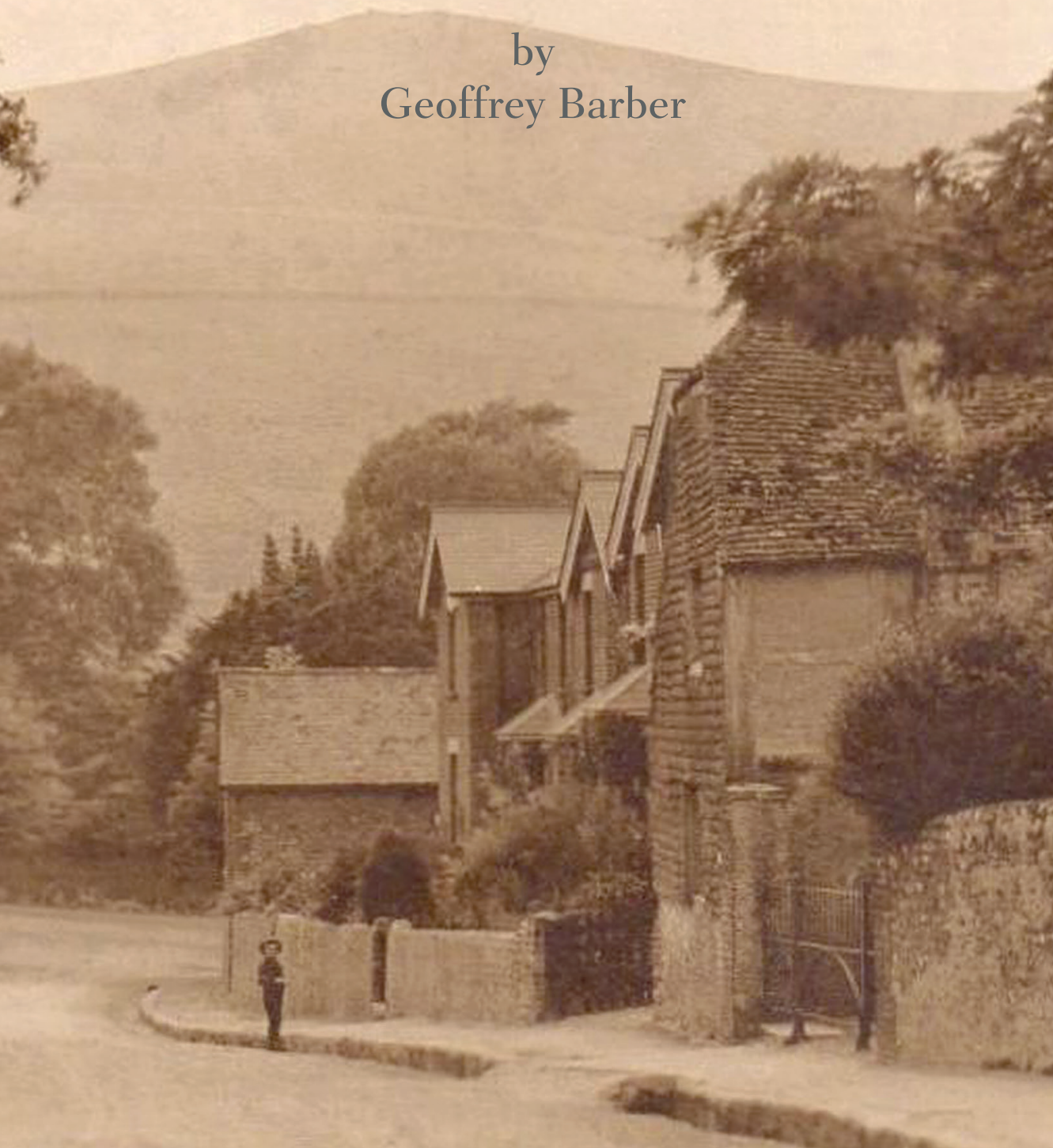


George Meek's Grandfather

by
Geoffrey Barber



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Cover image from a c1912 Judges' postcard (no. 997) titled "Church St
and Downs, Willingdon, Sussex".

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Song of the Chair-Men

We do not live, we only starve and linger;
We do not hope, we only drift along;
We have no faith, the years have made us faith-less
Come! listen to the chair-men's feeble song.

We have no grip on life all things pervading,
We have no cheer but what to-day may bring;
There is no love for those who walk in darkness,
Oh! listen while the trailing chair-men sing.

God send us help, or else there is no saviour;
God send us hope, or else we die in pain:
God send us light, or else we blindly falter,
God send us quickly back to sleep again.

Blindly we strive, the vultures gather round us,
Weakly we seek to arm ourselves and stand;
We may not fly, there is no welcome waiting
For such as us in all this teeming land.

We would be men, and do men's work untiring;
We would be free and never know a care;
We would be strong and give for what life giveth,
But Hope lies wounded, dying everywhere.

We would achieve, would quarry stones or build them
We've but our manhood left to us to save.
Oh! Land of England! is there none to help us?
Is life just this and presently the grave?

George Meek

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Introduction

GEORGE MEEK (1868-1921) is well known in Eastbourne where he worked as a lowly bath chair-man ¹ and lived in poverty for most of his life. He is remembered for one thing – he wrote a book about his life for which the well-known author H.G. Wells wrote an introduction. This guaranteed that it would be a success, which it was in both England and the USA. ²

You are probably thinking “Why H.G. Wells?” and the answer is that they had met through their common interest in socialism. George had sought H.G. Wells’ advice on writing a book and as there was so little actually written by the working man, Wells suggested he write about himself, and supported George in his efforts.

George’s book, published in 1910, is titled *George Meek, Bath Chair-Man, By Himself*. His memory was kept alive by Bill Coxall and Clive Griggs when they published *George Meek Labouring Man: Protégé of H.G. Wells* in 1996. George has well and truly earned a place in the history of Eastbourne and the fledgling socialist movement.

However, George MEEK’s legacy to me has nothing to do with socialism but rather the description of his life growing up with his grandparents, my 3x great grandparents. This is pure gold to a family history researcher such as myself.

In this article I hope to provide greater background on this part of his family and in particular to single out his grandfather, Benjamin KNIBBS OTHERWISE HUMPHRIES, a labouring man himself who is never mentioned by name in the book but who, on his death in 1878, was described by George thus:

He had been always, if anything, too kind to me. He more than filled the place of my father, whom I never remember seeing. I was very greatly attached to him, and delighted to be with him in the fields, or going to Polegate with him on a load of corn.

In George MEEK’s life of so much poverty and suffering I was understandably proud to read that my 3x great grandfather was a good and kindly man. His own story of hardship and suffering deserves to be told.

1 A Bath chair (named after its city of origin, Bath) was a popular form of transport for ladies and people convalescing at sea-side resorts and was used for journeys to the theatre, shopping or sightseeing. The chair was on two large wheels with a smaller pivoting wheel at the front which could be turned with a long handle. The vehicle was either pushed or pulled by the chair-man. (Coxall & Griggs, p97).

