

The Mysterious Appearing Children Of The Crossing-keeper's Cottage in Upper Soudley.

A real life puzzle.

Having read and re-read my mother's book, *Heaven Lies About Us*, I got to know a new family. One I had never met, and never will meet.

Fred and Charlotte James, or Aunt Charlotte and Uncle Fred as mum called them, rematerialised in my imagination. So did Uncle Sam, Cousin Edwin, and Cousin Violet. The little railway cottage in which they all lived is still there, sitting in a beautiful Forest of Dean valley, Upper Soudley. Anyone with an eye for landscape can see it's a golden place. Sheltered from strong winds, a small settlement of stone houses by a meandering stream, a Church, a School, a Pub, and, back in the day, a single-track railway line. What more could anyone ask of an English village?



The James's Cottage, as mum would have known it, c1920. It looks like Violet and Charlotte in the garden, with Fred seated near the back gate. The electric wires etc were Railway ones, fitted to work the bells and signals mum describes in her book.



I've always liked puzzles, and this was a ready-made one. Fred and Charlotte never had children; I presume there was a biological reason for that. But they adopted several, and two of them were living in the cottage when mum went to stay there with her own mother and two elder sisters after her father was blinded in 1917. My research therefore began with the James's themselves, and how they came to be bringing up Edwin and Violet. Start with what you know, then work backwards in time, is a good motto for anyone engaging in genealogy.



As it turned out, the beginning of my information digging went very easily. Uncle Sam's surname was Virgo, common in the Lydney area, and he was Charlotte's elder brother. I found Fred James's

marriage to Charlotte Virgo in 1888 straight away. It turned out that the James family had lived for a long time in or near Cinderford, but Charlotte and Sam's parents had moved backwards and forwards between the Forest of Dean and Stoke-on-Trent. The link between these places, I am fairly sure, was coal-mining, and the hunt for better pay.



As I have mentioned Virgo is a common enough surname where I live, and Colclough is a well-known one in the Potteries. Two Colclough sisters link my mother's family, the Worgans, and Aunt Charlotte's Virgo family. For lovers of detail and/or charts I've included an Excel sheet I made which represents the various family links I have found so far. (See page 4. Sorry I had to make it small to fit it in.)



In addition to learning from my mum's writing, there were many pieces of relevant information which other people had preserved, and were kind enough to share with me. Firstly I should mention Sheila Mansfield, whose family history research was a solid tranche of info already there for me to use. My grandfather George Worgan, and Sheila's grandmother, Ruth Worgan, were brother and sister. Not only had Sheila been beavering away finding out who was related to whom, and documenting a whole raft of our ancestors, she also preserved a number of family photos.

My favourite of these 'Pictures from the Past' is the group photo below. The people are seated outside the Crossing-keeper's Cottage, which had a railway track beside it, and the Bradley Hill Tunnel behind it. The cottage was built around 1894, and the James's were the first people to live in it. Back then the cottage came as part of the crossing-keeper's job - I think Charlotte was the official gate-keeper. Fred worked on the railways as a plate-layer; what we would now call a ganger.





My favourite group photo, taken around 1907, with the railway cottage in the background



When I first saw the above photo with Sheila's notes, she had already identified Fred and Charlotte James seated on the left, Uncle Sam at the back, and on the right her grandmother Ruth, and Ruth's

