

## Steam trains and Subterfuge

In my first submission to SFH (Vol 21 No 1, March 2014) I described my researches into my Sussex roots, via both Grandmothers. Although neither Grandfather had Sussex connections, until their marriages to my Grandmothers, their histories are equally interesting, and have disclosed a few skeletons!

Although born in East London, I grew up in, and my best memories are of, Lewisham borough, in the area of Brockley, South east London. I became aware that my paternal family had lived in this area for some time, although they later moved to Kent, then Sussex. My return to East Ham came with visits to my maternal grandparents, during the 1960's.

### *Steam is in my blood*

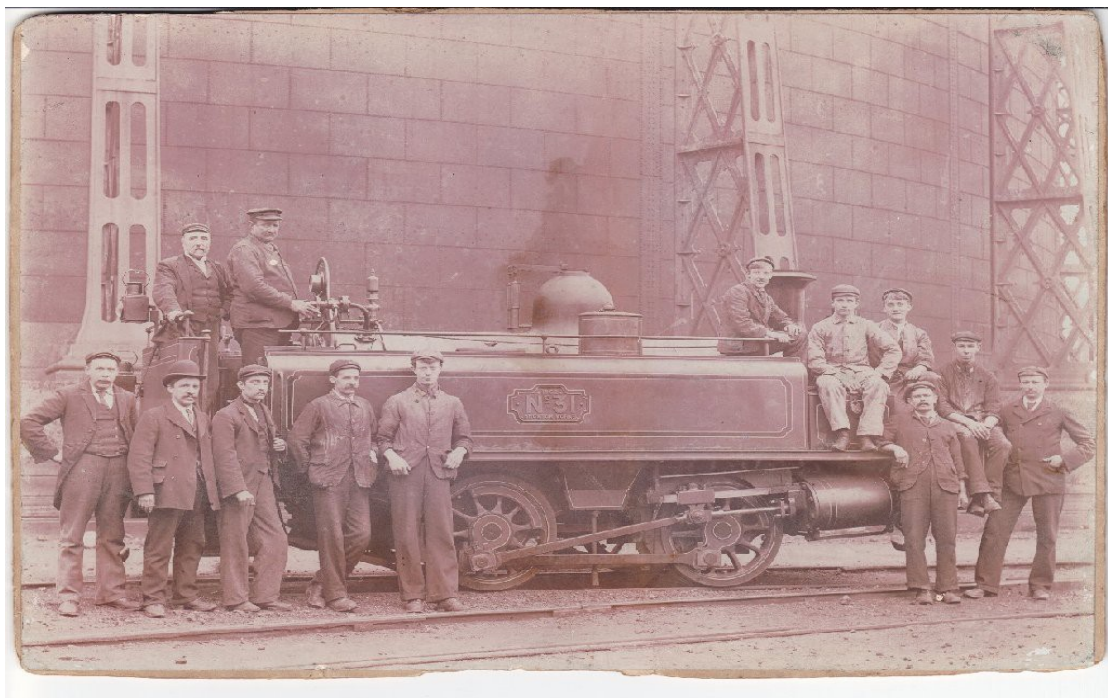
My maternal grandfather, Bertram James DOBBS, was born 5 September 1885, to John DOBBS and Julia (HILL). He married Edith Rose BOOTS (see previous article) 30 April 1920, and they had two children – Ronald Bertram John, and my mother Jean Margaret Julia, both inheriting their third names from their paternal grandparents. Bertram was an engineer, and worked for lighterage companies including Butler's Wharf, near London Bridge. But before I talk further about his experiences, I should go back to his father. Although Bertram was born in Beckton, East London, it is known that John originated from Norwich area. He was born to James DOBBS and Elizabeth (SMITH) 30 November 1845, and baptised 28 December 1845, in Heigham parish. The family address in 1851 was Dereham Road, and the census shows 5 older siblings, from 17 years old down to 7. By 1861, the family was at Mill Lane, with only John and 2 older siblings living with their parents, plus a Grandson, Charles. The occupation of the working members was "Agricultural Labourer" ("Charwoman" in the case of Elizabeth). In an adjacent street lived James DOBBS, wife Honor and daughter Harriet – almost certainly the oldest child of James and Elizabeth, and I assume Charles was their son, staying with the older James and Elizabeth.

