

The Enigmatic Mrs Anne Wombwell

wife of the Celebrated Menagerist

George Wombwell

I'm often being asked who Mrs Wombwell is, given there is no known record of her marriage to George Wombwell. I am also asked who is Anne¹ Morgan and is it the same person. Therefore I thought I would publish the information I have on Anne Wombwell.

She certainly lived, in retirement, in north west London, at 27 Belsize Road with one of her daughters during the latter half of the nineteenth century². She even existed in the censuses showing her as a one-time proprietor of a travelling menagerie. She seems though, to not be traceable, since in George's lifetime, there are no known records of her marriage to him. However, the truth as I understand it now is less mysterious than at first thought. I am indebted to many people and especially Margaret Hardy who provided essential genealogical information regarding Anne and her daughters and now trust this mystery is cleared up once and for all. At least I can always be an optimist!

The obvious starting point is one Anne Morgan who is mentioned in George's of 1850 will as the person inheriting the *No1 Menagerie*. Is this Anne Morgan the same as Anne Wombwell and if so when and why did she adopt the name Anne Wombwell? Was it on or after George's death or even maybe before?

From genealogy records we now know that one Anne Morgan was born in Braintree (now believed to also be George's birth town) in 1788. The father was believed to be Samuel Wombwell, one of George's brothers. This Anne Wombwell is then a niece to George. It is also known that the same Anne Wombwell married on 15th August 1806 at Saint Leonards, Shoreditch, to one Henry Morgan. Thus this Anne Wombwell becomes Anne Morgan. Anne and Henry have a daughter Caroline Morgan born 4th October 1812, Paddington, London and then a second daughter, Amelia Anne Morgan, born on 22nd December 1814 in London and she was baptised on the 15th January 1815. Henry's burial record shows 9th July 1815 at St Brides, Fleet Street, London, so Amelia was just a few months old when he died, aged 40 years of age³. Anne Morgan was thus widowed with her two small children in 1815.

¹For convenience I have adopted the spelling as Anne for both Wombwell and Morgan.

²Census records

³Parish records

She might have already known George Wombwell from her youth in Braintree and if so, was likely to have been in touch with George on her arrival in London, whenever that may have been⁴. It is entirely possible that she was already with the menagerie as it travelled around the country and met Henry, her future husband, when it passed through London some time before their marriage in 1806. This would of course, have been very early in the evolution of Wombwell's Travelling Menagerie, but might go some way to explain how she became to be in London during 1806. Amelia, her second daughter, baptism record shows Henry and Anne Morgan being of *Half Paved Court* and Henry's occupation as *Shopman*. Half Paved Court was an area on the south side of Fleet Street along Dorset Street⁵. So even if she had been travelling with the menagerie, she settled down with Henry in central London.

Amelia Anne Morgan, her second daughter married Edmund Bramston on the 14th October 1837 at St George's Church, Bloomsbury in London⁶. Edmund is also mentioned in George's will as executor and this is how we know that the Anne Morgan (nee Wombwell), Amelia's mother, is the same Anne Morgan that is recorded *living with* George Wombwell sometime during or after 1815, Henry's death⁷.

Census reports show Amelia and her mother Anne (as Wombwell), eventually living in the same property in Belsize Road, St John's Wood, London, after Anne Wombwell/Morgan retired in the early 1870's from the travelling show trade. The entry states Amelia Anne Bramston with mother Anne Wombwell. Anne then, had clearly adopted the name Wombwell again, although it was of course, her maiden name, so it would have not been out of the ordinary to re-adapt it after George's death, except she was a Mrs not a Ms. She would of course, have to remain Anne Morgan on legal documents such as George's last will in testament and that also fits in with the known, surviving records.

