

Letters from West Sussex to Indiana

1840-1864

Between 1992 and 2000 I was involved in research for the Petworth Emigration Project 1832-1837.¹ One of our quests was a search for letters written home by the emigrants, as they gave such a fascinating insight into their new life in Upper Canada and often provided clues to help us identify other family members. Collections of letters were published in pamphlet form² at the time, to encourage other would-be emigrants and some of these can be seen in the West Sussex Record Office. Other letters were found by trawling through all likely contemporary newspapers such as the *Brighton Gazette*, and the *Sussex Advertiser*. Sometimes we were lucky enough to find descendants of emigrant families who shared their original material with us. All the letters we collected were reproduced in a book *English Immigrant Voices*, published in 2000.³

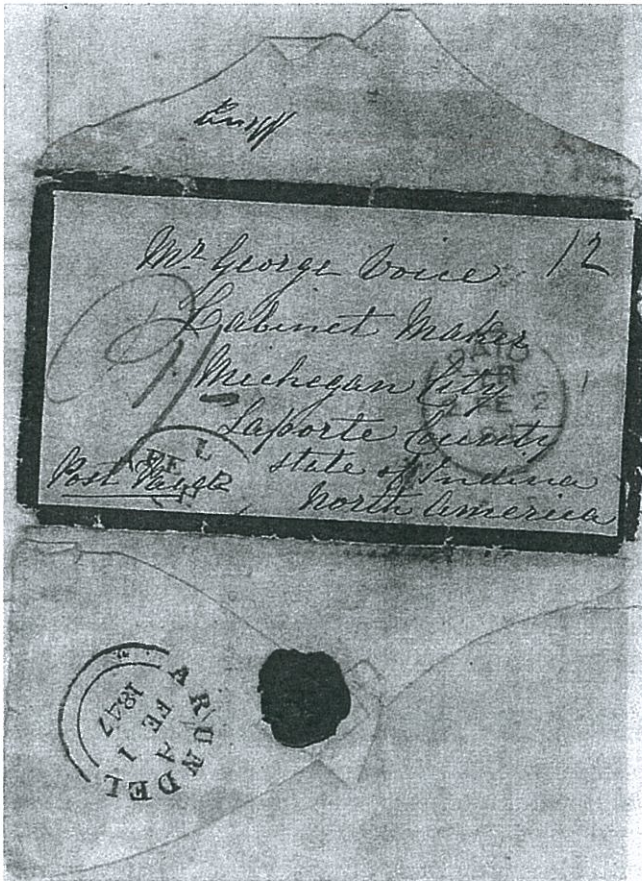
Recently we have been contacted by Mrs Lorraine Bear from Michigan, Indiana who has been able to shed more light on one of the emigrants known to us previously only as 'John', a nephew of Cornelius Voice. Lorraine has generously sent us photocopies of some original 19th century letters in her family's archive which have never before been published. These letters were written to Lorraine Bear's great grandfather John/George Voice, in Michigan, by his relations back home in West Sussex and refer to local people and places. The delightfully gossipy letter from his mother is full of interesting comments about the inhabitants of Billingshurst in 1846 – and I wish I could discover the real name of 'poor old Aunt Boney'.

'John' left Billingshurst for Upper Canada in the company of his uncle Cornelius Voice in 1834 on board the *British Tar*. Also in the party were Cornelius' wife Elizabeth Smallwood and their children William, Elizabeth, Cornelius, Martha, George and Joseph. Their eldest child Mary, was already married to James Elliott and they remained on their farm – Brown Hill in Ashington, West Sussex. However, after James died in 1845 Mary Elliott joined the rest of her family, who by then had left Ontario and were living in America.

When we did our original research in the 1990's we knew the emigrant only as 'John' because in letters written by William in 1834 and Cornelius Voice in 1835, published in pamphlets by Phillips of Petworth, only his first name is mentioned – 'John and me are going about 100 miles further up the country, to get 100 acres of land, they are giving out land to get inhabitants, and when I write again, if we have got it, I will tell you.'⁴ We understood that he was a relation of the Voices, because Brydone the superintendent on board the *British Tar*, in his *Narrative of a Voyage*,⁵ referred to Cornelius Voice with 'his two sons and his nephew' but we could not confirm John's surname.

