

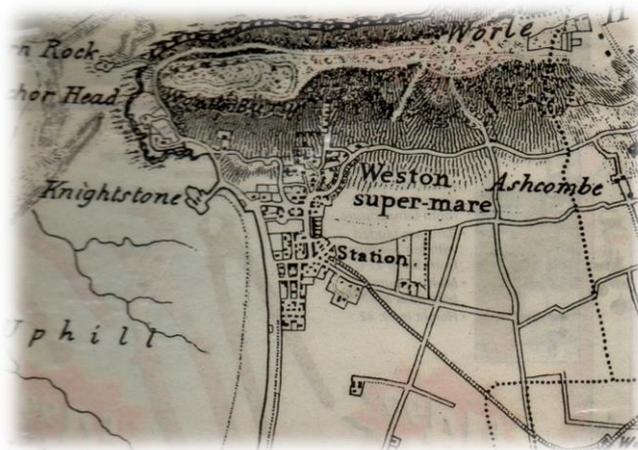
Discovering the Parsley Family, by David Hart

1: Whitecross Lodge

Back in the early 60's, I was introduced to this rather sad looking, back-street house in Weston.

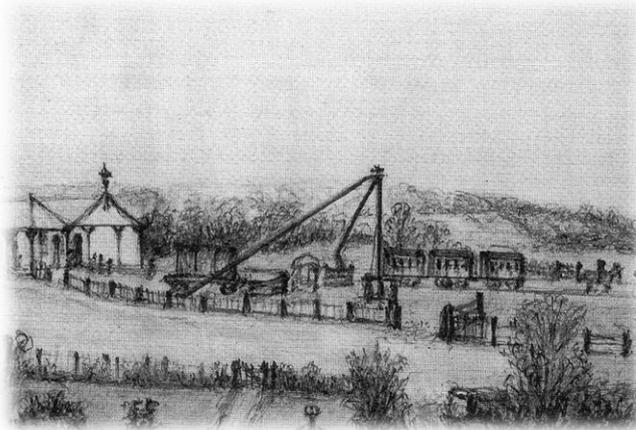


Being occupied by the activities within its walls, the house itself went unnoticed until a Weston Civic Society local history trail named it as Whitecross Lodge, the home of Richard Parsley, a local notable. His land on Weston moor was called the Whitecross Estate and he built Whitecross Lodge south of Watersill Road and east of the old Wallclose enclosure. The estate comprised the entire fields from Belvidere (a private mansion on the sea front) up to the Sanitorium, and from the wall by Uphill road to the extreme boundary of Locking Road, near the railway.



To the north, Richard Parsley had an uninterrupted view of Worle Hill apart from the track of the Bristol and Exeter Railway going to the terminus at Alexandra Parade. The railway opened in 1841 with horse-drawn carriages being used to bring passengers from the main-line station way out on

the moor. To the south and east of the house were nothing but flat moorland subject to seasonal flooding and the sand dunes stretching as far as Uphill.



I had to know more, and that process is still going on.

The Wesleyan Methodist Society from Watersill Road (Regent Street), bought the house in 1897. They had been in the Regent Street chapel for half a century but for some years it was felt that it was inadequate. On 30th April 1897 they heard that Whitecross Lodge was in the market. The following day, Saturday May 1st, the Sites Committee discussed it and decided to bring the matter before the Trustees on the following Monday. Negotiations were commenced on Tuesday, a deposit paid on Wednesday, and the Agreement was signed on Thursday, and Friday found the Trustees rejoicing that the house (consisting of four ground floor rooms with an extension housing the kitchen on the back), and the land was theirs.



Then they built the new church. Victoria Methodist Church opened and was dedicated on 13 September 1900, and bits of the house can be seen on many of the old church pictures. The reason why you can't see this church today is because of a fire in 1934, but the house was untouched. The house is shown on the 1940 map of Weston but still with the old church plan.



The church was rebuilt in 1936.

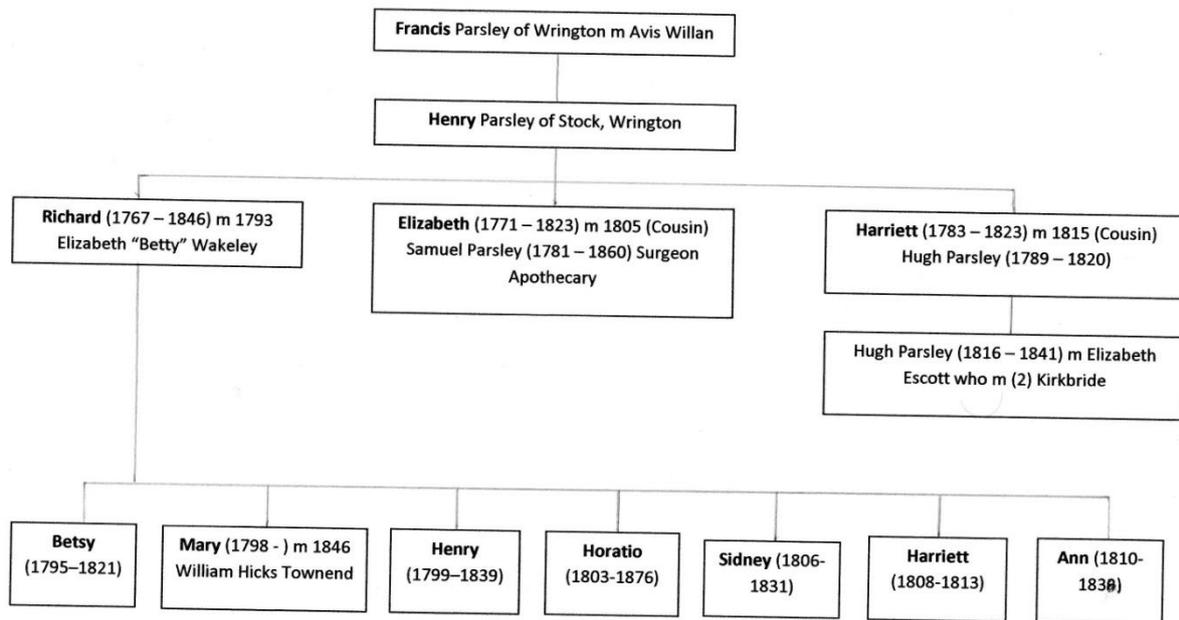


The house is one of the oldest houses in Weston, built by Richard Parsley somewhere between 1810 and 1840, and was the house where he lived with his wife Betsy and seven children.

