

Perhaps I had better own up straight away to having known very little about my family's ancestry until a couple of years ago, when I received a telephone call from Mervyn. Since when, thanks to his remarkable diligence, there is much that I now know about my forbears.

I have learnt that my Great Grandfather was instrumental in running the biggest trading company in pre-revolution Russia, a company that amongst other things traded in tea, cotton, sugar and wool.

I have learnt that my Great Uncle Raymond and his brother, my Grandfather Walter, sought and received permission from the king in 1917 to adopt their mother's maiden name Ffennell. That there was also another brother, Erwin, who disgraced himself socially, was disinherited by his father, was sued successfully by his brothers for deformation of character and emigrated to Australia where he died in mysterious circumstances. Definitely a "black sheep".

Finally I have learnt that my Grandfather Walter met and subsequently married Elizabeth Levick whilst working on the financial part of the Treaty of Versailles. Unfortunately their marriage was no more successful than the treaty.

All of this is of interest to me, but none of it compares with the remarkable lives of Raymond, Hope, and Hazel, who we have heard about today. It is hard to imagine a family more aware of its social responsibilities, and more dedicated in sharing what they had with others, both in the local community and with less advantaged in other places not only during their lifetimes, but for future generations to come. As someone who bears the Ffennell name I have found it truly uplifting to hear of their life story.

At the same time that Raymond was acquiring Wytham Abbey, my Grandfather, Walter, was purchasing Martyr Worthy Place, an estate three miles east of Winchester that comprised of a large house, a number of cottages, 3000 acres of arable land and a stretch of the river Itchen. When my Grandfather died in 1949, my Father Denzil inherited the estate, although by then much of the land and many of the cottages had been sold off.

Denzil was a naturalist and devoted much of his life to his passion of lepidoptery. In case you are wondering, that is moth collecting, and because he lived in only one place for much of his life he was able to put together a comprehensive collection for

that part of central Hampshire. Since his death in 1977 his collection has been kept in Oxford University's Museum of Natural History. My sister Diana and I were born and brought up in Martyr Worthy Place and have vivid memories of our Father hunched over his moth trap every early morning before the sun was up.

Today I and my wife Lucinda, and our daughters Jessica and Georgie, live in Martyr Worthy in one of the few remaining cottages on the estate, which now only comprises of an attractive formal garden that was part of Martyr Worthy Place and the stretch of the river Itchen.

Having inherited my Father's love of the countryside and its wildlife I have had the very good fortune to spend much of my life working on the river or up in the formal garden where I run a very small nursery business.

If I am the only remaining male member of the Ffennell family left then it is entirely possible that the name will die out. But who knows – maybe history will repeat itself and if my daughters were to marry then perhaps for some unforeseen reason their respective husbands may chose to adopt their wife's maiden name.

But if not, and should the name pass into history, it is comforting to know that in this part of Oxfordshire the name Ffennell will be remembered for generations to come.

SO IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO UNVEIL THIS PLAQUE  
IN MEMORY OF RAYMOND, HOPE, AND HAZEL.

*Simon Ffennell*