

The New Chapel

Watchfield Minute Book (BRO. D/EpB C126)

At a meeting of the principal Rate Payers of Watchfield held at the house of Mr Bowles this 18th day of Feb 1857. Resolved:

1. That it is desirable that the Chapel of Ease at Watchfield should be rebuilt on the piece of ground belonging to the parish called Chapel Ham and that the money arising from the sale of the old materials of the former Chapel shall be applied to this purpose.
2. That the under mentioned four Rate Payers be a committee for carrying the above resolution into effect: - Mr Bowles, Mr Ferriman, Mr Giles, Mr Atkins.



The Chapel centre, built new in 1857, on the piece of ground called Chapel Ham

Watchfield Parish Register (BRO D/P 112C/1/1) states that, *'Watchfield Chapel having been examined and found in bad repair was taken down in 1788, the materials sold and the money arising from the sale of the materials was vested in the purchase of £260.4.1 three percent consols (Annuities) and the interest was appropriated and pay a Schoolmistress to instruct a certain number of the poor children of Watchfield. In consequence of the pulling down of the chapel the inhabitants of Watchfield were obliged to go to the Parish Church of Shrivenham, this being found inconvenient and the cause of*

many never coming to church at all. It was determined at a meeting held at Mr Bowles' at Watchfield in Feb 1857 that the chapel should be rebuilt on a piece of ground called Chapel Ham and that subscriptions should be commenced forthwith and the following persons and societies kindly gave their assistance.'

The Ven Archdeacon Berens, Vicar	£300
Viscount Barrington	£100
The Earl of Radnor	£100
Diocesan Church Building Society	£100
The Incorporate Society	£90
The Bishop of Oxford	£10
Miss Cleaver	£30
The Rev E. Bouverie	£10
Alfred Sartoris Esq	£20
The Rev J.F. Cleaver	£10
Mr E. Fairthorne	£10
General Fox	£5
The Rev C.B. Calley	£5
Mr Bowles	£5
Mr Ferriman	£5
Mr Giles	£5
Mr Carter	£2
George Atkins Esq	£5
J. Belcher	£5
Mr Rickards	£5
Mr A.W. Fairthorne	£5
Mr Willis	£5
The Queens Advocate	£5
Rev W. Chambers	£5
Henry Calley Esq	£5
Mr W. Browne	£1
Mrs W. Browne	£1
Sale of Old Materials	£240.7.3
Collection on the day of Consecration	£22

The new chapel was designed by Mr Steer, Diocesan Architect, and was built by Mr Burchall of Shrivenham. The Foundation stone was laid by Lady C. Berens, wife of Archdeacon Berens, Vicar, on Mon, May 18, 1857, and the chapel was consecrated by Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford on March 4, 1858. The prayers were said by Rev C.B. Calley, Curate. Mrs Calley played the Harmonium, Viscountess Barrington and the Hon Misses Barrington led the singing. The chapel was dedicated to St Thomas the Apostle, which was the same Saint the former one had been dedicated to. The chapel Yard was consecrated at the same time.'



But why should the Anglican hierarchy, some 70 years after the demise of the old chapel, decide that a new one was needed at that particular time? The reason cited within the parish register was that travelling to Shrivenham was inconvenient and became the cause of many parishioners never attending church at all. However, it has been suggested by Steven Carter of Nottingham, whilst researching his family connections in Watchfield, that other, more pressing reasons, were likely to have been the catalyst. A Religious Education teacher, Steven notes that, *'The Congregationalists (or Independents, i.e. independent from any bishops or other ruling system) reached Watchfield by January 1824. Robert Carter, grandson of churchwarden John Carter, registered his house to be set apart "for the worship of Almighty God", as was required by law. Robert's petition was co-signed by George Peapell and Samuel Brown. Samuel Brown later appears co-signing with Isaac Jefferies and Henry Larter when William Gardner petitions to register his Watchfield dwelling on 28 October 1829. In October 1833, Samuel Brown and Henry Larter co-sign when John Brooks petitions to register his Watchfield dwelling.'*

With the 1830s came Primitive Methodism. Steven Carter notes, *'In December 1833 Henry Hayes successfully applied to have registered for non-conformist worship a house of the Primitive Methodist Society at Faringdon. Sometime during 1833-5, Hayes and other pioneers of Primitive Methodism visited surrounding villages, including Watchfield. By May 1836 Thomas Carter's house (or barn) was the centre for Primitive Methodist worship in Watchfield; and this continued for nearly 18 years, into the 1850s.'*

