

## **The mysterious marital career of Frances Elizabeth Otter**

Frances Elizabeth Otter was an elder sister of my great-grandmother Emmeline Otter or, in other words, my grandfather Ernest William Watts' aunt. She was born in Uppingham, Rutlandshire in 1847, the daughter of Charles Edward Otter, a carpenter, and his wife Mary Ann, and appears as such in the 1851 census aged 3. At least that much is clear and above-board!

In the 1861 census, she may be the Fanny Otter aged 14, born in Uppingham, working as a house servant for a certain Thomas Measures and his wife in Leicester. She is missing from the 1871 census, but turns up again in the 1881 census as the wife of a certain Frank Wetherall Griffin.

She had married Frank Wetherall Griffin shortly before the census, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 1881, in the Kensington Register Office, by certificate. He was 24 years old, a bachelor, living at 249 Cornwall Road Kensington, son of Francis John Griffin, Lieutenant Colonel of the 54<sup>th</sup> Foot regiment. She was living at the same address, declared herself to be 28 years old (but was actually 33), a widow, daughter of Charles Edward Otter, a farmer (as he is described on his death certificate, and my great-grandparents' marriage certificate).

But she gave her name as Frances Elizabeth **Legge**...

Their address on their marriage, 249 Cornwall Road in Kensington, was my great-grandparents' address in 1879 when my grandfather was born, so they had taken it over some time in between. They seem to have been close to my great-grandparents, as my great-uncle Frank Wetherall Watts was named after him, and my great aunt Frances Eva Hudson Watts, after her, no doubt. Also, I have a bible in my possession that is inscribed "to Ernest Watts from his uncle Frank Wetherall Griffin, Christmas 1895", so they seem to have kept in touch.

So, who was Mr. **Legge**?

There is only one marriage for a Frances Elizabeth Otter in the National Archives that would fit a birth in 1848. This is in 1869, but the groom is a Thomas Ringsell, and the bride's father is William, a fishmonger, so this is not 'our' Frances Elizabeth'.

Using FreeBMD to search for marriages of a 'Legg' or 'Legge' with a 'Frances Elizabeth' produces one entry, a marriage between a William Douglas **Legg** and a Frances Elizabeth **Rhineberg** (!) in 1873. This sounded promising, except for the Rhineberg. Was she married a third time, perhaps?

Before ordering the marriage certificate, I then searched around on the web for more information, and found the following:

The IGI produced exactly two William Douglas Legg(e)'s who would come into question:

- William Douglas **Legg** son of William & Margaret baptized 27.03.1836 in Reading, Berkshire
- William Douglas **Legge** son of Henry and Elizabeth Louisa baptized 13.02.1837 in East Lavant, Sussex

There are also wills for these William Douglas Legg(e)'s in the National Probate Registry:

- **Legg** William Douglas of “Ravenna” Mill-road Surrey died 9 August 1900 Probate London 8 October 1900 to Henry Arthur Legg retired chemist and Albert Henry Clemens gentleman Effects £162 11s. 7d.
- **Legge** William Douglas Esq 15 July 1880 The Will of William Douglas Legge last of East Lavant in the County of Sussex a Captain in Her Majesty’s Army who died 24 April 1880 at “Meuice’s” Hotel Rue de Rivoli Paris in France was proved at the Principal Registry by the Reverend Augustus George Legge of Elham in the County of Norfolk Clerk and Charles Egerton Legge of East Lavant Esquire the brothers the Reverend William Douglas Parish of Selmeston near Lewes in the County of Sussex Clerk and Augustus Frederick Coe of 14 Hart-street Bloomsbury-square in the County of Middlesex Solicitor the Executors. Personal Estate under £30,000. Resworn March 1881 under £25,000.

The latter sounds a bit ‘cloak-and-dagger’. British Army Captain dies in Paris hotel??

Both William Douglas Legg(e)s had military connections (as did Frank Wetherall Griffin) as shown in the London Gazette:

- February 20, 1872 Cornet William Douglas **Legg** to be Lieutenant. Dated 7<sup>th</sup> November 1871. Uxbridge Yeomanry Cavalry. Commissions signed by the Lord Lieutenant of the County of Middlesex
- April 17, 1866 5<sup>th</sup> Foot, Lieutenant William Douglas **Legge** to be Captain, by purchase, vice Charles John Miles, who retires. Dated 17<sup>th</sup> April 1866.

