

The Diaries of Charlotte Grove / Diary Notes / People & Families

WILSON

WILSON - In 1831, when “Little Mary” GROVE, the surviving child of Thomas & Elizabeth (nee HILL) of Ferne, attained the age of six, a governess is employed to look after her. For some ten years “Miss WILSON” is frequently mentioned in the diaries. For example, during the year 1834 her name occurs within some 47 entries. With never once a reference to a Christian name, Miss Wilson appears beyond reproach regarding the responsibilities towards her single charge, Mary, and the Grove family generally. She is reliable, trustworthy and dutiful, accompanying members of the family to church on Sundays, with only an occasional absence - almost certainly explained by a susceptibility to “sick headaches”.

It is not until the 1841 census, or in 1842, when she marries the Revd. Joseph GRISDALE, that we are able to deduce Miss Wilson’s true identity. She is Eliza, daughter of Robert & Eliza Wilson of Portsea. Richard DOWNES strangely declines to marry the couple and the ceremony is performed at Donhead St Andrew church by Charlotte’s brother, Charles Henry Grove.

After their marriage, Revd. Joseph Grisdale and Eliza move to Warwickshire, where Joseph takes a clerical position at Burton Hastings. The couple’s first child is born here in 1843 and they name her Mary, after her God-mother, Little Mary Grove, of Ferne.

Joseph and Eliza both died in Norwich, Eliza in 1889 and Joseph in 1893, leaving a will.

See also GRISDALE

Eliza Wilson was baptized at Portsea in 1810. She had a younger sister, Margaret Ann (bpt. Portsea, 1820) who also appears in the diaries. Margaret was employed as governess to the children of Dr. John Grove, of the Cathedral Close, Salisbury. According to parish records, the two girls are among some nine or ten children of Robert Wilson and Eliza HEPBURN, who married at Portsea in 1806. Both are described as “over 21”. The marriage licence describes Robert as a widower and a “Gent”. Other records tell us Robert was in the army and his daughter Eliza’s marriage certificate confirms this, describing her father as a soldier, although of unspecified rank.

Robert Wilson, a lieutenant in the 27th Foot Regiment (The Enniskillens), later of the 8th Veteran Battalion, and the Town-Adjutant of Portsmouth, died of cholera at Enniskillen in 1825. He was briefly imprisoned for debt in the Fleet Prison, London, during 1817 and his early death at age 40 directly contributed to his widow Eliza and her young family finding themselves in poverty. On the 21st November, 1825, a

notice appeared in the Hampshire Telegraph, appealing for charitable subscriptions to help the Wilson family. The youngest child, Edward Hornby Wilson, born 1824, is described as “Imbecile from Birth” in both the census and other records, and was sadly destined to spend most of his life within the confines of an asylum.

Although the fate of some of the other children is unclear, Eliza (and almost certainly later, her younger sister Margaret Ann) attended The Adult Orphan’s Institution, St Andrew’s Place, London. This was founded “for the relief and education of the friendless and orphan daughters of clergymen of the established church, and of military and naval officers”. Charlotte alludes to this in her diary entry dated Monday, 25th April, 1831:

“We walked in Hyde Park - then accompanied our Aunt to the British Institution [Art Gallery]. Bessy wrote about a Governess for Mary from the Adult Institution”.

Miss Eliza Wilson makes her first appearance at Ferne later that year, in Charlotte’s diary entry dated 8th September.

Although this explains the two Wilson girls’ education - an obvious requirement of their respective positions as governesses - a clue to their social status is provided by the appearance an aunt, a “Mrs Hepburn”, during the period 1839-1841. She is Sarah Hepburn, the girls’ unmarried maternal aunt, born ca 1784. The “Mrs” is obviously a courtesy title.

