



Wiltshire OPC Newsletter August 2024

Hello and welcome to the second Newsletter of 2024

I hope you enjoyed the last offering and found some articles useful and some entertaining, well we have more of the same in this issue. Please read on and enjoy.

Articles this week: -

Terasas Twitterings

One of Trowbridge's famous sons

Coincidence or what you will

Whats Happening in Wiltshire

Tips for Field Trips

Downer but not out

Resources (Other than ours) GRO

A tale of Woe and Caution.

Teresa's Twittering's or Co-Ordinator's Catch Up

Hi everyone

Firstly, I want to congratulate Val on her brilliant effort to resurrect our OPC Newsletter it had been left abandoned for several years not for lack of content but lack of time and volunteers. Our late dear friend Christine Brooks would have been doing her happy dance to see it back up and running. It might be a good idea to explain once more the concept of the OPC Project and what it we do. OPC stands for Online Parish Clerks. The idea was to provide family history research for free nationwide, county by county and then broken down by parish by parish. The mantle was adopted mainly in the Southwest of the country commencing with Cornwall. The idea was for volunteers to adopt a parish and transcribe the Vital Records (Births, Marriages, Deaths) and then to follow up with Census transcripts. The Cornwall project developed, and a few other counties joined in until Wiltshire was launched by Susan Penter in around 2006. I volunteered around 2007 and a handful of OPC's joined in. In 2008 due to a hacking incident, Susan had to rebuild the site. This gave us the opportunity to approach it in a more involved way. We took up the idea that family history was not just about baptisms, marriages and burials and we developed a crossover between family and local history. Sadly, due to ill health Susan was unable to continue to host and finance the website and handed the reins over to me. I was not able to fund the site and had no idea about hosting and web maintenance. I had the ideas but not the tools so to speak. Enter Richard Creswell our knight in shining armour who agreed to host the site and act as webmaster. Finances to keep the site running was going to be an issue and my late partner and couple of volunteers all suggested we take a leaf out of the Lancashire Project's book and try public funding. We wouldn't charge members for the use of the website, but we would ask for non-obligatory donations. I also used my birthday as a fundraising opportunity, sadly Facebook has stopped this process and only registered charitable organisations can benefit from fundraisers. However, we can publish the link to our Just Giving Page. This facility
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has meant we are able to raise the funds to keep the website online and add features when we find something that will enhance the site.

Information available on the OPC Network varies from county to county. The Wiltshire Project has a motto **"What may or may not be of interest to you, will be of interest to someone else"**.

Our parish pages are set out in sections, Church, Parish History, Buildings and Land, Crime, Directories, Education, Emigration & Migration, Employment and Business, Non-Conformity and Other Places of Worship, People and Parish Notables, Poor Law and the Workhouse, Probate, War, Conflict and Military. We also have pages for Countywide & Military items that are not parish specific. On each page/parish you will find information of varying content. The amount of information available depends totally on whether a parish has been adopted or whether transcribers have submitted items that they have transcribed for their own use and share with the project. The amount of information too is dependent on the amount of time the volunteers have, to be able to commit to the project. Therefore, some pages have far more information than others.

If anyone would like to help in anyway in transcribing, adopting, or helping out in any other way please let us know either by contacting me (Teresa Lewis, Co-Ordinator via the website) or by joining our Facebook Page. A search under Wiltshire OPC should find us. In the next edition I shall go into more detail about volunteering and helping out.

It is my intention to write a piece for the newsletter each edition and try to concentrate on one area of the project each time. I hope to keep it informative, fun and thought provoking at times. Until the next edition Happy Hunting and remember if you are out and about researching stay safe.

One of Trowbridge's famous sons. Yvonne B

When I researched my 3-x great grandfather William Elliker using his army discharge records, I found he had been born in 1772 in Trowbridge. But the only person I could find in the registers when I visited the Wiltshire Archives, from my home in Ireland, was a William Helliker born at that time and baptised in St James in Trowbridge. It took a few years to prove that this was really the same person as my William Elliker but in doing that I amassed a lot of documentation on the Helliker family in Trowbridge, and uncovered my link to one of the famous sons of that town, Thomas Helliker born 1783 and hung at Fisherton Gaol on 22 March 1803 which was his 20th birthday Here is what lead up to this horrific event.

Thomas had been born in Horningsham in 1783 but by the time he was 3 the family had moved to Trowbridge. He and his four brothers all became fustian shearmen. The late 18th, and early 19th century were turbulent times in the woollen industry. In 1784 Cartwright had invented the mechanical loom, and during the next twenty years machinery was gradually taking the place of hand labour in all facets of the clothing industry. At the same time the legal protection that shearmen had enjoyed was gradually being removed. Factories were replacing home-based occupations and Trowbridge, by the early 19th century, had more factories to the square mile than Manchester.

