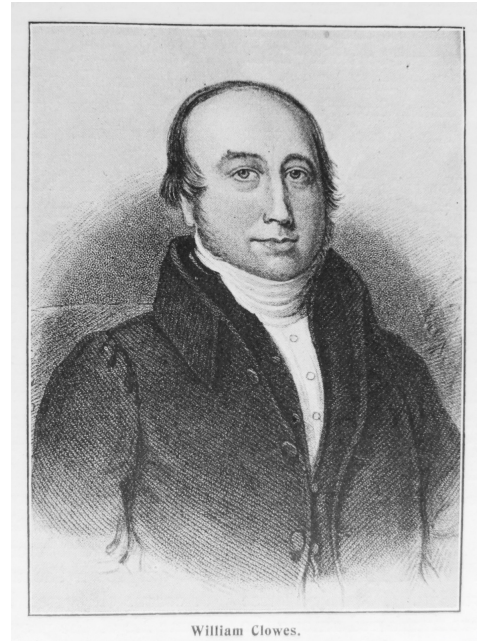


The Ancestry of William Clowes

Transcription of Sketch in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by A.A. Birchenough

Part 1

ALTHOUGH belonging to the people, the principal founders of the Primitive Methodist Church were proud of their distinguished forbears, and of the wealthy families with which they were connected. Walford, who had married a niece of Hugh Bourne's, asserts that "the ancestors of the Bourne family were Normans, and came into England with William the Conqueror. They settled in North Staffordshire, where their descendants, bearing the name of Bourne, are very numerous; but the estates obtained by the Conquest have long passed from the family, and are now in other hands." Lorenzo Dow, whose preaching and writings influenced Hugh Bourne to hold his first Camp Meeting on the Cheshire slopes of Mow Hill, claimed descent from the same family of Staffordshire Parkers, whose sons became entitled as the Earls of Macclesfield, and have played an important part in English national life.



On his maternal side, William Clowes was descended from an old and distinguished family who for several centuries had been resident in North Staffordshire. Mrs. Ann Clowes, the mother of the great evangelist, was a daughter of Mr. Aaron Wedgwood, whom Clowes describes in his interesting "Journals" as "an extensive manufacturer in the pottery department in conjunction with Mr. William Littler." These co-partners were brothers-in-law, for Mr. Aaron Wedgwood had married Littler's sister. The mother of Mrs. Clowes was the daughter of a gentleman potter, who resided at a mansion at Brownhills, midway between the towns of Burslem and Tunstall.

The father of William Clowes was by trade a working potter. In his earliest years Samuel Clowes was of a religious turn of mind. Unfortunately, through "the reading of a pernicious book, and yielding to temptation," he departed from the path of the righteous. All through his subsequent life, until the period of his last illness, he was "wild and dissipated," which produced much sorrow in the family circle, and was a great trial to his wife. Instead of trying to improve his social surroundings, and securing for his wife the position which her birth and family connections demanded, he surrendered himself to a life of profligacy and indolence. At the time when Samuel Clowes' wife's relatives were living in affluence, and were classed with the best families resident in the Staffordshire Potteries, he, through his drinking habits, lived in a workman's cottage in an obscure court, and never rose higher than a working potter. Shortly before his death he repented of his past, and sought forgiveness. Notwithstanding the moral deterioration of her husband, Mrs. Clowes did not disgrace the honourable name of the Wedgwoods. She possessed strong mental powers, and manifested an amiable disposition. In early life she had been thoroughly educated in the doctrines and practices of the Anglican Church. She was a stranger to saving faith and experimental religion until the conversion of her son William, through whose influence she found the Pearl of great price.

Although William Clowes in his Journals gives several interesting particulars respecting his relatives on his mother's side, he is altogether reticent on the subject of his father's relations. The Clowes' of Burslem were not so numerous nor so distinguished as the Wedgwoods. Out of a published list of "all the inhabitants of the town of Burslem," in the year 1750, there is but one householder of the name of Clowes. He is described as "Aaron Clowes of the Talbot Alehouse and smithy." There is not a doubt but he was the grandfather of William Clowes. In the year 1657 a William Clowes was churchwarden of Burslem Church, and in 1742 a Thomas Clowes was also churchwarden. Possibly these Burslem residents were numbered among the ancestry of William Clowes, the evangelist.

