

The Creed mystery – who was Thomas Creed?



Nice photo – but was this Thomas Creed born 1811 in West Pennard, Somerset?

Much of the Creed tree was already known but my attention was drawn to a family of nine siblings whose father, according to the parish register, had ‘left West Pennard for America’ in 1822 after the youngest was born: James (1809), Mary (1810), Thomas (1811), William (1812) my ancestor, Miriam (1814), Elizabeth (1816), Sarah (1817), John (1819), Ann (1822). I wondered what became of the children.

My cousin Pat sent me a list of baptisms she’d found in the neighbouring parish of North Wootton. We’d overlooked them as they’d not been microfilmed:

Matthew Philip and William Thomas (1839), Dorothy Eugenie (1845), Charlotte Augusta and Geraldine (1849), children of Thomas Creed, a carpenter at various ports and his wife Ann Amelia Creed. By this time I’d had a thorough look at the indexes of wills and the local censuses and I’d never heard of these Creeds. Only one of the births was registered at the General Register Office. So who were they and where did they go?

Well, my cousin Pat found one piece of the jigsaw. There was a burial at West Pennard of a W T Creed aged 65, who had died during a matinée performance at Drury Lane in 1904 – we’d no idea who he was but it looked as if he was the child baptised at North Wootton.

Fleshing out the material using wills

The search began in earnest. We particularly wanted a census entry as we suspected that the father, Thomas Creed, might have been born at West Pennard.

The will of W T Creed showed that he was a surveyor living in London, married. He named two sisters Dora (Mrs Moon) and Geraldine Creed but there were no people of these names living in the 1881 census, not anywhere in the whole country.

However, I recognised the name Geraldine. I opened up my box file full of brimming with wills which I’d bought when they were 25p per page. There was the will of Sidney Creed of Arch Villa, Pilton, dated 1920. I knew him: his branch was very straightforward. He mentioned his wife *Geraldine Creed* together with a niece. I had a hunch I was dealing with the same Geraldine. I found the will of the niece Kate Holloway, a widow who died in Wiltshire in 1966 and noted the name of her executor, Samuel Portch. Was this a clue?

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The answer came via the IGI for Somerset. Only a small percentage of parishes have been indexed for the county but in 1868 a double wedding is recorded in Evercreech of two sisters, Dora and Charlotte Creed, to James Moon and Samuel Portch. Portch! I sat in my marketing class at college and decided to leave early. I had to get to the record office at Taunton before it closed to see the original certificates.

I sat and pondered the evidence. It looked as if I'd found marriages for the three daughters, though I still didn't know their father's origins. I was fairly sure that Kate Holloway was a daughter of Charlotte and Samuel. But where were the family in the censuses and what had happened to the oldest brother, Matthew?

Visiting a descendant

In about as much time as it takes to tell this story I had driven across East Devon and was sitting in the drawing room of Charlotte's granddaughter, Audrey. Yes, she said excitedly, she knew all about the Portches and Kate Holloway was her aunt. Kate was known as Flo, in fact, and had been sitting under the table when Geraldine Creed came to visit the family. Audrey told me that Geraldine had said: "Charlotte, as you have so many daughters and I have none, couldn't you spare one to keep me and my husband company?" There was Flo sitting under the table. And thus it was that she was brought up by the Creeds, and became 'the lady of the family'.

So, part of my work was done. I had found the Portches in the 1881 census and in a few wills, which led me to Audrey. I had learnt everything I needed about the family, had seen some of Charlotte's crocheting and had solved the explanation about what Kate Holloway, Flo, was doing with the Creeds.

A few months passed.

The New Zealand connection

Then, on the internet, came a surprise posting.

Posted by Catherine Creed, New Zealand on Thu, 12 Nov 1998, at Rootsweb Creed Surname Forum

Matthew Phillip CREED born about 1833
GLAMORGANSHIRE, died October 05, 1904 at Hot Water Beach, Whitianga, New Zealand. His mother was Ann Amelia Creed, don't know her maiden name. In a letter from his brother W T Creed in North Kensington, London in July 1903, a reference is made to Matthew's father who lived till he was 93. Any information appreciated.

