

HISTORY
A History of Woodstock
by
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AS A PIONEER VILLAGE

The Town of Woodstock was established as a political entity by an act of the Virginia General Assembly in March, 1761. This action was sponsored by George Washington, who at that time was a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses representing Frederick County. (the Woodstock area was then a part of Frederick County, and remained so until 1772.)

That action of the General Assembly gave Jacob Miller full credit for initiating the idea. The Assembly action reads in part as follows:

... "whereas it hath been represented to this present General Assembly that Jacob Miller of the County of Frederick, hath laid off twelve hundred acres into streets and lots, ninety six of which are divided into lots of half an acre each, and the residue into streets and lots be it therefore enacted . . . that the land so laid out by the said Jacob Miller . . . shall be . . . established a town, and shall be called and known by the name of Woodstock."

Miller was obviously a very enterprising man. He and his family came to America from Germany in 1749, and settled temporarily in Pennsylvania. By 1752 he had succeeded in obtaining from Lord Fairfax a land grant of 400 acres in the area that would eventually be included in the town limits of Woodstock. It is reasonable to assume that he and his family moved here from Pennsylvania about that time.

Within the next few years, by purchase of adjacent parcels of land, he became the proprietor of 800 more acres. On this 1,200 acre plot he then proceeded to lay out the plan of a town on an elaborate and systematic scale. This was the town plan to which reference was made in the action of the Virginia General Assembly in 1761.

The question is often asked: Why was "Woodstock" chosen as the name for this new town? The town was settled largely by Germans, yet "Woodstock" is an English place name. The answer may lie in the fact that it was George Washington who introduced the resolution in the Virginia Assembly establishing Woodstock as a legal corporation. Jacob Miller may have left the choice of a name to Washington's discretion. If so, what might have influenced Washington? Consider this: Washington's ancestral home was Sulgrave Manor, located about 25 miles from Woodstock, England. Since Winchester was Washington's political base in 1761, and since Winchester is also an English place name, Washington may have been moved by sentiment to call his newest corporate neighbor by the same name as his English ancestral neighbor. All this is pure

conjecture, of course. Notwithstanding, this official nomenclature, Jacob Miller's town, continued for many years to be known as Millerstown, or on the tongues of the German residents, as Muellerstadt.

When Miller arrived to inspect his newly-acquired property what did he find here? For one thing he found a well-established trail running through it. Even before the first white settlers began to move into the Valley, Indians had beaten a path running the length of it. For many years it had served as a warpath for the Catawbe Indians of the South and the Delawares of the North, mortal enemies who had moved back and forth through this area in their attacks upon each other. This came to be known as the Indian Road, and was the main artery of travel through this part of the Valley. With many engineering adjustments throughout the years, US Route 11 has followed this old Indian Road, later called the Great Wagon Road, and Jacob Miller apparently used this old trail in laying out the main street of his new town.

There were also Indians settled here before the white settlers arrived. Archaeologists have found evidences of Indian settlements scattered throughout this area. In the early days, relations between the local Indians and the white settlers were friendly.

The French and Indian War changed all that. This war between England and France erupted in 1754, and continued until 1763. In America that conflict revolved around the struggle for control of Canada and the American colonies. In that struggle the French enlisted the help of the Indians, whom they used in raiding parties against the so-called "English settlers". Hence the name "French and Indian War".

The white settlers here in this part of the Valley began to sense that trouble was brewing when the local Indians began to move out of this area; to move northwest across the Alleghenies, doubtless induced by attractive offers of one sort or another from the French. From that point on until the late 1760's white settlers here were in constant danger from Indian raids. Many atrocities are recorded as taking place during that period.

This is part of what Miller found when he arrived to take possession of his newly-acquired property. What else did he find here?

Miller also found that white settlers had preceded him. We don't know precisely when the first pioneers arrived in this particular locality, but we do know that settlement of the northern end of the Valley began during the third decade of the 18th century. Miller arrived here approximately twenty years later. The Act of the Virginia Assembly establishing the town as a legal entity implies a small settlement here in 1761, noting that "several persons are now living there." There is no available map of the settlement that stood here before Miller arrived, but it is most unlikely that he found a row of cabins neatly situated along a village street. It is more realistic to assume that the community which he found here consisted of a scattered collection of log buildings.

