

The Button Files

Newsletter of the Warburton Society

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Editor:

Ray Warburton - ray1warburton@talktalk.net

Skype: ray.warburton

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The Newsletter

Welcome to the sixth issue of **The Button Files**. The three feature articles in this issue are:

- **The Story of the Poynton Clan** The clan I have spent longest developing during in the last six months is the Poynton Clan. It proved to be both bigger, and more interesting than I expected and that is described in this article.
- **A Lancashire Clan** is this issue's DNA article. Recent DNA results have produced a small group of matches and near matches that caused me to take a closer look at mutation rates, and allele frequencies. This article discusses my findings and conclusions.
- **Choppy Warburton and his Little Black Bottle** is the story of a 19th century athlete who became an early and successful trainer of cyclists before falling from grace and earning a reputation as the man who introduced drugs into cycling. This article explores his career, and whether his reputation was justified

Warburton One-Name Study

I have made the following updates to **The Warburton Website** since the last newsletter:

1. Following the article in the last Newsletter on the ancestry of Sam Warburton, his family is one of three families in a new collection of smaller families called Families 2.

2. There are three new clans, including the large **Poynton Clan**, and a smaller **Liverpool and Oldham Clan** which both result from investigation into the ancestors of recent DNA participants. There is also the **Warrington and Chorley Clan** which was split out from the **Warrington (Stanley) Clan** following discovery of an error.
3. There are a number of new DNA results, bringing the total to 30. Of these 9, including mine, are linked to the **Hale Barns Clan** and its associated clans. Another 4, all from Lancashire, seem to be linked but they raised some interesting issues. As well as updating the **DNA Results**, and **Results Commentary**, I did further research and added a **Mutations Table** as well as writing the article in this Newsletter.
4. I have made updates to several existing clans, including the **Bancroft, Mobberley, and Coppenhall Clans**. These updates often result from input from people who contact me through **The Warburton Website**. The running total is now 30 clans and 7 families including a total of 6797 names of which 4421 are Warburtons.

I notice that the hits counter on the The Warburton Website is now over 6200.

My current list of tasks follows. It looks very similar to the list in the last issue, reflecting the progress made (or not), and the size of the task. As usual it is subject to change as new ideas emerge. As I said in the last issue, if anyone sees anything they would dearly like to research themselves please shout. I would be happy to include your work on the website. The list does not include DNA activities which are discussed in the next section.

1. My plan to develop the Haslingden parish resource has finally come to the top of the pile. Not only is there the hope of resolving some of the issues from the article A Confusing Family in issue 3 of The Button Files, there is a new DNA result from a descendant of Eva Warburton Proctor (one of the four Lancashire matches). Also I now have the fact that Choppy Warburton also hailed from Haslingden.
2. When I did the Leigh parish recently I found a family that came from Lymm. Some time ago Cathy Warburton sent me a load of stuff on families from in and around Lymm parish, so I think I should develop a parish resource from Lymm before long.
3. Cathy has also been researching links from Warburton families in the US to their English originators. I need to capture and publish her work.

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4. A Warburton parish resource is also needed. Warburton parish is adjacent to both Lymm and Bowdon parishes, and is after all the source of the name.
5. Many trails lead to Tottington and the area just north of Bury. There is the Tottington Clan provided by Ann Cooper. A recent DNA participant had origins there. He is not linked to the Tottington Clan, but he is part of the new Lancashire DNA group. The Warbruton family in Always Turn the Page, The Bakers, and Sam Warburton's family are all from that area. Tottington falls in Bury parish though there are also chapels in and around Tottington. The number of Warburtons at Bury is vast so it will be a big task, but it needs to be done soon.
6. The CD of MIs in Altrincham and district, and the fiches when I acquired at the The Guild of One-Name Studies Conference over a year ago now, are still awaiting some attention.
7. Each of the parish exercises may result in extensions to existing clans, or even new ones as I proceed, but my emphasis will be on the resources in the immediate future.

The DNA Study

The DNA Study now has 30 results, with a couple more in process. The most significant development is the appearance of a small group of matches in Lancashire. This is the subject of an article in this newsletter.

Meanwhile my focus going forward is to make sure we have studied the ancestry of every DNA participant, and to try and identify a candidate, or candidates, to verify the DNA profile of each clan.

The Story of the Poynton Clan

The recently published Poynton Clan took longer to develop than I expected. There were a number of reasons for this, which are worth exploring. These include the size of the clan, the evolution in available Internet sources and how I used them to develop the clan, and the interesting historical fact the coal mining was conducted within 10 miles from where I grew up, and in a place where I never expected it.

