

From Darlington to Wellington: The Sad Story of Isabella Fry

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This begins with the story of one woman, who travelled from Darlington in the north of England to Wellington, New Zealand in the early years of the twentieth century. In telling her tale and that of some of her ancestors, I aim to illustrate how a piece of research progresses, to introduce a variety of English sources and hopefully to inspire you to tell your own ancestral stories.

The story began with some memorabilia in the possession of a Braund Society member; a lesson to us to exhaust the resources of those distant family members. There was a photograph of her grandfather, William George Braund (branch 2), a sea captain from a little fishing hamlet of Bucks Mills, on the north Devon coast. There was a series of letters and diaries from William's wife Mabel and William's baptismal certificate, which showed his parents to be Joseph and Ann Elizabeth Braund.

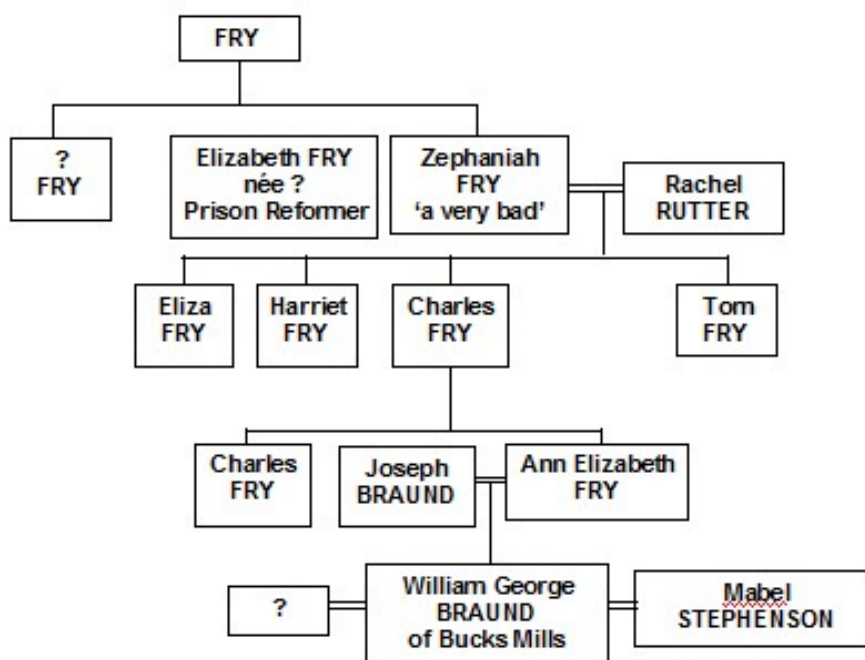


William George Braund

From the collection of the Braund Society

Along with the documentation, was the rumour that this family were related to Elizabeth Fry, the renowned, early nineteenth century, Quaker prison reformer. Like all good family stories this needed to be taken with a hefty pinch of salt. There was a piece of paper in the collection that expanded on the Fry connection. It read 'Rachel Rutter married Zephaniah Fry of 30 Castle

Street, Bristol - our grandmother. They had four children :- Eliza, Harriet, Charles, Tom.
 Grandfather was Charles Fry and they had 2 children, Charles and Anne E Fry. Anne El Fry
 married Captain Braund. Zephaniah Fry was our great-grandfather - he was a very bad man.
 Zephaniah Fry's brother was husband to Elizabeth Fry.' There was also a marriage certificate for
 William Braund and his wife Mabel. Surprisingly, this revealed him to be a widower, something
 that the family were not aware of. This enabled us to draw up a basic family tree and we sought
 to verify the pedigree and the rumours with documentary evidence.

