

What A Tangled Web We Weave

Recently I have been going through my DNA matches on Ancestry.com and using the ThruLines function to confirm the shared ancestors I have with those people I DNA match.

ThruLines is by no means a perfect predictor of shared ancestors, but it can be an excellent starting point when you've never heard of the person who has shown up as sharing a chunk of your DNA. In one such case Ancestry helped me link to a 6th cousin once removed through the Symons line, or so I thought.

And indeed, I do have an ancestor of that name, my x3 great-grandfather George Symons 1821-1874 from Barnstaple, Devon, England. All I know of his father is that his name was James. And when ThruLines suggested a brother and parents for James, I did get a bit excited.

My newly acquired distant Symons cousin also hailed from Devon however and unfortunately the Symons line that Ancestry suggested for this person turned out to be, in my opinion, incorrect.

Whilst I think Ancestry was correct to identify their ancestor as Charles Symons born 1874 in Newtown Abbot. ThruLines then went a bit skew-if getting his parents wrong and from that point on it was all downhill or should I say down a rabbit hole. I suspect the algorithm was simply drawing from other trees elsewhere in the system. My new cousin had not got as far as Charles in their own tree.

This paper will address who I think Charles Symons' ancestors were and also details his relationship with his wife and children and their subsequent families. The result of this is that I am still none the wiser as to who my James Symons was but a bit clearer on a tangled web of relationships where not all is as it might seem.

A Gunner in the Royal Field Artillery

As far as 1874 Charles is concerned, I'm reasonably confident I can get him back to a family that dates from the end of 18th century. However, this family of Symons did not have a son named James and so If we are connected through this line, we are 7th or 8th cousins and not 6th as ThruLines suggests. It is of course possible the Symons/Devon connection is purely co-incidental.

Remarkably I don't have any shared matches with this new cousin. They don't even match to my father, also a Symons descendant! So, it really is an open question as to who the shared ancestor(s) are between me and my new cousin, and they may well have nothing to with the Symons family.

What I know of Charles is that he married Edith Hobbs 1874-1960 on 12 March 1898 in Wolborough, Devon. They had two children before 1901. Charles Symons was a Gunner in the Royal Field Artillery and, in the census of 1901, and 1911 he's with his Regiment and not his family. More of this later.

Despite what the computers at Ancestry.com say Charles was the son of William Henry Symons 1847-1920 and Frances Harriet Bowden 1850-1917. Charles was the second of 6 children.

The Symons of Torquay and its environs

Charles' father William Henry Symons had a very complex history, so it is not at all surprising that his tree has proved a challenge. William was the son of William Symons 1818-1881 and Elizabeth Moist Mead 1829-1847. He was their only child and William junior's mother died just 18 years of age either in childbirth or soon after. William jnr was baptised the same day his mother was buried, 5 September 1847, at St Marychurch, Torquay. His parents had married in the same church the year before.



In the 1851 census William jnr nearly 4yo was in the household of his maternal grandparents in Kingsteighton while his father, a carpenter was about 6 miles away on census night visiting the family of Mark and Mary Bowden at 7 Waldon Terrace, Tormoham.

William senior married for a second time on 8 January 1860 in London to Louisa Pilcher (b.1826). In 1861 the family were resident at 41 Francis Street, Newington in South London. William jnr was 13 years of age and with him was his father, stepmother, and new stepsister 5-year-old Louisa Jane.

By the 1871 census 23-year-old William Henry had left his family behind in London and was back in South Devon boarding with the Truman family at Newton Abbot. He was working as a post-boy in an hotel. If William jnr was trained in the same trade of carpentry as his father, he doesn't seem to have ever taken it up. Soon after the 1871 census William jnr married Francis Harriet Bowden (b.1850).

I am aware that a number of trees on Ancestry.com record William snr also returning to Devon and he is often recorded as the 62-year-old William Henry Symons whose death was registered at Stoke Damerel in the second quarter of 1883. This is also found in the Geneanet Community Trees Index, but I believe this is an error.

