

FINDING LUCY SHEILA SHEARN

In 2008 I received a phone call from a lovely lady called Mavis. She had been recommended to contact me as she wanted to find out about her mother. A friend had tried hard to find her mother to no avail.

It transpired that Mavis was a 1st cousin 3x removed to my granddaughter but at the time I knew nothing of that.

I suggested she should come to my Tuesday research mornings and she agreed this would be a good idea.

My Tuesday group members told her that "if Liz can't find your mother then no one can"! That was not what I wanted to hear from them as this was probably going to be the biggest challenge of my life.

About Mavis DREW

Mavis was born on 13 May 1928 in Sheffield (not Sheffield Yorkshire but a small village here in Cornwall). Her parents were William Henry Meneer Roberts DREW who already had 7 children by his first wife and he was a widower. Her mother, according to her Birth Certificate, was Lucy Sheila SHEARN.

What did she know about her mother?

She said, Lucy was born on 25 Jul 1895 in Bristol. She had been adopted by a lovely lady and gentleman. (As we all know, there was no "official" adoption until 1927). She told us that they were Joseph SHEARN and Elizabeth GOLDSMAN. Joseph was born in 1822 in Somerset and was living in the workhouse and Elizabeth GOLDSMAN was born in 1845 in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. They married on 15th May 1895 (only 2 months before Lucy was born and Elizabeth was 50 at the time so far too old to be the mother of Lucy).

Joseph SHEARN died 2Q 1899 in Bristol. Elizabeth ran a guest house at 8 Richmond Terrace, Clifton, Bristol from 1891 - 1901. I hoped this was going to be useful to me as I lived at Pembroke Grove, Clifton from 1977 - 1985 so I knew the area well, it was only a quarter of a mile from my home.

Lucy remembered her "mother" dying in 1903 and believed she'd died of TB as she was coughing up blood. After her "mother's" death she remembers she remained at the house for some time. She told Mavis that "a friend of mother's had been left money to look after her but that she soon spent the money and put her in an Orphanage". Mavis was so upset by this although Lucy always told her that she enjoyed her time in the Orphanage and that when she left to go into "service" she ran back to the Orphanage.

This was all I was given to go on. As you can probably imagine, there was no Lucy born in the Bristol area in 1895! I didn't have a lot to go on so I started with the censuses.

In 1891 Elizabeth GOLDSMAN was a "Lodging House Keeper" at No. 8 Richmond Terrace, Clifton, Bristol. Living with her was Jessie A COPLAND - dau crossed out and Niece inserted! F W Coleman a wine merchant and Kate Coleman were lodging there.

Back to 1881 census and Elizabeth GOLDSMAN was a domestic servant in Northcote House, Clifton working for a very prestigious wine merchant family. It clearly states she is from Aberdeenshire.

Now fast forward to 1901 Elizabeth is obviously a widow and Lucy is referred to as "adopted daughter".

At this point we had no access to the 1911 census. I visited the Record Office in Bristol and looked for school records in the Clifton area all to no avail.

I checked for baptisms in all the parishes in and around the Clifton area of Bristol - again, nothing. There was a Lucy WRIGHT born in Barton Regis which is one of the Districts in the Bristol area. However I checked her and found her in 1901 with her grandparents. So I was able to eliminate her. I've always found it is important to eliminate people.

I didn't think I was ever going to crack this one. Then, wonder or wonders, in 2010 we were able to get a look at the 1911 census. Would this give me any more clues? YES.

Little Lucy was a servant in the house of Robert Henry Norgate who just happened to be the Resident Medical Officer of Stapleton Workhouse and Lucy was not born in Bristol. The clues were all there. Firstly, I realised that Lucy must have been brought up in the Orphanage attached to Stapleton Workhouse and that's why she had obtained a job with the Medical Officer. My problems weren't entirely solved though as the records for Stapleton Workhouse were burnt in an incendiary bomb in World War 2. However, there was another clue there which I realised Robert Norgate would have been sure of...Lucy wasn't born in Bristol BUT in Long Ashton just down the hill from Clifton but out of the District. This was the clue I had been waiting for.