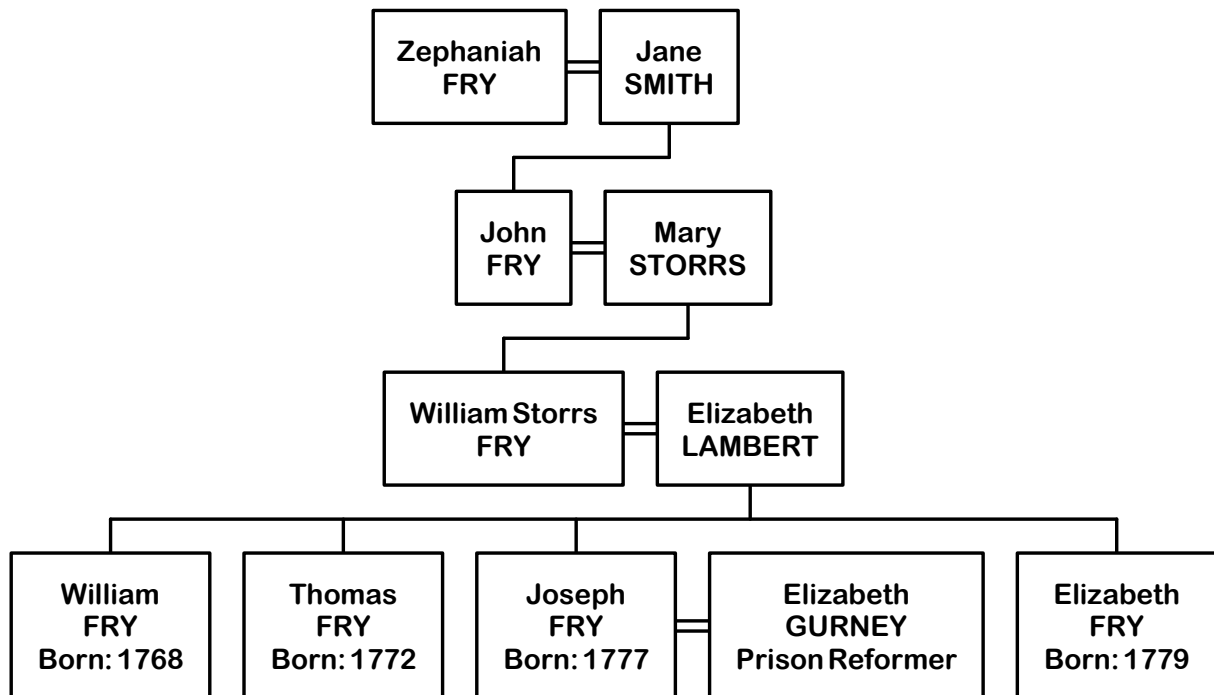


Of course, not every family is fortunate enough to have a cache of documents but it would have been possible to look at church records for details of the baptism and to obtain birth and marriage certificates if these had been lacking.

This threw up several questions: Who was the first wife? Could we verify the connection to Elizabeth Fry? Why was Zephaniah 'a very bad man'?

We researched Elizabeth Fry the prison reformer using secondary sources. Fortunately, an

excellent biography included a family tree. There is a gap in the Fry children but Elizabeth's husband, who we discovered was called Joseph, did not appear to have a brother called Zephaniah, although, encouragingly, there was a Zephaniah further up the family tree.



We used Civil Registration to obtain a copy of William Braund's birth certificate, which confirmed his mother to be Ann Elizabeth, formerly Fry. We looked in vain for a record of the first wife. But no marriage or death registration could be found.

The research was then put aside for some time. It is often a good idea to leave a particular line for a while and then come back to it with fresh eyes. It was when we began an extraction of all post 12 January 1858 wills for the Braund family that we had a break-through. The wills' index included an entry for an Isabella Braund of Wellington, New Zealand, wife of William George Braund, master mariner, whose estate was allegedly valued at £3228.

