

## An Abundance of Marmadukes!

**Gardener Name: Marmaduke H Johnson** - Age in 1881 Census: 15

Source: RG13 Piece: 1284 Folio: 4 Page: 3

Registration District: Abingdon County: Berkshire

Cumnor is a village and civil parish about 6km from the centre of Oxford, and to the south west of Botley, formerly in Berkshire but part of Oxfordshire since local government reorganisation in 1974. The population had been over 1,000 in 1841 but declined throughout the century during the agricultural depression. In the twentieth century it expanded with new building and the growth of public transport into a suburb of Oxford, and the 2011 census records the population as 5,755.

I first considered the geology and land use in the area to see what occupations it supported. Cumnor is largely stone-built, using grey limestone quarried fairly locally and the stony soils (clay with flints) of the North Berkshire Ridge were good for wheat growing. The loam, occurring where silt and sand were mixed with clay, was good for orchards and gardens, but there is little evidence of large scale market gardening in Cumnor in 1881. I know of one commercial Market Gardener from my husband's research into Robert Howse (qv) but this seems to be the only such enterprise in Cumnor at the time. He cultivated two acres - a plot with a house just off the Abingdon Road. I did find two or three other gardeners, one aged 72, in the 1881 census, but there are no details. James Webb, according to anecdotal evidence in a local publication about Cumnor, was a gardener at New Cumnor Place between 1895 and 1919 but is listed in the 1901 census as an agricultural labourer. By 1911 he is listed as "gardener and caretaker". In the early twentieth century a market garden was established on Cumnor Hill to supply the owner's Oxford market stall, but the land was later sold for building. There would be a ready market for produce in the Oxford colleges and growing suburbs. A smallholding on St John's college land in Cumnor grew vegetables to sell in Abingdon market and older men took to gardening to eke out a living when they 'retired' from paid work on the land.

Many general and agricultural labourers are listed, but towards the end of the nineteenth century the agricultural depression affected Cumnor. A successful brickyard was in operation at Chawley, a hamlet of Cumnor at the top of Cumnor Hill, where the raw materials for brick making were readily available, and from the mid nineteenth century until the 1930s the works grew from eight or nine men employed to over eighty.

I thought the name Marmaduke H Johnson, would be easy to find in documents but,

after I had discovered a direct line of no fewer than five Marmaduke H Johnsons, I changed my mind.

In the 1881 census Marmaduke is 15 and listed as a gardener. His father, also Marmaduke is a general labourer. The occupation of his mother, Sarah, and older sister Elizabeth is given as seamstress, while the younger children, William (13) and Rachel (10) are still at school. I decided at this point to go back to the first Marmaduke Johnson I could find in the area and go forward chronologically.

The first of my Marmadukes (I shall call him (A)), an Office Clerk, appears in the 1841 Census, aged about 45, so probably born in 1796, and married to Phoebe, who is ten years older. They live in the parish of St Peter le Bailey in Oxford with two grown up daughters and a boarder, Isidor D Lutomirski, aged 20 and described as Professor of Languages. Thinking this might give a clue as to the comfort and status of the household, I wondered whether he was a very youthful University professor, or a teacher in a school. I traced him to Edinburgh where he advertised in the postal directory of 1846-1847 stating "French, German and Hebrew taught, privately and in classes", so evidently a private tutor rather than a university professor. He claims to be "late of Cambridge", long enough to take a degree after moving from Oxford, but this was well before the Test Act of 1871 so it might not have been easy - though of course, I may be wrong in assuming he was Jewish. The Johnson house must have been reasonably substantial to accommodate four adults and a lodger of professional status. It is stated in the census entry to be in the New Road area, in Jews Mount Hill, or Bulwarks Lane as it was also known and is known today.

A son, a second Marmaduke (B), born about 1812 and baptised in Marylebone from where his parents presumably came, also appears on the 1841 census, apparently having left home and married, working as a cabinet maker. He was living in St Giles' parish, in St John's Road (or Street) in an area where houses were being built in the early nineteenth century on land belonging to St John's College, which still collects ground rents. Beaumont Street is particularly elegant, but the houses in St John's Street, though more modest, look comfortable. St John's, still a very wealthy college, owned land and property outside the city, including the Bear and Ragged Staff pub in Cumnor and the four cottages next door to it, whereas most of the cottages and land in and around the village were part of the estate of the Earl of Abingdon.

