In November 1898 W. C. Hazlitt, the grandson of Hazlitt the essayist and a distinguished man of letters in his own right, received out of the blue a letter from one W. S. G. Richards. Richards explained that he was working on the genealogies of West Country families, especially those boasting royal blood, and could trace the descent of Catherine Reynell, W. C. Hazlitt's mother, from Charlemagne. Would he be interested? This was not such a disingenuous inquiry as it might seem. W. C. Hazlitt had long been collecting and publishing material on his family history. His The Hazlitts, An Account of their Origin and Descent (Edinburgh, 1911) was to devote a whole chapter to the Reynells, but this makes no allusion to their Carolingian descent and there is no evidence that he ever replied to Richards's letter. If this was the case he showed commendable prudence. At least one person who had accepted Richards's assistance with a genealogical matter had come bitterly to regret it. What Richards had neglected to say in his letter to Hazlitt was that in 1891 he had achieved temporary notoriety and been sent to prison for two months for tampering with the genealogical manuscripts in the British Museum.

It is difficult enough to understand the psychology of individuals far better documented than Richards. In this particular case, however, it is clear his family circumstances exercised an unusually strong and scarcely beneficial influence on his later life. He was born on 18 February 1856 at 41 Great Camden Street, London, one of the five surviving children of William Glanville Richards, a 'Clerk in the Bank', and Adolphina Frederica Anne Richards née Dickinson. He was christened William Urmston Searle, William after his father and paternal grandfather, the Vicar of Dawley Magna in Shropshire, and Searle after his mother's grandfather Admiral Thomas Searle. His parents were distant cousins, both descended from the old West Country family of Glanville, which supposedly came over with the Conqueror. It is almost impossible now to recapture the mystique that once attached to such descents, but this was an age in which the Grosvenors still claimed kinship with a companion of the Conqueror who had been his 'Grand Huntsman' and the Fortescues to be descended from a knight surnamed Forte who had protected William at Hastings with his shield (escue). If for Tennyson simple faith was better than Norman blood, most people's simple faith was in Norman blood. Whether Richards himself had Glanville among his given names is unclear—it is not on his birth certificate—but he
certainly used it as soon as he was able and the effect on him of this Glanville inheritance was to be one of the chief sources of his tragedy.

When he was just eleven his father died, and in 1868 his mother remarried. Her second husband was Henry Sach. After studying at King’s College, London, Sach was to be ordained deacon in 1872 and priest in 1873. What Glanville Richards thought of his stepfather must remain an interesting subject for speculation. In any event Sach himself died, aged 51, early in 1880. It is probably no coincidence that at this time steps were taken to provide Glanville Richards with a career. On 18 February he was entered in the Theology Candidates Class of his stepfather’s old college, King’s, London. It was scarcely a surprising choice. His paternal grandfather had been a clergyman; his father’s sister was married to another, while his mother’s brother, George Cockburn Dickinson, was Vicar of Hartford near Huntingdon. It must have seemed especially suitable as Glanville Richards had early developed scholarly tastes, acquiring a reader’s ticket at the British Museum on 6 April 1877 immediately he became eligible following his twenty-first birthday.

