

*The below article is reprinted on our website by kind permission of the **Hertfordshire Family History Society** and the editor of "**Hertfordshire People**" their quarterly journal. Those interested in our society and its website may very well find useful information on the HFHS website: <https://www.hertsfhs.org.uk/> You might even want to join!*

Lost children on your tree could be in Canada

The story of Annie Clements of Sawbridgeworth and her children.

My grandfather Thomas CLEMENTS was born on 2nd February 1880 in Sawbridgeworth. 8 days later his father, also Thomas CLEMENTS, died from pneumonia just 5 days after his brother William Frederick CLEMENTS also died. Both men left large young families. I often wonder how they caught pneumonia. Were they out celebrating young Thomas' birth and got wet or fell in the river? Thomas' mother Martha was left with 6 children under 10. It was not unusual for a mother to die soon after a birth but less common for a father. Brother John who registered both deaths seems to have helped the families. Martha ran a confectionery shop in London Road at Walnut Tree Corner to support her family. Thomas grew up to be a nursery gardener training at Rivers Nursery in Sawbridgeworth alongside older brother Alfred who was a good amateur boxer. Alfred never married. Thomas moved to Surrey and married my grandmother Annie COLLET. The eldest boy Peter became a maltster and was a talented piano player. Daughters Nellie and Lydia Rose both married and had children. Nellie moved to Portsmouth after marrying Arthur HOLLIDGE. Lydia married Albert Arthur FISH and lived in High Wych. Martha was probably pleased with how her young family prospered.

But what of her sixth child Annie CLEMENTS? Poor Annie must have had a hard life. She was born 5th April 1878 and never married. She died of ovarian cancer on 16th February 1928 in Haymeads Infirmary – a place she was all too familiar with. Haymeads Infirmary was the new name for Hertford Union Workhouse in Bishop Stortford where Annie had been an inmate on more than one occasion. In 1891 Annie was still living with her mother in Sawbridgeworth. She was 13 and listed as a scholar. In 1901 she was again living at home with her mother Martha but she had no given occupation. This was not unusual for unmarried women. Also living with Martha was her married eldest daughter Lydia Fish, her unmarried sons Alfred and Thomas plus two grandchildren Mabel Fish, Lydia's daughter and George H Clements. Who were George's parents? His birth place was given as Great Easton in Essex. I sent for his birth certificate which revealed that George Herbert Clements was born on 19th June 1897 in Garth House, Great Easton his mother being Annie Clements a pupil teacher but the father's details are blank. M C Rigby the occupier of Garth House was the informant. Garth House was in fact a home for unmarried mothers run by Mary Catherine Rigby an ex-nun. In 1891 Mary Rigby from Doncaster was listed as sister of the poor at All Saints Home for the Poor at 83 Margaret Street, Marylebone. London. In 1891 this institution housed 47 sisters, 12 visitors, 3 servants, 31 industrial girls and 35 orphans – all female. Mary Rigby had therefore been closely involved with destitute women in London but it is not known why she moved to Great Easton to open The Garth unless it was an outpost for All Saints Home. 83 Margaret Street is still owned by the church but is now a venue for hire including its magnificent chapel. The sisters left their London base in 1901 and took possession of a newly built convent in London Colney in Hertfordshire. This became their mother house and included an orphanage.



As Annie was living with her son at home in 1901 her family were obviously supporting her but her mother was getting older. I was contacted by a lady in Canada via her Ancestry tree as her grandfather was a George Clements born in Great Easton, Essex. It soon transpired that this was Annie's illegitimate son. My contact told me that George had been sent to Canada as a Home Child in 1907 aged just 10. HALS does not have complete records of admissions but they do have microfilmed copies of the Bishop Stortford Board of Guardians meeting minutes covering the period when Annie was an inmate. In October 1904 a resolution was passed to reduce the number of boys resident in the workhouse by boarding them out or sending them to Training Houses. A list of names is given of boys adopted by the Guardians. In effect parental rights were removed and parents had no say in where their children were sent. In the minutes dated November 1904 on page 305 there is a list of boys sent to Dr Barnardo's as well as those immigrated to Canada via the Home of Industry. No Clements was on the list. Another resolution on page 352 was that mothers of illegitimate children should remain in the workhouse for 12 months after the birth presumably so they could work and pay back the cost of their keep while pregnant.

