



Museum News

Steyning Museum Newsletter

June 2013

Museum Diary

- 28.09.13 Antiques Valuation Evening
Steyning Centre
8.00pm - 10.00pm
- 26.10.13 Autumn Coffee Morning
Penfold Hall
10.30 - 12.00
- 31.10.13 Children's Activity Day
At the Museum
11.00-12.30 & 2.30 - 4.00
£1 per session.

200 Club

April Draw:

- 1st prize = Pat Assender (£35)
2nd prize = Charles Harries (£25)
3rd prize = Elizabeth Homeyard (£15)

May Draw:

- 1st prize = Jean Sims (£35)
2nd prize = Mrs P Green (£25)
3rd prize = Wendy Moss (£15)

Paul Norris, in giving his report as chairman of the 200 Club at the AGM spoke of how successful the club had been in the years since it was formed. It was created to provide a source of income for the Museum, and to the end of December 2012, it has been able to pass over a total of £18,625.00 to Museum funds - a vital part of our income .

Spring Coffee Morning

from Gill Kille

It was a very welcome relief to have a nice warm morning, after such a cold, wet winter. There was even some sunshine most of the time – it felt like a bonus! 71 people attended the first coffee morning of the year encouraged by the

good weather, and enjoyed a very pleasant morning chatting with friends over coffee and biscuits.

The raffle and the stalls did well, especially the cake stall. Unfortunately, due to the hard winter we did not have as many plants and seedlings for sale on the plant stall, but overall we raised a net profit of £279.95 for the Museum – an excellent result.

Also on display was a selection of some new, fine bone china decorative mugs, which were for sale and had been kindly donated by Helen Bland, a Friend of the Museum. A selection of these rather special mugs will also be available to buy from the Museum's shop, prices starting from £5.50 upwards, so next time you visit the Museum – do have a look.

Our thanks for the success of the coffee morning go to all the cake makers, all the helpers on the day, to all those of you who very kindly donated items for the plant stall and the bric-a-brac stall – and finally, to those of you who supported us by coming along!

We have decided not to hold a summer garden coffee morning this year, mainly in view of the very busy time during the last year with several successful fund raising events and also to give Sarah Leigh some breathing space. We hope to resume the event next year. If anyone has, or knows someone who has, a suitably large garden in Steyning to cater for approximately 65 people at the end of July/beginning of August 2014 and doesn't mind holding the event indoors in case of rain – please leave a note for Gillian Kille, Social sub-committee, at

the Museum. All that we require is use of the garden and kitchen – we will provide everything else.

Antiques Valuation Evening

As our last antiques valuation event was a success, we are holding another one with Simon Langton from Denhams on Saturday 28th September in the Steyning Centre. The entry price of £5 will allow you to bring one or two items to be valued if you wish. Tickets will be on sale at the door or at the Museum from 1st September.

Family History Research

from Jacquie Buttriss

Two recent Family History queries to come to the Museum were set at the time of the Great War. Here is an account of one of them:

A recent enquiry was focussed on two Wiston families in the early 20th Century, sparked off by the purchase of a WW1 medal from Ebay, and the enquirer's subsequent discovery of the Museum's family history blog, on which he saw two photos of the pupils at Wiston and Buncton Parochial School at the turn of the century. In particular, he saw that there were several Meetens boys in these photos, so close in age that it had been impossible to name them with any degree of accuracy. The enquirer was a descendant of one of these Meetens boys.

He wrote that he had a similar problem in identifying which Meeten boy (they later dropped the 's') had married which of two sisters. Alfred and James Meeten, it seems, married Kate and May Message at the end of the Great War. But who married whom and when? All he knew was that his grandfather, Alfred Meeten (the recipient of the medal bought on Ebay) married a Message girl in 1918, but he could find no record of this online. However, he was surprised to discover that his great-uncle James Meeten also married a Message girl, also in 1918, both marriages in the last quarter of the year.

Is there any chance, he wondered, that there might have been a double wedding?

Could I help him solve the mystery? Fortunately, we do have a copy of the Wiston Parish Registers for that year in the Museum's archives, so a quick look-up showed that his suspicion was indeed correct. Alfred Meetens was badly wounded in the Great War and invalided out, or discharged as the parish register shows, whilst James was still a serving soldier at the time of his marriage. There were seven Meeten(s) brothers, all fighting in WW1, including Alfred, wounded, and two others (Thomas and Edward) killed, so this family, like many others, suffered their tragedies. How they must have rejoiced therefore at the double wedding of Alfred to Kate and James to May on 3rd October 1918, just five weeks before the end of the war!

