Reading room and Library were opened that year. It was a few years before the building was completed, and, with support from Thring and Wales, a lecture

hall, a games room and classrooms were added in 1871. The contracts for the new National School, to be built next to the MIS, were signed in 1867 and once the buildings were erected soon after, the MIS had some overflow accommodation – the buildings were interconnected (see page 35).

## Trustees

With the building underway the MIS needed trustees to monitor the assets. Wales must have argued for the trustees to be businessmen from the town because the school did not supply many of them. Of course, Wales as President, was



*Wales, Rector & President MIS*

trustee and Thring was another. Given his financial responsibilities for the school, it would

not have been surprising if he had not taken on this responsibility. After all, because of his efforts to develop the school, he was in debt for most of his life. Wales, on the other hand, was a relatively wealthy man living in a large Rectory. Both men were of course very experienced in looking after building projects. Wales had done much building planning when he was Vicar of All Saints, Northampton and Thring was engaged with



*Wales's Rectory*

a

school building throughout his time at Uppingham. Perhaps he thought his schoolmasters had too much commitment to work at the school to take on the MIS management. It must be remembered that the MIS was principally for the benefit of townsfolk, even if the school was much involved in providing that benefit. Many of the members worked in the town and some of the most influential people in the town were shopkeepers and small businessmen; it was



*Ironmongers Shop*



*Drapers Shop*

right and proper that they should be among the trustees. Mr Irving, who had an ironmonger's shop, and Mr Hopkins, who had a draper's shop on the High Street, were two of them. The shopkeepers of Uppingham not only put a lot of effort into organising these mutual improvement activities but they helped to fund them, just as they had supported the Church's Restoration Fund.



*Inside Hawthorn's Shop*

Perhaps best known of the town's businessmen was John Hawthorn. He did much of the printing for the town and supplied books and newspapers; indeed he supplied these for the MIS Library and Reading Room, though the Telegraph was to be discontinued after the next MIS AGM. Hawthorn was a friend of Wales, perhaps because he held the stock for the Society for the Propagation of the

Gospel literature and supplied bibles and other books to the National School. He even supplied postage stamps to the town. Hardly surprising then that Hawthorn and the other printer/booksellers were at the heart of the movement for mutual improvement when they supplied so much of the raw material. One of the schoolboys, who wrote later of his experiences at the school under Thring, was W F Rawnsley<sup>12</sup>. He had been in contact with

<sup>12</sup> Rawnsley, W F – Early Days at Uppingham under Edward Thring, by an Old Boy, Macmillan 1904. Rawnsley later taught at the School

Hawthorn in those early days and had come to admire him. He considered him: *a man of invariable good temper, his knowledge of books, and the immense interest he took in the School and all that belonged to it.* He was one of Wales's allies, but he will have needed all his good humour during the typhoid crisis when he supported Thring taking the school to Borth. On the School's return in 1877, Hawthorn was one of the three representatives chosen to officially welcome the School back; an event shunned by Wales. Balancing his favours Hawthorne was Wales's Vice-President at the MIS and a manager as well as supplier of the National School. With the Rector he had obtained the land for the MIS and, with the churchwardens, arranged the conveyance of land for the new National School building on 19th December 1876. When Wales's wrote a letter fundraising for the infants 'school in 1874, it was Hawthorn who printed it: *To the churchmen of Uppingham from the Rector.* John Hawthorn was successful in his work and expanded his Printers' Yard premises and business with great energy. The 1871 census shows he employed three journeymen and an apprentice at his shop in Printers' Yard, and two maids and a nurse at home. He was a subscriber to appeals for funding for the MIS, Church Restoration and the National Schools.



William Compton, another trustee, had his principal business at the other end of the Market Square from Hawthorn's shop. The Vaults had a prime site alongside the church and opening onto the Market Square, at the very centre of the town. Throughout his life Compton (1822-1896) was a pillar of the church, and a churchwarden for 40 years from 1857. He showed great loyalty to Wales and later Rectors and even paid for a memorial to Wales in the East Window of the church. His considerable property in Uppingham included the Vaults, Swan Yard, and the island shop in the Market Square. Surprisingly he was one of the trustees of the Congregationalists and persuaded them to sell him some land on High Street East for him to build his fine residence, Compton House, He served on several charities, including the Town House for the Poor of



Uppingham: the Parish Vestry, and the Management Committee of the National Schools. As a leading merchant and benefactor his influence spread throughout the community; he was even Honorary Secretary of the Fire Brigade. Compton played his part in finding a resolution to the typhoid controversy, which facilitated the School's return from exile.

William Sheild was one of the two leading solicitors in the town, and he was the Steward of the Preston with Uppingham manor. Given he fulfilled the roles of County Court Officer, Registrar of births, turnpikes deaths and marriages and Clerk to the Nottingham-Kettering



and Leicester-Peterborough, not much of great legal significance happened in the town without either he, or William Henry Brown, the Steward of Rectory Manor, being involved. Sheild had premises in Sheild's Yard near the main entrance to the School. He was an obvious trustee and contributed to the building funds, served on the MIS committee and was for a time a manager of the National Schools. While Sheild was much respected throughout his career, Brown was convicted of having embezzled clients' money and was struck-off the Solicitors List.

*Sheild's Yard*

Another man well known through the town and school in his role as doctor was Thomas Bell. He was very active in the Society as was the Secretary for many years. Thomas was the son of Uppingham doctor, John Bell, and lived in High Street West<sup>13</sup>. He had been educated at Uppingham School and after training at Medical School in London he became the School's Medical Officer. The School Magazine said of him: *He was a conspicuous instance of the kind-hearted helpfulness so common among medical men.* He was a good choice for trustee; even if he didn't find it easy working with Wales or with Thring, he tried to be fair in his dealings. He was a sidesman at the Parish Church and as a doctor for the National School, though he had serious disagreement with Wales over his failure to give treatment to one pupil. His correct diagnosis of the first typhoid case at The Lodge in 1875 opened up the crisis. He was an ally of Thring during the Typhoid Crisis and was much involved in the controversy, clashing with the Medical Officer of Health, with Wales and the Rural Sanitary Authority<sup>14</sup>. When the school moved to Borth, Bell remained in town and

<sup>13</sup> Bell's house was where the Garden Hotel is today, it had been Revd Wm, Earle's House earlier. Bell later moved to High Street East to a property previously owned by a Greengrocer,

<sup>14</sup> Nigel Richardson – Typhoid in Uppingham, Pickering & Chatto 2008



kept Thring informed on developments in the town. With the help of other allies, he helped to unseat members of the RSA who were blocking improvements to the water supply.

The atmosphere at the MIS must have been difficult because opinions differed strongly on how the problem should be tackled. Wales himself was in the 'blockers' party, and bitterly opposed to Thring's plans to make improvements to the water supply and drainage which



*MIS & National Schools from East*  
MIS & Schools seen from East

would prove costly to rate payers.

