

The ties that bind

How a note revealed the link between two family branches and one remarkable woman

By **Carol Kerry-Green**



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DOCUMENTS

Notes

Don't ignore those bits of paper your grandmother scribbled on, they may hold information that could help you find the missing link in your family history. Address books, diaries, lists of names and dates, even notes on the backs of photographs; all these could help.

As well as discovering the life of a remarkable woman, my research into my 3x great-aunt Eliza led me to a connection between two lines of my family.

Eliza Green was born in 1831, younger sister to my 3x great-grandfather James. In the 1851 Census, "Eliza Christie" was living with her mother Dinah

Green in Hull, aged 20 with a one-year-old daughter also named Eliza. A search of the GRO indexes revealed a marriage for Eliza to a William Henry Christie in the Oct-Dec quarter of 1850. I found a copy of the marriage entry, which showed they married on 11 November at Holy Trinity in Hull. He was a mariner and given his absence from the 1851 Census, I assume he was away at sea.

Lost at sea?

By the 1861 Census, Eliza and William had four children:

Catherine E, aged eight; Thomas six; Eliza, three; and Mary, one. Again, there was no mention of William on the census. To try and find him, I searched crew lists of mercantile and Royal Navy vessels on www.findmypast.co.uk and www.ancestry.co.uk.

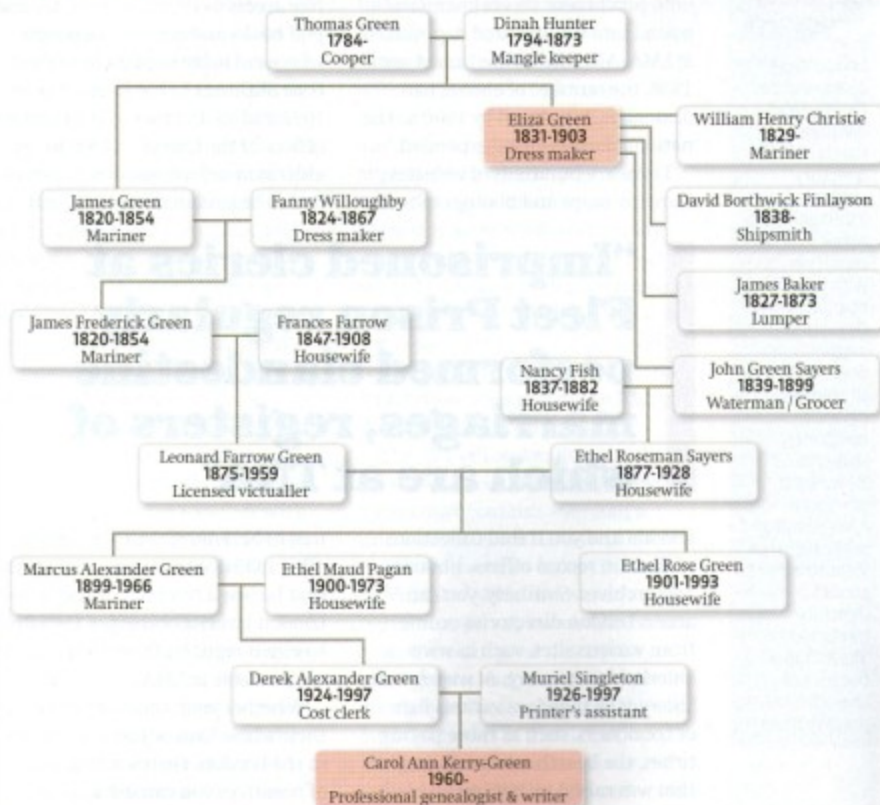
The closest I've found is a Wm Christie enumerated on board HMS *Immortalite*, moored at Gibraltar. He's described as 30, married, and his place of birth is Portsea, Hampshire. On his 1850 marriage certificate, he gives his age as full, meaning he was at least 21, giving an estimated year of birth as 1829 - this Wm Christie fits within that range.