In April 1907 Mrs Hegan moved a notice "*To call attention to the number of boys in the House and to ask the Board to decide what shall be done with them*". It was proposed by Miss Chisenhale-Marsh and seconded by Miss G W Nash that "*steps should be at once taken to Emigrate the following children now in the House to Canada through the Agency of Miss Macpherson's House and that a sum not exceeding £12 be expended for each child and be charged upon the Common Fund of the Union*". 5 children are listed including 4 from the SAVELL family aged between 7 and 13 as well as George Clements aged 10. There is no mention of mother Annie or any indication as to whether she was happy for her son to be sent so far away. Without admission details I do not know if Annie was with George in the workhouse or when he was admitted. Annie had a second illegitimate child in 1903 in the Workhouse so

possibly George joined her there then. On May 7th 1907 an item in the records refers to a letter requesting an undertaking that should an appeal be successful the board would pay for the Savell children to be repatriated but George was not included. On the findmypast website I found his immigration record. He sailed on 25th July aboard the SS Tunisian together with 68 other children including the Savells all in the care of a Mr Merry. The records can also be accessed on the Library & Archives of Canada website in the section on migration of Home Children. The guardians used the Annie Macpherson Home of Industry who organised the travel and placement of the children once they arrived in Canada. George and the other children were sent to the distributing home in Stratford, Ontario.

Back to the board of guardians' minutes on 5th November 1907 reports are entered on each of the 5 children. The Savell siblings were all sent to different homes in Canada. It then referred to *George Clements with Mr John PFEFFER, Dexter PO, Ontario farmer. George has a nice home and seems happy and contented. He says "I get plenty of everything, of cake and fruit. I like my place"*. Hopefully this information was passed on to Annie. In 1908 George replied to a Christmas letter but it does not state who the letter was from. He was still with the same farmer and seemed to like his new home. By October the report states *George Clements with Mr John Pfeffer, Dexter PO, Ontario. George has a good home and is well cared for here. Is a good looking little fellow and seems to be a bright boy. Does well at school. Is willing and obedient. Goes to Sunday School and Church.* Reports on some of the Savell children indicate that they are happy but William would like to hear from his mother so she presumably was still alive. George continued to do well and as he got older he was employed around the farm. He received \$30 a year which he banked as he did not need it while living at his new home where he was treated as one of the family. Many Home Children were not so lucky and suffered abuse, neglect and ill treatment. Later in life he said he was an orphan and referred to the Pfeffers as his parents so it would appear that they had informally adopted him. From 1910 the minutes are less informative as they just state the names of children for whom reports have been received. The last time George is mentioned is in 1913 when he was 16. His granddaughter was able to obtain his records from Barnardo's. These mainly cover his departure and time in Canada. She also made useful contacts via the British Home Children in Canada Descendants website



George Clements in later life

George went on to have a successful but hard life in Canada. He worked as a labourer and later a hardware store salesman. During the depression things were tough. In 1918 he married Florence Elsie BLACKWELL and they had 5 children. In 1920 George and Florrie could not support their family and the 2 children were looked after by relatives the eldest girl being adopted and they lost contact with her. By 1922 things had improved and daughter Doris was born. She later married and had 12 children the eldest Leona being my contact in Canada. Leona remembers him as an exceptional man although he died from leukaemia aged just 55. Leona said that the family stuck together through thick and thin. There is now a large extended family in Canada descended from George.

We can find no further trace of Annie's second child daughter Annie born 21st April 1903. Mother Annie's occupation was given as general servant. Baby Annie does not appear in the 1911 census nor in the BMD indexes. She was probably adopted and her name changed but this cannot be proved because formal adoption records did not start until 1928. Sometime after 1901 due to age and poor health Martha Clements moved into the Alms Houses in Sawbridgeworth so could no longer look after Annie or her children.

By 1911 both Martha and Annie were in Haymeads. With Annie was a second son Richard Clements aged 1. George was by then already living in Canada. Annie's occupation is given as General Domestic Servant. Martha is listed as a widow with no given occupation. She may have been admitted due to ill health as she died in 1912 whilst in the infirmary. From his birth certificate Richard Annesley Rackham Clements was born 16th November 1909 in the workhouse and once again no father's name is included although it is possible that his two middle names could be linked to his parentage. Annie's occupation is given as cook (domestic) of Sawbridgeworth. Horace Fuller RACKHAM was the vicar of High Wych from 1886 – 1928 when he died. He could have been a supporter of Annie in her hour of need. Annesley is an unusual name and there are very few recorded in the Hertfordshire area. In 1911 a Wilmslow Annesley born in Dublin was in the 4th Hussars based in Colchester. The only other record I could find for him was a medal card for WW1. Did the Hussars train in or visit the Hertfordshire area? Was Annie attracted to the handsome young soldier? Could he be Richard's father?

