

# JOHN THOMAS BETTS OF PEMBURY

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## OVERVIEW

John Thomas Betts (1809-1894) was the eldest son of wealthy London solicitor/distiller John Thomas Betts (1784-1847) and his wife Sarah Betts, nee Smith (1784-1855). He was one of eight children in the family ( four sons and three daughters born between 1809 and 1821).

The Betts family were Quakers and were originally from Frenze,Norfolk and it was there on October 28,1806 that John Thomas Betts senior married Sarah Smith. All of their children were baptised there but most if not all of them were baptised again in London, including John Thomas Betts junior who ,from the records of the Quakers, was baptised at the City Road Independent Tabernacle at St Luke, London October 4,1814. John Thomas Betts senior was one of several children born to John Betts (1759-1784) and Arabella Betts, nee Kemp (1764-1849) and was trained as a solicitor although he spent most of his life working in the distillery business.



John Thomas Betts senior and his family moved to London in the first quarter of the 1800's and it was there that John Thomas Betts started up a distillery business, under the name of John T. Betts and Company, a business that his eldest son John Thomas Betts took over and ran for a time until his brothers took over and then subsequently devoted his life to that of a translator of publications in foreign languages.

The distillery of John Thomas Betts had changed locations over the years but is mostly recorded in directories of the 1830's and 1840's at Smithfield Bars 7 St John Street in Clapham, London but also had premises on Warf Road. He was listing in directories as a rectifying distiller, and a wine and brandy merchant. The business was very successful and was passed along to his sons to run after his death in late May 1847although in 1824 he had gone bankrupt. John Thomas Betts and his family lived in a grand residence called ' Broomfield' which he had bought a freehold interest in from John Deacon in 1834. His widow continued to live there after his death until 1851 when in that year she sold the home to Charles Forbes who renamed it 'Broomwood'.

Turning now to the central figure in this article namely John Thomas Betts (1809-1894) he was born July 7,1809 and lived with his parents in Frenze, Norfolk and later in London. He received his early education in both places and like his father decided to become a barrister. He was an undergraduate at Corpus Christi

College, Oxford. On October 25, 1827 in London he was articled as an attorney at law and solicitor in Chancery with James Robinson for a period of five years. He was a student of Lincoln's Inn in 1832 and was called to the bar in May 1843. He is found listed in the records of the Old Bailey in a number of cases.

In the 4th qtr of 1843, at Wandsworth, London, John married Maria Sturt (1822-1916) who had been born in Clapham, Surrey. She was one of nine children born to Henry Sturt (1793-1872) and Ann Sturt, nee Barnard born 1794. She lived with her parents and siblings in Clapham up to the time of her marriage. Her father at the time of the 1841 census, taken at Wandsworth, London, was a Lieutenant in the army. John and Maria never had any children. Maria died in Pembury in 1916 while living at their residence 'Sunnyside' on the Green, known today as 5 Gates House on Lower Green Road.

At the time of the 1851 census John was living at Spring Well Cottage in Surrey where his occupation was given as "barrister at law not in practice and distiller". He was listed as married but his wife was not with him and the only other people residing there were three domestic servants.

At the time of the 1861 census John and Maria along with four visitors and three servants were living at Welwyn, Hertfordshire where John was a barrister not in practice. Sometime before 1871 the John and his wife moved to Pembury Kent.

The 1871 census, taken at Upper Green, Pembury gave John as a barrister not in practice. With him was his wife Maria, one visitor and four servants.

The 1881 census taken on Maidstone Road, Upper Green, Pembury gave John as a barrister not in practice. With him was his wife Maria and four domestic servants. The same information was given in the 1891 census.

Probate records gave John Thomas Betts of 'Sunnyside' Pembury when he died June 15, 1894. His headstone which bears his name and that of his wife Maria is located in the grounds of the Pembury Baptist Church at 1 Romford Road. There is a plaque to him in this church, having been a great supporter of it.

