

Charles Towsey of Henley upon Thames in the County of Oxford Gentleman

Mary Harriet Sparks

H. B. Moorhouse

W. J. Towsey

John Towsey

Henley upon Thames

Edmond Towsey

John Towsey

TOWSEY TALES

NAME: Gregory Geering (Gerynge etc.)

BIRTH DETAILS: 9 April 1663 Denchworth, Berks

DEATH DETAILS: 21 July 1724

CHART REF: Towsey Chart E2 & E6

MARRIAGE DETAILS: circa 1691, Sutton Courtenay, Berks.

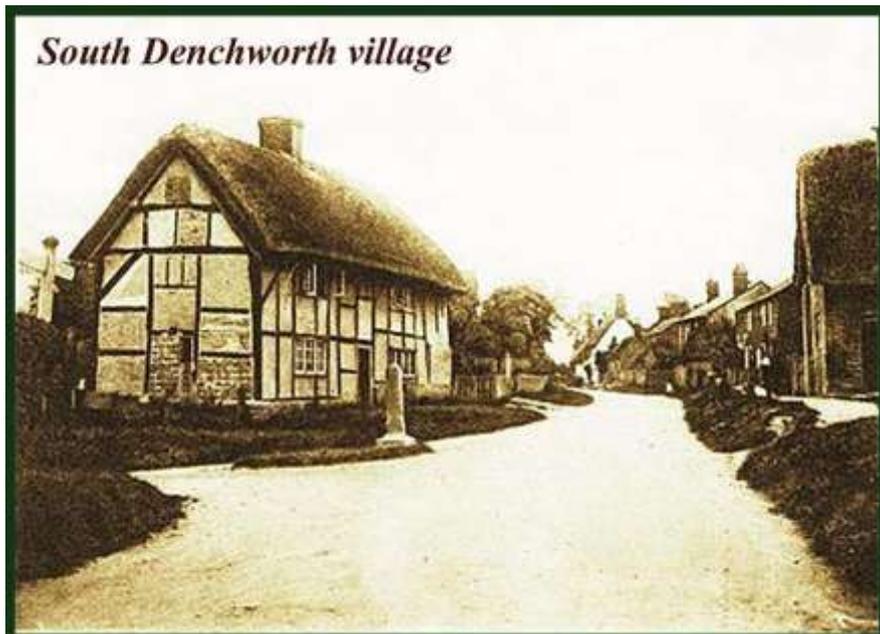
SPOUSE: Martha Hibbert

Sarah Geering, who married Edward Towsey in 1729, was the daughter of Gregory Geering, an attorney, who had grown up in and then owned the Manor of Denchworth, at the village of South Denchworth, a few miles from Wantage in Berkshire.



The Geering family had been tenants on a portion of the Denchworth Manor for some years before buying it from the Hyde family in 1663: the year in which Gregory Geering was born.

There are several elaborate marble memorials to the Geerings in the parish church at South Denchworth.



Tracing the various members of the Geering family is no easy task as there seem to be many of them about the county at any given time through several centuries and as so often happened, the same small pool of names was endlessly recycled not just from one generation to the next, but also sideways through cousins and anyone else who might have perceived a possible financial advantage in naming their child after a wealthy relative.

Gregory Geering's father, a yeoman, had been another Gregory, as had his father before him and these connections can be seen on Towsey Charts E2 and E6, then also connecting to other prominent families around that area. These include the Hibbert, Clement, Frogley and Aldworth families, found on Charts E3 and E4... Hang on! Did I

hear right: Frogley?! Yes indeed: Frogley. One might think that having the name Frogley would have been something of a

handicap. And well it might in other circumstances. In Wantage at that time though, if the local youths had wanted to ridicule someone, they would most likely have picked on John Pollexfen Bastard. There are records of the Bastard family up to the mid 19th century.

Gregory Geering was a member of Grays Inn in London.

Grays Inn is one of the four Inns of Court which existing at that time and still exist today.

These Inns of Court first evolved in the 13th century, when the English Common Law was becoming complex enough to require a specific course of study.

The church, who controlled the universities, were against the idea of teaching a common law, based on precedent, in favour of Roman Law, as administered by themselves. So the practitioners of the common law had to make their own arrangements.

After the Knights Templar, that annoyingly independent bunch of warrior monks, were disbanded in 1312, the property which they had owned on the banks of the River Thames, between London and Westminster, was leased by the king to the Knights Hospitaller. It was they who started renting houses in the churchyard to professors of the common law, from about 1326. The two Inns: Inner Temple and Middle Temple, still occupy these grounds. Just north of these is Lincoln's Inn, established by the Earl of Lincoln at about the same time. The largest of the Inns of Court is Grays Inn, just to the north of the other Inns, established on land leased from St.Pauls by Lord Grey of Wilton in the 13th century. All of

these Inns were flourishing as societies of lawyers by the early 15th century.

