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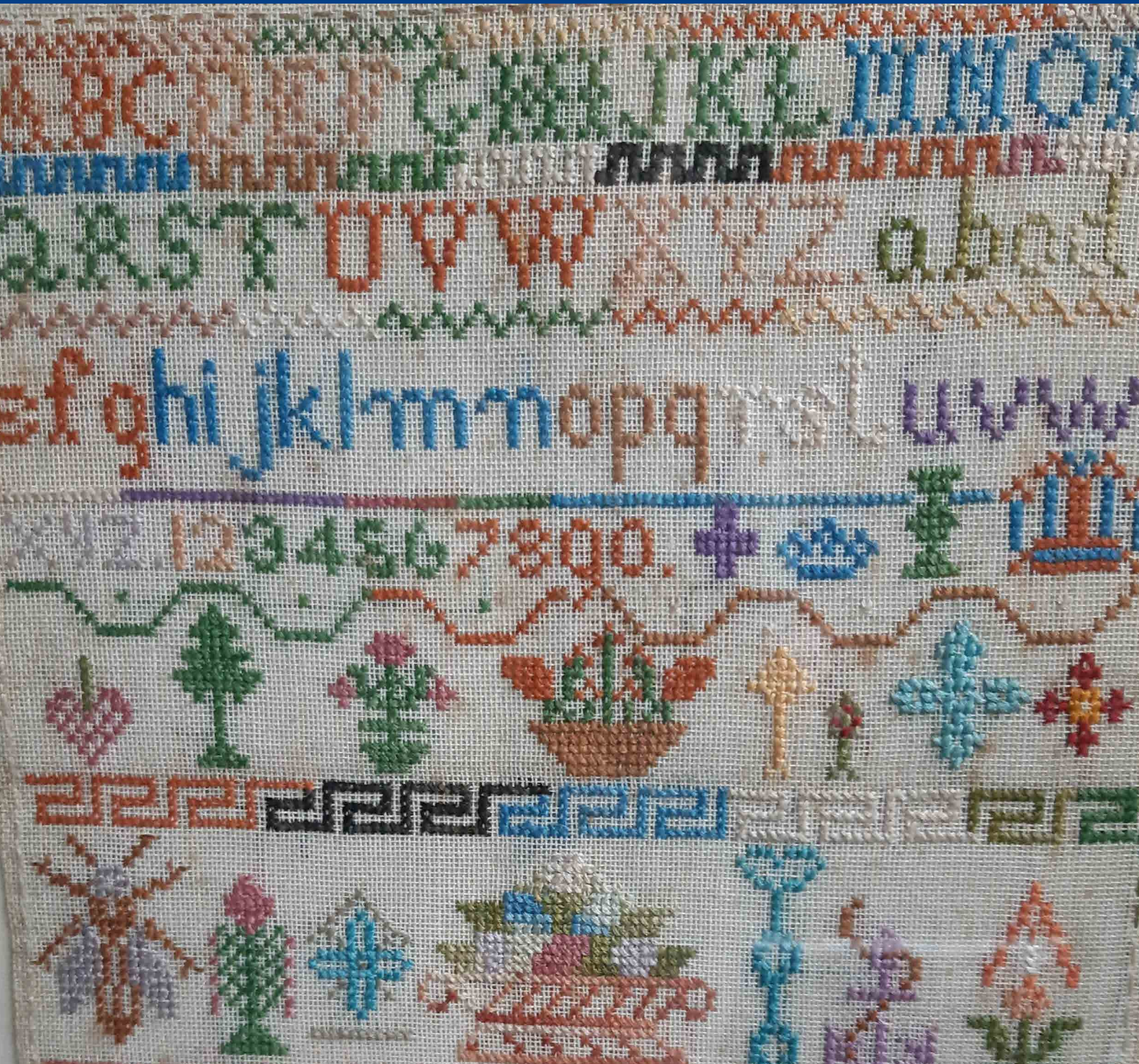
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# “Things”, or Beyond the Paper Trail

by Naomi Tarrant (5192)

Once the basics of a family tree have been produced or a one-name study well established, other ways to extend and enrich the work can be explored. Searching eBay and other online sites has replaced the serendipity of trawling through antique and second-hand shops for possible relics of our ancestors. ‘Things’ can create an exciting new dimension to the paper-based study of ancestors which is what most of our work entails. One type of object I have been involved with in the last 30 or so years are samplers, small embroidered pieces of cloth usually worked by girls between the ages of 7 and 14. Unlike a good many objects they nearly always have the maker’s name but they are often disregarded although there is a good deal of information that can be extracted from them.