2 A detailed review of the book was published in The New York Times on 25 June 1910.

Early Years in Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire

Benjamin was baptised 15th October 1820 at Tingewick, Buckinghamshire, the son of Henry HUMPHRIES and Diana LINES. He was baptised as Benjamin KNIBBS which in itself tells a story. His father Henry was illegitimate and although his legal name was HUMPHRIES he preferred to be known by his mother's maiden name of KNIBBS. ³

Benjamin HUMPHREYS [sic] married Elizabeth BULL, daughter of Thomas BULL and Martha BANDY, on 1st June 1841 at Tingewick, Buckinghamshire. Six days later they are recorded in the 1841 census residing in Tingewick, living next to (or with) Elizabeth's brother Richard BULL and his wife Sarah (Ben's sister). Ben's father Henry and siblings Nathan and George were living in the village of Finmere, Oxfordshire which is only about two kilometres away. ⁴

George writes that Ben:

... in his young days, while employed in London, had taught himself to read and write. Later he had been in some sort of service under the last Duke of Buckingham at Stowe House, Buckinghamshire [now a National Trust property] but in what capacity I do not know. There used to be a good deal of talk of poachers and poaching, so I should say he was either an under-game-keeper or one of their natural enemies — a poacher himself. When the Duke of Buckingham died there was a great sale at Stowe House, at which, I have heard my grandfather [Benjamin] say, a Lord Rothschild outbid the late Queen Victoria for a valuable bedstead. [The first Duke of Buckingham and Chandos died in 1839. The second Duke declared bankruptcy in 1847 and the first auction of Stowe House contents took place in Aug-Sep 1848]. He himself bought some old Windsor chairs from the kitchen, which, with their brightly burnished brass crests — consisting of a sheaf of wheat surmounted by a crown and surrounded by a motto — were among the most familiar

3 Henry's mother Elizabeth KNIBB had married a HUMPHREYS/HUMPHRIES but he had left her so she started using her maiden name. This was documented in a removal order for Rose Hannah HUMPHYRES [sic] from Eastbourne to Finmere, 8 Aug 1864. (ESRO DE/B 26/71). Henry's father is unknown but because he was born after Elizabeth's marriage (after her husband had left her) his legal surname is HUMPHREYS/HUMPHRIES.

4 The book *The Millennium History of Finmere* by the Finmere and Little Tingewick Historical Society (2001) has a drawing of the 1840 tithe map of the village of Finmere showing the houses & tenants and where Ben's father Henry KNIBBS lived.

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objects of my early childhood. When, in after years, my grandmother died and left them to me with the rest of her furniture, being out of work I was glad of the fancy price they fetched.

Ben and Elizabeth had four known children, all baptised at Finmere, Oxfordshire: Rose Hannah (1842-1871), Ann Elizabeth (1843-1872), Sarah (1846-1883) and Henry (1849-1849). Sadly, Elizabeth died on 20 April 1849 and was buried at Finmere. Ben also lost his 1 month old son Henry just three weeks later on 12th May 1849. Elizabeth's cause of death was mucous irritation (14 days) and ulceration of the intestine, and her age given on her death certificate is 34 years.

In the 1851 census Benjamin is a wagoner living in Ludgershall, Buckinghamshire and working on a property of 240 acres for Ralph & Jane SMITH under the name KNIBBS. His future second wife, Elizabeth MOORE, is also living in the village with her widowed father and illegitimate son, Charles. Ben appears to have arranged for his children to be looked after in Finmere as his three daughters were living there with Ann MOLDER, an unmarried pauper aged 60 years. Ann was possibly connected to the family as she had been a witness/sponsor to the baptisms for Ann Elizabeth in 1843 and Sarah in 1846, and Rose Hannah states in 1864 that she was born "in the house of Ann MOULDER [sic]".⁵

In 1852 Benjamin HUMPHRY [sic] married Elizabeth MOORE in the registration district of Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. There appear to have been no children from this marriage.

A New Life in Sussex

Sometime after this marriage Benjamin, Elizabeth and the three surviving children, Rose Hannah, Ann Elizabeth, and Sarah moved to Sussex. George MEEK writes that Ben:

... came to the neighbourhood of Eastbourne from Buckinghamshire with a farmer named Paxton, who had taken a farm at Willingdon. Here they occupied an old flint cottage which stood upon the corner of the main road and Church Street where "Flint House" now stands [now also known as

5 Removal order for Rose Hannah Humphryes [sic] from Eastbourne to Finmere, 8 Aug 1864. (ESRO DE/B 26/71)

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Five Gables]. Leaving Mr. Paxton's service after a time my grandfather entered that of another farmer named Reid at Jevington. Here he did some poaching. My grandmother has often spoken of burying fur and feathers to elude the search of their cottage made for them by game-keepers. Butcher's meat was scarce and dear in the country in those days. I do not suppose my grandfather's wages were very high. There were three growing girls to be kept and doubtless an occasional hare or partridge was acceptable.

The "farmer named Paxton" would have been John PAXTON, baptised 14th September 1817 at Finmere, Oxfordshire. He is listed in the 1861 census at Chalk Farm, Willingdon "a farmer of 1000 acres employing 30 labourers" and this where Ben would have worked.



Fig. 1. The west end of Church St, Willingdon c1905 showing the intersection with Red Lion Street, now called Coopers Hill, which was the main Eastbourne/London Road until the bypass (the A2270) was built in 1934. When they first arrived in Willingdon Benjamin's family lived in a cottage on the left hand corner of the intersection (the corner with the big tree "where "Flint House" now stands"). The cottage was demolished c1890s when Flint House/Five Gables was built on the site. Photo courtesy of Rosalind Hodge

GEORGE MEEK'S GRANDFATHER

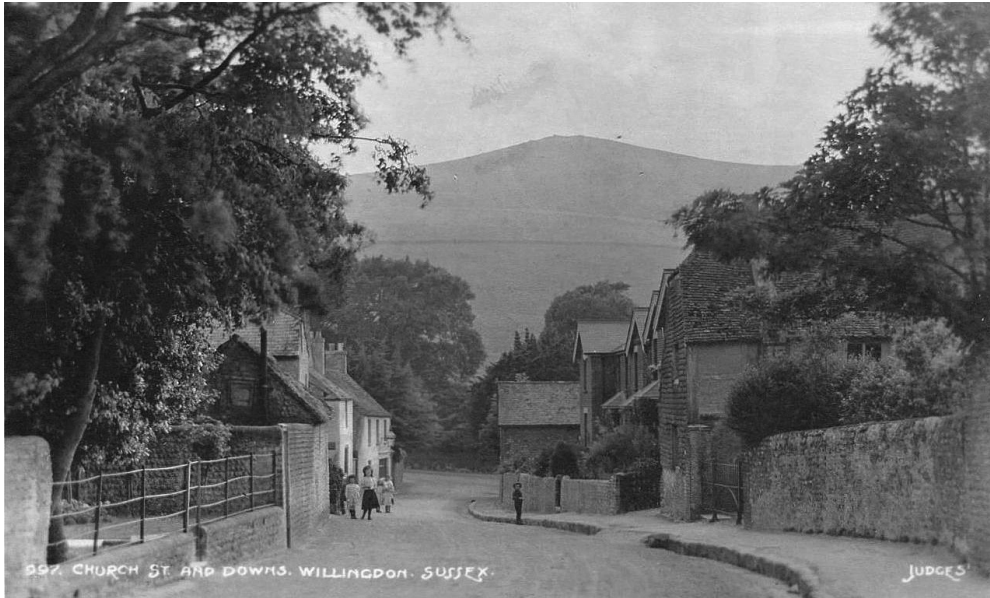


Fig. 2. A postcard c1912 of the same view as Fig. 1 but showing more detail up the hill and the Downs in the background.



Fig. 3. The farm house at Chalk Farm where Benjamin worked when he first arrived at Willingdon sometime in the 1850s. The house later became a hotel in the 1920s.

Photo courtesy of Rosalind Hodge.