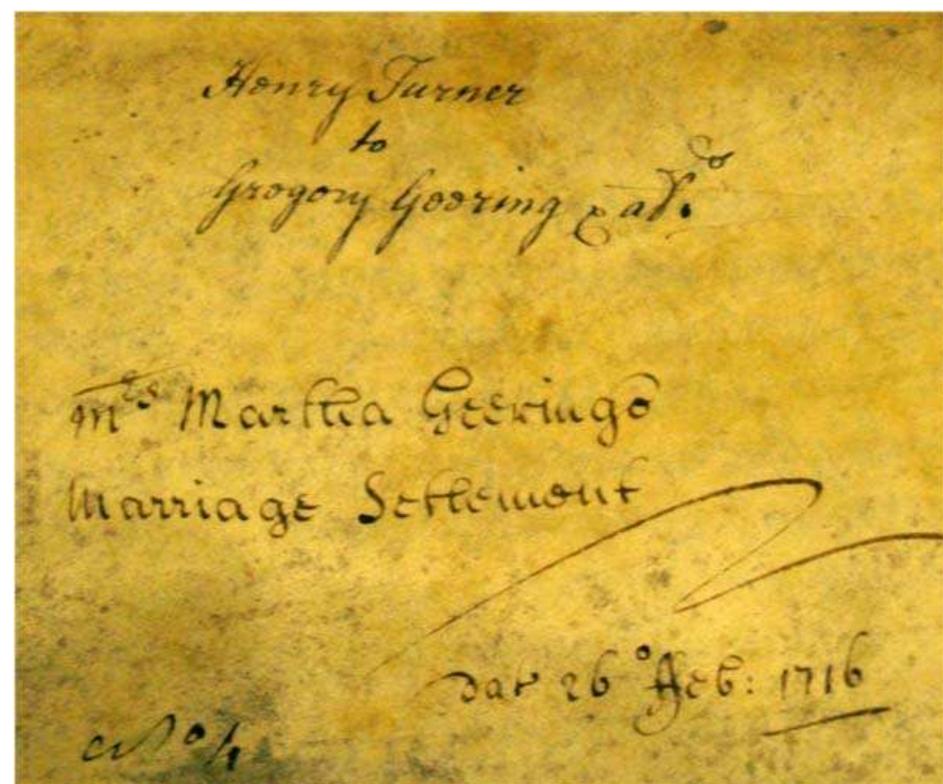
Each of these Inns are comprised of numerous office buildings for the various barrister's chambers, some residential apartments, their own halls, churches and parklands: Comfortable little worlds unto themselves.

Gregory Geering would have been undertaking his legal studies during the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell. At this time there was a lot of pressure on the universities to toe the politically correct line of the Puritan Parliament. This would not have been the best period during which to get a university education. Even without Cromwell's intervention, the range of subjects at the universities in those days was fairly limited, moving one towards an academic or religious career. So apart from apprentices to the legal benches, many looking to a career in commerce would also study at one of the Inns of Court.

Such a course of legal study did not come cheaply, so it was mainly the sons of wealthy merchants and landowners who enjoyed membership of these exclusive societies. Just as in the present day at the better universities, these years were when one developed connections which might help in one's career: The Old Boy Network.

The law firm that Gregory Geering established in the 17th century, was still practicing in London into the 19th century, under his descendants, all of whom seem to have been called Gregory,

Gregory married Martha Hibbert in about 1691 and had 13 children with her in



A marriage settlement contract for Martha Geering, born 1696, sister of Mrs. Sarah Towsey (nee Geering).

the 16 years between 1692 and 1713 The eleventh being Sarah, who married Edward Towsey.

