

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



Letitia's Story

Letitia Gilbert is an intriguing character. She had four illegitimate children. There is no way of knowing if these multiple extra-marital pregnancies were the result of a long-standing relationship, perhaps with a married man, or if they were a by-product of her lifestyle. It seems unlikely that they were the children of her future husband, Thomas Cook, as his first wife died at the beginning of 1840¹ and presumably they would have married sooner were this the case. The eldest of Letitia's children, Jacob, was born when she was about nineteen.² Her daughter Mary was baptised at Great Bedwyn, Wiltshire,³ followed by Amy Louisa, who was baptised at Froxfield.⁴ The youngest child, George, was baptised at Lambourn, Berkshire on the 10th



All Saints, Froxfield

The Children of Letitia Gilbert

Jacob baptised 28 January 1827 Great Bedwyn
Mary baptised 26 June 1831 East Grafton
Amy Louisa baptised 24 November 1833
Froxfield
George baptised 10 March 1839 Lambourn,
Berkshire, buried 7 January 1840 Froxfield

By her husband Thomas Cook

Harvey baptised 2 April 1843 Chute
Elizabeth Ann baptised 27 October 1844 Chute
Isaac baptised 31 January 1847 Chute
Charles born c. 1848 baptised 25 May 1861
Chute

¹ Burial register of St. Mary's, Chute, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

² Baptism register of St. Mary's, Great Bedwyn, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

³ Baptism register of St. Mary's, Great Bedwyn, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

⁴ Baptism register of All Saints, Froxfield, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

of March 1839.⁵ He was buried at Froxfield on the 7th of January 1840 'of Lambourn workhouse'.⁶ It seems likely that Letitia was in the workhouse at this time, perhaps with all her children. Alternatively, she may have been working in Froxfield and had left George, with or without his siblings, in the workhouse where he was almost certainly born. By 1841, Letitia and her three surviving children were living in East Grafton with her father, Isaac, three of her siblings and a nephew.⁷

When Letitia's daughter, Mary, married Jeremiah Hoare on the 18th of July 1851 at Chute, she gave her father's name as Moses Gilbert.⁸ He could be a complete fiction, or perhaps her father's Christian name was Moses. Her second marriage, to John Rolfe at Fosbury on the 22nd of April 1876 leaves her father's name blank.⁹ On marriage, Amy Louisa's father was listed as Thomas Gilbert,¹⁰ perhaps because her step-father's christian name was Thomas. Jacob's marriage to Mary Cumnor at East Grafton on the 18th of September 1851 pulls no punches. Under father's name it reads 'illegitimate so no father'.¹¹ Interestingly, Jacob had had banns of marriage called in the November of 1850, stating his intention to marry Ann Cue. The incumbent has made a marginal note to state that the couple were not married and that Jacob later married Mary.¹²

Letitia was not the only member of the Gilbert family to have children out of wedlock. Her sister, Elizabeth, also had four illegitimate children,¹³ sisters Ann and Maria had one each and their cousin Amy had three.¹⁴ Only one of Letitia's four sisters who reached the age of twenty one did not have an illegitimate child.

⁵ Baptism register of St. Michael and All Angels, Lambourn, Berkshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

⁶ Index to burial register of All Saints, Froxfield, Wiltshire via www.findmypast.co.uk.

⁷ 1841 census for East Grafton, Great Bedwyn, Wiltshire 1180 e. dist. 1 folio 52 Isaac Gilbert.

⁸ Marriage register of St. Mary's, Chute, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

⁹ Marriage register of Christ Church, Fosbury, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

¹⁰ Marriage certificate of Frederick Few and Amy Louisa Gilbert photocopy from fellow researcher.

¹¹ Marriage register of St. Nicholas, Grafton, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

¹² Banns register of St. Nicholas, East Grafton, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

¹³ Baptism register of St. Mary's, Great Bedwyn, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk. Baptism register of St. Nicholas, East Grafton, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

¹⁴ Baptism register of St. Mary's, Great Bedwyn, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk. Baptism register of St. Nicholas, East Grafton, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk. Index to baptism register for St. Mary the Virgin's, Vernham Dean, Hampshire via www.findmypast.co.uk.

On the 18th of June 1842, Letitia married widowed Thomas Cook at Chute, neither could sign and the witnesses were Jane and John Gilbert.¹⁵ They had four children, Harvey, Elizabeth, or Elizabeth Ann,¹⁶ who went on to marry John Few, the brother-in-law of Elizabeth's half-sister Amy.¹⁷ Next came Isaac, baptised at Chute on the 31st of January 1847¹⁸ and finally Charles, who was born about 1848¹⁹ but was not baptised until the 25th of May 1861.²⁰

In 1851, Thomas and Letitia were living in Hippenscombe. With them were their four children, two of Thomas' children by his first wife and Letitia's daughters Mary and Amy, or Emily as she was sometimes known. Thomas, Letitia and all the older children, including the girls, were listed as farm labourers.²¹ Thomas was buried at Chute on the 14th of August 1853.²²

Letitia's second marriage took place at Chute on the same day as the baptism of her youngest son by Thomas Cook, who was by then about thirteen. On the 25th of May 1861, she married shepherd Thomas Fisher, who was twenty years her junior. The marriage was witnessed by Ann Absalom and her son in law Frederick Few.²³ Letitia died of heart disease just nine months later, on the 18th of February 1862, at Hippenscombe. The death was registered by her daughter Mary Hoare.²⁴

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¹⁵ Marriage register of St. Mary's, Chute, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

¹⁶ Baptism register of St. Mary's, Chute, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

¹⁷ Marriage register of Christ Church, Fosbury, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

¹⁸ Baptism register of St. Mary's, Chute, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

¹⁹ 1851 census for Hippenscombe, Wiltshire HO107 1686 folio 163.

²⁰ Baptism register of St. Mary's, Chute, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

²¹ 1851 census for Hippenscombe, Wiltshire HO107 1686 folio 163.

²² Burial register of St. Mary's, Chute, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

²³ Marriage register of St. Mary's, Chute, Wiltshire via www.ancestry.co.uk.

²⁴ Death certificate of Letitia Fisher, lately Cook, née Gilbert 1862 from the General Register Office pdf.