

# British Connections

Official Publication of the International Society for British Genealogy and Family History

## Commerce: How Did Our Ancestors Earn and Spend Their Money?

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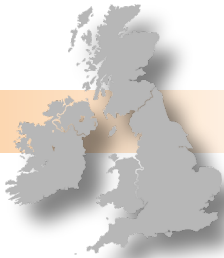
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## Uncover your *English* roots

Paul Milner, FUGA, MDiv



## An Ancestor's Worth: Two Underutilized Resources

It is actually quite difficult, if not impossible, for us to determine how well off our ancestors were. That is, at least until after 1858, when an approximate value of an ancestor's estate is provided in the indexes to wills and administrations created by the Principal Registry of the Family Division of the High Court of Justice. You may be able to get an idea of property values from taxes paid either to the government or to the parish. But these certainly don't give the whole picture.

So what might a researcher be able to do? I am going to discuss two sets of records connected with the probate process that you may or may not have used before in an English context. Please do not view these records through modern North American eyes as your interpretations and understanding will be skewed.

For background, the probate records we are likely to be familiar with are the will and the letter of administration. The will itself may have been

written on the deathbed or decades before the death. It is a description explaining how the decedent wanted their moveable assets to be distributed upon death. The wishes may bear no resemblance to reality, especially if written a long time before death. Nor is it likely to mention property, which is often settled by different rules, depending upon the county where the land is located—primogeniture, ultimogeniture, or gavelkind.

If a person did not leave a will, then the courts issued a letter of administration, following established rules to allow the estate to be processed.

Let's take a closer look at probate inventories and probate accounts, two sets of records you may not have used before. Both record groups may give us more information about our ancestors. If these records interest you, the best reference to start with is *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England* by Arkell, et.al. See below.

## Inventories

The inventory is a listing of all the moveable effects of a deceased person and was often requested by the probate court, especially for intestate persons. Inventories were drawn up and signed by two (or more) reputable neighbors of the deceased. Inventories are very common between 1529 and 1750. Legislation regarding inventories appear in different dioceses during the mid-thirteenth century. They seem to have been standard practice for clerics since the fourth century, and certainly not unusual for lay people since the twelfth century. They provide fascinating details about a person's lifestyle.

Probate inventories only deal with what the lawyers call "moveable property," that is, goods and chattels, and leasehold interest in land. They DO NOT deal with "real property," such as freehold or copyhold land, or what is called "landlord's fixtures and fittings," or mineral rights, or titles. As a result, inventories are NOT a reliable guide to the total wealth of an individual, nor can they be used for comparative analysis of relative wealth.

When possible, you should look at both the will and the inventory of the deceased. For example, there may be differences between how the deceased defined their status and how his peers defined him in the inventory. Look for items mentioned in both. We can use Parsivall Dixon from Fenwick, Northumberland, as an example. He wrote his will in January 1672, in which he had two bonds, each worth £200, giving them to his two daughters. He had rent due of £4 per year on some property that was to be given to his two sons, see Fig. 1.

Parsivall Dixon's December 1675 inventory, see Fig. 2, itemizes all the moveable assets that he owns. The last item is for debts and bonds owed to him of £525 6s 0d. Using the Bank of England inflation

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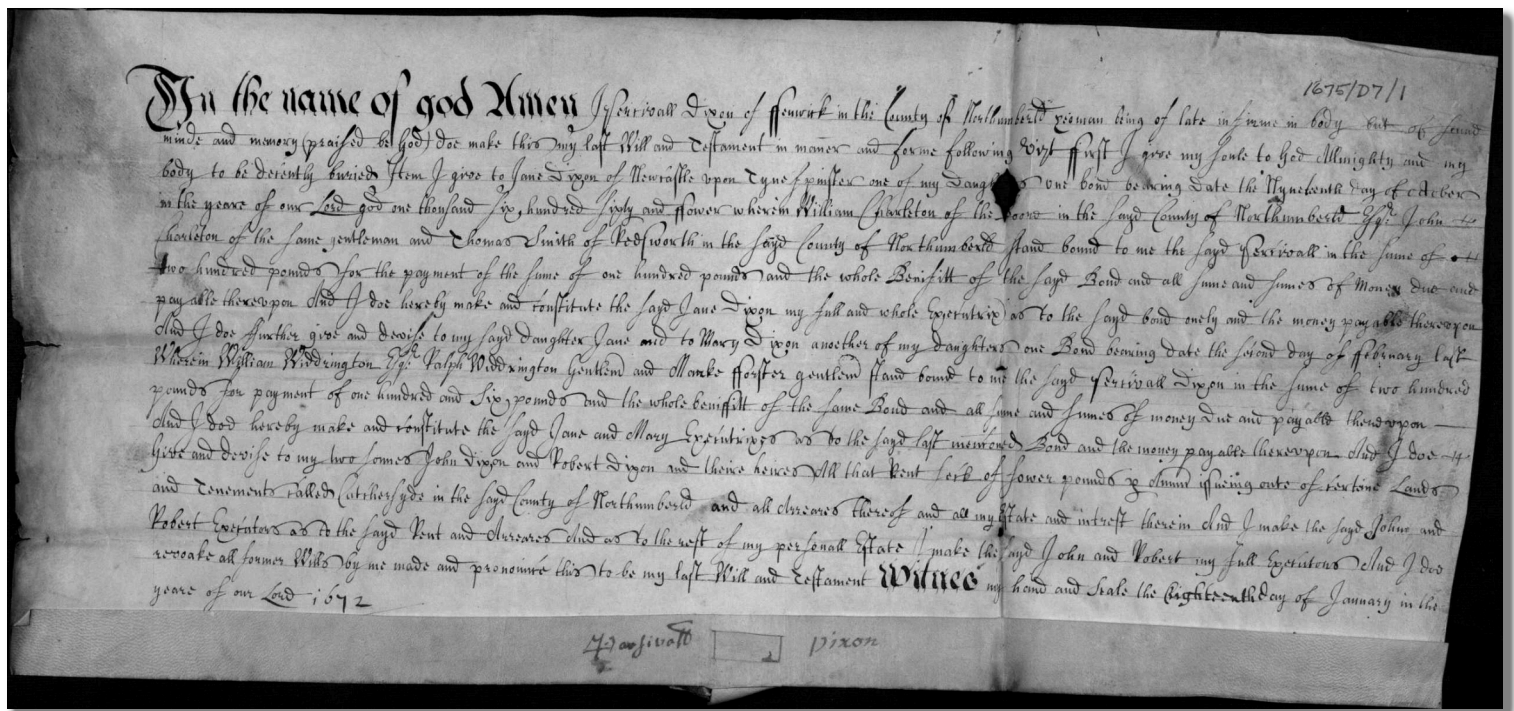


Figure 1. Will of Parsival Dixon of Fenwick, Northumberland, written January 1672, probated 1675. Diocese of Durham.

calculator ([www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator](http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator)), it would be valued at £88,257 (\$111,775) today. That would be a lot of money that he was owed. Be aware that not all church courts required debts owed to the deceased to be listed. Debts owed by the deceased to others are not assets but liabilities and are even less likely to be identified in the inventory. They should be listed in any probate account, but fewer of those have survived.

Let's make some other observations about Parsivall's inventory. As is common practice, the first item is his purse and apparel, that is, any cash in the house and his clothes, commonly lumped together. If clothes are identified separately, pay attention to whether they are special or unusual. The most common items on this and many other inventories are the animals, farm equipment, and crops in the ground. The farmhouse itself seems to be fairly simple in design, with a fore room and east and west lofts, all having beds, chairs, and chests. Interestingly, there is no mention of a kitchen.

If we look at John Edmeades's 1771 inventory from Halling in Kent, see Fig. 3, we see a much more

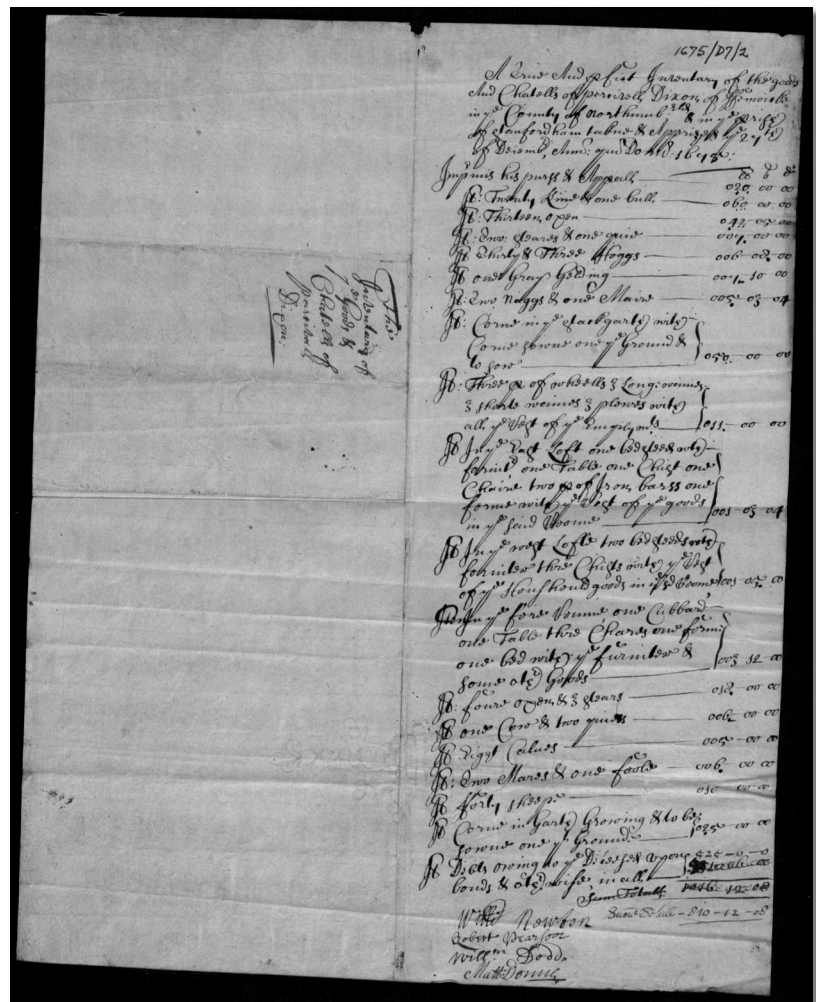


Figure 2. Inventory of Parsival Dixon, appraised December 1675. Diocese of Durham

typical format where you can literally follow the appraisers from one room to the next: kitchen; parlour, brewhouse; cellar; pantry; small cellar; the shop; inner chamber; middle chamber; best chamber; in the garreth; in the yard; in the oast; in the hopp garden; in the broom yard.

Many of the published inventories go from one room to the next. The items in the room may be listed and valued individually or collectively. It should be noted that the valuation of goods in the inventories was taken very seriously, and experts were often brought in to assess value. You may find the same specialist appraiser appearing on numerous inventories in the area.

For discussion of strengths and problems with using inventories, see papers by Arkell, Moore, Spufford, and Weatherill.

1. Arkell, Tom. "Interpreting Probate Inventories." In *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England*, edited by Tom Arkell, Nesta Evans, and Nigel Goose, pp. 72–102. Oxford: Leopard's Head Press, 2000.
2. Cox, Nancy and Jeff. "Valuations in Probate Inventories: Part I" In *The Local Historian* 16, no. 8 (Nov. 1985), pp.467–477; "Valuations in Probate Inventories: Part II." In *The Local Historian* 17, no. 2 (May 1986), pp. 85–100, available online [www.balh.org.uk](http://www.balh.org.uk).
3. Milward, Rosemary. *A Glossary of Household, Farming and Trade Terms from Probate Inventories*, 3rd ed. Derbyshire Record Society Occasional Papers No. 1. Chesterfield, England: Derbyshire Record Society, 1991.
4. Moore, John S. "Probate Inventories—Problems and Prospects." In *Probate Records and the Local Community*, edited by Philip Riden, pp. 11–28. Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1985.
5. Spufford, Margaret. "The limitations of the probate inventory." In *English Rural Society, 1500–1800: Essays in honour of Joan Thirsk*, edited by John Chartres and David Hey, pp.

