

Dear Family,

On February 3rd our cousin Fr. Freddie Copleston SJ died. The Guardian obituary by Michael J. Walsh was headlined 'God's Own Philosopher' and in The Independent Anthony Meredith SJ says '... he will be remembered less for his achievements, remarkable though they were, than for his unflinching courtesy, his modesty, his industry and his consideration for others'. Freddie was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1970 and in the same year when Heythrop became a constituent college of London University he was the first Principal. In 1975 he was made Honorary Fellow of his old College, St. John's, Oxford. Last year he was given what many believed a belated recognition, the CBE. Nine volumes of the History of Philosophy and other works, his lectures in various parts of the world and his recent autobiography published in the US represent his industry, but I shall remember the amusing stories told over a glass of sherry at Mount Street before going down to lunch, conversations about the family and things in general. Freddie was a kind and gentle man - much missed.

Hermione, Michael and I attended the Requiem Mass at Farm Street Church and the interment afterwards. We then returned to Mount Street where the good Fathers gave us lunch and, as in the Church, there was much affection shown for Freddie by everyone.

Due to peculiar health and some family problems I have done very little work on the family for several months, so it is just as well that correspondents have kindly brought information to me! Susan Blake (sister of Dick in Connecticut and Peggy in Crediton) sent some of the old cricket cuttings naming Offwell family members. These are the stuff of which family history is made. People become rounded characters when we know something of the leisure in their lives.

Robert Jago, while collecting his own family information at Portsmouth RO, also collected quite a lot of ours - Census readings mostly, which are of great help. Over the years his assistance has been phenomenal.

Now for something which will cause many flutters among members of that branch of the family concerned. A few weeks back my good friend Eileen Stage (you probably remember that Eileen compiles the National Coastguard Index) telephoned to say that she had heard from a lady in Australia that her forbear was a daughter of Joseph Coplestone, Coastguard, who had arrived in Victoria, Australia in 1864, by name, Elizabeth. Such excitement! Mrs. Peggy Walker of Ballarat is granddaughter of Elizabeth and knew nothing of Joseph's family, so I was able to tell her of his demise in 1847 after falling (or jumping or being pushed?) from the cliff at Old Head Station, Westport, Co. Mayo. I also told her of Joseph's descent, but that I had not known anything of Joseph's wife. I had been told that family legend had it that she was 'a Welsh squire's daughter', so you may imagine my delight at learning that her name was Mary Louise Williams.

With the information received from Peggy I wonder if Mary Louise was a squire's daughter, for a squire would be able to afford, I imagine, to take care of his daughter and family after the husband's death. Peggy has ascertained that 'Louisa Coplestone, Almshouse, Westport, died 5th March 1886 aged 83 years, a coastguard's widow. The informant was Louisa Kennedy, Almshouse, Westport, (her granddaughter).' If both of them were in the Almshouse they must have been in poor straits. There is also a baptism of 'Louisa, daughter of Joseph Copleston and Louisa, born 9th October and baptised 19th October 1822. No address given, nor father's occupation, nor mother's maiden name'. We know that Joseph was at Old Head Station then and I wonder if Louisa was the first child of the marriage. I've now written to the library in Dublin which holds the earlier registers of Westport and Louisbourg Churches, the latter being local to Old Head. Perhaps the burial will be found and with any luck, the cause of death detailed - I have also asked them to look for a marriage in the 1820's and other children. Peggy's grandmother Elizabeth married in 1868 Henry Sutton, also born in Ireland - it is interesting that on their marriage certificate her name appears thus 'Coplestone' and at her burial the name is given as Copleston. Incidentally, on Elizabeth's death certificate her name is given as 'Elizabeth Parsons Sutton', so the Parsons name was carried down another generation.

In 1836 when Joseph was among those furnished with Excise Commissions at the time when the illicit stills were being dealt with by the Revenue Police, there was a Chief Officer CG also of Westport District, but at Myniah Station, named Mr. George Williams - I know the name is not uncommon, but he can be borne in mind as possible father of Mary Louise - or Louisa as she is later called.

The fact that this is Newsletter No. 16 means that for eight years I have been doing them and for several years previously the booklet newsletter. How the time does fly! I should by now have been well into the writing-up of the family history, but still have only bits and pieces waiting to be joined together. My excuse used to be that I was still finding information and a lot would have to be re-written, but I can't even use that any more. I really should be consigned to an island in the Outer Hebrides with just food, drink and a typewriter and paper in order to concentrate.

Our dear cousins David and Ruth Copleston of Chester have made a number of contributions to Newsletters over the years and some great discoveries, too, particularly the ordination of our 4-gts-grandfather Coriolanus. Last December they sent a surprising piece of news which I didn't mention in the last Newsletter because I had hoped to round out the story - I haven't, so I give the details they found and hopefully someone will know who was the Maria Coplestone living in a cottage at Heaton Gate on the estate of Heaton Hall, Lancs., in 1841. They were pursuing Ruth's Appleyard family and found two members in the 1841 Census living in Heaton Gate Lodge. Would you believe that on the same page of the Census were Maria aged thirty, George aged 14 and Thomas aged 8? None of them born in Lancs., but 1841 did not give county of birth and since all were born before Civil Registration it will be a difficult task to find them. Also, ages in 1841 were given to the nearest 5 years and are sometimes unreliable. The only likely family which has Marias is that of Otterton, but I can't find one to fit. Presumably Maria is mother of the children and possibly a widow. Help!

To finish, let us have a 500 year anniversary of a family member who appears to be uncaring towards his neighbours and their property. I am indebted to the Devon Association and their invaluable Transactions giving various parochial histories, in this case that of Dartmouth. On May 5th, 1494 it was noted that 'There is much dung (fimum) lying in the street between the tenements of Thomas Copleston and William Cosby. On October 6th of that year 'Thomas Copleston and Thomas Rowe are in mercy (iis) because between the church and the church house are various gutters dangerous to the people.' During following years Thomas was fined several times for neglect; in 1496 Le pavient near le pelely (Pillory) is ruinous. Thomas Erle and Thomas Copleston are each fined iiii. Also, the way at Hardnesse is dangerous to people. Thomas Copleston is in default (vi d) and Thomas Copleston and Thomas Erle again fined iiii each for le pavient being broken near le pelory. In 1499 a gate which Thomas 'ought to mend' and in 1500 he pulled down various walls 'which annoy John Rowe in le pole (vi d). Thomas may be the third son of Ralph, but there may have been another Thomas at that time.

Have a good summer!

*Your boy,
Muriel*

