



Upper Eyth on  
Maiden Soule  
WALDESHARE  
WALTER CHARE  
SHEPHERD WOLD OR SIBERTSWOLD  
CHURCHILL B0  
Cox Hill  
Colred Street  
WALDER CHARE  
Napeheller Chapel  
Well Langdon in Ruins  
Pincham  
GURSON  
WESTL OF WEST

LYDDEN OR LYDDON  
Singlet  
Temple  
Little Water  
Great End  
EWELL  
The Warren  
Mimis  
BUCKLAND  
CHARTON or CHARLESTON  
Knightz Bottom  
RIVER STOUR

ALKHAM  
South Alkham  
RIVER MINIS  
Rhadagunde or Rhodagunde Abbe Ruins  
Mount Torvent  
Comb Farm  
DRELLINGORE  
Capell Hole  
West Alkham  
HOUGHAM  
Hougham Court  
DOVER  
The Devil's Drop  
Mucking  
Tashing Key  
Archill Fort

REDD  
The Butte  
D  
The Harbour  
Pier Head  
Switch House  
Queen Elizabeth's  
Fort



8 9 10 12



O U G H  
Winson East Light House  
West Light House  
South Foreland



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E



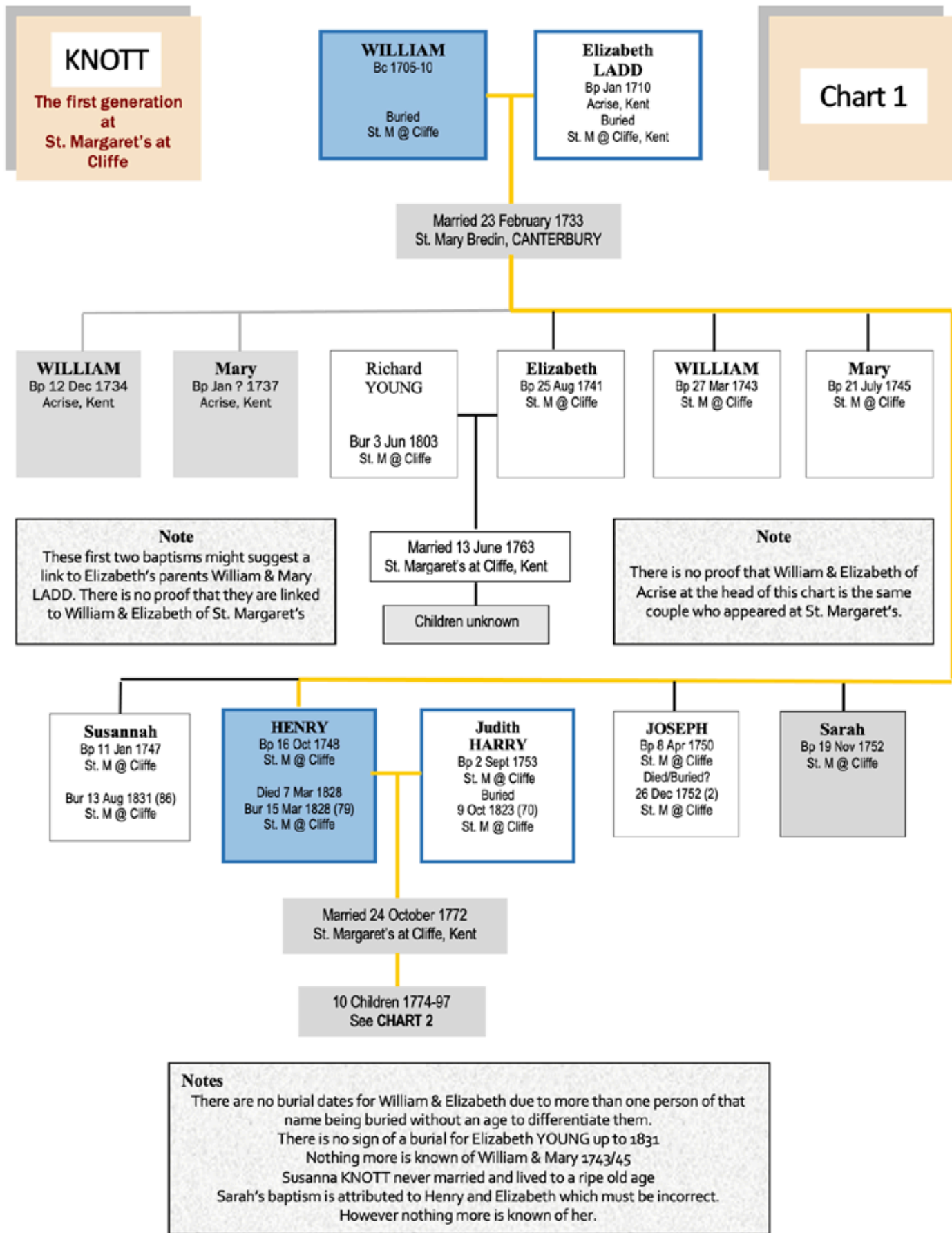
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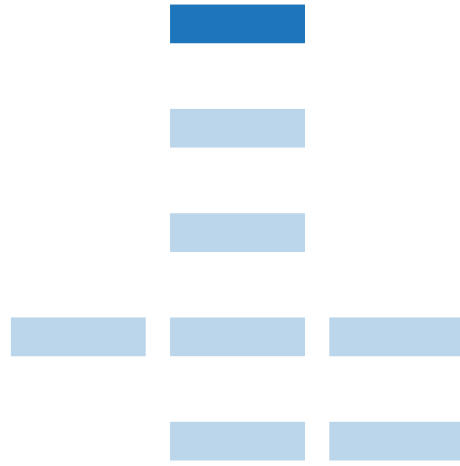


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One of the earliest printed maps of southeast Kent, published in 1769.



