The Snell family were resident in Essex for 120 years, and probably for much longer.

The first records to be so far encountered in the County are of nine children born to John Snell and his wife Rebecca, who lived in Colchester. They were: Rebecca (b. 11 September 1783), John (b. 3 May 1789), Mary Coe (b. 8 February 1791), Elizabeth Sarah (b. 10 June 1792), Sarah Wood (b. 16 March 1794), Shadrach Lindo (b. 11 September 1795), Thomas Inman (b. 20 January 1799 and died on 24 May 1799), Lewis Inman (b. 17 April 1800) and Emily (bap. on 9 February 1804, but believed to have been born in 1802). The first eight christenings took place at St. Nicholas’ Church, Colchester, and were conducted by the Rector, the Rev. John Smythies, while Emily’s was at nearby All Saints Parish Church.
John Snell was a woollen draper and tailor, plying his trade in what was in the late 18th Century a busy county town with close connections with London. Transport links by coach were frequent and quick, so it was unsurprising that John would make regular visits to the Capital to see customers or suppliers. Undoubtedly, it was while he was undergoing such a visit, that he met and fell in love with a London girl, Rebecca Coe. John and Rebecca were married in London at St. Anne’s Church, Soho, on 22 December 1782. The couple returned to Colchester, and the first child in the Snells’ large family was born in the following September. For the next 18 years the family lived in St. Nicholas’s parish, at the eastern end of the busy High Street and close to Colchester Castle and the George Hotel.

The George was a busy and long-established coaching inn where John probably embarked for his regular journeys to London. Their home was “over the shop” in the High Street, next door to the Red Lion public house. John probably shared the shop with his uncle Francis and his cousin James who were also drapers and tailors. The Snells were a family of some standing in Colchester at this time, with all three of them being listed in electoral poll books between 1784 and 1812, and this gave them the right to vote for their MP.

As the 18th Century drew to a close it was a time of great political tension and instability. By 1800 King George III had served 40 years as monarch but his influence and health were waning. He died in 1820 but by then he was blind, deaf and mad. In 1800 William Pitt was also approaching the end of his Prime Ministerial tenure, and in the latter part of the 1700s he had introduced a range of memorable legislation – some of it welcome and some of it repressive. In 1801 he resigned from office as a result of King George’s unwillingness to grant Catholic emancipation. However, Pitt returned for a second spell in office between 1804 and 1806.

The world beyond Britain was in no less a turmoil. In the 1780s Britain was defeated in the American war of independence and then quickly became embroiled in a continental alliance against French revolutionary forces across Europe. By 1802 peace had been negotiated at Amiens, but a few years later Napoleon Bonaparte began his own quest for French dominance of Europe. Hostilities with France lasted until 1814 with both Wellington and Nelson distinguishing themselves in their respective arenas to finally suppress Napoleon’s aims.

This, then, was the backdrop against which the Snell family played out their lives in Colchester and Ardleigh.

Research has established that at least four of John and Rebecca’s children were married. Rebecca, the eldest child, married first – to William Samuel Cant, a gardener from St. Botolph’s parish, Colchester – at All Saints on 15 August 1802. The couple are known to have had at least six children between 1803 and 1820: Rebecca, Sarah Ann, Mary Elizabeth, William John, Emily Eliza and William Samuel. The 1841 Census shows the couple living on their own in Priory Street, St. Botolph’s, Colchester. By now, William is recorded as a “town serjeant”. He died in the following year, aged 62. Rebecca did not re-marry and died at the age of 84 on 28 November 1865 at Loddon, Norfolk. Rebecca did not re-marry and died at the age of 84 in Loddon, Norfolk.