Wales's attitude changed once the work on a piped water supply was complete; he was determined to take advantage particularly as far as the MIS and the National Schools were concerned. Even in 1875, at the height of the battle, he was instructing Mr Whittaker, a civil

engineer, to sort out the drainage, remove the existing privies and build new privies in the recently constructed schools. Once piped water became available, he had plumber Cliffe, lay on a supply to the schools and MIS. He even asked schoolmasters, Earle and Candler, to chase up the Water Company (which he had opposed) to ensure an early supply.

Captain John Rooper was a significant figure in the town for he lived in The Hall, arguably



*The Hall*

the finest Georgian building in Uppingham. He was a good citizen who contributed well to town organisations; a suitable trustee. He subscribed to the fore-mentioned building appeals, was active at the Parish Church and the National Schools, and was a committee member of the MIS. In this, he worked alongside John C Guy,

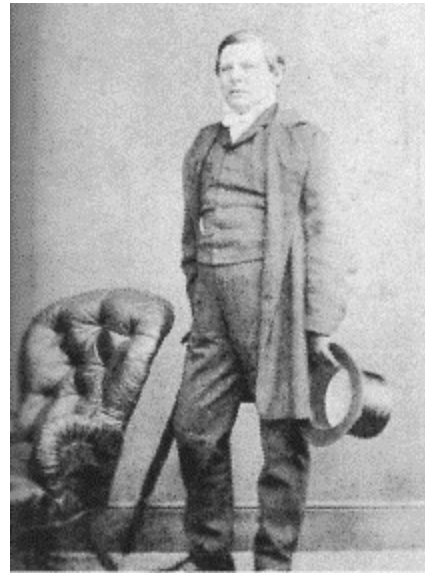
the manager of the Uppingham Branch of the Stamford, Spalding and Lincoln Bank.<sup>15</sup> As a committee, Guy no doubt encouraged the Society to keep its account at his bank, which, after various mergers, became part of Barclays Bank. Kelly's Directory shows that he was, like Sheild, Compton, Mould and Hawthorn, an agent for insurance companies. Guy was

<sup>15</sup> Later it became a branch of Barclays next to the school and recently converted to the School Shop.

much involved in the town and was clerk to the governors of the Grammar School. His wife provided piano accompaniment at MIS concerts and also played the organ at the Church.

The Society was also fortunate in its trustees and hardworking officers, several of whom, like Charles White, the Treasurer, Dr Bell, the Secretary and G Wolf, the Librarian, served for many years. The Library was a popular and well-used MIS facility, and at the 1864

AGM it was reported that the stock had increased by 220 volumes, Some 79 of these books were donated, 27 by Wales and some by Revd J W Witt, a house master at the school. A further 113 had been purchased. The society then had 128 members having lost 20 but gained 29 during the year. The Revd J B Brown, Vice President, was among the resignations, and the meeting thanked him for his valuable service. It agreed a programme of lectures was to be given by the President, Schlottmann, Rowe, Witt, Thring, Dagg, Ricketts, Byers, Brown (mostly schoolmasters) and Barnard Smith, the Rector



*Revd Barnard Smith, Rector of Glaston*

of Glaston (1861-76). Wales's friend, and Chairman of the Rural Sanitary Authority (RSA) and the Workhouse. Smith was very influential in Uppingham during the typhoid years.

### **David's Music Class becomes the Choral Society**



Uppingham Choral Society (UCS) can claim that its first season was in 1861 and that was four years before Paul David came to Uppingham. Whatever the facts, its origins were directly bound up with the MIS from the beginning. Music/Choral singing had been a MIS class from the outset. The music classes proved so successful that eventually they ended up as three separate groups, taught by David's assistants, including Beisiegel and Fricker. Paul David was appointed by Thring in 1865 and under his leadership and inspiration music in Uppingham developed so

well that it could reasonably be said that opportunities for music were greater than those in any similar sized school and market town in the country.,

Being in want of a decent place to perform, the early concerts were modest, simply Readings and Songs. Even in 1870 the choral class was only singing popular songs, like the *Ash Grove*, with the accompaniment of Mrs Guy on the piano and vocalists like Thorpe and Hawthorn. Once they had their new hall they were able to be more ambitious and, with David's help, they were able to benefit from listening to professional musicians, some of international standing. Local newspapers of 1874 refer to a concert on Easter Tuesday in



when artistes from Leicester Popular Concerts, New Musical Society's Concerts and Leicester Apollo Glee Union performed *Joseph Joachim* at the MIS. Paul David not only organised such events but also played the violin, accompanied by Mr Parrott from the School. The Grantham Journal (GJ) referred to '*entertainment far superior to normal but attendance was low*'. Progress was not always easy for not all of the young of Uppingham were keen on music. The GJ added *Those young men who attend for the purpose of creating a disturbance were less demonstrative on this occasion, effective means are being adopted to detect or punish offenders*. It opined that the people of Uppingham were more willing to support 'their own' and reported in the following January *the MIS Choral Class, conducted by David, gave a musical evening to a large appreciative audience*. By 1875, David was willing to try something even more ambitious. In June he prepared his Choral Class of 50 singers for a performance of a programme of Mendelssohn's music and, in addition, introduced a string quartet - Revd Wm and Mrs Vale Bagshawe, Miss Hopkins & W C Perry - colleagues at the school, who played a Mendelssohn Quartet, while the MIS provided a good audience. David had many musical friends who regularly visited and performed in the Great School. Friends of the David's family included Felix Mendelssohn and William Sterndale Bennett, who was persuaded to become the music examiner for the school. One of the regular visitors to Uppingham was the world-famous violinist, Joseph Joachim (1831-1907). Joachim returned to Uppingham in 1878, 1882 and 1884 to play in the school's spring concerts and sometimes brought friends

with him. His main interest was to spend time with David and other friends, but he happily performed for the school and made opportunities for David's MIS class to hear him play.

### **Choral Unions**

For centuries Uppingham had been an attractive place for people to enjoy social activities and for this purpose many travelled from the surrounding villages, and even neighbouring towns. Where in earlier days they came to enjoy the pubs and church activities, they were now able to enjoy a range of other activities and organisations, including the MIS. David realised that if his MIS class was to perform the major works in the choral repertoire then Uppingham, with a population of 2,601 in the 1871 census was probably not large enough to produce such a choir on its own. Indeed, the churches had for some time been looking further afield and combining their choirs and congregations. With this in mind, David persuaded the MIS Choral Class to set up the Rutland & District Choral Union based on its music class, along with choirs from Oakham and Market Harborough. He was even willing to call on singers from the nearby towns of Stamford, Melton Mowbray, Kettering and even Leicester and Peterborough. Though most of these places had their own choirs, some singers were willing to belong to both. The decisive factor in attracting the wider interest of singers from further afield was the role played by the musicians of Uppingham School, and in particular Paul David. The idea of Choral Unions was not new for they were very popular in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The Three Choirs Festival was already operating in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the Leeds Triennial Festival came into existence when Queen Victoria opened Leeds Town Hall in 1858, with Wm Sterndale Bennett conducting 400 voices. David's choral unions were the precursors of the Music Festivals which came to Rutland in coming decades and in which MIS singers would play their part (see page 33).

