

Stewart Charles Augustus Paget - Ewelme's Eccentric Inventor

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Stewart Paget (1872-1956) was born in Cork, Eire into a titled family stretching back to the reign of Henry VIII. His father, Vice Admiral Arthur Cecil Henry Paget, was descended through a minor branch from Henry Paget, 7th Marquis of Anglesey and 1st Earl of Uxbridge. It seems highly probable that Stewart's aristocratic origins remained unknown in Ewelme. He is first recorded in Ewelme in 1899 when he leased from the widowed Mrs Helen Franklin of 'The Views', a 5-acre market garden behind Winfield's Dairies, with glasshouses and an orchard called 'Ewelme Nurseries'. The 1901 Census records Paget, aged 29, lodging in the High Steet at 4, The Terrace, with Miss Rebecca Vernon, a middle-aged Benson born dressmaker. In 1918, at the advanced age of 46, Paget (occupation Tomato Grower), joined the RAF (Service No 281368), and was twice wounded. In 1921 he bought 'Ewelme Nurseries' from Herbert Orpwood for £330 and was included in the 1923 Electoral Roll - occupation 'Nurseryman'. By the 1931 Census he had disappeared.

Paget was an enigmatic character, and his 'strange' lifestyle is mentioned twice in Mrs Prister Cruttwell's booklet 'Ewelme: A Romantic Village' – *"...another strange inhabitant of Ewelme, one of the Paget family - who spent most of his time in raising cucumbers and tomatoes from his glass houses on the southern slope behind the village street. He was extremely musical and used to play his piano alone in a shed for hours: he was solitary by nature and used to sit at the bottom of a deep well, where he had a platform constructed to enable him to escape unwanted visitors! He was also given to scientific inventions, of which the patents were to make his fortune; unfortunately, they were always snapped up beforehand by a more wide-awake sort of person. But there is no doubt that 'our Paget' had more than a touch of genius."*

Paget patronized The Lamb Inn, over the bridge on the Benson Road, and Prister Cruttwell wrote again in her 'Ghost' section – *"Of more modern psychic happenings, a curious experience was recounted by the solitary, Paget. (He was careful to explain that although it occurred in the evening after dark, he had only partaken of a single glass of whiskey!) As he was crossing the bridge over the cress-beds, he was seized by a sudden cold feeling of fear. His flesh crept and his hair literally stood on end when he saw a huge dark shape emerge still darker out of the surrounding night and gradually tower over him till it reached a gigantic size. Although it seemed a shapeless mass, yet its effect was of some enormous slow-moving hairy animal which gradually glided past him till it vanished into the hedge and not till then could he find his legs again when he ran as hard as he could back to his own quarters. No one could explain the apparition though the villagers would shake their heads when the place was mentioned; they would not pass it alone at night and the cress-men too are said to have seen strange things there."*

Cyril Winfield was born in 1938 and his memoir mentions Paget, including the above-mentioned well, and an invention called the 'Paget Lamp'. *"My father [Edgar Winfield] told me he dug the well by Paget's hut above the dairy - it would be about 20 yards west of the walnut tree which I think is still there! Stewart Paget was an eccentric who ran a market garden up there at one time but was renowned for having invented the 'Paget Lamp'. You manually squeezed a trigger mechanism that drove an electric dynamo - a fore runner of the bicycle dynamo (in a way) that replaced the old 'King of the Road' spirit lamps that I can just remember! The orchard was indeed there - but was past it's best by my time. He had obviously been a character from all the stories about him still current when I was small."*

Such an unconventional man inevitably fostered some bizarre village legends. The late Aubrey Gilbey was born in 1926 and remembered Paget's barn being pulled down. He mentioned two Paget buildings and recounted a rumour that Paget was an author – *"In the front of Paget's Barn, [hut/shed] right behind Winfield's Dairy, there was a big building which covered a well and we always*

understood that Mr Paget used to go down the well to do his writing, because he had a boat down there! We were always warned not to go near the well."

Paget left Ewelme with these memories of his unconventional behaviour. (However, he was not the only Paget eccentric and certainly did not achieve the nationwide notoriety of a distant cousin, a generation further on. Followers of the Turf will recognise her name - The Hon. Dorothy Paget (1905-1960) who was described as the *'Last true eccentric of British racing'* and the *'Abominable Queen of the Turf'*. An uncontrollable youth, she was given a million pounds at 21, becoming a domineering, boorish, chain-smoking, 20-stone multi-millionairess who despised all men. She invested heavily in racehorses and a stud. She bet in huge amounts - and lost even more. Despite terrorising all her trainers, she did have huge success with the famous steeplechaser Golden Miller in the mid-1930s and bred Straight Deal to win a 'wartime' Derby at Newmarket in 1943).

Why Stewart Paget chose to settle and work in Ewelme for so many years is a mystery. It seems he retired to London. In 1939 he lived in Battersea, recorded as *'single, with private means'* and was executor to a lady in Chelsea in 1941. He died in Battersea in 1956.

Ewelme Village Archive