



**THREE TRUNKS  
in a  
BRANSCOMBE  
ATTIC**

**THREE TRUNKS IN A BRANSCOMBE ATTIC  
Barbara Farquharson Spring 2011**

I'll start at the end, with the moral to the story – or several morals –

- **never throw anything away**
- **always put names on photos**
- **admit you haven't a clue what's going to be important to future generations**
- **remember – history's mainly about ordinary people doing ordinary things**

I particularly like the last one: *people make history*. I'll add two more:

- 
- **history's all about accidents & coincidences**
  - **you can tell a story a hundred different ways**

So let's start with number five: – **coincidences**. This part's rather personal – I hope you won't mind.



When Jan, my husband, died, 9 years ago, we inscribed on his tombstone a line from one of his favourite poets, Charlotte Mew - 'the sea is singing on, sweetheart'. Mew is not well known – at the time, all I knew was that she'd had an unhappy life and committed suicide. One day I was talking to Elsie Mayo [*village archivist*]. 'It's a funny thing,' I said, 'the poem by Charlotte Mew reminds me of Branscombe'. Elsie, who knows about poetry, said 'It's not surprising, she used to come here!' 'What?' 'Well, she was friends with the Chick girls – she used to come to Hazelwood with them.'

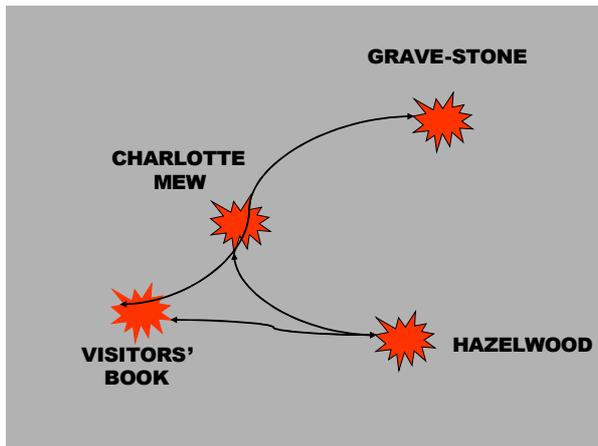


**1889-90 The Chick girls & Charlotte Mew**  
 back row: Mary, Edith, Harriette, Margaret  
 front: Frances, Charlotte Mew, Elsie

'How d'you know?' 'Well' she said, 'I was up at Hazelwood one time when Peter Blackman was alive and I saw an old Visitors' Book, and she was in it.' 'Where's the book?' 'I don't know.'

As it happens, I had already heard of this book. The Chick family who rented Hazelwood from the early 1900s and later owned it, were an amazing clan and they had some pretty amazing friends. I'd often thought it'd be nice to know more about their visitors. So where was the book? I went on the hunt, but Peter Blackman had died, and the book had vanished.

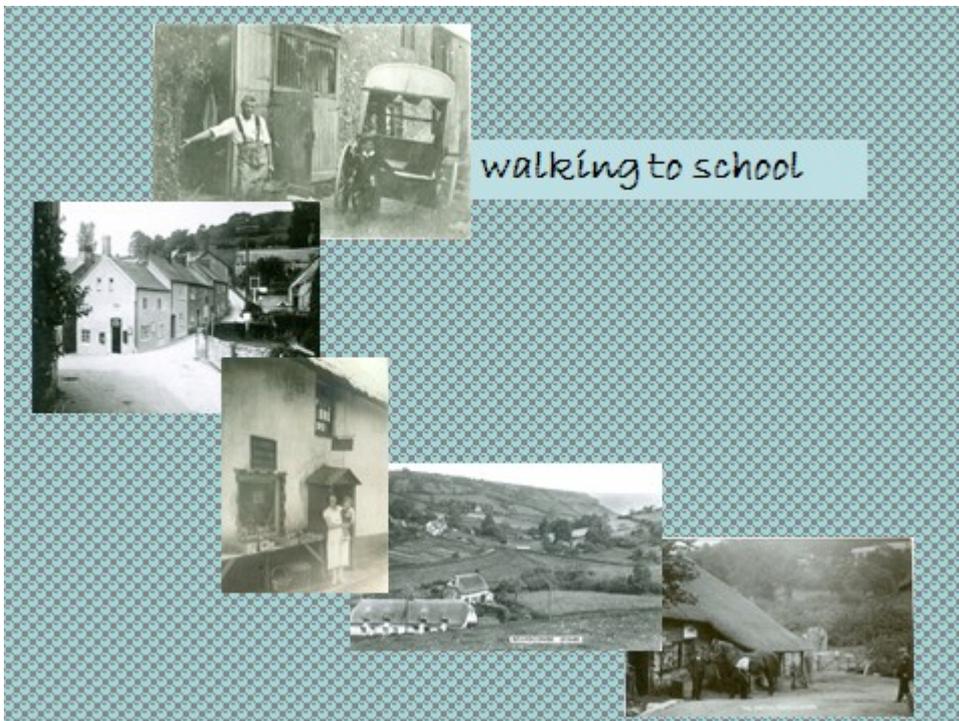
So, the first rather stuttering linkages – **a spidergram showing the inter-connection between things.**



**A second coincidence** – again rather personal.

I got as far as calling in at Maycoes, a house on Vicarage Hill which is still owned by descendants of the Chicks. I was talking to Peter Dickens, whose wife Anna Tomlinson was a descendent of the Chicks. There was a rather curious link, which I had pretty much forgotten between Peter and the Project.

About ten years ago, we did a project on **footpaths – footpaths that were real but that were also memory tracks.** **Ike Dowell** walked to Hole and remembered things from his childhood, his schooldays, from going to work at Hill Arrish; **Sid Sweetland** recalled walking behind the donkeys on the steep zigzags down to Clifly Gosling's cliff plats; Jenny Newton remembered being lifted onto Harry Layzell's shoulders and him delivering the mail loudly singing hymns all the way. And **Anna Dickens** *née* Tomlinson remembered when, as a little girl during the war she'd been evacuated with her mother, Margaret Tomlinson, and her brother Martin, to Branscombe. She remembered every detail of the daily walk from Vicarage Hill, down through the square, past Bank, the forge and up to the village school.



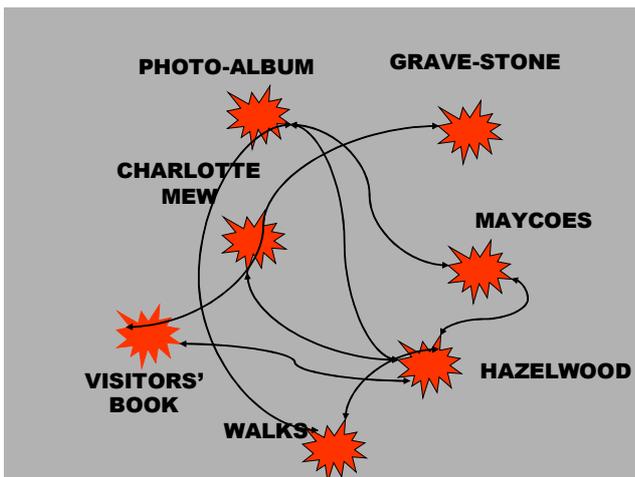
She had amazing recall. What I didn't know when she talked to me was that she was beginning to have Alzheimer's. Her short-term memory was pretty much shot, but she still had her long-term memory. Her husband, Peter Dickens, had been very moved, and so, ten years on, some time after Anna's death, when I went to talk to him about the Visitors Book, he was very generous. He didn't know what had happened to the Visitors Book but, he said 'There are some remarkable photo albums stored in a wooden chest in the hall at Maycoes.'



John (Torrance) and I went to look - there *were* albums full of Edwardian pictures. Our first reaction was, 'Oh well, lovely pictures, but we'll never know who the people are.' Imagine our surprise when we discovered that they'd been beautifully annotated – not just by one person, but by two, Margaret Tomlinson and her father, Arthur Tansley.

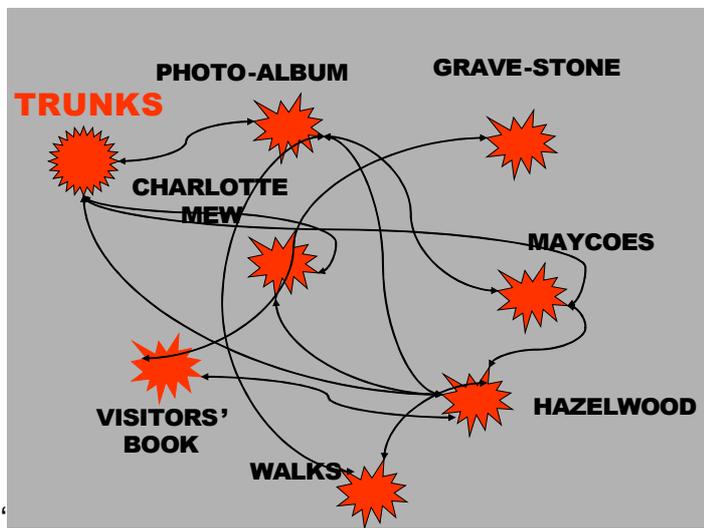


So now the spidergram grows –



Peter gave us permission to scan the photos, and then early last summer, passing by Maycoes, we met Anna's nephew, **Sam Tomlinson**. He was very friendly. Next morning he was on the phone: 'You're going to be a bit horrified, I went up in the loft last night. There are three enormous trunks stuffed with letters and photos!' Wow! Not horrified - but definitely amazed – jubilant –nervous.

Sam was leaving the next day and over the summer the house was going to be crowded with family. 'Could we, maybe, take everything back to our place?' 'Why not? You'll look after them.'



And so we drove to the house and John crawled up into the loft.



By the dim electric light bulb he spied several trunks, including two large black tin trunks, and one smaller one. We got the small one down the ladder, the others were too big and heavy. So we put everything into carrier bags and boxes, numbered them up, did the same for the chest full of albums, piled everything up by the garden gate, blocked the road while we loaded up, got home and wheelbarrowed the whole lot down to the studio.



So - now what?

We tip one of the plastic bags out on to the table. Full to the brim of unsorted letters, some folded, some still in envelopes with Victorian stamps on them.

