

My Paternal grandparents

My grandfather

William Henry Renouf 1882 - 1945

William Henry Renouf, known to his friends and work mates as Dick, was born on 5th May 1882, the fourth child of Mansell Adolphus Renouf and Sarah Gibson who then lived in a one floor apartment at 11 New Street, St. Peter Port. William Henry, like his siblings was born at home and spent his early years there. This was a rented property owned by his grandmother and Aunt Alice who also had apartments in the same building.

Brothers, Mansell Frederick [b. 1874] and Albert [b. 1878], as well as a sister, Alice [b. 1879] preceded William Henry. Two more children followed after him; his brother Harold [b. 1884] and sister Emily [b.1887]. Harold died aged three when William Henry was five years old.

William Henry's father, Mansell Adolphus, who on his marriage certificate described himself as a tobacconist, was working as a whitesmith [tin smith] at the time of the 1881 Census and later became a blacksmith [iron worker]. In this last capacity he was employed at Martin's foundry in Rue des Freres which made fire grates.

While the family would have been of modest means William Henry attended the Town School from age six to twelve. He would have learned to read and write in large classes of children from a similar tradesman background. He was also fortunate to be one of a few Guernsey children taught to swim by an Englishman, Edgar Parry, and became a strong and keen swimmer. He enjoyed the opportunity to play soccer and billiards.

At some point the family moved to their own house, Eastbourne in the Fosse Andre. Sadder times soon followed for William Henry. When he was twelve, his oldest brother Mansell Frederick died aged twenty and his mother, Sarah, developed tuberculosis and died in 1896 when William was fourteen.

At age thirteen [1895] William Henry began an apprenticeship as a painter and paperhanger with his cousin Alex Chappel [son of his Aunt Julia Chappel] in Smith St. Work life was demanding with long hours [7a.m. to 6p.m.] six days a week. Since the workers and apprentices had to walk to their various jobs, carrying their equipment in a hand cart, they often left home at 5 in the morning, not returning until 8 at night.

William Henry served out his apprenticeship over five years and stayed on as an employee of Alex Chappel, and his partner Wyatt, until the firm went bankrupt.

Family life was to be further disrupted for William Henry. His mother's unmarried sister, Emily Gibson [b. approx.1864] had come to live with the family at the Fosse Andre, probably during the time when his mother was ill. Two years after his mother's death a child was born to Emily Gibson. This was Alfred Cecil born in 1898. At that time William Henry was sixteen years old. Mansell Adolphus the putative father was fifty and Emily Gibson thirty four.

It is said that the young William Henry was not happy about the circumstances around the birth of his half brother, nor his father's public denunciation of Emily in the local chapel. However the baby was brought up in the family home and William was very fond of the child and was concerned about his welfare when Alfred Cecil went away to England and enjoyed motorbikes and fast cars.

Mansell Adolphus was to die in 1901 with cancer. So at barely twenty William Henry had lost both parents with debilitating illnesses as well as two siblings. He remained living at Eastbourne with Emily [his aunt], Albert [his brother] Alfred Cecil [his half brother] and his sisters, Alice and Emily and, in the early years of the new century, William Henry set up his own painting and decorating business.

In 1912, at a ballroom dancing class, William met Mary Ferbrache [1877-1964], a widow, and five years his senior. During the three years of their courtship William Henry gave Mary Ferbrache the nick name "Peter", and he always called her this, probably to conceal their relationship from his staff and family. They married on 15th September 1915 at St. Johns Church. He was by then thirty three and she was thirty eight.

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After their marriage they continued to live at Eastbourne until they moved into their new family home "Claremont", in Rosaire Avenue. This semi detached house cost them a hundred pounds.

In November 1917 their son Roy was born at home after Mary [now 40] had been in labor for three days. It seemed as though there was doubt that either or both would survive the trauma of this birth but, after a second doctor was finally called to help, both survived though both were scarred by the experience. Mary suffered a prolapse and Roy was gouged by the instruments used.