In 1847 the Reverend Thomas Gilbert, late of the Congregational Church at Wheathamstead, Hertfordshire, commenced his ministry at the Zion Chapel in Highworth. His work would take him all around the neighbourhood including Watchfield. His mission to Watchfield in 1857/8 was sponsored by the then Lord

Radnor of Coleshill and within the Berkshire archives several documents have survived which show this complicity. (BRO. D/Epb C124). A letter from Thomas Gilbert to Lord Radnor, dated 12 January 1857 refers to, '*the dire need of a decent size Chapel.*' He even submitted a little drawing of how he thought the chapel should look. He also noted ponderously, '*One thing I know, that a fearful responsibility rests upon me to do the best in my power for the poor, ignorant people of Watchfield and its vicinity.*'

The well-to-do ratepayers of Watchfield were content to let the labouring poor drink away their problems, but non-conformist preachers (with some socialist tendencies) were more of a threat. Primitive Methodism may have touched only a few, but Gilbert's successful Congregationalist mission in 1857-8 stirred many in the village and galvanised the respectable classes into action with the rebuilding of the Chapel of St Thomas. By the time it was built, Thomas Gilbert was already preaching to very large crowds of villagers. In a letter to Lord Radnor dated 10 July 1858 he notes, '*On Sundays, Divine Service has been regularly performed and the attendance has been varied from 90 to 120 persons. I have endeavoured to preach "Christ and him crucified" and I have known nothing else among the people the most earnest attention is manifested, and in many cases great seriousness. The Wednesday evening service has from necessity been discontinued for a short season as the labouring classes are all more or less engaged till late. I shall so resume it again as soon as practicable. The attendance on a week evening has been good, from 70 to 80 being the usual number.*'

Where could Thomas Gilbert have been holding such meetings that would have allowed him to accommodate 90 to 120 people? The quality of the venue had no relevance to Congregationalist teachings. A normal size house would be impractical and the unpredictable nature of the weather would require a roof. We know that he had a specific building provided by Lord Radnor as he states in a letter, '*I am very pleased with the place of Worship at Watchfield. I hope to open it on my return,*' (he's going away for a week to 10 days), but then adds, '*I observe there is no door to the pulpit. I once nearly fell out of one without a door.*' It could only be a barn.

The Census of 1861 provides us with the answer. Below is a copy of that census and it's significant to note that the entry for the, '*Independant Chapel*' is directly next to the entry for Watchfield House. There was a huge barn that stood very close to the entrance to what was known as Blgrave's Lane, which led to Watchfield House. It makes complete sense that the Census Commissioner would have placed them together as it would have matched his walk order.

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The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the

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Parish (or Township) of		Municipal Borough of		Municipal Ward of		Parliamentary Borough of		Town of		Hamlet or Tything, &c., of		Ecclesiastical District of	
Watchfield		Watchfield		Watchfield		Watchfield		Watchfield		Watchfield		Watchfield	
No. of Houses	Road, Street, &c., and No. or Name of House	HOUSES No. of Inhabitants	Name and Surname of each Person	Relation to Head of Family	Condition	Age of	Rank, Profession, or Occupation	Where Born	Whether Blind, or Deaf, or Dumb				
68	Back House	1	John Gilbert	Head	Mar	38	Scholar	Watchfield					
			Elizabeth	Wife	Mar	33	Blacksmith	Watchfield					
			John	Son	Mar	10	Scholar	Watchfield					
			Mary	Daughter	Mar	7							
69	Collins Road	1	Thomas	Head	Mar	35	Housekeeper	Watchfield					
			Emma	Wife	Mar	30	Field Labourer	Watchfield					
			John	Son	Mar	5	Scholar	Watchfield					
70	Do	2	Benjamin	Head	Mar	32	Ag Lab	Watchfield					
			Elizabeth	Wife	Mar	29	" " Wife	Watchfield					
71	Do	1	Thomas	Head	Mar	28	Ag Lab	Watchfield					
			Thomas	Son	Mar	27	" " Wife	Watchfield					
			Thomas	Son	Mar	16	Scholar	Watchfield					
72	Do	2	William	Head	Mar	32	Ag Lab	Watchfield					
			Mary	Wife	Mar	30	" " Wife	Watchfield					
			Mary Ann	Daughter	Mar	11	Scholar	Watchfield					
			Phaak	Son	Mar	8	"	Watchfield					
Independent Chapel													
Watchfield House													
			George	Head	Mar	46	Householder	Watchfield					
			James	Son	Mar	44	Householder	Watchfield					
			James	Son	Mar	16	Householder	Watchfield					
Total of Houses...		5	Total of Males and Females...		13	10							



