

Jesse Chennells 1821 – 1902

A distinguished resident of 19th century Wheathampstead

In October 2017, a small group of volunteers cleared the undergrowth in front of the United Church on Brewhouse Hill. Originally a Congregational Church, it became the United Reformed Church in 1972 when the Congregationalists merged with the Presbyterians and the United Church in 2007 when it merged with the Folly Methodists.



Before



After

This work revealed a number of gravestones, one of which was that of Jesse Chennells.



Inscription

In loving memory of Jesse Chennells, who went to sleep in Jesus June 21 1902 aged 81 years
'Safe in his father's home'.

also William George, eldest son of the above, who departed this life April 11 1897 aged 45 years
'Thy will be done'.

also Lelia Maud Chennells, died November 5 1897
(NB. The year is wrong. She died in 1878. See p.3.)

Jesse Chennells, a member of a long-established local family, was born in Wheathampstead in 1821, eldest of the six sons of Amelia and William Chennells of Town Farm which in 1841 Amelia (by then a widow) rented from the owner, Charles Benet Drake Garrard of Lamer. The other five brothers were named George, Adam, William, Thomas and John, who was the youngest and born in 1830. The family were devout Congregationalists.

In 1848, at the age of 27, Jesse married Phillis Gray who was 22 years of age. The 1841 census shows that Phillis, then aged 15, was living in Bury Green, Wheathampstead, in a household of six, none of whom appear to have been related to her. She may have been working as a straw plaiter but the census is indistinct.

The 1851 census shows Jesse (29) and Phillis (24) living in Marylebone, London with their first child, Jesse junior. The census says that Jesse junior was seven years old, which suggests that he was born before the marriage. Jesse senior's occupation is described as 'London City Missionary; 3,120'.

A second son, William, was born in 1852 and Phillis Amelia, their first daughter, in 1853 but the records show that she and Jesse junior both died in June 1856, their deaths being registered in Barnet. They may have been victims of the diphtheria epidemic of 1855-1857.

A third son, also named Jesse, was born in 1857, then Edwin in 1859 and Albert in 1860.

By 1861, the family had moved to Green Lanes in Tottenham and Jesse was working as a master butcher employing two boys. His brother George, now a baker and confectioner, was living with the family.

Phillis died in June 1861 at the early age of 32. She was buried at the United Reformed Church in Barnet.

The 1861 census shows a young woman, Charlotte Paul from Sandridge, visiting the household in Brewhouse Hill of Thomas Seabrook, cordwainer, who was also a Congregationalist. Perhaps she caught Jesse's eye because she and Jesse married in Edmonton in June 1862, when she was about 27 years old compared with his 41. Charlotte's father William was a carpenter in Sandridge.

Their daughter Louisa was born in 1863, Arthur in 1864, then Kate in 1866, Frederick in 1868, Thomas in 1870, Lelia in 1871, Minnie in 1873, Edgar in 1875, Walter in 1877, Charlotte in 1879 and Lionel in 1881.

Amelia Chennells died in 1867. Probate was granted to Jesse.

CHENNELLS Amelia. Effects under £300.	29 January.	Letters of Administration of the Personal estate and effects of Amelia Chennells late of Town Farm Wheathamstead in the County of Hertford Widow deceased who died 30 March 1867 at Town Farm aforesaid were granted at the Principal Registry to Jesse Chennells of Wood Green in the County of Middlesex Butcher the Son and one of the Next of Kin of the said Deceased he having been first sworn.
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In 1868, Charlotte's father William, now described as a builder in Sandridge, filed for bankruptcy. The list of creditors published in the Herts Advertiser on 13 June 1868 included Jesse to whom he owed £130.

By 1871, Jesse and Charlotte had moved into Town Farm (shown in the census as 'Town's End Farm') with six of the children. He was farming 90 acres and employing four men. The

minutes of the Congregational Church in Brewhouse Hill show that he was 'readmitted' to the Church in 1872 'having been away'.

Lelia Maud, born in 1871, died in 1878. The year of her death is wrongly inscribed on the gravestone.

For the rest of the nineteenth century, Jesse played an increasingly important part in village life and was often mentioned in reports in the Herts Advertiser.

ASSAULTING AN EMPLOYER.

