

CHAPTER XI

The Fryers of Yarmouth

Some people in Yarmouth still remember Little John Fryer the butcher, whose shop in the High Street is now known as Pinings, and who died in 1926. Also his brother George who lived in Victoria Road, and died in 1935. Many more know Gillian Fryer, the talented young organist and choir mistress at St. James's Parish Church, who now lives with her mother in Freshwater. But few realise that there were once many Fryers living in Yarmouth, and that the family has had quite a colourful history.

The Fryers originated in Titchfield, between Southampton and Fareham, and the first one to settle in Yarmouth was James Fryer, a baker, who with his wife Mary arrived here in about 1790. Mary's brother Isaac Butler was landlord of the Bugle Inn in Yarmouth, and this could well have been the reason why they came to live here. James and Mary had ten children in all, the last 7 of which were born in Yarmouth.

Their second son Moses was only a few years old when they came to the Island, and he lived here all his life, dying in 1862 at the age of 76. He was a plumber and glazier by trade, married twice, and had 15 children in all. His second wife Eliza Miller was the daughter of a Baker, and she bore him 6 daughters and 5 sons. They lived at the top end of the High Street, behind what is now Mount Cottage, in the little lane leading down to the Solent.

Of the eleven children of the second marriage three must have caused their father some distress. These were Jane (b. 1823), Sophia (b. 1829) and Richard (b. 1837), for early in 1853, together with Jane and Sophia's husbands, they became members of the Mormon Church, and later that year emigrated to America. But more about them later. William Aaron, the eldest of Moses Fryer's sons became a sailor, married a Swiss girl, had four children, and was lost at sea from a yacht on passage to New Zealand.

Two of Moses's younger children were twins, and were christened Albert and Victoria. They were born in February 1840, and the

story is that their birth coincided to the hour with the marriage of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. If we are to believe this story the Queen visited Eliza Fryer at her home in Yarmouth, and asked that the twins should be named after herself and the Prince. This was done, but alas Baby Victoria lived only for a month, dying before the end of March.

Another son of Moses was George Nick, who became a butcher, married, and had five children, of which one was Little John who followed his father into the butchery business. Little John Fryer was so christened as his father was an ardent member of the Ancient Order of Foresters which flourished in Yarmouth, the local Court once having 500 members. Altogether Moses had around 50 grandchildren, though 27 of these he never saw since they were born in America.

Moses also had a younger brother, William, born in 1800, who himself became the head of a Yarmouth family. In 1828 William married Hannah Tuck, a Beaulieu girl, and they settled in Yarmouth, living in a house in South Street which is now called "Halfway". William was a fisherman, and of the six children of this marriage, all four boys became sailors.

The eldest, Emmanuel, born in 1829, became a Trinity House Pilot. He married his cousin Leah, one of Moses Fryer's daughters, when she was 16, and they had 6 children, two of whom were twins. Emmanuel died in 1911 and his widow in 1921, at St. James Villa, Tennyson Road.

The second boy Henry William, born in 1837, became a master mariner and captain of a yacht. He married a Kentish girl, daughter of a coastguard, and they had 9 children. Later they moved to Cowes and their eldest daughter, Julia Harriet, married a Cowes man George Groves who later became the senior partner in Groves and Gutteridge Ltd. Their eldest son, another Henry William, married the girl next door, the daughter of a Calshot Lightship Captain. This Henry William also rose to be captain of his ship, but died of heatstroke, together with several members of his crew, when becalmed in the Red Sea. He was only 31 years old, and left his wife with 3 small children. Gillian Fryer, mentioned at the beginning of this story, is his great-grand-daughter.

The next son, James, was the father of eight children, one of whom, Kathleen Jane, died as recently as 1961 at South Lynn, Victoria Road. The fourth boy, George, also followed the sea and became a yacht steward.

William and Hannah Fryer and their family are listed in the Census of 1841 and 1851 as living in South Street, and it is interesting that the house in which they lived was also occupied in 1841 by an Ann Hiscock and her two children Charlotte and George. George became a sailor when he grew up, and of course Hiscock is a well known Yarmouth name in yachting circles. Incidentally, the 1851 census records that Elizabeth Fryer, aged 15, the eldest daughter of William and Hannah, was living next door to her parents as a Nursemaid in the house of Emma Small (whose occupation was given as Scavenger), and it is interesting that later Elizabeth married James Small, a shoemaker.

Besides the houses occupied by William Fryer and his brother Moses, the records of the time list two other houses in Yarmouth having Fryer tenants. One of these was a cottage on the corner of Quay Street and Market Square, the site now being the bakers shop of Mills & Son.