AGM

The Management Committee for the next year was elected at the Annual General Meeting on 23rd March. The Committee is therefore:

Jacquie Buttriss (Chairman), Jackie Campbell (Vice Chairman), Chris Tod (Curator), Paul Norris (Treasurer) Helen Coutrouzas (Minutes Secretary), Sarah Leigh (Stewards), Tony Ketteman (Communications and Friends Secretary), Joan Denwood (Education), Muriel Wright (Shop Sales), Erica Gaylor (Publicity). As before, Gill Kille will be Chair of the Social Events sub-Committee supported by Iris Taylor, Pam Perry and Mariella Alexander.

End Piece

David Thompson has been steadily building a magnificent archive which is of invaluable help in researching Steyning's past. As Jacquie Buttriss knows, amongst the shelves of records can be found many interesting stories of Steyning families in the past.

For this month's end piece David has provided us with a story to be found in those records.

Tony Ketteman (Editor)

ANOTHER STEYNING SCANDAL

1813 was a bad year for Steyning Post Office!

Someone must have noticed that one or more letters that they had sent through Steyning Post Office, and which were supposed to have contained Bank Notes, did not, in fact do so.

It is perhaps to be assumed that, in the first instance at least, they made enquiries of Steyning Post Office itself, though it would appear that either they, or the Postmaster himself, then referred the matter to the General Post Office in London.

In 1813, the Postmaster in Steyning was a Mr William Steer who belonged to a family which had figured in the Registers of Steyning Parish Church since 1752 and when he came to die in 1830, the Register recorded that he, William Steer, Postmaster, had been buried on 30th October, 1830 at the age of 80. Even at this advanced age, he evidently died in office! In point of fact it is likely that, as mentioned below, he was actually about 77 years of age.

It seems likely that William had a good education. He was most probably the son of John Steer of Edburton and Sarah (née Moor of nearby Newtimber, married 1768) being baptised at Edburton on 23rd October 1774. One would certainly assume that to be a Postmaster it would be necessary to read and write fluently and to have a good grasp of mathematics, etc. and it so happened that William's schooldays would have coincided with the appointment of the Rev. Mr Charles Vaughan Baker who had in 1754 been instituted as Rector of Edburton and very probably first taught at, and subsequently became, Master of Steyning Grammar School from that date. There is therefore every likelihood that William Steer was sent to Steyning Grammar School under his auspices and received his education there.

William was married to Ann Read, a widow, in Steyning Parish Church on 29th May, 1787. She was to die in 1827, some three years before he did, the Register recording that she was buried on 29th September, 1827 at the age of 74, showing that she was three years younger than her husband.

Steyning Parish Registers show two surviving children of the marriage: Zaccheus Steer, baptized there on 6th November, 1789 and Sarah Steer, baptized there on 18th February, 1791.

Zaccheus was to succeed his father as Postmaster in 1830 on his father's death and, subsequently, as shown in the relevant Census Return, one of his daughters, Jane, became an Assistant to Mrs Mary Sone, his successor in the post.

But in 1813 Mr William Steer, then aged between, say, 60 or 63, was running the Post Office, no doubt assisted by his wife Ann, then aged 60. His son Zaccheus, then aged 24, was a tailor. It would be interesting to know if he had attended Steyning Grammar School or, if not, where he received the education required to subsequently become Postmaster.

William Steer's daughter, however, would appear to have gone to Brighton, possibly being employed in domestic service.

The next actual reference to Sarah, however, must have come as a shock to the people of Steyning when they read – or at least those who could do so - on page three of the Sussex Weekly Advertiser & Lewes and Brighthelmston Journal for Monday, 24th May, 1813, a piece under the sub-heading of " Brighton " news: –

"We regret to state that Miss S _____, an interesting young woman, was one day last week committed to Horsham Jail charged with taking Bank Notes from letters passing through the office of her father, the Postmaster, at Steyning"

"The Times" newspaper for the same date, also on page three, reported more fully that

"In consequence of Bank notes having been lost, at various times, from letters sent through the Post-office at Steyning, Mr Parkin, junior, of the General Post-office, accompanied by a Bow-street officer, went down to Brighton last week, and detected the offender, who proved to be the daughter of the Post-master at Steyning, in whose possession stolen notes to the value of £15 were found. She confessed her guilt, and was committed to Horsham Gaol. She is only 20 years of age, and of a most prepossessing appearance"

One wonders who Mr Parkin, junior, was and if any Post-office archives – or any such of the Bow-street Runners - might reveal anything.