Fig. 4. Photograph taken from inside Chalk Farm c1900. The entrance in the flint wall on the right is to the farm house. The track in front of this entrance leads down to Red Lion Street, now Coopers Hill. Photo courtesy of Rosalind Hodge.

Ben was living in Jevington at the time of the 1861 census. The “farmer named Reid” at Jevington was likely John REED at Street Farm. In the census he was a farmer of 377 acres employing 3 boys and 7 men. Street Farm is near the intersection of Jevington Road and Green Lane.

The Daughters

Ben’s three daughters grew into adulthood and all eventually married.

Rose Hannah was a servant in Brighton for the 1861 census. In 1864, at the age of 22 years, she gave birth to an illegitimate son Henry (Harry) Benjamin HUMPHRIES at Eastbourne. This resulted in her needing financial assistance (relief) from the parish of Eastbourne and as a result the Overseers of the Poor instigated an examination to determine the parish in which she had legal settlement (the parish where she had the right to live and receive welfare) so that, in theory, she could be removed to that parish. The surviving settlement examination documents reveal much about her and Benjamin’s family history. The final result of the examination was the issuing of removal orders on 1st August 1864 for Rose

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Hannah and Benjamin to return to Finmere, although Benjamin states he had never received any parish relief. The removal order appears to have never been enforced as they remained in Eastbourne. This may have had something to do with the Union Chargeability Act of 1865 which made paupers irremovable after one year's residence. Alternatively, the overseers may have been primarily concerned with just recovering the cost of Rose Hannah's poor relief from the parish of Finmere.

Rose Hannah married Richard MEEK in 1869 at Eastbourne and they had a daughter Elizabeth in 1870 who died only two months old. At the time of the 1871 census they were living in Arundel where Harry was now known as Harry MEEK. Rose Hannah died in 1871 at age 29 years of consumption and was buried on 28th May 1871 at St Nicholas Church, Arundel. Harry was subsequently raised by his grandparents, Benjamin and Elizabeth, although he must have remained close to his step-father, Richard MEEK, as they both later immigrated to Canada where they died. Richard had a second marriage to Clara SMITH in 1875 at Hastings, and it is probably not coincidental that when Harry left his grandmother sometime after 1880 that he also moved to Hastings where he married Charlotte SHOESMITH in 1885. Harry, Charlotte and family immigrated to Canada in 1907 and have many descendants there today.

Ann Elizabeth was working as a servant at the Commercial Hotel in Eastbourne in 1861 under the name Anne NIBBS. She married William GODDEN, a fireman for the South Coast Railway, on 5th March 1865 at Eastbourne. They lived in Brighton and had four children before Ann also died at age 29 years on 6th October 1872 at Eastbourne of chronic nephritis (a kidney disease) and anasarca (swelling of the skin due to liver failure). She was buried at Eastbourne St Mary.

Sarah was living with her father and step-mother in Jevington in 1861. She married Joseph Edward MEEK (brother of Richard MEEK) on 1st January 1868 at Eastbourne. Their son George Edward MEEK was born there 6 months later on 1st June 1868. A second son, Moses Henry MEEK, was born in 1870 and she was to have more children in the USA after emigrating there in 1871, although she returned in 1877. She was to outlive her sisters and die of consumption in 1883 at age 37 years.

Enter George and Harry Meek

In 1871 George's parents immigrated to the USA arriving New York on 20th June 1871. They took Moses with them but left George behind to be raised by his grandparents, Benjamin and Elizabeth, as he was considered too weak to travel. Also left in the care of the grandparents was Harry MEEK, son of Ben's eldest daughter Rose Hannah who had died just before Sarah and Joseph emigrated. George was just three years old and Harry was seven years.

George MEEK writes about his life with his grandparents. It appears that they were living in Eastbourne to begin with:

My home life during this period was very happy. My grandparents were very good to me, and although we were poor we never knew what it was to want. My grandmother went out to work occasionally, but not, I think, regularly. I can remember her at a laundry in Cavendish Place, where I was anxious to turn the mangle; but I remember more distinctly her lace-making. She had a "pillow" and boxes of "bobbins," and with these she made excellent hand lace. She told me in after years that she used to sit on the beach in front of the Grand Parade with this work in the summer time and that she found some good customers for it among the passing gentry. I remember that one day she went over the rocks close to the Wish Tower to gather limpets, and that she fell and cut her face dreadfully. Part of the time we lived in a little two-roomed cottage in a yard, or "close," off Grove Road. This has since been demolished. Here, I remember, my grandfather brought out his gun and shot some starlings, which he had, baked in a pie, for supper. I think I must have been left by myself a great deal, or at most with my cousin, a lad who at that time could not have been more than seven or eight years old. There are recollections of lonely meals I ate, of no care except from him, of long evenings spent waiting for grandfather and grandmother to come home. They always came home sober. I do not remember seeing my grandfather the worse for drink except on one occasion, and that was on a Christmas Day. He had a glass or two of ale every day, but I gather that he never exceeded. My grandmother was never addicted to drink. She was careful, fond of her home, making no silly pretensions, but just anxious to live a quiet, comfortable life. One incident I recall with reference to her at this time. She had bought a new pair of boots at a local shop on a Saturday night. On Sunday she and

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grand- father went for a walk along the sands, and the soles of her new boots fell off! She loomed very large in my early days. When she was at home I spent most of my out- of-school hours with her. When I was sick — I remember only one occasion, when I had the measles — she nursed me, giving me, by the doctor's orders, port wine, a drink which I preferred very much to the nasty medicine. For some years afterwards whenever I felt I wanted something particularly nice I complained of feeling ill, and begged for more port wine. Then I had trouble with my teeth, which she tried to relieve by rubbing my gums with coarse salt. Also there were warm baths and shower baths, the latter administered by means of a garden watering-pot; nauseous castor-oil every now and then; pennies for sweets, which were often spent on children's books. Of these I acquired quite a large collection, and my grandfather bound them into one large volume. I suppose I could not read very well at that time, as I used to get him, when I bought a new book, to read it to me. The last year or two of our stay in Eastbourne we occupied three back rooms in a house in Cross Street, for which, I understand, my people paid four shillings and sixpence per week. While we were there the notable fire at Peerless' yard occurred. It was my habit on fine days, though I was very young, to go up and meet my grandfather in the evening when his work was done. I believe I spent much of my spare time with him. I remember going to the brick-yards with him, where I used to watch him load his cart with bricks. He put on his hands a pair of leather things like gloves with no backs to them. Then a man would throw bricks to him, three at a time, from a large stack; these he caught, piling them in his cart. It was amusing when I walked home with him to hear the tramp, tramp of his great hob- nailed boots and the pitter, patter of my little ones."

Their time in Eastbourne came to an end and the family then moved to Jevington, back to Street Farm which, according to the 1881 census, was occupied by Charles EDWARDS, a farmer of 318½ acres employing six men and one boy. A photograph of the cottage that Ben and his family lived in there is shown in Fig. 5.

