Pracy family history: the origins, growth and scattering of a Wiltshire and East London family from Tudor times to the 1920s, 5th edition (illustrated)

by David Pracy (b. 1946)

List of illustrations and captions

Note: what's new

The first four editions of the Pracy Family History were published on Martin HAGGER's website in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2012. Through these earlier editions, I have made many valuable contacts. I'm grateful to all of them for their support and encouragement, and all the new information they have provided. As a result of their contributions, and my own additional research, this fifth edition has trebled in size, from 25,000 words to nearly 78,000.

I have also for the first time added illustrations. Most are downloaded from the internet, but only where the copyright holder has made them freely available, or they are clearly out of copyright, or I can't see who the copyright holder is. I have as a matter of courtesy acknowledged them where possible, but if I have inadvertently included something that is in copyright, please let me know and I will remove it.

Apart from them, the main additions this time are:

- Chapter 3. Three Precy Cambridge graduates 1578-1610.
- Chapter 5. More about **Edward (b. 1668)** and his family, including Edward and Elizabeth (see Chapter 6). He was a currier (skilled leather worker) not a carrier, as I said in previous editions.
- A completely new chapter (6) about **Edward Prascey (1707-1780)** who became a wealthy gentleman, and about the descendants of his sister **Elizabeth (1704-1746)**. They were first cousins of Edmund Pracy senior, the baker. Based almost entirely on the very thorough research of Martin Hagger.
- Chapter 8. More about **Edmund** in the 1730s, including the earliest certain address for any of our family.
- Chapter 9. More speculation about **Mrs Newbank**, who was a character witness at **Elizabeth's** trial, but no firm conclusion.
- Chapter 14. Probable death in 1902 of merchant seaman **William Henry**, b. 1854. **Leslie Thomas (Les, 1920-2007)** a well-known conservationist in New Zealand.
- Chapter 17. More about the family soap business. Corrections and new information about **Amelia Caroline Hills** and her mother. More about the Army careers of her sons **Richard** and **Joseph William**.
- Chapter 18. More about **Henry Reginald**'s education and civil service career.
- Chapter 21. More about [Richard] **Henry Pracey**'s death, and about his **Dollwood** ancestors family from descendant Claire Pracey. A strange court case where he was said to have jumped into the Regent's Canal, and been pulled out by a stranger.

- Chapter 22. More about the **Gould** family and their scavenging business. **Emma (1818-1879)** in the Bethnal Green workhouse.

When quoting amounts of money, I sometimes gave rough modern equivalents based on the National Archives converter, but that is no longer being updated and I use http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/.

Ancestry has recently put on line London electoral registers 1832-1965. Their transcriptions sometimes produce strange results so it's always best to check the originals, but it is nevertheless a valuable new source. Extensions to the franchise in 1867 and 1884 made many of our family eligible for the vote for the first time, although they don't always seem to have registered. When they did, we have additional information about their movements, particularly between censuses. Until 1918, only men could vote in parliamentary elections, but in 1888 the Local Government Electors' Act gave some women the vote in county council elections, and a few Pracy women appear on electoral registers after that. For some unknown reason, many Pracys are listed as Pracey and the best way to catch both spellings is to search on Prac*y. No registers were published in 1916-17 because of the First World War, and I haven't generally searched later than that, other than to check one or two specific points.

More 20th-century death records from FreeBMD and Ancestry have come on line, so I have tried to trace deaths of Pracy women who married. Some tally exactly but in others the name is too common to be sure or something isn't quite right e.g. age, in which case I've given the likely date but with a question mark.

Just as I was proof-reading this edition, Findmypast included their British Newspaper Archive in a Full Subscription, which opens up a huge new resource for family historians. A quick search found 6005 hits for Pracy which – even when you take out piracy and similar red herrings – will involve investigating hundreds of articles. That will have to wait until the 6th edition!

Again I have made other minor additions and changes throughout, so previous readers may like to look just at those sections that most interest them, although all the pictures are new.

Part 1: Wiltshire

Three hundred years ago, on 16 October 1705, a boy was born at Bishopstone near Swindon in Wiltshire. On 1 November the parish register of St Mary's church recorded his name as Edmund PRESSEY. In 1722 Edmund was apprenticed in London as a baker and in 1744 he had a son, also Edmund, born in the parish of St Luke's Old Street, Finsbury.

Contemporary documents spelt the older Edmund's surname in at least six different ways, but the parish register recording his son's baptism gave his surname as PRACEY. That, with or without the E, is how our branch of the family has spelt it ever since. Most other branches have stayed with the Pressey spelling. Therefore, if you or one of your ancestors born in the 19th or 20th century has the name Pracy or Pracey, you are probably related – directly or by marriage – to the two Edmunds.

This brief history deals only with the Prac(e)y family. I should make four points about it:

- It mostly follows the male line – not because women were less important, but because they are more difficult to trace once married.
- It has far less detail about some people than others, simply because I know less about them. If you have more information about those who are just names, I will be happy to add it.
- It is mostly based on deductions from written sources, so if any of my conclusions are wrong I will welcome corrections.
- It usually finishes around the end of the First World War to avoid any possible danger of causing offence to the living, and because after that the family spread out so far that it became difficult to keep track of all the branches.

Only in Parts 3 and 4 of this history are you likely to encounter any relative that you have heard of. In order to get into it, therefore, you may like to try the helpful approach suggested by Mike JENNER, grandson of Horace Edward Pracy (1881-1954):

> I started trying to read it straight through from the beginning, but as soon as I started to hit names and dates (chapter 3 on) I found that in order to make it interesting I needed to establish where I was going to fit in. I hope I've expressed that clearly; there's nowt so boring as someone else's family history. I had to make your history mine in order to enjoy it.
>
> So I stopped reading and started moving back and forward using your index of contents and the tree from the website to find where I fitted in (under Horace Edward) and work back from that. Having roughly established my line I went back and read it straight through. Generally this went smoothly, though I found I had to keep on cross-referring, using your index of contents and the website tree to keep myself oriented and on the right track.

1. Presseys, Precys and Pracys

If you type ‘pracy’ into an internet search engine, you will come up with millions of hits because it happens to be the Polish word for work, but that is rather a red herring.

Most people think that the name PRACY sounds French. Précy is a small village in the Loire Valley, and there are indeed people in France with the surname Précy. Nearby in Lenoncourt, Meurthe-et-Moselle there was in the 17th century a family that spelt its surname Pracy. Because our family first arrived in London early in the 18th century, the obvious thought was that they were Huguenots – Protestants fleeing the persecution of Louis XIV. The Huguenot Society, however, sternly insist that if you’re not in their records you’re not one of them, and in our case at least they were proved right.

My pet theory was that we came from France a generation later than the Huguenots, but my own researches have in fact confirmed the more generally accepted explanation. Pracy is a variant of the West Country name more usually spelt PRESSEY, which means dweller by the priest’s enclosure.

Until the late 18th century spelling of surnames tended to be rather random. It depended partly whether the person involved could read and write, but more often on what was heard by the clergyman or recorder of the name. In 1707 two of our family were given as Susanna PREICE and Edward PRESEY in the same marriage document. Generally, consonants were much less likely to change than vowels.

In 17th-century Wiltshire our name was usually spelt PRECY or PRESSEY. However, in two early London records the spelling was more like ours. In 1578 Anne PRAYSEY married John MARTYNE at St Giles Cripplegate, but nothing else is known of her. In 1708 Morries PRASEY of St James Westminster married Jane STUBBS of Hampton at Saint Benet Paul's Wharf, although in his will of 1716 Morris and his relatives spelled their surname Pressey. I haven't linked these events to one another or to our family, but I thought that perhaps when they and the first Edmund came to London, something about their West Country burr caused those who recorded their surname to change the middle short E to a longer AY sound. History is seldom as simple as that, however, and so it proved in this case.

The earliest example of the Pracy spelling I have found anywhere was a baptism in 1691 at Cirencester in Gloucestershire, and there are other West Country examples in the 18th century. Edmund's father, William, was baptised Precy in 1665 and buried Pracy in 1746 (I have not yet traced his marriage). Phineas of Downton near Salisbury was baptised Pressey in 1762, married Precy in 1786 and died Pracey in 1841. The Prac(e)y spelling nevertheless died out in the West Country in the 1840s.

In 1881 the commoner Pressey spelling was still mostly to be found in a band across southern England – Wiltshire, Hampshire, Berkshire, Surrey, Kent and London. As late as the 1960s my near namesake David Leslie Pracy carefully spelt out his surname to a military officer, only to see him write it as Pressey.

Three families who migrated from Downton in Wiltshire to the USA and Canada are recorded as using it later in the 19th century, one of them as a conscious decision to distinguish them from other Presseys. Bonnie Parkins, who comes from the Canadian family, tells me that one branch continues to use the Pracey spelling.

Some censuses show Prac(e)ys not listed as such in the General Registry Office (GRO) birth, marriages and deaths indexes. In 1901, for example, there are 22 Praceys in eight families from six counties. I've checked a few of the originals which quite clearly say Prac(e)y, but none of them has any known links with our family. One of them was 23-year-old Aaron Pracey of Plymtree in Devon, who was born at Broadhembury in the same county. Aaron being a comparatively rare forename, I checked the FreeBMD website. There I found Aaron PEARCEY, registered in 1878 in the Honiton district which includes Broadhembury. It's a strange phenomenon that I don't fully understand but clearly there has been some kind of error. I have therefore ignored these other Prac(e)ys and assumed that all current ones are descended from the two Edmunds.

2. Bishopstone

Confusingly, there are two villages called Bishopstone in the not particularly large county of Wiltshire. The larger is in the south near Salisbury, but ours is in the far north-east, about six miles east of Swindon on the boundary with Oxfordshire (until 1974, with Berkshire). It is set in an attractive area of chalk uplands called the Vale of the White Horse, so named from the sinuously beautiful prehistoric feature at Uffington. In *Villages of the White Horse* (1913), the fine Wiltshire writer Alfred Williams rated

Bishopstone 'the prettiest of all the down-side, taken all round'[1]. Constructed from a variety of local materials, it 'snuggled into the downs as if it had grown there rather than been built' (H.W. Temperley).

Bishopstone simply means the settlement (tun) of the bishops. It was apparently formed as late as the 13th century, to provide an income for one of the prebendaries of Salisbury cathedral. Measuring roughly 7km by 2km, Bishopstone is the most easterly of four long, narrow parishes whose boundaries seem to have been defined with a geometric, rather artificial shape designed to give them 'settlement and meadow in the valley bottom, arable on the valley sides and part of the higher ground, and pasture beyond'[2]. It was for many years part of Ramsbury Hundred.

1. View of Bishopstone from the south. Mike Barratt, 2006.

The heart of Bishopstone lies in a triangle north of the Swindon-Wantage road, where two coombs *[wooded valleys]* converge. There St Mary's church, the manor house, the demesne farmstead and the mill were built. The village developed north of that nucleus as an arc of some 50 small farmsteads. Each had its own pasture with the uplands used for common pasture, where in 1647 the tenants had the right to graze a total of 1260 sheep.

The old saying 'as different as chalk and cheese' originated in Wiltshire, where the low-lying western parts of the county were suitable for dairy production while the chalky uplands in the east encouraged sheep farming. The sheep provided valuable meat and wool, but their main use was to provide dung to fertilise the thin chalkland soils for growing wheat and barley. At night the shepherd would pen the vast flocks of sheep in a fold made from hurdles, and each day he would move them on so that eventually the whole field was covered. This made communal management of farming essential, with a strong manorial court to control economic life and enforce discipline. With few hedges to mark boundaries, the traditional custom of beating the bounds was particularly important

[1] This paragraph based on WATTS, Ken. *Exploring historic Wiltshire*, vol 1: North. Ex Libris Press 1997 – a very interesting book with several pages about Bishopstone and the strip-lynchets.
[2] ROUTH, Marigold. *Amport: the story of a Hampshire parish*. Quoted in *The Family Historian*, Feb 2005, p22.

in chalkland parishes. There was normally, as in Bishopstone, a clearly defined village centre rather than a scatter of isolated farmhouses. It was a largely self-contained community which met most of its own needs. The most important agricultural improvement was the development in the early 17th century of water meadows, which covered grass with a thin layer of water. This encouraged early growth that could sustain livestock in early spring, when no other food was available. Only in the 19th century, with the coming of cheap fertilizer through the railways, did this pattern of agriculture come to an end.

2. Bishopsgate pond. Mike Barratt, 2006.

The most striking features of the landscape are the strip-lynchets, a series of steep terraced surfaces reminiscent of a Mediterranean hillside and popularly called 'shepherd's steps'. The most likely explanation is that they started spontaneously as a result of the downhill drift of plough-soil, but were then deliberately enlarged by medieval villagers to increase the amount of arable land. Taxation returns suggest that Bishopstone was fairly prosperous until the 16th century, but then it apparently fell into decline. The village website comments:

> Bishopstone, despite recent development, is one of the most attractive villages in Wiltshire. Many of the original cottages still stand and are much sought after. However, this was not always so because in 1659, John Aubrey writing in his *Topographical Collections* describes them thus: 'A more wretched lot could not be found in the whole country'.

During the 18th century the village began to spread south of the road and the number of farms fell, while those that remained grew bigger. In 1784 the parish measured 3,520 acres, of which 1,725 were arable, 700 meadow and lowland pasture, and 800 upland pasture and downland. By the 19th century most of the land had become concentrated into a few large farms, of which since the Second World War there have been only three – Manor, Prebendal and Eastbrook.

3. Lynchets above Bishopstone. Mike Barratt, 2006.

Swindon is now the dominant force in the area, and it is rather an anomaly that this quintessentially rural English village is administered by Swindon Borough Council. The parish council has a constant struggle to maintain Bishopstone's identity and independence. Many in Bishopstone feel that Swindon caters mainly for the needs of its own urban population, and that the village might fare better under the more rural Vale of the White Horse District Council. Sadly the only shop in Bishopstone has been forced to close but the village maintains a vigorous social life.

3. The early Precys

The *Victoria County History of Wiltshire* vol. 12, from which much of the above summary is taken, states:

> In the early 16th century the bishops leased their demesne lands to members of the Precy family and in 1542 Bishop Salcot granted a lease of them until 1605 to John Precy. In 1548 the bishop leased the whole manor, subject to the Precys' interests, to John Knight for 99 years. Knight was possibly a trustee of the Precys. Charles Precy held the manor from 1600 or earlier until his death in 1626. It passed to Thomas Precy and Henry Shelley, possibly his executors. In 1626-7 they sold the lease to Thomas Keate…

Until the late 19th century the land in Bishopstone was entirely owned by the church authorities, so it was held on leasehold or copyhold and it reverted to the church when those agreements ended. Thus there were no resident lords of the manor but, amazingly, our forebears were the nearest thing to it. They were apparently the leading landholders in this fairly prosperous village for at least a century.

Note: Even though our family was literate, spelling in those days was largely a matter of taste and the spelling of our name varied even more wildly than latterly. I, like the VCH, have referred to the Bishopstone family in general as the Precys, which was the commonest spelling in the parish records. It differentiates them from the broader Pressey family and from the 19th- and 20th-century London and other Pracys. I have also

produced a separate Timeline of the Precy family in Bishopstone, in which I have transcribed the versions of the name given in the original sources.

The earliest definite reference to a Precy in Bishopstone was Thomas, who left a will in 1500. The next was Harry, who died in 1523. John Aubrey wrote[3]:

> In the nave of the [Bishopstone] church beneath his picture on a brasse plate affixed to a marble this following inscription:
> Of your charite pray for ye sowle of Harry Preci, which Harry decesid on the ix day of July in the year of our Lord God Mdxxiii on whose sowle Jhu [Jesu] have merci. Amen.

By the 1860s the memorial had entirely disappeared from St Mary's church, as indeed had the family from the village. Wikipedia describes St Mary's as 'the finest Decorated church in the county, with a curious external cloister, and unique south chancel doorway, recessed beneath a stone canopy'.

4. Two views of Bishopstone church (*Martin Pracy)*

In 1545 a 'benevolence' *[Tudor Newspeak for tax]* was raised to help King Henry VIII fight yet another war against France. It was calculated on the ability to pay and Bishopstone was the most heavily taxed village in the Ramsbury Hundred, suggesting a considerable degree of prosperity. Heading the list, dated 1 April 1545, was John Precy, who had leased the village from Bishop Salcot in 1542. John and one other resident paid £1, which would have been the equivalent of £200 in today's money. In the whole hundred only Sir Edward Darrell and his widowed mother, distant relatives of the king's late wife Jane Seymour, paid more.

On 1 July 1576 a similar benevolence was raised, for Queen Elizabeth. Already things for the village and for our family seem to have been on the slide. Other places paid more than

[3] *Topographical Collections AD 1659-1670.*

Bishopstone, and Henry Precy was only third on the list. The income from his land was nevertheless a healthy £7 a year, on which he paid a standard penny in the shilling, or 11s 8d.

At the Quarter Sessions of Easter 1583 Thomas Whitway of Ramsbury gentleman was 'bound in £20', presumably because he had been accused of some misdemeanour. Henry Precy of Bishopstone gentleman and another each stood surety of £10 for Whitway's next appearance in court.

Later in 1583, at the Michaelmas session, Henry himself was on the wrong side of the law. Along with Ellen, Samuel and Charles Precy and others, he was indicted of 'rout, riot etc'. They pleaded not guilty but were fined 2s each. At the Easter 1584 session each had to pay a further 1s, although it is not clear whether they were found guilty. If they were, they escaped fairly lightly with a total fine of 12s, about the same as Henry paid in tax a few years earlier. If not, the fine seems very harsh.

Henry died in 1599 and left a will, which I haven't yet managed to decipher.

Note: The birth and burial transcriptions done by the Wiltshire Family History Society seem to have been done with great care. They have for example picked up peculiar spellings such as Sammull for Samuel, and differences of spelling between parish registers and bishop's transcripts. I have therefore been content to use their transcriptions.

One peculiarity, however, is that many Precys were baptised and buried in Bishopstone, but very few married. Several of them do not show up on Wiltshire marriage indexes either. It's possible that they were irregular or clandestine marriages (see note, ch 7.)

All the evidence is that babies were baptised within a few weeks of birth, and certainly people were buried very soon after death. I have therefore usually referred to births and deaths in this narrative, but I've given exact dates of baptisms and burials in the Timeline. Infant mortality was so high that it would slow down the narrative to mention them all here, but I think it important that these children should not entirely be forgotten so I have put all the details in the Timeline.

Parish registers survive from 1573, among the earliest in the area. The first records of Precys were the burials of Edward (1575), 'Elinor w. of Henry gent' (1586) and Samuel (1587). Elinor [Ellen?] and Samuel could well be the people mentioned in the 1583-4 quarter session records.

Then came a little clutch of five baptisms. It is likely that the five were siblings or cousins, but the information provided is too sparse for certainty. Three of the infants probably died young. Henry, who was born in 1589, was possibly 'Hairie Precy' buried in 1620. The most significant from our point of view was **Samuel** (baptised 29 July 1593), the earliest Precy who was indisputably our ancestor.

There may have been other Precy entries, but unfortunately the next ten years have been cut out of the register. The burial of Henry, who died in 1599 and left a will, could well have been recorded in the missing pages. The entries for 1600-3 were recovered from the bishop's transcripts. They give the baptism of Mary and the burial of 'Elizabeth Precye gent' [sic] in 1600.

In December 1603 the vicar of Bishopstone, Christopher Hare Poole, died. His successor gave considerably more information about the individuals on the register, including fathers' and husbands' names. If only Poole had done the same and the pages had not been cut from the register, we could probably have taken our knowledge of the family back another generation or two. It may still be possible to do so from other sources.

In the next 26 years there were no Precy baptisms but five burials: 'Richard son of Mr Henry' and Thomas in 1604, Joan wife of Thomas in 1606, 'Hairie' [sic – possibly Henry born 1589] in 1620 and 'Charles Precy Esq' in 1626.

Of some 600 baptisms and burials recorded between 1573 and 1626, Precy burials were four of only six entries to note 'gent', 'Mr' or 'Esq' – in those days a mark of high status. The other two were the baptisms in 1623 and 1626 of the children of 'Henry Shelley gent'. It is significant that in 1626-7 Shelley and Thomas Precy, members of the two leading gentry families in Bishopstone, were the men who sold off the lease of the manor. The *VCH* says that they were possibly Charles's executors, although no will or administration for him has survived.

Three members of the family attended Cambridge University, an indication of their status. The Samuel who died in 1587 had matriculated at Magdalen Hall on 7 July 1578, aged 17. Thomas, described as a 'gent.', matriculated at Oriel College on 23 November 1581 aged 14, and went on to be a student at the Middle Temple in 1589. Henry matriculated at Magdalen College on 25 January 1610 aged 18.

Beginning in 1529, the College of Arms undertook Visitations throughout the country, to establish whether coats of arms were being used correctly and investigate claims for new ones. Those for Wiltshire were carried out in 1565 and 1623 but the Precys were not mentioned in either of them, perhaps because they were only principal tenants rather than landowners in their own right. At least they were not among those dismissed as '*ignobiles omnes*', in a 'Note of all such as have Usurpet the Name and Title of Gentlemen without Authoritie and were Disclaimed at Salisburie in the County of Wiltsheire in Sept a$_{o}$ 1623'.

* * * * *

I'm not sure how all these early Precys were related. The following chronology fit all the known facts, but can only be very tentative:

- Thomas who died in 1500 was the father of Harry who died in 1523.
- Harry was the father or grandfather of John who in the 1540s held the lease of Bishopstone from Bishop Salcot.
- John was the father or grandfather of Henry, who died in 1599 and left a will.
- Henry married Elinor, who died in 1586. Henry and Elinor were the parents of Charles (died 1626) and Thomas, who were therefore brothers. Possibly also of Edward (died 1575), Samuel (died 1587) and Richard (died 1604). All five could have been baptised in Bishopstone before 1573.
- Charles married 'Elizabeth Precye gent', who died in 1600 giving birth to Mary.

- The Thomas who was mentioned in Henry's will (1599), graduated from Cambridge in 1581 and entered the Inner Temple in 1589, was married to Joan (died 1606) and sold the lease (1627) were all the same man. He is nevertheless a bit of a mystery: the Bishopstone parish registers do not mention him anywhere else, the Nimrod and Wiltshire FHS indexes have no marriage for a Thomas & Joan, and the National Burial Index does not list him.
- The children baptised 1588-92, and possibly others baptised 1594-9, could have been born to Charles & Elizabeth or to Thomas & Joan.
- Our earliest certain ancestor, Samuel who was born in 1593, can't have been Charles's son because, if he was, he would have been his heir. He was probably Thomas's son.
- Because Charles had no surviving children, his brother Thomas was his heir. From our point of view Thomas seems to have been the villain of the piece, because as soon as Charles died he sold off the lease and the family's influence in Bishopstone was never as great again.

4. The two Samuels

Samuel I (1593-1678)

Samuel is the earliest in our direct line that I have traced with any degree of certainty. He was described as a yeoman, a prosperous farmer with some influence in the village. He probably employed agricultural labourers who may well have dined with the Precy family, and perhaps even lived in the house.

Around 1626 Samuel must have married Edith, although I have found no record of a marriage. Their three daughters all died before they were four years old, but their two sons survived to adulthood.

Their elder son Charles was baptised in 1628. He married Mary BUTLER of Stratton St Margaret in 1654, when he was described as a 'gent'. They had three children but none outlived them. Charles died in 1672 and left a will in which he was described as a husbandman, a farmer below the rank of yeoman. That apparently represented something of a decline from the status of 'gent', although he did leave some £25 (£2,000 today). The widowed Mary died in 1680, having made a will which shows that she was living in a substantial house. She made various individual bequests, and even so an inventory valued her remaining possessions at nearly £50. She left everything to her Butler relatives, which did nothing for the long-term prosperity of the Precys.

Edith died in 1635, probably in childbirth, for she was buried two days after the baptism of her daughter. It must have been a bitter-sweet experience for Samuel to go to church twice in three days for such opposite reasons. He suffered a further double tragedy in the spring of 1637, when his daughters Elizabeth and Sarah died within six weeks of one another. At some unknown point he was remarried to Ann, who died in 1667.

In the Civil War, chalk country tended to be Royalist but Wiltshire as a whole supported Parliament, so we don't know which side Samuel took, if any. He may, however, have belonged to a remarkable movement, known as the Clubmen. Mostly yeomen and

farmers like Samuel, they opposed the constant disruption caused by the war and told both sides: 'If you offer to plunder or take our cattle, be assured we will give you battle'. Eventually Cromwell defeated them but theirs was a remarkable expression of ordinary people's feelings.

Samuel was buried on 12 December 1678 aged 85. He died intestate so his only surviving child, Samuel II, had to produce an inventory in order to obtain administration. Samuel's 'Goods, Chattels and Credit' were valued at only £11, which even then was well below average for a farmer, and contrasts considerably with the estate left by his daughter-in-law Mary two years later. It may suggest things were already in decline, and certainly they were when Samuel II died almost 40 years later.

* * * * *

Because the prebendaries of Salisbury Cathedral seldom lived on their properties, they usually appointed a vicar who was granted land of his own and received the tithes from the Prebend copyholders[4]. In 1672 the vicar of Bishopstone commissioned a glebe terrier, a survey intended to establish his income from the village[5]. Although the terrier covered only a small part of Bishopstone, it helps give a picture of the village at the time. Landholdings were scattered in fairly small parcels throughout Bishopstone – presumably so that each owner had a mixture of meadow, arable and pasture, and none could hog all the best portions.

The vicar had six major tenants. One of them was Samuel Precy, by then nearly 80 years old. He had a dwelling house (which would have been timber-framed with a thatched roof), barn, stable, cowhouse, 'backside' (back yard), orchard and close. He could well have stored grain in the barn, obtained meat and dairy products such as milk and cheese from the cattle, and grown his own fruit in the orchard. This suggests that he was a mixed farmer who would at least been self-sufficient, and probably able to sell his surplus at a profit. The house would have been sparsely furnished, with most of Samuel's wealth tied up in the farm.

The terrier gives a detailed account of all Samuel's landholdings. Although the art of map-making was well advanced, the churchwardens chose to produce the information in the form of a listing of individual pieces of land, described by reference to local place names and adjacent land holders. Details of the neighbours are not of general interest but I have quoted the place names, even though they mean little to those of us who don't know Bishopstone well. They reveal an intimate knowledge of the patchwork that made up the 17th-century countryside, scarcely possible for a modern farmer roaring up and down a hedgeless prairie on a tractor. I find them deeply evocative of their place and time:

> 3 acres of arable above Ickleton way; a head acre in the east field; two 3yards at Ladder way; one acre at Marwell; ½ acre at Combe foot; ½ acre in the Upper Hitchings; ½ acre in the Combes; two butts *[small irregularly shaped pieces of arable land]* in the Combes; ½ acre below Ridgeway; ½ acre on Ridgeway; headland ½ acre above Ridgeway; ½ acre at

[4] My thanks to Mrs GI Parker, who has researched the development of the church's landholdings in Bishopstone. She has very kindly corrected my misunderstanding of this and some other aspects of the village's history, and given some very useful new information.

[5] Transcribed by the Wiltshire Record Society and published in 2003.

Elcombe; ½ acre at Broad Gap; ½ acre in Flint furlong; ½ acre at Short hedges; a 3yard in the same furlong; one acre at Upper Short hedge; ½ acre on the Downs; ½ acre in the Downs; one acre at the Downs *[I don't know whether there is a subtle difference between on, in and at the Downs]*; ½ acre at the two short hedges; 1 yard in Chested; a headland acre at White pitts; 1½ acres in Crannell; ½ acre at Sanders hedge; ½ acre at Water Slad; ½ acre on Ridgeway; ½ acre at Ridgeway; ½ acre at Helman's hedge; ½ acre in Shillands; ½ acre in Nill; 2 acres at Marwell; ½ acre at Padpit; 1yd in Helands; 1 acre in Ull furlong; ½ acre in Black Lands hedge; ½ acre in Sheephouse furlong; ½ acre in Long Breach; 1yd in Old Craft; 1½ yds at Ladder; ½ acre at Horton's bush.

Samuel also had a few small unnamed pieces of land defined only by neighbouring landholders, and his sons Charles and Samuel occupied some land. Overall the family held some 50 acres scattered throughout the village.

Samuel II (1629-1716)

Samuel, the younger son of Samuel I and Edith, was baptised on 27 December 1629. On 17 September 1655 he married Priscilla TAYLOR (1636-1724), daughter of William. Samuel and Priscilla had ten children, and at least seven survived to adulthood.

Thomas was born in 1656. I've found no marriage for him, but he was a bondsman at the wedding of his sister Sarah. This entailed swearing that the details of the marriage allegation *[statement made on oath to obtain a marriage licence]* were true, and that there was no impediment to the marriage. His status was given as 'gent', an appellation that was given to his nephew Edward Prascey in his will of 1780, but not again to one of our family for a further century. Thomas died in 1723.

Sarah was born in 1659, and in 1690 she married John DORMER. They had three children – Sarah in 1691, Elizabeth in 1695 and John in 1697.

John came from Highworth, eight miles north-north-west of Bishopstone. Highworth is the highest point, not only in the worth (settlement) of which it is a part, but also in the whole county of Wiltshire. An important market town, it suffered badly during the Civil War but in the late 17th century enjoyed a resurgence. It was at this time that Sarah and two of her brothers moved to Highworth, although they were only there for about 40 years. In 1800 it was still the largest town in north-east Wiltshire, but the decision of the Great Western Railway to locate its works at Swindon led to Highworth's decline. It's perhaps for this reason that quite a few fine houses survive from the period the Precys were there, inspiring John Betjeman to describe Highworth as 'one of the most charming and unassuming country towns in the west of England'[6].

Charles was born in 1663. He married Hannah CLUTTERBUCK in 1688, when he was described as a yeoman of Bishopstone. That may have reflected his status as the son of a yeoman rather than because he held sufficient land in his own right, for he was a blacksmith, working in Highworth. He and Hannah had five children – Hannah born 1690; Thomas born 1694; Samuel born 1696; twins Charles and Edward born 1700, although Edward died after a few days. Strangely, no other deaths and no marriages for this family have been traced in Highworth or anywhere else.

[6] Information from http://www.highworthhistoricalsociety.co.uk/abouthighworth.htm, where there is much more about Highworth.

WILLIAM, our ancestor, was born in 1665 (see next chapter).

Edward was born in 1668 and became a currier. His craft required hard manual labour, great skill and a range of special hand tools. He turned stiff, tanned leather into a pliant, workable material for another craftsman such as a glover to transform into a finished product[7]. Perhaps because his tools were so valuable, Edward had a policy with the Sun Fire Insurance company of London.

Edward had four children – Elizabeth (1704-1746), Edward (1707-1780), Sarah (1710-1723) and Jane (b.1714). Edward junior was to become one of the wealthiest and most influential members of our family, and he took responsibility for his sister Elizabeth's children after her early death (for much more about them, see Chapter Six).

Elizabeth was born in 1671. She married Henry DICKESON of 'the parish of St Andrew in the City of London'. This is the first known occasion on which the family had links outside Bishopstone and the surrounding area, although these contacts were to develop rapidly in the 18th century.

Susanna was born in 1674 and married Henry GREENE in 1707. Although both came from Bishopstone, the marriage took place at Highworth. Susanna's brother, Edward the currier, was a bondsman.

5. Highworth High Street looking west, c.1905. *From Highworth Historical Society website*

Note: Before calendar reform in 1752, the New Year began on 25 March. For events between 1 January and 24 March I have therefore used the standard convention of giving the year according to contemporary and modern reckoning. For example, the parish register gave the year of Samuel's death mentioned in the next paragraph as 1715 but we would think of it as 1716 so I have put 1715/6.

[7] Information from https://www.curriers.co.uk/history, which gives a full description of the craft.

Samuel II died on 2 February 1715/6, aged 86. Priscilla was buried on 15 January 1723/4, aged 87. Until the 20th century the greatest risk to life came in the first five years so for people to live into their eighties was not as unusual as might be thought, but it still was quite rare for a couple to have their 60th wedding anniversary.

Whether they enjoyed the occasion is another matter, for it seems that Samuel was in a state of mental confusion. He died a few months later 'intending but not effecting… a will'. He apparently wanted his son-in-law Henry Dickeson to be the executor but Dickeson refused, as did Samuel's eldest son, Thomas.

Another son-in-law, Henry Greene, was one of Samuel's creditors and undertook the administration of the intended will. The law would provide an inventory and Greene was to use the proceeds to pay off the debts 'of the said Samuel as far as his goods shall extend'. At the time of his marriage Henry was described as a yeoman but the 1716 documents referred to him as a butcher, as did Priscilla's will in 1724.

The inventory gives a glimpse of what must once have been quite a prosperous household, shortly before it fell into terminal decline (£1 would be worth £85 today):

	£ s d
Imprimis *[First]* His wearing apparel and money in purse	2 – 0 – 0
Item *[Next]* One feather bed and all things belonging to itt, One Trunk, and a presse in the Inner Chamber	2 – 10 – 0
Item One feather bed and all things belonging to itt and one Coffer in the Hal Chamber	1 – 10 – 0
Item In the Kitchen Chamber one >>> at	0 – 5 – 0
Item In the Hall one Tableboard and frame, two >>> stools one spitt	0 – 10 – 0
Item one Hogshead two Barrells & two Flitches of Bacon in the Buttery	1 – 10 – 0
Item one Chair one warming pan two pewter platters in the Inner room	0 – 12 – 0
Item The brasse in the Kitchen	0 – 15 – 0
Item the Executors >>>	14 – 0 – 0
	23 – 12 – 0

John Spaniswick Robert Rowse

It seems that 'the law', through the executors, contributed the bulk of the money, and that Samuel's possessions were worth less than £10.

On 3 January 1723/4 Priscilla made a will. She declared herself 'weak of body but sound and perfect in mind and memory (thanks be given unto Almighty God)'. It was a standard formula, but perhaps also recognition of the contrast between her mental state and that of her late husband. Probably to express her gratitude and to help pay off the debts, she left everything to Henry Greene.

Again an inventory was taken:

Imprimis Her Wearing Apparell	00 : 10 : 00
Item her old Feather bedd and three beddsteedds with bedding and materials thereto belonging	02 : 15 : 00

Item Three old Coffers one Box and two old Trunks	00 : 10 : 00
Item Brass and pewter	00 : 10 : 00
Item two table boards with all other Lumber	00 : 10 : 00
	04 : 15 : 00

Priscilla's decision to make a will, the brevity of the inventory and the references to several things being old all suggest a further descent into shabby gentility.

5. The decline of the Precys in Bishopstone

Despite their problems, the Precys were influential in Bishopstone at least until the 1750s, but by 1800 none of the family was still there. This chapter describes and attempts to explain that disappearance.

William (1665-1746)

William was baptised on 28 December 1665**.** He married Mary around 1695, although I haven't traced the marriage and don't know her maiden name. They had 13 children, ten of whom survived to adulthood. He must have found some way of reversing the family's slide into debt, because he was able to afford the fees to apprentice three of his younger sons in London, rather than locally which would have been cheaper. This decision proved crucial to the survival of our family (see Chapter Seven).

Henry was born in 1696 and died in 1770. He is probably 'Henry Pracy' who in 1727 married Mary PACKER just across the Berkshire boundary at Lambourn, now best known for its association with the breeding and training of fine racehorses.

William was born in 1698 and died in 1738, apparently unmarried. On 23 February "William son of William Pracy and Elizabeth his wife" was baptised at Shillingstone in Dorset, but it's unlikely to have been the same William.

Thomas was born in 1700. He was probably apprenticed as a wheelwright in London around 1717 (see Chapter Seven). He can't have been the Thomas who died in 1723, because he would have been described as 'son of William'.

Mary was born in 1702 and married George CURTIS in 1731. FamilySearch lists a George Curtis baptised on 9 May 1703 at Lambourn, which would tie in nicely with Henry's marriage there later, although we can't be certain it's the same person.

There is no record that George's family had any previous connection with Bishopstone, but after their marriage he and Mary settled there. It would have been more normal for the newly-weds to move to the groom's village, which may confirm my suggestion that William improved the family fortunes so the Precys were better off than the Curtises. George and Mary had seven children, as did their son Henry. Henry's son Edward Curtis was still in Bishopstone in the early 19th century, working as a blacksmith.

In the 18th century there was something of a fashion for giving children their mothers' maiden name. On 24 May 1747 George and Mary Curtis's youngest child was baptised Charles Pracy Curtis, and on 1 January 1783 Charles's brother Henry had his son baptised Henry Precy Curtis. There were very few such instances in Bishopstone and the first was the daughter of a 'gent', so the naming of the boys may represent a memory of

the Precys' former prestige or an attempt to perpetuate the family name. If so, it was unsuccessful: in 1817 'Henry Preacy Curtis' and Ann SAYER were married in Highworth, and in 1850 Henry died in the Swindon Registration District which included Highworth and Bishopstone, but I have found no later mention of our family in the area.

EDMUND (born 16 October 1705) was our ancestor.

Charles was born in 1707 and apprenticed dyer in London in 1726 (see Chapter Seven).

Elizabeth (1708-1741), **Jane** (1713-1736) and **Edith** (1715-1736) all died unmarried and relatively young.

Samuel was born in 1716. In 1738 at Liddington, the most westerly of the four long narrow upland parishes mentioned above, he married Mary STOURS of Farmborough, Berkshire. Nothing more is known of him.

Four Precys who died between 1736 and 1741 were described as the children of William and Mary, suggesting that she was still alive, although I have not traced her burial. Infant mortality in the 18th century was an all too familiar reality, but to see their children grow to adulthood and then lose all but two or three must have been particularly painful for the old couple. In one awful week in December 1741 they buried their grandsons Charles and George Curtis and their daughter Elizabeth. William himself was buried on 3 January 1745/6 aged 80.

* * * * *

According to the custom of Bishopstone village, copyholders and leaseholders would have been obliged to house two or three other people, known as 'lives'. Presumably Samuel II could have had his son William as one of his 'lives', and as Samuel got older William would have taken over the running of the farm. William could in turn have had his two eldest sons, Henry and William II, as 'lives', and packed the younger ones off to London.

William seems to have been more resourceful than his father and grandfather. It must have been a blow to his plans when young William died, apparently unmarried and childless, and Henry didn't produce an heir. My original suggestion that William failed to make a will because there was little to leave was perhaps unfair. It may just have been that everything went to Henry because, sadly, most of his siblings were dead.

A survey of 1758 shows that 'Henry Presey' was the only Precy copyholder or leaseholder in Bishopstone. On 2 February 1754 he had taken up the copyhold of a fairly substantial property overlooking the millpond, in an area known as Hockerbench. Henry's 'lives' were Henry and William CURTIS, perhaps relatives of his brother-in-law George, who was the copyholder of a property some 200 yards to the north. Further north still was another property under the name of 'Mary Presey', who could conceivably have been William's widow although she would have been over 80. These three properties were perhaps all that was left of the much larger landholding that our family apparently had earlier. By a remarkable coincidence Henry Precy's property became part of the home of Rob Clark, Chair of Bishopstone Parish Council, who gave much valuable advice in the preparation of this part of the history. That area of the village became known as Rotten Row, because until recent improvements the houses were regarded as being of poor quality.

Paul Williams, speaking at the Swindon branch of the Wiltshire Family History Society in 2008, suggested that Bishopstone millpond in Henry's time was the original site of the Moonraker legend. A group of men were said to have sank barrels of smuggled brandy in the pond, and returned a few days later to reclaim their loot by hooking the casks out of the water with agricultural rakes. On being challenged by a group of excise officers, one of them pointed to the reflection of the full moon in the water and replied: 'We'm tryin' to get that girt big cheese out of the water.' The officers rode off, chuckling over the idiocy of the local yokels, who rapidly retrieved their precious brandy. However, most of Wiltshire claims a connection with the Moonraker legend so the claim remains unproven[8].

After 1760 there are just four further mentions of Precys in Bishopstone, only one of whom was certainly from our family. 'Jane Pracy', who died in 1762, may have been the daughter of Edward the currier, although there is no reason to suppose that she went to Bishopstone. Henry died in 1770, the last male Precy known to have been in Bishopstone. 'Mary Preasy', who died in September 1791, could have been the widow of Henry or of his younger brother Samuel. 'Sarah Presey', who married William NORRIS in March 1791, apparently died in 1824 aged 70; there is no obvious way she could fit into our family and she was perhaps Sarah Pressey, baptised at Salisbury in 1753.

* * * * *

Though no longer gentry, the Precys had remained in the middling ranks of Bishopstone society, and three of them made wills. The rapid decline of the Precys is rather surprising, but there seem to have been three main reasons:

- The failure of the two Samuels to make wills generated considerable paperwork, and may suggest a somewhat unbusinesslike attitude that could have contributed to the family's financial problems.
- After the death of the copyholder, the 'lives' mentioned above were entitled to take up part of the holding, so copyholds became more numerous but smaller in size. This constant sub-division of their property may have left the Precys without enough land to run a working farm.
- Infant mortality was fairly high and few of the Precy boys who did survive to adulthood are recorded as having male children: in five consecutive generations the male line carried on through just one man – the two Samuels and William in Bishopstone, and the two Edmunds in Finsbury.

There was also a nationwide change in agricultural conditions, to which these difficulties made the Precys ill-equipped to respond. Bill Wheeler describes how nearby in Hampshire the Munday family of Appleshaw suffered a similar decline[9]. He quotes GE Mingay, one of the finest historians of rural England:

> Small occupiers were especially vulnerable to market forces, and it is now apparent that the era of low prices, 1650-1750, had seen a tendency for land to accumulate in the hands of larger proprietors.

[8] Article by Lewis Cowen, *Wiltshire Gazette & Herald* 25 Jan 2007. Sourced 8 Oct 2008.

[9] IN *The Family Historian* (Feb 2005).

The patchwork of small scattered fields described in the 1672 terrier cannot have been very efficient. Despite the custom of 'lives', farms in Bishopstone, as elsewhere, were aggregated into fewer, larger holdings. The Precys had been fairly substantial proprietors and might have been expected to take advantage of this change, but circumstances conspired against them. The death of Henry in 1770 probably marked the end of any significant Precy landholding in the village.

In 1600 our family was the most powerful in Bishopstone, and in 1700 they were still influential there. By 1800 they had left the village completely and were living in one of the poorer parts of London, although the nephews and nieces of Edward Prascey thrived, and some bore his name. To my knowledge no branch of our family preserved any memory of our Wiltshire origins. Yet my father used at least ten words and phrases claimed by the Wiltshire Family History Society as local dialect. Whether they somehow passed down through seven generations, or are not peculiar to the county, I don't know.

* * * * *

I began my family history research in 1973, but it was not until 2002 that I discovered the baptism of the younger Edmund and his father's origins in Bishopstone. The story of how I did it may be of interest to other family historians, and can be found in a separate document, From north Wiltshire to north London.

Part 2: The move to London

The victory of Protestant William III over Catholic James II in 1688 ensured that the social and religious upheavals of the Civil War gave way to a moderate, relatively stable period. Between 1640 and 1750 the population, which had doubled in the previous hundred years, remained almost static.

Only London grew to any extent, doubling in numbers to become the biggest city in Europe. That increase was almost entirely due to migration from the countryside rather than to natural population growth. The forces which pushed Edmund, and his brothers Thomas and Charles, away from Bishopstone drew them to a capital described as '…a magnet for great numbers of people hoping to better themselves; too often it killed them. Yet thousands of these optimistic immigrants survived and created a city whose prosperity and vitality astonished all who came there.'[10]

6. Edward Prascey (1707-1780) and his sister Elizabeth's descendants

One of those who thrived was Edward Prascey. He was the son of Edward the currier (b.1668) and first cousin of Edmund, Thomas and Charles. Because he had no surviving sons, we knew little of him, but he was by some way the most influential member of our family in the 18th century. Edward was baptised at Highworth on 29 June 1707, and presumably born a few days earlier.

[10] UNDERDOWN, David. *Start of play: cricket and culture in 18th century England*. Allen Lane the Penguin Press, 2000, p74.

In 1703 at Ramsbury Edward senior married Jane THORNBOURGH of Bishopstone and their daughter Elizabeth was baptised in 1704. But there is a mystery here because the mother of Edward's three youngest children – Edward, Sarah and Jane – was called Elizabeth. One possibility is that Jane died and Edward remarried, but neither event has been traced in parish registers. Alternatively, 'Jane' may in fact have been Elizabeth wrongly recorded in the original, or there could have been a later transcription error.

In 1727 Edward junior was apprenticed in London as a vintner to William Smith and described as 'son of Edward Prascey of Hyworth in the County of Wiltshire'. Although we previously knew of both Edwards, this was the crucial piece of evidence that proved they were father and son. I'm very grateful to Martin Hagger for uncovering this, and his prodigious efforts in providing most of the information in this chapter.

The Vintners' Company received their first charter in 1363[11]. It was a grant of monopoly for trade with Gascony in southern France, then an English possession. It gave them far-reaching powers, including duties of search throughout England. The company was placed eleventh out of the Twelve Great Livery Companies in the order of precedence of 1515, but then went slowly into decline. In 1725 the duty of search was finally abandoned and fewer members of the Trade were becoming members of the Company, but Edward bucked this trend and developed a successful career. He twice appeared in a livery company poll-book as a Vintner, in 1759 of London and in 1768 of Henley-on-Thames.

From 1734 to 1740 Edward lived and had a business in the parish of St Benet Fink, close to the Bank of England in the Broad Street ward of the City. The church was demolished in the early 1840s to make way for an enlarged Royal Exchange, and the proceeds used to build a new church with the same name in Tottenham.

Edward was a citizen of some influence. Unfortunately the land tax records for the parish give no detail so we don't know exactly where his property was, but it certainly had one of the highest assessments in the immediate area. In 1736 he joined with John Bliss, Theophilus Perkins and Thomas Matthews to present a petition to the Lord Mayor of London, Sir John Tompson [sic]. The Churchwardens and Overseers of St Benet Fink had made a poor relief assessment of eightpence in the pound, which Edward and his co-petitioners described as

> …Illegall Unequall and Oppressive being a Strick Pound rate for One Year without regard being had to the Ability and Circumstances of the Severall Persons thereby rated and in as much as James Colebrooke Esqr . & Co. John Curryer & Co: Robert Bishop & Timothy Helnesley being of Superior Ability to Your Petitioners are rated Less than and not Assessed Equally with Your Petitioners. Therefore Your Petitioners Conceiving themselves Agreived by the said Assessment do Humbly Appeal therefrom And Humbly pray that Your Lordship and Worships Will make Such Order therein as to Your Lordship and Worship Shall Seem meet.

The original document was among the Justices' Sessions Papers on the *London Lives* website, but the outcome is unknown.

[11] There is more about the Vintners at https://vintnershall.co.uk/the-company/

Edward apparently moved away from London in the 1740s, but retained his links with the city. In 1739, he took on Richard Andrews as an apprentice for seven years but on 6 February 1744, Andrews was 'turned over' to Benjamin Wilding Citizen and Vintner of London for the remainder of his apprenticeship. No reason is given. In 1754 Edward wrote confirming that Richard Andrews "did justly & truly serve me as Apprentice from the date of his Indentures to the time he was Turned Over to Mr Benjamin Wilding..." If Richard Andrews was such a good apprentice, he may have been turned over because Edward had left London.

By 1751 Edward had taken over as landlord of the Red Lion, a famous old inn next to the bridge over the Thames at Henley. It had its origins in a Chapter House of about 1400 and is still there today, although it was extensively altered in 1889. It acted as the local office for the major mail coach services that ran from London via Hounslow and Maidenhead on to Bristol and elsewhere, and were authorised by the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford for travel to the university. Frequent references to Edward in the *Oxford Journal* suddenly cease in March 1767, so he almost certainly gave up his tenancy on Lady Day, 25 March, and retired shortly before his 60th birthday.

The Vintners take part in the well-known annual ceremony of swan-upping on the River Thames, in which swans are examined for injury or disease and then marked. In Edward's time, Henley was the most westerly point at which swan-upping took place, so he may well have played a significant part in the ceremony[12].

6. The Red Lion was extensively rebuilt in 1889 but is still an attractive building.
Photo by permission of Russ Hamer under licence.

[12] For a fascinating illustrated description, see https://vintnershall.co.uk/swans/

It was while staying at the Red Lion in 1776 that Dr Johnson is said to have been inspired to make his declaration that ‘There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man, by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn’. And the poet William Shenstone (1714-1763) scratched a poem entitled *On an Inn at Henley* on a window there:

TO thee, fair Freedom! I retire,
From flattery, cards, and dice, and din;
Nor art thou found in mansions higher
Than the low cot, or humble *inn.*
'Tis here with boundless power I reign,
And every health which I begin,
Converts dull port to bright champagne;
Such Freedom crowns it, at an *inn.*
I fly from pomp, I fly from plate,
I fly from Falsehood's specious grin;
Freedom I love, and form I hate,
And choose my lodgings, at an *inn.*
Here, waiter! take my sordid ore,
Which lackeys else might hope to win;
It buys what courts have not in store,
It buys me Freedom, at an *inn.*
Whoe'er has travell'd life's dull round,
Where'er his stages may have been,
May sigh to think he still has found
The warmest welcome -- at an *inn.*

So the Red Lion was of more than local importance.

