

Rosa Lyford

Some people are easier to document than others. Rosa's story presented many challenges, and perhaps lessons can be taken from the solutions.

Birth Record

Her advantage in having a relatively rare surname was outweighed by her parents having settled in Blewbury, Berkshire, whose Parish Registers for the relevant period have not been filmed by Family Search. The duplicate set of Bishop's Transcripts for Blewbury have been filmed, but these remain unindexed. The researcher needs to visit a Family Search Affiliate library to consult them, and finding a specific entry is difficult without an index.

Throughout her life Rosa's birth was reported to be around 1822, at either Blewbury or Windsor, Berkshire. Lawrence and Margaret Lyford were known to have raised a large family at Blewbury about this time, so I set about working through the film of Bishop's Transcripts seeking Rosa's missing birth record. It turned out to be earlier than expected:

"15 November 1819, Rosetta, daughter of Lawrence and Margaret Lyford, Blewbury, labourer"¹

However, Family Search also lists Martha, daughter of Lawrence and Margaret Lyford, with the same birthdate though a different location, in various user-submitted Genealogies, such this from the IGI:

Martha Lyford International Genealogical Index (IGI)	christening:	15 November 1819	Croydon, Surrey, England	father:	Lawrence
				mother:	Margaret Helena Mayne

This record is credible, since Lawrence and Margaret had married at nearby Mitcham on 8 December 1818, but no christening record for Martha at Croydon or Mitcham could be found. Clicking Martha's name opens a screen with the citation "..... submitted by ahigham ; no source information is available." This record cannot be accepted as a source, it is merely an unsubstantiated suggestion. Such records are worth investigating as they are unlikely to be total fabrications, but until a primary source, created very close to the time and place of the event, is discovered, they should only be regarded as possibilities.

Unsourced user-submitted genealogies were further called into question by another record at Family Search showing that a Martha Lyford with the same parents, had been christened on the same date at Kaikoura, New Zealand!! In 1819 that would surely have been a first!! No further records of this Martha's life or death have been found.

As luck would have it, I was already in contact with the Anne Higham named in the Family Search record. She had done a One Name Study of Lyfords, and was able to check her source, as she keeps very good research records. This turned out to be a transcription of the Blewbury Registers done by Oxfordshire Family History Society in 1995, consulted at the Society of Genealogists in London.²

Anne immediately recognised that an error had been made, but was it her error in extracting this record from the transcription, or was the error made when the register was transcribed? She sent out a message asking if someone could visit the Record Office to check the register. This was answered by the member who had recopied those records from microfiche to CD. He soon reported that the error was found in the 1995 transcription and has amended the master file to show that the child baptised was Rosetta, not Martha. Thanks to the internet it took only 3 days to correct an error made 24 years ago.

So now we know that Rosetta (commonly known as Rosa) was baptised on 15 November 1819 at Blewbury, Berkshire, England, daughter of Lawrence and Margaret Lyford, their eldest child.

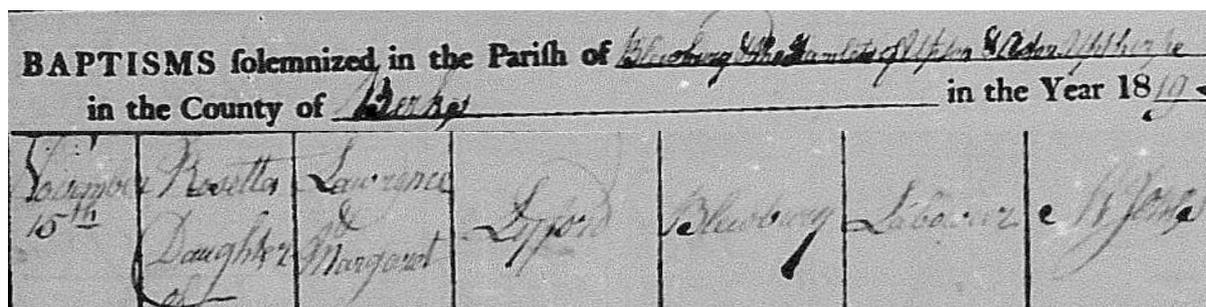


Image courtesy of Berkshire Record Office, 1 March 2019

This episode demonstrates the importance of viewing the original record, and not accepting a transcription or index as the sole source.

Census Records³

1841: Rosa Lyford, aged about 20, born Berkshire, was the only servant in the household of William Hanson 41, watchmaker, High St, New Windsor. Also present were Hanson's assumed wife, his 10-year-old daughter, and a trade employee.

1851: Rosa Lyford, aged 29, born Blewbury, Bedfordshire[sic], was a lady's maid in West Derby, Lancashire, employed by a merchant and county magistrate, with wife, 6 children, governess, and 9 servants.

1861: Rosa Empson, aged 39, born Bluebury, Berkshire, wife of John Empson, hotel keeper in Holborn, London. She had no children, but a Lyford nephew was in the household, and there were 2 children visiting, 2 boarders and 4 live-in staff.

1871: Rosa Empson, aged 49, born Windsor, Berkshire, wife of John, hotelkeeper of Hammersmith, London with 2 children visiting but none of their own, 1 live in employee.

1881: Rosa Empson, aged 59, born Windsor, Berkshire, with husband John, hotelkeeper of Harlsden, Middlesex.

