

John Samuel Hiron (1818-1877)

J.S. Hiron was born in London, the son of a clothier in The Strand. He settled in Deddington, establishing a bookselling, stationery and printing business in premises in Market Place in 1839. He married Mary Caroline Margetts, the daughter of a Deddington grocer, in 1844. At the beginning of the 1850s, Hiron was around 32 years of age.

Printing was a key means of communication before the typewriter was invented. Other than personal letters, almost every other form of written communication needed to be printed.

Hiron was clearly enterprising and hard working. In 1849 he founded *The North Oxfordshire Monthly Times, and Agricultural Advertiser*, an eight-page broadsheet, price 3d., published from his General Printing Office in Market Place.¹ While copies do not survive after August 1854, the newspaper continued to be published until at least 1860.²

Hiron's initial monthly advertisements in the paper, usually occupying two whole columns, show that in addition to his business as a bookseller, stationer, bookbinder, printer and newsagent, his shop was a veritable emporium selling a wide variety of goods such as paper hangings (wallpaper), soaps, ladies' reticules (small handbags), hair brushes, walking sticks, wools, cigars, etc.

He ran a subscription Circulating Library with over 2,000 books. 'Hiron's Improved Arithmetical Tables, for the Use of Schools', had sold over 12,000 copies by 1850.

In 1851 he was commissioned by the Deddington clergy team to print a new periodical entitled '*The Earnest Churchman*', 16 pages, price 2d., published monthly, although only four numbers may have been produced.³ One of the assistant curates at the time, the Rev. George Venables, was, like Brogden, a prolific writer,⁴ and he continued to commission Hiron to print some of his works after he had moved on from Deddington up to 1862.

Hiron also printed and published the New Year's Day sermon in 1858 by the Deddington Curate, the Rev. J.H. Burgess.⁵

¹ Bound copies of nos. 1 to 31 (3 July 1849 to 6 January 1852) are held by the Bodleian Library, G.A. Oxon b.102; microfilm copies of nos. 7 to 62 (1 January 1850 to 1 August 1854) are held by the Oxfordshire History Centre.

² There are references to the *North Oxfordshire Monthly Times* in the *Oxford Journal* in July 1858 and in the *Banbury Guardian* in April 1859. Volume 2, folio 5, of the Coggins Scrapbooks contains cuttings concerning the Oxfordshire Rifle Volunteers attributed by Coggins to the *North Oxfordshire Monthly Times* dated 3 January 1860, and conforming with the typeface employed by the newspaper dated 1 May 1860 and undated post 1 June 1860.

³ <http://dbooks.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/books/PDFs/590324608.pdf>

⁴ For example, '*Rejoice with Trembling: a sermon preached in the Parish Church of Deddington, Oxon, on Tuesday Morning, November 5th, 1850*'. Bodleian Library, 100 e.1418(1).

⁵ '*God's blessing upon the New Year: a sermon preached in the parish church of Deddington at the early morning service, on Friday, January 1st, 1858*'. <http://dbooks.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/books/PDFs/590182692.pdf>

News of the signing of the Treaty of Peace in the Crimean War in April 1856 reached the town through the electrical telegraph apparently installed in Hiron's News Room.

Like other tradesmen, Hiron took on agencies with several insurance companies, such as the Church of England Life & Fire Assurance Institution and the Railway Passengers Insurance Company. He was listed as an agent for Horniman & Co.'s Pure Uncoloured Tea in 1855.

Hiron was appointed Distributor of Stamps by the Board of Commissioners of Stamps in 1855. These were revenue stamps or impressed duty stamps rather than postage stamps. If a document was subject to stamp duty, it was not enforceable unless it had been duly stamped. Hiron's business address became the Stamp Office, High Street.

There is extensive biographical information about J.S. Hiron and his business activities in Brian Carter's *'Printers and Publishers in Deddington, 1840-2004'*, 2004.⁶

It appears that during the 1850s Hiron's printing business was doing less well, seemingly because of competition from Thomas Calcutt, another printer.⁷ In 1855 Hiron moved his business from Market Place to High Street, and Calcutt took over Hiron's premises and residence in Market Place.⁸

In July 1855, following the abolition of stamp duty on newspapers, Calcutt began publishing a competing newspaper titled *'The Deddington Journal, and Town and Country Newspaper'*. This was a 16-page broadsheet and was published weekly, although it may not have been published for long.⁹

Hiron involved himself in various local activities. He was the "indefatigable" hon. secretary of the Deddington Horticultural Society in the latter 1850s. In 1860 he became secretary of the local committee of the newly formed Deddington detachment of the Oxfordshire Volunteer Rifle Corps.

The Vicar, the Rev. James Brogden, was a prolific writer, and Hiron handled a number of printing assignments for him. The Rev. Risley in his diaries noted the close relationship between Hiron and Brogden. Hiron does not appear to have been his lead printer, however, Brogden having produced several substantial works before his arrival in Deddington.¹⁰

⁶ https://www.deddingtonhistory.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/2941/P-and-PinDeddingtoncomplete.pdf

⁷ Thomas Calcutt was a son of John Calcutt, Postmaster and a prominent Nonconformist.