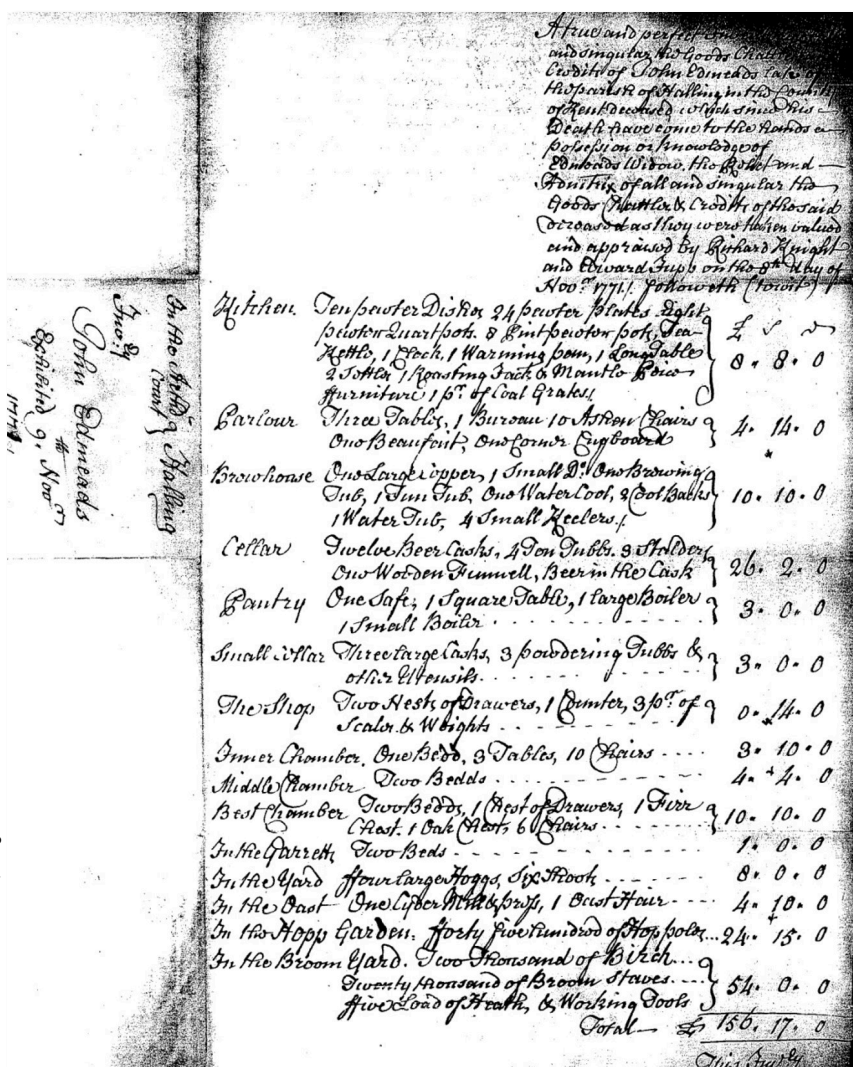


Figure 3. Inventory of John Edmeads of Halling, Kent, 1771. Diocese of Rochester. Note that inventory lists goods by room and values them collectively, not individually.

6. Tinning, Andrew and Sandra. *Dictionary of Old Trades & Occupations*. Woodcroft, SA, Australia: Tinning's Secretarial, 2nd ed., 1995.
7. West, John. *Village Records*, 3rd ed. Chichester, England: Phillimore, 1997. [especially pp.138–181, addressing inventories and wills in 16th and 17th centuries]
8. Wetherill, Lorna. "Probate Inventories and Consumer Behaviour in England 1660–1770." In *Records of the Nation—The Public Record Office 1838–1988—The British Record Society 1888–1988*, edited by Martin, G.H. and Peter Spufford, pp. 251–272. London: British Record Society, 1990.

There is a growing list of published probate inventories that are well worth looking for, especially if its in your probate court, as it will save you a lot of time. The introductory analytical essays in each volume are well worth reading. See below for examples from my personal library of published lists, often covering a small geographic area (town or a couple of parishes). The inventories may also be used solely or in conjunction with other records to examine a specific aspect of life in a period, e.g., Alcock, Overton, Steer.

9. Alcock, N.W. *People at Home: Living in a Warwickshire Village, 1500–1800*. Chichester, Sussex: Phillimore, 1993. [Stoneleigh, Warwickshire]
10. Herridge, D.M. *Surrey Probate Inventories 1558–1603*, Vol. XXXIX. Woking, Surrey: Surrey Record Society, 2005.
11. Johnston, J.A. *Probate Inventories of Lincoln Citizens 1661–1714*. London: Boydell Press for Lincoln Record Society, 1989.
12. Moore, John S. *The Goods and Chattels of our Forefathers: Frampton Cotterell and District Probate Inventories, 1539–1804*. Chichester, Sussex: Phillimore, 1976. [Gloucestershire]
13. Overton, Mark; Jane Whittle; Darron Dean; and Andrew Hann. *Production and Consumption in English Households, 1600–1750*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2004.
14. Steer, Francis W. *Farm and Cottage Inventories of Mid-Essex 1635–1749*. Chelmsford: Essex County Council, Essex Record Office Publication No. 8, 1950.
15. Trinder, Barrie and Jeff Cox. *Yeoman and Colliers in Telford: Probate Inventories for Dawley, Lilleshall, Wellington and Wrockwardine, 1660–1750*. Chichester, Sussex: Phillimore, 1980. [Shropshire]
16. Trinder, Barrie and Nancy Cox. *Miners & Mariners of the Severn Gorge: Probate Inventories for Benthall, Broseley, Little Wenlock and Madely 1660–1764*. Chichester, Sussex: Phillimore, 2000. [Shropshire]

## Probate Accounts

This is the final stage in administering an estate, generally listing the value of the estate as shown in the inventory, with listings of disbursements from the estate, including funeral costs, debts owed, court costs, rents, taxes, tithes, property settlements, wages, apprenticeships, etc. As the final step, it served two functions—to identify for the executor or administrator any action needed for remaining debts and to ensure that the residue or balance of the estate was distributed according to the will or according to the law. The probate account is usually filed with the church court about a year after the death.

The earliest known surviving account is 1521, and the last is from 1855, but they are strong from 1585 with numbers falling rapidly after 1685. Those surviving after 1685 generally involve disputes.

One of the main issues with probate accounts is limited survival. All known accounts have been indexed, and there are only about 43,000 in total. Maidstone in Kent is the best with 13,566; followed by London (TNA) 10,568; Lincoln 6,044; Trowbridge 1,696; Reading 1,661; Lichfield 1,361; Chichester 1,217; Taunton 927 and decreasing rapidly from there.

One of the major benefits of these records is the social and financial networks that can be built up, identifying all the people to whom the deceased owed money, as well as who owed him money. If we use the 1620 James Pettenden probate account from Rodmersham in Kent, see Fig. 4, we learn this: "Item payd to Theophilus Milner of Rodmersham husbandman for debt due and owinge unto him by the sayd deceased at the time of his death xviii shillings." In this example, we see a four-page document, and the first test you have will likely be in reading the handwriting, which does take practice and perseverance. The published index is only to the accounts of the deceased; it is not an every name index. In this case, I needed to know that James Pettenden is Theophilus's Milner's father-in-law; otherwise, I would probably not have gone looking for him.

17. Erickson, Amy Lousie. "An Introduction to Probate Accounts." In *Records of the Nation—The Public Record Office 1838–1988—The British Record Society 1888–1988*, edited by G.H. Martin

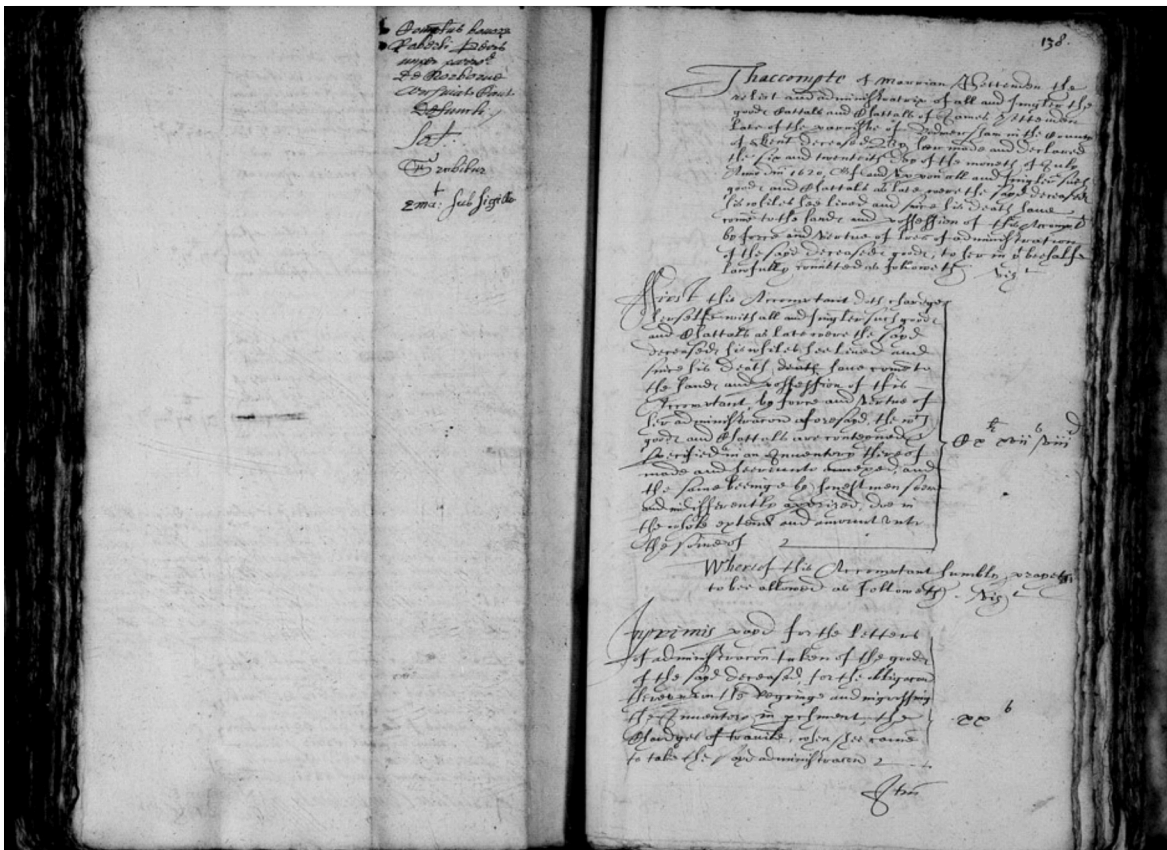


Figure 4. Probate account for James Pettenden, of Rodmersham, Kent, 1620. Diocese of Canterbury.

- and Peter Spufford, pp. 273–286. London: British Record Society, 1990.
18. Erickson, Amy. "Using Probate Accounts." In *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England*, edited by Tom Arkell, Nesta Evans, and Nigel Goose, pp. 103-119. Oxford: Leopard's Head Press, 2000 [excellent].
  19. Spufford, Peter. *Index to the Probate Accounts of England and Wales*. 2 vols. London: British Record Society, 1999. [Vol.1 provides a 100-page explanatory article on what the records contain and how to use them.]
- The purpose of this article is to expose you to two sets of records that are often underutilized, and point you towards good resources so you can learn more. Enjoy the search.

Paul Milner, FUGA, MDiv., lives in Chicago, Illinois, but is originally from the coast of Cumberland (now Cumbria) in northwest England. Paul has specialized in British Isles genealogical research for over 35 years. He teaches week-long English and Scottish research tracks at the ISBGFH British Institute, Institute of Genealogical and Historical Research (IGHR), and Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy (SLIG).

Paul is a recipient of UGA Fellow Award (2018) and the David S. Vogels Jr. Award from FGS (2019). He is the author of six publications providing how-to guidance for English and Scottish researchers.

Paul is currently the book review editor for the BIGWILL newsletter and retired review editor of the FGS FORUM. He is currently on the board of the International Society for British Genealogy and Family History (ISBGFH), the past president of the British Interest Group of Wisconsin and Illinois (BIGWILL), and a past board member of the APG, FGS and GSG. Paul focuses on British Isles resources and methodology on his blog at [www.milnergenealogy.com](http://www.milnergenealogy.com).



