

# Times Past

**Storrington & District Museum**  
*Preserving Yesterday for Tomorrow*

**NEWSLETTER • Issue No.8 • May, 2001**

## CURATOR'S CORNER

It's been a busy few weeks, reorganising the Museum after the installation of the new cabinets. There is still quite a lot more to be done but obviously organising the necessary workforce has to be done in a methodical manner. Hopefully before the next issue of *Times Past* most of the remaining work will have been done.

Our library is continuing to grow at a fast rate and we will soon have storage problems again. As before, if anyone knows of a suitable office where we could install our library and provide research facilities we will be very happy to hear of it.

The indexing of the family history material and property database is now under way and hopefully Kate, our present volunteer, will be able to make good progress while we have her services. Perhaps by the time she returns to more gainful employment someone else will feel able to take up the challenge!

We have kicked off with what will become a regular series of Special Exhibitions which will normally run for about a month [although this is flexible]. The current exhibition, which will run for the rest of May, is in association with National Museums Month. The theme chosen by the Sussex Museums Group has been "Food and Drink" and you will find two of the Special Exhibition cabinets have dedicated displays which are in addition to related items already on show in the Museum. To accompany "Food and Drink" month there is a special leaflet containing traditional recipes taken from the Greenfield family cookery book as well as Joan's recipe for *Sussex Pond Pudding*. The leaflets are 50p each to cover printing costs and a small donation to Museum funds and will remain on sale "while stocks

last". There is also a fun quiz – can you identify the series of mystery objects in the end display case? No prizes – answers available from the stewards' desk.

In June we will have a display of project work by the pupils of Storrington First School based on life in a Tudor village and later in the year there will be a special display to mark the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Charles II's escape after the Battle of Worcester. As I'm sure local folk know, legend has it that he stopped for a drink at the *George and Dragon* at Houghton, though I have yet to find mention of this in any of the contemporary accounts of his flight. There will also be exhibitions to mark "The Few" in September and, next year, in relation to a family reunion of the Lin(d)field One Name Group who celebrate their tenth anniversary. If your family or Society/Organisation has a special anniversary or if you have a special collection you would like to share with others please contact the Curator to discuss a date. Spaces seem to be filling up quickly so please give plenty of notice and we will do our best to accommodate you.

Sadly the Parham Steam Rally has been cancelled due to the Foot and Mouth restrictions but we hope to get out and about during the summer months wherever possible. Whatever happens, there should still be plenty to interest people in the Museum itself, so please, keep visiting, and bring your friends and family with you!

*Helen Whittle*

## GALLIMAUFRY

### *From Angmering Parish registers:*

16th July, 1749 – Baptism – George, son (perhaps) of Richard, certainly of Sarah Amooore.

20th November, 1757 – Baptism – James, son of Widdow Crossingham, shown and confessed to have been begotten by her late Husband's son. Upon examining the Lad, he solemnly declared the Hussy

attacked him on his Bed, first in her clothes, then naked. He did not comply. But afterwards She rushed into his bed naked and seized the Premisses.

3rd April 1765 – Baptism – William, son of Anne Robarts by God Knows Who.

2nd June, 1765 – Baptism – Sarah, daughter of Elizabeth Tye, who still remains un-Tyed.

## DAISY AND THE SAD POET

It is 1889 and the slight figure of a man emerges from the Monastery at Storrington to take his customary walk over the Downs. It is not one of the monks we see; it is a man who is in their care; one who is emerging from the self-inflicted injuries of malnutrition and drug addiction. He is destined to become one of the great literary figures of the nineteenth century and his salvation, though but passing, begins here, in Storrington.

On his walk he meets a little village girl – one of a family of eight. He calls her “Daisy” and charms her, and she, in return, gives him “tokens three – a look, a word and a wild raspberry”.

Whoever Daisy was we shall probably never know, but the life and work of the poet have been the study of more than a hundred books, many of them by members of the Meynell family, some of whom still live in Greatham and Rackham.

Francis Joseph Thompson was born on 18th December, 1859. His parents were dedicated Catholics; his father a doctor of medicine; his mother a teacher. Most of his first eleven years were spent at home with his two sisters with whom he shared the teaching of private tutors and governesses. Being a Catholic in Manchester in Victoria's reign meant that the children rarely saw others except at church.

Francis was gifted with a vivid imagination and an insatiable appetite for poems and stories. He also loved the pageantry and rituals of his religion – a love that manifested itself in all his later poems. Like most boys of the English upper middle-class of the day he was “packed off” to boarding school at the age of eleven to St. Cuthbert's College at Ushaw, near Durham. There he sought refuge from his 300-odd fellows by writing and reciting poetry, even in his sleep, some boys claimed.

