

THE LINK BETWEEN CLAVERING AND CAPTAIN COOK

A memorial at the back of Clavering Church mentions Captain Cook, to whom Clavering has a connection through Mary Wales, widow of William Wales, Mathematical School master at Christ's Hospital, patrons of Clavering Church. Wales was a most distinguished figure in his day, and sailed as astronomer on Captain James Cook's second voyage in 1772-5 on the ship *Resolution*. This is stated on the tablet, but it does not mention that Mary Wales was also sister to Charles Green, who was astronomer on Capt Cook's first voyage. Thus she was closely linked to the vital work of the astronomers on these epic journeys.

Her link to Clavering came about because she spent her last years living here. An adjacent memorial is dedicated to Rev Lancelot Pepys Stephens, incumbent here from 1818-34. Presumably Lancelot put up the other memorial himself in 1827 when Mary Wales died. At the time of her death, at the age of 87, she was living with the Stephens family at the Clavering vicarage, because William Wales and Mary were the parents of the vicar's wife.

This information has been supplied by Jenny Elliston of Melbourne, Australia who is directly descended from William Wales: Jenny is the great-great-great-great grand-daughter of William and Mary Wales.



Mary Wales' son-in-law, the man destined to become Clavering's vicar was also an interesting character. He was the son of Lancelot Stephens, a shopkeeper, comb-maker and 'coffee man', who was appointed a Freeman of the City of London in 1774. Lancelot senior owned a coffee house near the Strand, and one of the trustees was a Thomas Pepys, hence Lancelot junior's other unusual name, when he was born in London in 1766. He studied at Christ's Hospital School and at Pembroke College, Cambridge University. He was ordained in 1797, but continued to teach at Christ's Hospital. He and his wife had three sons, Lancelot, William Wales and Arthur Lancelot, baptised in 1814, 1815 and 1817 respectively.

He appears to have been a delightful man, judging by this description of Lancelot and his wife 'Mary Judith' from 'Recollections of Christ's Hospital' edited by R. B. Johnson (1896):

'What a bit of a golden age was it, when the Rev. Mr Steevens, one of the under grammar-masters, took his place, on some occasion, for a short time! Steevens was short and fat, with a handsome, cordial face. You loved him as you looked at him; and seemed as if you should love him the more the fatter he became. I stammered when I was at that time of life: which was an infirmity that used to get me into terrible trouble with the master. Steevens used to say, on the other hand, "Here comes our little black-haired friend, who stammers so. Now, let us see what we can do for him!" The consequence was, I did not hesitate half so much as with the other. When I did, it was out of impatience to please him. Such of us were not liked the better by the master as were in favour with his wife. She was a sprightly, good-looking woman, with black eyes; and was beheld with transport by the boys, whenever she appeared at the school-door. Her husband's name, uttered in a mingled tone of good-nature and imperativeness, brought him down from his seat with smiling haste. Sometimes he did not return.'

Another description, which reinforces this image of Lancelot, was written by his nephew, Rev William Trollope in 'A History of the Royal Foundation of Christ's Hospital' (1834), describing how Lancelot left teaching to become a vicar at Clavering:

'Scarcely had the new system been brought into active operation, when the Hospital was deprived of the services of the Rev. L. P. Stephens, who retired in the year 1817 to the living of Clavering, in Essex, after a faithful discharge of the entire duties of the under school for more than twenty years. His name will long be remembered with affection by those who, in passing through the school, had been partially under his charge. In communicating his instructions the sternness of the preceptor was forgotten in the indulgence of the parent; and, while his mildness of manners and gentleness of discipline will not be forgotten by the objects of his care, his openness of disposition, benevolence of spirit, and warmth of friendship have endeared him to the hearts of all who know him. He has been followed into his retirement by the best wishes of his friends and pupils; and may he long survive in the enjoyment of the happy consciousness of a useful and well spent life!'

And so it was that this much-loved teacher left Christ's Hospital to become Vicar of Clavering with Langley, remaining in situ until his death in 1834. During this time his teaching skills were deployed in educating

