

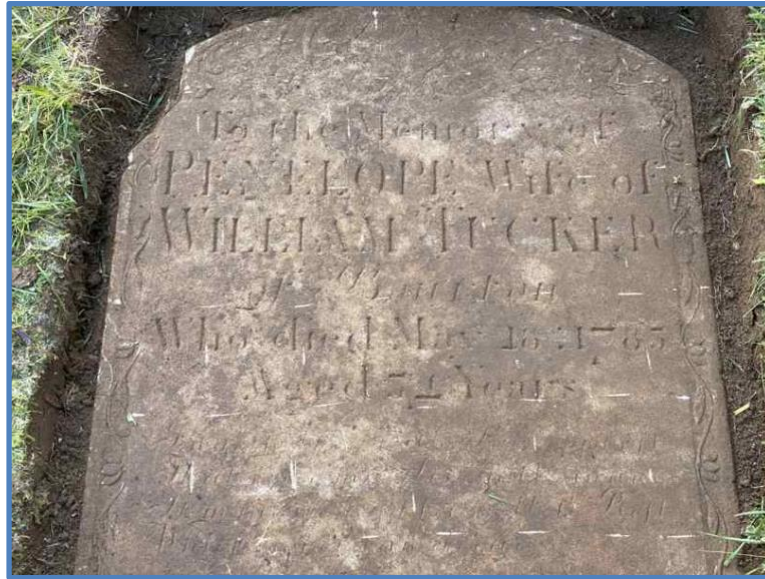
# The Tuckers of Bourton

Researched and collated by Neil B. Maw

When looking at Bourton House, now the private school known as Pinewood, it is tempting to imagine that it must have been the seat of an ancient family. However, an examination of the original part of the house places it firmly in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, the occupiers at that time, the Tuckers, were the original builders. From what is known so far, the story of the Tuckers is one of rags to riches. (Bourton House below from 1910. Courtesy of Paul Williams)



To perhaps learn more of the Tuckers, we have gathered what personal information we have so far and put it into a family tree. The original Tucker who brought the family name to Bourton was William who came from the village of Bishopstone, just a few miles away. William married Penelope Edwards in 1766 but she died in May 1785 with no recorded children. Her gravestone in St Andrew's Churchyard, Shrivenham, provided the information that she and William were at that time living in Bourton. (See below).



William was soon re-married to a lady called Dorothy but there is no record of the marriage in parish documents. They produced their first child who was son William in 1786 and Mary the following year. From a newspaper article (Swindon Advertiser 25<sup>th</sup> Jan 1875) we learn that it was Mary who would be instrumental in the outcome of the family fortunes. We also learn that William and Dorothy lived in a cottage in Upper Bourton and that William ran a small shop. They eventually had seven sons and two daughters. The sons were sent to school at Bishopstone. The eldest daughter Mary, when old enough, was sent out to service with a family in Swindon. When that came to an end, a lady in Swindon obtained a situation for her as a domestic servant in London. In time she was to marry her boss Mr Brown who with a partner called John Baker, ran a successful business as Silk Brokers. Upon the death of her husband, Mary married John Baker.

Another newspaper article included that there was a local legend that Mary's younger brother, Henry, walked to London to find work, clad only in his breeches and stockings. The story continued that a relative got him work and he rose to great wealth. If the first part of the story is discounted as romantic folklore, the rest of the story is true. Henry did go to London on the invitation of Mary, to ask him to join the Silk business and it's true to say that he thrived. (Wilts & Glos Standard 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan 1875). Another newspaper article stated that Henry was very proud of the fact that he was the son of a Berkshire Yeoman, and an agricultural family; that he travelled to London in 1819 and entered the business of John Baker, his

