

## TENUOUS CONNECTIONS

A light hearted look back at some family history.

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In David Waymouth's book 'Downton 7000 years of an English Village' I noticed a report dated Monday 16 May 1698. Its significance will be revealed later but first here is the entry.

*An account of those that in a riotous manner broke the Lady's waste within The Franchises of Downton by digging holes in the ground to putt posts for erecting a Cottage on the said waste ..... and notwithstanding the workmen (whose names are hereunder) were forbidden by John Snow, servant to the Lady Ashe, from proceeding any further in the said work, yett in contempt thereof they have proceeded and finished the said cottage.*

*Nicholas Lawes, senior, who is the owner of the cottage, Samuel Wheeler, carpenter, Walter Sheppard, apprentice to Abr. Wheeler, Joseph Chalk, junior, who thatched the said cottage, George Noble who breaded the walls of the said cottage, one other man who holpe digge the holes for erecting the said cottage. (WRO 490/932)*

The parish records for Downton show that a daughter of a Nicholas Lawes married, in 1706, a Thomas Weeb who happens to be one of my early ancestors so I like to think there is a family connection with the report. I am not sure that 'milady' mentioned in the account really cared much about that particular erection, she left her husband, Sir James Ashe, to whom the land belonged, not long after marrying him. Sir James was 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet of Twickenham, where I now live, thus providing another historical association with the Downton area.

The description of the building as a cottage was probably a hyperbolic statement; a single room hovel put up in a single day would be nearer the mark. Whether the Thomas in my family tree lived in such accommodation is unknown but parish records show he did have at least five children so housing, whatever it was, could have been a formidable challenge at bedtime. Thomas and his wife Elizabeth lived during the lifetimes of Isaac Newton and Christopher Wren, the latter born not far from Downton, and their parents would have heard first-hand accounts of the English Civil Wars the re-telling of which must have provided much needed entertainment. As for Newton's laws of motion: the handling of a horse and cart would have provided all the information Thomas needed about the subject and even if he hadn't heard of Wren he would have been familiar with cathedrals, Salisbury being only about 6 miles away. His eldest son, also called Thomas, fathered six traced children and lived to the age of 84 out-living his wife, Margaret, by 9 years which must have been a significant achievement in those days.

Thomas and Margaret's fourth child, James, born in 1739, and my next ancestor, would have had a problem deciding when to celebrate his birthday, the spanner in the works being the British government's decision to fall in line with Europe and introduce the Gregorian calendar. This happened during September 1752. Until then the start of the new-year was 25<sup>th</sup> of March, Lady Day. Moving from the Julian to the Gregorian standard converts this date to the 6<sup>th</sup> of April which still remains the beginning of the fiscal year in this country.

Sometime in the early 1800s James' grandson and namesake, born 1800, moved to nearby Homington the birth place of Hannah Chant who had already married another James Webb, cousin of the afore said James, and produced yet another James. Things became more complicated when after moving to Homington James, (the grandson), also married a Hannah, this time Hannah Small. This surfeit of identical monikers must have had the potential to generate confusion, so it is not surprising that no James nor Hannah appear in the following generation. During 1830, the time of the Swing riots, my ancestors were still working on farms in the Homington area but whether or not they had any riotous tendencies has not been recorded.

The next name in the family line is a George born, probably not coincidentally, towards the end of the Georgian period. He named his first son George Harry and with a slight of economic thought called

his second son Harry George and gave every other son George as a second name. This was unwittingly fitting; the origin of the name meaning a farm worker and George along with his sons began their working lives on the land. Perhaps his wife drew a line at any daughters becoming a Georgina and for reasons previously explained no concession was given to his parents; however his second daughter was called Charlotte Caroline, after his wife and her mother. Charlotte was illegitimate, her father, Bryant North of Durnford, is mentioned in magistrate's records of 1829 being accused of the pregnancy of Charlotte's mother, Caroline Waters. I have researched males and females in the family line but investigation into Caroline's predecessors is hampered by missing parish records an entry from which is as follows:

*The entries which follow were copied by me from some loose and decayed sheets of paper lying in the Parish Chest and the writing on which would soon have become illegible. They supply the interval between the years 1755 and 1794 with the omission of those between 1768 and 1780. I have made a verbatim copy of each entry.*

William Bruce

Perpetual Curate of Homington

January 31<sup>st</sup> 1850.