Developing the Poynton Clan

Firstly I will recap how I develop a Warburton Clan. There can be various triggers, such as contact from a clan descendant, that start me working on a particular clan. In this case the trigger was a DNA result. My aim is to have a DNA result for each clan and vice versa. I had a result for Frederick (Fred), unfortunately not matched to any other Warburton, and the knowledge his descendants came from Poynton, Cheshire.

I first take the Warburton line back as far as possible to identify the earliest known ancestor. I then follow all descendant lines forwards again, recording all Warburton descendants and their spouses. I try to record births, baptisms, marriages, deaths and burials, as well as census entries between 1841 and 1911. For daughters I

will include a note on their families where possible, but their children are not included in the tree, unless they are illegitimate and retain the Warburton name. As I try not to record living people (unless so requested) I don't go much beyond 1911 though if I am sent such information I will include it.

In Fred's case it took a little while to get started. Fred's father was born in 1907 so I was able to find him in the 1911 census, though only after getting his exact birth date from his death registration. This gave me his grandfather as Frederick Ralph, and his grandmother as Nellie, and lead me to their marriage registration. However I could find no other reference to Frederick Ralph in censuses, and it was only when Fred got his parents marriage certificate and was able to verify his great grandfather that I could find him. Not only was the name Frederick Ralph not used at any other time than in his marriage record and the 1911 census, he was actually born in Yorkshire during a time his father worked there, although he always entered Poynton as his place of birth on censuses once he left his parent's home.

Tracing the family back through census entries and parish register entries proved relatively straight forward as far as Peter (1810-71). Peter was baptised at St Mary's in Stockport on September 15th 1810. His parents were given as John and Hannah of Torkington. Unfortunately there was no other evidence of John and Hannah. There was no marriage, and there were no other children baptised with parents named John and Hannah. However there were quite a number of baptisms of children of Joseph and Hannah of Torkington.

I had to decide if it was possible that Peter's father had been named incorrectly. The lack of any other evidence of John indicated a mistake was possible, but it would be nice to have more. Peter became a coal miner and went to live in Poynton, as did several of Joseph's sons. However the most significant fact was that Peter named his youngest son Ellis. This is an unusual name, but significantly it was also the name of one of Peter's supposed brothers, a son of Joseph and Hannah.

In fact there are seven boys called Ellis in the tree, though I have been unable to determine the origin of the name. I can see no Warburton-Ellis or Marsland-Ellis marriages that are relevant, but I assume it must be a name that relates to either Joseph or Hannah's parents or grandparents.

Joseph proved to be as far as I could get back. His birth was around 1767, and he appeared in the records in 1791 as the father of John Warburton who was baptised at Marple. John's mother was Sarah, and Joseph and Sarah had two more children before Sarah died and was buried, at the age of 21, at All Saints in Marple. Sarah must have been very young when she married Joseph but there is no on-line record of a marriage between a Joseph Warburton and a Sarah in or near Marple. There was a marriage in February 1791 to a Sarah Guest, but that was in Malpas which is nearly 50 miles away on the other side of Cheshire. Although there is no evidence of children of the Malpas couple anywhere else it would be too much of a stretch to say they moved all the way to Marple without further evidence.

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Joseph of Marple had already moved to Torkington by the time Sarah died and he remarried, to Hannah Marsland in 1796. In all he had 13 children, many of whom also had large families. I couldn't find baptisms for some of his children, but evidence from censuses and marriage records ties all but two of the children (other than Peter) to Joseph. For two sons, Thomas and James, there is no direct evidence to link them to Joseph, but they both give Torkington as their place of birth on censuses, and James had a son called Ellis.

In all I have 171 Warburton descendants of Joseph in this clan. In addition there are many children of his daughters and granddaughters, and there are some sons and grandsons who have no obvious death record despite disappearing from censuses, and so may have emigrated. When you realise the history of the clan extends little more than a century this is a very prolific family.

The Geography

I have mentioned a number of places such as Torkington, Poynton, and Marple. Norbury and Hazel Grove are other places that occur frequently in the tree. These places occupy a small area straddling the boundary between the then parishes of Stockport and Prestbury. They also straddled the registration districts of Stockport and Macclesfield. With the exception of Marple which is a further mile to the north, these villages are in an area of about 2 square miles. Altrincham, where I was born, is 10 miles to the west.