He is said to be the most colourful figure among the early builders of Weston and a former sheep farmer and landowner. They say that in the 1840's he was a rather stout old gentleman, fresh in complexion, dressed in light kerseymere breeches and gaiters, a lapel coat, and a broad-brimmed hat - who was kind and considerate to all; especially his poorer neighbours. Ernest Baker, who created the first history of Weston from his interviews with elderly residents around 1880, says of Richard Parsley: "However some people made him out to be a typical tough and dour Yorkshire man, coming to Weston with the sole intention of turning green fields into a brick jungle, a man with no local connections except those formed through his business dealings and therefore a foreigner to whom Weston owes its advancement, the locals being too slow to see the opportunity." This was not correct. He was actually very much a local man from a local family, coming to Weston from the Parish of Kewstoke. His only connection with Yorkshire was that he grew teasels for the Yorkshire woollen industry!

So where did Richard come from?

2: Richard Parsley's Family



Brian Austin's research shows that he is probably descended from Francis Parsley of Wrington (1667-1729; Great Grandfather) who married Avis Willan, daughter of the Rector of Weston.

Richard was born in 1767 to Henry Parsley of Stock, Wrington, grandson of Francis Parsley. Henry was the eldest son and heir of a comfortable and fairly numerous local family. Richard also had two sisters Elizabeth (b 1781) and Harriett (b 1783). More about Elizabeth later.

Richard must have come to Kewstoke before 1792 as he was well known by this time in the Kewstoke Vestry when he was but 25 years old, being Overseer for 1792, 1795 and 1797 and also Churchwarden for three years from 1796 to 1798. He was probably managing farms in the area belonging to the Pigotts, good friends of his family. In 1793, Richard married Betsy Wakeley at the Parish Church of St John the Baptist in Weston. The births of three of his 7 children are registered in Kewstoke; Betsy 1795, Mary 1798 and Henry Wakeley Parsley in 1799. Richard's father-in-law was Daniel Wakeley who amongst many holdings was the tenant of Ashcombe farm from 1772. Daniel had married Hester Sheppard, the daughter of a very influential family whose farms and other holdings spread throughout Weston, Kewstoke, Worle and Banwell for over a century. (Hester's sister Nancy married Samuel Day, a gentleman of Kewstoke, so Richard had connections to some of the most influential people in the area.)

In about 1800, Richard moved from Kewstoke to Weston thanks to land deals with his in-laws. He lived in a little farm house situated at the north end of what is now Wadham Street. He took over

under Brunel, William Hicks Townsend. The wedding took place in St John's, Weston, in October 1846.

Richard Parsley died at Whitecross Lodge on 27 November 1846, in his 81st year. Betsy and Horatio lived on in Whitecross Lodge. Henry Davies and Joseph Whereat bought the Whitecross Estate.

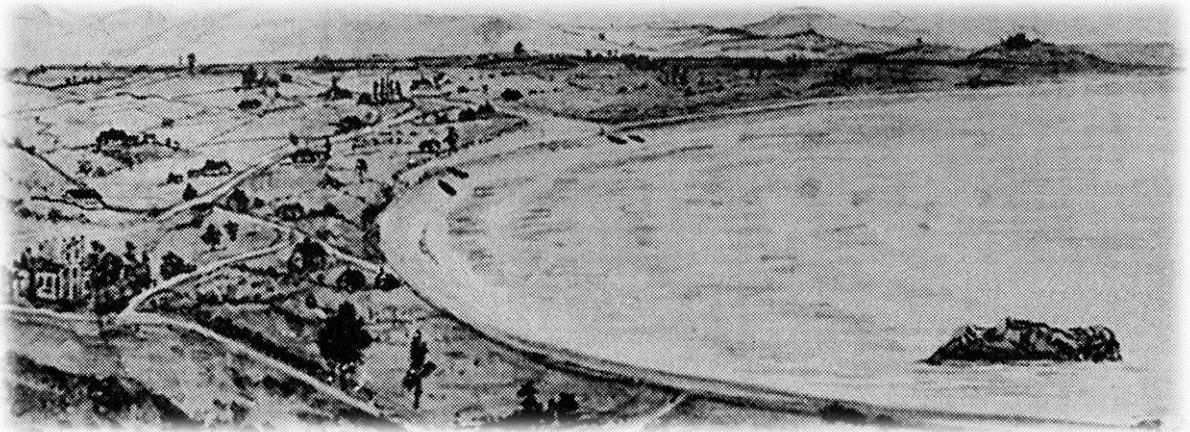
Betsy Parsley died in 1857, after which Horatio lived on in Whitecross Lodge as an apparently reclusive philanthropist, giving his occupation as that of grazier.

Horatio Parsley died in 1876. He was the last person to be buried in St John's church yard.

So what inspired Richard to want to develop Weston?