Before retirement I was a museum curator in the National Museums Scotland with care of the collection of Scottish and European clothing and textiles. One of my hobbies since the late 1960s has been my own family history, which quite honestly was not progressing very much until computers came along. However, work and hobby coincided as part of the work of a curator is researching the history and personal story behind the objects in the collection. It is much easier to identify objects than it is to recover their history if there is no back story, that is provenance. Clothes and textiles in particular have often lacked this information, partly because people forget or have never known who items belonged to, sometimes because of embarrassment or sometimes because to be seen to give, or worse to sell, such items to a museum, has been viewed with distaste. The economic history of Britain is based to a large degree on the story of the fibres that make up wool, linen and cotton cloths and their export. To view the fabrics entirely for their design or the technology behind their production, is to miss out on their economic and social importance in the lives of our ancestors. The reason for ignoring the wider context can probably be explained by the rather tight specialism that academic study involved in the past and textiles suffered especially because they are often dirty and crumpled, clothing rarely surviving in the state seen in portraits for example. Museum curators interested in the wider picture have fought an uphill battle at times to correct some of the misconceptions about clothing and have also received criticism for not looking at researching more widely, for example the clothing of the poorer parts of society, which of course rarely survive. In short you cannot win!

By the early 1990s genealogy was beginning to become popular and although a fair amount of work had been done tracing my own family there were no Scottish ancestors so I had little idea of Scottish genealogy. It seemed very appropriate to do a course at Stirling University on Scottish genealogy to help research on items in the museums’ collections. Not having any Scottish ancestors proved a problem as some of the exercises set for the course required research into actual families. This was solved by taking pieces in the collection that seemed particularly interesting to explore genealogically. They included Mrs Jane Gaugain, the author in the 1840s of one of the earliest hand knitting manuals, a linen damask weaver, John Ochiltree, who proudly wove his details into a set of napkins, and a large sampler worked by Marion Raith, aged 13 in 1799. At a later date she also included the deaths of her parents and her eldest daughter, worked in black. These three items proved to be helpful in introducing me to the problems, pitfalls and pleasures of Scottish genealogy, each resulting in a satisfactory amount of

information.<sup>1,2</sup> Marion’s sampler inspired me to look more closely at the Museum’s collection of samplers, about 200 in total, and later to extend the study.<sup>3</sup>

## Samplers

Samplers were originally worked to teach examples of stitches and patterns for embroidery and were probably made by both professionals and amateurs. Those that survive today in Britain have nearly all been worked by girls between the ages of about 7 to 14 and date from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Samplers can also be found coming from most European countries and the Americas, and in the more distant past from the Nazca and Paracas culture of South America and the Islamic era of medieval Egypt. Like all trades and crafts embroidery was taught by serving an apprenticeship and in London the Broiderers’ Company was the guild which maintained the craft and its standards.<sup>4</sup> The professional embroidery workshops were responsible in the medieval period for the elaborate ecclesiastical garments which were prized as gifts to popes and higher clergy throughout Europe and known today as *Opus Anglicanum*, as well as elaborate pieces for the royal court.<sup>5</sup> No samplers survive from these workshops, but the intricacy of the work would have necessitated that the needleworkers practiced their stitches before being allowed to use the expensive materials from which the pieces were made.

