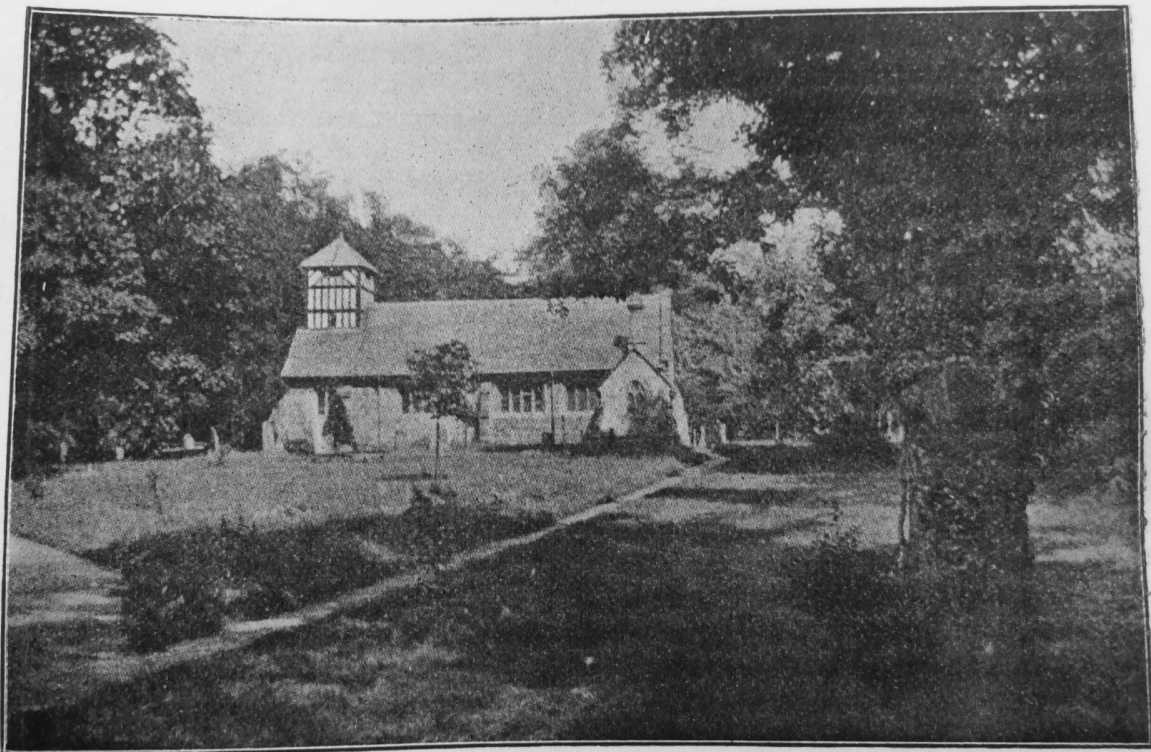


## Sidelights on the History and Personality of the Venerable William Clowes

### Chapter II

#### Transcription of Article in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by J.T. Horne

It is well to remember when we come to the study of any personality, that to obtain a clear conception of the character, two methods must be pursued. We need first to ascertain the ancestry, history and psychological significance of the personality; in other words we must get to know what made him the man he was. Then second, being here, we must find out how he lived his life; what his inner experiences were; how he passed through his great crises; how far did he succeed in carrying out his purposes, and realising his plans. These questions must be first answered separately, and then the answers to the separate questions must be combined to reach a correct conclusion. In the Clowes literature, in our judgment, sufficient attention has not been given to the first group of questions, with the result that a haziness has surrounded his personality. We hope to give a little light upon his ancestry and family, and possibly find the root from which the man has sprung. Every known incident will be used, which has not yet been published, to increase the light. Story will be compared with story, tradition with tradition, that out of the whole we may come to see him as he was.



WHITMORE CHURCH.

Photo. A. Shelley, Dresden.

