

"THE SAGE OF ALBURY, and the MAN MUSHROOM"



being
the story behind the
DEVIS-TUPPER VAULT
outside the west wall of the
OLD PARISH CHURCH, ALBURY, SURREY

THE SAGE OF ALBURY, AND THE MAN MUSHROOM

This is the story behind a monument which stands beside the west wall of the Old Parish Church at Albury, Surrey. The monument comprises a table vault within a small plot of ground fenced with heavy iron chains. Inscribed on one end of the vault are words briefly recording that this is the vault of Martin F. Tupper. Along the side of the vault is a memorial to one Anthony Devis and to a Mrs. Ellin Devis. The inscriptions have been recently re-incised and re-painted. Within the same fenced plot is a gravestone with a child's grave on one side of it, and on the other side of it an infant's grave.

Although there might appear to be nothing remarkable about any of this, a social historian may well find a number of questions to ask, as for instance:-

1. What is there so special about this particular monument, in a churchyard that has been closed for over a hundred years, as to have called for its refurbishment today?
2. Why should the inscription state that Anthony Devis died in the 89th year of his age, when he was actually only in his 88th year?
3. Why should the inscription refer to Mrs Ellin Devis, seeing that Ellin Devis died unmarried?
4. Why should the name of Martin Tupper appear on one end of what is clearly a Devis family tomb?
5. As this is recorded to be the vault of Martin F. Tupper, how did it come about that Martin F. Tupper is not in fact buried here?
6. Why should there be the child's grave in this plot? And why the infant's grave? And what story lies behind a third, almost indecipherable, name on the same gravestone?

What is there so special about this particular monument as to have called for its refurbishment today?

The Old Parish Church at Albury became vested in the Redundant Churches Fund in 1974. For the refurbishment of the Devis-Tupper vault the Fund engaged the services of the sculptor Arthur Ayres of Chelsea, who came out to Albury in 1976 after completing his work on the monument to Dame Sybil Thorndyke in Westminster Abbey.

The "special" nature of the Albury monument lies in its commemorating two notabilities who, between them, spanned the 18th and 19th centuries. Anthony

Devis was a member of a phenomenal family. Martin Tupper was a phenomenon in himself.

The Devis family, which came from Preston in Lancashire, provides one of the most interesting examples of hereditary talent in the history of British art. Anthony Devis (1729-1816) himself was a well-known water-colourist, who also worked in oils. The most considerable figure in the family, however, was Anthony's half-brother Arthur (1711-1787), an outstanding painter of portraits and conversation pieces. As regards period, Arthur Devis stands between William Hogarth (1697-1764) and George Stubbs (1724-1806). Hogarth retains his unique position among English artists as a chronicler of life and manners, satirical and humorous, particularly in his series of engravings "A Harlot's Progress", "A Rake's Progress" and "Marriage à-la-Mode". Stubbs was greatest as a painter of animals, and greatest of all as a realistic painter of horses, having thoroughly mastered their anatomy - Stubbs' treatise on "The Anatomy of the Horse" (1766) was based on an intense study he had made of this subject. The record left by Arthur Devis is a different one; he portrays for us the businessmen of the 18th century, their families, their homes and their attire. In his painting of interior and exterior portraits and portrait groups, carrying an aura of stillness and gentility, Arthur Devis stands unique. The comment made by Sir Kenneth Clark in his 1969 television series and book entitled "Civilisation" was:-

"The truth is, I think, that eighteenth century England, in the aftermath of its middle-class revolution, had created two societies, very remote from one another. One was the society of modest country gentlemen, of which we have a perfect record in the work of a painter called Devis. The other was the urban society, of which Hogarth has left us many records plenty of animal spirits, but not what we could, by any stretch, call civilisation".

Two of Arthur's children - Thomas Anthony (1756-1810) and Arthur William (1762-1822) followed their father as portrait and subject painters, the latter with considerable distinction. And Arthur's second daughter, Frances, married another artist Robert Marris (1750-1827).

Returning to our Anthony Devis; he lived and died a bachelor. In 1780, at the age of 51, he bought a house in Albury, the pleasant rambling Albury House, part of which dates from the 16th century, and there he lived and painted for over 30 years. A good landscape-painter himself, he filled the house with his own pictures and with many others that he collected, and he later added a large room to contain his further pictures.

