

Times Past

Storrington & District Museum Preserving Yesterday for Tomorrow

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STORRINGTON'S VANISHED WATERMILLS

These were most likely primitive watermills sited somewhere along the river Stor, which emerges under the Downs in the present Chantry Lane and meanders through Meadowside, crosses the road at Eastbrook and continues through Fryern and Hurston to meet the river Chilt at Wickford Bridge before they both join the Arun. There is no trace of these original mills today.

Near the source of the Stor beside a little waterfall which tumbles over the edge of the clay stratum to the next one of greensand, stands Waterfall Cottage. This was a fulling mill in the 18th century, where woollen cloth made from the fleeces of the sheep on the Downs was treated. The mill operated large wooden hammers which pounded the cloth in a water trough. The mill pond to provide the head of water was in the high field immediately south of the cottage and the stream then ran to the east of the garden, a site now marked by a concrete gully. The original stream was diverted into its present course beside the lane, before entering the Chantry mill pond.

Here, the head of water provided power for the Chantry mill where corn was ground. The Chantry miller had a bakery shop on the site and provided flour to Greenfields and other shops. Some delightful letters are extant in the West Sussex Record Office, informing Lord Leconfield's agent that "the water wheel is broke" and that no work could be done until it was repaired. In 1921, Bernard Hecks, son of the farmer at Sullington and Chantry removed the milling gear and installed a turbine which used the water power from the old mill wheel to generate the first electricity supply in the area. Initially, he used this to light up the lambing yards for his father's prize Southdown sheep, and to install electric milking machinery in the farm dairy. Sullington Cheddar Cheese was well known here, and the ground-breaking generating enterprise was widely featured in the national press at the time, with photos of Queenie Hecks, Bernard's sister in traditional milkmaid's costume complete with cotton bonnet, applying electric milking clusters to

a cow. Another photo showed Bernard throwing a switch in the generating room with a goose watching from his desk.

Sullington Church was converted from oil lamps to electricity by request, and soon private people and Storrington Church also wanted him to supply them with electricity. Storrington Parish Council, debating the street lighting requirements for the coming winter (they only lit the streets during the winter months, from the town gas supply) considered converting to electricity and Bernard Hecks installed two street lamps outside the village hall for the meeting, but it was decided to retain the gas lamps at that time. This first generating system lasted until the installation of a public supply in 1932.

There is another possible water mill site in the Eastbrook area which was revealed when the Book Shop changed hands in recent years and alterations were done to the premises before it opened as "Penny's" the hairdresser. Behind the shop the back part of the building has features strongly suggesting that it was a mill, the back wall drops into a concrete trough which could easily contain a wheel, and the stream runs along this trough before crossing the road. There are vague references locally suggesting that it was a snuff mill, but no hard evidence has yet been uncovered.

The next water mill was the Byne Mill, standing in the fields behind High Street until the 1970s. The access was by two paths, one from Mill Lane and the other from a field now known as the library car park. This old mill with its unusual cast iron wheel, was still grinding animal feed during WWII, but gradually fell out of use and became derelict. Great efforts were made to save it by local people, rapidly becoming aware by the 1970s of how much of old Storrington was being destroyed, but to no avail. Today a block of flats called Mill House stands on the site, the last remaining vestige of the old mill is an oblong iron opening in the brick wall behind the pond where the water used to pour onto the wheel. Even the millpond has been "restored" into a pretty

Recreational area, very different from its working days. A watermill has stood on this site from at least the 18th century. Byne Place Farm and mill were the subject of a lease in 1783 between Thomas Pelham, Baron Pelham of Stanmer and family, and John Lidbetter, yeoman. The old parish map of 1788 [which has proved to be extremely accurate] shows this mill. It was then in the tenure of Thomas Coates, miller, but even before that a watermill and pond were recorded in 1709.

The stream continues on its way, with a new riverside walk laid out by the Storrington Parish Council, past the site of the old manor house of Fryern to Hurston, where the remains of two wheel pits can still be seen. A probate inventory of 1712 for John Terrell, miller, deceased, shows it to have been an extremely prosperous and well-equipped establishment, which together with its farm produced cheese, salted meat for the winter, had malting and brewing equipment and was practically self-sufficient. In 1876 the then miller Thomas Elliott was in dispute with the Parish over the responsibility for hardening and maintaining the road to the mill (Hurston Lane). He insisted that it was a parish road and should be hardened by them, and the Parish claimed that it was only an accommodation road for the mill and its waggons. The matter became very acrimonious and went all the way to Quarter Sessions in Lewes. There is a full record of the trial and the evidence and we have a copy in the museum. It is easy to imagine the scene, elderly village labourers who had been involved with the mill and the road, people owing their livelihoods

to the miller, all conveyed over to Lewes to give evidence and submit to lawyers' cross-questioning. It makes fascinating reading. The matter was not finally settled until the new Parish Councils formed in 1895 were given the responsibility, among other things, of all the roads in the parish.