Family life was soon disrupted with William Henry being sent to fight in France in the last year of the First World War. He became a sapper [No.324581] in the 245th Army Troops Company of the Royal Engineers. He fought in some of the most bloody battles, where many Guernsey families lost sons, brothers and husbands.

After returning from the first World War in 1919 William Henry returned to his painting and decorating business. He was skillful and established a successful business, undertaking engraving and sign writing as well as painting and decorating. He employed up to fourteen men and moved the business from the yard behind his house to larger premises down the road.

In the years after the War the family became moderately well off. The family owned a car from about 1933 and they took holidays abroad every two years; going mainly to England to see members of William's family. They also went to the Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924 and to Paris in 1926. Their son, Roy, was sent to a fee paying school, Kingsley, House before going to the Boys Intermediate from which he won a scholarship to attend Elizabeth College [a Public School set up in the 1600's].

As was typical of the times Mary discontinued paid work after her marriage and did not have any direct control over family finances. Mary undertook some charitable work with the blind but most of her time was taken up with maintaining the home and raising her son. She tutored him in French and taught him to read before he began school.

During the depression William's decorating business contracted, but because of his reputation for craftsmanship and cheap prices [he made a half penny per hour gross profit, off each of his workers] the family survived the depression without too much distress. William was also able to supplement his income by sign writing [putting house names on the glass fanlights over front doors] or engraving the brass plates on coffins.

There was very little contact with Mary's birth family during these years. Instead holiday celebrations and picnics were in the company of various members of the Renouf family in Guernsey or England.

William Henry's youngest sister Emily became a servant, married Frederick Mix, and moved to Sydney Australia in 1915. Such was the distance that most of the family were never to see her again. William Henry's older sister Alice worked as a cashier at a grocery shop in Guernsey until she married in the 1930's and moved to England.

William Henry's brother Albert was a sailor on the Union Castle Line, but contracted tuberculosis and retired to "Eastbourne", the family home, and died in Guernsey in 1919. His half brother, Alfred Cecil at fifteen went to Scotland to live with his uncle Frederick Mansell [b.1850] and his wife. Alfred Cecil went into banking, married and settled in England with his two sons.

In September 1939 Roy, who had been in employment in Lloyd's Bank, enlisted in the British Army, and was called up in January 1940. Six months later Mary and William, faced with the imminent Occupation of Guernsey by the German Army, decided to "Go over to England to see the boy" and bought return tickets on one of the last mail boats to leave the Island on Tuesday 25th June.

William and Mary abandoned their home and business walking out of their house with a single suitcase and the limited cash they were able to take. Their house was soon ransacked by neighbors and later requisitioned by the Germans who housed an officer there during the Occupation.

On their arrival in England they set off immediately for Cirencester in a failed attempt to see their son. On route they met the Niles family, also trying to meet up with Roy. After this reunion the group of refugees spent a night in a local pub before they all returned to Reading where they were able to rent a large house in Kendrick Road which gave each family some private and some shared rooms.

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After a year in Reading William and Mary went to live with William's sister Alice and her husband in Pilton, Somerset. They stayed there for some months but didn't get on with Alice's husband, and although William had some work doing sign writing and engraving there was little for him to do. They returned to Reading and William got a job in a factory doing sweeping and other unskilled work.

By this time William, now aged 59, was showing signs of memory loss and the intellectual deterioration which has since been attributed to the lead in paints that he had worked with for forty years. He retired and Mary and William lived quietly in Reading, journeying away only to see their new grand daughter in March 1944 and to the big family Christmas in Chelmsford celebrating the end of the War in Europe.

At Easter 1945 William was committed to a mental hospital by his wife Mary who felt unable to nurse him at home any longer. She was by then sixty eight years old. William died soon after this on 9th July of pneumonia.