Not a great deal is known about the earlier life of Anthony Devis. His

name appears in the Roll for the Preston Guild in 1742, with the description "Painter", which is itself remarkable because he was aged only 13 at the time. Prior to moving out to Albury, Anthony Devis had lived in London but had travelled extensively throughout England, also visiting Scotland, Ireland and South Wales, as is testified by the hundreds of named topographical drawings preserved in public and private collections today. Many of his works are to be seen at the Harris Museum and Art Gallery in Preston. Up to a century ago his work was appreciated by connoisseurs who were forming the collections which later became National possessions. During the opening years of the 20th century his work fell into some neglect; from this it has re-emerged, and Anthony Devis is now recognised as occupying an honoured and well-deserved place among the important topographical draughtsmen of the late 18th century.

Martin Tupper (1810-1889), whose name today is hardly remembered even in Surrey, was lifted in his day to a height of fame that has been exceeded by few writers, during their lifetime, in any country in the world. This fame rested primarily on a single book, Proverbial Philosophy, written in the manner of Solomon's proverbs. Published originally in 1838, it ran through several editions and was republished in 1842 in a form that became for the best part of the next 20 years a stock present for weddings or birthdays, with a circulation approaching that of the Bible and Shakespeare. Well over a quarter of a million copies were sold in England: translations were made into several languages; in America its total sales exceeded one million copies. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were among the enthusiastic admirers of the author of Proverbial Philosophy. Indeed, on the death of William Wordsworth in 1850 Martin Tupper was a strong candidate for Poet Laureate, but he was passed over in favour of Alfred Tennyson whose poem "In Memoriam" had just been published and had been admired by the Prince Consort.

Yet by the late 1850's Tupper's style of writing was already falling out of favour, and a book could be filled with the insults, jokes, parodies and hostile criticisms inspired by Tupper during the 1860's and 1870's, when he became the most ridiculed author in English history. The noun "Tupperism", the adjective "Tupperian", and the verb "Tupperise" passed into the language as synonymous with "commonplace". Yet under these attacks Martin Tupper maintained his kindness and his good humour; one of his favourite jokes was that it was about time that "vituperation" was spelt with two p's.

The standard biography of Tupper, written by Derek Hudson in 1949, is aptly entitled "Martin Tupper; his rise and fall". That rise and fall was a reflection of the times. Up to the 1850's Tupper's rigid religious faith was in tune with the high seriousness of early Victorian England, but by the 1870's

and 1880's Darwin and Huxley had undermined the foundations on which Proverbial Philosophy was based; and in the conflict between the scientists and the religious world the general sentiment of the country had become more and more anti-clerical, anti-religious and materialistic.

Martin Tupper came to live in Albury, at Albury House, in 1840, but he did not die here. One result of his declining fortunes was that, from the 1870's, the house had to be let as often as a tenant could be found for it. And in 1880, in order to raise some capital, Martin Tupper mortgaged Albury House to the Duke of Northumberland. After that date Tupper saw very little of his house or of the village. By 1887, when the Duke foreclosed on the mortgage, Tupper was living in a semi-detached house in Upper Norwood, and there he died two years later at the age of 79.

These then are the two notabilities whose lives are recalled by the Devis-Tupper monument which stands beside the Old Parish Church. Their personalities form the background against which the further questions posed at the beginning of this Paper may be looked at.

Why should the inscription state that Anthony Devis died in the 89th year of his age, when he was actually only in his 88th year?

It is not to be doubted that Anthony Devis was born on 18th March 1728, and this fact taken by itself would provide sufficient corroboration for the statement that, on his death on 26th April 1816, Devis had entered on the 89th year of his age.

What was apparently overlooked, however, when the inscription was written was the fact that in the year 1728, and for over 20 years thereafter, New Year's Day was not 1st January but 25th March - a date that certainly coincided more recognisably, as regards seasons, with the passing of one year and the coming of the next.

The change of the New Year's Day to January 1st took place in 1752, so that according to the post-1752 reckoning Devis had been born on 18th March 1729. That this is so is confirmed by the obituary notice which appeared in "The Gentleman's Magazine" for June 1816 and which reads "April 25 (sic). In his 88th year, Anthony Devis, Esq., of Albury, Surrey".

Why should the inscription refer to Mrs. Ellin Devis, seeing that Ellin Devis died unmarried?

First to explain who Ellin Devis was. Arthur Devis, who has been referred to earlier as the most distinguished member of the Devis family of painters, had

22 children in all. Two of his sons, Thomas Anthony and Arthur William, have already been mentioned, as has his daughter Frances. Arthur's eldest child, however, was named Ellin (1748-1820).

Since 1780 Ellin's uncle Anthony had been living at Albury House. In 1812, he being then aged 83, Anthony Devis sold the house to his niece Ellin in return for an annuity and with a condition that he be allowed to continue living there for the rest of his life.