Above. All that remains of the Barn that was used by Thomas Gilbert in the 1850's. The road in the left of the picture is the entrance to Blagrave's Lane that led to Watchfield House. The modern flats of Squires Road and Maidens Close now stand on this spot. **Below.** The same barn looking across from Oxford Square but in a worse state of decay.



This would account then, for why so much attention, time and money was expended in re-building a new St Thomas'. The Non-Conformists were capturing the heart and minds of the labouring classes in huge numbers. What was happening in the sleepy little village of Watchfield mirrored what was happening in the rest of England. The Anglican church was entering a period of rebuilding its machinery. Watchfield became a priority as local rate payers wanted to win back the local inhabitants from the influence of a nonconformist preacher.

Watchfield Chapel in the late 19th century

In common with the rest of the country, the church played a major part in the lives of most of the people of Watchfield throughout the 17th-19th centuries. There were a few dissenters as can be attested to in the chapel presentments of the 18th century, but on the whole, the church and its doctrinal views were respected.

Part of the duties of the church concerned the education of the local children attending what were known as 'National Schools'. After visiting the Shrivenham children, the Diocesan Inspector (Rev Edward Barber) examined the children of Watchfield school and reported that, *'the answering was a little brighter than formerly.*

The school has just filled up, and many of the newcomers have still everything to learn.' Swindon Advertiser, Saturday 7 July 1883.

All the usual annual services were reported on by local correspondents. The Swindon Advertiser on Saturday 11 October 1891, noted, *'The harvest festival was kept in St Thomas' Church on Sunday 11th October. The decorations were of an appropriate character, and consisted of fruit, vegetables, corn, bread and flowers, a large quantity of which was given by the villagers. The Holy Communion was administered at 9am. The services, which were choral, were of a bright and hearty character. The sermon in the morning was preached by the Rev E.A. Ferguson, and in the afternoon by the vicar. The offerings of fruit, vegetables and flowers were sent to the Infirmary at Reading. The collections which were divided between the Reading Infirmary and Royal Agricultural Benevolent Society, amounted to £1.2s 8d.'*

On 2 January 1892, the newspaper said of the Christmas Services, *'The Christmas festival was well observed in the parish, and the services were of a bright and hearty character. On Christmas Eve there was full choral service at 7 o'clock, and on Christmas Day the Holy Communion was administered at 9.15. Morning service at 11. Afternoon service, at which the vicar was the preacher, was at 3.15. The church was very pretty and tastefully decorated.'*

And of the Easter following, the newspaper of Saturday, 23 April 1892, noted, *'There were two services every day during Holy week, and a sermon preached every night. The Easter services were of a bright and heart character, and well attended. At the afternoon service the sermon was preached by the Rev E.A. Ferguson, curate-in-charge. The church was very prettily decorated.'*



St Thomas' Church circa 1910. Picture courtesy of Paul Williams

Occasionally there were unusual services, like the one described by the Swindon Advertiser on Saturday, 22 September 1894. *'On Sunday sermons were preached at Shrivenham in the morning, at Watchfield in the afternoon, and at Shrivenham in the evening by the Rev Duncan, travelling missionary from Zanzibar in Central Africa. There was a large congregation in the evening. The rev gentleman gave a long and most interesting address upon mission work in Africa, taking his text from the prophecies of Ezekiel. The offertories at all the services in both Churches were given to the Universities Mission fund.'*

The land to the rear of the church was added to the churchyard as the Swindon Advertiser reported on Saturday 6 October 1894. *'The piece of land recently added to the churchyard was consecrated on Sunday last, by the Lord Bishop of Reading. His lordship arrived at the vicarage on Saturday evening and officiated at early celebration of the Holy Communion on Sunday morning and read the lessons at the mid-day service at the parish church. There was a special service at Watchfield in the afternoon conducted by the vicar. The psalms used were those appointed to be read at the burial service. The special lessons were read by the Rev Davis. A most striking sermon upon the use of churchyards was preached by the Bishop. His lordship observed that many places where he visited churchyards were a disgrace, while perhaps somebody's garden adjoining was kept in splendid order. After the service his lordship consecrated the new piece of ground, walking round and reading the service appointed, being followed by the vicar, choir, churchwardens, sidesmen and the parish clerk. The Rev Davis acted as staff-bearer. His lordship preached at Shrivenham in the evening.'*



Another view of the new Church from about 1910. Picture courtesy of Paul Williams.