Firstly, there is no evidence that William snr ever used the middle name Henry. His son of course did. I agree William snr's second wife Louisa died in London in 1868 but William snr remained in London and did not return to South Devon with his son.

The William H Symons who died in 1883 at Stoke Damerel had lived his whole life in that city and was a baker, not a carpenter. He was 3 years younger than our William snr and was the husband of Mary Bayly (b.1814). They didn't have any children.

In the 1871 census the carpenter William snr can be found at Shaftsbury Road, Willesden in North London. With him is a new wife, Elizabeth Jane Scott (b.1832), as well as his second wife's daughter 15-year-old Louisa Jane (now) Symons. By the

time of the 1881 census, they had moved to Denmark Street and young Louisa had become a dressmaker.

William snr died 1 October a few months after the 1881 census was taken. Louisa Jane Pilcher-Symons never married and died in 1893 while the 3rd Mrs William Symons, Elizabeth Jane, died in Willesden in 1915.

William Symons senior was the son of Elias Symons (b.1792) and Sarah Badcock (b.1796). He was Sarah's only child. Elias and Sarah had married on Boxing Day 1817 at Tormoham in Torquay. William was born the following year.

I don't know when, but it appears that Sarah died sometime after and certainly by 1830 when Elias married for a second time to Rhoda Vanstone on 3 January 1830 at Broadwoodkelly in Devon. Elias and Rhoda had two children, Mary born 1832 and John born 1837. In 1838 Elias married for a third time at Moreton Hampstead in Devon to the widow Isatt Langworthy née Scutt (b.1798). Elias had a fourth child with Isatt, a boy named Joseph Henry Symons 1839-1926.

Elias Symons/Simmons had been baptised at North Bovey, Devon on 19 February 1792 the son of William and Mary Simmons.

In summary –

- Charles Symons (b.1874) was the son of William Henry Symons and his wife Frances H Bowden.
- William H (b.1847) was the son of William Symons and his first wife Elizabeth M Mead.
- William (b.1818) was the son of Elias Simmons and his first wife Sarah Badcock. And finally,
- Elias (b.1792) was the son of William Simmons and his wife Mary Tucker.

No relation

Elias' son William Symons born 1818 would have been a contemporary of my x3 great-grandfather born 17 Oct 1821 at Pilton, Barnstaple. His father was a man named James from Tawstock and not an Elias so William snr and my x3 GGF were not brothers. They weren't cousins either. Elias had at least 7 siblings but none of them named James. So, despite the Ancestry ThruLines suggestion there is no evidence (yet) that the Simmons line of North Bovey of the 1780's onwards is in anyway related to my Symons family who were 35 miles away at Tawstock, Barnstaple, Devon.

Charles' descendants and my DNA match

Charles Symons is the great-great-grandfather of my DNA match. As mentioned above he married Edith Hobbs in 1898 and they had two daughters in their first two years of marriage. Edith Louisa born 23 December 1898 and Rosetta May born 21 July 1900. However, it appears that the marriage did not last.

In the 1901 census Edith was with her two infant children and her sister Ann Hobbs (b.1881). Her occupation was recorded as 'husband soldier' and as alluded to above Charles Symons, her husband, was at Deepcut Barracks on census night 1901.

In the 1911 census Edith was living at 3 Pound place, Newton Abbot with her widowed mother and the head of the house was given as a George Pillar (b.1868). Under 'relationship to head' the original entry against Edith's name reads 'Married' but has been since crossed out and 'Sister' written in.

was alive at midnight, or (2) arrived in this dwelling on the morning of Monday, April 3rd, not having been enumerated elsewhere. No one else must be included. (For order of entering names see Examples on back of Schedule.)		Wife, "Dowry," "Daughter," or other relative, "Visitor," "Boarder," or "Servant."	"one month," etc.	or "Widow," opposite the names of all persons aged 15 years and upwards. If less than one year write "under one."	total years the present Marriage has lasted.	(If no children born alive write "None" in Column 7.)	Total Children Born Alive.	Children who have Died.	If engaged in any Trade or Manufacture, the particular kind of work done, and the Articles made or Material worked or dealt in should be clearly indicated. (See Instructions 1 to 8 and Examples on back of Schedule.)	the empty clearly as the quantity answered. If employed by Government, state what be (See Instructions on back of Schedule.)
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1	George Pillar	Head	42	24	single	13	4	1	Illness	733
2	Edith Symons	Married	35	13	13	4	3	1	Housekeeper	
3	Louisa Hobbs	Mother	60	married	8	4	1			
4										
5										
6										
7										

Edith's two daughters were not with her on census night while Edith's husband Charles was with the army in Lucknow, India.

