

DR. WILLIAM HENEAGE LEGGE

by

Rosamond Pritchard & John Bleach

Dr. Legge settled in Ringmer in 1887 when he was in his late twenties and remained here until he died at the age of 53 on 6 March 1911. He was of a Derbyshire family, his father being Dr. William Legge of Derby, and was one of four boys - one became a barrister, one a clergyman and one an artist, while William followed his father by becoming a doctor, in which capacity he served the inhabitants of Ringmer for a quarter of a century. He had also at least one sister who survived to adulthood. His interest in local history may reflect another family influence for his grandfather, the Rev. William Legge, is described in one of Dr. Legge's obituaries as being an historian, of Fakenham, Norfolk.

There are people living in Ringmer who still remember him. One in particular, Miss Ethel Paris, lived very close to him when he and his family occupied 'The Lynchetts' on the Lewes Road. She recalls that Mrs. Legge died young (she died c.1901), leaving the doctor with five children, a boy called Dormer, and four girls, Celia, Daisy, Laura and Naomi. A first son had died in infancy. After their mother's death the children were cared for by Susan Washer who also looked after the home. Susan was much loved by the children.

Miss Paris recalls that there was only one bicycle among the children, and a fire only once a week in winter in the room where they practised the piano. Money may have been short as Dr. Legge often did not charge his patients enough to cover his expenses. Indeed, the recollection of him by Charles Painter, of this village, tells of him not charging certain patients at all. "Coming home from school one midday, whilst jumping a ditch, I fell heavily on my arm and broke it. Fortunately we had a very good doctor in the village, a Dr. Legge. My mother took me to his surgery, he set my arm, put it in splints, and I went back to school in the afternoon on time. Dr. Legge was very popular and kind hearted. My parents told me he would turn out any time, day or night, and if his patients were poor they were not charged. He dispensed his own medicines, which was appreciated as it saved walking three miles to the chemist in Lewes."

Dr. Legge crammed a lot of work into his life for as well as being a busy village doctor he was an historian and artist, a school governor, and a parish councillor. He contributed articles on many subjects, with illustrations by himself, to a quarterly review, 'The Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist'

(1) and, less frequently, to other magazines and journals. His interest in local history was perhaps fuelled by his awareness of the passage of time. In one of his articles he writes "though 'the waves of the sea are mighty and rage horribly' they are not more destructive of the little barks and businesses of man, than is the ceaseless roll of the river of years, both to his memory and his works. Let us rescue from oblivion and destruction what we may of those relics of the past found stranded on the 'bank and shoal of Time'". (2)

Many of his articles have a Ringmer interest though not everything that he wrote about the village should be accepted without question. For example, in his essay "The Church of Ringmer" (3) he claims that the north chapel was identical with the chantry endowed in 1275 in a bequest made by one Henry, vicar of Ringmer. Writing in the East Sussex News in July 1912, R. Garroway Rice suggested that the north chapel is of the early sixteenth century and was endowed by a bequest of Robert A' Borowe of South Malling. Robert's will of June 1535 directs that property of his in Lewes should be sold, the proceeds to go to the building of "the chapell that I began at Regmer (sic)". As the architecture of the north chapel (like that of the south chapel which was probably built as a result of a bequest by John Thatcher in 1526) is of the early sixteenth century, its attribution to the late thirteenth century is not acceptable. But this is to cavil - undoubtedly his writings contain much that will interest and inform those who are looking into the history of Ringmer and its neighbourhood.

The local historian is often also a contemporary observer and Dr. Legge is no exception. At the turn of the century he writes "There is a remarkable evidence of the transportation of the germs of vegetable life to be seen in the presence of some of the pretty maiden-hair-spleenwort-fern growing on the stone buttresses of the north side of the church. As no such fern grows anywhere else in the parish, nor within several miles of it, its occurrence may be explained either by the conveyance of its spores from the greensand neighbourhood of central Sussex, whence the building stone was obtained, or by their wind-carriage from the northern district". (4) There is no trace of the maidenhair fern on the northern buttresses now.

Again, in an essay called "The Decorative Arts of our Forefathers", (5) he includes illustrations of two needlework samplers, one by Lucy Rebecca Clark aged 12 years in 1846, the other by Charlotte Sansom dated 1832. Both these girls may have been of Ringmer families and, presumably, the whereabouts of the samplers was known to the doctor - does anyone know where they are now? There are many instances in his writings and drawings of selected items of his contemporary surroundings being recorded, and for us in the late twentieth

century they are an important aspect of his work.