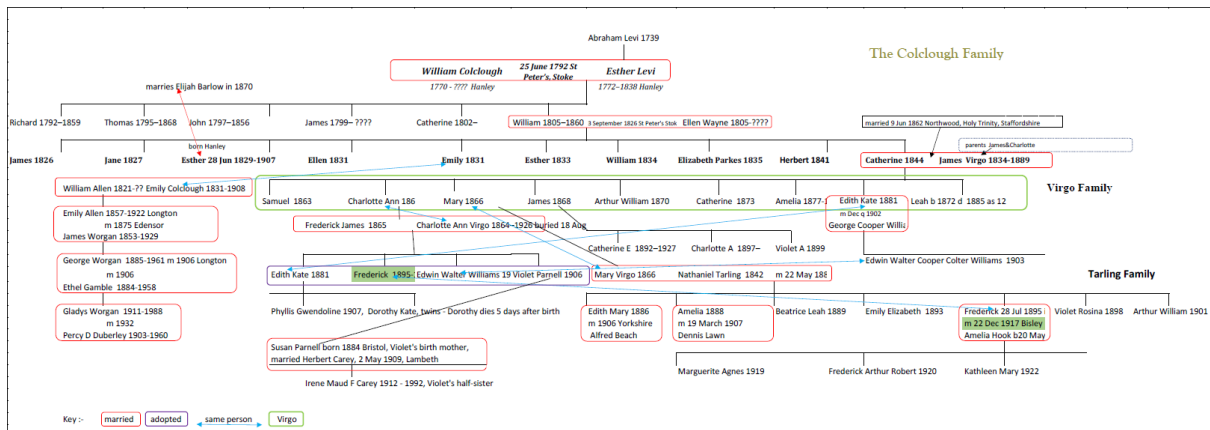
father, our great-grandfather, James Worgan. I wondered if the little girl in Charlotte's lap was Violet Parnell, but I soon realised she couldn't be. Violet was born in 1906, and the older lady seated in the center is Aunt Emily Allen (née Colclough), who died in 1908. (I'm including several censuses in this essay, which give snapshots of who was where back in the day)



Censuses of the James family led me to Edith Kate Virgo. I believe she was the first child Fred and Charlotte adopted. Edith Kate was Charlotte's younger sister, born in 1881. At first I thought the reason for the adoption was simply that Edith Kate's parents were poor, and that Fred and Charlotte were doing well for working people. Then I found out that James Virgo, Charlotte's father died in 1889, and Leah Virgo, one of Edith Kate's elder sisters, had died in 1885. Catherine, the mother, was left with two young daughters at home, Amelia born 1877 and Edith Kate. Probably with very little money they were living in poverty. The looming threat of the workhouse was an ever-present fear for many poor families who fell on hard times. No surprise that the open-hearted Charlotte took her little sister, Edith Kate, to raise as her own. (There were no official adoptions, as we know them now, back in Victorian times, so no official papers to find.)

1	2°	2°	1	4	Frederick James Head	all	20	Plate Layers	X	Wendland, Clo
					Emilie D° wife	all	20	Scholar		Abraham, Clo
					Kate Virgo	ad, all	20			D°

1891 census extract - Fred and Charlotte James, married in 1888 - living in Stockwell Green, Cinderford with Edith Kate



Family Trees - please magnify for easier reading



You may be thinking by now, *This is all very well, marginally interesting, but where is the mystery?* Try this then. Below is a photo of Fred and Charlotte, which I am sure was taken around 1896, a year or two after the Crossing-Keeper's Cottage was built. I have two reasons for my estimate of the photo's date. One is that the couple do not look that old – they would have been 30/31 in 1895. And the other is the lack of a porch on the front of the cottage. The front-porch appears on all the photos of this cottage I've seen, except this one. The obvious explanation is that this photo was taken before the first porch was built.

And the mystery? Who is the girl with the bow in her hair? (Edith Kate would have been around 15 when this photo was taken, so I'm sure the girl isn't her.)



Chronologically, the next adoptee known to me is Fred Tarling, b 1895. Fred was Charlotte's nephew. He was the son of Charlotte's sister Mary, and her husband Nathaniel.

When mum was staying with the James family in 1917, Fred Tarling was married, living with his wife Amelia in Newnham. Mum writes about visiting the Tarlings with her mother and Aunt Charlotte, after their unsuccessful attempt to see the Severn Bore.

I was told by Fred's granddaughter, Suzanne, that Fred's parents decided to move up north in the perennial search for better paid work. (They went to Rosedale, Yorkshire where Fred's father worked as a miner – probably coal.) Fred however was at an age when he was another mouth to feed, but not someone who could earn money for many years to come. He was brought to see Charlotte and her husband by his parents, who said, "She's your mother now," and then they left him to start a new life with his adopted family. That happened when Fred was around 4.