ABOVE: The family tree of what is thought to have been the first generation of Knott light keepers at South Foreland. As the first of the line, William (1705?-1776?) handed the baton to his son, Henry (1748-1828) upon his death, although this may have occurred earlier. KEY: Yellow is used to highlight the authors' direct line of descent; Blue boxes throughout this work indicate light keepers; Women married to keepers are white boxes with blue outlines; Grey boxes with names of people are for unproven relationships; marbled effect boxes contain notes.



# William & Elizabeth

Extracted from: *Light On The Forelands* by Ken & Clifford Trethewey, Jazz-Fusion Books (2022)

## Early 18th Century

The history of the first generation of Knott lighthouse keepers is beset with uncertainty; The Forelands are lit with coal fires; In this pre-industrial age, light structures are in the earliest stages of design and construction; Living conditions are primitive

### Keeping the Tradition Alive

The dramatized opening to the previous chapter did not actually happen. It was written to illustrate the existence of a family tradition that was described in detail and published in the early years of the 20th century, yet its author was unknown. We shall read in detail later that the family of George and Catherine Knott was a large one, and for the most part they were all known to each other and kept in touch with one another, but as in all families there are exceptions. One was Mary Ann or 'Polly' Knott who married a gunner from Dover Castle and disappeared from family view. The other was Henry Thomas Knott, the eldest of the family and the last light keeper who featured in the story. He seemed to distance himself from the rest of the family and became something of an enigma until his death in 1910.

For we two authors, the tradition was kept alive by Helen Knott (our Mother) whose father, Fredrick Rowland Knott, had been born in North Devon and as a child had been familiar with the lighthouse at Bull Point. As a child herself, Helen made regular visits to North Devon to see her 'Uncle' Herbert

Knott (her father's uncle) and 'Cousin' Frederick (Fred) Knott. These two men were both familiar with the published account of the tradition and had given talks on the subject in Barnstaple and surrounding area during the 1930s. Helen loved those stories of the light keepers, and became another torch bearer for the tradition which was passed on to us.

Nearly fifty years had passed since the 1930s and most of the 'old guard' had passed on, when, in 1979 we were unexpectedly discovered by a granddaughter of Henry Thomas Knott. Elizabeth Roberts became better known to us as 'Cousin Betty' and she had embarked upon a personal mission.

*"Having known all my life that my mother was the direct descendent of five generations of light keepers of the South Foreland Lighthouse in Kent, all named Knott, and that in some way or another they were connected to the family of Grace Darling, I thought the task of tracing them would be not too difficult."*<sup>1</sup>

So begins the first chapter of a little book that was privately published as a culmination of Cousin Betty's quest. It combined three lighthouse dynasties and not one – Darlings, Halls and Knotts. Yet, I could have chosen Betty's own words to describe our state

<sup>1</sup> Roberts, Elizabeth G: *They All Lived In Lighthouses*, p1.

of family knowledge in the early 1960s, when my brother Ken came home from school desperate for an interesting project. It was that same task that I suggested to him. Family folklore is one thing, but was there any truth in the old stories?

'Cousin Betty' was born Hilda Elizabeth Grace Ballyn in 1900/2Q at Holyhead. She was the first granddaughter to Henry Thomas Knott and she was also the first great granddaughter to George and Catherine Knott.

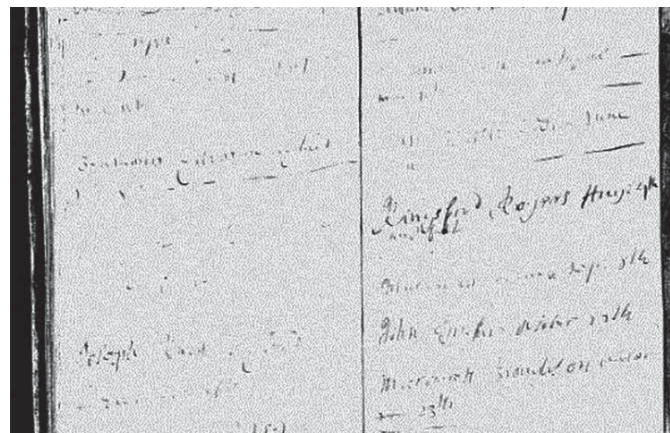
On the second page of Betty's book, she describes in some detail how the family tree blossomed from the parish registers of St. Margaret's with the unstinting patience of Mrs. Kathleen Arnold. She transcribed every single entry by the name of Knott from all the registers, and with some difficulty traced four generations of the family. Yet it was not complete and as I reviewed it in depth for the first time in 2003 with the new technological tool of being able to see the pages of those registers in the comfort of my own study, it was apparent that there were gaps, inconsistencies and inaccuracies that should be addressed.

