

# Preachers, Publicans and Performers

## The Chidlaw, Goff and James Families

### Welsh dissenters

**Dorothy Chidlaw** was born in 1777 at Bala, Meirionethshire in Wales, the seventh of nine children of **Benjamin Chidlaw** and **Anne Jones**. Dorothy's grandparents were **Jane** (c1690-1777) and **John Chidlaw** (1700-1780). John was originally a currier (processes leather) from Llanfyllin and a trustee of the Pendref Chapel there. He later moved to Bala where he continued working as a currier. He is buried in the Presbyterian Church, Chester Street, Wrexham. Jane is buried in the parish church of St Mor and St Deiniol, Llanfor, Meirionethshire, where Dorothy's parents, Benjamin and Anne, are also buried.



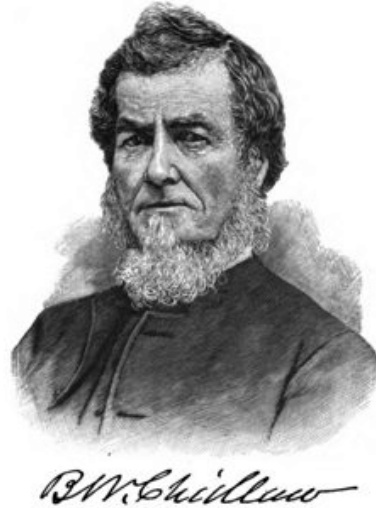
Pendref Chapel interior, Llanfyllin, Wales where John Chidlaw (1700-1780) was a trustee. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014



Parish church of St Mor and St Deiniol, Llanfor, Meirionethshire, Wales. Burial place of Dorothy Goff's parents Benjamin and Anne Chidlaw, and her grandmother Jane Chidlaw. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014

The Chidlaws were adherents to the dissenting church. John and Jane's eldest son John (Dorothy's uncle) trained for the Presbyterian ministry at David Jennings' Academy in Wellclose Square, London, and from 1752 until his death in 1800, he was the pastor at Crooks Street Presbyterian Church, Chester. Dorothy's brother Benjamin, wanting to escape the obligation of paying tithes to the Anglican Church, emigrated to America with his wife and children where he died in 1821 in Ohio not long after their arrival. His son Benjamin Williams Chidlaw became a pastor of the Congregational Church in Ohio, a chaplain during the American Civil War, and gave many years' service to the American Sunday Schools' Union. He returned to Wales where he died in 1892.

Rev. Benjamin Williams  
Chidlaw 1811-1892, nephew  
of Dorothy Goff (nee  
Chidlaw), practised in the  
U.S.A. but returned to Wales  
where he died in 1892.  
Source: findagrave.com



Dorothy's eldest brother John (d. 1804 Llanfor) married Catherine Richards c1793 in Wales. He inherited their uncle John's lease holdings at Bala. Dorothy had six sisters: Jane (1766-1834) married Thomas Harrison at St. James Piccadilly on December 27<sup>th</sup> 1807; Sarah (d. 1820 London) did not marry and inherited an annuity from their uncle John; Mary married Joseph Woods February 16<sup>th</sup> 1803 at St Georges Hanover Square, London; Ann married Samuel Cooper May 1<sup>st</sup> 1803, also at St Georges Hanover Square; Bridget (b. c1781) married September 1<sup>st</sup> at St Martin in the Fields, London. Dorothy's youngest sister Martha, a milliner, stayed in Meirionethshire and married John Roberts. Their son, Robert Chidlaw Roberts, went to Australia but was killed in a mining accident in 1852.



Of Dorothy's childhood, or why she and most of her sisters went to London, nothing is known except that she was orphaned at about 6 years of age and that Welsh would have been her first language. The girls may have gone to London to work as domestic servants. The earliest record of Dorothy in London is of her marriage to James Goff on June 9<sup>th</sup> 1802 at St. Martin-in-the-Fields.

St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London, c1815  
where Dorothy Chidlaw married James Goff  
in 1802. Source: ctgpublishing.com



Interior of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, by Augustus Pugin and Thomas Rowlandson for Ackermann's *Microcosm of London* (1808-11) Dorothy and James married here in 1802. Source: commons.wikimedia.org

### Robbery at the *Crown and Anchor*

**James Goff** was born in Middlesex in 1776 and earned a living as a licensed victualler (publican) in London. Nothing else is known about his early life or who his parents were.

Tax and directory records, and children's baptism records show him up to the early 1820s living and working at Britannia Row Islington and also in the St. Marylebone parish. By the mid 1820s he was the publican at the *Crown and Anchor*, Ebury Street, Pimlico. Here in 1827 James had a pewter pot stolen from him by a Mary Brown. She was sentenced to 7 years transportation for her crime (which also included the theft of other people's items).



