
RUDYARD KIPLING'S LINKS TO SEDLESCOMBE

"for sheer beauty and a certain air of quiet, it would be hard to beat Sedlescombe", said Rudyard Kipling

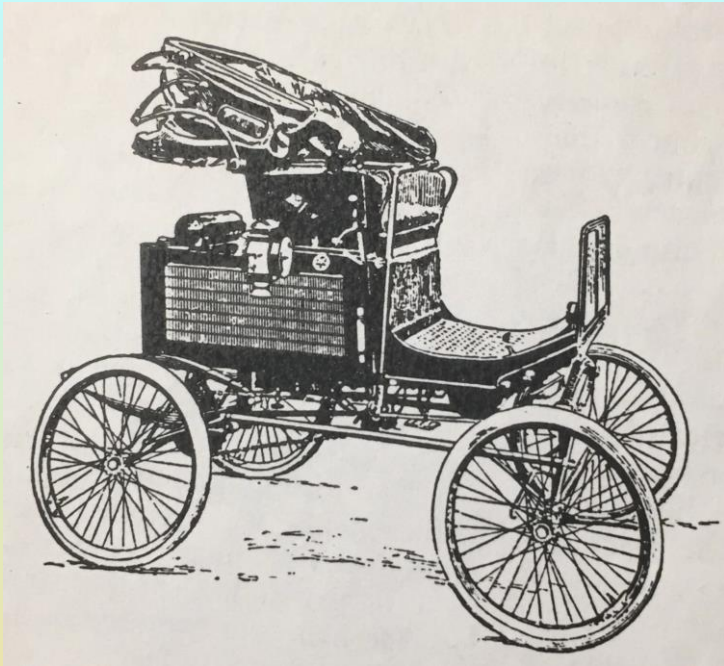


By 1900, Rudyard Kipling had become a household name with his very successful stories and poems for children and adults.

Rudyard and Carrie Kipling were attracted to the village of Sedlescombe around the turn of the 20th century. They were looking for somewhere to move from Rottingdean to where there was peace and quiet so they could try to recover from the awful loss of their eldest daughter Josephine who had died from measles aged 6.



Royalty-free picture Getty image of Rudyard Kipling



Early motoring was nothing less than an adventure on every outing, suffering breakdowns extremely often and being subject to the vagaries of the weather. There was also a lack of good roads and poor performance of the vehicles that meant that passengers were sometimes forced to get out and walk up hills, of which there are many in Sussex.

In 1899 Rudyard had first been invited to join the proprietor of the Daily Mail on a 20-minute drive in what Rudyard called “*one of those motor-car things*”. Although returning covered in dust, he was immediately captivated.

Although he loved cars, he never drove himself. At first, he hired a car and chauffeur, costing him 3 ½ guineas a week, and would be driven around the almost empty roads of Kent and Sussex often with his aunt in the back. Over the next few years, he had his own cars of various makes and despite the nuisance they almost all caused him, he never lost his love of the motor vehicle.



Rudyard really liked Sedlescombe. He had friends here. His old friend was Hercules Brabazon Brabazon at Oaklands Manor. Then he found what he thought was his ideal property. In the Village.

