

What is it?

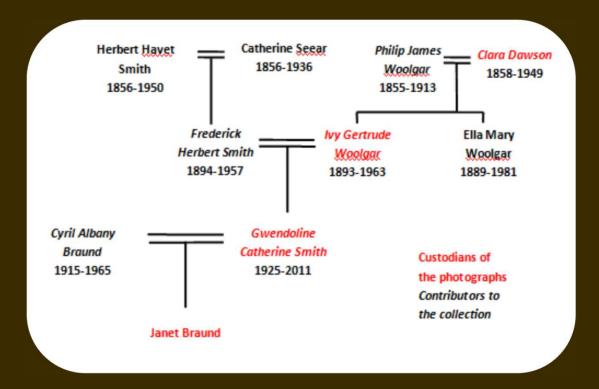
The collection, that will be the focus of this portfolio, is an album containing 565 family photographs, which date from the 1860s to 1956.





The album itself measures 30cm wide by 36cm from top to bottom and is 3.7cm deep. The faux leather, dark blue cover, with gold-coloured decoration, is protected by a clear plastic book cover. There are twenty four white, thick paper, double-sided interior leaves, creating forty eight pages. These are interleaved with protective tissue pages. There are no identifying markings providing clues to the manufacturer of the album. The album itself is of secondary importance; it is the contents that will be investigated further.

As the current owner, I have been familiar with the images in the album for more than six decades. I know that the photographs have been transferred at least twice from other albums since 1963 and that their move to the present album occurred about twenty years ago. The previous albums do not survive. All the photographs are affixed with double-sided, sticky mounts and all captions are in the handwriting of my late mother, Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith (1925-2011). These captions, naming most of the people, giving some dates and a few locations, are written in black biro.



Family Tree showing the Custodians of and Contributors to, the Album

Conversations, carried out over several decades, with Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith and Ella Mary Bird née Woolgar (1889-1981), my maternal great aunt, confirm that the photographs that have now been brought together in this current album are an amalgamation of what was, essentially, three separate collections that were subsequently combined and added to by two other custodians.

The first collection, arranged on three pages, contains thirty nine photographs that were preserved by my maternal grandfather, Frederick Herbert Smith (1894-1957). They depict members of the Smith and Seear families, who intermarried in three consecutive generations. They include images of Frederick's parents, his paternal grandparents and several of Frederick himself as a child and young man. Three are of an unnamed young girl, believed to be a cousin.

From the Collection of Frederick Herbert Smith









1914

Frederick Herbert Smith



William Joseph Smith (paternal grandfather)



Eliza Smith née Seear (paternal grandmother)



Catherine Smith née Seear (mother)



Unknown girl (cousin?)



Herbert Havet Smith (father)

Frederick was an avid train-spotter and there are four larger prints of Frederick and a group of men, standing in front of engines. One photograph does have a list of barely legible surnames scribbled on the back in pencil. These are in Frederick's handwriting. Frederick is wearing different clothes in each image, so they are believed to have been taken on separate occasions in the 1930s.



1935





Only one photograph does not include any people and that is of Frederick's family home in the 1910s and 1920s.

Luveka 6 Freston Road, Westcliffe-onSea



oldest photograph in the album, a carte-de-visite of Frederick's father as a child, taken in the early 1860s. The photographer was A. W. Wilson of De Beauvoir Road, Hackney.

This collection contains what is believed to be the

Herbert Havet Smith (father) c.1862



Eliza Smith née Seear (paternal grandmother)





Frederick

Herbert Smith

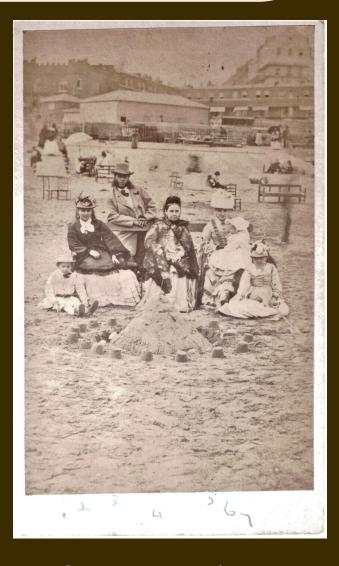
Three photographs have been cut into oval shapes to fit a locket. Another three, cut into larger ovals, were, presumably, previously in frames. Most appear to be studio portraits or professional photographs. Two of these are cartes-de-visite, the remainder are cabinet prints. Ten are roll-film snapshots depicting Frederick at Westcliffe, Frederick as a young man, Frederick's parents in older age and their home. These were almost certainly taken using the family's own camera in the 1920s.

