

# The Lost Gentry Of Willington And Findern



**Alan Gifford**



# **‘The Lost Gentry of Willington and Findern’**

**The story of the WARD and SPILSBURY families  
who played a major part in the  
history of the Derbyshire villages of  
Willington and Findern  
during the 18th to 20th centuries**

**Researched and compiled**

**By  
Alan Gifford**

**(Chairman of Willington Local History Group.)**

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## Photographs

All photographs are courtesy of the Author or The Willington History Group unless specifically mentioned.

Front cover St. Michael's Church – Willington, Derbyshire

Rear cover—part of First Edition of Ordnance Survey map. (Courtesy of The Ordnance Survey)

**It is hoped by the author that this research project will at least ensure that the families are not lost entirely but that their comings and goings and their not inconsiderable influence on the villages of Findern and Willington, are suitably recorded for posterity.**

**Any comments or additional information will be welcome.**

**Alan F Gifford.  
4 - DE65 6DT**

**'The Lost Gentry of Willington and Findern'**  
**The story of two families, the Wards and**  
**Spilsburys, who were of such importance in**  
**these two villages.**

# Introduction

Local history is a subject that fascinates many people; they seek to find who, and how, people lived in their neighbourhood in times past! I have been interested in my village for many years and am Chairman of Willington Local History Group, but have never before embarked on a project to find specific and detailed information about my home village, Willington, in Derbyshire. This publication tells the story of such an investigation and what emerged from the study. **What sparked it all off?**

In the first place it was an old Calke Estate map, dated about 1770, which showed part of Willington and which noted that various pieces of land were owned by a 'Mrs Ward':  
**So who was Mrs Ward I asked?**

Soon after this I was able to study the deeds of the Post Office in the village, thanks to being loaned them by a previous owner, Mike St John. I found the property and land was once owned by a Benjamin Spilsbury but, when it was sold to Mike's grandparents in 1927, the sale was by someone called Boulanger, who lived in a place called Whornock, in British Columbia, in Canada:  
**So why was a property in Willington sold from a place as remote as that?**

Then I chanced on an old deed in Derby Local Studies Library, dated 1788, where two gentlemen, Messrs Ward and Spilsbury, both from Willington, were involved in the purchase of a house in Friar Gate Derby:  
**So who were these men?**

John Lowrie, who is secretary of the History group in the village, lives in an old property known as 'The Shrubbery'. His deeds too contained references to the involvement of the Spilsburys.  
**And again who were they?**

Soon after this I was able, thanks to the kindness of the current owner Joe Gunter, to study the deeds of the Grange, off Hall Lane, Willington and once again there were clear links to Spilsburys and I noted the property was eventually sold by a Richard Hugh Spilsbury from Victoria, again in British Columbia.

**So why was the deal from western Canada? And Who was Richard Hugh Spilsbury?**

Finally I saw a large, old, notice board in St Michael's church, Willington detailing the benefits offered to the village by the 'Spilsbury Charity' in 1815.

**And who was behind this Charity?**

Clearly there was some kind of link between these disparate findings, but it was certainly not immediately apparent.

**How on earth did these details relate to each other?**

Additionally there was a longstanding mystery regarding the then recently demolished property known as 'Willington House' which in its later years was a public house. However for many years it was a much loved private residence, since available data from most directories etc seemed to suggest it dated from about 1860- but there was a strong feeling that it was older, and no information had been found as to who built it.

**So Who built Willington House -and when?**

Later I recalled that, as a member of the Willington Parish Council, back in 1993, we had found it necessary to merge together a number of old charities operating in the village, because the amount of money each was producing and which was still payable to 'the poor of the village' had become so ridiculously small in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century – and one of these was 'The Spilsbury Charity'!

Resolving this strange collection of bedfellows, and the many others which emerged (e.g. who scored the first goal ever for Derby County?) on the way, eventually covered events and people, spread out over some 400 years, and became a personal challenge which brought me into contact with people in New Zealand, the USA and British Columbia, all of which then led me into a visit to a small town in Warwickshire. A visit was also paid to the library of the University of British Columbia (unfortunately not by me!) and this un-earthed some key information which has all helped unravel this fascinating story.

### **A Big Thank You**

The considerable use of the Internet, emails, Derbyshire Records Office and the Derby Local Studies Library Derby have all played a part in the work and the email links established with Mary Spilsbury Ross (British Columbia), Carol Berch (USA) and Marlene Shipman (New Zealand) have been invaluable in helping tie this all together. (They had become involved through personal family history studies). In studying what became a complex saga close links emerged with the nearby village of Findern and John Hawkins, of Findern History Group, has contributed much valuable local information, as has Phillip Heath, Conservation Officer for

South Derbyshire DC who added some useful links. Anthony Sharpe of Heage has helped significantly in preparing this publication. Finally Max Craven, the well known Derby Historian has also assisted in this quest. I sincerely thank all of them (and anyone who I have omitted!) for their contributions and any errors which might emerge are due to me!

I also must thank my patient wife Judith, and my daughter, Anita Staley, and my friend Joan Taylor, for encouraging and assisting in this work, together with much proof reading.

This then is the story of the now '**Forgotten, or the Lost families**' of Willington and Findern, in the County of Derbyshire who were, for a time, important and powerful people in the area.

**(See also Appendix A)**

Alan Gifford  
January 2010



## Setting the Time Scene

To better appreciate what life was like in Willington and Findern, generally during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the period during which this investigation centres, it helps to understand a little about both of the old villages, land ownership and how life differed from the present day. (See also Appendix B)

### Land Ownership

The Domesday survey of 1086 calls the village of Willington, 'Willetune', and at that time there was no church. Willington Manor was divided between Repton Priory and Burton Abbey until the reformation (1538/9), but following the break up of these large religious bodies the lands owned by the Priory passed into the control of Sir John Port of Etwall and, by various endowments, eventually came under the ownership of the John Port Charity Almshouses, at Etwall, familiarly known as 'The Hospital Lands', and later as 'The Corporation Lands'. Eventually these estates, properties and land were sold off to private owners, generally in the 1920's. In parallel with this, following the break up of the Abbey, much of the remaining village eventually came under the ownership of Sir Henry Harpur, of Calke, but who sold some land off to Sir Francis Burdett, of Foremark. There were other subsidiary sales of land but these culminated in the sale of the Burdett 'Willington' estate in 1921, when most of the land passed into private ownership. Some of the lands were sold prior to the main auction and were in fact owned by the families under investigation.

Findern is also listed in the Domesday survey where it appears as 'Findre'. It was also under the jurisdiction of the Abbot of Burton until the Dissolution and, until 1858, was included with Littleover in the Mickleover ecclesiastical parish, leading to a close association between the two villages. The de Fyndernes lived there in a fortified manor house (situated where Castle Hill is now) until Jane de Fynderne married Sir Richard Harpur, who was a judge during the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1. As part of the marriage settlement Jane was granted a life interest in the Manor of Willington and presumably this

eventually led to the ownership of land in Willington by the Harpurs. The Harpur-Crewes of Calke Abbey stem from Sir Richard and Jane and they were prominent land owners in Findern until the early 1900s.

The present All Saints Church in Findern, which replaced a much earlier one, was built and consecrated as recently as 1862/63, when the population was about 470. Benjamin Ward Spilsbury was initially the curate, when it was rebuilt and later, from



**Willington, Findern and Repton, as shown on Burdett's map of 1767. Note the absence a road connection to Repton and the line of the new canal.**

1872 until his death in 1909, the vicar. The Spilsburys contributed significantly to the cost of re-building the new church and were also large land owners in the village.

### Inclosure Awards

Inclosure is a term used to describe various means of consolidating or extending land-holdings into larger units. This can include the partition of large areas of land communally farmed under the open field system into small fields farmed by individuals, the conversion of arable land to

pasture and the occupation of commons by large landowners, excluding other users. Inclosure awards are legal documents recording the ownership and distribution of the lands enclosed. They were normally invoked at the specific request of land owners in a village who felt restricted of their ability to maximise the use of this land as it was presently partially publically and partially privately owned.

In Willington, in 1766, the applicants were Sir Henry Harpur, Sir Robert Burdett, the John Port Hospitals charity and, amongst others, Joseph Ward. In Findern the inclosures were made in 1781 and were initiated by the Rev John Ward (Vicar of the Parish of Mickleover), Sir Henry Harpur, Phillip Coll Esq., Benjamin Ward, John Coose - Gent, and John Earp, all of whom were said to be 'proprietors and owners of the said commons, open fields and common pastures .... Which were incapable of improvement ... .. and it would be advantageous if they were enclosed'.

The inclosure rules of the day allowed an application to be made if the applicants together owned 90% or more of the lands in question, So we see that Benjamin Ward was one of the landowners who made the application for inclosure in Findern, as well as being a landowner associated with the inclosures in Willington.

The final legal inclosure document for Willington was published in 1768 but unfortunately no map has ever been identified to support the text, something which is normally present in most other places. The published documents gives details as to how the land etc should be controlled/owned in the future and give information on various matters including:-

- Public roads, turnpike roads and private roads (with widths).
- Public bridleways (with widths).
- Public footpaths and private footpaths (with widths).
- Area of land for public exercise and recreation.
- Allotment to the Lord of the Manor for his 'right of soil' on the common.

- Allotment to the Rector for his glebe land.
- Allotments to other parties
- Determining ancient inclosures.

Overall the Awards re-defined the nature of a community and must have represented a very traumatic period for those affected by its findings. The documents are still consulted today in matters of land ownership and rights of way. Land ownership at Willington was clearly defined for both Mrs Lydia Ward and Benjamin Ward, who figure significantly in this study. **(See also Appendix D for more data)**

### **River Transport**

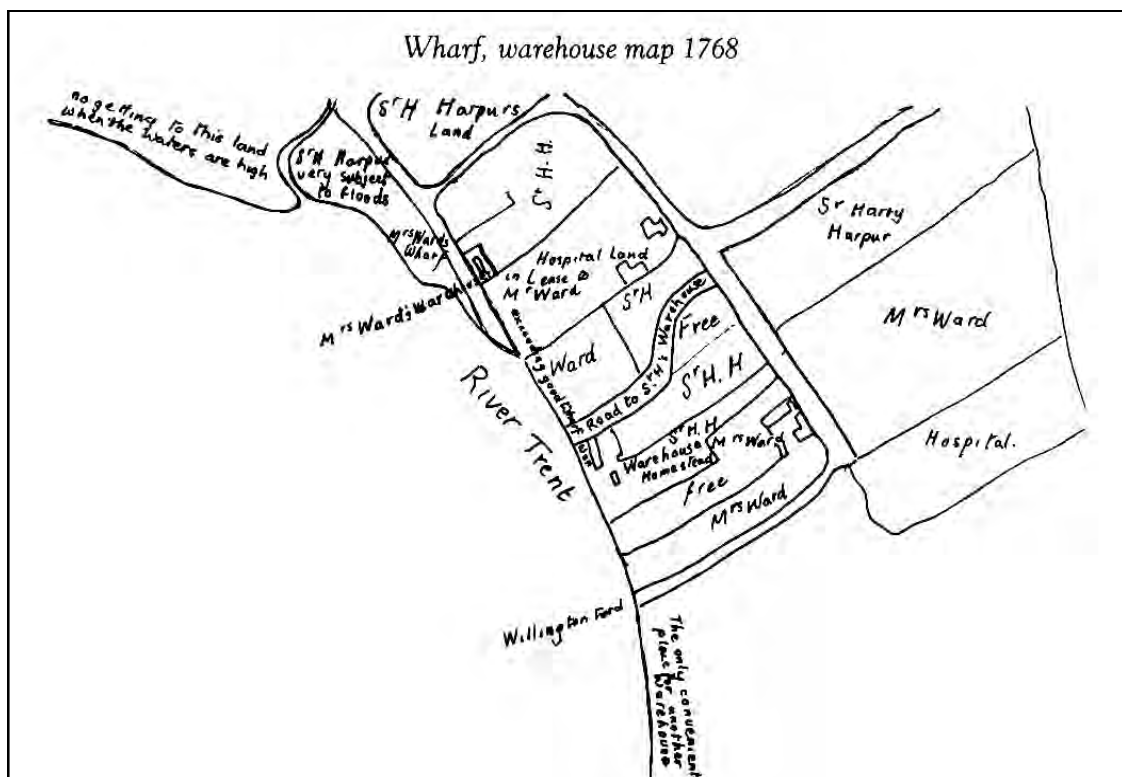
Prior to the coming of the Trent and Mersey canal, in 1777, the core of the village was centred around the St Michael's Church and along the riverside, towards the east. Willington was always quite a small place and in 1801 the population was 401 which had only increased by 170 to 571 one hundred years later, in 1901.

The River Trent separated Willington from Repton until 1839, when a stone toll bridge was built, and even then crossing the river was a costly event for most, until freed of toll in 1898. Prior to that river crossing was by a ford, to the east of the Hall on Hall Lane or by a ferry, off Meadow Lane. Transport was never easy, especially of bulk goods and pre-Canals and Railways movement of goods was by lumbering, large, wide wheeled horse drawn carts, using the few rudimentary roads and tracks. The river had its moment of glory as a means of transport in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first Act of Parliament 'for making the River Trent navigable' (to Burton) was passed in 1699 and wharves and warehouses were constructed at various places, including Willington. The boats were wide, flat bottomed, vessels hauled by teams of men who crossed from bank to bank, at points called 'rovings', to minimise the effects of the meandering river.