As a translator John Thomas Betts is found as the author of various books and is mentioned in several books by other authors. A dedication to John as well as his wife Maria is found on occasion in other books. John was mentioned in connection with Samuel Morton Petro and the Baptist Church in the Pembury Village News of Summer 2013. A photograph of John Thomas Betts (1809-1894) is shown above from the book 'A Memoir of John T. Betts of Pembury' by Letitia Jennings published in 1895, which book in part describes information from John's diary covering the period of 1838-1841 when he travelled in Germany and Italy.

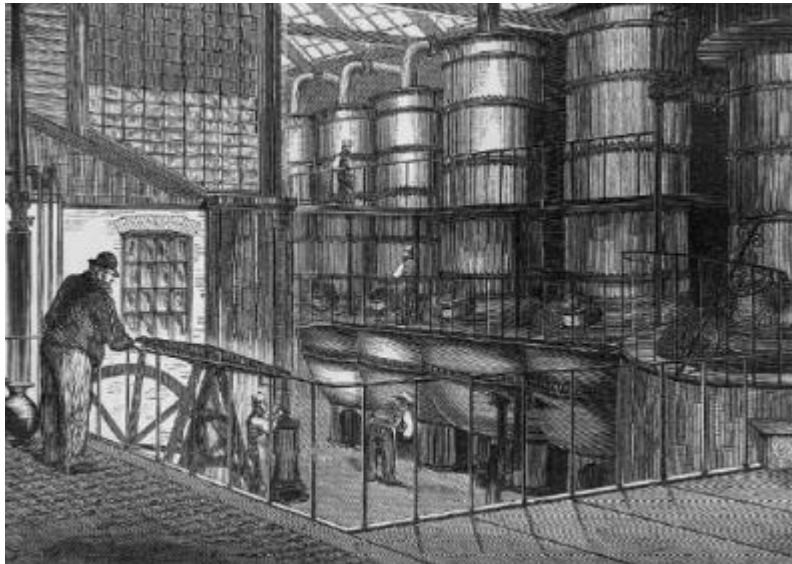
## JOHN THOMAS BETTS (1784-1847) AND FAMILY

I begin the information about the life and times of John Thomas Betts (1809-1894) with information about his parents and siblings and in the next section further details about him are given. The Betts family were Quakers.

John Thomas Betts was born 1784 in Frenze, Norfolk and was one of at least two children born to John Betts (1759-1784) a solicitor and Arabella Betts, nee Kemp (1764-1849). John also had eleven half siblings with the surname of Doggett who were born between 1789 and 1806. His sister Harriett Jane Betts, born in 1784 died at age 3 in 1787 in Norfolk. In the 1790's and early 1800's John and his family lived in Winfarthing, Norfolk.

On October 28, 1806 at Frenze. Norfolk John Thomas Betts married Sarah Smith (1784-1855) and with her had the following children (1) John Thomas Betts (1808-1894) (2) William Betts (1810-1889) (3) James Betts (1812-1847) (4) David Betts (1814-1858) (5) Sarah Betts (1818-1821) (6) Esther Betts (1819-1873) (7) Sarah Ann Betts (1821-1893). All of the children were born in Frenze Norfolk and were baptised there and some were also baptised in London for a second time. The marriage record noted that John was a bachelor of the parish of Winfarthing, Norfolk and that Sarah was a spinster of the same parish and that she was the daughter of Hammond Smith (1753-1816) and Sarah Smith, nee Green (1759-1832). Her marriage was witnessed by her brother John Smith.

The records of the Freemasons noted that John Thomas Betts was a distiller when he was admitted into The Strong Man Lodge in 1814 and that he was born 1783 rather than 1784 which is was given in his death record and other references.



John Thomas Betts was educated and trained as a solicitor and apart from a brief time in his life as a solicitor he went into the distillery business in London operating under the name of John T. Betts and Company. Freedom of the City records note that John Thomas Betts was admitted July 1, 1817 into the Company of Distillers.

The London Gazette of 1817 announced that a "commission of bankrupts awarded and issued forth against John Thomas Betts of Honduras Street Old Street County of Middlesex, rectifying distiller, dealer and chapman". The National Archives has a document listed as "In the matter of John Thomas Betts late of Upper East Smithfield Middlesex but now of Temple Place, Blackfriars Road, Surrey, rectifying distiller, wine and brandy merchant (dealer and chapman), bankrupt. Date of commission of discharge April 17, 1824".