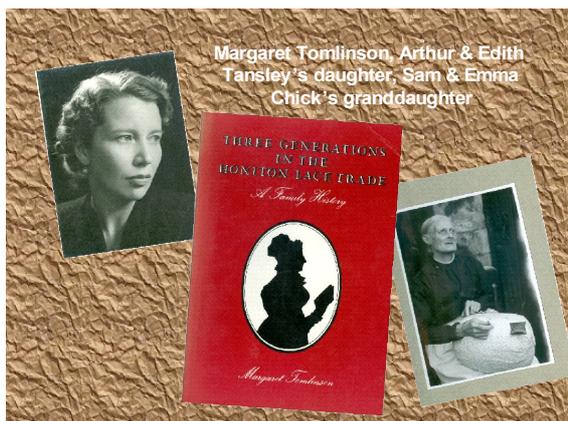


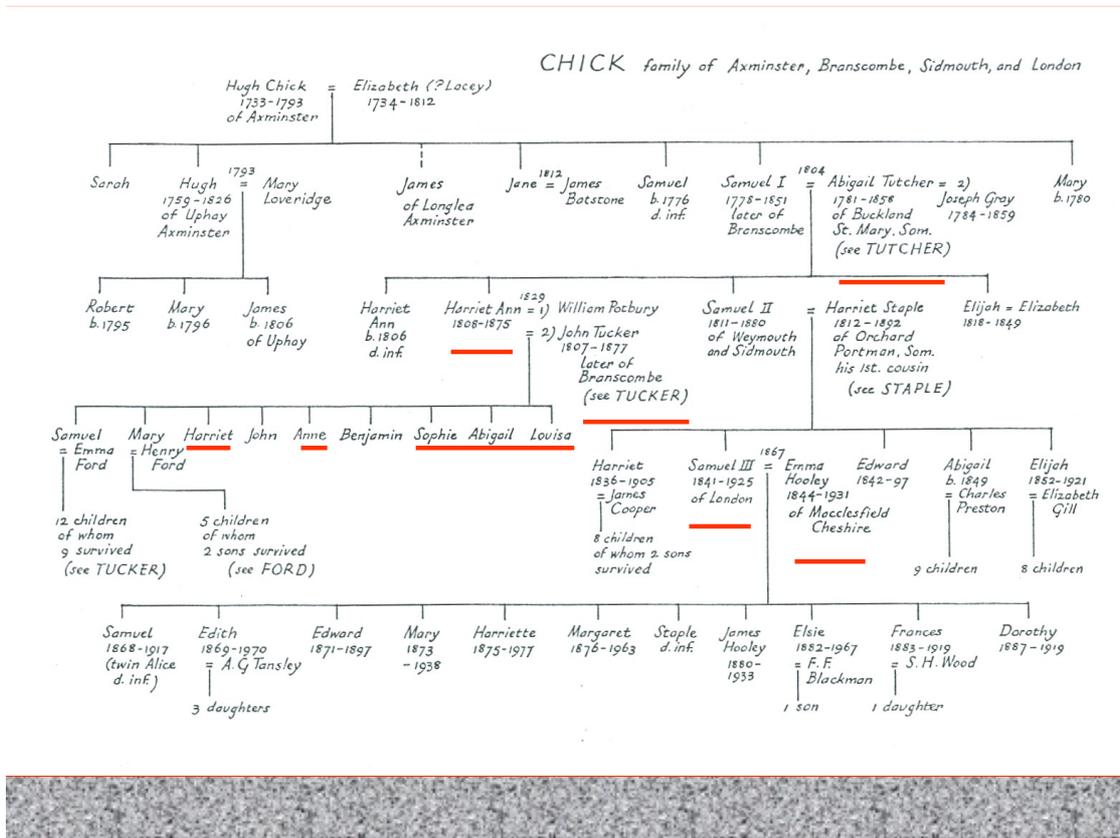
They seem nearly all to be addressed to Mrs *Tansley* ...'Dear Amelia'. They don't seem to have much to do with Branscombe. What's to be done? Ah - not so fast! There are lots more bags, and, yes, there **are** connections. The obvious one is this:



Here's a letter to Amelia Tansley; here's a wedding photograph, 1903, taken on the lawn at Hazelwood. The connection? Arthur Tansley, only son of George and Amelia, is marrying Edith, eldest daughter of Sam and Emma Chick of Ealing, London, and Hazelwood, Branscombe.

Now we have to pause while I fill you in a bit about the Chick family – a lot of this comes in Margaret Tomlinson's book.





Abigail, born 1781, marries farmer Sam Chick up at Berry farm. She's a formidable lady, and sets up as a lace trader. Her daughter marries John Tucker, lace manufacturer and they live at Barnells and have a large family (9 children; 6 girls).



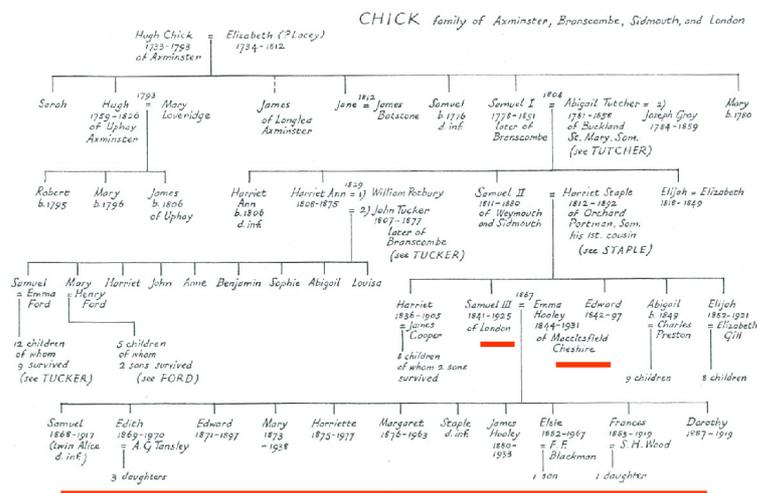
Tucker's a bit of a brute, forces his daughters to work in the family business, but when he dies they slam the door to the workshop, and when *they* die the contents

are burnt on a great bonfire. Not surprisingly, the Tucker girls are a pretty grim looking lot.

Abigail has a son, Sam II. He's an invalid, invents his own invalid chair – *pushed* by his dog -



He has a son, Sam III -



who goes off to London and runs a lace shop in Bloomsbury. The lace industry is in decline, so he switches into buying and selling property. He's very good at it.

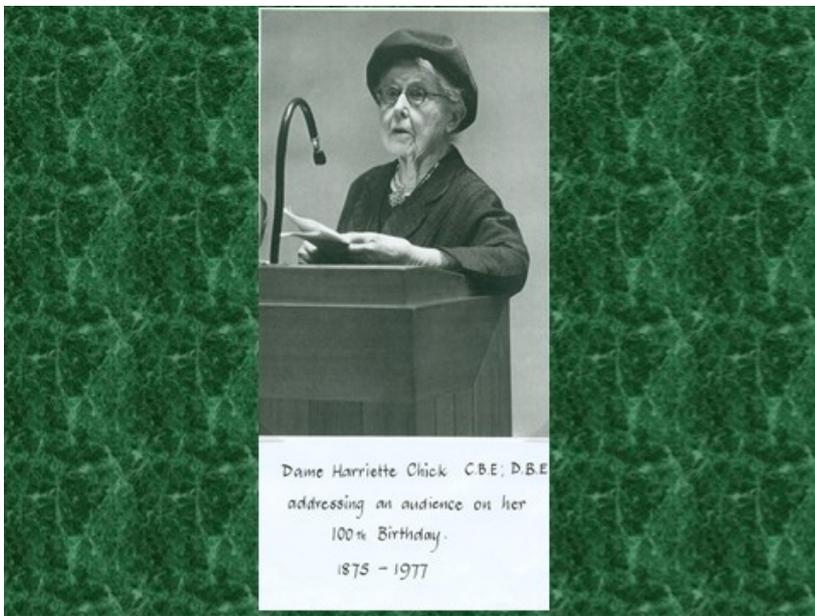


He marries Emma Hooley in 1867. They have ten children. The three boys are fairly average, the **seven girls** are pretty sensational. To their father's astonishment, they refuse to leave school to help in the business and demand to stay on and to go to university. This is the 1880s and pretty unusual. Two of them, Dottie and Frances, die very young, in 1919.

Edith, the eldest, studies botany, and marries Arthur Tansley who becomes a famous ecologist. They have three daughters, one of whom is Margaret Tomlinson.







Quite impressive ... especially when you compare them to their poor incarcerated Tucker cousins at Barnells.

So Sam III, their dad, having made a lot of money, and being fond of Branscombe, rents, and then buys, Hazelwood from Henry Ford.



This is in 1901. Family come down, and the girls bring their friends – including Charlotte Mew (letters, poems). Sam's very supportive of the new chapel, helps pay for the War Memorial, and sets up a village lending library at Hazelwood. Lots of people from the village work at the house. Edith and Arthur get married in

Branscombe Church, and Frances marries Sydney Wood in the Chapel. After Edith's wedding 200 children and the village band come up and serenade at Hazelwood –

love still you how much she enjoyed your wedding. Then lanterns were lit & to our astonishment the village band appeared in front of the house, followed by a married couple & the school children. The band played about an hour & the children danced all over the gravel in front. Every one was delighted, it made an extraordinary effect all lit up with lanterns. They all had wedding cake & the band had supper in the kitchen. (Cook danced with Albert) while the children & other people inspected the grass path. Then they



Sutton from being sent by Pop on the box of a carriage-poster. too polite to refuse. So I just got him today home with us. Supper went off all right, I feel a martyr in taking a seat next to Aunt Harriet, who, if anything, was a little more appalling in every way than usual but I had Harry on my left who was just sweet.

Sydney Wood marries Frances Chick 1911

Harriette writing to Edith after the Tansley wedding 1903

Two generations on, Sam Chick's grand-daughter, Margaret Tomlinson becomes an architect and designs and builds Maycoes, and does the make-over on Barnells.



Margaret Tomlinson designs & builds Maycoes 1931



She brings her children and a lot of evacuees to Branscombe during the war – and that's why Anna remembers the walk to school.



So there you have it, lots of Chicks and chicklets ... They go on, but we'll stop the family saga there and leave Branscombe for a while. What I want to do now is to tell you three different stories that emerge from the trunks.



When we first started we decided that, since we didn't want to get too bogged down, we'd pick out the Branscombe material and just put the rest in chronological order and leave it for someone else to worry about.



'Remember,' we said to each other, 'we're **not** going to get involved, we're just going to organise things.'



Fat chance! At the end of the second day John said, 'You're going very slowly – you're **reading** the letters!' I said: 'I know, but they're so **interesting**'. By the end of the third day, he'd succumbed – and everything slowed down. OK, we're **not** going to write a Victorian social history – but, hell, we might as well enjoy ourselves getting involved in the lives of these people; pondering the stories that they tell.

As it happens, there was another curious coincidence. Just as we started we were contacted by someone called Peter Ayres who was busy writing a biography of Arthur Tansley. Arthur Tansley, I hope you will remember, married Edith Chick. Arthur Tansley was Amelia Tansley's son. Now why would someone want to write about Tansley? **Here's our first story.**



Phot. 173. Interior of Saller's Wood, Branscombe. *Fraginus* dominant, with *Hedera*. *Mercurialis perennis* and *Stilla non-scripta* dominant in field layer. *Phyllitis scolopendrium* and *Arum maculatum* in foreground. On calcareous Upper Greensand. April. R. J. L.