Ellin Devis for her part continued to live mainly in London, at 20 Devonshire Place, Marylebone, where she ran a girls' school. Edward Edwards, in his "Anecdotes of Painters", says that she was "mistress of a highly respectable seminary for young ladies of fashion". The seminary was expensive as well as respectable, for an item in the Farington Diary (for 29th April 1794) reads: "Miss Dalrymple's expenses at Mrs. Devis's School for the last year amounted to £284". This expenditure was incurred at a time when Samuel Horsley, who had been rector of Albury from 1774 to 1779, was insisting as recently-appointed Bishop of St. David's, that no curate's salary should be less than £15 (the stipend of curates being then often under £10 a year).

Ellin Devis, who from her portrait was a dignified and somewhat masterful lady, lived and died a spinster but she bore the courtesy title of "Mrs" during her lifetime, and it was doubtless regarded as an equal courtesy to inscribe her memorial in like fashion.

Why should the name of Martin Tupper appear on one end of what is clearly
a Devis family tomb?

It will be recollected that Frances Devis, younger sister of Ellin, married the artist Robert Marris. There were two daughters of this marriage. One of these, Ellin Devis Marris, became wife to a Dr. Martin Tupper, F.R.S. Dr. Tupper was an excellent kind-hearted person, highly esteemed as a doctor and enjoying a fashionable and lucrative practice in the West End of London. His marriage in 1809 to Ellin Devis Marris was both a happy and an "advantageous" one, because her aunt "Mrs." Devis, the successful schoolmistress, had adopted her as her own child and heiress. Indeed it was at "Mrs." Devis's town house in Marylebone that the first child of the Marris-Tupper marriage was born, on 17th July 1810. This child was Martin Farquhar Tupper - the Martin Tupper of Albury.

[A glance at the Devis-Tupper family tree to be found at the end of this Paper will make these various relationships somewhat easier to follow.]

Picture then the circumstances at the date in 1816 when Anthony Devis, the Albury artist, died. He had been living, up to his death, in Albury House. That house was already owned by his niece Ellin Devis whose intention it was to

bequeath it to her niece and adopted heiress Ellin Tupper, with the further intention that the property should pass in due time to great-nephew Martin Tupper. In these circumstances it would not be altogether surprising for Ellin Tupper to cause a monument to be erected in the form of the tomb that we find by the Old Parish Church today. The wording inscribed by Ellin Devis along one side of the monument was: "Sacred to the memory of ANTHONY DEVIS Esq, late of this Parish who died April 26th 1816 in the 89th year of his age". Space was left for the further inscription that was added four years later: "Also of Mrs. ELLIN DEVIS late of Devonshire Place, Marylabone (sic), Niece to the above, who died February 21st 1820 in the 74th year of her age". And the inscription on the end of the monument reads: "The vault of MARTIN F. TUPPER, great-nephew".

But this explanation of why the name of Martin Tupper should appear on one end of the Devis family tomb is probably too facile, because at the time when Anthony Devis died in 1816 Tupper was aged only six, and he was only ten years old when his great-aunt died. What seems much more likely is that Martin Tupper himself caused his name to be inscribed on the tomb, and that he had this done at some date after the Old Church had been closed in 1842, in order to stake out his right of burial in this particular place.

For completeness it may be added that along the other side of the monument there is a further inscription: "In this vault are also deposited the remains of Mrs. MARTHA MORISON the long-trying and affectionate friend of the late Mrs. Ellin Devis. She died the 5th of April 1820 aged 66 years". No records remain of what lies behind the expression "long-trying friend" nor of what led to the death of this close companion so soon after Ellin Devis's own death.

As this is inscribed: "The Vault of Martin F. Tupper", how did it come about that Martin Tupper is not in fact buried here?

In the 1830's Martin Tupper's parents owned not only Albury House but also a town house in New Burlington Street. Martin had been through Oxford, and had set his heart on taking Holy Orders. What precluded him from following this vocation was a bad stammer, which he did not overcome until the age of about 35. Instead he became a barrister. Dr. Tupper had provided his son with a fair private income but had insisted he should have a profession before marrying. On November 26th 1835, the day after Martin became a barrister, he married his cousin Isabella Devis after an engagement lasting seven years. Isabella was the younger daughter of the painter Arthur William Devis, a happy-go-lucky individual with a reputation for historical subjects and portraits of children. Arthur William had died in 1822, leaving a widow and two young daughters entirely

unprovided for. Isabella's elder sister had died four years later.

