

Emails concerning Merritt family (and others)

April 1st 2014, David Madden posted:

After an incredibly arduous, 20-year search I've managed to prove that my great-grandfather was indeed from a Langrish family whose origins lie in East Meon. My mother's family (as with my father's) are Irish but her grandfather Robert Merritt had changed his name to join the navy and I finally had the breakthrough needed to connect him to Ernest Alfred Merritt, whose parents were East Meon people as far back as 1501 at least. Having grown up in London, I've always wanted to know where the English side of my ancestry came from and now, at 35, I've finally found them and I'm delighted!

The names include Merritt, Tribe, Sloper, Baker, Mulford, Blackman, Pearce, Cross, Budd, and a dozen others. It also turns out I'm descended from the Langrish family who gave their name to the manor there.

I'm now planning a trip down to see the village and am wondering when/where it's best to do so. I'm eager to see the place as soon as possible but am worried I might just end up walking around in the rain. A key site I'd like to see is the parish church where at least 17 generations of my family were baptised and married and buried.

It's all so brilliant to read about and yet I don't know a soul in the area so am wondering how best to go about a visit from London.

If you could please give me some advice it would be deeply appreciated.

With regards and thanks, David Madden

On 1 Apr 2014, Michael Blakstad wrote:

Dear David

I am sure something can be arranged. I assume you contacted me through one of our two history websites. You will therefore have tried putting some of the names to which you refer into the search engines ... I put Merritt into the search panel of eastmeonhistory.org.uk (our online archive) and it has come up with ten mentions. I recognise the other names, and know there is plenty of material on them.

How you arrange your visit depends in part on what you want to do. If you want to examine historic records, the best place to start is the Hampshire Record Office in Winchester - you would have to register as a Reader, which is easy

providing you have proof of identity - and then search by names and/or dates any members of your family about whom you want to learn. You would need at least half a day to do any serious research.

All Saints Church has its registers of baptisms, marriages and burials, and you can arrange to look at those, but you can access them online, [click here](#).

I hope this is helpful. Michael

Dear Michael,

Such a pleasure to hear back from you so soon.

My grandad's father died in Ireland in 1922 and all contact with the East Meon family was then totally lost. Sadly my grandfather Thomas Merritt passed away some 20 years ago in my teens so he never lived to know that a very great number of his first cousins were alive and well. The Merritts were a huge family and I've been in touch with a David Merritt from West Meon who is a distant relation. My furthest traceable connection to East Meon is actually through my great-grandfather's mother Elizabeth Tribe, whose tree extends back to the 16th century to the de Langrishe family who it appears were once manorial lords of some form before selling up.

Elizabeth Tribe had an extraordinary life of quite profound hardship and was abandoned by her husband, my great-great-grandfather James Merritt (also of East Meon). She had to raise her family alone but for the help of her elderly mother, who was a Sloper. It all sounds like a long time ago but it really wasn't- Elizabeth Tribe only died in 1926 and this means she was alive and well throughout my grandfather's early years. Indeed, she outlived several of her children. My grandfather was deeply affected by the early loss of his own dad so the whole thing means a great deal to me as I was very fond of the old man. Not to be overly sentimental, but seeing East Meon is for me thus quite a provocative and even moving possibility; to come full-circle I guess.

My large family in Ireland is avidly following my progress on the recent discoveries I've made and therefore it's a superb event for so many of us that we've at last made the connection.

I daresay many of the dwellings where my family lived may be gone now but seeing the church, court house, pubs and other places would be just wonderful and I am deeply thankful for your offer to show me around; I've done some initial reading via the East Meon History Group website but having someone at hand who knows the place so well is just brilliant and I'd therefrom love to take you up on the offer.

It might possibly also be of some use to the Society to have what is now a very extensive family tree. Maybe it would be of help to others, and would certainly show the relationship between the forty or so surnames I've accumulated, some of which may no longer exist in the region- including the curious surname

"Angoth", which must surely be ancient. If this sounds of use, please do let me know.

Best regards, David.

On 2 Apr 2014, Michael Blakstad wrote:

Dear David

Two quick responses ...

Yes, it would be most useful to have your family tree. Indeed, any information and/or research materials you might have would be of use to us.