# President's Message



**Craig L. Foster, AG**

## **Celebrating British Events**

Spring is upon us, and summer will soon be here. In England, this is the season of grand events such as the Chelsea Flower Show, Trooping the Colour, and Royal Ascot, as well as the not-so-sublime, like the Cooper's Hill Cheese Rolling event held in Gloucestershire. The Chelsea Flower Show has been held annually since 1912 and is attended by members of the royal family. Trooping the Colour has annually celebrated the sovereign's birthday for over 260 years. This year, the Colors of the 2nd Battalion Irish Guards will be Trooped by No. 9 Company Irish Guards in celebration of the king's birthday. Ascot Racecourse was founded by Queen Anne in 1711 but it wasn't until 1807 that Royal Ascot was first held. Since that time, Royal Ascot has been an anticipated event. In the June 20, 2023 issue of *The Standard*, Fergus Butler-Gallie writes, "Of course, the horses, the outfits, the gallons of Pimms and the glimpse of a royal help that along, but it is the primacy of fun, the

sense of regimented misrule, that puts Ascot at the upper end of the pantheon of British social occasions." When you think of Royal Ascot, chances are you will think of the song from *My Fair Lady*:

Ev'ry duke and earl and peer is here  
Ev'ryone who should be here is here.  
What a smashing, positively dashing  
Spectacle: the Ascot op'ning day.

Less inspiring, but probably as fun, if not more, is the annual Cooper's Hill Cheese Rolling, which takes place in Gloucestershire. The event is hundreds of years old, and some people claim it harkens back to pre-Roman times. Gloucestercheeserolling.co.uk describes the annual event this way: "[R]ecord-breaking crowds turn out in large numbers at Cooper's Hill in Gloucestershire to watch yet more brave souls risk life and limb chasing after a 7lb Double Gloucester cheese. The winner gets to keep the cheese they've chased after!"



*The royal carriages leave after carrying the Queen to the races on the Friday of Royal Ascot, June 2008, by Steve F, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=13542736>*

As you plan what events you might want to attend this year, you might want to keep in mind some of the above. Men, be sure to lay out your morning suit and top hat, and women, stylish dresses and skirts are appropriate, while hats, especially the extravagant and fancy, are a must. Planning for the cheese roll is a little simpler—try not to die when running, tumbling, and rolling down the 45-degree hill.

As you plan your upcoming events, there is one more event to mark on your calendar. British Institute 2024 will again be in Salt Lake City and will be held 14 through 18 October, with a “meet ‘n greet” evening on 13 October. This year’s British Institute is going to be interesting and informative, and not as dangerous as the cheese rolling. You will find more details about

the classes in both the newsletter and online at the ISBGFH website, [isbgfh.com](http://isbgfh.com). An added benefit to attending the classes in person is the opportunity to associate with fellow genealogists as you exchange research ideas and share stories. And, of course, another benefit is spending hours in the FamilySearch Library, researching to your heart’s content.

Now is the time to not only mark your calendars for British Institute, but to go online, register, and start planning your attendance in the fall. Cheese roll or morning suits and top hats are optional. We look forward to seeing everyone there for what promises to be an excellent Institute.

*Craig*





# From the Editor's Desk

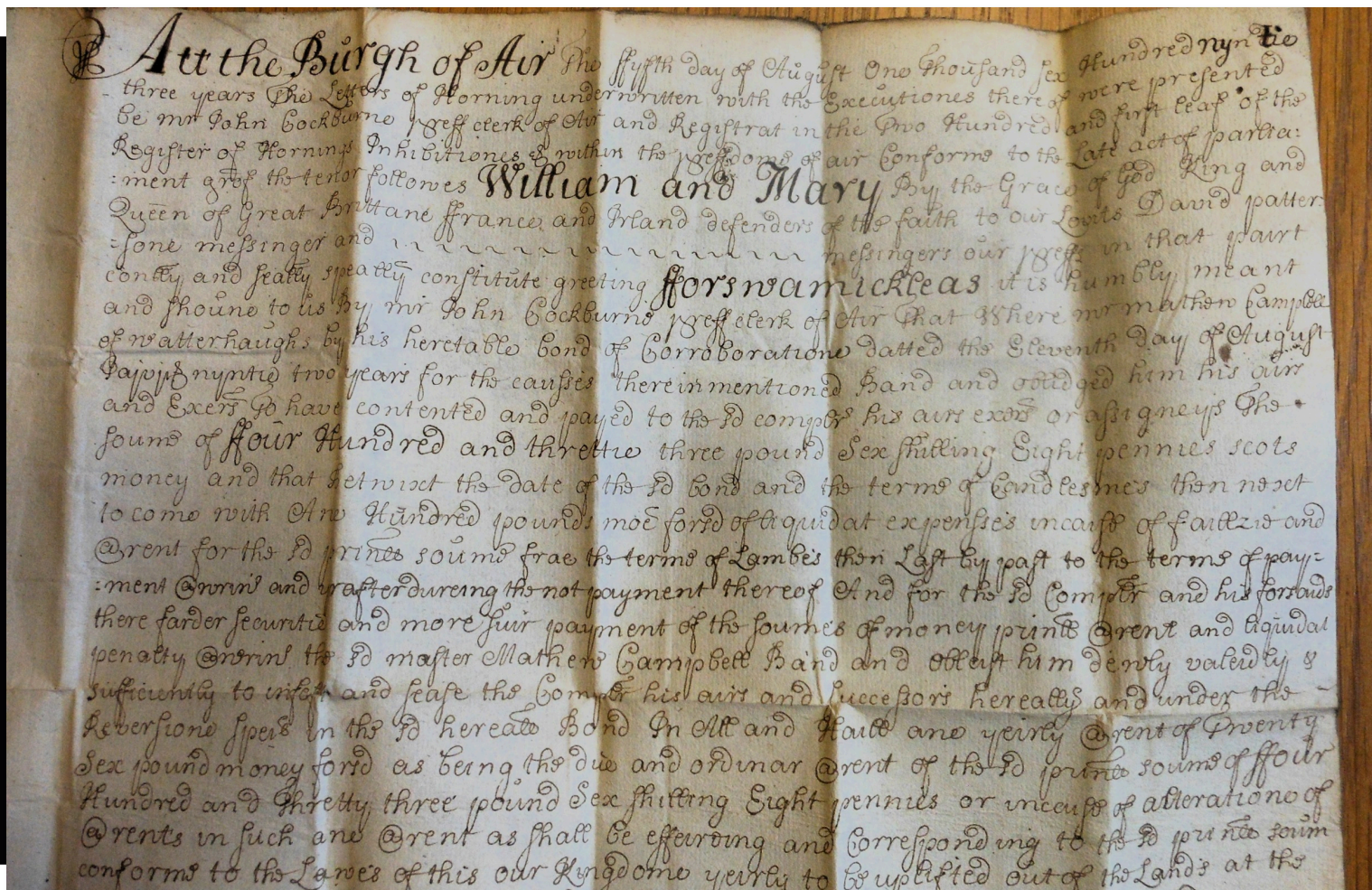
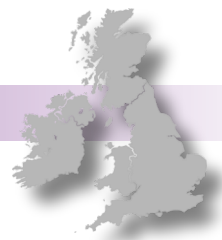
## Commerce and Money

Is the below representation of historical commerce still accurate today? Perhaps today's supply chains are the same or far more complex. In this issue of *British Connections*, you'll have a chance to peer through a dusty window into the daily lives of your British ancestors and see how they earned, spent, counted, and bequeathed their money. You'll see a few things that are the same (debt, midnight flits, and side-gigs), and a few things that are starkly different. Enjoy!

*Sandra*



Image from GDJ@Pixabay.com



A letter of horning issued against Matthew Campbell of Waterhaugh on August 5, 1693, for debts owed to David Patterson. National Records of Scotland, CS138/1261 (author's image).

## Scottish Debtors and Bankrupts

Money may be the root of all evil, but its use has been a necessity for Scots for almost a millennium. King David I, who ruled Scotland from 1124–1153, was the first to introduce indigenous coinage to the country, in the form of a silver penny, with 252 pennies struck from a pound of silver (a pound would later be equivalent to 240 pence, or twenty shillings to the value of 12 pence each). At the time of the Reformation in 1560, five pounds Scots were equal to a pound Sterling south of the border, whilst at the time of the Act of Union in 1707, twelve pounds Scots were

equal to a single pound Sterling. From this point onwards, the Scots pound was slowly phased out, with Sterling remaining the currency for the whole of the UK to this day. For ordinary tenants on farms and estates across the country, rents were typically paid in kind prior to the 1700s, but with matters of property and business, hard currency was the preference.

Court records at the National Records of Scotland are packed with issues relating to money, particularly cases of debts and bankruptcies, which can often yield useful information for our family history. As a typical example, take Ayrshire landholder Matthew Campbell



*The National Records of Scotland, in Edinburgh (author's image).*

of Waterhaugh, for whom there are many debt cases in the records of the Court of Session, Scotland's highest civil court (catalogued at CS138/1261, *Creditors of Campbell, of Waterhaugh vs. Creditors Campbell, of Waterhaugh: Decree of Ranking of Creditors*). Campbell's lands had been declared forfeit during the reign of Charles II, and while he later found favour again with his successor, James VII, in 1689, he had by now amassed a substantial series of debts for which his creditors soon came calling. In February 1693, for example, a creditor called David Patterson pursued the £433 6s 8d Scots that he was owed with the assistance of the courts. A "letter of horning" was issued against Campbell, declaring him to be a "rebel" against the Crown for failing to obey an instruction of the Crown courts to pay back what was owed.

In the same year, a separate "decree of horning and poinding" was also initiated against Campbell by an Elizabeth Neilson, with regards to a series of annuities that Campbell had failed to pay her. This led to an attempt to have his estate "poinded," i.e. all his moveable assets being seized to be sold off at a "roup" or auction, although not his heritable property. Because Campbell's lands had been declared forfeit for part of this duration, on January 3, 1694, he went to the Court of Session with an action to try to overturn the decree. The Lords considered the case and agreed

that his liabilities for the period in which he was forfeit could be "superseded"; in other words, the payment for this could be postponed. They nevertheless found that "the charge of horning was warrantable for the annuities preceding the forfeiture." On the basis of this judgement, some six months later, Elizabeth Neilson had a "decree of suspension" granted on July 21, 1694, against Campbell for income expected from 1675 to 1690, totalled at £1602, 6s, and 8d Scots. Instead, letters were executed against him for just eleven of those years from 1675–1683, preceding his land's forfeiture, and from 1689–1690, following its restitution. The reduced total now owed was valued at £1122 4s Scots, plus a further reduced payment of £146 13s and 4d for the forfeiture period.

By the end of the following year, 1695, Campbell had still not repaid his debt and was imprisoned. His luck ran from bad to worse, with the unlucky laird losing £100 through Scotland's disastrous colonisation effort in Panama, the Darien Scheme of 1696. Still fighting for the income due to her, Elizabeth Neilson had "letters of inhibition" drawn up against him in April 1698, preventing Campbell from parting with his heritable estate (i.e. his house and lands) or "burdening it," in other words to place any restrictions on it, or to use it as security for any other loans.

**T**HE Estates of JOHN BROWNLEE M'FARLANE, Tailor and Clothier, Nairn, were Sequestrated on the 21st day of August 1878, by the Sheriff-Substitute of Nairnshire.

The first Deliverance is dated 21st August 1878.

The Meeting to elect the Trustee and Commissioners is to be held at twelve o'clock noon, on Saturday the 31st day of August 1878, within Anderson's Hotel, Nairn.

A Composition may be offered at this Meeting ; and to entitle Creditors to the first Dividend, their oaths and grounds of debt must be lodged on or before the 22d day of December 1878.

A Warrant of Protection has been granted to the Bankrupt.

All future Advertisements relating to this Sequestration will be published in the Edinburgh Gazette alone.

DONALD FRASER, Solicitor, Nairn,  
Agent.

*Announcement of John Brownlee MacFarlane's sequestration in the Edinburgh Gazette, August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1878, [www.thegazette.co.uk](http://www.thegazette.co.uk).*

For the remainder of his life Campbell was caught up in continual litigation against many creditors, being eventually forced by relatives to sell his estate as a bankrupt in 1708. On August 9, just a few days before the roup was due to commence, he passed away, leaving a toxic mess for any prospective heir to inherit—so much so that his daughter Mary refused to be recognised as his heir, which would have made her liable for his debts upon completion of the inheritance process. The estate was instead inherited by a cousin, Reverend Hugh Campbell of Muirkirk, another of his creditors.

As well as detailing the circumstances behind financial hardship or bankruptcy, the records can also, at times, give us a glimpse of the impact on individuals concerned. Just prior to 1875, my great-great-grandfather John Brownlee MacFarlane moved his family from Inverness to Nairn to set up his own tailoring business. However, by 1878, he was suffering from a loss of trade in the town and had accrued serious debts as a consequence, forcing him by August to file for "sequestration," the Scottish bankruptcy procedure. The sequestration papers from the Nairnshire Sheriff Court at the NRS (catalogued under CS319/1911/2202), as well as entries in the *Edinburgh*

*Gazette* ([www.thegazette.co.uk](http://www.thegazette.co.uk)), give some insight into John's business downfall at this time and the damage that it did to his health.

