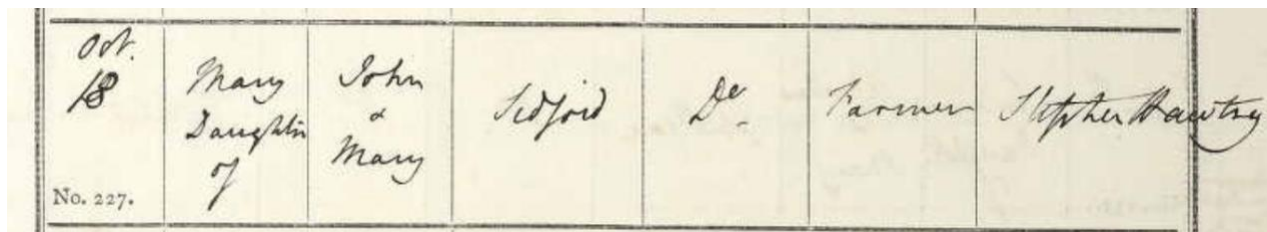


MARY AND WILLIAM BLACKMORE

Mary Blackmore

Mary Blackmore was born Mary Sidford in Stoke Farthing, Broad Chalke, Wiltshire, England. She was baptized in All Saints' Church, Broad Chalke on 18th October 1822. Her father was John Sidford, a farmer (1785 – 1842) and her mother was Mary Rich (1794 – 1856). She was the second eldest of eight children. In 1823, when Mary was less than one year old, the family moved to Faulston House in Bishopstone, a nearby village in the Chalke Valley.



Baptismal Register for Mary Sidford



Faulston Manor is a very historic estate, referred to in the Domesday Book of 1086. It became a centre for Parliamentary forces during the English civil war (1642 – 1651). The current front of the house dates from around 1780, though parts remain of earlier houses including, in the grounds, one of the fortified towers of the medieval manor.

By the mid nineteenth century the Faulston Estate was owned by Lord Pembroke from nearby Wilton House. The Sidfords became the tenants and would have been relatively wealthy farmers.

The household at the time of the first English Census in 1841 comprised John (50), Mary (40), George (20), Mary (18) and James (7). Mary's brother Fredrick, who was 12 years old in 1841, was away at school in Heytesbury, Wiltshire. Her sister Margaret (10) was visiting her mother's parents in Gloucestershire. There is no record of the other children, some of whom may have died whilst very young.

In Elizabeth Gallop's history of Bishopstone ⁽¹⁾ she refers to John Sidford as being "active in village affairs, carting flint (a building material), organizing the poor and generally making himself useful".

A proper village school was not established in Bishopstone until 1842. So Mary, who was clearly well educated, must have gone to school in Salisbury. On 14 May 1851 she married William Blackmore in St John the Baptist church, Bishopstone. The witnesses were her brother George and sister Margaret.



Mary Sidford/Blackmore

1. Elizabeth Gallop: *Bishopstone – a history of the farms, houses and people of a south Wiltshire village*. 1988

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1857. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of Bishopstoke in the County of Wilt.

| No. | When Married. | Name and Surname. | Age | Condition. | Rank or Profession. | Residence at the Time of Marriage. | Father's Name and Surname. | Rank or Profession of Father. |
|-----|---------------|-------------------|------|------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 63 | May 14 | William Blackmore | page | Bachelor | Solicitor & Attorney | Bathington County of Wilt | William Blackmore | Linen Draper |
| | | Mary Lidford | page | Spinster | | Bishopstoke | John Lidford | Farmer |

Married in the Church of ~~St. Andrew~~ according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England by me, James Lee

This Marriage was solemnized between us, William Blackmore in the Presence of us, John Lidford Henry Blackmore
Mary Lidford Margaret Lidford

Marriage Record – William and Mary Blackmore

William Blackmore

There are two substantial biographies of William Blackmore, by Herbert Brayer and Anthony Hamber ⁽²⁾. There is also a Wikipedia page. This note therefore only provides a short outline of his considerable career and achievements.

William Henry Blackmore was born on 2 August 1827 in Crane Street, Salisbury. His father William Bennett Blackmore (1796 – 1859) was a woollen and linen draper and cloth merchant in Endless Street in Salisbury. William B Blackmore was a prominent figure in Salisbury business circles and was Mayor in 1841. His father, The Reverend Richard Blackmore, was Rector of Donhead St Mary located on the edge of the Blackmore Vale in Dorset which may have been named after the family. Two of William Henry's siblings, Henry and Humphrey Blackmore, became owners of the Wilton carpet factory in 1835. His brother Humphrey was to play a significant role in William's later life.



