

THE STORY OF BENJAMIN MANNING'S LIFE IN NORTH DEVON AS REVEALED IN OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

Benjamin Manning was born in Tiverton in 1812 and, following his early years, was employed as a lace worker in a factory there owned by John Boden and Thomas Heathcoat, who opened another lace-making business in 1822 in Pilton, which came under the ownership of R. W. Grace & Co. by 1830 according to Pigot's Directory of that year. At some time in the 1820s, Benjamin came to work in this new factory, and in 1832 married a local girl, Elizabeth Gribble. By the 1841 Census Returns his entry described him as a lace machinist, born in Tiverton and living in Pilton with four children aged between seven years and eleven months.

BAPTISMS recorded in Pilton Parish Church

The four children of Benjamin and Elizabeth Manning

27th October, 1833 – John Gribble Manning

4th October, 1835 – William Manning

13th May, 1837 - Frederick Richard Manning

30th July, 1840 – Harriet Manning

Benjamin's occupation changed within the next ten years, when he is recorded in the Census Returns of 1851 as a 'butcher and grocer' living in or near 30 Pilton Street with his wife and four children, together with his wife's father and mother, John and Elizabeth Gribble.

Another major change in circumstances occurred in the next ten years, as by 1861 the Census Returns record that the whole family together with three servants and his mother-in-law were settled at 29 Joy Street, where Benjamin at age 49 was described as a spirit merchant and auctioneer.

By the 1871 Census the family living there had contracted to Benjamin, auctioneer and wine merchant, his wife Elizabeth, son William age 35 and five servants, still living at 29, but seeming to own or lease numbers 26 to 29 Joy Street. Their Spanish wine store at 29 Joy Street was known as 'The Bodega'.

The Post Office Directory for Barnstaple 1873 records the following entries referring to members of the Manning family:-

'Manning, John & Son, butchers and cattle dealers, 74 High Street

Manning & Son, auctioneers and valuers, Joy Street

Manning & Son, Spanish wine stores, 29 Joy Street'

In 1881 the Census Return records that Benjamin's wife had died by this time, with William the son still there age 45, unmarried, and the four servants as in 1871. Benjamin died on 6th May 1883 age 71. His son William proved the will which amounted £352.10s. 6d. Nos 26 to 29 Joy Street were eventually sold to Richards Bros., who demolished this block and built a new commercial building for their drapery business, which stretched from near the corner of Joy Street and High Street on the north side. This area was some years ago rebuilt as part of the present Green Lanes Shopping Centre.

It would appear that, taking the above information from reliable sources, a member of the Manning family was in fact involved in cattle dealing, but it was John, not his father Benjamin who was the likely tenant of what has become known as Manning's Pit in Pilton. Benjamin, the landlord of the Bodega wine bar at 29 Joy Street in the Census Returns 1861, continued to live there as recorded in subsequent Censuses until his death in 1883.

Margaret Reed