Burslem, the birth-place of William Clowes, is regarded as the mother town of the Staffordshire Potteries. It occupies a foremost place in the earlier history and making of Primitive Methodism. At the present time it is surrounded with the busy pottery towns of Tunstall, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent and Longton. On the fringe of these populous towns are a number of colliery and mining villages, which are closely connected with the staple industry of the mother town. In the first decades of the eighteenth century, and in the days of Clowes' grand-parents, Burslem was a straggling village composed of isolated pot works and detached cottage dwellings for the workers in clay. In the year 1750, Burslem had a population of only 1,000 inhabitants, and it was known as "The Little Parish." At that time it had only five shops, two of which were occupied by purveyors of meat. It had no Post Office, and the weekly delivery of letters were distributed on a Sabbath morning by an old woman, who brought them from Newcastle. In the heart of the busy town of to-day — within a stone's throw from Clowes' birth-place — and on the site of the present Town Hall, formerly stood the May-pole, around which the "Jolly Potters" and their families kept high carnival. Bull and bear-baiting and cock-fighting were included in the rough pastimes in which the people indulged. On all sides of Burslem village were deep clay-pits, where the potters from time immemorial had dug the native clay for the manufacture of their rude earthenware, and where they had deposited their unsightly mounds of pot workers' rubbish, locally known as "shard rucks."

The manufacture of clay into earthenware vessels is almost as old as the human race. In the days of man's first needs, drinking cups and household utensils were rudely shaped of coarse clay and hardened in the sun. With the development of mind, and the advancement of civilisation, society has outgrown the use of the clumsy vessels of coarse clay used by *primaeval* man. The home life of the people has created a demand for the exquisitely beautiful porcelain services and costly ornaments of earthenware production.

The introduction of the potter's art into the solitudes of North Staffordshire is lost in the mists of antiquity. According to tradition, pottery was made in North Staffordshire in the Romano-British period, and also in Anglo-Saxon times. In the days of the Tudors the manufacture of butter pots by the ancestors of William Clowes was an important part of the Burslem potters' art. In the year 1670, by Act of Parliament, the Burslem potters were required to make pots of a uniform size and thickness, which would hold fourteen pounds of butter, and be sufficiently hard so as not to imbibe moisture. These butter pots were extensively used by the dairy farmers of Staffordshire and Derbyshire in forwarding their butter to the London merchants. They were required to be of uniform size to avoid false packing of the butter, and they were to be non-porous, because it was the common custom of the "Moorlandish Cheats" to soak the vessels in water, and if possible thereby

defraud the buyer of the full weight of butter. From an insignificant beginning, dating from prehistoric times, when the ancient British fashioned from clay their sepulchral urns for receiving the ashes of their sainted dead, their drinking cups and food dishes for domestic purposes in their huts, and their incense-vessels for the religious rites of their Druidical grove worship, this inland earthenware manufacturing district has gradually grown in importance until it has become *par excellence* "The Potteries" of the world.

The chief reason why Burslem and neighbourhood became the centre of the pottery industry is attributable to the abundant supply of clay and coal. The whole district abounds with a variety of beds of clay suitable for the manufacture of earthenware. Coal was cheap and plentiful. In the middle of the eighteenth century it could be purchased at the rate of sixteenpence per ton.