Many of his essays are illustrated by his own very capable hand. The samplers mentioned above, some detailed drawings of internal features at Delves House, and copies of late eighteenth century drawings of Ringmer church and Middleham House are only a small part of his total output. In the library of the Sussex Archaeological Society at Barbican House in Lewes are two albums of his charming pen and ink drawings as well as water colours of flowers, details of churches, etc. Does anyone know of any other of his drawings and paintings?

Today he is remembered largely through his hobbies of local history and drawing. During his years in Ringmer, however, he was known also as a kind and generous doctor and as a hard working supporter of the then recently formed parish council. He has become at least in part (as he must have known he would) a victim of "the ceaseless roll of the river of years".

He died early in March 1911. An obituary appeared in the 'Sussex Daily News' of March 9. It reads as follows :-

"One of the most prominent residents of Ringmer passed away this week in the person of Mr. William Heneage Legge, the Chairman of the Parish Council. His demise, occurring after a brief illness, will occasion some surprise and cause deep regret among a wide circle of friends in the county and elsewhere. A quarter of a century ago, Mr. Legge took up his residence in the ideal Sussex village, where he had occupied himself largely in matters of local government. Latterly, however, he had not engaged so prominently in public work, though the promotion of village institutions always aroused his interest and warm support. His activities were mainly directed in pushing forward the affairs of the Parish Council, to which he devoted himself very assiduously and successfully. As an original member of that body he fulfilled the duties of Vice-Chairman from 1896 to 1909, when he was unanimously elected to the chair in succession to the late Mr. John Porter. He was also at one time a member of the body of Managers of Ringmer School, but was more publicly known following his profession as a surgeon and as district Medical Officer and Public Vaccinator for the Ringmer district of the Lewes Union. Mr. Legge was of a retiring and studious disposition, and archaeology claimed him as a devotee. His wide knowledge and the minuteness of his investigations in this interesting subject enabled him to collect a large number of rare curios with which he adorned his residence, while he was a frequent contributor to magazines. So engrossed was he in this hobby that it became almost a passion with him, and those fortunate enough to have inspected his collection and heard his descriptions of the various articles enjoyed an experience both enviable and

edifying. The removal of so familiar a figure will be much regretted in the district, where his loss will be distinctly felt. His wife predeceased him by about ten years."

References

- (1) We are indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Elsdon for allowing us to see a copy of 'The Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist' in their possession.
- (2) "Delves House, Ringmer" in 'The Reliquary', Jan. 1900.p.1.
- (3) 'The Reliquary', October 1898, pp.225-37.
- (4) Ibid, p.235.
- (5) 'The Reliquary', Apr. 1903, pp.81-91.

Published works of W.H.Legge

Most of Dr.Legge's published work appears in journals and magazines. Indeed, the British Museum Catalogue of Printed Books enters only one book under his name, "A guide to Lewes", published in 1905, for which his brother, Arthur Heneage Legge, RBA, provided some of the illustrations.

He was a regular contributor to the Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist (hereinafter referred to as RIA), a quarterly journal that appeared in January, April, July and October. In the decade 1897 - 1907 no less than twenty articles from his pen appeared in its pages. A list is given below. It is worth noting that about half of these articles deal wholly or in part with Ringmer and its environs.

- Oct. 1897 "Bell casting in the seventeenth century", pp.193-200.
- Oct. 1899 "The church of Ringmer, Sussex", pp.225-37.
- Oct. 1899 "The parish documents of Ringmer of the Jacobean and Georgian periods", pp.217-26.
- Jan. 1900 "Delves House, Ringmer, with some account of Gilbert White and his relatives there residing", pp.1-14.
- Jan. 1901 "The villages and churches of the hundred of Willingdon" (pt.1), pp.1-10.
- Jul. 1901 "The villages and churches of the hundred of Willingdon" (pt.2), pp.145-57.
- Jan. 1902 "Wilmington: its ancient priory, church, and 'Long Man'", pp.1-10.
- Apr. 1902 "The forest of the Broyle and the parks of Ringmer" (pt.1), pp.73-86.
- Jul. 1902 "The forest of the Broyle and the parks of Ringmer" (pt.2), pp.156-68.
- Oct. 1902 "The parks of Ringmer, in Sussex", pp.217-32. (This is a

continuation of the two previous articles).

