
NONSUCH ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY



OCCASIONAL PAPER

1. Some Activities
of the Documentary
Group.

N O N S U C H A N T I Q U A R I A N S O C I E T Y

for Epsom, Ewell, Cheam and Banstead.

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SOME ACTIVITIES OF THE DOCUMENTARY GROUP

It was in 1914 that W. Bruce Bannerman, F.S.A., started to transcribe the Ewell Parish Registers. The three volumes he dealt with cover the period 1604 to 1812, but, unfortunately, there is a big gap in the middle of the seventeenth century. These Registers were becoming very fragile, paper was crumbling at the edges and the ink was sadly faded, but despite these difficulties Mr. Bannerman completed his transcription with surprisingly few entries undeciphered.

A few years ago the Documentary Group decided that the transcriptions should be continued from where Mr. Bannerman left off, as far as the end of 1900. This was done, and a complete index was made of the entries, with a note on the cards of where the original entry could be found. Our index file now occupies eighteen cabinet drawers. From the three earlier volumes we have compiled "family" cards, which means that all obviously related persons are tabulated on one card, with, as far as possible, dates of baptism, marriage and burial, and an indication of their relationship to each other. With the more recent Registers we found family ramifications became too complicated, also, because people tended to be more mobile, it was only rarely that names could be traced through all three Registers, i.e. Baptisms,

Marriages and Burials. We are planning to keep photostat copies of all our transcripts so that information can be given quickly and easily to enquirers concerning their ancestors. Such work has proved very interesting and can lead to much speculation on the lives of earlier generations, for one gets glimpses of family dramas and tragedies. For instance, why were the Banns of William Davison and Dinah Goldsmith, published on November 9th and 16th, 1760, "forbidden by the Churchwardens" on November 23rd? The Banns of James Dibble and Martha Chapple, called on August 5th, 1787, were "forbid of the girl herself", and she married a William Coddard on September 16th that same year. How did the relations and neighbours react to such events?

In 1949 a lady, who wished to remain anonymous, started to record the inscriptions on the gravestones of the "old" churchyard, that is, the churchyard surrounding the old church tower. This she did single handed, making an exact transcription of each inscription and noting those of particular interest. She then made an alphabetical index of names so that the graves of individuals could be located or at least the section of the graveyard in which they are situated. This record is already valuable, for even twenty three years later some inscriptions are no longer readable.

This year the Documentary Group decided that this record should be correlated with the Parish Registers Index. Also we felt a similar record should be made of the gravestones in Number 2 Graveyard, that is the one surrounding the new Church, for even some of the newer ones were flaking badly. We approached the Vicar with this suggestion, and Mr. Hogben at once gave his approval and work started this summer. We found that the best method was first to draw a rough plan of each section of the area, then to plot in the graves, giving each a number and, for a double check, adding the name. Then we settled to work in pairs, plan in hand. Often the first task was to clean the face of the stone of accumulated algae and moss. One member of the little team would then, often with considerable difficulty, decipher the inscription, and the other would write it down. We found that team work was necessary because frequently the inscriptions were so worn that they had to be studied from various angles and in various lights before they made sense.

The next step will be to arrange our rough notes in numerical order for each of the four sections and then make "fair copies"; after which, an alphabetical index must be compiled.

It is impossible to be sure of dates and ages on many stones because of weathering, and much checking will have to be done with the Parish Registers. We should be able to add considerably to the information recorded in the Registers; for instance, we can in many cases ascertain relationships, e.g. "wife of the above", "sister of the above", which do not appear in the Burial Register. Our records when complete up to the end of 1900 should enable any grave earlier than 1901 to be located with reasonable ease and certainty.

Recording the gravestone inscriptions makes one realise far more acutely than do the Parish Registers how appallingly high was the infant death rate until comparatively recently. It is not uncommon to find a gravestone recording three, or even four, children who died under the age of five, with another child dying at about 10 years old. When such a record appears tabulated on a gravestone it makes one realise what enormous improvements there have been in public health over the last few generations. There must have been many families who for years on end were never out of the obligatory mourning for more than a few months at a time.

We have found much to interest us during our work. Besides recording the inscriptions we have studied the inscriptions themselves and the ornamental carvings. In the "old" graveyard we have found great similarities in several of the designs used by the stonemasons. There are several headstones carved with a pair of cherubs' heads which are nearly identical. The Brown family, whose graves are to the northwest of the old tower, have headstones with identical cherub heads, even though the dates of burial are some years apart. Verses seem to come from a rather limited anthology and several favourite ones appear over a span of years. One comes to the conclusion that the stonemasons probably had pattern books that could be produced when something special was wanted. The earliest extant gravestone is that of Mary Heard, who died 7th February, 1733, aged 39. Many of the eighteenth century stones are worth studying for both the letter-

ing and the design. In this century "emblems of mortality" were much in favour; skulls, full face or profile, surrounded by hour glasses, scythes, thigh bones, willow branches. One design is of a skull, full face, with the lower jaw missing, with what appears to be an ear trumpet sticking out of one ear hole; presumably this object is intended to represent the Last Trump. One cannot help feeling that the stonemason had been rather too ambitious and that his skill did not match his inspiration, for the skull looks remarkably like a Hallow E'en turnip head ghost.