Trowbridge was also the home of the largest woollen cloth producer, John Jones, the wealthy magistrate and owner of Staverton Mill. He wanted to mechanise his factory and make it a showpiece of modern production. Shearmen, who had served long apprenticeships, feared that power-driven machines would replace them. They were therefore forced, by the threat of unemployment, to form an alliance with the Yorkshire shearmen who were in a similar situation. By 1802 an illegal trade union monopoly existed between the two counties, and union cards bearing the words "Industry, Freedom and Friendship" were issued. Without this card it was impossible to keep a job in the woollen trade. My Helliker ancestors were part of this union, and as so many male members of the family were involved in the woollen trade, I am sure they must have been frantic. John, the eldest of the family, had finished his apprenticeship and was one of the leading union activists. He was arrested and

imprisoned for this, but his younger brother Thomas, a good looking, intelligent and extremely literate young man was to meet a worse fate and it is his story that follows.

At a mill belonging to Francis Naish in Conigre, young Thomas Helliker was in the middle of his apprenticeship when organised resistance to mechanisation flared into violence. Machine breaking, leading eventually to the movement known as the Luddites had happened frequently in many areas of England. A mill belonging to William Brett in Horningsham had suffered an arson attack on the very day it opened. Then in 1802 Trowbridge workers went on strike, supplies were attacked, and mills burned.

Thomas' boss Francis Naish also owned Littleton Mill, near Semington, but it was rented to a Ralph Heath. He had been tipped off that an attack was imminent and, along with other workers, had been guarding the mill for several nights. On 22nd July 1802 a group of seven men some with blackened faces, some with coats pulled over their face, confronted them, and the leader of the gang was said to have threatened Heath with a pistol. He stated that this man said he "would blow out our brains out if anyone dared to move" Once the machines in the mill had been destroyed Heath was released and fled to Trowbridge. He told police that he had not recognised any of the men. Several days later he made another statement to Naish and named Thomas Helliker. In his second statement he claimed that "the man's face was not so black as to be unrecognisable" This led Francis Naish to bring a claim before Mr Read, the Bow Street Magistrate, that Helliker had been involved in arson. There was fury amongst his fellow workers, and on the night of Thomas' arrest in August 1802 workshops in Conigre and Trowbridge were burned down.

Thomas, protesting his innocence was taken, under cavalry escort, to Wilton Gaol in Salisbury in order to prevent a rescue by his fellow shearman. He was held there during the winter of 1802/03 and throughout his imprisonment Thomas continued to state that he had not been at Littleton Mill on the night of the fire. On the 8th of March 1803 he was tried at "Wiltshire Assizes on a capital indictment, charging him with having riotously assembled with diverse other persons and wilfully aided in setting alight to Littleton Mill, in the parish of Steeple Ashton" Extract taken from Salisbury Journal of 14th March 1803 which carried a report of the trial. Apart from Heath's untrustworthy claim there was no other evidence against Thomas. Despite that the jury only took ten minutes to find him guilty. He was sentenced to death by hanging. Thomas had been very agitated during the trial but when the verdict was announced he "appeared as if relieved from a torturing suspense"

Six other shearmen were indicted at the same court for "administering oaths" (being members of an illegal trade union). Amongst them were James May – the Trowbridge secretary of the union, Samuel Harris, George Marks, P. Edwards and John Helliker – Thomas's brother. They had been held on the word of the only shearman to crack, when he was held and questioned. At the court this man "forgot" the wording of the oath and all six were released without charge. Three other prisoners were found guilty of capital offences, and sentenced to be hung, but they were reprieved before the judges left the city. Thomas was not.

On Tuesday 22 March 1803, which would have been his 20th birthday, Thomas was taken to Fisherton Goal for execution. The Salisbury Journal of 28th March 1803 stated that Thomas "bore a good character in ordinary relations of life. From the time of his conviction his behaviour was resigned and decent and when brought to the scaffold he betrayed neither unmanly fear nor audacious daring" After throwing his hat to friends whom he spotted in the crowd, the cap was placed over his head, and he was "launched into eternity"

Part 2 to follow in a future newsletter

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## **Military Matters**

### **Martin Barrett**

Hello everyone,

You might know me as the chap who posts every day in Facebook to remember the fallen of Wiltshire. I'll write in future newsletters about how I became involved in this and how we approach all-things

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military from an OPC perspective. As time is limited at the moment in the run-up to the school summer holidays (I have 2 children of school age), I just thought I would post a request for photos! I'm always on the lookout for photographs/images with a Wiltshire connection that we can re-use on either the WOPC website or to accompany one of the daily FB Remembrance postings. Maybe you've taken some photographs in your (Wiltshire) family history travels that you'd like to share. Obviously, we need to be aware of copyright issues on images, so any of your own photos would be ideal. If you do have any images you'd like us to consider for publication, please do contact me direct on Facebook Messenger or via the Contact option on the WOPC website.