Next to marry was Mary Coe at St. Mary the Virgin, Ardleigh, on 7 December 1809. She wed an Ardleigh wheelwright/carpenter and
widower, John Barrell Bedford, and they had at least nine children between 1810 and 1831: John Barrell, Mary, Shadrach John, Elizabeth, John, Rebecca Maria, Catherine, Rosa Ann and Frances. John married Mary Ann Bell of Westminster, London, at All Saints on 22 October 1817, and despite extensive research no children have been identified for the couple. Finally, Shadrach Lindo married three times and had a total of eight children.

Shortly after 1800 the Snell family moved from Colchester to the parish of Ardleigh – some four miles north east of the town. The reason for this is unknown, but it may have had much to do with daughter Rebecca’s marriage to John Bedford whose family was of some standing in Ardleigh. Trade directories of 1839 and 1845 record John as the village’s wheelwright.

Very little is known of the Snells’ Ardleigh years, but two parish census records6 – one in 1811 and the second in 1821 – provide a glimpse of the family’s life in the village. In 1811 the census shows John Snell still doing business as a tailor at the age of 54, but does not distinguish between other family members, other than to report that five people in total (two men and three women) lived in the family house. From this we must assume that the others were John’s wife Rebecca, Shadrach Lindo (whose elder brother had probably by now left home to join the East Essex Militia), and two daughters.

The parish census of 1821 shows a different picture and this time it lists the age ranges of those recorded. By now John had died (in 1814), leaving Rebecca responsible for the remaining family. She lived with two other females in the house – one aged between five years and 10 and a second aged between 21 and 30. Who these women were – in particular the child – is uncertain as Rebecca’s last daughter, Emily, would have been 19 in 1821. This census also tells us that Rebecca was now employed as a schoolmistress in the village.

It is clear that John and Rebecca’s ties to their former home of Colchester remained close to their hearts throughout their period in Ardleigh. John’s death – at the age of 57 – is noted in the parish register of St. Mary the Virgin Church, but his burial is recorded at St. Nicholas’ churchyard on 14 October 1814. Rebecca was also buried at St. Nicholas’ – on 23 September 1832 at the age of 72 – but by the time of her death she had moved back to live in the St. Giles parish of Colchester.

Mary Coe and John Bedford went on to raise their own considerable family in Ardleigh. They were also recorded in the parish censuses of 1811 and 1821, and the first national census in the spring of 1841 shows them living at Bovills Hall (one of four ancient manors in the parish of Ardleigh). John and his 20-year-old son, John, are both described as farmers, although it is likely that John senior would also still have been providing

Rebecca Snell’s signature on her daughter Rebecca’s marriage licence in 1802. John was unable to attend Rebecca’s wedding, states the licence, because he was “...necessarily absent from home in consequence of the derangement of his affairs.”

St Botolph’s Without, in Aldersgate, City of London, pictured in 2004. The church was completed in 1791.
wheelwright services. Three years later John senior died at the age of 61. By the census of 1851 John junior was in charge of the farm, which now comprised 91 acres and employed two labourers. Tragically John died on 17 January 1857 at the age of 38 and was buried at St. Mary The Virgin Church nine days later. A headstone marking his grave can clearly be seen today.

After the death of her first husband Mary Coe – now aged 55 – moved to live for a short time with her brother John at his home in Little Britain, London. On 17 February 1846 she married James Bell Biggs, a noted Ardleigh butcher and farmer, at the City of London church St. Botolph’s Without, Aldersgate; John Snell was a witness at her wedding. The couple returned to Ardleigh and lived with Mary Coe’s two remaining daughters, Rebecca Maria and Frances, at 61 Harwich Road – next door to John Bedford junior and his young family. Mary Coe died at the age of 78 on 3 January 1870 and was buried at Ardleigh.

John and Rebecca’s youngest child, Emily, survived and we have some tantalising glimpses into her life. For around 30 years she was employed as the housekeeper for the eminent independent Congregationalist minister, the Rev. Thomas Raffles DDL. Raffles (who was a cousin of Sir Stamford Raffles, the founder of modern Singapore) was born in London but lived for most of his life in Liverpool where he preached, wrote many pamphlets and composed hymns.

