

Article about JE Commins prepared by Kevin Bailey as part of his studies.

Having no known ancestors in one of the learned professions (church, law or medicine), the writer has focussed this assignment on a local clergyman, Joseph Edyvean COMMINS. This individual was chosen by way of a Google search for a "list of vicars of Shoeburyness". The first listed site¹ produced the following entry:

"Rev. Joseph Commins, M.A., vicar of North Shoebury and Little Wakering"

This was the starting point for further research into the educational and professional records of the reverend's career. With an unusual (and, perhaps, intriguing) middle name, "Edyvean" early research online produced a wealth of information. A memorial on the wall of St Mary the Virgin church in Little Wakering, Essex, reads as follows:

THIS TABLET
IS ERECTED BY
HIS SORROWING
FAMILY TO THE BELOVED
MEMORY OF THE
REV^d JOSEPH EDYVEAN COMMINS, M.A.
FOR 28 YEARS VICAR OBT.
MARCH 29 1866 OF THIS PARISH AGED 61
THOU WILT KEEP HIM
PERFECT PEACE WHOSE
MIND STAYED ON THEE
BECAUSE HE TRUSTEH
IN THEE
ISAIAH 26-3

A photograph of this memorial can be found on the "Essex Churches" website². It can be seen from this inscription that Joseph had a family and was loved by them. It can be assumed that Joseph was also respected by his parishioners. From the genealogical information provided, the life, education and clerical service of Joseph can be investigated. As it is said that Joseph died, aged 61, on 29th March 1866, it can be calculated that he was born around 1804/5. Also, he had also been vicar of the parish for 28 years; or since around 1837/8.

Reference to the England, Select Deaths and Burials Index of 1538-1991³ reveals that Joseph was buried in his parish, North Shoebury, on 3 April 1866. He did not, however, die in the parish. Probate Registry records confirm the church memorial inscription that Joseph died on 29th March 1866 but at Matlock in the County of Derby.

Just over sixty one years earlier, on 24th October 1804, Joseph Edyvean COMMINS was born to Thomas and Lydia COMMINS (nee EDYVEAN)⁴. Thomas was a Solicitor, thought to be living in Penzance, Cornwall, and moved to Bodmin just after Joseph's birth to become a partner in the firm of Commins & Goode. It can be seen that Joseph's middle name was provided to him by way of preserving or commemorating Lydia's maiden name. After her father's death, and shortly after marrying Thomas, Lydia and her new husband moved into her father's house in Bodmin. This provided a safe and stable home environment for Joseph. In 1806, Joseph was presented with a brother, Thomas junior, and, in 1807, a sister, Lydia Ann.

¹ Source: <http://www.historyhouse.co.uk/placeN/essexn09d.html>

² Source: <http://www.essexchurches.info/ChurchPic.asp?p=Little%20Wakering&no=0082&ty=n&imgno=002&maximg=002>

³ FHL Film Number: 1702587. Reference ID Item 5 P26

⁴ Source: <http://rprawson.net>. Much useful and interesting information was gleaned from this excellent site, recording Mr Rawson's heritage.

Researching Joseph's life uncovered a genealogical gem from Mr Rawson's website. Joseph's daughter, Emma, wrote a "short chronicle" of her family history in 1895 for her nephews, nieces and their children.⁵ In the preface of her narrative, Emma wrote the following passage:

"Some in the future may care, and some may not, for any reminiscence of their forefathers. Some only take note of the present fruit and flower of a tree and no account of the root from whence it sprang. But those who have gone before us should not be ignored or forgotten they have left us a goodly heritage in unsullied names and respected lives."

This profound statement, written in such an erudite manner, is testament to Emma's education, upbringing and worldliness. That it should be uncovered and appreciated by researchers over one hundred years later justifies Emma's original intention.

Interestingly, Emma does not refer to Joseph as "father" or "Joseph" but as "Edyvean". This suggests that either Joseph had taken to using his middle name or his family had done so, perhaps as a term of endearment. Emma describes the pleasant times that Joseph enjoyed growing up in a stable family environment in "happy companionship" with his brother, Thomas, and his sister, Lydia Ann. She describes fishing in the river and tea in the woods being a frequent delight. Against this background, Emma refers to her grandfather, Thomas senior has an "honest lawyer" who "never grew rich but wasted his money on farming of which he understood but little."

Notwithstanding this, in September 1812, Thomas paid £262 10s for the lease of a property called Boskear in Bodmin on behalf of Joseph and his siblings.⁶

While the town of Bodmin "went quite mad" in 1815 after Waterloo, Joseph had been "kept in" at the old Grammar School house in the churchyard. Emma describes Joseph's "rage and excitement and determination to free himself", which he did through an upper window, so he could join the "wild procession". This, perhaps, shows a wilder and more adventurous side to an individual who was to become a clergyman.

Emma does, however, describe a darker moment and a tougher side to her grandfather's character. There was a time when Joseph and his brother went to the gaol one day to be present at an execution. Their father quickly turned them back and "punished their morbid curiosity and disobedience" by flogging them.

