

Tough Life of a Tailor

George Blunden 1800-1886

Emblin Curnow 1793-1841

The Blundens in Hampshire



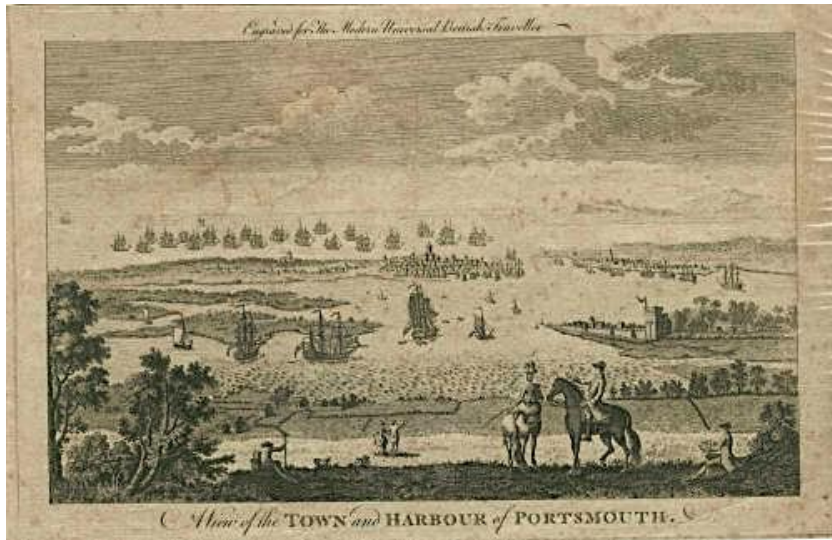
George Blunden's father **Benjamin Blunden** (1769-1814) came to London from Portsea in Hampshire. He was baptised at Holy Trinity, Gosport, the son of **John Blunden** and **Mary Leach** from Havant. All these places are in close vicinity in and near Portsmouth and the Hampshire coast. George's mother was **Elizabeth Bettesworth** (1774-1822), daughter of **Richard Bettesworth** (family originally from Petworth in Sussex) and **Mary Hayward** of Portsea. This is where Benjamin and Elizabeth married on July 17th 1794 and where they gave birth to their first surviving child, George. He was baptised at St. John's on February 28th 1800.

Holy Trinity, Gosport 1700s, where Benjamin Blunden was baptised in 1769.
Source: holyltrinitygosport.co.uk

Portsea, prior to 1792 known as the Portsmouth Common, was a fast-growing suburb for dockworkers around the large naval dockyard of Portsmouth. In 1802 Portsea had a population of 24,000 while 'old' Portsmouth had only 6,000. Portsea's Improvement Commissioners were very progressive in having the streets paved and cleaned, employing night watchmen and installing oil lamps to light the streets. Piped water, gas lamps and a free grammar school were soon to follow. So why did the Blundens decide to move to London? Perhaps they were farmers on the old Portsmouth Common whose livelihood was threatened by the Portsea development.



Map showing Gosport, Havant and Portsmouth. Source: visionofbritain.org.uk



Portsmouth and its harbour
1790. Source: Sense of Place
South East www.sopse.org.uk

Marylebone tailors

How these Portsea Blundens made a living we can only guess. Benjamin's two sons became tailors, so perhaps this was his trade also. By 1802 Benjamin, Elizabeth and young George left Hampshire to settle in the Westminster district outside the City of London which was fast filling with the suburban residences of the wealthy - plenty of customers for tailors. Here in the parish of St. Marylebone they produced four more children: Benjamin (1802); Elizabeth (1805); Mary (1807) and Jane Ann (1809). They were all baptised at St. Marylebone on July 30th 1809. The last baby, Hannah, was born there in 1813. Nothing else is known about their lives at that time.



In 1814, when George was about 14 years old, his father Benjamin died at the age of 45 years. Burial records show they were living in Bird Street, near the prestigious Grosvenor Square. Bird Street, in a tradesmen's and artisans' area, became Thomas Street and is now called Binney Street. In the 1820s it was part of an area that was redeveloped and then redeveloped again in the 1880s. Benjamin was buried in the parish of St. George's, the burial ground only a few blocks from where he lived. Eight years later George's mother Elizabeth died at the age of 48 years and was buried on January 27th 1822 in the nearby parish of St. Marylebone. This was the year when the redevelopments mentioned above were begun. Burial grounds in these parishes were closed by the 1850s and 60s due to overcrowding and consequently unsanitary conditions.

Bird Street (north east of Grosvenor Square), Westminster, London in 1814 when Benjamin Blunden died. Source: From *Stranger's Guide to London and Westminster* mapco.net

Moving 'down market'

The same year as his mother's death, George married **Emblin Curnow** on August 26th at St. Mary's parish church at Lambeth, on the south side of the Thames. There were at least five other weddings conducted that day at St. Mary's which was a common practice. This ancient church is adjacent to Lambeth Palace and was soon to be completely rebuilt and restored in the 1850s.

