

MISS MARY ELIZABETH DIXON OF CAISTOR (1836-1875)  
HER VISIT TO HESLEY HALL 11th to 22nd JUNE 1872

INTRODUCTION

From 1978 to 1988, David Saunders was Vicar of Caistor in Lincolnshire. During those years he became aware of historical personages who had featured in the life of the parish. The Dixon family had been a prominent family, and from time to time he consulted the Lincolnshire Archives to find out more. When he retired he had more time to pursue these and other historical interests. Having discovered Mary Elizabeth Dixon's diary in the Archives, a diary which illuminates the life of Caistor and of her family in the middle of the 19th century, he set about transcribing it. This was a task which has involved many visits to the Archives, but which has assisted him in his other research projects. Knowing that Hesley Hall is near to Tickhill, David sent us a copy of Mary Elizabeth's the diary record of her twelve day visit there. I have augmented the brief daily entries with notes giving further information about the people she mentions, the places she visits, the books she reads, and other activities in those days. There are words in the diary which David could not decipher; these are shown in square brackets. David Saunders is my brother-in-law.

*Donald Thorpe, Tickhill, March 2016*

FATHER AND ELDEST SON

Joseph Whitaker  
(1802-1884)



Bought Hesley Hall 1860s



Lived at Hesley Hall 1861 to 1922

Benjamin Ingham Whitaker

(1838-1922)

## THE DIARY ENTRIES

11 June 1872

Pa (*note 1*) and I came to Hesley Hall. Mr Whitaker (*note 2*) met us at Doncaster. Carrie (*note 3*) so pleasant – dined late.

12 June 1872

Pa with Mr Whitaker farming [?] down to lunch. Walked as far as the conservatory. Mr Whitaker and I played bezique (*note 4*).

13 June 1872 (*note 5*)

Pa left me – home by Lincoln. Wrote letter to the Rev Mr Maclean about Matrons' Meeting and to Dr Mackintosh, the Rev Mr Andrews and Mr Winter – sat in garden. Mr and Mrs [?] to dinner.

14 June 1872

Went to see the ferns – had lesson on them. Sat in Summer House. Read "Ivanhoe" (*note 6*).

15 June 1872

Had drive after lunch to Tickhill to call on the Berrys (*note 7*) and the Levets [?] – very hot. Dinner, music and bezique.

16 June 1872

We drove to Harworth (*note 8*) to church. Fine hot day – sat out in garden and read "Legends and Lyrics" (*note 9*).

17 June 1872

Headache – wrote to Anne Dixon (*note 10*) and Mrs Martin. Carrie and I sat in garden. Mr Whitaker and I played bezique.

18 June 1872

Wrote letters to Pa and Mrs Marris (*note 11*). We drove to Bawtry for Georgette and Edith Christian (*note 12*). Violent thunderstorm. Took shelter at the Hodgkinsons.

19 June 1872

Very hot – sat in Carrie's pretty room altering black tunic. We walked in the garden – came on to rain, bezique.

20 June 1872

Wrote to Mrs RR Dixon, brother John William and Mrs Borman. Went for a drive to Cantley with Carrie and Georgette. Edw Hudson (*note 13*) came. We played a rubber.

21 June 1872

Round the kitchen garden with Mr Whitaker. Packed. Wrote to Mrs Marris. Sat in garden. The Hodgkinsons came. Upstairs 7 times. We played whist.

22 June 1872

Finished packing. Carrie and Mr Whitaker took me to Doncaster – train to Retford and Lincoln

#### NOTES

**(1) Pa.** Mary Elizabeth Dixon's father was James Green Dixon (1790-1879), married to the daughter of a Brigg businessman. He was a prominent citizen in Caistor, a farmer and a seed and coal merchant. He was an active churchman and ran the Sunday School. He had four children: John William (who became bankrupt in 1890), Marmaduke (who went to live in New Zealand), James Green junior, and, the youngest and the only daughter, Mary Elizabeth. Mary Elizabeth Dixon was born in 1836 and died, aged 39, in 1875. She went to a private school in Louth.

**(2) Mr Whitaker.** Benjamin Ingham Whitaker (1838-1922) was the first-born child of his parents, Joseph Whitaker (1802-1884) and Eliza Sophia Sanderson (1816-1885). There were 12 children altogether of his parents' marriage: 9 boys and 3 girls; one boy died soon after birth. All the others married, two died in the last years of the 19th century, and the last of the remaining 9 children (who was also the last to be born, in 1860) died in 1945. All 12 were born at Palermo in Sicily, a fact which needs a brief explanation.

William Ingham (1739-1806) was an Ossett cloth manufacturer (and Joseph Whitaker's grandfather). The youngest of his six children was Benjamin Ingham (1784-1861). In 1806, this Benjamin moved to Sicily as the representative of the then Leeds based firm of Ingham Bros and Co., merchants and cloth manufacturers. He soon branched out in his own right, and became one of the richest and most powerful men in Sicily. He created a huge business dynasty which included massive investments in the USA, and also focussed on the production of Marsala wine which was exported to the UK and to other countries. Having no children, his business empire and substantial fortune passed to his nephews. One of the nephews, Joseph Whitaker, had already been handed the business in 1851.