Many of the inscriptions give glimpses of family history which would make an interesting, and often moving, story. There is the gravestone:

"In loving memory of Mary Williams, born August 10th, 1817, died December 29th, 1902. Erected by the family of the late Revd. Sir George L. Glyn, in gratitude for 62 years of devoted service."

One feels one would like to know Mary's position in the Glyn household. She does not appear to have been from a local family, as her baptism is not recorded in the Registers. It is just possible that the members of the team now working on the Glyn papers at Bourne Hall library may be able to fill in a few details of her life from the many diaries the Glyns have left.

There are sad stories too; Alfred George Channell, aged 17, was "accidentally drowned at Littlehampton on the occasion of the Sunday School Excursion, July 14th 1893". There are also memorials to men killed in explosions at Ewell Powder Mills, and to a porter killed "at the S.W.R. station Ewell on November 9th 1889, aged 35 years".

The Group is collecting material for a "History of Ewell", and the first step seemed to be to compile an index of local names from all sources, with an indication of where that information had been found, e.g. Wills, Indentures, Taxation lists and the invaluable 15th and 16th Surveys of Ewell. Then, when the "History" comes to be written it should be easy to go to the documents concerned for details. We are gradually collecting such lists of names. Although the Parish Registers go back no further than the beginning of the 17th century we have already pushed the family links several generations back, and hope that

the generations will be established.

The foregoing activities are mostly group work, but some members are doing independent research also. For instance, I am reading, and making extracts from, the Vestry Minutes and Overseers' Accounts, which date from the middle of the eighteenth century. Extracts from these have already appeared in Newsletters and Bulletins. Recently I found a Vestry Minute, which, for the older person, has a very familiar sound; this was -

"At a Meeting of the Inhabitants of the Parish of Ewell on Friday the 26th Day of Dec. 1800. This Meeting having taken into Serious Consideration His Majesty's most Graceous Proclamation of the 3^d instant and fully sensible of what importance it is that the true Objects of his Benevolent intentions should be carried into Effect as soon as possible, and the Pressures of the time on the Lower and Midling Classes of Society be thereby, and in Some Degree, and as far as it lies within their power, be Mitigated.

Do Resolve & Declare

First that we will by every means in our power Diminish the Consumption of Bread in our respective families, and on no Account whatever allow a greater Consumption of the same than after the Rate of one Quartern Loaf in each week for each individual.

2nd. That we will Abstain from the use of flour in Pastry, and Moreover carefully restrict the use thereof in all other Articles than Bread.

3. That we will use all such Substitutes in our respective Families as may be most Conducive to Lessen the Consumption of wheaten flour and also to exert our best endeavours to recommend and encourage in others the general use of all such Substitutes as are Attainable and likely to answer the purpose.

4. That as far as Circumstances will admit of it we will Carefully restrict the Consumption of Oates for the Subsistance of our Horses.

5. That we will use the Greatest Economy in our Respective families in every other Article of Food that may in any Manner or Degree facilitate the Acquisition of good and wholesome food

for the Lower and Middling Classes of People, and for that Purpose we will entirely abstain from the use of all such Soups and other Dishes as require a Consumption of meat for the purpose of extracting Gravies etc. and that we will on no account whatever allow of such Soups and Dishes at our respective Tables.

6. That the foregoing resolutions shall be and Continue in force till the 26 day of December 1801, unless that within that Period the Price of the Quartern Loaf shall be reduced to Ninepence, and in that Case these Resolutions shall be discontinued not sooner than one Month after such Reduction shall take Place.

7. That the Churchwardens do immediately wait on such of the Inhabitants of the Parish as those not now present may be disposed to concur in and Sign these Resolutions.

8. That 100 Copies of these Resolutions be printed, distributed among the Inhabitants, and Stuck up in different parts of the Parish as are most Convenient and Conspicuous".

In 1861 the Churchwardens were faced with a different problem. At the Meeting on April 1st of that year it was "Resolved That the attention of the Board of Guardians for the Epsom Union be immediately called to the state of the main drain or sewer running thro' the High Street and along the Kingston Rd in this Parish, and that the Board be earnestly requested to adopt such measures forthwith as may abate the present nuisance and prevent the said Drain or Sewer and the Drains connected therewith being or becoming injurious to health".

On June 12th, ten weeks later, the Board of Guardians replied that "Having received a communication complaining of the nuisance caused by the flow of the contents of the sewers into the Mill Stream at Ewell", caused an inspection to be made and recommended that a Public Meeting should be called to consider how best to abate the nuisance.

The Meeting was held on July 2nd and the following Resolution was passed: "That in the opinion of this Meeting it is highly desirable that all persons now draining into the main sewer should take measures for preventing the flow of sewage and other offensive matters into it and revert to the former system of having cesspools on their premises".

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for EPSOM, EWELL, SUTTON, CHEAM & BANSTEAD.

OCCASIONAL PAPERS

1. DOCUMENTARY GROUP REPORT
2. THE UNNATURAL FATHER, 1625
3. TRIAL OF JOAN BUTTS FOR WITCHCRAFT, 1681
4. EPSOM'S EAST END (Buildings)
5. EWELL BUILDINGS)
6. BELLS OF ST. MARYS)
7. EWELL VILLAGE 1930) Available
8. CONSERVATION IN CHEAM) Autumn, 1973.
9. BUILDINGS OF CHEAM)
10. N.A.S. EXHIBITION 1973)

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are

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Further details can be obtained from the Hon. Secretary

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