Some ordinary folk -

The Tewkesbury Knights

Andrew Paterson

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Contents

"Our history has been made, not entirely by Lords and Dukes, or by Kings and Queens, but by ordinary folk, by people like ourselves, who have walked these streets, have devoted themselves to some common cause, have loved and struggled, or found friendship here, who have found here something worth living for and, when the need arose, something worth dying for".

Alderman Frank Henry Knight on receiving the Freedom of the Borough of Tewkesbury, April 1967[1]

INTRODUCTION

This is a history of some "ordinary folk ... people like ourselves" written for the "ordinary folk" who are descendants of the five people in this photograph taken in 1936. From left to right are Frank, Donald, Barbara, David, Philip and Blanche Knight.

Although the family can be traced further back, the scope here is generally a couple of hundred years from the late 18th Century to 1981. These were years of fundamental change intersected by two devastating world wars, the first of which had a profound impact on the family. Its effects certainly endured for the rest of Frank Knight's life. Beyond the early 1950s, the story largely focuses on Blanche and Frank Knight.

The two families to which the Tewkesbury Knights owe their origins – the Knights of Northamptonshire and the Gregorys of Tewkesbury - were ordinary folk. Humble, hard-working families who endured the struggles of late 19th century and early 20th Century working class life with all its deprivations, danger and tragedy. Thomas Knight was a labourer on the railways. Henry Gregory was a waterman on the rivers and canals. Emma and Thomas, Susan and Henry, between them produced Frank and Blanche. Both children left school aged twelve, although looking at the books they read and the things they did some 60 years later, you would never have known this.

This story starts with the origins for the Knights in Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire, then moving to their early days in Tewkesbury and the origins of the Gregorys before looking at the

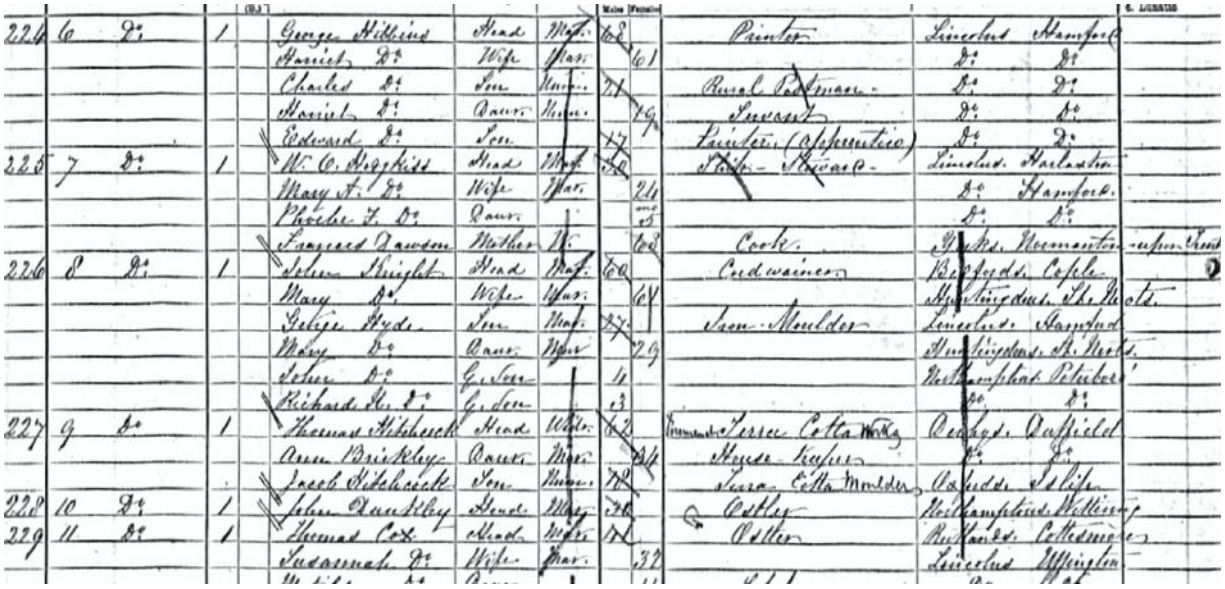
First World War, the inter-war years and then the civic years of Frank's heyday.

Like all family histories, this is a story full of holes – holes that will never be filled and those that are just awaiting for new discoveries. There will, no doubt, be a number of inaccuracies. Births, marriages and deaths set out the things that we might call facts, a framework on which we can hang trees that show relationships[2]. But histories are made up of far more than this. In this story, we will include snippets from newspapers, postcards, the odd photograph, other records of varying accuracy, received wisdom and passed down memories. These give the vital ingredient to history that is context. There are many things we are left to interpret, and, inevitably, we do this through the lenses of our own thinking and experiences. In this account there is some supposition and even speculation, some indulgent digressions. And things left hanging, unanswered. A basic rule of genealogy seems to be that the questions that one really wants to ask, only come to mind when those who could have answered them are no longer able to.

A few words about sources before we start

The Census

Family histories tend to be marked out by the years that start every decade from 1841 to 1921. These are the years of the Census, a goldmine of information. Before 1911, the Census provided only basic information about the households in a street – names , relationships, age, where people were born and general occupation. That is enough to piece together whole movements of families and this "street view" gives a real insight into how people lived and the social structure of the neighbourhood.

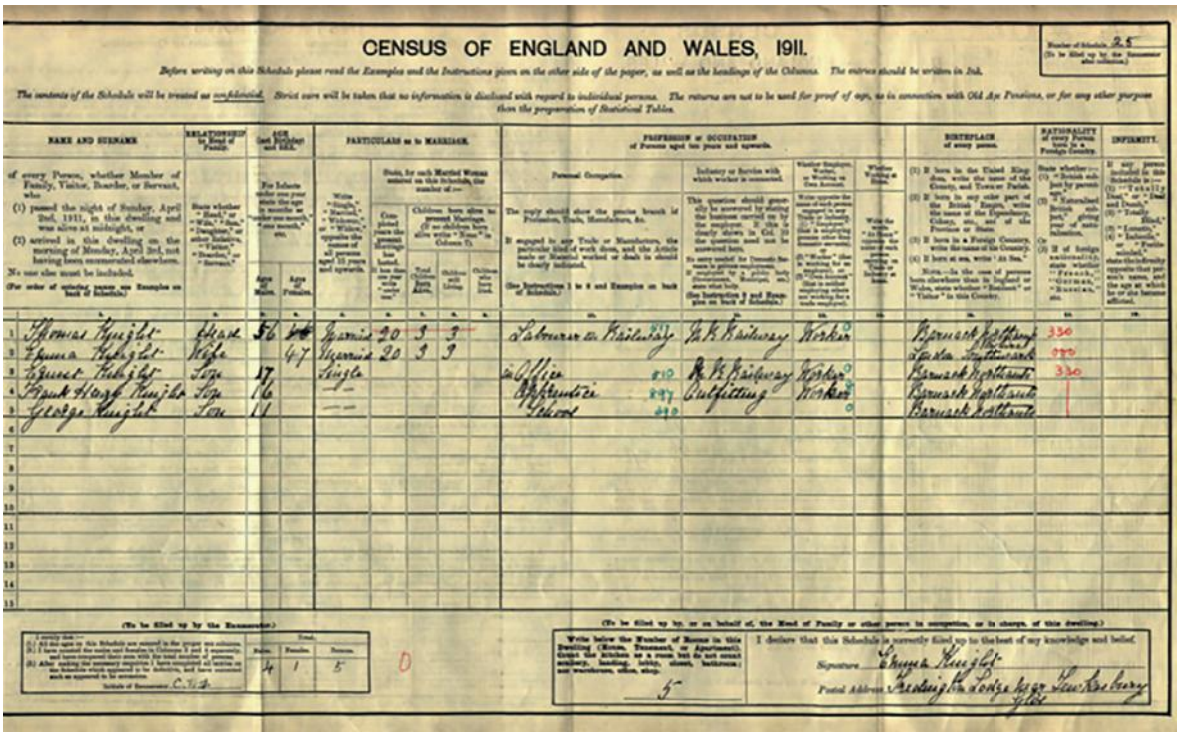


The 1871 Census for Tenter Street, Stamford - John and Mary Knight living at No.8

The 1911 Census was the first time people were asked to fill in the census form themselves and so, if nothing else, we get to see the beautiful handwriting of ordinary folk, many of whom had had little more than a few years of schooling. As each household in the 1911 Census is on a separate page, we lose the picture of the surrounding families. However, the 1911 Census introduced some additional questions. It asked more about the place of work and whether people had certain disabilities or were a "Lunatic, Imbecile or Feeble-minded". Funnily enough, that section does not get filled in very often. What does get completed is a fascinating and tragic section in which women were asked to state the number of children born live, and those that were still living.

The 1921 Census, which only became available at the beginning of 2022, is behind a pay wall which charges for each record viewed and this restricts the amount of census surfing that can be done. It has been used here where necessary to confirm who was living, where and what they were doing. That is the last Census that there is access to. Censuses are only published 100 years after they were recorded. In any case, the 1931 Census records were destroyed in the 2nd World

War and there was no census taken in 1941. However, in preparation before the war in 1939, a general registration was held and this can be viewed online for all people who are no longer alive and provides useful basic information.



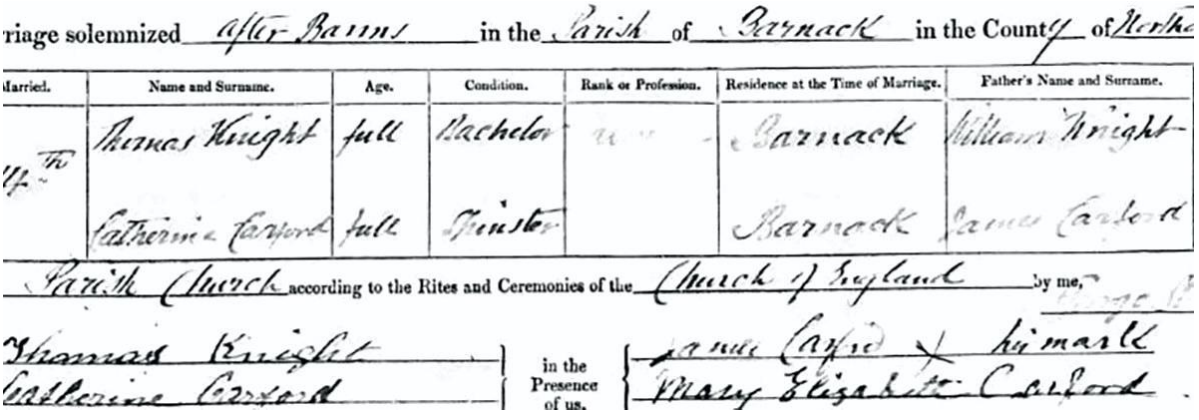
CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

This is the 1911 Census return for the Knight Family living at Tredington Lodge just outside Tewkesbury and filled in by Emma

Of course in histories, things happen between the census years and this means that some parts of this story get missed out. Electoral registers can also place people but their availability is a bit hit and miss. Some members of the family have managed to escape some censuses and in other ways fly under the radar.

Hatches, matches and dispatches

It has been a legal requirement to record births, deaths and marriages in England since 1837 and these records are generally available. Marriage records give details of occupation of both parties and both sets of fathers, as in the example below of Thomas Knight and his first wife Catherine.



riage solemnized after Banns in the Parish of Barnack in the County of Northa

Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.
	Thomas Knight	full	Bachelor		Barnack	William Knight
	Catherine Carford	full	Spinster		Barnack	James Carford

Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England by me,

Thomas Knight
Catherine Carford

in the Presence of us.

James Carford his mark
Mary Elizabeth Carford

Birth records give the place of birth but, of course, they don't necessarily give the name of the father. Death records can be very informative about causes and circumstances of death but in this history for a number of people, it has been difficult to track down any record of death. It is almost as if they have just vanished. Parish registers, which generally need to be accessed locally,

have not been used in this history. They may provide more answers and are certainly the source for things prior to registration. They could provide further scope for anyone who wants to pick up themes from this book or to go back further in time.

Burial records can give a fascinating insight into what life was like. On the page opposite is the Barnack church burial record for December 1904 and January 1905 when William Knight, Frank's grandfather was buried. This page shows the extent of infant mortality even in the early 1900s, alongside the deaths of those in their seventies. This is why *average length of life* can be such a meaningless measure.

Other sources

This story has also leant heavily on newspapers viewed through the online British Newspaper Archive which is a digitisation of the British Library collection. Cuttings provide an often detailed account – the quality of local newspaper journalism was, by modern local paper standards, outstanding. The rendition is often not good enough to print, so articles have generally been transcribed or quoted in this book.

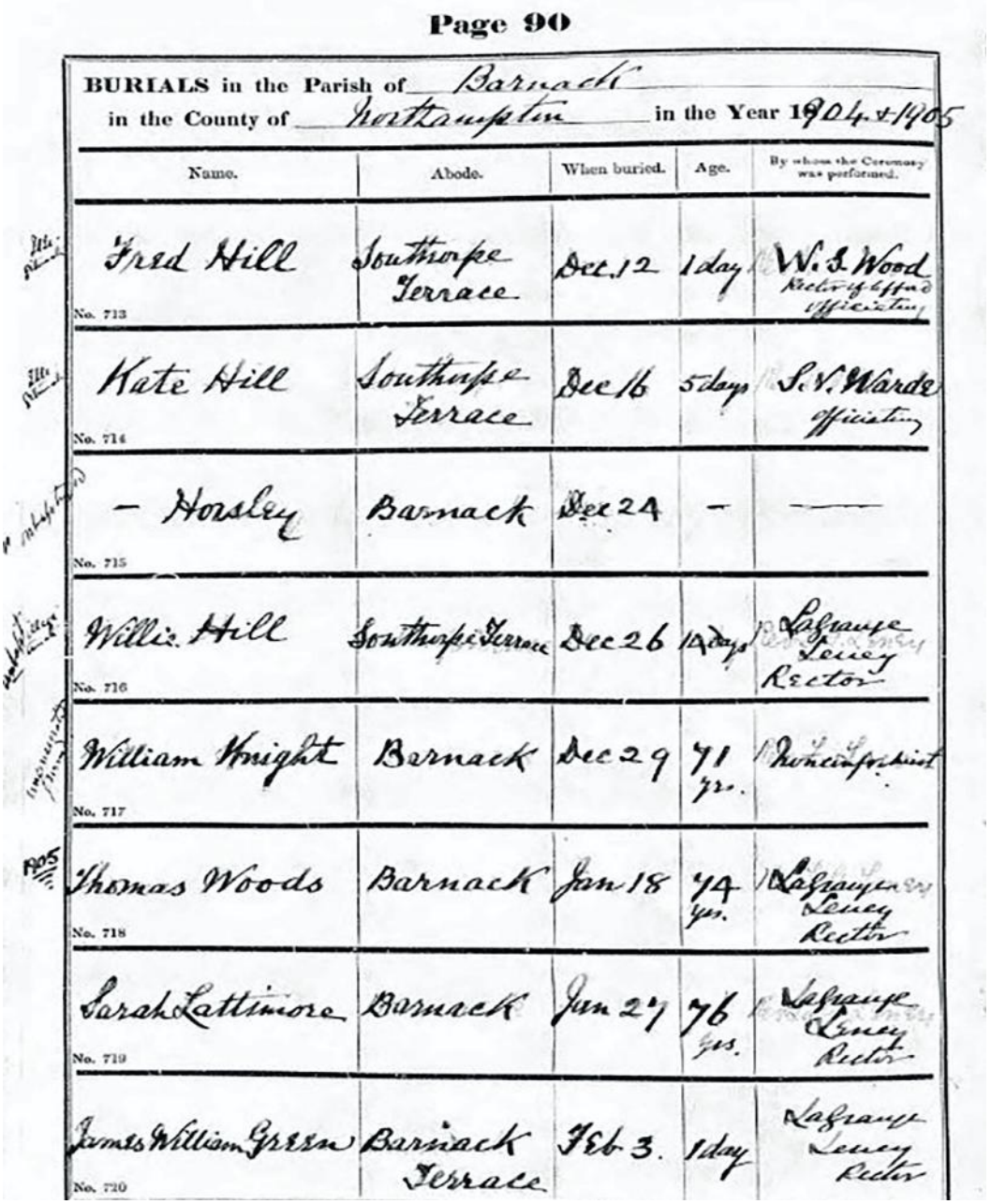
Much use has been made of the extensive resources of the Woodward data base kindly made available by the Tewkesbury Historical Society as well as a range of other records, war diaries, other war accounts and in one case, a German POW record.

Family photographs and Blanche and Frank's own collection of official and press photos tell a story as do the numerous postcards in a rather dilapidated album, originally sporting a wonderful Arts and Crafts design, which had been a gift to Blanche in 1909.

Finally, any digitalised material can be made available for anyone who wants to pursue things further. The family tree can be viewed on the Ancestry website

https://www.ancestry.co.uk/family-tree/tree/169925389/family.

This website provides ready access to census pages, death and other records attached to the family members as well as the Knight and Gregory tree. Developing the tree is an ongoing work in progress.



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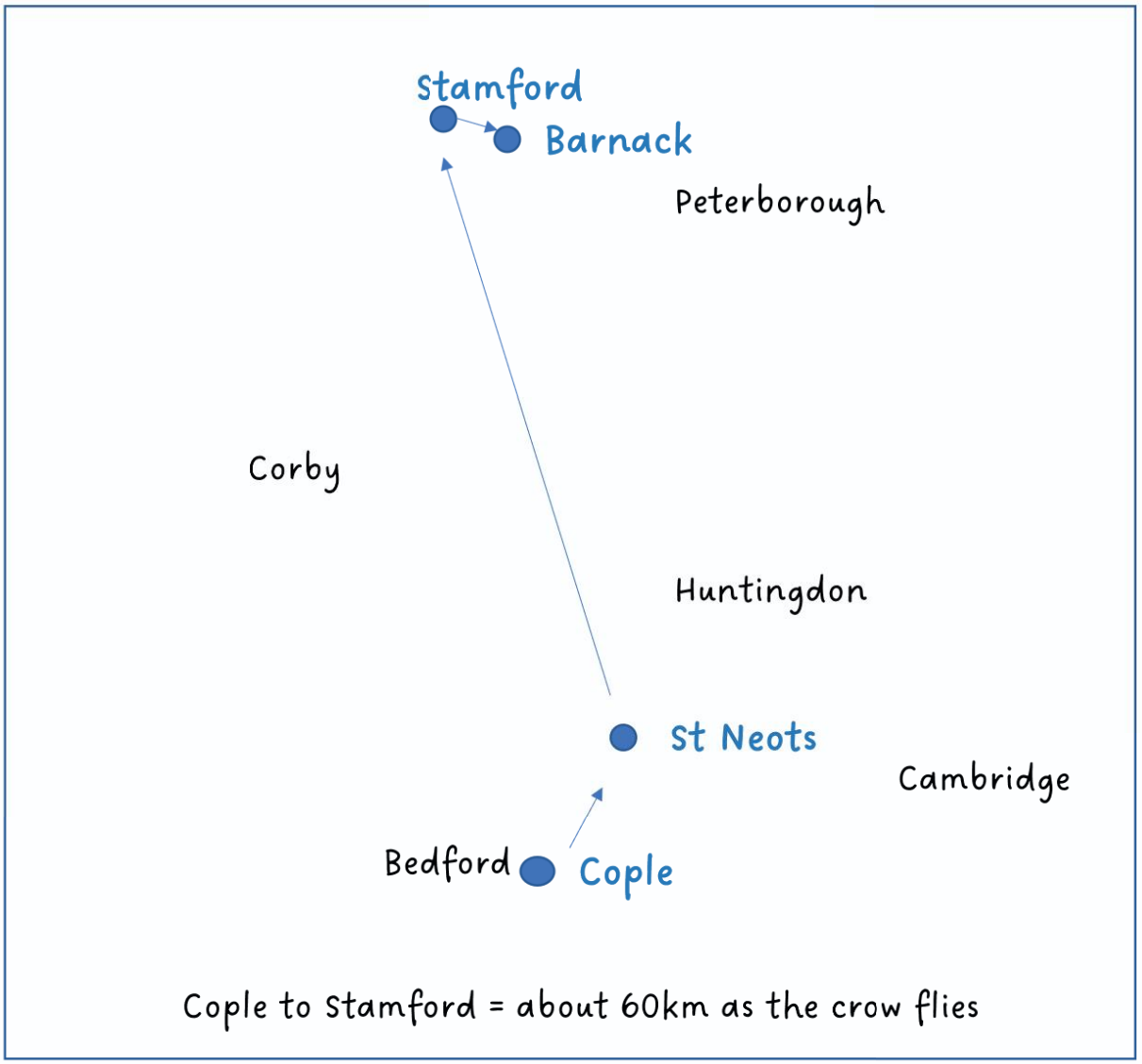
BURIALS in the Parish of Barnack
in the County of Northampton in the Year 1904 & 1905

Name.	Abode.	When buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
Fred Hill No. 713	Southorpe Terrace	Dec. 12	1 day	W. J. Wood Rector & Head Officiating
Kate Hill No. 714	Southorpe Terrace	Dec 16	5 days	S. V. Warde Officiating
— Horsley No. 715	Barnack	Dec 24	—	——
Willie Hill No. 716	Southorpe Terrace	Dec 26	12 days	Lagrange Lewey Rector
William Knight No. 717	Barnack	Dec 29	71 yrs.	Lagrange Lewey Rector
Thomas Woods No. 718	Barnack	Jan 18	74 yrs.	Lagrange Lewey Rector
Sarah Lattimore No. 719	Barnack	Jan 27	76 yrs.	Lagrange Lewey Rector
James William Green No. 720	Barnack Terrace	Feb 3.	1 day	Lagrange Lewey Rector

Barnack Church burial record for December 1904


Stamford
Barnack
Peterborough
Corby
Huntingdon
St Neots
Cambridge
Bedford
Cople
Cople to Stamford = about 60km as the crow flies

CHAPTER ONE
From Bedfordshire to Barnack

The Cople Knights

In this book, the earliest Knight it has been possible to identify is a Richard Knight (who lived from 1749 to 1791) and who married a Susan (possibly living 1749 to 1782). They lived in the village of Cople, a few miles outside Bedford. Cople is an old settlement, mentioned in the Doomsday Book and the name is derived from the words aligned to the modern phrase "Cock Pool" - a place where chickens were kept. Little of the original village of Cople, around the church and the Five Bells, is apparent today.