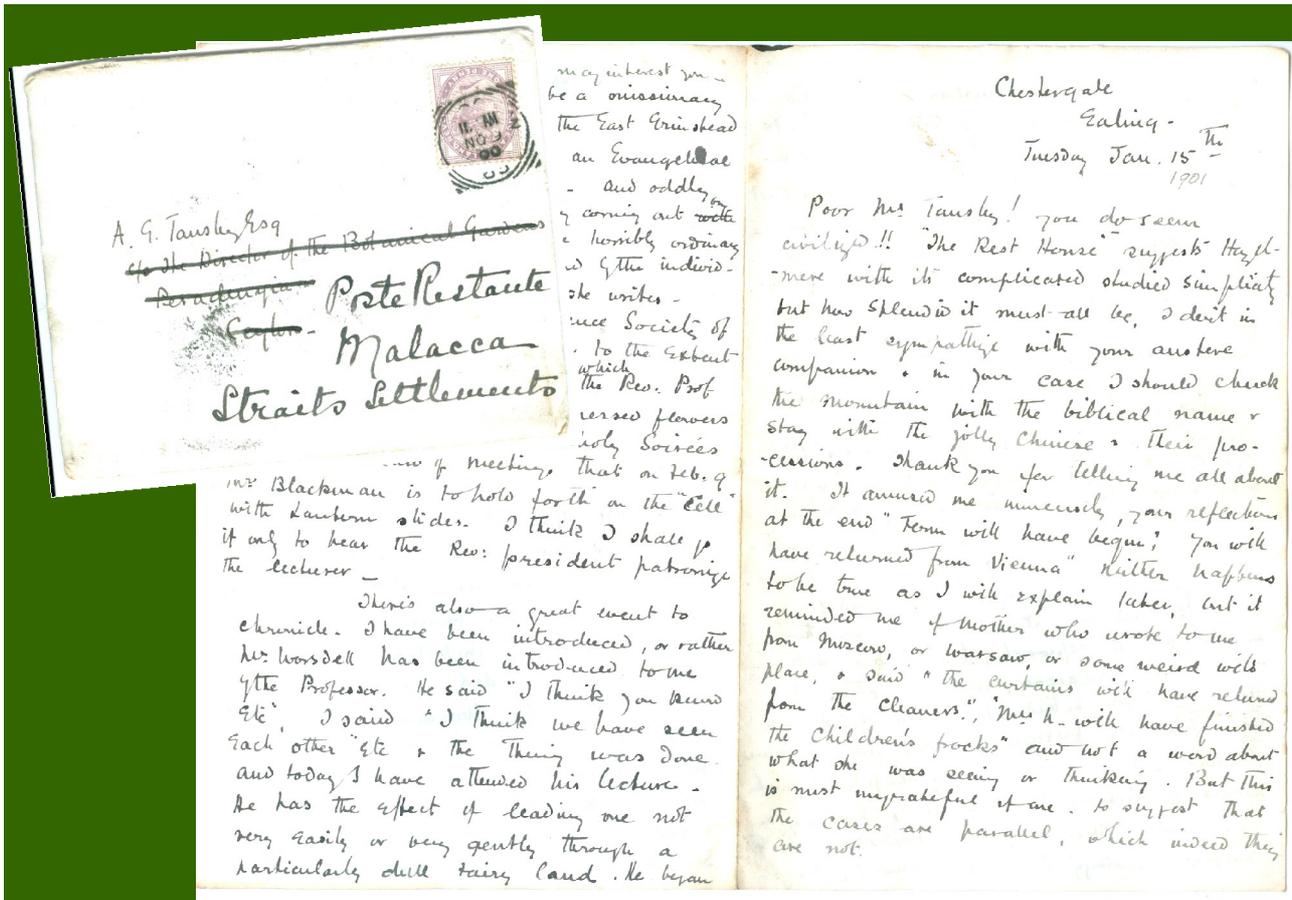


Well, it so happens that he was more or less the inventor of the study of Plant Ecology. He started out as a botanist which through to the end of the nineteenth century meant simply looking at plants as individual specimens. What Tansley recognized was that you had to think about them as plant *communities*, and you had to think about them in a *changing context*. He used **Branscombe** as one of his case studies - tramping the steep valleys, mapping the plant communities, coming back season after season. He got a lot of flak to begin with, but eventually the importance of his work was recognized and he was knighted. So that's why Peter Ayres was writing his biography. 'I'm almost finished', he said, 'but I haven't found much about his early life.'

Well – we had a trunk full!



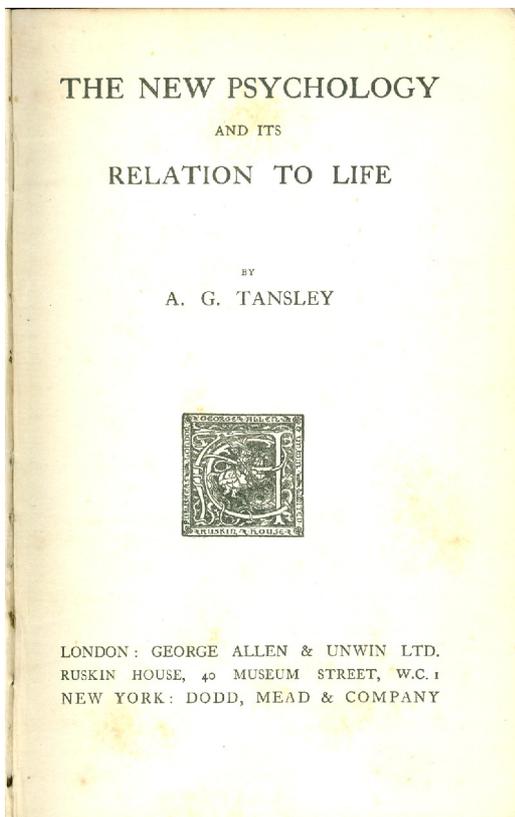
he did casually mention that he'd received amusing letters from someone called Edith Chick. We of course know, because we have Edith's early letters to Arthur, that these were letters of shy courtship.



## Edith Chick to Arthur – shy courtship 1901

I like the bit about a lecturer; 'he has the effect of leading me not very easily or very gently through a particularly dull fairy land.'

There's something else that comes out of looking at Tansley's letters.



## Arthur Tansley, ecologist AND psychologist

Just got under the net  
before 'disciplines' were  
named and fenced ...

In 1920 he writes an  
Introductory text to  
Psychoanalysis and  
went off to talk to Freud  
in Vienna

He belongs to a generation, at the end of the nineteenth, beginning of the twentieth century, when university learning was much more open-ended. It was only in the nineteen twenties that, as university education expanded, people began to create specialisms, and disciplines and boundaries. Tansley just got in before the barriers went up. First a **botanist**, then an **Ecologist**, then, rather amazingly, a **psychologist**. In his thirties, he became interested in Freudian analysis, wrote a popular book about psychoanalysis, and went off to Vienna to talk to, and be analysed by, Freud!

29 Feb. 1924.

Penning Pöhl,  
Rathausstrasse 20.  
Wien I. Austria.

Dear Maud,

Thank you very much for your last letter and the enclosures, which you say you don't want again. All the evidence is worth having, though Anny Lissie's story still remains the most important. With regard to the time by which I want anything fresh, it would be more useful before I leave here - probably end of June - than afterwards, and the sooner the better. But there is no need at all for you to inconvenience yourself to go anywhere to look for evidence, if you want to do something else. It will (or may) be gone at any time.

In the regard to the aunts I did speak to Anny Jenny on the subject last summer, but got nothing. She said she was only living in the house during the first year of my life, and afterwards had no special opportunities of observation. I think if you are seeing the aunts soon it would be better for you to talk to them than for me to write either of them a letter. They might easily refresh your own memory, when you get to talking about those days with people who were "there" (so to speak) and must have seen something of me & my behaviour. The most apparently trivial things might turn out very valuable. Do you know at what age I may have ceased to be in the parents' room & I went upstairs to sleep in the top room with a nurse? Was it Lissie's Boudoir or Miss Richetta who slept in the top room with me?

It still snows heavily here at intervals. The Ka & Dyffan are much taken up with their English clubs (of Vicars' children who were <sup>born</sup> in England soon after the war). Ka has been teaching country dancing to me & they soon are having a "display". Dyffan is teaching another (of boys) to act a small English play (Robt Horn). The affection of almost all the Austrians we meet for England is extraordinary.

Love from all -

Your affectionately  
Arthur

### Letter to Maud from Vienna 1924

'... Do you know at what age my cot ceased to be in my parents' room & I went upstairs to sleep in the top room with a nurse?'



Arthur's case & letters

Freud was very taken with him and wanted him to return to England to proselytise his new ideas – Arthur was tempted but at that moment he was offered the professorship in Botany at Oxford and decided to remain loyal to his first great intellectual passion. So these letters are not just about Tansley, but also about a whole lot of wider changes going on in the world around him.

I'll just add that this is one of those cases where the story can be told somewhat differently. There's a less heroic version, which doesn't come from the letters, but from chatting to Arthur's grandson, Martin Tomlinson. A bit of pure gossip.

## ANOTHER WAY OF TELLING



Martin Tomlinson,  
Arthur's grandson

Arthur & Edith with  
their daughters  
Helen & Margaret



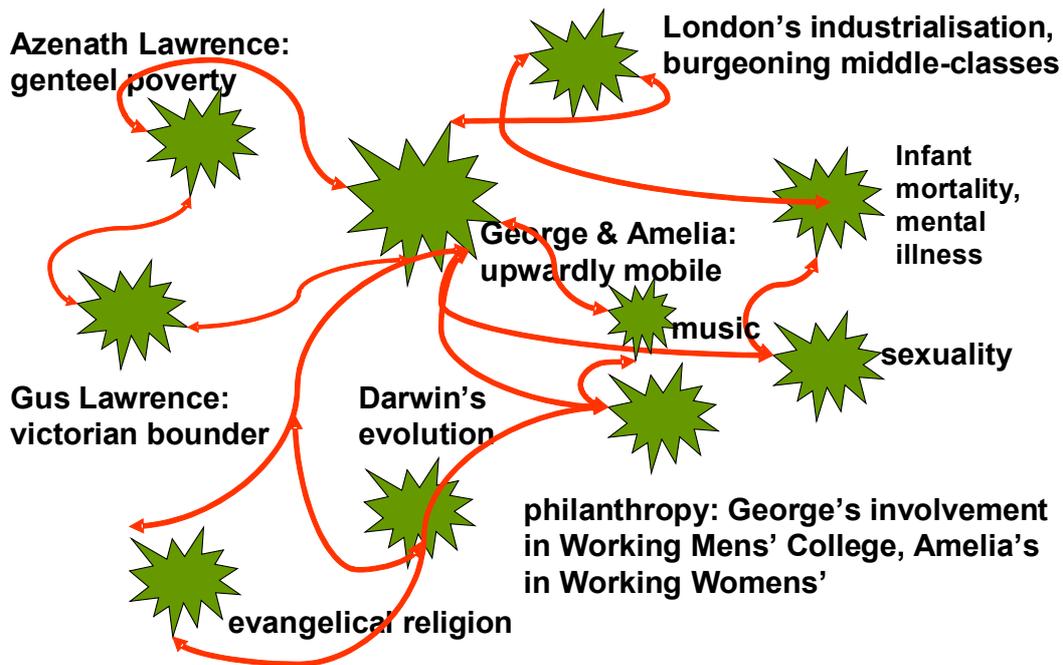
The Freudian episode occurs in the 1920s. Arthur was married, had three children, lived in Cambridge, was having trouble getting his ideas accepted, and **was having an affair**. According to Martin, Arthur told his wife and children as they sat around the breakfast table and, he said, it 'created quite an upset'!! According to Martin, it was because he felt very guilty and had had a particularly vivid and recurrent dream that he wrote to Freud!

So - that's Arthur, and, apart from that last bit of gossip, **all** the information came out of those trunks. But now there's another, equally interesting story to be told about **his parents, George and Amelia Tansley**.