Census returns suggest Charlotte was brought up by her grand-parents and that her mother was no longer alive at the time of her wedding. Her wedding certificate also suggests either Charlotte or the registrar thought her father's surname was Norton not North.

George, his father James and their families worked in turn on Well House, Bake and Standlynch farms, all parts of the Radnor, (Pleydell-Bouverie), estates providing a weak link to my birth place Pewsey. Rectors of that parish from 1816 to 1857 and again from 1880 until 1909 were Frederick Pleydell-Bouverie and Bertrand Pleydell-Bouverie respectively, leaving the legacy of the Bouverie village hall. During the 1940s there was yet another incumbent Bouverie. All three were Cannons of Salisbury, the later one known by the 12 year old school boys of that time to which he gave religious instruction as *the big shot of the district*, a natural appellation he would have found difficult to avoid.

While at Standlynch, George and family were living at Fourgates, the name given to cottages built from the proceeds to Lord Radnor as compensation for building a railway on his land. Cynthea Carter, wife of a one-time tenant of Standlynch farm told me that in the 1900s local children were paid a penny a day for stone picking, (used for road repair), which in turn paid for their schooling which was also a penny a day; also parochial isolation meant a local estate given to the family of Lord Nelson was known as Traff-al-gar House; and who can claim they were incorrect. George died in 1907 and his death certificate states place of death as Colebrook. Colebrook turned out to be a pair of isolated cottages serving a nearby farm which when visited had been turned into a single cottage and occupied by the farm's manager who claimed the place was haunted. Apparently noises emanate from one of the rooms – perhaps it's George throwing tantrums.

By the mid 1900s George's male offspring sought better livings; for example my paternal grandfather, Harry, who was a one-time carter at Standlynch, joined the Wiltshire Constabulary and eventually became an Inspector. In those days two preliminary requirements for joining the force were the abilities to ride a horse and a bicycle – presumably not at the same time. His height is recorded as being six feet which must also have been in his favour. Harry's wife, Hester, was one of three Shergold sisters who married three of George's sons. Unfortunately two of Hester's sons died young, one, Harry junior, from tuberculosis. He is buried at Sherston where his dad was stationed in the early 1900s. When, in 1998, I tried to trace his grave the then vicar, Rv. Ross, explained that 50 years previously the verger had fallen out with his vicar and ran off with the church records which included the layout of graves thus thwarting my objective. I was luckier tracing the old police house of the time along with its lock-up, both now comprise a private residence. Another son, Reginald, died as a baby; he was born in Devizes Police Station which in those days was on the Devizes Road and town outskirts, and is buried in non-consecrated ground, probably because his parents were

non-conformists. My mother also had a brother called Reginald who died at a young age; so it seems I was third time lucky.

There is a mystery attached to one of my grandfather's brothers, Lewis, living with his family in Hampshire who committed suicide in 1905 in the north of Wiltshire near Cricklade but the family didn't seem to know, or admit they knew, about it although it was reported in the local papers! A name was eventually put on the death certificate in 1908. Cricklade is not far from Sherston where Harry was stationed therefore I assume Lewis had visited or was about to visit his brother there. Harry was promoted to inspector in 1906; did he think his potential promotion would be affected by a brother committing suicide? It probably would have been in those days. He and my parents eventually finished up in Pewsey where Harry served. When my grandfather died his funeral procession, as described in the Marlborough Times, reads like a description of one of the local carnival parades that take place each year: There were 29 police officers and constables from Devizes, Marlborough and Lugershall all in parade uniforms, two clergymen and two mourning coaches that processed, presumably at the usual geriatric pace, from Manningford Bruce, where he died, to Pewsey Cemetery, over two miles away.

Seven years later my father gave up his job as a baker and joined the Royal Navy thus swapping his views of acres of countryside green for endless blue. Perhaps he met my mother, living in Wilton, when visiting relations in nearby Downton, I never thought of asking while they were alive so now I will never know.