A single seaside carte-de-visite was taken by a photographer from Ramsgate, Kent. The caption, written by Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith, identifies those in the photograph as follows: From the left 'Cousin Fred (Frederick Herbert Smith's cousin), Cousin Fred's mother, Cousin Fred's father (Katie Seear's brother), G grandma Seear, Daddy, ukn.' If the baby is indeed 'Daddy', then the photograph was taken in 1895, which is consistent with the date at which the photographer, Ebeneezer Ramsey, was working in the town. Some doubt is however cast on the identification of those depicted. Katie or Catherine Seear's brother did not have a son. Her half brother did have a son, Frederick Augustus but he would have been eleven in 1895 and this child looks younger than that. In addition, 'G grandma Seear' does look very much like Eliza Smith. It also seems unlikely that there would be a girl in the photograph who is not part of either family. If this photograph was taken in 1895, no obvious cousins, on either side of the family, fit with the ages and genders of this family group. If however the young boy on the left is Frederick Herbert Smith, rather than 'cousin Fred' other possibilities open up. In either case, the identification is in question.



'About 1900 with his father in Epping Forest'

There is an interesting exterior shot labelled 'about 1900 with his father in Epping Forest'.



Ramsgate carte-de-visite

From the Collection of Clara Woolgar née Dawson

The next collection was assembled by my great grandmother, Clara Woolgar née Dawson (1858-1949) and includes photographs of her parents, her children, her siblings and their descendants. It incorporates ten images relating to the family of her husband Philip James Woolgar (1855-1913), including his parents, his siblings and their descendants. Taken together, there are eighty two photographs that were once owned by Clara and they are now arranged on eleven pages. Those taken before the 1920s are studio portraits; later photographs include roll-film, home snapshots. Many appear to have been cut down from larger photographs.



William Dawson (father)



Mary Archer Dawson née Bowyer (mother)



Clara Woolgar née Dawson



Thilip Woolgar (father-in-law)



Thilip James Woolgar (husband)



Mary Woolgar née Cardell (Mother-in-law)



Ivy Gertrude Woolgar (daughter) c.1904 Cut from a larger school photo

Three particularly interesting images show Clara's husband, Philip James Woolgar, at work as a milkman (the third photograph is on page 21). Perhaps they were taken as part of an advertising campaign. The image with Philip and his son Percy (1891-1965), was taken about 1896. It provides clues to his occupation, which is confirmed in other sources. The name of the dairy is on the side of the cart, with an additional farm name on the front. I can learn about the clothes that they wore; the board in the background provides details of rents in the locality.

The group photograph, taken outside the shop, is not captioned but Philip is clearly identifiable, fourth from the left.

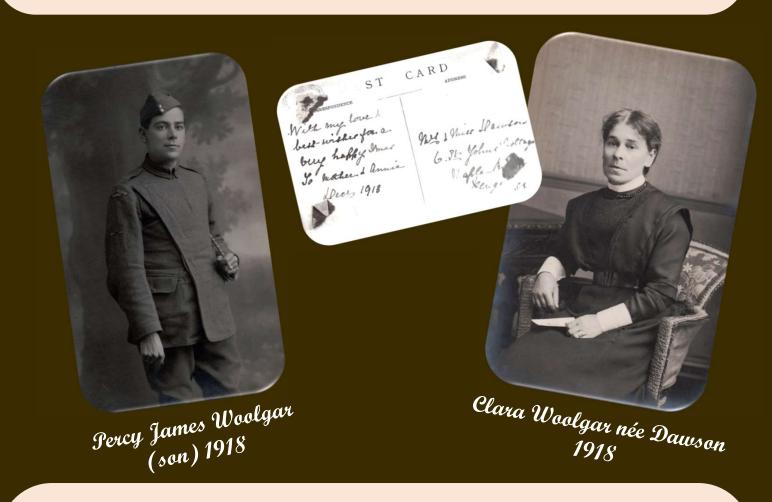
Philip James Woolgar (husband) and Percy James Woolgar (son) c.1896





