

Mr William James Peploe

William James Peploe was born 1859 in Stourbridge, Worcestershire and went to school in Wolverhampton where he became a pupil/teacher.

It is believed that he may have attended St Luke's Church School made famous for the formation of Wolverhampton Wanderers in 1877.

The school football team was called the Dallington Wolves and Mr Peploe would send telegrams to the team on behalf of the pupils.

11th March 1921 Sussex Agricultural Express

The Cup

Dallington's school children have a special interest in "the Wolves." After the Wanderer's victory over Everton on Saturday the following message was sent to Wolverhampton: - "Well done Wolves. Play up for Mercia's honour. Your guerdon will be the cup."

With sister Marianne age 20 they came to Dallington in 1884 where both were to remain for the rest of their lives.

Many years later Mr Peploe wrote of his memories of the first 24 hours in the village details of which appear in Karen Bryant-Mole's "Dallington, Six Miles from Anywhere."

"He and his sister lodged with a Miss Gosling, although he did not say which Miss Gosling. He found his hostess and her home cold and inhospitable. Miss Gosling was a pious woman, with an unwelcoming demeanour and a fondness for lengthy prayers. When Mr Peploe and his sister came downstairs on their first evening Miss Gosling pronounced grace in a sepulchral voice, before showing them into a sitting room warmed by a fire containing a single stick of wood. At about 9pm a tray containing two bits of bread and cheese, two glasses and a bottle of water were brought in and the guests were gravely informed that supper was ready."

Mr Peploe was later to recall:-

"The thought of it makes me shudder to this day."

They attended church the next morning. They were stared at as if they were "a pair of menagerie animals." No one came forward to greet them or welcome them.

After a dinner of cold beef and cold potatoes they attended the afternoon service when, again, no one spoke to them. Mr Peploe described these first 24 hours as the most miserable of his life.

Despite this dreadful start William Peploe was soon to establish himself at Dallington School and in so many aspects of village life. Many villagers, past and present have played major roles in support but the title of Mr Dallington deservedly goes to Mr Peploe.

Head Teacher

Church Warden

Secretary PCC

Sergeant in Sussex Militia

Church Choir

Secretary Brightling and Dallington Conservative Association
Vice president Dallington Mutual Improvement Association
Parish Councillor
Vice President Reading Room & Village Institute
Correspondent to the local press
Honorary secretary Swan Inn Slate Club
Overseer
Member of the Ancient order of Foresters
Hon. Sec Dallington Football and Cricket Clubs.
He was also closely involved in
Summer Fetes
Celery Suppers
Boxing Day parties
Most importantly of all he was head teacher at Dallington from 1884 until 1923
during which time he never took a day off with sickness.

It is difficult to imagine the Old School having 78 children in the mixed department and 21 infant children in the adjoining room.

The new school was opened in January 1914.

He was very popular with his pupils and stories abound of his kindness in providing shoes and other items of clothing for the children.

Many of the pupils went on to have children of their own and Mr Peploe acted as their Godfather.

A newspaper article in 1922 sums up what many villagers thought of him:-

“Not only is the spirit of the village personified in the kindly and ever obliging principal of the school, but Mr Peploe is a veritable local institution in himself, devoted not only to the educational interests of the children, by whom he is respected and loved, but ever concerned with the welfare of their fathers and mothers, to whom he has ministered in a wonderful variety of ways since he came to the village as long ago as 1884. Scarcely an event or celebration has taken place in that period without the guiding help of Mr Peploe’s hand, and it would be difficult to mention a club or society which he has not assisted in some capacity, in not a few cases taking the principal part of the burden upon his shoulders.”

During World War One a good number of the old boys would write to him telling him of their various exploits.

He also organised the Cigarettes for the Troops from the village.

William Peploe was a very active Conservative and was not afraid of publically voicing his opinion. This was helped by the fact that he was the correspondent for the local papers and was not afraid of letting his personal opinion interfere with the truth. An excellent example of how he allowed his personal politics to interfere with his role as village correspondent can be seen in the following report in the Sussex Agricultural Express.

21st November 1891

Liberal Meeting at Dallington

Lively Proceedings. Mr Ball Severely Heckled

The gentleman who seeks to woo voters of the Rye Division from their allegiance to their present excellent member, Colonel Brookfield M.P., paid this village a visit on Tuesday night, but unlike the great Roman general, he will not be able to say "I came, I saw, I conquered." the greater part of the audience as is usual at Liberal meetings at Dallington come from Ashburnham and neighbouring parishes being especially well represented. We should like to gently insinuate that some of the home Tories might show up a little more. It is scarcely generous to expect one or two to bear the brunt of the battle. The working men however, and the young fellows were there, and, taking a very moderate estimate, we should say that Dallington part of the audience Colonel Brookfield supporters outnumbered the Ballites by seven or eight to one.

A crowd surrounded Mr Ball's carriage as he drove away, and gave a lusty cheer for Colonel Brookfield.

Sussex Agricultural Express

Clearly the above report implies a very strong anti- Liberal reaction to the meeting. However, an additional response to the meeting appeared in the next edition of the newspaper.

"Sir, reference your liberal meeting correspondent's report of the Liberal meeting held here on Tuesday 24th November is so unfair and one-sided that it has caused strong comments.

The severe heckling spoken of was by the village schoolmaster and his sister only, and it certainly enhanced the enthusiasm of the large audience.....

It is interesting to note that both members of the Peploe family were so politically motivated especially as it is not clear if either of them had the franchise to vote at this time. Marianne certainly would not have had the vote until much later.

Nevertheless, they flew their political colours very openly, even changing the name of their home (Now Church Cottage) to Courthope Cottage after George Courthope, Conservative MP for the district of Rye from 1906-1945.

