

## THE RICHARDSONS IN ABINGDON REVISITED: THREE ARCHIVAL SNAPSHOTS

*Adam Guy*

She thought sleepily of her Wesleyan grandparents, gravely reading the *Wesleyan Methodist Recorder*, the shop at Babington, her father's discontent, his solitary fishing and reading, his discovery of music . . . science . . . classical music in the first Novello editions . . . Faraday . . . speaking to Faraday after lectures. Marriage . . . the new house . . . the red brick wall at the end of the garden where young peach-trees were planted . . . running up and downstairs and singing . . . both of them singing in the rooms and the garden . . . she sometimes with her hair down and then when visitors were expected pinned in coils under a little cap and wearing a small hoop . . . the garden and lawns and shrubbery and the long kitchen-garden and the summer-house under the oaks beyond, and the pretty old gabled 'town' on the river and the woods all along the river valley and the hills shining up out of the mist. The snow man they both made in the winter—the birth of Sarah, and then Eve . . . his studies and book-buying—and after five years her own disappointing birth as the third girl, and the coming of Harriett just over a year later . . . her mother's illness, money troubles—their two years at the sea to retrieve . . . the disappearance of the sunlit red-walled garden always in full summer sunshine with the sound of bees in it, or dark from windows . . .<sup>1</sup>

Abingdon was founded around a Benedictine Monastery by Saxons in the seventh century, although the area had been occupied since the Iron Age. In the fourteenth century, the town's position on the River Thames established it as a major centre for cloth-making, an industry that survived there into the early twentieth-century in the form of manufacturers of clothing, sacking, and carpet.<sup>2</sup> Abingdon's carpet-makers were also the first to manufacture yarn from jute as a substitute for hemp; they failed to capitalize on this innovation, however, by retaining the use of handlooms despite the development of industrialized production techniques.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the onset of industrial modernity gifted the town one of its most enduring legends. Abingdon was mooted as the potential site of a

---

<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, vol. 1 (London: Virago Press, 1979), 32. From here on references to the four volume Virago edition are in the text.

<sup>2</sup> James Townsend, *A History of Abingdon* (London: Frowde, 1910), 156.

<sup>3</sup> Jackie Smith, 'Email to the Author', 18 June 2017.

junction between the Western and Northern lines of Brunel's Great Western Railway, which would have established the town as a wealthy centre for population, travel, and trade. However, the town's Corporation and its inhabitants rejected the proposal in 1837–8, only recanting the decision in 1842 when it was too late. Perhaps relatedly, in 1869, Abingdon's status was downgraded as it ceased to be an Assize town, and so no longer provided the site for regular circuit courts.<sup>4</sup> So the town remained, as one early-twentieth century history put it, 'a small country town, not wealthy, but picturesque and good to live in'.<sup>5</sup> In the middle five decades of the twentieth-century, Abingdon was the site of the MG car factory. Formerly in Berkshire, in the 1970s it became part of Oxfordshire. In the 2011 census, the town had a population of 33,130.<sup>6</sup> Today, Abingdon serves in part as a major commuter town for Oxford, about seven miles to the north.

One of Abingdon's most famous offspring is St Edmund of Abingdon (c.1175–1240), a theologian, an Archbishop of Canterbury, and a preacher of the Sixth Crusade. The town's other famous child is, of course, Dorothy Richardson, who was born in Abingdon in 1873 and lived the first eight years of her life there. Late in her life, Richardson recalled those eight years as a 'very happy childhood in a spacious, large-gardened house near one of the loveliest reaches of the Thames and not far from the ancient university town of Oxford'.<sup>7</sup> Transmuted into 'Babington' in *Pilgrimage*, the town seems to be recalled early on in *Pointed Roofs* as 'the pretty old gabled "town" on the river and the woods all along the river valley and the hills shining up out of the mist' (I 32).

However, throughout *Pilgrimage*, Babington represents more the incidental location of particular personal memories for Miriam Henderson than a tangible geography. Beyond the private space of the Hendersons' garden, the only real sense of the locale is given in *The Tunnel* as Miriam recalls the countryside just beyond the town:

---

<sup>4</sup> Smith.

<sup>5</sup> Townsend, p. 158.

<sup>6</sup> Oxford City Council, 'Abingdon Profile – 2011 Census', accessed 3 December 2018, [http://www.oxford.gov.uk/districtdata/download/downloads/id/85/abingdon\\_census\\_profile\\_2001\\_to\\_2011.pdf](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/districtdata/download/downloads/id/85/abingdon_census_profile_2001_to_2011.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Dorothy Richardson, 'Data for Spanish Publisher', ed. Joseph Prescott, *London Magazine* 1, no. 1 (June 1959): 14.

sudden bright sunshine, two shouts, great cornfields going up and up with a little track between them . . . up over Blewburton . . . *Whittenham Clumps*. Before I saw Whittenham Clumps I had always known them. But we saw them before we knew they were called Whittenham Clumps. It was a surprise to know anybody who had seen them and that they had a name. (II 21)

