

George Montagu's place in the History of Kingsbridge

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George Montagu (1753-1815) was an Army Officer in the American War of Independence and later became an eminent Natural Historian, famous for his study of birds and crustaceans from his home in Kingsbridge, Devon..

The material in this film was originally produced during the 2 years of Covid Lockdown, which gave its three contributors the time and incentive to research the content and learn new skills. It was presented to the KEU3A Local History Group by Zoom.

It was later further developed, with additional images and a music soundtrack, into an iMovie which is now available on YouTube to the membership of the KEU3A.

The first section tells of George Montagu's legacy as a Natural Historian. He devoted himself to science and was one of the earliest members of [Linnaean Society](#). His greatest work was the scientifically well-received 'Ornithological Dictionary of British Birds' (1802) ['Ornithological Dictionary of British Birds' \(1802\)](#).

He showed that many previously accepted species were invalid, either because they were birds in summer or winter plumage or males and females of the same species. His study of harriers resulted in the discovery that the Montagu's harrier was breeding in southern England. He was also involved in

the first British records of curlew, cattle egret, little gull and gull-billed tern, whose breeding range in England is around his home in Devon. Fascinated by molluscs, abundant in the Kingsbridge Salcombe Estuary, he published the first comprehensive monograph on the molluscs of the British Isles: ' Testacea Britannica' (1803,1808) [' Testacea Britannica' \(1803,1808\)](#).

The second section reports on where in Kingsbridge he lived, and clears up a misconception.

It records the location of Knowle Cottage where his mistress and illustrator of his work, Elizabeth Dorville, lived and the true location of the grander Knowle House and Gardens where he later lived with his mistress and where he undertook his studies and ultimately his valuable collections were held.

The final section explores his colourful life, which included his eloping to Gretna Green as a very young man. This was followed by his service in the Army, and scandalous affairs.

He was later involved in a catastrophic firearms incident resulting in a fatality, and finally the squandering of his considerable fortune by a wayward son, before his sad death in 1815.

After stepping on a rusty nail whilst inspecting repairs at Knowle Cottage he died of lockjaw within just a few days.