An interesting event took place in October 1895, and the Swindon Advertiser of the 26th covered it. *'Last week this little hamlet was well astir caused by the visit of a Church Army van with Captain Bennett and his two assistants. The van was stationed in Mr Hedges' yard, where daily visits could be made by those who wished to converse with the captain connected with the Army. In return for these the captain and his two assistants made calls through the village. There was an open-air service every evening followed by a mission service in a large comfortable barn kindly lent by Mr R.W. Hedges, these services being well attended. Indeed, all the available sitting room was taken up every evening. The services were of a most interesting character. Hymns being sung and most earnest addresses given by Captain Bennett chiefly upon the Doctrine held by the Church of England. Dissenters attended the meetings in good numbers. Two evenings of the week there was a magic lantern service showing the mission homes, etc, in London; also slides showing the Life, Death and Resurrection of our Lord. Sunday evening was the crowning meeting when there was a large meeting in the Barn at 7.30, so as not to interfere with the Church or Chapel services. Captain Bennett preached from the words, "One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism." His address was of a remarkable character. He quoted passages of scripture in support of the Doctrine of confirmation and urged that infant baptism was never forbidden by our Lord. At the close of his address the Vicar (Rev E.F. Hill) delivered an earnest address. Many thanks are due to the members of the Watchfield Band, who were in attendance each evening, and to Mr A. Manners, who, although totally blind, led the whole of the musical parts of the services on the harmonium.'*

It was natural that the local people would hold their spiritual ministers in high esteem, and equally understandable that those ministers would have an affection for their flocks. The Swindon Advertiser in November 1889 noted, *'On Wednesday evening in last week, the united (adult) choirs of Shrivenham and Watchfield were invited to partake of a supper, kindly provided at the vicarage, by the Rev G.W. Murray, the esteemed vicar, prior to his departure, through ill-health, from the village, where he has ministered for so many years. A most sumptuous repast was provided and a very pleasant evening spent. During the evening the Hon Walter Barrington referred to the separation about to take place between the vicar and his people after the long period of thirty years,*

and trusted that the quietude of the future might be the means of re-establishing his health and prolonging the life of Mr Murray, from who they extremely sorry to part. The Rev G.W. Murray, in replying, stated the pleasure he felt in catering to their enjoyment, yet on the other hand how painful it was, on that, in all probability, the last time they should meet on such an occasion, and exhorted the choristers to live godly lives and show by their walk and conversation their worthiness to hold the office of reading the musical portion of the sacred services of the church. On Thursday evening the choir lads of both the villages entertained in a like manner.'

Such was the esteem in which the parishioners of Watchfield and Shrivenham held the Rev G.W. Murray, that when he retired due to ill-health, a collection confined to past and present residents, raised the enormous sum of £112. This sum in gold, was then placed into a splendid white watered silk bag made by the Hon Mrs Barrington, and 'G.W.M. 1889 Shrivenham,' beautifully worked thereon by the Hon W. Barrington. This was then presented to George Murray at a packed school room in November 1889. Also presented to him by Headmaster Mr Olliver, was an ebony walking-stick with silver handle and silver band inscribed, 'Presented to the Rev G.W. Murray by the teachers and scholars of Shrivenham School.'

The Swindon Advertiser of Saturday, 9 April 1892, reported two presentations. The first was sub-headed, 'St. Thomas' Church.' 'The vicar of Shrivenham, Rev E.F. Hill, has presented a new communion table, made of magnificent oak, to the parishioners of Watchfield. The rev gentleman made the design, the workmanship being skilfully executed by a local artist, Mr Rees Kent.'

Presentation. 'On Monday evening a very interesting meeting took place in the village schoolroom, when Mr R.W. Hedges (churchwarden) presented, on behalf of the inhabitants of Watchfield, a handsome set of silver salts and spoons to match, in Morocco case, lined with velvet and silk, to the Rev A.E. Ferguson, curate, on the occasion of that gentleman's approaching marriage. During the time Mr Ferguson has held office in Watchfield he has endeared himself to the villagers generally, hence the above expression of good feeling. The Rev gentleman thanked the subscribers for the very handsome gift.'