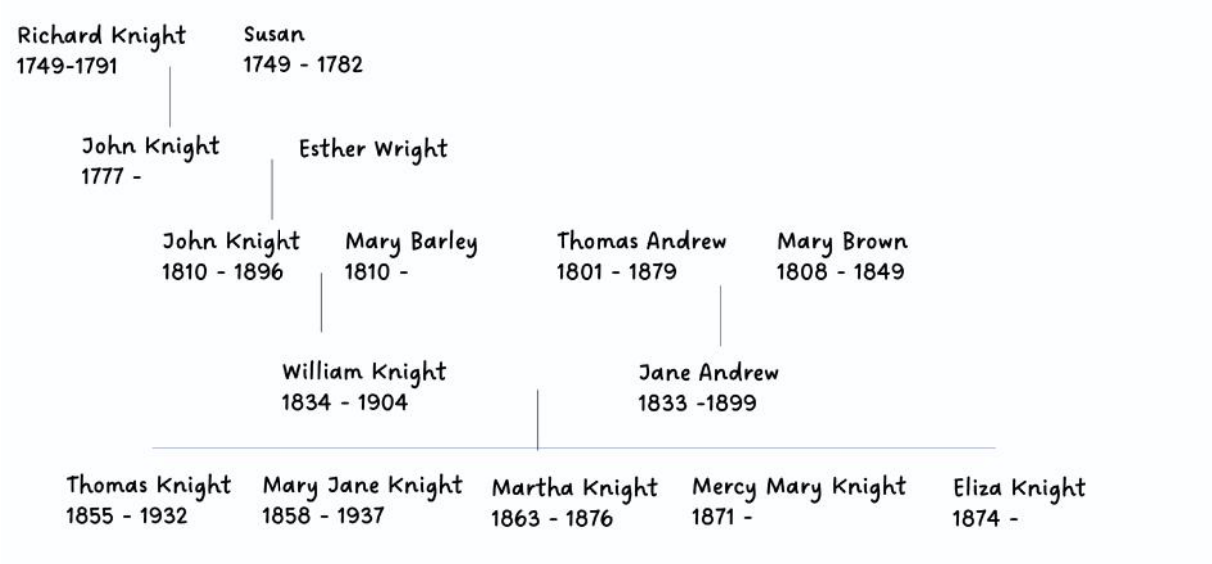
Remnants of 18th Century Cople - The Five Bells and the Church

Church baptism records show that in 1777, Richard and Susan had a son, John Knight. It seems likely that in 1802, John married Esther Wright from Kempston, some 5 miles from Cople and on the other side of Bedford. What brought them together, or even what work John was engaged in, is unknown.

The move to St Neots

A little more is known about their second son, another John – Frank's great grandfather. He, too, was born in Cople, in 1810, but the first real details of his life emerge thirty years later in the 1841 Census. By this time, he was living in the High Street of nearby St Neots in Huntingdonshire. He had married Mary Barley, the daughter of a St Neots fishmonger, in or around 1834. In 1841, on census day, their son, William (Frank's grandfather), was one of their young family of four children, ranging from 6 weeks to six years of age. They were living with Mary's father, William, and two of her unmarried sisters, Catherine and Martha. The sisters were both working in the lace industry. John was a shoemaker but it is not known if that was his occupation before moving to St Neots.

This was a time when there was increasing movement from the countryside to towns as people adjusted to changing economic and social conditions, often changing occupations in the process. Neither John senior nor Esther can be found in the 1841 Census, so it is possible that by this time they had died.



Boot making and the move northwest

Around this time, to the west and north of St Neots, in Northamptonshire, the shoe industry was rapidly expanding, providing alternative employment for many workers displaced from the worsted cloth industry which had become uncompetitive due to increasing costs. During the 19th century, boot and shoemaking came to employ almost half the population of the town of Northampton.

At first, boot and shoe making was carried out by craftsmen and their families working from home, but from the 1860s onwards it started to move into factories where shoes were assembled, often by women and children. So, in the 1840s, there would have been business for John Knight, as can be seen from the Stamford Mercury a local paper, 40 miles to the north of St Neots, which carried adverts throughout the 1840s for boot making journeymen[3].

So perhaps, not surprisingly, in the 1851 Census, the family are to be found in Tenter Lane in Stamford where both John and his son William are listed as shoemakers. Stamford was on the border between Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire (technically on the Lincolnshire side).

Sir Walter Scott thought Stamford was the finest stone town in the country. Today, it has over 600 listed buildings and many of the streets have some resemblance to the town that John Knight moved to in the 1840s.

Central Stamford today

John Knight lived in the same house (No 8, Tenter Lane) for the rest of his long life. Unfortunately, this is what Tenter Lane looks like today. The street adjoins Gas Street and the area was cleared for the gas works in the early 20th Century.

Tenter Street, Stamford in 2023

William and Jane

William later moved to the village of Barnack, 5 Km to the south, just inside what was then Northamptonshire. In 1854, he married Jane Andrew(s)[4], the daughter of Thomas, who along with Jane's older brother, was a blacksmith. In the 1851 Census, Jane Andrew, then 18, and her 3 younger siblings, all gave their occupation as "bird scarers". At best, bird scaring was very much a casual and seasonal venture that paid no more than five pennies a day. Perhaps the 2001 Census, when so many people declared "Jedi" as their religion, was not the first time that people had amused themselves at the expense of census enumerators.[5]

William and Jane had at least five children – Thomas (b1855), Mary Jane (b1858), Martha (b1864), Mercy Mary (b1871) and Eliza (b1874). The children are quite well spread out over almost twenty years, so there may have been more born in the intervening years who didn't survive. Martha died in her early teens of typhoid fever. The family lived in Main Street in Barnack, at first with a sister and brother of Jane.

Main Street, Barnack in the 1880s

Main Street is a road that in some ways has not changed greatly since that time, with the characterful workers' cottages of the 19th century now making desirable residences in the Peterborough commuter belt; a number of the cottages are now listed. At one end is the former Wesleyan Chapel; further down the street is the ancient parish church of St John the Baptist. The various censuses show that there were around 30 households in the road although this does not translate into the same number of houses as some buildings would have been in multiple occupation. Class distinctions were quite clear. On one side of the road were large farmhouses and just off the street was the Rectory, a very grand dwelling, now known as Kingsley House as this is where Charles Kingsley spent his early years. Many of the residents of Main Street were agricultural labourers but there were also a butcher, a couple of bakers, the police constable and a number of skilled workers such as carpenters who, along with William, were probably working from home. The local directory lists other shoemakers in Barnack but not William, so it may be that he was working for others or in a supply chain of some kind (in one census he describes himself as a shoemaker journeyman). In 1871, Thomas, William's eldest son, was described as a shoemaker apprentice. As house numbers were generally not recorded on the census record, we can't be sure which of the houses in Main Street was occupied by the Knights.

Main Street, Barnack today

Thomas Knight

Perhaps shoemaking wasn't the right line for Thomas, or, more likely, the growth of shoe factories was starting to have an effect, but by the 1881 Census, Thomas had become a railway plate-layer also known as a ganger. This was an occupation he stayed in for the rest of his working life although the actual nature of the work may have changed as he got older (later, in 1913, on one son's marriage record, his occupation was described as a railway flagman). Some of the work would have involved laying new tracks and for this, he might have had to travel some way from home. The job of a plate-layer also involved inspecting and maintaining the track, the rails, sleepers, bolts and so on. They greased the points and checked for wear and tear, coming together in gangs when sections of the railway needed replacing. A plate-layer may have been given a mile or so of the track to look after. Although there was some freedom in the work and some responsibility, working in winter would have been particularly trying. Any work on the railways was dangerous – in 1900 alone, over 16,000 workers were injured or killed on the country's tracks. The Northampton Mercury on Saturday 30 May 1885, reported an incident in Great Bowden some 30 miles from Barnack:

> *"As a man named Thomas Knight, ganger on the new works here, was crossing the line he caught his foot against the signal wires and fell, breaking his arm and had only just time enough to roll over into the six-foot way to save himself from being run over by an approaching train".*

We can't be absolutely sure that this was the same Thomas Knight but the location would have been well within his area of work and so it is pretty likely this was the Thomas Knight from Barnack. How things would have been different if he hadn't had the presence of mind to roll over – this book wouldn't have been written for one thing.

Plate-laying was hard physical work and poorly paid and a broken arm would have had a serious economic impact in the short term and may well have affected his longer term capacity. However, plate-laying did offer a route for promotion within the rail companies for some. It seems curious that Thomas, a man who could read and write and with an active political sense (he became a great supporter of the Liberals), remained in that role.

Catherine Carford

A few doors away from the Knights in Main Street was a family called the Carfords, whose daughter, Catherine was of a similar age to Thomas. She had been a servant to an artisan carver and gilder in Stamford but by 1881 was working as a dressmaker and back living with her family along with her young daughter Emma. On Valentine's Day 1884, Thomas and Catherine were married in the Parish Church, and in the following year, Harry was born. Disaster struck in August 1889 when Catherine died following a miscarriage and four days of "haemorrhage and exhaustion".

As their married life occurred between two censuses, we can't be sure where they lived or whether or not Catherine's daughter, Emma Carford, was part of the family. We don't know who her father was. There is no suggestion that she was Thomas's child and, by 1891 she was living with her grandparents.

Thomas was left a widower with a young child and as such, remarriage would have been an important social and economic priority. Whatever the circumstances that brought together Thomas and Emma Barber (who was nine years his junior), the consequences were significant. There is some evidence to suggest that Emma Barber was a driving force in the way the family developed.

Emma and Thomas Knight 1915

Emma Barber

Her grandchildren would later call her "Little Gran" "because she was tiny". She was a complete outsider in Barnack. Born in Southwark, she came from a family where her father, Henry, was a tailor and grandfather and great grandfather were hatters. Her granddaughter, Barbara, described how she had been "in service" and knew how to do things "properly". Being a servant was the most common form of employment for women during much of the 19th Century. Many middle class households might have had a servant, as Catherine Carford had been, and in our family history there are other examples[6]. The modern-day view of Victorian service tends to be coloured, accurately or otherwise, by TV serials set in grand houses, but for most servants life wasn't anything like that. In 1881, Emma Barber was working as a maid in a house in Paddington in the service of a widow of a music publisher along with her mother Maria "the cook" and her aunt, Elizabeth, a "Lady's maid". Emma's older sister, Maria, was working as a "nurse" (looking after an infant) in a family in Hampstead. This is what Emma's sister specialised in which meant that she moved frequently between jobs when the child she was looking after, reached their first birthday.

Maria and Henry Barber 1880s

There would have been a difference between working for a professional family at a certain level in metropolitan London and working in a fairly ordinary household in Stamford. London jobs were

sought after and were competitive. Elsewhere, staff would more likely have been locally sourced. Emma's occupation provides a reasonable clue as to how she ended up on the Lincolnshire border. Something must have enticed her to move away from London where she would have had connections and references but whether she had moved with an existing employer or had been recruited to a substantial household in the Barnack area, is open to speculation. In March 1891, Thomas and Emma were married in the Wesleyan Chapel in Leytonstone (in those days in Essex), where her mother was from and where her parents had moved to from south London. The marriage record unfortunately does not record her occupation or place of work so it remains unknown as to where she might have worked in the Barnack area.

Around Barnack are two stately homes - Walcot Hall, a mile to the south and Burghley House, occupied by the Cecil family, a mile or so to the north. But there is also Kingsley House, the Old Rectory and on one side of Main Street some substantial farm houses including one in a fortified style.

The Rectory - later named Kingsley House

Main Street from the Churchyard

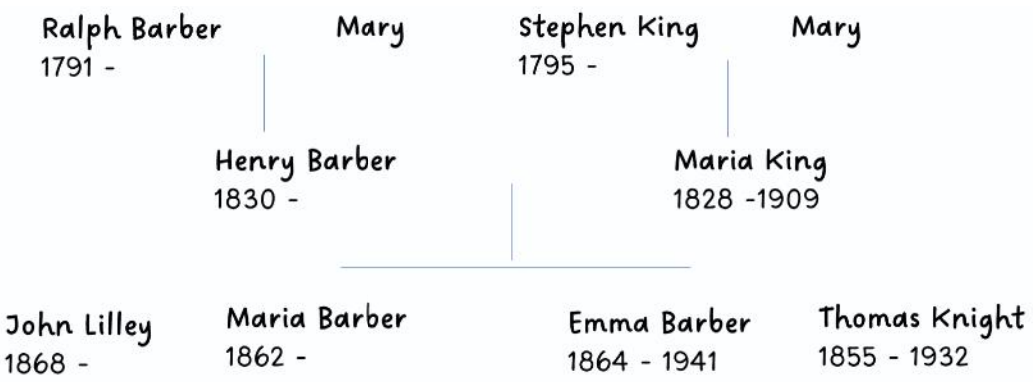
What is available is a fascinating piece of evidence which, of course, begs more questions. In Frank's postcard collection is a postcard addressed in Emma's handwriting to her mother, then living in Leytonstone. The stamp has been removed along with the postmark but the address would date it as within the 1880s. The scene is of Igls near Innsbruck – today a ski resort but then a summer spa. On the picture, Emma has written "August 17th – this will give you an idea of the country".

The post card from Austria, in Emma's handwriting sent to her mother in Leytonstone sometime in the 1880s

So we can conclude that whoever Emma was working for, had taken her with them to Austria. This chance of foreign travel must have been a tremendous opportunity for someone in her position.

The Barbers of Southwark

A certain amount of mystery surrounds the Barber family. This is certainly a topic that deserves more research in the libraries and archives of London. It may well be a case of too many Ralphs and Marys. We know that Emma's father, Henry, married her mother Maria King (then a tobacconist) in December 1861 and that from the marriage record, we know that Henry's father, a Ralph Barber, was a hatter and Maria's father, Stephen King, was a gardener. This helps us locate Henry's birth details – he was born in 1830 to Ralph and Mary but not baptised until 5 years later.



The Ralph in the baptism record (a hatter) lived at Bridge Road, Southwark. In the 1841 Census, the family of Ralph and Mary Barber, hatter of Bridge Road seems to be different. There is no mention of Henry or his sister Emma, and the Mary is a good ten years older than the Mary Barber recorded as the mother living with Henry and his sister Emma in 1861. We know from numerous newspaper announcements across the country that, in 1833, bankruptcy proceedings were taken against "Ralph Barber the Older, Ralph Barber the younger and George Barber". We may assume that this was the firm of Barber and Sons, Hat Manufacturers of Southwark that was listed in directories at the time. George Barber, who was imprisoned for debt, also owned the Southwark Hat Company. So was Ralph the younger, who by the time of 1841 census was no longer living at Bridge Street, Henry's father? Was George another son of Ralph the older? Just to confuse things even more there was another Ralph Barber, hatter, and married to another Mary who in 1841 had a daughter, Louise whilst living in Union Street and another daughter, Ann, in 1850 when living at Greenwalks, Blackfriars. Best not to mention Ralph *Ellis* Barber, hatter, who died in Southwark in 1862!

Henry and Maria Barber
Locket photos passed down to their grand-daughter Audrey Gibb

By the 1880s, Henry and Maria had moved to Leytonstone where Maria was originally from. Henry described himself as a "master tailor" and seems to have been quite well established. He must have died some time after the 1901 census and before Maria died in 1909 but it has been difficult to track down a record. There is no record of probate. Maria died from cancer in the home of her daughter Maria. Maria had married a carpenter, John Lilley, from the Barnack area (matchmaking by her sister Emma?) but there is no record of them after the death of Maria King – neither in the 1911 nor 1921 censuses.

The Parish Church of St John the Baptist

A perennial question that crops up in family histories is "how did they meet?" What brought Thomas and Emma together? Today it is hard to imagine what networks were at play – fellow servants with local connections perhaps? Thomas worked a 6-day week so the only time off would have been Sunday. Church attendance may have been required by a servant's employer, and in the parish church, pews designated for the servants would have put them closer in contact with other ordinary folk. Nevertheless, parish churches weren't renowned as dating sites.

The Wesleyan Chapel in Main Street Barnack that replaced the original chapel in 1898

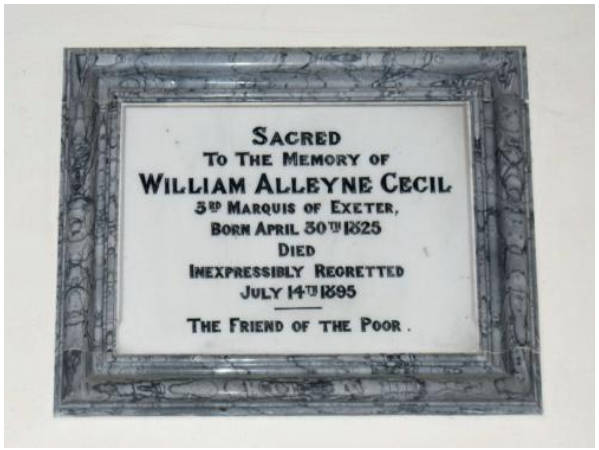
The Wesleyan Chapel, on the other hand, would have provided a greater level of social contact. In 1882, it was reported that "*nearly 100 sat down to a public tea"* at Barnack Wesleyan Chapel on Easter Monday. "*At 7 o'clock the Stamford choir gave their service of song. There was an overflowing audience*"[7].

The Chapel was located at the other end of Main Street to the parish church and grew in popularity through the latter part of the 19th Century.

Inside the Parish Church looking back from the altar

Along with his support of the Liberal Party, Thomas became a keen Wesleyan or Methodist. We don't know what drew Thomas to Methodism. John Wesley's doctrine emphasised the "priesthood of all believers" and the infinite value of each individual before God. Many working men and women began to reason that if God loved and valued them, so should their employers and those in authority over them.

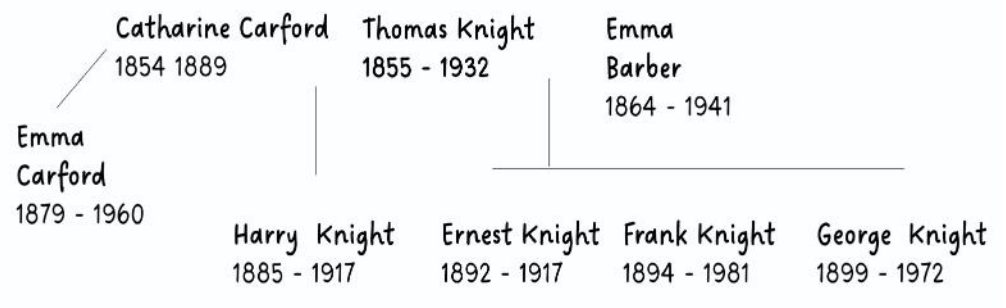
In the parish church, the view looking back from the altar of the people of Barnack ranked in their pews with the Cecils and others dominating the front, "friends of the poor" or not as the case may be, may well have stirred Thomas.



The very act of ordinary people absenting themselves from the established church represented a significant statement of independence.

The family grows

Over the next ten years or so, Thomas and Emma continued to live in Main Street. In 1892, Ernest (Ernie) was born followed by Frank in 1894. Then there was bit of a gap before George appeared in 1899.



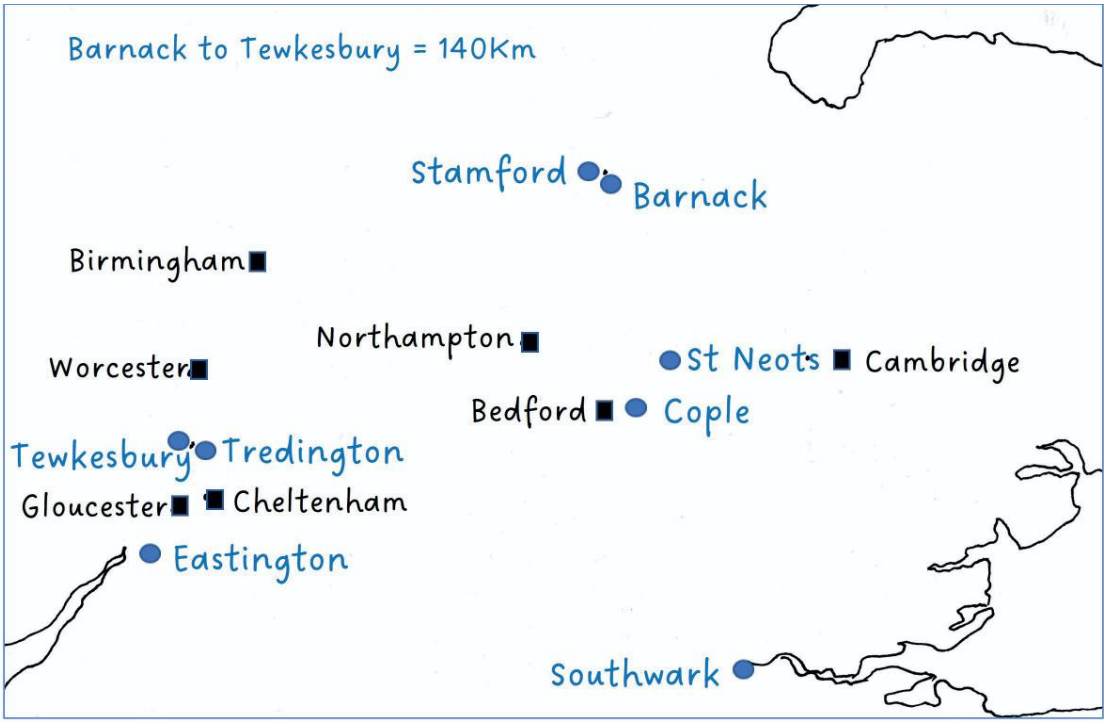
This photo, believe it or not, is of Ernie and Frank c 1895, and shows that Frank had yet to reach the age of "breeching" – basically being toilet-trained and able to wear breeches. That, sadly, is when the locks would have come off. You can see the mastery of a grandfather, perhaps, in those splendid boots. Both Ernie and Frank would have started their school days at the village school in Barnack, supplemented by the geography and more theological teaching that would have come from the Wesleyan Sunday School. By 1901, Harry was working as a gardener's boy. Perhaps, Emma had used her contacts to steer him in this direction. He certainly went up in the world and by 1911, Harry was a gardener foreman at Stoke Court at Nest End, Stoke Poges, where he lived in the garden bothy.