Both Norbury and Poynton had chapels-of-ease, which were designed to provide a convenient place of worship for communities that were some distance from the main parish church. Norbury, St Thomas, which served Torkington, and Hazel Grove, was in Stockport parish and registration district, while Poynton, St George was in Prestbury parish and Macclesfield registration district. Baptisms were typically performed at the local chapel, but marriages were more often performed in the main parish church. However there were also a number of Methodist and other non-conformist chapels, particularly in Hazel Grove, which were used by some of Joseph's descendants. Some marriages are only known from their registrations which show them as civil marriages. It is more likely these are non-conformist marriages as only the Church of England was allowed to register a marriage. Other denominations had to have a civil registrar present.

Before the nineteenth century many parishes were quite large, but as populations increased they were subdivided into smaller parishes and many ancient chapels-of-ease became parish churches of their own parish. This happened to St Thomas at Norbury in 1843, and to St George's at Poynton in 1871.

Using the Internet

After I received a little information on Fred's parents and grandparents I developed the Poynton Clan entirely from Internet sources. As I said earlier I record, where possible, details of births, baptisms, marriages, deaths and burials, and census entries between 1841 and 1911. In this section I will discuss the sources I used.

These sources are constantly changing, usually for the better. Although these changes were another reason why developing the Poynton clan seemed to take longer, these changes are encouraging. However the data available does vary from county to county. It is necessary to get familiar with what is available in the counties you are researching.

Much of my research is on families in Lancashire and Cheshire. Lancashire has the benefit of the On-line Parish Clerks Project which, although far from complete, has excellent transcriptions of parish register entries for the places and times it covers. Cheshire has the advantage of being the subject of an effort by FamilySearch to improve their parish register coverage, including scans of the registers themselves. For some reason the scans disappeared again, but many scans are now accessible on FindMyPast, though unfortunately, like Ancestry, it is a subscription site.

Much information is available from more than one source though some are better than others. Of the sites I use Ancestry and FindMyPast are subscription sites, but the others are free.

At the heart of my effort are the censuses as they enable me to build up the families, establish approximate ages, and determine place of birth, particularly for spouses. I use Ancestry for this. The information is also available on FindMyPast, but I am more familiar with searching on Ancestry, and now it has the complete 1911 census I only rarely use FindMyPast if I get stuck on Ancestry. The downside of Ancestry is the frequently strange transcriptions. I tend to search on Warb* to overcome some peculiar spellings, but there are some that are more obscure. Place names are also a challenge, as I suspect the transcribers have no knowledge of the geography they are dealing with.

The 1911 census is particularly useful because it includes how long a couple have been married, how many children they have had, and how many are still living. It is also the first completed by the householder, rather than an enumerator.

All births, marriages and deaths after July 1837 should be registered. Although the actual certificates can only be obtained for a fee, access to the registration indexes is free. I like to record the registration reference to help anyone who might wish to obtain the actual certificate. Also it ties down the event itself more accurately. Censuses take place in late March or early April so Ancestry's estimated year of birth is a year too late three times out of four. Registrations are indexed quarterly, though as 6 weeks is allowed to register they might be a bit late sometimes.

I use FreeBMD to get the information on the Registration Indexes. There are also county BMD sites for Lancashire and Cheshire (called LancashireBMD and CheshireBMD). These are created by local volunteers and sometimes have extra information. On births FreeBMD only has mother's maiden name from 1911 but the county sites might have it on earlier records. On marriages the county sites usually give the name of the church. On deaths FreeBMD only has age at death from 1865, but the county sites may have it earlier. Having

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said this the county sites are a "work in progress", and there is a dispute in East Cheshire, which includes Macclesfield, where the local council are prohibiting the extra information in the belief it will damage their sales of certificates.

Ancestry also has a search on births, marriages and deaths. Up to 1916 this is a copy of the FreeBMD information though the search can be defined differently, and response times are faster. This makes it better when you are searching for an event over a longer time period. After 1916 Ancestry has its own data and it extends up to 2005. I use this to look for deaths of all males, and any wives alive in the 1911 census, and any daughters who have already married so I know their married name. It is often, but not always possible to get a good, unique match based on date of birth and place of death. If the death occurs after the mid-1960s the Registration Index will also give the exact date of birth.

As Poynton is in Cheshire there is no Online Parish Clerk site available. The mainstay for searching for baptisms, marriages and births is still FamilySearch. It seems to be slowly extending its range beyond 1837 and has good coverage of Cheshire. However I still find some of its transcriptions incomplete, and there are often multiple versions of the same record. One of my favourite searches is to search for all Warburton baptisms in the years following a marriage, specifying the parents names. This is the best way to build families prior to the 1851 census, the first to include relationships. This will also identify children who died young and before they could appear in a census.