When he died in 1780 Edward left a will, in which he described himself as ‘of Whitchurch in the County of Oxford Gentleman’. Whitchurch, about 12 miles from Henley, is a pleasant riverside village which was a desirable retreat for the well-to-do, although William Shenstone condemned it for ‘too much trivial elegance, punctilio and speculation’. Edward had probably made enough from the Red Lion to be able to retire there and bought a substantial house, on which he took out fire insurance for £400 with the Rex Company. Unfortunately there is no clue in the will or the insurance document as to exactly where it was.

* * * * *

In 1734, after completing his apprenticeship, Edward married Sarah SIMMONS at St Matthew Friday Street, in the shadow of St Paul’s. The smallest of the Wren churches, it was demolished in 1885. It was best known as the now lost burial place of Sir Hugh Myddelton, who built the New River. Edward’s surname was recorded as Pracy, but he seems afterwards to have settled on the spelling Prascey. In 1737 his daughter was baptised at St Benet Fink and the first names of mother and child were transcribed by FamilySearch as Sarath, although the writing is pretty difficult and their name was almost certainly the more orthodox Sarah.

It seems that young Sarah and any siblings she may have had didn't survive to adulthood, because Edward in his will left most of his money initially to his wife, but then to his nieces and nephews and their children, several of whom were given Prascey as a middle name. They were almost certainly the offspring of his older sister Elizabeth (1704-1746) and William ALLEN, although no marriage has yet been traced. Between 1731 and 1742, at Pangbourne in Berkshire, they had seven children.

7. The River Thames at Pangbourne.

Wikipedia

But then in 1746 they died within four months of one another, and Edward took on responsibility for their children:

- **Frances (1731-1801)** probably married Jonathan SILLS (1729-1800) in 1756, and they had six children. Jonathan and Frances is quite a rare combination of first names, but I can't find their marriage anywhere.
- **John (b. 1733)** married Sarah PIERCEY on 3 November 1759 at Henley and they had at least four children. The will of Jonathan Sills refers to five unnamed daughters, but nothing else is known of them.
- **Richard (b. 1735)** was a watchmaker. He married Elizabeth FELLOWS on 13 February 1769 at Pangbourne and they had nine children.
- **Thomas** was born in 1737 and died a year later.
- **Sarah (1738-1803)** married John KEEN (d.1790) on 9 August 1757 at Tidmarsh, a mile south of Pangbourne. John was a smith, and they had nine children. For a while Kenneth Grahame, author of *The Wind in the Willows*, lived in Pangbourne at Church Cottage which had been a smithy, and possibly therefore formerly the home of John and Sarah Keen.
- **Elizabeth** was born in 1740 but nothing else certain is known of her.
- **Jane (b. 1742)** married Henry CLARK on 29 June 1771 at Pangbourne and they had three children.

Frances moved with her husband to London, and John settled in Henley. The rest of the family continued to live in Pangbourne which is just across the Thames from Whitchurch,

so it isn't surprising that Edward retired there to be close to them. The two villages were always closely linked – in his day by ferry, and from 1792 with a toll-bridge.

8. The bridge from Pangbourne to Whitchurch, built shortly after Edward Prascey's death.

Wikipedia

Edward's will, made on 27 August 1778, is a remarkable document, showing that he had done very well for himself. He left £2,300 in 3% Consolidated Bank Annuities and held mortgages worth £300 and £370, altogether worth at least £200,000 today. After his wife's death in September 1779, Edward wrote a long codicil. Although only Frances Sills and John Allen were named in the will as Edward's niece and nephew, all of the beneficiaries were in fact Elizabeth's children and their spouses, and her grandchildren. From the parish registers, the will, the codicil and other documents, we can piece together quite a lot about the family.

9. Henley in 1690, with the Red Lion to the right of the bridge and the Angel on the Bridge to the left. The scene would have been familiar to Edward Prascey almost a century later, but already in his time the bridge was falling into disrepair, and shortly after his death it was demolished and replaced with the present structure.
Where Thames Smooth Waters Glide website.

The mortgages were for two of Edward's nephews who, like him, were broadly in the catering trade. John Allen was a tallow chandler but also had £370 for 'a Messuage or Tenement in Henley' – possibly The Angel on the Bridge, on the other side of the main road from the Red Lion. Henry Clark had £300 for a 'Brewhouse Malthouse and other premises', unidentified but probably in Pangbourne. They seem to have been generous settlements that Edward chose to formalise in legal contracts, because he directed that the interest from the mortgages should be paid to his wife during her lifetime, but then revert to Henry and John and their families, who should be released from them.

John Allen was one of the executors. His daughter **Sarah Prascey Allen** was left £600, son **Edward Prascey Allen** £150 and son **John Allen** £200. Edward also left £200 to Richard Allen and £200 to Sarah Keen, both from 'Pangborn'.

Edward left £1,000 to the husband of his niece Frances, Jonathan Sills, who was joint executor with John Allen and Edward's wife, Sarah. In the codicil Edward wrote after Sarah's death, he left to Frances £50 in the 3% Consolidated Bank Annuities and, far more significant, 'all and every my Household Goods Furniture and Effects hereinafter particularly mentioned being in the House where I now live at Whitchurch'

The will shows the wide range of household goods that would have been owned by a prosperous gentleman in the late 18th century. He also refers to portraits of himself, his wife and his great-niece Sarah Prascey Allen, and it would be wonderful if they turned up somewhere. When the will was proved on 24 May 1780, it described John Allen and Jonathan Sills as the surviving executors. Their family histories are of some relevance to ours and interesting in their own right, so I summarise them below.

* * * * *

Edward Prascey Allen (1770-1854) was baptised on 10 January 1770, the son of John Allen and great-nephew of Edward Prascey. In 1808 he married Mary Jordan FAULKNER (1769-1847) and a year later their only son, Christopher Faulkner Allen, was born. The Faulkner and Jordan families were both big fish in the small pond that was the parish of Upton with Signet, near Burford in Oxfordshire. Christopher was probably named after Mary's cousin, Christopher Kempster, who was another leading Upton figure; he owned a major quarry in the village and sent his stone overland to the Thames, and then down to London by barge.

In 1841 Edward and Mary were living at Upton in the house of her brother William Faulkner, who rather splendidly described himself as a yeoman. William died in 1843 and, in compliance with his will, Christopher took Faulkner as his last as well as his second name, in order to inherit his uncle's property. Mary died in 1847, Edward in 1854 and Christopher Faulkner Allen Faulkner in 1870, all in Witney. Curiously, Christopher doesn't show up on any census under either surname.

Edward became a colourman, a specialist supplier of art materials. Initially he had premises at Round Court, north of the Strand near present-day William IV Street. Around 1814 he took over a business at 96 St Martin's Lane, described in 1828 as 'one of the oldest colour-shops in London'. Edward was sometimes listed in directories as E.P. Allen, colourman, and remained in business until 1838.

By the early 18th century painting had increasingly became an art rather than a trade, a shift which resulted in the recognition of the artist in his own right rather than as an artisan with manual skills. At the same time water colour painting became accepted as a fashionable pastime for the English gentry.This new market encouraged the emergence of the specialist artists' colourman. Records suggest that colourmen have been in evidence in London since at least 1725. [*Winsor & Newton website.*]

Many artists would have bought their materials from Edward Prascey Allen's shop, and at least two of them regarded it as appropriate subject matter for their water colours. George Scharf painted the one below in 1829, and C. Richardson did another around the same time.

96 St Martin's Lane was probably built around 1700 as a private house, and must have had quite an impressive interior. It was the museum and surgery **of John (Jean) Misaubin** (1673 -1734), an 18th-century Huguenot French and British physician and 'quack', who died there on 20 April 1734. The house may have been the setting for the third and fifth scenes in Hogarth's *Marriage à-la-mode*, where the young Viscount brings a lady of little reputation to a quack doctor to cure her complaint, and brings her back to complain that the pills have not worked. *[Wikipedia]*

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10. A painter and his apprentice – possibly George Scharf himself with his son – are leaving Mr Allen's the Colourman, in St. Martin's Lane. The small wooden cask on his shoulder may well be 28lb of white lead paste. http://patrickbaty.co.uk/2012/08/01/white-lead/#

A colourman called **Edward Powell** was active in St Martin's parish from 1724 until his death in 1744. In 1763 another Edward Powell, probably his son, was listed in as a colourman in St Martin's Lane, and by 1776 he was definitely at no.96. Whether there were two or three Edward Powells and whether the firm existed continuously from 1724 is well beyond the scope of the Pracy family history, but certainly around 1814 Edward Prascey Allen took over a well-established business in a fine old building from a man

called Edward Powell. When in the 1820s the lower end of St Martin's Lane made way for Trafalgar Square the numbering was unchanged, but no. 96 was demolished in the 1880s to make an entrance to Burleigh Mansions[13]Edward Prascey Allen's sister **Sarah Prascey Allen** was born in 1762 and married Charles GERRARD at Henley in 1791. Their sister **Mary Piercey Allen** was born in 1765 but died in 1769.

The Sills family

Jonathan Sills was baptised in 1729 at the Independent Free Church in Rotherfield Greys, a village just west of Henley. It was set up in 1662 when Puritan clergymen were ejected from the Church of England, possibly by Henley people seeking freedom of worship outside the town, and met in a small barn.

Jonathan was the second son of Samuel Sills and Dorothy PEMBERTON, who had married in 1724 at St Benet Paul's Wharf in London. He was buried aged 71 on 23 February 1800 at St Benet in a family vault on the north side of the church, indicating that he was a man of some substance[14].

Jonathan set up his own business and by 1790 he had taken his sons, Joseph (1766-1843) and Jonathan junior (1771-1842), into partnership. They traded as Jonathan Sills & Sons, merchants and wharfingers of Hambro Wharf (next to Southwark Bridge) and 217 Upper Thames Street. A passing reference in his will shows that Jonathan traded with Holland and probably other parts of the Continent, and a case at the Old Bailey shows that the firm also had links along the Thames.

11. Interior of St Benet Paul's Wharf, the only unaltered Wren church in London and now the official Welsh church in the capital.

The church / London Unveiled website

On 29 April 1796 Anthony CHANDLER and Joseph SALMON were indicted for 'feloniously stealing, six wooden boxes, value 6s and 900lb weight of tin plates, value £17 in a barge, called the Greenfinch, lying on the navigable River Thames, the property of Hercules Lovegrove'. Called as a witness, Joseph Sills stated that at Abingdon he delivered 847 boxes of tin plates to Lovegrove, who took them by barge to the Hamburgh Wharf. When they came to unload the boxes, six were missing. Chandler and Salmon

[13] *George Scharf's London* by Peter Jackson, John Murray, 1987.

[14] The burial register is actually that of St Peter Paul's Wharf but the vault must have been in St Benet. Although St Peter was destroyed in the Great Fire and the parishes of St Benet and St Peter were amalgamated, separate registers continued to be kept until 1812.

were found guilty of stealing them and sentenced to death, although Salmon was recommended to mercy because he was previously of good character.

Evidently the Sills family were quite litigious, for several more cases came to court in the next few years. In 1797 Elizabeth SHOTT was acquitted of stealing money and goods from Joseph Sills, who lived with his wife and six children in Seward Street. Early in the year 1800 the firm took two men to court for theft: on 23 February John WALTER was acquitted of stealing 5¾ pounds of nails worth 1s 3d, and on 2 April Henry MILES alias Deeper was found guilty of stealing linen and calico with a total value of £9 8s, and transported for seven years. It seems strange that one of these prosecutions was heard on the day of Jonathan senior's funeral and the other a few weeks later, when you would think that the family had other things on their mind.

Perhaps out of gratitude for Edward Prascey's generosity to him and his wife, Jonathan in turn showed an extraordinarily commitment to her family, as is shown by the long list of people mentioned in his will:

Frances Sills, his wife
Joseph Sills, his son
Jonathan Sills, his son
Edward Prascey Sills, his son
Elizabeth Go(u)lding, his daughter
Jane Ramsay, his daughter
Hannah Gurling (sic), his sister (wife of John Girling)
Barbara Sills, his daughter in law (wife of Edward Prascey Sills)
Samuel Sills, his brother, and his wife, sons, and daughters, at Three Rivers (Quebec, Canada)
John Allen, his friend and brother (his wife's brother), his wife and five daughters, of Henley
Sister Keen, of Pangbourne (his wife's sister Sarah, widow of John Keen)
Jane Clark, of Pangbourne (his wife's sister, wife of Henry Clark)
Richard Allen, of Pangbourne (his wife's brother)
Mrs Harper (nee Sarah Keen, his niece, daughter of wife's sister Sarah, and John Keen)
Elizabeth Keen (his niece, daughter of his wife's sister Sarah, and John Keen)
Elizabeth Clark (his niece, daughter of his wife's sister Jane, and Henry Clark)
Frances Clark (his niece, daughter of his wife's sister Jane, and Henry Clark)
John Keen & Mrs Keen, his nephew (son of wife's sister Sarah, and John Keen)
James Keen, his nephew (son of wife's sister Sarah, and John Keen)
Mr & Mrs Gerard, of Windsor (his niece, Sarah Prascey Allen, & husband Charles Gerrard)
Edward Sills, his grandson (presumably Edward Molineux Sills, by then aged about 12)
John [Winter] Pigeon (future husband of niece Elizabeth Clark)
Mrs Canning
Mr & Mrs Smith
Mary Canning, of Coventry
Mr John Brooks, of Maiden Lane
Mrs Ann Brooks, of Maiden Lane
Miss Mary Brooks, of Maiden Lane

The last seven may also have been family members, but haven't been identified.

Jonathan left a half-share in the business to his wife Frances and quarter-shares to sons Joseph and Jonathan junior. Frances died and was buried in the family vault in December 1801, and her will was proved in the Court of London on 8 January 1802. Later in 1802 the firm's clerk Francis Shipman was acquitted of embezzling a warrant valued at £5 7s.

In 1811 Joseph and Jonathan Sills were declared bankrupt but soon afterwards entered into partnership with Thomas Ramsay and Robert Gray, who traded from Three Cranes Wharf on the other side of Southwark Bridge. This may only have formalized an existing personal and commercial relationship, for in 1791 Thomas Ramsay (c1763-1833) had married Jane Sills (1768-1831), sister of Joseph and Jonathan. According to Claire Tomalin in her superb biography of Charles Dickens, p261, it was around this time that Little Dorrit sat quietly and looked out over the Thames from Southwark Bridge.

Even though the arrangement made obvious commercial sense, the business closed in about 1823. This was perhaps because the partners had made their pile and so retired to the country – the Ramsays to Camberwell, Joseph to Elstree in Hertfordshire and Jonathan to Brixton. Thomas and Jane Ramsay died in the early 1830s, Joseph and Jonathan Sills in the early 1840s. All four were buried not in their rural retreats but at St Benet Paul's Wharf, where the grandparents of the Sills siblings had been married more than a century earlier.

Edward Preacey Sills was born on 14 April 1759 and baptised eight days later at St Leonard's Shoreditch. He was one of eight children and the oldest boy, but the only one to have the middle name which he always used. Like his uncle, he normally spelled it Prascey. He married Sarah CLARKE in 1784 at St Antholin Budge Row, and had two children with her. She died in 1790 and a year later he married Barbara BEARD at her native village of Rottingdean in Sussex. They had a further nine children, but sadly both of Sarah's and five of Barbara's died young. They were buried at Bunhill Fields, which may suggest that the family's nonconformist tradition continued, as do certain passages in the will of Jonathan Sills.

Edward did not go into the family firm, but had his own ironmonger's business nearby in Dowgate Hill. Thomas Wetherby was apprenticed as a Glover to Edward in 1794 and 'turned over' to a Tallow Chandler in 1799, before becoming a Freeman in 1805 as a Glover – probably not an unusual progression at a time when livery companies no longer stuck firmly to their original trades. In 1799 Edward prosecuted Ralph Bell for receiving goods stolen from his premises and in 1811 he defended a case in Chancery, but the outcome is not recorded in either case.

In 1829 a House of Commons Parliamentary paper referred to 'a piece or parcel of ground, with the room or laundry wash-house and other buildings thereon erected in the occupation of Edward Prascey Sills, abutting south on the churchyard' of St John the Baptist Wallbrook, where all his children were baptised. A church history published in the same year refers to a piece of land 'late in the occupation of Edward Prascey Sills'. Edward disappears from London land tax records after 1816 which may well be when he and Barbara moved to Exeter, where he died in 1831. She was granted administration of his estate and was still there in 1841 but by 1851 had moved with her daughters Frances and Emma to York, where both were governesses. Barbara died in 1859 aged about 87.

The Sills family also had transatlantic connections. Jonathan senior's elder brother **Samuel (1726-1800)** went to Canada, possibly to take advantage of the trading opportunities presented by the victory of General Wolfe in 1759. In 1766 his was the first name on a petition to the King signed by 21 Quebec traders and 25 London businesses trading with Quebec, asking for the replacement of the Governor, General Murray, by a

civilian assembly. From 1780 to 1800 he was deputy post-master of Three Rivers, now Trois-Rivières in Quebec, and his son Edward continued in the post until 1824.

Rather sadly, Jonathan senior bequeathed

> to my dearly beloved Brother Samuel Sills at Three Rivers in North America twenty Pounds and to his Wife and Sons and Daughters ten Pounds each, not for mourning for that will answer no good purpose, but as a token which I hope they will accept of my respect regretting as I do that I never had the pleasure of ever seeing or knowing them…

What a contrast with our present easy communications! In fact Samuel outlived his younger brother by a few weeks, although neither would have known it.

In 1790 the Canadian authorities tried to conscript **Samuel's sons Jonathan and Joseph** and their friend Malcolm Fraser into their army, but they preferred to be 'used in companies expressly trained & controlled by Englishmen'. For sticking to their principles, the three young men were put in a jail which the local surgeon considered to be 'very prejudicial to the health of such prisoners'. Samuel evidently got his sons out on a promise that he would pay Sheriff Thomas Coffin £9 if they reoffended. Jonathan expressed his feelings in a topically named pamphlet entitled *The Northern Bastille, or The Three Oppressed British Subjects*, published in 1791. It is written in slightly archaic French that isn't always easy to read, but the English translation of the conclusion gives a feel of the slightly frenetic whole: 'Woe, especially to men who favour unfair! ... If Heaven refused his wrath to crush them, posterity will not refuse his anathemas.'

Joseph (1792-1849), one of the four surviving children of Edward Prascey and Barbara Sills, married Ann Moorhead in 1838 at Baltimore, and died at Charleston in 1849. He was the father of another Edward Prascey Sills (1839-1920 or later), a real estate agent who married Sarah Eliza (Sallie) MAY. They moved initially to St Louis Missouri, and then settled in Chicago. They apparently had no children, but in 1887 their servant Aline PARK married Ezra R FROST and had a son called Edward Prascey Frost (1890-1950), who became a colonel in the US Army. Perhaps Edward and Sallie more or less adopted Aline and she named her son accordingly. You wonder whether Colonel Edward Prascey Frost had the faintest idea where his unusual middle name came from.

7. Three London apprentices and their families

Most of William and Mary Precy's six sons and seven daughters survived to adulthood. There was no way all could be supported on a farm that was possibly in decline anyway, and in a village where wages were probably low and alternative employment opportunities rare. It therefore fell to Thomas, Edmund and Charles to move to London and seek their fortune. William did not leave them to their own devices, but paid for them to be apprenticed to masters of City of London Livery Companies. This suggests that he had turned the family fortunes round, for he would otherwise have taken the cheaper option of apprenticing them to local farmers.

The three brothers followed trades broadly related to agriculture, the rudiments of which they would have learnt by helping out on the Bishopstone farm. Probably each in turn went up the hill out of their native village, passing the familiar strip lynchets, and set off towards London. They are most likely to have walked along the Ridgeway, unless they were lucky enough to cadge a lift with one of the local carters who traded into the capital.

Possibly they earned a few pence helping a drover take his cattle and sheep to the London market. Or they could even have got themselves to the Thames and gone by boat. Thomas, as the pioneer, was perhaps filled with a mixture of excitement and apprehension as he ventured into this new world. At least Edmund and Charles knew their older brother would be there to greet them.

12. The path up from Bishopstone to the Ridgeway.

Thomas was a wheelwright, Edmund a baker and Charles a dyer. For information about the three companies I have used their websites, which are well worth a visit. It was not unknown in this period for apprentices to be badly treated and drift into a life of crime without completing their period of service, but this wasn't the case with the Pracy brothers. All three finished their apprenticeships, married, and set up in business on their own account.

Unfortunately the Wheelwrights' Company records for that period haven't survived, but Thomas was probably apprenticed when aged about 16. His trade would have required 'great skill…a powerful physique and brawny arms' but 'never provided a lavish lifestyle'[15]. Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables* gives a vivid portrait of a wheelwright's life in a large city[16]:

> It is a hard life to be a wheelwright, you always work out-doors, in yards, under sheds…In the winter, it is so cold that you thresh your arms to warm them…It is tough work to handle iron when there is ice on the pavements. It wears a man out quick. You get old when you are young at this trade. A man is used up by forty…

On 8 October 1727 the rather poetic marriage of 'Thomas Prasey & Eliz. Wasey' took place at the old St Leonard's Shoreditch, a few years before the new church was built. WASEY is a Norfolk name but at least six Elizabeths were baptised there between 1690 and 1705, and there's no way of knowing which was ours. 'William Praccey son of Thomas wheelwright & Elizabeth' was born on 15 July 1728, and on 4 August he was baptised at St Giles Cripplegate. Sadly the infant 'William s. Thomas Pracey wheelwright' died of smallpox, and was buried on Christmas Day 1729. Thomas may have been 'used up' by thirty, for no further record of the family has been traced.

[15] Wheelwrights' Company website, Feb 2005.
[16] Everyman's Library 1997 ed, p273.

On 2 March 1725/6 Charles 'son of William Pracy, yeoman, Bishopstone, Wiltshire' was apprenticed to a dyer named William HERBERT. This, the first London record of the Pracy spelling, was the vital clue that led to my discovering where the family came from. In this period, cloth-making was by far the most important West Country industry and much of it was sent to London for dyeing, so it was an appropriate trade for the young Wiltshire man.

The Dyer's Company received its charter in 1482 and is 13th in order of precedence of the Livery Companies. Along with the Vintners' Company, of which Charles's cousin Edward Prascey was a member, the Dyers take part in the annual swan-upping ceremony on the River Thames. Having rented various premises, the company moved to its present site at Dowgate Hill in 1731, towards the end of Charles's apprenticeship. That building fell down and its successor was in poor condition when in 1831 a surveyor – the appropriately named Charles Dyer – found that it had been built on rotten foundations. The present building dates from 1840.

On 12 November 1733 'Charles Prasey' married Sarah EALES in a 'clandestine' Fleet Prison marriage (see next chapter). The ceremony was conducted by Rev. Anthony Shellburn, one of the regular clergymen at the Fleet. 'Hannah Praysey daughter of Charles dier & Sarah' was born on 1 March 1733/4 and baptised at St Giles Cripplegate on 23 March.

As with Thomas, Charles and his family seem to have disappeared from the record. Sadly, they were probably among the many people that London killed. The late Bill Firth kindly trawled through several likely parish registers looking for their burials, but without success. London records are now coming on line at a great rate of knots, but they still haven't turned up.

I should add that I don't have absolute proof that Thomas and Edmund were the brothers of Charles. I had hoped, for example, that I would find a will for their father William and that it would name them. Sometimes, however, historians can only go for the balance of probability, particularly for sketchily recorded events that took place nearly 300 years ago. I think my suggestion that the three were brothers is plausible because:

- None of them appears in later Bishopstone records, whereas eight of their ten siblings do.
- Later migrants from a family tend to settle close to the pioneers, and all three had their children baptised at St Giles Cripplegate.
- The baptism dates of their eldest children fit pretty well with their ages (Thomas would have been 28, Edmund 24, Charles 26).
- Edmund was 16 when he was apprenticed, and Charles 18. Thomas was probably about the same age but the loss of the Wheelwrights' records makes the point impossible to prove either way.

8. Edmund the baker (1705-1763) and his family

If I could be whisked back in a time machine to meet just one of my ancestors, I would unhesitatingly choose Edmund. He formed the vital bridge between Bishopstone and

London. I would love just to hear his accent, and his reminiscences about the change and what he thought of it. As it is, I can only piece his life together as best I can.

Edmund probably arrived in London in 1721, the year in which Sir Robert Walpole was appointed Britain's first prime minister to restore confidence after the scandal of the South Sea Bubble. On 15 January 1721/2 'Edmund Presie' was apprenticed to Master Baker Stephen CROSS. He would have served under him for seven years, and probably lived on the premises or nearby.

The Worshipful Company of Bakers was believed in Edmund's time to have been given its charter by Edward II in 1307, although the first definite record of a charter was in 1486. The company now traces its origins to a Pipe Roll of 1155 and claims to be the second oldest of the City Companies, of which it is 19th in order of precedence. A Baker's Hall has stood on its present site in Harp Lane since 1506 – half a millennium. The first two halls were burnt down and the third was completed in 1722, the year that Edmund entered on his apprenticeship. It in turn was destroyed during the Blitz and the present hall was opened in 1963.

13. When they first arrived in London, the Pracy brothers used St Giles Cripplegate for baptisms, burials and a marriage. It was restored after the Second World War according to plans from 1545. Now entirely surrounded by modern buildings, it is Grade I listed.

Wikipedia

Although apprenticed to a Master Baker in the City of London, Edmund never became one himself. This may have been for shrewd business reasons. In 1710 the government had given local magistrates the power of fixing bread prices, which was not always done fairly. Sometimes bakers were not allowed to raise prices even when the cost of grain had increased. This problem was particularly bad in London, but Edmund's business was probably at St Luke's which was in Middlesex, where freedom of trade was greater and the magistrates brought no prosecutions against bakers. In 1735 the Bakers' Company petitioned the House of Commons, which agreed to introduce a Bill allowing prices to be fixed according to the type of grain used. True to form, Parliament only implemented its promise 23 years later, when it feared the consequences of a bread shortage caused by harvest failure and war with France.

Edmund could easily have died young like his brothers, for his trade was a risky one. Lumping heavy bags of flour could cause hernias, and the heat from ovens created thirst that often led to alcoholism. Perhaps the most serious hazard was flour dust, which was still dangerous in the 20th century:

> If a baker was exposed over a period of time to airborne flour dust and/or dust by skin contact, he/she could develop dermatitis (an inflammation of the skin), conjunctivitis (inflammation of the eyes), rhinitis (information of the nose) and even asthma – an inflammatory disease of the lungs which can cause a great deal of distress and may even be life threatening[17].

To survive to the age of 58, Edmund must have been pretty tough.

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On 6 October 1729, soon after completing his apprenticeship, 'Edmund Precey' married Elizabeth EALES at St Margaret's Westminster. Elizabeth was probably the sister of Charles's wife Sarah[18]. There are at least 30 eligible Elizabeth Eales on the IGI, three of whom had sisters called Sarah. One pair of sisters was baptised at Moreton Hampstead in Devon, another at Sapscote in Leicestershire and the third at St Mary's Nottingham. There is no knowing which, if any, were ours, but there is a fair chance that the Eales sisters, like the Pracy brothers, were migrants into London. Presumably Elizabeth lived in the parish or had some other connection with it.

Standing in the shadow of Westminster Abbey, St Margaret's was founded in 1120 and rebuilt around 1500. It is the parish church of the Houses of Parliament and of the local area. Stained glass windows commemorate William Caxton and John Milton who worshipped there, while Sir Walter Raleigh is buried under the altar. St Margaret's is now much sought after for weddings, and others married there included Samuel Pepys (1655), John Milton (1656) and Winston Churchill (1908).

Edmund and Elizabeth had two daughters baptised at St Giles Cripplegate. 'Mary Pracey' was born on 30 July 1730 but no further mention of her has been traced. Rachel was born on 22 January 1731/2 but on 4 March 1732/3 the St Giles register noted the burial of 'Rachell Pracey a child teeth'. It would not have been teething itself that caused her death but an associated infection: 'above a tenth part of infants die in teething, by symptoms proceeding from the irritation of the tender nervous parts of the jaws, occasioned inflammations, fevers, convulsions, gangrenes'.[19]

Later in 1733 most of the huge parish of St Giles Cripplegate was carved off to become a new parish, St Luke's Old Street. It comprised those parts of St Giles that lay outside the City of London, and there were already some 3,000 houses in the area. Built by George

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[17] Website of Raymond Agius, Professor of Occupational and Environmental Medicine and Director of the Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health at the University of Manchester Medical School: http://www.agius.com/hew/resource/hazard.htm

[18] In the 2nd edition of this history I wrote: 'It is probably just a coincidence that Edmund's brother Charles married a woman called Eales, because it is unlikely that the letters L and M would be confused, either in writing or pronunciation.' This is proof of the oft-stated axiom that we should always check original sources, for I based my statement that Edmund married Elizabeth EAMES on Boyd's marriage index. I still don't see how anybody could mistake the L for an M, so perhaps the error crept in because the two letters are close to one another on a typewriter keyboard!

[19] W. BUCHAN. *Domestic medicine*, Boston, 1793, p377. Quoted, *The Local Historian*, Nov 2009, p313.

Dance to a design of John James and Nicholas Hawksmoor, the church was known as 'Lousy St Luke's' because some thought that the dragon design of its weather vane looked like a louse. For the next 55 years all of our London baptisms and burials were recorded at St Luke's.

14. St Luke's Old Street in the late 18th century, when members of our family were baptised, married and buried there.

In the 20th century both churches suffered major damage. St Giles was severely bombed in the Second World War, and extensively rebuilt afterwards. St Luke's had been built on marshy ground and from the start had problems with subsidence. The very dry summer of 1959 aggravated this, so the roof was removed and the building declared unsafe. The area had become greatly depopulated, so the two parishes were reunited at St Giles.

St Luke's lay derelict until 1996, when the London Symphony Orchestra took it on and, over the next seven years, converted it into a splendid education centre. The opportunity was taken to carry out an archaeological survey of burials at St Luke's. It lists 336 individuals but none of our family was among them, probably because they were not wealthy enough to afford a lasting memorial[20].

Ancestry have now started to digitise various London land tax records housed at the London Metropolitan Archive, so of course I checked them and was pleasantly surprised to find Edmund. From 1732-8 he was listed in the books for the ward of Cripplegate Without at Castle Court, described by John Strype in 1720 as 'a pretty Yard, but small'. It was situated east of Whitecross Street, immediately south of the site where in 1750 Samuel Whitbread started the first purpose-built mass-production brewery in the UK.

This is by far the earliest London address we have for our family, and so rather exciting. By comparison with the surrounding area Castle Court was a relatively pleasant place, where Edmund lived for at least seven years. (There are no records for 1729-31, so it could well be that he and Elizabeth moved in after their marriage on 6 October 1729.) This, together with his having a skilled trade, suggests to me that he was quite a respectable young man – not as wealthy or influential as his cousin Edward Prascey, but nevertheless an ancestor to be proud of. We don't know where he went next, but this may be revealed as Ancestry open up more records.

[20] There is information about the church and the area at http://lso.co.uk/lso-st-lukes/about-lso-st-lukes, although unfortunately details of the report seem to have been removed.

I trawled through the St Luke's ratebooks for 1744, the year of his son's birth, but disappointingly Edmund was not listed, which suggests that he was a sub-tenant. Thus I don't know his later address but tradesmen usually lived literally 'over the shop', and I think his premises must have been fairly reputable. He had probably had his own business for 15 years when, at the time of his son's baptism, he gave his trade as 'baker'. The Bakers' Company exercised considerable inspection powers over London and the surrounding area, and they would have closed down his operation if it had not been up to scratch.

Evidently Elizabeth died and, on 27 December 1735, Edmund was remarried to Alice SPOKES in a 'clandestine' Fleet Prison marriage[21].

Note[22]: Clandestine marriages arose in the 17th and 18th centuries because a canon (church) law of 1604 regulating marriage was not supported by parliamentary legislation, and therefore could not be enforced in the civil courts. Under common law, marriage could still be valid even if some aspects of canon law were not obeyed. Clandestine marriages were conducted by an ordained clergyman, but away from the home parishes of the bride and groom, and without banns or a licence, so there was an element of secrecy. Although there were undoubtedly some abuses and clandestine marriages developed a bad reputation, they weren't necessarily disreputable but rather a cheap and convenient alternative to marriage in the local parish church.

Clandestine marriages were conducted in various places, of which one of the most notorious was the Fleet Prison. Legislation of 1695-6, intended to regulate clandestine marriages, inadvertently left a loophole that enabled the Rules or Liberties of the Fleet Prison [the area surrounding it] to expand its role as a centre for them. The Fleet was primarily a debtors' prison and stood on the east bank of the Fleet River in what is now Farringdon Street. By the 1730s, when the two Pracy couples were married, probably half of all London marriages took place there. They mainly catered for artisans, farmers, labourers and craftsmen from the poorer parishes of London, so Charles and Edmund were typical grooms.

A fascinating history of Fleet marriages, and the remarkable story of how their registers survived, was published in 1833 by John Southerden Burn. It is available on line at https://books.google.co.uk/books?pg=PP5&id=FRUaAAAAIAAJ#v=onepage&q&f=false

[21] The records are held at the National Archives and there are three different versions of the event. Their piece descriptions are:
1. RG7/146 - 'Fleet, London'. Officiating Ministers: Walter Wyatt's register. Index: Alphabetically arranged.
2. RG7/144 – 'Marriages and Baptisms from the Fleet Registers performed according to the Rules of the Fleet, London from 1734 to 1738 by Ministers Symson, Dare, Gaynam & Shellburn, and includes Dare's Register from 1747 to 1750 by Ministers Dare, Tarrant, Symson, Deneveu.'
3. RG7/133 – 'Marriages and Baptisms from Ashwell and Wyatt's Registers of the Fleet Registers performed according to the Rules of the Fleet, London from 1729 to 1736 by Ministers Flood, Ashwell, Wyatt, Gaynam, Shellburn & Wigmore.'

[22] This can only be a brief summary of a subject that I find fascinating. It's mostly based on the book by BURN, mentioned in the main text, and on an excellent little pamphlet by Tony BENTON: *Irregular marriages in London before 1754*, 2nd ed. Society of Genealogists, 2000.

15. Caricature of a Fleet marriage

In the year Edmund and Alice married, the Grub Street Journal – the Sun of its day – printed a long letter on the practices at the Fleet:

> *Sir, There is a very great evil in this town... I mean the ruinous marriages that are practised in the liberty of the Fleet and thereabouts, by a sett of drunken swearing parsons, with their myrmidons, that wear black coats and pretend to be clerks and registers to the Fleet. These ministers of wickedness ply about Ludgate Hill, pulling and forcing people to some pedling alehouse or a brandy-shop to be married, even on a Sunday stopping them as they go to church and almost tearing their cloaths off their backs...*

Although many Fleet marriages were perfectly respectable, it was allegations like these that gave them a bad reputation. Only with Lord Hardwicke's 1753 Act 'for the Better Preventing of Clandestine Marriages' was the position finally cleared up, with canon and secular law brought into line, and marriage in church made a requirement of the state.

Edmund and Alice were married by Walter Wyatt, described by Burn as 'one of the most notorious of the Fleet parsons'. From 1713, he had a marriage-house at the Two Sawyers in Fleet Lane. *The Book of Days: A Miscellany of Popular Antiquities*, Volume 2 edited by Robert Chambers (1832) refers to 'Walter Wyatt, whose certificate was rendered in the great case of Saye and Sele'. I can't find exactly what this refers to but the Barons of Saye and Sele were an aristocratic family and presumably there was some dispute about the inheritance. Referring to the Fleet parsons, Chambers goes on:

> Some carried on the business at their own lodgings, where the clocks were kept always at the canonical hour; but the majority were employed by the keepers of marriage-houses, who were generally tavern-keepers. The Swan, the Lamb, the Horse-shoe and Magpie, the Bishop-Blaise, the Two Sawyers, the Fighting Cocks, the Hand and Pen, were places of this description, as were the Bull and Garter and King's Head, kept by warders of the prison. The parson and landlord (who usually acted as clerk) divided the fee between them — unless the former received a weekly wage — after paying a shilling to the plyer or tout who brought in the customers.

In the 1740s, Wyatt moved to rather more salubrious premises up the road at Holborn Bridge, and set himself up in opposition to the fashionable Mr Keith in Mayfair. He recorded details of the marriages in pocket books that he later wrote up into carefully maintained registers, which he made sure he took with him to Holborn. The registers eventually found their way into the National Archive, and it's thanks to Wyatt that we know about our ancestors' marriage. That he was rather more conscientious than some Fleet parsons is confirmed by a note he made in his pocket book around the time he married Edmund and Alice: 'Give to every man his due, and learn the way of Truth.'

Wyatt conducted the ceremony ‘domi’ (Latin for ‘at home’); that is, at his own marriage-house at the Two Sawyers rather than elsewhere, as he sometimes did.

It’s sad to contrast this rather hole-in-the-corner business with the grander wedding of Edmund and Elizabeth in 1729, but that, for our family, was probably the exception. Their siblings, Charles and Sarah, certainly married at the Fleet in 1733, and it may well be that the untraced marriage of William and Mary, the parents of Edmund and Charles, took place at a similar ceremony in Wiltshire. Perhaps it also reflects the family’s declining fortunes, and the fact that a second marriage is often less romantic.

FamilySearch only has one Alice Spokes anywhere near the right age, and I think it as certain as anything in 18th-century family history can be that she’s the right one. She was baptised on 30 August 1713 at Wantage, the fourth of at least seven children of Thomas Spokes and Mary DARLING. Thomas was probably born in 1672, the son of Thomas and Anne. Mary was born in 1682, the only surviving daughter – after six sons – of Ambrose and Alice, which would explain our ancestor’s Christian name. Both families had been established in Wantage for over a hundred years. When Alice’s sister Martha was baptised in 1711, Thomas and Mary were described as being ‘of Grove’, a distinct hamlet to the north of the town which became a separate parish in the 1830s.

The surname Spokes is unusual, but there were quite a few of them in Berkshire and the surrounding counties. Nothing I’ve looked at so far gives any clue to the origin and meaning of the name but the Dutch name Spaak means ‘one who makes spokes for a wheel’, and the explanation may be as simple as that.

16. Statue of Alfred the Great in Wantage Market Place

Perhaps best known as the birthplace of King Alfred the Great, Wantage was in Berkshire until 1974, when it was transferred to Oxfordshire. It is a small market town about ten miles east of Bishopstone. It is similarly situated on the chalk uplands of the beautiful Vale of the White Horse, and almost as close to the Ridgeway as Bishopstone is. Although a weekly carting service between the West Country and London had passed through Wantage for at least seventy years, the road in Alice’s time was often impassable. The town was therefore probably at rather a low ebb, which may explain why she decided to try her fortune in London.

By a strange coincidence, Edmund Presse of Bishopstone married Alice RABBESON of Coombe Bissett a century earlier, on 1 July 1**6**33. I have found no other mention of this

Edmund and he was probably from the other Bishopstone near Salisbury, so I think it unlikely that ours was named after him.

The St Luke's register recorded the baptism on 4 March 1735/6 of 'Martha Bracey, daughter of Edmund baker & Alice'. That combination of parents' names is extremely rare and Edmund was a baker; in Wiltshire dialect B and P were interchangeable, and 270 years later I have occasionally had my name misheard as Bracey. Martha was therefore almost certainly ours. Alice Spokes had an aunt, a sister and a cousin with the fairly unusual name of Martha, which is perhaps further confirmation that she was our ancestor. I found no further reference to Martha Bracey/Pracy, so she too probably died young.

By 1741 most of the Bishopstone family had died, and Edmund and Alice were apparently the only Pracys from our direct line left in London. If indeed they were the only survivors, Edmund would perhaps have thought back to the year 1729, when he completed his apprenticeship and married Elizabeth, who immediately fell pregnant. His elder brother was established in his trade with a wife and young son. His younger brother was well into his apprenticeship, and perhaps planning to marry Elizabeth's sister Sarah as soon as he completed it. Back in Bishopstone, the family was thriving and Henry had recently married. It is easy to imagine the clan gathering in the prestigious church of St Margaret's for Edmund's wedding, with high hopes of a prosperous future. Instead, within twelve years Edmund lost at least four siblings in Bishopstone and, in London, his first wife and three daughters, and probably two brothers and their families. Even allowing for the high mortality of the time, the loss of twelve or more close relatives in as many years must have been heartbreaking for Edmund and his parents. It was the most tragic period in our family's history.

That most of the St Luke's Pracys apparently died is not surprising, for death rates in the parish were appalling. Far more people were buried than baptised, and many of them were infants. I have done no systematic count, but I get the impression that the majority of children must have died. When Edmund was born on 19 July 1744, therefore, his parents can't have been greatly confident that he would survive to perpetuate the family name, but survive he did.

Edmund senior died of a fever in December 1763 and was buried at St Giles. There is some fragmentary evidence that he may have moved back to that parish more than ten years earlier. A carman called William Spokes could well have been Alice's younger brother, who was born in 1718. He and his wife Sarah had son William baptised at St Luke's in 1742 and daughter Sarah Spookes [sic] at St Giles in 1750, so Edmund and Alice may have made a similar move.

And on 12 November 1755, John Pracey of Rose & Crown Court aged 15 months was buried at St Leonard's. He could just about have been a younger son of Alice, who would have been 41 when he was born, and Edmund. Rose and Crown Court was just east of Long Alley and Maximus Court, later Maxwell Court, where Edmund junior's son Thomas lived for many years.

Certainly on 2 January 1785 St Luke's recorded the burial of 'Alice Pracy a woman age', which, by the standards of the time, was a fair diagnosis – she was probably 71½ years old. The London family's final link with the West Country was broken.

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Until about 1700 our family was based in Bishopstone and after 1800 in London, but throughout the 18th century the Thames and its valley were a significant feature of our history. The birthplaces of Edmund and Alice – Bishopstone and Wantage – both have streams that eventually flow into the Thames. They and other members of their families would have made their way to London along the Thames Valley - probably along the Ridgeway or by road, but possibly on the river. We can't know exactly how things worked but it does seem likely that new London migrants from the same part of the country socialized together, and that was how Edmund and Alice met.

Edward Prascey was the landlord of the Red Lion at Henley-on-Thames, a major staging post on the road from Oxford to London. He had strong family links with the town and neighbouring villages. His sister Elizabeth and her husband William Allen brought up their family in Pangbourne, and several of them continued to live there. Edward's nephew Jonathan Sills and his siblings were baptised at Rotherfield Greys, just outside Henley.

The barge trade to London was a significant feature of the Thames in the 18th century. Traffic on the unimproved river could be risky if it ran aground, but some bargemasters owned several vessels carrying up to 200 tons each, and there was good money to be made. We know from the case of the stolen tin boxes that the Sills family had a wharf at Abingdon and they probably had others along the Thames, which the barge owners would have paid to use.

9. Edmund the carman (1744-1803) and his daughters

Edmund became a carman, the first of several in our family (see Chapter 10). This could well reflect the influence of William Spokes – if he was Edmund's uncle – or possibly Edmund delivered bread for his father.

On 9 June 1767 at St Leonard's Shoreditch 'Edman Preacy' married Lucy CARLTON. Both marked the register with a cross so were presumably illiterate. His name was also spelt 'Edman' on the baptismal entries for most of their children. That must have been how he pronounced it, and presumably standardisation of spelling was not quite sufficiently advanced for the clergyman to 'correct' it. Edmund and Lucy both described themselves as being 'of this parish'. This doesn't necessarily mean that they were living there because it was a popular church for weddings often used by outsiders, but Edmund senior was buried there so they may have been.

So far we have traced no baptism or any other earlier mention of Lucy, and all we know about her is that one of the witnesses was William Carlton, presumably her father or brother. Carlton is mostly a North Country name but a William Henry Carleton, son of William and 'Rebeckah', was baptised at St Andrew by the Wardrobe church on 6 May 1744. If William Henry was then a baby he would have been almost exactly the same age as Edmund, although there can be no certainty that he or his father was the William who witnessed the wedding.

In 1774 at St Giles, the sole witness at the marriage of Sarah Pracey and Henry BURROWS was Thomas Carleton. This Sarah is unlikely to have been the daughter of

Edward Prascey and Sarah Simmons, born in 1737 (see Chapter Six). There could nevertheless have been some connection not yet uncovered with our family or between Lucy and Thomas Carlton, because both surnames are fairly unusual.

17. St Leonard's Shoreditch features in the old nursery rhyme Oranges and Lemons: '…When I am rich, say the bells of Shoreditch…' This is an 18th-century print of the present church, built around 1740. The marriage of 'Edman Preacy' and Lucy Carlton was the first of many Pracy family events there.

The St Luke's ratebooks record that, from 1771 to 1794 at least, 'Edward Prasey' lived on the eastern side of New Street, which was off Old Street east of Ironmonger Row. This was a long time to be at one address, and suggests that Edmund was, like his father, a respectable citizen. The relevant volume for 1795 is missing, but in 1796 he was not listed. Unfortunately the Land Tax records for New Street in this period state only that the surname of the landlord was Berry. He may well have been Thomas Berry, a Kent farmer who built nearby Berry Street. New Street was later renamed Caslon Street, after William Caslon who revolutionised the design and manufacture of type-faces, and was buried at St Luke's. It and other properties were demolished, I believe in the 1960s, to make way for the Redbrick Estate.

Horwood's 1799 London map suggests that, by contrast with many of the squalid courtyards and alleyways in the area, the house was in a pleasant terrace which apparently had access to a communal courtyard or garden at the rear. It is amazing to think that the family could have found themselves in the countryside by walking up Ironmonger Row to City Road, which was opened in 1761 when Edmund was a youth of 17. City Road was an extension of the New Road (now Euston Road and Pentonville Road), which had been built in 1756 through the open fields from Marylebone to Islington, in effect as a ring road or by-pass for London.

New Street was very close to the premises of the Honourable Artillery Company in City Road. Edmund and his family could therefore have witnessed the first unmanned balloon flight in England, which was launched from the HAC's grounds on 25 November 1783. Similarly, he and/or his father could have attended some of the major cricket matches that were played at the HAC from 1730 to 1778.

The City of London Lying In Hospital moved to the corner of Old Street and City Road c1771. It and similar maternity hospitals founded in the 18th century were principally intended for the wives of poor industrious tradesmen. The mothers were either admitted to hospital for childbirth, or attended in their own homes by medical students and staff from the hospitals. Lucy's babies may well have been delivered in the hospital or with its staff present at home, but unfortunately that can't be confirmed because the hospital records for that period haven't survived

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18. The City of London Lying In Hospital c1830, engraved from an original print by Thomas Hosmer Shepherd

Hospitals and other improvements meant that London was gradually becoming a rather less hazardous place to live, and seven of Edmund and Lucy's nine children lived to adulthood. Their relatively healthy housing and nearness to the countryside may have contributed to this good fortune. The births were spaced out at fairly regular intervals of two years or slightly more, indicating that Lucy like most mothers breast-fed them: it was the nearest most people could get to a form of birth control.

The St Luke's burial register for 1787 noted: '1 July Lucy Pracy a woman fever'. But more unexpected is the burial of Edmond Pracy 'from St Mary Newington Parish' at St George the Martyr, Southwark, on 13 January 1803. Newington parish was literally over the road from St George's church, and Edmund probably lived in the area of present-day Swan Street, formerly Swan Yard.

* * * * *

When I first started researching our family, I soon got back to the Victorian period. Most of the men seemed to have respectable but fairly menial jobs, and they could broadly be described as lower-middle or working class. I assumed that their forebears came from a similar background, and it was a considerable surprise when I traced the Bishopstone connection with its gentry and yeoman farmers. I hadn't then come across Edward Prascey but, even so, I supposed from the apparently rapid deaths of all but the two Edmunds and Alice that the family were living in an unsavoury part of St Luke's and drifted fairly rapidly down the social scale.

Then I began to revise my opinion. In 1794, the last year that the younger Edmund was listed at New Street, the Pracys had lived in the Finsbury area for over 60 years. Edmund, like his father, followed a respectable trade and was probably self-employed, apparently fairly well off and occupying a middling place in society. He was renting what seems to have been a comfortable end-of-terrace house close to the church and the

countryside. Five of his seven children could at least sign their names and, if the marriage certificates of the other two had survived the Blitz, we would probably know that they could too. All in all, it seems that they were a comfortably-off lower-middle-class or respectable working-class family.

