

## **WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE – BARBARA WINDSOR**

### **BBC TV: September 6<sup>th</sup> - 2006**

For those who watched the episode on BBC TV, here is some background information on how Bures became involved.

In early May, an Independent Television Company producing the TV series contacted me through the Bures website, requesting assistance in locating residents of the village during the 1700s or 1800s with the surname Deeks, which was Barbara Windsor's maiden name.

My initial search uncovered Deeks residing in the village as early as 1726. The 1841 census publication allowed me to positively identify William Deeks, a 64-year-old bricklayer living across from the Baptist Church with his mother Mary and son Samuel, who was also a bricklayer. William Deeks was Barbara Windsor's great-great-great grandfather. Additionally, parish records from 1838 indicated that William Deeks worked on the Bures Hamlet Workhouse as a bricklayer.

In mid-May, I met with a researcher from London to compare our findings. We then consulted with Ida McMaster, a local historian in Mount Bures, for further assistance. Ida delved into her manuscripts and discovered various spellings of the Deeks name, such as Deiks and Deaks. While my focus was on the 1800s, Ida traced descendants back to 1623 in Mount Bures.

Throughout the remainder of May, I continued my research on the Deeks name by scouring the internet, local graveyards, and Parish Records.

In June, I had the opportunity to meet with the executive production team at Bury Records Office to continue our search for information. After our time at the Records Office, I guided the team back to Bures where we explored various filming locations in the village, including the High Street, Water Lane, and the Old Brickworks in Maltings Close.

Our plan involved showcasing Barbara Windsor as she examined the cottages in Water Lane and the Brickworks. Local brick expert Peter Minter from Bulmer was set to provide insight into the life of a "Bricklayer" in the early 1800s. It was clear that Bures would play a significant role in the program.

Throughout May and June, I dedicated a substantial amount of time to researching records and interviewing residents in the village. This task was challenging as I had agreed not to disclose the name of the celebrity involved. The TV company emphasized the importance of maintaining secrecy to avoid any premature publicity that could impact the series launch.

In addition to my research efforts, I was tasked with establishing a connection between the "Deeks" name and any local dignitaries, such as Gainsborough or Constable. This added another layer of complexity to the project, requiring thorough investigation and attention to detail.

My research into the Garrad family, who married into the Constables, revealed them to be a prominent and affluent family in Bures during that era. This investigation led me to explore as far as Norwich in search of connections. I delved into census records of neighbouring villages like Clare, Cavendish, Long Melford, and Glemsford to uncover potential family ties.

Deeks was a very popular name in that area

Through my efforts, I was able to trace the family tree of John Constable, discovering that his grandfather resided in Bures and his great-grandfather in Mount Bures, along with other Constable relatives.

While the Bury Records Office took credit for uncovering the Constable connection, much of the information had already been documented and shared with the producers. The family trees of the Constable and Garrad families can now be accessed on the Bures website.

Given the possible link to John Constable, I escorted the production team to Flatford in July to scout potential filming locations. The television company staff for economic reasons always arrived by train, and I assisted in transporting them from Bures, Bury, and Colchester to their destinations. I was always rewarded financially for these excursions.

Despite providing a significant amount of local evidence to the TV company, I was disappointed to learn at the end of production that the storyline involving the "Bricklayer" had been heavily edited out due to a lack of interest in that aspect of Barbara Windsor's background.

Possibly, I had spent too much time on the brick-layer relationship with Barbara.

It was disheartening to see nearly three months of work go to waste with only a few seconds of airtime dedicated to that aspect of the story.

The final filming by the BBC took place on a Sunday morning at Bury Library, where they received all the credit for uncovering the Deeks/Constable link.

It was disheartening to see that they had essentially plagiarized all of the research that I had painstakingly conducted at the library over the course of several weeks.

The entire televised scene at the Records Office was meticulously scripted and rehearsed with the staff for filming purposes.

Such as a staff member digging around in a box of records and like a rabbit out of a hat with a beaming smile said *"and you will never guess what my research has revealed"* .....

My colleague, Ida McMaster and I had managed to keep our secret hidden for several months, deflecting any awkward questions that came our way. However, our surprise was palpable when during the last weekend in August, the Windsor story was suddenly thrust into the limelight by newspapers such as the Daily Mirror and the East Anglian Daily Times.

It was the BBC that had broken the story, not the actual program makers.

I had diligently prepared a Press Release for all the local papers the day before the scheduled TV release. Unfortunately, it seemed that no one was interested in the three months of meticulous research that I had documented.

In other words - "I was now totally expendable"

The connection between "Deeks" and "Constable" was, in all honesty quite tenuous. For instance, Deeks, the bricklayer had worked for the Garrards, who were related by marriage to the Constables.

It would be a stretch of anyone`s imagination, to consider this a convincing link.

It is important to remember that the creators of this series are solely focused on crafting a compelling storyline, even if it means sacrificing accuracy in order to generate maximum publicity for their work.

Also, I suspect there comes a time when it`s financially too late to pull the plug and so they will clutch at anything to wrap up the story.

This is an abridged version of the full story which can be found on the Bures web site at: [www.bures-online.co.uk/windsor](http://www.bures-online.co.uk/windsor)

Alan Beales.