William Douglas **Legge** must surely be the man our Frances Elizabeth married in 1873 – he died the year before her re-marriage in 1881, she gave her name as **Legge**, and she was a widow.

*However*, when the marriage certificate came, it read:

- Marriage solemnized at the Register Office in the district of Strand on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 1873 between William Douglas **Legg**, full age, bachelor, gentleman, of Clements Inn Strand, son of William Legg (deceased) an Independent Minister, and **Frances Elizabeth Rhineberg**, full age, widow, no rank or profession, of St Marks Crescent Notting Hill, **daughter of Charles Edward Otter**, a Farmer. They sign W. D. Legg and F. E. Rhineberg. The witnesses are Charles J. Dorrell and J. E. Harper.

So, this is indeed ‘our’ Frances Elizabeth – she names the correct father. However, this William Douglas Legg is the one who only died in 1900!

In fact, we can follow William Douglas Legg through the censuses quite easily.

- In the 1841 census we find him in Castle Street, Reading aged 5, son of William Legg a protestant minister, as expected, and he has an elder brother Alexander aged 7.
- In the 1851 census he was not with the family on the night of the census, but his father William Legg B.A. Independent Minister, born in Scotland, and his elder brother Alexander were still there in Castle street, though his mother has died.
- In the 1861 census, William Legg the father is at the same address, has remarried, and has a 4-year old son named Henry A. Legg. William Douglas Legg is aged 25, a 3rd class clerk at the admiralty, living in Islington at the same address as his brother Alexander aged 26.
- He is missing from the 1871 census.
- In 1873 he married Frances Elizabeth Rhineberg née Otter.
- In the 1881 census he is married, aged 45, and has worked himself up to senior clerk at the admiralty, but is living alone at 19 Garrick Street, Westminster.

- In the 1891 census he is still married, aged 55 or 56, still a clerk in the admiralty, and living in Wimbledon with an elderly aunt, a visitor and a servant, but with no wife.
- In 1900 he died in Epsom aged 64 on the 9th of August, and mentions a Henry Arthur Legg (his half-brother) in his will (see above).

Which means that Frances Elizabeth, when she married Frank Wetherall Griffin in 1881, was not actually a widow! Or, if anything, the widow of Mr. Rhineberg, perhaps, but not Mr. Legg or Legge...

She seems to have done what many did before divorce became affordable in Britain in the 20<sup>th</sup> century - if the marriage was not working, disappear, and start a new life somewhere else (or at least another part of London), and with someone else. In 1881 Frank and Frances were already living at the same address, so presumably living together, and possibly for some time.

Perhaps she noticed the death of William Douglas Legge, and realized that the similarity of the names could help her camouflage the fact that her previous husband was still alive. Perhaps she even added the 'e' to her name on her marriage certificate with that in mind...

So, what happened to Mr. Rhineberg?

That is still a mystery. I have not found a marriage, or death, and the spelling of the name is questionable. FreeBMD shows only one single entry for Rhineberg for births, marriages or deaths - namely our Frances Elizabeth's marriage in 1873. There are many possible variations - Rheinberg, Rainberg, Reinberg, being just a few. Finding Mr. Rhineberg may prove to be difficult.

And what happened after 1881?

There we know that Frank and Frances were still together in 1891, although the census lists Frances Elizabeth just as 'Elizabeth', aged 37 (actually 43), but with the correct birthplace - Uppingham.

In 1896 Frank Wetherall Griffin remarried, as a widower. Incidentally, he married the daughter of a Luis Grey of the Austrian Army - so the army connection was preserved. That sounds like another story...

There is however, no death of a Frances Elizabeth Griffin registered. Did she die abroad? Was her death registered under Elizabeth Griffin, perhaps, of which there are too many to trace?

It could be as simple as that. First marriage to Mr. Rhineberg, who dies, second to Mr. Legg, that doesn't work, third to Frank Wetherall Griffin, that works until she dies, he remarries, end of story.

Or should one give one's imagination free rein? Had she run off, perhaps? Again? And married someone else? That also might be rather difficult to ascertain.

In fact, she may or may not have married a Mr. Rhineberg, who may or may not have died. And were there any other marriages before Mr. Rhineberg? By 1873 she was 27 years old, so if she started early, she would theoretically have had time to fit a marriage or two in before him. And

did she die between 1891 and 1896, or just run off? At that point she was only around 45, but presumably looked around 40. That's young enough to start life anew. Maybe even a few times...