

CHARLES WARREN AND THE LOST INHERITANCE



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INTRODUCTION

For a little while now, I've been researching the history of Simpson House, a Grade 2 Listed Building in the village of Simpson, Bucks.

Charles Warren and the Lost Inheritance: A talk at Simpson Village Hall, 9 March 2019

I'd read something about the house from various articles on local history, and in the little book "Simpson People and Places" etc.

They'd told me that Simpson House was built around 1830 by someone called Charles Warren and that the house had been surrounded by extensive walled gardens.

Charles, apparently, had been a farmer and landowner who owned not only Simpson House but the adjacent farm as well as other land and properties in Simpson Village. Some sources also claimed that Warren had also been an architect and builder who not only built Simpson House but several other prominent houses in the Fenny Stratford area.

I also knew that Warren died in 1872 and after his death the house and its contents and all his other land and properties was all sold off at auction.

But what I couldn't immediately find out was: who was Charles Warren and who were the Warren family? How did he come to acquire all his land and properties in Simpson? More to the point, where did the money come from to build Simpson House and its extensive gardens?

And, why was the estate – including Simpson House – sold off piece by piece after his death? Did he have no children to leave it to?

These are some of the questions I've tried to find answers to.

Its been quite a journey of discovery and on the way I have unearthed some surprising new facts as well as some puzzles and mysteries – and that's the subject of this talk.

Prelude, the churchyard

If you take a walk around the churchyard of St. Thomas Church in the village of Simpson and look closely at the tombstones and you'll discover something really rather unusual. Prominently placed close to the west wall of the church is an unusually large stone memorial tablet, set into the ground. Look at it carefully – you may need to clean the moss away from the inscription first - and you will see the reason why its so large. It's actually a **double** gravestone. On the **left** hand side the inscription is dedicated to the memory of Anne Gibbs who died in August 1820. The **right** hand side is dedicated to the memory of Thomas Goodman. Thomas, it seems, died a little later, January 1822.

Pause for a moment and you may want to ask the reason for this curious double memorial. Clearly, Thomas Goodman and Anne Gibbs were not husband and wife. But here they are, buried side by side in a prominent place in the church yard. Someone, it seems, wanted to make a public declaration of their relationship.

Walk around the corner of the church and you come to the main door. Here are 3 more graves. Again, they're difficult to read, some of the lettering has disappeared but you'll see that although the date of his death has been worn away the more ancient one of the stones is dedicated to the memory of George Gibbs. The other two stones are much larger. One is dedicated to Leonora Warren, daughter of Thomas Goodman. Leonora died in 1841. The second is dedicated to Charles Warren, husband of Leonora Warren, who died in 1872.

The Goodman Family

The Goodman family lived in the middle of the village of Simpson around the end of the 18th Century. There was a large farmhouse on the side of Simpson Road. It had been on the site for perhaps 200 years and in it lived Thomas Goodman. Thomas – and the Goodman family – were prominent landowners in the Simpson area. Also living in the cottage was Anne Gibbs and she was his housekeeper. Now it doesn't seem that Thomas ever married. But he did have two children; a son, George Gibbs and a daughter, Leonora. Their mother was Anne Gibbs.

As we saw, Thomas Goodman died in 1822 and when he died he left all his land and properties to his son George, after a bequest of £500 to Leonora. Sadly, George wasn't going to enjoy his inheritance for very long because, just 5 years later, in August 1827, George also died. Also unmarried, like his father, George left everything – the Goodman land, properties, and of course the old farmhouse - in his Will to his sister, Leonora.

Charles and Leonora

So, around the end of 1827, at the age of 40, Leonora Gibbs must have been quite a rich woman. Quite a catch, you might think. Well, somebody did, because quite soon after Leonora came into her inheritance in 1827 she got married. Oddly, there is no record of the marriage in the Simpson Church records and that's because it didn't take place in Simpson. It took me a long time to find out where. It actually took place in Clerkenwell, in London, at St.James Church. It was there, on the 29th August, 1828, that Leonora married: Charles Warren. Incidentally, I do know that this marriage record was correct, because one of the witnesses at the wedding was someone called Thomas Latham Warren and that was the name of Charles Warren's only brother. We'll come back to the Warren family later in the talk.

