

# *The Bowdon Sheaf*

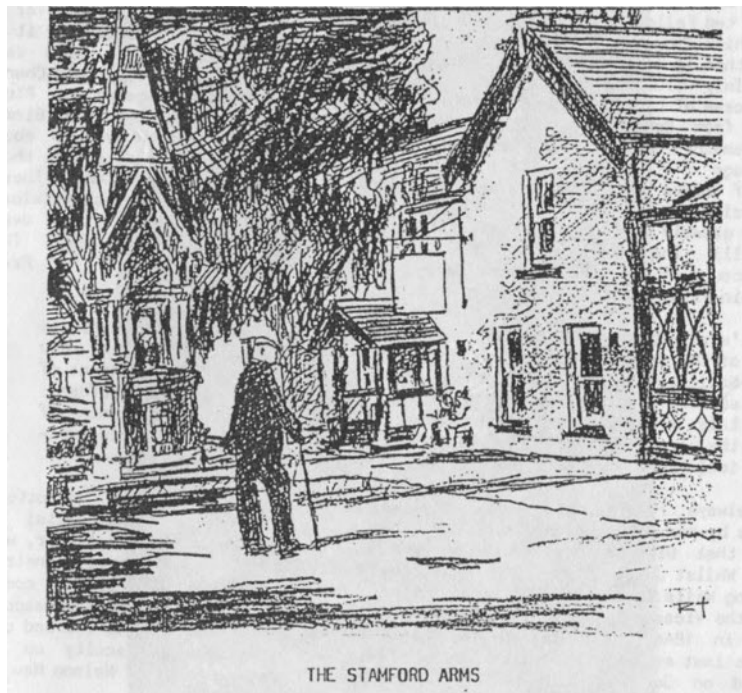
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**JAMES THOMAS LAW**  
**by Maurice Ridgway**

There is a portrait of George Henry Law in the drawing room of the Bishop's Palace at Wells where he became Bishop in 1824 having been Bishop of Chester from 1812. Whilst at Wells, where he died in 1845, he collected a great deal of the stained glass in the Palace and was responsible for demolishing part of the already ruined Great Hall at the Palace to make the grounds there more picturesque. It was however to his son James Thomas Law that he offered the living of Bowdon where he stayed from 1815 to 1821. The living was in the gift of the Bishop of Chester and as his father was the Bishop at the time it must have been a comparatively easy appointment.

James Thomas Law however had been born whilst his father was still a vicar in the Carlisle Diocese at Torpenhow on 8 December 1790. He received his education first at Carlisle Grammar School and then at Charterhouse, presumably the school kept by Dr Charles Burney the brother of Fanny Burner (Madame D'Arbly) the English novelist and diarist.

James Thomas Law's father later moved to Kelsall in Hertfordshire and then returned to the north as Bishop of Chester in 1812. It was the year James Thomas Law graduated at Christ's College Cambridge, and he proceeded to his Master of Arts in 1815. Meanwhile he was ordained deacon in September 1814 and priest in December the same year. He became Fellow of Christ's in September 1814, which he held until 1817.

His ordination to the priesthood was probably hurried as he was appointed Vicar of Bowdon on 22 July 1815. The living was worth £250. He then obtained a dispensation (from his father) to hold the living of Tattenhall worth £500 in 1816 and two years later this was extended to hold the Vicarage of Childwall in Lancashire, worth £300, which he later transferred to his brother Henry in 1822. To further supplement his income he became prebendary of Chester in 1818 which he held until 1828 and in July 1818, prebendary also of Lichfield. Along with two Fellowships at this time he was receiving an income of well over £1000 a year which in those days was a very large income. The old adage that it is not every man that is born to be Vicar of Bowdon (certainly as old as the 17th century) was certainly true in this case. Whilst still at Bowdon he was appointed Chancellor of the Diocese of Lichfield, and in 1824 Commissary of the Archdeaconry of Richmond.

He moved from Bowdon in 1826 and became Vicar of Harborne now a suburb of Birmingham where he remained until 1845. His move from Bowdon may have been brought about by his marriage (16 December 1820) at Bowdon to Lady Henrietta Charlotte Grey the elder daughter of George Henry Harry the sixth Earl of Stamford and Warrington. There are still stories about the couple which have become part of the Bowdon folklore, how the family greatly objecting to the marriage prompted the couple to elope over the garden wall!

