

The History of Antony and Dorothea Gibbs & of the early years of Antony Gibbs and Sons

By John Arthur Gibbs - 1922

CHAPTER II 1774-84—Exeter and Exwick

We now come to Antony Gibbs. It has already been stated that he was educated at the Exeter Grammar School. The first letter in which he is mentioned is one of January 1774 to his elder brother George from their father. He was then nearly 18 years old, and was apprenticed to a Mr. Brook of Exeter who "has a really very considerable trade and is extending his Spanish branch." He was learning Spanish, and "his heart seems much in his business." His apprenticeship was to be for four years longer. George was already acting the part of adviser to him, as we shall find him doing in later years, for their father wrote: "The defect in his character ... which you kindly touch with great tenderness is one which we have often pointed out to him, and our remonstrances have not been thrown away."

In 1778, the year when his apprenticeship probably ended, there is a letter from his father to him at Exeter in which the following occurs: "If anything very eligible should be offered in the way of insurance you may take a moderate sum. If such risks should be proposed as we would rather be without, you may use my absence as a pretence for shirking them." This looks as if he and his father were working together as insurance underwriters, but the letter stands by itself.

The next letters in which any allusion is to be found to his business are those which he wrote to his fiancée Dorothea Barnetta Hucks in 1783 and 1784. His brother Abraham had come home from Genoa early in 1780, and seems to have joined with him in the business in which he had meanwhile set up in Exeter; but the association was short-lived, for Abraham died in May 1782. The letters referred to show that Antony's business was that of an exporting merchant of woollens, and that he had his own office and warehouse in Exeter. It is on record in the books of the Guild called "The Incorporation of Weavers, Fullers, and Shearmen" of the Tuckers' Hall, Exeter, that he was elected "assistant" in the Guild 25 September 1778, "underwarden" 1781, "headwarden" 1782, "master" 1783, and attended "his last Hall" 1788, and that his brother Abraham was elected 28 September 1780, and made his last attendance November 1781. Five years later Antony was one of a committee of 27 appointed at a meeting of woollen merchants and manufacturers held at the Exeter Guildhall to deal with the illicit exportation of wool.

How capital was found for his business is seen in one of his letters to Dorothea Hucks, in which he explains that their marriage could not take place at once because "a great deal of the money which we have in the business is borrowed by my father, and in case any accident should happen to him would in all probability be called in. This would create the necessity of our lessening the business to such a degree as very considerably to diminish the profits; therefore before my expenses are increased the capital in the business should be increased." His aim was to save £1,000 of his own before marriage.

The “we” and “our” in the last-quoted passage may be taken to include Samuel Banfill, who we find from the letters of 1783 and 1784 was working with Antony, though they do not in so many words say that he was in partnership with him at this time, as he was a little later. With Banfill, who afterwards married his sister Anne, he had business relations from this period onwards to the end of his life. Banfill, though an able man, was not of a very amiable disposition. “Self-conceit and obstinacy will always be in his way.” “Banfill's affectation and tiffiness are worse than ever.” Even if Banfill was actually a partner, at any rate Antony was the principal figure in the business, so much so that he suggested to Dorothea that when they married they should take a house with offices under the same roof, to which he would transfer his business. He wrote to her that “Mr. Baring, Mr. Cuiller, and Mr. Kennaway have all of them press shops in the courts in which their houses stand,” as also had the house which he had in view for himself. The smoke of the press shop was an objection, and the idea seems to have been given up, but the allusion is of interest as affording further proof that Antony's business was of the same nature as that of the great merchant “tuckers” of Exeter. No doubt, as seems to have been the usual practice of the Exeter merchants, he bought unfinished cloth at the weekly “serge market” in Exeter, whither it was sent by the Exeter and Devonshire weavers, and after preparing it exported it.

During most of 1783 and part of 1784 Samuel Banfill was travelling in Spain for Antony. Antony was working very hard at his office, and when Banfill left he wrote that, till he returns, “my present confinement will not cease in any degree,” thus excusing himself for writing short letters to Dorothea in the week and only a long one each Sunday. In July 1784 he wrote: “Our business goes on extraordinarily well in all parts of Spain.” He was also trading with Italy: “£2,000 has just come in from Italy” (1783); and he had business with Hamburg, London, and Salisbury. For instance: “Tell Vicary that the people at Hamburg have settled the loss (probably insurance), and I shall receive £1,000 to account in about three weeks” (1783); and in 1784 he mentions insurance balances due to him in London which H. Townley Ward (his fiancée's brother-in-law) must help him to recover, and speaks of visits to Salisbury, where he had business with one Henry Wansey, and to London to see his bankers there.

