

From Little Acorns Great Oaks Grow

The Pillinger Family of Kingswood

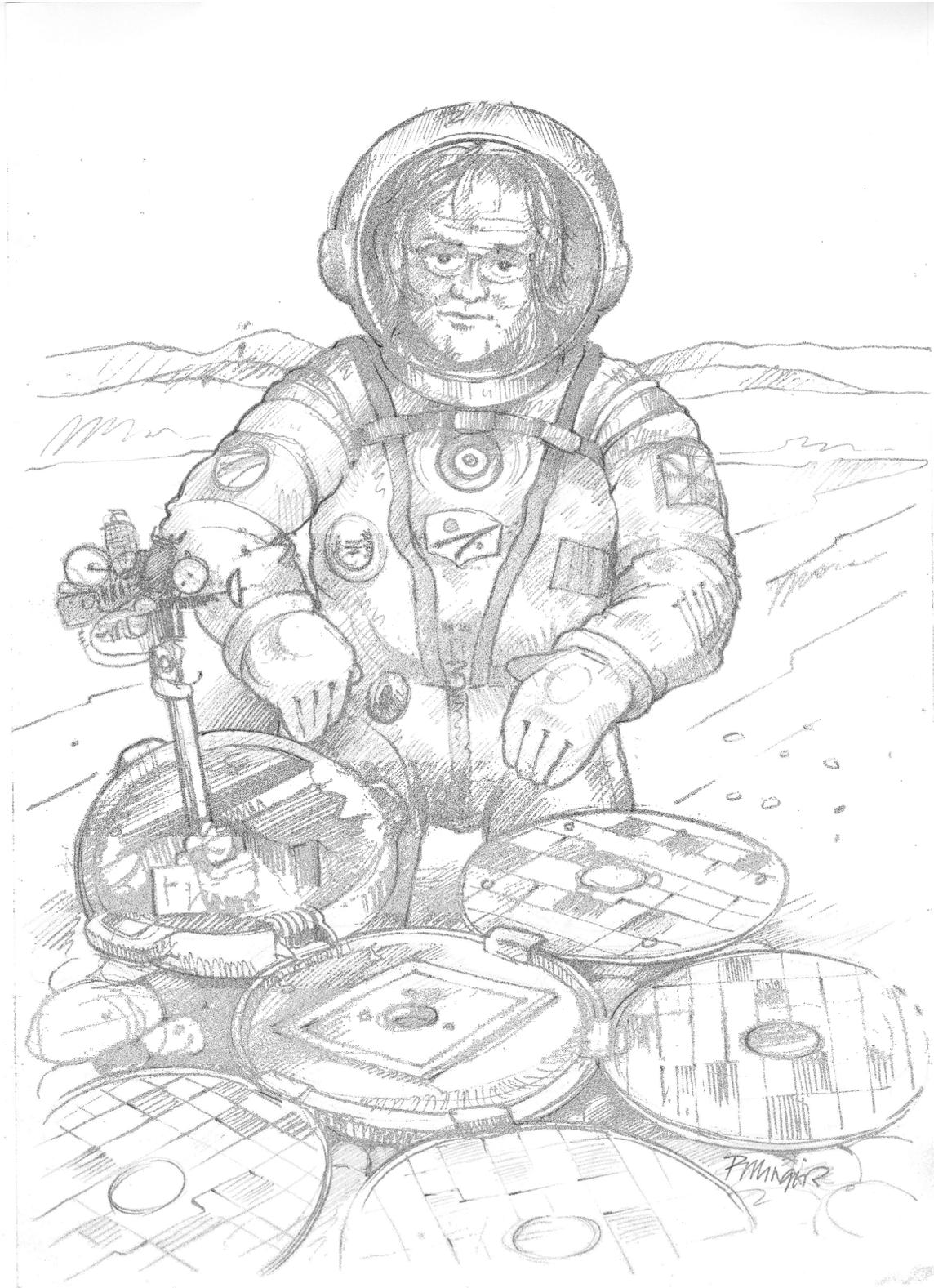
By

Doreen Patricia Lindegaard

(formerly Pillinger)

*Attempt the End
And Never Stand in Doubt
Nothing's so Hard
But Search will find it out.*

Robert Herrick



From Yatton Keynell to Outer Space!

Colin Pillinger on Mars

(drawn by Ian Pillinger)

PROLOGUE.

Would any of this have happened if we hadn't come to Brislington to live? Perhaps, perhaps not. I never had anything to do with Brislington before and although I knew vaguely that it was south of the river in Somerset as opposed to my own Gloucestershire territory, I would have been hard pressed to pin point it exactly on a map of Bristol. Our first house was in a long terrace, Wick Road, an ancient Salt – or White – Road built above a Pilgrim's Way, which followed a quiet stream along a wooded valley to a once famous shrine at St Anne's. Judging by the depth of the ravine through which this now timid waterway flows, a few million years ago it was once a raging torrent.

152 Wick Road was not a bad house at all, but the tiny front garden opened almost straight into the traffic of what would become known as a 'Rat Run', worrying with three adventurous toddlers anxious to take off into the wide world the minute my back was turned. So after a year or so, we moved, barely half a mile, though a world away, to a post-war house in a road built on the site of a WW2 US Army Camp, in 'old' Brislington, not far from what is laughingly called 'the village' though the former 19th century bucolic watering hole is now dissected by the A4. Likewise most of the grand merchants' houses are long gone as are nearly all the old cottages, the dwellings where the ag. labs, gardeners and domestics who had served the grandees lived. A notable exception is 'Nelson's Glory', a few yards away in School Road, which then unbeknown to me, was once the home of a family who shared my maiden name: Pillinger! ('LET EV'RY MAN DO HIS DUTY' is the patriotic paraphrase on a plaque set into the wall of the cottage.) The tower of the 13th Century Parish Church, dedicated to St Luke, is, like most ancient churches, built on a hill, and stands proud over the house tiles, ancient and modern; we still have many of our green spaces, though we now have to fight the marauding council tooth and nail to keep them, (since 2017, they have fancied a large housing estate to cover out park and allotments. I remember how ecstatic we were when we came here in 1972 that we could simply cross a road, go through a gate and along a lane to fields where cattle grazed. Alas the farmer is long dead and the cattle no more, but the fields are still there, so far, used now for dog walkers, including us, and as a pleasant short cut to the nearby trading estate.

When we first arrived, our children were 4, 3 & 2 and I was a stay-at-home Mum. How lucky I was! Each afternoon, come rain or shine, we would go out to explore our new territory. I named these outings 'The hippie trail to Afghanistan', which had an unforeseen consequence; when the USSR invaded that afflicted land a few years later ("*We've been there, haven't we, Mum?*" said the worried eldest child and I had to reassure my infantry that it was not actually within walking distance.) These outings were not without adventure; we once managed to hitch a ride from a passing boatman on the river Avon at Conham who loaded us all aboard and rowed us across the river to Hanham and another county, and we arrived at 'Nana' Pillinger's in Kingswood in the twinkling of an eye, but that's another story.

On the day my long journey with my ancestors began, we set out as usual, my boy Kevin in his push chair (they were not called buggies then) and the two little girls, Caroline and Celia, trotting along beside. We were wending our merry way through the churchyard when it started to drizzle. I had not taken much notice of the names on the gravestones up to then, but this time, suddenly, one stood out and poked me in the eye. Not a ghost, but as good as.

“STOP!” it cried. “AT ONCE! LOOK AT ME! I’M DOWN HERE!”

I obeyed, nearly falling over and almost pitched the baby onto the cold ground. He wailed in vain as I investigated the message.

The inscription on the flat stone in front of me came through loud and clear:

***Sacred to the Memory of James Pillinger
who died July 25th 1824
Aged 68 years
And Hannah, wife of the above who
died April 17th 1839
Aged 79 years.***

***Death may our souls divide
From these abodes of day
But love shall keep us near his side
Through all the gloomy way.***

I had always been a history buff but surely, history was all about kings and queens, great battles and politics, wasn't it? Not ordinary people. Not like us. When I told my brother, Colin Pillinger, he astonished me with his matter of fact reply.

“Why don't you ask the vicar if you can look at his records?” he said.

Incredible as this seems now, I had no idea there were parish records, let alone that they contained details of us, the hoi polloi, as well as the nobs, and that they went back centuries. So it was that a few nights later Colin and I were installed at a vast mahogany table at the vicarage, poring over the church archives. Mrs. Austin Allen, the vicar's wife, ramped up the suspense, producing them one by one, some registers bound in white leather, and older ones in parchment rolls. They contained the baptisms, marriages and burials of Brislington's parishioners from the 1500s, hand-written by previous clerics, variously faded, sometimes blotched and occasionally hard to decipher. I couldn't believe it. And.....the registers rained Pillingers which we eagerly harvested like so many fallen apples. In the blink of an eye we would meet a baby at his christening, be a guest at his wedding twenty years later, rejoice at the births of his children, (sadly, often as not buried in infancy), then finally there would be his own burial, if he was lucky, a few further decades

on; all of it a chilling reminder of the fleeting nature of all our lives. As well as the sparse details contained in the baptisms, marriages and burials, our parish is fortunate that in 1822, an eager young curate, called Charles Ranken decided to round up backsliders who were seldom seen in church. He knocked on doors, interrogated the occupants and wrote them down in his notebook. Were there Pillingers among them? You betcha.

'Aged between 60 and 70', the Reverend wrote of the various individuals; 'has two children living'; 'reads and can write a little'; 'has a Bible'; 'seldom goes to church'; 'takes in washing'; 'is in the Friendly Society'; ' has a nurse child' ; 'works for himself at Nelson's Glory'.

Pure gold. We scribbled and scribbled, It was cold, our feet went to sleep, our teeth chattered but still we wrote.....and copied and wrote.

Then all of a sudden, we were back to 1731, when the flow stopped with the baptism of Sarah, the daughter of Jeremiah and Betty Pillinger. (A year later this couple had another daughter, Shusanah, a name which clearly stuck in Colin's mind for future use when his own daughter was born.) But for now, there were no more Pillingers. Mrs. Allen said *"They must have come from somewhere else,"* and began packing up the books and replacing them carefully in the Parish Chest. Buzzing excited thank yous, we dropped a donation in the offertory box, packed up our notes and left. We had done our family history in an evening. All we had to do now was put it together into a Family Tree.

About a week later, satisfied with our efforts, (mostly Colin's suppositions) we took the finished article to show our Dad, Alfred Pillinger, but commonly called Jack:

"Now Dad," we said, puffed up and proud, *"Show us which one of these is your grandfather....."*

He put on his specs, and looked and looked again. A hush descended. Then breaking the silence he said.....

..... *"None of them, y'dummocks. We all come from Kingswood!"*

Not only that; our Pillingers were Chapel people, he said. Methodists. Wesleyans, three times on a Sunday, as well as midweek, 'Bible Class' and 'Band of Hope'. It had put him off for life. He listened to 'Sunday Half-Hour' with Nan, on the wireless, but was, he continued, *"inclined to believe, like you young 'uns, that this one time on earth is your lot."*

The Kingswood Pillingers, our ancestors, were harder to pin down than the Brislington family. They dodged about so. Perhaps they were searching for 'the truth', so over time chopped and changed, between Church and Chapel, as well as between one Chapel denomination and another: there were plenty of such places in Kingswood to choose from. *"Some on 'em gave better teas than others,"* Dad suggested, ever pragmatic. Kingswood, after all, had been in the forefront of the non-conformist revolution, 'the Great Stir' of 1740

when John Wesley and George Whitfield had preached to the 'ignorant colliers' in the open fields. The Pillingers led us (me in particular) quite a dance, not only in Kingswood. I came to know the local geography like the back of my hand, and as well as that went to places I had never heard of before.

In those days, the early 1970s, nearly all Church of England registers were in the care of the incumbent vicar rather than as now, in County Record Offices.¹ The custodians came in extremes. Some were hospitable and kindly, others were 'tricky vicars' among whom was the Reverend Canon at Yatton Keynell, (the cradle of our line), who was in a class of his own. He kept me on a knife edge for years, with excuse after excuse, too busy, weddings, funerals, Easter, Christmas, visits from the Bishop, the Archbishop..... I never even got as far as the vestry there. He was finally forced (by law, in 1978) to hand his registers over to the Wiltshire Record Office for safe keeping, where at last I was able to see them. An archivist, unbidden, told me,

"they had to be literally prised off him. He sat in the corridor, fuming, and holding them tightly to his chest shouting 'these belong to me! You've no right!'....."

Chapel records, unlike those of the Established Church are private property and their survival is a hit and miss affair. A newspaper headline which I chased up read '*Bill's attic is full of history!*' and it was too, full of assorted Sunday School books, and among them 'a lead' which led back to Wiltshire.

Many of our recent kin lie buried in the Wesleyan graveyard in Kingswood. I searched the grave records at their then home at Bamford's, the ironmongers, under a dreary yellow light bulb in an upstairs storeroom among boxes of screws, nails and tools of every sort. I took down all the family members but now wish I had listed everybody else too, for the records have now, inevitably, vanished. A few years ago I heard from a couple of spinster ladies who said they had them. I rushed to visit them. Then it turned out they didn't have them at all. What they had was a monograph of the names on the chapel tombstones, "Monumental Inscriptions" as they are known in the trade, a different thing altogether: only a few Pillingers were posh/rich enough to have gravestones as opposed to the yards of them who had unmarked graves. Despite my disappointment, thank goodness I didn't say "*Thanks, but no thanks,*" to the ladies, for this typescript list is now itself worth its weight in gold (my interests have expanded), the chapel itself is now roofless and the "unsafe" graveyard is an inaccessible island, overgrown and boarded up, hazardous, out of bounds to everybody. (*'elf 'n safety'* of course) In the days when it was still possible to wander about there, it was even then full of hidden dangers; I spotted the letters Gra----m Pi----- on a fallen stone and on further investigation fell through the bramble undergrowth and full length into the grave itself. (*"Trying to cut-out the middle man?"* enquired Dad's sardonic ghost.) Clambering out,

¹ Many of course are now on-line: very convenient, but not half as much fun. Then, you might travel fifty miles and come home highly satisfied at finding one previously unknown entry. Don't knock it though. It's so much easier.

I ripped my trousers and despite the blood from my scragged knees, managed to take a picture:



By then, Colin with bigger fish to fry largely left me to it, except when *a touch of the Doctor Pillingers* on headed notepaper proved helpful in unblocking an avenue of research. It's amazing what a handle or a few letters after your name can do.

Thus the years passed by. A tap had been turned on. Dad's ancestors; Mum's ancestors; the ancestors of my Danish and Irish in-laws; my next-door-neighbour's ancestors; anybody's ancestors; it became a cottage industry: 'Kingswood Annals'; 'Brislington Bulletins'; 'Black Bristolians'; 'Killed in a Coalpit'; neither were the long line of Brislington Pillingers allowed to rest in peace. I researched them as well. Of course I did.

When I started this quest, not only were the parish registers in individual churches, the civil records of births, marriages and deaths (from 1837 onwards) were at St Catherine's House in London, in huge tomes that had to be hefted from high shelves, a separate list for each quarter, with rudimentary indexes which gave name, number and district only with no certainty that the certificate containing the vital information for which you paid your money was the correct one. Censuses (at the time 1841-61 were all that was available) gave more information about who was who, with ages and occupations, and were (oh joy!) at Bristol Library but unindexed, and had to be accessed on spools of microfilm, with much cranking of the handles of antiquated readers, (groan!)

In 1979, an ITV newsreader, Gordon Honeycombe, (who died in 2015) hosted an inspirational TV series called 'Family History' based on his own research. He was years ahead of his time. Now *Family History* is everywhere. Everybody is at it. There have been umpteen series of 'Who do you think you are?' on BBC and plenty of other spin-offs. With the Internet, "everyfink's on there, in'it?" is the oft repeated mantra. Now the craze is all for DNA.

More years passed. We made our own family history, with good years and difficult years. What doesn't kill you makes you strong. (Never go into the restaurant business! As lucky baldy Greg Wallace warbles on TV's *Master Chef*, "It will change your life", but not, I guarantee, for the better.) I was emerging from one of our periodic sloughs of despond. We were stony broke and I was in a dead-end job, and doing a bit of paid family history research

on the side. I was more than usually irritable having just given up smoking. Caroline, our eldest, home that weekend from University, said

“Why don’t you do a Mature Student’s degree?”

“But I haven’t got any A-Levels,” was my doleful reply. Caroline, unlike me, is a glass-half-full person.

“No, but show them your research,” she said, with super confidence.

“Luck”, Seneca said, *“is when preparation meets opportunity”*. I got into Bristol Polytechnic which has since gone up in the world as ‘The University of the West of England’. I was awarded a grant. A grant! I couldn’t believe it. I graduated. Then, in my fifties, I got the only good job I ever had in my life, working for a Labour Member of Parliament. I stayed for nearly twenty years until I was seventy two.

And all through a walk in the churchyard. Kevin, the boy in the buggy was married at St Luke’s. The bride and groom had their photo taken by the famous Pillinger grave. *Family History*. I’m still at it. Each time I finish a project I say *“I won’t do another one.”* And my lovely long suffering old man, who says he agrees with Henry Ford that, *“History is bunk”,* says *“You will. You will.”* And of course, I will. Here I go again.



Me and baby Colin, aged 6 and 0, 1943.

“A man is not dead while his name is still spoken.”
Terry Pratchett

Hugh do you think you are?

In 1293 a Maiota de Pillingere² appears in the tax rolls for Stapleton, a small hamlet near Presteigne on the English/Welsh border, but unfortunately, the next Pillinger does not show up for another three hundred years until a certain Hugh, the son of John, was baptised at Presteigne in Radnorshire on 10 January, 1570. Then comes another Hugh, the son of Thomas and Joan Pillinger, at Kingsland, about ten miles down the road, on 23 March, 1577.



The Mediaeval church of St Andrew, Presteigne



The Church of St Michael & All Angels, Kingsland

It is not beyond the realms of possibility that either of these Hughs (Huws? I've always fancied a Celtic ancestry) is the same Hugh *Pellinger* who had a daughter, Elinor, baptised 18 January 1605/6,³ at Littleton Drew, about eight miles from Chippenham, Wiltshire. By 1614, Hugh and his family, having moved another ten or so miles and into another county, were at Doynton, Gloucestershire; a son, Richard was baptised there in 1614 on the 4th of September.

Before continuing with the Doynton family, I pause to consider Hugh's father, John Pillinger of Presteigne, who in the absence of any other candidate may be the same John Pillinger, who was a constable on the staff of the Winchcombe and Stonehouse Deanery Court. In

² PRO. E179/242/57 (with thanks to Eric Pillinger)

³ 18.1.1606 in current dating. Until 1750 the year began 25th March, (Lady Day). PRs are written accordingly.

1577 he rode out to Twyning, near Tewkesbury, to deliver a summons in a case of *immorality*: the unfortunately named Thomas Prickett and Elizabeth Meane were (ahem) at it, without being married. Pillinger returned to the Deanery and his zealous report (only surviving as an index, alas), obviously greatly impressed his masters, as the following year he was officially appointed 'Apparitor' also known as a 'Summoner'.

Despite the religious upheavals of the age, this ecclesiastical office seems not to have changed much since Chaucer's time when the Summoner, one of the pilgrims, delivered a bawdy tale on the journey to Canterbury. Chaucer's man crunched garlic as he rode, was covered in pock marks and frightened the children. He was not above taking a bribe in exchange for his silence over mis-doings, and for a quart of wine he would '*allow a rogue to have his concubine*'. Despite his shortcomings, Chaucer was not too hard on him.

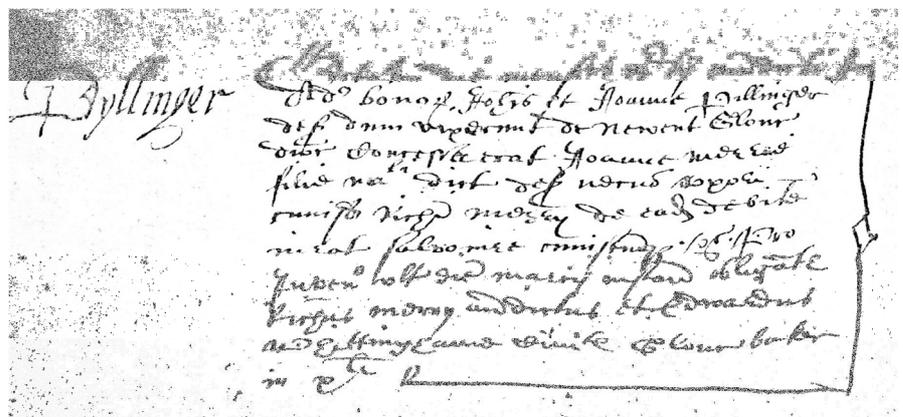
Though I suspect our John Pillinger was a busybody who enjoyed his work, for all we know he was entirely honest and only anxious to save souls from eternal damnation.



Do I detect a smirk as he delivers the warrant? And dig the crazy hair rollers!

If he is the same man, then by 1587 John was 'of Newent' when he and his wife Joan died and his daughter Joan Merrie applied for probate of his estate through her husband Richard, and Edward Whittingham, a 'baker and citizen of Gloucester'. This would imply that John left no male heirs. If so, where was Hugh?

The will of John & Joan Pyllinger



There is the merest suspicion of a connection between John Pillinger and Philip *Pellinger*, a promising scholar, born about 1557, who had received sufficient schooling, even perhaps at

Winchcombe, to enable him to read and write both Latin and English. Although family resources did not stretch far enough to send him to Oxford or Cambridge (he is not named amongst the *alumni*), he was ordained priest at Gloucester Cathedral on the 15 March, 1578, sponsored by one Edward Horton, gentleman, whose family owned large estates in the Winchcombe area. Is it too much to suggest that the Dean may also have put in a word for his cousin or nephew Philip at John's behest?

Since the Reformation there had been no bar to married clergy (apart from the brief intervention of Mary I) and though Queen Elizabeth herself preferred celibate priests, Philip took advantage of the situation and by the time he was installed in 1587 as vicar of Ditteridge, a small parish near Box in Wiltshire, he was a married man with a child on the way.

Philip and his wife Margaret baptised their first son, Jeremiah, on the 18th October that year, but sadly the baby boy lived less than a month. Over the next twenty two years Margaret gave birth to seven more children, four girls and three boys. Of these, one of the girls, Martha, died in infancy and another, Elizabeth, died aged twenty two. Philip recorded all their baptisms and burials in Latin in the parish register, strangely making no reference to the fact that they were his own children.

Jeremiah, baptised 18 October 1587; buried 16 November 1587

Rebecca, baptised 19 June 1589

Elizabeth, baptised 11 August 1590; buried 11 June 1612

Johannes, (John), baptised (-) March 1594

Martha, baptised 20 March 1602; buried 22 November 1602

Maria, (Mary,) baptised 24 June 1604

Jacobus, (James), baptised 10 September 1607

Nathaniel, baptised 20 April 1609



The 11th century Church of St Christopher, Ditteridge

Presumably Margaret may have miscarried several times between 1594 and 1602. I researched the above about four decades ago *in situ* at the church. The vicar at the time was a jolly, gentleman and elderly⁴, who said he had been “*put out to pasture*” at this ancient church, with “*not a lot to do*” and was enjoying it

⁴ He was probably a lot younger than I am now, but anybody over 50 seemed old to me at the time!

thoroughly. He was delighted to discuss the doings of his Elizabethan predecessor. As I, scribbling furiously, sat down with the vicar, my husband, was entertained to sherry in the homely living room by Mrs. Vicar, who found those who wanted to copy out names from the parish register a little bit odd. She preferred her embroidery or tapestry, she said, whichever one she had on the go at the time.

If the world is divided into two halves, 'British' and 'Foreign' (as my parents believed!) then another bisection is between those who get excited by faded writing on a bit of parchment and those whose eyes glaze over when the thrilling discovery is being explained to them. Here, we were neatly divided here into the two World types. As we walked back to the car in the dark, Norman, full of good cheer, said kindly, that he could understand why I enjoyed my hobby so much, however, once was enough and he would not be tempted to take it up himself.

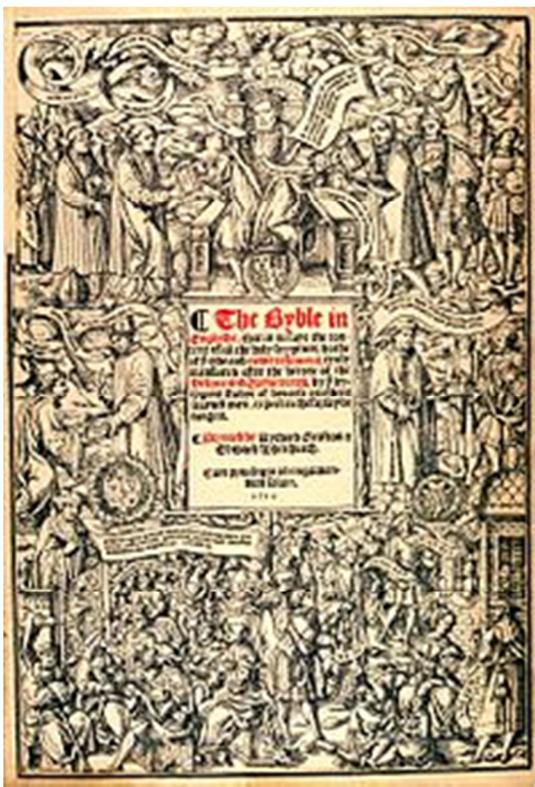
On 18 April, 1605 Philip '*exhibited his licence for preaching*' issued by Henry, Bishop of Salisbury, which must be a clue to the changing times after the accession of James I, with a new puritan regime coming to the fore.

In 1620, John, Philip and Margaret's son, then aged 26, became curate at nearby Colerne which would have pleased his father, who by now had been vicar of his tiny parish of less than one hundred souls, for thirty five years.

On 8 April 1622, Philip asked his colleague, the Rev John Dover of Box, to draw up his will.

It commences with that universal preamble present in all wills of the time, which acts as a Rosetta Stone, unlocking the rest of it, however difficult the handwriting or obscure the meaning:

'In the Name of God Amen, the eighth day of April in the year of our Lord God one thousand six hundred and twenty two, I, Philip Pellingier, clerke, parson of Ditchridge in the County of Wiltshire and diocese of Sarum being sick in body but of good and perfect remembrance, praise given to Almighty God, do make and ordain this my last will and testament in manner and form following that is to say:



'First I give and bequeath my soule unto Almighty God my Creator in full truth and sureness that I will receive the peace of the eternal kingdom of God out of God's bountiful mercy by the only true means and knowledge with all sufficient mediation of God's only dear son and my soul's Saviour and redeemer.

