

Richard Preston

James Weld (1785-1855): a brief biography of a Southampton yachtsman and politician

James Weld, owner of Archers Lodge and a prominent Reform politician in Southampton, was a member of one of the leading Roman Catholic families in England. His father, Thomas Weld (1750-1810), had succeeded to the family estates in the 1770s: those in Oxfordshire on obtaining his majority in 1771, following the death of his uncle Sir Edward Simeon three years earlier and those in Dorset, Hampshire and Lancashire in 1775, on the death of his elder brother Edward. His formative years were spent on the continent, educated by English and French Jesuits at St Omer and Bruges in Flanders. Three of his sons – Joseph, John and Edward – were educated at the English Academy at Liege, the only Jesuit educational institution to survive the suppression of the Order by Pope Clement XIV in 1773. Many of the staff and students of the English Academy fled to England in July 1794 in advance of the French occupation of Flanders. These Thomas resettled at Stonyhurst -part of Weld's property in Lancashire – in the hope that the infusion of new blood would stimulate a renaissance of English Jesuit education (see Maurice Whitehead, "In the sincerest intentions of studying": the educational legacy of Thomas Weld (1750-1810), founder of Stonyhurst College' in *Recusant History*, May 2002, pp 169-93). Devotional notebooks uncovered in a Sussex convent in 2010 show that Thomas kept a rigorous daily routine of prayers, Mass, Matins, the Rosary and twice-daily visits to the Blessed Sacrament, with eight hours a day reserved for 'hair discipline' (*CatholicHerald.co.uk*, 5 august 2010).

James was the seventh son of Thomas Weld and his wife Mary. His mother was the eldest daughter of Sir John Massey Stanley of Hooton Hall and Puddington Hall, recusant houses on the Wirral Peninsula. He was born on 30 April 1785 and grew up at Lulworth Castle, chief residence of the Weld family in Dorset. Father Charles Plowden, later rector of Stonyhurst College, was appointed chaplain and tutor at the castle a year before James's birth (*Oxford dictionary of national biography*). The castle was home, up the mid 1810s, of the exiled monks of Le Trapp, given asylum in the castle grounds after being driven out of France. Their regime of abstinence, mortification, labour, silence and prayer clearly had a deep effect on the Weld siblings. Thomas (1773-1837), the eldest son, became a Roman Catholic priest, later appointed Bishop of Upper Canada (although never serving there). In 1830 he became the first English Cardinal since Philip Thomas Howard in the seventeenth century (*Oxford dictionary of national biography*). Edward (1775-96) was destined for the priesthood but died prematurely whilst a student at Stonyhurst College. John (1780-1816) entered the priesthood and was appointed principal of Stonyhurst College in 1813. Humphrey (1783-1852) lived a secular life, but had a son in holy orders whilst each of his five daughters became a nun. His wife entered a nunnery on his death. Three of James Weld's daughters became nuns. The eldest Juliana took the veil in a Franciscan convent at Bruges aged nineteen. She died eight years later, in 1800, at the Abbey House in Winchester: a property owned by her father to which the nuns had fled when their Flanders convent was overrun by the French. Two younger sisters – Maria Theresa (died 1866) and Clara - entered the Order of the Visitation (the Salesian sisters) in 1805 and 1813 respectively. Maria Theresa, possibly the first Englishwoman to join the order, was superioress for twenty one years. Another sister –

Elizabeth Mary (died 1865) – was a Catholic scholar and writer of devotional works. Her best known work, *Mrs Herbert and the Villagers; or Family conversations on the Principal duties of Christianity*, was published anonymously in 1823. It went through at least ten editions, latterly under her married title of the Countess de Bodenham. Her husband, Charles Thomas Bodenham, was a member of the Roman Catholic Board.