There is a delightful painting by one of the Palmer ladies of this great old mill in action, and a small boat in the foreground pond. The site is at the lowest point of Hurston Lane enclosed by a right-angle bend in the lane. This mill collapsed in 1911, but one wheel continued to work, pumping river water to drive a piston which supplied Hurston cottages with spring water.

With the one stream supplying the heads of water needed to operate all the mill wheels along its course, the Chantry and Byne mills had to be worked in conjunction, and it is easy to imagine the fury of the millers when mischievous children pulled up the flood gates and let the water escape down the river! At the end of the 19th century, there was a very bad fire in a village centre shop in the early hours of one morning. Two policemen pounding the beat saved the inhabitants in the flat above the shop, but the fire was well out of control when the fire horses from Steyning galloped over with a manual pump. Efforts had to be concentrated on saving neighbouring property, and with the well in the Square soon exhausted, someone was sent post-haste up to the Chantry miller to wake him up and ask him to release the flood-gates, so that water could be drawn from the river.

Joan Ham

THE MEYNELLS OF GREATHAM

It was while conducting the 1991 census that I first saw Humphreys Homestead at Greatham. The Homestead consists of a number of buildings adjacent to a 17th Century farmhouse. A charming lady showed us round and told us of her grandparents Wilfrid and Alice Meynell. Recently the same lady, Mrs. Elizabeth Hawkins, assisted me in the compilation of this article. Only then did I realise what an exceptionally talented family came to Greatham in 1911.

Wilfrid, a Quaker from Newcastle-on-Tyne, was born in 1852 and came South to take up journalism. Sometimes a poet, sometimes a publisher of other people's poems, he came to specialise in religious, especially Catholic, works after his conversion to Rome in 1870. So it was that he met and married Alice Thompson after "falling in love" with one of her sonnets.

Alice was born in 1847, the younger daughter of Thomas and Christiana Thompson. Thomas's forebears had prospered in the West Indies, leaving him with sufficient income to travel, especially in Italy, where the two girls spent most of their childhood. He and his wife, a talented painter and musician, supervised the girls' education in the humanities and arts. As a result, both girls achieved fame while still in their twenties. Elizabeth (Mimi) showed at the Royal Academy at the age of 27 and her most famous work, "The Roll Call", was purchased by Queen Victoria.

Alice, spurred on by Mimi's success, had her first collection of poems, "Preludes", published in 1875 when she was 28. The sisters were invited by Lord Tennyson, the Poet Laureate, to his home near Haslemere, a singular honour, but the girls were not comfortable in the presence of the great man.

In 1868 Alice became a Catholic, confessing that she needed the discipline of the Church to control her passionate nature. Mimi followed her as did Wilfrid and many other academics of the late 19th century mostly due to the influence of Cardinals Newman and Manning.

After a courtship prolonged by Alice's father's opposition, Wilfrid and Alice were married in 1878. The bride wore the gold rosary once owned by Mary, Queen of Scots. Two months later, Mimi wed an army officer, William Butler who later became commander of the forces in Cape Province.

With their marriage, Wilfrid and Alice began the most constructive period in their lives. Wilfrid was the editor of "The Weekly Register" and from that grew "Merry England" in which Alice's poems and prose reached a growing public. Then, in 1887, a poem arrived at "Merry England". It was written on a grubby piece of paper with a request that the rejection slip (but not the poem itself) should be sent

to Charing Cross P.O. The author apologised for the sad state of the paper, it being his last sheet and the postage his last penny.

Readers of our 8th issue will remember "Daisy and the Sad Poet", about a derelict opium addict named Francis Thompson. This was his first attempt at publication, but it was six months before Wilfrid read the poem, "The Passion of Mary". Immediately recognising its exceptional merit he tried to locate Thompson, there being no knowledge of him at the Charing Cross P.O. Most likely Francis was sleeping rough in doorways, under arches or on park benches. Maybe he was keeping warm in a public library; one that had not barred him for his appalling appearance.

So Wilfrid published the poem in 1888 and it was read by Thompson himself; perhaps in a more sympathetic library. In such a bizarre fashion began one of the most moving and important partnerships in literary history.

To be continued:

E. P. Beaumont

THE ROMAN INVASION [REVISITED]

When I was asked to write a short piece on how the Romans came to Invade Storrington in April 2002 I thought that it would be easy. Further reflection made me realise that if you took the handful of us who were directly involved and asked the same questions, you would probably get as many different accounts as there were individuals, if not more! This is my version.

The first indication of what might happen came when Ron Ham told me that his new neighbour was a Roman Officer. Having been around the fringes of the Sealed Knot for a large number of years, this didn't cause me quite as much alarm as it might have done to a more sane person, even though, to a Civil War fanatic, Roman times mean about as much as the Stone Age.

