

This is the Sixty-Fourth of an occasional series of articles by David Stone about incidents in the history of Swanton Morley and its church

A STORY RELATING TO SWANTON WATER MILL

An article by Revd. Jessopp

Last time I told you about the Revd. Augustus Jessopp, who was at one time rector of Scarning, and I mentioned that he wrote an article *Swanton Mill* which appeared in the Sept 1899 edition of a journal called *The Nineteenth Century*, which was a monthly literary magazine.

This article tells a long, and slightly rambling, tale about events that took place at the paper mill at the beginning of the 19th century. At that time the mill was being managed for the executors of a former proprietor by a Yorkshireman called Singleton Gidlow who had recently lost his wife and is said to have become somewhat embittered. Now Gidlow had a family of three girls and a boy and, at the time of the events described, Hannah was aged 17, Jane was aged 16 and Sally was 15. The son was Sabine who was still at school.

The story starts with a runaway horse being caught by a young fellow called William Gant. As a result of this he was appointed head of the stables at the mill at the young age of twenty-two, and it was not long before Hannah fell for him. However, her sisters were jealous, suspicious and vindictive. Not long afterwards, the executors decided to sell the mill, but Gidlow did not have the money to buy it. He had been left a small estate in Yorkshire by his father, but it was heavily mortgaged and it took all his savings to pay off the mortgage, so he decided to take his family to Yorkshire.

This news caused Hannah and William to admit that they loved each other, but Jane caught them kissing and there was a dreadful fight between the two girls, which ended up with Sally intervening and seriously burning Hannah's arm with a poker. However, they all agreed to pretend that it was an accident because they were terrified of their father and feared that he would kill Will Gant if he were to learn the truth.

The family duly set off for Yorkshire, but Hannah failed to meet them at Spalding as had been agreed and they went on without her. She had returned to the Swanton Morley area and had married Will. Her father swore vengeance and at first none of the local farmers would employ Will. Matters did slowly improve but Will could only get work as a labourer. Even fifteen years after the elopement, by which time Hannah had borne Will twelve children (ten of whom were still living) the family was starving and Will was forced to take the Parish Allowance.

It was then that Hannah received a letter from her father telling her that her brother Sabine was dead. He offered to take her back if she begged his pardon and abandoned Will. This she would not do. However, things slowly continued to improve and over the next twenty years all their children married and left home. Will died when he was just sixty.

Hannah somehow came to hear that her sister Jane, who had been a widow for some years, was employed as some sort of housekeeper at a great house, and she sought her out. Eventually she managed to find her and she proved who she was by showing the scar on her burnt arm, but nothing further seems to have come of this meeting.

Hannah did not long outlive her husband and it was a year or two later that there appeared in the newspapers an advertisement for the rightful heirs of Singleton Gidlow. However, there was not to be a happy ending because her children could not prove the marriage of Will Gant to Hannah and their claim was not accepted.

I have found out a certain amount about the Gidlow family, but whether or not I have found the relevant ones is hard to say without a lot more work

There is a Singleton Gidlow (bachelor) married by Banns at St Alphege, Greenwich, in May 1775 to Elizabeth Know (Spinster). Both made their mark.

They then seem to have moved to Swanton Morley, for they had a daughter baptised there. This fits in with Jessopp's story about Singleton running the watermill.

Swanton Morley Baptisms

On 10 Dec 1791 Charlotte, daughter of Singleton Giddlow Pauper and Elizabeth New (sic) (Spinster).

But Charlotte did not live very long

Swanton Morley Burials

4 Jan 1792 Charlotte Giddelow daughter of Singleton Giddelow and Elizabeth his wife (late New), Spinster, pauper

The life of William and Hannah in Swanton Morley

Swanton Morley Marriages

On 3 Jan 1804 William Wright of this Parish m. Hannah Giddylow both single
Could this William Wright have somehow become confused with the Will Gant who Jessopp said married Hannah Giddelow? This couple had at least one child in Swanton Morley (see below).

Another Swanton Morley Baptism

On 25 Sept 1805 William, son of William Wright and Hannah, late Giddelow, Spinster

William Wright was buried in Swanton Morley on 23 October 1861, aged 66.

There is a tombstone in the churchyard which gives this date but puts his age as 64. It bears the inscription "the world keep silence for God himself will judge". One is tempted to think that this was a comment on the life that he was forced to live.