



MUSEUM NEWS

Steyping Museum Newsletter

October 2009

Museum Diary

- 24.10.09 Autumn Coffee Morning
Penfold Hall
10.30 - 12.00
- 18.12.09 Joint Christmas Social
Steyping Centre
7.00 for 7.30pm
- 20.03.10 AGM
Penfold Hall
2.30pm
- 17.04.10 Spring coffee Morning
Penfold Hall
10.30 - 12.00

Autumn Coffee Morning

As you will notice from the diary above, the next coffee morning will be on 24th October, to be held in the Penfold Hall as usual. There will be stalls for cakes and bric-a-brac, so all contributions to these will be most welcome. Coffee mornings are our main fund raiser so please come along and bring your friends.

200 Club

June Draw:

- 1st prize = Joyce Sleight (£35)
2nd prize = Mrs PC Green (£25)
3rd prize = Mrs C Holmes (£15)

July Draw:

- 1st prize = John Manning (£35)
2nd prize = Ian Copping (£25)
3rd prize = Margaret Blundell (£15)

August Draw:

- 1st prize = Peter Burton (£35)
2nd prize = Alistair Canning (£25)
3rd prize = Michael Drew (£15)

September Draw:

- 1st prize = Vernon Roper (£35)
2nd prize = Valerie Bullen (£25)
3rd prize = Jenny Toomey (£15)

From the new Chairman of the Museum

The editor has kindly given me space to introduce myself as the new chairman of the Museum Management Committee. My name is Jacquie Buttriss. I have been on the museum committee for 4 years and have been a steward since I first moved to Steyping 7 years ago. I feel privileged to have succeeded Sarah Leigh as chairman and look forward to getting to know you all better over the next few months. As you know, Sarah has done sterling work as the chairman over the past four, eventful years, during which time she has overseen the opening of the extension and the celebration of the Museum's 25th anniversary. In addition to these high points and all her responsibilities, Sarah has efficiently maintained the stewards' rota, which she continues to do, and has introduced several new stewards to our ranks. I would like to thank her very much for all her enthusiasm, dedication and hard work. Sarah is a hard act to follow, so I shall be grateful for your support.

Country Fair

The Museum had a very successful day with the stall at the Country Fair at the end of May, with 61 people trying the game. The Museum itself attracted 210 visitors and 32 of them completed the second part of the game where they had to use clues around the Museum to guess the name we had given to Steyping Man. One or two answers were wild guesses rather than being the result of detective work, but at least they resulted in some amusing efforts such as "Bagpuss".

Newspaper Clippings

We have been collecting clippings from the local press for many years. Now they are slowly being indexed, the next step is to copy the A3 sized pages onto the computer. First, they have to be copied and reduced to A4 size. The Museum copier doesn't handle A3, but that at the Community Centre does, and we are

allowed to use their machine. We are looking for someone willing to do that copying. Some simple training would be available.

If you would be willing to do this for the Museum, please leave a note for me at the Museum with your name and phone number.

Education Detectives

One of the chief functions of the Museum is to offer educational opportunities to schools. Joan Denwood takes the lead in organising our educational work, with help from several other Museum volunteers. She has provided below a description of an event staged in the Spring which shows the sort of thing we can provide.

23 Year 4 children (aged 9) from 5 local Primary Schools visited our Museum for the day on Monday 15th June. They came to learn many skills to help them become history detectives, to meet children from other schools and to have fun.

We (Chris Tod, Jacque Buttriss, Joan Denwood) planned 5 very different activities for the children to do. We are extremely grateful to Jill Kemp, Glenda Jaggard and Sally Rowe who helped to lead activities.

The children were aiming to complete a History Detectives Steyning Museum Passport by collecting stickers. They achieved a sticker on completion of an activity.

After a couple of getting to know each other and getting to know the museum quizzes, the children started the activities.

Activity one was using archaeological skills to discover objects, record their findings and understand what the findings might tell us about people from the past. This included getting covered in sawdust, taking measurements and asking and answering questions. The children loved it and you never know, one or two might become archaeologists of the future.

Activity two was deciphering old documents, where they had to put on white gloves to handle them. They learnt about letters and symbols used, different ways of saying things, different spellings, the problem when there is a lack of punctuation and different words or names for things. The children felt very special and important in their white gloves. They realised that reading old documents required clever detective work.

