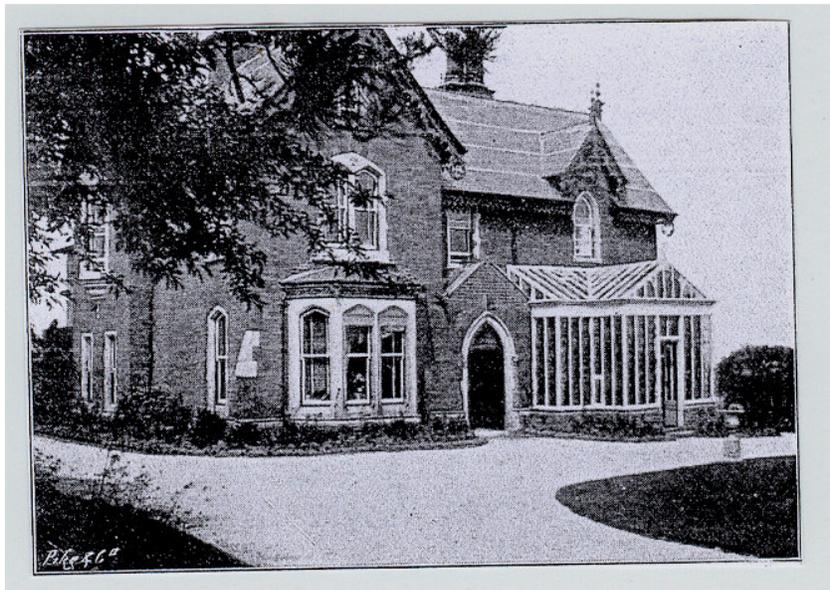


## Batworth House: an elegant Victorian villa

### Charles Henry Reynolds (1806-75): the builder of Batworth

Hunmanby contains two private homes bearing the name “Batworth”. The first is the pair of cottages (dated 1694) now knocked into a single residence on Northgate. The other, Batworth House on Muston Road, is only about half as old. Known for much of its existence as “The Villa” it is one of the more palatial buildings in the village. Its history is filled with both larger than life personalities and some tragedy.

Photographs from the Edwardian period show that the exterior of Batworth has changed very little. There is a generous bay window to one side of the front door. The glazed conservatory roof on the other side has now been replaced with slates, though all of the decorations remain. The chimney pots are covered with hexagonal and diamond patterning in slip relief. The gable ends and the guttering are lined with Lincoln green barge boards cut to a distinctive, organic design.



**Batworth in around 1903.**

Batworth House was built in the middle of the nineteenth century by the grocer and draper Charles Reynolds (1806-75), who hailed from Snaith, near Goole. The 1871 census shows that his business was based on Bridlington Street and employed two assistants.

It is believed that Reynolds was also responsible for constructing Hunslet House near the post office - now empty, but owned most recently by the late Eric Marshall. If the buildings present state of disrepair is overlooked, features such as the chimney pots and window lintels suggest a similarly keen attention to detail.

Two documents deposited in the East Riding County Archives at Beverley point to Mr. Reynolds' importance as a merchant and landowner. The first has him as a witness to a property transaction between George Green and Dr. Thomas Hagyard carried out in 1846. The second from 1870 is an indenture between him and Admiral Mitford concerning four tenements on the north side of Stonegate.

For all his conspicuous wealth, Reynolds had a less than contented home life. He was widowed at just forty-seven. One of their sons, John, died in infancy and the other children, Robert and Charles junior, were sent away to the Bluecoat School in London, an institution set up for motherless scholars whose fathers had to work.

No named descendents of Mr. Reynolds have lived in Hunmanby for a long time. About four years ago they briefly came back to attention. When Cross Hill Methodist Church was being cleared out in preparation for renovation one of the members discovered a white marble tablet propped at the back of the meter cupboard. This must have originally been set into the wall at the old Wesleyan Chapel (now the Co-op supermarket), which closed in 1958.

**In Loving Remembrance of  
Robert Henry  
Youngest son of  
Charles and Jane Reynolds  
Hunmanby.  
Who died on board the Sarah Nicholson  
Off the Cape of Good Hope  
April 29<sup>th</sup> 1872, aged 19 years  
*And the sea gave up the dead which were in it.*  
Rev. 20 C. 13. V.**

The epitaph taken from the book of Revelation was often used in those days for lamenting sailors or fishermen who had perished at sea. It is quoted in 'Shrouds not made wi' hands' (1888), a broad dialect poem by the Reverend W.H. Oxley, which imagines an old Filey widow standing on the beach mourning her drowned family.

The 'Sarah Nicholson' was a cargo ship built by Nicholson's of Annan, Dumfriesshire, and later converted to carry tobacco by Alfred Holt of Liverpool. Presumably Robert Reynolds died through accident or illness. The tablet currently rests in God's Acre cemetery.

The other surviving son, the younger Charles, also went away to sea, settling in British Columbia. More information on him is to be found in an essay in the pamphlet entitled *Hunmanby*, published by the village local history group in 1976.

### After Reynolds

The 1892 Bulmer's Directory for the East Coast lists the occupant of "The Villa" as having been one Dr. Henry Hick. Little can be found out about this gentleman. He was an old boy of Leeds Grammar School and previously practiced medicine at Frystone. At this point there were a number of surgeons and practitioners in the village, the most prominent of them being the Cornish-born Charles Goodridge Heard, who briefly chaired the village board, the precursor to the elected parish council.