A New Zealand contact obtained a copy of the will. Isabella left everything to her husband, who swore that the estate was worth less than £100. Now we had the New Zealand clue, we realised that this was probably where the first marriage took place. This proved to be the case. We sent for the certificate and when it arrived, it revealed a new Fry connection; Isabella's maiden name was Fry. Unlike English marriage certificates, those from New Zealand give mother's names as well as father's, so we could see that Isabella's parents were Charles Rutter Fry and Mary Dorothy Tweddell. It also showed that the marriage took place just six weeks before Isabella's death and that one of the witnesses was an Elizabeth B Rutter. Isabella was thirty nine years old, older than usual for a woman's first marriage.

The next step was to obtain Isabella's death certificate, again these are much more informative than those for England and Wales. Isabella died of heart failure and there had been a coroner's inquest. The certificate also showed that Isabella had only been in New Zealand for three months. We had found the first wife but we now had more questions, such as, why was there a coroner's inquest? and exactly how were Isabella and Elizabeth Ann Fry, her mother-in-law, related?

Newspaper reports and the details of the inquest helped us to answer the first question, although, inevitably, the newspaper reports conflicted. Piecing together the story, it seems that on Saturday 23rd October, a month after their marriage, William George left Isabella alone in Wellington and sailed on the *Komata*. On Tuesday 26th Isabella visited the doctor complaining of melancholia and claiming that she wanted to go back to England; the doctor dissuaded her. On Friday 29th Isabella was admitted to Misses Garrett and Jackson's private hospital Kensington Street. Doctor Herbert visited her on Saturday 30th and found her rational and quiet. The following day the doctor was summoned as Isabella had taken a bottle of nitric acid that she obtained from surgery. William was sent for and returned to Wellington. On Monday 1st Isabella was seen taking a bottle of acid outside the lavatory. William visited her and asked her why she took the acid. Isabella replied that she couldn't help herself. At 4.20pm that day she died of heart failure. The coroner's verdict was that her death was due to heart failure,

brought on by a dose of nitric acid 'self-administered whilst in a state of insanity'. Incredibly, no blame was attached to institution; an institution for those of a nervous disposition, who appear to have left acid in an accessible place not once but twice.

It was time to find out more about Isabella's life before she arrived in New Zealand and to see if we could find the connection between her and her mother-in-law. Contrary to popular belief, there are no consolidated passenger lists, recording all those who left the UK since the year dot. These do not begin until 1890. The originals are found in the National Archives and can also be accessed via subscription websites. We found Isabella, apparently travelling alone, leaving from London on the *Iconic*. The newspapers reported that Isabella was staying with a cousin, presumably this was the Elizabeth B Rutter who witnessed Isabella's marriage. There was no sign of an Elizabeth B Rutter on the passenger lists, or in the New Zealand indexes of birth marriage and death. The best we could find was a James Rutter going to Wellington in 1890.

We traced Isabella in the UK census records. She appeared to come from a respectable, middle-class, Edwardian family. Her father had been an accountant. There was no obvious connection with the south west of England, where William Braund came from, at this point. We ordered the marriage certificates for William George Braund's parents and for Isabella Fry's. Isabella's grandfather is shown as Charles Fry 'Accountant' and William Braund's maternal grandfather was Charles Fry 'Cashier'. Investigating Isabella and William's parents further, we found that William Braund's mother, Anne Elizabeth Fry, was born about 1832 in Runcorn, Cheshire, the daughter of Charles Fry 'Cashier'. The family piece of paper said she had a brother called Charles. Isabella's father, Charles Rutter Fry, was born about 1833 in Leeds, Yorkshire and his father was Charles Fry 'Accountant'. Leeds and Runcorn are about 70 miles apart by road. It looked highly likely that these men were one and the same, making Isabella and William first cousins.