Benjamin Hollingsworth was summoned for assaulting Mr. Jesse Chennells, farmer, his employer, at Wheathampstead, on the 8th May and the 13th May respectively.

Defendant did not appear, and the service of the summons having been proved by Police-constable Gibbs,

Complainant said: On the 8th May I was in the road at Wheathampstead opposite my gates when I saw the defendant and told him not to take beer into my fields and ordered him to go spreading manure, and to send the boy with the horse and cart. He said he would go with the horse and cart. I told him to do what I bid him, or he should do nothing at all. The boy was then going off with the horse and cart when defendant jumped up and took half a gallon of beer out of the cart. He thought I had gone and was going towards my fields shortly afterwards when I met him and said he should not take the beer with him. I told him that they had had some and if they had any more I should get no work done. He pushed me and said, "If you don't let me go I will knock your brains out." I said, "You shall not have the bottle," and took it from him and told him to go where he liked. He then hit me on the head three times and tried to throw me down. On the 13th May defendant came to me for his money and was very abusive. He pulled his clothes off, even his shirt, and rushed at me and pushed me. One of my men came between us and received a blow which was intended for me. Defendant did not strike me, the push is the assault I complain of on this occasion.

The Chairman: These are two very gross cases of assault. A servant assaulting his master must be taken very considerable notice of. For the first offence, on the 8th, the defendant will be fined £1 and 16s. 6d. costs; and in the second case the fine will be £1 10s. and 16s. 6d. costs; in default, 14 days in each case.

Not all the Herts Ad reports were of happy events. For example, a report on 3 June 1876 recounted how Jesse was twice assaulted by one of his own employees. The offender was convicted and fined £1 with 16s.6d costs for the first offence and £1.10s with 16s.6d costs for the second.

AN OLD OFFENCE.

Arthur Hosier was charged with stealing in October last a pickaxe, of the value of 3s. 6d, the property of Mr. Jesse Chennells, of Wheathampstead.—Police-constable Henry Gibson, stationed in the village, deposed that on Saturday night, the 28th October last, about ten o'clock, he saw the prisoner and another man named Walter Parker leave the Bell public-house, and observing that they did not go in the direction of their homes, witness watched them till about a quarter past twelve. Parker then came close to him, and he heard Hosier say "Look; there is someone standing there." Parker then came closer, and said "Good night," and witness said "Stop; I want to search you, as you have something under there." The pickaxe produced was then found on Parker, and to Hosier witness said "What did you put over the wall just now? I saw you throw something, and I will look." On doing so he found another pick. Parker was taken into custody; but on going to Hosier's house witness found that he had absconded, and nothing was seen of him till the previous day (Friday), when witness apprehended him.—Prosecutor, who lives at Town Farm, Wheathampstead, identified the pick found upon the prisoner as his property. Prisoner had before now worked for him, but was not at the time the tools were stolen. One was taken from a field, and the other from the blacksmith's shop. Such things witness had lost before, and he therefore thought the prisoners should be brought to justice.—Hosier elected to be tried by the bench, and pleaded guilty. For the offence, which the Chairman characterised as a "bad, dishonest, and disreputable proceeding," he was sentenced to one month's imprisonment, with hard labour. The bench commended Police-constable Gibson for his conduct in the case. He was told that he acted well, and did his duty on the occasion, by endeavouring to bring the offenders to justice.

On 26 May 1877, Jesse was reported as giving evidence against a former employee who was accused of stealing a pickaxe, value 3s.6d, from him. A second pickaxe was involved but that case was not proceeded with. The accused pleaded guilty and was sentenced to one month's imprisonment with hard labour. This sentence contrasts with the fines that were levied in the earlier case of assault, perhaps reflecting the priorities of the courts of that time.

In 1881, the Chennells family were still at Town Farm, now 100 acres, employing three men and two boys and with nine children (from Louisa through to Charlotte) living at home. Lionel was born on 20 May in that year. They were still there in 1891, with Frederick (22) working as a cabinet-maker and Walter, Lottie (Charlotte) and Lionel attending school.

This photograph of the family standing outside Town Farm is said to have been taken in 1891 on the occasion of Louisa's wedding. Jesse is standing by the fence.



THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH BAZAAR.—About six months ago it was suggested that a bazaar should be held in the old chapel, in aid of the debt remaining on the new building, which is a very pretty church in the gothic style, and was much needed. A committee of ladies was formed, and a plan decided upon to make it a success. The ladies and a number of friends, members of other denominations, at once set to work in earnest with one heart and spirit, to collect articles which would be likely to be disposed of on such an occasion, and some members of the Established Church helped materially. The bazaar was opened on Monday week by the Rev. J. C. Page, a missionary from India, assisted by the Rev. J. S. Hoppus, pastor, and several friends from Luton and St. Albans. The old building was tastefully decorated with evergreens, flowers, and suitable mottoes. The stalls presented a charming appearance, containing a large and varied display of useful and fancy articles. They were presided over by Mrs. Hoppus (assisted by Mrs. Bailey), Mr. Edwin Chennells (assisted by Mrs. Jesse Chennells), Mrs. Edward Lockhart, jun. (assisted by Mrs. Edward Lockhart, sen.), Mrs. W. Watt and Miss Rogers, Mrs. French, of Luton (assisted by Miss King). A refreshment stall, gratuitously supplied by various friends, was presided over by Mr. Jesse Chennells, and Mr. Edward Lockhart, jun., and was a point of great attraction. A pianoforte was kindly lent by Mrs. Jesse Chennells, and added much to the pleasures of the bazaar. During the first day several anthems, glees, and duets were sung by the choir, and several friends from Dr. Oswald Dykes' Church, Regent-square, London who kindly co-operated in trying to make the bazaar a success. There was a very handsome and artistic screen for sale, made by Mr. and Mrs. Edward Lockhart, jun., which was greatly admired. At the close of the bazaar, speeches were made by the Rev. J. S. Hoppus, Mr. Edward Lockhart, jun., and Mr. W. Watt, of London, who also closed with prayer. The sum realized was £42, the announcement of which was received with great applause.

By now, the Chennells family were playing an active part in the work of the Congregational Church, including helping with a bazaar that was organised in 1881 to raise funds to pay off the debt for the new church that had been opened in 1877, replacing the original chapel opened in 1815.

SEASON 1881.
VOLTIGERN,
 The property of Mr. Jesse Chennells, of Town Farm, Wheathampstead.

WILL serve mares this season in the surrounding neighbourhood at £2 2s. each, half-bred mares; £5 5s. thoroughbred mares; the groom's fee 5s.

Voltigern is by Thunderbolt, his grandsire was the great Voltiguer, whose blood is supposed to possess the best staying powers of any breed in the kingdom.

In the same year, and in some subsequent years, Jesse made money by putting stallions out to stud.

WHEATHAMPSTEAD.

JUBILEE.—On Jubilee Day, about 600 young unmarried persons were entertained to a tea and entertainment in a meadow belonging to Mr. Jesse Chennells. Between £20 and £30 had been collected by Mr. Chennells, Mr. Lockhart, Mr. Titmus and other gentlemen. The Codicote brass band was in attendance, and the event passed off in a most enjoyable manner.

He celebrated Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 with a party for 600 'young unmarried persons' in one of his fields.

The next story, dated 17 September 1887, shows that Jesse had been elected to chair a Vestry meeting to discuss problems with the sewage works that had opened in The Meads at the end of East Lane in 1876. There had been an outbreak of scarlet fever in the houses in East Lane, a disease which was 'often attributed to drinking impure water'. About a hundred 'gentlemen' attended the meeting, including such notable figures as George Titmuss and William Thrale. The meeting decided that, rather than spend £100 on a new donkey pumping-engine to ensure the flow of treated water to the river, £30 should be spent on improving the existing arrangements by using 'more efficient chemicals', improving the outfall from the filter beds, and using the existing underground gravels 'for the purpose of assisting the filtration'. A new management committee was elected to oversee the improvements which would, it was hoped 'carry the water into the river in a pure state'.

THE SEWERAGE OF THE VILLAGE.