Before moving to the next stage of the story for the Knights, it is interesting to see what happened to Thomas's parents and grandparents. Wars and childhood tragedies apart, some of the family were quite long-lived.

John Knight went on living at 8, Tenter Lane in Stamford for the rest of his life, continuing as a shoemaker or cordwainer (as he described himself in one census) until he finally retired. His wife Mary died sometime between the 1871 and 1881 censuses – no record of her death or burial has been located. He died in 1896 at the grand age of 85, living with a grandson, Isaac (son of John's third son, Isaac who himself lived to be 91, dying in 1931).

William and Jane continued to live in Barnack with Mercy and Eliza still at home in 1891, both dressmakers. He was of some standing in Barnack, being appointed to the Parish Council in 1896. Jane died in 1899. In 1901, William still gave his occupation as a shoe-maker but also as a "cottager". In the parlance of the time, this meant that he had some property or land which gave an income. He was living with his youngest child, Eliza, who described herself as "father's housekeeper". William died in 1904. He was nearly 70 years old.

Emma Carford married a gardener, Harry Hibbins, in 1903 in a ceremony that was witnessed by her half-brother, Harry Knight. Was Harry Hibbins a colleague of Harry Knight who he had introduced to his half sister? The Hibbins moved to various locations over the years. In 1911, Emma was living in Loughborough and by then had had 4 children of whom 3 were still alive. She died in Leicester in 1960 at the age of 81.

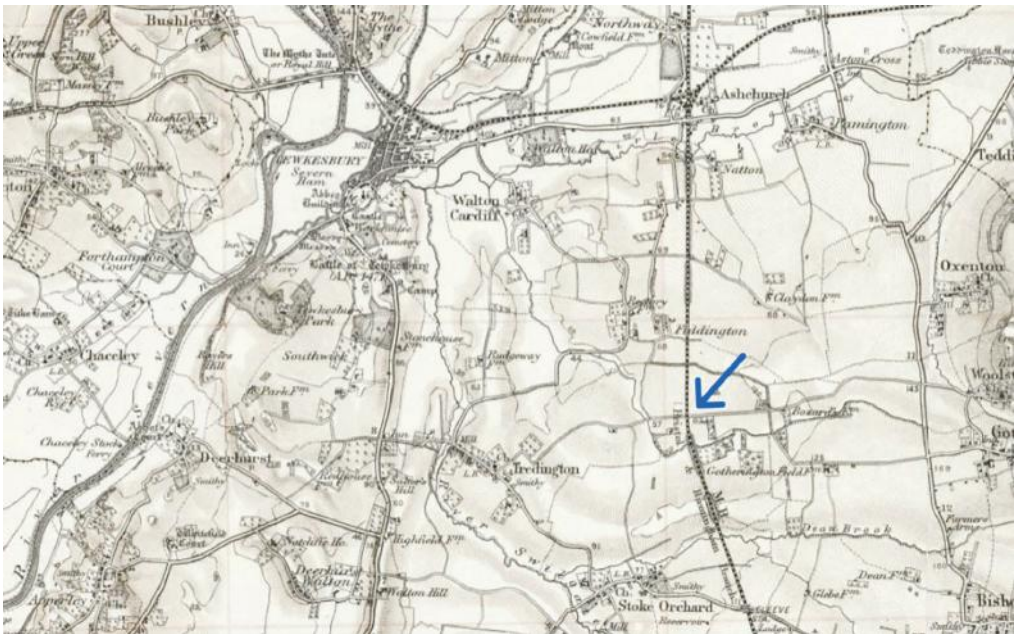


The family relocates from Barnack to Tredington near Tewkesbury

In the middle of nowhere - the view from Tredington Lodge

CHAPTER TWO
Uprooting and new beginnings

Soon after the turn of the century, Thomas and Emma made a dramatic decision to move the family from Northamptonshire to Tredington, just outside Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire. There is no indication of exactly what precipitated the move. Thomas remained employed by the same railway company, the London Midland and Scottish. In subsequent census returns, he still referred to himself as a rail labourer but the new job was a promotion in the sense that it came with a track-side house and presumably some responsibilities that went with it. Received wisdom in the family was that Thomas was a crossing keeper, but this isn't mentioned in the 1911 Census and in 1921 it is Emma who is recorded in that role[8].



The location of Tredington - arrows marks the crossing at Tredington Lodge

When exactly they moved is also unclear. A brief news cutting when Emma died in 1941, stated that she had moved to Gloucestershire in 1900. This was also the year given by Frank in a later interview in a local paper[9]. However, the 1901 census still has them living in Main Street, Barnack. The postcard collection doesn't help much as the earliest indication of their new address is 1906. Frank had the bulk of his schooling in Gloucestershire, so it is safe to assume they moved around 1901 or 1902.

Not only was this a major geographical shift (140km as the crow flies and over 2 hours by motorway today), but in doing so they exchanged the tight community of Main Street with close access to Thomas's father and family for a place seemingly in the middle of nowhere. Tredington Lodge was a rail track building on a fairly isolated crossing between Cheltenham and Ashchurch on the main Bristol to Birmingham line. It's a good couple of kilometres from the village of Tredington and a similar distance via paths to the village of Stoke Orchard. Tredington itself is 5 km by road to Tewkesbury.

All that remains today of Tredington Lodge is just the overgrown site by the rail tracks shown here in the top photo.

The next picture down shows the Lodge in August 1989 when the crossing (third photo down) was in the process of being automated and the building had been vacated prior to demolition[10]. It was a sizeable house and there was a piece of land attached for a garden where vegetables could be grown, but there were no services.

An account of life at Tredington Lodge in the 1950s talks of the firemen on passing engines, hurling large lumps of coal into the garden as a favour[11]. The family must have been able to hitch rides on certain trains, otherwise they would never have got to work. Sleep must have been difficult with the thunder of passing wagons in the night or the long drawn out clanking of the milk train.

A railway memorabilia auction in 2011 featured a "Tredington water churn" – revealing that fresh water had to be delivered by railway each day[32].

Isolated down a remote lane, exposed to the wind in winter, the noise and dirt of the railway, trying to read by oil light at night, living at Tredington Lodge does not seem a particularly attractive prospect. But the family seems to have flourished.

Ernie, George and Frank

It was a time of expanding horizons in other ways. Although they were very much a working class family and money would have been very tight, reading and writing were very important. Some of this self-education would have been fostered in the chapel. But the parents, in particular Emma, had ambitions for their boys. They nurtured a home that believed in a better life and where learning was an essential way forward.

Frank's postcard collection gives a taste of what would have widened their world view and aspirations. Cards sent to Frank from Cornwall, Whitby and from a family acquaintance climbing mountains in Wales, show something of the family's network. Contact was also maintained with Barnack.

Clara, whoever she was, wrote to Frank thanking him for his homemade Christmas card. The correspondent J Newman[12] wrote "we like the artistic productions of the boys". He or she goes on to say "we are most pleased to learn of Ernie's prospects which look bright," before adding "and he ought to consider himself a fortunate boy" in that way which adults have that seems to suggest that it wasn't something he had actually worked for.

All indications were, that Ernie was in fact, a serious and industrious young man. On leaving school around 1905, he obtained a clerical post in the railways and by the time war broke out he was in the engineering office at Gloucester. Until he got married in 1913 and set up home in Gloucester, this would have meant somehow catching a train down the line from Tredington Lodge each day.

When he left school in around 1907 at the age of 12 and a half, Frank found an apprenticeship in Tewkesbury with Walter Boughton, a well-established clothing outfitter, and began a relationship with the older man that was to shape much of his and his family's life over the next 25 years. In the first year, his wage was 2s 6d per week rising by a shilling a week for each year of the 4-year apprenticeship meaning that at 16 years of age, he was earning a staggering 6s 6d per week[13].

Walter Boughton's shop 83-84 Barton Street

Walter Boughton

With a family history of boot making, tailoring and hatting, an apprenticeship of this sort might have seemed a logical thing for Emma to have encouraged Frank to apply for. However, there were other factors as well in making the connection. not least that Boughton was a key figure in the local Liberal party, stalwart of the Tewkesbury Methodists (he played the organ for the church for 40 years) and a businessman and local politician with fingers in a number of pies.

Mixing with other young men in the Wesleyan Chapel and in the Tewkesbury YMCA, Frank might have been influenced in a number of ways. Although the sons were older, one family Frank would have come in contact with through the chapel, was the Priestley family. Joseph Priestley was the Headmaster of the Abbey School in Tewkesbury and another strong Liberal and Methodist. Joseph and Henrietta had four sons and four daughters.

Donald Priestley was a talented sportsman, and in May 1909, made his debut for Gloucestershire County Cricket Club against Sussex at Hove. His oldest brother, Joseph ("Bert") went on to become Professor of Botany at Leeds, and brother Raymond was a geologist on Shackleton's Antarctica Expedition (1907-9) and later, on Scott's fateful Terra Nova Antarctic Expedition in 1910-13. Raymond later became Vice Chancellor at Birmingham University[14].

In 1912, Donald Priestley married Edith Boughton, the daughter of Frank's boss. Henrietta Priestley was a member of the Rice family. William Rice & Co Ltd were corn, coal, hay and seed merchants and owned the Abbey Mill by the river in Tewkesbury. Donald and his younger brother Stanley, were wheat buyers at the mill and colleagues of another man who was to play a part in Frank's life, George Gregory.

The Abbey Mill, Tewkesbury

This is a photo in Frank Knight's collection that captures some of the camaraderie of the times. There is no label, and no immediate indication of what brought this group of young men together for a formal photo in their Sunday best. However, some of the men can be identified. Firstly, Frank kneeling at the end of the front row. The tall chap with a moustache in the back row is Harry Knight. The large chap sitting in the middle is Frank Gregory - he was the brother of Blanche Gregory who was soon to play a key role in the family history. Frank Gregory was a steam boat man for the Rice family at Abbey Mill. The dapper chap with the cravat and moustache in the front row is George Gregory, colleague of Donald and Stanley Priestley and uncle to Frank Gregory and Blanche. George was particularly active and was the Honorary Secretary of the YMCA, the Methodist Sunday School Superintendent and a Scoutmaster for the First Tewkesbury Troop based at the YMCA. It is likely that the younger man to the left of George is Stanley Priestley. And the much younger lad at the end of the back row could well be George Knight.

The Tewkesbury Methodist Church today

At a guess, the photo dates from around 1910/11. But what were they doing? Are these Wesleyan chapel boys or perhaps attenders of a Men's Own Brotherhood "Pleasant Sunday Afternoon"[15] event? Or, perhaps more likely, a group connected with the Tewkesbury YMCA? The lapel badges, if they were more clearly visible, might have revealed the answer. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was an ecumenical Protestant organisation that bridged some denominational divides and by the mid-19th Century had become an international movement. They maintained places of wholesome recreation with the intention of keeping young men from temptation and promoted a philosophy of "Muscular Christianity" - characterised by a belief in patriotic duty, discipline, self-sacrifice, masculinity, and the moral and physical beauty of athleticism. Frank maintained an interest in the Tewkesbury YMCA for many years, and in the 1930s was the Treasurer.

In 1912, when he was eighteen, Frank shifted his allegiance from the Methodists/Wesleyans to the Congregationalists in Tewkesbury. This suited Frank's ascetic more[16] and does not at the time

seem to have distanced him from his comrades, or indeed his future wife. He remained with the Congregationalists or the United Reformed Church which they became part of, until 1977 when, in the face of declining membership in Tewkesbury, they merged with the Methodists and sold their church to the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In his late teens, Frank developed a relationship with Blanche Gregory. She was three years older and was working as a draper's assistant in Tewkesbury. Later she was to work in shops in Weston-Super-Mare, Maidenhead and Swindon and was presumably a woman of some ambition. We will look at the Gregory family in more detail in the next chapter.

Blanche Emily Gregory

Ernie was the first to get married, at the age of 20. His wife, Beatrice Elsie Watkins, plays an important part in the family story although her long and, in many ways, sad life remains one of intrigue. Beatrice lived in Eastington, a village to the west of Stroud, 30km as the crow flies from Tewkesbury, and a journey in those days involving a change of train and a bus. The Watkins family crops up in many guises in the late 19th and early 20th century amongst the cloth workers of the woollen mills in the area. Making the links between the different families is a book in its own right.

Beatrice was born in nearby Leonard Stanley in 1891 to John and Mary Jane in a family that moved around the area, following work in the shifting fortunes of the industry in that period. At various times, John was a labourer, a teasel grower and a dray-man. Beatrice's siblings were born in Eastington, Leigh, and Westbury-on-Severn as well as Leonard Stanley. Beatrice was the last of nine children and she wouldn't have known her father as in her first year of life, he fell from his cart and hit his head on the wheel, dying shortly afterwards. Life must have been a struggle for a widow, especially at a time when the woollen industry was being rationalised. The family seem to have escaped the watchful eye of the 1901 Census but the 1911 count has them living in Middle Street, Eastington with Beatrice's brother John, a cloth dyer, as the head of household, Beatrice or Elsie, as she was then calling herself working as a quiller[17], living with her mother, another brother who was a cloth warehouseman, a sister, plus an older cousin in a 4 room house. The chilling column in the 1911 census, which asked for the number of children who were born alive but who had since died, revealed that for Mary Jane, the answer was four out of nine.

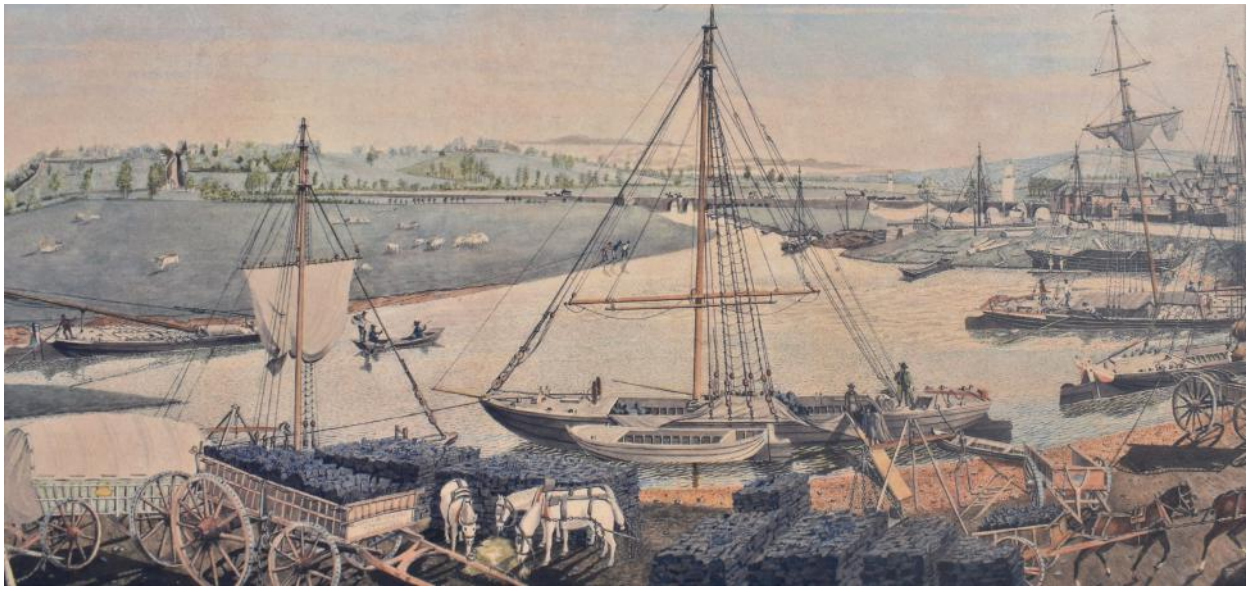
Once again, the question arises "how did they meet?" How did a quiller in Eastington get to know an ambitious clerk in the railway engineering works in Gloucester? In those days, friends' siblings were often a line to pursue. Elsie's sister, Emma Watkins, had married an employee of the same railway company, but he was gatekeeper at Frocester and unlikely to have had any contact with Ernest. News cuttings reveal that Ernest, despite his youth, was a well-known lay preacher at the time. The Wesleyan Chapel at Alkerton in Eastington was at that time on the Mid Gloucestershire preaching circuit. It would not have been the first time that a preacher had fallen for a member of the congregation or had caught the eye a young woman in the throng – or perhaps a bit of both.

Whatever, the circumstances, Ernest and Elsie got married on Christmas Day 1913. Less than seven months later, Ernest John was born, by which time they had set up home at 14, Roseberry Avenue in Gloucester. Their married life was to be brief.

Whilst Harry was a foreman Gardener at Stoke Court, Stoke Poges in 1911, he maintained close links with Tewkesbury as well as with the chapel and YMCA and may well have moved back to work in the area by the time of the war. Like Frank, he switched to the Congregationalists and was also a lay preacher. At the time when Harry was there, Stoke Court was owned by Henry Allhusen and noticeable guests under his ownership included Joseph Chamberlain, Churchill, Thomas Hardy, and Somerset Maugham. There is, sadly, no record of whether any of these visits coincided with his upkeep of the grounds.

Blanche Gregory

The canalised Avon looking South today



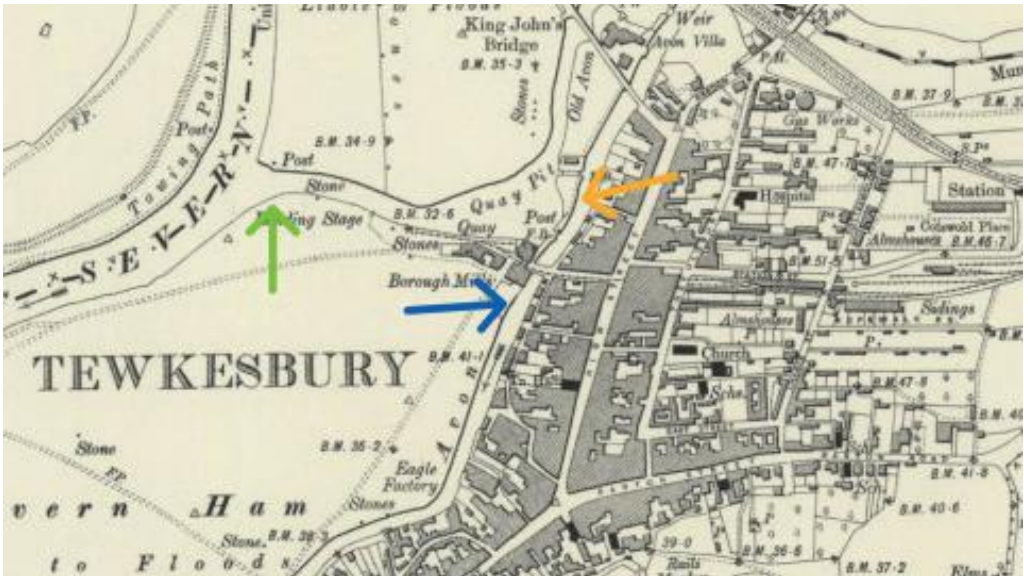
Tewkesbury Town Quay - the 18th Century tidal basin

The canalised Avon looking North today

CHAPTER THREE
Blanche and the Gregorys

We have seen how Frank Knight was pursuing an interest in Blanche Gregory and was well acquainted with her brother Frank Gregory and his and Blanche's uncle, George Gregory. The two families had come into contact through the Wesleyan Chapel and the YMCA. The Knights were newcomers to Tewkesbury and for many years didn't actually live in the town. The Gregorys, on the other hand, had been in Tewkesbury for three generations by the time they met the Knights. Like the Knights, the Gregorys have an interesting history, and this history in the 19th and early 20th century at least, was inextricably linked to the waterways. So, in looking at the family, it makes sense to explore Tewkesbury as a river town.

Tewkesbury is located at the confluence of the Avon and Severn Rivers. On the map below, you can see the Severn on the left and the Avon feeding into the Town Quay area on the right. In the middle is the Avon lock (yellow arrow) which enables boats to go from one river to the other. Up until the 19th century, the economy of Tewkesbury was closely linked with the waterways. The Avon became navigable to Evesham in the 1630s, and a few years later to Stratford-upon-Avon. The Severn, Britain's longest river, eventually became navigable as far inland as Shrewsbury. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Severn was the second busiest river in Europe, surpassed only by the Meuse. The Severn was still tidal at Tewkesbury until the 1800s enabling large boats to get to the town on the up tide as we can see in the painting opposite. They used sails when they could or were pulled along on the banks, first by men and then by horses. Today, Tewkesbury still retains access to the sea via the Severn and the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal. Historically, activity centred around the Town Quay by a tidal basin whilst warehouses, and various industrial buildings developed on the banks. Navigation enabled the transport of other products as well as grain and for the exports of Tewkesbury's industrial products including malt and leather.



