

In search of the real Ann Green

by William Evans

Associated with Clifton, and in particular with Clifton Court (now The Chesterfield Nuffield Hospital) is a character called Ann Green. Her simple gravestone is in Clifton churchyard: died 1864, aged 55. Upon those two facts (but altering the date of the death to 1854), a Clifton woman wrote a romantic historical novel, *Ann Green of Clifton*, published in 1936. The author was Ethel Winifred Baker, daughter of J Baker & Son, (wholesale and manufacturing stationers, foreign book and general importers, English booksellers and publishers, bookbinders, printers, colour-stampers and machine rulers &c &c, of the Mall, Clifton¹), pupil of Clifton High School 1897-1904 and social worker². Reece Winstone published a second edition, in a lurid green cover, in 1974, with notes and, of course, photographs of places mentioned in the novel.

Scores of details of the topography, the history and even the botany of Clifton and Bristol are worked into the story: the gallows in Pembroke Road, horseracing on The Downs, the chemist's shop in Clifton village, Rolinda Sharples the painter, and the visit of Princess Victoria to Clifton at the age of 10. There are even cameo parts for Sidney Smith, the Duke of Wellington and a repulsively well-behaved infant Charles Darwin. The book is didactic, moralistic, and improving, but with a sugary romanticism that would make devotees of *The Sound of Music* cringe.

Ann Green was made the daughter of a wealthy Bristol merchant who owned Clifton Court. She falls in love with Norton Lane, an Oxford don with an interest in social and economic reform. Because Norton Lane is only the son of a local shopkeeper, a fact which somehow had escaped our heroine's otherwise observant notice, Ann's father, who may also have got wind of the interest in social and economic reform, refuses his consent to the marriage. After much bosom-heaving in the back garden (but no bodice-ripping: this is Clifton in 1831 seen through the eyes of Clifton in 1936), the lovers arrange to elope, but the day before the intended marriage the Bristol riots break out. Norton tries heroically to persuade the mob not to torch the Cathedral, but is killed, and his body is conveniently and economically consumed in the burning of the bishop's palace. His dying words send his ring to his intended. Miss Green, grief-stricken but inspired to a life of self-sacrifice, nobly declines compensation for her father's slaves when slavery is abolished, and devotes her remaining days to working for Mary Carpenter, founder of the ragged schools and penal reformer.

The Ann Green of the novel is fictitious; the Ann Green in the churchyard must have existed. So who was this woman whose gravestone nudged Ethel Baker into following the example of Tobias Smollett, Fanny Burney and EH Young, and to add to the list of novels set in Clifton?

The exact date of Ann Green's birth is a multiple-choice question. If her gravestone is right in saying she was 55 in 1864, that would put her birth date in 1808/1809, but

¹ advertisement in Reid & Hicks (no date)

² Winstone (1974) xviii

according to the Clifton burials register³ and her death certificate⁴ she was 56, ie born in 1807/1808. The 1861 Clifton census return⁵, which did not round ages to the nearest 5, records her age as 50, which would put her birth in 1810/1811. As will be seen, none of these dates is correct.

The exact place of her birth presents problems as well. The 1861 census records her as born at Ledbury in Herefordshire, but Ledbury baptisms register⁶ does not record any Ann Green (however spelt) between 1797 and 1824, nor does the International Genealogical Index note any girl of that name born or baptised anywhere in that county in 1807, 1808, 1809, 1810 or 1811. Ann Green does not appear in the 1851 census for Clifton, so it can be assumed she moved to Clifton after that date. She first appears in Matthews' Bristol Directory for 1859⁷, where she is in the general list of tradespeople as Mrs Green of 13 Buckingham Place, and in the list of lodging house keepers at the same address. Those directory entries are repeated for 1860 and 1861. In the 1861 census for Clifton, Ann Green is recorded as unmarried, aged 50, a lodging house keeper, and head of the household at 13 Buckingham Place. Also there were John Green, aged 24, her nephew, who was a clerk, born in Lansdown, Bath; a servant, Mary Baily, aged 19, from Bedminster; and 4 lodgers: Mr Stephens, a gentleman's servant aged 55 from Montgomeryshire; Mr Thompson, aged 56, a shipowner, and his wife Mrs Thompson, aged 45; and Mrs Grant, aged 29, a lady's maid, who also came from Lansdown.