3: Weston in 1800

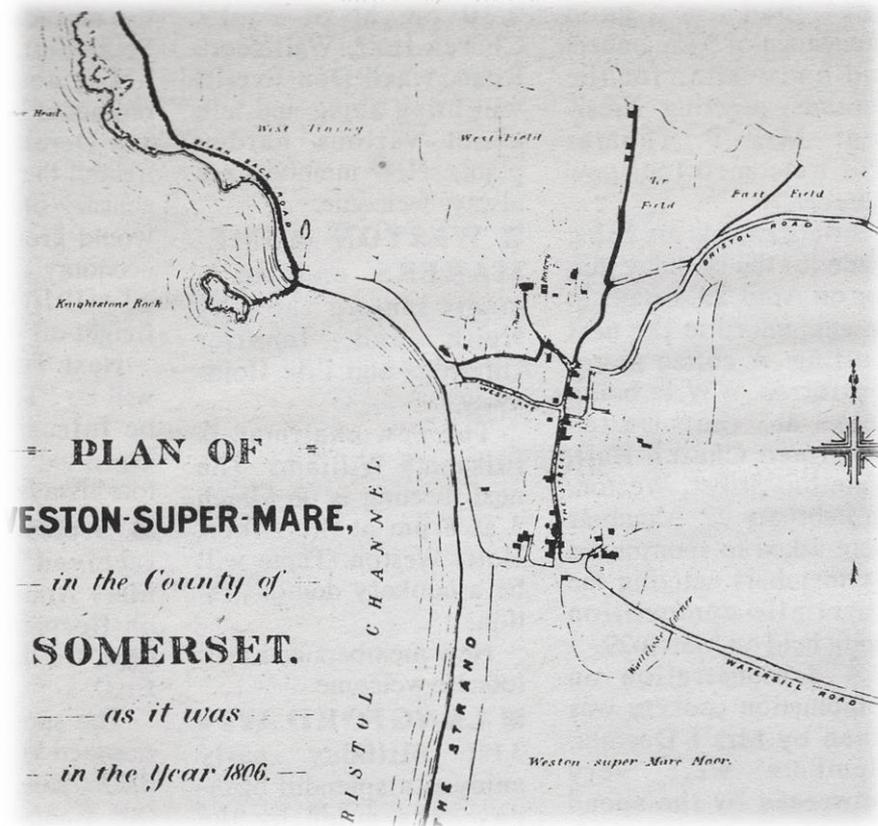
For centuries Weston people lived by farming and fishing around Anker's Head, Knight's Stone and Bearnback. Some earned extra cash by toiling in Worle's calamine pits, supplying zinc ore to the brass industry, while at Uphill others worked a small port. Weston consisted chiefly of huts hastily thrown up here and there, under the shelter of neighbouring sand banks, and tenanted by simple fishermen. The journey from Weston to Uphill entailed wandering along the beach or, in summer when the moor was dry, taking a track known as The Drove, which linked Uphill to Ashcombe Farm.



In 1800, Weston was one of the most attractive spots along a stretch of generally flat coastline, with its wide shallow beach and curving bay, the headland of Brean Down and the islands of Steep Holm and Flat Holm in the middle distance, and Exmoor and the Welsh coast visible far off. Once discovered, it seems to have been enough to draw visitors on a difficult and uncomfortable journey on unimproved tracks to a small village with virtually no civilised amenities. Village Weston did not have much to offer. While its primitive state charmed some visitors, others complained about the cart rutted and stone-riddled tracks that served as roads and of how when the wind blew they became enveloped in a sandstorm. There were no shops. All goods, and even beer, had to come from Worle.

The farms and thatched cottages of Weston straddled a narrow dirt track known as The Street, from the Lord of the Manor's summer house in the Grove to Watersill Road. Here the

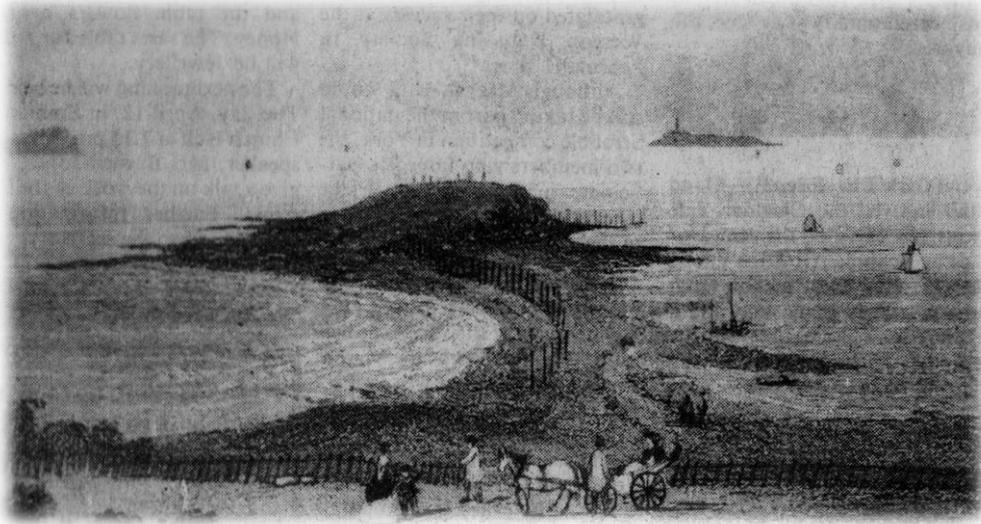
village ended at the Green, where locals met to gossip and cows drank from a pond opposite a farmhouse. A small lane branched into the meadow and orchards. Many of the poorest fisherfolk lived in shacks made from shipwrecks on the sand dunes, which ran from Knightstone to Uphill, there being no sea wall, lawns or road. A small stream trickled down the hillside and along The Street, whilst another wound its way slowly from Ashcombe along the line of today's Boulevard and into the sea somewhere opposite the Thatched Cottage.



In 1822, Weston's first guide book describes Weston like this:

“Weston-super-Mare does not present a very inviting appearance to the stranger. The houses scattered mostly without arrangement, and roofed with red tile, give a character of meanness to the village: and if a stranger first enters it on a stormy day and at low water, he may perhaps feel inclined to turn his horse's head towards home again: However a walk to Claremont Lodge and over the hill, would even then convince him that Weston has at all time attractions: and his surprise at the metamorphosis will be great if he patiently awaits the flowing tide. On a fine summer evening nothing can be more beautiful than the scene which it presents; numerous groups walking on its extensive sands, a variety of carriages of all descriptions, horses, ponies, donkeys, wheel chairs, etc, fishermen shrimping, and the villagers enjoying high tide after the labours of the day.”

It is but a tawny sea that comes swiftly in across the level sands; and they are dreary mud-flats that the ebbing tide leaves bare. But the air that blows in from the Atlantic gathers up from these broad banks a pleasant odour of the sea; and no sunsets are more beautiful than those which are reflected in their smooth monotonous expanse.



There was healthy fresh air and unspoilt views, compared with the unhealthy, smelly towns and cities.

4: What did Richard Parsley do in Weston?

In 1801, he moved to Weston to become the major tenant farmer of the manor and resident steward of the Pigott Lands. His actions show that he was an energetic and resourceful man, the founder of resort Weston. He formed a partnership with Mr William Cox senior of Brockley, a gentleman and friend of the Pigotts. The Cox family were tanners whereas Parsley was a sheep farmer. Prompted by his arrival and ideas, the Pigotts (Mr John Pigott, the Rev Wadham Pigott and their sister Ann Provis) began to revise the distribution of their land holdings and during 1807 sold many of the smaller holdings to Cox and Parsley.

