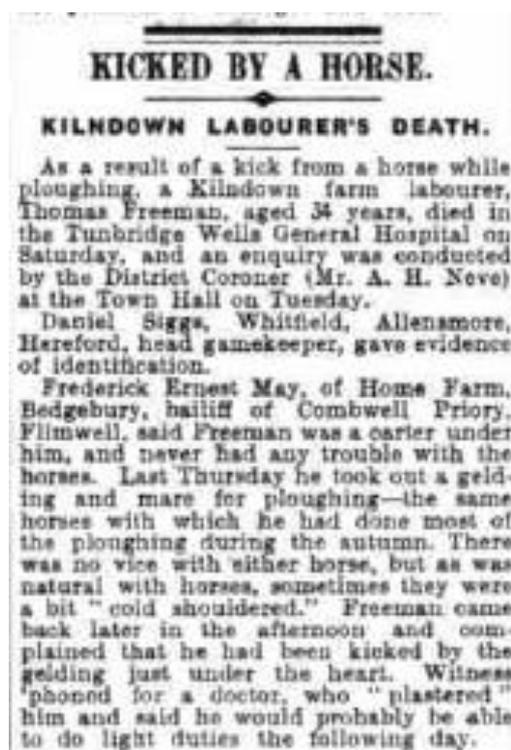


Village Echoes

Curious Burials in Kilndown

In 2021 an enquiry was made to the History Society about a grave in Kilndown Churchyard for a Thomas Sammy Freeman. It seemed an unlikely location for this man who was born in Kineton, Warwickshire in 1891. The enquirer was this gentleman's nephew, who had been trying to trace this part of his family tree for 21 years. He was also attempting to visit the relevant locations. Not wanting him to have a wasted journey from his home in Leeds, it seemed sensible to try to confirm the information that he had. This was simplified using the proof found by a genealogist he had hired.

Thomas had moved to Hertfordshire before WWI to become an assistant gamekeeper with his uncle, who had the unusual surname of Siggs. This enabled a trail to be followed to the South. As soon as war broke out he enlisted in the 'The Buffs' (East Kent Regiment) and although his army records were among many that were destroyed it was known by the family that he was injured twice in 1918. However, it seems that after the war he settled in Kilndown working at Combwell Priory as a carter. An article in the Courier of the time explains the mystery of his young death at 34. He was helping with a horse which kicked out and hit his head. He seemed to be alright at first but sadly died three days later.



His burial was recorded in the Kilndown records for Christ Church on 5th December 1928 but on inspection the site had no gravestone. This was conveyed to his nephew who decided that as there was nothing to see there was little point in a visit.

However, whilst looking for the grave spotted just below Thomas's burial was an unusually ornate grave, for Henry D. Lewis of Combwell Priory beside that of John Clotworthy Talbot

Foster Whyte-Melville-Skeffington, the 13th Viscount Messerene or 'Jock' of Chilham Castle together with his wife Annabelle.



Viscount Messereene is an Irish Peerage. It was created in 1660, along with the subsidiary title of Baron Loughneagh. Jock, as he was known, led an astonishingly full life. As well as the commitments that came with his title that he had inherited in 1956, he had been in the Black Watch during WWII but invalided out in 1940. This didn't prevent him from serving in the Small Vessels Pool for the Royal Navy, in 1944. He was Gold Staff Officer at the Coronation of the Queen in 1953.

He was active in the Conservative Society in Brighton Kemptown and Ashford, held various positions in the House of Lords besides sometime Commodore of the House of Lords Yacht Club. For over twenty years he was an active member of the Conservative Monday Club and its President until 1991.

He took part in the Le Mans Grand Prix D'endurance race in 1937 and promoted the first scheduled air service between Glasgow-Oban-Isle of Mull. He was a Freeman of the City of London, and a liveryman of the Shipwrights' Company in addition to being director of numerous companies. He was for some time a member of the Senechal Council of Canterbury Cathedral, a member of the Royal Yacht Squadron, and a Vice-President of the Kent branch of the Royal British Legion.

He was an extensive landowner based at Chilham Castle, which he had bought in 1949 for £94,000 at auction and where lived with his wife until his death in 1992.

So why is he buried in Kilndown? The answer lies simply with his wife Annabelle who was the daughter of Henry Lewis of Combwell who lived there with his wife. The Lewis's were very popular residents of Kilndown notably Henry, who was an active member of the British Legion in the village. It would seem that after her husband's death in 1936 Mrs Lewis and her daughter's family split their time between Combwell, and Chilham Castle, where she eventually died. They all chose Kilndown as their last resting place.