A John Tribe owned a mill, or possibly two, at Ramsdean in the seventeenth century, and there are numerous references to Tribes in the Parish Registers, though I expect you know that.

I am copying this email to one of our members, David Hopkins, who lives in Langrish and who has done a lot of research into families who have lived here in past centuries. He knows a lot more than me ...

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes, Michael

Hi Michael,

Many thanks for forwarding my message to your colleague. I'm actually indebted to a Richard Davies for a great amount of my family tree. I've no idea where he lives but his mother and my grandad were first cousins. It seems there was a mass-exodus of the Merritts from East Meon in the late 19th century so today they tend to be around West Meon, Petersfield, and further north. But that's just one segment of my Meon family. I looked at the link you gave and was pleased to see Blackman among the families- I've got Blackman ancestors too. Last night I wrote up my tree in total, with only my direct ancestors in it and it STILL amounted to 120+ people even if I left out the other children in each family.

I guess if I went for the de Langrishe family I could go back an awful lot further as they were landed gentry types and so are much more likely to be recorded. Still, 1501 is a pretty long way back! I've got a reader's card for the National Archives in Kew but I'll probably head to Winchester as well soon. If you want anything checked at the National Archives I would be glad to help you with that.

When I've got the whole tree properly arranged I'll definitely send it on as I'm guessing that well over 80% of the locals are in some way related to me- I even managed to find I had double descent from the same man- Edward Cross: my

great-great-grandparents James Merritt and Elizabeth Tribe were *both* great-grandchildren of Edward Cross!

Anyway, I look forward to hearing from your colleague and when my tree is complete I'll send it on.

Best regards to you and the Society, David.

On August 10th 2016, David Madden emailed:

Dear Michael,

I certainly remember our correspondence! Reading back through it now is a great reminder of how exciting it was to be able to say at last where the lost connection in my family's history lay. Especially after such an incredibly long period of searching.

Your last email also makes me wonder if I ever got around to sending you a version of the family tree? It's so large now that I imagine it includes at least one ancestor of every single person currently living in the Meon Valley and environs. Statistically speaking I'd say that's a certainty if their family ties to the area are longstanding.

That's the odd thing about it- beyond a certain point in time, long branches of my Meon family tree also belong to many others there, who I'm sure would like to have that info.

Since our last chat I've managed to find another fascinating piece of background on my great-grandfather's father. There's a funny letter in the Admiralty records showing that when James Merritt himself joined the navy he probably lied about his details in order to get his brother Stephen into the service as well. The captain of the ship writes to the Admiralty to explain that the matter only came to light when the bursar realised he was sending pay to a mother in East Meon for two men with the exact same name! He goes on to relate that my great-great grandfather's brother Stephen was apparently illiterate and didn't realise what name he'd been entered under. My assumption is that Stephen was too small for the navy but somehow got his brother James to stand in his stead, before James then later signed up too. Either way, it's a very rare occurrence to see an ordinary seaman of the 1820s being discussed in an Admiralty document- another lucky find for me.

It still amazes me that one section of my family lived in the same place for over five centuries and probably an awful lot longer.

Many thanks for getting in touch again,

Best regards, David.

10th August 2016, David Hopkins emailed

I am the David Hopkins of Langrish Michael referred to in his earlier correspondence. What amazing timing! The photo is a spider chart of your family in 1851 to 1871 that I am literally studying on my desk at this very moment!!!

Why? I am doing a study of "Rural Exodus" from East Meon in the mid 19th Century, tracing 600 people who left between 1851 and 1861, some (about 250 males) in some detail to establish who, where to, to do what, and maybe even why they went? From this, I am drawing seven case studies to emphasise the 'whole family' event and the Merritts are the most exciting. I am on the track of two of the children being RN sailors (one living with widowed mother Ann in Portsea in 1861)...but your dates suggest that this was something of a family tradition. I am also taking myself off on Friday to photograph the "Alverstoke Advanced Lines" where I think another two of the brothers were engaged in building military forts in 1861. I am also fascinated to here more of poor Elizabeth's (nee Tribe) harsh life....an old friend is Neil Tribe, last seen off to sea as a merchant seaman. Hope we can swap notes and happy to show you around if you come down. Any chance of a copy of the Admiralty documents?