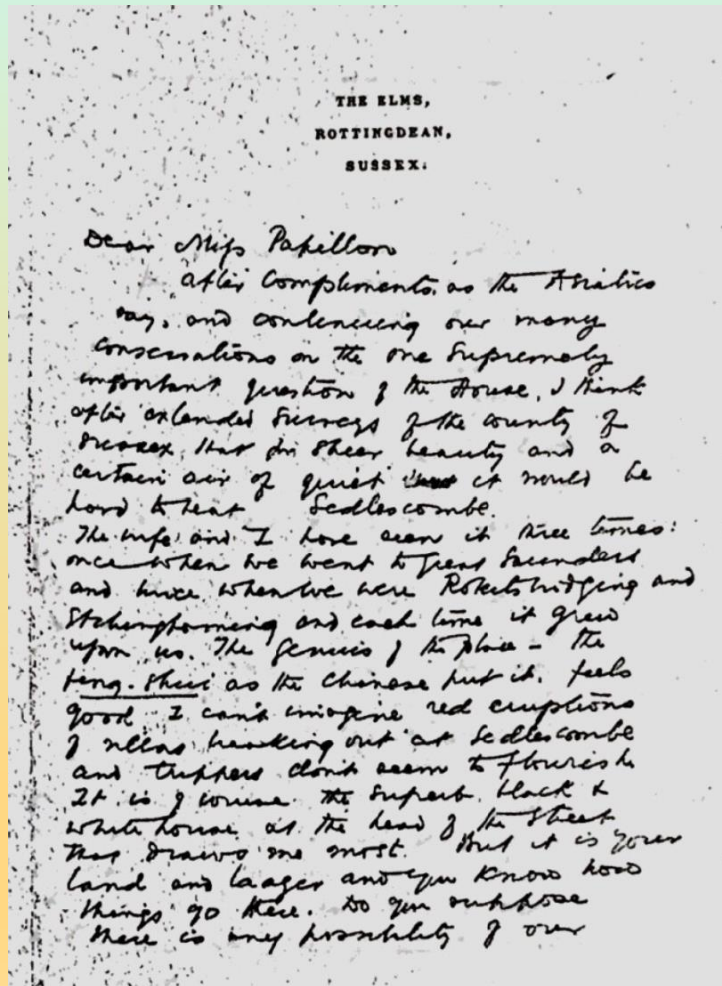
Rudyard wrote a letter dated 12 December 1901 to another friend, Miss Bertha Papillon of Crowhurst Park, asking for her help in contacting the owners of "The Old Manor House" in The Street, Sedlescombe, with a view to purchasing the property.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE LETTER

Dear Miss Papillon

"After compliments, as the Asiatics say, and continuing our many conversations on the one supremely important question of the house, I think after extended surveys of the county of Sussex **that for sheer beauty and a certain air of quiet that it would be hard to beat Sedlescombe.**

"The wife and I have seen it three times: once when we went to Great Saunders and twice when we were Robertsbridging and Etchingaming and each time it grew upon us. **The genius of the place - the feng-shui as the Chinese put it, feels good. I can't imagine red eruptions of ?????? breaking out at Sedlescombe and trippers don't seem to flourish. It is of course the superb black and white house at the head of the Street that draws me most. But it is your land and Etchingaming you know how things go there. Do you suppose there is any possibility of our** Continued on next page →



acquiring that house or getting so as to look at that house with a view to acquiring it - even on a long lease.

If I were the owner I am sure that I should put any intending occupant under the most terrible bonds not to spoil the thing but we should not spoil it we'd love it and cherish it and oil it and wax it and respect its diamond panes.

Now that you have seen John you will at once understand - how vital it is that we should have a house that John could take on and grow up in - and I think that black & white house would be good for his soul.

Wherefore please be a kind girl, & find out from its owner whether there is any chance of our being able to buy it and if so on what terms and "your petitioners shall ever pray" &c. &c