This piece of family history brings me to someone else who helped me with memories of her family. Suzanne Turley is Fred Tarling's grand-daughter. She was kind enough to invite me over to her house near Coleford where she showed me a family heirloom. Most of the tea-set that mum writes about when the vicar came to tea in 1917. The only major piece to be lost in the over one hundred years since, was the teapot.

Fred and Amelia Tarling went on to live in a second railway cottage in Soudley. This one was in Lower Soudley, where Amelia was responsible for the crossing-gates pictured on the next page. These gates guarded the road crossing of the short section of track between the Bradley Hill, and Haie Hill tunnels. Fred Tarling continued to work for the railway company.

Suzanne can remember visiting her grand-parents there, and a dangerous foray into one of the tunnels with other kids. When they returned with soot all over the backs of their clothes after squeezing against the wall when a train went by, it was obvious what mischief they had been up to. When the line closed in the late 60s, the Tarlings bought the cottage they had been living in from the railway, and retired there.

I think the boy standing at the back of the group photo on page 3, is Fred Tarling. Fred was born in 1895, so would have been about 12 when the photo was taken. A scan below of the 1901 census for the James family, then living at the Crossing Keeper's Cottage.

Household No.	Age	Sex	Name	Relation	Age	Profession or Occupation	Where Born
40	70	M	Sarah Welch	Head	70		Elton
	114	F	Ellen Mary	Grand daughter	114		London
41	57	M	William Wark	Head	57	Colliery of iron & coal	Gloucester
	50	F	Mary	Wife	50		
	81	F	Ellen Wark	Miner's wife	81		
	19	S	Robert Wark	Son	19	Coal	Soudley East Dean
	11	S	Lizzie E.	Daughter	11		
	6	S	Henry J. Wark	Son	6		
42	36	M	Fredrick James	Head	36	Platform Railway	Gloucester
	37	F	Charlotte	Wife	37		Staffs
	38	S	Samuel Virgo	Visitor	38	General Labour in Coal mines	Staffs
	70	F	Emily Allen	Visitor	70		Staffs

Household No.	Age	Sex	Name	Relation	Age	Profession or Occupation	Where Born
42	7	F	Beatrice Virgo	Visitor	7		Gloucester
	5	S	Fredrick Tarling	Nephew	5		Staffs
43	67	M	Samuel	Head	67	Millwright	Staffs

As well as Charlotte, Fred and Sam, we have Aunt Emily Allen aged 70, Fred Tarling 5, and a visitor, Beatrice Louisa Virgo b 1894. She was the daughter of Edith and Moses Virgo, married 1891. Edith's maiden name was Wooles. (One day I may get round to figuring out what relation Beatrice was to Charlotte. NB, a late update. I think I found the link. Beatrice's great-great-uncle was James Virgo b 1834. James was Sam and Charlotte's father. See screenshot of partial family-tree in Postscript.)

Perhaps some readers are now thinking, *Well this is getting better, we have one mysteriously appearing girl*. If you are one of them, please have another look at the first photo with the group of adults in it (page 3). Then tell me who the little children are, one in Charlotte's lap, and two on the ground in front of her. They aren't my Great-Aunt Ruth's children; she did not get married until 1913. Of course they could be neighbour's children come round to play. If so, who did they come to play with? Fred Tarling was surely too old to be their playmate.



Children in Lower Soudley watching a Railmotor pulling three carriages, having just emerged from the Haie Hill Tunnel.



