



The Meavy Book - 2020

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Thank you to,

Susan Darton for proof reading my work.

Rosalie Gordon at Planet Properties Croydon for providing some recent photos of the property and permission to use them.

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I have made every effort to ensure the events, dates and facts are correct in this book based on the source documents and public information available. I acknowledge that additional information may be available that updates this story and welcome any that may be provided.

For my grandson Hudson James Darton born 19.11.2020 and future generations.

Preface

For as long as I can remember there was a thin case bound book with the title MEAVY amongst a collection of other books and photos on the top shelf of a wardrobe in the spare room of my family home where I grew up in the Sydney suburb of Cremorne.

As a young boy from time to time I would climb up and “discover it” and look at the paintings on its pages and put it back in the cupboard. I had little interest or ability to read the handwriting, I knew it was old and so treated it with respect. Later I asked my father about it and he said it was created by William Darton a relative who was an artist in England. This was a bit confusing as my (deceased) grandfather’s name was also William. Further enquiry revealed William the Artist was my great grandfather’s brother. My father told me he visited Australia and painted here too. My father would also comment that at one time in his working life he would drive past the old Darton home called Meavy in Petersham on his way to and from work. He was surprised and pleased that it was still there.

In later life I eventually took the time to read the handwriting that accompanied the paintings in the book which was a gift from William Darton to his younger brother James Darton (my great grandfather) in 1909. Some years earlier James had written to William asking the meaning of the name Meavy as he was thinking of naming his newly built house in the Sydney suburb of Petersham Meavy. It was at this point that many of the family stories came together as pieces of a puzzle I didn’t know existed.

I wanted to get my great uncle William’s art in the Meavy book published for those that were interested and may have a connection. This private work had only been seen by a few. I felt he would have liked and approved of this. The book had been stored in the family wardrobe for more than 40 years and prior to that between its original place of delivery to Petersham had most likely travelled to

my Great Aunt Elsie's (Elsie was my Grandfathers sister) apartment in Elizabeth Bay House Sydney in the 1960s after the Meavy house was sold.

My original thought was to publish the book as a standalone item maybe with a short explanation. As my curiosity got the better of me I did more research it became clear there was a broader story to be told with the book, house and people at its center.

This is truly a story of connection, connection of a building in the Australian city of Sydney suburb of Petersham with a village in the English County of Devon. A close loving bond and connection between two brothers one living in the town where he was born and the other making a new life on the other side of the world in a new nation. For me a connection across the generations as I learn and share what I know about the Meavy book, the house of the same name and the people it sheltered.

Who knows where this may lead and I hope you find a connection here too.

Mark Darton

Great Grand Nephew of William Darton artist of Plymouth and Great Grandson of James Darton of Meavy at Petersham Sydney.

Background

The creator of the Meavy book William Isaac Brace Darton was born in 1854 the 3rd boy of 7 children to Ester and Isaac Darton in Plymouth Devon England. He attended the Plymouth school of Art where he later taught as an Art Master. In 1893 he is noted as a member of the College of Preceptors, the professional teacher's association of the time. In the 1900 census when he was 42 years old he states his profession as Artist, Art Master and his marital status as unmarried. He was living with his father at 19 Bedford Park road Plymouth. He painted in water colour mainly in South Devon depicting landscape and seascape scenes of the harbours and fishing communities around the River Yealm. He was accomplished in the use of light and shade in his painting of night scenes.

From details published in the Plymouth newspaper The Western Morning News he exhibited widely from 1887. Works included a number at the Royal Institute of Painters and the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. The newspaper contains many complimentary reviews of his work. I believe he visited Australia a number of times and two years after his father's death emigrated to Australia and then after his brother Jim (James) died, he returned to the UK to live. William died in 1938 in Plymouth at the age of 83.

James Sidney Darton, William's little brother (Jim) who built the house called Meavy was the 4th child born in 1858 to Ester and Isaac Darton at the Plymouth suburb of Turnchapel UK.

Their Father Isaac was a Master boat builder and had his own business, a partnership with another shipwright named Alfred Borlace at Mt Batten Plymouth. Family letters and text in the Meavy book suggest a happy childhood. I can't help feeling that there would not have been much money in the family looking after 5 sons, 2 daughters and his Wife. I expect things were very tight and at times even dire. Sadly 3 of the children died before their 7th birthday.

At some time before 1881 James made the life changing decision to leave his family and emigrate to Australia. At the age of 26 in 1884 he is documented as the pupil of Sydney Dentist Byron Ruse where he studied for 3

years before joining Dr Ruse as a partner in his practice at Elizabeth St Ashfield, Sydney.

James married Mary Johns in 1891 and the ceremony was held in the suburb of Campbelltown, Adelaide, South Australia. Sadly, I have no knowledge of how or where they met although Mary's family lived in Adelaide, the granddaughter of early free settlers who were Inn keepers. After the wedding they returned to Sydney and lived in Petersham in a house on New Canterbury road called Iluka.

They had 3 children all born at this house. William born 1892 (my grandfather, named after James elder brother), Elsie born 1894 and John (called Jack) born 1897.

Family stories passed down depicted James as being frugal possibly as a result of his upbringing. He was said to have been able to feed 10 people from an average chicken. He confiscated his 6 year old son's savings telling him "that's too much money for a young man to have." Later he lent the same son some money to purchase a home and charged him 6% interest the going rate of the day. Given his success he appears to have been an astute, hardworking businessman and an experienced dentist. A number of patient's letters praise him for curing them with no pain. "I have not felt the slightest discomfort" one wrote in a glowing unsolicited letter of recommendation. Newspaper articles outlined how James pioneered new methods of treatment.

Family photos and other letters suggest a close happy family. He appears to have been very close to his elder brother William and remained in contact with his father Isaac. In the 1900 census Isaac is noted as a widow as Ester, James and William's mother had passed away in 1898.

It appears James' left the partnership with Mr Ruse and went out on his own. In 1894 he was appointed dental surgeon at Lewisham Hospital in the neighbouring suburb from where he lived.

