

John GREGORY

John Gregory got off to a bad start in life – not that it was his fault. He was born in High Littleton on 30th Nov 1794, the result of an accident between Phoebe Gregory and John Britten, a cordwainer from Paulton. The Overseers caught up with Britten and he was ordered to pay 15 (old) pence p.w. maintenance until the child was self supporting. Poor Relief for Phoebe's child was paid at an increasing amount as he got older and by 1806 it was costing the parish 3/- p.w., less what was contributed by Britten. In 1807 the parish decided to rid itself of the liability of supporting some 20 pauper children by apprenticing them out to various ratepayers. After drawing names out of a hat 12 year old John Gregory was allocated to Henry Tucker, shoemaker of High Littleton, who was paid £2 by the parish to keep John until he was 21 and teach him to be a shoemaker.

John can't have stayed long with Tucker, as his apprenticeship, which should have been a significant event, was not even mentioned in a later Settlement Examination. John went to work in the pits, and for the rest of his life he regarded his primary occupation to be a collier, even though he worked as a labourer at different times. In 1811, when John was 17, his mother Phoebe married at High Littleton James Brock, another shoemaker. Phoebe died in May 1820, less than a fortnight before John married Peninah Watts at Paulton. John declared in 1848 that he never knew his mother or father, which is hard to believe in the former case, especially as he called his elder daughter Phoebe.

John Gregory never learnt to read or write and claimed to have never attended a place of worship. Presumably he didn't count his wedding and baptism at the age of 2 months. Peninah, on the other hand, was 44 years old, when she was baptized at High Littleton in 1834.

Although having a legal settlement in High Littleton, John and Peninah spent a lot of their married life in Paulton. By 1826 they had 2 children and were living in Paulton, when John became insane. With no immediate prospect of recovery he was removed to Dr Fox's Lunatic Asylum at Brislington and confined there for 18 weeks at the expense of High Littleton parish, which paid relief to Peninah in the meantime. John subsequently returned to Paulton. In 1830 the family were in need of relief and were moved back to High Littleton, where they were housed rent free in one of the poor houses at Stephen's Hill. After living there for 4 years and having another child John and Peninah went back to Paulton but in December 1838 he again became insane. This time he was taken with a guard to Dr Langworthy's Asylum at Box in Wiltshire and remained there at High Littleton's expense until the end of May 1839. John returned to Paulton and was later employed as a labourer on the roads at High Littleton. Over the years he and Peninah were relieved on many occasions by Clutton Union, on High Littleton's account, in the form of bedding, bread and money and they also received blankets from Mary Jones' Charity.

In December 1847, whilst living in Paulton, John became insane once more. He was duly carted off to Dr Langworthy's and stayed until All Fool's Day 1848, when he was transferred to the recently opened Wells Asylum. The Asylum Case Book recorded his details on admission and noted that he weighed 10 stone 7 lbs. The food must have agreed with John as it was reported in June that he had become very stout. He was released in July, in good health and spirits, in the care of one of the parish officers. John returned to Paulton, where Peninah died 2 years later. John subsequently found lodgings with John Savage, a coal miner, at New Town, Paulton but when he became continuously reliant on poor relief he was taken to Clutton Union Workhouse in Eastcourt Road, where he died on Bonfire day 1856, aged 61. He was buried at High Littleton.

It may be coincidental that each time John Gregory became insane he was living in Paulton but was alright when he lived in High Littleton. On the other hand, perhaps the people of High Littleton didn't notice anything unusual!

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