

WOODBURY LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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The Discovery of lace in the school at Woodbury Salterton

In April 2002, whilst searching for material for the Society's Jubilee Exhibition, Gill Selley found a calico bag amongst old photographs and programmes in Woodbury Salterton School. The bag had 19th century writing on the front and within appeared to have pieces of material and paper with pieces of lace affixed to them. The bag was taken to Carol McFadzean, an experienced lacemaker very knowledgeable about the history of lace, who identified the bag as that of a lace dealer comprising about 700 different samples of Devon trolley lace. The samples are all priced by the yard and some have the initials or names of those women making that pattern of lace. Trolley lace was not made after the middle of the 19th century, due to the speed and cheapness with which factories could produce it, and there are no other samples in Devon extant, as far as is known. This unique collection, which has caused considerable excitement internationally amongst lacemakers, will be sent, with the permission of the Governors of Woodbury Salterton School, to a museum for conservation and display. Additionally the bag held a satin handkerchief, 18 ins square, edged with metallic trolley lace, with a small flower in one corner and a crown with a pearl in the opposite one, both in Honiton lace, whilst in the middle is written in Honiton lace

*Her Most Gracious Majesty
Queen Victoria
With the humble gratitude
of the poor Lacemakers of
Woodbury Salterton*

A further larger satin piece has the inscription

*Her Most Gracious Majesty
With the humble hope of future orders*

Beneath the inscription this piece has a selection of lace samples attached and their price per yard.

In January 1841 *The Times* newspaper reported that "Her Majesty the Queen had graciously commanded a further order of lace from the destitute lacemakers of Woodbury Salterton in Devon. Her Majesty has also condescended to receive from them a lace frock for the Princess Royal and has in return sent a munificent present to the lacemakers".

Gill and Carol are researching all aspects of this discovery and hope to publish the results in a couple of years.

The site of Fairfield House

In 1830 a cob and thatch house, with pleasure gardens and greenhouses, was erected on the ancient site called Culvery Field and named Fairfield House. In the 1930's this cob dwelling was pulled down and the present house was built. Culvery was the medieval word for dovecotes and it is surmised that on this land the Lord of the Manor, resident in Woodbury from at least 1200 to 1360, kept his doves. Only the lord of the manor was allowed to keep doves so this piece of ground can be identified as being part of the Manor House estate in the medieval period. Tragically the whole site is being legally vandalised for the aggrandisement of developers this autumn, and any vestige of its medieval days has been bulldozed into eternity. It appears that three large suburban houses will be built there, after the shrubs and several of the trees have been removed, to look down on our beautiful old church like pretentious social climbers

Burgage Plots

Another part of our parish heritage also at risk from developers is the orchard of the Priory, one of the burgage plots off the Village Street. Here again a large suburban house is proposed in addition to the two to be constructed in the woodland between Stabbacks and the Pollybrook at the edge of the Golden Heart. Unfortunately the history of a village and the wishes of its residents are not paramount and developers appear to have all the cards stacked in their favour! Let us hope the other burgage plots will be safe.

The Snell Giants

In 1858 Sophia Elizabeth Snell the granddaughter of Joseph Tucker of Heathfield Farm in Woodbury Salterton married her cousin William Snell Pope from Crediton. In 1870 they set sail from Plymouth for Australia, dropping Pope from their name, and set up a bakery in Foster (Stockyard Creek) where William also became the local bandmaster. He was obviously a showman and his abilities came to the fore when he realised that his two daughters and son were rather large! Anna, aged 9, weighed 15 st 2 lbs, Tom, aged 11, was 16 st 4 lbs and Clara, aged 15, weighed in at 29 st 5 lbs. William decided to exhibit them as curiosities and earned a lot of money taking them around Australia. In 1898 the "giants" were taken on a tour in which they were exhibited in England, Europe and America. Clara, now aged 24, weighed 36 stone, and measured 78 inches around the waist, 26 inches around each calf and 22 inches around the arm; Tom, aged 20, weighed 19 stone and measured 48 inches around the chest; Anna, aged 18, weighed 24 stone. When Tom reached his 21st birthday he refused to be taken around as a curiosity any more and so the exhibiting was ended. He married in 1912, made a precarious living as a small farmer, and raised a family of four, of whom Jim, the eldest son, became a farmer 100 miles north of Melbourne. Jim has now semi-retired and has written a history of his strange family. Eighteen months ago he wrote to me asking for some historical details about the Tucker family of Heathfield which I was able to send him. I arranged to meet him when I was staying in Melbourne last December and found him (and his wife) to be very friendly and, though fairly tall, certainly not of gigantic proportions! (Gill Selley)

Log books For Woodbury and Woodbury Salterton schools

The log books for Woodbury School, dating from 1863, are in the Devon Record Office and those for Woodbury Salterton School, dating from 1866 are kept at that school. The entries are extremely interesting and amusing. The Woodbury Salterton log is very informative for the period of WW2, whilst the early Woodbury ones cover the schools at The Beals and Church Stile as well as the early days of the present school. The epidemics of measles, chickenpox and whooping cough are all documented as well as incidences of bad behaviour amongst the children. In 1867 Henry Salter of Woodbury Salterton was reported as being sick in school, the effect of eating too many plums! In 1868 Henry Salter was punished for biting George Smales. In early March 1868 the schoolmaster of Broadmead School at Church Stile had an accident with a gun and died two weeks later, his wife having to run the school in the meanwhile. In 1868 the children at Woodbury Salterton were given a half-holiday to have a game of cricket, which they greatly enjoyed! All the reasons why children were kept away from school are also recorded, including Albert Cain, in 1870, for "keeping birds" i.e. watching the cornfield to keep the rooks and pigeons from picking out the grain.

Programme of meetings for 2003

- 6 Feb AGM followed by a Social Evening with refreshments
- 6 Mar "The Coming of the Steam Railway and the Electric Telegraph" - an illustrated talk by Dr Michael Pope
- 1 May "Pre-Victorian Coinage found in the Parish of Woodbury" - an illustrated talk by Nigel Tucker
- 3 Jul An historical visit — to be arranged
- 4 Sep "Views, buildings and people of Woodbury Parish in the last 150 Years" - a guided computerised tour of the picture archive of the parish by Roger Stokes
- 6 Nov "The Vicars Choral of Exeter Cathedral and Their College" - an illustrated talk by John Allan (Curator of Antiquities at the Royal Albert Museum in Exeter)