The amended entries include noting that Edith had been married 13 years and had had 4 children with three of them still alive. No children were in the house on that census night.

In the 1921 census Edith was at 6 Court, 3 Pound place Wolborough, Devon presumably the same address as in the 1911 census. George Pillar was again with Edith as well as Edith Louisa, now age 22 and a Doris Symons aged 17, a Joseph Symons aged 12 and finally a grandson Samuel Symons aged 10 months.

George Pillar is listed number one in the schedule but his relationship as head has been crossed out and replaced with the word 'Lodger' whilst Edith who is second in the list has had the relationship 'Housekeeper' crossed out and replaced with 'Head'.

NAME AND SURNAMES	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Household	AGE	SEX	MARRIAGE or ORPHANHOOD	BIRTHPLACE and NATIONALITY
<p>of every person who is alive at midnight, on the night of Sunday, 24th April, 1921, and who, whether as member of the family or as visitor, boarder or servant in the household or establishment—</p> <p>(1) passes that night in the dwelling of the household or establishment, or</p> <p>(2) arrives and is received into the household or establishment on the morning of Monday, 25th April, not having already been enumerated elsewhere.</p> <p>No one else must be included. (For order of entering names see Examples on back hereof.)</p>					
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)
1 George Pillar	Head	52	M	Single	Devonshire Newton Abbot
2 Edith Symons	Housekeeper	46	F	Married	London B
3 Edith Symons Louisa	Daughter	22	F	Single	Devon Newton Abbot B
4 Doris Symons	Daughter	17	F	Single	Devon Newton Abbot B

This raises a number of interesting questions such as 'whose son was the 10-month-old Samuel Symons'?

And 'where were the other children on census night 1911' and 'does this mean that Rose (b.1900) was the one child 'no longer living' as recorded in the 1911 census'?

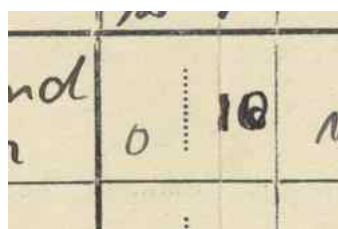
On the latter question Rosetta May Symons did survive and she married in 1920 to Leonard Frederick Furze (b.1896). In 1911 Edith had had 4 children as recoded in the census but all 4 were 'still living' and not just 3 as written on the schedule. Note, the original entry on children against George Pillar's name, since crossed out, was an accurate account, at least for Edith; 4 born, 4 living.

Looking at the birth and baptism records for Doris and Joseph it is clear to me that they are not the children of Gunner Charles Symons but are the children of George Pillar.

Doris was baptised on 23 April 1904 at St Leonard, Wolborough, Devon with the name Doris Pillar Symons, father 'George Pillar Symons' and mother, Edith Symons. Joseph was baptised Joseph Arthur Symons at the same place on 19 December 1908 but only his mother Edith was listed with no father recorded. The index of his birth registration gives his name as Joseph Arthur P Symons. I've not purchased the certificate, but I would suggest that the P stands for Pillar and so Joseph was also George Pillar's son.

In the 1921 census Charles Symons was a visitor at the McGowan household in Farnham, Surrey. He was described as an out of work retired soldier. I believe Charles' death is the one registered at Farnham in the second quarter of 1927, he was 52 years of age. In the fourth quarter of 1928 the now widowed Mrs Edith Symons married George H Pillar at Newton Abbot, Devon.