Activity three involved the children in learning from old pictures. They had to describe what they could see, looking at what was happening, people, clothes, actions, objects and then try to deduce! Using magnifying glasses and powers of deduction, it was the stuff of Sherlock Holmes.

Activity four was creating a day in the past by using 3 museum displays – Victorian Steyning, Education and Steyning Station. The children then wrote diary entries, using their imaginations and the information they had learnt. Many were inspired to write extensively. Getting up early to do domestic chores, getting the cane in school and smelly steam trains obviously struck a chord.

Activity five was separating fact from opinion based on the story of St. Cuthman. This included visiting the St. Cuthman statue and his window in our local church. Lively and varied discussions then took place, as well as dressing up and acting out the story, complete with wheelbarrow.

The children all successfully completed their passports which they then took home along with their work. The feedback from the children was that they all had a really enjoyable time and had learnt a lot, history detectives every one!

Christmas Social

Following the great success of the previous Christmas socials, The Steyning Society and the Museum are again joining forces for this year's event on Friday 18th December. Peter Harris is again organising ticket sales, and I have enclosed with this newsletter an invitation and a reply form to enclose with your cheque. The completed form and cheque should be sent to Peter Harris.

The Steyning Poem

The end piece this month is about a poem that may be familiar to you. It was written in the First World War and describes the author's fond memory of the lane leading from Steyning to Chanctonbury Ring (Mouse Lane). The poem was inscribed on a stone tablet placed in that lane to commemorate the Millennium. Having been damaged by a lorry, the stone was replaced and the damaged original is mounted on the wall by the door of the Museum.

In May you may have noticed a piece in the local press when the Museum was pleased to receive the original manuscript of the poem.

There is, however, a mystery, and Lynda Denyer has provided our end piece this month with an article which raises some questions about how and when the poem came to be written.

Tony Kettelman (Editor)

The Steyning Poem – ‘Chance Memory’ or ‘From Steyning to the Ring’

This poem has haunted many people since it was first printed by the Daily News in June 1916. The name of the poet was given as Philip Johnson. The fate of this man, who turned to poetry half an hour before 'going over the top' to face the guns of World War I, was unknown for over 50 years. Did he survive?

The poem appears in several war poetry anthologies and accounts of life in the trenches. The author Ernest Raymond (1888-1974) was one of many touched deeply by the Steyning poem. In his autobiography published in 1970, *Good Morning, Good People*, he revealed a remarkable piece of information. The passage is worth quoting in full:

In 1916, having recently escaped from the mud and filth of Gallipoli, I was with my brigade in the Sinai Desert, where we were slowly laying a railway through the sands towards Gaza, making straight in the desert a highway to Jerusalem. And one day I chance upon an old tattered copy of the Daily News and read in it a brief poem, whose final couplet seemed to me - I have said this in articles and on platforms and in private talks for over half a century - to capture an English soldier's native patriotism with simpler or more perfect words than any other lines in that luxuriant yield of poetry which sprang from the First World War. Ever a lover of the bare, sweeping downs of Sussex which find their crown in the ring of noble trees on Chanctonbury, I was caught, I suppose, by the title *From Steyning to the Ring*. I read the poem once - twice or thrice maybe - and have been word-perfect in it ever since. It was printed over the name 'Philip Johnson', and never from that day in 1916 till two mornings ago, in 1969, fifty-three years later, have I known who 'Philip Johnson' was, or heard of him.

I know now. The writer of the poem was a young officer in the 5th Battalion, Yorkshire Regiment serving in France, and this was his poem.

I can't forget the lane that goes from Steyning to the Ring
In summer time, and on the downs how larks and linnets sing
High in the sun. The wind comes off the sea, and oh, the air!
I never knew till now that life in old days was so fair.
But now I know it in this filthy rat-infested ditch,
Where every shell must kill or spare, and God alone knows which.
And I am made a beast of prey, and this trench is my lair -
My God, I never knew till now that those days were so fair,
And we assault in half-an-hour, and it's a silly thing:
I can't forget the lane that goes from Steyning to the Ring.

I don't know how many times I've walked up that lane quoting this last couplet to those walking with me, or how often I have mentioned on platforms and in articles the whole magical little poem by an author unknown.

And two days ago there comes a letter from a Miss Purvis, saying,

Since the death of my brother, Canon J.S. Purvis, in December I have been searching the family news cuttings albums to find an article which you wrote in the Sunday Times of 22nd May 1927. My mother preserved our copy at the time for she knew the pen name Philip Johnson was that of her elder son John Stanley. Through the years I have often thought that I should like to reveal to you the real name of the author who wrote this poem.