In order to work out what was Scottish in a sampler it was necessary to look at those made elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> Having a large collection to work with aided this review and eventually led to recognising some particular traits. Scottish samplers had a distinct advantage over those from elsewhere in the British Isles as they tended to have a good many initials, including those of the mother which, as women did not lose their own name on marriage, are very helpful in sorting out the parents. The other initials might include siblings or grandparents and later on possibly class mates. There were also a few distinctive motifs and the alphabets were often repeated more than once worked in alternating red and green threads and using different stitches. The metrical version of psalms was also slightly different in the Church of Scotland version, but the selection of texts found is wider than often realised. As an almost exclusively female occupation samplers have mostly been looked at as examples of embroidery and in America are regarded as ‘Folk Art’, which they are not. They follow the contemporary culture of decorative embroidery and were worked by girls after they had learnt the rudiments of plain sewing, that is the making of clothing, particularly underwear, and the sewing of household linen. These items required their owners’ names to be worked on them for identification when they were laundered and the sampler provided the means of working out how to do letters and numbers as neatly as possible. Samplers evolved over time as the education of girls moved from the home into schools. This aspect was common to samplers worked in all parts of Britain, but the lack of the kind of distinguishing features found on Scottish samplers has inhibited an overall study of English samplers, although there are one or two studies of individual areas or types.

So many museum collections and auction houses are now online that it is perhaps worthwhile for one-namers to trawl through them to look for items which might be related to their study. Many

samplers were worked at institutions that have a distinctive, style such as Ackworth, the Quaker school near Pontefract, or the Bristol Orphanage. Others name their local village school or record a young ladies' school otherwise unknown unless an advertisement is found in a local newspaper. Many samplers that end up in sales or in large private or public collections, are discarded by their original owners because they cannot work out who the maker is and believe there is no connection to their own family. What happens to items at death is a complicated business when dealing with the more ephemeral items left behind. Maiden or widowed aunts and sisters might have moved into the homes of other members of their family and when they died their effects were either sold or languished in the home until it was sold. One such complicated trail is described in an article by Dorothy Loudon over a sampler her husband was bequeathed by a cousin. She eventually deduced that her husband's second cousin had inherited the sampler from another part of her ancestry, which had nothing to do with the Loudon side.<sup>7</sup> A pair of samplers in the National Museums Scotland were worked by a brother and sister who both died young. An older sister appears to have scooped these up when her family home was dismantled after her parents' death and they were incorporated into her husband's family's collections. The problem of who worked them was complicated because her father had changed his name on inheriting an estate so the names on the samplers were not immediately recognisable as belonging to the family.

On the whole samplers are usually within a standard format and size, which changes over time, but there are so many variations within the format that samplers are rarely exactly the same as each other. One group of English samplers that have been studied in detail are from Norwich. They share some common styles and motifs and the family history of many of the girls has been revealed. Another detailed study has been done into a group of samplers which all have the same I. H. initials worked fairly prominently on them as well as the maker's name. This has been revealed as the teacher's initials standing for Judah Hayle, who lived in Ipswich in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Examples of these samplers can be found in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge and the V&A Museum in London. There are other groups of samplers which might share a common teacher, school or place of where they were worked.

### The Drowley sampler

One English sampler I own is not a family one and has led to some lock-down time research. It proves that it is possible to find out a great deal about an English sampler maker even without a place of origin, but it helps if there is an unusual or rare surname. The initial aim of this exercise was to see if there were any descendants of the maker so I could offer to return it to them. The sampler in question is quite large, worked on fairly coarse open weave canvas in coloured embroidery cotton. with eight bands of letters, numbers and small motifs and the lower third including the name and date, C. A. Drowley 1933. It was given to me by my parents' next-door neighbour, a local retired farmer's wife, who couldn't remember how she had acquired it, so it came with no provenance.

The way the sampler is marked with initials and not a first name is intriguing as it suggests an adult woman or even a man, and the date is late. The name Drowley is not a common one, but a quick search easily found a marriage for Charles Edward Drowley to Catherine Anna Bostock in 1897 at St Mary's Church, Weaverham, Cheshire, the next-door village to where my parents had lived, so this appeared to be the most likely candidate. It also opened up several unusual surnames in the maker's and her husband's families which provided an added 'rabbit hole' to disappear



down as I sought to put Catherine Anna in a wider context. After finishing the research and seeking photographs to illustrate this article, I discovered a book by a local historian which confirmed my research, so felt vindicated in pursuing the tale behind the sampler.<sup>9</sup>