He also continued in private practice. Having been previously part of the medical profession dentistry was regulated in Australia as a separate profession in 1901 with the introduction of the Dentist ACT and the establishment of the Dental School in Sydney. James registration certificate was number 447 dated May 10. He was also a founding member of the dental council established in 1910.

MEAVY the House

While living at the home called Iluka on May 8th 1901 James purchased just over a quarter acre block of land next door from a subdivision dating back to the original title of April 20, 1881 in Petersham and had a house built on that land located at 162-164 New Canterbury Rd Petersham New South Wales. The title shows the property was mortgaged in 1902, I expect to fund the building of the new home on the property. The mortgage was subsequently discharged in 1904.

The family story outlines he told his wife Mary it was an investment property, so she had little interest during the design and building process. When it was finished, he gave her the key "surprising" her with the new family home incorporating his dental surgery with separate entrance and they all moved in. Was this done as a surprise for Mary or did he just not want her involved in the detail and decisions? I expect it was just the way at the time where the male head of the family made the decisions like this for the family and in what he would have considered their and no doubt his best interests.

It was a grand house completed circa 1903 in the Federation style as it was designed and built over the time Australia was becoming an independent nation. The main entrance was through an arch to a tiled veranda. Open verandas were features of federation design and the house had them at the front on both levels. It incorporated a separate entrance on the right-hand side with a 4-room dental surgery from where he operated his practice. Also a feature of this style was the use of red brick, weatherboards and ornate timbers on the stucco covered fascia of the roof gables. The roof was steeply pitched and multi-faceted and was tiled with unglazed terracotta tiles. An interesting feature of Meavy was the semi-circular tower like structure on the left of the house featuring a turret made of sand stone and ornate brick work. The tower was very striking and provided an interesting feature to the interior. The interior of the house had high ceilings decorative features in the plaster work and timber features with 4 bedrooms, a formal dining and sitting room.



The newly completed Meavy circa 1903 not yet named. Top verandah James Darton, ground floor left to right daughter Elsie, Wife Mary, son Jack, Woman not known, Far right Man not know, Son William.

James' brother William may have come to Sydney to visit the family and see the new home, I think it is him in the photo. This photo of the home with the family shows at the time of completion circa 1903 there was no name on the house (second arch from the left). I expect James had not yet decided what to name the house. The second photo taken not too much later shows the letters MEAVY engraved in the stone arch above the entrance. This engraving appears to have been done before receiving Williams' book, no doubt there was discussion about what it would be called. William relates James wrote to him a number of years before he made the book and asked what the meaning of the name Meavy was as that was what he was thinking of calling the home. William responded with the little he knew and the book produced some years later was a result of his curiosity to find out more.

James was very proud of his new house and sent William photographs of a number of rooms with a description written on the back. The description, paintings and framed photographs in the rooms suggest James was still very much wanting to retain his connection to Plymouth and UK family.



The name Meavy now added to the entrance



Early 1900's the new home now named Meavy over the entrance arch.



Meavy in recent times.





James wrote on the back of the photos.....“Walls biscuit colour- to picture rail- (tinted plaster) linoleum – dull green + pink white flowers carpet old persian design brown reddy maroon – furniture polished oak except chairs to be replaced some day. Picture near fire place Shawfield's Trafalger. portrait- Mary's deceased brother- an old Turner and Regulus leaving Carthage – Other pictures each seen Village Wedding (Proof) – our old shop Boorlace Mast – and just out of the sight on the far side all oak bookcase see it reflected in the mirror.”



"You will recognise the pictures - fearless little me, distant view of Plymouth just showing in on the right. The plaques "Padricks" the B in the frame- Xmas cards painted by you long ago.

The walls are pink plaster to the picture rail – The picture rail brown and the carpet greyish blue with redish flowers"



The sitting room recently, now the living area of one of the apartments.



"View from the drawing room door. The waiting room showing on the right and Patients door in the distance – light showing in from the private front door – carpet green with pink flower pattern."

The Book

Having received James' request "What is the meaning of Meavy" William says he responded in a letter back to James with what he knew which wasn't a lot. Then years later his curiosity and wish to provide information in the form of an illustrated story got the better of him. I can imagine William taking time to arrive at the idea to respond and create a special gift for James (who he called Jim), one that would last and impart the love and respect he had for his younger brother.

The Village of Meavy is 17 kilometres (10.8 miles) from Plymouth where the boys grew up and William imparts it was part of their childhood, I imagine they may have visited many times. The opening of a rail line to nearby Yelverton made it easy for Plymouth locals to day trip to the area. From details in a letter from James' father Isaac it seems he was a keen walker having stated "I was always a good walker some Sundays I have done 40 miles....." I imagine the family may have walked around the Meavy district on many occasions.

William traveled to Meavy from his home in Plymouth by train to Yelverton and spent some time there speaking with the locals to learn about the history, taking detailed notes and sketching the famous Old Oak tree, Church, Inn and other buildings, bridges and the countryside. It is not hard to see how he enjoyed this project and was drawn in to learn more with each visit.

He says it was a pleasure making the book during Spring mornings, Autumn afternoons and even in Winter. I wonder if he did sketches and took them back to his studio and then painted with water colours or did he complete them at Meavy. I imagine he sat down to write the description of his visits and the paintings. You can see he has written with an ink nib pen and the writing shows the points where he has dipped the nib back in the ink well to continue writing. Maybe there were drafts but the finished pages do not show many corrections.

An artist always wants to spend more time improving their work but no doubt William was keen to

ship what he had created to his brother. He took the pages and paintings to be professionally bound into a case bound book. A small decal in the front of the book shows the business that provided this service was Underhill & Co Church House Frankfort St Plymouth. This would have been done by a book binding craftsman. The book has a red leather embossed cover with the title MEAVY stamped in gold in the centre of the front cover. I hope William was pleased when he returned to collect the 32-page book.

