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The exact date of the formation of this Church is unknown. But in the latter part of the 17th century the Nonconformists of Stroud met in Dyer's Court, where at the upper end of an orchard stood a barn which was converted into a Meeting House in about 1687. The present "Old Meeting House in Chapel Street" was completed in about 1711, though there have been a number of additions over the years. The present Minister is the Rev. Ernest Pritchard.

The next oldest Church in Stroud, according to Fisher, was the old Wesleyan Chapel, built in Acre Street in 1763. But since his day a new Methodist Church in Castle Street has been erected, (Minister—the Rev. E. H. Harland), and the old Wesleyan Chapel is used by the Salvation Army. This Salvation Army Citadel in Stroud is under the care of Major and Mrs. Richardson.

Stroud Baptist Chapel, erected in 1824, was the first building to be erected in John Street. The building cost £2,000, the money being raised by the late Rev. Henry Hawkins. At present the Church is without a minister following the Rev. A. J. Tugwell's departure for Portsmouth in February.

The other Congregational Church in Stroud is in Bedford Street. It was built in 1836 for £2,731. The reason for the erection of a second Congregational Church in Stroud was because the Old Meeting in Chapel Street was too small to accommodate all who wished to worship there. At first this new church was called "Union Chapel," from the mistaken belief that the street on which it stands would be called Union Street. But when this street

Conception, was built by the Dominicans and opened in 1859. The parish priest is Father J. Hickey, with curates, Father J. O'Connor and Father J. McNamara, the latter will be leaving Stroud next month. Now owned by the Christian Scientists, the Temperance Hall in Lansdown was built in 1879 due to the bequest of "a gentleman anxious to promote the cause of temperance." Over the years the hall has been used for the Borough School, and by the Liberals and local Conservative Association. Today the hall is used as a Christian Science reading room.

### "SWAN" AND "GEORGE"

As far back as 1654 two Stroud inns were mentioned in property deeds. One of them, the Swan, stood at the junction of Swan Lane with High Street, while the other, the George Inn, was some forty yards below in the same lane.

Being the chief hotel in the town the magistrates met at the George, and the old inn was often the scene of dances and balls.

On November 29, 1759, the fall of Quebec was celebrated in Stroud as follows: "In the morning the gentlemen, clothiers and chief inhabitants, met at the George Inn, from whence they walked in procession to the Church, drums beating, colours flying; and after hearing an excellent sermon preached by the Rev. Mr. John Warren, they returned to the George, where a handsome entertainment was provided; after dinner many loyal healths were drunk, liquor given away, and the evening concluded with bellringing, illuminations, bonfires and fireworks."

The George Inn was closed in 1819, and its business transferred to the Royal George Hotel. About the same time a new inn, called the Swan, was established on its present site in Swan Lane. Just before the last was the Royal George, which stood at the beginning of King Street, was replaced by Montague Burton's shop.

### HAUNTED

Stratford Park was purchased by Stroud U.D.C. as public gardens and pleasure grounds in 1935. It may not be generally known that for a brief period the house of Stratford Park was supposed to be haunted. One of the earlier owners of Stratford Park was Giles Gardner, a prominent local man and a justice of the peace. When he died his widow, commonly called Madame Gardner, remained in

residence until she, too, passed away in the house. We take up the story from Fisher:

"On the Sunday morning after her decease, while the coffin remains were lying in her chamber, the female servants in charge of the house were startled by the ringing of the bell that communicated with their mistress's room. Terror prevented their attempting to ascertain its cause, until other servants returned from church; when they summoned courage to visit the apartment of the dead and discovered that an owl had made its way down the chimney; and, in flying about, had entangled its claws in the bell-wire and caused the alarm."

### MURDERED & MUTILATED

Another local haunting is mentioned by Fisher. This was in a house which has now passed into oblivion, Spillman's Court. During the 17th century the Spillman's Court estate was a fairly large one, and extended over much of the land adjoining the Bath Road, Rodborough. A century or more ago the Court had a sinister reputation of being haunted because during the absence of the family at Sunday morning service the cook was murdered and mutilated in the kitchen. This occurred during the 18th century, but the ghost lived on for several generations!

