



## *Wiltshire People*

*Edward Collett*

*Bowerchalke*

### *FATHER OF THE FARTHING NEWSPAPER*

Edward Collett was born at St Petersburg on 13.04.1847, and it was there also, at the British Chaplaincy, that he was baptised on 15.05.1847, the son of John Homes (Holmes) Collett and Sophia Eleanor Wilson.

Some few years after his father died at St Petersburg in 1850, Edward and his mother and two brothers crossed Europe to end up in England.

Once they arrived in London the family of four set up home in Brixton where it is believed they were living in 1861 although no record has yet been found. And it was during the mid-1860s that Edward began to attend St Bees Theological College in Cumberland.

In 1816 the first Church of England college for the training of clergy outside Oxbridge was established at St Bees by William Law, the Bishop of Chester. Edward's studies there were interrupted in 1866 when he received the sad news that his mother had died at the family home in Brixton.

After completing the course at St Bees, Edward was ordained Deacon at Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford in 1870 by the Lord Bishop of Oxford, and the following year he was recorded at High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire.

The census in 1871 described him as Edward Collett from Russia who was 23. After this he was offered appointments on the Isle of Man, where he spent the next five years in a number of different parishes, and then at Silverstone in Northamptonshire, where he worked for two years.

On leaving Silverstone, he travelled south and arrived in the Wiltshire village of Bowerchalke on 30th September 1878, by which time he was thirty-one years old. Once settled at Bowerchalke, he remained there for the rest of his life.

Shortly after he took up his post as the Vicar of Bowerchalke, he became very interested in the village newspaper which he eventually took over and managed; writing the articles, using his own press to print the newsheet, and distributing the copies. This he did for the next forty-two years, until his failing health brought it to a close. An almost complete set of the 'Parish Papers' produced by Edward during those years is retained at the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

Prior to this he had long held an interest in writing and in 1874 he published a book entitled 'A Book of Meditations', and this was followed two years by the publication of his second work 'A Simple Plan of Preparation for Confirmation'. Both documents were reviewed favourable in The Guardian in 1876.

Accompanying Edward to Bowerchalke from Silverstone were two young people. The first of these was his housekeeper, Sarah Stone was eighteen and who retained that position until she later married into the Foyle family of Bowerchalke. The second was John Linnell who was twelve years old and who wished to study for the ministry.

Both of these were still living with Edward in the spring of 1881. The census that year listed the people at the vicarage as the Rev. Edward Collett who was 33 and a British subject from Russia, servant Sarah Stone who was 22 and from Combeinteighhead in Devon, and John Linnell from Silverstone who was 16.

Two other people were visiting at that time, and they were 22 years old theology student Henry Head from Winchester, and 28 years old Thomas Salmon from Blackford in Somerset.

Over the following decade Edward Collett was recorded living at Bowerchalke in all of the subsequent census returns aged 43 in 1891, 53 in 1901 when he was described as a clergyman of the Church of England, and again in 1911 when he was 63.

On the 12th April 1922 the final copy of the 'Parish Paper', edition number 1703, was produced by Edward Collett. Two years later in May 1924 Edward Collett died at Bowerchalke at the age of seventy-seven.

An article in the Salisbury Journal read as follows: *"We regret to announce the death of the Rev Edward Collett, Vicar of Bowerchalke, which occurred on Wednesday night. Mr Collett, who had been 54 years in Holy Orders and Vicar of Bowerchalke for 44 years, was greatly beloved by his parishioners for whom he lived a self-sacrificing life"*.

At his funeral, which took place in torrential rain, every house in the village was represented, and the chief mourners were his life-long companion the aforementioned John Linnell, and his brother the Reverend John Collett (above).

The grave of Edward Collett is marked by a plain tombstone and can be found on the left of the church porch. Inside the church, a stained glass window at the west end of the nave is dedicated to his forty-six years of faithful service.

This is shown below.