He would have wrapped it up well, addressed it and then taken it to the post office and paid the postage to send it on its 6 to 8-week journey to Sydney.

James by this time had already named the house Meavy with the letters etched into the stone arch that was the entrance to the house.

What joy and surprise James must have felt opening the parcel and then reading the book and looking at the paintings. No doubt he then shared the book with Mary and his Children.

A copy of the book follows and I have transcribed William's hand writing directly after with the page references.

MEAVY

To Jim "a younger brother"

This little book is affectionately dedicated
in the hope it may prove a fitting answer
to the question received from him a few
years ago - "What is the meaning of
Meavy? Can you tell me anything
about it as I am thinking of calling
my new home Meavy"

William Davison

Plymouth. 1909.



The Village Green

"As morning shows the day. so childhood shows the man"

That the early impressions of youth are valuable has been evident from the remotest time but that they are appreciated to the full is more than we can admit. yet when we have arrived at middle life we can see how those early impressions have been with us all along the path. influencing and moulding us. quite unconsciously perhaps but none the less vitally. I have always held that those who have noble and happy surroundings when young have a distinct advantage over those less favourably placed. I do not mean a worldly advantage but an intellectual and happiness.

To perpetuate those precious memories of boyish days even perhaps to other generations I am endeavouring to show the sources and scenes amid which they were born so that. ideally like Plymouth may be the motor of full fury up and down the wide world.

To that end I am dedicating this small book to Jim - a younger brother and to the days of our youth. The incidents of those days are many of them quite fresh yet though the boys are scattered to the four winds even as the seed scattered by the sower to varying soils and fates. Should I succeed in making the church bells ring and the oak to bloom and the river to sing then I shall have sown seed on good ground that will bring forth abundantly. For this is the original Meavy setting in the valley with her portals open to the west and backed by her moor hills. Although seemingly far remote from us with those miles of moorland separating us she is quite near by aid of train and a sharp walk.



The Oak
The Cross
& The Inn

And it is quite possible to see sitting here in Town, office or dwelling
and in an hour to be in the old kitchen of the "Royal Oak" where,
with some imagination you may feel the wide circle of the hearth with people
of the past. and out of the shadows of its chimney corner see peering faces of
bygone wayfarers. Then the busy world of an hour ago is on the part
and the scene before you the real one - Sit by the hearth side and watch the
smoke climb up the huge cavern of a chimney which extends the whole width
of the house. Look at those blue patches of sky in which smoke and clouds mingle
and tiny and fancey where you may find such another spot?
Over the fire place a long mantle piece holds a few quaint - jars - pots and
mugs of Brass, copper, etc. "wisely kept for show". They help to keep the
character of the place where huge oak beams are a dominant feature.

Then perhaps having finished your cider or your tea - for they are both available and good
you come out and look around you and behold the Oak from which the Inn takes
its name. I expect the oak is the seed or kernel from which the village sprang
and looking at it in its present decayed state one can see it must have
been glorious in its youth. If it had one - for so aged it is that it is quite
impossible to calculate it accurately. All we know is that it was mentioned
in a Saxon book or writing as a great oak somewhere about the 1000^{AD}. So that
we can with safety give it perhaps another thousand. Somewhere are who
fancy it was planted in front of the church to commemorate some festival
but I am convinced that the oak was here before the church. Although
I fancy there was probably a rude altar at which the early inhabitants of
this vale worshipped beneath its branches. We know they lived here and
their residences of stone circular huts are not far away and their old workings
and streamings scar the hillsides around; a mound of their tin ingots is built into a



Meary, from the Meadows.
The Manor Farm, 12. Tithes, 13 ann.

wall of a farm house a halfpence off. so let us believe that this ragged
tree through which one may walk and which I am told a villager rode his pony through
is a link with that past wherein men struggled and worked and fought for the future
that is now ours. It is a pleasure to see something alive that was healthy when the
Conqueror came - and that has gone on shedding its leaves regularly through kingdoms
have arisen and been overset. What stories it should tell of love and war! ?
Beneath the oak stands a cross dating back to about 1400 - possibly, post-then when
the church was renewed or enlarged. for the history of nearly all our churches are
much the same and this of Mealy has many periods of architecture in its walls
the bulk of its body being 15 centy. There is a more recent piece than that in
the Drake Chapel, whilst Chancel and Tower are about a century older than the
pair I have sketched. P. 11 goes back to Saxon times of before the Conqueror the
times were Saxon. Church documents tell of building operations in 1040 - so this masonry
of coloured stone - with its quaintly carved heads at the caps - is really Saxon.
The heads are anything, but the ornament represents a Bishop's pastoral staff or Crozier.
The Holy water Stoup is of the same period as is the grotesque head P. 19 now built into
the window head of the still hand by. I was rather amused when sketching it
by the remarks of a labourer who "beg Pardon sir" but what might you be looking
at there - so I explained: when he said I thought - you might be a architect or
clerk of works, and there was something wrong with the - Christing - (Rain pipe)
I slept in that room for twelve years and never seed that old thing afore
I wonder if he is old Sir Frances Drake. I reckon he was"

Into the gable end of the S. Transept is built the stonework of the window of Saxon
work - it was found during restoration under the Chancel floor and preserved thus.
The Stone fixing it, found at the same time is a coffin lid and probably covered



The Bridge

an early dignitary of the Church. There are several such to be found within
ten miles. The Church is dedicated to St Peter and on the front which is about 1350 date
are carved the Cross Keys - his emblems - Below is a list of its Vicars or priests as far
as they can be gathered -

1263 Richard de Breulsworth

1263 Master Robert de Polamford

1263-4. Hugh. called Spier and de Plympton.

