

Abingdon Monumental Works



Written by Sue Peyman-Stroud

For about 50 years the home of The Abingdon Monumental Works was at 24 Ock Street, Abingdon, part of the Clock House group of buildings. In the early part of the 20th Century the business was advertised in "Hooke's Abingdon Almanack and Directory" (Abingdon Library) as suppliers of monuments, crosses, tombs and headstones, executed in granite, marble and stone to the newest designs, best materials and first-class workmanship - at moderate charges! The advertisements were under the name of "T.Peyman" and this was in fact Thirza Peyman, (spinster) who in the 1891 census put herself down as "Manageress - Marble and Stone Works; Employer". Hooke's advertisement also stated that the business had been established for over a century. This referred to Thirza's great-grandfather *Thomas Peyman (1750-1835)* who established the business when he came to Abingdon in the 1780s, leased a house in Boar Street (Bath Street) from the Town Council and built the old "Almshouses-over-the-water" in 1798 (demolished 1884). His eldest son *Thomas (1790-1859)* was a stonemason / builder and continued the business from Boar Street with his brother *William* who was a carpenter.

Thomas (junior) married Sarah Prince (or Bartlett) and their eldest son *Henry Prince Peyman (1814-1877)* followed the family tradition and became a stonemason, also a skilled ornamental sculptor. He had moved the family business to Ock Street by 1861 where he lived with his wife Clara Holloway and his younger sister Thirza, (22 years his junior).

There are many examples of the memorials made by the Peyman family in St.Helen's Church, including those to the families **Gallaway** and **Eldridge** and to the **Rev'd.John Cleoburey**. In the churchyard are gravestones to: **Jenner, Woodridge, Davies/Syrett/Kempe** all with "H.P.Peyman" carved at the foot of each stone, However, the most exquisite example is that of the beautifully carved marble font in St.Helen's church with the name "H.P.Peyman - Abingdon" on the plinth. This font is a marble copy of the old stone Norman font at Sutton Courtney and it was exhibited at the Great Exhibition held in the Crystal Palace at Hyde Park, London in 1851.

In the 1861 census Henry was listed in Ock Street as a "Mason and builder employing 15 men and 1 boy". By 1871 he was listed as a "Sculptor and statuary employing 3 men." In 1873 the Church Wardens' Accounts for St.Helen's shows that H.P.Peyman was paid £3.8s.0d. for "fixing decorations in the Town Hall at the reopening of St.Helens Church." A man of many talents!

Not only did Henry carry out his trade as a monumental mason in the adjacent courtyard but he was also Treasurer of the **Mechanics Institute** whose reading

rooms were also situated at Clock House. The Institute had been established in 1854 with the aim to spread "useful knowledge, elevate the mind and bring the different classes of the town into social intercourse with each other." There were lectures on many diverse topics giving way to reading extracts from well-known authors, music and song as the public's tastes and interests changed. At one time Scientific evening classes were given but eventually the public preferred to be "entertained" rather than educated.

The Institute possessed a well used library and newsroom, the day-to-day supervision of which was carried out by Henry's wife Clara and sister Thirza until his untimely death in 1877 aged 63 years. The Institute had been at Clock House for over 20 years when it finally closed in 1879.

Clara and **Thirza** continued to run the Abingdon Monumental Works as the census of 1881 confirms with Clara shown as "marble and stonemason employing 2 men". Clara died in 1888 and Thirza continued to run the business as "Manageress" into the early part of the 20th Century. There are memorials in the churchyard at Shippon to the Stacy family which show the stonemason as being C.Peyman (Clara Peyman). It is in this churchyard that Henry, Clara and Thirza are all buried together under an unusual and very unimposing stone.

When **Thirza Peyman** died in 1911 she brought to an end not only the family business but also the end of the **Peyman** era in Abingdon which had been there for over 100 years. Other **Peymans** who had been born in Abingdon ventured elsewhere, presumably in search of work, to places such as London, Kent, Birmingham and as far away as Australia and New Zealand. Many of them took with them the Peyman trade of stonemason (builder) and carpenter which, in some cases, still continues to this day.

Notes on Photographs:

The font can be seen in St Helen's Church, Abingdon. It was made by Henry P. Peyman and was shown at the Great Exhibition in 1851.

The photograph of Ock Street was taken circa 1903 and the words "T.Peyman" and "Abingdon Monumental Works" can be seen inscribed on the white "Z" strip on the side of the Beaconsfield building to the left of the Clock House yard.