David Hopkins

David Madden to David Hopkins 11th August 2016

After those long two decades of trying to find where "Robert" Merritt came from it finally happened very suddenly when the son of one of my grandad's cousins sent me an army application form for Ernest Merritt, born in Langrish. The only true detail Robert gave when he joined the navy was his place of birth, Langrish, but there wasn't a single man of that name who fitted the bill. It's absolutely the same person in the army and navy application forms and the dates also match up between when Ernest vanishes and "Robert" appears on censuses. So for 20 odd years I'd been looking for completely the wrong man. "Where the hell does this Ernest disappear to? Why the hell is there no Robert in Langrish?" - you can imagine the frustration I felt for so many years, knowing Ernest was the missing suspect but not being able to prove it. Ernest was denied entry to the army for being too small so he took his uncle Robert's first name and off he went to sail the seven seas.

The irony, then, is that both my uncle Bobby and my cousin Robert were both named after the "wrong" man! Or as my cousin Rob put it, "Does that mean I have to change my name to Ernest now?!"

There have been a number of really bizarre coincidences popping up in my searches including the fact that my Merritt great-grandfather would have met my Irish paternal great-grandmother's brother without ever knowing they'd one day be family. How bizarre is that?! By the outbreak of the Great War, Robert was a chief petty officer training stokers and engine mechanics in Portsmouth. He would've met my paternal grandad's uncle many times while training him!! Sadly, my grandad's uncle was to leave Ireland for the last time in 1918 to be killed on the L10 Submarine just weeks short of the end of the war, just a kid aged 25. The entire crew was lost when their attack on a German destroyer off

Holland caused them to be sighted and wiped out. The sub fired a torpedo but an issue with the ballast caused the vessel to suddenly rise to the surface. They'd sunk one German ship but we're now a target for three others. By now I've grown somewhat accustomed to reading horrific stories of war deaths in my family or my pal Sam's (his great-grandfather was killed at the Somme) but somehow it's always affected me much more to know this poor lad from the far west of Connemara went to his grave in a submarine.

Some time ago I was in touch with a Dave Merritt from West Meon whose family were from, I think, Alresford. For certain he'd be a distant relative but I'm yet to prove how. He still lives locally with his wife Dot. He was kind enough to put me in touch with a man who remembered there being Merritts in East Meon until some time after the Second World War but as far as I'm aware they've now all gone. This doesn't bother me though as I'm sure half the Meon Valley is related to me, and definitely most of East Meon- of all the ancestors I've listed for Robert Merritt, roughly 90% of them where from East Meon.

What I'll do is type up my tree for you and send it on. It's incredibly large now and, as I mentioned to Michael, if I exclude everyone except my direct ancestors it's still over 120 individuals. Some of the surnames are so unusual that I've had trouble finding any info on them. There are Budds, Knights, Tribes, Blakes, etc but then there are names like Angoth, Mulford, Edney, Sloper, Killn, Naish, etc that I've never heard before. The curious thing is I seem to have far more Norman ancestry on my Irish side than I do on my Hampshire side- a large number of my Hampshire ancestors appear to have been Saxon arrivals.

It's so curious- I remember reading about the same Merritts in Portsea you're looking at now. I cannot for the life of me remember if I decided they were part of my lot or not. I think they are. I seem to remember Stephen Merritt (my great-great-grandfather's brother) was a sickly man who didn't stay long in the navy.

I will definitely get the admiralty document to you- I've a scan of it on my computer somewhere.

There's a bizarre mystery where James was concerned. He suddenly vanished one year and his wife Elizabeth Tribe is then referred to as "seaman's wife, abandoned". The women of that family interest me a great deal- there's definitely an untold and probably quite profound story there; coping with so much while the men seem to screw things up. It seems from census records that the family (now 'abandoned') survived in some degree thanks to the efforts of her mother, Sarah Sloper. Old Sarah takes in some of the children while at least one ended up in the poorhouse. One can only imagine the hardship they endured after James vanished- the family seems to have eventually fragmented completely. Poverty and double lives are themes in their existence that have stayed with me; this constant name changing and running off to sea and never coming home to the Meon Valley. When I see pictures of the place online it's hard for me to imagine why they would be so desperate to leave, but the little info I have about Hampshire rural poverty in the 19th century is such that I imagine it was an incredibly tough life. Robert did well; I think he would've been pleased with his