The tenant of this cottage was James Fryer. Born in 1808, the eldest son of Moses by his first wife, James was a sailor and in 1830 married Ann Hollis, a Thorley girl. They had four children, but tragically Ann died in May 1840 when the youngest child, Emily, was only a year old and the eldest, Ellen, only 9. The census of 1841 tells a pathetic story, James being away at sea, and the four children being in the care of a 20 year old servant girl, Sarah White.

In May 1843 James married again, his bride being Jane Lee of Norton, and the marriage bears some evidence of haste as their first child was born in the following August. In the census of 1851 James was apparently once again away, and his wife Jane, now 28, was caring for Emily, the youngest child from the previous marriage, also for her own three small children, and was in fact expecting her fourth.

The other Yarmouth house having a Fryer tenant was next door to the Bugle Inn, and the 1840 Tithe Award Survey describes this as a dwelling house owned by Benjamin Mew, let to Isaac Butler and sub-let to Mary Fryer. Mary was of course Isaac's sister, the widow of James Fryer the Baker, and the mother of Moses and William, mentioned above. In the 1841 census she is listed as being 75 years of age, but she may not have wished to disclose her true age, which according to her birthdate was nearer 80.

Which brings us back to Jane, Sophia and Richard, the children of Moses Fryer who subsequently became Mormons, since in 1841 Jane and Sophia, aged 15 and 12 respectively, were living just across

the Square from their Grandmother Mary, as servants in the house of John Stephens the builder. Mr. Stephens, who built Westhill House, lived in one of the houses facing south on to Market Square which were demolished in 1894. Richard was aged 4 and was of course living at home with his parents Moses and Eliza.

It is interesting to trace the subsequent history of these three Yarmouth children, all of whom left their native country for a new life in America, and none of whom found happiness there.

Jane Fryer was born in 1823, and when just 18 she married Francis Jorden in Milford, and apparently settled on the mainland, her first five children being registered in Shirley Common. Sophia, born in 1829, married John Thomas Geary, a lawyer and member of parliament, in 1852. Soon after his marriage Geary became interested in the Mormon Church, and before long he and Sophia, together with her elder sister Jane and younger brother Richard, were all persuaded to become Mormons. Richard was only fifteen at the time, and perhaps not old enough to make up his own mind, but he was no doubt influenced by his elder sisters. Jane's husband Francis apparently had reservations, but when the command came that all who accepted the revelation of Joseph Smith, the Mormon founder, should emigrate to Salt Lake City in Utah, and Jane intimated that she was going whether he accompanied her or not, Francis gave in and joined them.

Moses and Eliza Fryer and their other children would have nothing to do with the Mormon Church, but accepted the fact that these three were determined to go to America. They never lost touch and in fact were still writing to them in 1862. John Thomas Geary, however, who was 30 years old, was apparently dependent on his parents, and after failing to dissuade him from becoming a Mormon and emigrating, they cut him off with the proverbial shilling. There must have been many times in the future when he wished he had heeded his parents advice.

There were problems associated with the voyage across the Atlantic, which took 6-8 weeks, and they were not all able to travel together, but in the early summer of 1853 they joined forces once more in St. Louis to prepare for the long and hazardous wagon train journey across the plains to Salt Lake City. Now their trials and tribulations really began. None of them was really used to roughing it, and they were faced with a journey of nearly 2,000 miles through unknown and often unfriendly country, driving wagon and ox teams, and a herd of cattle.

In June Sophia gave birth to her first child, and her sister Jane had perforce to act as midwife. In fact, Brigham Young the Mormon leader, commanded Jane so to do, and from then on she was official mid-wife to the party. Jane, who had had no experience whatsoever in medical matters wrote home in desperation to her mother in Yarmouth, and asked her to send out a copy of "Dr. Gunn's Medical Book", and this completed her training.

It was not until October 1853 that they all arrived in Salt Lake City, having survived the rigours of the journey which included attention from unfriendly Indians. Houses then had to be built and preparations made to supply themselves with food during the coming winter, which proved to be exceedingly severe.

In the Spring Frank Jorden, Jane's husband, had had enough. He had never been an ardent member of the Mormon Church, and he decided that he and his family would be better off in California, where gold had just been discovered. Plead as he would however, he could not persuade Jane to travel any further, and in the end, after many tearful farewells, he set off by himself, the plan being that he should return after two or three years.