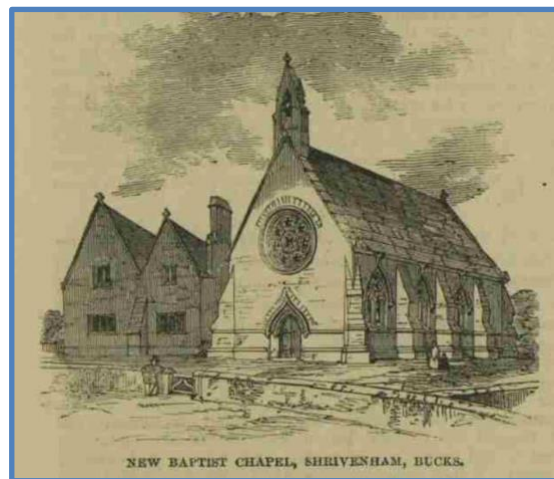
brother-in-law, who was a Silk Printer of West Ham. (North Wilts Herald 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan 1875). A few years later Henry and his brother Joseph were taken into partnership, the firm being called Baker, Tuckers & Co, and their head office address was 30 Gresham Street, London. Henry was the head of that company when he died in 1875. In addition, he also owned Silk Mills independently at Pendleton near Manchester and Macclesfield, superintended by his nephew, Henry Mead, and also Castle Mills at Rochdale, run by Samuel Mead, another nephew, and he employed thousands of workers.

In 1833 he married a lady reputed to be from a good family in Bedfordshire, Elizabeth Maddison. They would make visits to Henry's birthplace of Bourton and would occupy the house next to the farm of George Pocock. (More on this property later). Henry and Elizabeth were shocked and saddened by the wretched conditions of the local farm workers at Bourton and the poor impoverished state in which they were forced to raise their children with so little wages. They were determined to do something about it and started to use their fortune by buying up any property and land in Bourton as it came up for sale and gradually, Henry and his brother John, owned the greater part of the village.

In 1845 Henry commissioned the building of Bourton House. Pevsner in his book of Berkshire buildings (Page 92) noted that it was designed and built by Frederic Ordish at a cost of £6,650 and we know from an Indenture dated 1847 that it was built by that date and occupied by Samuel Argill Bates a farmer. There are also numerous newspaper advertisements confirming that it was in existence by 1845. (Below. Bourton House today - much extended and now Pinewood School).



Henry and Elizabeth, although of the faith of the Church of England, had attended sermons given by the Rev. Baptist Wriothsesley Noel (1798-1873). He was minister of St John's Chapel, Bedford Row, London from 1827 to 1848. In 1849 he became a Baptist minister and pastor of the nearby John Street Baptist Church in Bloomsbury. They were very impressed with what he said and there were certain elements of the episcopal church at that time they were unhappy with, so both became members of the Baptist community. Many of the Church of England, Diocesan Clergy were not happy with what they believed to be and indeed called, 'Dissenters.' The ruling, land owning classes became increasingly alarmed at the rapid rise of Baptist and Methodist churches, and the huge numbers of the working-class people that they were attracting. It was a similar case in many of the villages throughout the country including the nearby village of Watchfield. Using his great wealth, Henry Tucker built a new Baptist Chapel in Bourton and next to it a house for the Minister. (Now the Village Hall & The Manse.). It was officially opened by Rev. Noel himself in November 1851. (Below. Illustrated London News 1<sup>st</sup> Nov 1851. For more information see SHS Listing N959. And how it looks today - The Village Hall. Photo by Neil B. Maw).





Previous to this, Henry along with his sister Mary Baker (nee Tucker) and brother Joseph had already built a school in the village in 1842. The building still stands today, located at the top of the hill in the centre of the village. It was a great success in that it gave the children of the farm workers of Bourton a good basic education, something at the time that was only available to those parents who could afford it. The school on the hill outgrew itself by 1907 and a new building was erected in Steppingstones Lane. But the legacy of it lasted for 130 years. (Below. First school 1842 & second 1907. To read more information on the school please see SHS Listing No N770).