Here, Miriam recalls two ancient raised features in the landscape around Abingdon: Blewburton Hill, an Iron Age hill fort close to the village of Blewbury, another place with Richardson family associations; and, misspelled by Richardson, Wittenham Clumps (Figure 1), two adjacent wooded hills, one of which also served as an Iron Age hill fort. One of Richardson's modernist contemporaries, the painter Paul Nash (1889–1946), also used the Clumps in his art.<sup>8</sup> The name of this striking landmark makes its way into some of the titles of Nash's compositions, for example the watercolours *Wittenham Clumps* of 1912 and *Wittenham* of 1935. However, the two 'clumps' also appear, unnamed, in many of Nash's more mystical painterly visions of the 1940s, such as *Landscape of the Moon's Last Phase* (1943) and *Solstice of the Sunflower* (1945). For both Richardson and Nash, Wittenham Clumps serves as an emblem of the weak relation between words and the things they describe. By extension, Wittenham Clumps becomes for both a means of privileging memory and personal revelation in encounters with the phenomenal world.

---

<sup>8</sup> 'Paul Nash and the Wittenham Clumps', accessed 3 December 2018, <https://www.nashclumps.org/index.html>.



Figure 1: Contemporary Image of Wittenham Clumps [credit: Wikimedia Commons]

This article brings together some archival findings deriving from ‘Dorothy Richardson in Abingdon’, a Knowledge Exchange project I undertook in 2017. The project culminated in an exhibition about Richardson’s life and work at Abingdon County Hall Museum, and also involved my collaboration with the illustrator, Simon Reid, to produce a comic that introduced Richardson in a different way. I have written about all of these activities elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> The other part of the project entailed research into archival materials from Abingdon relating to the Richardson family. This article takes three snapshots from those archival visits. As such, I lead off from Wittenham Clumps as a preliminary point of qualification. In taking my three snapshots, my primary purposes are biographical. Though the material I set out below sometimes overlaps and interacts with material from *Pilgrimage*, I do not make any claim for the discovery of anything so

---

<sup>9</sup> Adam Guy, ‘Dorothy Richardson in Abingdon’, *Dorothy Richardson Blog* (blog), 20 September 2017, <https://dorothyrichardsonblog.wordpress.com/2017/09/20/dorothy-richardson-in-abingdon/>; Adam Guy, ‘Dorothy Richardson in Abingdon’, *Women: A Cultural Review*, no. 29 (2018): 267–69.

concrete as ‘sources’. There is certainly a space for speculation about the extent to which the historical record can bolster understanding of Richardson’s imaginative hinterland. But taking the example of what *The Tunnel* or Nash’s paintings do with Wittenham Clumps, I proceed from the assumption that artworks have a complex and ultimately irreducible relation to real-world events and places.

My main aim, then, is to supplement existing biographical writing on Dorothy Richardson’s origins in Abingdon. Two of Richardson’s biographers, Gloria Fromm and John Rosenberg, are highly informative and largely accurate on the Abingdon of the Richardson family. In what follows, I clarify, supplement, and occasionally gently correct Fromm’s and Rosenberg’s accounts. To do so, I take the metaphor of the ‘snapshot’ as my guiding principle, for I offer no grand synthesis or significant revision of our understanding of Dorothy Richardson’s roots. Below, I set out – patiently, partially, and always with an eye for the particular – some information gleaned from the archive that might help us look again at the situation into which the author of *Pilgrimage* was born.

#### *Snapshot 1: Methodism and the Bee Garden*

The religious background of the Richardson family is a source of debate among Dorothy Richardson’s biographers. The analeptic reflection early on in *Pointed Roofs*, where Miriam Henderson ‘thought sleepily of her Wesleyan grandparents, gravely reading the *Wesleyan Methodist Recorder*’ (I 32) seems to be enough for Rosenberg to conclude that the Richardsons were of ‘pious and prosperous Wesleyan stock’.<sup>10</sup> Fromm disagrees. Commenting on this passage from *Pointed Roofs*, Fromm sees Richardson intending ‘to throw little more than a thin veil over reality’, making the Henderson family ‘all Wesleyan Methodists (when the evidence seems to be that a good many of [the Richardsons] were Baptists)’.<sup>11</sup> Both biographers are in agreement that the Richardsons had been settled for a number of generations in Abingdon and its surrounding villages, particularly Blewbury. But the latter location gives Fromm her major evidence for the diversity of the family’s religious commitments: their nonconformism is consistent, but for Fromm, certain burial records prove ‘that a branch of the family was Baptist; certainly the Blewbury and some of the Abingdon Richardsons were’. Fromm even sees records of the

---

<sup>10</sup> John Rosenberg, *Dorothy Richardson, The Genius They Forgot: A Critical Biography* (London: Duckworth, 1973), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Gloria Glikin Fromm Fromm, *Dorothy Richardson: A Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 69.

marriage of Dorothy's aunt, Elizabeth, to Henry French in a Wesleyan Methodist chapel as inconclusive, suggesting that, of the two, it could have been French who was the Methodist. Ultimately, for Fromm – and in an pointed rebuke to Rosenberg – ‘the fact that in *Pilgrimage* [Dorothy Richardson] made her heroine's paternal grandparents Wesleyan Methodists is far from conclusive. There is not enough evidence to take *any* position, as I see it'.<sup>12</sup>

