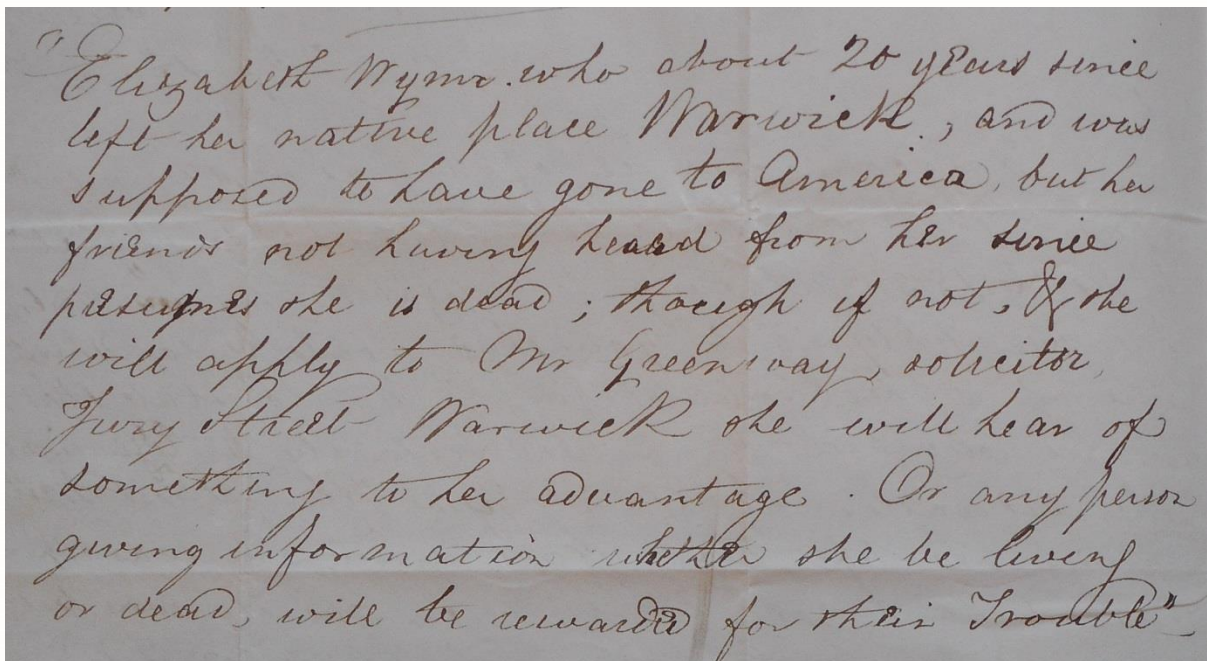


'The Whereabouts of Elizabeth Wynn': A Mystery of Dickensian Proportions CR1993/2

Picture the scene; the year is 1838, autumn is closing in. In the bustling streets of Victorian London we find Samuel Probert, a smith in his late 30s, purchasing a newspaper. This might not have been anything out of the ordinary for Samuel, except that today, he happens to notice a particular advertisement. It reads as follows:

'Elizabeth Wynn, who about 20 years since left her native place Warwick, and was supposed to have gone to America, but her friends not having heard from her since presume she is dead; though if not, & she will apply to Mr Greenway, solicitor, Jury Street Warwick she will hear of something to her advantage. Or any person giving information whether she be living or dead, will be rewarded for their Trouble.'



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Probert's transcription of the advertisement in the 1838 newspaper.
Warwickshire County Record Office, CR1993/2

Elizabeth Wynn, now there's a name he remembers. Samuel recalls how she lodged with him some years back, when he was living elsewhere in Westminster. She was in a poor way, but had repeatedly told him that she expected some property to be left to her, and would ultimately be better off. He hadn't heard from her in years, but the rumour was that she was supposed to have travelled to America. Although he doesn't suppose he'll hear from her again, Samuel pockets the advertisement.

