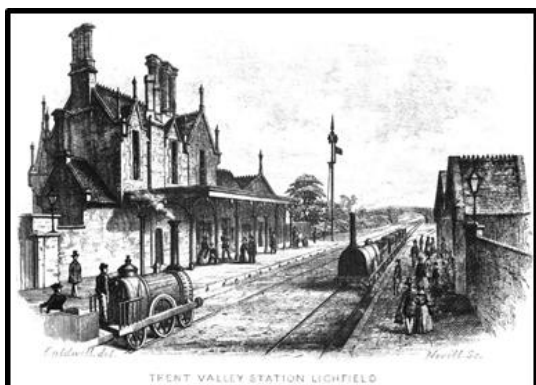


Lichfield's first station master

On the floor by the side of the pulpit at St. Michael's, there are tile memorials to the Durrad family of Streethay. The head of the family, William John Durrad was Lichfield's first station master, a churchwarden of St. Michael's and a notable figure in 19th century Lichfield Society. In this article we give a brief sketch of his life and times as one of the more publicly visible members of St Michael's in the nineteenth century,

William John Durrad was born in 1817, the second child of John and Ann Durrad of the village of Welford in Northamptonshire and baptised in the parish church. The Durrad name has a long history in that area, with a John Durrad of the nearby village of Misterton (d1726), being part owner of the Lordship of the Manor and a considerable donor to local charities. William's father, John (b1780), however seems to have been of humbler stock and is described at William John's baptism as a weaver.

In the early 1840s William John and another somewhat younger William Durrad, who were probably cousins, were owners of a bookshop in Eccleshall in Staffordshire, with William John, at least at first, being the senior partner. It was there that they met the vicar of the parish Rev Henry Moore, later Archdeacon of Stafford, who was something of a bibliophile. From that meeting, the influence of the clergyman was enough to find the elder William a position in the London and North Western Railway in 1845 as the company's agent in Lichfield representing the interests of the railway as it was being constructed, being paid £100pa.



By the time the station opened in 1847, he was the designated Station Master, on a salary of £120pa. He was also at that stage a married man, having married Elizabeth Lowe, at Tettenhall in April 1846. The original Lichfield station was situated on the west side of the Lichfield / Burton Road which the railway crossed on the level, i.e. on the opposite side to the current station. The picture shows the rather grand style that was adopted by the architect John William Livock. The station building contained not only the

passenger facilities and offices, but was also the Station Manager's House, for which William John paid £15 a year in rent. To the east of the station and the Burton Road, from 1849 the railway was crossed by the South Staffordshire Railway (now the Cross City line). This had a station to the north of the crossover entitled Lichfield Trent Valley junction. The South Staffs Railway was leased to the LNWR in 1861 and absorbed into the company in 1867. Clearly having two stations was inconvenient for passengers and both stations were closed in 1871 and a new station, with low level and high-level platforms, opened at its present site. William was the Station Master for the entire life of the original Lichfield station, with a wide range of responsibilities for the passenger and freight traffic, and for a significant number of staff. - clerks and the porters as well as yard staff. William and Elizabeth's children were born at regular intervals over the first decade and a half of his tenure as Station Master, and all were baptised at St Michael's church, the station being situated in Streethay, a township at the northern end of the parish. He was churchwarden for a couple of years in the 1850s and the churchwardens accounts in his neat copper plate hand, still exist in the Records Office.

He resigned from his post as Station Master in June 1871, by which time his salary was £150pa. Why is not at all clear – but perhaps the fact that he would be required to move into less palatial accommodation when the new station was built may have been a factor. There was a collection for a testimonial in the town, announced in the press, that raised a considerable (but not specified) sum. In the census of April 1871 all his children were still living at home. William Henry (22) was cashier at Lloyds Bank in Rugeley ; Aethur (20) was an undergraduate at Jesus College, Cambridge (and presumably on vacation); Walter (19) was also a bank clerk; whilst Emma (17) and Bertram (11) were identified as scholars. Both Arthur and Bertram attended Lichfield Grammar School and Loughborough School – and this may well have been the case for William junior and Walter too. Arthur and Bertram were ultimately ordained and took up a clerical career and served in parishes mainly in northern England; Walter and William junior continued in the banking world in Rugeley and London respectively whilst daughter Emma became a governess and companion in Cambridgeshire.

After his resignation William, Elizabeth and Emma moved to Misterton Cottage. This is on the corner of Trent Valley Road and Wissage Road and still exists – as Holly Lodge – in the grounds of the Samuel Johnson Hospital. Its name is of course an echo of the Durrad's roots in Northamptonshire. It was a substantial property. When it was eventually sold in 1890 it is described as being comprised of

Entrance Hall, Two reception rooms, Kitchen, Scullery, Pantry, Cellar, Four bedrooms, dressing room and WC. Well laid out gardens and a quarter of an acre of land.

Shortly after his resignation from the railway, William took up the post as High Bailiff at Lichfield County Court, based in St. John's Street, which he was to retain for the rest of his life. In this role he was responsible for executing warrants and court orders. He also had ecclesiastical responsibilities that may have dated back to his time as Station Master. Firstly, he was Apparitor to Archdeacon of Stafford (Henry Moore as noted above), with the responsibility to summon witnesses and execute the orders of the ecclesiastical court. Secondly, he was sub-librarian in the Cathedral library, so he obviously retained his bibliographic interests. Both of these positions would have supplemented the pension from the LNWR. In his civic roles he appeared regularly, if briefly each time, in the local press in the 1870s and 1880 – at the Mayor's luncheon, the Sheriff's breakfast and the perambulation of the city. He was also active in the St John's Freemasons Lodge and held office there – as Junior Deacon in 1870 and as Junior Warden in 1876.

1882 saw the death of William junior in Rugeley where he was a bank manager, from "*congestion of the lungs*". A muffled peal of bells was rung at St Michael's after evensong on a following Sunday, where both William junior and his father had been regular ringers. The following year William's wife Elizabeth died from heart disease. William Durrad himself died in January 1889. His obituary records that he had been ill for several weeks beforehand following an operation from which he was never to recover. The funeral was a full choral service and at the burial the choir gathered around the grave and sang the hymn "Now the Labourer's task is o'er". William, his wife Elizabeth and William junior are buried together in one grave in the graveyard of St Michael's church. It is currently (February 2022) somewhat overgrown and difficult to access. Nonetheless its design is rather unusual as can be seen from the picture.





They are also commemorated in floor plaques in the church at the front of the chancel beneath the pulpit, These are positioned (deliberately?) on the opposite side of the chancel to two similar plaques commemorating the lives of two of the 19th century Bishops of Lichfield (Selwyn and Lonsdale). I strongly suspect this placement was deliberate on the part of the family and church leaders. This is perhaps a final indication of the perceived importance of the Station Master in Lichfield society at the time.

In his will, with the clergy children Arthur and Bertram named as executors, William's effects are said to be worth £3138, a very considerable sum. What this refers to is not clear, but probably includes Misterton Cottage and its contents, some land off the Walsall Road as well as his personal effects and any other savings. The year after the funeral his daughter Emma married Frances Carver of Meldrith in Cambridgeshire (for whom she had worked as his daughter's teacher and companion), Misterton Cottage was sold, and the Durrad family finally severed its connections with Lichfield.

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