The Magistrates Court for Brighton was then held at Lewes and what the two above-mentioned newspapers were reporting was evidently the proceedings before the Magistrates in Petty or Quarter-Sessions at which Sarah Steer was remanded in custody at Horsham Gaol to await trial at the Lewes Assizes which, that year, were held on Friday, 13th August, 1813.

It is also worthy of note that, at a trial at the Old Bailey in London in June that year the Sussex Weekly Advertiser, etc. had reported that a certain William Smith had, for feloniously secreting a Post-office letter containing a large, though unspecified, amount of money, been sentenced to death. It must, therefore have been with very considerable trepidation that Sarah Steer would have found herself in the Dock before the Assize Judge, Jury and surrounding populace of lawyers, notables and common people at Lewes Assize Court that Friday, 13th August, 1813 charged with stealing the substantial sum of £15, the current value of which is understood to be about £500

Nevertheless, the official Court Register records that Sarah Steer was found "*Not Guilty*"

The Sussex Weekly Advertiser, etc., reported briefly on all the many cases which came before the Assize Court that day. When it came to Sarah it said:-

*"Sarah Steer, 21, for feloniously stealing sundry bank-notes from letters entrusted to her care – at the Post-office, Steyning – **Acquitted.***

It then went on –

"The above unfortunate girl, during her trial, fainted several times, and the Court and auditory felt much for the distressed situation of her father and mother who were the principal witnesses against her.

The Judge, highly to his honour, exercised much humanity towards the prisoner; and from His Lordship's observations the Jury must have been satisfied that there could be no necessity for her conviction."

Sarah and her parents must have been tremendously relieved. and I am inclined to the view that the above-mentioned phrase in the Sussex Weekly Advertiser for 24th May, 1813, that she was "an interesting young woman" might well mean that she was in "an interesting condition", that is to say that she was pregnant.

This, and the fact reported in The Times that she was "of a most prepossessing appearance" would appear to have so moved the Judge (a man!) as to convince the Jury (all men!) to bring in a Not Guilty verdict, notwithstanding that she would appear to have taken a large sum of money, having, according to the earlier report in The Times to have been found to be in possession of the Bank-notes and having made a confession!

We next hear of Sarah when, on 12th October, 1814, after the reading of Banns, she was married to a certain John Barratt, at St George's Church, Hanover Square, London. Both bride and groom signed the Register as did the witnesses, William Steer and Ann Steer.

Towards the end of his life William Steer, Sarah's father, made his will dated 2nd February 1825, a copy of which is kept in the Chichester Diocesan Registry at the West Sussex Record Office. Basically he left everything to his wife, Ann, for life, including two freehold properties in Brighton, one in Dorset Place and one in New Street, formerly Bond Street. On his wife's death the house in Dorset Place was to go to his son, Zaccheus and the house in Bond Street was to go to his daughter, Sarah, wife of John Barratt, a whitesmith. In the event, however, his wife, Ann, predeceased him and was buried in Steyning Churchyard on 29th September, 1827.

Meanwhile, by a codicil dated 8th September, 18.. the outright gift of the house to Sarah was revoked and substituted by a trust whereby the Trustees were to hold the house in trust for Sarah independently of any husband. No further trace of John Barratt has been found but Sarah Barratt, born in Steyning in 1791, appears in the 1851 Census of Brighton as a widow, living on her own in a room or rooms at 31, Cumberland Place, Brighton, her age being 61 and her occupation being Needlewoman.

William Steer was buried in Steyning Churchyard on 3rd October, 1830, said to be aged 80, and his Will and codicil also refer to another daughter, Elizabeth, the wife of Edward Diplock who may, perhaps have been the daughter of William Steer by an earlier marriage as he was about thirty-seven when he married Anne Read, who had certainly been married before and had had two children, by her first husband, namely James Read and Ellis Read.

Enquiries continue!

David Thompson
11.12.12