A big bonus of working on the Stockport area is that FindMyPast has recorded the parish records, including image scans, until quite late in the nineteenth century. I was therefore able to view many of the actual records and extract the information for myself.

Coal Mining in Poynton

I was surprised to realise that coal mining was a major industry so close to where I grew up. When I looked into it I discovered that the middle layers of the Lancashire Coal field extended south and were found to the east of the Red Rock Fault which ran north-south through Norbury and Poynton. To the west of the fault the coal was too deep to be mined.

There were several seams of between two and seven feet, some of which outcropped in the Poynton area so some mining activity went back to the Middle Ages. By the end of the 16th century there were already proper mine shafts with workings in all directions for twenty to thirty yards.

Serious mining dates from the end of the 18th century when Nathaniel Wright systematically acquired the leases to all the mines in Norbury and Poynton. By 1826 some years after Nathaniel's death, there were 18 pits with modern machinery, and over 300 workers.

The mines in Poynton were on land owned by the Vernon family and in 1826 the estate passed to John Venables Vernon, the 4th Lord Vernon. In 1831 the Macclesfield canal opened giving access to new markets

so in 1832 Lord Vernon decided to operate the mines himself. The mines continued to expand.



Fig 1. Sir George Warren's Sough, an early mine

The workforce was 483 men and 150 boys in 1847, and the maximum output of over 240,000 tons was achieved in 1859. However production subsequently suffered a decline exacerbated by the serious recession in the cotton industry that resulted from the American Civil War. The mines underwent a number of revivals and reinvestments and production again reached over 240,000 tons in 1897, but by 1915 this had declined to 175,000 tons with 451 men underground. Much of the coal was exhausted and the rest was becoming uneconomic to mine. The last pit closed in 1935 with 250 redundancies.



Fig 2. Park Pits, 1926.

This was the industry that many of Joseph Warburton's descendants were involved in, some to quite advanced ages. Many remained as colliers, but some were described as firemen, overlookers, or underlookers. A fireman was a foreman in charge of a part of the mine. An underlooker was "an official in charge of a part of a mine and responsible to the undermanager and supervising the fireman".

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A few stayed on, or returned to the land, and others escaped to trades such as watchmaking. Many of the women worked in the cotton or silk industries.

The Warburton Society

There are now 145 people in my Warburton Society distribution list. This is the second Newsletter to be placed on my Newsletter website and announced by email. However the website has only received 87 hits since the last Newsletter was announced so i need to understand if people are finding them OK.

Friends of the Warburton One-Name Study

Friends of the Warburton One-Name Study is a private group I have set up on Facebook. It currently has 34 members (who are also members of the Warburton Society, though there are 4 I don't have email addresses for and so aren't in the 145 on my distribution list). The purpose of the group is to share photographs and ideas. From time to time I leave a comment on what I am up to. I should try and get into a habit of doing that more regularly. I encourage you all to join.

To join the Friends you need to be on Facebook. Then just find me, I'm the Ray Warburton who lives in Chepstow, and send me a Friend request. I can then add you to the group.

If you have no interest in Facebook per se you don't have to use it for anything else. You don't need to put much in your profile, and you can make it private anyway. Personally I rarely use it apart from the group.

A Lancashire Clan

I now have four DNA results, all with a Lancashire origin which are close, but in a couple of cases not very close. The purpose of this article is to discuss the issues in determining if this is indeed a group with a common ancestor.

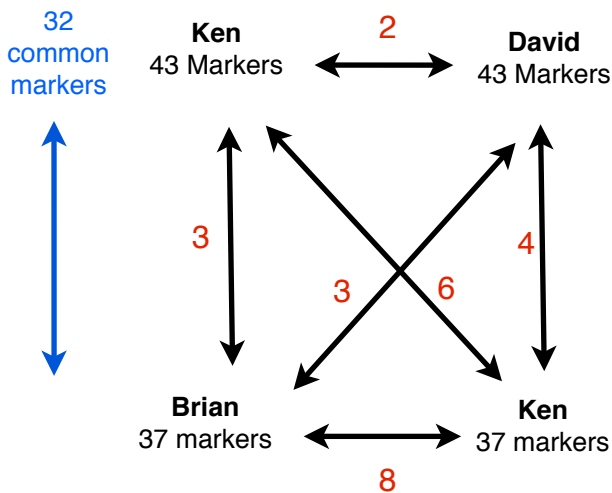


Fig 3: The number of mutations (in red)

The Lancashire four are Ken and David who were tested on DNA Heritage, and Ian and Brian who tested on FTDNA. The first two tested 43 markers, the second two 37 markers, and there were 32 markers common to all four. Ken and David are just two mutations apart in 43 markers, a good match. Ian and Brian are 8 mutations apart in 37 markers, which is a very weak match. However, when we compare the other possible combinations over the 32 common markers we find David and Brian are 3 apart, as are Ken and Brian. David and Ian are 4 apart, and Ken and Ian are 6 apart.