Lorraine Bear thought her great-grandfather George Voice, was actually this nephew John but the information on his gravestone in Indiana indicated that he was born on 19 July 1812 in Dover, Kent – rather a long way from West Sussex to be considered one of the Billingshurst Voices. More recently she has contacted us to say that she can now confirm that John was the son of William Voice, Cornelius' brother, and that he changed his given name to George in North America – a decision questioned by his sister in a letter written to him in 1840 and transcribed here. William Voice was in the army, stationed at Shorncliffe Barracks near Cheriton, thus both John and his sister Eliza Voice, who was baptised 1815 in Cheriton, were born in Kent. Eventually William Voice and his family returned to Billingshurst where he died in 1820. His widow Mary Ann Voice married Billingshurst farmer William Bridger, a widower with a young family and they had more children of their own.

The letters written to John, now known as George Voice, are from his sister Eliza Voice – soon to be Mrs Eliza Taylor, his mother Mary Ann Bridger, his brother-in-law George Taylor and his half-sister Sarah Bridger – whom he had never met. I have transcribed the letters and left the spelling as it is in the originals, only adding a little light punctuation to make them easier to read.



much indeed - you will say we have been
truly impetunate when I tell you George has
also met with an accident which had his
foot dreadfully crushed in the mill a
few weeks after Mother's accident and he
still continues very lame and not able
to wear his own shoe.

Figure 1: Envelope and letter excerpt from Eliza Voice

**Letter from Eliza Voice, Greenhurst, Thakeham to
her brother George Voice
9th November 1840**

Dear Brother

I am now happy for to write to inform you that we have just had the pleasure of Recvng a letter from you which gave us great pleasure to hear from you once more and I hope with the Blessings of god that this will find you in perfect health and happiness as thank god it Leaves me at the present. And should be happy indeed if I could but once more have the pleasure of beholding my poor Brother George face again, which would be a comfort indeed to no but I am afraid I shall never

again see that happy moment in this world unless my Dear Brother you can ever get the Chance for to come Back to England again. Should we never meet again in this world I hope the Almighty will bestowe to you your health and happiness in this world and we must Look up to him for protection and mercy and if we do that he will Lead us through Life and I hope if we never meet again in this world that we shall Boath be happy in the next, which is my fervent prayers Boath for you and myself and all our friends.

Dear Brother I was down at Mothers [Mary Ann Voice, now married to William Bridger] on Michallmass day and they where all quite well excepting Mr Bridger he was very poorly. Mother has got two more Children Since you Last Recd a letter from them their Names are James and Sarah [James baptised 1837 and Sarah baptised 1840 at Billingshurst] this is all I can say about them in my Letter as mother is going for to write to you for to answer your Letter and I do not see them very often I have been away from them this 5 years. I have been on my own hands, thank god I get a very Comfortable liveing a dress making and any thing that I can get for to do. I am living at Greenhurst near Thakeham with Mrs Taylor a widdow. [Ann Wood had married William Taylor at Sullington in 1803. The 1842 Thakeham Tithe Map and Apportionment show Greenhurst as a cottage, out-buildings and two fields]. I have been there ever since I Left home. I do not know weather you know her or not, she is Sister to John Wood at Merryhill [near Greenhurst] you know them you no they are uncle Voice Brother and sister. [John Wood's wife was Sarah Smallwood, sister of Elizabeth Smallwood the wife of Cornelius Voice]

You say Dear Brother you wish for to no if I was married that you might know how for to talk to me. I sure you I am not married, therefore I hope you will tell me what you wish for to say. Now I have answered you on this subject to the truth, I hope you will grant me the same favior and tell me in your next weather you are married or not that I may know how for to answers yours. Should that be the case I hope you will tell me and you may depend on it I will tell you when I am likewise.