In 1874, when I was six years old, my grand- father gave up his place at Peerless the builder's and took service as ploughman with a farmer named Edwards at Jevington, a village five miles over the hills and seven miles

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by road from Eastbourne. My grandfather was allowed the use of a farm wagon to remove our furniture from Eastbourne to Jevington. This, drawn by three huge brown horses whose names I subsequently learned were "Cubit," "Captain" and "Smiler," caused me great wonder. It had no tail-board at the back, simply a wooden bar across the top from side to side, and at the bottom a roller, through two holes in which long loose pegs were passed. This, I learned afterwards, was used when the wagon was loaded very high (with hay or com, for instance) to tighten the ropes which were passed over it from the front. The horses were gay with much jingling, brightly burnished brass about their harness, and blue, red and yellow ribbons on their bridles. I, my grandmother and my cousin Harry rode on top of the furniture. I do not remember much of the journey, except that when we had passed Wannock Glen my cousin got down and gathered a large bunch of primroses for me, so it must have been in the early spring. It is curious how little incidents of this kind are retained in the memory. I can see him now, a rough-clad little boy, handing the big bunch of yellow flowers up to me as I sat on the wagon. When we reached our little cottage we found there was no fire-grate in it. A broken one was borrowed. This had to be kept upright with two or three loose bricks. It had originally been a four-legged affair, but two of the legs had been broken off. We made shift with this for a time until a new one was bought. When my grandmother wanted to make a cake for Sunday's tea, and was not using the large brick oven in the washhouse, she baked it by placing it under the grate with a sheet of tin over it to keep the ashes from falling into it. This cottage can still be seen. It stands on the right, just inside the upper end of the village, opposite a large barn. They found that my cousin Harry was not needed, so they sent him into the workhouse. But he was not there long. My grandfather, much to my delight, fetched him out to be his ploughboy. Poor Harry never had much education.

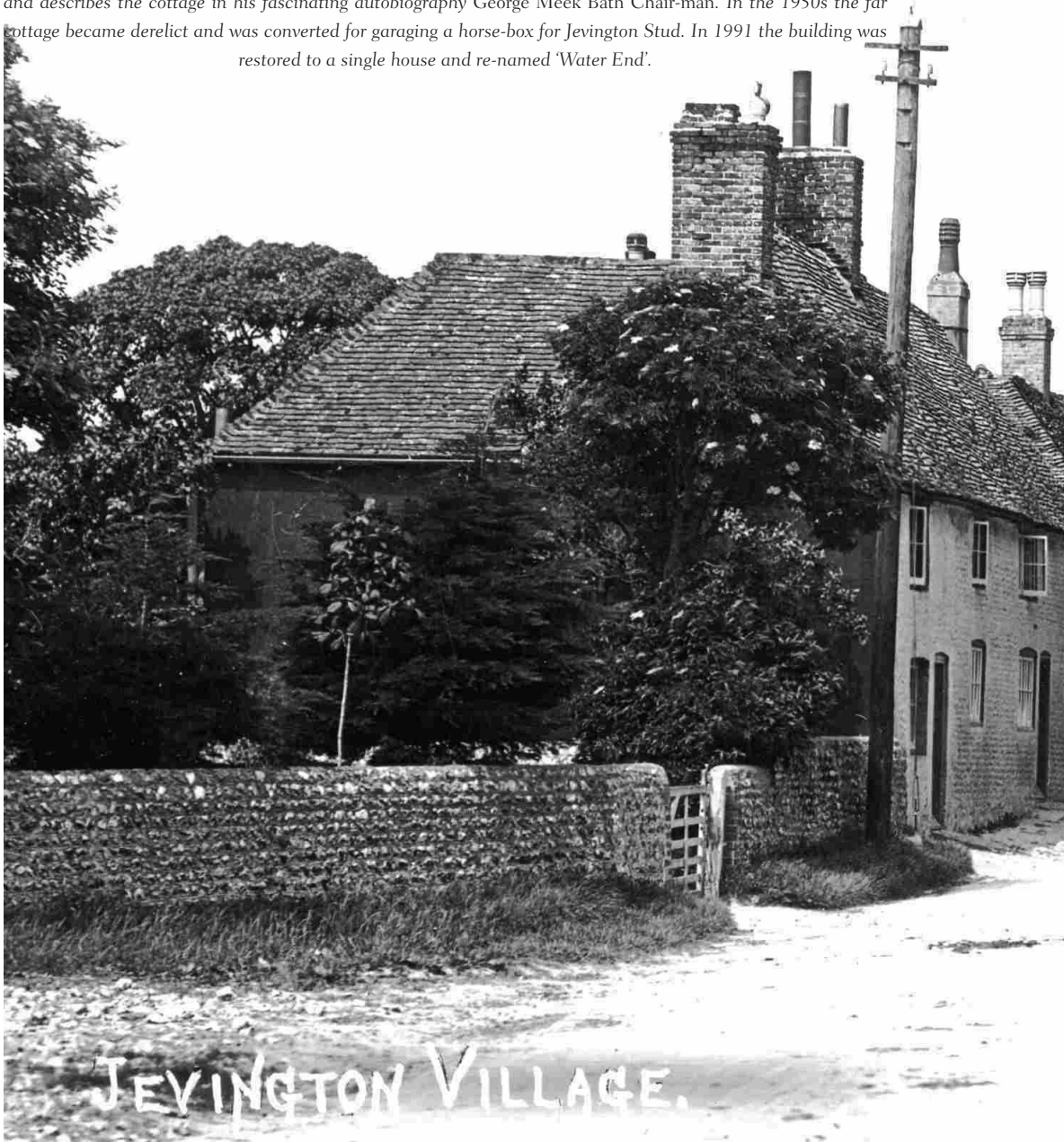
The cottage had about ten rods of garden attached. This ran down the side, the larger part given over to vegetables, but a long slip of it under a wall contained, among other things, flowers the seeds of which had been sent us from Ohio. This was my grandmother's special care. One year we tried to

continued on page 16

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Fig. 5. Benjamin KNIBBS otherwise HUMPHRIES and his second wife Elizabeth MOORE lived in Jevington in the 1870s in one of the cottages on the left with grandsons George Edward MEEK and Harry (Henry) Benjamin MEEK.

From the book *Jevington, Wannock and Willingdon: A Portrait in Old Postcards and Photographs* by Rosalind Hodge (2003) – used with permission. Rosalind captions this 1913 postcard with: *These old flint cottages are on the corner of Green Lane, opposite the Old Post Office. George Meek lived here in the 1870s with his grandparents and describes the cottage in his fascinating autobiography *George Meek Bath Chair-man*. In the 1950s the far cottage became derelict and was converted for garaging a horse-box for Jevington Stud. In 1991 the building was restored to a single house and re-named 'Water End'.*





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grow some Indian corn, but though it grew very high and the ears developed, it never fully ripened. People passing in carriages would often stop to buy a bunch of flowers. My grandmother insisted always that only sweet-smelling ones were worth having, consequently in the summer her garden scented the whole place. There was a pear tree, the special resting-place, I used to think, of our cat, and in the wall, serving the two houses, a well, from the depths of which the buckets some- times brought up bright-coloured lizards with the water. The neighbours once gave me so much honey it made me ill.

In the autumn and winter my grandfather would go rabbit-shooting (he had the farmer's permission to do so over some downland), and often brought six or eight brace home with him, but I never remember seeing him with a partridge or pheasant, or even a hare. He was fond of animals, of his horses and our domestic pets, which consisted of a tabby cat, a blackbird, a gold-finch and a number of tame rabbits.

On December 6, 1876, my grandfather received a telegram from Brooklyn, N. Y., saying that a theatre had been burnt down, and my father had been one of the audience. Shortly after- wards a letter in a black-bordered envelope came from my mother. My grandfather was threshing oats with a flail in one of the barns. I was sent to him with it, and directly he saw it he broke down and cried like a child, for my father had been killed in the fire.”