The words were sent without my brother's knowledge to the Press by his friend, a Quaker doctor, serving with the Red Cross. Please forgive me if I have bored you with these reminiscences but I have always wanted to uncover the anonymity of my noble brother 'Philip Johnson' and to thank you for the words in your article which gave so much pleasure to my mother and to me.

So 'Philip Johnson' was really John Stanley Purvis who became Canon Purvis of York and internationally famous for his versions of the York mystery plays. He died last year, 1968, and at his Memorial Service in York Minster the Dean said, 'We are met to give thanks to God for the life and work of John Stanley Purvis, Canon of the Cathedral Church, a Yorkshireman whose faithful Christian witness and devoted scholarship have enriched the hearts and minds of many in this County and beyond it.'

The version of the poem given by Ernest Raymond varies a little from the one which we now know is the author's original, dated December 2, 1915. Remarkably, Steyning Museum has acquired the hand written and dated original. It shows, in particular, the final line as "I can't forget the narrow lane to Chanctonbury Ring."

The Ernest Raymond version was carved into Yorkshire stone and mounted in that narrow Steyning lane, Mouse Lane, in the year 2000. The unveiling ceremony took place on Saturday, December 2nd, exactly 85 years after John Stanley Purvis wrote it. Councillor George Cockman said in a booklet produced for the event:

I have a sense that this stone will become a landmark, held in affection by local people and visitors alike. Like John Purvis who thankfully was able to walk this lane before and after the war, the downs, and Chanctonbury in particular, continue to attract and delight hundreds of people every year. Many, I believe, will take the ancient driftway down through the beech woods to find this stone at its end, and finding it will be enriched by the tradition of affection for downs, lane and town which John Purvis so memorably captured on that battlefield. And they will be glad that in the millennium year, we played our part in enshrining that tradition by setting this stone and telling its story.

In 2006, a lorry backed into the stone and split it in two. The local sponsors were concerned and generous enough to have a new one carved and mounted in the same spot. The cracked version was mounted next to the entrance of Steyning Museum, so there are now two stones commemorating the Steyning poem.

There is another poem by 'Philip Johnson' or 'Johnstone'. It was first published in the Nation magazine in February, 1918, eight months before the war ended. There is still doubt that High Wood is the work of J.S. Purvis. There is circumstantial evidence, however. The initials PJ are, of course, the reverse of JP for John Purvis. He was literally John's son or Johnson, since his father's name was John Bowlst Purvis. Also, the records of the 5th Battalion Yorkshire Regiment show that 2/Lt J.S. Purvis was injured on September 15, 1916 during the final assault on High Wood. A regimental history, *The Green Howards in the Great War*, by Colonel H.C. Wylly, originally published in 1926, gave an account of this and concluded:

The 5th Battalion The Green Howards with the 4th, reached its objectives and clung to it under a very heavy shelling, but when relieved early on the morning of the 19th by a brigade of the 23rd Division and withdrawn into divisional reserve, the 5th had had four officers and forty-eight other ranks killed, eleven officers and one hundred and sixty-two NCOs and men wounded and twenty-seven men missing - a total of two hundred and fifty-two casualties.

The names of the officer casualties are: killed, Lt-Col J. Mortimer, CMG, Capt F. Woodcock, 2/Lts G.S. Phillips and W.R. Lowson; while the wounded were Capt H. Brown, DSO, MC, Lts E.M. Robson and G. Harker, 2/Lts P.H. Sykes, A.G. Winterbottom, C. Martin, C.R. Hurworth, C.H. Dell, W.H. Game, W. Rennison and J.S. Purvis.

High Wood

Ladies and gentlemen, this is High Wood,
Called by the French, Bois des Fourneaux,
The famous spot which in Nineteen-Sixteen,
July, August and September was the scene
Of long and bitterly contested strife,
By reason of its High commanding site.
Observe the effect of shell-fire in the trees
Standing and fallen; here is wire; this trench
For months inhabited, twelve times changed hands;
(They soon fall in), used later as a grave.
It has been said on good authority
That in the fighting for this patch of wood
Were killed somewhere above eight thousand men,
Of whom the greater part were buried here,
This mound on which you stand being...