### **The second story.**

We really haven't looked at these letters in any detail ... but nonetheless ... because Amelia kept **every** letter, **every** invitation, **every** newspaper cutting, not to mention photos, and notebooks and artists' pads, it's unbelievably rich. I'd like to give you a glimpse into their world. Here's another spidergram: the Victorian world of George and Amelia Tansley.

## GEORGE & AMELIA TANSLEY'S VICTORIAN WORLD

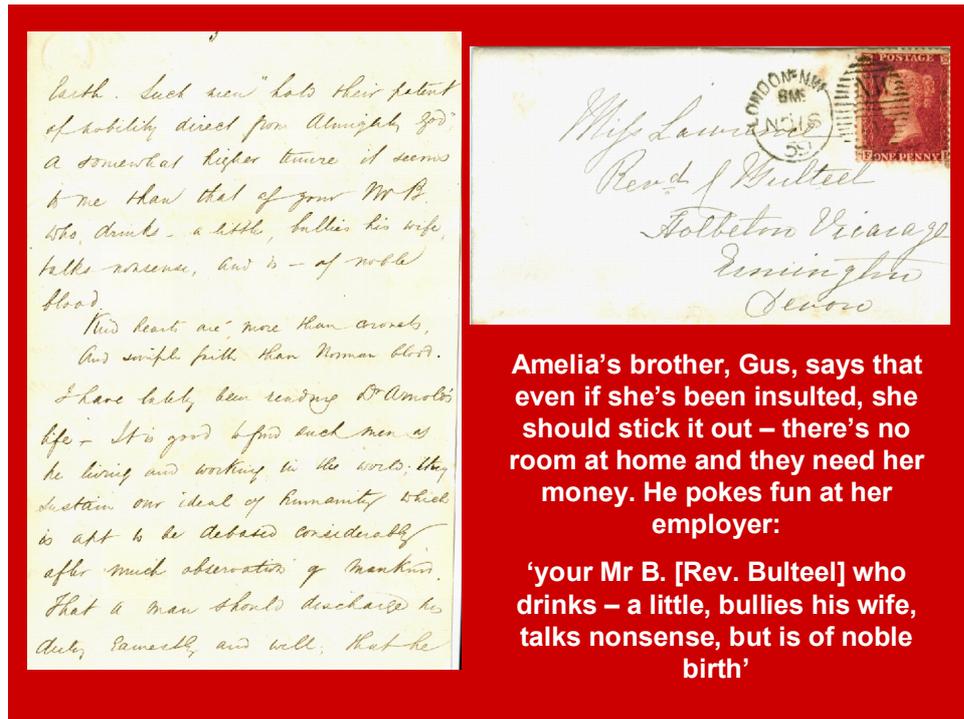


First, there are letters dating to the late 1850s between Amelia, **before** her marriage, and her mother Azenath Lawrence. Azenath writes on very flimsy paper, and, as was the fashion of the time, to save space, she cross-writes: first she writes in one direction, then turns the page and writes in the other.

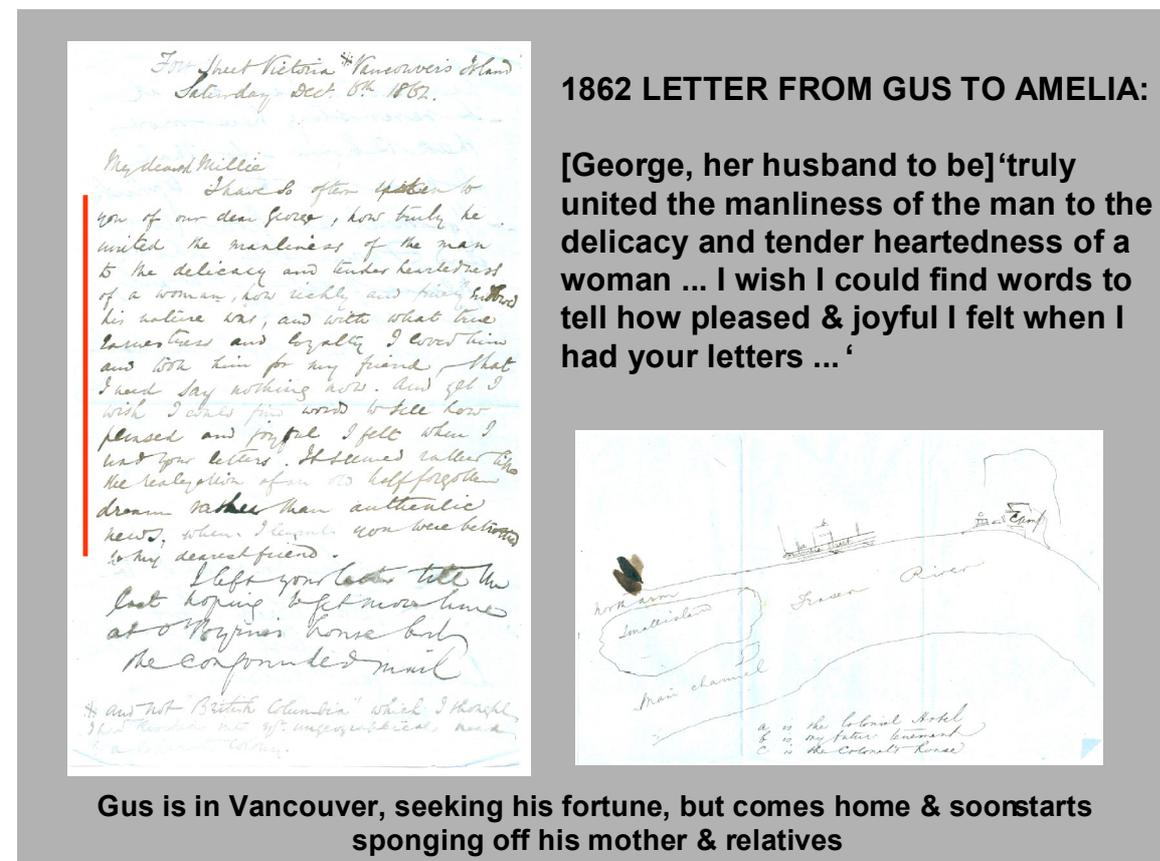


By the 1850s Azenath Lawrence seems to have been a widow – or her husband may have done a bunk. She is not well off. She has several daughters and at least one son, Augustus or Gus. Her daughter Amelia goes off as governess in a vicarage at Ermington in Devon. But something happens, and she wants to come

home. Her brother Gus is having none of it: there's not enough space in the house, he says, and anyway, they need her money.



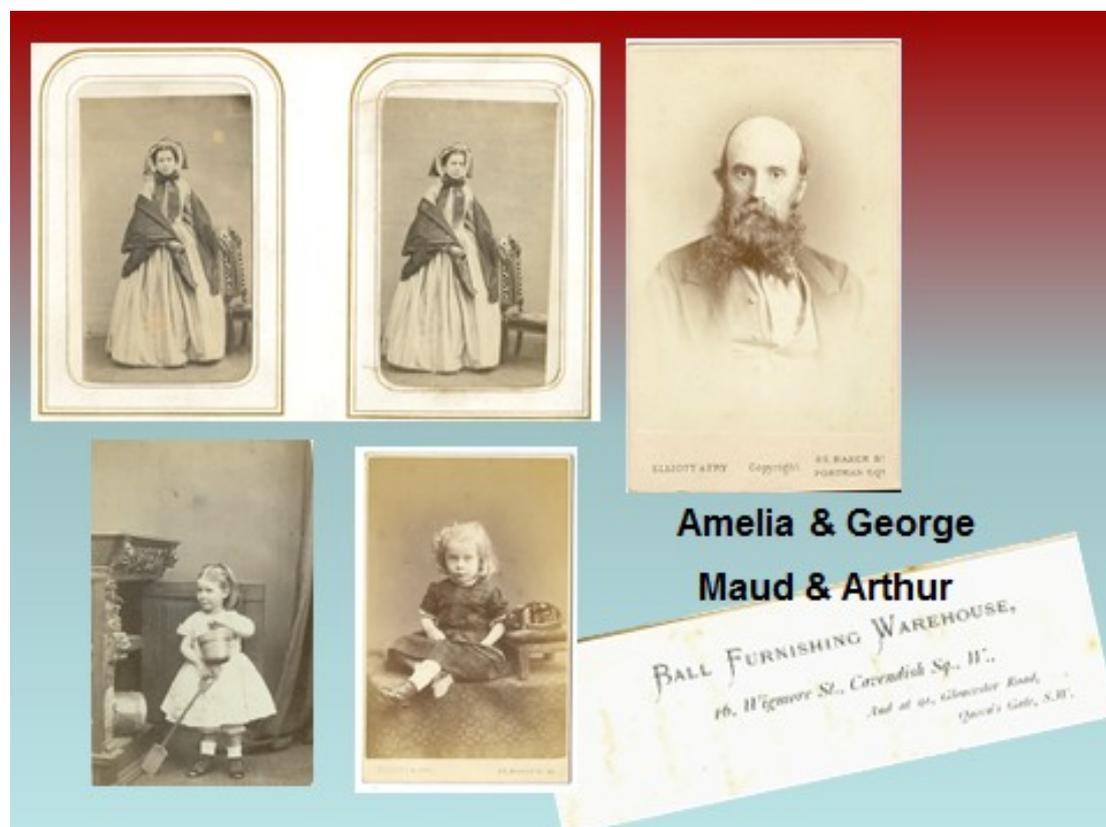
Gus can be very charming. When Amelia gets engaged to George he writes a very nice letter from Vancouver -



But there's always a slight whinge, and we weren't entirely surprised to find that later on he becomes a 'bad lot', sponging off his mother, sisters and brothers-in-

law, until, in the end, they ganged up, gave him a hand-out and told him he'd have to leave the country and never return! There always a cad in Victorian stories, and Gus is the cad.

- So, that's Amelia's mother, her brother: now her marriage. She marries George Tansley in 1862. George has inherited a small family catering business, furnishing 'routs and balls'.



He works hard, the business is successful – the middle classes are burgeoning and he's there to supply their social needs. He and Amelia buy a house in north London and then a large house in Adelaide Road near Primrose Hill. They have two children, Arthur and Maud, who are sent off to boarding schools. Soon they also rent a second home in Malvern.

- So, a successful middle class family, but there's more. This is the time of industrial revolution, of factories, railways, a time when living conditions for the working class were appalling. But also a time of philanthropists, social reformers, demands for equal rights for all men, and, more slowly, for all women. George Tansley seems to have been a very thoughtful, rather special sort of person. Having had to leave school at eleven, he enrolls at nineteen in the Working Men's College and then goes on to teach mathematics there.

Youth  
 Beautiful the Spring - young  
 as it grows  
 Beautiful the summer sun  
 Beautiful the autumn's glow  
 Beautiful the winter's snow  
 Beautiful in all time  
 as it goes.

Middle age . . . . . But it goes.

Old age  
 Beautiful the life of Spring,  
 Beautiful the land that day,  
 Beautiful the autumn's yield,  
 Beautiful the winter's field,  
 Beautiful each season  
 and after I leave,  
 Beautiful how all time and want  
 of earth beauty work own heart;  
 If the heart was right -  
 If the mind was free from sin  
 Then, oh! how they breed  
 Most beautiful  
 The Earth.

**Poem by  
 George**



Highgate H<sup>W</sup>  
 July 20. 1875.

