

Glemsford Local History Society

Newsletter - Volume 2, Edition 2 - January

1999

Who was Colonel Meek?

It is never a good idea to begin a story near its end, but the 1998 Armistice service at the War Memorial provoked a particular moment of recognition. The name of T. Meek - not a normal Glemsford name - stands proudly alongside the others, a hero of the Great War, who died quietly in the Second.

T. Meek has appeared frequently in my work on the Internet over the last six months. It all began with an e-mail received from a researcher, who had visited my "Glemsford" web site. This site began as a bit of fun for the Morris men, but has developed into something rather more, with the addition of details of the GLHS and some pages dedicated to the school's 125th anniversary.

The first request was looking for information about Colonel Meek, who was, apparently, recorded as a Glemsford resident at the time of his death in 1943, in Baghdad. My contact had only a vague address - the "Little House". After talking to a few "locals", I felt there could only be one possible candidate for this address - the small cottage opposite the Post Office, by Fair Green.

I sent a photograph of the cottage (again via the Internet) to my correspondent, who in turn sent a rather fine photo of Colonel Meek.

At the School's 125th anniversary celebrations, I published a plea for further information. Several people came forward with news of the Meeks, to the effect that Mrs (Dorothy) Meek had been the niece of two ladies who lived in the neighbouring cottage, and kept Pekinese dogs of a somewhat savage nature. There was apparently, a daughter who used to village and went riding from Clockhouse Farm. I transmitted all the snippets to my correspondent, who was delighted.

Colonel Meek had, apparently, fought in the Great War and had then trained as an accountant. At the beginning of the Second War, he rejoined the army in the Pay Corps, was posted to Baghdad and died there.

The reason for my correspondent's interest was his research into the background of holders of military decorations. Colonel Meek had been awarded the Military Cross during the Great War for a near-suicidal action in the face of German machine guns. So, on Armistice Sunday, the name T. Meek took on extra meaning..

As a postscript, the web site of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission contains the following inscription:

In Memory of Colonel Thomas Alexander Meek MC Royal Army Pay Corps who died aged 54 on Monday, 6th December 1943. Colonel Meek, Son of Andrew Alexander Meek and of Christina Malcolmson Meek (nee Baikie), husband of Dorothy Marguerite Meek, of Glemsford, Suffolk.

Remembered with honour

Extracts from the "Bury and Norwich Post"

Sid Watkinson has uncovered these items of intrigue and interest among a large collection of extracts.

December 28th 1850

At Glemsford on Thursday last some men employed in raising stone in field in occupation of Mr Corben Morley near Glemsford Bridge found the bones of two bodies two feet below the surface near the hedge.

January 8th 1851

Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir,

Re skeletons found near Glemsford County bridge. I have visited the spot several times, the skeletons were a male and young female, they ranged side by side, the male on the right side with no vestige of a coffin. Many think there must have been foul work but from their position east to west which implies it was a Christian burial which is confirmed by two sticks laid across them. It might have been a "strangers' corner" on a former burial ground as tradition says there was an ancient site of a monastery in that field. Old men say when ploughing within a half century or not much more, they have felt the plough jump over foundations. There is also a spring, a 100 yards away from the spring there is strong and unfailing sweet water and cold well known in this locality as "Holy Water" and frequently the thirsty labourer will go half way across the field for draughts of this cold sweet water from this spring. There is more evidence that the men struck the foundations of a wall 6-7 feet high from the surface, the stones appear about 4lbs in weight and of regular size. Two coins have been found, the supposition is that anyone buried would have been furnished with a St Peter's fee actually put in the hand for admission to heaven and to pay St Peter as he is supposed to hold the key to heaven. The first coin is a penny of the reign of Henry the 3rd who reigned from 1216 till 1272. The second which is a silver two penny piece from the reign of Charles 1st who reigned from 1625 to 1649. A copper token was found of Thomas Reynolds of the Star Inn and Huckster.

W. Boutell.

This snippet has all the fascination of so many old newspapers. But it seems to me that there are some extra questions to be asked. I have always heard that any "monastic" remains around Glemsford were most likely to be found in the New Street/Plum Street area, or out further towards Fenstead End, but here we have the clear suggestion of a local "tradition" placing such an establishment at the "Essex" end of the village. My assumption (supported by discussion with some with local knowledge) is that the "County" bridge would be the one which crosses the river at the station, rather than the bridge over the Glem on the A1092. If that assumption is correct, could there be a different twist to the origins of the "Casey", leading, as it does, from the station to the Church?

Obviously, the theories of Mr Boutell cannot, in themselves be trusted, but it would be interesting, indeed, to know if there were ever any further finds in this area, or whether any proper investigations were ever carried out.

Suggestions of "foundations", "walls", "stones ... of regular size", as well as strange burials and coins, provoke all sort questions. If any one out there can cast any light on matters, the Society would be fascinated to hear of them.

Meanwhile, look out for further extracts from Sid's collection.