Workers for Wraight,
Dumbrill and co. at
Alleyn's Dairy
Philip James
Woolgar
(husband) fourth
from the left

A few of the photographs in Clara's collection, dating from the 1910s, have been turned into postcards, as was common at the time. It is likely that several copies of each image would have been produced and distributed to friends. Loose copies of the photograph of Clara survive, supporting this theory. The copy in the album was written but presumably not sent. It is addressed to Clara's mother and youngest sister, the only sibling still living at home. The message reads, 'With my love and best wishes for a very happy Xmas To mother and Annie Decr. 1918.' On the reverse of the picture of her son in uniform Clara herself has written, 'Percy 1918. For my Birthday 15 April'.



On Clara's death, in 1949, these photographs passed to her daughter Ivy Gertrude Smith née Woolgar (1893-1963). As custodian, Ivy added more images to the collection, documenting her life as a young adult and then as a married woman. Ivy also included photographs of her daughter, Gwendoline, as a child. These additions are almost all family snapshots measuring 7cm x 4.5cm, with just a few studio portraits, taken it seems for special occasions. Ivy contributed a further 160 photographs, covering fourteen pages. Most are of the family but for the first time, personal camera ownership means that we see named photographs of friends, neighbours and work colleagues. Several photographs include family pets. More informal, candid shots are also a feature of Ivy's photographs. It was Ivy who amalgamated her husband's Smith-Seear collection with Clara's Woolgar-Dawson images.



Ivy Gertrude Woolgar 1914 Studio Portrait probably taken for her 21st Birthday



Ivy Gertrude Woolgar 1917 Studio Portrait





Ivy Gertrude Woolgar c.1921



'Reidie', a work colleague



Ivy and 'Billie'

Ivy with a friend, Midge Taylor

Gwendoline Catherine Smith (daughter) 1926 A professional photograph, apparently taken at home



A very rare photograph of Ivy and Fred together





A walking photograph of Ivy Gertrude Woolgar with her daughter Gwen







1949 captioned 'Mum's new shed'



Ivy Gertrude Woolgar



With son-in-law Cyril 1949

The whole collection passed to Gwendoline Braund née Smith in 1963. She added seventy seven images of her own young adulthood; now arranged over five pages. Again, there are a few studio portraits but most are snapshots of Gwendoline herself, on holiday and at home, of her friends and her pets.

There are some that are Polyfotos, the forerunner of photo-booth photos, where forty eight, slightly different, images were produced in a studio and printed on a sheet that could be cut up. Each photograph measures 3cm x 3cm. The sitter could then choose one or more to be reproduced in a larger size.

There are also examples of 'walking photos', taken by reflex camera operators, often in seaside towns. The prints would be developed overnight and made available to the customers.



On Holiday on the Isle of Wight



Gwendoline and Cyril Walking photograph 1947



Gwendoline Catherine Smith Studio Tortrait



Polyfoto

With one of many boyfriends and Squibs



With Squibs

When she married, in 1947, Gwendoline added the third collection, which related to her husband, Cyril Albany Braund (1915-1965) and his family, up until the time of Cyril and Gwen's marriage. There were 102 photographs in this collection, most of which date from Cyril's time in the services during and just after, the Second World War. These cover eleven more pages.

From the Collection of Cyril Albany Braund

All the early photographs in Cyril's collection are professionally taken, cabinet prints; like Clara's, a few have been turned into postcards. A couple were clearly taken by roving street photographers, or walking photographers. There is one from a photo booth, taken in 1932, which also records seventeen-year-old Cyril's weight as 9 stone.



Studio Portrait 1915



School Photo c.1924



Cyril with his brothers and mother Street Photographer c.1928



Booth Photo 1932



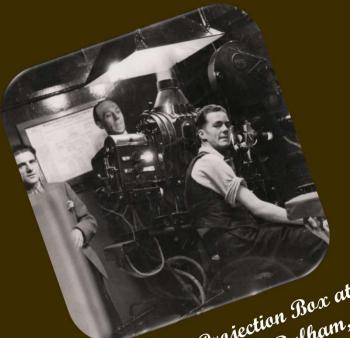
Family Studio

Portrait c.1922



Street Photographer 1935

Cyril worked as a cinema projectionist and some images are professional photographs of Cyril with his work colleagues. There are two that show the inside of the projection box. Work related snapshots begin to appear in the mid-1930s. There are several snapshots of Cyril with his lifelong friend, Eric John' Golding.