Although he had only arrived in Watchfield a little over a year earlier, the Rev L. Atkinson wasted no time in becoming a firm favourite with his parishioners. The Swindon Advertiser of 13 May 1893 reported that he had been appointed curate of Watchfield and was about to commence his duties. But then, in the editions dated 30 June 1894, a lengthy article appeared about his leaving, 'Farewell Sermon. It having become known that the Rev L. Atkinson would be preaching for the last time on Sunday afternoon last, a large number availed themselves of the opportunity of attending the service. So large indeed was the number that many would have gone away had not the officers procured forms and placed them up the aisle. The service was of a most striking character; among the congregation being several Nonconformists, Mr Stratford, who was conducting a camp meeting service, consented to close the meeting at 3 o'clock in order that those who wished might attend the church. The service was commenced with that grand old hymn, "All people that on earth do dwell." The rev gentleman chose for his text the words, "A certain rich man had a steward." He dwelt at length upon these words, explaining that God was the rich man and we his stewards. He referred to his approaching departure, and the whole congregation seemed moved as he approached the subject; indeed,

many were moved to tears. The rev gentleman almost completely broke down before he could conclude. In all probability, he said, they might never all meet again in this world, but he trusted might in the next. He had been thinking what words to choose to part upon, and he had chosen the 15th Psalm "Lord who shall dwell upon Holy Hill," etc. The rev gentleman who has been in the village but just over a year is by no means a low Churchman but very broad-minded and of a most humble disposition. He has won the respect of those with whom he had the least to do with, and this departure is regretted by all.

Presentation. On Thursday in last week, a meeting was held in the schoolroom to present the Rev L. Atkinson with a beautiful set of fish knives and forks and slice, consisting of 26 pieces and case. On the outside were the words in gilt letters, "Presented to the Rev L. Atkinson by the inhabitants of Watchfield and Shrovenham, on his departure from the neighbourhood." The list of subscribers included nearly all the heads of the families in the village, including the Hon Mrs Barrington of Beckett House; Mr A.W. Fairthorne and other friends, Mr Butler, Mr Dore and Mr Phillips of Bourton; and Miss Hughes of Longcot; Mr Looker of Westmill; Mr Reeves, Ruffins Wick; Mr Barrett, Mr Day, Stainswick; Mr Millard, and many others. Among the number were several Nonconformists. Mr Hutson opened the meeting and explained that it was called solely to present Mr Atkinson with the gift. They were all very sorry at his leaving. Mrs Hutson then asked Mr Atkinson to accept the gift. The rev gentleman, who was evidently greatly moved, spoke at a considerable length, dwelling upon the duties and responsibilities of a Christian Minister. He heartily thanked everybody present, especially those who had gone to so much trouble. (cheers). Mr Hedges proposed a vote of thanks to Messrs D. Pocock and U. Chivers, for collecting the funds, and said it must have been a great deal of trouble to them. Mr Pocock, in reply said if Mr Atkinson valued what they had done, and he was sure he did, that was all they needed. He proposed a vote of thanks to the subscribers and mentioned that great kindness had been received from all classes. Mr Phipps replied on behalf of Shrovenham friends, and Mr G. Wyatt, of Watchfield, a Nonconformist, also spoke in the highest terms of Mr Atkinson. A vote of thanks to Mr Hutson brought the meeting to a close. The committee who collected the subscriptions were: - Mr Hutson, Mr Hedges, Mr Phipps, Mr Stephens, Mr G. Wyatt, Mr R. Stone, Mr U. Chivers, Mr D. Pocock.'

There were many Vestry Meetings whereby the general church-going public could have their say on the how the church should be managed. But two in particular were covered by the Swindon Advertiser, and both give us a flavour of the local mood. The first was Saturday 30 April 1892. 'The annual Easter vestry was held on Friday evening at 6.30, thus giving everyone an opportunity of attending. The Rev E.A. Ferguson presided. The accounts were presented, examined and passed. It appeared from the accounts that there was a balance in hand (exclusive of heating apparatus fund) of 3s 9d. The Rev E.F. Hill, vicar, re-appointed Mr R.W. Hedges as his warden, and Mr A. Fereman was re-appointed parish warden. Mr David Pocock was again chosen sidesman. A strong feeling prevailed regarding the necessity of thoroughly repairing and cleansing the church, walls, etc, and hopes were expressed that funds sufficient to meet the same would be forthcoming.'