He had aimed at being accepted into the priesthood but his unsatisfactory school career proved too much for the authorities, and he returned home, now 18, to his disappointed parents.

Dr. Thompson now hoped that his son would follow him into the medical profession and sent him to Manchester on a six-year course at Owen's College. There, Francis “cut” most lectures and consequently failed his examinations. Unable to face his parents' disappointment again, he went to London where, in the great city's back-streets, he began his descent into degradation and misery. He earned a few miserable pence in the most degrading services; holding horses for cabbies, selling matches and – his one venture into private enterprise – shoe-blackening. Too poor

even to afford a doss house, he usually slept in doorways and under arches. So pitiful was he that even other derelicts, recognising him as a “gent”, sometimes gave him food from their own scant resources. A policeman gave him money and a prostitute allowed him to share her home. Such money as he could earn, or be given, went to buy laudanum, a derivative of opium, easily obtained at chemist shops and often given to babies by their harassed mothers. So poorly dressed was he, that he was sometimes asked to leave public libraries – a great deprivation for a literary man.

But a “good Samaritan” was about to come to the aid of this pitiable character; more correctly two Samaritans – Wilfrid and Alice Meynell – who ran a publishing business in London and issued an influential periodical called “Merry England”. One of the poems written by Francis in his occasional periods of lucidity was called “The Passion of Mary” and the Meynells immediately recognised the poetic genius revealed.

This should have been the salvation of Thompson for the Meynell's took him into their London home and set about weaning him off the deadly addiction to opium. The patience and kindness of the Meynell's and their eight children were rewarded only by a succession of poems and articles, which were widely acclaimed by the literary critics. Most thought him to be the greatest religious poet for years while his command of English was compared to that of Shakespeare's. Not all agreed to the extent of his talent; some (even his beloved Alice) deplored his excessive use of “-less” words such as “tameless, shunless” and even “quenchless”. Some of his detractors claimed that many of his words were invented by him because he was “too lazy to look up existing ones”. Two of his creations were “supportlessly” and “exhaustless”. Only one of his inventions has descended to us; he compared Love (God's, of course) to “a many-splendoured thing”.

Indolent he certainly was; the Meynell children, whom he adored and to whom he wrote many poems, used to try pulling him out of bed so that he might have a meal. If their parents had arranged for other luminaries to meet him for evening dinner, they would tell him that it was for lunch, but even then he would keep the company waiting. He had only one other interest – cricket. Not to play it, of course, but to watch it from the comfort of a deck-chair. He waxed lyrical over the exploits of his heroes; “my Hornby, my Barber long ago!”. Of him, E.V.Lucas wrote, “of all men Francis Thompson was

least like a cricketer.”

Thompson's most famous work, “The Hound of Heaven” was written at Storrington and, significantly, while temporarily off the opium. In a way it is autobiographical in that the poet is forever attempting to escape “God’s love”. It begins; “I fled Him, down the night and down the days – I fled Him down the arches of the years”. The poem ends in his final surrender; “Ah, fondest, blinded, weakest, I am He thou seekest!”

Thompson's end came on 13th November, 1907, with the triumph of consumption over laudanum. Several attempts to keep his pathetic body alive by

further spells in Sussex were fruitless and he died, weighing only five stone, at the Hospital of Saints John and Elizabeth in St. John’s Wood, close to his much-loved Lords. His legacy, apart from his poetry, was contained in an old tin box of assorted rubbish – broken pipes, a spirit stove with no wick and his note-books, mostly old exercise books.

His remains lie in St. Mary’s Cemetery, Kensal Green.

*E. P. Beaumont*

## DAISY

Where the thistle lifts a purple crown  
Six foot out of the turf,  
And the harebell shakes on the windy hill  
O the breath of the distant surf!

The hills look over on the South,  
And southward dreams the sea;  
And, with the sea breeze hand in hand,  
Came innocence and she.

Where with the gorse and raspberry  
Red for the gatherer springs,  
Two children did we stray and talk  
Wise, idle, childish things.

She listened with big-lipped surprise,  
Breast deep ‘mid flower and spine’;  
Her skin was like a grape, whose veins  
Run snow instead of wine.

She knew not those sweet words she spake,  
Nor knew her own sweet way;  
But there’s never a bird so sweet a song  
Thronged in whose throat that day.

Oh, there were flowers in Storrington  
On the turf and on the spray;  
But the sweetest flower on Sussex hills  
Was the Daisy-flower that day!

Her beauty smoothed earth’s furrowed face!  
She gave me tokens three:  
A look, a word of her winsome mouth,  
And a wild raspberry.