It needed another Act of Parliament to permit horses to be used (*'because of the damage done by these unkempt men'*) and later still sails were used. Large quantities of cheese and pottery were shipped from Willington to

Hull via the Trent and Humber rivers and thence to London, whilst coal, lead, ale, timber and salt also made up cargoes moved down the river. Coming into the area were large quantities of flint from eastern England. These were then taken overland by carriers, for use in the Potteries, who then brought back pottery for onward shipment by river. Some iron bars were imported from Sweden and Russia and shipped on by packhorse or carrier. There were warehouses in the village, certainly prior to 1744, when an advertisement in the Derby Mercury Newspaper advised *'The warehouse at Willington belonging to Sir Henry Harpur is now in the possession of the Nottingham Boat*

altogether by about 1810 but a map made during the planning of the building of the bridge over the River Trent in 1839 still located a warehouse about 200yards down stream from the bridge site (but of which no trace remains today). On the Calke Estate map reproduced below dating, from about 1768, the building is clearly marked as 'Mrs Ward's warehouse' on, what was then known as 'Warehouse Road', but now forms part of Bargate Lane. Another building, used as a cheese warehouse, was built adjacent to the Egginton brook and was reputed in 1766 to have been the scene of a riot by pilfering crowds and the Dragoon Guards were called out to restore order



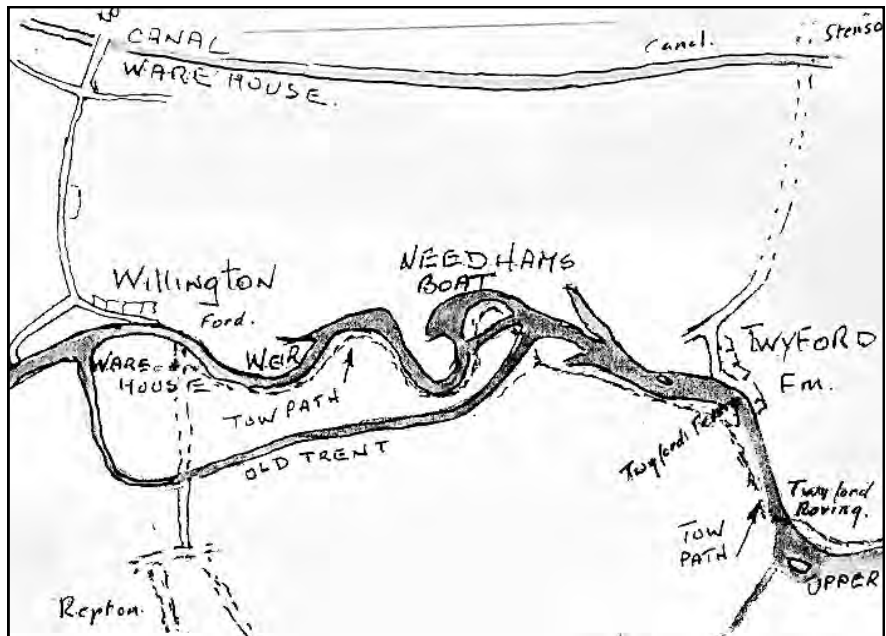
**The river bank at Willington on a Calke Estate Map 1768 which shows the presence of the wharfs and buildings. Note also the major landowners are Sir Henry Harpur, Hospitals and Mrs Ward (D2375/M/161/48)**

Company and able to receive all sorts of goods'. It was a lucrative trade and river traffic continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, being overtaken by the building of the canals and railways. The end was nigh in 1806 when another advertisement, again in the Derby Mercury, advised that *'Two Trent river boats in complete repair, are to be sold at Willington Wharf'*. River traffic appears to have ceased

**The coming of the Canal**

In the 1760's plans emerged, strongly supported by major pottery makers at Stoke on Trent, to cut canals which would join into the River Trent and greatly improve transport by water. The Trent and Mersey Canal ran for 93 miles, from Wilden Ferry, near Shardlow to the River Mersey at Liverpool and was

opened along its full length from 1777, although the local stretch through Willington and Findern was in use from 1773. Its construction, must have had a profound effect on Willington village and to a lesser extent on Findern. The line of the canal was to the north of the present Willington village centre, sweeping round to the east, passing Findern and then onto Shardlow. As well as freight, some passengers were carried on 'fast packet boats'. A wharf was built at Willington, together with a goods yard and a large brick, two storey warehouse on a plot of land near the present centre of the village. For a period material was transhipped from the canal to the river but eventually river trade disappeared and the canal carried all the goods that had been on the river, and much more. The commercial, horse drawn, narrow boat era had arrived and the boatmen and their families became a familiar feature of village and pub life.



**Re drawn detail from a map of the river at Willington, dated 1783, showing the warehouses by the river and canal. It also shows the river tow path and the Twyford 'roving' or crossing point, used by boatmen to shorten the route.**

and much more. The commercial, horse drawn, narrow boat era had arrived and the boatmen and their families became a familiar feature of village and pub life.

### Followed by the Railway

If the building of the canal had an impact on Willington, the construction of the Birmingham and Derby Junction Railway (later the Midland Railway), which opened in 1839 must have been a shattering experience. The dual track railway line crossed the centre of village, on an earthen embankment raised about 20 feet above the road level, the construction of which involved the building of stone 'skew bridges' across its two 'major' roads. To add to the general scene of change a high level station, with platforms on the up and down line, was constructed on the embankment, served by a goods lift, although passengers used steps or an incline for access.

With the advent of the canal and the railway, coupled with the turnpike (or toll road) to the north of the village, Willington became quite a hub of traffic.

### The Class System

The inhabitants of the villages were sharply divided into two main social classes; firstly the gentry together with Ministers, perhaps seen to be of slightly lower status, and secondly their servants, farmers and the large number of working class families, who often lived off the land, although the canal and railway later provided employment for a few.

The gentry lived in large, well proportioned houses, often near to or fronting on the river with the rest of population housed in scattered small single, or sometime double storey, buildings, many of which were thatched and of which only two survive today. It was an age without gas and electricity and lighting was by candles or oil lamps, water did not come from a tap- wells and pumps were the norm. The clothing of the rich followed the fashion of the times, albeit a little behind the times, whilst the poor lived in simple woven cloths.

The clergy of the times were a mixed group- they attended college and university to study and or qualify. Some became parsons because they felt the vocational need, whilst others were often second sons of gentry who

saw the position as suitable for living the life of the country gentleman and were directly attached to a church

The wealthy travelled by horse back or in private horse drawn carriages and stables were an essential feature of their homes. For the remainder, until the advent of the canal and railway, walking was the only option. The rights of the rich were jealously guarded. Poaching was rife and gamekeepers toured the area, the rich were awarded 'game licences' which permitted them to shoot in restricted areas, owned by the large estates. Prior to the formation of a 'proper' police force the 'Willington Association', a group of notable inhabitants of the village, paid rich rewards to those who informed on law breakers. They published a notice in the Derby Mercury Newspaper in 1799 advising of their intention to pay rewards for any person, not a subscriber to the Association, who gave information leading to the conviction of criminals. For example evidence leading to conviction regarding a murder, or stealing a horse, would be rewarded by payment of £5.5s.0d, a huge sum of money then! Pilfering from the warehouses in Willington, as elsewhere, was not uncommon. In 1770 two men were sentenced to seven years transportation for stealing three earthenware dishes. Twelve sheep's fleece, bound for Yorkshire, were reported to have 'disappeared' from the warehouse, whilst on the river, in 1798, a boatman was accused of stealing five cheeses, together worth £2.4s.6d.

In those times there was no social security as we now know it. The burden of looking after the old, the infirm and the unfortunate - as well as the lazy - fell on the family or the local parish. The Derby Mercury in 1804 carries an announcement that a Findern man had 'absconded' from his wife and family and left them chargeable on



**The old 'cheese warehouse', with Trent House on the left, during a flood in 1970. Both were demolished in 2009.**

the said Parish'. The overseer of the Parish was offering 5 guineas reward to 'whoever will apprehend the said man or give information thereof'. To put the 5 guineas into perspective, a frame work knitter in Findern in 1804 might be earning 14 or 15 shillings a week (70 -75 pence!) for working a 12 hour day. It was a large reward but perhaps reflected the cost the Parish would have to bear – and these were in 'good times' for the knitters because of the high demand brought on by the Napoleonic wars.



**The 'skew' railway bridge on Repton Road in about 1900. There was only access through the central arch at that time.**



**The style of clothing which was worn by a wealthy man of Wellington about 1810.**



**A typical formal dress for a lady, in about 1810.**

### **Other factors**

This was a period embraced by the so called 'Industrial Revolution' when, elsewhere, major changes to manufacturing were taking place, the textile industry dominating in many areas. However apart from the coming of the canal and railway Wellington and Findern remained largely self sufficient agricultural villages, the former having a large stud farm breeding horses, a most valuable commodity. Findern likewise was little affected by this period of change which affected so many other parts of the country although Jedediah Strutt, of

Belper textile mill fame, was apprenticed in 1740 to the local village wheelwright, maybe gaining some of the skills that later made him so famous.

Many wars were fought but the villages appear to have largely escaped their effects.

There was no school in Wellington until 1834, those seeking education either went away from the area, to boarding schools if wealthy, or walked each day to and from Findern, about a mile and a half away, where schooling was available.

# The Wards of Willington

For reasons and timing not yet established, Francis Ward, who was born in Nottingham in 1675, eventually decided to move to live in Willington, in South Derbyshire. He continued to live there for the rest of his life, reaching the good age, for that period, of 77 in 1752. He married, on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1700\*, in Mickleover Parish Church. Elizabeth Turpin, who had a sister, Dorothy Turpin (died 1765, aged 80) who probably lived in Willington but who is certainly buried in Willington church yard, her grave marked by a large slate stone. Dorothy benefited from the sum of £20 from Francis's will. His sister-in-law Anna Turpin, who also appears to have lived with them, must have been quite an unusual lady for her time since it was recorded that:-

*'She was a true stepmother to his family and that in his (Francis's) affairs she was a faithful adviser for more than 14 years. She took care of his commercial accounts, as his assistant, and she did all things like a man'.*

This is praise indeed for a woman at that time! (from University of British Columbia (UBC) notes)

## **\*Note**

The records of early weddings are often not well documented and until the Marriage Act of 1753 'legal' marriages were often the preserve of the gentry and aristocracy. Marriage licences became obligatory as a result of the Act in order to abolish the many 'common law' marriages which had taken place previously, often performed by unqualified 'priests'.

Up to 1858 Findern and Littleover were in Mickleover ecclesiastical parish. Their churches were technically "chapels of ease" for the convenience of local worshippers – thus saving them the 2 to 2.5 miles trek to Mickleover for normal services. However, all marriages HAD to take place at Mickleover church. So Elizabeth could have lived in Findern.

The other time when Findern residents had to go to Mickleover was for the annual Mothering Sunday service, which had to take place at the Mother Church.

Nothing is known directly of the business affairs of Francis Ward but one must suspect that from the fact that they lived by the River Trent, during the period when this was a navigable river that he made at least some of his money from the river trade. Indeed, in his will, he left, in addition to other significant financial considerations, 'my boats, barges and navigational aids' to his son Benjamin supports this view (**Also Appendix C - River Trade**). The house they lived in has not been identified directly but from information in the Willington Inclosure Awards, was called 'The Mansion House' and 'was (*situated*) in land late in possession of the Nottingham Boat Company and the garden of Lydia Ward'. A house is marked on the estate map referred to earlier, approximately on the site of the present Willington Hall, on Hall Lane. It may well be that the Mansion House was replaced by the Hall, which is alleged to have been built by the radical MP Sir Francis Burdett, about 1820, for an unmarried sister.

Francis Ward, Senior, had a family of six children viz:-

- *Francis* married, but had no children, dying young
- *Elizabeth* married Robert Banks and lived in Bawtry, Nottinghamshire
- Her sister *Mary* married John Banks, also living in Bawtry and who was presumably the brother of Robert, together with three others
- *Joseph, Benjamin and Dorothy*.

There are conflicting records as to their baptism: they are recorded as having been baptised in the High Pavement Unitarian Chapel in Nottingham, which was established in 1691, but a Spilsbury family record (UBC) states they were baptised at the Presbyterian Academy in Findern in the early 18<sup>th</sup>C! Maybe the former is a more reliable record!

Joseph Ward was born in 1706 and his first marriage was to a Miss Carew of Beddington. This marriage was childless and his wife died early, being buried in Beddington, a village to the west of Croydon, then well outside



**The 18th Century warehouse building by the River Trent at Willington which was not demolished until 2002.**

London. His second marriage was to Lydia Martin and they lost their first child, a daughter but had another, Lydia Henning Ward. Joseph was a Barrister at the Inner Temple, London, being admitted as a student on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1726, when he was 20 and was called to the bar four years later, on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 1730. The records of the Inner Temple note that he was 'a gentleman' and that his father Francis was also 'a gentleman.' Joseph purchased a ground floor chamber, with a cellar in Hare Court, on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1734, so he must have established himself by then. Twelve years later he sold his interest in this chamber to a fellow member of the Inn named John Bagnall. In May of 1746 he had been one of three candidates chosen by the Temple Inn to deliver a learned lecture to Clifford's Inn but it is not clear if he was ever selected for this honour. Perhaps not, and this could have been a reason for leaving his Chambers soon afterwards and returning to Willington where he became involved in the early stages of the village Inclosures, completed in 1768. He died in 1767 and was buried in Beddington, alongside his first wife and his daughter Lydia Henning Ward. The estate of Lydia, after her marriage to a William Augustus Skynner, of Cookham, in Berkshire and her death, very soon after changing her

will, was the subject of a High Court case in 1835 and subsequent years. **(See also Appendix E for more details on the case)**

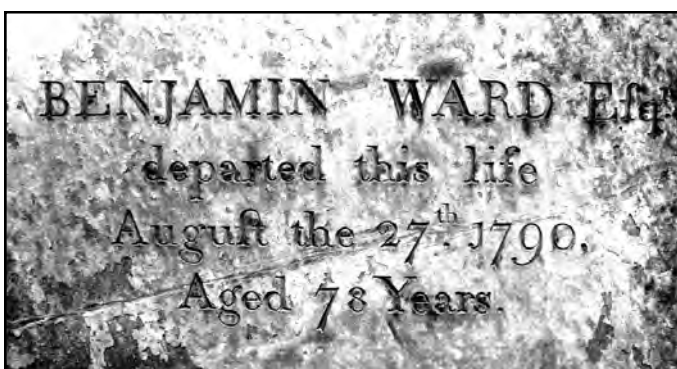
Joseph's brother, Benjamin, was born in 1712, in Willington and was baptised in the Unitarian Church at High Pavement, Nottingham on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1712 (RG4/1587). He married Elizabeth Woodhouse on the 19<sup>th</sup> June 1740 at St Martins Church, Leicester. He was noted in various documents as 'a gentleman and a merchant', owning properties in Derby and elsewhere. He also leased in 1756 a large property called 'The Great House', in Hayfield, in north Derbyshire, together with 26 acres of farm land. The reason why he had a house there has not been established, - maybe he was speculating in mills in the area being built at that time? He also bought a small estate on Nuns Green (now Friar Gate), Derby in 1788. A deed held by Derby Local Studies (4667) is dated 29<sup>th</sup> January 1788 and covers the sale of the property, outbuildings and grounds for £700, by the executors of a Benjamin Oldknow, to Benjamin Spilsbury of Willington, who had clearly been nominated and approved to act as a Trustee on behalf of Benjamin Ward in this deal. This action alone demonstrates that even by this time there was either a close



friendship, or at least a strong business relationship, between these two Benjamins, each coming from different families. Benjamin Ward, apart from being a landowner in Willington had property in Findern.

The 1771 Inclosure award for Findern names him as one of five *'proprietors and owners of the said commons, open field and pastures that in their present situation are incapable of improvement and that it would be advantageous to the several persons if the same were divided, allotted and enclosed'*. (The effect of inclosure would be that the use of the large open common lands were lost to communal use by villagers and were to be enclosed, such that more productive farming methods could be introduced to feed the growing urban population). They had other estates, recognised from a court case fought in 1834, in which part of the evidence notes that Ward also had had estates in Etwall, Willington and in nearby Twyford. So all in all the Wards at this time had money, properties and owned land, spread over a wide area- but no male heirs! Only their daughter, Lydia Henning Ward.

Benjamin Ward and his wife lived and died in Willington but had no family. Their large slate gravestones are still in the Willington churchyard and are in excellent condition, the text being extremely clear.



**The grave stone of Benjamin Ward at Willington Churchyard.**

Inside St Michaels Church there is an elaborate marble memorial, mounted on a wall, which is shared jointly between the Wards and Benjamin Spilsbury, his wife and their family, suggesting it was a close

friendship that existed between the families. Elizabeth Spilsbury died in 1784, aged 72 whilst Benjamin passed on in 1790, aged 78.

His sister Dorothy Ward probably played the most significant role in this story! She was born in 1718, lived in Willington, and went to the Presbyterian College (or Academy) in Findern (**See Appendix F Findern Presbyterian College**) where she met, and fell in love with a man called Lucas Spilsbury from Alcester, in Worcestershire, who was four years her elder and who was also attending the Academy. They married in Willington Parish Church in 1741 and he sold his extensive properties in Alcester about this time and moved to Willington. They had five sons and two daughters, of whom another Benjamin, born 1746 contributes significantly into this saga. Dorothy died in 1756, at the age of only 38.

