

The Chauncys of Little Munden

From a series of articles written by Jackie Morris for the parish newsletter, 2001 reproduced with Jackie's kind permission.

Over the next few weeks, I shall be printing a brief history of the Chauncys who as ancestors of the late Balfour family of Munden Parva contributed greatly to village life.

The Chauncy family came to Little Munden in the early 1800's, Charles of Dane End signing the vestry book in 1815 of Little Munden Church and taking churchwardens office a year later and in 1817 that of overseer. In 1816, his younger brother Nathaniel Snell, purchased the manor of Little Munden and took residence in Green End House. The Chauncy surname was that of their mother, Amelia, who on December 15th 1781, married her cousin, Charles Snell of Theobalds, Cheshunt and two years later had him take her name by royal licence given April 29th 1783. Seven children were born to them, four girls and three boys of whom their first, Charles, died a fortnight old, the second taking his name.

Nathaniel, their youngest son, born at Theobalds (December 29th 1789) married on August 29th 1814 Ann Oram, daughter of Colonel J. Alexander Bannerman, at Hackney Parish Church and on arrival at Little Munden they began to take a leading part in Hertfordshire social life. Having rich West Indian investments he entertained lavishly at Green End, his vivacious wife playing hostess to large numbers of gentry, organising soirees in their mansions with archery parties and feasting. At full moon, to cater for people from afar, horses and carriages filled the lanes to Green End House where quadrilles, waltzes and country dancing accompanied by harp and organ lasted far into the night.

Baptisms and weddings were occasions for special parties. J.I. Pryor of Clay Hall, Walkern, gives a picturesque description of the marriage of Nathaniel and Anns daughter, Charlotte, to Frederick Maples, gentleman of Hornsey on June 16th 1842. No expense was spared. Village girls dressed in white covered the church and churchyard with flowers. The poor sat down to a large dinner. And although the wedding was at 11 am celebrations went on until 3 am the next morning, with 150 guests rioting themselves over champagne, ices, substantial food and dancing.

Goodness, how life has changed at Green End!!

Another wedding followed in December and yet another the next August. Not content with marriages and mansion parties Ann turned even baptisms into social occasions, inviting many friends, the parish clergyman and relations to post Christening dinners and evening entertainments, but being Sunday of a sober kind, often at whist.

The Chauncys seem to have had a happy life at Green Elms. Her seven children were born: all survived. But Nathaniel's chief interest was the church and parish. Except for two occasions, he acted as churchwarden from 1817 to 1842 and at times served the village as overseer of the poor.

In 1819 he built a new straight road from Green End to All Saint's Church through his lands of eight acres and great wheathills in place of an old track that went through Three Corner Wood, traces of which may be found running alongside the present Rectory grounds. His commodious ice house still remains in the wood.

He laid claim to the parish church north chapel and in 1822 built a manor pew at its east end. From this time it ceased to be used for worship and lost its dedicatory name of 'St Mary', becoming known as 'Lordship Chapel'.

At the same time he repaired the roof at his own expense. In 1841 he built, or enlarged, as the style of brickwork suggests an older room, the present family vault for himself and his family. But three years later a West Indian financial crash drove him to forsake Little Munden for a smaller house in Maida Vale, London. Ann must have much lamented the loss of her elegant mansion and high social life. But J.I. Pryor, relating a sad visit he and his wife paid to the Chauncys that year to say goodbye, comments: 'Mrs. Chauncy bears her reverse of fortune nobly.' Twelve years later Nathaniel committed suicide by jumping from an upstairs window of his house in Westbourne Terrace, London, and was buried at Edmonton on July 10th 1856, the day unbeknown to Ann her third son Augustus

Snell, a lieutenant, died at Agra, India. She herself lived until her 100th year, dying at Bath. A noble wall plaque in the chapel commemorates all three.

To help redress his loss of fortune, Nathaniel sold the manor together with an estate known as Lordship Farm to his brother Charles, who had arrived in Dane End as a bachelor and had married Elizabeth Beale of Fitzroy Square, London, in 1817 at St. Marylebone Parish Church, and of her had two children, Elizabeth Snell in 1821 and Mary Snell in 1824.

He seems to have been of quieter disposition, shunning the social round and devoting himself to the life of church and village. He rarely missed the Vestry meeting and interested himself in the affairs of the poor. In 1840-41 he served as Sheriff of Hertfordshire. To his home as resident came Henry Edward Surtees, JP, DL, a Durham County Squire who in 1868 was elected MP for Hertfordshire. On a December day in 1843 he and Elizabeth, Charles' elder daughter, were married in Little Munden Church. She gave him three daughters, Elizabeth Ellen, Caroline Isabel, and Georgina Mary, and died in 1854 aged 33, her husband surviving her forty-one years.

Having obtained the manor Charles laid claim to Nathaniel's vault and there allowed his daughter to be interred in her elaborate coffin. Twelve years later he himself was buried near her. That the vault, built to take many coffins, holds only two is due to vast alterations made to the church in 1868 at a cost of £2,200 during which the chapel was filled with pews and the entrance to the vault covered by a thick slate slab and pew platforms. A chapel stained glass window, the only one in the church, commemorates Charles. A hatchment to him hangs above the medieval screen entrance.