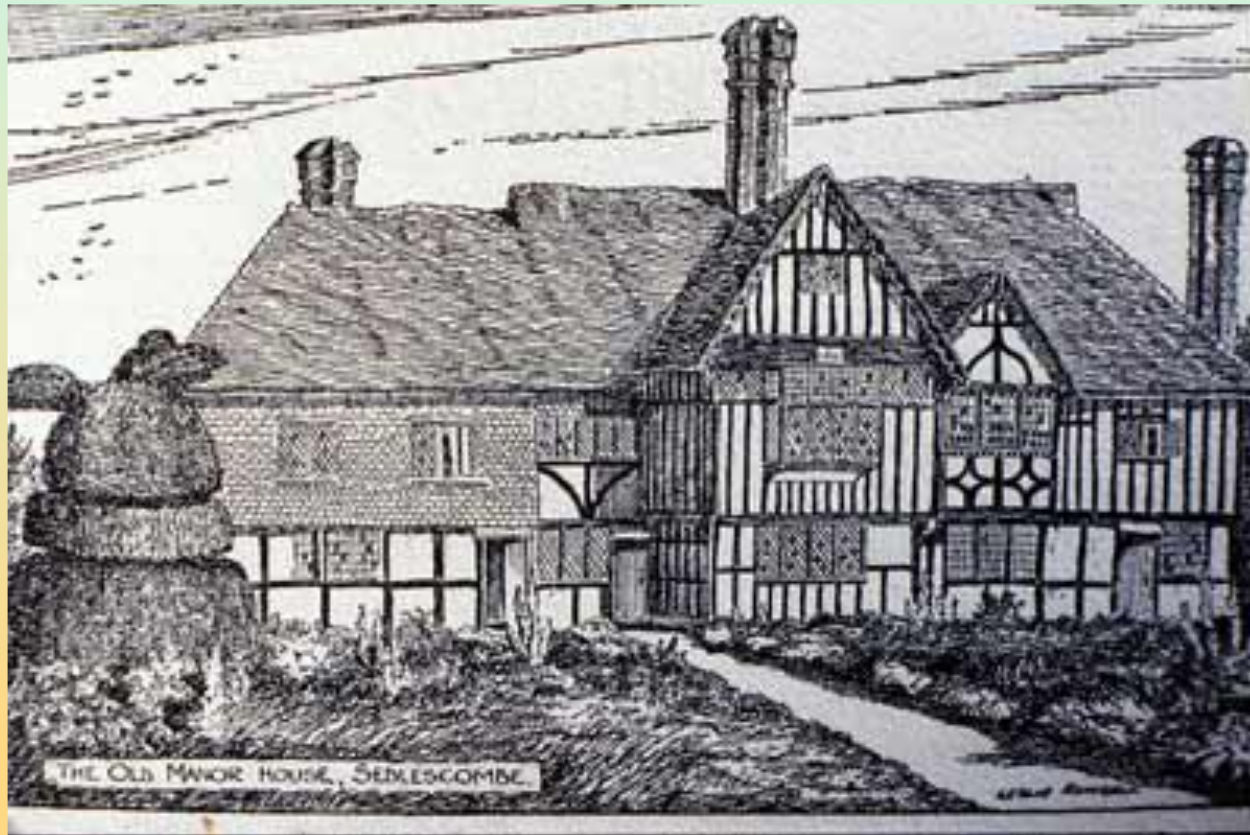
Sincerely Yours
Rudyard Kipling

TRANSCRIPT OF THE LETTER continued from previous page
“...acquiring that house or getting so as to look at that house with a view to acquiring it – even on a long lease. If I were the owner I am sure that I should put any intending occupant under the most terrible bonds not to spoil the thing but we should not spoil it. We’d love it and cherish it and oil it and wax it and respect its diamond panes.

“Now that you have seen John you will at once understand how vital it is that we should have a house that John could take on and grow up in - and I think that black & white house would be good for his soul. Wherefore, please be a kind girl, & find out from its owner whether there is any chance of our being able to buy it and if so on what terms and ‘your petitioners shall ever pray’ etc. etc.

Sincerely Yours
(Sgd) Rudyard Kipling”

NB – ‘your petitioners shall ever pray’ is an ancient way of expressing gratitude and respect, as well as a hope for a favourable response. (Info from CoPilot 2024)



You could think that Brickwall House (as it was called at the time) might be the property referred to by Kipling, but this can be ruled out by reference to a small booklet written in about 1910 by Sedlescombe resident, Mrs Harvey Brabazon Combe. In the book, in a page at the end, she refers to “Other Objects of Interest in Sedlescombe”. Here she lists both “**The Old Manor House, so much admired by Rudyard Kipling**” and also “Brickwall House, facing the head of the village”. Therefore, these are two separate properties.

Unfortunately, the lovely Old Manor House was not for sale, but Miss Papillon did her best and there were various letters between herself and the Kiplings on the subject.

Another reference to Sedlescombe was made in a letter from Rudyard to Miss Papillon in May 1902 when he told her his visit to Sedlescombe was delayed because “*the motor is broken down again*”. The steam locomobile is said to have given Kipling “*two happy years’ un-faithful service*”!

On 26th July 1902 Miss Papillon wrote telling the Kiplings the house was available. The following day, a reply arrived quickly in return not from Rudyard but from his wife Carrie:

“I am writing for the husband, who has been away for two days and finds himself submerged with letters, to thank you for yours of 26th with its enclosed which would have been of vast interest some weeks ago but now leaves us cold because it finds us the owners of a house called Bateman’s near Burwash... “

**How different would Sedlescombe be today if
the Kiplings had moved into The Old Manor
House instead of Batemans at Burwash?**

THE END OF THE KIPLINGS' INVOLVEMENT WITH SEDLESCOMBE

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