

FINDING GREAT-GRANDFATHER HARRY (HENRY) READ AND HIS FAMILY

When in 2007 I started searching for information on my great-grandfather (father of my granddad Joseph Read) and his family I had very little information to go on. In fact, all I had was Joe's marriage certificate which gave his father as William, and some fragments of information from my Nan (Joe's wife) before she died; that being Joe's mother Jane was of the Romany Lee family and that his father had died very young. I had vague memories that as a child I had only met one or two members of my granddad's family, and my mother told me that she had only met two of Joe's brothers and that there were many family rifts. I was also told the same by my aunt Gloria, Joe's daughter, and also that if any papers on the family survived they would almost certainly have been with Joe's brother Jim. Unfortunately Jim had died in 1994 (the last brother to die) but I knew from the Grange Road cemetery records of my great-grandmother Jane's grave that someone had dealt with Jim's funeral, and with very little information in existence I set about trying to trace that person, armed only with the name Jacqui Ritchie (the name given to me by the cemetery office as the person who dealt with the funeral). This did not prove easy, and in fact took over a year; by sending letters via the cemetery, looking through name searches and various search companies. During this period I concentrated on collating as much information as possible on my grandfather's family.

At that time, my aunt Gloria was the only person living I knew of that could tell me anything about her grandfather. Gloria also believed his name to be William, which corresponded to the name my grandfather stated on his marriage certificate. She also told me all she knew about Joe's brothers and her cousins; as I hoped, if I could trace those people, they might also have information that would help me. Gloria also said that she was told her grandfather had died young whilst her father Joe was a little boy. This meant that his death should have shown up around 1912-1915. However, after many checks of death indices and cemetery records etc., and purchasing several likely death certificates, I was unable to find a death with the name of William.

I obtained an assortment of papers, including the 1901 census, and going by his age and being born in Poplar around 1871, the only census record I could find was where the head of the family was stated as Henry, with wife Jane, living in Canning Town, West Ham district together with three children; Annie, William and Harry.

'Harry' was also on Joe's birth certificate of 1912 as 'Henry', although on all Joe's sibling's birth registrations he was down as Harry...I was getting a little bewildered! I carried out searches of birth records in West Ham and Poplar etc. for anyone who might possibly fit with what I knew, but without success. During this time I also obtained marriage details for Joe's siblings, and invariably their father was entered as Harry or Henry Deceased.

I also searched for the possible marriage of Jane, who I now knew from Joe's and other birth certificates was in fact Jane Sheckles, not Lee, but did not find one within the correct time-frame to either a William or a Henry/Harry, only an index to a marriage in Stratford West Ham in 1905, which was some years after the birth of Joe's siblings Bill, Harry, Fred, and Tom. In fact it seems that the only children born after their parents marriage were John James (Jim), Alf and Joe.

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The marriage certificate gave Henry's father as William, a gardener, and Henry's age as 34, which agreed with the census. The address for the marriage was given as No. 1 Montague Street, which was a street adjacent to the church. I checked electoral register entries but no Reads lived there, making me think this was an address used just for the marriage. The church being chosen away from where they were living so that no one knew they were not already married.

The witnesses to the marriage were a John and Sarah Lee, which sparked a memory of my Nan telling me that Jane was a Lee (which I had proven wasn't correct, but maybe there was a Lee link yet to be found). I had also considered the possibility that the reason for the late marriage of Henry/Jane was that one or the other had previously been married, but found nothing to support this.

I also discovered that Joe's sister Annie did not have a father named on her birth certificate and was in fact named registered with the surname Sheckles, although in later life she had taken the Read name and had been married as a Read.

At this point I decided to contact the cemetery again, partly to trace details of Harry/Henry/Williams death, and also to see if any other details were on record which might help me. This distracted me a little from the Lee link, but I was fortunate, as although they were unable to give me full details, it seemed there was a double entry for the grave details of my great-grandmother Jane Read. It turned out that she had been entered in the burial book under both Read and Marison; quite why wasn't clear. Using this information I checked the marriage records and discovered she had in fact remarried in 1915, a detail which linked to my great-grandfather having died whilst Joe, the youngest of his children, was just three years old.