Inside the Projection Box at
South London 1936
South London



Staff of the Majestic Cinema, Clapham, South London 1930



More than half of Cyril's collection, fifty five images, relate to his time in the services between 1943 and 1947. As well as the standard professional photographs of his unit and of Cyril himself in uniform, there are snapshots taken during his time in Italy. These include views of the surrounding area and some featuring cinemas where he worked after the war ended. There are none of his time in Ireland in 1944. Again, polyfotos and walking photographs are in evidence. Apart from John Golding, who joined up with Cyril, none of the other men in the photographs from the war era are named.



Studio Portrait taken in Blackpool



Professional photograph of the RAF Regiment



Polyfoto



Cinema at Lammie Camp, Naples January 1946





Roll-film snapshots including Vesuvius exupting and Pompeii 1944



Finally, a further 105 photographs, on twelve pages, were added by Gwendoline and they tell the story of her married life until the birth of her only child in 1956. All later photographs, depicting their life as a family are now in a separate album and do not form part of this study. Apart from wedding photographs, her own and those of friends and relatives, Gwendoline's additions are family snapshots measuring 9cm x 6cm, with the occasional enlargement. Almost all include people: Gwen herself, Cyril, her family, including her in-laws and some of friends. Family holidays were now the norm and these feature in the album. Whereas it was almost always Fred behind the Smith family camera, Cyril and Gwen seem to have shared the role as photographer.

There are two blank pages at the end of the album.

Day trip



Examining a Thotograph

I am approaching the contents of this album with the mindset of both an archaeologist and a family historian. The archaeologist would ask such things as: Where was this found? What was found with it? Has the context been altered or disturbed in any way? What does the object tell us about the way it was made and used and what can we learn about the people who owned it? The family historian would ask the same questions of a photograph that they would of any source: Who created this? What was its purpose? Is this an original source or a derivation? When was this created, how close in time to the event it is telling us about? And above all how accurate is this likely to be? Is it free from historical bias? Much of this can be applied to photographs.



Let us try to implement some of this, using an example from the album. This sepia image, measuring 14cm by 11cm, has been in the family all my life. It belonged to my mother and she passed it to me. Almost certainly, the photograph was previously in the home of my maternal grandmother and her mother before that. This great-grandmother, who I never met, died in the home of my grandmother, so it would be logical that this and other photographs of the family, passed to her. This particular image shows the husband and son of that great grandmother. It is now displayed in an album with other photographs of the same family. I know that this is not its original context, as this and the other photographs it is with, were in a different album within my living memory. I believe they have been moved at least twice.

Normally, for a photograph of this era, I could look on the reverse and find out who took it, giving me a clue as to location and date. In this instance, it seems that the picture has been removed from a carboard backing at some time in its life.

This is an unusual image, in that it is not the traditional studio photograph. I have no idea why it was taken. Perhaps it was a promotion on the part of the diary. Its unusual nature might make it mildly interesting as an example of late Victorian social history. But to me it is much more. It is for example, more generally interesting than this one.

To the casual observer, the picture on the right is just is an anonymous gentlemen. I can date the picture on the previous page to an extent from the photographic technique, the content and the style but also because I know when my great uncle was born and he looks to be about four here, so my estimated date is 1895. Although I prefer the previous one, both are important to me as I know who they depict. Or do I?

How do I know the picture on the previous page is of my great grandfather and my great uncle and that the photograph on the right is that same great-grandfather? I did know the great uncle when I was a child but never had a discussion with him about this photograph. So how do I know who this is? I was told by my mother. But again, she never knew her grandfather. The identification comes from a chain of oral evidence and the label in the album is now in my mother's writing. I trust her memory of these individuals, despite the fact that research has shown that, in the same album, she labelled some of the second cousins with the wrong names. My great aunt, the daughter and sister of the subjects, also discussed these photos with me. I know from other evidence that my great-grandfather, who this is held out to be, was indeed a milkman. His appearance is similar to other photographs that are also said to be him. Ideally, I would like corroborating evidence. I would like to find that cousins had the same pictures, similarly named but I don't have the luxury of cousins. On balance though, I am happy that, in this case, the individuals are accurately named. In this case, the provenance is good.

