

The Elusive Jane Emmerson

Sometimes a character in one's family tree eludes search attempts¹, and this was the case with Jane Emmerson of Skelton in Cleveland, born 1798. My grandmother was an Emmerson and while investigating her family I discovered that her father was one of a dynasty of Emmersons centered on Skelton's Hollybush Farm. Jane was part of this family.

Although Emmersons in the Skelton area go back to the fourteen hundreds, my in-depth research began with the family of Stephen and Alice Emmerson. In 1796 widower Stephen Emmerson aged 59, married 22 year old Alice Amos who was four months pregnant, and they produced seven children over the next ten years: five daughters, Mary, Jane, Alice, Elizabeth and Hannah, and two sons, Stephen and William. I traced their births, baptisms, marriages (or not) children, deaths and burials, and more besides. I had a clear picture of them all - except for Jane. Finding Jane has been, at times, like knitting smoke and the story of the search is a lesson in the possible pitfalls that can block the path of the would-be family historian. The main obstacles were that I did not know her date of death; her headstone inscription gives her name as Emmerson, so I assumed (wrongly) that she was a spinster, and she was not to be found on any census records, death indexes or parish burial records. Other obstacles presented themselves as the research progressed.

I found Jane's birth and baptism records relatively easily. This must have been a couple of years ago and at the time I was more interested in her siblings - Stephen, The Miners' Friend and William, who left Skelton for the American frontier. So I was somewhat cavalier in my search for Jane's records and initially confused her with another Jane Emmerson of Skelton who was two years younger, born in 1800. This

¹ I used three family history search sites for this investigation: Ancestry, Find My Past and Family Search.

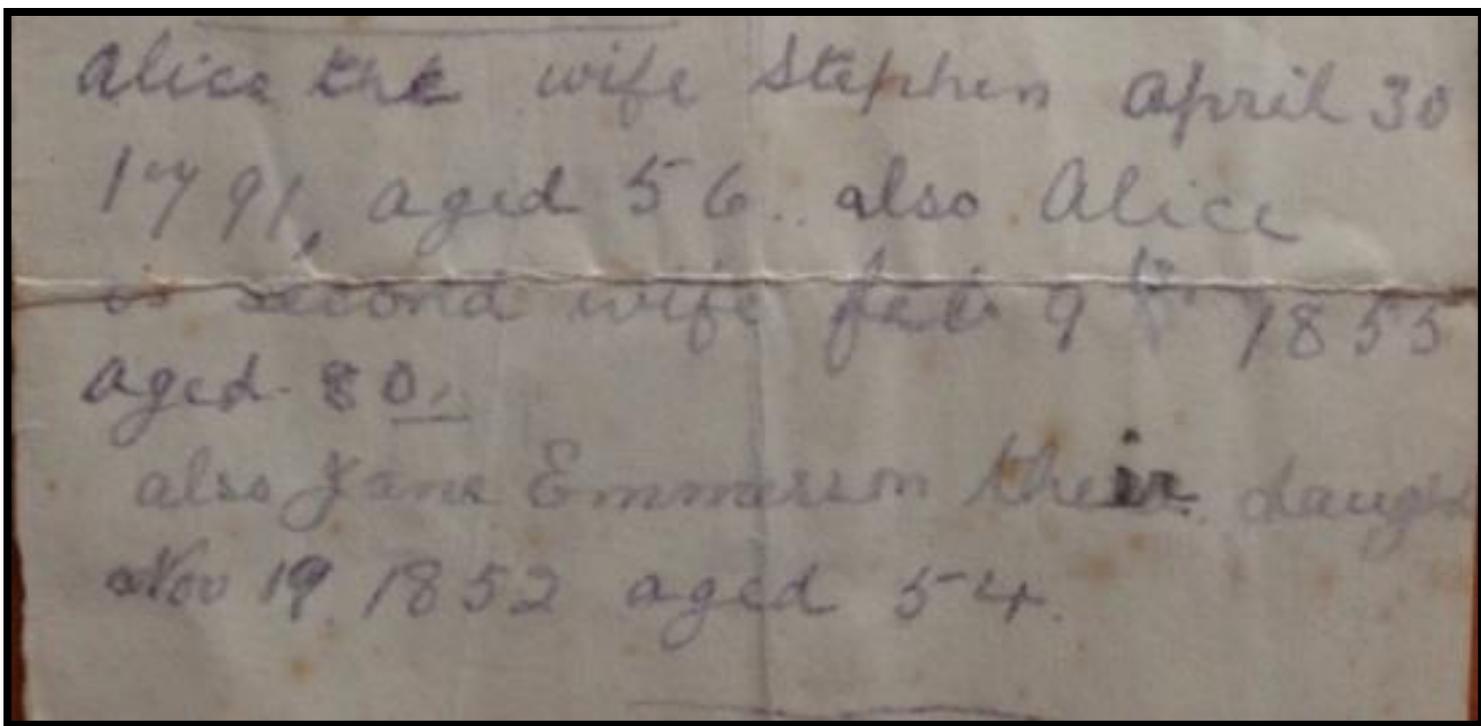
Jane married at the right age, and, as there were no other Jane Emmersons of Skelton marrying at that time, I confidently thought I'd found her and that the census enumerator had been careless in taking two years off her age. For a time I believed she had married and had lived in the nearby village of Kirkleatham but I began to have second thoughts when I remembered her headstone had her surname as 'Emmerson'. A further search showed me that the 1800 Jane was a second cousin so she was dismissed and I returned to the 1798 Jane, only to find that her baptism had not been straightforward. She was born on the 10th of April 1798, the second child of Stephen and Alice, but in the Skelton Parish Records she was wrongly named Elizabeth and her date of birth was recorded as April 11th. Thirteen years later her parents and godparents had to meet before Guisborough magistrate John Harrison, and swear under oath that Jane was not Elizabeth and her actual birthday was April 10th. To complicate matters further Stephen and Alice had named one of Jane's younger sisters Elizabeth. These odd events should have alerted me to the fact that finding Jane's records was not going to be easy. I subsequently found a family tree of the Skelton Emmersons in *The English Emmersons*², a book that details the history and growth of the families of Emmersons/Emersons throughout England. The author's research was usually accurate but on this particular family tree he omitted Jane and showed Elizabeth's birth as 1798 instead of 1802. If this researcher was confused who knows what other accounts and records relating to Jane are wrong. Having spent time looking at the profile of Jane's cousin I wasted more ancestry sessions looking on the census returns for Elizabeth Emmerson, who could have been Jane - or might have been Elizabeth. I found nothing and this line of enquiry turned out to be a very red herring.