Catherine Anna was born in 1875 in Cockerham, Lancashire and baptised there on 14 February 1875, so she was nearly 60 when she made the sampler, which was a puzzle. She was the second child of James Berry Bostock and his wife Jane. Her husband, Charles Edward Drowley, whom she married on 30 June 1897 at St Mary's, Weaverham, Cheshire, was described as an organist in the marriage register. He was born in Ashford, Kent, baptised there on 28 June 1874 the youngest child of William and Elizabeth Drowley. Catherine and Charles were married in Weaverham although they were both living in Usk, Monmouthshire, when the Banns were called. Both of them were far from home but probably met in St Peter's, Broadstairs, Kent, as in the 1891 census they are both living in that parish with their parents. Catherine's occupation is not given in the marriage register but in 1891 she is described as 17 and a pupil teacher, so she was probably working in the village school in Usk. Charles is recorded in some of the local papers as performing at concerts, including a charity concert on 19 January 1900 where he sang *The Absent-Minded Beggar*. This must have been his last appearance because he was admitted to the Abergavenny Lunatic Asylum and is recorded there in the 1901 census. Sadly he died there in 1910 as the result of choking on a piece of bread according to the inquest at Abergavenny on 9 April and was presumably buried in the Asylum's cemetery. He is described as having a good job as a clerk in Newport and was organist at Usk church, having been admitted to the asylum in 1900 apparently suffering from epilepsy and hallucinations. His grandmother, Ann Drowley, is recorded as dying in the East Kent Lunatic Asylum in 1878.

Catherine and Charles had a son, Edward Harcourt Drowley in 1898 who was born in Usk. However, their daughter Marjorie Kate, was born on 14 October 1900 in Cuddington, Cheshire, in the home of her maternal grandparents. Catherine is recorded there in the 1901 census with the children and she probably never saw her husband again. As a school teacher she had a transferable job so she was able to get a position in the local village school in Sandiway where she stayed until her retirement on 31 October 1935. She registered with the Teachers Registration Council on 1 July 1920 for a fee of £1.1s, where it states she was Assistant

Teacher at Sandiway since 1905, and that she had had no formal training. Glimpses can be caught of Catherine as a teacher in some local newspapers. In 1915 the Cheshire Higher Education Sub-Committee received a report on the teachers' classes in nature study and awarded certificates to those who obtained at least 50% including two Sandiway teachers, Catherine A. Drowley and Annie Robinson. But a more tragic story is the libel case her sister Amy, a dressmaker, brought against another teacher at Sandiway, Emily Edwards, for libel. This was widely reported in local and national newspapers at the time, perhaps because it was between two young working women with little financial means. Amy won the case and Emily was sent to Knutsford jail for two months. When she was released, she spent the rest of her days in the village so the two girls must have regularly met each other. Catherine had to give evidence in which one small piece was added to her story when it was revealed both she and her sister taught Sunday school. She can also be found in the local and parliamentary electoral registers from 1911 to 1931, the last one to be found online at the time of writing. Catherine died on 1 December 1951 at her home in Frodsham where she lived with her sister.

Of their children, Edward was killed in France, aged 19 and Marjorie married William Bannister Driver in 1927. They do not appear to have any children or at least any who lived, so there are no direct descendants of Catherine Anna. My idea of returning this piece to any descendants of the maker is now impossible so a rethink is required.

### Down the rabbit hole: the family names

A part of the research that was intriguing was the number of unusual or rare names so I decided to look if anyone in the Guild was researching them. Only Bostock was noted and looking at the Bostock website I was able to trace Catherine Anna and her father in the line of John Bostock of Sproston, Cheshire, her great, great, great, great grandfather, alive in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. James Berry Bostock was a gardener and he appears to have moved quite a bit around the country judging by the census and his children's births. James married Jane Orchardson in 1867 at Didsbury, now part of Manchester. She was the daughter of Charles and Catherine Orchardson, nee Carmichael, and her father was a coachman, perhaps working for the same person as James Bostock as both families were in Didsbury in the 1861 census. Jane was born in Edinburgh in about 1843, although no baptism has been found for her, but her family appear to have come from Brechin in Angus, where her great grandfather Peter Orchardson married Jean Downie in 1765. The family moved south sometime in the late 1840s as they are in Toxteth in 1851.

Orchardson is another unusual name and the only person anyone is likely to have heard of is the artist Sir William Quiller Orchardson, who painted large, enigmatic works on moral themes, popular in the late Victorian period. The Wikipedia entry for him says his surname is derived from the Highland name Urquhartson. Nearly all Orchardsons in the 1881 census are found in Scotland.

