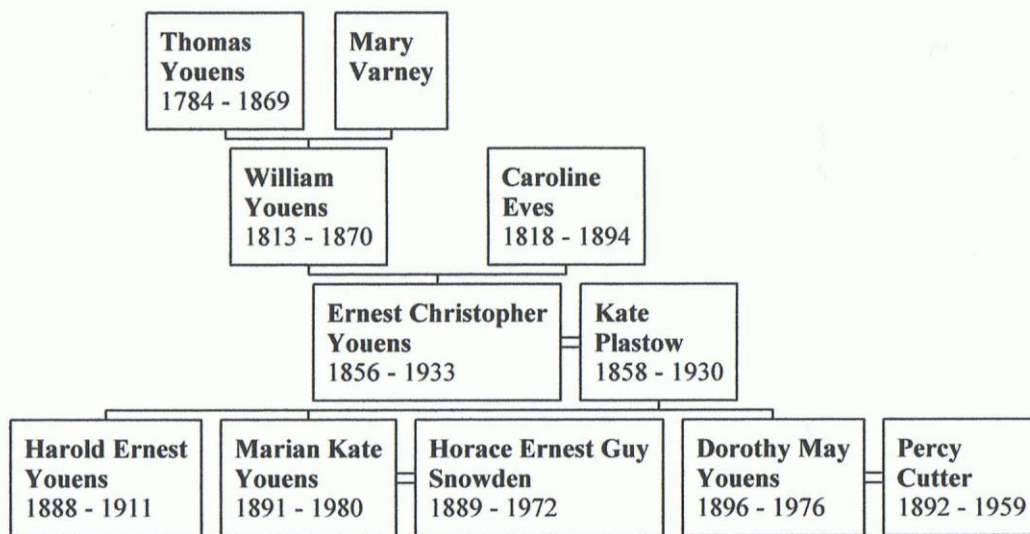


Ernest Christopher Youens (1856-1933), Photographer and Antiquarian

Ernest Youens was part of an enterprising and artistic family who lived in Dartford. He worked for the family firm as a basket maker and later became a professional photographer. Ernest was also the first curator of Dartford Museum.

Ernest was born on November 29th 1856 the eighth of nine children (two girls and seven boys) born to William and Caroline Youens, who married in 1837 and moved to Dartford in about 1845. Their children were Caroline (1839-1919), Ralph (1841-1910), Frank (1844-1910), Jesse (1846-1920), William (1848-1930), Albert Frederick (1850-1931), Clement Thomas (1852-1919), Agnes Maud (1855-1855), Ernest Christopher (1856-1933) and Urban Percival John (1859-1927). William Youens was a basket maker who was born in Fulham, a son of Thomas Youens, also a basket maker. His wife Caroline nee Eves, was born in Chatham.



Hourglass family tree of Ernest Christopher Youens

The 1851 census shows William Youens and his family living at Willow Cottage in Lowfield Street, Dartford. William was a devout non-conformist Christian. He lent a room in Willow Cottage to a group of Strict Baptists for them to worship in. This was known as Antioch Chapel¹. William attended the Independent Chapel in Lowfield Street and his wife Caroline was a teacher at the Sunday School there².

Thomas Youens (grandfather of Ernest) had three children, namely William (father of Ernest), Jane and Mary. His daughters married in the 1840s and emigrated to America². In 1858 Thomas, then aged 74, travelled to Texas to be with his daughters. Three of William's children namely Caroline (aged 21), Frank (14) and Jesse (12) went with him. Dartford Library has a copy of letters (transcribed) that Ralph Youens sent to his siblings in Texas over the period 1859 to 1876². Frank and Jesse both served in the Confederate Army for about 7 months during the latter part of the American Civil War (which lasted from 1861 to 65). By 1859, William and his family had moved to Tower Cottage, Tower Road, Dartford. This was a house that William built with his own hands. It was designed in an unusual style that incorporated some architectural features of a church. The building was demolished in about 1935 (a spiritualist church now occupies the site). In 1871, Jesse Youens built a house in Navasota, Texas in the style of Tower Cottage. It still stands and has been declared a Texas Historic Landmark.



Tower Cottage, 15 Tower Road, Dartford in about 1900 (photo from Dartford Library)

In 1861, the family living in Tower Cottage, Dartford consisted of William Youens (47, a basket maker), his wife Caroline (44) and their children Ralph (19), William (12), Albert (10), Clement (8), Ernest (4) and Urban (1). Ernest was admitted to the Wesleyan Boys' School in Dartford in June 1867, when he was aged 10³.

William Youens (father of Ernest) died in 1870, aged 56, of heart disease². The 1871 census shows Caroline Youens (a widow aged 53) at Tower Cottage, Dartford. Also living here were her sons Ralph (29), Albert (20), Ernest (14) and Urban (11), all shown as basket makers. Their business was advertised in the 1872 Perry's Directory of Dartford.

