

## Harman Harris – Workhouse Master and the Man behind the Window



There is a very beautiful highly decorated and colourful stained-glass window in St Mary's Church in Tattingstone dedicated to Harman Harris and his wife Mary. It depicts Solomon and Zerubbabel, a reference to the building and rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem from the Old Testament. The window is also noted for its masonic symbols and has even been used for a Masonic Christmas card.

So, who was Harman Harris ... the man behind the window?

He was born in Wix in Essex in 1808 and he married Mary Cutting, from the neighbouring village of Bradfield, in 1831. His first known job was as a Relieving Officer in Tendring. In this role he would identify the needs of the poor of the Tendring district as part of the system introduced in 1834 that created administrative areas called Poor Law Unions. Each union operated a workhouse as the principal way of

providing relief – hence the creation, in this case, of the Tendring Union and also the Samford Union here in Tattingstone.

Harman clearly worked his way up the workhouse system becoming first Master of the Tendring Union House and in or around 1853 he and Mary became Master and Matron of the Samford Union House or Tattingstone Union House as it was later known.

When Harman and Mary took up their posts here, they brought with them their youngest children, three boys Philip and Richard, and a baby called Joseph. By this time, they had lost two daughters at a young age, both named Mary. Their eldest son, Harman Jnr, was apprenticed to a plumber and glazier in Ipswich and their ten-year-old son Charles was at school with a cousin in Colchester. Within a few years Mary had her eighth child – a daughter called Sarah Matilda. Tragedy struck again, and twice, when Harman Jnr died age only 20 and Joseph age 22.

In her book *\*The House on the Hill\**, Sheila Hardy writes that Harman's qualifications were uncertain, but when he was interviewed for the position of Workhouse Master in Tattingstone, of the four applicants he was chosen by nearly unanimous approval from the Board—receiving nineteen votes, whereas his closest competitor received only six. Sheila also considered him to be a strict disciplinarian.

Apart from the information he recorded in the workhouse documents, very little is known about his life in Tattingsstone. An interesting letter has survived though that Harman wrote to The Ipswich Journal published on Saturday 21 October 1854, shortly after he took up post here.

*Tattingsstone Union House, 17th 1854.*

*Sir, allow me to state that you were misinformed respecting the number of cases of diarrhoea that had proved fatal in this House up to Tuesday 10th inst. In the Journal it was seven; but the number up to that day (exclusive of my son) was but three, and the number of deaths were in all but male, aged 75, female 76, female 22, and the fourth a female, aged 81, who had been bed ridden from her admission on the 18th of May last. I am, Sir, Yours most respectfully, HARMAN HARRIS, Governor.*

Clearly Harman wanted to set the record straight; also, truly sad that he writes of the death of his eldest son, Harman Jnr.

Outside of his duties as workhouse master, Harman was a long serving member of the British Union Lodge of Freemasons in Ipswich from 1854 until his death in 1885 and indeed Master of that lodge in 1858 only four years after joining. An excerpt from The Freemason, the masonic periodical, dated April 1876 notes Harman amongst others as attending the usual monthly meeting where “*a pleasant evening came to an end far too soon for the brethren assembled as is mostly the case in this popular lodge*”. His son Philip was a member of the same lodge.

Originally, Freemasons used to meet in local taverns and in the early 18th century these meeting places in Ipswich included well-known names such as The Golden Lion, The Great White Horse and The Crown and Anchor (now converted to a shop). In 1867 a masonic centre was established in St Stephens Church Lane, today the home of the Ipswich Conservative Club. However, it wasn't long before a new dedicated Masonic Centre was opened in Soane Street in 1879, and this centre has been in continuous use ever since. So, Harman was likely to have been to meetings at all these locations.

Together Harman and Mary remained at Tattingsstone and in post until Harman's death in 1885. Mary moved to Ipswich for a few years until her death in 1891. They are both buried in St Mary's churchyard along with their sons Harman Jnr and Joseph.