William Henry Blackmore

William Henry Blackmore attended King's College, Bruton, a public school in the neighbouring county of Somerset and then was articled to his uncle John Lambert of the Salisbury firm of solicitors Lambert and Norton. *Hamber* deals at some length with the social and, in particular, the educational circumstances in which the young William grew up in Salisbury. It is clear that he had a thirst for knowledge and that many of those with whom he and his brother came into contact were involved in pastimes such as fossil collecting and archaeology.

After qualifying in 1848 Henry joined the firm of solicitors Duncan, Squarey and Duncan in Liverpool, England, probably as a result of contacts with the Squarey family in the Salisbury area. He soon became a full partner. He and Mary set up home in Hooten, a village on the Wirral peninsula just outside Liverpool. Liverpool was rapidly expanding as a commercial centre and William Blackmore came into contact with a number of important Americans with land, mining and railway development interests in the USA. He remained a practising solicitor in Liverpool until he moved to London to the practices new offices in the City.

(2) Herbert Brayer: "A Case Study in the Economic Development of the West" 1949 (2 vols)
 Anthony Hamber: "Collecting the American West – the Rise and Fall of William Blackmore" 2010.

By 1865 William and Mary lived at Shepley House in Carshalton south of London. Here they lavishly entertained an array of mid-Victorian society including Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Mark Twain. By this time William Blackmore was involved in a large number of investment projects in both Europe and the Americas. Details are set out in the two biographies cited above and summarized in the Wikipedia entry.

William also had an interest in the arts. He acquired a number of early paintings by the Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The artist and the Blackmores were clearly in the same social circle. Rossetti wrote to one of his other patrons that Mary Blackmore was a kind and friendly individual who supported her husband's many wide ranging endeavours. She would welcome visitors at their homes in Hooton and Carshalton.

William was now a wealthy man and indulged his interest in collecting antiquities. By the mid 1860s he was financing a range of archeological excavations and related activities. At the end of his first visit to the USA in 1863 he sought out Native American archeological artifacts and acquired (for \$10,000 dollars, no small sum in 1863) a large collection from Edwin Davis. It was this collection that led to the founding, together with his brother, Humphrey, of the Blackmore Museum alongside the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum in St Ann's Street, Salisbury.



Humphrey Blackmore in the Blackmore Museum

The Blackmore Museum opened in September 1867. The Encyclopædia Britannica described it as "one of the finest collections of prehistoric antiquities in England." Later the two museums were amalgamated and, following Humphrey Blackmore's death in 1929, much of the Blackmore collection was distributed to other museums.



Photograph of William with Chief Red Cloud.

William Blackmore also had a considerable interest in collecting photographs of Native Americans. In the USA he formed a close working relationship with the Smithsonian Institution. In 1868 he loaned his ever expanding collection to the Smithsonian. Blackmore believed that photography was the best medium for recording the rapidly vanishing Native American communities and his collection represents a major contribution to their study. Many of his photographs are now in the British Museum and can be accessed on their website.

William and Mary had no children so she was free to accompany William on his travels during the 1850s and 60s. These included trips to a number of European countries. In 1872 she accompanied him on a trip to the USA and was recorded as having played an active

part in meetings with Native Americans. She was present at a meeting in May 1872 in Washington DC with Chief Red Cloud.

William sponsored an expedition in 1872 to survey the Yellowstone region of Montana and Wyoming. He commissioned photographers to record the expedition. He was joined on the expedition by his wife Mary. The St Louis Republican of June 19 1872 reported the proposed expedition:

AMERICAN PRESS.

TOUR AMONG THE INDIANS.—Mr. William Blackmore, an English capitalist and the distinguished founder of the Blackmore Museum at Salisbury, is about starting out from Denver on an extended tour over the Rocky Mountain region. He will be accompanied by Mrs. Blackmore, General Cowen, the Assistant Secretary of the Interior, and Colonel John Delano, son of Secretary Delano. They first visit Colorado Springs and Pueblo, accompanied by Colonel James Archers, who will show the party the great natural wonders about the "Garden of the Gods," Pike's Peak, and the Fountain Que Bouille. From Pueblo they go to the Yellowstone region with Professor Hayden, the United States geologist; then leave him and cross to Fort Benton, then down the Missouri River to Omaha, holding along the route interesting pow-wows with the Indians. Thence returning westward to Colorado, they cross the Sange De Cristo Pass to Fort Garland, and on to the Pagons' Springs where they are to have a pow-wow with the Ute Indians who are disaffected and have been making attacks on the settlers. They will next visit the Pueblo Indians at Taos, so as to be present at their great annual festival at the feast San Germina, on the 30th September. Afterwards they will visit Sante Fé, Albuquerque, and return *via* Fort Union to St. Louis. It will thus be seen that a most comprehensive route has been planned, having for its objects the study of the archæology and the manners and customs of the Indian tribes, and also a careful study of the flora and fauna of the country tra-