How Leonora came to meet Charles I have never been able to establish. I do know that Charles wasn't a local man and had no family in the Simpson area. In fact no one seemed to know very much at all about how Charles Warren came to be in the Simpson area and how he came to meet Leonora.

I managed to find out something about him. Charles was born in Petersfield in Hampshire in 1798 and baptised in Alverstoke, Hampshire also in 1798. In 1804 he was probably living in Falmouth, in

Cornwall, because for some reason he was baptised again there, when he was 6 years old. We do know that Charles had an elder brother, Thomas Latham Warren; and three sisters: Mary Anne, Martha, Elizabeth and Charlotte. Apart from that, I could find out nothing – where he lived, where he went to school, who his parents were. It seemed like a dead end. I even enlisted the help of the Cornish Family History Society but they couldn't trace him either.

I do know that a Marriage Settlement was completed between Charles and Leonora in 1829, just one year after they were married. This marriage settlement must presumably have dealt with the acquisition of Thomas Goodman's estate and would have included provision for what would happen to Leonora if Charles died before her. (I should perhaps explain here that in the early 19th century of course it wasn't possible for married women to own property, or rather to put it another way, if you came into property and then married then that property became your husband's).

Finding Charles

The settlement referred to a James Savage of Essex Street in the Strand, Architect. I remembered that I had read that Charles Warren was thought to have been an architect or builder. Could this be a clue? Looking up James Savage, I found that he was a prominent Architect and was Architect to the Middle Temple. His office was at 32 Essex Street, not so far from Clerkenwell. Savage had done a number of church building projects throughout his professional career.

There is an incredible database on the Internet – it's the digitised records of church building projects from all all over the country, extending way back into the early 19th century. It includes copies of plans and lists of people involved in the design and supervision of building works. And here on the database, I finally found Charles Warren, the projects he had worked on and up on my computer screen popped seven plans prepared by him. It was a sort of Eureka moment!

What it revealed was that Charles Warren was listed as a Surveyor, from Simpson, working for James Savage and that he had been employed in 1828 on a church building project in Newport Pagnell, at St. Peter and St. Paul Church. The work involved the rebuilding of the south aisle and adding pinnacles and battlements to the tower. Charles, it seemed was the Superintendent of the Works.

So, perhaps this explained why Charles came to the Simpson area? And how he came to meet and marry Leonora?

The Building Of Simpson House

Once the marriage settlement was done, it seems, Charles and Leonora decided to demolish the old Goodman farmhouse and build themselves a fine, new house.

And here it is – Simpson House

Its probably best described as a Regency-style villa, with the stucco faced front and the horizontal banding on the stucco very typical of that period. There are many houses with similar fronts, especially around Regents Park, built by John Nash in the early part of the 19th Century. But it has some quite distinct features. Some are usually described as Italianate – notice the shallow, 'hipped roof', which was originally slate and the wide overhanging eaves supported by pairs of what are known as modillion brackets. Look at the grand front door, actually a double door of six panels, with the 'reeded' columns on either side. Notice the lovely elliptical fanlight over the front door with the circle of coloured glass. (there's another on of these inside the house, over the dressing room door).

Other things to notice – it's set well up above the ground, with two wide York stone steps up to the front door and something else quite unusual: the sash windows have what is known as 'marginal glazing', something I have discovered you see extremely rarely.

(By the way the extension on the right hand side of the picture isn't part of the original house – it was added after Charles died, by a later owner.)

I should perhaps mention that although I call the house Simpson House it wasn't called that when Warren built it. In fact it didn't have a name at all. It wasn't until sometime after Charles died that a later owner, Thomas Kench called it Sympson House and then Simpson House. (For a while it was also called The White House.)

