

Samuel Field (1804-1886)

Samuel Field was the leading solicitor in the town. He practised law in partnership with Henry Churchill. At the beginning of the 1850s, Field was around 46 years of age.

He appears to have been an establishment figure, with his finger on the pulse of Deddington, holding various official positions, including:

- Vicar's churchwarden, 1853, 1854, 1859 and 1860;
- Clerk to the Magistrates of Wootton North Division (who met at Deddington);
- Joint Clerk to the Magistrates of the Banbury and Bloxham Division;
- Clerk to the Burford, Chipping-Norton, Banbury, Stow, Deddington, and Aynhoe Turnpike Roads;
- Joint Clerk to the Deddington and Kidlington Turnpike Road;
- Treasurer and solicitor to the Deddington Association for the Prosecution of Felons and other Offenders;
- Treasurer and solicitor to the Feoffees of the Deddington Charity Estates;
- Trustee of the Deddington Gas, Coke, & Coal Company.

In 1845, at the age of 41, he married a cousin, Anne Field, from Thame. There appear to have been no children of the marriage.

Field lived at The Hermitage, an elegant house in the north-west of the Market Place. "Mr. Samuel Field, clerk to the magistrates of North Wootton Hundred, is still remembered by Mr. Thomas Smith (of Messrs. Stockton, Sons and Fortescue whose offices are opposite) as a very legal figure issuing in dignified manner from its doorway."¹

Field appears to have held a long-term lease of the Castle Ground from the owners, the Dean and Canons of Windsor, dating from well before the 1850s.

Samuel Field was a cricketing enthusiast and one of the principal supporters of the Deddington Cricket Club. In the early 1850s he was President of the Club. In November 1851, the club members presented him with a handsome engraved silver chalice (capable of holding two bottles of wine) as a testimonial for allowing the free use of the Castle Ground "now for many years past" at a dinner held at the Unicorn Inn.

The cricket club seems to have been in abeyance for a period after the secretary ran off with the club funds in November 1852, but the club was revived in 1856 with Field as treasurer.

¹ Mary Vane Turner, *The Story of Deddington*, Chapter 5 (Deddington Folk), 1933.
<https://www.deddingtonhistory.uk/publishedhistories/mvt/5.deddingtonfolk>

The annual show of the Deddington Horticultural Society was regularly held on the Castle Ground, which was an ideal location, "courtesy of S. Field, Esq.".

1859-1861 saw the rapid growth of the Rifle Volunteer Movement, arising from fears of a French invasion. Field and Brogden, who had had an uneasy relationship during the early 1850s,² came together in December 1859 to promote the formation of a Deddington Subdivision of the nascent Oxfordshire Rifle Volunteer Corps. Field, who had previously been involved with the Deddington Troop of the Oxfordshire Yeomanry, offered the Castle Ground for drill and rifle practice.

When the Deddington detachment was officially formed in 1860, the initial officers were Samuel Field (56), Lieutenant, and C.D. Faulkner, Ensign. Field also made available a field called 'Battle Thorn' near Papermill Lane (then called Church Pits Road) for rifle butts.

Field's relationship with Brogden was further evidenced in April 1860, when he headed a petition by 121 parishioners to the Bishop of Oxford criticising Wilberforce for not supporting an application by Brogden for a grant for the education of his sons.³

Field was an active participant in local affairs through the Vestry meetings, which he sometimes chaired. Press reports indicate that he was involved with the management of the National Schools, and with the bread and coal charities. As Vicar's churchwarden, he laid the corner stone of the new National Schools building in March 1853.

At a "numerous and highly-respectable" meeting concerning Aynho Station at the King's Arms Inn in December 1852, one of the motions was a proposal by Field that Aynho Station should be re-named 'Deddington Station' or 'Deddington Road Station' as Deddington had the largest trade with the station.

At a public meeting in February 1854, chaired by Rev. Brogden, to protest against a proposal by Lord John Russell to amend the oath of the Queen's supremacy, thereby throwing open all offices of state to Roman Catholics, Field proposed a lengthy petition to Parliament to reject the proposed Bill.

There was another side to Field's character, however, which was less than open and perhaps guileful.

It appears that for many years the accounts of the Feoffees of the Deddington Charity Estates had been neither audited nor published, as they were required to be, giving rise to increasing dissatisfaction over the lack of accountability and alleged accumulation of hidden funds.

As the treasurer and secretary to the Feoffees, Field effectively controlled the management of the charity, yet he seems to have been impervious to the publicly-aided criticisms, and even declined to respond to enquiries by the Charity Commissioners.

² Field had written to the Bishop of Oxford in 1849 complaining about Brogden's absences. In 1859 and 1860 he was appointed Vicar's churchwarden by Brogden.

³ Oxfordshire History Centre, MSS. Oxf. Dioc. Papers c.1795.

Public disquiet led to a hearing by the Charity Commission in January 1854 on reforming the Deddington Charity Estates to address the current mismanagement and lack of accountability, at which Field was on the defensive, and there was evident tension in the exchanges between Field and C.D. Faulkner, another solicitor, whose father, Charles Faulkner, had strongly criticised the conduct of the Feoffees.

Samuel Field was at the centre of the dispute in 1858 concerning the restoration and 'repewing' of the parish church, to which he was strongly opposed.

The 'repewing' involved replacing the existing box pews, including Field's, which took up a lot of space and were regarded by some as a social evil since they excluded the poor, by open benches.

The issue burst into the open through a contested election for the role of Parish churchwarden at the Easter Vestry in 1858, when fund raising was already underway.

Charles Faulkner proposed the re-appointment of Mr. Henry Franklin, and Field was proposed, in his absence, by John Scroggs, a local auctioneer. The result was a tied vote, and the Curate (Rev. J.H. Burgess) exercised his casting vote against Field, whereupon C.D. Faulkner demanded a public poll of all ratepayers.

The ensuing behaviour of the supporters and opponents of Samuel Field, who was identified as obstructing the church restoration and 'repewing', and insulting the Curate, generated much invective, ostensibly causing Field to withdraw from the poll, although in reality he probably feared he would be defeated.

During the latter 1860s, when Field was again Vicar's churchwarden during the troubled incumbency of the Rev. James Turner (Vicar 1864-1877), there were common complaints, including the circulation of handbills, about the disgraceful state of affairs at Deddington church, including the occupation of the choir stalls by Field, his wife, and the Vicar's family.⁴

In the bankruptcy proceedings concerning his former partner, and brother-in-law, Henry Churchill, in 1870, Field was accused of exercising too much control by the other creditors.

While by all accounts Field continued living in Deddington during the 1860s, in the 1861 census return he is described as "Solicitor not in practice, retired". Apparently Churchill was paying Field £150 p.a., secured by a restrictive covenant, not to practice as a solicitor.

He is not recorded as living in Deddington in the 1871 census. Field died in Hampshire in 1886, aged 82.

⁴ See Coggins Scrapbooks, Volume 2 (1855-1888). <https://www.deddingtonhistory.uk/coggins,george1846-1920-scrapbooks> Field's box pew had been a casualty of the 'repewing' in 1858.