Raffles had a substantial household in Mason Street, West Derby, Liverpool. In 1861, at the age of 72, Raffles employed a footman, coachman, cook and housemaid, while Emily managed the entire household. Raffles died in 1863 and by 1871 Emily is living at 9 Victoria Mount (known originally as Victoria Road), Oxton – a small village on the outskirts of Birkenhead. She is described as an “annuitant” and we can assume that Emily earned her pension from her years in service. She was clearly comfortably off; her neighbours in what appeared to be genteel lodgings included retired ships’ brokers, master mariners, civil engineers and estate agents.

In 1871 and 1881 Emily – who was a spinster – had her own servants looking after her: in 1871 21-year-old Mary Williams from Ruabon in North Wales, and 10 years later Fanny Paddock, a 60-year-old spinster from Hampshire. It was Fanny who was with Emily when she died on 10 July.
1883 in Birkenhead.

What became of the remaining three children of John and Rebecca – notably Elizabeth Sarah, Sarah Wood and Lewis Inman – is uncertain, as no records have been found, despite assiduous research through contemporary national and parish registers. There is a record in the Essex Burials Register for the burial of a “Sarah Snell”, aged 41, on 13 March 1836 at Little Coggeshall. It is possible, therefore, that Sarah Wood Snell was living with her brother, Shadrach Lindo, at the time of her death (the dates for her birth and death match), but there is no corroborating evidence. It is also feasible that the girls married out of Essex (perhaps they moved to London, like so many others in the family at that time). All three may have died at a young age and their deaths cannot now be recognised from burial registers.

Of all of John and Rebecca’s children, it is Shadrach Lindo who is of most interest to this family history.

The years between his birth in 1795 and when he married his first wife in 1823 are a blank page. At the age of 28 Shadrach Lindo was a journeyman wheelwright. He would have had to serve his apprenticeship with a master, and it is reasonable to presume that this may have been with his brother-in-law, John Bedford, while the two families were living in Ardleigh. We don’t know why or when he moved to Coggeshall, but we do know that he married Sarah Rout at St. Peter-ad-Vincula Church, Great Coggeshall, on 12 November 1823.

The couple had five children. Tragically, as was so often the case in these times, their first child, Shadrach John, who was born in June 1824 and christened on 1 August, died one year later and was buried at St. Peter’s on 17 July 1825. The other children all survived: Sarah (b. 17 September 1826, bap. 15 October at St. Peter); Emily (b. 9 December 1828, bap. 1 February 1829 at St. Peter); Elizabeth (b. 14 March 1831, bap. 10 April at St. Peter), and finally Shadrach, who was born on 26 September 1832 and baptised on 4 August 1833 at St. Peter. Just three years after Shadrach junior was born, his mother Sarah died and was buried at St. Peter on 19 March 1836, at the age of 41.

Great Coggeshall was a busy, large village 10 miles south west of Colchester. It was the centre of a number of thriving industries as well as being the heart of a rural community, and the area was probably a magnet for those seeking work at the beginning of the 19th Century.

Shadrach Lindo married his second wife, Mary Ann Wood, at St. Peter on 20 April 1837. By the time of the 1841 Census the family is recorded as living in Little Coggeshall, but with one additional member: two-year-old Alice, Mary’s first child.

We know much about Alice’s life. By 1861 she was working as a 22-

This cottage is believed to be the former home of Shadrach Lindo Snell. It is referred to on a tithe map of Little Coggeshall dated July 1854. The tithe award translation refers to Plot 71 (believed to be the right-hand part of the cottage) as being owned by Jacob Unwin and occupied by “Snell and two others”. The pink cottage at the right of the picture is referred to in the translation as being a “house and wheelwright’s shop”, owned by Matthias Gardner and Joseph Denny and “occupied by Wood and four others”. Mr Wood may have been one of the men known to have been employed by Shadrach Lindo (a master wheelwright) at this time. These cottages are situated next to Grange Farm (the high wall of which can be seen at the extreme right of the photograph), at the top of Grange Hill and are just a few hundred metres from the centre of Great Coggeshall.
year-old housemaid for the affluent Wild family at Clapham Lodge, South London. She met and fell in love with Thomas Burrow, the son of non-conformist parents, Samuel and Mary Ann Burrow. He was born on 10 September 1831 in Exeter and christened at the town’s Castle Street Independent Chapel the following November.