As the photographs have been moved from other albums, the original context has been lost. The current arrangement is influenced by Gwendoline Smith's curation of the collection. Some of the photographs have been cut down, others have been removed from their original cardboard backing.

The images in this portfolio are not the originals. They look very similar to the originals but as digitised copies. In their digitised form, the clues regarding photographic technique have been lost. Anything printed or written on the reverse is not visible. Modern technology provides the opportunity to edit and enhance photographs. In some cases, I have edited the images to make them clearer and I have rounded the corners of many for aesthetic reasons.

Digital technology allows the images to be manipulated in other ways. My Heritage https://www.myheritage.com provide an app that will colourise photographs. This gives my grandmother reddish hair that she never possessed in real life. The same company also allows photographs to be 'aminated' and creates short videos from family photographs, that make the individuals seem to move in a manner that can be regarded as exciting or disturbing. This 'bringing to life' of old family photographs may impact on our emotional attachment to those images but it is tampering with the evidence.





Images colourised by My Heritage



What does it Mean?

The fact that these photographs have been passed on through, in some cases, four generations indicates that they were treasured and seen to be worthy of preservation. I grew up looking at the images and hearing the associated stories. As an only child, an only grandchild and on three of the four sides of the family, an only great-grandchild. These photographs were and still are, a substitute family. Although I was never conscious of being lonely, I spent my childhood inventing impossibly large families of siblings. As I grew older, I realised that I did have a family; they were in the pages of this album and they were not, for the most part, people I had met. Their images in the album gave them a tangibility that merely knowing their names would not. The photograph collection helped to shape my sense of identity and engendered a sense of belonging. It is impossible to know if I would feel less emotionally invested in these photographs if I had had a living extended family with whom to interact.

When the album was temporarily mislaid a few years ago, even though I had scanned some of the images, it is not overstating the case to say that it was akin to a bereavement.





I feel particularly attached to these photographs. The one of lvy and Gwen, taken in 1926, speaks to me of continuity and it was recreated by my daughter and granddaughter in 2014. My mother with 'Mef' encapsulates my mother's joy and is symbolic of her life-long love of animals.



The smallness of my family means that, apart from the seaside carte-de-visite, this is the only family group in the album. Group photographs are an outward show of family unity but that unity may be an illusion, revealing what the sitters, or the photographer, wished to portray, in the same way that modern selfies do. When we consider who stands where and who is given prominence, group portraits can convey something of the family dynamics. This picture of Philip and Clara with their children, is a fairly standard, symmetrical grouping of the family; there not much that is revealed from this. The only contact between them is Philip's hand on the shoulder of his older daughter, Ella. This seems to be a spontaneous gesture, as it is not replicated by Clara and Percy on the other side. There is no corresponding hand on lvy's shoulder. Does this tell us something about Philip's relationship with his daughters?





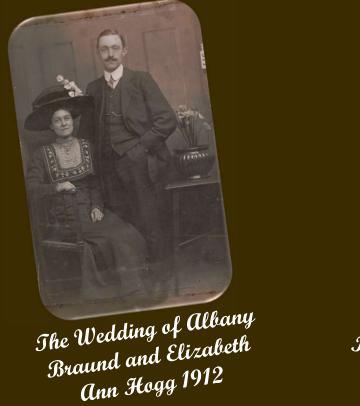


Other photographs that hint at family dynamics

The Gaps in the Album

Kuhn (p. 2) says of family stories, "such narratives of identity are shaped as much by what is left out ... as by what is actually told" and the same can be applied to collections of family photographs. The blanks in the album are as significant as their contents. Why are certain people not represented? Were they not photographed, or were their images not preserved?

