

Mr Tisdale's Angel

Anyone walking through our churchyard, or just passing along Church Lane, cannot fail to notice a white marble angel standing high above the surrounding gravestones. Closer inspection will reveal her to be a monument to Jane, wife of T W M Tisdale of Severn Lodge, Mountfields, who died in July 1890. At this date she must have been one of the first to occupy the new graveyard, recently opened in 1886. Census records show that she died aged only 43 at a time when death could strike all ages through common diseases and everyday infections which got out of hand. She was obviously sorely missed by her husband and the scale of the monument reflects his grief, as was his comment: "Say what a good wife should be and she was that."

Clearly we have a very personal story in an age when such display or proper 'celebration of death' was seen to be important, especially for those cut down at a young age. By contrast, her husband lived another twenty six years before joining her here at the age of 71 in 1916.

Elaborate monuments at this time would have also displayed a family's wealth and importance in the community as can be seen, for instance, in the older parts of Shrewsbury Cemetery. Some rise so high that they risk becoming a 'health and safety' issue. Fortunately, this angel still stands upright, although nearby stones have sunk. These include that of Revd. George Newton Lloyd, who played an important part in establishing this new church and graveyard in the 1880s. The design of his gravestone consists of a cross laid to rest on a pillow as an appropriate symbol for a departed vicar, (as well as being safe from the present dangerous tilting).

While it is quite obvious why the Revd. Lloyd and other 'locals' lie here, the Tisdale connections with Bicton remain unclear. Their resting place should have been the Shrewsbury Cemetery, opened in 1856, where Jane's parents-in-law already lay under a granite obelisk. Perhaps Thomas felt that Bicton was just as close to his home in Frankwell and the new graveyard could offer a better highly visible site for a more romantic monument.

At this time, there were several monumental masons trading in Shrewsbury, of which the Edwards brothers at the Welsh Bridge in Frankwell would have been the most likely providers. They advertised as 'Monumental, Architectural and Ecclesiastical sculptors and masonry contractors'.

Such monuments would have been very expensive and therefore we need to take a closer look at the Tisdale family fortunes and connections. The inscription 'T W M Tisdale' actually hid his full name, known from other records: Thomas (after father) William (after grandfather) Matthews (after father's cousin). He was a surveyor by profession and at times worked with his brother Charles Edward as surveyors and estate agents from their offices in Talbot chambers in Market Street (since rebuilt after fire). All this was actually a business started by their father which they carried on after his death in 1876.

By this time, Thomas 'senior' had also been Borough surveyor and engineer for 26 years, alongside that private practice as civil engineer, surveyor and valuer. Amongst other things he designed the Welsh Methodist Chapel in Frankwell which has since been incorporated into Theatre Severn. Then, in 1875, he produced a fine map of Shrewsbury, which unfortunately was soon rendered obsolete by the new large-scale mapping by the Ordnance Survey. The sons therefore found themselves in a new world of national mapping which would undermine the traditional work of local surveyors.

In his will, originally made in 1867, Thomas senior also left Severn Lodge to his two sons. Wife, Elizabeth, had already died by this time, as well as a daughter, Elizabeth, who appears to have died in infancy. Subsequent census records show that Thomas W M and new wife Jane had taken over Severn Lodge by 1881 while brother Charles and new wife Anne moved eventually to Admaston. There is no mention of any grandchildren, except in very general legal terms, in the will, and no children appear in any other records.

The will also included several other rented properties in Frankwell and even Rhyl, together with a range of commercial investments. Clearly the brothers had good financial backing even if the surveying business was proving weak.

In the 1890s, after Jane's death, directories show a succession of different occupiers of Severn Lodge, while Thomas disappears from the professional lists. Where he retired to remains a mystery, perhaps it was to Rhyl! Anyway, he returned to be buried beside Jane in 1916. Later, in 1922, brother Charles and his wife Anne, in a similar way, joined his parents under that granite obelisk in Shrewsbury Cemetery. Thanks to 'health and safety' concerns, this now lies dismantled and half hidden in the grass, while the Bicton angel still proudly looks over our churchyard after more than a century. Let us hope it may do so for many more years as a celebration of a personal story and the Victorian ways of treating death.

This whole story also highlights the modern issue of conserving and maintaining these old graveyards as part of our national and local heritage. With the old churchyard, as well as the plots around the angel, we in Bicton certainly have our share of this problem to deal with somehow.



The Great I Gird

In ever loving memory of
JANE
THE DEARLY BELOVED WIFE OF
T. W. M. TISDALE
OF SEASIDE LODGE MOUNTAIN, BIRMINGHAM,
WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE
JULY 31st 1880
"Say what a good wife should
be, and she was that."

WIFE OF
**THOMAS
W. TISDALE**
BORN 1810
DIED 1880