It is generally believed that the original family of Wedgwoods, the maternal ancestors of William Clowes, belonged to the sequestered hamlet of Wedgwood, located in the extensive parish of Wolstanton. Wedgwood is of British origin, and said to be derived from Woden's Wood. The fabulous deity known as Woden was the Mars of the northern counties. The earliest member of the Wedgwood family, whose name is recorded in history, was Thomas De Weggewood, who, in the year 1370, held the office of frank-pledge or head-borough of the hamlet of Weggewood. A century later John Wedgwood, of Blckwood, who is said to be "descended from a family that took its name from Wedgwood in Wolstanton Parish whence they came," married Mary, heiress of Mr. John Shaw. He had with her as patrimony the extensive estate of Harracles, in Horton Parish, near the Staffordshire Moorland capital of Leek. In the year 1563 their descendant, John Wedgwood, of Harracles, was appointed High Collector of Subsidy. He married Mary, daughter of Mr. Thomas Egerton, "with whom he had part of the mannour" of Horton. They had eight children, several of whom married into wealthy families, one of the daughters being united in marriage to a distinguished London goldsmith.

John Wedgwood, the grandson of John Wedgwood, of Blackwood, married a daughter of Sir Thomas Hazelrigg, of Mowseley. This lady of title was the niece of Arthur Hazelrigg, who was one of the five famous commoners in whom the generalship was invested by the notorious Rump Parliament. He was impeached in 1641-2, and ten years later died while a State prisoner in the gloomy Tower of London. Hudibras represents him as—

"The activist member of the five,
As well as the most primitive."

Their eldest son, William, married the grand-daughter of Sir Thomas Bromley, of Holt Castle, Denhighshire. His brother, John Wedgwood, married a daughter of Sir Charles Wolsey, Baronet. One of the daughters of this union was married to John Fenton, nephew of Elijah Fenton the celebrated North Staffordshire poet, and another daughter married Dr. John Addenbrooke, Dean of Lichfield. About the year 1612, Gilbert, the younger son of Richard Wedgwood, of Harracles, and brother of John Wedgwood, the High Collector of Subsidy, married Margaret, daughter and heiress of Thomas De Burslem, of Burslem. The Burslems were an old family of long standing in the Stafford County. In the earlier years of the seventeenth century they owned the larger portion of Burslem, and also possessed extensive lands in different parts of the Potteries. One of the earliest known members of this ancient family was John Burslem, of Dale Hall, whose name appears in the Court Rolls. He was

appointed foreman of the Leet Jury in the years 1563 and 1569. These Courts, which have become almost obsolete, were held for the election of officers and the trial of minor offences. The holding of this office proves that John Burslem was a gentleman of wealth, position and influence.

From this union of the family of the Wedgwoods with the De Burslems, the distinct branches of the Wedgwoods of "The Big House," the "Overhouse," the "Churchyard," the "Great Josiah Wedgwood," and Ann Wedgwood, the mother of William Clowes, are descended. For several generations, before the birth of William Clowes, his ancestors had been extensive potters and large property owners in Burslem and its vicinity. There was a great tendency for the Wedgwoods to inter-marry with their relatives. It is affirmed that in the seventeenth century that at least one third of the inhabitants of Burslem village bore the name of Wedgwood, and were descended from the same family of Wedgwood hamlet.

William Clowes was well acquainted with his relationship with the Wedgwoods, and with feelings of pardonable pride he refers in his "Journals" to his kinship with the members of this distinguished family. He says: "Messrs. Thomas and John Wedgwood, cousins to Mr. Aaron Wedgwood, in 1740 built the largest house in Burslem, to which was given the name of the Big House. They also in that town built the first manufactory which was not covered with thatch." These gentlemen of the "Big House" were the sons of Aaron Wedgwood who married Mary Hollins. This worthy couple were the grandparents of William Clowes' mother. There is a melancholy interest associated with them, for they were both buried on the same day and in the same grave in the Burslem Churchyard. The tomb is a costly one, and is surrounded with massive iron railings several feet in height. The inscription on the flat tombstone reads: "To the memory of Aaron Wedgwood, who died April 21st, aged 77, and Mary his wife, who died April the 22nd, aged 76, and were both interred April the 26th, 1743." Within the enclosure is another tomb containing the mortal remains of several members of their family and the relatives of William Clowes.

