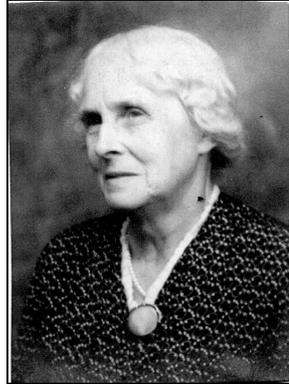
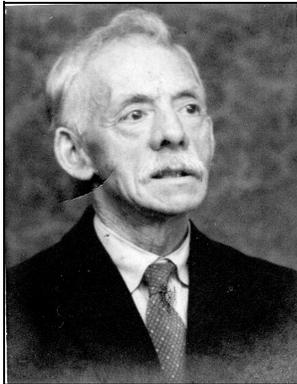


Earlier Days

D R A F T

Ian's Maternal Great Grandparents

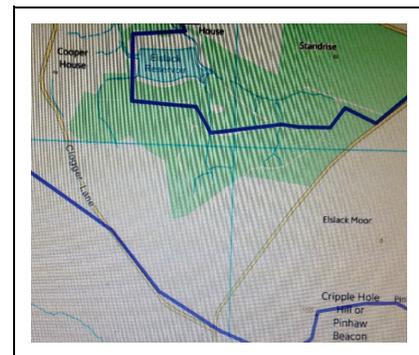
My Mum, Ian's grandma, was the elder of the two daughters of my maternal grandparents, Henry and Elizabeth Anne Howarth (shown below). Grandpa was born in Hooley Hill, Audenshaw in 1874. Grandma, was born in Ashton under Lyne in the same Manchester area in 1875.



Ian's great Grandpa started his working life as an apprentice to a felt hat maker. If you recognise the term "mad hatter" you will probably know about the mercury poisoning related to that industry and why we were always glad that Grandpa had not made it his (potentially shortened) life-time career.

Grandpa was not only one of the most gentle, kind, caring and hard working men that I have ever known, he was also,

always, very resourceful. Before he left the felt industry, although never formerly recognised for it, he had invented felt hand grips for bicycle handlebars. Prior to felt hand grips, I am given to understand, one simply gripped bare metal - part of the reason, perhaps, why some earlier bikes were described as "bone-shakers!" The felt grips were the predecessors of the rubberised grips with which many of us are familiar. Most shoes were made of leather back then and walking was the typical means by which one got from one place to another (at least, locally). Shoe soles soon wore out and were expensive to replace! Grandpa taught himself to "mend" shoes, that is to replace the soles and heels with new leather. His freely given services as an expert amateur shoe mender were available to and appreciated by all family members and friends. Grandpa was also very skilled in painting and decorating. He was an instinctive "handyman!" It seemed to me that, like Mum, Grandpa could fix anything. But gardening, particularly growing vegetables, was his personal passion. And, as we were to discover, he could even catch rats!



When Dad got a supposedly permanent job and our family moved to North Yorkshire in 1935, we found ourselves living in Cooper House (*the tiny dot in the top LH corner of the Ordnance Survey map above*), a stone cottage on Elslack Moor, just a few hundred

yards from the Pennine Way (walking trail) and few thousand yards down the moor from Pinhaw Beacon (the views are magnificent from Pinhaw (*located at the bottom RH corner of the map*)). The cottage was quaint but old. It was attached to a rat-infested barn. It was all that Mum and Dad could afford at the time. The noise of rats in the walls at night was more than disconcerting but, as urban dwellers until that move, Mum and Dad did not know where to start on a solution. Hence an urgent letter (or perhaps it was a telegram) to Grandpa who arrived by train a few days later to deal with the problem! Keith and I went to school the next morning, arriving home late in the afternoon to see a line of about 15 no longer threatening rats of diminishing sizes at the side of the lane, laid out prior to burial, one supposed. I still shudder at the recollection! I didn't ask how Grandpa caught them but I do recall, thankfully, that we saw no more of them.