Following several meetings of creditors in August and September 1878, a local draper in Nairn called Charles Bain Mackintosh was appointed as trustee to oversee the sequestration of John's estate, as per stipulations laid down in the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act of 1854. Interestingly, five years earlier, in 1873, John had christened his second son as Charles Mackintosh MacFarlane, and it may be that he was named after the man who was now to oversee John's bankruptcy, perhaps suggesting that they had been acquainted for some time. An inventory of John's stock was gathered by Mackintosh, noting that he had £18 worth of small articles of light drapery goods and children's toys, household furniture worth £20, book debts to the value of £5, and rent and taxes to be paid to the value of £21 14s, "leaving a probable balance of £21 6s to meet £158 17s 6d of ordinary Debts due by the Bankrupt, besides expenses of Sequestration".

John moved to cheaper accommodations in Nairn, with the 1881 census also confirming that he now had a lodger residing with his family. However, from a letter written by Mackintosh on June 23, 1882 to an



*The final resting place of John Brownlee MacFarlane (1838-1922), at Tomnahurich Cemetery, Inverness (author's image).*

accountant at New Register House, it was clear that John had become very ill as a result of his situation. This now noted that John had £10 in stock comprised of light drapery articles and children's toys, household furniture at £20, and no book debts, with rents and taxes to pay of £21 14s, leaving a probable balance of £8 6s, to meet £158 of debts still owed. Importantly though, Mackintosh added these "can never be paid looking to the value of the estate and the poor circumstances of the Bankrupt whose health is also broken down."

It was further noted that as part of the sequestration process, John had agreed in October 1878 to pay his creditors a composition of one shilling per pound, which was accepted, but that "the poor Bankrupt has not yet been able to pay all the Composition and as he has also been unable to pay even the agent's outlays, it was thought that no harm could accrue to any person

by letting matters lie until the Bankrupt would be able to pay off the Composition, for if the Sequestration had gone on in the ordinary way there would not have been anything for anybody." John was eventually discharged from the sequestration process, and by 1887 was found once again back in Inverness, working as a tailor.

Many similar cases of debtors and bankrupts are available at the NRS. For further details on Court of Session records visit [www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/research-guides/research-guides-a-z/court-of-session-records](http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/research-guides/research-guides-a-z/court-of-session-records), whilst information on sequestrations can be found at [www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/research-guides/research-guides-a-z/court-of-session-records/sequestrations](http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/research-guides/research-guides-a-z/court-of-session-records/sequestrations).

*Based in the Ayrshire town of Irvine, Northern Irish-born Chris Paton runs the Scotland's Greatest Story research service (<https://scotlandsgreateststory.wordpress.com/>) and the daily Scottish GENES genealogy news blog (<http://scottishgenes.blogspot.com>).*



*Amongst his many publications are Tracing Your Scottish Family History on the Internet, Tracing Your Scottish Ancestry Through Church and State Records, and Sharing Your Family History Online from Pen and Sword, as well as Down and Out in Scotland: Researching Ancestral Crisis from Unlock the Past. Chris also tutors short courses through Pharos Teaching and Tutoring Ltd, including Scottish Research Online and Scotland 1750–1850: Beyond the Old Parish Registers.*

# Jones

## The Surname Interests Challenge

### Sandra Roberts with Megan Heyl

At a recent ISBGFH board meeting, we challenged each other to add names to the ISBGFH surnames list and review the list for possible matches with people in our family trees. As I looked through the [list](#), I struggled to find names, and it occurred to me that our surname list could be much longer if more members would participate.

It's easy for members to add names, locations and dates—check out our form on <https://isbgfh.com/surname-interests/>. You can also view the surnames list on this page—it is **only accessible to members who are logged in**.

Finally, I settled on Jones. My Jones ancestors are an old match from American colonial times, and based on their spouses' surnames, they appear to be Welsh. Unfortunately, they are Marylanders from the 1700s, but they are still worth chasing down:

Mary Jones, b. 1712 in Anne Arundel, Maryland, m. Richard Bond, b. 1716, Baltimore, Maryland. His mother's name was Eleanor Gwynn.

Megan Heyl, our Education Director, was one of the Jones connections in our surnames list, and she was happy to talk with me about her Jones family who immigrated from Wales to Canada in the 1800s, and then came to the U.S. in 1920.

Here is one of Megan's Jones family members:

Louisa Jones, b. 1833, Llandeilo'r-Fan, County Powys, Wales; d. 1894, Tregara, Monmouthshire, Wales.

Megan's records for Louisa don't include her parents, so we couldn't establish a connection; however, we also discovered that Davis/Davies is another common name in both our families, and we conversed about Welsh names in general.

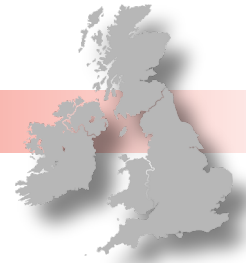
Megan told me that her cousin, Guilym Davies, wrote a book about the family, and it's [available on Amazon](#): *In my Father's Footsteps, with the 53rd Welsh Division from Normandy to Hamburg*, Pen and Sword, 2015.

I was impressed.

After talking with Megan, I came away with a fresh understanding of my Welsh ancestors. (Megan is an expert on research in Wales.)

You should give it a try. Add your names first, then spend some time with the list and look for potential connections. Email the individual(s) you'd like to chat with. Other ISBGFH members would love to hear from you!





*Copperworks on the Tawe river near Swansea, at the start of industrialisation, before the valley was fully transformed and developed, 1811. Engraver: John George Wood (1768–1838), National Library of Wales, Welsh Landscape Collection, Wikimedia Commons, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:View\\_of\\_the\\_Copper\\_works,\\_with\\_part\\_of\\_Morris\\_town,\\_upon\\_the\\_Tawe\\_near\\_Swansea.jpeg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:View_of_the_Copper_works,_with_part_of_Morris_town,_upon_the_Tawe_near_Swansea.jpeg).*

## A Band of Builder Brothers: The Rise and Fall of a Swansea Family Business

Once upon a time, many people were drawn to Swansea because its streets were lined, not with gold, but with copper. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this port town in the far west of Glamorganshire rose to prominence as the world's largest copper smelting centre when, at its height, it produced over two-thirds of the world's copper and was thus crowned with the moniker “Copperopolis.”

Situated as it is on the south Wales coast, at the mouth of the navigable river Tawe and on the south-western edges of the South Wales Coalfield, Swansea had long served the area as a port and market town and had, even prior to the eighteenth century, greeted mariners, merchants, and migrants. It already had some significant, well-established connections with trading centres along the English Channel, including the city of

Bristol and the county of Devon, as well as places far beyond. Coal had been exported from its harbour, albeit on a small scale, for centuries, and it had long been a destination for many families and individuals from the surrounding countryside who sought alternative work opportunities.

But as Wales began to take centre stage during the early eighteenth century, when industrialists built some of the world's first large-scale foundries and sank the country's first large-scale coal mines, Swansea—because of its location—was destined to become a major focus of the Industrial Revolution. That revolution was powered by coal that existed in abundance on the town's doorstep and its hinterland. Swansea was also in a prime position to receive copper ore and tin that was mined just across the English Channel in Cornwall (and, later, ore from parts of Europe and South America). Large quantities of clay and flint also began to arrive in its port from the

English West Country, which, in turn, gave rise to a significant pottery and porcelain industry in the town.

Swansea's very first copper works opened in 1720—they were established by Cornish copper mine owners on the banks of the lower river Tawe, an ideal location to receive the ore that had arrived in the nearby harbour from Cornwall. The town's transformation had begun.

Over time, parts of Swansea and its neighbouring villages became unrecognisable as further copper works were built in the vicinity of the river. Their smoking chimneys spewed noxious fumes into the air, transforming Swansea from what had once been described in the eighteenth century as "the best built and most cleanly town in all Wales" into a nightmarish vision that could have been dreamt up by Dante. In 1812, Daniel Webb, a visitor to the town, graphically

described a landscape that had been contaminated by pollution:

...towards the entrance to Swansea, the appearance is frightful, the smoke of the copper furnaces having entirely destroyed the herbage; and the vast banks of scoriae surrounding the works, together with the volumes of smoke arising from the numerous fires, give the country a volcanic appearance.

The heavy industries that mushroomed along the Lower Swansea Valley during the nineteenth century, in particular, needed an ever-increasing number of workers, and they duly flowed into the town from different parts of Wales as well as from the southwest of England and beyond.

Many of the English workers—both men and women alike (yes, large numbers of women were employed in



*The Bristol Company Copperworks—situated on the banks of the river Tawe, one of Swansea's earliest copperworks. Engraver: John George Wood (1768–1838), National Library of Wales, Welsh Landscape Collection, People's Collection Wales, <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/22410#?xywh=-7%2C-1%2C712%2C524>.*



the metal works and other Swansea industries)— unsurprisingly came from Cornwall, but also from other parts of the English West Country, including from communities within the Somerset Coalfield to the south of Bristol and Bath. As a result of those coal mining and trading connections and Swansea's links with Bristol, word quickly went around of new work opportunities that lay over towards the west in Wales, just along the English Channel.

However, the available work was not confined directly to the town's industries, for the dramatic rise in the number of people who lived in Swansea meant there were openings for those with a commercial or entrepreneurial bent who wished to set up businesses that would cater to the needs of the town's burgeoning population. Those enterprising individuals included shopkeepers, tailors, carpenters, and masons. It is this history that forms the backdrop to the story of the Weaver family in Swansea.

### **An Entrepreneurial Family of Builders**

Brothers John and Francis (Frank) Weaver arrived in the town at the height of industrial activity, around 1874 when they were in their mid-twenties. Another four siblings, including their younger brothers Alfred and Thomas, soon followed them.

They were all born in the Somerset parish of East Harptree, located around 10 miles south of Bristol. Their father was a coal miner who would have worked in one of the coal pits local to the family's home in East Harptree. Their maternal grandfather was a stone mason who was involved with building and repair work in and around the area, and it appears that he passed those skills down within the family to his grandsons, for their individual histories show they followed in his occupational footsteps.

The second half of the nineteenth century was the era of the great migration into the new industrial areas of Wales. John and Frank Weaver followed this trend. With the skills passed down from their grandfather, they set up a building business they called "J & F Weaver & Co" that was located in the Manselton area of Swansea, not far from the main copper works and the densely populated districts of Hafod and Landore.

Thomas was the youngest Weaver brother, and he

followed John and Frank to Swansea. Sadly, he died young, aged only 30, in 1893, at a time when the family's business success was reaching its height. Just before Thomas's death, the firm was contracted to build the Moriah Baptist Chapel in the community of Clydach and to rebuild Swansea's Sailor's Home, located near to the harbour.

The firm later won tenders to build several prominent buildings in and around Swansea, including the Rhyddings New Calvinistic Methodist Chapel, a new school at Manselton (built in 1900), and extensions to Dyfatty and Plasmarl schools. They also secured contracts to build the Friendly Societies Hall in Cwmbwrla and a new annealing furnace at the Cwmbwrla Tinplate Works. The brothers could clearly turn their hands to industrial and public buildings alike.

One of the most impressive buildings the family worked on was the new Swansea Technical College which still dominates the Mount Pleasant area of the city today. They won the tender against tight competition, as was reported in the *Weekly Mail* on 2 November 1907. This building has served the community for over a century, and during that time specialised in vocational subjects, including business and computer courses.

### **NEW TECHNICAL COLLEGE FOR SWANSEA.**

At a meeting of the Swansea Corporation Schools Buildings Committee on Monday the question of erecting a permanent building for the Swansea Technical College in lieu of the present temporary structures came on, and eighteen tenders were opened for the proposed college buildings. The tenders showed a remarkable divergence, the highest being about £4,000 above the lowest. The tender of Messrs. J. F. Weaver and Co. at £7,500 was accepted.

The brothers were therefore involved in constructing some of the most notable public buildings in and around Swansea, and their work continued during the First World War when, in 1915, they were commissioned to build a military hospital in Danycoed on the edge of the town.

The brothers' own sons entered the business during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while the



The Swansea Technical College. By Wiccasha, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Swansea\\_Met\\_Mount\\_Pleasant.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Swansea_Met_Mount_Pleasant.JPG)

sons of Thomas Weaver started their own separate business (“Weaver Bros”).