Here is a final tenuous connection: the well known character Tom Forrest, played by Bob Arnold, in the radio serial *The Archers* was a great friend of my father-in-law who was instrumental in getting him an interview at BBC Birmingham and when Bob retired he went to live with his daughter in, guess where, - Downton.

*The Police House Sherston in 1900*



*The same house in 1998*

HARD TIMES  
*Experiences of family ancestors*  
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Some readers may remember the journalist and actor John Wells but may not be aware of his publication 'Princess Caraboo' a true story about a young woman who during 1817 managed to convince some refined people of Bristol that she was a princess. Although a book to be recommended that is not my reason for mentioning it here but for the fact that the subject of the story walked from Witheridge, some miles west of Tiverton in Devon to London via Bristol and Calne. No doubt she had help along the way but it was a bit more than a casual stroll and I was impressed by the length of the journey undertaken. While investigating the maternal side of my ancestors I discovered that on several occasions they too travelled long distances, in fact, between Wilton, near Salisbury, and Wookey in Somerset. The reason for such a journey, and there were several of them, being that their official "place of residence" was Wookey, the family being traced back to there in records for 1764, but their preferred place of residence was Wilton. Parish records of the Overseers Accounts <sup>(1)</sup> disclose that they were always foiled in this attempt by some minutiae in the rules of the "Settlement Act" <sup>(2)</sup>. Thus when parish relief was necessary they returned to Wookey to obtain it. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the poor of the period probably had little option but to journey by foot, beg along the way for food and shelter and take their chance with the weather and robbers. The journey between Wilton and Wookey couldn't have been an easy one and on one occasion, in 1813, after arrival at Wookey, two of my maternal grandfather's ancestors, John Turner and his wife Patience, unsurprisingly required new shoes and were given additional money to purchase them. There is evidence that the early Turner ancestors also visited Kidderminster and Axminster. Apparently at some time their livelihood was connected to the carpet industry but with life in Wilton a preference.

The reason for not achieving this goal can be explained by The Poor Law/Settlement act, (1642 – 1834), which made each parish responsible for poor relief. Its terms, listed below, were extracted from reference (2).

*In order to have a legal settlement, a person had to fulfil one or more of the following conditions:*

- *be born into a parish where the parents had a settlement*
- *up to 1662, live in a parish for more than three years; after 1662 a person could be removed within 40 days of arrival and after 1691, a person had to give 40 days' notice before moving into a parish*
- *be hired continually by a settled resident for more than a year and a day (this led to short contracts so people did not get a settlement)*
- *hold parish office*
- *rent property worth more than £10 p.a. OR pay taxes on a property worth more than £10 p.a.*
- *have married into the parish*
- *previously have received poor relief in that parish*
- *have served a full seven-year apprenticeship to a settled resident*

The act embodied a disincentive to leave your *place of residence* so it must be assumed that as far as the Turners were concerned life in Wilton was easier than that in Wookey.

Genealogical research unearths family events that our ancestors would rather have forgotten but which today is accepted as important accounts of history, for example: It turned out that my Turner grandfather was born out of wedlock, his birth certificate giving no indication of who the father might be. Three years after his birth his mother, Emma, gave birth to another illegitimate son this time in the South Newton Union Workhouse. For some people the workhouse was probably the least unpalatable solution to a desperate situation. Emma, it turns out, was quite productive in the birth department later producing at least another eight children with husband Ezer Barnes whose surname and place of birth coincide with that of the Master, James Barnes, of the workhouse in which she was earlier confined. If there is a direct family connection between Ezer and James it has yet to be found.

The South Newton Union Workhouse was built in 1827 and early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was used to house mentally handicapped people, later it became part of an industrial estate. The Pewsey Workhouse, built in 1835, also became a home for the mentally disadvantaged but the site has now been redeveloped for housing.