It has been a long-standing local tradition that when Miller arrived he found a log church standing more or less in the center of this small community, and that when he drew his plan of the town he left this church sticking out half-way into main street. It is thought that the church faced west at the head of what is now called East Court Street.

That seems like an odd arrangement. Why didn't Miller lay off the main street a few feet to the west and thus line up the front of the church with the property line on the east side of the street? Miller doubtless had a good reason for this odd arrangement. He was no doubt influenced partly by the fact that the ground around the church must have included a cluster of graves. It is a known fact that a sizable graveyard did develop in proximity to the church. Miller himself may have seen the beginning of that. A traveler many years later, in 1848 observed in his Journal that the village church stood in the center of the street, and that "around it were many grassy mounds, showing where the rude forefathers of the village sleep".

In the plat of his new town Miller not only left the church in the center of the main street; he may have intended to create a symbolic focal point at the center of the village. Main Street (which Miller called King Street) was, and now is, straight and wide, and a traveler standing blocks away at either end of town would be able to see the church, and as he approached it he would discover that he must, in deference to it, change his course slightly. In Miller's day the Courthouse and Jail did not occupy the corner lots, and even today those buildings sit a considerable distance from the street, so that there would have been, and still is for that matter, ample room for traffic to move in a semicircle around a building standing in the center of the street.

During the year following the Virginia Assembly's action incorporating the town, Miller held a big land sale at which time many of the lots that he had carefully plotted on his land were purchased. Unfortunately Miller did not live long enough to enjoy all his dreams of municipal growth. He died in 1766, just four years after his big land sale, but this sale had held promise of an encouraging future; he had sold over forty lots on that occasion. After his death his son-in law, Abraham Brewbaker, became proprietor of his grant. Brewbaker was supported in this responsibility by a self-perpetuating board of trustees who had been appointed by the Virginia General Assembly in 1761 to serve as an official governing body for the new town.

(Incidentally, this form of local government continued until 1795, at which time the town was authorized to elect trustees annually. Woodstock was governed in this way until 1872, when the form of councilmanic government now in effect was adopted.)

The history of Jacob Miller's town cannot be determined with any accuracy. Unfortunately, the Town Trustees appointed in 1761 left no record of their deliberations. In fact, no record of Trustee deliberations can be found for the entire period of Trustee management. Moreover, there was no local newspaper prior to 1817.

Miller's plat of the town described in the 1761 Act of the Virginia Assembly is available. That established the first official boundary of the town, but it does not indicate where existing buildings were situated. Also available is the record of purchases in the 1762 land sale. This provides a better clue to the size of the town. Apparently the price of a lot with no building upon it was 20 shillings. Since some of the lots sold for much more it can be assumed that a building had already been erected there. Based upon these prices the size of the town in 1762 must have been a small village of not more than a dozen dwellings. Most, if not all, of these earliest houses were built of logs. Chimneys were constructed of bricks or stone, more often of the latter. Realistically speaking, Jacob Miller's town was an unpretentious pioneer village.

AS THE COUNTY SEAT

Two things happened in 1772, six years after Jacob Miller's death, that had significant impact upon the town: Woodstock became the county seat of Dunmore county (the name was changed in 1777 to Shenandoah County), and Peter Muhlenberg arrived in Woodstock to begin a pastoral ministry.

John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg was a Lutheran clergyman from Pennsylvania who came to Woodstock in 1772 to serve as pastor of Lutheran congregations in this area. Because Virginia was still a British colony, and the Anglican church was the only denomination officially recognized, Muhlenberg discovered that he could render a more effective leadership if he had Episcopal ordination, so he went to London and was ordained a priest in the Anglican church. Upon his return to Woodstock, he served both Lutherans and Episcopalians in this area until he entered military service in 1776.

Muhlenberg had an extensive parish. In addition to his congregation in Woodstock, he served congregations in Strasburg, Edinburg, Mt. Jackson, Fort Valley and even one in Page county. In Woodstock he conducted services in the Village church "in the center of town". Muhlenberg and his family lived in a house that stood on the corner where a bank is now located.

Muhlenberg came to Woodstock as a pastor; he left four years later as the commander of a military regiment. In those four short years he became the chief spokesman of local Revolutionary discontent, and the acknowledged leader of local patriotic efforts.