He wasn't an honest, gentleman farmer. At this time Parsley was also associated with Patty Parsons, "the Weston Witch", in what appears to be a smuggling arrangement. In the late C18 and early C19, smuggling rum, silk, gold and other coinage was a way of earning extra income in the area, and the locals played a game of cat and mouse with the Excise Men. The Dolphin pub in Uphill was a popular haunt of smugglers, and the Half-Way Inn, on the site of the Royal Hospital, often drew its curtains to signify that it was safe for smugglers to enter Uphill Bay. Old Patty Parsons of Kewstoke was involved and told the locals to stay indoors on nights when things were going on. Parsley was also involved, as was the Rector. At this time, Parsley held almost all the coastal fields from Slimeridge to Kewstoke. When Parsley, as steward to the Pigott family, was asked to appoint people to watch the coast for smuggling, he appointed a one eyed man, a cripple and an 80 year old!

Those were the days when smugglers watched and waited for the red glow of the signal-fires by Uphill Church, or on Worle Hill, or on St Thomas's headland, that should warn them which landing-place to run for, and many a keg of brandy that had never paid the king's dues was hidden under a pathway that crossed the sand-hills where Regent Street now stands. Once, it is said, a French lugger ran into the bay at high water, and began to put her cargo of spirit-kegs over the side, buoying them to wait for boats from the shore. But the tide went down before the work was finished. When morning broke the sea was half a mile away. The hapless craft was high and dry, with her precious casks strewn round her on the mud.

Some of the smaller holdings that were sold to Cox and Parsley were in the sand dunes. It is said that some of the inhabitants, apparently fishermen who had been squatting in various dilapidated cottages and huts, were evicted, even though some had lived there for many years in amicable relationship to the manor estate. The sale of the ancient and decayed cottages or fishermen's huts with their small parcels of land – formerly designated "Auster Tenements" – carried with them certain exclusive rights of common land. Cox and Parsley were mainly concerned with acquiring these common rights for, although they both continued to farm profitably, they had already decided that Weston might be developed as a resort. Subject to a perpetual rent charge, they bought the Auster Tenements from the Smyth-Pigott family. They then applied for an act of Parliament to enclose all the waste land in the parish. Their objective was the creation of a new pattern of land ownership of the 993 acres of common land in the parish.

Parliamentary enclosure was becoming common among north Somerset parishes by the end of the 18th century, the motive generally being a desire for greater agricultural efficiency on the part of leading landowners. It ended the commoner's rights over open land.

Together with Cox, Parsley obtained an Act of Enclosure, supported by the Pigotts and two thirds of the landowners, in 1810. Some plots on the sea front were sold off to pay for the process which included new roads, hedges, ditches, walls and the stabilising of the dunes. They obtained the West Tying on the hillside and a large tract of land south of the village. Parsley's land on the moor became his Whitecross Estate.

SOMERSETSHIRE.

Weston-super-Mare Inclosure.

Notice is hereby given,

That the COMMISSIONERS appointed for carrying into Effect the Act of Parliament for this Inclosure, will proceed to

Sell (in Fee) by Auction,

At the House of Joseph Leman, known by the Sign of the NEW INN, Situate in the Parish of WORLE, in the County of Somerset,

On Monday, the 8th Day of July, 1811,

Between the Hours of FOUR and SIX in the Afternoon,

THE UNDER-MENTIONED

LANDS,

Subject to such Conditions as shall be then produced.

Lot 1.—A Piece of LAND, Part of Weston-super-Mare Moor, containing by Admeasurement one Acre and an Half, (near the House of the Rev. Mr. Lewis,) bounded Northward by an intended Road, Southward by Lot 3, Eastward by Lot 2, and Westward by the Sea Beach.

Lot 2.—A Piece of LAND, Part of the said Moor, containing by Admeasurement One Acre and an Half, bounded Northward by the said intended Road, Southward by Lot 3, Eastward by Part of the said Moor, and Westward by Lot 1.

Lot 3.—A Piece of LAND, Part of the said Moor, containing by Admeasurement Two Acres, Three Rods, and Ten Perches, bounded Northward by Lots 1 and 2, Southward by Lot 4, Eastward by the said Moor, and Westward by the Sea Beach.

Lot 4.—A Piece of LAND, Part of the said Moor, containing by Admeasurement Five Acres, bounded Northward by Lot 3, Southward and Eastward by the said Moor, and Westward by the Sea Beach.

These Lands are put in small Lots, and selected for Sale for the Accommodation of Persons inclined to build Houses near the Sea and the Village of Weston-super-Mare.

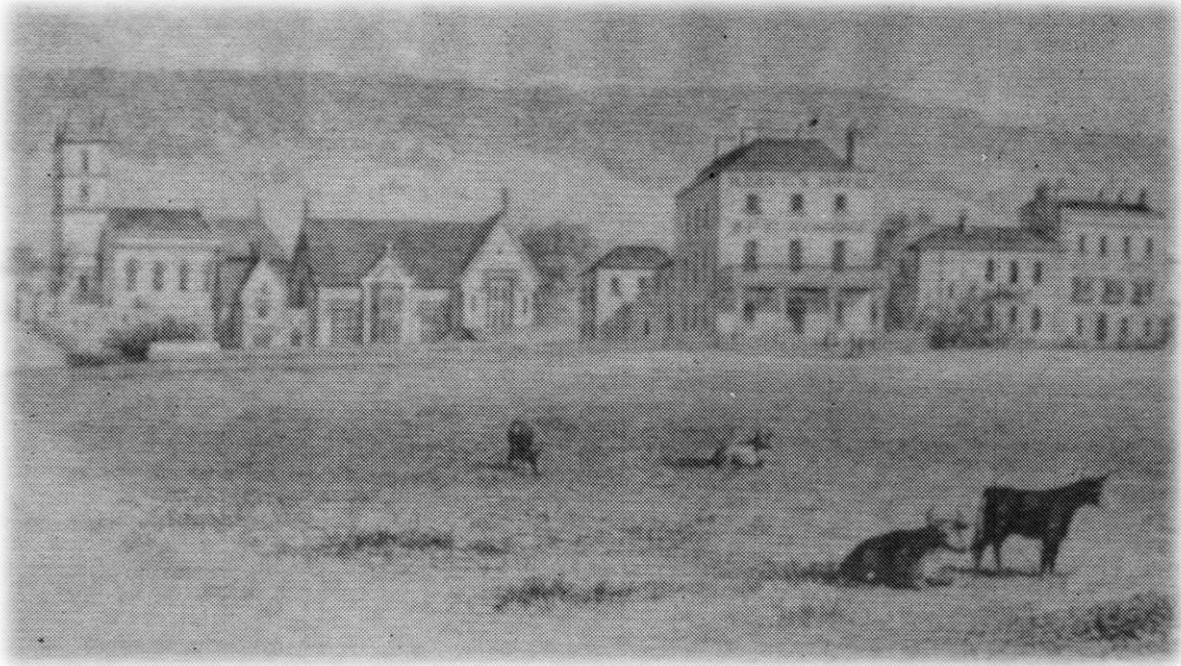
For viewing the Premises, apply to Mr. RICHARD PARSLEY, of Weston-super-Mare, and for further Particulars and Conditions of Sale, to Mr. JAMES STAPLES, Land-Surveyor, at his Office, No. 7, Queen-square, Bristol, or to Messrs. SAMUEL and JOHN BAKER, Solicitors, Blagdon, near Bristol.