We now have evidence about two important aspects of Ann Green's life: she earned her living, in Clifton at any rate, as a lodging house keeper; and her nephew John lodged with her.

It might be expected that another important aspect of her life, that is, the date she died, would be certain and well-evidenced, but that is not so. The Clifton burials register gives the date of the funeral, not the death, leaving the choice between 21 February 1864 (the gravestone) and the 22nd (the death certificate). The informant was Maria Green, whose address the registrar recorded as 1 St James Parade, Bath, which leads from Westgate to Southgate Street. Sceptics might harbour the unworthy thought that there is enough dubious information in the story so far to warrant checking whether that address was genuine, but the 1861 census return for Bath⁸ does record Maria Green as living at 1 St James's Parade, a grocer's shop, with her husband Richard Green, a broker and grocer.

Given that according to the 1861 Clifton census Ann Green's nephew John, also surnamed Green, and from Bath, was lodging with her at Buckingham Place, it can be inferred that Maria Green was Ann Green's sister-in-law, and was married to Ann Green's brother, who was called Richard. That Maria was not a sister of Ann Green is corroborated by Ann Green's death certificate, which records Maria as "Present at the death", which would not have been the entry if Maria had been a blood relative.

So we now have some more firm facts about Ann Green: she had a brother called Richard who was a grocer in Bath, married to a woman called Maria.

³ BCRO FCP/StA/R/5(d)2

⁴ GRO 1864/1 Clifton 136

⁵ RG G/1726

⁶ HRO AN75

⁷ CBRL

⁸ RG 9/1687

The Clifton registrar was not the only one to make slips of the pen: the 1861 Bath census enumerator recorded Maria as having been born at Bear Regis in Dorset. He also recorded Richard as born at Monsby, Hereford. There is no such place. But there is a place in Herefordshire called Munsley, and such an error in transcribing from note to census book is readily understandable: the enumerator will not have been the last inhabitant of these parts unable to read his own handwriting. Munsley is a village about 4 miles north-west of Ledbury. And the Bath census enumerator did not get everything wrong: he recorded Richard as 59 in 1861, which would put his date of birth in 1801-1802. Sure enough, in the Munsley parish baptisms register⁹ we find that Richard Green, son of Herbert and Elizabeth Green, was christened on 22 August 1801 at Munsley.

Now if Richard Green had a sister called Ann, might not Ann also have been baptised at Munsley? She was: Ann, daughter of Herbert and Elizabeth Green, was baptised at Munsley on 2 November 1806¹⁰. So at last we have a birthplace for Ann Green, and a birth date as well: not 1810-1811, as per the Clifton census return, nor 1808-1809 as per her gravestone, nor 1807-1808 as per the Clifton burials register and her death certificate, but 1806 as per the Munsley baptisms register. So when she died, Ann Green was not, as her gravestone proclaims, 55, but 57. She was born and baptised at Munsley in Herefordshire in 1806, had a brother Richard, kept a lodging house in Buckingham Place, Clifton, and looked after her nephew John.

By 1863 Ann Green had moved from Buckingham Place and was keeping a lodging house at Walton Lodge, later Norland House and adjoining buildings, in Lower Harley Place, off Canynge Road near Christ Church Clifton¹¹. According to her death certificate, that is where she died. The cause was cancer of the oesophagus. It may come as no surprise that the Clifton registrar had difficulty with the spelling.

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⁹ HRO AN75/1

¹⁰ HRO AN75/1

¹¹ Post Office Directory for Bristol, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Shropshire, London 1863