WEST KENT
Basket & Siebe Manufactory
Tower Road, West Hill, Dartford.

The Public are respectfully informed that persons requiring any Article in the above line will consult their own advantage by applying personally or by post to

YOUENS BROTHERS,
 Who guarantee every article made by them of the best quality at the lowest possible price.

BASKET CARRIAGE WORK OF ANY KIND DONE ON THE SHORTEST NOTICE.

Fancy Baskets neatly Repaired. Chairs Re-bottomed with either Plain or Ornamental Seats.

Advert placed by Youens Brothers (1872)

William Youens (Ernest's brother) married Ellen Elizabeth Bignall in 1874. They travelled to Texas later that year with Clement Youens. In 1881, the Youens family in Dartford consisted of Caroline (63), Ralph (39), Clement (28, who had returned from America) and Ernest (24). The sons were all basket makers and unmarried. As a sideline, Ernest kept bees at Tower Cottage and sold the honey.



Blank invoice for Youens honey

In 1887, Ernest married Kate Plastow in Dartford. He was aged 30, she was 29. Kate was born in Dartford. In the 1881 census, she is shown as a needle mistress at the Metropolitan Imbecile Asylum and School in Darenth (on the outskirts of Dartford). Ernest and Kate went on to have three children, Harold Ernest (b 1888), Marian Kate (b 1891) and Dorothy May (b 1896). The census in 1891 shows Ernest (34, basket maker), Kate (33) and Harold (3) living at 17 Tower Road. Ernest's mother Caroline (73) was still living next door at 15 Tower Road with her unmarried sons Ralph (49), Clement (38), Albert (40) and Urban (31). Ralph and Clement were basket makers. Albert and Urban were both described as "artist in natural flowers". Caroline Youens died in 1894 aged 76.

In about 1897, Ernest decided to seek a living as a photographer. The Perry's Directory of Dartford for that year contains the entry "17 Tower Road, E Youens, photographer." The 1901 census shows Ernest (44, photographer), Kate (42), Harold (13), Marian (9) and Dorothy (5) living at 17 & 19 Tower Road (this property still exists). Ernest took portrait photos.

E. C. YOUENS, Photographic Artist,
 17 & 19, TOWER ROAD, DARTFORD.

Portraits, Groups, Wedding and Garden Parties, Landscapes, Architecture, &c., in Silver, Platinum, Bromide, &c.

PRICE LISTS FREE. ENLARGEMENTS MADE TO ANY SIZE.

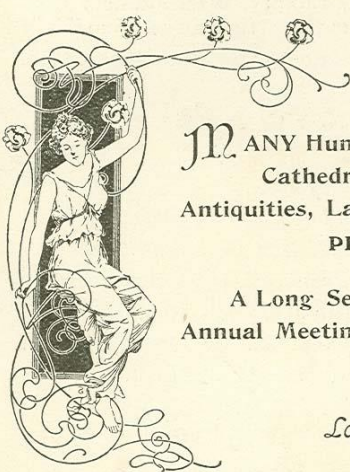
1913 advert



Ernest's studio at 17 & 19 Tower Road

He also built up a collection of local photos, which he offered for sale.

KENTISH VIEWS.



MANY Hundreds of Photographs, comprising the Two Cathedrals, Abbeys, Castles, Churches, Monuments, Antiquities, Landscapes, Etc.

PRICES from 4s. PER DOZEN.

A Long Series of Sets of Photographs, illustrating the Annual Meetings of the Kent Archæological Society.

Lists sent on Application.

Lantern Slides supplied of any View.

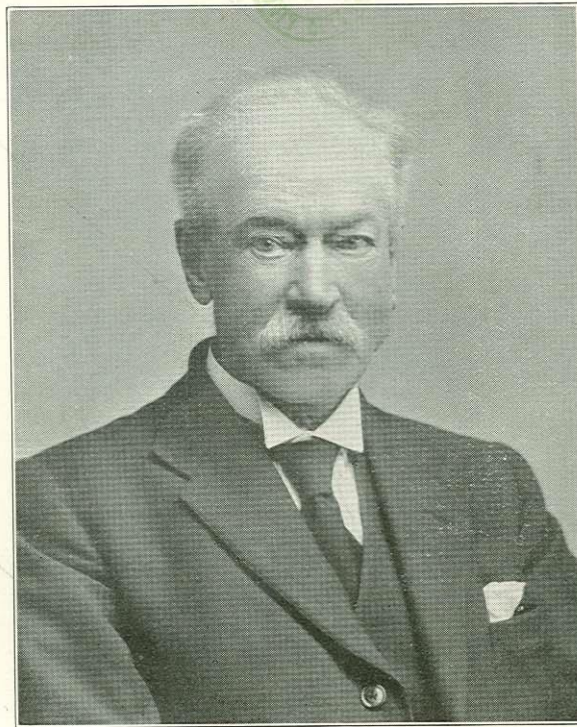
E. C. YOUENS, By Appointment Photographer to the Kent Archæological Society.

