

Christopher Turnbull 1832-1908

Christopher was born in Workington 19 April 1832 and was baptised in the Workington Presbyterian Church on the 18th January 1834 by Rev. C. Turner¹⁶. He was the third son and fourth child of William and Dinah. He grew up at Castle Gardens, where his father worked a nursery and market garden. Christopher was apprenticed at Workington Hall Gardens. From there he went to Edinburgh and then as a foreman gardener to Holker Hall, a residence of the Duke of Devonshire, at Cark in Cartmel, Grange-Over-Sands, Lancashire¹⁹.

After working at Holker Hall, Christopher returned to Workington about 1855 and his father, William, rented Bank Gardens for him from the Curwen family of Workington Hall. He worked Bank Gardens for 17 years until William died in 1872. On 28 August 1856, when he was 24, he married 19-year-old Eliza Anderson, a farmer's daughter, in the St Andrew's Parish Church at Orwell in Cambridgeshire⁶. Eliza was baptised at Therfield, a small village east of Letchworth in Hertfordshire and about 9 miles southwest of Orwell, on the 28th May 1837. She was the daughter of Richard and Mary Anderson. At the time of the marriage Christopher's residence address was given as Workington and Eliza's as Orwell. Witnesses to the marriage were Thomas Gatward and Eliza's older sister, Ann Anderson. Thomas (b. 1838) was 18 years old and probably a friend of Eliza. It is interesting to speculate how Christopher and Eliza met? It seems most likely that Eliza visited Cumbria. There were Andersons living in Harrington and an Isaac Anderson, a market gardener in Workington who may have been related to Eliza.

Holker Hall Gardens

William Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire, owned Holker Hall when Christopher Turnbull worked there. William was Lord Chamberlain to George IV and William IV. The gardens, now covering 25 acres, are part woodland, part formal and essentially Victorian in character. The 200 acre parkland is the result of planting by Lord George Cavendish in the late 1700s. In the early 1800s an arboretum, conservatory, balustraded terraces by the House and a large walled kitchen garden were added¹⁸.

Orwell

Orwell is a parish adjacent to a Roman road, 3 miles north-west from Shepreth station on the Hitchin, Royston and Cambridge line of the London and North Eastern railway, 8 miles southwest from Cambridge and about 7 miles north from Royston. The soil is clayey and chalky, and the subsoil clay, gault and limestone. The crops are wheat, barley beans and fruit. The population in 1921 was 469. The Church of St Andrew is a building of stone and flint, consisting of chancel, nave, aisles, south porch and an embattled western tower containing a clock and 5 bells: the chancel is Perpendicular and the nave Early English: in the chancel is an effigy of Dr. Jeremiah Radcliffe, one of the 47 translators of the Bible in 1608-11, buried here 4 March, 1611.

Christopher and Eliza were, living in Guard Street, Workington¹⁵, when their first child, Mary Eliza, was born in 1858. Early in 1861 Christopher and Eliza had 3-year-old Mary Eliza and 9-month old William¹⁷. Christopher's unmarried older sister, Eleanor, was living with them.

In 1871 Christopher was still living at Bank Gardens, Workington with his wife and seven children. He was a market gardener, like his father, and employed two labourers. The children were: Mary E. born 1859, William 1860, Annie B. 1861, Dinah Eleanor christened 28 January 1864, Christopher 1866, Fred 1868, John Richard 1870, Eleanor 1873, Harry 1876. A newspaper report suggests Eliza had ten children¹¹ so one may have died in infancy. In 1872, following the death of William Turnbull, Christopher and his family moved to Castle Gardens.

For many years Christopher was a leading member of the Plymouth Bretheren. Although religious and very temperate he was never teetotal. He was very fond of singing and it was reported that "his

splendid bass voice could be heard when passing the garden”¹⁹ Apart from growing produce, Christopher was a noted basket maker. The baskets and swills were used for the garden products. They were made from willows growing in Castle Gardens, reputedly seedlings (or cuttings) from a willow growing on Napoleon’s grave in St Helena¹¹.

The weeping willow which drooped over Napoleon’s tomb in St Helena was taken there from Britain in 1810. Napoleon was very attracted to the tree: but it was short lived, succumbing to a violent storm about the same time as Napoleon died. Cuttings from the tree failed to take so more cuttings were planted in 1828. These were successful and many cuttings have been taken from the resulting trees and planted in Britain and elsewhere¹².

Eliza died, aged 41 years, between October and December 1878. In 1881 Christopher was at Castle Gardens living with his children: Mary Eliza aged 23 years, now Mrs Moore; Annie B. aged 19 years, Dinah aged 17 years, Christopher aged 15 years, Fred aged 12 years, John aged 10 years, Eleanor aged 8 years and Harry aged 5 years.

In 1881, son William aged 22 years had married Annie ? from Cockermouth, was living at 23 Finkle Street, Workington and working as a gardener. In 1884 William moved to 173 John Street and he was still there in 1901. It was probably William who was referred to in the West Cumberland Times of March 8th 1890 as finding a dead infant in a box while digging a grave at St Michael's Churchyard.

Christopher’s second marriage was to Sarah Bliss (spinster, 38 years), on 11 October 1886 in Penrith Register Office⁶. Sarah was described as a ‘gardener’ from Stainton (near Penrith) on her marriage certificate. She was the daughter of William Bliss. Christopher and Sarah had three children: Joseph Bliss (b. Jul/Sept 1888)⁶ Sarah Jane (b. Oct/Dec 1890) and Lily (b. 18 Apr 1892). In 1891⁴ Christopher, Sarah, Joseph, aged 2 years and Sarah aged 4 months were living at Castle Garden. Christopher’s older children: John (gardener 20 yr), Eleanor (domestic servant 18 yr) and Harry (gardener 14 yr) were living with them. There were two other servants (gardeners) living at Castle Garden.