It also gradually became apparent that it was someone within the family network of Henry Thomas Knott who had written the original account of the Knott family and submitted it to *Horner's Weekly* for publication in the first years of the 20th century.

My brother and I have spent much of our adult life searching for information about the South Foreland Lights. As our time gradually ebbs away, it is now our turn to pass the torch on and this is our way of doing it. What began in 1908/10 as a small article in a 'Penny Magazine' is now a significant story in pride of place in a 'coffee table' book. Enjoy the read.

### In The Beginning

The Knott Family is not the only family to be able to claim that they were keepers of the South Foreland lights, and although this book will feature the Knott family significantly it must also acknowledge all those other dedicated men (and, no doubt, sometimes women too) who spent the night hours tending the light in every kind of weather, on every day of the year. In modern times historians have changed their focus from the 'great and the good' to the ordinary working man, but in so doing have discovered in their researches that he was very rarely considered important enough to be given a name. As a consequence this would seemingly be an



ABOVE: A photo of the parish register at St. Margaret's at Cliffe showing the burial of Joseph Knott in 1753. Sadly, like so many others from these times, much of the record is illegible.

BELOW: A photo of the reference to the Knott family contained in Stevenson's work. Once again, the degree of certainty is diminished by confusion over the keeper's name, here Henry and not William, passed down through the family. [Stevenson D A, p103]

Probably the longest continuous family service as lightkeepers began with the appointment of Henry Knott at the Forelands in 1730: one of his descendants retired from service with Trinity House in 1910.

impossible task, yet every now and again something is uncovered that has to be recorded.

### Edward Beane, Mark Redman, George Sharpe and William Harris

There are only four men named as light keepers before the coal-fired beacons were superseded by the more traditional lighthouses in the early 1790s, but the reliability of the source of those names varies enormously.

In 1651 Charles II had been exiled following the Battle of Worcester and he was replaced by the Commonwealth, personally governed by Oliver Cromwell. Lights had been established at South Foreland in 1634, at the start of the troubles that led to the English Civil War. Yet, in 1652 Edward Beane was named as one of the light keepers at South Foreland. This discovery is attributed to Lt. Colonel Cavenagh, St. Margaret's first historian, who found a letter written by him to the Navy Commissioners saying that he would follow their orders in the keeping of the lights to the advantage of the Fleet. Of course, what is ignored is the level of literacy and the letter is more likely to have come from an Agent than the man tending the brazier. However, it must also be said that one Edward Beane was buried in the churchyard of St. Nicholas, Ringwould, a



ABOVE: The Wren-designed Queen Anne building of Greenwich Hospital, the Trustees of which owned and managed the lights of the Forelands from 1715 to 1832.

neighbouring parish, on the 1st October 1681. The St. Margaret's Village History Society archive contains a handwritten list of names that is relatively modern and anonymous, and following Beane it names a Mark Readman (1709) and there was indisputably a Mark Redman (sic) in the parish register in that year with a wife whose name was illegible. They had baptised a daughter, Ann, with no further entries to be found. Mark Redman is a distinctive name for the 17th century and a baptism was found in that name in the church of St. Mary, Walmer to William and Rebecca Redman on the 2nd March 1689. A search for a marriage led back to St. Margaret's at Cliffe and confounded the situation when it was dated 18th January 1702. It was between Mark Redman and Elizabeth Christian, but as it was in transcription I believe that from the style of writing of the day that 1708 has been confused with 1702 and transcribed incorrectly. Again, the document that linked the name with the occupation is unknown, but it is left to stand as a possibility.

The name about which there can be no dispute is that of George Sharp(e), of whom we will read later, but he began work in about 1691, so he was contemporary with Mark Redman and might well have been a colleague.

William Harris is the last name on the list and is not only specifically dated 1753, but it is said that he

was serving on the Low Light. The name and date is linked with William Knott, but again the source of the information is unknown.

### **In Search Of The 18th c Knott Family At St. Margaret's At Cliffe**

**I**n the 19th century, three generations in a family of light keepers is easily found, but five generations is a different matter. According to the family tradition it all began in 1730 and the 18th century is every family historians' nightmare. My opening words made it all sound so simple. The work has already been done by others, but I have focused upon the omissions and the inconsistencies which I will clarify in this section as I unravel the story of the Knott family.

The year 1730 was a year of opportunity. As the images in our artwork show, the light structures were primitive at this time. Earlier, glazed lanterns had been installed at South Foreland in order to afford the keepers of the two braziers some protection from the elements, but if the keepers were grateful, then the mariners were not. The glass was very poor and the keepers' practices insufficient to provide an effective light. As the complaints escalated, in 1730 the owner of the lights, the trustees of Greenwich Hospital, took the decision to



ABOVE: In this old postcard we are looking southwest across St. Margaret's Bay. A significant collection of houses exist at beach level. Today they are mostly gone. The village of St. Margaret's at Cliffe is out of the picture on the right. The South Foreland is in the centre left and the lighthouses are in the distance on the cliff top. Unlike today, the grassy slopes are mostly devoid of undergrowth and trees. Notice the three main public access roads on the cliffs. (See pq).

BELOW: This view is of St. Margaret's Bay looking northeast viewing the beach from the opposite direction from that shown above.





