

**The History Of Begbroke Hill Farm 1734-1804  
(INCLUDING WHAT BECAME OF THE OWNERS AND THEIR FAMILIES)**

**by Mrs. C.J. Coppock ©**

Kezia Sellman of Hailey near Witney married Robert Fitzherbert on 17 January 1734 at Shipton-under-Wychwood but tragedy was to strike when after only seventeen months of married life Robert suddenly died. This must have been an awful time for the young Kezia as only four months later in the December of 1735 she gave birth to a son, Robert.

Kezia held the Fitzherbert estates in trust for Robert during which time, on 10 June 1745 she married for a second time to Thomas Hirons of St. Clements, Oxford. Life was again to test her strength of character when Robert suddenly died in the May of 1754 aged just 18. Kezia was living at Bladon at the time of her death in 1788 and contrary to many reports of the title to the Fitzherbert estates passing in their entirety to Kezia's niece Elizabeth Cockin at this time, Kezia's will makes no mention of this.

Kezia's niece Elizabeth Cockin (born 1750, daughter of William Cockin and Jane Fitzherbert who married at Shipton-under-Wychwood 25 November 1749), was at this point the only surviving member of the Fitzherbert family but she was not yet 21 so the title to the estates was held in trust by her father (see Bladon Award of 1767). Her mother Jane had died in 1752 giving birth to William, Elizabeth's brother, at Bladon, who subsequently died at the age of ten weeks.

Two miles away in the village of Cassington was a family of yeoman farmers named Taylor. Deposited family wills at the Oxfordshire Record Office show this family had resided here since at least the mid-1500's. It was from here that the Taylor connections with Begbroke Hill Farm originated, a William Taylor (baptised 29 Sept 1706) in the hamlet of Worton having married by license, a Hannah Haws from Oakley, Buckinghamshire, in 1739 at Waterperry.

William and Hannah had a number of children including two daughters, Mary and Elizabeth who died when young. This left the two sons Thomas (baptised 1739) and William (baptised 22 October 1749). It is shown in the records of the village of Stonesfield that Thomas married Mary Hounslow of that parish in 1766, but intensive research has so far failed to find any trace of the pair after this date.

In May 1764 Hannah's husband William died leaving her with son William.

A few months later Hannah was a married woman again, having remarried on 11 Sept 1764 at St. Peter's church in Cassington to William Cockin, father of Elizabeth and widower of Jane (nee Fitzherbert). Along with her son, Hannah also brought a number of small properties to the marriage including the Taylor home in Cassington which passed to her from her late husband. With young William and Elizabeth now being stepbrother/sister to each other and living under the very roof of the property which she was eventually to have title to once she turned twenty-one, the scene was set for a tempestuous period in the history of Begbroke Hill Farm.

It is a possibility that during this period in history the parents would have urged William and Elizabeth to marry. They eventually did so by license on 15 July 1773 at St. Michael's parish church, Begbroke in front of witnesses William Maylard of Bladon and John Prior although records also show that the marriage was due to take place the previous year, William having purchased a marriage license in 1772. However the reason for the delay is unclear.

After the marriage the couple went to live at Begbroke Hill Farm with William and Hannah Cockin (from Church Court records of 1790) and life there must have been difficult as the relationship between the newly-weds appears to have been a rather stormy one and there is some doubt as

to whether the marriage was ever consummated. Despite the fact that William Cockin and Hannah continued to live at the farm right up until their respective deaths in 1781 and 1778, after 11 years of marriage, in 1784, Elizabeth initiated an "Ecclesiastical Separation from Bed and Board and Mutual Cohabitation" in the Church Courts. (Documents of this case held at Lambeth Palace Library. Papers of the initial hearing of this case are also held in the Dept. of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.) This case she based on her husband's alleged adultery with housekeeper Elizabeth Russell and in the third of her allegations, maintains that the marriage had been consummated although William strenuously denied it.

There have been many publications over the years stating William Taylor was "a cruel and unworthy husband". Many people may have believed this but generally there is an underlying cause and this certainly appears to have been the case as the church court papers go on to allege that Elizabeth had for some time, since at least 1781 been conducting an affair with a Mr. John Field, a footman at Begbroke Hill Farm often taking him into her bedchamber when William was "from home". The two were also alleged to have frequented the "Sign of the Pyed Bull" (today the Punchbowl Inn on the corner of Hensington Road) in Woodstock.