My maternal grandmother, Georgina Clark, originated from the Weymouth in Dorset area and her parents also found it necessary to suffer the workhouse, this time in Bridgewater whence their young children were taken from them and deposited in the Weymouth Workhouse; this is recorded in the 1841 census. Separation of parents and children was the established procedure for workhouses! Times really were harsh in those days and so was the law. Ann Inett an ancestor of a cousin was, in 1786, sentenced to death for stealing some clothing. Luckily this was later commuted to seven years transportation "...beyond the seas" where Ann's luck changed and she became the mistress of the Governor of Norfolk Island and bore two sons by him. Later her life story was made into a West End play!

In the Clark family line there are also criminals: Georgina Clark's maternal grandmother had an illegitimate son, born 1810, who was also transported to Australia for theft. His name was George Bye described in his criminal record as being 5' 4½" tall, having red whiskers and a hairy chest. The colour of the latter is not recorded. The poor women then had the misfortune of marrying a James Quinton who later was sent for three months hard labour for 'deserting his family'. This took place in the Salisbury area. In those days Salisbury was known as Sarum. The family must have decided to start a new life because they moved to Dorset resulting with the Clark – Turner – Webb connections.

The Webb ancestors managed to avoid workhouses, instead they worked on farms accepting meagre wages for long hours but they probably could have relied on a tied cottage for housing. Their only indiscretions unearthed being the occasional illegitimacy. My paternal great grandmother, Caroline, born 1829, was the illegitimate daughter of Charlotte Waters and Bryant North. In those days if a woman fell pregnant with an illegitimate child she was legally obliged to notify her parish of *settlement* prior to the expected birth, and submit to a 'Bastardly Examination' by local magistrates. This was done because the mother and child may rely on 'Poor Relief' which was supplied by her parish of 'settlement' and Bryant North lived in a different parish. In Charlotte's case Bryant North failed to turn up for the hearing, a relation represented him instead; the reason is unclear. What affect Charlotte's misfortune had on her future is guess work but it appears that she never married; the last known record of her, when age 30, is living with a William Pickford, age 55, in Fisherton Anger – now part of Salisbury. Meanwhile Caroline was brought up with relations in Homington until she was old enough to enter service. In 1853, age twenty four, she married George Webb. They would have met in their youth because George worked on farms bordering Homington. Their children would be the first in the Webb line not to be encumbered by the Settlement Act <sup>(2)</sup> and following its abandonment they tended to disperse to find different employment.

The Holmes side of the family being farmers as opposed to farm workers had a relatively easier life and a direct descendent exercised this to the extent of gambling away all his wealth, including farm and public houses. This resulted in him experiencing his own hard times as a lowly carter. Earlier ancestors had also backed the wrong horse when during the English Civil Wars they supported Charles I resulting in Cromwell fining them, but not to the extent of rendering them paupers. Since then the Holmes' have successfully spread throughout the north east of England and the other side of the family have made modest gains in the south.

(1) WRO/1241/91/A. WRO/1242/91B/24

(2) <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/poorlaw/settle.html>

## THE NAME GAME

*What's in a name?*

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It takes a strong willed lady to defy several hundred years of tradition by insisting her only son, born in 1898, should be named Robert when by established practice it should have been William. Robert's father was named Ralph and for generations the Holmes family had named their first born son alternatively Ralph and William, a practice followed by every son in a Holmes family so that each Ralph begat a William and each William begat a Ralph, an unwanted difficulty when tracing the Holmes' ancestry. However, unknown to Robert's mother a namesake of the past played an important part in the families' fortunes.

It is known that the Holmes family were long established in the north east, many of them being either owners or tenants of land in the region for generations and the Sunderland Antiquarian Society who investigate the rich and powerful of the past were sufficiently interested to trace the family's origins. Apparently, the associated name 'Hulme', a local name in Lancashire, first appears just after the Norman Conquest in the records of the Manor of Hume. This name could derive from the northern Middle English *holm* meaning island. Interestingly, the place name Pewsey in Wiltshire, associated with the Webb family, has a similar meaning in Old English. Also of interest is the Hume estate previously mentioned having owners called *Randolph* or *Randolphus*. It existed somewhere between what is now Telford and Manchester. There is also mention of a 'Seigneur de Holm' who may or may not be in the same family, attending William the Conqueror. Around 1433 John Holm of Holm Hall forsakes his Lancashire pad and begets eight sons among them a Robert who, if I have interpreted the information correctly married the daughter of an official carrying out a Visitation survey for Yorks and "*came into the bishop rick*". The purpose of a 'visitation' was to prevent fraud by investigating the coats of arms of nobility and gentry and to record pedigrees. '*The bishop rick*' was the extent of the country over which a bishop had jurisdiction.