Another factor in the eventual blooming of choral music in Uppingham was the work being

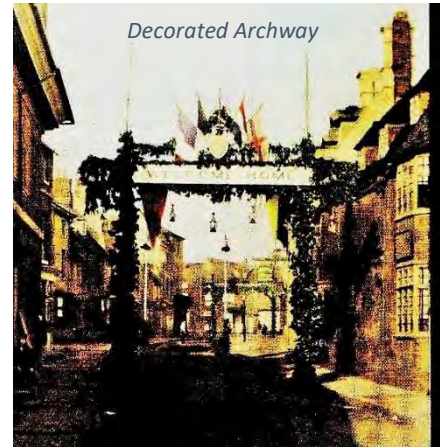


done in the Church of England National Schools to give the town's children a good musical education. The schools, neighbours to the MIS, had opened not long after the society's buildings. A succession of musical headteachers ensured that the children had a good music education and opportunities were later available at the MIS for them to take

things further in a class, a band or in the church choir. In the next century it developed a pleasing reputation for music under its enthusiastic teachers. Perhaps the most notable was church choirmaster Richard Watts who was appointed in 1890 and served until 1929.

### Return from Borth

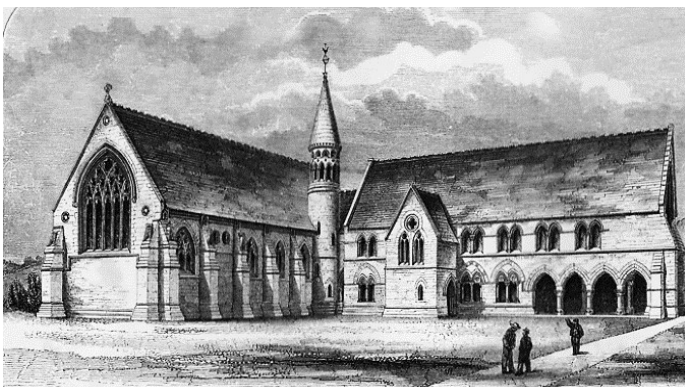
Thring and his staff and pupils returned in triumph from their evacuation in 1877. By that time the MIS committee included Thomas Dolby (Draper), Wm Hope (Chemist), Wm Kirk (Builder), Wm Wilford (Bookseller), Charles Mould (Shopkeeper), James Sneath (Blacksmith), James Thorpe (Publican), Wm Weed (Toll keeper) and Charles White (Ironmonger) and these were among the people



who pressured the authorities to bring the school back. Richardson writes *'relieved townspeople celebrated the school's return by hanging streamers, bunting and evergreen arches across the streets, along with banners bearing messages such as 'Welcome Home' and 'Flourish School: Flourish Town.'* Thring was presented with an illuminated address.<sup>16</sup>

The Rector, William Wales, had opposed all Thring's efforts to find a solution to the problem of the water supply in the town during the months he was in exile. But the town tradesmen were strong in their welcome. Wales was furious and refused to allow the church bells to be rung. He stepped down as President of the MIS<sup>17</sup>. Thring took over and ushered in a great enlargement of MIS activities.

Thring was elected President and he was determined to set up recreational activities to



*Schoolroom and Chapel*

improve welfare of townsfolk, as well as expanding its traditional activities. He declared that it was *'essential to wellbeing that good and harmless recreation should be provided'*. He recorded; *At Christmas we have a gathering in the great schoolroom, when I give them tea etc,*

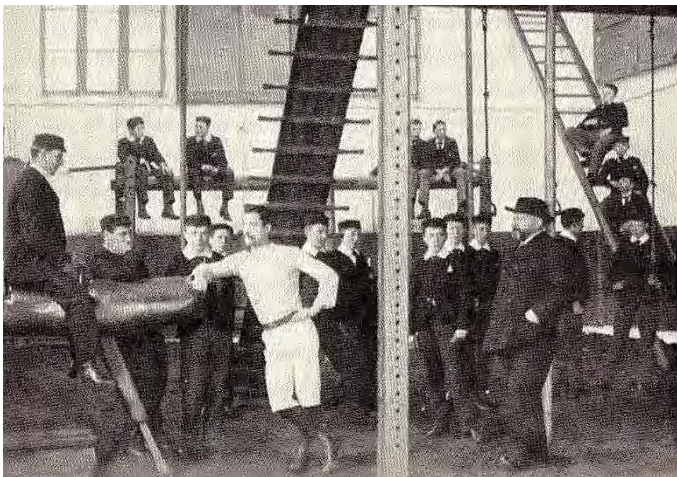
<sup>16</sup> Nigel Richardson – A Spring Invasion – Uppingham School at Borth 1876-7, 2021

<sup>17</sup> Vivian Anthony – Chancellor William Wales, Rector of Uppingham 1859-1879, Rutland Record No. 40

*A coffee Tavern is just going to be started, and we have little boys' cricket, and football clubs for the boys under 15. In January 1879 he exulted - getting on capitally with the town now: we have some 200 persons attending classes... I wound up the year by inviting all the members to a conversazione in the great schoolroom last week. 777/2070 [town population] came, all in fact who would (wanted to) come; we had pictures and music and microscopes for the young people; plenty of cake and tea<sup>18</sup>. Classes were to be given by David (Choral), Revd Vale Bagshawe (Religious Instruction and Humanities), Schlottmann (German), Cobb (History), Rossiter (Drawing), and Rawnsley (Elocution). 150 new books were obtained for the library. As new President, Thring gave an excellent lecture on 'The Market Value of Education' and included some good humoured anecdotes. As a result of the drive the MIS added 100 members. The GJ 12 October 1878, reminded readers that the MIS is non-sectarian [Wales had gone!] with a sub is 1/6d a qtr.*

## Beisiegel

Thring was no passive observer of recreational activities as Malcom Tozer has informed us<sup>19</sup>. He was keen enough on cricket to play for the school team and was involved with the MIS in reviving the town club in August 1871. John Hawthorn and Howard Candler had headed the MIS committee to find them an excellent ground, just a short distance from the town centre. A town football<sup>20</sup> club founded in October 1874, and the Uppingham and District Football club played its first game on the Victoria Ground (the GJ reported). A tennis club followed, run by masters' wives, and it attracted 130 members. A great ally in all this



was Georg Beisiegel, appointed by Thring to promote physical education at the school and

to assist David with the Music. Thring encouraged him to become involved in town activities. He did not disappoint; Beisiegel must have been a man of considerable energy as well as abilities.

<sup>18</sup> Nigel Richardson - Thring

<sup>19</sup> Malcolm Tozer – The Ideal of Manliness, Sunnycrest Books, 2015

<sup>20</sup> Uppingham School played its own brand of football which was not Association rules. See Tozer

Apart from being Vice President of the MIS, he held several other offices – Rutland County Councillor, Vice Chairman Uppingham Parish Council, Guardian and Overseer of the Poor, President of Uppingham Quoit and Skittle Club, Vice President of both the Cricket and the Football Clubs, Committee member of the Horticulture Society, and Secretary of the Association for the Prosecution of Felons. In the national arena he was a Councillor of the Physical Recreation Society and President of the National Society of Physical Education. How did he find time to be at David's right hand in matters musical?