William, who had a sad and difficult childhood with a harsh father, is remembered as a kind and gentle man who supported his son with his schooling and sporting endeavors and who enjoyed family life. I regret that I did not know him.

My great grandfather

Mansell Adolphus Renouf 1848 - 1901

Mansell Adolphus Renouf, born on 31st May 1848, was the second child and oldest son of the eleven children born to Mansell Renouf and Julia Bichard. He had five brothers and five sisters, all born between 1845 and 1861. Mansell Adolphus lived much of his life at 11 New Street St. Peter Port Guernsey.

We know very little about Mansell Adolphus's childhood but it is likely that he had very limited formal education, which was not compulsory at that time. His occupations have been variously recorded as being a tobacconist, whitesmith and blacksmith. He would have commenced work at approximately twelve years of age.

No doubt as an eleven year old in 1859 he witnessed the second visit of Queen Victoria to the island. He would also have witnessed the rapid development of the town with new industries developing in the island; and quarrying and ship building contributing in major ways to the islands economy. During his adolescence he would have witnessed the considerable out migration from Guernsey to the lands of new opportunity; Canada and Australia; amongst them two of his cousins.

After his father was drowned in 1868, when Mansell Adolphus was twenty years old, he took on the responsibilities of head of the household with his mother. At the time his younger siblings would have ranged in age from seven to nineteen years. His older sister Julia Mansell Renouf was by then married and had gone to live in Kent, England with her sailor husband James Chapple.

At the age of twenty five, Mansell Adolphus married the twenty year old Sarah Gibson [b. 10 1 1853] on 28th September 1873 at St. John's Church. His bride was the daughter of John Gibson and Ann Watts. John was a shoemaker who lived in Wimbledon. Ann, his wife, was unable to sign her children's birth registrations.

We know that Sarah had two sisters; Emily and Annie. The 1871 Census shows John living at 54 Great College Street St. Pancras with a second wife and three other daughters. However, it appears that John may have abandoned his first family as an Ann Gibson with two daughters, Emily and Annie are living in another part of London. Sarah, then aged 18, was an artificial flower maker living in Shoreditch.

Mansell Adolphus and Sarah made their first family home at Rue Union where their oldest son was born. They then moved to Herzil Street where the next two children were born and subsequently returned to an apartment at 11 New Street where Mansell Adolphus's widowed mother and some of his siblings still lived.

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Three more children, born between 1881 and 1887, were born in this house. One, Harold [b 1883] was to die at three years of age. In 1894 their oldest son, Mansell Frederick, was also to die at age twenty.

At the time of the 1881 Guernsey Census the following people were present in the New Street house, in three separate apartments. Julia Renouf [Mansell Adolphus's mother] aged fifty six was head of one household and living with her were her sons William Henry Renouf [31] an unmarried white smith; Albert James Renouf [23] an unmarried valet; and Annette Chappel [4] her motherless grand daughter.

Mansell Adolphus [32] then a whitesmith was head of another household with his wife Sarah [28] and their first three children Mansell Frederick [6] a schoolboy, Albert [4] and Alice Beatrice [1]. The third household comprised Edward Bricknell [24] head householder and painter born in England and his wife Alice Mary Bricknell [24] sister of Mansell Adolphus.

At some stage Mansell and Sarah moved into a new single story cottage, Eastbourne, in the Fosse Andre. Here Mansell Adolphus was widowed at forty eight when Sarah died in 1896 of tuberculosis.

Two years later a child was born to Sarah's sister Emily [then aged 34], who also lived at Fosse Andre. She presumably came to help care for the younger children after Sarah became ill. Her child Alfred Cecil was supposed to have been fathered by Mansell Adolphus when he was fifty. While his name is not recorded on the birth certificate it is cited on the baptismal record at the Methodist Church in 1900. Apparently Mansell was consumed by guilt about this affair and confessed to the congregation, but denounced Emily as a temptress.