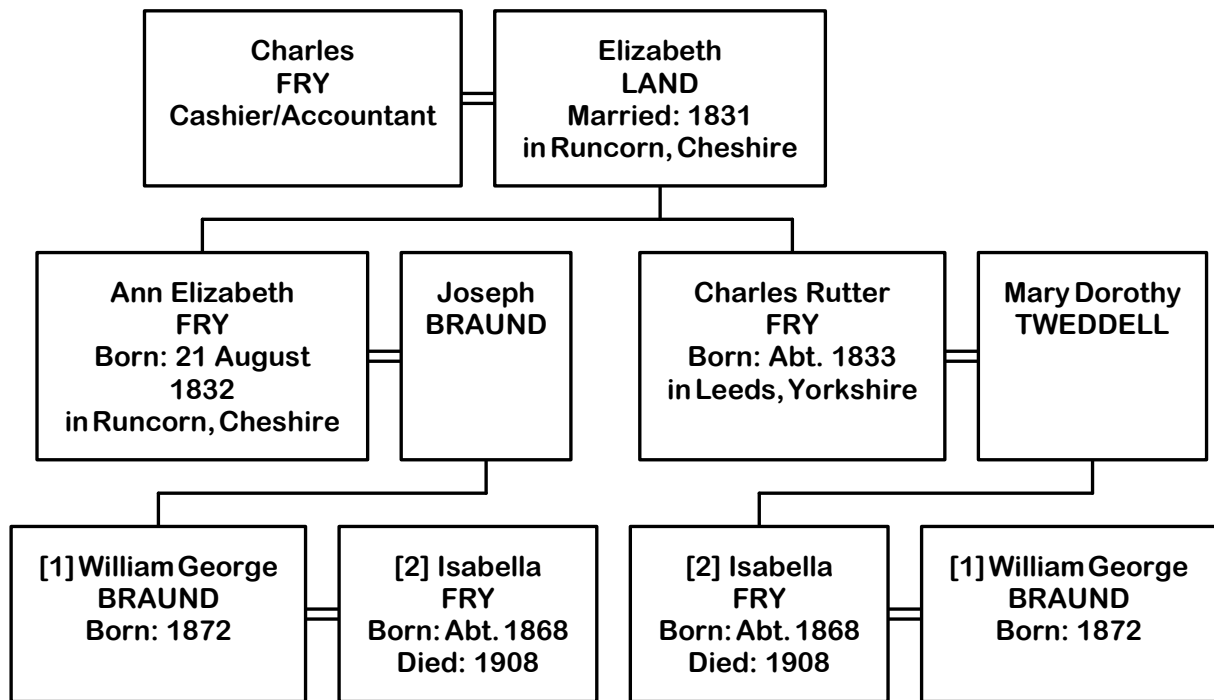
As the family were reportedly Quakers, we wondered how easy it would be to find baptismal records. Family Search soon led us to Ann Elizabeth, daughter of Charles and Elizabeth Fry née

Land, being baptised on 11 September 1832, having been born on 21 August. This baptism took place in the Runcorn chapel of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. This is an offshoot of Methodism, so at this point they were not Quakers. Luckily, because this was a non-conformist baptism, the mother's maiden name was recorded; this would be unlikely in an Anglican (Church of England) baptism record. At the time, no baptism could be found for Charles Rutter Fry. A marriage for Charles Fry and Eliza Land took place in Runcorn parish church in 1831. As this was prior to 1 July 1837, all marriages, except those of Jews and Quakers had to take place in a Church of England church.

In the absence of a baptism for Charles Rutter Fry, to really clinch the relationship, we needed to find Charles Rutter and Ann Elizabeth together in the 1851 or 1841 census. By 1851 Charles was in Durham and Ann was in Kent. Finding them in 1841 was more difficult. Eventually a possible entry was found in the Leeds in household of Elizabeth Walker. There is a scarcity of detail in the 1841 census, no relationships are given, no precise places of birth and ages are inexact. In this entry both Charles and Ann were said to have been born in Yorkshire.

Further investigations showed that Charles Fry senior died in 1833 and his widow, Elizabeth Fry, married Thomas Walker in 1839 in Leeds. So here were Ann and Charles with their mother and step-father. Interestingly, Thomas Walker's occupation is that of 'scribbler', or a carder of wool, a significant step down the social scale from Charles Fry.

