

[The Pracy Family History](#)

From north Wiltshire to north London: the Wiltshire roots of the Pracy family

One of the amazing things about the internet is that family historians who for years ploughed their separate furrows can now get together and share their findings. At least half a dozen people had been researching the Pracy family, and all got stuck on the origins of Edmund PREACY of the parish of St Luke's Old Street, who married Lucy CARLTON at St Leonard's Shoreditch in 1767.

In 2002 I cracked the problem, with the family historian's usual combination of hard work, inspired guesswork and sheer luck. Perhaps the best way of explaining it would be to retrace my steps from the beginning and work through systematically.

I began family history in 1973 and soon got back to Edmund and Lucy. An Open University degree and three books about Nazeing where I live meant that for many years family history took a back seat. I was aware that the internet was transforming family history and, when in 2001 I started teaching a family/local/house history course at the local college, I knew that I would have to find out about the net at least one week ahead of the class! I decided that as a practical exercise I would revisit the problem of Edmund and Lucy. Ironically, almost all my new discoveries were the result of traditional methods, although the net did give me one crucial lead.

I began with the IGI, which told us that around 1730 at St Giles Cripplegate three children with variations of the name Pracy were baptised. They were:

- 1728 William PRACCEY son of Thomas (Wheelwright) and Elizabeth
- 1732 Rachel PREACY daughter of Edmund (Baker) and Elizabeth
- 1734 Hannah PRAYSEY daughter of Charles ('Dier') and Sarah

There was also Sarath PRASCEY, baptised at St Benet Fink in 1737, whose parents, Edward PRACY and Sarah SIMMONS, were married at St Matthew Friday St in 1734.

Knowing that St Luke's Old Street had been carved out of St Giles in 1733, I thought there must be a good chance that Thomas, Edmund or Charles might be the father of 'our' Edmund. I started ploughing through microfilm of the St Luke's registers at the London Metropolitan Archive, and it took me several hours to get as far as 1739.

I found that in 1736 a couple recorded as "Edmund baker & Alice BRACEY" had a daughter called Martha. I thought this was probably our family because

- B and P in Wiltshire dialect are often interchangeable
- Our Edmund was a baker
- Edmund and Alice were unusual names, particularly in combination
- An Alice Pracy was buried at St Luke's in 1785.

However, this didn't help with Edmund junior. Many entries had been rendered illegible by water damage and I became convinced that his had been one of them.

Not relishing another day squinting at the LMA microfilm, I decided to visit the Society of Genealogists. I hoped to find a link with a PRESSEY family that had been in London since the late 16th century and by the early 18th was well established in the neighbouring

parish of St James Clerkenwell. It seemed promising but eventually I decided that it was a blind alley.

After a fairly cheerless lunch, I wandered along the London parish register shelves and came across a handwritten index to St Luke's baptisms from 1742 to 1755. Naturally I started looking for the PRs but the page fell open at the PEs and my eye was drawn to an entry for "Edmund son of "Edmund & Alice PEACEY, b. 28 July 1744, bap. 19 Aug". I later checked the original at the LMA and found that it could equally well be read Peacey or Pracey. This was not just wishful thinking, for as late as 1891 the badly written marriage certificate of Henry Pracey was wrongly but understandably indexed as Peacey by the GRO.

Back at home, I checked *English Origins*. No sign of Edmund, but there was a record for Charles PRACY, son of William Pracy yeoman farmer of Bishopstone in Wiltshire, apprenticed as a dyer in 1726. It seemed reasonable that he had married Sarah after his seven year apprenticeship, and that soon afterwards they produced Hannah.

I knew that only about 30 of the London livery companies have as yet been added to *English Origins*, so I went to the Guildhall to look at the microfilmed records of the Bakers' Company and there was Edmund PRESIE, apprenticed on 15 January 1721/2. Unfortunately, however, the Bakers didn't record the fathers of their apprentices, so I was not much further forward.

Then came at the SoG one of those days of which family historians can only dream. First I looked up the Pracys on their CD-ROM of Pallots Marriage Index. There at Christchurch Greyfriars, Newgate St, were the elusive marriages of three of the younger Edmund's children: Elizabeth (to James KERSHAW in 1805), John William (to Elizabeth Jane PALMER in 1806), and Thomas (to Mary MORGAN in 1809). I also checked Boyd's Middlesex marriages, which had Edmund PRECEY & Elizabeth EAMES at St Margaret's Westminster in 1729, presumably the parents of Rachel.

Knowing that even in a more literate age people have trouble spelling my surname, I increasingly thought it likely that the Edmund references from 1721 to 1744 were all to the same man, but I still didn't know where he came from. *English Origins* had suggested several possible marriages in East Anglia and I spent a while on them without success. Next I looked up Edmund BRACEY on *Boyd's Londoners* and was quite excited to find three of them, but after flourishing from c1565-1620 they petered out and my day seemed to be doing the same. I knew of several PRECY/PRESSEY families in Wiltshire, Hampshire and Surrey, but there seemed to be no obvious reason to start with any of them in particular.

Then I remembered something rather theoretical from one of my OU history courses - the push/pull model of migration. The idea is that if economic hardship forces someone to move away, their relatives may be affected by the same circumstances and move to the same area. From about 1640 to 1750 was a period when the population of England remained almost static but the population of London doubled, so there was a chance that other members of the family had moved to London. I therefore decided to check the SoG's parish register transcriptions for Bishopstone where Charles Pracy had come from, and there he was! - Edmund PRESSEY, son of William and Mary, born 16 October 1705,

baptised 1 November. Charles was shown as being born on 14 December 1707, thus confirming the family link.

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