At some point after leaving the felt hat industry, Grandpa entered the civil service. He was accepted by the General Post Office, (GPO) then a UK government department. He was a mailman for over thirty-two years. During the many years he was attached to the Blackpool Post Office – the family having moved there from Manchester in 1914 – Grandpa cycled thousands of miles over his daily rural delivery route, knowing every family by name. In addition to the traditional gold pocket watch, Grandpa was presented with a Meritorious Service Medal, on his retirement.



Although in his forties in World War I, Grandpa answered the call and served overseas in Egypt. He was attached to the Army Post Office (APO) but I don't know whether that was before, after or during the major attack on the British Forces in the Suez in 1915. Grandpa would never talk about his war experiences except to imply that he was really just a postman in a different uniform.

I refer elsewhere to my grandparents' possible earlier connections with the Methodist Church (which in Canada would be the United Church). Lending support to that notion is the fact that Grandpa brought home from Egypt a bottle containing so-called "holy water" that he, himself, had taken from the River Jordan with the intention that it be used in the christenings of his grandchildren, should he ever be so blessed! Born nearly ten years later, I was the first of his three grand children to be so christened.

I think I was probably about 11 or 12 (i.e. the beginning of WWII) when, rather boldly, I later realised, I asked Grandpa if he had ever killed anyone when he was a soldier. Always kind and considerate, Grandpa gently explained that he wasn't offended by my question but that it was not a fair question to ask of any soldier who had been on active service in time of war and that, on principle, he would not answer it. He continued by

explaining – and I remember this very clearly – that he did not believe that soldiers wanted to kill people any more than the rest of us did but that, in war and only in war, there were circumstances in which that principle had to be ignored because there were no immediate alternatives and the one thing a soldier can never forget is that, like it or not, orders must be obeyed. As my brother has since qualified, a soldier can raise an objection to an order but only after carrying it out (Keith served his compulsory 2-year conscription in the British Army, post WWII. As a student, he had been exempt until graduation).

Grandpa always attributed to his army service his considerable skill at table games such as Dominoes and “Whist” (the latter an English card game from which Bridge was developed). When his fellow soldiers went out to the pub or elsewhere for drinks, Grandpa would accompany them but while they were at the bar, he would play dominoes and other table games of the times. I think he may have also played darts, another popular pub game. Grandpa never smoked or drank alcohol in his life. He said that fact never affected his social relationships with his comrades in arms. Nor did Grandpa ever find reason to visit the local pub once he returned from service. As I look back at the less than thirty years in which I knew my Grandpa, I can only say that, probably more than any other person I have known, he fit my understanding of the Biblical definition of “Salt of the Earth.” That was Grandpa!

Ian’s ’s great Grandma Howarth went to work as a weaver in a Lancashire textile mill at the age of 11. The UK has what most of us would consider to be an appalling history of child labour particularly in Victorian times, but it wasn’t much different from that of other industrialised nations. Child labour was cheap labour! Would that it could be eradicated in those countries that have since fallen into the same pattern! Child labour was always of great benefit to the corporate world but, sadly, as it remains, it was also of great benefit – perhaps even the source of survival – to poor families such as that of my grandmother. History tells us that poor families have always sought employment for their children as soon as they were able to work, presumably as a matter of family survival. Industrialisation simply provided more opportunities for work. (For an informative article by Emma Giffen, a Professor of History at the University of East Anglia, U.K., see <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/child-labour>).

Although Nana (as Keith and I always called Grandma) rarely spoke of her child labour experience, when she did talk about growing up, I got a sense of an unbelievably hard life about which she truly preferred not to speak, perhaps, not even to think. Nevertheless, although she did not work outside her home after her marriage, Nana, like Grandpa, maintained a strong work ethic throughout her life. It seemed to me so sad that Nana’s working life had its beginnings in those black and shameful days of exploited child labour.