The year after his enrolment at King’s saw his first recorded publication. His family had been living at Lee Lane Farm, Windlesham, and in 1881 he produced in an edition of a hundred copies The Registers of Windlesham, Surrey, from 1677 to 1783 (London: Mitchell and Hughes). Although many of the subscribers were his relatives, the venture must have had a serious drawback from Glanville Richards’s point of view. His own family, being newcomers to the parish, were not recorded in the registers. He circumvented this to some extent by notes on ‘Past and present families in Windlesham’, inserted at the end, which included disquisitions not only on Waterer’s American Nurseries, but also on his mother’s and her connections. However, for a decade past he had been collecting material for an extended study of the Glanville family. This appeared in 1882 as Records of the Anglo-Norman House of Glanville from A.D. 1050 to 1880 (London: Mitchell and Hughes). Of its later members he could claim to have first-hand accounts. ‘The writer’s grandmother well remembers Roger Glanville [of Ashburton, 1744–1820] (who was her grandfather).’ The rest is a laborious compilation from printed and manuscript sources carrying the story of the Glanvilles back to Ranulf de Glanville, Henry II’s Chief Justiciar, and beyond. Although the assemblage of so much miscellaneous information was impressive, it is another question how far Glanville Richards understood the problems involved in the critical interpretation of medieval genealogies. Frederic William Maitland, the great legal historian, probably understated the case when he observed of the information provided in the Records, ‘much of this is incorrect or very questionable’. But Glanville Richards was not given to self-doubt. John Pym Yeatman, who provided an introduction for the work, must have been startled to discover that Glanville Richards had annotated this at various points with such comments as ‘the writer has quite mistaken what Lord Hervey has written’ and ‘this has been entirely disproved’. Yeatman is yet another of the grotesque figures who haunts the subterranean galleries of Victorian genealogy. His great claim to fame is his assertion that the text of
Shakespeare’s will, as well as its signature, is in the Bard’s own hand. The suggestion that he contribute the introduction for Glanville Richards may possibly have come from the publishers Mitchell and Hughes who that same year also brought out Yeatman’s *The Early Genealogical History of the House of Arundel*. Their estimate for printing this was £200 but they appear, very foolishly, to have neglected their normal practice of securing cash in advance, for Yeatman was unable to pay them. His own account of his financial troubles is worthy of and was possibly intended for comparison with the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. According to him he had been ruined by a Chancery suit which, because his health had broken down, he had been compelled to settle for a paltry £1,600, not a third of the sum due to him. He claimed to have been robbed even of this by his solicitor who had died shortly afterwards a bankrupt, but not before bankrupting Yeatman himself for interlocutory costs of £200. The legal wrangles between Yeatman and Mitchell and Hughes were to continue for many years. Perhaps because he was a barrister by profession he was much addicted to litigation. Consumed by a growing paranoia he was convinced that both for personal reasons and because he was a convert to Rome who had tried to prove that Shakespeare was a Roman Catholic, the legal profession was biased against him. Indeed at one point he was even suing the Lord Chancellor for libel. Glanville Richards had clearly strayed among very odd company. When he so cavalierly savaged Yeatman’s introduction he could scarcely have known what danger of legal action he courted. However, the barrister was possibly distracted by his more pressing problems with Mitchell and Hughes. In any case, as things turned out, Yeatman had suffered very little from Glanville Richards’s attentions compared with the unfortunate Joseph Leete.

Leete was an archetypal Victorian figure, a self-made merchant who had grown rich from the export of English goods to the Continent in the wake of Cobden’s Commercial Treaty with France (fig. 1). It is easy to understand why he should subscribe to the belief that ‘the real aristocracy of a nation is that which strengthens and dignifies a country, that which spreads her commerce and her power, and that which creates her moral influence. Since, then, these great results have mainly been achieved by the middle class of England, it follows that, even from the simplest annals of men derived therefrom, something may be gleaned of interest and profit’. If we know a good deal more about him than we do about Glanville Richards, it is because Leete carried his principles into practice, printing his own simple annals that others might profit thereby. Nor was he above publishing photographs of himself, either in the garden of his residence, Eversden, South Norwood Park, attended by straw-boatered gardeners on a rectangular striped lawn, surrounded by gravel walks, and inset with over-planted parterres of geraniums from which rise standard roses in the style now known as municipal, or at the dinner in 1902 at the Hotel Cecil to celebrate the Fiftieth Anniversary of Joseph Leete and Sons, at which he was presented by his employees with a bust of himself by F. W. Pomeroy (fig. 2). Leete’s hobby was genealogy and he was wealthy enough to indulge it without having to undertake the spadework himself. In 1864 he had actually obtained a reader’s ticket at the British Museum but by happy chance on his very first visit he found himself sitting
Fig. 1. Glanville Richards's victim, Joseph Leete of Norwood. (The Family of Leete, 1881, frontispiece)
next to a long lost acquaintance, Charles Bridger, a genealogist who worked for Stephen Tucker, Somerset Herald. 'My mission to such an uncommercial locality was quickly explained, and knowing that my time was too precious to be given up to such researches as would be needful, I readily availed myself of Mr. Bridger’s offer of services.' Bridger toiled away at the parochial records of Cambridgeshire. Leete himself had been born just across the Hertfordshire border at Royston. Before that the family had come from Eversden, from which the South Norwood villa took its name. After Bridger’s death in May 1879 the material he had collected was edited for Leete by John Corbet Anderson, who had published studies of such diverse localities as India, Shropshire, and Croydon.