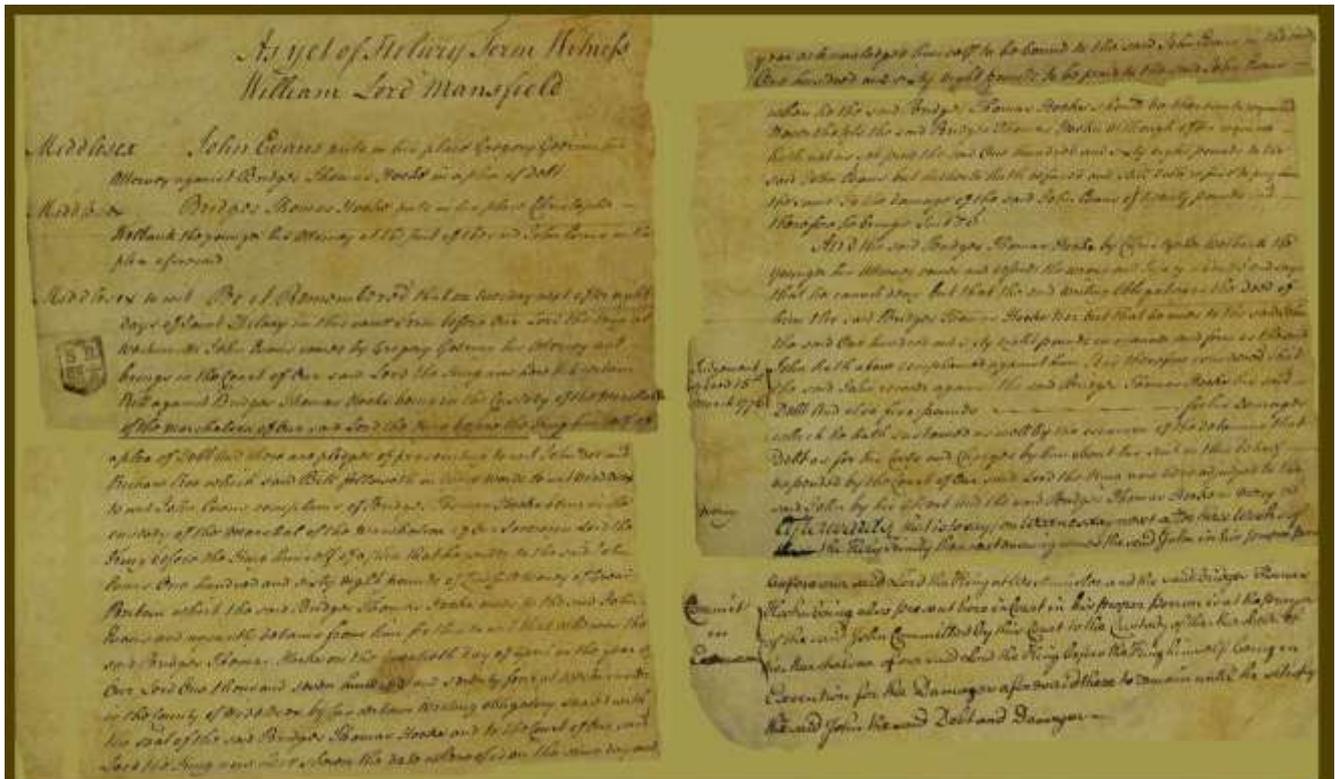


the 16 years between 1692 and 1713 The eleventh being Sarah, who married Edward Towsey.

Gregory must have commuted quite often between London and Wantage. Apart from running his London legal practise, he was also elected a governor of the Wantage Town Lands in 1699 and sheriff of Wantage in 1711.

As mentioned, the Geering law practise continued long after the passing of this Gregory Geering, in 1724. His eldest son was supposed to be the next in the continuing line of Gregorys, but he never married and died at 35 years of age. His younger brother, William, does seem to have practiced law and one of his sons, another William, was Procurator General of Arches at the Court of Canterbury.

There are several references in later years, to lawyers in London called Gregory Geering but, as mentioned, there were so many Geerings about the country with the same names, it is difficult to be certain they all fit in. We can be reasonably sure though, that the following Gregory would have been a grandson or great grandson of this Gregory, who died in 1724.



Before Lord Chief Justice Mansfield (William Murray), on the King's Bench (the highest court), during Hilary Term, 1776 (the first of the four terms of the year).

In the county of Middlesex

John Evans is represented by his attorney, Gregory Geering, in a plea to recover a debt from Bridges Thomas Hooke, represented by his attorney, Christopher Welbank.

Hooke is in custody at the Marshalsea prison, in Southwark. Most prisoners in the Marshalsea were debtors, some of whom could be kept there for many years, largely at the discretion of their creditors.

Being run as a commercial venture, the prison would be a living hell for those without means, but more like a club for those with some money. They had access to a shop and restaurant within the prison and would also be allowed out during the day, hopefully to raise money to pay off their debts. The advantage for such people of being in the Marshalsea, was that they were protected from further prosecution for debt. Charles Dickens' father was in Marshalsea for several years, from 1812 and this experience made its way into Dickens' writings.

Also mentioned in this court appearance, are the names John Doe and Richard Roe. It appears that this mention is a way for John Evans to prevent others from claiming debts against Hooke, before he was paid.

The names John Doe and Richard Roe, were often used in court cases at that time, referring to persons whose names were either unknown or allowed to remain anonymous. These terms are no longer used in Britain, but are still seen in police and court reports in USA. The famous case of Roe v Wade, which made abortion legal, is such an instance, where the pregnant woman's identity is concealed by the name Roe.

As a result of this court appearance, Hooke was returned to the Marshalsea until such time as he could repay Evans, with costs.

I have also discovered another case involving Gregory Geering, which sheds light on a particularly interesting piece of history.