Now, there was a workhouse in Long Ashton BUT these records were held in Weston-Super-Mare Registrar's Office. The great thing was that, by pure chance, the day I got that information a very good friend of mine just happened to be in Taunton Record Office and had a dongle so I knew I could email her with my request...the request was:

"Please could you look in Long Ashton Workhouse book for a birth or baptism of a child, possibly called Lucy. Forget the surname. She was born on 25 Jul 1895 and would have been baptised within the month". Back came the information I needed. Yes, there was a child born there by the name of Lucy FINTRAY whose mother was referred to as Annie FINTRAY. I rang Weston-Super-Mare to confirm if they had a Birth Certificate...yes they did. So I sent for the certificate.

At this time I still had to work out WHY was Lucy's birth name FINTRAY? Where did she get it from? Going back to the 1891 census, I realised that Jessie Annie COPLAND was obviously the daughter of Elizabeth but it wouldn't be suitable for a single lady in her position to have an illegitimate daughter. I then used the LDS site and found Scottish Records are brilliant. There was the birth of Jessie Annie COPLAND the illegitimate daughter of Elizabeth GODSMAN and George COPLAND. They lived in the next village to FINTRAY!

I joined the Rootsweb Aberdeen list and had some wonderful help and was able to get 8 generations for Mavis back to the 1600s.

That wasn't the end of the story as far as I was concerned, I felt I needed to know what Jessie had done? She obviously never bonded with her daughter. Mavis didn't want to know any more about her grandmother who she obviously felt quite angry with for abandoning Lucy.

Jessie married John HARPER on 15 Feb 1899 in Plaistow Parish Church, West Ham, London, he was a ship's steward. They were living together in 1901 but by 1911 Jessie says she is a widow and was living at 31 St Michael's Hill, Bristol with a spectacle maker (James Cattermole) "living on own means". So, where did she get her money from? Where and when did John HARPER die? But, none of that seemed relevant.

Mavis had got her wish and on 04 Nov 2012 we said a final sad farewell to Mavis as she joined her Mum. She was a real character and spent the last years of her life in the beautiful village of Paul in West Cornwall.

ROBERT ALLEN 1831 - 1883

I was living in The Emirates when I was researching my grandmother's line. I knew her mother was Emma Elizabeth ALLEN born in Winchester, Hampshire on 05 Jun 1854. Her father was Robert ALLEN who was a Church Organ Builder who had been apprenticed to Father Henry WILLIS probably the most famous Organ Builder. Robert was sent to Winchester to be in charge of the installation of the new organ in Winchester Cathedral.

I managed to find his baptism at St John's, Hoxton (London) on 14 Aug 1831. He then had a brother John baptised 10 Mar 1833 and a sister, Elizabeth 12 Dec 1836 but how was I going to get his mother. From censuses I knew his father was also Robert - he was a letter carrier and his mother was Elizabeth but how was I going to get his mother's maiden name?

This was an easy one. There was one more child, Mary born 1838 after Registration started. I looked for her birth and sent for her Birth Certificate - born 03 Jul 1838 and baptised 29th July 1838. This gave me everything I wanted. Her father was a letter carrier which I already knew, so I'd got the correct Mary (not easy with a surname of ALLEN) and her mother was Elizabeth COLLINS. As a result of that I was then able to get Robert and Elizabeth's marriage details - 30 Nov 1829 at St Georges, Hanover Square. This proved that she was the Elizabeth who was my Robert's mother. With such a common name, Elizabeth, it would have been easy for Robert Sr to have married twice but as this was just under 2 years before Robert Jr was born I knew I had the right one.

So, by going to the youngest member of the family I was able to skip around. If Mary hadn't been born in 1838 I might still be looking for the maiden name of their mother.