According to Emma, Joseph "had no special advantages at the Grammar school at Bodmin under Mr Boor" and added that he "did well at College notwithstanding neglect at school." It can be assumed from this narrative that Joseph was not an exceptional student prior to entering university. As grammar schools were originally endowed by the church, the original intention was to teach Latin. Over time the curriculum was broadened to include subjects such as Ancient Greek, English, natural sciences, mathematics, history and geography.⁷ Joseph's school day probably ran from 6am to 5pm and he would have left at age 14.

In March 1824, the lease of Boskear was assigned to a Thomas West for £600.⁸ It may be that Thomas had, shrewdly, made provision for the cost of the education of his children as, around this time, Joseph had entered university. At that time, the only universities in England were Oxford and Cambridge. It was not until 1832 that Durham University was founded. Details exist of the admission and graduation of students. Alumni records are the major source of information and Joseph's records can be found in "*Alumni Cantabrigienses: A Biographical List of All Known Students, Graduates and Holders of Office at the University of Cambridge, from the Earliest Times to 1900*". This work is a biological register of former members of the University of Cambridge published between 1922 and 1953.

⁵ A typed copy can be found on the R P Rawson website.

⁶ Source: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/rd/37b3f382-d5d6-450a-a52c-1725c44d6a79>

⁷ Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammar_school

⁸ Source: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/rd/84a5eb3e-a1a8-43a8-96e6-cbac8cd1f3d0>

An enhanced version of the original printed entry⁹ reads:

Commins, Joseph Edyvean.

Adm. pens. at ST CATHARINE'S, Jan. 14, 1823.

B. at Bodmin, Cornwall.

Matric. Michs. 1823; B.A. 1827; M.A. 1838.

Ord. priest (Ely) Nov. 2, 1828; V. of North Shoebury, Essex, 1830-66.

V. of Little Wakering, 1838-66.

Chaplain to the Earl of St Germain's.

Died Mar. 29, 1866, aged 61, at Matlock. *Cant.*

Act Bk.; G. Mag., 1866, l. 762.)

Joseph entered St Catherine's College, or "Catz" as it is now affectionately known, in Cambridge on 14 January 1823. He was an Admitted Pensioner (Adm. Pens.) meaning that he was an undergraduate student without financial support from his college. Admission as a Pensioner was the second of three ranks in which students were matriculated; the others being a scholar or a sizar. It can be seen that he matriculated (or enrolled) during the Michaelmas term of 1823. This term runs from September or October until Christmas. Later terms are Lent (January to March) and Easter (April to June).

Joseph graduated as a Bachelor of Arts in 1827. In the same year, he took his first steps into his career into the clergy. Prior to the 1840s, the requirements for individuals to enter the Clergy were few. Candidates were required to demonstrate their knowledge of Latin and the Scriptures. and to demonstrate to the Bishop's satisfaction a good moral character and status. If this could be achieved, the first step was to be ordained as a deacon by the Bishop. To do this, a candidate would have to certify that he had a nomination to a curacy and that he was at least 23 years old. On 28th October 1827, Joseph was licensed as a Curate in the village and civil parish of Sithney in Cornwall. A Curate is a member of the clergy engaged as an assistant to a vicar, rector or parish priest. Joseph received a "Yearly stipend of One hundred and fifty pounds to be paid by the Vicar of the Parish Church of Sithney aforesaid, at four Quarterly Payments, by even and equal Portions Together with the Surplice fees, and [sic] the use of the Vicarage house in which or in the parish you are to reside together with the Garden and Offices."

At the same time, Joseph was ordained as a Deacon under the Bishop of Exeter, William Carey, at the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Palace in Exeter. One year later, on 2 November 1828, Joseph was ordained as a priest under Bishop Bowyer Sparke at the Bishop's Palace in Ely. This event was also recorded on page 234 of the *British Critic*, *Quarterly Theological Review* and *Ecclesiastical Review*, Volume V, of 1829.¹⁰ Eighteen months later, on 2 April 1830, Joseph was instituted as the Vicar of North Shoebury, near Southend in Essex.¹¹ Emma described the event in her "chronicle". She noted that "In 1830, Edyvean received the Lord Chancellor's living of North Shoebury, Essex."

Emma's narrative adds some clarification for Joseph's link between the churches of North Shoebury and Little Wakering. She states that: "On first becoming Vicar 1830, of Shoebury my Father acted as curate to the adjoining parish of Little Wakering. On the death of the vicar of that place, the parishioners sent a memorial to the governors of St. Bartholomew's Hospital - the patrons of the living - to ask that he might be their vicar and he was appointed to it. The services in his two churches being alternate."

Although Emma's narrative provides helpful background information, it can be seen from the Alumni records and the memorial of St Mary's church that Joseph became vicar in Little Wakering in 1838, some eight years after becoming vicar at North Shoebury.