RICHARD BISHOP, Auctioneer.

By Order of the said Commissioners,
S. BAKER, Clerk.

BROWN, Printer, Mirror Office, Small-Street, Bristol.

When they obtained their Enclosure Act, Weston changed swiftly. They had the sand banks levelled and the whole appearance of the place soon changed. With partners Cox, Capell and Fry, he built Weston's first inn, then known as the Hotel and later Reeve's on the site of an old burnt-out farmhouse.

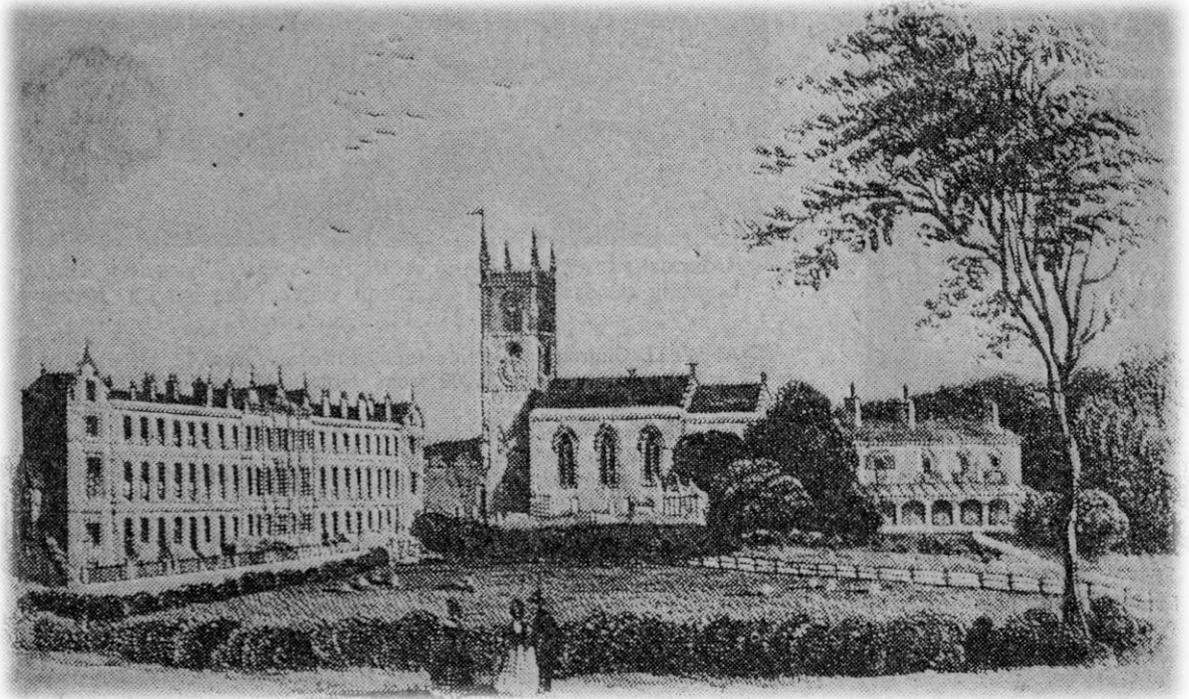


It was a bit of a gamble, and had to close from 1811 to 1814 due to lack of custom. Slowly, Weston began to acquire a reputation among the doctors of Bristol and Bath, and the wealthy public, as a health resort within easy reach of their homes. Cox and Parsley helped to finance the first passenger coach service to Bristol via Worle and Banwell.

In 1824, Parsley was involved in the rebuilding of the Parish Church .



Weston's small medieval parish church, set on the hillside above the village, was razed to the ground in 1824 making way for a new St John's to Richard Parsley's design.



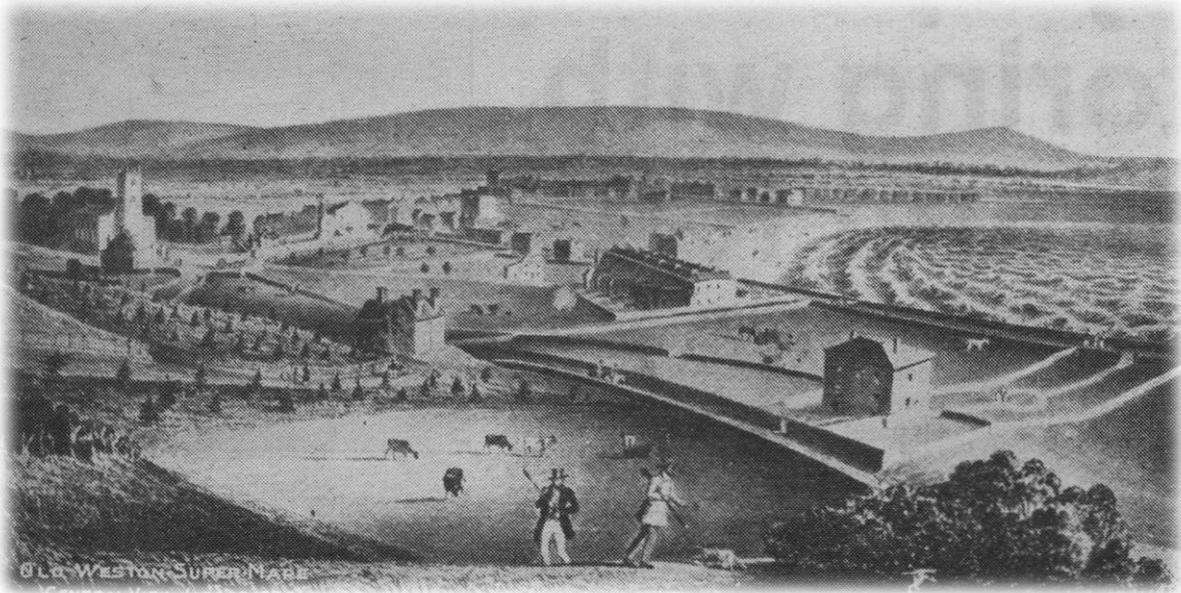
Some locals found it rather difficult to forgive him for pulling it down and erecting a building which a critic described as "one of the most raw, wretched discreditable specimens of Christian architecture I ever beheld; a common hodman could have planned a better one". "Nothing but pulling down Mr Parsley's work will ever make it better than a great, ungainly, awkward, preaching house." Parsley was, after all, only the contractor. He was acting on the instructions of the Rector, the Rev Wadham Pigott, who was also Lord of the manor and who gave £1,000 towards rebuilding the church. The old village church had been allowed to fall into a very decayed state.