The factors to consider include mutation rates which seem to vary considerably between markers, and maybe for a single maker between families. I've also been looking at allele distributions, and the length of a generation.

When I look more closely at mutation rates I find a number of sources that don't entirely agree but follow a pattern. I have put a Mutations Table on my website with the details and sources, but in summary I am using a rate of 0.23% per marker for DNA Heritage, 0.42% for FTDNA, and 0.28% for the 32 common markers.

This disparity seems quite surprising but the 5 unique FTDNA markers are quite volatile, and of the 8 differences between Ian and Brian, 3 are in these 5 markers.

Each marker in a DNA result has a value representing the number of times a short sequence of DNA is repeated at that location. Over a number of results some values will be more common than others. Each possible value is known as an allele, and the proportion of the total results which each allele is found to have is the allele distribution. For example marker DYS464d has a value of 17 in 69% of people in haplogroup R1b (to which the Lancashire group belong).

However all 4 of the Lancashire group have a value of 19 at marker DYS464d, though the incidence of 19 is only 2% in the R1b haplogroup. I will return to this later. The new Mutations Table on the website includes allele distributions for each marker where it is known.

When trying to determine when the most recent common ancestor of two people with a matched DNA profile might have lived, the answer is given as the number of generations. For example if two participants have 2 mismatches in 43 markers on the DNA Heritage test (with an average mutation rate of 0.23% per marker) there is a 50% chance the common ancestor lived within 14 generations. The question is, how long is this in years, or how many years should we consider each generation lasts.

Many sources seem to suggest numbers like 25 years per generation. However I think these tend to consider lines of inheritance and so consider only time to the first born son. When I look at my own ancestry the average generation over the last 10 generations is 37 years. In one instance my 3x great grandfather was born when his father was 59, and he was only the 4th of 8 children of his father's second marriage. I don't know if I am typical, but I

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suspect there is probably quite a variation between different families. Some years ago I attended a wedding where the groom's grandmother, and the bride's great grandmother were present, and the groom's grandmother was the elder of the two.

I have seen 30 years quoted in relation to DNA calculations so I think it is probably a suitable number to use. It means that since the first person (Sir Peter) adopted the Warburton name in the 13th century we have had about 25 generations. Therefore to consider whether 2 modern Warburtons have a common ancestor we need to look at the probability of a common ancestor in the last 25 generations.

There is a further consideration that might be relevant. The village of Warburton was founded in the 10th century as a fortified settlement near a ford on the river Mersey. I would imagine it was established with a handful of families, and 3-400 years later when surnames were being adopted it would still be largely populated by descendants of these families. This would be particularly true of the males, although wives might come from neighbouring villages.

We know that the lords of the manor adopted the Warburton name when they established a manor house there. As they moved in regional or national circles it makes sense to use their place of abode as their name. However if there were other adopters amongst the lower classes it would only make sense to take the name of their place of origin if they were no longer living there. Is it not possible, therefore, that if 2 such adopters came from a village where many people were already related, they might already have a common ancestor before adopting the name? We therefore have the possibility of a pre-Warburton common ancestor up to 1050 years, or 35 generations ago.

One other possibility is a non-Warburton common ancestor. I have noticed it is not unusual for there to be multiple marriages between two families. It must be possible, therefore, that 2 Warburton girls, maybe from different generations, have illegitimate sons by members of the same local family, thus giving them a common non-Warburton ancestor.

When we look at the Lancashire group the largest genetic distance is between Ian and Brian with 8 mismatches on the 37 marker FTDNA test. Five of these mismatches are in the 32 common markers and I will use these to determine the probability of a match. It seems to be the worst case due to the lower mutation rate, though the maximum genetic distance in the group at 32 markers is 6 mutations which will have a lower probability. Unfortunately the Moseswalker MRCA calculator I use only gives values for up to 5 mutations.

Looking at the chart for 32 markers and a mutation rate of 0.28% we find that there is a 10% chance of a common ancestor in 20 generations, and a 25% chance of a common ancestor in 26 generations. Does this mean a common ancestor is unlikely? I think not. There are only 2 possibilities. Either there is a common ancestor, or there is a random match. We have to consider the

probability of two unrelated people having a random match. If this probability is significantly less than the probability of a common ancestor within 25 generations then, to paraphrase Sherlock Holmes, when you have eliminated the improbable, then the possible is probably true.

