

John Trinder's Family History

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I first became interested in our family history about 45 years ago, when my mother's cousin Kenneth Kelsey, my second cousin, showed me his KELSEY family tree (my mother's maiden name)

I have my copy here if you care to see it and it has an entry for my grandmother who was born Elizabeth TIPTON at a small village called Stanton Lacey near Ludlow, Shropshire in 1870. I do not remember my grandmother because I was only 2 years old when she died in 1942 of Diabetes. I do remember my mother telling me that my grandmother was originally the vicar's housekeeper and she came to Lydney, Glos with the vicar when he was promoted to a larger living.

Kenneth had always been keen to trace his family roots. It was his early teenage hobby and over time he managed to trace back to his tenth grandfather, my eleventh grandfather, around about 1550 who owned a water-powered flour mill near the village of Kingsley, Hampshire. He must have had a successful business because one of the bells in the local church was donated by him and it has the family name stamped on it.

Apparently work in many instances was hard to come by in those days in the smaller communities and therefore when children became teenagers it was necessary for them to leave home to find work in other parts of the country. My great, great grandfather James Kelsey on my mother's side of the family moved from Fareham, Hants to Lydney Gloucestershire, Forest of Dean. I do not know what his trade was, nor what work he did.

I do know that my grandfather Maurice worked in a tin-plate mill near the coal docks in Lydney. I vividly remember when I was about 10 years old he took me for a visit into the furnace building at the mill to show me the almost white hot metal coming through very large rollers at a pre-determined width and thickness. The heat was terrific and how anybody managed several hours a day in that temperature must have been quite a challenge. This goes some way to explain why at the end of the work shifts men would drop into the local public house to replenish some of the liquids they had lost at work.

Around about 1911 my grandfather's brother, who had worked at the tin mill emigrated to America, where he managed to obtain a position in a similar mill and was much better paid than the wages he received in this country. As a result he constantly wrote to my grandfather trying to persuade him to give up his job and also to emigrate to America where he was, and he would make sure there would be a job waiting for him.

I recall my mother telling me that things came to a head in early 1912, when she was 10 years old, and a decision was made to go. At virtually the day or so before my grandad was to leave work he was offered a good promotion and consequently the move never happened and they decided to stay. Perhaps it was just as well otherwise they might have travelled on the Titanic !!

Fate plays a strange hand sometimes.

When Ken retired from working for the Gloucestershire County Council he extended his hobby and interest in genealogy by helping other people to discover their past family histories.

He became so well known that he received numerous requests particularly from America for help in tracing ancestors originally from this country.

On one or two occasions I remember going with him to visit graveyards and scraping off moss and crumbling pieces of tombstones or monumental inscriptions as they are known, to establish evidence of names and dates.

He would, as best as he could, draw up family trees of ancestors long gone for people living abroad who have perhaps never visited this country. There is a huge interest now with people abroad wanting to know where their families originated from.

He didn't charge people for his time but he was grateful if he was successful in helping and was happy if he was given something to offset his costs, which could be quite considerable, because by nature of the tasks he had to do a large amount of travelling. Most of his work was spent in the Gloucestershire and Cotswold area.

We have to remember the internet is a fairly recent happening, and before the coming of computers tracing family trees was a much more difficult task.

The one thing I always remember him telling me was you have to try to prove each step backwards and the obvious way is to obtain certificates of Birth, Marriage and Death for your relations. This should be possible back to 1837 when certificates were first issued.

These are obtainable from the General Records Office for about £9 each. I have collected quite a lot over the years. It is quite exciting waiting for the certificates to arrive because they come by Royal Mail a few days after they have been ordered. You are not sure until you see them as to whether you are on to the right family or not.

I was led astray once because there were two Alfreds in the Trinder family born in the same year – 1857- in the same area, one in January, one in August. With Kenneth's help we were following the wrong one for some time. They turned out to be cousins.

When I first started I wanted to concentrate on my family surname: Trinder.

Kenneth helped me hugely to establish my family tree, but there was a problem in 1750. It appeared that our surname may have changed from Kimber to Trinder. About 30 years ago we visited a small village called Sunningwell in Berkshire and by great good fortune we called at the village church and vicarage and luck was on our side. We managed to meet with the vicar who explained that he was retiring and the church registers of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials were actually being sent the next day to the archives in Reading. He was very obliging and after I explained the reason for our visit regarding Family History, he allowed us into the vicarage to look at the books which were extremely old, and the earlier entries were written in very old English letters.

In small villages in earlier times there were not many reasons for people to use their surnames. Most of the population could not read or write and sometimes there were quite large gaps in time in the register entries. As I remember the first letter of my surname could have been read as a K or a T and the d could have been a b. Confusion would be on the cards especially when there was a change of vicar.