1266 William de Sica Villa

1309 Martin Walter de Hygmonelonde

1310 Sir John de Swafelde

1321 John de Stapelford

1321-22 Sir John de Shirefode

1329 Sir John Lyngeyn

1331 William Wywenham

1396 Henry Gardiner

1400 John Schute

1409 John Dyson

1410 Richard Toker

1416 Richard Lytle

1417 John Cole

1456 Thomas Hytle

1488 John Hytlys

1500 William Denfode

1508 Thomas Hardyng

1535 William Warynge

1548 Bernard Cole

1576 Thomas Pepper

1605 Martin Richard Moore

1614 Joseph Shute

1673 Thomas Stephens

1715 Richard Dunning

1738 Charles Williams

1755 Bartholomew Dawey

1772 John Parker

1795 Roper Shute

1799 William Smyth

1808 George Jones

1831 John Shute

1872 James Coston

1876 William Hippesley

1878 William Gordon Gray.

1895 Richard Treger Tyacke

It is interesting to note that the title of Sir and Master
imply a wealthy holding in those far off days and the
Cotton list - probably covered one of the knights -

Not also the names - Norman - or Irish - from the English -
Spier - now Collins Spier of Brixton - Sica Villa -
now Sackville's. Hygmonelonde - possibly - Melbourn -
Shirefode. Shirefod near Plympton. Wywenham - Newnham -
Dyson - Deacon - Hytlys - Hiers - Hytle - Hill - etc. -
Denfode - Derriford - Some names have died out
entirely but many remain as you will see or remember.



A
SAXON WINDOW
enclosing a Copper Lid

now built into the gable end of
Transsept - it was found under
the chancel floor during restoration.



THE FONT. (1350)

The crossed keys
have reference to
St Peter - to whom
the church is
dedicated -

The Church had also a Road screen. The doorway and stairs leading to which remain.
There are memories to the Drake Family who as successors of St. Francis owned
the place and still do so - in connection with Buckland Abbey where Drake
lived for a time. He also lived in the house here depicted as "The Manor Farm" P 15
while he was making the Leat to convey the Abbey to Plymouth. It is
quite a nice little Elizabethan house. attached to the Church at one time
and the walls of the Farm buildings are full of old pieces of cut stone that
formed parts of earlier buildings that stood here before the dissolution
of the Church. ere yet Henry had defied Rome. Note the nice approach
the steps. the arched porch. the mullioned windows. the well defined chimney
and the simplicity of it all as the outcome of a truly great age.

Going to the extreme east end of the Village one can see a fording place and
stepping stones. on the Sunday morning when I made the sketch a Farmer
daughter in bonnet splashed across - whilst your niece and her
boy waited for me. P 17 According to Mr James Davidson - a local scholar.
who visited the spot after reading an old charter now in the British Museum
he identified it as the spot set forth as a boundary of a piece of land granted
by Charter to E. Mercie & Thos of Clute in 1031. (half a manse of land at
Mecwi - the place being called the Clate. (Cleeche a Ford. or
stepping stones -" Mr P. N. Worm confirmed this by his researches:



A SAXON PIER
forming one side of Chancel-
Arch. Mr. George Salmon
gives the date as 1040. from ancient
documents -
-DOORWAY. leads to Road to St. Peter.

A little further on up the road is a fine old granite cross. P 21.
with another cross incised on it. It marks the parting of two ways
one to the village the other to a farm and foot-path leading to

Sheepston. As Meavy and Sheepston were attached to Plympton
Priory these old crosses were land marks on the roads that
connected them - the Cottage below the cross - (see winter scene)

is of good structure as to walls, and almost identical in
form with one between Shagher bridge and Biercleigh and another
between Shagher and Plympton ^{which} and probably were shelters

for the priests during their perambulations - five hundred years ago.

Others doubtless existed for I have seen alterations made even in my
time. The crosses remain - many of them but almost lost sight of now.
The base of one I know on the wild moor and a whole one in another
place, where tracks were - before roads - at or near Cadover Bridge.

The predecessor of this bridge was one of the earliest constructed and a
charter exists wherein a Saxon Princess conveys the right to build it.

(I have mislaid my reference) found later - "The earliest mention of a Bridge
on Dartmoor seems to be that of the Ponte de Cadaworth" in a charter
of Isabella de Fortibus - Countess of Devon - to Buckland Abbey - (Crossing)



W. DARTON

The Hearth &
Chimney Corner.
in The Inn.

Coming back to the village once more - we can notice in hedge wall
and stable wall similar stones to those used in the construction
of the old Saxon Piers in the Church and shewing that the builders
did not go far for their materials but made good use of those
close at hand - the beautiful red and buff and greys -
Taking a final look round observe a window of the Inn



a pinnacle
of the Church Tower

overlooking the Churchyard. shewing
I fancy that the Inn was possibly
the early church house, an old inhabitant
remembers it or a portion of it as a
"poor house" so I should say
it - was ecclesiastic
in its early usage



a window of the Inn
overlooking the Churchyard -



the Parish Door



The
Matur. Farm.
near the residence of Sir Francis Drake

W. DARTON

P.7.
So we leave Meavy in the twilight. by the bridge which "still keeps
a hoary eyebrow" though parish councils are enemies to picturesque
bridges and even now are plotting to take it away and replace it
by a new and straightened one - let us hope they will not succeed
just yet - I would suggest that they build another and better if
they can before they remove the old and trusty one -

forming the stream. Most battles over stony ways like "another brook"
we trespass but, were we always virtuous we should miss much
of pleasurable scenes in this world - coming to "Gratten Ford" -

we are able to cross on a new bridge useful but not handsome
and even tolerance when viewed from a half mile away. When it
fits into the landscape fairly well. P.31. just a few hundred yards off
is the Farm. among elm trees - modern farm of older materials
built in its walls. It must have been a nice place and had a
private chapel I expect for, I see a pointed doorway dedicated to
sugar use. portion of corbie - steps Mullins - transoms telling
of former glory. but one tiny window I made a sketch of it



The Ford.
"Cleece": Stepping Stones:
mentioned in a document nearly
a thousand years ago



Window - Early English

Cut out of one piece of stone the opening about
12" by 8" is evidence of skill - endurance and
beauty of the 13th centy. - (I am told of one precisely like it in N. Devon -

Across the road from the Farm gate are some
steps leading to an orchard or garden - P. H. 29
a granite trough receives water close by -
This garden looks as if it had at one time
contained a fish pond - and a raised terrace.