During the last few weeks a sensation, amounting almost to alarm, has existed in the parish on account of the discovery that the sewage works are in a most unsatisfactory condition. Why this is so, and who are to blame, are questions which are too delicate and not sufficiently practical to enter into; but it has undoubtedly been a case of everybody's business becoming nobody's business. The village is at last aroused upon the serious importance of seeing to the efficiency of the sewage works, and this feeling has been accelerated by the outbreak of contagious diseases, such as scarlet fever, often attributed to drinking impure water. This outbreak is fortunately confined for the present to some houses in East Lane, near the river and also near the works; and it would be well if the officers of the Sanitary Authority ascertained if the houses are properly drained and have good water supply. Wheathampstead is under the Rural Sanitary Authority meeting at St. Albans, and is represented on that Board by Messrs. D. Smith and G. Titmus. The sewage works are situated in East Meads, East Lane. There are two receiving tanks, from which the sewage has been drawn and supposed to be chemically treated so as to thoroughly deodorise it, through some channels specially, but it would seem not satisfactorily, constructed to provide a good fall. This fact is at the root of the mischief. We were informed that the land at the spot is so thick with good gravel that it would be possible to treat by mere ground filtration ten times the quantity of sewage at present to be dealt with, and with absolute safety. The Authority had proposed to supply the power which might be obtained from a proper fall in the filter beds by fixing a donkey pumping-engine, which would probably cost £100, and the ratepayers had not approved of that scheme. With one grievance and another, and with many residents ready with suggestions, to think nothing of the threatening outbreak of disease, it was natural that the ratepayers should desire to meet in conference; and it was not to be wondered at at the same time that the wording of the notice issued by the overseers should be in such strong form as follows:—

NOTICE OF VESTRY.—Parish of Wheathampstead.—September 3rd, 1887. Notice is hereby given that a vestry will be held in the National schoolroom, in and for this parish, on Thursday, the 8th day of September, 1887, 8 o'clock in the afternoon. 1.—To enquire into the present condition of the sewage, and to discuss matters relative thereto, together with the expenditure of the parish money in extending the sewage works, purchasing donkey engine, etc. 2.—Also endeavour to ascertain as to how, by whom, and when the present committee was appointed; also the duties incumbent upon the committee, and the way in which those duties have been performed.

About a hundred gentlemen manifested their interest in the meeting by personal attendance, Mr. Jesse Chennells being voted to the chair, and there being also present Mr. Dawson, Mr. D. Smith, Mr. G. Titmus, Mr. Finch, Mr. Thrall, and all the members of the original committee but two, the Vicar and Mr. Ransom being away. All the members present of the original committee were invited and consented, to stand on the new managing committee who were appointed, numbering in all sixteen gentlemen, so that if numbers go for anything there ought never to be any complaints of the working of the sewage works at Wheathampstead. The view of the meeting was that instead of the donkey engine arrangement the present system should be continued under improved circumstances, the alterations to include the use of more efficient chemicals, the making of a good outfall in the filtering beds, which are to be increased, and utilizing the gravel underground for the purpose of assisting the filtration. By these improvements it is hoped to carry the water into the river in a pure state; at present such is not the case, and the Conservators have already complained. The special expenses are estimated to cost not more than £30. The new committee will see to the details of the arrangements and works, and will forward them resolutions for confirmation by the Rural Sanitary Authority. On Thursday last the committee were at the works and commenced overhauling the arrangements; and an adjourned vestry meeting is to be held. If all we hear be true, there must have been laxity in some quarters of the kind which places the health of these small village communities in great jeopardy.

GRAND CONCERT AT THE VILLAGE HALL.

