

NATHANIEL DYER – A newly discovered bit of history

By Betty Mills

Nathaniel Dyer was one of Nailsworth's most colourful characters but until recently, comparatively little was known about him.

To quote from my *Portrait of Nailsworth*,

'..... To counteract the effect of the non-conformist chapels. Jeremiah Day (one of the new style "factory" mill owners) set up a fund to build an Anglican Chapel. For architect they had



Nathaniel Dyer.

Nathaniel Dyer. His name suggests that he might have been local and he was apparently one of the new generation of wealthy landlords who made their money through trade and established themselves as a cut above the ordinary workingman. He ran a wine business from the (old) George and is known to have done some architectural work on Wotton Church. He lived at Spring Hill House (later The Lawn and today, Winslow House) onto which he built a fine Georgian front with a stone pillared porch. Similar to those at Newmarket House and Newmarket Court, (Isaac Hillier's now demolished home).'

The story goes that his enemies threatened to dance on his grave so, with the bishop's consent, he was buried in his own garden under a specially erected tomb. His gravestone may be seen today in

an alley off Springhill Gardens.

Needless to say, the story gave rise to various legends and later, his descendents who were having difficulty in letting the house got a former tenant to sign a document declaring that they had not been worried by his ghost.

Nathaniel Dyer designed a building which looked rather like a nonconformist chapel with a quaint little tower which gave rise to the name "Pepperpot Church". It was erected in 1794 but for various reasons the bishop refused to consecrate it. It was in the Avening parish and it was planned that it should be served alternately by priests from Horsley and Avening. Nailsworth was then in the three parishes of Horsley, Avening and Minchinhampton. The church was on the boundary between Horsley and Avening, which runs down the side of what is now The Cross Pub. This led to disagreements and Avening became solely responsible. Trustees who had problems financially managed it. The bulk of the congregation was poor and could not afford seat rents, so allowing people to build their own "galleries" raised money. Great indignation was caused when Nathaniel Dyer built himself a gallery with a private entrance. However, in his will, he left the church £100 for a sermon to be given each year on his birthday, which was on February 6th. Ten shillings went to the churchwardens and the remainder to provide bread for the poor forever.

Some years ago I was given portraits of Nathaniel and of one of his four wives by a lady who told me she was his only surviving descendent. I placed them in Winslow House. Then, suddenly a family of Dyers turned up from Bredon, near Tewkesbury. It turned out that Nathaniel had bought a manor house and farm there where he often stayed and on his death he left them to a nephew. I visited the family. Saw the imposing manor, which nowadays is rather near the Motorway and found the graveyard full of Dyers. I decided it would be right for them to take over the portraits which needed a bit of attention. Photographs will be provided which will replace the portraits at Winslow House.