

## **Grandparents**

I wish I had known my grandparents. Alas, I was born too late (or they disappeared from my life too soon).

By the time I was born in 1920 I had 3 out of 4. My mother's father, WILLIAM OWEN RIDDY, had gone from my life a decade or so earlier. No one in our household talked of him. He had abandoned my grandma and his four grown-up children and gone to Cambridgeshire where he met and married a young woman called EDITH. They had a daughter named KATHY who became the local church organist and with whom my mother corresponded and even called on in World War 2. I am sure old OWEN RIDDY was an old rascal but I knew only what I heard in whispers in the house. He was quite bright for a country boy (which he was, hailing from some village in Ireland and coming here with the heavy influx of Irish labourers who came to England in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to dig canals and later to install railways). His 3 sons and 1 daughter (FREDERICK born 1885, Percy (known as PHIL) 1887, BLANCHE KATHLEEN 1889 and ERNEST 1891) all seemed to inherit his ability to succeed in life. He went into business successfully as a CARTER owning horses and horse-drawn carriages and carts, son FREDERICK became a golf professional when he emigrated to Canada, son PHIL played soccer as an amateur for QPR and later for Tottenham Hotspurs before emigrating to Canada. There he won more than a dozen international caps for the England team who, as émigrés, went under the name of The Old Country and played against Canada. (I do not know how the Canada team differed from the England team. Perhaps they were second generation Canadians.)

My mother BLANCHE KATHLEEN RIDDY was my mother and therefore, of course, faultless. She was intelligent, learned from everything she saw while in domestic service (which she was, from age 13) and was the backbone of our COOPER family. Under her beady eye we were disciplined – my father as well – and we acquired three houses which realised sufficient income for a decent standard of living and afterwards a reasonable pension to supplement my father's occupational pension in old age.

My uncle ERNEST the 4<sup>th</sup> child became a highly skilled metal worker who worked for British Thompson Houston at Rugby and was seconded to the experimental team of Sir Frank Whittle where he worked on the first jet-powered aeroplane engine.

Mt maternal grandma CATHERINE SARAH RIDDY (née SMITH) lived with us until she died in 1947 aged 95. She was a character and I had lots of time to talk to her about her ancestry. Like so many people of her era her life was one of survival, and only hard work and loving cooperation with the family ensured her survival. Her uncle (named SMITH) she could recall. He went out to India with the first railway locomotive that country possessed and he made that his lifetime occupation.

Gran had a heart murmur. We, her grandchildren, would take it in turns to put our heads to her breast and listen to the unequal rhythm of her heartbeat. The things I remember best about her were her loyalty to our Cooper family. She was always home to welcome us after school or work; she was always ready to spoil us; she would look forward to Christmas when she would indulge herself with a tiny tot of brandy. When she tasted it she recoiled with the horrible taste; then she settled patiently to await next Christmas and her wee tot of brandy. And I recall taking her (just her and me alone) on the tram to Lowestoft. (Who was in charge of whom?!) She and I, every day on that holiday, would sit in deckchairs on the beach, joining the beach mission being conducted by the Church Army. Every day we sang "When I survey the wondrous cross". I have never forgotten the words of that hymn.

### *Grandparents (pre-1920)*

I cannot recall my Cooper grandparents. My grandfather HENRY FRANCIS COOPER, born around 1850 died in 1922 when I was only 2 years of age – a pity because I had a great admiration for him and he was fond of me. It hurt him more than it hurt me when he accidentally burned me with a cigarette he was smoking. He was a character of whom any young boy would have been proud. As a youth he had joined the British Army in Africa by giving a false name “Thompson” and a fake age. His campaign medals are in one of John’s boxes somewhere (probably wrapped in the camp blanket which bears all my old Scout badges).

As a young man HARRY COOPER (he was known locally and in the family as “Old Harry”), presumably after returning from Army service in Africa, joined the Metropolitan Police, to which his own father had belonged. As a young constable he had a beat that included his home in Stonebridge Park, NW London. Everyone knew Old Harry. He walked his beat always carrying his cape, over his shoulder in inclement weather, and rolled, secured to his wrist by a leather strap, in fine weather. It was his habit in fine weather to whack any unaccompanied boy he passed across the seat of his pants with the cape saying “That’s for doing nothing, you wait until you do something.” The boys always regarded it as a joke, particularly my father ERNEST HENRY COOPER who was the slowest runner among the local boys and who invariably collected the wallop. During his Metropolitan Police service I understand that he was awarded the Royal Humane Society’s Certificate on Vellum for his actions in breaking down a stable door and rescuing horses from a fire. Where the certificate is I do not know. My father was not the oldest son. Perhaps my Uncle Frank, the eldest son, had it after his parents died. Later in life Old Harry became a recruiting Sergeant in the Army during the First World War. Later still he became attached as an umpire to Surrey County Cricket Club and took various examinations to become a professional umpire with Surrey CCC. He was due to umpire his first First Class match on the day that he died. Surrey CCC kindly gave my grandma ALICE, his wife, a financial donation.

Grandma Cooper died in 1924. I was four years old. She always seemed a small demure lady. She came originally from Bristol and I have a postcard-sized photo of her with her grandsons, one of whom is me. Her copper-plate writing on the back of the photo is beautiful and her pride in all these grandsons is obvious.