

Banking in nineteenth-century Leicester¹

by David L. Wykes

Pares's Bank, St Martin's, Leicester

The bank of Pares & Co. was originally established in May 1800 with Thomas Pares, Thomas Paget, John Pares and James Heygate as partners. Thomas Pares (1746- 1824) was the senior partner in the law firm of Messrs Pares, Miles & Alston. His brother John Pares (1749-1833) was a partner with James Heygate (1747-1833) in the hosiery concern of Messrs Pares & Heygate.² Thomas Paget (1732-1814) of Ibstock had been one of the leading livestock breeders in the Midlands, second only to his cousin the celebrated Robert Bakewell of Dishley. Paget had apprenticed his son, Thomas jun., to Pares and Heygate for six years to learn the trade, giving the very substantial premium of £1500, on the understanding that at the end of that time his son was to be taken into the firm as a partner. The firm was one of the largest in Leicester during the last decade of the eighteenth century, with a substantial American market. According to Pares's daughter, Ann, her father's share of the profits had averaged about £3000 a year. Shortly after Thomas Paget jun. completed his term of apprenticeship, the firm experienced a considerable reduction in business following the introduction of new machinery by Joseph Paget & Sons of Loughborough and a number of other manufacturers. As a result his prospects in the hosiery business largely disappeared.³

The banking firm was established following the decline in the hosiery concern. The principal management of the business was undertaken by Thomas Paget jun., who in 1807 married Ann Pares, the daughter of John Pares. The bank was built, facing St Martin's, in the north-east corner of the garden of Grey Friars House in Friar Lane, which Thomas Pares had purchased in 1776 from the daughter of Richard Garle. Ann Pares recalled that

after one or two profitless years it became a very lucrative concern, & continued so till the death of the elder Mr Paget in 1814, when by his Will he left his son sole executor, & the Oxenden estate (my Uncle's share in which having been exchanged for an equal value of Property jointly purchased by them in Oxfordshire) charged with his Widows jointure & five thousand pounds to each of his 4 Daughters - My Husband then took his Father's place in the Bank & a 4th share in the Profits.

The Oxenden estate proved to be a liability for Paget, for shortly after the death of his Father, a great reduction took place in the value of land, leaving the estate still

- 1 This historical note supplements the account of 'The early banks and bankers of Leicester' in C. J. Billson, *Leicester Memoirs*, pp.1-34. Leicester: Backus, 1924. This note was prompted by Mrs Betty Dickson, a Vice-President of the Society, sending me her notes on the Billson family and family photographs.
- 2 For a pedigree of the Pares family, see J. Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Commoners of Great Britain and Ireland, enjoying territorial possessions or high official rank; but uninvested with heritable honours*. 4 vols. 3, pp.605-6. London: Henry Colburn, 1836; and of the Heygate family, see J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*. 4 vols. in 8 pts., 4.2, p.628. London: Nichols, 1795-1811.
- 3 LRO, DE365/298, Short Memoir of Thomas Paget (1778-1862) by his widow, Ann, the daughter of John Pares, 22 Sep. 1864; Billson, *Leicester Memoirs*, pp.21-22.

burdened with the payment of his Mother's jointure and the legacies to his sisters. The bank, however, continued to prosper. Thomas Pares died in 1824, and a new arrangement for the partnership became necessary since his property which was entailed could no longer be used to secure the bank debts. It was therefore proposed by John Pares that his younger son, John, should become a partner in the Bank, 'but after a Rugby & Oxford education (being intended for the Church) & as there was no prospect of him becoming a man of business & for other painful reasons', Paget objected to the introduction of his wife's younger brother as representing too great a risk.

He had also become aware about this time that the Sons of the elder Mr Heygate had made false entries in the Bank Books in London & employed Bank money in gambling transactions of their own, so that, as my Husband believed at any moment we might all be ruined.

In vain my Husband tried to convince my Father of the dishonesty of the Heygates - his long connection with the elder Mr Heygate made him incredulous, & blinded him to what was shortly afterwards made public by the Newspapers

Paget & Kirby's Bank, High Street, Leicester

Concerned at the risk he faced as a partner as a consequence of unlimited liability, Paget withdrew from the partnership in 1824, giving up his share in the Bank which was then providing him with an income of about £3000 a year. At first he resolved to live quietly on his reduced income, and considered a number of proposals, such as going to Edinburgh to complete the education of his two sons, or living abroad, rather than run the risk of total ruin that he would have suffered if the partnership had failed. Before any of these schemes had been settled, two of Paget's cousins, Joseph Paget jun. and William Paget of Loughborough, asked him to join with them in establishing a new bank. The Paget brothers had made their fortune in the business which had destroyed Thomas Paget's future prospects in the hosiery firm of Pares and Heygate in 1800. It was agreed to allow a small share in the new partnership to Samuel Kirby, the former chief clerk of Pares's Bank. The Bank was opened in Friar Lane in 1825. The following year it was moved to the High Street to the present site.⁴ Writing to his wife, a prominent Leicester hosiery manufacturer, Samuel Coltman, did not consider the prospects for the new bank were particularly good.

