

Colyton Parish History Society Newsletter 23 May 2021

A bumper issue this month with the pleasing announcement of our plans to reopen the Heritage Centre in June; an interesting account by Phil Wright of the life of a George Samuel Sellars who lived here in Colyton during the Victorian era and worked on the railways , a report of a recent family reunion in Colyton and news of a new book by Maggie Rice about a Henry Bagwell from Exeter, who travelled to America on the *Sea Venture* with Sir Thomas Gates and Sir George Somers in 1609 and became a successful early Planter there. Thank you to all the contributors this month. More contributions always welcome. Enjoy!

Sarah Charman

Editor

1. History Society News

The History Society Management Committee would like to draw your attention to the following:

Reopening of the Heritage Centre

With lockdown easing and the prospect of all restrictions being removed from 21 June, the Parish History Society management committee has decided to seek to reopen the Heritage Centre - initially for three days a week - with effect from **1 June**. In order to do so however we require your assistance please!

We need volunteers to return and join in a new rota to help run the Centre. We plan to open on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday each week with two sessions from 11 am - 1 pm and 1pm to 3 pm - so shorter hours to begin with. Effective safeguarding measures will be put in place. Please can you let Jacquie McCullough know as soon as possible if you are able to do a session either morning or afternoon on any of those days. If you haven't volunteered before but fancy doing so Jacquie will be happy to talk you through what is involved. Do come along it's good fun!

2. Other News

- a. The White family: Moya makes happy visit to Colyton to see where her parents were married and meets a long lost cousin!**

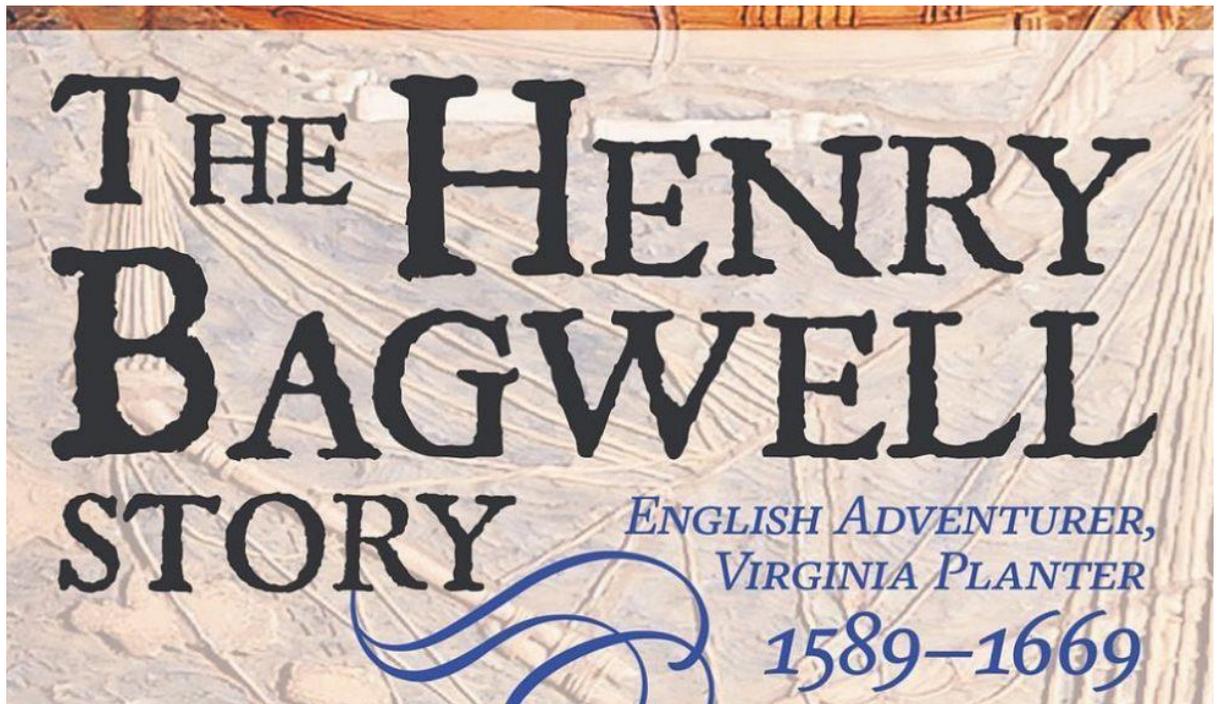


Glennis Ashbolt has kindly provided the following report of a recent visit to Colyton by Moya - seen above with local resident Greville White. Recently Glennis was contacted by a friend who explained that a former school friend was shortly planning to visit Colyton with her daughter and was keen to discover more information about her family - and could Glennis help?. She put them in touch and Glennis in turn contacted Chairman of the History Society, Marian Sydenham.