Jane is buried in old All Saints churchyard, Skelton. There are two Emmerson headstones. In grave 302 are Jane's father's first wife, Alice,

his second wife, also Alice (Jane's mother), and Jane. Frustratingly, on the headstone inscription, much of the lettering relating to Jane has been eroded... *Alice the wife of Stephen Emmerson April 30 1791 aged 56 also Alice Emmerson the second wife who departed this life 9th February 1855 aged 80 years also Jane Emmerson... daughter who departed this life ...ember the ... aged ... years ...* thus I did not know when Jane died. A further problem was that there was no record of a Jane Emmerson in the burials section of the Skelton Parish Records post 1813. (Jane's rebaptism occurred that year so I assumed she was still alive in 1813.)

What to do next? I needed a date for Jane's death. She was not on the census returns for Hollybush Farm. Did she die before 1841, the date of the first census? How could I know? An unexpected breakthrough came with Ann and Norman Judson. In January 2015 I displayed a small exhibition of my Hollybush Farm/Emmerson research in Skelton library, and called for any members of the public who were related to, or knew of, the Emmersons, to contact me with information. Anne and Norman did just that.

Norman Judson was the son of Alice Judson, nee Emmerson, ex-landlady of the Royal George at Skelton, and he had several letters and other artefacts belonging to his mother that threw more light on the Emmerson family. His mother was the great, great granddaughter of Stephen and Alice Emmerson and Jane was her great, great aunt. Alice died in 1974, but during her lifetime she took an interest in family history and in 1937 she received a letter from a Mrs. Bessie Edens of Texas. Bessie was a great granddaughter of William Emmerson, Jane's brother, who had emigrated to America, and she was keen on tracing the family line. The two ladies corresponded and Bessie eventually visited Alice in Skelton. Alice took Bessie to the old All Saints graveyard and Bessie jotted down the inscriptions on the two Emmerson graves. She included this information in a subsequent letter to Alice. Serendipity - the headstones were in better condition in the 1930s so Bessie and Alice had been able to see the full text carved on them, including the missing words.



Detail of Bessie Eden's letter from Corsicana Texas to Alice Judson at the Royal George, Skelton in 1942.