Paul David had returned to running the music classes and, in the following February, the MIS hall echoed to the sound of another concert of songs, choruses and readings<sup>21</sup>. In April the choral class sang items from Handel's *Samson* and David accompanied bass songs on his violin with Mrs Guy on the piano. This appears to have been the first time that UCS/Music Class had sung Handel but, from then on, it was to become staple diet. Within a couple of years (in May 1880) the choral class gave the first ever performance in Uppingham of Handel's *Messiah* with the help of an efficient band and with David conducting. In later years Beisiegel would sing in the Gilbert and Sullivan operas.

The Beisiegels were becoming a prominent family in Uppingham. George (1836-1904) was active in the music and choral groups in the town and conducting. He became a churchwarden and played a full part in church activities. MIS taking a music class, contributing to chamber He had a fine house



built on the Stockerston Road. David gave both Beisiegel and Fricker concerts to conduct in 1880. Numbers for the MIS music class became so large that in 1882 they were divided into separate classes to be taken by George Beisiegel (glees and madrigals), C Rossiter, Rev J H Mullins, and Mr Hinton. When George was 26, he married Sarah Jackson aged 21, in London, though she was a local girl, and the soprano soloist when, along with Fricker and Messrs Gallrein and Heydrich, they performed at the Choral Class Christmas Concert in 1879, and on many other occasions. Their son Philip was educated at the School. He played rugby for the XV 1885-86 and cricket for the XI in 1887 before going on to Selwyn

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<sup>21</sup> The Rutland Echo & Leicester Advertiser reported.

College, Cambridge and obtaining a BA 1891. Philip also took a prominent part in town life, as executor, churchwarden and businessman, before becoming a teacher himself. He later built the town's Model Sanitary Laundry on Ayston Road in 1902.<sup>22</sup> The Beisiegel family grave is in the lower churchyard of the Parish Church. Richard Watts, the organist of the Parish Church, was a good collaborator with the Beisiegels. As the National School headteacher, he was a close neighbour of the MIS. Richard married Annie Mould and together they sang in the Choral Society, and with Beisiegel helped found an Orchestral Society. Sometimes Watts conducted the Town Brass Band, and he organised many concerts. Some of his Church choristers were MIS members.

### Expansion post-Borth

The success of the new Thring initiatives depended to a large extent on finance but once the sports clubs were founded, the MIS left it to their committees to manage them. Thring had convinced the MIS to set up a debenture scheme and he was the biggest single purchaser, though surprisingly a generous contribution was received from William Wales, even though he was no sportsman. Both Wales and Thring canvassed wealthy friends for support, especially for the Horticultural Show and they were so successful in recruiting the 'Big Names' that the show eventually became of more social importance than the MIS. The Vegetable and Flower Show was chaired by Mr Drury. The GJ continued to report MIS activity and in February 1878 it was commending Revd John Skrine for his lecture on Shakespeare, the horticulture team for their Show at the Cricket Ground, and the Victoria Cricket Club, for whom Thring had found a new ground, on their progress. H H Stephenson, probably the finest cricketer to have lived in Uppingham and the school coach, played his part. The MIS efforts to increase the amount of recreational activity continued and a

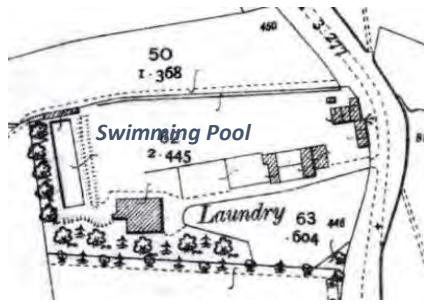


*Falcon Hotel*

meeting was held in the Falcon Hotel on 21 May to discuss building an Open Air Swimming Pool for Uppingham. The Falcon proved a conducive venue for positive thinking, and it was not long before a site was purchased from Mrs Forster of Ayston Road. A Pool was built, measuring 45 x 10 yards, made of blue Staffordshire bricks with

<sup>22</sup> See ULHSG – Uppingham in Peacetime – Article by Roy Stephenson and Norman Tomson, 2007





concrete base and surrounds, and including substantial dressing rooms with curtains. The Pool was said to have very pure spring water, filtered through Helpston gravel. On 18 May 1880 the new Swimming Pool<sup>23</sup> was opened by new rector Canon C Yate, Wales having retired the previous year. 700 people attended the opening, when Mr Ellingworth

gave a demonstration of Swimming and Life Saving techniques. Meanwhile tennis and croquet were added to the MIS programme and an Athletic branch was founded. More books were added to the Library, a total of 4,608 by 1880. So, with 39 new members, the MIS buildings were considered too small for purpose; a message reinforced when 400 people turned up for the MIS Display of Work, held in the Great School Room. Essays were examined by the headmaster of Bromsgrove, who gave a favourable report. The AGM on 11 May confirmed Thring as President, Bell as Secretary, White as Treasurer, and Draper as Librarian – a settled team. The new Rector, Vale Bagshawe, Skrine, David, Beisiegel, and Haslam were elected Vice-Presidents; and 376 members. No lady members were recorded as attending the AGM; in fact, little was reported during these years to suggest that there were lady members, but they must have played a part in the choral classes and other activities that went well beyond making the teas. No doubt they were much more

involved than they were credited in the records; for instance, in horticulture, acting and games like tennis (called the 'Grasshoppers')<sup>24</sup> Marie, Thring's wife, presented the Society with embroidered banners, which were blessed at a simple ceremony by Thring himself.<sup>25</sup> On special occasions town organisations marched through the streets with their banners.



*Rector in Coronation Parade 1911*

<sup>23</sup> This was the site next to which the Laundry was built in 1902, making use of the same spring water.

<sup>24</sup> J H Skrine – A Memory of Edward Thring, 1890

<sup>25</sup> Malcolm Tozer quotes Skrine in Rutland Record No 32.

## Taking-up the MIS 'Music Flag'

The final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century very musically very productive. The 1879-80 season had opened with the GJ reporting that the MIS had formed a town band with Mr Fricker as their bandmaster. The band was a success and was in great demand throughout Rutland in the coming years. S G Fricker was on the music staff at the school for 43 years and married one of Paul David's daughters. He was a fine violinist and a close colleague of George Beisiegel as David's deputy. Both were active Vice Presidents in the MIS and had been given choral class concerts to conduct in 1880, and both played chamber music with Paul David. In January 1879, Lady Victoria Evans-Freke, who lived in Bisbrooke Hall, invited the Uppingham MIS choral class to present their 16<sup>th</sup> concert in the Bisbrooke Schoolroom; just one example of gentry responding to Thring's appeal for support for MIS.