This case is from 1809 and could be either the same Gregory Geering from the 1776 case, or perhaps his son, who was also an attorney.

KING v. FERGUSSON.

2nd May, 1809

HIGH COURT OF ADMIRALTY.

JUDGMENT.

IN this case the Judge decreed a monition against *Alexander Fergusson*, as commander of the private ship of war, *Lucy*, *Gregory Geering*, who appeared for him, *Henry Hobbs*, and *William Ransom*, his sureties, on granting him letters of marque, citing them to appear and see proceedings had against them, and to shew cause why the bail recognizance should not be decreed to be forfeited for a breach of his Majesty's instructions. The act of parliament requires that upon granting letters of marque, the Captain and two sureties shall appear and give security; but on considerations of convenience, where the Captain is absent, the practice of the Court permits some other person to appear for him.

Swabey on the part of Mr. Geering contended—That only the two sureties were bound, and that when *Mr. Geering* appeared on behalf of the Captain, he did not bind himself personally, and that therefore he ought to be relieved.

On the other side it was urged by the King's Advocate,—That the bond must be interpreted by its own tenor, and not by extrinsic evidence. That *Mr. Geering* had personally bound himself by the terms of the bond, and the Court could not exonerate him, and lay the burden upon the other two.

Sir William Scott.—The question in this case is, whether the security given, is to bind the captain, or the party who appears on his behalf. Now it is clear that *Mr. Geering* could not by any act of his bind the captain, from whom he had no authority; and there is no intimation in the bond itself that he intended to do so. In the act of parliament it is specified that the master and two sureties shall give security; if therefore, the substitute cannot bind him, and does not bind himself, there is a want of one of the three sureties required, and the provisions of the act are not complied with. In the description, it is true *Mr. Geering* appears on behalf of the captain, but what is the obligatory part of the bond? "They do all severally consent that execution shall issue forth," against whom? not against the captain, but "against themselves, their heirs, executors, and administrators." It is for the parties to consider well before-hand how far they are willing to incur that risk, and if any inconvenience arises from the practice, it may be altered; but I cannot venture to say, that the undertaking by which *Mr. Geering* submitted to bind himself, does not bind him.—*Recognizance forfeited.*

Many people know that during the sixteenth century, Queen Elizabeth secretly condoned the actions of certain favourites, such as Francis Drake in attacking Spanish ships as they took treasure back from the New World.

By the eighteenth century, privateering was being conducted on a massive, organized scale by all of the European powers as a cost-effective way of fighting an economic war against their enemies.

Whereas naval ships were expensive to build and operate, to say nothing of the constant problem of finding crews, by licensing private operators to go out and capture the merchant vessels of your enemy, the government could save money whilst, if necessary, being able to deny involvement in such activities.

The proceeds would be divided between the crew, the government and speculative investors.

Privateers might buy up old naval ships, convert merchant vessels, or build small raiders themselves.

The government would licence a privateer with a 'Letter of Marque' that specified the name of the ship, the captain and perhaps the scope of activities that they were thus entitled to undertake. This also required that the master, plus two other signatories, would pay a bond, promising to abide by the terms of the Letter of Marque. Needless to say, the generally unsavoury nature of the business meant that privateers would often overstep their authority or even go completely rogue as pirates. The famous Captain Kidd was one such.

It would appear from the report of the case involving Gregory Geering, that when he acted on behalf of the captain of the private war ship, 'Lucy', he was acting not as an attorney, but as an interested party.

It is likely that Geering was a financier of this venture, which would have involved raiding the ships of France, with whom Britain was at war at that time. As Captain Fergusson was probably already at sea, Geering had appeared on his behalf, along with the two other guarantors.

Something went wrong and the case came before the High Court of Admiralty, who dealt with such matters. Because Captain Fergusson had most likely run off, or gone rogue with the Lucy, the law required that those who signed the surety would have to forfeit their bond money.

Geering was arguing, through his lawyer, that he should not be held liable, because he was merely acting on behalf of the captain. It is obvious that according to the law, Geering was indeed liable, but, as a member of an old and

respected legal family, who were probably friends with the judges of the Admiralty Court, it was decided that he was, in fact, not liable.

So what happened to Captain Fergusson and the Lucy?

It might be that Fergusson was captured and the ship sold, or he might have simply run off to the newly independent United States of America where he sold the ship and pocketed the cash.

We see that in 1812, after the US had declared war on Great Britain, that the Lucy, from Virginia, has been issued with a Letter of Marque, under a different captain, by authority of US President Madison, to attack British merchant ships.

Both Britain and the US used privateers extensively during the War of 1812. The US because their navy was still small and the British because of their commitments to the war against France.

Privateering came to an end with a treaty signed in Paris in 1856.

There are no more records of the Geering family after this.