Robert had a son William, presumed deceased by 1580, and grandson Adam who turn up in Bishopwearmouth, now subsumed by Sunderland. Adam had a son, Ralph, and a grandson, baptised 1592-3, also named Ralph and it is the latter who acquired various properties and land thereabouts and from henceforth the family tree has been constructed but it's not from the line of the first born, that ceased in 1713 when a Ralph Holmes of Bishopwearmouth, died without producing a son. The decedents of Harry Webb created the same situation so that George Webb's line relies upon male offspring from Harry's brothers. Similarly, other branches of the Holmes family did survive and prospered, unfortunately any family endowments for Robert Holmes, born in 1898, had already been dissipated and Robert married for love not money. His wife's surname was Coulson and her paternal ancestors were glass blowers not farmers.

Coulson is a common surname name in the north east of England but its origin is not clear and it may have more than one source. Prior to the 12 century surnames were rare although there is a record of 1090 mentioning an Ælstan Colsune, probably of Viking origin, so perhaps the name came across the North Sea, Confusingly it has also been used as a first name but not perhaps as confusing as some Coulson family relationships: Bobby's maternal grandfather, widower Edward Coulson, married widow "Lala" Palmer and later one of Edwards daughters, Annie, married one of "Lala's sons, Robert Palmer. To complicate

matters further it is thought, and this is most likely true, that Annie was an orphan probably left at one of the Seaman's Missions at which Edward preached!

In the south of the country the family names of Webb and Turner are straight forward. Both are occupational. Various spellings of Webb: Webbe, Weeb, Webber, Webster etc, of Anglo Saxon origin, were used to denote a weaver with pre 7<sup>th</sup> century definitions of Webbe to denote a male weaver and Webster a female one. The only call to Webb fame that I am aware of is a Captain Webb who in 1872 was the first to swim the English Channel. Turner as a name could originate from the Anglo Norman French *turner* a maker of objects from wood, bone or metal or from the Middle English *turnspit* – an interpreter.

The other family name of interest is Shergold, the maiden name of Harry Webb's wife. The name probably derives from the 8<sup>th</sup> century Anglo Saxon *scir-geld* meaning bright gold and it would have been a baptismal name. Another possibility is a connection with *scirgill* meaning 'pleasant valley.' Some Jewish traditions and names such as Hester, Miriam, Naomi and Martha were used by the Shergold family but there is no evidence of strong Jewish connections. Given names do go in and out of fashion; it is unlikely today, for example, for Percival Frederick to be a popular choice for given names yet in the 19thC that was so for dad's elder brother who, in the absence of my father who had been killed during WW2, was responsible for setting me on the road of electrical engineering.

Surnames don't usually travel with the female line and now Marsh, Bower and Morrell have been introduced to the family tree. The origins of these names can have more than one source for example Bower of Saxon origin means 'a chamber or shaded place' but if of Scottish origin means 'a bow maker'. Similarly, Morrell could derive from the Old English 'mor' for waste upland or from Norman French for 'a dark person'. Marsh is likely to be of topographical origin although a French Nobel with a similar name was given land in Kent by William 1<sup>st</sup> and, coincidentally, the Marsh family tree starts in Kent – but several hundred years later.

Names give some sense of long past family history and all of the names mentioned in this essay have family crests, (coats of arms), so there is always the possibility of a family member being related to someone of authority in the past. This possible claim is strengthened by Genealogists who declare that members of the indigenous population will be no more than the 20<sup>th</sup> cousin away from each other. There are several coats of arms designs for each name mentioned therefore more than one family with the same name thought they were sufficiently important to obtain one and even today a person can have a suitable design registered if they so wish.