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A STERLING HISTORY

In a bid to dispel the family myths, Keith Brewwood tells
Claire Vaughan how his search led him back to medieval
clergy, via eminent silversmiths and sporting heroes

"AS CHILDREN, my brother Barry, sister Lyn and I were told some tall stories – that we were the only Brewwoods and anyone else with the surname was an impostor," says Keith Brewwood, a 54-year-old businessman from Macclesfield, Cheshire. But the grandmother he had never known, Emma Sarah Brewwood, seemed to attract particular venom: "We were told she was a drunk, who had deserted her husband and children." And there was the tale of a Brewwood pushing her husband down the stairs. Nearly half a century on, Keith has finally discovered some of the truth behind these stories and come closer to his ancestors than he ever believed possible.

Keith's mother Ella died last year and it was at a reunion with Barry and Lyn to scatter her ashes that everything changed. "We chatted about the family stories we'd grown up with and realised we'd been spoofed. That day, I made it my mission to find out what had happened to Emma Sarah. I engrossed myself in trying to trace her – signing up to GenesReunited and joining every genealogy group I could find." Keith began to seek out other Brewwoods using the internet, ordering birth, marriage and death certificates to build up his tree and was shocked by what he found.

His great grandparents were James (1842-1900) and Lucy, a flower seller. "On James' death certificate it states that he died after falling down the stairs. The coroner's report didn't add anything, but when I checked the local papers, I found there had been a police investigation as the damage to James' skull was considered too severe to have resulted from such an accident." So did Lucy push him? She was never charged and Keith is still

Keith Brewwood
outside Brewwood
parish church,
where his
forebears worked

**THE DAMAGE
TO JAMES'
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AN ACCIDENT**

trying to piece together the truth. What's certain is that she liked a drink. Another police report tells how she was robbed of £40 (a lot of money for someone of her means) on a drinking spree.

It was Samuel, Keith's grandfather and Emma Sarah's husband, who held the key to Lucy's mysterious drinking fund, his wife's disappearance and the theory that other Brewwoods were impostors. A secretive man, Samuel had been a Petty Officer First Class in the Navy – and Lightweight Boxing Champion of the Five Navys of the Empire before the First World War. As a teenager, he'd boxed in the amateur clubs of Bermondsey as 'Kid Brewwood'. To supplement his navy pay, he boxed professionally whenever his ship docked, as 'Stoker Brewwood', and sent any winnings back to his wife and mother Lucy. "Just before he died in 1966, Samuel burned all his posters and cuttings, so I had no idea about his sporting past until my uncle Jim mentioned that granddad had 'boxed for money'. He also said that 'mother' drank away the winnings sent back, assuming this was Emma Sarah, when it was actually Lucy." Keith contacted boxing historian Miles Templeton, who helped fill in the gaps. "Miles searched his archives and came up with a





THE FAMILY TREE OF KEITH BREWOOD



mass of extracts and reviews of Stoker Brewood's fights – it was fascinating." Samuel left the navy after 12 years' service and found work in Macclesfield, moving the family up there. "Emma Sarah was unhappy and eventually left him, taking their youngest children, Ivy, Thomas and William, to live in London."

Emma Sarah left a big black hole when she disappeared. Frustratingly, all Keith could find were her birth and marriage certificates – there seemed to be no divorce, death or any other record of her. The name Nurse came up during his search, but he dismissed it. It wasn't until a relative, Debbie Vaughan, eventually pursued this connection that her disappearance made sense. "Debbie found that Emma Sarah had remarried in London in 1938 without divorcing – not unusual in those days because of the expense. She married a Thomas Nurse, claiming to be a widow on her wedding certificate – she was a bigamist!"

Keith believes that it was the shame of the break-up along with family Chinese whispers that led to the tales of drunks and imposters (could the three younger Brewood/Nurse children have been the "impostors"?). Keith tracked down some of the missing Brewoods – children of William and Thomas – and

they remember their grandmother Emma Sarah well and say she was teetotal.

The Brewood skeletons were out of their cupboard, but this was only the beginning. In his search for Emma Sarah, Keith had come across many other tantalising snippets and he felt he had to explore further. His Google hunt had produced names including Benjamin Brewood listed at The Goldsmiths' Company. Clicking on one of the links, Keith had found himself on an antiques website. "On the site there was this beautiful silver creamer made in 1746 by Benjamin." So Keith contacted The Goldsmiths' Company to discover how this remarkable craftsman fitted into his ever-expanding family. The librarians confirmed that Benjamin had been a member and sent over an extract from Arthur Grimwade's *London Goldsmiths 1697-1837 Their Marks and Their Lives*, which recorded Benjamin's father as Robert, a yeoman from Markfield parish near Hinkley, Leicestershire, and that Benjamin had been apprenticed to Samuel Bourne in 1692. From 1699, he was a "free" worker

BACKGROUND

The master silversmiths

LIKE MOST 18th-century silversmiths, three generations of Brewoods followed a career path prescribed by the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, which was then, as now, the trade's governing body in London. According to a statute dating back to 1565, each served a seven-year term as apprentice to a master goldsmith learning his trade while avoiding "the many temptations to which youth are liable in the great city". During this period, they received a board and lodging allowance of £15 (£20 from 1770), but no wage.

