

George Merryweather

Steward to the Beckett Estate, Shrivenham from April 1815

There is no intention here to provide an in-depth study of Beckett and the Barringtons. That subject will be addressed by another publication bearing the same or a similar title. However, it will be necessary for the reader of this Listing to understand the events leading up to the appointment of George Merryweather as the Steward for the Beckett Estate in the Parish of Shrivenham, Berkshire.

Lord William Viscount Barrington was the second Barrington to bear the title. He was a very successful and influential man. As well as being an M.P. he also held the position at various times of Secretary at War, Treasurer to the Admiralty and Chancellor of the Exchequer. He also held the, '*Ear of the King.*'

In his personal life he had no children, so this required that he must look to his brothers for an heir. It was his younger brother John who led a distinguished military career as a Major-General, that provided the three sons that could continue the Barrington line, William, Richard and George. However, the first two caused much trouble and concerns for their uncle. In his letters that accompanied his Will, we learn that William despaired of the behaviour of his two delinquent nephews; so much so that he decided he could not trust either of them with the administration of his beloved Beckett Estate. Consequently, on his death in 1793, the estate was placed in Trust to be overseen by his three surviving brothers, until such time as a suitable heir was apparent. This happened in 1814 with the death of Lord Richard Viscount Barrington. (4th)

Having been ordained as a priest, George, the third son of John Barrington, tended the Living in Sedgefield, Durham, but was happy to inherit the title of Lord George Viscount Barrington (5th). With full control vested in him, George needed a suitable person to act as his Steward for the Beckett Estate. The previous 21 years of '*Caretaker Stewards*' had left the estate in a mess. Little had been done to keep the farms, houses and cottages in good repair, and many of the tenants were in arrears of rent.

Enter: George Merryweather.

We know nothing about the life of George Merryweather before he was approached by George Barrington to consider the role of Estate Steward. They both had a mutual acquaintance in Mr Hollingsworth who must have recommended Merryweather for the job, but we don't know what the connection was. In his first letter to him, George Barrington states that he's sorry to find that Merryweather has not yet got out of his difficulties, but we don't know what they were. We know from reading the 68 letters that survive, that George Merryweather was a well-educated man. His command of the English language and his philosophical statements would suggest that he had attended university. His letters that form part of the Barrington Collection at the British Library have been photographed by Shrivvenham Heritage Society and the 70,000 words transcribed into digital format. They date from April 1815 when he first began his work as Steward and continue through to the end of 1816. Curiously, the year of 1817 is missing but the whole of 1818 is complete. The last letters of 1818 contain no indication that he was leaving his job, so we can only assume that he continued until 1821, when a new Steward was appointed called Robert Dawson. (*See separate listing N909 in this Catalogue for more information*). At the moment we know nothing more of George Merryweather, his wife or his seven sons and seven daughters.

His letters written to Lord Barrington (*5th Viscount*) are a rich source of information. They provide us with very detailed information about what was happening on the Beckett Estate immediately after the Trust period had ended. They are also a rich source of day-to-day life in the '*Township*' of Shrivvenham two centuries previous. It is the intention of Society members to extract this information in a modular style, whereby interesting facts are taken from the letters and used as individual listings in the online catalogue.