life by the end. Without a dad to guide him he worked non-stop for over 20 years, became a chief petty officer, had a smart black uniform and insignia, and retired to Donegal where he died in 1922 having been retired on health grounds with a good pension. He entered the navy as a stoker, endlessly shovelling coal into trucks, heaving it onboard, dropping it down to the engine furnace rooms, then spending untold hours in that baking heat shovelling, shovelling, shovelling. Crisscrossing the world, helping to set up the Hong Kong naval station during the Boxer Rebellion, going on mapping expeditions to the Pacific, training young men for the Great War...it was quite a long way from the poverty and uncertainty of his early life in Meon. His record is remarkable really- an extensive list of ships and the ensuing promotions until he's finally an officer. I actually have the only photograph of him in existence and it shows him in the earliest part of his career covered in soot with all his mates from the engine rooms, equally covered in grime. It's actually quite a rare item in that these weren't the kind of men to be ordinarily photographed in the 1870s. I can send that onto you as well if you like. When I then found an example of what he would've looked like on promotion to chief petty officer it was a huge difference, and a pleasing one. Robert lies buried in a secluded country cemetery, having earned his rest more than most. A man that I once knew so little about is now very much a living figure in my mind, and one that I have tremendous admiration for.

I guess this story is repeated endlessly across these islands- people refusing to sink into anonymous poverty, deciding instead to get out there and be someone else. The entire experience has given me boundless gratitude to God for all the countless daily blessings we all have- just the simple fact that I can take a holiday or change jobs or eat what I want or go where I want...compared to those who fled rural Hampshire in the last century we are all rich beyond our wildest dreams.

The last thing I'll mention is that there is a possibility Robert/Ernest's father James was onboard a navy vessel which intercepted a slaver ship in the Caribbean! I've not been able to tie down dates just yet but if I'm right then James Merritt was a crewman when his ship captured slavers after gunning them at sea and rescuing the slaves. I didn't mention it before as I wasn't 100% sure of the dates. God alone knows where James ended up- bigamy, a life at sea as a pirate, a runaway living in Shanghai...I have no idea.

Well I hope that has given you some pleasure in reading it. When I find a few days freedom from work etc I will be up to the Meon Valley and would be delighted to meet up with you.

In the meantime, if you are looking for a riveting book on social history I recommend in the highest terms a book called Jack Tar by Roy and Lesley Adkins. It's inexpensive and worth every penny- a history of the life of ordinary naval recruits in Nelson's navy. You don't need an interest in navy matters to enjoy it; it's the kind of book you end up telling others about so much that you get on their nerves! By the time you finish it you'll want to read it again.

Right. So I'll type up this tree, send the admiralty letter re James and Stephen Merritt, and also send on the photo of Robert.

Please excuse the length of this email but, as you can see, finding my missing family in Meon has meant a great deal to me.

Do please keep in touch and let me know how you get on with your researches.

Best regards, David.

David Hopkins to David Madden 11th August 2016

The Fates certainly seem to be having a field day! Two amazing (additional) coincidences unfold! Your 'abandoned' Elizabeth and her son Earnest aka Robert, and mother Sarah lived next door but one to me!!! This is where the Tribes lived at Home Farm Cottage (then two dwellings known historically in the village as Dairy and Cheese Cottages)..I think the Tribes and abandoned E lived to the left. I live next door to Home Farm itself the other side. Sadly Home Farm Cottage was burnt down on May 1 this year. I think it will be rebuilt...but not for a while. I post a photo at the bottom of how it looked this Spring.



Home Farm Cottages formerly Cheese and Dairy Cottages

David Merritt of West Meon? My wife, Head of West Meon School for a decade and a half, attended his wedding. His wife was daughter of her caretaker for all those 15 years. Never be 'shy' to send me as much info as a Hotmail post can take I am fascinated by family trees (mine is 4500'ish...but I've stopped there!) ...but I am trying currently to be very focussed on my current research....and including the Merritts. I am looking at the drivers of one nuclear family (ie two generations) that took themselves out of East Meon and what subsequently happened. So...my focus is John Merritt, Ann (nee Cross) and all their children.