ABOVE: The church of St. Martin at Acrise is where the first record of our Knott family was located.

remove the glazing.

There was another reason that the lights did not shine so brightly – incompetence – and one keeper is said to have paid the price with his dismissal. The Agent at Deal was now looking for a replacement who came in the form of William Knott – or so the story goes.

Those who have searched the parish registers before me could not find William Knott in St. Margaret's at Cliffe and my first sight of the registers presented me with the reason for that failure. They were almost illegible (see pq) and it was not only age and neglect which was the cause. The incumbents (or their scribes) had no sense of order and their penmanship can only be described as a scrawl.

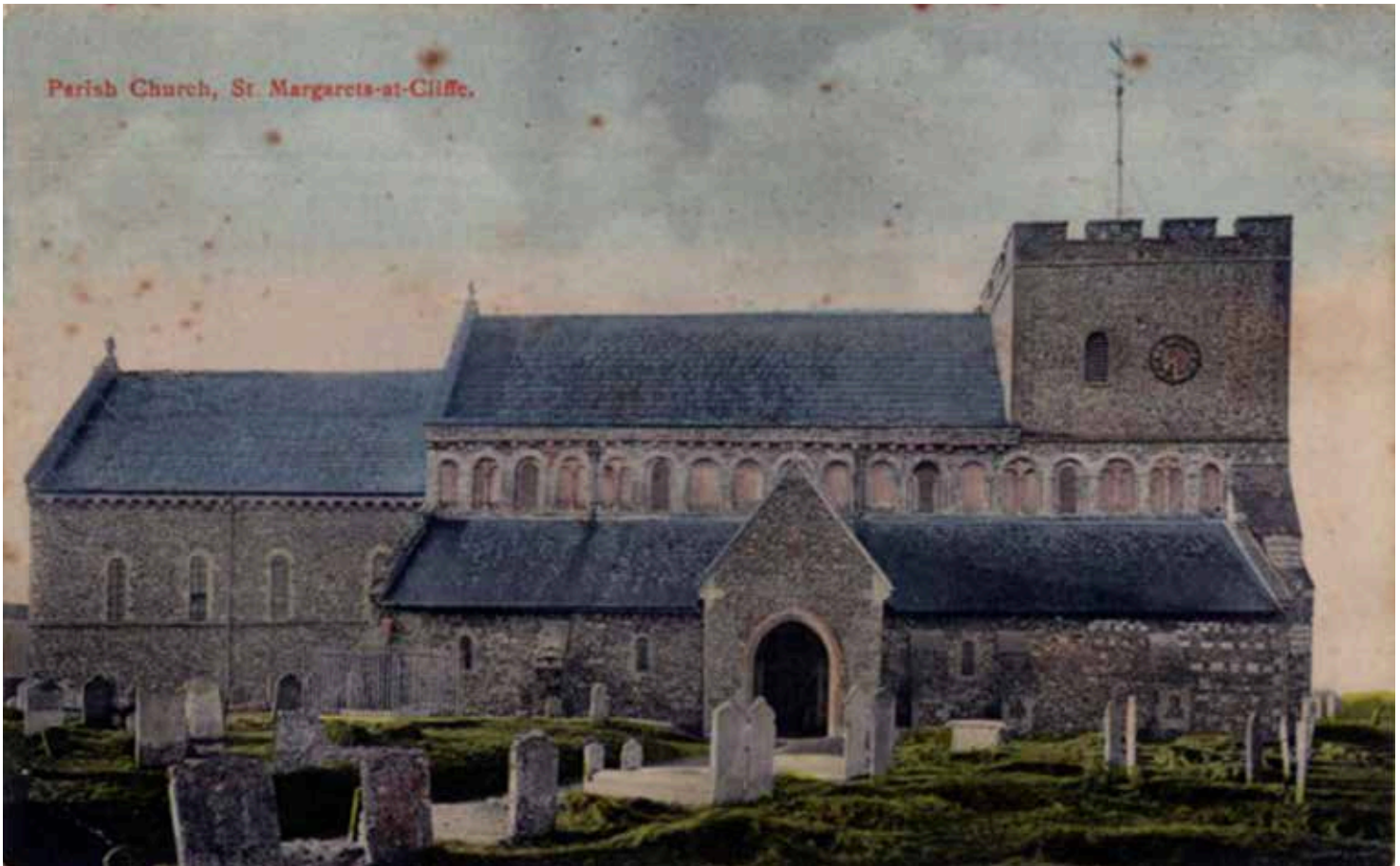
Three events critical to a description of a life are birth, marriage and death. It was the period from 1700 to 1730 where I was expecting to find births or marriages. I found neither, which was not only disappointing, but also perplexing. It was perplexing in the sense that the only entry for a Knott was the marriage between John Knott and Mary Wraithe on the 27 November 1695. This was compounded by the birth of a son, John, baptised on the 2 September 1699. This would then allow for the steady appearance of more baby Knotts at regular intervals; sadly, nothing was found.

St. Margaret's at Cliffe was a small parish in

common with most of the other rural parishes within a 10-mile radius and consequently these life events were not many in number during the course of a year. A minister in a parish in this area was not a busy man. This meant that the recording of these events did not occupy very much space in a ledger and it should have been straightforward to spot the surname, even in a handwriting that was difficult to read. It was not. There were pages where the diluted ink had faded to invisibility. There were pages that had been despoiled by damp. The ledgers had also come apart causing detached pages to be 'misplaced.' As a consequence, so was my search – lost!