During the case hearing, evidence was heard from a number of the servants and general staff at the house, but none state that William ever physically abused his wife during these trying times. Jonathon Savage, servant to Mr. Taylor, gave a most colourful account, stating that William was guilty of "treating her unlike a wife and calling her whore, threatening to flog her"....."refusing her Port wine and menaces against the servants if they got her wine"....."divesting her of the management of the house". Another servant, R. Burgin also went on to state that William was once seen "striking at her with the loaded end of a horsewhip". Servant Elizabeth Soden stated that Elizabeth Taylor has spoken to her about having had a miscarriage and another staff member Elizabeth Tolley, appears to confirm this in her evidence whereby she mentioned nothing about cruelty, but went on to say about "her screams in the night, blood in the bed and consequent illness".

Elizabeth Taylor "eloped" from the household in 1784 and went to live with friends sympathetic to her situation, but it remains a mystery as to why she began these proceedings in the same year, alleging adultery, when it was obvious that evidence of her own affair would become apparent during the hearings. It is true that William had started a relationship with Elizabeth Russell but as to when it is not clear, but the Rev.'s J. Tesh and W. Brady gave evidence during the hearings, to their baptism of two bastard children, William (baptised 2 May 1786) and Robert (baptised 11 May 1787) both of which William Taylor acknowledged as his own, but this was two years after the case was initiated.

In 1790 the case was finalised and Elizabeth was granted her separation. William had to, from that point, pay Elizabeth yearly alimony and he also had to pay for a residence for her in Brackley, Northants. It must be stressed here that, despite the separation, Elizabeth was still, in law, William's wife, not ex-wife, as many people over the years have mistakenly believed. Consequently, upon William's death she would have regained title to the estates which she had brought to the marriage.

William, Elizabeth Russell and the two boys lived at Begbroke Hill Farm as a family up until Elizabeth gave birth in 1791 to daughter Hannah and again in 1792 to another girl, Elizabeth after which Taylor had his solicitor draw up his Will.

In the Will it states that he had bought a house in Begbroke for son Robert along with other properties purchased at the same time in Kidlington. The house purchased for Robert was next to the schoolhouse in St. Michaels Lane, Begbroke but was pulled down years later when in the ownership of Sir George Dashwood.

According to popular belief, William was "way-laid" by "footpads" somewhere along the Oxford - Woodstock Road in May 1797, although to date no supporting evidence has been uncovered. Before he died however, William added a second codicil to his Will appointing friends Joseph Shepperd and John North, along with Elizabeth Russell, his executors. It does appear that his strength was dwindling as it is signed in a very shaky hand. He was to succumb to his injuries a short time later being buried in Cassington on 4 June 1797.

Included in William's estate were a number of properties originally bought by his father which had then passed to him through his mother. One of these was a bakehouse in Long Hanborough which at the time of Williams death, was in the occupation of a Samuel Harris and was subsequently sold to him by Williams' executors in 1799. Then in 1802, the property in Begbroke bought for Robert was sold by Russell, North and Shepperd and a portion of the monies from this sale was taken by Elizabeth Taylor being William's widow.

It was to be a busy time for William's executors. The "Index to the Deeds of the Settled Estates of Blenheim" held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford show that also that year, the executors appeared in the Manorial Court at Woodstock. This large tome gives details of the parties named in various deeds, indentures etc relating to properties which over the years have come to form the Blenheim estates. It states that the then Duke of Marlborough purchased a number of properties some of which had originally been bought by Taylors father, William, and uncle, Robert Taylor of Cassington, in the early 1700's. There is no mention of the Taylor family home in Cassington although Land Tax records show the Duke in possession from 1799. (The writer has for some years requested access to William Taylor's administration papers, which, according to the "Index to the Deeds of the Settled Estates of Blenheim" are held in the Muniment Room at Blenheim Palace. We have had no help whatsoever from the Estate Office so this line of research has proved a dead-end.)

Title to Elizabeth's estates had, by law, passed to William upon their marriage (a married woman was unable to hold title to property until the Gladstone government passed the Married Womens Property Act in the late 1800's) and with her husband's death she found herself once again in control. From this point Begbroke Hill was no longer to be home to Elizabeth Russell and the children and their lives were to change dramatically.

They moved to Kidlington and subsequently to Old Headington where Elizabeth Russell became housekeeper to her brother Samuel (his Will of 1807). The two teenage boys were apprenticed, William to a mason and Robert to a carpenter while Hannah and her sister Elizabeth, both having been well educated, particularly in music, were eventually to become school-teachers in Headington (from a letter written by Begbroke schoolteacher Dame Parker in the 1800's and deposited in the Oxfordshire Record Office).

Elizabeth Taylor died at her home in Brackley, Northamptonshire and was buried in St. Michaels churchyard, Begbroke, her Will distributing the estate amongst several of her former friends and associates. Contrary to popular belief, her Will also makes no mention of her having left 50pounds to each of the Taylor-Russell children as mentioned in the letter by Dame Parker.