About the year 1740 the two brothers, Thomas and John Wedgwood, left their father Aaron's employ as lead-ore-glaze potters, and entered upon another department of superior pottery manufacture, known as the white stone ware. For some time they were unsuccessful in their experiments, and were about to abandon their project when, through an accidental circumstance, they were encouraged to proceed. It appears that "the water with which they prepared the clay became highly saturated with salt, owing to the shard ruck or rubbish from their ovens being placed immediately above their waterpool, and which rubbish contained much salt. The rain passing through the shard rock dissolved the salt and carried it into the pool, whence it got into the body of the ware and in conjunction with the flint and clay together with the lime, which generally adheres to flint stones, formed a fusible body that arrived at a state of vitrification with a lower degree of heat than was requisite to prepare this body for the salt glaze. This discovery induced them to make another trial with pure water, and in this they succeeded beyond expectation."

The Wedgwood brothers followed up their fortunate success by building a large pottery manufactory on an extensive scale, where they had a good supply of water. At the time of its erection the enterprising brothers were subject to much jealousy and carping criticism for having dared to erect a manufactory which was so much in advance of any other in the neighbourhood. This elaborate building is the one referred to by William Clowes in his "Journals" as the first pottery

manufactory erected in Burslem that was not covered with thatch. Adjoining their pottery, and fronting Swan Square, they built a substantial three-storied mansion, which, as Clowes says, was the largest house in Burslem, and was generally known by the name of the “Big House.” These gentlemen, having secured a large competence as the result of their commercial integrity, were enabled in the year 1763 to retire from business.



The brothers Wedgwood were princely potters, for in addition to the “Big House,” they also owned the “Ivy House,” which was so called because it was covered with a profusion of ivy. It was a double-fronted house, standing by itself at the corner of Shoe Lane, which is now known as Wedgwood Street. It stood in what was then the centre of Burslem village, and overlooked the green. Although the “Ivy House” was smaller than the “Big House,” yet it was conspicuously large in comparison with the wood-and-plaster cottages that surrounded it. The “Ivy House” and adjoining works were rented by the great Josiah Wedgwood from his relatives. For a few years the “Ivy House” was the home of Mr. Josiah Wedgwood. To this abode he brought his newly-wedded bride, and commenced house-keeping. The Ivy-House property was purchased in the “thirties” by the Market Commissioners, and was pulled down for the erection of the present Market Hall.

Mr. Thomas Wedgwood, of the “Big House,” was born in the year 1703. He married his cousin, the daughter of Dr Thomas Wedgwood. Thomas Wedgwood died in the year 1776, and was buried in Burslem Church. The inscription upon his gravestone is somewhat singular, for he is described as the

“brother of,” which illustrates the peculiar affection that existed between these two men. It reads: “Here lies the body of Thomas, brother of John Wedgwood, who died April 8th, 1776.”



Parish Church, Burslem.

Aaron Wedgwood the grandfather of William Clowes, was born in the year 1717. His partner and brother-in-law. Mr. William Littler was the son of a gentleman potter who resided at Brownhills, on the outskirts of Tunstall. Upon attaining his majority he inherited a small landed estate. About the year 1745 he joined Aaron Wedgwood as co-partner in earthenware manufacture. At the time when the superior “China” ware was being successfully made at Chelsea, Worcester and Derby, its method of production was a sealed book to the potters of North Staffordshire. Messrs. Wedgwood and Littler having noticed that in some respects the fine “white stone ware approached to porcelain,” they combined their skill and devoted their wealth to find out the secret of manufacturing ware which would resemble Oriental china. It is said that their experiments were eminently successful both in the body of the ware and in the method of glazing it. They have the honourable position of being the first firm of potters who used the fluid glaze by immersion. They started a pottery for the manufacture of china at Longton Hall. William Clowes, in his autobiography refers to this expensive attempt on the part of his grandfather and his partner. He says: “In 1750 the manufacture of the white stone ware was carried to a high state of improvement; and by them afterwards the first china-ware was made at Longton near Stoke.” These gentlemen, like other manufacturing experimenters and pioneers, sacrificed their wealth by their investigations. In later years they found themselves rich in practical experience, but poor in financial wealth. They, however, gained the distinction of being the first makers of china in the Staffordshire Potteries. They communicated their trade secrets and information to their relative, the great Josiah Wedgwood, who greatly benefited by their investigations.