The article in the Sussex Agricultural Express for the 20th October 1900 continues be very by partisan:-

The Election

Election Day passed off without any exciting incidents. We are greatly indebted to W.Alexander Esq. of Heathfield Park, for the use of a carriage and pair to convey voters to Brightling during the day. Had we been able to service a trap for the evening nearly every elector would have voted. As it was, about 80 per cent exercised the privilege, and of those it is estimated that nine out of ten plumped for the Colonel. The result was received with unbounded delight.

Mr Peploe's interest in village affairs led to his involvement in a wide variety of national events including the Great Hop Demonstration in 1908. When 50,000 demonstrators marched on Trafalgar Square demanding that the government impose import tariffs on imported hops. This protest was not supported by everyone and was publicly criticised in many quarters.

Not only did he take part in the protest, he even used the press to attack the critics who claimed that the event was, in reality, a drunken riot.

Sussex Agricultural Express 27th May 1908
The Great Hop Demonstration

Sir-

As one of the many thousands who took part in Saturday's great demonstration in Trafalgar Square, I wish to express in the strongest possible manner my contempt and disgust for the lying and libellous reports in the reptile radical press. It seems to have vexed the righteous souls of the "Holy Kill Joys" of these puritanical publications, that some of the demonstrators were actually wicked enough to buy some beer and share it with their comrades. Well I know I was jolly grateful to a kind-hearted Londoner who handed me a glass as I marched along in the procession. Good luck to him wherever he may be.

That there were only two convictions for drunkenness from cases arising from the demonstration is sufficient answer to those detractors of the most remarkable and successful gathering ever held in London.

What good did it do? Well one thing, it showed many foreigners in London what they have never seen before – a great army of Real Englishmen – grandsons and great grandsons of the men who carried the old flag from "Portugal to the Pyrenees". If Mr Haldane was looking on-and I hope he was-how he must have longed for a magician's wand to churn us all in to Territorial soldiers.

I am yours faithfully
W.J. Peploe

Mr Peploe involved himself in local issues with great enthusiasm and was happy to make use of his position as the local press correspondent to publicise his personal opinion and possibly antagonise one or two of his neighbours

26th December 1891

Entertainment

The usual Boxing Day entertainment will take place in the school room. Those objecting to a good honest laugh should stay away.

Sussex Agricultural Express

11th November 1892

Early Closing

We are very pleased to note that our village shops are now closing at 7pm instead of 8pm on all evenings except Saturday.

We certainly do not see why they should not all close at 8-30pm on the latter day. If they kept open till midnight we know several people in Dallington who would turn up to do their purchasing at five minutes past.

It might appear to some that Mr Peploe took advantage of his position as local correspondent, choosing what and what not to see published in the local papers. A hint of this appeared in the Sussex Agricultural Express on the 10th March 1894:-

School Reports

Sir:- Your correspondent (Mr W.J. Peploe) appears very much averse to the practice of inserting school reports in your paper; perhaps he will kindly say why every little item of news connected with Dallington is always fully reported while her Majesty's Inspector's report on the National School is so carefully left out.

I am sir, Yours etc.

One connected with a School

I think it was true that Mr Peploe did make every effort to "get every" little item" published but from a history point of view he has given us a lasting record of some thirty years in the village. Occasionally these news items were more romantic than they were informative as the following report illustrates:-

Sussex Agricultural Express

16th December 1905

Killarney in Sussex

"The charm of Dallington scenery is freely acknowledged but it is not so generally known that on moonlight nights when the mists are in the valley, we have the "Eden of the West" brought to our very doors. The scene on Monday night from Beech Gate was of idyllic beauty, groups of trees in Dallington Forest forming isles in a lake some miles in extent."

The Dallington Controversy of 1890

This very compelling heading tends to disappoint the modern reader although it does show how religion and politics played such an important role in village life and therefore not surprising that Mr Peploe in this issue.

Mr Edward Watson a farmer from Dallington who was a County Councillor; an executive member of the local Liberal party as well as being a non-conformist took exception to the Revd. Tatham and his Roman tendencies and his indoctrination of the Dallington School pupils.

This resulted in pages of letters appearing in the local press as both sides exchanged insults.

Needless to say, the controversy eventually disappeared from public view.

He retired in 1923 after 39 years as head of Dallington School. On his retirement he received a gold watch from his sporting friends; a gold chain from his school children and £61 from the parishioners.

Mr Peploe died on the 19th October 1931 Friday 23rd October 1931.

Maud Simmons, in her "Memories of Dallington" was to recall;-

“The Church was full at his funeral. He was so well known. He was a very healthy man, and he used to have a cold bath every morning right through the year, but at last he could not sleep and his brain went first, and then he got bodily ill. It was a very great loss to the village when he died.”

He was held in a very high regard and the crowded church reflected the respect in which he was held.

Contemporary journalism allowed for a good deal more detail of funerals than the present time, hence this added information:-

“And it was wearing the black and orange colours of Wolverhampton Wanderers and the scarlet tunic of the Cinque Ports Regiment, and with one white rose on his breast that he went on his last journey to his rest.”

Finally, it is fitting that we conclude this talk by taking a look at this picture of Mr Peploe that has hung in the Old School since 1932. A news article in the Sussex Agricultural Express records the unveiling.-

“Memorial to the Late Mr Peploe”

During a dance held at the Old School on Wednesday evening on behalf of the Cricket Club, the portrait which had been subscribed for by members of the Reading Room and other friends, was unveiled by Mr Russell.

Mr Claypole asked the Rector to say a few words before the unveiling and Canon Hatton spoke of the keenness of Mr Peploe regarding sport and how pleased he would have been with the success of the football team this year. He also said how fitting it was that the photograph would be hung in a room in which Mr Peploe had spent so many hours in teaching the children of the parish.”