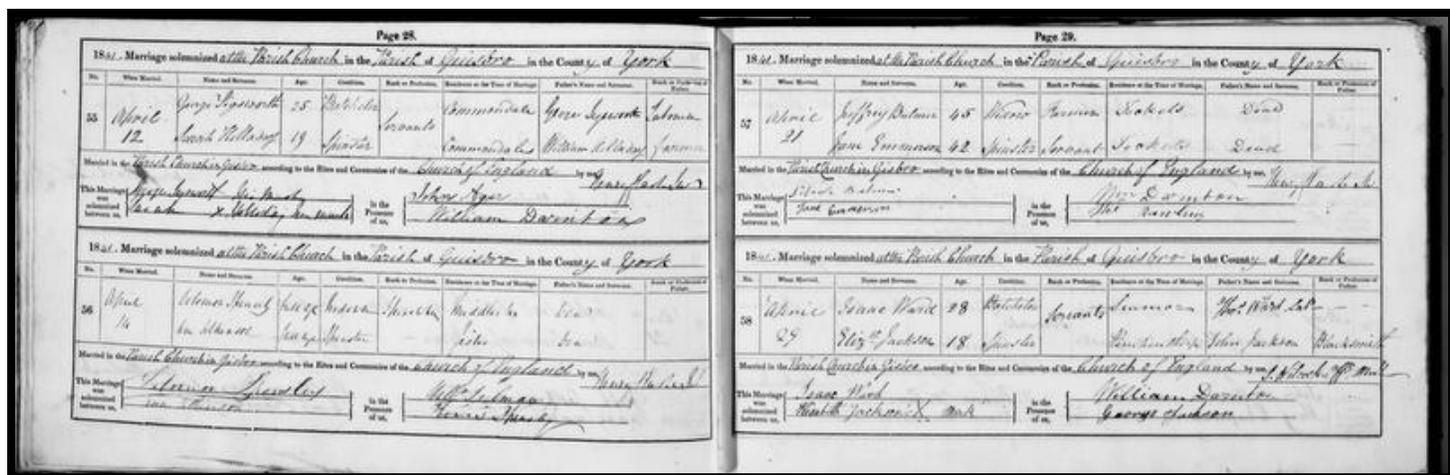
*Alice the wife of Stephen Emmerson April 30 1791 aged 56 also Alice Emmerson the second wife who departed this life 9th February 1855 aged 80 years also Jane Emmerson **their** daughter who departed this life November the 19th 1852 aged 54 years.*

So now I had the date of Jane's death. She died in 1852 therefore she should have been somewhere on the 1841 and 1851 census returns, but I found nothing. I could only conclude that, even though her maiden name was on her gravestone, she had been married, so I would not find her under 'Emmerson'. But when, and to who?

Jane was possibly still living at home on Hollybush Farm when her father died in 1833, as she was mentioned in his will, but with no mention of a husband and children. She was left property and land which would go to her heirs - if and when she had some - after her death, and a half share in half of a pew in the new church (now 'old') which she was to share with her sister Hannah, also unmarried. I began looking for marriages post 1833.

1841 seemed promising. There were two Jane Emmersons married that year in nearby Guisborough, but the records on two of my family history sites did not display an original image. They just listed who had been married on the same day, in the same place, but did not say who was married to whom. Thus in the April/May/June Quarter of

1841 Jane Emmerson, Ann Atkinson, Elizabeth Jackson and Sarah Holliday could have married George Sigsworth or Isaac Ward. Four women and only two men? It seemed two men were missing from the list – and one of them, I discovered later, was Jane’s husband. To further complicate matters, in a later record from the same year, the July/August/September Quarter, a second Jane Emmerson could have married James Eston or Henry Wilson. And so could Margaret Angus. I searched the records of all the men on these two lists but none of them had married a Jane Emmerson born 1798. Then, on Find My Past, instead of a list of names I found copies of the original parish records for Guisborough’s St Nicholas church. And Jane was there, getting married to a forty-five year old widowed farmer, Jeffrey Bulmer. Both gave their address as Tocketts (a farm, a water mill and a few cottages between Guisborough and Skelton) and Jane described herself as ‘servant’. But she signed the marriage register rather than putting a cross. She was clearly literate.³ Did ‘servant’ mean a housekeeper or governess, perhaps? The double page of marriages for April 1841 also showed marriages for Isaac Ward and Elizabeth Jackson, George Sigsworth and Sarah Holliday and



Jeffrey Bulmer and Jane Emmerson. Marriage 1842

³ My research on the Emmerson family has unearthed examples of her older sister and two younger brothers' writing, showing that the family were at least educated to elementary level.

