

My Goxhill Family History

I came to live in Goxhill with my husband six years ago having previously always lived in Grimsby. Neither of us had any connection with Goxhill but we both liked the village and found the people we met here were friendly. My favourite pastime came to be walking with our dog, Harry, on the Humber bank. I loved walking there, feeling somehow drawn to the place and although some find it too bleak, I always felt kind of at home there amongst the peaceful wild beauty.

About three years ago at Christmas time I fell while walking there with Harry and broke my ankle. While recovering, and finding myself with a lot of time on my hands, I began researching my family history something that had been on my 'to-do' list for ages. Starting with the 1901 census that had recently been made available to view online, I had some snippets of information about both sides of my family. Almost one of the first things that came up was an entry for my paternal grandfather's family, living in Hull, but what intrigued me was that the birthplace listed for both of his parents was "Lincolnshire - Skitter Haven". This interested me because I knew that there was a Skitter Ness and a Haven shown on the OS map on Goxhill's coastline. It couldn't be connected, could it?

I sent an e-mail to Scunthorpe library to enquire if there was any record of a Skitter Haven in this part of the country. The answer came back no - there was no such record but they did tell me that skitter was an old word for a waterway or open sewer, which I found quite amusing.

Next I sent off for a copy of my great-grandmother's birth certificate and when it arrived it showed that my great-grandmother, Sarah Elizabeth Johnson, was born 1 April 1870 in East Halton and her father's occupation was as a brickyard worker. This excited me because I knew that there had been brickyards in various places along the Humber bank and I was convinced there was a connection. Going further back the 1871 census showed the Johnson family residing in Skitter Lane, East Halton, with the children's birthplaces listed as "Goxhill, Lincs".

Everything fell into place for me when I bought a copy of the book "Glimpses of Old Goxhill" published in June 2004. On page 106 was a piece about the local brickmaking industry by Bob Towle. When I read the words "the seventh yard was on the Goxhill side of Skitter Haven (East Halton Haven)" and that the brickyards had each had "a row of terraced houses for the workforce" I knew that this was the exact place that my great-grandmother had been born and had lived there as a child with her parents and brothers and sisters. Although there wasn't much more information about the community, I did discover that Skitter Haven had even had its own Methodist Chapel. Sadly, there's no trace left of what must have been a thriving community because it was all demolished some time ago.

I felt so moved by these revelations because it occurred to me that here was a reason why I'd felt drawn to spending time walking along the bank. Something in me had felt an instant sense of belonging even though before moving here I'd hardly ever heard of Goxhill and I had never been here. I could hardly believe that by pure coincidence I now lived so close to the place where 130 years ago my ancestors had lived and worked.

Why be a victim of circumstance?

I read an article the other day about some research concluding that over the past 50 years our society has shifted its basic beliefs from "I can make a success of my life if I try hard enough" to "Success is more about chance than anything I can do."

Okay, so both statements are rather simplistic. But what interests me are the implications of those belief systems. If you see yourself as a victim of forces beyond your control then personal responsibility becomes a meaningless concept. For our society that victim mentality manifests itself in matters as diverse as obesity (it's the fault of fast-food marketers) to poor turnouts to vote in elections (politicians are all as bad). One could also make a strong case for its knock-on effects for crime rates, drug & alcohol use, and family break-up.

Yet it should not be this way. We are living in an age when we have more control than previous generations over our lives. There is less prejudice and discrimination on grounds of race, gender or sexual orientation. Technology frees up our time from mundane tasks and brings greater travel and entertainment opportunities within our reach. Better communication and the Internet help create more efficient markets in goods and services.

So what about the implications for each one of us as an individual? Buck the trend and focus on what you can do instead of what you may feel is "being done to you" and you will bring more success to your life.

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