

John Hatt: Printer, Bookseller and
Crime-Fighter in
19th Century Cambridge

The discovery of this interesting man came from checking burial records at cemeteries in Cambridge. There were no burials listing either Hatt or Hatte in the American Cemetery outside Cambridge at Madingley. However, a search of the Mill Road Cemetery produced the following record:

In remembrance of JOHN HATT died 12 March 1866 aged 76

Also SARAH his wife born 23 July 1804 died 6 May 1887

Also of SARAH ELIZABETH BARNES died 14 August 1926 aged 86

A search of Kelly's Trade Directory of 1847 brought up the record that John Hatt was a 'bookseller, binder, stationer' who also ran a circulating library at 3 Peas Hill Cambridge. Another book lists him as a Cambridge printer. All the indications are that John Hatt was a significant figure in the University town. Back in the 18th and 19th century citizens in the book-trade were independent, influential men and purveyors of ideas, the most notable being the printer Samuel Richardson who launched the whole genre of the novel with his *Pamela* and *Clarissa Harlowe*. John Hatt was, in his own way, also a 'mover and shaker' in the University town but is now completely forgotten.

Cambridge stationers, printers & bookbinders by H.P. Stokes [1919] explains that printers in the city "...used their wealth for charitable purposes" and were involved "in municipal and ecclesiastical matters."

H.P Stokes describes the 'class' that John Hatt would have been part of: "Next to the Teachers and Scholars and to the Bedells, no persons are more characteristic of a University town than the stationers and such-like. Under the words 'such-like' may be included Booksellers and Bookbinders, Copiers of manuscripts and Illuminators, Makers and sellers of Parchment in former days and of paper in later times."

A study of John Hatt's life confirms this description: he lived through the reigns of three very different monarchs - George III, George IV and Queen Victoria- and contributed both practically and aesthetically to his community. One interesting fact is that his life seems to flourish and fade along with two other phenomena which swept Cambridge at that

time. One was the development of the Camden Society, a group of undergraduates who were passionate about church architecture. Many of the features we notice today about Victorian churches came about because of the Camden Society. Initially they were just undergraduates at Cambridge who strolled along to Peas Hill to purchase paper. They were outsiders to the town and most likely would have worshipped in their own college chapels: the Round Church was considered by some colleges as rather too Low Church and plebeian for their tastes. But Hatt worshipped there and seems to have been passionately committed to the place. Could it have been through him that the undergraduates -all from rich families- learned of the ancient building and were galvanised to save it when the nave collapsed in the 1840's? There were three other Round Churches in this country but only the one in Cambridge would survive.

The other phenomena which also flowed along in tandem with his life and career was the birth and death of *The Cambridge Advertiser*, a free news-sheet which became a serious presence on the newspaper scene. Again, it is something John Hatt had links with - this time of a commercial nature. So, in studying his life one keeps coming across these other influences.

The first time we hear of John Hatt is in *The Cambridge Advertiser*. His advertisement makes it clear that he has been trading for years but he has never chosen to advertise in the other 2 staid local papers.

The Advertiser started in 1839 as a free advertising news sheet [A4 size] and then grew to be a chargeable newspaper purveying advanced Liberal ideas. It wrote about issues such as the Repeal of the Corn Laws, the problems of Ireland and the need for more secular education; its attitude was much more Liberal (today we might say Left-Wing) than the *Cambridge Independent Press*. The fact that this 'rag' became quite as popular as it did rather alarmed the establishment. Eventually the paper seemed to be seen as a bit of a threat both commercially and ideologically to the Tory *Cambridge Chronicle* and the moderately liberal *Cambridge Independent Press*.

After a run of 11 years the established newspapers closed in on the up-start. It was a buzzing gadfly, representing the views of a certain business group and artisanal class which were educated but had no voice or forum in the other older journals. John Hatt and his friends obviously fell into the *Advertisers* group.