However, documents in the Oxfordshire Record Office suggest that, in the generations leading up to Dorothy's birth, Wesleyan Methodism was the dominant religious strain within the Richardson family. Two documents in particular show Thomas Richardson, Dorothy's grandfather, to be a prominent sponsor of Wesleyan Methodism in Abingdon and its surrounding towns and villages. One document shows Thomas Richardson, listed as a ‘grocer’, to be co-signatory with seventeen others to a freehold deed dated 1 July 1857 for the establishment of what on the front of the deed is called a ‘Wesleyan Day and Sabbath School’ in Wantage, a town about ten miles south of Abingdon.<sup>13</sup> In the main body of the deed, the purpose of the school is defined as being ‘for the education of children and adults or children only of the labouring manufacturing and other poorer classes’ in the parish. Among Thomas Richardson's co-signees is William Richardson, a grocer of Blewbury – his brother.<sup>14</sup> Thomas Richardson is also co-signee to a settlement deed – dated 21 June 1861 – of copyhold land for the purposes of erecting a

---

<sup>12</sup> Fromm, 401.

<sup>13</sup> Wantage had had a Wesleyan Methodist church since 1845 (see ‘Our History’, *Wantage Methodist Church*, accessed 3 December 2018, <https://www.wantagemethodist.org.uk/our-church/our-history.html>). All of the locations of importance discussed in this article are marked on the map in Figure 2.

<sup>14</sup> Document NM6/24/D1/29, Oxfordshire Record Office, Oxfordshire History Centre. The evidence for William being Thomas Richardson's brother is as follows: the 1861 census data for Blewbury shows a William Richardson, listed as a grocer, who is 58 years of age, and was born in Preston Bissett, Buckinghamshire (a village about twenty-five miles to the north of Abingdon); Christening records from Preston Bissett for 20 November 1802 show the birth of a William Richardson, born to James and Martha Richardson; meanwhile, the 1861 census data for Abingdon shows a Thomas Richardson, listed as a grocer, who is 60 years of age, and was born in Bicester, Buckinghamshire (a town about twenty miles to the north of Abingdon); Christening records from Bicester for 17 August 1800 show the birth of a Thomas Richardson, born also to James and Martha Richardson. Rosenberg also mentions the ‘joyless’ Blewbury Richardsons, including ‘Uncle William, a grocer, draper and baker’ (Rosenberg, 2).

Wesleyan Chapel in Steventon, a village four miles to the south of Abingdon. Here, he is co-signee with eleven others, three of whom also signed the deed for the Wantage school. William Richardson is absent from this document.

The two documents here speak to a broader nineteenth-century history. The missionary, educational, and philanthropic impulses behind Thomas Richardson's sponsorship of Wesleyan Methodism in his local area is indicative of the general rise of Methodism in Britain: as Manfred Marquardt notes, 'Wesleyan and Methodist Churches grew rapidly' in the nineteenth century, 'especially in the expanding industrial areas with workers, who had to endure

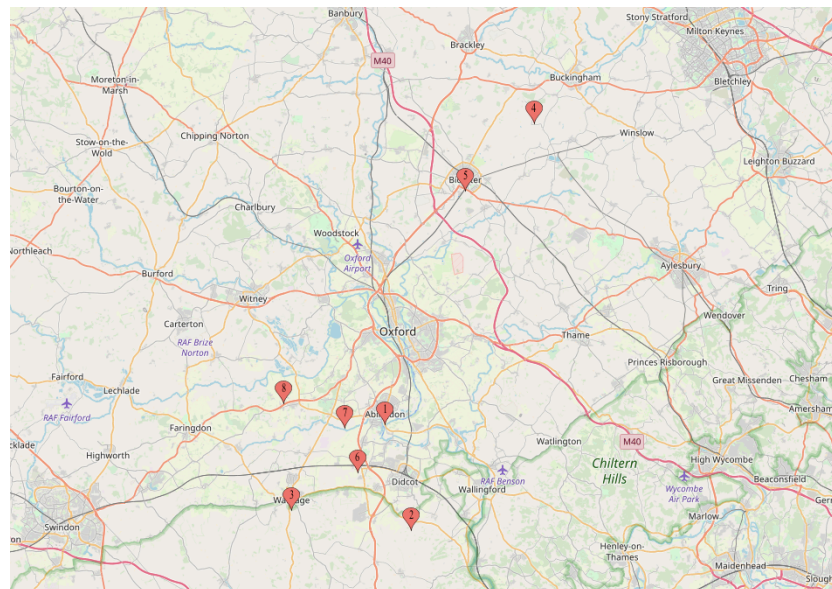


Figure 2: Present-day map, marking locations of importance for the Richardson family. (1) Abingdon (2) Blewbury (3) Wantage (4) Preston Bissett (5) Bicester (6) Steventon (7) Marcham (8) Longworth. [Credit: Open Streetmap Contributors]

economic hardships'. However, the Wesleyan Methodism of the Richardsons was not the democratic and evangelical revivalism that facilitated the movement's spread around the world and ensured its popularity in working-class communities. Marquardt states that, as it grew in the nineteenth century, Wesleyan Methodism developed its identity of 'holding a high doctrine of the pastoral office, and constructing more

stylish church buildings'; it was, ultimately 'a middle-class connexion', though still a significant constituency, 'whose membership had risen to 450,000 by the end of the nineteenth century'.<sup>15</sup>