versed. Mr. Blackmore will collect such specimens illustrating the various subjects of his investigation as will no doubt prove a valuable acquisition to science. He is a gentleman of varied and extensive culture, who takes great delight in all matters pertaining to the natural sciences. He has also a strong desire to study the Indian character, and is firmly impressed with the belief in the capacity of the Indians for civilisation. As he is extensively engaged in developing the mining resources of Colorado and New Mexico, doubtless business will be combined with study and pleasure. Mr. Blackmore commences his long journey with the zeal of an enthusiast, as will be seen by the following extract taken from a private note addressed to us:—"You see I have carved out an excursion which for interest, novelty, or enjoyment, will rival any that can be planned in the Old World. I shall be glad to add to my knowledge of the great resources of your country, and shall hope to return—barring scalping and accidents—to the Old World a wiser man."—*St. Louis Republican*, June 19.

By July 1872 the expedition had arrived in Montana and sadly Mary contracted pneumonia whilst in Bozeman, Montana and died. Her death was recorded in the local Montana newspaper as follows:

Sad News--Sudden Death of Wife of Sir William Blackmore

Bozeman, M.T., July 19--Mrs. Blackmore, the wife of Sir William Blackmore, an English gentleman eminent for his scientific attainments, died very suddenly at this place last evening. She will be buried today. They had just arrived at Bozeman for the purpose of joining Professor Hayden's exploring party up the Yellowstone. She died from a congestive chill, brought on from over fatigue and the sudden change in the weather.

Another Newspaper, the Avant Courier said: The deceased had by her amiability and peculiarly happy talent of gracefully adapting herself to the trying circumstances of a journey over our rugged mountains, endearing herself to the limited circle of acquaintances she formed during her brief sojourn in our midst and her sudden demise caused a universal expression of sorrow at her loss and sympathy for him whose cup of happiness had so rudely been dashed to the ground.

William purchased land in the town for her burial and donated it to the town for a cemetery. The Sunset Hills Cemetery serves that purpose today. The expedition leader, Ferdinand Hayden, named the 10,000ft Mount Blackmore, just north of Yellowstone National Park, in her honour. William was badly affected by the death of his wife and wrote in his diary on the return trip: "I, having bathed in the Pacific and visited New Mexico, hope to get back once more to Old England. I feel I cannot say "Home" again for I feel that none is left for me".

In the above press report William Blackmore is referred to as "Sir". In other writings in the USA he is referred to as "Lord" Blackmore. Unfortunately, he was never knighted or enobled! This perhaps reveals a slightly less respectable side to William Blackmore. Many of his investment projects appear to have been somewhat dubious. He was adept at persuading businessmen to make investments on which they were promised extraordinarily high rates of return, which never materialised. By the early 1870s he was involved in a huge number of inter-related business ventures in England, Europe and the USA. These included land holdings, railways, mineral mines, a Welsh colliery and telecommunications.

Following the recession of 1873 much of his fortune was lost. The stress of his disintegrating investments and financial liabilities, overwork and over indulgence in strong liquor began to take an effect on his health. About 1870 the Blackmores had moved to an apartment in Belgrave Mansions, Grosvenor Gardens in London. These were "serviced apartments" and better suited to their lifestyle of almost constant trips abroad. On 12 April 1878 William Blackmore shot himself in his study in Belgrave Mansions.

The account in *Hamber's* book of the death is somewhat harrowing. William took five hours to die and for some reason, possibly because it was a suicide which was illegal, was never taken to hospital where he might have survived.

Suicide carried a considerable stigma. This may account for the very cursory recording of William's passing. There was no obituary in national newspapers. That in the local Salisbury newspapers focused solely on his activities in relation to the museum and did not mention his wife. In accordance with his wishes he was buried in Brompton Cemetery, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London.

One of William's failings was in not securing any long term financial security for his museum. His death had a major impact so that, despite the efforts of his brother Humphrey and other relatives, the museum amalgamated with the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum and most of William's collections were sold to other museums and collectors. Some went back to the USA. As noted above, much of his collection of photographs of native Americans is in the keeping of the British Museum and can be viewed on their website. But for all his achievements while alive, William Blackmore left no lasting legacy and he is almost forgotten in his native city of Salisbury.

As for Mary Blackmore, in 1866 she had funded the north window in the Farmer's Aisle of Bishopstone Church in memory of her parents (photo below) and a memorial commemorating her death in Bozeman, Montana is alongside that window. Her brother Frederick took over the running of the Faulston Estate after the death of their father and, until his death in 1897, was a highly respected member of the local community.



Mike Ash
February 2026

