

Catherine Seear

My great grandmother, Catherine, was born on the 2nd of February 1866 to Frederick and Ann Balls Seear née Bulley. The family called her Katie, or Kate. She was their second child; her elder sister, Annie Ellen, had lived for just a few weeks in 1864. Catherine also had a half-brother, Frederick Rickard Seear, who was nine years old when she was born. Three older half-sisters had also died in infancy. As Catherine was the only one of her father's five daughters to survive, I wonder how he treated her.



My favourite picture of Catherine c.1871

Unfortunately all those of her as a child and young woman do not belong to me and were re-taken on a cheap Instamatic camera in the 1980s, so are poor quality



Catherine c.1873

The address that is given on Catherine's birth certificate is 3 Market Terrace, Bridge Road, Bethnal Green, Middlesex.¹ This address does not appear to have existed and may be 3 Newmarket Terrace, Cambridge Road. Catherine's family were comfortably off; her father was a master grocer with a shop in Hackney High Street, East London. When she was thirteen months old, Catherine's younger brother, Richard, was born.

¹ The birth certificate of Catherine Seear, 1866, from the General Register Office.

By 1871, the family were living at 105 Grafton Street in Mile End.

Catherine's father's business had expanded; he was a tea dealer employing eighteen men and there were two live-in domestic servants.²

We know that the family moved again fairly quickly, as when Frederick made his will on the 4th of October 1875, he gave his address as 36 Cawley Road, Hackney.³ In 1881, Catherine and her family were living at 11 Albany Road, Lea Bridge Road, Leyton, Essex.⁴ Nothing is known of her education and she may have had private tuition. She spoke very good French.⁵



**Believed to be
Richard,
Catherine's brother**



**Catherine
c. 1882**

On the 22nd of February 1884, Catherine's father, Frederick, died of angina, presumably a stroke, at 11 Albany Road. Despite imaginative searching, his widow, Anne and children Catherine and Richard, cannot be found in the 1891 census.⁶ When Catherine married the following year, she gave her address as 24 Eastbank, Stamford Hill, Hackney and this address

² 1871 census for 105 Grafton Street, Mile End, Middlesex RG10 568 folio 68.

³ The will of Frederick Seear proved 1884, held at The Principal Probate Registry.

⁴ 1881 census for 11 Albany Road, Leabridge Road, Leyton, Essex RG11 1726 folio 5.

⁵ Information from the late Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith, granddaughter of Catherine Smith née Seear.

⁶ Census indexes for England and Wales at www.findmypast.co.uk.

is occupied only by a servant in 1891,⁷ so the family may have been away from home. They apparently did enjoy cruises and pictures survive of someone purporting to be Catherine that were taken in Berlin, so they could have been on an overseas trip.⁸

On the 7th of June 1892 Catherine Seear married her first cousin, Herbert Havet Smith, a cornbroker, at St. Thomas', Hackney. The witnesses were her brother, Richard and Eliza Smith, who was either Herbert's mother or sister.⁹ Their daughter, Edith Katie was born on the 8th of April 1893 and lived for just three days. The number of short-lived girls in the family might suggest some



**Believed to be
Catherine Seear –
taken in Berlin**



**The Seear Family in Margate
c.1895**

Catherine is believed to be seated with her son, Frederick on her lap. The genders and ages of the others in the picture don't quite fit with her brother or half-brother's families. Her mother is in the centre.

⁷ 1891 census for 24 Eastbank, Stamford Hill, Hackney, Middlesex RG12 183 folio 46.

⁸ Information from the late Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith, granddaughter of Catherine Smith née Seear. Photographs in the possession of the late Alan Seear.