Frank Weaver, one of the firm’s original founders, died in 1923, and the last surviving (and oldest) of the brothers, John Weaver, died in 1931, aged 83 years. The success of their business is suggested by the value of their respective estates as noted on their probate records. Francis’s entry on the Probate Calendar shows that his effects were worth £44,356, while John’s were worth £39,501, which would be the equivalent today of over £2million and just under £2million, respectively.

**WEAVER** Francis of Claremont House Belmont-terrace Cwmburla Swansea died 30 June 1923 Probate Carmarthen 6 September to Francis John Weaver builder and contractor and John Hugh Price colliery traffic manager. Effects £44356 17s. 11d.

**WEAVER** John of Harptree House 23 Approach-road Manselton Swansea died 24 May 1931 Probate Carmarthen 14 September to Francis Henry Weaver and George Llewelyn Weaver builders. Effects £39501 16s. 4d.

The probate calendar entries for Francis and John Weaver. National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995, via Ancestry – [www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1904/](http://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1904/)

Their deaths heralded a change in the fortunes of the Weaver family, for dark clouds were gathering at that time, as they were for the wider community. During the late 1920s, three of Thomas Weaver’s sons—William John, George Henry, and Charles Ernest Weaver, who had set up the separate building firm of Weaver Bros.—had taken on a large project in the Manselton area of the city where they had built several homes and shops. This development was advertised in the *Western Mail* on 8 June 1929, and the announcement suggests that the firm was in charge of the whole development, including the rentals. This was clearly a very large and risky project to undertake at a highly portentous time in the world’s economic history, for it coincided with the advent of the Great Depression—the largest economic downturn of the twentieth century that swept from the US to the UK in 1929 when world trade quickly slumped by half. The next few years brought widespread unemployment—in the UK, over three million people found themselves out of work, but in the industrial areas of Wales, unemployment at its height reached a staggering 70%. Swansea, whose fortunes were so dependent on both trade and industry, was therefore hit hard as the world’s heavy industry output fell by a third. This had profound effects on so many of the town’s residents, including the Weaver brothers, whose venture into residential and retail development could not have taken place at a worse time. They were caught in a tide of events that they simply could not control. This change in fortune was clearly signalled in a legal notice that was published in the *Western Mail* at the height of this economic stress on 30 November 1932, which revealed that 60 years after the family had arrived in the town and had helped shape its modern skyline, Weaver Bros. was declared bankrupt.

**MANSELTON Shopping Centre.—Manselton, Swansea, New Houses and Shops for Sale, in thickly populated district; excellent business opportunities; price, £950; ground rent, £5 5s. 0d. p.a.—Full particulars from Weaver Bros., 74, Sydney-street, Brynhyfryd, Swansea. 'Phone 4583. 458011**

Swansea itself did not fully recover from the hardships of this period. International competition had, in fact, started to erode the town’s dominance of copper production some years previously, even though the tinplate industry continued to operate fairly

## Legal Notices.

### THE BANKRUPTCY ACTS, 1914 AND 1926.

IN THE COUNTY COURT OF GLAMORGAN-  
SHIRE HOLDEN AT SWANSEA.

IN BANKRUPTCY. NO. 31 of 1932.

Re GEORGE HENRY WEAVER, residing at  
41, Kildare-street, Manselton, Swansea.  
CHARLES ERNEST WEAVER, residing at  
74, Sydney-street, Brynhyfryd, Swansea,  
and WILLIAM JOHN WEAVER, residing at  
33, Sydney-street, Brynhyfryd, Swansea,  
and carrying on business under the name  
or style of "WEAVER BROS." at Builders  
Yard, 74, Sydney-street, Brynhyfryd, Swan-  
sea, Builders.

We, ALFRED ERNEST CLUTTERBUCK, of  
23, Rutland-street, Swansea, Accountant, and  
ALBERT WILLIAM LLOYD SLEEMAN, of  
10, Northampton-place, Swansea, Incor-  
porated Accountant, HEREBY GIVE NOTICE  
that we have been duly appointed and certi-  
fied by the Board of Trade as Trustees of  
the Estate of the above-named Bankrupts.

All persons having in their possession any  
of the Effects of the Bankrupts must deliver  
them to us, and all Debts due to the Bank-  
rupts must be paid to us.

Creditors who have not yet proved their  
Debts must forward their proofs of Debts  
to us.

(Signature of Trustees).

A. E. CLUTTERBUCK.

A. W. L. SLEEMAN.

Date, 29th November, 1932. 7750

successfully until the mid-twentieth century, thanks in part to increased demand during the Second World War. Nevertheless, that war and its destructive bombing raids also deeply scarred the town and ultimately intensified its economic downturn.

Sadly, many buildings built by the Weaver brothers were damaged during the war, but others, like the graceful Technical College, survived intact. From its elevated position, the building continues to proudly look over the city today, a fitting memorial to a band of brothers who, around 150 years ago, with not much money but plenty of ambition and skills, took a risk by venturing westwards to a distant Welsh port town brought to prominence by the industrial world's thirst for copper, and ended up playing a key role in its urban development.

### Notes:

The National Archives has a handy historical currency converter where you can calculate how wealthy (or poor!) your ancestors were:

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/  
#currency-result](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result)

*Eilir Ann Daniels has been studying family history for well over 30 years and, as the founder of the research service Your Welsh Ancestors, has been working as a professional researcher since 2009.*



*Eilir is a Full Member of AGRA (the Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives), and is a Pharos Tutors instructor, teaching "Researching Your Welsh Ancestors and Tracing Living Relatives" courses. She provides research services for private clients and solicitors and carries out research for the BBC's Who Do You Think You Are? and for programs on S4C (the national Welsh language TV channel) and BBC Radio Cymru.*

*She is a native Welsh speaker, and her academic background, which includes a degree focused on the development of Welsh and UK society after the Industrial Revolution, provides the basis for her genealogical work today.*



## Charlie Whellams's Family and Life in the East End of London



*Whellams family, 1938 (author's collection).*

Charles John Whellams, known to his family and friends as simply Charlie Whellams, was my maternal great-grandfather. He was the son of Charles William Whellams and Sarah Whellams (nee Vears), and he was born at North Street, South Hackney, London, on 30 May 1859. Never a wealthy man, he nevertheless somehow managed to put food on the table for a seemingly never-ending stream of Whellams children. He was twice married and fathered his first child, another Charles Whellams, in 1880, and his last, my great aunt "Doll," in 1917. My grandmother, Emily Whellams, was born in 1911, and she and her sister Doll stand either side of their father in this 1938 photo. There is no doubt who commands this group. Sporting

a bowler hat, with a carnation in his lapel and a Yorkshire terrier tucked under his arm, Charles would have been close to eighty when this photo was taken. He would die in 1942.

North Street, Charles's place of birth, exists today as Northiam Street, close to fashionable Victoria Park, where you'll need at least £600,000 to think about buying a one-bedroom flat, or £5,000 per month if you are in the market for renting a two-bedroom property. It was very different in Charles's day.

In 1889, the Victorian philanthropist Charles Booth published a poverty map of London, systematically grading (and colouring) the streets of London

according to the incomes of the people who lived there. Ten years later, he published his second poverty map and followed this up with *Life and Labour of the People in London*, which was published in 1902 (<https://booth.lse.ac.uk/map/14-0.1174/51.5064/100/0>). The first edition of the poverty maps was based on information gathered from School Board visitors, the second from social investigators who accompanied policemen on their beats across London and recorded their own impressions of each street and the comments of the policemen. A century later, the maps and the social investigators' notebooks make fascinating reading.

In the detail below, the purple shading for North Street, taken from the 1898–99 poverty map, indicates that the people living here had mixed incomes, some being comfortable while others were poor. In volume one of *Life and Labour of the People in London*, Charles Booth expanded further:

Small regular earnings. poor, regular earnings. Factory, dock, and warehouse labourers, carmen, messengers and

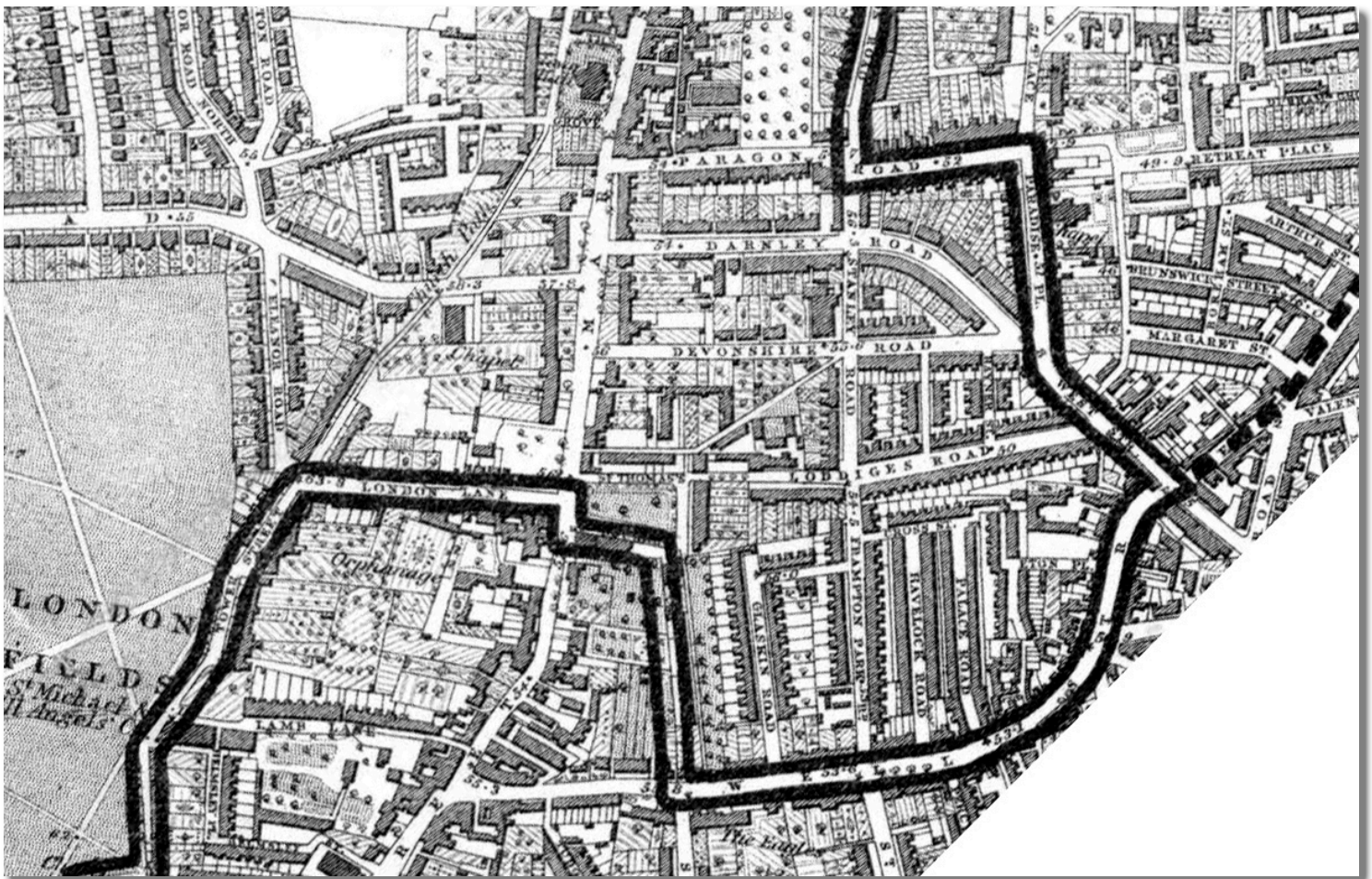
porters. Of the whole section none can be said to rise above poverty, nor are many to be classed as very poor. As a general rule they have a hard struggle to make ends meet, but they are, as a body, decent steady men, paying their way and bringing up their children respectably.

Charles Whellams first appears on the 1861 census as a one-year-old infant living at 7 Melina Place, South Hackney, with his parents, Charles and Sarah, and two siblings, and also his uncle, William Whellams, and his young family. Charles Senior and his brother William were cobblers from Suffolk and had both made the move to London a few years earlier. They consistently appear on census returns as boot or shoemakers, and my great-grandfather appears to have, initially at least, followed them into that trade.

