

The George Bygone – July

In last month's 'Bygone', we described the marriage of a widowed landlady of The George (Mary Ann Girling) to a much younger man, also fated to predecease her. Similarly, in July 1893, Emily Lion, since 1885 the landlady of what by then, perhaps over-grandly, was known as The George Hotel, took another husband at the age of about 59.

Emily, born Warner in Ashfield cum Thorpe (between Debenham and Earl Soham), had married Francis Lion, a London publican (of New Quebec Street and, possibly, The Bricklayers' Arms there) in London in 1875, but by the 1881 Census was a widow, having returned to her former occupation of domestic nurse. We are not sure how she came to be landlady of The George, with no obvious connection to Wickham, but she had probably gained experience of the trade through her first husband. Soon after her arrival she advertised in the *Ipswich Journal*, perhaps poignantly:

FOR SALE, a Beautiful Lace SCARF, four yards long; handsome embroidery and very fine; suitable for a bridal veil or dress trimming. Price Two Guineas. —E. L., George Inn, Wickham Market.

Her second husband was Frederick Gormer, born in Dallinghoo in 1854, so about 20 years her junior. His father, John Gormer, at the time of the marriage farmed at Green Farm, Pettistree and, later, Home Farm there. Frederick's mother, Louisa Herring, had died when he was only two years old. In 1871, at the age of 17, he enlisted in the army and joined the 9th (The Queen's Royal) Lancers cavalry regiment. The regiment, with Frederick as a Private in A Troop, was posted to India in 1875 and, subsequently, took part in the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–1880), under the overall command of Major General Sir Frederick Roberts. They fought at the Battles of Charasiah and Kabul in 1879 and in 1880, led by General Roberts, they took part in an epic and exhausting 20-day, 320-mile march from Kabul to relieve the besieged city of Kandahar.



9th Lancers on the march to Kandahar (by Orlando Norie)

After leaving the army (we are not sure exactly when) and on his marriage to Emily, Frederick took over as landlord of the George and, in 1900, took an active part in

Wickham's celebrations of the Relief of Mafeking in South Africa. The garrison, commanded by Robert Baden-Powell of scouting fame, was rescued after a siege of 217 days, by a force under the overall command of, by then, Field Marshal Lord Roberts. Since the beginning of the Second Boer War in October 1899, Britain had had little to celebrate, suffering embarrassing defeats at the hands of a lesser, but determined and well-equipped, foe, so the successful relief, was occasion for nationwide rejoicing. For a while, 'to maffick', became slang for, in today's parlance, 'partying' wildly in public. The events in Wickham reported in the *Ipswich Journal* on the 26th May, under the heading 'Mafeking Rejoicings' certainly fitted the bill:

WICKHAM MARKET.—The church bells rang merrily. The town band paraded the street, and afterwards played patriotic airs on the Hill. The Gunpowder Plot "guns" kept up an incessant "fire" during the evening, and a huge bonfire, with Kruger's effigy on the top, was lighted at nine o'clock in a field near Gelham Hall. The celebrations were continued on Monday. At noon the school children formed a procession from the school, carrying flags and banners, and singing patriotic songs. At the Ironworks they were joined by the workmen, and with the brass band at their head, marched to the Hill. There the band played several selections, and the children sang the National Anthem. Cheers were given for the Queen, Baden-Powell, and "Dear Old Bobs." An old trooper, Mr. F. Gormer, adorned with medals, who marched with Lord Roberts to Candahar, exhibited a series of sword exercises to the accompaniment of the band. Mrs. Whiteley and other ladies distributed sweets and oranges to the children. In the afternoon, the church bells rang out a merry peal—the date touch, 1900, in one hour 7½ minutes. The treble was taken by F. Patrick, 2nd G. Reeve. 3rd E. Todd, 4th C. Rush, 5th W. Reeve, and tenor E. Sherwood (conductor). In the evening there was a torchlight procession, and the church bells "fired" volleys. The employes at the Ironworks and the school children had a half-holiday.

Records show that Gormer's medals referred to included the Afghanistan Medal (probably with the battle honour bars as shown) and the Kabul to Kandahar Star.



Only a month later, however, the following announcement appeared in the *Evening Star*.

DEATHS.

GORMER.—On the 26th of June, at the George Hotel, Wickham Market, of heart disease and paralysis, Frederick Gormer, aged 45, late of the 9th Lancers, second son of the late John Gormer, Home Farm, Pettistree, Wickham Market.

The *Framlingham Weekly News* reported in its obituary that, "...Mr. Gormer had been ailing for several months past but has been able to keep about till recently. He was formerly in the army and was a fine built man." Perhaps his arduous overseas service had ultimately taken its toll, although his celebratory exertions may not have helped either.

The again-widowed Emily Gormer continued as landlady of the George until about 1904; dying in Ipswich in May 1908, aged 74.

Our in-house Campanologist writes: The date touch rung as part of the Mafeking celebrations as reported in the Ipswich Journal was 1900 changes long, i.e. the bells were rung 1900 times. It is not specified what method (the term used for the pattern followed by the ringers) were rung but it took one hour, 7 ½ minutes to ring all 1900 changes.

If you have any historical facts, memories, photographs of The George, characters associated with the pub or groups that used it you wish to share, contact us by e-mail at heritage.wmgeorge@btconnect.com.