Madame, please,

You are requested kindly not to touch
Or take away the Company's property
As souvenirs; you'll find we have on sale
A large variety, all guaranteed.
As I was saying, all is as it was,
This is an unknown British officer,
The tunic having lately rotted off.
Please follow me - this way...

the path, sir, please,

The ground which was secured at great expense
The Company keeps absolutely untouched,
And in that dug-out (genuine) we provide
Refreshments at a reasonable rate.
You are requested not to leave about
Paper, or ginger-beer bottles, or orange-peel,
There are waste-paper baskets at the gate.

The Poets of World War I at: www.langdale-associates.com says of the High Wood poem:

In fact, Purvis' inspired prediction became reality sooner than he might have envisaged: soon after the war, High Wood in Flanders Fields became one of the first places to be visited by tourists. This macabre place has never been totally cleared of bodies and the debris of war. Estimates suggest that the ground contains the remains of some 8,000 British and German soldiers who were killed in action here. Even today, parts of the wood still conceal live ammunition and it is unsafe to stray from the paths.

The Cranleigh School archivist copied for Steyning Museum a signed sketch by John Stanley Purvis of Martinpuich, in the same locality as High Wood. The date on the sketch is September 15, 1916, the very same date for which his regiment recorded that he was a casualty at High Wood.

John Stanley Purvis returned to the Western Front after his injury at High Wood. He was promoted to Lieutenant, having seen his brother George killed in action, and relinquished his commission on account of ill-health the day after Armistice Day. Lieutenant Purvis was fortunate to have survived the war. He faced the greatest dangers from March 1916, the date given by the London Gazette when he became a newly assigned Second Lieutenant. This is commonly said to have been the rank least likely to survive.

An unsolved mystery surrounds the Steyning poem. J.S. Purvis appears to have reached the Western Front after the date on which he wrote it. He was, it seems, still a teacher at Cranleigh School, Surrey and a Second Lieutenant for the Junior Division of the Officer Training Corps. The record of Purvis' service medals confirms that he was not in active service in December 1915, since he did not receive the 1914-15 Star. This medal was issued to everyone who saw service in a theatre of war between 5th August 1914 and 31st December 1915. In addition, his school says that he left Cranleigh "in December 1915". The story is still being researched. In any case, though, 'Chance Memory' has rightly taken its place alongside the work of Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and others still known as the War Poets.

Purvis returned to Cranleigh School after the war. His job as a teacher of history was still there for him. He had joined the school in September, 1913 after studying at St. Catharine's College, Cambridge. There is even today a thriving Purvis Society at Cranleigh. He had gained his MA in Classics and History and, pursuing a lifelong enthusiasm for his subject, he became an active member and Honorary Archivist of the Surrey Archaeological Society. The Cranleigh School archive records that Purvis' hobbies included sketching and water colour painting, and he was a keen horseman. This may provide a further clue as to why he adopted the pen name Philip, originally a Greek name meaning 'lover of horses'.

The school teacher and amateur historian had a further career in mind, however. He was ordained as a priest in 1933. Leaving Cranleigh in 1938, he returned to his native Yorkshire where his career in the Church soon presented him with marvellous opportunities for an historian. He was appointed as the Archivist to the Archbishop and Diocese of York in 1939 and rose to become a Canon of York Minster. Here he was the founder and first Director of the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, entrusted to collect together and catalogue the vast, chaotic archives of the diocese. The Yorkshire Post of May 11th, 2007 reported that these two million documents were about to be placed on an online database:

Basic indexes were created by the institute's former head, Canon John Purvis, but much of his work was done as he leafed through papers high up on top of York Minster while he was on fire-watch duty during World War Two - making his efforts necessarily incomplete.

This was a very different experience of war for the author of the Steyning poem. He published a large quantity of historical research. Much of this is recorded by the Yorkshire Archaeological Society, of which he became President. He was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and of the Royal Historical Society. But John Stanley Purvis is best remembered for his invaluable translation of the York Mystery Plays, for which he won the OBE in 1958.

Canon Purvis was living with his sister Hilda when he died on 20th December, 1968 aged 78. She passed his vast collection of personal papers to those who had a special interest in his work. Her contact with Ernest Raymond identified the author of the Steyning poem for posterity. Ultimately, this contact also enabled Steyning Museum to gain the original hand-written version thanks to the kindness of Peter Raymond, Ernest's son.

Lynda Denyer