Jacob's Well Mews, off George Street Westminster. James Goff had a pub here in the 1820s. In the 1850s the street was described as 'having fairly comfortable households with good, ordinary earnings.' Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014

### Undertakers and upholsterers

James and Dorothy had four children: **Eliza Chidlaw Goff** was born on March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1804 and baptised May 30<sup>th</sup> 1804 at St. Mary's, St. Marylebone, London; a second daughter Maria Walker Goff was born on January 13<sup>th</sup> 1806 and baptised on March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1806 also at St. Mary's; and two sons: James Copeland Goff born in 1811 and baptised at St. Marylebone and Charles Phillips Goff baptised on March 17<sup>th</sup> 1817 at Islington, when his father was a publican in Britannia Row.

Of these children Maria did not marry and died at 70 years of age having lived some of her life as housekeeper to her brother Charles and his family. Charles, an undertaker of Elizabeth Street South, Pimlico, married Elspeth Ann James. They produced four children: George C. Goff, James Speight Goff, Herbert Chidlaw Goff, and Elspeth W. Goff. James and Herbert became barristers' clerks. Charles died in 1886 at 69 years of age and lived all his married life at Elizabeth Street South. His brother James was an upholsterer and lived in nearby Ebury Street, Pimlico, until he died in 1887 at 76 years of age. He married Catherine (maiden name unknown) and they had five children: Maria Catherine Goff, James Goff, Walter Goff, Emma Goff and Albert Joseph Goff.



Left: Site of St. Mary's, St. Marylebone on High Street Marylebone, where Eliza Chidlaw Goff was baptised in 1804. The church was demolished in 1949 and the site turned into a Garden of Rest. Source: waymarking.com

Below: Grave of James Copeland Goff, Catherine Goff, Walter Goff, Maria Catherine Brennand and Albert Joseph Goff at West Brompton Cemetery, London. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014



Above: 89 Ebury Street, Pimlico residence of upholsterer James Copeland Goff. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014



James Goff died at the age of 74 on November 27<sup>th</sup> 1850 from 'gout in the stomach'. Dorothy died on October 17<sup>th</sup> 1844 at 67 years of age from 'dropsy and diseased liver' at 25 Lower Ranelagh Street, in the parish of St. Georges Hanover Square. This is where they were living in 1841 according to the census. Only eight months earlier she attended the death of her daughter Eliza. Dorothy's death certificate states that Ann Speight was present at her death. Ann was a relative by marriage, and the name Speight appears in some of the Goff family's names.



Grave of Dorothy and James Goff, Maria Walker Goff, and Alfred John Goff at West Brompton Cemetery, London. Photos: Euan McGillivray 2014

### Eliza Chidlaw Goff and William James

James and Dorothy's eldest daughter Eliza married **William James** (born at Donhead St. Mary in Wiltshire c1810 and no relation to Elspeth James mentioned above) on November 27<sup>th</sup> 1834 at St. Georges Hanover Square. The witnesses were Eliza's brother James Copeland Goff and her sister Maria Walker Goff. Eliza and William had two children: **Eliza Chidlaw James** in 1836 and Sarah Maria James in 1839. Around this time William earned a living as butler to the Earl of Rosebery, Lord Archibald Primrose, a Scottish nobleman who had a residence in London.

By 1844 Eliza became ill and died at 39 years of age on March 4<sup>th</sup> 1844. The cause of death was 'dropsy of chest and heart disease'. Her mother Dorothy was at her deathbed at 13 Grosvenor Street West, in the parish of St. Georges Hanover Square. Eliza was buried at All Souls' Cemetery on March 17<sup>th</sup>.

Right: Parish church of Donhead St. Mary in Wiltshire, where William James was baptised in 1810. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014





Above: All Souls' Cemetery, Kensal Green. Eliza's grave is somewhere in this section. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2018

Left: St. Georges Church, Hanover Square, London where William James and Eliza Chidlaw Goff married in 1834. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014



*Mogg's Strangers' Guide to London* map of 1834 showing Grosvenor Street West and Ranelagh Street just below Green Park. Source: Mapco.net

## A 'destitute swell'

William was still a servant at this time, and according to the Will of his father-in-law James Goff, made in 1849, William had also been a shopkeeper in Ranelagh Street near where the Goffs lived. However, William had soon fallen on hard times and ended up in the Debtors' Court. On Thursday February 28<sup>th</sup> 1850 at 10am, William appeared before the Court for Relief of Insolvent Debtors at the Court House, in Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. In 1858 the journal, *The Leisure Hour*, describes the court:

'All sorts of jocular legends and sarcasms are current concerning this central spot—the barristers who plead here, the attorneys who crowd here, and the luckless tribe who are brought up for exhibition here, in pursuance of their own request, yet against their wills. The court itself ..... is said to be the refuge of destitute 'swells.' What we note on entering the court while business is doing, is a lack of every thing agreeing with one's ideas of the dignity and majesty of justice, and a general aspect of wear and tear, not to say shabbiness, about the denizens of the place, and also of the place itself. The court room is small and inconveniently crowded....'<sup>1</sup>

On February 12<sup>th</sup> 1850, *The London Gazette*, in giving notice of the pending court hearing, printed details of William's employment and residential history, presumably for the benefit of any of his creditors:

