

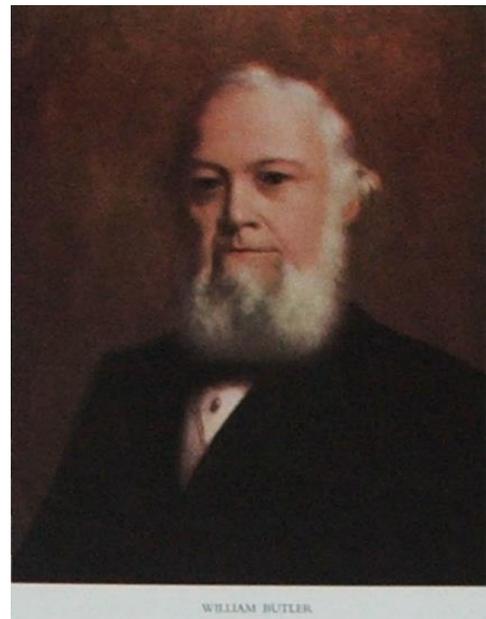
Summerhill House St George

– A Tale of Two Houses



The land between Troopers Hill and the river was in the same ownership as the Hill itself from 1758 through to 1924. In that time the land was used for [copper \(& possibly lead\) smelting](#), various chemical works and fireclay mining. However the longest term user of the site was [Butlers Tar Works](#) which started at the east end of the site in around 1843 and gradually expanded, so that by the time the works closed in the 1980s it covered the whole area.

William Butler was manager of the works from very early on. At the time of the 1851 census he was living at Whites Hill, but moved to Gloucester to set up his own works in 1860. After a [fire nearly destroyed the plant in 1863](#), the then owners of the works, Robert & Daines sold it to Mr Butler; it then remained in the control of the Butler family until 1952.



Many people know that Summerhill House in St George was linked to the Butler family. William Butler moved there shortly after his return from Gloucester with his family in 1863.

In his book 'Houses and People of Old St George', published in 1936, William T Sanigar also refers to 'Summerhill House'. He describes the history of the school that was established there from 1804 to 1865 under the control of a series of different people.

Given the timing of the closure of the school and the move of the Butler family from Gloucester it could be assumed that the premises that the Butler moved to was that previously occupied by the school, however, the description of that site when it was offered for sale (with frontage to two turnpike roads) does not match the property occupied by the Butlers.

Examination of old maps shows that there were in fact two different houses in St George, both on the road to Bath and both referred to as Summerhill (or Summer Hill) House. Both were for sale in the 1860s.

No evidence of either property now exists, with both sites having been redeveloped.

The maps below from [Bristol City Council's Pinpoint mapping system](#) show the two sites.

On the 1840s Tithe map, plot 1060 (ringed in blue) is shown as Summerhill House, while plot 1044 (ringed in red) is 'House & Garden'



However, on the early editions of the Ordnance Survey maps (c1900) Summerhill House is clearly named in the plot that was number 1044 on the Tithe map, while plot 1060 has been redeveloped, with the school building no longer in existence.



It was the more easterly 'Summerhill House' shown on the later maps that was the Butler residence. The house was demolished in the 1960s and replaced with terraced houses, with blocks of garages behind.

Summer Hill House – Establishment for Young Ladies

According to William Sanigar, the Summerhill House that became a school – not to be confused with the current Summerhill Infant School and Academy built in the late 1800s – came into existence as school, in 1804.



The school's best known masters were Mr John Stone who ran it from 1835 to 1855 and then Mrs Sanderson who ran it as a school for young ladies from about 1859 to 1865. During the time of Mr Stone, Marcus Holmes, husband of [Elizabeth Emra](#) was a visiting drawing master. Sanigar states that the building was owned from 1813 by a Mr Nicholas Webber Jones and N W Jones, of Berkley-crescent, Bristol, advertised the premises for let or sale during 1865 and 1867. It is not known who then purchased it, but the site was clearly redeveloped shortly afterwards.