It may be that Frank was wrong in leaving his young wife and two small children in this way. Jane was also just beginning her third pregnancy, though he may not have known this. There is evidence that he wrote her several times begging her to join him, and there is little doubt they loved each other. Whatever the rights or wrongs of the case the subsequent behaviour of Brigham Young, the Mormon leader is difficult to condone. Young was opposed to any Mormon leaving Salt Lake City unless he especially wished it, and his word had almost the power of holy writ. Less than a year after Frank Jorden had left, Brigham Young offered Jane as second wife to a Richard Harrison who was being sent to southern Utah, 300 miles away, to help start an ironworks, and Young himself married them. Frank Jorden Jnr., Jane's eldest son, later wrote in his diary "Here in the spring of 1855 you might have found us just entering upon the life of Polygamy. Oh, that I could wipe out from my memory the bitterness to which this introduced us".

Jane had seven children by Richard Harrison but did not find happiness with him. One of her grand daughters, Bessie Snow of Pine Valley, Utah, has written a most interesting and informative book about Jane, Sophia and Richard Fryers life in America, and it this book which is the main source of information. Of her grand-father Richard Harrison she writes:

"He was the sort of man who was master of his household. He was fussy, particular, and precise. Everything around him had to be just so. He expected and generally got prompt obedience from those around him. He was strict, firm, determined, irritable and domineering to the point of cruelty".

Jane's first husband Frank Jorden continued to write to her and there is evidence that Richard Harrison intercepted many of his letters and prevented Jane from ever seeing him again. Jane died in 1898 at the age of 75, and her youngest daughter said of her that she was the saddest person she ever knew, and one of the kindest. Her grand-daughter Bessie Snow said "Only grandmother herself will ever know what she went through. I do hope God had reserved a nice peaceful nook for her up in heaven where she found Frank Jorden, with out-stretched arms, waiting for her under an apple tree in full bloom".

The Mormon religion certainly brought no happiness to Jane Fryer, nor to many of her children. One of her daughters, Annie Jorden, fell in love with a James Haslam when she was 16 and they wished to marry. Haslam unfortunately was not a Mormon, so Annie was not only forbidden to marry him but was told she must marry a 60 year old man, Robert Richey, who already had two wives, or her own step father Richard Harrison. Of the two she chose Robert Richey. Her brother, Frank Jorden Jnr., tried to prevent the marriage and as a result his life was threatened. Frank was ultimately expelled from the Church, and several attempts were made on his life before he managed to get away. He left, determined to find his long lost father, and after a journey of 6,000 miles was rewarded for his steadfastness.

Thanks to Bessie Snow we know a great deal about the Fryers who went to America, far more in fact than about those who remained in Yarmouth. But a letter written in May 1862 by Albert Fryer of Yarmouth to Richard Fryer in Utah does give us a little information. Albert was 22 at the time, and was the survivor of the twins named after Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

In his letter Albert besought Richard to leave the Mormon faith and return to the religion he was brought up in. He said that their father, Moses, was seriously ill and had been bedridden for four months and was not likely to recover. In fact Moses died two months later, in July 1862 aged 76.

"Mother stays upstairs now almost all of the day with Father. Her leg is better than it was. It was very bad a little

while ago Annie is getting along pretty well. She is still at the school. She sends her love to you both wishing you many happy returns of your birthday. William's wife was confined last Good Friday with a son. She is getting along pretty well excepting she has a cold in her leg which confines her to her bed. William is away from home in a yacht called the "Florence". The Duke of Leeds is the owner. William is the Mate of her. George and Leah are getting on pretty well. Their children likewise. Aunt Griffin is quite well, likewise Uncle and Aunt Cove. Uncle William is still living. He is pretty well. Old Mr Maud is still alive. He get out a little but is very much altered. Edward Woolgar is married and has two or more children. He is in a yacht here. Robert Butler has a very nice school in which he is Master. He has a two class man. Archibald Bannister and William Day are in the Training College at Battersea. Bannister has obtained a first class scholarship. He has a Queens Scholar likewise; he is first on the list in the college. Day has not been there long enough to pass yet. Our dear school master died last month. He was greatly beloved by all who knew him. He has left a wife but no children. Your old friend William McWhite is still alive. He very often enquires for you. He is married and has several children. Doctor Clarke has left here and we have a new doctor by the name of Dr. Meeres. I think I have told you of most of your acquaintances. I must tell you now of Yarmouth, and its neighbourhood.