And a little later in that decade the emphasis was still on the outside of the church building. Swindon Advertiser, Saturday, 18 April 1896. 'The annual church vestry was held at the Parsonage on Wednesday, the 8th inst. The accounts were examined and passed. The parish warden explained that he had not yet received the usual subscription from certain gentlemen, but it was estimated the accounts would about balance. The winter having been very mild, the quantity of fuel consumed for heating the church was about half

that of the previous year, but against this had to be put the purchasing of certain lime trees which had recently been planted in the churchyard and which takes off the bare appearance of the new piece of ground which has recently been added; also there was the cost of a pair of oak gates erected by Mr Rees Kent, of Shrivenham, and which was seen for the first time on Easter morning. Mr Hedges was re-elected parish warden. The vicar re-appointed Mr Hudson his warden, and on the proposition of the Vicar, Mr Pocock was re-elected sidesman. It is to be regretted that so few attend the vestry meetings. Although since the passing of the Parish Council Act the vestries are for purely Church matters, still, those connected with the church management will be always glad to see the parishioners attend. It was mentioned that at the half-past nine Holy Communion celebration on Easter Sunday there were 34 communicants, which speaks well for a small hamlet.'

Then, of course, there were weddings, and some managed to make the headlines in the local newspaper. The Swindon Advertiser, Sat, February 11, 1893.' *A very pretty wedding took place in Watchfield Church on Wednesday last, between Mr J. Betterton, Head Game Keeper for Mr Palmer of Reading, and Miss Charlotte Wyatt, second daughter of Mr William Wyatt of Watchfield. The Rev. G.D.C. Wheeler, Vicar of Cleobury Mortimer (late curate of Watchfield) officiated, assisted by the Rev. E.F. Hill, Vicar of Shrivenham. The hymns 350 and 351 (A and M) was sung by the choir. Mr F.F. Manners, organist, playing in his usual good style. The bride was attired in a cream cashmere dress, trimmed with lace and ribbon, and wore a wreath of orange blossoms and veil. She was given away by her father, Mr Fred Wyatt, acting as best man. The bridesmaids, Miss Carie Wyatt, Miss Violet Underwood, Miss Florry Wyatt, and Miss Annie Still, wore pale pink zephyr dresses, prettily trimmed with lace and large white hats trimmed with tulle and ribbon. The bride and bridegroom left for Marlston with every good wish. They were the recipients of a great number of presents, including a dinner service from the Rev. E.A. Ferguson; 'The Christian Year' from the Rev. G.D.C. Wheeler; two views of Shrivenham church from the Rev. E.F. Hill; a silver teapot from Mr Harry Cox.'*

Then three years later the local newspaper on 19 September reported, 'The marriage took place at the parish Church on Monday in last week of Miss Beatrice Annie Lawrence, eldest daughter of Mr J. Lawrence, of Stallpits Farm, and Mr William Hedges, only son of Mr Robert Hedges, of Watchfield Farm. The bride, who was given away by her father, was attired in white cashmere, and attended by her four sisters, the Misses Ethel, Agnes, Mabel and Ida Lawrence, and the Misses Blanche and Madeline Hedges, sisters of the bridegroom, dressed in cream aplacca with blue trimmings. Mr J. Puzey acted as, 'Best Man.' The ceremony was performed by the Rev E.F. Hill (vicar), assisted by the Rev J. Footman (curate). Many handsome and useful presents were received, including a silver butter dish and knife presented by about 40 of the inhabitants of Watchfield to Mr W. Hedges as a token of their respect and esteem.'

On Friday 6 January 1899, the Swindon Advertiser reported of Watchfield, 'In this small hamlet, the closing week of the year, saw one birth, one marriage and one death. The wedding which took place on Saturday at St Thomas's Chapel-of-Ease, was a very pretty one. The contracting parties were Mr James Dicken, son of Mr Eleazor Dicken, of Bourton, and Miss Amelia Crew, of Watchfield. The ceremony was performed by the Rev J. Footman. Mr Dicken, who emigrated to America a few years ago, has lately returned to his old country, and is about to take up his abode at Foxham, near Dauntsey, Wilts.'