A recently discovered report for the National Trust, the new owners of the light, purports to have carried out research into the Knott Family and arrives at conclusions that I cannot replicate. It randomly selects a marriage on the 17th February 1703 at St. Margaret's at Cliffe between a William Knott and an Elizabeth Lawrence. William is alleged to have been born in Barham in 1680. The Parish Register that is currently available on-line has just four marriages in that year which are illegible at the bottom of a page. Turning the page reveals subsequent blank pages. It is also clear that there is a second register on-line capturing 1705, but the preceding pages are also illegible. So the statement cannot be corroborated.





ABOVE: An old postcard from the 1890s of the parish church of St. Margaret's at Cliffe viewed from the north.

NOTE: Contrary to the style of the caption on the card, our convention throughout is not to hyphenate the name of the village, but to include the apostrophe.

BELOW: The church as seen in 1985.



The next assertion concerns a son to William and Elizabeth, baptised William in June 1706; it also cannot be supported for a different reason. There were only three baptisms in 1706 and all can be clearly read with 1705 and 1707 on either side of them. They were baptisms to Marsh, Gilpin and Spratt - not a Knott in sight.

There is a moderately large incidence of the name Knott in southeast Kent, and it is possible to match common names like William and Elizabeth together. I had already entertained the possibility that William Knott had been born in another parish, for there are instances of a Knott presence in most of the adjacent parishes. Nevertheless, only one parish provided a suitable candidate, Northbourne parish. This parish was ideally located about one mile inland from Deal where the lighthouse agent was based, and just six miles from St. Margaret's at Cliffe. Although the parish was agricultural, Deal was a mariners' town and a community that could provide someone suitable to be a light keeper.

A child named William was baptised to William and Elizabeth Knott on the 15th February 1712 and within the target range. The register also revealed that a William Knott had died and was buried at Northbourne in 1730, a perfect match for a son's change of occupation. However, that son never left Northbourne. He died there in 1785 and was buried by the parish as a pauper.

I cannot say that this search has been exhaustive, yet I have looked for a suitable William Knott in all the nearby parishes. I am convinced that there is little realistic possibility of finding one William Knott who might have been a candidate for the new task of light keeper of the South Foreland Light.

The next objective is to uncover from the St. Margaret's Register exactly when a William Knott appeared in its pages. Before any search for a marriage can begin, the name of the lady involved should be known. A search could be conducted without it, and in a small parish that might produce the right result, but in St. Margaret's at Cliffe there was no such entry for a William Knott (or any other Knott) in the vicinity of 1730, the year when the employment of a Knott as a light keeper was alleged to have begun. In fact, a single page covers the period 1730 to 1746 and there are no marriages recorded for 1730 to 1734, but I cannot over-emphasize just how difficult that exercise was to conduct for the reasons I have already explained. However, it was not entirely fruitless.

In 1745 an easily legible baptism was found that attracted immediate attention. It was a child,

Mary, to William Knott and his wife Elizabeth. They had arrived, but from where is not yet known. The register soon revealed four more baptisms to William and Elizabeth culminating in 1752. But these entries exemplify the eccentricity of the keeper of the register. Following Mary was Susanna in 1747, Henry in 1748, Joseph in 1750 and Sarah in 1752, and all were sandwiched between marriages that ended in 1746, two pages of random burials and more burials that began in 1706. It was as if the minister of the day had found some empty space in the ledger and decided to use it up. But there were two more earlier entries. One was barely legible as William Knot in March 1743, and the other was in transcript only, as the pages defied scrutiny. It was Elizabeth in 1741 and it brought the family total to seven children.

However, there is another problem. The baptisms spanned a period from 1741 to 1755, but there was a gap in the years 1752 to 1754 and all historians know what happened then. The British Calendar Act (1751) decreed that the Gregorian calendar was to be exchanged for the Julian calendar and 11 days had to be eliminated. Wednesday 2 September was followed by Thursday 14 September and the new financial year remains to this day as the 5 April instead of Quarter Day on the 25th March which was traditionally the day when rents were due, salaries paid and labour contracts agreed.

Many parish registers show evidence of this change which was not readily welcomed by the population in general, and it has affected the records of more than one family member. But at St. Margaret's, as in many other parishes, pages from the registers curiously disappeared. Meanwhile, I must return to the search now focused upon the marriage of William and Elizabeth which is not apparent in St. Margaret's at Cliffe or in its immediately adjacent parishes where at least one family of Knotts can often be found.

### The Knotts Of Acrise

In her book about the Knott Family, Betty Roberts wrote:

*"Thanks to the research of Mr. Duncan Harrington I heard that William Knott and Elizabeth Ladd, both of Acrise, had married in Canterbury's St. Mary Bredin by Licence in 1733."*<sup>2</sup>

So, what are we to make of this?

St. Martin's Church, Acrise is 14 miles west of the South Foreland light in the hinterland behind Folkestone. It is also 13 miles from St. Mary Bredin

<sup>2</sup> Roberts, p9.