19. Two Pracy churches in Southwark – St George the Martyr (left) and St Mary Newington

I now think that between 1795 and 1805 all of this changed, and the decade saw quite an upheaval for the family. The two eldest girls, Ann and Rosetta, had decidedly unconventional marriage arrangements. Rosetta and John William had a brush with the law in 1798, while Elizabeth was imprisoned for two years in 1799. There is no record that the three youngest – Thomas, Lucy and Rebecca – had similar problems, but they must have been affected by them.

Edmund's burial entry shows that by 1802 he had settled in Southwark. We don't know exactly when or why, though we can speculate. He may have encountered some misfortune or committed a minor misdemeanour that did not find its way into the written sources, but was enough for him to move south of the river where, in a rapidly growing city, he could have found obscurity. If this happened in or soon after 1795, when he disappeared from New Street, it could explain why Rosetta, John William and Elizabeth got into difficulties with the law. It was quite a tribute to Edmund that, some six years after his death, his two boys both named their eldest sons after him.

After 1805 the family seem to have overcome their problems and settled down again. Elizabeth, John William, Thomas and Rebecca all married at Christ Church Greyfriars Newgate, between 1805 and 1822. People from outside the parish sometimes used the church for marriages, and it's unlikely that the Pracys ever lived there.

Even though Ann, Elizabeth and Rebecca moved to south London and Rosetta to Australia, the family made the effort to stay in touch. The sisters in particular seem to have been close and affectionate. I think those links must have been forged or strengthened in this crucial, difficult decade so would like to find out more, but I have probably exhausted the somewhat limited sources.

Ann, Rosetta and Elizabeth all had children. Elizabeth probably died fairly young but Lucy lived to the age of 65, Rebecca to 82, Rosetta and Ann to 88. The 1841 census shows that Ann, Lucy and Rebecca were all living on their own means, courtesy of annuities from Rosetta, who made her fortune in Australia. Rosetta took a dim view of the financial abilities of men, so seems not to have given similar support to her brothers or their children, some of whom lived in considerable poverty.

The brothers John William and Thomas, like their father and grandfather, had their own well-established small businesses. John William was a watchmaker, while Thomas and his wife ran a milk business. Both men married and produced large families, and it was this next generation that led me to suppose that we were essentially a working-class family, for most of them had relatively unskilled jobs and insalubrious housing, often dying young. Rather it seems that the most successful of the younger generation – John William's two youngest sons – followed more closely in the family tradition.

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Ann was born on 26 March 1768. At St Luke's on 13 April 1789 she married 'William HARDCASTLE of this parish'. She would not have had to travel very far, because New Street was just round the corner from the church. Hardcastle was mainly a Yorkshire name, so William was probably William Rawlins Hardcastle, who was born and baptised at St Luke's in 1764.

The marriage seems not to have lasted, and a few years later Isaac Fox came into Ann's life. On 26 January 1795 she had a daughter called **Rosetta Hardcastle** and on 14 March 1797 another called **Ann Fox Hardcastle**. The two girls were both baptised at St Leonard's a month after they were born. In 1795 their address was given as Cock Lane, immediately south of St Leonards, and in 1797 as The Curtain, now Curtain Road. I could find no certain later reference to either of them, although several women called Ann Fox were married in and around London in the 1810s and 1820s.

Isaac was probably the biological father of Ann Fox Hardcastle and perhaps even of Rosetta, although William was recorded on the register as the father of both. No record of William's death or of a marriage between Isaac and Ann has been traced, even though they went on to have at least five more children, all girls. It may well be that Ann's marriage to William broke down but he was still alive, so she and Isaac lived together as man and wife without the option of making it legal. Perhaps in 1795 Ann was still living with William at Cock Lane, but by 1797 had moved in with Isaac at the Curtain.

Then the St Leonard's registers recorded that '**Ann** d. of Isaac and Ann Fox of the Curtain' was baptised on 27 September 1802, having been born on 5 September 1801. It seems improbable that Ann would have waited a whole year to have her daughter baptised when she normally had her children done within a month, so it's possible that young Ann was actually born in 1802 and this was a clerical error.

Meanwhile '**Charles Richard** s. of Isaac and Ann Fox of Kingsland Road' was born on 5 February 1802 and baptised on 26 February. It seems strange but I think there must have been two couples with the same combination of names, even though it's fairly unusual. In 1795 an Isaac Fox married Ann PILGRIM at Benington in Hertfordshire, and they could possibly have moved to Shoreditch. It's biologically impossible for one woman to

have had both Ann and Charles Richard, and Curtain Road and Kingsland Road are at opposite ends of Shoreditch.

Isaac and Ann Fox then had three daughters baptised at St George the Martyr. **Lucy** was born on 22 February 1804 and **Rebecca** on 5 August 1806, but nothing more is known of them and they probably died as infants. **Susan** was born on 12 September 1808 and became a dressmaker. A second **Rebecca** was baptised at St Mary Newington on 9 May 1813, when the family were living at Swan Yard and Isaac was said to be a coachman. She later joined her aunt Rosetta Terry in Australia.

It's unlikely to be coincidence that Ann had her younger girls baptised at the church where her father was buried, but we don't know the exact connection between the two events. She may have moved to Southwark to be with Edmund, only for him to die almost straight away. Or she may have moved earlier, but chosen to go back to Shoreditch for her daughter Ann's baptism in 1802.

Isaac Fox died in 1839, said to be 68 years old. Ages given at death weren't always accurate, though, and several people with that name were born around 1770, so we can't be sure exactly who he was. Ann, who was described as deaf on the 1851 census, died on 1 January 1857. She was said to be 92 although she was in fact nearly 89. Both died at Garden Place, Crown Street, Newington. Maps and censuses suggest that Garden Place was built in the 1830s as a cul-de-sac off Crown Street. The site was immediately south of the present Elephant and Castle station, and the houses were demolished in the 1860s, to make way for the railway.

Rosetta (29 July 1770 – 5 September 1858) emigrated to Australia, where she married Samuel Terry and became perhaps the wealthiest woman in Australian history (see next chapter).

Edmund was born on 25 August 1772, but the St Luke's register noted the burial on 27 July 1774 of 'Edward Pricy a child smallpox'. Edmund was often erroneously replaced by the commoner name Edward, but the Pricy spelling was used only then, and again by error in the 1870s. Although I don't have a strong Cockney accent, I do tend to pronounce race as though it were rice and occasionally get post addressed to David Pricy. This may indicate that, not surprisingly, Edmund spoke with a London accent.

'**Edman** Pracy son of Edman carman & Lucy' was born on 28 August 1774, a month after his namesake brother was buried. Sadly he too died of a notorious scourge of infancy, measles, aged only five. Parents often recycled the name of a dead child, but when another son was born a year later Edmund and Lucy called him Thomas. It's a modern misconception that high mortality rates hardened 18th-century parents to the loss of their children, and it may be that the memories associated with their two boys made it too painful for them to use the name again.

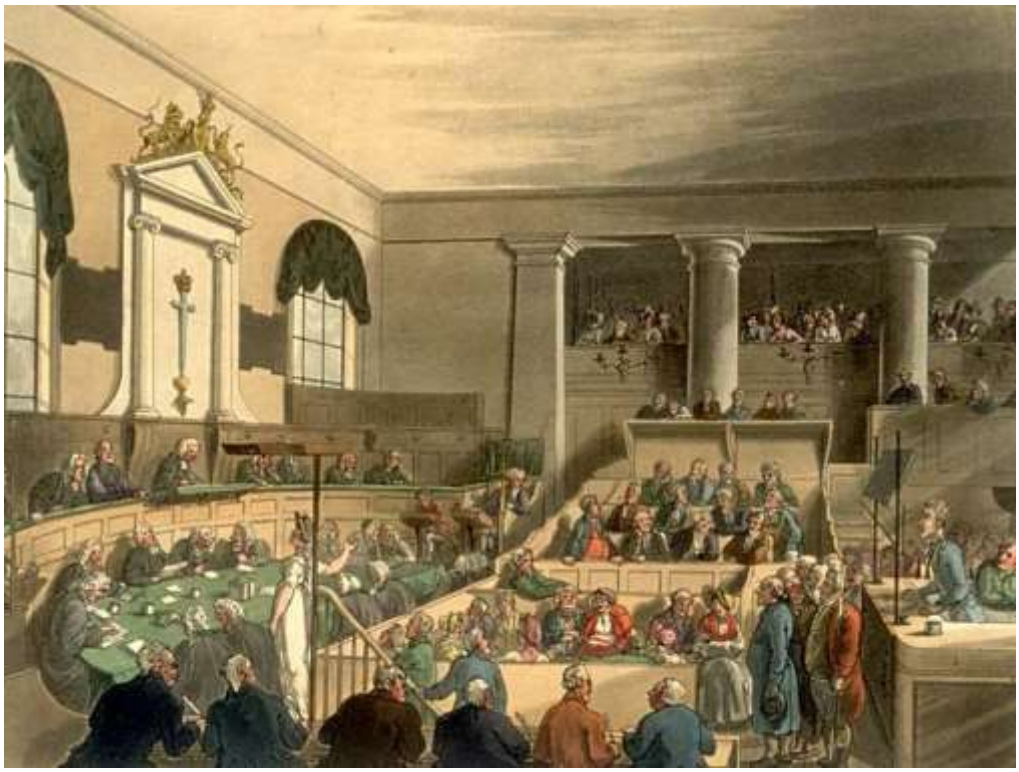
Elizabeth was born on 11 January 1777.

On 1 November 1799 Elizabeth stole goods worth about £6 10s from her employer Mrs Mary CAMROUX, milliner of 9 Brinsley Place Islington[23]. No home address is given for

[23] Details in this paragraph from the award-winning www.oldbaileyonline.org website. I have searched that site, Motco and Google for Brinsley Place without success. The Old Bailey site says it isn't always

Elizabeth, so she may well have been a shop assistant living in. The Camroux were a family of Huguenot origin, who enjoyed mixed fortunes. Mary's husband John Lewis (b. 1748) came from one of the wealthier branches of the family, which included bankers and prosperous shopkeepers. Mary herself was born WEST but nothing more is known of her[24].

On 4 December at the Old Bailey quarter sessions Elizabeth was convicted of simple grand larceny. Her sister Rosetta had only just travelled out to Australia as a free passenger and Elizabeth must have come close to joining her involuntarily. She could even have been hanged but by then capital punishment for thefts not involving violence was unusual. On the day of her conviction, four people were sentenced to hanging and 16 transported. Elizabeth was one of five people who escaped with the next most serious punishment – two years in the Middlesex House of Correction and, rather inconsequential by comparison, a fine of one shilling (only about £1.60 even today).



20. The Old Bailey in 1808, by Thomas Rowlandson and Augustus Pugin

Perhaps Elizabeth owed her relatively light punishment to a Mrs NEWBANK, who was called as a witness and 'gave her a good character'. Claire Pracey has traced the marriage in 1760 of Edward Newbank and Elizabeth CALTON, a spelling then almost interchangeable with Carlton and Carleton, which gave the exciting possibility that Elizabeth was Lucy's sister. In 1773 Thomas Newbank married Elizabeth BELL with Edward, probably his

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possible to locate addresses given in trials. Further information about felons convicted at the Old Bailey 1791-1834 is in class HO 26 (criminal registers) at the National Archive, but unfortunately those for 1799 are among the few that are missing.

[24] Information from Camroux descendant Pat Gerber, who says that she 'came from the wrong branch of the family'.

brother, as a witness. But the Elizabeths were buried at St Mary Islington, one in 1792 aged 66 and the other in 1795 aged 55. In 1782 Robert Newbank married Ann SHUTTLEWORTH at St Giles and in 1784 his brother William married Sarah GRAHAM at St James Clerkenwell, although none of the witnesses has any obvious relationship to our family. There is no record that Ann or Sarah Newbank was buried before 1799 so one of them could have been Elizabeth Pracey's Mrs Newbank. There could have been some kinship as yet untraced, but the exact nature of the Newbank link is unlikely to be established.

The recently built prison was situated at Coldbath Fields, on the site of the present-day Mount Pleasant Post Office. Modelled on the ideas of the reformer John Howard, it was intended to replace physical with psychological punishment, but the venality of governor Thomas Aris meant that the new prison differed little from older ones. The poets Southey and Coleridge wrote in *The Devil's Thoughts*[25]*:*

> As he walked through Coldbath Fields he saw
> A solitary cell
> And the Devil was pleased, for it gave him an idea
> For improving his prisons in hell.

Men, women and children were indiscriminately herded together, and had to work ten hours a day. Elizabeth would have done hard labour such as beating hemp, and been put into solitary confinement so that she might reflect on the error of her ways.

LARGE OAKUM-ROOM (UNDER THE SILENT SYSTEM) AT THE MIDDLESEX HOUSE OF CORRECTION, COLDBATH FIELDS.

Elizabeth survived her deprivations and in 1805 married James KERSHAW at Christ Church Greyfriars Newgate Street, in the City of London. I wondered whether it might be more than coincidence that this was just up the road from the scene of her trial, and may

[25] Cited in TAMES, Richard. *Clerkenwell and Islington past*, Historical Publications, 1999, pp 63-6. The book gives three illustrations of Coldbath Fields, and a good idea of just how bad conditions there were.

represent some sort of pastoral relationship between the church and the prison. On the other hand, her younger brothers and sister were also married there, in 1806, 1809 and 1822 respectively.

21. With a rather sad symmetry, Christ Church Newgate Street was built by Wren after the Great Fire and gutted as a result of enemy action during the Second World War. The church tower and part of the walls survive. An information board gives details about the church and a garden that has been laid out on the site of the nave. The parish was united to St Sepulchre's in 1954.

Kershaw is chiefly a Lancashire name, unusual in London, so this may have been the James baptised in the neighbouring parish of St Sepulchre's Holborn on 23 February 1777. He may also be the James Kershaw of the Workhouse, who was buried at St George the Martyr Southwark in 1820. No burial for Elizabeth has been traced, but from 1834 onwards her sisters Ann and Rebecca were mentioned in several wills and she was not. Elizabeth had therefore probably died, perhaps weakened by her prison experience.

James and Elizabeth Kershaw had two daughters. Elizabeth was born on 29 March 1805 and baptised at St George the Martyr Southwark on 5 October 1806, the same day as Ann Fox's daughter Rebecca. Named after two of her aunts, Rosetta Rebecca was born on 2 May 1807 and baptised on 6 January 1808 at St Mary Newington. Elizabeth junior was probably a shopkeeper listed on the 1841 census in Marylebone. In 1841 Rosetta was a servant, still in Southwark, but in 1851 was a tailoress, listed as a visitor in St George in the East. Nothing more is known of either of them.

The parish registers were lost too, but fortunately some bishop's transcripts survive from the early 1800s, and a complete run from 1809. Some information of brides and grooms, and their years of marriage, was also preserved in Pallot's marriage index.

John William and **Thomas** were the ancestors of all later Pracys. They are dealt with in Parts 3 and 4.

Lucy was born on 8 September 1783 and died on 7 January 1849 at 3 Sidney Street, which was later renamed Wakley Street after the social reformer and MP for Finsbury,

who founded *The Lancet* medical journal. Lucy had previously lived round the corner at 16 Dalby Terrace, an 'imposing terrace … built in 1803 on a common formerly used for executions and prize fights'[26].

22. Now numbered 366 City Road, 16 Dalby Terrace seems to be used mostly for offices. Martin Hagger stands in front.

Lucy never married. On the 1841 census she was living at Upper Islington Terrace, now Cloudsley Road. She was listed as the female servant of a 14-year-old of independent means called Harriet DYER, but I rather think it was the other way round and Harriet was Lucy's servant. Later in the decade Lucy became the first of the London family known to have made a will, which she wrote on 5 July 1848. She left a variety of possessions and £170 in cash (£10,000 today). Evidently she was closest to her Fox relatives: she left £10 (£600) to her younger sister Rebecca Fox and 19 guineas (£1,200) each to her sister Ann Fox, her niece Rebecca and her niece Susan, who was present at the death. She was buried at St Mary Islington.

Rebecca was born on 27 October 1785. On 29 August 1822 at Christ Church Newgate Street she married John FOX, a widower who was perhaps the brother of Isaac Fox. In 1841 the widowed Rebecca was living in Clapham and in 1861 she was in Lambeth. A Rebecca Fox who died in Lambeth in 1867 said to be aged 65 could well be ours, even though she would have been 81, because she was the only one listed on the 1861 census. Her two eldest sisters lived to the age of 88, so clearly the longevity genes evident in Bishopstone persisted well into the 19th century.

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From the late 17th century to the early 19th, there are several other references to people called Pracey or Pracy, but none has any known link to our family. They were possibly

[26] *Victoria County History* Islington.

Presseys using a variant spelling of the name, or badly written Traceys, Staceys etc. I've listed them here in case some connection comes to light in the future.

- In 1693-4 Charles Pracy paid 'Four Shillings In The Pound Aid' to help fund King William III's European wars. His property in the Whitefriars Precinct of Farringdon Ward Without in the City of London was assessed as worth £30 (£2,700 today), on which he paid £6, and his stock as £50, on which he paid 12s[27].
- From 1737-42 George Pracey paid land tax on a property at Bright's Alley, near present-day Wapping High Street. The writing is perfectly clear so that is definitely his name, but nothing else is known of him.
- In 1763 a drayman called Thomas Pracey stole four butts from his employer, Andrews PANKEMAN, a brewer at Hoxton. A cooper called Ephraim Shaw received three of them as stolen goods, but Pracey and Shaw were caught with the fourth. The famous magistrate Sir John Fielding committed Pracey to the New Prison and Shaw to Clerkenwell Bridewell. A drayman was a carman working for a brewery so it's possible that this was Edmund with a wrongly reported forename, but there's no firm evidence for the suggestion.
- More strangely, the *General Evening Post* of 14 January 1777 refers to 'White's, Boodle's, Stapleton's, Lowe's, Pracey's and Robinson's'. White's and Boodle's were well-known gentlemen's gambling clubs but setting up such an establishment was way outside the scope of our family and doesn't quite seem Edward Prascey's thing. I haven't found one with a similar name, so I can't imagine what that was all about.

The following appear on church registers, with my comments below in each case:

- **Baptism at St Botolph Bishopsgate 31 December 1693: Job PRACEY son of John and Grace**. It could equally well say Tracey and there is no other record of this family.
- **Burial at St Giles Cripplegate 2 May 1731: James Pracy, age**. In those days anybody who reached 60 was considered aged, so I thought that perhaps James could have been a brother of William and the first to come from Bishopstone to London. It seems, however, to be a coincidence, for no James is recorded in our family and a James Pressey was baptised at St Giles on 13 April 1639.
- **Burial at St Leonard's 12 Nov 1755: John Pracey Rose & Crown Court, 15m.** This can't, as I suggested in the 4th ed, have been John PRESSEY, baptised 21 Aug 1754 at St Andrew Holborn, because he died 5 days later. He could have been a younger son of Alice, who would have been 41 when he was born, and Edmund.
- **Burial at St Luke's 6 Sep 1768: Elizabeth Pracy a Child, Convulsions.** I couldn't find a relevant baptism. Ann Pracy was born on 26 March 1768 so this Elizabeth can't have been ours unless she was born before Edmund and Lucy were married.

[27] http://www.british-history.ac.uk/source.asp?pubid=26

- **Burial at St Luke's 4 Apr 1770: Elizabeth Pracey a Woman, Child bed.** She could be the mother of Elizabeth above, but I couldn't find a relevant marriage.
- **Baptism at St George in the East 1 Dec 1771: James Pracey. Father Robert, a stickmaker of Pennington Street Stepney, mother Judith.** This is near Bright's Alley, where George Pracey paid land tax 1737-42. These two references may suggest the presence of a Pracey family in Docklands, but there is no other trace of them.
- **Burial at St Giles Cripplegate 6 Aug 1772: William Pracey a Man Pensioner, Fever.** One William was born in Hampshire and one in Wiltshire in the 1690s, but there is no certain connection.
- **Baptism at St George in the East 9 Feb 1774: Mary d. of Charles Pracy 'Linen Sp.'? by Jane, B.G.R.** The writing is difficult but the occupation could be an abbreviation for linen spinner, although I don't know whether that's likely in 18th-century London. The clergyman also used abbreviations for addresses eg RHW was probably Ratcliffe Highway, but I don't know what BGR stands for – Bethnal Green Road seems too far away. No other trace of this family, unless they were related to Robert the stickmaker or Mary was the one who married in 1812 (below).
- **Burial at St George the Martyr 17 Dec 1808: George Pracey a Child from the Workhouse.** This is the parish where in the previous six years Edmund the carman had been buried and four of his grand-daughters had been baptised, but by 1808 the family was past the worst of its troubles and there is no record of George's baptism, so there is no obvious way he could have been part of our family.
- **Marriage at St George Hanover Square 4 Sep 1812: James Dunning & Mary Pracy, both from the parish and illiterate.** There are three possible Marys on Familysearch but none is very likely.

10. Rosetta Terry, née Rosey Pracey (1770-1858)

Rosetta was born on 29 July 1770. She was baptised **Rosey** but known as Rosetta – probably by 1795, when Ann's eldest daughter was given that name, and certainly in all later records. In 1810 she married Samuel TERRY, calculated by the economic historian William D Rubinstein to have been the wealthiest Australian ever. She was, however, a woman of great achievements in her own right, with an independent spirit quite exceptional in her time. She was by some way the most remarkable person our family has produced, and if my time machine allowed me to meet a second Pracy not in my direct line, she would undoubtedly be my choice.

This chapter is only a brief summary of her life and career. It would have been impossible without my distant Australian cousins who contacted me via this website and gave invaluable information and support. They are: Janice Eastment, great-great-granddaughter of Rosetta's nephew Thomas Richard, and her partner Kevin Shaw; Marilyn Mason, widow of Rosetta's 4 x great-grandson; Graham Smith, Rosetta's 3 x great-grandson. As a result of Marilyn's

exciting discovery of an advertisement in the London *Oracle and Daily Advertiser* of 22 November 1798, I have rewritten much of the first part of this chapter, and made minor changes to the two following ones.

The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* includes an article by Gwyneth M Dow, a descendant of Rosetta's son John Terry. She summarised Samuel and Rosetta as 'two able, single-minded early colonists who resolved to reverse their unfavourable, brutalizing early fortunes – and succeeded'. She also wrote a well-researched biography of Samuel, on which this chapter is based[28]. In it she suggested that perhaps 'in this great-grandmother of mine we have an unwritten story to show that the female of the species is more deadly than the male'.

For a longer version of this chapter you can read my entry for the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies Biography of an Ancestor competition. It was the first attempt to meet Dow's challenge, but please note that Marilyn's find means that some of Part I is now out of date, although Parts II and III are less affected.

1770-1798: An English rose

Sources for Rosetta's early life in England are sparse, and she seems at times deliberately to have obscured details of her past. The following suggestions are therefore largely speculative, although the guesswork is as educated as I can make it.

The first mystery is her name. Whereas all her siblings had solid old-fashioned names, Rosey by contrast seems rather flighty and fanciful. It certainly isn't known among the Pracys, so perhaps it came from her mother's side of the family. We also don't know exactly when she came to be known as Rosetta rather than Rosey, but her sister Ann had her eldest child baptised Rosetta in 1795, so I have referred to her as that throughout.

The second puzzle is that, when Rosetta died, her mother's maiden name was recorded as NEWBORK. The informant was Rosetta's niece Rebecca Fox and it was over 90 years after the marriage of 'Edman Preacy' and Lucy Carlton. It is therefore hardly surprising that Rebecca was misinformed, but it seems more than coincidence that this was similar to Newbank, the surname of Elizabeth Pracey's character witness at her Old Bailey trial in 1799. I can find no record anywhere of the surname Newbork, so a misreading of Newbank could have crept in somewhere. Perhaps a Mrs Newbank became almost a surrogate mother who helped bring up the young family, and Rosetta told Rebecca about her.

Third is the rather curious fact, discussed in more detail below, that Rosetta has links to three Lancashire criminals sent to New South Wales as convicts. Edward MADDEN and Samuel TERRY were convicted at Salford, Henry MARSH alias MARTIN alias JONES at Liverpool. This could be sheer coincidence, particularly as she is not known to have met Samuel in England. However if there was some sort of family disaster, she may well have left London and gone to Lancashire for a while.

1798-1810: Rosetta Marsh

Rosetta first emerged into the light of history late in 1798, with this advertisement in the *Oracle and Daily Advertiser* for 22 November:

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[28] *Samuel Terry: the Botany Bay Rothschild.* Sydney UP, 1974.

ABSCONDED

On the 29th August last, JOHN PRACY, Apprentice to Thomas Eaton, Watch Movement Maker of no 7 St James's Buildings Rosoman's-street Clerkenwell. He is 19 years of age, about 5 feet 4 inches high, slim made, light lank hair and walks very upright. It is supposed he is harboured by his own sister, whose name by Marriage is Maddon, but now goes by the name of Nash, took with him a dark velvet Jacket and Breeches, a red Waistcoat with black spots, likewise a light mixed coloured Coat made Frock Fashion, with black velvet Collar and pearl Buttons, a Marseilles Waistcoat, white ground very full of Red Stripes, and corded mixed Thickset Breeches with Pearl Buttons.

This is to give Notice, whoever harbours or employs the above John Pracy, will be prosecuted; and if any Person will bring him as above, or give information so that he may be taken, shall receive Two Guineas reward [£70 today]. THOMAS EATON.

N.B. If he will return to his duty, he shall be forgiven and every thing made agreeable to him.

The first name of John Pracy's sister isn't stated but in 1810, when Rosetta married Samuel Terry, she gave her surname as Madden, so it was almost certainly her. In 1791, at St Andrew's Holborn, James Madden married Rose PERCY of St Giles Cripplegate, but their names are rather too different to assert that they were Edward and Rosetta. No definite marriage for Rosetta to Edward or any other Maddon/Madden has been traced in the usual Pracy haunts of St Luke's, St Leonard's and St Giles, but if she did spend some time in Lancashire it could have taken place there.

Certainly it did not last, for by 1798 she and Henry Marsh had had a son, also called Henry, but when and where he was born isn't known. Although Nash is probably a misprint for Marsh, the phrase 'goes by the name of Nash' suggests that Thomas Eaton didn't believe she had legally re-married.

Rosetta was nearly 17 years old when her mother died. Even allowing for the influence of her older sister Ann and perhaps Mrs Newbank, she must have helped in the upbringing of her younger siblings and thus learned mothering skills. When John ran away, she was 28, with a son of her own. Ann was living with Isaac Fox and, although we don't know whether the Pracy household was still intact, Rosetta evidently felt responsible for John, though perhaps with some degree of exasperation.

On 22 November, the date of the newspaper advert, a convict ship called the *Hillsborough* had been moored at Portsmouth for at least a month, to receive convicts in preparation for sailing to Australia. Henry Marsh had come from the *Prudentia* hulk at Woolwich on 20 October, and also on board was Edward Madden. A few days later, Rosetta went as a free traveller on the *Hillsborough,* with her son Henry Marsh. Since the advert says that anyone harbouring John would be prosecuted and that she was doing precisely that, she was possibly keeping one step ahead of the law and might otherwise have made the same journey as a convict. Conversely, John may have absconded to help her get to Portsmouth and the *Hillsborough.*

Edward Madden's entry on the register for the Hillsborough

The convicts were picked up from various prison hulks, one of which was infected with jail fever (typhus). Soon after the *Hillsborough* left Langstone Harbour near Portsmouth, disease broke out and one third of the 300 convicts died on the voyage. Their plight was not helped by the brutal master of the ship, William Hingston. He starved prisoners and shackled them so heavily that they could barely move. The resultant scandal led to the *Hillsborough* being called 'the Death Ship'. Governor John Hunter described the survivors as 'the most Miserable and Wretched … I ever beheld'. One of those who died on the voyage was Edward Madden, who was buried at sea off Cape Town on 1 April 1799.

Thus Rosetta travelled with her son Henry, his father (Marsh) and her husband (Madden). Another child, Esther Marsh, must have been conceived as soon as Rosetta arrived in Sydney, for she was born on 28 April 1800. Henry junior worked on ships sailing out of Sydney and rose to the rank of captain. At the time of his death in 1825 he was employed by the East India Company. He died unmarried in Rangoon, aged about 28.

When in July 1799 Rosetta disembarked in Sydney, she found herself in a new and precarious world. There was little in the way of infrastructure, food sources or farms, and support was several months away. At first administration was fully in the Governor's hands and the settlement was a combination of military outpost and open prison, but once free persons began to settle and acquire land or goods, there was a different and constantly evolving situation. The government granted land with the intention of creating a colony, but this raised questions about the application of British laws and the form of government, particularly as they related to the rights of freed (emancipated) convicts.

She was always known in Sydney as Rosetta Marsh but when in 1810 she married Samuel Terry she described herself as 'Rosater Madden Widow', reverting to a surname that she hadn't used since she was in England. If Rosetta had been married to Marsh and he was still alive, she could not legally have married Terry. Whatever the precise truth, Rosetta's claim to be Madden's widow left her free to marry a man who was to become the richest in Australia. People were often economical with the truth in ways that were unlikely to be detected half a world away, and Rosetta's track record suggests that she was no exception.

Rosetta's third child, John, was probably born in 1806. John's surname was Terry although Samuel and Rosetta were not married at the time of his birth. This would indicate that Rosetta's relationship with Marsh had already broken down. Family legend suggested that his father was John HARRIS, Surgeon in the New South Wales Corps and a wealthy landowner. This may however, at a time when nobody wanted to be descended from convict stock, have been an attempt to bring a gloss of respectability to the family. We may never know whether Samuel was in fact John's biological father, but certainly in his will he mentions 'my son John Terry', whereas he refers to Esther and Henry Marsh as 'the daughter/son of my said wife by a former husband'. These somewhat irregular arrangements were typical of a colony in which men greatly outnumbered women.

* * * * *

After her arrival in Sydney, Rosetta gradually began to build her fortune. In England she could, like her sister Elizabeth, have had a job in trade, which would have given her the experience to develop her formidable business abilities. She probably used methods

similar to those of Sarah Bird, who in 1798 became the colony's first licensee of a public house[29]:

> I did a little trade in the passage here in a number of small articles, such as sugar, tea, tobacco, thread, snuff, needles, and everything that I could get anything by ... I have sold my petticoats at two guineas each, and my long black cloak at ten guineas, which shews that black silk sells well here; the edging that I gave 1s 8d per yard for in England, I got 5s for it here. I have sold all the worst of my cloaths, as wearing apparel brings a good price.

As early as 1803 Rosetta in her own name bought a small farm, details of which were listed on the muster of 12 Aug 1806:

> Rosetta Marsh. Came free *Hillsborough* 1799. Lives self. By Lease. Potatoes ½ acre. Orchard ½ acre. Hogs One. In hand, wheat 2 bushels, maize one bushel. Proprietor and three children not victualled. 1 Convict not victualled. 1 free man employed.

In 1808 she was among the traders who bought wine, spirits and dried fruit in a cargo that arrived from Edinburgh. She paid £133 (£4,300 today) and Surgeon Harris £115, which shows that she was not just a front woman for Harris's business interests. Her future husband Samuel Terry spent just £3.

Rosetta soon became a person of influence in the colony. In 1808 she was one of the few women among 800 'Free and Principal Proprietors of Landed Property' who signed a petition to Governor William Bligh, asking him to make representations to the King for trade privileges and trial by jury. The petition was also signed by Terry and Harris. Soon afterwards Bligh, not for the first time in his eventful life, was deposed from office – this time in the 'Rum Rebellion', in which officers of the New South Wales Corps led by George Johnston and John Macarthur mutinied against Bligh's attempts to suppress their commercial activities and especially their trade in rum. Rosetta subscribed £20 to a proposed fund to provide expenses to Macarthur and a presentation sword to Johnston.

In 1809 Rosetta received grants of 150 and 50 acres from Col William Paterson, one of three men who administered the colony after the military overthrew Bligh. She rather grandly called this land Islington, perhaps in recollection of the area close to her childhood home that was a centre of the livestock trade.

When in January 1810 Governor Lachlan Macquarie arrived to replace Bligh, he expressed 'the high displeasure of His Majesty on account of the late tumultuous and mutinous proceedings', and reversed most of the actions taken in the previous year. Rosetta was therefore one of the settlers who addressed a memorial (petition) to the Governor appealing for their grants to be continued and legalised. She declared that 'she has three children Fatherless and Unprotected which she has hitherto maintained and Educated by the most persevering Industry and by an equal share of Industry is now possessed of a Considerable number of Head Cattle Breeding Mares and Other Stock'. Her appeal was successful, for Macquarie granted her request, backdated to 1 January 1810.

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[29] *The coming of strangers: life in Australia 1788-1822* by Baiba Berzins, Collins in association with State Library of NSW, 1988, p103-4.

23. Lachlan Macquarie (1762-1824),Governor of New South Wales 1 January 1810 – 30 November 1821.

He is considered by historians to have had a crucial influence on the transition of New South Wales from a penal colony to a free settlement and therefore to have played a major role in the shaping of Australian society in the early nineteenth century. [Wikipedia]

It seems clear that Rosetta built up her fortune largely by her own efforts, but precisely how she did it can only be a matter of speculation. Back in England she could, like her sister Elizabeth, have had a job in trade, which would have given her the experience to develop her formidable business abilities. I doubt whether the family had much capital to give her when she left England, but she may have accumulated a little of her own. When in 1809 44 wine and spirits licences were granted in Sydney, she was one of only four women to receive one. She perhaps accumulated her wealth as a trader, acting like other women of the time as a sort of banker.

Early in 1810 Rosetta went to law four times, to recover money owed to her for goods and services or as compensation. In the most remarkable case, Rosetta took on one of the leading families in the colony – that of George Johnston, who less than two years earlier had deposed the unpopular Governor Bligh. Johnston was in England attempting to vindicate his actions, so left his property at Annandale in the charge of his mistress, the beautiful Jewish woman Esther Julian who later married him. Rosetta prosecuted Esther 'for the negligence of her servant James Hooper, in improperly putting a mare to horse, by which the mare died'. In September 1809 Rosetta had ordered her servant, John Winch, to deliver a dark bay mare to Annandale, for mating with one of Mrs Julian's stallions. The stallion immediately leaped on the mare and Hooper tried to assist him, but Winch saw something was going wrong, so took the mare back to her stable but she died at about midnight. The court found that the penis of the horse had burst the rectum of the unfortunate mare and caused her death. Esther pleaded not guilty but a verdict was given for Rosetta of damages of £80 (£2,500 today) + costs.

1810-1838: Rosetta Terry, wife

Rosetta was thus an effective businesswoman and landowner in her own right, so when she and Samuel combined their resources they became the wealthiest people in Australia. Theirs may well have been a love match as well as a shrewd financial arrangement, but even so she ensured that they signed an agreement 'securing to her all her stock previous to their marriage'. In 1792 Mary Wollstoncraft had published her influential *Vindication of the Rights of Women* which perhaps influenced Rosetta, who could read and clearly had strong feminist views.

Recent brilliant research by Janice Eastment and Kevin Shaw[30] has established that Samuel Terry was born in 1778 at Youlgreave in Derbyshire. His family moved to Lancashire around 1792 and on 7 November 1799 at Lancaster Quarter Sessions he was convicted of stealing 400 pairs of stockings, and other goods. In June 1801 Samuel arrived at the convict settlement where he was placed in a gang of stonemasons that built Parramatta jail, but soon he developed a reputation for respectability.

Samuel began to build up his fortune. It was alleged that he got people drunk so they signed away their possessions, but others disputed this. He was highly regarded by Governor Macquarie, who in 1817 described him as a 'wealthy trader', dealing in the provision of fresh meat and flour to the government. He always drove a hard bargain, as is indicated by his readiness to prosecute his debtors, but was regarded as a fair and well-respected employer.

24 Rosetta Madden née Pracey was a wealthy woman in her own right even before 1810 when she married Samuel Terry (1778-1838), 'the Botany Bay Rothschild'..

A month after Rosetta married Samuel their son Edward was born, and in 1811 their daughter Martha. The populist historian Frank Clune described Rosetta as 'a mother in a million, co-founder of a dynasty that has prospered for generations'. Judging by the number of men in her life, I would think that she must also have been a very attractive woman.

Samuel was the largest shareholder in the Bank of New South Wales, founded in 1817 as Australia's first bank, and Rosetta was among the 31% of woman shareholders. Female votes could only be exercised as proxies by male shareholders, but the couple apparently had a good relationship and conflict over his exercise of her vote seems unlikely. Samuel was also associated with many benevolent and religious movements in Sydney. Respected as honest and capable in money matters, he often became treasurer.

Samuel died in 1838 after a stroke, aged about 62. A rumour swept Sydney that he owned a trunk full of gold and money but it was never found. His estate was nevertheless valued at £200,000 (£8.8 million today), which made the scale of his fortune unique in Australian history. In 1825 he had made an elaborate will which gives an idea of just how extensive the Terry assets were. To 'my dear wife Rosetta' went Box Hill itself,

[30] *Who was Samuel Terry?* IN *The Ryde Recorder*, vol. 43 no.4, Sep 2009.

along with ‘the household furniture plate linen and china that I shall have in use in the house in which I shall usually reside at the time of my decease’. Initially the chief beneficiary was to be their son Edward but he proved a great disappointment, so Samuel tied up Edward’s property in trust and divided the other properties, money and assets among all the children. Edward died childless and intestate a few months after his father, in an influenza epidemic.

Ironically, therefore, the Terry name was perpetuated by the boy who probably was not Samuel’s son. In 1831 John married Eleanor, daughter of Richard Rouse who had been Samuel’s supervisor when he worked as a convict in the stonemasons’ gang. When John died in 1842, following a fall from his horse, his estate was valued at £30,000. His three sons, who all built themselves large houses, played significant roles in Australian history and had many descendants.

Immediately after Samuel’s death there was published in London a pamphlet snappily entitled *The History of Samuel Terry, in Botany Bay, who died lately, leaving a princely fortune of nearly one million sterling.* It was described on the title page as being *By A.L.F.*—— LATE OF NEW SOUTH WALES. It is not surprising that the author chose to conceal his identity and wait until after Sam’s death, for otherwise he would surely have been sued for libel. According to A.L.F., who dubbed him ‘the Botany Bay Rothschild’, Sam left property that ‘amounted to almost a million sterling’, and ‘bequeathed his wife an annuity of almost ten thousand pounds’. Sam bought up ‘acres…in and near Sydney, hitherto covered with filth and rubbish’, and made his fortune when his land became valuable for building. He was also said to have been responsible for the death by hanging of a family servant found guilty of theft, and for the madness of a friend whose farm Sam sold when he was unable to repay a loan of £800. Rosetta was presented as dressing in ‘a simple, nay, coarse manner’, being too mean to employ a servant and having a ‘niggardly, fearful and narrow mind’. Since the author was wrong about such basic details as Sam’s age and Rosetta’s background, there is little reason to suppose that he was any more accurate in his more lurid accusations. Much of the pamphlet was proved to be false, but it illustrates the great passions aroused by the idea that people could in effect benefit from their crimes in England by accumulating great wealth in Australia.

1838-1858: Rosetta Terry, widow

Much of Sam’s money passed to his nephew John Terry HUGHES, who in 1825 married Rosetta’s daughter Esther Marsh. The Sydney Gazette reported that ‘after the ceremony the happy couple set off in their chariot to Mr Terry’s country seat at Box Hill’. They ‘took the world easy and lived in fine style’, and went on to have six daughters and a son. Hughes went into partnership with John HOSKING, who had married Sam and Rosetta’s daughter Martha. John Hosking and Martha Terry were married in 1829 but it was not until the late 1840s that they presented Rosetta with three granddaughters. The second of them rejoiced in the name Ada Australia Pracey Hosking.

Hughes went into partnership with John Hosking, who had married Samuel and Rosetta’s daughter Martha. When their Albion Mills burnt down in 1841, it was underinsured and in an attempt to save themselves they borrowed large sums against the assets of the Bank of Australia. Their company finally collapsed in 1843 and they brought the bank and themselves down to spectacular bankruptcy. Rosetta’s shrewdness in keeping her assets

separate enabled her to buy some of Hosking's property before it was sequestrated, and she even petitioned the court for money that he owed her. Thus she was able to preserve the family's fortunes for the next generation.

The Terrys did not entirely forget Rosetta's Pracy sisters. In a codicil of 1834 Sam directed payment of annuities to various people including 'Mrs. [Ann] Fox of London twenty pounds and after the death of the said Mrs Fox the like sum to her sister Rebecca Fox for her life'. On the 1841 English census Ann Fox, Rebecca Fox and Lucy Pracy are all listed as being of independent means and living in comfortable suburban houses, so after Samuel's death Rosetta probably gave each of her sisters a regular allowance. Following the Australian pattern, however, she apparently made no similar provision for her brothers or their children.

Rosetta died from 'decay of nature' on 5 September 1858, aged 88. Her personal wealth (excluding her land) was valued at £27,000. Like her sister Ann and niece Susan, she was no stickler for accuracy about her age: at the time of the 1828 census she subtracted six years, but her death certificate rounded her up two years to a nice neat 90.

Two years earlier Rosetta had made a will which shows that her shrewd brain was by no means in decay. In the light of half a century's business experience, not least with her bankrupt sons-in-law, she took a decidedly feminist line. She made provision that the men in the family should only have annual income rather than property. The women were to have their estates 'free from the debts or control of any husband'.

The will of Rosetta's sister Lucy shows that by 1848 their niece Rebecca Fox was living at Box Hill, apparently as a sort of companion to her aunt. In what was evidently a fairly standard clause Rosetta left all her household goods to Rebecca, as Sam had to her. Rebecca was also given some 500 acres and a house in Crown Street, Surry Hills.

Rebecca was appointed an executor and trustee of the will, along with Rosetta's widowed daughter Esther Hughes and William Manners Clark, the family lawyer. Under the original will of November 1856, Esther's daughter Priscilla was pointedly excluded from receiving any property, but a codicil of February 1858 was written specifically to readmit her to the fold. Perhaps Priscilla had shown signs of being as feckless as the men in the family, but proved to her grandmother that she was trustworthy after all.

Rebecca Fox seems to have been almost as adept as her aunt at sleight of hand. When she registered Rosetta's death she gave Edmund's profession as merchant rather than carman, although that may have been what her aunt told her. After Rosetta's death Rebecca married Alexander Maclean HENDERSON on 11 December 1860 at the Church of Scotland in Paddington, New South Wales. Her father's Christian name was given as Richard and he was described as a gentleman, whereas in fact he was a coachman called Isaac. Rebecca was also the most creative of all our family in the matter of her age, which she gave as 34 when she was actually 47. Rebecca died in 1879 and was buried at Rookwood Cemetery.

* * * * *

There can be little doubt that Rosetta Terry deliberately cast a smokescreen over some of the more dubious aspects of her past. With a sister and possibly three husbands convicted of theft, she may well have had good reason to. Even without such concealments the histories of ordinary people in those times are difficult to recover, so all of us who are researching her

would welcome any assistance, however small, in unravelling some of these mysteries. Yet the most important thing about Rosetta Terry is that she overcame all her difficulties, to become a truly great pioneer Australian.

11. The Pracy heartland

With an unusual surname like Pracy, we can combine registration and census material to get a very full picture of who was related to whom and what happened to them.

We seem on the whole to have been a pretty stay-at-home bunch. John William's sister Rosetta and son Thomas Richard emigrated to Australia, and both had descendants. Three of the younger Edmund's daughters married or lived with men from south of the river where they settled, and in the 1880s and 1890s a few more brave souls moved there. Apart from them, we were rooted in east London for well over a hundred years. What sort of area was it, and what was our family's place in it?

In the 16th century the capital began to expand beyond the Cities of London and Westminster into neighbouring parishes such as Finsbury and Shoreditch. In 1598 John Stow deplored the development of Goswell Street and the loss of the fields which were 'commodious for citizens to walk about'. Initially some wealthier people lived there and as late as the 1790s Edmund and his family were occupying what was apparently a pleasant suburban terrace in the north of Finsbury, close to the countryside. Already, however, those parts closest to the City were heavily built up, mostly with small businesses and cheap rented housing for working-class people. The first national census in 1801 recorded that 26,000 people were living in St. Luke's. Since distrust of the census is nothing new, that may have been an underestimate.

What happened next was well summarised by Felix Barker and Peter Jackson[31]:

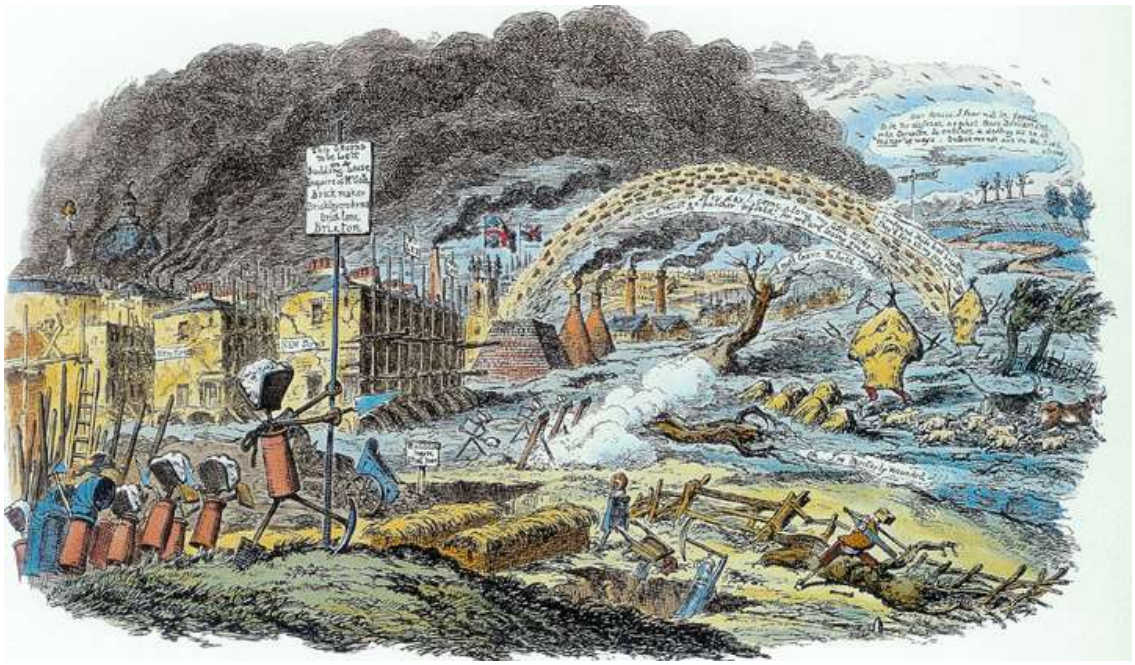
> In the fifty years leading to the middle of the century London's population more than doubled. In 1801 London was still a leafy city of under a million people: by 1851 two million were living and working in a metropolis whose rooftops were blackened by smoke from factory chimneys. Fine new terraces and overcrowded tenements were both the outcome of mid-Victorian commercial prosperity…

I suspect that the Pracy brothers and their families may have had aspirations to move out but had to live at or near their places of work, and lacked the resources to break free. For another half-century the Pracys remained in the older parts of Shoreditch, with a few nearby in the City and Finsbury. The population of Shoreditch grew from 34,766 in 1801 to a maximum of almost 130,000 in 1861, before the coming of the railways enabled people to move out and numbers began to decline.

In the late 1820s the Church of England recognised the rapid growth of Shoreditch and created two new parishes north of Old Street – St John the Baptist Hoxton west of Kingsland Road, and St Mary Haggerston east. By 1903 no fewer than 21 parishes had been carved out of the ancient parish of St Leonard's, but then as population moved away most of these new churches were closed. The whole area continued to be called Shoreditch but the threefold division into Shoreditch, Hoxton and Haggerston remained,

31 *London: 2000 years of a city and its people*. Macmillan, 1983, p294.

so wherever possible I have referred to them specifically. Only after 1850, and increasingly in the 1860s, did the Pracys begin to venture out of their heartland. They went initially to Hoxton and Haggerston and to Bethnal Green, which is immediately east of Shoreditch although it never formed part of it.



***25 The pace of change was brilliantly illustrated by George Cruikshank in his cartoon* London going out of Town; or, the March of Bricks and Mortar.**

Bethnal Green in the early and mid-Victorian period was probably the poorest and most overcrowded parish in the country. The *Victoria County History* has an excellent summary of social conditions there at http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=22751, but perhaps the most graphic account was given by Dr Hector Gavin (1815–1855)[32]. He moved from Scotland to east London in 1838, and immediately discovered an insanitary and unhealthy city with human and animal waste lining the streets, industrial pollution, and extensive overcrowding. He was soon appointed surgeon to the Bethnal Green workhouse and during the 1840s used his local knowledge to expose these horrors. He became an effective propagandist for the Health of Towns Association[33]. It hoped to shame central government into reform, and wrote in one report:

> There are parts of London where I have walked for hours with liquid putrefying filth in every kennel or hollow—where the odour was that of one perpetual sewer or cesspool, and where squalor and wretchedness were visible without variety.