The five surviving sons of Thomas Weld shared the family estates: an unusual division in an age when primogeniture was the custom in large landed families. Thomas was given the *caput* of Lulworth Castle. The expense of so large a residence later forced him to close the castle and move to a more manageable house in Clifton, near Bristol. Joseph inherited Pylewell House, near Lymington. He succeeded to Lulworth Castle in 1828, when his eldest brother renounced his landed interests on entering the priesthood. Humphrey inherited Chideock in Dorset and George (born 1786) was bequeathed Leagrim Park in Lancashire. James's legacy was Britwell in Oxfordshire. It was then occupied by nuns of the English Poor Clares, given asylum by Thomas Weld in 1800 after fleeing from Aire in Artois. Their abbess, Sister Euphrasia Weld, was an aunt of James. Her recently-married nephew moved from Cowesfield House, a Weld property in Whiteparish in Wiltshire, to Britwell in 1813. The displaced nuns found a new home at Coxside in Plymouth. James was a reforming landlord. He was a pioneer of cottage allotments, several acres of the estate being divided into portions of half to one acre each and let for rents between £1 and £5 (*Essex Standard*, 7 December 1833). He was to speak, with the Reverend James Crabb and others, at a meeting of the Labourers' Friend Society at Southampton Town Hall on 22 November 1833 in favour of the cottage allotment system (*Hampshire Telegraph*, 2 December 1833). In September 1823 'the modern well-made household furniture' and household effects were sold at auction and the house, with the surrounding pasture land but excluding the woodland, was let with immediate possession (*Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 13 September 1823). James and his family moved to Southampton, the retained Britwell woodland – chiefly beech, ash, oak and willow – a continuing source of income as the timber was felled. James also kept the honorary title of lord of the manor of Britwell. The family lived for almost thirty years at Archers Lodge, off the Avenue: first recorded there in All Saints rate books in Lady Day 1824, after briefly renting a property in the Polygon. The lodge was initially rented from the Harrison family (Samuel Harrison, a banker who died in 1820, had built the property), but was purchased by Weld at auction in November 1826. The property - four acres encompassed within a ring fence - comprised the Georgian house, coach house, stables and "beautiful and elegantly arranged pleasure grounds, flower gardens, luxuriant plantations and shrubberies, walled fruit garden, well stocked and highly productive, with a green house, and also an inclosed paddock" (*Hampshire Telegraph*, 13 November 1826). Eight acres of park-like gardens had been added by 1851. The gross estimated rental in 1851 was £254.10s, with a rateable value of £172.10s. Six house servants, a lodge keeper and a gardener were listed in the 1851 census.

James Weld married into one of the best-connected Catholic families of the day. His bride was Juliana Anna Petre, third daughter of Robert James, 10th Baron Petrie. It was a reconfirmation of earlier family ties. An uncle of James – Edward Weld (1731-75) – had

married a daughter of the 8th Baron. Juliana's mother was Mary Bridget Petre (*nee* Howard), a sister of the future 12th Duke of Norfolk. The marriage took place in Edward Street, London on 15 July 1812. There were seven children to the marriage:

Henry Thomas Weld - born in London, 31 January 1816 - was the eldest of three sons. He does not fit into the Weld tradition. He emigrated to the United States of America in 1838, his occupation recorded as 'engineer' on his arrival in New York on 31 December. He was managing agent and director of the Maryland and New York Iron and Coal Company, recently established and largely capitalized by English shareholders. It was largely to represent their interests that Weld went to America. *A report made by Henry Thomas Weld, Esq, of the Maryland and New York Iron and Coal Company's lands, in the County of Allegheny and State of Maryland*, published in 1839, was the earliest assessment of the mineral resources of what was then an unexploited wilderness. The Maryland and New York Iron and Coal Company built huge rolling mills at Mount Savage in the Allegheny Mountains and was responsible for the first iron rail road constructed in the United States. In 1845 Weld purchased 12,000 acres of timber lands in Somerset County in the neighbouring state of Pennsylvania. He set up a saw mill in what was to become the settlement of Southampton Mills. He later became one of the largest coal-barge proprietors on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. By the 1860s he owned real estate valued at \$10,000, personal estate valued at \$8,000 and enjoyed an annual income estimated at \$4,000. With wealth came social acceptance. He married into a well-connected family. Harriet Emily Hoffman Tilghman, who he married in Maryland on 30 May 1843, was the English-born daughter of Captain Philemon Tilghman, RN. Her father had fought on the English side during the War of American Independence, but other members of the family had ties with the earliest days of the Republic. Her grandfather, James Tilghman, was a gentleman lawyer and a former member of the Legislature of Maryland. Uncles included a former Chief Justice to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania (William Tilghman) and an *aide-de-camp* to George Washington (Lt Col Tench Tilghman). Henry lived for most of his time in America at Mount Savage and was responsible for the building of St Patrick's Roman Catholic Church there in 1862/3. He died in July 1893, insolvent and leaving a will disposing of what was now probably a fictitious estate.