Thomas was fired with religious fervour and became a London City Missionary with the Christian Brethren, working under the influence of T George Bell at Shouldham Street Chapel. It was Bell who married Thomas and Alice at Shouldham Street Chapel, St. Marylebone, on 17 August 1871. At the time of his marriage Thomas was living alone in lodgings at 8 Grove Place, St. Marylebone, while bride-to-be Alice was now living at Clare Lodge, Queen’s Road, Wandsworth, where she worked as a parlourmaid for Selina Doxat, a 79-year-old widow. Interestingly, Alice’s half sister, Elizabeth Snell, was a witness (and presumably bridesmaid) at the wedding.

The couple went on to have four children: Else (b. 1873), Philip (b. 1875), Eliza (b. 1879) and Sarah Christine, who was born on Christmas Day 1882. After their marriage, the couple soon moved to the village of Ridge, Hertfordshire, where they lived and worked for around 20 years. Thomas and Alice retired to The Throghts in the village of Bishop’s Cleeve, Gloucestershire, where they were recorded in the 1901 Census. Alice died, aged 81, in Gloucestershire.

Mary Ann had a second child, Josiah John Snell, who was born on 25 May 1842. She next had a girl, Martha Wood Snell, who died only five months later on 23 October 1844. Martha died of “decline” at Priory Street, St. Botolph’s, Colchester, where she was being cared for by her aunt Rebecca — Shadrach Lindo’s sister. Mary herself died on 6 July, Tabitha Brooks (then living in Stoneham Street, Great Coggeshall, as a 20-year-old infant school nurse), and who was to become Shadrach Lindo’s third wife. Blacksmith’s daughter Tabitha was born in 1819 at Tooting Gravener in Surrey which today is part of the South London suburb of Tooting. The couple married — not in Coggeshall — but at St. John the Baptist Church, Croydon, on 24 April 1846.

By the Census of 1851, 56-year-old Shadrach Lindo was a master wheelwright in Little Coggeshall employing two men. Moreover, Shadrach junior was by now a journeyman wheelwright (no longer an apprentice) at the tender age of just 18. At this time there were five wheelwrights recorded in Great Coggeshall and one in the neighbouring hamlet of Little Coggeshall.

Shadrach Lindo’s daughters, Sarah, now aged 24, and Alice, 12, were still living at home in 1851. Around this time Sarah was a teacher and running an Academy (or school) in the village. There was one other resident: four-year-old Dorcas Barham, recorded as a “visitor” from Salisbury in Wiltshire. Ten years later, Dorcas is still living with the Snells and is described as a cousin. In fact, Dorcas is believed to have been Tabitha’s cousin, and she was also recorded by the 1861 Census as living with her aunt Elizabeth Dedman (née Brooks) in Sudbury, Suffolk, on the day the census was taken! She was an apprentice mill man.

On 25 August 1859 Sarah Snell married a Swiss man, John Lewis Marc Haldy (known simply as Mark
Haldy in the records), at St George’s Parish Church, Hanover Square. He is a shadowy figure as there is only one census reference for him. Haldy was a farmer’s son and a widower when he married Sarah, and lived in South Street, Mayfair. He was also a good deal older than his new bride – some 22 years difference, in fact – and he was employed as a courier.