This marriage resulted in the merging of the Ward and Spilsbury families, the latter eventually becoming dominant. This was perhaps the most significant linkage of the two families since, unlike the other members of the Ward family, it resulted in male heirs and their story continues in the next section of the booklet.

These were still troubled times in religion in this country. The Ward family were Presbyterians. But Non Conformists were only just being 'tolerated' and the Church of England and Roman Catholicism was still strong in many areas. It is possible that the Wards changed from C of E to Presbyterian at this time.

It is however clear that the absence of male heirs eventually brought to an end the dominance of the Ward family in Willington and their obvious close relationship/friendship with the Spilsbury family led to that family emerging as the new property and land owners in the area.

## The Spilsburys and an Alcester/Kings Coughton Link

Our story can be traced back with considerable certainty to a Thomas Spilsbury, who was born in Rock, in Worcestershire, in 1520 and who died there in 1571, marrying Isobel on the way, in 1545, again in Rock. The name Spilsbury may well go back much further, perhaps to the Norman Conquest in 1066, since a Johannes de Spilsbury was given a living in Worcestershire at that time but, since this has little bearing on the saga we are studying, this trail has not been pursued. Through a few generations we move on to his descendents William Spilsbury and his wife Anne, of Bewdley, who had two sons and at least three daughters, Son John was born in 1629 and who was 'ejected from a church living' in Bromsgrove in 1662 (possibly a 'Dissenter') and James (b 1639) is believed to be the father of another James (b 1682), who figures later in Alcester, a small town in Warwickshire. ( Oh why did families of that period all use the same Christian names?)

Meanwhile, in a small hamlet about one mile to the north of Alcester, called Kings Coughton, **Thomas Lucas**, a wealthy merchant, bought up as much as possible of the available land, including a small farm, all in relatively small pieces, from a Mr John Cresser, of nearby Great Coughton. In 1691 he paid over eleven hundred and forty pounds for these lands and the numerous small houses which stood on them, quite a considerable sum of money, possibly worth millions in today's currency. He also bought a half timbered property on the Birmingham Road called '**The Moat House**'. The source of Thomas Lucas's fortune which enable him to do this has not been established.

### Note

In present times Kings Coughton is a small community, largely located in the fork in the roads between the B4090 to Droitwich and the A435 to Redditch, but with some other properties down to the east, bordered by the small River Arrow, where the village water mill was situated. The triangle formed by the fork is bisected by 'Kings Coughton Lane'. The area is very rural, with many trees, bushes and fields and with only a small industrial development (Mill Fields) down by the river. The Moat House is also in the area backed to the river. There is large area of undeveloped land at the west end of Kings Coughton Lane and to its north, much of which was owned by the Spilsburys in the past.

The Moat House is probably the oldest property still standing in Kings Coughton and was originally a farm. It is included in the list of scheduled buildings, part of it being attributed as being from the 16<sup>th</sup> C and the rest late 17<sup>th</sup> C. There are two clear phases to the house, the original three bay, black and white half timbered, hall house, completed and with the later addition of a cross wing, to the southern side. For the major part of it's early history it was in the ownership of the Lucas/Spilsbury/Ward families. An entry in a Bailiff's accounts dated 1713 notes ownership as belonging to '*Mr Spilsbury, late of Mr Lucas*'. It eventually changed hands when the entire Spilsbury Estates, including those in Derbyshire, were sold off in the 1920's. The Moat house is still standing in 2009, with many more modern additions and is presently operating as a large public house.

The properties noted above were 'in the Lucas/Spilsbury families' ownership at the time of the Inclosure Awards in 1770 and, of the 617 acres covered by these awards, about 50% was owned by the Lord of the Manor, the Grevilles of Beauchamp Court, the remaining land being divided between the Lucas family (later the Ward/ Spilsburys), the Fishers and the Harpers.

Thomas Lucas's daughter Elizabeth inherited his estate on his death in 1706, at the age of 56. She married, in 1712, as his second wife, James Spilsbury (b 1687 see above, who incidentally was a witness to Thomas's will),



**The Moat House Hotel, Kings Coughton' in 2008. As a house this was owned by the Lucas / Spilsbury families in the 18th Century.**

she died 24 years later, being buried in Kidderminster. James, who died in 1740, had three wives in all, but only the marriage to Elizabeth Lucas produced living children and amongst those who survived (the mortality rate of young children was very high at this time) was **Lucas Spilsbury** (b 1714). The family must have been Presbyterian, since Lucas was sent some sixty miles north, to the village of Findern, in Derbyshire, to attend the acclaimed Presbyterian Academy, where he would have received tuition from the renowned preacher Dr Latham. (See **Appendix F–The Dissenters**) Here he met **Dorothy Ward**, the only daughter of a Willington merchant Joseph Ward, and the pair fell in love, getting married in the parish church of St Michael's, in Willington, Derbyshire on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1741.

For reasons which have not yet been confirmed, but may be associated with the religious turmoil of the period, Lucas Spilsbury, on his marriage in Willington to Dorothy in 1741, moved to live there and must have become 'an absentee landlord' to the properties he owned in Warwickshire – that is living afar but collecting rents and dues through his agents, from the various properties in Kings Coughton and elsewhere. By this marriage the Spilsburys eventually became the heirs not only to the properties and land at Kings Coughton, but also to the Ward's Estate at Willington and elsewhere (because Dorothy Ward had no brothers to inherit the estate on the death of their father).

Lucas was quite a gentleman and his name appears in a number of roles in the Derby area, including supporting the raising of a force against Bonnie Prince Charlie during the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, when the Prince marched on Derby in December of that year, eventually turning back at Swarkestone, only five miles from Willington! Although he was still living in Willington, when Lucas died in 1764, like his wife Dorothy who died earlier in 1756, he was buried in Alcester Church, Warwickshire, so the family bond to that area must have remained strong.

The bond between the Findern Spilsburys and the Alcester area is also well evidenced by a brass wall plaque in St Nicholas Parish Church, Alcester. This reads as follows:-

**"Memorial to James Spilsbury of Alcester who died 1740 and his son Lucas Spilsbury who died in 1764 aged 50. Also Dorothy, wife of Lucas Spilsbury and daughter of Francis Ward of Willington, Derbyshire, who died in 1756, aged 38.**

**This memorial is placed here by their descendants Benjamin Ward Spilsbury, Vicar of Findern in the County of Derby 1892"**



**The plaque in St Nicholas Parish Church, Alcester, Worcestershire, installed by Benjamin Spilsbury, of Findern in 1892**

No other gravestones, or memorials to members of these families, were to be found in the churchyard in 2008, the majority of headstones having been removed when it was converted to open lawns some years ago.

The family name 'Lucas', although it was then lost as a surname, was perpetuated in the Spilsbury family as Christian names over several hundred years.



**St Nicholas Parish Church, Alcester, Warwickshire.**

## The Spilsburys come to Willington

Lucas Spilsbury and Dorothy Ward (1718-1756 ) married in 1741 in Willington, at St Michaels church and then set up their home in the village, possibly in a property previously on the site of the present Willington Hall, on Hall Lane.



**The former Findern Academy, in Doles Lane, where Lucas Spilsbury met Dorothy Ward in about 1740. They are now a series of cottages. (Photo John Hawkins)**

Lucas was clearly a man of substance and moved in the 'right' circles, since as already noted he had contributed £20.00 ( a lot of money at that time) to a fund set up in Derby to help repel the advance of 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' on Derby in 1745! He had seven children, two daughters and five sons. Their last daughter, Dorothy, was born, in 1754, but her mother died just two years later in 1756, aged only 38. Dorothy, who links into the Willington story, then appears to have been brought up by Joseph and Lydia Ward, her uncle and aunt, since Lydia's will (1792) records:-

*'I give to Mr Ward's ( AFG note- her husband!) niece Dorothy Spilsbury who has lived with me since her childhood three thousand pounds old South Seas annuities which are standing in my name'*

and in a codicil to the will she further states:-

*'I give my niece Dorothy Spilsbury,*

*besides what I gave her in my will, my ring with my late daughter's hair which is set round with diamonds and my little picture and my late husbands picture and my best diamond earrings.'*

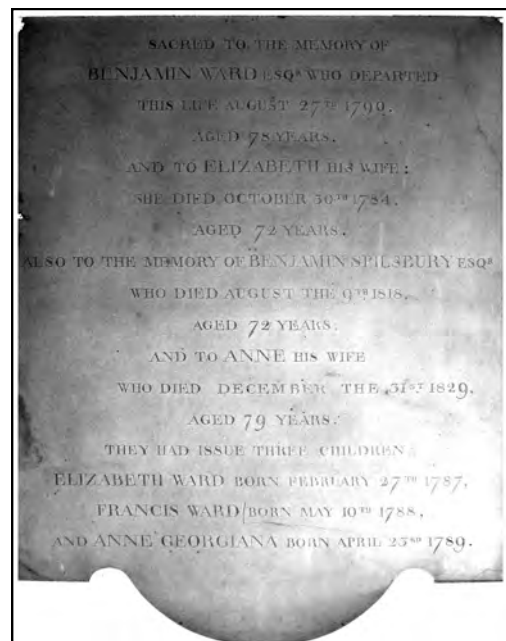
The above will therefore reveals, without doubt, that Dorothy Spilsbury lived in Willington with Lydia Ward, (who was childless, viz. 'my late daughter'), after the death of her own mother, at least until Lydia died in 1792, when Dorothy would have been 38 years of age. She was without doubt very wealthy, since the £3000 bequeathed to her by Lydia would have been worth approximately £3.5M today (as estimated by *Measuringworth web site*). But she remained single, dying a spinster, at the grand old age of 81, in 1837, living variously in Willington, London, Cambridge and Granchester.

A major party in this story however was yet another Benjamin, son of Lucas and Dorothy Spilsbury, who was born in 1746. He too grew up and lived in Willington and married Anne Arden, daughter of Henry Arden, of Longcroft Hall, in Staffordshire in May 1766. They had three children, one son Francis Ward Spilsbury, (born 10th May 1788), and two daughters Elizabeth Ward Spilsbury (b1787) and Ann Georgina Spilsbury (b 25 April 1789) The latter died quite young in Blackpool on Sept 3rd 1811, aged only 22 years, and was buried in the Church at Poulton in Lancaster, but why in Blackpool or what was the cause of her death has not yet been established.

**Note** here the early use of the name 'Ward' as a Christian name by the Spilsburys for two of their children, one of each sex!

Benjamin Spilsbury, living in Willington, was a close associate and friend of Benjamin Ward (son of Francis), who also lived in Willington. Their tight business connection, or friendship, is evidenced by the fact Benjamin Spilsbury acted as a Trustee for Benjamin Ward in the purchase of a house in Derby for the latter and both names are included in the associated deed dated in 1788 (Derby Local Studies Deed 4667) as :-

Sacred to the memory of  
**Benjamin Ward** who departed this life  
 August 27<sup>th</sup> 1790  
 Aged 78  
 And to **Elizabeth** his wife  
 She died October 30<sup>th</sup> 1784  
 Aged 72  
 Also to the memory of **Benjamin**  
**Spilsbury**  
 Who died August 9<sup>th</sup> 1818  
 And to **Anne** his wife  
 Who died 31<sup>st</sup> December 1829  
 Aged 79  
 They has issue three children  
**Elizabeth Ward** born February 17<sup>th</sup> 1787  
**Francis Ward** born May 10<sup>th</sup> 1788  
 And **Georgina Ward** born April 23 1789



**The marble memorial plaque on the wall of St Michaels Church, Willington commemorating the Ward and Spilsbury families. The actual text is displayed in the adjacent panel**

*'A Dwelling house, outhouses, warehouse, stables, barns and gardens on NUNS GREEN by Benjamin Spilsbury, acting as a Trustee for the Benjamin Ward Trust, from the executers of a Benjamin Oldknow, for £700'*

The property, which is situated on what is now known as Friar Gate, in Derby, must have passed over to Benjamin Spilsbury, since records (deposited in the Library of the University of British Columbia –hereafter referred to UBC ) show he sold it again in 1794. In fact, in his will dated 1790, Ward left his properties and other assets to Benjamin Spilsbury who, of course, was his nephew, being the son of his sister Dorothy (who had married Lucas in 1741).

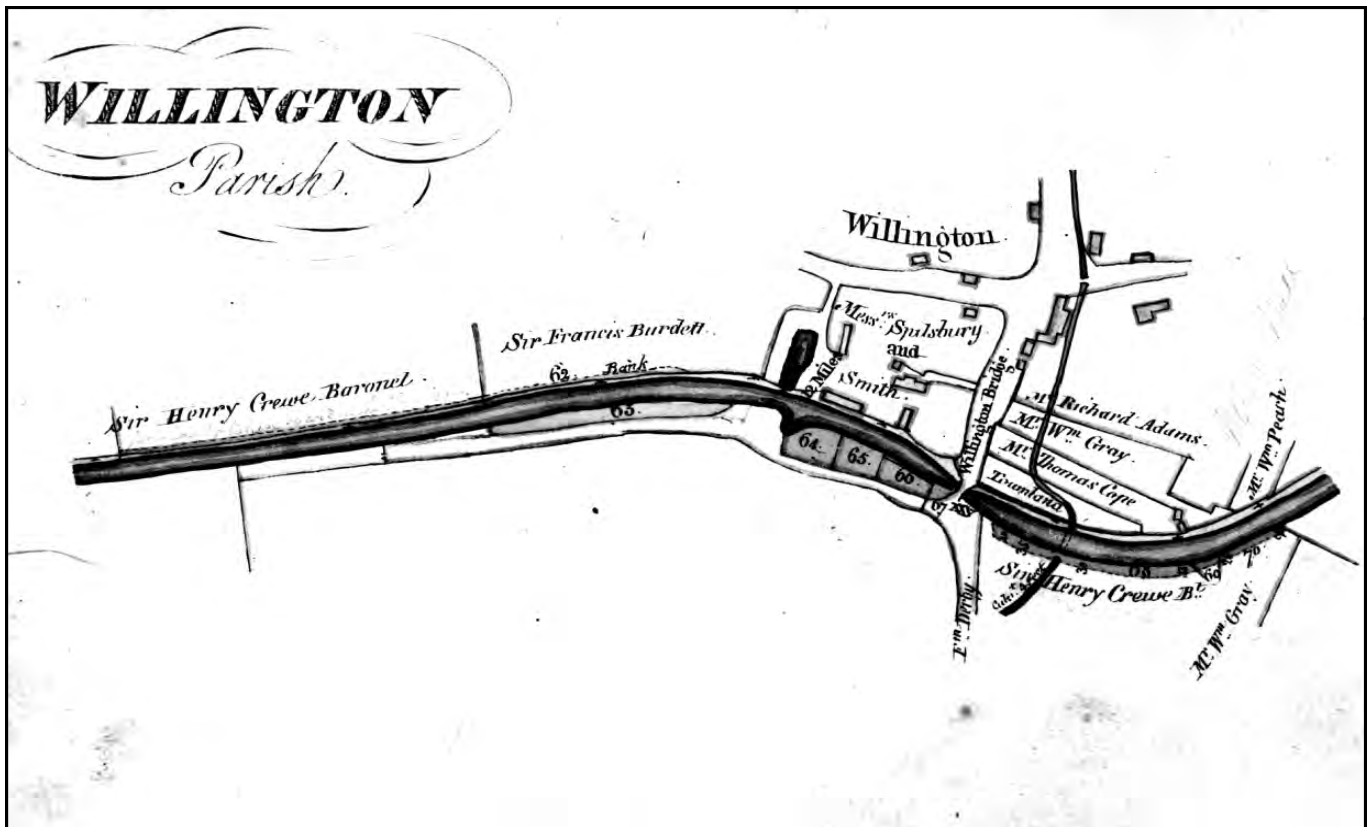
The close nature of their friendship has been mentioned earlier and an elaborate marble wall plaque in St Michaels Church, Willington records the names of **both** couples, and the children of the Spilsburys, but significantly, no children's names are associated with the Wards!