A grand benefit concert, organised at the cost of much time and trouble by Mr. Jesse Chennells and his family, was given in the Village Hall on Tuesday evening before a crowded audience, the hall and gallery being filled to the utmost. Mr. Chennells' philanthropic object was to benefit a family known to many in the village who have been left orphan and helpless by the unusually sad circumstance of the death of both parents in one week some few months since at Radlett. The case was known to be a truly deserving one; and Mr. Chennells' wide acquaintance with musical people enabled him to prepare a concert which would otherwise have been, we should think, practically impossible to an ordinary *entrepreneur*. Artists from the village and neighbourhood were recruited by first-class talent from the metropolis; and the evening being clear and mild, the support given to the object in view could not have been larger, and doubtless there would have been sufficient patrons to fill a much larger hall. Mr. Chennells secured not only the patronage but also the influential presence of all the principal tradesmen and residents; and the audience on Tuesday did themselves honour by so readily backing up the promoters of a charitable cause, served in such instances in no better way than by a good entertainment. The village hall is an excellent place for entertainments, and on Tuesday the interior had been completely covered with decorative material. Mr. Webster had kindly lent a grand and numerous display of flags of all nations, which were tastefully hung by that gentleman and Mr. Geo. Chennells. The Royal Standard—a huge piece of drapery—covered the wall at the back of the platform, which was set off with many foliage plants in pots, branches of holly, &c., and wreaths and festoons of holly and evergreen were bestowed upon the chandeliers, the walls, gallery, &c., rendering the hall very gay and comfortable. The Rev. J. S. Hoppus had been announced to preside, but he was unexpectedly called away from home during the day; and in his place Mr. J. Chennells took the chair. A second apology had to be made for Madame Rémon, who was indisposed; and Mr. S. Heath sent a substitute in Mr. Saunders. The programme was gone through without a hitch, and the audience seemed to appreciate very keenly some items which were far above the average. Mr. Steele, who with the Misses Chennells and Miss Revill, assisted with the accompaniments during the evening, played as an introductory, a pianoforte solo, entitled "Vive les Soldats" by Lange. Of the lady singers, Miss Osborne deserves first mention, her voice and style being refined and finished

(continued)

ACCIDENT.—As Mr. Jesse Chennells, of Town-farm, was driving home from St. Albans market, on coming down Dead Woman's-hill, he met three hay carts. He safely passed two, but the ladder at the rear of the third cart caught Mr. Chennells' trap, and turning it over, threw Mr. Chennells violently into the road, inflicting such severe injuries that it will be a long time before he completely recovers from them.

In 1888, Jesse organised a concert to raise funds for a family of orphans in the village. Several members of the Chennells family helped, both in organising and in performing. The Village Hall referred to in the report was the Congregational Church Hall which at that time served as the Village Hall. The report that appeared in the Herts Ad dated 28 January 1888 goes on to give a detailed account of all the performances that were given.

However, on 8 November 1890, the Herts Ad reported that Jesse had been seriously injured in an accident at Dead Woman's Hill (now Sandridge Road, just north of the King William junction in St Albans).

Possibly because of the after-effects of this accident, Jesse and Charlotte left Town Farm in the early 1890s and moved to Gibraltar Lodge, a large house in Batford situated in what is now Batford Road which runs parallel to the Lower Luton Road behind the Gibraltar Castle pub. It was demolished in 1968.

This photograph, taken in about 1895, shows Jesse (on the left with his hand on the railing) and his family in a classic pose as a Victorian paterfamilias. His wife Charlotte is standing behind him. The young man standing behind Jesse may be young Lionel. He died in October 1900 and was buried at the then-Congregational Church in Wheathampstead; his gravestone was uncovered at the same time as Jesse's.



WHEATHAMPSTEAD.
PROPOSED VILLAGE HALL.
A PARISH MEETING.
 A parish meeting was held in the National Schoolroom on Friday evening last to discuss the advisability of building a village hall. Among those present were: Major General Cherry Garrard, Sir Cecil Clementi Smith, Rev. A. Oliver, Mr. G. Clark (Chairman to the Parish Council), Mr. W. Pearce (Vice-chairman), Councillors G. Timms, Dr. Alston, J. Nash, O. Odell, H. F. Woollatt, E. Smith, G. Russell, H. Ivory, C. J. Parfitt (Clerk to Parish Council), and Messrs. W. Seabrook, T. Clark, R. Jenkins, Sibley, Miller, T. Mylles, John. Chennells, Jesse Chennells, A. Warren, J. McCulloch, J. Holland, R. Clark, F. Wright, Cole, Wilsher, and J. Westwood.
 Mr. G. Clark, chairman, said he had called that meeting to ascertain whether they were in favour of providing a village hall for Wheathampstead. On May 17th the subject of build-

Despite having left Town Farm and moved to Gibraltar Lodge, Jesse continued to play an important part in the life of Wheathampstead, as shown by this report in the Herts Ad of 15 July 1899 where he attended a parish meeting to discuss whether a rate should be raised to pay for a new Village Hall to replace the one at the Congregational Church, which could be used only for events that were compatible with Nonconformist principles. After lively discussion, the motion was defeated – nine votes in favour and 25 against. Those present read like a list of the great and good of late 19th century Wheathampstead.