Gavin's hard work and ability caught the eye of the famous social reformer Edwin Chadwick, and in 1848 he was appointed secretary and medical superintending inspector

[32] Information about Gavin based on his entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography.*
[33] See http://www.medicinethroughtime.co.uk/historyofmedicine/publichealth/healthoftownsassociation.htm

to the newly formed Board of Health. The Public Health Act of that year marked real progress for a group of reformers, including Gavin, who dramatically improved approaches to sanitary management. However, it disgracefully excluded London and in response the Metropolitan Sanitary Association was formed. Gavin, as one of its honorary secretaries, used his position to criticize the capital's sanitary state and urge the extension of the 1848 act to London.

Gavin's best-known work, *Sanitary Ramblings* (1848), was a street-by-street account of Bethnal Green's alleys and slums. You can see the full text on line at http://www.victorianlondon.org/publications/sanitary-2.htm, but of particular interest to our family is his description of Hare Street (now Cheshire Street), where several of them are known to have lived and others may have done:

> HARE-ST, 7.-This street is abominably dirty and foul; a condition which results from no imperfection of the street itself, as it is well paved and has a good roadway. The back yards of the houses here are in a most scandalous state. Let us take one as an example:-The back-yard of No. 79 is in a perfectly beastly state of filth; the privy is full, and smells most offensively. There is a large cess-pool in it, one part of which is only partially covered with boarding; the night-soil was lately removed from it, but the stench arising from it is still very great. In another part is a little puddle, or pond, of foetid semi-putrescent mud. A pig-stye has lately been removed, but the organic remains common to such places, are mixed up with the earth, and form a pasty mass spread over part of the sail. The wife of the present occupier lately died of fever, and his child recovered with great difficulty. None of the inhabitants are well; three cases of fever and one death were clearly traceable to the abominable filthiness of this place.

* * * * *

Only when I started to chart their addresses on contemporary and modern maps did I realise just how limited Pracy territory was. Starting from Liverpool Street station, you can comfortably do a round walk of all their known Shoreditch addresses in two hours. I have prepared similar linear walks covering the City and Finsbury, Hoxton and Haggerston, and Bethnal Green. You can find these walks in a separate document, Pracy walks. Another document, Pracy gazetteer, gives in date order all known Pracy addresses from 1771 to 1901.

The overcrowded, unsanitary conditions would have been horrifying to 21st-century eyes, but gradually improved. Parents in the 18th century had produced large numbers of children in the hopes that one or two would survive to support them in old age. By the mid-19th century those who died in infancy were the exception and some Pracy families had six or more children grow to adulthood. Even so, some 15% of our children died in infancy, significantly above the London average of 11%: between 1866 (when the GRO first gave ages at death) and 1914, 124 Pracy children were born and 19 died before the age of five. Breast-feeding continued to be the most effective form of birth control, at least for a year or so after a child's birth.

Shoreditch and the surrounding areas had pockets of great poverty and some criminality, but our family seem to have been fairly respectable working people who perhaps weren't drawn into the worst of it. Elizabeth found herself in the dock of the Old Bailey in 1799, as did my grandfather in 1904 (although I consider him more sinned against than sinning

– see below, chapter 23). In 1850 William Charles was charged with riotous and disorderly conduct in a music hall, and bound over. In 1888 Thomas Richard Angell was charged with stealing rhubarb from a nine-acre enclosed market garden at Tottenham Hale Farm. Apart from them, I have traced no record of our family committing any significant crimes, although there were several marital irregularities which nowadays would have been resolved by divorce.

It is generally accepted that 19th-century census returns under-recorded women's occupations, but some Pracy women's jobs were noted. They mostly worked in the clothing trade, presumably at home or in the small factories and workshops that were a feature of the Shoreditch area. Several of them were servants of various descriptions, but by the 1880s some of our family were able to afford live-in servants of their own.

For much of the 19th century most of the Pracy men worked in what could broadly be called transport services. The main motive power would have been the horse. It could have been housed in one of the many stables in the area, but men often had to take their horses home with them. It would not have been easy for horses to co-exist with large families in a typical two-up/two-down Shoreditch terraced house, so the animals would presumably have been stabled in the back yard. These trades were often hereditary, so although there is little or no direct evidence of Pracys passing their business from father to son, there may well have been family connections.

Several like the younger Edmund were carmen, what we would probably call a carrier or carter of goods. It was often a casual, rather insecure occupation, although it was also sufficiently prestigious to have its own City livery company. The only Pracy admitted as a Master Carman was Edmund James (1808-1890), who was also the only one to be listed in Kelly's directory. I suspect therefore that the rest either had their own small one-man businesses or were employed by other people.

With the coming of the railways, there was less call for carmen and some of them became coachmen or cab-drivers, jobs which were similar but not synonymous. Both might have driven a horse-drawn carriage for hire, but only a coachman could have had a wealthy private employer. They would probably have worked mostly in the West End and the City, and gone home to the East End after their often very long working day. Nineteenth-century novels such as *Black Beauty* give an idea of the hardships to which wealthy but thoughtless hirers could subject cabbies. In the 1870s a temperance organisation began to build cosy little huts where cabbies could find food and shelter, but before that they all too often found comfort in the pub. It is therefore not surprising that some of the Pracys who did that work died prematurely. Cabbies picked up the majority of their fares from the main railway stations, and in the 1890s staged three successful strikes against attempts to restrict their access.

The years before the First World War saw the rapid development of motor transport and the rapid decline of horse-drawn vehicles. Colonel RB Oram, who started work in the London docks in 1912, remembered that

> The carmen were a class that has long disappeared. Dressed in a garb that often included a broken-down garb of fustian colour, they built up a resistance to the winter cold, from which their vehicles afforded no protection, by adding further layers of overcoats. 'It's three coats warmer today' accurately described a spell of milder weather… No carman was seen without

> his whip. It corresponded to today's ignition key, the symbol of his control of his vehicle. Often the whip had a silver mount and had been in his possession for years…[34]

Other men worked in the catering trade as cellarmen or porters. They often lived on the premises, which were usually pubs. The temptation to sample the goods may have contributed to the fact that they too tended not to be long-lived.

One of the most significant events in the history of the East End was the coming of the railway, to Bishopsgate in 1847 and on to Liverpool Street in 1874. Cheap workmen's fares meant that for the first time large numbers of people were able to live well beyond walking distance of their work. The railway network expanded, so after 1870 the Pracys were scattered and it became impossible for their often large families to keep in touch with one another. They drifted apart so, a century and more later, only diligent family history research has reestablished the links.

John William's two youngest sons followed the family tradition of running their own small business. Indeed, they became employers in their own right. In the 1860s and 1870s they and other members of our family moved out to the then appropriately respectable middle-class suburbs of Hackney, Islington and Leyton. Their sons in turn found new opportunities as commercial clerks rather than in traditional manual jobs. Other branches of the family didn't catch up with these advances until the 1890s.

Expansion of businesses in Shoreditch meant a gradual decline of population, and by 1901 only one Pracy family and one individual were living there. By then most families had settled in the rapidly expanding London suburbs. Some younger people without family commitments, including several women, found employment outside the capital, although mostly still in the Home Counties.

* * * * *

In July 2005, to mark the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, the Museum of London undertook an archaeological dig at Shoreditch Park in the area formerly known as Hoxton New Town[35]. There on the site of a former market garden an estate of high-density housing was built in the 1820s, when New North Road and the Regent's Canal were built. The poorly-constructed two-storey terraced houses were described by contemporaries as 'fourth-rate', which was officially the lowest category. They give an idea of the type of house many of the Pracys would have lived in.

The dig was on the site of Dorchester Street, immediately south of Poole Street. It gave a good idea of what the houses had been like. The foundations apparently consisted of rough and ready rubble dumping. Each building had the same basic arrangement, consisting of a front parlour and rear dining room. Beyond this was the kitchen, with clear signs of drainage and support for a range or hearth. Next to the kitchen, the solid yard surface led to the external washroom and outside toilet. The tenants disposed of their rubbish and sewage through a complex of culverts to cesspits in the back yard, which was also used for the disposal of ash from coal fires. Around 1900 the homes were extended to increase the size of the kitchen and to add a washroom and toilet.

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[34] *The dockers' tragedy*, p2.

[35] The dig was the subject of a *Time Team* Special, first broadcast on 29 October 2006, which you can see at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=buS8203B1Dg

During the war many of the houses were destroyed in bombing raids and by V2 rockets, and much of what remained was damaged beyond repair. Eventually it was all swept away and the park was laid out in the 1980s.

Some of our family members were in Hoxton New Town in the 19th century, and others occupied similar houses nearby. By the start of the Second World War none of the Pracys was still there and few were in the surrounding areas, showing the extent to which we had moved away from our Shoreditch roots.

Part 3: John William Pracy (1779-1831) and his descendants

John was born on 2 March 1779 and baptised at St Luke's on 6 April. He became a watchmaker, a skilled trade that occupied an estimated one-third of the population in the nearby Clerkenwell area. An Isaac Fox baptised on 11 November 1765 was the son of Isaac Fox, a watchmaker of the Minories. This could suggest an early link between the Pracy and Fox families, although the younger Isaac may not have been the same person that married Ann.

We have already considered the effect of John's abscondment on his sister Rosetta, but it's worth quoting the advert again, to see what it tells us about him.

> ABSCONDED
>
> On the 29th August last, JOHN PRACY, Apprentice to Thomas Eaton, Watch Movement Maker of no 7 St James's Buildings Rosoman's-street Clerkenwell. He is 19 years of age, about 5 feet 4 inches high, slim made, light lank hair and walks very upright. It is supposed he is harboured by his own sister, whose name by Marriage is Maddon, but now goes by the name of Nash, took with him a dark velvet Jacket and Breeches, a red Waistcoat with black spots, likewise a light mixed coloured Coat made Frock Fashion, with black velvet Collar and pearl Buttons, a Marseilles Waistcoat, white ground very full of Red Stripes, and corded mixed Thickset Breeches with Pearl Buttons.
>
> This is to give Notice, whoever harbours or employs the above John Pracy, will be prosecuted; and if any Person will bring him as above, or give information so that he may be taken, shall receive Two Guineas reward [£70 today]. THOMAS EATON.
>
> N.B. If he will return to his duty, he shall be forgiven and every thing made agreeable to him.

This is by some way the earliest description we have of any of our ancestors. Apart from telling us about his physical appearance, it shows that he was quite a dandy. The fact that Thomas Eaton was apparently willing to take John back without any punishment may suggest that he was a relatively kindly employer and/or that John was a good worker, and makes it all the more puzzling that John should have run away. As John did become a watchmaker, he presumably returned to complete his apprenticeship. Rosoman Street, which in his time housed several watchmakers, still exists and is situated between the London Metropolitan Archive and the former Family Records Centre.

In 1806 at Christ Church Newgate Street John married Elizabeth Jane PALMER (1787-1871). She was born at Pennington Street in the parish of St George in the East Stepney, the daughter of Richard, a bricklayer, and Ann. Their surname on the baptismal register was spelt Parmer, a variant of the surname before spelling was standardized. She had at

least two siblings, Mary Ann born in 1781 and George Smart born in 1783. Evidently Elizabeth Jane was a woman of some education, for on the 1851 census she was described as a schoolteacher.

26 Three men of letters in Bunhill Fields. John Bunyan's tomb (foreground) with a memorial to Daniel Defoe (obelisk, left) and Willam Blake's grave (right) in background. *Wikipedia*

John was buried at 3.30pm on 9 January 1831 at Bunhill Fields, the leading nonconformist burial ground. The cost was £1 18s, suggesting that the family was fairly well off. John's children were baptised at St Giles Cripplegate, however, so it is unclear whether or not he had strong religious views. John Wesley had used the Finsbury area as a base since the 1740s and opened his chapel there in 1778, so some family members could well have been Methodists.

Baptismal registers show that, until 1813 at least, John and Elizabeth lived at Rodney Court in Chapel Street. This was just inside the City, on the site of the present-day Barbican Arts and Conference Centre. The next five baptisms, from 1815 to 1826, recorded them as living at John Street and the last in 1828 at St John Street, which was also known as John Street. This isn't in St Giles but it is well-known as the main road from the City through Clerkenwell, immediately to the west. It seems likely that the family lived there, although it was a long road and we have no idea where.

Another possibility is that the family were in Shoreditch at one of two John Streets that were, confusingly, only about 200 yards apart. Both were, like St John Street, just over a mile from St Giles, so it would have been easy enough for John and Elizabeth to get there. Certainly in 1841 the widowed Elizabeth Jane and her family were at 1 (now 153) Curtain Road on the corner of Old Street and close to the more northerly John Street, which is now the western part of Rivington Street. And in 1851 she was living at Motley Street (now Christina Street), literally round the corner from the other John Street, now the northern part of Phipp Street. Both John Streets were in the heart of Pracy territory and most of their children settled in various parts of Shoreditch, which would perhaps have been more likely to happen if the family already lived there. I had thought this the less likely option, but when in 1868 John William's son Edmund James was admitted as a Master Carman he gave his father's address as 'John Street, Curtain Road', which could be either of them.

In 1854 Henry was married from 12 Brunswick Place, Hoxton. By a strange coincidence, Elizabeth later retired and moved into 12 Brunswick Street, Haggerston. It was in a block of almshouses and a few months before her death, in 1871 aged 84, she was described as an almshouse annuitant. Also there was Emma CRISPIN, 'almshouse nurse', aged 63.

Like Edmund and Lucy, John and Elizabeth had nine baptised children, spaced out at intervals of two years or so. The slow improvement in sanitary conditions continued and only one of them, Ellen Lucy, died in infancy.

An infant called Jane Pracy of Lamb's Passage, next to Bunhill Fields, was buried there on 12 August 1807, aged two months. We know of no other Pracys in the area at that time so she may have been the eldest child of John William and Elizabeth Jane. There is, however, no record that they lived at that address, and unlike all their known children she was not baptised at St Giles. There is therefore no proof either way.

12. Edmund James, Elizabeth Jane, Mary Ann and her descendants, Ellen Lucy

Five of John William and Elizabeth Jane's sons had children. They are covered in separate sections, not because they were more important but because it is easier and clearer to do it that way. The remaining four children are dealt with here.

Edmund James (1808-1890) married Jane ALLEN (1809-1864) at St Leonard's Shoreditch in 1829, but they had no children. She died on 2 January 1864 and on 23 June he married a widow, Charlotte OSBORN nee UNDERWOOD (c1802-1868). The witnesses were Edmund's ubiquitous younger brother Joseph William, and their sister Mary Ann LAMBERT. Charlotte died four years later, and both of Edmund's wives were buried at Victoria Park cemetery. Edmund again remarried within six months, this time to Charlotte Mary JOSLIN, 25 years his junior. Both marriages were in Hoxton at St Mark's Old Street, which was next to the present-day tube station. Edmund's younger siblings Henry Charles and Mary Ann had married there in the mid-1850s, but no other family events took place there.

27. Victoria Park Cemetery was opened by a private company in 1845 and closed in 1876. For a while it fell into neglect but in 1894 was laid out as a 'bright, useful, little park called Meath Garden'.
http://www.burial.magic-nation.co.uk/bgbethnalgreen.htm

On 6 January 1868 he paid £9 15s to be admitted as a Master to the Worshipful Company of Carmen, the first member of our family to have been involved with one of the City livery companies since the three brothers and their cousin Edward moved up from Wiltshire in the 18th century. On 7 October 1870 he was admitted as a freeman of the City of London, which was something you applied for, but nevertheless a considerable achievement. He would have had the right to drive his sheep across four of the London

bridges, and to be put in a taxi home rather than in the cells if he was found drunk in the street. You rather suspect the influence of the 60-year-old's young wife in these new ambitions.

Mid-19th century censuses and other sources show Edmund living close to the river at various addresses in the City. In 1841 he was at 3 St Andrew's Hill, in 1851 at 158 Upper Thames Street, in 1861 at 23 Dowgate Hill and in 1864 at 3 Broken Wharf Upper Thames Street. He probably moved around in between, and it seems likely that for much of his working life he carted goods from ships docked in the Thames. On his last marriage certificate he proudly declared himself to be a master carman, but curiously changed his father's trade from watchmaker to carman.

The coming of steamships meant that the old ragbag of wharves, docks and inlets in the City were used less and less. Between 1864 and 1870 they were swept away and replaced by the Embankment. With them probably went the livelihood of Edmund James, by then in his late 50s, but if so he was resilient enough to start again. By 1868 he was living in the heart of Pracy territory at Clifton Street Shoreditch, and in 1875-6 he had a business at 9 Gloucester Street (now Hewett Street), Curtain Road. By 1881 he had probably semi-retired, and he and Charlotte had moved out to 111 Glenarm Road Hackney, where they had a live-in servant.

On the 1891 census, 'Mary Pricey' was listed as a widowed laundress with four lodgers. More surprisingly, she was said to have two daughters - Louisa Jennett Pricey, a 24-year-old dressmaker born in the City, and Mary Pricey, 20, a servant born in Bow. Why these two suddenly appeared a few months after Edmund's death, where they had been and where they went, I have no idea. Mary would be impossible to trace, but despite an extensive search in the usual sources, I could find no reference to anyone who could conceivably have been Louisa Jennett.

In 1892-3 Charlotte was listed on the electoral register as Ann Pracey and in 1894-5 as Elizabeth Pracy. The 60-year-old then took a leaf out of Edmund's book and remarried, at St John's Hackney. The groom was Thomas CARTER, a 66-year-old widower and foreman at the Board of Works. Nothing certain is known of her, but she was possibly the Charlotte Carter who died in Hackney in 1899, said to be aged 64.

Elizabeth Jane (1815-1876) became a dressmaker. In 1852 she married Edward BROWNE, a widowed upholsterer, at the church where her father and his siblings were married half a century earlier – Christ Church Newgate Street. This was probably just coincidence, for their addresses were both given as Warwick Lane, very close to the church.

On the 1861 and 1871 censuses Edward and Elizabeth Jane were living in Haggerston at 10B Cumberland Street (renamed Scawfell Street in 1878). The numbering of the street was eccentric even by the standards of the time, and it's impossible to identify exactly where the house was. His occupation was given in 1861 as 'proprietor of houses' and in 1871 as 'retired upholsterer'. Living nearby at 11 Tuilerie Street was Elizabeth Jane's brother Henry Charles (see chapter 18).

Elizabeth Jane died in October 1876 and Edward the following July, aged 79. In a will dated 6 December 1876, he was described as a gentleman. He left all his property to

Henry Charles Pracy, who was also the executor. Edward's son by his first marriage opposed the will, claiming that his father was not of sound mind and that the will was obtained by undue influence. After examination of witnesses and the solicitor who prepared the will, the court found in favour of Henry. Browne had been staying with Henry and his family, so the decision was perhaps made on the grounds that they had been nursing him.

Although Browne's effects were valued at below £200, he left two pieces of property to his Pracy in-laws. To Mary Ann Elizabeth, eldest daughter of Elizabeth Jane's brother Joseph William (see chapter 16), he gave a leasehold property at 4 Elizabeth Street (now Mansford Street), Hackney Road. To Henry Charles he bequeathed two freehold housses at 151-3 Curtain Road, on the corner of Old Street, for which Henry had the vote. In 1841 it was no. 1, and Elizabeth Jane was living there with her widowed mother and her younger brothers Joseph William and Henry Charles. This seems unlikely to have been a coincidence, and is probably how Edward Browne and Elizabeth Jane Pracy met. According to Henry Charles Pracy's will, proved in 1909, he still owned the property.

Mary Ann (1823-1900) was a servant, who in 1841 was working in Bishopsgate for a family called Fickling. In 1851, at Clapton Passage Hackney, she was housemaid to Robert Wakefield, retired secretary to a life assurance company.

In 1855 at St Mark's Old Street, very close to where her mother was living, Mary Ann married William Benjamin LAMBERT, who was described as a servant. The witnesses were her sister Elizabeth Jane and brother Joseph William. In 1856 William Benjamin and Mary Ann had a son, William John, in Marylebone where William Benjamin died in 1857.

On the 1861 census the widowed Mary Ann Lambert (wrongly spelt Lambatt on the original) and her son William John were staying with her sister Elizabeth Jane Browne at 10B Cumberland Street, Haggerston. In 1871 William John was listed as Edward Browne's nephew but Mary Ann wasn't there and I couldn't find her anywhere else.

In 1881 Mary Ann was back in Marylebone at 15 Henry Street (now Allitsen Road), which was the home of a little cottage industry. She was listed as 'laundress at home', while two other women were 'tailoress at home', one was 'needlewoman at home' and one was 'ironer from home'.

William John Lambert became a mercantile clerk. In 1878 he married Sarah Elizabeth SMITH in Hackney, where in 1879 their son William Pracy Lambert was born. To the best of my knowledge, William Pracy Lambert was the first person since late 18th-century Bishopstone to be given Pracy as a middle name, although several of Edward Prascey's relatives had his spelling of it. A few years later four of Henry Charles Pracy's grandsons also had it. In 1884 Florence Elizabeth Lambert was born in Shoreditch, and by 1891 the family had settled in Walthamstow, where William John's mother, Mary Ann, had moved in with them.

Mary Ann and William John Lambert both died in 1900 in the West Ham registration district, of which Walthamstow was then part. In 1901 the widowed Sarah was almost certainly an underclothing machinist, boarding in Tottenham. With her was another son, 8-year-old Edward John, who may have married Alice M MOREY in the West Ham

district in 1927. William and Florence were lodging at separate addresses in Walthamstow. He was a clerk and she was a telephonist, both typical occupations at a time when many people commuted from Walthamstow into the City. Florence married Duncan ROBERTSON and in 1911 her husband and her brother were both commercial travellers selling typewriters.

Ellen Lucy (1825-7) died aged 1 year 4 months. She was buried as Helen Lucy at Bunhill Fields on 15 March 1827, a few months before William Blake.

13. John William Pracy (1810-1868) and his descendants

John William II married Sarah READ (1813-1876) at St Dunstan's Stepney on 9 November 1834. John at first was a labourer and then a porter, but around 1847 became a carman.

On 15 August 1836, John was a witness in a case of petty theft heard at the Old Bailey[36]. Henry WILLIAMS was indicted for stealing on 20 July 1836, one piece of timber, value 1s, the goods of Robert WEBB. John gave evidence that at half past seven on the evening of 20 July, he saw the prisoner take a piece of timber from a new building in Gracechurch Street. The next morning he informed the foreman, William THOMPSON, who saw Williams take two pieces of timber from the building, and gave him in charge to the officer. Williams was also indicted for stealing two more pieces of timber on the following evening. Thompson gave evidence that Williams said at the watch-house that he did it through want, and had disposed of the first piece for something to eat and a night's lodging. Williams was given a good character and the jury found him guilty with a recommendation to mercy, so he was confined for just two days. In 1836 John William Pracy was a labourer whereas his cousin John (1813-1867) was a tallow chandler, so I think that this is more likely to be him. The case gives a glimpse into the kind of labour he would have done. He would probably have been able to walk to Gracechurch Street in about 20 minutes.

John and Sarah were typical of the Pracys in that they moved fairly frequently within a limited area, mostly in Shoreditch. From 1837 to 1846 at least they lived at Three Colts Court, off Worship Street near Paul Street. After venturing a quarter of a mile south to Whitecross Place, they returned to 5 New Court, Hill Street (now Bonhill Street) – just round the corner from Three Colts Court but across the parish boundary in Finsbury. From 1858 to 1861 at least they lived at 2a King's Head Court, at the junction of Earl Street and Long Alley (redeveloped and renamed Appold Street in 1879), and in 1867 they were at 15 Cowper St. Their furthest move was to 10 Bowling Green Walk Hoxton, where John died of chronic asthma in 1868. He was buried at Victoria Park Cemetery.

Whereas his parents and grandparents had had all their children baptised before they were a year old, John had his first three done at St Leonard's Shoreditch as a job lot when they were 8, 6 and 3 respectively. This may perhaps suggest a change in social customs, a decline in religious observance, or the arrival of a zealous new clergyman. His fourth child was baptised at St Paul's Bunhill Row when she was 8 but, strangely, he missed the

[36] http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=t18360815-1778&div=t18360815-1778&terms=pracy#highlight Accessed 26 May 2008.

opportunity to have nos. 5 done at the same time. Curiously, No. 6 was baptised at St James Shoreditch in 1858 when he was six weeks old and again at St Mark's Shoreditch when he was 8, while no. 5 seems to have missed out altogether.

John William III (1835-1903) was a cab driver. In 1857 he married Sarah Maria MEADWELL (1834-1915) at St James Curtain Road Shoreditch**, a** parish that had been formed out of St Leonard's in 1848. It was in the heart of Pracy territory, and over the next 15 years ten of our marriages and five baptisms took place there. The church was on the site of present-day 21 Curtain Road, but it was demolished in 1935 and now there is no sign that it ever existed.

John William lived in Bethnal Green for most of his life. From 1875-8 he was listed on electoral registers at 8 Pollard Street but from 1879-84 he had a chandler's shop at 8 New Inn Street Shoreditch, close to the soap factory of his uncle Joseph William and cousin Thomas Richard (see below, chapter 17). While he was there, he and Thomas Richard both had the vote. On the 1881 census he was at the same address but described as a coachman, so he perhaps accumulated an income by doing both jobs part-time. That would not have been unusual in the somewhat precarious economic climate of the 19th-century East End. From 1887 he was listed on the voters' register as renting two unfurnished upstairs rooms at 51 Wellington Row. Remarkably the terrace has survived the destruction of the Blitz and housing redevelopment, and looks much as it must have done when John and Sarah were there. By 1901 they had moved to 87 Barnet Grove where they had similar accommodation at a rent of 4s 9d a week. The rent at Wellington isn't shown, but John was 65 years old and perhaps had to look for something cheaper.

In 1911 the widowed Sarah Maria was listed at 95 Columbia Road, a shop which had five rooms. She was staying with 47-year-old Henry HOLLINGTON, an off licence keeper working on own account, and his 48-year-old wife Maria. Rather touchingly, Henry described Sarah as 'friend', which the enumerator sternly changed to the more formal 'visitor'.

John and Sarah had three daughters.

Elizabeth Sarah was born on 20 July 1861 and became a machinist. She married Alfred Charles DAVIS at St Thomas's Bethnal Green in 1884, when her family had just moved to 31 Gibraltar Walk. Alfred and his father were described as general dealers, as was Elizabeth's father who presumably was still combining cabbying with trading. That may well have been how Alfred and Elizabeth met. They lived for many years at 23 Atherton Road Forest Gate, with children Charles Albert, Violet, Leonard Ernest and Dorothy Alice, and a live-in servant. Alfred was listed in 1891 as a marine general dealer, in 1901 as a rag and metal merchant and in 1911 as a general dealer. Evidently he was in partnership with brother William Thomas, who described himself similarly and lived next door at no. 21. Davis is rather too common a name to be sure what happened to them afterwards.

Angelina Alice died in 1865**,** aged only seven weeks. In previous editions I mistakenly assumed she was named after her mother, but the record of her baptism at St Phillip's shows that it was in fact after her aunt. The family were then living at 21 Tyssen Street.

Alice Minnie (1871-1926) was a boot fitter in 1891. She was married at Shoreditch in 1897 at St Mary Haggerston to John William CRAIB, a postman. They had three daughters, Lilian Alice, Nellie Elizabeth and Doris Daisy.

George Philip (1837-1866) was also a cab driver. He married Sarah Maria's sister Angelina MEADWELL (1838-1921) at St James Curtain Road in 1861. The sisters were obviously close, for they were witnesses at one another's weddings. Their happiness must have seemed complete when later in 1861 each couple had a daughter, and they called them both Elizabeth Sarah. This is one of several cases where Pracy brothers had children within a few months of one another and gave the cousins the same names. This seems to have happened when they were very close – understandable and rather touching, but not helpful to the family historian. Without seeing certificates or baptismal registers, it is often impossible to distinguish between them.

Briefly the two couples shared a house at 6 Hereford Street Bethnal Green, but soon they moved to different numbers in Curtain Road. After that they moved around a lot but didn't live at the same address again.

George and Angelina soon had three children, but in 1866-7 tragedy struck in a manner that had already become unusual, and was more reminiscent of London life a century earlier. They were living in New Tyssen Street which, even by the standards of the time and place, was exceptionally cramped and unsanitary. Dr Hector Gavin gave a savagely sarcastic account of conditions there:

> This Street is in process of paving, but is as present in a most abominable state of dirt. No.- in this street has afforded an excellent illustration of the interest which is taken by the proprietors of small tenements to preserve their property from decay, and their tenants from disease. Not till the one has become dilapidated, and the other profitless, do they manifest that interest which it is their moral duty to display, and the neglect of which is entailing upon a squalid population disease, premature decay, poverty, immorality, and irreligion. Five persons occupied this dwelling, and were successively attacked with fever; they were all removed to the workhouse. Two other persons again occupied the dwelling, and in turn succumbed to the insidious poison which haunted it; they likewise were removed to the fever wards of the workhouse. Again, a third family of two persons made their home in this place, and again the potent poison manifested its power, and prostrated the occupants with loathsome fever - again did the workhouse receive the victims of disgraceful negligence and cruel apathy. Then, and not till then, was the foul and filthy cesspool emptied, and the drains, choked with solid filth, half cleansed; and when the work was done, and the foul smells still hung about the place, indicating the persistence of the poisonous agency, another family instantly, and in complete ignorance of the calamity impending over them, occupied the thrice-stricken abode.

Around the time Gavin was writing, some 50 extra dwellings were crammed on to the already squalid and overcrowded Tyssen Estate, so it is hardly surprising that George Philip and his infant son **William John** died young. George, his father John William II and niece Angelina were buried at Victoria Park Cemetery. But Angelina and two of her children survived. The 1881 census shows that they were still just about in Bethnal Green, near the border with Hackney at 30 Marian Square, off Pritchard's Row. Angelina's first name was given as Ann and she was a boot machinist. By 1889 she had moved to 3 Marian Square where she was the first Pracy woman to appear on the

electoral register, although then and on the 1891 census she was wrongly called Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Sarah (1861-1918) was born on 25 October 1861, three months after her namesake cousin. She was listed on the 1881 census as a 'filter paste' and another girl in the same house was a 'paste filter', so presumably they worked in a nearby factory. In 1887 at the parish church of South Hackney, Elizabeth married Henry HARROW, a coachman and the son of a deceased watchmaker. He was said to live at 28 Poole Road and she at no. 30. On the 1891 census Elizabeth was with her mother at Marian Square but Henry was listed on his own in Paddington, although that may just have been because his work happened to take him away on census night.

In 1895 Angelina (wrongly indexed by the GRO as TRACY) was remarried at St John the Baptist Hoxton to Robert Henry HILL, a 56-year-old widower living at 14 Pownall Road. Angelina's address was 356 Hackney Road, and her daughter and son-in-law Henry and Elizabeth Harrow were the witnesses. On the 1901 census he was still at Pownall Road but Angelina was with Henry and Elizabeth in Notting Hill, although she was described as visitor rather than mother-in-law, so was perhaps just staying with them. Her surname was given as Pracey but that was probably just an error, for she and Robert were both described as married. Robert was a china manufacturer and Angelina was a charwoman.

By 1911 Angelina and Elizabeth had both been widowed. Remarkably, they had moved to Chatham where they were living with Elizabeth's children, Florence and Henry. Mother and daughter were working as tailoresses at their 5-room home, 22 Cobden Road. Angelina filled up the form in a neat, clear hand, calling herself Anne. Elizabeth died in the Medway district, which includes Chatham, in 1918 and Angelina died there in 1921, aged 85.

George Philip junior (1864-1945?) was an 'apprentice pianoforte trade' in 1881, but in 1883 he sailed to New York on board the *Egyptian Monarch* and settled in America. The 1910 US census shows him living in Cook Illinois, married to Henrietta K OFECL (Hattie), who was born in Missouri of German parents. Their children were George R, aged 20, and Clara E (16). He was probably 'George R Pracy', who died in Cook Illinois in 1945, said to be aged 82.

On the 1900 census George Philip had stated that he was born in England but in 1910 he said New York, while Angelina in 1911 declared that she had had three children but only one (clearly Elizabeth Sarah) was still alive. Either she believed he had died or there was some sort of estrangement between mother and son, although there is no indication of what might have caused it, and it is far from certain.

Ann (1840-1924) married Edward James DELAFORCE at St James Curtain Road in 1864. He came from a family of Huguenot silk weavers that has been extensively researched by descendant Patrick Delaforce[37]. Ann was a 'shoe binder' in 1861 and a 'boot fitter' in 1871. Edward, like Ann's sister-in-law Angelina, was a boot machinist. It seems likely therefore that often the family helped one another find jobs, and found spouses through work.

[37] http://www.art-science.com/Ken/Genealogy/PD/swft2.html#AugustusEdwardDF

Edward and Ann apparently had no children, but as the eldest daughter Ann took on an important role in the Pracy family. She was a witness at the second marriage of her sister Sarah. After her father's death, her mother went to stay with Ann at 46 Huntingdon Street (now Falkirk Street) Hoxton, where she died in March 1876.

In earlier editions I floated the possibility that Edward and Hannah Delaforce who died at Hackney later in 1876 were our Edward and Ann. As the result of an email from Simon Charles Baynton AUGER, I searched the IGI and FreeBMD and soon found another Edward and Hannah, which disproved my suggestion.

On the 1881 census at 22 The Parade, High Road, Lee, Edward Delaforce was listed as a shop assistant and said to be married. At 39 Maria St (now Geffrye St) Shoreditch 'Anny Dellyforce', a lodger and boot machinist, was said to be a widow.

In 1891 Edward was a lodger at 30 Chambord St Bethnal Green, a porter working for a land auction firm. He was said to be married but no wife was present. Ann was listed round the corner at 42 Baroness Road as Annie BAYNTON, wife of William. They had two sons, George aged 9 and Bertie aged 6. Albert Arthur Baynton was born on 1 June 1884 at 1 Columbia Road Bethnal Green, but no birth certificate has been traced for George Thomas Baynton.

In 1901 Edward Delaforce was listed as a market porter at 6 Corbet Court, Spitalfields with Keziah, said to be his wife, although no marriage of Edward Delaforce to a Keziah has been traced. Ann was with her sister Elizabeth Jane Sagrott and family at 52 Huntingdon Street, three doors from where she had been when her mother died 25 years earlier. Also there were William Baynton and their two sons. William was a self-employed wood carver and son George was working for him.

On 25 March 1903 at the Shoreditch registry office William John Baynton, a 68-year-old widower, married Ann Delaforce, 62, said to be a widow. Both were living at 52 Huntingdon St and her father's name was given as John William Pracy, a carman, confirming that she was Ann Pracy. On the 1911 census they said they had been married for 31 years, so clearly they regarded their marriage as starting in 1880 rather than 1903.

William Baynton's first wife was Mary Ann STEWART. They married in 1853 and had three sons, William, Alfred and Walter. William and Mary Ann were still together in 1871 but I couldn't find either of them on the 1881 census, or her in 1891. She died in Shoreditch in 1895. Simon Auger is descended from their son Walter.

In 1881 Edward Delaforce described himself as married but Ann said she was widowed. This suggests that for whatever reason she left him, and presumably got together with William around the time of the 1881 census. The fact that aged over 40 she could have children with William suggests that any problems between her and Edward weren't on her side.

If Edward was still alive in 1903 Ann would technically have been a bigamist. Indeed, if he really did marry Keziah he would have been as well. Since they continued to live fairly close to one another it seems likely that each knew the other was still alive, and perhaps family and friends as well. However, as their marriage took place 40 years earlier and she had since had two children with William, I doubt whether anybody would have been too shocked.

An Edward J Delaforce died in Shoreditch in 1918, said to be aged 75. Another Edward James Delaforce was born 1852 but he would only have been 66 so our man is nearer the right age, 78. William Baynton died on 31 December 1920 aged 87, also in Shoreditch. Ann Baynton, née Pracy, died in the Hackney registration district in 1924 aged 83.

Sarah (1846-1922) had left home by 1861, when she was a servant to a retired butcher and his family. They lived at the Jews' Alms Houses, Devonshire Street (now Colebert Street), in Mile End Old Town. She married William Durley MEACHEAM, a cabinet maker, at St James Curtain Road in 1864. William's family lived at New Inn Yard, near where Sarah's uncle Joseph William Pracy had his soap factory, so that may be how Sarah and William met. What became of him is unknown, but certainly the marriage did not last long.

In 1868 at Plumstead Sarah registered the birth of a daughter, also Sarah. She gave the father as William DAY and described herself as 'Sarah Day formerly Pracy'. Perhaps Meacheam was then alive but later died, for in 1872 – back in Pracy territory at Bethnal Green – Sarah married Day at the church of St James the Great. William and Sarah were illiterate, although Sarah's sister Ann Delaforce could sign her name. Sarah was pregnant with her fourth child and went on to have five more with Day.

Having married herself off to Day prematurely, Sarah then seems to have killed him off early as well. On the 1901 census she described herself as a widow, even though he was living round the corner from her and didn't actually die until 1905. On the same census Sarah's brother Henry was separated from his wife and their cousin George Joseph Thomas Pracy from his. It's not something I remember from earlier censuses so perhaps it was a new social trend – doubtless these days they'd just have got divorced.

By 1911 Sarah was living in a four-room house at 36 Marcus Street West Ham with son Henry, a house decorator who reported her death there in 1922.

But for Sarah Day you would not be reading this, for one of her descendants was the compiler of this website, Martin HAGGER.

Elizabeth Jane (1848-1915) married Charles SAGROTT at St Mary Haggerston in 1870, and had six children with him. They lived in Hoxton at 52 Huntingdon Street, later Falkirk Street, from 1881 to 1911 and probably longer. Charles was variously described as a leather cutter, and as a 'clicker' in boot and shoe manufacturing. This involved cutting out a shape from the hide to best advantage and was the most skilled occupation within the trade, so would have commanded a higher wage. On the 1891 census Elizabeth and her children George and Elizabeth were listed as box makers, almost certainly working round the corner at a large showcard and box factory in Wellington Street. Booth's survey recorded that the street 'looks pink at the East and purple to pink at the West' – in other words, it was pretty respectable, as their being there for such a long time suggests.

Thomas George (1852-1874) became a compositor. Sadly he died aged only 22 of Bright's disease in Bart's Hospital, the first of our family known to have died in hospital rather than at home.

The records show how small the world of the Pracys still was. In 1871 Thomas was lodging at 14 Gloucester Street (now Hewett Street) with a different Charles Sagrott, also a clicker and apparently a cousin of Elizabeth Jane's husband. In 1875-6 Edmund James had his carman's business a few doors away at no. 9. Thomas's landlord, a gold plater called Samuel Butler, was still there and may well have talked with Edmund about his young nephew.

The street then had some attractive Georgian houses but they were perhaps destroyed by bombing, for it is now a rather undistinguished industrial estate. It does, however, boast a plaque to Shakespeare's Curtain Theatre, which was nearby.

Henry (1858-c.1906) was a coachman/cab driver. In 1880, at St John the Baptist Hoxton, he married Mary Jane HUNT (1855-1929), the daughter of Thomas, a house painter and Mary, a silk weaver. Henry's father's name was given as William Pracy and he was described as a contractor. The witnesses were Mary Jane's sister Grace and James Arthur HUDSON, who she married in 1881. Mary Jane's address was given as 52 Huntingdon Street, where Henry's sister Elizabeth Jane Sagrott and her family lived for many years. Henry's was 22 Essex Street (now Shenfield Street), an ordinary little terraced house where the 1881 census shows a total of seven families and 19 people. They included Henry and Mary Jane and their 7-month-old daughter **Elizabeth Jane**. Even by the standards of the time it sounds a wretched existence, so it is no surprise that the marriage seems not to have prospered.

In 1891 Henry and Mary Jane were nearby at 48 Crondall Street with her nephew Alfred Hunt, but their daughter was not with them and there is no further record of her, so probably she had died. Certainly a second daughter, **Louisa Christina**, was born in 1884 and baptised at St John the Baptist but died before she was two.

28 St Leonard's Hospital Kingsland Road, formerly Shoreditch Workhouse

On 25 January 1896 Mary Jane was admitted to the Shoreditch Workhouse in Kingsland Road, later St Leonard's Hospital[38]. She was described as married but having no home, which sounds a very sad state of affairs. On the 1901 census Henry was living with his sister Elizabeth Jane Sagrott and her family at 52 Huntingdon Street, while Mary Jane was described as a servant but living as a pauper. In 1911 she was still in the workhouse, said to be a charwoman and widowed, although Henry's death hasn't been traced. She was on several occasions discharged but immediately readmitted, presumably just a

[38] Fuller details of the buildings and their history can be seen at: http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Shoreditch/

bureaucratic procedure. She died there in 1929 so, sadly, spent almost half of her life in the workhouse. Perhaps losing her children triggered some sort of depressive illness that these days could have been treated with therapy or drugs. Her sister Grace Hudson reported her death under her correct name, Mary Jane Pracy.

14. George Thomas Pracy (1812-1853) and his descendants

George married Frances Julia BOOTH (1818-1895) at St Giles Cripplegate on 11 January 1836. Like his brother John, he had a relatively unskilled job, that of cellarman. This perhaps represents something of a drift down the social and economic scale compared with their father, a skilled craftsman.

On the 1841 census George was living at Acorn Street, a short road off Bishopsgate where the Exchange Arcade is now situated. Frances Pracy was listed with her mother Susan Booth and her daughter Frances at a different house in Acorn Street. When in November 1841 Frances and George's son George was born, the address of the birth and of the informant, George senior, was given as 18 Acorn Street.

In the first published version of this history, I said there were two entries at different houses in Acorn Street for George Pracey. Having had the opportunity to check a clearer version of the census online, I now think I was wrong. George was indeed a wine porter born in Middlesex, but the general labourer born in Ireland seems to have been George PEACEY – a strange coincidence, but no duplication. In the course of my research I have found Pracey misread as Peacey at least twice, so it isn't entirely surprising that I made the opposite mistake.

On the 1851 census Susannah Booth and her grandchildren Frances and George were listed at 14 Sadler's Place, Allhallows, London Wall. Frances and her younger son Charles haven't been traced anywhere. George was at 25 Holywell Lane Shoreditch, where on 30 November 1853 he died of phthisis, a wasting disease of the lungs, aged only 40. His wife Frances was present at the death, but I don't know whether there is any significance in her not being with George when the two censuses were taken.

Unusually, Frances's job of bonnet-maker was listed on the 1841 census, even though she was then a young married woman. The 1881 census shows that 40 years later she was still pursuing the same trade. Evidently she had some degree of success, for by 1891 she was 'living on own means'. She lived in Blossom Street and then White Lion Street (now 32 Folgate Street), just across Bishopsgate from Acorn Street. A few doors along at 18 Folgate Street is the atmospheric Dennis Severs House http://www.dennisseversh ouse.co.uk/, which gives a wonderful idea of what life might have been like for our 18th-century ancestors.

Frances Emma (1836-1880) married Robert James WRIGHT, a harness maker, at St Bartholomew Moor Lane in 1860. Their daughter **Florence (1861-1888)** married Henry HOLMES in 1882 and had two sons, Henry Victor (1883-1970) and Herbert Gordon (1886-1961). On 13 February 1888 she gave birth to Florence May, but sadly mother and daughter died on the same day. On the 1871 census Robert is listed as having two other children, 14-year-old Louise and 7-year-old Francis, but Henry Victor's granddaughter Mandy Adams has been unable to trace their births.

George Joseph Thomas (1841-1904) married Emma Herbert VINCENT (1844-1915) in 1872. They were both box makers, as were Elizabeth Jane Sagrott and two of her children. The two families may therefore have been in touch, even though they were fairly distant cousins. George first had the vote in 1879 at 2 Whitmore Cottages in Hoxton, but a year later he moved across the boundary into Hackney, at 59 De Beauvoir Road. In 1891 George and Emma were living at 19 Ritson Road but may later have separated, for in 1896-9 Emma was listed on the electoral register at 37 De Beauvoir Road. In 1901 they were boarders in different households, George was still in Hackney at 20 Blanchard Road but Emma was in East Ham, where a fellow-lodger was her sister Anne Vincent. In 1911 she was a visitor with William and Hannah LUGG at 497 Kingsland Road, a five-room dwelling.

George and Emma had four surviving children. Their daughter **Emma Vincent (1872-1946)** became a bookkeeper, in 1891 in the Civil Service and in 1901 at the Royal Pavilion Hotel in Folkestone. In 1902 she married Captain Francis Blakeman HAMMOND (1845-1924), a retired master mariner, and they had a daughter, Gladys Emmie Pracy Hammond. In 1911 they were living in a 6-room house at Charing, Kent.

Florence Ellen (1879-1945) was married in 1899 at St Mark's Dalston to Alfred COBB, a draper's manager in Hastings. They soon had a daughter, Florence Kathleen, but the marriage seems not to have lasted. In 1911 Alfred was still in Hastings with 10-year-old Florrie, and stating that he was married. Florence Ellen, however, was back in Hackney, living in two rooms at John Campbell Road with William BROCKTON and their daughters, 9-year-old Ivy and 4-year-old Queenie Florence. William and Florence stated that they had been married for ten years but no marriage is indexed by the GRO. Ivy's birth was probably registered with the surname Cobb, and Queenie's was certainly registered as Brockton. They also said that they were professional singers, performing in 'music halls, concerts, etc.' but there is a bit of a mystery with William, who doesn't appear on any previous censuses. Perhaps they got together for an on- and off-stage partnership and adopted a new surname. When a third child, John William, was born in November 1911, Florence gave her maiden name as Pracy, which is how we can be sure this Florence is ours.

In 1918 William died and Florence was listed on the electoral register at 76 Russell Road Wood Green, where she remained until 1936 at least. In 1921 she married Richard BEAUCHAMP and took his surname but either he died or they separated, because in 1932 she reverted to the Brockton surname, although she was probably Florence E Beauchamp who died in the Edmonton district in 1945.

George Henry (1874-1951) was shown on the 1891 census as a live-in barman in Islington. Other than Rosetta and Thomas Richard who settled in Australia, he was the first Pracy in almost 200 years to move permanently out of London. Precisely why is not known, as he had a semi-skilled job that he could equally well have done in London: the 1911 census shows he was a packing case maker at a rubber works. He was living in a five-roomed house at Boughton in Chester. His handwriting was rather flowery but neat and legible.

In 1906 he married Martha Jane BODDY (1876-1931), and they had five children. **Evelyn Vincent** was born in 1909 and died in 2002. **Frederick C** was born in 1913, but

like three other Pracy children he died in the September quarter of 1918. This was the worst infant mortality in the family since the 1840s, and they were probably victims of the great influenza pandemic that accompanied the end of the First World War.

George Henry served with the King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment in the South African (Boer) War, and with the Royal Army Service Corps in the First World War.

In 1916 a 'Private GH Pracey' of the Motor Transport Army Service was cited as co-respondent in the divorce case of Frederick William Ford v Elizabeth Ford. This is a rather curious case, because George Henry was the only Pracy with the initials GH but is unlikely to have been involved: he was in the RASC, and neither he nor anyone else in our family is known to have been in the MTAS. Elizabeth was said to have committed 'frequent adultery' with Pracey and given birth to his child. Frederick was a motor driver by trade so may well have served with the co-respondent, which could have led to the wartime romance. In 1919 the marriage was dissolved and Frederick was given custody of their two children.

Others of George Henry's family were even more adventurous than he. His brother **Frederick Charles (1881-1969)**, perhaps like some of his siblings, wwas educated at Wilton Road School. In 1901 he was a live-in barman working for a pub at 70 Hoxton Street, but he wasn't on the 1911 census so may have been on his travels. In 1916 he emigrated to New Zealand where he ran a private hotel in Nelson, South Island. In the First World War, he was wounded while serving with the New Zealand infantry.

Fred's son **Leslie Thomas (Les, 1920-2007)** was a conservationist and lover of the outdoors, and a great character. Having served in the New Zealand Air Force, in 1949 he published a survey demonstrating the damage to native fauna caused by possums. To gather the data, he went on long walks every day and got through 16 pairs of boots a season. He started the first national government possum control throughout New Zealand and set up search stations at Orongaoronga and Paraki valleys. His daughter Karen said he knew New Zealand like the back of his hand and would see an advertisement on television and be able to name the exact place it was. His main work was as a government deer-culler, essential because over–grazing by deer, possum and other introduced species had started opening up forests and causing erosion. You can read more about him at http://www.nzdeercullers.org.nz/news.aspx

29. Les Pracy's possum research camp in the Orongorongo, 1966.

Photo: Monty Shipman

George Henry's son **Sydney Herbert (1907-1992)** and daughters **Hilda Hayden (1912-1984)** and **Josephine E (1918-2007)** also went to New Zealand, although Josephine returned to England after about ten years. Sydney travelled from Southampton to Wellington in 1925 and at first lived with his uncle Fred. Sydney's children Jane Jocelyn Mary Riley and Paul Hayden Pracy both live in Auckland, and Jane has kindly given me further information about the family.

