

## Simeon Strange by Shirley Newman 1999

### MY PATERNAL GREAT GRANDFATHER - SIMEON STRANGE

- Bapt:** 15 March 1846 at Lydiard Tregoze, Wiltshire, 3rd child of parents:  
William and Elizabeth Strange (nee Embling) of Priorsfield,  
Lydiard Tregoze.
- Siblings:** Mary Ann, Bapt 1841, Lydiard Tregoze  
George, Bapt 2.7.1842 do  
Edwin, Bapt 15.9.1848 do  
William Richard, Bapt 17.7.1852 do  
John, Bapt 10.3.1855 do  
Rhoda, Bapt 8.3.1857 do
- Married:** aged 19, to Elizabeth Loveday of Broad Hinton, on 21 July 1865 at  
the Zion Chapel, Highworth, Wilts.
- Died:** 1932 at Stratton St Margaret Workhouse, Wilts.
- Bur:** Wroughton St John's Churchyard on the left of the path, no headstone
- Children:** Twin boys died in infancy of Scarlet fever  
Louisa Lucy, b 1847, Swindon, mar John Robinson,  
Lydia  
Letitia Martha (Pat) mar Frank Burkett,  
Ruth b 16.12.1872, Swindon, d Wroughton 1907, mar James Newman,  
Chilton Farm, Wroughton  
Hubert, b Wroughton 1874, mar Mary Elizabeth, b Wroughton 1888,  
d 1974 Freemantle, Australia  
Mar Kylie Leader b Wroughton, d Freemantle,
- In addition to their own children, Simeon and Elizabeth brought up:  
Minnie, b 1891, illeg. daughter of Ruth Strange and James Newman;  
Frank, b 1904, illeg. son of Letitia (Pat) Strange;  
Frederick, b 1907, youngest son of Ruth & James Newman.
- Lived at:** Priorsfield, Lydiard Tregoze  
Cob Gutter, Lydiard Tregoze (1851 Census)  
Spittleborough Farm, (servant aged 15, 1861 Census)  
Church Farm Cottages, Swindon (1871 Census, agri.lab)  
Gospits Farm, Swindon Rd Wroughton, (1881 Census, lab)  
11 Marlborough Road, Wroughton  
Priors Hill, Wroughton  
Workhouse, Stratton St Margaret

***(Note – Simeon was Janet Millar’s (nee Williams) great grand uncle, making Shirley and Janet third cousins***

***I have been unable to locate Shirley Newman the author of this biographical sketch, for permission to reproduce the article or to verify any of the source material; on the basis of the already established internet availability, I have taken the responsibility to reproduce it here  
– Stewart Millar)***

**S**imeon appears to have been small boned, thin and wiry in build - like my Father Fred, and not unlike Frank Strange, but smaller. The only two photographs of Simeon were taken by my Father Fred with the brownie box camera just a few months before he died at Stratton Workhouse at the age of 86. He seems to have had the same high cheek bones as Frank and Fred had.

In character he was a sweet, kind, mild man; religious and even tempered. He must have been intelligent in order to have moved from his humble beginnings to having a small farm of his own. He was literate and hard working. He started out in life as a hired labourer (via the Michaelmas fairs), then built up his smallholding and dairy farm near the Black Horse in North Wroughton.

Simeon Strange was described as a servant aged 15, at Spittleborough Farm, in the 1861 Census. Spittleborough lies next to Lydiard, so this was probably one of his first jobs. He worked at Hook at one time.

He got married At Highworth Zion Chapel when he was 19 years old, to Elizabeth Loveday. (There were families of both Stranges and Lovedays at Highworth at that time, so whether they were visiting or living there I don't know). After he married, they settled for several years at Church Farm Cottages, Swindon where the twins and the first two girls

were born. In the 1871 Census they had 2 lodgers living with them.

Then they moved to Swindon Road Wroughton where the rest of the family were born. Gospits Farm was next to where Barratts the wheelwrights are now in North Wroughton. The farmhouse was thatched, with the dairy at the rear. The girls used to pick bunches of buttercups and put in jars on the dairy window sills where it was cool and white. They had two donkeys called Dorcas and Dolly. There was an orchard with wonderful apple trees which bore very sweet and juicy apples, which Frank and Fred used to "nog", and several fields at the rear where they grew vegetables. Simeon also rented fields further at the back where he kept about 15 cows, grew vegetables. He made his own butter and cheeses, delivering the produce in his horse and cart to the large houses in Old Swindon - Belmont Crescent, Westlecot Road, etc (never in New Town).