On 18 May, Moya and her daughter Debbie came to Colyton and met Glennis and Marian. Together they spent an interesting couple of hours discussing the White family. Glennis said:

" We took them to the shops the family ran many years ago, to the Heritage Centre, the church where Moya's parents were married and finally to see Greville White who turned out to be a long-lost cousin. Thanks to Marian's extensive knowledge and amazing memory a lot of gaps were filled in and Moya had a very enjoyable time."

- b. ***The Henry Bagwell Story: English Adventurer, Virginia Planter 1589 -1669, New book by Margaret Rice***



Family historian's success: First book to be published in USA

Ten years ago Margaret Rice set out to research the history of the Chappell family, who were merchants and mayors of Exeter during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

Thomas Chappell was mayor of Exeter in 1588, and is Rice's direct ancestor. One of Thomas's grandsons, Henry Bagwell (born in 1589) was a passenger in 1609 on a ship called the Sea Venture, part of a fleet of ships bringing supplies and colonists to the struggling settlement known as James Fort, later Jamestown, England's first permanent colony in the New World.

The Sea Venture was wrecked in a storm on the reefs of Bermuda, the survivors were marooned for nine months and finally reached Jamestown on May 21st 1610. On board were many key officials including Sir Thomas Gates, from Colyford, the appointed Lieutenant – Governor of the Jamestown Colony, Sir George Somers from Lyme Regis, the Admiral of the Fleet and a young man from Lyme Regis called Silvester Jourdain, who, along with William Strachey, wrote and published eye witness accounts of the voyage.

Henry first settled on the mainland, a few miles north of Jamestown. He later moved across Chesapeake Bay to the Eastern Shore of Virginia where he became a substantial landowner, and family man.

In 1629 he was elected as a burgess to represent the Eastern Shore at the General Assembly held in Jamestown. The General Assembly had been established in July 1619 with a Council of State and two burgesses elected to represent their community. Henry's claim to fame, is his role in 1632, as the first Clerk of Accomack- Northampton County Court, the first judicial court established in what

is now the US. Henry's signature is on the very first minutes of the Court meetings, and they still exist today.

This is the first biography of Henry Bagwell. The result is a 220-page book that sets out what is known about Henry, a figure previously lost to history, though important in his time.

Records in Devon and Virginia provided the clues and Rice makes the most of them, principally from archives in the Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter and other local Heritage Centres in Devon, as well as the Eastern Shore Public Library, the Library of Virginia, among others.

Mike Sampson, honorary editor of *Devon Historian*, published by the Devon History Society, states, "This is how history should be written" and "this volume is a fitting memorial to Henry and the determination which he and others showed in finally establishing permanent settlements in Virginia."

About the book - *The Henry Bagwell Story: English Adventurer, Virginia Planter 1589-1663*, was published on May 15, 2021 in a hardcover edition for £20 and e-book format for £7.50. Print copies and e-book can be ordered from the publisher at www.secantpublishing.com copies can be ordered from leading e-book retailers including Amazon, Apple, Barnes & Noble, Google Play, Kobo, and Book Depository.

The author - Margaret A "Maggie" Rice is a retired teacher and child-care lecturer. This is her first book. She lives with her husband Ray in Tiverton and they have two children and three grandsons.

About the publisher - Secant Publishing is an independent publisher located on the East coast of the USA, in Salisbury Maryland. Now entering its eighth year of issuing and re-issuing books of particular interest to writers and readers in the Maryland area. Visit www.secantpublishing.com or email info@secantpublishing.com

<https://www.theexeterdaily.co.uk/news/local-news/henry-bagwell-story>

c. George Samuel Sellars - Colyton's own Forrest Gump - by Phil Wright, Exeter

A couple of years ago whilst searching on 'Find My Past' for details of members of the Seller(s) family, I stumbled across an article in *The Cornishman* dated 22nd March 1944 about a George Samuel Sellars, a retired railway guard residing in Penzance who was celebrating his 100th birthday. My eyes lit up when I read he was born in Colyford, as was my great grandfather Alfred Sellars in 1863.

There were no clues as to the identity of his parents, although it said his father died when he was only a few months old and his mother gave instructions on lacemaking and was known to have bought brandy smuggled in through the village of Beer.