But my mother, although she would only have been three when he died, tells stories of Charles turning his hand to all sorts of trades, probably what today we would call a "side hustle." He certainly bred Yorkshire Terriers in later life, and the dog under his arm may be "Chum," a prize stud. He would also catch wild birds on



Note the purple shading for North Street, taken from the Charles Booth 1898–99 poverty map, indicating that the people living here had mixed incomes, with some being comfortable while others were poor.



Part of 1885 Boundary Commission Map for Hackney Central.

Hackney marshes, and then sell them for their "trills"—anything to make a few extra bob to feed a growing family.

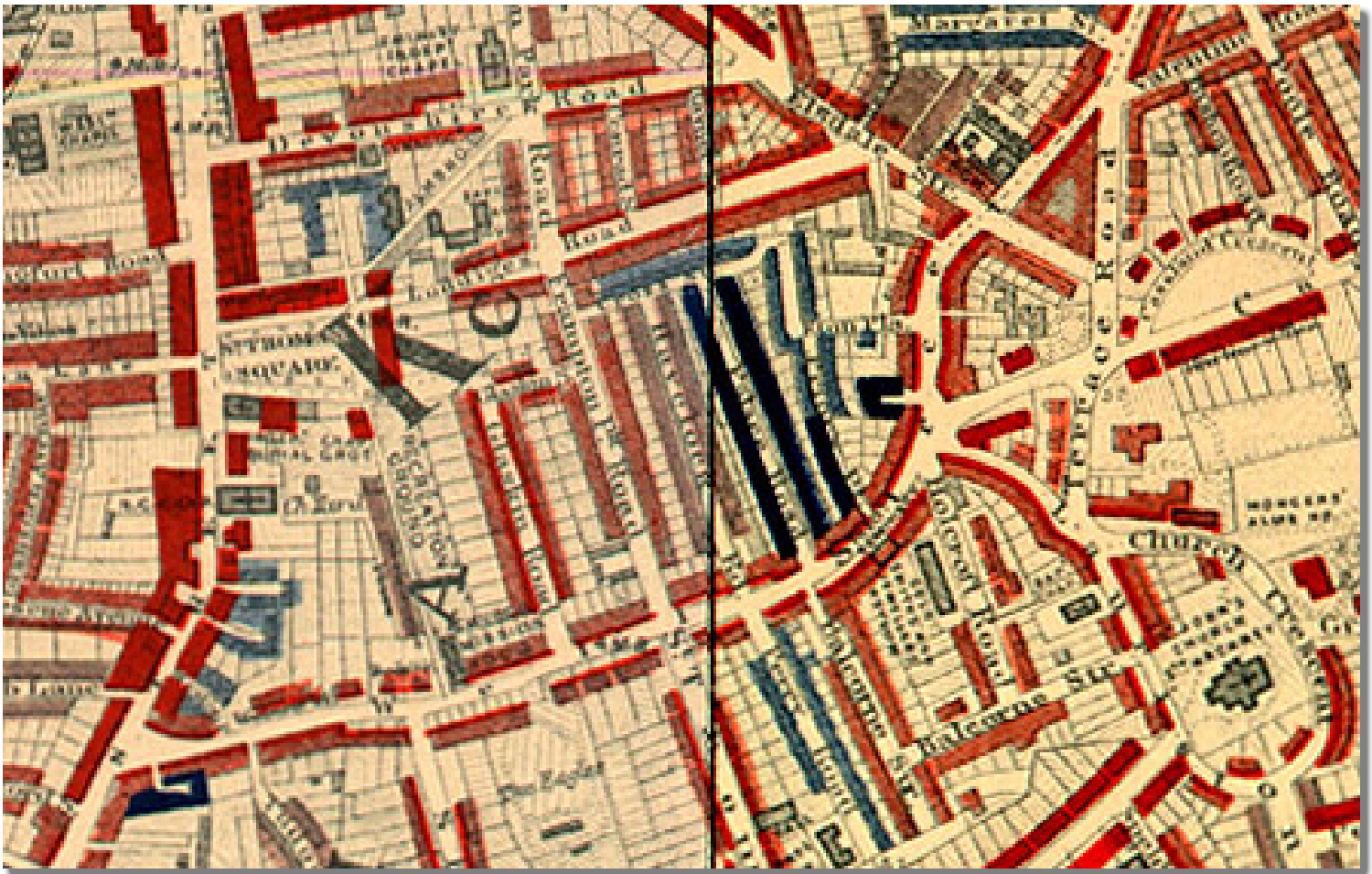
In 1879, Charles married Ellen Vickerman, a South London girl whose birth had been registered at St. Saviour, Southwark, in the December quarter of 1859. Where they met is unclear, but their marriage was registered in the Bethnal Green district in the last quarter of 1879. Charles and his bride would have each been about twenty years old. Charles Whellams junior was born in 1880, followed by Ellen (1882), Albert (1884), Annie (1886), and John (1889).

By the time the 1891 census was taken, Charles Whellams was already establishing an extensive family. He is noted as the head of the household and living at 23 Havelock Road, Hackney, with his wife and five children. The house was probably a typical Victorian two-up, two-down terrace, as there is also another family noted as living at that address. Charles is recorded as a 32-year-old boot finisher.

Havelock Road was situated in the Hackney Central District and ran parallel to Palace Road, where the family had been living in 1884 when Albert Elisha was born. The details above are taken from the 1885 Boundary Commission Map for Hackney Central. As far as Charles Booth was concerned, Havelock Road was slightly better off than Palace Road—light blue rather than dark blue—but in reality there probably wasn't a lot in it.

The detail at the top of the next page is taken from Charles Booth's 1889 poverty map of London. The line running through the centre bisects Havelock Road (to the west) and Palace Road to the east. Charles Booth's assessment of the area in 1898/99 (below) shows that little has changed.

Neither Havelock Road nor Palace Road exists today. Loddiges Road, seen on the 1889 map, is still there, as are Frampton Park Road and Darnley Road, but much of the area to the east of Mare Street and north of Well Street has been redeveloped. The light blue and dark



Part of Charles Booth's 1889 poverty map of London.

blue streets on Charles Booth's map have completely gone, replaced to day by what looks like a housing estate.

Ellen Whellams died in childbirth in 1899, having successfully delivered two more children, Maud and Arthur, in 1894 and 1896, respectively. Her 1899 infant, Ernest, died almost immediately, followed by his mother soon afterwards.

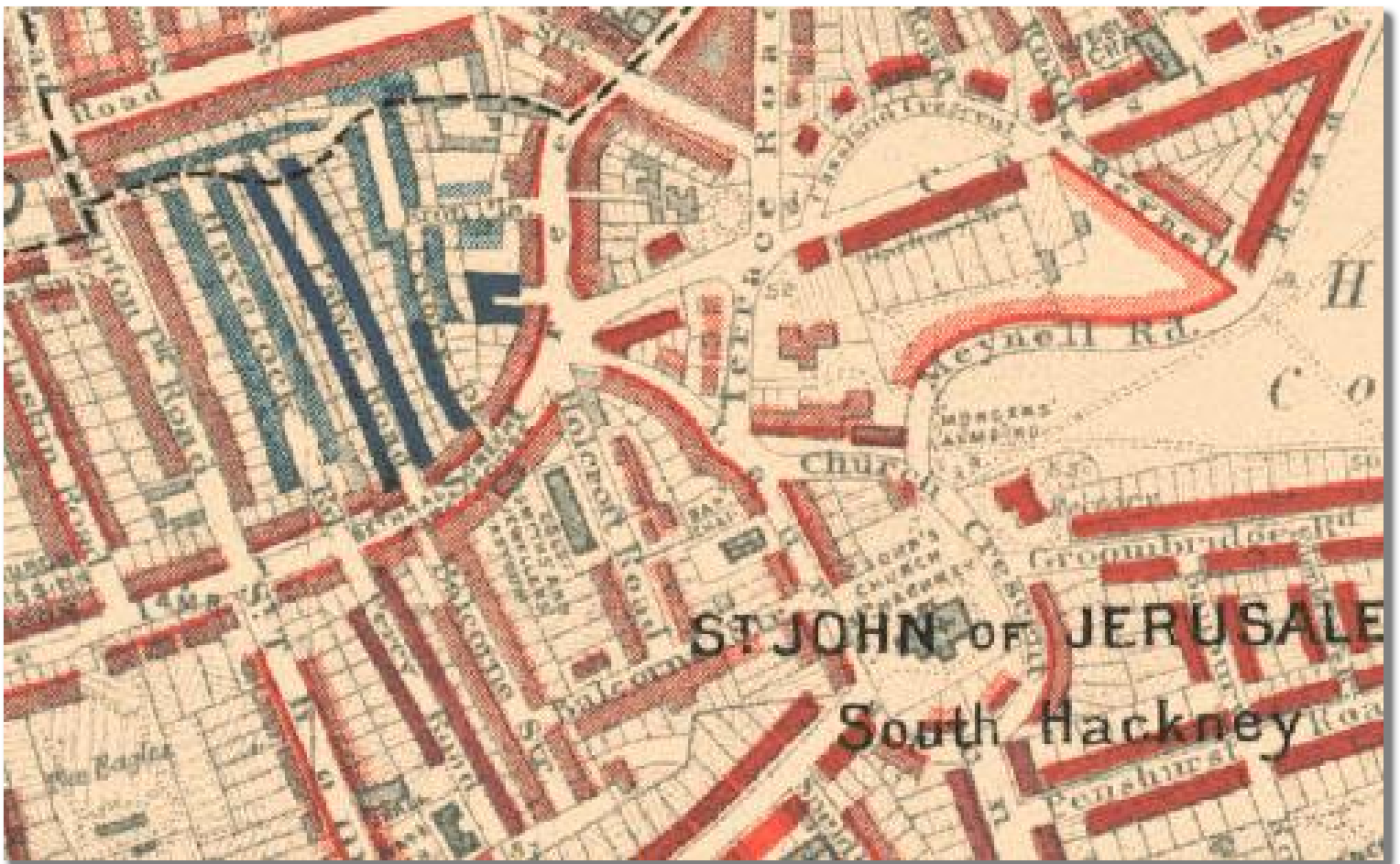
By the time the 1901 census was taken, Charles Whellams had moved away from Hackney and was living further east at 49 Boston Road, Walthamstow. Walthamstow was off the beaten track as far as Charles Booth was concerned and too far east to feature in Stanford's Library Maps of London series. The westernmost edge of Walthamstow appears on one map but not the area covering Boston Road. Similarly, those 1885 boundary maps for London that are available online do not feature Walthamstow.

By 1901, Charles was recorded as the head of the household, aged 42, working as a bricklayer's labourer.

His wife is noted as Susan Whellams, aged 41, running her own business at home as a shirt ironer. Like Charles, her place of birth is recorded as Hackney.

To date, I have been unable to identify Susan Whellams. She is recorded on the 1901 census as Charles Whellams's wife, but I have not been able to locate either a record of their marriage or, indeed, her subsequent death. It is possible that Susan Whellams was not Charles's wife but a helper; perhaps another family member, such as a sister-in-law. It is a reasonable assumption to make. With a young family, Charles would have needed some help in bringing them up. Furthermore, by the end of the year, Charles had married again, and if Susan Whellams was actually his second wife in April 1901, it would have left him precious little time to meet, court, and marry Mary Marmoy, who was certainly Mrs Charles John Whellams by the end of 1901.

Charles's married Mary Marmoy at The Lighthouse, Markhouse Road, Leyton in 1901.<sup>1</sup> Their marriage was



*Loddiges Road, seen on the 1889 map, is still there, as are Frampton Park Road and Darnley Road, but much of the area to the east of Mare Street and north of Well Street has been redeveloped.*

recorded in the December quarter of that year in the West Ham district. When Charles married her, Mary was a widow. She was born in Dalston around 1874 and had married Henry Marmoy around 1895. The couple had two daughters—Mary (born around 1896) and Susan (born around 1898). Both girls were born in East Ham. Henry Marmoy had died around 1900, and Mary and her two daughters appear on the 1901 census living with her parents (John and Mary Coombes) and Mary's five brothers and sisters at 103 Beaumont Road, Leyton. Mary's surname is recorded as Marmory on the census return.

I am uncertain where Charles and Mary lived in the early years of the twentieth century, but it was certainly in the Walthamstow/Leyton area of what is now east London. They did, however, start what was for both of them, a second family. Ada Whellams (Aunt Midge) was born in 1902; Alice (Aunt Lall) around 1907; William in 1909; Emily, my grandmother, on 31 May 1911; Alfred in 1913; and Emma Sarah (Aunt Doll) in

1917. Alfred died of diphtheria in 1915, having been vaccinated against it. This event triggered a mistrust of injections in Emily's family, which has lasted at least two subsequent generations.