The marriage is recorded in the Bowdon Marriage Register. There is a short account of his work at Harborne in 'Harborne once upon a Time' by Tom Presterne published in 1913. Here it relates how he was... 'a very business like man. He was the means of causing the interests of the free School in High Street to be transferred to the new National Schools near the Church. He obtained the consent of all the trustees except one who was very stubborn in his refusal; this refusal was however overcome by the tactful management of the vicar. The Rev. Chancellor Law was an authority on Ecclesiastical Law.' He was always referred to as Chancellor Law, and his wife as 'Lady Charlotte'. His father was by now Bishop of Wells and in 1840 he was appointed by him as special commissary of that Diocese presumably because of the ill-health of his father, who died in 1845. Whilst James Thomas Law held the appointment he was partly instrumental in founding Wells Theological College. He resigned the appointment of special commissary in 1844, the Vicarage of Harborne in 1845 and the Commissary of the Archdeaconry of Richmond in 1846 but retained the Chancellorship of Lichfield until the end of 1873.

One of his last acts as Chancellor of Lichfield was to issue a faculty on January 1873, and on January 12th 1874 his successor Bishop Hobhouse of Nelson New Zealand was admitted as Chancellor in his stead.

A superficial reading of these details would seem to indicate that he merely sought promotion, but he coupled with his positions a lively responsibility. Not only was he responsible for the founding of Wells Theological College, but also interested himself in the Birmingham School of Medicine and Surgery at Queens College Birmingham where he was appointed Warden in 1846, (Shades of) and also helped to found Lichfield Theological College.

Tom Presterne, who wrote 'Harborne once upon a time', and who knew him, ought to have the last word which he records in his history... 'He was a fine type of his time, very slim, rather tall, an oblong face, slightly bronzed complexion, black piercing eyes, and snow white hair rather bristly; and what was very singular at that time, he had a stubby moustache. This is as I saw him. His sermons were like homilies, and so interesting that I though a lad, could listen attentively. Although a dignitary, he was very homely with his parishioners, when they met in vestry on the business matters of the Church. His remarks were familiar and forcible, and were frequently quoted in the village. He was Vicar here (at Harborne) from 1825 to 1845. He resigned, and I believe he lived afterwards and died at Stapeley House Harborne...'

The date of his death was 22 February 1876, he was 86. His name appears in the Dictionary of National Biography volume xxxii (1892 Edition) where it records seven works by Law.



The Rev<sup>d</sup>. James Thomas Law

**J. M. D. MEIKLEJOHN: AN EDUCATIONAL PIONEER**  
by Myra Kendrick

Directories and guides to the Altrincham and district area of Cheshire in the late 1850's and early 60's contain references to a boys' school in Bowdon named Rosehill School and to its headmaster, John Meiklejohn. According to the Bowdon Census of 1861, this was a modest establishment consisting of eight boarders, one assistant master and four servants, in addition to Meiklejohn himself. Day pupils are not mentioned, though there is evidence that local boys attended.

The school was situated in the area of Bowdon on the southerly slope of the hill, still popular for private schools and once known as Rosehill, hence the school's name. Its owner is mentioned in Balshaw 'A Stranger's Guide to Altrincham' as John Meiklejohn, M.D., which letters do not appear to represent a medical degree, but elements in his name: in full John Miller Dow Meiklejohn. White's Directory of 1860 gives his degree correctly as M.A., and the 1861 census return tells us that he was then aged thirty, a bachelor from Scotland.

This young man, full of energy and enterprise, was to make this school highly respected locally and for himself to make a name through his educational work both nationally and internationally.

Meiklejohn was born in Edinburgh on 11th July 1830, the son of a schoolmaster who himself ran a private school at which he educated his own son. Later John Meiklejohn taught in his father's school and at the same time studied at Edinburgh University for his Master's degree, finally graduating in 1858 after his move to Bowdon. No doubt he completed his studies some time before, but did not pay for graduation until the comparatively late age of twenty-eight. He was undoubtedly an able student, as in 1853 the university awarded him a gold medal for Latin. It is interesting to note that the M.A. degree course at Edinburgh at that date included studies in Mathematics and Natural Philosophy, i.e. Astronomy, Hydrostatics and Optics.

It would be interesting to know what led to his move to Bowdon, only recently opened up as a residential area for Manchester business and professional men. Since the opening in 1849 of the Manchester to Altrincham and Bowdon railway, a much faster means of transport than the earlier horse-drawn boats on the Bridgewater Canal, the population of Bowdon was growing fast, and there was a great need for good schools. But how did this become known to a young man born and still living in Edinburgh? The move may have been made about 1858. The school seems to have established itself quickly and to have lasted until about 1867, at which date we can read in a letter from a local resident of a presentation to the headmaster by past and present pupils of a silver service; evidently a retirement present. Meiklejohn was stated to be "away to Scotland tomorrow".

