

Origins of the Prater Family – A View

The earliest member of the Prater family who can be clearly identified is William John Prater, Esq who was born in Wales in about 1060. His father's name is unknown, but we believe that he came from Normandy, was born around 1020-25, was the brother of Reinbald de Presbyter and had settled in Wales some time before the Conquest. Although the family may have held estates in Wales these are not recorded, but they did hold Ampney St Peter in Wiltshire and we believe that William and his wife moved there in the early 12th century to escape hostilities. Before this William had been a Shire Reeve (origin of Sheriff) to the Prince of Powys and married one of his daughters. By this time the Normans had made some inroads into subjugating parts of Wales and the rulers of Powys were referred to as Princes rather than Kings. A candidate for the father of William's wife would be Cadwgan ap Bleddyn, but in any case he would have been one of Bleddyn ap Cynfyn's sons. We can therefore trace maternal ancestors for the second generation of Praters but not paternal ancestors and will return to this later.

Probably shortly before moving to Wiltshire, William had two sons that we know of, the eldest and his heir was William Prater, Esq born in 1100. The family had strong connections with the Delamere family, William senior's sister-in-law had married a Hugh Delamere of Chester and their daughter Gladys married William junior (who was her cousin). William and Gladys had a son Robert Prater, Esq born in 1140 who also married a Delamere. Six generations later, a William Prater, Esq born in 1400 who was great, great, great, great grandson of Robert Prater, was still living in Wiltshire and he too married a Delamere. Several of the preceding generations had been Shire Reeves (or Sheriffs), though of different counties, and the family estate was now Water Eaton near Castle Eaton on the Thames in Wiltshire. Exactly when they acquired this estate is unknown but they were gradually acquiring more land, so by the time of the latter William's grandson John Prater, Esq born in 1480 he owned extensive holdings in Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Somerset. The family controlled the wool trade in that part of the country, holding most of the grazing and all the major wool production centres.

The hierarchy of English gentry at this time ascended from yeoman, gentleman, esquire, knight to baron, so the head of each generation of Prater so far would

be considered to be middle ranking gentry. John Prater was the Bailiff (Reeve) for Sir Anthony Kingston and he married his daughter Elene who was his sole heir, so acquiring nearby Inglesham Manor. Their son George Prater, Esq born 1512 was Reeve of Nunney, Somerset for his cousin Sir William Paulet and he later purchased the holdings of Nunney (including the Manor and Castle) in a tax deal involving his father's estate. He also inherited Latton Manor near Water Eaton. The Praters were a Catholic family and in 1534 King Henry VIII created the Church of England, no longer recognizing the Catholic Church. Only their high social and political standing and wealth allowed them to survive the penal taxes that were introduced. The church at Nunney Castle contains tombs for the Delamere, Paulet and Prater families, indicating that they were linked in both life and death.

George Prater's son Richard Prater, Esq born 1540 was also Reeve to Sir William Paulet and lived in Nunney Castle after his father's death. The family now owned several manors, 70 farms (40 with serfs), four thousand acres of meadowland and 300 acres of woodland. His son George Prater, Esq born 1562 and grandson Colonel Richard Prater, Esq born 1590 continued to live at Nunney Castle. But in 1645 during the English Civil War it was attacked by a parliamentary army under the command of Lord Fairfax and Oliver Cromwell. Col Richard was a Royalist, like most Catholics, and had garrisoned the castle and taken in many refugees. When the castle was surrounded by two regiments of soldiers with cannons, Col Richard refused to surrender. Even after the cannons had been fired at the north side of the castle breaching the wall, he continued to resist and hoisted a flag with a Catholic crucifix on it to taunt the besiegers, but after two days he was forced to surrender. Some reports claim that he was executed on the spot or else banned from the castle for life, but either way he was not heard of again.