William remains a mystery to me, not least because Eliza Christie, widowed, married David Borthwick Finlayson on 11 March 1866 at the parish church in Sculcoates, and so far I've been unable to find a death for William. The mystery is compounded by the births of the two younger daughters, Eliza and Mary on the 1861 Census. I found that both girls were registered with the middle name 'Pickering', the same last name as one of Eliza's boarders in 1861. Was this a coincidence, or was Eliza having an affair with John Pickering, in the belief that William was dead? Still, the father's name on the birth certificates is shown as William Henry Christie, a sailor in the Merchant Service.

More suitors

Before their marriage in March 1866, Eliza and David had a daughter Margaret Jane, born in Hartlepool, Durham on 19 August 1865 and baptised at Holy Trinity, Hull on 30 December 1866; this could mean that William died somewhere between August 1865 and March 1866 when Eliza became a widow and could legally marry David. However, they didn't

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enjoy a long marriage: they had another daughter Eliza Finlayson born in June 1867, but just over a year later in August 1868, Eliza married for a third time to James Baker at St Mary's, Lowgate, Hull.

I haven't been able to find a death for David between 14 September 1867 (when he and Eliza were witnesses at Eliza's

– the two other little girls Eliza and Mary Pickering Christie died of measles in early 1862. Her marriage to James in 1868 could well have been a way to ensure a home for her children.

James and Eliza had no children together, but James had two daughters Margaret and Sarah Jane. In 1871, James, Eliza and her four children were

“Once again, Eliza was widowed. I can only imagine what she must have been feeling”

nephew's wedding) and 19 August 1868 when she married James Baker, despite a thorough search of online and archive resources. David was a shipsmith, so it's likely that he was also away at sea on a regular basis. It must have been a blow to Eliza to lose another husband leaving her with a family of four children: Kate, 16; Thomas, 14; Margaret, three; and Eliza, one

living at 21 George Yard. James' daughter Margaret married in 1868, and Sarah Jane early in 1871. Tragedy struck the family again on 10 August 1873 when James died of heart disease, aged only 44. His occupation is given as lumper. Once again, Eliza was widowed. I can only imagine what she must have been feeling, or was she becoming inured to death?

Marriage witnesses

Who were the people present as your ancestors' exchanged vows?

Always look at the names and signatures of witnesses on marriage entries, as they were often family members, or close friends and can confirm a relationship. In Eliza's case, witnesses on each of her marriage certificates confirmed relationships in her wider family. Her nephew James F Green was a witness when she married David Borthwick Finlayson and they returned the compliment when they were witnesses to his marriage the next year.

Sarah Jane Plummer was one of the witnesses when Eliza married John Green Sayers. She was James Baker's youngest daughter and that led me to her marriage to Richard Plummer. All these interconnections can help clarify that you're on the right track.

RECORDS

Registers

Before sending for a marriage certificate, check out the parish registers where the marriage took place at the local archives office. These are often available on microfilm, and the original entry would have included your ancestor's signature.

At this point in my research I was having difficulty keeping track of Eliza. I couldn't find her on the 1881 Census, her son Thomas was married and there was no trace of daughter Kate. Eventually after trying various combinations of names, I found the family through daughter Eliza Finlayson aged 13. For some reason, Eliza Baker had been enumerated as Kate C

63	12	1	Kate C Baker	Widow	49	Housekeeper	Hull
			Sarah Finlayson	Widow	13	Scholar	Hull
			John T Humphrey	Widower	54	Painter	Hull
			Albert J Humphrey	Widower	14	Scholar	Hull
			Richard Leitch	Widower	9		Hull
			Harriet Ann Jackson	Widow	6		Hull

Baker. Eliza's age - 49 - was correct and her family included not only her daughter Eliza, but nephews John and Albert Humphrey and grandchildren Richard and Harriet Ann Jackson, both the grandchildren of her third husband, James Baker. All I can think of is that Eliza and her daughter Kate became confused as one person on the census.

Family ties

However, the 1891 Census drew a blank. It was then that a small light bulb went off in my head as I remembered the scribbled notes my great Aunt Ethel had left about her family, one of which reads:

"My grandfather had nine daughters, my mother - Ethel Roseman Green, née Sayers, being the youngest but one... I don't know the name of my maternal grandmother - my grandfather married again a widow with daughters, one of whom emigrated to Australia - she married but had no children, and, I think she adopted a son."