The many surviving examples of their work bear witness to their skill

Inevitably, death, debt or debauchery (on either side of the agreement) ended many apprenticeships prematurely. But for those who lasted the course, a 10s fee to Goldsmiths' Hall secured the freedom to pursue their trade working silver and gold within the crowded, but profitable, streets of the city.

Benjamin Brewood I sought his freedom as soon as possible, setting himself up in business without delay in 1699. The fact that his marriage to Martha was registered as a fleet marriage indicates that he may have acted a little hastily – fleet marriages were contracted either from legal convenience or on account of temporary detention for debt. In similar circumstances, Benjamin's

son was more cautious, waiting three years after completing his apprenticeship before applying for his own freedom in 1755. In the interim Benjamin II probably worked as a journeyman to build up enough capital to start his own business; it is estimated that at least £500 was required at the time to establish a successful silver workshop after costs for premises, tools and materials. Moreover Benjamin I had registered his mark, a distinctive double "B" – also adopted by his son – as a smallworker, making snuffboxes and buttons.

The more commercially minded Benjamin II earned his reputation as a largeworker, crafting essential domestic items such as tankards, mugs and tea urns. He was joined by his two

sons and the many surviving examples of their work bear witness to their industry, skill and success.

Despite the mystery surrounding his fleet marriage, Benjamin I was a highly respected member of the trade – in 1708, he was elected to the council, or Livery, of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths. Through its committees, the Livery is still responsible for policing the Hallmark Act. In doing so, the Company provides a living link to the distant world of the Brewoods, upholding traditions three generations of the family aspired to. ■

Martyn Downer is author of *The Queen's Knight* (Bantam Press, 2007)



Black Ladies Priory, Brewood, where William de Brewode was once chaplain

with his own business in Bull in Mouth Street in London. His wife Martha was also mentioned. Benjamin switched to working in silver, perhaps because it was cheaper, leaving wonderful examples of his work. But there was more.

Another extract from Grimwade's book yielded details of Benjamin's son, Benjamin II, who followed in his father's footsteps. If anything, he was more famous than his father. He had made the creamer Keith found. How well-known was the Brewood silversmithing dynasty? "I spoke to a dealer at one point and asked if they'd heard of Benjamin Brewood and she said, 'Oh yes, he's a famous silversmith'."

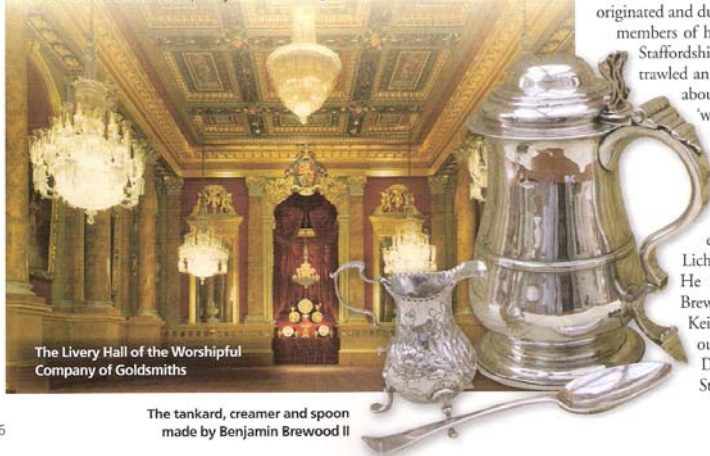
THOMAS AND HIS FAMILY WERE IN THE WRONG PLACE AT THE WRONG TIME

Benjamin II's silver creamer had really caught Keith's eye. "It was hand-worked by my ancestor – I had to have it. I also bought a Brewood tankard and a set of spoons – I don't think my wife was too pleased!" What's it like to hold something that links you with past generations? "The creamer is so pure, so delicate and dainty, and to think something so wonderful was crafted by my ancestor – it feels fantastic."

Keith wanted to find out where the Brewood name had originated and during his search, uncovered some of the earliest members of his family. There's a village called Brewood in

Staffordshire and Keith wondered if there was a link. He trawled antiquarian books and other sources to find out about its early history. "The name originally meant 'wood on the hill' and refers to a forest nearby that was used by royalty from the 12th century."

One useful source was *Brewood: A Resumé – Historical and Topographical* by James Hick Smith (1874). The author had researched the area in great depth using various ecclesiastical sources relating to the clergy of Lichfield, Coventry, Wolverhampton and Chester. He identified Robert, Stephen and Bernard de Brewode as the earliest Brewoods in the village. Keith turned to medieval records to try and find out more, accessing the Bishops' Archives for the Diocese of Chester, Coventry and Lichfield at Stafford Library. He also visited the archives at



The Livery Hall of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths

The tankard, creamer and spoon made by Benjamin Brewood II



Chester, Lichfield and Coventry, and the William Salt Library, finding a mass of old documents. "It's ancient stuff, wills and manorial records, some of it in Early English and Latin. You have to be patient. I've hired experts to translate bits." These records helped show Keith's descent from these three men.