Old map showing the original confluence of the Avon and Severn (green arrow), the canalised Avon (blue arrow) and the Avon Lock (yellow arrow). You can see the Quay, the area of the tidal basin in the painting

Upper Lode Weir

In the 1850s a large weir was built on the Severn together with the Upper Lode Lock which enabled water levels to be maintained in the area around the Town Quay. However, by this time, the railways were having a significant impact and the heyday of the waterways was over. They did retain some importance as transport routes though, and barges were used right up until 1998 by Healing's Mill which imported grain from Avonmouth via the Bristol Channel and Sharpness.

When built in 1865, Healing's Mill, (also known as the Borough Mills), was considered one of the largest and most modern flour mills in the world. It was completely modernised in the 1970s and operated until 2006.

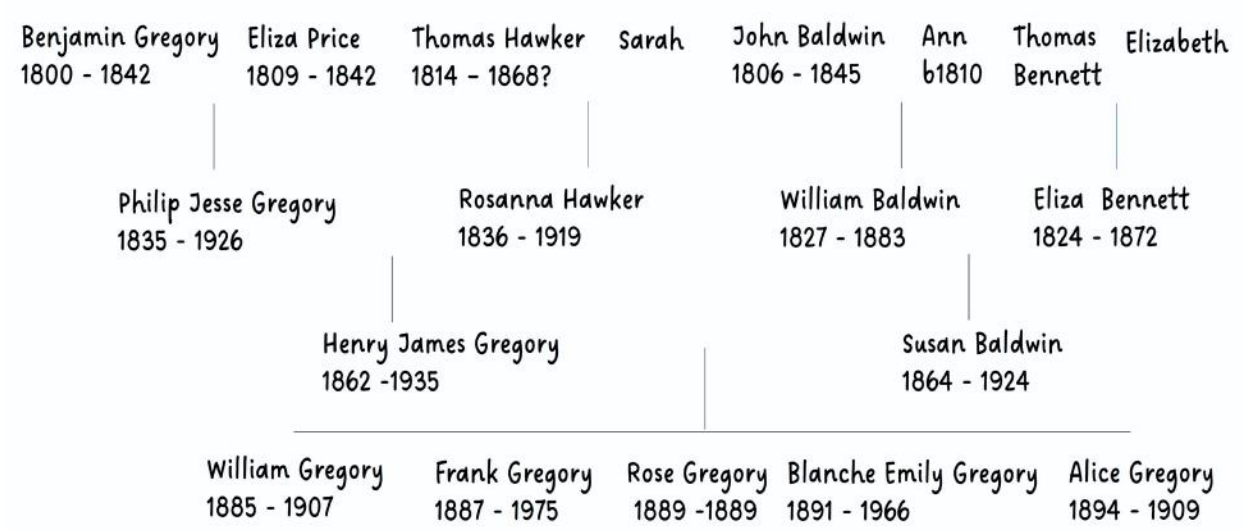
Healings Mill from the canalised Avon on one side and the Old Avon leading to the Severn on the othe

Boat building has also been a part of Tewkesbury's history with the town being ordered on two occasions to produce royal boats - for Henry IV and later one for Elizabeth I. Boat building switched to leisure craft in the 19th century. Blanche Gregory's great great grandfather, Benjamin, set up a boat building business with another man called Burcombe, in the basin around 1830, but the business was not successful and was dissolved. The site on which Benjamin started his Tewkesbury boat building was soon occupied by the boat builder firm set up by Charles Bathurst who dominated the trade in Tewkesbury from 1847 until after the 2nd World War.

Bathurst also operated steamers for river trips. In the 1921 census both Blanche's brother Frank and her Uncle Frank were working as boatmen for Bathurst. By the 1970s, Bathurst were no longer operating but boats built by Bill Shakespeare achieved international fame. Shakespeare, who started as an apprentice at Bathurst's, formed his own company at Tewkesbury in 1960, building glass fibre racing boats. Known as the "Tewkesbury Terror," he achieved some renown before his death on Lake Windermere in 1971, whilst practising for a Grand Prix. Boat building is no longer important in Tewkesbury, although Tewkesbury Marina, with its 400 berths, has some associated support businesses.

Bathurst steamers King and Jubilee

The Tewkesbury Gregorys



A native of Shropshire, born in Bridgnorth in 1798, the boat-builder Benjamin Gregory was the son of William and Hannah, another family of shoemakers. William was descended (via a couple of generations) from Thomas, a miller and cooper of some standing in Bridgnorth, but who had been born in Bunbury, Cheshire in 1643. The line can be traced further back to a William and Alice Gregory in Bunbury who were yeoman farmers. They were people of substance, literate, in possession of a library and their son Edward, described himself as a "scholar of Bunbury" in 1591.[18]

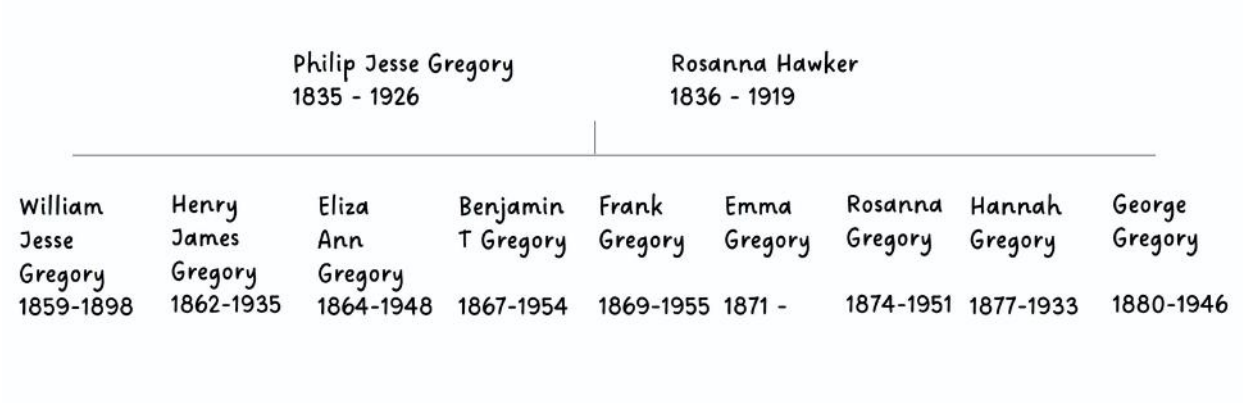
By 1830, Benjamin had made his way down the Severn to Tewkesbury where he married his first wife Sarah Osborn, a marriage that ended barely a year later with Sarah's death. Benjamin remarried the same year, to Eliza Price, another Tewkesbury woman and together they had six children over the next 10 years. Phillip Jesse, Blanche's grandfather, was the second to be born in 1834 in Tracey's Row. Their son Henry, died within a couple of months of his birth in 1840.

After the collapse of Benjamin's boat business in Tewkesbury, the family moved upstream to Worcester. Benjamin died in February 1842 from "inflammation of the brain" at the age of only 44. Their last child, William was born posthumously and in October of that year, Eliza also died, leaving five orphaned children under the age of 10.

By all accounts, Phillip, or Jesse as he was often known locally and to the family, was a real character who made up for a rather inauspicious start in life. As a young man, he once got himself into a spot of trouble.

On 7th December 1855, the Tewkesbury Weekly Record reported a case brought before the magistrates chaired by the Mayor. Jesse Gregory and Joseph Pardoe were charged with neglecting to fulfil a contract. A Mrs Mayall stated she engaged the defendants to take a boat to Picton and back with a load of coal. She advanced them money at different times to the amount of £9. Then the men told her they couldn't bring the boat home as "they had lost their money" and she had been obliged to hire another two men to go after it. There then ensued a debate between a Mr Moore defending and the Magistrates as to whether the magistrates actually had jurisdiction in this case. The Mayor concluded that "Mr Moore had ably argued the case for the defendants... it was a very bad case and one which deserved punishment, and the Bench regretted they had no jurisdiction."

In 1858, Philip (Jesse) married Rosanna Hawker at Tewkesbury Abbey. Rosanna was the daughter of a waterman, and had been employed as a servant. She gave birth to nine children over 21 years. All who were born alive survived childhood, and three (Benjamin, Eliza and Frank) lived well into their eighties. Rosanna was also a hardy and remarkable woman; even into her seventies, and nearly blind, she was known to have rowed a boat across the Tewkesbury floodwaters[19].



In 1881, Philip was a barge captain, in the employ of Messrs Rice & Co[20]. According to the census enumerator, along with his sons Henry and Benjamin, he was "found on the canal bank" at Hatherton Lock in south Staffordshire, on the Staffordshire Worcestershire Canal which joins the Severn at Stourport, more than 80 km from home and a long way to be towed by horses. Life as a waterman must have been hard, with long periods away from home.

The Abbey Mill of Messers Rice & Co for whom Philip and sons worked

Avon Lock - joins the canalised Avon on the right of the photo with the old part of the Avon leading to the Severn on the left. The lock is in front of the modern house in the middle of the photo.

Avon Lock

Avon Lock, Tewkesbury plays an important part in the Gregory story. By the time of the 1901 Census, Philip was the keeper of the Avon Lock and his family lived in the house by the lock. This house was a converted house boat which according to the land tax return had been built for a Mr Aston Boswell, who died before he could live in it. It can be seen in the background of this splendid picture of Philip. In the photo, Philip is on the left with his son Frank and another man believed to be related (from now on Philip's son Frank Gregory will be referred to as "Frank senior" to avoid any confusion with Blanche's brother Frank Gregory). The land tax return concluded that the lock made no profit as the repairs and upkeep used up any income that was in excess of Philip's wages.

Avon Lock - Lock-keeper's house

Avon Lock today with the modern Lock-keeper's cottage

A tragedy occurred at the Lock House in 1896 which gives some insight into life at the time. Frank Jesse Gregory, the two year old son of Frank senior, was staying with his grandparents when he pulled from the table a cup of scalding tea, the contents of which fell on his right arm. He was at once taken to the Tewkesbury Rural Hospital but in spite of every attention, he died two days later. The newspaper described the child as being of a "weakly nature" and unable to survive the shock. A verdict of accidental death was returned.[21]

Blanche Gregory was the fourth child born to Henry and Susan Baldwin. Susan, or Susanna as she was originally known, was also Tewkesbury born and was a machinist living in the area near the river. The couple were married in Tewkesbury in 1884, living at the time at Back of Avon, down by the river. Henry and Susan had five children over nine years all born in the area - William Henry (b1885), Frank (b1887), Blanche Emily (b1891) and Alice (b1894). Rose was born in May 1889 but lived for only 11 weeks.

Jubilee Cottages, Gravel Walk, Tewkesbury

In the 1891 Census, Henry was a toll collector on the waterways, but, by 1901, he was back on the barges again along with his oldest son, William. At that time, the family were still living at Back of Avon, at Sweets Court, but in the 1900s they moved inland to Jubilee Cottages in the alleyway called Gravel Walk.

These were years of tragedy for the family. By 1909, only two children, Blanche and her brother Frank, were still alive. William died from pneumonia in 1907, which the family attributed to his playing football in the rain. This was followed in 1909 by the death of Alice from purpura haemorrhagia, a condition causing deformed platelets in the blood which meant that she bled easily with the blood failing to clot. Aside from this, there are signs that Alice was not a healthy child generally. Postcards belonging to Blanche suggest that Alice spent some time away from home in convalescence

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In the photograph below, probably taken at the time of Philip and Rosanna's 50th wedding anniversary in 1908, Philip, Rosanna and Henry are in the front row and from left in the back row are Frank senior, Blanche, Alice, Frank (Henry's son) Susan and Henry's brother George. William had died the preceding year.

In the 1911 Census, Blanche's father Henry, and her brother Frank, were both described as steam boatmen working for Abbey Mill. Soon afterwards, Henry succeeded his father, Philip, as the lock-keeper at Avon Lock and the family left Jubilee Cottages, a house with such sad memories, and moved back to the river.

Frank senior continued as a boatman but working later for Healing's Mill rather than Abbey Mill. He seems to be very much part of the core family and later reports would suggest he was well regarded locally - but he did get himself into a spot of bother. The January 13, 1917 edition of the Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucester Graphic reported that Frank senior, then aged 47, and a Charles Denning, aged 50, both bargeman working for Healing and Sons were charged with stealing from the Healing's Mill steam barge Despatch at the docks in Gloucester, one sack of sharps and four bags of flour to the value of 5 pounds 18 shillings and 9 pence. It was a somewhat bizarre case with a Sergeant Major in the Army Service Corps, William Woodyatt, being charged with receiving the goods. "All the prisoners pleaded guilty" and all three "expressed their sorrow and appealed for leniency". This must have been something out of character as both Denning and Gregory received good character statements from their employer Healing Mills and also from a Tewkesbury policeman who attested he had known them for seven years. After some time in prison on remand, Gregory and Denning were bound over and released.

"I cannot feel that we in this island are in any degree responsible for the wave of madness which has swept the mind of Christendom... Everything is ready as it has never been before. And we are awake to the tips of our fingers. But war is the Unknown and the Unexpected! God guard us and our long accumulated inheritance."

Winston Churchill writing privately to his wife, 28th July 1914

"Little did I dream, England, that you bore me
Under the Cotswold Hills beside the water meadows,
To do you dreadful service, here, beyond your borders
And your enfolding seas."

Ivor Gurney, from the poem Strange Service written in July 1916 whilst serving with the 2/5 Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment at the start of the Battle of the Somme.

CHAPTER FOUR
Righteousness Against Might
The First World War

The security of the days of the Tewkesbury YMCA and young men finding their feet in an advancing world was to be shattered by the arrival of the First World War. There are different ways of looking at this war. One way is to think of the geopolitics, its global reach, and its consequences for civilisation. Churchill, in the quotation opposite, prophesises the old order ("Christendom" or Europe) exploded by its confrontation with the forces of modernity. The implications are calamitous, as T.S. Eliot later alluded to in The Wasteland with his "London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down".

Another side of the story, captured by Ivor Gurney's poem is one in which *ordinary folk* were wrenched from the peaceful Cotswold Hills to fight as soldiers in this war; to do this 'dreadful service'. Gurney places the personal loss of innocence, and a sense of betrayal, centre stage.

We cannot know exactly how the Knights felt. The only written evidence we have of the actual thoughts of the Knight family at the time is in the postcards sent, and these reveal little. All correspondence was censored, so conversations are benign and the last thing anyone would have wanted to do would have been to instil any more fear or doubt in those waiting for news at home.

However, from the opening quotation in this book, when Frank talks of the things "worth dying for", we know that for him, sacrifice for the cause of righteousness was necessary and justified. He didn't let the doubts of people like Gurney lead him to waver from this view and when the Second World War came round, he found it difficult to accept that one of his sons became a conscientious objector.

All four Knight brothers were enthusiastic recruits soon after the British declared war in August 1914. Frank and Harry volunteered as part of Kitchener's 3rd Army, leaving Tewkesbury on September 21 1914, along with 99 other recruits as portrayed by the rather wonderful account set out on the next page which comes from a local paper of the same day (and from which this chapter's title comes). The photo spread shown here from that edition made an important souvenir for family and friends.

101 RECRUITS FROM TEWKESBURY AND DISTRICT

(GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECHO, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21. 1914).

"The third batch of recruits for Lord Kitchener's Army, numbering 101 from Tewkesbury and the surrounding villages, left the borough by the 1.32 p.m. train on Monday for Bristol. Recruits from the villages were conveyed to the Drill-hall in motor-cars lent by Sir Richard Martin and Messrs. A. O. Butler (Twyning) and F. J. Gyngell (Tewkesbury). Previous to departure, the Mayor (Coun. W. U. Hayward) and the Vicar of Tewkesbury (Rev. E. F. Smith) provided the men with refreshments at the Drill-hall, whilst gifts of tobacco were made by Mr. and Mrs. A. F. Turner and Mr. and Mrs. C. C. Moore.

Before leaving the Drill-Hall the Mayor addressed the men, and wished them from all the inhabitants God-speed and the best health and luck (applause). He was sure they would do their duty conscientiously, pleasantly, and well, and be a credit to the old borough of Tewkesbury. They were very much indebted to them for the splendid spirit they had shown by coming forward in such large numbers. He felt they would be amply rewarded when they returned, and each would able say I did my duty when my country needed it (applause, and singing of "For he's a jolly good fellow"). The Vicar wished them speed on their errand on behalf of the honour of Tewkesbury and England. If there ever was a war on behalf of liberty it was the present one. But there were two bigger things they were fighting for: (1) they were going to keep their pledged word (2) they were fighting on behalf of righteousness against might. The men sang a verse of the National Anthem before leaving the Drill-Hall.

Outside they were preceded by the Town Band and a combined bugle band of the Ist and 2nd Tewkesbury Scouts and C.L.B[33]. These Scout Troops and the Twyning Troop led the way to the station. There was a large crowd at the station and a good number en route to give the men a hearty send-off, while the band played patriotic airs.

Before the train steamed out of the station the bugle band sounded the general salute and the Town Band played the National Anthem. "

The 9th Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment that Harry and Frank joined had only recently been formed in Bristol. From Bristol they moved first to Codford St Mary, near Warminster in Wiltshire, where a large training camp had been established. Both Harry and Frank were rapidly promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal. The Tewkesbury Register on 17 October 1914 carried an account by Harry Knight ("one of the Tewkesbury Y.M.C.A. Men Gone To The War") in which he describes this role –

"The Lance-Corporals have to dish out the 'grub', and it is like feeding the lions at the Zoo, for all of us have splendid appetites. Food is generally plentiful. We get a variation now —Drill Musketry — route marches, night attacks etc., and the majority of us enjoy it.[22]"

By November, the Battalion was back in billets in Cheltenham. They stayed in Cheltenham (presumably with easy access to Tredington and Tewkesbury if leave was allowed) until April 1915, when the Battalion moved to Longbridge Deverill back in the Warminster area. For those who had originally thought they would be "home for Christmas", the long periods of training and awaiting deployment must have seemed tedious after the initial excitement of recruitment. Frank and Harry did not land in France until 21 September 1915, a full year to the day that they left on that 1.32 pm train for Bristol.

An early photo of Frank Knight at a training camp - sitting in the centre

Harry Knight

The 9th "Glosters" were destined for Salonika (around the city of Thessaloniki) in Macedonia where British troops were part of an Allied force fighting the Bulgarians and allies in the Balkans. They reached Macedonia in November 1915, travelling via Marseilles.

It is difficult to work out exactly what fighting Frank and Harry were involved in. They are both likely to have been in the Battle of Horseshoe Hill in August 1916. In December 1916, Harry was reported as wounded in the foot and it seems he spent some time back in England around Easter 1917 before being reassigned to the 2/4 Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment for duty in Flanders. Frank would have been involved in the Second Battle of Dorjan in 1917 before returning to England to take up officer training in November 1917.

Frank's platoon in the 9th Glosters - Frank middle row, fifth from the left (location unknown)

The Salonika Theatre is said by some to be one of the most illogical ventures of the 1st World War (although there could be quite some competition for that title). The troops arrived too late and with inadequate force to prevent the fall of Serbia and an unhappy collection of different armies maintained a front with sporadic fighting until 1918.

The infrastructure was poor and the terrain challenging, so much effort was put into building roads and draining swamps. Periods of inactivity led to some troops even growing crops. This, and a widespread view that this wasn't real fighting compared to the western front, led to the use of the disparaging term "the gardeners of Salonika" when referring to the 400,000 odd British soldiers who had the misfortune to be posted here. In reality, it was no easy ride. The Bulgarians held the high ground and had the advantage on shelling. Disease was rampant with endemic dysentery, and with malaria in the stifling hot summers afflicting nearly 40% of the allied troops. Winters were bitterly cold, for which the soldiers were ill-prepared.

Ernie

Ernie was in the Territorials when war was declared so there was no question of "signing up". The three Territorial Battalions of the Gloucestershire Regiment (the 4th, 5th and 6th Battalions) were all on the Western Front by June 1915. Each of these spawned a second Battalion which took on new recruits (the 2/4, which Harry transferred to in 1917, the 2/5 that Ernie transferred to in 1917, and the 2/6). Ernie was in the 1/5, based in Gloucester where he lived. They had just departed for their annual summer camp on the Isle of Wight when war was declared. They were immediately recalled and mobilised for war service, training in Essex until departing Folkestone for Boulogne on 29 March 1915.

By mid-April they were south of Arras doing stints in trenches. By October, in the Sailly aux Bois and Hebuterne area they were enduring daily bombardment. The fighting eased off a bit in January and February, increasing in intensity in the months leading up to the first Battle of the Somme which began in July 1916.

At some stage in July, Ernie (by then a Sergeant) was badly wounded in the left arm which necessitated his repatriation. Two postcards sent home from Buttevant in County Cork, Ireland, suggest that he was, for a while, at the army convalescent camp at nearby Ballyvonare, before returning to Gloucestershire.

He was able to spend some time at home in Gloucester with Elsie and his son, Ernest John, who he had hardly seen as he had been born only 4 weeks before war was declared. He stayed around 8 months in Gloucester until Easter 1917 when he joined the 2/5 Battalion in Flanders.

George

So, what about George? George was clearly eager not to be left out. In May 1915, although still only 15 years old, he enlisted with the Gloucestershire Regiment in Tewkesbury, giving his age as 19. One can only imagine the conversations at Tredington Lodge, if he had indeed told his parents what he was doing. Recruits were not asked to provide proof of age or even proof of their names. The minimum age for volunteers was 18 but under-age enlisting was not uncommon. It is estimated that some 250,000 under-age lads attempted to sign up and many went on to fight. The youngest boy to get to France was discovered to be only 13 years old.