Henry Tucker believed that good religious teaching went hand in hand with efficient cottage accommodation. His first experiment was to erect some cottages each with a good cellar, two rooms on the basement, two rooms over and the attic above. They proved expensive and Henry decided that it was too ambitious if he were to build many more. Later cottages were two basement rooms and three above, omitting the attic story. They were all built of stone with all the sanitary appliances and good-sized gardens. They were rented out typically for 2 shillings (10p) to two shillings and six pence (12.5p) per week. The Farmer's Gazette of 8<sup>th</sup> June 1861 reported that Henry Tucker had recently built several sets of five-roomed cottages containing three bedrooms and two living rooms at a cost not much exceeding £125 a-piece. In order to carry out the modernisation of the village, Henry had taken down all the old tiny, thatched cottages that agricultural workers were traditionally housed in; he considered them ashovels. Such were his strong opinions on the subject that in December 1860, at a dinner for the Faringdon Agricultural Library, he spoke at length about the problem, and a newspaper article based on his speech made for grim reading. (Essex Standard 28<sup>th</sup> Dec 1860). It highlighted stories of chronic overcrowding in insanitary conditions whereby farmers treated their workers worse than their animals. He was determined that the same could not be said about Bourton and as his family just about owned all the village, something could be done. It was the Tuckers, but especially Henry, who turned it into what became labelled a '*Model Village*.' (Below - the likely two expensive first cottages in the distance behind the Cross Tree circa 1910 and other cottages. Photo courtesy of Paul Williams).



A most cherished gift that Henry Tucker gave to Bourton was the introduction of his version of a Harvest Home. This was a celebration of Harvest and usually held in September, today often referred to as Harvest Festival. From various newspaper articles it's possible to learn much about them. There are several references to how Harvest Homes were conducted previous to Henry Tucker, with statements such as meetings of, *'Drunkenness, unrestrained rioting and excess.'* At the first Harvest Home held on the Tucker estate in 1858, one rule would apply that lasted through the Tucker dynasty - no alcohol. This sobering effect quite simply made the whole day more pleasant. The news reporter noted that, *'In the park, immediately in front of the mansion, on Friday last was erected a monster tent, underneath which was arranged tables and seats for the accommodation of about 200 persons, and at half past three the tables had been beautifully supplied with beef and mutton, vegetables and plum pudding, each seat became occupied by the labourers and their wives employed on the estate.'* (Swindon Advertiser 6<sup>th</sup> September 1858). The article also summarised the transformation that had occurred in the village when stating, *'Within the last 15 years there has been erected wholly by the family, and principally by that worthy and distinguished member of it, Henry Tucker Esq., an entire new village at a cost amounting to many thousands of pounds.'* The description goes on to describe how the inside of the tent was decorated with flowers, bible quotes of love and respect for your fellow man, and thanks to God for a bountiful harvest. After dinner, everyone was encouraged to go out into the ornate grounds of Bourton House to play games and then back into the tent at six o'clock for the speeches - and there were lots of them, not only from the host Henry Tucker, but a plethora of religious leaders. This was followed by another act of kindness that would also last the Tucker dynasty when all the married women and widows would be invited to meet Mrs Tucker (Elizabeth) and each receive a quarter pound packet of tea. The men and boys each received a neckerchief - silk of course, the main business of the Tuckers and what had made them so very wealthy. The children were not forgotten. Outside of a Harvest Home a *'School Treat'* would include a special visit i.e. *'The annual treat of the school children of Bourton was held on the premises of Mr & Mrs Tucker of Bourton House. About 90 children assembled and were presented with prizes of articles of clothing.'* (Wilts & Glos Standard 20<sup>th</sup> August 1864).

The Harvest Home of 1864 provided the information of the building of what was to be another important building of from the Tucker dynasty. The local newspaper reported that,

*'Mr Tucker (Henry) has caused a room 100 feet long by 25 feet wide to be built in a yard at the back of his mansion and although the room is yet in an unfinished state, the Harvest Home dinner and services were held in it on Thurs last,'* (Swindon Advertiser 12<sup>th</sup> September 1864). This became commonly known as the *'Long Room'* for many subsequent years. The description continued, *'Two tables extending the whole length of the room having been well and abundantly furnished with roast beef and plum pudding, for 190 workmen and their wives employed on Mr Tucker's estate.'* And it was normal practise for Henry Tucker, members of his family, farm managers, to be carvers and servers. (Below. The row of cottages built by Henry Tucker for his workers. On the opposite side of the road to the left - The Long Room).