Family Emigration⁴

Rosa's parents, Lawrence and Margaret Lyford, emigrated to Nelson, New Zealand, sailing on 18 Dec 1841 in the *Mary Ann* with 8 children. Three children remained in England: David aged 15 was part way through a blacksmith's apprenticeship which he wished to complete; Emily aged 13 lived with her uncle William and his wife, who had no family of their own; but why would Rosa, aged 20 prefer to remain in service?

Rosa's Daughter⁵

Our current knowledge of Rosa reveals that she would not have been an acceptable emigrant because she was pregnant and unmarried. The NZ Company was particular about the "quality" of the applicants it chose, using a column in the register to record sightings of the marriage records of the emigrants.

In 1841 Rosa apparently had a relationship with her employer, **William HANSON**, the watchmaker of High Street, New Windsor mentioned in the census record above.

Their daughter **Elizabeth Mary LYFORD** was born on 2 Mar 1842 in St James parish Clerkenwell, London, and died there on 6 Sep 1842, of phthisis. She was buried at Spa Fields Burial Ground, Clerkenwell, age 6 months.⁶

Rosa registered the birth on 7 Apr 1842, and signed the form at the Registry Office. Although not legally married, she said the father was William Lyford, and the mother Rosa Lyford, formerly Hanson. She had exchanged father's and mother's surnames to give the baby the Lyford surname as would be necessary, but the father's name is also recorded for posterity – if one can read the clues.

The following day Rosa went to a different Registry Office and registered her baby again. The birthdate and forenames were the same, but the address had changed to qualify in the new district. The father is named as William Hanson, watchmaker, and the mother as Rosa Hanson, formerly Lyford. Rosa chose not to sign, and made a mark.

This appears to be a clever piece of blackmail. Rosa needed Hanson to pay her expenses until she could resume employment. As a watchmaker, Hanson would have been vulnerable to a damaged reputation destroying his business.

Baby Elizabeth died of phthisis, aged 6 months. By 1851 Rosa had been promoted to lady's maid in a household with 9 servants, far away in Lancashire. This was quite a step up in status, suggesting that Hanson had given her a very good reference. William Hanson's occupation in 1851 was listed as "Magistrate, Silversmith" so apparently he suffered no repercussions from this episode. Both the wife and daughter present in 1841 appear to have died, and William remarried before 1851.

1842. BIRTH in the Sub-district of <u>St James Clerkenwell</u> in the County of <u>Middlesex</u>									
Columns—	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No.	When and where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name, and surname of father	Name, surname, and maiden surname of mother	Occupation of father	Signature, description, and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
188	Second of March 1842 at 3 Wardens Court	Elizabeth Mary	girl	William Lyford	Rosa Lyford formerly Hanson	Jeweller	Rosa Lyford Mother 3 Wardens Court	Seventh of April 1842	Abraham Western Registrar

1842. BIRTH in the Sub-district of <u>West London</u> in the <u>City of London</u>									
Columns—	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No.	When and where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name, and surname of father	Name, surname, and maiden surname of mother	Occupation of father	Signature, description, and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
18	Second March 1842 16 Bartholomew Close	Elizabeth Mary	girl	William Hanson	Rosa Lyford	Watch Maker	The Mark x of Rosa Lyford Mother 16 Bartholomew Close	Eighth April 1842	William Fortescue Registrar

1842. DEATH in the Sub-district of <u>St. James Clerkenwell</u> in the <u>County of Middlesex</u>									
Columns—	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
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
	Sixth of September 1842 at 5 Aylesbury Place	Elizabeth Mary Lyford	Female	6 Mos.	—	Phthisis	Frances Holmes Present at the Death 5 Aylesbury Place	Seventh of September 1842	Abraham Western Registrar

This story could easily have been missed if the certificates had not been purchased.

Marriage⁵

In the 1851 census John Empson, aged 27 from Yorkshire, was a footman in a banker's household at West Derby, Lancashire, and it was probably through his employment that he met Rosa Lyford, from Berkshire, the Magistrate's lady's maid, also at West Derby. All her life Rosa reduced her age, for example stating that she was 29 instead of 32 in the 1851 census. On 15 June 1853 Rosa and John were married at St George, Hanover Square, London and spent the rest of their lives as hotelkeepers around London. They had no children, but later census show that they often had children visiting or boarding with them.

Rosa's Death



A possible death record for Rosa Empson aged 69 was found in the 1891 index for Fulham Registration District. This was consistent with the ages Rosa had given in various census.

However, John Empson's probate record in 1899 mentioned a widow, Rosina Empson.⁷ Had he remarried, or had the lawyer been confused about Rosa's birth name, Rosetta? The index shows that John Empson and Rosina Cooper were married in December quarter 1891 in Brentford Registration District. John's probate shows an estate over £20,000, and whilst some of that may have come from his second marriage, the implication is that John and Rosa had enjoyed some financial success.

This is confirmed by their headstone in Hammersmith, showing that Rosa died in 1891, and John in 1899.⁸

1. Bishops Transcripts for Blewberry FHL film 1279451 at www.FamilySearch.org
2. Blewbury (St. Michael) Parish Registers, Index on Microfiche. Oxfordshire FHS, 1995
3. Census details with images attached from www.MyHeritage.com
4. NZ Company Emigration Register with images attached, at Archives New Zealand, Passenger Lists database at www.FamilySearch.org
5. Birth, death and marriage certificates courtesy Anne Higham, obtained from General Register Office <https://www.gro.gov.uk/gro>
6. Nonconformist Burials Database (with images) online at www.FindMyPast.co.uk
7. Find a Will (with image of probate summary) <https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk/#wills>
8. Billion Graves index at www.FamilySearch.org, with image from www.BillionGraves.com.

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