

## COACHMAKING TRADES IN BENSON by Jane Farquharson

Coachmakers, wheelwrights and harness makers in Benson were first recorded in the mid eighteenth century but these trades may have been well established long before. Benson was known as a centre for the building of coach wheels and axle trees. The earliest records of coachmakers in Benson concern the **Padbury** family. John **Padbury** was a harness maker in Benson, who died in 1738 and his business was carried on by his son, Phillip, in Benson Fields. John left his "*land in the common fields of Benson*" to Phillip. The Padbury family then expanded into coachmaking. The marriage register of St Helen's Church records that in 1761, William Underwood, coachbuilder, married Ann Padbury. Phillip Padbury rented Lower Farm, Preston Crowmarsh during the period 1780 to 1799, when the estate was sold. (*Victoria County History*.) The Padbury coachmaking business finally went bankrupt in 1805. By this time, coachmaking employed 25 people in Benson.

Further details of **the freehold estate of Philip Padbury** are provided by the advertisement which appeared in Jackson's Oxford Journal in 1805. It included a substantial brick and tiled dwelling house with a brew house and cottage adjoining, coach shop, blacksmith's and wheelwright's shop, as well as three and a half acres in Benson Fields, (common fields shared with other parishes.)

48 Jackson's Oxford Journal (Oxford, England), Saturday June 22 1805 BNEW004

1805

Philip Padbury, Coach-Maker,  
Bankrupt,

uilding Estate and Busine

**FREEHOLD ESTATE, BENSON, OXON.**  
**T**O be SOLD by AUCTION, by H. BRADFORD and SON, at the Feathers Inn, in Wallingford, Berks, on Friday the 26th Day of July, 1805, at Three o'Clock in the Afternoon, in two Lots, by Order of the Assignees of PHILIP PADBURY, Coach-Maker, a Bankrupt, under such Conditions as shall be then produced,—A desirable FREEHOLD ESTATE, at Benson, near Wallingford, consisting of the following Particulars, viz.

Lot I.—A substantial Brick and Tiled Dwelling House, with a Brew House and Cottage adjoining, Coach Shop, large Blacksmith's Shop, Wheelwright's Shop, Saw House, Barn, Stable, Cart House, Cow House, and other Out-Buildings, large Garden, Yard, &c. late in the Occupation of the said PHILIP PADBURY; the Whole measuring 51 Yards by 97.

Lot II.—Three Acres and a Half of rich Arable Land, and a Piece of Meadow, in Benson Fields.

**Advertisement for the auction of Philip Padbury's premises in Benson 1805**

Thomas **Coles**, a Benson coachmaker born in 1746, bought Phillip Padbury's coachmaking premises. He was a churchwarden at St Helen's Church and had paid for one of its bells in 1781. (*See photo below.*)



Thomas Coles died in 1809, and left his premises to his eldest son, Thomas. His will describes him as, “*Thomas Coles, the elder of Bensington in the new county of Oxford, coachmaker*”. Other property was to be sold to provide for his wife, Frances, and some silver items were left to his daughter, Fanny, who had married Thomas Powell, also a coachmaker, in London in 1805. The executors of the will of Thomas Coles were his wife, Frances and his sister, Martha Costar, widow of Benson. (*His wife, Frances, was born a Costar and was probably the younger sister of William Costar, the Oxford coach proprietor. Thomas Coles' sister, Martha, was the second wife of the same William Coster. She was buried next to William in St Helen's churchyard in 1820.*) The will of Thomas Coles records that his Bensington property had recently been acquired from Philip Padbury.