Rarely, I have drawn down a Death Certificate from GRO (coss it costs a lot) but I ordered John's a week ago. It arrived today. John died in 1849, the cause of death being "colic". Having got through the baby version of this on-line, it would seem that this was a symptom that nowadays really suggest death was from gall stones, kidney stones, or perhaps intestinal cancer, appendicitis...or even lead poisoning.

He was described as a "pauper" in 1841 and in socio-economic terms I suspect the 'push' drivers for his bereft family were therefore crisis and economic, whilst the 'pull' drivers were economic and increased potential opportunity. This is still a work-in-progress and a subset of something much broader...but his family went three ways. Widow Ann with youngest children and the two oldest sailor sons to Portsea (aka Portsmouth) where the older sons presumably came and went between trips at sea. Middle sons to Alverstoke (aka Gosport) employed in "Public Works" building the "Alverstoke Advanced Line" forts...and a remnant of females in East Meon. It seems James. left behind, soon is darting between Portsmouth (where he was married to E) and East Meon (resident I suspect at HF Cottage) and was a sailor too by early/mid 1860's. She (E) later describes herself as "wife of a Labourer (deserted)" ...so he may well have left the Navy before he flitted off into oblivion. I think (lots to check) she went into Petersfield Workhouse but re-immersed as a Housekeeper to an elderly gentleman living in the ruins of Cowdray House at Midhurst before dying at a ripe old age in East Meon. It is also fascinating to note her youngest son who left with her to Portsmouth ended his days living with his family in sole possession of perhaps the second most prestigious house in East Meon Village!

I hope I can bounce my current 'myopic' focus on this nuclear family off you and I also hope I can use your comments on the deliberately rather vague enlistment details the family used as this is so helpful to me in supporting my suppositions on the trail of 500 people only of which I can trace 75% between 1851 and 1861!

One last question, as you seem to have cracked this ...How can I trace in which HM ships Merritt's served on between 1840-1880 if they do not appear on "Vessel" returns in Censuses?

Best Wishes David

David Madden to David Hopkins 12th August 2016

I'm absolutely gobsmacked! It's like reading a Thomas Hardy novel- long lost sailors and workhouses! The "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" as Shakespeare would have it.

I just cannot believe you're living next door to the cottage. I opened the photo and must admit it caused me to have a moment of pause...I never knew these people but my grandfather Thomas Merritt was very dear to me and spent his life not knowing where his father came from or where his family was. He was a toddler when his father died, again leaving another mother to raise children on her own. The Merritts of Meon ended up being a gigantic family yet living all over

the world. This recent news would've meant so much to my grandad had he lived longer.

Even more bizarre that you have a link to David and Dot Merritt! I've chatted to David on the phone many times and I'll have to pop up and see them when I get time. He was incredibly helpful with getting names for people to phone and also giving me the vicar's details re baptism records etc. What a small world we live in.

I know that Robert and his new wife were in Portsmouth for a period around 1902 as I've seen them in census records. He must've visited family at that point.

My internet connection is on the blink at the moment but I'm spending the evening getting together all the info I promised. In the meantime I've typed up John and Ann's trees which I'll be able to send you soon. Luckily (in one sense) that side only goes back to the 11th generation, so it all fits on one page of a spreadsheet. The Tribe side of my tree goes back so far I end up being related to the de Langrishe family who I gather used to own a swathe of the area and gave their name to the village. Im sure the Langrish family is much more well-documented due to their wealth. I've read bits and pieces about them.

Regarding naval personnel service records, these are available online via the national records office website which deals with the admiralty. The service record lists the entire career of a seaman including conduct, pay, and dates onboard. As they're handwritten it can involve some detective work to figure out what the vessels are. The copperplate writing can be a nightmare. With a service record you can then check where they were at a given point by searching online for that particular ship's engagements, or by checking the physical logbook at Kew...which is obviously a lot more time-consuming. Sometimes helpful souls have put the ship's chronological passage details online but only in tough terms. To know for certain one has to get hold of the actual logbook and read through it.

Again, another thing I'll have to send to you all would be Robert's naval record. It's impressive in its own right and would probably be of interest to others.