With regard to the album under review here, a notable omission is a wedding photograph of Frederick Smith and Ivy. The wedding took place in 1922, when wedding photos for the professional classes were the norm. Frederick was a chartered accountant, well able to afford the price of a wedding photographer. My paternal grandparents, for whom money was in short supply, were photographed on their wedding day in 1912, despite the bride being six months pregnant. A professional photograph of Ivy's bridesmaid does survive, as does a piece of Ivy's wedding dress and her wedding ring. Perhaps the photograph was framed and therefore not in the album but the album does include photographs that have been removed from frames. Can the fact that Frederick appears in very few photographs just be attributed to his role as the family photographer? He was known to dislike social situations but it does seem unlikely that his aversion to being photographed would extend to his wedding day.





Another question that arises is, why are there no photographs from Catherine Smith née Seear? The Smiths were far more affluent than the Woolgar family, so it might be expected that they visited the photographer more often and owned a home camera earlier. The couple of surviving pictures of Frederick, taken in the first decade of the twentieth century, suggest that the Smiths had access to their own camera by then. Yet Woolgar family photos survive, whilst the Smith collection is limited to a handful preserved by Frederick. There is no evidence of any images that Frederick's mother, Catherine, may have once owned, taken or treasured. Hamlett says (p. 191), "the composition of family archives took place over time, and we cannot know what was discarded, or if retention was accidental." In this case however I do know that Catherine visited the photographer as a child and a young woman, leading to speculation as to why she did not pass on any of those images to her descendants.

In the 1980s, contact was made with a descendant of Catherine's first cousin. Intermarriage means that he was also the great nephew of Catherine's sister-in-law. He was a Seear both by birth and by adoption. His adoptive mother lived to the age of 102 and was the custodian of a wealth of family memorabilia. This collection included several pictures of Catherine and her brother as children and young adults. The only option at that time was to attempt to rephotograph them with an instamatic camera, meaning that the images I have are not very satisfactory. The question remains as to why Catherine herself did not keep copies.



Catherine Seear c.1871



Catherine Seear c.1873



Richard Seear c.1873



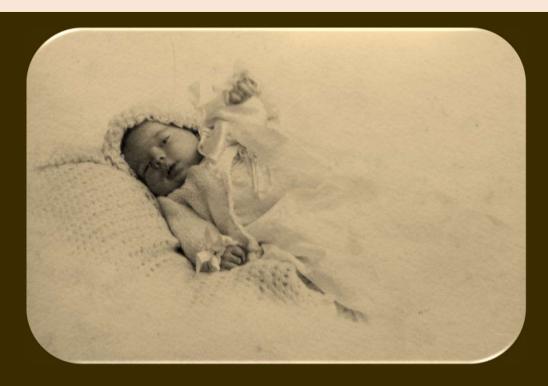
Catherine Seear c.1881



Catherine Seear c.1891 in Berlin

Why are these pictures missing from my album?

A notable gap in the Dawson collection, is an image of Clara's eldest grandchild, Margaret Jean, known as Peggy, who died at the age of six weeks. Although the practice was more popular in the nineteenth century, post mortem, or memorial, photographs were still being taken at this time. I do not know if this is an example. Perhaps if it was, it might explain Clara's reluctance to have a copy, or did she find keeping a visual reminder of her granddaughter too painful? Surely, if she had possessed a copy of this image, she would have kept it. This photograph was in the possession of Peggy's niece. The concept of post mortem photography gives additional motivations for taking and preserving images.



Margaret Jean 'Feggy' Bird 1921-1921

How do the gaps in the album make us feel about the people concerned? Catherine Seear and Caroline Howe are two of my great-grandmothers, both of whom died long before I was born. Do I feel closer to Catherine Seear, whose image I have, or am I fascinated by Caroline Howe, whose appearance is unknown to me? Although she was reported to have been a formidable figure, I am drawn to Catherine. Is this though because of her remarkable resemblance to my own granddaughter.



Catherine Seear looking remarkably like her great great great great grandaughter

How do we Feel?

The album contains both formal studio portraits and family candid shots. The two pictures of Clara Woolgar below are very different and not just because of the era in which they were taken. They provoke different responses. In the photograph on the left Clara epitomises the cosy, archetypal, cuddly grandmother figure, which is how my mother portrayed her. Yet, another of Clara's granddaughters, my mother's cousin, said, 'She was a dreadful woman, always fussing over the cat and with no time for her grandchildren.' Cats and dogs certainly figure in pictures of Clara. Did she, her daughter, or her granddaughter, my mother, curate the collection and decide to retain images that fitted either their memories of Clara, or an idealised portrayal of her.