Charles (1849-1922) doesn't show up on the censuses for 1851-71 but in 1881 he was a gunner in the Royal Marine Artillery Barracks at Portsea, Hampshire. By 1886 he had returned to the Shoreditch area and was a voter at 12 Hearn Street under the Service Franchise, probably in relation to his job. From 1889-96 at least he was living at 68 Mansell Street Whitechapel, and described himself as an employer builder-bricklayer. By 1901 his attempt to build up his own business had evidently collapsed and he was working as a builder's labourer, living back in Shoreditch at 22 Paul Street.

While in the Portsmouth area Charles met Charlotte CAWTE (1861-1938), who was born in Southampton. The unusual surname Cawte is mostly a Hampshire one, and it's uncertain which of two Charlottes born around the right time she was. Charles would have had to get his commanding officer's permission to marry but was apparently among the 95% of soldiers who failed to do so, although he gave her surname as 'Pracy formerly Cawte' on their son James's birth certificate. It's possible that there was some kind of misunderstanding that didn't come to light until later, for it was not until 1921, when Charles was 71 and Charlotte was 60, that they officially married.

Charles and Charlotte had three surviving children. **Frances Florrie** was born at Portsea in 1882. She married Thomas George WEBSTER at St Leonards in 1904 and they had at least six children. In 1911 Thomas had a newsagent's business in Pracy territory at 83 Hare Street, Bethnal Green. **George Charles (1886-1909)** was born in Shoreditch and working as a carman in 1901 but died young**.**

James William (1889-1958) married Caroline NICHOLSON in 1912 at St Anne Shoreditch, and they had five children. Unusually for such a late period, he and one of the witnesses were illiterate, although the other witness, his sister Frances, did sign her name. In 1911 he enlisted as a private in the Special Reserve of the 7th Fusiliers, stating that his name was William and his trade was bottler. During the First World War he was a private in the 17th London Regiment of the Royal Engineers and he may also have been 'William James Pracy', who enlisted in the Royal Marine Artillery in 1915.

In 1911 Charles was working on own account as a general dealer in waste paper, and Charlotte was assisting him. They claimed to have been married for 29 years. They were living in three rooms at 3 Axe Place, Hackney Road, regarded by Booth a few years earlier as 'poor'. The writing is quite neat but Charles's signature doesn't look much like it, so perhaps the form was filled up by Charlotte or James.

Julia Sugden (1852-1911?) was shown on the 1861 census as living with her widowed mother. A record on the 1881 census shows how family historians should not jump to unproven conclusions. A gold dealer named Joseph NIALL and his 29-year-old wife Julia were listed as a separate household at 3 Blossom Street Spitalfields, where Frances Julia Pracy lived. I thought it highly likely that she was Julia née Pracy, because

she would have been 28 and Julia was then an unusual forename. Correctly, however, I didn't make a firm statement and in fact the 1874 birth certificate of their daughter shows that Julia's maiden name was Whittaker.

In 1885 Julia had a daughter, also called Julia. No father's name is given and nothing more is known of the little girl, so her mother may have had to give her up.

Julia Pracy did not show up on the censuses for 1871 and 1881 but in 1891 she was listed in Southwark – though not as Julia Pracy. She was shown as the wife of John CROSSLEY but didn't in fact marry him until 1896, when he gave his forenames as Charles John. In 1901 Julia was living at Peabody Buildings, Greenman Street, Islington and said to be widowed, although the only death I can find that was likely to be her husband was that of Charles Crossley, who died at St Giles Holborn in 1897. Julia followed a trade similar to her mother's, being listed as a bonnet maker in 1891 and a fancy hat maker in 1901. She may well have been Julia Crossley who died in Islington in 1911, although her given age of 54 would have been four years too young.

William Henry (1854-1902?) became a merchant seaman, who in 1888 was serving as an Able-Bodied Seaman, first on the *GW Wolff* out of Belfast and then as one of 14 hands on the *Briton* out of Portsmouth. He was probably 'Henry Pracey', recorded on the 1871 census as a 19-year-old apprentice on the *Gateshead*, a vessel moored in the Liverpool Docks; and 'Henry Pracy' who died in 1902 aboard the *Ascot*, although his given age of 39 would have been nine years out.

15. George T Pracy of San Francisco and his descendants

The story of George Thomas and Frances Julia has a bizarre postscript that would not have been out of place in the pages of their contemporary, Wilkie Collins. At least two of his novels turned on questions of identity theft, and it seems that we have a case of this in our family.

Suzanne Girot is an American video producer and freelance writer. In 2002 she published a short article in the *Noe Valley Voice*, which serves the area of San Francisco where she lives. It included the following extract:

> As part of my family history project, I'm filming my 85-year-old dad in front of all the San Francisco houses that were built and inhabited by our ancestors… Most people document their genealogy in writing; my medium is video…
>
> Back at the family farm on 23rd Street, my dad continues his living history. 'This house was built by my great-grandfather, George Pracy. He acquired the property and several more acres in the Noe Valley in the 1860s.'
>
> He holds up an old photo to the camera.
>
> 'You can see that this part of San Francisco was completely undeveloped. In this photo from 1869, the house is standing alone in open fields. It was a farm with a stable for horses. Pracy was quite a horseman. He retired at 40 from his job as a machinist and lived another 40 years riding horses with his old cronies.'
>
> My camera scans the photograph -- the barn, silo, water tank, windmill, the big house.

> ‘George Pracy’s daughter, my grandmother [Mary Ann Scheider], was widowed with five small children, one of whom was my mother. They moved into this house and my mother grew up here. She went to Mission High School in the late 1890s. When she married my father, they settled here. I was born up in that room.’ He points to another upstairs bedroom...
>
> …‘There's the parlor where Aunt Meila called the family together during the 1906 earthquake.’ He points to a downstairs room that faces on 23rd Street. In a sweeping gesture with his arms, Dad puts on his falsetto voice: “Come, everyone, we'll all die together. It's the end of the world.” Of course, that was before my time. The house wasn't damaged; it didn't even lose a fireplace. Old Man Pracy built it right.’

To complement their father’s reminiscences, Suzanne’s brother looked into the written records. Soon he found on the 1880 census George T Pracy who was described as a retired machinist, which fitted in with George Girot’s account. Pracy was aged 66 and, ‘keeping house’, his wife Francis [sic] J was aged 60. Both were said to have been born in England.

A quick search of the IGI revealed George Thomas Pracy, baptised in 1813 and married to Frances Julia Booth in 1836, both at St Giles Cripplegate. They should have been a year older than indicated on the census, but it is not unusual for people to knock a year or two off their ages and there was no reason to doubt that this was the right couple. According to a Pracy/Scheider family Bible in the possession of the Girots, ‘GT Pracy & JF [sic] Pracy emigrated to America 13 April 1842’. An unnamed son was born on 30 July, only to die two weeks later, and daughter Elizabeth was born in Montreal in 1844.

The family then moved to New York. There Suzanne’s great-grandmother Mary Ann was born in 1847 and another daughter, Emily, in 1848. On 29 January 1849 in the New York Court of Common Pleas, George T Pracy signed a Declaration of Intent to become a U.S. Citizen. Six weeks he sailed aboard the ship *Salem* for San Francisco, where gold had been discovered. This was a hazardous journey round Cape Horn, taking a minimum of 100 days and occasionally up to 200. The census shows that on 22 July 1850 Frances J Pracy with daughters Elizabeth, Mary Ann, and Emily were in the 10th Ward of New York City. George wasn’t with them and hasn’t been traced elsewhere on the census, but by 21 October 1851, when he became a naturalized American citizen, he was back in New York.

By 1855 the family had settled in San Francisco. Joseph T Pracy was born there in 1854 or 1855[39], Ella Olivia in 1857 and Charles Alfred in 1865. Sadly, Emily died in 1859 aged 11 and Charles in 1878 aged 12.

City directories suggest that George Pracy retired later than his great-grandson George Girot thought, perhaps around 1870 when he built the big house. Mike Schmeer has worked diligently on what he calls ‘the Great Pracy Caper’ but the earliest entry he found was in the Colville 1856/57 Directory, in which George is apparently in business with

[39] The manuscript ‘History and Reminiscences’ by George W. Pracy in 1960 gives the birth date for Joseph T. Pracy as 5 Nov 1855. The source of this date is unknown but probably came from family records. The Pracy/Girot bible, which usually seems to be reliable, states the birth date for Joseph Pracy as 18 Nov 1855. However, the obituary from the Stevens Institute of Technology ‘Indicator’, p343 in 1891 gives Joseph’s birth date as 18 Nov 1854 and censuses say he was five in 1860, 15 in 1870 etc. And sister Ella would have been born 26 months after him if it was 1854 but only 14 if it was 1855. So 1854 perhaps has the edge by 3-2.

one Nelson R. Herrick. The entry reads 'Herrick & Pracey, machinists, Fountain Head Water Works, Market; established Oct. 1855'. The entry for George himself reads 'Pracey, George T. of Herrick & Pracey, res[idence] Rich cor[ner] of Folsom'. After this Herrick drops off and George appears by himself. An advertisement in the 1864 San Francisco city directory for 'George T. Pracy, Machinist & Blacksmith 109 & 111 Front Street between Mission and Howard' shows that he was still working. In 1867 he was listed as an engine builder and in 1869 he filed a patent for an 'Improvement in Governors for Steam Engines'.

30. Mike Schmeer found this wonderful photo among Beverly (Pracy) Hosmon's belongings. It is a daguerreotype possibly taken about 1850 but the sitter is unidentified. George T Pracy is one of the possible candidates that Mike suggests, so he asks if we can compare it with other early photos to see whether we have a similar likeness.

The 1870 census shows George as a machinist but by 1880 he had more or less retired. He passed the machine shop business on to his son Joseph, although he may have applied for more patents in the late 1880s. An 1890 San Francisco city directory lists George as a 'capitalist', presumably living off his income, while Joseph is shown as joint owner with Jeremiah E Day of the American Tool Works. In 1883 Joseph married Susie A Idell but he died in 1891. The firm became jointly owned by Joseph's widow Susie and his partner, Day. The son of Joseph and Susie, George Wesley Pracy, was to write the *History and Reminiscences* that were a very useful source for this chapter.

For some 15 years George and Frances lived at various addresses near his machine shop, close to the San Francisco waterfront. Around 1869 on the outskirts of San Francisco they built the big house described by George Girot to Suzanne. It was on a plot of about ½ acre, on 23rd at the corner of Church St. Behind it were a water tank, carriage house, and stables. There they lived for many years until they built a smaller house around the corner on property he owned at 1037 Church St. At that point George's daughter, Mary Ann Schneider, moved with her family into the big house.

George Pracy died on 20 September 1896 while living at Church St, said to be aged 82. His wife died exactly three months later.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, we in England had been researching all the Pracys, including George Thomas and Frances Julia. The IGI's 1880 San Francisco census entry for George T and 'Francis J' intrigued me, so I discussed it in a short postscript to the George Thomas chapter in the first published version of this history. Then I found Suzanne's interview with her father through a Google search, and emailed her. The two sides of the mystery began to come together, and we have stayed in touch.

Pracy is an unusual surname and our 19th-century family relationships are thoroughly accounted for. It is therefore inconceivable that there were two couples called George T Pracy & Frances J Booth and that one couple was otherwise unknown, particularly as they were more or less the same age. The most plausible explanation is that we have an early example of identity theft. I believe the American couple are more likely to have been the impostors because in England:

- On 7 June 1841 the census recorded George and Frances as living in Acorn Street where their son George Joseph Thomas was born on 5 November, less than nine months before the American couple's short-lived boy.
- English George was always described as a wine porter or cellarman, whereas the American made a sudden and slightly improbable change to being a machinist.
- Other members of the then close-knit Pracy clan would surely have known.
- A certificate established George's death in 1853, while Frances appeared on the censuses for 1861, 1881 and 1891, and on the GRO death index in 1895.

However, Mike Schmeer points out that we have no hard evidence yet, so we should keep an open mind. He is still seeking official American documents but has traced nothing earlier than George's Declaration of Intent in 1849, although census data confirms the birth dates from the 1840s given in the family bible. Potentially useful English sources such as passenger lists don't survive from that early period, and there is nothing like a will of some English Pracy or Booth family member that names George and/or Frances as an heir. Suzanne recently found in a box of her father's papers a deed dated 1893 which is signed by both George T. and Frances Julia Pracy and again, I know of no English family document as early as this.

Nevertheless, unless Mike finds something new, I think the balance of probability is still that the American pair saved themselves the trouble of creating new identities by purloining those of George and Frances, perhaps because they were fleeing justice in England. They used the middle initials of the real couple although sometimes her Christian names were reversed, and for his marriage in 1883 their son Joseph gave her maiden name as 'Julia F Booth'. This suggests that they knew the real George and Frances pretty well, or somehow got sight of an official document such as their marriage certificate. The 1896 death notice for 'Julia Frances Pracy' gives her age as 76 years 7 months and Frances Julia Booth was born on 28 April 1818 so would have been 78 years 7 months. This offers the intriguing possibility that the American lady knew and celebrated the correct date for 'her' birthday, although she took two years off the real age.

If they were impostors, the San Francisco couple who called themselves George Thomas and Julia Frances Pracy carried their secret to the grave. Yet they made a good life for themselves, and their descendants are proud of the Pracy name. Some of the English

family were able to meet Suzanne when she visited London in June 2007. As I told her then, even if the San Francisco people aren't Pracys in a strictly biological sense, they are nevertheless truly members of our family. Sadly Suzanne died on 1 June 2014 and her cousin John Hosmon wrote 'Suzanne was a wonderful person and did so much to help my family understand the bigger picture of our extended family'.

If anybody has any documents or other information that might shed any light on the mystery, Pracys on both sides of the Atlantic would be delighted to hear from you.

16. Thomas Richard Pracy (1818-1888) and his descendants

Thomas followed in the adventurous footsteps of his aunt Rosetta Terry to Australia, where he also settled. Much of what follows is family tradition there. His descendants are rightly proud of him and may have elaborated the stories, most of which came from Eva Elelia MILSON née Pracy via her granddaughter Carol CLIMPSON. Eva was born ten years after Thomas's death and some of her older relatives would have remembered him. I would neither dismiss the information out of hand nor assert it as incontrovertible fact, unless further evidence is found.

Thomas Richard is said to have run away to sea at the age of fourteen, just after the death of his father. He took his mother's pillow and a little black box, which went everywhere with him. He sailed on a ship called the Ellen or Helen, by coincidence or otherwise the names given for his infant sister who died.

Thomas Richard worked his way up from cabin-boy to captain, and carried copra around the Pacific Islands in a windjammer. In the ultimate traveller's tales, he is said to have 'harpooned whilst being attacked by a shark' and rescued his brother-in-law from cannibals who were fattening him up in a cage for the pot. He seems not to have been the traditional black sheep of the family and is said to have returned regularly to England. His younger brother Joseph William called his eldest son Thomas Richard, suggesting that the two remained in touch and on good terms.

Thomas Richard may well have gone with the intention of visiting his aunt Rosetta and eventually settled near her in Sydney, although there is no firm evidence that they ever met. In 1853 he married Jane Jackson GLOVER (1833-1910). Her father had been convicted of horse-stealing in England, and deported to Australia on the *Asia 2*. For some unexplained reason Thomas Richard was called James Pracey on that certificate and those of his two eldest children, although he later reverted to his correct name. They had ten children, the two eldest named after Thomas Richard's parents.

His eldest son **John William (1853-1925)** had a grandson, **Thomas Richard (1908-1985)**, sometime Labour mayor of Waterloo, Sydney**.** He was involved with William John McKell, who started life as a boilermaker and became Labour Premier of New South Wales (1941-47) and Governor-General of Australia (1947-53). According to Gary Sturgess, former adviser to the Liberal Party who has researched corruption in NSW, McKell was corrupt and the key link between him and his partners in crime was Thomas Richard Pracey, who was said to have trained McKell's trotters and been McKell's 'bagman'. McKell's biographer, Chris Cuneen, dismissed this, claiming that

> Pracey was a confidence man and petty criminal who was gaoled several times in the 1950s and 1960s for bankruptcy offences and fraud. Accusations that McKell was in cahoots with Pracey are implausible and tend to be fanciful… McKell never hid his fondness for racing. Pracey was probably known to him as a trotting trainer and party worker… but McKell's family has vehemently denied the allegations of criminality…[40]

Cuneen seems to have been concerned about the feelings of McKell's family but not of Pracey's. Thomas Richard's daughter Marlene equally vehemently rejected the accusations against him, claiming that the real bad man was McKell himself and that her dad was the 'fall guy' for him. She told cousin John William Pracy (b. 1949) that Thomas Richard was well liked and respected within Waterloo and did a lot of good for his local community. He was regarded as a Robin Hood who took from the rich and gave to the poor. Perhaps like *A.L.F.* in the case of Samuel and Rosetta Terry (chapter 9), Cuneen is attacking a dead man who can neither respond nor sue for libel. The most successful politicians have a knack of wriggling out of things and leaving others to take the blame, and it may be that McKell having climbed to the top of the greasy pole is a classic example of this.

* * * * *

In previous editions I gave a brief list of other Thomas Richard Australian descendants, but this was incomplete and lacked any detail. Because I don't know enough about the relevant historical sources or about the geography of Australia, I'm not equipped to write a chapter on the same lines as the rest of this history. I hope therefore that some of my Australian cousins will take up my invitation to do so.

17. Joseph William Pracy (1820-1879) and his descendants

Joseph married Jane SHERRIN (1816-1876) at St Luke's Old Street in 1843, when they were both said to be living at 77 Rahere Street. Several of their descendants became musicians but other branches of the Pracy family were not, to my knowledge, similarly gifted. It therefore seems likely that this musical ability came from Jane's side of the family.

Jane was listed on the 1841 census as a dressmaker, living independently as a lodger at Nicholas Street, between Mintern Street and Buckland Street in Hoxton New Town. Her father Samuel was a grocer who apparently had recently remarried, to another Jane. It was fairly unusual for an unmarried daughter to move away, so perhaps she didn't get on with her stepmother, who was only a few years older. She can't have gone very far, for the 1841 census gives Samuel's address as Hoxton New Town, although unfortunately it isn't more specific so we don't know exactly where he lived.

Initially Joseph and Jane moved around Shoreditch but by 1851 they had settled at New Inn Street, west of Shoreditch High Street. The census enumerator was a bit of a feminist, listing the occupations of all the wives as 'domestic duties' although he wrongly gave Joseph and Jane's surname as Prudy. There Joseph ran Thomas (later George) Brown & Co, a firm that made fancy soap. It was a fairly disgusting trade that involved boiling up animal fat, vegetable oils, ashes and lime in large pans. Not surprisingly, it produced

[40] From CUNEEN, Chris. William John McKell: Boilermaker, Premier, Governor-General. New South Wales UP, 2001, p187.

revolting smells. Because it used tallow it was often combined with candle-making, and in 1854-7 Joseph had a chandler's shop at 21 Warner Place, Hackney Road.

In 1853 Lord Palmerston removed the duty on tallow in order to cut the cost of soap and thus encourage cleanliness. Joseph's business thrived, and some time in the 1860s he was able to get away from the smells of New Inn Street to pleasant middle-class suburbs, presumably travelling in to his business by train. In the early 1870s he lived at Grange Park Road and other addresses in Leyton, and by 1878 he had moved to 95 Mildmay Road Islington. He was first listed on electoral registers at New Inn Street in 1873 and at Mildmay Road in 1878.

31. In 1876 Joseph's wife Jane died and he provided her with a fine memorial obelisk in Abney Park Cemetery Stoke Newington, close to the monument to the hymn-writer Isaac Watts. Three years later Joseph was buried there too. The cemetery was opened specifically for nonconformists, a family influence that is confirmed by the fact that in 1851 their son Joseph William was baptised at White's Row Chapel, a Congregational chapel that had moved from Spitalfields to Bishopsgate Street in 1839.

Joseph was only the second London Pracy after the younger Edmund's daughter Lucy, in 1848, to make out a will. Its very detailed provisions seem to have been intended to protect the business premises and to ensure that his money did not fall into the hands of unscrupulous suitors of his unmarried daughters. In the event, several of his children died prematurely and the business failed, rendering many of the will's provisions irrelevant. Joseph's was in some ways the most tragic and ill-fated branch of our family, but also his descendants had considerable achievements to their name, including doctors and teachers who were the first Pracys known to have gone into any of the major professions.

Mary Ann Elizabeth (1844-1887) never married. She was joint-executor with her eldest brother, Thomas Richard, of their father's will, which shared ownership of the business between them. She was to have enough from the business to pay the rent, rates and taxes on 95 Mildmay Road, though not more than £60. After Joseph's death she became head of the household there, but by 1885 was living at 11 Reedholm Road, Stoke Newington. The electoral register shows that her brother John was, nominally at least, paying £26 a year rent for two upstairs furnished rooms to 'Miss Pracy, same address'. Ironically, the tenant had the vote and the landlady didn't.

Mary Ann Elizabeth died on 10 March 1887 when she was described as a house proprietor, living at 10 Ferndale Road Upton Park in West Ham. Her brother Thomas

Richard had died six weeks earlier and her sister Elizabeth Jane three weeks after him. Mary Ann succumbed to pneumonia, which may well have been brought on by the stress of her siblings' deaths and attending their funerals in raw February weather. All three were buried with their parents in the tomb at Abney Park Cemetery.

Jane Ellen (1845-1902?) was, under the terms of Joseph's will, to have £26 per annum which would be forfeit if she were married. Mary Ann and their youngest sister Emily had £52 a year unconditionally. On the 1881 census they were described as annuitants, whereas no occupation was listed for 'Ellen'. Such discrimination must have been very hurtful as well as financially disadvantageous. In 1861 Jane Ellen was listed, as her mother had been, as a dressmaker whereas Mary Ann had no occupation. In 1871 Jane Ellen was not at home at all, so perhaps she was rather too independently minded for her father's liking.

In 1886 she married John EASTER in Yarmouth, and presumably lost her £26 a year. She was probably Jane Ellen Easter who died at Loddon near Norwich in 1902, although her given age of 52 would have been four or five years out. Since the case of her cousin Julia Sugden Crossley is similar, it's possible that there was a gallant trend for a few years to be knocked off women's ages.

Thomas Richard (1848-1887) was shown on the 1861 census as a 13-year-old boarder at Bancroft's School, which was then in the Mile End Road on the site of present-day Queen Mary College. It undertook the 'Education and maintenance of 100 boarding foundationers and about 200 day scholars from 10 to 13 years of age, [who] remain until 16 years of age'.[41] It was founded in 1728 and in the 1890s moved to Woodford Green in Essex. It gradually developed from a small, charitable boys' boarding school, and is now an independent fee-paying school that also offers means-tested scholarships. I haven't been able to establish the exact basis of Bancroft's finances when Thomas Richard went there, but either he won some sort of scholarship or his father had to pay some fees. This would suggest that Joseph William was an ambitious and fairly prosperous member of the rising Victorian middle class.

Thomas ran the family firm with his father and took it over when he died, which was when he first had the vote. On the 1881 census he described himself as 'Soap Manufacturer Employing 6 Men & Two Boys'. Initially it was jointly owned by Thomas Richard, his sisters Mary Ann Elizabeth and Emily, and Emily's husband Peter Taylor but on 16 November 1883 *The London Gazette* announced that

> if any Partnership has heretofore subsisted between the undersigned [four]… in the business of a Soap Maker, under the style of Brown & Co., such partnership (if any) was dissolved, by mutual consent, on the 7th November instant; and that the said business will henceforth be carried by…Thomas Richard Pracy…on his own account.

In the 1880s the rise of big companies like Lever and Pears brought major competition for smaller soap manufacturers. I suspect that this must have affected Thomas's firm, and probably his health. He died on 28 January 1887 of acute bronchial pneumonia and exhaustion. He was perhaps taken ill very suddenly, for he died at the factory. Thomas

[41] Herbert Fry's Royal Guide to the London Charities, edited by John Lane, 1917

and Mary Ann both left over £300 so they were not bankrupt, but their premature deaths may have been related to the additional strain.

Thomas married Elizabeth ANGELL (1845-1890) at St Mary's Leyton, on 2 April 1871. The census was taken that day, and they apparently spent a rather unromantic wedding night at 4 New Inn Street, where the soap business was. Her father was John, a porter who probably died when she was aged about nine, and her job as listed on the 1861 census was 'stamping stationery'. Soon afterwards they moved to 9 Springfield Villas, Springfield Road in the developing suburb of New Southgate, where they employed a live-in servant. They had nine children in twelve years which suggests that Elizabeth did not breast-feed, perhaps because it might have been regarded as 'common' and alternatives were becoming available to those who could afford them.

Tragically, Elizabeth died within three years of Thomas Richard. The children, who all survived to adulthood, were left orphaned. The four oldest children were able to go out to work but the other five had to be cared for. Their three Pracy uncles and two aunts all had children of their own, and the Angell side of the family was probably not very well off.

There was therefore nobody to look after the younger orphans and they were taken into the Chase Farm Schools, now Chase Farm Hospital. The Edmonton Poor Law Union had opened the Schools in 1886 for orphaned and needy children. A full description can be found on a splendid website, on which this section draws[42]. It is a mercy that old Joseph William, who went to such pains to provide for his own children, died relatively young. He therefore did not live to see his grandchildren go into what was in effect the workhouse.

It must have been a terrible experience for the five children, aged between seven and thirteen. They had been brought up in a comfortable middle-class home with their parents, older siblings and a live-in servant. Within four years they had lost both parents and the siblings had moved away to seek work. They were thrust into an institution which, though not as dreadful as such places had been half a century earlier, would still have seemed cold and forbidding. On arrival, they would have been sent to the bathroom, stripped of their own clothes, bathed, put into clean clothes, and confined to a dayroom until examined by a doctor. Most of the other inmates would probably have been working-class, so perhaps teased and bullied the young Pracys for what may have been relatively posh manners and accents. They could well have been emotionally damaged, and it may be no coincidence that only one of the five is known to have married.

The Guardians took parental control of orphans, who usually stayed at the school until they were fifteen. They then had a responsibility to help children find places when they left. Boys might join the armed services or do an apprenticeship. For girls, domestic service was sometimes an option. Ironically, the three youngest Pracy girls, who had been brought up with their own servant, themselves went into service.

The five eldest children were all baptised within a few weeks of birth at St Stephen Spitalfields, which was built in 1861 on the east side of Commercial Street. The district was formed from the north-west corner of the parish of Christ Church to serve a growing

[42] http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Edmonton/

population. In 1863 parts of St Leonard's Shoreditch were added to it, and they may have included 4 Inn Street which Thomas Richard gave as his address. In 1930 the parish was reunited with Christ Church, Spitalfields, and the church was demolished.

We don't know why Thomas and Elizabeth didn't have the other four baptised, but it may suggest that Thomas didn't share the faith of his father, who died in 1879. The 'Union Schools Enfield' arranged for the three youngest to be baptised on 26 October 1890 at St Andrew Enfield, although the entry for the middle one, Arthur, was crossed out – presumably because he objected. There's no record that Grace was baptised anywhere.

Lilian Margaret Angell (1872-1950) never married, and from 1901 or earlier lived in Ilford with her aunt Emily Taylor. She became a music teacher in 1903, and on the 1911 census was listed as a professor of music. In 1914 she advertised her services in Kelly's *Essex Directory*. She formally registered as a teacher in 1920, stating that she was a Licentiate of Trinity College of Music London (pianoforte), and had a Certificate in General Principles of Scientific Teaching from the college.

Thomas Richard Angell (1873-1922?) was charged in 1888 in connection with what the *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* headlined as 'an outrageous hoax'. He and another 15-year-old, Walter SCOTT, were said to have stolen rhubarb from a nine-acre enclosed market garden at Hale Farm Tottenham. It was owned by Thomas HOLLINGTON, who stated that a well-dressed man had impersonated him and told children from the nearby Coleraine Park School that the rhubarb season was over so he wanted to clear the field. About 80 men, women and children then descended on the field and stripped it bare, causing considerable wanton destruction in the process. Hollington called a policeman who came to the scene and there was a mass stampede, but the constable was able to arrest Pracy and Scott with a quantity of rhubarb in their possession. They claimed that the man had told them they could take the rhubarb, and helped them get over the fence into the field. They were remanded on 50s bail (£150 today) while the police sought the 'inciter of the outrage'. Though probably less innocent than they made out, they were perhaps unfortunate in that, among the many culprits, they happened to be the two the policeman grabbed. The incident has its amusing aspects, but can't have been much fun for Mr Hollington.

In 1891 Thomas was a boot finisher, staying in Tottenham with the NARMAN family where the father and eldest son were in the same trade. By 1901 he had become a draper's warehouseman, lodging in Hackney. There at St John's church he married Caroline Augusta BIGNELL, who made gentlemen's silk ties, so they may well have met in the course of business. Electoral registers list Thomas living in three rooms on the top floor of 139 Elderfield Road Hackney. He was paying 6s 6d a week rent to his father-in-law, William Bignell, a hydraulic lift man for the Midland Railway.

Thomas and Caroline had a son, Roland George (1903-1981), but tragedy struck again in 1905. Caroline, aged only 27, died at Portsmouth, and a few months later her father died in Hackney. Happily, my previous suggestion that Thomas could have committed suicide and not been identified proved to be unnecessarily melodramatic, for in 1906 he travelled from Liverpool to Montreal, presumably to start a new life. He is probably Thomas R Pracey, who died in Ontario in 1922. In 1911 Roland was living in Leyton with his grandmother, Lucy Bignell, but she died when he was only 13.

Marian Elizabeth (1875-1932?) was in 1891 a servant to John SUTTON, a Tottenham bricklayer. In 1897 she was married to George Henry LOCK at St John the Evangelist Lambeth. In 1911 they were living in three rooms in Lambeth. He was a general labourer, she was a dining room waitress and they had two children. She is possibly Marion E Lock who died in 1932 in Holborn aged 57.

Joseph William III (1876-1967) was boarded in 1891 in a 'home for working boys' at 88 Blackfriars Road Southwark, and working as a printer's boy. In 1899, also at St John the Evangelist Lambeth, he married Lily Madora BATTAMS (1875-1963). They were married for 64 years or only a few weeks short, and so theirs was the longest lasting marriage in our family. Their eldest child was the fifth and last **Joseph William**, who was born in 1900 but sadly died a few months later. They had three surviving children – **Florence Winifred (1904-1988)** who never married, **Hilda May (1908-1984)** who married Edward G MANNERS IN 1941, and **John Alfred (1912-2000)**.

Around 1903 they moved to 29 Falmouth Chambers, Falmouth Street, Southwark. In 1911 they were living there with their daughters in two rooms. Joseph described himself as a leather cutter of athletic goods, working for a leather goods manufacturer. His handwriting was strong and clear. Joseph inherited the family's musical gifts and put them to good use as a Bandmaster in the Salvation Army, for which he composed several pieces of music.

Emily Beatrice (b. 1877) was the oldest of the children to be taken into the Chase Farm Schools. She was shown on the 1901 census as a girls' industrial trainer at the Hitchin workhouse.

In 1911 she was living at 7 Lower Seymour Street, Portman Square, which had 13 rooms. Evidently it was some sort of medical practice, for she was described as a servant and a domestic nurse. The head of the household was a 40-year-old Scottish physician named Hector MUNRO, who qualified in 1894 and was still practising in 1947. There were eight people there and several of them filled up the form, although it was signed by Betsy Mitchell, a 65-year-old single lady living on private means.

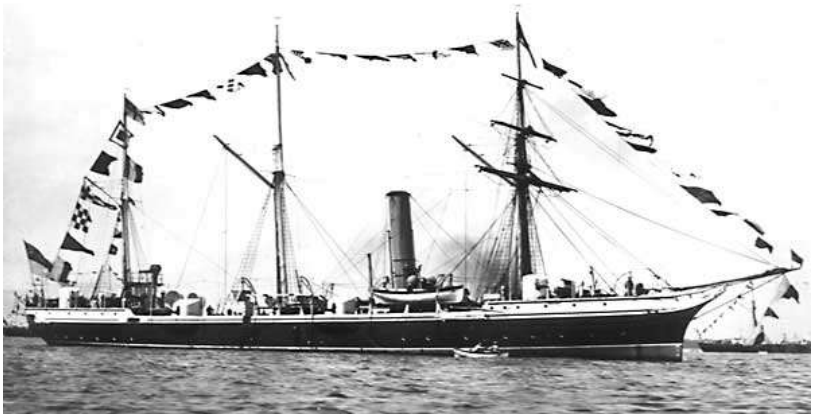
By 1913 Emily was a nurse in Port Sudan on the Red Sea, where she married Francis STUART, who worked in shipping. After that, nothing more is known of either of them.

Grace Helen (1879-1950) was in 1901 a cook at a large house on the Epsom Downs. In 1911 she was the cook to Frederick Lambton, 4th Earl of Durham, at his country home, Fenton House at Wooler in Northumberland. Sir Alec Douglas-Home, prime minister in 1963-4, was Lambton's grandson, and the eccentric but likeable architectural historian and broadcaster Lucinda Lambton his great-grand-daughter. Evidently Lambton got his servants to fill up their entries on the census form, because the handwriting is very varied; Grace's is small and neat. She is the first and oldest of the servants to be listed so evidently held a senior position, though not for much longer: from 1913 she was a 'domestic economy instructress' at various council schools in south London. She obtained diplomas in cookery, laundrywork and housewifery, and formally registered as a teacher in 1920. In 1921 she was living at 19 Upper Montagu Street Marylebone, now a Grade II listed building, which you can see at https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1066195.

Margaret Alice (1882-1904) was in 1901 a domestic housemaid in the household of a Wimpole Street surgeon. She was apparently a companion to a Mrs W Hodgkinson on board the *SS Ivernia* when in 1903 she sailed to Bristol, Rhode Island. Sadly Margaret died in the Glendale district of Northumberland the following year, aged only 22. The Lambton house is in that district, so she may well have been working in their household with her sister Grace.

John Henry Arthur (1880-1963) and his younger brother Herbert were probably put into the armed services by the Poor Law Guardians at the age of 12.

On the deleted baptismal record of 1890 he was referred to as Arthur. He served as a seaman in the Royal Navy during the period 1892-1906. I haven't traced the earlier records but on 21 October 1901 he signed on for a further 12 years and his card gives some interesting details. A stoker based at Chatham, he was dark-haired and hazel-eyed with a fresh complexion. He had a hope & anchor heart arrow on his left arm and a heart arrow on his right arm. His height was given as 5 ft 2 and nine-tenths inches; being a similar height myself, I can imagine that he might have been rather aggrieved at being denied the tenth of an inch that would at least take him to 5 ft 3 inches. He is listed as serving mostly on the Pembroke II which according to Wikipedia is the shore barracks at Chatham, though I'm no naval historian and open to correction.



32 John Henry Arthur also served on HMS Wildfire. *Photo from Imperial War Museum.*

For reasons not explained on the card he was invalided out on 10 May 1906. I couldn't find him on the 1911 census.

Herbert Edward Leopold (1884-1954) was Elizabeth's ninth child in twelve years, so she could have been forgiven for giving him the initials HELP. Perhaps for that reason Herbert didn't always use his middle names. He probably had his third name in honour of Queen Victoria's youngest son, Prince Leopold, who died a few weeks before Herbert was born.

Herbert completed a period of service in the Middlesex Regiment and was probably the infantryman listed on the 1901 census at Hounslow Barracks as Charles Henry Pracy. He too inherited the family's musical gifts, for in 1911 he was one of many musician privates serving with the 4th Middlesex Regiment in the Albuhera Barracks at Aldershot. In 1913 he was living at Lower Byrom Street in central Manchester, and gave his trade as musician when he rejoined the army as a private in the Royal Fusiliers. He was on the list of individuals entitled to the Silver War Medal, which was given to servicemen who

were discharged with a serious wound or illness – they wore it at home so they wouldn't be accused of not doing their duty. He was said to have enlisted with them on 3 September 1914 and been discharged on 13 March 1919.

On 30 May 1929, the day of the General Election, 'Herbert Pracey (30) and George Leslie (28)' were arrested for obstructing the footpath outside a polling station at Miles Platting, an industrial suburb of Manchester. They were distributing Communist literature and their attitude was said to have caused a crowd of 600 to gather. Police asked them to move away but they refused, claiming that they were on legitimate election work for the Communist candidate for the Manchester Platting seat, JJ Vaughan. Both men were found guilty, with the option of a 20s fine or 13 days in prison. Although 'our' Herbert was aged 45, he had been in Manchester in 1913 and it was almost certainly him. I haven't managed to find the exact election results but the Communist Party, split by internal division, polled a total of only 50,000 votes in the 25 seats where it stood. The popular JR Clynes was re-elected as Labour MP for Platting, so the activities for which Herbert and George were fined or imprisoned were, alas, pretty futile.

Elizabeth Jane (1849-1887) married James Darcy JONES at St Mary's Leyton, on 22 October 1871. Six months earlier the couple had been the witnesses at the marriage in the same church of her brother Thomas Richard. James was a railway clerk and his father was said to be deceased. Elizabeth Jane received nothing from Joseph William's will, although he expressed a wish that 'if she should require pecuniary assistance' his other children should 'assist her according to their ability'. Her death three weeks after Thomas Richard's, on 16 February 1887, seems to have been a tragic coincidence, for the cause was cancer of the uterus from which she had been suffering for nine months.

Joseph William II (1851-1914) was not mentioned in his father's will, probably because he was not involved with the family firm. He was a commercial clerk and by 1901 had risen to be the secretary to a building society. He married Emily Georgina REEVES (1859-1923) at Lewisham in 1880, and they had five daughters.

Ella Marian (b. 1882) was appointed in 1898, after open competition, as a 'girl clerk' in the Savings Bank Department of the Post Office and, after promotion to 'woman clerk' worked there until 1902 at least. By 1914 the Post Office was the largest employer in the world and its online archive is a valuable source of information about ordinary female workers, who were well represented in the ranks.

Ella and **Constance Emily (b. 1883)** were reported in *The Times* on 11 September 1907 as being among a group of missionaries about to go out to serve with the China Inland Mission. The CIM was founded in 1865 by the Reverend James Hudson Taylor who, despite public criticism, allowed single women to work in the mission field. It was badly affected by the anti-Christian massacres of Europeans in the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, so Ella and Constance must have had considerable faith and courage to go to China so soon afterwards. Nothing more is known of them, so they presumably stayed there, or at any rate overseas.

Edith Florence (1885-1919?) started working for the Post Office as a woman clerk in 1903. On the 1911 census 'Edith Florence Mary Pracey' was listed as a 29-year-old bookkeeper living and working at The Railway Hotel, Stephenson Street, Birmingham.

She married Frank HM BOLTON, a bank cashier, in 1912, and may be Edith F Bolton who died at Lewisham in 1919, aged 34.

Kate Madeline (1888-1961) never married. In 1911 she was working as a probationer children's nurse at the Manchester and Salford Home for Infants in the Prestwich area of Manchester.

Ida Winifred (1891-1980) married Clifford HOLLINGSWORTH in 1921, and they had four children.

Joseph and Emily at first lived at Stoke Newington where they had a live-in servant.

By the time of the 1891 census Joseph was living at 28 Ringstead Road, South Norwood. He was outnumbered as the only male in a household of nine, for he also had two sisters-in-law living with him. Joseph and Emily no longer had a servant, so the younger of them – 14-year-old Eveline Reeves – may have earned her keep by fulfilling that role. The elder sister-in-law, 19-year-old Clara Reeves, was listed as a confectioner's manageress. Kelly's 1891 *Directory for Kent, Surrey and Sussex* gives at 60 High Street South Norwood a confectioner called 'Js Wm Pracy'. Presumably Joseph owned or rented the shop, and Clara managed it for him. From 1898 to about 1908 Joseph and Emily lived at 4 Hampton Gardens Catford.

In 1911 he, like his younger brother John, was working for the Port of London Authority. He was living in a six-room house at Gordon Road, Chadwell Heath, and he filled up the census form in a sprawling but legible hand. He died in the Bromley House Institution, known until a year earlier as the Stepney Union Workhouse[43]. He had no known connection with the area, so perhaps it served as what would now be a hospice. Joseph left Emily £647.

Henry Edward (1854-92) worked for his father and eldest brother at the soap factory. From 1881-5, and maybe longer, he was living round the corner at 2 Bateman's Row. The poor chap was perhaps left behind to endure the smells while his elders decamped to more salubrious suburbs. Joseph's will specified that Henry should 'be paid weekly fair and reasonable wages gradually increasing …to two pounds a week'. He wanted Thomas 'to do his best for his brother…either by giving him a bonus at the end of each year or in such other manner as he shall think fit and so long as he shall consider the said Henry Edward Pracy deserves the same'. That may suggest that Henry was thought incapable of running the business, and certainly he didn't take it over after Thomas Richard died.

In 1890, though, Henry was shown on the electoral register in a dwelling house at 5 New Inn Street. Next door, no.4 was listed as a 'manufactory' where the owner from 1890-93 was given as Edgar Cooper of Ashgrove House Cricklewood, although rather strangely I couldn't trace him on the 1891 census. Perhaps Cooper took on the business and briefly employed Henry, but the 1891 census listed a soapmaker called Doyle living there. Other sources suggest that Henry emulated his uncles John William III and George Philip in

[43] http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Stepney/

becoming a cab driver. Like his brother Thomas and his uncle George, Henry died before he was 40.

The firm survived Thomas's death, presumably in Edgar Cooper's hands, but finally closed in 1893. The premises were bought by Everard Allen Ford, an East India merchant and Lloyd's 'Name'. In 1901 a general labourer was living at no.4 but in 1911 none of the New Inn area is shown on the census, so perhaps the houses were pulled down and replaced by the rather grim light industrial premises that I remember from the 1980s.

33. New Inn Yard, Shoreditch. A 3-bedroom apartment there now would be a snip at £1.5 million.

In 1874 at St Leonard's, Henry married Amelia Caroline HILLS, who was born in 1853 in Hoxton at an area called the Land of Promise, off Kingsland Road. Her father, James, was a labourer or porter about whom I have traced very little: I couldn't find him or his family on the 1851 and 1861 censuses, but he probably died in 1862.

Her mother's story is quite complicated. She was born in 1831 and aged 11 baptised Elizabeth Rennard Green at St John the Baptist Hoxton. She married James there in 1853 and her name was recorded as Elizabeth Reynolds Green, but when she remarried in 1867 she dropped the Green and gave her surname as Reynard, even though she said her father was George Green. Her husband was William Charles BLOMFIELD (1839-1919) and in 1871 they were living in Shoreditch with their son, another William Charles. 'Amelia Hill' and her brother Benjamin were listed as William's daughter- and son-in-law, which then could refer to stepchildren. Elizabeth died in 1925, aged 94.

When Amelia married Henry, she was a seal skin maker, and illiterate. He was 20 and she was 19 so both needed consent – Henry of his father and Amelia of her guardian, presumably Blomfield. In 1871 'Richard Hill' had been baptised at St John the Baptist Hoxton, son of Amelia Caroline 'single woman'. There's no way of knowing whether Richard was Henry's son, but in 1881 he was listed on the census as 'Richard H Pracy'; the H could be a nod to his original surname, because he isn't known to have used it later. Henry's father and eldest sister were the witnesses at the wedding, but you wonder what they thought of it all. Joseph William seems to have been rather a stern individual and, if he disapproved, it could help explain why he didn't trust Henry with the soap business.

A few years after Henry's death in 1892, Amelia was listed on the electoral register at 46 Ely Place, Hoxton. Four doors away at no.38 was George STELFOX (1864-1939). On the 1901 census, George and Amelia were living at 8 Myrtle Street, with Amelia for some mysterious reason listed as CF Stelfox. She, like George and his daughter Agnes, was working as a French polisher. On the 1911 census they were living at 33 Dorchester

St, where later the archaeological dig was done. Listed as Amelia Pracy Stillfox, she was with George, his children Albert and Mary Anne, and her son Joseph William Pracy. George, who had been widowed in 1893, said they had been married for 14 years but that is probably the time they had been living together, because there is no sign of an official marriage and her death in 1913 was registered in the name of Pracy. She was ten years older than him, but six of them were knocked off on the census and the death certificate.

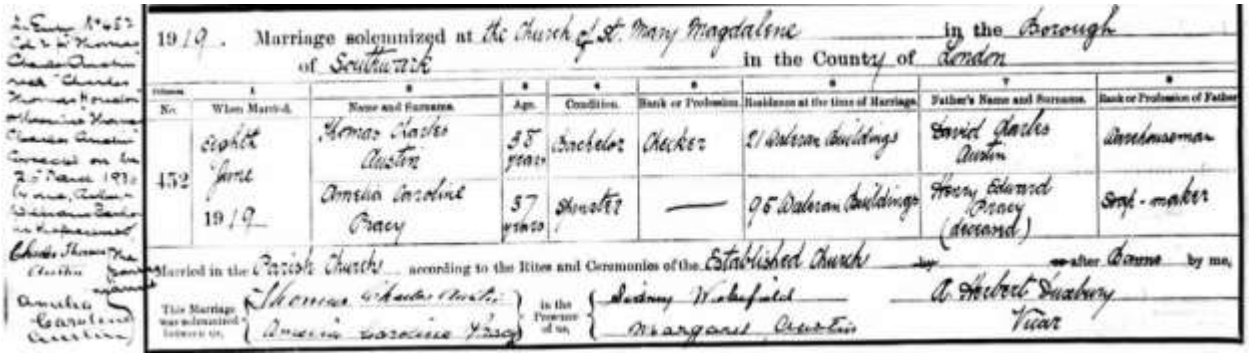
Amelia Caroline had four surviving children.

As noted above, **Richard (1871-1939)** was registered at birth as Richard Hill, but after his mother's marriage took the name Pracy. He was a craftsman in wood, who in 1891 made tables and later graduated to cabinets.

In 1899 he almost certainly enlisted with the Queen's Own (Royal West Kent Regiment), although there are two slight discrepancies in his attestation papers: he gave his age as 23 when he was 27, and he put an E in his surname. He was a labourer working for a cabinet maker, Frederick Schaffer of 6 Little Essex Street, Hoxton. He gave his address as Wilmer House, Wilmer Gardens, Shoreditch, which was apparently a boarding house for single working men. He was 5 ft 2½ in tall and weighed 124 lb. He had a fresh complexion, blue eyes, fair hair, and scars on his left shin and the back of his head. Recruited from the Territorial Army, he was 'embodied' [into the regular Army] on 11 December 1899 after 76 days drilling, and 'disembodied' [discharged] on 9 June 1901. He served his time overseas in Malta, and received the Mediterranean Medal. He probably rejoined the Royal West Kent Regiment during the First World War.

Richard was present for Territorial Army training in 1902 and 1903 but not in 1904, probably because he had married Ruth Eliza PAGE (1878-1960?), in her home parish of St Paul Bow Common. They had no children. In 1911 they were living in two rooms at 125 Fairview Road, Tottenham. His handwriting was a bit spidery but legible. He again took four years off his age, but it was given correctly when he died in 1939. Ruth was listed on Islington electoral registers until 1959, but I couldn't trace her death.

Amelia Caroline (1881-1965?) was in 1911 a labeller and packer working in a chemical factory. On the 1901 and 1911 censuses Amelia was living in Hoxton with her grandparents William Charles and Elizabeth Reynard Blomfield. In 1911 she filled up the form for them, in quite a neat hand. In 1919 Amelia married Thomas Charles AUSTIN and their daughter was another Amelia C. She gave her father's trade as soapmaker rather than cab driver, so perhaps the collapse of the firm had, by accident or design, been airbrushed out of the family history.



19 19. Marriage solemnized at the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in the Borough of Southwark in the County of London

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
432	eighth June 19 19	Thomas Charles Austin	25 years	Bachelor	Checker	21 Dolman Buildings	David Charles Austin	Bookbinder
		Amelia Caroline Pracy	37 years	Spinster	—	95 Dolman Buildings	Henry Edward Pracy (deceased)	Soap-maker

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by me, A. Herbert Duxbury Vicar

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Thomas Charles Austin and Amelia Caroline Pracy, in the Presence of us, Sidney Wakefield, Margaret Austin

Joseph William IV (1884-c.1930) began working life as a labourer for his half-uncle William Charles Blomfield junior, a cabinet maker of 88 Mintern Street.

On the day of Queen Victoria's death, 22 January 1901, Joseph enlisted in the Middlesex Regiment to serve in the South African (Boer) War. He is at different times recorded as being in the 5th Battalion (57th Foot) and the 3rd Battalion (The Duke of Cambridge's Own), and probably served alongside his brother Richard. He was then 5 feet 5 inches tall and weighed 117 pounds. Many soldiers recruited from the East End were found to be undernourished, but in the 21st century his Body Mass Index would not have been deemed unacceptably low. He had a medium complexion, blue eyes and brown hair, with two distinctive scars and a tattooed left forearm. In 1902 he guarded Boer prisoners on St Helena and spent three months in South Africa, on the way to a six-year tour of duty in India. He was then transferred to the Army Reserve at home for four years, and discharged in 1913.