There may be a further indication of Anne Morgan being Anne Wombwell, by way of an entry in the last will in testament of one Mary Gregory (nee Wombwell). She is thought to be one of Anne Wombwell's sisters. Mary's probate record shows one of her executors as *Amelia Anne Bramston, Widow – the neice...executor*. Edmund Bramston, Amelia's husband, had died in 1859 so in 1880, Amelia would also be a widow, but more importantly, it indicates the relationship of Mary Gregory to Anne Wombwell as her neice.

⁴It is not yet known when Anne Wombwell arrived in London.

⁵ Now known as Dorset Buildings and lies between St. Brides' Church and Bridge Street

⁶Parish records

⁷Last will in testament of George Wombwell

ON the 18th day of November 1880
 the Will with ~~Codicil~~ thereto of

Mary Gregory

~~formerly of~~

~~late~~ of the Marlborough Buildings
 Saint Albans in the County of
 Hertford Widow _____
 deceased, who died on the 9th day of November 1880
 at the Marlborough Buildings aforesaid

was proved in the Principal Registry of the Probate Division of the High Court of

Justice, by the Oath of Alexander Fairgrieve of

Glenview Collinton Midlothian

North Britain Paper Maker (the

Husband of Testatrix's niece Harriet) and

Amelia Anne Bramston (in the Will

written Bramston) of No 27 Belsize Road St

John's Wood in the County of Middlesex Widow
 the niece _____ the sole _____ one of the

Execut^{rs} named in the said Will — they having been first

sworn duly to administer, power being reserved of granting Probate of the said Will and

to

Figure 1 Mary Gregory's Will

This is the last Will and Testament
 of me Mary Gregory of the Marlborough Buildings St Albans
 Hert's widow I appoint Alexander Fairgrieve, the Husband of my Niece
 Harriet and my Niece Amelia Anne Brandon Executors of this my Will
 I bequeath all my furniture household effects and plate unto and equally
 between the said Alexander Fairgrieve and Amelia Anne Brandon
 to the said Alexander Fairgrieve the sum of Ten pounds for his trouble in
 acting as my executor I bequeath one hundred pounds to my Niece Ann
 Sopham and ten pounds to Ann Fanny Wombwell, and ten pounds to Mary
 Ann Brooks the wife of James Brooks of Holywell, Hill St Albans and
 said Baker I bequeath all the residue of my personal estate unto and
 equally between the said Amelia Anne Brandon and each child of hers
 living at my decease and each child of my deceased sister Elizabeth
 Blythe living at my decease (except the said Ann Sopham) and the issue
 living at my decease of any child above mentioned who may be then
 dead such issue to take only and if more than one equally among them the
 share which his her or their deceased parent would have taken if living
 at my decease In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand this second
 day of November 1880 - Mary Gregory - Signed by the said Mary
 Gregory in the presence of us present at the same time who at her
 request in her presence and in the presence of each other have subscribed
 our names as witnesses - Henry Brabant, St Albans - Francis Wren
 Brabant St Albans.

Proved at London 18th November 1880 by the oaths of Alexander
 Fairgrieve (Husband of Testatrix's Niece Harriet) and Amelia Anne
 Brandon (in the Will written Brandon) Widow, the Niece, the Executors
 to whom adm^o was granted.

Figure 2 Mary Gregory's Will continued

Mary had been married to one William Gregory on 10th November 1814. Note that one of the witnesses, in the image below, was possibly a G. Wombwell, but I originally did not expect it to be the Menagerist, since he was illiterate as far as I can ascertain. This literacy factor has now been brought into disrepute by further research, but that will be the subject of another publication, so I now believe it is very possible that this was George Wombwell, the menagerist.