By 1871, John had moved, and was lodging with an elderly widow, Mary Armitage, in Edmonton, Enfield, Middlesex. His occupation was "Fire-man" to which a different hand has added "on a railway". Here I must make a confession; ever since I can remember I have been a railway enthusiast – primarily steam, particularly Industrial and Light railways, and specifically Narrow Gauge (as in Wales, but also elsewhere). Whether this predilection was passed to me genetically, or by example from my parents, I cannot tell. (My hobby includes making models, operating on a local Miniature Railway, and membership of a couple of Heritage steam railways). I have long known that my great grandfather John was, eventually, a locomotive driver, at the Beckton Gasworks<sup>1</sup>, in east London.

The first photo shows this distinguished man (with moustache) at the controls of his allocated locomotive sometime in the early 1900's. He must have been among the first employees, as the Works was only built during the late 1860's, and opened around 1870. John married Julia 21 July 1872, in Edmonton, but soon relocated to the Beckton area, living in Roman Road, East Ham in 1881; from 1891, the family were at Winsor Terrace, a row of company houses backing onto the Gasworks<sup>1</sup> marshalling yard, where my mother remembers playing with her brother between and underneath the railway wagons there – a Health and Safety nightmare! He retired in 1913, and continued to live for the rest of his life, in Winsor Terrace, Beckton. He died 26 March 1941; Julia died 20 June 1943. They had six children, including Bertram.



We can now return to my Grandfather, Bertram. In 1901, he was a “Dock Messenger” living at the Beckton home. However, the photograph below from my collection shows a young Bertram, seated on the tank of a locomotive beside the chimney, with a large number of other men around and on the loco. Family tradition has it that he helped build this locomotive, as an apprentice, and the building date is shown as 1902. That this locomotive (and a twin) was constructed at the Beckton works, is a matter of record. It was a close copy of a series of locomotives, originally supplied by the company of Neilson & Co. Apparently Neilson's were not impressed by this, and further bought-in locomotives were obtained from other manufacturers! The two photos show that the Beckton locomotives were built to a reduced height to enable them to work in the close confines of the Gasworks buildings. Number 31 later became the “Royal” locomotive, used for visiting dignitaries, and kept in polished condition.



By 1911, Bertram was boarding in Walworth, Lambeth, London. Here is recorded as “Engine Motor Fitter”, employed by the General Motor Cab Co. As mentioned above, he married Edith in 1920, with registered address in South Esk Road, Forest Gate London, and I believe they then lived in the same street, until the 1950's, when I first knew them, although at a different number. When Edith died in 1962, Bertram was recorded as “Fitter and Turner (retired)”. He lived alone for several years, before staying with my parents for a few years, and then in a home in Stratford. He died 29 March 1970, at the home, of complications of prostate cancer. In many ways he was an inspiration for my own engineering interests, and encouraged me in electrical science.

We must now consider my Great-grandmother, Julia Hill, and the plot thickens! My mother kept the bound family Bible, presented to John and Julia at their marriage in 1872. In this is recorded their names and birth details; those of their children, and subsequently grandchildren, with their Marriages; and Deaths. These are supplemented by later details, in different hands, including Bertram and my mother. So, firstly we knew Julia was born 11 June 1847, and this gives her surname as “HILL”. The only other HILL names recorded are William (died 9 December 1879 aged 93), and Ellen (d. 13 May 1876 aged 91). For many years, my mother assumed these were Julia's parents. However, given the date of Julia's birth, 1847, and the ages of these worthies at death, suggests birth dates for William and Ellen as around 1786, which would make them about 61 when Julia was born! When I started to research my Tree, the first information I obtained about Julia was that she was born in Buntingford, Hertfordshire. I duly tracked down a probable birth record, and obtained the relevant birth certificate. This revealed that Julia was born to Emma HILLS, in Layston Workhouse (part of Buntingford). Emma was unable to sign her name, and the column for the father's name is blank. Furthermore, Emma had previously had a daughter, also named Emma, in 1845, under similar circumstances. Emma was recorded as being born about 1826 (most Census records \*) in Buntingford, although no birth record has been found. In 1857, she married George ALDRIDGE. This corresponds with a record in the Bible, to his death in 1890. There is no reference to Emma in this book, but it appears that she and George had at least three children. George was born around 1830, and there is no suggestion that he was the father of Emma's earlier children. In 1861, George and Emma were living, with their two elder children, plus Emma junior, in Buntingford High Street (95). Meanwhile, Julia HILLS was found at another property in the High St, with William and Ellen HILLS, shown as their granddaughter (68). If these property numbers correspond to the current postal addresses, these were opposite each other, as confirmed by a visit by my wife and myself a few years ago. So, Julia went from an inauspicious start, to a rather grand old lady, as recalled by my mother.