Solomon Bewley and Ann Atkinson. It was clear that Jeffrey Bulmer and Solomon Bewley were the two men omitted from the lists I had found earlier on Ancestry and Family Search, in an obvious transcription error.

But was the Jane who married Jeffrey Bulmer my Jane? I still had doubts. Marriage registers usually show the names of the bride and grooms' fathers, and their jobs or professions. Frustratingly, on this one, in the place of father's name, in both cases, was the word 'dead' and both fathers' professions had been left blank. I wanted to see the words 'Stephen Emmerson, Farmer, Deceased', which would have made me certain I had the right Jane. I wondered if these blanks indicated a family rift but I saw similar blanks on another of the marriages shown on the double page spread from St Nicholas, Guisborough. I returned to the Skelton Parish Records. And here was something that reassured me I almost certainly had found Jane. A Jane Bulmer of Ayton had died on November 19th 1852 and had been buried in Skelton on the 22nd of November. November 19th – the same date as on the headstone – and Bulmer, Jane's married name.

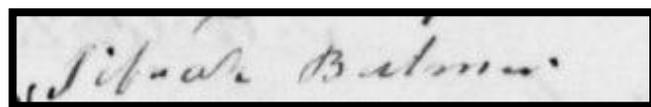
**Detail of Parish Records. All Saints.
Skelton in Cleveland
September/October/November 1852**

(Page 1.)

| BURIALS in the Parish of <u>Skelton</u> in the County of <u>York</u> in the Year one thousand eight hundred and <u>52</u> | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| When Buried | Name. | Abode. | When buried. | Age. | By whom the Ceremony was performed. |
| Sep. 14 th | Grace Gowland No. 1. | Skelton | Sep. 22 nd 1852 | 80 Years | Wm. Clave Perpetual Curate |
| Sep. 20 th | Robert Robinson No. 2. | Skelton | Sep. 22 nd 1852 | 8 Months | Wm. Clave Perpetual Curate |
| Oct. 17 th | Elizabeth Lowe No. 3. | Skelton | October 19 th 1852 | 20 Years | Wm. Clave Perpetual Curate |
| Oct. 21 st | William Judson No. 4. | Skelton | Oct. 27 th 1852 | 5 Months Infant | Wm. Clave Perpetual Curate |
| Nov. 19 th | Jane Bulmer No. 5. | Ayton | November 22 nd 1852 | 54 Years | Wm. Clave Perpetual Curate |

But then there was the Jeffrey problem. Nothing was simple in this search. Wanting to find out more about Jane's husband I began by looking for Jeffrey Bulmer, who I guessed was from Great Ayton, and I found two Jeffrey Bulmers born five years apart. One was born in Ayton in 1796. He would have been the right age - 45 - for the entry in the marriage register. His father was a stone mason. The other Jeffrey was also born in Ayton but in 1791 and was the son of a farmer, which was significant. He was too old by five years but more likely to be the right Jeffrey as I discovered this older Jeffrey had relatives in Skelton. Then I found the younger Jeffrey on the 1851 Durham census, born in Great Ayton, married to Maria and with several children. He was a builder on the 1851 census and a builder and farmer on another. 'Farmer' suggested that this Jeffrey could just possibly have been Jane's husband. For a while I was convinced he was a bigamist. I theorized that he had married Jane in 1841 while already married to Maria and thought this was why Jane returned to her maiden name. Yet somehow this did not seem right.

I then found that a Jeffrey Bulmer had married someone called Ann Kitchen in 1807. This could have been the older Jeffrey as he was sixteen in 1807, very young to marry but it was possible. This date rules out the younger Jeffrey who would have been about eleven. This marriage also links to the fact that the older Jeffrey was a widower when he married Jane, but try as I might I could not find anything else on Ann Kitchen or records of the birth of children to her and Jeffrey.



Jeffrey Bulmer's signatures - 1807 and 1841

I did find that the signatures of the Jeffrey Bulmer who married Ann Kitchen in 1807 and the Jeffrey who married Jane Emmerson in 1841

were remarkably similar bearing in mind they were made thirty four years apart.