- Jan. 1903 "Sussex pottery", pp. 1-19.
"The churches of Hayling Island", pp. 70-1. (This is a note on 'low-side' windows.)
- Apr. 1903 "The decorative arts of our forefathers, as exemplified in a Southdown village", pp. 81-91. (The Southdown village' is Ringmer.)
- Jul. 1903 "The ancient church of Bishopston, in Sussex", pp. 173-85.
- Oct. 1903 "On purses; a purse, and a priory", pp. 217-29.
- Jan. 1904 "About almanacs", pp. 1-14.
- Apr. 1904 "A decorated mediaeval roll of prayers", pp. 99-112.
- Jan. 1905 "Fragmenta antiquitatis in some Sussex churches", pp. 1-13.
- Oct. 1905 "Glimpses of ancient agriculture and its survivals to-day", pp. 217-27.
- Jul. 1906 "On Sprott's illustrated chronicle", pp. 183-94.
- Oct. 1907 "The trinity in mediaeval art", pp. 233-43.

He contributed also a few articles and notes to the Sussex Archaeological Collections (SAC) and wrote part of the second volume of the Victoria County History of Sussex (VCH).

- SAC vol.42 (1899) "The low side windows of Sussex churches", pp. 248-9.
vol.45 (1902) "Ancient stones found in Ringmer", pp. 34-9.
vol.49 (1906) "Britellus Avenal, rector of Buxted", p.170.
vol.52 (1909) "Contents of Ringmer parish chest", pp. 184-6.
- VCH vol. 2 (1907) "Forestry", pp. 291-325.

The library of the Sussex Archaeological Society at Barbican House, Lewes, contains a bound volume of articles by him, mostly from RIA. In 1910 it was the property of Mr. Treherne of 'Merton Cottage', Ringmer - it was presented to the Society very soon after this date by an unknown donor. At the end of the bound papers is a hand written note (by Mr. T.?) headed "Reliquiae Leggeanae not included in this volume" and there follows a list of articles and the journals, etc. in which they appeared. Some of those listed were RIA articles - these have been checked and are in the RIA list above. The others, which have not been checked, are as follows :-

- Field Naturalists Quarterly (1904, vol.3) "The natural history of Ringmer".
The Churchman (1905) "The Archbishops of Canterbury and their connection with Sussex". (Appeared in five consecutive parts.)
Gentleman's Magazine (no date) "The bridge".
Longman's Magazine (no date) "The hedge".
Sussex Daily News (no date) - ' a long series of articles on the churches

and villages of the Ouse valley'.

There are four articles in the volume from unidentified journals :

"Sport in the middle ages, in the country of the Southdown Hunt".

"Three parsons of the past, as seen in their wills".

"Ancient wills".

"Parson and parishioner in the eighteenth century".

This list has been compiled from material in the Brighton Reference Library and the library of the Sussex Archaeological Society. It does not claim to be complete - if readers know of other works by WHL please contact the editors.

A plea and a postscript

The plea

In SAC vol.53 (1910) the editor of that journal notes that W.H.Legge of Ringmer "has asked me to let it be known that he has a very large collection of notes from Court Rolls at Lambeth Palace and elsewhere relating to the Archbishop's great Manor of South Malling" (p.276) and that he would be pleased to put them at the service of local historians, etc. Does anybody know of the whereabouts of these notes? If you do, John Kay and John Bleach would like very much to share your knowledge.

The Postscript

Did the doctor's son continue at his father's writing desk in the southern hemisphere? The Brit.Mus.Cat. of Printed Books lists one H. Dormer Legge as being the author of two books on Australian coins, published in Australia c.1950.

Editors' Note

Since the above was written several further memorials of Dr.Legge have been discovered:-

1. A copy of a postcard he had printed, featuring his drawing of the memorial to Sir Herbert Springett in Ringmer Church, with a message on the reverse declining a social invitation on the grounds that he was pre-occupied with the preparation of his article for the Victoria County History. A copy of this postcard is now represented in the Ringmer History Study Group's photographic collection.
2. A series of letters written by Dr. Legge to Dr.L.F.Salzman, relating to his historical studies, preserved with Salzman's notes. Unfortunately Salzman's replies have not been preserved.

3. Dr.Legge's granddaughter, still living in Lewes, produced a photograph of him, which has enabled his identification in many of the photographs of village events in the first decade of the century preserved in the Study Group's collection.

4. Anna Beckwith discovered in the Village Hall an elaborate carved chest bearing an inscription stating that it had been donated by Dr.Legge to the Parish Council. The chest, in a rather neglected condition, has been used for some years for storing props belonging to the Dramatic Society. It is hoped that it can be restored to house the Study Group's archives.