'Item. I give and bequeath my body unto the earth whereof it was made and to be buried under the east end of the chancel of the parish church of Ditchridge aforesaid.

'Item. I give unto the poor of the parish of Ditchridge, two shillings.

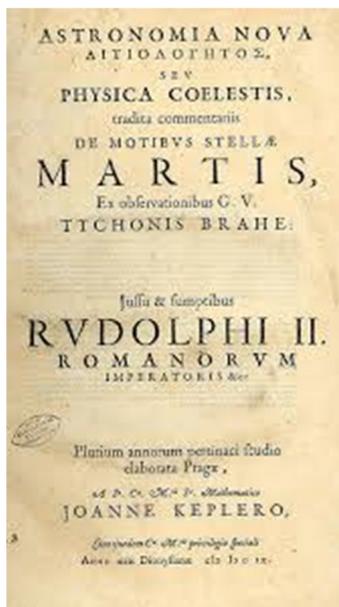
With the formalities ended, we come to the bequests to the family:

'Item. I give and bequeath unto my eldest son John Pelling, clerke, all and every one of my boots and all my wearing apparel, both of linen and also of woollen.....'

Boots? I paused. How many pairs did he have? I looked again and my spirits soared, for the word was **BOOKS**. 'Each and every one of my books.....'

If only he had named them. Perhaps there was quite a library. I surmised them

The Great Bible of 1539, in English, to be read in all churches? Probably. The Book of Common Prayer – of course, but did Philip also own 'An Introduction to the Devout' by St Francis of Sales, a volume reputedly valued by Catholic and Protestant alike? Foxe's *Booke of Martyrs*? The King's own diatribe against witches, 'Daemonologie'? But, in this library of



wishful thinking, why should not 'Astronomia Nova', published 1609, Kepler's ten year study of the motion of the planet Mars be there among Philip's books? If it was not there, then it ought to have been.....it could have been..... I come down from the clouds and continue:

'Item. I give and bequeath unto Rebecca my eldest daughter, five pounds to be paid unto her after the decease of, or before, at the discretion of Margaret, my now wedded wife.

'Item. I give and bequeath unto Mary my younger daughter the sum of five pounds to be paid to her in like manner as before aforesaid.

'Item. I give and bequeath unto James, my second son, five pounds in like manner as before specified.

'Item. I give and bequeath unto Nathaniel, my youngest son, the sum of five pounds aforesaid at the discretion of my now wife Margaret whom I make, ordain and constitute my full, sole and entire executrix of this my last will and testament in witness thereof, I, the above named testator Phillip Pelling, put my hand this day and year first written.'

His signature 'P. Pelling, clerke' written in a shaky hand was witnessed by John Dover, the incumbent at nearby Box. If Rev Dover buried his friend at Ditchridge as instructed he omitted to make a note of the proceedings. Philip was certainly dead by 10th September, that year when two parishioners, Peter Webb and William Clements, came on the scene to make an inventory of his property:

'Imprimis. In the Hall.

One table board in a frame. One joined chair, a plank bench frame seat. One joined chair. Pieces of pewter of all sorts. One dozen spoons for a pewter pottinger. Two salts and two candleholders.

Two pair of andirons. One branding iron. One pair of tongs. One pair pothooks. One warming pan. One branch. A pair of pothangers. One pair of brass candlehorns, one brass pot and one posnet.

In the Buttery.

Tureens and tubs of all sorts.

In the Chambers below and above.

Three feather beds. Three flock beds and three coverlets. Three coverlets and three pair of blankets.

Linen.

Three pair of sheets. One table cloth and two napkins. One chest. One coffer.

His wearing apparel.

His books. (There they are again, not one named.....)

One mare. One cow. One pig and the poultry. Corn in the barn and hay.

The whole amounted to £30. 6s. 4d out of which Philip had debts amounting to £4.15s 10d, owing to Henry Binny of Chippenham and to Peter Webb and William Clements, the inventory makers.

Philip was no more, and neither was the living. A new priest had to be appointed. Margaret with her children, Rebecca, aged 33, Mary, 18, James, 15 and thirteen year old Nathaniel vacated the vicarage and moved to Pockeridge, just outside the village of Corsham. She survived Philip by a mere three years and in turn left a lengthy will, abbreviated as follows:



**Cottage,
Pockeridge
Farm,
Corsham⁵**

⁵ Adve

To daughter Rebecca: £10 of lawful English money.

To son James: £6 of lawful English money

To son Nathaniel: £6 of lawful English money

Also to Rebecca: one flock bed, a pair of blankets, one red and yellow covering and the bedstead thereunto belonging. One posnet, (?) one brass kettle, one pewter candlestick, one pottinger and one pail.

Also to Nathaniel: one pair of andirons and one spit.

To son John: ten shillings of lawful English money

'I have devised unto to my daughter Rebecca, my said sons James and Nathaniel, the sole estate of my cottage and out houses and all my lands belonging thereunto called Pockeridge.

'All the rest of my goods, cattles, chattels, I give and bequeath unto my daughter Mary Pellingher who I do ordain and constitute my sole executrix of this my last will and testament, to pay all my debts and other legacies before mentioned according to the true intent of my last will as the profits shall arise out of my devised lands to my daughter Rebecca and sons James and Nathaniel by virtue of an indenture of lease holdings dated 9th day of June in the 22nd year of our sovereign King James the King that now is.....

'My daughter Mary to see my body decently buried and my funeral service discharged. And I do make and ordain my beloved in Christ Richard Kington of Jaggards and Anthony Moss of Pockeridge, overseers of this my last will.....'



Jaggards House, Corsham

Margaret was buried at Corsham and her will proved on 22 September, 1625.

Wills of course pose as many questions as answers. Why only ten shillings to John the clerk? Presumably because he was set up already and anyway, he had his father's books. But why was

he not executor? Come to that, why was Mary executrix rather than her older sister

Rebecca? Perhaps the spinster Rebecca was (as my mother would say) *'not quite the thing'* but if she and the two boys were all to live together in the leasehold cottage, where was Mary to live? Was she engaged to be married? Margaret's friends, her 'beloved in Christ' who were to oversee proceedings, Anthony Moss and Richard Kington came from influential families in the neighbourhood; Jaggards is one of the most historic houses in North Wiltshire. Pockeridge House, Pockeridge Farm and Pockeridge Lodge are likewise all still there and keep their secrets.

The biggest question of all is what became of all these Pellingers? They disappear from Corsham and for that matter from everywhere else. Unfortunately it was a time of upheaval; the country would soon be at war with itself. Members of the clergy would be thrown out of their livings. Parish registers if kept up at all, (by a civil official a 'Register') were often sporadic with many missing entirely for thirty or forty years of chaos, through the Civil War and the new order of the short-lived Commonwealth. Parish registers proper do not appear again until after the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660.

Occasionally we catch a few glimpses of the Pillinger family through the fog of war, but most of their doings, along with almost every other member of the *hoi polloi* were lost during this bloody period.

A John Pellingier (perhaps a son of John the curate) was married to Bridget and they had two sons and a daughter: Andrew, date of birth unknown, Nicolas, born in 1640 and Elizabeth, in 1643, both baptised at Lacock.



The picturesque village of Lacock.

On 6 August 1655, Nicolas ('son of John Pillinger, of Lacock, husbandman') was sent to Bristol as an apprentice to Walter White as a wire drawer.⁶ John Pillinger died in 1681 and was buried at Lacock.

In the meantime, big brother Andrew had gone to seek his fortune in London where; on 23 May, 1682, as Andrew Phillinger (*sic*) he married Susanna Wash at St James, Duke's Place. By 1695, Andrew and Susan had been joined by Nicolas at All Hallows, Barking, where they appear in a rudimentary census 'London Inhabitants Within the Walls' – listed as Andrew Pillinger, Susan, his wife and Nicolas, his brother. They were well off with a personal fortune of £600 or more! Bridget, their mother, still lived in Lacock, where she died in 1698. Of Elizabeth, their sister, nothing else is known. Susanna Pillinger, wife of Andrew was buried at All Hallows on 14 July 1699. Nicholas, apparently unmarried and childless, was buried at the

⁶ 6.8.1655, BRO, City of Bristol Apprentice register

same church on 17 December 1704. Andrew Pillinger, widower, married secondly Susannah Whit, spinster, at St Paul, Shadwell, Tower Hamlets by licence on 6 April 1703. Both parties were then living at Greenwich. They then turn up at Cardington, Bedfordshire in 1714 as parties to a land transaction and where Andrew practiced as a 'Chirurgeon' - a surgeon. His will was proved 21 October, 1719⁷ and Susanna's on 2 May, 1721.⁸ With both Andrew's childless, this line of the family became extinct.

A Nathaniel Pellingier, 'the son of Nathaniel and Isabella' who was baptised at St Martin the Fields on 31 May 1678 may well have been a grandson of Nathaniel born in 1609 and a James Pillinger, buried at Chippenham 26 February 1678 may be Philip's son who was born in 1607. But this is supposition without a jot of proof.

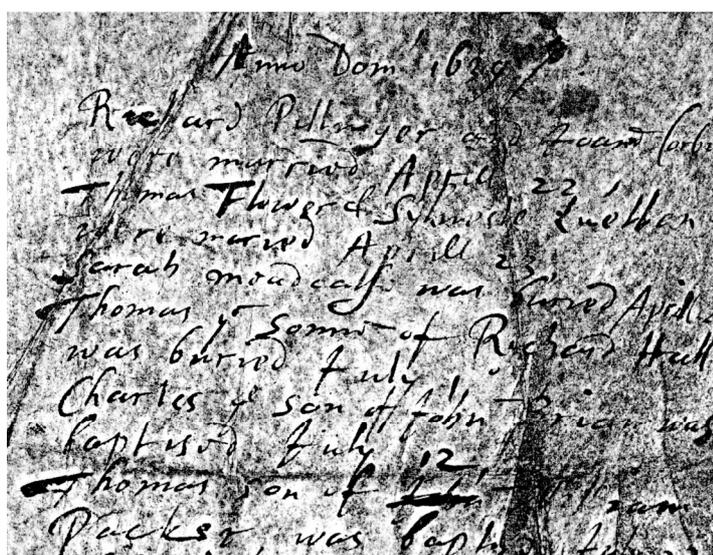
Having come to a dead end, we now return to Doynton where we left Hugh Pillinger with his two recorded children, Elinor born in 1606 during a sojourn at Littleton Drew and Richard in 1614. It is highly probable that Hugh had two other children, born in the intervening years, Margaret and Philip. (You cannot help but remark on these two circumstantial names!) Hugh lost his (un-named) wife shortly after Richard's birth and married secondly, Mary Palmer at Box, Wiltshire in 1618. With Mary he had three more children, Elizabeth, 1618 and William, 1620, both at Box and John, at Doynton in 1621.

It is just worth a mention that Edward, the son of a John Merrie was baptised at Doynton in November 1609, who may have been relative Richard Merrie, John Pillinger the summoner's son in law.

There is silence until a flurry of weddings at Doynton: Margaret Pillinger married Richard Poole, 1630 and Eleanor (Elinor) married Walter Willshire in 1637; Richard married Joan Corbut at nearby Wick and Abson on 22 April, 1639 and Philip married Elizabeth Bird on 16 November 1640 at Whitchurch, on the Somerset side of Bristol. The marriages follow the general pattern that girls married in their own parish and boys looked elsewhere for their brides, and married in the girls' parish.



Holy Trinity, Doynton.



'Anno Domini 1639 Richard Pellingier & Joan Corbut were married, April 22' at Wick & Abson.

Richard and Joan's first child was a daughter, Sarah, born at Doynton in June 1640, who lived only three months. The couple then moved to Siston, a village a short distance away where Mary was born in 1641 followed by Sarah II a few years later. Both girls

grew up to marry at Siston, Mary to John Jay in 1667 and Sarah to Luke Style(s),⁹ a coal driver, in 1666.

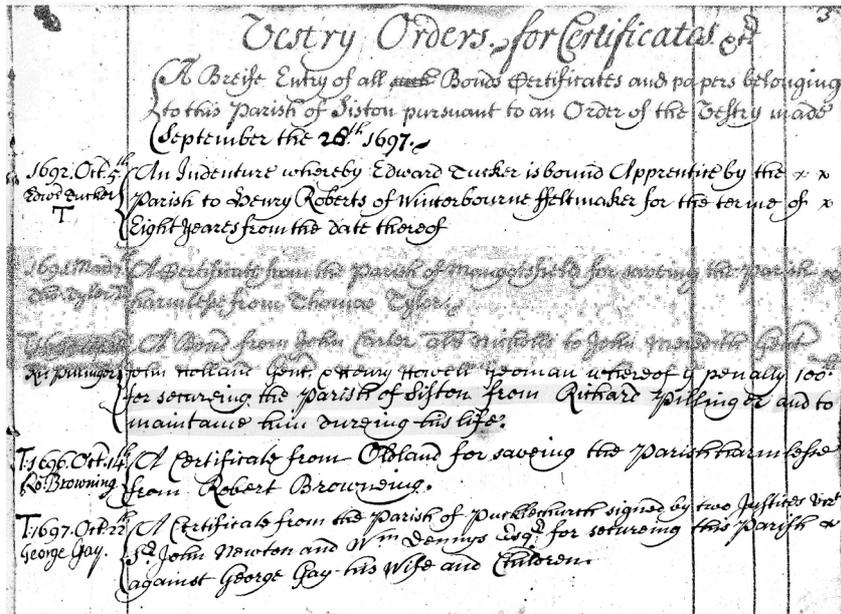
Philip's wife Elizabeth died, just a year after their marriage, giving birth to their daughter, who was also named Elizabeth. The child was baptised on 7 November 1641, the same day as her mother was buried in Doynton churchyard. Philip took another wife in 1643; the vicar being so laid back that he could not be bothered to ask the bride's name, and recorded the simple line: 'Philip Pillinger was married'. In fact her name was Alice. She and Philip had a daughter, Bridget, in 1644, the same year that Hugh ('Hugo' according to the register) was buried on 22nd November.

The two sons of Hugh's second marriage, William, born at Box, Wiltshire, in 1620 and John, born at Doynton the following year, settled down at Box where they became joint patriarchs of that branch of the Pillinger family; one or other is likely to be our ancestor, but for reasons which will be explained later, I cannot say which.

Following the upheavals of the Civil War (when we can only imagine the suffering of the family, along with everybody else) no Pillingers were in Doynton. Richard survived at Siston

⁹ Luke 'Stioles', coaldriver, Siston was 'bondsman' when Thos Walter married Elizabeth Dandy, 29.4.1674, BMLB. Luke makes a fleeting appearance in my book, "Killed in a Coalpit".

and in 1674 was living with Sarah, his daughter, her husband Luke Stiles, and a lodger, Will Hardin.¹⁰ He was still alive in 1695 when, an aged man, he was being maintained through 'A Bond from John Carter, alias Nicholls to John Meredith, Gent, John Holland, Gent, & Henry Howell, yeoman, whereof the penalty (is) 100li for securing the parish of Siston from Richard Pillinger and to maintain him during his life.'



'for securing the parish of Siston from Richard Pillinger and to maintain him during his life.'

Richard was then about seventy nine years old. There is no note of his burial and for all I know, he may be alive still.

Other Early Pillingers:

Gloucestershire: (1500-1600)

Bromsberrow. Alice Pillinger married John Stone, junior, fletcher, 1604/5

Herefordshire: (1500-1700)

Bishopstone. Francis Pilliner (sic) daughter of Elizabeth & Bartholomew, bp 1662

Elizabeth Pillinger daughter of John and Mary, bp 1686

Richard Pillinger son of Richard and Elynor, bp 1687

Cradley. William Pillinger married Alice Lewen, 1579. They had four daughters, Joyce (Jocosa) 1580, Anna, 1588, Maria, 1591, Elizabeth, 1595

Alice Pillinger married William Walton of London, 1605

Anne Pillinger (presumably Anna, above) married Francis Hay, 1611

Colwall. Elizabeth Pillinger married Robert Pitt, in 1604.

¹⁰ A "Perambulation" of the parish of Siston, 1674, which also includes another ancestor, Thomas Summerill, of whom more anon.

Nottinghamshire:

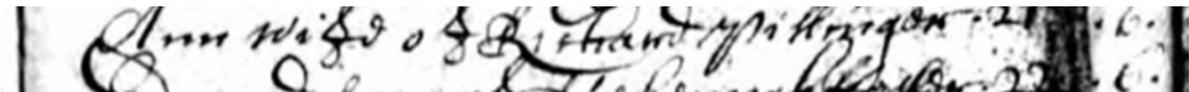
Gotham. Luce Pillinger married George Winfield, 1604

Worcestershire: 1500-1700

Castlemoreton. Jane Pillinger, bp 1635 & Anne Pillinger, bp 1638, daughters of Francis Malton. Edward Pillinger, son of Margaret, bp 1627; Alice Pillinger married William Thomas, 1629

Worcester. John Pillinger married Anne Wood, 1645.

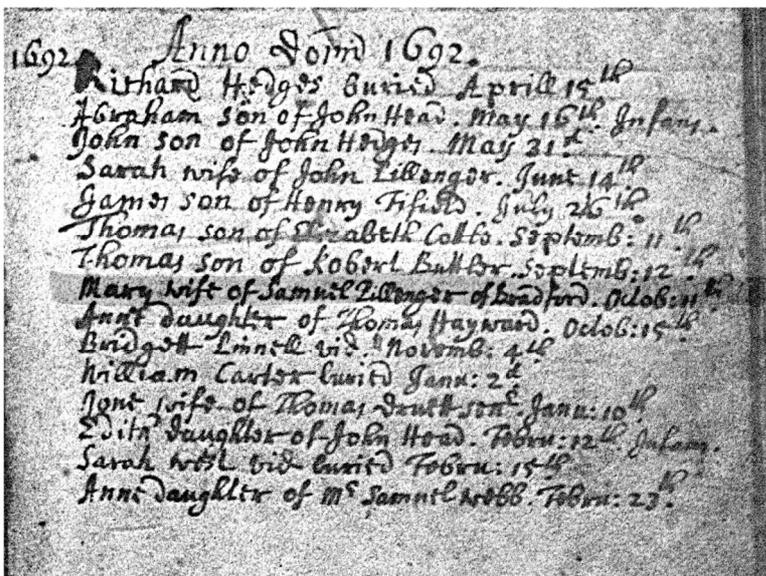
London, St Olave, Southwark. Ann wife of Pillinger buried 21.10.1647



Maybe one day more information will be found to join them altogether. It is a semi dark-age as far as the family is concerned.

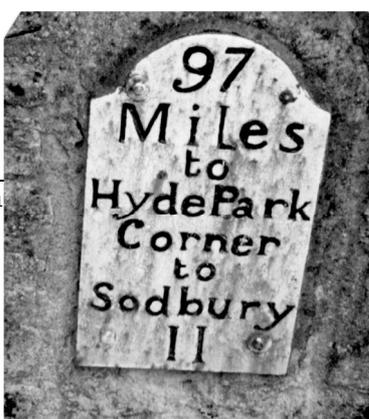
A boy called "Sally" (Yatton Keynell and Colerne)

At last in 1692 in Wiltshire, we are on slightly firmer ground. Hugh's children and grandchildren were thriving at Box¹¹ when one Samuel Pillinger, with no discernible antecedents showed up there with an ailing wife, Mary, and a seven year old son in tow, the boy I later identify as Sallai Pillinger. Mary Pillinger died of an unknown cause and was buried on 11th October that year in the churchyard at Box among the Pillinger throng who had by then dwelt in the village for almost a century, yet the wording in the register



suggests that she was an outsider, singled out, 'not one of us': 'Mary, wife of Samuel Pillinger of Bradford.'

The Parish Register of Box, Wiltshire, 1692, showing the burial, on October 11th 1692 of 'our Mary' the wife of Samuel Pillinger of Bradford as well as Sarah, wife of John Pillinger of the large Box family.



Bradford is of course Bradford-on-Avon, not its larger Northern namesake. Samuel remarried there the following year on the 26th May, the register entry shown as: *Samuel*

onraker Inheritance'

Pillingor and Sary Boteller. Apart from these two entries concerning Sam, there is not a prior whisper of him at Bradford or at Box or anywhere else for that matter. No baptism, no record of his marriage to his first wife Mary, no baptism of their son. It would seem logical that Samuel was a member of the Box family – why else would he bring his wife to be buried there? But he didn't stop there long and turns up, a year or so after his new marriage on the 19 August 1695 at nearby Yatton Keynell where '*Mary, daughter of Samuel Pöllinger and Sarah his wife*' was baptised.

Yatton Keynell, also known as Church Yatton, is just to the west of Chippenham with a parish church and an old inn called The Bell. When the pub was modernized in recent times, a gruesome discovery was made: the skeletons of a cat and a rat were found walled up inside as a protection against evil spirits. An ancient sign in a wall advises those who wish to escape from the village that it is 97 miles to Hyde Park Corner but only eleven to Sodbury.

Samuel and Sarah settled down in Yatton Keynell and in the next decade six more children were born and baptised: Thomas, 1 September 1697, Elizabeth, 30 April, 1699, Samuel, "the last of August" 1701, (who died an infant) and Nathaniel on 19 January 1703. In 1704, another Samuel was born and in 1705, a daughter Sarah. Perhaps weakened after her last confinement, Sarah became ill with an infection which she passed to little Samuel aged two. Mother and son both died and were buried together on 16 June 1706, 'in woollen according to the law'.

Burial in a woollen shroud as against some other more costly material had been made compulsory by Act of Parliament to stimulate the home grown wool trade.

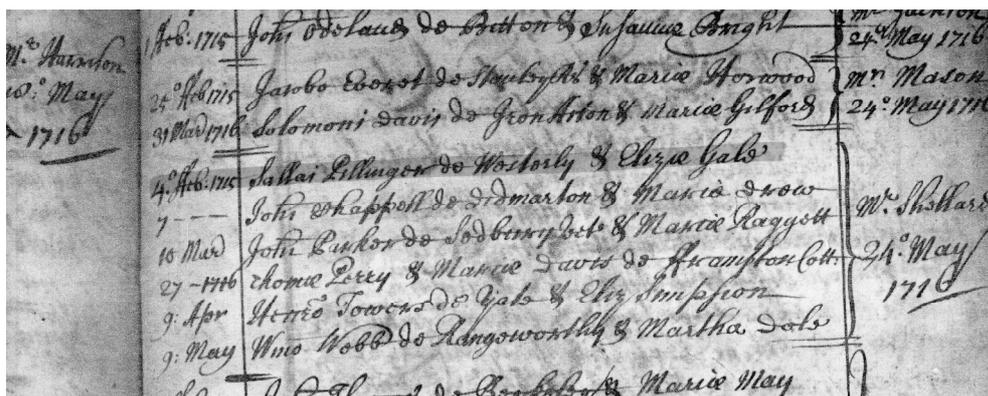
'No corpse of any person (except those who shall die of the plague) shall be buried in any shift, sheet, or shroud, or anything whatsoever made or mingled with flax, hemp, silk, hair, gold, or silver, or in any stuff, or thing, other than what is made of sheep's wool only.'

A printed form showing that the law had been obeyed was produced for use before the funeral and an affidavit had to be sworn preferably before the local JP, but more often it was the vicar himself who administered the oath and issued the certificate. Failure to comply resulted in a fine of £5. Many of the well to do chose to pay the fine and be more grandly sent off, like an actress, Mrs Oldfield, cited by Pope in his 'Moral Essays', who was buried in '*a Brussels lace head dress; a Holland shift with tucker and double ruffles of the same lace, and a pair of new kid gloves.*' I think I can safely say that Samuel and his family were not among the grandees for whom a fine was an option.

Though I have not found a record of his third wedding, by 1715 Samuel had a new wife, variously shown as Susan, Susanna or Shusanna. (It is not known whether the additional 'H' in her name was generally silent. The current Shusanah, Colin's daughter, has chosen the noisy version and is known as 'Shu'.) A third Samuel, baptised on 25 September 1715 was Shusanna's only child; sadly like the other two little Samuels before him, he did not survive. He was buried in 1720, aged five. Shusanna Pöllinger herself was buried at Yatton Keynell on the 7 May 1736. Samuel then remained a widower until his death in March, 1741.

For convenience Samuel's eldest son shall be shown as Sallai throughout this text, though his name puzzled everybody; he appears as Sallia, Salliah, Sallier, even Shelah. The classically trained indexer at Gloucestershire Record Office stating that 'Sallia' is Latin for 'Saul' lists him accordingly. As he probably could not read he was in the hands of the know-alls who interpreted him in their own way. Though the name is still current in Israel, I do not know of another in Britain, then or now. The original Sallai is an obscure personage in the Book of Nehemiah, of the tribe of Benjamin, a priest returning to Jerusalem in the days of Joshua. Perhaps somebody or other, maybe a sombre Puritan was flicking through his Bible when the new baby boy was born and suggested the name. If Mary Pillinger, who died at Box, (who I presume was his mother) was a Puritan, this may be the reason I cannot find her marriage to Samuel or a baptism for her baby, Sallai. It is a tiny hook on which to hang a supposition. I suspect everybody called him "Sally" anyway. Maybe he punched a few of them.

The first time he makes an official appearance is on a Marriage Licence Bond, dated 4 February 1715, though as the year ended in March, it is 1716 by current reckoning. The bond occurs within a list of other couples and is countersigned with no explanation by a Mr. Shellard, three months later on 24 May 1716:



Marriage Licence, Gloucester, 4.2.1715/6, Sallai Pillinger of Westerly and Elizie Gale.....

Sallai and Elizabeth were married at Cold Ashton that same day. Why Westerleigh? Why Cold Ashton? Did the bridegroom have to trek up to Gloucester for the licence? The ways of our ancestors and their prodigious travels on foot, on horseback or by cart are a mystery. A licence speeded matters up and dispensed with the 'calling of the banns' which would otherwise have delayed the ceremony for three weeks. On production of a licence, the wedding could take place at once in any church in the realm. Sallai was about thirty two years of age, his bride, even less of a spring chicken, was thirty seven.

Elizabeth & the Gale family.

Like her new husband, Elizabeth came from Yatton Keynell where her first known ancestor is Josias Gale. He had two sons, Josias and Arthur, who were married during the Commonwealth period, a time when most of the Anglican clergy had been dispossessed. The beautiful Church of England marriage service from Cranmer's prayer book of 1552, which had been considered offensive by some stiff-necked persons as unduly Catholic had

been done away with altogether. Weddings were rather bleak affairs, without even a ring, which was deemed by the Puritan establishment as *'a circle for the Devil to daunce in'*. Sin was spotted everywhere. The pubs were shut and Christmas, of course was banned.

