

Report on Meeting 12th May 2023

'Oral Family Stories'

Several members brought along their accounts of passed-down stories which had stimulated their interest in finding background and verification.

Jane's tale was pre-Great War, about her aunt and a Methodist minister, the mystery of a birth that was acknowledged but reportedly stillborn. No firm evidence exists because it seems that there was no record of stillbirths at this time. When did they start to be recorded? To be looked into. Terry suggested that if Jane took an Ancestry DNA test, then there may be a match from any descendant of the aunt, if the baby actually survived (as Jane suspected), was adopted and subsequently had children.

Andy's story was about a couple who were determined to ignore parental objection to getting married, and did so by 'having to get married', deliberately. The groom was the son of a local tenant farmer, the bride was the daughter of the manager of the asylum in Preston. The story doesn't explain which set of parents objected to which family background! That part remains a mystery, but Andy found the marriage certificate and the subsequent birth certificate – five months apart, so gratifyingly it was true.

Terry told of a mystery surrounding the part page of a Parish Register, Grandma and Grandpa marrying in early May but this R.C. marriage was not registered until September.

Marian told of a Humanitarian marriage that had not being recognised as a legal marriage by the local Registrar. Local to Barbados, that is, but there must be many countries or territories where this could also apply.

Manchester Library: Andy and others reported that FindMyPast is free there, though will require booking, so access to e.g. 1921 census and newspaper archives.

Roger's case was about a 'love child' ancestor, begot by 'Sir' Richard Hillary, a baronet. The daughter of the illicit union was Roger's great great grandmother. There is a man called Roebuck in the oral tradition, who administered a fund for the child's maintenance, even into her adulthood. David and Israel Roebuck came up in research, as Commission Agents in Leeds, centre of the wool trade and with strong connections with Wensleydale, where the Hillary family originated prior to 1800. Further research showed that there was no baronetcy, at least not for Richard Hillary, a bachelor and formerly a 'merchant of Liverpool' in 1801 and who died in 1803 in Jamaica, where he had inherited a sugar plantation and owned many slaves. It turned out that his younger brother was the baronet, conferred on him by King George III some years after Richard's death. This was Sir William Hillary, a notable character who inherited brother Richard's wealth, and married into serious money, spent it on raising a regiment to fight Napoleon – hence the baronetcy – defaulted on many loans from fellow Quakers (yes, Quakers owning slaves and slaving ships, that was a surprise), blowing possibly £120,000 then absconding to the Isle of Man, out of reach of his creditors and marrying bigamously before divorcing wife no.1. He then became a local hero by founding the forerunner of the RNLI, a set up whose patron was George IV, its president the Archbishop of Canterbury and its first chairman the Earl of Liverpool, then Prime Minister! This would make a good film. Apparently Sir William organised and took part in many rescue missions off Douglas, IoM, has a couple of statues erected as his memorial, and even has a class of lifeboat named after him. So no real evidence that the Hillaries are part of Roger's ancestry, except the time frame is right, for Richard Hillary and the Roebuck boys, and the 'love child' Harriet Harvey married great great grandfather Fryer and named several of their

children after the Hillary family: 'Richard Henry Fryer', 'William Hillary Fryer', and his own great g'father 'Samuel Winn Fryer' – Richard Hillary's mother's maiden name was Winn, and Isaac Lascelles Winn was Richard Hillary's uncle and bequeathed him the slave plantation 'Stretch & Sell' (later named 'Adelphi', moving from sugar production to rum, which it produces to this day) and who was a Quaker, of course, and had a fleet of slaving ships sailing the notorious Liverpool – West Africa – West Indies trade triangle. A fascinating wider history. Much information provided by a remarkable website, University College London's 'Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery'.