Mansell Adolphus died at the Fosse Andre of stomach cancer on 14 June 1901 at the age of fifty three. Mansell Adolphus was outlived by his mother, Julia and his five children. His second son, Albert who served on the union Castle Shipping Line, never married and his two daughters, Alice and Emily married, migrated to England and Australia respectively, but were childless. Of the seven children of Mansell Adolphus only William Henry and Alfred Cecil were to have children; with three sons between them.

My great great grandfather

Mansell Renouf 1818 – 1868

Mansell Renouf, born on 24th November 1818, was the fifth and youngest child of Rachel Mansell and Nicolas Renouf. He had two older brothers, Nicolas and Jean George, as well as sisters Rachel and Sophie born between 1809 and 1818. Mansell, was baptized at the Town Church [like his siblings before him] on 6th December 1818. His godparents were Thomas Le Poidevin [his uncle by marriage] his aunt Marie Renouf and his paternal grandfather.

We know nothing about Mansell's young life but it is probable that he grew up in the town and found work there, as a "waterman" or mariner. We do know that during the first decades of the nineteenth century Guernsey was transformed from being a primarily rural community of sixteen thousand people, to a more town- based society with a large immigrant population. During the 1820's visitors from England began to arrive on the new steam ship service, attracted by the milder climate.

After a cholera epidemic in 1832, which killed 100 people amongst the 2800 families in the town, major improvements were made to buildings and drainage as well as street widening. Residences were removed and new commercial buildings, including the Markets, were built and the harbour was developed.

At the age of twenty five Mansell married the nineteen year old Julia Bichard [b. April 1824], daughter of Jean Bichard and Marie Brouard, at St. Peter Port on 28th May 1844. Jean Bichard was a Cooper and had his home and business in Cornet Street St. Peter Port. Julia, had an older sister and brother, Sophie and William, as well as younger brother John.

The 1841 Census reveals that there was a Jean Renouf also a Cooper; living with his family at Coupee Lane St. Peter Port. We believe that he was a distant cousin of Mansell. However, it has proved impossible to

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find any trace of Mansell and his siblings or parents in Guernsey at either the 1827 citizen registrations in St. Peter Port nor in the 1841 Census, so we are unable to determine their occupations or where they lived.

The newly wed Mansell and Julia lived first at 44 Fountain St. [1851 census] and then at 11 New Street [also known as Marguerite St.] in a three storied terraced house near the town centre. Over the next seventeen years [1845 -1861] Mansell and Julia had eleven children; six boys and five girls. By 1861 we find that Julia's, presumably widowed, mother was living with them as a housekeeper.

We know that three children died in infancy. They were Amanda Sophie [b. 1858 d. 1860 at 20 months] Mary Rachel [b.1855 d. 1866 aged 9 months] and Thomas Edward [b.1852 d. 1852 of convulsions aged 6 months]. It seems certain that life in the town was more precarious than country life where infant and premature deaths were not so common.

All of Mansell's children would have been born at home with the help of family and midwife. The opportunities for schooling of these children would have been minimal; and the family would have struggled economically without benefit of home grown food.

We have information about some of Mansell and Julia's children. Their oldest child Julia Mansell Renouf, was born on 24th February 1845. She married James Chapell, a sailor from Cawsand in Cornwall, and was the mother of Alice, Annette, Beatrice, Alex, James and Frederick Chapell. The 1881 Census shows that Annette was staying with her grandmother, Julia, whilst the remaining children were living with their recently widowed father and his sister in Plumstead Kent. The 1891 Census shows four of these children living at New St. with Julia, their grandmother. We know that Alex stayed on in Guernsey and went into business as a decorator there.

Their next child was Mansell Adolphus, who has been already discussed. Following him were William Henry b. 3rd September 1849, who became a whitesmith and had one son [William Hunkin Renouf]; Frederick Mansell born 25th October 1850 who was a tea merchant and teetotaler, worked in Scotland, where he married a widow, and died in a cart accident in 1915. He was childless.