⁹ The marriage certificate of Herbert Havet Smith and Catherine Seear, 1892 in family possession.

genetic problem. Edith Katie died from marasmus, which is a failure to thrive, akin to malnutrition.¹⁰ She was buried at Abney Park Cemetery.¹¹

Their son, Frederick Herbert, my grandfather, was born on the 2nd of December 1894 at 32 Braydon Road, Stamford Hill, Middlesex. At the time, Herbert Havet was described as a corn salesman.¹² Frederick was apparently sickly as a child¹³ and was not baptised until the 17th of October 1897.¹⁴ The baptism took place at Stamford Hill Congregational Church¹⁵ so it is likely that the family were still connected with the area at this date. This alliance with non-conformity is unusual in the Smith and Seear families and indeed Catherine Smith née Seear is reported to have become a Catholic in later life.¹⁶



**Frederick Herbert
Smith c. 1896**

In 1901, together with their young son, my grandfather Frederick Herbert (Eric) and Catherine's mother, Anne Seear née Bulley, Catherine and Herbert were living at 159 Osbaldston Road, Hackney.¹⁷ Despite having had her mother to live with her, Catherine never spoke of her to her granddaughter.¹⁸ Anne was to leave the Osbaldston Road property to

¹⁰ Death certificate of Edith Katie Smith 1893 from the General Register Office.

¹¹ Abney Park Cemetery burials index website

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~abneypark/abneyy.html>. This website is no longer available, see <https://www.devsys.co.uk/ap/Homepage.asp>.

¹² The birth certificate of Frederick Herbert Smith 1894 from the General Register Office.

¹³ Information from the late Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith, granddaughter of Catherine Smith née Seear.

¹⁴ Baptismal certificate of Frederick Herbert Smith, in family possession.

¹⁵ Baptismal certificate of Frederick Herbert Smith, in family possession.

¹⁶ Information from the late Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith, granddaughter of Catherine Smith née Seear.

¹⁷ 1901 census for 159 Osbaldston Road, Hackney Middlesex RG13 213 folio 87.

¹⁸ Information from the late Gwendoline Catherine Braund nee Smith, granddaughter of Catherine Smith née Seear.

Catherine, along with furniture, plate and jewellery, in her will.¹⁹



Lureka

About 1908 Herbert and Catherine moved to 'Lureka', Westcliffe-on-Sea, Essex.²⁰ They later moved to Cambridge Road, Westbourne, Bournemouth, Dorset. Despite the 'servant problem' of the 1930s, they kept a butler, Basil and their granddaughter particularly remembered the red tulips in the garden.²¹ By 1935 Herbert and Catherine were at 'St. Ann's', Bournemouth; this property had been converted into flats before they lived there.²²

Catherine was described as being standoffish and undemonstrative, very 'upper crust' and a little like Queen Mary. She always sat on an upright dining chair with her crochet or knitting, with its steel needles on her lap.²³



**Catherine and her
granddaughter
Gwen in 1925**

¹⁹ The will of Ann Balls Seear proved 1918, held at the Principal Probate Registry.

²⁰ Information from the late Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith, granddaughter of Catherine Smith née Seear.

²¹ Information from the late Gwendoline Catherine Braund nee Smith, granddaughter of Catherine Smith née Seear.

²² Information from the late Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith, granddaughter of Catherine Smith née Seear.

²³ Information from the late Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith, granddaughter of Catherine Smith née Seear.

The family were comparatively well off and owned other property in the Bournemouth area,²⁴ apart from the house in which they lived.²⁵ Apparently, Herbert put their properties into Catherine's name to save death duties, thus she was able to give away much of their wealth to the Catholic church. Allegedly, they were left with nothing but mortgages, an eiderdown, two cushions and an orange box for a table. If this is the case, then Herbert re-couped some of the money before his own death, twelve year's after Catherine died.²⁶

When Catherine died of a heart attack,²⁷ reportedly whilst replacing a light bulb,²⁸ on the 23rd of January 1938, they were living at 5 Branksome Gate, Western Road, Bournemouth.²⁹

²⁴ 29 Surrey Road and 'Hawthorn' 40 Alumhurst Road.

²⁵ Probate account in association with the will of Frederick Herbert Smith, proved 1957, in family possession.

²⁶ Information from the late Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith, granddaughter of Catherine Smith née Seear. Probate account in association with the will of Frederick Herbert Smith, proved 1957, in family possession.

²⁷ The death certificate of Catherine Smith née Seear 1938, in family possession.

²⁸ Information from the late Gwendoline Catherine Braund née Smith, granddaughter of Catherine Smith née Seear.

²⁹ The death certificate of Catherine Smith née Seear 1938, in family possession.