It took around six weeks before George was found out and subsequently discharged on 3 July 1915 "having made a mis-statement of age at enlistment". Not to be deterred, two days later, on 5 July 1915, George enlisted again with the 3rd Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment in East Ham. He was rumbled more quickly this time and was discharged in Gravesend on 30 July under paragraph 392 of the Kings Regulations 1912 section 3a ("not being likely to become an efficient soldier" but in reality, for mis-stating his age). Whilst one attempt might have been overlooked, a second attempt, and with the same regiment, was considered to be serious. However, the Lieutenant Colonel of the 3rd Battalion, writing to the recruiting centre on 15 July, seems to put in a special word for George and a plea for some leniency – maybe he, himself, had a young enthusiastic son too.

> *"He states as his reason for re-enlisting is that he likes soldiering and is keen to go to France, and that he has 3 brothers serving in various Battalions of the Gloucestershire Regiment... In these circumstances and considering his youth, I beg to request that authority may be given for his discharge after he has been cautioned, by me regarding the seriousness of his offence and that he must not again re-enlist until he is of the proper age."*

August 1917

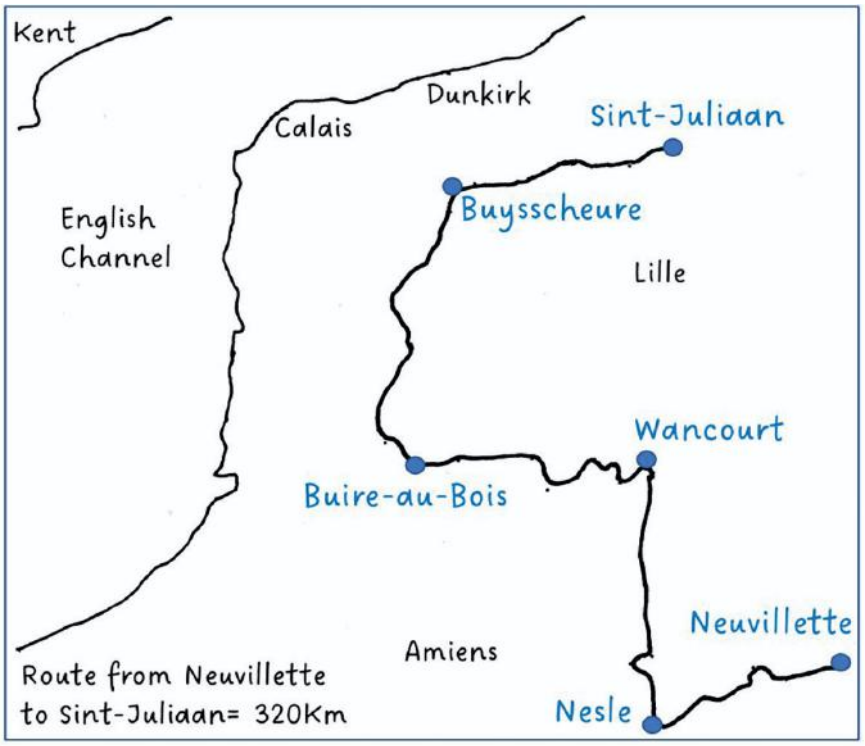
The summer of 1917 once again found two Knight brothers in the same theatre of war – this time Harry and Ernie. The 2/4 and 2/5 Battalions of the Gloucestershire regiment were part of the forces engaged in the Third Battle of Ypres in Flanders, which came to be known as the Battle of Passchendaele. These hostilities lasted from July to November and involved a major attempt to gain control of the ridges to the south and east of Ypres. Both Harry and Ernie went to Flanders around April – Ernie joining the 2/5 Gloucestershire after his period of convalescence and Harry joining the 2/4 Gloucestershire after his wounding in Salonika.

This is not the place to delve into the detail of this campaign or the controversy that has surrounded it since. To give some flavour of some of the criticism, David Lloyd George, who, as Prime Minister at the time was opposed to it, declared in 1938 that "Passchendaele was indeed one of the greatest disasters of the war. No soldier of any intelligence now defends this senseless campaign."

In the event, Ernie and Harry were just two of the 325,000 allied troops and 260,000 Germans who were killed in the five months of fighting. The Allies gained just 5 miles of ground. In 1918, in order to organise their defence against the German Spring Offensive, the British abandoned the Passchendaele ridge without firing a shot.

Ypres was in a bulge in the western front known as the Salient, with German forces on three sides and which was held, fairly precariously by British troops. Going eastwards beyond the British front line, was a large low plain descending down to a stream, the River Steenbeeke. On the other

side of the river, the land rose to the Passchendaele Ridge, behind which German gunners had a clear view across to Ypres. The plain was heavily fortified by the Germans with concrete structures in places. Any drainage on the plain had been destroyed in the fighting and the land had become a mud bath.



The 320 Km trek for the Gloucestershire 2/5 Battalion, three quarters of which was on foot

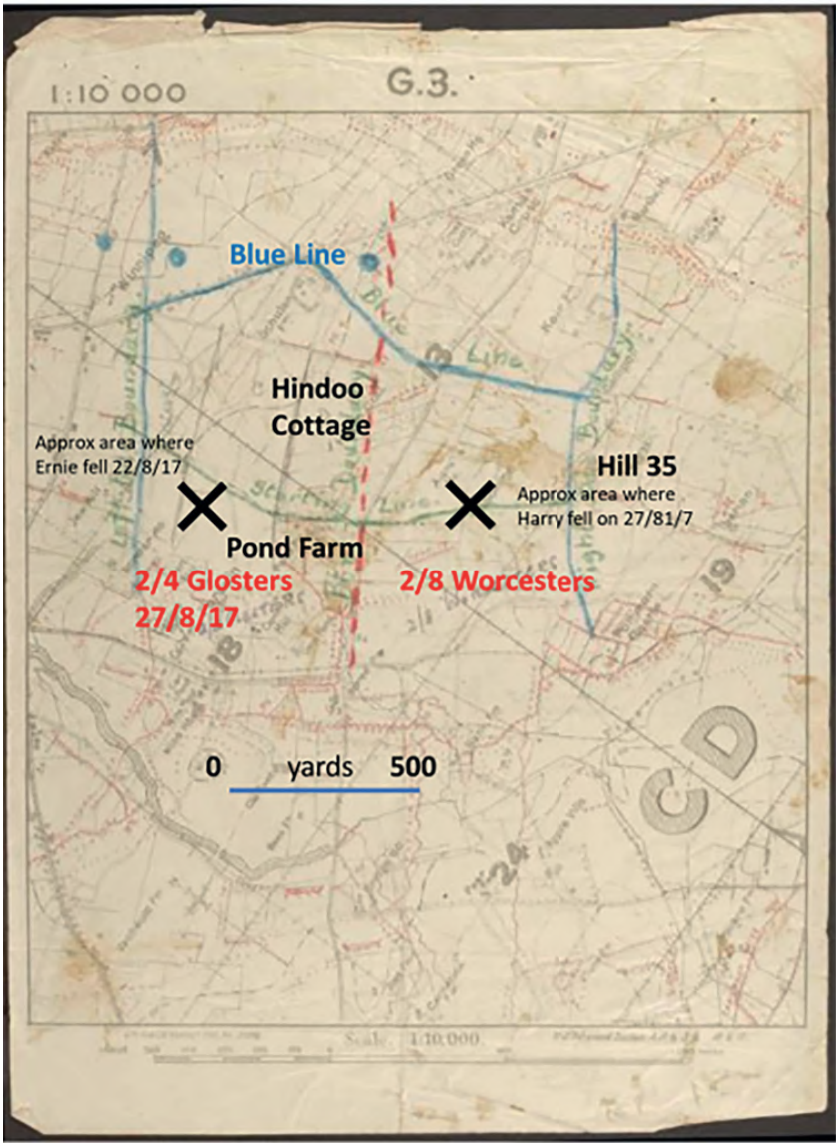
Between May and August, the 2/5 Battalion had travelled well over 320 km, from east of Amiens up to an area near the border town of Buyssheure by the end of July and then, in the final push via Watou, to the St Julien area just outside Ypres. War diaries capture some of the deprivation and hardship, the constant changing of billets, the lack of washing facilities. Little is mentioned of the poor and inadequate food but a lot about the marching - three quarters of this 320km travelled had been on foot. The men must have been exhausted - "*Bent double , like old beggars under sacks*"as Wilfred Owen described it in *Dulce et Decorum Est* Until August, the Battalion had been marching and training and at Buire à Bois where they were based for a while, platoon competitions were held. Despite a gruelling, exhausting existence, it was the calm before the fighting began.

On 22 August at 3 am, the Glosters were in support of the 2/4 Oxfordshire and the 2/1 Buckinghamshire Regiments[23]. An attack was launched on Pond Farm, a concrete German fortress with five machine guns which had resisted previous attacks. It is difficult to tell from published accounts and war diaries, exactly what happened or where Ernie was. Fighting continued:

> "*At 12 noon, two platoons attacked it after a hurricane bombardment. Two platoons from C Company were then sent up and these, together with D Company, stormed the concrete fortress with great dash killing or capturing the entire garrison. The losses were heavy*" [24].

During the night a German counter-attack recaptured Pond Farm. The following day it was "easily recaptured" by the British. Five days later, Harry, who was acting Corporal by this time, was with the 2/4 Glosters in the same vicinity. Pond Farm was now under British possession with action being taken only a few hundred metres to the north and east[25].

> *"The attacks on 27 August were minor operations which were costly and inconclusive, so these operations were halted amidst tempestuous weather. The battalion took part in an attack, alongside the 2/8th Worcesters to capture part of the German third line. Unfortunately the attack was unsuccessful, according to the Battalion War Diary: 'the failure to reach the objectives was chiefly due the mud and to the men having to lie in water for 12 hours prior to the attack".*[26]



On this map taken from the 2/4 War Diary, with details superimposed, are shown the likely places where the brothers were killed - probably only a few hundred metres apart.

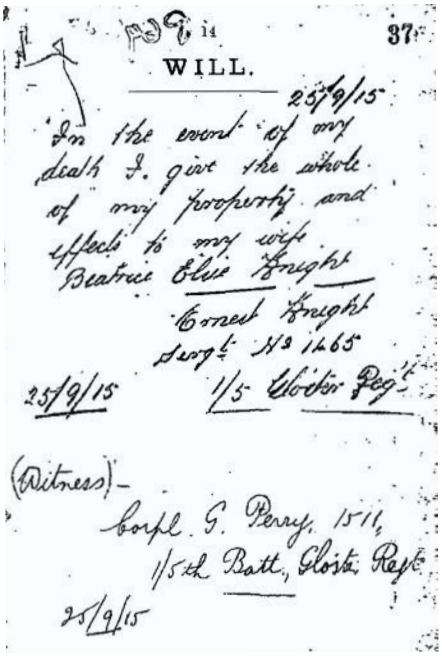
It is moving to see the two obituaries on the same page of the Gloucestershire Echo with the comment, "Much sympathy is felt for Mr and Mrs Knight whose double trouble has come within the short space of a few days". Ernie, of course, left Elsie and their son Ernest John. We learn that Harry left a fiancée, a Miss MacDonald. It has not been possible to identify who she was and whether she was from Tewkesbury.

Neither body was identified for burial. They are commemorated along with 35,000 others at Tyne Cot, Belgium. Harry features on the Tewkesbury Congregational Church board (now located in the Methodist Church) and was added to the Tewkesbury War Memorial only in 2018 on the centenary. Ernie does not seem to appear on any memorial. Bizarrely, Frank who survived the war, is on the roll of honour at St John Baptist Church in Tredington.

There was an important convention for letters to be sent home at the earliest opportunity to those bereaved. This was immensely important for those at home and also a significant act for those writing, trying to make sense of the appalling loss they were all facing. How much store one can set by what was written, is another matter. They were hardly likely to write anything that wasn't complimentary or anything contrary to the sentiments of Ernie's Captain's "*we could ill afford to lose him*". As a result, the comments can seem anodyne.

The Lieutenant of Harry's platoon wrote of him being "one of his best gunners". The Chaplain writing to Elsie reported that Ernie "*was a good soldier and well-liked by his comrades and it may bring some consolation to know that he died bravely fighting for his country*". More interestingly

though, a letter from a Corporal writing on behalf of Ernie's platoon said "*Sgt Knight set his men a splendid example. At the time of his death, he was acting Company Sergeant Major but on hearing that his platoon had some stiff work to do, he at once obtained permission to take charge of the men*"[27]. News reports of the brothers' deaths indicated that by this time George was serving. No records of his war experiences have been located[28]. His daughter, Audrey, recalls him talking of his being wounded but being lucky that it missed his forehead.



WILL.

25/9/15

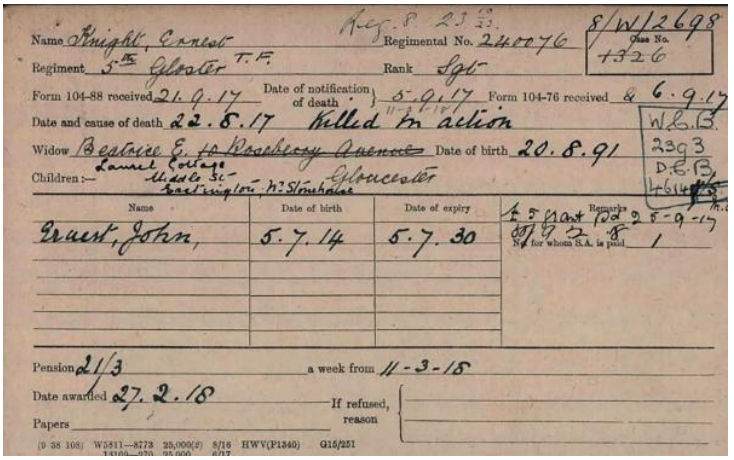
In the event of my death I give the whole of my property and effects to my wife Beatrice Elsie Knight

Ernest Knight
Sergt No 1465
1/5 Glosters Regt

25/9/15

(Witness)-
Corpl G. Perry, 1511,
1/5th Batt, Glosts. Regt.
25/9/15

Ernie's will written after he had had an early taste of fighting.



Name Knight, Ernest Regimental No. 240076 Class No. 8/W/2698 +326
Regiment 5th Gloster T.F. Rank Sgt
Form 104-88 received 21.9.17 Date of notification of death 5.9.17 Form 104-76 received & 6.9.17
Date and cause of death 22.8.17 Killed in action
Widow Beatrice E. 10 Rosebery Avenue Date of birth 20.8.91
Children:- Laurel Cottage Middle St Tredington Nr Stroudwater Gloucester

Name	Date of birth	Date of expiry	Remarks
Ernest, John,	5.7.14	5.7.30	1 5 past Pd 2 8-9-17

No. for whom S.A. is paid 1

Pension 21/3 a week from 11-3-18
Date awarded 27.2.18 If refused, reason
Papers

W2611—8273 25,000(2) 8/16 HWV(P1340) G15/251

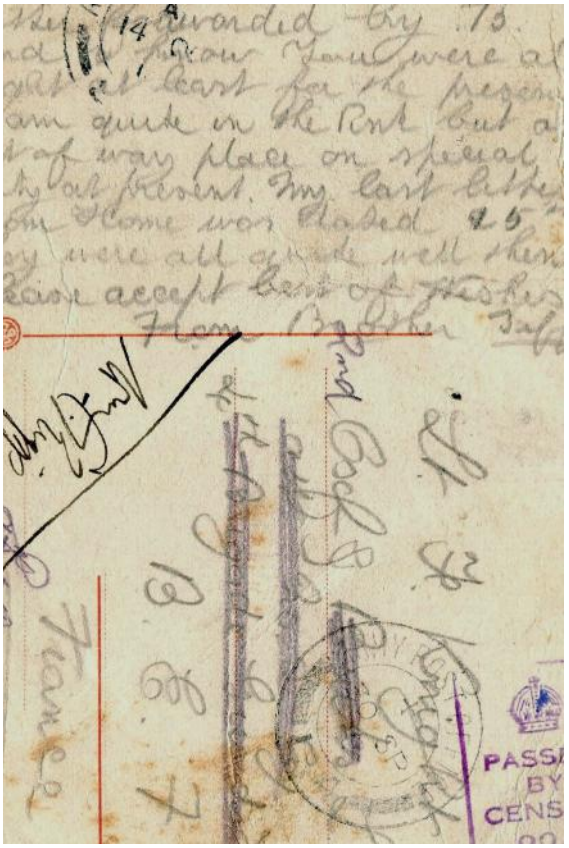
Details of Elsie's weekly war pension of 21 shillings and 3 pence

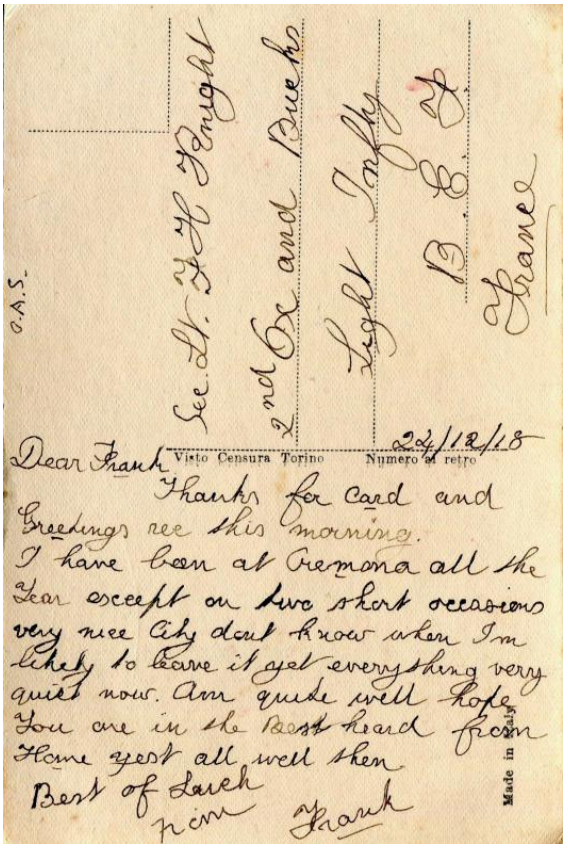
Frank 1917-18

Frank progressed through the ranks quite quickly and was recommended for officer training. He returned to England in November 1917 with a view to starting training. The family had taken the decision not to tell him about the deaths of his brothers whilst he was away, a step that left him feeling very bitter when he arrived back to the news.

Frank and Blanche were married at the Wesleyan Chapel in Tewkesbury on 23 December 1917 witnessed by George Gregory, Blanche's uncle and an old acquaintance of Frank Knight, and the first wife of Frank Gregory who was also called Blanche.

Frank Gregory had married Blanche Fletcher Macdonald in 1915. He enlisted in 1918 and was posted to Italy where, for the most part, he was stationed in and around Cremona. In the post card collection there are several cards sent from Frank Gregory to his sister Blanche signed with his nickname "Brother Tiff". One, addressed "Dear Brother", shows a real sense of affection to his new in-law Frank Knight".

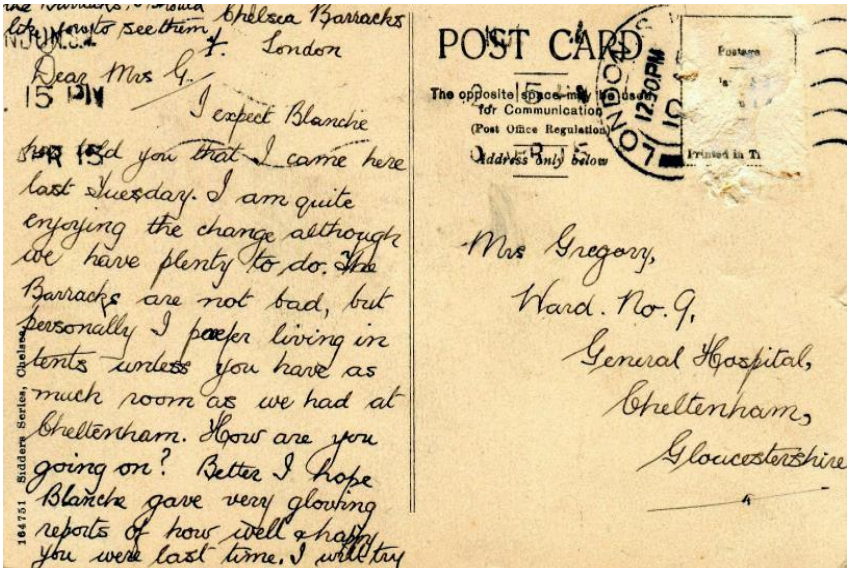


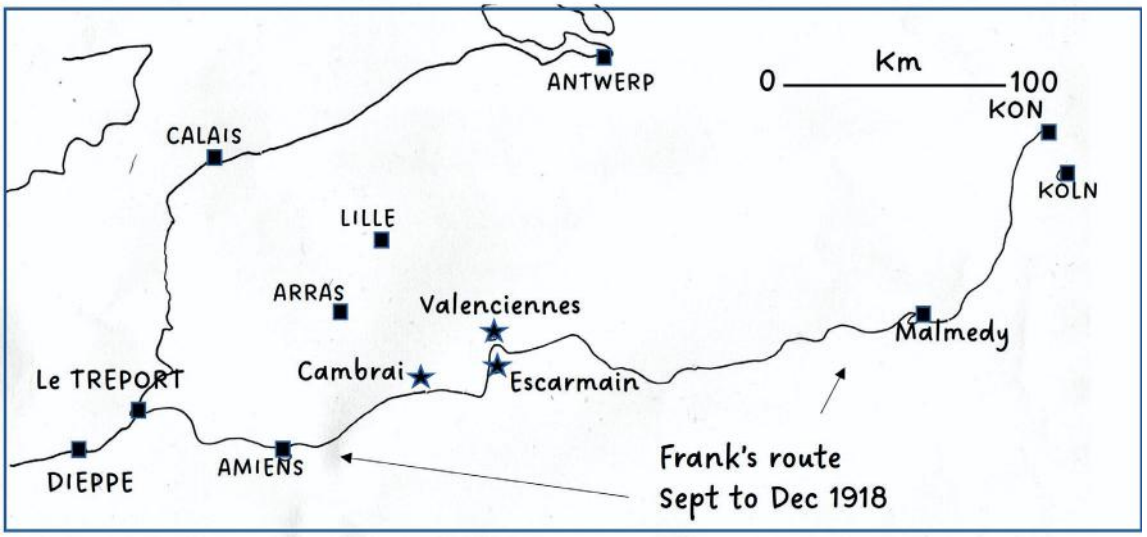


Frank Knight's officer training took place over 4-5 months mainly at Catterick, North Yorkshire, although at one point he was at Chelsea Barracks. Here he is writing from Chelsea to his new mother-in-law who was in hospital at the time.