Martin and Isabella Tupper started their married life in a small house in St. Pancras, but in 1840 the young couple took over Albury House. The Tupper parents had never made Albury their principal home, and from 1840 they lived permanently in London. In 1840 Martin was, of course, no stranger to Albury. He had known Albury House for many years, first as the country house of his great-aunt "Mrs." Ellin Devis and then as his parents' country house. He had furthermore developed a deep affection for the Old Parish Church. As a young man he had benefited greatly from the ministrations of Hugh McNeile, rector of Albury from 1822 to 1834. This was McNeile the famous preacher and evangelical, who later became Canon of Chester and Dean of Ripon. Tupper's attachment to the Old Church was to prove one of his most steadfast traits: a photograph, reproduced in Hudson's biography, taken at the age of 73 shows him as a white-bearded patriarch standing outside the north porch of the church.

But back in 1840, newly-arrived in the village as the owner of Albury House, Tupper was still a young man of 30. Meanwhile there had been stirring events in the locality, focussed around another Victorian notability, Henry Drummond (1786-1860), who in 1819 had purchased the mansion of Albury Park, the grounds of which abut on the Old Parish Church. Drummond, a wealthy banker and Tory MP for Surrey, was described by Carlyle as "a singular mixture of all things - of the saint, the wit, the philosopher - swimming, if I mistake not, in an element of dandyism". He shared with J.B. Cardale the chief responsibility for the founding of the Catholic Apostolic Church, and it was his wealth and hospitality which made Albury the centre of the activities of these sincere and devoted people who looked for the Second Advent and believed that the gift of prophecy had been restored.

To quote a passage from Hudson:-

"It was almost inevitable that two such zealous and unusual personalities as Drummond and Tupper, living close to each other in a small village, should eventually come into conflict. Yet it was not primarily over religious differences that the two quarrelled.

The village of Albury originally stood round the old church in Albury Park, but except for one building all trace of the former village had disappeared long before Tupper's time. The villagers had gone to live in the hamlets of Weston Street and Little London, which make up the Albury we now know. In consequence the parish church had become far removed from its parishioners; it was also, according to Drummond, in a bad state of repair. Drummond therefore offered to pay for the building of a new church in the centre of the village. In February 1839 he obtained the Bishop's permission to close the old church and to proceed with this plan.

Tupper apparently failed to realise the full enormity (as he thought it)

of Drummond's scheme until the summer of 1840 - perhaps because it was only then that he finally disposed of his cottage at Park Village East, St. Pancras, and came to settle at Albury. As soon as it dawned on him that his beloved old church was threatened, he began to make a tremendous row, and presented a printed petition to the Bishop of Winchester, signed by himself and more than twenty of the other parishioners..... But Tupper's case was hopeless from the start - for the Bishop's permission had already been given."

The last service in the old church was held in December 1841, after which the altar, pews, font and bells were transferred to the newly-built parish church.

In 1855 there was an Order in Council closing the old churchyard. This caused a further, temporary, break in relations between Tupper and Drummond - the earlier break, in the 1840's, having been meanwhile mended. After Tupper had claimed in the 1850's an "inalienable right of burial", Drummond's rejoinder was reported to have been: "You can come and be buried here as soon as you like, for all I care". Tupper lived, as it happened, for another thirty years or more, and when he died in 1889 he was buried with his wife in the churchyard of the new parish church. The inconspicuous gravestone there records:-

To
the beloved memory of
MARTIN FARQUHAR TUPPER
(author of Proverbial Philosophy)
who died Nov.^r 29th 1839
in his 80th year.
"He being dead yet speaketh"

also of his affectionate wife
ISABELLA
daughter of Arthur William Devis
she died Dec.^r 28th 1835
Aged 74 years
a short time after her golden wedding.
"In death they were not divided".

Why should there be the child's grave in the plot which encloses the
Devis-Tupper vault? And why the infant's grave? And what story
lies behind a third, almost indecipherable, name on the same grave-
stone there?

Martin and Isabella Tupper had nine children in all. The eldest were

three girls, and then came four boys. The eighth child, Alice, was born in July 1851. When the Tuppers added a new wing to Albury House in 1852 a japanned tin box was let into the brickwork containing a parchment invoking God's blessing on the work, signed by Tupper, his wife and all the children. An attached note by Tupper explained that the four youngest had signed "with hands held". Within little more than a year, in January 1854, Alice had died of a paralysed spine. This loss affected Tupper deeply. The child's grave in the Devis-Tupper enclosure is that of Alice. And the infant's grave is that of the Tupper's ninth child who was still-born later that same year. It would be in 1854, almost certainly, that the posts and iron chains were added round the vault, to create the enclosed plot.