I can't claim to be a statistics expert but my understanding is that if the probability of a specific value at one marker is 90% and the possibility of another specific value at another marker is 80% then the probability that a particular person has both values is 72% (.9 x .8 expressed as a percentage). There are allele distribution values available for all 32 markers that are common to both the DNA Heritage, and FTDNA tests. These values are specific to the R1b haplotype to which the Lancashire group (and my Cheshire group) belong. If you multiply the probabilities of having the most common allele for each of these 32 markers, then the probability of an individual having all 32 most common values is just 6 one thousandths of one percent. The chances of sharing some of the less common alleles are even less. The Lancashire group all share 4 allele values which are less common. These are DYD393 where they share a value of 23 which carries a 22% probability, DYS447 value 24 which has a 17% probability, DYS464d value 19 which has a 2% probability, and DYS442 value 13 which has a 12% probability. Multiplying just these 4 values gives a probability of any two people at random having all four values of under 0.01%.

In the Lancashire group we have 4 people, all with the same surname. I think we can safely say we have a group who share a common ancestor, though that common ancestor probably lived around the time surnames were adopted.

Choppy Warburton and his Little Black Bottle

This is the time of year for summer sporting events. One which I always enjoy watching on TV is the Tour de France cycling race, so it seems appropriate to look at the life of one of the earliest cycling trainers, one James Edward (Choppy) Warburton. Choppy has been the subject of at least 2 books as well as a BBC Radio program on drugs in sport, and a number of Internet entries. The most recent book is *The Little Black Bottle* by Gerry Moore, which in turn refers to the privately published *'Choppy' Warburton: Long Distance Runner and Trainer of Cycling Champions* by Richard Watson (which I have yet to read; my copy is in the post).

In June 1896 Choppy was at the height of his powers as a trainer. The previous August one of his riders, Jimmy Michael of Aberaman in South Wales, had won the 100 km paced race at the first official World Championships. Then the previous month Arthur Linton, also from Aberaman, had been placed 1st in the Bordeaux-Paris race, the most prestigious road race of the day.

Choppy was a showman. According to the *Cycling Gazette* of Chicago he was "undoubtedly the most widely

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advertised figure in European cycle racing circles. His every movement created talk". The magazine Paris Velo described him thus: "In the track centre he is the only one you see. His great overcoat and his Derby hat pushed down to his ears, with a bang of his fist he gives an air of mystery that intrigues rivals. From his pocket he suddenly takes a small glass container, shows it to his rider, uncorks it with dramatic care, pours the unknown mixture that it contains into a milk bottle and then still running, knocking over anyone who gets in the way, gets himself to the other side of the track to pass it on to his rider".

Choppy himself said he only coached four riders, and three of them were World Champions, Jimmy Michael, Arthur Linton, and Arthur's younger brother Tom. This was not strictly true but made a good story. However it was 'the little black bottle' that was Choppy's downfall. He was very secretive about its contents. Some thought it a bluff, other's that it was something much more potent.



Fig 4. Arthur Linton, Choppy, Jimmy Michael, and Tom Linton

Early in June 1896 Choppy's riders were appearing at a meeting at Catford Race Track in London. Arthur Linton made an attempt on the 2 mile record but his lacklustre performance showed he was still suffering from his exertions in the Bordeaux-Paris race. However it was the performance of Jimmy Michael that was more worrying. Reports are contradictory. Reports say that after taking a drink from Choppy's bottle he was clearly unsteady on his bicycle; some say he actually set off in the wrong direction. What is known is that he failed to finish his race and blamed Choppy for poisoning him.

Worse was to follow. It was soon clear that Arthur Linton's poor form was due to more than tiredness. He was forced to return to South Wales to recuperate, but died of typhoid on July 23rd. It wasn't long before his demise was related to his efforts in the Bordeaux-Paris race, and that he was able to give such an effort because of the contents of Choppy's little black bottle.

An article in Cyclers' News by 'One Who Knows' described an episode in the race as follows: "I saw him (Arthur Linton) at Tours half way through the race at

midnight when he came in with glassy eyes and tottering limbs and in a high state of nervous excitement. I then heard him swear, a very rare occurrence for him but after a rest he was off again though none of us expected he would go very far. At Orleans at 5 o'clock in the morning Choppy and I looked after a wreck, a corpse as Choppy called him, yet he had sufficient energy, heart, pluck, call it what you will to enable him to gain 18 minutes on the last 45 miles of hilly road." Although Linton finished first it transpired he hadn't followed the correct route so he was officially placed joint first with his French rival Gaston Rivierre.