Ben's reaction was understandable considering the deaths he had experienced in his family. Not only had he lost his first wife Elizabeth and son Henry in 1849, but two of his three daughters who came to Eastbourne with him were now deceased also: Rose Hannah in 1871 and Ann Elizabeth in 1873. Now he was faced with the death of his only surviving daughter's husband and the consequences this would have for the family.

Joseph's death in the Brooklyn Theatre fire on 5th December 1876 caused Sarah to return to Eastbourne. Her return in 1877 was a disappointment to George. He makes it clear in the book that he felt she was indifferent towards him and that she was “sometimes kind to me, sometimes otherwise”. Although his mother did live with them for a while, she moved to another house in Jevington after she began to quarrel with Elizabeth, with George remaining with his grandparents.

The End of Happy Days

Ben died on 4th October 1878 at Lower Willingdon. His death certificate states that he died of pneumonia (6 days) and was 59 years old. He was buried on the 8th October at St Mary the Virgin, Willingdon. His daughter Sarah MEEK, of Lower Willingdon, was present at the death.

But alas! and alas! my happy days — happy in spite of canings and motherly frowns — were numbered. My grandfather quarrelled with the farmer for whom he worked at Jevington, and taking service with another over the hills in a neighbouring village, had only been with him three weeks when he died of bronchitis, aged fifty-nine. His death was a great blow to me. He had been always, if anything, too kind to me. He more than filled the place of my father, whom I never remember seeing. I was very greatly attached to him, and delighted to be with him in the fields, or going to Polegate with him on a load of corn.

George MEEK was only 10 years old when Ben died. He then lived with his grandmother, Elizabeth, and his mother Sarah at Willingdon but with Ben gone their circumstances were now one of dire poverty. They lived on parish relief, Harry's earnings as a carter boy, and occasional work by Elizabeth and Sarah.

George's time with his grandparents ended when he was 12 years old (1880) when he left his grandmother Elizabeth to live with his mother and her new partner George MOCKETT in Eastbourne. Harry remained with Elizabeth for a short while but by the time of the 1881 census he had moved to Hastings where he was a brick maker's carter under the name Henry HUMPHREY. He remained there until 1907 when he immigrated to Vancouver, Canada with his wife and four children, still using the name Henry HUMPHREY.

In 1881 Elizabeth was lodging with George and Amelia PUTLAND and family in Willingdon and her occupation is given as lace maker. Rosalind Hodge, archivist for St Mary the Virgin, Willingdon, writes:

I found Elizabeth Knibbs in the 1881 census living a couple of doors away from Danns Farm [now named Portsdown Manor] and this would have been in a row of cottages named at various times Mewetts Row or Meachants Row [which were] demolished in the early 1960s.

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In the 1881 census we also find 13 year old George MEEK living with his mother Sarah and her partner George MOCKETT at 57 Susans Road in Eastbourne. Living with them are Sarah's two sons Joseph (9 years) and Arthur (4 years) who were born in Brooklyn, New York, and two month old Kate MOCKETT. George left home for good in 1883 (probably after the death of his mother) when he was 15 years old and described the three years with this family as:

... decidedly the most unhappy I have ever lived through. If my mother ever gave me a kind word I do not remember it.

George writes that he saw his grandmother again in 1883 just after the death of his mother and that he then visited her regularly every Sunday while she lived in Willingdon and he lived in Eastbourne. At the end of 1888 Elizabeth moved to Eastbourne to be near him as she was getting frail. George "took a small unfurnished room for her in Susan's Road".

Elizabeth died in 1890:

My grandmother's illness gave me my first experience as a sick nurse. I sat up two or three nights with her; then she was taken to the infirmary, where she died.

George later writes:

The old lady was getting more feeble; she was close upon seventy-four, and early in the following March 1890 she contracted bronchitis, and died a few days afterwards. She was buried at Langney [Langney cemetery in Eastbourne] on a very windy day, I being the only mourner. She had always been very fond of me; no mother could have been more kind.

Last Words

Ben is to be admired for the way he kept his family together in the face of adversity. He overcame the death of his first wife by remarrying and taking his new wife and three surviving daughters from Finmere, Oxfordshire to Willingdon in Sussex where they grew to adulthood and were eventually married. He experienced the early death of two of these daughters and then raised two of his grandchildren. One is left with an impression of a hardworking, kindly man who kept his family together throughout a difficult life. He made the best of a life where poverty, hardship and loss were a constant threat and an almost inevitable consequence of their way of life and the times in which they lived.

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September 2015

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The author is a descendant of Benjamin's daughter Ann Elizabeth HUMPHRIES who married William GODDEN on 5th March 1865.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

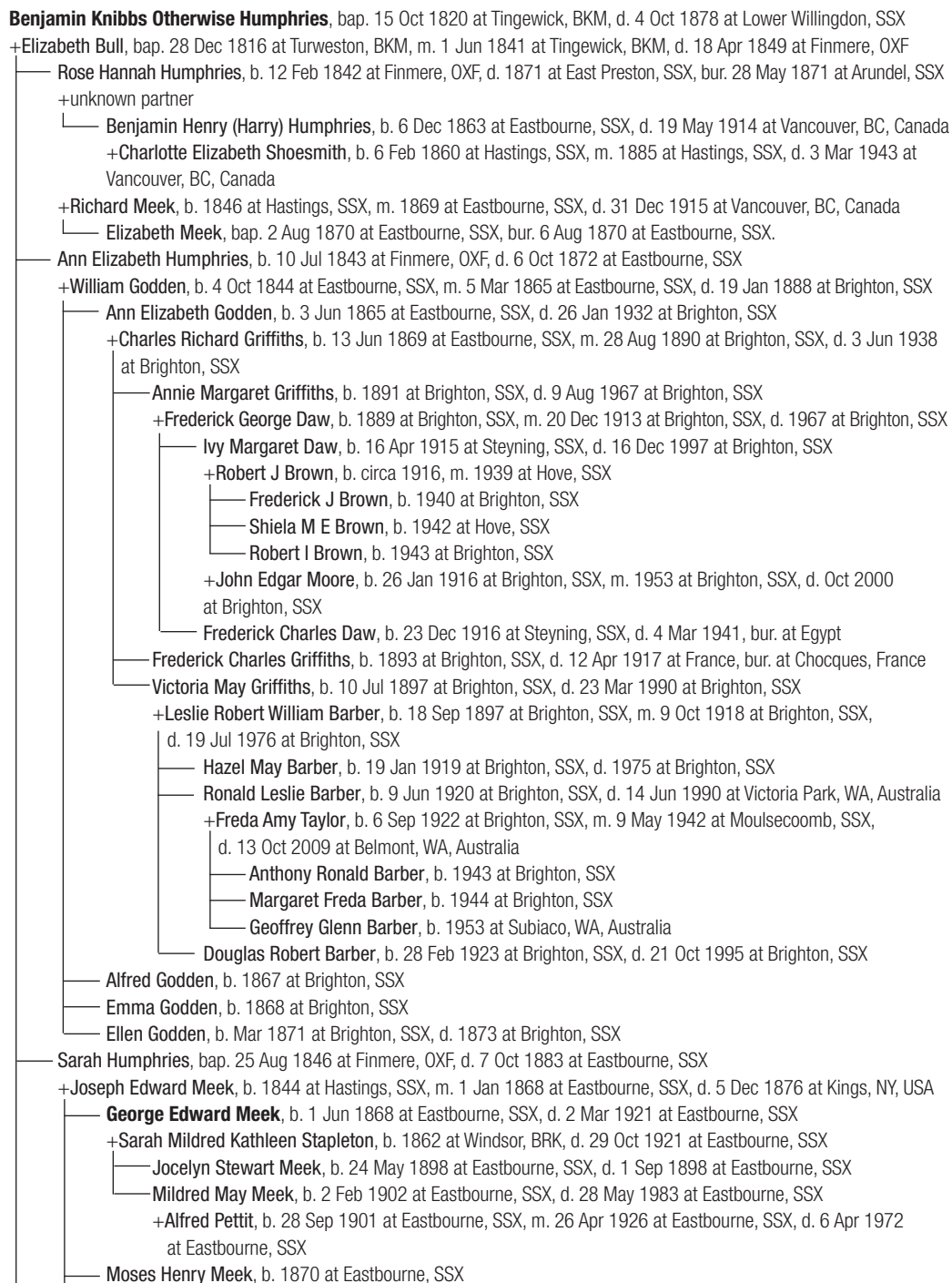
The author wishes to acknowledge the work done by Patricia Armstrong on this family. Patricia was the first to inform me (in 2011) of George Meek's book and her helpful emails have pointed the way forward for my research on this family. Some of the information in this article is the result of her research.

