

## CASE STUDY TWO



# Tragedy on the Tilford Road

How our reader used an inquest report to uncover a fatal accident in her family tree

By **Carol Kerry-Green**



Carol became interested in family history ten years ago and is now studying for a diploma in genealogy.

**M**y husband knew very little about his great-grandfather. However, after discovering that he'd changed his name, I found the details of his untimely death.

When I first started researching my husband's

family history, I spoke to my father-in-law Frank Kerry about his parents and their ancestry. I was surprised to discover that his birth registration stated Frank White. He said that his father's surname was Kerry, which was the name of his grandmother's second husband. He also told me that they didn't really know what happened to his grandfather (also called Frank White), only that he had died in an accident with a horse and cart.

The next time I visited the family history section of our local library, I checked the microfiche of the General Register Office index for Frank's death, sometime between 1907 and 1910. I found the entry I wanted in the March quarter of 1909 and sent for the certificate. This told me that on 25 February 1909, at the Cottage Hospital, Farnham, Frank had died from "internal injuries produced by having been accidentally run over by a Furniture van" and that an inquest had been held two days later. His occupation was given as a "carman" and he lived at 6 Yeovil Road, Farnborough.

### White on track

I set out to find out more about Frank White and his family. His certificate stated that he was 28 at the time of his death, meaning he was born about 1881. I knew that in 1909 he lived in Farnborough, but I didn't know where he was born. I used the 1901 Census was at Ancestry ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)), and although I couldn't find Frank, I found his wife, Susan Ellen Gaines with her family at 5 Yeovil Road. Scanning the adjacent returns, I found Frank, just two entries above her at 6 Yeovil Road, a 20-year-old coal carter – he'd married the girl next door! The Census also gave his birthplace as Odiham, Hampshire.

Armed with this new information, I visited the Society of Genealogists in London where I examined Odiham's parish registers. I was able to put together a family tree for Frank and the White, Watts and Gaines families who were linked by marriage in several generations. Frank was the eighth child of James White and Louisa Watts, born in Odiham in 1881. He moved to Farnborough, presumably for work, where he met and married Susan on

### GOOGLE

#### Streetview

Use the Streetview function at <http://maps.google.co.uk> to see what your ancestral homes look like. Type in the address and click the yellow man to see a modern picture



REGISTERED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH

ISSUED AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number: COL234620

REGISTRATION DISTRICT: Farnham

Parishes in the full-name of: Farnham

in the County of Surrey

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
When and where born	When and where married	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, occupation and address of informant	When registered	Signature of register
Frank White 1881-1909 Carman		Male	27 years	Carman	Accidental death	Miss Potter 113, The Rectory Farnham, Surrey	26 Dec 1903	Miss Potter

REGISTRATION DISTRICT: Farnham

Parishes in the full-name of: Farnham

in the County of Surrey

15th day of June 2004

REGISTRATION DISTRICT: Farnham

Parishes in the full-name of: Farnham

in the County of Surrey

REGISTRATION DISTRICT: Farnham

Parishes in the full-name of: Farnham

in the County of Surrey



**Top** Frank White's 1909 death certificate gives the cause as 'accidental death'

**Above** Trimmers Cottage Hospital where Frank died

26 December 1903, and they had two children: Frank, born 1904; and Nellie, born 1907. In February 1909, he was sent on a job by his employers

with two other men to drive furniture vans from Rowledge to Wisley Green via Tilford, a journey that ended in tragedy.

### Accidental death

His death certificate told me an inquest had been held, but I learned that the coroner's papers for this date were no longer available. So, I had to check local newspapers. I wasn't in a position to visit Farnborough, so I put a request on the Rootschat forum ([www.rootschat.com](http://www.rootschat.com)) for lookups in Hampshire, to see if anyone could visit the local library and check the newspapers for me. Fortunately, a kind soul did just that and within a few days I had a transcribed copy of the inquest report of Frank's accident from

*"He was walking with the horses instead of riding on the dickey, and was run over by the van"*

## Carters and carriers

*The men who transported goods before the advent of cars*



In the days of horse-drawn transport there were plenty of jobs for men known as carters, carriers or, occasionally, carmen. Their job entailed driving the cart, loading and unloading goods and looking after the horses. Many carriers went between towns and villages, and you can often find details of these services in old directories such as Pigot's or White's at local record offices and [www.historicaldirectories.org](http://www.historicaldirectories.org). Others worked for the railways, collecting goods at the railyard and taking them to their destination.