Mr. Horne Esq  
 Chairman of the Com<sup>tee</sup>  
 of the College for looking women

Dear Mr Horne  
 Will you kindly read this my letter  
 of resignation from the Com<sup>tee</sup> at Mr. Dug's  
 meeting? I regret very much  
 having to take this step but  
 have no alternative.

Work of any kind in the College  
 has been made impossible for  
 me. I ~~supposed~~ <sup>was the</sup> ~~copy~~ <sup>of the</sup>  
 a letter ~~to~~ I have received from  
 the Hon. Sec<sup>y</sup> - Mrs's Secretary -  
 which will show this, and also.



**Original WMC in  
 Gt Ormand St**

THE OLD HOME IN GREAT ORMAND STREET

He works all day, then hurries over to the College. And Amelia does too. Rather to our surprise we discovered that there was a Working Women's College, she'd enrolled there, and she and George met when they were both students. There are some marvellously acrimonious letters when some members of the Women's College want to amalgamate with the Men's College and others don't or, at least, they object to the high-handed way in which the move is being pushed through. Amelia resigns. Most of our letters are letters to Amelia, but in these disputatious moments, we have the drafts and redrafts of her letters of protest.

- Amelia, and perhaps George, though that's less clear, took her religion seriously.

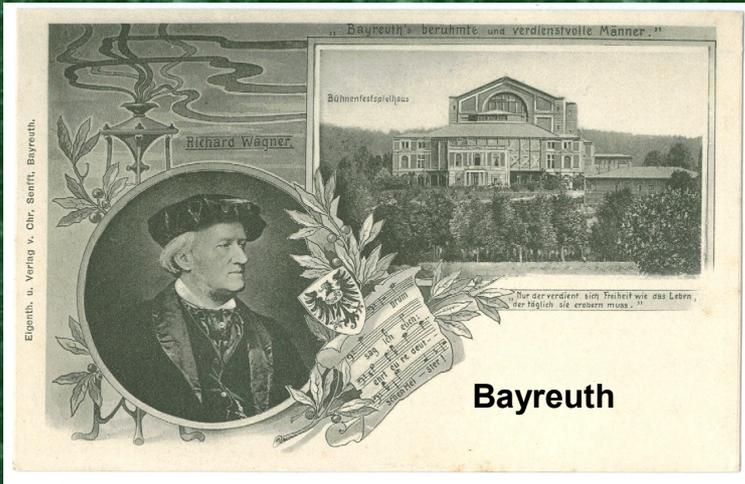


**Amelia's private box with sermons, notes, and letters from the evangelical preacher and lecturer, Rev. Ainger**



And in keeping with their social consciousness, she – perhaps they - become interested in the sort of intellectual & devotional Christianity advocated by the Rev. Alfred Ainger, a well-known preacher and literary figure of the 1880s. Amelia seems to have been a bit soft on Ainger, she keeps his letters in a special box, writes endless notes on his sermons, attends his courses on English literature, keeps cuttings, writes occasional fairly awful religious poems, and sends him flowers each Christmas. He, in turn, clearly enjoys all the attention and writes well modulated replies.

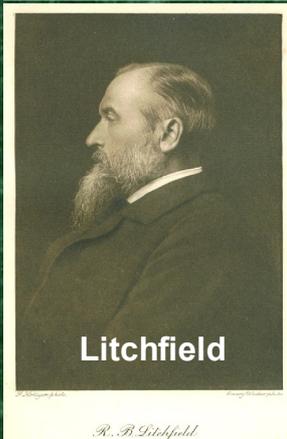
- All this, and also, particularly for Amelia, a passion for music -



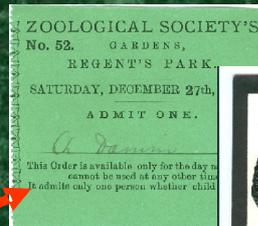
Bayreuth



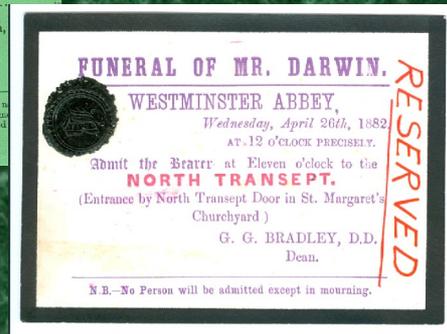
Henrietta Litchfield, daughter of Charles Darwin



Litchfield



Ticket to zoo signed Charles Darwin

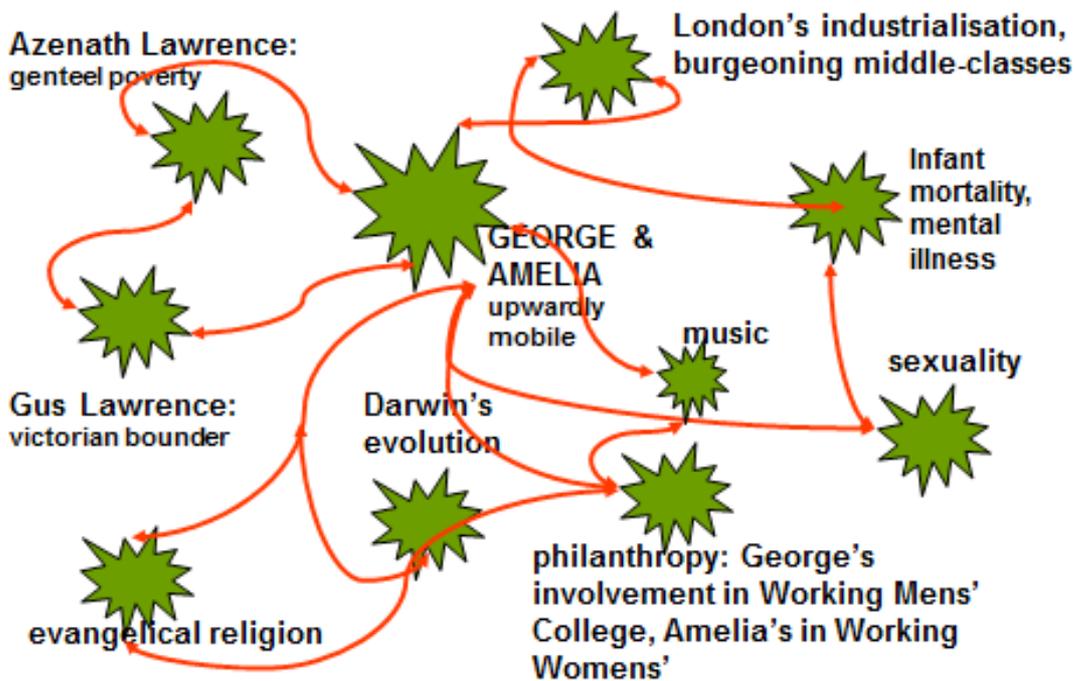


His funeral

– most particularly Wagner – a passion partly inspired by one of George’s colleagues at the Working Men’s College, Robert Litchfield. It happens that Litchfield marries Henrietta, the daughter of Charles Darwin. And so we also have tickets to the new London zoo with Charles Darwin’s signature, and, later, an Invitation Card to Charles Darwin’s funeral in Westminster Abbey! Amelia goes off to Bayreuth to hear Wagner, and, in later life, in the 1890s, we find Amelia immersed in organising and attending endless concerts, and letters of acceptance and polite regrets arrive in shoals. From the addresses, one could map a whole socio-geography of Hampstead middle-class concert-going families. So **upward mobility, philanthropy, religion, Darwinism, music.**

**Another thread - infant mortality, mental illness:**

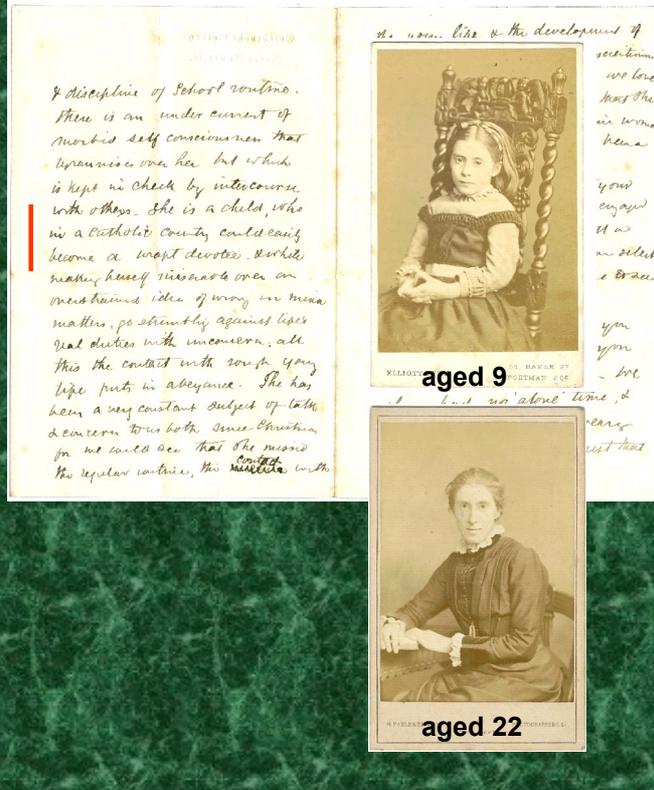
## GEORGE & AMELIA TANSLEY'S VICTORIAN WORLD



- Another thread that comes through from the letters is the amount of illness and the fear, in particular, of children's illnesses. With the fog and smog of London, poor sanitation, inadequate heating, lack of antibiotics etc etc. flu, pleurisy, and infectious diseases are all life-threatening.
- There is also a very personal thread about attitudes to *mental* illness. George and Amelia have two children. Arthur is delicate as a child and much cossetted, but Maud, the older child, is treated very differently. It's not clear to us what Maud's problem was, but whatever it was, it was not treated sympathetically. Her mother finds her very trying – she's painted as difficult, slovenly, untruthful, *peculiar* ... And, pathetically, Maud buys into the story. Amelia neglects, and rejects her and she gets bundled off to live in the country with various families. What seems to be likely is that she was one of those ultra-sensitive children with an almost mystical nature. There's a letter where a sympathetic teacher suggests that if she'd been a Catholic she would probably have entered a sacred order.

Letter from a school teacher to Amelia:

'she is a child, who in a Catholic country could easily have become a wrapt devotee ...



- Although Amelia was unsympathetic to Maud, she too has an intensity about her. It came out in her relationship to the Rev. Ainger, and in a rather curious set of letters from Emma Corfield in the 1890s

have me), which is so invaluable in a woman. I know that beside you I must stand in striking contrast, but I have the greatest possible esteem for you, faith in you and if you will have me, you must take me with all my imperfections on my head.

I should never have had the courage to offer my love & friendship to you though I had long since given it to you in my heart and wished for nothing on the world so much as yours; you may imagine then that you have put me in the Seventh Heaven of delight, but I am far from being a demonstrative individual so do not cry out to all the winds what I feel. But you must know this, if you know anything of me, that I can keep my own counsel. You have really made me feel very happy; all things have a greater zest for me.

You know what Shakespeare says "Love given when sought is 1871 but given unsought

capable of so much. So much of what you say echoes my own feeling - there seems a wonderful sympathy in our natures - a something which has drawn us together and which influences us when apart. But we must not let our feelings get the better of us they must not carry us beyond ourselves. There we shall both feel calmer and better by each other and then our love instead of being an exciting will act, if 1873 really trust, as

These letters are extraordinarily passionate. The two are clearly romantically attached. At first, Emma's seems the more passionate, then, two years later, she's

cautioning Amelia. It *probably* wasn't a sexual relationship, but it certainly was intense!