Subsequently, the non-conformist registers that are held in class RG4 at the National Archives became available and searchable online and a posthumous baptism was eventually found for Charles Rutter Land, although his mother signed the register as Fry. She would have been three months pregnant when her husband died. This is a reminder that baptisms might not always be recorded with the surname we expect.

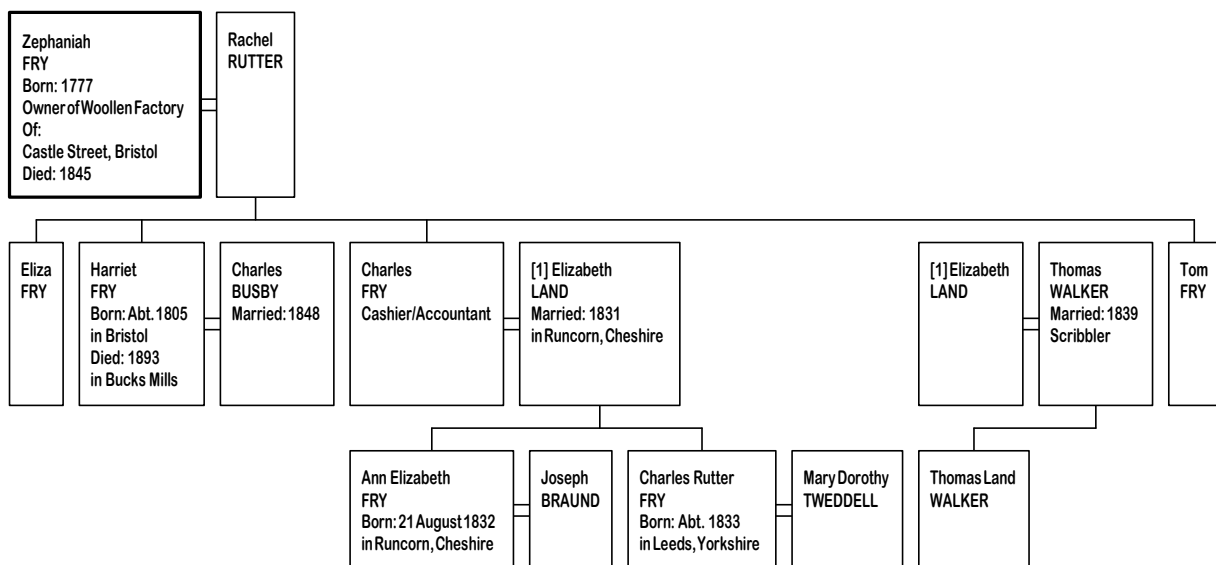


There was still no evidence of a Quaker connection and we had not found the link to Elizabeth Fry née Gurney; was her husband Zephaniah's brother as stated on the piece of paper? The 1891 census for William George's mother, Ann Elizabeth Fry, finds her as a widow, in the Devon village of Bucks Mills, sharing her household with an aunt, Harriet Busby, who had been born in Bristol. The paper in family hands said that Zephaniah and Rachel Fry née Rutter had a daughter called Harriet and further research in census, church and civil registration records showed that this was her.

We now had a Bristol connection to work with. Zephaniah was still alive in 1841 and appeared in the census as a woollen factor of Castle Street, Bristol, which was what had been stated on that piece of paper. It seemed that several of the statements on the paper were true, would the rest be also? Zephaniah died in 1845 and left a will. Before 12 January 1858, wills were not held centrally and might be found in regional archives or the National Archives. Zephaniah's was in the latter and could be downloaded online for a small fee. The will mentions his daughter

Harriet and son Thomas but not his daughter Eliza who was probably dead, or his grandchildren by his son Charles, who had died in 1833.