Cox and Parsley instigated Weston's first promenade, from Knightstone to Leeve's cottage, in 1826. It consisted of a gravel path fronted by a low wall.



In 1830, Parsley was in the partnership that built the Railway Hotel, the first Market House, (the market had originally been out of doors) and the local lock-up. He made a fortune out of local development and it is understandable that he did not welcome the Parliamentary Reform Act that was passed in 1832 which gave many more people the right to vote. He built a satirical memorial to it on the Whitecross Estate, a massive tower which was crowned with a bishop's mitre. The satire was in the base of the tower, which was a pigsty. It is from this tower that his estate got its name. The tower was pulled down in 1888.

Cox died in 1831 but the Cox-Parsley firm continued until 1834.



Up to 1833 there were only four houses between Reeve's Hotel and Anchor Head. In that year, however, as owner of the land from the mill to the shore, Parsley divided it into building lots and soon Weston began to put on a new and improved appearance.

At Weston's town hall, local government was vested in 18 elected Commissioners under the Improvement Act of 1842, and of course Parsley was among the local nobles elected. At first the Commissioners met in borrowed premises in the Plough Hotel in High Street, and then in offices in the gas works in Oxford Street.

Richard Parsley died on November 19th, 1846, according to his memorial.

"Death of R Parsley Esq. The inhabitants of this watering place have to lament the loss of one of their oldest fellow townsmen, who throughout a long life has been a principle mover in promoting the welfare, as indeed he had been in the formation of Weston-super-Mare. We allure to the death of Richard Parsley, Esq., which occurred on Thursday 18th ult, at his residence, Whitecross House at the advanced age of 81 years. We are old enough to remember when, about 40 years since, Weston-super-Mare was a small village, with but few houses, and at which place parties from the neighbouring villages occasionally spent the day, taking with them their provisions which were deposited at a cottager's, the only house then affording any accommodation. The late Rev Mr Leeves, the Rector of Wrington had then his little residence there, which is still standing, but this was the only one near the water. Mr

Parsley, with the late Mr Cox of Brockley, was the first person to commence building. They erected Reeves Hotel, and having purchased a good deal of the land which had heretofore been unproductive from the late Rev Wadham Pigott, induced others to speculate in building, and in this manner the now flourishing watering place was commenced. Mr Parsley has, from the period to which we have alluded, taken a lively interest in the town, and has frequently contributed to its prosperity. His last acts of benevolence were the giving a large piece of land for the erection of Emmanuel Church and the burial ground, and also a piece of land on which the Friend's Meeting House has been erected."

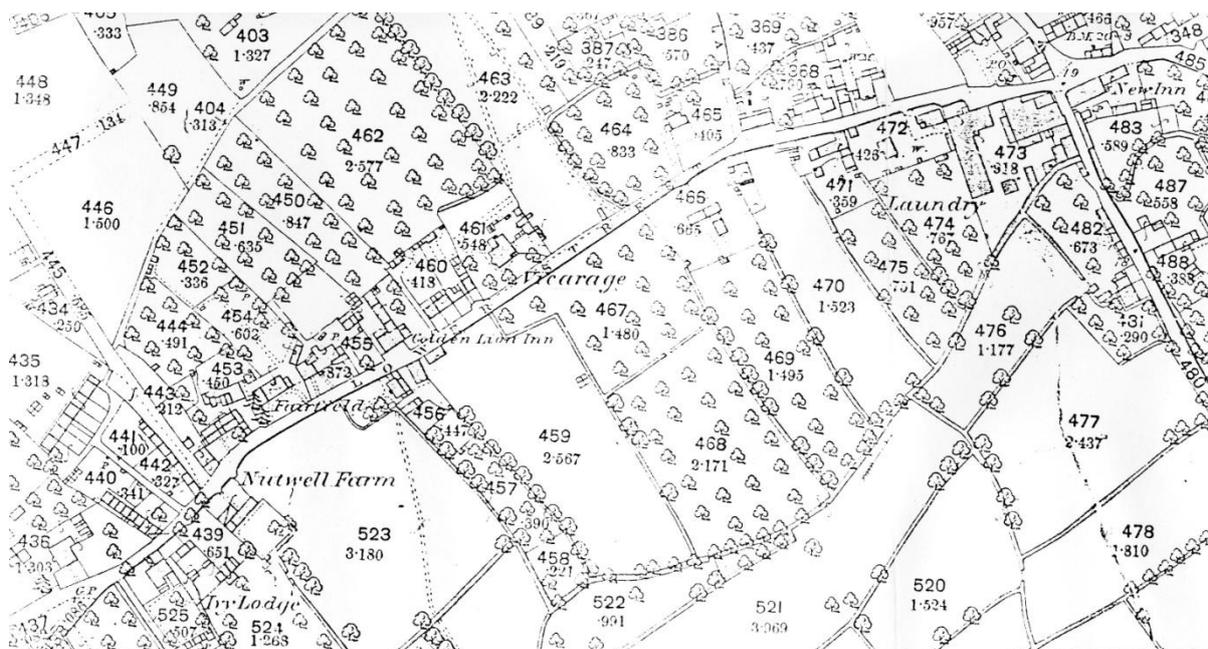
What about the other Parsleys?