*Bisbrooke Hall*



Clearly the MIS choral class was becoming a well trained and experienced choir and it was prepared to move on to greater things: they performed *Messiah* in May and Haydn's *Creation* in December of that year (1880). David believed the time was ripe for a meeting to found 'a Union of the

*Choral Societies,*<sup>26</sup> which brought together the MIS, the Oakham Institute and musical friends from Stamford'; and this would of course perform under the direction of Herr Paul David. The first concert was in 1882 on Feb 17 when the Rutland & District Choral Union, consisting of the MIS, Oakham, and Market Harborough singers, performed *Messiah* in Poultry Hall Oakham. Special trains were run to Oakham to enable people from Uppingham and Stamford to attend the concert. Over 200 musicians, including the orchestra, took part. Later this Union would give way to the Rutland Music Festival (RMF), for which a choir was formed to perform Haydn's *Creation* in 1883. It is from this time onwards that the MIS was replaced at the heart of music making in Uppingham by bodies better suited to continuing musical development in the area. Not that the MIS gave up its title lightly; 'MIS' remained for a

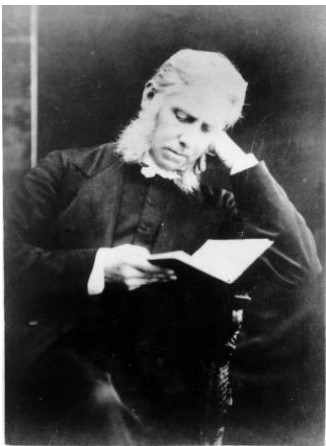
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<sup>26</sup> Reported in the Rutland Echo & Leicester Advertiser

time as a 'fig leaf' of validity for the organisation of musical activities, including the AGMs of UCS or singers for the RMF.

Before he retired Paul David had established a regular MIS chamber music concert. Aficionados in Uppingham were able to hear some of the finest pieces in that repertoire. For example, on 22 November 1881 Haydn and Beethoven Quartets, and the Schumann Piano Quintet were played. Another classical concert of similar standing was enjoyed by the MIS audience in August 1882. However, slowly but surely choral concerts ceased to acknowledge the MIS name. The 35<sup>th</sup> Musical Evening was actually held in the National Schoolroom in Preston by invitation of Lady Freke. Not that this was the end of chamber music concerts in Uppingham; indeed, it could be claimed that, despite several breaks, these concerts, started by the MIS, have continued, with a few breaks to this day. Uppingham School continued to provide music for the town; their musicians taking leading parts in concerts and productions, playing the church organ, giving music scholarships to local boys, and making some of the school's facilities available<sup>27</sup>. Bryan Matthews credits Douglas Guest with re-starting the concerts. Guest became Director of Music in 1945, establishing The Paul David Concert Society, among his many special achievements. Nowadays such concerts are organised by Music in Lyddington and held in their church.

The Rector of Uppingham Parish Church, Canon Yate, had succeeded Thring as MIS



W.J. Canon Yate, President

President in May 1880 and continued his interest in the Society. The annual treat for the church choir, featuring a fine tea and readings from the Rector, the Curate and Frank Hodgkinson, with songs from Beisiegel and Charles White providing the accompaniment, was held in the MIS Hall. The growth in the numbers using the MIS Hall was such that Beisiegel and Dr Bell, the Secretary, argued that a larger hall was needed for concerts and other events. Typical of that generation of Uppinghamians, they did not wait for grass to grow under their feet and quickly

purchased a building plot for £180. A building fund was quickly opened and started off with £30 from the Committee. At the 1883 AGM Canon Yate declared the fund had reached £116.15s. Unfortunately, demands on the generosity of patrons were stretched because the National School failed to meet the requirements for national funding and an urgent meeting

<sup>27</sup> Vivian Anthony – in Uppingham in Peacetime – ULHSG 2007

was called to discuss how to fund future needs. Many of the same people were approached



all the appeals for funding. The MIS committee continued its work on footpaths and public benches, and this tradition of mutual effort on public projects – including litter picking – continues to this day, helping Uppingham to win ‘Best kept Town’ Prizes. With Thring’s help, the town had taken ownership of Tod’s Piece and

the principle of Self-Help was still alive in the town, even though in 1928 the town council took responsibility for its maintenance and installed a playground for children under

MIS members even laid on entertainment to raise funds for a Coffee Tavern and eventually Mr W A Hope took over a room, formerly used by the British School in High Street East, spending a considerable sum repairing the roof and purchasing forms, before converting the room into a coffee house. Nowadays Uppingham is full of ‘coffee houses’, taking over where once its pubs were the main social outlets. Another initiative at this time was the Pipe and Drum Band, formed by Mr Eve, the superintendent of the National School. It paraded on special occasions, like the traditional late-night shopping before Christmas, which began with the December Meat Display in the Market Place. In the evening townsfolk paraded from shop to shop to see what could be purchased for the forthcoming festive season, and to listen to the Town Band, now trained by school teacher, Mr Perris.

### **Signs of Decline**

After the glory days of Thring’s presidency, the MIS membership, began a slow decline. By the AGM of May 1886 Dr Bell was deploring the fact that no new building had yet begun on the site purchased for a larger Hall; but he did acknowledge that the Games Room, and the Billiard table in particular, were so well used. Was this the first indication of the direction in which things were going? Revd W Vale Bagshawe, Senior Master at the School, was a committed and long-serving member of the MIS; presiding over the AGM in 1887 when 59 new members were admitted; unfortunately, 72 members had left, and membership had

fallen to 311. As the owner of land along the Stockerston Road, where some fine houses were built, Vale Bagshawe was influential in the town as well as the School.

Thring remained faithful to the MIS until the day he died in 1887. Even on his deathbed, he told his wife he must accompany the MIS officers on an important architectural visit<sup>28</sup>. In the end his daughters went in his place. Perhaps this was a meeting to consider further MIS building. Thring died soon after and was buried in the graveyard of Uppingham Parish Church, within sight of the MIS building. The burial was conducted ‘with much ceremony, amid a large crowd of OUs and townsfolk’.<sup>29</sup>



Hodgkinson, a close ally of Thring through much of his life, had had a serious falling out with the headmaster, but when he died Hodgkinson was buried in a grave alongside Thring’s; Hodgkinson’s under the white cross. With both Wales and Thring gone new personalities would be needed if the MIS was to be restored to its best. A morale-boosting testimony to the effectiveness of the MIS classes appeared when the GJ reported that C J White, son of Treasurer, Charles White, had won Queen’s prizes in his Guildford Art and Science examinations – drawing, geology, electricity, light and heat – and C J said his success was down to classes at the MIS.

### **The Uppingham Choral Society**

While David remained in charge, there was no worry for music in the town. However, the status of his MIS class choir was changing, and the title ‘Uppingham Choral Society’ was appearing in its place. They still used the figment title ‘*in connection with Uppingham MIS*’ when with 74 singers they performed *Messiah*, but it was under the title ‘Uppingham Choral Society’ that the choir warmed up with glees and part-songs before their first rehearsal for the next season in October 1888. A new larger concert hall had still not been built and concerts were moved from MIS to the Oddfellows Hall in High Street East. It was in that hall that the UCS invited winners from the Rutland Competitive Festival to join with them in a combined chorus of 80 voices, with Grace Woodcock providing the accompaniment. The practice of the time was to donate the proceeds of such concerts to charitable causes and when UCS sang carols in the Market Place, the beneficiaries were the Leicester Royal Infirmary, Oakham Cottage Hospital and the inmates of the Workhouse.