[\* There is a death record for Emma ALDRIDGE in 1903, at Royston, where George had died, showing an age of 84, which, if the correct person, would suggest an earlier birth date, more in line with the 1841 Census that suggests approximately 1821. I guess I ought to follow this up).

### *The William Emerson conundrum*

This puzzle concerns my father's paternal grandfather (my great grandfather). For most of his life he was known as William Emerson SANDERSON (1848 - 1891) and was apparently the son of William Emerson SANDERSON (1802 – 1876). From these I obtain my family name. For convenience I will refer to them as William Jnr and William Snr.

However, firstly I should trace my paternal line back – my father was Stuart Emerson SANDERSON (1913 – 1997) the second of four siblings, children of Henry Emerson SANDERSON (1881 - 1931) and Rose Ella NICOLLS (as described before). Henry was born to William Emerson SANDERSON and Fanny Susannah (WARD).

William Jnr married Fanny Susannah WARD on 29 April 1878, in Greenwich (Kent – now London

SE10). They had three children, including my grandfather Henry Emerson. In the 1881 Census [3 April] they lived in Lewisham Kent (now SE13) , and he gave his age as 32, suggesting a birth year of 1849; and his birth place as simply Kent. In the 1891 Census [5 April], the family had moved within the Lewisham area to Emerson Terrace, Forest Hill. He was 42, and stated he was born in Greenwich. He died 30 June 1891. He was recorded as Bank Clerk, a career followed by Henry and my uncle (but not my father). Initial searches for his birth were therefore made in the Greenwich area, but nothing was found. However, before his marriage, he was found living with William Snr, in 1871, at Guildford Road Greenwich, aged 22, and born in Sydenham (Lewisham, Kent). Also noted were two siblings – Jesse E (19) and Marion J (16), but no sign of a mother. Both William's Snr and Jnr are found in 1861, lodging with Henry Ward in Greenwich, whose family included a young Fanny Susannah thus indicating we were on the right track. Again William Jnr is shown as being born in Sydenham. However, once again, no sign of a birth record was found there either. Finally, moving back to the 1851 Census [30 March] William Snr is living in Greenwich, with his aged mother (Jane), her Nurse, a servant, and his Housekeeper – Marion MILLER, aged 26, a widow – with her son William E MILLER, aged 2 and born in Sydenham. This enabled a search for the birth record of William Miller, and sure enough, a record for William Emerson MILLER was found, in Dartmouth Place, Sydenham, Lewisham. The certificate confirmed a date of 20 May 1848, father William MILLER - a carpenter, and mother Marion MILLER, formerly MILLER. A further discovery, in the will of William Snr, stated: *"...I give and bequeath to my adopted son William Emerson Miller known as William Emerson Sanderson ..."*. On the face of it, we have a story of kindness on the part of William Snr, in taking in the widowed Marion and her son, and later adopting William Jnr as his own. It would appear that, therefore, I am descended genetically from the Miller family, not Sanderson! However, the existence of two (half?) siblings for William Jnr in the 1871 Census, led to a search for these. What the 1851 census hides is that Marion was heavily pregnant, and the birth of Jesse Emerson SANDERSON on 7 July 1851 was registered to William Emerson Sanderson (Snr) and Marion Miller. In the same circumstances Marion Jane SANDERSON was born 13 August 1854, and another, Albert Emerson SANDERSON on 7 September 1856. As indicated above, the whereabouts of Marion after the births was a mystery, and no record of a marriage between her and William Snr is found. The three younger siblings are also noted as "adopted" in William senior's will, despite the clear statement that William (Snr) was their father, in the birth certificates! In the same census that shows the two Williams in 1871, Jesse Emerson and Marion Jane are present, but Albert appears to be missing? Albert SANDERSON, however, was found in the 1881 census, lodging in Deptford (Greenwich) at the house of John KNAPMAN, along with Marian SANDERSON, aged 41, a "widow" (which would be true as William Snr had died in 1876) as a boarder. Both are recorded as "annuitant", so were in receipt of some allowance. Marian appears to be too young to be the mother of the four siblings, but probably John Knapman was not fully aware of the ages? (Marion Jane SANDERSON, the younger, was by this time married to George CARTER, and living in Greenwich with two children). Albert is then found to have left Southwark Workhouse in 1882, and subsequently married in 1883, and seems to have prospered. In fact, his father's will did not let him inherit until 1881, when he was 25, so he may have struggled financially for a time! It should be noted that William (Snr) was a "House Agent" and apparently not short of property. I have recently continued my search for Marion MILLER, and came across a death record for Marion Jane SANDERSON, in 1890. With the record number, I was able to order a PDF copy from the GRO, and sure enough, she was noted in Greenwich, as aged 60 years, the widow of William SANDERSON an Insurance Agent. Shockingly, the cause of death was 'Alcoholism', and the informant was an 'Inmate' at the same address, suggesting she was in some sort of hostel? At least with an alternative potential year of birth, I was able to search again for her. I finally came up trumps, with a census record in 1861 for Maria Jane MILLER, at an address in Lewisham Road, Greenwich. Reference to the image showed her with her three later children –

