

PART 1: THE GREAT WAR: 1914-1918

Chapter 1: Introducing "Grandad"

My grandfather, Charles Gordon Parkin, was born in Kirkby¹, Nottinghamshire on 1 December 1897. Although his first name was Charles, he was always known as Gordon. This was a common practice at the time and was also a feature of other characters who appear in his diaries. For example, two of grandad's brothers are referred to as Leonard (or Len) and Cyril, although their full names appear to have been John Leonard and Thomas Cyril respectively. Similarly, his older sister is referred to as Olive although her full name appears to have been Alice Olive. This practice, and the fact that several characters have the same name, e.g. Alice, Barbara, Bert, Gordon, Jim, John, Leonard, Margaret, Olive, Willie etc., make it difficult to always be sure who is being spoken about in the diaries and to cross-reference characters appearing there to public records, e.g. of births, marriages and deaths. This is further complicated by common surnames, such as Smith and Jones, variations in spelling and grandad referring to both his and grandma's parents as "mother" and "father". In addition, it appears that grandma made some diary entries and sometimes she referred to grandad in the first person and sometimes to herself.



Grandad's birth certificate



Sarah Parkin – Grandad's mother

According to a family tree compiled by grandad, his father, my great grandfather, Henry, was born, in Ripley, near Belper in Derbyshire in 1861² and his mother, my great grandmother, Sarah (nee Lander) in Denby, also near Belper, in 1862. They were married in Denby, on Christmas Day, in 1882. The family trees I have do not give details of their brothers and sisters. However, according to details of their wedding³, Henry's father was called James Isaac⁴ and Sarah's father

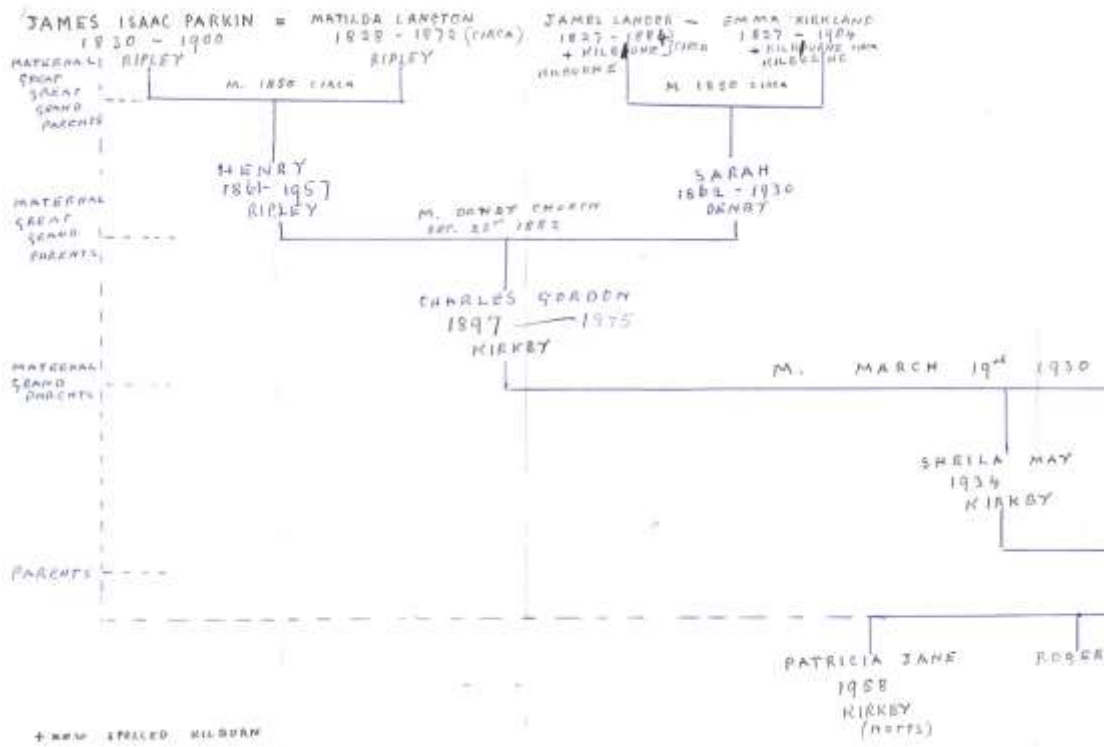
¹ The registration district in which he was born is Basford. The town is referred to locally as "Kirkby" (pronounced with the second "k" in contrast to the better-known town in Merseyside) but, since the 1950s, it has been formally known as Kirkby in Ashfield. Prior to that, the part where grandad lived (close to the Summit Colliery) was known as East Kirkby (although there is also a village in Lincolnshire by that name) and before that Kirkby Folly. I recall grandad being very particular about whether Kirkby in Ashfield had hyphens or not but I could not remember which way round it was! Both forms seem to be used. In his 1955 and 1956 diary when he refers to the formal name change from East Kirkby to Kirkby in Ashfield, he uses it unhyphenated. So, this is the format I have tended to use when spelling out Kirkby in Ashfield in full - except where quoting someone who has used it hyphenated - but I have often just referred to Kirkby in line with local usage.