The first edition of *The Family of Leete* appeared in the latter half of 1881. Glanville Richards presumably kept abreast of genealogical publications for in May 1883 he wrote to Leete offering assistance in the further elucidation of his pedigree. Throughout the summer the two men corresponded, Glanville Richards, whose last letter was dated 27 September, enclosing notes on and transcripts of documents he had made at the British Museum. Nothing further happened until 1890 when Leete, who was meditating a second enlarged edition of his family history—it eventually appeared in 1906—passed on.
the Glanville Richards material to Anderson with unexpected results. The sequel was
recorded by Francis Bridges Bickley, the assistant in charge of the Manuscripts Students'
Room at the British Museum. 'On the 19th of May 1890 Mr. Corbet Anderson a reader in
the Students' Room brought to my notice two manuscripts Harley 6164 and 6148. I
examined these manuscripts and found that both had been tampered with.' In MS.
Harley 6164 the genealogy of the Levitts—or Letes as they were now presented—of
Fittleworth in Sussex had been somewhat unconvincingly extended back five generations
to a John Avenell of Gamlingay, Cambridgeshire, living in 1380/1 (fig. 3). It had,
furthermore, been annotated 'Vide Avenell Pedigree'. If the reader followed this
injunction in MS. Harley 6148 he discovered a genealogy of the Avenells which carried
the family back to the reign of Henry II. This had had three generations added at the
end so that the two quite separate trees overlapped and ran into one another. The forger
had, however, made a mistake, so that the latter table has one generation less than the
former. Appalled by this discovery, Bickley looked at the other manuscripts Glanville
Richards had had out with these two on 15 August 1883. Only one had been tampered
with, Add. MS. 5937, but into this had been inserted an entirely new folio, fol. 44a,
bearing a supposed Avenell/Lete pedigree, which purported to reach back as far as 1035.
Bickley went on to check all the manuscripts Glanville Richards was known to have used
in the years preceding and following August 1883, but all he found was the name
Glanville, apparently in his hand, pencilled in MS. Harley 972. There was also the case
of one further insertion in MS. Harley 6164. In a pedigree of the family of Browne of
Betchworth in Surrey and Tavistock, Devon, a daughter Thomasine had been inter-
polated who was claimed to have married a John Glanville of Tavistock 'vide deed of
mortgage of land in Tavistock 1571. [In my possession John N Glanfield 1862' (fig. 4].
As the manuscript is a copy of the Heraldic Visitation of Sussex in 1634 and was part of one
of the collections which had been at the British Museum since its foundation in 1753, this
entry defied innocent explanation.

There could be no doubt who was responsible. It was beyond belief that any genealogist
other than Glanville Richards could have a common interest in the Glanvilles, Leetes, and
Avenells. In any case, though he had made some attempt to disguise his style, the entries
were only too evidently in his hand, a fact that the letters and transcripts he had sent to
Joseph Leete bore out. The Museum was informed it could proceed against him for
malicious damage and the case came up at the Central Criminal Court before the
Recorder of London on 11 March 1891 with Mr Leete as one of the prosecution witnesses.
After the case against him had been presented, Glanville Richards spoke in his own
defence. It had always, he said, been his first thought to treat with the greatest care every
manuscript entrusted to him. If he had made any additions or corrections to the
manuscripts he did not remember it and he certainly did not admit doing so. The jury, of
course, found him guilty. The Recorder, who had observed in his summing up that he had
never come across another case like it in his thirty-five years on the Bench, was less
concerned with the physical damage to the manuscripts than with the alteration of
pedigrees. It might, he commented, make a difference of £20,000 a year to someone at
some time if particular pedigrees were tampered with. He sentenced Glanville Richards to two months' imprisonment without hard labour.

In a society where respectability was all, the public disgrace must have been almost harder to bear than the incarceration. Not only had he lost his good name, he had lost his ancient name as well. The Glanville element in his surname of which he had been so inordinately proud had to be abandoned. Henceforth it would have made him too conspicuous. The question arises of why he ever embarked on a course of action which was to have such disastrous consequences for him. Although he denied at his trial that he had been in needy circumstances, there is evidence that he was in financial difficulties in 1883. He had begun to fall behind with his fees at King's. Those for the Lent Term, twelve guineas plus extras, were not paid until the beginning of the Easter Term and he finished the year still owing six guineas to the College, a debt apparently never settled. Perhaps connected with this was the fact that he never took his Theology examinations and seems at this time to have abandoned his intention of entering the Church. He protested that he had not expected to receive any money for the notes he had sent to Mr Leete but Leete did, in fact, send him two or three sums amounting to twenty or thirty pounds. Given that he had had to fabricate the entries in the first place he must surely have done so in the expectation of some return. It may be that following his stepfather's
death the family finances were disordered. Someone had also to pay Mitchell and Hughes for printing *The Registers of Windlesham* and *Records of the Anglo-Norman House of Glanville*. There is no evidence that Richards himself had any money. When at the turn of the century he was living in Plymouth at 5 Wesley Terrace, Hyde Park Road, the street directory gives his occupation as ‘clerk’ and reveals among the neighbours of this heir to a great Norman family a grocer, an engine driver, an instructor of musketry, and a naval warrant officer.