This period therefore clearly represents the point in time where the wealth of the Ward's passed over to the Spilsbury family via Benjamin, since no direct male heir existed to Benjamin Ward.

Benjamin Spilsbury's presence in Willington is further marked in a number of ways. For example the Horse Tax Register of 1785 (copy held by Derby Local Studies, page 1 line 10), and also in other later years, records that Benjamin Spilsbury of Willington had one 1 Saddle Horse, 2 Draught Horses and the Tax he paid was 10s.0d, valid until 29th September 1785 and he lived in Willington.

**Note** Various other taxes were imposed during the 18th Century which perhaps mirror present day car taxes. For example:-  
 Cart Tax 1785-1798 – owners of 2, 3 or 4 wheeled carts  
 Carriage Tax 1747 – 1782 – owners of 2 or 4 wheeled carriages.  
 Horse Tax – 1784 – 1874 – owners of Carriage and saddle horses.  
 Farm Horse Tax - Horses and mules used in husbandry or trade.

Benjamin Spilsbury continued operating from the wharf by the River Trent but must have recognised that, from its opening in 1777, the growth of the canal traffic (the motorway of its age), was going to be a major money maker! He clearly bought, or already owned, a plot of land which embraced the entire area of the



**A plan of the canal and the centre of the village of Willington, made in 1815 for the Canal Company. This clearly shows the wharf owned by 'Spilsbury and Smith' covering the present area of the Marina and properties into the centre of the village. Note the absence of the railway in the village centre !  
Reproduced by Courtesy of British Waterway (Ref BW110/3/4)**

present Marina and included the sites of the Rising Sun and Green Dragon public houses. A plan held by the Waterways Archive (BW 110/3/4) dated 1816 (shown above), clearly defines the land as being owned by 'Messrs Spilsbury and Smith'. This plan shows several buildings on the site, at least one of which must have been a warehouse, and also the presence of a 'winding hole', that is a place where a boat could be turned round on canal, (which incidentally is directly opposite to where the present one is located). This venture must have been profitable since, in 1815, Benjamin Spilsbury launched a charity for the poor of Willington, the funding of which came from a rental of £5.00 per year derived from the warehouse, viz

'providing a clear yearly rent of 5L to be issuing out of the undivided moiety of an edifice or building in Willington, then used as a wharf, and a parcel of land belonging thereto, used as a wharf, then in the tenure of William Smith and Co

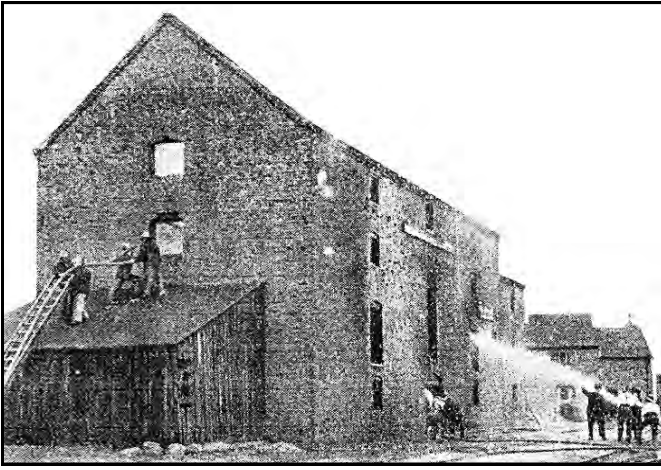
adjoining the haling-path of the Trent and Mersey Canal, .....to be distributed to 20 poor men and women of the parish.'

The huge wooden, hand painted, Charity board is still displayed on a wall in St Michael's church, in Willington.

The trust continued to operate into the 20th century but, due to the, by then, small amount

other part; the said BENJAMIN SPILSBURY granted to the said FRANCIS WARD SPILSBURY, a clear yearly rent of 5£. to be issuing out of the undivided moiety of an edifice or building in Willington, then used as a warehouse, and of a parcel of land belonging thereto, used as a wharf, then in the tenure of WILLIAM SMITH and Co, and adjoining the haling-path of the Trent and Mersey Canal, the same to be payable half-yearly

**Part of the hand painted 'Spilsbury' charity board which is displayed in St Michaels Church, Willington.**



**The brick built ware house at Willington canal wharf which was owned by Mr Spilsbury was finally burnt down in a disastrous fire in 1936. The wharf cottage can be seen behind.**

1810' showing he still had property in that Warwickshire village.

Also from family records prepared by Francis Mosley Spilsbury in 1866 (UBC) we learn:-

1. Benjamin and Anne started to build the red brick house by the river known as The Grange on December 16th, 1816, as Anne's dower house (i.e. home of a widow, Mrs Francis Ward Spilsbury also used the Grange as a dower house from 1865 to 1876).
2. Benjamin spent £500 building 'rooms' on Corporation land in Willington.

The 'red brick house' referred to in 1 above, 'known as the Grange', is still standing in 2009 and is about 50 yards from the river bank, off Hall Lane. It was advertised to let in the Derby Mercury newspaper on May 25th 1831, and the text gives a good description of the property, as follows:-

*Desirable Property to be Let  
TO BE LET –FURNISHED*

*A very convenient and well built DWELLING HOUSE situated at Willington upon the banks of the River Trent, and suitable for the residence of a respectable family, heretofore occupied by the late Mrs Spilsbury.*

of money presently involved, was first merged with two other charities in 1993 (the £5.00 was worth about £3300 in 1815). In about 2000AD the Spilsbury trust was finally removed from the Charities register as being 'non operative'.

He was also apparently operating as a 'money lender' since a deed in Derbyshire Record Office (D255 M/T14 dated 1801) records that he loaned £1000 to John Sutton of Heanor on land and property, redeemable in 12 months, on payment of £1000 plus 5% interest.

In his own hand (UBC) he records, amongst other items that, he built the boat house 1809, wrote his will July 28th 1809, that portraits were painted of his wife and himself March 1813 and he 'paid Land Tax- Kings Coughton March 8th



**The river frontage of 'The Grange' at Willington, built by Benjamin Spilsbury in 1816 (photo 2008)**



**The river frontage of Willington House in about 1900 when still a private house, owned by Sir Gordon Ley.**

*The house comprises upon the ground floor a hall or entrance, a dining room 20 feet by 15, a breakfast room, butlers pantry, kitchen, back kitchen, dairy, larder, & etc, ale and wine cellars, with other attached and detached offices; on the first floor a drawing room 20 feet by 15, four excellent lodging rooms, three attics, water closet, and other conveniences. Also a double coach house, three stall stable, barn, cow house, piggeries, and large garden, leading down to the River Trent.*

*The house is neatly furnished: immediate possession may be had and if any accommodation to a tenant, five or ten acres of pastures land may be occupied with the house.*

*To view the premises apply to Mr Gilbert Watson' at the offices of Messrs Mosley and Barber, in Derby*

**Note** that the property remained in the ownership of the Spilsburys, since it was only offered for rent. The above description well fits the present house by the river, although naturally there have been many alterations since that time.

The £500 spent on 'building rooms'(2. above) may well have been in the building of Willington House, on 'Corporation' land, later to be a school, private house, hotel and then a pub, which was finally demolished in 2002. This expenditure clearly relates to this

particular property since 'Corporation' was an alternative name given to lands belonging the John Port Charity, of Etwall, Derbyshire, and this was the only land they owned fronting the river, which was where Willington House stood.

We know from Glovers Directory of 1843 that at that time this house was the home of the Rev F W Spilsbury of Willington. We also know that he lived in the Grange at a later date and the Hall was owned by a third party (Mrs Alsop) so the only other suitable property, owned by him, was almost certainly Willington House.

**Note**

The John Port charity/hospital/corporation founded in 1755, was frequently referred to as 'The Corporation' following a change in its administrative arrangements in the seventeenth century whereby it was incorporated by royal charter. The Corporation owned a considerable amount of land which originated from the endowment under the will of the second John Port and the Corporation had subsequent ability to acquire more land.

As noted earlier, Benjamin Spilsbury died on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1818 whilst his wife Anne lived until 1829 and then at a good age of 70 years, died. Both are buried, and are still suitably commemorated, at St Michael's church, Willington.

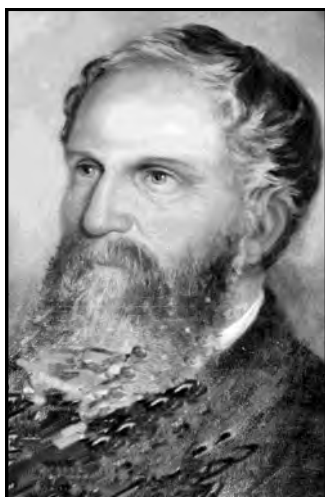


## Rev Francis Ward Spilsbury—Vicar of Willington

As we have seen earlier Benjamin Spilsbury lived, and married, in Willington and had three children, Francis Ward (b 1788) and two daughters, Elizabeth Ward (b 1787) and Ann Georgina (b 1789), who died at the early age of only 22, still a spinster, in Blackpool.

Her sister Elizabeth married Archdeacon J H Bourne of Cotgrave, near Birmingham, and they had 5 sons and 3 daughters, but their branch of the family do not figure in this story.

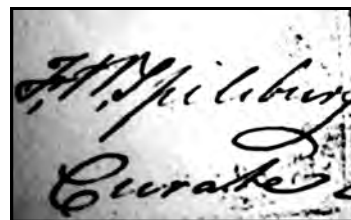
However Francis Ward Spilsbury (FWS), the only male, was clearly destined to inherit the family fortunes! He went initially to nearby Repton School, just across the River Trent, and then on to Cambridge, where he studied at Jesus College and obtained a MA (Master of Arts degree) by 1814. He was ordained a deacon in the Church of England in 1811 and became firstly a curate at Weston under Lizard, in Staffs, but by 1824 was the Stipendiary Curate at Willington St Michaels, where he later became the vicar and remained in that office until he died, on June 20<sup>th</sup> 1864.



**The Rev. Francis Ward Spilsbury  
(1788 –1864)  
Vicar of Willington**

Francis married into the well known local family of Mosley's, who were living at that time in 'Park Hill', the dower house for the Every family of nearby Egginton Hall. His conquest was Emma Penelope Mosely, the

only daughter of Ashton Nicholas Mosley, they were married on the 21<sup>st</sup> December 1826, in Egginton Church. Their house, 'Parkhill', is still standing, largely complete, and is a typical, large, Georgian type, essential red brick property, about 2 miles west of Willington, just off the road towards Hilton. In due course they had three children, two sons and a daughter, but more on them later.



**The Signature of the Rev  
Francis Ward Spilsbury  
when a curate at  
Willington Church**

It would seem that Francis, initially the curate, and then vicar of St Michaels in Willington, was very much taken up by his role as a wealthy gentleman. The Spilsbury charity, set up by his father Benjamin in 1815 specifically nominated him, as the vicar of Willington, and his heirs, as having the responsibility of providing £5.0s.0d annually, obtained from the rental of the warehouse by the canal and being required to '*distribute the same equally amongst such poor men or poor women or belonging to the said parish*'.



**'Parkhill' the dower house of The  
Every family and the home of  
Francis Ward's bride, Emma Mosley  
(Post card c.r. 1900)**



**St Michaels church, Willington, still complete with tower and its pinnacles, bought in part by Rev Francis Ward Spilsbury**

Piggott's Directory 1835, lists 'Rev Francis Ward Spilsbury' of Willington, under the heading 'Nobility, Gentry and Clergy'. From Bagshaw's Directory 1846 we learn that '*The Rev F W Spilsbury owns a neat mansion near the River Trent*' presumably Willington Grange, since he inherited it from his father.

He must have been a wealthy, but

benevolent, person since Bagshaw also reports that 'The church (at Willington) was re-pewed and a north transept erected at a cost of £800, mostly defrayed by Sir Francis Burdett and Rev F W Spilsbury'. They both also contributed to the cost of the new stone tower and its pinnacles (which are still in place).

Another major benefaction to Willington arising from Francis Ward Spilsbury was the fact that he established, and built, the first ever school in the village which opened in 1831, on Castleway. Prior to that date children from the village had to walk to Findern if they wished to attend a school. His school building is still in use in the village, although somewhat expanded from the original version, and it is currently administered by 'The Old School Trust' as a social and meetings venue, and also as a post school and evening educational establishment. FWS was also a Trustee on the Committee formed to finance, and build, the toll bridge over the River Trent between Willington and Repton, which was opened in 1839, although perhaps surprisingly he was not a signatory in approving the bridge plans



**The centre of the village of Willington at the turn of the 19th Century was much the same as the Spilsburys would have recognised. The Green Man, on the left, dates from before 1806, whilst the Rising Sun, on the right was built on land once owned by Benjamin Spilsbury. The old canal bridge is in the centre of this picture and a single horse and cart are the only forms of transport to be seen, apart from the bicycle! Photo Magic Attic Archives.**

drawn up by James Trubshaw since some land was taken from his church yard to provide the access in what is now Repton Road, to the new bridge.

Francis moved in the 'right' circles as evidenced by his listing (Derby Mercury- Dec 1837) as a 'Patron' of South Derbyshire Conservatives, along with many other dignitaries including the Duke of Rutland, Sir Francis Burdett, and Sir George Crewe. His status was further raised in April 1843 (D M) when he was elected a Member of the Royal Agricultural Society of England.

Bulmar's Derbyshire directory for 1846 records '*The Rev F W Spilsbury owns a neat mansion near the River Trent*' but makes no reference to any other properties he owned. Whites Directory of 1857 however includes the statement:-

*'There are several neat mansions in Willington occupied by the Rev Francis Ward Spilsbury, George Smallwood and Mrs Francis Allsop (The Hall). The first two are owned by Rev F W Spilsbury'*

We know the Spilsburys owned the Grange so it appears that Willington House was the other house he owned and which was built before 1843 (as recorded in Glover's Derbyshire Directory, 1843 which has Francis living there). George Smallwood mentioned above was quite possibly renting Willington House from him and in so doing Mr Smallwood brought his daughter Hannah into the village, where she met and married one of the Spilsbury sons, in 1857 (see later).

