

## The Aston Family

The girls who embroidered the samplers were the daughters of **Alian Aston and Mary Blakeman** of Chipping Campden, who married on 30th November 1852. Alian, born in November 1834, was the son of George Aston, a baker, and his wife, Martha Ellis; Mary, born in July 1835, was the daughter of William Blakeman, labourer, and Esther Keen, whose family ran the old mill at Westington.

The records show that in the summer of 1858, before they married, Mary had given birth to a baby girl called Frances Kezia Blakeman. However it seems the baby did not thrive, for she was christened the following spring, in March 1859 - as Frances Aston, taking her father's name - and died the following month.

By the time of the 1861 census, the couple were living in Cowfair with their second baby, Martha, and Alian was working as an agricultural labourer.

By 1871, Alian and Mary lived in the High Street, and Alian's occupation was given as haulier. There were now 4 children, all daughters - Martha 11, Esther 9, Mary 7, and Peninnah 2. However, in April 1876, Alian died, aged 41.

The 1881 census shows Mary, now 46, still in the High Street and working as a seamstress. Two of the girls were still with her - Esther, 19, and Peninnah, 12. Her daughter **Mary** had left home by now and the census for that year shows her, now aged 16, working as a female servant at a lodging house in Wimbledon. So far, I have found no further trace of her.

Next door but one (near the corner of Sheep Street) lived widower Frederick Ellis, a carrier, and in January 1885, he and Mary Aston, nee Blakeman, married. Frederick died in 1901, aged 76, and Mary in February 1912, aged 76.

The eldest of the three remaining daughters we know about, **Martha Aston**, married a widowed farmer from Napton-on-the-Hill called Edward Jessett in October 1888 and had her own family of 3 girls there. (Marion, Edith Evelyn, and Dorothy) She died in 1951 in Midhurst, Sussex, where she had moved before the 1939 survey, presumably to live with one of her children.

**Esther Aston** was born in June 1862 so was 14 when her father died in 1876. She left Campden at some point after the 1881 census but was back home to marry William Alfred Starkiss on 1st June. He was from Hertfordshire and had been working as a footman in a house in Eaton Square, Westminster though at the time of their marriage was working in Liverpool. The following year, 1888, their first daughter, Evelyn, was born in West Derby, Liverpool, but by the time their second daughter, Ada Mary, was born, in the spring of 1890, they were living back south, in Pimlico, London.

The 1891 census shows them living near Rotherham, South Yorkshire, where William, 31, was employed as a hall porter at the colossal 18th century mansion of Wentworth Woodhouse, home of the Earl and Countess Fitzwilliam. The house had a 606 ft facade, said

to be the longest of any country house in Europe, and supposedly had 365 rooms, one for every day of the year.

By 1901, the Starkiss family was living in Abbots Langley, Hertfordshire, and William, 41, was working as a domestic butler. They moved to Campden at some point in the next few years, for the 1906 Directory shows William running the Plough in Lower High Street in 1906. William died in May 1908, after which Esther continued to run the pub with her two daughters.

In September 1910, Evelyn Starkiss married local grocer Robert Smith, who had built Park Road Villas in 1904, and this was where they all lived after Esther gave up the pub. The land adjoining was a cherry orchard and there was a small shack there where Esther sold sweets for many years in the 1930s and 40s, which older Campdonians remember with affection. There is a photo of her standing by the door of the shack in the CCHS archive. She died in the summer of 1949, aged 87. Evelyn and Robert had a son, Robert, known as Bobbie, born in 1911, and daughter Evelyn, born 1917.

The younger daughter, Ada Starkiss married Nathaniel Charles Butter Bloodworth in September 1917: he was a widowed baker/confectioner from Cheltenham. Just 3 weeks after the wedding, "Charlie" was sent to fight in the trenches and was gassed, though he survived. After the war, the family moved to the London area, and the 1939 survey shows him working as an office clerk. By then they had a 20 year old daughter who was named after her mother. Young Ada married Leonard Beer in July 1944 and had a son, Christopher, in April 1946.

The youngest daughter of Alian and Mary Aston, **Peninnah**, was born in 1869. She moved to London and by 1891 was working as a kitchenmaid at 9, Grosvenor Place, Westminster. Here she met her future husband, William John Crees, a 22 year old footman from Hertfordshire. They married in December 1898 at Watford and at the time of the 1901 census, were living in Wandsworth. By now, William was employed as a bank messenger. In August 1904, their son, William Jesse Crees was born. The 1939 census shows that they had moved to Iver, Eton and it was here that Peninnah died in July 1942, aged 73 and William in February 1945, aged 76.

It was Peninnah's grandson who donated the samplers to CCHS back in 2005. Despite extensive searching, I can find no connection so far between the Aston family and Martha Ballard, who stitched the oldest sampler back in 1833.