ABOVE LEFT: The Knott family clearly established a reputation in St. Margaret's at Cliffe.

ABOVE RIGHT: The limestone gravestone of George Sharpe (1748) in the churchyard of St. Margaret's at Cliffe.

The now illegible inscription once read: Here lieth the body of / GEORGE SHARPE / late of this parish / he / departed this life February / the 4th 1748 in the 83 year / of his age / He was light keeper 56 years / in ye South Foreland. He left / 3 sons and 1 daughter viz / George / Vincent, John / and Elizabeth / . Grave 327 in grid square W14.

in Canterbury and to be married by Licence was a very unusual decision and no more so than its cost. In 1730 it was 5 shillings – almost one week's wages. However that is what the record states and the date of the marriage was Saturday 23rd February 1733. I would not have chosen to search in this area, but I also must remember that Harrington did not have the benefit of digital search tools to help him. He was following some personal instinct. Yet, even with modern aids, I have failed to find any suitable marriage between a William Knott and an Elizabeth. His discovery is the only one I have seen and I accept it at face value. As a consequence I made a thorough search of the Acrise Parish Registers with the following interesting results.

The parish was a little over 1000 acres, equivalent to the size of three moderate farms and in 1851 it could only boast 25 houses so it was very small. One hundred and fifty years earlier – in 1700 – the pages of the parish register held the name Knott, but only briefly.

Three baptisms were conducted by the Rector Thomas Rymer for Henry and Mary Knott in 1711, 1713 and 1715 and, as I was expecting, two baptisms were conducted for William and Mary Ladd in 1710 and 1711. The entry for Elizabeth Ladd is badly written, leaving the date in 1710 uncertain. Their second baptism of John in 1711 was entered immediately preceding the entry for Henry Knott which was dated the 10 August 1711, but although

Elizabeth's date is unclear they certainly were not baptised together. However it does suggest that the two families were living as neighbours in Acrise for a short time.

Unfortunately the three Knotts – Henry (1711), Vincent (1713) and John (1715) do not embrace a William and the parish is so small that all the baptisms from 1700 to 1720 are contained within five scrawled pages. These pages, however, suggest another situation in that neither family was a long-term resident, unlike four other family names which appear and re-appear continually. The Knotts and the Ladds were only resident in the parish over the years 1710 to 1715. Of course, 1710 was the year following the Great Frost of the winter of 1708/09, and a subsequent famine and the decimating effect of that winter may have caused them to leave in search of a better living.

### A Marriage Of Uncertainty

Once again the story is incomplete and the evidence is deficient and it is time to move the discussion forward to the Marriage by Licence at the church of St. Mary Bredin, on the southern boundary of old Canterbury, in 1733. This very small church was found at the apex of two main Kent arteries. Stone Street was the Roman Road from Hythe to Canterbury and the Roman Watling Street, otherwise known as the Dover Road (now the A2),



ABOVE: More correctly called St. Margaret's at Cliffe, this old postcard shows the centre of the village that was home to the Knott family for so many years. The road straight ahead goes to the cliffs and the beach, whilst the lighthouses are found about 1.5 miles (2 km) down one of several roads to the right (see pq).

speaks for itself. Acrise, at the base of the triangle, was on the road to nowhere, but Watling Street was about six miles to the north of their nearest village, Densole, and reached Canterbury close to the church of their intended marriage.

The registers of St. Mary Bredin are not available on-line, but the transcribers of the 100 or more marriage entries in the period 1730 to 1740 have added frequent notes which suggest difficulty in interpreting the pages. In the shorter period of 1732 to 1734 in which our target marriage occurred there were just 33 marriages. Not one of them involved a couple in which one of the pair came from Acrise, except 'our' couple. So there was no obvious link between the two churches. A history of the church reveals that it had no incumbent between 1670 and 1737 and it functioned with a succession of curates, a well known and not unusual situation where marriages were conducted and no questions were asked.

If this was, indeed, the situation then why was a license necessary? Why did they not marry in their own parish church? It would have cost them nothing. The reasons for hurried marriages or use of a parish church that was not their own are clear. Usually a baby was on the way, but that was not the case with William and Elizabeth. Then there was the situation in which the parents of one or both of the young people were against the marriage. That, too, does not seem to apply to our couple, as we shall see. The third, most common reason was that there was not enough time to fulfill the residency stipulation

of the parish, usually because the groom was in the Army or the Navy. This residency varied from four weeks to six months as there was no uniformity until Banns were introduced in 1752. Yet William was a member of neither service. So how does this apply to William and Elizabeth? I have no answer to that question, but Betty Roberts suggested that William was a mariner.

Family historians and archivists seem to agree that these licenses, in general, do not survive. Most were written at a cathedral office, sealed and handed to the couple. When it was presented to the minister at the chosen church it was opened, read and put aside in the vestry. Inevitably they would eventually be 'tidied up' and destroyed. It was also common for the wedding to be conducted on the spot, shortly after the appearance of the couple on the clergyman's doorstep. St. Mary Bredin was just a short 15-minute walk from Canterbury Cathedral in Rose Lane, close to Watling Street.