Recently, in a box that I brought over to Canada in 1986 after clearing out the rented house in which my parents had lived for more than 50 years, I found treasure! First, an unmarked envelope contained a UK standard General Post Office "Registered Letter" envelope (very strong, durable linen-backed manila), post marked "26 March 1917," a date which bears no relationship to its contents but is of significant interest in itself. Not only is the envelope now ninety-nine years old and as strong today as it ever was, but, also, it is addressed to Nana at 62, Layton Lane, Blackpool. I had completely forgotten that, when they first moved from Manchester to Blackpool in 1914, Mum's family lived in Layton Lane (now Layton Road). I found a photograph of Layton Lane on the internet. It was taken four years before they arrived. The location is identified as being close to #40. The Howarth family lived at # 62, presumably a few houses back from the picture. The red GPO Mailbox in the forefront, or its successor, would certainly have been their local mailbox. (Photo by Blackpool area historian Ted Lightbown. It is taken from the following post: <http://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk/lifestyle/nostalgia/g-day-via-queensland-from-layton-tom-1-6345357>).



The rural scene beyond the white walled cottage suggests that they lived on the edge of town. But, coming from the density of Audenshaw in Manchester, with its many textile mills and other factories, it must have seemed to Mum's family like living in another world! The post from which the picture is taken included greetings from the man who lived at #40 and, on retirement, went to Australia to be closer to his family. I was intrigued to read that he attended Devonshire Road School which I also attended when we lived for a short period with my grandparents. I remember it mostly because we used slates for our school work, not pencil and paper - a step back from the kindergarten I had previously attended (from which I have arithmetic exercise books).

Inside the Registered Letter envelope was yet more treasure, namely, loose and crumbling pieces of a "copperplate" style hand-written copy of Nana's Birth Certificate, signed by the local registrar in 1888, one hundred and twenty-eight years ago (*see below*). Despite a missing (administrative) section, the document contains a wealth of information of which I had no previous knowledge! It also raised questions for an inquisitive mind like mine. For example, why the apparent need for a registered copy of the original birth certificate when Nana was a few days short of her 13th birthday! I can understand that the original might have been lost but this was a poor family and copies cost money so there would have to be good reason! An article by Professor Emma Giffen offered some possible solutions. Grandma started work at the age of 11 but under the 1878 *Factory Act*, she could have been employed from the age of

10! Later amendments to the 1880 *Education Act* set the earliest school leaving age at 12 which Grandma would have reached in July 1887. Perhaps, to maintain her working position, there was some requirement of proof of age required by the new law. With or without that knowledge, I appreciate the fact that the copy was found. Without it I would not have known my maternal great grandparents' given names or occupations, or where they actually lived.



Elizabeth Anne Howarth's Birth Certificate (copy, 1888)

I now know that Ian's maternal Great Great Grandparents were Samuel and Catherine Silcock and that his Gt Gt Grandma Silcock's maiden name was Boardman.

I do not recall Grandma Howarth ever speaking of her parents nor Mum talking about her grandparents but, as I became "middle-aged" and my hair didn't quickly turn white - as happened to Grandma, Mum, Auntie Marion and Keith, Mum often remarked that I was just like Grandma Silcock who, apparently, "died in her nineties with barely a grey hair in her head" - a glance in a mirror tells me that I pose no threat at least to Gt Grandma Silcock's hair record!

Gt Grandpa Samuel Silcock's occupation is described on the certificate. At first reading, I read, "Self actor" and below, "Grinder." The Grinder part sounded reasonable. People of my generation in the UK grew up with periodic visits from the local knife "grinder." Firmly attached to his 2 wheeled hand cart, which he pushed around the local towns and surrounding villages, was his foot operated grinder. For a price, he sharpened our kitchen knives and our scissors. The "self actor" part was more intriguing! Could Keith and Ian and I be descended from some once famous

Manchester Thespian? It was certainly possible, for theatre and music have long been deeply embedded in the Manchester culture. I don't recall a time since my early childhood when I haven't known about and listened, initially on the radio and also by means of hand-wound record players, to the wonderful Hallé Orchestra, perhaps the most famous of Manchester's Orchestras. But, surely, if Gt Grandpa Silcock had been an actor in Manchester's theatre culture, Mum would have told me. There had to be another meaning to the term. Was "self-actor" simply an earlier century's way of describing self employment? The itinerant grinders were certainly self-employed!

