# Harmsworth Family

## From Ros Otzen 28th April 2015

Ancestors William Harmsworth and Mary Harmsworth (nee Tyrrell) lived in East Meon in the 1780s and 1790s. (She may have lived there her whole life). They married on 5 July 1784.She was buried 5 December 1795 and William on 5 March 1797. William’s mother Elizabeth Harmsworth was buried there on 16 March 1797.

William’s brothers, John and wife Dinah Wilkes, and Charles and wife Mary, lived in West Meon at the same time. Their other brother Thomas was a Marine in the First Fleet to Australia, with his wife Alice and children accompanying him. They landed in Australia in January 1788 and Thomas died in April 1788. His wife never got to return to England. They are our ancestors.

Is there any trace of this family in your records? I imagine there would be no gravestone, but…?

Warm regards,

Ros Otzen

Melbourne, Australia

## From Michael Blakstad EMHG 28th April 2015

 Thanks for your query. This is just to acknowledge that your email has arrived. I am forwarding it to David Hopkins, who is our expert on the genealogy of village families. He is in the throes of studying for an Open University degree at the  moment, so forgive him if it should take him a while to respond …

My ancestors also sailed to Australia, in their case from Ireland, a bit later than Thomas Harmsworth. They settled in northern Victoria (the family myth being that Ned Kelly ‘knew’ my great great &c grandmother). Until very recently, the family has had land at Serpentine, north of Bendigo. I attended school, briefly, in Melbourne (Burke Hall, the prep school for Xavier) in 1949. At that stage we had relatives in Melbourne. I keep meaning to investigate them!

Anyway, I hope we can help you trace the Harmsworths of East Meon.

## From David Hopkins EMHG May 3rd

I have had a quick look at both the East and West Meon Parish Records and Harmsworth seem to have been on both parishes since records were kept (that is Mid 1500's). The most interesting entry I found was in the East Meon Parish Records where William Harmsworth of Froxfield (born 1739) married Elizabeth Eyles (borm 1753), eldest child of Richard Eyles (1729-1788) on 7 October 1779 at All Saints' East Meon. This is a family we know quite a lot about. They lived at a "big house" called Bereleigh, and other daughters married rich men (particularly a sister who married Cornthwaite Hector of neighbouring Bordean House, who set up the first local bank and owned breweries and then built an even bigger house (and went bankrupt but repaid all the investors!). So.....Elizabeth probably married a Harmsworth "of substance". He is described as a "farmer".

I suspect that the epicentre of Harmsworth genealogy is actually Froxfield which adjoins both East and West Meon.

Frustratingly, even though the parish records exist for Froxfield my so far attempts to read them have produced a nil result as they are so faded as to be unreadable in any light lit room. I hope to get better luck if I can view the micro fiches in a darkened room. This also accounts for why you cannot find them on line. Perhaps we will crack it in the end....but I'm sure some of your family secrets lie there!

## From Ros Otzen May 3rd 2015

This is magnificent! I am particularly pleased to know the family was in the area for centuries.  I’m part of a large group of descendants who have been looking for Tom Harmsworth for years. The most popular theory was he was born into the family of a Coachman, Richard Harmsworth, in Stepney – and yes, there is such a record. But this child died a year later.

All we had was his marriage to Alice Mansfield in Barkway, Hertfordshire in January 1780. We still have no clear idea why Tom was in Barkway – says on the marriage record, ‘resident in this Parish’ whereas for Alice it says ‘of this Parish’.

I was idly looking in Hertfordshire County Records, available on-line, and found a Poor Law exchange: this showed Tom had joined the West Kent militia as a substitute, probably in the big recruiting drive of 1778, and was thus entitled to Poor Law support for his wife, so he applied to have her transferred to his parish of Warnford. The documents from both ends of this deal are available. The Warnford clerk is a John Bull!  I presume Tom wanted his wife to get some help and care from his brothers and their families while he was away.

The Warnford letter names Alice as ‘Rachel’ – a clerical error. She had a baby daughter by the time Warnford agreed to accept her in December 1781 – little Ann. She is my husband’s ancestor, and came with her family to Australia on the First Fleet. A brother Thomas was born at Warnford in 1784 – I have a copy of the entry. Another child, John, was born on the ship, the *Prince of Wales*. Terribly, little Thomas died of ‘camp fever’ 0n 24 February 1788 – barely a month after the Fleet arrived. Even more frightening, Tom himself died also of dysentery on 30 April 1788, leaving the small family alone in the wilds of Sydney cove. Alice married again. I attach all my notes etc about them all for your interest.