If one has an idea from which county a family may have originated from, it is a good idea to contact the local Family History Society in that county. In my case I knew my father was born in Wallingford,

Berkshire so I joined the Berkshire Family Society some few years ago and I am still a member. This costs me £16 a year for which I receive a quarterly journal which contains interesting articles about the county and families who have lived there in the past. There is also a show "Who Do You Think You Are" which is held at the N.E.C in Birmingham annually. This is where the different county Family History Societies exhibit and are available to help people to find their family roots. It is well worth a visit if one is interested in family history.

It is interesting to know that before the last 2 World Wars families quite often consisted of 8 or 10 or more children. Quite frequently if one of the parents deceased, the surviving parent was not long before remarrying, perhaps to a widow or widower who may have several children already of their own. Therefore it was not unusual for families to consist of a dozen or more children living in two up two down cottages. I have this example in my family where my great, great grandfather married a widow who had several children of her own already.

We should also remember that in times gone by there were no such thing as benefits or pensions and old peoples sheltered accommodation. The best perhaps, was alms houses if one was lucky, or it was the workhouse. Consequently it was normal for elderly parents, when they could no longer work, to move in with their children, as can be seen on some of the census's from earlier times.

Government census's are a very valuable tool. The most recent one which is available to see is 1911. These have been conducted every 10 years since 1841. I do not think there was one done in 1941 for obvious reasons. The census is only released into the public domain after 100 years. Presumably not many people can still be alive after that length of time, although it seems we are beginning to live longer on average. The first census was not so informative as the more recent ones. The modern ones, for example normally contain the work that the family members did. I may be wrong but I think I have heard that there will not be one in 2021 because of the costs involved.

Over the centuries it seems my family members moved to other small villages in Berkshire, Buscot and then Sunningwell, 3 miles north of Abingdon. Subsequently moving to Abingdon itself.

I knew my family originated from Berkshire. Really useful sources of information, I have discovered, have been obtained from various C.D's from the Berkshire Family History Society. These contain church records for the various parishes in the county on Baptisms, Marriages and Burials. I have realised my family appears for the first time in records at a small village called Eaton Hastings around the late 1500's and early 1600's.

My grandfather first started work in the Post Office in Abingdon in 1896 before eventually he obtained the Post Masters job at the smaller town of Wallingford. During the First World War my grandfather was asked to set up a Post Office for an army transit training camp at Chisledon, Wilts. and he was subsequently transferred to a larger transit training camp at Halton, near Wendover Bucks. He was actually required to join the army on a short service arrangement and as such became a member of the Royal Engineers Signal Corps with army number 376594.

It was during this time that I remember him telling me he was in some way involved with a fire at the camp, but he didn't elaborate very much about the incident except it had something to do with railway carriages.

I know he was awarded the O.B.E. for his efforts with the fire and probably because of his war service. After the war was over and he returned to normal civilian life he was promoted to a Head Postmasters position in the Post Office. From that time onwards until he had to retire at the age of 60 in January 1940, he was advanced every few years to various larger Head post Offices throughout the country. I know that he didn't want to retire from Post Office work but he had no choice in those days. Because of having being promoted about every 3 years to higher responsibilities he and

my grandma had no fixed home life roots. As a result they decided to come to live in Soham in 1940 where my father had become the sub postmaster in 1933.

My father was in a reserved occupation running the Post Office and therefore not obliged to join up. Late in 1940, when it was obvious the war had some way to go, grandfather persuaded my Dad to volunteer to join the Royal Signals with the idea that grandfather would continue to run the Post Office in Soham, whilst my father was away. I don't think my grandad was too unhappy with this arrangement!!

I was only a few months old when he joined up so I didn't remember him at that time. My first memory of my father was in late 1945 when he was demobbed unexpectedly and came home unannounced up the stairs to our flat above the Post Office. I remember being quite frightened because he was quite a large man in full army uniform complete with beret! I think up to that time I thought my grandad was my father.

Later on I remember my dad telling me of an occasion when a little before D day, June 6th 1944, he was at a show at one of the London theatres which was being compared by Tommy Trinder, who had become quite famous at that time in the theatre world. During the show Tommy Trinder asked the audience if by chance there was anybody there with the same surname as he, and if so would they make themselves known to him after the show. This my father did and I think they had a drink together. They obviously didn't know of any family connection between them but I have since discovered that Tommy Trinder's father came from a small village called Shilton not so very far away from the Berkshire villages my family stem from.

