

Freedman (Friedman, Freeman, Fridman) Family

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Adapted from Monica's emails by Esther (Herschman) Rechtschafner

Recently I received an email from a Catholic woman from Liverpool. Professor Dov Levin (Modern Jewish History Department, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, ISRAEL) referred her to me, as the "Sveksna Expert". Monica has written a book about her parent's forbidden love and, of a 20-year search for her father who she never knew, who had been cloaked in mystery for almost 60-years. Here is a small excerpt from her book...

"For me, the story began after my mum died in 1989, when I found a letter, which instigated my search and led to a discovery that has left me wondering if there is some instinct or memory locked away, hidden deep within our DNA. Because instead of uncovering a sordid family scandal, which I had expected, I found a heart-warming story, which slowly revealed itself from a pauper's grave in a London Jewish cemetery. Life is so different today, but in the inner-city slums of Liverpool during the early part of the 1950s, for an unmarried Catholic woman to give birth to a child at the age of forty, was an absolute disgrace. She had broken all the rules and the consequences were cruel and often brutal. My mother experienced bigotry and ridicule on a grand scale and was ostracized by many in the community. She would never reveal my father's identity to anybody, which led to further speculation. It was not until after her death when I found the letter, which led me to uncover the reason for all the secrecy, but it would take me a further 20-years before I actually discovered who my father had been and I now understand why, since I could barely read, I've had an unexplainable fascination with anything of Russian origin, from dolls to old violins..."

The letter was from the warden of the apartments in Hampstead, where Monica's father had lived, the letter was giving her mother the news of her father's death. But it was not until the following Christmas when she was told that this man had been her father, that he was Jewish and that her parents had met secretly for 25-years, up until her birth... and ending in her birth.

Other than knowing that he had lived in Liverpool from about 1930 until the mid 1950s, little else was known about him as her mother had always kept him a closely guarded secret. By this time, six years had passed since his death and the apartments only kept their records for three years and nobody knew him. The hospital where he died would not give Monica any details about him unless she could prove she was his daughter, which of course, she could not. It was a brick wall the size of China's and the search was shelved many times over the years.

Neither of her parents had married and they had kept in contact with each other throughout their lives and Monica now knows that her father had kept an eye on her from a distance. It was a sad ending to a sad story, but it is a story as old as time.

After receiving help from members of a small website forum, where her thread has received close to 300,000 hits and with the availability of records now online and websites such as JewishGen, Monica eventually found the living descendants of her father's siblings and has been welcomed warmly into their family. She has now turned her research around, to go backwards, tracing her paternal family's roots. For Monica, it has been a fascinating learning curve into Jewish history and culture.

Jewish roots are so difficult to trace with all the name changes and given that Monica was not brought up in the Jewish faith, there were times when she felt like she was banging her head against that brick wall, which genealogists so often talk about. Her mum's Catholic family were one of the oldest families in Liverpool and she has linked up with other researchers and found her maternal family's Liverpool roots going back as far as the year 1573, while her maternal grandmother had Irish roots. Irish family history is extremely difficult to research as many records were destroyed in the 1922 fire at the Dublin records office. As if the Jewish side was not difficult enough, her research into her father's Jewish family, has now taken her to Dublin!

Monica's father was born in Liverpool in 1907, he was 48 years of age when she was born. Her father was the youngest of nine children and three stepchildren. His father, Monica's paternal grandfather, Louis Friedman, was born in 1867. Louis' marriage records gave his Hebrew name as Yehuda Aryé Lieb and also gave his place of birth as Germany, as confirmed on the 1891, 1901 and 1911 UK censuses. However, Monica did not trust her grandfather's Germanic claim, as he had married three Russian women, her grandmother Rebecca Cohen being his 2nd wife who died young in 1911. Louis was widowed three times. His marriage records gave Louis' father as Tobias Friedman, the family name has been found as Friedman, Freedman and Freeman. The only match was a Tobias Freedman who died in Dublin in 1902. Tobias and his wife Faiga Freedman were living at Emorville Square on the 1901 Dublin census, they were boarding with the Masliansky family and are mentioned briefly in James Joyce's Ulysses.

Further research found an Isaac-Jacob Freedman living near, in the area of Dublin known as Little Jerusalem, because of the many Jewish people who had settled there. Isaac-Jacob had naturalized in Dublin before emigrating to South Africa in 1892, where his eldest son, Maurice Freeman became the Mayor of Johannesburg in 1934. Isaac's naturalization records gave his parents as Tobias and Fege Freedman and his date and place of birth as the year 1854, SWEKSNA, KOVNO, RUSSIA.

Monica's grandfather Louis, did not naturalize and yet, he was not interned as an enemy alien during the First World War or WW2, putting yet more doubts in her mind of his German homeland and her gut feeling knew her roots would be in Russia. It was another two years before a record was found in the Dublin Metropolitan Police alien register, of her grandfather, Louis Freedman when he signed the alien register whilst visiting Dublin on 28th June 1917.

This record in the alien register took the information from Louis' identity card, it gave his description, his home address in Liverpool and the details of his wife and children who were with him and the address where he stayed during his visit. Monica has a copy of the original record, which gave his place of birth as... SWEKSNA, KOVNO, RUSSIA! So Monica's gut feeling was correct all along and this was the proof she needed to demolish Louis' Germanic claim!

Since then, more siblings to her grandfather have been found in Dublin. A sister, Esther-Baila Friedman (Fridman) Father Tobias Friedman, married Maurice Abramson in Dublin in 1887.