It must have made a nice walk for early owners;

This is conjectural but if one were to discover
a Victorian Permit the natural conclusion would
be that some one wrote it - and modern folk
are too indifferent or not sufficiently cultured
to undertake such things now - so we will take
it together with the window - and lance-headed
doorway and other things and go on our way.

I found the same want of observation here as at Meavy.
only a well dressed and fairly well to^{do} man this time
was interested in me when sketching the little inn
he volunteered the information that he had lived at
Yellerton and passed this farm at least five times
each week for 13 years but had not observed it before!!



Saxon. Pict head.
now built into the glass wall.



A Pict Head
Saxon



The Stone
in the Pict
probably
Saxon



St. Church Door . .
 is almost identical with
 that of Landulph. and that of St. Dominick
 both in Cornwall .



A. Wayde Cross.

Age unknown

the road up from Stratton leads on to Gelverton Common and Roborough Down
and almost directly to Buckland Abbey. That over the stepping stones
takes the traveller to Donland and on to Walkhampton Church. The
limits of the Plympton Priory in that direction - so that all the old ways,
bridges etc. were in their hands as indeed nearly all the land was in
the clutches of the Church - for even Langdon Court was the property of
Plympton (in the days when it paid to have knowledge of
men and things) and Sutton also paid its share of dues -

It is no marvel if the Church looking back at those times and what
her losses were is moving all her energy to bring the people under
her power and will as then - It is no wonder when they read their
own history that some of them should become tyrants in their
small parishes seeing they are but human with like passions to
ourselves - Tyrants there have always been - as there have been
oppressed - deliverers have arisen as occasion offered only
to be partly understood - When man shall really understand
man then he will deliver himself - But the old order changeth.



At Grailin Ford.

slowly it may be - yet it changes. I have tried to show you how the passing of a thousand years or more has effected ^{Many} but slightly - when the time is considered - it may be compared to a leaf in a quiet corner of the bend of its stream: out of the current - it rests placidly - whilst the torrents of events rush swiftly by. At Yelverton it is felt - for there, population grows and a suburb of Plymouth it seems rather than a country place - yet it is a mile away and that is not much when the speculative builder comes along -

So now I am bringing you out of the village so that we may have a last look round - perhaps toward sunset when the hills are lit up as we tramp toward the station.

Graton Farm is on our left as we look back and the view bridge is mellowed by the distance. P-31. This is one of the pleasantest views whether the time be evening or morning -

If Donland is selected to depart from then that view where the river winds about in the valley on its way to the sea. P-32 - is to be found as ^{we} go up the hill - under right conditions. It is a fairly good place in which to bid the day farewell.



A cottage by the way
forming a horse-pole.

but not the scenes of the day. They remain to us: A Thousand years
has not altered the outline of the hills or changed visibly the course of
the river: just as they were attractive and inviting of old so they
were romantic to us in our youth and interesting and refreshing
in our later years. so may they remain in the years to come for
other generations - There are many lessons to be learnt even by
a cursory glance at things here as we find them, showing how
much we are indebted to those who were before us and placed
"stepping stones" so that others might follow any stream or
mapped out a water course so that we may not thirst in
the town of Plymouth for generations to come - who saw the beauties
of a great tree and the symbol of endurance at the same time
who saw when a place was suitable to build in and erected
dwellings - who in fact took advantage of the simple things
close at hand to enrich and embellish their lives -



The road up to
Caden Bridge -
Lairn Tr. & Sheepsol behind

To take advantage of the things at hand was characteristic of the men
of the times and we find in an entry of Corporation accounts 1576. 77

"Itm pd to certayne men that viewed the River at the request of.

mr mayor and his brethren for their paynes and their charges about
the same. 1ijs v^d." But it was not till 1584 that a bill was brought
before Parliament to enable the inhabitants of Plymouthe to obtain water
from the "Mevie or Meavy" a river distant from the said Towne about
eight or tenne miles which with some charge wille brought into the said Towne.
by the buying of whiche water most of the Inconveniences and Damagers and divers
others shall not only be remedied but some parte of the Channell of the
said Haven secured and cleansed by the river to the perpetuall continuance
of the same haven a matter most benyficiell to the Realme."

"Itm payde to Thomas Barden for 12 horses hire to Mevyge for verry the water xx^d"

"Itm payde at the Church House of Mevyge for wine and milk 1js. v^d"

So that horse hire was not costly then - neither could good work be done
without something to drink - apparently - There were also such things as

"Considerations" for another entry is for "Itm to the pson of Mevyge in clothe
as much as cost 13^d" a small exp for him - for some service -?

Whereas the judges etc. Lords of Mannors and others had as gift "a tonne of wyne"
+ "Three Hoggsheds of Clarette wyne for their paynes & their help in the water course."



at Grafton Farm
"wayside fountain"
Steps lead to walk and ancient garden
and probably Fish Pond.

Now having come to the last page I must leave room for regrets and explanations - regrets that the thing is not better done seeing that now it is done as far as I shall do it. - the explanations are these.

That it is done at all is due to the fact that some years ago when you were building your house and were looking round to find a name for it you remembered Meavy of our youthful days - and you wrote to me asking if I could tell you the meaning of it. - I then gave you all I knew about it: - which was little - but with the little I possessed came the desire to know more - hence this collection of sketches and notes generally. - I will not vouch for the historical accuracy of all the statements although I believe them myself to be true - just as I believe my sketches to be true when viewed from the artistic standpoint.

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The making has been a pleasure to me though long intervals of idleness are between the efforts - but the reward has been found on certain Spring mornings and autumn afternoons and even winter has had its charm. - when some fact or feature artistic, architectural or archaeological has been added to our much beloved Meavy. - William Darin -



Grafton Farm. & the valley.



Good Night.



Meavy Plymouth 1909

To Jim, a younger Brother.

