

The children they never had

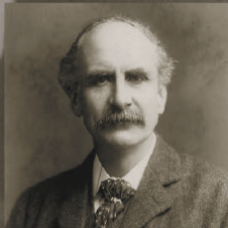
Thomas Greg was the sixth member of his family to live at Coles Park and manage the estate and farms in and around Westmill.

He grew up in his family home outside Manchester close to the textile mills at Quarry Bank which made the family's fortune.

In 1895 he married Mary Hope and they came to live in Westmill. As his uncle was still alive and living at Coles Park, Thomas and Mary began married life at Dial House on The Green.

Thomas was 37 and Mary was 45 when they married, both admired country life and Westmill became the family they never had.

They dedicated their lives to preserving and improving the village for its inhabitants.



Thomas Greg

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The village and villagers when the Gregs came to Westmill



George Fox in farmer's smock, with wife Susan 1890-95

Liz Mitchell's PhD research into the collections of Mary Hope Greg

'Treasuring things of the least': Mary Hope Greg, John Ruskin & Westmill, Hertfordshire



Liz Mitchell



Westmill

The Coles Estate



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Mary Mary Quite Contrary

Mary Greg was an unusually well educated woman, who had been to a school where John Ruskin, the art historian, social reformer and supporter of rural life and crafts, was a visiting teacher. From him she had learnt to notice small, ordinary things and to appreciate country life.

She kept a nature diary with delicate illustrations of common country flowers and plants she found in her walks around Westmill and she collected ordinary objects like cooking utensils and farming tools, finding beauty in their commonplace simplicity.

The Gregs opened a Museum in a cottage which had been the blacksmith's forge and Mary donated her collection to it and encouraged the village to contribute their findings too.



Mary Greg

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What do you think about the collection?
What would you donate to a village museum today?



Westmill Museum
exterior



Westmill Museum
interior



Flail :



Commemorative Jug - :
William Gladstone :



Oil lamp :



Sickle :

Photos courtesy of Stevenage Museum from Mary Greg's Westmill Collection



Photos courtesy of the MG Collection, Manchester Art Gallery - photography by Ben Blackall

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That communal spirit

The first thing Thomas and Mary did for the village was to convert Vine Barn into a Village Hall for dances and concerts as well as lectures and classes.

There was a library with books donated by the Gregs. At its opening Thomas Greg said:

“...this hall is but the outward expression of that communal spirit which was so great a feature of our English villages and the inward and propelling force which is to make it a living factor is to be found in yourselves...”

As well as the hall, the Gregs donated many of the beautiful things we enjoy in the village today - Green fields for recreation and conservation; copses and allotments for healthy eating and exercise; the children's playground for play and education and they made improvements to the school; founded alms-houses for the needy; improved homes; and built modern family housing with large windows and modern features.

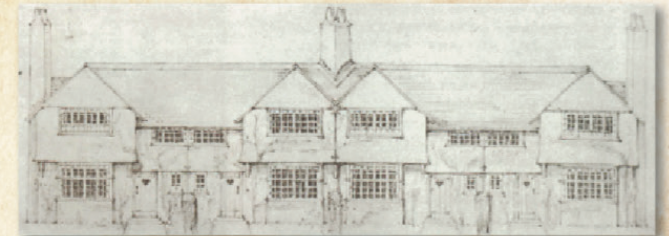


Westmill Village Hall

Look at the plans for the Village Hall.
Are they what we have today?



Westmill Village Hall and the original plans



Five room School Cottages by architect Charles Spooner 1904



Circa 1900

Do we still live as a community as Thomas Greg described in his speech?

Creating a gem

Charles Spooner, the architect who converted the Village Hall, went on to work in Westmill for Thomas and Mary Greg for 40 years. A follower of Ruskin's he was keen to preserve village life at Westmill by improving the housing.

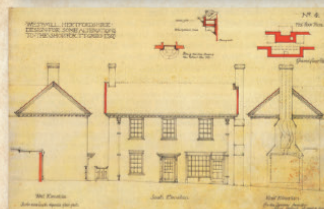
Spooner remodelled the Green and made small changes to many of the surrounding cottages; he altered Dial House and the village shop; designed the church lynch-gate, pulpit and lectern; he built School Cottages and he made minor tweaks and nudges to many other Westmill cottages turning Westmill into the exceptionally pretty place it is today.

Although he was a nationally famous architect, lecturer and furniture designer he asked to be buried in the Westmill churchyard.



The Village Green well cover

Can you spot changes Spooner made to the shop and Dial House?



Westmill Village Shop as it was,
Spooner's design for alterations
and the shop today



The Church showing Spooner's lynch-gate and entrance



The Church lectern



The Church pulpit

If you go into the churchyard you can find the grave of Spooner and his wife

Continuing the good work

The Thomas and Mary Greg Trust

Thomas Greg died shortly after WW1 and, Mary set up the Thomas and Mary Greg Trust in 1923 in his memory.

She continued their work in the village through the Trust but she realised she needed to find a way for the village to be looked after, when she was gone. Lonely, without Thomas, she moved to London in the 1930s but kept in touch with village life and the Trust as her letters to Mr Hummerstone, her builder, a Churchwarden and first Chairman of the Trust, show.

Shortly before WW2, Coles Park and the estate, including Westmill, were sold and Mary Greg was worried that the Trust would not have the money to meet its demands without her interventions. She therefore donated the School Cottages, which Thomas had left to her personally, to Ruskin's society The Guild of St George in the hope it would work with the Trust to ensure its continuation.

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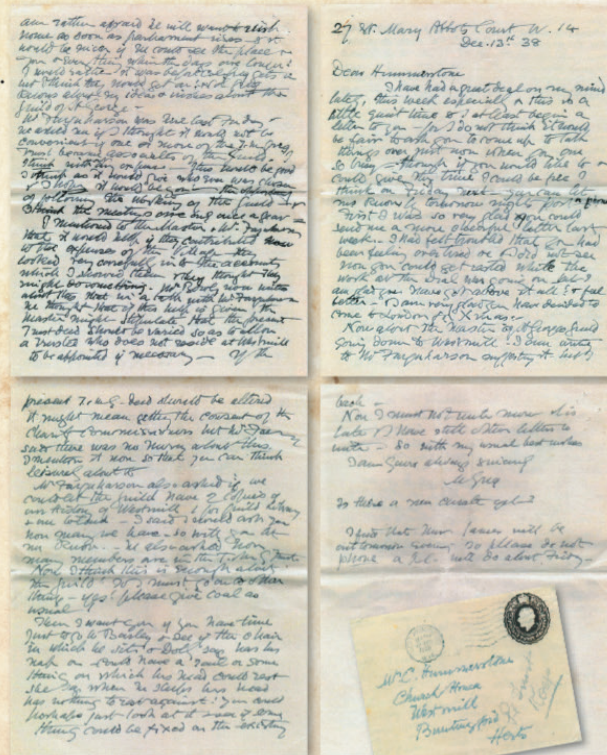
Thomas and Mary's plaque

Can you spot the Greg or Greg Trust plaques on our buildings?

Mary Greg's letter to Mr Hummerstone



Thomas and Mary Greg plaques can be found on houses throughout Westmill



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