The author also wishes to thank:

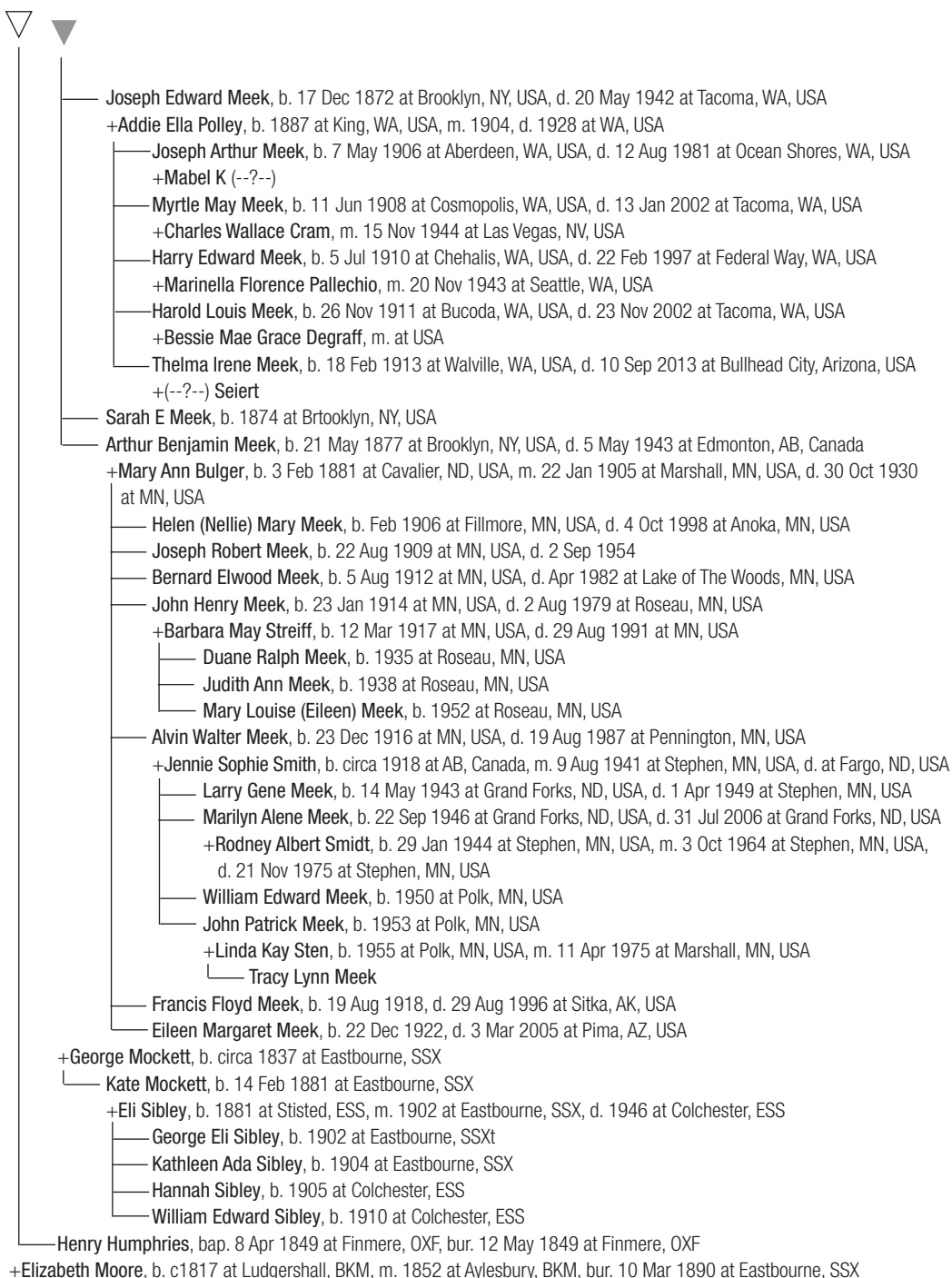
- ~ Rosalind Hodge, archivist at St Mary the Virgin, Willingdon and author of the book *Jevington, Wannock and Willingdon: A Portrait in Old Postcards and Photographs* (2003) for providing photographs for this article and also for providing information on the history of Willingdon.
- ~ Ralph Wilkins of Eastbourne for his transcription/extract of the Settlement Examination of Rose Hannah Humphyres [sic] (ESRO DE/B26/71).

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APPENDIX I Descendants Chart



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APPENDIX II

Settlement Examination of Rose Hannah Humphyres

Background to Settlement Examinations and Removals

The Act of Settlement and Removal (1662) established the need to prove entitlement to poor relief (money, food, clothing, etc.) by the issuing of **Settlement Certificates**. The certificates proved which parish a family belonged to and therefore which parish had the legal responsibility to provide poor relief if needed. The certificate gave the right of a person to live and receive welfare in their parish of legal settlement. Settlement certificates were issued by the Overseers of the Poor.

In the event of the parish authorities discovering that a person was likely to become a financial burden and become chargeable to the parish (for situations such as illegitimacy, illness or vagrancy), the parish authorities undertook a Settlement Examination. The examination took place under the auspices of the Overseers of the Poor and a Justice of the Peace and was carried out to determine whether the person had a legitimate right to residency in the parish.

Following the findings, a guilty person would be served a Removal Order and then, forcibly if necessary, removed from the parish. These procedures were part of what is known as the Old Poor Law.

A person gained the right of settlement under the following conditions:

- A new born child took the father's settlement regardless of the place of birth.
- A parish apprentice from the age of seven who served and lived in the same parish for 40 consecutive days.
- A married trader or person renting a smallholding or farm who had stayed for 12 months, paid parish rates and rented property over £10 per year.
- An unmarried man who had worked for a year in the parish.
- A woman took the settlement of the man she married and a widow who remarried took the husband's settlement.
- Servants who stayed one year from date of hiring, and left with full wages.
- A person who inherited an estate of land and lived on the estate for more than 40 days.

In 1834 the **Poor Law Amendment Act** was enacted which removed the provision of poor relief from the parish. Poor Law Unions were created (new local government units) run by a board of guardians elected by ratepayers from their constituent parishes. A workhouse was established in every poor law union supervised by a workhouse master and matron.

The concept of settlement was not abolished though and the right to institute the removal process remained with the parish officers and not the elected guardians up until 1865. The newly established poor law unions became the district of settlement entitlement.