Surprisingly, however, the trial did not put a term to Richards’s genealogical pretensions. His most substantial publication, physically at any rate, was yet to come. Some time before 1896 he persuaded Sir Humphrey De Trafford, 3rd baronet of Trafford Park in Lancashire, to commission *The History of the De Traffords of Trafford, circa A.D. 1000–1896* (Plymouth, 1896). This was work after his own heart. The De Traffords were another old Anglo-Norman family who, at this period, claimed an unbroken male descent from one Randolph, Lord of Trafford in the reigns of Canute and Edward the Confessor. To emphasize the impressiveness of the De Trafford lineage Richards was also able to demonstrate their relationship to Charlemagne, the Saxon Kings of England, the Byzantine Emperors, and even Ivar, Jarl of the Uplanders. For good measure he also threw in their descent from eighteen of the Magna Carta barons and fourteen of the original Garter knights. The text was sumptuously illustrated with the arms of the various families. This was all conventional wisdom but within a decade J. H. Round had demolished it. Round demonstrated that though the De Traffords undoubtedly were an ancient family the first Randolph, far from living at the time of Canute—a theory first asserted by the Cheshire antiquary Randle Holme—could not have been born until the second half of the eleventh century, while Trafford itself could not be proved to have belonged to the family before the time of his grandson or, at the very earliest, his son. Whether Richards lived to witness the discrediting of his most cherished fancies is not known. After his letter to W. C. Hazlitt he disappears from the records and even the date of his death remains to be uncovered. Whether he was a rogue or simply an overenthusiastic romantic—or possibly both—can be debated. In either case he contributed nothing of value to the study of genealogy and it must be his epitaph that the only lasting mark he made was on the manuscripts in the British Museum.

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3 These details are given on his birth certificate.

4 W. U. S. Glanville-Richards, *Records of the*


10 He is described as Assistant Preacher at St Peter-upon-Cornhill from 1873, and Curate of St George the Martyr, Southwark, 1872–7, with addresses at 49 Newington Causeway, SE, and Windlesham. *Crockford's Clerical Directory for 1880* (London, 1880), p. 874.


13 His address is given as 149 Cornwall Road, Bayswater. British Museum Central Archives: Original Papers, 1890, no. 2113 (4).

14 Mrs Sach is described as of Lee Lane Farm, Windlesham, and Upper Clapton, Middlesex (p. 58).


20 This view is expressed by J. C. Anderson, in his introduction to *The Family of Leete*, ed. Charles Bridger and John Corbet Anderson (printed for private circulation, 1881), pp. xx, xxi.


22 Ibid. (1881), p. viii.

23 Leete's introductory letter is dated 5 September 1881. Ibid., p. v.

24 Details of the case as they emerged at the trial were reported by *The Times*, 12 March 1891, p. 12.

25 The Keeper of Manuscripts had notified the Museum Trustees of the case in a report dated 7 June 1890 (British Museum Central Archives: Original Papers, 1890, no. 2113). This report was read at a meeting of the Standing Committee of Trustees on 14 June 1890 (Trustees Minutes c. 18475), which ordered consultation with Warners, the Museum's solicitors, on the advisability of prosecuting Glanville Richards. These informed the Trustees that he could be indicted under the Malicious Injuries to Property Act if clear evidence could be adduced to handwriting (Trustees Minutes c. 18472, of the Standing Committee meeting of 12 July 1890). At their next meeting on 2 August (Trustees Minutes c. 18509) the Standing Committee decided to request Mr Leete to give evidence as to handwriting. At the Standing Committee of 8 November (Trustees Minutes c. 18547) the Principal Librarian told the Trustees that Mr Leete had agreed to appear as a witness and a letter from Warners was read saying that Counsel had advised that Glanville Richards's correspondence with Mr Leete was sufficient to maintain a prosecution.

26 Details of Glanville Richards's payments to the College between Michaelmas Term 1882 and Michaelmas Term 1884 may be found in the College Archives, KA/FB/5, fols. 9r–10, 25v–26, 40v–41, 55v–6, 105v–6.

27 *Eyre's Plymouth and Devonport District Directory* (London, 1898), p. 145. He had moved to Plymouth by 1890 when his address had been Sherwell Cottage, Old Laira Road, Plymouth. British Museum Central Archives; Original Papers, 1890, no. 2113 (5).

28 On the title-page the author describes himself as 'Late of KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON, etc., etc.'.

29 'The Trafford Legend', *The Ancestor*, x (July 1904), pp. 73–82; 'Mr. Bird and the Trafford Legend', ibid. xii (Jan. 1905), pp. 52–5.