MY *WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?* MOMENT

Family history research doesn't just involve dusty documents and microfilm. **Matthew Wells** has a few genealogical surprises in store when he visits Gloucestershire



Matthew Wells has long had an interest in genealogy, but inspired by TV programmes and easy access to data online, he has been exploring his family's history in more detail.

TAKING IT FURTHER

Forest of Dean Family History Society website: **www.forest-of-dean.net**

John Sheraton and Rod Goodman, *Exploring Historic Dean* (Fineleaf Editions, 2009)

While researching the Read family, my maternal line, I visited the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire.

I wanted to learn more about Ann Read, (born in May 1856), the third of George Read (1828-1879) and Jane Tingle's (1828-1896) ten children and see if I could trace any descendents of Ann's brothers and sisters in the village of Ruardean.

My first port of call was Cinderford Public Library, where I found that the Forest of Dean Family History society had listed all names included in the 1841 and 1861 census returns. This was invaluable as I found out from the 1841 census that Jane, aged 13, lived in an area called Moorwood, not far from Ruardean. I also located George Read and his family at 'The Pludds,' near Ruardean.

I already knew from the 1881 Census that Jane Read (née Tingle), five of her children, a grandchild, her brother-in-law (Richard Read) and Richard's eldest son William's family all lived at Newham Bottom, a hamlet near Ruardean Woodside.

When I visited the hamlet I spotted two rows of cottages that seemed much older than the other houses. On the northerly row there was a plaque inscribed The Old Shop.

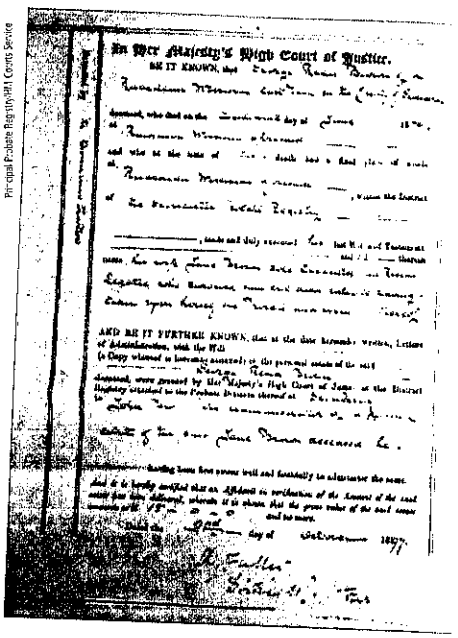
Just past The Old Shop the lane ended abruptly, but a footpath continued past an old tip of the True Blue Colliery, which was in production from 1788 until the 1950s. I imagined William Read – who was recorded, aged 12, as a 'coal miner' in the 1851 Census – tramping up the hill from his cottage to work. Jane's husband, George, had also been a collier, but he was not mentioned in the 1881 census and I didn't know why.

In Ruardean Woodside I asked a lady directions and her husband, Sam, mentioned that his mother was a Reid and that they used to live in Newham Bottom.

Being a close-knit community, it was likely that many of the Reads and Reids were related. Sam said there was a lady who was related to the Newham Bottom Reads still living "around the corner."

The following day I met the lady herself, Barbara. She turned out to be my second cousin once removed, as she is related to the Reads of Newham Bottom. Meeting her was the kind of break that you think only happens on *Who Do You Think You Are?*

Barbara was intrigued by my search. Her grandfather, John



The grant of probate for George Reid junior, which was issued 18 years after his death in 1879.

Brown Reid, was buried in Ruardean Churchyard.

Barbara knew vaguely that her family was related to the Reads from Newham Bottom and she had three old family documents. These were: an indenture confirming the sale of property at Ruardean Woodside to George Read (1785-1846); a will belonging to his son, (another George) who died in 1879; and George's Grant of Probate.

The Grant of Probate was completed in 1897 long after George's death. He had made his wife Jane, to whom he had left everything, his executrix. She survived him until 1896 without having executed his will. The Grant of Probate turned out to be the missing piece in the puzzle. It explained why George was not in the 1881 Census. He had died two years before, in 1879.

The internet, local records and magazines are rich genealogical hunting grounds, but you can't beat getting out there and talking to people. I could not have found a fraction of this information without visiting the Forest of Dean and asking questions.

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