Finally, keep an eye out for the re-launched Military Information page which will appear on the WOPC website in the next month or so!



## What's Happening in Wiltshire

While there are many events held locally during the summer months many are orientated towards children and summer fayres, if you need a bit of relief from this then try the following online event. Teresa Lewis (Co-Ordinator) has been invited to take part in this.

**Tuesday 24th September 2024 (7.30pm UK time; repeated on the 26th September at 9am UK time):** A look at the work of the Online Parish Clerks, both within our own County and elsewhere in the Country. Further detail in the next edition of the Wiltshire Family History Society Journal, and on the Society website.

## Field Trips and Excursions

Anyone out and about in Churches, Churchyards villages or places of interest for family research always be respectful and observe and comply with any rules and regulations stipulated. If you take a dog with you make sure you have the relevant materials to clean up after your pooch, especially in churchyards.

Guidance notes for field trips can be found on the OPC Facebook page and our OPC website  
Good Hunting

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## Coincidence or what you will Sandy M.

A strange co-incidence which left us speechless! Some years ago, on Ancestry I 'met' a distant cousin who was born in Brighton but moved to New Zealand as a young girl with her mother. She is my 2nd cousin once remove and a 4th cousin, 6th cousin and 6th cousin once removed! The inter-marriages in the New Forest have a lot to answer for! Suzey and I corresponded for a long time and eventually she came to England during a European tour and stayed with us – twice. We got to New Zealand in 2015 and met up with her and her family in Christchurch. Part of the trip was designed to coincide with a visit to my husband's New Zealand relatives for a family get-together in Oamaru. So far it is a nice, simple story. About two years ago we were looking at our emails and we both had one, at the same time from our respective NZ cousins. Not unusual until we looked at the content. We both had the identical photograph – my cousin Suzey and her husband standing next to Barry's cousin Barbara with her husband. How did they know each other? It seems that Barry's cousin's son worked with my cousin's husband. They got chatting at a 'works do' and comments like 'my cousin in England would

like to show us our heritage on the Isle of Wight' and 'we visited the New Forest'. At this point the penny dropped that they were talking about the same people - us! Good friends ever since.

## Downer but not out - yet! Val E.

One of my many tasks that keeps me sane and my brain healthy, though doing very little for my eyesight is transcribing, anything from indentures, bastardy bonds settlement certificates and parish registers.

As I have a foot in both camps so to speak (Hampshire and Wiltshire and that large forest in between), I fluctuate between the two, this by the way, led me to an idea for a future article on Boundaries, more of that in the next newsletter.

Having started an article in the previous newsletter on the Swing Riots and my family connection to them, it brought my attention to the Gange family of Earldoms parish of Landford, my 3-x great grandmother and sister to John Thomas Mitchell Gange the Swing Rioter.

Fanny as she liked to be known by, had an illegitimate child, James Gange, my 2-x great grandad, and according to a Bastardy Bond the father was John Spickernell. At that time, (several years ago) the Spickernell name was a dead end, so I looked at the surname of the man Fanny went on to marry. Charles Downer.

This is where one has feet in both camps. Charles downer was born in Breamore Hampshire in 1804 and he married Fanny in 1829 they had one child Henry Downer born 1830, before Fanny sadly died in 1832. The Downer family can be traced back to Charles Downer born (according to age at death) about 1705 but where in Hampshire? And that was I thought the end of that, as I have been in contact with another researcher of the Downer family who had also come to a halt at that date.

However, one day I googled the surname Downer and came up with an article written by David Moody<sup>1</sup>

Godshill and Woodgreen a squatter's settlement on the edge of the new Forest 1600–1840 intrigued I found that Woodgreen straddled several parishes including Breamore, and the article itself had 31 references to the Downer surname. This took me back to a Thomas Downer and Frances Downer of Fordingbridge who married a Mary Drodge and Edward Drodge respectively, again it was the name that did it. Drodge!

Edward Drodge's parents were Edward Drodge and Dorothy Raleigh. Now does that surname sound familiar.

Dorothy Raleigh was born in 1623 at Downton House, Downton in Wiltshire – so back over that border again, her parents being Walter Raleigh, Doctor of Divinity and Maria Gibbs. The Rev. Walter Raleigh was one of the sons of Carew Raleigh and his wife Dorothy Wroughton, whose brother was **the** Sir Walter Raleigh of history.