Dear Brother I hope you will answer this as soon as you get it that I may know weather you have Receivd it or not. I shall be waiting with the greatest enxiety to hear from you which I hope Dear Brother you will not Fail in sending to me as

soon as you get this. Mary [Elliott] had a letter from uncle [Cornelius Voice] at Christmas Last and we thought you was not living with him as your name was not mentioned in the Letter. Dear Brother you say you thought we had all quite forgotten you but never give that one moments thought, for I can ashure quite the contrary you are often thought of and often talked of likewise with us all. One thing I wish for to know why you have Changed your name from J[oh]n unto G[e]o[rge] I hope nothing in perticular.

You spoke about Ann Reed she is married about a twelvemonth and one Child and her name is Goacher. Dear Brother I forgot for to say that I was truly sorry that you have been so ill as you say you have bein and you think it has bein your own fault as you think it has bein through different Climates. Therefore Dear Brother I hope if you think that you make up your mind and Rove no more but make yourself Contented in the place you are in. I must now begin for to draw to a Conclusion with my kindest and affectionate Wishes for your health and happiness and prosperity and welfare through life is the most fervent wishes from your Sincer and affectionate Sister Elizah Voice
Direct to me Elizah Voice, Mrs Taylors Greenhurst, Thakeham, Sussex.

Mary Ann and her second husband William Bridger had lived at Priors Farm, Billingshurst but had now moved to Wooddale Farm. Wooddale was previously known as Dirty Dale and had been the home of the Johnsons. William Bridger's first wife was Elizabeth Johnson, so there is probably some family connection. William Bridger and Elizabeth Johnson were married in 1820 but after the birth of five children, Elizabeth Bridger died aged 32 in 1829 leaving behind a very young family for her husband to care for.

Mary Ann Voice apparently had an illegitimate daughter, also named Mary Ann and baptised at Billingshurst only a month before her marriage to William Bridger. No father is named at her baptism in 1831 but she was presumably Bridger's child. Mary Ann and William Bridger then had four more children. All the Bridger children – including Mary Ann – appear on census returns with the exception of one son, Job.

Letter from Mary Ann Bridger to her son George Voice

Mr George Voice, Cabinet Maker, Michigan City, Laporte County, State of Indiana, North America
Billingshurst May 21 1846

Dear Son

It was with great pleasure we received a letter from you after your long silence, and we were very glad to find by the contents of it that you were in good health and that you had seen the folly of a roving life. We rejoiced greatly, as every thinking parent ought to do, that you had been brought to see your state before that All Wise Being who ordereth all things for the best for those that trust in Him and strive to walk according to his commands. –

Many and great changes have taken place here since you last heard from us, so many indeed, that when we take a review of the past and think on the fleeting nature of everything around us it seems a folly to lay out plans and schemes for the future as too many do, without a single thought of what may happen on the morrow.

As the affairs of your relations will naturally interest you the most, I must first tell you that we are remov'd from Priors, though had your letter arriv'd a little earlier it would have found us there, We are now living at Wooddale – Old Mr & Mrs Johnson have been dead nearly two years and we have taken the business [Mary Johnson buried in 1844 aged 70 and John Johnson "of Wood-dale" buried in 1843 aged 73 both at Billingshurst]. Our family is increased as well as our business, we have added two more to the stock, James & Sarah since you heard from us last, we are all I am happy to say in the enjoyment of good health –

Your Sister Eliza has been married now about three years to George Taylor of Greenhurst, where she was living when you had the letter from her. He is a Miller. They are living in Amberly Parish, they have no Family, nor do they enjoy very good health. They desire their kind love to you and your dear partner, – James Elliott is dead and his dear wife [Mary Voice] (we have heard) intends going to America, and that young Cornelius [Voice] is coming over to fetch her – You will be sorry to hear

that Poor John Voice is dead, he has been dead about a year, he left a family of Seven children, but the oldest with the widow, are able to carry on the business [he was a shoemaker], They live at the bottom of the Churchyard where Old Jane Smart used to live (she has been dead now some years.) He bought the premises before he died.

