

AXBRIDGE HIGH STREET: PORTRAIT OF A MID 19TH CENTURY COMMUNITY

By Elizabeth Holmes

Introduction

In the mid 19th century the main trade area of Axbridge was the Market Square and the High Street. Whilst most of the wealthier families lived in Cheddar Street - the Fry family, the Parkers, the rector, Elizabeth Crosse - the High Street and the Square were the preserve of the established and comfortably off tradesmen and must have presented the bustling face of the town. This study of the High Street concentrates on the area between the Methodist Chapel and the Market Square. The looseness in the naming of the streets (see below) makes it difficult to determine the end of the High Street and the beginning of the Square. My starting point was the 1851 census. I have looked at all the houses that are listed by the 1851 census enumerator as being in the High Street which means that I have ended at the Lamb Hotel.

Information is largely derived from the three censuses of 1841, 1851 and 1861, trade directories¹ of 1840, 1844, 1848 and 1859, the tithe commutation map of 1838 and its accompanying register and the poor and church rate assessments of 1851 and 1852 respectively. A comparison of the censuses reveals that in the middle years of the 19th century there was very little change of family occupancy in the High Street: the same strings of neighbours occur in two and often all three censuses. Once these strings are cross-referenced with the tithe commutation map it is possible to pinpoint the houses - or at least positions in the High Street - that long dead people occupied and so bring the street back to life.

Nomenclature

The 1841 census divides the street leading off the square to the west into three parts: the part below Horn's Lane is referred to as West Street within the borough and seems to extend into what we think of as the Square; then follows Silver Hill, seemingly between Horn's Lane and the Methodist Chapel; finally, there is West Street without the Borough which extends to the border with Compton Bishop.

The 1851 census denominates the first two parts of the street as High Street. The enumerator has evidently recorded the south side of the street as far as the top of Silver Hill and then returned down the north side before continuing up West Street.

The 1861 census reverts to the tripartite approach although the name Silver Hill has now been replaced by Axbridge Hill. Today of course the High Street becomes West Street at Horn's Lane.

Fixed Points of Reference

It is always difficult to determine the face of a street in previous centuries. Houses can be split up or amalgamated over the centuries, new frontages can be put on, extensions added or parts pulled down. In Axbridge the High Street apparently underwent a facelift in the Georgian period, but a closer look reveals that some of these Georgianisations were much later in date: the house east of the old butcher's has a much older aspect in early

¹ Braggs directory 1840; Pigot & Co. trade directory 1844, Hunt's directory 1848; unidentified trade directory of 1859

photographs. Later building has tended to be in keeping with the Georgian element so that the street has a homogenous feel to it. The houses either side of St Jude's appear very 19th century yet both had shop fronts as late as the 1960s.

Fortunately for the social historian the constricted nature of the street with houses abutting one another has meant that there has been little room to change the layout radically. A comparison of the tithe apportionment map of 1838 and the conservation area map of 1960 reveals a substantial correlation both between plots of land and the buildings on them. This correlation allows us to locate a large number of the mid 19th century inhabitants, even though we cannot say that the houses they lived in looked as they do today.

Some houses do however remain substantially unchanged. Of these Choate House is the most imposing. On the other side of the road Lord House and most of the houses down as far as Raymond Court still retain an early 19th century feel and occupy the same plots as they did then. It is not the same story for the north side of the street. The Red Lion has taken over a larger building to the west of it: the Bank House was originally much smaller - it is used as a marker point for the 1841 enumerator who describes it as the Green House. At some time subsequent to 1861 the bank swallowed up its much larger neighbour. Another useful marker is the Woolpack, now converted into flats and showing little evidence of its former use.

Further Identification Using the Tithe Map

The tithe commutation map is a document that shows the plots of land in the town as they existed in 1838. The accompanying register gives details of ownership and the occupier. It can therefore be very useful in establishing locations. However, as the tithe map identifies gardens rather than dwellings there is some danger of misidentifying the owners of properties but where attribution is backed by other evidence from other sources that danger is minimised. We know, for example, from the purchase of Castle Garden by Jemima Dyne - now the car park for Choate Apartments - that a John Cox had owned the land bordering the garden to the east. This was in 1814. The 1838 tithe map shows buildings opposite the Red Lion which must be the stables, coach house and buildings detailed in the aforesaid land purchase. Next door to them is the garden owned by John Cox who also owned 9 acres of arable land on the Moor. When the enumerator in 1851 records a John Cox farmer of 8 acres, living at the top of the High Street the evidence is fairly conclusive that John Cox's house was next door to Henry Symons' garden - the house known today as Lord House.

Although frontages may have changed over time, the basic plot structure in the High Street is remarkably unchanged. At first glance the former Red Lion looks as though it has always been a single building. The tithe map clearly marks it as two, and this again is borne out by the document pertaining to the purchase of Mr Henry Symons' residence. He also bought a cottage and stable on the East side of Horn's Lane described as being

... bounded on the East by premises belonging to the Red Lion Inn ... and on the South by the stables and premises of ... James Swearse

Correlations like these combined with recurrent strings of neighbours enable us to map further down the street. When other plots appear at the predicted point, then the hypothesis as to who lived where is reasonable, although there can be no absolute certainty without documentary evidence such as deeds.

Through the combination of census, tithe commutation map and poor/church rate assessments we can map most of the High Street. On the south side we can suggest ownership in the mid nineteenth century as far down as Raymond Court but there has been

more redevelopment on the north side. Sadly the usefulness of the tithe map ends well short of the Market Place. Apart from some seemingly vacant lots on the North side, the houses at the bottom of the street have no gardens. They are therefore of no interest to the mapper and have been indicated by a solid block. It is clear that many of these are of great antiquity but it will become equally clear that it is impossible to say with any certainty who lived where.

Note. I have broken my tour of the High Street into three parts, following what emerges as three distinct groupings in the street. I start with the upper part of the High Street going about half way down the north side and returning up the south side. I then look at the houses above Horn's Lane before returning to the lower part of the street first on the south side and into the square and then similarly on the north side. Where possible I have indicated in the margin the present day house number or name.

The High Street in the mid nineteenth century

1851: the year of the Great Exhibition - Crystal Palace in Hyde Park; railway lines being built all over the country; clocks set to a standard time; gas light beginning to light our cities and towns; the Communist manifesto had been published three years previously. This was a time of enormous change in Britain but how did Axbridge fare?

In appearance Axbridge was a modern community. Nearly fifty years earlier George Bennet had written of its houses as being *in general ... old and meanly built, many of them with timber, lath, and plaster somewhat in the manner of old London before the fire*². However, during the early 19th century many of the houses had been given new frontages, a trend which continued up until the second part of the 20th century. The town had a Georgian aspect. The commercial hub of the town was the High Street and into the Square. Despite the modernization the street preserved its medieval dimensions, narrow and no doubt very noisy and busy. Richard Trew had had occasion to take action at least twice against dangerous driving through the town. There was even public brawling amongst the more substantial members of the community. Gaslight did not come to Axbridge until 1865 so the busyness would no doubt cease after nightfall.

