

## **Nursing in the Local Area**

Following an interesting article by Harry Barnard in the Parish Magazine of May 2017 about Meyer Cottage, Danehill, I thought it was something worth following up. Just to recap, Meyer Cottage was built in memory of Miss Meyer of the Danehill and Horsted Keynes Nursing Association as she wanted somewhere permanent for the District Nurse to live. The Corbett family gave the land and the cost of the house was raised by local people.

Miss Katherine Meyer who was the fifth child of parents who went to Tasmania in search of health for Mrs Meyer. The plan was successful but after some years a terrible epidemic of scarlet fever swept the district and all Mrs Meyer's children were cut down, except Katherine. After this they decided to return to England.

Katherine's father was a doctor, interested in mental disorders. He saw service in the Crimea, had a large hospital under his charge, and escorted the ladies who went to help Florence Nightingale in her task in the Crimea. On his return to England he was made Governor of Broadmoor Asylum.

When Florence Nightingale conceived the idea of establishing a home for the training of nurses, Miss Meyer, then in her early 20's, was one of the first to take advantage of it. She became a probationer at St Thomas' Hospital and afterwards took special training in District Nursing. Here she made the acquaintance of Selma de Luttichau who became her lifelong friend and fellow worker. In 1871 they launched the North London District Nursing Association. In this they worked together for over 30 years.

On the grounds of health and owing to Miss de Luttichau's advancing years (in her 70's) she and Miss Meyer retired and moved to their new home, Solvang, at Birch Grove. This is a Danish word meaning Sunny Fields and is appropriate as Miss de Luttichau was Danish.

In London Miss Meyer spoke at many fund-raising meetings and in March 1896 the Annual Meeting of the North London District Nursing Association was held at 413 Holloway Road, where Miss Meyer lived, alongside 8 other nurses. This meeting was attended by Mrs Benson, wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury. After the death of her husband, Mrs Benson moved from Lambeth Palace and took on the lease of Tremains a short distance from Birch Grove.

By March 1911 there was a lot of interest in the Suffrage movement and at the Congregational Hall at Horsted Keynes an important meeting was held. By now Miss Meyer was the Hon. Secretary of the Horsted Keynes Branch of the Cuckfield and Central Sussex Womens Suffrage and in the audience was Mrs Benson, together with Mrs C H Corbett and Miss Cicely Corbett (Woodgate - Danehill). Mr Downend of the E F Benson Society has told me that Mrs Benson would have been interested in both nursing and suffrage; In fact any good cause in the area she would want either to be involved in, or know about. She did miss being at the centre of things once her husband died and she had to leave Lambeth Palace.

Mary Benson was a complicated character and despite having been married and having several children, she quite liked the company of women especially, and in the book 'As Good as God, As Clever as the Devil' it mentions that Mrs Benson often spoke to people by their Christian names and it quotes "Annie - she loved me - I led her into some

beauty, some good but what might I have done! and Katie Meyer (the daughter of the Superintendent at Broadmoor) who did not love me so well". One of Mrs Benson's sons wrote the Mapp and Lucia books, another wrote the words to Land of Hope and Glory.

Thus Miss Meyer and Mrs Benson would have known each other since at least 1896 and it would appear that they both retired to live in Birch Grove and Horsted Keynes about the same time. For nine years Miss Meyer and Mrs Benson, greatly aided by the late Mrs Corbett, arranged for nurses to come from the North London District Nursing Association for a few months at a time. Miss Meyer started the Danehill and Horsted Keynes Nursing Association.

After Miss Meyer's death Solvang was sold and purchased by Mrs Corbett-Ashby (later Dame Margery Corbett Ashby) the Danehill Parish Historical Society's first President. The property was renamed "Wickens".

In the 1901 census a Miss Adelaide Wickens is at Birch Grove and she is described as a Monthly Nurse. Is it possible this may have something to do with the change of name from Solvang to Wickens? - there is a connection. There is also the connection between the North

Small world with all these possible linked connections.

My thanks to the E F Benson Society, Richard Loader, Nick Turner and Find My Past.

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