By 1850 the established papers had managed to make inroads on its advertisers; they had more financial 'padding' and eventually *The Advertiser* was forced increase its prices so much that it became unviable. Its closure must have been a blow to Hatt who had also used its presses at times for special or large print-runs eg in the publishing of his own *History of the Round Church*.

This tiny church opposite St Johns College dates back to 1100 and the legend was that it had been built by and for the Knights Templar on their way to the Crusades. This story was put forward by one of Hatt's Guides to the Round Church written in 1846.

He wrote lovingly about its memorials (some to families whose children he probably knew) and about the carved likenesses of the Knights Templars as angels. He, his wife Elizabeth, his nephew Henry and his daughters Ann and Sarah regularly worshipped there even though their home and shop in Peas Hill was far closer to four other churches.

John clearly had both emotion and spiritual links with the Round Church and it is reasonable to suppose that he contributed funds to its restoration in the 1840s. He was also clearly knowledgeable about architecture as well as the fledgling Cambridge Camden Society (circa 1839 -1868) which he describes in a familiar way.

Hatt outlines how they managed to raise £4000 to save the ancient building because: "...The situation of the church in one of the ancient Universities, gave it at once a claim to national reverence and appeared to justify the confidence with which they appealed to the public for pecuniary assistance."

Hatt describes the Camden Society as 'indefatigable' and certainly they would go on to become a major influence on the restoration of churches in the Victorian era. At the end of 1841, the societies' journal *The Ecclesiologist* was launched. This started as a newsletter written by undergraduates and printed in Cambridge. Was it printed or distributed via the Hatt bookselling business? Did it use the *Advertisers* presses? Given Hatt's familiarity with the group, his role too as stationer with a 'Cheap Paper Warehouse'

"which he will sell as cheap as anyone in the Trade"

and his central premises at Peas Hill, it is quite possible that he was involved in dealing with *The Ecclesiologist* in some way in the late 1830's and early 1840's.

Later re-naming themselves The Ecclesiological Society the group moved to London. There they attracted support from many wealthy and powerful members of society, both peers and parliamentarians who felt that society might be improved if congregations worshipped in churches furnished in a particular medieval style.

John's 16 page booklet is still available from the Cambridgeshire Collection. It is not a dull dry guide but one of wit and erudition. Towards the end he describes how in the winter of 1823, four Divines put themselves forward as candidates for election to the post of Minister of the Round Church. Suspicion was cast on the integrity of the election with a dispute over spoiled ballot papers. The two front runners for the Church's 'living' fought it out thus:

"...a very laughable occurrence took place in what might be called a race to the Bishop's Palace at Ely, between two of the reverend divines. All the mighty powers of Jehu himself who drove furiously were called forth on the occasion..."

Interestingly John was not a native of Cambridge at all but born in Brentford, then a river town in Middlesex. Perhaps his parents moved here or perhaps he inherited some family business? He clearly received a good education which may hint at schooling in Cambridge. By the age of 18 [around 1809] (according to one of his own advertisements thirty years later) the young man had started trading as a bookseller. But he was not poorly educated despite the fact that he began working at a young age.

His *History of the Round Church*, although simple, is elegantly written; the writer is well-versed in architectural terms and also in the Bible which he quotes frequently. He commissioned a tasteful engraving of the new re-furbished church for the cover of his book.

He explains that this shape and size of church was very rare: there were only three others originally in England but all of them had now collapsed. Hatt names them and may have actually seen one or other of the other churches possibly the Temple in London or Maplestead in Essex.



But John Hatt wasn't only interested in religion and church architecture. He was very much a 'townsman' who met in The Pickerell Inn, a pub frequented by fishermen and wharf-labourers. There in February 1839 he was one of the founders of the Town of Cambridge Association, a sort of Neighbourhood Watch scheme established to protect his fellow businessmen. The group's aim was:

"..the Speedy Apprehension and effectual Prosecution of Felons and Thieves of every denomination, and of other Persons committing Offences on the Persons or Property of any of the Subscribers."

