



Brighton and Beyond

A History of the Cowley Family

The Life and Times of Louisa Cowley

The following account is taken from notes written by Edith Mabel Woods (nee Souch b 1895), daughter of Charles Webster Stephen Souch and his wife Edith Clara (nee Vine), and granddaughter of Louisa Souch (nee Cowley), supplemented and amended by further research. Edith's words were sent to me by Louisa's great, great granddaughter, Catherine Fenton, and are published here with her kind permission.

"My grandfather Thomas Souch was married twice. His first wife, Mary Jane Boxall, died in childbirth in 1865 just a year or so after their marriage. (Their son, James Boxall Souch, subsequently died in about 1875 at just 9 years old.)

Thomas then married Louisa Cowley (1845 – abt 1900) on 4 March 1867. Louisa was the youngest daughter of farmer Charles Cowley and his wife, Miriam of Rottingdean. There were three sons from this marriage – Ernest Walter (b abt 1868), Charles Webster Stephen (b abt 1870) and Albert Edward (b abt 1872).

Thomas Souch was a blacksmith and served in the Hussars. When he left the army he bought two farriers businesses. The business was a great success and in the 1871 census Thomas is listed as a 'Master Smith' employing six men and one boy. Thomas's brother, James Souch, was the foreman. Sadly Thomas died from pneumonia in 1873 aged just 34. With three young children, Louisa had to rely on James Souch to run the business. Eventually, on 27 June 1875, Louisa married James believing that he would run the farriers successfully and provide for her and her children.

Louisa had another five children by James Souch – Frederick James (b abt 1875), Lizzie Louise (b abt 1877), Edith Ada (b abt 1880), Howard Ellis (b abt 1882), and William Thomas (b abt 1887). James took to drink and steadily drank away the business! He brought Louisa and her children to the point of starvation. While he spent all his time in the pub Louisa would have men calling to collect debts and to take away pieces of furniture that he had sold from her lovely home. In the end they barely had a chair to sit on. Louisa's older sons tried to help her as much as possible. My father told me that Louisa would send one of the boys to her father Charles Cowley, a wealthy farmer of Rottingdean, to ask for help and he would take his leather pouch from his smock and place two gold sovereigns on the table saying, "for Gods sake don't let that man know that I have given you this money"!

The three sons from Louisa's marriage to Thomas left home in their teens. Ernest went to work as a clerk and died in abt 1907 at the age of 42. Charles Webster Stephen went to work at the Cowley bakery in Pool Valley, Brighton - 'Ye Old Bunn Shoppe'. He later established his own business, the Black Rock Bakery. Albert Edward went to Hardcastles in East Street, Brighton, chemist and photographers, and became interested in photography. Later he took photos of Brighton which were published in a tourist guide 'Breezy Brighton' but although I posed for some of the pictures, I have never seen a copy.

Louisa died aged 56 in abt 1900. My father recalled his stepfather, James, calling round to ask the family where Louisa was to be buried. They told him to get out because he was responsible for her death! Shortly after the funeral the police called to tell them that James had committed suicide by poisoning himself in the cemetery. The family said they wanted nothing to do with him and he had to be buried by the parish."

Edith Mabel Woods

Edited by Peter Cowley – November 2015