One of the earliest "declarations of independence" to appear in the colonies in those stirring pre-Revolutionary days was initiated at a meeting held in Woodstock on June 16, 1774, over which Muhlenberg presided, and the bold Resolutions that issued from that group were largely influenced by Muhlenberg.

Every school child has heard the story of that Sunday morning church service in Woodstock in January of 1776, when pastor Muhlenberg threw off his clerical vestments

and stood before the congregation in the uniform of a continental soldier, while his drummer boy mustered volunteers at the church door.

In Woodstock today there are four tangible memorials to this "fighting parson of the American Revolution." In 1878 the town fathers named a street after him. In more recent years they adopted as the official seal of the Town a representation of Pastor Muhlenberg standing in his pulpit dressed in a regimental uniform beneath his clerical gown. Other memorials are Muhlenberg Plaza on West Court Street and the bust of "the General" on Court Square.

Muhlenberg's influence had been greatly enhanced by the fact that Woodstock became the county seat the same year that he arrived in town. From that point on what happened in Woodstock affected a wider area than Jacob Miller's twelve hundred acres.

The naming of Woodstock as the county seat immediately necessitated two public buildings - a courthouse and a jail. The first courthouse was located in the one hundred block of what is now North Church Street. (Jacob Miller had named this street Duke William Street). This first courthouse was a temporary adaptation of a residence, known for many years afterwards as "the old Fadely building". It stood on Lot 172. It was razed in the 1880's to make way for a more modern residence.

By 1774 the county had erected a more permanent courthouse on the rear of what is now called "the courthouse yard". This building served as the courthouse until 1795 when the stone portion of the "old courthouse" was erected in front of the 1774 building. That first "permanent" courthouse is no longer standing.

The stone courthouse was enlarged in 1871 by the addition of what may now be called the middle section of the present building. It was designed as a courtroom, and served as the only courtroom for the county until the new courthouse was built. In 1886 the back section of the present building was added for a Clerk's Office. Although the county now has a new and more spacious courthouse, the old courthouse is still used for court business. It is the oldest courthouse in current use west of the Blue Ridge.

Various dates are given for the erection of a jail on "the Jail Lot," ranging from 1774 to 1793. The building that was eventually erected on this site, and that was enlarged through the years, was torn down in 1906 to make way for a more substantial and attractive building that continued to serve until the present jail was built in the early 1970's.

In 1774 Abraham Brewbaker deeded the lots on the south side of East Court Street between Main and Church streets to the vestry men of Beckford parish to be used for a church building and a graveyard. The Episcopalians did not erect a church building on their property until 1882, but prior to that a sizable graveyard had developed on the Main Street corner.

The origin of that graveyard must have dated back to pioneer days. It was no doubt an extension of the "many grassy mound" around the village church described by the visitor in 1848. It is obvious that this Episcopal graveyard was the oldest burial site within the corporate limits of the town. Even after the village church was torn down in the mid-19th century, and the graves immediately around it were either removed or covered over, the corner lot remained a burial site until the early 1880's when the Episcopalians sold that corner portion of their property to help finance the building of their church. By that time, judging from numerous references in the local newspaper to the neglected condition of that burial site, the corner graveyard had become a disgrace to the community.

These are word pictures of what the center of town looked like during the closing decades of the 18th century. Remnants of the past were the village church still standing in the middle of the street, the Muhlenberg house nearby and the graveyard. However, the handsome stone courthouse and the brick jail were visible reminders that Jacob Miller's little pioneer village was now the county seat.

Other changes in the appearance of the town as it grew in size and importance were not systematically documented. The principal source of information for these early years are isolated references in old copies of the local newspaper. Sometimes the editor rejoices over noted improvements, sometimes he laments neglected areas, and occasionally, but not often enough, he injects a choice scrap of local history into a news item.

An example of the latter is the local paper's report on the demolition of the Shockey Flats in 1935. This old building that once stood on the site now occupied by the Municipal Building was a remnant of the late 18th century. The paper reported that it "was certainly erected between 150 and 200 years ago by George Fravel, and was known then as Fravel's Stage Tavern. All stages going up and down the Valley stopped at this hostelry. Later it was Reamer's Tavern, and after that it was owned and operated by Charles Welsh for many years."