The Upper Part of the High Street

Most families here were owner-occupiers, many of the menfolk wealthy enough to have appeared on the List of Electors of Axbridge³ for 1852. The most prominent of these town worthies was Henry Symons. He was the town's alderman, and by profession a solicitor. He was however, much more than this. In 1833 as mayor of Axbridge he had

*entertained the Corporate body and a large party of gentlemen of the town and neighbourhood, at a dinner in the banqueting room adjoining the new Town Hall*⁴

He had been agent to the West of England Insurance Office and was elected a Guardian of the Poor in 1845 a post he held for many years. His house - **Choate House** - is most impressive and dominates the view of the town from the moor. Henry Symons purchased the house, newly built, from Simon Payne of Uphill Manor (the Paynes had been prominent in Axbridge in previous generations as the names on the chancel floor of the church testify). It

Choate House

²Topographical description of Axbridge in The Gentleman's Magazine Vol.75, pt1: 1805 p.201

³ The right to vote was determined by wealth. See **The Social Mix** later in this paper.

⁴*Bridgwater and Somerset Advertiser 18th Nov 1833*

filled almost the whole of its plot, for the garden was on the other side of the street: known as Castle Garden it contained the coach house and stables. Sadly it is now no more than the car park to the house which itself has been made into apartments after a brief life as the offices of Sedgemoor District Council.

Symons was apparently a conscientious man, regularly attending the meetings in the church vestry. He also seems to have been an independently minded man who had no hesitation in registering his disapproval of certain actions of the local council.⁵ In 1851 he was 61, his wife Jemima some 14 years older than him. As Jemima Dyne she had supplied the money - in excess of £1,000 - for the purchase of their home when they married in 1814. Jemima was a substantial heiress and one wonders whether this was a love match with the bride so much older than the groom; more likely, this was a property deal, the younger son being advantageously married off by his family.

Although Henry Symons is described as the owner, the property was in fact administered by trustees, and after his wife's death in 1862 Henry very soon relinquished all interest in it to his son - in - law Francis Jeune. There was an even bigger age gap in this marriage: Jemima and Henry's daughter, Margaret, was 27 years younger than her husband. They were staying with the Symons' at the time of the 1841 census with their young daughter, also Margaret. At that time Francis Jeune was dean of Jersey, but he was soon to be appointed master of Pembroke College, Oxford and eventually Bishop of Peterborough. An eminent man to be visiting the little town. Perhaps we can imagine him and the family calling on Peter Fry at the big house at the other end of the town. Fry's second wife was Jemima's sister, Margaret, and the 1841 census records Amy Dyne, Jemima's youngest sister, as living with the Frys. Amy died in 1847 and is buried in Axbridge churchyard close to her nephew and Henry and Jemima's grandson, Helier Garbet Jeune, who died aged only 9 months.

Henry Symons had been born in Cheddar, the son of John and Mary Symons, whose memorial is in Cheddar parish church. His brother, Benjamin Parsons Symons, was one of the leading churchmen of his age: perhaps it was he who introduced Margaret to Dean Jeune. Jemima Symons had been born in Sittingbourne in Kent and by 1851 Eleanor Brutton, an unmarried niece from Stonehouse in Devon, was also living with them. All this suggests a far-flung family. As befitted their status in the town they had three servants living in as well as servants housed in property in Horn's Lane. They too were not local people: one of them, James Pavey, from Stoke St Mary had been with the family for at least ten years, so the position must have been a good one.

Jemima Symons lived to the ripe old age of 86, dying in 1862. Henry survived her by only 8 years during which time he moved away to Islington. However, his body was brought back to Axbridge for burial so he lies not far from where he was born, in Cheddar, in the town where he exercised great influence during his lifetime.

Choate House is bordered on one side by Horn's Lane. Apart from the house also owned by Henry Symons, the only other dwelling here was rented by a Chelsea pensioner, 70 years old, still apparently working as an agricultural labourer. This is presumably the cottage at the top of Horn's Lane today. On the other side of the lane lived James Swearse, 51 in 1851. His house has now been incorporated into the **Red Lion** but the 1838 tithe commutation map shows it as dominating its smaller neighbour. Although the 1851 census does not give him an occupation, Pigot's trade directory describes Swearse as a carpenter and cabinetmaker. He seems in fact to have been rather a jack-of-all-trades: in 1841 he was living in the Market

Red Lion

⁵Disagreement over the enclosure of the ponds by Church Steps recorded in *Richard Trew 1793-1874, mayor of Axbridge: history of Axbridge in the nineteenth century* by Virginia and Stanley Castle

Place and described himself as a builder. Earlier still, in 1838 he owned the Lamb garden as well as the garden next door. The newspaper account of the celebrations for the opening of the new Town Hall record that he, in his capacity of landlord of the Borough Arms (the then name of the Lamb), had provided the meal

The dinner was excellent and served up in Mr Swearse's best style. Many loyal and constitutional toasts were drunk and the evening which was enlivened by several appropriate songs was spent in great conviviality⁶

Mr Swearse seems to have been quite a wealthy man, owning another property in Mary Street, land and a cart house on the Moor, as well as his house in the High Street. A widower in 1851, he lived with his two unmarried sons: the elder, Charles, was an articled clerk to Henry Symons while the younger, George, had followed in his father's footsteps and was a journeyman carpenter. We can follow George a little further: by 1861 he had married Lavinia Day, daughter of Jane Day a landed proprietor, and was living with his wife and mother-in-law across the street from his father. Lavinia's father was William Day, described as a cropper on Lavinia's baptismal entry⁷. James Swearse died in 1863 and by 1871 we find George and Lavinia living on the other side of the road. George now describes himself as a hotelkeeper. This suggests that he took over the Red Lion and incorporated it into his father's old house to make the building we see today. Lavinia died in 1871 aged only forty so she did not enjoy her new abode for very long. By 1881 George had remarried.

In addition to Charles and George, James Swearse had an older son, John, who had been living at home in 1841 and was like his father and younger brother a carpenter. By 1861 he too was living on Axbridge Hill, by then a farmer with six children and a house servant. The 1859 Trade Directory describes him as auctioneer for Axbridge.

As James Swearse's house was incorporated into the Red Lion, - now no longer a public house - it is obvious that the inn was smaller than it is today. A photograph of the 1960s shows a heraldic lion on a plinth on the front of the building. At the time of the census the inn was owned by Henry Stokes senior and run by his son Henry Stokes and his wife Elizabeth, both in their early forties with a baby daughter of two. There seems to be a sad story here. The couple had four other children living with them in 1841 but by 1851 these children were living with their grandparents, Henry and Sexa Stokes in Moor Lane. Between the time of the census and the assessment for the poor rate later that year Henry died.⁸ One can speculate that it was because he was ill that the older children were not living with their parents. The inn was then bought by a Jesse Cook. Perhaps the establishment was no longer successful for it changed hands again in 1856 and yet again in 1859. Although Henry Stokes senior continued to appear on the list of electors throughout the 1850s it would appear that he did not prosper either. By 1861 he was widowed and living alone and his status had dropped from market gardener to farm labourer. We shall meet Henry Stokes junior's brother, Richard, a little later in our journey down the High Street.

Next to the Red Lion is the house now known as **Yeoman House** where lived Charles Hill, aged 55, and his wife Sarah. Hill had run the Red Lion transferring the licence to Henry Stokes at the beginning of 1836. Two unmarried daughters, Mary Ann and Sarah, lived at

Yeoman House

⁶*Bridgwater and Somerset Advertiser 18th Nov 1833*

⁷17th October, 1830

⁸The poor rate shows that William Ham had land from the LATE Henry Stokes in Moorhays. This was the son, not the father who is still alive at the time of the 1861 census.

home earning their living as dressmakers. By 1861 the girls seem to have moved out but by 1871 Sarah, married and with a son of her own had moved back to be with her mother. Like James Swearse, Charles Hill was a carpenter: he had been trading in the town for some time and was involved in the renovation of the old school buildings in 1850. He owned not only the property the family lived in, but also another in West Street and when he died in 1856 he left an estate worth over £400: this excluded any freehold property of which he had a substantial amount. By the 1861 census his widow, Sarah, was able to describe herself as '*an owner of properties*'. She survived into grand old age, dying in 1889 aged 80. In the 1881 census she describes herself as a builder's widow at which time she was still sharing her home with her daughter Sarah – now also a widow - and her grandson Charles Hill Savage, named after his grandfather.