The garden side of the house had another remarkable feature – a full length glazed door, with a coloured fanlight above it. The door was originally I think decorated overall with stained glass, - it apparently had a seascape in the central panel, now, sadly, along with most of the rest of the coloured glass, missing. I think its possible all the coloured glass in the fanlights and the garden door may have been designed by Charles brother, Thomas Latham Warren, who was a glass manufacturer in London. On the outside, there was a canopy, set on metal columns with tiling on the two walls next to the window.

The local villagers must have been quite amazed to see this magnificent villa, with its large windows and high roof, rising from the demolition of what was probably an old thatched farm house. But it wasn't just the house that would have surprised them, because Charles and Leonora laid out beautiful gardens surrounding the new house. Immediately next to the house was a formal garden, with lawns, flowerbeds, two conservatories, a summerhouse, a fountain, a pond and statuary. Beyond that, enclosed by high walls, was a vegetable garden and beyond that again an orchard. All the way along Simpson Road, from the Plough public house as far as what is now Warren Bank was a high wall, which then turned and ran along the side of the house.

It's worth remembering that at the time we are talking about – around 1830 - this part of Simpson Village was, with a few exceptions, not much more than a collection of thatched cottages, and the village was described as:

one of the most wretched of many miserable villages in the county. During a great portion of the winter the main road was generally impassable without wading through water 3 feet deep for a distance of about 200 yards.

The flooding probably came from the overflowing of Simpson Brook, a problem which didn't get solved until way after Charles Warren's time. There is a suggestion that Charles 'procured' the raising of Simpson Road as a flood prevention measure, although I haven't found any first hand evidence for that.

The progress of Charles

House and garden finished it seems that Charles soon established himself in the local Simpson community. In 1830 he was one of the Trustees of the local Pigott charity. From 1832 to 1839 he was a Churchwarden at St Thomas Church. It seems that he continued to work for James Savage, because in 1834-1835 he worked on another church building project, over in Bow Brickhill, at All Saints Church. As well as this, Charles expanded his activities into contracting. During the 1830s the railway building mania reached Buckinghamshire and in 1836 the building of the London to Birmingham railway started. A local newspaper report from 1840 showed that Charles was a contractor for the construction of cuttings and embankments around Bletchley Station.

(The report was about him being sued by a group of labourers claiming non payment of wages for carrying out works on the railway embankments east of Bletchley station. As it happens, they lost their case).

Death in the Afternoon

On the afternoon of 5th April 1841 a tragedy overtook the Warren family. Leonora, now aged 54, who was taking afternoon tea at Simpson House, was suddenly taken ill. I don't know the cause of the illness and the precise circumstances but she died later that day. The events were so unusual

that an inquest was called for, although the verdict would perhaps not be something we would be very satisfied with now because the Coroner concluded that Leonora had died "*By the Visitation of God*". Leonora was buried in St. Thomas churchyard next to her brother George and Charles had a memorial tablet installed inside the Church.

Within 4 months of Leonora's death, Charles married again, marrying Sophia Gee, at Emberton Parish Church. Sophia was aged 47, a widow, from Olney. Her father was James Page, a publican.

From 1841 onwards Charles was listed in a number of Buckinghamshire directories under the heading of "Clergy and Gentlemen."

Charles and Mary

In the summer of 1844 Charles received some rather surprising news, which was to have a dramatic impact on his life and perhaps on the life of Sophia. Charles was to become a father. The news was surprising because the mother of the child was not his wife, Sophia, who by then was in her early 50s, but a young local woman, Mary Ann Clarke, just 20 years old. Mary was a lacemaker, a common occupation for young women in Buckinghamshire at that time. Her family came from Bow Brickhill, where they had lived for many years. You may remember that Charles had worked in Bow Brickhill in 1834 on a church building project.....maybe that where he came in contact with the Clarke family. Mary's father was a millwright, perhaps connected with the church building works?