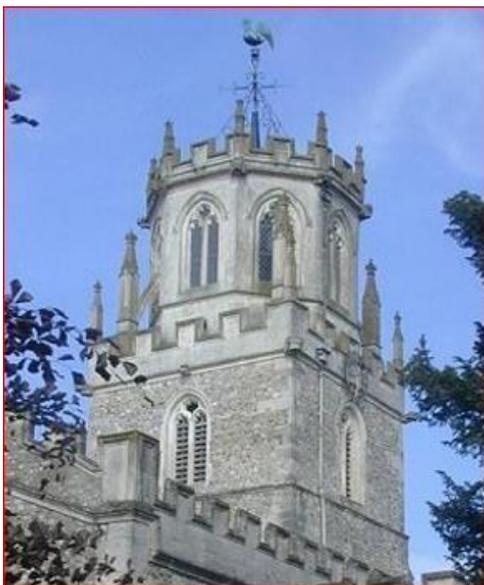
I recently made the breakthrough and established that centenarian George Samuel Sellers was my 2nd cousin 3 x removed! His great grandfather was my 4 x great grandfather, William Seller baptised at Seaton in 1741 and buried Axmouth 1819. Most of the family lived in Axmouth or Seaton but some moved up river to Colyford and Colyton.

I now know that George was born on 20 March 1844 and baptised in Colyton on 12 April He started using Sellers from the 1861 census. His father John Swetland Seller (1807-1846) was a wheelwright and died aged 40. His mother Sarah Slaughter came from Beer (1803-1876)

The newspaper article was quite lengthy, setting out some of the things he did and saw in his life. It reminded me of Forrest Gump, the character played by Tom Hanks in a film about a man who seemed to find himself in the middle of historical events.

In addition to the normal telegram from the monarch, which said, *“The King & Queen are much interested to hear you are celebrating your 100th birthday and send you hearty congratulations and good wishes”*, he also had a letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury. He wrote, *“I hear you are approaching your 100th birthday and that you were confirmed by my father who was then the Bishop of Exeter. I wish to send you my warmest congratulations...”*

The article went on to say. *“As a lad he sang in the church choir (Colyton) and later played the violin and cello in the orchestra which in those days accompanied the singing”* This musical talent was passed onto his son George Jnr as I will describe below.



When George was a few days past his 10th birthday, he was given the task of announcing the end of the Crimean War. *“The first indication they had of the end of the Crimean War was when the postman drew into their village in a laurel-decked cart. The question was raised as to how they should announce this to the people and young Sellers was instructed to go to the top of the church tower and sound the cornet. He believed he played ‘God Save the Queen’.”*

The arrival of railways to Devon gave opportunities for young men to get away from traditional jobs. In the 1861 census George is employed as a shoemaker and living in Colyton

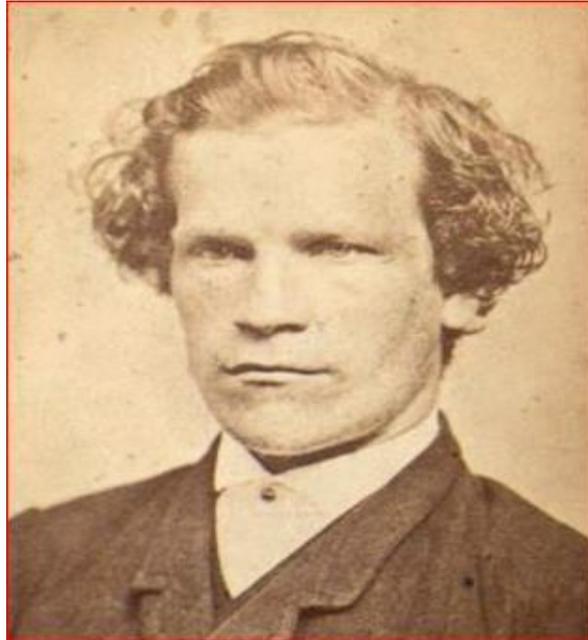
with his mother, a lacemaker. However, his head was turned by the arrival of the iron rails *"His first association with railways was when as a lad he rode in the trial trip when the South Devon Railway Co opened up."* I expect this was what was to become the GWR as the South Western Railway which came through East Devon did not arrive until 1860, but the South Devon Railway, later absorbed by the GWR, came in the 1840's.

My maternal grandfather Dan Pring (later to marry Emma Sellers from Colyford) was to choose the London & South Western Railway. As a boy he was a farm carter in Newton Poppleford, but the arrival of the branch line in the village in 1897 saw him desert horse for pick and shovel and became a ganger/platelayer at Seaton Junction for the next 40 years.