So Thomas Richardson's Methodism and his prominence in local Wesleyan circles are indicative, among other things, of his class status. Certainly other archival documents in the Oxfordshire Record Office index his wealth and status through the succession of properties he bought or leased, particularly in the 1830s and 1850s.<sup>16</sup> But one document in particular provides an incidental detail that has a striking resonance with *Pilgrimage*. As 'Babington', Abingdon's main importance to *Pilgrimage* is that it is the setting of the novel-sequence's central, and most-frequently recurring motif – the 'bee-memory', which I quote here in one of its more reparative iterations, as Miriam reveals it to Amabel in *Dawn's Left Hand*:

I was back in the moment of seeing for the first time those flower-beds and banks of flowers blazing in the morning sunlight, that smelt of the flowers and was one with them and me and the big bees crossing the path, low, on a level with my face. And I told her of it and that it must have been somewhere near my third birthday, and her falling tears of joy and sympathy promised that never again should there be in my blood an unconquerable fever. (I 243)

As recorded in an indenture, on 9 November 1869, Thomas Richardson paid £129 to the Mayor, Alderman, and Burgesses of the Borough of Abingdon for the purchase of a patch of land adjacent to property that he already owned on Ock Street, one of Abingdon's main thoroughfares. As with Thomas's adjoining property, this land led all the way down to the River Ock, a tributary of the Thames. Its significance, though, for Dorothy Richardson's readers, comes with the name of the land that this new purchase borders on its other side. In purchasing land from the borough of Abingdon, Thomas Richardson extended his property so that it now bordered with land owned by Christ's Hospital, a long-established and prominent local charity, discussed further below. As mentioned a number of times in the indenture, this land was known locally as the 'Bee Garden'. In setting out the boundary-lines for the plot being sold, the indenture gives an impression of the area at ground-level. Thomas Richardson's

---

<sup>15</sup> Manfred Marquardt, 'Methodism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. James E. Kirby and William J. Abraham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 86.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, documents B111/1/D/37, B111/1/D/38, and B111/1/D/43, Oxfordshire Record Office, Oxfordshire History Centre.



newly-acquired land, it says, is bordered ‘on the West by the said Ground called the Bee Garden and the same is marked out and divided from the Bee Garden by Stones’.<sup>17</sup> Four years before Dorothy Richardson was born, her grandfather extended his property so that it bordered with an area known locally as the ‘bee garden’. The two properties were separated only by stones; whether the stones mentioned in the indenture denote a stone wall or merely stones marking out a line on the ground seems irrelevant given the importance to Dorothy Richardson of her early childhood experiences in bee-filled gardens.

*Snapshot 2: Acquired by Virtue of...*

My next archival snapshot moves forward a generation and takes us to the scene of the Richardson family’s *hamartia*. From Rosenberg’s and Fromm’s biographies, there seems to be a number of dimensions to Charles Richardson’s attempts at moving his family a further step up in Abingdon’s social hierarchy. The first was religious. Places for Wesleyan Methodist worship had never been far from the Richardsons in Abingdon: a chapel was recorded first in the town, from 1823, in Stert Street, where the family owned property; from 1847, the congregation then moved to Ock Street, which would have been close to the Richardson family holdings near the ‘bee garden’; finally, Abingdon’s Wesleyans found a permanent home just off Ock Street on Conduit Road, on the edge of Albert Park, where Trinity Church still stands today.<sup>18</sup> But as Fromm notes, Charles Richardson ‘rejected his family’s Nonconformism. While *they* attended Dissenting services, Charles took his wife and daughters to Abingdon’s elegant parish church, St. Helen’s’. Though Fromm takes some interpretative license with the claim that this shift was taken for ‘pleasure, which his father and mother frowned upon’, she gestures towards a more likely reason: ‘Every Sunday, as the white swans of St. Helen’s glided by, Abingdon society aired itself; and Charles Richardson was there – to see and to be seen.’<sup>19</sup> To move one’s worship to the Established Church was to signal conformity to existing class structures, and to hope for the legitimacy that it might confer on the family of an aspiring gentleman.

---

<sup>17</sup> Document B111/1/D/45, Oxfordshire Record Office, Oxfordshire History Centre.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Trinity Church Abingdon’, accessed 3 December 2018, <https://trinityabingdon.org.uk/wordpress/history/>.

<sup>19</sup> Fromm, *Dorothy Richardson*, 3–4.