⁹ Taken from: <http://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/cgi-bin/search-2016.pl?sur=commins&suro=w&fir=joseph&firo=c&cit=&cito=c&c=all&z=all&tex=&sy=&eye=&col=all&maxcount=50>

¹⁰ Source: <https://books.google.co.uk/>

¹¹ Source of all clerical information, save source 10, was via <http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/persons/index.jsp>

Joseph's first wedding ceremony as officiate was for his sister, Lydia to Captain Oakley, who was stationed in the town's newly forming barracks. Emma explains that Deborah LILBURN acted as a bridesmaid to her friend.

For Joseph, 1831 was a monumental year. Some time before, the Lilburn family had moved from Dover in Kent to Southend to the west of Shoebury. Captain William LILBURN (born 1768) was the Commander of a revenue cutter named "Lively". Emma states that he brought his wife, Deborah (nee SARMON) and his five children to Southend. One of William's children was Deborah LILBURN (born 1809) who Emma describes as "tall, amiable and lively". By the time the family had moved to Southend, Deborah had spent two years in a Convent in St Omer.

Upon his retirement, Captain Lilburn moved his family to a cottage in Shoebury. Emma records the meeting of her parents. She states that "In 1831 a new vicar was appointed who soon became on intimate terms at the "Cottage" this was my Father, and he was soon attracted by Deborah's charm of person and manner, and became in due course her accepted suitor.

Joseph and Deborah were married in the church at North Shoebury in 1831 by the rector of the parish of South Shoebury, Reverend Philip Wynne Yorke. On 12 November 1832, Joseph and Deborah became parents when their son, Charles was born. Emma followed on 1 November 1834.

Notwithstanding Joseph's move to North Shoebury, the 1831 electoral register for Bodmin in 1837 reveals that Joseph had "one undivided third part of freehold, house and garden at Bore Street". His "abode", though, is stated as being "North Shoebury, Essex". The remainder of the freehold was held in equal parts by Joseph's brother and sister.¹²

Alumni records show that, in 1838, Joseph became a Master of Arts.

Surprisingly, the 1841 Census shows the Vicarage at North Shoebury being occupied by "James" (aged 35) and "Dorothy" Commins (aged 31) with Charles, aged 8, and Emma, aged 6. It is probable that the enumerator mis-transcribed Joseph and Deborah's names.

In 1851, Joseph and Deborah (properly transcribed) were recorded in the Census as still living at the Vicarage. By this time, Joseph seems to be prospering as the census shows a 47 year old servant, Samuel Richardson, and a 66 year old house servant, Susan Page, also residing at the property. Charles and Emma are not recorded at the property. Emma's narrative reveals that Charles emigrated to New Zealand in 1851, where he "...had a taste of rough riding and sheep farming.." before being employed by the legislative council. It is not clear where Emma was residing or what she was doing at this time.

At the time of the 1861 census, Joseph and Deborah can still be found at the Vicarage with Emma, now 26, and a visitor, Philippa Milburn. Also recorded are a groom, George Pettit, and his wife, Susan (who was described as a cook) and a house keeper, Sarah Popplewell.

Perhaps a sign that all was not well with Joseph came in February 1865. Courtesy of the McCarthy Index¹³, it can be seen that Joseph signed an Indenture conveying his property in Cornwall to Mr William Langdon. This may be seen as Joseph putting his affairs in order before his death. Joseph's death was recorded in the registration district of Bakewell, Derbyshire in volume 7b on page 401. Emma's narrative explains why he died so far from home. In the mid-1850's, the Royal Artillery started to build a formal barracks in Shoebury. Joseph had become acquainted with some of the personnel at the barracks. Emma states that "General Eardly-Brown was the last Commandant while we were at Shoebury and I think of him with pain for it was owing to his own persuasion that my dear Father was induced to go to the Hydropathic Establishment at Matlock for cure, as he was at that time in failing health and suffering."

Emma accompanied her father to Matlock, while her mother remained at home. She explains that "...after little more than a fortnight, we heard that she [her mother] was unwell and he [Joseph] made me return to her, I did so, in great grief at leaving him, but thinking he was gaining benefit and that I should soon be able to

¹² Source: www.ancestry.co.uk

¹³ <http://www.mccarthyindex.org/images/stories/index/1865%2014th%20February%20Warleggan.pdf>

return to him. Three days after General Eardly-Wilmot came to break the news to us that he had died while making ready to come home. God knows what suffering it all was; I cannot dwell on it even now. His home-coming was on Easter Eve, he having died on Thursday March 29th, 1866."

An entry in the National Probate Calendar records that The Reverend Joseph Edyvean Commins left effects of under £1,000. The entry, in 1866, records the following narrative:

"14 May. Letters of Administration (with the Will annexed) of the Personal Estate and effects of the Reverend Joseph Edyvean Commins late of North Shoebury and Little Wakering in the County of Essex Clerk deceased who died 29 March 1866 at Matlock in the County of Derby were granted at the Principal Registry to Deborah Commins of the Vicarage aforesaid Widow the Relict the Residual Legatee named in the said Will she having been first sworn."

After Joseph's death, Emma and her mother, Deborah, moved to Dover and lived with Deborah's sister, Fanny. There, Emma met and married Thomas Guy, the doctor attending her mother, in 1882. Deborah died on 28th July 1890. Emma died on 9th February 1920, leaving effects of £5,120.