The Mabbett Family

Estimated reading time: 11 minutes



Detail of stained glass window in St Cyrs dedicated to Miss Mary Mabbett d.1890

Mabbett or Mabbot?

This surname is also spelt Mabbet, Mabet, Mabbot and Mabbutt and probably a few more ways besides. According to the

Internet Surname Database it is a diminutive of the medieval female name Mab(be), short for Amabel. Amabel meant lovable – judge for yourself how lovable our Mabbetts were.

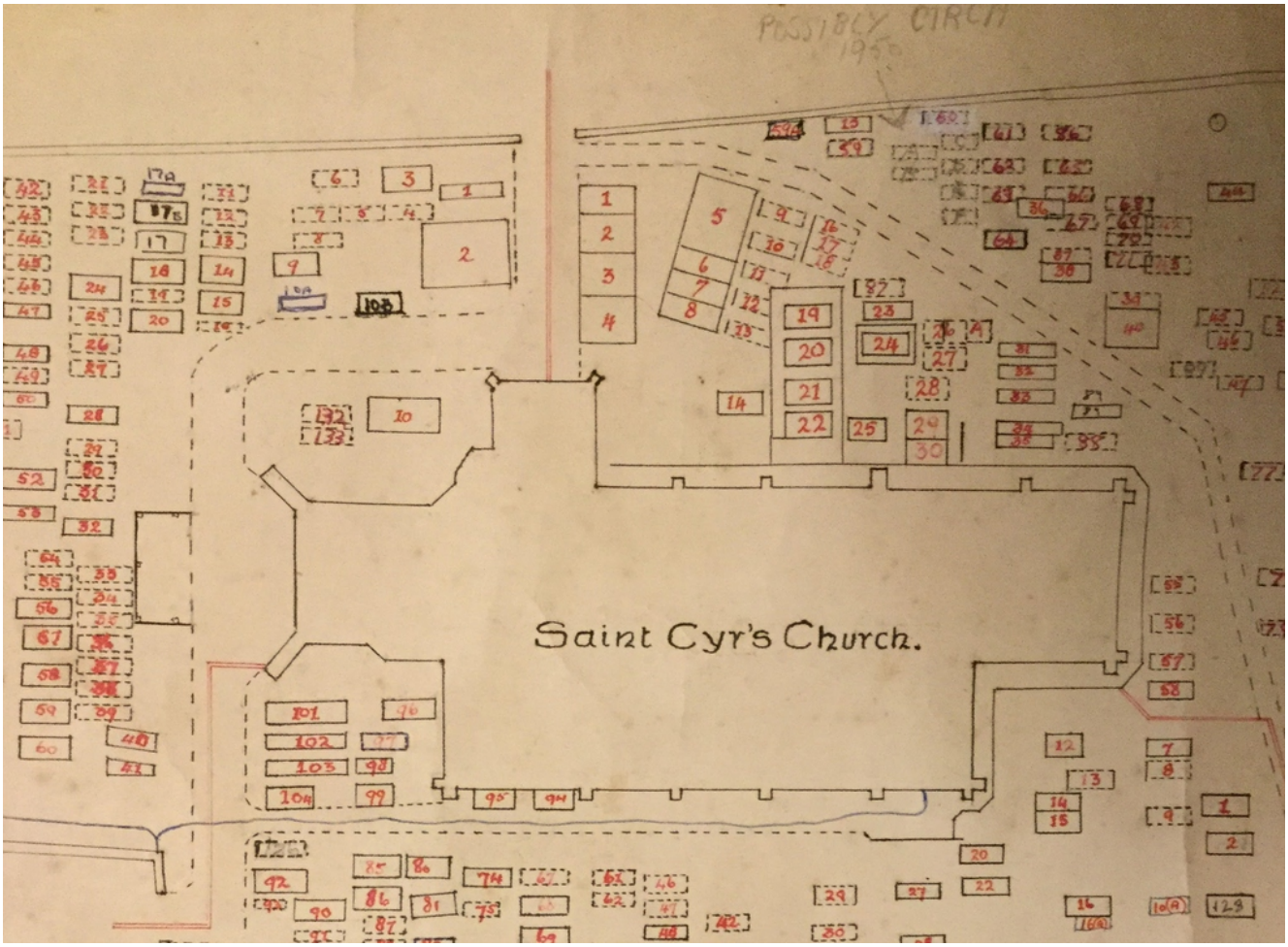
Why are the Mabbetts interesting?

Well, mainly because they ended up owning so much property and land in Stinchcombe in the late 19th century. They were also great benefactors and left us an impressive row of chest tombs in the churchyard.



The four chest tombs of the Mabbett & Browning family

When I refer to the tombs later on, I will employ the same numbering system as the Churchyard Plan. Each section of the churchyard north-east (NE), south (S) and west (W) has its own plot numbers. A new churchyard plan, by John Pinch, will soon be available inside the church.