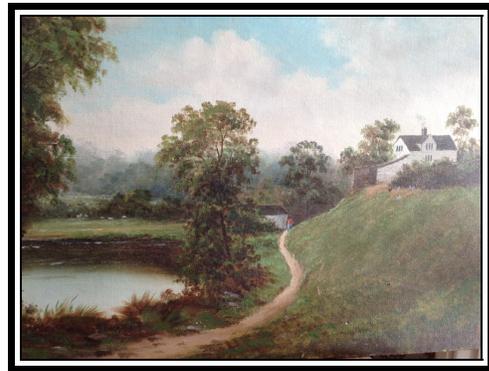
But my magnifying glass told a different story, one that also demanded research! What in the world was a "Self actor Minder?" I had no idea! Fortunately, the World Wide Web does not share my ignorance! A list of occupational titles from earlier days, told me that a "Self actor Minder" was a person who watched and minded the "Self actor Mule!" Not an agricultural, zoological or circus occupation, however! The "mule" of this occupation clearly fit the textile industry surroundings of Chadwick's Yard, where Grandma Howarth was born and, I believe, lived with her family until her marriage. From the *Hall Geology Website* I learned that the Self actor Mule was a multi-thread spinning machine invented in 1779 as a hand operated spinner and automated (thus "self acting") in 1830. I have no proof but it is certainly conceivable that the textile mill in which Gt Grandpa Silcock minded his "mule," was where he met his future bride, Catherine Boardman, my Great Grandma Silcock.

The sad piece of information in Nana's Birth Certificate is the "X" which is described in the beautiful handwriting of the Registrar as "*The mark of Catherine Silcock, Mother, Chadwick's Yard, Ashton under Lyne.*" Great Grandma Silcock was unable to sign her name.

Nana always insisted that she too was unable to write but I discovered that wasn't strictly true. Nana could write but she was very self conscious about the quality of her writing and spelling, having had such limited formal education. I think Grandma chose not to write for fear of making mistakes - although, if absolutely necessary, she would pen a message to Mum or to Grandpa. But who would ever have criticised her? Certainly, not us! We adored Nana! Nevertheless, Grandpa was the penman for their correspondence but letters to family, truly, were a joint effort. There was an established correspondence routine! I have seen it in process. Dinner (or tea as the evening meal was often called in the "working class" UK in those days) would be over, the table would be cleared, the dishes done! Nana and Grandpa would sit together at the table, pen, ink bottle, writing paper and blotter at the ready and together they would compose the letters. Although Nana did not write, I do recall that she read the daily newspaper although perhaps not as intensively as Grandpa. And they always listened to the BBC News on the radio.

Grandma did have an older half-sister, Auntie Millie, of whom I have very clear memories. It is odd, because I am unable to recall Auntie Millie's face although I do recall those of her husband and her daughter. Auntie Millie was married to Will Fish, a well respected chemist and herbalist. They, too, lived in Manchester. As long as Uncle Will was alive, our family was always supplied with Uncle Will's own original "pink ointment," a seemingly magical cure for cuts, bruises and virtually anything that called for ointment. We grew up believing that if nothing else worked, Uncle Will's pink ointment would fix the problem.

Although never told so, specifically, as mentioned above, my sense is that Grandma and Grandpa may have met through the social activities of a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel (which, in Canada would now be the United Church) somewhere in the Ashton-under-Lyne area of Manchester. Although they didn't attend church in the many years that I knew them, they and also Mum often spoke of the "Sunday School picnics" they used to enjoy at Marple, a town on the River Goyt, a tributary of the Mersey River, a few miles south of Manchester. The name "Marple," apparently, derives from the old English words, *maere pill*, meaning "The stream at the boundary" - the boundary being that between the Counties of Cheshire and Derbyshire.



