



Roy Stockdill Wiltshire Roots

When my wife and I married in Coventry 53 years ago it never occurred to us that we might both have lines of descent from contiguous Wiltshire parishes, no more than five miles apart and in one case only a mile apart. My ancestry was almost entirely from Yorkshire, or so I thought at the time, and my wife Stephanie's was mostly Warwickshire.

However, when I began to research both our family histories in the early 1970s a truism of genealogy reared its head at an early stage: that the farther back you go in time and generations, more counties and more towns and villages enter your family tree and you find yourself with ancestors in places you'd never thought of looking!

For me, the realisation that I was not 100 per cent a Yorkshireman came when I discovered a pair of paternal great grandparents, Andrew YOUNG and Sarah MEAD, who were married in 1852 at Rodden, a district of Frome which lies right next to the border with Wiltshire. Andrew was from Gloucestershire but Sarah had been born at Frome. Tracing them through the BMD records and censuses found them having many children, including my grandmother Harriet YOUNG who was born at Twerton, a suburb of Bath, in 1865. However, in 1881 they suddenly appeared in Bradford, Yorkshire.

It became apparent that my great grandfather Andrew, a weaver, must have taken his family up to the West Riding in order to find work in the booming wool and textile mills of Bradford [Yorkshire] at a time when the West Country cloth industry was dying, due to the heavy competition from the new technology of the woollen and cotton mills of Yorkshire and Lancashire.

My great grandmother Sarah MEAD, a wool spinner, was born at Rodden on the outskirts of Frome in 1829. It transpired, however, that her father, my great great grandfather Philip MEAD, had been born at Bratton, the village that lies immediately beneath the Iron Age hill fort of Bratton Camp and the famous White Horse, about 1796. The censuses of 1841 and 1851 told me that Philip had moved just across the Wiltshire-Somerset border to become a factory foreman at Rodden.

Getting my Mead ancestors at Bratton farther back proved problematical, since Philip's father, James MEAD, born about 1764, sometimes also used the name of PAIN. He married Mary GIDENCE at Bratton in 1789 and baptised children in both surnames. I found a marriage at Bratton in 1760 of John MEAD and Martha PAIN and my researches suggested that James was probably born illegitimate to a sister of Martha's and adopted by John and Martha Mead, hence his use of the surnames Mead and Pain.

Having found my own Wiltshire line, I turned to my wife's family tree. Most of her ancestors were from Warwickshire, specifically Coventry, Stratford-upon-Avon and Henley-in-Arden. However, she had clear recollections as a schoolgirl of visiting relatives, uncles and aunts and cousins, at Westbury Leigh, Westbury. Armed with this information, I found the marriage at Westbury in 1881 of her great grandparents, Henry HALL and Mary Ann DEW. The 1891 census revealed that Henry had been born at Trowbridge and Mary Ann at Dilton Marsh, so my wife's lines from Wiltshire were clearly established.

The surname DEW turned out to be fairly prolific at Dilton Marsh, with many folks of the name appearing in the censuses. Mary Ann was born in 1858, the daughter of Robert DEW, a railway labourer, and Charlotte JONES. I was able to trace the Dews back to an Abraham Dew (1732-1821), my wife's 6x-great grandfather. But what intrigued me particularly was that Dilton Marsh is barely five miles from Bratton where my Mead ancestors came from!

It got even more intriguing when I discovered that Stephanie's great great great grandfather, Eli HALL, who was born at Trowbridge about 1812, lived for many years at Edington which is no more than one mile from Bratton! Eli was a shoemaker and appeared in a number of directories at Tinhead in the eastern part of Edington parish. Could my ancestors at Bratton and my wife's at Dilton Marsh and Edington have known one another? It is such a small and very rural part of the world that it seems likely in the 18th and 19th centuries. We sometimes joke about discovering one day that we are umpteenth cousins!

If anyone recognises any of the names and thinks they might be connected to my wife or myself feel free to e-mail me at: roy.stockdill@btinternet.com

OPC Note:-

For those of you who are not familiar with Roy Stockdill it probably won't surprise you to learn that he is a very clever genealogist. His reports for various genealogical magazines continues his career of journalism. Roy is a very witty and straight to the point kind of journalist and has been rewarded for his hard work by having been published by several National and Local Newspapers. Roy has been a long-time supporter of OPC projects and we are fortunate that he has shared his own Wiltshire background with us.