Poor old Aunt Boney is gone too, but the Old Gentleman is still living with his son Belah, in pretty good health, tho' I think he must be 85 years old. Mrs Hughes lives in the house near the Old Workhouse where he used to live, Dick Hughes is again transported for 7 years⁶ – he has been gone about six months, and it is the general wish that he may never come back again, as there seems but little chance of his altering his course of life.

Old Edward Voice is still living, with his son Job in the house where he used to live, tho' he has given up the business to Job, who has taken Hoil Farm, with that at Parbrook, but he makes a sorry Farmer,
–

The changes most affecting the Parish at large, has taken place at the Shops. Mr Kensetts and Mr Puttocks, – Mr Kensett was convicted of Receiving stolen goods about 18 months ago, and sentenced to 14 years transportation,⁷ – There were a great many coppers [for washing clothes] stolen in the Neighbourhood about that time and they were traced to his House. The Case caused great sensation in the parish and throughout the whole county at the time and all possible means were resorted too, to get his sentence mitigated, it was of no avail but he died on his passage out to Burmuda.⁸ The Family have since left, and left the business to Philip Peskett, that used to live there in Mr Irelands time, –

Mr Puttock, has sold off and let his business to James Trower (formerly apprentice to him) and all the family are gone off to America, They are now living at Frankford Nr Philidelphia, – Your Old Master (Tom Venn) is quite reduced in circumstances, – after leaving Five Oaks, he took a small Farm at Slinfold and then at [Wisborough] Green, but he spent what little he had. He has lived about at different places since. He was in limbo a little while and once I believe in the Union House [workhouse], He is now living about Horsham and hawks vegetables about the Town, – He was got to an enormous size before he fail'd, but he is not so stout now.

The Old Man has been dead some years, – Old Mr Farhall has been dead some years – his son John has the Farm at Clerksland but Maurice lives there, he is Married again to one of the Osborne's (formerly of Guittonhurst) He has Malhandean, Jackmans, Hadfold & Guilmans Farms, and Richard has Woodhouse, Wildens & Hampshires, and uses Lockyers & Newbridge, where he is living. Old Richard Evershed fail'd there 2 or 3 years ago. He is now living with David Baker, in a New House he has built in the Cricketting Field.

Your Old Treble singing Partner (Thomas Baker) is still Clerk at the Church, he lives where John Voice did when you left, His wife was one of the Holden's of Minceswood, they have 4 Children, so that he is got the start of you. We knock up a pretty good Choir at the Church, and one of Job Voice's Son's scrapes the Bass Viol.

George Puttock is still living at The Kings Arms. He lost his oldest son (William) about two years ago, which was a great loss to him, and young John Allman died in the same year, we have had several changes at the Kings Head – Richard King is living there now – one of Old Polly King's Grandsons, on the hill.

Old Higler Turner is still living He broke his leg 2 or 3 years ago and after a long time he got the better of it, and about a fortnight ago he broke it again in the same place. It is thought by many that it will be too much for him this time, but you know he is pretty tough. [James Turner evidently was pretty tough as in 1851 aged 78 he was living with his wife and family near the Kings Arms, Billingshurst and still working as a higler/poulterer].

We hope you will write as soon as possible after you get this, and send us all the news you can of the general features of the country with the prices of provisions, and the way you do business generally, – Direct to "William Bridger, Wooddale Farm, Billingshurst, Sussex, O[ld].E[ngland]." – which will be sure to find us – But now we are on the subject of directions, yours makes us think that we are apt to attach English ideas to your American words, for instance, you tell us to direct to "Michigan City".

Now, our Ideas of a City is, that it is a large place, containing many large Streets and Public Buildings, and in England were we to send to a person living in a City, we should be obliged to

state the Number of the House, and name of the Street, otherwise the letter would stand a poor chance of reaching its destination.

