

Jaz Chappell - Family history, Odd Down connections

I grew up on stories of my Grandfather Shellard. He was a sometime coal miner, stone mason and farmer. When I say farmer he was, in 'Archers' terms much more Joe Grundy as compared to Brian Aldredge. When living on Odd Down the family home was at Beehive Cottages and much later Burnt-house Cottages. In between times he was a farmer at Fortnight Farm, Combe Hay.

My father had told me, when we were driving to Wells, past the fields divided up with dry stone walls, "Your Grandfather contributed to the building of those walls as part of a work-party from Shepton Mallet prison, where he was serving six months for poaching." When asked to submit something to the website I thought I would take a closer look at this story.

It didn't take long to find many occurrences of Thomas Shellard mentioned in various print media publications. I sort of knew he was a 'bad lad', but I was shocked. He was in the dock for affray and rioting in South Wales when he was a coal miner. I would have to investigate further to see if there was a relationship to striking miners. He was in front of the magistrates for being drunk and disorderly at Kings Lytton. He was on numerous occasions hauled in front of magistrates for poaching offences, one time stating he was not baiting a bank but merely planting potatoes with his long-time friend and associate Albert Barber. The case was thrown out. On other appearances, poaching accusations were thrown out because of not enough evidence. What did for him in the end was not being caught for poaching but being caught for being in the possession of poaching equipment. Arrested in Wellsway, followed by being found guilty and handed a six month jail sentence. I can only imagine the joy of both the gamekeeper and the magistrate for catching the recidivist poachers who had escaped justice over many years! I admit to being shocked by his repeated behaviours ... but am I?

There is no way for me to prove the other story about his horse breeding but I believe it! He had a reputation for having good horses for sale. He only had mares and foals. So, where was the stallion? My father told me he used to 'steal' the stallion belonging to the local squire.

My memory is of a kindly old man giving me bristly kisses with twinkling blue eyes.