The first child born to our newly wedded couple was a son, inevitably named after his father. William was baptised on the 12th December 1734 in Acrise Parish Church, illustrating the point that neither pregnancy nor family disapproval were the reasons for the long journey to Canterbury. Neither were they just passing through the parish, as a second child was taken for baptism at St. Martin's in 1737. Their first daughter was named in recognition of Elizabeth's mother, Mary, and baptised on the 10th July, but it was at this point that the trail ceases.

If there is one thing that a family historian must

cultivate, it is an open mind sprinkled with a dash of scepticism, and that has taxed me to the limit with this investigation. There are a number of factors with which I am not comfortable, but, on balance, I believe that it is probable that William and Elizabeth of Acrise and William and Elizabeth of St. Margaret's at Cliffe are the same couple. In doing so, I acknowledge that Duncan Harrington had reason to recommend his discovery to Betty Roberts forty years ago, when researching archives was an entirely different experience that took the researcher closer to the source than is possible today.

### **The Knotts Of St. Margaret's At Cliffe**

Transposing the Acrise Knott Family those few miles across Kent to St. Margaret's at Cliffe was not a simple matter of dovetailing the two together. There was a major obstacle in the form of two children named William and Mary overlapping at both places. There are no burials in their names at Acrise - indeed, there were no more than eight or so burials each year. One male, Adam Ladd, was buried in 1736 and he had been 'brought from Dover,' according to the burial entry. I wonder whether it was a funeral that Elizabeth Knott (née Ladd) had to attend.

The inability to effect a smooth transition has always undermined my confidence in a conclusion proposed by others. My conclusion is that the St. Margaret's story begins in 1741 with the birth and baptism of Elizabeth Knott to a young couple called William and Elizabeth. Where they had come from is not known with certainty. We must remember that migrating from parish to parish was not simply a question of walking down the road on a whim. Every parish was responsible for the care and welfare of its parishioners and those born and baptised in the parish. Newcomers were not welcome unless they carried a Settlement Certificate from their old parish - a guarantee to accept them back if they fell on hard times. Every newcomer had to demonstrate that they were self-sufficient and would not be a drain on parish resources. In other words, William had to have a job. Well, we think we know what that job entailed: we think that he was a light keeper.

### **A Typical Working Life**

The last baptism, barely legible in the register for 1752, shows a girl, Sarah, born to one Henry Knot and a wife whose first name is illegible. If it was Elizabeth Knott then she was 42 years old when she gave birth to her last child, who was baptised

on the 10th November 1752. Her husband, William, was probably a little older, although no baptism has ever been found for him, but was this baptism in our family? I believe it was for there is no suggestion of any other couple named Knott in the parish at this time.<sup>3</sup>

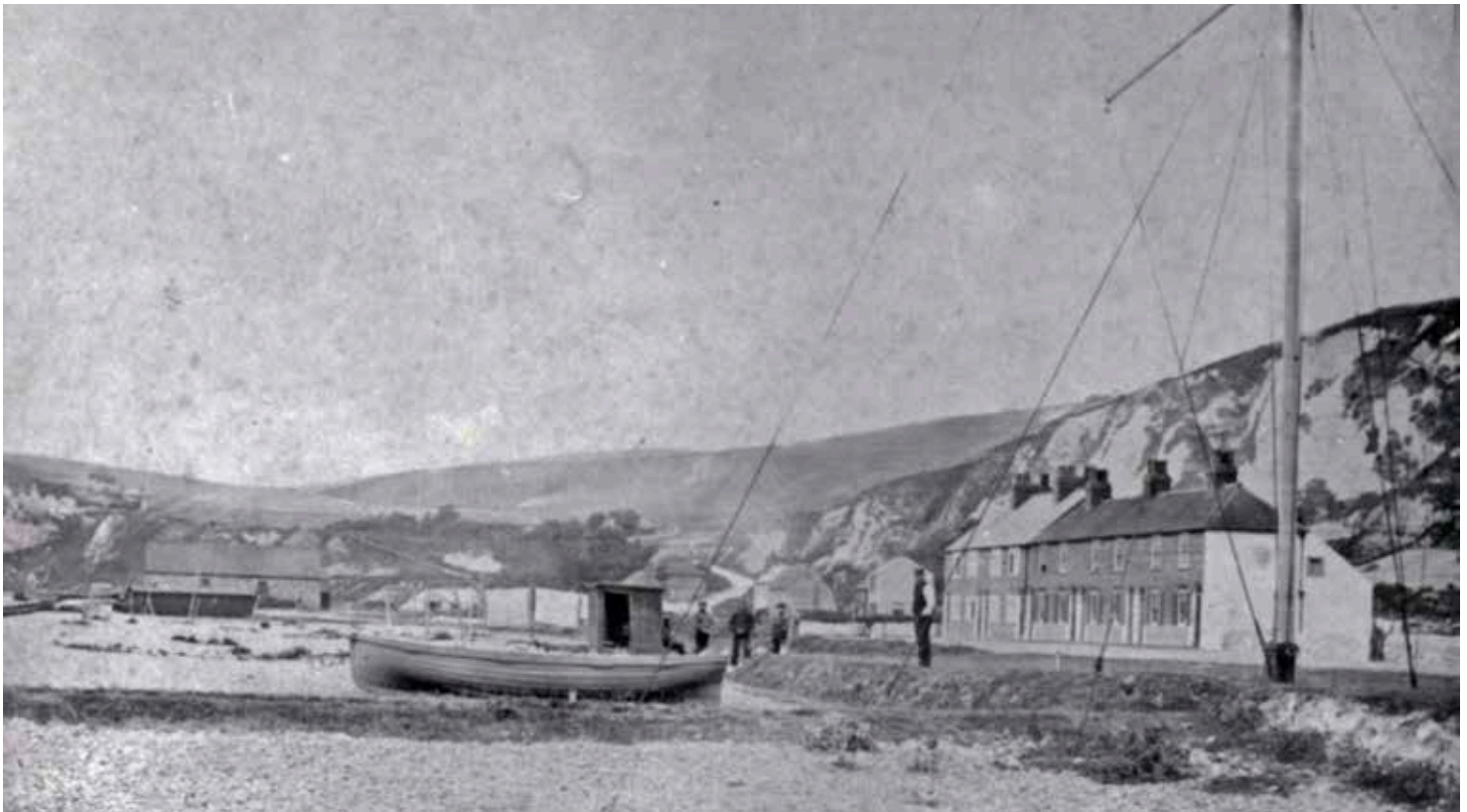
In the mid-18th century our couple was well into middle-age, with a family of seven children to feed and clothe on a wage that has been suggested was little more than £1 per month. Keeping the light burning effectively all night was no simple matter, and there was no one else with whom to share the night hours. It is true that William shared the task with a colleague, but they had a brazier each to keep alight and a headstone in the churchyard of St. Margaret's reveals the identity of that other keeper - George Sharpe (sometimes Sharp).

