

## Cornish Connections

My Great Great Great Grandmother was Eleanor Thomas the wife of Henry Laity Rogers. Henry and Eleanor's son, Henry born 1833, emigrated to Australia from Cornwall in 1854 sailing with his family from Plymouth to Adelaide aboard the *Standard*. I am a descendant of Henry Rogers, son of Eleanor.

Until recently I'd known very little of Eleanor and nothing of her antecedents. There are a lot of Thomases in Cornwall and it seemed to be an impossible task to establish with any confidence precisely which family of Thomases she came from. Eleanor and Henry Rogers had married in 1832 at St Ives, Cornwall. She appears in several census records and is consistently described as coming from St Ives and that's where things have been left for some considerable time.

Recently however I checked my DNA connections on Ancestry.com which revealed through the ThruLines function a number of potential 5th to 8th cousins, suggesting we might be related through a sibling of Eleanor Thomas.

There were three such connections; DP, EB and CM. Curiously though whilst all three were shown to be descended from a Matthew Thomas, two of the trees had Matthew born circa 1804 while for one of my potential cousins their ancestor, Matthew Thomas, was a little younger born in 1812. Both these Matthews were from the far west of Cornwall and ThruLines suggested the 2 Matthews and my Eleanor were all children of a Mathew Thomas born in 1783. Despite the algorithm I surmised it was very unlikely that Eleanor would have had two surviving brothers both named Matthew. It seemed more likely that my three distant cousins where in fact all descended from the same Matthew Thomas, which begged the question, 'Which one?'.

Firstly, it's worth noting there were in fact a number of Matthew Thomases born in West Cornwall in the early 1800s to fathers named Matthew. In total I have found 9 including a Matthew Thomas baptised at Zennor in 1804 and a Matthew Thomas baptised at St Ives in 1812.

### **Matthew Thomas of Cornwall via Bristol**

Starting with the 1812 Matthew it appears that he died in 1870 at Skillogolee Creek, South Australia. Several trees on Ancestry record this man as the father of a Thomas Thomas born 1843. Matthew's death notice records that he died at the residence of a Mr Thomas Thomas but frustratingly it made no reference to the relationship between the two. It did however note that he was 'late of Bristol'.

Through further research I was able to discover that this Matthew had spent a few periods in hospital in Adelaide for eye infections, two in the mid 1860's and lastly in the months leading up to his death. These records confirmed he was a native of Cornwall and had arrived in Australia aboard the *Royal Dane*. This led to discovering that Matthew had arrived in Melbourne in 1863 bound for Adelaide. Very few Ancestry trees had many details for Matthew other than his birth in Cornwall (despite newspapers saying that he had come from Bristol) and his death in Australia. On the basis that he was in England in the period leading up to his arrival in Australia I then searched the decennial censuses.

It wasn't too difficult to find a Matthew Thomas of the right age born in Cornwall and living in Bristol in 1861. This record showed Matthew living at Baldwin Street, Bristol St. Nicholas along with a son and daughter and a niece. Curiously all four were recorded in the census as unmarried. Clearly an error in Matthew's case, or was it? The hospital records in Adelaide and the shipping record of his journey out to Australia both indicated he was single, but what was of more interest to me was the name of his niece.

Matthew's niece was recorded as a 26-year-old dress maker from Cornwall named Eleanor Rogers and as it happens my x3 Great Grandmother had a daughter of this name, same age. There were no other 1861 census records for my Eleanor who in 1878 married William Hix.

Given the DNA link with CM this then, for me at least, proves that Matthew Thomas (1812-1870) was the brother of Eleanor Rogers née Thomas (1808 –1890) and that CM is my 5<sup>th</sup> Cousin once removed.

### **'1812' Matthew's wife & children**

The two children listed with Mathew in 1861 were Mary, 19 years old and Thomas, 18, and they can also be found in the 1851 census living with Matthew and their mother, Alice, and younger sister Alice b.1845. In the 1861 census Alice junior was at her Aunt Eleanor's (my x3 GGM) but was recorded as a 'visitor' rather than a niece which is why I hadn't made this connection before.