The Rev F W Spilsbury, his wife Emma and his family of three children figure in the 1841/1851 census, as living at Willington. They continued to live in the village and their passing is marked by two separate brass plaques on the east wall, inside the church which read:-

In memory of Francis Ward Spilsbury MA  
Clerk of Willington  
who died June 20<sup>th</sup> 1864 aged 76 years  
**And also**  
To the beloved memory of  
Emma Penelope Spilsbury,  
wife of Benjamin Ward Spilsbury,  
Born Mar 15th 1795 Died Oct 6<sup>th</sup> 1873 (aged 78)

Their children were Francis Mosley, born June 20<sup>th</sup> 1826, Benjamin Ward (1830) and Emma. Francis, who died in 1878, was a confirmed bachelor. He lived most of his life in Willington, part of the time at least in 'The Grange'. He was an ordained minister of the Church of England but the Victoria County History for Burton on Trent 2003, records on page 131:-

*A new church (St Mary's and St Modwen's), Guild Street was built on the street front, partly paid for by F M Spilsbury, of Willington, Derbyshire, a former Anglican priest who had converted to Roman Catholicism.*

Like many other Spilsburys The Rev Francis Mosley Spilsbury initially took to the Anglican 'cloth' and the 1851 census has him living as a 'lodger' in Somershall, Staffs, and he is later recorded as the 'curate' of Somershall'. In the 1861 census he is back living in Willington, a clergyman without curacy and has 21 year old Elizabeth Wolley living in as his servant. By 1871, still living in Willington, he is now a 'landowner' and has a different housekeeper. It is not clear where he was living but the Grange was still owned by the family so he may well have been there. But at some stage he changed his faith over to Catholicism! Again, like many other Spilsburys of that era, he must have been wealthy (in the census he is described as 'landowner') since in his will dated December 1869 he leaves land and property including that on which Willington Post Office presently stands at the end of Castleway, and his family home 'The Grange', to his brother, Benjamin Ward Spilsbury (see below). His will also declares monetary bequests of almost £12,000, (worth approx £1.2M now) including several thousand pounds to members of the Catholic faith and £100 to the Pope! He also leaves money to Trinity College Oxford to purchase six salt cellars, to be inscribed in his name, together with 'his Butterfly collection'. In addition he also left property and lands in Kings Coughton, Great Coughton and Alcester to a Trust, clearly showing there were still links with that area. Mysteriously he also leaves almost £1000 (£100K today!) to Mary Davis, of Marchington, ('formerly my dear Mary Tabener'), with no indication as to who she

was. (This link has not been pursued)  
(See Appendix F)

Francis's sister Emma Louise, who was born in October 1833, plays no obvious role in the events in Willington village and eventually married Francis Barber and had two children. She died, aged 37, on May 27th 1870.

Perhaps the key member of this branch of the family, as far as this story goes, was Benjamin Ward Spilsbury (BWS), born

January 27th 1830 in Willington. On November 4th 1857 he married in Willington church, Hannah Warren Smallwood, whose father we encountered earlier as living in Willington House and it was presumably through this connection that they met. They were married by his brother, the Rev Francis Mosley Spilsbury and shortly after getting married they moved to live in Findern. Over the next twenty years they had a very large family, known locally as 'The Clan'.

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## The Catholic Spilsbury.

As this booklet was going to press further information emerged on the role of Rev Francis Mosley Spilsbury and the Catholic Church of SS Mary and Modwen, in Burton Upon Trent, referred to on page 25.

A chance meeting by the author with a lady associated with the church pointed to the fact that a window there carried his name, noting him as a major benefactor. In fact the magnificent east window, telling the story of St Modwen, contains a small image of Francis Mosley Spilsbury and an inscription which reads

**'Pray for the repose of the soul of Francis Mousley (s!) Spilsbury, a great benefactor to this church R-I-P'.**

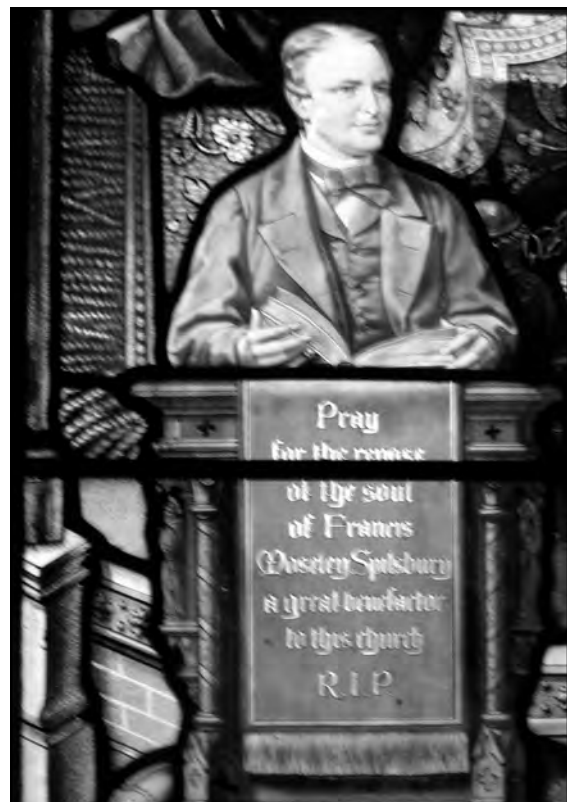
In a booklet produced to celebrate the centenary of the church in 1979, written by Richard Kelly, he records that 'Spilsbury, a convert clergyman from the Church of England gave £1800 (worth more than £150K today) towards the cost of building the church and that a memorial to this generous man can be seen in the bottom left hand corner the stained glass east window.'

The window, behind the main altar, was the work of M. Duhamel-Marette, of Eveux, Normandy and the total cost was £231, including installation by the local firm Thomas Lowe. Two masses are still said each year for Francis Spilsbury and, since he died in 1878, he did not see the completed church.

Despite converting to Catholicism he expressed a wish in his will to be buried in the family vault in Willington (C of E) parish church and requested that he should be

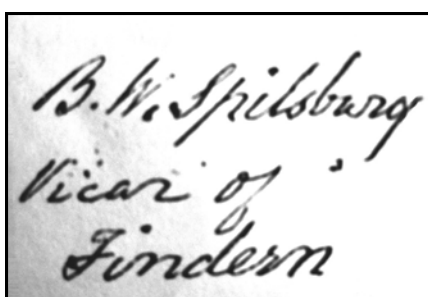
simply remembered on a tablet as '**Francis Mosley Spilsbury M.A of Willington**'. He appears to have been a kind and generous man.

**The chancel window of SS Mary and Modwen's, Burton-on-Trent and detail from bottom left light.**



## **Rev Benjamin Ward Spilsbury. (Vicar of Findern) and beyond**

Benjamin Ward Spilsbury, was born in Willington on January 27<sup>th</sup> 1830 and was one of the three children of Francis Ward Spilsbury. Like his father Francis he went to the rather exclusive public school in nearby Repton, continued his education at Cambridge (Trinity College) where he gained a BA in 1852 and an MA in 1859 and was later ordained in to the Church of England. In 1857 (before he gained his MA) he married Hannah Warren Smallwood, the daughter of George Smallwood who was renting nearby Willington House. Hannah was 10 years younger than him at the time of the wedding and over the next few years they had a large family of five sons and four daughters (more on these later), as was customary at the time. They must have moved from Willington soon after the wedding since, from the 1861 census, their children were born in Findern. The family lived in an attractive country house in Findern, overlooking the Trent valley, called 'The Longlands', built about 1659, which is still standing in 2009. This property was sold by the family in the late 1920's and for a while, in recent years, it operated as a hotel but was converted to flats and house in about 2004, surprisingly not being a listed property, despite its obvious historic connections.



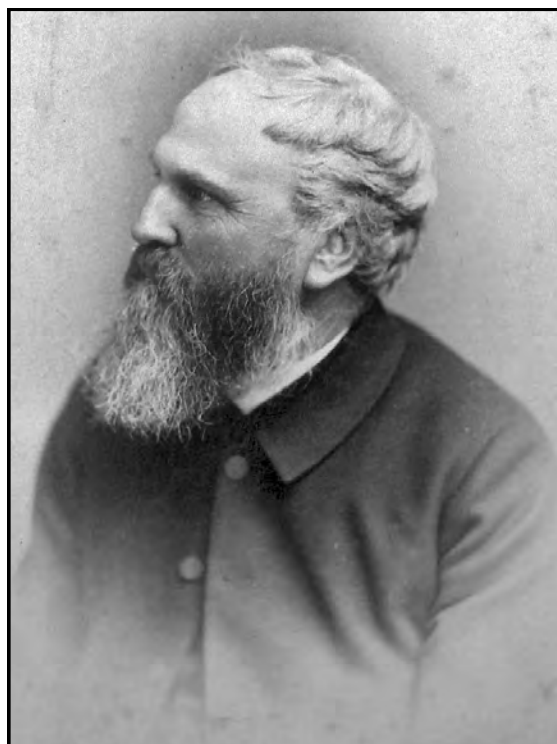
*B. W. Spilsbury  
Vicar of  
Findern*

Benjamin Ward Spilsbury initially was the curate at All Saints Church in Findern from 1862 to 1872, (which is about a mile and a half nearer Derby than Willington). This was consecrated only in 1863, having been rebuilt at a cost of some £2000 on the site of an old Saxon place of worship. Benjamin was shortly afterwards made the vicar, a post he held until his death in 1909 As noted above the Longlands property continued to be owned by the Spilsbury family until well after he died

and for many years served as the village's vicarage. His family (together with their pet family names where known) were:-

Francis Arthur (Uncle Frank)	1858 -1926
Mary Penelope	1860 - 1884
Louisa Catherine (Aunt Kate)	1861 - 1936
Ann Elizabeth (always referred to as Bess)	1863 1950
Benjamin Ward ( Ben )	1864 - 1938
George Lucas	1865 - 1925
Isabel Sarah (Bella)	1869 - 1956
Ashton Willmot (12th July)	1871 - 1960
John Humphrie Arden	1877 - 1904

Benjamin Ward Spilsbury (BWS) was known to all as "The Governor" and his family, "the Clan" (as they called themselves), continued to grow over almost 20 years. For many



**Rev. Benjamin Ward Spilsbury  
Vicar of Findern  
(1830-1909)**



**'The Longlands', a country house overlooking the Trent Valley at Findern, Derbyshire, the home of the Spilsbury 'Clan' for more than 70 years. It had seven bedrooms and a 'plunge pool' in the garden.  
(photo courtesy John Hawkins)**

years no one permanently left the family home, Longlands, nor married, at least until 1898. From census data we know that in 1881, Benjamin was in residence with his wife Hannah, four daughters and one son John and also his mother-in-law, Sarah Smallwood, quaintly described as "a lady from Chatham, Kent". They had five servants living in to attend to their needs and the house was described as the 'Findern Vicarage'. By 1901 BWS, now 71, and his wife had three daughters and four sons and living with them, Ashton and Mary Penelope being absent. None of those covered by this census were married.

After he died in 1909, the two daughters, Bella (Isobel Sarah) and Kate (Louisa Catherine) continued to live at Longlands until

it was sold by auction in 1921. They then moved to live (as recorded by local directories and memory) in the Grange at Willington. Bella outlived her sister Kate, who died in 1936, and remained in the house until at least 1941. She died in 1956 and is buried under her full name, Isabel Sarah Spilsbury in Findern churchyard, as are her other sisters.

**The Spilsbury  
coat of arms.  
Copy held in  
British Columbia**



## The Spilsburys in Canada

Three of the Governor's five sons travelled, separately, to the west coast of Canada, each having received a "remittance", or funding, from the family coffers. The first to leave Derbyshire was Francis Arthur, known to the family as Uncle Frank. He arrived at a remote west coast community in Whonnock, British Columbia, in 1878 and built a log shack there on the Fraser River, a few miles east of the then emerging city of Vancouver. The first permanent white settler and landowner in Whonnock was a Scot, Robert Robertson, who had settled there 17 years earlier in 1861 and it was an isolated place until the arrival of a railway in 1885. Clearly the eldest son's

experience as an early settler in the wild west was not to his liking and after much hunting of game and also 'sowing his wild oats', he duly returned to Derbyshire to spend the rest of his days with a mistress, in the converted Tower Windmill at Findern, which at the time was conveniently owned by the Spilsburys, having recently been converted into a house. Before he left Canada however, he sold the land at Whonnock to his younger brother Benjamin Ward (II), better known as Ben. The settlement at Whonnock by now boasted a railway station, a school, general store and a number of Churches. Ben was a young man of considerable sporting abilities. He was



**The Spilsbury 'Clan' outside the Longlands cr 1900**  
**Seated (l-r) Louise Catherine, Frank, George, Hannah (wife), 'The Governor', Benjamin Ward, Anne Elizabeth.**  
**Standing John Humphrey, Benjamin Ward jnr., Auguste Boulonger.**  
**(probably taken by Isobel Sarah (Bella) who was a photographer.**  
**-Photo courtesy Spilsbury Family Archives (British Columbia)**



**Benjamin Ward Spilsbury (jnr) as a Cambridge Football 'Blue' in 1888. He scored the first ever goal for Derby County, 'The Rams' in 1884 (photo courtesy P Seddon)**

**Ashton Wilmot Spilsbury, Aged about 20, in about 1890. He was perhaps the most successful of the three brothers who went to Canada. (photo Spilsbury Family Archives )**

educated at Repton School where he played football and cricket and won the long jump four years in succession, breaking the school record in 1882 He went on to Jesus College Cambridge and gained both soccer and athletics "Blues". Later he played professional football for Derby County from 1884 to 1889 and had the honour of scoring that club's first ever competitive goal, in a match against Blackburn Olympic, in 1884. Soon after his last game for the club in 1889, he left Derbyshire with a young bride, Edith Jessie Bairnsfather. He had also collected a family "remittance" and the pair settled on the 360 acre 'farm' his brother had owned in Whonnock. Despite his other abilities however he had no talents or flair for farming the land and he fared no better than his brother! The hard life of a pioneer proved too much for him so he moved on to the nearby new city of North Vancouver. There he described himself as a "land agent", studied divinity, and then sold the land he owned at Whonnock to yet another member of the family, his younger brother, Ashton Wilmot Spilsbury. However soon after this Ben lost all his money in a major financial depression in the 1890's and

eventually returned to the family home in Findern, England, where he died in 1938, being buried with his father and mother in the local churchyard.

After parting with his "remittance money" to his brother, Ashton tried hard to become 'the farmer' where his brothers' before him had failed, but his education in England did not equip him well for the task! Ashton was, initially educated at a Willington private school run by a George Messiter in a property later to become the Willington House Hotel and where he is recorded as a "scholar" in the 1881 census. Like his brothers he then went to nearby Repton School and then on to Clare College Cambridge, where he studied medicine. Farming in Whonnock was quite different; it was very arduous and Ashton worked hard, clearing land, even blasting tree stumps with dynamite and building himself a homestead. In 1898, at the age of 26, he married in Whonnock a twenty seven year old immigrant from London, Alice Blizzard. During that year he features a number of times in a diary, kept by a local man, John Williamson, on life in the area at that time, including the

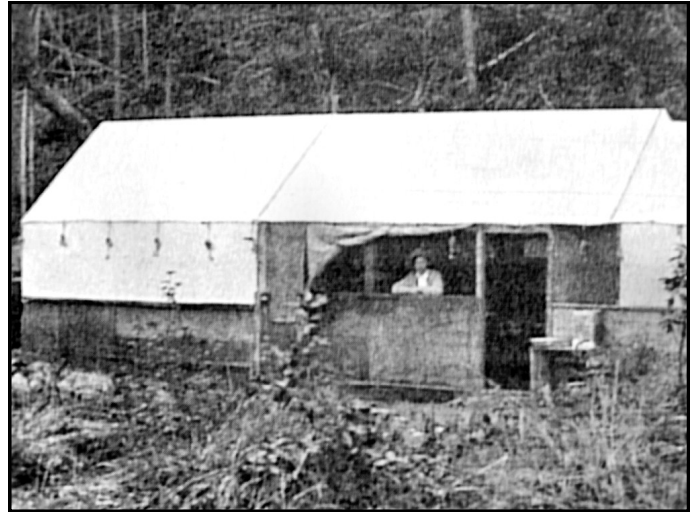


fact he asked the local council for a rebate in his taxes because “there had been a delay in getting the correct figures to him” - his request was refused! He is listed on the 1898 voters register as a “farmer” and is noted elsewhere as being a Justice of the Peace (JP).