Now, I warm to the picture on the left, with its human touches. The studio portrait, almost certainly taken at the time of Clara's marriage, shows an attractive young woman, full of hope for the future. I feel that I may have liked that Clara more, yet I identify with the candid shot. Perhaps that says more about my current life-stage than my reactions to Clara. Did I prefer the image on the right when I too was a young woman? Perhaps I did.





Clara Woolgar née Dawson



'Cousin Katheen' Kathleen Mary Dawson 1895-1969



'Cousin Ada' Ada Florence Leighton 1870-1963

Does our reaction to an image change if it is of someone we knew in real life? I knew 'cousin Kathleen' (actually my grandmother's first cousin) in older age. 'Cousin Ada', also my grandmother's first cousin, I never met, although I remember her sisters. Strangely, I feel more connected to Ada; is this because she is a younger woman in the photograph, or is it because I know less about her?

Appendix

The following family members are depicted in the album

The Smith-Seear Collection - relationships to Frederick Herbert Smith are given.

Frederick Herbert Smith 1894-1957 self

Herbert Havet Smith 1866-1950 father

Catherine Smith née Seear 1866-1938 mother

William Joseph Smith 1825-1887 grandfather

Eliza Smith née Seear 1823-1900 grandmother

Anne Balls Seear née Bulley c.1835-1918 grandmother

Young unnamed girl, believe to be a cousin

Additions by Ivy Gertrude Woolgar - relationships to Ivy are given.

Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith 1925-2011 daughter

The Braund Collection - relationships to Cyril Albany Braund are given.

Cyril Albany Braund 1915-1965 self

Albany Braund 1888-1963 father

Elizabeth Ann Braund née Hogg 1886-1966 mother

Stanley Arthur Braund 1913-1970 brother

Ada Louise Braund née Forsdyke 1910-1983 sister-in-law

Leonard Braund 1916-1981 brother

The Dawson Collection - relationships to Clara Woolgar née Dawson are given.

Clara Woolgar née Dawson 1858-1949 self

Philip James Woolgar 1855-1913 husband

Thomas Dawson c.1830-1899 father

Mary Archer Dawson née Bowyer c.1830-1919 mother

Philip Cecil Thomas Woolgar 1888-1894 son

Ella Mary Bird née Woolgar 1889-1981 daughter

William Edward Bird 1884-1944 son-in-law

Muriel Chown King née Bird 1898-1968 son-in-law's sister

Harold Edwin 'Rex' King 1893-1952 husband to son-in-law's sister

Philip Bird 1922-1925 grandson

Muriel Olive Bransden née Bird 1924-2017 granddaughter

Cynthia Mary Thursting née Bird 1926-1988 granddaughter

Marjorie Evelyn Bailey née Bird 1928-2014 granddaughter

Beryl Helen Abrahams née Bird 1930-2018 granddaughter

Percy James Woolgar 1891-1965 son

Ivy Gertrude Woolgar 1893-1963 daughter

Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith 1925-2011 granddaughter

Sophia Emberson née Dawson c.1856-1939 sister

Constance Sophia Mary Emberson 1878-1954 niece

Alice May Wellard née Emberson 1887-? niece

Richard Wellard c.1883-? niece's husband

Nellie Constance M McDiarmid née Wellard 1909-1954 great niece

Dorothy Alice May Wellard 1913-? great niece

Marrion M Wellard c.1918-? great niece

Alice Hart née Dawson 1861-1949 sister

May Bula Dear née Dawson aka Hart 1889-1937 niece

William George Thomas Dear 1890-1949 niece's husband

Harold Sydney Sadler c.1892-1938 nephew

Norman Gerald Sadler 1895-1955 nephew

Annie Elizabeth Dawson 1874-1955 sister

Kathleen Mary Dawson 1895-1969 niece

Philip Woolgar c.1818-1884 father-in-law

Mary Woolgar née Cardell c.1816-1892 mother-in-law

Caroline Leighton née Woolgar 1842-1919 sister-in-law

William Leighton 1831-1900 sister-in-law's husband

Ada Florence Leighton 1870-1963 husband's niece

Jessie Caroline Leighton 1874-1965 husband's niece

Mary Ann Woolgar 1845-1907 sister-in-law