<sup>28</sup> Nigel Richardson – Thring of Uppingham

<sup>29</sup> Bryan Matthews – By God’s Grace ... 1984

## Oddfellows

Mention of the Oddfellows is a reminder that opportunities were growing for Uppingham folk to enjoy their leisure time. The MIS position of pre-eminence for social activities was gradually eroded in the coming decades. Some people belonged to more than one society. Some organisations offered specialist activities while others were more recreational.

Oddfellows was a national mutual society and lodges had existed in Rutland from early in the century. Members joined to gain protection for their families against the cost of illness, injury or



*Oddfellows Hall*

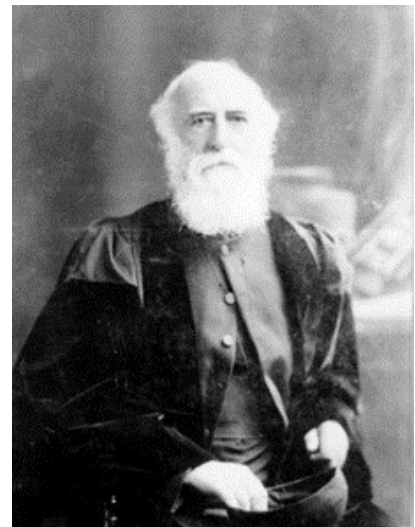
death. Uppingham members occasionally used the MIS premises for meetings but there was a Lodge Room in a pub in

Glaston. When they held their annual march from the pub to Bisbrooke Hall in 1888, they asked the MIS band to accompany them. A Lodge named The Rutland Social Design Lodge eventually moved to buildings



*Lodges Meeting*

of the former British School and this became their Hall. A group photo taken in the 1920s shows a combined meeting of Rutland Lodges, with some Uppinghamians, like Canon Richardson, in the picture. The MIS Band was again invited to play at the Oddfellows' AGM. The band had become so popular that it was regularly invited to perform at the Horticultural Show and in local villages. In 1889 Mr W Angrave conducted them in the Market Square playing sacred music for Good Friday. In succession, shopkeeper Mr Gregory took over. He also sang with his three sons in the Parish Church Choir and had a shop in the Market Place, which sold music, records and musical instruments; he was a great asset to Uppingham's musical life. The Society had a new President, Archdeacon Lightfoot in 1890 and he served until he died in office in 1907. He is buried in the lower graveyard of the Parish Church opposite the MIS.

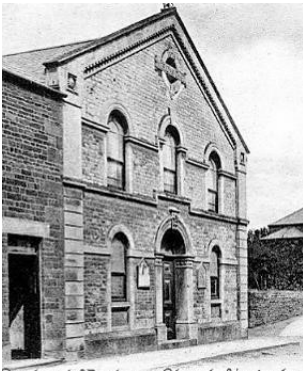


## Into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The dawning of a new century was a good time to reflect on the achievements of the Mutual Improvement Society in Uppingham. The Society had been responsible for most of the development of the 'Self-Help' movement in Uppingham Town. It had provided a vehicle for the townsfolk to organise for themselves the activities they enjoyed. In this they had undoubtedly relied heavily on Uppingham School. The schoolmasters had provided much of the intellectual impetus and had created one of the most successful areas of activity, that of music. Perhaps a decline from that position of leadership was inevitable as other organisations developed to supplement and rival the MIS, even in its prominent sphere of music. In the new century, organisations like the Oddfellows, Primrose League, YMCA, Working Men's Club, League of Nations, Girls' Club, Women's Suffrage, British Legion, and the Chamber of Commerce, along with the Churches, expanded their activities. It is paradoxical that the change of emphasis which occurred in MIS activities, a move away from the intellectual to the recreational, would have been boosted by Thring's efforts in the latter. The 20<sup>th</sup> century growth in recreation was inexorable and, while the Library continued to be used, musical opportunities were found elsewhere, even if the MIS occasionally offered musical initiatives, like the children's entertainment staged, with Nellie James on the piano, and lots of singing.

The Leicester Chronicle (LC) reported on the first MIS AGM of the century: long-serving Thomas Bell was not only 'still around' but was in the chair. Perhaps the Rector's role as President was honorary. The shopkeepers continued to play a leading role in the Society; A J Kirk had taken over from J B Hewitt as Secretary and Kirk had an assistant, Charles Pettit; the faithful Draper was of course still the Librarian. Another assistant Secretary, J Wignall, reported that there were 183 members in the Society even though attendance at the AGM was poor. They planned for the winter season to include an elocution class and one visiting speaker would be the celebrated reader, Mr Brandram. At long last the local press referred to a programme for ladies: Mrs Skrine, wife of the housemaster of Brooklands, would run a series of cookery classes for ladies, and Miss Lane of the Leicester School of Cookery would be a guest speaker. Among those who took on committee responsibilities in the MIS were Rev George Christian (schoolmaster) Fred Oakley, W J W Stocks (photographer), R T White (appliances), and Henry Drake.

The MIS was not, of course, the preserve of any one of the churches and there were many Methodists among the membership. Henry was a well-respected member of the Drake family,



*Wesleyan Methodist Church*

who were leading Methodists in Uppingham<sup>30</sup> from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Henry's father John had been a stonemason and had built Wisteria House on Ayston Road, worked on the Methodist Chapel and produced numerous gravestones for the Churchyard. Prominent Methodists in the MIS were Mark Flint (High Street Watchmaker), G F Dolby (Books), Herbert Thorpe and A J Kirk (butcher). As the Secretary's report elucidated, being active

in the Society meant that Henry Drake was among those playing regularly in the Whist and Bridge teams. He eventually became President of the Society.

### **Recreation and Competition**

So 'Mutual Improvement' was increasingly replaced by 'Recreation and Competition'. From the beginning of the century, an explosion occurred in the playing of billiards and whist, and indeed other games like draughts and bridge. Teams were set up throughout the area to play competitively in leagues and many of the MIS men were involved. Revd Edward Moore, (1907–1920) Rector of Uppingham and Archdeacon of Oakham, agreed to be President of the MIS and the Choral Society, even if some leading members were transferring their interest and energy from the MIS to other causes. The Headmaster, Rev H W McKenzie, Sir Arthur Fludyer (Ayston Hall), John Gretton MP, R Sterndale Bennett, S G Fricker, and G W Worrall were elected Vice Presidents. C E Manton (School Music Department) was appointed Conductor, and he had Mrs Raven as his deputy and Grace Woodcock as accompanist.

Even after losing their two strongest supports – Thring and David – music continued to thrive in the town. David was succeeded by Robert Sterndale Bennett, and over the 37 years he worked at the school, he also played a major role in the town, though he makes very few appearances in MIS files. The Uppingham Choral Society (UCS) became the dominant musical influence in the town but the need to produce large choirs resulted in the Rutland Musical Festival (RMF) growing in importance as the MIS influence on music diminished

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<sup>30</sup> Margaret Stacey – The Story of Uppingham Methodist Church, ULHSG



## Rutland Music Festival

The RMF attracted singers from all over Rutland and further afield. Competitive events had not been unknown to the MIS in earlier years but in the years before the First World War,



Canon John Richardson

'competition' became the new motivator for the Society and for other organisations. The MIS members were particularly successful in the Billiards and Whist Leagues, often on the winning side. The musicians of Uppingham also competed successfully in the Rutland Festival.



