

THE MADDISONS AND THE TURNEYS

John Gillis

If, like me, you had been under the impression that Henry Williamson was born in the little house in Comfort Road, Brockley, then you will be surprised to learn that this is not so. Comerford House in Comerford Road was, at the time of The Dark Lantern (and indeed for many years before) the dwelling of one William Mould, Builder. HW was born nearby at 66 Braxfield Road. This pleasant little house is still there, and to judge by its clean and well decorated exterior is looked after with loving care by its present occupants. Henry's father was William Leopold Williamson, a bank clerk. His mother was Gertrude Eliza Williamson, nee Leaver.

William Leopold Williamson was born on 7 May 1865 at Wood Street, Ryde, Isle of Wight. His father was Henry William Williamson, an architect and surveyor; his mother was Adela Leopoldina Williamson, nee Luhn. He married Gertrude Eliza Leaver at Greenwich Registry Office on 10 May 1893 when he was 27 years old and she was 25, and they lived at 19 Cranfield Road, Brockley. Gertrude's mother was Henrietta Leaver, nee Turney, which disposes of the theory that the name Turney, used in The Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight, was fabricated from a twist on the family name of Leaver. In fact, HW went back two generations. Gertrude's father was Thomas William Leaver of 'Westpelaer', Cavendish Road, Sutton, Surrey. A Worcestershire man, Thomas was born on 25 November 1839 in Tardebigg, Bromsgrove and became a manufacturing stationer. His father was John Shapcote Leaver, a commercial clerk; his mother

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was Eliza Leaver, nee Bartlett. His son (Uncle Hugh in The Chronicle) was Hugh Thomas Victor Leaver, born on 25 April 1866 at 3 Arthur Terrace, Victoria Grove, Stoke Newington Road, Hornsey, at which time Thomas was a commercial traveller. (I should imagine he represented the stationery firm.)

In Lewisham Cemetery, London (actually Ladywell Cemetery in Ladywell Road), grave No. 82 in plot G is the Leaver family grave. The worn stone reads:

In Loving Memory of HENRIETTA beloved wife of T.W. Leaver who died December 16, 1910, aged 73 years.

"The Lord promised His blessing and life for evermore."

Also MAUDE H. SIMPSON. wife of S. Simpson, daughter of the above, who died April 24, 1920 aged 55 years.

Also HUGH T.V. LEAVER who died July 1917, 1920 aged 54 years.

Also of the above THOS. W. LEAVER who died Nov. 15, 1923 aged 83 years.

R.I.P.

Also S. ST PAUL SIMPSON who died Nov. 10, 1934 aged 71 years.

The Local History Department of Lewisham Public Library is a mine of information with a collection of old Borough Directories listing registered voters of the borough year by year. Browsing through the 1890 edition I came across one Henry William Williamson residing at 47 Beacon Road. In 1892 he had moved to 1 Molesworth Street. The name may be coincidental, yet could Henry's grandfather have moved into the district also? From the Borough Directories I found that in 1911 a Sidney Simpson was resident at 73a Adelaide Road (Charlotte Road in The Chronicle), although his name has gone from the list in the following year.

The grafting of fiction on to fact, at which HW was a master, is exemplified by the list of residents at Hill-

side Road, actually Eastern Road. The Maddisons/Williamsons lived at No. 11, and the Turneys/Leavers next door at No. 12. At No. 89 there were the Farthings (the Grouts in The Chronicle, and at No. 10 was Josiah Large and his good lady, whom HW called Mr and Mrs Bigge. Old Mr Pye at No. 13 was actually Frank Prout, and at 'The Turret House' where the wonderful Rolls family lived there was the family of one Hugh Stanley Nicolson. Whether the sans pareil Helena really existed I have not yet been able to discover, but I feel sure she did.

The houses in Eastern Road were renumbered, probably between the wars, and ten were added to the old numbers. Thus the Williamson home, originally No. 11, became No. 21, having also, until August 1914, borne the name 'Hildersheim'.

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