Moving on from Fred Tarling and his wife, which is the classic, **And they all lived happily ever after** story, we come to Cousin Edwin. Sad to say, this is in part a tragic tale, and one which must have upset Charlotte and Fred very much. Of course I came at it not knowing who Edwin was. My first document to check was the 1911 census for the James's Cottage, please see below.

having been enumerated elsewhere. No one else must be included. (For order of entering names see Examples on back of Schedule.)		Relationship, or "Servant."	Ages of Males.	Ages of Females.	aged 15 years and upwards.	lasted. If less than one year write "under one."	Total Children Born Alive.	Children still Living.	Children who have Died.
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	
1	Frederick James	Head	46		Married	23			
2	Charlotte Ann James	Wife		46	"	"			
3	Sam Virgo	Brother	48		Single				
4	Frederick James Darling	Adopted	46		"				
5	Edwin Williams	"	9		"				
6	Violet Farnell James	"		4	"				
7									

As expected, we have two additions to the James' Family listed, Cousin Edwin and Cousin Violet. The Williams surname could have presented an insurmountable research problem, but luckily I have access to the brilliant forest-of-dean.net forum. On it is a load of useful info for the genealogist. In particular Parish Records of births, marriages and deaths for the area. Many thanks to the people who made the gigantic effort to transcribe it all.

Using this resource, and with some help, I found that Edwin, born 1903, was the son of Edith Kate Williams (née Virgo) and George Cooper Williams. They were married in 1902, in Drybrook. When Edith Kate married George Williams she was 21, and he was 35ish. George's first wife had died. He had had three children with her.

I was surprised and shocked when I found out what had happened. Charlotte, who never had children of her own, ended up raising two generations of the same family.

The meeting up of Edwin's parents was almost certainly down to the railway. George Williams had the same job as Fred James, he was a plate layer (aka ganger). An interesting write-up on local railway plate layers here <https://www.wyevalleygreenway.org/platelayers>

Drybrook is a village, a little larger than Soudley, but not of any great size. For some reason the railway company decide to extend the line, which came from Newnham, via Soudley, on from Cinderford to Drybrook. Indeed there was a grand scheme which involved building a tunnel, and connecting this branch line to the Ross-Gloucester line at Mitcheldean Road Station. Everything, including the tunnel, was built, but it was never used by passenger or freight trains. The furthest freight trains started from was Drybrook Quarry, and Drybrook halt was the end of the line for passengers. (The Hawthorn's Tunnel was used by the Navy to store munitions in WW2.) A good summary of this rail-line with maps, here https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest_of_Dean_Railway

Whether Fred James took George Willams home to Soudley for drinks a few times after George's wife had died, I don't know, but I consider it very likely. Neither do I know why Edith Kate decided to marry George. Perhaps she was sorry for him. Or maybe he was a charmer. It turned out badly, however. And I suspect Charlotte was immensely sad at the course of events. She had raised her sister, Edith Kate, for almost all her pre-adult life.

I don't think there is any doubt that George's principal problem was drink.

The following was found for me by a member of the FoD.net forum:-

Ross Gazette Thursday, 21 April, 1904

UNION CHARGABILITY

George Cooper Williams, platelayer of Elmwood, near Coleford, was summoned by M.F. CARTER, Esq., Clerk to the Guardians of Westbury on Severn Union, for neglecting to maintain his wife and child.

Defendant, who said he had a widowed mother and **three children of his first marriage** to maintain on 17s a week, was ordered to pay his wife 7s.6d a week and pay the 50s to the Guardians by 1st June, or go to goal [sic] for a month.

A second extract below, found for me by a friend. George about 5 weeks behind on maintenance.

Ross Gazette Thursday, September 29, 1904.

From a report of Littledean Petty Sessions

A wife's maintenance, — George Cooper Williams, of Elwood, near Coleford, railway packer, was summoned by Edith Kate Williams, his wife, for nonpayment of arrears on a maintenance order.

The sum of 37s. 6d. was due, and the order was 7s. 6d. a week—Defendant, who did not appear, was stated to be earning 24s. a week, and the Court made an order for the payment of the amount claimed within a week.



The Williams surname means it is very risky to make assumptions of identity from one record, but I believe the ones below are the 'right' people.

George was born c1865 and so the age, place of residence, and name all match.