SCHOOL PREMISES.—To be SOLD or LET, those extensive PREMISES so long favourably known as SUMMER-HILL SCHOOL, two miles from Bristol on the Upper Road to Bath. Having good frontage to two turnpike-roads; this property presents an advantageous site for Building. Rent, £70 per annum; price, £1,000. If desired, half the purchase-money could remain on Mortgage.—Apply to N. W. JONES, the Proprietor, Berkeley-crescent, Bristol. 968

Summerhill House – Home of the Butler Family

According to the 1840s Tithe map what became Butler's Summerhill House was in the ownership and occupation of Charlotte Eyre. Her son, Thomas Dowling Eyre, was also living there and he continued in residence after her death in 1845. For a while he [ran the house as a lunatic asylum for up to three men](#) and this drawing of the house was part of the plans submitted for approval of that use. T D Eyre died in 1860 and the house was briefly occupied by Benjamin Poole Esq. It was advertised to be let unfurnished in 1862 & 1863.



The adverts described the house as “a desirable residence, containing dining room, drawing room, and breakfast room, with seven bedrooms, dressing and bath-rooms, kitchens, and other offices; coach-houses, stabling for three horses, fowl-houses &c, heated with hot-water pipes, and an abundant supply of both types of water.

The premises comprise about two acres of land, laid out in a lawn, shrubberies, kitchen garden and orchard, well-stocked with choice fruit trees, in a highly productive state; commanding extensive and delightful views of the surrounding country”

The ‘highly productive state’ of the fruit trees was confirmed by a report in the Bristol Mercury on 28th September 1861 concerning the ‘notorious character and prize-fighter’ Frederick, alias, Monkey Jones, who was convicted of stealing a ‘sack of choice apples from the orchard of Mr Benjamin Poole’. The prisoner claimed he had picked up the sack from the road and ‘that’s not stealing them’ – he was sent to Gloucester prison for three months.

It is known that William Butler was in occupation by February 1866 as Mr Butler gave it as his address in a letter to a newspaper on that date.

William Butler was born in 1819 and married Ann Boam, who was two years younger, in 1839. By the time they were living at Summerhill House in 1866 they had 5 daughters and 4 sons; two other sons had died as infants. Three of their daughters were married by this time but it is possible that one, Emma, and her husband, Robert Bird, were also living at Summerhill House.

Summerhill House was at the highest point in St George directly opposite the path that still exists as a public right-of-way leading from what is now called Summerhill Road to Troopers Hill Field. At the entrance to the path is a milestone (Grade 2 listed and probably dating from around 1800) marking 2 miles from Bristol and 9½ miles to Bath. This path links to tracks or paths across Troopers Hill shown on the earliest Ordnance Survey maps and Mr Butler may have followed these to get to his Tar Works at the bottom of the Hill. Troopers Hill Road provided an easy alternative route.



The existence of these old routes that became rights of way leading to the house, implies that the site has always been of importance. Certainly being at the high point there must have been an impressive view of the house looking up the path.

Being on the Bristol to Bath Road Summerhill House was also convenient for access to the City of Bristol. While making this journey in 1867 William Butler met with an accident that was reported in the Western Daily Press on Thursday 23rd May. Mr Butler was travelling in a ‘dog-

SERIOUS ACCIDENT.—On Monday evening, as Mr Wm. Butler, of **Summerhill House, St George's**, one of the Guardians of Clifton Union, was driving towards the city, the horse, which was a very spirited animal, when near the Fire Engine turnpike became troublesome, and commenced kicking rather violently. He also managed to get one of his legs over the shaft of the dog-cart, and, without this being noticed by Mr Butler, he continued to gallop down the road until they reached Redfield, where, in trying to turn a corner, the horse capsized the vehicle, throwing out Mr Butler and a boy who was riding with him. Mr Butler was found insensible right under the dog-cart, and as soon as he could be extricated he was carried to one of the houses in the neighbourhood, where he was at once attended to. Mr Keedwell, of Hanham, a friend of the injured gentleman, who happened to be in the neighbourhood, rendered every assistance in his power, and despatched a messenger for Dr. Day, who attended and dressed Mr Butler's severe wounds. He was subsequently conveyed home, where he still lies, progressing towards recovery. The boy who was riding with him fortunately escaped with a few bruises. The horse, in consequence of his galloping nearly a quarter of a mile with his leg over the shaft, was frightfully lacerated.

cart' when the horse 'a very spirited animal' started kicking violently and managed to get one of its legs over the shaft. The horse galloped down the road until trying to turn a corner near the 'Fire Engine turnpike', 'the horse capsized the vehicle, throwing out Mr Butler and a boy who was riding with him. Mr Butler was found insensible right under the dog-cart'. Mr Butler's 'severe wounds' were attended to and he was then taken home to recover. The boy apparently escaped with a few bruises, the horse was 'frightfully lacerated'.