'William James, formerly of Ranelagh-street, Pimlico, Bookseller and Stationer, next of Montague-street, Montague-square, next of Buckingham-place, Pimlico, next of Charlotte-street, Pimlico, not in any business or employment, next of Charlotte-street aforesaid, next of Grosvenor-street West, Pimlico aforesaid, Butler to a Nobleman in Belgrave-square, next of No. 101, Blandford-street, Portman-square, not in any business or employ, next of No. 139, Piccadilly, Middlesex, House Steward to a Nobleman, also giving musical entertainments at the Egyptian-hall, Piccadilly, for the exhibition of the performance on the piano of his daughter, known as The Infant Marie, next of Albany-street, Regent's Park, Middlesex, not in any business or employment, next of Tunbridge Wells, next of Canterbury, next of Southampton, next of No. 150, Albany-street aforesaid, next and late of No. 3, Blenheim-street, Bond-street, Middlesex, giving Musical Entertainments as aforesaid, and late out of business or employ'

Insolvent Debtors' Court House, Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London where William James had to appear in February 1850. Source: [clairegrey.co.uk](http://clairegrey.co.uk)





Belgrave Square today where William James was a 'butler to a nobleman'.  
Source: Londonsquares.net

Humiliation complete, William did secure a release. However, this does not mean his debts were necessarily cleared. According to *Mogg's New Picture of London and Visitors' Guide to its Sights*, 1844: 'The principle upon which it (the insolvents' court) is established is this: - The person is for ever released, but the property never, as long as any claims remain unsatisfied.'<sup>2</sup>

### Daughters on the stage

As noted in William's employment history, one method by which he could earn a living and perhaps pay off his debts, was to put his daughter Sarah Maria, known as *The Infant Marie*, on the stage. According to newspaper records, she had been performing on the piano, and in song and dance from at least early 1849, and at many venues across England. A news item from the *Cheltenham Looker-On* of October 26<sup>th</sup> 1850 states:

'Since Marie's appearance in Cheltenham a succession of concerts have been given by her parent and preceptor in several of our cities and large provincial towns, at all of which we observe from the newspapers of their respective localities, our young pianiste, vocalist and danseuse, has been eminently successful....'

From 1850, in the news items and advertisements for Sarah Maria's concerts, William's elder daughter Eliza, appears as her sister's supporting performer. Between this time and into the summer of 1852, the two girls continuously performed all over England, as well as at Edinburgh. Was William on the run from his creditors? Were William's daughters his sole means of income, or did he earn his own money? Perhaps William was also on the stage - a Liverpool concert review of 1850 mentions Mr. James performing:

**THE INFANT MARIE'S ENTERTAINMENT.**—During the present week, this astonishing prodigy, who is only eight years of age, has been giving a series of musical entertainments, sentimental, comic, and dramatic, at the Concert Hall, Lord Nelson-street. In some of her songs, such as "I'm Ninety-five," "Jenny Jones," "Little Red Riding Hood," &c., she appeared in character, and admirably sustained the representations throughout. She is a most pleasing singer, and her abilities as a pianist are of a high order. In addition to her other performances, Marie appeared as a *danseuse*, in costume. She was rapturously applauded throughout, and the evening's entertainment was varied by the efforts of Miss E. James (sister to Marie) and Mr. James. It will be seen by the advertisement that she will appear again this evening (Friday) and during the next week. Next Friday evening, we understand, will be positively her last appearance in Liverpool.

Review in *The Liverpool Mercury* 13<sup>th</sup> December 1850

On the 1851 census, William and his daughters are living at 68 Charlotte Street, Marylebone, but he gives no occupation. In 1861 and 1871 he is a boarder at The Colosseum Hotel in Great Portland Street (near Carburton Street) with his occupation given as 'private' and 'annuitant' respectively. On his daughters' marriage certificates he is described as a freeholder in 1859 and as a stationer in 1865. The 1871 census is the last record we have of William.

In 1858 William's daughters migrated on the ship *Aloe* to begin new lives in Australia.



Eliza Chidlaw Box (nee James) began her working life as a musical performer with her sister. Source: Louise Smith

Ann Hurley

2020

See my story **Missing Person** for more about Eliza Chidlaw James  
See my story **'The Musical Wonder'** for more about Sarah Maria James.

[hurleyskidmorehistory.com.au](http://hurleyskidmorehistory.com.au)

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.victorianlondon.org/legal/insolventcourt.htm> also The Victorian Dictionary  
<https://www.victorianlondon.org/index-2012.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.victorianlondon.org/legal/insolventcourt.htm>

Other resources:

Birth Death and Marriage certificates - General Register Office England

*British Newspaper Archive* (British Library)

Burial Register Kensal Green Cemetery

Deceased online <https://www.deceasedonline.com>

Ellis, Jan - UK: Goff and Chidlaw descendant

*England & Wales, Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills, 1384-1858* (Ancestry.com)

*England and Wales Census Records* (Ancestry.com)

Parish of St Georges Hanover Square marriage records