

What's in a name?

I've always wondered how my Arabic name got to Windsor, England. Maybe this could explain it.

"Here's a letter from Daddy in Egypt for us," Emily called up to her mother.

Mrs Lewis came downstairs from the nursery. She missed her husband and silently cursed Monsieur de Lesseps and his Suez Canal under her breath for taking him away.

"I wonder what he's doing now?"

Emily handed her mother the letter, postmarked 12th September 1868.

Mrs Lewis eagerly slit the envelope open, scanning the familiar writing of her beloved Eion.

"Read it aloud," begged Emily, "Please."

She too missed her big bear of a father who used to manage the coal mines in the valley of their rural Welsh town. He'd been asked to help oversee the huge construction force involved in the piercing of the Isthmus of Suez between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

Mrs Lewis sank into an armchair in the weak sun, the better to see the writing. Thank goodness it had stopped raining. There was a lot of washing to get dry. Emily sat on the arm of the chair peering at the cramped handwriting.

"Dearest Charlotte, Emily and Donald," her mother read aloud, pausing to listen to the wailing cry of two-year old Donald floating down to them, and the footsteps of the maid hurrying upstairs.

"I hope you are both well and that the little one is thriving," she continued. "I miss you all so much. I miss the rain. At last it's beginning to cool down. The summer has been so hot that we've lost many construction workers. There are 30,000 people building the canal in a big push to get it finished by '69, a much bigger workforce than the mine in the valley, but the digging is still done by hand."

"How many is 30,000, Mother?" Emily enquired, unable at aged ten to envisage such a large number.

"As many people as there are in this whole town, I expect," Mrs Lewis replied.

"Goodness gracious! Go on, Mother."

“I have to inspect the working conditions of the people since the English complained about them being forced to build the canal. Not that they cared about casualties when they forced the Egyptians to build their d...d railway line for them. I go riding out into the desert on my camel with my guides to spend weeks at a time on inspection. I wear Arab clothes as it is more practical and comfortable.”

“I would like a camel ride.” Emily could imagine herself sitting up high atop the ‘ship of the desert’, gazing out at the Pyramids. She’d be surrounded by a sandy wasteland, with an oasis and green date palms in the distance. Emily was a reader and loved books.

Mrs Lewis continued. “The new town of Port Said grows more commercial daily. Sailing ships and native dhows create a colourful picture, especially at sunset. I have tried my hand at a water colour painting of the scene but either my paint box or myself are sadly inadequate.”

“I shall imagine a picture and paint it for him.” Emily leaned in closer to her mother.

“I have befriended a little girl about your age Emily, at the camp. She reminds me of you. Her name is Kinsa, which means gold or treasure in Arabic. She speaks a little French, learned from the many French people working on the canal. She runs up to me and asks, “Bonbon, M’sier, bonbon s’il vous plait.”

“That means Sweeties, mister, sweeties please.” Emily was learning French along with music, painting, needlework and English as part of the education of a young lady who was required to catch a good husband. She never could spell well.

“Oh, good news!” Mrs Lewis exclaimed. “He’s coming back on leave next month.”

The weather produced a thunderstorm to welcome Eion Lewis home, a storm which he thoroughly enjoyed almost as much as seeing his family.

“Ah, my little Welsh Kinsa, my treasure!” He swung Emily easily through the air, as she squealed with excitement.

“Charlotte, my dear! You’re a vision of beauty, like your daughter.” He embraced her while young Donald clung shyly to his mother’s skirts. Who was this huge man coming threateningly close to his mother?

“I would really like to be your treasure,” Emily smiled up at her father, hanging firmly onto his hand.

“Then so you shall be. Kinsa will be your nickname.”

It stuck. She was Kinsa from then on.

Kinsa married Netterville Briggs, and they had a talented daughter they named Emily. She married Harry Stone, a handy chap from New Zealand who turned up as they were moving to London where Emily could be closer to better singing and painting tutors. Emily became a Professor of Music at London University. In 1904 they all immigrated to Whanganui, New Zealand, with Emily and Harry's children, Jack aged six, and Jeanette, two, a delicate child not expected to live.

In 1941, Jean had a daughter she named Kinsa and lived to the ripe old age of 91.