While not necessarily affluent, Marmaduke (B) would need to be financially secure to live in St John's Street. Of course he may only have rented rooms. He was married on 27

July 1833 at St Peter le Bailey church to Mary Derrick and by 1841 had four children, aged from one to five years old, Mary, Emma, Marmaduke (C) and Phoebe. His occupation is given as Cabinet Maker. By 1847 the Post Office Directory lists Mrs Mary Johnson as “stationer” and Marmaduke Johnson as keeping a “Receiving house” for mail at 8 New Road, but in 1851, still a cabinet maker, he is living in St Aldate’s District, while his father, Marmaduke (A), now explicitly a Post Office clerk, is living with Phoebe (“clerk’s wife”) and one daughter, Mary Ann, who is 32, in a house in New Road numbered 64. I am intrigued by the family’s apparent Post office connection. One would expect the 8 New Road address to be correct as it appears in a directory, while 64 New Road may be another address or just an enumerator’s numbering. Receiving Houses, which took in prepaid mail for despatch and delivery, were amalgamated or closed in 1839, a period of change in the mail service, and many shut down when postage stamps appeared in 1840 – their proprietors had previously been paid two pounds a year and 1d for each letter handled. Perhaps the stationer’s shop did not provide sufficient income if the premises were no longer a receiving house, or Marmaduke (A) had moved or died before 1861. An alternative that, on consideration, seems more plausible, is that Marmaduke (A), Phoebe and daughter Mary Ann, now 32 and with no occupation given on the census, are actually keeping the stationer’s shop and post office at 8 New Road, 64 is merely the enumerator’s numbering and Mary Ann is the Mrs of the advertisement, and not her sister-in-law. Whatever the circumstances, I could find no trace of Marmaduke (A) in Oxford after the 1851 census.

New Road was indeed a fairly new road at the time, constructed between 1769 and 1770 by the Newland and Botley Turnpike Trust across part of the castle site as a turnpike connecting Oxford city to the Botley Road causeway and thence to the Cotswolds and the West Country. The Oxford canal lay to the north, and a coal wharf was established in 1790. The railway arrived in 1844 (the Great Western) followed by the London and North Western a few years later, with rival stations in Park End Street. New buildings included County Hall a re-modelled county prison. The Johnsons’ immediate neighbours were a book keeper and a commercial clerk, and a carrier’s agent lodged with them. New Road was a centre of commerce as well as a busy thoroughfare, where a Post office and small business could thrive.

The next Marmaduke (C) was twelve in 1851 and living with his family in the St Aldate’s district, but by 1861 he is, at 22, married to Sarah, some eight years his senior, and living in Cumnor, Sarah’s birthplace, with two daughters Henriette (or more likely, Henrietta) aged 3 and Emma,<sup>1</sup>. His occupation is given as Clerk, so perhaps he is following in the steps of his grandfather (A). His older daughter was born in Tubney, the younger in

Slough, so the family had evidently moved about, but what brought him to Cumnor and what job opportunities it gave him I have not discovered. By 1871 his family has increased to four daughters and two sons and he is working as an agricultural labourer. (The older son is the next Marmaduke (D) (our gardener) Had he (C) failed to find work in his own line of business and moved to the country for a job, and possibly the chance of cheaper housing or a tied cottage, or just to be near his wife's family?

Marmaduke (D) is fifteen years old and a gardener in the 1881 census. By 1891 he has married Emma also born in the village, had three daughters, Emma, Florence and Caroline, and become a groom and coachman. He may have combined this work with another "outdoor" job as a gardener, but this is not stated. He could have worked at one of the larger houses, such as New Cumnor Place, the Vicarage, or Wytham Abbey. Meanwhile, his father, Marmaduke (C) has become a gardener! He and Sarah have a daughter, Henrietta, still living with them, and a three year old grandson, Charles, known as Johnson, so possibly William's son? (or even Henrietta's?) He could have worked at any of the aforementioned houses. Wytham Abbey had ambitious gardens within a park laid out by Capability Brown. By 1890 another imposing house, Oaken Holt, had been built for Sir William Wilson Hunter in the hamlet of Farmoor on the Eynsham road, and this too had well-tended gardens and a conservatory. In 1901, the 62 year old Marmaduke (C) is still a gardener, with the same family members, wife Sarah, daughter Henrietta, and grandson Charles, now 13. "Our" Marmaduke (D), is now an estate labourer with five children living at home, Marmaduke (E) aged 9, Thomas, 7, Annie, 5, Frank 3 and Mildred 1. The three older girls have presumably left home and are perhaps in service.

The 1911 census entries are beautifully written, presumably in the Marmaduke's own hands and reveal that Marmaduke (C) is now a widower and at 72 is still employed as a domestic gardener, living with his daughter Henrietta now 53, as housekeeper, while Marmaduke (D) is an Estate Labourer. This information is amplified as "worker on Lord Abingdon's estate". He has five children living at home, including the next Marmaduke (E). They are Florence aged 23, Marmaduke 19, Thomas 17, Frank 13, Mildred 10, Norah Mary 8, and Arthur 5. Florence's occupation is given as "housemaid" but she is "out of employment". Marmaduke (E)'s occupation is carpentry and he is a "worker in a joinery works", Thomas is a brickyard labourer, and the younger four children are at school. Eleven children in all were born to Marmaduke (D) and Emma, of whom ten survived. Of the three oldest children only Florence reappears in 1911 and she has obviously been working away from home. Emma and Caroline possibly also went into service, and it seems likely that Annie, who appears only once, as a five year old, is the child who died.