Robert Sterndale Bennett

Canon Richardson became Rector of Uppingham in 1920 and was elected President of MIS. Probably the most musical of Uppingham's rectors, he and his wife and daughter competed in the RMF, winning prizes in the chamber music section. This 'Golden Age of the Festival' would give Uppingham musicians a chance to perform under the baton of Malcolm Sargent at the RMF. The newspapers took a keen interest in these competitive festivals, so popular at the time. The festival appeared first in 1907 and it was planned for it to be held on a triennial basis; unsurprisingly, it was suspended during the 1914-18 War. It was not revived until 1921 when the RMF was noncompetitive. The headmaster allowed it to be held in the Uppingham School Memorial Hall (Now the Theatre is a memorial to those who had died in the South African War and to Paul David); which had been opened in 1905. Malcolm Sargent had been the organist of Melton Mowbray Church and he became much involved in organising the revived RMF. In 1923 he conducted 300 voices – from Uppingham, Oakham, Melton, Whissendine, Kettering, Leicester, Stamford, and Peterborough - in Elgar's *Banner of St George*.

Richard Watts, church choirmaster 1890-1929, a friend of Sargent encouraged his choristers to sing with the RMF; this included his wife Annie, daughter of Thomas Mould, who sold the site for the MIS. Thomas Baines, her grandfather and her uncles, William, and John, were MIS members.

*Rutland Music Festival Choir at Uppingham School Memorial Hall in 1923*



Even before the First World War the MIS was beginning to concentrate heavily on competitive activities for men. The billiards team of W H Ingram, H Drake, J G Buckland, C Sneath, J Dalby, A Jackson and H Thorpe, enjoyed much success in the League, and MIS membership held up surprisingly well for where membership had been 170 members in 1905, in 1912 it was still 143. Members

were of course lost during the War and many of the Society's activities had been suspended. Some meetings were held during the war, as in 1913 when the minutes of the AGM record that Henry Drake presided over a small gathering. Loyal and longstanding members like Secretary, Thomas Bell (1861-1914) and Librarian, R Draper (1861-1925) helped to keep the Society alive but by the 1920s the rise in the activities of other organisations contributed to the decline of the MIS, even though it enhanced the opportunities available to the people of Uppingham.

### **Uppingham Amateur Operatic Society,**

Many MIS members joined the operatic society (UAOS) which had been formed in 1923. Their first production, *The Pirates of Penzance*, proved so popular that for a time Gilbert and Sullivan became the principal musical activity in Uppingham, though the UCS remained, and many singers belonged to both organisations. The UAOS, like other organisations donated any profits to charities and after *Pirates*, the Rutland Memorial Cottage Hospital was better off by £12 19 2d. MIS singers, along with the schoolmasters, became leaders in the Operatic Society. Robert Sterndale Bennett was a driving force, Joe Love, Uppingham baker, was the principal tenor, and Miss L Weed, the leading lady. The Stamford Mercury (SM) commented '*the talent in the town combined well with that available in the school*'. Support for music also came from the local aristocracy and gentry: the Earl of Ancaster,

General Codrington of Preston, and Canon Richardson among them. From the School, the names of Toby Belk, G L Morris, Fred and Mrs Bashford.

*L. Weed, J Love, W Davidson, Barnes*



Joe Love frequently appeared in the reports and from among the MIS town members Davidson, Dalby, Barnes, Forbes, Gregory, Thorpe, Weed, York and Hall could be identified. Len Hall was late on the MIS scene; he became headteacher of the National School in 1939. His schoolhouse, being alongside the MIS premises, eased his involvement in a wide range of town

activities. Richard Watts had made school music an important and successful, and both his and Len Hall's choirs were successful in local festivals and competitions. Len produced annual pantomimes.

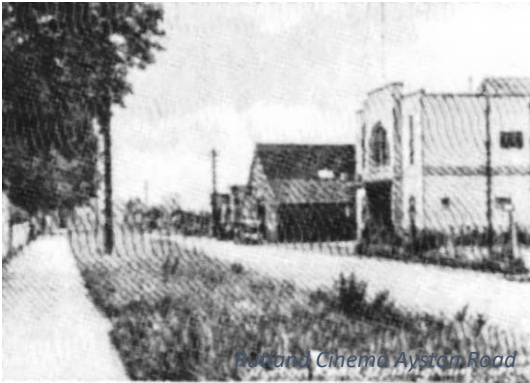
Colin Hall writing about his father<sup>31</sup>, gave a picture of life in School House, alongside the MIS: *the School itself was built on many levels, with the Infants school the highest up the hill and the most senior of the junior school at the bottom. Tucked in amongst this complex of levels there was the Mutual Improvement Society and Reading Room run as men's only club that seemed to function around billiard tables. Even In 1939 the house had water fed by a large cast iron pump set at the side of the stone sink and a chemical toilet. He added the "Nash" as it (the school) was known locally, was at the foot of Scale Hill, built in 1867, paid from voluntary subscriptions and the sale of land, now the Upper Cricket Field. It faced south, looking across the small valley up to Uppingham School's Middle playing field and caught whatever sun was going. To the South and West were cultivated allotments.*

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<sup>31</sup> Colin Hall – in Peter Lane Files ULHSG

## New Facilities

Other public facilities were emerging and, though the Rutland Cinema in Uppingham was



Rutland Cinema Ayston Road

not opened until 1937, J W Stocks, Photographer, was showing films in Oddfellows' Hall from 1913. That same year, the Hall was densely packed for a Women's Suffrage Meeting, despite the disturbance created by some men. Winning choirs from the Rutland Festival used the cinema stage for celebration concerts. The League of Nations branch

was attracting members and the MIS hosted some of its meetings in their hall. Along with other clubs, the MIS arranged some ballroom dances, a form of entertainment which was growing in popularity. Uppingham now had another suitable venue for dances in the new Church Rooms.

In 1915 the Parish Church had purchased a property in High Street East, for use as a church hall and made possible by the Rowell bequest of £1,000. The wooden building erected on the site was said to have been one of the navvies' huts left over from construction of the railway line and Haringworth viaduct.

The building had its limitations, but the MIS and many other organisations used it during the 1920s while plans were discussed for a new building. A new Rector, Canon C C Aldred (1930-49) took matters in hand and a plan, prepared



Canon C.C. Aldred

by Mr Dolphin, was approved by the PCC and in April 1932 a tender of £1,799 was accepted.

Dances, often with a live band performing, were frequently held there and with



The Church Rooms Town Hall

classes, produce shows, pantomimes and more, it was doing much of the job that the MIS had done in earlier years. The building was commandeered by Government in 1940 for *war purposes*; it was taken over by the Town Council in 1975 to be used as the Town Hall.