Further details of the Bensington coachmaker's premises are recorded in an advertisement published in Jackson's Oxford Journal in 1810, when the property was again sold by auction. The freehold estate matches the description in the first advertisement of 1805 and included a substantial brick and tiled

dwelling house and brew house etc. as well as workshops. This time the location was described as, “near the Red Lion Inn”, and Philip Padbury is recorded as the former occupier. (*The Red Lion Inn was the imposing brick building in the High Street on the corner of Mill Lane.*)

112 Jackson's Oxford Journal (Oxford, England), S Saturday April 7 1810 BNEW00112

1810

Freehold Estate, Mr Philip Padbury,  
Coach Maker

Building Estate Sale

**FREEHOLD ESTATE, BENSON, OXON.**  
**T**O be SOLD by AUCTION, on the premises, near the Red Lion Inn, Benson, on Wednesday the 25th day of April instant, at Two in the afternoon (unless previously disposed of by private contract).—A very desirable FREEHOLD ESTATE, with immediate possession; consisting of a substantial brick and tiled dwelling house and cottage near, with brew-house, and other convenient buildings; commodious work shops, barn, good garden, and orchard, and four cow commons, late in the occupation of Mr. Philip Padbury, coach maker.  
 For further particulars, and to treat for the purchase by private contract, apply to Messrs. Hedges, solicitors, Wallingford.

**Above: Advertisement for the auction of the coachmaker’s premises in 1810**

A coach workshop in a similar location was advertised in 1833 when the property was described as in “*a central situation in Benson, nearly opposite the Old Red Lion Inn*”. This time the coachmaker was Benjamin Arthur, who had recently taken over from his retired father, Charles Arthur.

**BENSON OXON.**  
**BENJAMIN ARTHUR,**  
**COACH AND HARNESS MAKER,**  
**G**RATEFUL for the many favours and patronage he has received from the Nobility, Gentry, and others, during the short time he has remained in business at his father's late residence, begs to inform his friends and the public that he is removed to a central situation in Benson, nearly opposite the Old Red Lion, (premises far preferable to the old manufactory), where his business will be carried on with punctuality and dispatch, and on the most reasonable terms; and he trusts, by an unremitting attention to their commands, to merit their approval, and a continuance of their favours.

**Above: Advertisement for coachmaker’s premises in Benson 1833**

If this is the same property, it seems that it once belonged to Philip Padbury, then Thomas Coles and then his son, and later Benjamin Arthur in 1833. When Richard Costar (son of William Costar, the Oxford coach proprietor) made his will, in 1821, he left property in Benson including stables and workshops “*opposite the White Hart Inn*” in the “*occupation of Mr Arthur, a coachmaker*”.

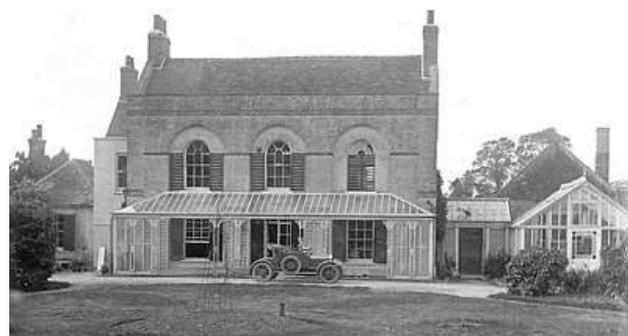
Charles Arthur came from London but worked as a coachmaker in Benson from 1816, when his daughter was baptised in St Helen’s Church. Charles worked with Mr Shackelford. Benjamin, son of Charles born in 1804, continued coachmaking in Benson until the 1840s, when he moved his business to nearby Wallingford. Benjamin Arthur is recorded in the 1851 census in High Street, Wallingford as a master coachmaker employing seven men. Two of his children, Henry and Sophia married members of the Pettit family.

**Thomas Powell** was the coachmaker who married Fanny Coles in London in 1805. He was the son of a Benson wheelwright, but went to London together with three or more brothers to pursue a career in the coach and carriage making business. The Powell brothers were partners in the coachmaking business called Wright and Co. in Ray Street, Clerkenwell. Thomas and Fanny returned to Benson before 1830. They had only one child, who died aged four.