In 1905 he followed the Governor’s edict which required any of the family to return to Findern for the birth of their first child, in this case a son, Ashton James Ward Spilsbury, who later became better known as Jim Spilsbury. The ‘Clan’ at Findern however found Alice to be ‘rather a caste below them’ and she displayed her rebellious spirit by cutting her hair very short, wearing trousers and even becoming a suffragette!

In 1906 Ashton and his family returned to Whonnock and attempted to produce and market ‘Devonshire cream’ in that area, but without success. The farm was sold just before the 1914 war and eventually the family moved to Savary Island, about 100 miles north of Vancouver, and for many years lived in a large tent. Ashton and his son Jim made a living ‘odd jobbing’ - building fences, digging wells and repairing the summer cottages of the wealthy. In 1921 ‘The Longlands’ Findern was sold and fortunately Ashton inherited a goodly sum of money from the proceeds of the Willington/Findern estate - life out there improved considerably. His son Jim (Ashton Ward Spilsbury) went on to become a very successful business man, inventor, writer and water colourist, and eventually the owner of the Queen Charlotte Airlines in British Columbia.

Sister Anne (Bess) was also a rebel in some ways. In the 1901 census she is still at home, aged 37 and she then went over to Canada and met up with her brother Ashton. Whilst in Whonnock she met a member of the native ‘Kwantlen’ tribe, one Auguste Baker, and married him, almost as if to spite her rigid parents. The family insisted that his surname be changed to ‘Boulanger’ – the French for ‘Baker’ because it sounded more acceptably European. (Bess in fact first appeared right at the start of my quest because, coupled with her unusual name and living in British Columbia, she was the owner given on the deeds of the post office in Willington when it



**The tent on Savary Island, near Vancouver, in which Ashton and his family lived just prior to, and during, the 1914 war.**

**(Photo Spilsbury Family Archives )**

was sold in the 1920’s! This was one of the factors that led me into this maze of information and people!) However Bess and Auguste returned to England soon afterwards because, in 1906, they were given the use of the converted tower windmill at Findern as their new home by her father.

The Rev Benjamin’s displeasure with Bess however is evident from the contents of a deed, dated 12<sup>th</sup> June 1906. This document covered the details relating to their use of the windmill house, in which she was given its use and that of the surrounding land, under a Trust, which decreed these would initially revert to her husband on her decease but then subsequently return to the ‘Clan’! However the whole arrangement was wrapped up in a large number of restrictive clauses relating to what should happen if she had children - BUT in 1906 she was 42 year’s of age - the ‘Governor’ was clearly not out to encourage children appearing! The couple appears to have later returned to Canada and do not figure in any local records. Unmarried elder brother Francis then took up residence in the windmill, allegedly with his mistress, and died in 1926, aged 68.

Benjamin Ward Spilsbury died on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1909 and is buried in the church yard in Findern, his grave, that of his wife Hannah

who outlived him by 12 years and died in 1921, and also those of numerous members of 'The Clan', being together in a cluster, behind the west corner of the church, marked by a granite Celtic cross. He left a will which gave property to his second son Benjamin, but nothing to Francis! His will also left the majority of his properties and lands in Trust with executors for a period of SIX HUNDRED YEARS! (This was an ancient practice called 'entailing', designed to keep intact large estates. It fell into obsolescence, since it tended to leave the owner of the estate with land and property but little money to maintain them).



**James Ward Spilsbury,  
better known as Jim,  
the successful  
business man who  
founded an airline in  
1943.  
(Photo Spilsbury Family  
Archives )**

Meanwhile Ashton's brother, Ben, continued to live a quiet life in North Vancouver. He had two sons, both born in Vancouver, Benjamin Ward Spilsbury III, known always as Rupert, and Richard Hugh Spilsbury. Following the "edict" two subsequent daughters, Ann and Mary, were born at Findern and, for some inexplicable reason, they were left there for years to be raised by the "clan" in Findern and



**The windmill at Findern, as a house conversion, looking much as it did when the Spilsburys owned it.**

didn't go to Canada to join the family until they were in their late teens!

Over the years, the Grange at Willington was rented out to a variety of people, including a cousin, Colonel Godfrey Mosley, a Derby solicitor, whose wife, Hilda, inherited the entire Calke Abbey Estate in 1924. She took with her from the Grange to Calke a large inlaid round table, which is still on display at Calke Abbey, in Derbyshire, presently a National Trust property. While she was living in Calke Abbey, the Governor's grandson, and executor for the family estate, Richard Hugh Spilsbury, came to the UK from Canada to visit her and he eventually sold off the "Grange" in 1956, and the other remaining assets, on behalf of the residual family. Unlike his father, Richard adored the wilderness of British Columbia, became a forester and eventually became head of research for the British Columbia Forest Service. He died in 1999 at the age of 93 leaving three daughters and no sons. Brother Rupert, predeceased him, leaving only a daughter and back in Derbyshire the two remaining brothers, George Lucas and John Humphrie Arden Spilsbury both died as bachelors', again with no issue, and so we reached the end of an era – they all ran out of male heirs to continue the family name!

Clearly the requirement in the will that the land and property remain in trust for 600 years must have been at least partially overcome because 250 or so acres of the Spilsbury estate, including farms, fields and woodlands, mostly centred around Findern, (but excluding the family house 'The Longlands') were sold at a public auction on March 18<sup>th</sup> 1921, by auctioneers D Page and Sons, of the Wardwick Derby. The Sale was conducted on behalf of Benjamin Ward Spilsbury and the **Trustees of the Estate** and the sale also included the windmill at Findern, referred to earlier, together with a house at Willington, by the Egginton Brook, known as 'Brookside'. This property was sold for £625 to the then tenant, Mrs Llewellyn. (It has been demolished during 2009, as part of the Calder Aluminium

works site clearance, prior to the building of 90 houses).

Although clearance to sell some of the Spilsbury estate had been obtained by 1921, in 1937 a number of deeds of 'Disentailing' (needed to overcome 'entailed' properties) were entered in by Benjamin and the Trustees. The culmination of this action was that Benjamin Ward Spilsbury gave up all of his title to the estate to his son, Richard Hugh Spilsbury, who was then able, in the 1950's to sell off the remaining properties, including the Grange at Willington.

The Wards and Spilsburys were no longer represented in either Willington or Findern.



**The Spilsbury family grave in Findern churchyard is marked with this elaborate Celtic Cross.**



**Richard Hugh Spilsbury, aged 93, with his daughters, Allene, Mary and Sheila shortly before his death in 1999. (photo courtesy of Mary S Ross)**

## Conclusion

So it's happened again - The Ward family eventually produced no male heirs and passed their name, and wealth, onto the Spilsbury family with whom they were closely associated. The Spilsburys then carried the Ward-Spilsbury name for three generations and that line eventually ran out of steam too! They failed to produce a male heir! The last of the male stream had three daughters! It is the end of a long chain – dating back to at least 1650- two important families, the 'Local Gentry', lost in time.

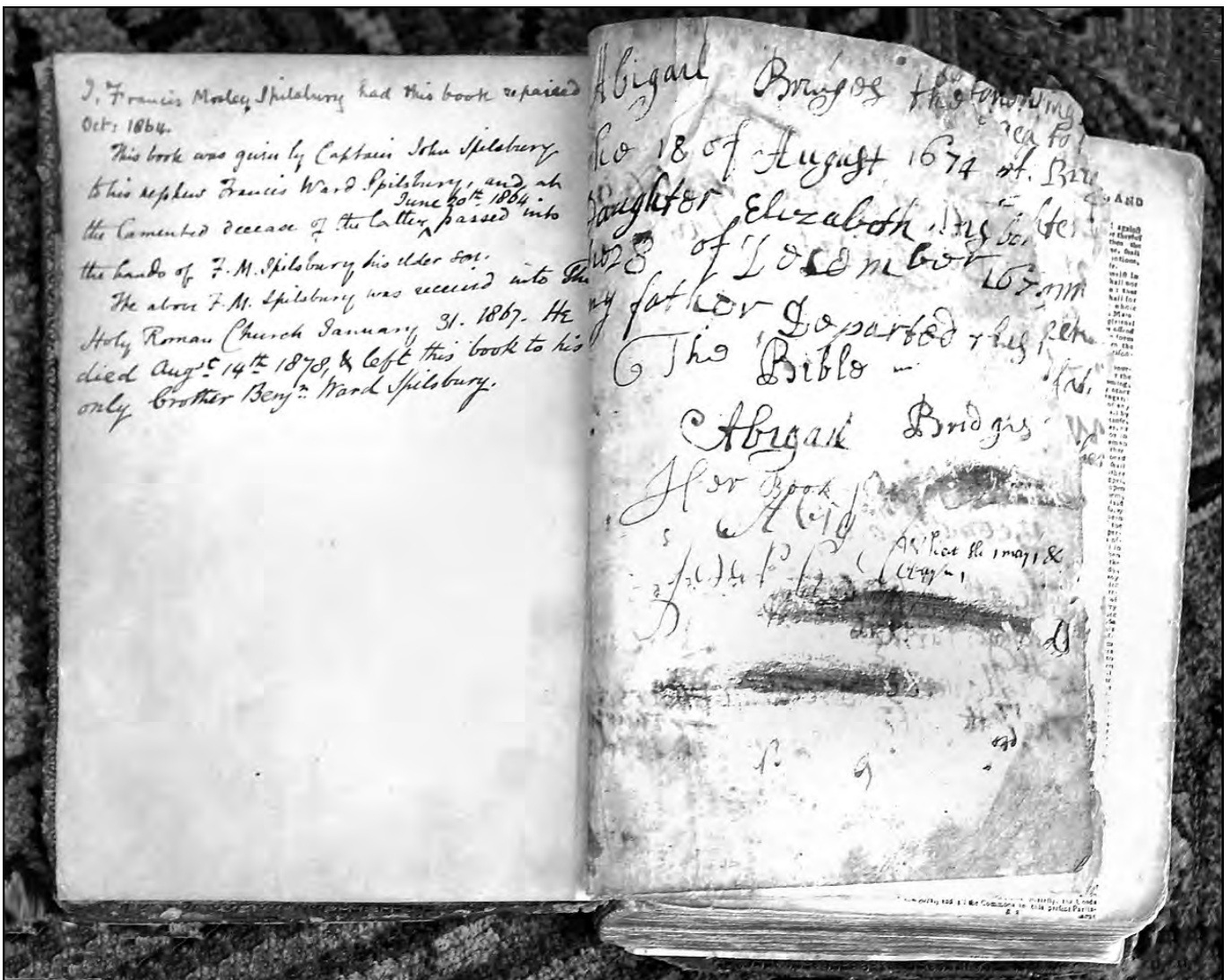
A few gravestones in Willington and Findern churchyards, a memorial and a hand painted, 'Spilsbury Charity' board, dated 1815, on a

wall in Willington church, a small cul de sac known as "Spilsbury Close" in Willington, a nautical point on a headland on Texada Island, British Columbia, called "Spilsbury Point" and a small summer cottage on Vancouver Island called "Spilsbury Cove" are all the visible remains today of what had been two very influential families in South Derbyshire! 'The Grange', at Willington, remained in the Spilsbury family ownership for almost 150 years and is still a gem of a house, down a secluded drive to the River Trent! 'The Longlands', at Findern, for many years the Spilsbury home and the Findern vicarage, is currently being converted into apartments.

Maybe the developer at Willington who built the Coachway Estate in 1990's was being far seeing when he named a small cul de sac by the river, near where the warehouses and wharfs had been,

***'Spilsbury Close' – and even included the standard 'no through way' symbol. It was indeed the end of that branch of the Spilsbury family- and their predecessors, the Wards, had already long gone!!***





I, Francis Mosley Spilsbury had this book repaired  
Oct: 1864.

This book was given by Captain John Spilsbury  
to his nephew Francis Ward Spilsbury, and at  
the lamented decease of the latter passed into  
the hands of F. M. Spilsbury his elder son.

The above F. M. Spilsbury was received into the  
Holy Roman Church January 31. 1867. He  
died Aug: 14<sup>th</sup> 1878 & left this book to his  
only Brother Benj: Ward Spilsbury.

Abigail Bridges the morning  
the 18 of August 1674 at  
daughter Elizabeth  
of London  
my father departed & he left  
The Bible

Abigail Bridges

Her Book  
at the  
City

**The Bible dating from about 1660 from which some of the data in this document has been extracted. (Courtesy Mary S Ross)**  
***The left hand page of the fly sheet reads:-***  
**‘I Francis Mosley had this book repaired October 1864.**  
**This book was given by Captain John Spilsbury to Francis Ward Spilsbury and on his lamented death June 20th 1864 passed into the hands of Francis Mosley Spilsbury, his elder son.**  
**The above Francis Mosley Spilsbury was received into the Roman Catholic church January 31st 1867. He died 14th August 1878 and left the book to his brother Benjamin Ward Spilsbury.’**  
***Authors Note -It was taken to British Columbia in 1957 by Richard Hugh Spilsbury and is presently in the hands of his daughter Mary Ross Spilsbury***

## **More information**

Whilst carrying out research for this publication the author has been led down many side tracks and has also found numerous examples of details, which, whilst adding to one's knowledge of the people concerned or the situation they were in, did not continue to pursue the lineage these families had followed through the years.

I have therefore decided, rather than embodying too much information in the main body of the text, to add a series of Appendices (which then become an optional read!). I hope you find them as fascinating as I have.

## **Appendix A**

### **Some Key Sources of Information**

#### **The University of British Columbia Collection and the Spilsbury Bible**

##### **Introduction**

Apart from using the normal census data etc, whilst browsing the web for 'matters Spilsbury' I chanced on an entry for some documents held in Canada. Fortunately one of my fellow Spilsbury seekers (Carol Berch) lives in Los Angeles and also has an apartment in nearby Seattle. She arranged to visit the University and was able to photograph, or copy, much of the material relating to the present study. Clearly there is much more but she believes she has covered most of the key documents.

An inventory on the web site describes the papers donated by Ashton James Spilsbury in December 1989, held in the Special Collections Division, Main Library, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. Considerable data on the Alcester area was from Kings Coughton, by G E Saville, private publication, 1973.

##### **Biographical/Historical Note**

A. J. (Jim) Spilsbury was born in Findern, Derbyshire in 1905, the only child of recent immigrants to Canada, Ashton Wilmot and Alice Maud Blizzard Spilsbury. He grew up on the British Columbia coast, mainly on Savary Island. At the age of thirteen Spilsbury went to the Orient on board the S. S. Melville Dollar as a merchant marine officer apprentice. Seasick and lonely, Spilsbury spent many an hour in the radio room of the freighter. This experience sparked a life long interest and extremely successful business career.

