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Hidden Treasures: Archer Roots in England

Over fifteen years ago my uncle Geoffrey Archer initiated a family history project to record information about current generations and to document information about his father and grandfather. Because all three were Anglican priests there was a well kept record of their ministries in Crockford's. Crockford's is a clerical directory of current Anglican clergy in Great Britain which is published every two years. Up until 1980 it was a published record of worldwide Anglican clergy. Usually it would list the clergy person's parishes in a short biography.

When I started to be interested in genealogy a few years ago I assumed Geoffrey had exhausted all possible sources of information. Little did I know how much was actually hidden away in various old family books that he had saved over his life -time. I was taking a series of Basic Genealogy courses online through the National Institute of Genealogical Studies and the University of Toronto that suggested that I look for family bibles and that I interview all of the oldest family members. I assumed wrongly that all this information had been culled from family bibles and books.

About a year ago when I was stuck in my search somewhere back in 1850 England with the Archer line I asked Geoffrey if he would go through any old books he had from the family and send me copies of what was written there. Geoff said yes he had some old books and he would look them up and see what he could discover. He transcribed about eight typewritten pages. When I received them I asked for photocopies of inscriptions in the front of three books so I could see the handwriting.

One was an 1833 prayer book with a birth date of May 28,1766,5 of _____, and 21st March 1847,9 of____ death date for " Elizabeth Archer mother of Mary Archer, mother in law of Isabella Ambler Archer " and a diagram showing a list of Isabella's seven children, a line from Robert Henry , her fifth child to WLA (William Lawrence Archer) and 4 initials (B,T,W,G) for the 4 boys Bob, Ted, William, Geoff and "Isabelle" .

Another 1720 prayer book showed "Mary Archer, a gift from her beloved mother Elizabeth Archer who died March 21st 1847". By working from what I knew to what I didn't know, I first sought the correct death date for Robert Henry Archer. I had been told around 1878, but he was not in the 1878 death indexes. I quickly located his death recorded in the 1877 index. It was only then that I realized I could do likewise for Elizabeth Archer. There was only one English reel for 1847 in the

Bracebridge LDS Center and I found it in the first quarter of 1847. I found the two death certificates on the last day the Center was open (December 2) and ordered them by phone with a credit card to the General Register Office in Merseyside U.K. before Christmas and received them by mail on December 27,2000.

Elizabeth was listed as a widow of Richard Archer, Baker at 73 Lower Thames Street, London, England. When I used this information at the LDS Center on the International Genealogical Index on the computer, I discovered the whole family - Mary Archer who was referred to in the 1720 prayer book, and six other siblings, and the marriage of the couple in about 1795 all in the same church St. Michael Paternoster Royal, London. Because Richard was listed as a Baker I asked someone on the London Rootslist online to check the London Commercial Directory for 1846, for either Elizabeth's or Richard's name and address and discovered Elizabeth Archer listed as a "Ship's Biscuit Baker" at age 80 years old, one year before her death .

A third book was an 1841 "Lyra Apostolica" had R.H.Archer written in the top right hand corner. In another hand was written: "To my dear sister on the 21st anniversary of her birth, this trifling gift from her most affectionate brother, Augustus Ambler Bristol, Feast of Ascension " In my own Anglican prayer book I found that The Feast of Ascension is somewhere in May or early June. From my English Ancestors course at the National Institute of Genealogical Studies I learned that the 1841 census was carried out June 7,1841, so I can follow up on that to find her brother. I could not locate him in Bristol on the 1841 census so I tried another route.

On another English census course we were asked to look up someone new on any UK census. Only then did I realize how easy it would be to use the 1881 census at the LDS Center and look for Augustus Ambler. There he was in on Barn Street, Lavenham, Suffolk, with his wife Caroline, daughter Jessie (also born in Lavenham), son in law, George E Greenhead and two grandchildren John I and Jessie M Greenhead. At the LDS Centre, I used Augustus Ambler and his wife's name Caroline to do a parent search and found that in 1851 three of their children were baptized respectively Annette, January 22, Florence, September 17, and Mary, October 1 in St. Peter and St. Paul Church, Marlborough, Wiltshire. Since 1851 was also a census year I looked through the census records but was unable to locate the family . With their birth places listed I was able to corroborate that these were my ancestors and trace them through other census records.

I decided to look at the Lavenham, Suffolk 1871 census next because it would have more information than earlier ones. There at the Barn Street Grammar School was Augustus, Schoolmaster aged 50, Caroline his wife age 45 and son Frederick aged 14 born in Hackney, Middlesex, Edward 13 and daughter Jessie 12 both born in Lavenham, Suffolk. Augustus' younger sister Isabella had been a schoolmistress in Hackney where she lived so that was the family connection to Hackney. There was no sign of the other siblings Mary, Annette, and Florence, who were baptized in 1851 in Marlborough, so it is difficult to know whether the girls were alive at the time. It would be possible to find the Anglican church in Lavenham, follow up further to check for possible deaths for fourteen years earlier or up to 1881 or marriages in the previous couple of years.

In the 1861 census at the Grammar School on Barn Street were Augustus Ambler, Schoolmaster, Caroline, Schoolmistress, and their children Mary, age 11 born in (town name illegible), Middlesex, Annette, age 10, born Wiltshire, Sussex (sic), Flor,(sp?)age 6, born Hackney, Middlesex, Fred, age 4 born Hackney, Middlesex, Edward age 3, born Lavenham, Suffolk, as was Robert age 9 months. All children were listed as scholars except the three youngest ones. Again more could be revealed by a search of church records in Lavenham.

This story shows how one can work back and forth between family records in old books, death indexes, death certificates, census records, church baptismal records, Rootslists, commercial directories and in our case Crockford's directory of Anglican clergy.

While the story is still unfinished, the inscriptions from old family books have given me great advances in my research. I look forward to finding more data on Jessie Greenhead and her family when the UK 1901 census is released in 2002.

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