What was surprising was that I already knew the name of the man she had married from research I was doing on my ex-wife's family – William Marison, who was in fact the brother of my ex-wife's great-grandfather! This at least explained why Joe had thought his father's name was William, as he was obviously there when Joe was a young boy. Aunt Gloria had been told of William, and had also previously seen her parent's marriage certificate. What I did not understand is why in later life Joe's brothers had not told him his real father's name, and why had he not realised himself when obtaining a passport, as he must have had a birth certificate, although possibly not a full copy. However, what this information meant was that I could probably rule William out as the name of my great-grandfather, leaving it more likely to be Henry, with Harry being used as a nickname. I then searched again for both his possible birth, and his death, although I had no luck at all, no matter how exhaustively I checked and rechecked the records.

I then had a little luck whilst going through some 10-15 year old telephone books on Ancestry looking for information on Reads. I suddenly decided to look up the name 'Ritchie', which I had been given by the cemetery office, and found a few in the Canning town area where Jim Read had lived, the nearest being in the next street to where I had lived with my nan and granddad as a child. I rang the number for an Ian Ritchie and he apparently knew of Jim Read, and told me Jacqui was his sister and had dealt with Jim's funeral on behalf of her aunt named Marion Palmer. In due course I got to speak to Marion, and although she didn't have any papers, she did say that she knew the Read brothers had not liked William Marison, and had been told they threw him out for hitting their mother.

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I continued in vain with my search for a possible Henry. At the same time I collected all I could on Joe and his siblings. I talked to Gloria again and was told what she knew of Joe's siblings children, and knew that his sister Annie had children, as did his brother Bill (Bill is also in the Jane Read grave), and that brother Tom had one daughter who had gone to Canada several years ago. Apparently my grandfather's brother Alf had disappeared after his wife was killed during the war, and went to live somewhere near the Potteries, (but from the cemetery records I knew Jim had had contact, as Alf was part owner of Jane Read's grave). According to Gloria, my grandfather's brother Harry, also commemorated on the Read grave, had died in the war without marrying, and didn't know of any children of his or of Jim. Gloria didn't even know there was a brother Fred (whom I had traced) and who also seemed not to have had any children.

Now I decided to trace forward on my grandfather Joe's sibling's family in the hope that if successful, they could possibly provide further information that would help me in my search. Then Marion Palmer got in touch again; she had found an old address book and about 15 'Read' family photos, and was I interested...what a question! She sent the photos to me and what a find they were; as among them were photos of my father as a boy, my great gran and several of my granddad's siblings, but unfortunately all a bit late to include the elusive Henry Read. As for the address book it had a telephone number for a Daisy Read, someone whom Marion had heard of before.

I started checking around and came across an entry on the war graves commission for Harry Read's death at sea on a merchant ship the Rawalpindi. It stated that his wife was none other than Daisy Read; it seemed my aunt had been wrong and that Harry had married. A quick trawl of the Birth/Marriage/Death indexes soon found the marriage, and two possible children. I then decided that, even though years out of date, as I had been lucky once before with old telephone numbers, just possibly it could happen again. I rang the number and the lady who answered seemed a little startled but confirmed she was Daisy's daughter, Joyce Read, who was one of the two births I had found registered; the other being Harry, her brother (on the birth entry as Henry).

We had a chat and I also spoke to her brother; it seemed I had found two cousins my aunt never even knew existed. Eventually I visited them both and discovered that Harry had known my own father and had met him once when they were both at South West Ham College many years before, yet Gloria knew nothing! What did help was that both confirmed being told of their grandfather's death; with Joyce saying that she was told it was due to a heart attack while at work in the docks. When I mentioned the name Lee which was given to me by my Nan, they both agreed that the Lees were in fact related to our family. Joyce believing they were cousins, Harry however knew a little more, stating that in wartime he once visited a shop with his mother near Leyton (where they went to get help with obtaining food which was rationed and scarce) and the shop was close to Clarence Road where Fred Read had lived. The shop had belonged to a Joey Lee who Harry thought was his father's cousin; apparently a bit of a character and an entertainer who played piano on the pub circuit. Harry also had a vague recollection that Joey may have been gay.