Jesse Emerson SANDERSON, age 9; Mary Ann (Marion) Jane SANDERSON, age 6; Albert Emerson SANDERSON, age 4. The transcription was incorrect, showing the children as "Davieson". Maria was shown as Head of the household, and as "Day Nurse" which I read as "Dry Nurse" from the image. The children are each recorded as "Nurse Child" which suggests Maria was trying to distance herself from being their natural mother?

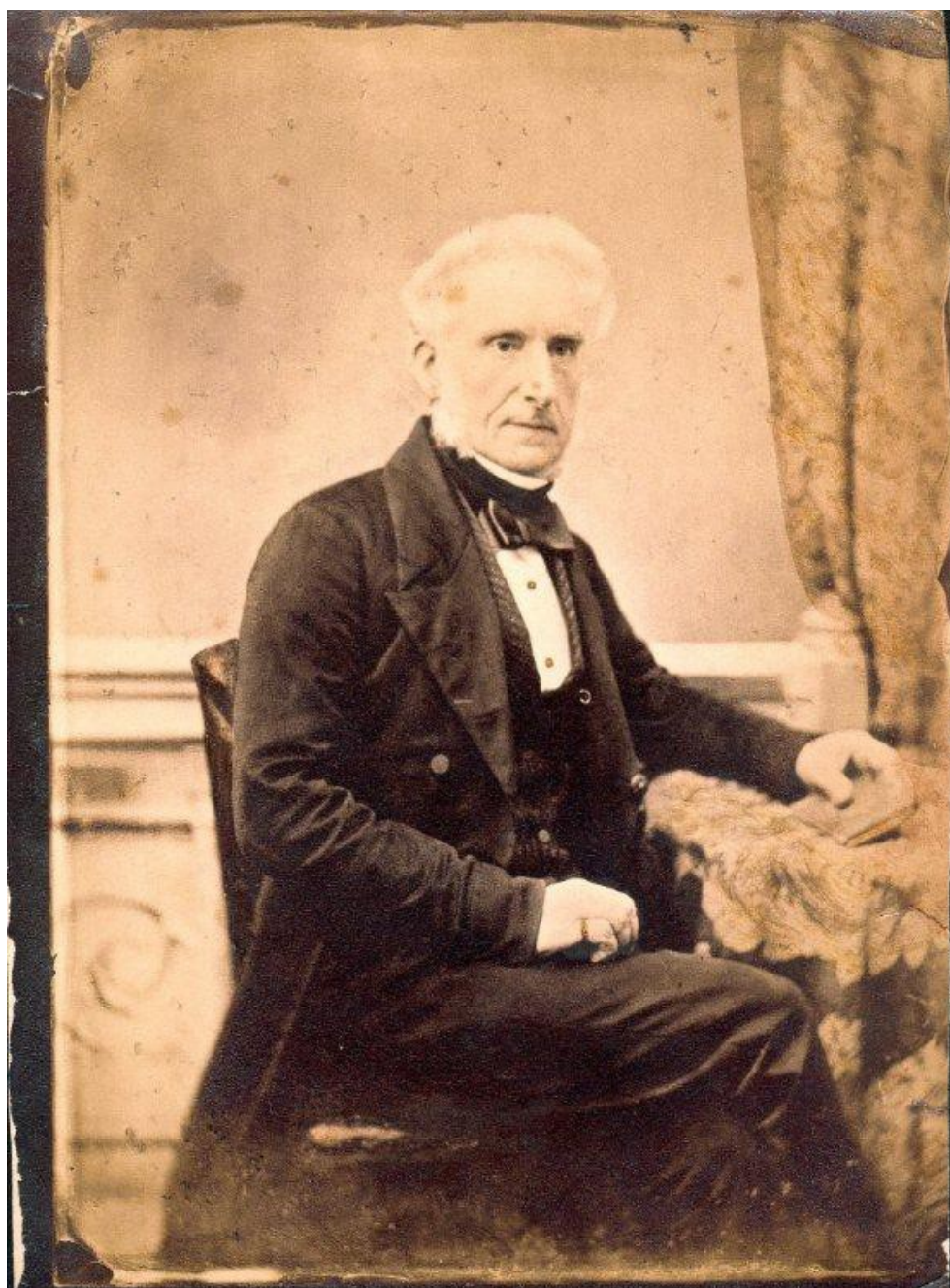
To go back another stage, to 1841, William Snr is then found in the same location as in 1851, but living with his wife, Eliza, and their 16 year old daughter, Frances M. For many years no further trace was found of Eliza, although Frances married and had 10 children. Finally Eliza was tracked down, with a marriage record for Eliza SHALLESS to William E SANDERSON, on 8 June 1824, in Lee, Lewisham, Kent. With this maiden name, it was possible to trace her birth, in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, on 30 April 1805, baptised 26 May 1805. Her parents were Thomas SHALLESS and Elizabeth MORRISON. In the 1861 census, Eliza is living in Woolwich, as "Proprietor of Houses" and describes herself as "Widow". It would appear therefore that she and William had separated, and that she wanted nothing to do with him! (However, she appears to have shared William's involvement in property). She is absent from the 1871 census, but her death record shows she died in Woolwich, on 14 January 1872. Here, at least, the neighbour who was present and registered the death, was clear that Eliza was the wife of William SANDERSON, House Agent, which is consistent with what we know of him.