Morris's Directory of Cheshire for 1864 contains an interesting advertisement for the school, suggesting that Meiklejohn was in advance of his time in educational theory and practice. He speaks of limiting the number of pupils, and of providing a resident master for every twelve boys, thus assuring individual attention for each pupil.

He stressed the point that "average and the duller boys" received as much care and attention as the brighter ones. A good foundation was evidently laid in basic subjects such as "English Composition, Arithmetic, Writing and Reading", from which the curriculum broadened out to include classical and modern languages, mathematics, English Literature, History, Geography and other unspecified subjects. No mention is made of the sciences, but it is likely that certain boys received such instruction.

Meiklejohn was forward-looking enough to see the advantages of preparing pupils for the Oxford Local Examination as soon as they were instituted, in 1858, and as well he entered candidates for the then new Civil Service examinations, instituted in 1855. He was pleased with his boys' results in both types of examination. A note of pride in his equipment appears at the end of the advertisement: "The best English and German maps - Historical and Geographical - and the best apparatus of every kind, are used in the school

In 1864 he married. As his first child was born in 1865, the Meiklejohn sons could not have been educated at Rosehill School, for at a date difficult to fix exactly, but certainly before the 1871 census, Meiklejohn moved to London and the school disappeared from local records. The name was used again some years later by A J Pearce for his boarding and day school for boys.

Among Meiklejohn's non-local pupils was the youngest son of a famous American hydrographer, Matthew Fontaine Maury, whose great work was the charting of main ocean currents. Meiklejohn's gift for teaching had been brought to Maury's notice some years earlier, before the move to Bowdon, by the Astronomer Royal of Scotland whom Maury had asked to recommend a tutor for the sons of some of his colleagues and himself, stipulating that he wanted, not a purely classical education, but one giving attention to mathematics and science. So Meiklejohn was appointed and developed a firm friendship with Maury; hence the appearance of the youngest Maury boy at Rosehill School, where he did well in a rigorous regime, afterwards passing on to higher scientific education in London. It is evident that Meiklejohn found a great lack of suitable textbooks for use in his school, for he set about to write and publish his own in a range of subjects including English language and literature, history and geography. Bartholomews of Edinburgh published his Comparative Atlas, Physical and Political, and Chambers his English readers, though eventually, years after leaving Bowdon, he himself took over the London publishing firm of A M Holden, which, after his father's death, one of his sons carried on under the name of Meiklejohn and Son.

John Meiklejohn's career developed rapidly after his move away from Bowdon. He became successively an Inspector of schools in the year (1870) of the education act that established compulsory elementary education for all children; an Endowed Schools Commissioner in Scotland (1874) and the first Professor of Education at the University of St. Andrews (1876). He lectured widely on educational topics, at teacher training institutions such as the College of Preceptors and at educational conferences up and down the country, and was an eloquent and entertaining speaker. He became an examiner for the Oxford and Cambridge Local and the Civil Service Examinations, and through his textbooks for use in schools he had a world-wide influence. He was indeed a man for his time, helping to implement the great educational movements of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His own theory and practice were deeply influenced by the epoch-making work of the continental educational theorists Froebel and Pestalozzi. For instance he deplored the concept of a teacher as one who poured information into the receptive mind of the pupil. He believed in developing the child's whole personality, drawing out his interests and encouraging him to find out for himself through the exploration of books. He discouraged over-reliance on learning by rote, once so popular in schools. The small classes he advertised as a feature of his school in Bowdon were ideal for putting such theories into practice. Such are still the aims and ideals of many educationalists, although financial pressures have hampered their translation into practice.

This small Cheshire school then was the starting-point for the career of a man of ideas, wit and wisdom whose influence was indeed far-reaching.

A strong debt is owed to Miss Mary G Goss, Staff Inspector, Geography, I.L.E.A., retired, and to the Sub-Librarian, Edinburgh University and the Keeper of the Muniments, St. Andrews University.