John Thomas Betts and his family lived in a grand residence called 'Broomfield' which he had bought a freehold interest in from John Deacon (a retired Scots soldier) in 1834. His widow continued to live there after his death in 1847 until 1851 when in that year she sold the home to Charles Forbes who renamed it 'Broomwood'. Shown above and below are images of this home. The one below refers to a date of the home of 1797 which may be the date it was constructed. Further details about the history of this residence can be found on the internet. John is listed at this residence under the name of "Broomfield House, Battersea, London" a barrister in directories of 1835 and 1837. This fine home was demolished in 1904.



Directories of London record the premises of the distillery at 7 St John Road, Smithfield Bars. Advertisements for the business were found during the 1830's in a number of publications such as The True Sun of January 6, 1836 and September 26, 1831. The Westminster Review of 1844 contains two advertisements for Betts Nassau Seltzers and Betts Patent Brandy with his business premises given as 7 Smithfield Bars. Other advertisements note that he was also a distiller of gin.

Patent records show that John Thomas Betts and his sons held a number of patents pertaining to distilling and bottling. The Mechanics Magazine of 1836 for example reported on a patent to John Thomas Betts "for improvements in the process of preparing spirituous liquors in the making of brandy". Newton's London Journal of Arts and Science of 1845 reported on "a patent to William Betts of Smithfield Bars, London, distiller and Alexander Southward, Stocker, of the same place, for improvements in bottles, jars, pots and other similar vessels and in the mode of manufacturing, stoppering and the covering of the same" which patent was sealed January 22, 1845.

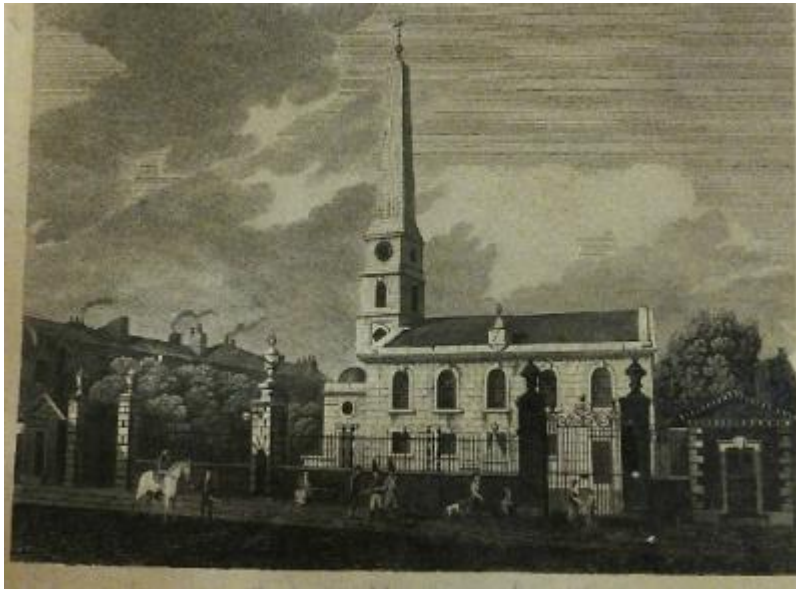
The Spectator of 1846 reported on "the late firm of J.T. Betts and Company and that John Thomas Betts was succeeded in the business by his sons and that the company name is now J.T. Betts jun and Co." which refers to his son John Thomas Betts (1809-1894). An indication that the company continued for some years is given in the Mechanics Magazine of 1856 where "an application for prolongation of patents by John Thomas Betts, William Betts, James Betts and David Betts of Smithfield Bars and Wharf Road, distillers etc" which continues by listing three patents of 1842. The name of the company is still found in directories up to at least 1863. When the business ended was not established.

John Thomas Betts senior died in London in late May 1847 at Wandsworth, London and was buried at Islington, London May 29, 1847. The Non-Conformist Register listed John Thomas Betts born 1784; buried May 29, 1847 at Bunhill Fields burial ground, City Road age 63 of Broomfield House, Clapham, Battersea Parish". Probate records for him dated July 16, 1847 can be found online and refers to him as being of Broomfield House and of Smithfield Bars, London, a distiller.