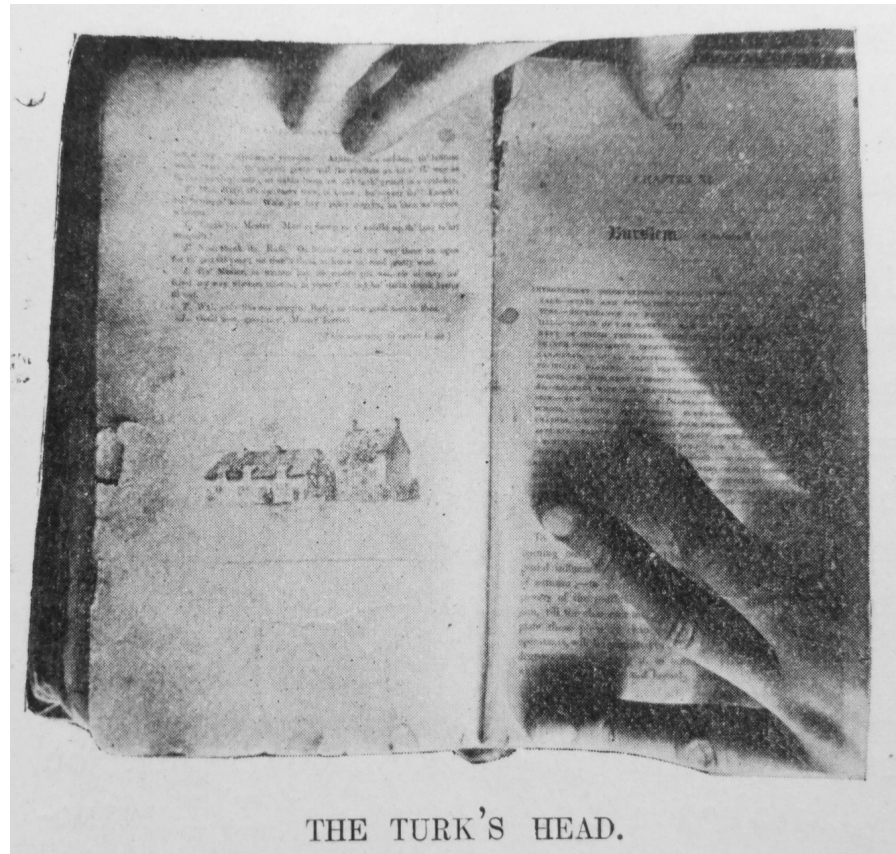
In those memorable days, of what we may call a second Reformation, when as a duty, year after year, John Wesley regularly made his tour of the country, Burslem was included in his itinerancy. We read in his Journal under March 8th, 1760, "went on to Burslem, near Newcastle-under-Lyne, a scattered town on the top of a hill, inhabited almost entirely by potters, a multitude of whom assembled at five in the evening. Deep attention sat on every face, though as yet accompanied by

deep ignorance." The following entry shows that twelve months later he again visited Burslem, and preached on the same spot. "March 19th, 1761. I rode on to Burslem and preached at half-past five in an open place on the top of the hill to a large and attentive congregation, though it rained almost all the time, and the air was extremely cold." While Wesley was thus labouring for the spiritual welfare of this people, Aaron and Richard Wedgwood were putting forth their powers to introduce new and better methods for manufacturing pottery at Burslem. They had succeeded to the business of their father, who died in 1743, and they became the first manufacturers of china-ware in England. These brothers were men of great wealth, and "erected the first brick-built manufactory at Burslem, roofed with tiles." They also built a handsome house, called from its superior size and elevation, "The Big House." Mr. Wesley describes Burslem as "a scattered town," but we should have preferred to call it a poor struggling village, for it was composed of only two hundred and ten buildings, of which twenty-two were Pot Works and nineteen ale houses. With the exception of the "Big House" and the adjacent factory all these buildings were roofed with thatch. The following picture is given in the Burslem dialect of the time: "Fawmal]y, it were a fearful ruffish spot. AW th' hahesen wurn thatcht loike this heer'n; an afore ther durs, e'ery body had a bread oon an' ess midden'; an' th' taken street here wur aw full o'cley-pits . . . bu' th' Big-hahis wur thought a wonderfu' bildin at that teyme. Ther wur nout loike it aney where abat." It was in this "Big House" that Ann Wedgwood was born and from which she was married to Samuel Clowes.