WILLIAMS, George buried 24 June 1907, Residence: Nailbridge, Parish Chapel: Drybrook – Age at death: 45 years

Cause of death 'acute nephritis uraemia' – [*i.e. his kidneys packed up.*]

I think by the time George died, the marriage between him and Edith had broken down, and they were living apart. It's possible that Edith and Edwin went to live with the James's around 1905, but I can find no evidence on that one way or the other. Opportunities for paid-work for women were extremely few and far between in the Forest at this time, especially for one with a child under 5.



Next we have the birth of twin girls, Dorothy Kate and Phylis Guendoline, to an Edith Kate Williams on the 30th of August 1907 in Westbury-on-Severn. I found these births fairly early on in my research, but discounted them as being almost certainly to another Edith Kate Williams (i.e. merely a chance correspondence of name).

I was new to family history research when I began looking at this, and I couldn't think what Edith was doing in Westbury. However I recently went back over this record, and found that the mother's maiden name was Virgo - ho-hum. Re-examining the other details, the place of birth was down as Union; that meant Westbury Workhouse. Unmarried girls, or women on their own, like Edith, often had to resort to the workhouse when they were expecting a baby. There was shelter, food and minimal medical support. Background info: <https://www.workhouses.org.uk/WestburyOnSevern> It should be noted that Westbury Workhouse covered a large part of the Forest at that time including, I believe, Soudley.

Dorothy Kate died on the 4th of September 1907, 5 days after she was born, but Phyllis Guendoline survived. At the age of 26/7 Edith Kate was a widow, and had given birth to 3 children, one of whom had died.

The other interesting piece of information from the birth records was the father's name, Archibald Douglas Williams. "Who he?" I hear you ask. "No idea," I reply. Having failed to find anyone of that name knocking around the area back then, I'm beginning to wonder if he was a polite fiction. As I understand it, in the absence of a father, the mother could give whatever name (or none) she fancied for the absentee parent. Or maybe there was an Archibald Douglas **Somebody**, who was given the surname Williams by Edith Kate for the birth-certificate, to match her married name. Looking at all the dates, it is barely possible that George was the twins' father, but I very much doubt it. For one thing, why give a name other than your husband's when registering births, if he was the father?

Much to my surprise, Edith Kate managed to dig herself out of the hole she was in, and get a job. The 1911 census finds her in Llangiwig, Glamorgan, Wales, working as a house-keeper to a Mr. William Steward aged 48. He worked at the local Steel Mill in Pontardawe. She has Phyllis Gwendoline aged 3 and a bit with her. Mr. Steward has grown-up children who live elsewhere, and it looks as if his wife had died. I'm guessing that the reason Edith Kate left Edwin with her sister Charlotte was that he would have been another mouth to feed, if she'd taken him with her. There's nothing to say whether Edith Kate kept in touch with the James's, or not. Charlotte was illiterate, but I believe Fred could read and write.

The next recorded event is Edith Kate's second marriage. It's to a Mr. Richard Francis in 1914. The 1921 census lists the couple living at 16 George Street, Pontardawe. In addition to Edith and Richard, on the form, are Edith's daughter, Phyllis G. Williams, 13 years and 10 months, and Richard's daughter, Edith M May Francis, 4 years and 2 months.

Also in the 1921 census William Steward is living at 11 Thomas Street, Pontardawe, with some of his family.

Mum makes no mention of Cousin Edwin's mother in her writing. Of course mum was still only 15/16 when Aunt Charlotte died, so may have been kept in the dark about what were sensitive matters. It seems inconceivable to me that Edwin was not told he had a mother, and a half-sister living not far away in South Wales, but you never know.

Finishing up this section, in 1932 Phyllis G. Williams married William H J Walwyn, both of Pontardawe. In 1939 we have Phyllis G. Walwyn living in Blakeley Hall Road, Oldbury, West Midlands. Also on the register are June M Walwyn aged 6, Phyllis's daughter, and Edith K Francis, her mother Edith Kate, now retired, aged 58ish. No mention of husband William.

The last record I have of Cousin Edwin is the 1921 census, when he is still living with Fred and Charlotte James. He's working at the nearby Eastern United Colliery which opened in 1909. More info here https://www.sungreen.co.uk/cinderford_east_dean/eastern_united.html Edwin's job was looking after the pit ponies and horses which pulled the coal carts underground. No luck finding him after this. The Williams surname finally defeated me.