The end of the nineteenth century brought difficult times for Cumnor, which seems to have suffered badly from the agricultural depression. Maybe Marmaduke (C) would have done well to stick with the urban lifestyle of his father and grandfather. I said I could find no trace of Marmaduke (A) and Phoebe in Oxford after 1851, but they did turn up in Bicester, living in Market End. Phoebe died in 1856, but her husband lived until 1861, dying within days of his son, Marmaduke (B) – the younger Marmaduke first, on 30 March 1861, and his father on 9 April. One senses a tragedy but I have found no clues, much less proof. No disasters or epidemics are recorded in Bicester at the time, though the Market End area's sanitation left a lot to be desired. In any case, why did Marmaduke (B) die in Bicester when his abode is still given as Oxford? There is a record of a Mary Johnson dying in Oxford in 1863, likely to be his wife since she is of the right age (52) and living in St John's Road.

I should like to know why any of the town-dwelling Johnsons, literate, comparatively well-educated and secure in their working lives, as craftsmen and post office clerks, should have moved out to Cumnor. I have a gap around the time of Marmaduke (C)'s appearance in the 1851 census as a twelve-year-old child at school in Oxford and his appearance in Cumnor in 1861 as a 22-year-old clerk with a wife and two daughters. In an attempt to identify his wife, Sarah, I trawled through the 1851 census for Cumnor to find suitable Sarahs. There were surprisingly few, mostly infants or middle-aged housewives, but Sarah Barson, the daughter of the gamekeeper, who lived at Deancourt, fitted the bill – she was the right age and the eldest of ten children. She and the next two daughters are described as laundresses, along with their mother, enough to suggest a small business enterprise near enough to Oxford to provide a service in the Botley Road area. This could be how Marmaduke (C) met his Sarah, but is, of course wild speculation. No occupation is given for Sarah in 1861 or 1871, but by 1881 she is listed as seamstress. By 1891 she has been promoted (or has promoted herself) to "tailoress" In Cumnor at the time this meant specifically a trouser finisher, an outworker for Thomas Hale of Oxford, sewing on buttons, making up linings and pressing the finished garment. The work was delivered by carrier and collected a week later.

Parish documents might help to fill in gaps but Cumnor registers are housed in Reading, and not available on line, so I have not yet consulted them. Marmaduke (C) died on 11 December 1921 at the age of 83 and is commemorated by a traditional gravestone in the graveyard of St Michael's church. This was erected primarily for his wife Sarah, who had died in 1901, and includes Henrietta, who died in 1923.

“Our” Marmaduke (D) (the gardener in 1881) is also buried in St Michael’s churchyard. Again, the gravestone is in memory of his wife, Emma, who died in 1928 aged 62. He has been added when he died in 1944, aged 79, and the death of his son – Marmaduke (E) – is recorded as 11 March 1918, aged 27. This last death suggests a First World War casualty, but his name does not appear on Cumnor War Memorial, so his early death must be due to illness or accident.

There are tantalising glimpses of the Cumnor Marmadukes in quotations from newspapers, registers and rate books in local history society publications, but it is not easy to tell which is which. For instance, both junior and senior Marmaduke Johnsons appear on the lists of occupation electors for 1900 and 1910 with no details other than that they each occupy a dwelling house in the village (as opposed to one of the hamlets) One of these, according to the Poor Law Overseer’s Rate Book for 1900 is one of the “Bear” cottages belonging to St John’s College.

Parish councils were set up in 1894 and a meeting was held in Cumnor to elect councillors on 12 December. Six of the candidates (including M. Johnson, a gardener) were elected by a show of hands, but three men tied for the seventh place and a proper election had to be held. M. Johnson, whether Marmaduke (C) or (D) was not elected this time, but four farmers, defeated the first time, were elected, having rallied supporters, with three candidates again tying for two places. This went on until one candidate stood down. It seems Cumnor had taken democracy to its heart, and M. Johnson wished to be part of it. An HM Johnson stood in 1904 but was not elected. I like to think too that he was part of the local agricultural workers’ union when the opportunity arose.

All five men were named Marmaduke Henry Johnson, each calling his eldest son by that name and I should love to know why this became a tradition. Latterly it seems that one of the Marmadukes used Henry as a first name, but all appear as Marmaduke Henry in Census returns. It also seems that pairing Marmaduke with Johnson was a tradition generally (I have come across instances all over the country). There is obviously scope here for further research – or possibly a novel?

All the families were apparently literate – two were Clerks, and Marmaduke (B) and his wife Mary are able to sign the Marriage Register in 1833 – as are their witnesses, Marmaduke and Mary. The children, of all the families, do not appear to leave school unduly early: Mary, the eldest child of Marmaduke (B) is still at school at 15.

I have raised more questions than I have answered, whilst avoiding the set question

altogether, but if I have the energy I shall attempt to fill in some of the gaps at a later date! This is very long, but I have, as requested, gone off at a tangent, and have researched not one man, but a dynasty!

## Sources

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*Census 1851 HO107 Piece: 1728 Folio: 139 Page: 33*

*Census 1861 RG9 Piece: 733 Folio:16 Page: 26*

*Census 1871 RG10 Piece: 1284 Folio:22 Page:24*

*Census 1881 RG11 Piece: 1284 Folio:4 Page:1*

*Census 1891 RG12 Piece 977 Folio:44 Page:1*

*Census 1891 RG12 Piece 977 Folio:47 Page:7*

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