

Orlando Horace Cooper

On the 1851 census John Atmore Knights was stated as 12 years of age and was one of five boarders at a school in 'Hackford next Reepham' in Norfolk. The ages of the boarders ranged from 8 years to 15 years. The Head of the household, and also the School Master, was Orlando Horace Cooper who was described as married. Although Mr Cooper's wife was not present Lucy, his 12 year old daughter was. On the face of this it appears his wife was just temporarily away from the home. As the address of the school was not shown I tried to find it on the other census returns but Orlando, and his wife, were very elusive. I did find him in the 1854 White's Directory though, listed as 'Boarding & Day School, Mill Hill', although I couldn't find Mill Hill on the old Ordnance Survey maps of Reepham. A search of the newspaper archive revealed in 1862 the death of Hannah Hall 'the faithful and unwearied housekeeper of Mr Orlando Cooper of the Mill Hill Academy' so the address appears to be correct.

But what started as a routine address search uncovered what the newspaper reports of 1863 described as '*An Extraordinary Bigamy Case*' at Beverley in Yorkshire. It appears Orlando's wife, Kate, had left him and 24 years later had married another man. The first day of the hearing was delayed as the solicitor was attending another court to answer a charge of fraud against the second husband! There are some lengthy newspaper reports that make interesting reading, repeating virtually every word that was said in court. Strangely, the reports state 'the first husband had now died' even though Orlando's sister stated in her statement to the court that she had seen him at the railway station that morning. Also, there is no death recorded for Orlando Cooper until 1869 (Aylsham registration district).

There were also other ambiguous claims in the case, his wife claimed he deserted her and she hadn't seen him for a number of years, not knowing if he was still alive – if so why was their daughter living with him and not her in 1851? It was also claimed she often came to 'follow him and shout things at him, eventually to ruin him'. Whether she succeeded or not is not known, but he does appear to have left Reepham and moved around the county quite a lot, and taken to drinking.

Oddly, in April 1864 Mrs Cooper was found not guilty.

Orlando was in court in November 1864 for being drunk in Little Walsingham so this confirms he could not have already died as was stated in the court.

There was also an earlier case reported for stealing two gold rings in Portsmouth, but this was in 1845 when he was sentenced to six weeks hard labour, the last week to be in solitary confinement.

Notes:

1837 January Marriage reported in Hadleigh, Suffolk : –
Orlando Cooper to Eliza Mockford.

1838 (3rd Q) Death recorded of an Eliza Cooper in North Witchford.

1838 (3rd Q). Marriage of Orlando Cooper to Kate Gray in Cambridge.

1839 (2nd Q). Lucy Susanna Orlando Cooper, born North Witchford Reg. Dist. Cambs.

An unrelated Orlando Cooper

In the 1860s there were other reports about a Soldier, also named Orlando Cooper, who had deserted and looking at his records I can confirm this is not the same man. He was born in 1839 in Norwich and became a shoemaker before joining the 6th Regiment of Foot (No1517) in 1860, he was discharged in 1870 having been in the Defaulter's Book 31 times, mainly for Desertion and AWOL. He returned to shoemaking, married and raised a family.