Tommy Trinder's father came to work in London as a tram driver and Tommy was born on 24th March 1909 in Stretham, London. He was nearly the same age as my father. Some of you may recall his catchphrase was "you lucky people" and I have had that quoted to me from time to time at the Ely City Golf Club, although that phrase doesn't seem to apply to my game of golf.

On D day plus 3 my father crossed to Normandy with 3 army lorries, 2 fully equipped with wireless apparatus and the third lorry as a back-up, which also contained the soldiers individual kits. I think I remember my father telling me the lorries used the Mulberry Harbour B. One of Churchill's ideas. Churchill realised that all the French Channel ports would be heavily defended by the Germans, and therefore an alternative to landing the allied troops ashore had to be found.

Hence the floating harbours off the Normandy beaches of which there were 2, Mulberry A for the Americans and Mulberry B for the British & Canadians. D day was originally scheduled for 5th June but was delayed to 6th June because there was a big storm in the Channel and Mulberry A became unuseable, so that Mulberry B had to be used for all the heavy vehicles. My father's lorries with their wireless equipment were attached to General Montgomery's mobile headquarters and my father travelled with them through France for the next year or so. When Churchill arrived from England on the destroyer HMS Kelvin and transferred to the beach on an amphibious vehicle called a DUKW, I have a photograph here of my father in the background as Churchill stepped down from the vehicle. This occurred on Juno beach 13th June 1944. If you care to see it.

Towards the end of the war, I was told my father was sent with some others by air on a DC3, Dakota, to Copenhagen to report on the fact that the Germans were leaving the city undefended and therefore the city was to be declared open. Whilst he was there he liberated the very large German red flag with a black swastika on one side and an eagle on the other, which was flying at the gestapo headquarters in the city. He brought it home with him and for many years it remained folded up in our hall cupboard.

Whilst he was in Copenhagen he became very friendly with a Danish family and the father of that family knew my dad had possession of the flag. Eventually my dad was asked to return the flag for it to go into the occupation museum which was being set up in the city, and he sent it back. Not many years ago we went on a Baltic cruise to St. Petersburg. On the way back we called at Copenhagen for a visit and we went to the museum. Unfortunately it had been set on fire by some fanatics only a fortnight earlier. I was told by a guard on the site that not all of the museum had been destroyed and it would be re-built in time. So I hope to go back some time in the future to see if the flag survived.

Another of my early memories was of my grandfather having me sit on a blanket when I was about 4 years old on the back seat of his Ford 8 car to disguise what was underneath.....tins of jam, butter etc which I believe may have come from a nearby American air-base. My grandfather was allowed a petrol allowance because of delivering post office telegrams to the neighbouring fen areas. He was quite enterprising. I also remember when I was older him allowing me to sit on his lap to steer the car on some of the quieter country lanes whilst he operated the controls. No such thing as Health & Safety then!!

Two further early memories I have:

On 2nd June 1944 @ 1.05 a.m. there was a huge explosion seemingly in the town. I was sleeping in my mother's bedroom since I was only 4years old, and my father was still away. I remember my grandfather coming into the bedroom with a torch telling us not to worry and that perhaps an aircraft had crashed nearby. It turned out to be the Soham Railway station disaster where one truck carrying bombs for the allied air forces in East Anglia blew up. If it had not been for the heroism of

the train crew in detaching the first burning truck from the rest of the train, the likelihood would have been Soham and the whole of the surrounding area would have disappeared, including possibly Ely. There were 44 trucks in total. It was also very fortunate that the two gasometers situated at the gas works close to the Soham station, were only partially filled and they didn't blow up. Nevertheless Soham station disappeared and all the shop windows in the High Street were blown out. One of the truck's wheels was subsequently found half a mile from the explosion.

The two platforms of the station were very quickly replaced as a temporary measure with railway sleepers. I vividly recall catching the morning steam train from Soham station at 8.06a.m. (always on time) when I started work at the Cambridge Head Post Office in 1956. This train connected at Ely with the 8.20a.m Fenman train arriving at Cambridge station at 8.45a.m and enabling me to catch the bus into work at 9.00a.m. Subsequently around 1963-1964 under the Dr Beeching programme the stations at Soham, Fordham & Mildenhall were demolished and as I see it today we could really do with them back again.

My next early memory was the winter of 1947-8 when the floods occurred and I remember going with my father and other men from the town in the middle of the night to Barway where the river bank of the Great Ouse was in danger of giving way, and I helped filling flour bags with sand to reinforce the banks.

My story wouldn't be complete without me thanking Kate Cann for all her hard work in helping me with my family history and I would recommend that if members of the U3A are interested in their family histories they contact Kate.

Thank you for listening, I hope you found it interesting.