

## 1. EARLY HISTORY OF THE AYERS FAMILY

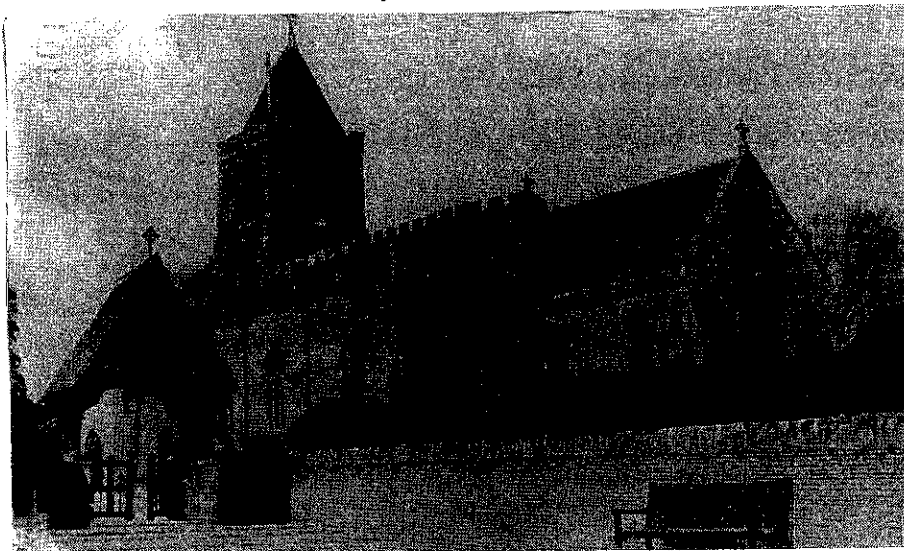
The history of the Ayers family, as far back as can be ascertained, begins in Bedfordshire England about the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first recorded entry is a marriage of WILLIAM AIRES (labourer) to JULIANA HARRIS at Wymington Bedfordshire on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July 1748. He was also buried there on 11 January 1753.

They had three children: Thomas, Mary (named after Juliana's parents) and WILLIAM - baptised at Wymington on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February 1752. The name is recorded as AIRS at the baptism but when WILLIAM married MARY DENSON on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1776 his name was spelt AYRES. The spelling of names in those times depended on how the Rector or recorder felt it was spelt, as very few of the ordinary folk were literate.

### The Church of St Lawrence at Wymington



WILLIAM and MARY as far as is known had four children - RICHARD, Ann, Sybilla and Thomas. Their surnames at baptism were spelt Eyres, Ayers, Airs and Ayr. (A literal interpretation of the name gives the meaning as "son of the heir", but it was a common surname in England at the time, so little importance can be attached to this). William (junior) lived to what in those days was a great age, dying on March 9 1829 aged 76 years. He was buried at what was by then his home village - Turvey.



**All Saints Church at Turvey**

RICHARD married REBECCA EATON daughter of William and Elizabeth Eaton of Turvey. It is not as yet known where they were wed, but they eventually settled in Turvey where the family stayed until emigrating to New Zealand. He was a mason by trade. His son THOMAS was baptised in the Turvey Parish Church in 1817, and came to follow his father's line of work. Another son JAMES was also a mason by trade and appears to have lived in Turvey until his death sometime after 1842. There is also record of the death in 1832 of Elizabeth Ayres aged 11 years, daughter of Richard and Rebecca Ayres. In all Richard and Rebecca had eight children. Rebecca died in 1838 aged 62 years and Richard died at Turvey in 1840.

## **THE VILLAGE OF TURVEY**

The name Turvey comes from 'Turf-field'. Turvey is situated in north-west Bedfordshire ("the Stone Country"). Brick making and stone masonry are long standing economic activities in the area which contains many fine old churches. It was an area of few gentry but had a large number of yeoman farmers with comparatively small holdings. The whole area was one in which grinding poverty was apparently a commonplace. Thus in an 18th century Bedfordshire village 27 could die of smallpox in 52 years and only 38 die of old age. In the village of Turvey itself in 1671 the assessors of Hearth Tax noted there were 107 dwellings in the village of which 53 could pay the tax and 54 were discharged. This meant that these latter dwellings did not have a fire. Most of the villages in the area did not have a pub because the men were too poor to drink.