The couple to be wed made simple vows before a Justice of the Peace and logged by the 'Register', most of whose records were (unfortunately) destroyed when the Monarchy was restored. Conversely, in the few cases where the documents do survive, they are a godsend for the family historian, being far more detailed than the old Church entries. During the years of the Republican experiment the Register's entries showed the name of the bridegroom's father and the name of the bride's mother! This felicitous habit was abandoned following the Restoration and parentage would not be entered again in marriage certificates until 1837, with one huge difference: up to the present only the father's name is shown for both bride and groom. The mother's name, at least in England and Wales, (Scotland is more enlightened) is not stated for either party.¹²

The Register's entries for Yatton Keynell concerning several of Elizabeth's relatives have fortunately survived:

'Arthur Gealle the sone of Josias Galle, and Ann Willes, daughter of Ann Willes was married at Grittleton by Nicklas Green Jystice of the Peace the 2d day of July. The witnesses are Josias Galle and John Harris. Robert Rimell, Register of the Parish of Eatton Keynell, 1665.'

and his brother.....

'Josias Geall, the son of Josias Gealle, and Perris Smart, daughter of Jone Smart have been published three Lordes days from 8 day of July to 22 July and marriage at Hullavington by me, George Tye, Justis of the Peace 27th August 1655. The witnesses are Abraham Smart and Martha Stone (?) year 1655.'

Arthur and Ann Gale had twins, Joan and George born in 1656. After Ann's death, Arthur had three more children with his second wife, Jane: John in 1668, Nicholas in 1670, and 'our Elizabeth' who was baptised on 9 June 1678 at the parish church at Yatton Keynell, the 'old order' by then having been restored.

Perhaps prior to her wedding Elizabeth was staying with relatives. Arthur Gane and Alice Wilton were married at Cold Ashton in 1714 and were resident there when their children Elizabeth, John, Mary and Hannah were born. Could Gane be a slip of the quill for Gale? At Mary's baptism in 1721, her father's name is stated to be Arthur *Gale*.

¹² Though measures are currently afoot (2019) to change this omission, and about time.

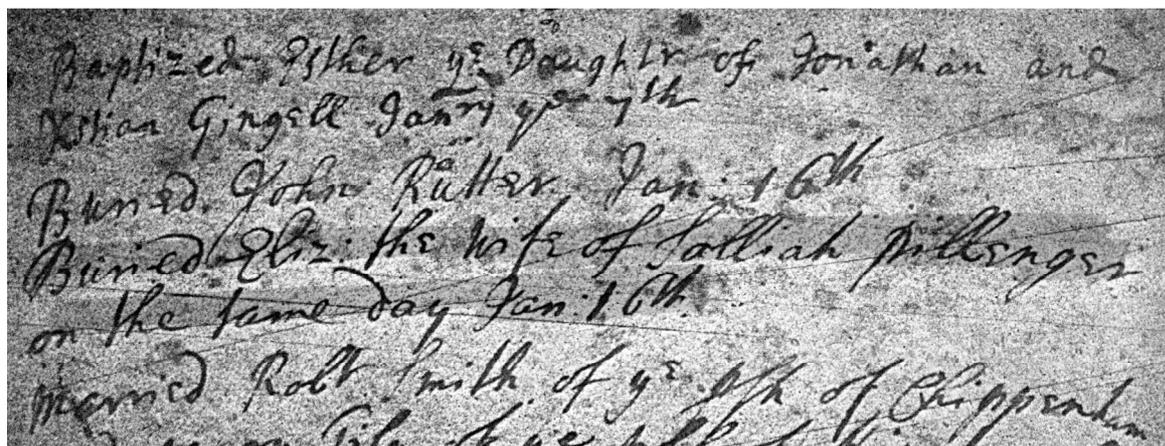
Samuel & son of Samuel Bellinger & Sarah his wife was baptiz'd Sept
 25.
 Rachel daughter of Isaac Green & Anne his wife was baptiz'd
 David, son of David Johnson & Hannah his wife was baptiz'd
 Sam. son of Jonathan Gough & Christian his wife was baptiz'd
 Sam. son of Jonathan Gough & Christian his wife was baptiz'd
 Rich^d Bell was buried 12th Feb.
 Betty bread & daughter of Edward Board & Alice his
 wife was baptiz'd Feb. 13.
 Sarah daughter of Henry Freeman & Sarah his wife
 was baptiz'd 10. March.
 Thomas son of Richard Callimore & Sarah his wife was baptiz'd
 April 8. 1710
 Thomas son of Rich^d Callimore & Sarah his wife was baptiz'd
 Nathaniel son of Sathiah Bellinger & Elizabeth his wife
 baptiz'd April 24th.
 Gabe Fricker of B. Stone & Dinah Hand of M. J. wife
 married April 23rd.
 Edmund Rector

The wedding at Cold Ashton.

The manner of the wedding smacks of haste: a licence, Westerleigh, then a service at Cold Ashton; and after the deed was accomplished, the couple returning home to Yatton, respectably spliced and nobody any the wiser. Their son Nathaniel was baptised just over two months later on 24 April 1716. Their second son, born in 1721, was called Arthur, after Elizabeth's father and possibly Arthur Gale/Gane of Cold Ashton who, to stretch the elastic of supposition a little more, might have been her brother.

buried July 28th
 Samuel son of Samuel Bellinger & Sarah his wife was baptiz'd Sept
 25.
 Rachel daughter of Isaac Green & Anne his wife was baptiz'd
 David, son of David Johnson & Hannah his wife was baptiz'd
 Sam. son of Jonathan Gough & Christian his wife was baptiz'd
 Sam. son of Jonathan Gough & Christian his wife was baptiz'd
 Rich^d Bell was buried 12th Feb.
 Betty bread & daughter of Edward Board & Alice his
 wife was baptiz'd Feb. 13.
 Sarah daughter of Henry Freeman & Sarah his wife
 was baptiz'd 10. March.
 Thomas son of Richard Callimore & Sarah his wife was baptiz'd
 April 8. 1710
 Thomas son of Rich^d Callimore & Sarah his wife was baptiz'd
 Nathaniel son of Sathiah Bellinger & Elizabeth his wife
 baptiz'd April 24th.
 Gabe Fricker of B. Stone & Dinah Hand of M. J. wife
 married April 23rd.

The register of Yatton Keynell: baptism of 'Nathaniel son of Salliah Pillinger and Elizabeth his wife' as well as Samuel & Susan's son Samuel.



Sadly, Elizabeth Pillinger's married life was brief. She died shortly after Arthur's birth and was buried at Yatton Keynell on the 16 January 1722/3.

The widowed Sallai soon remarried and moved to nearby Colerne with his new wife Mary and his two young sons, Nathaniel and Arthur. Arthur whose christening had been overlooked in the sadness of his mother Elizabeth's passing, was baptised there, along with a new baby half-brother, William, on 21 May 1727, the entry in Latin is '*Gulielmus et Arthur, fillii Sallai Pillinger*'. A daughter, Mary ('*Maria filia Salai Pillinger*') was also born at Colerne and baptised there on the 8 April 1730.

No more is known of Sallai until his return to Yatton Keynell for his burial on 21 April 1737. He was survived by his father, Samuel and also by Mary, his widow, who lived on for another forty years. She was buried on 16 June 1776, aged 88, described '*the widow of Shelah Pillinger of Allington*', a hamlet between Yatton Keynell and Chippenham.

Arthur Pillinger, the second son of Sallai and Elizabeth went to Marshfield in Gloucestershire where he and his wife Joyce brought up a small family, Mary, baptised 1752, who died aged seventeen, Betty, in 1754, (of whom nothing else is known), then Sarah and William, who could have been born any time between then and 1759 when they were received into the church together. Sarah gave birth to a daughter Betty in 1780 and two years later married Richard Bancroft of Box. William was married to Jane, surname unknown, who had a daughter, also Jane, baptised in 1777 at nearby Bitton. He turns up again, alone, at Romsey, Hampshire, in 1787, apprehended as a beggar: his sad progress across country is documented:

'[William Pillinger] the said vagrant being brought to Alderstone in the County of Wiltshire and delivered to the Tythingman thereof in order to be further conveyed to Marshfield in the County of the Gloucester.....which said Tythingman is to be allowed the sum of twelve

shillings and sixpence for conveying one vagrant 50 miles. Given under my Hand, the Eleventh Day of August 1787.'

What happened to William after that is a mystery.¹³ A George Pillinger, born circa 1777 (who may or may not have been his son) was buried at Marshfield in 1834 aged 57. George was survived by a Hester Pillinger who may be George's widow or his sister. She is said to be 'aged 60' in the census of 1841, but when she died in 1849, survived by nobody, she was supposedly aged sixty one.

A marriage of a William Pillinger to Hannah Salway is recorded at Box in 1749. He may be William, the son of Sallai and Mary, who was born at Colerne, 1727. His sister Mary married William Taverner at Yatton Keynell in 1756.

But.....Nathaniel Pillinger, the son of Sallai and Elizabeth is our lad.

Nathaniel and Sarah

At a Family History Society meeting nearly forty years ago, I overheard somebody (a man) say: *"I'm not really interested in my ancestors. They were only a lot of old ag. labs. Never amounted to anything at all. Not one of them. Nothing much to find there."*

The agricultural labourer – the ubiquitous ag. lab. - is the common ancestor of us all, even the Queen! He may have dodged up and down the ladder.....

*When Adam delved and Eve span
Who was then the gentleman?*

.....but generally he clung to the edge of disaster. Apart from near starvation (*'Give us this Day our Daily Bread,'*) common to all our kind, the Pillinger family had an additional worry, for they were often on the move as well: they lived and worked in one place but were 'legally settled' in another. For at least a century, the dreaded couplet 'Yatton Keynell' hung over the Pillingers like the proverbial Sword of Damocles. A sorry saga began with the arrival of Nathaniel and Sarah at Bitton in 1754, continued with enforced removals, (and stubborn returns), and was responsible for the incarceration of their grandson, as an aged pauper, in Chippenham Workhouse; it even led to their great-grandson Stephen lying to the census taker in 1851, that his birth place was 'Not known', a ruse which I later rumbled. His evident thinking that if 'they' didn't know where he came from then 'they' couldn't send him back there, was entirely reasonable although something of a setback to me at first. But I am getting ahead of myself.

With no central social security system, (until the wretched Union Workhouse was devised in 1834) it was the duty of each parish to maintain its own poor at subsistence level should they be unable to work through accident, sickness or decrepitude. The poor were kept, albeit grudgingly, by small hand-outs from rates levied on the better off parishioners.

¹³ I believe William may have been the father of James Pillinger, who was later transported to Australia.

Outsiders who arrived in a parish without a document of some sort saying where they belonged were sent packing with a flea in their collective ears. Incomers, like Nathaniel and Sarah Pillinger and their children were tolerated so long as they had work and could keep themselves, but the Vestry needed proof that if they fell upon hard times, they were (and would remain) the responsibility of the place where they were 'settled'. If necessary they could be forcibly deported there. Any children, orphaned or otherwise, irrespective of their place of birth were deemed to belong to the parish where their father had obtained settlement; a widow, likewise, could be removed to her late husband's parish, whether she knew anyone there or not. Those who could not provide the magic paper, vagrants, tinkers, gypsies, all manner of wanderers, were likely to be 'whipped from pillar to post', that is, from the pillory to the parish boundary where they became the responsibility of someone else and so the sorry story continued.

Nathaniel was able to produce the necessary document, a 'Settlement Paper' dated 2 November 1754 which reads:

*'The churchwardens and overseers of the poor of the parish of Yatton Keynel in the county of Wiltshire do hereby acknowledge that Nathl Pillinger, labourer, Sarah his wife, John their son aged fourteen years and Betty their daughter aged about eight years are inhabitants and parishioners being legally settled in the parish of Yatton Keynel aforesaid.....'*¹⁴

¹⁴ BRO P.B./OP/6a36

Wills to wit

To the Churchwardens and Overseers of
the Poor of the Parish of Bitton in the County
of Gloucester and to any or either of them
These,

15

We whose hands and Seals are hereunto subscribed
and set being the Churchwardens and Overseers
of the Poor of the Parish of ~~Slaughterford~~ ^{Wotton Bassett} in
the County of Wilts aforesaid. do hereby Certify
own and Acknowledge that Nathl Pillingor
Labourer, Sarah his wife, John their Son
aged Fourteen years, and Betty their
Daughter aged about eight years. are
Inhabitants and Parishioners Legally settled
in the Parish of ~~Slaughterford~~ ^{Wotton Bassett} aforesaid. In
Witness whereof we have hereunto set our hands
and Seals the Second Day of November in the
Year of our Lord one Thousand Seven Hundred
and Fifty Four. John Edwards

Attested by

Richard Paroch
John Potter

William Beard

John Edwards

William Beard

Seals

Churchwardens
Overseers

The Second day of November in the Year of our Lord
one Thousand Seven Hundred and Fifty Four. Seen
and allowed by us two of his Majesty's Justices of
the peace for the Said County of Wilts Richard Paroch
one of the subscribing witnesses to the Execution of the
above written Certificate having first made Oath
that he with John Potter the other subscribing
witnesses did see the Said Churchwardens and
Overseers of the Poor severally sign and Seal
the Said Certificate and that their names attesting
the same were of his and the Said John Potter's
own proper hand writings.

W. M. B. A. C.

Signed, sealed and delivered. Slaughterford, a small village five miles from Chippenham is also written on the paper (twice) and both times crossed out which hints of a previous port of call from whence they were turned away, but the Bitton churchwardens took a chance and accepted the family as temporary parishioners. The document was carefully stored in

the parish chest where some two hundred and thirty years later, in a damp turret room in St Mary's church, Bitton, I unfolded it and for the first time read the message contained there.

Nathaniel and Sarah never suffered the ignominy of 'removal' to Yatton Keynell for within a couple of years of their arrival in Bitton, both were dead.

Sarah is a cipher. I do not know where or when she was born, or where (if?) she and Nathaniel were married. If theirs was a marriage without benefit of clergy, as I suspect, I have no chance of discovering her surname. Despite the example of Sallai, a belt and braces man if ever there was one, with both a licence and a wedding recorded, there is, in general, a dearth of legal marriage records among the Pillingers. The majority of their early unions must have been 'clandestine', a term which evokes fly-by-night elopement, thoughts of heiresses abducted by fortune hunters, and parental disapproval, but none of these applied in our case. It was all down to cost.

For a wedding, in the absence of a licence (as obtained by Sallai) from the Bishop of the Diocese, which allowed the ceremony to take place at any church and at once, the 'Banns' had to be called on 'three clear Sundays' in the church of the parish where both or one of the parties resided. Any member of the congregation could object with 'a just impediment' to the marriage as in the dramatic literary intervention in *'Jane Eyre'*. The great numbers of irregular ceremonies which took place without either banns or a licence had become a matter of public scandal. The most notorious venue for such unlicensed marriages was the Fleet Prison in London and at other 'marriage houses' nearby. It is unlikely that any of the Pillingers travelled so far to plight their troth when just about anybody could perform a marriage ceremony, generally for a small fee: defrocked 'lawless' ministers could be found, or most notably, the landlords of public houses supplemented their incomes in this manner. A woman called Sarah Morris, living in Bitton in 1749 described to the Overseers of the Poor how she was married to one James Morris, a horse driver, of Wick & Abson:

'at a Publick house going down the hill towards Bath by a person unknown to her but she believes kept the Publick House [who] read over that part of the ceremony used in the Church of England which relates to the man's taking the woman to his wife and the woman's taking the man to her husband.....her said husband made the usual answers and the ceremony with the ring was performed.....'

The couple co-habited for a fortnight after which Morris disappeared. As she had not seen or heard anything of him for a year, she *'not knowing whether he was alive or dead'*, called herself 'a widow'. The legality of such a ceremony did not worry the Overseers, but they were concerned that she had been left destitute and was currently 'on the parish' being kept, albeit meagrely, as a drain on the rates. As James Morris was adjudged to be legally settled in Bristol in the parish of St Philip & St Jacob, they were anxious to unload his 'widow' there.

It is also possible that Nathaniel and Sarah and the rest of the Pillingers whose marriage records are missing married themselves by 'jumping over the broom', which involved no cost at all, or like Sarah Morris, moved slightly up the rung of respectability by paying a third party, possibly though not necessarily a pub landlord to perform a ceremony; perhaps a

man like John Burrows, who was active in Bristol a few years earlier¹⁵, '*a noted corn cutter, who would marry people for so small a price as eighteen pence*'. No stigma apparently attached; in any case, if a couple arrived at a new parish, as did Nathaniel and Sarah, no-one would have known whether they were married or not. As long as they did not fall upon hard times, through illness, unemployment, widowhood, left orphaned children, all of which might become a parish responsibility, blind eyes were not so much turned as closed altogether.

In 1754, Lord Hardwick's Marriage Act restricted all weddings to parish churches and public chapels, and thus put paid to clandestine marriages. The poor as well as the unscrupulous fortune hunters, would have to pay up for a licence or a church wedding like those on the straight and narrow; unless they eloped to Gretna Green, but that is another story. From then on it becomes easier to trace marriage records

Thus, without a marriage record, all that can be said for certain about our ancestor Sarah is that she was the mother of two children, spent her married life roaming about Wiltshire and finally turned up in south Gloucestershire, at Bitton, in the 1750s with her husband and children and died young, probably less than forty years old.

With Nathaniel there is slightly more to go on. His birth at Yatton Keynell is confirmed by the record of his christening on the 24 April 1716 as the son of Sallai Pillinger. His mother, Elizabeth died when he was about five years old and although nothing is known of his childhood, we can assume that he went to Colerne where he lived with his father, his new stepmother Mary, his brother Arthur and his half-siblings William and Mary. Whether he went back to Yatton Keynell when his father Sallai returned there is not known, for by the time he arrives again in the story two and half decades had passed. In October 1740, he is twenty four and in dire circumstances: locked up in Marlborough Bridewell. What had this master criminal done to merit incarceration? The family historian soon gets used to the trivial charges for which a person could be imprisoned in *ye goode olde days* but Nathaniel's case is exceptionally trifling.....and sad. He had taken a few sacks from a farmer, Robert Pearce, and cobbled them together to use as makeshift blankets.

'Nathaniel Pillinger was charged by Walter Hungerford, Esquire Charged on the oath of Robert Pearce with having in his house one sack, a winnowing sheet Converted into Bedding, the property of the said Robert Pearce and other Sacks, the property of Others and Also on Suspicion of Breaking the Said Pearce's Barn and stealing Another Winnowing Sheet.'

¹⁵ Farley's newspaper 11.2.1727

Wilts R.O. A Kalendar of the prisoners of his Majesty's Bridewell in or near Marlboro in and for the said County the 7th day of October 1740

Elizabeth Godding Committed by George Hungerford Esq^r Charged on the oath of Rich^d Brunton on a strong suspicion of having in the Night time Robbed the Garden of the said Rich^d Brunton of several pecks of Garden Peas with a Shuttle, Basket and a Sack the property of the said Rich^d Brunton.

John Bone Committed by George Hungerford Esq^r Charged on the oath of Rich^d Brunton on a strong suspicion of having in the Night time Robbed the Garden of the said Rich^d Brunton of several pecks of Garden Peas with a Shuttle, Basket and a Sack the property of the said Rich^d Brunton.

Sarah Chalder Committed by George Willoughby Esq^r Charged on the oath of Edward Westburn wth having taken and Carried away Divers pecks of Wheat the property of Henry Popham.

Elizabeth North Committed by George Willoughby Esq^r Charged on the oath of Edward Westburn wth having taken and Carried away Divers pecks of Wheat the property of Henry Popham.

William Popham Committed by George Willoughby Esq^r Charged on the oath of Edward Westburn wth having taken and Carried away Divers pecks of Wheat the property of Henry Popham.

Abraham Clarke Committed by W^m Stanley and W^m Villet Esq^r for having taken and Carried away his family and wife from the property of the said George Hungerford on the oath of Charles Popham but he having made his escape is again Retaken and now in Custody.

A Kalendar (sic) of the Prisoners of His Majesty's Bridewell, in or near Marlboro7th day of October 1740.¹⁶

It is not difficult to imagine the reason for Nat's pitiful theft: say he had purloined the sacks and taken them to his house (a damp and cheerless hovel, more like) to provide a little rough comfort for his (probably pregnant) wife Sarah. From the Bitton 'settlement' we know that their son John was born that same year. What if Sarah, exhausted, had just given birth?

¹⁶ Wilts R.O.

It is a grim premise. A winnowing sheet was about as coarse as you could get, used to separate the wheat from the chaff.¹⁷ Against the odds, wife and baby both survived, and thus so did all of us who came after.

This pathetic drama, with its echoes of 'No Room at the Inn' is likely to have taken place at Cherhill, a small village between Calne and Marlborough amid the chalk downs of the Ridgeway. In Nat's and Sarah's time the place came complete with its own gibbet on the hill fort, known as Oldbury Castle, a deadly reminder to keep wrongdoers in their place. The hill is owned by the National Trust now and is notable for one of the famous Wiltshire White Horses which was cut out of the chalk after Nat's time, in 1780.

Other desperadoes in the Bridewell with Nathaniel was a woman arrested for stealing vegetables from a garden, caught with a basket and a sack; two other jades for the theft of '*divers parcells of wheat*'; a man for deserting his family, leaving them chargeable to the parish of Cleave Pepper, who had '*escaped and been retaken*', and my favourite, John Born, '*an incorrigible rogue*'. We all know plenty of those, but they can no longer be had up for it.

There is nothing to say whether Nathaniel was convicted and sentenced, whether he went to prison or suffered the humiliation of a public flogging, but as there is a substantial gap between the children's births, (Betty was christened when they stopped at Calne on 24 April 1745) the inference must be that he was in gaol, perhaps for a few years.

Yatton Keynell, Colerne, Marlborough, Cherhill, Calne, Slaughterford and finally Bitton; probably tramping on foot, with many a night spent in the open, or in a barn if they were lucky, when they could go no further.

And why Bitton? Then as now, people did not simply pick a place on the map and decide to go there. Immigrants are drawn to places where they have the possibility of work or where they already have friends or people like themselves, relatives or members of the same tribe; hence enclaves and ghettos, whether St Paul's in Bristol, Bradford, Leicester, Brick Lane, Golder's Green or the Banlieus of Paris. On 6 July 1735, Nat's uncle, Thomas Pillinger, his father's half-brother, the son of Samuel and Sarah, who had made something of himself, had turned up at Yatton Keynell ostensibly to have his baby daughter Sarah christened, but probably to show off a bit: Tom had become a moderately successful tenant farmer at Wick & Abson, the village where Richard Pillinger of Doynton had been married a century before. This might not be the only occasion when the paths of uncle and nephew crossed. What could be more natural for Nat to hope that his Uncle Tom might give him a job?

Nathaniel and Sarah had brought their children to Bitton, the principal parish of 'Kingswood'. Prior to the making of the Victorian town of the same name, which is a suburb three miles on the outskirts of Bristol, Kingswood was an inclusive term for an area which commenced where the eastern edge of the City & County of Bristol joined the county of Gloucestershire at Lawford's Gate. It included the entirety of the old Royal Chase, the

¹⁷ 'The Winnowing Sheet' Ralph Hedley, oil on canvas, 1898 demonstrates the more traditional usage. (Laing Gallery)

King's-Wood from which the name derived, starting with the outparish of St Philip & St Jacob, called Barton Regis, and continued to the then equally large tract of Bitton, with its two chapelries at Hanham and Oldland. 'St George', which is also now the name of a Bristol suburb was originally 'New Church, Kingswood' and was built in the 1750s as the Anglican response to the spectacular successes of the Methodist conversions there a few years previously. The area had become industrialised, was pitted with mine workings and had become notorious for commotions and uprisings. A week-long strike in 1738 (when the coal owners docked the wages of the miners) added to the fearsome reputation of 'the rude and ignorant Kingswood colliers' and led to the excited arrival of the religious icons of the age, the Wesley brothers, John and Charles, George Whitfield, and a young Reading schoolmaster called John Cennick, all of whom preached in the open air to save souls. After this, Kingswood was gripped in religious ferment which seems to have waned somewhat by 1752, as hunger was replaced by looming starvation and the failure of the harvest was followed by another disaster, a 'cattle plague'. The rumblings of dissent in Kingswood were such that Rev John Cennick with misguided optimism preached a sermon, 'Deliverance from Death', taking as his text

"Jesus said that he that believeth in Me hath everlasting life. This is the Bread that cometh down from Heaven that man may eat thereof and not die."

Unfortunately God did not provide and the unrest spilled over into riot when despite the food shortage, the Corporation of Bristol bought up corn and loaded it on the vessels in the Quay for shipment to Ireland. Events then followed a predictable pattern and the Kingswood people, under a 'Captain and Colours' marched on the Council House where they implored the Mayor to stop the export of wheat. The Mayor replied in soothing tones saying he would see what he could do, but most of 'the mob' were not in the mood for empty promises, and went to the Quay where they began to unload the cargo. In turn they were set upon by special constables affording 'a pleasant diversion for the spectators'. Arrests were made and the Mayor swore in more 'specials' armed with muskets, cutlasses and clubs. A unit of the Scots Greys were also called in to quell the expected attack which indeed came a few days later. Four of the Kingswood men were killed when the guard '*fired a few pieces among them*' and twenty five more were rounded up and taken to the City's Newgate Gaol. Sporadic violence continued for about a week until quiet was restored. John Wesley preached to the prisoners saying piously "*They would not hear the Gospel while at liberty. God grant they may profit from it now!*"

The ringleaders, who remained at large, were charged with High Treason in their absence with the small fry in Newgate handed out relatively short gaol sentences accompanied by swingeing fines, which probably ensured their indefinite incarceration. 'Risings' of one sort or another continued throughout the century and into the next, and this along with petty thievery and the inevitable executions cemented Kingswood's reputation. In short, it was no

place for incomers. We can only assume that Nat Pillinger, and his little tribe arriving at his Uncle Tom's door must have been absolutely desperate.

'Uncle Tom' Pillinger who was born in 1697, had arrived in Wick & Abson by 1733, with his wife Ann, two children, Betty and William, and another, who would be called Ann, on the way. Sarah who was born next was christened twice: at Wick & Abson on the 27 April 1735 and then again in Yatton Keynell on the 6th July the same year. The baby's grandfather, Samuel, (who was also Nathaniel Pillinger's grandfather) was still living there at the time, (he died in 1743) with his third wife Susan and it is likely that this was the occasion for a family reunion.

