

The Maternal Line

Having a granddaughter, when you are a family historian, focuses the mind on motherhood and maternal ancestry. This is often more difficult to trace than the male line, because each generation introduces a new surname. My granddaughter is the eleventh identifiable generation in the direct female line. I am very fortunate to have photographs of seven generations of these eleven women.

So who are my maternal ancestors, where did they live, when did they marry and how old were they when they became 'Granny'? Many of my direct line female ancestors lived into their late eighties or nineties; I am planning on inheriting those genes! The exception was my grandmother, who was a smoker, let that be a lesson to you. Despite this, a tendency to have children in the late twenties or thirties means that only twice has the family spanned four living generations. Spring births were popular and many of these ladies died in the spring too. The line starts in Essex before moving to the London suburbs, then escaping to the Isle of Wight and Cambridge.

I will start with my mum, Gwendoline Catherine 'Gwen' Smith, who was born in 1925 in Addiscombe, Croydon, the daughter of Frederick Herbert and Ivy Gertrude Smith. She married Cyril Albany Braund in 1947 at St. Martin's, Croydon and died in Devon in 2011. She married at 22 and had one child, born when she was 31. She became a grandparent at 57 and died at 86.



My Grandmother (Granny), Ivy Gertrude Woolgar, was born on 4 January 1893 at 7 Chalford Road, Dulwich. She was the daughter of Philip James and Clara Woolgar. She married Frederick Herbert Smith on 8 April 1922 at St Clement Danes, London, when she was 29. She died on 25 April 1963 at 28 Sundridge Road, Addiscombe, Croydon, at the age of 70. She had one child at the age of 32 and became a grandparent at 63.



Great-grandmother, Clara Dawson, was born on 15 April 1858 at Great Baddow, Essex. She was the daughter of Thomas and Mary Archer Dawson. She married Philip James Woolgar on 21 December 1886 at St James', Dulwich when she was 28. She died on 26 January 1949 at 159 Davidson Road, Addiscombe, Croydon. At the age of 90. She had four children, the first at the age of 30. She became a grandparent when she was at 63.



Great great grandmother, Mary Archer 'May' Bowyer, was born in 1830, probably in March, in Writtle, Essex. She was the daughter of John and Ann Bowyer. She married Thomas Dawson, when she was 25, on 2 April 1855 at the Independent Protestant Dissenters' Old Meeting House, Chelmsford, Essex. She died on 16 April 1919 at 6 St John's Cottage, Penge when she was 89. She had six children, she had her first child at the age of 26, became a grandparent at 48 and a great grandparent at 76.



3x great-grandmother is Ann Oliver. She was born c.1799, probably in the summer, in Writtle, Essex, the daughter of James and Elizabeth Oliver. She married John Bowyer on 25 December 1822 at All Saint's Norton Mandeville, Essex when she was 23. She died on 25 February 1889 at Highwood, Writtle, Essex at the age of 89. She had six known children, the first at the age of 30 but there may have been additional children born in the first seven years of her marriage that have not been discovered. She was a grandparent at 56 and a great grandparent at 78.

Elizabeth Fitch, 4x great-grandmother, was born c.1768, probably in the late summer, in Writtle, Essex, the daughter of Cornel[ius] and Ann Fitch. She married James Oliver on 20 January 1794 in Writtle, Essex when she was 25. She had eight children, the first born when she was 25; she was pregnant when she was married. She was a grandparent at the age of 55, or possibly earlier and a great grandparent at 88 or earlier. She died on 21 September 1863 in Blackmore, Essex at the age of 95.

5x great grandmother, Ann Palmer, was born c.1747, probably in the summer, almost certainly in Writtle, Essex, the daughter of Thomas and Sarah Palmer. She married Cornel(ius) Fitch on 14 November 1764 at All Saints, Writtle. She died when she was 67 in the summer of 1815, probably in Writtle. She was married at the age of 17 and had twelve children. She had her first child at 17 and was a grandparent at 46, or sooner.

Finally, 6x great-grandmother, Sarah Cooper. Very little is known about Sarah. She married Thomas Palmer on 2 October 1739 at Writtle and had four children. She may have died in 1752 but the name is too common and the records are too sketchy to be certain, there are other possibilities. It may be that she was born c.1715, the daughter of Thomas Cooper. If this is indeed her, then was her mother Ann Sand(s)ford, who married Thomas Cooper in 1698 or Sarah Eve who married Thomas Cooper in 1709?

The genes that my granddaughter might have inherited from Sarah are pretty diluted but nurture, as well as nature, plays its part. I wonder how many mannerisms and traits have travelled through these generations?