A berry red, a guileless look,  
A still word, – strings of sand!  
And yet they made my wild, wild heart  
Fly down to her little hand.

For, standing artless as the air,  
And candid as the skies,  
She took the berries with her hand,  
And the love with her sweet eyes.

The fairest things have fleetest end:  
Their scent survives their close,  
But the rose’s scent is bitterness  
To him that loved the rose!

She looked a little wistfully,  
Then went her sunshine way:  
The sea’s eye had a mist on it,  
And the leaves fell from the day.

She went her unremembering way,  
She went, and left in me  
The pang of all the partings gone,  
And partings yet to be.

She left me marvelling why the soul  
Was sad that she was glad;  
At all the sadness in the sweet,  
The sweetness in the sad.

Still, still I seemed to see her, still  
Look up with soft replies,  
And take the berries with her hand,  
And the love with her lovely eyes.

Nothing begins, and nothing ends,  
That is not paid with moan;  
For we are born in others’ pain,  
And perish in our own.

*Francis Thompson*

## FRIENDS' NEWS

Our programme of walks started very successfully on April 22nd when a party of 27 joined Trevor Povey for a fascinating tour of the old shipbuilding areas of Shoreham. Trevor's inimitable style gave us a real flavour of an important Sussex industry until its terminal decline from the mid-19th century when the demand for sailing ships dried up. We walked down the streets where they made the ropes and sails and identified some of the many taverns and beer houses where the thirsty workers would have spent much of their leisure time! Wouldn't it have been an amazing experience to have wandered along those sleepy streets some two centuries ago when they would have been a hive of bustling activity and human energy?

The Friends have organised a coach trip to the Greenwich Maritime Museum and Cutty Sark for Sunday, 1st July. The cost of the journey is £10 per person and tickets are available from Gina Wilmshurst (01903 892210), Top Table and Angelus Antiques in Storrington.

Admission at Greenwich is £10.50 (senior citizens free); to visit the Cutty Sark costs £3.50 (senior citizens £2.50).

It is hoped that the walks programme for the Summer months will still go ahead, despite the current closure of various footpaths due to the Foot-and-Mouth crisis. The guided walk at Ashurst on 12th July, for instance, will include an extended visit to the church if there are still restrictions on footpath access.

Our annual sale of bric-a-brac in the square at Storrington took place on Saturday, 19th May, when we raised over £200 for the Museum. In order to replenish our stocks, we would like to remind our worthy supporters that we are always happy to receive suitable items you may wish to donate. Please contact Gina on the number above.

And finally ... the Friends' Annual General Meeting will take place this year at 7.30pm on Thursday, 13th September at the Old School. We will be showing the film Tansy which was shot locally during the 1930s and depicts some fascinating scenes of long ago – there are even some sheep on the South Downs!

Sadly this will be for members only – but if you are not a member and would like to see it, then please come along and join (membership details below).

*Malcolm Linfield*

The Friends of Storrington & District Museum have been established to promote, assist and support the Museum through fund raising and social activities

The subscription is £5 per annum for individuals or £7 for family members (which covers a household of two adults and their dependent children under the age of 18 years)

If you would like an application form, please contact the Membership Secretary, Jean Robinson on 01903 743682, or pick one up at the Museum

### *Letter from Mr Geoff Goatcher, Cedar Tree Cottage, Rock Road, Washington RH20 3AH – 11.03.01.*

I was very interested to read the article on Fryern Park in the last issue of 'Times Past' and, especially, from an horticultural standpoint, about the mysterious white blossom on Christmas day.

As mentioned in the article, Fryern formerly had one of the great local gardens with a large collection of interesting trees and shrubs. In the 1930's there was tremendous rivalry between the gardens – and gardeners – of Parham, Gerston, Greyfriars, Fryern, and the Abbey at local Flower Shows.

I question whether, in fact, the white blossom was actually 'Blackthorn'? There is a form of Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) named 'Biflora' – the "Glastonbury Thorn" – which, at least in the south and west of England can produce its white flowers at Christmas.

The legend is that Joseph of Arimathea, whilst visiting Glastonbury at Christmas time, stuck his thorn staff in the ground, whereupon it burst into leaf and flower; and indeed, there was a very ancient tree of the species growing in the grounds of the Abbey until the mid 1880's.

If the bush was this type it could well have been in bloom on Christmas day; but the blooms are fragile, and if there was – as is likely – a frost, then the flowers would have disappeared and certainly would not have been visible the following evening. Moonlit nights in late December virtually always indicate sharp frost.

Well, it is something to argue about!