Mary Whellams died in 1920 and is buried at Woodgrange Park cemetery in Manor Park, Newham, east London (below). During her marriage to Charles, she worked as a washer woman and suffered from ulcerated legs, having one of these amputated shortly before she died.

The 1911 census shows that he was working as a car cleaner, and by 1921 Charles was a labourer at the Woolwich Arsenal. Throughout his long life he never learned to read or write. The 1911 census was completed by his wife, and the 1921 census, presumably by one of his children. The family as a whole was poorly educated, with my grandmother only attending school on alternate days, for instance, when it was her turn to wear the shoes. On one



occasion, a School Board Inspector visited the family home and tore Mary Whellams off a strip, presumably for not sending her children to school. Mary, who was scrubbing the front doorstep at the time, replied by tipping the bucket of water over the inspector.

There were also visits from the Relief Office (part of the local workhouse). Money would be handed out but only if families were truly in need. No money would be given if there was anything in the house that could be pawned or sold. Emily Whellams remembered that on at least one occasion, the family did a "moonlight flit," packing up whatever belongings they had on a cart and moving house to avoid paying the rent.

Emily went to school at Leyton High Road School and grew up at 187 Dawlish Road, Leyton. In the latter years of her mother's life, she would come home at lunchtime to bring her beer from a pub close by (all in all, a considerable walk). By this stage, Mary Whellams was bedridden and also deaf, and she would have a lunch of beer, bread, and cheese. An undated photograph of Mary holding a baby reveals a woman who looks a good deal older than her years.

Shortly after her mother died, Emily was befriended by Mrs. Woodward, who lived in Francis Road, which ran parallel to Dawlish Road. She saw Emily and a friend sitting on the kerb and playing with pieces of coloured glass. She asked the girls if they would like a coloured ribbon for their hair, to which Emily's friend replied that Emily couldn't as her mother had just died. Mrs. Woodward said that she would find her a black ribbon instead. Mrs. Woodward had two daughters of her own who would have been about twelve or thirteen, and Emily would benefit from receiving a lot of their clothes and shoes that were too small for them. Emily was astounded on one occasion, on going to Mrs Woodward's house and seeing a long line (or full shoe-rack) of shoes. Mrs Woodward invited her to choose a pair to see if they would fit.

Emily Whellams seems to have been taken under Mrs. Woodward's care a good deal until she went to work, probably at the age of 14 or 15. Mrs. Woodward wanted to adopt her and asked Charles Whellams for permission to do so. This was declined, but nevertheless, Emily was fed and clothed and was also exposed to a totally different way of life. Emily's

daughter is convinced that she probably picked up some refinement from Mrs. Woodward, too, and while her brothers and sisters would swear like troopers, Emily didn't. She was also determined, when she had a family of her own, to see that they were properly educated.

After his wife died, Charles Whellams lived on for a further 22 years and died at home in Dawlish Road in 1942. He was 83 years old, a remarkable age to attain considering the hard life he had led. During his lifetime, he fathered at least 13 children and worked in a number of different trades.

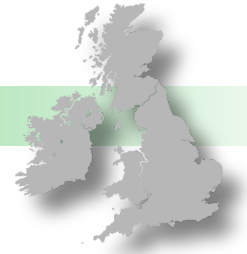
Today, he lies buried at Woodgrange Park cemetery, the traditional last resting place for London's Eastenders.

---

1. Source: Joan Nixon, granddaughter.

*Paul Nixon is a British military historian and author; the proud great-great-grandson of a Crimean War colour-sergeant; and the grateful grandson of a First World War veteran. Paul has a forensic knowledge of British Army regimental numbers and is the driving force behind the British Army Ancestors website at <https://britisharmyancestors.co.uk/>.*





## Irish Values and Measurements

The Republic of Ireland was a part of the United Kingdom from 1801 to 1922, with Northern Ireland continuing to be so. Consequently, over time, there have been many differences in how things were measured on the island of Ireland as opposed to over the water in Britain.

One of the most extraordinary facts for many people to learn is that there was, in fact, a time difference between Dublin and London just prior to October 1916. For some 37 years, Dublin had followed a time set by the Dunsink Observatory, which had been set at 25 minutes and 21 seconds behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). In the aftermath of the Easter Rising, however, the government decided to standardise measurement across the UK, and on Sunday, October 1, 1916, the clocks in Ireland went back some 35 minutes to adjust to GMT, rather than an hour as in Britain, a practice that has continued to this day. At the time it happened, one of the rebellion's leaders, Countess Constance Markiewicz, later to become the first ever female member of the UK's Houses of Parliament, complained in a private letter that "public feeling [was] outraged by forcing of English time on us."

However, time was not the only commodity to have different sets of measurements. On the currency front, for example, from 1701, thirteen Irish pounds were the equivalent of twelve English pounds Sterling, a situation which continued for a quarter of a century after Ireland was brought into the United Kingdom. In 1826, the Irish pound was finally abolished, and Britain's currency of Sterling was adopted. As with the English pound, the Irish pound had twelve pence to the shilling, and twenty shillings to the pound, a total of some two hundred and forty pence. Following its secession from the UK in 1922, the Free State continued to use Sterling until 1928, when a new Irish



A handbill announcing the forthcoming end of Dublin Mean Time in 1916. Dublin City Council, public domain, Wikipedia, [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Time\\_\(Ireland\)\\_Act\\_1916.jpg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Time_(Ireland)_Act_1916.jpg)

pound, known as the "punt," was once again introduced, pegged to the Sterling rate on an equal pound-to-pound basis.

In Northern Ireland, following Partition, Sterling remained the currency as it does to the present day, although the Bank of Ireland, Ulster Bank, and Northern Bank continue to be able to produce their own Sterling-based banknotes. This is a fact not commonly known in Britain, where problems often



Two versions of the Irish 10p coin in the decimal era, prior to the 1990s, and the later smaller version briefly introduced before the country switched to the Euro. Fair use, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coins\\_of\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Ireland#/media/File:Irish\\_ten\\_pence\\_\(decimal\\_coin\).png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coins_of_the_Republic_of_Ireland#/media/File:Irish_ten_pence_(decimal_coin).png).

Republic of Ireland, with one pound now comprised of one hundred pence. After 1979, Sterling and the punt slowly began to diverge in value, but even as late as the 1980s, small coinage, such as the halfpenny, penny, and two pence coins, were still commonly interchangeable between the punt-based currency in the south (with their wonderful Celtic mythology-inspired designs) and the Sterling based currency of the north. From 1999 forward, the Republic of Ireland adopted the Euro as its currency, which it continues to use to the present day.

emerge with folk from Ulster wishing to spend their Northern Irish printed Sterling notes in British establishments. From the late 1960s, decimalisation was introduced to the north, alongside the rest of the UK, a practice that was quickly adopted also in the

There are many other areas where measurements have changed over time, which are equally worth knowing about when it comes to appreciating the holdings of our ancestors in the past. For records denoting land holdings, for example, you



The original Prendergast plot of land in Killonerry townland, measured by two different standards in 1827 and later in 1850 (author's image).



*The length of the Irish mile was standardised to British imperial measure in 1824 (author's image).*

will often see areas of land defined in acres, roods, and perches, often abbreviated to A, R, and P—thus a land holding at 4A 2R 27P means 4 acres, 2 roods, and 27 perches. An acre was comprised of 4 roods, and a rood comprised of 40 perches, with a perch being 7 square yards in size. That may seem straightforward enough, but how the various measurements were actually defined has also changed, not just when measured against Britain, but even on a regional basis across the island.

An acre was originally the amount of land that a team of oxen could plough in a day, with the word "acre" originally deriving from the old Anglo-Saxon word "aecer," meaning "a field." For most of the research we do between the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Plantation periods and 1824, the records we look at will usually, but not always, involve what was known as the "Irish acre" or the "plantation acre," measuring 7,840 square yards. This was based on the size of an acre as used in Yorkshire, England, and in west coast borderlands around the Solway Firth in Britain, taking in parts of Scotland and England. Whilst this was common use, for example, in the 1654–1655 Civil

Survey (available via [www.irishmanuscripts.ie/product-category/imc-digital-editions/](http://www.irishmanuscripts.ie/product-category/imc-digital-editions/)) and the subsequent 1655-1656 Down Survey of Ireland (<https://downsurvey.tchpc.tcd.ie>), it did differ from the "English acre," which is also sometimes found used in Ireland in this period, for example within the Plantation of Munster in 1580.

Not long after Ireland joined the United Kingdom, the system was changed to a series of smaller "statute acres" or "imperial measures," introduced by the Weights and Measures Act 1824, with one plantation acre being the equivalent of 1.62 statute acres, or one statute acre being 4,840 square yards. This is important to note because in records such as Griffith's Valuation, the measurement used is the statute acre, whereas in earlier records, such as tithe records, the system commonly used is the plantation acre. A conversion may, therefore, be necessary between different record sets when comparing them. To give an example, my wife's 3rd great-grandfather John Prendergast was noted in the 1827 tithe applotment records for Killonerry townland in Co. Kilkenny as holding 13 acres, 3 roods, and 22 perches of land, or some 13.88 acres.

By contrast, just 23 years later in the Griffith's Valuation records from 1850, his son Thomas was noted as holding 22 acres, 3 roods, and 6 perches within the same townland. To the unwary, it appears that Thomas's holding has increased since his father's day, but, in fact, it is the exact same plot of land—the measure for John being taken using the old Irish acre measure, and for Thomas, the new imperial measure.

Just to confuse things further, in terms of length measurements, there was also a unit called a "perch," which was 7 yards in length (the equivalent of an English "rod"). A "chain" was made of 4 perches, and 40 perches were a "furlong," with 8 furlongs to the Irish mile (meaning there were 32 chains, 320 perches or 2,240 yards to the Irish mile). Again, standardisation took place in 1824, with an Irish mile becoming the equivalent of 1.27 statute miles, with an Irish mile previously set at some 6,720 feet, some 1,440 feet longer than its English equivalent.

If it truly is a long road to Tipperary from Britain, it used to be an even longer one by English measure!

Based in the Ayrshire town of Irvine, Northern Irish-born **Chris Paton** runs the Scotland's Greatest Story research service (<https://scotlandsgreateststory.wordpress.com/>) and the daily Scottish GENES genealogy news blog (<http://scottishgenes.blogspot.com>).



Amongst his many publications are *Tracing Your Irish Family History on the Internet (2nd edition)*, *Tracing Your Irish Ancestors Through Land Records*, and *Tracing Your Belfast Ancestors from Pen and Sword*, as well as *Sharing Your Family History Online*. Chris also tutors short courses through *Pharos Teaching and Tutoring Ltd*, including two Irish themed courses, *Progressing Your Irish Research Online*, and *Researching Irish Land Records*.



CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF BIRTH

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, LONDON

Application Number. *PAS. 96208/75/F/2*

REGISTRATION DISTRICT *Sculcoates*

*18 75* Birth in the Sub-district of *Drypool* in the *Borough of Kingston upon Hull*

No.	When and where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name and surname of father	Name, surname and maiden surname of mother	Occupation of father	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
	<i>Twenty seventh December 1874 20 Sherwood Square Marvel Street Drypool</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Boy</i>	<i>Robert Dring</i>	<i>Betsey Dring formerly Earle</i>	<i>General Labourer</i>	<i>The above Robert Dring (Infant) 20 Sherwood Square Marvel Street Drypool</i>	<i>Twenty sixth January 1875</i>	<i>G. Pollock</i>	<i>Registrar</i>

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Births in the District above mentioned.  
Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, LONDON, under the Seal of the said Office, this *10th* day of *December* 19*75*.

**BXA200228**

Form A502M 51-4793 90M 11/74 McE

John Dring birth certificate, 1874.