I must now think of closing my letter, I am not able to give you half the news which would interest you, I wish you could pay us a visit, you would see many changes in the place that I have overlooked. But should there be any one that you should wish to hear off, that I have forgotten, you shall know in my next, if you will name it in yours. All the family unite with me in love to you and your Dear Partner, we hope she will not forget to urge you to write, should you be inclined to neglect to do so. Hoping this may find you both in good health and happy is the prayer of your affectionate Mother Maryann Bridger.

PS I had almost forgot to tell you that Miraim [sic] Johnson is married to Wm Turner at last, after a Courtship of nearly 20 years. They were married about 3 Month ago. Aaron Johnson is living at Duckmoor, Moses at Dann which he uses, and John at Leverance which he uses & the little farm at 5 Oaks where Venn used to live. Job is living in the Street & has no business of his own at present. He married one of the Holden's of Minceswood, – all the rest, as I dare say you know, are at America.

Eliza Voice married George Taylor in 1843 at Thakeham. He was the son of Mrs Mary Taylor with whom she had been living since she left home and her late husband William Taylor. George was working for the miller and farmer Henry Humphrey at Amberley in 1841.

The windmill was up on the Downs south of Amberley village at High Titten. The stone built smock mill was erected in 1824 and although originally designed as a corn mill, it later became a cement mill, used for crushing chalk quarried from the nearby chalk pits. It reverted to corn milling, with the addition of an underground wooden shaft, which turned a cement mill in a shed nearby. The mill was demolished in 1875, so that the chalk on which it stood could be quarried.⁹

Letter from Eliza (Voice) Taylor to her brother George Voice.

*Mrs Taylor, Amberley, near Arundel, Sussex [post-marked at Arundel Fe[bruary] 1 1847]
Mr George Voice, Cabinet Maker, Michigan City,*

*Laporte County, State of Indiana, North America,
Post Paid*

Amberley Jan 29th 1847

My Dear Brother

We were all very pleased to hear from you and that you were in good health, but the very day your letter arrived I am sorry to tell you Mother met with a bad accident. In going down to the pond for a Bucket of water, by some means or other her foot slipped, she fell and Broke her leg. The doctor was setting the Bone when your letter arrived but I am happy to tell you she is much better but mends very slowly – I fear she will not be able to do without her Crutches until the warm weather sets in, but we must trust in God and hope for the best, – Bridger [Eliza's step-father] I must also tell you has met with an accident in coming from Horsham. He was thrown out of a cart and it was a very narrow escape for him. He has hurt his head very much indeed –

You will say we have been truly unfortunate when I tell you George has also met with an accident and had his foot dreadfully crushed in the Mill a few weeks after Mother's accident and he still continues very lame and not able to wear his own shoe. [The 'edge runner' stones in a cement mill ran vertically in a stone trough to crush the lumps of chalk, so accidents were not uncommon.]

And now I must speak of your intended journey home to England. You know without my telling you how pleased we shall all be to see you and your wife and family (if you have any), and sincerely hope you will not disappoint us. We will if it please God, all meet together again once more as you wish and I also hope you will spend as much of your time as you can spare with me at Amberley –

You must be sure and write to us and say which day you intend coming that some of us may meet you. If you come to London there is the Brighton Railway which will bring you to Arundel and that is within 5 miles of my House and I will come there and meet you if you only write and say when. [The London to Brighton Railway opened in 1841 but did not reach Ford until 1846 not long before Eliza wrote this letter. Ford Station was known as Arundel Station until the Mid-Sussex line opened in 1863 when New Arundel Station was built]¹⁰ Or

