

## Now bear with me on this one

My x4 great grandmother was born Elinor Marten, she married under the name Eleanor Gilbert and baptised a daughter named Elizabeth. Elizabeth went by the name Eleanor and is my x3 GGM. Or so I am going to argue.

Genealogy can be a less than exact science. A fellow researcher often reminds me that 'when all else is excluded what's left is probably the truth'. The eminent philosopher Sir Karl Popper coined this 'falsificationism'.

Ideally, where memories fade documents link the generations, though sadly in England these become less and less precise the further in time you go back, particularly ~~in the period~~ before the mid-19 century when statutory registration when ~~and~~ regular censuses were introduced. Very quickly an element of guesswork inevitably comes into play.

Before 1813, if you're lucky, along with the baptismal name you will get the parents' names but more often than not only the father's name appears. You'll get the name of the church and parish, a date for the baptism but not usually a date of birth and again if you're lucky, a record was made of where the family lived and that's about it. For burials the information can be even more sparse, sometimes just providing the date of burial and the names of the deceased and that of the officiating priest. And that's it. Marriages don't fair very much better often providing nothing more than the church, date and the names of the wedded couple and their two witnesses.

On the upside the population was smaller than it is now, and people didn't move around quite as much so the 'John Smiths' in a given area can be counted in single digits rather than the 100s. Often, there's a good chance that a John Smith who married in parish X is the same John Smith who was baptised in the same parish 25 years before. And a 'good chance' is the most I will claim for what follows.

Recently through DNA matches Ancestry.com suggested a distant cousin of mine was related to me through an unknown brother of my x3 great grandmother Eleanor Rogers née Thomas born circa 1809. Having investigated it I'm pretty sure that is the case and the brother in question was Matthew Thomas born circa 1812.

There is significant supporting evidence for this. On census night 1861 Matthew had one of my x3 GGM's daughters with him recorded as his niece. That same night and in the house of my x3 GGM there was Matthew's daughter, unfortunately only described as a 'visitor' which is why I hadn't previously any real idea what relationship she had to my family.

In the 1851 census Matthew was hosting his mother the widow Mrs Eleanor Thomas born circa 1781. It seems to me a fair enough assumption that this woman is my x4 great grandmother, the mother of my x3 GGM.

I was then able to identify who Eleanor and Matthew's parents were. But here there is a certain degree of guesswork or calculated assumptions because while much of

this tree hangs together; dates, places and occupations, there is a little problem with names. Well, one in particular.

The family that I had found and presumed to be that of my x3 GGM named Eleanor doesn't have girl named Eleanor in it.

I'm pretty confident that Matthew's parents are Eleanor Gilbert and Matthew Thomas married at St Ives, Cornwall. I'm pretty sure that Matthew is the brother of Eleanor Rogers née Thomas. Which leads me to conclude that Mrs Eleanor Rogers was the daughter of Eleanor Gilbert and Matthew Thomas.

And to make this fit I am presuming that the daughter the couple did baptise on 5 May 1808 with the name Elizabeth is my x3 GGM who called herself Eleanor. I can find no other records for Elizabeth Thomas of St Ives b.1808. She doesn't appear to have married or been buried anywhere in Cornwall, but perhaps what seals it for me is that there is no other record of an Eleanor Thomas being born in this area at this time.

But this paper is all about who Eleanor Thomas née Gilbert was.

Apart from her marriage to Matthew Thomas at St Ives in 1807 and the baptism records of her five children, the only other records of this woman are her appearances in the census records of 1841 and 1851. I have yet to find the registration of her death.

The census record of 1841 finds her living with her husband and their youngest surviving daughter in the Stennack area of St Ives and confirms that she was born in the county of Cornwall. The 1851 census with more detail gives a specific age of 70 years, recording her place of birth as the village of St Keverne.

A fair bit to be getting on with I thought. Unfortunately, I can't find a single Eleanor Gilbert born anywhere in the county around the projected year of her birth. In fact, according to the Online Parish Clerks database no child with the name Eleanor Gilbert was baptised in the 100 years either side of when she is supposed to have been born!

I have discounted the possibility she had a different maiden name, acquiring Gilbert through an earlier marriage. The OPC database transcription records that she was a spinster when she married Matthew Thomas.

