

Who Was John Newton Mappin?

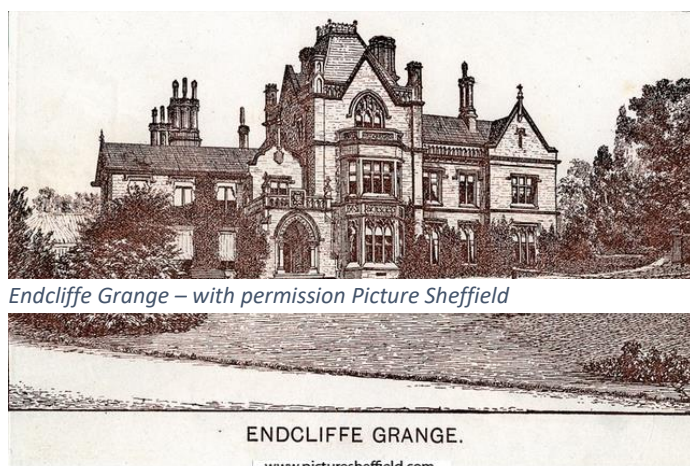
Part 3

In my final blog I want to show how John Newton Mappin's generosity in life - towards the church and in civic philanthropy - continued after his death, and permanently altered the cultural landscape of Sheffield. But first, how did Mappin accrue the wealth to fund his benevolence? We know that by 1837, when he was 34, Mappin described himself as a 'common brewer'. After his death in 1883 his Rotherham and Doncaster breweries were said to be producing around 100 quarters of malt. Dave Pickersgill of Sheffield CAMRA has kindly clarified what this implies - he says that according to this figure Mappin was producing around 115,200 pints a week. This supplied the 30-odd pubs he owned and leased, and perhaps others too. It was evidently a thriving concern.

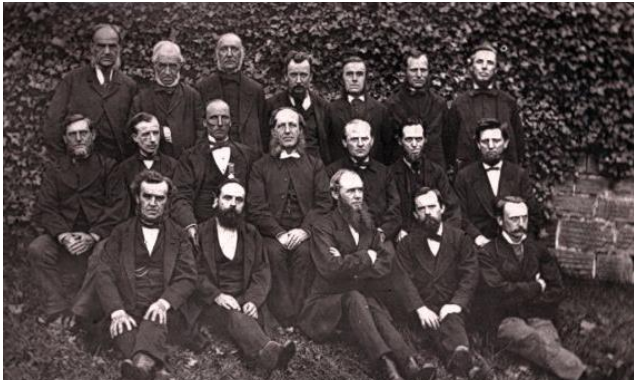
As well as amassing a probably substantial income from his brewery Mappin was a huge promoter of the railways, from north to south, east to west, from early in his working life. He was, for example, Director of the Manchester Sheffield and Midland Railway company, and others, was active on the committees for the Direct Western Railway, and many others, and had lucrative shares in many other booming railway enterprises. Presumably, he saw that the railways were necessary for moving the goods, livestock and people that were essential for his and other businesses, and invested in them. He also had at some points in his career stocks and shares in the Sheffield United Gas Light Company, the Sheffield and Hallamshire Bank, Sheffield General Cemetery, Crystal Palace Company, Joseph Rodgers and Son Ltd, one of the most eminent Sheffield cutlery companies, Newton, Chambers and Co Ltd, iron founders, and Tickhill Gas Light Coal and Coke Co. Ltd. The fruits of canny investment must have made up a substantial proportion of his wealth.

I will now look at Mappin's will, which is revealing - of his lifestyle, his priorities, even his affections. As a document which details the possessions of a man of his class it is telling - here are his musical instruments and his Erard pianoforte, from the London workshop of the piano maker to her Majesty Queen Victoria. You can see an advertisement for an Erard piano in the 11 October 1873 edition of the 'Sheffield Daily Telegraph' on sale at Stacey's Pianoforte shop in the High Street. Also, his books and bookcases, his horse, his landau, his silverware, his wines, his armour, sculptures, bronzes, statues and objets de vertu, watercolours, drawings and engravings, hot house plants, jewels and trinkets etc. and much else are mentioned and disposed of.

Most people towards the end of the nineteenth century died leaving nothing, or debt; Mappin was one of the minority who amassed a fortune and left a will. Compared with his neighbours, most of whom were connected with steel and metal manufacturing, his fortune was relatively modest - only about £10 million at today's values. Edward Vickers, for example, who built Tupton Hall left about £22 million in today's values, and Thomas Jessop of Endcliffe Grange left about £88 million in today's values.



Unlike most such families Mappin had no children. But his affections and loyalties are evident behind the dry words of the will. He left his wealth to a cutler friend, his nephews and their families, nieces, his Lady Housekeeper (so long as she did not marry), trusted servants and faithful employees, and the vicar at St John's (so long as he performed his duties to the satisfaction of the will's trustees). He left £1000 each (about £120,000 in today's values) to Sheffield General Infirmary, the Sheffield Public Hospital and



Scripture Readers Society in Sheffield - with permission Picture Sheffield

Dispensary, the Boys Charity School (or Bluecoat School) in Sheffield, the Orphanage (or Cherrytree) at Totley near Sheffield, the Rotherham Public Hospital and Dispensary, and the Scripture Readers Society in Sheffield.

But then comes the extraordinary bequest of Mappin's collection of 153 paintings to the city of Sheffield and of £15,000 (around £1,750,000) to build a gallery to house them, 'in perpetuity and without any charge'.

Why did Mappin collect art? Within the highly status conscious Victorian society collecting art was an activity which allowed wealthy business men, such as Mappin, to

establish themselves as a middle class elite. Mappin's art collection was well known before he died and he loaned pictures to the Sheffield School of Art's annual *Conversazione*, and to galleries elsewhere. He bought many paintings from the Royal Academy summer shows and from artists' studios to make his collection. Collecting and showing pictures were markers of a particular social identity in Sheffield, just as in London.

However, there are also more personal reasons why Mappin might have collected paintings. A press report about the opening of the Mappin Art Gallery in July 1887 comments that he liked to get up between 4 and 5 a.m. as a younger man to paint in his leisure time. The same report suggests that his work as an engraver with his father taught him his appreciation for art. He certainly lived close to his collection - at his home Birchlands there were 42 pictures in the drawing room, 51 in the picture gallery, 18 in the dining room, and 23 in the breakfast room, with a few more unaccounted for.

The speech givers at the opening of the Mappin Art Gallery in July 1887 suggest a further motive for his art collecting and his magnanimous gesture of a gallery to house his pictures for the town of Sheffield.

Their view was that the collection was a thing of beauty, that the gallery was an engine of social good, and its donation to the town was to improve the lives of Sheffield's working people. Also, that following Mappin, other public spirited entrepreneurs who made their money through the activities of the populace, should plough it back into the city they helped to build.

John Newton Mappin's name is no longer much remembered, but his generous legacy can be traced in the ongoing spiritual and cultural life of the city.

Loveday Herridge
20 May 2024



*This little group was taken on the steps of the Mappin Art Gallery opening day in 1887. The group includes the Mayor, Sir Henry S... who received the honour of knighthood on June 20th, 1887, Sir Thorpe Mappin, and Mr. A. J. Mundella, M.P., who is seen to... holding a paper in his left hand. Members of the Town Council...
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Opening of the Mappin Art Gallery 1887 - with permission Picture Sheffield