##### **Scope and Content Note**

The A. J. Spilsbury Papers consist of 3.5 metres of materials, dating from 1870 to 1985. There are family papers consisting mainly of

genealogical findings on Spilsbury's forbears, wills and some legal documents concerning land owned by his family in New Westminster, British Columbia, at the turn of the century (1870 to 1910); records gathered or kept by A J Spilsbury on Spilsbury & Hepburn Ltd and its successors, 1940 to 1985; records of Queen Charlotte Airlines Ltd 1946-5 and a large collection of photographs, 1870 to 1987, mostly taken by Spilsbury.

##### **Major Finds**

The most important 'find' during the visit to the University in this study however was a small note book recording jottings on the family history dating back to the 17th C, in hand written script and clearly developed over many years of study. Mary Spilsbury Ross, a niece of Jim,( who by this time had become involved in the study) was able to confirm that this assembly of information on the family had been compiled by Francis Mosley Spilsbury (1826 -1876), son of Francis Ward Spilsbury, vicar of Willington, who had set himself the task of 'family historian'. For more information on this collection see:-

[http://www.library.ubc.ca/spcoll/AZ/PDF/S/Spilsbury\\_A.J.pdf](http://www.library.ubc.ca/spcoll/AZ/PDF/S/Spilsbury_A.J.pdf)

##### **Spilsbury Family Bible**

Mary Ross also owns a large old family bible (printed in 1660) which had been taken to Canada, from Findern, by her father, Richard Hugh Spilsbury in the 1950's, as executor to the Spilsbury estate. The original owner was Abigail Bridges (b 1646 - d 1732) whose mother married the Rev James Spilsbury in 1708. On Abigail's death ownership passed to the Spilsburys. The bible contains faded notation on many 'births and deaths' in the family which has generally been correlated with data obtained from other sources, such as census data, wills, press cuttings etc to enable this book to be produced. (See photo on page 35)

## **Appendix B**

### **Willington in 1857, (part of the description of Willington, as contained in Whites Derbyshire Directory)**

‘Willington is a pleasant well-built village and Parish, situated on the north bank of the Trent, 6½ miles SW from Derby and 4½ miles NE from Burton on Trent. Here are several; neat mansions occupied by the Rev Francis Spilsbury, George Smallwood Esq. and Mrs Francis Allsop. The first two named are the property of the Rev F W Spilsbury. The parish contains 1,193a or 38p on light fertile land and in 1851 had 109 houses and 442 inhabitants, of whom 227 were males and 215 females; rateable value £3,743.6s.

Sir Robert Burdett, Bart, is lord of the manor and principle landowner. Etwall and Repton Corporation and the Rev F W Spilsbury are also owners. The Grand Trunk canal passes near the north side of the village on which Messrs Bass and Smith, of Horninglow, have a large warehouse and coal wharf. The Birmingham and Derby Railways (West Branch of the Midland) passes through the village and occupies 15a of land and has a neat station. The booking office is a small brick building, the roof of which is just level with the rails, on account of the embankment, and the line crossing two of the streets, by stone bridges, the means of approach from the booking office to the platform is by a flight of 31 stone steps, near which are two good inns, with stabling and every other convenience, viz. the Rising Sun and the Green Man. In 1839 a good substantial bridge with 5 arches was erected across the Trent to Repton, on which there is a toll house; it was built by subscription, at cost £9000, and the approaches to it about £3000, for construction of which the public are much indebted to Mr Stephen Glover of Derby.

The Church, dedicated to St Michael, is an ancient stone edifice, with nave, chancel and pinnacled tower, in which are three bells and contains several neat tablets. The living, valued in the King’s book at £4.17s.3d, now £82 has been augmented with £800 Queen

Anne’s bounty, vested in lands at Ashby de la Zouch, Leicestershire. The corporation of Etwall and Repton are patrons, and the Rev Wm Findlay, incumbent, for whom a vicarage is about to be erected. The Baptists and Wesleyan Methodists each have places of worship here. A small school was erected in 1831, by Rev F W Spilsbury, who principally supports the same. The Odd Fellows have a Lodge, and there is also a sick society here. The feast is held on the first Sunday after the 19<sup>th</sup> September.

The manor in the Domesday survey belonged to the King and partly to Ralph Fitzherbert. King Henry II gave a manor to Burton Abbey. The other manor appears to have been given with the church at Willington, to the prior and convent of Repton, to whom the tithes were appropriated in 1223. Wm. Westcote conveyed this manor, about the year 1554, to Sir John Port, founder of Repton School.

The Post Office is at Mr Cantell’s. Letters arrive by foot post from Burton on Trent at 9:30am and are despatched at 4:30pm. There are four passenger trains and one goods train each way, daily; Mr W Cantrell is station Master.’

#### ***Comments by author.***

*It is interesting to compare Willington 150 years ago with the village today— indeed it is still a village but the population is probably nearer 3000 than the 442 quoted by White. All land in the village, other than that owned by the village itself, is now in private hands. There is a pleasure boat marina on the canal and whilst the railway and station are still there (the latter recently rebuilt) there is no booking office— you pay on the train but the train service is no better!. The bridge was freed of toll in 1898 and carries a large number of cars (not invented in 1857) through the village centre to join the main national road network at nearby ‘Toyota’ island. The Anglican and Baptist churches are still in place, the latter in a new building. The Post Office is still at the end of Castleway but there is no longer an annual feast!. It was also most interesting to note that there were a large number of trades and professions followed, in the village, in addition to a number of shops.*



## **Appendix C**

### **River Trade**

The River Trent, the third longest river in England, rises in the Biddulph Moors in Staffordshire, and flows through the Midlands for about 185 miles before it joins with the River Ouse and then flows into the Humber Estuary. Gainsborough and Torksey were the main ports for sea-going vessels also used for transshipping goods from the shallow draught boats coming from the upper reaches of the river.

There were few bridges and river crossings. Generally rivers were crossed by fords and ferries. For example there was no bridge between Swarkestone and Burton on Trent until the building of the toll bridge and causeway between Repton and Willington, in 1839.

Until about 1600 the river was only navigable as far as Nottingham but was then improved to permit traffic to the Wilden Ferry, close by Shardlow. The principle problem was the numerous stretches of shallow water, where even shallow draught boats could 'bottom'. It was particularly problematic as the boats approached Burton. It was over come, in

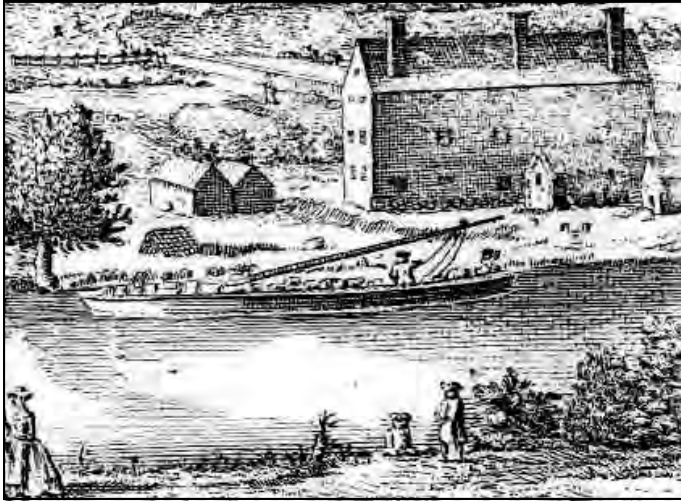
part, by constructing 'pound' locks, or weirs, from which water could be released in sufficient quantity to allow the boats to navigate through shallows, although adjoining mill and land owners presented many legal objections to the practice, as it interfered with their normal operations. Such locks were built, for example, at Shelford and Kings Mills.

The ease with which goods could be transported in bulk by water, compared to road travel, led to pressure to extend the navigable sections. Burton brewers saw it as a way whereby they could get their product to London and campaigned for further extensions, to embrace their town. Following the Act of Parliament, in 1699, more improvements were possible upstream and new locks were duly built at Winshell, on the outskirts of the town. Willington developed, as a direct result of this Act into an intermediate 'river port', with wharves and warehouses built on the northern bank of the river. A road in the village which runs across the river side from Bargate Lane was at one time called 'Warehouse Road' (Inclosure Awards 1768).

This road led directly to 'Mrs Wards Warehouse', and the river side wharves continued eastwards for about 400 yards, almost to the ford. From the Calke estate map of the village (see page 9), undated, but



**The bridge over the River Trent, between Willington and Repton in 2008**



**'A typical River Trent barge with its sail lowered passing a warehouse, probably about to pass under a bridge'**

clearly drawn before the canal was completed in 1777 (*it does not show the canal but must have been produced after Joseph Ward died in 1767, since his widow was marked as a land owner*), much can be learnt about the importance of this section of river bank.

Approximately in line with the end of Oaks Road, in Willington, was another road, now completely gone, leading down to Sir Henry Harpur's warehouse and then, nearby, a further property, designated as a 'Warehouse and homestead' for which the ownership was not defined. This was probably the 18<sup>th</sup>

century two storey brick building which was demolished as recently as 2002 and which had still been used as cottages as recently as the 1960's (see page 14). There has been no trace of the other buildings marked on the map for many years. The old map also identifies an area on the river bank, to the west, where there was 'no getting to this land during floods' and another adjacent point which was 'very subject to floods'. Further to the east it marks a spot 'where another warehouse might be built'. (This is just beyond the present Bridleway 11, which leads down to the river). A further section of the river bank is marked as, 'an exceedingly fine wharf' and interestingly, some of the stone edging to the bank still survives, on private land. A slip way into the river still remains, more or less complete, with iron rails running into the water, at the landward end of which there is an old cast iron hand operated winch, which was restored in 2006 by Willington History Group. This winch may well date from the period when the wharves were active and would have been used to haul boats out of the water. There would certainly have been other smaller buildings and the river side must have bustled with life for almost a century before the opening of the canal made this a much more viable mode of transport.



**The boat winch, by the River Trent, refurbished by the Willington Local History Group.**

## Appendix D

### **Notes on the 1768 Inclosure Award for Willington, largely as relating to the Ward Family**

The author is fortunate to have a typed copy of the Inclosure Award text for the village of Willington dated 1768, which comprises 62 pages of A4, typed in double space format. The punctuation etc follows the format of the original handwritten script (DRO ref Q/RI 105) and has just a few headings to different sections. Understanding the text however is not helped by the fact that, apparently, no map was ever made to accompany the text and it requires close reading to try and establish exactly where the land allocations were made against the present village layout. This is further hindered by the fact that there is no comprehensive field names map for the village and the field names are continually used in the Award document to define boundaries.

The following are some of the main entries relating to the Ward and Spilsbury families.

The main applicants to Parliament for the Inclosure of Willington were Sir Henry Harpur, Sir Robert Burdett, the John Port Hospitals charity and, amongst other named persons, Joseph Ward. Data for consideration by the Commissioners was to be submitted by August 1766 and the area under consideration was approximately 1300 acres.

An allotment of land was made to Joseph Ward called 'Trent Green' joining to the River Trent bounded by the ancient croft of Thomas Shorthose, the yard of Sir Henry Harpur and a warehouse of **Joseph Ward** and then on to Willington ford. (*Thomas Shorthose is known to have lived in The Shrubbery, on Hall Lane so this clearly is a large area of land towards the river bank*)

It then refers to the house of Benjamin Trowle as being near the public road from the Sands (*this ran by the brook, presently Repton Road*) to Willington Ford (*which was located down Meadow Lane - the house could well be the Brook House and the Malt house - later a*

*warehouse - recently demolished in 2009. Note the grave of Benjamin Trowle is in the churchyard at Willington*).

The Public Roads in the village are then defined. A road leading from Willington to Burton on Trent, called **Burton Road**, beginning at the NW corner of Grange Yard (*opposite the church*), along the Sands to Townsend Close then west between the allotments of **Benjamin Ward** and the overseers of the Poor of Willington – (*From Church along Repton Road into Castleway, with Benjamin Ward's land, the site of the present Post Office*). The document continues by defining **Twyford Road** leading out of Townsend Close (*Post Office*) to North of Pinfold Lane (*corner of Oaks Road*) between the allotments of Sir Henry Harpur, **Lydia Ward** and the school master (*Hospitals land*)

Of considerable importance was another public carriage, cart, drift road called '**Warehouse Road**', approximately 30" wide, leading from Willington Ferry eastwards from Malt House to the south end of the lane leading from the Smithy (*Now Bargate Lane*) and containing the area allocated to **Lydia Ward** on the north side of the Trent.

It further refers to Inclosed lands, 'late of **Joseph Ward** assigned to Lydia Ward, called Trent Green, with the warehouse late of Joseph Ward, now of Lydia Ward'.

(*This confirms that Joseph died whilst the Commissionaires were sitting and that Lydia, his widow, took over his property and land by 1778*). The report continues by referring to more land owned by **Lydia**, this time to the north of Twyford Road and assigns more land to **Benjamin Ward** (2r 29p) described as 'bounded by Burton Road, Hall Orchard and Handford's Yard' *possibly the present site of Post Office –corner of Castleway?*)

Finally it apports land to Lydia Ward, being part of a croft, late in possession of Nottingham Boat Company, adjoining the MANSION HOUSE and Garden of the said **Lydia Ward**. (*This appears to confirm that the Wards lived in a property, now long gone, and possibly on the site of the present Hall, on Hall Lane*)

There are other references to land allocated to either **Lydia or Benjamin Ward** but the locations are less well determined. However there can be no doubt that in 1788 the **Ward** family were major land owners in Willington.

## Appendix E

### **Major court cases for the Wards and Spilsburys**

*In carrying out this study for a long time it appeared that the source of the wealth of the Spilsbury family in Willington and Findern was as a direct bequest from the Ward family. This superstition was aided by the findings of a report of a London high court case, in 1835 but.....*

Joseph Ward was born in Willington in 1706 and practised as a London Barrister, then married his second wife, Lydia Martin, and returned back to live to Willington. He died in 1767 and was buried at Beddington (near Maidenhead), the home town of his first wife. With Lydia he had one living child, a daughter, Lydia Henning Ward, although when she was born is not clear. In his will, also dated 1767, he refers to her as 'an infant' so we can perhaps assume that she was no more than say 3-5 years old at that time i.e. born about 1764

Twenty years after the death of her father Joseph, his daughter, Lydia Henning Ward, who had inherited much of his estates in the Derbyshire/Nottinghamshire areas, married on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1787, a William Augustus Skynner, of Cookham, in Berkshire. Based on the above premise regarding her age, at this time she would therefore be about 22 -25 years of age and one would have thought, at a responsible phase in her life. She had been married for only 19 months when she died, on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 1789. Just a few days before her marriage to Augustus she had made a will in favour of Lucas Ward Spilsbury, her cousin, whereby her properties and lands in Willington, Etwall, Twyford and Stenson, all

in Derbyshire, were to be managed under a Trust and limited to the use of Trustees and their heirs during the life of Lydia, with any rents being paid to Lydia. She also established that the Trust ensured the longer term care of the estate. In respect of this Trust Benjamin Ward, her uncle, became a '**heir in law**', and who then, by his own will, subsequently bequeathed his estate, (including the trusteeship of Lydia's property) to Benjamin Spilsbury.