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I was now prompted to go back to my searches and look for Henry Read's death record again and also to look into the Lee family. Despite driving both Newham and Tower Hamlets Registry office staff mad, I still could not find any likely records for the death of Henry. However, when searching West Ham and Middlesex censuses for a Lee family who might fit in somewhere, I found a John and Sarah Lee in the 1901 census living at No.1 Montesqui Street, West Ham. This was about 400 yards from Harry and Jane, which suggested a possible error on the marriage entry of Henry and Jane, with 'Montague' being written down by the Vicar instead of 'Montesqui'; after all it would make sense that Sarah's younger brother might live with her and her family.

I also found the Lee family in the 1891 census at Wouldham Street, Canning Town. They came from Poplar, as had Harry Read, so I searched the Poplar marriage index looking for a John Lee marriage that might fit and found, in early 1881, a marriage of John Lee and a Sarah Ann Read. I obtained the certificate for this marriage which took place in November 1881 and which showed that Sarah's father was also William, a labourer. I now believed I might have found Henry's/Harry's sister and the link to the Lee family, as they would have been my grandfather Joe's cousins as well.

One point that stood out in the census returns of John and Sarah Lee was that Sarah's first son was named Harry. This is another possible clue; Sarah possibly having named a son after her brother who was going under the name of Harry.

As there was a census in April 1881 I was able to locate a family with a daughter, named Sarah, close to the age given by the marriage details and with a father named as William. The family lived at No. 4 Flint Avenue, Poplar. Sarah had a brother David Henry (a transcription error reads Daniel Henry).

William Read was named as the head of the family, born in Leytonstone in about 1828, as was his wife Elizabeth in about 1827. Sarah was named as just Sarah, no middle name, born about 1864 and there was a David Henry born about 1867. I subsequently traced the Baptisms at Holy Trinity Mile End, which confirmed that I had the correct Sarah Ann, and I also obtained David's Birth Certificate. The father's occupation on the documents found varies between blacksmith, driller, labourer etc. and wasn't much help in confirming he was the same William (the gardener) named by Henry on his marriage. I also looked to see if there was another possible sibling named Henry/Harry, but none was found. Sarah had given her address on marriage as 116 Kerbey Street, Poplar, although on checking there wasn't a Read family at this address in the census, although there was one in 1881 at 154 Kerbey Street, with the name Eliza as the witness on Sarah's marriage certificate; although as yet I cannot link this family.

John Lee's family were from Goodliffe Street, which is near to Flint Avenue, although it was 51 Venue Street at the time the census was taken. This is different from the address on John Lee's baptism, but again it is in the same general area.

By now I definitely believed that I had found 'Henry'; going under the nickname 'Harry', and he was in fact David Henry, sibling of Sarah Lee (nee Read), whose age is an exact fit, and being married by his correct second name of Henry. I was hoping to find him referred to as such in the census between his birth and the 1901 census, whilst still with his parents, but the only possibility was the 1891 census and I couldn't find him in at all.

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I did try to find a David H Read in the 1891 and 1901 censuses and other possible marriage entries, because if I had found him it would prove he couldn't be Henry, but David is not to be found anywhere else either, which leaves the possibility I am correct in my assumptions. I did find one other possible in Fulham, but the son Harry was a stonemason, not a labourer, so I dismissed him.

I then decided to follow Sarah's parents and found the marriage of William Read to Elizabeth Gregory in Stepney in December 1851. William Read named his father as William and his occupation as a GARDENER (which relates back to Henry's father's occupation on his marriage, although this would be Henry's grandfather). His wife Elizabeth Gregory named her father as Edward, with his occupation given as 'carman' (later this became a problem as her father's name was actually George!). Both had given their birthplace as Leytonstone, and when I checked for possible baptisms, I found William in the archives at Vestry House Waltham Forest as William Reid, son of William Reid (*misspell*), and Mary Catherine, which fitted to a family found in the 1841 census entry at Leytonstone named Read.