This little book is affectionally dedicated in the hope it may prove a fitting answer to the question received from him a few years ago “what is the meaning of Meavy - Can you tell me anything about it as I am thinking of calling my new home Meavy”

William Darton 1909

“As morning shows the day to childhood shows the man”



Page 2

That the early impressions of youth are valuable has been evident from the remotest time but that they are appreciated to the full is more than we can admit yet when we have arrived at middle life we can see how those early impressions have been with us all along the path. Influencing and moulding us quite unconsciously perhaps but none the less vitally. I have always held that those who have known an happy surroundings when young have a distinct advantage over those less lavishly placed. I do not mean a worldly advantage but are intellectual and happier.

To perpetuate those precious memories of boyish days even perhaps to other generations I am endeavouring to show in the sources and scenes amid when they were born so that Meavy like Plymouth may be the mother of full forty up and down the wide world.

To that end I am dedicating this small book to Jim a younger brother and to the days of our youth. The incidents of those days are many of him quite fresh yet though the boys are scattered to the four winds even as the seed scattered by the sower to varying soils and fates.

Should I succeed in making the church bells ring and the oak to bloom and the river to sing then I shall have sewn seed on good ground that will bring forth abundantly. For this is the original Meavy setting

in the valley with her portals open to the weak and beckoned by her noble hills. Although seemingly far remote from us with those miles of Mooreland separating us she is quite near by means of train and a sharp walk.



Page 4

And it is quite possible to be sitting here in town, office or dwelling and in an hour to be in the old kitchen of the "Royal Oak" where with some imagination you may fill the wide circle of the hearth with people of the past and out of the shadows of its chimney corner see peering faces of by gone wayfarers..... then the busy world of an hour ago is as for past and the scene before you the real one – sit by the hearth side and watch the smoke climb up the huge cavern of a chimney which extends the whole width of the house. Look at the blue pattern of sky in which smoke and clouds mingle and try and fancy where you may find such another spot?

Over the fireplace a long mantel piece holds a few quaint jars – pots and mugs of brass, copper etc wisely kept for show. They help to keep the character of the place where huge oak beams are a dominant feature.

There perhaps having finished your cider or your tea for they are both available and good you come out and look around you and behold the oak from which the inn takes its name. I expect the oak is the seed or kernel from which the village sprang and looking at it in its present decayed state one can see it must have been glorious in its youth as had me for to aged it is that it is quite impossible to calculate it accurately. All we know is that it was mentioned in a Saxon book of writing as a great oak some time about the 1000 ad to that we may safely give it perhaps another thousand. Some there are who fancy it was planted in front of the church to commemorate some festival but I am convinced that the oak was here before the church although I fancy there was probably a crude alter at which the early inhabitants of the vale worshipped beneath its branches we know they lived here and their residences

of stone circular huts are not far away and their old workcamp and streamings scar the hillsides around a mould of this tin ingots is built in to



Page 6

a wall of a farm house a half mile off.

So let us believe that this rugged tree through which one may walk and when I am told a villager road his penny farthing is a link with the past where in men struggled and worked and fought for the future that is now ours, it is a pleasure to see something alive that was healthy when the Conqueror came – and that has gone on shedding its leaves regularly through kingdoms have risen and been overset – what stories it should tell of love and war? Beneath the oak stands a cross dating back to about 1400 possibly put there when the church was renewed or enlarged. For the history of Meavy all our Churches are such the same and thus of Meavy has many periods of Architecture in its walls the bulk of it today being 15th century. There is a more recent piece than that in the Drake Chapel which changed the tower and about a century older than the pier I have sketched P11. goes back to Saxon times of before the conqueror the times were Saxon.. Church documents tell of building operations in 1040 so this masonry of coloured stone with its quality carved heads at the cap is really Saxon. The heads are anything but to ornamental represents a Bishop's pastoral staff in congregation. The Holy water stoup is of the same period as is the grotesque head P19 now built into the window head of the sill hard by. I was rather amused when sketching it by the remarks of a labourer who “ by Pardon sir” but what might you be looking at there – to I explained – when he said I thought you might be a clerk of works and there was something wrong with the church (rain pipe).

“I slept in that room for twelve years and never seen that old thing afore. I wonder if he is old Francis Drake - I recon he was”.

Into the sable end of the S Transept is built the stone work of a window of Saxon work it was found

during restoration under the church floor and preserved thus.

The stone filling it found at the same time is a coffin lid and probably covered



Page 8

an early dignitary of the church. There are several such to be found within the walls The church is dedicated to St Peter and on the floor which is about 1350 date are carved two cross keys- his emblem. Below is a list of its Vicars of parish as far as they can be gathered.

It is interesting to note that the title of sir and master imply a wealth holding in those far off days and the coffin lid probably covered one of the knights.

Note also the names Norman at first- then from the English Splot now comings Splate of Brixton – Sicca Villa now Sackville – Mymmelande possibly Membland- Shieforde sherforde was Plympton- Nywenham – Newnham- Dyson – Deacan - Hyckys . Hicks - Hylle – Hill Etc... Denforde – Denninford

Some names have died out entirely, but many remain as you will see or remember.



Page 10

The Church had also a rood screen. The doorway and stairs to which remain.

There are memorials to the Drake family who as successors of Sir Francis owned the place and still do so - in connection with Buckland Abbey where Drake lived for a time.

He also lived in the house here depicted as “the manor Farm” p15 whilst he was making the trip to convey from Meavy to Plymouth it is quiet and nice little Elizabethan house. Attached to the church at one time the walls of the farm building are full of old pieces of cut stone that formed parts of earlier buildings that stood here before the dissolution of the church and yet Harry has defied Rome- Note the niche approaching the steps. The opened porch the mullioned windows the well defined chimney and the simplicity of it all the outcome of a truly great age.