On the 1911 census, when living with his mother, he was listed as a waiter. He married Elizabeth F REED in 1917 and they moved to Elham near Folkestone in Kent, where they had seven children. I could find no record of his death but it apparently took place around 1930, for their youngest child was born in 1929 and Elizabeth remarried in 1931.

John Henry (1891-1961) was working in 1911 as a barman at the Queen's Head, 405 The Strand in London. The head of the household was employed as a licensed victualler and there were ten servants, including John. He was already a reservist in the 5th Battalion of the King's Royal Rifle Corps, and on 21 July 1911 enlisted for 'short service' of seven years. In the First World War he served with them as a private, and on 25 July 1916 at Winchester was discharged with wounds, so was awarded a Silver War Badge. He married Lilian J FAIRBAIRN in 1912 at All Saints Battle Bridge, Caledonian Road, Islington, and they had five children. Among his grandchildren is John William Pracy (b. 1949), who was delighted to find that his combination of forenames is so significant in our family. He and his brother David Leslie have given me useful information about their branch of the family.

John (1857-1937) also was not mentioned in the will of old Joseph William.

In 1888 John married Laura Elizabeth KEABLE (1865-1951), the daughter of James Allan Keable, a coal merchant's clerk who rose to be the chief clerk, and they had three children. They lived initially in East Ham at Red Post Lane, which was later renamed Katherine Road in honour of Katharine Fry, who lived nearby. She was the daughter of the famous prison reformer Elizabeth Fry, and author of a noted history of East and West Ham. By 1891 John and family were living at 46 Selwyn Road Plaistow with a domestic servant.

In 1894 they moved to Crouch End where they remained, initially at 7 Elm Grove and after about 1906 at 36 Birchington Road. On the 1911 census it was said to be a dwelling with 8 rooms, where he was living with Laura and their two surviving children. He described himself as a storekeeper working for the Port Authority. His handwriting was appropriately neat and clear, with quite a flourish to his signature. Son Douglas (21) was an insurance clerk but no occupation is given for daughter Constance (20).

John's grandson Robert often stayed with him. He recalled that the house was within sight of Alexandra Palace, which transmitted radio signals that could be picked up with the aid of a long aerial in the garden. Using a crystal set, the signals could be heard through headphones passed from one listener to another, which was very exciting for the small boys. John shared the family's love of music, and in particular the operas of Wagner. When he came home from Covent Garden, 'the melodies continued in his head and disturbed his attempts to get to sleep'. John's musical tastes were pretty eclectic and he took his grandchildren to see famous music hall stars such as Albert Chevalier Junior and Little Tich. He took them on the tube or horse-drawn bus, and Robert still remembers the smell of the horses. John also had a passion for cricket and Robert spent many happy hours with his grandfather at the Hornsey Cricket Club, one of the leading clubs in Middlesex.

Laura's 70th birthday on 6 May 1935 was on the same day as the Silver Jubilee of King George V. The family watched from Bush House as the procession made its way to St Paul's for the Thanksgiving Service, and then celebrated with a great dinner in the evening.

John died in 1937 at St Bartholomew's Hospital (Bart's), and Laura in 1951 at home.

* * * * *

John worked for half a century as an administrator in the London Docks. He rose through the ranks from the lowly job of Writer to the important post of Superintendent of the Town Warehouses. Because the records have been well preserved, we're able to trace his various jobs and even his salary.

John entered the service of the East & West India Dock Company on 9 December 1871, two months short of his 15th birthday. Although he didn't appear on the census earlier that year, the dock records show that he was then living with his parents at 4 Rose Villas, Grange Park Road, Leyton.

John steadily worked his way up the hierarchy. His first post was that of a Writer in the Engineer's Department of the Western Dock at £30 a year. After six months he was promoted to be a Third Class Clerk, with a salary of £40 and an increase of £5 a year. He worked in the General Offices, initially of the Eastern Dock at Blackwall, and from June 1874 of the Western Dock, more or less where the Canary Wharf development now is. On 22 March 1876 he was promoted again, to Second Class Clerk, working in the Superintendent's and General Offices of the Western Dock. He started at £60 with an annual increase of £7 10s to a maximum of £120.

34. New Dock-House of the East and West India Dock Company in Billiter Square, 1877.

Image from several websites selling it as an original print.

By the 1870s the docks of the East & West India Dock Company and the rival London & St. Katherine's Docks Company docks were becoming cramped and obsolescent. In 1880 the London & St. Katherine's built a new dock, the Royal Albert, next to its Victoria Dock. The East & West India adopted a more radical solution, and in 1886 they opened new docks down river at Tilbury. John was promoted to First Class Clerk there, and his starting salary of £130 rose annually by £10. The cost of building Tilbury was more than twice as much as anticipated, and almost bankrupted the company. There were cuts in staff and salaries, so John must have been well regarded by his managers.

On 1 January 1889, as a result of their financial problems, the East & West India and London & St. Katherine's Docks Companies joined to form the London and India Docks Joint Committee. This was the year of the Great Dock Strike when the newly unionised workers, led by Ben Tillett and John Burns, achieved their aim of 6d an hour – the 'Dockers' Tanner'. Newspapers claimed that 'Superintendents and clerical staff carried revolvers for self-protection, they have been so constantly threatened', though there is little evidence that the weapons were ever used and it's hard to imagine John as a gun-toting vigilante.

The East & West India's First Class Clerks started at £130 a year, substantially less than London & St. Katherine's £200, and on 1 January 1890 John's salary was increased from £160 to £190. Both companies had a maximum of £220 which John reached on 1 January 1893, but on 30 April 1894 he was appointed to the Manager's Office and his salary again rose in £10 increments, to £260.

In 1899 John had the sad duty of examining a body believed to be that of his colleague William Anningson, an engineer who drowned in a yachting accident off Harwich. John confirmed it was Anningson, and was given permission to take his clothes back to London for the relatives to inspect.

The London and India Docks Joint Committee was a rather conservative beast that made no attempt to seek new business. In 1898 the East & West India Dock Company finally agreed to full amalgamation, which was regarded as 'like being married in church after you have been married at the registry office'[44]. They were very much the poor relation and it really was more of a takeover. Even then there was no great rush, and it was not until 1 January 1901 the two companies formally merged as the London & India Docks Company.

On the same day John's salary jumped to £320 which was presumably no coincidence, though I don't know the exact causal relationship. Even though John's rank was still that of First Class Clerk, he was listed on the census three months later as a Dock Officer rather than a Dock Clerk, so the salary increase probably represented an enhanced status.

Exactly one year later, on 1 January 1902, John was appointed as Storekeeper in the Stores Department. Clearly this humble-sounding post was very important, for John's salary increased by £110 to £430, and went up by a further £20 annually.

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[44] From: The West India Docks: Historical development, Survey of London: vols 43 and 44: Poplar, Blackwall and Isle of Dogs (1994), pp. 248-268.
URL: http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=46494 . Date accessed: 05 August 2008.

There were still problems with the docks so in 1902 a Royal Commission recommended the establishment of a port authority to buy up and manage all London's docks, but the various vested interests could not agree on how to do it. It was only on 31 March 1909 that the Port of London Authority was finally established, largely through the energy of Lloyd George and his successor Churchill as President of the Board of Trade. A few weeks later John was promoted to the post of Chief Storekeeper at a salary of £650.

On 1 June 1911 John was appointed Principal Examiner in the Examiner's Department and on 27 February 1913 Chief Clerk in the General Manager's Office, but his salary remained at £650. Strike action in the scorching hot summer of August 1911 achieved wage increases and improvements in the system of casual labour, although a second strike in 1912 was relatively short-lived and unsuccessful. John as a senior member of staff would probably have had to help manage the strikes. The information about John Pracy's career comes from a List of Salaried Staff in the PLA Transfer Book which was compiled in about 1919, and John's appointment in 1913 is the last listed for him there. The final mention of John in the PLA records is an obituary in the staff supplement for November 1937, which states that he retired on 1 April 1922 as Superintendent of the Town Warehouses.

35.

The Port of London Authority's Cutler Street Warehouses, where John Pracy was Superintendent.

Tower Hamlets Local History Library.

The jewel in the crown of the Town Warehouses, Cutler Street, was used by wholesale oriental carpet merchants in a free port status with its own custom house entrance.

In 1914 John Masefield, later appointed the Poet Laureate, visited Cutler Street. He was inspired to write a poem which, though its quality was not up to that of his famous *Cargoes*, gives a vivid picture of the empire over which John Pracy presided:

> You showed me nutmegs and nutmeg husks,
> Ostrich feathers and elephant tusks,
> Hundreds of tons of costly tea,
> Packed in wool by the Cingalee,
> And a myriad of drugs which disagree.

Cinnamon, myrrh, and mace you showed,
Golden Paradise birds that glowed,
More cigars than a man could count,
And a billion cloves in an odorous mount,
And a choice port wine from a bright glass fount.
You showed, for a most delightful hour,
The wealth of the world and London's power.

The historians who quoted Masefield have themselves have given a fine description of the warehouses[45]:

> Few people were given the opportunity to visit the dock warehouses, surrounded as they were by tall walls and protected by the watchful eyes of PLA policemen and customs officials. The warehouses of the port were one of London's best kept secrets. Those that did penetrate their security may well have been offered the ultimate geography lesson, but were as likely as not to be blinded by the sheer scale and statistics of it all. In the mid-1920s the PLA warehouses alone had accommodation for over 1,000,000 tons of goods including: 28,000 pipes of wine; 120,000 casks of brandy; 33,000 punches of rum; 1,000,000 bales of wool; 125,000 tons of grain; 500,000 carcasses of meat; 35,000 tons of tobacco; and 30,000 tons of tea… Had Masefield been counting he would have found 17,000,000 cigars and 26,000,000 cigarettes in store at the Cutler Street warehouses.

All of this confirms the family recollection that at the time of John's retirement he was superintendent of several warehouses and knew a great deal about the country's trade with the East, in particular India.

* * * * *

In 1912 a 16-year-old school leaver called RB Oram was appointed as a Fourth Class Clerk at the PLA. Eventually he rose to be a colonel in the Army, and Superintendent of the Surrey Docks. In 1970 he published *The Dockers' Tragedy*, which set the story of the dockers' struggle for stable working conditions within the framework of his own life and career. The book gives a fascinating insight into life in the early days of the PLA, towards the end of John Pracy's time there.

Oram described the General Office:

> This huge building, erected in 1805, and more than one hundred years later substantially unchanged, held about sixty clerks… A wide central passage bisected the general office; at the far end a glass box stood, raised on a dais. In this, lord of all he surveyed, reigned the Principal Clerk… a dignified figure in a frock coat…
>
> Traffic at the docks was then entirely horse drawn. As a protection from the thunderous noise of the ironshod wheels on the cobbled dock roads, the General Office was fitted with double windows – an early instance of effective double glazing…
>
> In the winter the office was 'warmed' by two massive open fires, unfortunately built on the same side… After the fashion of the days when they were constructed, ninety percent of the heat went up the chimney… As the junior clerk in the office it was, I suppose, right that my desk should be at the extreme distance from the nearer of the two fires. When the winter of 1912 arrived I learnt what cold meant…

[45] ELLMERS, Chris and WERNER, Alex. Dockland life: a pictorial history of London's docks 1860-2000. Mainstream, 2000, p89.

> One National Telephone served the whole office; it was used very occasionally for internal calls. Private calls by the staff were forbidden. There was also a primitive machine for internal use which you turned until a bell rang. This was the signal to lift the receiver and to hope that the man at the other end could hear you.
>
> The PLA had taken over from the dock companies the excellent system of providing staff meals, plus a few very simple amenities… Immediately outside the kitchen and in full view of the dining tables was a battery of six earth closets. They were the only provision made for the staff. When the need arose one applied to one's senior clerk for a key; the time it was issued – and returned – was entered in the book and you placed your initials alongside the entry…
>
> In spite of the grim surroundings there was an old-world charm about our relations with one another. [Even] the youngest clerk was addressed as 'Mister'… Each morning on arrival, an employee shook hands with the clerks in his immediate circle. If, during the day, he went to another part of the large office, this would be treated as an occasion and he shook hands with the appropriate clerk and his colleagues. Before he left at night it was a courtesy to shake hands once more. The First World War destroyed this courteous ritual and it was never revived.

Oram also explained the PLA hierarchy:

> The staff was divided into two grades, major and minor. The major staff [including John] filled the positions in the dock offices. The minor staff peopled the many departmental offices scattered around the docks…
>
> On the major staff, life began at fourteen with the Fourth Class Clerk… Starting at £50 a year he progressed by annual increments of £10 to £120. On this sum he should be able to marry. While waiting for his family to grow up he waited also for promotion to the next grade. As a Third Class Clerk he rose, by the same gradual steps, to £170. By this time his family might be off his hands and he could wait with less impatience for promotion to a Second Class Clerk with a yearly maximum of £210. As a matter of diminishing interest to the staff, there was a grade of First Class Clerk who received the princely sum of £5 a week. The retiring age was 65 and the staff pyramid, with its broad base, became progressively narrower as it reached its apex. In each main dock office a Principal Clerk, salary £300 a year, reigned supreme as no clerk has done since the end of the First World War…

Oram says that 'very few reached the top', so his account shows how remarkable John's rise was. It wasn't even automatic that a clerk should be promoted from fourth class to third: Oram recounts the case of a man who was denied the increment that would have taken him to the fourth-class maximum of £120, so was ineligible for promotion to third-class and remained on £110 for over thirty years. John advanced far more rapidly than Oram's average clerk. He reached the rarified heights of First Class Clerk aged only 29 when he hadn't even married, much less got his family 'off his hands'. Descriptions of posts in the PLA hierarchy seems to have been very meticulous, so John's post of Chief Clerk may not have been the same as that of Principal Clerk described by Oram, but the fact that John earned twice as much as one of these panjandrums shows the extent of his achievement.

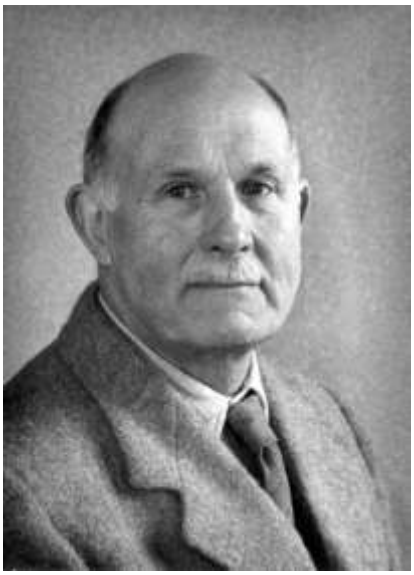
Douglas Sherrin (1889-1964) was only 12 when his younger brother **Gordon Keable (1897-1902)** died, which possibly influenced his decision to become a doctor. Initially he worked for an insurance company in the City, ironically on the advice of his family doctor who perhaps discouraged him from going into the profession. The call of medicine proved too great, however, and aged 23 he started his training. He entered

Barts and became house surgeon to R Cozens Bailey and William Girling Ball, both distinguished teachers of surgery. In 1916 he qualified as a Member of the Royal College of Physicians (England) and a Licentiate of the Royal College of Surgeons (London).

In the First World War Douglas was given a temporary commission as a Lieutenant in the Royal Army Medical Corps, and his rank was later raised to temporary Captain. He worked in the 23rd British General Hospital, based at Etaples. While a regimental officer with the 57th Division in July 1917 he was gassed at Armentières, and later served on the staffs of military hospitals in France and at Aldershot. In 1919 he relinquished his commission but retained the rank of captain.

On 24 August 1917 at Atherstone in Warwickshire, while on sick leave, Douglas married Gwendoline Blanche POWER, a sister at Bart's. She was from a medical family, and he joined her father's general practice at Atherstone as a junior partner. Not surprisingly, Douglas was the first Pracy known to have had a telephone and one of the first in his area, being listed in the 1926 Birmingham & District directory as Atherstone 23.

Douglas was very interested in surgery and had all too much experience of it during the war, but in order to be fully qualified he needed further theoretical and practical training. He studied in his spare time and in 1923 the Edinburgh Royal College of Surgeons awarded him a Fellowship, the highest level of qualification for a doctor. At small general hospitals in the 1920s GPs carried out basic surgery, but the more complicated procedures needed a specially trained surgeon and in 1926 Douglas was appointed as an Honorary Surgeon at the then Nuneaton General Hospital. In 1936, under the Workmen's Compensation Act 1925, he was appointed Medical Referee for the Atherstone, Coventry and Nuneaton County Court Districts. From 1944 he devoted himself entirely to his surgical work.



36. Dr Douglas Sherrin Pracy.

Photo from his grandson, Martin Pracy

In *The Times* for 27 January 1925 he was among hundreds of people listed as giving donations towards the preservation of St Paul's Cathedral, his contribution being 10s.

In 1927 Douglas gave evidence in the tragic case of a double shooting on a farm at Witherley, a village near Atherstone. A gamekeeper called Thomas Goldsmith shot Walter Bull, a farm bailiff, and then turned the gun on himself. Dr Pracy said that Goldsmith had seemed very worried on the day before the shootings, and that he was mentally unbalanced when he carried them out. The Findmypast newspaper database records many other cases involving him, which will be well worth following up,

Douglas also served his profession through the British Medical Association. He was a member of the General Council from 1949 to 1960, and for much of his career was on various national and local committees. His colleagues recognized his contribution by electing him as a Fellow of the BMA. He died at Bart's in 1964.

The two sons of Douglas and Gwendoline followed their father and maternal grandfather in qualifying as MRCS LRCP at Bart's, both in 1944.

John Power (1919-92) served in the Royal Army Medical Corps during the Second World War, and in 1948 was made up from Lieutenant to Captain. He briefly practised as a GP before specialising in industrial medicine. He started work with Metropolitan Vickers (AEI) in 1950 and from the late 1960's was employed by British Rail. In 1945 he married Ethel P 'Bunny' JESS and they also had two sons. **Robert Sherrin (b. 1950)** trained as an economist and worked for British Gas. **Martin Power (b. 1947)** trained as a medical physicist and migrated to New Zealand and later Australia.

Martin recently took part in the National Geographic Genomic Project, which aims to identify ancient human genetic relationships and thus migration patterns for the whole planet. The project studies the male Y chromosome which is passed directly from father son and normally follows the family name. Barring 'an undocumented adoption or a fling with the milkman' (as Martin rather neatly put it), the Pracy 'haplotype' is common in the South of England and we are descendants of the earliest migrants to Europe, the Cro-Magnons who arrived some 40,000 years ago.

Robert (b. 1921), like his father, went on to pass his FRCS, in 1953. He took his London University MB, BS before concentrating on ear, nose and throat surgery with a special interest in children and particularly in small babies. He distinguished himself in the fields of laryngology and otology, and was an examiner for the English and Irish Colleges of Surgeons. When he retired from the NHS and became Dean of the Institute of Laryngology and Otology, London, he did some research that resulted in the award of MPhil, also University of London.

Constance Maud (1891-1968) never married. She was an Associate of the London Academy of Music and won their Gold Medal for pianoforte. Some of the other young women in our family began teacher training aged about 20, but she didn't start till after the First World War so may have gone into the profession to help fill the gap left by the loss of all the men. She began teaching in 1922, did her training in 1924-5 and qualified in 1926. She became music mistress at Our Lady's Convent, Stamford Hill. Her nephew Robert recalled that when her students came for their piano lessons he had to be very quiet. In 1929 she travelled with her elderly parents from Liverpool to Montreal, and in 1933 they went from London to Marseilles and later returned from Yokohama in Japan.

Emily (1859-1950?) married Peter Speechly TAYLOR (1853-1921) at All Saints Stoke Newington, in 1883. The witnesses were Emily's brother Thomas Richard and her sister-in-law Emily Georgina, who was then living with Joseph William II in Stoke Newington. The late Joseph William I's occupation was sanitized to that of perfumer. Peter was the lodger at 95 Mildmay Road and so she fulfilled what seem to have been her father's worst fears, but by then the Married Women's Property Act of 1882 had been passed, and she would have had a little more security. Like Emily's brother John, Peter was listed on the 1881 census as a commercial clerk, so that was probably how he was introduced to the family. In 1911 he stated that he was employed by the PLA, although apparently not at as high a level as John.

Early in 1887 they were living at 35 Ferndale Road Upton Park, the same road as Emily's sister Mary Ann Elizabeth. There Mary Ann died less than a month after her sister Elizabeth Jane Jones. Emily recorded Elizabeth's death the next day, but when Mary Ann died it was four days before they reported it and Peter had to do it. What it must have been like for them, with a two-year-old son and a baby daughter, doesn't bear thinking about.

Soon after these tragic events Peter and Emily moved into her brother John's house in Red Post Lane. They had three children, **John William**, **Jessie Marian** and **James Mackay**. In 1891 Emily's 19-year-old orphaned niece Lilian was staying with them and was already a music teacher. In 1894 the whole family including Lilian had moved out to 78 Woodlands Road Ilford, and they were still there in 1911. Daughter Jessie was a telegraphist for the PLA, which was clearly quite a source of employment for the family. Son James worked as a clerk for Ilford Urban District Council.

Old Joseph William had left the family piano to Emily, so perhaps she too was musical. Her great-nephew Robert remembered her as a wonderful person who wore enormously tall hats and went on holiday with the family. She may well have been the Emily Taylor who died in the Wood Green district in 1950 aged 90, although hers is too common a name to be sure.

18. Henry Charles Pracy (1827-1909) and his descendants

Henry was barely three when his father died.

In 1854 he married Mary Elizabeth GORSUCH (1829-1884), the daughter of James St Swithin Gorsuch (1801-1870), a London clothier. His father John was the youngest of five brothers who were all Clerkenwell watchmakers, and their father was a watchmaker in Prescot near Liverpool. There is some evidence that they were descended from a landed Lancashire family but this would need further checking. Gorsuch Street and Gorsuch Place off Kingsland Road in Shoreditch presumably had some connection with the family, although I don't know exactly what.

The first John William Pracy was also a Clerkenwell watchmaker, which may be where the connection between the Gorsuch and Pracy families began. On the other hand, Henry's marriage certificate and his mother's death certificate gave his father's profession as 'late foreman London Docks', which is so inaccurate as to suggest that there may have been some hidden agenda. The witnesses were Mary Elizabeth's father and her sister Jane Hannah.

In previous editions I stated that Henry became the most successful of all the 19th-century Pracys, and added that 'his secret was simple – he married into money and influence'. There's some truth in that, but I now think it was less simple than I suggested: he owed something to his own efforts, and also to the bequest he received from Edward Browne (see Chapter 11). Browne's will stated that in 1876 Henry Charles was 'the manager to Messrs Homan & Co of Wormwood Street in the City of London'. From directories and census returns we can trace the development of Homan's and his likely career path with them.

By 1839 Homan's were established as 'Homan & Herne wholesale shoe and leather warehouse' at 25 Skinner Street, near Snow Hill. In 1816 Francis Homan married Ebenezer Herne's sister Mary Anne at St Leonard's Shoreditch, where in 1822 their son Ebenezer was born. The brothers-in-law apparently set up in business together some time later. Herne was listed on the 1841 census as a shoemaker, in 1851 as a merchant and in 1861 as a retired leather seller. In 1850 the firm was listed as Francis & Ebenezer Homan & Co, so the father and son had presumably bought Herne out.

There is no occupation for Henry on the 1841 census, taken when he was 13½, but he could have started work soon afterwards. He was said to be a warehouseman on the 1851 census and on his marriage certificate in 1854. That sounds a fairly humble occupation, although his later career suggests that even in his mid-20s he could actually have managed the warehouse, especially as the 1851 census seldom differentiated between managers and other staff. Francis and Ebenezer Homan, who owned and ran the firm, were only listed as shoe warehousemen.

In 1856 Francis Homan died and the firm was renamed Homan & Co. By 1860 they had moved from Skinner Street, shortly before it was demolished to make way for Holborn Viaduct. Their new address was 28 Wormwood Street, off Bishopsgate. They had slightly changed the nature of their business, being described as 'shoe manufacturer and leather merchants'.

37. In the 1980s Tuilerie Street was demolished to make way for Haggerston Park but a splendid old-fashioned street-sign can still be seen on the side of the London Picture Centre.

Photo: Martin Hagger

In 1861 Henry was still a warehouseman. He was living in Haggerston at 11 Tuilerie Street, so called because it was on the site of a tile factory. Around 1864 Henry moved to 16 Glaskin Road Hackney where, as 'Charles Pracey', he was the only member of our family to be listed on the electoral register before the major extension of the franchise in 1867, so he was already a man of property.

Homan & Co also had premises in Norwich and Northampton. In 1871 Henry was living at Church Street in Heigham, one of several villages that became part of Norwich as it expanded beyond its walls in the 18th and 19th centuries. Kelly's 1869 directory described Heigham as 'a place of convenient resort from the city'. Henry was 'manager of a boot warehouse', so evidently Homan & Co had sent him to manage their Norwich business, which was in Theatre Street. At that time they employed altogether 600 hands, but I haven't discovered how long the firm took to grow to that size. It arrived in Norwich between 1850 and 1858, and closed between 1872 and 1875.

Later in 1871 Henry took over renting the house at Grange Park Road Leyton from his brother Joseph William. Presumably he had moved back to London to manage the Wormwood Street premises, where the firm was simply described as 'shoe manufacturer'. Certainly he had done so by 1875, when Kelly's Essex directory listed 'Hy.C. Pricy' at Capworth Street, Leyton. The family lived at Shrubland Villa until 1885 and then 2 Caroline Villas, both in Capworth Street. By 1895 Henry was at 37 Grove Green Road Leytonstone, and soon afterwards he moved across the road to no.74.

Rather unexpectedly, Homan & Co suddenly disappeared from Kelly's London directory, in 1880. Ebenezer Homan was listed on the 1881 census as 'retired merchant', so presumably he had made his pile and sold up. On the same census Henry Charles was described as 'Manufacturer (Boots)' and his son Henry Edward as 'Clerk (Shoe Warehouse)', but by 1891 Henry Charles was a 'Retired boot manufacturer'. Censuses didn't always indicate whether people had retired from their occupations, so Henry Charles could have retired at the same time as his employer. Henry Edward may well have worked for them too, and then found a job in a similar firm.

Under his will Henry left the very considerable sum of £6856 (£400,000 today), although he seems to have done little or nothing to help the orphaned children of his nephew Thomas Richard. In 1889, on his son's marriage certificate, he described himself as a gentleman, the first in our family to do so since Edward Prescey a century earlier. Admittedly it was by then a somewhat elastic term, and perhaps reflected his having made enough money to retire, but it nevertheless represented a notable social and economic rise for the youngest brother of a porter, a cellarman and a dressmaker. His was perhaps the only branch of the family that never quite lost the respectable tradesman's outlook of the two Edmunds and John William the watchmaker. It may be unfair, but I get the impression that his success made him a bit of a snob.

When the Essex County Cricket Club moved from Brentwood to Leyton in 1885, Henry became a member, paying a guinea a year. At the 1903 AGM, he seconded adoption of the accounts and was mentioned in a newspaper report. Membership of the county club was almost expected of anyone with social pretensions, although he probably had a genuine interest in the game as well. He was a vice-president of the Leyton club, which was one of the strongest in the county at that time. It was to some extent a nursery for the county club, and regularly featured Essex players such as Charlie McGahey. His sons Henry and Edward were useful cricketers who played for the Leyton 1st XI. Edward was elected an Essex member after his father's death, so presumably had previously gone to the cricket with him or borrowed his membership card.

Henry and Mary had four surviving children. Their daughter **Florence Emily** (1860-2) was the first of our family to be named after Florence Nightingale, but sadly she died aged only 1.

Mary Elizabeth was born in 1858 in the Shoreditch area, perhaps Haggerston where the family was living in 1861. At Leyton in 1881 she married William Henry SUNLEY (1856-1909), whose surname is sometimes wrongly transcribed SIMLEY. He was a clerk until 1891 but by 1901 had become the foreman of a paper mill. They lived at 5 (later 10) Melbourne Road Leyton, and had seven children – William Henry, Florence Mary, Henry Pracy, Ethel Margaret, Edward Charles, Dorothy May and Gladys Lily.

In 1911 William Henry was a sub-librarian with Leyton Urban District Council, and filled up the form in an appropriately neat hand. His brother Henry Pracy was a butcher's assistant but in 1913 'Harry Pracey Sunley', a farm labourer, and Mabel Jane WARNELL, both of Walsingham in Norfolk, were married at Toronto Gore, Ontario, Canada. They returned to England where in 1917 their son William Henry Pracy Sunley was born. In 1962 William took out patent GB948514 on a dispenser for a toilet roll or interleaved toilet pack.

Emma Eleanor was born in 1863 in the Shoreditch area. In 1892 at Leyton she married George Markham MURDOCH, who ran a firm of decorators. By December 1903 they had five children – May Eleanor, George Pracy, Catherine Mary, Charles William Pracy and William Pracy. I suspect that Henry Charles Pracy was a strong influence in four of his grandsons being given our surname as a middle name. The family was living at 74 Grove Green Road Leytonstone with Henry Charles who was 'living on own means', and described not as father-in-law but as head of a separate household. In 1928 'George Pracey Murdoch' was listed on a *Times* advert as Secretary of the Hispano-Suiza Motor Co. Ltd. As late as 1939 the house was occupied by Charles William Pracy Murdoch.

Edward John (1865-1956) was born after the family had moved to Hackney. As well as being a good cricketer, he played amateur county football for Essex; in 1887 he was a half-back against Surrey but Essex lost 5-1. He was listed in 1891 as a salesman of fancy toys, and in 1895 as a fancy goods warehouseman at 48 Camberwell Road SE. By 1901 he was a clerk to an insurance company. In 1911 he and his family were living in a five-room dwelling at 25 Grosvenor Park, Southwark. He filled up the census form in a clear, confident hand that befits his occupation as a commercial clerk.

In 1894 at St Paul Herne Hill he married Jessie FINDLATER (1864-1954), who was born at Grantown-on-Spey in Scotland. They had two children. **Alexandra Irene (1901-1997)**, known as Irene, never married.

Henry Edward Findlater (1894-1976) attended Christ's Hospital School, which in 1902 had moved to Horsham from a site adjacent to Christ Church Newgate Street. He went up to Christ's College Cambridge in 1913 to read chemistry. In 1915 he obtained a Class I pass for his Natural sciences Tripos part I, but left for the war in 1916 and was admitted to a degree by wartime statutes. He married Margaret Ethel SIMPSON in 1920.

Henry had a long career as a chemical engineer with Shell, to which passenger lists give some clues. In 1927 he travelled to Singapore, probably on the way to a posting at Sarawak, where he remained until 1933. Shortly afterwards he was appointed as the manager of Shell's refinery in Trinidad, where crude oil products were 10 million barrels per year. He was reported in *The Times* of 29 May 1937 as being elected President of the Trinidad section of the British Bridge League. He probably stayed there until 1941, when he was recorded as returning to England via New York. Margaret seems sometimes to have stayed with him abroad, but also have come back to England more often. There is no record of either of them going overseas by ship after 1941, although they could perhaps have travelled abroad by plane.

In 1911 Edward and Jessie were living with daughter Irene at 25 Grosvenor Park SE, which had 5 rooms. The form is filled up in a strong, clear hand.

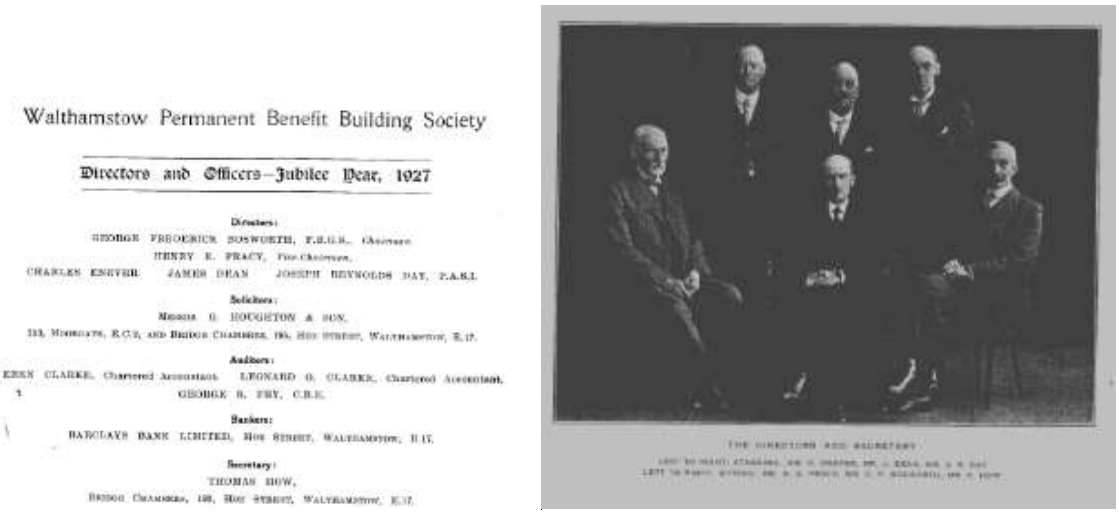
Henry Edward (1856-1937) was in 1881 a clerk in a shoe warehouse, presumably a job working for his father or obtained with his influence. When he married in 1889, he gave his profession as clerk, although he didn't state in which trade. By 1891 and until 1911 at least, he was a music publisher's manager.

In 1889 Henry married Elizabeth Annie PEARCEY (1855-1933) at St Mary Stamford Brook, a recently created parish in Hammersmith. This seems strange because neither of them had any known connection with Hammersmith, and in fact Elizabeth Annie belonged to a remarkable family that had been in Leyton for a hundred years. Bride and groom both gave their address as 24 Westville Road Hammersmith, which on the 1891 census was apparently a house in multiple occupation. The wedding was quite a Pracy takeover, with Henry's father, sister Emma and brother Edward as witnesses.

Elizabeth Annie's father was given as 'Thomas Pearcey (deceased) Builder's Foreman', which was not strictly accurate as she was illegitimate and his real name isn't known. However, her grandfather, Thomas, was a bricklayer and died around the time she was born. In an age when respectability was important, her mother, Annie Elizabeth, may well have told her – or at any rate the Pracy family – that he was her father rather than her grandfather, and upgraded his trade a little. Until 1871 Annie Elizabeth had been a laundress, but by 1881 she was a certificated teacher and on the 1889 marriage certificate her daughter was described as a schoolmistress, which represents a considerable achievement for both women.

In 1891 Henry, his wife and mother-in-law were living in a terraced house at 10 (later 23) Cairo Road Walthamstow. The remarkable similarity between the names Pearcey and Pracy confused the 1901 enumerator, who recorded Annie Elizabeth's surname as Pracy. She died in 1904 and may have left Henry and Elizabeth a little money, for in 1905 they moved to a rather grander double-fronted house nearby – Ivyside, 60 Orford Road. The 1911 census shows that the house had seven rooms. Henry's handwriting is strong, but perhaps not always entirely legible if you don't know what it says.

Henry was quite an influential figure in Walthamstow. He helped found the Walthamstow Antiquarian Society, and became vice-chairman and director of the Walthamstow Building Society.



Walthamstow Permanent Benefit Building Society

Directors and Officers—Jubilee Year, 1927

Directors:

GEORGE FREDERICK SOSWORTH, F.R.G.S., (Chairman.
HENRY E. PRACY, Vice-Chairman.
CHARLES ENEVER. JAMES DEAN. JOSEPH REYNOLDS DAY, F.A.S.I.

Solicitors:

Messrs. G. HOUGHTON & SON,

Auditors:

EDEN CLARKE, Chartered Accountant. LEONARD G. CLARKE, Chartered Accountant.
GEORGE S. FRY, C.B.E.

Bankers:

BARCLAYS BANK LIMITED, Hoe Street, Walthamstow, E.17.

Secretary:

THOMAS HOW,

38. This golden jubilee booklet shows the directors of the Walthamstow Building Society as a group of highly respectable businessmen, with Henry Edward Pracy (left) the only one sporting a beard and a bow tie.

Henry and his cousin John (1857-1937, son of Joseph William) were listed in the 1928 London telephone directory and were therefore the first in our family to be on the phone at home. By 1935 his brother Edward and his daughter Elsie had joined them.

Henry and Elizabeth are buried in the churchyard of St Mary's Walthamstow, in a prominent position next to the north wall of the church. They had four children.

Margaret Mary (1891-1939) in 1911 was attending the Home and Colonial Training College, a teachers' training college in Lordship Lane, Wood Green. She married Alec DAINES in 1917. One of their two daughters married the late Bill FIRTH, who was well-known in local and family history circles and provided me with much useful information.

Edith Winifred (1899-1988) married Sidney ERRIDGE in 1928 and they had a daughter, Janet.

Henry Reginald (1894-1916) attended Sir George Monoux Grammar School in Walthamstow. From 1909 to 1912 he went on to the Strand School, which was a successful training school for civil servants, then situated in the basement of King's College London and later relocated to Elm Park in Lambeth.

In December 1912, after open competition, he was appointed as a Second Division Clerk in the Civil Service, and in August 1913 he was assigned to the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries. His entry in the Strand register says that in 1914 he obtained first place in examinations for the Welsh Insurance Commission so he seemed destined for a glittering career, but it was not to be.

In the First World War, he initially volunteered as a private in the Honorable Artillery Company Infantry. On 9 April 1916 he was commissioned, on probation, as a Second Lieutenant in the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment. He was presumably among the grammar school boys who were recruited as officers after the flower of the public schools had been cut down. He was fatally wounded during the Battle of the Somme and on 5 September 1916 died at Corbie, where he is buried.

Elsie Mabel (1895-1978) never married but did much good work in the Walthamstow and Leyton area.

At a time when it was still unusual for women to go into higher education she obtained a B.Sc. (Econ.) She was elected as an alderman of Walthamstow Borough Council in 1932, and became Chairman of the Education Committee. She was re-elected in 1938 and resigned when her second term of office expired in 1944. Her adult education lectures were popular with her students, not least because she was said to have had 'a fund of racy stories'[46].

A lifelong socialist and Labour Party member, Elsie Pracy made a stirring speech at the ceremony for the laying of the foundation stone of Walthamstow Town Hall in 1938. She compared the solid foundations of the building with the solid socialist beliefs of the mayor, Catherine McEntee.

ORDER OF PROCEEDINGS

AT THE

Laying of the Foundation Stone

of the

New Town Hall and Council Offices

WALTHAMSTOW,

BY

THE WORSHIPFUL THE MAYOR

(Alderman Mrs. C. McEntee, J.P., E.C.C.)

Chairman: Councillor V. L. McENTEE, M.P.

(Chairman of the New Town Hall Committee).

Saturday, 29th October, 1938, at 3.15 p.m.

Proceedings.

The Chairman of the New Town Hall Committee (Councillor V. L. McEntee, M.P.) will take the Chair and make a Statement.

Mr. P. D. Hepworth will invite the Worshipful the Mayor, Alderman Mrs. C. McEntee, J.P., E.C.C., to lay the Foundation Stone of the New Town Hall and Council Offices for Walthamstow.

The Worshipful the Mayor will address the Assembly.

Alderman Miss E. M. Pracy, B.Sc., will move a vote of thanks to the Worshipful the Mayor.

Alderman J. C. Hammond will second the vote of thanks.

Alderman Ross Wyld will move a vote of thanks to the Chairman.

Councillor W. B. Fitt will second the vote of thanks.

39. Programme for laying the foundation stone of Walthamstow Town Hall. Concealed beneath the stone is an airtight chamber containing a casket of documents that detail the citizens' hopes and plans for the future together with keepsakes of their time.

40. Walthamstow Town Hall was opened in 1941 and is now a Grade II listed building.

Elsie Pracy was also interested in theatre and wrote plays, although none to my knowledge was ever performed. In 1926 she appeared in a play about the Tolpuddle Martyrs written by Reginald Sorensen, later Labour MP for Leyton West. Sorensen played George Lovelace, one of the union leaders. Elsie 'was George's sweetheart, a serving maid who used all her influence and womanly wiles to get George to have

[46] Information from Robert Barltrop, who told me he was rather disappointed not to have attended them himself, although he had friends who did.

nothing to do with the union, only to change her view when George is arrested and sent to Botany Bay'. The performances of Reginald and Elsie were said to have been very good. I found this on the Hayes People's History website because she happened to perform the piece in Hayes, but she was evidently an accomplished amateur actress and presumably was in many other shows I don't know about.

In 1949 Elsie founded the Leyton-Wandsbek Friendship Association, which twinned the London suburb with one in Hamburg. Wandsbek was chosen by recommendation of Reg Sorensen, as being a parallel town to Leyton. It was one of the first examples of town twinning, which became an important way to 'mend the wounds of war' with France and Germany after the Second World War. Fifty years later, 91-year-old former councillor Vi Gosling recalled that they were inundated with families offering to look after orphaned German children when they first visited Waltham Forest. 'We had an amazing response in 1950 when the first group of German children came over. More people offered accommodation than we had people. It was a great cultural exchange. We would benefit because when we went to Wandsbek we saw much of Hamburg, so we became familiar with another city. It was very exciting.'

* * * * *

As was sometimes the way with the Pracys, Henry Edward shared a name with his first cousin. Joseph William and Henry Charles were the two youngest sons and both went into business. They may therefore have been particularly close within the family, but the experiences of their namesake sons were very different. Within ten years of Joseph's death the business collapsed; his Henry Edward stayed in Shoreditch and became a cab driver, dying aged only 38. By contrast, Henry Charles's business thrived; his Henry Edward moved to the then healthier environs of Walthamstow and became a publisher, living to the age of 81.

The next generation, however, saw a great irony. Joseph William's grandson and namesake survived twelve years as a professional soldier, but apparently did not serve in the First World War and later fathered seven children. Henry Charles's male line came to an end, because his only Pracy grandson volunteered for that bloodbath and was among the 35% of young officers killed in it.

19. Linking the two halves of the family, and refuting one of its myths

Henry Reginald Pracy is commemorated on the war memorial at Monoux School and on a plaque in St Mary's church, Walthamstow. The plaque's prominent position is an indication of Henry Edward's place in local society. In his will, he requested his daughters 'without imposing any trust on them to keep the memorial of their brother Henry Reginald Pracy in the church of St Mary in good order'. Over 90 years after the young man's death, his memorial is indeed in good order.

I too attended Monoux, and went to the church for Founder's Day services. My parents had never heard of Henry Reginald, and it was his memorials that led me to start researching my family history in order to see whether we were related.

In 1965, shortly after I started working at Walthamstow Central Library, Elsie Pracy came in and I needed to ask her name. She said 'Pracy' and when I replied 'So is mine' we naturally got into conversation. When later I established that we were distant cousins she was intrigued and invited me home to 60 Orford Road, where she still lived, for tea. She was over 80 but as bright as ever and I count it a joy and a privilege to have met her. It was unfortunately only after her death that I found out about her Labour Party and town twinning activities, and I wish I had been able to ask her whether they were inspired by the loss of her brother.

I would have thought that if knowledge of our Wiltshire origins had survived anywhere in our family it would have been in Henry Charles's branch. His aunt Ann Fox was still alive when he was in his 20s, and she in turn was 16 when her grandmother Alice of Wantage, widow of Edmund of Bishopstone, died. Ann and Henry Charles could well have met at family events, although even these days few young people have much curiosity about their family history and the old lady's deafness might have made communication difficult. His was also the best-educated branch of the family: in the early 20th century, long before university education became commonplace, it boasted at least three graduates. And Henry Edward, who was 15 when his grandmother Elizabeth Jane died, later became a joint-founder and committee member of the well-regarded Walthamstow Antiquarian Society.

They were therefore the most likely to have investigated the matter, yet Irene Pracy insisted to Bill Firth that our family were Huguenots who came out of Norfolk. Her first cousin Elsie told me the same, although less dogmatically. The Huguenot theory is a common one, but I had no idea why Irene and Elsie should have thought we came from Norfolk. Then I came across the 1871 census which shows Henry Charles and his family living just outside Norwich. They can't have gone there before 1867 when they were in Hackney, and they apparently moved back to Leyton later in 1871. The earliest memories of Irene's father, Edward John, would therefore probably have been of Norfolk. Perhaps his recollections were somehow transformed into the belief that the whole family came from there. Of such stuff are family myths made.

Part 4: Thomas Pracy (1781-1846) and his descendants

Edmund and Lucy Pracy's youngest son was born on 6 October 1781, and recorded in the St Luke's register as being baptised William on 4 November. They were scrupulous in having their children baptised, so it is inconceivable that they would have missed out one child and that the son of an otherwise unknown Edmund and Lucy was baptised at the same time. There are no further references to William but many to Thomas who would have been the same age. I conclude therefore that 'William' and Thomas are the same person.

I would guess that either he adopted the name Thomas because of confusion between John William and William, or more probably it is literally a clerical error. 'William' was one of eleven babies baptised that day and the recording clergyman usually wrote up a month's baptisms and burials some time later, so he probably made a simple mistake.

Mary Pracy née MORGAN (c. 1781-1863) married Thomas at Christ Church Newgate Street on 24 July 1809. Apart from the Australian descendants of Rosetta and Thomas Richard, she was the only member of our family to be born outside England before the 1890s.

She stated on the 1851 census that she was born in Cardigan, in south central Wales. FamilySearch for that county reveals five Mary Morgans baptised between 1779 and 1783, and there may have been others not listed there. Two of them were baptised in the improbably named settlement of Strata Florida, which developed around a once prosperous but now ruined abbey in 'a wild, lonely and picturesque valley deep in the hills north of Tregaron'. I would like to think that our ancestor had grown up in such a romantic place, but the reality is that we can never know for sure. There is a good potted history and some excellent photos at http://www.castlewales.com/strata.html

Romantic or not, Mary's early life wouldn't have been easy. An anonymous verse referred to the lack of work for young women in rural Cardiganshire: 'I'll go to London come Lammas if I'm alive and well; I won't stay in Wales to break my heart.' [47]

In the early 1800s it was still commonplace for Welsh people to drive their stock to London for market, and Cardigan was a cattle-rearing area. That is probably how Mary met Thomas, particularly as they subsequently had a milk business. It was based for half a century at 1 Maxwell Court in Long Alley (now Appold Street), on the corner of Eldon Street close to present-day Liverpool Street station. In 1807 Thomas Batchelor had applied to set up a printing-press at 1 Maxwell Court, but there is no evidence that he ever did so. Shoreditch in general was a centre of furniture-making but Long Alley in particular was notorious for its second-hand trade, rather charmingly described in 1861 by the journalist and actor-manager John Hollingshed as 'that melancholy avenue of vermin-haunted furniture'.

Leigh's *Weekly Markets* of 1819 reported on the milk trade[48]:

> In delivering the milk to the consumer, a vast increase takes place, not only in the price, but also in the quantity, which is greatly adulterated with water, and sometimes impregnated with still worse ingredients, to hide the cheat. By these practices, and the additional charge made for cream… one writer has said the advance or profit is 150%. The milk is conveyed to the consumers in tin vessels, called pails, which are principally carried about by women, mostly robust Welsh girls: it is distributed twice daily through all parts of the town. The profits are undoubtedly great where the consumption is constant and certain…

According to Leigh, the cows would have been large Holderness short-horns. Some 7900 of them were kept in the then largely rural county of Middlesex – many in Islington, after which Thomas's sister Rosetta Terry named her farm in New South Wales. The cattle would only have been a mile or so from Long Alley. Overall they produced about seven million gallons a year and the total paid out was £328,000. The price was 10d or 11d per gallon according to the distance from town. The retail dealer agreed with the cow-keeper for the produce of a certain number of cows, and undertook the milking himself. The Welsh girls would certainly have had to be robust, for they distributed the milk on yokes

[47] Mi af i Lundain Glame / Os byddaf byw ac iach / Arhosa i ddim yng Nghymru / I ddori 'nghalon fach. From: JONES, Emrys (ed.) The Welsh in London, 1500-2000. University of Wales, 2001.
[48] http://www.londonancestor.com/leighs/mar-weekly.htm

said to have weighed over 100 lbs. They were famous for their cries of 'Mi-o', or milk below, and Mary was doubtless one of them.

In the 1810s Thomas's occupation was given as 'milk man', but after that he was listed variously as a porter, wine porter and wine cooper. This may suggest that Mary ran the business while Thomas helped out by collecting the milk and got other work when he could, or perhaps as their children grew up they began to collect the milk. The trade may have become less profitable: in the 1810s milk retailed at 6d a quart with a retail margin of 2d, but from 1834-64 at 4d a quart with a profit of only 1d to 1½d[49]. Certainly Mary took charge after Thomas died of 'natural decay' in November 1846, and was buried at St Leonard's.

