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Great-great-grandfather HUGH PIGOTT and his wife MIRIAM BUXTON

The indisputable facts concerning Hugh Pigott are best set out as follows:-

- 23rd March 1797, birth at Faringdon.
- Youngest child of Leonard Pigott, a staymaker, and his second wife Sarah New.
- 1824 Hugh set up in business as a baker in Gloucester Street.
- 19th May 1824, marriage at Faringdon Parish Church to Miriam Buxton of Alpheton, Suffolk.
- 1826 birth of first child, Mary, who later married Edwin Counsell, a watch-maker from Ross-os-Wye who set up in business in the Corn Market, Faringdon.
- 1827 Birth of Richard who became a solicitor's clerk, married Mary Langshear Clare and finally settled in Cheltenham.
- 1830 Birth of Robert who married Susannah Clare and later Anna Maria Beak. He became a baker, corn-dealer and (from 1871) Pastor of Providence Baptist Chapel, Swindon.
- 1832 Birth of my great-grandfather John.
- 1832 Hugh is named as having voted in a Parliamentary Election.
- 1834 Birth of Sarah who married William Collett, a miller and farmer from Bampton.
- 1835 Birth of Elizabeth. She did not marry. The only Anglican member of Hugh's family. She was a school-teacher at Corsham, Chippenham and Worcester. In 1883, after caring for her widowed father, she trained as a missionary and went, as an 'honorary' worker to the Zenana Mission of the CMS. at Karachi. She died at Amritsar in 1886.
- 1847 In a Tithe Conversion Map Hugh is named as the owner of an eight-acre plot of ground, with cottage, called the 'Old Cherry Orchard' at Great Coxwell.
- 1867 Hugh Gave up his business to Robert and lived in retirement at Brooms Place and later in Marlborough, both in Faringdon.
- 16th February 1875, his wife Miriam died.
- 22nd February 1883, Hugh died. Both he and Miriam were buried in the Free Church Cemetery, Canada Lane, Faringdon. Until 1982 their grave was marked by a very informative headstone. This has now been removed, along with many others, as part of a plan to tidy up the Cemetery. The intention is to re-erect the headstones up against the boundary walls.

Hugh's birth, like that of his wife in far-off Alpheton, was recorded in the Parish Register. The births of their children were not so recorded because of their parents' allegiance to the Strict Baptist Church. The parents' marriage took place at the Parish Church because, at that time, there was no provision for marriages in non-conformist premises other than the Quakers.

The facts relating to Hugh's wife Miriam are as follows:-

- 4th September 1794, Miriam baptised at Alpheton, Suffolk. She was the oldest of the three daughters of Robert Buxton, a small farmer, and his wife Sarah Dyer. The younger sisters were Harriet and Cozbi.

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- 19th May 1824, marriage to Hugh Pigott at Faringdon.
- 16th February 1875, death at Faringdon.

The aspect of my grandfather's life-story which has proved most absorbing is the discovery of his involvement in the Worthing Riots of 1884. In the story of John senior attention focussed itself on the unsolved puzzle of his rejection by the Block Green Baptists. But in this chapter of the family history the most absorbing question is, 'How did Hugh Pigott of Faringdon come to marry Miriam Buxton, the farmer's daughter from a tiny village in Suffolk?'

The first clue was found in Robert Pigott's memoirs. He said that his mother's parents, 'experienced difficulty in keeping their heads above water. In consequence their three children were obliged to turn out in the world.* [Victims, no doubt, of the Enclosure Acts which changed the face of rural England & drove thousands of small farmers into the towns.]

While living in Norfolk Street in the Strand she (Miriam) used to worship with the saints at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, White-chapel. To this place she used to run after attending the young ladies on Sundays and had to run back with all speed to attend them on their return from church.'

Whilst speaking volumes about Miriam's athletic prowess, to say nothing of her spiritual zeal, this rather naive statement does at least indicate that, after coming to London, she had found employment as a ladies' maid with a family, as yet anonymous, in Norfolk Street.

The next clue was in the form of a photograph we found amongst family papers. On the back of it my mother had written 'Elizabeth Twining, lifelong friend of Elizabeth Pigott.' Being a Londoner I remembered that Norfolk Street is very close to the premises opposite the Law Courts in the Strand which were, and still are, the London headquarters of the famous tea-importing company. Samuel Twining, the present head of the family, confirmed that the photograph was, indeed, one of the daughters of Richard Twining who, early in the nineteenth century, had lived at 34, Norfolk Street.

There seems no doubt, therefore, about the identity of Miriam's employer but we had made no progress in answering the question, 'How did Hugh and Miriam meet?' But meet they did and they decided to marry.