What we found so interesting about this family history is that it's coming at us from a very particular direction. It's not told through Amelia – not through her eyes, not through her voice, but nonetheless she is the centre point for *other people's involvement with her*, which also reflects her involvement with the world around her. It's largely a *woman's world*, and that in itself is very interesting.

**And so to our third and last story. Quite different.** It's quite short, and I have found it incredibly moving.

In the bottom of one of the trunks were two rather nice water colour paintings.



**Pictures signed S. Tansley,  
1806**

**Small leather case  
with letters from S.  
Tansley to Louisa  
Brooks 1831 - 2**

They're copies of classical pictures – one's Poseidon with a trident, the other – I don't know, and one of them is signed S. *Tansley*, 1806. There was also a very small black leather case with seven letters in it. They were written before envelopes existed. The letters are folded into little oblongs which are closed with a blob of sealing wax, and then addressed. They're posted and franked. They were written, with one exception, by S. Tansley to Louisa Brooks during 1831 and 1832. They're letters of courtship, and when we first found them, we couldn't work out who was

who or where they fitted in. Could the S. Tansley of 1806 be the same as the S. Tansley of 1831? We put them aside.

Some time later, John and I went up to Cambridge to see Peter Dickens, and in the course of handing over some things that came from Maycoes, Peter said, quite casually, 'Oh, there's a box that my wife Anna brought back here. Maybe it should go with the rest.'



It's a cheap little casket, imitation leather, papered inside with newspaper with a design printed over it. Inside there are ten letters, identical to the ones in the small black wallet. Below the letters, at the bottom of the casket



there's a small silver pen and pencil, a little double magnifying glass, silver thimble, a tiny silver box shaped like a book with what looks like the remains of some snuff. There's also a tiny crocheted purse just large enough to hold a large silver medal marked 'William IV & Queen Adelaide crowned Sep 1831', also 10 small silver four-penny pieces dated 1836 and 1837, and one bent, much worn silver coin dated 1817. There was also a small box –



containing three gold rings to fit someone with small fingers. One plain thin wedding ring, another set with small turquoise stones, and a third with a tiny oblong cameo containing a smidgin of plaited pale hair. There was also a gold pin with an inset amber stone. Finally – a bit of a shock -



a small cardboard box containing a partial front upper denture. The pink gum is decayed, the shaft to anchor it to the jawbone is still intact, the teeth are small and white.

In all, the small leather case and the casket contain seventeen letters, a doctor's bill, a prescription, and a recipe for calf's head soup. They cover a short period of time – just seven years - 1831 to 1838 - plus one later letter, dated 1845.

Reading the letters, we begin to conjure up the lives of a small family, lower middle class, living in London in the 1830s. We have only used *one* other source, a short paragraph in a book entitled *The Working Men's College 1854 – 1904*. Its importance will become apparent at the end of the story. <sup>i</sup>

Samuel Tansley – who is never called Samuel or Sam, even by his wife, but always Tansley or Mr Tansley – ran a small catering business – a 'ball and rout' business from 11 Dorset Street off Baker Street in London.

1831



**SAMUEL TANSLEY** inherited a small catering establishment in Dorset Street off Baker Street.

He didn't marry until he was in his forties. He is the 'S.Tansley' who, twenty-five years earlier painted the classical lady and man.



1806



He lived above the shop. He had inherited the business, and in fact his father had been bankrupted earlier on. So he may have been a rather cautious man, preoccupied with improving the business, and he doesn't marry until he's over forty. So S. Tansley 1806 is the same as S. Tansley 1831 ... We don't know how or when Samuel Tansley met Louisa Brooks – whom he always called Lucy. By the time the letters are under way, they've exchanged kisses. She's come to London from Trowse Newton near Norwich where her father is the village wheelwright. She too can read and write, but her spelling's unpredictable. She's in service, aged about 26, and when the story opens in November 1831, she's working for a Mr Hardy at 14 Portland Place, Clapham. She and Samuel are 'walking out'. Sometimes she comes over to Dorset Street, more often he walks to Clapham, through Hyde Park, a good long walk that takes him an hour and a half. They can only meet on Sundays. So the letters get under way. In the first one -

Nov. 15. 1831

My Dearest Lucy,

I shall be glad to see you in Dorset St on Sunday evening, according to your arrangement and likewise your friend, if you are quite sure that calling for her and waiting till she gets ready, will not hinder you too long, as you will have barely time to come, and go, and be a little while with us, and besides if she is with you how am I to get my dozen kisses, for you know you don't like to kiss before company, but as you are a good gal, I shall leave it to your own discretion whether to bring her now or stop till some day when you have longer time to stop, only mind not to be any later than you can help as you have some distance to go beyond Dorset Street

turns over

**'If she is with you how am I to get my dozen kisses, for you know you don't like to kiss before company ...'**

**'almost starved for want of kisses'**

**'send as long a letter as you find time to write without stopping to consider how to express yourself in a fine manner ... The more natural it is express'd the more likely it is to come from the heart'**

Jan 15. 1831

Dear Lucy,

As the evening was so wet last Sunday I supposed that was the reason why I did not see you according to appointment, and expected I should see you soon, or that you would send me a line saying, how, where, and when, I should have the pleasure of seeing you again, but as Thursday morning is now come, without any intelligence from you, I begin to be apprehensive, least illness or some other untoward circumstance has prevented you, therefore pray let me hear from you and send as long a letter as you can find time to write without stopping to consider how to express yourself in a fine manner but say what comes first to your mind as it occurs to you, as any thing written by my dear girl gives me pleasure

Samuel is less than happy that Lucy is bringing a lady friend to their rendezvous ...

They seem to be courting out of doors:

*I hope you got no cold being in the damp so long last Sunday, and mind and dress yourself up warm next Sunday believe me my darling girl,*

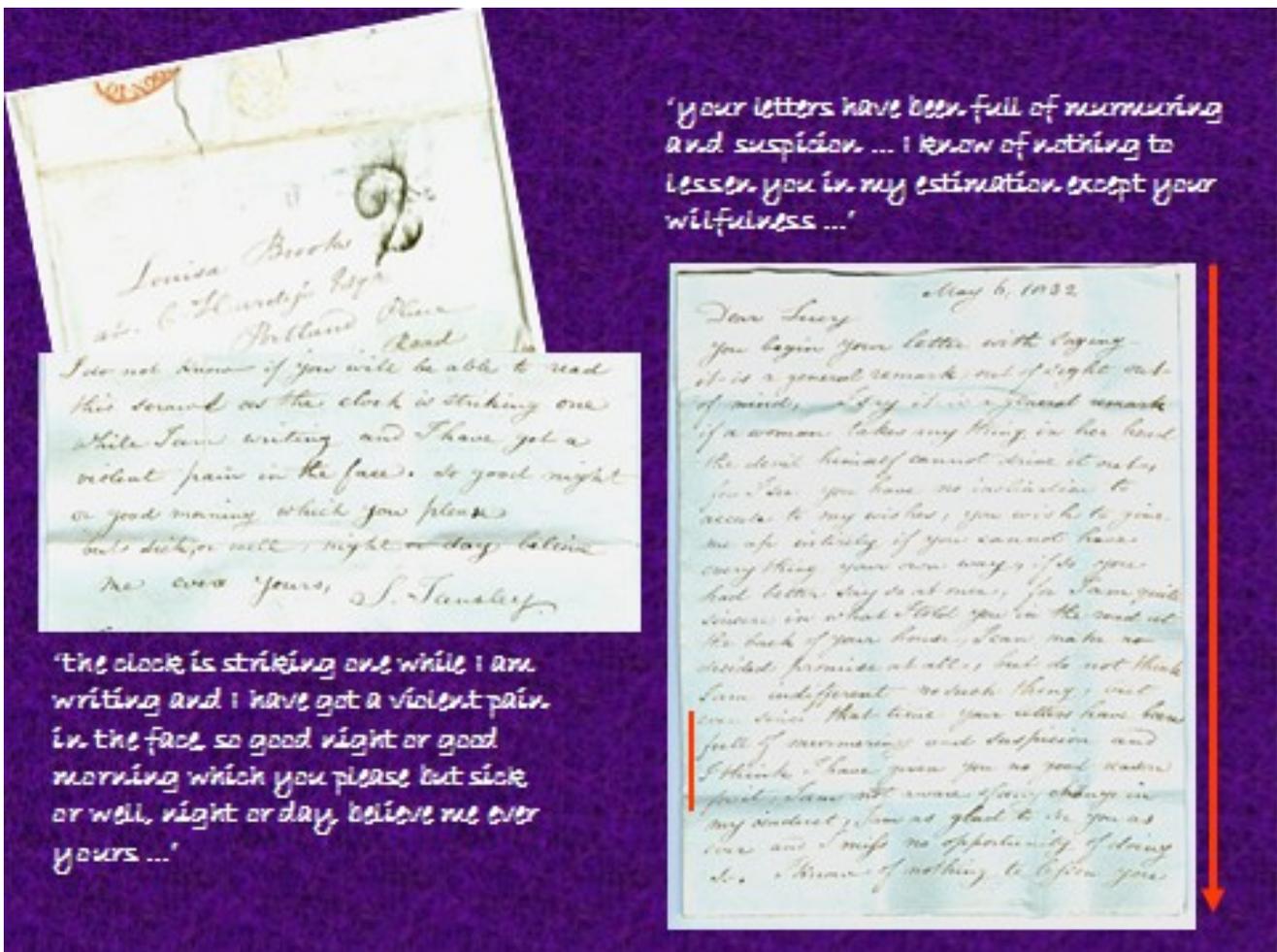
The second letter, marked Dec 15 1831, worries about why she didn't keep her appointment with him. He wants her to write honestly -

*send as long a letter as you can find time to write without stopping to consider how to express yourself in a fine manner but say what comes first to your mind as it occurs to you, as any thing written by my dear girl gives me pleasure to read, and the more natural it is express'd the more likely it is to come from the heart ...*

He is, he says,

*almost starving for want of kisses.*

Two letters later -



'your letters have been full of murmuring and suspicion ... I know of nothing to lessen you in my estimation except your wilfulness ...'

I do not know if you will be able to read this servant as the clock is striking one while I am writing and I have got a violent pain in the face. do good night or good morning which you please but sick or well, night or day, believe me ever yours, S. Tansley

'the clock is striking one while I am writing and I have got a violent pain in the face so good night or good morning which you please but sick or well, night or day, believe me ever yours ...'