² Free BMD has details of a Henry Parkin whose birth was registered in Belper in Q3 1861 but there was also a Henry Parkin whose birth was registered in Belper in 1862. This makes finding more details of my great grandfather tricky, particularly as I have found cases of records where I know it refers to him and his date of birth is given as 1862, e.g. the 1901 census.

³ And the family tree grandad constructed.

⁴ According to census and other data, James Isaac was born in 1831 and he married Matilda (Mitilder) Langton in 1847. Their children were Water (b1853), Hannah (b1858), Henry (b1862), Agnes (b1864), William (b1868) and Eliza (b1871). They lived in Green Hillocks Ripley. Matilda died in 1872. In 1881, Henry was living with his brother Walter and family (wife Eliza b1853 and three children – Albert b1874, Catherine b 1877, Annie b1881) in Providence Street, Ripley. Both Walter and Henry were listed as coal miners. That same year, James Isaac was still at Green Hillocks with his two youngest children William and Eliza. But, he was listed as married to Ellen Parkin (although I have struggled to find details of their wedding). They were said to have three other children all with the surname Lovely – Ellen b1866, Mary Ann b1874 and John b1876. I have not managed to find details of them. From FreeBMD, James Parkin appears to have died in Belper in Q1 1884 aged 53. However, grandad's family tree has his dates as from 1830-1900.

was called James.⁵ Sarah's mother was called Emma. Among mum's papers was a photograph of granddad's great grandfather who is identified as Mr Kirkland and who I assume was Emma's father. The back of the photograph reads "This photograph was taken after Mr Kirkland my grandfather was dead they propped him up in a corner."



Top – grandad's great grandfather Mr Kirkland – apparently taken posthumously
Above – family tree constructed by grandad in December 1961. This part shows his side of the family

I am not sure why, or exactly when, granddad's parents moved to Kirkby. Based on places and dates of birth, it appears to have been sometime between when their youngest daughter, Eva, was born in

⁵ According to the family tree compiled by granddad, her father was called James Lander (1827-1884) and her mother was Emma Lander (nee Kirkland) (1827-1904). They married circa 1850. According to the 1871 census, Sarah was living at Bottles in Denby with her family. Her father, James, was born in 1827 and her mother, Emma, in 1827. Her siblings were Fanny Elizabeth (b1852), Ann (b1853), Charles William (b1858), Maria (b1860) and Alice (b1870). According to FreeBMD, James and Emma married in Basford in Q4 1850. I found details of a James Lander who died in Belper in 1885 but he was aged 63. According to FreeBMD, Emma Lander died in Belper in Q1 1904 aged 77.

1895 and when grandad was born in 1897. A newspaper article at the time of grandad's mother's death stated that they moved to Kirkby in 1897 and this was confirmed in a newspaper article at the time of grandad's father's death. Henry made and sold shoes, initially from a wooden hut at the junction of Portland Street and Low Moor Road.⁶ When the diaries start, he has a workshop and shop in Station Street⁷ in Kirkby in Ashfield and it seems he may also have had other shops, for example in Pinxton.