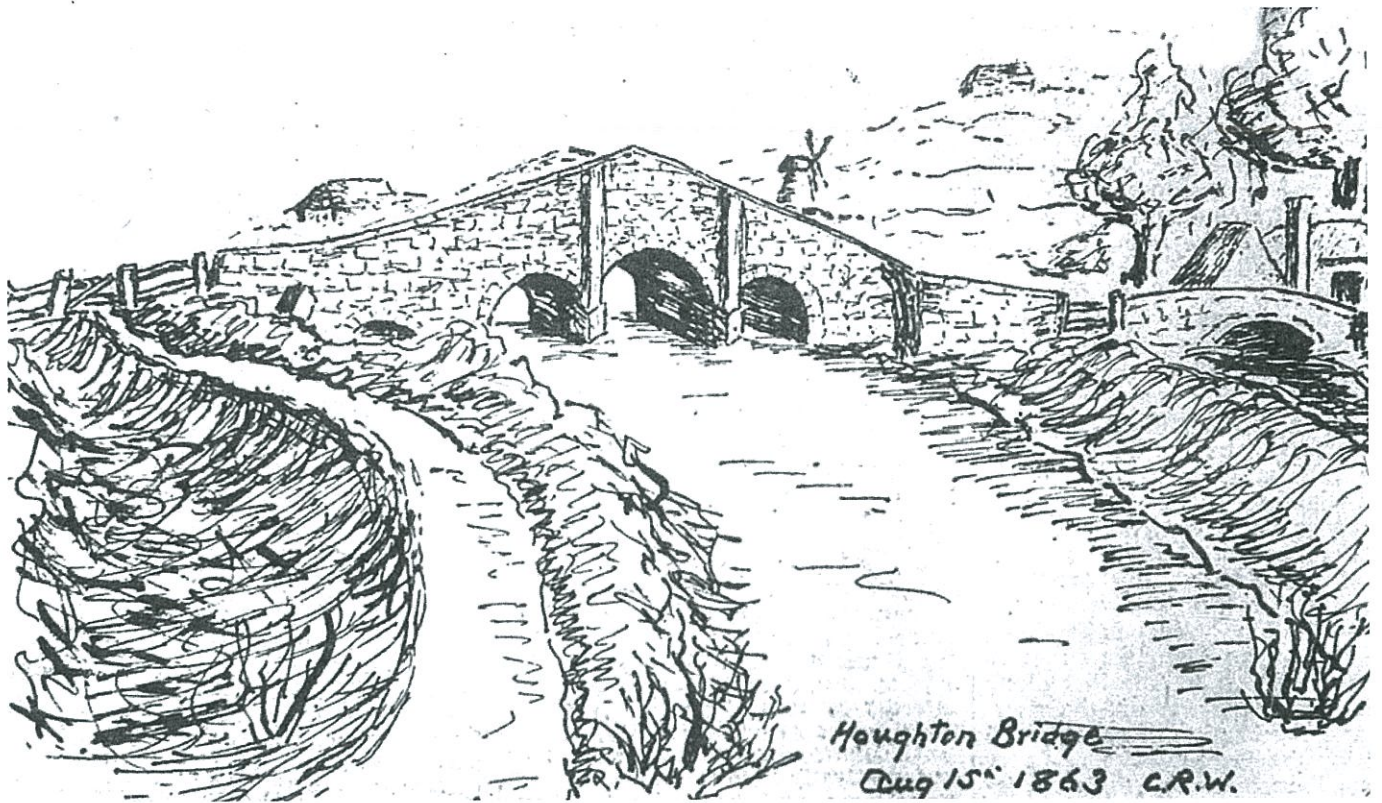


Figure 2: Amberley Mill just visible behind Houghton Bridge 1863.
Illustration courtesy of the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum.

you can come by Coach if you prefer doing so to Billingshurst, the same Coach runs now that always did three times a week and starts from the Elephant and Castle. But you will be sure and write as soon as you receive this – I will put my directions at the bottom of the letter – I must now conclude hoping to see you soon you [sic] and with Kindest love from all to yourself and wife I remain my dear Brother
your affectionate Sister Eliza Taylor

George Taylor's wife Eliza Voice was buried at Amberley in 1848 aged 33. On the 1851 census George, a widower, was living at High Titten Cottage, his occupation given as miller grinder. George was married again in 1854 to Elizabeth Upperton. By 1871 he had stopped milling and in 1881 had moved into the village to a cottage in East Street. Elizabeth died just before the census of 1881.

Letter from George Taylor in Amberley, to his brother-in-law George Voice.