Illness and death were ever present and shortly after Tom and Ann Pillinger returned from their nostalgic jaunt to Wiltshire, their son William died. The frequency of baby deaths in former times has led some historians to allege that because such bereavements were expected they were less painful to bear, but I cannot believe this is true. For many women though, a permanent state of pregnancy was the norm throughout their married life up until the menopause, provided they survived until then. Ann Pillinger gave birth to seven more children, making a tally of ten in all.

In 1751 there was high drama. The third of the children, Ann, junior, grown up, aged nineteen, and unmarried, discovered she was pregnant. The girl panicked and ran away from home, and for a time subsisted on the streets of Barton Regis on the eastern edge of Bristol, until practically on the point of death, she was forced to knock at the church door, where she entered and was routinely 'admonished'. The Overseers of the Poor of St Philip & St Jacob's, having castigated her for her sinful ways cast her into the House of Correction at Lawford's Gate, along with other malefactors, to await cross-examination by the officers of the law.

Under the Poor Law, a child born out of wedlock to a destitute mother would become the financial responsibility of the parish in which it was born, yet another facet of the 'Settlements and Removals' system. Another burden on the ratepayers was to be avoided if at all possible and the Overseers, all men, not necessarily inhumane, but practical to the bone, discussed what should be done. There were several options. *In extremis*, where the woman had no fixed settlement, she might be taken to the parish boundary and dumped there to make her way to the next parish and the next until she finally gave birth, on the road or if she was lucky, in some farmer's barn. If her place of origin was known the solution was rather more straightforward, but even so could involve lengthy negotiation between parishes. By far the most satisfactory outcome all round was if the culprit (the alleged father of the child) could be found and forced into matrimony. Ann Pillinger's case was open and shut. Not only did she tell the officials where she came from, she gave them a name, Richard Rew. To seal his fate, the majesty of the law was required. Thomas Haynes, esquire, Justice of the Peace, Lord of the Manor of Wick & Abson (and Tom Pillinger's landlord) was sought out and armed with a warrant, went in search of the miscreant.

The Haynes family, *nouveau riche* Lords of the Manor, (by purchase), and chief landowners were *the* authority in Wick & Abson. Did Dick Rew say “Not me, *guv*,” and get a swipe with a riding crop for his cheek? Did he go quietly thereafter walking sedately behind Mr. Haynes, a stately figure on his mare, all the way into Bristol? The records say that Mr. Haynes:

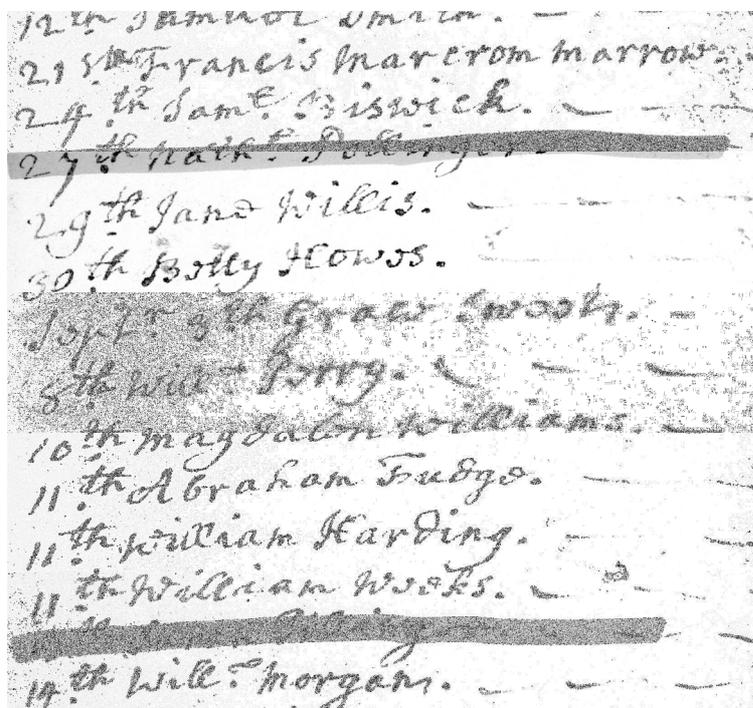
‘to the House of Correction committed the body of Richard Rew, charged on the oath of Ann Pilonger with having begotten her with child, which child when born is a bastard, and likely to become chargeable to the Parish of St Philip & St Jacob.’

With both parties in secure custody, the banns were called for the wedding. God bless the bureaucrats who wrote in the book:

‘Richard Rew was kept three weeks and married, and discharged by the Overseers of the said Parish.’

The ‘happy’ occasion took place in St Philip & St Jacob’s on 24 February 1752 where the marriage register simply states the names of the couple and the date, with no hint of the commotion behind the scenes. So far I have found no evidence of the birth of Ann’s child.

By the time Nathaniel Pillinger and his family knocked on Uncle Tom’s door, all this drama was in the past. We have to imagine that Nat’s dream of work came true, if not on his uncle’s farm then labouring at one of the local coal pits, but this apparent change of fortune did not last.



Less than two years after he arrived, Nathaniel was dead, aged 40. His surname recorded incorrectly as “Pollinger”, he was buried on the 27 August 1756 with Sarah, his wife following him to the grave just over a fortnight later on 13th September. The Bitton vicar did not waste ink giving the cause of the deaths of his parishioners, supplying only their names and the dates they were buried. Why he amended the spelling to Pillinger when he buried Sarah it is impossible to say. We have no

inkling of why Nat and Sarah were carried away so swiftly in what should have been the prime of life. Disease or simply worn out? If they died from some infection, it is a wonder that their two children were not also stricken, but both John and Betty survived, orphans, somehow fending for themselves, for the next couple of years.

Meanwhile, over at Wick & Abson an unspeakable tragedy was set in motion, when, at the end of May 1758, Tom and Ann Pillinger's daughter Mary, aged eighteen was taken ill, shivering and vomiting with severe pains in her head and back. By the third day a rash appeared on her face which rapidly spread to the rest of her body, forming raised pocks oozing with pus. By now their worst fears were realized for Mary had contracted small pox, a major scourge of the 18th century. Inoculation, a fearsome procedure had been available for over thirty years, but was not to be undergone lightly. Matter from a pustule on an infected individual would be introduced to another person through a cut in his or her skin. The recipient would become ill, with, hopefully, a mild form of the disease from which they would recover and thereafter would be immune. But there was a very real chance they would die. Even if inoculation had been available in Wick, which I doubt, I feel sure there would have been a general reluctance to submit to it. Poor young Mary grew worse and died. She was buried on 4 June 1758.¹⁸

Through the remainder of the summer and winter, the rest of Tom and Ann's children continued healthy, then with the onset of spring 1759, Betty who was about 27, developed the same disease. She was buried on the 20th March. Her sister Hannah aged 17 was buried on the 24th June, and then the three youngest children Thomas, aged eleven, Jacob, 5 and Amy, 7, sickened. The little ones were buried together on the 16th July. Samuel aged fourteen died nine days later. All their burial notices in the register are accompanied by the dire words: '*in the small pox*'.

In the short space of thirteen months where there had once been nine children in the family, only three remained. It is hard to imagine grief on such a scale. Those who escaped were Ann Rew, (if indeed she was still alive, for she has disappeared without trace, following her wedding, her husband and child with her); Sarah, the baby who had been christened at Yatton Keynell who was now aged 24, and John, who was fifteen. The stricken family surely thought they could not possibly suffer any more. Then after a gap of almost five years, John became ill with the familiar symptoms. In his twentieth year, he too died of small pox and was buried beside his brothers and sisters on the 25 February 1764. Only Sarah remained at home. Like her parents, Thomas and Ann, she must have been rendered immune in the first outbreak of the infection. On the 20 October 1764 she married a local man, James Osborne. Her mother, Ann, having suffered the devastating loss of so many of her children clung to life for another four bitter years. Her burial entry contains only her name and the date, a broken heart not considered sufficient to be remarked on as a cause of death.

According to Benjamin Franklin, death and taxes are the only certainties in life, though the rent collector must come a close third. From 1763 to 1764 Thomas Pillinger paid rent of £3. 10s. 0d (£3.50p) per year, at 17s.6d (87½p) per quarter: 'for the cottage, late Kings' to his landlord, Thomas Haynes, esquire. By 1765, and particularly after John's death the previous year, it must have become too much for him, with his portion decreasing to 10 shillings per annum and the greater part of the holding rented by one Richard Kew. The name is a tease. Could this have been his reluctant son in law Richard Rew? Richard Kew had a wife called Ann and four children born at Pucklechurch between 1756 and 1770. Much as I would like

¹⁸ Between 1757 and 1768 at least a dozen more parishioners died from smallpox.

to think that the family became reconciled when grief put the earlier escapade into perspective, with the best will in the world I cannot turn Kew in Rew. What a difference one letter makes.

Thomas Pillinger's rent remained static until Lady Day 1776 when he paid £2 for one year. Despite the change in the calendar in 1752, from which date the New Year began on January 1st, the old methods persisted at Wick & Abson as far as rent collection.¹⁹ Thomas paid another £2 on the 16 September 1777, though this was presumably in arrears and his plot makes no further appearance until October 1780 when it is 'late Pillinger's' and rented to one George Woodington. Tom Pillinger had by then left Wick for nearby Bitton, living his last years among those other family members who had come from Yatton Keynell. He lived to the then great age of 86 and was buried at Bitton in 1783. His brother Nathaniel, (not to be confused with 'our' Nathaniel, his nephew of the same name) who was born in 1703 to Samuel by his second wife Sarah went from Wiltshire to the City of Bristol. A rare bird, he has so far been spotted only once, on the 3 May 1734, when 'Samuel, the son of Nathaniel Pillinger, carpenter' was baptised at St Mary Redcliffe. Sadly, this little Samuel shared the same fate as the others of his name and was buried at St Thomas's, Bristol, on the 24 November 1734, six months after his christening 'aged 2'.

Nothing further has come to light about Nathaniel the carpenter or his wife. As with many other christenings so far encountered, the mother's position was of so little account that her name is not recorded. The weekly news sheets of the time frequently advertised for tradesman to take their chances in the New World and I would like to think that Nathaniel and his unnamed wife went to America.

Back in Bitton as the year 1758 drew to a close, another shocking event occurred. Young Betty Pillinger, the daughter of Nathaniel and Sarah had become one of the burdensome poor who could be uprooted and returned to Yatton Keynell, never mind that she wouldn't know the place from a hole in the ground. She was not even born there, but that is where she 'belonged' and there she must go. Matters came to a head on the 30th December. I marvel at the bureaucracy in that once again there was an all-purpose form. Oh England, my England!

'For as much as Complaint has been made unto us..... that

BETTY PILLINGER

*'is coming to inhabit the said parish of Bitton not having gained a legal settlement therein and has become chargeable thereunto; we do judge... the same complaint to be true... and further on the examination of John Pillinger taken upon his oath adjudge that said Betty Pillinger was last legally settled in the parish of Yatton Keynell..... and... in His Majesty's name require and order and command you... to remove the said Betty Pillinger from Bitton unto the parish of Yatton Keynell.....'*²⁰

¹⁹ Echoed even today for tax purposes!

²⁰ BRO P.B./OP/6b21

We see that John, her brother was questioned. If he tried to save her, it was to no avail. Out into the snow went the weeping Betty and out of our story.

The crisis for John did not end with his little sister being trundled away on a carrier's cart. Two days later on New Year's Day 1759, he was summoned in turn to the vestry to make his own declaration:

*'The information of John Pillinger aged about eighteen years who upon his oath saith that he believes he was born in the parish of Cherhill in the County of Wiltshire and when he was about five years of age he went with his father to live at Calne in the same County and sometime after that this informant removed from Calne to Yatton Keynel in the County of Wiltshire and this informant came to live with his father and mother and his sister Betty Pillinger in the parish of Bitten in the county of Gloucestershire there being a certificate granted from the parish of Yatton Keynel.....acknowledging the informant's father and mother and sister Betty to be parishioners lawfully settled in the parish of Yatton Keynel aforesaid.'*²¹

John made his mark where the magistrate Charles Bragge indicated, and with a warning ringing in his ears not to get into trouble, left the Vestry and the infamous paper behind him where it was carefully stored in the parish chest. With the confident swagger of youth, he probably forgot all about it. Did he forget his sister too? Two years later in 1761, he was married to Catherine Lear.

The Lear family had been established in Bitton since at least 1700. Humphrey and William Lear were living in the hamlet of Oldland in 1747 when they attended the annual Court Leet, an ancient institution to which all eligible males were annually summoned to deal with 'publick nuisances' like unlawful holes in the ground, overflowing drains, unsafe fencing and straying livestock. As it met in a pub, it had much to recommend it, breaking the monotony of daily toil with an excuse to come home drunk into the bargain. William is named again, this time with a John Lear, on a map of 1750 showing the coalminers of the Kingswood Chase, which was divided into the 'Liberties' of various landowners. It is not surprising to find Lears among the many miners killed at their dangerous work; several more were transported to Australia, one of them, Stephen, was executed there in 1825. An earlier William Lear was 'an ancient man, his labour done' named in a list of the poor of Oldland on the 13 May 1743. He was paid two shillings out of the rates: no question of him not being a *bona fide* parishioner. With all of this, I have been unable to find a baptism for Catherine, which is not too surprising as so many Bitton inhabitants were lax about christening their children. ("The name of Jesus was totally unknown to them", George Whitfield had said in 1739 when he remarked famously of the tears which ran in white gutters down their black faces as he preached.) A John Lear married Catherine Frankham in 1720. Maybe our Catherine was their granddaughter. Perhaps like John, she was another orphan and all alone.

²¹ BRO P.B./OP/6g78

The wedding took place on the 7 September 1761 and in good time, for their son Nathaniel named after John's father was christened eleven weeks later. In 1763 they had a daughter, Sarah, named after his mother.

Should we picture a cosy cottage with the two young marrieds nodding by the fire, and their infants playing at their feet? Hardly. Catherine was a working wife. She was the sole proprietor of a business enterprise, manufacturer and vendor of an indispensable product. Everybody drank beer, even children, as it was safer than water. The boiling of water combined with barley (or fermented apples in the case of cider) laced the beverage with alcohol, killing off the harmful micro-organisms and thus protected the drinker. Beer also provided nutrition. It was enjoyable. What's not to like? Most wives would have produced small beer for family use but Catherine was a professional, her dram shop providing a public service which attracted the rabble. Complaints were made. Having omitted to obtain a licence, Catherine was arrested in December 1763 by the agents of the magistrates, Henry Creswicke of Hanham Court and (again) Charles Bragge who had deliberated over Catherine's husband John a couple of years before.

The Bragge family was up and coming, with a country seat, boasting a pleasure park at Mangotsfield. Charles Bragge's son, another Charles, then aged nine, would later change his name to that of his mother, a sister of Earl Bathurst, take his seat in Parliament and be elevated to Minister for War. He supported the slave trade and, no surprise, was against trade unions. If the Bragges were upwardly mobile then the Creswicks were sliding down the ladder. Henry was a less colourful character than his father Francis who had one time unwisely purchased Kingswood Chase, which was already ravaged by coalmining, in the vain hope of restoring it as a bucolic hunting ground for the delectation of the rich. This and other misadventures, a false charge of treason, a death sentence (pardoned), a duel fought against the Attorney General in Ireland and several spells in prison so depleted the family fortunes that the Creswicks were always teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. Nevertheless, whilst Bragge's house, Cleeve Court, vanished years ago, Hanham Court is still inhabited, famous for its garden which is occasionally open to the public.

Bitton being in Gloucestershire, Catherine was carted off thirty or so miles to the county town to take her trial at Gloucester Castle. No picnic, such a journey on a bleak December day, trundling along in an open wagon, probably wet and shivering with cold, sick with terror, and left to the elements whenever the Justices' lackeys' felt like stopping 'to rest the horse' along the way.

And then, a month later, on the 10 January 1764, she was brought to trial at the Epiphany Sessions and.....

'.....convicted in the penalty of Ten Pounds for an offence committed against the Excise Law and for want of sufficient Goods and Chattells whereon to levy the same'.

TEN POUNDS. It was an enormous sum. A labourer's wages for half a year. The Pillingers would never have seen such a sum all at one time.

Gloucester Castle was a terrible place, so filthy that due to complaints by the citizens of 'noisome stinks', (as everything stank, it must have been really humming), it was torn down in 1782 and a new gaol purpose-built. The most desperate prisoners were secured by a great chain which passed through their individual fetters, and was then padlocked to the wall. Those not chained, men and women alike, mingled unhindered, habitual criminals lumped in with those convicted of minor offences encouraging lewd behaviour. No provision was made for the sick, and the place was foul, with epidemics rife, especially typhus or 'gaol fever'.

Unbelievable as it seems, somehow Catherine survived. Whether against the odds John managed to scrape together enough for the fine, or there was some sort of General Amnesty, she was free by February 1767, when she turned up at Oldland Chapel for the baptism of her third child, called John, which suggests she had been back at least nine months.

No doubt John along with all the men and some of the women graced any rough and ready entertainment on offer, among the 'thousands' who gathered in the forest waste in 1769, to watch a much anticipated prize fight between 'Stephens the nailer' and George Milsom, a Kingswood collier.

Stephens was odds on, but Milsom won in seven minutes, to the fury of 'the fancy' who believed Stephens had 'sold the fight' (i.e. taken a dive). The colliers 'riotously' carried their hero away shoulder high. The Bristol Journal printed the rhyme:

*He that fights and runs away
Lives to fight another day
But he that is in battle slain
Will never rise to fight again.*

But it was no fluke. Milsom, who again started as the underdog, won his next fight in four minutes.

In February 1770, John and Catherine had another new baby, Jacob, but three months later the boy's brother, little John, aged three died and was buried. Another John was born and baptised on the 5 July 1772 and the parish register shows his parents to be John and *Mary* Pillinger. What an irritation that entry is. There was no other John around, so did he have two wives on the go? Had he taken up with Mary when Catherine was in gaol and kept the arrangement going? What did Catherine think of it? Mary disappears as quickly as she had come, and Catherine went on having children with John: Mary in February 1775 and Simon, who was brought to church on Christmas Day, 1778. There may be a simple explanation.....that the clerk, making up a batch of entries in retrospect, simply misremembered the mother's name. Maybe, maybe not.

Made For Ever!

John Pillinger, seemingly now a regular resident at Oldland attended the Bitton Court Leet most years. Much of the business was still about the actions of small time 'adventurers'.

Tempers were frequently lost, as in 1773, when Michael Short, accused of prospecting for coal on Oldland Common was told to fill up the large hole he had dug and get off by Christmas, otherwise pay a fine of ten shillings, He called the assembly.....

“a parcel of gawkam fools”

...and was slapped with another fine for contempt. He was not alone. They were all at it.

‘Daniel Chandler, Thomas Jefferies and John Pettygrove have dugg two deep holes or colepitts on a common called North Common which are now open and very dangerous to the publick for which we amerce each them the sum of one shilling to fill up the same by 25th December or forty shillings each’..... “Thomas Summers to fill and secure from danger a cole pitt he dug, and to fill and secure from danger [another] a cole pitt he dugg on North Common, forty shillings’.....and a small entrepreneur by any standards.....’William Palmer to fill up a hole he dugg in the Waste Ground and fined two shillings’..... and so on and so on.

The temptation to speculate was widespread and anybody who could sink a shaft did so. One unnamed crew had struck it so rich they called their workings ‘Made for Ever!’ a name which stuck and is still in use today, long after the memories of the mines has faded; my brother Colin started school at Made For Ever, aged five, as a mixed infant, though for some obscure reason, perhaps to give the neighbourhood a bit of class, it was saddled with the name ‘New Cheltenham’. Bah.

Whether John Pillinger ever dug a hole in the ground in hope, we shall never know but certainly he would have warmed his family by collecting loose coal which spilled from outcrops in the ground all over Kingswood. Up to the middle of the last century there were still a few nooks where these remnants could be found. In the harsh winter of 1947, I recall our Dad, Jack Pillinger, going out with a bucket and returning with it, full of small coal, amongst it some of the better stuff, a few knobs. And beaming all over his face.

At this time in their history, unlike the Brittons, Burchills and Garlands, from whose families they would take their wives, the Pillingers were at this time in their history only occasional coalminers, going down the pit when there was no other choice but they would have been no strangers to dangers involved. The population was decimated by accidents in the pits which were reported occasionally in the press with phlegm and without much detail. The following is a typical example

‘Tuesday four men were drowned in one of the coalpits in Kingswood by the water breaking suddenly in upon them. Three of them have wives and children.’

And things were not about to get better. The dire conditions which had driven the community in the past to march and riot had not improved in the years since Nathaniel and Sarah had arrived with their children. Poverty had now become, if not quite a crime, then a matter of shame. Those who were in receipt of parish relief were forced to wear ‘The Badge’ a letter ‘P’ for Pauper sewn on to their clothes, to set them apart. Avoiding this humiliation

perhaps drove otherwise law-abiding people to crime and not a few Kingswood men ended their short brutish lives upon the gallows.

In 1781, John Read, nicknamed Joby, and John Ward, two colliers, were hanged for stealing a silver tankard from a Mr. Jones of Willsbridge. In September 1783, James Bryant was hanged for stealing a sheep. Six months later Benjamin Webb, aged 38, and twenty three year old George Ward were taken when astride stolen horses and charged with the theft of two lambs from Isaac Lewis of Bitton who had offered a £20 reward for their capture. In Gloucester Gaol they made a desperate attempt to saw through their leg irons but were foiled by the vigilance of Mr. Giles, the keeper. They were then more securely held by gruesome fetters called 'The Widow's Arms', an iron straitjacket. Protesting their innocence, and praying devoutly at the scaffold, they were executed at Gloucester in March 1784. In 1786, 'the noted Cayford' described as the leader of a Bitton gang was hanged at Oxford. The same year, three young burglars, Joseph Fry, George Fry and Samuel Ward, who confessed to stealing £7 in cash, a silver ring and a crown piece came up for trial at Gloucester. They were said to be part of a gang, real thugs, who operated a protection racket, selling 'insurance' – the premiums ten shillings and sixpence, first class, and five shillings, second class, which was collected annually at Lansdown Fair with the policy holders thus '*avoiding their felonious attentions*'. Presumably first class people were not robbed at all, and second class people only a little bit! It was said the Frys' father used to hide his sons in a cave which was entered through a trapdoor in the floor of his hut when the hue and cry was out for them. Despite this sensational stuff young George Fry got off. His brother Joseph aged 19 and twenty year old Samuel Ward were both condemned. The Gloucester Spring Assizes of 1786 had been crowded even by prevailing standards. No less than nine men, including Fry and Ward were drawn to the scaffold in carts which were set in motion simultaneously. Said the Gloucester Journal giving it the full whack.....

'When the poor wretches fell the whole crowd seemed to utter a groan of commiseration. Just as the malefactors were turned off, two strong flashes of lightning burst from a cloud attended by thunder.'

.....all of which must have served as a horrible example to John Pillinger and his sons, their contemporaries, especially the fate of the Wards, few of whom could have remained. Even the reprieved George Fry did not escape. A few years later, ironically 'going straight', he was killed at his work in a coalpit.

Baby Simon, the last of John and Catherine Pillinger's children lived only a couple of months. By the criteria of the times, Catherine was fortunate in losing only two of her infants, but thereafter she herself disappears from the record. She was certainly dead before 1785, for on the 12th March that year, John, described 'widower' married for the second time.

John's second family

John was forty four, and his bride Silvia Haines, a spinster of twenty seven. His first marriage had been witnessed by 'the mark of John Haines', probably a relative of his new wife which confirms the close-knit nature of a place where everybody knew everybody else. This time round William Bush was the witness: like so many more he would meet with an unhappy

end..... *'killed in a coalpit belonging to Mr. Leonard & Co. on 28th December 1798 by a stone two hundredweight falling on his body.'*²²

As a child Silvia had been no stranger to poverty. On the day after Christmas, 1760, her widowed mother was the subject of an Order under the Poor Law. Destitute and the sole support of her children Hester aged 13, Dinah, 9, Samuel, 8, Febe, 3, and two year old Silvia, she was 'allowed five weeks to get them placed else all that is of age will go to apprentices'. She found situations for the two older girls but failed with her son. On the 9 March 1762, Samuel Haines was placed as an apprentice to John Wood, esquire of Bitton, to learn '*the art and mystery [sic] of husbandry*', a bondage he would have to endure until he was twenty four years old. The parish relieved itself of the responsibility of many a poor child in this way. It would be unnatural if Silvia did not share John's horror of getting into the hands of the Overseers.

As John and Silvia set up their home together the children of his first marriage were going out into the world themselves. In 1785, Sarah, aged 22, married a coalminer, William Jay and produced a family of Jays. In 1793, William tried his hand at a spot of illegal prospecting: the Court Leet alleged that he.....

'made an encroachment of the common waste; to get off by February 1794 or be fined £5.'

With this valiant attempt at private enterprise behind him, William returned to work for others. On the 4 January 1809 he was killed whilst at his work in the Golden Valley pit.²³ There was hardly a poor family in Kingswood who did not lose husband, father, son, son-in-law or brother-in-law in the pits, a situation graphically described by Thomas Shillitoe, a Quaker, who came to Kingswood in 1812:

*'In the first cottage we entered we found three small children left quite by themselves. We found that the father had been killed in the coal-pit and the mother was gone out to a day's work and yet we had met with more pitiable cases, much larger families left to struggle with almost starvation. The repetition of this same language almost daily assailed our ears, "My husband, my sons, were killed in the pit."'*²⁴

On 26 September 1787, John's eldest son Nathaniel was married to Mary Yeales. Despite apparently living at home when he took out a marriage licence he had no doubt where he belonged: 'Yatton, alias Church Yeaton in the County of Wiltshire'. As Mary was only eighteen her mother Sarah's consent was required and duly given. The wedding took place at Bitton and a son they called John was born to the couple several months later in the common pattern.

Nathaniel junior moved to Nailsea on the Somerset side of Bristol, sometime after 1793, probably to mine the coal which supplied the glassworks for the famous 'Bristol Blue Glass'. Though there is no record of Mary's death, he was married for the second time in 1798, at

²² GRO D260

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ 'Journal of Life, Labours and Travels of Thomas Shillitoe, Quaker', 1839.