The second part of Charles's attempt at social ascent is the most significant. Dorothy Richardson herself noted that, 'inheriting the whole of my grandfather's considerable business, my father had sold it and settled down to a life of leisure'.<sup>20</sup> Upon Thomas Richardson's death in early 1874, as Rosenberg notes, Charles was left with 'an estate of something under £8,000 together with properties in Abingdon, Blewbury and Bicester. The bulk of the estate, apart from certain charges and legacies – mainly a life income to Charles's mother and a substantial bequest to his sister – went to Charles. And it was enough to set him free of the trade which he loathed'.<sup>21</sup> Fromm adds narrative colour to this transformative event:

[Charles] inherited the shop and house on Ock Street in which he had been raised, three branches of the business in nearby villages (Blewbury, Marcham, Steventon), a freehold in Abingdon's Stert Street (which gave him the right to vote), and £8,000. Charles lost no time. Four months after Thomas Richardson was buried in the sizable vault he had made sure was ready for him, befitting a proud and prosperous tradesman, his son unburdened himself of a hateful heritage. He sold everything: the buildings, the fixtures, the fittings, all the utensils, all the horses (including Punch the chestnut, Flower the gray mare, and Tommy the nag), and all the carts and vans. The man who bought all this for £5,000 felt a sense of achievement and good fortune.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Richardson, 'Data for Spanish Publisher', 14.

<sup>21</sup> Rosenberg, *The Genius They Forgot*, 3. A document from the Oxfordshire Record Office expands on these details. It shows that Thomas Richardson died on 13 January 1874. Alongside the property he left to Charles, he left his wife Mary a legacy of £50 and an annuity of £175 for the rest of her life. He also left his daughter Elizabeth (by this point Elizabeth French) an initial legacy of £2500, plus another legacy of £1500 to be received upon her mother's death. This document reveals, however, that Elizabeth French died exactly fourteen years after her father, on 13 January 1888, and before her mother, who lived until 17 October 1893. The document that contains these details (dated 4 May 1894) does so to legally confirm that Charles Richardson has paid his father's second legacy to his sister's heir – her husband, Henry French. Presumably, this document ensured that French would not be drawn in as a debtor in Charles's bankruptcy proceedings. See document B111/1/D/51, Oxfordshire Record Office.

<sup>22</sup> Fromm, *Dorothy Richardson*, 3.

As Fromm states in the notes section of her biography, the ‘inventory of the sale of the business to George Rant, a sixty-four page document dated May 18, 1874, gives the exact sale figure as £5,173 16s. 2d.’<sup>23</sup>

The inventory is still available to view at the Oxfordshire Record Office. The scale of this document is significant, giving an insight into the extent of the Richardson family business, and the importance this business must have had in the local area. In Abingdon, the inventory lists a shop including gas fittings, a sugar room, two lofts, an office, a passage, a warehouse, a (likely public) tea room, a ‘small room’, a cellar for cheese and wine, a lard cellar and lard house, bacon stoves and a bacon house, a smoke room, a salt house and salting room, a brush room and match loft, two stables, at least three yards, a boot house, an outhouse, powder houses, a workshop, a pig sty, an ‘under shed’, and a barn. At Blewbury, it lists a mere ‘shop’ *and* an ironmongery shop, an office, a bake house, at least three cellars, a ‘loft or flour room’, a drying room, a bacon house, a slaughter house, and a yard. In Marcham, it lists a shop, a cellar, a bacon house, a loft, and a house with parlour and bedroom. And in Steventon it lists a ‘tenant’s house and trade fixtures, fittings, utensils and furniture’, a warehouse, a loft, a yard, a store, a bacon house, a shed, and an outhouse. The document goes into much more detail than this. But such an overview gives a sense of the extent to which the Richardson family business would have been embedded in the daily life of people in these four Berkshire towns and villages.<sup>24</sup>

A Memorandum of Agreement of 15 April 1874 between Charles Richardson and George Rant shows, however, that Charles only sold ‘the Goodwill of the Businesses of a Grocer and Provision Dealer as now established on the premises at Abingdon at Blewbury at Steventon and at Marcham’, entailing the sale of all ‘the stock in Trade together with all the Tenants and Trade Pictures Implements Horses Carts and Harness [sic]’. The actual properties in which these businesses were situated were only leased to Rant, guaranteeing the Richardson family (or at least Charles Richardson) an annual income. The premises of the business at Abingdon would generate £156 a year, those at Blewbury £60, those at Steventon

---

<sup>23</sup> Fromm, 401. According to the currency converter of the National Archives, Charles Richardson’s £8,000 inheritance plus his additional £5,000 from the sale of the family business is equivalent to roughly £814,000 today, accessed 3 December 2018, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter>.

<sup>24</sup> Document P134/E/1, Oxfordshire Record Office, Oxfordshire History Centre.

£30, and those at Marcham £40. The Memorandum also stipulates that, for the twenty-one year duration of these leases, Charles Richardson would not ‘enter into business as a Grocer and Provision Dealer or be concerned directly or indirectly in the sale of such articles commonly sold in such trades within a distance of 20 miles from either of the premises’, less he forfeit over £1000.<sup>25</sup> Charles had not only secured a fortune, but had created a legal barrier between himself and the trade that had created that fortune.

