

## George and Agnes Smith and Family

*Rob Forsyth*

George Smith served his country in the Boer and Afghan wars. Six of his seven sons, two sons-in-law, six grandsons - one of whom was killed in action - two great grandsons and a great great grandson followed him into uniform. He also had five daughters with spouses and descendants who served. Tracking down this widely dispersed family has been a major exercise which is still not complete so more may have served than are listed. I am extremely grateful to family members who helped me. Anyone who wishes to receive or supply further information about the family or have access to the family tree should contact Stephannie Davis at [lil.miss.freckles@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:lil.miss.freckles@hotmail.co.uk). She is Jesse's great granddaughter.

**George (Cokey) SMITH** (1868-1955) Sergeant.

He served with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry in the Boer War and in India/Afghanistan. The Khyber Pass featured strongly in his stories. He also served in the Home Guard in WWII aged 71 - a role reprised by Lance-Corporal Jack Jones in the BBC series 'Dad's Army'.

He was called 'Cokey' because he came from a fairground family in the Coventry area which ran a coconut-shy stall. The 1901 census includes George and his wife Agnes (née Finch b1870) with the first three of their children - Agnes, Elizabeth and George - living at 66 Broad Street, in Foleshill, Coventry. In 1908 they moved to Deddington; firstly to The Knowle and then to what had formerly been the Exhibition Public House on Horsefair - known by the family as the 'Exey' where the photo below was almost certainly taken [now Rothbury House]. Cokey dealt in antiques from his pony and cart. It was not unknown for him to drive it out for the day but come back asleep in the cart trusting the pony to get him home! They moved again to Lime Cottage on New Street in about 1922.



(l to r) Ernest (Ernie), George (father) with Irene (Rena), Agnes, Nellie (Nell) with doll, Agnes (mother) with Ruth, Herbert (Herbie), Jesse (Jess), Elizabeth (Bess), Stanley (Stan) and Frank. Kenneth (Ken) is not yet born and George Thomas has joined the navy

### The 12 children of George and Agnes are marked ♦

♦**Agnes HARRIS** née Smith (1896-D). Her husband, Henry (Harry) Harris, served in WWI and was badly shell-shocked. At one stage they lived in Deddington Mill and in later years Agnes lived at No 1 Chapel Square.

**Kenneth (Ken) Henry HARRIS DFM** (1917-40) Sergeant. RAF.

He was the son of Agnes and Harry Harris. Prior to WWII he served in the Merchant Navy as a Radio Officer. During the war he flew in Blenheim aircraft, 82 Squadron, as a wireless operator/gunner. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM) shortly before being killed in action. An account of the circumstances of his death is on page 9.

**Ronald (Ron) HARRIS** (1918?-D) RAF.

Son of Agnes and Harry Harris. He is believed to have served in the RAF in WWII but no record is held.

♦**Elizabeth (Bess) PRESTIDGE** née Smith (1898-D). Married Edgar Prestidge.

♦**George Thomas SMITH** (1900-61) Able Seaman.

He joined as a Boy Seaman under age in September 1917 by giving his birth year as 1899. His records show that he grew by two more inches in the next year! He served on *HM Ships Vendetta*, *Venomous* and *Vega* (V class destroyers); at one time he was in Russia with the Naval Brigade fighting Bolsheviks. In 1929 he left the active service but remained on call in the Royal Fleet Reserve doing annual training.

On the outbreak of WWII he returned to active service as possibly the oldest Able Seaman in the navy and served onboard *HMS Ausonia* throughout the war. *Ausonia*, was an ex-Cunard liner and had been requisitioned and converted into an armed merchant cruiser; it became a Depot Repair Ship in 1942. His nephew, David Smith, served on the same ship in the Mediterranean in the 1960s. George and his wife, Daisy (née Mansell, sister to Frank's wife Hannah Lillian), and family lived in Lime Cottage on New Street.

**George William SMITH** (b1928) Private.

Son of George Thomas. He served as a regular soldier in the Coldstream Guards and was in Malaya fighting the Communist insurgency at the same time that Robin Hall (book p.95), a National Serviceman, was killed.

**Ross WESTCOTT** (b1988) Lance Corporal.

Grandson of George William's sister, Dorothy Westcott. He served in the Grenadier Guards from 2006 to 2012, including time in the Falklands, Jamaica, Kenya and Afghanistan some 120 years after his great great grandfather had served there. At the time of writing he is Manager of the Duke of Cumberland Public House in Clifton.

♦**Herbert (Herbie) Lee SMITH** (1901-71) Private.

He served with the Royal Berkshire Regiment from 1923 to 1931 in India. He was married to Olga (née Frowen) and they lived at the Lamphouse on New Street.

**Herbert (Herbie) John SMITH** (b1938) Able Seaman (book p.97).

**David (Smudge) SMITH** (b1941) Able Seaman (book p.97).

Both were sons of Herbert Lee.

♦**Jesse (Jess) Finch SMITH** (1903-63) Stoker 1<sup>st</sup> Class.

Served in the Royal Navy 1920-30 on *HMS Revenge* and *HMS Warspite*.

**Thomas (Tom) Lee Smith** (1928-2012) Private.

Son of Jesse. He served in the Queen's Royal Regiment (The Buffs) 1947-52.

**Barry John Kinley SMITH** (b1955) Served in the Royal Marines.

**Jesse Nigel SMITH** (b1957) Served in the Royal Navy and Royal Marines.

Sons of Thomas Lee. Both of them served post WWII (p.21).

♦**Frank SMITH** (1905-77) He did not serve for medical reasons and worked in the metal factory in Adderbury. His wife was Hannah Lillian (known as Dill) Mansell.

♦**Stanley (Stan) William SMITH** (1907-D)

Served in the navy on Atlantic and Russian convoys in WWII. His niece, Dorothy, recalls that he returned home at one stage with badly burnt arms following involvement with the rescue of the oil tanker *MV San Demetrio* whose remarkable survival, following an attack by the German battleship *Admiral Scheer*, was made into a film in 1942 and is one of the very few contemporary testaments to the bravery of the merchant seamen on convoy ships. The Captain of the *San Demetrio* was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

♦**Nellie (Nell) KEOGH** née Smith (1908-2007). Her husband, John Keogh, was in a reserved occupation in the steel factory in Banbury.

♦**Ernest (Ernie) SMITH** (1910-87) Lance Corporal. He was a groom at Upton House prior to WWII. He joined an Anti-Aircraft Regiment and served in the Orkney Islands amongst other places.

♦**Irene (Rena) IVENS** née Smith (1913-88). Her husband, Herbert Ivens, was in the Home Guard.

♦**Ruth HUMPHRIES** née Smith (b1915). Married George Humphries. His father, Walter, served in the Oxfordshire Yeomanry in WWI.

♦**Kenneth (Ken) SMITH** (1916-2009) Trooper.

Served 1937-45. (book p.64).



Agnes and George



(l to r) Agnes, Ken, Bess, Rena, Ruth



**George Thomas**



**Herbert with Olga and Priscilla**  
See also Home Guard photo in book p.69



**Jess**



**Stan**





**Ken**



**Ken Harris - in his pre-war  
Merchant Navy uniform**



**Tom**



**Ross Westcott**