

A Dover Family History

by **Merril Lilley**

In Newsletter 44 I wrote an account of Marion Leila Griffin who was born in Dover in 1930 and now lives in New Zealand. She visited Dover on a two-week holiday in 1992, when she met 'Budge' Adams. On her return to New Zealand Budge sent her two newsletters and she joined the Dover Society. She has received our newsletters since then and has corresponded with me and with Sheila Cope over the years.

The article in issue 44 tells some of her history but since then Marion has sent to me a large package of all the material she had kept relating to her family history. This includes many photographs and letters. She had decided that it was not of interest to people in New Zealand and that it should be in archives in Dover, where it would be accessible to anyone who wished to undertake research. Before handing Marion's package to the Kent History Society for safe keeping I thought I would write another article for the newsletter telling her story.



James and Myra Leila Harmer

Marion's grandmother was Myra Leila Sartain, a midwife. In 1902 she married James Harmer, who worked as a gas and water fitter. Marion's mother, Irene Myra Harmer, was born on 11th January 1904 at 157 Buckland Avenue. The family subsequently moved to Lascelles Road and later to Bartholomew Street and Irene had many happy memories of her childhood in Dover. In 1918 she went to Harrow-on-the-Hill in Middlesex to help a relative with young children and while she was there she met her husband, Mervyn Charles Holmes, at the Wembley Empire Exhibition. They were married in Hendon in 1924 and spent their honeymoon in Dover before travelling to India where Mervyn was stationed at Peshawar, near the Khyber Pass.

In 1930 Irene and Mervyn visited Dover and stayed with Myra at Bartholomew Street and there Marion was born. At the end of that year the family returned to India. Irene had four more children, two boys and two girls, all born in India.

As she grew up Marion was conscious of



James and Myra Leila Harmer. Armistice Day, 1918

Mervyn and Irene Holmes and family, Peshawar 1938



the fact that she was the only child born in England. Her parents were always trying to arrange a holiday in Dover but fate was against them. They planned a holiday in 1934, which had to be cancelled because there was an outbreak of smallpox on the ship. After the outbreak of war in 1939 they were unable to visit England and when the war was over they were told they could not return unless they had sick and dependent relatives there. Many British citizens decided to go to one of the Dominions and in 1946 the Holmes family made their home in New Zealand and from there sent food parcels to England.

Many years passed before any of the



Nelson South Island, New Zealand

family visited England. At last Mervyn, Irene and their daughter Ruth came to Dover for a holiday in 1972. Marion Griffin (née Holmes) did not see the land of her birth until 1983 when her work took her to London on a course. She only managed a brief visit to Dover then, she returned in 1992 for a two-week holiday.

Marion's father died in 1985 and her mother, Irene in 1997, aged 93. On the front cover of Irene's funeral sheet is a photograph of St. Peter and St. Paul's Church in Charlton. One of the photographs in Marion's collection shows her mother in 1995 surrounded by some of her keepsakes and holding a copy of Ivan Green's book on Dover. All members of the family, Harmer, Holmes and then Marion Griffin kept a great many records. In the package I received from Marion there are six carefully labelled envelopes containing items as follows.

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| 1. 1880-1906 | Dover |
| 2. 1910-1920 | Dover |
| 3. 1924-1927 | Dover and India |
| 4. 1930s | Dover |
| 5. 1931-1946 | India |
| 5. 1948-1990s | Nelson, New Zealand |
| 6. 1972 | Mervyn, Irene and Ruth on a visit to Dover. |

In these envelopes is a wealth of family history: family letters written from India to England and vice versa, old postcards sent from Myra to Irene, a copy of the National Ration book from 1918, a letter from a friend describing the bombing of Dover and Chitty's mill in 1945.

Marion felt that many of these original items would be of interest to local historians or archivists and therefore sent them to me as I was editor of the Dover Society Newsletter. I hope members will find them of interest. For anyone wishing to find out more about the family the collection will in future be lodged with the Kent History Society.