Either through the good fortune of inheritance or astuteness or both, when Harman made a will in 1879, he owned several properties to leave to members of his family. His three surviving sons Charles, Philip, Richard and his “*dear wife*” Mary each inherited different houses in the villages of Wix in Essex and Brantham and East Bergholt in Suffolk. Mary also inherited “*all and every my household furniture linen and wearing apparel books plates fixtures china, horses, carts and carriages and also all and every sum and sums of money which may be found in my house or be about my person or due to me at the time of my decease. And also all my stocks funds and securities for money book debts money or bonds bills notes or other securities.*”

Harman had further added to his property portfolio in 1884, only months before his death, by purchasing four tenanted cottages including a shop on White Horse Hill, Tattingsstone for £165. In a complicated legal progression, the properties had been owned by a John Newman who had left them to John Alloway, the Governor of Ipswich Gaol, but John

Alloway predeceased John Newman and so they were passed to Alloway's son, a clerk in holy orders, the Rev. Josiah Alloway. Josiah couldn't have lived further away – he had moved to New Zealand and so he used a proxy to act for him in the sale of the properties, the wonderfully named Hephzibah Cable the wife of an Ipswich Licensed Victualler. The legal situation became more complicated after Harman's death as his wife who had inherited the Tattingsstone properties gave them to her only surviving daughter and youngest child, Sarah Matilda. Sarah married Samuel Capon, and following her parents' path, both became Master and Matron of Shipmeadow workhouse near Wangford, Northeast Suffolk. After Samuel's early death Sarah married a second time to James Eldred. Sarah retained the properties until 1925, when she sold them to David and Elizabeth Bullard for £370; the Bullards being members of a large local family at that time.

Probate on Harman's estate of £1,042 12s 7d was granted in March 1885. It amounts to roughly £166,780 in today's money.

Of Harman's three surviving sons, the eldest Charles lived in Bromley le Bow in London and was a successful linen draper; Philip was a master of a different sort, a Master in the Merchant Navy, and in later life a dock superintendent for P&O and he lived in Ilford, Essex; and Richard, a warehouseman also lived in Ilford.

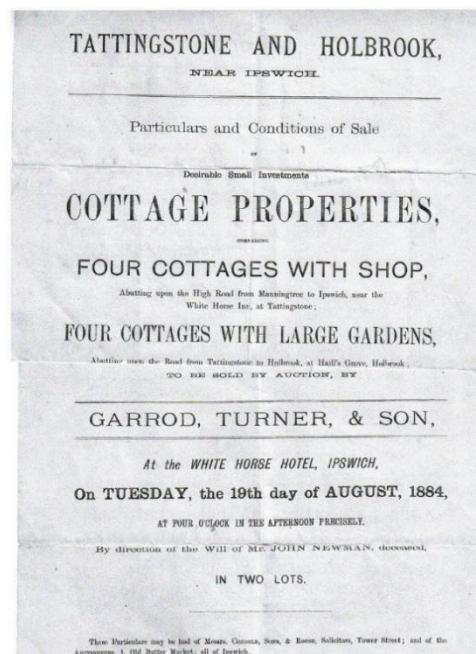
The big question is who commissioned and paid for the stained-glass window? Was it the Harris family or the Freemasons?

It is set in the north side of the church and portrays large images of Solomon to the left and Zerubbabel to the right. From the Old Testament, Solomon's Temple, also known as the First Temple, was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE during the Siege of Jerusalem. This event marked a significant moment in Jewish history, leading to the Babylonian exile of the Jewish people. Several centuries later Zerubbabel, with the first group of exiles to return to Jerusalem, rebuilt a temple on the same site known as the Second Temple.

There are three distinctive masonic symbols at the top of the window.

- The Star of David at the very top symbolizes the connection between the divine and humanity.
- A little lower down to the left is the plumb and level, as used by stonemasons. The plumb is a symbol of justice, rectitude, and the importance of living in an upright manner, while the level is a reminder that all men are equal.
- And then to their right, the square and compasses. The square is a symbol of morality, and the compass represents the relationship between the individual and society.

This window, and others in St Mary's, were made by the famous Victorian company Clayton and Bell. They were the most accomplished stained-glass producers of their time and amongst the most prolific with their works in many churches, cathedrals and



universities throughout the country and around the world. Their windows are exceptional with vibrant colours and expressive draughtsmanship, with no other stained glass coming close to their quality and skill.

Harman was obviously an influential man both in the village and beyond and it's been rewarding bringing together the various aspects of his life that have cropped up in my earlier research.

(With thanks to Simon Page for the photograph, the late Sheila Hardy, the Freemasons Provincial Archivist, Steve Driver, and last but not least Stephen Smalley for the original inspiration)

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