It was in the 1860s that Joseph Whitaker acquired Hesley Hall, and on the north wall of the chapel there is a memorial indicating that Benjamin Ingham Whitaker lived there from 1861 to 1922, and that his 7 surviving brothers (all named) were brought up there. Benjamin Ingham Whitaker married the 19-year-old Caroline Lucy Hudson in 1871, and added the chapel to Hesley Hall in 1891 in memory of his mother: there is a Latin inscription at the west-end of the chapel:

AD DEI GLORIAM ET IN PIAM MEMORIAM ELIZA SOPHIE WHITAKER OBIT MDCCCLXXXV

On 25 July 1950, Hesley Hall was opened by Queen Elizabeth as a "School for Crippled Children".

**(3) Carrie.** Caroline Lucy Hudson (1851-1941) married Benjamin Ingham Whitaker in Scarborough in 1871. They had no children. One of her sisters-in-law wrote of her: "...she had money and was clever, with a great sense of humour, very pretty ...). Caroline (Carrie) and her husband Benjamin (Benny) were distantly related, they had the same 18th Century great-great-grandparents, Anthony Fearnley and Hannah Thomas. Caroline's parents, Lucy Fearnley (1828-1906) and Frederick William Hudson (1819-1876) were from Hull, he was a business associate of Mary Elizabeth Dixon's father, and it seems likely that he retired to Scarborough. They had two children, Caroline and Edward (see Note 13).

**(4) Bezique.** A 19th-century card-game which seems to have come from France, and was reputedly the favourite card-game of Winston Churchill. It became fashionable in Britain in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century.

(5) Notes on the recipients of the letters written by Mary Elizabeth: **Mr Maclean** was the vicar of Caistor (the Matrons' Meeting was an Anglican Sunday School support group set up by Mary Elizabeth's grandfather in 1808); **Dr Mackintosh** was the doctor in Caistor; and **Mr Winter** was the head-master of the Caistor National School.

(6) "**Ivanhoe**". Sir Walter Scott's novel written in 1819, and associated with areas of England nearer to Hesley than to Caistor.

(7) **The Berries and the Levets**. In May of 1872, Charles Bury (1803-1895) became Vicar of Tickhill for the second time. "Bury" is often pronounced "berry". As there are no "Berries" listed in Tickhill at this time (nor "Levets" either) it is assumed that the diary entry has the wrong spelling, and that this visit to Tickhill was to the Vicarage. This assumption is supported by the fact that Charles Bury and his wife Isabella had a daughter, Margaret Charlotte who was born in 1836, the same year as Mary Elizabeth Dixon. This daughter was now married and living in another part of the country, but it could be that, being the same age, the two girls had become friends by being at the same school in Louth. However, it would not be necessary for there to be any connection of this kind to make a visit to Tickhill or to the vicar.

(8) **Harworth** is the village to the south of Hesley Hall, and Hesley is in that parish. The diocese of Southwell had not yet been created, and Nottinghamshire was part of the diocese of Lincoln. A reference to this may be made in the chapel at Hesley Hall with the inclusion in the artwork, in the Baptistry, of St Hugh of Lincoln and his swan. Southwell diocese was created in 1884, and the chapel was added to Hesley Hall in 1891.

(9) "**Legends and Lyrics**". This title was almost certainly the first of two collections of poetry by Adelaide Anne Proctor (1825-1864). As well as being a poet, she was also a philanthropist who worked on behalf of unemployed women and the homeless. Her poetry was very popular in the mid nineteenth century, and, apparently she was Queen Victoria's favourite poet. Coventry Patmore stated that the demand for her work was greater than that of any other poet except Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

(10) **Anne Dixon**. The first cousin of Mary Elizabeth. Their fathers were brothers. Anne, whose father was John Thomas Dixon, was heir to the Holton le Moors estate.

(11) **Mrs Marris**. The school-teacher at Louth when Mary Elizabeth was there, and with whom Mary Elizabeth had a continuing friendship, though she always referred to her as "Mrs Marris."

(12) **Georgette and Edith Christian**. Georgette (aged 7) and Edith (aged 5) were the daughters of Caroline Christian (née Whitaker) and her late husband Ewan. Ewan Christian died in 1870 aged 37. Caroline, the sixth child of her Whitaker parents, was born 7 years after her brother Benjamin. In January 1873, Caroline married again to another Mr Christian, who was a cousin of Ewan, both of them being in partnership as architects.

(13) **Edw Hudson**. Edward Harrison Hudson (1852-1891) was the brother-in-law of Benjamin Whitaker; being a year younger than Caroline his sister. There is a stained glass window in the Hesley Hall chapel in his memory, in the south wall of the chancel. The two lights of the window feature St Augustine and St Martin. Edward Hudson married in 1880, and, in the next ten years before his death at the age of 39, he and his wife, Amelia Florence Richardson, had six children (three girls and three boys). One of the girls, Rosamond Margaret, married Gordon Howard, the heir to the Earl of Effingham, but they divorced before he inherited the title. She is the ancestor, however, of all the succeeding earls.