On the same tack, previous editions of the newsletter have contained contributions from the Totman and Watkinson families about their connections with Australia, through the offices of the 19th Century legal system. John Slater has provided us with further evidence of the "connection", and the workings of that legal system, with some extracts from the reports of the Suffolk Assizes from the "Bury and Suffolk Free Press". They make salutary reading.

23 January 1828

James Oakley and John Hamm, of Glemsford, for stealing 2 horses and 2 saddles from the reverend E.D. Batts of Glemsford.

Transported for Life

16 January 1839

John Sargent, for stealing a fat pig from Farmer Wales of Glemsford

15 years Transportation

19 January 1842

David Clark, age 21, of Glemsford, for stealing 13 watches and £3 from Geo. Carter

10 years Transportation

19 January 1842

Geo. Oakley, age 42, of Glemsford, for stealing 6 bushels of turnips

7 years Transportation

10 April 1844

Jabez Copsey and Stephen Boreham of Glemsford, for setting fire to James Allen's barn, Glemsford, sentenced to be

Transported for Life

September 1847

John Gridley, of Glemsford, for stealing a knife and handkerchief from Chas. Payne

7 years Transportation

John has also provided the following supporting information and comment.

Between 1828 and 1853, within a 10 mile radius of Sudbury, 62 men, 3 women and a 9 year old boy were transported to the colonies.

The average agricultural wage for men was 9s for a 70 hour week (if employment was available). The Wage Bill for a Long Melford farm, for the week ending 24 May 1839, for the employment of 13 men and 5 boys, totalled £5 16s 0d. By comparison, the annual income (from tithes and glebeland) for 1846, for the Reverend George Coldham, Rector of Glemsford, was £826 0s 0d, an average of £16 per week.

The "Suffolk and Essex Free Press" reported in March 1849 that the Rev. Geo. Coldham of Glemsford prosecuted Geo. Gooday, age 66, for stealing some potatoes. Gooday was sentenced to 1 month's gaol. The Rev. Coldham said he had employed Gooday as an act of Charity, to keep him off the Parish.

Recent Publications

I am sure members will be interested in details of a couple of recent books which have been published by local historians, both of whom have contributed to our meetings in recent years.

David Possee has written "The Weaver and The Throwster". In his publicity for the book, David writes: "It is 200 years since George Courtauld came to Pebmarsh to convert a corn mill into a silk mill. ...The book gives the reader an insight into how and where the 19th Century Silk Industry in Essex and Suffolk developed. Subjects covered include rates of pay and working conditions as well as social events organised by the owners." The book is available from Gainsborough bookshop in Sudbury, price £4.95, or by post (+£1.05 p&p) direct from David Possee, 22 Stubbs Lane, Braintree, CM7 3NR.

Meanwhile, if you have enjoyed "The Long Furrow", as well as his other publications, Ashley Cooper's new book "Our Mother Earth - of the furrow born" is bound to appeal. This book is published by Bulmer Historical Society, at £7.95. I obtained my copy from Kestrel Books in Sudbury.

It is the sort of book you can browse, and delve into, or read as a whole. Built around my pet fascination - reams of oral history - as well as a wealth of documentary evidence, the book is full of detail about the more recent past as well as the more distant passages of history.

There is plenty of Glemsford interest, either from references to local farming traditions or to more precise examples of local industry. Gillman Game is well known to us, of course; here, he pops up telling Ashley Cooper about the exploits of Ratcatcher Brown in Glemsford, whose activities seem to have taken the proportions of a Glemsfordian Pied Piper.

Other items of direct interest to longer-standing members of the Society will be the references to the brickworks at Bulmer. I was also particularly intrigued by the details of the Tithe Rebellions of the 1930s; here, surely, must be a fertile area of Local Historical research for the future.

The book is a little irritating in the way the text switches from quotation to text and back, in a variety of typefaces, but that is a stylistic criticism. It is beautifully illustrated by Benjamin Perkins.

The President's Evening

Given that, yet again, this newsletter is late in appearing, I do have at least the opportunity to pass on, in this public forum, my personal, and the Society's formal, thanks to George and Ann for their hospitality at "Chequers" back in December. We are always greeted with great warmth, and 1998 was no exception. I know I speak for everyone when I say we all enjoyed the evening immensely.

I suppose I ought also to be apologising for the frustration and argument caused by that Quiz, but I won't.

Back To The Internet

The full text of this newsletter is available at the website along with other items connected with Glemsford and the History Society, if you have access:

<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/stephen.clarke/contents.html>

I have recently, for instance, added the full text of [Ted Hartley's](#) view of Glemsford in the 1920s.

I am regularly asked by correspondents for help with family research. I do my best to keep people in touch, but I do rely on "local intelligence" for this, and it does take time. If you can help, please do not hesitate to let me know. Recent requests have included the Chatters, Hartley and Suttle families.

... And finally

From the "Free Press", August 1st, 1896 "On Wednesday morning last week, the Three Turns Inn at Glemsford was burnt to the ground, also a fibre shed adjoining the property. The property belonged to Mrs Smith, a widow, she is also the landlady of the house. It stands at the junction of three roads hence its name, close to the railway station. It has recently been re-roofed completely with slates. The cause is undiscovered."

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