Another newspaper report on the demise of the old building noted that under the management of Jacob Reamer the tavern "was the stopping place for many historic figures such as President Andrew Jackson and President Millard A. Fillmore. During the "Bloody Days" of 1861-1865 the fiery Southern politician, Henry Clay, was reported to have been a guest at the tavern."

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries Woodstock provided a scheduled rest stop for stage coaches on the great wagon road that ran through the town. Fravel's Stage Tavern was probably the first, but others followed. In 1820 Mrs. Ann Turnbull ran an ad in the local newspaper announcing that she had taken possession of "that noted tavern stand known by the name of the Woodstock Coffee House and Hotel formerly occupied by Mr. Gray." In 1852 Frederick Sheffer bought property on Main Street that is designated in the deed as "the Buck Tavern property." This reference implies that a

Tavern had already been established on that site some years before. Another hotel, built in the early 1830's and known as the Gibbs Hotel, was located across the street from "the Buck Tavern property."

This brief survey of taverns in this small Valley town implies considerable commercial activity in Woodstock in these early stage coach days. While the town did not keep pace commercially with Winchester and Harrisonburg, it's merchants and artisans did manage to provide general necessities and services for itself and its rural neighbors.

According to Martin's Gazetteer of Virginia for the year 1835 Woodstock had one printing office, five mercantile stores, two taverns, three tanyards, four saddlers, two hatters, five boot and shoe factories, five house joiners and carpenters, three wheelwrights and chair makers, four tailors, two smith shops a tinnier, two saddletree makers, two saddletree palters, two bricklayers and masons, two plasterers, an earthenware factory, a stoneware factory, a watchmaker and a wagonmaker. The first brickyard in Woodstock was started by David D. Hoshour in 1835, apparently too late to be listed in Martin's Gazetteer.

The commercial importance of Woodstock was appreciably enhanced by the coming of the railroad. The first railroad in Shenandoah county south of Strasburg was the Orange, Alexandria and Manassas Gap railroad. By 1856 trains were running as far as Woodstock, and by 1859 the line was completed to Mt. Jackson. The war interrupted work, and Mt. Jackson remained the end of the line until about 1868.

A striking change in the appearance of the town in the 19th century was the removal of the Village Church from the middle of Main Street. The church was torn down about 1850, but no record has been found to indicate when it ceased to be used for religious purposes. However, by the late 18th and early 19th centuries various denominational groups had begun to worship in their own buildings.

The Lutherans and the Episcopalians may have been the last to discontinue services in the Village church, due to Peter Muhlenberg's prior association with them in that building. By 1803 the Lutherans had laid the cornerstone of a building, but this was not completed until 1822. This building stood on the present Lutheran property, but faced on church Street. The Episcopalians did not erect their own church until 1882.

If local church historians are correct, members of the German Reformed congregation (now the United Church of Christ) were worshipping in their own building in the early 1770's. This was a simple log building located on the present site of the "Old Reformed Cemetery" in the 300 block of South Church Street.

The first house of worship for the Methodist congregation was a log building erected about 1808 on the same location as the present Methodist Church. The Presbyterians had purchased the eastern portion of the Episcopal property on Court Street

and had erected their own house of worship there in 1833. That building was burned during the civil War, but rebuilt on its present location.

In addition to the Episcopal church already mentioned, the town acquired three more church buildings during the late 19th century: Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church in 1870, located on the corner of Church and Locust Streets; the Christian (Disciples of Christ) Church in 1880, located at that time on High Street just off Commerce Street; and the Roman Catholic Church in 1888, located on the corner of North Main and Foundry streets.

Cultural and civic activities in Woodstock during the 19th century kept pace with commercial and religious activities. Two significant events occurred in 1817; (1) the Woodstock Academy was chartered by the Virginia General Assembly, and (2) Williams and Bogan founded the Woodstock Herald, now known and published as the Shenandoah Valley-Herald.

The Woodstock Academy must not be confused with Massanutten Academy that was not established until 1899. The Woodstock Academy was located on what is now East Court Street (once called Market Street) on property now belonging to the Presbyterian Church. This was the first school in the community for young men, providing a formal education in the English language. It rendered a notable service for many years. In 1847, a similar school for young ladies, called the Woodstock Female Seminary, was established. In 1870 a new public school system was established by the state of Virginia, and local schools were incorporated into that system.