I do not think the Paget Bank will be likely to do much business in Les'ter - The Politics of Mr T[homas Paget] will prevent the Tories & the other being a hosier will prevent the trade from being connected with them — The proposal of dividing 6 pct upon a new joint stock Company is alone sufficient to condemn the plan - It must necessarily be a long time before any profit can be derived from a new establishment where no original invention or new improvement is introduced & ultimately any profit must be very doubtful.⁵

Coltman's assessment was to prove too pessimistic, though the original arrangement lasted only a couple of years. According to Thomas Paget's wife, the partnership 'not proving as remunerative as the Mr Pagets of Loughbro' expected, they retired, leaving my Husband & eldest son with Mr Kirby in the Bank'. She also confirmed Coltman's prognosis that Leicester hosiers were discouraged from using the bank because of the involvement of the Paget brothers.

4 LRO, 21 D 51/II/52, fo.5, St Martin's parish rate books, second rate, 1825; II/55, fo.10, second rate, 1826.

5 LRO, 15 D 57/163, Letters of the Coltman family, Samuel Coltman, Halifax, to his wife, Mary Coltman, Leicester, 29 Jan. 1824.



2. Pares's Bank, St Martin's, Leicester, corner of Grey Friars. Bank manager's house on the left facing St Martin's. (Photograph courtesy of Mrs E. M. Dickson)

It appeared that the Leicester Townspeople were averse from exposing their circumstances by Banking with men who were engaged in the same Business as themselves, for shortly after the retirement of the Loughboro' Partners the Bank became prosperous.⁶

The partnership then continued as Paget & Kirby (now Lloyds Bank, High Street, Leicester). Samuel Kirby (1787-1854) had entered Pares & Co. as a clerk in January 1803, at the age of 15. At the same time, his elder brother, John Kirby, had been taken into the office of Messrs Pares, Miles & Alston, attorneys, and four months later was found a place in the hosiery warehouse of Messrs Pares & Heygate. John Kirby believed that he would have been taken into the bank if his handwriting had been thought good enough. Their father, John Kirby sen., was a substantial tenant farmer of Thomas Pares, and had as a result been able to persuade Pares to find positions for his two sons.⁷

Samuel Kirby had resigned from Pares & Co. at the same time as Paget. About this time William Billson (1806-1880) entered Pares & Co. as a clerk, and it seems likely that he was taken on in place of Samuel Kirby.⁸ In 1828 Billson married Elizabeth the

⁶ LRO, DE365/298, Short Memoir of Thomas Paget.

⁷ D. L. Wykes, "Trade flat, money scarce, spirits low": The Journal of John Kirby of Leicester, 1813-1848', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, LXIV (1990), p.40.

⁸ The 1875 Annual Report of Pares's Leicestershire Banking Co., on the retirement of Billson as Manager of the Bank, recorded that he has been connected with the Bank as Chief Officer 'from its commencement as a Joint Stock Bank in March 1836, and having been previously eleven years with Messrs. Pares, Heygate and Hodgson, his connection with the Bank has extended over the long period of fifty years'. Information from National Westminster Bank Archivist, Lothbury, London.



3. Manager's house and garden behind Pares's Bank, St Martin's.
(Photograph courtesy of Mrs E. M. Dickson)

daughter of John Gilham, a hatter of Bedford. By the time of the 1841 Census, Billson, described as a cashier, was living with his wife and six children in the house attached to the Bank. In the return for the 1861 Census, Billson was described as the Manager of the Bank, and in which capacity he continued to serve until his retirement in 1875. By that date he had been connected with the Bank for 50 years. The Directors presented him with a purse of 1000 guineas in recognition of his services. He had been elected a seat on the Board of Directors in 1863, and continued to serve until 1878. After his retirement, Billson lived at Belmont Villas on the New Walk, where he died in 1880. His eldest son, also William, became a solicitor in partnership with Samuel Stone, whose daughter he married. The second son, John, became a coal merchant, but the other two sons, Charles and Henry, joined the bank. Henry was to remain a banker, but Charles left to build a railway for the Turkish Government and died in Smyrna. The youngest son, Alfred, became a solicitor in Liverpool and received a knighthood, but died in the House of Commons shortly after becoming an MP. His son was the historian Charles James Billson, who wrote *Medieval Leicester*.

In 1886 William's nephew, Arthur Bolus, became Manager of the Bank, and moved into the manager's house attached to the Bank with his wife Mary and six children. The photograph of the manager's house and garden behind the Bank dates from this time and shows in the right-hand corner the private entrance from Hotel Street.

9 The last two paragraphs are based on Mrs Dickson's notes of her family. I am very grateful to her for allowing me to make use of them.