



MR. HAROLD JOHN PHELPS (14/12/1872 to 8/5/1968)

Mr. Harold J Phelps who died on 8th May 1968 at age of 95, was a great authority on fruit and growing and is buried in Tibberton Churchyard (HT N34).

Born on his father's farm, the Elms, Tibberton, near Gloucester, he lived practically his whole life in the village. Two years after the death of his wife Lydia in 1966, he moved from his cottage at Tibberton to rest home in Cheltenham, where he died after a short illness. He was survived by his daughter, Mrs. Mary Ratcliffe.

Mr. Phelps was educated in Gloucester and later went onto manage the family farm and firm, famous for its fruit and more particularly for its cider, including champagne cider, and perry. Until well into his nineties he remained a familiar figure in Gloucester. "He always wore a bowler hat and often seen carrying a baskets of apples for sale in the city."

Mr. Phelps was a churchwarden at Holy Trinity, Tibberton, a manager of the village school, a parish councillor and a member of the Newent Board of Guardians who administered the Poor Law. For many years he was a prominent member of the Gloucester Root Fruit and Grain Society.

In 1910 he won second prize in a 'Gloucester Root, Fruit and Grain Society Competition' for his work on an old orchard that has been made young again by planting intervening spaces and looking well after young trees. "At the outset this orchard did not appear to lend itself competition, and, indeed, it was a difficult one to deal with, but the improvement effected reflects great credit Mr. Phelps, and the position of the orchard the list of prize-winners contradicts the idea that appears to be entertained in some quarters, i.e., that old orchards have not much chance of winning prizes."

In 1933 the Citizen reported Mr Harold J Phelps and his son had taken a Mr Rosslyn Smith of Hythe into partnership in the old established business of cider merchants at Tibberton. "This business has been carried on in the Phelps family for nearly three-quarters of a century."

In 1937 the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution held a meeting in the Albion Chambers, Gloucester paying tribute to Mr Harold J Phelps for his many years of work as chairman and secretary to the committee and "the great loss his absence will be to the Institution and its work in the community."

In 1964, the Citizen also reported Mr Phelps, a well know local fruit grower, was carrying a basket of apples on the steps leading to the first floor of Shire Hall when he fell, fracturing his leg. He was swiftly taken to Gloucester Hospital where his condition was described as "fair".

He clearly remembered the opening Gloucester Newent railway line in 1885 and was there in 1959 to ride on the last passenger train. Before the line was built, he recalled dipping sheep in the old Gloucester-Hereford canal. Mr Phelps' funeral was held at Tibberton Church.

*Edit extracts from Lawrence Davis 'Tibberton- A further look at our village' 2012 and extracts from newspaper archives.
David Mills 2024*