## JOHN THOMAS BETTS (1809-1894)

John Thomas Betts was the eldest son of John Thomas Betts (1784-1847) and was born July 9, 1809. Census records all give his place of birth as "London". A photograph of him from a book was given in the 'Overview' above.

John had been baptised twice, the first on October 4, 1814 at the City Road Tabernacle Independent St Luke at Finsby, London (image below) and for a second time on October 19, 1830 at Frenze, Norfolk. Several of his siblings were also baptised twice at the same churches .



John received his early education in Frenze, Norfolk but by 1814 the family had moved to London where he completed his education.

University records show that John was "an undergraduate of Corpus Christi College, Oxford; a student of Lincoln's Inn November 5, 1832 (then aged 22); called to the bar May 4, 1843; the eldest son of John Thomas Betts, a distiller of London".

From his Articles of Clerkship it was recorded that " John Thomas Betts, the son of John Thomas Betts, a distiller of Smithfields, London," was to serve as an attorney of law and solicitor in Chancery for a period of five years from October 25, 1827 with James Robinson, attorney.

The records of court cases of the Old Bailey make reference to John acting as a barrister in various cases in the early 1800's but as the eldest son he also became actively involved in his father's distillery business and at times he is given in records as both a barrister and distiller. It is known from census records and patent records that by 1851 John's brothers were running the distillery and John's occupation was given as " barrister not in practice" having devoted much of his life as a translator and author of various books.

From the records of the Quakers the marriage between John Thomas Betts and Maria Sturt took place in Wandsworth, London in 1843. Maria Sturt (1822-1916) had been born in Clapham, Surrey and died in Pembury Kent on May 17, 1916. She was one of nine children born to Henry Sturt (1793-1872) and Ann Sturt, nee Barnard, born 1794. She was living with her parents and siblings in Clapham up to the time of her marriage to John. Quaker birth records gave Maria Sturt born July 30, 1822 at Westminster with parents of Henry and Ann Sturt.

At the time of the 1851 census John was living at Spring Well Cottage in Surrey where his occupation was given as "barrister at law not in practice and distiller". He was listed as married but his wife was not with him and the only other people residing there were three domestic servants.

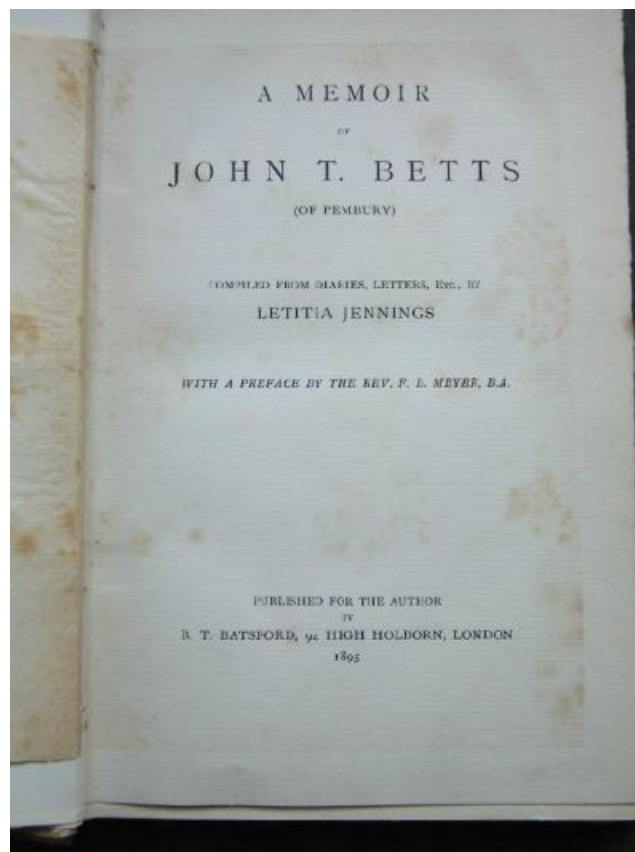
At the time of the 1861 census John and Maria along with four visitors and three servants were living at Welwyn, Hertfordshire where John was a barrister not in practice. Sometime before 1871 the John and his wife moved to Pembury Kent.