In 1861 Sarah had left teaching and was a lady’s maid to Anna Maria Bruce, the wife of Lieutenant Colonel Bruce of the Grenadier Guards. The Bruce family (including their two children and Anna’s sister) lived with their substantial household of servants at 13 Montagu Place, Bryanston Square, London. Ten years later and aged 45 Sarah is recorded as living with Mark in a large tenement at 9 Adam Street West, Marylebone. She was making her living as a dressmaker and the couple had two lodgers.

Mark died before the next census in 1881 and by then Sarah had returned to service with Scottish widow Joanna Maitland and her family at The Grove, Boltons, Kensington. Sarah remained with Mrs Maitland for nearly 20 years, eventually becoming the family’s housekeeper.

When she retired around the turn of the century, Sarah chose to live with her sister Emily in the village of Hurst in Berkshire. When she died, at the age of 87 on 12 February 1914, Sarah was living in Laburnum Cottage, Hurst.

We have some similarly fascinating insights in the life of Shadrach Lindo’s youngest daughter by his first wife. By 1851 Elizabeth Snell had left home and was working as a nursemaid in the home of wealthy retired merchant, 88-year-old William Sollow. He lived with his three daughters, son and three grand-daughters in Park Road, Clapham. Several servants, including Elizabeth and her sister Emily, looked after the family.

She continued to work for the Sollow family until some time before the spring of 1871 when the census records her as having made progress in her career, working as a housekeeper and cook for 36-year-old solicitor, Frederick Green, and his young family at 40 Gloster Place, Paddington. Elizabeth managed a household that included two maids and a 19-year-old Swiss nurse, Marie Leuba, who cared for the master’s two-year-old son. Sadly, we have no record of Elizabeth after this time.

Finally, Emily Snell, Shadrach Lindo’s third daughter by Sarah Rout, had a life less dedicated to service. While she worked for a time with her sister in William Sollow’s home, Emily married plumber William Brooks at St Botolph’s Church, Aldgate, in London on 14 May 1855. William, who was born in 1831 in Tooting, Surrey, is thought to have been related to Tabitha Brooks,

St George’s Church, Hanover Square, London, where Sarah Snell married Mark Haldy.
Shadrach Lindo’s third wife – possibly Tabitha’s younger brother. This makes for an interesting relationship between Emily and her step-mother!

Emily and William had three daughters – Amy, Phoebe and Bessie. In 1861 the family is recorded as living at 72 Moneymers Street, Shoreditch, together with William’s brother, Henry, a blacksmith (like Tabitha’s father). The couple lived in Shoreditch for nearly 30 years, until they eventually moved to 71 Chelsham Road, Croydon, when they were both in their sixties. William died and Emily moved to Mungle Farm, Winnersh, near Wokingham, Berkshire, where she was recorded as “living on own means”.

There is no obvious connection with Berkshire, but it may have had something to do with Emily’s widowed daughter, Amy Record, who – with her nine-year-old son, Jack – was also living with her mother on the farm. Amy, who was aged only 36, was a schoolteacher and may have secured the job in Winnersh and invited her mother to live with her. Also living at Mungle Farm at this time was Emily’s older sister, Sarah, who was now aged 75. Emily died at Whistle Green, Hurst, on 6 January 1909 at the age of 81.

By 1871 Shadrach Lindo and Tabitha were living with one other member of the family – Shadrach’s older brother John, now an 81-year-old widower. Shadrach Lindo died on 23 January 1878 at the age of 83 and in his will he left his personal estate of under £300 to Tabitha. His brother died at Church Street, Great Coggeshall, on 30 August of the same year aged 89. Following John’s death, Tabitha moved from Coggeshall to South London to be with her family. She died on 20 November 1892, aged 73, of chronic rheumatism in the Union Infirmary, Battersea (the hospital was part of the Wandsworth and Clapham Union Workhouse, off St John’s Hill). At the time she had been living with her nephew, Harry Dedman and seven children: Eliza (30), Samuel (27), Emma (23), William (21), Caroline (12) and David (nine). Ann worked as a dressmaker. Samuel was born in the Braintree area, but Eliza and the children were all born in Great Coggeshall. The Polleys are thought to have been a non-conformist family as a number of the children, including Ann (23 October 1831), were baptised at the village’s Independent Chapel.

