

## John Colthurst

was born in Bristol in 1811 the eldest son of a Bristol maltster. His medical education was initially as a pupil in Bristol in Henry Clark's medical and surgical school, with Mr E Duck at St Peter's Hospital and then at St Bartholomew's Hospital London where he had to spend at least six months to qualify to take the Membership of the College of Surgeons. He also held his Licentiate of the Apothecaries Company. He followed this by training in large hospitals in Milan, Florence, Naples after which he taught Bristol students in practical and surgical anatomy from 1834, and set up in practice in number 11 The Mall, Clifton.



11 The Mall, Clifton

He married Mary Trivett who was 6 years older than himself in 1833 and they had two daughters, Mary and Ellen. Ellen married an architect, Walter Stuckey Paul, who was in partnership with Hanson, the architect of Clifton College and who later became a member of College Council and also played rugby for Gloucestershire. His unmarried sister-in-law Ellen Trivitt who was three years younger than his wife, lived with them from before 1841 until 1886.

Colthurst was appointed as surgeon to the Clifton Dispensary in Dowry Square, but was never appointed to the staff of the Bristol Infirmary. He was, however, appointed to the Bristol Medical Reading Society in 1844 and remained a member of this twelve man club until 1856. He was also elected FRCS in 1844.

It looks as if he was in partnership with Dr W Mortimer of 33 Richmond Terrace for a few years and he attended the Bristol and Bath Section of the Provincial Medical and Surgical Association from 1847 to and was elected secretary in 1851. With the President of the Association, Dr John Addington Symonds, he wrote a letter to Professor James Simpson, the President of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, congratulating the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons of Edinburgh on their stand against homoeopathy. The letter stated: 'That this meeting has seen with much satisfaction the Resolutions unanimously adopted by the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons of Edinburgh regarding Practitioners of Homoeopathy and desired to offer its best thanks to them for their expressed determination to uphold the Science of Medicine by severing from their Body those who act in a manner so unbecoming the Character of either, the Physician

or the Surgeon and that this Resolution signed by the President and Secretaries on behalf of this Association be transmitted to the Presidents of the Colleges'<sup>i</sup>  
Dr Henry Marshall living at 8 Mall – was in partnership with Colthurst until his appointment as physician to the Bristol General Hospital.

In 1852 he was involved in a sensitive ethical issue regarding a Dr Cox of Bath who had published a letter in the local newspaper .

He was elected councillor for Clifton on the Bristol council in 1854 and remained on the council until 1869. He was also active in other ways and was elected Chairman of the gentlemen's club – the Subscription Rooms (the Clifton Club) in the Mall for a number of years from 1858.



The Clifton Club

He was appointed to Clifton College's foundation Council in 1860. The 1861 census states that he owns 257 acres in Somerset and owns a Chew Magna house, Chew Court. In his evidence to a parliamentary commission in 1867<sup>ii</sup> Colthurst employs about 4 boys and as many women. 'thinks the people of Chew Magna a very idle set'.

Colthurst was appointed medical referee to the Liverpool and London Globe Insurance Company from 1862-64.

Constructing a railway from the north Somerset coalfields to the Bristol docks appeared to be a sensible move and the Bristol and North Somerset Railway Act of 1863 authorised the raising of £275,000 in shares of £20 each and Colthurst was appointed one of the seven directors and was elected chairman. The continuing problems of funding this railway resulted in Colthurst asking to be relieved of his financial obligations following a disagreement with the other directors about various things. This was refused and in 1866 it became apparent that the agent for the project had been mismanaging the funds. In 1867 Colthurst resigned from the board having been adjudged bankrupt owing about £38,000. He also resigned at that time from Clifton College Council.<sup>iii</sup>

In the 1871 census he was living at Chew Court in Chew Magna. He now was farming only 128 acres and was employing eight men and two boys. Ten years later he was farming 115 acres was described as a yeoman and employing 5 labourers, four boys, one gardener, one groom and one carpenter and deriving income from land and dividends.

By 1891 he was 80 years old, was widowed and was described as being retired. He died in October 1895 and was buried in the churchyard next door with his wife and sister-in-law.

Just before he died he was given a subpoena to appear in a London chancery court to give evidence about a dispute on some land that he owned in Mangotsfield. It appeared that someone was extracting coal from this land inappropriately. He obtained a medical certificate indicating his incapacity to attend the hearing.



Chew Court in Chew  
Magna

Apparently, the remains of a Roman villa was found recently in the garden of Chew Court.

---

<sup>i</sup> Letter from Colthurst to Prof Simpson 1851 Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh

<sup>ii</sup> Evidence to the Parliamentary Commission enquiring into the employment of children, young persons and women in agriculture 1867

<sup>iii</sup> Warnock, David The Bristol & North Somerset Railway 1863-1884 Temple Cloud Publications 1978