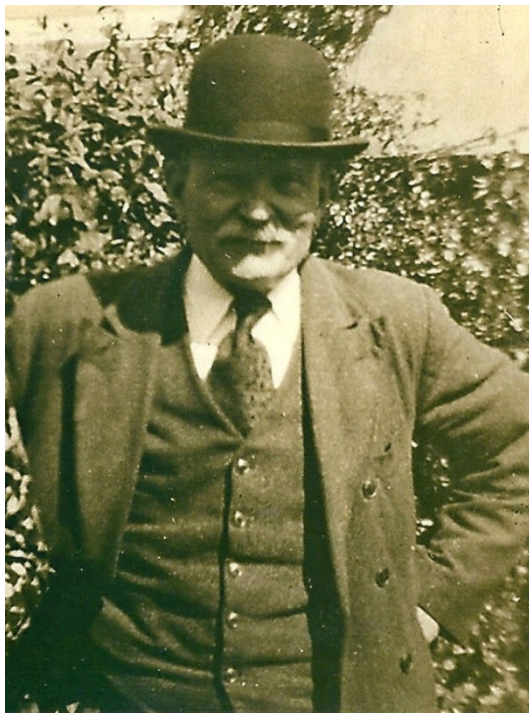


Great-Grandmother's Secrets Revealed!

I have realised for some time now that the most personal and therefore most valuable family history material has come not from looking back but from looking forward to find living descendants. It is the information and artefacts that they inherited (and which you didn't!) which can greatly expand your understanding of the family. It may simply be photographs (I had none of my great-grandmother) or it may be some very valuable information.

One of the most useful tools for finding living descendants is the huge number of personal family trees on sites such as www.ancestry.co.uk. For those who participate in DNA genealogy research the database of your DNA matches on sites such as www.familytreeDNA.com is another. I also choose to publicise my family tree on my own website www.nynne.org which serves to draw in previously unknown relatives.

It was via my own website that I was contacted in 2013 with a rather unusual request. A person emailed me saying that he was looking to take over the 100 year lease on his great-grandfather Harry Finley's grave in Portslade as it had about 20 years left on it and could therefore still be used. The only problem was that my great-grandmother Annie Mary Taylor (1872-1953) was the registered owner and he had no idea who she was – she certainly wasn't part of his family! He had tracked me down by searching on her name and finding my web site.