I eventually cottoned on



I believe the grandson Samuel Symons recorded in the 1921 census was the Samuel J Symons whose birth was registered at Newton Abbot in the first quarter of 1920. This would mean he was at least 14½ months old when the census was taken and not 10 months as recorded. Having said that it appears that this figure, copied here, has been overwritten in the schedule and may be 16 not 10.

In later life Samuel would be known as Samuel Joseph Cotton and this points to both his paternity and maternity.

Samuel was likely the son of Samuel Joseph Cotton (b.1870). It appears that Edith Louisa Symons began a relationship with Samuel senior around 1919 which likely lasted until Samuel snr's death in 1935. I believe they had four children in total Samuel Joseph jnr, Joyce Kathleen Cotton in 1922, George Reginald Cotton in 1929 and Hilary Margaret Cotton in 1933.

Now, there is a lot of reading between the lines with this. Again, I have not purchased any of the birth certificates for these Cotton children but unlike with Samuel jnr their births were registered under the name Cotton, however the index records the mother's maiden name as Batten and not Symons!

At first glance this might suggest that these children come from a totally different family. However, in the 1939 English and Welsh Register the youngest, Hilary, is living with 'Edith Cotton' born 23 December 1898. The same birthdate as that for Edith Louisa Symons. They were at 13 New street Plymouth, Devon and there was a third person with them whose name and details have been redacted. I would suggest this is the 10-year-old George.

Having said that I've not found English and Welsh Register entries for 1939 for Samuel jnr, then 19 or 17-year-old Joyce. (Though Joyce could be the Joyce Cotton born 7 Nov 1922 who is recorded in the Register at Bradbury Farm, Hertfordshire as part of the Women's Land Army).

Cotton family No.1

It seems that Samuel sen and Edith Louisa Symons never married or at least I can find no record of them doing so and this is probably because Samuel's first wife also named Edith (b.1878) survived her husband by over 30 years.

Samuel Joseph Cotton (b.1780) married Edith Dolby Batten in 1896 and they had two children, Caroline Maude born in 1901 and Emily Irene born in 1904. According to the 1921 census Samuel, an engine fitter working for Great Western Railways, was boarding in Plymouth while his wife was in Newton Abbott with their youngest daughter Emily. Their eldest, Caroline, had married Frank Moon (b.1896) at Newton Abbot in 1920. Also in Newton Abbot was Edith Louisa Symons and the baby Samuel Joseph Symons-Cotton.

Cotton family No.2

Since 'Batten' was the mother's maiden name used in the registration of the births of Joyce K in 1922, George R in 1929 and Hilary M in 1933 and given Samuel's first wife was a Batten this raises the question as to whether Edith Batten, and not Edith Symons, was their mother. I think not for the following reasons.

While Edith Batten was 44 when Joyce was born she was 51 when George was born and 55 years old at the birth of Hilary whereas Edith Symons was 24, 31 and 35. It seems to me given their respective ages it is much more likely that Edith Louisa was their mother, and I would hazard a guess their births were registered by their father where he gave the maiden name of his legal wife for the mother's name. Of course, purchasing the full certificates will reveal who registered the births and the age given for the mother amongst other things to get a full picture.

There are a number of trees on Ancestry covering various of the above people. None of them record Edith Batten as the mother of Joyce et al nor recognise them as siblings of Caroline M or Emily I who were born at the turn of the century.

So, based on what is available online and as extraordinary as it is, that is how I read it. I would suggest the prevailing social mores and the legal framework all conspired to lead to the perplexing records for the births of Doris, Joseph A, Joyce K, George R and Hilary M.

All of the supporting evidence the above can be found on my Palmer Rogers family tree at [Ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk). If you don't have access to Ancestry, just email me for anything you would like me to share.

Thanks, and a health warning

As ever many thanks go out to all those who share their research on the World Wide Web. It is very much appreciated. Please feel free to contact me and let me know wherever I have made errors in the above. I am aware that in this paper I have made quite a number of assumptions and would advise that my findings should be considered with extreme caution. There are quite a number of certificates that if purchased would provide certainty or correction on many of the relationships suggested here.

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