

This is a Story from 'A Few Forgotten Women'



The Search for a Forgotten Grandmother



Around 2010, to my cousin, Susan's, amazement she discovered that her father was adopted. This meant that the lady she had grown up with and called "Nanna" and who had lived with them for several years, was in fact (as far as our research is at present) no blood relation. Susan's once solid background now contained a void which we set about trying to fill.

From her Father's birth certificate we know the name of his mother, Christina Lawrence. For over

18 months a search for this lady proved fruitless. There was no Christina Lawrence of approximately the right age, living in the right area.

By good fortune I won a DNA test which I gave to Susan and after the obligatory spitting into the tube we waited in anticipation. The matches appeared, however no names seemed promising but there was a fairly high match, disappointingly the tree was private. Subsequent to tentative correspondence the tree was revealed. Again we felt deflated as none of the names seemed promising, until, Susan, in a late night phone call pointed out that a foreign sounding name, Lorenz, in the tree, if said quickly, sounded like Lawrence.

The owner of the tree confirmed that an ancestor was a German immigrant had come over with 2 sons. There was talk of an English liaison. At present we know little of the background of Henry Lorenz, b. 1845 in Baden and his 2 German born sons, Herman b. Heidleberg in 1872 and John also b. Heidleberg in 1878. Sometime in the mid 1880s Henry met and set up home with Julia Smith, (I can find no marriage despite in 1911, 26 years married, crossed out) originally from Leicestershire. Their first daughter, Annie Elizabeth was born in Chadderton, Lancashire in 1887, followed by Christina Lorenz on 11th April, 1889.

Henry worked as a repairer of property, sadly passing away aged just 48 of “Dilatation of the oesophagus” and exhaustion, on 28th May 1897. Without her husband’s income Julia became a paper flower maker which in the heyday of the Victorian era was nearly an obsession but by the end of the 19th century was in rapid decline. At this time neither Annie or Christina were recorded as working but by 1911 Christina was the only one employed as an operative in the card room at the local mill. This was a hazardous environment with dust and cotton fibres filling the air and consequently being breathed in by the workers.

The family had always had lodgers, to help with family finances and 1911 was no exception. Living with them in their 5 roomed house at 3, School Road, Chadderton, was Stanley Collier aged 37, married, but not with his wife, a colliery store keeper. Annie filled out the census return, perhaps Julia was ill as also at the age of 48 on 25th Sept she died of “apoplexy”, a catch all term when there was a sudden death with loss of consciousness. How long Stanley continued to live with the sisters we do not know.

Annie never married, however, Christina’s two step brothers did. Herman married Irish born, Sarah Jane Hanna on 30th June 1894 and John married Lily Atherton, Christina’s cousin, (daughter of Mary Ann Smith, Julia Smith’s sister and James Atherton). As the law stood at the time,

once Sarah and Lily married German citizens, they too became German citizens. This was to have serious consequences for the family in the succeeding years.

On 28th June 1914, the Archduke, Franz Ferdinand was shot and on just one month later, Britain declared war on Germany. All enemy alien citizens were rounded up as a consequence of the quickly passed, Alien's Act of 5th August 1914. This of course included, Herman and John Lorenz. Initially they were interned at a camp in Lancaster, later being transferred to Knockaloe on the Isle of Man. Their families did not escape restrictions as they came under very strict regulations too, limiting their movement and lives. In October of 1914 as a result of an overnight stay at her sister's home, Sarah Lorenz was arrested. Had a neighbour reported her? She might have imagined that she would have just been warned but German feeling ran so high that she was sentenced to a period of imprisonment, causing her to collapse in the dock.

As Annie and Christina were not actually German or married to Germans they were not subject to the same limitations but their position and status in their local society could well have been seriously compromised.

Personal and national events brought distress in 1915 for Christina as on 8th February her sister, Ann Elizabeth died at the early age of 28 from

heart disease and dropsy. Annie was recorded on the Electoral Roll in that year. Her qualification would probably have been ownership of 3, School Road, so did Christina take over the ownership on Annie's death? A national, nay, international event was to have a direct effect on Christina. On 7th May 1915 the liner, Lusitania was sunk by German action. Anyone with connections to Germany was already in an uneasy situation in their community but this event caused them to be even more ostracized. Despite not being a German or married to a German, Christina's German heritage would have put her in an uncomfortable situation.