For some time, I thought Grandad was the youngest of five children. John Leonard (Len) was born in Belper District on 17 April 1889. He married Ethel Mary (Mellar) in 1913⁸ and, by the time the diaries start, they are living away from the family's home.⁹ For some time, I thought they had a son called Gordon. He appears in grandad's early diaries and is recorded in a family tree prepared by mum (see below) as Len and Ethel's son. Cyril (Thomas Cyril) was born in Belper District on 1 December 1890. This meant grandad and Cyril shared 1st December as a birthday. When the diaries open, Cyril and grandad are sharing a room and working together in Station Street. Cyril married Minnie (Robinson) on 2nd July 1915, as recorded in grandad's diary. For some time, I thought grandad's oldest sister, Olive, was Sarah Olive and was born in Belper District in 1894. However, she was in fact Alice Olive and was born in Belper District on 10 June 1884 making her the eldest of the Parkin siblings. When the diaries open, she is also married¹⁰ (to John William Smith) and they have a son, also called Leonard¹¹, who is sometimes referred to in grandad's early diaries as "Lalla". Finally, Eva (Eva Emma) was born in Belper District in 1895. When the diaries open, she is still single and living with the family.



Parkin family circa 1903 – Olive, Leonard (Len) and James (Jim) (back row) Henry, Cyril and Sarah (seated middle row) Eva and grandad (front row). This photograph was taken by A&G Taylor who were described as photographers to the late queen. They had businesses in Barnsley, Derby, Nottingham and Sheffield.

⁶ Based on a newspaper article at the time of his death.

⁷ According to the 1911 census, the family occupied 70, 72, 74 and 76 Station Street.

⁸ From FreeBMD, between April and June 1913.

⁹ In the 1921 electoral register, they were recorded as living at 64 Forest Street and they were also noted there in 1922 and 1923. From 1925, their address was given as Boughton Road, (New) Ollerton. In 1925, 1928 and 1929, Thomas Parkin was noted as living there. Could this refer to Cyril? In 1930, there was also an Adeline Parkin living with them.

¹⁰ From Free BMD, they married between April and June 1905

¹¹ I have not been able to identify his birth definitively on FreeBMD. There are a number of Leonard Smiths born in Basford between 1905 and 1911 (when information on mother's maiden name began to be recorded). He appears to have been born between 1906 and 1909. According to the 1911 census, John and Olive were living at Hurst Leigh, Welbeck Street with their son, who was called Cyril Leonard, and was born in 1909. Armed with this information, I found him on FreeBMD but he was born in Q2 of 1908. John's job was given as a colliery onsetter below ground. He was [in charge of loading and unloading the cage](#). However, in the 1939 register, John's occupation was listed as motor haulage contractor, bus proprietor.

However, in the newspaper article relating to granddad's mother's death in 1930, it said that she had six children and that the eldest, James H Parkin, had been unable to attend the funeral as he was living in Canada, in Regina Saskatchewan. It turns out that he was James Henry Parkin and was born in Belper in 1887. He married Annie Marie Higham in the first quarter of 1906. From February to April 1914, granddad does refer to a James, e.g. "*James came over on his motorbike*". He also refers a lot to Jim and to Annie & Jim. They "*came over*" frequently between 1914 and 1918 and, at one stage, granddad says "*Jim & family came over*". It seems Jim may have worked in the family business but, in March 1920, "*Jim started work at the Summit*". He is last mentioned in 1922.¹² Jim gave granddad a flute in March and, in April, granddad said "*in the morning Jim and I went to Nottm by motor*". The newspaper article refers to their children as Gordon and Ethel¹³ the same names as my grandparents. So, it seems Gordon was James and Annie's son and not Len and Ethel's. This explains some entries in the diary, e.g. "*Jim and Annie came over & fetch Gordon back*" and, in May 1918, "*gave Jim my silver albert and locket for Gordon...*" It also explains why there are no mentions of Gordon after about 1918. I don't know precisely when James and his family went to Canada but presumably it is sometime after 1922 based on the diary entries above. It was certainly before 1929 as there was a Christmas and New Year card among mum's papers from Gordon to granddad posted in Canada in December 1929.