William Butler had a reputation as a good employer, on 24th July 1869 the Western Daily Press reported on an outing of 'Messrs Butler & Co's Workmen' The employees of the Crew's Hole Tar & Resin Works 'with their wives and sweethearts, met at the residence of Mr Butler Summerhill House, on Tuesday morning, where five of Brookman's breaks were waiting to convey them to Cheddar'. When there they were reported to have done 'ample justice' to an excellent dinner, returning home after view the 'magnificent scenery of Cheddar Cliffs and the caves'.

William Butler was very much involved with the United Methodist Free Church and was involved in the chapel on Crews Hole Road opposite his works from when it was built in 1853.

By 1881 William and Ann Butler had moved to 'The Grove' and Clifton, where they lived for the rest of their lives, but William Butler continued to be very heavily involved in life in St George, he had been elected as chair the St George Local Board when it was formed in 1874 and continued in this role after his move, at this time St George was outside the City of Bristol and in the County of Gloucestershire.

The fountain that still stands at the junction of the roads to Hanham and Kingswood was presented by William Butler to the parish in 1890 and it is also reported that he donated the Plane trees for the avenue in St George Park (and that [his gardener, James Perrett](#), planted them).

When William Butler moved to Gloucester in around 1860, it seems he kept his property at Whites Hill, as his father, Joseph Frearson Butler is recorded as living there in the census of 1861. Joseph had moved Bristol with his second wife, Mary, and they are buried together at Hanham United Reform Church on Tabernacle Road. Joseph died in 1878 and his wife in 1887. Also buried in the same grave is [Ephraim Butler](#),



one of William's brothers, who died in 1879 while he was returning from South Africa after the death of his wife, with his three young daughters.

In 1888 during dispute over the location of a [smallpox hospital](#) William Butler offered a seven acre field at White's hill, near Nag's Head Hill for its construction, it was however built on Troopers Hill instead.

Following William and Ann's move to Clifton, their oldest surviving son, William Henry Butler (born 1847) became the householder at Summerhill House. William Henry lived there with his first wife Esther (née Haining) and their three children. They may have lived in the house with William and Ann before their move to Clifton, though after his marriage he is reported to have initially lived on Air Balloon Hill. William Henry Butler joined the Butler company in 1868 and became chairman of the board when his father died in 1900.

In 1881, Mabel, the orphaned youngest daughter of William Henry's Uncle, Ephraim, was living at Summerhill House with the family (at 5-years old she was the same age as William Henry's oldest son also called William).

Esther, wife of William Henry Butler, died at Summerhill House in 1907. In 1912 William Henry married his second wife Cornelia Williams and in 1915 they moved to the Priory, Westbury-on-Trym, which was a very large and grand house.

This seems to have ended the occupation of Summerhill House by the Butlers, but it then became the home of the Foss family, who had very strong links to the Butlers.

The residents of St George remembered the Butlers, the Western Daily Press printed a letter from AG Durbin on Saturday 4th May 1935 – "When reading your report of the passing of the late Col. J B Butler... I could not help thinking what a wonderful influence for good the Butler family wielded in the neighbourhood of their residence at Summerhill House... when I was a boy.. the members of the family of the first William Butler used to walk down Air Balloon Hill and Troopers Hill Road to worship at the United Methodist Chapel, Crews Hole, for many years – a distance of over a mile – and then back after the service... Whit Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday was a very busy time for the Butler family at their residence. Practically all the Sunday school scholars and children together with their officials, headed by brass bands, marched in procession to their house and grounds where a bun was often provided for the children and a donation to each school to carry on the work."