Mrs Hepburn features in Charlotte’s social set within several diary entries, both in Salisbury - sometimes at Dr. John Grove’s house in the Close - and also at Ferne. On Friday, 28th May Charlotte reports, *“We went to Dr. Grove’s. Called on Mrs Hepburn. She is going to leave Salisbury”*. According to the 1841 census, taken on 6th June, she is still in Salisbury, described as Sarah Hepburn, living in New Street, St Thomas. She re-appears again in diary entries dated Saturday 19th June, Sunday 20th of the same month and then finally on Friday 25th, when Charlotte tells us, *“M^{rs} Hepburn’s old Aunt is dead & has left her £50 a year”*. (Note: I have tried in vain to discover the identity of the “old aunt”. Her will might provide further clues about the Hepburn and / or SYDENHAM families. See below)

The 1841 census provides scant information, but informs us Sarah Hepburn is of independent means, aged “55” and was born in Wiltshire. There is one other member in the household, an Elizabeth PEARCE, a servant aged 21, also born Wiltshire.

Sarah was baptized at Blandford Forum, Dorset, on 16th May, 1784, the daughter of John Hepburn and Elizabeth Sydenham (see below).

Margaret Ann Wilson married Henry Lyster STEEL at St Pancras, London, in 1844. Henry, the son of Henry and Emily Steel, was born in 1814 (New Brunswick) and baptized at Botley, Hampshire, in 1818. The couple emigrated to Canada with Margaret’s aunt, Sarah Hepburn, in 1845. Very soon afterwards Henry and Margaret emigrated to Australia and at about this time they had a baby girl, Emily Margaret, born either in Canada, en route to Australia or in Australia itself. Newspaper notices report the death of the girl’s mother, Margaret Ann Steel, on 4th April, 1853, at Glenmona, near Burn Bank, Victoria, “in the 33rd year of her age”. Much later, there is notice of the marriage between Henry & Margaret's only daughter, Emily Margaret, on 30th November 1877 at St Paul's, Redfern, Sydney, to John (Assistant

Light-house keeper), only son of Capt. John SKELTON, of Green cape, New South Wales (Light-house keeper).

Emily is described as the “Great grand-daughter of John HEPBURN, Earl of Bothwell, late Captain of HM 42nd Regiment”.

The Earls of Bothwell originate in Scotland. James Hepburn (1534-1578), 1st Duke of Orkney and 4th Earl of Bothwell, is best known for his association with, abduction of and marriage to Mary, Queen of Scots. James was the chief suspect in the murder of James VI’s father, Henry Sturt, Lord Darnley. He was maternal uncle to Francis Stewart (1562-1612), who became the 5th Earl Bothwell. With no legitimate male heirs, the title effectively died out.

John Hepburn, grandfather of Miss Wilson, was born ca 1746. He became a Lieutenant, later Captain in the 21st Foot Regiment and a member of the Military Knights of Windsor. He is to be found in several notices regarding military appointments and promotions within publications such as the Bath Chronicle, the London Gazette and the Hampshire Telegraph. The Aberdeen Journal, dated 14th May 1806, gives notice of the marriage of his daughter Eliza to Lieut. Wilson, at Portsmouth, where John is described as Captain Hepburn, of the Royal Veteran Battalion. Hepburn is a Scottish name, of course, and this suggests there are probably still Scottish family connections.

John married Elizabeth Sydenham, of unknown ancestry, at Richmond, in 1783. It is most probably Elizabeth’s signature, as Elizabeth Hepburn, which bears witness to her daughter Eliza’s marriage in 1806. Apart from known children - Sarah (b. 1784) and Eliza (b. probably 1785) - the couple had another girl, Emily, probably born around 1791. There is a baptism for “Emilia Hepburn” with parents John and Elizabeth, at Melcombe Regis on 24th July of that year.

There are very strong connections between the Hepburn and Steel families and to both families and Canada. Colonel Thomas Steel, also a member of the Military Knights of Windsor and grandfather of Henry Lyster Steel, served in Canada. His son, Captain Henry Steel, also served in Canada and married Emily Hepburn, sister of Eliza. Their son, Henry Lyster Steel, who was born in New Brunswick, married his first cousin, Margaret Ann Hepburn.

Henry and Emily Steel had earlier emigrated to Australia, around 1823. Henry’s brother, Watson Augustus Steel (1789-1876), youngest of the four sons of Thomas Steel, arrived with his wife in 1829. After Margaret Ann Steel’s death in 1853, Henry Lyster Steel married his first cousin, Isabella May Steel (1819-1895), daughter of Watson Augustus.

In 1822, the Oxford Journal and the Scots Magazine both report the death of Late-Captain John Hepburn, Esquire, age 76, at Portsea.