I spent about as much time puzzling over the last, named adoptee, as the others put together. Violet Parnell's origins were a tough nut to crack. I'm still not certain I have the right answers – you will have to judge for yourselves.

The starting point was simple enough. Violet Parnell was born in Soudley in 1906, and given to Charlotte to bring up as her own when a few months old. I imagine that was why Violet was the apple of Charlotte's eye. Unlike her other children, Violet was hers almost from birth. Like Edwin, Violet is listed as being part of the James family in the 1921 census. Aged 15, she is still in school; highly unusual for a girl of her age in the Forest at that time. And that's where things came to a screeching halt.

My first thought was that Violet was another relative of Charlotte's, but I found no marriages between Virgos and Parnells. Indeed I found very few Parnells at all in the Forest of Dean. It is an unusual name around here, definitely not local. In the end I cracked, and paid £2.50 for a scan of Violet's birth certificate. To anyone who knows me, that is an indication of how desperate I was. Paying for something like that is not really me, as I'm careful with my money (aka a notorious old skinflint). Below is a copy of what I received.

Registration District <i>Westbury on Severn</i>										
Sub-District <i>East Dean</i>										
1906 BIRTHS in the Sub-District of <i>East Dean</i> in the County of <i>Gloucester</i>										
Columns -	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
No.	When and Where Born.	Name, if any.	Sex.	Name and Surname of Father.	Name and Maiden Surname of Mother.	Rank or Profession of Father.	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.	When Registered.	Signature of Registrar.	Baptismal Name if added after Registration of Birth.
	<i>Death July 1906 2 1/2 Soudley East Dean P.D.</i>	<i>Violet</i>	<i>Girl</i>		<i>Susan Parnell</i>		<i>S. Parnell Mother Soudley East Dean</i>	<i>Twenty Fifth July 1906</i>	<i>Edwin Henry Long Registrar</i>	

Obviously I don't know what you think, but to my mind, this Certificate contains two stretchers, if not out-right lies. For one thing, from the handwriting, it has evidently all been filled in by the same person, presumably Mr E.H. Long. Therefore Box 7, which is supposed to be "Signature ... of Informant", does not contain a signature. Secondly, and more importantly, Susan Parnell was only a Soudley resident in the sense she'd been living there for a few months in the final stages of her pregnancy. If she had any long-term connection with Soudley, which contains many more trees than people, I would have already discovered it, and I didn't. The other obvious fact is there is no Father's name given. That almost certainly means that Susan Parnell was unmarried.

Before the internet that would have been that. There can't have been that many Susan Parnells of child-bearing age around in 1906, but without an address, or at least some idea of where Violet's mother came from, this puzzle would have remained a mystery. These days, however, various family history sites make country-wide searches possible.

My fixed opinion is Violet's mother was Susan Ethel Parnell, born in Bristol in 1884 - so 21 or 22 when she gave birth for the first time. In 1901 Susan was living with her family in South Lambeth, All Saints, London. She worked there as a Printer's Moulder. Now I can't prove this is the right Susan Parnell, but I'd be highly surprised if I'm wrong. I'd be delighted and grateful if someone else takes a fresh look at this, and comes up with a different Susan Parnell who is definitely correct. However I'm not going to hold my breath waiting for that to happen.

Having got that far all that remained was to link Susan with someone who had personal connections in Soudley. Further head-scratching, and the checking-out of fruitless ideas ensued. To me the obvious answer was Violet's missing father. There were two problems with that. One was I had no idea who he was. And even if I could name him, how would someone with links to Soudley end up getting a London girl pregnant? My puzzle-solving ambitions had been thwarted, but like a dog gnawing a bone, I was very reluctant to give it up.



If you are feeling in the mood to try spotting things, please have a look at the 1901 census extract which appears on page 6. For those who don't know, that census was compiled by someone in each area, who was paid to go round houses collecting information. The numbers in the left-hand column (40, 41, 42, 43...) represent families. Each family may or may not have lived in a separate building, but the order means consecutive residences are near one another. When I scanned this census record looking for clues (a sad insight into my life, some might say) one word jumped out at me, **London**.