Maurice Abramson was found on the 1939 electoral rolls living with a family named ERLICH. He died in 1944 and Baila Erlich registered his death. But Maurice or Esther Abramson don't show up on the 1901 or 1911 Irish censuses and there is no trace of Esther, Baila Fridman since she married Maurice Abramson. Many deaths were not registered in Ireland and the mix of Yiddish and Irish accents meant that many of the few deaths that were registered, were usually wrongly transcribed as information was often lost in translation. It was lucky that the death of Tobias Freedman was registered. Although no death has been registered for his wife Faiga/Fege Freedman, a stone-less grave is listed in Dolphin's Barn cemetery's records for a Feige FREEMAN, who was buried on 7th July 1927. Many people could not afford gravestones in those times, so there is no gravestone on either Tobias Freedman or Feige Freeman's graves.

Monica has recently found another brother. Ralf Friedman married Sarah LEVY in Dublin in 1880. His marriage authorization certificate from the Beth Din states his name as Philip Fredman with Hebrew name, Raphael. On the 1901 and 1911 Dublin census, he was listed as Philip Freeman. Philip and Sarah had 9 children, but only 5 daughters survived to marry. Philip also signed the Dublin alien register having not naturalized and these records state that he was admitted to the Donnybrook Hospital in May 1915. Thanks to the helpful archivist at Donnybrook Hospital, 5 documents and letters were found in the archives, giving character references for Philip. A person needed to prove he or she warranted admission to Donnybrook Hospital, which was a charity hospital. For Philip, there was a problem because he had not naturalized. May 1915 was not a good time for aliens, even friendly aliens, after the Lusitania was sunk off the coast of Ireland and in cities such as Liverpool and Dublin, immigrants and their businesses were attacked. It was also the beginning of the troubles in Ireland.

The character references for Philip held a surprise. They were from five different clergymen from the Baptist Chapel in Dublin, vouching for Philip; and they explained that he had converted to Christianity when he was 16 years old and was a quiet man who had been persecuted by the local Jewish community for converting and from the rest of Ireland for being an alien. Philip was caught in no-man's-land. The clergymen pointed out that he was not an enemy alien and mentioned that he was from Russia-Poland. It was only that he could not afford to naturalize. This area of what was known as Russia-Poland is now Lithuania. Most of the Jews who settled in Ireland were from this area. Eventually he was admitted and was in Donnybrook for two years, which was a hospice for people with chronic incurable illnesses. There is also a letter from his wife Sarah dated May 1917, requesting permission to take her husband home as their daughter was very ill and that letter is so sad. These handwritten letters need to be given to Philip and Sarah's grandchildren, who will treasure them for ever.

Sarah's letter mentions their daughter and refer's to her as "Mrs Harris, wife of a Jeweler" this daughter was known as Nellie and she married Abraham HARRIS in Belfast. Abraham Harris was born in Wales about 1875 and was the son of Simon and Maria HARRIS née BLOOM. Abraham and Nellie (Eleanor) Harris are listed on the 1911 Dublin census living next door to Nellie's parents Philip and Sarah. They have two daughters, 5-year-old Simona and 2-year-old Esther. However, the letter that Sarah wrote to Donnybrook Hospital gives an address in the village of Green, in Orpington, Kent. Further research shows that Abraham Harris, now calling himself; Albert J. HARRIS was living at this Orpington address.

The name "Harris" pops up three times within Monica's Freeman family. Besides, Philip and Sarah's daughter, Nellie/Eleanor Freeman marrying Abraham Harris, Isaac-Jacob Freedman who

emigrated to South Africa, was married to Dorah née HARRIS and when her grandfather Louis visited Dublin in 1917, he and his family stayed at the home of Ada LEVIN, whose name was also née Harris. Ada's parents were Mendel and Chana Zorochovich, who had changed their name from Zorochovich to Harris when they came to the UK from KARKLENAI, KOVNO. Whether these three Harris families were connected to each other seems feasible, but remains unproven so far, but given that they also had connections to Wales, it does seem likely.

Another daughter of Philip and Sarah's was Minnie aka Maria and she married Harry RUSSELL in Dublin and they had a daughter Winnie Russell, born in Belfast in 1906. No living family have yet been found. Another daughter, Evelyn married Charles BERG in Liverpool in 1914. They had two children born in Liverpool and then another two children born in Manchester. Then they 'possibly' went to London and that brings Monica's research to where it is today.

Monica has posted notices on the Litvak SIG of Jewishgen hoping to find another researcher who is maybe researching her Freedman family and evidence of their births in Sveksna. I have searched the Sveksna records but her family name does not appear on any of my lists, but this does not say very much. I am currently not sure that her grandfather's family was from Sveksna. However, the place she found listed as the place where he came from, was listed under the following names: Sweksna/Sveksna, Kovno, and Smeksna, Vexna, Veisknai. She may be referring to Veisknai, which is also known as Vexna. She now is almost finished writing the book and still feels that her grandfather was from Sveksna. She understands that the family name may have been a bit different in Sveksna. However, she has two official documents, naturalization records and alien records, both stating Sweksna as the place of birth for her grandfather Louis and his elder brother Isaac-Jacob Freedman and she has sent me copies. She has also given me interesting information about the Jewish communities of Liverpool and Manchester. Monica is in contact with descendants of Isaac-Jacob Freedman and also living descendants of Abraham Harris' siblings and the grandson of Ada Levin née Harris. She would love to find living descendants of the BERG family and RUSSELL family and any grandchildren of Philip and Sarah Freeman. Monica has already received many orders for her book, which will be published later this year. If you think you have a link to any of the names given here, please contact Monica at her email address given above.