### ***George and Elizabeth Sharpe***

George Sharpe died on Sunday 4th February 1748 and was buried four days later on Thursday 8th February. His headstone reveals that he was in his 83rd year and he had been a keeper of the South Foreland light for 56 years. This means that he had begun work in 1691, a date which suggests that he could have been one of the two keepers mentioned in the new lease of 1690 (see pq), and one of those who were concerned about being taken by the Press Gang. If that is the case then he had already worked for fifty years before William arrived to work with him, when George was already 74 years old. Infant mortality in George's family was exceptional as he is thought to have had 11 children between 1688 and 1708 and the four children named on his headstone were the survivors. A fifth child appears in the pages of the parish registers baptised to George and Elizabeth Sharp. Judith was that exception (1698), but other entries are George (1700), an illegible name in 1704, and Elizabeth (1708). Dates are lacking for John and Vincent, also named on the headstone. Elizabeth is thought to have died in 1732, but this untidy state of knowledge is entirely due to faded and illegible pages in the parish register that defy recognition.

The year of George Sharpe's death was also the year that saw the birth of Henry Knott, the family member who was alleged to have taken on the role from his father when his time came. It begs the question - which of George Sharpe's sons took

<sup>3</sup> This problem of illegibility in the registers is probably the source of confusion that led to Stevenson naming the first keeper at South Foreland as Henry Knott (see p74).



ABOVE: An early photograph of St. Margaret's Bay in 1865. The lighthouses are on the top of the cliffs, out of shot on the left.

his role as keeper of the light? It is interesting to contemplate the difficulties these two men in keeping two lights burning at a roughly equivalent brilliance. Each fire was totally dependent on a draught from the wind that came from all points of the compass. A northerly wind found them slightly sheltered by the land behind; winds from the east or west put them in line with one another. (See the map of 1769 on pq that names them as the East and West Lighthouse). To be downwind of a smoky fire must have been uncomfortable; fog presented its own problems. The mariners in the Channel would be hoping - indeed, expecting - to see a light, and no more so than on a hazy, misty, even foggy night when the keepers had to work hard to keep the light as bright as possible, whilst not attracting the ire of the Agent from Deal concerning their excessive coal consumption. It was a tough job, both mentally and physically, every night, seven nights a week. Yet it could be idyllic on a short, clear night in June with a friendly moon for company, in complete contrast to a long November night, lashing with rain, driven by gale force winds that constantly threaten to extinguish the light.

Deliveries of coal at the lighthouses were a regular occurrence, arranged by the Agent in Deal, and in that respect the two families were fortunate in having a ready supply of fuel for warmth and cooking, but nothing has been said about

kindling wood. South Foreland was the windswept conclusion to the North Downs. It was high and mostly barren of trees. Yet the keepers' braziers had to be lit every night, and a ready pile of dry wood was essential. Much of it must have come from the bay as driftwood, even wreckage from foundered ships, but that could not be relied upon. So my thoughts turned to seaweed. Dried seaweed was hauled up the cliff in large metal buckets that had carved vertical grooves into the cliff face over centuries. The farmers used it to spread on their fields, but would it burn? It is also said that these grooves were used to lower clandestine lamps, which could not be seen from the landward side, in order to signal to the smugglers that were an intrinsic part of this coastal scene.

By 1760, William would have been about 50 years old and he had been the keeper of the light for 20, perhaps 30 years. William and Elizabeth's family were fast growing up and marriage was in the wind for 21-year old Elizabeth. She married Richard Young in the parish church on the 13th June 1763 when her younger brother Henry was 14 years old. He had been one of three sons, but following the death of Joseph (2) and the lack of information about William, Henry was the only remaining son on whom the family's hopes were pinned. Would he take on the unforgiving task of a light keeper? We shall see.