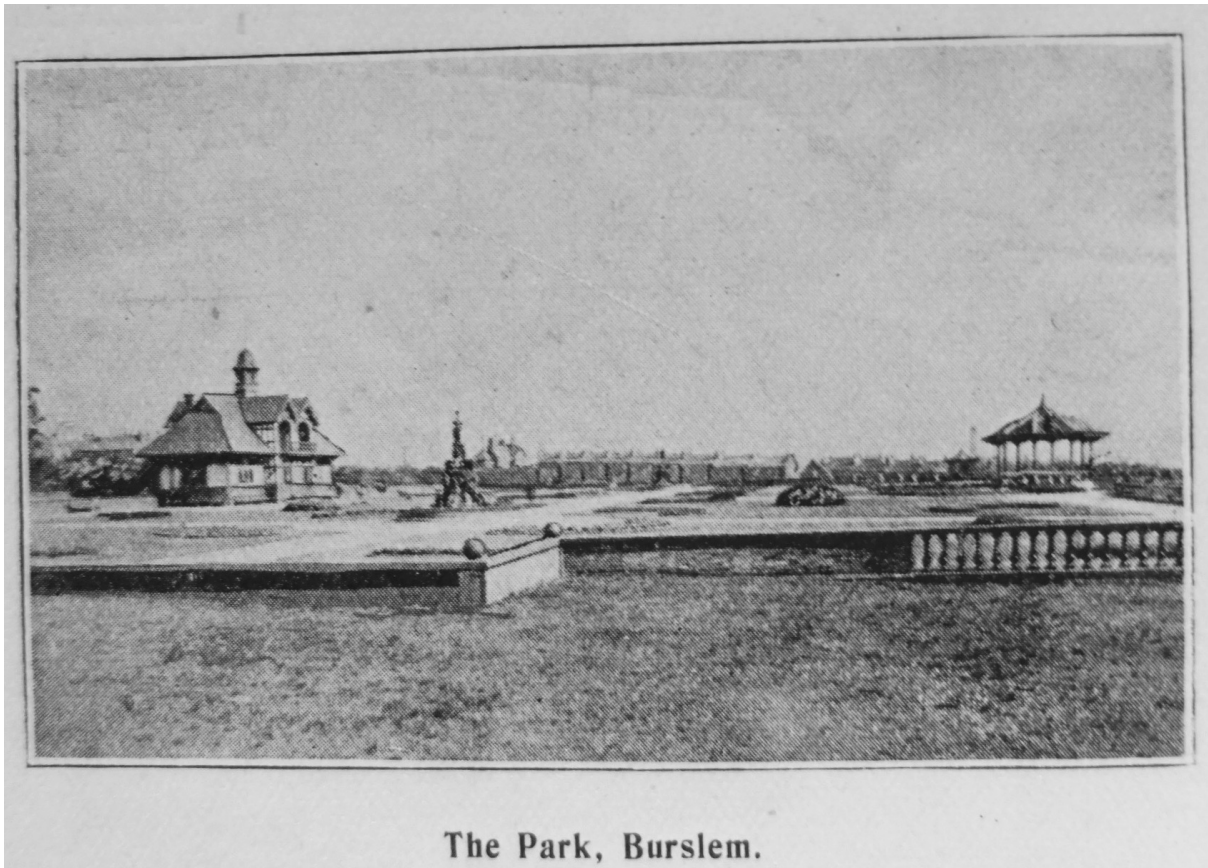


Queen Street, Burslem.



Queen Street, Burslem.

A rare specimen of china or porcelain ware that was manufactured about the year 1754 by Wedgwood and Littler at their Longton works is still extant. About the middle of the nineteenth century a Mr. Aaron Wedgwood, who was a lineal descendant from Clowes' grandfather, was living at Tunstall. He, like his father, was an artist connected with the Potteries, and is described as "a most worthy man."



References

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