

Charles Towsey of Henley upon Thames in the County of Wexford Gentleman

Mary Harriet Sparks

M. B. Moorhouse  
Edmond Towsey

# TOWSEY TALES

**NAME:** Frederick Towsey

**BIRTH DETAILS:** 23 April 1800, Henley

**DEATH DETAILS:** 18 Nov. 1840 Camberwell, Sth. London

**CHART REF:** Towsey Chart D1

**MARRIAGE DETAILS:** 13 April 1830, Henley

**SPOUSE:** Elizabeth Mary Gibbon

Frederick was the first of the two surviving sons of William Augustus Towsey and Elizabeth Ann Moorhouse.

Frederick's father died in Henley on October 11th, 1828, at fifty five years of age, leaving his wine merchant business in Henley to his sons Frederick and Charles.

Judging by Frederick's claim that he had been running the business for a few years already, we can reasonably assume that W.A. Towsey must have been in ill-health for some time.

With the death of their father and the taking over of the business, Frederick and Charles as young gentlemen, both seem to have thrown themselves into the life of responsible citizens in

## Jackson's Oxford Journal 25 October 1828

### FREDERICK TOWSEY

**B**EGS to inform his friends and the public that, in consequence of the death of his lamented father, the Business will in future be conducted under the firm of **FREDERICK TOWSEY and CO.**

F. T. having had the principal management of the concern for the last few years, he feels confidence in soliciting future favours; and in returning his sincere thanks for those so long conferred on his late father, he begs to say that no exertion shall be spared on his part to merit their continuance.  
*Henley-on-Thames, October, 1828.*

Henley.

In 1830, Frederick married Elizabeth Mary Gibbon, the daughter of the late Reverend Benjamin Gibbon of Pembrokeshire.

Between 1831 and 1838 they had five children in Henley. Of these, only the first died in infancy. All the rest lived at least until 1841.

The advertisement for a sale of 'fancy goods', for the benefit of the local school, shows that the ladies of the Towsey family: W A Towsey's widow and Frederick's wife, were also socially active.

In 1834 and 1835, Frederick served as a church warden which meant being involved in the administrative affairs of the town, though by that time, many governmental duties were being handled by elected, secular officials.

We see also in 1834, when Frederick was church warden, that his younger brother had helped out by making a booklet showing to whom each of the pews in the church was allocated.

This slim, hand written volume, must be one of the most boring reads of all time, but its purpose was no doubt functional;

## Jackson's Oxford Journal 24 August 1833

*HENLEY-ON-THAMES, August 8, 1833.*

**A**FANCY SALE will take place, (by permission of the Mayor,) in the Town Hall, Henley, on the 26th and 29th days of August, 1833, for the benefit of the Infant and National Schools, under the Patronage of Right Hon. Lady Dungarvon, Blount's Court. Right Hon. Lady Mark Kerr, Holmwood. Lady Stapleton, Grays Court.

- |                                     |                                       |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Miss Allnutt, Henley.               | Miss Ovey, Henley.                    |
| Mrs. Belcher, Henley.               | Mrs. Capt. Parker, Henley.            |
| Mrs. Bussell, Henley.               | Miss Parker, Henley.                  |
| Mrs. S. Cooper, Henley.             | Mrs. Pechell, Bix Rectory.            |
| Mrs. P. Cooper, Bird Place.         | Mrs. Phillimore, Shiplake House.      |
| Mrs. Coventry, Greenland.           | Mrs. T. A. Powys, Medmenham Vicarage. |
| Mrs. C. Fanshawe, Fawley Rectory.   | Mrs. Quarrington, Reimham.            |
| Mrs. Freeman, Henley Park.          | Mrs. Rigall, Crowsley Park.           |
| Mrs. Gardiner, Reimham Lodge.       | Mrs. Roberts, Grays Rectory.          |
| Mrs. Hall, Harpsden Court.          | Mrs. Scott, Danesfield.               |
| Mrs. T. Hall, Sheep House.          | Mrs. Sedgwick, Gillett's Cottage.     |
| Mrs. Hind, Mill End.                | Mrs. Sparks, Henley.                  |
| Mrs. Hopkins, Nuffield.             | The Miss Stapletons, Grays Court.     |
| Mrs. Jackson, Henley.               | Miss Treacher, Henley.                |
| Mrs. Jeston, Henley.                | Mrs. Treacher, Henley.                |
| Mrs. King, Rectory, Henley.         | Mrs. F. Towsey, Henley.               |
| Mrs. C. Lane Badgmore.              | Mrs. Arkyns Wright, Crowsley Park.    |
| Miss Langley, Henley.               |                                       |
| Mrs. Lydekker, Henley.              |                                       |
| Mrs. Scott Murray, Hambleton House. |                                       |

One shilling admittance on the first day.

in clearing up any doubts as to who should sit where in the church, during the tedious, self-righteous monologues that the good citizens would have felt obliged to sit through every Sunday.

On 19<sup>th</sup> August 1839, Frederick and Charles formally dissolved their partnership as wine and spirit merchants, which had been trading under the name of Frederick Towsey and Company.

Perhaps Frederick did not enjoy the wine business. Maybe he thought that he could do better in the more dynamic setting of the big city. Perhaps he woke up one morning and simply decided that he could not stand the claustrophobic atmosphere of Henley life any longer.

We do not know exactly why Frederick moved with his family to London in 1839, but I suspect that some sort of emotional upheaval might have been involved.

Frederick and his family moved to Camberwell, in South London where he set up business as a bookseller and stationer, at 2 Leicester Place, on Camberwell New Street.

In August of 1840 Frederick and Elizabeth's sixth child was born, but lived for just ten months.

Unfortunately, Frederick's new life very quickly went very wrong.

On November 18th, 1840, he died from what today would be called a drug overdose. The death certificate says that he "Poisoned himself by taking laudanum, being of unsound mind at the time".

Laudanum became very popular in the 19th century. It is a solution of opium dissolved in brandy.

One might think that a combination of opium and brandy would induce no more than a pleasant, relaxed state of mind. This is probably what it did in most cases, but to someone whose mind was completely absorbed in and regulated by the rigid social codes and simplistic religious dogmas of that time, the freedom of the euphoric state induced by opium, might well lead to paranoia and then psychosis.

The census of 1841 shows Frederick's brother Charles (then 30 years old), living in Bell Street, Henley with his mother (then 65 years old) and one servant. Maria, Frederick's eight year old daughter was also staying with them at that time, whilst Frederick's widow, Elizabeth was back in Camberwell with two servants and her next two children, but not her two year-old son, who might also have been staying with other relatives, allowing Elizabeth some freedom to run her business.

Frederick's widow carried on the stationery business for some time, but then we lose contact with her, until she turns up in the early 1850s, in Islington, north London.

Of the four children of Frederick and Elizabeth, none lived long enough to marry and have children. They all died between the ages of 20 and 30 years, except for the fifth, Walter Long Towsey, apprenticed to a watchmaker, who died in 1858 at 19 years of age, from tuberculosis.

Elizabeth was living at 4 Gibson Square, Theberton Street, Islington, when she died on 20th December, 1855, at just 49 years of age. The executor of her will was Frederick's brother, Charles Augustus Towsey.