It is to be noted that the date of these burials, in 1854, was some twelve years after the closing of the Old Church, and this continued use of the churchyard may well have been the occasion for the Order in Council being promulgated in 1855 formally closing the churchyard also. A year or two afterwards, Nathaniel Hawthorne paid a visit to the Old Church with Tupper. "The graves", recorded Hawthorne in his journal for April 1856 "were covered with a garden blooming with flowers, and evidently constantly and carefully cultivated and weeded."

The third name was added to the gravestone in 1871, thirty years after the Old Church had fallen into disuse. The full inscription on the stone reads:-

ALICE
EVELYN TUPPER
A dear Christian child
Born July 16 1851
Died January 15 1854
Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven
Also
a little brother who died at birth
Sept 12 1854
Children of Martin F. & Isabella Tupper
Also
in Loving Memory of
HENRY DE BEAUVOIR TUPPER
Born at Albury February 15 1847
Accidentally Killed in South Africa
May 31 1871
Thy brother shall rise again

Henry was the Tuppers' third son, who had grown into a promising, handsome

lad of 24 and who had gone out to seek his fortune in South Africa. He was sitting beside the driver of a bullock wagon that was taking him and his companions from Port Elizabeth to the diamond fields where they were working, when a sudden jolt threw him from his seat and one wheel of the wagon went over him.

A literary footnote may be added here. The Devis-Tupper vault stands a little to the north of a great yew in the south-west corner of the churchyard. Towards the end of 1857, some three years after Tupper had buried his two infant children - a girl and a boy - in the Devis-Tupper enclosure, he was writing the romance "Stephan Langton" by which he is best remembered today. (It was Tupper's description in that book of the Sherbourne Pond, or "Shirebourne Pond" as a silent pool that accounts for the name "the Silent Pool" now having wholly replaced the traditional name of this stretch of water). Tupper's romantic story includes the drowning, in the Silent Pool, of a maiden of the name of Emma, together with her brother, after pursuit by the wicked Prince John. The story, as told in the book, continues "The funeral of John's last victims duly took place in the old churchyard of Alderburie they lie a little northward of the great yew in the south-west corner". This is the very spot that had such poignant memories for the author.

Some answers to the deemed questions from the assumed social historian inquisitive about the Devis-Tupper monument have been given above.

The patient reader may, however, have a question of his own to ask as to the choice of the title of this Paper: "The sage of Albury, and the man mushroom". "The sage of Albury" is readily identifiable as Martin Tupper, who carried that sobriquet easily enough for the first twenty of more years of his sojourn in the village. "The man mushroom" is less readily identifiable as being Anthony Devis. Devis was a great favourite with the village children because he was wont to carry gingerbreads in his pocket for distribution. Why then did they not nickname him "the gingerbread man"? He had a more noticeable characteristic than the carrying of gingerbreads. He carried an umbrella. Umbrellas had been known in England in the 17th century, but their use did not become general until the latter part of the 18th century, and Anthony Devis was the first person in this particular locality to carry one. In the East umbrellas have been used from early times as a shield against the sun. It was the traveller James Hanway (1712-1786) who became the first celebrity to bring

one of these home and use it in London. In those days, however, an umbrella was not the black metal-framed article with which we are familiar today as a shield against the rain - our present-day article has been evolved from the umbrella with "Paragon" ribs that was devised by Samuel Fox in 1852. The umbrella that Anthony Devis carried would have wooden ribs and as it was a shield against the sun it may well have been white in colour. What more apt description then, of this dark-trousered figure stumping around the village beneath his protective cover, than the nickname that he was given, of "the man mushroom"?

History, with its real people, is never far away when you enter a churchyard such as ours.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

(by R.Charles Walmsley F.R.I.C.S.)

The material for this Paper has been drawn in the main from the two following sources, both standard works of reference:-

"Martin Tupper: his rise and fall"	Derek Hudson (Constable) 1949
"The Devis Family of Painters" (F.Lewis, Publishers, Limited. Leigh-on-Sea) 1950	Sydney H. Pavière The Tithe House

The drawing of the Old Parish Church of Albury on the front cover of this Paper is by Mr. John L. Baker and is now in the ownership of Dr. Maurice Burton.

The DEVIS-TUPPER Family Tree

Frames indicate successive owners of Albury House, Albury
CAPITALS indicate the Devis family of painters

Anthony Devis = (1) Ellin d.1727 (2) Ann