There were quite a fair number of children baptised with the name Eleanor in the county of Cornwall in the late 1700s. According to the OPC website there were nearly 500 in the period 1771 to 1791.

Narrowing down the search to the immediate area of St Keverne, which the 1851 census records as her place of birth and looking at the 5 years either side of the birth year estimated from her age in the 1851 census. I identified 8 Eleanors, 1 Elener, 1 Elinor and 2 Ellenears. None of them with surnames even closely resembling Gilbert.

There were two baptisms with no father recorded and one was of an Elleneer Marten, the daughter of Ellener Marten, held 15 July 1781 in St Anthony-in-Meneage, less than 3 miles from St Keverne. Apart from the proximity and the timing there wasn't much to link this woman and her daughter to my family. The transcriber of this record noted *'There is a large ink blot covering something written after Marten'*. We can only speculate what information is hidden there.

However, this was not the first child that the single woman Ellener Marten had. 14½ months earlier she had baptised another daughter in the same parish named Jemima and this baptism record provided a little more information. This time the record was free of any stains covering up the text and stated that Jemima was *'the natural dau of Elinor MARTIN by Robert GILBERT of this Parish'*.

Was this man the father of both of Eleanor Marten's children? I think the clues are he was, or at least the two sisters believed he was. Why do I think these two daughters of Eleanor Marten were Robert Gilbert's? Firstly, I can find no Cornish records of marriage or burial for Jemima Marten/Martin. There is a burial record for an Eleanor Martyn in St Keverne in 1786. I believe this is of the mother and not the infant Eleanor. I can find no other records of the mother marrying or dying. Of course, the two girls and mother could've left Cornwall.

However, it is worth noting that in Cornwall in the early 1800s there were marriages of a Jemima Gilbert and of an Eleanor Gilbert and these two single 'Gilbert' women do not otherwise appear in the baptism records around the time they would've been born. Like Eleanor it seems that Jemima Gilbert ended up in St Ives where she married a Robert Richards four years after Eleanor Gilbert married Matthew Thomas.

Based on subsequent census records Eleanor Thomas née Gilbert was around 26 years of age when she married in January 1808, and this is consistent with a birth/baptism of July 1781. I've not yet identified census records for Jemima Richards née Gilbert. But absence of any contrary evidence Jemima was 31 years old when she married John and, given she baptised her last child in 1821, this would fit.

So, who might Robert Gilbert be? Jemima's 1780 baptism record says he was 'of this Parish' and in 1784 a Robert Gilbert married a Sarah Piper in St Anthony-in-Meneage. They would go on to have 12 children all baptised in St Keverne, Cornwall.

Robert Gilbert was born circa 1745 and was 5 years older than Jemima and Eleanor's mother. His wife Sarah was 12 years his junior. Sarah was 27 when she married and 44 years old when she had her last child. Robert died in 1823 aged 78 and his wife died the following year aged 67.

Two years into Robert and Sarah's marriage the infants Jemima and Eleanor lost their mother. Did they take them in? Eleanor certainly believed she hailed from St Keverne, though Sarah doesn't feature as a name for any of the 5 daughters the two sisters had between them. (Those names were Elizabeth, Anna Maria, Mary, Mary and Charlotte)

Robert was nearly 40 years old when he married Sarah. I can't find an earlier marriage for him and unfortunately the 1784 marriage record is silent on his status. But this leaves a challenging question as to why he never married the mother of his first two children. Even if he was married when the sisters' mother fell pregnant why did he marry someone else when he was free to do so?

I don't think this is a deal breaker and still contend that there is a very good chance that Robert Gilbert (1745-1823) was the father of Jemima and Eleanor Marten and my x5 great grandfather.

My thanks go to all those public Ancestry.com trees from which I have drawn much of the above and particular thanks goes to the team at Cornwall On-line Parish Clerks without whose searchable records at [www.cornwall-opc-database.org](http://www.cornwall-opc-database.org) I would never have been able to uncover these new members of my tree. For ease I have produced a chart below.

Glenn Palmer

London 6 February 2023  
[gatp63@hotmail.com](mailto:gatp63@hotmail.com)

# Gilbert Family Tree