What seems clear is that Charles didn't dispute that he was the father. When Mary had her child in January 1845 he was happy to recognise him as his son. What Sophia thought about it is something else. She must surely have been hugely embarrassed by it, something that I imagine would become a source of local gossip and a local scandal. After all, apart from the great age difference between Charles and Mary, Charles was by then a well known and prosperous member of the local community, Trustee, Churchwarden, member of various organisations, a contractor and landowner.

So we could speculate that Charles' affair with a 20 year old lacemaker and the birth of an illegitimate child 4 years after his 2nd marriage took place wouldn't have found a great deal of favour with Sophia. As we will see later she may have got her revenge many years later when Charles was close to death.

After William was born, Mary Clarke lived with her mother and grandmother in Bow Brickhill and as far as I can understand was supported financially by Charles, who must have stayed in contact with her because when William was 6 years old Charles paid for him to go and attend a private school in Wendover as a boarder. In fact William was a 'parlour boarder' - a privileged class of boarder at a small private school. Parlour boarders paid more than other pupils, perhaps double, in return for which they had a room of their own. They would often eat with the schoolmaster and his family – and enjoy much better food.

Whether Mary Clarke ever married or had other children, I don't know. Her own mother, died in 1851 and Mary doesn't appear in the later Censuses for Bow Brickhill. William, her son, had his name changed to William Clarke Warren. In the 1861 Census William is listed as a scholar living in George Street, Woburn, probably in the Bedford Arms Hotel.

Charles Warren – Gentleman

We can catch up with Charles again in 1851 when he appears in the Census as a farmer owning 52 acres. In the 1850s He was a member of the Board of Guardians of Newport Pagnell Workhouse and a Member of the Royal Bucks Agricultural Association; and then his fortunes seem to have progressed even further: in 1861 he's shown as a landed proprietor with 191 acres, various cottages and employing seven people. In local directories he continues to be listed under Clergymen and Gentry.

Charles makes a Will

On 28 October 1868 Charles, then aged 70, made a will. In the will, he requested that he be buried in the Simpson churchyard, in a brick grave, adjoining the grave of his first wife Leonora; and that a memorial tablet be placed inside St. Thomas Church, similar to the one for Leonora. You can see both of the tablets which are still there on the wall.

In his will, which is a very long and complicated document which extends to some 6 closely written foolscap pages he bequeathed to

William Clarke Warren, the son of Mary Anne Clarke, late of Bow Brickhill...

my gold watch and chain and my other articles of jewellery

later in the will he says

after the decease of my Wife Sophia Warren I give to William Clarke Warren the whole of my plate and such part of my goods and effects not exceeding in value one third as he may select for his own absolute use

Charles then wanted his estate divided up equally into four parts, between

William Clarke Warren

my Nephews Thomas Warren and William Bond and

my friend Charles William Powell

All these four were named trustees of the Will.

There were then a number of bequests to members of the Warren family, including his brother, sisters and nieces.

So, that seems to me like a very fair and generous Will. He was recognising his attachment to his only child. He was leaving him personal items such as his gold watch and other jewellery, which either were of some value or certainly of sentimental value; and other personal goods; and he was receive a quarter of the estate.

The Mysterious Second Codicil

Now, we come to the great mystery of the *final days* of Charles Warren. The story starts on the eleventh of April, 1872. Charles' solicitor is summoned to Simpson House because Charles wants to revise his Will. On that day he signed a codicil to his Will: a very short, very simple but quite devastating document.

Here's the wording:

I revoke all the devises and bequests made to or in favour of William Clarke Warren and I revoke the appointment of the said William Clarke Warren as a trustee and executor of my said will

I leave my residuary estate upon Trust to my nephews William Bond and Thomas Warren in equal shares absolutely.