I found Richard in the findmypast migration records leaving Liverpool on 30th June 1922 aboard the SS Montrose part of a party of 100 children in the care of Mr Merry. Richard too had been sent via the Annie Macpherson organisation and was looked after by one of the Merry family. Rachel Merry was Annie Macpherson's sister. Her other sister Louisa Birt was also involved in the organisation. So Richard too had been sent to Canada as a Home Child. From 1910 the government ordered Poor Law Unions to remove any poor, orphaned or homeless children over 3 years of age from the workhouses. According to the Guardians' minutes some were sent to cottage homes their clothing, housing and education still chargeable to the Board of Guardians. Richard was sent from the workhouse to the children's Cottage Home in Coopersale near Epping run by Essex but the Guardians were still responsible for him. The Government of Canada Library and Archives Home Children database confirmed that Richard was sent out with the Annie Macpherson Homes to Belleville, Ontario. Richard is also mentioned in the Board of Guardians records at HALS. On the 14th March 1922 Miss Chisenhale-Marsh once again moved a motion to send 6 children to Canada

“Being chargeable to the Common Fund of the Union and having consented to migrate to Canada the necessary steps be immediately taken to effect the emigration through the Annie Macpherson House of Industry and that a sum not exceeding £36 10s 0d be expended for each child and be charged upon the ? Fund of the Union” These children were older than those sent out with George the youngest being 11. Reports on their arrival and placement in Canada were noted and satisfactory updates in the following years but no details about individual children or where Richard ended up. A rootsweb page for Marchmont House listed Richard as travelling with Mrs Merry from the Macpherson Home in London and was allocated to Mr John Hanna of West Huntingdon in Canada.



Until 2016 this was all we knew about George’s younger brother. He appeared to have vanished but through a Facebook Home Child page my Canadian contact finally traced him in 2016. In an email she said *“more info on Richard and it is sad in a way so I will tell you his story. Richard landed in Canada in late June 1922. Just prior to my Mom's birth. He was sent to Belleville and the Marchmont House [Annie McPhereson Group]. From there he went to a farm in Hasting twp Ontario. Later he was transferred to another farm outside Tilsonberg Ontario, which is just outside London where my Grandfather was living. When his indenture was completed he moved to London Ontario and worked in a box making factory for a while. He married Flossie [short for Florence] and settled in East London Ontario where he worked for the postal service. Quite the thing as both brothers married a Flossie [short for Florence]. He died on 14 June 1990 and is buried with his wife in Mount Pleasant Cemetery in London. I have not connected to any of his descendants as yet and I have no idea if the brothers ever were in contact with each other. [picture attached] I have also joined a BHC group on facebook and they have been very helpful in getting me information. It was through this group that I was able to trace down Richard (Dick)”*

So from an unexpected contact via Ancestry in 2009 I discovered what happened to my grandfather's nephews. To us it seems amazing that children so young were sent so far from home. It was not only Canada that welcomed them. Australia, Rhodesia and New Zealand also accepted unaccompanied children particularly after WW2. As late as 1968 children were still being sent to Australia. It is thought that between 100,000 and 130,000 unaccompanied children went to Canada and about 10% of today's population are descended from Home Children. Many had happy and successful lives but others were ill-treated and abused. They were often ashamed to admit their past. George maintained that he was an orphan and yet he must have known that his mother was alive until 1928 when she died. Many of the parents were told lies about their children including that they had been adopted by English couples. The children were often told their parents were dead when in fact they were just unable to care for them. Parents were devastated when they tried to reclaim their children only to find that they had been 'adopted'. George and Richard Clements were very fortunate in that the Guardians took an interest in them even after they had arrived in Canada. They also both had good placements but even so the experience must have been very traumatic and their descendants are anxious to find out as much as possible about their experiences.

The Guardians minutes are a mine of information not just about the emigration of children. If there are missing children in a family from the mid-19th to 20th centuries it could be worth checking to see if they were sent overseas.

Useful sources:

- HALS <https://beta.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/libraries-and-archives>
- <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/immigration-records/home-children-1869-1930/Pages/home-children.aspx>
- <http://canadianbritishhomechildren.weebly.com/>
- Ancestry family trees
- <http://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-united-kingdom-records-in-travel-and-migration>
- Workhouse admission registers and Board of Guardians minute books