

WHO HAS A FAMOUS ANCESTOR

We would all like to think our ancestors were famous, but this rarely happens, I investigated my family history for more than 25 years, before the days of computers, Internet and the present interest in family history. It was a hard task visiting record offices, churches, local history collections, libraries and burial grounds all over England, many miles from Norfolk. It became an obsession and I collected boxes of information on ancestors, eventually I turned this into a large book, getting 50 copies printed for libraries, record offices and family members.

Starting this project I had expected to find my ancestors were '*Hung as sheep thieves*' or deported to Australia as '*Undesirable Citizens*'. This proved not to be the case, I was able to establish, with supporting documentary evidence, a long family chain. At times my ancestors were paupers, residents of the poor house, carters, lay preachers, labourers, company directors and owners, accountants, working men and women who at times could not read or write. They were always married in church, and never seemed to be before the courts. Not much fame there it would seem, however they held a feudal title and a small area of land descended from 'The Kings of Ireland'. Of course these Kings were no more than thugs or clan leaders, those then are my only doubtful claims of famous ancestors.

If my ancestors were perhaps unknown, at least one Belton resident had a great grandfather of very great fame and this is her story -

'To Save My Patients'

I never really knew my great grandfather, but I do know he has been regarded as rather special by people working in health care. Our family have always been East Anglians, in the early nineteenth century they lived at Upton Park, when my great grandfather was born in 1827, this was part of Essex, today it is East London. Great grandfather wanted to be a surgeon and studied for this at London medical schools. When qualified he moved to Glasgow, and after practicing there for some years became the cities Professor of Surgery in 1859. Ten years later he moved to Edinburgh, becoming Professor of Surgery at Scotland's leading hospital. Then at 50 years of age he returned to London hospitals training and becoming Surgical professor there. However it was in Glasgow that my great grandfather, Joseph Lister, made his greatest contribution to medical science, in this city he invented a carbolic antiseptic spray which greatly reduced surgical mortality.

My great grandfather was constantly asked to visit hospitals all over England, mainly to demonstrate his carbolic antiseptic spray and lecture on antiseptic surgical procedures. His fame grew, particularly when asked by a newspaper reporter '*What made you invent this antiseptic spray*' to which he gave this simple reply '*To save my patients*'. Queen Victoria was impressed, and created him a Baronet, but he would gain even greater fame. This came in 1887 when aged 70 and still passing on his knowledge of surgery, he became the first medical man to become a Peer of The Realm, when he was made Baron Lister of Lyme Regis. Despite these claims to fame, his personal view of the role he played to develop modern antiseptic surgical practice was quite different to that given in most books.

My great grandfather often discussed his work with my grandfather, who relayed the following to me, through my father, the story was great grandfather had informed them several times :-

'I may have killed more patients with my antiseptic spray than I saved. The spray formed a fine mist of water particles that covered the patient we were to operate on. This antiseptic mist soaked the patient and killed any bugs or disease. The problem was these soaked patients got cold, caught a chill and died of pneumonia.'

This self-doubt was probably not justified, most of these patients would probably have died anyway, also without his invention and his practical demonstration of antiseptics, later important progress in this field of study would have been delayed for years. By the time he died in 1917 aged 90 many surgical methods he pioneered had progressed greatly, new surgical antiseptic methods resulted that ensured patients were no longer being soaked.

E. P. B.

We all dream of having famous relatives, but in truth few of us do, I wonder if anyone else in Belton can claim to having ancestors of such great fame.

Brian E Callan.