On finishing officer training, Frank joined the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry on a short-term commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in June 1918.

Any wording that could reveal a location on postcards was censored, but it is easy to see from two cards to Blanche that he landed in Dieppe around 17th September 1918 and had moved up the coast to Le Treport by 29 September.





Frank's route September to December 1918

This suggests that Frank caught only the end of the Hundred Days Offensive which ran from August to November, starting with the Battle of Amiens in which the Ox and Bucks played an important part. This offensive, aided by revolution in Germany, led to the Armistice on 11 November 1918.

Frank may not have caught up with the Ox and Bucks in time to have participated in the Battle of Cambrai (8-10 October) but would have been involved in the last major battle the regiment fought at Escarmain (23 October) as part of the Battle of the Selle. The regiment continued to be involved in skirmishes and mopping up until the armistice. By that time, they were at St.Pol, near Valenciennes.

After the end of the war, the Ox and Bucks then became part of the army of occupation crossing over into Germany from Malmedy in Belgium in December and taking up a base at Zons outside Koln.

Company football team during the occupation - Frank in centre

Strange Hells - the aftermath

Numerous men from Tewkesbury were killed in the war leaving behind bereaved families and devastated communities. There are some 154 listed on the town memorial, which does not include all those on memorials in surrounding villages. Amongst acquaintances were Donald Priestley, killed in October 1917 at Passchendaele, and his younger brother Stanley who was killed in July 1916 in the Battle of the Somme. In the end, it is difficult to properly appreciate the effects that the War would have had on the surviving members of the Knight family. Many veterans did not talk about the First World War. And when people have suffered such awful loss, it can be difficult to confront the possible pointlessness of it all.

At the beginning of this chapter, we saw the view from the Gloucestershire poet Ivor Gurney. Gurney was a fellow soldier with Ernie in the 2/5 Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment. The two must have known of each other. Gurney wrote about the various effects of the First World War on its veterans as we can see in the poem below. Frank Knight escaped the economic and social degradation of some veterans that Gurney predicted "*walking town to town sore in borrowed tatterns*". However, it is likely that many in the trenches or any other part of the battlefield, would have suffered from what, today, would be defined as post-traumatic stress disorder. None could have escaped the "*strange Hells within the minds War made*" however much they had to keep from sight their pain.

Strange Hells by Ivor Gurney --

There are strange hells within the minds war made
Not so often, not so humiliating afraid
As one would have expected – the racket and fear guns made.
One hell the Gloucester soldiers they quite put out;
Their first bombardment, when in combined black shout
Of fury, guns aligned, they ducked low their heads
And sang with diaphragms fixed beyond all dreads,
That tin and stretched-wire tinkle, that blither of tune;
"Apres la guerre fini" till hell all had come down,
Twelve-inch, six-inch, and eighteen pounders hammering hell's thunders.
Where are they now on state-doles, or showing shop patterns
Or walking town to town sore in borrowed tatterns
Or begged. Some civic routine one never learns.
The heart burns – but has to keep out of the face how heart burns.

In the closing months of Frank's life, he recalled an incident which he had shared with his children long before, but which had never left him. The details were, by then, too vague to tie down or to relate to anything in a war diary but it involved men under his command, who continued to shoot at enemy soldiers who were clearly surrendering. For Frank, it was an unforgivable act, which he had been unable to stop and unable to ever forget.

Barton Street, Tewkesbury today - the buildings are more or less the same, if nothing else is

CHAPTER FIVE
Getting Established

This chapter brings together the period from the end of the WW1 to the end of the 1940s for the Knights. This is a period when the family became established in all sorts of ways, and the family we are directly descended from was formed. Both Blanche and Frank established positions in Tewkesbury life that formed the foundation for the "Civic Years" that were to follow. As key family members died, it was a changing of the guard, and the world moved relentlessly on.

To begin with, this was a period in which Britain was a nation either trying to blank out, or cope with, the enormity of 1914-18 and the losses that could never be forgotten. There was some economic recovery in the twenties, only for things to collapse again in the Great Depression of the 1930s.

After Frank was demobbed and returned to Tewkesbury in 1919, and when Blanche was expecting, they set up home in the dwelling above Boughton's shop at 84 Barton Street. This is the maisonette which today is above Gio's Barbers. Boughton's shop also occupied No 83 Barton Street which is currently Tilley's Tea Rooms.

83 and 84 Barton Street today. The Knights lived in the maisonette above Gio's Barbers. It would have looked very similar to the advert for Boughton's shop in Chapter 2

About the same time, Frank went into partnership with Boughton and in the local directory the firm became known as *Boughton and Knight*. The building was owned by Boughton and he and his family had lived in these rooms themselves. It is a very old building; in the details for its Grade 2 listing, Historic England describe a "*late 18th century or early 19th century front on a 17th century or earlier fabric and rear wing*", The accommodation comprised 4 rooms on the 1st floor, two rooms on the floor above and on the ground floor behind the shop and its office were an external toilet and wash house. This was Frank and Blanche's home until the late 1920s and three of the children were born here – Philip in early 1920, Barbara in 1921 and Donald in 1923.

These photos below show Philip at 4 months with Blanche and Philip and Barbara in 1922.

The houses on the Barton Street front were more substantial than the ones behind. A number of alleys led from Barton Street down to the Swilgate stream, of which Fletcher's, Hughes, Fish and Yarnell's Alleys can still be seen today. Nowadays, the alleys of Tewkesbury are attractive and picturesque and can be explored using the *Alleycats* app. But historically their crowded and slum conditions were in contrast to the buildings that fronted the main streets. The Knights had mains water and benefited from gas and later, electricity.

Progressing from shop hand to partner did not necessarily bring great returns, and money continued to be tight throughout the twenties as Frank bought into the business. In 1925, Boughton appointed Frank to the part time post of Assistant Secretary of the Tewkesbury Building Society which brought a small additional income. In reality, Frank's interest in the business had started to wane.

Walter Thomas Boughton died in 1933 at the age of 79. Received wisdom in the family was that Frank had somehow felt cheated in the partnership and this became apparent on Boughton's death. What was behind this is difficult to work out. Boughton died intestate so this may have complicated matters. On Boughton's death, Frank was offered the role of Secretary of the Building Society which was more of a full time role and he closed the outfitting business down.

Whatever bad taste the partnership had left, Boughton's patronage of Frank had provided him, an outsider to Tewkesbury, with an important step up in the Town and he must have felt indebted to him for that. Frank continued on that trajectory, becoming a magistrate in 1937 (and continuing until 1968 serving as deputy chairman and then Chairman of the Bench). He was first elected to the Borough Council in 1938.

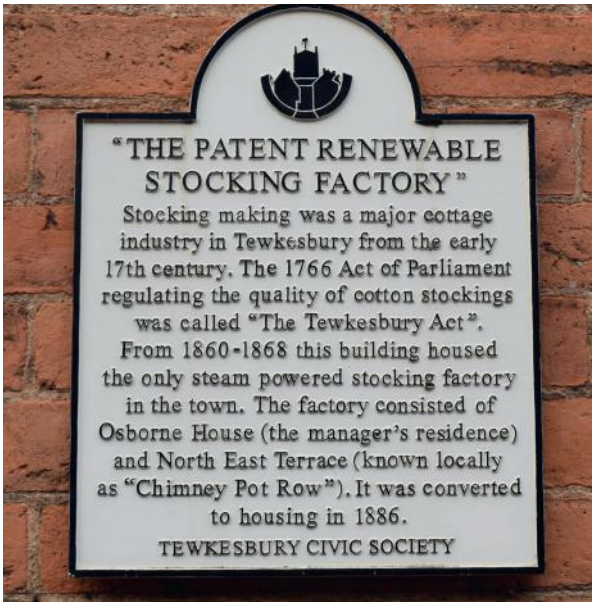
Osborne House

With the expectation of a fourth child, more space was required and the family moved to Osborne House, 14, East Street, just north of Barton Street, in time for David to be born there in October 1928.

East Street was an old industrial road with a number of industrial buildings, and Osborne House had been the house for the manager of an adjoining factory complex. In the latter part of the 19th century, the whole site had been converted to housing.

Industrial blocks on East Street - the complex adjoining Osborne House on the right

Originally, the site had housed a shoe works before it had become The Patent Renewable Stocking Factory. By coincidence, the shoe maker was one William Knight – no relation at all, but an émigré from Pennsylvania.



History of the Patent Renewable Stocking Factory adjoining Osborne House, East Street

The picture below shows Osborne House today - it is the cream building attached to the old factory complex behind and is referred to as No 14 East Street. In their Grade II listing for Osborne House, Historic England also include Nos 15 and 16 which open onto the road. Just to confuse things further, the modern house to the left of the photo, which adjoins a building on the site of the old East Street Smithy, and which has been built in the front garden of the Knights' home, today calls itself Osborne House

The Knights' house had a reasonable sized front garden as well as well as a small back yard.

The Knight's house was the cream painted building

In this photo of Donald, Philip and David (1937) you can see the roof of the front door and the front bay which are still clearly visible today from the road.

The floor plan from a 2003 planning application shows roughly what the ground floor layout would have been like in the 1930s. Stairs went down to a cellar and to four bedrooms above. It was a substantial house for the times and a big

step up from Barton Street. With the move to this house, the family had gained some status and financially things became easier as the Building Society business expanded and Frank earned additional income from some part time work from the Town Council.

Education

The children attended the Junior and Senior Tewkesbury Council elementary schools – up to 9 years of age pupils attended a school in Barton Road; older pupils, a school in Chance Street where there is still a school today. The schools were primitive by today's standards. During the First World War, classes had been increased to between 40 - 70 pupils, and they were still large by the time the Knight children started attending. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Knight home was a place for learning which significantly improved the prospects for the four children, as the Tewkesbury Register and Gazette 3 June 1939 reported:


TEWKESBURY BOY'S SUCCESS

Wins Scholarship to Public School

"*Councillor F. H. Knight. J.P., and Mrs. Knight of East-Street, Tewkesbury, learned on Wednesday morning that their youngest son, David, had been successful in obtaining a scholarship to Rendcomb College near Cirencester. This college is classed as a public school and Master David's feat is greater by reason of the fact that this is the first time that this scholarship has been gained by a Tewkesbury boy. Only four of these scholarships are available each year for boys attending elementary schools in Gloucestershire. David, who will not be eleven years of age until October, is attending the Tewkesbury Senior Council School, and very naturally the headmaster. Mr. A. E. Leathern, A.C.P., and the masters and mistresses are very elated at the honour which David has brought to this school. Master Knight will proceed to Rendcomb College after the summer vacation. In gaining a scholarship, David has followed the footsteps of his brothers and sister. Both Philip and Donald gained scholarships to the Tewkesbury Grammar School and their sister secured a scholarship to the Tewkesbury High School for Girls. Recently Philip distinguished himself by gaining a scholarship to University College, London where he is studying for a science degree. Councillor and Mrs. Knight have therefore just reason for being proud of their children*"

Warwick House, Tewkesbury High School for Girls - Barbara front row, fourth from the left.

David at the piano

Music

Blanche was a keen singer and a member of the Tewkesbury Choral Society but Frank was less musical. The children had access to a piano and David became particularly proficient. Both Philip and David played the organ in the Congregational Church, and for weddings and funerals elsewhere, which would have earned them some pocket money.

Music recitals were noted with some enthusiasm in the local press. The Cheltenham Chronicle for 9 July 1932 reported that Master Philip Knight, then aged 11, had given two recitals at the Tewkesbury Brotherhood which were much appreciated. On a later occasion at the weekly Brotherhood meeting in 1938, Philip gave two "*pianoforte solos*" - "Dreaming" by Schumann and "A Melody" by Engelmann. It was certainly a relief to know that at one funeral Philip had played "*appropriate music*". At the Tewkesbury Public Assistance Institution, the staff and inmates sung Christmas carols and hymns with "*much heartiness*" to Philip's accompaniment.

Much social life centred around the church: Barbara was a keen member of the Tewkesbury Sisterhood and at a church fund raising event in 1937, the local paper reported that Donald was responsible for competitions and Philip displayed a hitherto unknown talent by providing "*character reading from the hand*". David was reported as being awarded a book prize for his efforts in collecting pennies for the mission ships in the South Seas.

Life was not as grim as it might sound. Although sport was not a family obsession, they did many of the things that other children did. They had bikes and got out - it is generally flat country and they ventured quite far - and there was walking on Bredon Hill and in the Malverns. There were some holiday trips as well; Barry Island in South Wales was their destination for more than one holiday.

Gladiator re-enactment at the High School for Girls - Barbara on the left

On holiday at Barry Island

There was the usual rough and tumble of family life with four children. In later years, Barbara would comment that having three brothers, and then the misfortune of having three sons, had meant her life had been one of perpetual teasing. How serious this was in the 1930s is not exactly clear. She recounted a tale, which seems quite mild compared to the treatment she may have received from her own children, in which she had gone through a whole day at church with a note pinned to her back inviting all to "Please kick me".

Don, David and Philip c 1938

David and Blanche

Philip at Osborn House

Blanche and Frank at Osborne House - complete with spectacular wall paper

However, home life was generally strict and disciplined. Frank did not suffer fools gladly and, as Frank and Blanche built their position in public life, there were expectations of "setting a good example". Nevertheless, there was a sense of true affection for Frank and he was always referred to, by the children and their families, as "Pop". Stern-looking photos belied a man who had a lively, if dry, wit and, beneath the surface, a genuine warmth. However, as others have since observed, he was better with younger children than when they were older.

The Knight children were all conscious of the limitations of small-town Tewkesbury. Barbara would complain later of the "ridiculous" separation by sex for the grammar students into two very small schools and the restricted opportunities this meant, particularly for the girls. Her sights had been set, from an early age, on travelling far afield. Barbara went on to study at Bristol University in 1940. Donald went on to higher education after war service and David was awarded a Stapleton Scholarship to Exeter College, Oxford in 1947, taking up his studies after National Service. Philip's degree course was interrupted by the war. As a conscientious objector, he was not allowed to proceed with the degree and was unable to finish it until the war had ended. He received his Masters of Science in crystallography from the University of London in 1949, by which time he was a lecturer in Physics at the Northern Polytechnic.

No. 9 Rope Walk

David, Blanche, Frank and Barbara outside Rope Walk

In the 1940s, probably after the end of the war, the family moved from Osborne House to No 9 Rope Walk about 5 minutes' walk away. This was a fairly substantial semi-detached house opposite the Chance Street School, with a larger rear garden.

Understanding Frank and Blanche

Frank and Blanche's increased public activity coincided with the three older children moving on and David spending all term away from home at Rendcomb. As the family matured and Frank and Blanche became established in the community, Frank's own thinking developed.

Frank had a passion for education. As someone who had had to leave school aged twelve, he envied those who in later years would have the chance to go further and was impatient with those

who turned down, or wasted, opportunities. In effect, he was largely self-taught. The move from Tredington to Barton Street traded the oil lamp for the gas lamp and then the electric bulb so reading in the evenings became a more realistic proposition. Both Blanche and Frank were avid readers. Frank could quote Shakespeare and Dickens liberally, as well as the great poets. A love of literature and history, his fascination for people as characters, coupled with a strong affection for Tewkesbury, led naturally to his later friendship with the Tewkesbury author and conservationist John Moore and his wife Lucile. Somehow, Frank obtained sufficient qualifications to be able to take up the part-time role of Town Treasurer (from April 1935 to November 1938) and to complete the necessary exams to become an Associate of the Building Societies Institute in 1949 and a Fellow in 1955.

As he became more politically involved, Frank found ways of expressing his views in addition to speaking from the pulpit as a lay preacher. We can get a glimpse of some of his thinking from a speech that was reported in detail.

It was March 1939, on the eve of the Second World War, and Frank, who had just been elected President of the Tewkesbury and District Free Church Council, gave the annual presidential address in the Methodist Schoolroom. Frank had an erudite, if dense, style. His words were chosen with much thought and sentences carefully constructed; this from a man who had left school at 12.

Reproduced in full in the Tewkesbury Register and Gazette on Saturday 18 March 1939, under the headline "*DICTATORSHIP IN BRITAIN Creeping in by Backstairs Route*," the speech was nominally trying to set out what the role of the Free Church Council should be - something more than "*strong resolutions with weak cheers*".

The speech captures the fears and reality of the times, but also reflects much of Frank's philosophy of life and what mattered to him. Frighteningly, perhaps, the speech holds true for today. It is too long to include in full here, but there are some sections that are well worth citing. Essentially his speech calls for efforts to adapt to meet the spirit of the age and emphasises the need for a wider diffusion of knowledge. There is a religious part too, arguing that loyalty to Christ should not be confused with loyalty to tradition, which at times may need repudiating. Whilst, certainly in Frank's older life, his children may have considered him to be somewhat rigid and stubborn, this isn't the impression gained here when he argued that

> *"There are few problems that we can approach in the same manner that our fathers approached them".*

He appeals against apathy in the face of the dire threats he saw -

> *".... make no mistake about it, dictatorship is not confined to Germany and Italy. It is creeping into the life of the British people by many a backstairs route and watchfulness will have to be exercised if we are to avoid that deplorable state in which we shall be expected to voice the opinions of a certain section of the community or remain silent. ...."*

And as a man of action there was a practical way forward that linked liberty with social justice -

> *"The Free Church Council exists to make our common witness more effective, and vital questions which affect the well-being of our fellows must always be matters of grave concern to us. ...Our influence must always be on the side of legislation for safeguarding the liberties of people, for dealing with such evils as malnutrition and employment and for promoting the cause of peace. And our support must be positive and definite."*

Frank then goes on to reassert his belief in education which he sees as a means and the opportunity for progress. This was before the 1944 Act, the raising of the school leaving age to 15 and free secondary education for all.

> *"We rightly condemn conditions which deny to children proper food and nourishment. It is a condition almost equally evil which denies complete and unlimited education. It is not merely evil, it is also very short-sighted. The intelligent youth of any country is that country's greatest asset and we shall never reap full benefit from our educational system until we have appreciated that very elementary truth. Elementary education will not be at its best until it is entirely unsectarian. Secondary education will not be at its best until It is entirely free and accessible to every intelligent boy and girl. Great strides have been taken in that direction, but there are yet obstacles to be removed ere we can truly claim that there is equality of opportunity".*

And education and knowledge lead to wisdom and challenge:

> *"That is the best thing that could possibly happen in most matters of public concern—that every aspect of the case should be ventilated. It is only by complete knowledge that we can enter into understanding of any subject. It is most necessary that we should have a clear view upon such subjects as education, unemployment, peace and the various forms of government with which the world is afflicted. These are matters which vitally affect the present well-being of the people and probably the future well-being of the world."*

In the years of civic life that followed, he may not have relished that challenge in the same way. For instance, one news report described how he resisted, unsuccessfully, the opening of the Housing Committee to the press and public, something which today would be without question.

The family and the Second World War

Despite his own experiences of the horrors of war, and the devastation it had caused his family, he was in no doubt of the need to enter into conflict again with Germany. Frank's upbringing of his children had instilled in them their own sense of social justice, principle and conscience but when Philip decided that he had to become a conscientious objector, Frank found this very difficult to accept, although, in time he came to respect the decision, if not agree with it.

Philip conducting choir and orchestra in the bombed ruins of Boulevard Congregational Church, Weston-Super-Mare June/July 1942

Blanche, Frank and Kathleen

Undeterred and greatly supported by Kathleen Coney[29], (whom he married in 1942), Philip persisted. The couple were sent to Weston-Super-Mare where Philip was engaged in hard labour and where Kathleen taught for the duration of the war.