The only Elizabeth Gregory baptism found was to parents Elizabeth and George on the International Genealogical Index (IGI) for which I obtained the Baptism record, and I then found the family of Elizabeth Gregory in the 1851 census (on the same page as William Read's family), and George her father had given his occupation as a CARMAN. I cannot understand why the father's name is Edward on her marriage certificate, a mistake on entry perhaps by the registrar? I have traced George's baptism and he doesn't have a middle name, I also tried to find baptisms of an Elizabeth with a father Edward but found nothing which would fit. The occupation of 'carman' is one definite link that I had found the correct Elizabeth. The second thing which makes me sure I have the correct Elizabeth is that Leyton has only 25 pages or so on the census, and on the 1851 census our William Reid/Reed is living three entries along from the family of Elizabeth Gregory, father 'George'. This almost certainly has to be the correct Gregory family.

I had problems finding the Read family in 1851, but eventually with help from Marion they were found as REED, where the head of house is Mary Catherine Read, widow of Ratcliffe. On searching I found and obtained a copy of a suitable entry of death for her husband William in 1850 in Wanstead. The main interesting point, which made me feel even stronger I had the correct READ family, is that the occupation of Sarah's father William is given as 'gardener' in the 1851 census. This showed that my 'Henry/Harry', who named his father as William, a gardener, on his marriage and Sarah were almost definitely siblings. I did carry out another search for births or baptisms of Henry or Harry at this point, just to be certain, but could find none linked to this family group. The only other siblings of Sarah I knew to exist from census information were an elder brother William, whose birth details I have obtained, and a Frederick, which I haven't obtained, and who died quite young. However, I found twin girl siblings in 2009 that had died and whose baptisms I have obtained, so it may be there are more children to find to fill the large gaps in the family birth list; but not another candidate for our Henry.

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As well as Sarah Read naming her first son Harry, as mentioned earlier, other family naming patterns are that William Read of the 1841 census, and wife Mary had a son Frederick (shown in the 1841 and 1851 census), this name seems to have been carried through the family, as does the name William, as Sarah has an elder brother William who is shown in the 1861 census (Read), along with the sibling Frederick who seems to have died in 1866 (West Ham). There is also a sibling named Frederick with Sarah in the 1871 census (Reid), albeit with a slight problem in that although sibling William is given correctly, Frederick is shown aged four, even though he had died in 1866 and we are now 10 years ahead on the census! This cannot be correct, as the date of birth given on the census for this Frederick is 1867, which is in fact the date of birth of Sarah's brother David Henry (whose certificate I already have. One possible reason for this discrepancy could be that whoever gave the information to the enumerator was still grieving for the Frederick who had died earlier.

I did try later to find any other record which would show David Henry and our Henry as being one and the same person, but even though I looked through school records, electoral and many other types of record, nothing was found.

I was a little worried that no matter how much searched I had not yet found the death of 'Henry/Harry' Read, and worried in case he had not really died soon after my grandfather was born as I had been told. Especially as Jane remarried in 1915 and grandfather was born in October 1912, therefore I only had a small time slot to search. If he had not died, but had just disappeared somewhere, or if either had happened some time prior to October 1912, then he wouldn't have been the father of my grandfather. This meant my father and my siblings would not have been Reads, and quite possibly could have been descended from Marisons instead (the name of my great grandmothers second husband of 1915, who as I said earlier was related to my ex-wife's family).

I managed to prove this was not so as in January 2009 when I researched the Electoral Registers for addresses, and knowing that the family had lived in West Ham, he appeared in 1911 as Henry at No. 5 Morecombe Street, and crucially, 1913-1914 at 43 Vincent Street which is where my grandfather was born, thus proving he was alive up to, and around, September 1913. From electoral registers it appears that 5 Morecombe Street and 43 Vincent Street may have been adjacent properties, possibly connected somehow.