The Union Chargeability Act of 1865 made paupers irremovable after one year's residence, and settlement law essentially became a means of cost allocation between poor law unions. It is estimated that in 1867 there were 4,700 removal orders in England and Wales.

References:

<http://www.genguide.co.uk/source/settlement-certificatesexaminations-and-removal-orders-parish-amp-poor-law/173/>

Charlesworth, Lorie: *Welfare's Forgotten Past: A Socio-Legal History of the Poor Law*, Published by Routledge-Cavendish, 2010.

Settlement Examination of Rose Hannah Humphyres

[Extracted by Ralph D Wilkins on 18th August 2015 from file reference DE/B 26/71 located in the East Sussex Record Office (ESRO), The Keep, Brighton.]

Item 1 of 6 pieces

[Note: Item 1 is a full transcription.]

[// shows page break in original document, an unreadable word]

22nd June 1864

Rose Hannah Humphyres. I am a single woman and the daughter of Benjamin Humphyres (usually called Nibbs) he is a carter and is now residing at No 11 Tower Street Eastbourne, where he has lived about a year, my mother is dead, she died about 15 years ago, she died at Finmere near Buckenham in Oxfordshire where we were then living. Finmere is about 4 miles from Buckenham. I believe I was born in Finmere in 1842. My father was married to my mother before Elizabeth Bull at Tingewich a village between Buckenham and Finmere they were married before I was born my father has since married again – I have never lived with my father very little since he has been married to his 2nd wife, he has been married to her about 11 or 12 years. I came into this house in or about the 8th May 1863 and staid here till 14th May 1864 during which time I was Union charged. I came into the house again on the 10th day of June // since which time I

GEORGE MEEK'S GRANDFATHER

have been charged to the Parish of Eastbourne. I was confined on the 6th of December last with my little boy his name is registered as Benjamin Henry Humphyres.

23rd June 1864

Benjamin Humphyres otherwise Benjamin Nibbs- states that he is now residing at Eastbourne that the Pauper was born in the Parish of Finmere. That we do not know where he was born, that is father and mother are both dead, has an elder brother about 10 years older than himself now living at Finmere that he has never received any relief from any Parish neither did his father that he remembers except on one occasion when he received relief from the Buckenham Union on account of an accident he received on the Railway. That he has no knowledge where his father was born. That his Grandfather // always went by the Surname of Nibbs so did his father and he has always gone by the same name but was married to paupers mother by the Surname of Humphyres.

[Above hand written in pen, below also - written in a different style with small writing containing many mistakes and much crossing out.]

No date given

William Nibbs saith I am now 52 years of age and have been in the Parish of Chipping Warden in the county of Northamptonshire where I was born. My brother Benjamin I remember was born in the Parish of Tingewick in the County of Buckenham and was baptised at the church there. Mr William Neal of this Parish Labourer was one of his Godfathers the other one is dead, my father Henry Nibbs was illegitimate and was born as I have heard in the Parish of Whitfield in the County of Northamptonshire. My father afterwards married Diannah Vines and was removed in or about the year 1814 under an order of removal from the Parish of Whitfield to the Parish of Finmere. I do not remember my mother or father ever receiving relief from the Parish except on one occasion when the Parish Doctor - my Grandmother Elizabeth Nibbs was in receipt of relief for many years before she died from Finmere Parish whilst she was residing at Whitfield where she died about 2 years ago. My Aunt Susan Nibbs is now living there and receiving relief from this Parish.

Geoffrey Barber

My Grandmother married Henry Humphryes who left her shortly afterwards and my Grandmother resumed her maiden name of Nibbs and all the family have always gone by that name – I do not know nor ever heard where Humphryes belonged I do not think it was in this Parish.

After my father was removed from Whitfield here he also lived, here he never served as Parish Constable or overseer – My father was about 71 years of age when he died which was about 3 years ago. I have understood that my Grandmother gained a settlement in Finmere Parish by living and service. The nearest money order and officer is Buckenham.

Robert Greaves the landlord of the Kings Head Inn states I am now about 58 years of age and have been living in this Parish all my life. My father was one of the Constables of the parish in or about the year 1814. I remember his being sent for when Henry Nibbs was sent home to the Parish under an order of Removal along with his wife William and Sarah two of their children to break open a door of one of the cottages used as poor cottages to gain admittance. I have served as an Overseer of this Parish on several occasions.

[All above written on a single sheet of blue paper divided into 4 pages. Any spaces between paragraphs have pencil notes inserted indicating location of parishes. These have not been transcribed.]

Item 2 of 6 pieces

A notelet dated 25 July 1864 from Bacon house Finmere stating:

They must have forfeited the right to settlement due to having lived outside the Parish for over 14 years and she is capable of looking after herself if healthy”

Signed by Jeffery Tredwell Overseer.

[Hand written in ink on cream coloured paper complete with very small envelope addressed to Eastbourne Vestry Office includes a Victorian Penny Red stamp.]

GEORGE MEEK'S GRANDFATHER

Item 3 of 6 pieces

A Removal Order dated 1st August 1864 from the Overseers of the Poor of Eastbourne to their counterparts in Finmere for the removal of Rose Hannah Nibbs alias Humphyres , Benjamin Nibbs alias Humphyres and Henry Miller Emary [unclear]

Item 4 of 6 pieces

Order from Justices of the Peace dated 9th August 1864 listing the followings grounds for removal:

For that said Rose Hannah Nibbs alias Humphyres who has never married and who has never done any act whereby to gain a settlement in her own right is the lawful daughter of Benjamin Nibbs alias Humpyhres and Elizabeth his late wife who were legally settled inhabitants of your said Parish of Finmere.

And that that the said Rose Hannah Nibbs alias Humphyres was born on or about the 12th Day of February in the year in or about 1842 in a house occupied by one Ann Moulder situate in your said Parish of Finmere wherein her said mother and father then dwell.

And that the said Benjamin Nibbs alias Humphyres is the said father of the said pauper and Rose Hannah Nibbs alias Humphyres has never done any act whereby to gain a settlement in his own right.

And for that Henry Nibbs alias Humphyres the father of Benjamin Nibbs alias Humphyres the father of the pauper Rose Hannah Nibbs alias Humphyres was born in or about the year 1814 with his wife Diana and their then two children removed under an order of Justices from the Parish of Whitfield in the County of Northamptonshire to your said Parish of Finmere against which said order no appeal whatsoever was made.

And also for that the said Rose Hannah Nibbs alias Humphyres has had an illegitimate child namely Benjamin Nibbs now aged 8 months or there

Geoffrey Barber

about which said child is now residing with her and chargeable to our said Parish of Eastbourne.

*Signed by Churchwardens and Overseers for the Poor
Wm Brodie James Dryter Caleb Diplock*

[Above documents (items 3 and 4 are pre-printed large forms in size A1 with names inserted by hand) were prepared by Messer's Gell and Son with a covering letter dated 9th August 1864 which simply stated:]

*Dear Sirs, Re R H Nibbs alias Humphries removal
I send you orders and grounds for removal herein.
Signed J Lovell for Mr Gell.*

Item 5 of 6 pieces

A bill dated 2nd September 1864 to The Churchwardens and the Overseers of the Poor of the Parish of Finmere in the County of Oxford.

