

Obituary Bill Ridout of Berkhamsted, 1934 -2008

Many readers will remember Bill Ridout who died in September 2008. Bill was among the first 300 members of the SDFHS. For many years Bill attended the annual meetings, gave lectures to branches of the Society and was involved with Dr P Sherwood in inputting to computer memory the 1891 census for the Society

Bill was born in Jarrow in 1934 but moved shortly thereafter to Amersham in Buckinghamshire. He was a lifelong member of the Boy Scouts and a keen gardener. He became a computer programmer firstly on main frame computers and the Society is indebted to his computer skills in the significant bequest to the Society of his 'Ridout One Name' archive.

Bill married Eunice Gilbert in 1955 and they set up home in Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire where their sons Stephen and John have early memories of him working on the family history in the 1970's. As a member of the Society of Genealogists Bill served on advice panels at the forerunners to the 'Who Do You Think You Are?' exhibitions. Having established contact with Ridouts in the USA and North America he exchanged visits with them and gave lectures on family history. He also visited Australia and New Zealand and

took the opportunity to meet Ridouts there. Of his own family line Bill was disappointed to reach a dead end at Fountleroy Farm near Folke some two miles from Sherborne. At this point most of us would have given up, but he turned his researches to all references and spellings of his surname.

Bill continued the work started by Arthur George Ridout (1852-1939) whose papers are lodged with the Society of Genealogists. Bill compiled a complete record of all ecclesiastical records of baptisms, marriages and deaths for the whole of Somerset and Dorset in the family name until 1837, searchable by Christian name. With the sterling assistance of Mrs Maureen Ridout of Sutton, Surrey over ten years they added all national records from 1837 to 1999. With further assistance from Val Andrew of Wimborne and her late husband Ken, 29,000 Ridouts in the census returns were identified and added to the archive. Wills and Administrations are recorded from 1300 onwards. Bill halted his research when his wife was taken ill in 1997; she died in 1999.

Bill was delighted when a DNA test showed that he was distantly related to one Orlando Ridout IV of Annapolis, Maryland, a direct descendant of John Ridout of

Sherborne who had emigrated in 1753 to be secretary to Governor Sharpe of Maryland. Orlando Ridout continues to own the farm settled by his forbear.

I was introduced to Bill as someone who might help me with a block on my research and found not only a knowledgeable family historian but someone who was outstandingly generous with his time and the results of his own research. He remarried in 2004 to Ros, a physiotherapist who had treated Eunice but he had already been diagnosed with what proved to be a terminal illness.

Bill has bequeathed to SDFHS the whole of his archive on the Ridout name. Its size is daunting with in excess of 90,000 computer entries. A review of the hard copy material is in hand to see what needs to be preserved for future use and the Guild of One Name Studies has kindly agreed to help with assessing the computer material.

I am grateful to Ros and John Ridout, Orlando Ridout IV, Maureen Ridout, Val Andrew, Roger Guttridge and Ted Udall for their assistance.

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