

Jane Austen and the Lefroy Family

(from the 'Becoming Jane' website)

We received a very interesting email a couple of weeks ago from a man who owns the former church of St. Oswalds in Fulford, York, England.

His garden is the former grave yard and he emailed us to tell us that there were two mid 19th century burials in this graveyard, captain Anthony Lefroy and his wife Elizabeth.

We have touched on Anthony Lefroy, Tom Lefroy's younger brother, before in previous quotes but here are some details below. Anthony Lefroy was born on October 19 1777 –and became a Captain in the 65th Regiment, the commission being purchased for him by his Langlois great-uncles. Anthony had a love match marriage in 1798 to Elizabeth Wilkin, she was considered undesirable due to her lack of fortune and the Langlois family refused to provide any further financial assistance.

Tom Lefroy was eventually able to obtain for his brother the position of Barrack-Master, first in Arundel and later in York, where this branch of the family therefore remained. One of Anthony and Elizabeth's sons, Thomas Edward Preston Lefroy (1815-1887), married in 1846 his cousin Anna-Jemima Lefroy (daughter of Anna Austen and Benjamin Lefroy. Anthony Lefroy died on September 7th 1857.

This story has always been interesting to us as the marriage between Anthony and Elizabeth was in 1798, this is the year that Tom Lefroy would have still had very strong feelings for Jane Austen. Given that his younger brother had married a woman of no fortune and gone against the families wishes, it would have been very difficult for Tom to also cut himself off from the family too, he would have felt a huge responsibility to "marry well" given that his second younger brother (Benjamin) was still 16 years old.

The email received recently stated:

"He was indeed the master of nearby Fulford cavalry barracks, but I have no more information regarding his tenure. The grave consists of a huge thick slab of stone surrounded by railings. There is a full inscription of who he was and more importantly, who his father was.

It is said he married without the support of his family, especially his rich uncle Benjamin and subsequently lost the support of his family. Perhaps this explains why he remained in obscurity as a lowly captain when his brother achieved greatness. What is sure he remained true to his wife and they stayed together until his death - she died only a few months later."