I'd just discovered that Eliza's daughter Margaret Finlayson had emigrated to Queensland on the *Merkara* in 1891, through Ancestry, and it seemed too much of a coincidence.

Ethel's grandfather was John Green Sayers who married for a second time to an Eliza Baker. Once I got the marriage certificate, I was able to confirm that this was the same Eliza. On 4 March 1883, John Green Sayers a 46-year-old widower married Eliza Baker a 51-year-old widow. Her father's name was given as Thomas Green (deceased) a cooper; and witnesses were John Thomas Humphrey (Eliza's nephew) and Sarah Jane Plummer (Eliza's step-daughter). My 2x great-grandfather John Green Sayers married my 3x great-aunt, and Eliza brought up John's motherless daughters.

On the 1891 Census, John and Eliza were living in Waterloo Street, Hull and John's job had changed from waterman to grocer. With them are his two youngest daughters Clara aged 16, and Ethel R, aged 13. I can't

Top The census entry for Eliza showing her enumerated as "Kate C Baker" in 1881
Above James Baker's death certificate

CLUES

Occupation

These are usually noted on census entries, birth, marriage and death certificates and can help to give a picture of how your ancestors lived. Knowing your ancestors' job can help in searches for further information.

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH

Application Number 3483475-1

REGISTRATION DISTRICT: HULL
1877 DEATH in the Sub-District of Saint Mary in the County of the Town of Kingston upon Hull

Dist.	When and where died	Name and number	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description and address of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
1	1881	Kate C Baker	F	49	Housekeeper	Heart Disease	John T Humphrey, 17 Waterloo Street, Hull	12th September 1881	[Signature]

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the original copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said District, the 9th day of September 2011

DVD 104550

WARNING: THIS IS A CERTIFICATE RELATING TO PAYING OR RECEIVING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE IS A CRIME UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE REGISTERED INFORMATION ACT 2003. A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.

help but wonder if Eliza persuaded him to change jobs, having already lost three husbands whose occupations were to do with the sea.

Ethel R was my great-grandmother. She married Leonard Farrow Green on 25 August 1896 when she was 19; Leonard was Eliza's great-nephew, her brother James' grandson. I've often wondered how my ancestors met each other, and in my great-grandparent's case, I

now know they were related through marriage and must have met as children.

John died in 1899 and Eliza appears on the 1901 Census as a 70-year-old widow living on her own means. She died 12 March 1903 and her daughter Eliza Brown (née Finlayson) was present at her death. This indomitable lady had outlived four husbands and looked after not only her own children, but the grandchildren of her second husband, her nephews, and her fourth husband's motherless girls. I can't imagine what it must have been like, perhaps waiting years to find out if her first husband had died only to have such disappointment in her second and third unions. While many may have given up, Eliza took on not only another husband but his young children as well. The more I researched Eliza's life, the more I came to admire her resilience and I have become very proud of her. ■

Victorian widows

Mourning rituals for those who lost their spouses

People lived with death on a daily basis in Victorian Britain and celebrated the lives of those who passed away. There were strict mourning rules followed by the upper classes, which must have seemed indulgent to the working classes. The most famous widow of this period is Queen Victoria, who wore mourning clothes for Prince Albert from his death to hers, 40 years later.

Widow's weeds, or blacks as they were known were supposed to be worn for a full year, after which time it

was acceptable to introduce grey or lavender colour into dress trims. For working class widows such as Eliza, who had a family to provide for, new clothes for mourning wouldn't have been affordable, so to remain respectable in the eyes of the world she would have dyed her everyday wear black. After two years, mourning could be 'put off' and normal life resumed, but for some widows those two years must have seemed a lifetime.

CONTACTS

East Riding of Yorkshire Archives and Local Studies

County Hall, Beverley, HU17 9BA
www.eastriding.gov.uk/culture-and-information/archives/archivesloc
t.01482 392790

WEBSITES

Ancestry

www.ancestry.co.uk

Findmypast

www.findmypast.co.uk