Going to the extreme east of the village one can see the fording place and stepping stones - on a Sunday morning when I made two sketches a farmer daughter on horse back splashed across whilst your niece and her boy waited for me p17 According to the James Davidson Saxon scholar who visited the spot after reading and old charter now in the British Museum he identified it as the spot set forth a boundary of a piece of land granted by charter to E Therie a thegn of chuts in 1031 (half a mans a of land at Meavy the place being called Claea (Clechan a ford or stepping stones - Mr P N Worth confirmed this in his researches.



Page 12

A little further on up the road is a fine old granite cross P.21

With another cross incised on it marks the parting of two ways, one to the village the other a farm and footpath leading to Sheepstor. As Meavy and Sheepstor were attached to Plympton Priory these old crosses were land marks on the roads that connected them – the cottage below the cross (see winter

scene) is of good structure as to walls are almost identical in form with the one between Shaugh bridge and Biesleigh and another between Shaugh and Plympton which probably were shelters for the parish during their perambulations five hundred years ago. Others doubtless existed for I have seen alterations made even in my time. The crosses remain = many of them but almost lost sight of now the base of one I know on the wild moor and a whole one in another place where tracks were – before roads – at or near Cadover Bridge.

The predecessor of this bridge was one of the earliest constructed and a charter exists where in a Saxon Princess conveys the right to build it (I have mislaid my reference) found later – “the earliest mention of a bridge on Dartmoor seems to be that of the Ponte de cadawotthy” in a chapter of Isobella de Fortibus – countess of Devon – Buckland Abby “(Crossing)



Page 14

Coming back to the village once more we can notice in ledge wall and stable walls similar stones to those used on the construction of the old Saxion pier in the church and showing that the builders did not go far for their materials but made good use of those close at hand - the beautiful red and buffs and greys –

Taking a final look round observe a window of the inn overlooking the church yard showing I fancy that the inn was possibly the early church home: an old inhabitants remembers it or a portion of it as the “poor house” so I should say it was ecclesiastic in its early uses.



Page 16

So we leave Meavy in the twilight by this bridge (P7) which “still keeps the hoary eyebrow” through parish councils are enemies of to picturesque bridges and even now are plotting to take it away and replace it by a new and straightened one- let us hope they will not succeed just yet. I would suggest

that they build another and better if they can before they remove the old and trusty one- Following the stream that babbles over stony ways like “another brook” we trespass but, were we always virtuous we should miss so much of pleasurable scenes in this world. Coming to “Gratton Ford” we are able to cross on a new bridge useful but not handsome and even tolerable when received from a half mile away when it fits in to the landscape fairly well p31 just a few hundred yards off in the farm among elm trees modern farm of older materials built in its walls it must have been a nice place and had a private chapel I expect for I see a pointed doorway desecrated to pagan use – portions of conjoins- steps mullions- transoms telling of former glory but one tiny window I made a sketch of it



Page 18

Cut out of one piece of stone the opening about 12” by 8” is evidence of this endurance and beauty of the 13th century. (I am told of one precisely like it in St. Dominick’s.

Across the road from the farm gate are some steps leading to an orchard or garden p.29 A granite trough receives water else by-

This garden looks as if it had at one time contained a fishpond – and a raised terrace. It must have made a nice walk for early divines.

This is conjectural but if one were to discover a Victorian bonnet the natural conclusion would be that someone loved it – and modern folk are too indifferent or not sufficiently cultured to undertake such things now- so we will take it together with the window and lancet doorway and other things and go on our way.

I found the same want of observation here as at Meavy only a well dressed and fairly well to do man this time was interested in me when sketching this little scene- he volunteered this information as he had lived at Yelverton and passed this farm at least five times each week for 13 years but has not observed it before.



Page 22

The road up from Gratton leads on to Yelverton common and Roborough Down. and almost directly to Buckland Abby -Then over the stepping stones takes the traveller to Dousland and on to Walkhampton Church. The limit of the Plympton Priory in that direction – so that all the old ways, bridges etc were in their hands as indeed nearly all the land was in the classifications of the church for even the Langdon court was the property Plympton (in the days when it paid to have knowledge of men and things), and Sutton also paid its share of dues –

It is no marvel to the church looking back at those times and what her losses were in moving all the energy to living the people under her power and will as then it is no wonder when they need their own history that some of them should become tyrants in their small parishes seeing they are but human with like possessions to ourselves tyrants there have always been as there have been oppressed. Deliveries have arisen on occasion opened only to be partly understood – when man shall really understand man then he will deliver himself. But the old order changeth.



Page 24

Slowly it may be; yet it changeth. I have tried to show you how the passing of a thousand years or more has affected Meavy but slightly – when the time is considered – it may be compared to a leaf in a quiet corner of the bend of its stream. Out of the current it rests placidly while the torrents of the elements rush swiftly by. At Yelverton it is felt, for their population grows and a suburb of Plymouth it seems rather than a country place – yet it is a mile away and that is not much when the speculative builder comes along.

So now I am bringing you out of the village so that we may have a last look around. Perhaps toward sunset when the hills are lit up as we tramp toward the station.

Gratton Farm is on our left as we look back and the new bridge is mellowed by the distance. P-31 This is one of the pleasantest views whether the time to be evening or morning-

If Dousland is selected to depart from then that view where the river winds about in the valley on its

way to the sea. P32- is to be found as we go up the hill – under right conditions it is a lovely good place in which to bid the day farewell.



Page 26

But not the scenes of the day they remain to us a thousand years has not altered the outline of the hills or changed visibly the course of the river just as they were attractive and inviting or old so they were romantic to us in our youth and interesting and refreshing in our later years. So may they remain in the years to come for other generations- There are many lessons to be learned even by a cursory glance at things here as we find them, showing how much we are indebted to those who were before us and placed “Stepping stones” so that others may follow dry shod or mapped out a water course so that we may not thirst in the town of Plymouth for generations to come – who saw the beauties of a great tree and the symbol of endurance at the same time. Who I am when a place was suitable to build in and erected dwellings who in fact took advantage of the simple things close at hand to enrich and embellish their lives.-



Page 28

To take advantage of the things at hand was characteristic of the men of the times and we find in an entry of Corporation accounts 1576?? I am pd to certayne man that viewed the river at the request of Mr Mayor and his brethren for their prayers and their charges about the same but it was not till 1584 that a bill was brought before parliament to enable the inhabitants of Plymouth to obtain water from

the river or Meavy a river distant from the said town about eight or nine miles which with some charge will be brought in to the said towne. By the buying of which water most of the in commodities and dangers others shall not only be reminded but some panic of the channel of the said haven survived and unused by the river to the perpetual county now once of the same haven a matter most beneficial to the real me.