You will note the recurrence of the second name Emerson for male offspring. This name is rare, so the fact that William Miller (Jnr) was named Emerson is suspicious – especially in light of the clear (later) affair between William Emerson Snr and his housekeeper. The fact that Marion gives "Miller" as her maiden name as well as her married name also raises questions – could the father be an invention – of a scared young woman, pregnant by her employer? Could she have given her father's name? I recently found an 1841 census record for a Mary Miller, aged 11, living in Blackheath (close to both Greenwich and Lewisham). Her father was recorded as William. If this was Marion, by one of her many names, then this latter suggestion is more possible. Why would she name her son Emerson, if she did not already know William Emerson Snr? The treatment in his Will of William Jnr was the same as that of the children (admitted as) born to William Snr and Marion. William Jnr was appointed joint Executor, with Jesse, and suggests that in fact William was not simply "adopted" but a true son of William (Snr)! Although perhaps there is still room for doubt? The fact that William (Jnr) lived at **Emerson Terrace** is surely not a coincidence either!

It appears that both Jesse and Marion Jane died young (1885 and 1886 respectively) after marrying CARTER siblings! They had no male children. However, Albert Emerson SANDERSON had several children, and I have traced his male descents to a Stewart SANDERSON who was born in 1953 (in Brighton, Sussex). I later found a brother to Stewart, and made contact with their niece; I hoped to compare DNA, to confirm whether we both have a male connection to William Emerson Senior, however neither uncle was willing. In a similar way, this line maintained the second name Emerson, down to the same generation as my father. I did however, receive some photos of this line, and found that several similarities in facial details exist, but not enough to definitively state that we are all descended from William Emerson Senior.

My final evidence comes in photos below. The first shows William Emerson senior, later in life, probably around 1870; the second is of my late father some 120 years later. Apart from the difference in demeanour – stern and official against relaxed and happy, I think you will see the similarity in profile, especially our Sanderson nose, with flared nostrils!

It would therefore appear that William Emerson SANDERSON senior was an honourable man, who nevertheless fell for a younger woman, and that he made the best provision for his illegitimate children by her. So, I can proudly own the name SANDERSON!





- i A full account of the Beckton works and railway system is given in a book "Beckton's Railways and Locomotives", by D Marden, from Kestrel Railway Books.