Hick's death was recorded in July 1893. Given that he was only 31 years of age, there must have been other residents at Batworth in the 1870s and 1880s.

### James Varley (1844-1906): Hotelier extraordinaire

In the later 1800s Mr. Reynolds' grand home came into the hands of the hotelier James Varley (1844-1906). Varley's father, William, rose from being the Head Waiter at the Cross Keys Inn, Market Place, Hull, to owning that establishment. James shared a head for business and for two decades ran the Crescent Hotel on the seafront in Filey. During that period, he was reckoned to be the most successful independent hotel-owner in England. Aristocratic guests included Baron and Lady Amphlett, and Lord Brudenell Bruce, the son of the Marquis of Ailesbury. Leopold II, King of the Belgians, stopped by for tea on his way to visit Queen Victoria.

Varley's reputation certainly went before him. It was said that if the Crescent had no vacancies he refused to turn anyone away unless he had personally found accommodation for them elsewhere in the town. Carriages ran between the railway station and the hotel with the family name emblazoned on the sides.



**An advertisement for the Crescent Hotel from the late nineteenth century (courtesy of Filey Museum).**

Varley contributed a huge amount to the civic life of Filey. He was a member of the old Local Board, the predecessor to the Urban District Council. At the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria he donated a public drinking fountain, which still stands at the foot of Cargate Hill.



**The Jubilee water fountain at Filey, 2008. The inscription says “Presented to the town of Filey by James Varley April 5<sup>th</sup> 1897”. The donor’s initials feature in a crest at the top of the fountain and at the base of both columns are curious carvings which seem to show a heron among reeds trying to eat an eel which has wrapped itself around the bird’s neck and bill.**

Varley sold the Crescent to the Hudson Hotels Company for a handsome sum in September 1896 and briefly ran Cox’s Hotel on Jermyn Street, Piccadilly. The pull of the East Coast was too strong and he soon exchanged this London business interest for a gentle early retirement in Hunmanby.

Whenever possible he opened the gardens of Batworth for fundraising events, particularly if the village band wished to perform.

The grounds appear to have undergone improvements at this time. He added the coach house (now a separate residence). The front of that building bears a plaque with the maker's initials and date: "J.V. 1901". An identically carved stone forms a seat in the middle of the rockery bank by the driveway.



**One of the marker stones in Varley's garden. He evidently liked the sight of his own initials.**

In a sad coincidence, James Varley like Charles Reynolds before him was widowed prematurely and lost a son. Harry Varley (1877-88) was the victim of an unfortunate farming accident. During the summer holidays he would help out on a farm owned by father. Mischievously dangling his hand into one of the machines, two fingers became caught and crushed in a cog wheel. In spite of receiving excellent medical attention and an antiseptic dressing he soon felt his jaw becoming stiff. Within days he had succumbed to tetanus. He was just ten-and-a-half years old.

James Varley struggled with a heart valve problem and was greatly mourned in the local area. At his funeral, Rev. A.N. Cooper (the "Walking Parson") based the eulogy on Romans 16 v. 23, a New Testament passage in which St. Paul praises Gaius, his host in the city of Corinth.

The parson pointed out that wherever there was a “host” like Varley who was prepared to treat his guests as warmly as his family the surrounding community would inevitably be blessed.

Miss. Varley (1876-1968): the solitary spinster at Batworth

Varley’s spinster daughter continued to reside at Batworth well into the twentieth century. Many older residents of Hunmanby remember Clara Varley (1876-1968), an exceptionally tall and gaunt woman, stalking down the hill to the shops dressed in an ancient black frock. She had an erratic temperament and was prone to both generosity and miserliness. In 1951 when the village staged a history exhibition to coincide with the Festival of Britain she allowed one of her most treasured possessions to go on display. From her grandmother she had inherited a school exercise book which was well over one hundred years old. According to the local newspaper the copperplate handwriting was much admired by the one thousand people who filed past it.

Herbert Ashley Smith recalls in his autobiography that villagers would marvel to hear about the facilities housed up at Batworth – taps producing separate hot and cold running water and a private generator. Whenever Miss. Varley was having work done at the house she would seek out stale buns at his father’s shop. These were the “reward” she handed out to the unsuspecting labourers during their “lowance” break. Outside Batworth she displayed a notice warning hawkers that they would be chased away by a ferocious dog. No such animal existed.

Greater benevolence was shown to the Church and schoolchildren. Once a year at Harvest Festival, Clara Varley would dress the pulpit at All Saints’ for her good friend the Rev. Brook-Jackson. Youngsters from the village were occasionally allowed up to Batworth to view magic lantern slides dating back to her youth. I have heard it said variously that she worked for a time as a missionary in China or India after her father passed away.

No source has as yet come to light which would point to there being any truth in that. I do know, however, that the Rev. Alexander Lee, vicar of Hunmanby immediately after Brook-Jackson, did perform mission work in Suzhou, near Shanghai, for a number of years. One is inclined to think that any slides from the Far East being shown at Batworth most probably belonged to the parson rather than to Miss. Varley.

James Varley had been meticulous in keeping records during his time in the hotel trade. These should have been an invaluable resource for local historians. It is thought, however, that in old age his daughter destroyed the lot. In 1962 she was forced to sell up and moved to a York nursing home where she lived out the rest of her days.

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