Hannah was later committed to Littlemore Asylum entering the institution on 29 July 1846, aged 55 and Oxfordshire Health Authority Archive records show she suffered from what we today would regard as depression. The records go on to state that she died of gradual decay at 11.20pm on 15 February 1868. She was buried in the grounds of the asylum.

The last record of her sister Elizabeth is in the Census of 1851 showing her as working at a house in Littlegate Street, Oxford as a servant.

William, the eldest of the boys, married twice, firstly to Elizabeth Rice in 1810, by whom there was six children and then for the second time to Elizabeth Sadler of Radley, Berkshire who at one stage was in the employ of a Professor Elvey, Professor of Music at New College (from Will of Mrs. Elvey in which Elizabeth was left a 20pound annuity). William died in 1851 and was buried in St. Ebbes churchyard while brother Robert had married Sarah Fry at St. Andrews church, Old Headington in 1817. Robert and Sarah had seven children over the years, their eldest son Alfred (born 1822) being the writers grandfather. By the time of the 1851 census Robert had lost his sight but he and his family continued on in Old Headington until his death on Christmas Day 1871, his final years having been spent on parish relief. He was buried in St. Andrews churchyard in the name of 'Robert Russell'.

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#### **SOURCES:**

**\*\* ALL BIRTHS, MARRIAGES AND DEATHS ARE TAKEN FROM OXFORDSHIRE PARISH REGISTERS.\*\***

**DEPOSITED WILLS AND ADMONS IN OXFORDSHIRE RECORD OFFICE:**

1. William Taylor of Worton (parish of Cassington), 1608.
2. Avis Taylor of Cassington, 1624.
3. Robert Taylor of Cassington, 1635.
4. Elizabeth Taylor (nee Penn) of Cassington, 1702. (ADMON).
5. Robert Taylor of Cassington, 1724.
6. Hannah Taylor (nee Haws), 1764 (ADMON).
7. Kezia Hirons (nee Fitzherbert, nee Sellman), 1788.
8. William Taylor of Cassington/Begbroke, 1797. (with 2 codicils).
9. Elizabeth Taylor (nee Cockin), 1804.
10. Samuel Russell of Headington, Oxford, 1807. (W272/3/10).
11. Mrs. Elvey (incl. papers from O.R.O's. Morrell Collection).
12. Samuel Harris of Long Hanborough, 1818. (W222.42;263/2/5).

#### **MARRIAGE LICENSES OF:**

13. Hannah Haws (of Oakley, Bucks) and William Taylor of Cassington, 1739.
14. Hannah Taylor (nee Haws) and William Cockin of Bladon, 1764. (Ms. Oxf. Dioc. papers d90/1)
15. William Taylor (born Cassington) and Elizabeth Cockin, 1772 and 1773.
16. Ecclesiastical Separation from Bed, Board and Mutual Cohabitation case papers of 1784-90 brought between William Taylor and his wife Elizabeth (nee Cockin), held at Lambeth Palace Library and the Dept. of Western Manuscripts, Bodleian Library, Oxford. (Ref: Bbb1554/1; Bbb1554/2; E47/28)
17. Property indentures relating to house in Begbroke bought for Robert Taylor (bpt. 1787) by his father William (d.1797).  
(O.R.O. ref's: DASH XVII / i / 1-2-3-4-5 ] - Purchase of house; DASH XVII / i / 6; ] - Sale of house; DASH XVII / i / 7; ] - Sale of house)
18. Register of Electors for 1832 for the County of Oxford.
19. Plans of the Estates in Begbroke, Yarnton and Bladon belonging to Elizabeth Taylor in 1798 (Map Dept. Bodleian Library, Oxford).
20. Quarter Session Records for Oxfordshire.
21. Published Fitzherbert pedigree.
22. Bladon Award of 1767.
23. Land Tax Assessments for Begbroke (1760-1801); Cassington (1760-1831); Kidlington (1786-1831); Long Hanborough (1760-1831)
24. Kidlington Parish Enclosure Award and map (1810-18).

25. Oxfordshire Health Authority Archive admission registers, Case Books and Registers of Deaths.
26. Rent payment records for Long Hanborough, Cassington, Kidlington and Begbroke.
27. "Index to the Deeds of the Settled Estates of Blenheim", held in Bodleian Library.
28. Letter re Dame Parker (Begbroke schoolmistress) information concerning the Taylor children. Held in O.R.O., formerly in the Cassington Parish Chest.
29. Census Returns for Oxfordshire.

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9. And finally to Frances Sumsion (my late sister) formerly of Wheatley, Oxon who helped keep my interest in the family history alive by always reminding me about our grandmother Mary Ann who always kept a copy of William Taylor's will in her wicker basket on top of the wardrobe, forbidding anyone in the house to go near it during those final years of her life when she lived with us in the family home in Headington.