

### **John Godwin King CBE (1864-1948): Founder of the Priest House Museum.**

John Godwin King was born into a wealthy Nonconformist family in Walton on the Hill, Lancashire in 1864. Both his father & grandfather had been doctors in Everton but his grandfather became wealthy by buying shares in gas companies in the 1840's. Godwin King followed family tradition & studied medicine at Cambridge but never practised.

In 1892 he went to Australia, having travelled in the United States, Japan & India. In Queensland he met & fell in love with his cousin, Charlotte Francis & they were married in Brisbane Cathedral before returning to England.

They wanted a suitable country residence in the South of England & nearly bought a house in Hampshire before the deal fell through but in March 1896 they bought Stonelands, one mile from West Hoathly.

In 1906 he bought the Manor of West Hoathly, which included The Priest House, the Great House (Manor House) & the cottages on the west side of North Lane. He restored The Priest House & filled it with a collection of local artefacts & items he had gathered on his world tour. He opened the museum to the public in 1908 & in September 1935 he gave the house & its contents, with an endowment, to the Sussex Archaeological Society. Godwin sat on the governing Council of the Society for forty-one years, was Chairman of the Finance Committee for seventeen years & was a founder member of the Sussex Archaeological Trust, created in 1924 to administer the Society's historic properties.

Both Godwin & Charlotte were ardent Liberals. Godwin's brother, Joseph King, was elected as the Liberal MP for North Somerset in 1910 but Godwin refused all invitations to stand for Parliament himself. He was elected to the County Council in 1899 as an Independent; in 1904 he was appointed an Alderman & served on the council until his death. He sat as a JP, attending Quarter Sessions in Lewes & was chairman of East Grinstead Petty Sessions. He was also a member of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage (his daughter Ursula, was a member of the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies in the East End of London). In 1942 he was awarded the CBE.

John Godwin King died in his sleep in February 1948, aged 84. Charlotte died four months later, following a stroke. Their ashes were placed in a grave in the woods at Stonelands.