The Civil War left no serious visible scars on the town. No major battles were fought in the immediate vicinity, although skirmishes and large troop movements were not uncommon. Various homes were used from time to time as headquarters for staff officers on both sides of the conflict, and as occasional emergency hospitals. A few buildings were destroyed. The scars left by the war were mostly personal.

Those who had business with the Court, and shoppers from the outlying areas, enlivened day-to-day activities on the streets of this county seat, but during the closing decades of the 18th century, and well into the 19th, the town itself did not grow much in size.

The first census of this area was taken by Alexander Hite in 1783, but it recorded the population of the county as a whole and not by districts or townships. Two years later another census was taken, but this, too, did not include a statistical breakdown of population figures for the town. In 1820 the local newspaper took an unofficial census of the town and reported a population of 740. Another unofficial census taken thirty years later reported a town population of 900.

Environmental conditions in the town did not improve much either during this period. Even as late as 1878 an irate citizen wrote a letter to the editor of the local

newspaper complaining that the town fathers were "penny-wise and pound-foolish" in their continued neglect of needed improvements. He ventured the opinion that a stranger who saw the town in the daytime would not dare to venture out after dark. He reported that "Woodstock is spoken of as the most ragged, dirty and uninviting county seat in the Valley."

This critic must not have been very wrong, judging from repeated references in the local newspaper, and even in Minutes of the Town Council. For example, in a meeting of the Council held in January 1883 the committee on Health was reminded that something needed to be done about the offensive smells along the street caused by privies and hog pens. Apparently many privies and hog pens were so placed that offensive matter was discharged into open drainage ditches. At one meeting of the Council, the Committee on Health presented a bill for expenses incurred "in cleaning out ditches, liming gutters, and disinfecting foul and impure places."

In 1899 it became necessary to pass an ordinance forbidding the burning of wastepaper or other matter, or building a fire of any kind, on the streets after three o'clock in the afternoon. The Council also ordered the Town Sergeant "to see to it that no slops were emptied on the streets, but only in the rear of the buildings."

While pedestrian traffic on the streets of the town could be unpleasant, and even hazardous at times, in daylight hours, pedestrians were well-advised not to venture forth in the dark. That precarious condition had been frequently discussed, and finally, in January 1880, the Council authorized the purchase and installation of "24 lanterns" to be placed on poles throughout the town "where they shall be most needed". Once this was done, the Council employed a lamplighter to take care of these lamps. He was paid one and a half cents per night for every lamp he serviced. He was instructed "to light all the street lamps every night and keep them lighted from dark until 10:30 except when the moon is shining and providing sufficient light to enable people to walk the streets with comfort and ease."

Today the environmental conditions described here seem primitive indeed, and they were. But Woodstock was not the only town in the 19th century that suffered such "growing pains". Living conditions in Woodstock, as in all advancing communities, were gradually changing as the 19th century drew to a close. Then, with the installation of the town water system in 1901, and the introduction of town electricity in 1904, Woodstock entered the twentieth century.

TODAY

Since the turn of the century, Woodstock has grown and rebuilt slowly while protecting the historical and attractive character of the town. The population grew slowly, with older people moving to the Town for its scenic beauty and tranquillity. Industrial development occurred and with it good paying jobs. Commercial establishments moved in providing Woodstock with a strong retail base. The town began to emerge as one of the

largest population centers of the County and also became the service, retail, and government center.

Today the population approaches 3,500 with approximately 1,500 homes, many sales and manufacturing establishments, four schools and a hospital. The town is surrounded by the rich fertile land of the Shenandoah Valley, beautiful mountains and the Shenandoah River. Woodstock maintains its role as the center of commerce, government, and health care in Shenandoah County.