The oil paintings above, of the river at Marple, always hung in my Grandparents' various living rooms, usually, one on each side of the fireplace. All my life, I have known these paintings. In the flickering firelight of late afternoons, I have taken many imaginary walks over the footbridge or along the winding path to the white cottage. For the past thirty years, the paintings have hung on our walls. Both Mum and Grandma referred to the scenes as "the pond at Marple."



The Footbridge at Marple
(Wikipedia)

Internet research found the more recent photograph on the left. Although the different angles prevent clear comparison, it suggests, perhaps, some forgivable licence on the part of the artist. The charm remains! My love of

these paintings was shared by Fred. We always wanted to know more about their origins and the subject but were never successful. During our month long UK visit in the late 1970s, on the spur of the moment whilst returning from a 3 day visit to Lincoln (and that is a Fred and me story), Fred, Ian and I tried unsuccessfully to find the location of the scenes in the oil paintings. We found Marple without difficulty and were soon directed to the "pond!" But that pond appeared to be artificial and was surrounded by hundreds of people, many of the men fitting the somewhat stereotypical image of the UK "Industrial North" of rolled up pant legs and shirt sleeves, all enjoying a sunny Sunday afternoon – the picnic edibles coming mostly from a nearby café and fast food stand. Friendly as people were, obviously we were in the wrong place, yet, no-one we asked could redirect us! This was their Pond! No beautiful walking and cycling trails along the River Goyt as still featured in today's brochures! No resemblance to the idyllic rural images with which I had grown up – images captured so beautifully by the artist, S Burton, over a hundred years ago!

Mum's family moved to Blackpool in 1914. Grandma had been very ill and was making only a slow and difficult recovery from major surgery. Grandpa and the family's medical advisors agreed that sea air rather than the heavy industrial city air in which they lived, might be of great benefit - and they were right! Grandpa applied for and was granted a transfer within the Post Office system and the family moved to 62, Layton Lane. Some years later, they moved downtown to 12, Elizabeth Street, an address firmly etched in my mind from a very early age: "Where were you born, Audrey?" "12, Elizabeth Street, Blackpool." I would reply! But that was later both in time and in telling!

Ian's great Grandpa Howarth died on November 24th, 1956, a year before Keith and I came to Canada. Nana died in October 1963. Recently, I found the receipted bill from the undertaker for Nana's funeral. The cost? Just under what at that time would have been around \$111 – an amount that is hard to believe today!

I have always wished that Nana and Grandpa could have known Ian and their other Great Grand children. Despite the generational differences in attitudes towards and treatment of people with disabilities, I know that Ian and his cousins would have been no less cherished by Nana and Grandpa than were Mum and Auntie Marion and their offspring, Keith, cousin Jean and me.

ADC May 2016

TEL SKIPTON 366

Residence: 2, Croft Terrace, Carleton

PARK PLACE, CARLETON, SKIPTON

DR. TO J. WHITEOAK
JOINER AND UNDERTAKER

Mrs H. Pollard 3 Garden Terrace, Carleton, 9th Oct. 1963

To the cremation of the late Elizabeth Ann Howarth.		
Light Elm Coffin, arranging and attending cremation	30	0 0
Skipton U.D.C. Cremation Fee	10	0 6
Doctors' Fees	4	4 0
Hire of Hearse	3	15 0
" " 2 Mourning Cars	6	0 0
Bearers		15 0
Gratuities		8 0
Flowers to Hospital		5 0
	55	7 6

PARK PLACE, CARLETON, 16th Oct. 1963 No 830
Received from Mrs H. Pollard

Cheque 55 7 6
Cash 55 7 6
Total £ 55 7 6

For J. WHITEOAK
WTH 7MANKS