

The Gravestone - Part II

Records of people, as opposed to places, began in Britain in the time of Elizabeth I around 1580 when, for example, the parish records of Chinnor began. As many, even wealthy people, were illiterate the spelling of the name was at the whim of the priest or the recorder and this would account for the many different spellings of surnames, even in the same family. It is noticeable how the present spelling only tended to establish itself with the increasing education of members of a family. Before Elizabeth's time the location of dates and many names becomes more a matter of chance and will require a long search of recorded property leases, court records and taxation lists in the hope of finding the odd clue. The earliest established date of the Eustace name is 1568 and refers to Agnes and her father at Watlington. Simple arithmetic suggests that the latter must have been born in the 1580's, about the time when King Henry VIII was trying to solve his matrimonial problems. The memorial brass of Jeremy Eustace (Ewstes), also of Watlington, with his father Robert again leads us back to this date or thereabouts. The Chinnor part of the family was in existence in the 1560's and probably before. Bledlow first appears in the Chinnor records in 1630, but time has not allowed the detailed examination of the earlier records at Bledlow, which are either in latin or are difficult to decipher. Around 1600 there appears to have been three families of Ewsters (Ewtes or Eustace) in Chinnor, one in Bledlow and one or more at Watlington. There may have been another at Henton, or this could have been Thomas from Chinnor who may have moved. There is a marriage record of John Eustace of Chinnor to Anna Eustace of Bledlow, probably cousins of some degree, and it looks as if they were the earliest recorded owners of the old cottage in Keens Lane, with the rainwater head of 1692. In the same year the tenor bell of Pyrton Church was loaned

to Thomas Eustace with a promise that it would be restored at the parishioners request. This promise was kept and the bell is still in the church to this day, although it is never rung. This was probably done to save it from the zeal of the Puritans.

The Chinnor records for the first half of the 18th century are sparse and it seems that it was the Bledlow and Henton families that flourished. The main stream at Watlington seems to have died out.

From the point of view of wealth and social standing the Watlington branch seems to have been the most successful, having grown in importance until they were Lords of the Manors of Watcombe and Britwell and even sported coats of arms. Grandfather and grandson with their wives were buried at Pyrton and their memorial stones are in the Church porch. It is one of these that carries the coat of arms, or what is left of it, as it has been worn away by the feet of successive generations.

The fortunes of the Bledlow people seems to have been very mixed, with one family well-to-do and the other illiterate. Two of the children were baptised without acknowledged fathers, the entry in the records for the second child left me in no doubt - 'filius spurius'. The Watlington families with whom the Eustace family inter-married in the early 19th century - Saw, Copus and Pocock - show similar cases and in each the woman was described as a 'lacemaker'. This cottage industry was so general at this time that 'woman' and 'lacemaker' meant virtually the same thing. It is possible that the necessity for selling their lace often involved an unwanted pregnancy as part of the price. The occupational hazards of the industry! Harrington Eustace of Chinnor was a leading figure in the latter half of the 18th century, described as schoolmaster and scrivener and apparently lame, he was a strict non-conformist. His house was registered as a religious meeting house in 1753 and two years later he was appointed lay-preacher.

He founded a school in 1808 when it had between 30 and 40 pupils and was undoubtedly the fore-runner of the British School which survived until 1896, and which still exists in the Lower Road, as the Silver Band Headquarters.

He died in 1777 and it was his work, in co-operation with Keen, Allnutt and 'Father' Mead that laid the foundation for the Congregational Church in the High Street, which was built in 1805.

Richard Eustace of Siddenham left estate to his daughter in 1758, but with this proviso:- "but if my daughter Mary will not be guided by her brother Richard, then my son Richard shall pay my daughter Mary Eustace one shilling a week!" Mary laughed last as Richard died the following year, so Mary inherited the lot and immediately sold it for £20.00. This was probably what father was trying to prevent.

Bledlow was not to be outdone in good works and in 1784 Elizabeth Elizabeth Eustace gave land to provide "lots of linen" for the poor of the village. This land now brings in £4.50 a year.

There is a baptismal entry in 1789 for William Eustace and for four of his sons between 1816 and 1828. The date coincides with the date on the gravestone, but where are the daughters, and also the marriage To be continued.....

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