The Hill family is somewhat of an enigma. Hill was affluent enough to appear on the list of electors and left a reasonable inheritance to his widow. Yet his two daughters worked as dressmakers and he took in lodgers – three men from Leicester: a 61 year old widower, one Thomas Worth, a shoemaker by trade; a married son, Frederick Worth who described himself as a lecturer in astronomy; Joseph Pool, a 19 year old hairdresser. Perhaps Sarah Hill was just a good business woman making the most of her property assets.

Another Axbridge luminary lived in this upper part of the High Street in what the 1841 enumerator describes as the *Green House*, now part of **Bank House**: he was Richard Trew, nine times mayor of Axbridge, manager of Stuckey's Bank, Clerk to the Union, alderman after the resignation of Henry Symons. He was 56 in 1851, his wife - Martha - some three years older. Living with them was his unmarried son, Richard Banyer Trew, who was to die in 1864, a year before his mother. The son also described himself as clerk to the Union. Apparently however he did the job unpaid while his father was paid £125 p.a. from 1845. It is a mark of Richard Trew's integrity that two influential men of the town single him out in their wills: Peter Fry

Bank House

assigns [to Richard Trew] the dwelling house and premises thereto belonging now in his own occupation situate in Axbridge as a small return for his honesty and integrity⁹

and Thomas Nicholls, the aged town clerk, left his money to the town through the agency of Richard Trew who seems to have benefited personally from the bequest.

We find Richard Trew at the same address in 1871, a widower living with his daughter in law and three grandchildren. A second son, John Banyer Trew had a printer's and stationer's business in the Square and was living in Cheddar Street. He had married Louisa, daughter of Charles Fowler, one of the wealthier families of the town.

The elderly man living next to Richard Trew was William Crease. He was unmarried, not a local man and a currier by trade. In addition to the house in High Street, he owned a considerable amount of land on the Moor and like his neighbours was a man of substance. He had been an important person in the town: in 1840 he was Mayor of Axbridge and in 1848 was the Registrar for Marriages. Like James Swearse he had been an overseer of the poor, responsible for seeing that the poor rate was paid. Now aged 73, he lived alone with his houseservant, Ann Durston, in a substantial house. He was to survive a few more years, dying in 1859 aged 81. It was some time after that that the house was taken over by the bank to expand it into the form we see today.

⁹This is the Green House which Trew had been occupying since before 1839

Two further electors of Axbridge lived below William Crease. The first was James Read, at 70 three years younger than his neighbour. Read lived with his wife, Ann, and two granddaughters, Sarah and Mary Chubb, the elder a milliner, the younger a scholar. Here is the first of the Read dynasty which spreads out on both sides of the town: his brothers Joseph and John live further down the street and a third brother Henry in Cheddar Street. All three of the brothers in the High Street had followed in their father, Thomas's, footsteps and were butchers. Read had retired before the next census of 1861 and died sometime before 1871. His wife Ann was also of sound Axbridge stock. She had been a Colesworthy, daughter of a yeoman farmer in the town. She survived her husband and by 1871 was 87 years old. She was still in the High Street - presumably in the same house - living with her two granddaughters, the elder married and still a milliner.

No.28

The second elector was William Cox Andrews, living with his wife Hester and daughter Mary. He was a master mason and in 1851 was 59. Lodging with them was Thomas Salisbury, Hester's brother, himself a retired shopman. William was still working 10 years later when he described himself as a mason and ironmonger. The family monument is just outside the church porch in Axbridge, an imposing edifice, perhaps indicating the place William Cox Andrews felt he had in the Axbridge society of his day. At the time of the census the Andrews' house was subdivided: in the other part lived the 78 year old Jemima Bilbie, a landed proprietor who had just one more year to live. Whatever her connection with the clockmaking family¹⁰, it is clear is that she was of local stock, being aunt to Eliza Dade Creedy who lived closer to the town square.

No. 26

Both Hester Andrews and Thomas Salisbury are beneficiaries under the will of Thomas Dowdney whom we shall encounter further down the street, Thomas Salisbury being referred too as Mr Dowdney's *very dear friend*. Cox, Andrews, Salisbury are dominant names in the town, part of a web of relationships which extend in many directions. Linked to them are other names we shall encounter in the High Street: Jervis, Read, Day, Woolf, and Ham.

In fact if we return up the street to opposite Henry Symons' mansion we find one of William Cox Andrews' cousins, John Cox. He describes himself to the 1851 enumerator as a farmer of eight acres. That he should thus describe himself and his wife as a Farmer's wife, his daughter as a Farmer's daughter suggests that the family thought well of itself. Indeed he is described in the 1840 Kelly's directory as a yeoman. He owned a little more than he admitted to in 1851 - or perhaps he had added to it: he had 9.2 acres in the Moor as well as land in Portumead to the south of the town. An owner-occupier, John Cox had inherited his house from his uncle, Richard Cox. In 1851 he was 64, his wife some six years older. Cox was not only cousin to William Cox Andrews but also to Henry Stokes, owner of the Red Lion opposite, and like them had sufficient means to be on the electoral roll.

Lord House

Two doors down (the house in between was uninhabited at the time of the census) in a house once known as *Laws* and is now called **London House**, lived the upwardly mobile Joseph Ham. In 1840 and again in 1848 he was described as a boot and shoemaker; by 1851 he was a master cordwainer, wealthy enough to employ ten men and to be on the electoral roll. He too was getting on in years by 1851 - he was 60 and his wife 59 - and he died early in 1860. He was a firm employer: in 1858 he took one of his employees to court for going absent

London House

¹⁰John Bilbie, clockmaker, of Axbridge died in 1767 aged 33.

without leave - poor Richard Barnett was sentenced to one month's hard labour for this offence¹¹

Three adult unmarried children were living at home: one son, Alfred, was an accountant, so had made the move from trade to profession. In fact by 1881 he had become a banker's surveyor. Living with the family was the errand boy, Albert. As well as owning the house and garden in the High Street, Joseph worked land on Bailiff's Wall leased from the burgesses of Axbridge. A reference to a Joseph Ham jnr occupying a house and garden further up West Street suggests that this is the son of Joseph Ham, cordwainer. If so he had not got out of trade as had his younger brother Alfred, for he is described as a painter and glazier. The will of James Ham, Joseph's father, reveals intermarriage with other leading Axbridge families: Joseph's sister had married into the Salisbury family.

It was to this substantial dwelling that Jane Day aged 78 and describing herself as a landed proprietor moved in company with her daughter Lavinia and son-in-law George Swearse. Before her daughter's marriage the two ladies had been living at the very top of West Street.

The affluent nature of those living in this upper part of the High Street would suggest that while there may have been one or two shop fronts the majority of the buildings were private residences or business premises. This was a part of the town where the well established and often elderly lived, those with standing and influence in the community. As we move down the street the aspect changes to a street lined with shops on both sides.