Why, and exactly when George moved from Westminster to Lambeth is not known. It was probably a cheaper area to live, and at this time country villas would have dotted this semi-rural landscape of pastures and paddocks. But as well as this, the areas situated close to the Thames River were becoming more and more populated and experiencing the same problems as in the City, primarily caused by the polluted Thames and poor, damp and overcrowded housing.



St. Mary's Lambeth from the Thames in 1825. Emblin Curnow and George Blunden married here in 1822. Source: *Old and New London* Vol.6 1878

All that is known about Emblin is that she was born in 1793, her parents' names and where she was born are not known. As mentioned, George's occupation was a tailor, a trade he practised all his life. Two months after they married, Emblin gave birth to a baby son who died by December that year. They were living in Lark Hall Lane in South Lambeth. Whilst living in the Lambeth district they produced five more children: George Bettesworth (1824), Esseline (1827), Emblin (1827), Georgina (1830), and **Henry Cecil** (1832).

In 1841 they were living at 2 York Street Lambeth, near Waterloo Road and not far from the Thames River. Sadly, on January 18th that year at the age of 48 years Emblin died at home, the cause of death was consumption. The certificate states that G. Blunden was present at her death, this may have been husband George, daughter Georgina, or son George. Consumption, now known as tuberculosis, was a common killer of 19th century city dwellers where crowded and damp conditions, poor air quality, lack of proper sanitation and nutritional deficiencies led to the spread of many such diseases. Dampness would have been prevalent in this area of Lambeth known as Lower Marsh

where George and Emblin lived. A few years later in 1848 most of York Street was demolished along with many other small lanes and streets to make way for the building of Waterloo Station.

Journeyman tailors

George now had five children to support between the ages of 9 and 17. Presumably 17-year-old son George was already learning his future trade as a tailor like his father. Six months later in June of 1841 when the census was taken George and four children are listed at York Street (George, Esseline, Henry and Georgina) and also 25-year-old Maryann Blunden – possibly a young second wife or maybe another relative helping to look after the children¹.

By 1851 George is listed alone on the census living at 3 Holly Place, further south near Bedford Road Brixton. No occupation is given and he is described as a widower. At the next census of 1861, George was described as a journeyman tailor and living at 15 Chichester Place (a row of dwellings on Wandsworth Road) in South Lambeth but closer to the Thames. With him are his unmarried children: 31-year-old George, also a journeyman tailor and 30-year-old Georgina, a milliner. With them are George senior's nieces: 27-year-old Maria Barr a dressmaker, and 6-year-old Louisa Barr. During this time George said a final farewell to his youngest son, Henry and daughter-in-law Elizabeth, as they departed in 1854 for Plymouth and then to sail for Australia.



The address of the Blundens in 1861: Chichester Place c1825, probably an architect's illustration. Source: Dr. John Coleman

In 1871 the census shows George and his son were still journeyman tailors. George senior was a lodger with shoemaker William Heston and his family at 4 Swanswick Place, Union Street Clapham, not far from Chichester Place. George junior was living nearby with the family of David Anderson, a gilder. The next census in 1881 shows George, now 81 years old and his bachelor son, now 59 years old, at 84 Paradise Road Lambeth near Clapham Road, sharing a house with the same Anderson family (David Anderson now a grocer's porter).

Lambeth workhouse

It was only five years later that at the age of 86 years, George died at the Lambeth Workhouse Infirmary on Brook Street. He was still a resident of 84 Paradise Road, but ill health, debility and lacking any sufficient means of support, he had been forced into the infirmary for the poor. How long he was there is unknown. On his death certificate

the cause of death given was 'Senectus, and Bronchitis Longa' – senility and persistent bronchitis. It is unknown whether any family were present at his deathbed.



The airing yard for aged men, Lambeth Hospital in 1966, formerly the Lambeth Workhouse Infirmary where George Blunden died in 1886. Source: Lambeth Landmark

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See my story **A Drowning in Cundletown** for more about their son Henry Cecil Blunden

hurleyskidmorehistory.com

Notes:

¹ There is a record of a George Blunden marrying a Maryann Allcock from York Street Lambeth in 1847. However, his given occupation is a clerk, and condition - bachelor, and father's name George, a farmer. So this does not seem to be our George Blunden.

Other resources:

Birth Death and Marriage certificates - General Register Office England

Blunden, Bob -Vic., Blunden descendant

Brixton history <http://www.urban75.org/brixton/history/history.html>

Charles Booth Online Archive <http://booth.lse.ac.uk/>

England and Wales Census Records (Ancestry.com)

Genealogy and family history www.londonancestor.com

Historic maps www.mapco.net

History of Lambeth www.ideal-homes.org.uk/lambeth

Hoole, Ivor *A Guide to the Alleys, Courts, Passages and Yards of Central*

London www.gyford.com/archive/2009/04/28/www.geocities.com/TheTropics/Cabana/9424/

John Snow's London 1859 <http://www.ph.ucla.edu/epi/snow/1859map/>

Lambeth history and information www.landmark.lambeth.gov.uk

Mr Weller's Knowledge of London <http://www.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/London.html#Geographical>

Workhouse history and records www.workhouses.org.uk