5. Samuel Parsley's Family

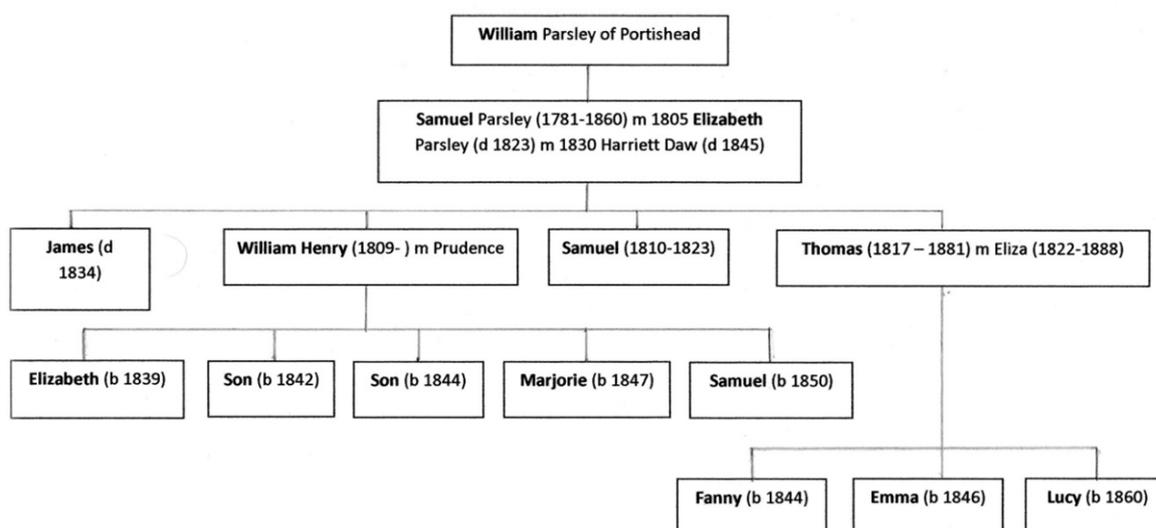


Samuel (1781 – 1860) was the son of William Parsley of Portishead. He was a "Chirurgion" and surgeon to the Weston poor from 1821 to 1831, living in Ivy Lodge in Lower Street, Worle





He was also a temperance campaigner. He married Richard Parsley's sister Elizabeth in 1805 and had at least four children (possibly 7), William (b 1809), James (d 1834), Samuel (1810 – 1823) and Thomas (1817 – 1881). Elizabeth died in 1823. Samuel married again in 1830 to Harriett Daw (aged 49), widow of Robert Daw Esq of Devonport.



James died on May 12th 1834 on board the ship Nelson on his passage from Barbados, where he had been for the recovery of his health.

“Mr James Parsley, son of Mr Samuel Parsley, surgeon, Worle; one who, from his amiability and sweetness of disposition, is sincerely and deeply lamented by all who knew him.”

As a temperance campaigner, Samuel was very involved in Worle:

Saturday November 12th 1845, Worle: On Monday evening a lecture was delivered in the Wesleyan Association Chapel in the parish by Mr J Russom on the "Pathology of Temperance", illustrated with beautiful colossal drawings of the human stomach in health and disease, liver, heart, lungs, etc.. As may be supposed from the character of the subject, the lecture was of deep interest and being handled by Mr Russom with superior ability it gave great satisfaction. Samuel Parsley Esq, senior surgeon of Worle, in the course of the evening gave his opinion founded upon a practice of upward of 50 years, that intoxicating drinks were not at all necessary, but injurious even in moderation; and he could prove, he said, that a majority of diseases were brought on through their use. Mr Russom has promised to deliver his lecture on the 3rd of next month in the Temperance Hall, Banwell.

His son, William was also involved:

May 15th 1845, Banwell: The members of the Total Abstinence Society of this Parish held a public meeting in their hall on Wednesday evening, April 9th, which was most respectably attended. The chair was taken at 7 o'clock by W H Parsley Esq, surgeon, in the absence of the esteemed vicar, who was prevented from attending through indisposition. The chairman briefly opened the meeting, and called upon that eloquent and judicious advocate the Rev Robert Gray Mason, who, in a speech of nearly 2 hours, pointed out the various evils of intemperance. At the close a few persons signed the pledge. The cause is increasing here, the number of members being 433.

Samuel relinquished his professional pursuits in favour of his son William Henry Parsley FRCS in October 1844, aged 63. Samuel moved to Banwell soon after his retirement. He was selling off some of his goods from Ivy Lodge in Worle on 11th and 12th May 1846:

Sale by auction of excellent household furniture, port, sherry, and claret wines, superior Cognac Brandy, town-built Phaeton, etc

The whole of the superb, modern and costly furniture, handsome dinner and tea services, choice old wines, phaeton, harness and numerous other effects of Samuel Parsley leaving his residence.

Soon after the auction, someone stole his door and dumped it in a ditch.

Sat May 16th 1846, Worle: Early on Tuesday morning last some evil disposed persons carried away a large door from the lawn of Samuel Parsley Esq of this parish and left it in a ditch, also one of the entrance gates of the Rev N Wodehouse, and a hatch from Mr Loman, and broke a few panes of glass in the shop window of Mr Rich, draper. A reward of £5 is offered by Samuel Parsley Esq.

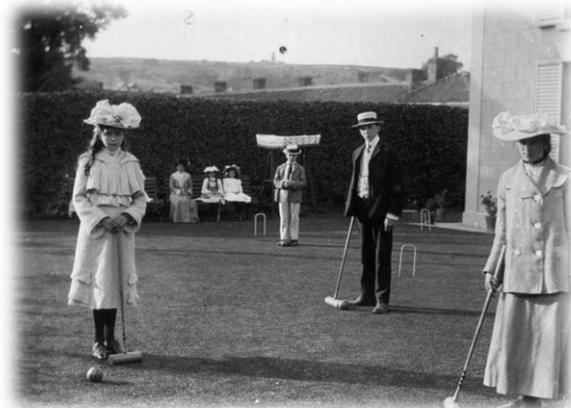
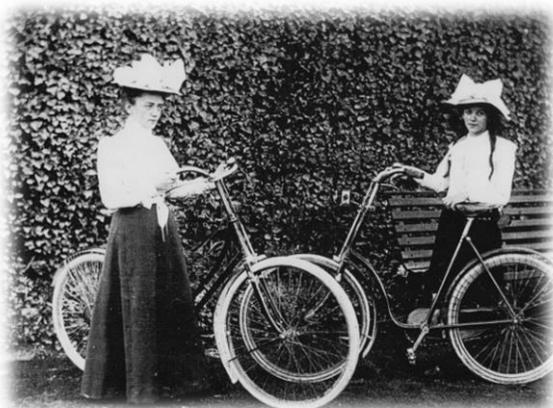
Harriett died in 1845. Samuel moved to Sidcot and then Woodborough, but it is presumed that he kept Ivy Lodge, letting it out. He won a prize for his vegetables at Wrington Horticultural Society's show on Saturday July 29th 1854