Above left – Granddad with dog circa 1903. This photograph was taken by W Ashton of 307 Alfred Road, Brightside, Sheffield

Above right – I am not entirely sure when this photo was taken or why but the four children at the back could be granddad, Len (back), Eva (front) and Cyril in circa 1902 so this could be King Edward VII coronation

¹² In the 1922 electoral register, James and Annie Parkin are listed as living in 76 Station Street

¹³ They were both born in Kirkby before the family emigrated to Canada. John Henry Gordon was born in the second quarter of 1907 and Ethel Eva Doreen in the fourth quarter of 1910.



Wedding of John Smith and Olive Parkin in 1905 Back row – James (Jim) Parkin, Leonard (Len) Parkin, Unknown [but looks like John Smith’s brother?]¹⁴, Cyril Parkin Middle row – Annie Higham, unknown, John Smith, Olive Parkin, unknown Front row – unknown (probably Cyril Smith), grandad, Eva Parkin

¹⁴ According to the 1901 census, John Smith was living with his family in Milton Street. His parents were William (b1855) and Sarah (b1857). He had five siblings – Thomas (b1881), Florence (b1882), George (b1886), Beatrice (b1889) and Cyril (b1895).



Wedding of Annie Higham and James (Jim) Parkin in 1906 showing Leonard (Len) Parkin, unknown¹⁵, Cyril Parkin (back row) Unknown¹⁵, Annie Higham, James (Jim) Parkin, Olive Smith (middle row) Unknown, grandad, Eva Parkin (front row)

¹⁵ Probably Annie Higham's brothers. Based on the 1901 census, her parents were John (b1854) and Maria (b1852). She had four brothers – Bert (b1883), Albert (b1884), Ephraim (b1887) and Francis H (b1893).



Wedding of Leonard Parkin and Ethel Mellar in 1913 showing Cyril Parkin, Olive Smith, James (Jim) Parkin, Annie Parkin, John Smith, grandad (standing at back) Leonard Parkin and Ethel Millar (seated). I am not sure who the boy reclining at the front is. It could be Gordon Parkin (Jim and Annie's son) or Leonard Smith (Olive and John's son).

My Ever Dear son Gordon
 Just a line to let you
 no we shall be please
 to see you back although
 I know you are all right
 with Jim and Annie still
 I shall be please to see
 you at some agin: so shall
 be please when it is Sunday
 no good night and good
 bless you from your ever
 loving Mother. Mother Bromston
 ++++++ - + + + +

Letter to grandad from his mother dated 1 August 1913

Also among mum’s papers was a letter which seems to have been written to grandad by his mother. The reverse of the letter identifies it as dating from 1 August 1913 and as having been opened while at Dinnington. It seems he may have gone there with his brother Jim and his wife Annie but I don’t know any details of this trip as it precedes grandad starting his diaries in 1914. The letter appears to read, “My Ever Dear son Gordon. Just a line to let you no (sic) we shall be please to see you back although I know you are all right with Jim and Annie still I shall be please to see you at home again so shall be please when it is Sunday. So good night and God bless you from your ever loving xxxx Mother xxxx.”

The diaries also contain a great deal about Joe and I was beginning to think he might be another of grandad’s brothers. However, he does not appear in any family tree that I have. In addition, in 1917, grandad’s diary states that Joe’s aunt visited from Cauldwell and, in February 1918, grandad refers to Joe taking some tablets of his for “his father”.¹⁶ So, it seems pretty plain that Joe and grandad were not brothers but their precise relationship only became clear to me much later into my exploration of the diaries.¹⁷

Grandad used a variety of diaries during this period. His first, in 1914, was a gift from his sister and was a Letts diary as was his 1918 diary. He used a Collins Ruby Diary in 1915 and this seems to have been purchased from Henfrey Stationers and Booksellers in Kirkby. His 1917 diary was the first time he used a complimentary product from a shoe company, in this case, Allen and Caswell of Kettering.



Grandad’s World War 1 diaries

¹⁶ Based on 1901 and 1911 censuses, it appears that this was Thomas Dovey.
¹⁷ See Chapter 11.