The younger brothers fit more easily into the Weld narrative. Francis Joseph Weld - born at South Down Cottage in Weymouth, 5 September 1819 – was educated at Downside and on the continent at Valognes and Rome. He became a novitiate in the Carmelite Order but, unable to cope with the severe discipline, later entered the English College at Rome – of which his uncle Thomas was cardinal protector – in order to train for the priesthood. Ordained in March 1842, he was the following year made Domestic Prelate of His Holiness. He returned to England as chaplain to the Carmelite nuns at Lanherne in Cornwall (1844-8). In 1855 he was appointed the first missionary rector of Isleworth in Hertfordshire. He died in post in September 1898. In 1862 he had been recommended by the Bishop of Clifton as Archbishop of Trinidad. Philip George Weld – born 16 August 1828 and baptized at St Joseph's in Southampton – entered the Catholic College near Ware in Hertfordshire in 1841, destined for the priesthood. A life unfulfilled, he was drowned, whilst still a student at Ware, in a boating accident in April 1845. At the moment of his death a vivid apparition of his son,

accompanied by St Stanislaus Kostka – a patron of Jesuit novices - appeared to James Weld. It was a phenomenon that has exercised psychical researches to the present day.

There were four daughters to the marriage. None married. Agnes Weld – the third eldest, born in Weymouth, 30 July 1821 – entered a Benedictine convent in Brussels in September 1841. She was known in the order as Mary Agnes Weld. The convent subsequently relocated to Winchester and then to East Bergholt. She died in February 1883. The remainder lived, largely unreported, in the secular world. Anna-Maria Weld – born in London, c.1813 – died at Eaton Square in London in June 1851 and is buried in St James's Catholic Cemetery in Winchester. Katherine Mary Weld – born at Britwell House, 25 August 1817 – lived with her father for most of her life. It is to Katherine that we owe the account of the apparition noted above, written in 1883 and published three years later in *Phantasms of the Living* by Edmund Gurney, Frederic W H Myers and Frank Podmore (volume 2, pp 241-3). Charlotte Adelaide Weld – born 23 August 1830 and baptized in St Joseph's in Southampton – died at Lulworth Castle in November 1862.

James Weld was a keen yachtsman. He attended the founding meeting of The Yacht Club – direct descendant of the Royal Yacht Squadron – at the Thatched House in London on 1 June 1815. He was a member of the Royal Yacht Squadron for almost forty years. Five yachts, each registered in Southampton, appear on the RYS lists under his ownership: *Pylewell* (cutter, 26 tons) 1815-17; *Julia* (yawl, 43 tons) 1818-25; *Paul Pry* (cutter, 22 tons) 1826-8; *Twins* (cutter, 95 tons) 1834; *Lord of the Isles* (cutter, 45 tons) 1836-41. An advertisement for the sale of *Old King Cole*, a half-decked cutter of 11 tons built by James Weld, appeared in the *Hampshire Advertiser*, 1 May 1830. It was offered for sale at 80 guineas. James was always in the lee of his elder brother Joseph Weld in the yachting world, but was nevertheless a significant figure in the intensely competitively racing culture which was centred in Cowes and in which betting, often for huge stakes, was an integral element. The first match between privately-owned yachts around the Isle of Wight was probably that between James Weld and Christopher Rice Mansel on 20 June 1824. (Ian Dear, *The Royal Yacht Squadron, 1815-1985*, published in 1985). The wager was for 100 guineas. The following year, £300 was staked on a race between Weld's *Julia* and the Marquis of Anglesey's *Liberty* from Cowes to Swanage and back (*Morning Chronicle*, 25 July 1825). James's influence spread to other sailing venues along the south coast. He was steward of the Weymouth Regatta in August 1831 – graced by the family and retinue of the recently-deposed Charles X of France, then guests of Joseph Weld at Lulworth Castle – and August 1831. The following summer James was one of three stewards of the Torbay Regatta. In June 1834 he was elected a member of the Plymouth division of the Royal Western Yacht Club. In March 1839 he was elected Commodore of Southampton Yacht Club. He resigned in May 1845, citing the pressure of other commitments, but his six years of office saw the revival of the hitherto almost moribund Southampton Regatta, the decision to build a new club house and, under royal patronage, the transition to the Royal Southern Yacht Club.