It's a while since I looked up a service record online but it's very easy to search for them and I think it costs about £3 or something. Finding the right person is a process of elimination by date and place of birth, then when you think you've got the right person you can download the record. Don't get James's though as I already have it, but I'm struggling to find it. I've sent you Stephen's in the meantime but it's not much use. I believe I'm right in saying I can get any of them for free by taking my laptop down to the NRO at Kew and downloading them there.

The last time I went to the NRO I managed to spend 5 hours just reading ships' logbooks. The time just absolutely whizzes past- reading captain's notes saying "Funnel wrecked in collision, officer on watch firmly advised to be more careful" and "Two coal trucks lost into harbour, plus two torpedo and a spanner" which

made me laugh...God knows how you could accidentally drop a torpedo! Like you, I'm also a fanatical fan of records and stories.

The entire collection can be searched by entering keywords on the NRO Kew website. What's not in the Hampshire office will be at Kew if it's of any significance.

Elizabeth seems to have survived an awful lot. I wonder if the gentleman she was maid to left her an inheritance which the son then used to buy the nice house in East Meon with? That seems possible, doesn't it? Either way, it's exceptionally strange that the son seems to have done so well. I'll write up Elizabeth Tribe's details too at some point- maybe a name in her tree might explain for you how this could've happened.

Are there still Tribes in Meon?

It's incredibly late and yet again I've stayed up reading names and getting carried away with everything. Work tomorrow so I'd better finish off.

One last odd detail from history: did you know the district in Dublin called Rathmines is named after the Meon Valley? More precisely, it's named after the De Meones family who bought up tracts of land in Ireland.

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_Meones_family The De Meones family originated in Hampshire; they moved to Ireland in the thirteenth century, became substantial landowners in Dublin and gave their name to the ...

Thanks so much for sending the photo. Best, David

David Hopkins to David Madden 18th August 2016

You thought this story was Hardy-esque! It gets more and more remarkable. If you are a creative writer there is a fantastic, mainly true, very sad docu-novel here.

Elizabeth Merritt (nee Tribe), abandoned by her husband, ends up in 1901 as a General Servant at the "Seven Stars" pub in the East Meon tything of Stroud (the pub is still going strong). But in 1911 she is living with widowed James Chitty (he being then 79) as "housekeeper" in "the ruins of Cowdray House". My first instinct was to take him as a retired gent and "housekeeper" at face value. But on closer investigation I think not. James Chitty, born in Chipstead, Surrey, is described as a "late gamekeeper", whilst at age 40 he was a "Agricultural Labourer"...and I think the "ruins" were literally that.....because grouped in with them is the most remarkable census return I have ever seen. Four women, 60, 24, 22, and 18 who have refused to give any information about themselves other than very boldly scrawling on the return "NO VOTES FOR WOMEN. NO INFORMATION FROM WOMEN". The census taker has volunteered the view that the three youngest were "laundresses", but is unsure of their full identities



It doesn't have a happy ending. Elizabeth was buried in All Saints churchyard, East Meon on the 9th March, 1926 age 84. But our parish register records "died at 1 Ramshill, Petersfield"seemingly an unremarkable address....but in fact the Petersfield Union Workhouse!

Best Wishes David

David Madden to David Hopkins 19th August

I have one question I had to ask, having been utterly distracted all day by the latest updates: does anyone know if Elizabeth has a gravestone in East Meon? The poor woman has been on my mind all day and I'm guessing she has no gravestone.

Best, David

David Hopkins to David Madden 20th August

No...Elizabeth Merritt (Tribe) has no gravestone. In fact the only one of her family I can find is her youngest son Luke and wife (the seemingly better off one) who was buried in 1898. Sadly both he and his son (also Luke) died within a month of each other.

It is definitely Cowdray House ruins where E was living in in 1911. Being in Midhurst, it is only 10 or so miles from here....but how she met her "late gamekeeper" is open to conjecture. The relationship between "the suffragettes" and E is unclear as they refused to give information. Ancestry links them but they seemed to be running a laundry from the ruins...so we have to guess

The Petersfield Workhouse was still there until about 2000 (housing Social Services!) ... it is now redeveloped for starter homes. It had about 100 inmates in 19th C.

Hope that helps BW D

Michael Blakstad to David Hopkins August 20th

You probably know that the Workhouse in Petersfield was destroyed by German bombers in WWII. MBB