Being a carter was a physically demanding job and would have necessitated a good knowledge of the local area. The type of carts used would vary from job to job, from a two-wheeled vehicle pulled by one horse that delivered goods in a town, to larger four-wheeled vehicles pulled by teams of horses.

the Farnham Haselmere and Hindhead Herald.

Arthur Marks told the inquest that he, Frank and their colleague Chas Mosdell were on the road opposite the entrance to Tilford Reeds when

Frank experienced trouble with his van. Chas said that he was at the bottom of the hill when he noticed from the light on Frank's van that he was coming down the slope pretty quickly. When he got to the van at the bottom of the hill, he saw that only two horses were attached - Frank had been walking the other one in its harness.

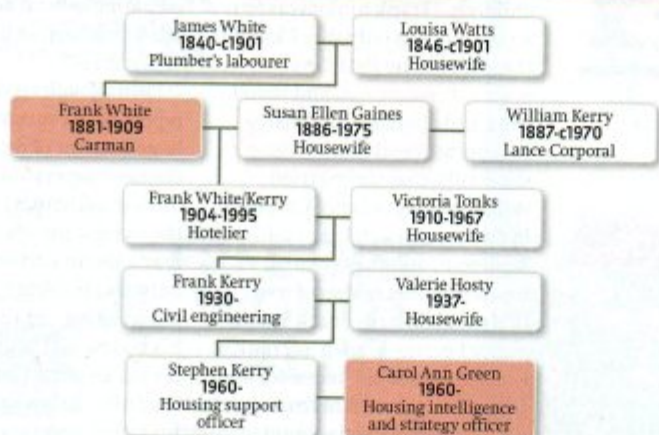
Neither of the men actually witnessed the accident, but it appears that the horses bolted due to the excess demand on them (the furniture van weighed between four and five tons). It's likely that Frank was walking beside the horses instead of riding on the dickey, and was run over by the van on its steep descent. He was taken to Trimmers Cottage Hospital in Farnham at 11.30pm. From the testimony of Miss Potter at hospital I know that Frank was conscious when he was

## COMMUNITY

### Cottage hospitals

These small, rural hospitals usually had about 25 beds. The first centre of this kind was established in 1827 and there are still around 470 community hospitals in the UK today

## THE WHITE/KERRY FAMILY TREE





1903 - Marriage solemnized at St. Peter's Church of St. Peter's, London

No.	When Solemnized	Parish or Place	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Qualifications or other Particulars	Bride's Name and Surname	Rank or Profession
127	1903	St. Peter's Church	22	Single	Comer	Warranted	Frank White	Labourer
	1903	St. Peter's Church	20	Single	General	Warranted	Charles James	Labourer

Witnessed by the Minister of the Parish, according to the Rites and Customs of the Church of England, by the following persons:

Minister: Frank White  
 Witnesses: Susan Ellen Kerry, Charles James, Arthur S. Smith, John Stone

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a register of Marriages in the Registration District of Hartley Winney  
 Given at the General Register Office, under the Seal of the said Office, this 2nd day of June 2004

MXB 643927

I, **FRANK KERRY** of 41 Moreshoe Crescent, Old Dean Estate, Camberley in the County of Surrey Hotelier do solemnly and sincerely declare as follows :-

1. I was born on the 1st day of April, 1904 and am the person mentioned as Frank White in the Certificate of Birth now produced to me and marked 'A'.
2. I have been married once only on the 24th day of December, 1927 and then to Victoria Anne Lily White (nee Tonks) and I am the person mentioned as Frank White in the Certificate of Marriage now produced to me and marked 'B'.
3. In approximately the year 1913 my Mother Susan Ellen White married William Kerry and since the date of my said Mother's remarriage I have always been known as Frank Kerry and I have for fifty years and upwards used the name of Frank Kerry for all purposes including official documents other than my said Certificate of Marriage.
4. Frank White appearing in the said Certificate of Birth and in the said Certificate of Marriage are one and the same persons as me this Declarant.

