

The Smith Family Baby Gowns

I am the proud custodian of three Victorian baby gowns. I always thought that they were two gowns and a petticoat for one of them but this is clearly not the case. The finest and smallest gown, is beautifully hand sewn, with a broderie anglaise skirt. This was popular between the 1840s and 1880s. It is definitely newborn size and would probably be too small for today's newborns.



The Smallest Gown



The Largest Gown

The other two gowns are a little larger and are machine stitched, meaning that it is very unlikely that the hand sewn one was intended to be worn underneath. Although machine sewn garments could be as early as the 1850s, it is far more likely that they date from the 1880s or 1890s. They came from the Smith family and certainly the two larger gowns were believed to have been christening gowns. My youngest daughter was christened in the largest of the gowns when she was six weeks old and would not have fitted in

the smaller ones then, even though she was under 7lb at birth. All three of my grandchildren have been posed for photographs in the largest gown.



So whose were they? None of them could not have been my grandfather's christening gown. Frederick Herbert Smith was born on 2 December 1894 but wasn't christened until 17 October 1897. Perhaps they weren't intended for a christening.

Who might have lovingly handsewn the smallest gown? There are no family stories of my great grandmother Catherine Smith née Seear being a sempstress. The skilled needlewomen were on my maternal grandmother's side of the family. Was this then a Dawson gown and not a Smith one? Or did Catherine get someone else to make it for her newborn child. Were any of the gowns intended for my grandfather's elder sister, Edith Katie, who lived for just three days in April 1893? Did the smallest gown in fact belong to the previous generation? Sadly, we will never know. On balance, it seems likely that these were just everyday baby wear for a family of the Smith's status in the second half of the nineteenth century, as we can see from this photograph of my grandfather, aged about two.



**Frederick Herbert
Smith**