Barbara spent the first few years of the war at university in Bristol graduating in July 1943 and

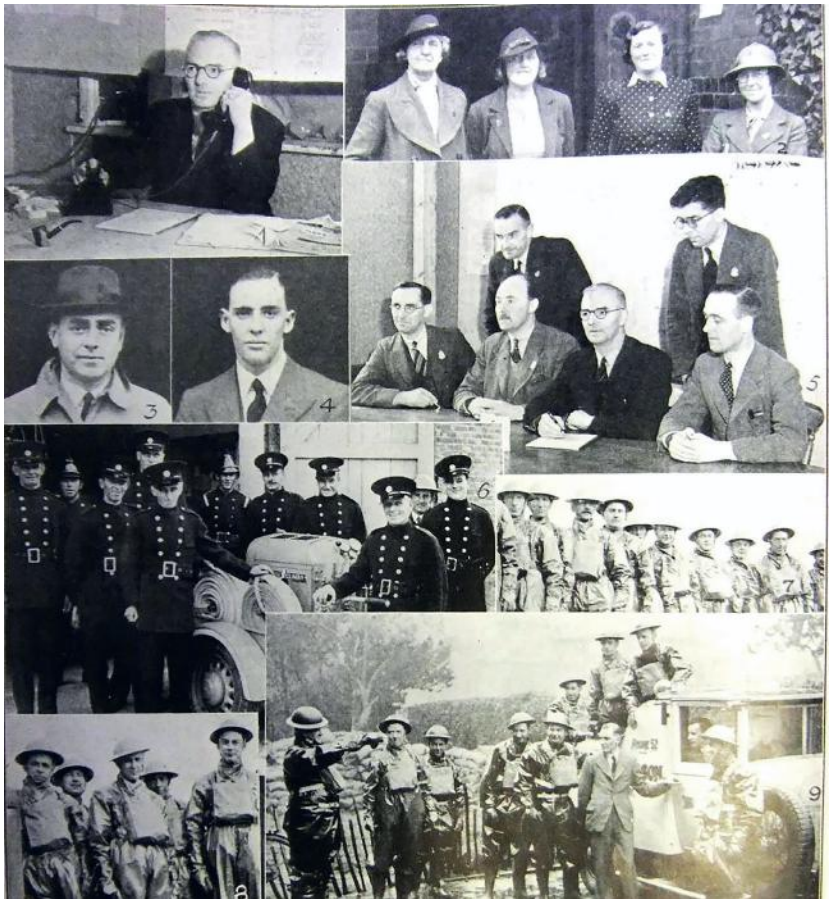
truncating her teacher training year so as to start teaching in Bradford on Avon as teachers were in such short supply.

Don 1942

David and Blanche, 1947

Barbara 1948

Don enlisted with the RAF in Weston-Super-Mare in 1942. He then spent a period of time training to be a navigator in Canada where much of the RAF training took place. He saw active service on Lancaster bombers from 1944 onwards. He remained in the RAF at the end of the War and was involved in the Berlin Air Lift in 1948. Family members report how he was frequently air sick and hated heights and also how he battled for years with his conscience over the devastation that the bombing raids had left.



David was still at school during the war. He did his National Service in the RAF from 1947 to 1949 in Singapore, and in August 1948 he met up for a day with Barbara who was by then en route to Hong Kong on the SS Carthage.

In later years, Frank was a fan of "Dad's Army". This photo spread from the Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucestershire Graphic, 21 October 1939, featuring the Air Raid Patrol (ARP) preparations for Tewkesbury could have been taken from the stills of any episode. Frank, a member of the Emergency Committee, is in the photo second down on the right on the far left.

Wartime life in Tewkesbury struggled on; Frank and Blanche endured the hardships that all ordinary folk faced. Barbara reserved her sugar rations to sustain her father's sweet tooth and the many spoonfuls that laced his tea. During the war, Frank was also Chair of the Borough Food Control Committee and Blanche was the organiser of the Free Churches Soldiers Club for four years.

Eastington - Laurel Cottage in Middle Street (also known as Suffolk Road) is marked by the arrow

CHAPTER SIX
Other Lives

The 1920s finally brought retirement for Thomas and Emma Knight. In 1921, they were still at Tredington Lodge with George, who was by then, working as a blacksmith for T.T. Whiteley in Tewkesbury. Up to 1923, Thomas was still working as a labourer for the Midland Railway and Emma was the Tredington Crossing gatekeeper.

Eastington and the Knights

When Thomas wrote his will in 1920, he mentioned as part of his estate, the "*cottages in Middle Street, Eastington*". Thomas and Emma were not wealthy people. It is possible that Emma had received a small inheritance when her mother died, but there is no record of probate to verify this. Perhaps they were just very careful and, of course the same value was not given to houses in those days as it is today. They were clearly preparing for retirement and presumably had become familiar with Eastington through the connection with Ernie's wife, Elsie.

We can assume that one of the cottages was Laurel Cottage where Elsie had moved to after Ernie's death and where her second son, Lesley Hooper Knight, was born 11 months after Ernie was killed. George joined Elsie and her two boys at Laurel Cottage in 1922 and established the Forge, just down the lane at the other cottage owned by Thomas.

Laurel Cottage, Middle Street, Eastington (also known as Suffolk Rd)

The Old Forge, Middle Street, Eastington

By 1924, Thomas and Emma had retired and moved to Laurel Cottage and Elsie had moved elsewhere in Middle Street. George continued to live at Laurel Cottage with his parents until he married Gertrude Emily Marling, who was also a native of Middle Street, in January 1929. It was some time before the Forge became suitable to live in and until then they lived elsewhere in Middle Street.

The Marlings were another family very much involved in the woollen mills of the area. In the 1911 Census, Gertrude's father was working in the press shop, her mother was a weaver, her brother was a cutter and Gertrude herself (aged 13) was a picker. By 1921, presumably a reflection of the

demise of the cloth industry, Gertrude was working as a housemaid for a Captain Turner at The Grange in Eastington.

Gertrude and George

Emma (middle) and friends, Margate 1937

George and Gertrude had three children – Harry born in 1931, Audrey in 1933 and Peggy in 1937. Audrey has fond memories of Emma - she would give the children a penny every Friday - and of being impressed at being told that she had been born within the sound of Bow Bells and was a genuine cockney.

Thomas had a few years of retirement before dying at Laurel Cottage in December 1932 from endocarditis at the age of 78. Emma stayed at Laurel Cottage until her last days when she moved to be with George and Gertrude at the Forge. It seems that she was still pretty active in her seventies. This photo taken in Margate shows Emma ("Little Gran" as she was known to the Tewkesbury Knights) and two others (possibly one is Gertrude's mother) on a seaside jaunt to Margate in 1937 which must have been quite an expedition. Although today it is a quick spurt up the M5 from Eastington to Tewkesbury, in those days it involved a convoluted bus and train journey, and so the Tewkesbury and Eastington Knights rarely met. Barbara remembered visiting as a teenager and playing with the younger children and she also had very fond memories of "Little Gran", but such occasions were few and far between.

Emma died at the Forge at the beginning of 1941, nursed by Gertrude after a bout of pneumonia. She was 77. Audrey relates how well Gertrude and Emma got on and remembers how as Emma was dying, she pointed to the photos of Harry and Ernie on the wall. Emma left The Forge to Frank and George in equal shares. Frank relinquished his share and the Forge passed to George. Presumably, a reciprocal arrangement was made for Laurel Cottage although evidence for this hasn't been found.

Elsie and Ernest John Knight

Over time, it would appear that relations became more distant between Ernie's wife Elsie and the family although Elsie did not move away from Eastington, but lived in adjacent or nearby roads. Emma maintained good relations with the other members of the Watkins family – her will, written in 1940, was witnessed by Elsie's uncle still living in Middle Street and her cousin Beatrice Eliza Miles (nee Watkins).

Ernie and Elsie's son, Ernest John, started working in the aircraft industry in Gloucester and in 1935 joined the RAF as a civilian. This meant that when war broke out he became a member of the air force rising to the rank of warrant officer and flying as a navigator.

At first, he was with the 143 Squadron at Coates, Lincolnshire but on 1st October 1942, transferred to the 521 Squadron at Bircham Newton in Norfolk. This was to be the start of a new venture. The squadron was responsible for taking meteorological readings over the North Sea and Channel, critically important for air operations into Europe and in defence. Ernest was to train as a met observer. His first sortie was on 4th October. He was part of a crew with 4 others in a converted Hudson FH 379 bomber which should have taken off in the very early hours. The flight was delayed by thick fog, but the pilot eventually decided to attempt a take-off at 07.15 hours. Thick fog still blanketed the airfield, and the aircraft appears to have started swinging to port during take-off. Sufficient altitude was gained to clear a hangar but not a radio-mast. The collision sliced off the starboard wing and, as the aircraft crashed, the tanks exploded engulfing the wreckage in flames. There were no survivors.

Hudson FH 379

The grave of Ernest John Knight at Eastington churchyard

The detailed newspaper account of the funeral provides a wealth of information on relations and acquaintances. A large number of mourners packed the Wesleyan Chapel at Eastington before making the journey of about a mile to the parish church where the burial took place and where both Thomas and Emma are also buried. War time travel restrictions must have made the journey for Frank and others difficult. For Elsie, Frank and George, another war casualty must have been unbearable. It was a blessing that Emma was no longer alive. Although now in a state of disrepair, Ernest's grave is still identifiable. Also commemorated on the grave is his cousin Eric Watkins, son of Elsie's brother John, who was killed less than 2 years later, when his plane failed to pull out of an attack dive on a Japanese camp in the Burmese jungle. Eric was actually buried at Taukkyan War Cemetery, Myanmar.

Harold Barnes

The newspaper account lists wreaths sent (somewhat unfeasibly) by step brother Leslie (serving in the Middle East) and someone called Harold (a POW). So who was Harold? In August 1945, at the age of 54, Elsie married Harold Barnes on his release from a POW camp in Poland. He was fifteen years younger than her. He had spent virtually the whole war as a prisoner and his prompt release and return to England suggests he was not in a particularly healthy state. Sadly, he died on New Year's Eve 1945 from septicaemia associated with a carbuncle on his back – they were married for only 4 months.

Although nothing is known about their relationship, what we can learn of Harold's sad story gives an insight into what life could be like for some people at the time. Harold was born in 1906 to an illiterate groom, Walter Barnes, and Florence Russell. In 1909, when Harold

was three, Florence died from diabetes leaving Harold, a much older brother and his younger sister. Walter promptly remarried to Ada Elizabeth Watkins. Ada turned out to be something of a fairy-tale stepmother. In 1915, the NSPCC prosecuted both Walter and Ada for cruelty to Harold. Walter escaped punishment but Ada was bound over for a year. Before the year was out, the pair were prosecuted again following concerns about injuries raised by Harold's school. By then, Harold had been placed in the care of the Cirencester Poor Law Institution. The evidence suggested Harold had experienced brutality and starvation – he was a stone below the average weight for a child of that age. This time, Walter was fined and Ada sentenced to 2 months hard labour. The court ordered that Harold be taken into care by Barnardo's. Harold can be tracked in the 1921 Census to the Barnardo Home for Destitute Children in Stepney in the East End of London. This was a huge institution where the boys were taught a trade. Interestingly, of all the boys on Harold's page in the census, he is the only one without a trade. There is no more documentation of Harold until he was called up and joined the 8th Battalion Royal Worcesters. He was captured in France in May 1940 and sent to Stalug 344 Lambinowice in Poland where he was assigned to a cement works.

Was Ada Watkins a relative of Elsie's and perhaps had Elsie felt a family responsibility and taken him under her wing? Did Harold have some kind of learning disability that singled him out for the appalling treatment he received but which his sister escaped? The family link with Elsie feels plausible but it has not yet been possible to ascertain this.

The Gregorys

For the Gregorys, the inter-war years were a period of significant deaths and some new beginnings. It was also a period when yet another Blanche comes into the story.

In December 1918, Philip and Rosanna celebrated their 60th (Diamond) wedding anniversary. The Tewkesbury Register of 21 December 1918 recorded:

"We are pleased to note the happy old couple are in good health: they are and have always been, highly respected and we are sure our readers will join with us in offering them hearty congratulations and in wishing them many happy days to come".

Sadly, less than three months later in March 1919, Rosanna died. She was 83.

Philip and Rosanna photographed for their 60th anniversary - photo from the Tewkesbury Register

Susan Gregory, Blanche Knight's mother, died on 31st December 1924 at the age of 60. She had been a diabetic for 15 years and lapsed into a diabetic coma. She had had a hard life and one which had encountered much loss. Blanche's father, Henry, who had taken over the role of the Avon Lock Keeper when Philip, his father, had retired was still at the lock at the time.

In March 1926, the grand old man, Philip Jesse Gregory, died at the age of 91. From a difficult early start, he had been a real survivor aided without any doubt by the strength of Rosanna. He was clearly a well-known and respected character in the community. Even in later life his presence was noted, sitting with his cronies, outside the Black Bear, where the Bredon Road, Mythe Road and High Street meet, watching people entering and leaving town. His obituary noted that he had been lock keeper for over a quarter of a century. Philip received a good send off from the Wesleyan Chapel. At his funeral, the Charles Wesley stalwart "Jesu Lover of my Soul" was sung with Walter Boughton, at that time Mayor of Tewkesbury, at the organ and "a beautiful collection of flowers

included a tribute from the Minister and Members of the Wesleyan Church". His status in the family can be measured, in part, by the number of times the name Jesse appears in subsequent generations.

On Easter Saturday 1929, at the Wesleyan Chapel, Henry got married again, to (another) Blanche, his cousin, Blanche Hawker. Her father William, Rosanna's brother, was a waterman as had been his father, and in 1851, had been an early employee of the newly established Bathurst boatyard.

Blanche had been a spinster all her life and, at one stage, was working as a servant for an auctioneer in Islington. In the 1880s, the family were living in the alleys in Tewkesbury. Somewhere along the line, she must have either had the resources to buy, or had inherited, a fairly substantial house in Park View off the Gloucester Road. Henry and Blanche lived there until she died in 1933, only four years into the marriage. The house was sold for £470, a significant sum for the times. Henry then moved in with the Knight family at Osborne House. Henry died from a stroke at Tewkesbury Rural Hospital in 1935. He was 73.

For Frank Gregory, it was also a time of death and new beginnings. In 1921, he was living with his parents at Avon Lock with his wife Blanche (nee Fletcher) and was working at the Bathurst boatyard. In April 1926, Blanche died of breast cancer; they had no children. In May 1929, a month or so after his father had remarried, Frank married Annie Elizabeth Pratt in the parish church at nearby Twyning, the first village up the Avon from Tewkesbury where her family lived. Annie was the daughter of a gardener, who had been trained at Kew and then moved to work at Stanway House in the Cotswolds. Annie came to marriage late for those days and she gave birth to George in 1932 at the age of 40. The family moved away from the centre of town to the new council houses at Priors Park.

At the wedding of Frank Gregory to Annie Pratt, 11 May 1929

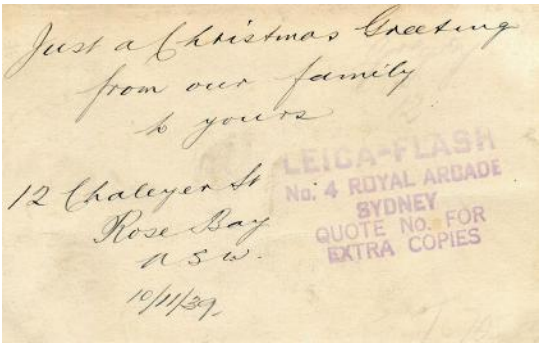
This is a wonderful wedding photograph taken at Mythe Cottage, on the A38 just outside Tewkesbury (full of the joi de vivre that seemed to accompany photographs of those times). Back row from left: Henry Gregory, Frank Knight, Frank and Annie, George Perks , Dorothy Fennel (Annie's best friend.
Front row from left:. Blanche Gregory, Blanche Knight, Alice Pratt, (Annie's sister). Barbara and Donald, Annie's sister Mary Perks, their mother Mary Ann Pratt and an unidentified older lady.

Annie's mother, Mary Ann Pratt at some stage moved in to live with them at their new home on the Priors Park estate. In 1937, she died from pneumonia brought on after falling down the stairs at home. It must have been a traumatic incident for them all. The coroner expressed concern that the handrail did not extend to the top of the stairs and referred the matter to the Town Council who were responsible for these new houses.[30]

George Gregory

So what happened to Blanche Knight's Uncle George who had been such a presence in the early Tewkesbury days? He tried to enlist to fight in WW1 twice and each time was refused on health grounds. Whatever the health problems were, they were of sufficient concern for his doctor to suggest that he should consider emigrating. So in 1920, he embarked on SS Edinburgh Castle, bound for Durban, South Africa for the first stage of a journey that he intended would land him in Australia. However, whilst in Durban, George fell in love with Gladys Merle Whiteley, the daughter of a local Methodist preacher. George was 41 and Gladys was only 21. The age difference was too great so after 9 months he returned home broken hearted[31]. Nevertheless, not to be deterred, he went back to South Africa later in the same year, again on the SS Edinburgh Castle and took up residence at the YMCA in Durban. He became a local preacher and also the Honorary Secretary of the South African Temperance Alliance. He finally married Gladys in 1925 and their first child William Jesse Gregory was born in 1926.

George was still determined to move to Australia and in July 1927, he resigned his posts in Durban and, leaving wife and child there, he set off on the SS Berrima for Sydney. George found work as a storeman at David Jones Ltd, a flagship department store on Elizabeth Street, Sydney. Gladys and William joined him later in January 1928.



Christmas photo and greeting from George and family to the Tewkesbury Knights, 1937

They had two more children and George continued to work at David Jones for the rest of his life, as a share clerk and then as Assistant Secretary. George died of Bright's disease in June 1946, aged 66. Gladys died of a 'bad heart' in February 1960.

Frank and Annie Gregory on their wedding day

Frank in the Tewkesbury Festival of Britain Parade in 1951 followed by the Mayor of Gloucester, the City High Sheriff and the Mayor of Cheltenham

Frank with Sir Nicholas Ridley, MP for Cirencester and Tewkesbury and later variously Secretary of State for Transport, Environment and Trade and Industry under Thatcher

CHAPTER SEVEN
The Civic Years

With their children off their hands, local politics and public service came to dominate Frank and Blanche Knight's lives in the late 1940s and 1950s. Frank's religious non-conformism was important, but he was also greatly influenced by Liberal Party thinking introduced to him by his father. Although the last Liberal member of parliament for Tewkesbury was elected back in the 1880s, local Liberals retained an influence in local politics. Blanche, too, was a keen Liberal and a delegate at area meetings. The Manchester Guardian was the newspaper in the home. When interviewed in 1978 for Gloucestershire and Avon Life, Frank was still reading The Guardian as it was by then called, but commented that the newspaper's "*concept of liberalism and my own cannot always coincide these days*". Goodness knows what he would have thought of it today.

Frank was first elected to the Borough Council in 1938 at the age of 44 and was "raised to the Aldermanic Bench" (i.e. made an Alderman) in 1946. He retired from the Borough Council in 1974 at the time of local government reorganisation. From 1967, he represented Tewkesbury on the County Council, sitting on the Education Committee until 1977 when he finally retired at the age of 83. He was also the Tewkesbury representative on the North West Gloucestershire Water Board, and up until 1965, he continued with his day job as Secretary to the Tewkesbury Building Society.

Throughout, Frank sat as a Liberal council member. True to his Liberal leanings, his modern day historical hero was Lloyd George. Frank had a fascination with people as characters and, despite his own strict moral standards, could be quite forgiving of other's failings. To him, Lloyd George's moral weaknesses were more than outweighed by his achievements in founding the welfare state. He seemed, however, less forgiving in his later years of the circumstances surrounding Jeremy Thorpe's departure from politics. There was a lighter side to Frank - a song sung in the family was "*Lloyd George knew my father, my father knew Lloyd George*" (to the tune of Onward Christian Soldiers), a popular ditty from the early twentieth century with its political allusions, not least to Lloyd George's liberal handing out of honours. There was, of course, another popular version - "*Lloyd George knew my mother...*" but there is no record of this being sung in the Knight household.

Frank's four terms as Mayor (1949-50, 1950-51, 1951-52 and 1957-58) came at a time when the country was struggling to build back after the war. He realised that Tewkesbury had to move on from being a backwater market town and it was a period when significant decisions could still be made locally. It was also a period when significant changes were imposed on the Town. For instance, the railway was closed much to Frank's dismay. He was reported as ending one committee meeting with the caustic comment "And three cheers to Dr Beeching". There is no doubt, however, that the coming of the M5 and Junction 9, enabled the town's post 1970s growth. In recent decades, local government in England has been relentlessly undermined by Westminster and it is now a shadow of its former self. The fifties and sixties were still a time when local councils had influence; there was greater local interest and respect for the processes.

The standard of local newspaper journalism was staggeringly high compared with the click bait of today and events were recorded in considerable detail. Frank's photo album contained press photos of various formal dinners and events (none labelled so sometimes difficult to place) and some at which Frank and Blanche as Mayor and Mayoress cut slightly awkward figures. Frank was a teetotaller all his life - as was Blanche - and alcohol was prominent in civic events in those days. And how comfortable was he really in all the paraphernalia that went with being a mayor – he, who once found even the Methodists and Wesleyans too elaborate, who had spoken out against the constraints of tradition and who had always set store by ordinary folk? Certainly, Blanche felt the pressure of keeping up appearances at formal occasions.

Here are Frank and Blanche cutting the cake for the Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineers 10th Anniversary in 1952, a photo signed by the Lt Colonel.

Frank and Blanche greet a VIP - who was she?

The list of areas that Frank was involved in over the years was extensive. At various times, he was Chair of the Area Planning Committee, the General Purposes and Finance Committee, and the Housing Committee. He was Chair of the governing bodies of both Grammar Schools and President of the Liberal Association.

Frank at the Bristol Aeroplane Company

Industrial development was key to transforming Tewkesbury's fortunes. This meant developing the Tewkesbury Industrial Estate in New Town and supporting the industrial development of Ashchurch adjoining Tewkesbury to the east. The British Army's storage facility for armoured vehicles was located at Ashchurch, and this was an important local employer. The Town Council supported its further development.

The post-war aircraft industry powered much of the economic development of Bristol and Gloucestershire. The photo on the previous page, was taken on a visit to the Bristol Aeroplane Company, at Filton to see the construction of the Bristol Brabazon, is a real piece of history. Frank can be seen peering out from between the two rather formidable personages in the front row. Only one prototype of this plane was ever made to fly. It was designed as the first wide bodied plane but as a 4 turbo prop plane achieving the magnificent speed of 250 mph it failed to compete with the Comet jet, also being developed, but capable of a speed almost twice as fast. The whole project, costing about £350m in today's money was abandoned after test flights when no buyer could be found. Circumstances would date this photo at around 1949/50, the period of Frank's first stint as Mayor of Tewkesbury.