**EXTRACTS FROM THE WILL OF JAMES WATMOUGH  
VICAR OF BOWDON 1647-1660  
by Marjorie Cox**

James Watmough, of Loton, Lancashire, was a scholar of Brasenose College, Oxford and graduated B.A. in 1638. In the upheaval of the Civil War he was given the living of Bowdon in March, 1647, as a tested Puritan clergyman. His will is dated 15 March, 1658, Old Style (the year beginning on March 25th) i.e. by our reckoning 1659, and was proved in 1661. The special interest of Watmough's will lies in the large number of specific bequests. From the clothing and personal belongings we gain some picture of the outward man the several pairs of carefully distinguished gloves, the walking staff, the 'birdeing piece' c.f. fowling piece, the old black cloak.

The named books which he bequeathed to lay friends and relations show a breadth of reading. In addition to contemporary books of sermons, meditations and essays (two by bishops), he left works which show scientific leanings - Pliny's Natural History, Francis Bacon's Natural History and Nathanael Carpenter's treatise on geography. Two members of the local gentry are mentioned: Thomas Brereton of Ashley, who built the chapel at Ashley Hall and was buried at Bowdon in 1660 and Robert Tipping, the inventory of whose own possessions, taken in 1663, included several maps. Watmough's 'loving kinsman', William Bentley of Northwich, was an interesting figure. He was an active Parliamentarian in the Civil War, a practising physician, an influential feoffee of the grammar school at Northwich and a scholarly collector of books.

**Introduction**

"In the name of God Amen the fifteenth daie of March in the yeare of our Lord God according to the accompt now used in England one thousand sixe hundered fiftie and eight, I James Watmough of Bowdon in the Countie of Chester Clerke beinge sicke and weake in bodie but of good and perfect memorie praised bee God for the same doe make and ordeyne this my last will 4 testament In m a m e r & forme followeing .... Also itt is my will and mind that my noates 4 manuscripts shall bee preserved & kept entire safe for the use of my eldest sonne, Also I doe hereby give & bequeath to my wellbeloved Unckle John Sorocold of Loton in the County of Lancaster gentlmm the walkinge staffe wch Mr Brereton of Ashley gave mee Also I doe hereby give & bequeath my best paire of Gloves and my best hatte to my brother Richard Watmough & I doe give & bequeath to my brother Robert Watmough my best paire of Bootes: and the birdeing piece wch Hamnett Burges hath Alsoe I doe hereby give & bequeath to my deare mother my little ringe which hath a stone therein entreateing her acceptance thereof: Also I doe hereby give & bequeath to my sister Margaret the wife of Raphe Lowe gen. my paire of plaine Cordivant gloves, Also I doe hereby give to my servant William Barrett one suite of my cloathes such as my executors shall thincke fitt, Also I doe hereby give & bequeath to my servant Margaret Owen my old blacke Cloake, Alsoe I doe hereby give to my servants John Spakeman & Ellen Shelmerdine two shillings & sixe pence apiece: Alsoe I doe hereby give & bequeath to my loving kinsman William Bentley of Northwich in the County of Chester gentlmm a Booke in my studie entituled Plinies naturall Historie; And I doe hereby give & bequeath to my brother in lawe Raphe Lowndes of Ashley two bookes in my studie of the Lord Bacons the one called his naturall historie and the other conteyneinge certaine Statutes Alsoe I doe give & bequeath to my sister in lawe Elizabeth Lowndes wife of the said Raphe Lowndes doctor Sandersons sermons now in her husband custodie & the knife which was my brother John Judsons, Alsoe I doe give & bequeath to my Nephew John Lowndes sonne of the sd Raphe Lowndes the Booke called Doctor Halls meditations; Alsoe I doe hereby give & bequeath to my Cozen James Watmough who now lives with mee, the little Bible which hee now hath & the book entituled Felthams Resolves. Also I doe hereby give & bequeath to my aforesaid Brother in lawe Raphe Lowe my gloves that have the blacke Fringes; Alsoe I doe give to Elizabeth Hunt of Bowdon widowe two shillings & sixepence,

Alsoe I doe hereby desire Mr Dunster of Northenden to preach my funerall sermon.... And I doe hereby give to Mr Robert Tippinge the booke in my studie entituled Carpenters Geographie; Alsoe I doe give to my said son John Watmoughthe bible with my Name upon itt & the bible wch I preach in and my seale. Alsoe I doe give & bequeath to Nathan Ashton my paire of Shooes; Alsoe I doe hereby give 4 bequeath to Thomas Brereton of Ashley Esq. the booke entituled the Miscelaneous historie to Mrs Brereton of Ashley the book e entituled the blessed man written by Mr Bolton...."