However before Lydia's death, she made a new will, drawn up only 18 days before she died, apparently revoking the earlier one and making her new husband her executer and leaving her mother, Lydia Martin Ward, as her major beneficiary. There was virtually no reference in this will to her husband. In default (of the estate going to her mother) however the estates were to revert to William Augustus Skynner and the properties she also owned at Willington and Repton areas would then be available for his sole use.

But Lydia's mother died very shortly after her and the estate therefore reverted to the new husband. The new will, (which effectively excluded the Wards/Spilsburys), was challenged by the Wards in 1789 and in March 1790 Benjamin Ward reiterated his claims to this large estate, as **heir in law**. Regardless of this Skynner, between 1804 and 1815, sold off huge pieces of the estate to major Derbyshire local families, such as the Burdett's of Foremark, for not inconsiderable amounts of money! In 1818 Benjamin Spilsbury (already beneficiary of the will of Benjamin Ward) made his eldest son Rev Francis Ward Spilsbury of Willington his heir. Francis also became the major beneficiary of his cousin Lucas Ward Spilsbury's estate (who was another '**heir in law**' to Lydia's estate), having purchased the total interest in Lucas's estate for £1000 from him in 1827. Armed with all this background knowledge, and no doubt aggrieved at seeing the large estate he saw as rightly being owned by the Spilsburys now being sold off by Skynner, Francis Ward Spilsbury took the case to the High court in 1835 to establish the validity of Lydia's original will. The findings, at the Kings Bench, went in his favour, and he was awarded full custody of the estates etc.

## Authors Note

*So it seemed that this was where the Spilsbury wealth came from but these expectations were soon shattered, since a later report was found, of an appeal against the Court findings, almost 50 years after Lydia's death:-*

Unhappy with the original court findings the buyers of land from Skynner, (and no doubt being harried by F W Spilsbury) contested the above result! The major power, exerted by the Burdett family then came to the fore, and they took the disputed findings to the House of Lords in May, 1842 to appeal, under a '**Writ of Error**'\*\*. Their Lordships overturned the original findings, declaring the 'new will' of Lydia Ward was in fact legal and that Augustus was in fact the major benefactor. *This decision became 'case law'.*

So forty six years after Lydia Henning died it seems nothing came the way of the Spilsburys and the associated lands and properties, originally owned by the Ward family, therefore passed over into other ownership. The Spilsbury fortunes did not benefit at all!

### **\*Heir in law**

*The heir of somebody's property under the law if that person dies without a valid will.*

### **\*\*Writ of Error**

*The object is to review and correct an error of the law committed in proceedings, which is not amendable, or cured at common law, or by some of the statutes of amendment*

**Comment** – It seems incredible that the will was contested in the courts so long after the death of the major players'. No reason has been established for this huge delay!

## **Appendix F**

### **Non-Conformists or Dissenters**

(based on data provided by John Hawkins of Findern History Group)

#### **Introduction**

*The meeting of Lucas Spilsbury from Alcester and Dorothy Ward of Willington at the Findern Academy and their subsequent marriage in 1741 was one of the lynch pins in the development of the Spilsbury family to become such important people in both Findern and Willington. This note outlines the religious situation which led to the establishment of the Academy.*

#### **Back Ground**

Throughout history various religious factions have struggled to get the upper hand. The 1500s in England was a time when the throne, and therefore power, oscillated between Roman Catholic and Protestant dominance. Queen Elizabeth I achieved a measure of stability during her reign (1558 – 1603).

In the 1600s the winning of the Civil War by the Parliamentarians, led by Oliver Cromwell, put the Puritan doctrine to the fore. This was an austere form of Protestantism. But in 1660, after 11 years of 'The Commonwealth', the monarchy was restored with King Charles II on the throne. He was a self-indulgent pleasure lover who, privately, supported Catholicism. In a backlash against Puritanism various Acts were introduced. In 1662 the Act of Uniformity was imposed on the church and clergy introducing a Book of Common Prayer and a prescribed form of service. About one fifth of Church of England clergymen refused to conform to the Act and resigned or were ejected from their livings: they became known as the "Non-Conformists" or "Dissenters".

In 1665 the 'Five Mile Act' imposed even more restrictions on them. It banned them from living within five miles of a corporate town – of which Derby was an example. Significantly, the village of Findern, neighbour of Willington, is five and a half miles from Derby. (The Non-

Conformists were also banned from holding any public office, banned from the universities, and were not allowed to teach in grammar schools.)

Finally, as far as this story is concerned, the Non-Conformists achieved a small measure of constitutional acceptance in 1689 in the Act of Toleration after the Protestant King William III and Queen Mary came to the throne. This Act allowed them to apply for licences to have their own 'meeting houses' for religious services. It is clear that Findern had become a home to Non-Conformists because the records of the Derbyshire Quarter Sessions show applications in Findern as follows:

1689	John Erpe
1689	John Carter (P)
1689	John Cooke
1693	Jonathan Webster
1689	Edward Fleming (P)

These men applied to have their own houses used as 'meeting houses'.

The (P) expressly indicates Presbyterian in the records, but it is probable in Derbyshire at that time that all were Presbyterian.

### **The Findern Presbyterian Academy**

In 1693 a Non-Conformist Academy was founded in Findern by Benjamin Robinson. From 1720 to 1754 Dr Ebenezer Latham was in charge. He was a noted physician and preacher who lived at 'The Longlands', Findern. This house, in later years, became the long-term residence of the Spilsburys.

The Findern Academy had a high reputation. Apart from Lucas Spilsbury attending the academy another Spilsbury, from a different branch of the family, was there at the same time. He was Francis Spilsbury, later to become a Presbyterian minister of note, who was the grandson of the Bishop of Bristol. His father, the Rev. John Spilsbury, Fellow of

Magdalen College, Oxford, for many years was the public minister of Bromsgrove, in Worcestershire. Another notable pupil was Thomas Bentley, born in Trusley, Derbyshire. He was accomplished, classically educated and well-travelled. After a chance meeting in Liverpool he became the London agent of the famous Josiah Wedgwood of pottery fame. Coincidentally, it was Josiah Wedgwood and his associates who were behind the cutting of the Trent and Mersey Canal (1777) that passes through both Findern and Willington.

Another moving force in the Industrial Revolution of the late 1700s was Jedediah Strutt., a Derbyshire farm boy who came to Findern in 1740 at the age of fourteen to serve an apprenticeship with the local wheelwright. This date coincides with that for Lucas Spilsburys association with the Academy. In such a small village it would be very unlikely that they did not meet.

One source claims that the young Jedediah received some tuition at the Academy. He must have been very promising material considering his later achievements – and one of his sons became a Fellow of the Royal Society. Jedediah was a lifelong Non-Conformist (as were many prominent men of the Industrial Revolution) and built a Unitarian Chapel in Belper where his mills were situated. The chapel and some of his mills still stand today.

The Academy was not an imposing building by today's expectations, but was typical of its time. These academies and grammar schools were usually small affairs in small towns and villages, catering for the sons of the poorer gentry, the clergy and the more ambitious farmers.

## Appendix G

### **Francis Mosley Spilsbury, Oxford University and Catholicism.**

Throughout this research into the Ward and Spilsbury families it has become very obvious that religion was a key issue in their way of life. Dorothy Ward and Lucas Spilsbury were clearly Presbyterians, having met in the 'Findern Academy' (see also Appendix F) and yet their family was closely associated with St Michaels Church of England, Willington as witness by elaborate memorials inside the church to members of both Wards and Spilsburys. The Rev Francis Ward Spilsbury was the vicar of St Michaels and there are also memorials to both him and his wife within the church. One of Francis Ward Spilsbury's brothers, Benjamin Ward Spilsbury, went on to become the vicar of All Saints, the church of England, in Findern.

However Francis Mosley Spilsbury, the brother of Francis Ward, who remained a bachelor all his life, although initially C of E, at some point changed his faith to Catholicism- the only member of the family to make such a change. It was this man who produced much of the early records of the Spilsbury family history which are deposited in the University of British Columbia Library. So why did he change faith?

It is perhaps significant that he received his later formal education in the 1840's at Trinity College, Oxford. It was here at that time that a group of thinkers had begun questioning the role of the Church of England and the state. It started in 1833 when John Keble delivered a powerful sermon on the subject and lasted until at least 1846 – just the period when Francis Mosley was at the University. The so called 'Oxford Movement' posed deep and far reaching questions about the relationships between the church, the state, the Catholic heritage of the church of England and the responsibilities of the church itself and four scholar priests became known as the Tractarians, since they published many tracts on the subject.

It was in this charged atmosphere young Francis Mosley Spilsbury studied and, whilst

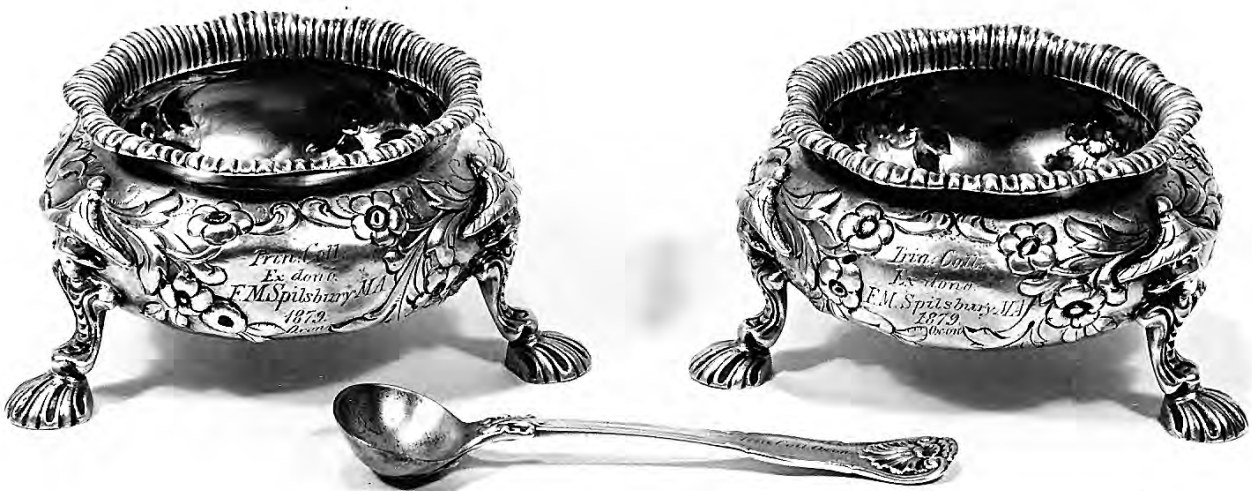
he does not seem to have been a member of the group, he may well have been influenced by them, possibly leading to his change of faith. The strength of religion at that time is further demonstrated in that Catholics were not allowed to be members of Oxford University until the reforms of the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

So he became the odd one out in the family and one wonders what his brother Francis Ward felt? He had however clearly formed a strong bond to the University, although there is no evidence that he ever went back. In his will he left £50 in cash to 'The President' of Oxford Trinity College to buy six silver salt cellars and spoons to be inscribed '**the gift of Francis Mosley Spilsbury, sometimes commoner at Trin Col, Oxon.**' He also left £200 to the college to 'maintain' and add to his collection of Lepidoptera butterflies. With the help of the archivist at the college it has been possible to locate these items in 2009!

Please see the photo over the page.

But note—he did not get the inscription he wanted! It reads in fact:-

**Trin Coll  
Ex Dono  
F.M. Spilsbury M.A.  
1879  
Oxon.**



**The salt cellars bought by Oxford Trinity College from F M Spilsburys bequest, 1879. (Photo by kind permission of The President and Fellows, Trinity College.)**



Appendix H

A typical page from the notebook found in the University of British Columbia Library. (Compiled by Francis Mosley Spilsbury.)

B. at Alcester Oct 26 - 11  
 1756 - aged 38

Lucas Spitsbury  
 Born 1714. died 1764 <sup>B. July 17<sup>th</sup> Alcester</sup> aged 50. Married Dorothy Ward of Wellington in 1741. He had issue five sons and two daughters. B. at Alcester

Francis Ward born <sup>Nov 6</sup> 1742. died an infant <sup>Jan 7 - 1743</sup> at Wellington

Lucas ~~Ward~~ born <sup>Oct 9<sup>th</sup></sup> 1743 died 1816. married Elizabeth Charlotte <sup>Lawyer</sup> Storm of Hull. in <sup>Jan 18</sup> 1776. He died & buried at Bawtry Church. <sup>Mar 2 1816</sup> Yorkshire. <sup>Left 2 sons - see will</sup> Was a lawyer.

John ~~Ward~~ born 1744 - died 1833<sup>89</sup> Was Captain in ~~Mary~~ single. died at Doncaster. (Bible)

Benjamin born 1746. died 1818. married to Ann ~~Arden~~ of Longcroft. 1786 had issue one son and two daughters. lived and died at Wellington in 1818 -

Elizabeth <sup>XX</sup> born 1748 <sup>m Hollingsworth 72</sup> married Mr John Banks Hollingsworth <sup>adopted by Mr. Robt Banks</sup> and had issue. By Lethbury - London -

Joseph born 1752 - died 1791 drowned at Shardlow & buried at Torsae single. <sup>aged 39</sup>

Dorothy born 1754. died ~~1785~~ single. lived at Wellington and in London <sup>1840</sup> afterwards with the Martins of Cambridge & at Grandchester 1833. <sup>aged 75</sup>

Mr Rev John Banks

~~X~~ Lucas eldest son reported to be Lucas Ward Spitsbury - <sup>John</sup> - <sup>see Lucas S. s will. proved 1716</sup>

## Appendix J

### The charts of the Ward & Spilsbury families (Compiled by Mary Ross Spilsbury)

#### Ward Family

Francis Ward. 1675-1752  
m. Elizabeth Turpin (sister Dorothy)  
moved from Nottingham to Willington  
(established The Wharf at Willington)

I  
I  
I

I	I	I	I
Joseph b 1706	Elizabeth	Benjamin b 1712 d 1790	Dorothy b 1718 d 1756
I Carew b 1792	m. Robert Banks	m Elizabeth Woodhouse	m Lucas Spilsbury b 1741
2 Lydia Martin d.1790	(No Issue)	(Benjamin left estates to his nephew	(nb link to Spilsbury)
(left estate to Ben. Spilsbury, nephew)	Benjamin Spilsbury b 1746		
I	I		
I			
I			
Lydia Henning			
m 1789 Auguste Skynner			
(contested her will that left all to Lucas Ward Spilsbury b 1743)			





**Alan Gifford**



**Mary Spilsbury Ross**

## **Willington Local History Group**

Willington Local History Group was formed in 1998 as a direct result of the celebration organised by the Parish Councils of Willington and Repton to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the freeing from toll of the bridge over the River Trent, connecting the two villages. The bridge was designed and built in 1839 but carried a toll until 1898. It was designed and built by James Trubshaw, by public subscription, at a cost of about £11,000.

In order to mark the event considerable research into the bridge's history was required and this led a number of people to the idea that a Local History Group would be well received in the village of Willington.

The Group meet on the second Thursday of each month, from October until April, with an organised visit outside the village during May. Meetings are held in the Old School, Castleway, Willington at 7-30pm and visitors are always welcomed.

**For more information contact the Secretary on 01283 704959**





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