The very name of the Town of Cambridge Association hints at the ancient rivalry between 'Town and Gown'. This arose from the concept that those who belonged to the University and its Colleges were privileged and protected from the realities of life in urban Cambridge. Outsider this Bubble, the Townsmen suffered many deprivations ie lack of water during droughts whereas the colleges owned vast amounts of property and had their own wells.

In many issues the local citizens felt that they were hard done by and John Hatt's association seems to have concentrated on crime-fighting. The University and colleges protected their assets by had their own police-force - the 'Bulldogs', as well as their own courts, and could in various ways administer punishment by withdrawing their favours and business patronage. The fact that the TOCA was set up indicates that many ordinary shopkeepers and businessmen felt that they had little protection. The articles of the TOCA insist that it is 'For Gentlemen'. They wish to be seen as worthy of respect as the college hierarchies.

The Town of Cambridge Association pay an annual 10 shilling subscription to be a member of this protective group. But the group does not seem to have any other altruistic aim. A search has

not so far yielded information that they were engaged in any kind of charitable relief.

At the end of January 1845 extracts from reports of the University Senate mention a massive legal case over whether there should be a stone altar in the Round Church and if so whether it was a communion table or a credence table. While this was being fought out the wintry weather caused so much hardship among the poor in Cambridge that in March the University Senate was sufficiently concerned to vote funds to help them:

In consequence of the continuance of the inclement weather a general subscription for the relief of the poor was entered into on the 19th March

Did it cross John Hatt's mind that wonderful as it was to have the Round Church re-furbished, while the money was spent on church architecture, there was also considerable poverty in his area? 60 years later the reformer Eglantyne Jebb [friend of Sara Hatt later Lady Blomfield] would write of the high infant mortality in Cambridge and the poor nutrition of its working classes. The sum of £4000 raised to repair and restyle the Round Church would have had the buying-power of several millions today - perhaps John reassured himself that at least the project offered solid employment to local craftsmen.

Curiously John Hatt never seems to have been given any University contracts for printing, unlike the majority of other Cambridge printers. The fact that he ran a circulating library indicates that he was prosperous enough to stock and loan out items such as maps and tables of statistics which students and academics might find too expensive or cumbersome to buy outright. Hatt appears therefore to have been fairly successful but strangely does not appear in any of the lists of printers granted work by the University.

Was he a Non-Conformist (as were many other Hatts in England at that time)? Probably not but people who worshipped at the Round Church tended to be rather Low Church and the University favoured those who were of High Anglican persuasion. The University and Cambridge Establishment had grim memories of the occupation of Oliver Cromwell. During the latter half of the 19th Century a local school master was sacked from his post at the Perse School simply because he was a Non-Conformist. Clerk Maxwell Road is named in his memory.

The fact that the Hatts' were buried at Mill Road Cemetery also indicates a low church background. This was a burial

ground which would accept Non-Conformists. Many Church of England Vicars would bar Non-conformists from being buried in the consecrated grounds of their churches or would allow it only under cloak of darkness.

Probably John and his wife Elizabeth were just stout Protestants. The fact that he chose The Pickerell as the meeting place for the Town of Cambridge Association makes it unlikely that he was a true teetotal Non-Conformist. However the final sentence of Hatt's *History of the Round Church* ends with a sort of Protestant rallying cry. John has described a court case in which a Judge ruled in favour of particular stone altar being placed in the church. It was the sort of altar favoured by strict Protestants:

"A much severer battle was then fought not for this Church alone but for all the Reformed Churches throughout the country, and a glorious victory was obtained on behalf of the whole Protestant cause."

Despite his great contributions to Cambridge society in this era, John Hatt has been almost completely forgotten, except for the slight reference to him and his wife on his daughter's memorial. Which branch of the family did he belong to? Sadly the Hatt business did not continue at 3 Peas Hill. A few years after John Hatt's death a trade manual mentions that the premises are now occupied by a Mr Veal who is an ironmonger.