# The Hull Mystery

## Donna Rutherford

Can you imagine running off to sea at an early age, leaving your family, and becoming a sailor? During the age of sail, life at sea was arduous for sailors. They endured cramped quarters, battled diseases, faced meagre rations and wages, and braved harsh weather conditions. By 1873, the age of sail had mostly ended, with the introduction of new ocean-going battleships that did not carry sails. Sailing ships still carried cargo on long voyages, though steamships soon pushed those out of trade. My great-grandfather was a sailor; he joined the Navy at 16, and by the time he was 27, had worked his way to New Zealand, where he married, had a family, and died in 1948. Although my great-grandfather never spoke much about his family, during family tree research, I found him in various records, and I have his birth, death, and marriage certificates, copies of the census,



Humber Bridge, near Kingston upon Hull, Yorkshire, England, Darkalfar@Pixabay.com.

and his Navy record. In 2015, after I took a DNA test, John Dring's family history transformed into what I affectionately dubbed "The Hull Mystery." My great-grandfather John Dring was born at 2 Sherwood Square, Marvel Street, Hull, on 27 December 1874; his birth was registered in Drypool, Sculcoates, Kingston Upon Hull in the East Riding of Yorkshire. John's parents were Robert Dring and Betsey Foster (nee Earle). At 16 years old, in December 1890, John joined the training ship HMS *Impregnable* along with

*Chatham* 158352 158352

Name in full } *John Dring* Date of Birth *27 December 1874.*  
Place of Birth } *Hull, Yorkshire*  
Occupation } *Paint-Maker*

Date and Period of C. S. Engagements.	Age.	Height. Ft. in.	Hair.	Eyes.	Complexion.	Wounds, Scars, Marks, &c.
<i>27 December 1892. 12 years</i>	<i>7-2 18</i>	<i>5-4 1/2 5-8</i>	<i>Dark Dark</i>	<i>Grey Dark</i>	<i>Dark Dark</i>	<i>Rose tattoo on Arm</i>

Ships, &c., served in.	List and No.	Rating.	Sub-ratings.			Badges.	Period of Service.		Character.	If Discharged, Whither, and for what Cause.
			Rating.	From	To		From	To		
<i>1</i>										

John Dring's Certificate of Service (author's collection).

other boys who joined the Navy between the ages of 15 and 16 and a half. HMS *Impregnable*, at that time, was based in Devonport, Plymouth; she was a 121-gun screw ship renamed from her original HMS *Howe* and was later to become the HMS *Bulwark*. Some of the timbers from this ship were later used and can be seen today in the Tudor revivalist style interior and fascia of the Liberty Store in London. Throughout his naval career, John served on various ships, including the HMS *Impregnable*, HMS *Pembroke*, HMS *Goldfinch*, and HMS *Forte*, rising to the rank of Petty Officer First Class. His record, marked by commendations for very good conduct and several gratuities for his service, reflects a distinguished tenure ending with his discharge for shore service in 1902. Of note, John joined the Navy just a few months after his mother died in April 1890. Family lore was that John "ran off to sea" because he did not like his stepmother, although John's father,

Robert, did not remarry until 1927. Robert married Emily Ada Wilson (nee Atkinson), who was a Seaman's wife and had possibly become Robert's housekeeper. John Dring was the middle child of Robert and Betsey and at the time of John's birth, the family was living at 2 Sherwood Square, Marvel Street, Hull. Prior to John's birth, Robert and Betsey had two daughters, Betsey, and Ada; however, sadly, both these girls died in 1872 of whooping cough, young Betsey in March of that year at three years old and then 15-month-old Ada in May. A son named Robert was born in February 1873 and then John followed in December 1874. Robert and Betsey had two more children, William in 1877 and Henry in 1880. By the time Henry was born, the family had moved to Mill Yard in Holderness Road. There were no further children, and in the 1881 census, the family of Robert, Betsey, and their four sons (Robert, John, William, and Henry) were living at 3 Mill Yard,

**1881 England Census for Robert Dring**  
 Yorkshire > Southcoates > ALL > District 13

				<i>Robert</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>Brother</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>Labourer</i>
<i>96</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Robert</i>	<i>Dring</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>do</i>
				<i>Betsey</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>28</i>	
				<i>Robert</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>Schooler</i>
				<i>John</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>do</i>
				<i>William</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>4</i>	
				<i>Henry</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>11 Mo</i>	
<i>97</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Ada</i>	<i>Howell</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>Labourer</i>

1881 Census, Robert and Betsey Dring.

# UK, Naval Medal and Award Rolls, 1793-1972

Queen's and King's South Africa Medals 1899-1902 > ALL > Naval and Marine Brigade personnel who served ashore and afloat during the Boer War

H. M. S. *Thrush*

Official or Regimental Number	Name	Number of Medal	Rank or Rating	No. on Ship's Books	Clasp for	When delivered or sent
175,175	<del>Davison G. A.</del>	8681	AB.	5/23		Sent to Gibraltar 19 Dec 03
196,343	<del>Dunbar Jas.</del>	8682	Ord	29	RUN	RET'D TO ARSENAL.
268,772	<del>Drummond D.</del>	8683	6RA3	5/2	Captn	Sent to Pembroke Mar 1902
Reg 8667	<del>Duish A. J.</del>	8684	Pte	17/10	RUN	Sent to Thrush 15 Dec 02
198,143	<del>Down A. J.</del>	8685	Ord	5/41		RET'D TO ARSENAL.
158,352	<del>Druig, J.</del>	8685A	AB.	5.12		Sent to Thrush 14/1/01
						Party 10/2/04

Boer War Medals, UK Naval Medal and Award Rolls, HMS Thrush.

Sculcoates, Hull. In 1890, and before the next census, Betsey Dring died. She was 39 years old, her cause of death being pleurisy and bronchitis. This left widower Robert with the four boys: Robert, now 17; John 15; William 13; and Henry, 9. It was around this time that John joined the Navy.

In 1902, the Navy participated in the Boer War, at which point John served on the HMS *Thrush* and is listed in the UK, Naval Medal and Award Rolls as receiving the South Africa medal. Dring is a particularly unusual name to search for in historical records as it is surprisingly often mistranscribed. In the example of the UK, Naval Medal and Award Rolls, John's last name is written as "Druig" but note the Regimental number of 158,352 is the same number as on John's certificate of service. HMS *Thrush* was on active service during the Boer War, which lasted between October 1899 and June 1902. In early 1902, she helped a British force in Nigeria re-open trade routes on the Lower Niger, closed by the piracy of some locals.

At the end of the Boer War, John purchased shore leave to make his way to New Zealand. On 31 May 1902, he was one of the able-bodied sailors on the ship *Salamis* making its way to Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, arriving 5 August of that year. Six days later, 11 August

1902, he was on the ship *Waihora* from Sydney across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand. It is unknown if or how often he saw his family during his time in the Navy, but on arriving in New Zealand, he joined his father's sister and family in New Plymouth in the Taranaki province. In 1905, John married his first cousin Alice Maud Longstaff at her father's home in Taranaki. Alice Longstaff was the daughter of James Longstaff (1853–1938) and Alice Dring (1855–1952). Alice Dring was John Dring's aunt from back in Yorkshire; James and Alice had married and had a family in Yorkshire and emigrated to New Zealand in 1899 aboard the *Ruahine*, settling in the Taranaki province of the North Island. It is unknown if John Dring left the Navy specifically to join his father's family, but family lore was that he was in love with his cousin and followed her to New Zealand. Alice was fifteen when her family emigrated, and we do not know if he knew her from Yorkshire. John Dring and Alice Longstaff married in 1905 when Alice was 22 years old. For some cultures, first-cousin marriages are considered taboo, but it was common practise in earlier times and is still common in some societies today. It is important to note that there is no significant risk of genetic disorders for children of first-cousin marriages; there is no biological reason to discourage first cousins from marrying at all.



Cousin marriages in some populations are more of a cultural taboo than a biological one, although in some American states it is illegal to marry your first cousin; however, even today in the UK, it is perfectly legal for first cousins to marry. It is common knowledge that Prince Philip and The Queen were third cousins. John and Alice had four daughters during their marriage, one of whom was my maternal grandmother. In 2018, all our assumptions about the Dring family were upended. Members of my family took Ancestry DNA tests in 2015, and it later became evident that not everything was as we had anticipated.

In 2015, I did my first DNA test with AncestryDNA; it was when Ancestry first released their tests in the UK, which was where I had already been living for several years. Initially, match numbers were exceptionally low for UK testers, and I only had thirty-two "4th cousins or closer" in the database. I knew I had pedigree collapse

from the Dring/Longstaff side, so I was expecting to see DNA matches to those families that were perhaps a little higher than the average for any expected relationships. As the database grew and I had more matches, I was surprised to see the Dring/Longstaff matches no higher than the average amount expected, but I did not take too much notice at the time. By 2018, my "4th cousins and closer" number started to move into the hundreds, and by then I had tested my mother and her brother. Around this time a high match appeared in our match lists that was a bit of a mystery. I started calling this my "Hull Mystery" as the match's family were based in Hull, Yorkshire, where the Drings and Longstaffs had lived. I contacted the match, and they were kind enough to provide their family tree, but no one seemed to connect at all to my Drings and Longstaffs. I initially wrote this off as a family tree error, but as more shared matches arrived, many had trees that aligned with my Hull Mystery match. I knew then



*John (top right) and Alice Dring in front of him with their four daughters, a son-in-law, and my mother, who is the young child at the front of the group (author's collection).*

## 1881 England Census for Robert Dring

Yorkshire > Southcoates > ALL > District 13

Household No.	Street No.	Street Name	Age	Sex	Occupation	Marital Status	Birth Date	Notes
96	3	"	1	Male	Head	Mar	23	Labourer
				Female	Wife	Mar	22	do
				Female	Servant	Mar	28	Schooler
				Male	Son	Unm	8	do
				Female	Daughter	Unm	6	do
				Male	Son	Unm	4	do
				Female	Daughter	Unm	11mo	do
97	11	"	1	Male	Head	Mar	53	Labourer

The Ashton family in Sherwood Square 1871 (author's collection).

that something was not as we expected; it did not seem likely that all these people had a wrong tree—they all connected to the Ashton family of Hull that had no connection to me at all. Something was not as it seemed, and my Hull Mystery deepened further.

I started building a research tree to identify how this collection of matches connected to each other and to find out more about this Ashton family. Research trees at Ancestry should be kept private and unsearchable so that when you quickly build up trees of your DNA matches to see how they connect, you are not misleading anyone or creating a wrong tree that could be copied across the database. Ancestry does not index unsearchable trees, so your research cannot inadvertently be seen or copied by anyone. I was working with the genetic genealogy principle that generally a group of shared DNA matches will have a common ancestor, and their common ancestor is likely also yours. The common ancestor of the Hull Mystery group were George and Jane Ashton. I had matches to that family and their parents. I found George and Jane Ashton in the 1871 census living at 4 Sherwood Square, Marvel Street, Hull. Reader, you may want to glance back to the beginning of this article and view John Dring's birth certificate. In 1874, John Dring was born at 2 Sherwood Square, Marvel Street, Hull. The question arises, how did I get the DNA of the neighbours? DNA testing itself can tell us many things—who we descend



John and Alice Dring's grave in The Henui Cemetery, New Plymouth, New Zealand (author's collection).

from and where our distant ancestry might be from, but it cannot tell us about the circumstances surrounding an event. What happened at Sherwood Square, Marvel Street, Hull is likely to remain a mystery forever, but what we do know is that likely one of the Ashton men fathered my great grandfather. In genetic genealogy, this is known as an NPE, "not parent expected" or a "non-paternal event," meaning the man named on the birth certificate is not the biological father. Statistically, the most likely candidate was Charles Ashton, the oldest son. At the time of John's conception, Charles was twenty-one, and Betsey was twenty-three, and they were living next door to each other. But that is all we know; what happened in Sherwood Square can only be the subject of speculation.

John Dring has very few living descendants, as only one of his children went on to have a family, and we have all discussed this interesting genetic conundrum. We have considered that John knew something was not as it seemed, or he looked different to his siblings—maybe his father knew something about the circumstances of his conception. Was this why John ran off to sea and to New Zealand, rarely speaking of his family back in Yorkshire? Did he realise he was not marrying his genetic first cousin (in fact, they were not related at all). While I was recently back home in New Zealand, I paid a visit to John Dring's grave. There, in the quiet of the cemetery, I revealed to him all that I had discovered about his paternity. Yet, the enigma of the Hull Mystery persists—why was John the son of the next door neighbour?

*Donna Rutherford is a New Zealand genetic genealogist based in London with English, Scottish, and Irish ancestry. She specialises in complex DNA cases, such as those involving adoptions, foundlings, and surprise results. In 2019, Donna was one of the co-authors of a paper investigating the effectiveness of using genetic genealogy to identify individuals in the UK, which has been used to inform UK law enforcement on the potential use of Investigative Genetic Genealogy in the future. Donna has been a regular speaker at international genealogy conferences and has a well-known blog at [donnarutherford.com](http://donnarutherford.com). She is the admin of a UK Facebook group, DNA Help for Genealogy (UK), and a co-admin of the RUTHERFORD Y-DNA project at FamilyTreeDNA.*





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