The manners and morals of the Burslem Potters have been often described as "coarse, brutal and vicious." The workmen held their sports on the "Hill Top" where Wesley preached, and every Pottery had its own "wake" which was a time of debauchery. The honours of the Pot-bank required that its "wake" should equal, if not excel, that of its neighbours', in coarse amusements. The methods of trading were of such an order that they contributed to the demoralisation of the work-people. The ware was sold at the ale-houses to "Pot-peddlers," who carried their load of pots on the backs of horses or mules, going from town to town to dispose of their commodities. A peculiar feature of the peddlers' visit to Burslem was that a boxing contest invariably occurred between the peddlers and the potters; for as a class the packmen were expert boxers, and many prided themselves in their proficiency. It sometimes happened that the peddlers, in their wanderings, engaged a professional boxer, and brought him to the pottery town, in order to make money by a wager-battle. They arranged for their man to introduce himself in some disguise, and then warily create a dispute with the potters, to be followed by a boxing match. These savage sports always drew together a number of spectators. In later days William Clowes took a prominent part in these wager contests, and sometimes received personal injury. He tells in his "Journal" that "Through fighting my body has often been so beaten that I have been nearly covered with bruises. On one occasion I was carried out from the room apparently dead, and medical help obtained." The contest in which he received this dangerous blow arose from the acceptance of the challenge of a peddler. It appears from what we have been told that his competitor was a professional boxer who had been brought for a wager-battle, and he inflicted such a blow that Clowes was carried out of the room, apparently dead; and a medical man was hastily called to determine whether any symptoms of life remained. It is to this boxing that the local poet refers in his lines to the honour of the pot-pugilist:-

"How Stouker Unwin beat the pedlar,  
And made the packmen stare;  
Until their looks were dull and flat  
As cracked and crazed ware."

