

Henry George Lock

H G Lock (1876 -1963) was my grandfather. He died when I was nineteen years of age so although I knew him quite well, it was merely as 'Headington Grandad' as he lived with his wife in Headington, Oxford, for the early years of my life. Now many years on, it is possible to analyse his character more fully using comments from my parents and my sister as well as what is written in the article following this introduction.



H. G Lock in 1892

It would seem that Henry may not have had a completely fulfilled life. He states in his writing at the outset 'few and evil were my days' which suggests he did not look back with contentment. He was certainly a rather argumentative person and was very blunt in his utterances although that said he was very kind and took my sister and I all over the place when we were young, both in Oxford and later in London after he had moved there as an old man. Indeed some of my earliest memories are of bus rides to obscure parts of the capital which often involved a disagreement with the conductor!

From the article which follows, we get a vivid insight into village life towards the end of the nineteenth century. One of a large Victorian family, he clearly played with his younger brothers and other local lads but as he got older there is some evidence that he didn't quite fit in. Maybe this was because he was a rather unpractical member of a family who were mainly artisans. The father, Joseph (1839 -1905) was quite an accomplished stonemason, carpenter and sign writer; younger brother Bert (1878-1958) went into the family stonemason's business and was well known for his skills in the craft almost up to his death.

Harry on the other hand, after what sounded like a tough but secure childhood was at some time in his teens sent up to London as an apprentice to a large concern in the Barbican area. As such he was indentured and received no money, although accommodation and board were provided. From other writings it is clear that he was desperately unhappy at first and used to spend his free time (of which there was very little!) on Paddington Station watching the trains pull out to Culham, the nearest station to Sutton Courtenay. It maybe that around this time he gained his deep religious commitment which remained with him for the rest of his life. Latterly he was a Christadelphian.

He must have returned to Sutton on occasions as we have a photo of the family from about 1892 showing him as a smart young man of about sixteen. Things must have improved over the years for he eventually met and married Ethel Sinfoil in 1906. The Sinfoils appear to have come from North London and Hertfordshire, but Ethel's family lived in factory Yard, Streatham, where brother Walter was chief engineer at the P B Cow Rubber Works (later LiLo)

There were two children of the marriage: my aunt, Ethel or 'Effie' (1907 -1998), and my father Harold (1910 -1995). By this time the family was living at Clarence Road, Wimbledon and granddad was an early commuter.

This continued for sometime but with the outbreak of war in 1914, life became quite difficult in London and, back in Sutton, Maria was finding it hard to cope with running the Plough. Son Bert was called up and served in the RFC, leaving no one to help. So the family moved back to the village in 1915, and helped to run the pub. This was not altogether to his wife's liking but she had little choice in the matter. Meanwhile Henry's strong religious convictions forbade him taking up arms and he registered as a conscientious objector and was put to work on the land. My father suffered from having a 'conchie' as a father and it was made worse because Henry was sent to work at Culham College where Harold was at school. This may account for the distance there always was between father and son. Harold left school at 15 to work in Oxford. He always claimed he deliberately failed his scholarship so he wouldn't have his father intruding on his secondary education. In 1926 he was apprenticed as an instrument maker at Oxford University and subsequently worked there until he retired in 1978.

Meanwhile with the war over life returned to something like normality although of course the village had changed for ever. Henry and Ethel continued to run the pub and eventually took over the licence when Maria died in 1931. Also that year both brother Joe and sister Hetty also died so it must have been a difficult time. A happier occasion was the marriage of Effie in 1930 to Gerald Osborn, a distant cousin. They moved to Streatham Common, living not far from the old Sinfoil home in Factory Yard.



H G at his daughter's wedding in 1930



Ethel outside the Plough in 1920s



Family group at Effie and Gerald's wedding (key at end of article)

The pub flourished in the 1930s, my father helping out on his return from work each evening. However, Henry had not been well and Ethel was suffering from bad arthritis. Both were in their 60s by the end of the decade and, conscious of what was about to descend, the Plough was finally sold to Morland's Brewery of Abingdon in 1939. There had been some sort of loan taken out from Morlands and there were problems with the sale. Eventually though all was settled and Henry and Ethel moved to the house in Ridgeway Road, Headington, quite close to Harold and Elsie (who my father had married in 1937)

They remained there during the war, with Henry doing odd gardening jobs in the area but his wife deteriorated and had difficulty walking. As a very small boy I can remember going round there for tea on occasions but around 1948 it was decided that they should sell up and move to Streatham to live with Effie and Gerald. Grandma lived on, wheel chair bound, for a further three years and died in 1951(2?)



'Headington Grandma' in 1950

This left Henry to live out his life alone. We did not know how well he really coped but he remained active and was good with my sister and I both when we visited Streatham and when he came to Oxford. It was during this era that the disagreements with bus conductors took place! On one occasion, on a visit to Richmond Park, Grandad collected some dried cowpats for the garden. These were placed in a brown paper carrier bag and, on boarding the bus back home, were put under the stairs in the luggage area. When the conductor charged 2d for luggage an argument broke out, the bag was retrieved and placed between us for the remainder of the journey. Little did the conductor know what was within! I was very embarrassed. Another day we went for a ride to the terminus of a bus route out to Shirley near Croydon. At the end of the line the conductor called 'all change please' but as we were going straight back Grandad saw no useful purpose in descending the stairs only to have to go back up again so we sat tight. After a second call an irate conductor came up the stairs and turned us off. The bus then promptly left without us and we had a long wait for the next one!

Next door to Effie and Gerald lived a jobbing builder by the name of Hepworth. He was an interesting chap who bred tree frogs in a greenhouse in his garden. Through the greenhouse ran a model railway which fascinated me. 'Heppy', as he was known, in those pre-white van days used a hand cart for his business. In an unguarded moment he offered the cart to grandad when it was not in use. From then on, 'Heppy's Cart' bowled through the streets of Streatham Common with grandad at the shafts, causing confusion and mayhem! Eventually after a mishap, Heppy regained sole use of his cart!

Henry lived out the remained of his life in Streatham, though was a quite frequent visitor to our home in Oxford. In those days my father owned an elderly but reliable Morris 12. However, if ever grandad was to go anywhere, especially to church on a Sunday morning, it was almost guaranteed that the car would fail to start. My father gained quite a complex over it!

Then one day in 1963 came the phone call from London. Having watched the boat race in, and been pleased that Oxford won, he settled in his chair in the dining room enjoying the early spring sunshine and nodded off. He never woke up. A peaceful way to meet one's end.



H G Lock in 1960



Back Row Housekeeper- Rosie Godfrey- Nancy- Bell ringers and others
 Middle Row Humphrey Cooper -Tommy (?) -Hetty -Old Humphrey- Bert -Kath-Harold-Henry-Elsie-x x-x-Joe-Eva
 Sitting Dolly Lacy-Joy-Madge-Sophie- Gerald-Effie-Ethel-Maria -Sally-Ada Lock
 In front Unknown children