The Young Affluent above Horn's Lane

Before moving further down the hill towards the Square, however, it is worth having a look at the few houses above Henry Symons' properties on either side of the street. This is variously known as Silver Hill and Axbridge Hill in the earlier and later censuses. Next door to Henry and Jemima Symons lived William Lane and his wife Sarah. He was a cabinetmaker and at 25 years old more than half the age of his neighbour. His parents had lived in the house before him, and his mother had run a small school there. The family was to increase over the next ten years but they did not remain in Axbridge for in 1881 we find them living with their 15 year old daughter in Bristol, where William was still working as a carpenter.

No.4 West St

While it is difficult to pinpoint the occupiers of the other properties in this small stretch - there is less correlation between the three censuses of 1841, 1851 and 1861- we can consider the families as a group.

We have George Walters, decorator aged 38 married to Jane Parker Budgett, a family we shall soon encounter as we move towards the Market Square. Walters was not born in Axbridge but his family must have been local since Mary Bridget, his elder unmarried sister who was living with them, had been born in the town. George and Jane had two small children and in common with most of the other occupants in this small part of the town was prosperous enough to maintain a live-in servant. George died in 1865 and was buried in Axbridge and by 1881 his widow was living in Bristol.

No 6 West St

Sharing the house with the Walters was Robert Parker, a certified attorney aged 32. His family owned one of the most important houses in Mary Street with a rateable value only slightly less than that of Alderman Henry Symons' property. He was to marry a local girl, Sarah - possibly Sarah Jervis - and by 1881 he was living in Cheddar Street and practising as

¹¹Shepton Mallet Gaol Register 9 Dec. 1858

a solicitor. The tithe map shows that the land attached to the house next to the one occupied by the Lanes was owned by a Robert Parker. This would indicate that the younger man was living in a family owned property which we can pinpoint as 6 West Street.

The surgeon James Higgins and his wife Catherine also lived in this part of town - as would be expected, with a live in servant. As a professional man Higgins had moved into the area at first renting the house which he was eventually to buy.¹² We also find George Harris Tucker, a tiler and plasterer aged 46 who in the next year was to marry Maria Jervis, daughter of one of the old established families at the bottom end of the High Street. He had been living in this house with his parents in 1841 but now has a housekeeper to take care of him. We also find William Ham, another of Joseph Ham's sons and like his father a bootmaker. Like his brother Alfred, he too would leave trade and had become the schoolmaster at Badgworth by 1881.

The makeup of this group seems very different from the main part of the High Street: while some of the inhabitants are part of the web of core Axbridge families - Jane Walters, born Jane Parker Budgett; William Ham; George Tucker soon to be marrying into the Jervis family - several of the occupants had moved into Axbridge. Some had come from just outside the area as in the case of John Wall of Huntspill and some from much further afield - James Higgins came from Vauxhall and his wife from Andover. There seems to have been a mixture of tradesmen and professional people and the age group is much younger. The surgeon, James Higgins, and a certified attorney, Robert Parker, lived here, the latter sharing a building with a decorator and his family. Other tradesmen included bootmakers, a gardener, a tiler and plasterer. Ages ranged from 25 to 46 and there were a number of small children. This was quite an affluent little group: three of this group - Higgins, Walters and Tucker - were on the roll of electors, in four of the seven households housekeepers or servants lived in. Perhaps not all families here were too affluent, however: John Wall was a master boot and shoemaker and his wife Martha helped in the business as a shoe binder. They had six children under 10 and also a lodger, an elderly widower, William Street, who is described as a pauper. In 1838 William Street had occupied this house - owned along with several others in the vicinity by Charles Payne of Uphill Manor. It would seem then that as in the case of Thomas Salisbury and William Andrews William was related to Martha Wall, rather than this being a family which needed a lodger to make ends meet. However, the fact that he is a pauper, that Martha Wall has an occupation and that there are no servants suggests that this household is rather different from the others in this small enclave.

Return to the High Street

Let us now return to the lower part of the south side of the High Street. The stability of occupancy remains remarkable here. Below Joseph Ham lived John Budgett Stoward who described himself as a plumber and decorator. In 1851 he was 38 years old with a wife of 29, Emma, who had come into the area from Wiltshire and a daughter of seven, Kate. An elderly aunt, Elizabeth Etchell, was living with them and continued to do so until her death in 1865 by which time the family had been increased by the birth of a son. John's father had been a plumber before him. He had also held the Stamp Office and had been agent to the Royal Exchange Insurance Office. His will of 1843 describes him as a gentleman and it was from him that John Budgett Stoward inherited the dwelling house as well as cottages and premises - a stable and carthouse - in Moor Lane. John Budgett Stoward had a servant living in but

No 27

¹²The tithe commutation schedule shows that Higgins was occupying a house owned by Simon Gully. The relationship between the occupiers of land in 1839 and the census of 1851 is very strong here.

had apparently not yet fulfilled the requirements to be entered on to the electoral roll. However, he was very well in with the Axbridge mafia: he was a regular attender at vestry meetings and became churchwarden in 1853; in 1856 he was mayor of Axbridge and in 1861 he was part of the committee formed to consider the repairs to the Town Hall - his tender was accepted for the said repairs.

John Budgett Stoward's brother, Frederick, also lived in the town, further up the hill in West Street where he earned a living as an animal painter.

Below the Stowards lived Richard Stokes a tailor aged 35, married to Elizabeth, 40, and with three children under five, Lydia, Eliza and Eli. Although new to the house, Richard was Axbridge born and bred as was his wife. He was the son of Henry Stokes and therefore brother to the licensee of the Red Lion and cousin to John Cox. In 1841 this dwelling had been occupied by Mary Tozer, a widowed schoolmistress with five children. She was daughter to James Ham and so brother to Joseph Ham the cordwainer living two doors further up the street. The house Richard Stokes rented was not a very prosperous one with a rateable value of only £4. It must have been quite a crowded establishment for they had living with them not only a 13 year old niece, Lydia Crosse, but also a lodger, a local lad named John Day, aged 20, who was a carpenter's journeyman. The Stokes do not seem to have been a very fortunate family. The family was still at the same address in 1861 but by 1871 Richard was a farm labourer and may have moved within the street. He still had two children at home, John and Anne. He died later that year and by 1881 his widow Elizabeth had moved to Corsham with her daughter Annie to be close to her eldest daughter Lydia who had married a railway worker, Henry Osmond. Interestingly, her niece, Lydia Crosse, who had been with them in Axbridge in 1851, was visiting Corsham the night of the 1881 census.

No. 25

Another tailor lived next door to Richard Stokes - James Day. Older and more prosperous than his neighbour, James employed three men and had a journeyman tailor living on the premises. Like his fellow tailor he only rented his property but he had been at the same address prior to 1841 and was still to be found there in 1861.

No. 23

Not so for the next house down This was occupied by two families: James Lane a shoemaker's journeyman of 56, his schoolmistress wife, Jane, who had come from Ireland originally and their 15 year old daughter. They had moved from next door to Henry Symons' establishment - a house now occupied by their son - where Jane had earlier run a small school. The head of the second family was a widow, Catherine Harding, who earned a living for herself and her four small children as a grocer. It must have been quite a hard life for her as she was only 35. This family had evidently moved around: all the children were born in different places and she herself came from Cricklade. It would appear the family continued to move for in 1881 Albert was to be found in Topsham, Devon where he was the manager of a paintshop.