The 1871 census, taken at Upper Green, Pembury gave John as a barrister not in practice. With him was his wife Maria, one visitor and four servants.

The 1881 census taken on Maidstone Road, Upper Green, Pembury gave John as a barrister not in practice. With him was his wife Maria and four domestic servants. The same information was given in the 1891 census. The 1901 census gave Maria at 'Sunnyside', Pembury, as a lady of independent means. With her were three domestic servants.

Probate records gave John Thomas Betts of 'Sunnyside' Pembury when he died June 15, 1894. His headstone which bears his name and that of his wife Maria is located in the grounds of the Pembury Baptist Church at 1 Romford Road. There is a plaque to him in this church, having been a great supporter of it. His estate was valued at 9,399 pounds with his widow named as his executor.

A book entitled 'Spanish Reformers of Two Centuries from 1578' published in 1874 stated that John Thomas Betts was a translator of Valdes Hundred and Ten Considerations and of Constantine's Confessions of a Sinner". This book was dedicated to John and to his wife Maria Betts "who both caused this work to be undertaken, and zealously promoted its execution and publication. This dedication was by Dr. Boeamer, professor of Roman Languages with the University of Strassbury. John was found referred to in a number books as a translator. The book 'A Memoir of John T. Betts (1809-1894) of Pembury' of 145 pages was by Letitia Jennings and dated 1895. An image of the title page from this book is given opposite and the photo of him given in the 'Overview' was from this book. This book provides extracts from the diary of John Thomas Betts for the period of July 1838 to August 1841 when he travelled in Germany and Italy and notes the places and people he saw; his reading and his literary and musical interests.



The 1911 census, taken at Sunnyside, Upper Green, Pembury gave Maria Betts as a widow. With her in this residence of 12 rooms was her niece Ada Meyer, a single lady aged 60 born in Clapham, and two domestic servants. The census recorded that Maria and her husband never had any children.

Shown below left is a photograph of the headstone of John Thomas Betts and his wife Maria, which is located at the Pembury Baptist Church, 1 Romford Road. Shown below right is a photograph of the church.



Probate records for Maria Betts gave her of Sunnyside, Pembury, a widow, who died May 17, 1916. The executors of her 4,924 pound estate were her niece Ada Meyer, spinster, and Howard Hawkins, gentleman. She was buried in the same cemetery as her husband and her name appears on the headstone of her husband. Her age on the headstone at the time of her death was given as "in the 94th year of her age".

The Pembury Village News of Summer 2013 gave an article entitled 'Baptist, Philanthropist And Entrepreneur' about Samuel Morton Peto who was born August 4, 1809 in Woking and was buried at Pembury Old Church. In part the article reports that Samuel and his second wife Sarah Kelsall (who he married in July 1843) retired to Blackhurst, Halls Hole Road, Tunbridge Wells and "Desite being a Baptist, for person reasons he chose to attend Mount Pleasant Congregational Church. He was a friend of John Thomas Betts, a wealthy translator who lived at 'Sunnyside' on the Green in Pembury. The house is now known as No. 5 Gates House. Betts was a member of the Pembury Free Church and he invited Peto to become a Trustee in 1885. A new Church was needed as the old one showed signs of decay, and the roof eventually collapsed. Peto gave 50 pounds to the building fund and secured many donations. G & F Penn, local builders were appointed constructors and the new Church opened on 19th July 1887" ..... "There are brass plaques to Peto and John T. Betts in the Baptist Church, where the latter is buried in the small graveyard".



Shown above is a photograph of the Betts home as 5 Gates House, a name which appears on the gated entrance. I wish to thank Tony Nicholls for taking and sending me this and other photographs of the house.

On the Pembury History website one can find mention of the name Betts in connection with businesses from the 1960s' onwards at 1323 Henwood Green, Church Road and 2 High Street but it was not established by the researcher if any of the proprietors of these shops are related in any way with the Betts family that is the subject of this article.