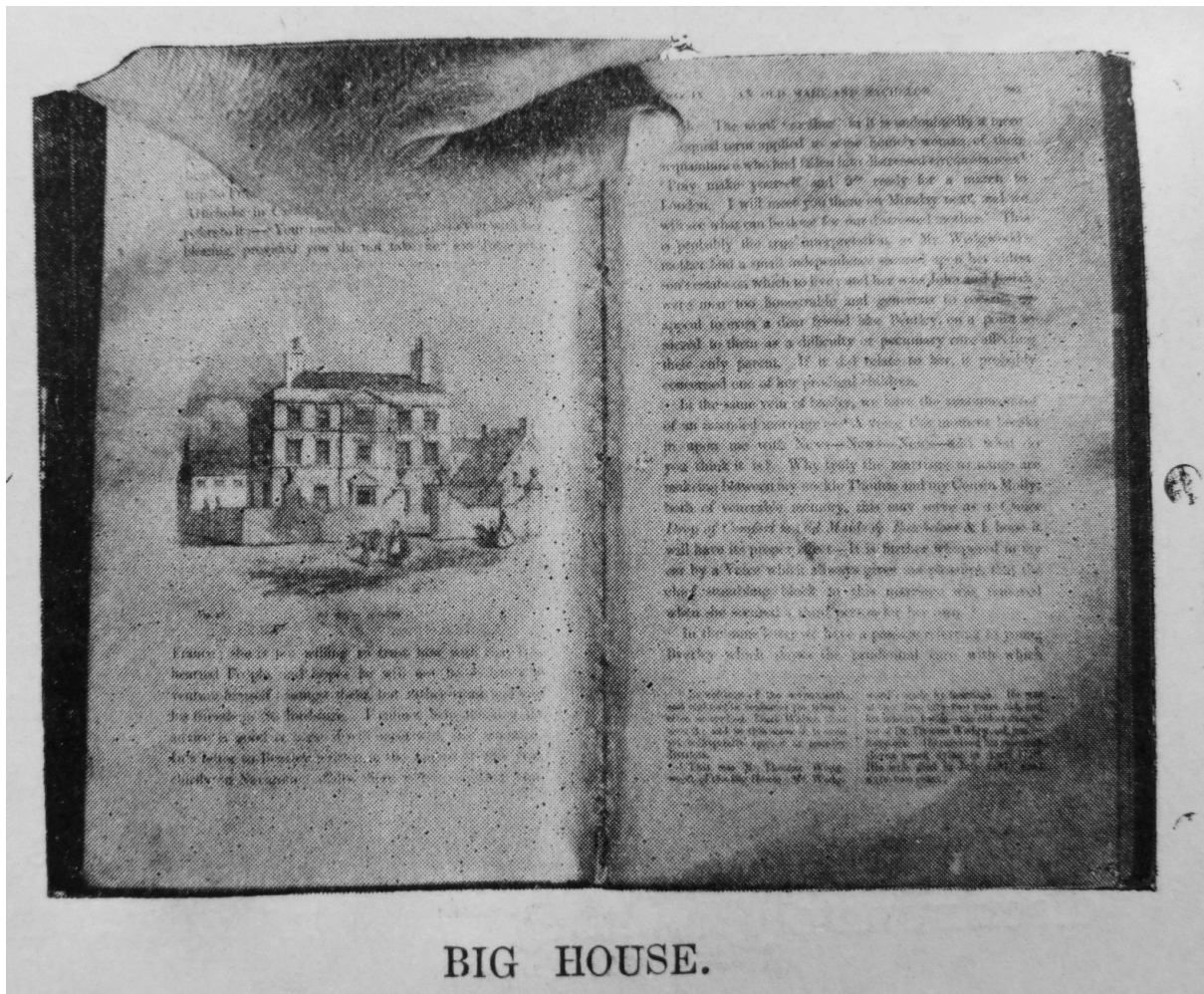
But this was not the only part which the tavern played in the industrial life of Burslem; for it was also the meeting place of the potters during the firing of the ware. As soon as the articles had been placed in the ovens the potters proceeded to the tavern, and many of them continued their carousal until they were compelled to return to attend to the kilns. We had better give one or two incidents which have been told us illustrative of the customs of that time; as William Clowes and his father were spectators, if not actors in similar affairs. Mr. Wedgwood writes us: "I fear that William in his unregenerate days, and his father also, were too frequent customers of the 'Turk's Head' public house." This "Turk's Head," which occupies such a large place in the life of Burslem at the close of the Eighteenth Century, was a half brick and half wood structure, very popular as a public resort. It almost adjoined the "Ivy House" and the Churchyard Works of the Brothers Wedgwood. The "Turk's Head" and the "Blue Bell," another old thatched tenement, had one yard in common, the extremes of both places meeting, and there was no kind of fence between. The landlords of the two inns were never known to quarrel about the



boundary. The potters used both places indiscriminately, as they were both near their works. A very rude but effective method was adopted in those days for dealing with a drunk and disorderly customer. When he refused to comply with the expressed wish of the company he was summarily ejected from the tavern and tied to the sign post of the house, and there allowed to remain until he had become both civil and sober. This rough treatment continued for many years, but was ultimately abolished through the influence of Madam Egerton, wife of a leading potter at Burslem.