So, with a stroke, if you like of the pen his only son, William Clarke Warren was to be completely removed from the Will and all the bequests to him were revoked. So as a result, William, who by then had married and had 3 children, including a son, - a grandson for Charles Warren, who he had named Charles, after his grandfather, was completely removed from the will.

The Death of Charles Warren

That codicil was signed by Charles on 11th of April and 9 days later he died, in Simpson House. According to the death certificate the cause of death was 'Organic disease of the liver.'

William recorded in his family Bible:

"I lost my parental inheritance through the mysterious codicil to my fathers will."

How can we explain these remarkable changes to Charles Warren's will? There seem to be a number of possible scenarios that might explain these dramatic alterations to the Will.

Perhaps Charles was of sound mind and judgement. He just decided that he wanted to change his will and 'cut out' his only son. No pressure was put on him to do that.

But why would he do that? He had it seemed enjoyed good relations with his son. He had paid for his education at a private school. William had named his own son after Charles. By the time of his death, William Clarke Warren had a growing family with 3 children. It would have been a great benefit to him and his family to receive some of his father's estate. And why would Charles want to take away all the personal items - his gold watch and chain, his jewellery - he had left William in the original will? That seems like a particularly nasty and spiteful thing to do.

An alternative possibility was that perhaps Charles was very ill, perhaps physically weak and mentally confused and someone pressured him to change the will. Maybe he was in such a poor mental and physical state that he didn't really know what he was being asked to do? The codicil was drafted out, turned into legal language by the solicitor and Charles just signed the bottom of the page.

Or could it have been Sophia? Was she jealous of the attention paid to William and resentful still of the affair he had with Mary Ann Clarke. She may still have been mindful of the scandal of the affair with a woman some 25 years younger, a common working woman and the embarrassment it had caused her. This was her chance to get some sort of revenge.

If so, it was a particularly vengeful act. Sophia did not stand to gain from changes to the will. If you look at Sophia's own will it's clear that she was not herself a poor woman; anyway, she was already over 70 and Charles had been careful enough to ensure that she could continue to live in Simpson House until her death.

If not Sophia, perhaps the nephews? They clearly stood to gain from the new Will : they would receive half of the estate instead of just one quarter and half of the proceeds from the sale of Charles' possessions and household goods and all the contents of Simpson House.

But there is another problem with this scenario.

One of the nephews, Thomas Goodman Warren, had already emigrated to Ontario, Canada in 1870. It seems very unlikely therefore that he returned to England to take part in any scheme to change his uncles will.

So, that leaves just one other person: William Bond, the son of Charles' sister Martha. He was in England, he would have realised the potential gain to him of changing the will; and he too might have been jealous of what he might have thought was the special favours received by William.

My attempts to trace William Bond and any family he may have had have so far been unsuccessful. We may never know the truth. There are of course no records or written accounts.

I have been able to trace the descendants of Thomas Goodman Warren in Ontario, Canada, but I can't say whether he had any involvement in the changes to the will, nor whether he ever received his share of the estate.

After death

We saw that Charles died, aged 75, in April 1872. Sophia of course was still living at that time, so she continued to live in Simpson House for another two and a half years until she also died, in Simpson House, in September 19th, 1874.

Then the trustees and executors moved swiftly and with brutal efficiency.

Just 3 weeks later, on the 12th and 13th of October 1874, the contents of Simpson House were all sold off. Look at the Auction Notice and here are the personal items that would, if not for the mysterious Second Codicil, have gone to William:

**A Gold Lever Watch, two Gold Watch Guards, with Gold Seals
A Gold Scarf Pin
upwards of 130 ounces of silver
china**

Also auctioned was what was described as 'handsome drawing dining and bedroom furniture', together with all Charles other goods and possessions.

Then, also 13 October, another auction, of Charles Warrens land and properties, was held. The land included various meadows, closes, pasture land and three cottages and Lot 1 was Simpson House.