By 1841, Thomas **Powell** had made his fortune from coachmaking and had become a very rich local landowner. Some of his lands in the “*common fields of Bensington and Ewelme*” had been acquired from the estate of Richard Costar (the Oxford coach proprietor, who was the son of William Costar, above). He had also bought land from Kitty Burford, widow of Richard’s nephew, Edward. Thomas Powell retired to Kingsford House, High Street, which was then a fine villa, standing in extensive grounds, extending as far as Mill Lane. He also owned Colne House, Brook Street, where his niece, Mary Ann Corsellis lived.



Kingsford House, High St.



Colne House, Brook Street, Benson

Thomas died a childless widower in 1851, and left all his property, including a “*coach manufactory situate in Bensington.....lately in the occupations of Silvester Green*” to his siblings and their offspring. (*Henry Silvester Green, a schoolmaster, lived in a house adjacent to the Old Vicarage in 1851. It is now called “The Limes”.*)

In 1839, William **Shackelford**, (*the younger*) was recorded as a coach maker working in Oxford and Benson. William Shackelford’s house and coach manufactory was recorded in the 1841 Tithe Award located in the property now called “The Limes”. An old map clearly shows most of the garden to the side and rear was covered by buildings which could have been used for the building and repair of coaches and carriages. Richard Costar, the Oxford coach proprietor, once owned a coach made by Shackelford.

Richard **Costar**, had been baptised in Benson. He owned many of the buildings in Birmingham Yard, including a blacksmith’s shop with two forges, a wheelwright’s yard, a builder’s workshop and a range of buildings used by coach-makers and harness-makers. This whole area of workshops came onto the market when Richard, who made a will in 1821, died in 1840. As he was also unmarried and childless he left all his property in Benson to his only sister, Sarah Burford, and her children.

The 1841 and 1851, Census Returns show that a coach maker, Robert **Vernon** was living in the cottage next to the Crown Inn in the High Street. Robert Vernon is recorded in each census until 1881, by which time he had moved to a larger cottage in Brook Street, where he employed a servant.

William **Warner** was a harness maker in Benson living at Littleworth in census records from 1851 to 1871. Richard **Archer** was also recorded as a coachmaker, living in Littleworth.

Carriages were painted by specialist craftsmen, often in a workshop nearby, or on the same site as the coachbuilder. These paint shops had to be kept immaculately clean and free from dust, to ensure that a high gloss finish was not ruined by specks of dirt. The painters ground their own pigments and prepared their own oil paints. The advertisement also lists many different types of timber, including walnut, oak, ash, deal, pine, birch, mahogany and elm.

The coaches were constructed using high quality timber with a perfectly straight grain, because customers demanded a perfect finish. The wooden coach panels had to be free from knots and smooth enough to be used as a ground for painting. Painters were divided into three clearly defined specialisms: body painters, line painters and herald painters. Of these, herald painters, who painted coats of arms on coach panels for status conscious gentry, earned the highest fees. The customers who ordered a decorated coach expected to pay as much for the paintwork as for the construction.

There were two generations of herald painters who were also landlords of the Crown Inn in the early decades of the nineteenth century. William Costar (1760-1820) and his son of the same name (1786-1834) were both herald painters. (*William and his father were cousins of the Costar family already mentioned.*)

An example of the art of heraldic coachpainting was discovered in a Benson cottage in the High Street in 1987. Other coachpainters recorded in census returns included Thomas Barnett in Brook Street, Henry Whiting and John Blissett.

By 1840, the new railway system was providing an alternative method of transport to stagecoaches, but private individuals still maintained carriages of all types for their personal use. In 1841, Harry **Costar** was recorded in the census as a coachmaker, living near the Crown Inn. He was the son of William Costar, (1786-1834, the coachpainter mentioned above). Harry continued coachmaking when he moved to fashionable Cheltenham and then Oxford, where he was recorded in the 1871 census.