Despite the significant break represented by the inheritance and sale of his father’s business, Charles Richardson’s social aspirations – and the significance of the wealth he turned towards those aspirations – can be shown to pre-date the events of 1874. As Rosenberg notes, upon their marriage, Charles and Mary Richardson moved ‘into a pleasant house in Marcham Road, Abingdon’ that was ‘situated between the two branches of the Richardson business, one in Ock Street and the other in the suburb of Marcham’.<sup>26</sup> But, as Fromm says,

Charles had shifted his residence by the time Dorothy arrived to a newly fashionable area called Albert Park. The park had recently been commemorated to the late Prince Consort, and around it had sprung up a crescent of homes. Charles rented one of these, a large white-stoned house with a walled garden, which Dorothy would remember as the scene and source of her first experiences. Her father settled down here, once he was completely free, to a life of leisure.<sup>27</sup>

Certain qualifications and corrections can be made to this account. In this period, Albert Park was not just ‘newly fashionable’ but entirely new. In 1860, the *Oxford Journal*, the *Builder*, and the *Reading Mercury* carried advertisements for an open competition for ‘a design for laying out the pleasure ground in Conduit Field’ in Abingdon. Conduit Field was a patch of farmland on the outskirts of Abingdon, distinguished by the presence of the Conduit House, a stone cistern building used, as John Carter and Jacqueline Smith note, as ‘a catchment and storage house for tapped springs within the area, the water then being channeled south down the natural incline to Ock Street’. The park itself was likely completed by June 1862, when Oliver Kilby was appointed park keeper, with a salary of £40 per year. By 1865, with the unveiling by the Earl of Abingdon of a

---

<sup>25</sup> Document B111/1/D/46, Oxfordshire Record Office, Oxfordshire History Centre.

<sup>26</sup> Rosenberg, *The Genius They Forgot*, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Fromm, *Dorothy Richardson*, 4.

monument to the Prince Consort – which stands to this day – the park acquired its name.<sup>28</sup>

The park was given over as a recreation ground to the public by its owner, Christ's Hospital. Already mentioned above as the owner of the 'bee garden', Christ's Hospital is an Abingdon-based charity formally founded in the sixteenth-century; to this day it provides almshouses as well as donations to individuals and causes in the local area.<sup>29</sup> Since Conduit Field extended beyond the space allotted for Albert Park, the road on which the Richardson family settled, Park Crescent, was also built on land owned by Christ's Hospital. Here, material from the charity's archive can be used to correct one of Fromm's claims. The Richardsons did not rent the 'large white-stoned house' on Park Crescent; in fact, Charles Richardson leased the land from Christ's Hospital and commissioned the building of the house there himself. In a document dated 6 September 1871, a 900-year lease is agreed between the Master and Governors of Christ's Hospital and Charles Richardson for an acre of land. The document states that, 'Charles Richardson being desirous of erecting a dwellinghouse' on the plot in question 'applied to the said Master and Governors for the purchase of the said land but it was deemed undesirable in the interest of the said Hospital that the said Master and Governors should part with the fee simple in the said premises'. Instead, Charles Richardson paid £260 for the lease, as well as committing himself to a yearly ground rent of £2 a year. He committed to 'build upon the said piece of ground in a good and substantial manner a messuage or dwelling house according to elevations and general plans which have been approved of by the said Master and Governors and will not at any time hereafter during the said term pull down or make any alteration in the elevation or architectural decorations of the said messuage'. The lease also commits – as such documents often do – Charles Richardson to retaining the land for a private dwelling, forbidding him from using the premises for a business, a school, chapel, tavern, public house, lodging-house, shop, or warehouse.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> John Carter and Jacqueline Smith, *Give & Take: Scenes from the History Christ's Hospital, Abingdon. 1553–1900* (Abingdon, 1981), 61, 64, 66.

<sup>29</sup> See 'Christ's Hospital of Abingdon', accessed 3 December 2018, <http://www.ch-of-abingdon.org>.

<sup>30</sup> Lease, Master & Governors of the Hospital of Christ of Abingdon to Mr Charles Richardson, 6 September 1871, Archives of Christ's Hospital of Abingdon.



Figure 3: Charles Richardson's monogram on the external wall of the house on Park Crescent [Credit: the author].

The archives of Christ's hospital also hold account books, where Charles Richardson's split biannual payments are duly recorded. Among those also listed as paying ground rent to Christ's Hospital on Park Road – which forms a semi-circle around Albert Park with Park Crescent – includes one John Creemer Clarke. Clarke was a prosperous local clothing manufacturer, Abingdon's mayor between 1869 and 1870, its Liberal MP between 1874 and 1885, a philanthropist, and a supporter and founder of Abingdon's Trinity Methodist Church (see above).<sup>31</sup> The Richardson family now lived among the most influential people in the town. It is likely that the house Charles Richardson commissioned was designed by the prolific local architect Edwin Dolby, who designed many of the houses on the Albert Park estate, as well as some of the early buildings of Abingdon School, a public school, which moved to a site next to Albert Park in the 1870s, and now owns the Richardsons' house on Park Crescent.<sup>32</sup>

To this day, the house retains a monogram set into one of its external walls (see Figure 3). The monogram includes three elements: first, it records the date 1871; second, some initials (likely C.R. – the shape of the C might suggest a middle initial – though I cannot source whether Charles

---

<sup>31</sup> See 'John Creemer Clarke', *Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society*, <<http://www.abingdon.gov.uk/history/people/john-creemer-clarke>> [accessed 3 December 2018].