James was also a dry-bob. He was, like his father, an excellent shot, frequently praised in a sympathetic press for his slaughter of game and his prowess at pigeon shooting. The latter was a notorious excuse for betting. James also followed family tradition in the army reserve.

He was elected a cornet in the Dorsetshire Yeomanry Cavalry on its reformation after the breakdown of the Peace of Amiens in 1803. He was promoted lieutenant, *vice* his elder brother Humphrey, in February 1807, resigning in October 1813 on his removal to Britwell. In June 1815 he was elected a captain in the Second or Southern Regiment of the Oxfordshire Local Militia. In November 1830, at the height of the Swing Riots, James was one of the organizing committee which raised £3,000 to form a voluntary rifle corps of 100 young gentlemen from Southampton to protect the town and neighbourhood from riots and acts of incendiarism (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 11 December 1830).

A life in politics or in civil administration was denied to Weld until the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act – “that measure of justice, that measure necessary because it was just” – in 1829. He was, for the first forty years of his life, “an alien in his own land” (in a borrowed quotation from Lord Lyndhurst). Later speeches hint at the depth of his frustration. He told the Southampton Reform Protection Association in 1838 that “... when he first entered Southampton as a resident he found the army, the navy, the corporation, the magistracy, and every situation resting between the throne and the worst paid exciseman beyond his reach, and the gates of admission closed against him” (*Morning Chronicle*, 27 August 1838). Again, in a letter to the *Edinburgh Courier* in August 1843: “The gates of ambition were closed against me, myself surrounded by degradation and insults, and all which to the aspiring mind could render life desirable far removed”. Once free of his political shackles James joined the next great crusade, that of parliamentary reform. He seconded the address of thanks to William IV for his dissolution of the anti-Reform parliament at a meeting in Southampton Town Hall in April 1831. He was chairman of the Grand Reform Dinner of the friends of Reform held in the Long Rooms in May 1831. In the general election of the same month he proposed Arthur Atherley as a pro-Reform candidate for the borough. Weld took the opportunity to contrast Southampton – for ever a free town – with the unfree boroughs of Lymington, Christchurch and Andover, “the people of which towns have no more interest in the return of their Members than lampposts in their streets” (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 7 May 1831). He was a requisitioner to the Hampshire County Reform meeting held at Winchester in October 1831. He proposed the first resolution at the Southampton town meeting in May 1832 to petition the House of Lords to pass the Reform Bill which had recently been sent up from the House of Commons. The interchange between the succeeding ministries was characterized as “child’s play – a mere leap-frog between Lord Grey and the Duke of Wellington. First down goes the Duke and over goes Lord Grey; then down goes Lord Grey and over goes the Duke; but ‘ere long I hope we shall see the Duke get another tumble” (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 19 May 1832).

Catholic emancipation allowed Weld to stand election for public office. He was proposed as a Commissioner of Waterworks for his home ward of All Saints in December 1835, but lost a highly politicized election. In December 1836 – the second election after the passing of the Municipal Reform Act - he was elected a town councillor for the same ward. He came top of the poll and, in the subsequent council, was appointed the first chairman of the Town Lands Committee. In October 1837, however, his name was removed from the burgess lists by the revising barristers sitting in the borough revision court. He was one of several victims of a

Tory-inspired purge of pro-reform voters. No cause is known, but was likely to have been on the grounds of protracted non-residence. The immediate consequence was disqualification from sitting in council (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 7 October 1837). He was replaced the following month by the Tory Joseph Bernard. Weld faced the electorate again in November 1841 – the year he would have stood had he not been deselected – but this was a bad year for reformers and all four Liberal candidates for All Saints were defeated. He did not stand election again. His name was twice mentioned as a possible Liberal candidate for Lymington, a borough in which the Weld writ ran large. He made a short canvass in December 1834 following the resignation of Sir Harry Neale, Bart and in June 1841 his name was briefly coupled with that of William Nightingale of Embley Park as the ministerialist candidates for the town. Weld never attempted the representation of his adopted town but nominated or seconded Liberal candidates in a run of four successive elections: Arthur Atherley (May 1831), John Easthope (January 1835), Lord Clarence Paget (July 1837) and E J Hutchins (July 1841). He had been amongst the chief supporters of the barrister Charles Frederick Williams as Liberal candidate in August 1830. His retirement shortly before nomination may have denied Weld what was to become his accustomed place on the hustings (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 7 August 1830).