Dorothea Barnetta Hucks, of whom mention has been made already, was the youngest daughter of William Hucks, wine merchant of Knaresborough in Yorkshire, by Eleanor daughter of Thomas Barnett of the same town. The only ones of their thirteen children who survived childhood were Eleanor, William, Harriett, John, Dorothea Barnetta, and Joseph. The Knaresborough family was a younger branch of the wealthy Hucks family (brewers) of London, whose representative in Dorothea's day was her and cousin Robert Hucks (the younger), brewer of London, whose estates at Aldenham, Clifton Hampden, Wallingford, and elsewhere eventually came, through his nieces Sarah and Anne Noyes, to George Henry Gibbs the eldest son of Antony and Dorothea Gibbs.

Dorothea's mother, of whom frequent mention will be found in these pages, is thus described in a letter written after her death by Mrs. William Hucks of Dulwich, widow of a 1st cousin of William Hucks of Knaresborough. “Few were so favoured in the beauty of person, for she was the fairest of the fair, one may almost say the perfection of loveliness, when I first knew her, yet as free from vanity as those that have no pretension to beauty.” The numerous and lengthy letters written by her which are preserved show her to have been a woman of much spirit, living

for her children, who were all much attached to her, economical, religious, and bearing her many family afflictions with great fortitude.

Antony Gibbs probably had his first opportunity of meeting Dorothea Hucks in 1780, for in October that year she came with her eldest brother William to stay in Heavitree on the outskirts of Exeter, when she was nearly 20. The marriage of her eldest sister Eleanor (bap. 1752) with Henry Townley Ward had taken place in 1774. He was the only son of the Rev. Henry Ward, of Ingatestone, Essex, and a well-to-do London solicitor "of eminent abilities," living (in 1780) in Soho Square, and practising (since 1765) in Henrietta Street, Covent Garden. Letters to Dorothea from her mother and sisters, all very affectionate, tell us that from 1777 to 1779 she was living for the most part with the Wards in London. Her eldest brother William (bap. 1754) was also in London, being one of the clerks of His Majesty's Receipt of Exchequer. She was a young lady of a very attractive and sprightly nature, and had many admirers both in Yorkshire and London, and more than one offer of marriage. In March 1779 Mrs. Hucks was staying in Bristol with her son William, and her daughter Harriett who was ill with consumption, and it may be that she became acquainted with George or others of the Gibbs family there; or Vicary Gibbs, now living in London, may have known the Wards, with whom he was soon at least on intimate terms. Harriett died later in 1779, aged 19. Dorothea was sent to Heavitree in 1780 with her brother William owing to the serious state of his health, and (to a less extent) to her own indifferent condition, and the conjecture may be hazarded that through the Wards' friendship with Vicary they went there to be under the medical charge of George Abraham Gibbs. "I see by yours the Gibbs family continue their friendship and attention to you; God reward them for it," wrote Eleanor Ward to her at this time, and the quotation marks the first actual record of the acquaintance between the Gibbs and the Hucks families. Dorothea was apparently in Exeter again in the summer of 1781.

We have seen that Antony's brother Abraham died in May 1782. "I hear he was soon to have been married to a very pleasing and agreeable woman," wrote Rose Heath to her brother John; and there is a note by Henry Hucks Gibbs saying that this may have been Dorothea Hucks, for he remembered his mother telling him that she had heard that Abraham was much attached to Dorothea, and that she felt his death much. However this may be, Vicary Gibbs began a correspondence with Dorothea in June 1782 from which it is clear that he, at any rate, was at least deeply interested in her; for instance, "Nanny and you and Mary are almost the dearest persons in the world to me," the first and the last his own sisters; and, "If you knew how much we are interested for you."

Portrait drawings by John Downman, R.A., were done between 1781 and 1783 of the brothers Abraham and Antony Gibbs, and of Dorothea Hucks, her brother William, and brother-in-law Ward. All are in Lord Aldenham's possession, except that of Dorothea, which has been lost, but copies and photographs of it exist." The only other original portrait of her is a miniature (set in a brooch), probably by R. Crosse, which Lord Aldenham also has. The Downman is the only original portrait of Antony, the oil paintings of him at Aldenham House, at 22 Bishopsgate, London, and elsewhere being enlarged copies of it.