No. 21

We have now reached the **Manor House**. George Nowell in his list¹³ gives its ancient name as *Woolcots* and indicates that it had been the residence of the late George Symons who had died in 1833. During the 1840s there had been lawsuits over Symons' will, which were not settled for years. In 1841 the house had been occupied by a Betty Walker and her large family but by 1851 Frederick Read and his wife had moved in from further up the hill in Axbridge. Frederick was a saddler and harness maker of 37, his wife a schoolmistress.

Manor House

¹³List promised by George Nowell to Mr L Fry of London comprising the ancient name, present owner and the occupier in 1841.DD\OB\25

Frederick was affluent enough both to be on the electoral roll and to employ a live in servant. He owned land on the hill and in Portumead and worked land leased from Peter Fry. His house and the considerable quantity of land behind it he held from the estate of the late George Symons. Axbridge born, - he was the son of Charles Read whom we have already encountered on the North side of the street - he had been in business since before 1840 and was still a saddler in 1859. Frederick died in 1864 and his son took over both the business and the house. Frederick's widow, Catherine, remained living close by and even in 1881 was still employed as a schoolmistress.

We now come to another group of house owners, older families who had been living at the same address from before 1839. The first of these is Maurice Jervis, a corndealer and tallow chandler and one of the electors. As well as two houses Mr Jervis (or Jervice as it is recorded in earlier documents) owned much of the land immediately behind the houses on the south side of the High Street near the Square and in addition owned and worked land on the moor. His wife, Elizabeth, was seemingly a Read, sister to Henry¹⁴. She had died in 1845 and Maurice lived with his four unmarried daughters and an unmarried son. Maurice seems to have had a fiery relationship with one of his sons: he quarrelled publicly with his son John and took him to court where John was bound over to keep the peace.

No. 17

Maurice's elder son, Henry, was also a tallow chandler and ironmonger: he lived in the Square in a house owned by his father. Henry Jervis was married to Frances who was invited to become the local schoolmistress for a time and they had a child of two, named Maurice after his grandfather. Sadly this was their only child and he died young. His grave and those of his parents and grandparents may be seen in the churchyard. Before the next census Maurice had died and his eldest daughter, Elizabeth who remained unmarried seems to have taken over the business. However, by 1861 Henry and Frances had moved into the High Street, opposite his childhood home and was presumably taking his share of running the business. We have already met Maurice Jervis' second daughter, Maria, who married George Tucker living further up the hill. It is likely that it was Sarah Jervis who married Robert Parker, the attorney we have met on the hill.¹⁵ The youngest daughter, Ann, also remained unmarried and ended up living in Church Lane with one of her nieces.

Thomas Dowdney lived next door to the Jervis family in the house now known as **St Jude's**. He was a landed proprietor and on the electoral register. His circumstances are rather intriguing: let us look at the 1841 census. According to the enumerator Thomas Dowdney was living as a *servant* in the house of John Gallop, a man of independent means aged 65 who owned a substantial amount of land on the moor and the hillside as well as two houses in the town. In the same establishment is Mary Bennett, thirty years old and also of independent means. John Gallop's neighbour is Maurice Jervis, who worked some of his land on the moor. Yet a look at the tithe commutation list reveals that Thomas Dowdney owned both a substantial house next door to Peter Fry's residence in Mary Street in 1839 and land in Moorhays. His house was let to a Maria Jenkins in 1841. By 1851 Bruges Fry was renting it from Dowdney who was living alone in the High Street house. He now described himself as a landed proprietor and was keeping a servant. The house he was living in he now rented from George William Bennett - surely a relative of the Mary Bennett of

St Jude's

¹⁴Thomas Read rented 8 sittings in pew 27: 4 were occupied by his sons, Richard, Thomas and William, his daughter, Sarah, and daughter in law Charlotte. The other 2 were occupied by Maurice Jervis and his wife Elizabeth. This would suggest that Elizabeth was also a Read, occupying the family pew.

¹⁵The 1861 records Parker as being married to Sarah born in Axbridge and aged 34. The only Sarah living in Axbridge of the right age is Sarah Jervis and certainly their status would be compatible.

1841- along with a stable and garden in Moor Lane. There was practically no difference in rateable value between the two properties but perhaps Thomas wanted to be nearer his family: after all he was 71 in 1851 and died four years later. We may not know how he came to be described as a servant in 1841 when he quite clearly was a man of independent means but we do know quite a lot about him as we have his will. He set great store by his personal possessions bequeathing his mahogany washstand to his niece Mary Lewis, wife of Richard Lewis, pictures of himself and his wife in silhouette to his friend Thomas Salisbury and his wife's clothes to a mother and daughter in Wrington. It is clear that the Dowdney, Lewis and Salisbury families were all connected by marriage.

A great nephew by marriage lived next to Thomas Dowdney at **Raymond Court**: Richard Lewis, woolstapler and fellmonger employing five men and yet another of the worthies of Axbridge. Despite his young age - he was 29 in 1851- he was on the electoral register of 1850-51, and stood unsuccessfully for election as a Guardian of the Poor in 1856, when he was narrowly defeated by Alderman Symons. He had evidently followed his father into business: William Lewis is described as a tawyer in the 1841 census and as a woolstapler in 1840. We have his father's will in which William sets out in detail how his wife, Mary, is to be provided for by his youngest son, Richard. Mary lived to be 84, dying in 1863. She lived in West Street with her granddaughter Sarah and close to her elder son, William, a baker. Richard had married Mary, daughter of John Maggs, mayor of Axbridge, and great-niece of Thomas Dowdney. Yet again there is a considerable age discrepancy as Mary was 42 in 1851. Nonetheless they have a young daughter of 2. Richard was elected mayor of Axbridge in 1861 by which time he had retired from business and he was also one of the churchwardens. Their house contained a mahogany washstand, a barometer, a pianoforte and a pencil drawing of a yew tree, all bequeathed by Thomas Dowdney. By the age of 49 - the 1871 census - Richard was widowed and living with his daughter, Matilda. He now referred to himself as a landowner and mayor of Axbridge. The importance of that position to him is underlined by the entry in the burial register. When he was buried in 1889 the rector recorded him as *the last mayor of Axbridge*¹⁶.

Raymond
Court

The houses between here and the Square are almost impossible to trace as they were in 1851. New frontages and the lack of delineation on the tithe map have ensured this. Their ancient nature is apparent but there has been too much alteration. We are, however, able to get a picture of who lived next to whom all the way to the Square.

Next door to Richard Lewis lived Mary Young, an unmarried landed proprietor of 70. Ten years before she had been living with her sister Hester, or Hetty. Although the house she owned and lived in was only rated at £4 she also owned the one lived in by William Lane on the hill - which was rated at nearly twice as much - as well as land on the Moor which was worked by other people.

Next door but one (the intervening house was unoccupied in 1851¹⁷) lived two more sisters, Mary and Jane Swearse both pastrycooks by trade. Their mother, Mary, had died in 1842 and it would appear that Mary inherited the house. The census suggests that they lived together but on the church rate assessment they are separately assessed, both as owner

¹⁶ The office of mayor was abolished at this time to be resurrected in the 20th century

¹⁷ It would seem that the unoccupied house was of some substance as by 1861 it was occupied by Charles Fowler, a wealthy brewer who had married Martha, daughter of Richard and Martha Trew

occupiers. Despite being three years younger than her sister at 67, Jane was the head of the household, continuing her trade. She did not survive her mother long for she died in 1853.