The National Archives' Discovery Catalogue includes documents in regional archives and we were able to discover that there were relevant documents in Bristol Record Office. A visit allowed us to access leases relating to Zephaniah's property in Castle Street. The property had first been leased by the grandfather of Zephaniah, another Zephaniah. When looking for a baptism for Zephaniah the younger, we finally found the Quaker link. Quaker records are very detailed and are now in class RG4 at the National Archives. They are available on some subscription websites and can be searched at www.bmdregisters.co.uk. Using these, we found that Zephaniah did indeed marry Rachel Rutter in 1803 at the Bristol Society of Friends (Quaker) meeting. This finally gave us confirmation of the Rutter connection.

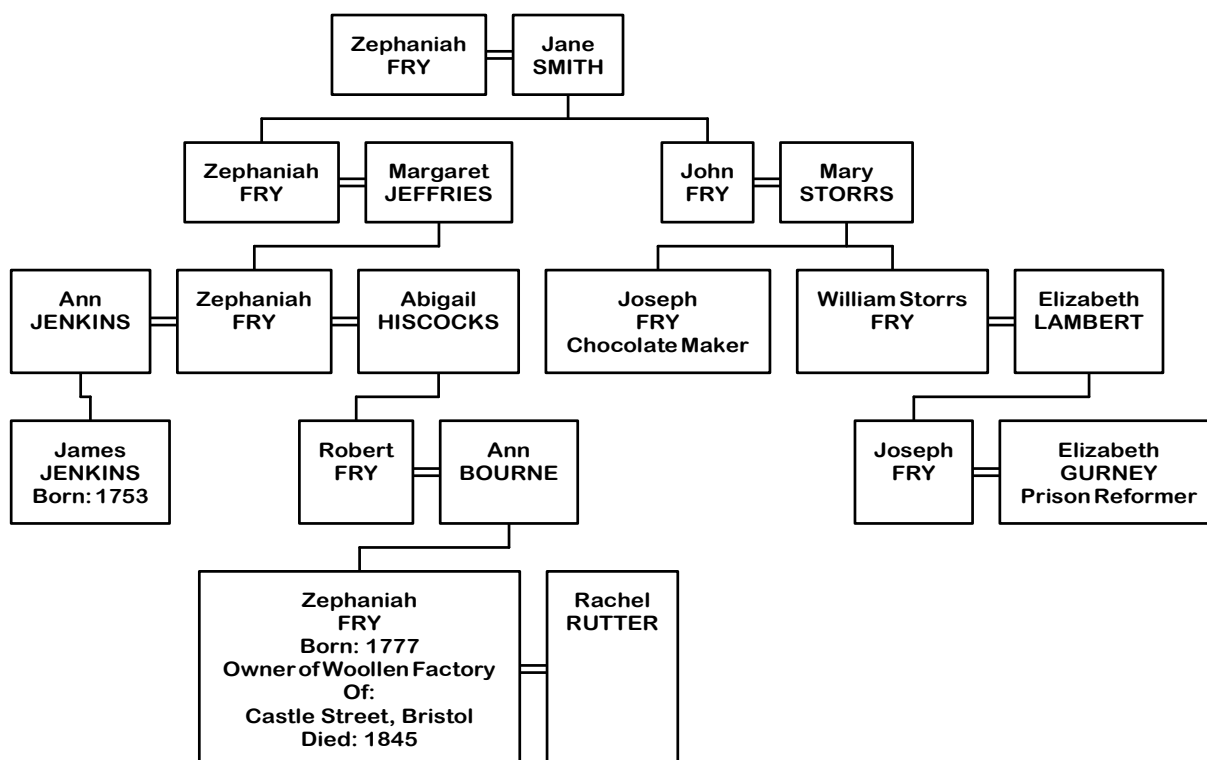


It is always sensible to work from the known to unknown, rather than randomly tracing a famous family and hoping for connection. Nonetheless, we did try to trace the family of Joseph Fry, husband of Elizabeth Gurney the prison reformer. It was using the Quaker records,