From this point on it wasn't difficult to establish that Matthew had married Alice Trezise in 1839 registered at Penzance, Cornwall and that they had three children. Fortuitously, the 1851 census also records Matthew's mother the widow Mrs Eleanor Thomas of St Keverne, Cornwall aged 70. I had now discovered a further x4 Great Grandmother.

### **Matthew and Eleanor's parents**

Matthew's father's name had been reported as Matthew in Ancestry trees though it's not at all clear what this was based on. It's possible it was recorded on his death certificate which I have not seen. I found a baptism record at St Ives for a Matthew Thomas, son of Matthew and Eleanor, dated 17 January 1812.

Looking through the records I was able to identify a further 4 baptism records for this couple in this parish namely; Elizabeth (5 May 1808), Mary (21 Jan 1814), Mary (18 Dec 1816) and Charlotte (7 Aug 1824). The earlier Mary, and Charlotte both died in infancy. The second Mary went on to marry a James Jennings in 1845 but sadly it was not to last as Mary died in 1848, just over a year after giving birth to a daughter also named Mary.

In the 1841 census living at Stennack, in St Ives there is a Matthew and Eleanor Thomas aged 55 and 60 respectively. Also, in the same household there was a Polly Thomas aged 25. I believe, with little supporting evidence, that this household is the same family and that Polly, so named in the 1841 census was in fact Mary Thomas born in 1816. There doesn't seem to be any other records for Polly, including any Polly Thomas born circa 1816 in Cornwall. But this is not the only problem with names.

My x3 GGM was Eleanor Thomas born circa 1809. However, the closest of the baptism records referred to above is for an 'Elizabeth' christened May 1808, four months after Matthew Thomas married Eleanor Gilbert, the mother of the aforesaid children. I've searched but have not found any other record for this Elizabeth Thomas and so I have concluded that the baby born just after her parents married, and christened Elizabeth, was to adopt the same name as her mother and is my ancestor, Eleanor Thomas.

It seems to me that all the evidence is pointing in this direction, both census records and DNA strongly suggest Matthew and Eleanor were siblings in this family.

### **So, what of the 1804 Matthew?**

Now that I knew the full family of the '1812 Matthew' I was able to quickly conclude that the other two genetic links, DP and EB, we're not through this man as their lines did not go through any of Matthew's three children with Alice. Added to this DP and EB did not share my DNA link to CM. '1804 Matthew' was definitely a different man altogether with at least 2 of his descendants genetically linked to me. If he wasn't my x3 GGM's brother, how was he related to me?

'1804 Matthew' had married a woman named Charity Nichols (1807-1836) and this immediately sparked my interest as I have a branch in my family that includes Nichols. Indeed, it is one of the longest branches I have in my family taking me back to the mid 1500s. And these Nichols or Nicholls also hail from Cornwall. However, this line, rather than running through Eleanor Thomas is for me traced through her spouse's ancestors.

### **Nicholls, not Thomas DNA**

My x3 GGF and Eleanor's husband, Henry Laity Rogers b.1808 was the grandson of Catherine (or Christiana) Nicholls (b.1749), the wife of Phillip Rogers (b.1755). It occurred to me then that despite the ThruLines best intentions perhaps I was related to DP and CB through the Nichol(l)s family rather than the Thomases.

Looking into the other public trees featuring Charity Thomas née Nicholls the consensus was she was the daughter of Richard Nichols (1768-1851) and granddaughter of Richard Nicholls (1736-1778). Several trees had this Richard as the son of Henry or Henricus Nichols born early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This last name rang bells with me but when I checked my own tree, I discovered that my Henricus Nicholls did not have a son named Richard.

The research into the Cornwall Nicholls is quite extensive and it's been undertaken by many people over many decades. A 259-page document was compiled by Warren Duff titled *NICHOLLS FAMILY of GULVAL PARISH CORNWALL, ENGLAND* and I have a copy of the Dec 2008 edition.

I've drawn on this on numerous occasions and it was from this source that I had Henricus Nichols with 10 children but no Richard, and so I was surprised to see some people had this same man having a son named Richard which did not feature in my Tree.

