**The story of Edward Gurnett (1698-1765)**The name Edward Gurnett appears only once in the Swanbourne records. He was allotted land in Nearton End, Swanbourne in 1763, which today is still called Gurnett’s Ground. He does not appear in the parish register yet there are people from the Gurnett family in the area. Who was he?This article attempts to unravel the story.
 **Water Stratford**Long before there were Gurnetts in Swanbourne, there were Gurnetts in the Buckingham area, which is the first record of Gurnetts in Bucks. The first recorded family was that of John and Elizabeth Gurnett who lived at Water Stratford. They had children Sarah, Edward, Thomas and Anthony who were born between 1667 and 1685[[1]](#footnote-1).

**Buckingham**
John and Elizabeth’s son Edward Gurnett was probably born in 1672[[2]](#footnote-2) and he seems to have moved to Buckingham where he had children Elizabeth, John, Edward, Mary, and Thomas between 1693 and 1703[[3]](#footnote-3). Edward Gurnett’s son Edward Gurnett was probably born 1698[[4]](#footnote-4).

The family were cowkeepers who supplied the London markets with butter. Edward Gurnett’s brother John Gurnett was a labourer who used to work for Lord Cobham at Stowe. He then became a drover, driving cattle for graziers and butchers. John Gurnett married Elizabeth Cox in 1721 and they had a son Edward Gurnett in 1729.
 **Drover**
I have now tried to reconstruct the most likely story of Edward Gurnett of Swanbourne from surviving records. Edward Gurnett seem to have become a drover taking animals into London. Edward Gurnett used land at Swanbourne; land at Ford near Dinton near Aylesbury; and land at Denham, Fulmer and West Drayton near Uxbridge as staging posts for animals on their way to London. **Living in Denham**In the 1720s, Edward Gurnett was farming at Denham, where he probably met Jane Jennings. In 1729, at his wedding to Jane Jennings of Denham, at Mayfair he is described as a husbandman[[5]](#footnote-5), which was another term for a farmer. In 1737, he leased Rusholte and Redhill Farms for 21 years[[6]](#footnote-6). In 1751 he took Denham Court (now called Buckinghamshire Golf Club) when he was described as a yeoman, who was a farmer holding land freehold.

Edward and Jane Gurnett had many children at Denham between 1731 and 1744, but in those days many children died in infancy, including their sons Edward and John, so he had no surviving sons, but they had three daughters who lived to adulthood[[7]](#footnote-7): Ann born 1736, Elizabeth born 1740[[8]](#footnote-8), and Catherine born 1742. Having no surviving sons of his own, Edward Gurnett seems to have taken on his ten-year-old nephew Edward Gurnett.

**Living at Fulmer**
In the 1750s Edward Gurnett’s family seems to have moved to Fulmer. Fulmer is a village in south Bucks just to the west of Denham, and just south of the Chalfonts. In 1756, Ann Gurnett married Joseph Pigg, farmer of Fulmer. They had a son Joseph in 1758 and a son Edward in 1762, who were christened at Fulmer. In 1760, Edward Gurnett’s wife, Jane, died at Fulmer where she was buried.

In 1761 Elizabeth Gurnett married Edward Bavin in London[[9]](#footnote-9). However they were not married long, and Edward Bavin seems to have died and left Elizabeth a widow[[10]](#footnote-10).

**Edward Gurnett the nephew**
Sadly, the nephew Edward Gurnett was badly behaved. He robbed his uncle and ran away to Chalfont, where he worked for a brickmaker. Whilst in Chalfont he bore a child out of wedlock and he fled to London to avoid responsibility. He went to live in Highgate, where he went by the name of James Cox. There he was accused of stealing silver items from one Daniel King. He passed the stolen property to someone who reported it to a Magistrate. As a result Edward Gurnett appeared at the Old Bailey on 6th June 1761 accused of theft[[11]](#footnote-11). He “was indicted for stealing one silver watch value ten pounds, one silver pint mug value three pounds, and two silver salts value thirty shillings”. He was executed at Tyburn on Monday 5th October, 1761. The chaplain at the prison interviewed him and wrote down what he said where we get these details of his life.
**Coker Family**
In 1764 Catherine Gurnett married Robert Coker of Denham[[12]](#footnote-12). In the parish register she is described as Catherine Gurnett of Fulmer which also suggests that the family were living in Fulmer then. They had a son Robert Coker in 1764
**Moving to Swanbourne and Dinton**
After his wife died, it seems that Edward Gurnett and his widowed daughter Elizabeth Bavin, may have moved to live at Swanbourne. Maybe Edward Gurnett spent a lot of time at his lands at Ford, because in 1761, a year after his wife died, and aged about 63, he married Ann Hitchcock, spinster of Dinton[[13]](#footnote-13) at Dinton. Dinton is to the west of Aylesbury in Bucks. In the parish register he is described as “Edward Gurnett, widower of Swanbourne”[[14]](#footnote-14). In the record for Dinton it is recorded that Edward and Ann Gurnett had 2 messuages, 2 barns, 2 stables, 2 gardens, 2 orchards, 50 acres of land, 20 acres of meadow, 20 acres of pasture in Swanbourne and Ford, Dinton.

**Swanbourne Inclosure Awards**The following year, in 1763 Edward Gurnett was awarded land in the Swanbourne Inclosures. The Inclosure Award reads that Edward Gurnett was awarded land in compensation for all lands he had been using. He was awarded just over 39 acres[[15]](#footnote-15). The land is still called Gurnett’s Ground and lies behind Brook Farm in Nearton End.