The farm must have prospered because he had a bank account, and it was his custom to visit the Bank in Old Town once a week to pay his money in on market days, so the turnover must have been worth the visit. Frank remembered that his Grandfather had a cheque book (which was very unusual in those days).

The 1881 Census shows they had a lodger in the house as well as 3 children living at home - Lucy, Ruth and Hubert 7, (Mary not having been born yet).

Simeon, in contrast to his brother George, was said to have been a "sweet, mild man." He was religious and a church warden at St Johns Wroughton for many years. There is a brass plaque on the wall of the tower to him, and he is mentioned as being church warden in 1906 when there was a church outing.

I am told that his daughters were "all too good looking for their own good", and the Strange parents were too kind and not strict enough with them. Louisa the eldest, married in haste, John Robinson of Swindon. Lydia went away and became a school teacher; had an affair with the school headmaster for many years and had twin girls by him. (It was sad that when his sick wife died and he was free, she had just resigned herself and married someone else).

My Grandmother Ruth at 18, had a daughter by James Newman of Chilton Farm in 1891 called Minnie, whom Simeon and Elizabeth Strange brought up at Gospits Farm, (their youngest child Mary being 3 at the time). Then a few years later Letitia Martha (known as Pat) had Frank Strange (by Frederick Parsons, a tall 6ft 2in. good looking redheaded coachman) whom her parents brought up as their own as well when she went back into service. She subsequently married Tom Burkett a butcher at Southampton and made a new life for herself.

When Simeon and Elizabeth were in their 50s, Ruth who had married James Newman seven years before, came home to Gospits Farm for the

birth of my Father Frederick. Unfortunately Ruth caught Scarlet Fever during the confinement, and died two weeks later on New Year's Day 1908. By this time their daughter Mary had married Kylie Leader and had a small baby, so Fred was given to her to nurse for a few months, thereafter the Grandparents looked after the baby again. So the household in the early 1900s consisted of Simeon and Elizabeth, Minnie a teenager, Frank and Fred. Elizabeth missed her youngest daughter, and Frank remembered that she cried as she was making the beds and he heard her crying "my poor Mary, I shall never see you again in this life". She also had a favourite saying which was "in the midst of life we are in death".

Simeon's son Hubert (Bert) grew up to be a wastrel and got into debt many times. Simeon paid off his debts and finally lost all his money because of Bert. They were very poor when Frank and Fred were children. Bert used to drink heavily and was lazy. When Simeon went into Swindon with his horse and cart to sell his butter, cheeses and vegetables, Bert was supposed to tend the fields with the hired hands, but Simeon frequently got back to find Bert and the men all drunk and incapable lying in the fields with the empty casks by their sides which they had got from the pub and charged to Simeon. So not only was he in debt for the beer, but the fields hadn't been worked either. After he married, Hubert lived in one of three houses near the Three Tunns Inn at Wroughton, and used to ride a white mare. He had 1 son and 2 daughters (one called Nina whom Fred saw riding in hunting gear when he went to Guildford later).

Simeon sold his farm (after the farmhouse had burnt down) to settle

Bert's debts. Bert went to work for a Jewish banker as farm manager at Shalford near Guildford. "He had big ideas and rode to hounds as he had in Wroughton".

Gospits Farm was where Barretts the Wheelwrights are now; the story goes that Barretts wanted the farm next door in order to expand. Some people said that a spark from their forge went onto the thatch and the farm conveniently burnt down! Frank Strange, when a teenager cycling up Croft Road to the GWR Works, remembers someone called out to him "your roof is going up a treat" - and he looked back and saw the blaze. He turned round and went back to find the farmhouse ruined. So Simeon, Frank, my Father Fred and Minnie were homeless. They went to live in 11 Marlborough Road Wroughton (rented) and later in a tiny cottage on the right hand side going up Priors Hill.

Elizabeth (Grannie Strange) had died 11 November 1918 in the great influenza epidemic of 1918. She was nursed by her daughter Lucy Robinson in Cricklade Road Swindon, and brought back to Wroughton to be buried in St John's Churchyard (left of the path). Joe Newman remembers on his way home from school, stopping in respect as a cortege went by and someone said to him "that's your grandma" - no one had told him that his Grannie had died. He was upset. Joe remembers her and Simeon with affection and said they were a kindly old couple. Apparently Grannie Strange was the first to call him 'Joe' instead of William. Fred was 10 years old when she died.