Very close to the Square lived Henry Coomer, a young farmer of 32, his wife Ann and their four small children. He had started out as a cropper, but in 1851 had elevated himself to farmer. He seems to have moved one door up by 1861 and had changed his trade to that of pastrycook; it is tempting to suppose that he took over Jane Swearse's business. By this time the number of children had increased to six. Four of them were still living at home in 1871 at which time Henry had returned to the land, this time as a market gardener.

Henry Coomer was living next to John Read, 65, brother to James and uncle to Frederick. He was also a butcher, specialising in pork products. He was also related to the Cates family, for a niece - Matilda Cates - was living with him and his wife. John's wife Susan was an incomer who had come from Marylebone. Ten years later his wife had died but his niece was still with him in the same house, a shopkeeper. John eventually died in 1869 aged 85.

Finally, on the corner of the Square in **King John's Hunting Lodge** lived John Tuthill, saddler and harness maker. He was living in the Market Place (presumably the same house) in 1841. By 1851 he was 54, his wife Martha a year younger. They had two unmarried daughters living with them. Mary at least remained unmarried. She moved away from Axbridge to become a shirtmaker in King's Norton. By 1861 the house was taken over by a corndealer, one Thomas Robinson who in 1851 was running the Lamb Hotel.

King
John's
Hunting
Lodge

Now let us return up the High Street to William Andrews' house and work our way down the north side. William Andrews' neighbours were James Simmons, his wife Mary and five of their children. They had moved from Bristol to Axbridge but had been in the area for at least eighteen years as these children had all been born in Axbridge. In 1851 he described himself as an ironmonger whereas ten years earlier he had used the old fashioned term of tinman. In the 1841 census there was a female servant living in, perhaps to help care for the children the youngest of whom was then only one week old. Presumably the child died for there is no mention of a 10 year old child in the 1851 census: however, there was an addition to the family in those ten years - a boy, Theophilus. Joseph Simmons, the eldest son did well for himself becoming a civil engineer and by 1881 he was in Lambeth with his family.

Barley
Cottage

The Simmons lived next to the second inn in the High Street, the Woolpack, which has now been converted into flats. The inn had belonged to William Lewis, father of Richard Lewis the fellmonger. We have the advertisement for its sale and it was eventually sold to John Read. In 1851 the licensees were Henry and Lucy Pethers from Wells and Cheddar respectively. There seem to be no children: Henry was 42, his wife some ten years younger. In 1840 there had been eight inns in Axbridge, three in the High Street, by 1848 that number had reduced to five. This inn changed hands at least three times in twenty years. In 1854 Henry Pethers met with a sad accident:

No. 22

*he was thrown from his carriage and scalped his forehead. He lies in a dangerous state but some hopes are entertained of his recovery*¹⁸

Perhaps he gave the inn up after that.

¹⁸Weston Super Mare Gazette 30th September 1854

Next to the Woolpack going down the hill we find another of the Salisburys, Thomas' elder brother, Joseph Puxton Salisbury, who had married Sarah Day, a member of another dynastic Axbridge family. Like one or two others we have met, Joseph did not own his house: however he did own another house in West Street which he let out for considerably more than the rent he was paying for the house he was living in. This house he let to Joe Polybank who had moved into the lower part of the street by 1861. In 1851 Joseph Salisbury was 62 and by trade was a builder and ironmonger. One of his jobs was to repair the stocks, but he was accorded the title of chief constable of the town, although that meant little more than putting miscreants in the lock-up. An unmarried son lived with Joseph and Sarah: George Salisbury had followed in his father's footsteps and was a journeyman carpenter. Joseph only lived another two years, dying in 1853 but George continued to live in the house. By 1861 he was married with a wife, Caroline, and three small children.

Next to the Salisburys lived another of the Read dynasty, Joseph. Like both his brother down the road and his father, Joseph Read was a butcher but unlike them he did not survive into extreme old age: he died in 1862 aged 67. In 1851 Joseph was 58, his wife Elizabeth some eight years younger: the daughters were fifteen and eleven. There had been at least three sons, two of whom had died in infancy. While the children were young Joseph had employed a young servant girl to live in but by 1851 they had dispensed with such services. The site of Read's dwelling house is now occupied by **no.18**. A remarkable set of deeds exist for these premises: they show that there was a dwelling on the site in 1799 but when the property was sold to Joseph Read in 1837 it was described as a *waggonhouse*. Interestingly, Maurice Jervis was also entitled to use of this waggonhouse: he, of course, lived on the other side of the road. Shortly before his death, Joseph sold his house to his brother, Henry. The conveyance speaks of a tenement *newly built* on the site. So Joseph had built himself a house on the premises he had bought early in his career.

As with the south side of the street it is not possible to correlate present day Axbridge with the houses as they appeared in 1851. However, we do know who lived in this area. Some time between 1841 and 1851 another butcher moved next door to Joseph Read from Silver Hill. This was John Woolf. He was a younger man than his neighbour - a mere 35 years old. There were five children under 12 in the household and a servant to help his wife, Sarah. While he lived here we are told that he improved his house:

*he was paid £14 to improve his house by ranging the front in a straight line with the house of Joseph Read adjoining.*¹⁹

Thus there were two butchers side by side, and the property remained a butcher's until well into the 20th century. This family spread its wings after 1861: Day Woolf the elder son became a greengrocer living in Stoke-on-Trent and the second son, Robert, became a fruit and potato dealer in Aston, Birmingham. The presence of Day in both father and sons' names underlines the link with the Day dynasty in Axbridge.

Henry Salisbury who lived next door to Mr Woolf was the son of Joseph Salisbury (living three doors up). He had married Hannah Woolf - presumably related to John Day Woolf - in 1840 but by 1851 he was a widower, though only 33, and living on his own. By trade he was a plumber and only lived to be 47 himself. Henry rented his house from Maurice Jervis and also worked land belonging to Thomas Dowdney. In 1841 these premises had belonged to

¹⁹Castle's book on Richard Trew

John Day living two doors down the street and had formerly been called *Little England*. It was to this house that Henry and Frances Jervis moved during the 1850s.

Next door lived Samuel Tuthill, another family who had been in Axbridge for at least two centuries. His wife Mary had been a Jervis, daughter of Maurice Jervis across the street. Their eldest child had been named after his grandfather but sadly he died when only fifteen. Samuel was a hairdresser as his father had been before him but he also dealt in toys, perfume and stationery. In 1841 he had lived further up the hill in West Street and by 1861 he appears to have crossed to the other side of the road and was living in Catherine Harding's house, between James Day and Frederick Read. He had six children living at home and a servant lived in. Three children remained at home in 1861 by which time Samuel's sister, Charlotte, a dressmaker and two nieces - also dressmakers - had joined the family.

John Day, Samuel's neighbour, described himself a grocer, In fact a perusal of the directories of the period reveal him to be much more than this: he had entries under china and glass dealer, grocer, draper and dealer in sundries so he must have had quite an emporium. He was affluent enough to employ two house servants to look after the family of three small children and had been living in the house in 1841, when he was 25. His eldest son John George Day became a farmer in Shrivenham Wilts. John George's ten children were all born in Axbridge and the family took an Axbridge girl, Eliza Jane Neath, with them as servant when they moved.

Next to John Day was Charles Day, a 58 year old carpenter. Despite the commonality of name with his neighbour, this would not seem to be a family of the first rank in the town for Charles Day's 20 year old unmarried daughter was a general servant and his 15 year old son a labourer. The family was still there ten years later, but Charles himself was now a labourer. Their two youngest daughters, 19 and 16 were still at home. The 1881 census suggests that the eldest son, Charles, became a gardener and ran the Gardeners' Arms in Cheddar.