⁸ Per advertisement by Calcutt in *The Deddington Journal*, No. 10, 8 September 1855, page 16.

https://www.deddingtonhistory.uk/_data/assets/image/0018/18162/1855TheDeddingtonJournal_backpageissue10.red.enh.jpg

⁹ Only two issues, from September 1855, partially survive (pages 1 and 2, and 15 and 16, in each case). It probably had more of a local focus than Hiron's paper. Thomas Calcutt emigrated to New Zealand two years later.

¹⁰ *'Illustrations of the Liturgy and Ritual of the United Church of England and Ireland'*, 3 volumes, 1842. Codrington Library, All Souls College, Oxford, N13355444-6.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433061823724&view=1up&seq=14> Volume 2;

'Catholic Safeguards against the Errors, Corruptions, and Novelties of the Church of Rome', 3 volumes, 1846-51. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=yale.39002053180775&view=1up&seq=25&skin=2021> Volume 3, 1851.

Later in the 1850s Hiron was a member of a clique led by John Scroggs, a local auctioneer with premises in Bull Ring, who supported Samuel Field in his opposition to the church restoration and 'repewing'.

Notwithstanding their relationship, Brogden's increasing impecuniousness caused Hiron ultimately to sue him in the Woodstock County Court in 1856.

Hiron was a major creditor, and became the representative of Brogden's unsecured creditors. Deddington creditors were owed over £400. He attended Brogden's hearings before the Insolvent Debtors' Court in London in November 1857 and January 1858, and was appointed assignee for the unsecured creditors.

At the same time as Brogden's insolvency proceedings were reaching a climax, Hiron was devastated by not one, but two, family tragedies. His wife Mary (37), died in December 1857, following the birth of a daughter, leaving Hiron to prepare for Brogden's final court hearing in the immediate aftermath.

His grief was compounded when his infant daughter died five weeks after his wife's death. Hiron and his wife had previously lost infant sons in 1849 and 1855. Subsequently, he re-married into the Bennett family of Hornton.

When Brogden returned to Deddington upon the lifting of the third sequestration in April 1859, Hiron met him at Aynho station, and gave him temporary accommodation at his house, as the Vicarage had been assigned by the Bishop to the Curate, Rev. J.H. Burgess, until October.

Hiron's relationship with Brogden was evidenced in April 1850 when, along with Samuel Field, he headed a petition by 121 parishioners to the Bishop criticising Wilberforce for not supporting an application by Brogden for a grant for the education of his sons.¹¹

Hiron could be a difficult man to deal with. Risley found him frequently insolent. "He was as he always is insolent."¹² When he was dismissed as Distributor of Stamps in 1862 (see below), a second reason mentioned by Risley in his diary was "general Incivility".

Hiron also had a tendency to be involved in assaults, the first in 1841, although in this case he was the victim.

In November 1851 an apprentice called Greenwood applied to the Magistrates to dissolve his apprenticeship with Hiron "upon the grounds of ill treatment from his master, being oftentimes sworn at and abused, and at others stinted in his food, not having enough allowed him to eat". The Justices considered the charge altogether unfounded, but agreed that the indentures of apprenticeship should be cancelled.

Disagreements with his wife's family in 1854 led to Hiron being assaulted by his two brothers-in-law. The three were bound over to keep the peace for twelve months.

¹¹ Oxfordshire History Centre, MSS. Oxf. Dioc. Papers c.1795.

¹² Smedley-Stevenson, *op. cit.*, Volume 32, p.349, 21 September 1854.

In 1855 a neighbour, Mrs. Susannah Robinson, charged Hiron with trespassing by using a path through her garden. This may have been when Hiron had moved from Market Place to High Street. Mrs. Robinson could not prove her complaint, and the case was dismissed.

In 1857 Hiron was charged by his servant, Ellen Simons of Hempton, with assaulting and beating her. He testified that the girl had become saucy and slothful, and had refused to do work Mrs. Hiron had ordered her to do. After hearing the witnesses, the Magistrates dismissed the case and commended Hiron for meeting such an unfounded charge.

In August 1863 Hiron appeared before the Deddington Petty Sessions, accused of assaulting a laundress, Ann Ell, who had forced her way into the kitchen seeking payment of a small balance due to her for washing. Hiron removed her from the premises. While his witnesses attested that he had not struck her, the Magistrates considered that he had used a greater degree of force than was necessary, and fined him 2s. 6d. and 10s. costs. Reports of the case appeared in seven Banbury, Bicester and Oxford papers. Hiron failed to pay the fine, and a warrant of commitment was issued at the September Petty Sessions.

Hiron's casting a vote in the county by-election in 1862, which he was ineligible to do as he held an office of profit under the Crown, led to his dismissal from the Stamp Office.

There are no references to Hiron in the local press, or in the Risley diaries, after December 1863, suggesting he left the town shortly after the Ell case.

The *North Oxfordshire Monthly Times* was produced to high editorial standards. There were well-written leading articles, some of considerable intellectual rigour, on national, local and religious issues of the day, rarely attributed. Clearly many articles were copied from national papers, copyright seemingly not being an issue in those days.

Hiron only referred to himself as the publisher. The identity of the Editor was not disclosed, but it is unlikely to have been anyone other than Hiron himself, indicating he was an educated man of some intellect. Given Hiron's relationship with Brogden, it is conceivable that some of the leaders were the product of his pen.

It appears Hiron moved to Derby, where he became a timber merchant, a far cry from the skilled trade of a printer and publisher. Sadly, following a serious accident with a saw, he died in 1877, aged 59.

