

The Freemans and the Jane Austen family

by Pat Noble

The best known Freeman in Abbots Langley was John Cope Freeman (1724?-1788) who owned Langley House from the 1750s; it later passed to his wife Susanna and then to his sister Stella. His parents, Cope Freeman and Catherine Margaret (née Hampson), had both died on a voyage home from their West Indian plantations in 1734; John Cope and his three younger sisters survived the voyage. John Cope was taken into the guardianship of his uncle, George Cure, himself recently a widower after the death in 1733 of his wife Elizabeth, another Hampson sister. John's sisters, Mary Clementina (Molly) and Stella Frances, were cared for by aunt Jane Payne (née Hampson) and later moved to London but remained in contact. John Cope's guardian remarried to Catherine Payne and he grew up with his cousins George Cure (b 1744) and Capel Cure (b 1745); Capel was later to become deeply involved in the affairs of the Freemans at Langley House. John Cope's sister Molly did not marry and died aged 60 in 1786. Stella Frances did not marry until 1799; she was thus 71 when she married an Admiral, John Carter Allen, who died in 1800. On the death of Susanna Freeman, Stella Frances Allen bought Langley House and other Abbots Langley property of her late relatives.

John Cope's aunt Rebecca Hampson also came from this Gloucester medical family with their wide links to the West Indies. She moved to Kent and her second marriage in 1727 was to Dr William Austen; their children included Philadelphia (b 1730) and George (b 1731) who, by 1737, were

orphaned. George was sponsored by an Austen uncle and made his way to St John's College, Oxford, matriculating in 1747, ordained in 1755, becoming a teacher at Tonbridge School in 1757. Philadelphia seems to have been cared for at some point by some Freemans in Hertfordshire; by 1745 she was apprenticed to a milliner in London but by 1753 had travelled to India, finding as husband a surgeon in the East India Company, Tysoe Saul Hancock. Tysoe, Philadelphia and their daughter Betsy returned to England and although Tysoe had to return to India, he remembered the kindness of Molly Freeman and sent her messages and muslins from India. It is perhaps surprising that Rebecca's children do not appear to have benefitted from the Hampson family's West Indian wealth.

John Cope and his sisters drew income from their Jamaican estates. He drew £700-800 from time to time from his Bristol agents. By 1773 John Cope's son Henry Thomas Cope Freeman had graduated from University College Oxford but was known by George Austen to be unwell in 1774, dying in 1775. In his will the young man left 'unto my dear Relation the Reverend George Austen of Stevens(t)on in the County of Hants the sum of one hundred pounds sterling'. This sum has not been found in the Austen account at Hoare's Bank, but it is possible it was not paid until after 1795 when an agreement suggested that Henry Thomas's legacies could be paid out of a Trust fund, his executor having died by 1778 in Antigua.

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(There was a record that John Cope had paid £30 to the Reverend Austen through Hoare's Bank in 1765.)

George Austen asked his cousin John Cope Freeman to be godfather to his youngest son Charles in 1779, Charles's sister Jane Austen would have then been only 4-5 years. There was no mention of Charles Austen in the Wills of John Cope Freeman, his wife Susanna or Stella Frances Allen, aunt to Henry Thomas who had remembered the father George.

The wills consulted here are from the National Archive at Kew but they are supplied in copy script from the eighteenth century. Two of them are interpreted in Jon Spence's book, *A Century of wills from Jane Austen's Family 1705-1806*; my copy came from Jane Austen's House at Chawton. Background is amply supplied by Deirdre Le Faye in *Jane Austen: A Family Record* (CUP 2004). A number of newspapers of the period have given details of events such as property sales in Abbots Langley. ■

The Website

The Abbots Langley Local History Society website is at <http://www.allhs.org.uk>.

Available from the left-hand menu, the Projects section of the site has recently been updated with a zoomable Tithe Map and downloadable Award spreadsheet (see article on page 9).

The Projects section has also recently been updated with photographs by Eve Durnall of the Thomas Armstrong event held in May this year (see article on page 11).

Audrey Ashby



This photograph shows a group of members of the Abbots Langley Local History Society who attended Audrey's memorial service on 1st April 2011.

It was sent to us by Audrey's daughters Pauline, Frances and Barbara, who add: "Audrey enjoyed being involved with the Abbots Langley group and we hope it will continue. Once again, a big thank you to you all who attended. It was much appreciated." ■

Corrections – the Linen Map

A couple of corrections to the article about the linen map, which appeared on page 10 of Journal 33:

We have confirmation that the linen map was at one time hung up in the new school, c1971-74, but no direct memory of it being displayed in the old school. If anyone can remember it being there, we would be pleased to hear from you.

Also, there is no Sexton at St Lawrence Church in Abbots Langley today! Just generous volunteers who help look after the church and its grounds. ■