So, I dug out Warren's paper and found that Henricus did in fact have a son named Richard (1736-1778) married to Anne Davey (1733-1796), Charity Nichols' grandparents. It seems I had simply failed to transcribe them into my Ancestry tree. It makes me wonder how many other people I've missed off!

DP, CM and I share the ancestors Henry Nicholls (1711-1757) and Anne Leggoe (1714-1776). Therefore, CM is my 7<sup>th</sup> Cousin and DP is my 7<sup>th</sup> Cousin once removed.

### **Related nonetheless**

However, I don't think that's quite the end of the story because I believe that Charity's husband, Matthew Thomas born circa 1804 was the son of the Matthew Thomas who died in an accident at the Wheal Chance tin mine in 1809.

It's pretty clear from census records and other documents that 1804 Matthew hailed from Zennor, in Cornwall. In the baptism records for Zennor there are 4 Matthew Thomases baptised between 1800 and 1810. Most trees record Matthew's father as also named Matthew and there are 2 Matthew Ts baptised by a father named 'Mattw', one in 1804 and another 6 months later in 1805.

Between 1790 and 1810 there were 17 baptisms in Zennor of Thomas children with a father named Matthew. Unfortunately, no mothers' names were recorded at this time. These children almost certainly do not all come from the same family and while baptism dates are not the same as birthdays there are several baptisms of Thomas children that are so close together, they almost certainly aren't all siblings. Added to this there was no parish burial of a Matthew Thomas between the 1804 baptism and the 1805 one and I have concluded that the 1804 baptism was a child who at least survived into the 1810s and that the 1805 baptism is of a child of different parents.

In the 1851 and 1861 censuses Matthew and Charity's youngest daughter also named Charity (b.1836) was living with an aunt and an uncle; brother and sister John Thomas and Mary Thomas. Almost certainly siblings of 1804 Matthew.

At this point it might be worth noting that Charity Thomas née Nicholls died in 1836 probably in childbirth delivering the Charity referred to above. Matthew married again to Wilmott Osborne (b.1815) and had a further 7 children. It may not be too surprising then that Charity junior ends up living with an uncle and an aunt rather than her father and stepmother. Though it doesn't really need any speculating as to why, because there are many reasons why people have the living arrangements that they do. The key point is that this adds weight to my theory that 1804 Matthew was the son of the Zennor miner who died in 1809.

In Zennor a Matthew Thomas baptised a Mary Thomas in 1796 and a John Thomas in 1806 and both these dates fit with the census records referred to above. The Matthew who died in the mine accident was recorded at the time as leaving behind a wife and seven children. Considering the Zennor baptism records and bearing in mind that the miner had married a Charity Christopher in 1793 I am reasonably confident-ish that they had the following children.

- Charity 1793-1797
- Mary 1796-
- Charity 1798-1867
- Nancy (Ann) 1801-1872
- Jane 1802-1877
- Matthew 1804-1857
- John 1806-

I realise that only 6 of these children were alive when their father was killed in the mine leaving one surviving child unaccounted for, but I can't with any confidence speculate on which of the other children baptised at Zennor was a member of this family.

An interesting thing about '1804 Matthew' being the son of the unfortunate miner is that this provides a second Nichols line, at least by marriage. His mother was Charity Christopher b.1768 in Zennor, the daughter of Nicholas Christopher (1737-1811) and Charity Thomas (1749-1835). Charity C's baby sister was Elizabeth Christopher b.1778 who was the wife of Richard Nicholls (1768-1851) and the mother of 1804 Matthew's wife Charity Nicholls. In short, 1804 Matthew was the first cousin of his first wife.

### **Conclusion**

I think I'll give Ancestry.com's ThruLines a 4 out of 10. Of the 3 DNA matches it got one spot on. CM is in fact related to me through Matthew Thomas (1783-1848) and Eleanor Gilbert (1781-18??), my x4 GGPs and CM's x3 GGPs. In the process I discovered these previously unknown parents of my x3 GGM. Whilst the other 2 DNA matches are related to me it was not through the ancestors suggested by the algorithm, but to be fair it gave enough for me to work out how we are related.