41.* Milk Below!** ***by Francis Wheatley, as part of his 'Cries of London' series, 1792-1795. This image may be slightly romanticized, but will give an idea of how Mary Pracy might have looked.

Image on several websites so I assume it's not copyright.

We can't know whether Thomas and Mary watered down their milk or made 150% profit, but the fact that the business lasted on the same premises for over 50 years suggests that it thrived. The goodwill of a 'milk-walk' could change hands for anything up to £100 (£5,000 today) so it was sometimes a highly profitable trade, but one contemporary rather uncharitably described milksellers as 'the dregs of the residuum'.

Because English would have been Mary's second language, she is likely not to have spoken it that well, or at best with a strong accent. She was the only Pracy spouse in that generation known to have marked her marriage lines with a cross rather than a signature, and her trade was not highly regarded. The witnesses were David Jones and E. Griffiths, who both sound somewhat Welsh. Perhaps therefore the rest of the family thought that Thomas had married a little beneath him, even though one of them was a jailbird and another was living with one. By her will of 1848, Lucy Pracy left £10 to John William's widow Elizabeth Jane but nothing to the recently widowed Mary. That might suggest some sort of family rift or even anti-immigrant racism – 'Taffy was a Welshman / Taffy was a thief…'

[49] Unfortunately figures for the intervening period aren't available. This and most of the following background information on the trade from: ATKINS, PJ. The retail milk trade in London c1790-1914. IN Economic history review, 1980. New series, vol 33 no. 4, p522-537.

We can't be sure precisely what form the business took. Behind 1 Maxwell Court there was a yard, where cows could have been kept. This is less surprising than it might sound, for the number of urban cowsheds and dairies grew from an estimated 200 in 1831 to over 2,000 in 1871. On the other hand, Thomas and Mary could perhaps just have stored milk there overnight. Neither was ever described as a cowkeeper, the usual word when cows were kept on the premises, and they didn't appear in trade directories of the time. This may suggest that most of their trade came from selling milk around the streets, rather than from people coming to Long Alley. A large-scale Ordnance Survey map shows that by 1872 the yard had been entirely filled in.

Ratebooks show that the gross annual rent on 1 Maxwell Court was estimated at £13. In 1844 the rates were paid by Maria Wilkinson alone, and by 1854 the joint-owner with her was Peregrine Hogg Purkiss or Purvis, of Winchmore Hill. On the 1861 census he was listed as 'Proprietor of Houses', but there were too many Maria Wilkinsons to be sure which was the right one.

I can't prove it at this distance in time, but I suspect that Mary was quite a forceful character. On the 1851 census she had herself listed as the head of the household, even though her 39-year-old son John, a widower with three children, was also there. John was head of household in 1861, but the 81-year-old Mary was still shown as a milk dealer. Censuses indicate that all of her children and grandchildren had jobs of their own so the old lady must presumably have had to distribute the milk herself, perhaps relying on customer loyalty built up over many years. She died of asthma in 1863, when her age was given as 84. The family were still living at 1 Maxwell Court but must have moved out soon afterwards.

20. Thomas Edmund (1810-1840) and William Charles (1827-1869) and their descendants; Mary, David, Ann, Henry

Unless Mary falsified her age, she was almost 30 when she married Thomas and about 45 when she had the last of their eight children. John and Richard, who had numerous descendants, are dealt with in separate sections, and the rest here.

Thomas Edmund (1810-1840) married Elizabeth Hannah PHILLIPS (1806-78) at St George in the East on 23 November 1834. The witnesses were Thomas's cousin Edmund James and his wife Jane, so clearly the two branches of the family were still in close touch. The two eldest cousins followed the family trade of carman and probably worked together, for theirs were the only branches of our family to settle in the City close to the Thames rather than in Shoreditch.

Thomas and Elizabeth had three children, **Thomas Edmund** in 1837, **Isabella** in 1839 and **Francis** in 1841. In 1837 they were living at Bateman's Row in Shoreditch but by 1839 they had moved near the river.

Such was the fragility of life that by the end of 1841 only poor Elizabeth and her son Thomas were left. Isabella was buried aged 19 months on 4 November 1840 and her address was recorded as Naked Boy Alley, which led down from Upper Thames Street to the river, opposite Bread Street Hill. Thomas senior's death was apparently not

registered, but he was buried on 20 December 1840 and his address was given as 3 Crown Court Trinity Lane, a site where Mansion House Station now stands.

The census of June 1841 shows that Elizabeth and her two sons were living at 2 Church Place, on the west side of Garlick Hill opposite St James Garlickhithe. She stated that she was a chairwoman – probably what we would call a charwoman. With her was Isabella Phillips, presumably Elizabeth's sister and the reason for the naming of her daughter. They were still there on 21 December 1841, when Francis died of 'inflammation of the brain' aged only seven months.

The family used several different churches. Isabella and Francis were baptised at All Hallows Bread Street, while Isabella was buried at St Michael Queenhithe and Thomas at Holy Trinity the Less, Trinity Lane. As people moved out of the City these churches and others became redundant and were demolished. The disinterred remains were moved to the new City of London cemetery at Aldersbrook Road in Ilford. A few of the graveyards were built on but after the Disused Burial Grounds Act of 1884 most were converted into public gardens.

Elizabeth has not been traced on the 1851 census but in 1861 was listed as a washerwoman lodging at 3 Fleet Lane, Farringdon. By 1871 she was living in the City of London Union workhouse at Cornwallis Road, Upper Holloway. She was one of 440 paupers, 256 of them women, and there were just ten residential staff. She died there in 1878, aged 70.

Thomas Edmund (1837-1907) married Emma Harriet SHAWE (1839-1905) at St Mary Islington, in 1861. He moved in with Emma and a widowed bootmaker named Henry BATTEN, described as her father on the census but presumably her stepfather, and a witness at the wedding. He lived at 14 River Terrace and she at 15. Curiously, the clergyman inserted an extra O into his and his father's Christian name, so it is spelt Edmound. They were at 19 Goswell Street [now Road], a site now occupied by offices that you can see if you walk from Barbican station to the Society of Genealogists.

In October 1873 at London Guildhall Frederick Arthur PHILLIPS was accused of embezzling various sums of money from his employer, Thomas Cheal NORRIS, an elastic webbing manufacturer of 47 Aldermanbury. Phillips had worked for Norris as a commercial traveller for four or five months, and was authorized to receive money on his behalf. Emma Pracy testified that she assisted her father in his boot and shoe business at 4 Powell Street, Goswell Road. Phillips collected £6 11s 6d from her and gave her a receipt, but failed to pass it on to Norris. He was found guilty and the magistrates sentenced him to three months hard labour.

Censuses and electoral registers show Thomas at four different Islington addresses, including 44 Oxford Road from 1888-94 and 174 Downham Road from 1900 until his death. He was a bookbinder who probably worked for one of the small firms in the Goswell Street area, and could have commuted even after he moved out to Islington. Thomas Edmund and Emma had no children and with his death the name Edmund, which had been so significant for two centuries, finally passed out of our family.

Mary (1815-1874) was listed on the 1841 census as the servant of Sarah Bocquet at Kennington, Lambeth. In 1846 at St Leonard's Shoreditch she married Frederick

Michael ASTELL. He was a servant and she was a cook. Later he was described as a confectioner and then as a cook. Previously I thought she probably stayed in Lambeth and died there in 1853, but after a careful examination of FreeBMD and the censuses I think that was a different Mary Astell. Our Mary's eldest son Frederick was born there in 1845, but by 1847 the family had moved to 28 Barnet Street, Stepney.

There they had five more children – William Henry (1847-1890), James George (1849-1888), Charles Thomas (1850-1893), Alfred John (b.1858) and Mary Ann (b.1852), who probably married William OVERY in 1875. All six children were baptised at Christ Church, Watney Street, Stepney. Rather strangely, the surnames of the two youngest were recorded as Pracy rather than Astell. There were two different clergymen, so I can only guess that something in the way the parents gave the information somehow led to a misunderstanding. During the 1860s they moved to Mile End, where Mary died in 1874 and Frederick in 1889.

David (1819-1826) was possibly named after one of his mother's Welsh relatives, for in England David was a much less common name in the 19th century than it became in the 20th, when we were ten a penny. I had hoped to find out more about my first namesake, but he is the only one of the eight children to whom there is no further reference.

However, on 14 November 1826 a boy named Edward Pracy from Long Alley was buried at Bunhill Fields, aged 7 years 10 months. That is exactly the age that David would have been, and there is no other mention of an Edward Pracy. David's eldest brother was baptised as Thomas but later referred to as Thomas Edmund, so David's full name may have been David Edward and it is almost certainly he that was buried. His uncle John William could well have arranged for David's interment at the place where his own infant daughter, Ellen Lucy, was buried a few weeks later.

Ann (b. 1821) was unmarried when on 17 July 1845 at Shoreditch Workhouse she gave birth to Caroline, who the chaplain described as 'the illegitimate daughter of Henry Smith and Ann Pressey'. The 1841 census lists 16 Henry Smiths aged between 20 and 30 in Shoreditch alone, so there is no possibility of tracing exactly who he was.

Sadly baby Caroline died shortly afterwards but that was hardly surprising, for in 1847 the report of a special Parliamentary sub-committee on workhouse provision criticized conditions at Shoreditch. It was found to be overcrowded, with 1,000 inmates in accommodation designed for 800. Its 150 chronically ill inmates were housed in poorly ventilated wards close to the healthy inmates. Concerns were also expressed about the quality of the water supply. In November 1847, the workhouse was the subject of a 'Grand Comic Interlude' at the Royal Standard Theatre in Shoreditch[50].

Ann may well have been 'Ann Praisey', said on the 1851 census to be the 25-year-old servant of Thomas BOWLER of Bishopsgate. Ann was illiterate and that unique spelling of our surname may have been the best she, Bowler and the enumerator could manage.

[50] http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Shoreditch/

In 1860 at St James Curtain Road Ann married John PATTISON, a 32-year-old carpenter who was living with the family at Maxwell Court. John and Ann may well have been introduced to one another by her brother William Charles, who was also a carpenter. On the 1861 census Ann was listed as a laundress. In 1871 she, John and 7-year-old daughter Mary Ann were living at Castle Place on the Shoreditch/Finsbury boundary at present-day Epworth Street, but nothing more is known of them.

Henry (1823-1846) died in November 1846, about three weeks after his father, and like him was buried at St Leonard's.

William Charles (1827-1869) was a coachmaker and carpenter.

An incident from 1850 gives an insight into how he – and doubtless his Pracy contemporaries – spent their leisure time, although we wouldn't know about it if the evening hadn't gone slightly awry. He was in the gallery for a performance at the Britannia Saloon in Hoxton Street, where the famous owner-manager Sara Lane put on melodramas like Sweeney Todd and other entertainments. A group of boys became very rowdy and Constable W. Butler 'laid hold of a boy' to eject him, but was surrounded by several of the audience and Pracy exclaimed 'chuck him into the pit'. Butler thought that 'but for the interference of the check-takers, several of whom came to his assistance, the threat would have been carried into execution'. He took Pracy and his accomplice William Cole into custody and they appeared at the Worship Street police court, where they were charged with riotous and disorderly conduct. Pracy and Cole were required to find a surety for their good conduct for the next six months[51].

It's clear from the censuses that he was known within the family as William, but in 1862 he married Charlotte HAINES (1832-1896), who seems to have her own ideas about what he should be called. On their son Albert's baptismal certificate in 1867 he was named as Charles William, and when he died she registered him as plain Charles. He and their youngest son were both buried at Victoria Park cemetery. On the 1871 and 1881 censuses Charlotte was described as a needlewoman but by 1891 she was retired and living at 2 Siddons Road Tottenham, where she was on the electoral register. With her was 'A. John Pracy', as the census called him, and evidently Albert was supporting his mother.

William Charles and Charlotte had four sons.

Charles Edward (1863-1929) was an engineer's fitter. In 1889 at St Mary Magdalene Woolwich he married Frances Elizabeth MARTIN, who was born in Tunbridge Wells. The first three of their four children were born in south London but by 1901 they had moved to Tottenham, where they remained. In 1911 they were living in a six-room house at 7 Broadwater Road Tottenham, and Charles's writing on the census was bold and legible. **Charles Bertrand (1890-1965)** was a clerk with the well-known catering firm of Spiers & Pond, who described themselves as 'universal providers'. In 1911 he signed up for four years as a reservist with the 6th Battalion City of London Rifles. In the First

[51] *Daily News* , Friday, January 18, 1850; Issue 1139. Accessed via the 19th century British newspapers website. You can find much more fascinating information about the Britannia Saloon via an internet search engine.

World War he served first as a private with them, and later as a gunner in the Royal Garrison Artillery. He married Ethel LOREY in 1922 and they had five children, among them Margaret USHER who gave me much useful information about her branch of the family, as did Norman Charles's daughter Marie SHERRATT. In 1911 **Bessie (1892-1916)** was a florist's assistant but she died young. She and **Ida (1893-1964)** did not marry. **Nora (1899-1980)** married Sydney L CHENERY in 1924. When Charles Edward died in 1929, the Amalgamated Engineering Union made a collection for the dependents of the 'late Brother Pracy of the Tottenham Branch'.

William Thomas (1865-1877) was admitted to the Great Ormond Street Hospital three times in 1876. He was suffering from scrofula, which caused his liver to be enlarged. It is a great tribute to his mother that she was so persistent but sadly her efforts were unavailing, for he died early the following year aged only 11. **Frederick (1869-1871)** also died young, aged only 15 months.

Albert John (1867-1936) never married. After his mother's death he moved in with his brother Charles Edward. He was, like his brother, an engineer's fitter, and in 1911 was working for a brewery.

21. John Pracy (1813-1867) and his descendants

John was, at least from 1836-42, a tallow chandler, but by 1851 had reverted to the family trade of carman. He married Rebecca DOLLWOOD (1807-1842), probably in 1834 or 1835 although, strangely, the marriage has not been traced. Rebecca was born on 14 November 1807 and baptised at St Giles Cripplegate, daughter of cordwainer John (surname sometimes spelt Dolwood with one L) and Mary HARWICK.

The 1841 census lists them and their three children living at Maxwell Court in a separate household from Thomas and Mary. Rebecca died of consumption and was buried at the nonconformist Golden Lane Cemetery, which operated from 1832-54. The site is currently being redeveloped as a school, and the contractor responsible for moving the bodies to a cemetery at Finchley commented: 'The plots at Golden Lane cost more than £1 (£50 today), at a time when a meal cost a penny (20p). They weren't paupers' graves.' Rebecca's mother, who had been working as a servant in St Pancras, moved in with the Maxwell Court family but died early in 1843 and was buried at St Botolph's Bishopsgate.

John continued to live at Maxwell Court at least until 1861. That year's census shows a widow, Mary IVE, as head and sole member of a separate household at 1 Maxwell Court. Three weeks later, on 21 April 1861 at St James Curtain Road, John married Mary. She was present at the death of her mother-in-law, Welsh Mary, which she reported. She was born HOUSNELL c.1800 and died in 1868.

On 21 April 1867, the sixth anniversary of his second marriage, John collapsed and died in Eldon Street, just a few yards from Maxwell Court. His death was so sudden that there had to be an inquest, which was held two days later and found the cause to be 'Sudden Extravasation of blood on Brain'. Extravasation is a kind of haemorrhage, defined as 'the leakage of blood from a vessel into tissues surrounding it'.

John (1835-1917) was a printer who had been apprenticed to the trade by the time of the 1851 census, when he was 15. Around 1863 he went to work for Edmund Evans

(1826-1906), who in 1851 had founded the Racquet Court Press, near Ludgate Circus. In the 1860s Evans established himself as the leading and the best woodblock colour printer in London. Evans produced attractive chrome block illustrations for children's books, and was described as 'probably the best-known colour printer of the century'[52]. Among his illustrators were Walter Crane (1845-1915), Ralph Caldecott (1846-86) and Kate Greenaway (1846-1901). Evans was a popular employer who probably had some 30 engravers and John Pracy became foreman, so his position was quite an influential one.

42. If you search an internet engine for images of 'Racquet Court Press', you will find many lovely illustrations, which I can't reproduce for copyright reasons. John Pracy probably did some of them, but gets no personal credit. This is the firm's imprint.

We have a fascinating insight into John's working life, because he was interviewed for the Victorian philanthropist Charles Booth's survey into life and labour in London. It was recorded in manuscript notebooks now held in the archive of the London School of Economics, which kindly gave permission for us to reproduce the interview with him[53].

As part of his campaign against poverty, Booth undertook his survey between 1886 and 1903. It was organised into three broad sections: poverty, industry and religious influences. The industry section investigated every conceivable trade in London from cricketers to wigmakers, to establish wage levels and conditions of employment. The investigation took the form of interviews with workers, managers and owners.

John was one of 25 printers interviewed by George E Arkell, mostly in November 1893. John's great-grandson, Mike Jenner, made the following transcript:

> Went over the questions on the form with Mr P.
>
> Wages in this work are 44/- to 45/- best men; 40/- average rate, the union rate being 38/-. Does not think the union helps the men much beyond the fact that membership enables him (sic) to get into a larger number of houses. When engaging a man, he would ask what houses he had worked in and would judge the man's capacity by the kind of house. There are only 3 or 4 houses doing similar work and a man who had worked at one of these would have the preference.
>
> The men are all permanently engaged. Am (sic) obliged to keep them as the work is a speciality and they have to train the men to their work.

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[52] WAKEMAN, Geoffrey. A guide to 19th century colour printing. Loughborough, Plough P, 1975 p40.

[53] They wrote to Mike Jenner: 'The Library is happy for the transcript of the above pages detailing an interview with your great-grandfather, John Pracy. The transcript will certainly make a fascinating addition to the family history web pages and we are always happy to encourage a very wide use of the archives and Booth's interviews certainly provide a good deal of social background for the family historian. We wish you all the best with the Pracy family history.' I find it very encouraging that a respected academic institution recognises the value of family history and the contribution the LSE can make to it.

The work consists mainly of illustrations for books. The coloured pictures are printed from blocks, one block being prepared for each colour. Around the room in which we met were a large number of specimens of the work done by the firm. They included a number of Kate Greenaway's children's books, and coloured frontispieces and plates for other books.

The busy season is the autumn – July to Sept (sic) when they are preparing the Christmas books. Spring is the slack time.

Men do not shift from one branch to another.

The demand for the work is decreasing; foreign competition – German and Dutch – is taking the trade. It is a question of cheapness; the cheap foreign labour enables them to do it. Things that had to be done quickly were done in England but work in which time was no object went abroad. He remarked that it was strange that people always wished them to turn out work quickly while they gave the foreigner the six months he asked for.

Trade is learned by apprenticeship – 7 years. A lad is put to the machine and if he is intelligent he is apprenticed after a while. Indentures are always given.

The most skilled part of the work is the mixing of the colours and this Mr P does himself.

As to the time it takes to learn, Mr P says it is never learnt. He has been at it all his life and still has something to learn. If very quick a lad could pick the trade up in two years but the average time is 4 years.

As regards capacity Mr P is in his 59th year[54] and has been at Evans for 32 years and he can do his work alright. Does not like running up and down stairs so much as formerly of course.

Litho printing does compete but not in the long runs.

John was a member of the Stationers' Company and in 1902 became the second member of our family after Edmund James to be granted the Freedom of the City of London.

As a skilled craftsman who rose to a responsible managerial position, John would have enjoyed a reasonably secure income for all or most of his life. This enabled him to be a microcosm of the way in which the Pracys, and indeed Londoners in general, gradually moved away from the centre of the city. In 1841 and 1851 he was living with the family at Maxwell Court, on the fringe of the City. In 1861 as a young 'Printers Machine' he was lodging at 2 Red Lion Passage, off Hoxton Street on the site of the recently-built Shoreditch Library. When his eldest child was born in 1865 he had moved a few hundred yards northwest to 15 Buckland Street.

By 1867, he was living at 9 Pownall Road, where from 1873 he was one of the first in our family to have the vote. It is at the northernmost edge of Haggerston, on the more respectable and middle-class side of the Regent's Canal. It was, however, 'too close to the canal and too far from the station to really attract commuters'[55], and in 1885 he went a further mile north to 48 Gayhurst Road in the Dalston area of Hackney. Around 1897 moved round the corner to 59 Lansdowne Road [now Drive], a comfortable dwelling with 6 rooms. In 1911 he described himself as 'printer pensioned (not state)', indicating that he had a good pension from his employer. His handwriting was pretty good for a 75-

[54] Mike Jenner comments: This helps establish that the Mr Pracy mentioned here is Great Grandfather John Pracy, who was born on 6 November 1835; ie was 58 (his 59th year) at the time of this interview. We also know of no other Pracy who was a printer in London at this time, other than John.
[55] MANDER, David. Impressions of Hackney. Sutton, 2001, p18.

year-old. By the time of his death at the Homerton Infirmary in 1917 he had moved round the corner again, to 43 Lavender Grove.

43. 59 Lansdowne Road [now Drive] Dalston. At various times several of John's adult children were recorded as living there.

Photo: Mike Jenner

In 1864, shortly after starting work at Evans, John married Jane BATSON (1838-1915) at Christ Church Watney Street. She was born in the tiny village of Rimpton in Somerset, the daughter of John, who died when she was three. On her birth certificate he was described as an agricultural labourer but on her marriage certificate he had become a farmer – a not unusual rise in status! The 1861 census shows Jane as a servant, one of the thousands of girls who came up from the West Country to find employment as domestic help.

John and Jane had six surviving children:

Florence Jane (1865-1929?) married her next-door neighbour Robert CHRISTIE at St Michael and All Angels Hackney in 1892. He was a plate glass cutter, originally from North Shields in Northumberland. By 1911 they had five surviving children and had moved from Dalston to 77 Vallentin Road, Walthamstow.

Frederick John (1867-1938) was listed in 1891 as running a grocery business and in 1901 as a commercial traveller. At the time of the 1911 census he was a druggist's traveller lodging with the Beer family in Newport, Monmouthshire. He married Elizabeth M WHITE in 1922. Frederick and his parents were buried at Abney Park Cemetery.

Walter James (1869-1945) was in 1891 following his father's often hereditary trade, that of printer. In the early 1890s Walter and his older brother Frederick were listed on electoral registers as renting first-floor bedrooms from their father at 5s 6d a week. On the 1901 census Walter was listed as a machine minder, living as a boarder in Portsmouth and said to be unmarried.

Every family has skeletons in its cupboard, and one of ours was the birth of Florence May Pracy on 9 March 1900 at Tynycwm, Tirymynach, Llanbadarnfawr near Aberystwyth. It is, by coincidence, in the county of Cardigan from which Mary Morgan came a century earlier. The mother's name was given as Sarah Anne Pracy formerly

LEWIS, and the father's as Walter James Pracy, a tea traveller. Walter was not described as such on the censuses of 1891 or 1901 but, if he was telling the truth, perhaps obtained the job through the influence of his brother Frederick.

The birth was registered by Sarah Anne's mother Elizabeth Lewis. On the 1901 census Elizabeth was listed as the head of the household and a tailor's widow, while 21-year-old Sarah Ann gave her surname as Pracy and described herself as 'commercial traveller's wife'. Elizabeth spoke only Welsh but Sarah Ann was bilingual.

Walter was probably Florence's father. In that case he would have had obligations to Sarah Anne and Florence, so may well have lain low in Portsmouth to avoid them. I could find no further mention of Sarah Anne Prac(e)y and Lewis is too common a surname to be sure that any reference is to her. She was apparently convinced about the marriage because in 1911 young Florence Pracey was living with grandmother Elizabeth Lewis, speaking only Welsh. In 1925 Florence married John EDWARDS, and when registering the births of her two children gave her maiden name as Pracey. Wales was a strongly nonconformist area and Sarah Anne may have taken the Prac(e)y name to avoid the disgrace of being perceived as an unmarried mother.

Although the GRO indexes for the relevant period do not list a marriage for Walter James to Sarah Ann, later in 1901 he was married at St Thomas Portsmouth to Eliza NORRIS (1868-1941) of that parish, a nurse. The 1901 census lists him at 9 Broad Street and her at 76, but I couldn't find them in 1911.

Minnie (1874-1941?) was a laundress. In 1908 in the West Ham registration district she married William Robert WILKINSON, who worked for the London County Council as a labourer on rolling stock. They had two children and in 1911 were recorded living in a separate household at the home of her parents, 59 Lansdowne Road.

Alice (1877-1938) married Walter John LE SUEUR (c.1875-1948) at St John's Hackney in 1900, and they had one daughter. In 1911 they were living in Sheffield, where Walter was working as a fruit salesman, but she died back in Hackney.

44. Before and after. Mike Jenner celebrates clearing his great-grandparents' grave at Abney Park Cemetery. *Photos: Martin Hagger*

Horace Edward (1881-1954) was a boot clicker in 1901. He went on to train as a surgical belt fitter with the textile company, Jaeger, and rose to manage one of their shops in the West End of London (the Strand or thereabouts). In 1901 he was living with his parents at Lansdowne Road, Hackney, just down the street from the Paget Arms public house. There a new landlord was about to arrive with a 13-year-old daughter, Elizabeth Victoria ROOKS (1887-1973). Elizabeth's family came from Tiverton in Devon but she was born in London where her father had been a police inspector.

In 1911 Horace was living with his parents but bought 19 Grove Road (now Lampard Grove), Stamford Hill. In 1912 he and Elizabeth married at St Philip's, Dalston, and they had three children. Of these their two sons were blessed with daughters, so the Pracy name does not continue in that line. Horace and Elizabeth's grandson, Mike Jenner, has kindly provided this information about his branch of the family.

Mary Ann (1837-1907), who never married, qualified as a professional nurse. She worked as a domestic servant in a succession of well-to-do homes, looking after sick individuals. In 1881 she was at Islington in the household of a company secretary, and in 1891 at Worthing nursing the widow of a wine merchant. By 1901 she had retired and moved to Sutton in Surrey.

Mary Ann died in 1907 and left effects valued at £366 to Dr Walter GRIPPER and Evelyn Hayes Gripper. They were presumably people she met in the course of her professional work, and not as far as I know members of our family. In 1909 Dr Gripper wrote a short piece in the *British Medical Journal* on his case-based observation that acute dermatitis could result from the smallest doses of quinine. In 1923 in *The Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, he wrote up *A Case of Congenital Subluxation of Humeri* about a 9-year-old girl who temporarily and painlessly put her arms out of joint whenever she lifted them above her shoulders[56].

Henry (1840-75) was registered at birth as Richard Henry but always referred to as Henry after that. In 1851 he was an errand boy and in 1861 a labourer, living as a lodger at 65 Hare Street (now Cheshire Street) in Bethnal Green.

On 15 October 1862 newspapers reported an incident that had apparently taken place the previous day. Henry Pracey, described as 'a tall young man', was brought before magistrate Henry Selfe, accused of attempting to commit suicide. John Brown, a manure dealer, stated that at 9 o'clock that day he saw the prisoner behaving strangely on a railway bridge across the Regent's Canal at Bethnal Green. He saw him 'give one, two and then deliberately throw himself into the canal'. Mr Brown 'pushed a piece of wood towards him, to which he clung, and was saved'. Mr Selfe asked Henry why he had thrown himself in, and he replied carelessly: 'To have a cooler.' 'With your clothes on?' 'Yes, with my clothes on.' 'What do you mean by it?' 'I meant this, to have a cooler, and had one.' Henry stated that he was a labourer and admitted that he had been drinking

[56] http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/picrender.fcgi?artid=2103369&blobtype=pdf Sourced 23 Feb 2008.

heavily in recent weeks. Mr Selfe concluded: 'You would have been drowned if that good man Mr Brown had not pulled you out. I shall remand you for a week to the Clerkenwell House of Detention.'

45. Visiting time at the Clerkenwell House of Detention, 1862. It was demolished in 1890 to make way for Hugh Myddelton School, although the catacombs survived and are often used as a film location.

It was a curious episode. Perhaps Henry's drinking had reduced his inhibitions, and there's no real reason to doubt his claim that he just wanted to cool off. Presumably if he had been determined to take his own life he would have weighted his pockets down to make sure he didn't re-surface, and not clung on to John Brown's piece of wood.

According to the 1871 census Henry Percey [sic] (cellarman) and Charlotte BENNETT (general servant) both worked at a coffee house at 167 Bishopsgate, in the City of London. This site has been completely redeveloped and is now numbered 135. By a happy coincidence it is now a branch of Caffe Nero.

On 15 December 1872 Henry and Charlotte were married at St James Curtain Road, even though neither of them lived in the parish. This may have represented the last manifestation of Pracy clan loyalty before increased family sizes and the expansion of the railway network made it impossible for them all to keep in touch. Henry Pracey (corn carrier) said he was the son of John Pracey carman deceased. A son, Henry, was born in 1873 but Henry senior died in 1875 at Bart's of a leg infection.

I could find no further mention of Charlotte, but at St Paul's Clerkenwell on 8 November 1891, Henry Patrick son of 'Henry Patrick Pracey deceased' married Rhoda Jane WARD (1873-1957). I thought that perhaps Charlotte was remarried to a Mr Patrick, but I could not find her or Henry on the 1881 or 1891 census under either surname and therefore have no idea where the Patrick came from. Some people, however, invented middle names for themselves when they became popular around the turn of the 20th century. This may be an example, particularly as Henry's own children all had at least two names.

On my badly written copy of the certificate his surname looks like Peacey and that was how it was indexed by the GRO. It seems to be a coincidence that the surname was misspelt twice - Percey in 1871 and Peacey in 1891. There can be little doubt that he is our man, for on the 1901 census he gave his name as Henry Pracey, his birthplace as the City of London and his age as 29. He was then a labourer at an iron foundry.

Rhoda, who was described on the 1891 census as a 'trim bead worker', was the daughter of John James Ward (1837-1900). He became a blacksmith and married Ellen BOYT in

1864 but apparently met with an accident, for on the 1871 census he was described as blind and on 'Charity + allowance from Parish'. His 1881 census entry said 'Sells Music in Street' and in 1891 he was listed as a street musician, so it was quite an achievement for him to overcome his disability and earn his own living.

Most of us Pracys sometimes have our name spelt with an extra E, and have to correct it. Henry senior and Charlotte were illiterate, but were consistent in using the Pracey spelling. Henry junior continued that tradition, and his branch of the family is the only one to do so regularly.

Henry and Rhoda had ten surviving children. For a while they lived at 55 Georges Road but by 1911 they were living with seven of the children at 36 Eden Grove, Holloway. Henry's handwriting is somewhat sprawling but mostly legible. He noted that 'all my children have been born in the City of London Hospital City Road', and added proudly 'all of us are British'. He was a house painter working for a builder and 15-year-old Florence was 'a work girl'. Harry, Albert, Ethel and Ruth were at school. Lewis was 2 and [Gwendolen] Olga was 3 months. Three children had died – **Rose Charlotte (1893-4)**, **Lily Victoria Alexandra (1904)** and **Clifford Andrew Ward (1906-7)**, all three of them buried at the Islington Cemetery. It's almost unimaginable that they had just two rooms, but it seems to have been a happy family. Most of the children married young and had their own families, so Henry and Rhoda had over 40 grandchildren.

Gertrude Rhoda (1892-1975) served in the First World War as a worker in Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps. After the war she emigrated to Australia where she probably married John William SMITH and had at least one child, but by 1928 she had returned to London and had three more children.

Violet May (1896-1963?) married William Arthur MORSE at St David's Barnsbury in 1914, and they had five children.

Florence Elizabeth (1897-1958) married Albert V PIZZEY in 1914 and they had four children.

Henry Patrick (1899-1945 – **Harry**). In the First World War he – or less likely his father – served as a private in the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, giving his name as Patrick H Pracey. In 1922 he married Amy Henrietta RODDA (1900-1960) and they had four children. He was a cobbler, and had a patent for a shoe heel. He died on 25 March 1945, probably from a heart attack, and is buried at St. Pancras Cemetery.

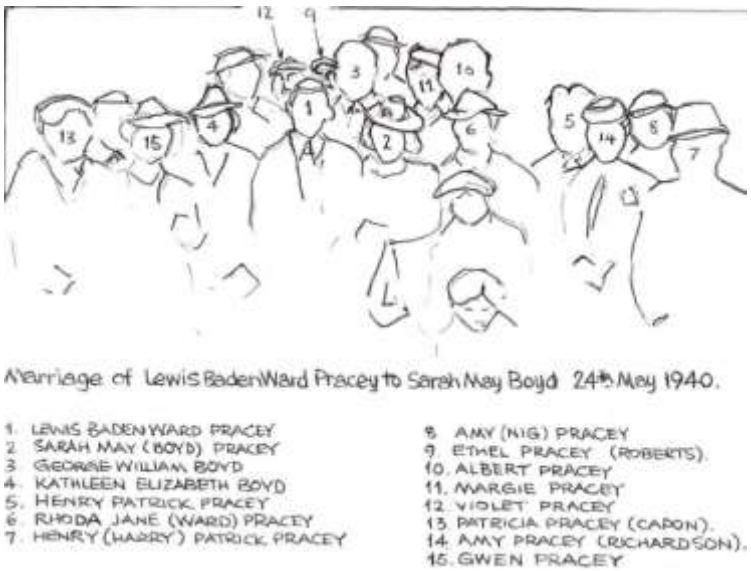
Albert Edward (1901-1985) lied about his age and went into the Great War aged 16. He was a private in the Royal Horse Artillery and was taken prisoner in France. He married Alice M MORRIS in 1922 and they had eight children. He was a printer and she apparently worked as a telephonist during the war. One of their daughters, Lilian M (b. 7 August 1935), was shown on passenger lists as travelling from New York to Southampton in 1959. At the time, she was an artist living in Chelsea.

Ethel Kate (1902-1963) married Reginald G ROBERTS in 1925 and they had four children.

Ruth Maud (1905-1956).

Lewis Baden Ward (1908-78) was obviously named after Baden Powell, who had founded the Scout movement in the previous year. Perhaps his initials suggest that his father was a cricket fan. In 1940 Lewis married Sarah M BOYD and they had three children.

Marriage of Lewis Pracey and Sarah Boyd, 1940. Photo from Claire Pracey, key by her father.



The family tradition was that he ran away to sea, and certainly in 1927 he was a cabin boy on a ship that travelled from Yokohama to Oregon, giving his age as 21 when he was actually 19. Later he was as a ship's steward, appearing on the New York passenger lists for the Pareora in 1930 and for the Aquitania in 1943.

On 13 August 1943 he arrived at Liverpool from Colombo in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) aboard the SS Mauretania. He was one of 84 men listed as 'distressed British seamen' who had apparently been aboard the Eastern Prince, a passenger ship that was requisitioned as a troop carrier. It had probably picked them up after their own ship had been sunk by enemy action:

> Once the ship was sunk, the crew's wages stopped and in many cases, the ship being their homes all their worldly possessions disappeared with it…They were then at the mercy of charity and often had to travel home as Distressed British Seamen, still without pay, until they could get home and sign on again[57].

Evidently he was not seriously injured, for in 1944 he was the chief engineer's steward on the Ile de France, which was also in use as a troop carrier**.**

Gwendolen Olga (b. 1911) married Alfred MALLETT in 1933.

Margaret E (b. 1918) married James C LINIHAN in 1937 and they had five children. Her daughter June JOHNSON and Lewis Baden Ward's grand-daughter Claire Pracey have both kindly given me much additional information about the family.

Henry died in 1955 and Rhoda in 1957 so they were married for over 63 years, the second longest-lasting marriage in our family that I have traced. There was a great celebration of their diamond wedding anniversary at Collins Music Hall, Islington Green.

* * * * *

In February 1911 the family was involved in a rather disturbing case heard at the Old Bailey, before Judge Charles Darling[58]. William Jones, a 47-year-old labourer, was accused of 'feloniously by force decoying… Harry Patrick Pracey, aged 10 years, and Albert Pracey, aged nine years, with intent to deprive Henry Pracey, the father of the said children, of the possession of such children'.

At 5.40pm on 9 February when they hadn't returned from school Henry went out to look for them, and eventually found them at Bridewell police station at 1.10am.

Harry gave evidence that he and his brother left school at 4.30 and the man invited them to have tea and cakes in a coffee shop in Hornsey Road. Jones told them he had been a soldier and had been all over the world. He took them to another coffee shop in Upper Street at about 10pm, and then they walked to the Embankment. 'I did not want to go with him, but he held our hands and I was frightened,' Harry said. Albert confirmed most of what his brother said, and added that it was not raining.

PC Andrew Harm said that at 11.30pm saw Jones with the two boys, who were wet and appeared frightened. It had started raining at about 10pm, and was a cold and wet night. Jones told the policeman that he was the boys' father but they said he wasn't, and burst into tears. PC Harm cautioned Jones and said he would take him into custody for child stealing, and Jones became abusive. Harm took Jones and the boys to Bridewell Police Station, circulated the intelligence, and made the boys comfortable in front of the fire until their father came.

Jones gave evidence that the boys wanted to go with him. He told the lads he would have to spend the night out on the Thames Embankment, and they wished to go with him. He asked them if they would not get into trouble for being out late. They answered 'No,' and said they had often remained out late and sometimes stopped out all night. The boys

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[57] Information from Martin Navarro on the Rootsweb site, sourced 6 Nov 2008 https://www.rootschat.com/forum/index.php?topic=405086.0

[58] Information from the Old Bailey website: http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=t19110228-12&div=t19110228-12&terms=pracey#highlight

volunteered to show him the way and he did not take their hands. He was the worse for drink and did not know what he was about. It was a fine night. He would have taken the boys back to their parents in the morning.

It must have been difficult for the jury to reach a conclusion. Even on the relatively minor matter of whether it was raining, evidence was in conflict. Eventually they gave their unanimous verdict that the prisoner was guilty of leading the children away, but not of permanently depriving the parents of their custody. They therefore found him not guilty of criminal intent, which was probably the right decision. Jones seems to have been lonely and inadequate, but not to have intended the brothers any harm.

22. Richard Pracy (1817-1852) and his descendants

Richard married Emma GOULD (1818-1879) in 1840 at St John the Baptist, New North Road. The church served the parish created in 1826 to cater for the needs of the rapidly growing Hoxton New Town area. Emma's father Benjamin died aged 50 in 1833, and was buried at St John the Baptist. Its grave-book gives us fascinating information about the early days of the new church, and about Benjamin. It was a District church which meant that it still came under the vicar of St Leonard's who took a fee for all the burials at St John the Baptist, usually 2s 4d for adults or 1s 8d for infants. This was the same as the district minister and the churchwardens who actually carried out the ceremony.

46. St John the Baptist Hoxton, built in 1826 to serve the rapidly growing Hoxton New Town. The view on the right is taken from the south side, where Benjamin Gould had a prominent grave. His daughter Emma married Richard Pracy there in 1840.

A select few had marked graves and Benjamin was among them. The family paid five guineas for the grave in 'Best Ground West side of South path', and a further £1 4s 10d for the ceremony. Benjamin's address was given as Worship Street so he didn't live in Hoxton, but perhaps he chose to be buried there so that he could have a more prominent position than in the crowded old churchyard of St Leonard's. This probably explains why Richard and Emma chose to be married in a church with which they had no obvious connection. The ceremony was carried out by the Reverend Anthony Plimley Kelly, who

had also buried Benjamin. He was involved with the parish from its creation until his death in 1864, and was said to be 'very active in schools and other parochial work.'

Benjamin was clearly pretty well off, which means that Emma was quite a catch for Richard. Benjamin's prosperity isn't surprising because he was a scavenger, then a far more impressive occupation than it sounds to us. They were private contractors who collected rubbish and piled it into mounds. They sold it as raw materials for other industries, sometimes becoming very rich. Perhaps the best-known was the fictional Noddy Boffin in *Our Mutual Friend,* based by Charles Dickens on his real-life friend Henry Dodd, known as 'the Golden Dustman'.

Benjamin's business was inherited by Emma's brother John, who paid rates on three houses, stables, shed and harness room. Such small business premises were often named after their owners, and it was called Gould's Yard. It was situated on the south side of Worship Street, at or near the corner with Long Alley. On the 1841 census John was described as a carman and scavenger, and in 1851 as a dust contractor. John apparently died in 1856, and it seems that the business and its prosperity didn't survive him.

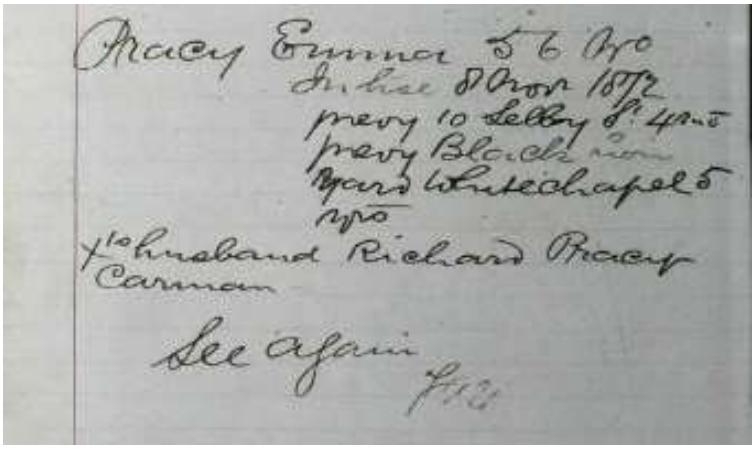
Richard followed the Pracy family trade of carman, so it is likely that he worked for his brother-in-law. In 1841 Emma and Richard were at Providence Place near present-day Scrutton Street, but soon afterwards they moved into Gould's Yard. They were still there in 1851, when Richard was described as an ostler. Soon afterwards the family moved across Shoreditch to 16 Reliance Square, near New Inn Street where Richard's cousin Joseph William had his business. Soap manufacturers were among the best customers of dust contractors, so Richard may have been a sort of family go-between.

47. Reliance Square has changed out of all recognition since Richard's time, but the name survives. This narrow passage leads southwards off New Inn Yard. The North London line is above left, on the viaduct.

In November 1852 Richard died prematurely of phthisis, aged only 35. A year later Joseph William's elder brother George Thomas, who lived at nearby 25 Holywell Lane, died of the same disease. Both were buried at St John the Baptist, Hoxton. Perhaps a combination of unhealthy living conditions and London fogs accounted for them. Both houses were probably pulled down in 1860, but that would have been to make way for the North London Railway rather than because they had been condemned as unfit.

Emma has not been traced on the 1861 census but may well have been living in Hare Street (now Cheshire Street) in Bethnal Green, for in the early 1860s her children Eliza and John Gould were both married from addresses there.

By 1871 Emma was at 7 Black Lion Yard Whitechapel, off Old Montague Street. This was an ancient and cosmopolitan area well known for sugar refining, and only a few years earlier no. 7 had been occupied by a German sugar baker[59]. In the 1880s Black Lion Yard was settled by Jewish immigrants from Europe, and became notorious as one of the haunts of Jack the Ripper.


Pracy Emma 56 Wo
[illegible] 8 Nov 1872
prev 10 Selby St 4 mo
prev Black [illegible]
Yard Whitechapel 5
yrs
x to husband Richard Pracy
Carman
See Again
F18

48. Excerpt from Bethnal Green Poor Law and Settlement Book, 1872

On 8 November 1872 Emma suffered a further decline in her fortunes when she was investigated for a possible removal order under the Poor Law. The record is abbreviated, the handwriting difficult and my knowledge of the law less than I would like, but what seems to have happened is this. She had been living at Black Lion Yard for about five years, and then earlier in 1872 moved to Selby Street in Bethnal Green, probably to live with her son John Gould Pracy. It seems that this didn't work out and after four months she went to the Bethnal Green workhouse. Her [deceased?] husband was Richard Pracy carman, and there was perhaps a thought that she could be removed to Shoreditch where he had paid rates. There is a note to 'see again'and, possibly because she had lived in Hare Street for some years, she was allowed to stay at the Bethnal Green workhouse, where she died in 1879. Her cause of death was given as 'old age', even though she was only 60 – a sad commentary on the hardships of her later life.

Emma had five surviving children, the youngest of whom probably was not Richard's.

Eliza (1841-1907?) married Richard Ralph FOX at St James Curtain Road in 1862. Unusually, she was baptised as an adult just before this, perhaps to please Richard or his family. Richard came from near Stoke-on-Trent and was a cabinet maker. He had no known connection with the Foxes who Ann and Rebecca Pracy married earlier in the century, even though according to the 1871 census he and Eliza rather curiously had two daughters called Rebecca. One aged eight was staying with her grandma Emma Pracy, and one aged nine months with her parents. By 1881 Richard and Eliza had five children, none of them called Rebecca. Richard and Eliza were still living in Shoreditch in 1901, and she is probably the Eliza Fox who died there aged 66 in 1907.

[59] Carl Wilhelm Ludwig Siewert from Hilvershausen. http://www.mawer.clara.net/sugarssen.html

John Gould (1843-1915) was presumably named after his uncle, the scavenger. He was at various times a smith, a stoker (described by Tony Robinson in his TV series as among the worst jobs in the world), a sailmaker, a bricklayer and a labourer. At St James Curtain Road in 1864 he married Emma CRISPIN (1846-1907), who was born in Spitalfields. She was the daughter of William Crispin, a dyer, and Sophia CONNEW, who were married at St Leonard's Shoreditch in 1828. John was able to sign the register but Emma put her mark. I think it must just be a coincidence that she had the same name as the 'almshouse nurse' of Elizabeth Jane Pracy in 1871.

John and Emma's eldest child was born in St George's in the East in 1868, but by 1870 they were living in Bethnal Green. On the 1871 census they were listed at Union Row (now Morpeth Street), about a mile east of the other Bethnal Green Pracys. By November 1872 they were back in the Pracy heartland at 18 Selby Street, half a mile north-west of Black Lion Yard. I went there in the early 1970s, when I first started the family history game, only to find that it had just been demolished. The http://collage.cityoflondon.gov.uk website has a 1957 image of what I missed, but Selby Street is now a rather smart modern development.

Around 1878 John Gould and Emma moved to 28 Wellesley Street Mile End, a house shared with two other families. John was listed on electoral registers there from 1881-96 and then crossed the road to no.15, where he and the family remained. Booth's survey described the street in 1898 as 'Mixed. Some comfortable others poor'.

Unlike his sisters and his wife, John Gould was able to sign the marriage register rather than just make a mark. The 1870 Education Act meant that such illiteracy became increasingly the exception. Rather strangely, however, he marked rather than signed the birth certificate of his youngest son in 1882. Tom Wood suggests that a similar case may have been caused by 'some sort of temporary incapacity'[60]. If family tradition is correct, John Gould's 'temporary incapacity' could well have been caused by drink, but of course there are other possible explanations.

John Gould died of acute bronchitis on 16 November 1915 at the Bromley House Institution, formerly the Stepney Union workhouse..

John Gould and Emma had six surviving children.

Emma Sophia (1868-1943) was presumably named after her two grandmothers. In 1887 at St Philip Stepney she married Henry (Harry) Frederick SAUTTER, wrongly indexed by the GRO as SAULTER. Both were said to be living at 28 Wellesley Street. Born in Germany but a British citizen, he was a painter at the time of their marriage, and later a baker. They had five children but he died in 1905, aged only 41. In 1911 she was working at 84 Corporation Street, her five-room house in West Ham, as a trouser cutter. Two years later, her eldest daughter, Elizabeth, married the lodger, James ANDERTON. In 1915 when she reported her father's death, and again in 1943 when she died, the Saulter spelling was used – possibly because it looked slightly less German.

Elizabeth (1870-1918?) married Herbert William PORTER at St Philip Stepney in 1899, and they had three children – **Ada, Herbert** and **Winifred**. She was known in the family

[60] *Family Tree Magazine*, Jul 2005, p22.

as Lizzy, which was the name given on the 1871 census rather than the more formal Elizabeth. By 1911 the family were living in Plaistow and he was a tramway conductor. She may be the Elizabeth Porter who died in the West Ham district in 1918, aged 48.

John (1872-1944) was my grandfather. He was a private enquiry agent who from 1901-4 became entangled in the Pollard divorce case, notorious in its day. It led to his being imprisoned for three months with hard labour, which I believe to have been a gross miscarriage of justice. Chapter 23 gives a fuller account of the affair.

Herbert W Porter was also listed on the 1901 census as a private enquiry agent. My grandfather may well have introduced his sister Lizzy to Herbert, and certainly was a witness at their wedding. There is no record that he had any involvement with the Pollard case, which may just have been luck, or may mean that he left the agency in or soon after 1901. His son Herbert George Porter (Bert) was the only cousin my father kept in touch with, and most of the early family memories come from my conversations with the two of them.

I'm very proud of the way in which my grandfather overcame his awful experience and rebuilt his life. He married Emily Mary Ann VISICK at St Dunstan and All Saints Stepney in July 1905, but suffered further tragedy when she died a year later giving birth to Emily Mary (Bess).