In the Cornishman article, George said *"I remember the great excitement caused by Brunel building the bridge across the Tamar (1859) thus joining Devon to Cornwall for railway traffic. There was nothing else I wanted to do but to join the railway. It was so fascinating – machinery and speed, being so new and fresh"* So, smitten, sometime in the 1860's off went George to London and joined the GWR at Paddington in 1862 as a porter. He said *"to join in those days one had to go before the board of Directors and have a severe interview. There were many wishing to join but only a few were accepted. Education was not as advanced so only those who could read and write were favoured."* George had received his education at Colyton grammar school.

George indulged in a bit of name-dropping as he said *"The first woman I ever saw with a crinoline was Brunel's daughter (Florence Mary). I thought she looked ridiculous. I saw her on Paddington platform"* Brunel died in 1859 and for a while, Florence lived with her mother in Stokeinteignhead before returning to London to marry. Sadly she died aged just 28.

His next brush with history came in 1864 when he went to witness one of the last public hangings. *"About 1864 (14th November) I went to see Franz Muller hanged. Muller had murdered a Mr Briggs on the line between Bow and Hackney Wick. He was hanged at eight in the morning. There was a great crowd there, with every window occupied by ladies and gentlemen who had paid high prices to see the execution. It was customary in those days for the gentry to indulge themselves in this manner. I was not more than a yard or two away from Muller and I heard the German clergyman beseech him not to die with a lie on his lips and Muller confessed. I never slept for a fortnight after."*



Franz Müller

This case makes interesting reading;

https://www.btp.police.uk/about_us/our_history/crime_history/the_first_railway_murder.aspx

This was the first known murder to take place on a British train. A banker was robbed, thrown from a train and died shortly after. The suspect had fled to America on the 'Victoria' a sailing ship, but Inspector Tanner of Scotland Yard pursued him on a steamer 'City of Manchester' and overtook him. Briggs was met at the quayside, extradited and brought back for trial. Over 50,000 people witnessed the hanging.

As the public were alarmed at this case, a consequential benefit was the introduction of corridor coaches and communication cords as well as small window, cut into compartments, known as Müller lights. And finally, a quote from the website 'Roman Road London'. "Müller's most iconic contribution to modern society is ironically the least well known. After this incident, across the whole East End, people would refer to any head injury in relation to the newspaper reports of the physical damage perpetrated by Mr. Müller onto Mr. Briggs. Over time, this generalisation transformed into a phrase to recall just how horribly drunk someone was. Hence the phrase describing a person as being 'Absolutely Müllered'."

Employment in the new world of railways was not all George found, he also found a bride! Sarah Jane Jordan came to London from rural Norfolk. She was born in a village called Surlingham near Norwich. Although the marriage certificate describes her father as a farmer, his census records has him as an Ag lab. By 1861 she had migrated south to Lambourne, Essex where she was working as a kitchen maid to Norwich born Rev. Goodwin, which probably explains how she got the job. George may have met her when employed as a porter at Paddington as that was his

employment as shown on their marriage record. He may have been attracted by her Norfolk accent, which would have sounded like his own East Devon burr.

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1869. Marriage solemnized at *Trinity Church* in the Parish of *Paddington* in the County of *Middlesex*

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname	Rank or Profession of Father
311	Jan 27 th 1869	George Sellers	25	Bachelor	Porter G.W.R.	Cirencester Street 117	John Sellers dec	Wheeler Street
		Sarah Ann Jordan	25	Spinster	—	Cirencester Street 117	William Jordan	Fireman

Married in the *Said Church* according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, after *Banns* by me,
Robert Rogers
Minister of the Gospel

This Marriage was solemnized between us
George Sellers
Sarah Ann Jordan
 in the Presence of us,
Robert Rogers
Minister of the Gospel
Emily Luchett

At the time of his marriage in January 1869, he was living at 47 Cirencester Street, close to Royal Oak station just outside Paddington. By the 1871 census they had a son, Reginald, born November 1869 and their migration west had started, albeit a half mile to Acklam Road, Westbourne Park. Crucially the census shows he had progressed to be a railway guard. When his 3rd son Harry was born in 1874 the baptism record shows he had gone another mile west but he was still within walking distance of Westbourne Park station. Sadly, Harry was to die aged two not long after the family moved to Cornwall.

George's next memory I fear is slightly flawed. He is quoted as saying "*I was hastily summoned to Windsor to take a special train to convey Queen Victoria to London. She had received a message that her mother, the Duchess of Kent had suddenly been taken ill.*" As George was not promoted to guard until after 1869 and Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg- Saalfeld, aka Duchess of Kent and the Queen Mother, had died in 1861, he must have muddled her with somebody else, but as he was 100, I will forgive him!

