



The Mormons in Lenham..¹ a Story from Woodside Green

Perhaps you have never heard of "Woodside Green", but Woodside Green is, like West Street or Warren Street, part of the Parish of Lenham. Historically, people living outside of the village often felt that they were an afterthought when it came to parish politics, which were, until not too long ago, represented by the church. Perhaps it was the disenchantment with the church which made one young man, James Turner (born 28.3.1819), turn to the Mormon Church (see also the article: 'My ancestral Home' in the December Focus). James Turner was the son of Mary Stedman and James Turner, who ran a public house which

became known as "The Duke of Wellington". The Tuner family owned the popular pub in Woodside Green well into the 20th century (see our article:

<https://www.heritagelenham.co.uk/public-houses>)

James Turner had married Mary Finch from Otterden in 1840 and moved with his wife to London, where he became a baptised member of the Mormon Church in 1850. He was sent to Lenham as a missionary, where he encountered "considerable prosecution" and 'opposition". He emigrated in 1854 to join his brethren in America. At that time, the Lenham Mormon congregation, which he had set up, had 30 members. Some of them followed his example and also emigrated to America.

Turner was ordained a priest in 1857 but was sent on a 'military' mission and it is likely that he was involved in the Utah War. He was ordained a high Priest in 1866 and became a counsellor to a Mormon bishop.

The main obstacle to Utah being recognised as a State of the United States of America was the fact that Mormons were allowed several wives. In order to become a state of the USA, this practice was outlawed. James Turner was arrested in 1887 and held for 50 days on the charge of "unlawful cohabitation" with several wives. It was, however, only in 1890 that the Mormon Church rescinded its polygamy laws. James Turner died in September 1895 and did not live to see Utah become a member state of the US on January 4th 1896 . He, a man of humble beginnings, is still revered as a prominent member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

¹ The article is based on the account found in: Latter-day Saint biographical encyclopedia : a compilation of biographical sketches of prominent men and women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints . p.589 to 590