On October 31st 1896 The National Cycling Union (NCU) held a hearing into Jimmy Michael's claims of poisoning and banned Choppy from all race meetings under the NCU's jurisdiction. Choppy continued to work abroad but through 1897 his health began to deteriorate and on 17th December 1897 he died, aged 52, of heart failure, in lodgings in Wood Green during a visit to London to plead his case in an appeal against his NCU ban.

Following his death his reputation continued to suffer and he became known as the man who introduced drugs to cycling. Arthur Linton was considered to be the first man to die from the use of drugs in cycling. But who exactly was Choppy Warburton, and did he deserve the reputation he gained after his death?

James Edward Warburton was born on the 13th November 1845 in Haslingden, Lancashire, just 2 months after the marriage of his father James, and mother Harriet Birtwistle. His parents had 13 children in all, but only 6, all boys, survived long enough to appear in censuses. Many sources say his nickname came from his father, a seaman, who, however rough the sea, would only admit it was a bit choppy. However James senior was a weaver in a cotton mill when James was born, and later became landlord of the Wagon and Horses public house in Haslingden. It would appear the seafarer was either an uncle, or from an earlier generation. James senior was one of several of that name born in Haslingden around 1822 so I have yet to identify Choppy's grandfather.

Choppy himself went to work in the mill at the age of eight. When he was seventeen one of his tasks was to go to the railway station at Helmshore whenever an engine was needed to come up to the mill to pull away the loaded wagons. It was Choppy's habit to run back alongside the engine, an act that was spotted by one of the mill's owners who was himself an amateur athlete. Impressed he invited Choppy to run at a local meeting, and he was subsequently signed up by the Haslingden Athletic Club. This was the start of a long amateur athletic career that culminated in him being acknowledged as the amateur champion of England in 1878.

Through most of his career he continued to work as a warehouseman in the mill. He also found time to marry, in 1874 to Mary Ann Johnson, and in 1878 their son James Allen (known as Jimmy) was born. A daughter Mary Ann followed in 1880.

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Choppy's new found responsibilities led to a change in career. Shortly after his marriage he became the licensee of the Fisherman's Arms in Blackburn. This gave him an income and a place to live, but following the birth of his son he needed more. At the age of 34 he decided to turn professional. As an amateur he had been able to make some money by selling prizes, but professionalism allowed him to win prize money.

In 1880 he was persuaded he could earn good money in America. His brother George had already emigrated to North Carolina. A second brother, the improbably named Doctor Warburton followed later and became a Professor of Music. Choppy's own American adventure was less successful. He found himself in a world of confidence tricksters, and villains. Gambling was rife and many races were fixed. Choppy often had to run to orders, though he sometimes won when he shouldn't. He originally planned to be in America for 3 months but only arrived home in August 1881, travelling under an assumed name to avoid some of the crooks who felt he owed them money. He had missed the birth of his daughter. He also left behind a tarnished reputation, one American newspaper considered he was "crooked all the way through after his first race, and ran in the interests of a gang of bullies and blacklegs who told him when to win and when to lose", though it did admit he was "persecuted, plundered, and punished...but he couldn't expect any better from the crowd he trained with".



Choppy (right) in his running days.

Fig 5.

Choppy continued running until 1892. He even returned to America, avoiding the acquaintances from his first trip, and possibly competing under an assumed name. His last race was a handicap race for veterans of fifty years and over. Choppy won easily but an objection was lodged, pointing out he was only 47. He was disqualified, and so his running career ended rather ignominiously.

Meanwhile in 1885 Choppy left the Fisherman's Arms to become manager and trainer of athletics in Stanley Park, Liverpool. However this was not a success and he returned to managing pubs, though by the 1891 census the family was living in Salford over a shop they appeared to be letting out. Choppy however was not at home.

Choppy first appeared as a cycling trainer in 1892 working with FJ Osmond, a former NCU champion. He clearly knew much about the conditioning of an athlete from his own career. He understood the importance of diet, and of the importance taking on food and drinks during long endurance events. He was himself a non-smoker and teetotaler who organised all his own training. An addition Choppy was excellent at instilling confidence and self-belief, whilst his showmanship allowed him to get the best exposure for his charges.

