

Emma Maria–Fact–Fake: Erica Griffiths

She waded through the meadow, spring grass swimming around her knees. She wanted to diligently examine every piece of quiet earth, but the deep pasture threatened to sink her plans.

'It must be here somewhere,' she muttered, as she pushed through the growth, seeds and pollen trailing in her wake.

A faint track appeared, a slipstream of someone else's path. She followed it to the back corner of the cemetery where the graves were older, but still with no real pattern. Instead, headstones old and new popped up their fragments among tangled flowers, like bubbles in a boiling pot.

She had travelled to Wales to find proof of her great great grandmother Emma Maria, her namesake and potentially the ancestral matriarch of her family. She had pieced together her family tree, enjoying finding evidence to solve the puzzle. There was Ernest Edward the ship's doctor, Mary Anne who bore 13 children and Frank and Florence who sadly lost their only child. Only Emma Maria, the final piece, remained elusive.

She barged her way through the centuries, attentively inspecting the antiquated stones, while valiantly trying to keep to decaying edges, to avoid walking on the dead. She fell often, the uneven surfaces twisting her ankle, cruel thorns painfully scratching her, even crying out as her foot sank into the space below the ground, trembling to think what was beneath.

Winter daylight was short, and helpers would be unlikely now, but she was determined to finish her search. A white headstone blinked in the fading light, a snaggle tooth peeking from a mouthful of hay, with only the name '*Emma*' visible. The writing was barely legible, she needed to create the missing image with her rubbing wax and paper. She crept closer, crouching on top of the grave, brushing aside vegetation to complete her stone rubbing. The outline of '*Maria*' materialised. Her heart raced, could it be her? Further down she rubbed '*Born 1963*'.

'No that couldn't be right,' she mumbled, 1963 was her birth year, surely it should read 1863.

She tugged at handfuls of grass to free the bottom of the headstone for her copy. She tried to adjust her position to read her sheet in the gloom, awkwardly angling herself on the grave as a shuddering crack split the air. The soil fell beneath her, she frantically clawed at the crumbling edges, unable to escape, only to glimpse '*Died 2023*' as she sank deep into the earth below.