*To amount paid for the maintenance of Hannah Rose Nibbs alias Humphries and her illegitimate child from the sending of the order for their removal to this date: £1 8s 0d.
Signed J W C Coles Esq.*

[J W Campion Coles held the post of Eastbourne Borough (Vestry) Secretary for over 25 years and is often praised for his accurate book and record keeping]

Item 6 of 6 pieces

A notelet dated 23 September 1864 from Bacon House Finmere stating:

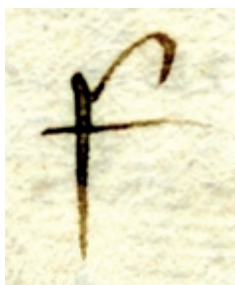
*...charge too high but on receiving a fully detailed bill will settle in a proper manner”
Signed by Mrs Tredwell on behalf of her husband Jeffery Tredwell both Overseers.*

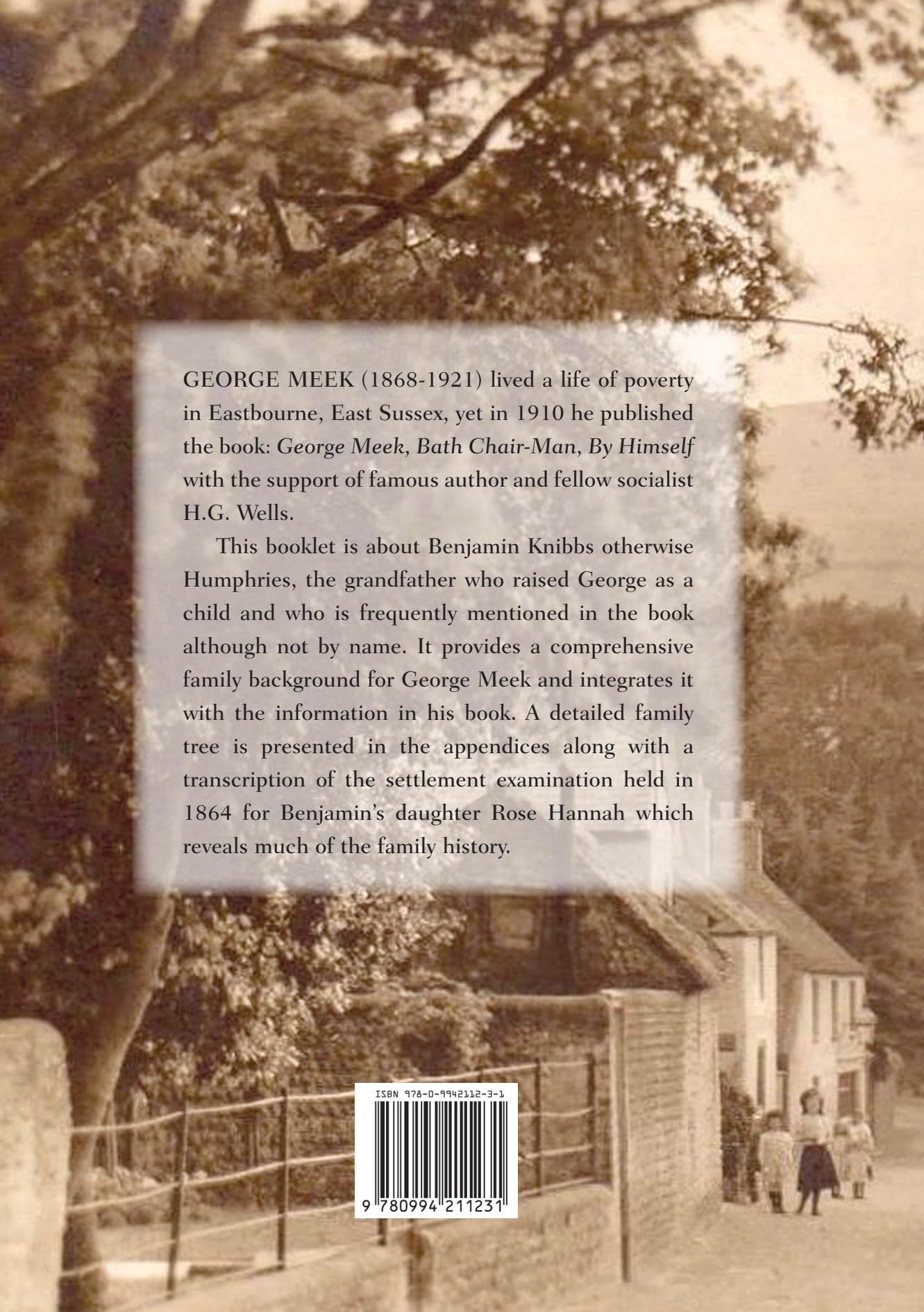
[Hand written in ink on cream coloured paper complete with envelope addressed to Eastbourne Vestry Office includes a Victorian Penny Red stamp.]

COMMENTS (G.G. Barber)

There appear to be some inaccuracies in the information provided to the Overseers:

1. Item 1, 2nd section (23 June 1864): Benjamin is said to state "*That his Grandfather always went by the Surname of Nibbs*". This should be Grandmother, not Grandfather. His Grandfather was a Humphreys who left his Grandmother Elizabeth soon after they married. Elizabeth reverted to her maiden name of Nibbs after he left and her children took this name although their legal name was Humphreys. It could also refer to Benjamin's father, Henry.
2. Item 1, 3rd section (no date given): William Nibbs states that Diannah Vines is the wife of Henry Nibbs, father of William and Benjamin. This should be Diana Lines/Lynes (not Vines). Research indicates that she was probably known as Hannah as the only possible baptism for daughter Sarah is to Henry and Hannah Nibbs in 1813 at Whitfield (Henry's birthplace). Also, we know that in 1814 Henry and family were removed from Whitfield to Finmere where we find that Hannah Nibbs was buried on 25 Oct 1833 aged 43 (Henry would have been 45).
3. Item 1, 3rd section (no date given): William Nibbs states that his grandmother Elizabeth Nibbs died "*about 2 years ago*" – i.e. c1862. She actually died on 16 Sep 1842 at Whitfield (age 85 years) and was buried there on 19 Sep 1842. (GRO Death Certificate, Jul-Sep 1842, Brackley, Vol 15 Page 131). However, her daughter Susan Nibbs ("*Aunt Susan*") was living in Whitfield as stated and died there in 1867 (3 years after this settlement examination).
4. Item 1, 3rd section (no date given): William Nibbs states "*My Grandmother married Henry Humphyres who left her shortly afterwards*". Research by Patricia Armstrong gives the name as Jonathan Humphreys (married 19 Nov 1780 at Whitfield), not Henry, although this has not been verified. After Jonathan Humphreys left Elizabeth she had an illegitimate son, Henry, who was the father of Benjamin.
5. Item 1, 3rd section (no date given): William Nibbs states that his father Henry Nibbs died about 3 years ago at 71 years of age. This is true; he died on 8 July 1860 at Little Tingewick and was buried at Finmere on 10 July 1860 (age given as 72 years though). (GRO Death Certificate, Jul-Sep 1860, Tingewick, Vol 3a Page 283).





GEORGE MEEK (1868-1921) lived a life of poverty in Eastbourne, East Sussex, yet in 1910 he published the book: *George Meek, Bath Chair-Man, By Himself* with the support of famous author and fellow socialist H.G. Wells.

This booklet is about Benjamin Knibbs otherwise Humphries, the grandfather who raised George as a child and who is frequently mentioned in the book although not by name. It provides a comprehensive family background for George Meek and integrates it with the information in his book. A detailed family tree is presented in the appendices along with a transcription of the settlement examination held in 1864 for Benjamin's daughter Rose Hannah which reveals much of the family history.

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