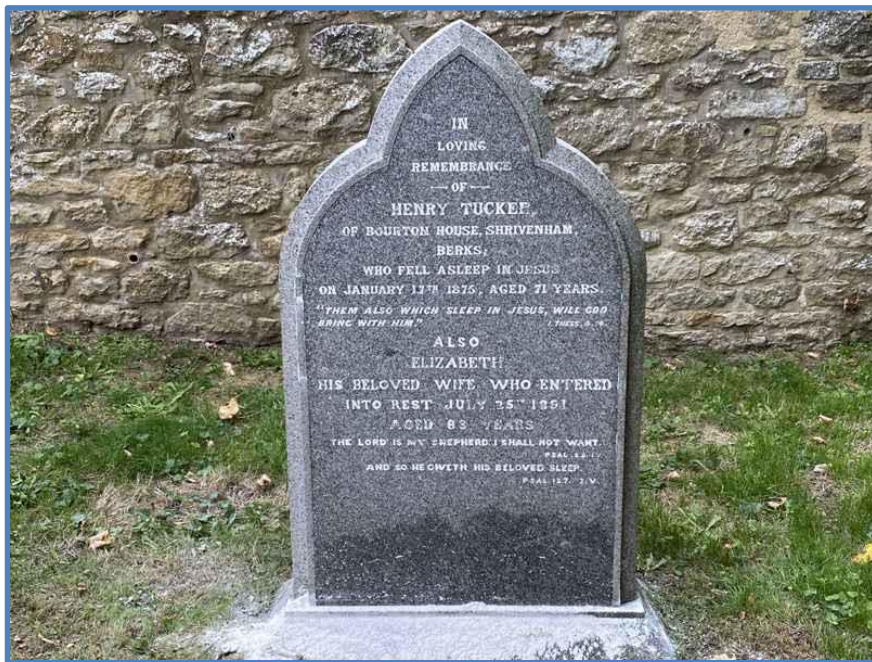


Henry was the obvious choice for public office. As early as 1850 he was a Justice of the Peace for Berkshire and an acting Magistrate on the Faringdon Division. He was also a Magistrate across the border in Wiltshire for the Swindon Division. In 1870 he was nominated High Sheriff of Berkshire. Just a year before he died, he stood as a Liberal candidate for parliament for Cricklade but his heart wasn't really in it and he was not elected. A newspaper article stated that early in 1875 he developed a liver infection and became extremely jaundiced.



(North Wilts Herald 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan 1875). He continued unwell and on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1875, after spending a considerable time outside Bourton House supervising the planting of some trees, he died suddenly the same evening, aged 72.

His funeral was carried out according to his wishes as a very private ceremony with no pomp, just family and invited guests only attending. (NWH 30<sup>th</sup> Jan 1875). It was held at the Baptist Chapel that he had erected in the village in 1851 with burial in the place reserved for himself and his wife. Elizabeth survived until 1891 when after two years of ill-health she passed away. Her funeral was on the 6<sup>th</sup> August and like Henry's, it was a private ceremony with family, friends and estate tenants in attendance. (Swindon Advertiser 6<sup>th</sup> August 1891. Below, their Memorial stone).



Another Tucker brother Thomas did not join in the family business of Silk, but instead preferred to be a farmer. His farm was at the bottom of Silver Street, Bourton on the right-hand side and would become known as Church Farm. (Demolished). The census of 1851 gave the information that his farm was quite large and consisted of 491 acres of land and he employed 27 labourers. In 1859 he gave a small piece of land and a substantial donation towards the building of a new church that was dedicated to St James. This was in response to the growing popularity of what the diocesan clergy and landed gentry were calling

dissenter churches. The same had happened in Watchfield with a new chapel having been built the previous year. Thomas had married a local girl Lucy Povey in 1833, the event being recorded in the Shrivenham parish register. They did have one child, a son called Benjamin who was baptised at St Andrew's, Shrivenham on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1834, but sadly died on 19<sup>th</sup> of the same month. From subsequent census records it would appear that they produced no further children. He died in 1868 and was buried on 17<sup>th</sup> April at Shrivenham. Lucy died in 1874 aged 68 and was buried at St Andrew's on the 8<sup>th</sup> June. (Below. Referred to as Church House but it was the farmhouse of Church Farm. Photo ex-RMCS Library).