Then Ron casually mentioned that the Second Augusta Legion were planning to walk from Wiston House to Storrington along the Downs as a "dry run" to a much larger exercise. Wouldn't it be nice to give them tea at the museum?

A little later someone suggested maybe we ought to put on a Special Exhibition of local archaeology to coincide with the [still only a possibility] walk.

With little over a week to go before the walk the number of Romans involved had grown from "about half a dozen" to "maybe a dozen or more plus horses" [oh yes, and their support team] and could we find somewhere to keep the horses while the Romans were having lunch...

Assistant Curator Gina Wilmshurst [never one to do things on a small scale] thought it would be nice to lay on an authentic Roman banquet for them. By this time "their" numbers had grown to around thirty...

By this time communications were getting a little like Chinese whispers Ron was to dress up in a toga, so was the Chairman of the Parish Council, Tony Read. Maybe the Curator should also...? The TV people were coming... And so it went on.

The weather forecast was dire. An optimistic estimate of the number of spectators was around 50 if we were lucky.

Well, the weather held, just. Around 200 people signed the Museum visitors' book, a number which can probably safely be doubled for the number who "got away". Many photos were taken, some appearing on the website by the same evening. The Curator's feet, shod in "Celtic" sandals, froze. The banquet was unforgettable and we are all still on speaking terms. And the Romans would like to do it all again!

Helen Whittle

FRIENDS' NEWS

We would like to remind all our members that the 3rd Annual General Meeting will be taking place on the evening of Thursday, 12th September 2002 at the Old School, Storrington. A copy of the Agenda and a Membership Renewal Form for 2002/03 is enclosed with this newsletter. On page two of the form is a Gift Aid declaration box; please fill in, if you have not already done so previously (or can't remember!) and send back with your subscription to the membership secretary at the address shown. Subscriptions remain the same as last year: £5 for individuals and £7 for family members (two adults at the same address plus any dependent children under the age of eighteen).

Gina has once again organised a fascinating lecture programme for the coming year, details of which are given below. We thank all our members for their valuable support during 2001/02, and look forward to another challenging year for the Storrington and District Museum. Please support us in 2002/03; your help is vital if we are to continue to build upon the achievements of the past three years.

Malcolm Linfield

AUTUMN AND WINTER PROGRAMME 2002/03

All Thursday evening meetings will be held at the Old School, School Lane, Storrington starting promptly at 7.30 pm. The cost will be £2.00 on the door. There is no charge to attend the AGM.

Thursday, 12th September – Members' Evening and Annual General Meeting (Members Only).

The main part of the evening will be a talk by Ron Ham on 'Cracking Wartime Codes', to follow immediately after the AGM. Nominations are invited for the vacant post of Hon. Secretary (see Agenda).

Following Ron's talk, members will be offered a glass of wine and the museum will be open for a viewing of the special exhibition on Storrington Churches. – Members' dispays invited.

Thursday, 10th October – "Tales of the River Bank in the Adur Valley" by Trevor Povey.

The Museum will open for a viewing of the special exhibition on 'The Wildbrook Villages'.

Thursday, 14th November – "The Natural History of the South Downs" by Patrick Coulcher.

To include a special exhibition of wild life photographs by Roger Wilmshurst.

Thursday, 12th December – "The History of Amberley Museum" by Brin Thomas.

To include a festive glass of wine and a mince pie. The Museum will be open for a special viewing of 'The Flower Fairies', which is being repeated by popular request. Gift Stall – contributions welcome.

Thursday, 19th December – The Friends' Supper. (*Details to be arranged*)

Thursday, 9th January, 2003 – "More West Sussex on Film" by Alan Readman, *West Sussex Records Office*.

Thursday, 23rd January – Stewards' evening at Sandhill Farm House, Washington. (*By Invitation*)

Thursday, 13th February – "The Portsmouth to London Barge Route" by Tony Pratt.

The Museum will be open for a special exhibition on the W.I.

(*During the Summer there will be an outing on a barge, to include a cream tea*)

Thursday, 13th March – "The Home Guard" (*Speaker to be announced*)

This is a preliminary to our enactment event on ...

Sunday, 6th April – Storrington and Warmington-on-Sea Home Guard.

Exhibitions, wartime lunches and much more. (*Details to be announced*)

ANOTHER JUBILEE

Ten years before Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II ascended the throne a young Irish priest was ordained into the Roman Catholic Church. Father Kevin Cassidy celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of his Ordination on the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary [15th August, 2002]. A special Mass was held at the Priory of Our Lady of England here in Storrington, followed by a party in the cloisters which was attended by some of his many friends, young and old, from all sections of the community.

“Father Cass” has long been a landmark in the village, having lived here since 1947 and serving as parish priest for 38 years, finally retiring as recently as 1990. In that time he has become a friend to many people, always ready to stop and chat, and accepted as an honorary member of many families. He has the gift of finding a humorous word or story to suit everyone and every occasion. We wish him a long and happy retirement.
