

## The Story behind the Snowdrops – KEELEY HALSWELLE

Many of you will know that each January a grave on the right of the pathway to Steep church door is resplendent with masses of snowdrops. Have you ever wondered about those whose grave they mark?

Major General Nathaniel John Gordon served with 31<sup>st</sup> Madras Light Infantry . He lived with his wife Mary, née Hedley, at Stoner Lodge. In 1873, their daughter Helena had married artist Keeley Halswelle, who was also later buried in the same grave as his parents in law.

Keeley was born on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1832 and became a 'moderately successful Victorian academic artist' who has an entry in the Dictionary of National Biography. He designed both Stoner House and Stoner Lodge, having the former built for himself. He had begun his artistic career by drawing for the Illustrated London News. He exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1862. He also illustrated books and exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy, where he was elected A.R.S.A. in 1865. From 1869 he spent some years in Italy, but from the 1880s he gave up figure painting for landscapes. In 1882, he showed a painting entitled: 'Three Counties from Whetham Hill, Petersfield' and was elected to the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours in the same year. The Halswelles had two sons: Gordon, born in 1874 and Wyndham in 1882. Both sons went into the army. Their father, Keeley Halswelle, sadly died of pneumonia in Paris on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1891 and was later buried in the Steep grave on 20<sup>th</sup> April. His son Wyndham was killed in 1915. His name appears on Steep's War Memorial and on the memorial tablet in Steep church. Keeley's widow, Helena, lived until the age of 90 years, dying in Devon in 1936. Their son Gordon survived, married and had a son. In the 1990s a great grandson was located.

We don't know who planted the snowdrops or when, but they go on multiplying to this day and present a welcome forecast of the return of new life to all who pass by. Fran Box [franboxsteep@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:franboxsteep@yahoo.co.uk)

(With acknowledgements to an article by Jill Thompson-Lewis in a 1999 bulletin of the Petersfield Area Historical Society.)



"At the end of the Day".  
Painting hung in Wanganui Art Galley,  
New Zealand by Keeley Halswelle