Dorothea Hucks and Eleanor Ward were at Knaresborough in June 1782. Their father died at Thirsk on 3 July, and was buried at Knaresborough; and in August Dorothea heard, while staying with the Gibbs family in Exeter, of the death of her brother William at Messina, where he

had gone for his health. "Happy it is for her," wrote Eleanor Ward, "that she is with such friends who make it their whole study to entertain her"; and in another letter: "Say everything kind to the good family you are in. I think them your sincere well-wishers and best friends." All that were left of the Knaresborough family now were her mother, her sister Eleanor Ward, and her brothers John and Joseph.

Antony seems to have made his proposal of marriage to Dorothea in January 1783. She wrote to consult her mother, who thereupon wrote to her daughter Eleanor Ward suggesting the imprudence of the match, and asking her to convince Antony "of the impossibility of keeping a family in the genteel way which I am sure with his generous spirit he would like to do"; and afterwards she wrote to Dorothea referring to the Gibbs family as "people for whom I have the greatest regard and who merit from me every act of friendship it in my power, not only on your account, but also on that of your poor dear brother's." ... "I almost think Mr. Ward would put a negative on the match from the face of 'affairs,' yet I leave you mistress of yourself; you are not a child - your future happiness with him must entirely depend on his success in business and his life; if you dare run the risque, it is yourself which must abide by it - I dare flatter myself you will believe that to be the friend of my child is a character I am very desirous to convince you of in this and every transaction in life, and therefore think myself much obliged by this mark of your confidence." Vicary Gibbs had written to Dorothea: "I shall leave you to collect my opinion from my behaviour, adding only that this circumstance, though it cannot add to my regard for you, will, I hope, afford me now frequent opportunities of showing it." Before Dorothea left Exeter, about the end of January, to join the Wards at Bath and go with them to London, her engagement was definitely arranged. The first of Antony's letters that have been preserved is to her, and is dated 6 February 1783; 48 others of his written to her before their marriage are in the Aldenham collection. In one of the earliest of them he writes: "I am quite happy to find you and Vicary are sociable again as usual. After you he has my first claim to friendship; you may well suppose how anxious I must be for you to remain always on the best terms together." His letters to her are straightforward and simple, and show that he was deeply in love with her, and that there was a most complete understanding between them.

Mrs. Ward now had charge of her brothers John and Joseph. The latter (bap. 1772) was a King's scholar at Eton. John (bap. 1769) went this year to Harrow, this course having been urged by Vicary Gibbs, who knew Dr. Heath, the headmaster, well. Mrs. Hucks' father, Thomas Barnett, of Knaresborough, had died in 1781, and her mother, who had then come to live with her, also died early in this year (1783), so that she was now left quite alone. She therefore sold her house at Knaresborough, but retained other property which she had in that town, and, after spending the summer at Exmouth, where Dorothea was with her part of the time, took up her residence there early in 1784. Thither Antony frequently went on horseback to visit her.

Ward, who was fond of shooting, driving, and boating, in 1784 made a house on the Thames between Bray and Windsor, called "The Willows," his country residence, and he held it for the rest of his life. There Dorothea was with the Wards from April to August 1784, and during that time Antony snatched a few days from his business to pay them a visit.

Eleanor Ward was so much to Dorothea that she deserves some further notice. Her mother wrote of her to Dorothea July 1784: "I once thought Mr. and Mrs. Ward fire and water, yet now they run on smoothly as egg and oil, each setting off the other and mutually striving to please