Bliss Family

Sarah was the daughter of William Bliss (b. 1814 at Penrith). William (father or brother) and John Bliss (brother) were market gardeners at ‘The Gardens’ Stainton⁸. The 1891 census record indicates that Sarah was born in Sunderland, Cumberland⁴. This is probably an error. Sarah may have thought she was born in Sunderland, Durham, where her two younger brothers were born⁹, but it is more likely that her birth place was Berwick, Northumberland as recorded in the 1881 census from information given by her father. The family was living in the village of Dacre just west of Penrith in 1881 and comprised William (widower, aged 67), Sarah (33 yr), William (unmarried 32 yr), John (unmarried 30 yr) and Jane (unmarried 23 yr). Jane was born in Dacre so it appears the family had lived there for over 20 years. Mary Ann Bliss was also christened in Dacre on 7 Jan 1854. In 1881 (unmarried, aged 26 yr) she was working as a domestic servant for her retired uncle and his invalid wife, William and Maria Gilley, at 18 Edgehill Road, Ecclesall Bierlow, Yorkshire¹³. William was from Bolam, Northumberland and was probably the brother of Mary Ann’s mother, Ann Gilley who was christened in Bolam on 15 October 1820. By 1891 Mary Ann had returned to Stainton and was living with her father and brothers, William and John, and sister Jane⁴.

Sarah died on 2 October 1897 (aged 50) and left her effects worth £85 (= about £4700 in 2000) to her husband. Christopher was left with young children. It appears that Sarah’s younger sister, Mary Ann Bliss, went to Castle Gardens to help Christopher. Mary Ann (46 yr), and children Sarah Jane, Joseph and Lily were living with Christopher at Castle Garden early in 1901¹⁴.

Christopher and Mary Ann Bliss married on 23 Sept 1901 in the Office of the Superintendent Registrar, St Helier, Jersey, Channel Islands⁵. After Hardwicke’s Marriage Act of 1754 in England and Wales, the Channel Islands became a kind of Gretna Green for eloping couples. They also allowed a widower to marry his dead wife’s sister, a union forbidden in England⁷. It was for this legal reason the marriage took place in St Helier. On 29 January 1902 Christopher made a will in which he appointed Mary Ann Bliss of Stainton near Penrith the Guardian of Lily, Sarah Jane and Joseph Bliss. This may have been because his Jersey marriage to Mary Ann was not recognised in England. There is a letter

from Christopher to John R. Turnbull describing the the fruit trees and vegetables on Jersey and also the voyage by steamer from Southampton which left Mary Ann “*rather indisposed*” (see Appendix 3). On this, as on many of his letters, Christopher put on the back of the envelope “*Hoping this morning will find thee bright and well.*” Mary Ann was 47 years old when she married and there were no children from this union¹⁰

Christopher remained at Castle Gardens until he died on 13 March 1908 (aged 75)³. He was buried in Harrington Road Cemetery on 16 March (Grave 81, Section 8, Division C).

Funeral of Mr. C. Turnbull. On Monday afternoon the internment took place of Mr Christopher Turnbull, a well-known and much respected townsman who occupied up to his death the Castle Gardens on the Whitehaven Road. Mr Turnbull had been in failing health for some considerable time and on Friday afternoon passed peacefully away at his residence. The funeral was largely attended by friends from both town and country. The arrangements were in the hands of Mr H.J. Hawkins, undertaker.

Workington Star and Harrington Guardian 20 March 1908.

Death of Workington Gardener. On Friday the death took place of Mr Christopher Turnbull the well-known florist who for many years and up to his demise carried on an extensive business at Castle Gardens. Deceased had reached the ripe age of 75 years. He was held in highest esteem by both Old Workingtonians and the rising generation for his sturdy independence and integrity.

Cumberland Pacquet 19 March 1908

He also left his estate to the three children youngest children to be equally divided. His sons John (Richard) and Christopher were named as executors¹. His effects were £90 (= about £4550 in 2000). Probate of the will was granted in Carlisle on 25 March 1908.

John Richard Turnbull (6-7) took over the lease of Castle Gardens on 6 May 1908 at an annual rental of £40 and was listed as a nurseryman there in 1910². We have no record of what happened to Mary Ann after the death of Christopher. It appears that Joseph and Lily never married. Sarah Jane married William Foster in Whitehaven in 1915 and they had two sons William C. and Harry.

Information sources: ¹Copy of will and probate record. ²Kelly's Directory 1910. ³Bobby Turnbull, his grandson, told me in 1986 that Christopher had relations in Canada but they lost contact after Christopher died. ⁴1891 census. ⁵Marriage Certificate. ⁶St Catherine's House index. ⁷Somerset and Dorset Family History Society Journal 27 (2), p. 76. (Channel Islands edition) 2002. ⁸Bulmer's Directory of Cumberland 1901. ⁹1881 Census. ¹⁰Notes from Mabel Bingham (nee Turnbull) via John Bingham. ¹¹Newspaper report of J.R. Turnbull's golden wedding May 1946. ¹²'Trees in Britain'. L.J.F. Brimble. Macmillan and Co., London 1948. ¹³1881 census. ¹⁴1901 Census, ¹⁵Post Office Directory of Cumberland 1858. ¹⁶Workington Presbyterian Church baptismal records Book 26 IV. ¹⁷1861 Census. ¹⁸www.statelysthames.com ¹⁹Letter in Workington News abt 5 Apr 1908.