Through most of his career as a trainer Choppy was based in Paris where he was manager of the cycling team of the Gladiator Cycling Company. Cycle companies saw cycle racing as an ideal way to advertise their products and maintained strong teams. This was also the age of paced racing. Choppy's cyclists did their racing behind teams of pacers riding tandems, triplets, and machines for up to six riders. Choppy understood that good training and organisation of the pacing teams was essential for getting the best out of his riders. Including cyclists and pacers Choppy trained a team of about 30 riders.

The one skill Choppy lacked was any understanding of the mechanics of the bicycle. Nevertheless he had considerable success, though his life had a significant affect on his marriage. For a while his wife and daughter moved to Paris with him, but later returned to Lancashire, and at the time of his death they were planning to move to Australia. His son Jimmy became a cyclist, working with Choppy for a time, but when Choppy died he was living in America and riding as a pacer.

A central element in Choppy's showmanship was his little black bottle. It was clearly part of his act, and his secretiveness about its contents added to his allure. He certainly never tried to hide it. We shall probably never know its contents. The wildest suggestion was a mixture of strychnine, which in small quantities relaxed muscles, and heroin which numbed pain. Others thought it was all show, and probably contained water. More likely Choppy had developed a mixture of herbs and other ingredients that had given him energy and stimulation on his own long runs.

It should be remembered that at the time there were no rules about what competitors might take. Substances such as laudanum (an opium-based painkiller), cocaine,

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caffeine, arsenic, and strychnine were all available from the local pharmacy, and many preparations were advertised and marketed as stimulants and tonics that contained caffeine, or cocoa amongst their ingredients. The contents of the little black bottle would probably fail a modern drugs test, but by the standards of the time they were probably unremarkable.

Most professional athletes and cyclists of the time were from working class backgrounds, as were most of the crowds that watched them. They knew the hard backgrounds in the mills and mines that the athletes had escaped from, and understood why they would use whatever means available to further the athletic career that enabled them to escape. The amateur athletes, on the other hand, were mostly from the upper classes, typically university men who later progressed to serve on the various associations that ran the sports. They tended to regard the professionals, and especially their trainers and managers with deep suspicion. Choppy's brash showmanship would not go down well with the amateurs of the National Cycling Union, and they were probably delighted to have cause to ban him.

It has to be admitted that Choppy was not whiter than white. Race fixing associated with gambling was not unknown, and it is possible that nobbling a rider who wouldn't agree to toe the line occurred. However if we consider the incidents that most tarnished Choppy's reputation they can have a very different interpretation. Arthur Linton's ride in the Bordeaux-Paris race was certainly remarkable and probably aided by some sort of stimulant. However it stretches the imagination to suggest it was the cause of his death two months later. He clearly needed a rest and Choppy begged him to return to South Wales to recuperate, but Linton refused and continued to race for the best part of six weeks before it became clear he was ill. Typhoid, the cause of his death, was known as the scourge of the over-trained. His exertions in the Bordeaux-Paris race were probably just one element in the over-exertions that made him vulnerable to the disease.

The second incident, the supposed poisoning of Jimmy Michael, is easier to explain. Michael had been disenchanted by his contract with Choppy for some time. Choppy signed his riders to strict contracts which gave them a salary and bonuses, but gave Choppy half their prize money. As Michael became more successful he felt he should have more of his winnings. He was also keen to try America where the rewards were said to be greater. Choppy had planned to take his riders to America earlier in the year but Arthur Linton was prone to home sickness and refused to go, so the trip never materialised.

Then Michael was contacted by an American trainer called Thomas Eck who had brought a team to race in England. However they knew Michael's contract with Choppy would be difficult to break unless they could charge him with something serious. The events at Catford would seem to be designed to achieve this end, and before the end of August 1896 Jimmy Michael was in America with Eck.

Choppy was clearly a colourful character but the claim that he was uniquely responsible for the introduction of drugs into cycling would seem to be extremely unjust.

Next Issue

I plan to publish issue number 7 around the turn of the year. My current ideas for feature articles are:

- The Warburton Haplotypes (this idea has been around for a while but could be replaced again if something's more interesting turns up).
- The story of Ringway and Hale Chapels, and the role of my ancestor Josiah in that story.
- The coverage of parishes records by both FamilySearch and FindMyPast has improved, with actual images of some parish records available. I also intend to upgrade my Ancestry subscription to include parish records, and I have a subscription to the new MyHeritage SuperSearch. Working on various parish resources should give me a feel for the relative merits of each of these. I included some comments on Internet use in my article on the Poynton Clan but I should have more to say by the next newsletter.

As usual my plans are fluid, especially if I receive better submissions or suggestions from members.