A sudden reunion

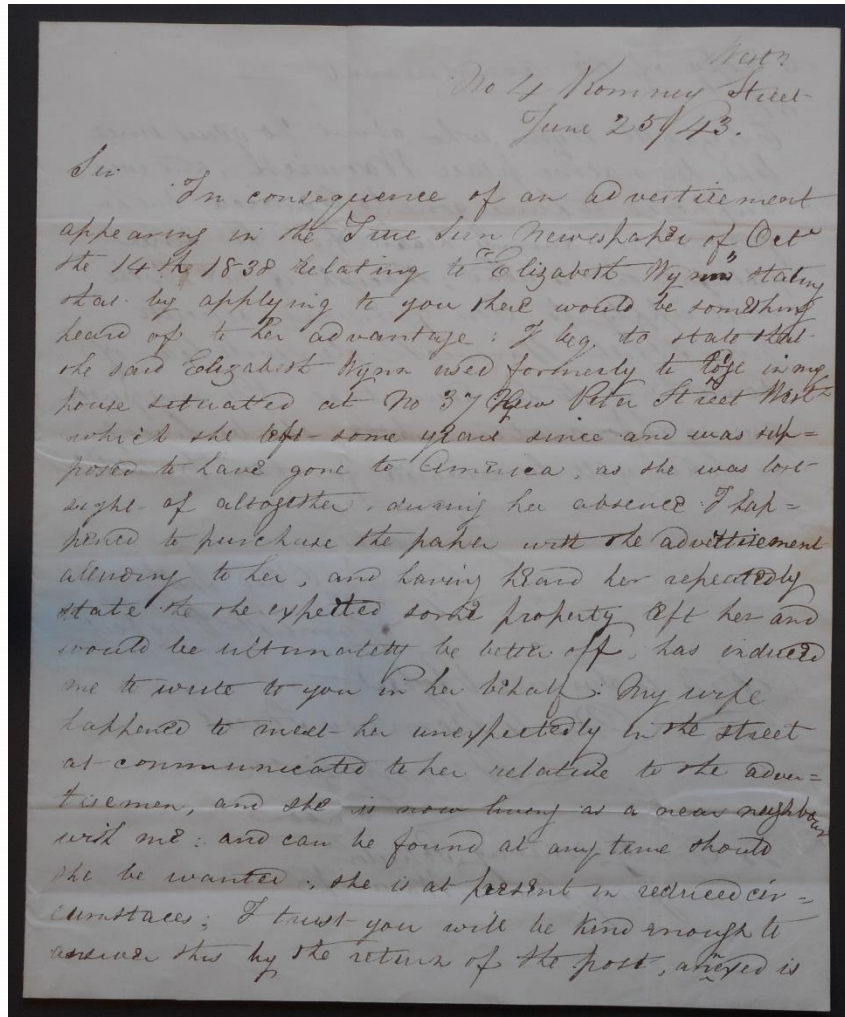
Fast-forward five years to the summer of 1843, and Samuel has long since abandoned hope of ever having cause to write to 'Mr Greenway, solicitor'. His wife, however, has not forgotten the advertisement; thankfully so, because one day in the street, by total coincidence, she stumbles once more upon Elizabeth Wynn. As it turns out, Elizabeth is living very near to the Probert's house at 4 Romney Street. Mrs. Probert is sorry to see that her circumstances are even further reduced. She eagerly tells Elizabeth about the advertisement, both curious and excited to know what this news 'to her advantage' would entail. When Samuel hears of their meeting, he resolves to write, finally, to Mr. Greenway.

Unsatisfactory conclusions

But here, unfortunately, our story must come to an abrupt end. The letter that Samuel Probert wrote to Mr. Greenway has arrived in our archives and it describes the story as laid out above. Unfortunately there is no context to the document from which we could ascertain what happened next. It is a mystery, and one which is nothing short of Dickensian.

Was this Elizabeth Wynn truly the person Mr. Greenway sought, or was this all pretence in the hopes of a misbegotten inheritance? Why did she leave Warwick, did she ever travel for America and if so, why did she return so many years later? Was she reunited with the friends who thought her dead? Was she ever contacted by Mr. Greenway? Did she indeed learn something to her advantage, and was it enough to pull her from the 'reduced circumstances' that she found herself in? Was there a large estate to be claimed, or was it so eaten up by legal costs that there

was nothing left? Or perhaps there was never an inheritance, and this was simply a ruse by Mr. Greenway to 'smoke her out' from hiding?



11/27
No 4, Newman Street
June 25/43.

Sir

In consequence of an advertisement appearing in the True Sun Newspaper of Oct^r the 14th 1838 relating to Elizabeth Myer stating that by applying to you there would be something been off to her advantage: I beg to state that she said Elizabeth Myer used formerly to live in my house situated at No 37 New Port Street North which she left some years since and was supposed to have gone to America, as she was lost sight of altogether, during her absence I happened to purchase the paper with the advertisement alluding to her, and having read her respectfully state she expected some property off her and would be ultimately be better off, has induced me to write to you in her behalf: My wife happened to meet her unexpectedly in the street at communicated to her relative to the advertisement, and she is now living as a near neighbor with me: and can be found at any time should she be wanted, she is at present in reduced circumstances: I trust you will be kind enough to consider this by the return of the post, and is

Samuel Probert's letter to Mr. Greenway, 1843.
Warwickshire County Record Office, CR1993/2

I have not been able to find the answers, but I can't help but feel that there must be documents out there (wills, probate, passenger lists, newspapers, parish and census records) which could shed some light on the story.

Do you fancy playing the detective and solving our mystery for us?