That might have been the end of it, you might have thought...but there was another twist in the tale. I have some some doubt that Simpson House actually went into the auction, or if it did, whether it actually sold. Why do I say that? Because it appears that the house wasn't actually sold until the following year, 1875, when it seems, the Executors sold it to one Octavius Burrell. But oddly, the following day, Octavius took out a mortgage on the house and one year later, in 1876, Octavius sold it to a Thomas Kench. It seems unlikely that Burrell ever lived in the house. I decided to have a look and see who was Octavius Burrell, how did he come to buy the house from the estate and why did he sell it on so quickly?

Octavius, I found was the son of Walton Burrell, a prosperous landowner farming in Suffolk; so prosperous, it seemed, that Octavius had no need to follow any particular occupation; he lived in Bloomsbury, London, a man of independent means. What was most interesting about him was that in September 1872, just a few months after Charles died, Octavius, aged 22, had married a young woman called Elizabeth Warren, aged 28..

Could she have any connection with Warren family from Cornwall and Simpson? The marriage took place in the Registry Office at St. Pancras. I obtained a copy of the marriage certificate, which told me that Elizabeth Warrens father was: Thomas Latham Warren, who, if you will remember, was Charles Warrens brother.

So, here we have Octavius Burrell marrying Elizabeth Warren just a few months after the death of Charles Warren, by which time presumably the contents of Charles' Will would have been known. Significant, or not significant? Again, we will never know. But it is interesting that when Octavius Burrell bought Simpson House from the estate, he paid £1,250 for it. When he sold it to Kench, the price was £1,500. A tidy profit.

Aftermath

That seems to be the end of the mysterious events surrounding the death of Charles Warren and the disposal of his estate. Kench and his wife moved into Simpson House in 1876 and lived there for the next 12 years. What happened to all the players in this mystery play?

Sophia Warren, despite having lived in Simpson for over 30 years, was buried in Olney, near her first husband.

Thomas Goodman Warren, who emigrated to Canada in 1870, married Isabella Hales and they went on to have 9 children. He died in Beaverton, Ontario in 1939.

Of William Bond, I have so far found no trace. So I know nothing of his family or any of his descendants.

Octavius Burrell lived with his wife Elizabeth in and around Hanover Square in London. Elizabeth died, childless, in 1889. Intriguingly, Octavius later moved to Aspley Guise, just a few miles from Simpson, where he died.

William Clarke Warren, married Bessie Taylor in 1868. By the time of Charles' death in 1872, they had three children, including a son they named Charles, after his grandfather. They went on to have a total of 9 children, who produced 17 grandchildren. Bessie died in 1921 and William died in 1931 in Salvington, Sussex.

So there are many descendants of Mary Ann Clarke of Bow Brickhill and Charles Warren of Simpson.

Postscript 1967

Nearly 100 years after the death of Charles Warren, in April 1967, a middle aged man, accompanied by his wife, walks up the front path of Simpson House and knocks on the front door. The door is opened by the then current owner, Warren Dawson. The visitor introduces himself. He is Professor Michael Warren and he is, he declares, a great grandson of Charles Warren and Mary Ann Clarke.

Having lived in Simpson House for over 30 years, Dawson is able to tell Professor Warren much about the history of the house, both in Warren's time and later. After tea and a tour of the gardens – which Dawson and his wife had carefully restored back in the 1930s – Professor Warren and his wife prepare to leave. Dawson presents him with a small framed photograph of his great grandfather, which he had obtained many years previously from a local resident.

Look carefully at the photograph. Charles, a rather portly and serious looking Victorian gentleman is sitting at a desk. He is wearing a long topcoat. Beneath the topcoat is a waistcoat. And what's that running from the top to the lower pocket of the waistcoat. Could it be a gold chain, attached to a gold watch? If it is, perhaps it is the gold watch and chain sold off with all Charles' possessions at the auction in October 1874. the gold watch intended to be left to William Clarke Warren, Professor Michael Warren's grandfather?

That is, until it was taken away from him, by the mysterious second codicil to Charles Warren's will.

**Simpson House, Simpson
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