Another incomer lived next door owning a substantial residence rated at £17. He too had been living on Silver Hill in 1841. He was the chemist of Axbridge, Edward Hallam, and came from Walworth, London. His wife Elizabeth however, was of local stock, coming from Winscombe. His was one of two Quaker families in the town attending the Sidcot meeting. It is tempting to suggest that he occupied what is now known as the old drug store, which was certainly a chemist's shop in early photos of the town.

No.4?

Hallam and his neighbour, Robert Kerslake, were men of substance and both were on the electoral roll. Kerslake was a master tailor of 43; his wife, Susannah, was an incomer from Upcombe in Devon. As happened so often in the town the elder son had followed his father into the trade and was a tailor's journeyman. There were four other sons living at home as well as two daughters. Also in the household was a 17 year old tailor's apprentice, William Kerslake of Wrington, presumably a relative. By 1861 the household had reduced to Kerslake and his wife, two sons - Henry who was a printer and William who was learning the tailoring trade - and John Gould who was a journeyman tailor. Henry married Joanna Bull of Cheddar Street and this generation eventually went first to Wells and then to Chelmsford. In 1871 William Kerslake, Robert and Susannah's younger son, appears in the census as a master tailor. He has a young wife Elizabeth and a three year old son, William. The family traditions were being kept up though another generation.

On the corner of the Square lived George Tripp Creedy, married to Eliza, niece of Jemima Bilbie still living further up the road in 1851. George had been born up the road in Shipham but his wife had come from London originally. George had a chequered career it would seem: a cordwainer in 1851, a butcher in 1841. He also tendered as mail contractor for Axbridge and in 1859 became Superintendent of Labour at the workhouse for an annual salary of £40. The couple survived well into the second part of the century and even at the advanced age of 74 George described himself as an industrial teacher at the workhouse. The local minutes of the council record that Mr Creedy would not sign an agreement for a levy of 9 pence in the pound to recast the bells in the parish church. Whether this was an altruistic act on behalf of those who could not afford the levy or whether he had no desire to pay up himself is not recorded.

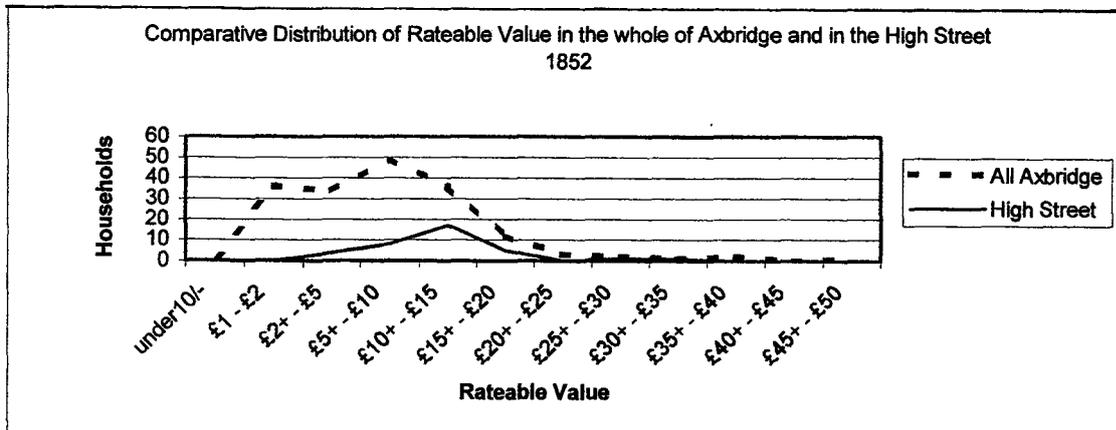
Finally on this side of the road we come to Thomas Robinson, victualler, and in charge of the **Lamb Inn**, an establishment substantial enough to have an ostler, a cook and a waitress living in. This was one of the properties in Axbridge owned by Charles Fowler who lived next door and who had married Richard Trew's daughter. Neither Robinson nor his wife were from Axbridge and his children had all been born in Cheddar where he had run the Bath Arms. In the Lamb boarded the 85 year old Thomas Nicholls, still town clerk and justice of the peace. Twenty years earlier he had been living in the Axbridge Hill area of the town. He hailed from Shropshire originally, but had spent so much of his life in Axbridge that he preferred to stay in the town in his old age. When he died he left his money to his old friend Richard Trew to use for the good of the town.

The Lamb

Some Observations and Conclusions

A Measure of Affluence

The houses in the High Street represent 19% of the total in Axbridge. To gain an idea of their relative status in the town, we need to consult the poor and church rates drawn up in 1851 and 1852 respectively. All houses were assessed at this time and the rate varies in the town from less than 10 shillings for the poorest property to £49 for the wealthiest. The chart below shows the distribution of rateable value both for Axbridge as a whole and for the High Street. The majority of houses in the town fall into the £1 - £15 bracket, 31% of which are rated at between £5 and £10. For the High Street itself, however, the peak is later and indeed, 66% of the houses in this area of Axbridge are rated at more than £10: this represents 42% of all the houses in this bracket. Furthermore, no house is rated at less than £4. While the wealthiest houses are not in the High Street (only alderman Symons' house with a rateable value of £35 can be described as a prestigious property) but in Cheddar Street, neither are there poor cottages as are found in the other streets, including Cheddar Street and the Market Place. Almost everyone here is relatively comfortably off



Another measure of affluence is whether the wife and unmarried children work. In much of Axbridge children over the age of 14 are working while many of the women are also contributing to the family's finances. Not so in this part of the town. In the High Street with the exception of two schoolmistresses living next door to each other, a young widow who was a grocer, and a pastry cook, the women have no occupation. Similarly on Silver Hill a milliner and a shoebinder helping her master boot and shoemaker husband are the only working women. Amongst the adult children we have the young men following their fathers into the family business or training for a profession. Most unmarried daughters are not employed although there are some significant exceptions.

And of Stability

Of the 46 houses between the Market Square and Methodist Chapel (newly constructed in the mid nineteenth century) 23 were owner occupied.

A closer look at this figure - almost 54% if we take into account the three houses unoccupied at the time of the 1851 census - reveals that the top half of the High Street was almost entirely owner occupied. Eight of the ten households in this area had been in possession of the 1851 owner prior to 1838. Here is evidence of both of prosperity and continuity. If we project forward another 10 years to the 1861 census, while death has taken its toll in a few cases, there has been little other movement. On the north side the Red Lion had changed hands twice in that time. On the south side of the street both John Cox the farmer and Joseph Ham the master cordwainer had died. John Cox's house remained empty²⁰ but James Day - a longstanding and prosperous member of the Axbridge community - had moved into Joseph Ham's establishment, while the house next door was occupied by the son of James Swearse - another long term resident.

A second area of substantial owner occupancy appears at the other end of the High Street and again there is a strong element of stability. On the south side, Mary Swearse in 1841 was succeeded by her daughter Mary in 1851; Mary Young had succeeded her sister Hester; Richard Lewis had inherited his father's fell mongering business which had been in existence prior to 1838 and Maurice Jervis' chandler and corn dealer's business also dated from that same period.