June 16 1864

My Dear Friend and Brother i at last take the oportuntaty of riting theas fuv lines to you and hope

this will find you and youres quite well. But i must tell you that i have been very poorely for some time with a Cold and Cough and also my wifs is very porley for She Suffers very much with the rumaiteck. Dear Brother i was very Pleased to hear frome you and to hear that you and yours whear all quite well, but i had begane to think that i neaver Should hear frome you again as it was so long Since i heard frome you last.

Dear friend you wish to know when poor Eliza your Sister died. She died in december 17 1848. She diede in decline. She was ill some time. She kept her bead 16 weeks.

Your poor mother died 2 years ago last March. She died with a Parlitick Stroke. She took on Saturday and died on Wensday and never Spoke again. She was buried at LudgerShall near Petworth. Your two Sister and three brother and father are living out there now. Dear brother i Shall be very pleased to hear frome you again at any time

i must bring it to a close i reamin yours Sincerely
george Taylor
My adress is george Taylor, Amberley near Arundel
Sussex

Sarah Bridger was the half sister of George Voice. Sarah was born to Mary Ann and William Bridger in 1840, six years after George emigrated, so they had never met.

Letter from Sarah Bridger, Park Farm, Lurgashall, to her half-brother George Voice.

Sarah Bridger, Park Farm, Ludger Shall, Petworth, Sussex, Old England

June 20 [?] / 64

My dear Brother

Allthou I have never seen you I have heard owr poor Mother Speak often of you and she was very much put out to think she never heard wher you was. If you will be kind anuff to write to me I will answer yours and so keep up corespondence to each other.

Hope your dear Wife and family his quite well from your loving Sister Sarah Bridger

There is no evidence that George Voice ever returned to visit his family in West Sussex. He married twice and had seven or eight daughters. George died aged 79 years, on 26 August 1890 and is buried in Greenwood Cemetery, Michigan City, LaPorte County, Indiana.

Leigh Lawson

FOOTNOTES

¹ Wendy Cameron and Mary McDougall Maude, *Assisting Emigration to Upper Canada, The Petworth Project 1832-1837*, McGill Queen's University Press 2000

² *Letters from Sussex Emigrants*, Petworth: John Phillips 1833-37 and other sources too numerous to mention here

³ Wendy Cameron, Sheila Haines, Mary McDougall Maude, *English Immigrant Voices, Labourers' Letters from Upper Canada in the 1830s*, McGill Queen's University Press 2000

⁴ Reproduced in *English Immigrant Voices*, Letter 98: 27 Oct 1834

⁵ James Marr Brydone, *Narrative of a Voyage of Emigration, 1834* Petworth: John Phillips. Reprinted 1987 as *Voyage of Emigration to Toronto, Canada*

⁶ Richard Hughes was convicted of fraud at the Petworth Quarter Sessions on 8th Jan 1846. His sentence was transportation to Tasmania (Van Diemen's Land) for seven years. He went on the ship 'John Calvin'. England & Wales, Criminal Registers 1791-1892; Australian Convict Transportation Registers 1791-1868 Ancestry.com.

⁷ Peter Kensett aged 50 was convicted of receiving stolen goods and sentenced to transportation for 14 years at the Western Division Sussex County Sessions on 2 Jan 1845. England & Wales, Criminal Registers 1791-1892 Ancestry.com.

⁸ Leonard J Maguire, *The Diary of Peter Kensett 1819-1844*, The General Baptist Assembly Occasional Paper No. 21

⁹ H.E.S Simmons papers, Science Museum Library, courtesy of the Sussex Mills Group and Sussex Industrial Archaeology Society. Also H.E.S. Simmons, 'Survey of Windmills in Sussex', *Sussex County Magazine* (Vol 11 1937) 738-803

¹⁰ Tim Hudson (ed), *A History of the County of Sussex* Vol 5 part 1 Arundel Rape, Victoria County History 1997

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With thanks to Lorraine Bear, Peter Hill, Richard Howell and Martin Snow