“ I am payde to Thomas Burden for his horses five to Meavy for the water”

“ I am payde at the church howse of Meavy for wine and milk”

So that horse time was not costly then – neither could good work be done with out something to drink apparently – there were also such things as “consideration” for another entry is for “ I am to the PS on of village in lone as much as cost” a small up for him- for some service? Whereas for Judges etc lords of manors and others had as gifts “a tonne of wine” “three hoggs heads of claret wine for then payers in this help in the main cause.”



Page 30

Now having come to the last page I must leave room for regrets and explanations – regrets that this thing is not better done seeing that now it is done as far as I shall do it. The explanations are these. That it is done at all is due to the fact that some years ago when you were building your house and were looking around to find a name for it you remembered Meavy of our youthful days and you wrote to me asking if I could tell you the meaning of it – I then gave you all I knew about it which was little,- but with this little I possessed came a desire to know more – hence this collection of sketches and notes generally – I will not vouch for the historical accuracy of all the statements although I believe them myself to be true. Just as I believe my sketches to be true when viewed from the artistic standpoint.



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James continued working as a Dentist both at the hospital and in private practice. He also enjoyed Golf and was a member of the Bonnie Doon Golf club. The family had a holiday shack at Port Hacking and correspondence from Our Lady's Retreat Wollongong NSW suggested he supported them with dental visits.

Both James' sons were given a choice of vocations so long as they were "professional" both chose medicine. William opened a practice in the NSW country town of Kandos and from letters James and Mary visited no doubt to also see their 2 grandchildren. Jack remained in Sydney in a neighbouring suburb to Petersham and was married with one child. Occasionally he would act as a locum for his brothers practice in Kandos.

A newspaper article relates how James travelled back to the UK and attend the British Open Championship at Hoylake in 1924, meeting and dining with many of the famous golfers of the time. The article says not all of his correspondence was published due to his strong views expressed about some of the players. I don't know if Mary accompanied him on this trip.

Isaac died in 1922 and with his Father gone and at the age of 70 in 1924 William emigrated to Australia and I expect travelled to Sydney with James. I assume he stayed at Meavy.

In 1930 tragedy struck the family when James and Mary's youngest son Jack Darton was killed in a car accident. He was 33 years old leaving his widow with their young son.

James died suddenly at the Meavy residence in September 1931 aged 73. With James now gone William must have missed Plymouth and returned to live at 73 Amhurst Rd Penny-Comequick where he died in 1938 at the age of 83.

Mary remained at the house until her death in 1947 aged 80.

Her daughter Elsie Darton inherited the estate as the only surviving child, William her brother died 4 years earlier of a heart attack.

The ownership of Meavy was transferred to Elsie and in December 1949 she rented the top floor of the home to her niece Edith Mary Wiltshire and the dental surgery separately as a going concern to Henry William Sengelman. Elsie continued to occupy the ground floor. Elsie sold Meavy to a Mr A. Amata the title showing the transfer on May 5th 1961. She moved to live at an apartment in the historic Elizabeth Bay House in Sydney and remained there until her death in 1971.

It appears Mr Amata converted the house in to 3 flats and in October 1971. A development application was lodged by him with Marrickville council to convert the existing and recently vacated Dental Surgery to a fourth flat. There were already 2 on the ground floor and one on the top floor. Correspondence between council and the owner suggests there were a number of unauthorized internal modifications within the house such a bathroom and kitchen at the time no doubt as a result of its changed use and leasing after Mary died in 1949. It was not uncommon in the 60's and 70's for large old houses in Sydney to be converted in to flats or boarding houses mostly done with little regard to regulations or council approval. This application also flagged the owner's intent to demolish the garage at the side of the home and incorporate 4 parking spaces into the plan.

Circa 2000 a further major development took place to add a new building to the back of the existing house also replacing the back half of the house, consisting of 4 apartments and a townhouse. This meant the property now accommodated 9 apartments and a townhouse. Again, not an uncommon development during this time where laws and culture evolved to encourage high density living. The original front half of the house was retained, and a resident car park dug underground at the back. At the same time the title was changed to allow for the individual ownership of each apartment. It is unusual that a developer would have had the foresight to retain any of the original property, there was no doubt a commercial reason for this decision. I think it was also testament to how well the house was built to be able to still be incorporated into a new design after 80 years.

Houses are just structures with the ultimate purpose to provide shelter for those people that live in them. It is the people that bring them to life and their actions and stories that create the lasting connection from all those years ago. In 2020 as I write this, nearing its 120th birthday Meavy still stands today looking much the same from the front as it did when it was built. The entrance arch still proudly shows the name MEAVY.





Isaac Brace Darton



James Sidney Darton



Mary Darton (nee Johns)



William Reginald Darton



Elsie May Darton



John (Jack) Kenneth Darton



Prior 1881 a young man in his twenties living in Plymouth UK made the life changing decision to emigrate to Australia. There he trained as a dentist, married, had 3 children and built a grand home in Sydney which he called Meavy after the village near where he grew up.

He wrote to his older brother an artist to ask him the meaning of Meavy and just before 1909 his brother visited the village producing a book of sketches and a written “tour“ as a gift for his brother on the other side of the world.

The man that build the house was my great grandfather and his brother my Great Uncle.

I have pleasure in telling the story of them both and sharing the Meavy book as a snapshot of Meavy in 1909.

Mark Darton