Catherine Anna's husband's line comes from Kent, where the name Drowley appears to be most common. Charles' father William was a bricklayer and he married Elizabeth Pullee in Dover on 21 February 1854. In the various census William is often missing from home but as a bricklayer he was probably away for work, usually turning up in the census as a lodger. William was born in New Romney on 15 November 1833, his parents being John, a carpenter, and Ann, née Wood. William is described as a builder on his son Charles' marriage certificate but it is son William John Drowley who started the building firm of Drowley & Co. in Woking. As well as going bankrupt several times, Drowley

& Co, builders are mentioned in an interesting court case in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century concerning the right of builders to take away old building materials, arguing it was a custom of the trade. The judge disagreed without taking into account 'custom' and dismissed the case, refusing to allow it to go forward to a higher court. It's obvious he thought he was being 'taken for a ride' and that it was so patently unfair to the house owner.

Pullee like Drowley appears to be a Kent name and both are fairly rare in the 1881 census. Surprisingly both names are usually spelt correctly presumably because they were local names. In one transcription the name is down as Puller, but it is quite clearly Pullee in the original document. The most obvious mis-spelling would be Pulley but again this is not a name that is found very often.

This exercise provided a good opportunity to test the new Family Historian 6 which had several major changes, so a basic family tree was created. Once started the temptation to go further down the 'rabbit hole' and investigate Newing, Sparkle, Passon and Buckman amongst other names had to be resisted, but it had provided an interesting and entertaining exercise in using online resources only such as FindMyPast, ScotlandsPeople, Ancestry, The Genealogist, Family Search and the British Newspaper Archive, as archives were not open.<sup>10</sup> What information I have on marriages will be uploaded to the Guild's Marriage Index.

An unusual surname and the wealth of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century documents online, as well as luck, stamina and an interest in revealing the story behind an object, led to a satisfactory conclusion. So if you have a sampler in your collection whose place in your family story is not known, please do not dismiss it as it can be rewarding as I hope this article has helped to prove.

### Notes

1. Tarrant, Naomi, 'Mrs Jane Gaugain, Edinburgh's Celebrated Author of Knitting Manuals', in *The Scottish Genealogist*, LXIII, 2016, 3-12.
2. Tarrant, Naomi, 'Scottish Figured Damasks of the 18th-century', *Riggisberger Berichte*, 7, 1999, 83-97.
3. Naomi E.A. Tarrant, 'Remember now thy Creator': *Scottish Girls' Samplers 1700-1872*, Edinburgh, The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2014. Issued as an eBook March 2022 from [www.socantscot.org](http://www.socantscot.org)
4. Their records were unfortunately lost in The Great Fire of London in 1665.
5. Staniland, Kay, 'Embroiderers, Medieval Craftsmen series, British Library, 1991.
6. A website with a large array of samplers from many countries can be found at [www.antiques.samplers.org](http://www.antiques.samplers.org)
7. Loudon, Mrs Dorothy, 'A Scottish Sampler', *Descent*, Journal of the Society of Australian Genealogy, 37, 2007, 41-44.
8. King, Jill E, *Four Lives: Pioneer, Slave Owner, Poet, Schoolteacher*. C.C.Publishing (Chester), 2020, The lives of four local residents of Cuddington and Sandiway, Cheshire, including Catherine A. Drowley, pp81-101.
9. The numbers for each name in the 1881 census for England, Wales and Scotland are taken from Surname Atlas, a CD produced by Archer Software, 2011. The degree of 'rarity' uses that found in "Seven Pillars of Wisdom": The Art of One-Name Studies, published by the Guild. They are only a snap shot of the occurrence of the name in the UK. Anything below 30 is Tiny, 30-300 Small, 300-3000 Medium and over that Large. The numbers of the main names are Pullee 30, Drowley 75, Orchardson 40 and Bostock 2814. Sparkle has 5, Passon 11, Newing 462 and Buckman 482, all the rest are over 2000.
10. There are one or two basic Drowley trees on My Heritage which I did not look for until after the research was finished as it would have spoilt the fun!

Naomi is studying the surname Wunnington with the variant Wennington and can be contacted at: [wunnington.wennington@gmail.com](mailto:wunnington.wennington@gmail.com)