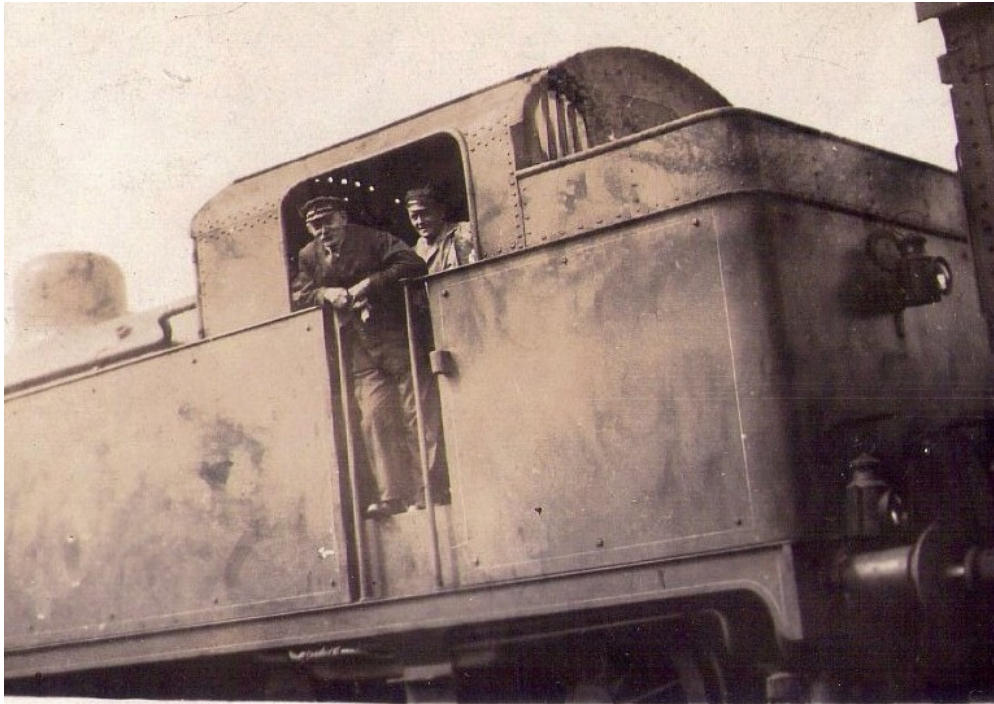
Widower and train driver, Harry Finley

When it came to family history research my great-grandmother was a person of great interest to me. She and my great-grandfather, George Taylor (1877-1968) had separated c1908 after having four children, one being my grandfather Arthur Taylor. Annie then went on to have three more children and for the rest of her life refused to tell even these children who their fathers were. On their birth certificates the father's name is just left blank.

My lack of information about Annie Mary Taylor was due largely to my grandmother, wife of Arthur Taylor, who never got on with her and, according to my mother, even burnt the letters Annie sent to them after they had emigrated to Australia! Apparently the bad feelings went right back to when Annie disapproved of her son Arthur marrying my grandmother and things just snowballed from there. The result was that we did not even have a photograph of Annie and had lost contact with the family after my grandparents emigrated in 1948. My own mother's recollection of Annie however was that "she was the most hospitable of all the relations" so I was certainly interested to find out more about her. The fact that Annie was the original purchaser and registered owner of Harry

Finley's grave started an investigation which was to "crack this case wide open" and lead to the identification of the father of two of Annie's post-separation children.

My first task was to be of assistance to the person who contacted me about the grave and find the person currently entitled to inherit the lease on the gravesite. This raised questions such as: did Annie leave a will or were letters of administration granted, and if so, who was the executor? If not, who was the next of kin? We were instructed by the Brighton & Hove City Council that to determine the current owner we need to follow the line of descent down to the last surviving child of Annie. As this person was also deceased it would be their executor(s) who would be entitled to be the new owners, or else their next of kin.



The train driver Harry Finley in one of his trains at Brighton.

My first avenue for tracking descendants is to go www.ancestry.co.uk and search the user submitted trees in the hope that one of the descendants I am looking for has started their family tree and that I can match it with mine. With genealogy so popular at the moment this does have a reasonable chance of success. In this case I was lucky, found a matching tree and was very pleased to discover that the tree owner was a child of the last living child of Annie Mary Taylor, and hence entitled (together with her brother) to be the current owner of Harry Finley's grave. I am pleased to say that some months later the ownership of Harry Finley's grave was successfully transferred to his great grandson. More importantly for me, I had discovered a first cousin once removed that I never knew I had. She was the daughter of the eldest of the post-separation children and I have twice since had the pleasure of visiting her.



Annie Mary Taylor (nee Wadey)

But the story doesn't end there. Just who was Harry Finley and could he have been the father of Annie Mary Taylor post-separation children?

I must admit to being a keen participant in DNA genealogy so my first step was to convince Harry Finley's great grandson to have an autosomal DNA test which costs US\$99 at www.familytreeDNA.com. I then had to convince my newly met cousin to do the same test - which they both did. The results which came back showed that my cousin and I were a very strong match, as would be expected of first cousins. Unfortunately she did not match Harry Finley's great grandson, so Harry Finley was clearly not her grandfather.

But Annie Mary Taylor had three children after separating from George Taylor. The father of the eldest was clearly not Harry Finley and he remains unknown to this day. However, the descendants of the two other children were known to my cousin and I had the pleasure of meeting them at the Post & Telegraph pub in Brighton on a visit there in 2014. I think it was at this meeting that the seeds were sown to get one of them to do the DNA test as well. In due course, without further

prompting, one of them did and the match to widower and train driver Harry Finley was proven and a lot of family history explained.

Harry Finley was shown to be the father of Annie Mary Taylor's last two children. The records show that he died at her house and she then purchased his grave at the Portslade cemetery. She never told these children that he was their father but he was always there in the background!

I am pleased to say that I now have photographs of my great grandmother, Annie Mary Taylor. More importantly, I have a greater understanding of her life and a connection to a group of living relatives that I never had before.

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