It turned out that the Welch family (sometimes spelled Welsh) had members who had been living in London for some time. Ellen Mary Welch, 14, who was now living with her grandmother Sarah, 2 doors away from Charlotte and Fred James, was born in London. This is purely circumstantial evidence, but I know a smoking gun when I see one.

It looks to me that John Welch (Ellen's father), who was born in Soudley, moved to London searching for better paid work. The family appear on several censuses in Victorian times living in Medleys Place, Bermondsey, London in the district of St Olave, Southwark. I checked, being ignorant of South London geography, and South Lambeth is pretty close to Bermondsey.

So my hypothesis (for what it's worth) is that Susan Ethel Parnell and one, or several, of the Welch family became friends down in London. Finding herself pregnant in 1905/6 Susan cast around for a way of having her baby, conceived out of wedlock, that did not disgrace her and her family. She obviously needed somewhere far away from London she could stay for several months. And she needed someone who would do a good job of bringing up her as yet unborn baby when it arrived. I doubt Susan had much money, so she would also have needed to do all this on the cheap, while not being able to work – the answers were her friends in Soudley, and Charlotte James.

To me all this made a great deal of sense. It sated my desire to solve a puzzle, to my own satisfaction at least. However, going back over my research, my theory was cast into doubt by one inconvenient fact. Sarah Welch, Ellen Mary Welch's grandmother, died in 1905 (about a year before Violet was born). Ellen would have been 18. Whether the family home was vacated immediately after Sarah died, or whether another relative came there to help out, and so Ellen went on living next to the James's for some time, I do not know. All I can say for sure is that Ellen appears on the 1911 census living in Cheltenham with her aunt and uncle.

I did turn up a little more information on Susan. She returned to her family in London, and married Herbert Carey on the 2nd May 1909 at St. Barnabas's Church, Lambeth, Surrey. The Careys had one child, Irene Maud, born in Lambeth in 1912. If I am right, Irene was Violet's half-sister. Rather like Edwin's case, I have no idea if anybody from later generations knew about all this. Charlotte and Fred must have known, as presumably would a few other people living in Soudley back then; also Susan, and some of her family. But I don't think there is any one left alive who could say for sure what happened.



After she finished school, Violet became a teacher via, I think, the same apprenticeship-type training my mother did. She worked for many years at St. Whites School in Cinderford.

In 1930 Violet, aged 24, married James Edwin Davis in Cinderford. They went on to live in Ruspidge, which is on the Soudley side of Cinderford, and raised a family there. Their descendants are still living in the area.



Once-upon-a-time this would be the end of the 'Violet Parnell Story', but these days we have a new avenue of research – DNA testing. If testing was done, and my conclusions are correct, Mrs. Davis's descendants would find they are related to descendants of the Londoner, Susan Parnell. I don't think Irene Maud Carey had children, but Susan had a whole raft of brothers and sisters.



Did I hear someone mutter, "That's not many Mysterious Appearing Children." As a final thought then, in her book HLAU mum writes about a shopping trip by train from Soudley to Cinderford with her Aunt Charlotte:

A steep hill lay before us leading into the town. One of Aunt Charlotte's fostering connections lived halfway up the hill, and we often called there.

Cinderford Station lay at the bottom of the valley. To get to the town centre, you had about a 5-minute walk up Station Street.

Two points on this. One is that mum was never mealy-mouthed; and she had a very good memory for names. I think she deliberately didn't name the 'fostering connection family,' almost certainly for reasons of privacy. And the second is, this cannot have been any of the adoptees we do know the names of. Fred Tarling was living in Newnham, Edith Kate in South Wales, and Violet and Edwin were of course still at home.

I have no precise number of how many children Charlotte and Fred informally adopted, but a total of 8 or 9 seems likely; 10 or more would not surprise me.