Part of the old churchyard plan (Mabbett tombs numbered 19-22 in top right quadrant)

Nowadays there aren't any Mabbetts in Stinchcombe. Happily, elsewhere they are very much alive and some take a keen interest in their origins. Back in 2000, a man called Paul Mabbott visited our area for holiday and family history purposes. Whilst I can't agree with Paul that the origin of Stinchcombe's name is valley infested by gnats, his ***theories*** on the Mabbett family tree tie in with my own research.

The John Mabbett who (indirectly) started it all in Stinchcombe

Let's begin with the first Mabbett mentioned in Stinchcombe. The inscription on the oldest of our Mabbett chest tombs helpfully refers to John Mabbett of Coaley. Or more accurately to Mary, wife of John Mabbett of Coaley.

John himself probably never lived in Stinchcombe and didn’t always live in Coaley. He appears to have started out as a yeoman in Owlpen, where he married Anne Dovie and had three children. In 1695, he took his second wife, Mary Browning of Stinchcombe. After producing several more children, they moved to Coaley.

Later on some of John’s children and his widow came to live in Stinchcombe. The likely reason was that Mary inherited the estate of her brother John in 1727. Coincidentally, that was the year that the first of her grandchildren to be born in the village made his appearance.

Did the Mabbetts or Brownings have an hereditary condition?

Of course a lot of people did die young in those days, but to my inexpert eye early death seems especially common in this family. A geneticist might say that this is nonsense!

Two of John and Mary’s young sons (John and Thomas) feature on tomb NE-21 and a third (William) on the adjacent tomb NE-22. (This is also the tomb of Mary’s parents and two brothers, one of whom died young.) These three Mabbett boys died in their 20s.



North face of tomb NE-21 inscribed to Thomas Mabbett d.1731 aged 26

The brother and sister of the last Mary Mabbett in Stinchcombe continued the pattern. Her sister died as an infant and her brother aged 20.

Missing link number 1

Fortunately for the continuance of the Mabbett family, John Mabbett of Coaley's son Anthony lasted into his mid-30s. This gave him time to marry Sarah (although I can find no record of the ceremony) and have five children. The first child, John, was baptised in North Nibley and Daniel, Anne, Mary and Elizabeth in Stinchcombe.

Presumably, Anthony is the ancestor of any subsequent Mabbett heirs. Although he was buried in Stinchcombe, there is no longer any sign of his grave. Likewise he is not mentioned in

Bigland's Historical, Monumental, and Genealogical Collections relative to the County of Gloucester which sometimes identifies now vanished monuments.

Missing link number 2 – still missing!

Next up is another John Mabbett who seems to spring up fully formed. In 1775 he suddenly pops up in the ***Land Tax records***. These records are available for Gloucestershire from 1741 to 1833, so if he had been in Stinchcombe pre-1775 we would probably know.

To date all attempts to link this John Mabbett with Anthony Mabbett have failed. One clue may be a newspaper article that says the estate was ***entailed*** until the 19th century. Anyone who has read Pride & Prejudice knows that this can lead to a distant cousin inheriting when there is no legitimate son.



Copy of Pride & Prejudice awarded as a prize by the Primitive Methodist Sunday School in 1919
(Carol on Flikr)

Mabbetts in the Land Tax Records

After 1775, the name John Mabbett crops up with increasing frequency in the Land Tax records. From 1823 to 1833, John Mabbett senior and John Mabbett junior are both present. Starting in 1800, there are references to John Mabbett gentleman, suggesting the Mabbetts now consider themselves a step up from yeoman farmers.

This evidence hints at a grandfather, father and son sharing the same name, although other scenarios are possible. The John Mabbett that appears in 1775 is likely to be the man buried in 1791 (tomb NE-20). His namesake born in Stinchcombe about 1777 may be his son and is certainly the father of the John Mabbett born in 1800.

Old & New Syle Calendars (and stolen days!)

Richard Bartlam has found an article in the Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette of Thursday 05 April 1792 reporting that J. Mabbett Esq has died of a paralytic stroke in Stinchcombe. I believe it is the same man as mentioned above, but the inscription on the tomb uses the old Julian calendar. In this the year started on 1st April rather than 1st January so a date in March 1792 would have been recorded as March 1791. Officially, Britain made the change to the Gregorian calendar in September 1752. It was far from popular, in fact there were ***riots*** about the 11 “stolen” days. There is a certain logic for sticking to the old calendar on a tomb so that the date of death is consistent with the date of birth.

Mabbetts in the Census

Later on, when census data becomes available, we have access to more detailed information.

1841

Living at Eves Court, we find John Mabett (40), his daughter Mary (13), his son John (6) and his unmarried sister Elizabeth.

Eves Court, later spelt Eaves Court, is believed to be the house now called Lamport Court. After the death of Mary many years later, a newpaper article describes it as the home of her ancestors for generations.