<sup>32</sup> There is a well-sourced Wikipedia entry on Dolby. See 'Edwin Dolby', accessed 3 December 2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edwin\\_Dolby](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edwin_Dolby). Richard Ekins notes the lamentable recent failure of a proposal to put a blue plaque commemorating Dorothy Richardson on the house on Park Crescent: see Ekins, 'Dilemmas of Placing and Dating in Blue Plaque Research: The Case of Dorothy Richardson in Bloomsbury (1896–1907) – An Essay in Grounded Theory and the Social Construction of Knowledge', *Pilgrimages: The Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies*, no. 8 (2016): 85, n. 22).

Richardson had a middle name); and third a Latin motto, 'virtute acquiritur honos'. The motto was likely an appropriation from higher-ranking and probably unrelated Richardson families: *Fairbairn's Book of Crests of the Families of Great Britain and Ireland* attaches this motto to a number of Richardson families from England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.<sup>33</sup> *Fairbairn's* translates the motto as 'honour is acquired by virtue', while Google translate offers a slightly different emphasis with 'acquired by virtue of honour'.<sup>34</sup> What Charles Richardson did acquire, he acquired through inheritance; whatever his claims to honour or virtue, the irony of his chosen motto is perhaps indicative of a character who would not manage to hold on to all that he had acquired.

### *Snapshot 3: For Sale*

Charles Richardson disappears from the archival record in Abingdon in the 1880s. The reasons are well-documented. Following Charles's poor investments and a decline in his fortunes, the Richardson family had to move, first to Worthing on England's south coast, and then to Barnes in south-west London. In Fromm's telling, Charles Richardson

managed to cling on to solvency, by a hair, until 1893. At the end of this year, his broker died suddenly, and the whole flimsy edifice collapsed. Charles Richardson was declared a bankrupt, and a public auction took place, which Dorothy did not attend. The family move was also accomplished without her.<sup>35</sup>

Charles Richardson re-emerges in archival holdings from Abingdon just before this point in time. The Oxfordshire Record Office holds a mortgage document dated 10 July 1893, in which Charles Richardson re-mortgages some of his remaining Abingdon property. This property, the document states, is fixed as the source of his mother's annuity from his father's will, and the remaining legacy due to his sister's husband (following his sister's death) upon his mother's death. Nevertheless, the document shows one Emma Augusta Mary Ann Kingham agreeing to lend Charles Richardson £700 against the value of this property. The archival record suddenly emanates desperation.

---

<sup>33</sup> *Fairbairn's Book of Crests of the Families of Great Britain and Ireland*, 4th ed., vol. 1.2 (London and Edinburgh: T.C. and E.C Jack, 1904), 470–71.

<sup>34</sup> *Fairbairn's Book of Crests of the Families of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1.2: 91.

<sup>35</sup> Fromm, *Dorothy Richardson*, 120.

A catalogue detailing an auction, scheduled for 3pm on 12 March 1894, pertaining to the 'Highly-Important [sic] Sale of Business Premises, Private Dwelling-Houses & Cottages' shows what happened after Charles Richardson's bankruptcy. The auction is listed as taking place at the Queen's Hotel, in Abingdon, but further information can be sought either from the Abingdon-based solicitors 'Bartletts and D'Almaine', or from 'Messrs. Ford, Lloyd, Bartlett & Michelmore, Solicitors, 38, Bloomsbury Square, London'.<sup>36</sup> The text of the catalogue overlaps so significantly with other information on the Richardsons in Abingdon that it must advertise the auction brought about by Charles Richardson's bankruptcy.

The first item in the catalogue clearly ties the auction to Charles Richardson. It lists the following:

Lot 1.

A FREEHOLD GROCER'S SHOP,  
Warehouse, Office, and Outbuildings, with  
DWELLING-HOUSE,  
Garden, Orchard, and Stabling for 6 Horses,  
Situate [sic] in OCK STREET, Abingdon, with a frontage of 62 feet  
to the street, and an average depth of 300 feet running to the Ock  
Stream, and now in the occupation of Messrs. RANT & Co.,  
Grocers.

The Dwelling-house consists of Dining and Drawing Rooms, 6  
Bedrooms and 2 Attics, Kitchens and Cellars.

There is a very nice out-let; the whole occupying NEARLY AN  
ACRE OF GROUND, with a Stream of Water at the lower end of  
the Property.

A Grocer's business has been established for upwards of half-a-  
century upon these premises, and under Messrs. RICHARDSON &  
SON, became one of the largest in the County, and has been since  
carried on very successfully by Messrs. RANT & Co.

