

THE LUDLOWS OF CHIPPING SODBURY

by Robert J Haines

The 'education' of arguably one of the greatest medical benefactors to mankind, and a celebrated elopement, which was to lead to a very controversial ruling by a House of Lords committee relating to the inheritance of a Scottish Earldom :- these are just two facets of the story of the Ludlow family of Chipping Sodbury in Gloucestershire.

The family appears to have its relatively humble origins in the tiny Gloucestershire village of Shipton Moyne, where, on December 5 1647, Christopher, the son of Stephen Ludlow, was baptised. Christopher later removed to the nearby market town of Chipping Sodbury, where, in 1681, he married a local lass Anne Hellier¹. An apothecary by profession, Christopher was to lay the foundations of the family's long association with the town, with particular regard to its business life and the medical care of the townsfolk.

His son Ebenezer, apprenticed to a tailor in 1712, became a successful mercer within the borough². He married Mary, a daughter of Daniel Webb (1644-1713), another thriving mercer of the town³. Ebenezer's son Daniel (b.1720) chose to follow his paternal grandfather's calling; he was apprenticed to Abraham Ludlow (probably an uncle), a surgeon at Bristol, in 1735, at a cost to Ebenezer of some £52 10s. 0d.⁴.

On the completion of his medical apprenticeship, Daniel Ludlow returned to his native Chipping Sodbury, where he built up a very successful practice. Possibly, it was whilst on a visit to his first cousins, Mr. George Webb (1719-1766) and Mrs. Mary Gabb (née Webb, 1710-1780), who resided at Wick, near Berkeley, that Daniel Ludlow first heard that the 13-year-old Edward Jenner

(1749-1823), the orphan son of the late Rev. Stephen Jenner (1702-1754), vicar of Berkeley, was seeking an apprenticeship with a local surgeon. George Webb and his sister Mary, through their mother Elizabeth (née Witchell, 1678-1736/7), could also claim distant kinship with the Jenners of Berkeley, via their mutual descent from the Nelme family of Stinchcombe, Cam and Slimbridge. George Webb and the Rev. Stephen Jenner were 4th cousins⁵.

Thus, circa 1762, the young Edward Jenner, a keen naturalist, who had aspirations to enter the medical profession, commenced his apprenticeship with Daniel Ludlow at Chipping Sodbury. It was at this time that Jenner heard that anyone having had cowpox never caught smallpox, a fact he remembered during his studies at St. George's Hospital in London before returning to his native Berkeley as the local doctor.

A WELL-KNOWN STORY

In the summer of 1796 Dr Jenner experimented by inserting some cowpox lymph from a pustule on the finger of Sarah Nelmes, a local dairymaid, into the upper arm of James Phipps, an 8-year-old boy. He later took the drastic step of inoculating the boy with pustule material from a patient suffering from virulent smallpox. To his relief and delight the boy did not succumb - he appeared to be immune.

Thus began the story which culminated in the announcement by the World Health Organisation in October 1979 of the worldwide eradication of this often fatal and always disfiguring disease. And this success story began from a verbal seed sown in Mr

Ludlow's surgery at Chipping Sodbury.

Growing up with the young Jenner in the Ludlow household were Masters Daniel Ludlow junior (1757-1802) and Christopher Ludlow (1755-1784), Daniel's sons. In later life, Daniel junior and Edward Jenner became members of the Convivio-Medical Society, which met at the Ship Inn at Alveston, and also of the Medico-Convivial Society, which met at the Fleece Inn at Rodborough.

Master Christopher Ludlow, meanwhile, had also entered the medical profession. Apprenticed in 1768, he too became an apothecary-surgeon. In June 1776, at Chipping Sodbury, he married Elizabeth Maria Blanchard, and in the early summer of 1777 their son Daniel was born but, sadly, the baby soon died. Several months passed, then scandalous gossip swept through the town:- Mrs Ludlow had eloped with one James Campbell, an officer with the 40th Regiment then stationed at Bristol⁶. The cuckolded Christopher gave up his practice, enlisted and became garrison surgeon in New York, but ill-health forced him to return to England, where, in Bristol in January 1784, he died a broken man.

Meanwhile, James Campbell and his companion Mrs Ludlow, who appears to have reverted to her maiden name of Blanchard, returned to Campbell's native Scotland and lived there as man and wife, and were recognised as such by other members of the Campbell family. After a further period of army life abroad, Campbell was forced to retire owing to ill-health, and he died in 1806.