On the other side of the street two strings show Robert Kerslake in occupation in all three censuses and living next door to Edward Hallam, chemist, from sometime before 1851 to after 1861. Hallam had moved from further up West Street between 1841 and 1851. Three further houses a little higher up the street were also owner occupied for more than twenty years: these belonged to tradesmen, two butchers and a grocer of longstanding in the community

Two further occupants should be considered as part of this group: Thomas Dowdney had chosen to continue as tenant in the High Street, although he owned a substantial property in Cheddar Street; Robert Parker, a young man at the start of his career at the other end of the High Street, was living in a property owned by his family.

The houses between these two areas of owner occupation may have been rented but there is the same pattern of stability. On the south side, of the six houses not owner occupied three had been occupied by the same tenants for more than 20 years. The situation is far less clear on the north side of the street. While the houses on either side of the Woolpack Inn were occupied long term, those below the two butchers - Joseph Read and John Day Woolf - seem to have changed tenants frequently. In addition, families seem to have moved from one side of the street to the other. It is however dangerous to draw such a conclusion as the

²⁰ It was bought by George Harris Tucker then living further up the street

apparent movement may simply reflect a different way of working by the enumerator. Such is not the case when considering the movement from one side of the town to the other. It is interesting to note that while there was a fair amount of movement from the upper to the lower part of High Street/West Street there is far less movement between one side of the town and the other. Robert Parker did move from his bachelor establishment in Silver Hill to join the rest of his family in Cheddar Street and we have Edward Whiting moving in the other direction but they are exceptions.

The Social Mix

In the mid eighteenth hundreds, the right to vote was determined by wealth. Those whose property – whether owned or rented – had an annual rateable value of more than £10 were entitled to be placed on the electoral roll. A study of the electoral roll of Axbridge is therefore worthwhile in our attempt to establish the prosperity of individuals. In the top section of the High Street, of the seventeen households, twelve - over 70% - were on the electoral roll, and six had servants living in, further evidence that the heads of household were at the upper end of Axbridge society. Here lived the banker manager, the solicitor, the cordwainer with 10 men in his employ, the yeoman farmer. No less than four had been mayor of Axbridge; Henry Symons was the alderman for the town; John Budgett Stoward held the Stamp Office.

Further down the High Street we have tradesmen, their frontages presumably shop fronts. There is certainly architectural evidence for a large number of shops in this part of the town as well as two inns, the Red Lion and the Woolpack. There were four butchers, a baker, a pastry cook, a corn dealer and tallow merchant, two saddlers, an ironmonger, and a chemist. All these trades would be apparent as one walked down the street in the mid nineteenth century. There are however other tradesmen who may not have been advertising their occupations so obviously: there are three tailors, a hairdresser, and three carpenters. In addition there is a substantial cordwainer's business, a fell monger and wool-stapler employing five men and a master mason. These three presumably did not have shop fronts on the High Street. Nor did James Swearse living at the top of the street, next to the Red Lion: his business was in the Square according to the Kelly's directory of 1848. Moreover, interspersed with these shops are private dwellings. Such a one is the residence of Thomas Dowdney living between two nephews. Another landed proprietor, Mary Young, lived two doors down and a third, Jemima Bilbie, shared a dwelling with William Cox Andrews, the master mason, on the other side of the street.

Patterns of Age

At a time when the national average life expectancy was 39.5 Axbridge was a bastion of longevity! The average age of the men living in the High Street is 45.5 and of the women, 36.1. The several lodgers in this part of Axbridge are almost all elderly, with an average age of 58.6. When these figures are looked at more closely some interesting patterns emerge. Firstly, the average age of the head of household in the 1851 census in the top section of the High Street is 58+. This compares with an average of 49+ lower down the street and perhaps even more significantly 34+ on Silver Hill.

Secondly, there is a surprising number of households where the wife is some years older than the husband. The greatest difference is in the Symons household where Jemima is 14 years older than her husband. Although the other gaps are not so large, of the twenty married households in the High Street, in over a third of them the wife was the older by from 3 to 13 years. This same trend occurs in Silver Hill where two of the four married households are of the same composition. If we examine these families more closely, it

becomes apparent that in a large number of them one or both are incomers: four come from within the county, but the remaining four come from much further afield. This would suggest some dynastic marriages and this certainly seems to have been the case with the Symons.

Children

The position of adult children has already been touched upon. In the top part of the High Street where unmarried children are living at home, sons are training for a profession or are working in their father's business while almost all the daughters either have no employment or are described as annuitants. In the rest of the High Street a number of young men have followed their fathers into a trade.

As for younger children, they are few and far between, although there is a small group of neighbours in the middle of the south side of the street all with young children. Significantly, almost all of these children are born to families who do not own their properties (although several of them will go on to do so later in life). The exceptions are the Kerlake and Lewis families. This was not a street that rang with the voices of little children!

The mid nineteenth High Street was a bustling place, with sufficient shops and businesses to supply all the day-to-day needs of the townsfolk. There were some younger families with small children, but the great majority of the houses were occupied by older couples, many with adult children still at home. The men would seem to have had a sense of public duty, as many held public office. A list of churchwardens compiled for the 1850s shows that the vast majority of them were drawn from this tightly knit group, many of them related by blood or marriage. This settled society continued for another twenty or so years by which time the railway had arrived in the town and people were seeking pastures new. Nonetheless George Gissing could write at the end of the century:

'Axbridge? Here is a view of the market-place. What a delightful old town!'

'One of the sleepest spots in England, I should say. The railway goes through it now, but hasn't made the slightest difference. Nobody pulls down or builds; nobody opens a new shop; nobody thinks of extending his trade. A delicious place!'

'But surely you find no pleasure in that kind of thing, Miss Nunn?'

'Oh yes -- at holiday time. I shall doze there for a fortnight, and forget all about the "so-called nineteenth century."²¹

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²¹ The Odd Women by George Gissing

SCHEMA TO SHOW THE OCCUPIERS OF THE HIGH STREET IN 1851

South Side

North Side

James Durston	gardener	James Higgins	surgeon
<i>house unoccupied</i>		John Wall	bootmaker
George Tucker	tiler & plasterer	George Walters/Robert Parker	decorator/solicitor
William Ham	shoemaker	William Lane	cabinet maker
		Henry Symons	solicitor/alderman
LEON'S LANE			
John Cox	farmer	James Swearse	carpenter
<i>house unoccupied</i>		Henry Stokes	innkeeper (Red Lion)
Joseph Ham	cordwainer	Charles Hill	builder
John Budgett Stoward	plumber & decorator	Richard Trew	bank manager
Richard Stokes	tailor	William Crease	currier
James Day	tailor	James Read	butcher
James Lane/Catherine Harding	jour. shoemaker/grocer	William Cox Andrews	mason
Frederick Read	saddle & harness maker	James Simmons	tinman
Maurice Jervis	tallow chandler & ironmonger	Henry Pethers	innkeeper (Woolpack)
Thomas Dowdney	independent	Joseph Salisbury	builder & ironmonger
Richard Lewis	fellmonger & woolstapler	Joseph Read	butcher
Mary Young	independent	John Day Woolf	butcher
<i>house unoccupied</i>		Henry Salisbury	plumber
Mary & Jane Swearse	pastrycook	Samuel Tuthill	hairdresser
Henry Coomer	farmer	John Day	grocer etc
John Read	pork butcher	Charles Day	carpenter
John Tuthill	saddler & harness maker	Edward Hallam	chemist
		Robert Kerslake	tailor
		George Tripp Creedy	cordwainer
		Thomas Robinson	licensed victualler

Owner occupiers

Bold Type indicates householders on the electoral list for 1851