

Leckhampton Commemorated in Cambridge

It is something of a surprise to come across the name of Leckhampton in the University of Cambridge, where the graduate campus of Corpus Christi College is known as Leckhampton House. It is a modern development centred round the original house, which was built in 1880 by a Fellow of Trinity College, Frederick William Henry Myers.

Myers had been a pupil at Cheltenham College from 1856 to 1859, before going on to read Classics at Cambridge, and I am indebted to the Secretary of the Cheltonian Society for much of the following information. Myers' precise connection with Leckhampton is not clear. When he entered Cheltenham College as a day boy, his widowed mother lived at an address in Blackheath, his father having been a clergyman in Keswick. Unfortunately, the College entry form does not show where he would be lodging, though it would not be unreasonable to assume that he lived in Leckhampton, or at least that he knew it well, for example as a place for hill walks. Whatever the reason, he evidently developed a fondness for Leckhampton and when he settled down to life as a Don in Cambridge he chose to name his house after the village.

Myers is considered one of the most distinguished Old Cheltonians, and also one of the most unusual. An outstanding classical scholar and essayist and one of the earliest of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, he was also a founder member of the Society for Psychical Research. He invented the term 'telepathy', for which he was convinced there was satisfactory evidence. It is sad to record that a message received through a medium warned him that he would die in 1902, and he planned his work with reference to that date. In fact, he died of a heart attack in Rome in 1901!

There is a striking memorial to Myers in Cheltenham College Chapel, executed in the workshops of H H Martyn & Co Ltd. It includes a bronze bust of Myers and a symbolic Tree of Life. At its foot is a tiny mole, recalling the time when the sight of a dead mole brought home to him as a child the awful finality of death and set him to wonder whether there was another life to come. Happily, in the carving, the little mole is again alive and well and busily burrowing.

Sources:

Prospectus for Corpus Christi College, Cambridge
Cheltenham College Register 1841 - 1889
Cheltonian Society News 1987 -1988