What Christina did next isn't on any records, as she does not appear until on 26th Sept 1917, when she gave birth to a son, Henry Stuart Lawrence, at 6, Norwood, Beverley, Yorkshire, Susan's Father. To lessen the impact of her German name Christina had anglicized both hers and her baby's names. Beverley was a journey of around 85 miles. What made her make such a journey in order to give birth to her baby? An illegitimate birth did bring shame to a family but Christina's family were already separated by legal restrictions.

The house at 6, Norwood was not an unmarried mother's home. In previous censuses there had been a family name Lorenz living a few doors away but we have yet to discover a family link. Baby Henry was not registered until 21st Oct when Christina gave her address back in

Lancashire, a few yards away from her home in School Road, as 179, Minor St, Failsworth. However she would have had to return to Beverley as the registration had to be made in person. Why did she leave it so long to register her son? Unfortunately there was no Electoral Roll in the war years

On 21st Dec 1917 a birth certificate for baby Henry was purchased, presumably in preparation for a very distressing event in Christina's life which occurred on Christmas Day, the handing over of her baby to a couple from Huddersfield, 43 year old John William Gaskell and his wife 41 year old Ann Elizabeth Steele. In 1917 there was no formal adoption but there must have been some form of official sanction as Christina wrote a letter renouncing her rights to her baby which was witnessed by a local authority midwife, Emma Anderton. This area of Lancashire had been in the forefront of improving care for pregnant women and after care, having an excellent reputation and Emma Anderton having been a qualified midwife since 1905.

The Agreement Dec: 25th 1917

I the Mother of this Baby Boy
Henry Ernest Lawrence

do hereby agree to give absolutely
and entirely without reserve or any
further claim whatsoever

My only wish is that he may grow
up to be a good citizen, and a joy
to you whom I now hand him over to.

Signed by his Mother. Christina Lawrence

Witness Emma Anderton Health Visitor. Certified Nurse &
Midwife Failsworth Urban District Council

Had Susan not found out about her Father's "adoption" in 2010 she would have had a great shock when the 1921 census was released as the information was recorded clearly with the baby's new name John Henry Gaskell and his father recorded as deceased. The other surprise found in this record is where Christina was living, 34, Pole Avenue, Failsworth, with midwife, Emma Anderton and husband John. They must also have found her a job as Christina was a cook at the Newton Heath Waggon Works, for the same employer as John.

For 10 years Christina disappeared from the record when in 1931 she turned up on the Electoral Roll at 18, King George's Avenue, Blackpool. She was still there in 1939 employed as a housekeeper in a boarding house. In 1964 Christina passed away, she was still employed at 18, King George's Ave but now she was living in the next street, at 19, King Edward Ave. The person "causing the body to be buried" was an undertaker. Did Christina die alone with no one to care for her?

CERTIFIED COPY
Pursuant to the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953

FE 78

Registration District: Blackpool

1964 DEATHS in the Sub-district of Blackpool North in the County Borough of Blackpool

Column	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description, and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
181	<u>Eighteenth February 1964</u> <u>19 King Edward Avenue</u> <u>Blackpool</u>	<u>Christina</u> <u>Loring</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>73</u> <u>Year.</u>	<u>18 King George Avenue</u> <u>Blackpool</u> <u>Housekeeper</u> <u>Spiritist</u>	<u>1. (a) Anaemia</u> <u>(b) renal failure</u> <u>(c) hypertension</u> <u>certified by</u> <u>J. W. H. Scott M.B.</u>	<u>W. B. Dewhurst</u> <u>causing the body</u> <u>to be cremated</u> <u>125 Heligate Drive</u> <u>Blackpool</u>	<u>Twenty first</u> <u>February</u> <u>1964</u>	<u>J. Beattie</u> <u>Registrar</u>

Christina's ashes were scattered in Rose Garden 9 in Blackpool Crematorium. Was she the lady in the background at the boarding house where people were attended to but no one took a great deal of notice who looked after them. Did she go to church or bingo, enjoy the illuminations? Was there no one to pay their respects?

Susan has a vague recollection of when she was very young, standing in Gynn Square, Blackpool, with her Mum and Dad who were discussing whether to visit a lady. Was it Christina? Did they know then that Susan's Dad was adopted? Christina was buried with no one but now as we place her back in Susan's life she will not be a "forgotten woman" but be a Grandmother, Great Grandmother to 2 and a Great Great Grandmother to 4 children. Of course there is still one link in Susan's background missing, a Grandfather, but hopefully we may be close to filling that void.

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