Nearer our time, on December 31, 1886, a Stonehouse boy was murdered in the lane leading from Cainscross Road to Lodgemore Mill. He was carrying the week's wages for the employees of a Lightpill cloth manufacturing firm, amounting to £201, and was struck down and robbed. The murderer was caught and hanged at Gloucester on January 26, the next year, a very speedy retribution. This episode created a great sensation, and it is just possible that our oldest readers can recall the special editions of the "Stroud News" which dealt with the crime and trial.

### BREWERY POET

No account of Stroud would be complete without a reference to Stroud Brewery. The Brewery was established towards the end of the 18th century by Mr. Peter Leversage, of Middle Lypiatt. In 1819 Mr. Joseph Watts became proprietor of the business. At that time the Brewery had an unofficial Poet Laureate in Mr. "Teddy" Wilkins. Under the delusion he could write poetry Wilkins produced doggerel by the yard. It

was surmised at the time that the strong beer which he drank to excess, was both the source of his inspirations and the wages for his work. This is a fair example of Wilkins' work:

"When going one day, to my employ,

I met a wagon load of joy;  
It made me thirsty to see't  
—for why,—

It came from Watt's Brewery."

The Stroud Brewery Company was formed in 1888, and in 1928, Stroud's other brewery, Godsell and Sons, of Salmon's Spring, was acquired by the Stroud Brewery.

### BALLOON ASCENT

A large crowd gathered on Wallbridge Wharf in the year 1785 to see a Mr. Sadler, of Oxford, carry out his intention of making a balloon ascent from the Wharf. The better part of the day was taken up by making enough gas to fill the balloon. The gas was made in a cask containing small pieces of iron and diluted vitriolic acid. In the end the crowd became so impatient that Sadler took off before his balloon was properly filled. Because of this the balloon did not reach any great height, and

it descended in a field at King's Stanley, about three miles away.

### £50 EACH

A special public meeting was called in 1832 to consider the erection of a large public building in Stroud. To raise enough funds subscription shares of £50 each were issued and by this means over £3,000 was raised. Early in 1834 the Stroud Subscription Rooms were opened, though the interior was not completed until 1837.

When the building was nearing completion a ramp made out of planks was constructed from Threadneedle Street to the top of the building. One Friday evening a Mr. William Radcliffe, having completed certain business in the Swan Inn, mounted his horse to return home, missed his way in the dark, and rode up the planks to the top of the building, before he realised his mistake. Dismounting, he tried to back his horse down the planks, but the animal fell and was killed. Mr. Radcliffe reached the ground in safety, but what he thought about it all next morning may be left to the imagination!

(To be continued)

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Continuing

# STROUD

APRIL 19, 1957

- ★ The Churches of Stroud
- ★ When Magistrates met at "The George"
- ★ Haunting at Stratford Park
- ★ Wallbridge to King Stanley-by balloon!

IN 1304 there was a dispute between the clergy of Bisley and the inhabitants of Stroud, as to who should pay for the restoration of the chapel at Stroud.

To settle the dispute a document was drawn up, which said that because the distance between "Strode and Bysselye" was so great and so dangerous, the inhabitants might provide, at their own expense, a place in the chapel for baptisms, to avoid the long journey to Bisley.

At that time the size of the Stroud Chapel was 33 feet long by 16 feet wide, so the population could not have been very large. The font provided in 1304 was destroyed in 1836, when a new font was installed. The tower and steeple were added in the 14th century and in the next century a nave, aisles and gallery were provided.

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was called Bedford Street, the new church adopted the name. The minister is the Rev. E. K. Doman.

In addition to the Salvation Army Citadel, there is another place of worship in Acre Street, called "The Acre Street Rooms." This building was erected in 1852.

## THE PEOPLE'S HALL

The People's Hall was erected in Silver Street, by Mr. Opie Rodway at a cost of £443 in 1864. Today the Hall is in Hill Street, and is run by the Assemblies of God.

St. Alban's Church in Parliament Street is a branch of Stroud Parish Church; and there is a religious Meeting House above Lansdown.

The Catholic Church, at Beeches Green, dedicated to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, was built by the Dominicans and opened in 1859. The parish priest is Father J. Hickey, with curates, Father J. O'Connor and Father J. McNamara, the latter will be leaving Stroud next month.

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