and be pleased; their happiness gives me heartfelt pleasure, as it seems built on a foundation that has grown stronger by time." Mrs. Ward was most loyal to her husband, who for his part grudged nothing that she wanted. Another letter of Mrs. Hucks to Dorothea speaks of "your dear, friendly sister, so disinterested and so loving to her brothers and sister, must, if not akin to her, claim one's esteem; what then must I feel and how thankful to the Almighty for permitting her father's and my weak though well-meant lessons and instruction to form a mind so infinitely superior to that of most of her sex." Romney's famous portrait of her does not belie this character which her mother gives her, and some of the numerous letters of hers that exist, written to Dorothea, are in keeping with it. According to *The Gentleman's Magazine*, she was "distinguished for personal charms and accomplishments." She had a large acquaintance in society, many of whom are referred to in her letters, and joined in the social amusements of the time, such as the opera, balls, Ranelagh, and race meetings. In the country she devoted herself to her farm and garden and to the care of her numerous dependents on the estate, and the entertainment of her guests, and was a great lover of birds and other pets. She had no children, and was lavish in her affection for her sister, for her brothers when she had the care of them, and for a girl whom she had adopted named Louisa Oakden. At the same time, as will appear below, she was rather intolerant, and her affection, even for those nearest to her, was prone to wane under opposition of views, and she could be as strong a hater as she was a friend. Full of sympathy and sensibility, she yet was no weak character, if the expressions in her letters may be trusted as evidence.

The correspondence between Antony and Dorothea, and between the latter and her sister, seems at this time to have been almost as frequent as it might be now, whereas in those days the receiver of a letter paid at least 1s.; but a letter of Eleanor Ward, whose husband was a zealous Whig, heaping ingenious curses on Pitt for "taking off the privilege of franking," shows that she at least had opportunities of sending free letters. Really Pitt only curtailed the abuses of franking, and there are many instances of franks in the later letters of the collection.

George Abraham Gibbs had given up his post in the hospital in 1781, and during the greater part of 1783 and 1784 he or some of his family were living at Pytte in Clyst St. George. It was Antony's custom to sleep there rather than in their house at Palace Yard, riding on horseback to and from his work in Exeter. "I am not naturally fond of business," he wrote to Dorothea, and country pursuits always attracted him. His brother George, with his wife and children, was staying at Pytte in June 1783. Vicary Gibbs was there too earlier in the year, and had done very well on his first circuit in Devon, Cornwall, and Somerset. Antony, who was fond of music, had a piano at Pytte, which he sent to Exmouth for Dorothea's use when she was there hoping she would have lessons from William Jackson of Exeter (the composer). In 1786, when he and Dorothea were staying in London, he spoke of going with her to "the Messiah, which will be an extraordinary gratification to me." His sister Sarah was prostrated at Clyst in 1784 with the illness of which she died the next year, and much of his spare time was taken up with care of her. Mrs. Hucks wrote of him at this time: "It is impossible not to love him for his attention to his sisters; a good son and brother must, I think, make a good husband."

Antony was one of 26 appointed as a committee at a public meeting at the Exeter Guildhall on 14 May 1782 to consider a letter from Lord Shelburne, Secretary of State, suggesting the raising of a local corps for national defence.

At the election of 1784 in Exeter Antony took an active part "to serve Mr. Baring," and was on the committee. The candidates were John Baring, of Mount Radford House, Exeter; Sir Charles Warwick Bamfylde, of Poltimore and Exeter; and James Buller, of Downes, Crediton. Mr. Baring, after his return had been made safe, wished to throw his interest on Buller; but when Antony and a Mr. Hirtzol, who preferred Bamfylde to Buller, gave him to understand that if he did so they would think it a very unhandsome return for the many plumpers which they had given him (Baring) when they might have voted secondly for Bamfylde, he consented to adhere to a strict neutrality. Hirtzol and Antony made their remaining votes poll for Bamfylde, and Buller lost the election by more than 60 votes, the two others being returned, Baring 150 ahead of Bamfylde.

At this time Antony was an admirer of Charles James Fox, with whom Dorothea seems to have been acquainted. He wrote to her: "In the latter part of the contest [at Exeter] I was assisting a friend of your friend Mr. Fox, Sir Charles Bamfylde, who I verily believe would otherwise have been thrown out." It is likely enough that the French war converted Antony from his Whiggish tendencies; at any rate, in his later years he, like his father and the rest of the family, was a strong Tory. It may here be added that in November 1775 George Abraham Gibbs' name appears among the signatories to an "address of the High Sheriff, Gentlemen, Clergy, and Freeholders of the County of Devon" presented to the King, assuring him of their loyalty and deploring "the conduct of your American subjects," with whom war had opened that year.

The marriages of Antony, of his sister Mary, and of his brother Vicary all took place in 1784, so that this year was an eventful one for the family.

Vicary Gibbs married in London in June Frances Cerjat Kenneth Mackenzie (b. 1755). She was the eldest daughter of Major William Mackenzie (d. 1770) and of Mary (d. 1813) daughter of Matthew Humberston of Lincolnshire. One of her brothers was Francis, Lord Seaforth.