Many thanks go out to the work of the countless researchers on Ancestry.com who publish their findings in public trees and from which much of the above is drawn. Of course, any mistakes are mine and I will be grateful for being corrected wherever I am in error. And a particular shout out to Warren Duff whose work was, as ever, an invaluable resource.

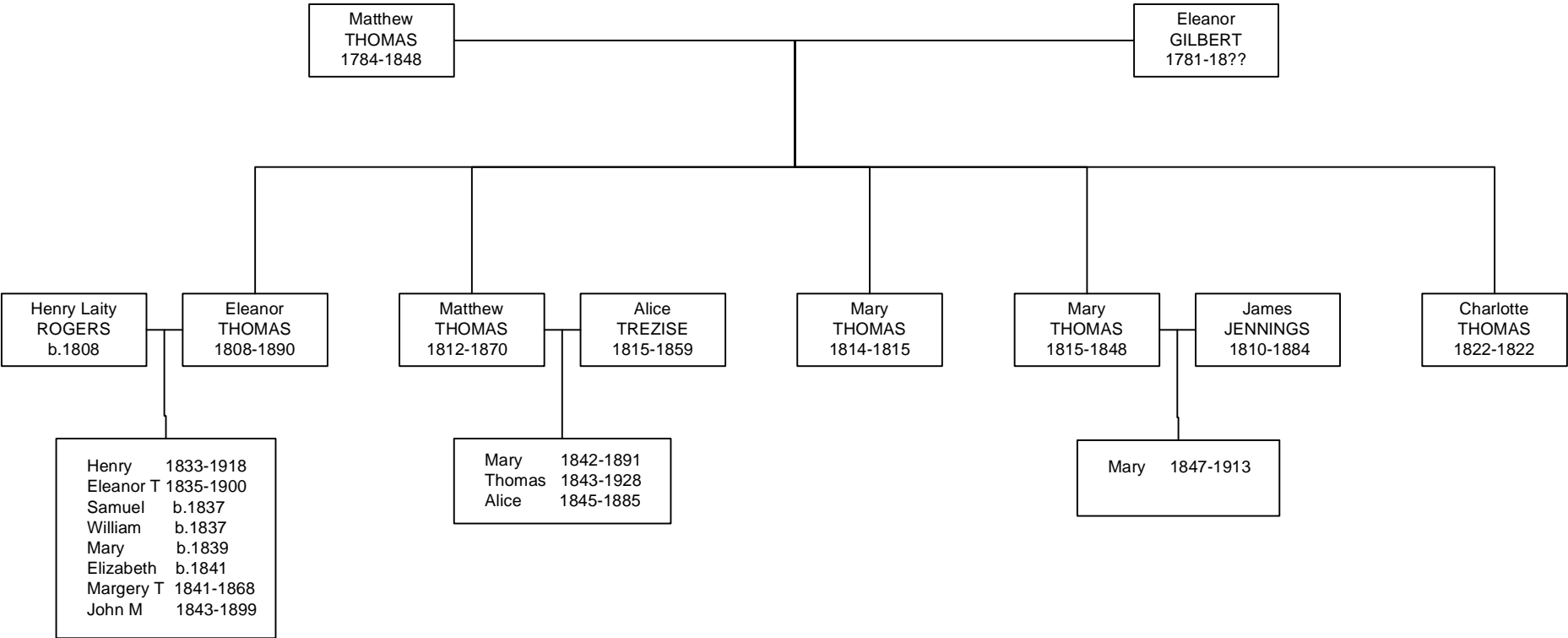
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P.S. For those with an interest in notable non-conformists '1804' Matthew's Great Grandfather (through his paternal Grandmother) was Matthew Thomas of Treen, Zennor (1714-1796) and was the first to open his house to John Wesley the 'founder' of Methodism, when he visited Zennor in 1744. On a subsequent visit Wesley was hosted by his son William Thomas. The Thomases were some of the first Methodists in Cornwall and instrumental in the denomination gaining a footing in the county.

Thomas family of St Ives. Cornwall



## My Nicholls family links to '1804' Matthew Thomas

