

## **BANBURY BOY (or his descendant) MAKES GOOD: where the BBC missed out**

*Jeremy Gibson*

Few readers can be unfamiliar with the television series ‘Morse’ and its sequel, ‘Lewis’, both starring the actor Kevin Whately. All Banburians will know that our town’s leading hotel is the Whately Arms (a twentieth century title but with some historical precedent). Historians will know that our most famous Vicar was William Whately (1583-1639).

On 2nd March BBC-1 presented its final (of the current series) “Who Do You Think You Are?” popular ancestry-tracing programme, its subject being Kevin Whately. The researchers try to make out they are discovering previously unknown information. As Kevin himself was well aware of his gt.gt. grandfather Richard, an Archbishop of Dublin (who merits ten pages in the *Oxford DNB*), their task with his thoroughly English family was more a matter of selection. Those watching or listening carefully may have caught a fleeting reference to ‘The roaring boy of Banbury’, but this was disregarded to pursue some seventeenth century relatives called Thompson, with an early connection with Virginia.

What the researchers missed was that our Rev. William Whately was indeed a direct ancestor of Kevin’s. His father Thomas (1550-1637) was Bailiff and Mayor of Banbury. Thomas’s uncle George (d.1593), born at Henley-in-Arden, was twice Bailiff of nearby Stratford-on-Avon (1563-4, 1583-4). Parson William, before becoming Banbury’s vicar in 1610, was ‘Lecturer’ at Stratford.

Who else was around in Stratford in the 1590s and up to 1616? No less than William Shakespeare. He would have heard William Whately ‘lecture’. His father John Shakespeare was Bailiff in 1568 – so *he* must have known ‘uncle’ George Whately.

The relationship might have been even closer. In 1582, a day before the licence for his marriage to Anne Hathaway was issued, there was a similar licence for a William Shakespeare – to marry Anne *Whateley* of Temple Grafton near Stratford. That mystery remains unsolved.

Be blown to the ancestral bankers (not a popular association today) and the slave-traders (must remember the ethnic dimension) – actor Kevin Whately’s ancestors *knew* William Shakespeare. Given their puritan credentials, they weren’t likely to have been his friends, but still that’s quite an ancestral claim.

And who researched “The Whately Family of Banbury” (*C&CH*. 4.3, Spring 1969)?: the late Erik Chitty, in his time a well-known character *actor*. Keep it in the trade! Kevin, forget your recent Geordie aberration. You’re a Banbury boy, and your ancestor Vicar William, “the roaring boy of Banbury” was clearly just as much of an actor, from the pulpit!