

FREEMAN/ KITTERIDGE – What's in a Name!

After a long period of stagnation, I have finally managed to push back the Freeman family a further generation.

My husband Alan's 3x great grandfather William Freeman, of Saffron Walden, Essex, turned out to be the youngest of six children, only the eldest of whom lived long enough to be entered on the census. This eldest child, John – I learnt from a descendant in Australia – was born and baptised before his parents married in 1791. Their names were John Freeman and Lucy Kitteridge, so son John, and his subsequent descendants, were known as either Kitteridge or Freeman Kitteridge, names which have proved remarkably fluid in official records.

However, John's great grandson, Robert Freeman Kitteridge, used this duality to his advantage. He first appeared independent of his family on the 1901 census, as sixteen year old Robert Freeman, a domestic hall boy at No.6 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. Ten years later, under the same name, he was butler to the Willis brothers at Brasted Chart, near Sevenoaks in Kent, alongside house and parlour maid, Alice Osbourn. Both were listed as single, but in fact they had married in early 1908 in Southwark under Robert's Kitteridge surname! A daughter was baptised on 17th May 1908, Lillian Freeman Kitteridge, at Cranleigh, Surrey, Alice's home town. Three year old Lillian was with her grandparents there on the 1911 census.

Robert served with the Royal Navy and their newly formed air arm from 1916 to 1918, fathering son Frank in 1916 and daughter Mary Ann in 1921, both born in Brasted Chart. He died in 1928, but wife Alice Freeman Kitteridge lived until 1966, dying in Croydon at the age of 80.

Robert and Alice's employer in 1911 was also of interest – William Willis (1841-1923) – listed on that census as the proprietor of The Platinotype Company, manufacturer of photographic paper.

Born in Cornwall, the family can be found on the 1861 census in Birmingham where William's father, also William, was a landscape engraver. William Jr patented the platinotype in 1873, a photographic process using platinum, with further patents in 1878 and 1880. He set up his company in 1880 which sold both the licences to use the process and the materials needed.

William lived much of his life in Bromley, Kent, where he was vice chairman of the local camera club, and presented the cottage hospital with its first x-ray machine. He died in 1923, leaving £106,833 to be administered by his retired bank manager brother, John Willis.

In recent years the platinotype process has had a resurgence of interest, with modern technology improving the problems it had with preserving issues.

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