Joseph was the third of the Tucker brothers. He entered the silk trade with his brothers William, John and Henry and his sister Mary. The census of 1841 showed that he was at West Ham Abbey silk works with his brother John. In that same year he married Maria Peacock in Pavenham in Bedfordshire. The 1851 census showed them both at a property in Woodford Street, West Ham and they also had a daughter Mary aged 8 and he is described as a '*Silk Warehouseman*.' There were two unmarried Peacock females listed who were sisters of Maria and they were described as '*Gentlewomen*' - that is to say they were ladies with money. The rest of the household consisted of a Governess, Nurse and five servants, clearly an affluent household. At the next census of 1861 he was recorded at Pavenham, Bedford with his family and the following census of 1871 the same. Joseph Tucker clearly enjoyed life there and became the Squire of the Manor at Pavenham Bury. Like his brothers that were

in the silk industry, Joseph became a very wealthy man. He mirrored everything that his family did at Bourton, so he did at Pavenham. He built new cottages, a school, repaired bridges and roads, held Harvest Homes in the grounds of his large house, and like his brother Henry, was a firm advocator of total abstinence from alcohol. In essence a huge benefactor from circa 1850 until his death on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1877 at Pavenham.

The earliest information on John Tucker has already been touched upon when he was recorded at West Ham Abbey in the same household as his brother Joseph in 1841. He is described on several occasions as a '*Manufacturer*' and his factory or works was at West Ham Abbey in London, Essex. His business however, consisted of the manufacture of silk items, such as handkerchiefs, neckties, but all beautifully adorned with decorative items such as flowers, known generally as silk printing. He also had a great interest in things agricultural and he bought up land for farming around West Ham which then was open agricultural land and not the city of London as it is today. He bought and kept a large number of animals with which he entered many shows and did exceedingly well with them on the whole. He was able to do this because similar to the rest of his brothers, he became extremely wealthy. On 13<sup>th</sup> May 1851 he married Sarah Smith, the daughter of Thomas Smith of Parsonage Farm, Highworth, she was aged 26 and he 44. The ceremony seemed to be a very quiet affair with no coverage of the event in the media other than a minimal few small lines. A man of his wealth marrying the daughter of an eminent farmer, landed gentry, would normally have prompted a much-detailed headline. But it was likely to have been a marriage of convenience because at that time, John Tucker was not a well man. A newspaper reported that his '*health had been in a declining state for a considerable period.*' He died at Parsonage Farm on the 5<sup>th</sup> August 1856 aged 49 years. (Essex Standard 8<sup>th</sup> August 1856). But the shock information came from the same newspaper on 20<sup>th</sup> August, '*The late John Tucker Esq., of West Ham Abbey, was interred in the family vault at Shrivenham, in Berkshire on Saturday week. Deceased was probably the heaviest man in this county, weighing, a little time previous to his death, upwards of 32 stones, or more than 4 cwt. (One hundredweight was 112pounds) No hearse could be procured large enough to convey the body to its last resting place; a temporary carriage had to be adapted for that purpose. He expired at the residence of his father-in-law, at Highworth, Wilts, where he was on a visit, and a portion of the front of the house had to be taken out before the body could be removed.*' This information also confirms that the westerly tomb of the two Tucker chest tombs at St Andrew's, Shrivenham, is a vault and likely that both of them are. (To read the full inscription please