The Col J B Butler referred to in the above letter was Joseph Beaumont Butler, one of William Henry's three brothers. He was born in St George in 1857 and married Minnie Stephens in 1909 at the age of 52; he had also lived at Summerhill House until his marriage and succeeded his brother as chairman of the Butler Company in 1927. He had four daughters - two of whom married the sons of the next occupant of Summerhill House, Dr Edwin Foss.

Doctor Edwin Vincent Foss was born in 1872, he qualified as a doctor in 1898 and started work as a GP at the practice of Dr James Young at Cloudshill House St George. Later Dr Young sold Cloudshill House and the business to Dr Foss and at the time of the 1911 census Dr Foss was living with his wife Mabel (who he had married in 1906) and widowed mother at Cloudshill House along with a son George aged two, a child's nurse, cook and a housemaid.

Edwin Foss appears to have run a very successful and popular surgery at Cloudshill House and he had a growing family so at some point he moved to Summerhill House, while still keeping Cloudshill House as the surgery. This may well have been around 1915 when WH

Butler moved to Westbury-on-Trym, it may have been at this time that the western half of the grounds were sold for housing (99 to 109 Summerhill Rd).

Cloudshill House remained in the Foss family right through to 2008, when the last of Edwin's children, Molly Foss died. A history of Cloudshill House was told by [Dave Stephenson in a feature in the Bristol Post](#).

Two of Edwin Foss's children became doctors and followed their father in running the surgery; the first was Dr George Lush Foss (born 1908), who had to take over running the surgery in 1935 on the day he graduated because his father suffered a stroke. Edwin Foss died on 11th November 1935. Earlier that year, in August, Dr George Foss had married Eileen Butler, daughter of Joseph Beaumont Butler.

Dr George Foss was in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and so left St George at the start of the war in 1939, at this point his sister, Dr Joan Mary Foss (born 1914), took over the surgery. George spent part of his war service at the Chemical Defence Experimental Station, Porton and was awarded the OBE, he rose to the rank of Surgeon Captain in the RNVR.

Dr George Foss also appears briefly in the [story of transgender man Michael Dillon](#). In 1939 Dillon discovered that Dr Foss had been using a new drug called testosterone, he was using it to treat female patients for "sex problems", and Dillon (then known as Laura Dillon) thought it would help him. He made an appointment to see Foss and asked for treatment. Following a psychiatrist report Dr Foss refused to take Dillon on as a patient, but he did give him some testosterone pills. After the war Dillon became the first trans man to transition medically.

Local people still remember Dr George and Dr Joan Foss and say that at one time Dr George was at Clouds Hill House and Dr Joan (who married another doctor, George Struthers, in 1947) was running a surgery at Summerhill House.

The other link between the Foss and Butler families was that George and Joan's brother, Kenneth John Foss, married Margaret Beaumont Butler (sister of George's wife Eileen) in 1936. Ken Foss had been working at Butlers for two years when he got married and in 1940 he became a director, taking over from his mother-in-law. Like many of Butler's employees he was considered to be in a reserved occupation and so was not called up during the war, some of the chemicals and products being produced by Butlers were considered essential to the war effort.

In 1963 Cloudshill House ceased to be a surgery when the practice moved to the new St George Health Centre in Bellvue Road, one of the first purpose-built and pre-fabricated health centres in the country. Dr Joan Struthers continued to see patients until 1984, her 70th year, and died while living at Cloudshill House in 1988.

Summerhill House was demolished in the 1960s, so it seems that the Foss family must have sold it around the time when Cloudshill House ceased to be a surgery.

Part of the site was bought by the Council for road improvements; the remainder of the site was used for new housing – nos 111 to 141 Summerhill Road and Francis Court.

Undated photograph of Summerhill House, taken from Images of England – St George Redfield and Whitehall – Compiled by Andy Jones, David Stephenson, Dave Cheesley and Jill Willmot of [Barton Hill History Group](#)



[Loxton Ink drawing of Summerhill House on Bristol City Council's mapping system](#)



You can read more about the Tar Works and the Butler family in 'The Butlers & the Coal-Tar Distillery at Crew's Hole' by Brian Vincent and Raymond Holland ([ALHA Books](#)).

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