May 6, 1832  
Dear Lucy  
you begin your letter with saying it is a general remark out of flight out of mind. I say it is a general remark if a woman takes any thing in her head she don't know if she can drive it out or no. you have no invitation to account to my wishes; you wish to give me up entirely if you cannot have every thing your own way; if I had better say so at once; for I am quite sincere in what I tell you in the road at the back of your house, I can make no decided promise at all; but do not think I am indifferent to such things; but I am sure that time your letters have been full of murmuring and suspicion and I think I have given you no real reason; I am as glad to see you as ever and I wish no opportunity of doing so. I know of nothing to lessen you

Samuel's a little bolder, instead of walking up and down in front of her house, he will, if necessary, ring the bell, and may even step over the doorstep! He ends in fine style:

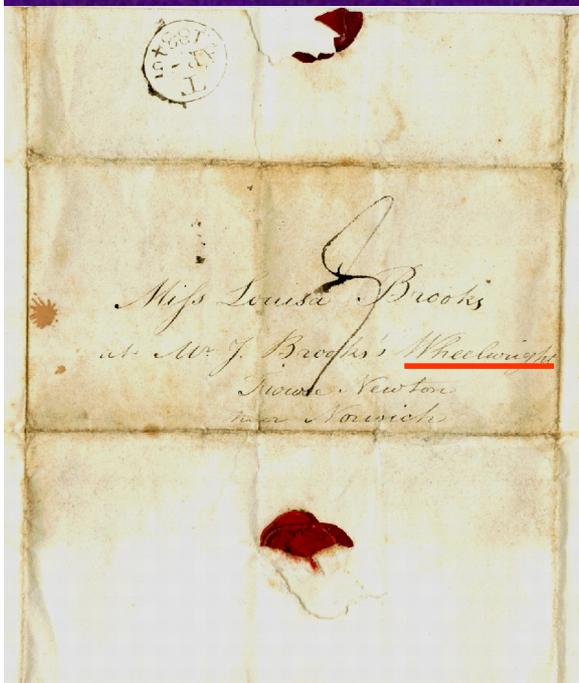
.. the clock is striking one while I am writing and I have got a violent pain in the face, so good night or good morning which you please but sick or well, night or day, believe me ever yours,

By the sixth letter - and we're now into February - Lucy seems to be getting impatient, and Tansley's getting cross. He says,

... your letters have been full of murmuring and suspicion. ... I know of nothing to lessen you in my estimation except your wilfulness and that is in your own power to mend therefore don't be so cross there's a dear.

Another few months, and now it's Nov 1832, and Lucy, it seems, is still muttering ... And then it's April 5<sup>th</sup> 1833, and still nothing much seems to have happened. Then there's a gap, a year goes by. It's now April 1834 –

A year has gone by. It's April 1834, Lucy is probably living with Samuel, but is not married. She is visiting her parents near Norwich. Her father is, or was, a wheelwright



*Mr Tansley*  
*To Mrs William Stocker Surgeon &c*

1834.

June 11	Linniment	Mrs	2-6
Sep 15	Attendance on Mrs Tansley		3-3-0
16	Wangh		1-6
17	Mixture		3-6
18	Pill		1-6
19	Mixture		2-6
20	"	"	4-6
21	Wangh		1-6
22	Mixture		3-6
	"		3-6
23	Mixture		3-6
24	"		3-6
25	"	Pill	4-6
26	"	"	4-6
27	"	"	4-6
28	"	"	4-6
29	"	"	4-6
Oct 1	"	"	4-6
2	"	"	4-6
3	"	"	4-6
4	"	"	4-6
5	"	"	4-6
6	"	"	4-6
7	"	"	4-6
10	Mixture	Baby	3-6
19	Linniment	Mrs	2-6
Nov 6	Mixture	Baby	3-6
23	Powder		1-6
24	"		1-6
25	"		1-6
	Carried Forward		8-12-6

A doctor's bill! September 15 'attendance on Mrs Tansley'. So Lucy has had a baby, was pregnant when she visited her parents, and has persuaded Samuel to marry her ...

We may suspect that the reason there were no letters during that year was because Lucy had moved in with Samuel. But he still hadn't made an honest woman of her. She's visiting her parents near Norwich and he's still addressing the letter to 'Miss Brooks.'

The next 'letter' is in fact a doctor's bill and now things become clearer. Mr Stocker lists his fees starting with 'liniments' on June 11 1834, i.e. two months after Lucy's visit to her parents. Then, Sep 15, comes 'attendance on Mrs Tansley'. 'Attendance' costs £3.3.0 which is quite a lot. I think it's safe to say that 'attendance' means confinement and that, in fact, baby Joseph has been born. So, working back from this, Lucy was about three months pregnant when she visited her parents. It also seems that, between the visit and the confinement, Samuel has done the right thing and married her on April 19<sup>th</sup> at St Giles in the Field!

By the time of the next two letters, March 1837, another two and a half years have gone by. This time the letters are **written by Lucy**..

**LETTERS FROM LUCY,  
MARCH 1837 - ONE**

Lucy's brother didn't come for the letters, & so she kept them.  
How very fortunate!

The first is to her parents near Norwich, her little son is staying with them

as it dears us all that this time thank God  
for it, I have little to say just now but  
expect to hear much in return I hope you  
will write me a long letter about the child  
and your selves how you have been all  
this long cold winter and tell me how he  
gets on he is now past his half year as  
Mr Tansley or my self will come (early in  
August to fetch him home unless Mrs  
Dear Father and you can make up your  
Minds to bring him up I should be so  
happy to see you here a little while but  
that you will let me know before the time  
is expired his Father sends him a book  
and I send him a ball to play balls  
with his grandpapa but I hope he will  
not break your windows Mother, we  
get the half past two of the clock  
I long to see him and to hear him talk and  
if he can speak plain let him learn  
his letters I hope My Dear Mother

you dont find him to much for you  
let me know how your health is found  
if you are ill let me know as we would  
rather have him home a little sooner  
then for him to go any ware else but  
I hope please God you are pretty well  
I should like a little bit of yours and  
fathers hair to put in a ring or brooch  
to remember you of as well as your  
pictures which I have got in gilt  
frames and shall always keep perhaps  
you will give him a look to bring for me  
dont mind its being white it will look  
the more honourable and since  
Nature has been so odd and unkind

‘I should like a little bit of yours and fathers hair to put in a ring ... Don't mind its being white it will look the more honourable’

‘... And I send him a ball to play balls with his grandpapa but I hope he will not break the windows ...’

**LETTERS FROM LUCY  
MARCH 1837 - ONE**

One of the letters is to her parents, the other to her sister, all of them living near Norwich. Her brother was supposed to take the letters from London to Norwich, but he failed to come and fetch them and so they were never delivered. Very lucky for us!

Lucy writes to her parents. She's had another baby, George. She has to help her husband with the business and one way of coping is to send Joseph, her first child, to stay with her parents. She asks fondly after him:

*His father sends him a book and I send him a ball to play balls with his grandpapa but I hope he will not break your windows Mother, ... I long to hear him talk and if he can speak plain let him learn his Letters*

She's paying her mother to look after the baby, and also sending some money to her father. She apologises for not sending more,

*I assure you that trade has been very bad indeed this winter in London and still remains so, it has made 70 pound difference in our Books since Christmas less than Last year*

Lucy asks her mother for a lock of her and her father's hair to put in a ring or a brooch -

*don't mind its being white it will look the more honourable ...*

What do you think? - isn't the little plait of hair in the ring this very same lock of hair?



The second letter from Lucy, is to her sister Harriet -

## THE SECOND LETTER IS FROM LUCY TO HER SISTER HARRIET

Harriet's little son, John, has been sent to London to become Samuel's apprentice.

'although his wages may appear little he has bought a very pretty new hat ... Always has a little money ... and .. a sovereign in the Savings Bank'

I embrace the opportunity of sending a few lines by Mr. M... which I hope will meet you and family well as it leaves me and mine and also your son, and I am happy to inform you (a very good boy, and takes to the Business very well and Mr. Tansley is very partial to him, and I believe John is equally the same to Mr. ... for nothing can be done without his Master's knowledge and consent, you know Harriet how Tansley always plague me in joking, and indeed I am ten times worse off now than ever for John gives him a lift every now and then and so between them a pretty life in that respect, they would if they could make me

Wash with ours! and the weeks pass on rapidly and although his wages may appear little he has bought a very pretty new hat and got his shoes well mended and always with a little money in his pocket, and more than that, a sovereign in the Savings Bank through our Possessions, and he very often gets money at the houses we serve and sometimes drink as well and so I have saved his been money this Quarter, which, though little adds up by being taken care of, and now I have told you the particulars on

John's doing well, has his own room, and he and Tansley are ganging up on Lucy.

Although times may be bad, they can't be doing too badly because Samuel has taken on Harriet's young son John to work as his apprentice. Lucy writes to reassure her sister that her little boy is fine, he's got his own room, eats with them, and he and Samuel tease her – but she gives as good as she gets ...

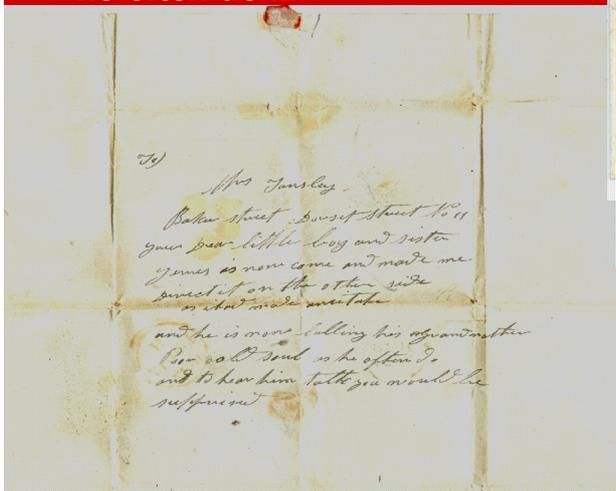
Good, isn't it? And I imagine, rather rare detail of a small family, gradually bettering itself, showing how town and country relatives work together.

Next letter, July 1837, is 3 months on, and now Harriet is writing back to Lucy –

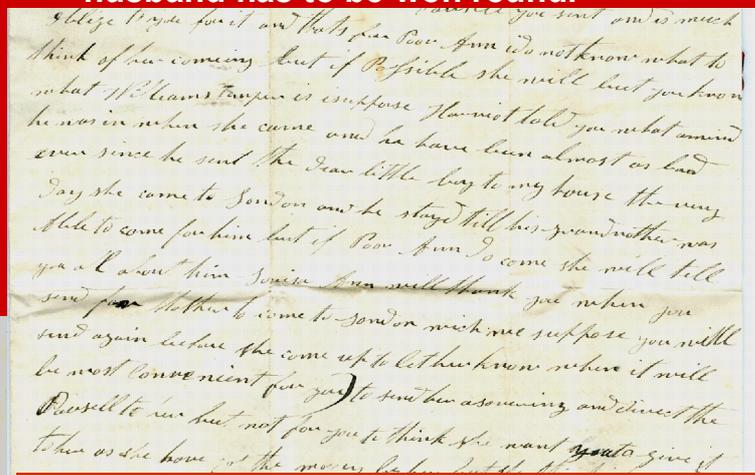
**THREE MONTHS LATER, JULY 1837, NOW HARRIET IS WRITING TO LUCY**

Lucy's little son, Joseph, is still with his grandparents, but the grandmother has been poorly -

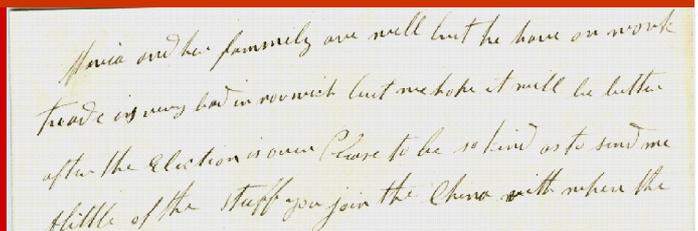
'your dear little boy is now come ... He is now calling his grandmother *Poor old soul* as he often do ...'