Lot 2, meanwhile, constitutes 'FIVE FREEHOLD COTTAGES,  
STONE-BUILT AND TILED, Adjoining the above Property, three of  
which from the street, the remaining two are in the court yard'. Lot 3 is 'A  
BRICK & SLATED FREEHOLD PREMISES In Stert Street, Abingdon,  
Consisting of double-front Grocer's Shop and Counting House, with

---

<sup>36</sup> However coincidental and trivial a connection, no reader of *Pilgrimage* could neglect to note that only two years later, Dorothy Richardson moved to an attic room on Endsleigh Street, under a mile from the solicitors who assisted in her father's bankruptcy proceedings.



good Cellarage. The Dwelling-house contains 2 Sitting Room, 5 Bed Rooms, Kitchen, Wash-house, and Scullery [...] These Premises have been occupied as a Grocer's and General Shop for the last 40 years'. Lot 4 is a 'BRICK-BUILT & TILED PRIVATE DWELLING-HOUSE in Stert Street, adjoining the last Lot'. Lot 5 is from Longworth, a village about eight miles to the West of Abingdon – a "FREEHOLD BRICK & TILED PREMISES, Stable, Coach-house, Yard, and Garden' with 'TWO FREEHOLD COTTAGES' adjoining — all together a 'very nice Village Property, all in good order, and a Grocery and General Business has been carried on there for many years'. Lot 6 is from Blewbury — a 'STONE-BUILT AND SLATED DWELLING-HOUSE, Double Shop and Bakehouse, Cart Shed and Stabling, Bacon-Curing House with Loft over, good Cellarage, Outbuildings and Garden. Dwelling-House consists of 2 Sitting Rooms, 5 Bed Rooms, and Domestic Offices'. And the final lot, number 7, also at Blewbury, is 'A VILLA RESIDENCE, Brick-built and Slated, Containing 2 Sitting Rooms, 3 Bedrooms, Attic and Kitchen, with COTTAGE ATTACHED, Containing 1 Sitting Room, 2 Bed Rooms, and 1 Attic; Verandah at the back; large Garden behind the Villa and Cottage, Coal and Wood House, Stable and Gig House'. Once again, such details give some sense of the world of the family into which Dorothy Richardson was born. The catalogue also lists the tenants of all of the residential properties for sale: notably, the villa residence of Lot 7 at Blewbury is said to be rented by a 'Mrs Richardson', surely a relative.<sup>37</sup> However, most significantly, as well as being listed as the leaseholder for the businesses and properties of Lot 1 in Abingdon and Lot 6 in Blewbury, George Rant is also listed as a the tenant for the house at Longworth.<sup>38</sup>

Included with the auction catalogue in the Oxfordshire Record Office archives is a memorandum of agreement from the auction, where George Rant confirms his deposit on a payment of £2150 to Charles Richardson.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Unlike Abingdon, Blewbury is given its own name in *Pilgrimage*. In *Dimple Hill*, Miriam Henderson recalls her relatives there, and is taken 'back to Blewbury and the enigmatic vision of Great-Aunt Stone sitting blind and motionless in the clasp of the graceless parlour chair whose high back had the dreadful shape of a halved cylinder, plaintively querulous with all about her; crippled Aunt Emma on the other side of the fireplace, bent listeningly over her cross-stitch texts, distributing, without looking up, abrupt rallying comments and snappish rebukes; the convulsively talking uncles, coming and going and still, in late middle age, browbeaten and uneasy' (IV 434).

<sup>38</sup> Document B111/1/D/50, Oxfordshire Record Office, Oxfordshire History Centre.

<sup>39</sup> Document B111/1/D/50.

A year before the expiry of the lease Rant signed for Charles's businesses and properties, Rant seems to have taken the opportunity to purchase them in full. As one man's fortune waxes, another man's wanes. It is enough, perhaps, with Miriam Henderson in *Oberland*, to convince us that 'absolute property in land [...] is a crime', and to aid our imagining, if not of Rant, then at least of 'Rent as a clutching monster astride upon civilization' (IV 54).

I also talk pointedly here of *men's* fortunes. The archival record of the Richardsons in Abingdon is typical in the fact that it indexes patriarchal structures enshrined in finance and law. But if such structures were normative in nineteenth-century Britain, then the example of the Richardson family archive goes beyond finance and law, and evokes the particular social texture of the patriarchal environment into which Dorothy Richardson was born. Dorothy Richardson's Abingdon was a small place, which would have defined her according to the prominence and relative status of her paternal line. It is a world of prosperous grocers and gentlemanly aspirations, of the role and standing conferred upon men and their conduct by occupation and religion. Meanwhile, however much he is projecting backwards from her eventual suicide, Rosenberg describes Dorothy's mother, Mary Miller, as 'isolated' in Abingdon, coming with Charles as she did from her family home in East Coker in Somerset.<sup>40</sup> Though Dorothy Richardson was born in Abingdon, surrounded by her father's family, there is more research to be carried out regarding her maternal line.

I would like to thank the following for their permissions, help, information, and advice while I was carrying out the research that went into this article: Jackie Smith, the archivist of Abingdon town and Christ's Hospital; Elin Bornemann and Matt Stevens of the Abingdon County Hall Museum; the Clerk, Master, and Governor's of Christ's Hospital of Abingdon; and the staff at the Oxfordshire History Centre. This research was funded by the AHRC Dorothy Richardson Editions Project, AH/I004011/2, and with the support of the University of Oxford KE Seed Fund.

---

<sup>40</sup> Rosenberg, *The Genius They Forgot*, 2.