17 & 19, TOWER RD., DARTFORD.

1908 advert

In March 1906, Ernest wrote a letter, published in the Dartford Chronicle, suggesting that a museum be established in Dartford. An exhibition of local antiquities was held that year in a room in the Congregational Church⁴. A museum committee was formed by Dartford Urban District Council. In 1907 it was decided to collect and display exhibits at the Dartford Technical Institute in Essex Road. Ernest was appointed as the Honorary Curator of this collection, a position he held until his death. His role was unpaid at first. Ernest was later paid a small salary, which he sometimes used to acquire specimens⁵. The museum was transferred to a room in the new public library building in 1921.

In 1932 Sidney Kilworth Keyes published his book "Dartford : Some Historical Notes". Ernest helped him by supplying information and pictures. Keyes included the page below in the book, to thank him.



Self Photo

ERNEST CHRISTOPHER YOUENS.

FOR well over half-a-century it has been Mr. Youens' hobby to collect and record any object or item of local antiquarian interest, with the result that his bookshelves and files are a veritable gold mine of information to a local historian. When he knew of my intention to publish this book, he most generously placed his collection at my disposal.

Many an interesting item and anecdote, many a little tit-bit of local history, have I culled from his records, and therefore I owe him a deep debt of gratitude for his kindly thought and courtesy to me in my labours.

This work, which Ernest Youens has for so many years been doing in a quiet and unostentatious way, is of inestimable value to our old town, and the writer wishes, on behalf of his townsmen and himself, to express to him their very great appreciation and thanks.

Harold Youens, Ernest's son, died in 1911 aged 23. His elder daughter Marian married Horace Snowden (who worked for his family's printing business in Dartford) in 1922 and they had a son in 1923. Ernest's other daughter Dorothy married Percy Cutter in 1918 and they had daughters in 1923 and 1926.

Clement Youens (Ernest's brother) married Kathleen Annie Redsell in 1901. They lived opposite Ernest at 30 Tower Road and had daughters in 1904 and 1906. Clement was an artist and painted pictures of local scenes. Dartford Library has several examples of his work, which can be viewed at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/artists/clement-t-youens>. He died in 1919 aged 66.

Kate Youens, Ernest's wife, died in 1930 aged 72. Ernest passed away at his house at 17 & 19 Tower Road in 1933 aged 76. He had been in failing health for some time and died from a heart attack in his sleep at night. Ernest's funeral service was held at Dartford Congregational Church on West Hill, which he had attended for over 50 years. He took an active part in the church's activities – he was in the choir, treasurer and a senior deacon⁵. An obituary⁶ said “*Ernest Youens was a kindly, peaceful soul who pursued the even tenor of his ways, unruffled by the artificial storms of modern times.*”

Ernest was buried in East Hill Cemetery in the same grave as his wife and son. It is inscribed *HAROLD ERNEST YOUENS, born 10th Feb 1888, died 5th Oct 1911. / Accersitus ab angelis, quiescit in domino Jesu / KATE YOUENS, born 29th March 1858, died 20th Aug 1930 / A soul so truly sweet can never die, but lives and loves throughout eternity / ERNEST CHRISTOPHER / YOUENS / died 16th Nov 1933.*

“Accersitus ab angelis, quiescit in domino Jesu” is Latin for “Summoned by angels, he rests in Lord Jesus”.



The grave of Ernest Christopher Youens

Ernest was the last of his siblings to die. His father, mother and brothers Ralph, Albert, Clement and Urban are buried near him in East Hill Cemetery. Ernest's sister Caroline (who married William Armstrong) and brothers Frank, Jesse and William died in Texas. Memorials to all of them are on the Find A Grave website.

Philip Taylor © 2014
PhilT42LQS@Yahoo.co.uk

References

1. *Dartford, Some Historical Notes*, Sidney Kilworth Keyes, 1932.
2. *Youens Letters Transcribed*, Ernest Lewis Youens.
3. *At Maidstone Archives*, Dorothy Galdwyn, North West Kent Family History Society Magazine, January 1982, page 189.
4. *History of Dartford museum - a long and varied history*, on Dartford Borough Council website, accessed March 3rd 2014.
5. *Museum Curator's Funeral*, Dartford Reporter, November 25th 1933.
6. *The Passing of a Kindly Gentleman*, West Kent Advertiser, November 23rd 1933.