Below is a photo, with my mother on the left, Aunt Charlotte seated, and Violet Parnell on the right. Again it was taken outside the front porch of the James's Cottage. Assuming mum is 15, then this was 1926. The flowers and background greenery tell us the season was late spring or early summer. Aunt Charlotte died a few months later, bringing to an end her family's life at the Crossing-keeper's Cottage. In those days the cottage went with the job, which had been Charlotte's.



A slightly later photo of the cottage than the one at the start. The cables etc. running down the wall, are now missing.

Uncle Sam Virgo died a few years after his sister Charlotte. Fred James was still alive in 1939, I found him on the register of that year. I believe he died in the 1940s, but there are several men of that name who died around then, and I'm not sure which one is him.



Updates on my family history investigations here: <https://www.nickduberley.com/contact/>

I plan on issuing a new free pdf version of all my mum's writings about her childhood, together with my notes and old photos, but it's not finished yet. When it is done, I will of course put it on my website.

Nick Duberley, 23rd Jan 2024



Postscript

25th Jan – I just got round to checking a few more things, in particular Beatrice Louisa Virgo's family. (Beatrice was listed as visiting the James's on the 1901 census.)

First a shout-out to Familysearch.org, a brilliant free resource for genealogists – one I use a lot. I'm including two screenshots from that site. The first, below, shows Beatrice's link to James Virgo b 1834, who was Charlotte's father.

The second screenshot, on p16, shows part of the James Virgo and Catherine Colclough family tree. This tree is one I have done some research on, because my mother was descended from William Colclough and Ellen Wayne.

Having praised internet sites, and used them extensively for my research, a final word of warning. Not everything you find on these sites is wholly accurate; some is bang on, some is partly right, and quite a bit is just dead wrong. For example, there is an Abraham Levi on the right-hand end of the final tree on page 17, born 1739, father of Esther Levi. So far so good, but I doubt that the Abraham Levi I am descended from ever lived in Montgomeryshire, Wales, or married a Mary Williams there.

There was an Abraham Levi from roughly the right time period who lived in Wales, and I believe he also had a brother who lived there. However, I think this is just a chance matching name. To the best of my knowledge, my ancestor, Abraham Levi, lived in the Stoke-on-Trent area. I haven't done the extensive research on this which would be needed to reach a firm conclusion, but it would need more evidence than I've seen to convince me that there weren't two Abraham Levis around in the mid-1750s, living in different places – that seems to me to be the simplest explanation. Caveat emptor still applies in the internet age.

The screenshot displays a genealogical software interface with several profile cards and a dropdown menu. The cards include:

- Beatrice Louisa Virgo** (1894-Deceased • GLDR-D97)
- Moses Virgo** (1873-1938 • 94GS-TQH) married to **Emily Wooles** (Deceased • GLDP-PVC)
- Walter Virgo** (1845-Deceased • K8BR-PMX) married to **Elizabeth Cooper** (1844-1887 • K8LW-M62)
- Wooles** (Deceased • GLD5-1Y)

A dropdown menu for **James Virgo** (1806-1858 • MJHN-KCM) is open, showing a list of children:

- James Virgo (1834-Deceased • LC56-JNZ)
- Ann Virgo (1836-1837 • MJ8X-SGD)
- Frances aka "Fanny" Virgo (1838-Deceased • L14B-Z51)
- John Virgo (1840-1886 • MJ8D-HBR)
- Emma Virgo (1842-Deceased • MJ88-48M)
- Henry Virgo (1844-1883 • L14Y-LN4)
- William Virgo (1844-Deceased • MJ8D-523)
- Walter Virgo (1845-Deceased • K8BR-PMX)
- Joseph Virgo (1848-Deceased • MJ8X-8TM)
- Ann Virgo (1849-Deceased • 93TV-18C)
- Henry Virgo (1851-Deceased • L14B-939)
- George Virgo (1854-Deceased • GKJY-JKD)
- Samuel Virgo (1855-Deceased • KZ3K-KQF)

Buttons for "ADD SPOUSE" and "ADD CHILD" are visible.