Then came Thomas Edward born 7th January 1852 who did not survive, and Orlando John b 16th November 1853. The latter was first of all a butler and later in life worked at the National Gallery in London. He married twice but had no children, and died in 1940 and was, reportedly, a "colourful character".

Mary Rachel, born 16th June 1855, broke the run of sons but died prematurely. She was followed by Alice Mary, b. 25th November 1856 who married Edward Bricknell, had a son who died in infancy and subsequently had one daughter [Alice], was soon widowed, and thereafter helped her mother on a fish stall at the Guernsey market. In later years she cared for her mother at New Street before moving to Jersey to live with her own daughter until she died in 1920.

Amanda Sophie was born on 9th May 1858 and died soon after. The last son was Albert James born on 17th October 1859. He was a valet who never married and he later helped his sister run the fish stall through to the 1920's. My father remembers that he ran the errands for Alice.

The last of Mansell and Julia's children was Annette Amanda born 18th June 1861. She is said to have married a young Jersey man named Perchard and had a son who was apprenticed to Alex Chapple [her nephew]. No record of her marriage has been found.

Mansell's occupation was listed as a boatman and pilot on his marriage certificate and he was involved with the development of St. Peter Port harbor facilities which commenced in 1853. We know he was still employed by the States of Guernsey [the local government] at the time of his death. He was also known to own a five meter gig.

Family legend tells us that Mansell was the keeper of the light house on the breakwater at Castle Cornet and a newspaper account at the time of his death confirms this. His job was to go daily to light and extinguish the gas light. This was all right in fine weather but in rough stormy weather he had to crawl along the breakwater, as there was no handrail, to full fill his duties. It was said that his wife Julia used to watch his progress from their home in New Street.

However, early photographic records indicate that the Castle lighthouse was not built until after 1865 when the breakwater was completed so Mansell could have only been responsible for this light for three years.

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There was another lighthouse at the end of the south quay of the Old Harbour from about 1832, before the causeway joining the Castle to the island was built. It is possible that Mansell was responsible for this one before 1865. Furthermore the prisoners used to be rowed from the end of this quay to their incarceration in the Castle. As Mansell was also a boatman he may have had this duty as well.

Mansell's work as a boatman involved him with the building of the New Harbour in Guernsey which began in the 1853. He was similarly involved with building the new harbor in Sark where he died aged 49.

Newspaper records tell us that Mansell sailed to Sark on 19th July 1868 taking four passengers with him. Family legend says he did not want to return that evening because of the wind squalls, but the Harbour Engineer insisted they return although the boat was known to be unsuitable for the conditions. The newspaper reports say that they left Sark along with some other vessels at 5pm.

At somewhere around 8pm there were strong NW winds and squalls of rain which appear to have dismasted the boat and tipped out the passengers. One drowned man's watch stopped at 8 20pm.

Mansell Renouf's body was not found until the 2nd of November, stripped of some clothing and his boots. He was identified by the ring he was wearing. It was thought that he had swum from the capsized boat back to Sark but died at the foot of the cliffs, too tired to climb to safety. The Pilcher Memorial, above the Gouliot Passage in Sark, outlines this tragedy.

Mansell was buried on 5th November at the Brothers Cemetery in Guernsey followed by a wake in the house at New Street. Apparently there was a large procession accompanying his coffin, many of the local shops closed and boats in the harbor lowered their flags to show their respect. The paper reports a subscription was taken up for his widow and seven children started by a donation of twenty pounds from the family of one of the other drowned men. The paper stated that the government should also pay a pension to the widow as he drowned in the line of duty and under duress to sail on that day. We do not know if this eventuated. However we can establish that Julia was able to buy the house at New Street in later years.

We do know that his widow Julia, at age forty three, with at least two children under twelve years of age, set up a fish stall in the Market where she worked for many years. Kelly's Trade Directory cited her as being a fruit seller, greengrocer and fishmonger in 1898 and a fishmonger in 1903.