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### **THE STAMFORD ARMS AND THE GRIFFIN** **by John Chartres**

The layout of most English villages includes the juxtaposition of church and public house. Bowdon may therefore be regarded as curious in having the juxtaposition of a large church and two quite large public houses in its centre. Written history 'remains silent' about the exact origins of The Griffin and The Stamford Arms. However it can be fairly safely assumed out of some documentation and passed-down memories that The Griffin was the earlier of the two establishments to be described as 'public houses' or 'inns'. The Griffin was probably not quite far enough South-West of Manchester on the Chester road to have been a coach staging post, this role probably first falling to The Swan at Bucklow Hill. Nevertheless records obtainable indicate that The Griffin certainly included livery stabling amongst its facilities as well as the normal arrangements for farmers to conduct their business transactions in comfort on market days. The origin of the name 'Griffin' poses many intriguing possibilities. A 'Griffin', of course, is a mythical monster (occasionally spelt as Griffon, Gryphon, etc) and the offspring of a lion and an eagle.

The present pub sign depicts such an animal. How did 'our pub' come to be called 'The Griffin'? There is a possible explanation in the existence of a Griffin family of 'The Manor Bartherton' (or 'Betherton') near Nantwich in the 13th century. This was apparently a Cheshire family of considerable substance, so that somewhere down the line the name may have been conferred upon the inn. 'Griffin' is NOT a common public house name. The most intriguing, and enjoyable story which this author has heard about the origins of the next-door Stamford Arms is that the building was originally a farmhouse; that the local farm workers preferred to refresh themselves out of sight and sound of their 'masters' and that the farmer's wife agreed to brew and serve ale to them in the privacy of her kitchen. Thus there arose, it would seem, something akin to an 'Officers' Mess' and an 'Other Ranks' Mess' in Bowdon.

The records held by the two brewery companies now administering the two Houses (Boddingtons in the case of The Stamford Arms and Wilsons in the case of The Griffin) begin no earlier than 1885. Both sets of records, in the form of 'indentures' relate to the leasing of the two establishments by the trustees of the then deceased Harry, Earl of Stamford and Warrington and of his widow, Catherine, the Countess. Documents relating to The Griffin show that in 1886, John Hunt obtained a lease at the rate of £75 per annum for 14 years. He later sold out to William Trevillier of Booth Street Manchester for £1,550; and in 1891 Arthur Oxley acquired it for the same sum, the whole 'messuage' including three roods and seven perches — 5,980 square yards, it seems.

Other negotiations at the beginning of the 20th century placed The Griffin in the hands of Wilsons Brewery, earlier known as Key & Whittaker. The Boddington Brewery records show that in 1885 Alfred Ling obtained a lease of The Stafford Arms at a rental of £84 per annum and had to insure the premises for £1,000. In 1899 Mary Ling (who was either the widow or the daughter of Alfred, and whose name is recalled by many Bowdon residents) bought the property for £5,000 under a mortgage arrangement with Boddingtons Brewery. It seems probable that both establishments became 'managed houses' under the ownership of the two breweries from the early years of this century. Both seem to have prospered.

One of the interesting developments was the building of 'The Pavilion'; an extension of The Stamford Arms, abutting on to The Griffin. It was largely a wooden construction designed to provide facilities for dancing and other social activities. Many Bowdon residents probably still remember the enjoyment of slow waltzes and quick steps on the sprung floor of The Pavilion in the years when so many meetings, so many courtships and so many happy marriages owed their beginnings to those magic words: 'Would you like to have this dance with me?' The Pavilion went on to provide this form of enjoyment into the Second World War (and what an important morale-builder a well-conducted dance floor was in those days) but eventually fell into disrepair until the day when Fire Prevention Officers declared it unsafe for this sort of activity.

It reverted to the mundane task of being a storeroom for all sorts of unwanted objects, Although its exterior, linking the two public houses and curving around the bend in the road opposite the church still made it attractive to the outside viewer. In recent years however, Boddingtons have assessed its potential, invested a very large sum of money in it and have produced another attractive asset to Bowdon. Almost concurrently Wilsons Brewery have invested in The Griffin. The present decor in The Pavilion has something about the late '20s and the '30s in it, plus something redolent of Somerset Maugham, the Raffles Hotel in Singapore and the Dragon Room in Kuala Lumpur. The Bowdon Sheaf does not aspire to provide an 'Eating Out' feature for its readers but it can be recorded that this writer and 'his companion' have eaten well at both establishments at prices which their colleagues on certain national newspapers would probably not even both to put on their expense accounts.