They took a lodger after moving to Marlborough Road, - a baker who worked across the road in The Pitchens - which gave them a little

income and no doubt free bread. Minnie courted him and they married and moved to Honiton in Devon, which left the three men on their own. Minnie married at Wroughton, and when all the people were seated in the church the parson wouldn't conduct the ceremony because she hadn't been baptised! So In front of the congregation they marched to the back of the church to the font, and she swore at the parson and said "now that's enough, now marry us". Eileen Selby was at the wedding when a child and remembers the day.

Frank remembered that Minnie was bad with money as well and got Frank and Simeon into debt. Frank had his job in the GWR and bought a bicycle on hire purchase in order to get to work. He used to give Minnie the money to buy the weekly postal orders, and had a shock when they wrote saying he was in debt and the instalments hadn't been paid.

After Minnie left, the three - Simeon , Frank and Fred moved to a tiny house in Priors Hill . Frank said "they lived without a woman in the house for 2 years", and must have been extremely poor. Frank remembers he and Simeon having only a pint of beer, bread and cheese for Christmas Dinner. Fred said that the only present he ever received at Christmas once was a sugar mouse, so it became a tradition in our family that he always bought us a sugar mouse each Christmas!

By this time Simeon was well in his 70s, and they were finding it hard to cope. So my Father Fred at about 13 years old(in about 1921) went to find himself somewhere to live and work. He went first to The Bear Inn at Hungerford where he lived in as a boot boy but was very unhappy and didn't stay long. He subsequently had

a variety of jobs and lodgings in Swindon.

Frank stayed with his Grandfather for a while, but then went into lodgings in Swindon which was nearer his work. He was fortunate in having learned a trade and having continuous work.

Frank remembered that Simeon used to sit and pare his finger nails with a knife! (My Father Fred used to drive me mad when he did similar instead of using the scissors, but upon reflection, I suppose poor people years ago couldn't afford scissors!)

At some time Simeon went to live at St Margaret's Old Peoples Home at Stratton St Margarets (the Workhouse). His mind began to wander as he slowed up, and several times he tried to walk all the way home to Wroughton. Fred and Elsie visited him at Stratton in 1932 before he died and took the photos of him. Elsie's father Jim Bennett, was the Chairman of the Board of Guardians which managed the Workhouse and orphanages in those days. He kindly agreed to sign the papers to pay for Simeon's body to be brought back to Wroughton for burial in the churchyard (left of the pathway near his wife Elizabeth although there is no stone to mark it). Frank was at the funeral.

Obituary from the North Wilts Herald:

### "WROUGHTON DEATH

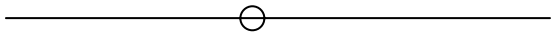
The death has occurred of an old Wroughton resident, in Mr. Simeon Strange, at the age of 83.

For many years Mr Strange was in the farming business at the Gospits Farm, where now stands the wheelwrights' business of Messrs Barrett & Co., Wroughton, though it is many years since he gave up business.

For many years he was Vicar's Warden at the Parish Church, at the time the Rev. J. R. Turner was incumbent. He was acting in that capacity at the time the Wroughton Church tower and bells were restored, in April of 1906."

Shirley Newman

August 1998



## NOTES

Eileen Selby told me that there was a Strange Family Bible at her Grandmother's house in Cricklade Road. Unfortunately, Eileen's step-father Jack Sturgess and his second wife came from Brighton, (as did their relatives). After Eileen's mother died she had nothing to do with him, so Eileen had nothing from her home and doesn't know what happened to any Strange family mementoes or the Bible.

However, Frank told me he had a large photograph of his Grandmother Elizabeth somewhere, and a whole stack of old photos which he would look out for me to see. (They were there at the Windsor Road House apparently before they moved to the flat). I would like to see what the Strange grandparents looked like; everyone says how kind and sweet they both were, but no one says what they looked like!

Where the Co-operative Discount Supermarket now stands on the corner of Newport Street and High Street Swindon there was a bank which was owned by the Strange family in the 19th century. I still wonder if we are connected to that branch.

I still think there must be some connection re: the Simeon Strange born at Aston Tirrold, Berks in the 1840s of a William Strange, as the name combination is not common.

I must try and trace the Guildford branch - what were Hubert's children's names?