

## Our ROBERTS Family History

We first find our Roberts ancestors in Herefordshire at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century when parish records began. The name is derived from either “servant of Robert”, more common in England, or “son of Robert”, more common in Wales. Although the name Robert was found in England before the Norman Conquest in 1066 it was mainly introduced into England by the Normans. In Wales the name is most widely found in the northern parts. So, the family is probably more likely to have descended from the servants of a Norman Robert’s family but whether they themselves were Norman, Anglo Saxon or Gaelic we cannot tell.

Our earliest known ancestor is a John Roberts born around 1505, probably in Bridstow a village two miles west of Ross-on-Wye (then known as just Ross), who in 1539 married Elizabeth Thomas from nearby Peterstow. They had three sons that we know of and the youngest of these was Reignold Roberts born in 1550 in Bridstow who had five children around the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The third of these, and eldest son, was John Roberts born 1599 in Bridstow. Like his grandfather John, he too had three sons and the youngest of these was also a John Roberts born in 1621 at Tarrington, about 10 miles north of Bridstow. This John was known to have been a Gentleman farmer at Weston under Penyard, two miles east of Ross-on-Wye. Since he was the youngest son of a lesser branch of the family but appeared to be a member of the landed gentry, it suggests that the family were quite well established. His third child and heir was James Roberts born 1646 who married an Alice and had ten children.

Thomas Roberts born 1680 in Weston under Penyard, was the sixth child and fifth son of James Roberts and so would not have been expected to inherit much from his father. Thomas had six children, and the second of these James Roberts born 1706 in Ross-on-Wye as a second son may well have felt it would be better to look elsewhere for his fortune rather than wait for a paltry inheritance. Indeed by 1727 we find him 175 miles away in Clitheroe, Lancashire marrying Ann Scott from Rochdale and the following year the first of his children was born in nearby Holden. He was already recorded as a Yeoman by that time, but whether he had acquired the land and property necessary for this status by marriage or by work is unknown. The third of his children and his heir, was Henry Roberts born 1732 in Holden who was also a Yeoman but spent most of

his life in nearby Gisburn where all nine of his children were born. The third of these and eldest son was James Roberts born 1764 in Gisburn.

James married Alice Coates in Hubberholme in 1789, had children in Sedbergh and Halifax between 1790 and 1803 and died in Wakefield in 1834. All of these places (including Gisburn) were originally in the West Riding of Yorkshire and are associated with farming and/or the Woollen Industry. He was therefore most likely a Yeoman Farmer and/or a Yeoman Clothier, and probably started as a farmer and progressed to a clothier as he ended up in two of the three major centres of the Woollen Industry (Halifax and Wakefield). The woollen trade had declined during the Civil War but had recovered by 1750 and reached a peak between 1770 and 1840, before mechanisation was introduced. His oldest child and only son John Roberts born 1790 in Sedbergh became a General Practitioner and Surgeon. As a child I remember being fascinated by stories of Dr Roberts riding across the moors at dead of night, black medical bag strapped to his saddle, as he went off to attend a patient. John's three sisters were unmarried and in 1861 were all living together in Wakefield on the income from a number of houses they owned there, so the family were obviously quite wealthy. John Roberts himself had nine children between 1817 and 1835, and at least two of these were doctors.

The eldest was Dr James Roberts born 1817 at Linthwaite, who attended University College London where he received the Conjoint Medical Qualification (MRCS and License of the Society of Apothecaries [LSA]). He lived at Golcar and had two sons, Arthur born 1851 and Alonzo born 1855, who both went to Medical School in London (Arthur first being a Theology student at Clare College, Cambridge) but then dropped out to live grandly off their own means with servants. The next son of Dr John Roberts was Dr William Roberts born 1821 at Linthwaite, who was a Surgeon but didn't acquire his MRCS until 1860. He had one son, John Henry Graham Roberts born 1849 at Linthwaite, who was a Gentleman and Watercolour Artist. John Roberts' third son was John Roberts born 1825 at Linthwaite and whose marriage certificate in 1856 stated he was a Surgeon. The census records for 1851, 1861, 1871 and 1881 all document this John Roberts as a Druggist (Pharmacist). His great-granddaughter (my mother) claimed he was a Doctor but I couldn't substantiate this.

After researching the history of medical qualifications I believe that this can all be explained by The Apothecaries Act 1815 and The Medical Act 1858 passed

by Parliament to regulate the qualifications of Practitioners of Medicine and Surgery. The first Act made the LSA compulsory for all Physicians and those who wished to dispense medicines. The second Act made registration compulsory, though single qualifications would suffice (eg. the MRCS, the LSA or the Licence in Midwifery). So the first John Roberts would have had at least the LSA in order to practice as a Doctor after 1815 but may not have had any formal surgical qualifications. Of his sons, James Roberts had both the MRCS and LSA and so was very well qualified to practice as a Doctor. William Roberts must have had the LSA at least (but not necessarily any surgical qualifications) in order to practice as a Surgeon in 1851, but after the Act of 1858 may have felt a little exposed and so he obtained the MRCS in 1860. The third son John Roberts must have had the LSA in order to be a Druggist in 1851 and this would have entitled him to become a Surgeon by 1856. However, after 1858 he probably decided, with a wife and young son to support, against obtaining further surgical qualifications, and although he could have continued as a Surgeon he chose to remain as a Druggist. He was still technically a Doctor but he would have had to be placed on the Register in order to practice as one and I can find no evidence of this. A fourth son, Charles Roberts born 1830 in Linthwaite was also a career Druggist and so he too must have had the LSA.

Returning to John Roberts born 1825, he had four children by his wife Priscilla Graham, the eldest of whom was his only son George William Roberts born 1856 at Linthwaite just three months after their marriage. Like his father George was initially a Druggist, but by 1891 he was a Coal Agent and in 1911 he was an Assistant Overseer and Rate Collector. George married Jane Sykes in 1886 and they had three sons, but the first two died at 7 and 8 months of age respectively and so Hubert Roberts born 1891 at Slaithwaite was the sole surviving child. Hubert was a Clerk in a Woollen Mill before the war and then served in the Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment from 1915-18 where he was promoted to Sergeant. He was gassed while fighting in the trenches and never fully regained his health. In 1919 he married Marion Brooksbank at Huddersfield and they had one child Audrey Jacqueline Roberts born 1922 at Slaithwaite. The Registrar named on her birth certificate was her grandfather George William Roberts. At this time Hubert was a Commercial Clerk in Slaithwaite, but they later moved to Cheadle in Cheshire where he ran a dairy until his early death aged 47 years.

Audrey met Richard 'Dick' Fiddian whilst at Girton College, Cambridge during the Second World War but having met the family in Ashton she ended up marrying his elder brother James Fiddian in 1943. After the war they had five children (one of whom is your author) who later gave them 14 grandchildren and the large family Audrey had always wanted.

Paul Fiddian – October, 2014