Jesse died on 21 June 1902. In his will, he left just £55 to his wife Charlotte as sole beneficiary, which suggests that he had transferred the bulk of his property into a trust.

Postscript

In 1901, Town Farm was being farmed by George Russell (49), a native of Wheathampstead, and his wife Emma (50) with the help of their son Frank who was 17.

In that same year, Chennells 'Chemist and grocer' shop was being run by Jesse's youngest brother John (70) and his wife Annie (59). It was also the village post office. Their son Frank (24) was living at home and working as a clerk in the post office. This photograph must have been taken before 1908 because the sign for The Bricklayers Arms, which closed in that year, is still in place. It seems likely that the lady standing in the shop doorway is Annie Chennells. The site is now occupied by John Curtis Estate Agents.



John Chennells died in on 31 December 1905. He is buried at St Helen's Church.

IMPORTANT SALE OF PROPERTIES.—On Friday in last week, Mr. S. Pryce Harding of Messrs Harding, and Son, auctioneers St. Albans, offered by auction at the Bull Inn, Wheathampstead, several valuable properties, by direction of Messrs Pryor, Reid, and Co., Limited. Lot 1, comprising the valuable freehold property lately known as the Two Brewers, situate in High-street, Wheathampstead, was sold to Mr. Julian Pearce for £530. Lot 2, comprising a freehold property in High-street, Wheathampstead, and lately known as the White Hart, was purchased by Mr. Samuel Odell for £500. Lot 3, a freehold property known as the Hope Brewery, situate on Brewer's Hill, was secured by Mrs. Chennells for £690, and Mr. A. F. Wilsher became the purchaser of lots 4 and 5, a freehold cottage and corner plot of land at Marford, for the sum of £210.

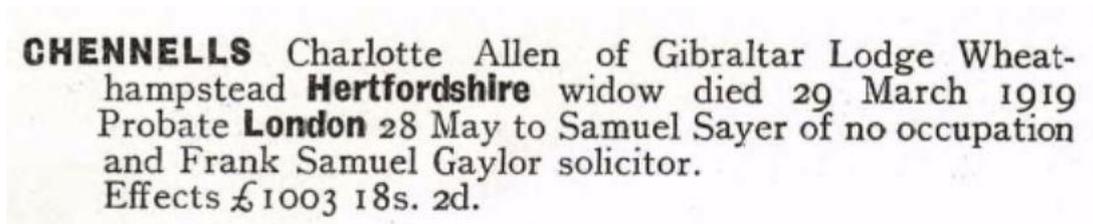
A Mrs Chennells bought the Hope Brewery in Wheathampstead as Lot 3 at an auction held at the Bull Inn in 1906. The brewery had closed in 1904 so Mrs Chennells must have bought the empty building.

It seems probable that this was Mrs Annie Chennells though Jesse's widow was still alive and living at Gibraltar Lodge.

In 1911, Annie Chennells, now a widow, was running the shop. Frank, now 34, was married to Stella (27) and was employed as the sub-postmaster. They lived at an address on Brewhouse Hill. He took many photographs in the village and produced postcards such as the one above.

Annie died in 1914 and is buried with John in St Helen's churchyard.

Jesse's widow Charlotte died in 1919, leaving an estate valued at £1003 18s 2d.



CHENNELLS Charlotte Allen of Gibraltar Lodge Wheathampstead **Hertfordshire** widow died 29 March 1919 Probate **London** 28 May to Samuel Sayer of no occupation and Frank Samuel Gaylor solicitor. Effects £1003 18s. 2d.

Edgar Chennells died in December 1919 of influenza that he probably contracted while on active service in 1918. His name is inscribed on the village War Memorial.

For more about the Chennells family in the 20th century, see 'High Street Map' in the History section of the Wheathampstead Heritage website at <http://www.wheathampsteadheritage.org.uk/highstreet/highstreethistory.asp> Click on 'John Curtis'.

Sources

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Patrick McNeill
November 2017