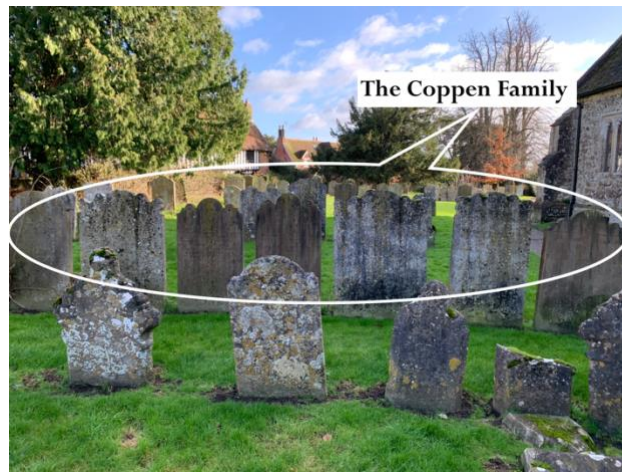


The Coppen family and their links to the East End of London

By Richard Thomas



There are 8 gravestones, all in a row, and all remembering members of the Coppen family. In addition, there are two plaques inside the chancel area of the church that remember another two members of the family.

We can see from the information on the graves that we have the parents and children of a large family (certainly by today's standards). The parents were Jeffrey Coppen and Mary Coppen (nee Apps). They were both born in the 1750s and Jeffery was 49 when he died in 1800, and Mary died in 1824 aged 68. The gravestones also tell us that they were from Elmstone Hole Farm, which is between Liverton Street and Grafty Green, today, a conservation area in the parish of Lenham.

But the main noteworthy thing about these 8 gravestones is that they tell us that 5 of the children of Jeffrey and Mary were late of Jubilee Street, in the parish of St Dunstan in Stepney, Middlesex. This is the East End of London.

These 5 were one of the sons – George – and four of the daughters – Elizabeth, Susan, Sarah and Caroline. They were born in the 1780s and 90s and died in the 1850s and 60s.

The plaques in the church remember Edward another son of Jeffrey and Mary, and Edward's son John. Both of whom also had London connections.

There were other children of Jeffrey and Mary who don't seem to have moved to London.

One of the 8 gravestones is for John Coppen who was in East Farleigh at the time of his death. Another son, Jesse, died in 1819 aged 27, another son, William seems to have stayed at the farm and died there, and another daughter Ann married a Jonathan Clark and moved to Headcorn. Her grave is in the churchyard in Headcorn and her name is given as Ann Coppen Clark. She kept the Coppen name, which must have meant something to her and perhaps to the people in the Headcorn-Lenham area. Lenham must have meant something to those who had moved away and came back to be buried here.

It was probably this large number of siblings that meant that they couldn't all make a living running Elmstone Hole Farm and they needed to find other ways of making a living.

Something which no doubt affected many large families in the past.

We don't know when the various Coppens left Lenham, but the 1841 Census tells us that

George, Sarah and Caroline were in Jubilee Street, Stepney. George is described as a Grocer, and he most likely had a shop. His sisters are described as female servants. It remains unclear if they were helping in the shop as the census had a limited number of job titles that could be used so they end up being described as 'Female Servant's. It is a nice thought that in

their grocery shop they sold produce from Elmstone Hole Farm in Lenham, but we have no way of knowing. Stepney was once a place with many shops where street peddlars who sold the ware in London stocked up.¹ From the 1851 Census we know that Sarah and Caroline were still in Stepney but we now learn that they were at 16 Jubilee Street. The Census doesn't give us any sort of job description. Susan and Elizabeth, who both died in 1866, were still living at 16 Jubilee Street at the time. The records show that their nephew Jonathan Clark was an executor to both of their wills. He is described as being a Carrier, of Liverton Street. Was he carrying produce from the Coppen farm to London?

In the 1851 Census Jonathan Clark, who was probably a son of sister Ann and Jonathan Clark in Headcorn was living next to Elmstone Farmhouse. **Susan** was farming at Elmstone Hole Farm with a teenage girl as a house servant and a teenage boy as an agricultural labourer. In another house at the farm were a

Brother **Edward** was living in Bethnal Green in 1841 according to the census and his profession is given as Cloth Factor. Was he producing and selling cloth from Lenham sheep? Edward is still in Bethnal Green in 1851 and, even though he is now 63 years old, he is described as a Traveller in Woollen Cloth – a travelling salesman in the days before cars? Must have been hard work. Let's hope he had plenty of customers in London and didn't have to travel too far. John Coppen, son of Edward, who had been baptised in Holborn, was living in Hackney, he'd married a girl from Merionethshire in North Wales, and they had two sons at the time: **Adolphus Jones Coppen and another John**. There is a grave in Lenham Cemetery, across the A20, for an Adolpho Coppen, and the internet suggests that his brother John died in 1928 and is also buried in Lenham Cemetery.

Family bonds must have been strong in the Coppen Family as two great-grandsons of Jeffery and Mary, both of whom were born and brought up in London, chose to be buried close to their family.

Just a few words about **St Dunstan's church**² in Stepney. It is the Mother Church of the East



End, and its bells are in the nursery rhyme Oranges and Lemons - "When will that be, say the bells of Stepney."

During the Great Plague of London in the 1660s St Dunstan's had to cope with a large number of deaths. In one eighteen-month period 6,583 died, with 154 being buried in one day in September 1665.

The church has a long, traditional link with the sea and many sailors were buried here. It was once known as the 'Church of the High Seas'. And anyone born at sea was entitled to be baptized there.

¹ A website full of beautiful stories about life in Spitalfields: <https://spitalfieldslife.com>

²Image: By Ethan Doyle White - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=107007279>