together with wills and other records in Bristol and Wiltshire Record Offices, that we finally found the connection to Joseph Fry, husband of Elizabeth Gurney. Joseph was not Zephaniah's brother; the connection was much more distant. In fact he was Zephaniah's second cousin once removed. We also found links to the famous chocolate-making Frys. In addition, we tied up another loose end and identified the Elizabeth B Rutter, who had witnessed Isabella's marriage. The relationship here was also one of second cousins once removed, illustrating how this extended family kept in touch with each other. Elizabeth B Rutter was still in England, in Wiltshire, in 1901 but left shortly afterwards. She was back in England by 1919, as she applied for removal from a Dorset Quaker meeting to one in Norwich, Norfolk. This information was found by putting her full name into the National Archives' Discovery Catalogue.

Interestingly, the inventory of a Zephaniah Fry who died in 1716, the 4 x great grandfather of Isabella, revealed a number of items relating to the wool trade, in which many of the early generations of the family were engaged. These included marrow cloth, broad cloth and remnants of drugget.

We were left with one question. Why was Zephaniah Fry a very bad man? In this search we were helped by the use of family surnames as middle names and by unusual combinations of names. Merely putting 'Zephaniah Fry' into a search engine led us to the text of an out of print book, *Strength in weakness: writings of eighteenth-century Quaker women* by Gil Skidmore. This revealed that 'James Jenkins (1753-1831) was born 16 August 1753, the illegitimate son of Zephaniah Fry (1716-1787) a prosperous and married Quaker merchant of Chippenham, Wiltshire and his servant Ann Jenkins. Both his parents were disowned for adultery, although Zephaniah was readmitted after only two years.' It seems that the 'very bad man' was not Zephaniah husband of Rachel Rutter but his grandfather.



That was not quite the end of the story. The Discovery Catalogue had also led us to some records of the Quarter Sessions' Court. These courts were functioning from the twelfth century until 1972. They contain a wealth of information that goes far beyond criminal cases. Sadly, the records are not yet available online, so you have to consult the originals in County Record Offices. In the records, we found Zephaniah Fry being accused of obtaining money under false pretences by using bank notes drawn on a bank he knew didn't exist. There were several offences of this nature. The indictments describe Zephaniah and his co-conspirator Edward Hughes as 'being evil disposed persons and common cheats and contriving and intending unlawfully, fraudulently and deceitfully to cheat and defraud.' Surely 'a very bad man'.

The story was filled out using newspaper reports. *The Bristol Mercury* records that he was imprisoned for eighteen months. We just needed to identify which Zephaniah Fry was the criminal. The court records show that he was a 'cousin' of our Zephaniah, husband of Rachel Rutter. He was said to be 'of St. Albans.' In an English context, this immediately brings to mind

St Albans in Hertfordshire however further research shows that there is a lesser known St Albans in Bristol, a warning not to make assumptions.

So which Zephaniah is this? This is family history, it is not fantasy, at this point we do not know.

Selected Sources

English and Welsh Civil Registration

From 1st July 1837

Near complete free index <http://freebmd.rootsweb.com>

Complete Indexes on subscription websites. Purchasing certificates online www.gro.gov.uk

English and Welsh Wills from Proved from 12th January 1858

The indexes are available on subscription websites and at <https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk>

Where copies of the wills themselves are available.

New Zealand Records

<http://bdmhistoricalrecords.identityservices.govt.nz>

<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>

Passenger Lists

Passenger Lists 1890-1960 originals BT27 at the National Archives www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Family Search

www.familysearch.org

Wills Proved before 12th January 1858

Much more complicated to find. Try county record offices. Those proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury are available online for a fee at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk or at www.ancestry.co.uk

Non-conformist Registers

Many in class RG4 at the National Archives. Indexed at www.bmdregisters.co.uk - images available online for a fee or free at The National Archives, also available on some subscription websites.

Fry Family

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Fry

Rose, June *Elizabeth Fry: a biography* MacMillan 1980

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