

Agnes Jervis

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Swynfen Jervis, my great (x5) grandfather, appears to have died shortly before two shocking secrets were unearthed! The first can be seen in the article titled "Mary Amelia Dobbie". The second involves his granddaughter (Agnes Jervis), George Henry Lewes, Thornton Leigh Hunt and a lady better known as George Eliot.

Agnes Jervis was born in St. George Hanover Square, London on 24 May 1822. She married a gentleman by the name of George Henry Lewes in Westminster, London on 18 Feb 1841. I believe they lived with George's best friend, Thornton Leigh Hunt, and had four children together:

Charles Lee Lewes

b. 1842 in Kensington, London
d. 26 Feb 1891 in Luxor, Egypt

Thornton Arnott Lewes

b. 1844 in Kensington, London
d. 19 Oct 1869 in Regent's Park, London from tuberculosis of the spine.

Herbert Arthur Lewes

b. 1846 in Kensington, London
d. 1875 in Natal, South Africa

St. Vincent Arthy Lewes

b. May 1848 in Kensington, London
d. 23 Mar 1850 in Kensington, London from measles.

Just two weeks after the death of St. Vincent Arthy Lewes, Agnes gave birth to another son. The father of this son was Thornton Leigh Hunt and not her husband George. Despite the parentage, George agreed to register the son as his own and this child was named Edmund Lewes. The Carlisle Letters Online gives an account of this setup:

"Well till Thursday night I had no speech with any mortal—then, about eight o'clock walked in Mrs Lewis of all undesired people!—My first feeling was that I was intruded upon by "an improper female"—but as the interview proceeded, her calm self-approving manner, and radiant face—radiant as with conscious virtue (!) really—quite subjugated me, and I began to fancy it must be "all right" for her tho looking so very shocking to me. She said Lewis was "perfectly happy" in his monstrous position—"showed more esteem and affection for her than when she lived with him as his wife"—and "made more of the Baby than of any of his own children"!! he "liked babies best and this one had come in the place of his youngest that died"! it is "very brown, with unmistakable Hunt eyes."—Lewis came to take her home—in tearing spirits—He theatrically kissed the tips of my fingers when I shook hands with him and then kissed Mrs Lewis on the mouth! and said "Well darling!—how did you get here"? a more comfortable well-doing-like pair one would not wish to see!"

Ref: Carlyle, Jane Baillie Welsh. JWC TO THOMAS CARLYLE, 4 August 1850. CARLYLE LETTERS, Vol 25: 135-137.

Unfortunately the marriage didn't last as Agnes gave birth to another child by Thornton Leigh Hunt in Oct 1851. As mentioned above, George Henry Lewes put his name on the birth certificate of Edmund Lewes. This action stopped him from applying for a divorce as he was seen to have condoned the adultery. Agnes and George parted and Agnes had a further two daughters with Thornton before dying in Fulham, London on 22 Dec 1902.

George Henry Lewes met Mary Ann Evans, known then as Marian Evans, in Oct 1851. They didn't live together for a further 2-3 years and a trip to Germany in July 1854 was viewed as their honeymoon. Upon their return from Germany; Marian took to calling herself Mrs. Lewes. The three surviving sons of George and Agnes were not made aware of this "marriage" until they returned from their school in Switzerland in 1859. From then on, Agnes remained "Mama" whilst Marian became "Mother". Despite never marrying, George and Marian were buried together in Highgate Cemetery, London.

In January the Daily Telegraph published the " [100 novels everyone should read](#) ". Middlemarch by George Eliot was voted number one. Thornton Arnott Lewes suffered from tuberculosis of the spine and was cared for by George and Marian during the writing of Middlemarch with his death being mentioned in Marian's diary. George's children are featured throughout her diaries however with Charles being London based, he receives [more](#) attention. Herbert even named his two children Marian Elizabeth Lewes and George Henry Herbert Arthur Lewes!