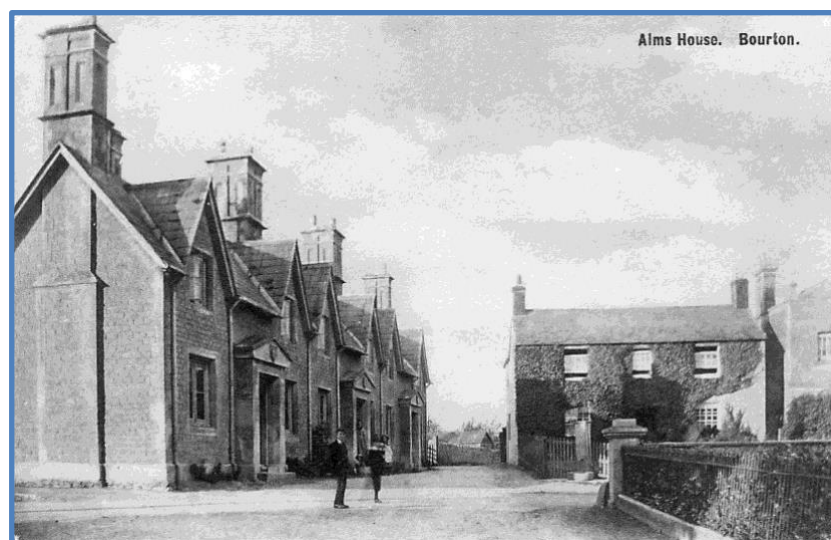
email SHS). In his Will he left his house and farm in Bourton to his wife Sarah. (Below. One of the Tucker Chest Memorials under which is a family vault).



At Lower Bourton there is a large and unusual property known for many years as Bourton Grange. It's unusual in that it consists of nine gables that have all been fashioned in the Dutch style. On two of the gables that face the main entrance, the adorning finials have the initials J.T. on one and the date 1849 on the other. Most commentators attribute this to John Tucker. Certainly it's most likely that the Tucker family were responsible for its erection, but was it John or perhaps Joseph ? When reading the above accounts of the two brothers, it is unlikely to have been Joseph. He had married Maria in 1841 in her home village of Pavenham in Bedfordshire and he enjoyed the rest of his life living there. His name was on the indenture of 1847 making him a Trustee of Bourton School, but he was one of most of the Tuckers. But Joseph had little need to return to his native village of Bourton. Therefore, the circumstances of the time would favour John. The school indenture of 1847 included John's name and also, he and business associate and brother-in-law John Baker, financed the building of the six Alms houses in the centre of the village. The indenture for them was



dated 1847 so it was likely that they had already been built by then. (Below. Alms Houses circa 1910 - Photo courtesy of Paul Williams).



Also completed two years after that was Bourton Grange. It's likely that it replaced an earlier house as in a newspaper article following the death of Henry Tucker it was stated that Henry and Elizabeth would make visits in the summer (they married in 1833) and would be, *'occupying the house now attached to the present farm of Mr George Pocock.'* Positive identification came from a hand-drawn map dated to 1865 which clearly shows that George Pocock occupied Manor Farmhouse next door to the Grange. The electoral register for 1847 (at that time only land and property owners could vote) recorded John Tucker of West Ham as owner of a freehold property at Bourton and John Allaway as the occupier. The register of 1855 recorded the same. Although no documentary evidence has yet been discovered, it seems justified to suggest that John Tucker built this lavish house for his young bride to be who was half his age. But John was not a healthy man as detailed above. In the last few years of his life, he must have allowed his business interests and farm at West Ham to be overseen by trusted staff whilst he was cared for by servants at his wife's family home, Parsonage Farm in Highworth, whilst John Allaway continued to occupy the Grange. (Below. The Grange from the air. Photo by Neil B. Maw).