Keith's research involved old photos, historical documents, death certificates and family records

ANCESTORS FROM THE MIDDLE AGES

Robert, Stephen and Bernard worked for the church, which is why records of them survived. He found that the surname dates back to the 12th century when the first recorded Brewood, Robert de Brewode, was a vicar of Brewood (1150-52). Generations of Brewoods in the village worked for the church. These include Bernard de Brewood (1194) and his son Peter de Brewood (1216-1244), who worked under the Bishop of Coventry in Lichfield. Robert de Brewode (1319), son of Adam de Brewode (1319), was vicar of Brewood Village and his brother William was Chaplain of the Priory of Black Ladies in Brewood.

From this small Staffordshire village, the Brewoods spread all over the world. "During my search for the elusive Emma Sarah, I wondered if she might have emigrated to the US, so I checked passenger lists and the other US records and came across a Thomas Brewood, who had died in the Jamestown Massacre in 1622." Keith found Thomas in other sources too – *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, and the title *Virginia Immigrants and Adventurers 1607-1635* – as well as other antiquarian books and sources not on the internet. Thomas, it transpired, was Benjamin Brewood I's great uncle.

In 1622, Thomas, employed by the London Virginia Company, sailed with his wife and two children to Jamestown,

USEFUL SOURCES

William Salt Library

Eastgate Street, Stafford
ST16 2LZ
01785 278372
www.staffordshire.gov.uk/
leisurearchives/williamsalt/

Stafford Library

Staffordshire Record Office
Eastgate Street, Stafford
ST16 2LZ
01785 278379
www.staffordshire.gov.uk/
leisurearchives/srol

Cheshire and Chester Archives and Local Studies Service

Cheshire Record Office
Duke Street, Chester,
Cheshire CH1 1RL
01244 972574
recordoffice@cheshire.gov.uk
www.cheshire.gov.uk/
Recordoffice

Lichfield Record Office

The Friary, Lichfield WS13 6QG
01543 510720
lichfield.record.office@
staffordshire.gov.uk
www.staffordshire.gov.uk

The Goldsmiths' Company

Goldsmiths' Hall, Foster
Lane, London EC2V 6BN
020 7606 7010
www.thegoldsmiths.co.uk/
thelibrary/archives.htm

Virginia Historical Society

428 North Boulevard, Richmond,
Virginia 23220, USA
PO Box 7311, 23221-0311
001 804 358 4901
www.vahistorical.org

Miles Templeton (historian)

miles.channelhouse@tiscali.
co.uk
www.prewarboxing.co.uk

Chesapeake, in America. There awaited him 200 acres on which to farm tobacco. The settlers had a good relationship with the local Algonquian Indians. But the tribe became disenchanting and on 22 March 1622, raided the plantations killing over 347 settlers. Had they stayed at home, Thomas and his family would have been safe thanks to a tip-off, but this news did not reach the plantation they were visiting on the day of the massacre. "I felt incredibly sad when I found out the fate of Thomas and his family – they were in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Other Brewoods who emigrated to the US had more luck. Keith uncovered an Albert Henry Brewood, descended from Benjamin Brewood I's brother Robert, who was a very successful engraver, making Christmas cards for the White House. He is said to have known President Roosevelt personally.

Of his new-found extended family, Keith says, "A year ago, I was one of only a few Brewoods and a complete family history novice, now I'm setting up my own website to keep far-flung family members abreast of Brewood research. We want to celebrate all Brewoods living or dead. In a way they'll never die – there will always be a record of them." ■

KEY SOURCES

The Goldsmiths' Company

The Goldsmiths' archives, dating from 1334, can hold biographical detail about a forebear, as well as their career. Keith was sent information on three generations of Brewood silversmiths (including Benjamin II's children) and these provided the Hinkley link. A private record viewing must be arranged.

Virginia Company records

Information from various sources

combined to help Keith piece together the story of Thomas Brewood and his family's fate.

These include: Virginia Company archives, Virginia Historical Society, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* and

the listing of *Virginia Immigrants and Adventurers 1607-1635*.

Specialist publications

If your ancestor pursued a sport professionally or even as an amateur, seek out specialist titles in which they might have featured. Keith was able, with help from historian Miles

Templeton, to uncover detail about his grandfather's life in boxing magazines and other memorabilia.

Bishops' Archives

Keith consulted the archives for the Diocese of Chester, Coventry and Lichfield at Stafford Library. They provided him with information about his Brewood village antecedents who had been part of the clergy. Keith was able to take his family as far back as the 12th century because the church had kept such good records.



A vintage boxing publication that Keith used