Nailsea, to Betty Tyzick. Nothing then is known about him or his family, until his eventual return to Yatton Keynell, probably having been 'removed' there from Nailsea and where he was buried on the 16 July, 1815, aged 55.

In 1786, Silvia's first baby was born and called Simon, the same name as Catherine's lost infant. This little Simon makes no other appearance in the record and he must too have died young. In 1789, John and Silvia's second son, Robert, was born, and in 1793, a third son called William.

A Hulk called 'Captivity'

If John had a favourite son, I think we can assume he was Jacob, born in 1770. Certainly Jacob was the only one who was given 'a start in life' designed to take him away from labouring in the fields or coalmines. A formal apprenticeship to a reputable master who was a Freeman of Bristol, was quite different from a parish apprenticeship whereby poor boys were disposed of. An apprenticeship like this cost money:

'Jacob Pillinger, son of John Pillinger, of Batheaston, coalminer, to James Martin Hilhouse, shipwright, and Mary his wife, for seven years. Friends to find apparel and washing.'

The date of the indenture is the 5 January 1792 – but why was John in Batheaston? There had been no Pillingers there since the early 1700s, (and those who *had* lived there departed for Brislington) but the place was part of the Somerset coalfield, so it was obviously work related. It was evidently a temporary sojourn as John attended the Oldland Court Leet in 1793, with Nathaniel, who was still then in Bitton. Jacob was aged twenty one, old for an apprenticeship, but not uniquely so. His age was not the only problem: he was a married man with a child. He had married Ann Muntin at Bedminster in 1790, and their daughter Mary Ann was already a year old. Muntin is a surname which is frequently found at 'the New Church, Kingswood' otherwise St George. I have the feeling that Ann was a cut above Jacob and the idea that he should learn so late to be a shipwright may have been mooted by her family.

Who could blame Jacob if he felt out of place at Hilhouse's yard amongst a lot of fourteen year old boys? And if Ann had intended to go out to work to make ends meet, then her frequent pregnancies would have made such plans difficult. But.....a successful apprentice with his seven year term behind him could set up on his own account as a tradesman. He could apply to be a Burgess of Bristol, the prestigious Freedom which would enable him to vote at elections, an obvious step up, and a privilege never so far enjoyed by any Pillinger. So far so good.

By 1808 Jacob and Ann had eight children, six girls and two boys, with the youngest, William, only about a year old. It is unlikely that Jacob completed his apprenticeship; even if he qualified, he did not become a Freeman but found work in the city docks, working his way up to 'boatswain', a senior petty officer aboard ship, in charge of the rigging and stores, and presumably he went to sea from time to time. Then everything went wrong.

He was arrested on the 20 October 1808 and charged with the theft of 5 bags containing 4 hundredweight of sugar, the property of a Mr. Miles, from a vessel, the 'Nelson', belonging to Alderman Claxton & Son, at the time lying in the floating dock in the Port of Bristol. The robbery was evidently planned. His two accomplices were not the usual chancers, but professional men, James Buck, a customs house officer, and Richard Fryer, a constable of the watch. The three men were taken to Newgate where their names are listed in the General Gaol Delivery. They remained in the gaol for six months awaiting trial. Pillinger, Fry and Buck were convicted at the Assizes on the 11 April 1809 and sentenced to be transported for seven years beyond the seas. James Buck, who was only twenty two, had been a promising young man with a good career ahead of him. Twenty five worthies from Portishead signed a Round Robin petition on his behalf which was sent to Mr. Vicary Gibbs, the Bristol Recorder, with the inference that he had been led astray by the two older men.²⁵ All to no avail.

Fortunately or unfortunately for those convicted, the voyage did not start at once. For five more months, Jacob and the others remained at Newgate in 'The Pit' an underground dungeon reserved for condemned prisoners and those awaiting transportation. In a room only seventeen feet square, reeking and filthy, the convicts were provided with foul straw mattresses on a perpetually damp floor which lay below river level. The chimney was permanently boarded up and the door at the top of the steps remained bolted night and day. The only light and ventilation came in from one tiny window. The more mutinous and desperate prisoners were 'ironed'. The only food allowed was a daily ration of one and a half pound of bread at a cost of sevenpence ha'penny, for which even the poorest had to pay the gaoler. Outside a collecting box begged donations and occasionally, charitable people sent in supplies of potatoes, beef, herrings and coal. Some of those who entered Newgate simply faded away, others died of disease; small pox, or the dreaded 'gaol fever', which was spread through the bites of lice and fleas.

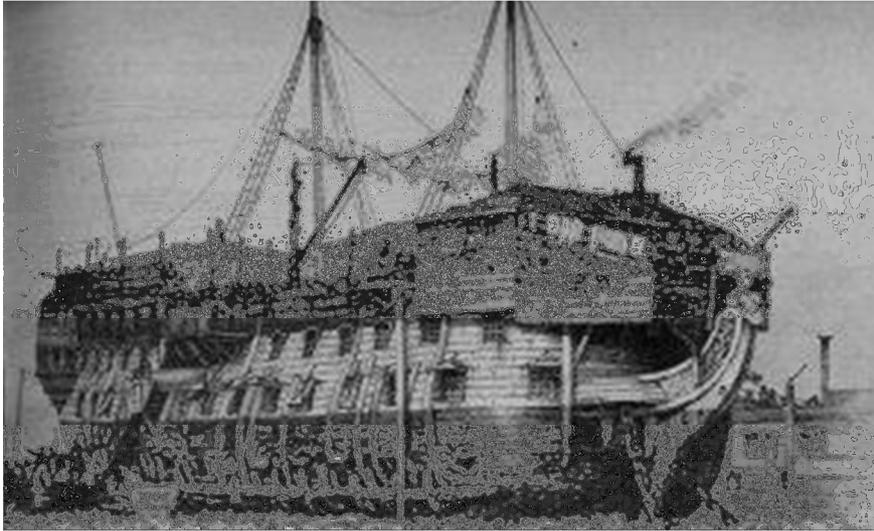
In September, 1809, Jacob was allowed to bid farewell to his wife and children and with thirteen others who had been convicted at the same Assizes, he was taken from Newgate to Portsmouth Harbour and the prison hulks. The convicts were chained to the outside of mail coaches, a desperately sorry spectacle, designed to 'encourage' onlookers who saw them pass by, some lobbing missiles at them. The hulks were old ships of the line, no longer seaworthy, in some cases, actually rotting away, finishing their useful service to house the prisoners until places could be found aboard the Australia-bound transport ships. Sometimes convicts remained aboard the hulks for months and even years. Needless to say, death relieved many before the next ordeal could begin.

The hulks register which received the prisoners from Bristol records them as:

JACOB PILLINGER (42)	PETER STILL (49)
WILLIAM DAVIS (20)	DANIEL PILL (12)
WILLIAM DAVISON (34)	JOHN PILL (10)
HENRY HEAD (13)	AMBROSE BRYANT (23)

²⁵ HO 47/42/21

DENNIS TURNER (40) WILLIAM THOMAS (21)
JAMES BUCK (22) WILLIAM COX (30)
RICHARD FRYER (38) alias Latham, JOSEPH HALL (26)



The name of the hulk was 'Captivity', formerly HMS 'Monmouth', a 64 gun 'fourth rate ship', launched in 1772. What happened to the two young boys aged ten and twelve whose surname reads like an abbreviation of our own? I wish I knew. The fate of some of the other prisoners can be ascertained from the hulks' registers. Bryant, a rogue who was discovered with forged notes in his pocket on arrival, was put on board HMS 'Gambier' on the 16 March 1811, as were Thomas and Cox. Hall sailed on HMS 'Indian' on the 27 June 1810. James Buck was sent to Guildford on the 20 August 1810, with no other details, and Fryer was granted a free pardon in 1813. Free pardons were also given to Davis, Davison, Turner and Still at various times up to 1815. The prisoners were marched off to hard labour outside the dockyard on a daily basis. On one of these excursions Jacob Pillinger got away. Against his name is the single letter 'E'. Incredibly, this stands for ESCAPED, but sadly, this is the last which is ever heard of Jacob Pillinger.

Not that he was the only one on our line who came up against the long arm of the law. For this, we go back to September 1786, the General Gaol Delivery, and a list of those committed to Bristol's Newgate Prison.

James Pillinger, bc1776, Kingswood area - d. Australia, 1845

The prisoners were mostly minor ne'er do wells, but among them was a merry band who had recently caused a great hue and cry, namely Shusannah alias "Shuke" Milledge, aged 20, Elizabeth James, alias Watkins, aged 20, John Atwood, aged 15, James Pillinger, aged 10, and Thomas Davis, aged 19.

The facts of the case were that *"Yesterday sennight a farmer had his pocket picked in our [Bristol] Fair of his purse by a Lady of Easy Virtue containing 120 guineas. As soon as he*

*discovered his loss he employed the proper officers and went in search of her, but hitherto she has eluded her captors.*²⁶

By the times the newspaper printed the account, the news was out of date. The “lady of easy virtue” had been identified and with a male and female companion had been picked up three days before, at Salisbury. The man was examined first:

“Thomas Davis, otherwise Thomas Morgan, says he is about nineteen years of age, born and bred in the parish of St Philips in Bristol, was brought up in the Poor House. He ran away from thence when he was about ten years of age; has been employed by Mr. Ward, a wire drawer in Lamb Street for three years. Lived with Mr. Hawker at Kingswood at the Fire Engine Public House a year or more; from thence went on board the “Prince Alfred” cutter; was with her three months; has been in the Coast of Guinea in the “Apollo”; came from sea about 18 months ago; ever since has travelled the country selling hardwares; don’t recollect the name of any person who bought any goods. Has a silver watch in his pocket, maker’s name William Round, London, no.260. Has in his pocket of guineas, an half, eight half crowns; silver shoe and knee buckles and silver sleeve buttons and all new apparel of every sort. Says he met with the two women at Bath Friday and came up with them to Salisbury.”

(Tom Davis, once a seaman on a slaver, that most diabolical of all trades, must have cut quite a dash in his breeches and buckles.)

The woman: *“Susanna Millege, [sic] otherwise Millard, says she is about 21 years of age, was born at Stapleton, was brought up in the Poor House there; was apprenticed to her aunt Susannah Smith of Kingswood. Ran away after serving three years. Used to carry meat and garden stuff in Bristol Market; rented a room for a twelvemonth in Lawford’s Gate of one Richards, shoemaker. Came from Bristol Saturday or Sunday last alone from Bath and there joined Davis and Betty James; has in her pocket 15 guineas and a half and five shillings, new silver show [sic] buckles and all apparel, new, which she says was bought at Warminster. Has in her bundle new cloth for shifts aprons, &c.”*

The second woman: *“Betty James says she is about 20 years of age; was born in Monmouthshire; lived in service with Mr. Howell at Registon’s Grange. Left her master about four years ago; travelled about the country with hardware. Lodges at the Guard Boat, Temple Back. New silver buckles in her shoes, new gown, new cloak, new shoes, new petticoat.”*

They presumably travelled in most of their finery, for an inventory was made of the stuff they left in Salisbury:

“Two pairs of new stays: two cotton gowns and one petticoat of the same pattern, new, two pairs of new Round Robins; one black silk cloak; two muslin aprons; one cotton shirt, two pocket handkerchiefs; two linen caps; two pairs of black stockings; one pair of pumps. One flannel petticoat; one old safe guard; one old apron; one old stuff gown; two pairs of new pattens.”²⁷

²⁶ Bonner & Middleton’s Bristol Journal 9.9.1786

²⁷ Bristol Record Office, General Gaol Delivery files.

The silver buckles and buttons must have been taken as evidence when the trio were removed to Bristol, charged with stealing from the farmer, John Bray.

John Bray, and his companion, John Roberts, both from Bishops Nympton, South Molton, had come up from Devon with cattle which they sold at St James' Fair for £130. From then on it was a sorry tale, old as time itself.

At about midnight Bray, Roberts and a man called William Pollard were passing St James' Back when they heard a fiddle playing. In search of the action, they followed the music into a house where they were picked up by the two girls, Shusanna Milledge and Betty James, and all of them sat drinking beer. Roberts told Bray to *"take care of your pocket"* for he had seen the tall woman (Milledge) fingering the buttons on his breeches. In his pocket was a yellow canvas bag which contained £109 and some odd shillings. He checked and found it intact. The woman Milledge *"frequently came up to me and sat at my right hand side"*. Five minutes before she came up to him the last time before she departed he had the money and immediately after she left he missed it. The watchmen and constables were duly summoned. They *"made all possible search"* for Milledge and the other girl but the birds had flown.

An informant said they had gone to Bath where they were pursued by Bray and the constables. At Bath they were joined by a man, identified as Davis, and the three of them had taken a chaise to Warminster. The pursuit continued where the frantic Bray was told they had bought several silver trinkets but had already departed for Salisbury. At last he caught up with them in that town, and apprehended them, with the help of Joseph Kite, the Mayor's officer from Bath. He searched the two girls who played tag with him, passing the articles between themselves. At last he *"caught hold of said Milledge's hand"* and found it held a green purse containing ten guineas as well as a copper farthing which he had kept for luck. It had been in the same bag with the guineas and from *"it being remarkably bent he knows it is the same farthing he lost having been in possession thereof two years"*. (Both Siene and Shuke were said to have been in possession of this "lucky" farthing when arrested separately and at different times! A good defending counsel would have pursued the matter, but at that time there was no legal aid for the defence. The poor had to defend themselves.)

John Roberts confirmed that he and Bray had gone to the house in St James' Back where Milledge first attempted to pick *his* pocket of which he warned his friend. Within moments of the other man's pocket being picked he heard the girl cry *"Scut!"* He did not know the meaning of this but had since learned it meant *"Run away"* or *"Make off"*.

The justices then examined Mary Webb, wife of William Webb, a labourer of Tucker Street, who had waited on the company at Jane Elworthy's on the night of the robbery. She recalled the farmers coming in with two girls she knew as Shuke and Bett. The girls came downstairs later without the men, but with several boys. Shuke cried *"Scut! Scut! Damn your eyes!"* Soon after that the farmer complained he was ruined and that he had lost 100 guineas. She went with the watchmen and the farmer to Temple Street where they found the boys who had been with Shuke.

“which boys are now present, giving their names John Atwood, James Pillinger and James Siene.”

Pillinger had four guineas sewed inside the lining of the back part of his breeches and Atwood had two or three guineas which they said had come from Shuke. The arrest was reported in the Bristol press: *“Prisoners to take their trials at our next Assizes which begin Monday; viz: Susanna Milledge, Elizabeth James, John Atwood, James Pillinger and Thomas Davis for defrauding John Bray.”*²⁸

James Pillinger was a street urchin, big city flotsam, only ten years old, and thus was born in or about the year 1776. Not altogether surprisingly, there is no record of his birth, though there are a few tentative clues to his antecedents. Who would fit as his likely father? There is a spare, as we know, a William, married to Jane, whose daughter, also called Jane, was baptised in 1777 at Bitton. If only a son called James had been baptised at the same time!²⁹ Nothing further is known of either Jane thereafter, but it does seem likely that William, the father, was the man who, ten years later, was apprehended begging at Romsey, Hampshire, and was conveyed to Marshfield where he was legally "settled", the home village of those Pillinger cousins, the descendants of Arthur, the son of Sallai. What happened to William afterwards is unknown, but what could be more likely that James was his lost son who had to fetch as best he could on the Bristol streets? Also, young James knew Shuke – and she too came from the “Badlands” of Kingswood, as did Tom Davis.

With the others, our boy was lodged in Newgate Gaol where vice of every sort flourished and the stench of filth and human ordure hung over all. One name was missing from the list of those arrested: James Siene. He had turned “nose” and his evidence of the happenings at Jane Elworthy’s was added to the versions already given by the farmers and the waiting woman.

On the Friday night, September 1st, he said, he was with Shuke and Bett, who he knew as Elizabeth Watkins and the boys Pillinger and Atwood. The girls were drinking with the two farmers who were *“a little in liquor”*. Shuke sat close to the right of Farmer Bray and had her left arm round his neck with his head in her bosom. Whilst they were in this situation he saw Shuke pull her hand out of Bray’s breeches pocket with a bag and he heard money jingle. At once she jumped up from the farmer, calling to Bett *“Come along!”* and both girls went downstairs followed by Siene himself and the two other boys. Shuke cried *“Scut!”* and the five of them ran to Counterslip where Shuke knocked up Tom Davis, calling out, *“Come and make haste for I got some money and if you don’t make haste somebody will be after us!”* Bleary eyed, Tom joined them in the street.

²⁸ BMBJ 16.9.1786

²⁹ Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, though CTP often accused me of romantic delusions. He longed to “find James” though and even wanted to send me to Australia to see if I could find more! The Bitton registers have been transcribed by the Bristol & Avon Family HS. The transcriber has miscopied “Jane” which is correct for “James”. I saw the entry originally in the Bitton vestry, and have checked it numerous times since. It definitely reads “Jane” and “daughter”. If anybody reads the transcript CD, please don’t write to me making “Eureka” noises.

As they trooped back up Temple Back and into Beer Lane, James Pillinger, who he knew by the nick-name of "Mutton", said to Shuke

"Come – if you'll give us anything, do it!"

Shuke took out the bag and gave them some guineas. In doing so, she gave Pillinger the crooked farthing which he threw back at her and they all laughed. Siene who had so far received none of this largesse picked up the farthing. Siene said he thought Shuke would have given them more, but Davis wouldn't let her. It was about 3 a.m. by the time they parted in Beer Lane, the boys in their various ways and Shuke, Bett and Davis up Temple Street towards the Gate. When Siene was taken in charge he had in his pocket half a crown, and some ha'pence and the crooked farthing. On the other hand, James Pillinger (arrested Saturday morning) had four guineas in gold and Atwood two guineas.

Shuke Milledge of course denied the robbery. (Well, she would wouldn't she?) She had met the farmer at Jane Elworthy's but, she said

"I never sat on his lap or put my arm round his neck. We were both drunk. Sometimes we danced. The farmer fell asleep, and I went home to my lodgings. I set out for Bath next morning about ten o'clock. A boy I knew was due to be flogged there later in the day. I went to the gaol and gave him half a guinea. This half and the other guineas I had were given to me by several gentlemen at a great many times."

In Bath gaol she met up with Tom Davis and Bett James, by chance. They set off for Warminster where they had a fancy to buy linen shifts. A young gentleman she met there gave her the silver buckles which she later had inscribed with her name. They all three put up at "The Lord's Arms" at Warminster until Tuesday, and then they met a returned chaise which conveyed them to Salisbury where they stayed at "The Black Horse". She intended to make peppermint water to sell at Salisbury Fair. She had on her fourteen and a half guineas and the silver buckles.

"Before I saw Davis on the Saturday at Bath I had not seen him for six months. I know nothing about the farmer's money. I don't remember any boys at the room at St James' Back. I was much in liquor and I went home and lay down at my lodgings."

Thomas Davis said he came from Warminster to Bristol on the Friday night and departed on Saturday morning for Bath. He did not see Shuke until they met at Bath prison. There was nothing to do at Bath and he decided to go to Portsmouth. He spent the night under a hay mow. To his surprise at Warminster he ran into Shuke again.

"No! She is certainly not my wife! I had not seen her for three weeks before we met in Bath on Saturday. I went there to see the boy flogged. I gave him two shillings at the prison. I bought the silver buckles I had on me at Portsmouth. I don't know where I bought the new coat and waistcoat I was wearing. I did not put up with Shuke at Salisbury. My business there was in order to go Portsmouth. I did not see Shuke at Salisbury nor do I know her business there. The money found in my pocket was saved by me."

Betty James's money and buckles were, like Shuke's, given her by generous "young gentlemen" she met on the road. She denied ever seeing the farmer.

Shuke was found guilty at the Assizes but no sentence was passed: a point of law obliged the Recorder to refer her case to "the twelve judges". For the moment, she remained in Newgate, well aware she faced the prospect of being hanged by the neck until she was dead. She was still in gaol when she fell in with another of our putative relations, Edward Harris, of whom more later. It is not recorded whether John Bray had what was left of his money returned. I would have liked to have been a fly on the wall when he got back to his wife in Devon.

Of the rest who were associated with the case, Betty James was bound over. Davis and the boys did not fare so well; only James Pillinger escaped death. James Siene and Thomas Davis were later convicted of other – to our modern minds - minor crimes. They were all sent aboard the second Fleet, which became known as the Death Fleet. Siene died aboard the "Surprise" during the voyage and Davis aboard the "Neptune"; John Atwood, was also aboard "Neptune" and was among those who came ashore more dead than alive. He was buried 9 July 1790, nine days after reaching Sydney Cove. Even John Dyer, the boy who Shuke and Tom went to see at Bath before he was flogged, also died aboard the "Neptune". They were all bad boys, but surely did not deserve their terrible fate.³⁰

Meanwhile, whilst in Newgate, James Pillinger took up with another boy, twelve year old John Pearson, who was there for the theft of a silver cup. Pearson was sentenced to six months for this and to be flogged. James's punishment is not recorded, but as we all know, gaol is the thieves' university. Both boys continued in tandem with their life of petty crime. In 1791, by which time James was fifteen, they were apprehended for the theft of a watch found guilty and sentenced to transportation for seven years aboard the "Pitt".

James survived the voyage and arrived safely in Australia where it is almost beyond doubt that he met Shuke Milledge, who was herself eventually transported aboard the "Lady Julian", the infamous women's transport ship, known as "The Floating Brothel".³¹ He married Elizabeth Wood who as a child was brought to the colony by her mother, convicted in London of shoplifting. On Norfolk Island James and Elizabeth had two children and in 1808 they were amongst those transferred to Van Diemen's Land. During years of hardship on Tasmania, four more children were born. Eventually James received a grant of 70 acres of land at Clarence Plains on which he ran thirty sheep. Here we catch a glimpse of him:

"James Pillinger, of Millbrook, Tunbridge, was one of the Norfolk Island settlers, who were transplanted to Tasmania. Most of them were given land at New Norfolk - hence the name.

³⁰ The problem of such feral children became such a scandal in Bristol that it eventually led to the national nautical school, HMS *Formidable* at Portishead, and various orphanages established by George Muller & Mary Carpenter.

³¹ For the further adventures of Shuke, her fellow female transportees and the gangs of boys similarly removed, see "The Bristol Sheilas", my current project.

James Pillinger was evidently a good judge of land; there are few better blocks of country in the Midlands than the Millbrook estate was when he had it. At one time he evidently ran over the country at Antill Ponds, as he is buried close to the present Warringa homestead. He it was who built the flour mill at Millbrook, once the gristing centre for a big district. I have heard the old hands say that wheat from as far away as Inglewood was once carted to Millbrook to be ground. It was said of the original Pillinger that he was a very strong man, and that he used to carry a bag of flour under each arm from the mill to the waiting wagon or dray.”³² (Perhaps he was of robust build? A side of “Mutton” hence his early soubriquet.)

After his wife Elizabeth’s death in 1824, he began to drink heavily and eventually lost the farm. He died in 1845.

His son James II through hard work, grant and purchase of land, was a self-made man of considerable property, with fifteen thousand acres at its peak.

His grandson Alfred Thomas Pillinger *“was for many years the Member of Parliament for Oatlands in the days of single electorates, and for some time Minister for Lands. He was a most genial man, but without outstanding ability as a statesman. He was, all the same, a good worker for his Electorate, and very popular with all classes.”³³ As well as being Coroner and Magistrate for the district he sat in the Tasmanian House of Assembly for 23 years, and served two separate terms as a Minister for Lands. Not surprisingly he opposed the retention of the Port Arthur convict settlement as a historical site. No doubt too many questions would be asked!*



Alfred Thomas Pillinger

The Pillinger name is perpetuated in a nature reserve, the Tasmanian Wild Rivers national park. I recently found a wonderful website describing a walk through this wilderness and pictures of the jetty at East and West Pillinger. There are very few relics of the convicts, but

³² “Chronicles of the Burbury Family” Chapter 7, on-line.

³³ Ibid, “Burbury”

here and there are a few ruins. Better still in memory of Alfred Thomas are the restored tenders of the railway engines dotted about, a reminder that he in his time as a minister brought the railway line to the area. Alfred Thomas Pillinger died in 1899. So the family became respectable. For many years they kept their convict origins a secret, (James was supposed to have come to Australia as a surgeon on a convict ship!) until the centenary celebrations of 1977. His direct descendant, David Pillinger of Tasmania, with whom I corresponded for years prior to his untimely death said, notably:

“For many years it was considered shameful to have a convict ancestor. Now, because I have three, it puts me on some kind of pedestal.”

Back to Jacob Pillinger, to Redcliffe Hill and beyond

Jacob's escape seems to have malfunctioned and ended with his death. His wife Ann must have been informed sometime that she was now a widow. With true grit, she picked herself up from catastrophe and became the licensee of a public house, 'The Talbot' on Redcliffe Hill where she was in charge by April 1823, when she was fined £5 for 'offences against her licence'.

Five of Jacob and Ann's children, all girls, including Ann Sinnett (who took over as pub landlady in 1826) survived to adulthood, and were married, Mary Ann to Francis Clark, Charlotte to William Trowbridge, Sarah to William Farler and Ellen to William Pines.



Redcliffe Hill in 1830

All signed the register at their weddings, showing that Ann had procured an education for her girls.

The wedding of William Pines and Ellen Pillinger 'both of this parish' took place on the 25 October 1824

at St George, where just three years previously Ellen's sister Ann had become the wife of an accountant, Thomas Francis Sinnett. These Pillinger descendants had become 'the middling sort'.

William Pines was a master mariner. Whilst he was at sea or ashore, Ellen lived a peripatetic life giving birth at various Bristol parishes, each time at a different address when each new child came along: St Mary Redcliffe, Bedminster and St James. Emma was born in 1826, William, 1828, John, 1830, Ellen, 1831, Charlotte, 1833, Matilda, 1834, Jessy Ann, 1837 and Frederick Pitt Pines in 1838.

In 1841, Ann Pillinger, said to be aged 60, was living at the Talbot with her widowed daughter Ann Sinnett aged 35, plus the Sinnett children Henry, 18, Eliza, 15, ten year old twins, Matilda and George, and a servant, Anna Jones, aged 15. There is only one member of the Pines family who lived in Bristol: William, shown incorrectly as 'aged eleven', was a boarder at Colston's³⁴ School. William is the only one of the immediate Pines family ever to appear in *any* census. Were they dead? Not on your life. For all the years of their marriage William Pines had been in and out of the Port of Bristol. Ellen had seemingly had enough of it and before they could be counted in 1841, the whole family had gone to sea with him.