After the death of her husband John, Sarah married William Farrow Lawrence on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1858 at Highworth. The census of 1861 confirmed that William was a member of the Royal College of Surgeons aged 40. At that time, they had a daughter together, Sarah aged one. The number of servants that were listed on the census suggested that they were an affluent family and that fact is confirmed with sight of the following census in 1871. The family had moved to Bath where they had a son, two more daughters and an impressive seven servants. But the following year tragedy struck when William died and a notice appeared in the newspaper by the family solicitors dealing with the probate. (NWH 16<sup>th</sup> Dec 1872). Sarah continued to live at Bath and died on the 25<sup>th</sup> July 1887. After the process of probate had been completed her estate at Bourton was put up for sale by auction on the 13<sup>th</sup> August 1888. (Cirencester Times 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1888). The advertisement containing the notice of sale included the information that the property had been in the occupation of John Allaway for 50 years, meaning that he must have arrived in Bourton circa 1838 and he was listed on the 1841 census. It seems likely that Sarah Lawrence (*nee* Smith) knew John Allaway from the time that she was married to John Tucker and must have been involved in the building of the Grange. It may account for why a newspaper article concerning the probate of John Allaway stated that, *'For over 50 years Mr Allaway occupied that farm, and during that long period his rent was never altered.'* (Swindon Advertiser 26<sup>th</sup> August 1893). Sarah was well catered for by John Tucker's Will and her second husband William Lawrence was a surgeon, so she was undoubtedly financially secure. This fact coupled with personally knowing John Allaway would likely account for why his rent was never altered. The article further stated that, *'In 1888 Mr*

*Allaway bought the farm, it costing him £6,400.* This opportunity to buy the farm was clearly brought about by the death of Sarah in 1887. (Below. More quality cottages for the workers built by Henry Tucker).



Tracing the life of the eldest son William has been more of a problem when compared to his younger brothers. He married Elizabeth Painter at Tubney, a small village in between Faringdon and Oxford, on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 1804. The next location available for him is from the census of 1841 when he's recorded at Creswells Farm, Stratfield Mortimer which is just to the south of Reading. At that point he has a son called William who is aged 25. A newspaper announcement in 1845 suggested that he must have had a daughter named Jane Mary when it described her as, '*daughter of Mr. William Tucker of Mortimer, Berks.*' On the 1<sup>st</sup> of February that year she married Edward Charles Curtis at All Saints Church, West Ham, where the Tuckers carried out a large amount of their silk business. (Chelmsford Chronicle 7<sup>th</sup> Feb 1845). By the time of the 1851 census, William was still farming at Mortimer aged 65 with his wife Elizabeth aged 70. By then he must have been thinking of retirement, but the Electoral Registers for Mortimer record that he was still at Creswells Farm right through until 1865. His death certificate recorded that he passed away at Kingsbury, Essex (Greater London) but the inscription on one of the two family burial vaults at St Andrew's Churchyard, Shrivenham, show that he died on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 1866 and was interred therein on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Whereas we know quite a lot about the elder Tucker girl Mary, we know nothing of her sister Elizabeth. Mary died on 31<sup>st</sup> May in 1845 and is buried at Shrivenham in one of the family vaults, but we have no information as to what became of her sister, if she married or when she died. Of the remaining brother Charles, we know very little other than he was 39 when he died in 1835 and buried next to his mother and father in Shrivenham churchyard.



The building of St James' church at Bourton (Berks Chronicle 13<sup>th</sup> August 1859)

**FARINGDON.**

The corner stone of the new church at Bourton, in the parish of Shrivenham, was laid on Monday last, under the most favourable circumstances, by the Viscountess Barrington. The ceremony was attended by most of the neighbouring clergy and gentry, and in the absence of the vicar, an appropriate address was delivered by the Rev. Canon Wordsworth, D.D., vicar of Stanford in the Vale. The church, which is to be dedicated to St. James, is to contain 160 sittings, and will be built from plans by Hugall and Johnson, architects, London, and when finished, will probably be one of the best specimens of architecture of its size in the neighbourhood. The contract has been entrusted to Mr. Birchall, of Shrivenham, and the stone work is to be executed by Messrs. Honeybone, of the same place. The site of the proposed church has been presented, together with a munificent donation to the building fund, by Mr. Thomas Tucker, of Bourton.



Upon the death of Elizabeth at Bourton House in 1891, the Tucker dynasty had come to an end. In 1894 the whole estate was put up for auction and was purchased by Cyril Kendall Butler. (Knighthood in 1920). Visitors to Bourton today may notice a distinct lack of typical rubblestone thatched cottages, that may be seen in most surrounding villages. It was the humanity and generosity of the Tuckers that had brought this about. They created the '*model*' village where estate workers were made to feel valued instead of what had been the normal practice of treating them worse than livestock.