I searched again for Jane and Jeffrey on the census returns. I finally found them on the 1841 census living in Ayton, with a ten year old daughter, Susannah, which again equated with the fact of Jeffrey being a widower. He had again given his age as 45, but by now I had talked myself out of my bigamy theory. I decided that the older Jeffrey had simply lied about his age at his marriage and to the census enumerator, or the enumerator could have been careless. I noticed that, on this census, Jane had also lost two years. To date I have found no information on Susannah Bulmer.

| | | | | |
|----------|----------------|----|------|---|
| 1 | Jeffrey Bulmer | 45 | Sex: | M |
| | Jane do | 40 | | F |
| | Susannah do | 10 | | F |
| TOTAL in | | 5 | | |
| Page 5 | | | | |

1841 Census Great Ayton

I still felt I needed more evidence. The place of birth was not given on the 1841 census so I did not have proof that this Jane was Jane Emmerson of Skelton (although I was ninety nine per cent sure). Several questions arose. Jeffrey was described as having 'Independent Means' rather than working as a farmer. Was this enabled by Jane's inheritance? The marriage was April 1841, that year the census was in June, by which time Jane and Jeffrey were resident in Great Ayton - but they were apparently living at Tocketts when they married. Was Tocketts just a name for residency purposes so they could marry in

Guisborough? Why not marry in Skelton? These are questions for which I have no answers, as yet.

If I could find Jane with the older Jeffrey on the 1851 census then the younger Jeffrey could not possibly be Jane's husband and he could remain in Durham with Maria. But I could NOT find the couple in 1851 although I hunted over a period of weeks. Eventually a friend from my ancestry group stumbled on them on the Ancestry site and earned my undying gratitude. She found a Jefnah Bulmes and Jane Bulmes living in Great Ayton in 1851 and 'Jefnah' was sixty *which meant he was born in 1791*. The names were simply transcription errors for when I looked at the actual handwritten census it revealed a badly written 'Jeffrey Bulmer' and 'Jane Bulmer'. Crucially, Jane's place of birth was given as Skelton. Jeffrey had reverted to his job of farming, with a farm of 16 acres. Had Jane's inheritance money enabled him to buy this land?

| Parish or Township of | | Ecclesiastical District of | | City or Borough of | | Part of | | Village of | |
|--|--|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------|---------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Name of Street, Place, or Road, and Name or No. of House | Name and Surname of each Person who abode in the house, on the Night of the 30th March, 1851 | Relation to Head of Family | Condition | Age of | | Rank, Profession, or Occupation | Where Born | Whether blind, deaf, dumb, or insane | |
| | | | | Males | Females | | | | |
| 1 | Jeffrey Bulmer Jane do | Head Wife | Married Married | 60 | 60 | Farmer of 16 acres | Yorkshire Skelton | | |

Census 1851 Great Ayton. Jane and Jeffrey Bulmer - (Jefneh and Jane Bulmes).

So now I had a birth, a marriage, an inheritance, a burial, and two residency records, but I felt I needed to know where and how Jane died, and who registered her death. These facts could shed even more light on Jane's last years. So I sent for her death certificate.

The certificate stated that Jane Bulmer (Emmerson) had died of consumption – what we now call tuberculosis. She died in Skelton, almost certainly at Hollybush Farm, her family home. Although the certificate shows that Jane was indeed the wife of farmer Jeffrey Bulmer, it was her brother, Stephen, who registered the death, and was present when she died.

| No. | When and where died | Name and surname | Sex | Age | Occupation | Cause of death | Signature, description and residence of informant | When registered | Signature of registrar |
|-----|---|------------------|--------|-------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 174 | Nineteenth November 1852 Spelton | Jane Bulmer | Female | 53 years | Wife of Jeffrey Bulmer Farmer | Consumption — Certified | Stephen Emmerson in attendance Spelton | Twentieth November 1852 | John Rogers Registrar |

Detail of Jane Emmerson's Death Certificate.

Weak and coughing blood, surrounded by the Emmersons, Jane died on November 19th 1852. She was 54, the age written on her headstone, not the 53 of the death certificate (but this is typical of Jane's records). Why had she come home? Had she separated from Jeffrey? Where was he when she died? What happened to Susannah? Had Jane found sanctuary at Hollybush or was the family simply helping her husband to look after her? We may never know.

In conclusion this short article has looked at the search for one family member, Jane Emmerson. It has shown the many problems and pitfalls that can beset the would-be family historian and some of the solutions that I personally found; through dogged, tedious searching but also happy chance. This kind of research progresses in knight's moves, two steps forward and one to the side (or worse, two steps backwards and one to the side), but although some questions remain, the research bore fruit and the elusive Jane Emmerson finally emerged from the shadows.

Fellow researchers – if you hit a brick wall, there is almost always a way round it. Enjoy *your* search.

Josie Bland. September 2015