One of the most important coachmakers in Benson was Albert **Bailey**, who had a shop near Birmingham Yard, where he made chaises and carts in 1830. He employed six men in 1851. A company called Hoare and Bailey made coach wheels. (*The Victoria County History mentions Albert Bailey's land, off Watlington Road, on which the British School was built in 1851.*)

Albert died in 1868, after 70 years in the business, when his stock-in-trade was advertised including over 30 carriage and cart bodies. Colours and oils for painting were included (*see the advertisement on the next page*), which suggests that Albert Bailey also employed coach painters.

In 1886, Mr. John Bailey, was said to be the last Benson coachbuilder. As coachmaking became less profitable, the craftsmen of Birmingham Yard adapted their skills to constructing parts for railways carriages and trucks, and repairing carriages.

**BENSON, OXON.**

**To Coach-makers, Wheelwrights, & others.  
STOCK - IN - TRADE, COACH - MAKER'S TOOLS,  
HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE, and EFFECTS,**

**TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,  
By Messrs. FRANKLIN & GALE,**

On the premises, Benson, the property of the late Mr. Albert Bailey, on Tuesday and Wednesday, the 7th and 8th days of April, 1868.

The Stock will be Sold on Tuesday, at Ten for Eleven o'clock, and comprises a four-wheel phaeton, Irish car, two gigs, dog cart, about 30 gig, phaeton, and cart bodies, new four-wheel dog cart body and carriage, fly body, new lance-wood shafts, about 1000 oak spokes, quantity of seasoned felloes and stocks, walnut tree, oak, ash, and deal plank, pine, birch, mahogany, and elm boards, oak, ash, and elm timber, two lathes, six benches, great variety of tools, quantity of new patent axles, steel springs, scroll irons and steps, new carriage lamps, carriage trimmings, colours, oils, &c., new bar iron, spring steel and hooping, a large assortment of smith's tools, anvils, vices, smith's forge, bellows, &c., &c.

The Household Furniture will be Sold on Wednesday, at Eleven for Twelve o'clock, and consists of mahogany, four-post, and other bedsteads, feather beds, hairmattresses, blankets, counterpanes, chests of drawers, wash stands, dressing tables, looking glasses, mahogany, dining, and other tables, sideboard, couch, chimney glasses, fenders, mahogany and other chairs, carpets, books, eight-day clock, two large cupboards, with folding doors, kitchen utensils, six stocks of bees, and other effects.

May be viewed the day previous to the sale. Catalogues to be had at the place of sale; at W. D. Jenkins's Machine Printing Office; and of the auctioneers, Ewelme, Garsington, and Wallingford.

**Sale of Albert Bailey's stock-in-trade 1868**

Henry **Munday** was a harness maker in Brook Street, Benson from 1861 to 1881 and the business was carried on by his son, Edgar. He used the right hand front room of No.1 Brook Street for the making and repair of harness and saddlery. His son Edgar John Munday continued this business from 1903 until 1911 when he became Post Master and used part of the post office building as his workshop.



Above: The Benson Post Office, which doubled as a shop used by Edgar John Munday, saddler and harness maker. The stagecoach was one of Vanderbilt's coaches, which operated from about 1908 until 1914. Vanderbilt was an American millionaire, who recreated the days of horse-drawn transport, and enjoyed driving his own coaches.

Information on the Powell family is taken from  
**THE POWELL FAMILY OF BENSINGTON OXFORDSHIRE**  
Compiled from Cousin Bruce Humfrey's Chart, of 1951, letters written by Thomas Henry Powell to Charles August Powell in the late 1920's provided by Audrey Ruth Daphne Powell, documents provided by Margaret Havell Humfrey, documents provided by Andrew Charles Powell, and documents and census data collected by David John Powell and Ann Faubion Powell.

Next page: A plan of Birmingham Yard, Benson in the 1930s.