On his marriage certificate John was described as a confectioner, and he remained a shopkeeper for the rest of his life. From 1906-1914 he had a shop at 176 High Street Walthamstow, opposite the Palace Theatre. The theatre featured many well-known music hall stars, and was apparently quite a money-spinner for the business. It cannot have been easy for John to bring up the baby on his own and run a busy shop. It seems that for a while his parents helped out, because when Emma died on 28 May 1907 their address was given as 176 High Street. On the 1911 census John's father and brother were both living with him but unemployed, so he probably had quite a lot on his plate. Daughter Emily was with her Aunt Emma, though we don't know whether this was a long-term arrangement to help John, or just a temporary visit.

49. Walthamstow High Street when John Pracy had his confectionery shop, just out of the picture on the right hand side. The Palace Theatre with its distinctive towers is on the left.

Photo: Vestry House Museum, Walthamstow

John was remarried in 1910 at West Ham Registry Office to Gertrude Louisa WATCHAM (1880-1974), who lodged at 5 Clifton Avenue, off the High Street. Her father could scarcely have had a profession more appropriate to his name, for he was a policeman in the Essex force. He was twice fined 10s for being under the influence of liquor while on duty, but on the credit side was promoted to the Merit Class for praiseworthy conduct in extinguishing a fire. Gertrude had my father, John Weston ('Jack'), in 1912. My grandfather was advised to move to somewhere more rural for her health, so in 1914 he took a grocer's shop at 1 Kings Head Hill Chingford. She lived to be 94, so the move evidently did the trick.

The Kings Head Hotel at the top of the hill circa 1900, with Pracy's shop opposite; until 1886 the village post office.

50. John Pracy's shop (left) with the King's Head opposite. If the caption is correct in saying that the photo was taken circa 1900, it must have been added later, because John didn't move in until about 1914.

51. My grandfather outside his shop, c.1930. I don't know who the ladies are.

John was rather cunning in the way he had the shop listed in Kelly's directories. In the Chingford edition, which went to local people, it was shown as a grocer's. In the Essex edition, which went to outsiders who might struggle up the long steep hill on a hot day, it appeared as a refreshment room. According to Kelly's, in the late 1920s he reverted to his original trade and the shop became a confectioner and tobacconist's. John was apparently the first Pracy tradesman to have a telephone, being listed in the London directory from 1932 onwards. He remained at the shop until his death in 1944. In 1928-9 my grandmother's brother Montague was the last person to serve a full year as Chairman of Walthamstow Urban District Council, shortly before the town was incorporated as a borough and therefore had a mayor. Montague Watcham was a Labour councillor and my father recalled that at one election, presumably in 1929, some of his friends who were Young Conservatives decided to 'go and heckle old Watcham'. Dad was greatly relieved that Uncle Mont was his mother's brother, so the different surname meant that he did not have to reveal the relationship. Another brother, Weston Watcham, had a fancy cake shop in Walthamstow High Street.

52 John Pracy aged about 70

My father took over the shop when he returned from the war and ran it until the late 1960s. On one occasion a customer introduced himself as another Pracy and they had quite a chat, but if my father found out exactly who he was I don't remember him telling me. It shows how much the family has been scattered that they were total strangers.

The shop was housed in the front room of a cottage that is shown on Chapman & André's Essex map of 1774. I always enjoyed going to that old place, and it undoubtedly contributed to my later love of history. I distinctly remember that it was, appropriately, there rather than at home in our 1938 maisonette that I asked my mother 'What is history?' 'Kings and queens and what happened in the past,' she replied. Not bad, considering that historians have written whole books attempting to answer the question, but she could equally well have replied 'It's all around you in this cottage'.

Albert (1874-1891) was often spoken of by my grandfather and Lizzy to my father and Bert Porter, and I think the family felt his loss greatly. The 1891 census listed no occupation for him, so he was perhaps already seriously ill.

Arthur William (1879-1941) was a warehouseman in 1901. On the 1911 census he was listed as an unemployed fish frier so probably was involved with a short-lived fish

restaurant called Pracey & Masterson, listed in the Post Office Directory for 1910 at 120 London Road Southwark, near the Elephant & Castle.

He took over the Walthamstow shop from John until 1921 at least. He married Ethel RANDALL (1895-1941) in 1914, and adopted her son Walter, who took the Pracy name. The 1921 Walthamstow electoral register shows him as living with a Stella, which may have been a pet name for Ethel, although it would be unusual for it to appear on an official document. In 1921 he bought a plot of land in Oakhurst Gardens Chingford for £1100, although he apparently sold it six years later for £100 less. From 1922-5 at least he lived at Orchard Cottage, Forest Side.

They later moved to 32 Southwell Road Camberwell. There on 16 April 1941 Arthur, Ethel, her daughter-in-law Dorothy and grandson Walter were the only Pracy family to be wiped out in an air raid, although one or two individuals may also have been killed. Ironically, Ethel's son was away serving in the forces as a motor transport driver and survived the war.

George Thomas (1882-1966) was a porter in 1901 but later was a tram conductor working for the London County Council. On Christmas Day 1907 at St Matthias Poplar he married Eliza Matilda WEBB (1885-1954), a 'tent machiner' who was known as Lylee[61]. The witnesses were his brother Arthur and her sister Ada. She was the daughter of William Francis Webb, a house decorator, and Henrietta WRIGHT. George and Eliza had two daughters, Ada Eliza Vera (1909-1986) and Mildred Emma (1910-1995). In 1911 they were living in three rooms at 28 Brunswick Street, Poplar. George's writing was strong and legible, although a flourish on the end of the Y in our surname led the transcriber to read it as PRACYS. In 1921 they were living next door to Arthur, at 178 High Street Walthamstow, but later in the 1920s they moved to the Romford area. Thus the brothers who had remained close for at least 40 years scattered to three different London suburbs. In 1934 Mildred married Frederick J VIDLER and in 1936 Ada married Frederick's elder brother, William T.

Richard (1845-1901) was described in 1871 as a carman but in 1872 and 1881 as a general labourer. In 1880 he was nevertheless entitled to vote in the Parish of Bromley St Leonard, one of just 42 well-established lodgers when the vast majority of electors were householders. He was paying 4s a week rent for two unfurnished upper-floor rooms at 12 Munro Terrace, Three Mills Lane.

53. Beckton Gas Works, 1930.

National Maritime Museum, London / Newham Archives and Local Studies Library Collection.

[61] Information about her from Clive TOLLEY, grandson of Eliza's sister Ada (1883-1964).

By 1882 he was a marine store dealer at 9 Scott Street Canning Town, which was also his home. In 1891 he was a labourer at a gas works, almost certainly the Gas, Light & Coke Company's huge works at Beckton. On the 1901 census he was listed as a 'stationary engine driver'. For more information about this occupation, type the phrase into a search engine. The gist of it is that he probably operated a steam engine or boiler, presumably at the gas works.

On Christmas Day 1872 Richard married Sarah HORTON (1850-1927), sister of his sister Emily's husband, at Christ Church Spitalfields. They were living in the parish at Pelham Street (now Woodseer Street), but unlike their siblings and cousin Henry Pracey chose not to use St James Curtain Road – perhaps an early sign that the various branches of the family were about to go their separate ways.

Richard and Sarah had eight children and over 30 grandchildren.

William (1873-1918) was an engineer. He married Mary A MUNDAY (Polly, 1877-1928) in 1903. In 1911 they were living in three rooms at 130 Liverpool Road, Canning Town. Described as a 'stationary engine man', he was evidently doing a job similar to his father's, and worked for a 'coaling syndicate'.

They had two children. Mary Phoebe Dorothy (1905-1981) married William D WALL in 1938 and they had one son. William George (1907-1985) married Matilda L HUMPHREYS, also in 1938, and they had one daughter.

Richard (1875-1946) was a coal porter at Beckton. He married Eliza Ann TICKNER (Minnie, 1879-1932) in 1898. In 1911 they were living in a five-room house at 186 Bidder Street Canning Town, with their six eldest children and his mother Sarah, brother Walter and sister Emily. Richard's handwriting was slightly sprawling but legible.

It is probably his namesake, son of Amelia Caroline Hills, who in the First World War served as a private in the Royal West Kent Regiment, but this Richard may have joined the Norfolk Regiment. I think he is the most likely candidate to be 'R Pracy' who was listed in the 1931 London phonebook at 53 Edward St, E13.

Richard and Eliza had seven surviving children. Annie Flora (1898-1978) married Henry W PATNELL in 1931 and they had one son. Eliza Ann (b. 1900) married Bernard Carr in 1920, and they had one son. Richard William (1903-1962) married Dorothy HANFORD in 1926 and they had one son, but she died in 1937 and in 1943 he married Grace Florence ALDERMAN (d.1972). Emily Sarah (b. 1906) married Joseph MORRIS in 1925 and they had two children. Violet H (b. 1911) married Joseph JACKSON in 1933 and they had three children. Doris L (1912-1962) married Albert E HICKMAN in 1931 and they had three children. Eva B (b. 1914) married Frank KING in 1932 and they had three children.

Annie Maria (1877-1962) never married. She was possibly the woman listed as 'A M Pracy' who travelled from Liverpool to New York in 1906. I couldn't find her on the 1911 census, so she may have been out of the country for some time.

George (1881-1934) enlisted in the Royal Field Artillery in 1899 and in 1901 was a gunner stationed at the Cavalry Barracks in Leeds, Yorkshire. He served in the Boer War and on the North-West Frontier in India. He returned to England and lived in army domestic accommodation at Colchester and Aldershot. The 1911 census shows that he

had florid but clear handwriting similar to that of his namesake George Henry, although they were very distant relatives and that was presumably a coincidence. He said he had five rooms but the enumerator rather unkindly cut this to two, perhaps because George had included areas like the scullery which the instructions specifically said to ignore. In the First World War he served at the Battle of Mons and was very proud of being one of the Old Contemptibles. He earned various medals and decorations including the Belgian Croix de Guerre and the Meritorious Service Medal, and in December 1917 was mentioned in dispatches. He rose to the rank of Quarter-Master Sergeant Major and stayed in France and Belgium until June 1919.

In 1910 George married Isabella Louisa Mary WOOD (1883-1935), who before her marriage was a nurse. They had three children in England – Doris Nellie L (b.1911), George R (b. 1912), Albert J (b. 1914). In 1921 they emigrated to Australia where (Malcolm) Keith was born in 1922. He and his daughter Ann KEATING provided some very helpful notes about their branch of the family, some of which are incorporated here. George became Caddy Master at the exclusive Killara Golf Club in Sydney.

James (1884-1916) worked as a sugar refiner, and later as a general labourer in a chemical manure works. He married Maud Gertrude Victoria STROWLGER in 1906, and in 1911 they were living in a three-room house at 82 Vincent St, Canning Town. By then they had sadly lost two children, possibly both called Lilian Gertrude, but they had two surviving children – Albert Edward J (1910-2003) and, later, Douglas Kennedy (1913-1995). James volunteered for service in the King's Royal Rifle Corps on 1 October 1914 and became a corporal, but like his distant cousin Henry Reginald was a casualty of the Somme. He and many others were killed on 15 July 1916 and buried in a nearby field. Shortly afterwards the Germans bombarded the field and no trace of their bodies was ever found. They and over 73,000 other untraced soldiers were commemorated on the Thiepval memorial, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. His two boys were the only Pracy children to lose their father in the First World War, so as a family we were relatively fortunate.

In 1926 Maud was remarried, to Alfred COLLINS. Albert E J married Lilian PARKES in 1937. Douglas K married Ivy L SPRAGGINS in 1939 and they had two children.

Albert Edward (1889-1969) married Ellen CUTLER (Nell, 1890-1975) at St Gabriel's Canning Town on Christmas Day 1910. They inadvertently became minor characters in a drama that ended up in the West Ham Police Court, where the clergyman who married them was found guilty of fraud and impersonation, and imprisoned for six months. I have written up this intriguing case in a separate document, Not a Rogue?

In 1911 Albert and Ellen were living in two rooms at 26 Clifford Road, Canning Town. As a newly married man, he proudly signed himself on the census form as 'Mr Albert Pracy' in handwriting was large and rather painstaking, but legible. He was a bag printer at a manure works. He served in the First World War as a driver in the Royal Field Artillery. On 18 October 1919 at Preston 21-year-old Private A. Pracey was discharged from the Lancashire Fusiliers with the Silver War Medal; Albert was the only Prac(e)y the right age, but it seems unlikely that it was him.

They eventually had eight children – Annie S (b. 1911), Ellen L (b. 1912), Ivy M A (b. 1914), Emily E (b. 1919), Albert E (1923-23), Vera D (b. 1926), George B (1929-34),

Ronald James (1932-69). Ivy recalled that her brother Albert died of a respiratory infection aged about four months. George was a page boy at Ellen's wedding in February 1934 but died of meningitis on 8 June, a sad event that Ivy clearly recalled when talking to her great-nephew Peter SACKETT more than 70 years later.

Walter (1891-1973) married Alice THORNTON (1889-1926) in 1913. They had five surviving children – Walter J (1914-72), Albert E (1919-2003), Alice (b. 1921), Doris H (b. 1923), Rosaline E (b. 1925). After Alice's death he married a widow, Kate DAVIS née BURLES (1890-1976), and they had Eileen and Kathleen. In the First World War he, like his brother, was a driver in the Royal Field Artillery.

Emily Sarah (1894-1974) was a matchmaker at Bryant & May in 1911. She married Albert S SEARL in 1915 but he died two years later. In 1920 she married Robert George ENNEVER and they had three children – Ronald L (b. 1924), Joan D (b. 1927) and Audrey B (b. 1936).

Emily (1849-1920?) was a machinist dressmaker. In 1871 she was living with her mother at 7 Black Lion Yard, and their neighbours at No. 3 were the HORTON family. Later in 1871 Emily married George Horton at St James Curtain Road. Emily and her mother were both illiterate.

In 1881 they, like their siblings Richard and Sarah Pracy, were at Scott Road Canning Town, further along the road at no. 28. In 1911 they were living in five rooms at 259 Oxford Street, Mile End Old Town, where George worked as a boot repairer. They had had ten children but four had died. She was probably the Emily Horton who died at Whitechapel in 1920, aged 70.

Maria was probably born in 1855, although her birth was apparently not registered and an IGI record of her baptism has been deleted as inaccurate. Maria was listed on the 1871 census as aged 15 and living with her mother. Since Richard had died in 1852, he was presumably not Maria's father. She may have been 'Mary PRAVY', who in 1881 was a live-in barmaid at the Flying Horse Inn, 149 Mare Street, Hackney; two other people whose surnames were transcribed as Pravy were in fact Pracys.

In 1884 she was married at Christ Church Watney Street in Stepney, to a German baker called Gustav REINHARDT. In 1881 he was working as a live-in baker's assistant at 168 Old Kent Road, but I could find no further trace of either of them, so it's possible that she went back to Germany with him. If she was still alive at the time of the First World War, she would surely have felt divided loyalties.

23. Why my grandfather went to prison: the Pollard divorce case

When I described the birth in Wales of Florence May as a skeleton in the Pracy cupboard, I little thought that I would find an even bigger one in my own branch of the family. It is because so many people uncover unexpected episodes like this that I have long suggested that family history should carry a government health warning, but it was still quite a shock when I found out that my grandfather had gone to prison.

The advantage of having an unusual surname is that you know any reference relates to your family. When I checked The National Archive website under Pracy and Pracey, I

found CRIM 1/91 July 1904. It referred to a John Pracey who was one of six defendants in a case of conspiring to defeat the course of justice. I ordered the document and a massive box with over 600 pieces arrived. I started to read and the very first paper was Chief Inspector Froest's testimony of how he arrested John Pracey at Slater's Detective Agency. Later my grandfather was a confectioner but on the 1901 census he was listed as an enquiry agent, so I realised it must be him. There were several John Pracys alive then, and it just hadn't occurred to me that the reference was to my granddad. I read through over 200 documents but there was obviously far too much to get through in a day, so I went to *The Times* online archive. Edwardian journalists were paid by the line so even there reports of the case were immensely long. Later I came across reports in the *Penny Illustrated Paper*, the Edwardian equivalent of the *Sun*.

There is also a chapter about the affair by Edward Marjoribanks in *Carson the Advocate*, his biography of the then Solicitor-General, who led the Crown's prosecution in the case. Marjoribanks, author of a magnificent *Life of Sir Edward Marshall Hall*, tragically took his own life as the result of a failed love affair. The Carson biography was still in progress when he died, and was prepared for publication by his half-brother, the first Lord Hailsham. Some minor errors, for example with dates and forenames, might well have been eliminated if Marjoribanks had seen it through the press, but it is nevertheless a very useful summary.

I discovered that there were three separate court cases, which were spread out over most of 1904. The first was in February, when the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division had to decide whether there was a case to answer. The second was a magistrate's hearing at Bow Street Police Court in April and May. The last was a prosecution at the Old Bailey in October and November. The essence of the case in all three courts was that six men were 'charged on a warrant with conspiring to pervert and obstruct the due course of law and justice in the divorce suit in which Mrs Pollard was the petitioner and Thomas Pollard the respondent'.

I have used *The Times* reports of witness statements in the three court cases in an attempt to make a single narrative of what was a very complicated episode. This is the Pracy family history so I have emphasised my grandfather's role slightly more than would be appropriate in a strictly objective account.

Background

The main characters in the saga were, with ages in 1904 where known:

- Hugh Charles KNOWLES, 29, 'gentleman' of 25 Vincent Square, Westminster. The 1901 census says he was an employer but had no occupation. He was born Hugh Charles KINO, the son of Charles Julius who came from Russia, described as a woollen manufacturer and later as a City tailor. Some time between then and 1900 the family changed their surname to Knowles. When Charles died in 1900, he had three children and left just over £1 million. He knew the artists Adolphe Legros (who designed a book plate for him), Auguste Rodin and James Whistler. His son Guy, Hugh's younger brother, become a major collector of their work and donated some of it to the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. It seems unlikely

that Charles made his money from his relatively humble trade but, wherever it came from, Hugh and his brother certainly benefited from it.

54. A fine view of CJ Kino's shop at 164 Fenchurch St undergoing alterations in 1888.

http://www.heritage-explorer.co.uk/web/he/search.aspx?crit=kino

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- Thomas POLLARD, 50, unemployed former worker in the tea trade and insurance.
- Kate POLLARD, 31, his wife, a 'pretty restaurant manageress'.
- Henry TINSLEY alias Captain SCOTT alias SLATER, 55, proprietor of Slater's Detective Agency.
- [Henry] Albert OSBORN, 36, solicitor.
- George Philip HENRY, 43, detective agency manager.
- John PRACEY alias BRAY, 32, private enquiry agent.
- Frederick Stanley DAVIES, 39, private enquiry agent.
- Cyril Broughton SMITH, 35, private enquiry agent.
- Minnie WILSON, 25, Plymouth 'lodging house keeper'.
- Maude GOODWIN, Plymouth prostitute.

Slater's Detective Agency was started by 'Captain Scott' whose real name was Tinsley, and first shown in trade directories in 1886. He had worked for Henry Salter, a mortgage broker who was also an enquiry agent, and was said to have taken the name because it might enable him to get some of Salter's clients. Slater's was initially located in the City of London at 27 Basinghall Street, the same address as Salter's.

In 1896 Slater's moved to 1 Basinghall Street which they shared with the Aerated Bread Company, best known as the ABC chain of low-budget self-service tea rooms. About 40 men were employed in 12 rooms on three floors, and a considerable part of their business was watching people. In their adverts they claimed that in 17 years they had never failed

in the Divorce Courts because they had been able ‘to secure reliable, independent and corroborative evidence’.

In 1904 manager Henry had been employed for ‘a considerable time’, Pracey alias Bray for 14 years, Davies for 19, Smith as a temporary since October 1900. The solicitor Albert Osborn worked at Coleman St, just round the corner from Basinghall St. His offices were connected with Slater’s by a special telephonic wire and he visited almost daily, helping with court legalities of evidence gathered by the agency. The names of Knowles and Osborn often appeared in the call book of visitors.

John Pracy began working for Slater’s around 1889. In 1890, aged 17, he travelled from Glasgow to New York and on the 1891 census he was listed as a rent collector in Leeds, both presumably in connection with his work. He was staying at a temperance hotel, which fits in with his later abstemiousness as a possible reaction against his father’s habits. John was also listed at his parents’ home as ‘travelling’, but some respondents misunderstood instructions and included people who weren’t there on census night.

Agents with unusual surnames were advised to adopt an alias shorter than their real name. John therefore dropped the C of Pracy and – in an unconscious echo of our Wiltshire roots – changed the P to a B, so was known as John Bray. My father always said that as a young man his father spent some time in France and we assumed that he was a commercial traveller, but it would make sense that he went there on his enquiry work. For some unknown reason *The Times* sometimes referred to him as Bray and sometimes as Pracey (sic – never Pracy), and I have used whichever was in the original.

Chronology

4 July 1891. Thomas Pollard and Kate Sampson married in West Ham registration district, perhaps in Forest Gate where she was living in April. He was 37 and she was 18.

1893. Son Reginald Skerrett Pollard born at Forest Gate.

1900. They were said to have ‘lived together unhappily on account of the husband’s drinking habits and his cruelty to his wife’.

1901

31 March (census night). Thomas and Kate were living together at 9 Thornfield Road, Shepherds Bush. He was listed as unemployed, she as a restaurant manageress.

April. Pollard went to Plymouth to stay with his parents, 84-year-old Thomas and 73-year-old Edith, who were living ‘on own means’ at 32 Headland Park.

20 September. Knowles visited Slater’s where he saw Henry, the manager. It was said in court that ‘For some reason best known to himself he was strongly desirous of helping Mrs Pollard obtain a divorce’. In all Knowles paid Slater’s over £5,000 (£300,000 today), including £600 for Osborn.

Perhaps because of a concern about possible libel actions, Marjoribanks took a very mealy-mouthed attitude towards Knowles, stating that his ‘part in the story was now a passive one’ and that he had ‘a romantic and innocent interest’ in ‘the pretty manageress’. Osborn he didn’t even name, simply referring to him as ‘the solicitor’.

November. Several Slater's employees were immediately sent to Plymouth to try to obtain evidence of Pollard's adultery. They dogged him incessantly for ten days but could find nothing incriminating. Smith was 'worming his way into Pollard's confidence by supplying him with drink' but Slater recalled him because he was too inexperienced.

1902

February. Davies, with 19 years' experience, was sent to Plymouth. He 'looked like a typical "toff" of the 'nineties, with enormous flaxen moustaches and whiskers', and passed himself off as a commercial traveller.

March. Davies took Pollard to Jersey, where they called at many pubs and drunk so much that the coachman fell off the box. They went to a house and Pollard 'had an idea what it was'. Davies acted as Pollard's valet and 'the result so long looked to was obtained'. He gave the girls 10s (£30) each and 'said he was carrying the funds as his master was a little bit wrong in the head'.

April. A meeting between Davies, Henry, Osborn and Knowles decided that the Jersey evidence was far too dangerous to be used for a petition 'because it was feared that it would be found out that misconduct had been procured by an agent'.

10 July. Osborn went to Plymouth and met Minnie Wilson and Maude Goodwin. Minnie lived at 9 Summerfield Place, where she and most of the neighbouring heads of household are rather coyly described on the 1901 census as lodging house keepers working on their own account at home, so it was evidently a red light district. Maude wasn't listed on the census but was presumably one of Minnie's girls. Osborn showed a photo of Pollard to Maude, who said she thought she knew the gentleman. Minnie said: 'Of course you know the gentleman! You stopped with him lots of times.' Maude denied it and Osborn told Minnie: 'See if she will give you any further information than she has given me, and tell her to put it in writing.' These were said in court to be 'very extraordinary proceeding on the part of a solicitor'.

Osborn told Pollard that Kate was going to take out divorce proceedings. Pollard asked on what basis and Osborn replied: 'Oh we know all about your doings at Plymouth.' Pollard said: 'You have found nothing wrong as regards women'.

12 July. Ex-Slater employee Simmonds later testified in court that, back in the office, Osborn said Pollard was 'altogether too straight, and I cannot bend him… I have seen two prostitutes and showed them this photograph. They don't seem to know anything about him, so I threw a sovereign (£60) among them, and they then signed these two statements.' When Simmonds said that was a dangerous procedure, Osborn retorted: 'Any judge or jury will believe me before believing these prostitutes. Besides, we can do all right on this evidence', and tapped a pocket into which he had put the two statements.

Pracey was present at that interview, and after Osborn had gone he told Simmonds: 'I am not at all happy over what he has shown you. He and the captain are playing it up too thick, and there will soon be an end to this dirty work.' He then referred to 'a terrible twisting' he once got at the hands of the well-known counsel Sir Edward Clarke.

14 July. Kate Pollard petitioned for divorce on the grounds of her husband's 'cruelty and frequent adultery with Maude Goodman'.

1 August. Osborn and Bray went down to Plymouth together.

2 August. Pollard received a note: 'Dear Tom, Will you meet me at the Clock Tower at 11 o'clock, as I should very much like to meet you? Just back from South Africa. Your old friend, FRED.' He went there out of curiosity but saw no one he recognised and had no idea he was being watched. Bray, who had sent the note, told Maude he wanted her to identify a gentleman whose photo she had seen and with whom she was supposed to have stayed. He pointed out Pollard to Maude, but she wasn't sure she had met him. Bray said: 'There's our man', but his back was to them. She said: 'I can't tell whether I know him by his back. If I could see him face to face I could tell you if I know him.' Bray said: 'We will walk on the Hoe and then you will be able to see his face.' Pollard apparently recognised Maude but she didn't get close up to him. She said to Bray: 'I suppose he knows me.' He bought her refreshments and suggested that they went to 3 Summerland Place, where she signed a paper saying she recognised the man pointed out to her as Pollard and he had gone with her to 3 Summerland Place.

55. The Plymouth Clock Tower, where 'John Bray' arranged a rendezvous with the hapless Thomas Pollard

Later in August. According to Marjoribanks, it was Osborn that persuaded Maud to sign the paper, for which he paid her a few pounds, but her statement 'turned out to be a simple fabrication'.

22 November. At Plymouth Osborn and Bray gave Maude a subpoena to go to London. Osborn frightened Maude into going to the Law Courts, even though 'she was not quite sure of the man'. She had received £7 (£400) from him.

24 November. Mrs Pollard got an uncontested decree nisi in the Divorce Court. Bray was one of those who gave evidence.

December. Pollard wrote to the King's Proctor, a solicitor representing the Crown. He may intervene in probate, nullity, or divorce actions when collusion, suppression of evidence, or other irregularities are alleged. He may also show cause against a decree nisi being made absolute. Pollard claimed that the evidence against him had been fabricated and that he would have opposed the application but he had no money.

1903

January. At first the King's Proctor did nothing, but then important new evidence came to light and 'the clouds began to gather round Slater's'. A few Slater's employees set up a rival firm called Simmonds' Detective Agency and one of them, Edgar Cartwright, took with him some papers related to the Pollard case. He took them to the King's Proctor, who saw they were so incriminating that he determined to intervene because Pollard had been 'induced to commit adultery'.

March. Bray went to Plymouth and told Maude if she heard any more about the case she was to stick to what she had said. He asked her to sign a document confirming her statement to the Divorce Court, but she refused. She had stayed with a man very like Pollard and pointed him out to Bray, but when she heard him speak she knew it wasn't him.

14 May. At Pollard's suggestion, he and Maude met at the King's Proctor's Office. Pollard had never been at Summerland Place, and neither of them had ever seen the other.

11 July. Pollard lodged an appeal, claiming that he was 'prevented from defending the case for want of means'.

1904

March. The case was heard before the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division of the High Court. Known informally as 'Wills, Wives and Wrecks', it was replaced by the Family Division in 1970. The case was so important that it was brought by the Solicitor-General, Sir Edward Carson. A Conservative MP and then a leading Ulster Unionist, his intransigence later helped bring Ireland close to civil war. The court was crowded for

THE ASTOUNDING CASE OF POLLARD v. POLLARD: SPECIAL "P.I.P." SKETCHES AT THE LAW COURTS.

56. The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times, Saturday March 26, 1904, p201

what the *Penny Illustrated Paper* called 'An astounding case', which went on for a fortnight. Carson's opening statement took the whole of the first day and then Sir Edward Clarke led for Mrs Pollard. In the witness box, she 'surprised everyone with her charm and sincerity', and repeatedly said, 'I wanted to be free, and to end this miserable life'. Knowles, who had spent £5,000 on the case, said that he was not particularly in love with Mrs Pollard but would spend an equal sum on anybody who had been treated as she had. 'You will probably have a large clientele,' Carson observed sarcastically.

57. Sir Edward George Clarke (1841-1931), who once gave John Pracey 'a terrible twisting', spoke eloquently before the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division of the High Court for Mrs Kate Pollard and Slater's Detective Agency. One of the leading barristers of his day, he appeared in many high-profile cases but was best-known for his brilliant but unsuccessful defence of Oscar Wilde against charges of homosexual practices.

As proceedings became increasingly serious, Sir Francis Jeune, President of the court, asked the crucial question: 'Did Maude Goodman speak substantially the truth, or did the solicitor in the case induce her to state what was entirely false?' Clarke launched an eloquent defence of Slater's in which he attacked the motives of Simmonds' Detective Agency, the role of the King's Proctor and the state of the divorce laws, and concluded with a passionate appeal on behalf of Mrs Pollard. Carson responded with an even more powerful attack on Slater's and their methods. After considering the matter for just five minutes, the jury found that Davies, acting under instruction, had induced Pollard to commit adultery, and that Slater's and Osborn had presented a false case to the court. Carson concluded by asking that all the papers in the case should be impounded for the use of the Director of Public Prosecutions, a signal that those involved in the case would be called to account.

Late April. All of the accused were arrested separately, and their comments recorded. Pracey said: 'I did not think they would pull me in'. They were brought to Bow Street before the Chief Magistrate of the Metropolitan Police Courts, Sir Albert de Rutzen. He later, in 1913, heard the case of Sylvia Pankhurst, who recalled '…the old Magistrate with his half-shut eyes, who always reminded me of a tortoise'. Osborn and Scott were defended by barristers, the detectives by a solicitor. Bail of £6000 (£350,000 today) was found for Osborn but not for Scott (also £6000), Davies or Pracey (£1000 bail - £57,500 today), and they were therefore removed to Brixton jail. It had been a military prison but in 1898, when it was returned to the Prison Commissioners, the buildings were enlarged and improved and made the trial and remand prison for the whole of the London area.

58. The Bow Street hearing, April 1904. 'Pracey or Bray' is second left in the dock

9 July. After an unexplained delay, the case came to court. Slater's counsel suggested there was no case that he had instructed his servants to gather false evidence at Plymouth or Jersey. Slater never came into contact with Mr Knowles, who was reputed to be a millionaire: 'If … the amount of the fees paid was a criminal transaction, why was not Knowles in the dock?'

Osborn's counsel stated that 'The case against Osborn was that he was defeating law and justice by the evidence of a woman which he knew to be false'. He claimed that Osborn was 'perfectly justified in all that he did'. Osborn read a statement denying conspiracy or procuring Maude Goodman to give false evidence.

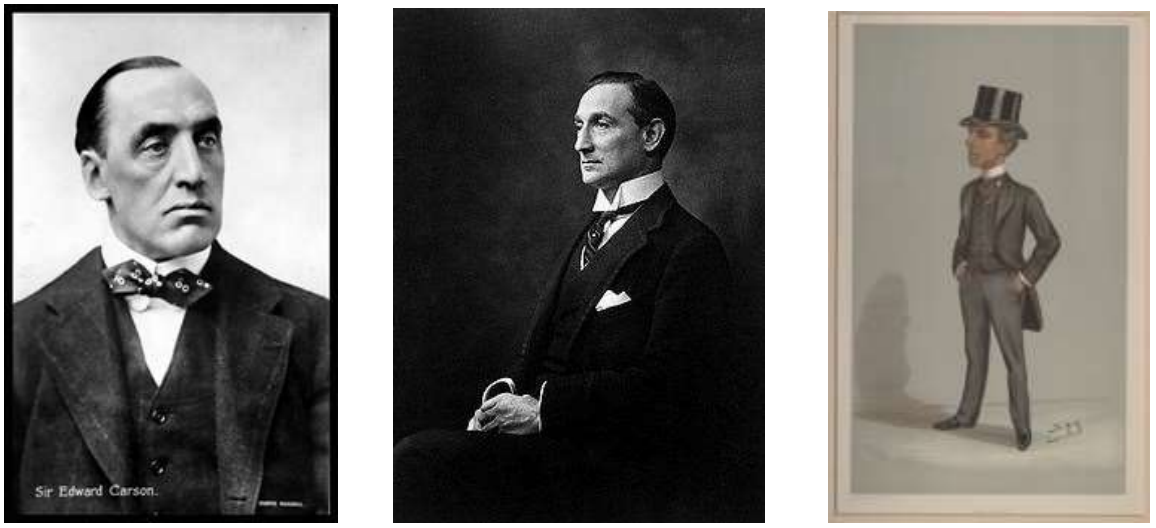
Bray said that he had never conspired with any of the other defendants, or had any communication with Slater about the case. He quite believed that Maude Goodman had identified the photograph of Pollard. (If anybody spoke on my grandfather's behalf, *The Times* didn't report it.)

12 July. The magistrate said he was bound to send the case for trial. It was due to start at Old Bailey on Monday 25th but the barristers were not available or unable to prepare in time, so it was stood over till the October sessions.

The trial at the Old Bailey

25 October. The case started at Old Bailey, with four leading figures typical of the political/legal establishment in the Edwardian era taking part:

- Judge Charles Darling was a Conservative MP. He later presided over several notable murder trials and the appeals of Dr Crippen and Roger Casement, as well as the rather less significant case of the alleged abduction of Harry Patrick and Albert Edward Pracey.
- Sir Edward Carson, the Solicitor-General, prosecuted on behalf of the Treasury. he was involved in many famous cases and from 1910 was an intransigent leader of the Ulster Unionists.
- Sir Rufus Isaacs, who defended Slater, was a Liberal MP who later succeeded Carson as Solicitor-General. In 1912 he became the first Jewish Cabinet minister but was involved in the Marconi Scandal, which nearly brought down him and Lloyd George. As Lord Reading he became Lord Chief Justice in 1913.
- Charles F Gill, who defended Osborn, was an experienced KC who had defended Adolph Beck in a notorious miscarriage of justice that led ultimately to the establishment of the Court of Criminal Appeal in 1907.



59. The three leading barrister-politicians in the Pollard case at the Old Bailey: Edward Carson, Rufus Isaacs, Charles Darling.

My grandfather and the other prisoners were defended by Mr Graham Campbell and others. As Sir Rollo Graham-Campbell, he later succeeded de Rutzen as Chief Magistrate of the Metropolitan Police Courts. His *Times* obituary damned him with faint praise as a sound and conscientious lawyer, but he lacked the oratorical skills of Carson, Isaacs and Gill, who were regarded as among the greatest in a golden era of brilliant advocacy.

Opening for the Crown, Carson pointed out the extreme gravity of the charges. Procuring of evidence cost £2280 (£160,000 today), which was paid to Scott, and legal business cost nearly £600 (£30,000) which went to Osborn. The position of the parties made the figures seem remarkable – Mrs Pollard a waitress earning a small amount of money, Mr Pollard living with his parents on a few shillings a week allowed by his wife. 'Private detective agencies carried out for the public a very dangerous business'. They 'took up a method of work which must be distasteful to most individuals', and were accountable to no public official. They needed to keep good records but there was no account of how the

money had been spent. Pollard's entrapment was a 'scandalous and heinous arrangement'.

Over the next week, the various witnesses gave evidence which I've incorporated into my account. Near the end there was much heavy-handed, scarcely relevant jesting between Darling, Carson and Isaacs over politics and other topics. The barristers then summed up for their clients.

3 November. Isaacs submitted that Scott was in Australia at the time of the conspiracy, and so there was no case to answer. Judge Darling said Scott's conduct was 'open to severe condemnation' but there was no evidence on this charge to put before the jury, so he directed them to acquit him.

4 November. Graham Campbell said Pracey was sent down to Plymouth to watch Pollard and his reports were honest. If Maud had been mistaken about Pollard, why shouldn't Pracey have been? 'Was it clear that Pracey pointed out Pollard to Maude Goodman? Was there not room for some doubt on that point?' After she had identified Pollard, surely it was a perfectly proper thing for Pracey to get her to sign a statement on the subject. He put no pressure on her to come to London or as to what evidence she should give. There was no evidence of conspiracy.

In defence of Osborn, Gill made one of the finest speeches of his career. He denied that the solicitor had done anything unprofessional. Calling a woman of immoral character was a very ordinary way of proving adultery for divorce. Osborn was entitled to go to Plymouth to see the woman and there was no way of compelling her to give evidence. There was no evidence that he knew about the Jersey incident. If Osborn had committed a misdemeanour, it was a matter for the Law Society, not the courts, and there was a danger of a miscarriage of justice similar to that in the Adolph Beck case.

7 November. Carson's closing speech matched Gill's for eloquence. The issues were 'far higher than the matrimonial affairs of Mr and Mrs Pollard or anyone else'. It was a question of whether 'the sources of justice can be tampered with for the most sordid motives'. Interference with evidence brought before the court would 'taint the very fountain of justice itself'.

The judge in summing up said that allegations of adultery should not be made without evidence. With regard to Osborn, he asked how a man could allow a statement of misconduct to be put into court when he knew it to be false. The jury retired at 6.22 and returned 1½ hours later. They were unable to agree about Osborn but found Henry, Davies, Pracey and Smith guilty.

Mr Justice Darling said the men conspired to put together a case in which they did not believe. Davies, Smith and Pracey were to some extent the tools of Henry, the manager. Henry was given 12 months, Smith and Davies six and Pracey three, all with hard labour. Pracey 'was the least guilty, but I do not know that that is saying very much', the judge commented. The agency needed to be stamped out, because it 'was perfectly prepared to go any length in the way of proving an offence that never had been committed, if only a sufficient amount of money was found by those who wanted that thing proved.' The case of Osborn was stood over to the next session.

9 December. The Crown decided to go no further with the case against Osborn and the Attorney-General withdrew the prosecution.

1905

Slater's Detective Agency went out of business. The case was one of the most significant of its day, because the fall of Slater's meant that agencies no longer manufactured evidence but did their proper work of detecting it.

1906

Having filed for divorce on 21 October 1905, Kate obtained a decree nisi on 24 April 1906 and a final decree on 30 July. In the same quarter, in the Paddington district, she married Hugh Charles Knowles.

1911

On census night, Hugh and Kate Knowles were living on private means in their 12-room house in Paddington; with them and their five domestic servants were their three-year-old son Kenneth Guy Jack Charles, and Thomas and Kate's 18-year-old son Reginald Skerrett, who was described as Knowles's stepson and had taken his surname. Albert Osborn was still a solicitor, living with his wife, nephew and two maidservants in an 8-room dwelling in Kensington. George Henry was a builder's collector, living with his wife and son in a 6-room house in Leigh-on-Sea. Cyril Smith was out of work, visiting a lady of private means in Solihull. John Pracy was a confectioner living with his father, wife and brother in five rooms in Walthamstow. Minnie Wilson was married to a music hall stage manager and staying in theatrical digs in Plymouth. I couldn't trace Thomas Pollard, Frederick Davies, Maude Goodwin or – unsurprisingly – the elusive Henry Tinsley.

Conclusion

Once I had summarised the case, I then had to decide what to do about it. In a way it was fortunate that my father is no longer alive, because I didn't have to choose whether to tell him. I know he was very fond of his father, and it may well have come as quite a shock. On the other hand, he may have known about it and protected me, in which case I would have wanted him to tell me all he knew.

In any case I feel that there's little to be ashamed of. I'm far from being an old-fashioned class warrior, but it seems to me that the case displays the Edwardian class system at its worst. The three men who instigated the whole scandal were of higher social status and got away scot-free. The wealthy client didn't even come to court, while the owner and the solicitor were each represented by a well-known King's Counsel and a junior. The manager and the three detectives, who came from humbler origins, had to make do with a competent but uninspiring barrister, and indeed my grandfather had to share him with another detective. They were punished for nothing worse than over-zealous carrying out of instructions from their social superiors.

Clearly the prime mover in the whole affair was Knowles. If he hadn't paid the agency, none of the later events would have happened. 'For some reason best known to himself

he was strongly desirous of helping Mrs Pollard obtain a divorce', and after a prudent interval, in 1906, he married her. Slater's counsel asked: 'If the amount of the fees paid was a criminal transaction, why was not Knowles in the dock?' It was a good question, to which the answer seems to be that his status as a gentleman and reputation as a millionaire placed him above the law.

The owner of the agency, who took most of the money, was the shady 'Captain Scott'. He probably used some of his ill-gotten gains to brief the brilliant young barrister Rufus Isaacs, whose advocacy seems to have been the main reason why Judge Darling ordered the jury to acquit a man he described as 'open to severe condemnation'.

The secrets of the jury room are, of course, sacrosanct, so we shall never know why the jury couldn't reach agreement on guilt or innocence of the solicitor Albert Osborn. The trial went on for a fortnight yet they started their deliberations at 6.22 on a dark November evening, and were out for only 90 minutes. In that time they managed to convict the four detectives so could have had very little time to discuss Osborn, who to my mind was the most blatantly guilty of all the accused. Even worse was the Crown's outrageous decision to drop the charges so he got away scot-free.

What of the detectives? Henry as the manager clearly instructed his men to gather evidence, while Smith and Davies were both fairly blatant in their attempts to entrap Pollard. None of the three seems to have been too scrupulous about how they did it and their sentences seem reasonable, except when compared with the leniency shown to Knowles, Scott and Osborn.

Pracey, by contrast, expressed his reservations about Osborn and Scott to Simmonds: 'I am not at all happy over what he has shown you. He and the captain are playing it up too thick, and there will soon be an end to this dirty work.' It was soon after this that he carried out his little plan at the Plymouth Clock Tower and it may be that his employers put pressure on him to do this, although he apparently shared Maude Goodman's initial belief that Pollard was the man she went with. He had objected to what was going on, and seems to have been genuinely surprised at his arrest.

My grandfather was not well served by his barrister, who also had to defend Smith. As an advocate Graham Campbell clearly wasn't in the same league as Carson, Isaacs and Gill. He failed to convince the judge to dismiss the case or the jury to acquit Pracey. His questioning whether Pracey even pointed Pollard out to Maude was an unconvincing line of argument, and he surely would have done better to concentrate on the reservations his client expressed to Simmonds. I therefore don't think it's just family loyalty that makes me feel my grandfather was unfairly treated.

The First World War and after

By 1914 the Pracys had begun to move out of east London. Rosetta and Thomas Richard had gone to Australia and had many descendants. Three of Edmund the carman's daughters settled south of the river, as did Edward John and his first cousin Joseph William (1851-1914) later in the 19th century. George Henry went up to Chester and some of his family stayed in the north-west, while his brother Frederick and his children Sydney and Hilda emigrated to New Zealand. Several men went into the Army and their duties took them further afield. They usually returned to London, although George and

Isabella later emigrated to Australia, as did Gertrude Rhoda Pracey. Mary Ann's work as a domestic nurse took her to various parts of the Home Counties, and by 1901 the orphaned younger daughters of Thomas Richard the soap maker had followed suit. When not in the Army, their brother Herbert lived in Manchester.

Despite these departures, the Pracy clan continued to be centred on east London. Some of the older generation remained in the East End at Shoreditch, Bethnal Green and Mile End. Most families moved out with the railway into the suburbs of West and East Ham, Ilford, Leyton, Walthamstow, Tottenham, Hackney and Islington.

After the First World War Dr Douglas Pracy moved to Atherstone in Warwickshire and Joseph William (1884-c.1930) to the Folkestone area of Kent. Everyone else remained in the same east London suburbs. In the late 1930s several families went to the Romford area, perhaps encouraged by the building of arterial roads and the growth of car ownership.

It was only after the Second World War that the Pracys really began to spread out, although most stayed in southern England to bring up their families. By the 1990s Pracys were to be found in Norfolk, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, Dorset, Devon and even Wiltshire, close to our roots in Bishopstone. Locations recorded on death certificates suggest that some moved north in retirement.

Many children born during and after the First World War do not subsequently appear in marriage or death registers, suggesting changing social patterns, longer lives and more emigration than before. I suspect that in 2112 a Pracy seeking to trace our family history in the 20th century will have a far more difficult job than I had for the 19th.

Postscript

In the 1970s, when we were young and fit, my wife and I did much of the donkey work for this history. We heaved hundreds of volumes of GRO births, marriage and deaths indexes at Somerset House. We had to ensure that the books did not fall over the balcony and down five floors, thereby necessitating the issue of another death certificate. We often were almost the only people there, and paid 37½p (£4 today) for a certificate. We trawled through original parish registers at the Guildhall and the Greater London Record Office. We squinted at scratchy census films on poor-quality readers in the Black Hole of Portugal Street, otherwise known as the Public Record Office.

We belonged to a family history society, but had no idea that other Pracy descendants were doing much the same sort of thing and finding the same information. We typed out all our findings and compiled little hand-written family trees of various branches of the family, but did not always grasp how they were related to one another. Now the Internet and genealogy software have transformed things out of all recognition. I am hugely indebted to Martin Hagger who, as well as including the Pracys on his website, converted the typewritten lists into splendid spreadsheets. We're happy to answer queries from bona fide researchers.

Forty years on, I have a BA in modern history and an MA in Local and Regional Studies. From 2002-7, I was Local Studies Librarian at Vestry House Museum in Waltham Forest, where two branches of the family lived for most of the 20th century. Family history for

me was therefore a bit of a busman's holiday and so I didn't do as much original research as I used to, although I enjoy writing and this narrative was a labour of love. Now I'm fully retired I obviously have less time, but I have managed to do some new research, which has found its way into this edition.

I hope this brief history will inspire you to research your own branch of the Pracy family. It mostly finishes in the 1920s, but that is also the point at which written sources begin to be complemented by personal memories. Where I have written 'and they had…children', it may refer to you, your parents or grandparents. I'm grateful to everyone who responded to the first four published versions with fresh information, and I will always be pleased to receive more. I will be happy to include family photos, but please send them to me as jpg attachments or similar, and don't put originals in the post.

Main sources

Good family historians are as conscientious as academic ones about giving their sources, but copious references would take up almost as much space as the text. I have therefore only given a few footnotes, which acknowledge direct quotations from other authors. Martin Hagger on the family tree gives full citations of sources for all births, marriages, deaths and other events. If you would like to know my source for a specific fact you are welcome to contact me. It will probably be one of the following:

Primary sources

Ancestry, Findmypast and Genealogist websites.

GRO birth, marriage and death indexes and certificates.

IGI, Vital Records Index, National Burial Index.

Wiltshire Family History Society – transcriptions of Bishopstone parish registers and CD-ROM of marriage licence bonds.

Nimrod Wiltshire indexes - marriage, 'varied' and wills.

Websites for the Wheelwrights', Dyers', Bakers' and Vintners London Livery Companies.

Registers for London parishes:

- Christ Church Greyfriars Newgate Street (two marriages on Pallot's index only)
- St George in the East, Stepney
- St Giles Cripplegate
- St James Curtain Road, Shoreditch was opened in 1841, with 600 'sittings' (seats). It was demolished in 1935 and the parish was united with St Michael's Mark Street.
- St Leonard's, Shoreditch.
- St Luke's Old Street, Finsbury.

- St Mark's Old Street, Shoreditch was opened in 1848 with 350 sittings. It closed in 1937, when the parish was divided between St Leonard's and St Michael's.

Censuses 1841-1911.

Kelly's and other trade directories.

Wills and administrations.

English Origins – apprenticeship records, teachers' registrations 1870-1948.

The National Archive – passenger lists, First World War medal cards, attestations, and other military and naval records.

Proceedings of the Old Bailey website: http://www.oldbaileyonline.org

The *Guardian* and *Observer* online archive.

The *Times* online archive.

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Personal communications to Martin Hagger and/or me from Mandy Adams, Simon Charles Baynton Auger, Mike Booth, Rob Clark, Carol Climpson, Janice Eastment and Kevin Shaw, Bill Firth, Margaret Fisher, Brenda Flaherty, Pat Gerber, Suzanne Girot, Janet Goodridge, Mike Jenner, June Johnson, Ann Keating and her father Keith Pracy, Marilyn Mason, Flick Miller, Noel Osborne, Gwendoline I Parker, Bonnie Parkins, Claire Pracey, Bruce and Maureen Pracy, David Leslie Pracy, John William Pracy (b. 1949), Martin Pracy, Robert Pracy, Jane Jocelyn Mary Riley, Peter Sackett, Mike Schmeer, Marie Sherratt, Andrew Smith, Graham Smith (Queensland), Clive Tolley, Margaret Usher.

If you would like to develop your own research on the Pracy family, or if you would like advice on how to go about it, you are welcome to contact me at d_pracy@hotmail.com

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