Plat of Woodstock Virginia

(57) John Sevier
Purchased this
lot for £ 20 from
Abraham Brubaker

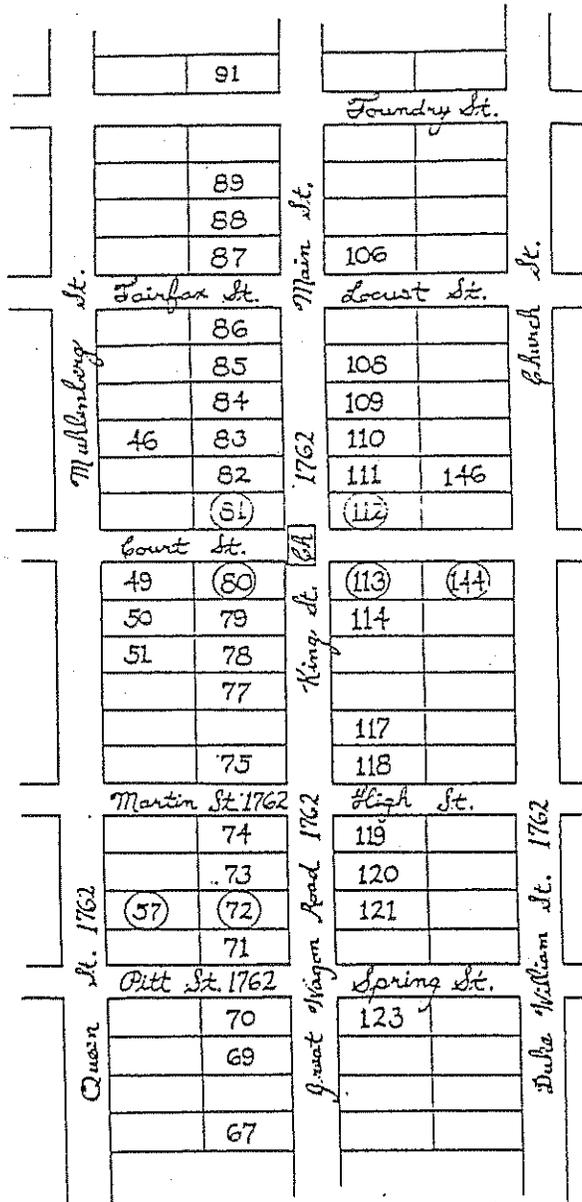
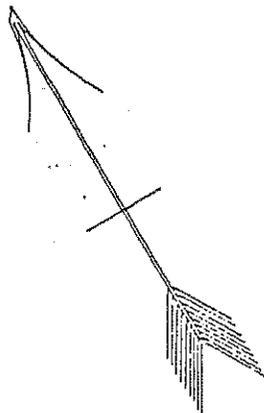
(72) Home of Jacob
Miller 1762-1776

(31) (82) A. Brubaker
and Barbara his wife
April 20, 1774 for 5
shillings, deed 2
lots for county court
house and jail

(113) (144) A. Brubaker
and wife April 20, 1774
for 5 shillings, deed
these 2 lots for
Church and Graveyard

(112) Peter Muhlenberg
and wife Hannah, Nov 8,
1783 sell this lot
to Mathias Zehring
for £ 135

Each lot is 6 rods
wide 135 rods deep
contains $\frac{1}{2}$ acre



April 26, 1762? Jacob Miller
and Barbara his wife
sold 44 lots and allot
in Newtown of Woodstock
Frederick County, Va.

Below are named some
of purchasers and number
of lot and price paid

- 44 John Bonawit 20s
- 49 Adam Yeager 20s
- 50 Peter Humble 20s
- 51 Peter Humble 20s
- 67 Jesse Broughton £20
- 69 Charles Rody 20s
- 70 Friedrich Ronger 20s
- 71 Peter Ronger £20
- 73 Joseph Pilch 20s
- 74 Joseph Pilch £6
- 75 Jacob Byers 20s
- 77 Joseph Pugh 20s
- 78 Thomas Langdon 20
- 79 Cornelius Ruddell £20
- 82 John Funk 20
- 83 Conrad Brinker £1
- 84 Moses Striker 20
- 85 Peter Hoffman 20
- 86 John Jones £4.5
- 87 George Apply 20
- 88 William Menger 20
- 89 Burr Harrison 20
- 91 Aaron Gassenberg £2
- 106 John Jacob Neath £6
- 108 John Tackitt 20
- 109 Barned Reedy 20
- 110 Jacob Pershinger 20
- 111 John Hartow £14
- 114 John Bonawit 20
- 117 John Jones £6
- 118 Thomas Langdon £6
- 119 George Bolnd 20
- 120 Adam Yeager 20
- 121 George Whit 20
- 123 William Menger 20
- 146 John Harrow £6