

Robert Burgess born 1840

Robert was the second son of a family of 3 boys and 1 girl, William, Robert, Eliza and George. Their forebears had been resident in Enderby for generations.

For as long as can be traced they have been Non-Conformists, members of the Independent Baptists.

With a smooth, quiet disposition, Robert had a native astuteness and greater ability than most of his fellows. He was a non-smoker, very temperate and altogether a lovable nature, by reason of which he gained the highest respect of all who knew him.

He was above medium height, broad and substantially built, with good, regular features, rather massive head and flowing, dark beard.

He married Elizabeth Ann Freer, the daughter of a small dairyman of the village. Elizabeth was of medium height, sturdily built, with a very dominant personality, totally without polish, native or acquired, often blunt to the point of crudeness in her manner, and not at all what could be called "lovable" in disposition, but possessing a good degree of sound common sense and determination.

She could be affable when circumstances called for affability, but she could also be ruthless in speech and action. She was by no means beautiful, but just a very ordinary looking woman with a more than ordinary ability to have her own way. Her tongue was feared by most and probably as much by Robert, who treated it very quietly, as by anyone.

Elizabeth Ann, by her forceful personality, played no small part in the advancement of Robert's career, both in business and the various public activities in which he became engaged.

For a number of years after marriage, they lived in a small cottage, one of a row called Langton's Row, off Chapel Street. Here all their children were born, and here they both worked in "Stocking Frames".

Early in their married life they felt the urge to make for themselves a competence for later years, and to "get on" in life. They both worked in the frame until, by their united efforts, Robert was able to have a Workshop of his own and become a "Bag-hosier", so realising part of their ambitions.

Later they moved to a larger house on the main (*Chapel*) Street.

Here they began to do a little in the way of trading. In quite a modest way they launched out in the sale of potatoes and paraffin, for there were no facilities for purchasing these in the village. They continued with this for several years till the Co-operative Society began to sell in opposition and so closed them down.

For many years, stocking making was the sole industry in the village until, in the 1860s, the huge hill of granite on which Enderby stood, began to be exploited for street and road making and paving.

About the year 1860 some of the more progressive of the villagers saw that the newly-opened quarries were bringing an influx of workers. New houses were needed, so a "land-society" was formed several nearby fields purchased, streets laid out, and a "new" Enderby sprang into being.

Robert was amongst the most active of these far-sighted men. He became a "Trustee of the Landsey" as it was called. In a few short years all the plots of land were taken up and success of the venture was assured.

It was in the newly laid-out John Street where Robert chose his plot, building, at first, two houses with a workshop at the rear in which to house his newly-acquired frames. Later on he added two others adjoining the first and so started his more prosperous career.

He became dissatisfied with having his yarn and stockings conveyed by "carrier" and purchased a pony and cart to do his own conveying.

By this time new machinery was superseding the hand frames and Robert found himself tied to a dying craft. Frames were giving place to the newly-invented rotating "Griswold" machines which were much less laborious and could be easily worked by girls. What was he to do?

About this time he was offered a good position to go to India to teach the natives this new process of manufacture. He would have willingly taken the position; Violetta, the younger daughter, pressed him to go and take her too, but Elizabeth, his wife, was adamant, she would not go, so he scrapped his frames, installed "Griswolds" in their place and entered on a new era in his life.

Several years earlier a Co-operative Society had been established in the village in connection with which Robert had been one of the pioneers. For many years he was on the committee and was, for a time, Chairman of the society.

For many years he was a member of the Blaby Board of Guardians, representing Enderby on that body, and when, about the year 1884, the Parish Council Act was passed, he was elected one of the first members of the new Council, and he retained his seat until advancing years caused his retirement.

They resigned their membership of the Independent Chapel and left the Church to eventually settle down with the Primitive Methodists.

Robert had a gift for music and had a very fine baritone voice. He had been choirmaster with the Independents, and was for a time at a loss in the new surroundings. He became Sunday School teacher to a class of youths, and trustee of the Church, and brought his high degree of common sense and stability into church policy.

When the new Chapel was envisaged, Robert and his family took full share in the venture, working with everyone to the common goal. As the opening of the new chapel drew near an augmented choir was formed and Robert was appointed Choirmaster, a position in which he found expression for his musical gifts and exercised then to full advantage.

He was proud of his choir and he held the post for many years. There is no doubt that this appointment cemented his interest in, and service for, the Primitive Methodists in a way that nothing else could possibly have done. When he retired from this position, the choir made him a presentation of a mounted and inscribed walking stick, which he greatly prized, but, true to his independent nature, he rarely, if ever, used it. He was 'independent' of help of a walking stick to the last, despite his advanced years. He was in his 84th year when he died.

During those years of settling down with the Primitive Methodists, new friendships were formed within the circle of their new fellow-members. The Church had been enriched by the influx of other worthy families – quarry workers from other villages, Mountsorrel, Huncote, Croft, Stoney Stanton and so far away as Cornwall and Wales - and the presence of these incomers helped in the cementing process of Robert and his family. Meanwhile the girls were growing into womanhood, and in desirability in the eyes of the two Stableford lads who, on their part, were fast approaching manhood. So it seemed but a step (*two steps rather, seeing there were just two girls in Robert's family and two boys in John's*) to the joining of the families when Harry chose Anne to be his companion for life and some years later I (*Sam*) surrendered to the charms of Violetta and chose her to help perpetuate the Stableford name and tradition. Elizabeth Ann died at 66, while Robert passed away in 1924 in his 84th year, revered by everyone who knew him, full of honour, integrity and good works.