Sir Walter laying down his cloak for Good Queen Bess →

Now there is a connection I would never have made or known about had I not been intrigued by a surname.



<sup>1</sup>Proc. Hampshire Field Club Archaeol. Soc. 71, 2016, 126–147 (Hampshire Studies 2016)

There are 13 generations between me and Sir Walter but that is nothing – is it! So, have I finished my research on the Downer and Drodge families? I think I can safely say the answer is NO!  
To be continued....

## Featured Resource (apart from our own site)

### GRO Website



The Government website used by family historians to order birth death and marriage certificates is an amazing resource.

I remember in the early 70s lugging very large red volumes from shelves to a stupidly useless narrow bench like table looking manually through the indexes, while at the same time fighting for a space.

Days were spent manhandling these tomes searching for that elusive ancestor, scribbling down the reference and putting in a bulk order to be delivered via the postal service to your home. Admittedly the GRO site is only searchable for births and deaths but with the addition of the mother's maiden name for the births, which used to be only available from 1911 onwards, is now a heavily used resource by me at least.

Also, with the addition of the purchasing options from full certificate, PDF copy or digital image ranging in price from 12.50 for a full certificate, 8.00 for a PDF copy – both posted out to you, or the digital copy available immediately online for 3.00

| -----                 |                                                                              | Surname:                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <b>DOWNER, -</b>                                                             | <b>FARLEY</b>                                                                                                       |
|                       | <i>GRO Reference:</i> 1837 S Quarter in ISLE OF WIGHT                        | Volume 08 Page 166                                                                                                  |
| <input type="radio"/> | <b>DOWNER, -</b>                                                             | <b>COLLYER</b>                                                                                                      |
|                       | <i>GRO Reference:</i> 1837 D Quarter in ISLE OF WIGHT                        | Volume 08 Page 163                                                                                                  |
| <input type="radio"/> | <b>DOWNER, DAVID</b>                                                         | <b>WESTMORELAND</b>                                                                                                 |
|                       | <i>GRO Reference:</i> 1837 S Quarter in WATFORD UNION                        | Volume 06 Page 432                                                                                                  |
| <input type="radio"/> | <b>DOWNER, JAMES</b>                                                         | <b>HOLDING</b>                                                                                                      |
|                       | <i>GRO Reference:</i> 1837 S Quarter in FORDINGBRIDGE                        | Volume 08 Page 126                                                                                                  |
|                       | <b>Order this entry as a:</b>                                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Certificate <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PDF <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Image |
| <input type="radio"/> | <b>DOWNER, JESSE</b>                                                         | <b>UPTON</b>                                                                                                        |
|                       | <i>GRO Reference:</i> 1837 D Quarter in ISLE OF WIGHT                        | Volume 08 Page 173                                                                                                  |
| <input type="radio"/> | <b>DOWNER, SAMUEL</b>                                                        | <b>SMITH</b>                                                                                                        |
|                       | <i>GRO Reference:</i> 1837 S Quarter in OF SAINT GEORGE THE MARTYR SOUTHWARK | Volume 04 Page 90                                                                                                   |

I have frequently purchased a digital copy and found them just as good.

I download them on to my computer asap as they seem to disappear into the ether after a couple of months. Note if you want to check the progress of any of your orders make sure you make a note of your reference

- ▶ [Logout](#)
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You can check in the My Orders section how your order is progressing, but you do need your reference number.

Marriages are usually searched using a different site known as FreeBMD more on that next time

## **A tale of Woe and words of Caution. Sandy M**

I was always quite confident with my Hatch line from Wiltshire as I knew where they were born, baptised and buried. I visited the family there often. Until the fatal day when I decided to purchase more certificates from the GRO! The first one I received had a different father on a marriage certificate. That had to be wrong as only 2 or 3 people out of 74 in Public Trees on Ancestry had different parents – 71 people could not be wrong. Yes, they could. There are now more baptism and burial records online so I checked them all and I definitely had the wrong parents –which threw this line out completely. After many hours of going over and over different records I believe I have now found the correct line. The family I assume was illiterate as every date on census, marriage, death and burial records was different. He was described on his marriage document as ‘a man of the New Forest’ – not helpful! In the end the ‘new’ parents re-connected further back – hopefully! The words of caution – do not believe everything you read or hear so check it out thoroughly.

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That’s all for now, hope you have enjoyed the read, if you feel you have something to add, an experience or information that may be of use to others don’t hesitate to contact me via our fb page

August 2024

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