

George Eyre's Hate Campaign against Rev. Harvey Ewelme News, Summer 2004 and Oct-Nov 2012

A document dated 1877 in the late George Cannon's files reveals Eyre's bitter dispute with the Rector, Rev William Wigan Harvey and was probably the reason for Eyre supposedly burying his brother in his garden.

For the purpose of publicly lampooning his enemies, Eyre had built a brick wall opposite his house (the present War Memorial wall by the Watercross Centre) and he determined to humiliate the Rector by affixing "*A Declaration of the Rev Mr Harvey's feelings towards the unoffending dead, as evinced by the correspondence which has passed between him and Mr Eyre*".



The cause of the dispute was that Eyre seemed determined to plant a weeping willow tree by his young son Charlie Eyre's chest tomb monument by the path near the (now disused) door of St John's Chapel on the south side of the church. Charlie was buried in 1869, and Eyre had previously planted two weeping willows, which had died. He planned a third when Rev Harvey objected to the unsuitability of such a tree in that small location, offering a rose bush from the Rectory garden instead. Eyre refused, ordering William Franklin (thatcher) and Mr James (gardener), to go ahead. Rev Harvey served a legal notice on them all to desist or be sued. Eyre claimed Counsel's Opinion that the Rector could not object, and added he had no jurisdiction over St John's Chapel anyway.

The dispute escalated, with Eyre writing a diatribe to the Bishop of Oxford dated 31st March 1877 complaining of "*Rev Harvey's 'Doings' which every High Churchman would condemn!*" In a further letter to Rev Harvey he threw in for good measure, the '*riotous proceedings displayed by his son, on the evenings of the 19th, 20th and 21st November [sic], 1870*', referring to the three nights on which the Rough Music was organised. (A strange accusation, as this was presumably Ewelme's Curate, Rev Charles Harvey).

Eyre then found himself hoist on his own petard, as he discovered one morning on his own brick wall that during the night an 'unknown artist' had the temerity to place a drawing for the attention of

passers by. This depicted a steam train pulling a carriage with a passenger accompanied by the Devil ‘flourishing his tail’ and a railway guard announcing ‘Change here for Rome’. Stung to fury, and obviously believing the Rector was behind this popish slur, he thundered – “I will prevent any indignity being offered to my remains, for I will not be interred in Ewelme Church Yard, but in my own Garden.” He would not just have a grave - but would build a grand Mausoleum between two fir trees, with a weeping willow extending over and appropriate lithographed inscriptions prepared for posterity to know how he and his ‘unoffending Charlie’ had been treated. He further threatened – ‘to have a Notice affixed forever to his premises in order to perpetuate Mr Harvey’s Doings to all generations, and to show that such a man had once lived; and a copy of it shall, from time to time, be circulated, to all classes in the neighbourhood’.

The presence of this psychopathic individual must have been a thorn in Rev Harvey’s side. The Rev. Harvey, the gentle friend of Prime Minister Gladstone, died in 1883. His antagonist survived him by nearly 2 years.



Monogram House (now High House), the home of George Eyre

Further information about George Eyre comes from the book ‘Our River’ by George D Leslie, R.A. written in 1881 with reflections he and his friend Mr Marks encountered on a visit to Ewelme. Mr Leslie copied out two of the lampoons posted on Eyre’s brick ‘memorial’ wall opposite Eyre’s House (Monogram House).

‘There was rather an eccentric character living up the village – a lawyer who was in the habit of placing curiously inscribed tablets on the wall of his house facing the road, one of which I remember ran thus:

*“King Bomba was infuriated.
He and his advisers glut with revenge,
But they and his despicable cringers
Have been cannibalised.
Nickory tasted, post office related within” and the date.*

Another was as follows:

*“Mr – has also pitchpoled the
Emperor of the Brazils, and rescued
a poor man whose skull had been
savagely broken.”
“Mr – has no potato ground to give
the poor, but he will not show them the fruit
of a black heart.”*

These, and others equally mysterious, I believe referred to various quarrels and lawsuits which this gentleman had had with his neighbours. (Note King Bomba, I was told, referred to the village doctor, and the Emperor of the Brazils was a farmer in the neighbourhood.) Coming upon these curious inscriptions in the midst of this quiet little corner of the world, with hum of bees, birds song, and all the sweets of country life around, not forgetting the happy little brook running just in front of this very house, they jarred curiously enough on one's feelings, and served to remind one of the smallness of our natures, and the ridiculousness of our wrangles and disputes.'

George Eyre's grandiloquent plans came to nought. He was the last in generations of yeoman farmers in Ewelme (Eyres Farm was on land opposite the Shepherds Hut and extended up Eyres Lane). Eyre died a bankrupt on 27th January 1885, aged 81 in Watlington. He was buried in Ewelme churchyard on February 2nd 1885, bringing to a close 250 years of the Eyre dynasty in Ewelme.

Ewelme Village Archive