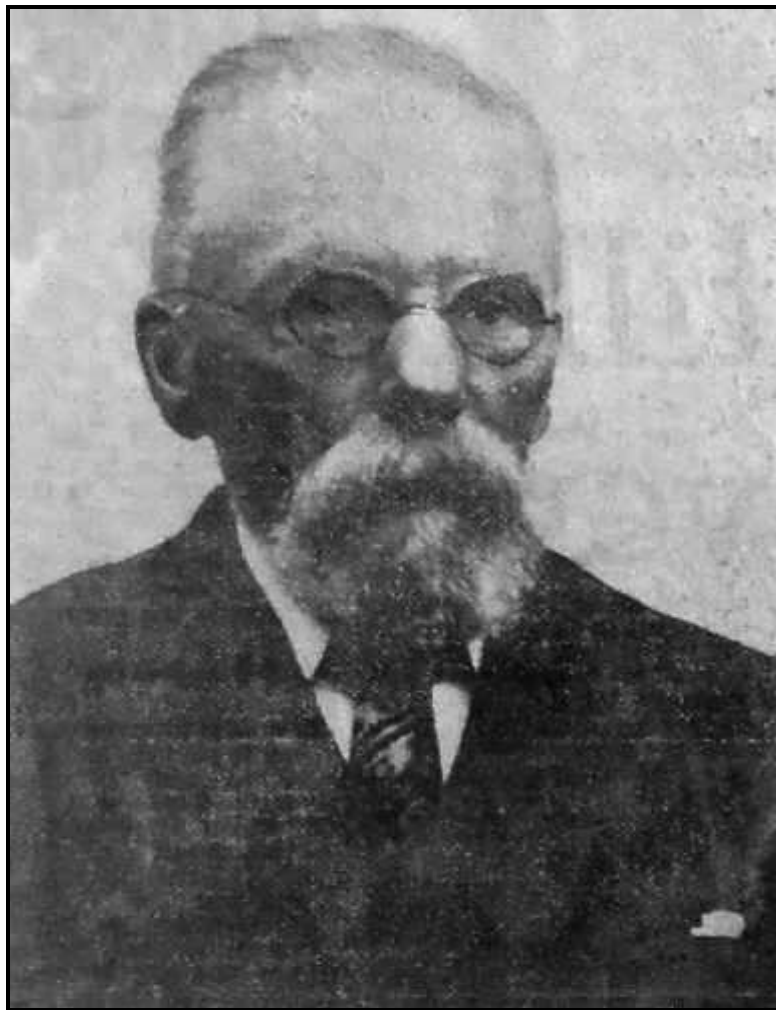


## **THE LIFE OF WILLIAM BRIGGS**

**SCHOOL MASTER AT STAUNTON HAROLD SCHOOL &  
HEADMASTER AT COLEORTON VISCOUNT BEAUMONT  
SCHOOL. ALSO ORGANIST AT  
ST. MARY'S CHURCH, COLEORTON**



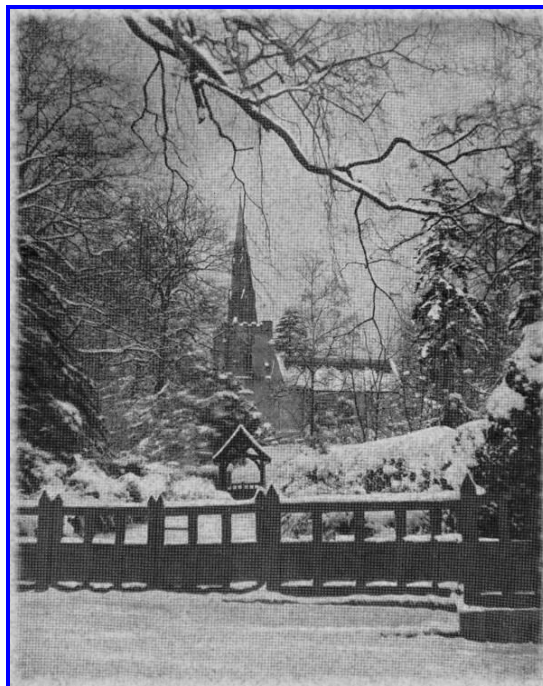
**BY SAMUEL T STEWART - NOVEMBER 2021**



**Staunton Harold School - 1938**



**Coleorton Viscount Beaumont School**



**St. Mary's Church, Coleorton**

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## WILLIAM BRIGGS

The 1861 census shows that William Briggs who had moved to Staunton Harold from Melbourne was the school master at Staunton Harold School, and was living in the School House with his sister Sarah. His aunty, Hannah Newbold, who was aged 71, was also living at the School House and was listed as a stocking framework knitter.

William, at the age of 28, married Emma Judd On the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1861 at Melbourne Parish Church. Emma, who was also a teacher, was listed as a National School Mistress at the National Academy, Penn Lane, Melbourne in the 1861 census (this school is now a listed building). She was born in Cubbington c.1836, and was an apprenticed school teacher in the Kenilworth area according to the 1851 census.



### **St. Michael & St. Mary's Parish Church, Melbourne & the old National Academy School, Penn Lane ( Founded 1738, and rebuilt in 1822)**

William Briggs, the son of Samuel Briggs, an agricultural labourer and a stocking frame knitter, was born in Melbourne, Derbyshire in 1833. William will have spent his early years with his family in Melbourne, and in the 1841 census we find the family living at Church Close, Melbourne, his sister Mary was also living at home. By 1851, William was living at the Melbourne Rectory where he was a house servant to the Vicar of Melbourne, the Rev. Joseph Deans.