Clowes mentions dancing as one of his attainments. Each of the principal taverns provided for dancing parties, and the passion seems to have affected all grades of life, for dancing companies existed everywhere. These companies, with their fiddler, visited neighbouring towns and villages for competitive dances. There is a story told of a company of Burslem dancers visiting Endon, and they commenced the dance about seven o'clock on the evening of September 2nd, and did not stop until daylight on the 14th. But it is only right to add that this refers to the time of the alteration of the Calendar when eleven days were dropped by Act of Parliament.

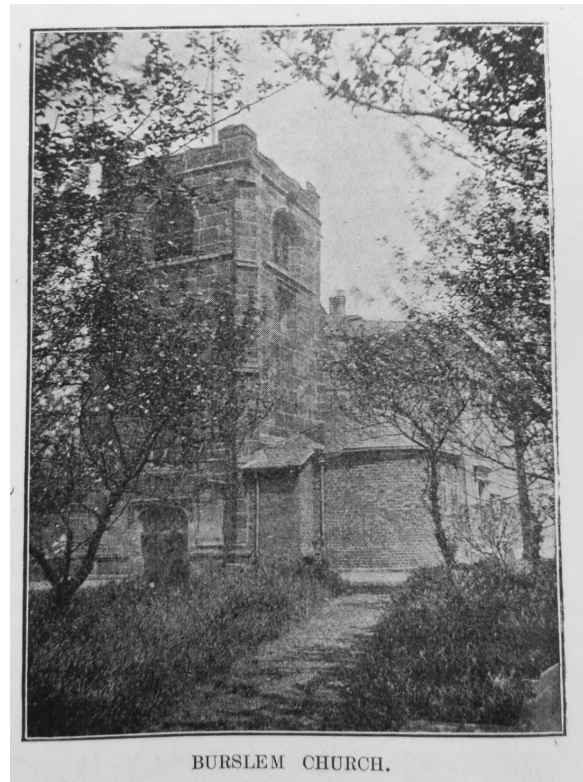




From the year 1770, or thereabouts – the time of the completion of the Grand Trunk Canal - may be dated the commencement of the great commercial prosperity of Burslem and the district. It was the beginning of the multiplication of factories; towns and villages sprang into existence; inhabitants flocked in from every side; and trade increased with amazing rapidity. John Wesley's "Journal" gives an animated picture of the altered appearance of the district during the period covered between 1760 and 1790. But this rapid growth of wealth was accompanied by a wild barbarity. The people became intoxicated with their material prosperity, and domestic decency and common morality were even more flagrantly ignored and outraged. It was a period of brilliant material development, but if we can fairly judge from the reports which have come down to us the morals and manners of the people were honey combed with vices. Their increased wealth only served to give greater facilities for the development of the animal passions at the sacrifice of their higher powers. But in fairness it should be said that the condition of the people was very largely the outcome of their social and industrial surroundings; their vices and dissipations were generated in, and recruited from, and encouraged by the conditions in which they were compelled to live. We could no more imagine grapes without a vine, than to believe that such vices could exist without depending very largely upon the nutriment supplied by such an industrial condition. The vices were the expression of unregenerated humanity living its life in such a poisonous atmosphere.

We shall be pardoned for dwelling at such length upon these industrial changes, when it is remembered that the streams of influence which they produced powerfully affected the characters of both parents of William Clowes. Indeed, every person, man, woman, and child, whether in the "Big House" or the cottage, would have to breathe the morally tainted atmosphere. Living in that "Big House" Ann Wedgwood had her dreams, and Samuel Clowes, by some means unknown to us, gained her ear and won her affection. Possibly, with the passion of youth, it may have been a romance played out in her father's factory - the "Churchyard Works" - but if so it was a romance which had for her a somewhat tragic ending; for she found that life is not an ideal but an actual. We know very little of the immediate ancestry of Samuel Clowes who wooed and won Ann Wedgwood. He is often described as a native of Burslem, but on what authority we do not know. . . At that time many persons named Clowes were living at Burslem, but up to the present we have failed to trace any immediate relationship between them and Samuel Clowes. In an old book, kept in the Burslem Parish Church, which we were permitted to search, we found in many places the name of Clowes.