In the following year, his alleged widow made application to the War Office for pecuniary assistance stating that her husband had died insolvent. 'He left me', she wrote 'with three children, without any smallest means of support. I apply'd respecting the Widow's pension and have made Oath before a magistrate, but as I have unfortunately lost my marriage lines in America, I am afraid it cannot be procured. My husband was Ensign and Lieutenant in the 40th Regiment during the war with that country. In September 1782 I was married to Mr. Campbell in Edinburgh by Mr. MacGregor, the Galic minister (who is also dead), as is Ensign William Willcot, of the 40th, who was the witness to our marriage. The present Galic minister has been wrote to, and he says that he got no register from any of his predecessors'.

The situation looked bleak for Mrs Campbell and her children. The eldest child, William, was baptised at Gateshead-upon-Tyne in January 1788, but his date of birth was never truly ascertained. However, Elizabeth Maria, by her own hand, had stated that she married Campbell in 1782, which was during the lifetime of her husband Christopher Ludlow, implying that this second marriage was bigamous and thus invalid.

BETTER PROSPECTS

Things were looking up by 1812, when her son William inherited an estate at Glenfalloch from a cousin John Campbell. Elizabeth Maria died in 1827, and her son in 1850. It was William's son John Alexander Gavin Campbell who, in 1862, on the death of a very distant kinsman, John, 2nd Marquess and 5th Earl of Breadalbane, suddenly found himself the prospective heir to a Scottish peerage and a vast estate. Another cousin, Major Charles William Campbell, disputed the claim, declaring John's father William to be illegitimate through the bigamous nature of the marriage between James Campbell and Elizabeth Maria Blanchard.

A lengthy court case ensued, which ended up before the Law Lords in the House of Lords in 1864. The fact that James Campbell had executed a legal document in 1793 at Gibraltar, declaring Elizabeth Blanchard to be his wife, and that during his long residence in Scotland (where co-habitation and mutual admission of espousal were legal proof of marriage) the marriage had been acknowledged by the family, led the Lords to declare, although not unanimously but by a majority, that John A. G. Campbell was the legal heir to the title and estates. Thus, the grandson of a penniless Chipping Sodbury woman became entitled to style himself 6th Earl of Breadalbane and Holland, Viscount of Tay and Paintland, and Lord Glenorchy, Beneraloch, Ormelie and Weick. More importantly, perhaps, was the inheritance of the family estates centred on Taymouth Castle, Perthshire, which, in 1883, consisted of 438,358 acres, yielding an annual income of £55,700. John Campbell enjoyed his earldom for seven years. He was succeeded in 1871 by his 20-year-old son Gavin, who, in 1885,

was created Marquess of Breadalbane by Queen Victoria, and was Lord Steward of her Household, during which period she also created him a Knight of the Garter⁷.

One wonders if the 19th century descendants of Christopher Ludlow's brother Ebenezer were aware of this controversial peerage case and its outcome. The Ludlows of Chipping Sodbury, doctors, bankers and by now also Church of England clergymen, began to desert their native town. Ebenezer Ludlow junior, M.A., (1777-1851) became Town Clerk of Bristol, and his two sons, Arthur and John, after a university education, were ordained and served as rectors of Littleton-on-Severn and Compton Greenfield respectively⁸.

REFERENCES

- 1 Gloucester Marriage Allegation: May 17 1681. Ann Ludlow's will proved at Gloucester, 1731.
- 2 Ebenezer Ludlow, apprenticed to Joseph Wear, tailor of Chipping Sodbury, 1712. Glos. R.O. D 3567 2/36.
- 3 Will of Daniel Webb (1644-1713), proved at Gloucester, 1713. Will of Henry Webb (his son, 1684-1726/7), proved at Gloucester 1726/7. G.R.O. D 2071 / B 6, Mar. 19 1722/3 lease of tenement to Ebenezer Ludlow.
- 4 Daniel Ludlow's apprenticeship, 1735. G.R.O. D 3567 2/36.
- 5 Pedigree charts of Nelme, Webb, Witchell, Davies and Jenner families, compiled by the author, have been deposited with the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London and the Jenner Museum, Berkeley, 1991.
- 6 Glos Notes & Queries, Vol. IV, 1893, p. 410 The Ludlow-Campbell elopement.
- 7 Complete Peerage Breadalbane.
- 8 Glos Notes & Queries, Vol. V, 1894, p. 443 Ludlow of Chipping Sodbury.