Hugh's banns were called at Faringdon and Miriam's at St. Clement Danes in the Strand. As nobody raised 'just cause or impediment' Miriam was duly issued with the appropriate certificate, left her employment and journeyed to Faringdon to be married in the groom's parish, not in the bride's as was more usual. We could not escape the thought that they must have met in London, that Hugh had returned to his home-town with his savings, set himself up as a baker and then asked Miriam to marry him. The discovery

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amongst our family papers of a photograph of Elizabeth Twining as a very old lady suggests strongly that Miriam never lost touch with at least one of her 'young ladies', a notion entirely consistent with all that we have learnt about the kindly Elizabeth Twining's innumerable philanthropic activities.

But what had Hugh been doing in London? It seems fairly certain that his father, Leonard, had died in 1801 in Faringdon and had been taken back to his home village, Letcombe Regis, for burial. The theory that Hugh had left home to ease the burden of his widowed mother and make his own way in the world seems reasonable enough. (It will be remembered that his son Robert and his grandson John did something similar in their respective generations.)

A new and startling light was thrown on the problem when we discovered, as a result of our research, two very distant cousins, Mrs Ethel Moss, Hugh's sprightly octogenarian great-granddaughter from Cumnor in Oxfordshire, and Maurice Hugh Pigott, his great-grandson from Devizes in Wiltshire.

When talking to new acquaintances we have set ourselves two rules, 1. not to probe too far too fast and 2. not to put leading questions, knowing that some people will give you the kind of answer that they think you want to hear.

Our meetings with these two delightful cousins were separated by nearly three years but their response to the same question, 'Do you know what Hugh did before his marriage?' was roughly as follows:-

Ethel Moss: In my family there has always been a tradition that Hugh was a seaman, probably a ship's cook. My son still has a small wooden box which Hugh made to hold his shaving things. He didn't like the long voyages and couldn't wait to get back to see Miriam.

Maurice Hugh Pigott: I think Hugh spent some time at sea. I remember that, as children, my brother and I used to play with an old seaman's chest that had belonged to Hugh. Of course we haven't got it now.

Among the items which passed to me on the death of Emma Jane Allen was a small compass in a plain mahogany case. The degree markings are typically those of a nautical style, as opposed to a surveyor's compass.

Emma Jane stated that it had once belonged to *'father's grandfather'* and had been given to her husband by John Pigott senior (Hugh's son) with the words:
I am giving you this compass because, like you, it has travelled thousands of miles across the sea.

The reference to 'father's Grandfather' was, I feel sure, an error and that she meant to say 'father's father'.

And so we have these three tenuous scraps of information which individually or jointly would not convince a court of law. Nevertheless it is surely significant that in three families which, to my certain knowledge, have had no contact for the best part of a century, traditions should have persisted having about them a strong 'whiff of the sea.'

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All that we can do is to lay these traditions alongside the few facts which seem beyond dispute, that Miriam was a lady's maid in the household of Richard Twining, tea-importer and major share-holder in the East India Company and whose home was in Norfolk Street, and that Miriam used to attend Zoar Chapel in Great Alie Street, Whitechapel which was a mere stone's throw from St. Katherine's Dock with its great tea and spice warehouses.

The rest must, I think, be left to the reader's imagination for when evidence is exhausted we are left only with speculation. With his total preoccupation with spiritual matters Hugh's son Robert insisted that it was religious zeal that spurred Miriam's hurrying feet to 'worship with the saints' in her off-duty hours. But is it possible that Zoar Chapel held some more worldly attraction for her, especially when a certain ship was in port?

In spite of this last cynical thought it has to be admitted that Miriam's very real Calvinism persisted throughout her life. While her children were small one imagines that she and Hugh attended the Faringdon Chapel. But the Alivescot Chapel Book tells us that by 1841 (when her children were aged between fifteen years and six) 'Mrs Miriam Pigott of Faringdon' was a member and remained so for twenty years.

There is nothing to show that Hugh had shifted his allegiance so one has to imagine Miriam, accompanied by one or more of her six children, driving the pony and trap twelve miles each Sunday (or perhaps every other Sunday) to listen to some favourite and eloquent preacher.

SOURCES: Parish Registers of Faringdon, Alpheton, Letcombe Regis and St. Clements Danes, London

Census Returns for Faringdon, East Hanney, Bampton and Cheltenham Faringdon

Tithe Conversion Map of 1847

Kelly's Directories

Records of the Church Missionary Society

Memoirs of Robert Pigott. Writings of Emma Jane Allen

Correspondence with Samuel Twining

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