

# Horton & Little Sodbury Famous Folk

This panel briefly describes the lives of just some of the famous people associated with our area. There's the Prout who both owned and then built a large part of what is now Washington DC, and his nephew who made ground-breaking scientific discoveries. Then there's a woman who became one of the most successful children's writers at the age of 63, and even a vicar, who turns out to have been a celebrated artist in his youth. They have had world-wide impact far beyond what might have been expected for a small rural community.



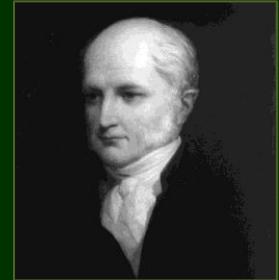
**DILLA the 'secret' artist** Francis (Frank) Wright Bourdillon, vicar of Horton from 1914 to 1923, died in Little Sodbury in 1924 at the age of 73. He was a shy man, so his parishioners probably had no idea that as a young man, he was a well-respected artist, one of the founding and key members of the 'Newlyn' school in Cornwall. He had inherited a strong religious outlook – perhaps part of his Huguenot ancestry – and his colleagues tell how 'Dilla' became more taken up by religion, such that he eventually gave up art, became a missionary, and, eventually, vicar of Horton. His painting covers many styles – his most famous is 'On Bideford Sands' from Kingsley's Westward Ho. The Penlee gallery in Penzance has one of his paintings, 'The Jubilee Hat'. Many of his works are highly regarded and have realized many thousands of pounds at auction. *Shown above 'Across the Beach'*

*Dilla, bottom right*



## PROTON MAN William

Prout was born in Horton in 1785. Educated in both Bristol and Edinburgh, he became a practising physician in London. However, today he is remembered as a very distinguished scientist, making contributions across what to us seems like an amazing array of topics, from medicine, to biological chemistry, and fundamental physics. For example, he proposed the classification of food into sugars, starches, 'oily bodies' and albumen (carbohydrates, fats, and proteins); he contributed to the improvement of the barometer; he coined the term 'convection' for that type of energy transfer. However, most famously, he proposed that the fundamental particle of matter was the hydrogen atom, which he called the 'protyle', such that all other elements were multiples of that. Although at first disproved, it was subsequently shown that he had been on the right track to the extent that the hydrogen nucleus has a constituent particle that is indeed in all other elements. Rutherford coined this the 'proton' using the suffix '-on' for particles, and the stem of Prout's word.

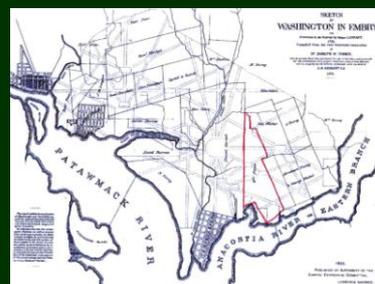
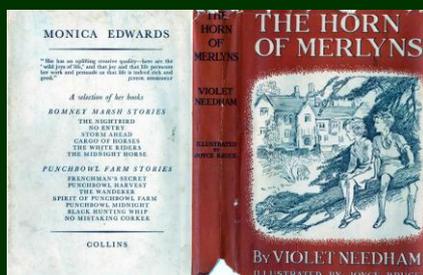


## PROUT of WASHINGTON William

Prout was born in Horton to Nebuchadnezzar (later called Ebenezer) and Martha Prout in 1755 or 1756. He arguably has an even greater claim to fame than his scientist nephew of the same name. Growing up locally, he became a successful merchant. He was, apparently, fascinated by all the potential opportunities in the newly-independent North American eastern seaboard. He set sail for there in 1790. He quickly became successful as a merchant. However, it was his acquaintance with fellow merchant George Walker that changed his life. Essentially, Walker knew that George Washington was looking for a seat for the new Federal Government and was recommending an area near the Potomac. To cut a long story short, William managed to buy 500 acres in the centre of the potential area for the then massive sum of £10,000. Because he did this late in the day, he had a separate meeting with the President to become part of a deal selling 50% to the Federal government. Because it all took such a long time (the Capitol building was not finished until 1813), many of his fellow landowners did not do well, but William did. He remained part of the new community and prospered – many of the key parts of the city were built on his land, including its oldest church. He died in 1823, a respected pillar of the community of Washington.

**VIOLET NEEDHAM** was born in Mayfair (in 1876), but the connections of the Needhams with the area are very strong – direct antecedents of influential families who have owned, amongst other property, Horton Hall, Little Sodbury Manor and Widdenhill House. Violet herself lived in both Horton Hall and Widdenhill House. At the age of 63 she published her first children's book, *The Black Riders*. This was followed by another novel, and other writing, each year for almost twenty years. They were tremendously successful. Apparently, many local folk of the time have been identified as characters in the novels, and she often makes use of the surrounding countryside – indeed, *The Horns of Merlyn* has an illustration of Little Sodbury Manor on the dust jacket. Joyce Bruce (aka Mary Joyce Rawlins and Joyce Burges), another local resident, illustrated many of the books.

The *Violet Needham Society* was established in 1985 to help celebrate, promote and research her life's work. She died locally at the age of 91 in 1967, just 24 hours before her sister, Evelyn, with whom she shared her last years in Horton.



*A.S. Jan 2014 (from papers by descendants of the Prouts).*

*Prout's land outlined in red, left.*

These panels cannot do justice to their stories. If you want to know more you will find further information on the Internet, or even better, perhaps, join the Horton Local History Group. Maybe you know of more famous people from around here? If so, or just to find out more do contact: Maggie White Tel.: 01454 314436