**Elizabeth Gurnett and Westfield King**
Meanwhile Edward Gurnett’s daughter Elizabeth had met Westfield King of Swanbourne whose wife had died in 1762[[16]](#footnote-16). Westfield King is an unusual name and he made the Westfield King who had been a framework-knitter in London who was made a Freeman of teh City of London on 16th September 1737.

In 1764, we get the first reference to a Gurnett in the Swanbourne parish church registers. There is a record of the banns of marriage of Westfield King and Elizabeth Gurnett, who are both described as ”of Swanbourne”. Banns were read at St Swithun’s Church on 3 successive Sundays: 29th January, 5th February and 12th February 1764. Intriguingly on 5th February 1764, on the day that their second set of banns were read, this couple had their son Benjamin christened. The parish register records Benjamin as “a bastard child of Westfield King and Elizabeth Gurnett or Bavin”. Although she was technically Elizabeth Bavin it maybe that the people of Swanbourne had never met her husband, and she is still known as Elizabeth Gurnett. There is no record of a wedding taking place after the banns were read and it seems that it did not happen. Whether there was a problem or one party changed their mind is not known, we can only guess. Elizabeth’s son Benjamin was known as Benjamin Gurnett and not Benjamin King. In those days children of unmarried mothers usually took their mother’s name.
 **Coker Family**In 1764, Edward Gurnett’s sister Catherine Gurnett married Robert Coker of Fulmer. They had a son Robert in 1764, and twin daughters Catherine and Sarah in 1771,

**Death of Edward Gurnett**
In July 1765 Edward Gurnett died and was buried at Fulmer. He may have died at Denham because in his Will written shortly before he died he writes “in the parish of Denham”, or he may have died at Fulmer. In any case, he is buried at Fulmer (which is not far from Denham) where he was probably buried with his first wife Jane, who was buried in Fulmer in 1760.

**Edward Gurnett’s Will**
Edward Gurnett’s Will survives amongst the records at the county archives Aylesbury[[17]](#footnote-17). Edward Gurnett had 3 daughters who were his co-heirs, so he seems to have left property into the names of his two sons-in-law, and he left money to his widowed wife and daughter Elizabeth. It says that he left his “wife Ann Gurnett the sum of one shilling”. He left £150 to his daughter Elizabeth Bavin, who is described as “widow living with Joseph Pigg”. Joseph Pigg was her brother-in-law, so effectively she is living with her sister.
It was not until 1870, that women in the UK could inherit land, upto then only men could, but women could inherit money, so the lands were left to the sons-in-law Joseph Pigg and Robert Coker. It states that Edward Gurnett left his son-in-law Robert Coker £110 and an estate at West Drayton. The residue was left to his two sons-in-law Joseph Pigg of Bovingdon, and Robert Coker of Denham who were both farmers. This residue would have included his lands at Swanbourne. The Will was proved on 29th July 1765. (We would have to look at any surviving records for Gurnetts Ground how it was inherited and sold.)

**What happened to the rest of the family?**
After he died Edward’s second wife and widow, Ann Gurnett, seems to have returned to live at Dinton, where her name appears in the Hobbs land papers.
**Pigg Family of Bovingdon**
A year after Edward Gurnett’s death, in 1766, his daughter Ann Pigg, described as a “gentlewoman” died and was buried at Bovingdon. Her husband Joseph Pigg remarried in 1767, aged 36, to Elizabeth Bird[[18]](#footnote-18). He was described as a “Farmer” and died in 1791. Joseph and Ann’s son Joseph Pigg married Elizabeth Norwood. H died in 1821 aged 62. The Pigg family of Bovingdon descend from them.

**Coker Family of Denham**
Catherine Coker died in Denham in 1809 aged 67. Her husband Robert Coker died in Denham in 1808, aged 75. Their son Robert Coker married Ann Grosthead in 1792 and they settled at Denham. The Coker family of Denham descend from them.

**Gurnett Family of Swanbourne**
Elizabeth Bavin alias Gurnett seems to have continued to live at Swanbourne with her son Benjamin, who was known as Benjamin Gurnett. Benjamin Gurnett married Rebecca Brome at Swanbourne parish church on 5th November, 1787[[19]](#footnote-19). When he died in 1839 he was described as aged “about 77”[[20]](#footnote-20). It is from them that the Swanbourne Gurnett family descend...

Neil Rees
5th September 2023

1. see Water Stratford Parish Registers [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Edward Gurnett, christened son of John and Elizabeth Gurnett, 26th November 1672. At this time children were usually a few months old when they were christened [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. see Buckingham Parish Registers [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Edward Gurnett christened son of Edward Gurnett 30th June 1698. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Registers for St George’s Chapel, Mayfair, London [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Way family estate papers, Denham Place [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Denham Parish Registers records children christened and buried children of Edward and Jane Gurnett from 1732 to 1744 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Elizabeth Gurnett christened 29th October 1740 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Edward Bevan, bachelor and Elizabeth Gurnett, spinster married in London 12th March 1761 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Evidence: Elizabeth Bavin had banns of marriage in 1764, and was called a widow in her father’s Will from 1765. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Middlesex Sessions, from original at London Metropolitan Archives MJ/SP/1761/07/004 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Fulmer Parish Registers, marriage 6th April 1764 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. She is probably the Ann Hitchcock christened daughter of Richard and Mary Hitchcok 21st February 1737 at Dinton [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Dinton Parish Register for 13th Jan 1761 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. actually 39 acres and 11 perches, where there are 160 perches to an acre [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Westin King married Elizabeth Forster “both of this parish” at Swanbourne 27th October 1757, then Elizabeth King, wife of Westfield King buried 25th June 1762. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Archdeaconry of Bucks Records, Will proved 17th July 1765 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Marriage License 30th July 1767 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Swanbourne Parish Register Marriages [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Swanbourne Parish Register Burials [↑](#footnote-ref-20)