Matthew's story was quite something. Catherine brought me up-to-date. After his mother was committed to a lunatic asylum he ran away from home

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to join the Merchant Navy. In Australia he jumped ship and stowed away to New Zealand where he met a whaler, Pita Te Kohiwi. Together they went to Tauranga where he met and married Pita's sister Ramarihi, a Maori warrior, some time in the 1860s. Though Matthew was described as a bushman, working at the Mercury Bay sawmills, he kept an excellent orchard with very good cider. This amused me as of course this is what he *would* do with his Somerset blood. Catherine had married their descendant, Ron, and she was wrapped up in authentically repairing the old home on the Coromandel Peninsula when she came across the old letters.

Old family letters come to light

The letters from W T Creed to his brother Matthew took me a hair's breadth away from believing that their father Thomas Creed was my Thomas baptised in 1811 at West Pennard. I couldn't prove it.

“London 1887. My Dear Brother. After many years I have found out your address. I have Been a Clerk of works for the last 17 years and I am also an Inventor and Patenter. I work very hard and do as well as I can, we have no children and as Building Surveyor we are much about the country. But I hope to stay with the Duke [of Westminster] for a time. Father is now quite an old man he does not do much now we help to keep him. Henry lives at Woolwich and has two children living they had 14 in all he is in the Milk Trade and I should think does well, our Sister Dora you know the Eldest is Mrs James Moon lives in the States has three Children I think they are Farmers, Charlott our next sister, is Mrs Porch also in the Farming our youngest Sister was at my House the week before last, she is Mrs Sidney Creed also in the Farming she is well off they will all be delighted to get a line from you.”

“North Kensington, London 1903. My Dear Brother. I cannot tell you how sorry I am to hear that you are not well But I trust it is not so Bad as you think the Dr is oft times off the right track you are not old and come of a race that live long. Look at our Father 93 and your Grandmother Creed 85 and your Dear old Grandfather Cock also 85 neither of them died of old age. Grandfather had Cancer and Grandmother fell down stairs so Cheer up and put your trust in God.”

More evidence to support Thomas Creed (1811) being the father of the North Wootton children:

Geraldine Creed was a visitor with Sarah Creed (1817) in one census and in the next census had taken over a farm, Tilham Street, from Miriam Creed (1814). Her brother was buried at West Pennard which suggests a link with the parish. If her father was Thomas Creed (1811) these connections would make perfect sense.

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Proof at last

I had to find a census for Thomas Creed. It shouldn't be hard as he lived to such an age. The 1881 census was no use – it gave his birthplace as 'Somerset'. The 1901 had not yet been released. In the Exeter LDS Family History Centre I could consult the Woolwich FHS indexes for Woolwich. There in 1891 was Thomas Creed aged 79 with his birthplace given as 'West Pennard'. At last! But there were two Thomas Creeds baptised at West Pennard, one in 1810 and one, mine, on 12 June 1811. A final tussle to establish the truth. The older Thomas could not be the Woolwich man, his mother died in her forties (and his burial was subsequently found), while the 1811 man had a mother who lived to be 83, clearly this was he, and his mother, sadly, must have fallen down the stairs.

I have not found the family in the earlier censuses nor have I obtained the death certificate of Martha Creed, 1868, mother of the brood of nine. I should like to know exactly how she died – heart attack or internal bleeding? – and to visit the farm to see how steep the stairs are, but that is the gory family historian for you. In the meantime I am very pleased to add this unusual family onto my tree knowing that they belong.

Images available:

- Hand-drawn family tree showing the relationships
- Letters of 1887 and 1903 from W T Creed
- Photographs of Matthew Creed and Ramarihi Te Kohiwi (separately)

NB. Geraldine Creed does not appear in the 1881 census as she is indexed under one of her other names, Eugenia. She was, in fact, known as Dinah.

Postscript:

It took another 15 years to rehabilitate three more siblings: Mary, John and Ann. But by this time the internet and findmypast marriage transcriptions were very much here to help us. Back in 1998, such puzzles as 'who was Thomas Creed' could by no means be easily solved.

We also found a suggestion that the father Thomas Creed senior, may have gone to the Catskill Mountains, New York with his wife's cousins the Clarkes (see my blog).