"In Yarmouth we have a new Coastguard House and cottage besides a large house for the Lieutenant. We have a new Key. I mean to say that it is much enlarged. A Bridge from Yarmouth to Freshwater. Those houses where Grandfather used to live are taken down and new ones put up. A new house also where Taylor Taber lived and that land on the top of our hill where old William Law used to live is filled up with nice houses from number 16 to number 72 and one villa at a much high price. We have a new Gas House, Steam Mills, New Schools, New Malt House built against Mr. Tenkins, a new and very fine Rectory near Lady Burrards for our minister. Those gardens behind Old Blacksmith Harness are entirely filled up with new cottages by the name of Alma Place. There are a great many cottages built going down toward the mill . . ."

Another letter written about the same time by Eliza Fryer, the wife of Moses and mother of Albert, contains the following.

"I am still with Albert and Leah and my sister Ann lives in the same house with us, but by herself. We have a great many new houses, a Bridge to Freshwater, a gas, clam Boats, and large new Forts. Yarmouth is very much altered. Old Mr. Clark is dead and they have left Yarmouth. Leah has three children, George three, William two . . . your aunt Cove is still living at Hill Top, Beaulieu. Mary has four children and not a very good husband. Captain of a Yacht. Albert has not very good health. But he fights on. Some times cuts Headstones which he does well. He is a very steady labourer and quiet and very kind to me and so is William. And they are all very good to me. I hope you are finding sufficient for the day so that you may not want. My love, deep love dwell on your hearts. May God bless you and be with you for ever hence. My blessings for your welfare in Life, and your Eternal Happiness in Heaven with all our united Love.

Your affectionate Mother,
Eliza Fryer."

Soon after receiving the above letters Richard Fryer and his wife Teresa, together with Sophia and John Thomas Geary and other Mormon families were sent down into southern Utah to found a new town at Toquerville. When the Gearys arrived they were met by the church authorities, including the local Mormon Bishop Joshua Thomas Willis. Sophia is reputed to have been a very beautiful woman, and the story is that when Bishop Willis first saw her he said "My God, that is the most beautiful woman I ever saw in my life. I'm going to have her if I have to go to hell to get her". Hardly the sort of remark one would expect to hear from a senior dignitary of any church.

He was apparently as good as his word, and the family blame him for breaking up the Geary marriage. Anyway they separated, and John Geary went back up north to Salt Lake City where in 1867 he died in a shooting accident. Some say he committed suicide. Sophia was married to Bishop Willis - divorce-seemed to present no difficulties to a Mormon who had his eyes on a woman - and Bessie Snow has since written "Whether Bishop Willis went to hell for Aunt Sophia I don't know, but according to her Geary

children *she* went *through* hell after she married him. They say he did little to help her support her children . . ."

Sophia had three children by Joshua Willis, and the last one killed her, on May 27th, 1872, both she and the baby being buried in the same casket.

Richard Fryer, the youngest of the three immigrants, was 25 years old when he and his wife and small daughter moved down south. From all accounts he was an ardent Mormon, and a friend of Brigham Young. He was also, according to people who knew him, artistically very talented, not only as an artist, but also as a sculptor and musician. He played for dances, trained the choir, painted curtains and scenery for local plays, and gave music lessons. He was a talented violinist.

Richard was also a very hard worker, but found life in Toquer-ville difficult, and the struggle to feed and clothe his family a constant battle with the elements. Whether this finally got him down, or whether the fact that he was beaten up on two occasions damaged his brain, no one knows for certain, but he began to experience periods of temporary insanity. He got it into his head that this wife was having an affair with their next door neighbour, Thomas Batty, and finally ordered her and their infant son Moses out of the house. Teresa Fryer accordingly left him and lived most of the time after that with the Batty family.

Early one morning Richard went to the Batty house and demanded to see his wife. He then produced a loaded revolver and shot first Thomas Batty, then Teresa and finally his son. He then went and barricaded himself in an unfinished house he was building and prepared for a siege. The local Sheriff formed a posse and surrounded the house, and on firing their first salvo Richard Fryer fell dead.

So all three Fryer children found nothing but hardship, bitterness and tragedy in America, and in reading of their unhappiness one cannot but come to the conclusion that the strange, dogmatic Mormon faith must carry much of the responsibility. In all charity however one must remember that these early pioneers suffered untold hardships, both in travelling to Utah and in building a life for themselves once they were there. This life was never easy for them, and there is no doubt that their religion sustained and comforted them, even though it brought many of them pain and grief. Perhaps one should not judge them too harshly but only reflect that their lives might have been very much happier had they not

abandoned the faith they were brought up in. The little parish church in Yarmouth, where the Fryers used to worship, which had already been there for 200 years when they left, is still there, comforting and unchanged, and the last of the Yarmouth Fryers, Gillian and her mother, still worship there every Sunday.