They turn up sporadically. In 1847, William junior and his brother John were crew members of the 'Hudson' a 511 ton barque sailing out of Liverpool for Sydney, William is said to be 18 and John, 19, though it should be the other way round. The 'Hudson' arrived in Australia and an advertisement in the Sydney Morning Herald, of 12th January 1848, describes the vessel as 'a new fast A1 sailing barque' leaving the port for Liverpool and seeking wool and other cargo. Lloyds Register of 24th August 1847, Liverpool to Sydney, and 26th December 1848, shows that William Pines was master, with general cargo, nine cabins, with eighteen crew, two steerage passengers plus Mrs. Pines, with one son and three daughters!³⁵

Back in Bristol, Ann Pillinger of the Talbot Inn, Redcliff Hill died on 20 July 1849, aged 75, 'deeply regretted by her relatives and friends'.³⁶

She left a complicated will. James Evens of Redcliffe Hill, wine merchant and John Farler of the same, grocer (presumably a relative of her son-in-law William) were named as her trustees. Her daughter Charlotte Trowbridge and granddaughter Ann Chappell were to receive £80 each for their sole benefit and not for use by a husband or any future husband. (It amuses me to speculate that Ann hadn't much time for husbands, whether her own, or anybody else's.) Ann Chappell was to receive her money in instalments of £1 per month. William Pines, her grandson, the old boy of Colston's School was to receive £50, with the same sum to her grandson Henry Sinnett. To daughter Mary Clark she left 'all my wearing apparel'; to daughter Ann Sinnett, 'two silver salt cellars and salt spoons marked with the initial letters of my name. Also my clock which I request she keeps in the family'. The bed, bedstead and all the furniture in the bedroom at the Talbot was to go to grandson Henry Sinnett. Then there was considerable property: messuages, dwelling houses in Harford

³⁴ Hush my mouth. At the mention of Edward Colston's name I should now gouge out my eyes with a hot poker. According to Bristol fanatics, we are supposed to rewrite history.

³⁵ Sydney Harbour papers

³⁶ Bristol Merc. 28.7.1849

Street, New River Street, North Street and elsewhere to Ann Chappell and Charlotte Trowbridge with the interest divided between the children of Mary Clark and Ann Sinnett.

A codicil added 28 June, 1849 left another property at Hillsbridge Place to be shared between Henry Thomas Sinnett, Eliza Sinnett, Matilda Ann Sinnett, (the children of Ann Sinnett) and Sarah Reed, (the daughter of Mary Clark).

The will and codicil were endorsed by the 'x' of Ann Pillinger and proved by the trustees on 1 August 1849, with effects amounting to £450.³⁷

It is intriguing that the only member of the Pines family to receive a mention in Ann's will is William junior. Was there a rift between Ann and Ellen? Perhaps she was scathing about her daughter going to sea.....

"Along with a lot of coarse sailors. Common!"

.....she may have said, though anyone who kept a pub near the docks was scarcely a blushing flower.

The pub remained a family affair when Ann's son, George Sinnett took over in 1852 and he held the licence until 1861 when John Crook, an interesting surname, became the licensee.

According to family legend William Pines senior died somewhere 'off Liverpool' and he may be the William Pines whose death is registered there in December 1851, though this is just as likely to be William, junior, or the child of another Pines family. A possible relation, Philip Pines, married Elizabeth Hill in Liverpool in the September Quarter of 1846 and she appears in the Liverpool census of 1851 living in the household of her father, William Hill, a book keeper. This Elizabeth Pines was aged 27, a mariner's wife, born at Nottingham. She had two boys, Philip aged 3, and one year old William. Men named William Pines married at Liverpool in 1856 and 1864. Elizabeth Pines turns up in Bristol in 1861, at South Place, St Mary Redcliffe, with only one son, Philip, now a thirteen year old office boy. Coincidentally in 1871, Elizabeth Pines, by then a widow of forty seven, was a servant of Isabella Ker Ranken, of Townsend Villas, Richmond, Surrey. Isabella was the widow of the Rev Charles Ranken, formerly curate of Brislington who had interrogated the backsliders of the parish in 1822, among them the Pillingers of that place, which is where I came in.....

By 1881, Elizabeth Pines had found refuge from her lot as a household drudge and was living with her son Philip, now aged 34, a master mariner, his wife Elizabeth and three young grandsons. In a reversal of fortunes, they employed a young maid.

In the meantime, Ellen Pines, nee Pillinger had returned Bristol where she died on 16 February 1866 at York Road, Montpelier.

³⁷ BRO, Bristol wills

Frederick Pines, William and Ellen's youngest child arrived in Australia having jumped ship to get to Queensland when gold was discovered there in 1858. This was the tail end of the Gold Rush, with shallow deposits not nearly sufficient to sustain the numbers that flocked to the state. It was consequently called 'the duffer rush' as many of the prospectors had to be bailed out by their governments or charitably indulged by shipping companies to get them home, steerage. Fred did not return to England and died in Australia in 1901. His son Walter changed his name to Dunstan for reasons unknown and married four times!³⁸

John the Hatter

In following Jacob to Bedminster, his grim journey to the hulks and beyond to his supposed death, we left the rest of his family in Kingswood. A half century had gone by since

Nathaniel, Sarah and their children trudged into Bitton vestry carrying the document which bound them to Yatton Keynell. It still lay in waiting in the parish chest at St Mary's church.



As one by one their grandchildren had come into the world at Bitton, had been christened, married and in their turn produced more children, they had

probably forgotten that they did not 'belong'.

On the 9 February 1794, young John Pillinger, the grandson of Nathaniel and Sarah, and the son of John and Catherine, became the fourth of the new generation to take a wife. His bride was Hester Britton, and like him she was described as 'being of this parish'; indeed, the Brittons, were one of the largest families in the area and had lived in Bitton since 'time out of mind'.

Although the major occupation of the Kingswood district at this time was still coalmining or quarrying, from time to time some Pillingers followed other trades One of these was John, who became a hatter. There is no paper work to show how this came about, but certainly he must have learned his trade on the premises of a master hatter. Around the villages of Oldland, Cadbury Heath, Pucklechurch, Winterbourne and Frampton Cotterell, the manufacture of felt hats was a major industry. The most desirable hats, 'beavers', were of fur and made in the latter villages, whilst the cheaper all-wool felt hats were made at

³⁸ I am grateful to Pamela Hunt of Australia, a descendant of William & Ellen Pines for the additional information.

Oldland, and consequently by our John. These down-market hats were much in demand by West Indies plantation owners to protect their property – their slaves - against sunstroke as they cut cane under the broiling Caribbean sun.

Though the masters had small factories, in the main, hatting was a cottage industry, carried on in kitchens and outhouses. It was hazardous work. If the mercury, used to raise the scales of the animal fur to lock them together, called ‘carrotting’, didn't get you (so that you went ‘mad as a hatter’), then pneumoconiosis from the fibres in the air might well do so. Hands were likely to be deformed from the agony of being dipped in boiling water: if mercury penetrated any cuts, they refused to heal.

For the luxury hats, the fibres were cut from a rabbit skin and placed on a bench over which was suspended a bow, like that from an oversized violin, and the vibrations separated the fibres which formed into a mat, called ‘the batt’. These batts were moulded into a cone, reduced by boiling and then rolled to create felt. The felt would then be sent to the master hatter for shaping.

Urine was used to speed up the felting process and one of the more intriguing places on the Kingswood ‘Hatters’ Trail’ is called Penny Lane where, according to Chris Heal, a local expert, who took me on ‘the Trail’ the inhabitants would line up with buckets of the stuff, to be sold for a penny. As I had heard this before – it was one of Dad's gems of folklore - it's bound to be true (!)

Like many industries, the trade was cyclical, subject to peaks and troughs, with consequent bouts of short time and unemployment. At the best of times, the makers of felt hats were very poor and underpaid.

On the 22 June 1798, the elder John Pillinger, the coalminer, now aged about 57, was temporarily unable to work. He appeared before the Overseers of the Poor at Bitton who wrote in the ledger:

‘Two weeks pay to Jno Pillinger, being ill... two shillings’.

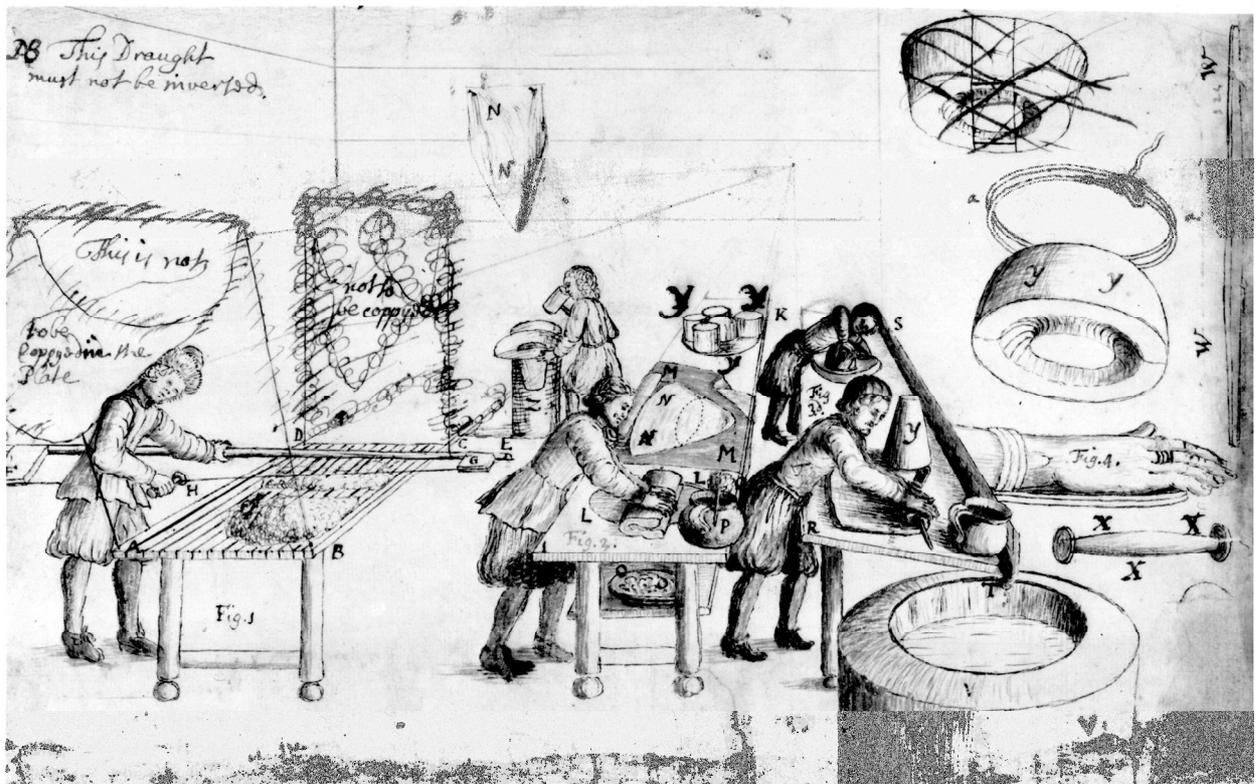
At this time no-one questioned ‘old’ John’s right to subsistence from the funds. He had lived in the parish with the odd break (the mysterious spell at Batheaston) for almost forty-four years.

Three years later, on 3 April 1801, his son, John the hatter, now the father of a young family, was himself obliged to call cap in hand at the vestry. Perhaps there was a slump in the hatting trade. He told the routinely sad story which the Overseers of the Poor had heard again and again. No work, nothing to feed his family. His children? Isaac was only six. Yes, he realised boys of this age were handy underground, but the child was very small. Sickly. The others were hardly more than babies. His wife had only just risen from child bed, and both she and the little ‘un were like to die.

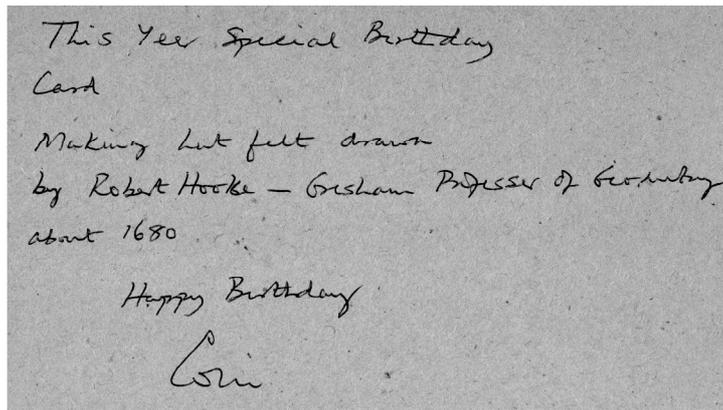
A stop gap payment of the customary two shillings was counted into his hand, and the next claimant took his place. There was then a shocking development. Someone must have been

rooting through the parish chest and possibly by chance discovered the settlement certificates of Nathaniel Pillinger and his son, John the elder. After almost half a century, the wheels of bureaucracy rolled into motion. The family had never obtained 'Settlement' anywhere other than Yatton Keynell, so the following week when 'young John' called at the vestry for his dole money, he was stunned to hear words something like the following pronounced against him.

..... *John Pillinger. We have proof that you are not a parishioner: therefore you are not entitled to be further relieved by the parish of Bitton. You and your family are settled now, just as you have always been, in the parish of Church Yatton, alias Yatton Keynell in the County of Wiltshire and the Diocese of Salisbury.....*



Hatters at work



.....undated but probably 1996-2000, when Colin was likewise Gresham Professor - in his case, Professor of Astronomy.

After his first dumbfounded silence, I have no doubt the Pillinger temper flared; with his deep-set eyes wild, almost leaping from their sockets, his face black with rage, he accused his accusers. He was born in Bitton; this was where he was christened and married. His wife was a Britton. His father had lived here all his life. No bloody outsider him, never! Without waiting for the rant to subside, the Overseers produced their trump cards, thrusting before him the two papers which had been validated in bygone days by his father and grandfather. John could not read and any paper with writing would have been mysterious, magical. He was silenced momentarily. With an air of smug righteousness, he was shown his father's mark. They would summon John senior if necessary. Yes, cried John the hatter, he would have his father brought in. The proceedings adjourned while he fetched his father. The elder Pillinger agreed the mark was indeed his, but likewise he could see no good reason why his settlement at Yatton Keynell should affect his son, and his son's family. Calm advocacy not being a family trait, I suspect the elder Pillinger then lost his temper too, spluttering incoherent abuse through broken teeth. Pillingers could (and did) fight between themselves but just let anybody else say anything to the detriment of one or other then they would combine tooth and nail.

The elder Pillinger's presence did no good whatsoever and indeed may have made matters worse. Clearly neither man 'knew his place' and that would not do at all. Any softening on humanitarian grounds was now out of the question. The letter of the law would be obeyed.

The decision taken in the Vestry proved to be controversial and the Vicar was probably not best pleased when he had to ride into Wiltshire to sort things out. Would the overseers at Yatton Keynell accept responsibility for the family which had not been back there for nearly half a century? Evidently after some wrangling they decided they could and they did. The costs are detailed in three terse lines of the Bitton 'casualties' book, spelling as shown, on 10 April 1801:

'To a jurny to the Parson..... 2s. 6d

Paid for an order of Removal.....4s. 6d

To Removeing John Pillinger and his Familey to Church Yeaton..... 15s. 0d'

The Order of Removal, addressed to the 'Churchwardens and Overseers of the Parish of Church Yatton' was drawn up on the standard form, alleging that John and his family were 'intruders' just like little Betty, John's aunt had been, so many years before. They were shown as *'John Pillinger, Hester his wife and four children, namely Isaac, aged six years, Elizabeth, five years, Jacob, two years, and Hester, six weeks old.'*³⁹

They were given two shillings to help them on their way, and escorted to the parish boundary by the Constable, where they were then passed from parish to parish until they reached their destination.

Perhaps John threw an angry parting shot, which contained both rage and tears, but I believe that later he would have embellished this scene describing himself in full throttle: *"I cussed 'ee blind,"* he might have said, or *"I cussed 'em up 'ill and down dell."*

What he probably did say was *"Dussen't thee think thee's sin the last of !!"*

And they hadn't. He brought his family back..... and they were removed again.

Inflation, presumably, had put up the cost in December 1802. *'To removing John Pillinger and Family to Church Ayton..... £2 2s. 0d'.*

If this smacks of pig headedness, in reality John probably had little choice but to return to Bitton again. If hatting was all he knew, then it is unlikely he would find a comparative outlet for his craft in rural Wiltshire.

So back to Bitton they came: but now the principle had been established, that even if the Pillingers were born, christened, married, lived, died and were buried at Bitton, their rightful domicile was Yatton Keynell, and this extraordinary to-ing and fro-ing was set to continue for the next half century.

A census taken of Bitton and its two chapelries in 1801, (only the numbers survive) puts the total population as 1,094 at Bitton, 795 at Hanham and 3,103 at Oldland, a total of 4,992 souls.

I have tried to picture the cottages of the poor in which our family dwelt: made of wattle and daub with a thatched roof, leaky and damp in the winter, stifling in summer. There might be a window, which may or may not have been glazed with two rooms on the ground floor, made of stone if the occupants were lucky, with sand to keep it clean, but otherwise made of earth as in 'dirt poor'. The walls may have been plastered and in better times, white limed. There was a fireplace, where all the cooking for the family was done; a chimney which had to be regularly kept swept as fire was a major hazard. A table board on a trestle

³⁹ BRO P.B./OP/6b55

with forms to sit around, with utensils of wood or pewter upon it. Father's chair, a luxury item, joined by a carpenter, with arms, and out of bounds to the rest of the family. A trunk, which would also serve as a seat, would contain a few precious articles: perhaps threadbare blankets or ancient clothes. Perhaps there were two rooms above for sleeping, with straw covering the floors, the parents in one, the children in the other; an old bedstead in each, with straw or flock pallets with a few coverings. (Even in Dad's day, the early 1900s, the cottage where they lived only had two bedrooms, one where their parents slept and the other for the rest, divided by a curtain for the sake of decorum between boys and girls. Finally there would be a couple of chamber pots, to collect the hatters' vital ingredient, and surely, even the Pillingers were not 'Too poor to have a pot to piss in.')

Outside there would be a lean-to workshop, for the hatting equipment and other tools. Perhaps there would be a privy. As there were no indoor washing facilities, for personal hygiene, there would be the parish pump. Those needing a more fastidious toilette might bring water inside in a bowl. Probably many did not bother to wash at all, except a dip in the river in summer. (Hot water in particular was thought to let in disease.) Laundry was done in the river. If a woman fell in she could be dragged down by her heavy clothes; there was a high instance of women drowning whilst at this task. They would have kept a few fowls and undoubtedly had a pig in an outhouse to be fattened and killed when winter loomed.

John Pillinger the elder died in Bitton aged 64 in March 1804. He was survived by his widow Silvia, and the remaining children of his two marriages, three sons, John, Robert and William still on hand, and Nathaniel elsewhere, plus a married daughter Sarah Jay and the youngest of all, little Ann Pillinger. John's second daughter, Mary had died aged 22 in 1797, and as there is no further trace of the second Simon, born in 1786, I presume that he too died young.

In June 1805, six year old Ann fell ill. She was hurriedly christened, to save her soul from eternal damnation and buried shortly afterwards. In August the same year, John's daughter in law, the careworn Hester died. During the last few years of enforced removal and wearisome return she must have known nothing but misery and despair. She was buried in Bitton Churchyard along with the rest.

Only three months after Hester's death, the widower, John junior, the hatter, threw in his lot with a widow called Anne Stone, formerly Harris. Their marriage on 10 November 1805, at St Mary's Bitton was witnessed by John's brother in law, William Jay, the husband of his sister Sarah, who would be tragically killed at his work in a coalpit in 1809. After the ceremony was over, William obligingly put his mark to the wedding of the next couple too, who must have arrived at the church without witnesses.

Anne Stone, widow, formerly Harris

Anne's Harris family had been in the Kingswood area for at least a century. They shared the name with the usual motley crew of wrong doers and wronged against, but with numerous Harris's, and very irregular records, it is impossible to be sure of Ann's parentage. If the age given at her burial (60) is correct then she was born about 1773, and she could be the child



baptized at the Hanham Chapelry in 1774, the daughter of Samuel Harris, a widower, and his wife Hannah Deare who were married by licence at St Philip and St Jacob's in 1768. Samuel, in trade as a butcher, was thus one of the better off members of the clan. But there are other Anns, otherwise Nancys, older and younger with different parents, and many couplings with never the same pair twice, which suggests games of musical marriages.

The Champion, Jack Slack, a Norwich butcher.

The male Harris's as a tribe were well known in the district as prize fighters, who 'boasted of never having been beat'. According to all the available evidence this is untrue, for they seem to have met with little success though it has to be said the quality of the opposition was pretty high. When a John Harris mounted the ring at The Lamb, outside Lawford's

Gate, in the outparish of St Philip's in February 1755, it was to take on Jack Slack, a Norwich butcher and sometime Champion of England.

Slack's training routine was interrupted when his dog, a liver and white pointer called Pero went missing: Jack issued a poignant request for its return.

Slack won the bout six minutes, which was disappointing for the crowd who had paid handsomely for tickets: two and six in the Gallery and a shilling for standing room. Sadly no news was relayed concerning the dog.

When Cornelius Harris, the licensee of a Brislington pub, took on the same Jack Slack, he was beaten so comprehensively that his life was despaired of but he did survive for a few years, perhaps brain damaged. Another Harris, Bob, who fought the up and coming Benjamin Brain, his fellow Kingswood collier, was also out of luck, which was not altogether surprising, for Brain became Champion of all England in 1791. Prize fighting for the 18th century working class male was probably the only legal way to possible fame and fortune: if these aspiring champions had lived in later times, for instance in the 1960s, they would have attempted escape by forming rock or skiffle groups, gone in for photography or ladies' hairdressing.

As well as 'Big Ben' Brain, the area could boast other champions, among them Tom Cribb and John Gully. Gully became an MP and made the Dictionary of National Biography. In a later chapter we shall meet Pillingers who fancied themselves too, perhaps inspired by their Harris forebears.

A '*notorious rogue out of Kingswood*', Edward Harris, had unsuccessfully tried to 'get on in the world' through the more traditional route of petty thievery. In 1786, a married man with a child, in his thirties and thus old enough to know better, he was in Newgate gaol awaiting transportation. Most of those under sentence had no effects to dispose of, but Harris was supposed to own a house. A man called James Purnall called at the gaol with a view to purchase the same. It was difficult to talk business in the main yard with everyone milling about, and when Harris suggested they adjourn to a passageway, Purnall agreed. Once there, he alleged that Harris took him by the collar and forced him to the ground. In the scuffle, a woman, another of our old friends, a woman, robbed him of his shoe buckles.

Edward Harris and Shuke Milledge, for it was none other, were charged with robbery.

The judge found the story too far-fetched, and they were acquitted. It made very little difference to Shuke. On 11 September 1787, she was sentenced to death for the robbery of the farmer John Bray. The awful ritual of the black cap was gone through, but four days later before the Ordinary could preach his condemned sermon, she was granted mercy. Her sentence was commuted to transportation for fourteen years.⁴⁰ The fate of Edward Harris is unknown and it must be supposed that he died awaiting transportation, either in Newgate, or in one of the hulks.

Ann Harris, (who is possibly Edward's sister) and Stephen Stone were married at Bitton on the 14 January 1794; they had a daughter Mary in 1797, and another, Dinah, who died before her first birthday in 1799. Ann gave birth to a third girl, a replacement Dinah in 1800. In July 1801, Stephen Stone died. He was probably a young man of about thirty. If he was a coalminer he may have been killed in one of the numerous accidents in the pits or died of a mining related disease. He was almost certainly a Moravian, like the majority of the Stone family who were notable among the early followers of the young John Cennick, the schoolmaster and preacher, who aged only twenty years old had come to Kingswood full of fire to join the 'Great Stir' of 1739. Within a year Cennick had had a spectacular doctrinal falling-out with the formidable John Wesley and left the latter organisation taking twenty four 'disciples', 12 men and 12 women, with him. Foremost among these was James Stone, a collier, who heard Cennick preach in Kingswood under a sycamore tree, fell in love and married Cennick's sister. Their daughter Mary Stone married a marine, Sergeant John Kennedy, and sailed with him on the First Fleet to Australia.⁴¹

It is safe to assume that Stephen left Ann and her two little girls in poor circumstances. John Pillinger, equally impecunious, could hardly have been much of a catch, but they decided to pool their meagre funds and settle down with their children, her two and his five. Within a

40. Shuke survived Australia, eventually returned to England and married the master of an Essex hulk.

41. The blameless Mary Stone, another Kingswood characters, also has a role in "The Bristol Sheilas."

few months, seven children were reduced to six when Isaac Pillinger, the little boy for whom John had pleaded in the vestry, sadly passed away, aged eleven.

Like her late husband Stephen, Ann was a follower of John Cennick and his older mentor, the evangelist George Whitfield. She belonged to the congregation at Whitfield's Schoolroom, which was built in 1741. (This building, of historical importance for its part in the birth of Methodism, is derelict after years of neglect and now after an arson attack, is a mere shell, a disgrace to Kingswood.)

John and Ann's first child was a son in 1807, who was christened in Whitfield's schoolroom and named Evangelist after St John the Evangelist, the Gospel writer. In 1808, they had another son, Stephen, named after Ann's first husband, the first time the forename Stephen was used in the Pillinger family, but which started a trend, passing from father to son, so that there are still boys called Stephen Pillinger, direct descendants, to the present day.

The long French war was drawing to its conclusion and fear of invasion by Napoleon, which had been real enough for Bitton to draw up plans to evacuate the parish should the worst come to the worst, had largely receded. No Pillinger in our branch of the family had felt disposed to take the King's shilling and had evaded the Press Gang when they made forays into Kingswood to be seen off by the tough miners. Just as well. When the conquering heroes of Waterloo returned home they were rewarded by nothing except their country's gratitude. Nobody saw to the welfare of the battle hardened, but often maimed veterans, some of whom had been pressed into service in the first place. Hordes of them took to the roads, starving and embittered, looting whatever they could get. That year the harvest failed totally. Of those people who were 'settled' about half were 'on the parish'. Some who were children at the time recalled later that not a day passed without their parents having to go to the Poor Law for relief. Need had increased substantially while resources remained static. Relief was reduced accordingly. In 1795 a man was supposed to need a minimum of the price of a three gallon loaf per week for himself and an extra 1½ gallons for his wife and each member of his family. In the year after the war, 1816, when Stephen was eight years old, a man and his wife were supposed to share a three gallon loaf between them. Small wonder that previously honest men were driven to poach whatever they could catch and women grovelled in the fields for nettles, roots and bare cabbage stalks for their cooking pots.