Vicary and his wife lived at first in Red Lion Square, London, where Maria Elizabeth, their only child, was born in 1785. Their residence was Bloomsbury Square in 1792, 42 Bedford Square in 1806, and 35 Russell Square in 1811. Their last move was in 1814 to 67 Russell Square (Baltimore House). From at least as early as 1802 they had, besides, a house on Hayes Common, Kent.

Mary Gibbs married on 12 April, in Exeter Cathedral, the Rev. Charles Crawley, B.C.L., son of Thomas Crawley, otherwise Boevey (d. 1769), of Flaxley Abbey, Gloucestershire. His acquaintance with the Gibbs family is sufficiently accounted for by his having been curate of Broad Clyst near Clyst St. George, and afterwards of Whitestone, the next village to Exwick. His only and elder brother Thomas Crawley Boevey (1743-1818) of Flaxley Abbey (2nd Bart. 1789) had married in 1769 Anne Savage, whose father was the Rev. Thomas Savage of Field Court in Hardwick, Gloucestershire, and of Broadway, Worcestershire, and also rector of Standish, Gloucestershire; and her mother Eleanor, daughter and heiress of Thomas Barrow, of Field Court. Colonel George Savage, the only brother of Mrs. Crawley Boevey, presented Charles Crawley to the vicarage of Broadway this same year (1784), but he never resided there, and remained at Whitestone till 1789. He then became rector of Stowe-nine-Churches, Northants, but Colonel Savage allowed him to hold Broadway as well as Stowe, saying that he was "glad to find Broadway within distance," though the two are over 40 miles apart. The connection of the Crawley family with Devonshire had been further established by the marriages of Susanna and Catherine, the sisters of Thomas and Charles. Susanna Crawley (1748-80) had married in 1766

Edmund Bastard of West Alvington, near Kingsbridge, Devon. (She died childless after marrying, secondly, on 19 March 1777 at Flaxley, Captain, afterwards Sir Thomas, Hyde Page, Knt. R.E.) Catherine Crawley (1753-1842) married at Flaxley on 12 March 1777 the Rev. Duke Yonge (1750-1823), 3rd son of the Rev. John Yonge of Puslinch in Newton Ferrers, Devon. Duke Yonge was at that time curate of Yealmpton, near by; but in 1783 he was given by his mother's (the Duke) family of Otterton the vicarage of Otterton, which is only 7 miles from Clyst St. George, a living which he exchanged for Cornwood near Yealmpton, in 1793. A long enduring intimacy between the Yonge family and the Coleridge family of Ottery St. Mary arose from the Otterton connection. A visit paid by Duke Yonge to Antony Gibbs at Exwick is recorded in 1786.

The Gibbs family of Exeter became great friends with members of the Yonge family, and this friendship, as well as that with the Crawley families, was destined to be cemented and carried on down the generations by the marriage in 1817 of Antony Gibbs' eldest son George Henry with the Rev. Charles Crawley's daughter Caroline, the marriages of three of Sir Thomas's children with children of the Rev. Duke Yonge, and of two others of them with children of his brother the Rev. Charles Crawley; the marriage of Antony Gibbs' second surviving son William, in 1839, with a daughter of Sir Thomas's son Sir Thomas (3rd Bart.); and the marriage in 1903 of William Gibbs' granddaughter Anstice Katherine Gibbs with the Rev. Stafford Crawley, a great-grandson of the Rev. Charles Crawley.

Antony and Dorothea were married 3 October 1784 at Littleham, close to Exmouth, where Dorothea, on leaving the Wards, had joined her mother in August.

After their marriage they lived at first in Exeter. There is mention of £50 a year being the rent aimed at, and the house selected was on the "Town Walls." Their eldest son, George Henry Gibbs, was born (no doubt in Exeter) on 24 August 1785, and baptised at St. Mary Major, Exeter.

Soon afterwards they arranged to live just outside Exeter at Exwick House. Letters from Antony to Dorothea in the early part of 1786 show that she was then paying visits to the Wards and to the Crawleys, while Antony and the child were at Exwick House, which was in the hands of workmen making it ready for them. Their daughter Harriett was born (no doubt there) on 8 October, and baptised at St. Thomas' Church.