**SHE WRITES AGAIN, the letter is flustered, their sister Ann wants to accompany her mother and little Joseph to London but her bad-tempered husband has to be won round.**



**And there's a touch of politics -**



**THREE MONTHS LATER, JULY 1837, NOW HARRIET IS WRITING TO LUCY**

She's sending her young daughter to town for a visit – or perhaps to help Lucy. Meanwhile, in Norfolk, she's been helping look after Lucy's little boy. There are some lovely bits -

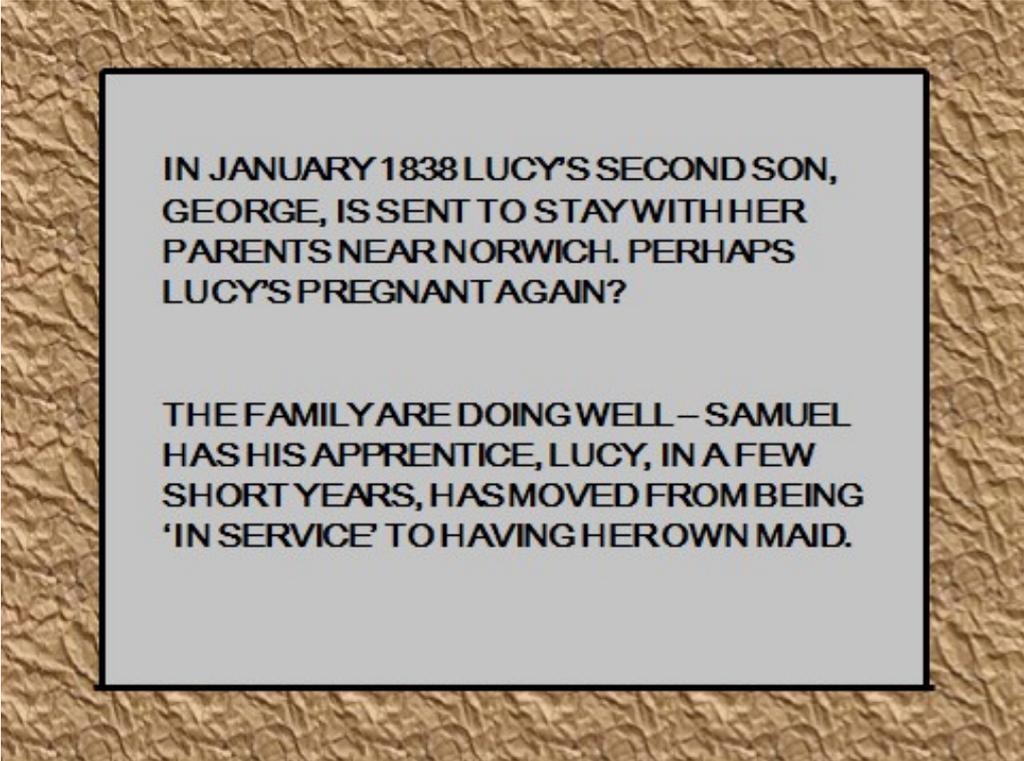
*I never see such a little nip in my life as he is he is very well and grone (sic) very fast ...*

*Your dear little boy and sister Jenny is now come ... he is now calling his grandmother Poor old soul as he often do and to hear him talk you would be suprised (sic)*

In her second letter, it becomes clear that Harriet and Lucy's mother wants to bring Joseph back to London. Another sister Ann wants to come with them but she's got a problem with her bad-tempered husband William. An elaborate plot is being hatched whereby Lucy sends a sovereign to Ann for the journey, even though Ann has already saved up the money but William mustn't know she has. Interestingly, and unusually, there's a touch of politics:

*... Maria and her family are well but he have no work trade is very bad in norwich but we hope it will be better after the election is over.*

There are a couple more letters. One, from another sister, dated January 1838 makes it clear that Lucy's second little boy, George, has gone to stay in Norfolk. This sister is recommending a servant, and the second letter is from the servant-to-be, Martha Jones. She sounds rather dodgy, but at any rate her letter shows is that in less than six years Lucy has gone from being 'in service' to having her own maid! All is going well -



**IN JANUARY 1838 LUCY'S SECOND SON, GEORGE, IS SENT TO STAY WITH HER PARENTS NEAR NORWICH. PERHAPS LUCY'S PREGNANT AGAIN?**

**THE FAMILY ARE DOING WELL – SAMUEL HAS HIS APPRENTICE, LUCY, IN A FEW SHORT YEARS, HAS MOVED FROM BEING 'IN SERVICE' TO HAVING HER OWN MAID.**

Except, of course, that it isn't. The letters come to an end, and our first assumption was that, for whatever reason, we simply didn't have any later ones. But, as you may already have guessed, Lucy's little George grows up to be George Tansley who takes on his father's firm and marries Amelia. And it so happens that in the account

of the *Working Men's College* in which George figures prominently, there is one short paragraph.

We discover, from *The History of the Working Men's College* that in 1838, a few months after the last letter, Lucy dies ... perhaps in childbirth ...

LUCY

His mother, a Norfolk woman, died when he was about two years old, leaving two boys, of whom George was the younger. Thus he never knew a mother's care ;

So, only a few months after Martha Jones's letter, Lucy has died. We don't know why. Perhaps, like so many other women, she died in child birth. Maybe little George had been sent to the country because she was expecting. All we know, from the same account, is that George was just two when she died, that Samuel soldiered on and never married again. Then, nine years later, his elder son Joseph dies. He's only thirteen. George, aged eleven, has to leave school to help in his father's business.

**SAMUEL TANSLEY SOLDIERS ON  
WITH HIS SHOP & HIS TWO SMALL  
SONS**

**THEN, IN 1847, AGED ONLY  
THIRTEEN, JOSEPH DIES**

George was little more than eleven when his schooldays came to an end, and he was taken into his father's shop. His brother, who had been his constant companion, had by this time died at the age of thirteen; and he was left alone with his father

There's one more letter in the casket - it's a very formal school letter penned by Joseph, aged eleven. His school teacher has dictated it and has forgotten that Joseph has only one parent. It was kept by his father and is dirty and worn.

Christmas 1845

My dear Parents

Mr Blake desires  
me to present his Compliments, and  
to announce to you, that the vacation  
will commence on Sunday the 20<sup>th</sup>  
Instant and terminate the 3<sup>rd</sup> of  
January ensuing.

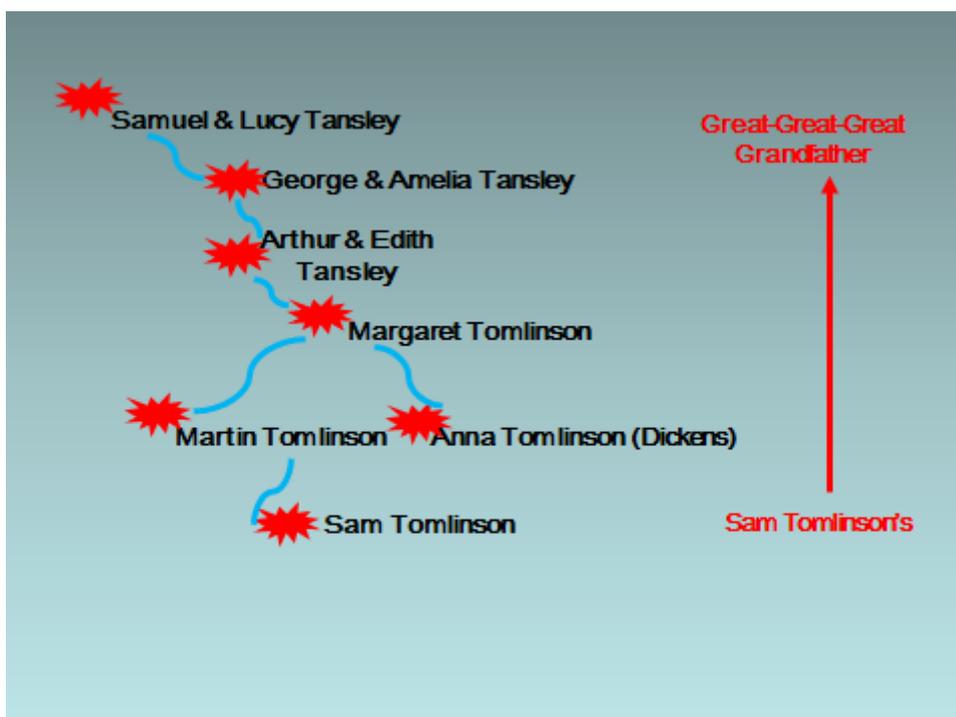
I have, my dear Parents, to  
add, that I trust the progress I have  
made in my various scholastic duties  
will meet with your approbation, and  
to assure you that I shall use

Joseph's Letter

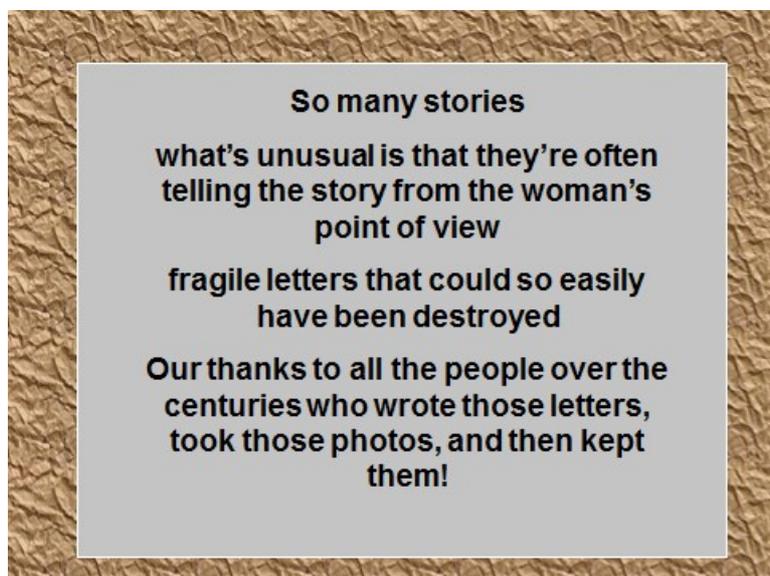
My Mother's  
Joseph's Letter  
Kept by my  
Father  
L.P.

**1845, A SCHOOL LETTER  
FROM JOSEPH, AGED 11,  
TO HIS FATHER**

That's it. All this happened one hundred and eighty years ago ... Little George in this story is the man who marries Amelia - or put it another way -



So many stories - and all based on those fragile letters that could so easily have been destroyed. I guess I'd like to end by giving fervent thanks to all the people over the last two centuries that wrote those letters, took those photos, and then held on to them! And to the family today who allowed us to touch, briefly and inadequately, so many people's lives and their forgotten worlds.



<sup>i</sup> Whilst putting together this talk Elizabeth Tansley made contact. Married to a Tansley, but not directly connected to our branch of the family, she nonetheless kindly provided a family tree, the date and place of Samuel & Louisa's marriage, an approximate date for Louisa's death (January – March 1838), and information on Samuel's father's bankruptcy. I'm very grateful to her.