AND I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true and by virtue of the provisions of the Statutory Declarations Act 1835.

DECLARED at 41 Moreshoe Crescent, Old Dean Estate, Camberley in the County of Surrey  
 this 3<sup>rd</sup> day of January  
 1964

*Frank Kerry*

Before me,  
*W. E. M. Vaughan*  
 A Commissioner for Oaths

admitted. He'd told her that one of the horses had broken its leg, but said nothing about how he died with his own wounds. He received the next day from internal injuries. The jury returned a verdict of accidental death, but added that had the van been fitted with a foot brake, Frank would probably have been riding instead of walking beside the horses, and would have traversed the hill successfully.

I was struck by this horrific and needless accident, but also the minutiae of details that the coroner's inquest covered. The

**Top** Frank and Susan's marriage certificate  
**Above** Frank Kerry's official statement to change his name

## RECORDS

### Library

The Society of Genealogists' library has an unbeatable collection of parish registers on microfilm/microfiche and other unique family history resources

wife Susan Ellen a widow at just 23 years-old with two young children - Frank junior was four and Nellie was only two. I looked them up on the 1911 Census ([www.1911census.co.uk](http://www.1911census.co.uk)), and found the family living with Susan's parents at Yeovil Road. It wasn't until 1912 that she married William Kerry, a Lance Corporal in the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, and they went on to have six more children. From this time onwards Frank White junior became known as Frank Kerry and used the name for all purposes except on his marriage certificate to Victoria Annie Lilian Tonks in 1927.

"I've been able to pinpoint almost exactly where the accident took place"

## Cornering coroners

You can check proceedings in local newspapers

If your ancestor was killed suddenly, unexpectedly or in an accident, there will probably have been an inquest into their death. Unfortunately, many coroners' records, such as the one for Frank White, have been destroyed, as coroners could dispose of them after 15 years. If the report you're after does survive, it'll be closed to public access for 75 years.

If you can't find the inquest papers at The National Archives or local offices you may strike gold by looking in local newspapers. Since the 18th century, inquests were reported a few days after the death, so use the date that appears on the death certificate as a starting point. The proceedings may have been reported in great detail, including eyewitness reports and police statements that can give you a much better understanding of the circumstances surrounding your forebear's death.

facts provided by the various witnesses unveiled a detailed picture of Frank's last moments. One of them, George William Lonsdale, was called to help at the accident. By using his statement alongside maps and the Streetview function at <http://maps.google.co.uk>, I've been able to pinpoint almost exactly where the accident took place.

## Name change

Frank's death left his wife Susan Ellen a widow at just 23 years-old with two young children - Frank junior was four and Nellie was only two. I looked them up on the 1911 Census ([www.1911census.co.uk](http://www.1911census.co.uk)), and found the family living with Susan's parents at Yeovil Road. It wasn't until 1912 that she married William Kerry, a Lance Corporal in the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, and they went on to have six more children. From this time onwards Frank White junior became known as Frank Kerry and used the name for all purposes except on his marriage certificate to Victoria Annie Lilian Tonks in 1927.

Later in life he officially changed his name by deed poll, stating that he'd "always been known as Frank Kerry and I have for 50 years and upwards used the name of Frank Kerry for all purposes including official documents other than my certificate of marriage."

Even though the inquest report hasn't survived, the huge amount of detail in the newspapers almost makes me feel as though I attended the inquest myself. The work Frank senior carried out was hard and his death must have left a lasting impression on his widow and young children. It's hardly surprising that my father-in-law said that his father never mentioned the tragedy. ■

## CONTACTS

### Society of Genealogists

14 Charterhouse Buildings, London, EC1M 7BA  
[www.societyofgenealogists.com](http://www.societyofgenealogists.com)

### WEBSITES

#### Ancestry

[www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)

#### Findmypast

[www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)

#### Rootschat

[www.rootschat.com](http://www.rootschat.com)