An important inventor and industrialist, Sir George Dowty, was a keen supporter of the town, playing a leading role in the aeronautics industry of Gloucestershire during the war and afterwards. Dowty had works in the town itself and at Ashchurch where Dowty Hydraulics were set up in 1956, initially to manufacture hydraulic pit props used in mines worldwide. What remains of the various Dowty firms in Gloucestershire still make propellers, and also the landing gear for Airbus. Lady Marguerite Dowty (shown here with Frank and Sir George), was a great supporter of Frank. She was Canadian, a good twenty years younger than her husband, and clearly a person of immense charm who put people at their ease. Apparently she and Frank got on like a house on fire.

Blanche, Lady Dowty and Frank. George Dowty, second from the right

Frank's passion for social justice was manifest in his interest in housing and in education. The author John Moore, who became a good friend of Frank, based his Brensham Trilogy on the Tewkesbury Alleys, painting a picture of rough, tough and colourful characters. Frank sat on successive councils that sanctioned the demolition of the worst housing and encouraged the outward spread from the once compact town. Reflecting on the removal of the slums, Frank recalled:

> *"There were certainly some lively people around then. The ones described in John Moore's books I knew them all. Some of the folks in the alleys worked in the shirt and collar factory or the shoe works but there were always those with big families and no money who simply begged for a living. Blank Alley, Bleach Yard, Merrett's, Spring Gardens off Chance St .... I remember all those in particular but they weren't the kind of places you'd fear to walk along. The people were simply downright poor, rather than rascally".*

"We can't allow this sort of thing" - The work of a magistrate

Throughout, Frank continued to sit on the town's magistrate's bench. It was an important part of his life which, like everything, he took seriously. Local newspaper court reports give a glimpse into mundane matters of the times but also reveal a somewhat officious world with priorities which today might seem strange, and a world where policemen seemed to have had plenty of time to spend pursuing minor offences. Cycling without lights was a common misdemeanour of the first half of the twentieth century with quite harsh punishment. For instance, Gertrude Marling, who was to marry George Knight, was fined 5 shillings in 1920 for the offence. She was a maid at the time and that would have been her weekly wage. The reason she wasn't using lights was quite possibly because she couldn't afford to in the first place.

Here we can see some examples of Frank's work as a magistrate, all taken from 1950. He did his fair share of fining cyclists not only for lightless travel but also for "riding bicycles in St George's Fields". By 1950, the fines had increased to £1 (£44 in today's money). In another example of criminality, seven residents were summoned before him for having dogs without licences and each fined £1.

Some cases were more substantial. The Tewkesbury Register and Gazette of 7th October reported that the Mayor Alderman F.H. Knight chaired the Borough Children's Court that week and heard a case of a 12 year old boy who had stolen a money box from his father, thrown the box in the river and spent the proceeds on "fairground rides and hired boats". In a connected matter a Mr Green of Cotteswold Gardens stated he was in the habit of leaving money, usually 3 shillings, on a ledge at the side of his house for the milkman. One morning, the milkman complained to him that he had not received any money for some time. The matter was reported to the police. Two coins were marked and PC James kept the money under observation and saw the boy approach the front of the house, look to the right and left, and take the two coins. The boy had spent these ill-gotten gains on ice cream and asked for all offences to be taken into consideration. In court, his mother admitted that "he had a weakness for money matters". The boy was remanded for two weeks with Alderman Knight remarking that he hoped the boy would think it over and come back prepared to cooperate in any actions to be decided by the court.

In a final example involving Frank, in July 1950, a John Underwood was sent to prison for two months for causing malicious damage and using bad language to the annoyance of passers-by. A witness described how Underwood had swung a bag at a van windscreen smashing it. When the owner had gone out into the street "bad language was used". "The defendant told the court he could not remember anything that had happened". Sending him to prison, Alderman Knight told him, "we can't allow this sort of thing".

The Family

In the very early 1950s, Frank and Blanche themselves moved out of the town centre to a house they had designed and built on the Ashchurch Road. It was a large house, set back from the road in a generous plot. To give some idea of the size of land, another house has since been built in what was the front garden. 'Arden' was the house that Blanche had dreamt of. It was a grand gesture, in keeping with the role of Mayor and Mayoress but out of keeping with Frank's character. All the children were soon to leave Tewkesbury for ever. For a couple who didn't drive, the house - a mile or more from the town centre - became increasingly inconvenient. By the early sixties, they had moved to a small 2-bed bungalow on the other side of town, but a 10 minute walk to the High Street. The walk took them past the Black Bear where forty years before, Jesse and his mates had sat watching the comings and goings of the town.

Arden on the Ashchurch Road

5, Digby Drive

Philip had married Kathleen Coney in 1942 and his siblings got married in the early fifties. Barbara to Edward (Ted) Paterson in Hong Kong in January 1952, Don to Rhoda Hanson (known as Valerie or Val) in Birmingham in April the same year; David to Mary Wash in January 1954. Grandchildren followed; first with Rosalind (1950) then by Vivien (1953), Mark (1954), Richard and Andrew (1956), Peter Paterson and Peter Knight (1960) and Amanda (1964).

Barbara and Ted 1952

Don and Val 1952

David and Mary 1954

The family in 1955: From left Vivien, Val, David, Blanche, Mary, Frank, Kathleen, Philip, Don and Rosalind

Vivien and Richard c 1958

Blanche, Peter Paterson and Barbara 1960

Tewkesbury 1965 - From left Andrew, Mary, Amanda Peter P, Peter K, Frank, Mark, Blanche, Barbara

Blanche

As well as being Mayoress four times, Blanche was active in public life in her own right. In her time, Blanche was a member of the Tewkesbury Hospital amenities committee and the Tewkesbury Townswomen's Guild as well as other social and welfare organisations. At one stage she was in charge of Meals on Wheels and treasurer of the Golden Hour Thrift Club. Blanche was an active member of the local Liberal association.

Blanche presents the trophies at the High School sports

Blanche inspecting contestants at the 1958 Tewkesbury Pram Derby in aid of the Firemen's Benevolent Fund

Blanche had suffered from ill health for many years and, in May 1966 she had a severe stroke from which she died soon after. She was 74. Blanche had been a constant support and companion to Frank and he was left distraught.

Blanche died before Frank was to receive three accolades in recognition of his lifetime's work. Less than a year after Blanche died, Frank was given the Freedom of the Borough, a rare honour, and in 1970 was awarded the MBE. The Alderman Knight School (a school for children with special needs aged 7 to 19) was opened in the late seventies – the name being a tribute to his contribution to education over the years and his belief that education was for all. Frank was a self-effacing man who never blew his own trumpet although this did not mean he wasn't quietly proud of these achievements.

"A man for all seasons"

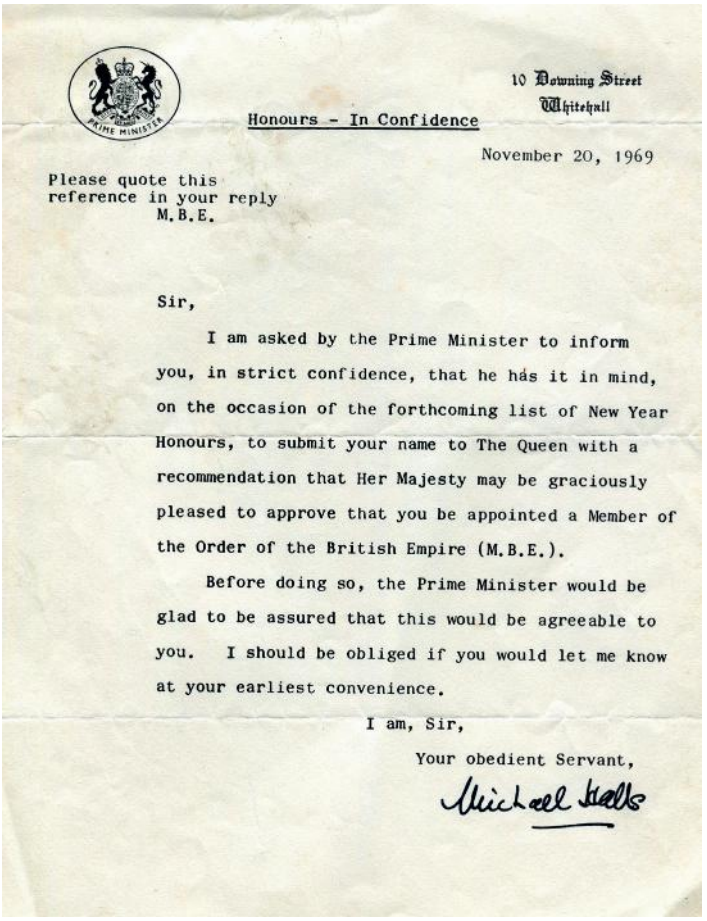
This book opens with a salient quotation from Frank's acceptance speech at the ceremony for the Freedom of the Borough at the Watson Hall (the venue for all those Brotherhood meetings in the earlier part of the century). In the address, Frank displayed some of his renowned knowledge of local government history, pertinent as this was in the period leading up to the major reform of local government in 1974. He stressed the importance of lower tier authorities who had connection with the people on the ground, the "ordinary folk" who were always in his sights. He declared:

> *"for my part I have great faith in the future of the town. I hope I shall see some of the healthy growth that is envisaged in the Development Plan. I believe that in spirit, not necessarily in detail, the proposals are both desirable and necessary, but I also believe in all sincerity that our future success will largely depend upon the extent to which all those who seek and serve this place, in every walk of life, and so far as is humanly possible, subordinate their own interests to the common good."*

The speech was also telling in other ways. In accepting the honour, Frank was conscious that he had not always held popular opinions and had sometimes been slow to accept majority views. Other speakers alluded to differences in opinions too but nevertheless showed an underlying respect and appreciation of Frank as a person. Councillor Workman observed that in whatever capacity Alderman Knight represented the borough, he did so not only in a business-like manner, but with dignity and good humour. Although he was not in agreement with all of Alderman Knight's views he counted it as a privilege to have served with him on the council and had had many opportunities of seeing "this dynamic person work and to witness the crisp humour which he frequently displayed and which was so much part of his makeup". The Mayor, Councillor Brown, found that no-one could surpass Alderman Knight when it came to a chairman's speech. He had heard him speak at 22 school speech days and he had always held the attention of parents and pupils alike; "Here is a man for all seasons" he concluded.

The audience in the Watson Hall for Frank's Freedom of the Borough ceremony in 1967. Front row from left - Mary, David, Vivien, Don, Val and Richard

Frank continued to be involved in local Government until the reorganisation of local authorities in 1974, and as a county councillor until 1977, by which time, aged 83, he was finding the trek up to Gloucester for meetings challenging.



10 Downing Street
Whitehall

Honours - In Confidence

November 20, 1969

Please quote this
reference in your reply
M.B.E.

Sir,

I am asked by the Prime Minister to inform you, in strict confidence, that he has it in mind, on the occasion of the forthcoming list of New Year Honours, to submit your name to The Queen with a recommendation that Her Majesty may be graciously pleased to approve that you be appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (M.B.E.).

Before doing so, the Prime Minister would be glad to be assured that this would be agreeable to you. I should be obliged if you would let me know at your earliest convenience.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

Michael Halls

At a Special meeting of the Tewkesbury Borough Council held on the 4th day of April 1974

F. H. Knight, Esq. M.B.E. was appointed Honorary Alderman of the Borough of Tewkesbury, in recognition of his meritorious service with the Tewkesbury Borough Council.

IN WITNESS whereof the Common Seal of the Tewkesbury Borough Council hereunto affixed this Fourth day of April 1974

Mayor

In the summer of 1974, the family came together to celebrate Frank's 80th year. It was the only occasion ever that all members of all three generations (minus Blanche of course). were present together.

August 1974 From left: Philip, Richard, Ros, Don, Val, Vivien, Ted, Peter P, Kathleen, Frank, Andrew, Mark, Barbara, Amanda, Mary, David, Peter K.

Times were moving on for everyone. Frank's brother George Knight died in 1972, aged 73 (George's wife Gertrude died much later in 1989 aged 92).

Frank Gregory, Blanche's brother, died in 1975, aged 88 survived by his wife, Annie, who died in 1984 aged 92. A distance had grown between the Knights and the Gregorys over the years. Perhaps it was just differences in interests and aspirations. There is some suggestion that the sale of Blanche Hawker's house back in 1933 had led to a dispute, but Barbara remembered her mother being particularly fond of Annie after that time. Certainly the camaraderie of the YMCA days, and of that affectionate 1st WW postcard, had long dissipated.

Elsie, Ernie's wife, died in 1977, aged 85, predeceased by her second son Leslie in 1974. In April 1978 Val - Don's wife - died after a short illness; she was 47.

Andrew, Philip, Kathleen, Ros, Frank, Barbara and Mark in Richmond, 1976

Frank with Kathleen and Philip outside their home in Hanwell

After Blanche died, Kathleen and Philip took Frank on holiday to Europe, visiting Tyne Cot, the memorial on which Harry and Ernie are listed. Even as late as 1977, Frank would take the train down to London and spend Christmas with them, and at the age of 80, he was still able to play table tennis on the dining table at David's home in Saffron Walden.

Mary Knight took Frank back to Barnack to revisit his roots but Tewkesbury was his real home and it meant everything to him. However, when his Parkinson's Disease and immobility meant it was impossible to stay in the bungalow, he reluctantly accepted the offer of a move to be with Kathleen and Philip in their new home in Bexhill on Sea, where he could be looked after with care. In a farewell interview, he told the Evesham Journal in March 1980, *"I don't want to go - almost everything in Tewkesbury is of interest to me".*

Frank died on 28th December 1981 at St Helen's Hospital in Hastings following a stroke. He was 87. A memorial service was held at the Methodist Church in Tewkesbury a few weeks later. There was a good crowd and it was an important family gathering. Philip played the organ as he had done, 15 years previously, for Blanche's funeral. The reading, fittingly, was from the Sermon on the Mount with its themes of social justice and ordinary folk.

At the start of the service, the congregation was commanded to stand - not for Frank, but for the arrival of the Mayor and Town Council who then entered with full regalia. It seemed, for a man who was generally private and self-effacing, oddly intrusive, and somewhat anachronistic for a man, who had once resisted tradition. But it was a visible display of Frank's stature in the twentieth century history of his beloved town, and as he once said, it was a history that could be made

> *"not entirely by Lords and Dukes, or by Kings and Queens, but by ordinary folk, by people like ourselves".*

The last occasion all the Knight siblings met - January 1992
From left: David, Don, Barbara and Philip

A Personal Postscript

Being brought up in Hong Kong, meant that for the first 18 years of my life, I only met Frank and Blanche on a few occasions whilst visiting England in 1960/61 and in 1965, and Frank on his own a few more times in 1969. I did get to know Frank much better when I came to live in England in the 1970s and there were longer conversations in the last 18 months of his life. But of course I didn't ask the questions I would like to ask now.

As others in the family have observed, Frank was very good with young children; perhaps less so when they grew older. As a small child, I remember going with him into the copse at the front of Arden to cut firewood and being taken down the lane by the pigsties to wave at the school children on the passing train. I have vivid memories of him putting me on his knee and doing the "This is the way the so and so rides" – you can find instructions for a sanitised, health and safety approved version on YouTube, but Frank's rendition was the real thing. "This is the way the gentleman rides" had me hitting the ceiling; the farmer jiggly joggling, nearly dislocated my neck. I now wonder who passed this down. Was this something William had done with his children and John before him? And was that cobbler's anvil in his garage, something inherited from the boot-making days? My childhood memories of Frank were therefore warm ones. Blanche, was a harder person for a child to get to know. By the sixties, she was unwell and the strains and stresses showed.

My later, more adult conversations with Frank were quite far ranging. There was always something of interest, even in the seemingly endless hours playing scrabble. He remained inquisitive and tried to keep up his reading which with glaucoma and failing eyesight became harder, although he could still spot a ship that no-one else had noticed, looking out to sea from Philip and Kathleen's house in Bexhill. We did tease him a bit, and I am not sure how well he really took it. He maintained a life-long principle of never using a superlative unless it was really warranted and as a result, it seemed he never used them at all. Kathleen would cook him a splendid meal, to which he would remark, "Thank you dear, that was quite nice".

In his last years, he felt the pain of his loss of dignity in old age – "I don't want to be pushed like a baby" he once said when being traversed along the seafront promenade in a wheelchair. And by his eighties, he was struggling to be empathetic with some current thinking and sometimes strayed into that old man dismissiveness that we should all guard against. But even then, you couldn't mistake the passions and compassion, and a genuine feeling of concern for the world around him.

When I was growing up, my mother, Barbara or "Bob" as she was known to the Tewkesbury family, often talked about her family life and for her it hadn't been an unhappy one, although she may well have felt constrained. What I remember of the things she told me has inevitably coloured the approach to this book. Some things took on a new life when we moved, completely by chance, to live just ten minutes' drive from Eastington churchyard and with all three sons attending the same school that Ernest John Knight had attended some eighty years earlier. However, by the time I had started to get really interested in family history, Barbara had lost much of her sight and showed less interest in recounting and delving into the past. She harboured no particular affection or nostalgia for Tewkesbury.

In his mischievous poem, This Be The Verse, Philip Larkin wrote:

"Man hands on misery to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf.
Get out as early as you can,
And don't have any kids yourself."[34]

Although it may not be as bleak as Philip Larkin suggested, we are all to some extent, the product of things that have gone before and so we all have our personal postscripts to write. At the risk of sounding hackneyed, for me, family history is part of the quest for who I am. Influences can be passed through the generations. Things we can put a finger on and those we can't even know, may shape our world view, our values. Strong personalities can inspire both adherence and rejection.

For me to begin to understand myself, I need to understand the joys and complexities of my mother, Barbara. To understand her, I look for clues in Frank and Blanche. And so it goes on. I think it is fair to say Barbara inherited, more perhaps than her siblings, some of the utilitarian and moralist Nonconformism that powered Frank's life. She married a Scottish-Yorkshire man from a strong Nonconformist missionary heritage and so you can spare a thought for their three sons!

Whether or not, what it is that man hands on to man and which deepens like a coastal shelf, is necessarily misery, as Larkin put it, is another matter entirely.

Andrew Paterson, August 2023

Endnotes

1 Gloucestershire Echo 22 April 1967

2 The genealogy websites encourage people to complete extensive trees – often this is done with more enthusiasm than substance. Sometimes it is not possible to find dates and relationships or to validate other people's conclusions online.

3 A worker who has learned a trade and works for another person usually by the day

4 Variously spelt Andrew and Andrews in different censuses.

5 In England and Wales 390,127 people (almost 0.8%) stated their religion as "Jedi" on their 2001 Census forms, surpassing Sikhism, Judaism, and Buddhism

6 For instance Blanche Hawker and Gertrude Marling

7 The Peterborough Standard 23 April 1882

8 Occupation of railway crossing keeper was also recorded on Emma's death certificate.

9 Gloucestershire and Avon Life , January 1978

10 Thanks to RP Marks – details of the Lodge at https://www.flickr.com/photos/rpmarks/4343653827/in/photostream/ Licence https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/

11 Thanks to Richard Chatham of the Tewkesbury Historical Association

12 J Newman may have been an old acquaintance of Emma's – a Newman was a witness at her marriage in Leytonstone in 1891.

13 As recalled in the article "Frank Knight's Tewkesbury" in Gloucestershire and Avon Life , January 1978

14 There are full and fascinating accounts of the Priestleys on Wikipedia

15 The Pleasant Sunday Afternoon movement developed from 1870s with the aim of reaching working class men with little interest in church attendance. Although there was a religious slant the intention was to capture interest including later through music but also through speakers. There was a political dimension with Labour and Liberal politicians , including Keir Hardie, being supporters. Although there was clear temperance dimension, in some part of the country they met in pubs. In Tewkesbury Watson Hall was the venue and meetings could fill this. The motto was the biblical quote "All ye are brethren"

16 The Weslyan Methodists were a split from the Anglican Church of England and maintained the lectionary and creeds as well as a system of bishops. The Congregationalists owed their origins more to the Puritan groups in the 17th Century and the Civil War and believed in the autonomy of each church's congregation.

17 A quiller wound the yarn onto quills that were used in the weaving looms

18 Personal communication from Jane Glover.

19 As relayed by Karen Philpott.

20 Obituary in the Tewkesbury Register and Gazette 4 March 1926

21 Gloucestershire Chronicle 9 May 1896

22 Online biographies Tewkesbury Historical Society Military history written by Malcolm Waldron, with family research assistance from David Willavoys https://tewkesburyhistory.org/docs/BiogsWW1/Knight-Harry-(107)-RB5-OK.pdf

23 The Story of the 2/5 Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment, AF Barnes, Crypt House Press, 1930

24 The Story of the 2/5 Battalion, ibid

25 See further details in "A Noble Band of Heroes", John Dixon, Tewkesbury Historical Society p47 https://tewkesburyhistory.org/docs/BiogsWW1/A-Noble-Band-of-Heroes.pdf

26 Online biographies Tewkesbury Historical Society - see reference above
27 The actual letters no longer exist – extracts taken from the news reports
28 In September 1940, as the result of a fire caused by an incendiary bomb at the War Office Record Store in Arnside Street, London, approximately two thirds of 6.5 million soldiers' documents for the First World War were destroyed
29 An interesting coincidence –like William Knight, Kathleen was born in St Neots
30 Gloucestershire Echo 4 August 1937
31 Thanks to Karen Philpott for the detail in this section
32 Catalogue for British Railwayana auction 16 October 2011 (Lot 4)
33 CLB - the Church Lads Brigade an Anglican youth movement
34 From "High Windows", 1974 Faber and Faber Ltd