To follow the family line to my wife we must return to Richard Prater, Esq born 1540 who had another son William Z Prater, Gentleman born 1574. As a minor son he didn't inherit much of the family estate, but did receive a holding at Newlyn in Cornwall (3 miles south of Newquay). So for the next 250 years we find this branch of the family living in what is now St Newlyn East or else in Crantock, much more modestly than the family living in Wiltshire. William Z Prater had two sons, Francis Prater, Gentleman born 1618 and Thomas Prater (possibly Yeoman) born 1619. Our line follows Thomas, who had a son William John Prater, Gentleman born 1644 who had a son William Prater,

Gentleman born 1675 in St Newlyn East, but settled in Crantock. His eldest son Francis Prater, Yeoman born 1711 had six daughters but no sons, so his second son William Prater, Yeoman born 1712 succeeded him. This William Prater was succeeded by his son Thomas Prater born 1759 in Crantock, a farmer who married his cousin Elizabeth Prater, one of Francis Prater's six daughters. Their eldest son Josiah Prater born 1783 was a farmer of 5 acres at Halwyn, West Pentire and they also had a son Francis Prater born 1791. Francis was initially a farmer, but later became a cordwainer (maker of shoes and other luxury leather articles using fine, soft leather from Cordoba in Spain) showing the first indications of artistry in the family.

Francis Prater and his wife Elizabeth (nee Dennis) both lived at Hamlyn Cottage and their three children were born there. Their youngest child, Joseph Prater born 1820 was a journeyman carpenter and had moved to London in his twenties. He married a Londoner and they had nine children whilst living in Islington. The censuses generally give his occupation as carpenter, but sometimes as home decorator or builder, and he was still working in his seventies. His third child was Henry "Harry" Prater born 1855 and he became a wood engraver, one of many artists in the Prater family (including four of his brothers), married at Hackney and ended his days in Romford, Essex. The second of his five children was Mary Elizabeth Prater born 1883 who in 1906 married Thomas Henry Peperell at Hackney. The youngest of their five children was Phyllis Joan Peperell born 1920 an amateur artist who married Thomas Stuart Leaford in 1943 at Romford, Essex. The eldest of their three daughters is my wife, born Patricia Mary Leaford in 1947 at Harold Wood, Essex who trained as a pharmacist before becoming a marketing executive.

So, I have traced the Prater ancestors from my wife's grandmother all the way back to the Norman Conquest and William John Prater born 1060, but we need not stop there. Although the paternal line cannot be traced back beyond his father who would have been born in Normandy in about 1020 we can trace his wife's ancestors who came from Wales. We have also found a common ancestor for the Praters and the Peperells over 1000 years before the marriage of Mary Elizabeth Prater and Thomas Henry Peperell. This was Hywel Dda (the Good) born 882 who became King of the Britons and had several children. His daughter Angharad ferch Hywel married Tewdwr Trevor, who was great-great grandfather of Ranulph Peperell born 1025. Another of his children was Owain ap Hywel who was great-great-great grandfather of the Princess of Powys born

1080 who married William John Prater. This Princess was the daughter of Cadwgan ap Bleddyn born 1055, who became Prince of Powys and granddaughter of Bleddyn ap Cynfyn born 1026, who was King of Gwynedd and Powys. If we go back another 1000 years from the common ancestor Hywel Dda we find another common Prater/Peperell ancestor known as Beli Mahr (the Great) born 130 BC. The family line from Bleddyn ap Cynfyn to Beli Mahr goes back 35 generations; starting with Cynfyn ap Gwerystan born 985 who was King of Powys we jump 8 generations to Tegonwy ap Teon born 730 who was Bishop of Gloucester, then 10 generations to Gwrtheyrn ap Gwidol born 375 who is cited as the first King of Powys, another 12 generations takes us to Endos ap Eddolen who was born in 5 BC, whose great-great grandfather was Beli Mahr.

From Beli Mahr we can trace a common ancestry to the Peperell family back 23 generations to Brutus of Troy born 835 BC the first King of Briton. For more details consult the document 'Origins of the Peperell Family – A View'. If we explore the maternal ancestries from Cadwgan ap Bleddyn back towards Beli Mahr then it is really a Who's Who of Kings of Gwynedd, Powys, Deheubarth and Seisyllwg, but I will not give the details here. They can be found by starting with Cadwgan ap Bleddyn and using the 'ancestors' button. So, for instance Cadwgan's mother's mother Ealdgyth of Mercia born 1020 was the daughter of Leofric, Earl of Mercia and Lady Godiva (Godgifu in Saxon). I do encourage you to explore this ancestry as it will give you an insight into early Welsh history and their interactions with Saxon and later Norman neighbours.

Paul Fiddian – September 2014