It is likely the West Kent militia had been doing coast guard duty around Portsmouth. Tom must have signed up for the First Fleet Marine corps from Portsmouth, as the volunteer list was only open for about a week, and was massively over-subscribed – there were thousands of servicemen demobbed in the early 1780s after the American War finished and the French had gone quiet for a while, so jobs were at a premium, and really hard to get. They got 300 volunteers for the Australian corps, that had to whittled down. They only took 24 Marine families, so Tom and Alice were seen as good material for such a venture.

I saw the group from Froxfield in my searches – good to know they were all connected. Good luck with your examination of the records.

It’s extraordinary to think of the different fates of members of the same family.

## From Michael Blakstad 4th May 2015

Did David refer you to the section of our website dedicated to Glenthorne House, [click here](http://www.eastmeonhistory.org.uk/content/catalogue_item/glenthorne-house)? I did the original research, and duly forgot about it!

The Harmsworth family which didn’t go to Australia seems to have done better than poor Tom and Alice, and as David has reported, married into another successful family, the Eyles.

Your information about the Australian branch is fascinating. There has been a rather half-baked television series here, called Convicts, about an early settlement of prisoners and the soldiers who guarded them, which scratched the surface of the pioneering days. I preferred the books of Kate Grenville, but have no idea how accurate the history was in either …

I don’t suppose you have any photographic records of your predecessors? Or documents? (Or access to relevant illustrations or records online, which we could access?) From the pages on Glenthorne you will see the kind of records we like to retain and display concerning families with connections with East Meon, and yours would be fascinating to include, if you were willing.

## From Ros Otzen 5th May 2015

I really enjoyed the Glenthorne House section of your website – it is clear I must come and visit!  I assumed that the Harmsworth brothers were agricultural labourers, but clearly the one who married into the Eyles family was doing better than that.

The two files I sent you summarise much of the material I have on the Harmsworths. There are mentions in the diaries of a number of First Fleeters to the birth of their son John during a horrendous storm in the ‘Roaring 40s’ between Cape Town and Australia, and to both Thomas’s deaths, which I have transcribed.

There is, of course, much more about his wife Alice, and daughter Ann.  I am a historian, and have been writing about the origins of Australia through the experiences of our ancestors: I am halfway through the account of the First Fleet from Tom and Alice’s point of view, and will send it to you when finished. (We have just landed in Sydney Cove at this point!)The Alice/Thomas Harmsworth files I sent you and David contain all the references and transcriptions I have been able to find.

Alice was involved in the case of a terrible hanging of several marines for stealing food, during the second year of the colony. The supplies ship didn’t make it past Cape Town and the colony was starving. A group of marines developed a clever way to rob the stores, which involved the use of a key which Alice had given to the ringleader. Most of the men were hanged.

Her name is also mentioned in a case of child molestation – the first trial of a pedophile in Australia’s history – when little Ann’s friend Elizabeth Chapman (both about 8 at the time) was raped by this marine.

Alice married Daniel Stanfield, another Marine. When he finished his three year contract as a marine, he opted to stay, and became a farmer on Norfolk Island, which was then the back-up food source for the very hungry colony at Sydney. He built a very prosperous farm on this tropical island, and had many children with Alice, but when the government closed the island settlement and the family was taken to Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania) in 1808 and had to start all over again. An extraordinary story!

Alice’s Harmsworth daughter, our ancestor Ann, married Samuel Marsden whom she met on Norfolk Island – he was a member of the infamous New South Wales corps. (No relation to a more famous Rev Samuel Marsden from Yorkshire who was a prominent early power in the colony). The whole array of descendants, led by John Marsden, has been trying to find Samuel’s origins in England – no luck so far! I’ve been concentrating on the Harmsworth side. There are dozens of families in this network all co-ordinated by John. He actually visited Warnford at my suggestion and found Thomas the younger’s birth record in Warnford church records. The image of it is in the Alice Harmsworth file I have sent you.

All this will take time for you to digest, I imagine.