He added, "*Usually, before the Queen travelled, the company (GWR) had considerable correspondence from Mr Gladstone about the speed of the train. I was in charge of a train on another occasion when the Queen went to the Isle of Wight.*"

George said, "*I was appointed through passenger guard from Paddington to Plymouth in 1875*" This was probably extended westward shortly after, as by 1876 he had moved with his family to Penzance where he was to remain for the rest of his life. He recalls "*I was snowed up in Sonning cutting (a few miles east of Reading) on the night mail for three days in the blizzard of 1881*".

On another occasion ... "*I had in my care from Penzance to Paddington the survivors of the 'Schiller' the German mail-boat which was wrecked off the Scillies with 310 drowned*" In fact, 335 died with just 37 survivors when the SS Schiller struck rocks just east of the Scillies. Recommended reading <http://aboutscilly.com/the-wreck-of-the-ss-schiller-1875/> on the 'About Scilly' web page.

On a less sombre theme, he said *"I took the last broad gauge train to Paddington on May 20th 1892. This reached Paddington early on Saturday morning. Crowds were gathered along the way to see us."* Most early railways had their lines set 4' 8½" apart. This odd measurement is thought to be the spacing of road ruts from Roman times which in turn was designed to reflect the size of a horse's rear end! However, Isambard Kingdom Brunel must have had elephants in mind as he decided on 7' 0¼". Brunel thought his wider gauge would allow faster speeds and the better transportation of goods. The GWR had eventually to follow the rest of the country and their whole network was re-gauged by 1892.



George was the passenger guard on the last eastbound broad gauge train from Penzance to Paddington in 1892. Here is the last westbound, passing through Sonning cutting where George was snowbound for 3 days in 1881. Supplement to the Railway Gazette 1935

George's eldest son Reginald had followed him in working for the GWR. He was a draughtsman in the Engineers Dept. at Reading. It was here that he greeted his father as he paused on this historic journey.

Looking back over his railway career, he said *"I have run well over three and a half million miles. The Company sent their own photographer for inclusion in the special souvenir book, which also contains some of my memories. On centenary day August 31st 1935, I saw the new Riviera Express arrive at Paddington. I was overwhelmed by the luxury coaches and powerful engine."*

George lived for over 60 years within earshot of a guard's whistle at Penzance station, firstly in Leskinnick Terrace, then as his family grew, Alma Place.

He and Sarah had 7 children;

1. Reginald (1869-1958) as mentioned spent 45 years working for GWR living in the Thames Valley
2. George Jnr. (1871-1961) inherited his father's interest in music and became a Professor of Music and music teacher. He was the organist at St John's Church Penzance for over 50 years
3. Harry died aged 2

4. Annie Sarah (1876-1955) married Ernest Short who started working as a telegraph boy and retired as Head Postmaster in Penzance.
5. Edith Emily ((1879-1968) Married Alfred Amour, telegraphist with Western Union.
6. Gertrude Mary (1881-1968) another with musical genes. Many newspaper articles show her singing in concerts and for the Penzance Amateur Orchestral Society. She married Thomas Briscoe, a nurseryman/gardener who trained at Kew and worked in several large estates.
7. Maude (1884-1976) Worked as a telephonist for the post office. Did not marry but supported father in his later years and gave support to Gertrude after she was widowed.

The Cornishman article concluded with reports of messages from several Reverends and a Cannon with whom he had been acquainted. Photographs were taken outside his home with the District Traffic Manager of the GWR and the Penzance Station Master.

George's final quote was:

"Many promotions were offered to me. These I declined preferring to live by these beautiful shores of Mount's Bay. I am thankful for my long and thankful life, which I still enjoy with my dear ones and my good friends around me."

George Samuel Sellers, the boy from Colyford who saw so much in his long life died on 9th December 1946 and was buried in Penzance cemetery. When I next go down there, I will seek him out and say hello.

3. Things you may have missed

Honiton Charter Day

- https://www.midweekherald.co.uk/news/honiton-royal-charter-anniversary-7975394?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=DM40920

Mary Anning statue

- <https://lyme-online.co.uk/news/lyme-regis-news/maquette-of-mary-anning-statue-to-go-on-display?IYA-mail=849809d2-783c-47dd-98e3-4c821c95cf93>

Creatures discovered on Jurassic coast to be immortalized on new 50p coins

- <https://www.bridportnews.co.uk/news/19304364.creatures-discovered-jurassic-coast-immortalised-new-50p-coins/?ref=rss&IYA-mail=849809d2-783c-47dd-98e3-4c821c95cf93>

Killerton has reopened

- <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/killerton>