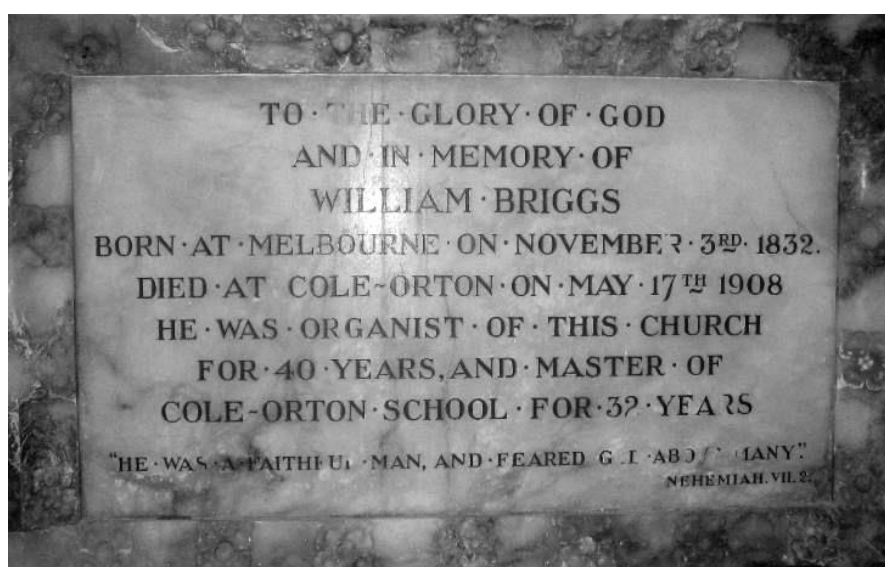
This appears to have been a critical move for William, and we can speculate that it was the vicar who would have sponsored him when he decided to move into teaching. Unlike his future wife, William had no formal teaching qualification. It is likely that during his stay at Melbourne Rectory, his musical abilities were developed. We know that he was active in church bell-ringing, and it is possible that it was during this period that he may also have been an apprenticed organist.

The Leicester Journal reported in June 1865 on a concert held in St. Mary's Church that the gem of the evening was the "White Squall", sung by Mr. William Briggs, the organist of Staunton Harold, who accompanied himself at the pianoforte, his rich baritone manly voice filled the room. Lady Beaumont (9th Baronet's wife) was presiding at the organ.

The Loughborough Monitor newspaper dated 26th April 1866 reported that in a grand choral and instrumental concert held at Whitwick, Mr. Briggs of Staunton Harold ably presided on the pianoforte. As Sir George (9th Baronet) and Lady Beaumont were one of the distinguished guest party, it is quite plausible that these concerts were the catalyst for William Briggs eventually transferring to Coleorton as school master and church organist.

In 1874, William had become the treasurer for the "Ashby & District Association of Teachers."

William Briggs would go on to become a significant figure in Coleorton society, and became the head teacher at Coleorton's Viscount Beaumont School from 1869 to 1901 during which time he became the church organist for forty years. William was one of very few Coleorton individuals who have been honoured with a stained glass window in St Mary's Church plus a tablet commemorating the contribution he made to this parish.



**The window and plaque in St. Mary's Church, dedicated to William Briggs, A tablet beneath the window bears the words from the second verse of the seventh chapter of the Book of Nehemiah –  
"He was a faithful man, and feared God above many".**

William and Emma Briggs moved to the Viscount Beaumont School, Coleorton in the summer of 1868, by which time they had two children, Agatha and Francis John, both of whom had been born at Staunton Harold. William Briggs became the second headmaster at Viscount Beaumont's Church of England School, following Mr. George Brown. He retired in 1901 after 32 years plus dedicated service.

It is almost certain that at the time William moved to Coleorton he was an accomplished church organist, as he almost certainly started playing at St Mary's Church around the time he arrived there to live in the School House in 1868.

William was not a qualified teacher it seems, although his wife who became the schoolmistress was. They made their home in the School house attached to the side of the school and by the 1871 census had a daughter Eleanor and a general servant Sarah Ann Wright living with them. In the 1881 census, their sixteen year old daughter Agatha was given as a "pupil teacher". By 1891 they had two further

daughters Alice M and Constance E. By the 1891 census, Agatha was listed as a dressmaker, and their nineteen year old daughter Alice M was recorded as a “pupil teacher”. 1901 was their retirement year, and their daughter Agatha, aged 36, was still living with William and Emma and now recorded as an assistant teacher of 68 pupils. Also living with them are Mabel R, granddaughter aged 11, born in Redditch, Worcs, and Frederick W, grandson, aged 8, who was born in **Windsorton, Cape Colony, Northern Cape Province, South Africa.**

**William was a man who cared little for detail, and resented the need for red tape in school life. An insight into his view of school records can be seen in the first entry of his school log book. In a charming sentence, he sums up his whole attitude - “after a visit by a school inspector I was instructed to keep a log book to record school events”. His entry records the fact that he is starting a log, and says that this prompts him to recall that it is 23 years since he first came to the school. Once he started, his entries were far from frequent or lavish. In 32 years he had filled only as many pages of his new book.**

**Cont'd on following page:-**



**The above two photographs of pupils at Coleorton Viscount Beaumont School, dating from 1898, under the Headship of William Briggs.**

**William features in the top photograph, and with his wife Emma in the bottom one.**

**Note the large number of seggs / studs in the soles of the boy's boots to prevent the soles wearing.**