The MIS continued to provide social activities in the First World War, but the character and activities of the Society had changed out of all recognition from the early days. The Society lost a keen member in 1931, Edward Arnsby, who had been a member for many years, latterly as Vice President, and representing the MIS in the Whist and Bridge leagues. Like so many other MIS members, he had been much involved in the affairs of the town. As a cattle dealer and an owner-grazier, his interests were agricultural, but he lived in the High Street and helped to organise the annual Fat Stock Show. He was a director of the Uppingham Gas Light and Coke Company and a Parish Councillor. In his younger days he had played for the Cricket Club and remained a member until his death. His partners in the MIS Bridge/Whist teams in the Welland Valley League in 1909 were C Barber, W D Hudson, F Oakley, T Scott, W Clarke, A Steward, W Weed, G F Dolby, H Drake, W Harding, W Oakley, R T White, W H Ingram, and A Dorman – most pillars of the town. As champions of Rutland, they beat the champions of Northants on 3 May 1930 and the Stamford Conservatives in December that year.

You couldn't say that the MIS was 'on its last legs' in the 1930s, the billiards team of A L York, E E Waugh, F J Clarke, C Love, E T Silman, and W D Hudson played in the Stamford & District League and they even had a 'B' team and F Oakley was vice President of the Whist League; but attendance at the AGMs continued to be small and total membership had fallen to 103 by 1932. Paul David died aged 91 in 1932. The Rector gave way to Henry Drake as President, and Charles, the son of founder-member John Hawthorne, was the Secretary. When the club had a Whist Drive in 1933, 116 people attended and the UCS benefited from the proceeds. In 1934 the committee discussed the acquisition of electricity for the Hall, and they redecorated the Reading Room, the Library and the Games Room. A Jumble Sale raised enough money for new books for the library and in the circumstances the finances were looking healthy. Apart from their Hall, the Society had assets of £100 in War Loan Stock, and the income and expenditure account was in the black. In 1935 a record number of 280 attended the MIS Carnival Dance in the Church Rooms on Boxing Day. The Society still had 96 members and a well-used reading Room and Library and the teams in billiards and whist leagues were winning their matches.

## Conclusion

In the relatively short time between 1860 and 1940 the Mutual Improvement Society had contributed greatly to a change in the social life of the people of Uppingham. If the emphasis changed from mutual improvement to recreation over the years that was no less valuable. Following Foster's Education Act of 1970, the nation steadily adopted compulsory education and the need for the MIS to centre on educational improvement was diminished. However, the notion of lifelong learning remained strong and other organisations took up the cause alongside the MIS. The Society's contribution to the development of music in the town was outstanding. Paul David and his team brought Uppingham to pre-eminence among the smaller towns in the region. In this he had great support from his colleagues in Uppingham School, which was itself in a period of transition from a local grammar to a major national boarding school. The town was fortunate that the schoolmasters were willing to play an enthusiastic part in the affairs of the Society.

The early history was dominated by the two great personalities living in Uppingham at that time, namely Chancellor William Wales, Rector of the Parish, and Edward Thring, Headmaster of the School. Fortunately, in the matter of the MIS they were to cooperate or even compete with each other to benefit the town. Sadly, and in so many things, they were in bitter opposition, not least in how the town should deal with the typhoid epidemic. For

most of the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Society lived up to its name of 'Mutual Improvement'. Its programme of classes, lectures, reading and discussion, along with some fine concerts, filled the bill admirably. Before the turn of the century the MIS was providing or encouraging a wide range of recreational activities, from which the town football, cricket, tennis and other clubs emanated. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the emphasis of the society was on indoor games like billiards and whist. If competition from other organisations and activities pushed the MIS to the fringes of social activity in Uppingham, though the loyalty of some of the shopkeepers, businessmen



and school in Uppingham remained to the end. Even after the Society was wound up in

1940, the following notice appeared in the newspaper in 1946. Was the MIS going to become a social club?

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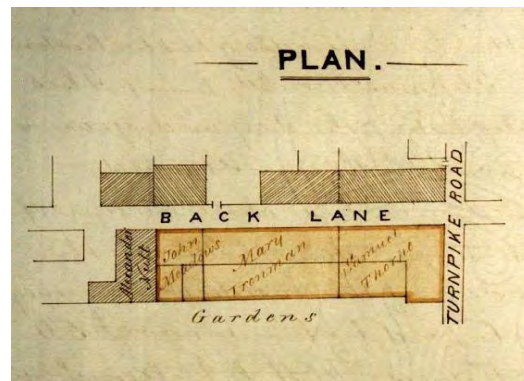
## Appendix: The site for the Mutual Improvement Society and later for the National School

The change of ownership described & delineated in a plan in the margin of the Rectory Manor Court Roll **Court** held Thursday 5 November 1863 before Thomas Brown gentleman Steward for Rev William Wales Clerk, Lord of the Manor.

### RMUCR VOL VIII Pages 79 - 81

**Parties :** Thomas Mould of Great Easton, Leics, farmer, to  
John Hawthorn of Uppingham, printer & stationer.

**Property** (a) Messuage or tenement with yard & appurtenances belonging;  
(b) Building adjoining last described tenement used as a barn, stable & hovel with the yard thereunto adjoining & belonging;  
(c) Other building adjoining last described premises on the East used as a stable, hovel & barn with the yard thereunto adjoining & belonging



**Rent:** YR 2d.

**Recites :** In consideration of £200 for the absolute purchase of the customary inheritance in fee simple, Thomas Mould surrendered out of Court by Thomas Brown Steward the above property to which he was admitted at a General Court held 7<sup>th</sup> November 1850 under the Will of his late father William Mould deceased.

Properties formerly in the occupations of -

- (a) Thomas Trigg, late of Thomas Sellars and now of John Meadows;
- (b) Late in the occupation of William Nutt and now of Mary Ironman;
- (c) Heretofore in the occupation of Joseph Curtis, since of William Harbutt, late Charles Stokes and now of Samuel Thorpe.

Held with other hereditaments copyhold of the Manor under annual rent 2d, but the hereditaments hereby surrendered are held under apportioned annual rent 1½d.

To the use of John Hawthorn.

Witnessed by R H G Wilson, solicitor, Uppingham.

**Refs :** RMU Vol VI ff 316-319 items (c), (d) & (e).  
And at RMU Vol VIII pp 86-88.

### Inquest and Homage

- |    |                    |         |   |                  |
|----|--------------------|---------|---|------------------|
| 1. | Christopher Sewell | Foreman |   |                  |
| 2. | John Baines Mould  | S       | ( | 8. Samuel Thorpe |
| 3. | William Ingram     | W       | ( | 9. John Wadd     |



- |    |                   |   |   |     |                   |
|----|-------------------|---|---|-----|-------------------|
| 4. | Robert Stretton ) | O | ( | 10. | William Satchell. |
| 5. | William Dodson )  | R | ( | 11. | John Love.        |
| 6. | William Mould )   | N | ( | 12. | Samuel Halford    |
| 7. | William Nutt )    |   | ( | 13. | Thomas Dean.      |