James Weld was an active Liberal politician in Southampton throughout the 1830s and early 1840s. His support of the abolition of the national debt, places, pensions and sinecures put him on the radical wing of the party. The events of the 1837 election convinced him of the need for secret voting: “With regard to the Ballot, he thought it was at once pregnant with good and evil, but from all he had seen and heard of the conduct of their opponents, he thought it should be no longer withheld” (*Hampshire Telegraph*, 31 July 1837: nomination of Lord Paget). He set himself as the friend of the displaced and degraded Irish Catholics. He spoke against the landed Protestant majority, argued for reform of Irish municipal corporations and praised the work of the ‘Great Liberator’, Daniel O’Connell. In other respects, however, he held less extreme views. He was in favour of the reform of the Corn Laws, but proposed a fixed duty rather than outright repeal. His opposition to the separation of church and state and to the alienation of the property of the established church suggest a largely non-sectarian approach to religious matters. Away from party politics, Weld was a member of the committee appointed in October 1837 for the defence and preservation of the public rights over the common fields of Southampton. This was not entirely altruistic. Archers Lodge rubbed against the Common, and Weld exercised his right to graze sheep on its grassland.

Weld was a well-known figure on the magisterial bench. He was elected a Justice of the Peace for Dorset in 1831 and for Hampshire in February 1834, sitting for the Southampton division. In February 1848 he was elected a JP for the Borough of Southampton, one of a phalanx of Liberals appointed in a bid to weaken Tory influence on the bench. He frequently served on the Grand Jury at Hampshire Assizes and – often as chairman – at Southampton Quarter Sessions. He was an Income Tax Commissioner for the division of Southampton, trustee of the South District of the Southampton Turnpike Roads and a trustee of the Charity Estates in Southampton. He was one of several Liberals directly appointed to the latter by the

Master of Chancery in order to dilute the partisan list submitted by Southampton Corporation, then under Tory control. Weld held a raft of directorships during the railway mania of the mid 1840s. These included the Manchester and Southampton Railway (also a subscriber for £2,000), the Manchester and Rugby Direct Railway and the Cheltenham, Oxford and Brighton Junction Railway. He headed a committee established to promote a direct link between Southampton and Bristol through the Southampton and Dorsetshire Railway. The schemes invariably failed. The same fate had befallen the Salisbury, Romsey and Southampton Railway, launched at a meeting at the Dolphin Inn in April 1836 at which Weld had proposed the key motion approving the building of the railway (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 23 April 1836).

James Weld moved in exclusive social circles. He attended levees at St James's Place in the reigns both of William IV and – in March 1840, presented by the Duke of Norfolk – of Queen Victoria. He was leader of a Whig deputation offering the town's congratulations to the young monarch on her marriage to Prince Albert. James and his wife were regular patrons of borough and county balls held in Southampton. There is a suggestion, however, that he failed to maintain the momentum of his early life. Alan Leonard ('The story of Archers Lodge' in *Hampshire*, November 1979, p 54) quotes a Weld family historian that "Poor James was extravagant and eventually went bankrupt, but as his line has died out there are no papers to tell us how or why". It is possible that Weld was one of the many victims of the mid-1840s railway mania. The family had vacated Archers Lodge by December 1852. James died at Weymouth on 24 February 1855. His widow was in Winchester by the time of the 1861 census, living at 1 Chernock Place (now part of Southgate Street) accompanied by two unmarried daughters (Katherine and Charlotte), three female servants and a footman. She died there, aged 72, on 3 June 1862. Probate was assessed at 'under £7,000', of which £5,000 had been held in trust by a pre-nuptial agreement dated 4 July 1812 (will in Hampshire Archives and Local Studies, 5M62/5, page 496). This hardly betokens poverty, but was a fraction of what the family was nominally worth in their pomp. Archers Lodge was sold in September 1864.

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