In the 1851 census, William Parsley MRCS(42) is in West Street, Banwell as a Medical Practitioner. He has a wife Prudence(45), daughter Elizabeth (12), sons aged (9) & (7), daughter Margery (4) and son Samuel (1), and two young servants.

Also in the 1851 census, Thomas Parsley is down as a farmer at Locking Head (33, b Banwell 1818) with his wife Eliza (aged 29) and daughters Fanny (7) and Emma(2). He is still there in the 1861 census, saying that he has 250 acres and employs 8 labourers and a boy. He now has another daughter Lucy.

Samuel dies at Woodborough, aged 82, on the 19th of October 1860. The sole Executor is William Henry Parsley, Surgeon. However in 1860 Thomas owns three houses, "Ivy Lodge", "Lipstone" and "Langridge".

Thomas retires from farming in 1877, selling the farm and moving to Ivy Lodge. He dies on 9th February, 1881 leaving his estate to his wife Eliza. His estate includes land in Worle including that around The Golden Lion Inn. In the 1881 census Eliza is in Ivy Lodge with her three daughters. Eliza Parsley dies on 12th September 1888 and her estate is granted to Fanny Parsley. In the 1901 census Fanny and Emma Parsley are still living in Ivy Lodge with nephew Frank Burton and nieces Fanny and Francis Burton





Emma dies in 1912 and Fanny in 1913 and are buried in St Martin's churchyard, Worle.



So what is Left to remind us of the Parsleys?

6. The Parsley's Today

The Parsley family name has lived on in the surrounding villages through several descendents of the original Wrington-Churchill group, but there is not much within Weston-super-Mare to remind us of its first real developer and his brother-in-law, not even a street name.



There are 12 Parsley burials at St Martin's and a memorial plaque in the church:

Emma Parsley (Daughter of Thomas) 5/5/1912 aged 62

Fanny Parsley (Daughter of Thomas) 1/12/1913 aged 67

Eliza Parsley (Wife of Thomas) 13/9/1884 aged 57

Thomas Parsley (Husband of Eliza) 9/2/1881 aged 63

Samuel Parsley (Husband of Harriet) 16/10/1860 aged 82

Harriet Parsley (nee Daw)(Second wife of Samuel) 23/2/1846 aged 53 years.

James Parsley (Son of Samuel) 12/5/1831 aged 21

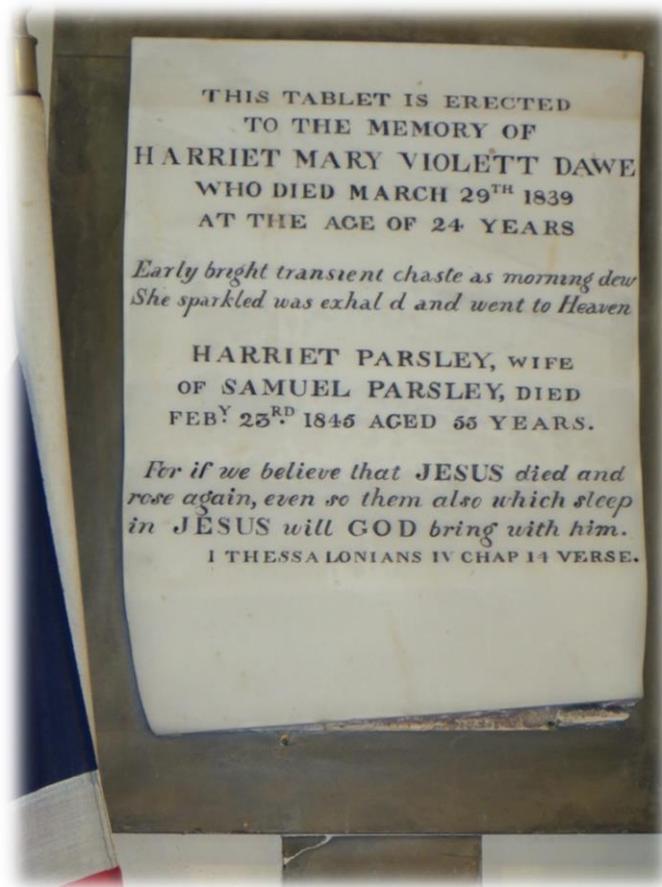
Samuel Parsley (Son of Samuel) 17/9/1823 aged 13 years.

Elizabeth Parsley (First wife of Samuel) 23 July 1823, aged 42 years.

Edward Parsley 19/7/1823 aged 2 years

Anstice Parsley 23/2/1820 aged 6 months

Mary Elizabeth 11/2/1820 aged 13 years



Worle still has Ivy Lodge.



Richard Parsley's family are buried at St John's church yard, Weston-super-Mare.



Hariett Parsley 21/06/1813 aged 5

Ann Parsley 11/02/1838 aged 28

Elizabeth Parsley (Betty) 27/01/1857 aged 86

Henry Parsley 11/06/1839 aged 40

Sidney Parsley 26/03/1831 aged 25

Richard Parsley 19/11/1846 aged 80

Henry William Parsley (nephew) 01/10/1837 aged 17

Betsy Parsley 13/04/1821 aged 26

Horatio Parsley 26/04/1876 aged 70. Horatio Parsley was the last person to be buried in St John's churchyard. The tombstone is to be seen outside and just east of the porch.

St John's Church, rebuilt by Richard Parsley, is still there.



The Royal Hotel is still there.



An unmade road off Neva Road is still known by the locals as Parsley Lane.



And there is still **Whitecross Lodge**, now known as Victoria Lodge.