1851

This time John (50), his wife Martha (56), Mary (23), John Browning (16) and Elizabeth Ann (52) are present. Browning is John junior's middle name, confirming the connection with the earlier Mabbetts and their Browning in-laws.

John senior is described as a landed proprietor occupying 140 acres but the name of his home is not given. His sister, Elizabeth Ann, is described as a landed proprietess, suggesting that she owns land in her own right.

1861

By now, John junior has been dead for several years and is the first occupant of a new tomb (NE-19). Its austere style is very different to the more ornate tombs of the earlier Mabbetts and Brownings. The rest of the family are still living together, presumably at Eaves Court. Mary aged 33 is still unmarried, as she remains for the rest of her life.

1871

Mary (43) continues to live with her widower father and her elderly maiden aunt. All three are now described as landowners.

1881

Mary (53) is now alone, apart from her servants, her father having passed away in 1879 and her aunt the following year. Elizabeth Ann is interred in tomb N-20 along with another John Mabbett, possibly her father. There is nobody left in the direct line of descent although there are collateral branches of the family i.e. aunts, uncles or cousins. She has inherited her father and aunt's estates and is described as having an income chiefly from land.

What was Miss Mary Mabbett like?

Unlike the other members of the family, we have enough evidence about this woman to get an idea of her personality. Comments made in newspaper articles shortly after her death in 1890 go beyond the usual courtesies. There is "a very general manifestation of sorrow" and Ven. Sir George Prevost appears "deeply moved" at her funeral service. She is "missed by a large circle of friends". Reporters acknowledge Mary's good works with references to "substantial evidence of her benevolence in many directions" and say how she "endeared herself to the poor".



Brass plaque beneath the window dedicated to Miss Mary Mabbett

In her will, Mary made a charitable bequest to provide warm underclothing to the poor of Stinchcombe every October. £200 was invested so that the vicar and churchwardens could use the income to buy the necessary items for those who needed them most.



The austere tomb NE-19 of Mary Mabbett and her parents and brother

Mary was held in such high esteem that there is stained glass window in her honour at St Cyr's – see the photo at the top of the article. She rests with her parents and brother in tomb NE-19.

Buildings in Stinchcombe associated with the Mabbetts

Mary Mabbett's estate was auctioned off by Messrs D Legge, Son & Pearce at The Old Bell in Dursley. In addition to her main residence, she had owned twenty-one house and cottages and 370

acres of land in Stinchcombe, Cam, North Nibley, Coaley and Berkeley.



The Old Bell Hotel, Dursley by Philip Halling CC BY-SA 2.0

Our Virtual Village will include pages on several of the buildings Mary owned in Stinchcombe, including Lamport (Eaves) Court, ***Street Farm***, The Buildings, Church Farm and the Old Post Office.

The North Wraxall connection

Before we finally leave the Mabbetts, let's make a short foray out of the area to rural Wiltshire, not far from Chippenham. Unusually, two successive John Mabbetts married women from the Holborow family of ***North Wraxall***.

Mary Mabett's grandfather married Mary Holborow in 1797, while her father married Martha Holborow in 1826. Her grandmother died in North Wraxall in 1802 and is buried there, still quite a young woman. Mary's own elder sister, Ann Martha, sadly died as an infant and is also buried at North Wraxall. This

suggests that regular visits continued between the relatives in Stinchcombe and North Wraxall over many years.



St James church at North Wraxall Photo © Phil Williams (cc-by-sa/2.0)

Mary's aunt Elizabeth Ann had such strong links to North Wraxall that she made a ***bequest*** to the poor of the village in her will. It provides clothing, bedding and fuel to "the most deserving and necessitous" and is perhaps the model for Mary's later bequest in Stinchcombe.

A Postscript: The Persistent Pitmans

Trudy Chinn has given me some interesting information about a court case relating to Mary Mabbett's estate. Miss Mabbett generously left annuities for life to various people with whom her connection is not obvious. They do not appear to have been

her domestic servants and most do not live in Stinchcombe. One of the annuitants is a woman called Louisa Pitman. Presumably alerted by the annuity, Louisa, her sister Frances and their widowed mother Sarah Pitman fight a successful court case for a share of the actual estate.

I was interested to find out who they were.The three ladies live in South Croydon, but census data show that Sarah was born in either North Nibley or Stinchcombe about 1806. I can't find a record of her marriage to John Pitman to be absolutely certain of her maiden name, but I suspect she was Sarah Mabbett. Sarah was the daughter of Frederick & Elizabeth Mabbett, born in North Nibley, but baptised in Stinchcombe in 1806. Frederick was the son of a Sarah Mabbett of Coaley, born about 1777. No father's name appears in the records so he may have been illegitimate. Clearly, the relationship to Mary Mabbett was sufficiently well proven to convince the High Court.

Kath Hudson