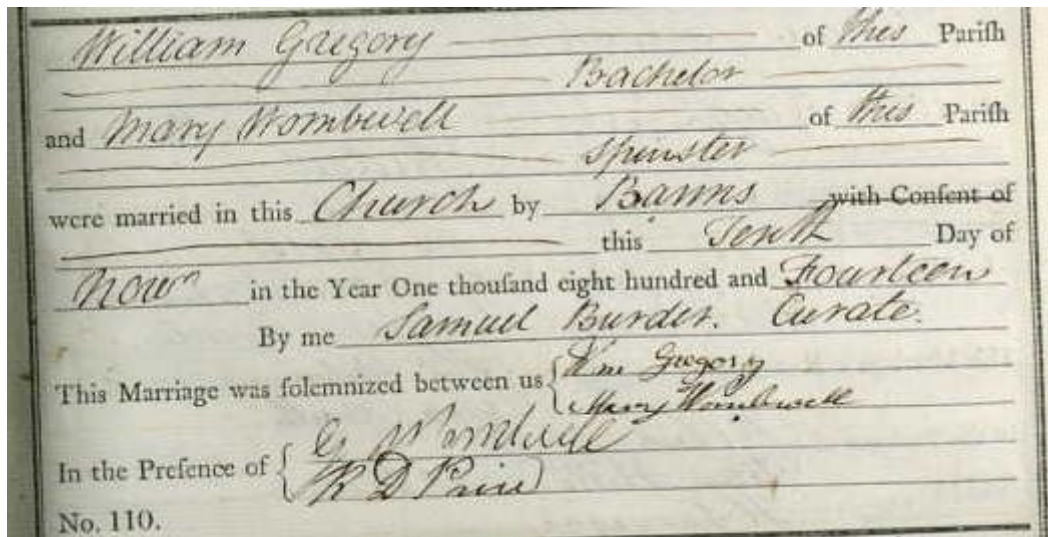


Figure 3: From St Dunston in the West, Fleet Street, London parish records showing the marriage of Mary Wombwell to William Gregory

Although Mary's probate record indicates she may be Anne Wombwell's sister, it has not yet been proved by birth records. If they were both daughters of Samuel Wombwell, so far no evidence has been forthcoming. However, by inference, it looks reasonable to assume the relationship given the lasting connections in legal documents throughout the life of Anne Morgan (nee Wombwell).

It is no surprise that George Wombwell's will also connects the Gregorys to Anne Wombwell. One Elsia Gregory is a further benefactor mentioned in George's will. Indeed, Eliza Gregory daughter of William and Mary Gregory is the first benefactor in George's will with the gift of one hundred pounds.

Triobletor Barkman I give and bequeath to Eliza Gregory the a daughter of William and Mary Gregory the sum of one hundred pounds and unto my Executor Edmund Bramston of Dorset Street Pentonville

Illustration 4: Portion of George Wombwell's last will in testament showing Eliza Gregory's inheritance

Despite the seemingly enigmatic life of Anne Wombwell (Morgan) it is very clear to me that the extended Wombwell family was a very close one. Anne lived with her daughter and husband Edmund for several years and Edmund Bramston was one of George Wombwell's trusted business partners. Mary Gregory (nee Wombwell) her sister, must have stayed quite close to her during Anne's lifetime given the legal connections, although there is no proof she was connected to the menageire businesses.

I am sure one day Anne will be connected to Mary as daughters of Samuel Wombwell by birth records, but until they surface we have to assume the connection. There's certainly little evidence to date that can separate them apart whether they are Samuel's offspring or not.

In two further census records, Anne Wombwell is recorded as *living in caravans* (as a travelling

showperson would be of course). In the 1851 census she is recorded as living with Harriet Blight at Wardleworth in Lancashire. Anne Wombwell is shown as a widow 63 - *wild beast merchant*. In the later 1861 census, Anne is still with the Blight family *in caravans* at Doncaster, Yorkshire. Here Anne Wombwell is recorded as a widow aged 73 *proprietor of menagerie*.

Unfortunately for historical record, neither of these are before George's death in late 1850. It is still a question as to when Anne Morgan reverted to the name Wombwell, but she had done so at some stage. Any documentary evidence that she did so before George's death in 1850, would be gratefully appreciated as would any further records of Anne Morgan and her family that may come to light.