In the matter of crime, it has already been noted that the parish of Bitton was considered particularly vicious. Unbelievably, about half of all the petty crimes in the calendar of the Gloucestershire Quarter Sessions emanate from this one parish, which illustrates the degree of the mire into which Bitton and its surroundings had sunk. One family above all others was notorious, and with their associates, they became known as the Cock Road Gang

John Pillinger the elder must have been acquainted with Benjamin Caines from their attendances at the Oldland Court Leet and his children surely knew Ben's sons and daughters. Benjamin Caines, who was a horse trader, was married to Ann Cool and the union produced ten children of whom the eldest, George was imprisoned at Monmouth in 1799, along with Francis Britton for passing counterfeit money. At Bath in 1804, his brother Francis Caines, an oyster and cider seller stole £400 worth of cloth, for which he was hanged

along with Thomas Batt, Charles Fuller, alias the Squire, and Henry Warn. Francis was buried at Bitton and it was said that his brother Benjamin, aged 11, sat on the churchyard wall whistling throughout the interment. George Caines, by then released from gaol was caught stealing pigs with men called Cribb, Hathaway and Cox. The pigs were hidden in George's sister Betty's front room. Isaac Cox was captured and George attempted his rescue by beating the constable with the butt end of a gun. He was taken into custody, and 'frighteners' were put on a man called James Francis, (who was due to give evidence against the gang), by shots being discharged into the room where his children slept. George was condemned, but later reprieved and transported. Thomas, his next brother, nicknamed Captain Gaines, was arrested during another riot and transported. Sister Betty went to gaol for receiving the pigs. Her common law husband Timothy Bush was later transported for horse theft, as were two of her sister Lydia's husbands. Benjamin, aged 23, the whistler on the wall, was hanged for a burglary. His body was put on display in his father's front room, and donations were collected to give him a memorable funeral. The corpse was carried on a bier from Cock Road to Bitton, attended by six maidens dressed all in white, with a huge concourse of his friends and acquaintances lining the route. The burial in the churchyard was by candlelight. In due course, another Caines brother, Samuel was transported to Australia for various robberies. James Caines Bush, the son of Betty Caines and Timothy Bush was hanged for a murder at the Tennis Court Inn at Warmley, (opposite Colin's & my senior school, Kingswood Grammar School) which he almost certainly did not commit, together with along with a man called Mark Whiting. James' brother Francis Bush, transported for the theft of a spade, finally brought the whole grisly episode to a close.

John may have come to the conclusion that his brother's fate could have been much worse, though he may have been unaware that Jacob, by now, was almost certainly dead. This is supposition, for I have no idea where John and Ann were from Evangelist's christening in 1807 until 1816, when they brought two more children, Harriet and Aaron, for naming at Whitfield's schoolroom. Why they failed to christen Stephen at the same time is a mystery.

Evangelist and Stephen like their half-brother Jacob were coalminers, obliged like all of Kingswood's poor to bring in money from a young age. Jacob, at 16, was already an old hand. Perhaps Ann worked at the pit head, bagging up coals, hands calloused or bleeding with the agony of chilblains. With a sinking heart she must have said goodbye to her two little boys as they in turn, aged seven or eight, climbed into the bucket, with chains round their waists, iron candle sticks jauntily stuck into the bands of their round hats, surely made by their father, to go to their work in the dark and dangerous bowels of the earth where so many died, many of them children of a similar age.

In 1820, the Yatton Keynell parish officers paid a dole of seven shillings to 'John Pillinger in need', but it was his stepmother Silvia, Bitton born and bred, but who had acquired her late husband's settlement, who appears most prominently in the Poor Law accounts of the Wiltshire village then and later.

In 1820, on August 13th, 'disbursements' were paid to 'Silvey' Pillinger, for 4 months, £1.12s. In 1821 she received two payments, £2.12s. 0d and £3. In 1822 her dole amounted to £2.8s. 0d and in 1823 '31 weeks at 1/6d per week, a total of £2.6s. 6d'.

Jacob in trouble

Jacob Pillinger the second, named after his departed uncle, the only surviving son of John the hatter's first marriage, now moves centre stage. Jacob had endured at best a childhood of uncertainty and deprivation. In 1801 he had been 'removed' from Bitton along with his parents and continued to share their roaming existence until he was old enough to fend for himself. At the age of twenty two he got into serious trouble. On 24 October 1820, with his fellow coalminer George English, also 22, he was charged with breaking into the house of Isaac Churchill the elder, at Siston, and 'carrying away therefrom one pair of dark velveteen breeches, value two shillings, one pair of light corduroy breeches, value five shillings and a pocket handkerchief, value two shillings'. At Gloucester Castle a detailed description was made of him, from which we have the first Pillinger 'portrait':

'dark grey eyes, brown hair, brown complexion, long face with a short thick nose, a small mole between his shoulder blades and another on his chin. Five feet five inches tall and stout made; Illiterate.'

Jacob's conduct in gaol whilst awaiting trial was described as 'indifferent', which suggests the sullen shrug, as adopted by youngsters then and now, in an effort to be thought 'cool'. The two young men came up at the Lent Assizes. George English had previous form. He was found guilty and was sentenced to death.

No longer cool, Jacob's legs must have buckled as with stomach churning he gripped the bar of the dock with whitened knuckles, his throat choking back vomit. Seconds later he was almost fainting with relief. Jacob Pillinger: 'Not guilty'.

Let him savour that moment for a while for it is the only piece of good luck he will ever have in his life.

George English's capital sentence was commuted to transportation for life and he sailed for Australia on the 'Lord Hungerford' in July 1821. Also aboard were other locals, John Evans, a Wick and Abson butcher and William Stocker, a painter from St Philip's. Another passenger, George Bailey, at the time aged 21, from Cold Ashton would be executed two decades later in New South Wales. Samuel Williams, aged 53, a labourer from Westbury-on-Trym, was cruelly separated from his thirteen year old son, who was transported on a different ship, the 'Shipley'. Samuel died on the voyage on the 23rd September, followed by poor George English on 8th December.

Jacob went home from his ordeal at Gloucester and celebrated his release with some abandon. On the 14 October 1821 he married nineteen year old Mary Bracey at Bitton church. Their daughter Sarah was born on 20 January 1822, just nine months and ten days after his acquittal.

On 21 July 1822, Hester Pillinger, who was a babe in arms, during the first traumatic Pillinger removal was married at Bitton to Joseph Wiltshire. The marriage was witnessed by her father John, with the usual "X". (Hester, not christened as an infant, rectified the omission and joined the Church of England at St Michael's, Two Mile Hill, in 1855.)

Jacob's daughter Sarah, aged sixteen months, and her new baby sister, Harriet were brought to the Wesleyan School in Blackhorse Road for baptism on the 11 May 1823. Perhaps the matter of religion had been controversial between the young parents. Jacob may have wanted his children christened in the established church, despite never having received the rite himself as a child, for just under three months later, on 2nd August, he went with his two half-brothers to St George's, Hanham Abbots⁴², and they were received into the Church in a triple christening: *'Jacob aged 24, John aged 16, Stephen aged 14, the sons of John Pillinger of Made For Ever, hatter, and his wife Anne.'*

Jacob was not Ann's son, of course, but Hester's: it is a compliment to her that he seems to have thought of her as his mother. His half-brother, the boy christened in 1807 as Evangelist at Whitfield's schoolroom had dropped (or had been advised to drop), his original first name as being too flighty for the Church of England and he became plain John. And as for Stephen, it was his debut in the records, solving my long quest to confirm his parentage. Going along with the fashion, Harriet, their sister, baptised in 1816 at the Tabernacle, also decided to be christened again, and is registered at St Ann's, Siston in 1824, as 'an adult'.



Silvia Pillinger continued to attend the Yatton Keynell vestry for her dole. In 1824, 16 weeks: £1.4s. 0d; in 1825, from the 9th May to the 15th August, one guinea, with a subsequent payment of 17s. 6d, plus a special entry, 'Silvia Pillinger in need' of 1s 6d. In 1826 she was 'on the parish' more or less entirely, and in this year John the hatter was also in financial straits and received two payments, 'in need' on December 3rd, ten shillings and another, undated, 'John Pillinger, one shilling'.

In 1825, Robert Pillinger, a coalminer, born in 1789, John's half-brother and Silvia's son, occupied a tenement and land rated at 1s.7½d which he rented from an R.E. Gerrish. (By coincidence our childhood home, 33 Victoria Park was rented from a Miss Hilda Gerrish. Perhaps a case of history repeating itself.) Robert and his wife Mary Bryant were married on Christmas Day, 1810, at St Philip and St Jacob's.

Despite the Bryants being the most numerous of the local families, she inherited Robert's 'settlement'. In 1827 it was Robert and Mary's turn to get the order of the boot. They were paid 7 shillings to tide them over after which the Overseers drew up an Order of Removal dated the 11th October and they were dispatched to Yatton Keynell, signed for, like a couple of parcels:

'22nd day of October 1827, delivered to William Gaisford by me, William Tyler'⁴³

⁴² Not to be confused with 'St George, KW' now in Bristol

⁴³ BRO P.B./OP/6b125

'Robert Pillinger in need' collected his dole of 4 shillings on the 2nd November, and over the next year received another five payments amounting to £1.6s.

Stephen Pillinger was now twenty and a young bridegroom waiting with his best man, Abraham Williams outside Holy Trinity Church, Kingswood, on his wedding day, the 16 November 1828. Holy Trinity was almost new, one of the 'Waterloo churches' built through a Parliamentary grant of 1818 to celebrate the triumph over Napoleon. Jane Summerill, the bride, duly arrived with Stephen's half-sister, Dinah Stone, as a second witness. The vicar spelled Stephen's surname incorrectly as 'Pollinger', just as a previous vicar had spelled his ancestor Nathaniel's burial entry, but as all four parties 'marked' no-one knew any different. Perhaps after the ceremony, the young people toasted each other at the King's Arms, a pub just up the road from the church. If Dinah fancied Abe Williams then she would be disappointed, for ten months later he married Elizabeth Bracey, Jacob's wife's sister. Stephen and Jane Pillinger were their witnesses.

Jane and the Summerills

Jane's family appears in many guises: Summerill, Summerell, Summerhill, Sommerel, but for the sake of convenience, I shall call them all Summerill. They are first noted at Marshfield and became fixtures in Siston after the Restoration of the Monarchy.

In 1674 the vicar made a perambulation of the parish and listed the inhabitants, *'the cottages on both sides of the common from Thomas Summerill's to Mr Bamford's being twenty six in number'*.

Thomas Summerill, senior, his wife, Thomas, junior, and the otherwise unknown Sarah Shin all lived together. Among their neighbours was the widowed Richard Pillinger of the Doynton family who as we have seen lived with his daughter and son in law.

Some of the Summerills were small time mining 'adventurers'. In 1727, Stephen Summerill agreed with Richard Haynes, Lord of the Manor of Wick and Abson, that same Justice who escorted the reluctant Richard Rew to his wedding, to dig a pit on Churchley Hill, Breachyate, and to pay Mr. Haynes 2s. 6d in the pound on the sale of any minerals found thereon. There was a similar agreement in 1734 between Mr. Haynes and Samuel Summerill. Samuel was back again in 1737 with different partners, William & John Freeks of Siston, who were probably his brothers-in-law & Stephen Cambray of Wick, to dig for coal in land between the Griffin alehouse (which is still in business) & Hormaple Hill, with a contract for seven years from the 24 January 1738.⁴⁴

In 1736, Benjamin and Stephen Summerill, hatters, were transported for life to the plantations of Virginia for the theft of two dozen hats.

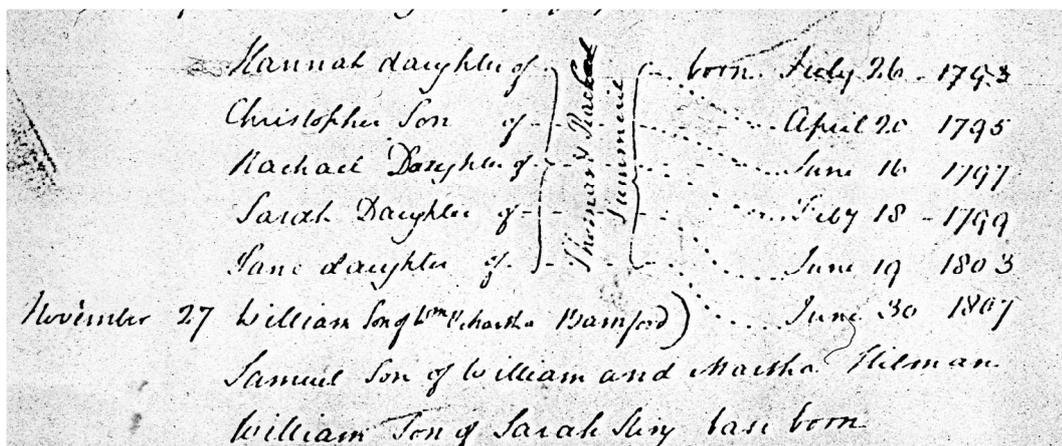
⁴⁴ GRO Ref 14581 HA/E/15

Jane's great grandparents were William Summerill and his second wife Mary Freek or Frigg a relative of Samuel's partners in the mining enterprise. William and Mary's eldest son Joseph, born in 1731, was literate and signed the marriage register when he wed Sarah Jefferies in 1756. The youngest of their five sons (two died as infants) was Thomas, born about 1767 who was working as a mason's labourer at Westerleigh Pit when he married Rachel Skinner.

Rachel's family can be traced back to one Christopher Skinner who was living at Wickwar during the Civil War period. He was the father of William who married Mary Jefferies at Wapley and Codrington in 1670. Their only child, Christopher, born about 1680, married Hester Pierkinson of Wapley in 1707. They had six children, of whom only Susanna, born in 1709 and William, born in 1710 survived. Hester died in 1735; Christopher then married a second wife, whose name is not recorded, and they had three more sons, including Christopher, junior, in 1740. Christopher senior succumbed to smallpox in 1753, as recorded by the parish register. In 1767, Christopher junior married Hannah Cole, whose family were also living at Wickwar during the Civil War. Christopher and Hannah had eleven children, but the last born proved to be the end of Hannah for she died in childbirth in October 1786, though the baby, Elizabeth, survived at least long enough to be christened. Christopher, a farmer, married his second wife, a widow, Sarah Wiltshire, by licence on the 8 May 1788. He was buried in May 1828 at the then remarkable age of 89.

Rachel who was baptized in 1772, was the third born of Christopher and Hannah's children. She gave the family Christian name, Christopher, to her own son.

Thomas and Rachel Summerill who lived alternately at Westerleigh and Siston evidently following the available coalmining work, omitted to have their children christened until they were rounded up in Siston by the vicar, who brought the whole bunch of them to church on the same day, the 9 October 1808 and recorded their dates of birth:



**A job-lot:
baptisms of
the young
Summerill
children at
Siston**

Hannah,
born 20 April
1795,

Christopher, born 16 June 1797, Rachael, born 18 February 1799, Sarah, 19 June 1803 and finally, the baby, our Jane, born 30 June, 1808.



St Anne's, Siston

Jane's brother, Christopher Summerill, like his father, was a coalminer. He married

Mary Crew in 1821, and following her death, again in probably in childbirth, married her sister Elizabeth. They lived variously at Warmley and Whipper's Hill, Oldland with their children Mary, Joseph and John. Christopher finished his working life as an ag. lab. at Tennis Court Lane, where sixty years later the Grammar School would be built, and later still Colin and I were destined to walk along, or in his case, bike, on our way to school. Christopher must have told people he was as old as the century, for his age was recorded as sixty six when he died in 1866.

On the 30 January 1831, Stephen and Jane Pillinger, nee Summerill, christened their first child, Alfred at Holy Trinity, Kingswood. Stephen was a coalminer and their abode, given as 'Black Lane' is descriptive.⁴⁵ Adjacent in the register, is the christening of Aaron Pillinger, aged 15 years and nine months, 'the son of John Pillinger, hatter and his wife Ann, of Made for Ever.' Once again this was a second christening: perhaps the teenager was standing as Godfather to his baby nephew, and the vicar seized the opportunity of taking him under the Church's wing. For many years after this event, Aaron was 'lost' to me, as he makes no other appearance in Kingswood. He had certainly gone away, travelling widely through the country, and had taken up what was for the Pillingers, and for anyone else of their class and upbringing, a surprising occupation. He was a musician. We shall hear more of him later.

By 1831, at the time of Alfred's christening, his great uncle and aunt, Robert and Mary had returned to Bitton. A census was taken in 1831 which was simply a count of the population of each parish and does not officially survive. However, in a few places unofficial notes taken by enumerators have been kept and among these is St Mary's, Bitton (though not the Chapelries of Oldland or Hanham), one of only two sets for the whole of the county of Gloucestershire. Robert's household appears as 'one house, one family, three males, one female over twenty, with one coalminer and two excavators'. Navvies were presently

⁴⁵ now called 'Holly Hill Road'.

carving a railway system throughout the land, a wonder of the age, most of them anonymous like Robert's lodgers. Their work was probably on the local stretch between Bristol and Bath where nine miles of track was diverted to serve at least ten of the local Coalworks, namely Hole Lane, Pill Leaze, Cowhorn Hill, Grimsbury, Warmley, Siston Hill, Soundwell, Shortwood, Pucklechurch and Coalpit Heath.⁴⁶

Stephen and Jane settled down to married life and became patriarch and matriarch of the Kingswood family. Though other Pillingers were producing young at the same time, none went at it as tirelessly and successfully as Stephen and Jane; consequently, a great majority of all those Pillingers whose descent is from Kingswood are the progeny of this couple. Between 1831 and 1853, they had thirteen children of whom nine survived into old age, and five were sons who carried the name forward. Throughout the 'hungry thirties' they moved frequently, back and forth between Black Road and Siston, either 'the Bottom' or 'the Common'.

Cholera

On 1 August 1832, an extraordinary general meeting was called at Oldland Vestry under the chairmanship of one of my heroes, Henry Hill Budgett, a Kingswood Hill grocer, Methodist, educationalist and philanthropist. Cholera was raging in Bristol and the managers of St Peter's Hospital, always the Poor House, now the Union Workhouse, had been sending boys into Kingswood, placing them in

'cottages so small and close as to be likely to increase and promote the disease even more than in their residence at the hospital and that by scattering such boys (many of whom for all the managers know may be affected by the disease) abroad among such a dense population of very poor persons as are found in this neighbourhood, the probability is that such a measure will be the means of extending and spreading the disease at a very alarming rate.....'

Cholera was made for 19th century Britain. The Industrial Revolution had brought country dwellers into towns where they occupied overcrowded slums. With sanitation non-existent, overflowing cesspits seeped into the main drains of a pitifully inadequate water supply. Flies settling on the communal dung heaps did the rest. Harry Budgett's warning went out too late and the boys continued to come to Kingswood for 'safety' from the disease. Cholera, 'an attack of the bowels' came in two savage waves in 1832 and 1833/4. It was known as 'King Cholera' for it infected rich and poor alike, initially from contaminated water and secondly by direct contact with case or carrier. Those affected could go from health to death in three days. Acute diarrhoea was accompanied by vomiting; dehydration led to complete collapse and hideous death. Horrifyingly, one recommended 'cure' was a total denial of fluid to the victim, the exact opposite of what was necessary. Having no clear idea of how the disease was spread the authorities could do little other than try to keep it under control by

⁴⁶ Ba Chr 13.1.1825

the burning of fouled clothing and bedding, relying on brave women to nurse the sick and trying as far as possible to isolate the afflicted. The Kingswood Hill homeopathy as directed in a pamphlet of 1834 to keep the affected area warm and drink plenty was ahead of its time, though a suggestion of rhubarb as an additional laxative may have done more harm than good.

Silvey Pillinger had continued to be paid dole at Yatton Keynell in the years 1828, 1829, 1830 and 1831. Also on the 10 August 1832, 'John Pillinger in need' was paid six shillings by the Overseers and on the 18 August he and his wife were 'in need' to the tune of 3s.6d. On the same day Silvey was allowed £1.10s. 7½d. I can only hope that John was allowed to collect his stepmother's due, for she was very ill, in fact dying.....

The next entry reads: 'Paid Silvey Pillinger's funeral, £1.0s.0d'.

Silvey was carried to her pauper's grave, in Bitton, of course, on the 19th August, and said to be 71, though she was more likely 74. In death her abode was stated to be Oldland, and not Yatton Keynell.

A Trade Union for the Hatters?

In February 1833, a strange and convoluted notice appeared in the local press:

"OLDLAND HATTERS.

It seems necessary that the advisers of the above parties should be made acquainted with the law as regards voluntary affidavits before magistrates. Sir William Blackstone says The Law takes no notice of any perjury but some as is committed in some Court of Justice having power to administer an oath before some magistrate or proper officer invested in similar authority in some proceedings relating to a civil suit or a criminal prosecution for it esteems all other oaths unnecessary at least and therefore will not punish the breach of them for which reason it is much to be questioned how far any magistrate is justifiable in taking a voluntary affidavit in any extra judicial matter as it is now too frequent on every petty occasion since it possible that by such idle oaths a man may frequently in for conscientiae concur the guilt and at the same time evade the temporal penalties of perjury. Lord Kenyon in different cases has expressed a doubt whether a magistrate does not subject himself to a criminal information by taking a voluntary extra judicial affidavit. This may explain satisfactorily the statements that have already appeared with regard to this subject.

[Signed] a Correspondent.⁴⁷

"You what.....?" the Hatters undoubtedly scratched their heads with no idea what this meant, and perhaps muttered, "Don't 'ee talk lovely?"

⁴⁷ FFBJ 18.2.1833

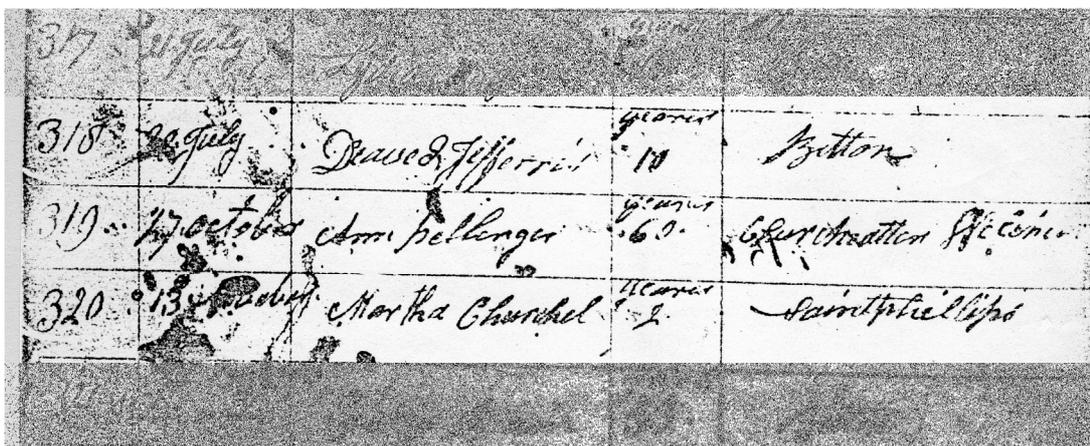
What the writer was evidently trying to say is *'Don't swear oaths. If you do you will get into serious trouble.'* The authorities were very touchy about workers' organisations. A year later in 1834, six Dorset labourers who became known as the Tolpuddle Martyrs, were sentenced to transportation for the swearing of illegal oaths, which caused uproar and changed history.

The Hatters must have gone further than allowed in the articles of their organisation, as sent by George Ollis, a hatter of Oldland Common, to the Rev. Henry Ellacombe of Bitton in 1829 *'by which our conduct as a Body is regulated one to another, especially to our aged and infirm as I think you will thereby discover that there is nothing in our Laws as a Trade contrary to our duty towards the Almighty or our duty towards our fellow men.'*

'We assist Each Other in Time of Need' reads the proud legend on George Ollis's letterhead.

Hopefully John Pillinger was assisted for it seems clear that the hatmaking trade in 1833 was more than usually quiet. From April he was on the parish trudging once a month to Yatton Keynell to collect his pay.

April 19th gave John Pillinger in need..... 10s.0d
 May 19th gave John Pillinger in need... £1.3s.0d
 June 14th gave John Pillinger in need...8s.6d
 July 12th paid John Pillinger8s.6d
 August 9th paid John Pillinger 9s.0d
 September 6th paid John Pillinger..... 8s.6d



Ann's burial, 27 October, 1833, Whitfield Tabernacle, Kingswood

If Ann had previously gone with him to Yatton Keynell when he collected his dole, on the 6th September she was probably not fit enough to travel. She died on or about the 24 October 1833, perhaps another victim of cholera, of malnutrition, or just worn out. She was buried on the 27th of the month according to her own Calvinist faith at the Whitfield Tabernacle.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ the mock-Gothic Whitfield Tabernacle was not built when Ann died, but now it is derelict, like the Wesleyan Chapel, another relic of past religious fervour.

The record is pedantically correct but eccentrically spelled: 'Ann pellingier aged 60 years of Churchheatton, Wilshier.'

On November 1st, the Overseers at Yatton chipped in with one pound in part payment for her funeral. On the 29th November, no longer having a wife to support, John's dole was reduced to five shillings.

On the 22 July 1834, Henry Hill Budgett delivered his annual report to Kingswood Benevolent Society painting a vivid picture of the conditions which drove John and many others in the community on to the parish. There was, Mr. Budgett stated, '*a population of more than 20,000 inhabitants, all of whom with very few exceptions were ordained to tread the dreary steps of penury and by the sweat of their brow earn a pittance far too small to meet the urgent cries of nature. They were hardly fed, poorly clad and scarcely sheltered from the inclemency of the seasons; to this was added sickness and consequent inability to reap even the small reward of daily industry. The agents of the Society were from their charity work familiar with the hovel of poverty, with a single miserable room as the only apartment, a wretched bed on the cold damp ground the only furniture where the victim of disease and woe lingered on in nakedness and filth, loathsome to all.*'⁴⁹

Goodbye to Yatton Keynell and the Soldier's Farewell

Conversely, in 1834, John Pillinger seems to have been in work, for he received only one dole of five shillings during the whole year, but matters deteriorated rapidly. Ominous changes were afoot. The Poor Law which had been in operation, with a tweak here and there, since the time of Queen Elizabeth I was in the process of reform. The parson-economist Thomas Malthus had argued that the system of outdoor relief to individuals led to idleness and vice, encouraged early marriage and thus over population. Though his views were controversial, it was generally agreed that reform was necessary, and the eventual result was the Poor Law Amendment Act, which lumped the paupers together under one roof, the Union Workhouse. The Yatton Keynell books carry an intriguing entry: 'Expenses for John Pillinger at Mr. Coles'. Whilst "Mr. Coles" could have been a doctor, I rather doubt it. I believe that the worthy ratepayers were becoming peeved at being responsible for one whose tenuous connection with their parish had died out a century before; therefore I suspect that they had sought legal opinion and Mr. Coles was 'learned counsel'.