On 28th February 2009 I was contacted by Eric Lee via 'Genes re-united'. He had seen my family tree on the website and decided to get in touch. Eric is the son of a Thomas Lee, and had traced Thomas' mother as Sarah Lee (nee Read). I had been looking for a Lee that linked to my family for some time, so this was great news. Eric and I talked and he confirmed all that Harry Read had said about a Joey Lee, the Joey in question being in fact his father Tom's brother which proved that Joey Lee and Harry Read were first cousins. Eric has since written me an E-mail confirming all this and supplied several certificates, including Sarah's second marriage, and also sent a photo of Joey Lee.

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The following is extracted from his e-mail of March 2009.

Family Tree – notes for Bill Read on the LEE/READ connection

The birth certificate and death certificate I had for my Grandmother Sarah were for the wrong person which restricted my further research.

1) Sarah Read or Sarah Ann Read was born in 1864 in Poplar, the middle name Ann does not seem to appear until her marriage certificate. Her Father was William Read; this information provided by Bill Read – birth certificate being obtained.

2) Sarah Ann married John Lee also born in Poplar at 24 Sabberton Street. His birth certificate shows his mother as Mary Ann Lee, late Outram formerly Hunter. They married in West India Dock Parish Church – children Jessie, Mary Ann, Rose, Harry, Joe, Tom and Alf.

3) John Lee died aged 58 in West Ham Union Infirmary on 15th June 1920. Wife Sarah was then living at 13 Carey Street, Tidal Basin.

4) In 1923 Sarah (no middle name) was still living in Carey Street aged 62 or 58 according to which document you read, remarried a 66 year-old widower Alfred Burrell (retired engine driver) at St Marks Parish Church, Victoria Docks.

5) Sarah was always known to Tom Lee's children, including me, as 'Granny Burrell'.

6) Sarah became a problem to the family late in life – details unknown but today would be called Alzheimer's. She went into Tooting Bec asylum, then the only alternative, where I think she died.

Notes on Joe Lee b1900 son of Sarah and John Lee

1) My father's brother, my uncle Joe, we saw rarely; to my knowledge he had a shop in or around Custom House and Stratford and later in Folkestone, Kent, selling sweets, trinkets, etc. Also involved in the green grocery trade, lived for a time in the Plumstead area. He was an accomplished pianist on the pub circuit and he was 'Gay'.

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Conclusion

Although I searched for absolute proof that 'Henry/Harry' is in fact David Henry, the sibling of Sarah Ann Read, without finding anything concrete, I also never found anything remotely connected to another possible Henry. I feel there is now more than enough associated evidence for it to be proven that David and Henry is one and the same person. I accept that David Henry Read is my great-grandfather. As I said the only other possibility is Sarah does have a sibling Henry I haven't yet traced, which is extremely unlikely, especially as David's age fits exactly to the known age of my great-grandfather (census, birth and marriage). We know Henry and Jane married out of a known Lee household; we have the fact that both Sarah and Henry had a father William who was a gardener. That Lee is a family name proven to be linked to the Read family, as cousins, and that many names seem to carry on in the family naming patterns, also including that Henry and Jane named their first son William, after his father, their second son Harry and their third son Frederick; these being names which were in Henry's family. Then there came a Thomas, 4th son, which is the name of a possible brother of Henry's grandfather William, who is shown with them in the 1841 Census, and then 5th came John James, John (actually Johann) being the name of Mary Catherine Fauls' father. The 6th son Alfred and 7th son Joseph I haven't yet linked as names used within the Read family, but Joseph does exist in the Lee family.

Having finally established enough evidence which proves that the Read and Lee family are linked, and satisfied myself of the above, suddenly on the 13th March 2010 the death certificate of Sarah and David's father was obtained, it stated that son H Read was present at death; for me the final bit of proof that like many other people David had dropped his first name and went under the name Henry or Harry. Exactly what I had been searching for, so as a last precaution Marion and I searched yet again for another possible Henry or Harry, a possible sibling of Sarah, but none was found. Although in July 2011 during a routine search we did find a baptism of a possible George in Stepney, which we are looking into, as George was the name of Elizabeth Read nee Gregory's father.

It amuses me that my grandfather thought his father's name was William as I mentioned earlier, he then named my father as William, and subsequently my father named me as William...all in error, and perhaps we should have been David, Henry, or Harry!

Bill Read

February 2013