On one page there is an entry showing that on "22nd day of April, 1794," a meeting was held and many signatures were attached including that of "William Clowes." But there is no evidence of any immediate relationship between these Burslem residents and Samuel Clowes. On the other hand, there is a tradition that Samuel Clowes - the husband of Ann Wedgwood - belonged to a country family, and had temporarily removed to Burslem for the purpose of learning the potting business. We have tried to get fuller information on this subject, but unfortunately we were too late in our enquiries. The Rev. Joseph Aston to whom we wrote replied, "Am sorry I cannot help you re Clowes and Whitmore. I have a distinct recollection of old Mr. Milward telling me something about it, but he is dead, and I find his family are unable to say anything on the subject; it is quite strange to them. I cannot remember



BURSLEM CHURCH.

with any degree of certainty what he said." This tradition, however, finds support in the entry in the Marriage Register of Burslem Parish Church, for it shows that the banns of the marriage were published in the Church at *Whitmore* as well as Burslem. Now what does this dual publication mean? At that period the parishes of Whitmore and Burslem were both members of Stoke parish, but they were subsequently severed from it by the Stoke Rectory Division Act, 1807. We have submitted the question to two legal authorities in the district, and they are agreed that the only conclusion that can be safely drawn from such an entry is that the bridegroom belonged to Whitmore parish and the bride to Burslem. It is every way probable that Samuel Clowes was a member of a Whitmore family, but served an apprenticeship at Burslem, where he wooed and won Ann Wedgwood. The entry in the Register shows that the marriage between them was celebrated at Burslem on May 31st, 1773, and reads as follows:-

"Banns of Marriage between Samuel Clowes and Ann Wedgwood were published March 21st, 28th, and April 4th, in Whitmore Church.

No. 189. Samuel Clowes of the Parish of Burslem, Potter, and Ann Wedgwood of the parish aforesaid, single woman were married in this Church by publication of Banns, this thirty first day of May, one thousand seven hundred and seventy-three, by me R. Bentley, Minr. De Burslem. This marriage was solemnised between us, Samuel Clowes, Ann Wedgwood. In the presence of us Aaron Wedgwood, James Lowe."

It is not known where they lived during the first years of their married life. It has been suggested that they went into a house at Ball's Bank, but it is hardly likely that the bridegroom would take his newly wedded wife from the "Big House" to reside in such a district. Miss Wedgwood is said by those who knew her, "to have been naturally amiable, of great mental vigour, of unblemished morals, and as having been educated in the doctrines and ceremonies of the Church of England." To imagine that Aaron Wedgwood would consent for his first born to go to such a place for a home, or even that his daughter willingly went to such a place, is to suppose that she had not only given up her name, but had also recklessly thrown aside all her social instincts. It would certainly not be what we should expect from a woman of "great mental vigour." With the passing years, and the changes which they brought; with the humiliation attendant on her husband's conduct, and the poverty resulting from his indolence; and possibly the isolation from her family and early associates, and the shame at her social descent, she may have been driven to hide herself in such a district, with its strange surroundings, and foul and unsanitary conditions. It was surely after, at least, a few years that we find her in the cottage at Ball's Bank.

According to the testimony of old residents the cottage in which the Clowes lived when William was born, was demolished in 1893, and its site is now part of a road leading to a slaughter house. In 1780, and for many subsequent years, it was the end house of a row of six workmen's cottages forming one side of a rude square, the other end cottage joining a row of similar buildings at right angles, forming another side. The front doors, which were the only entrances to the houses, opened to the bank, which was called "Ball's Bank" from the custom of the potters gathering upon it to play ball. An old potter who showed us the place said that when he was a boy he had many times seen the play, and he described it as consisting of kicking a ball against an adjoining wall. The man was declared the winner who kicked the ball the highest, and the greatest number of times, without allowing it to touch the ground.

(To be continued)

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## References

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1906/139