Negotiations went on for the whole of 1835 plus the first three months of 1836, during which time John was paid 'five shillings extraordinary' each month which was reduced to ten shillings for three months on the 6 October 1836. For the month 30th November to 28th December, he was paid a final 'extraordinary' of one shilling and sixpence, and told to clear off. They handed him a letter for which the cost was meticulously recorded: 'twopence'. He could not read it and no doubt they explained it to him. His lifeline was cut. Enough was enough. No more out-payments. *Finito*. John now had two options: enter 'the House' or starve.

⁴⁹ Reported in FFBJ.

There are several puzzling entries among Yatton's recipients of dole handed to members of the Pillinger family: on the 11 May 1823, 'a letter from Margaret Pillinger, 8d' and in 1832, undated, 'paid Samuel Pillinger in need, 5s 0d'. I can only imagine that they are long lost offspring of Nathaniel. Such strays turn up from time to time in the family historian's notebook.

William Pillinger, John and Silvia's second son, born in 1793, married Hannah Isaacs in Bristol at St Philip and St Jacob in 1821 and the couple returned to live in Bitton. In 1825 he 'defaulted on the rates' owing 1s 0½d for land belonging to a Samuel Keyford. William and Hannah had five children, who were received into church haphazardly. Hannah was born in 1822; her sister, Mary, followed in 1824, who was christened aged four in 1828, along with her little brother John, aged one. A fourth child, Anne, was baptised aged nine in 1836, when she may have already been ill. She died the next year. Simon, the last of the children died in 1835, aged three.

Like his brother Robert, William also appears in the 'lost' census of 1831 in which only the principal householder is named. William had 'one house, with 4 males, 4 females, one male over 20, two coalminers'. The four males must have consisted of William himself, who was the male 'over 20', John, his son, aged about four, and two lodgers, both under twenty, of whom one was also a miner; the four females being Hannah and her daughters Hannah, Mary and Anne.

Ten years later in 1841, William and Hannah had moved to Oldland with Mary, 16 and John, aged thirteen. Hannah junior had been married to George Jeffrey since 1839 and had left home. In 1846, Mary had a child, William, out of wedlock. In 1851, still single aged 25, she was a staymaker, still living with her parents, her son, William, 5 and brother John, aged 22, a coalminer. In 1861, John having been recently married and Mary were both absent, from the family home, though Mary's son William now aged sixteen was still with his grandparents and working as a coalminer. William and Hannah senior were sixty seven years old although the enumerator recorded them both as '87'; maybe they looked that old. Poor William senior was already ill, and died shortly after the census was taken. By 1871, Mary, their daughter was living as the wife of a carpenter, Samuel Kirby, aged sixty, and her mother, (described 'mother-in-law' in the listing) came too. There were six young Kirbys in the household, though it is not clear whether any of them were Mary's children. Samuel Kirby and Mary Pillinger tied the legal knot in 1875. The widowed Hannah died in 1880 aged 85.

John Pillinger, the son of William and Hannah, married Ann White at Holy Trinity, Kingswood in 1858. They went to Australia and he would not be heard of again until 1889 when he returned and became a local sensation, but that comes later in our story. William, Mary's son, married Elizabeth Potter at St Barnabas, Warmley in 1868 and then disappeared forever, perhaps also to 'foreign parts'.

Killed in a Coalpit

The baby Harriet, Jacob and Mary Pillinger's daughter, christened in 1823, did not survive, and their next daughter Ann lived only six months. In 1824, another daughter, Elizabeth,

was born and in 1826, a son, John, who was buried aged seven months. In 1829, when they were living at Potter's Wood, a second Harriet was born. In 1831, both Elizabeth and Harriet died and only Sarah, the eldest, now aged nine remained. The tragic Mary, worn out with child bearing and grief was buried at Holy Trinity Kingswood on New Year's Day 1832 aged 30 years.

On the 12 February 1832, Jacob witnessed the marriage of his friends Thomas Parker and Ann Gelding at Holy Trinity, and three months later on the 12th May, at Bitton, he himself married again. His bride was Elizabeth, the widow of a labourer, Thomas Joy, with four children: Matthew, Hannah, Hester, and Thomas Joy, who was a babe in arms. After he had endured such misery and continual bereavement, Jacob may have allowed himself to hope that the surname of his instant family would prove to be prophetic.

Jacob and Elizabeth's first child, named Jacob after his father, was born in April 1833, and christened the following June at the Kingswood School chapel. Another boy, Isaac, was born on the 4 March 1837 and christened aged two months at the same chapel, but the tragic cycle continued and both babies died. Another Jacob was born in 1835 and at last appeared to thrive.

On the morning of the 20 June 1838, Jacob Pillinger rose at first light and dressed in his pit clothes. As usual he stuck the spike of his T-shaped iron candlestick through the rim of his hard hat, which also enclosed a ring of spare tallow candles. These candles, made by the Old Candle and Soap Works on Kingswood Hill were used by all the miners as the Kingswood coal was not considered "fiery". Even after the invention of the Davy Lamp, many miners in the area still worked by candlelight. Jacob took up his 'tommy' of bread, cheese and onions, wrapped in a square of rag, for 'bread-time' which Elizabeth had prepared along with a bottle of tea, which he would drink cold to last him the long day. He put the provisions into his pockets. Elizabeth, though 'expecting' again was up and about; so was Matthew Joy, her son, also off to work in the pit. Jacob said 'Goodbye' to his family and set off to walk the two and a half miles to Easton for the shift which started at 6 a.m. Jacob who was forty years old now, looked older. He was seared with the disfiguring marks of his trade, the blue scars which pitted the arms, back, knees and faces of all the miners.

In the shift which Jacob joined on that summer morning the other adult was Francis Thatcher, aged 34, a married man and the father of four, the last of whom was only nine days old. They were joined in the cart by three boys, Francis Palmer and Aaron Clark, both sixteen and his brother Daniel aged twelve. Another brother, John, had been killed at the same pit a few weeks before. They prepared to descend in the open-sided cart slung by four one and a half inch ropes and operated by a nut wheel to regulate the speed. For some 180 feet the descent was normal – then without warning the teeth of the nut wheel gave way and the vehicle plunged downwards at a sickening velocity, crashing into the scaffolding built to cover the five feet of casual water which lay on the floor of the level.

The cart broke up on impact, but the occupants, though horribly mutilated by the fall were not yet dead. Another 480 feet of rope which had been released by the defective wheel careered crazily down on top of them, imprisoning their broken bodies in its coils as they struggled in the black water. Three men, waiting at the bottom of the shaft – the night shift

they were to have relieved – made a desperate attempt to man-handle the ropes off them, but their labours took more than half an hour. By the time they reached their mates, they had all drowned.

An inquest was convened the same afternoon before the Bristol coroner, Mr. J. B. Grindon at the Lebeck Arms, Easton. The bodies of Pillinger, Palmer and Thatcher had been laid in an outhouse of the pub and the two Clark boys at a nearby cottage. The evidence began with John Nash, engineer to the Lower Easton Coal Company. Mr. Nash said *“I did not know but what the wheel was sound. I believed it was. I went down myself at about 11 o’clock last night with a child of my own. I should not have gone down if I apprehended danger. It is the duty of the engineer and the two bailiffs to look after the machinery. I examined it as often as was necessary, sometimes two or three times a day. When the wheel is greased it is very seldom we can stop it to clean it because the water would gain on us too rapidly. Mr. Harvey the bailiff frequently goes down the pit twice a day. Harvey is not one of the owners; he is not likely to risk his life to save a few pounds expense. No complaint was made to him of the wheel that I ever heard. The wheel was cast iron.”*

Isaac Harvey, the bailiff was next called. He told of the rope running round at liberty, the iron of the broken wheel flying in every direction and the workmen dashing in panic to escape from it. He said that he had turned the wheel less than three weeks before – *“not through any apprehension of danger but to give it equal wear. The burden on the wheel was not too great: at the time of the accident not more than twelve hundredweight. It had been working all night with four tons on it. The wheel was cleaned when it was taken down and turned. All the grease was burnt and the wheel carefully examined. The security of my own life depended on the strength of the wheel, I would not have allowed anyone to descend into the pit had there been any defect. There was no spare wheel on the premises. We never had one break before, I have managed engines for seven years. As soon as possible, I ordered the horse wheel to be prepared and Stephen Miles and Joseph Miller went down. I did not go down myself.”*

Samuel Godfrey was next called and told how he and two other men attempted to pull the rope away to get to the men in the water: *“They were all dead. I and the other two men had been in the pit all night. The five were coming down to relieve us.”*

The coroner stopped the inquest at this point, saying that further evidence was unnecessary. There was no doubt – he said – that it was a most melancholy and shocking accident but it did not appear blame could attach to anyone. Thus directed, the jury returned a verdict, the standard verdict in the case of mining accidents. ‘Accidental death’.⁵⁰

Jacob’s body was brought home, in a cart, covered by a sack, surely by his brothers Stephen and John, in a scene which could have been a carbon copy of that witnessed by A. Braine in his ‘History of Kingswood Forest’:

‘There came out of a lane a horse and cart containing the dead body of a man just killed in a pit. He was laid on his back and a sack thrown over him. [I followed] the cart to the house

⁵⁰ BM 23.6.1838

where the deceased was being conveyed. About ten yards from the house, the cart stopped and one of the men went ahead to break the news. The wife of the dead man, two little girls and an aged couple were at breakfast, 'I am come to tell you some bad news,' said the man with the cart. 'What!' said the young wife, rising quickly from her seat. 'Bad news,' said the man again, but don't be alarmed.' 'My husband's killed!' said the young wife, screaming, having caught sight of the cart sideways through the window; suddenly she rushed to the door, and before another word could be spoken fled up the road, and fainted near the feet of her dead husband. The words 'gone' or 'dead' or 'killed' mingled with the sobs and groans and murmurings of many people who had gathered around added greatly to the distress. The body was brought to the cottage, lifted out of the cart, and laid upon the clean sanded floor. Meanwhile, the widow and the two little girls, orphaned, the grandfather and grandmother were all bathed in tears. 'Is he really gone? Oh, it cannot be!' exclaimed the young wife. But thus it was; her husband had that morning gone cheerfully to his work, got into the cage, the rope had broken, precipitating him and two others to the bottom of the shaft, killing them instantly.'

In the wider sense, as a result of the accident, the proprietors of Easton pit improved the general safety and comfort of their men and by 1841 they had installed in place of the open cart 'a commodious hutch made of riveted iron plates in the form of an elliptical dome with two entrances'. In this hutch seven men and two boys could go up and down together 'snugly protected from the jets of water as well as from any stone or other substance accidentally falling on them'.⁵¹

Jacob was buried in the churchyard at Holy Trinity. Elizabeth, his widow did not lose the child she was expecting: young Elizabeth was born in January 1839, and was christened at the Wesleyan Chapel on the 24th February aged 4 weeks, along with her brother Jacob who was four years old.

In 1841 we find them living in Blackhorse Road, Potter's Wood, Oldland, in 'a tenement and garden',⁵² Elizabeth, aged 40, with Jacob, aged 6 and Elizabeth junior, 2. Elizabeth was described as 'a laundress': she took in washing for the nearby Kingswood Reformatory School.

Elizabeth never remarried. The baby Elizabeth grew up to marry John Moss who became an underground bailiff at Easton, the same pit where her father had died. In January 1894 he gave evidence at the inquest on David Webb, aged 61, who died in a falling of the roof, his body trapped against the airway by a broken prop.⁵³ I believe John Moss was an ancestor of my protégé, the late Fred Moss, one of the last of the Speedwell coalminers and who, with my encouragement, wrote the mundanely entitled 'City Pit', which became a local bestseller.

Sarah, Jacob Pillinger's only surviving child from his first marriage who would have seen her father for the last time when he left for the pit on the fateful morning in 1838, was at work herself by 1841. At the census she was 'in service', a housemaid, aged 15, for a family called

⁵¹ Waring, E. Government Report, Children & Young Persons in the S. Glos. Coalmines. 1841

⁵² 1841 census & Tithe Map, Oldland, BRO

⁵³ BTM 9.1.1894

Wellinger at Jubilee Place, Bedminster. Ten years later, 'a servant, unmarried, aged 27, born Kingswood' she was at Somerset Square, also in Bedminster with two other maids, Jemima Hazel and Harriet Bowden, in the household of Thomas Harris, a prosperous engineer who employed 25 men, and whose family consisted of his wife and ten children. On the 8 September 1860, Sarah was married at Bitton to Abraham Williams, a widower, a farmer of Cock Road, the son of Abraham Williams, perhaps the same man who had witnessed Stephen and Jane's marriage in 1828. Stephen and Jane Pillinger witnessed the marriage, but a newspaper announcement clearly shows that the bride was not the most important family member there.⁵⁴ Sarah was described as 'the sister of the Rev. Jacob Pillinger of Kingswood.' His sister was evidently very proud of him.

A Pin Header

On the 26 January 1840, (Evangelist) John Pillinger, collier, was married to Sarah Stanley, a pin header, the daughter of John Stanley, also a collier, at the other Holy Trinity at St Philips, Bristol. They appear on the 1841 census at Made for Ever, following their respective occupations.



Pin makers at work, ca 1900

Pin making was amongst the principal trades of Kingswood, and its workforce was predominately made up of women. In September 1841, Elijah Waring collected evidence for the Children's Employment Commission, and

he described the Pin Manufactory:

'Pin-making furnishes employment to a multitude of the poor population; the operation of fixing on the heads being carried on to a great extent by females, in private houses as well as in the manufactories.'

'Heading the pins, which employs the largest number of hands is performed wholly by females, each of whom sits before a machine worked by a footboard tread treadle, having by her a wooden bowl of pointed shanks, and of heads, the heads being formed of compact spiral wire, spliced off by a machine not unlike a chaff cutter.'

'The header takes an indefinite number of shanks between her thumb and fingers, and dips them into a bowlful of the heads, when she generally finds each shank furnished with a loose head. She then drops the pins singly into a perpendicular receptacle in the block under the

⁵⁴ WDP 10.9.1860

hammer, and by a single motion of her foot rivets on the head. This is performed with almost inconceivable rapidity and without any intent occupation of the eye.

“The old fashioned heading machines are semi-barbarous contrivances which it would be desirable to see annihilated. They require a close and continuous application of the sight, a protracted action of the feet and an inclination of the whole body unfavourable to health. It appears however that the liability of the improved machines to get out of repair impedes their introduction.”

The women worked twelve hour shifts, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. in winter and 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. in summer with voluntary overtime of one hour in the summer months, ‘for the sake of earning a little more’. As Saturdays were worked, this meant at the least a 72 hour week, and perhaps 78 hours. All the hands were paid ‘by the piece’.

Waring spoke with several young women of 16 and 17 whose weekly wages were between 3 shillings and 4s 6d. A 13 year old boy working as a wire straightener in the same factory received 5 shillings per week. Waring remarked on the great discrepancy between the wages of the men, who were mostly pointers, and earned from 21s to 31s, and some as much as 40s, compared to the pay of the women.

Waring said: *‘There is a deplorable ignorance among the young females in these works. Nothing can be more offensive to the moral sense than the contrast between the good looks and neat costume of many of them, and the uncouth speech in which they betray their want of common good training.’*

At the Soundwell pin works 13 out of the 28 girls under 18 did not go to Sunday School; sixteen could not read and none could write. At the Two Mile Hill works, 11 out of the 25 girls questioned could not read, and only one had an ‘imperfect’ knowledge of writing. Nine did not attend the Sunday School. Some improvement, it was felt, might soon be expected at Two Mile Hill at least, as Robert Charleton, the proprietor, had opened a school where *‘boys and girls receive a useful education for 2d per week and one penny extra for writing, including copy books.’*



Robert Charleton, a Quaker, employed about 110 women and girls, at the Two Mile Hill factory, one of the largest in East Bristol, the majority between 14 and 18 years old as well as 50 men and boys. The boys, employed at drawing and straightening pins, were all sons of men who also worked at the factory; some were paid by Charleton, some by their fathers. No employee was under the age of twelve. In addition, five hundred women and girls were outworkers, ‘heading & sticking’ in their own homes, with six or seven women sharing a single block.

Girls who went out to work were considered to be in moral danger if they were not also trained in household work and thus were '*accustomed to take a share in the domestic labours of home [so that] when they become wives and mothers, [they] fulfil their relative duties very respectably.*' It was clearly preferable if they stayed at home or went into household service:

'It is, nevertheless, hardly probable, that they can be, generally, so well qualified for the economy of housekeeping, as girls who have been either in service, or in constant household training.'

Attendance at Sunday School was highly desirable and was equated with respectability. Charleton was quoted as saying that he believed the women he employed were "*respectable*", and most of them "*virtuous girls*". Males and females were kept separate in both the Kingswood manufactories which '*rejected any candidates for employment, who cannot bring with them a fair moral character.*' Charleton fined his employees threepence for using foul language.

Braine⁵⁵ asks us to imagine '*what a thundering noise a block of this kind would make in a house: wherever one went [could be] heard the incessant thumping and bumping of the pin headers.*' The homeworkers were thought to be '*exceedingly fond*' of the work, and '*not infrequently three or four would sing together some ditty, keeping regular time with the thump, thump of the pin block.*'

Only hymns were allowed on the factory premises.

Robert Charleton and his agent Mr. Lambert were said to be very highly thought of by their workpeople. Whether Sarah worked at home or at the factory, she was a pioneer. It was surely much preferable to taking in washing.

In 1843, John and Sarah's only child, Isaac, was born. John was buried at Whitfield Tabernacle on the 26 January 1850, aged 43.

In the census of 1851, Sarah was living with her son Isaac at Potters Wood in the household of her brother-in-law, George Freke. Sarah's sister Hester and nieces Usilla and Ellen were all pin headers. The youngest Freke boy, William, aged 13, had been at work for seven months, at a back breaking job, as a 'stone breaker for the (turn) pike'. In 1861, the widow and her son were living at Burchill's Lane, with her unmarried sister, Elizabeth Stanley. Isaac, his name given as 'John' had gone into short-lived business as a grocer. As Isaac, a labourer, he married Hannah Lear at St Anne's, Oldland on the 10 February 1868. Sarah his mother was buried at Whitfield's Tabernacle in 1870 aged 69.

In 1871, Isaac, now working as a mason's labourer, Hannah his wife and two sons, Alfred 2, who died young, and Aaron, 1, were back at Potter's Wood. By 1881 they had moved to Mounthill, Hanham. Isaac, a Jack of all trades, was now working as a shoemaker, with his ten year old son Aaron as his assistant. There were four younger children: Caroline, 9, Beatrice, 6, Alfred, 3, and Bessie, aged four months. Ten years later, Isaac had another change of address, Claypitts Lane, but followed the same occupation; his three elder children had all joined him at the bench, Caroline as a machinist.

⁵⁵ 'History of Kingswood Forest'

For the younger generation of this family, marriage was in the air. In 1895, Aaron married Elizabeth Shepherd at Bitton and Beatrice married Edwin Wiltshire, at Mangotsfield. The following year Caroline 'Carry' Pillinger married Abraham Watts; they had a daughter Miriam, born in 1897.

By 1901, Edwin and Beatrice Wiltshire and their sons Wilfred and Edwin were living at no. 49 Victoria Park, Kingswood. (Colin and I grew up in this street; to us no. 49 was 'Florrie Phipps's house'.) Edwin Wiltshire was a bootmaker, like the majority of the inhabitants of Victoria Park. The red-brick terrace houses were custom made for the outworkers in the boot and shoe trade which had by then superseded coalmining as the major industry of Kingswood. Each house had a workshop attached at the back. Carry Watts died shortly after Miriam's birth and her child was brought up by her parents. In 1901, Abraham Watts was living with Edwin and Beatrice Wiltshire as their lodger. Beatrice Wiltshire died aged 27 in 1903.

In 1901, Isaac and Hannah were at Water's Road, near Holy Trinity Church, where Isaac had branched out yet again, this time as a market gardener, bravely, on 'his own account'. Alfred, Bessie, Florence and Alice were still living at home as well as their granddaughter, the orphaned Miriam, aged four. Abraham Watts remarried in 1903, and went to live near his former in-laws at Water's Road but his daughter Miriam remained with the Pillingers. Edwin Wiltshire, who also remarried, had two more sons and had moved away from Victoria Park before 1915.

In 1911, Isaac, 68 and Hannah, 66, were greengrocers at Derrick Road. They had been married 43 years, had brought eleven children into the world, of whom only four were currently still living. Their daughter Alice, 23, a coat maker, and their granddaughter, Miriam, 15, a trouser maker lived with them.

Reece Winstone's book, 'Bristol as it was, 1874-1866' contains a picture of 'The Kingswood Market Woman', later 'recognised by her grandson as Mrs Hannah Pillinger 1845-1916. She traded in Clifton and Cotham.' I have unfortunately not traced this unnamed grandson but I believe her to be Isaac's wife Hannah. Braine⁵⁶ gives an interesting pen portrait of one of the... *'class of women who attended the Bristol Market from this neighbourhood. They usually carried fruits, flowers and vegetables and had for this purpose donkeys with panniers. They wore large "shovel" hats and thick heavy blue coats with capes. Generally fine women, [they rode] perched upon their donkeys, and, rain or shine, seemed to defy the weather.'*

Hannah Pillinger of Derrick Road, Kingswood was buried at Wesleyan Chapel graveyard in 1916 aged 72, and Isaac followed a year later, also said to be 72, in the same grave as their daughter Florence who had died in 1906.

⁵⁶ History of KW Forest, ibid

The last of John the hatter

We last met John, the father of the three boys Jacob, Evangelist John and Stephen in 1836 when he was finally refused relief by Yatton Keynell. The census of the 6 June 1841 has him still at work as a hatter, aged seventy, living at the evocatively named 'Leather Heaven' with James Brimble and his wife Dinah, who I believe was John's stepdaughter, Dinah Stone. There were 21 inhabitants of Leather Heaven at the time, but that aside, the place is a mystery: it appears in the census pages between Soundwell and Made for Ever and despite numerous enquiries, nobody has ever been able to tell me anything about it.

Times continued hard in the hat making trade, and 'a respectable hatter' told Elijah Waring, the government inspector in May 1841 that low wages and the high price of provisions had so much crippled the resources of the workmen in the district, that his trade "*which lay principally among that class, had fallen off to one half.*"

John is not to be found in the 1851 census and whilst I presumed him dead, no record of the event appeared to exist. For years I looked for his burial in every graveyard in Kingswood, all to no avail until.....2007, when the indexes to the holdings at the Bath Register Office went on line. Unlike the General Register Office's early listings, Bath R.O. (God love them!) revealed the crucial information of the deceased's age. The death of a John Pillinger aged 80 was registered in the June Quarter of 1848 at Chippenham. Chippenham? Why Chippenham? Wiltshire? ("*Oh ye dummock!*" cried Dad's ghost.) I still did not twig, but with the age and name appearing to tally, it was worth a punt. I wrote a cheque for £7 and sent for the certificate.....which revealed that John Pillinger had died on the 9 January 1848, aged 80, as I already knew, but there was his occupation: 'hatter'; address simply 'Chippenham'. 'Cause of death: *died suddenly in Bed. Visitation of God.*' The informant was the Coroner, William B. Whitmarsh, who for some reason failed to register the event until the 18th April. So there had been an inquest and the Victorian 'sensibility' shown by the lack of a proper address could only mean that John had died in one of two places: a Lunatic Asylum or the Workhouse.

Despite this breakthrough, I assumed I would not get much farther. The Wiltshire Record Office was in the process of moving from Trowbridge and so it was not until a few months later, the 29th October 2008, that I could set out with my daughter Celia for a little more sleuthing and arrived at the spanking new offices at Chippenham.

Unfortunately the Chippenham Workhouse admission registers for this early date have not survived, but the burial register of St Andrew's Church shows that John had been laid to rest in the churchyard there on 13 January 1848. This time his abode is shown as 'Asylum'. Had he lost his mind as well as well as being destitute? The nearest asylum was at Devizes, but its admission registers have also been lost. Though feeling that an inquest on an eighty year old man who died in bed was unlikely to have caused much of a stir, I checked the appropriate local paper, the Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette and to my great surprise found a report of the same date, 13th January, headed 'Inquests' it was short and to the point:

'At the Chippenham Union Workhouse, on the body of John Pillinger, an aged man, who was discovered dead in his bed by an inmate who had gone to him with his breakfast. Verdict: Visitation of God.'



In the Workhouse

I just about curbed myself from clenching my fist and shouting "Yes!" and risking an outraged "Sssshhh!" from other

researchers, or even ejection from the premises. But I did breathe out loudly. And smile. If you think it odd that the sad end of this poor old man should be cause for jubilation then you will never be a family historian.

More soberly, I was grateful that John had found a friend in the nameless fellow inmate who had waited on him at the last. I hoped that the man (and it must have been a man, for they segregated the sexes) had attended John's pauper's funeral. Did Stephen or the rest of his surviving children know of his death? Why had none of them taken him in?

I thought of the significance of the letter which the Yatton Keynell officials had handed to him some years before. At the end he must have been turned away from Bitton: Bitton people were sent to the Keynsham Workhouse and John still did not belong, so had to apply once again to Yatton Keynell, 'in need' and because Yatton is in Wiltshire, and within the Chippenham Union, it was to this grim place he was sent to die.

On Christmas Eve 1847 the Guardians recorded an order for provisions 'for an extra dinner on Christmas Day for the inmates':

*'40 lbs Beef and Suet
28 lbs Flour
2 Bushels Potatoes
56 lbs Carrots
1 Bushel Turnips
12 lbs Raisins
12 lbs Currants'*

There is no record in the Guardians' minutes to show when John entered the Workhouse and likewise his death was not mentioned, but a few weeks later on the 21 January, 1848, the Treasurer paid the Master a cheque for £1. 5s. 0d 'in respect of the previous quarter's indoor funerals', which must refer to those who were resident. It was all very businesslike.