Shadrach and Ann were married on 28 September 1853 at St. Matthew’s Church, City Road, London. They were living at the time nearby at 19 Goswell Road, but why they chose to wed here, rather than in Great Coggeshall, is unknown. It is the case, however, that the Snell family had strong family ties with this part of London.

The couple soon returned to Great Coggeshall and settled in West Street, with Shadrach quickly widening his business into coachbuilding. On the 11 July 1854 Ann gave birth to the couple’s first child, Alice, followed by Harry in 1857 and Ellen on 2 April 1859. [A further child, Anne Alice, is recorded in the register of baptisms for Great Coggeshall Congregational Church on 9 October 1859, although no birth, marriage or death certificates can be found at the General Register Office].

Autumn 1862 proved to be a tragic period in the lives of Shadrach and Ann. Three-year-old Ellen died on 17 September followed just three weeks later (on 11 October) by five-year-old Harry. Both children died of the frighteningly common Victorian disease, scarlatina (now
known as scarlet fever). Indeed, it is thought that the Snells’ first-born, Alice, also died around this time and of the same complaint (although Alice’s death has yet to be confirmed in records). This horrific situation struck the Snells just eight years later when Bessie (born in 1864) and a second Harry (born in 1866) were also struck down by scarlatina within three weeks of each other.

How this set of experiences affected the young parents is unknown, but their grief can to some extent be imagined. These events might also account for the fact that at the time of the 1861 Census Alice was living with her maternal grandparents, Samuel and Eliza Polley, just a few doors away from the Snells in West Street. It is possible that Alice had already contracted scarlatina and was being isolated from her younger siblings. Ann Woodfine and her coach painter husband Charles were neighbours and friends of Shadrach and Ann. They lived next door and it fell to Ann to help the Snells during those sad autumn weeks of 1862 and then again in 1870; she was present at the deaths of all four children and formally recorded their passing with local registrar Harold Giles.

Frederick Snell, who was only 18 months old in October 1862, was mercifully spared his siblings’s fate, and over the next 10 years Shadrach and Ann went on to have three further children who survived: Katie Ellen (born in 1863), Anne Ellen (1869) and Emily Rosa (1872).

Although formerly the site of a Roman encampment, Coggeshall’s history of any note began in 1140 with the foundation by King Stephen of a large Cistercian abbey. The monks were extensively sheep farmers and this promoted the wool and cloth trade from the 15th to the mid-18th century on which Coggeshall’s prosperity was based.

During this time the town rose to prominence and was one of the most industrial towns in Essex, famed on the Continent for a type of cloth called Coggeshall Whites. This prosperity has left a rich legacy of timber-framed houses and Coggeshall today has almost 300 "listed" buildings.

Probably the finest bequest from the wool years is the large 15th century cathedral-style church of St. Peter ad Vincula built with wool merchant’s money, most notably the Paycocke family whose own fine 16th Century house is a prominent landmark in the town.

Following the demise of the wool trade the first half of the 19th century was given over to the manufacture of silk and the production of the famous Coggeshall tambour lace, and during this period well over half the population was engaged in these flourishing cottage industries.

The decline in fortunes of Coggeshall in the late 19th Century can be clearly traced through the annual records of the trade directories. One directory published in 1871, reports that Great Coggeshall had a population of 3,679 and a rateable value of £8,654. Little Coggeshall’s population was 429, with a rateable value of £2,447. By 1886, however, another directory reports the Great Coggeshall population has reduced to 2,998 and that of little Coggeshall to 373 – a clear indication of the economic decline of the villages at this time and the enthusiasm of families like Shadrach and Ann to try their luck in booming London.

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