Julia lived as a widow for forty years with her widowed daughter Alice Bricknell. Her sister Sophie Gould also lived nearby until 1899. Julia died at age eighty three of pneumonia and cardiac failure on 16th November 1908, still living in New Street, and outliving her oldest son.

We believe sixteen grandchildren succeeded Mansell and Julia, although not all survived to adulthood.

My great great great grandfather

Nicolas Renouf 1785 - 1821

Nicolas Renouf, born 26th August 1785, was the second son of Thomas Renouf and Marguerite Naftel, and like his siblings he was born at the second Renouf family farmhouse, Monnaie de Bas, built in about 1780 on an acre of land once owned by the Naftel family, and adjacent to the original Renouf farm house at Monnaie de Haute.

Nicolas had four younger brothers [James; Jean; Jean George; and Henri] and three younger sisters [Elizabeth; Marie; and Rachel]. Of these nine children only Jean was to die in infancy.

So we can safely assume that Nicolas and his siblings worked on the farm and apple orchards in their youth, as there was no schooling available at the time. We can also assume that the family was healthy and well fed judging by their survival and longevity. During his first eight years Nicolas's great grandmother

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Elizabeth Le Petit lived with the family. She had outlived her husband by some fifty seven years, dying at the great age of 92 years.

At some point Nicolas and his younger brothers left the family farm to be worked by his father and oldest brother. Nicolas's brothers, Henri and Jean George, became carpenters; one working in St. Andrews, and the latter in St. Martins. What became of James is not known and he, unlike his siblings, was not a godparent for his various neices and nephews so he may well have died early.

While there is a record of his father buying small properties in St Andrews for his younger sons, we believe Nicolas moved to St. Peter Port to find employment as his children were all baptized there. But we do not know what trade he followed. This move into the congested and unhealthy town signaled a significant change in life style from the past.

We know that Nicolas was married on 30 October 1808 at St. Saviours Church, when he was twenty three. Rachel Mansell, his wife, born in April 1784, came from nearby rural St. Saviour's parish and was the youngest of eight children born to Pierre Mansell, also a well off farmer. Pierre died in 1815 and his widow Marguerite Le Lacheur moved to St. Peter Port where she died in 1823. It is possible that she lived with her daughter Rachel and son in law Nicolas during these years.

Nicolas and Rachel had five children; three sons and two daughters all baptized at the Town Church. Their oldest son, Nicolas, was born in 1809, married at 22 years of age and died prematurely at age 28, either by accident or as a result of the unsanitary crowded conditions in the town. We have not found any children born of his marriage. Their second son, Jean George, was born in 1814 and we can find no marriage or death records for him. We have also been unable to find the marriages of Nicolas's daughters to see if this will throw any light on what happened to the family in the early decades of the 18th century.

Nicolas died young in November 1821 and was buried in the Town Church on 15th November. He left his widow with young children and she subsequently remarried the son of a Frenchman, Olivier Mahe on 18th December 1824. There is then a gap in the family history until Mansell Renouf, until the fifth child and youngest son of Nicolas, married Julia Bichard in St. Peter Port in 1844.

This part of the Renouf history, then, is the most elusive. In part because state recording systems were in their infancy, but also because this was a time of considerable social upheaval and dislocation for the Renouf family which had previously lived in rural St. Andrews parish in multiple - generation family farmhouses. Now they were scattered, living apart from kin in the tenement houses of the town, and reliant on their own skills in the new cash economy.

Furthermore, we have discovered that there was a reluctance by Non Conformist [Methodists] families to register their births and deaths.

The links with St. Andrews and the family land seem to have been broken with the untimely death of Nicolas. [**Note** ; Further Information about Nicolas's antecedents are contained in Chapter 5 of the Book The Renoufs of Guernsey 1500 -1900]