

SUPPLEMENT TO THE 'LAY PEOPLE' PAGE ON FANNY DUDLEY née COOKE (1857-1900)

I was working on a history of [Irby Hill PM Chapel](#) in Wirral to 'publish' on this website. Searching the site for 'Irby' led me to Fanny Dudley's page and I soon realised that I had already come across Fanny's parents George and Harriet Cooke:

- George Cooke, born 1825/6 in Woolstanwood, Cheshire, 1½ miles west of Crewe; parents Randle and Catherine Cooke.
- Harriet Cooke, born 1829 in Newbold Astbury, Cheshire, about 2 miles south west of Congleton; baptised 9 August 1829; mother Ann Wallworth.

They married on 1 February 1856 in the parish church of Newbold Astbury and had the following children:

Emma, born in Newbold Astbury, birth registered in 1856 Q3

Fanny, born in Ightfield, 3½ miles SE of Whitchurch, birth registered in Whitchurch, 1857 Q3

Randle W. (named after his paternal grandfather), born in Ightfield, birth registered in Whitchurch, 1859 Q1

Betsy, born in Middlewich, September 1860

Harriet, born in Middlewich, February 1862

John, born in Middlewich, August 1863 (not Northop, Flint, as shown in the 1871 census)

Ann, born in Northop, Flint, in August 1864 (not Irby, Cheshire, as shown in the 1871 census)

Arthur, born in Irby, Cheshire in November 1867

George, born in Irby, Cheshire in August 1870.

The 1861 Census shows:

- George, Harriet, Emma and Betsy as 'visitors' at the home of Hannah Witworth, Wall Hill Lane, Newbold Astbury.
- Fanny (aged about 3½) living with her uncle and aunt [Rev. Thomas Bramall](#) [1] and Mrs Eliza Bramall (George's sister) in Scotland Street, Ellesmere, Shropshire.
- Randle – has not been found in the census records.

Note that Fanny's obituary states that she went to live with the Bramalls when she was six; this record suggests that she went to them much earlier.

The 1871 census shows:

- George, Harriet, and children Randle, Betsy, Harriet Jnr, John, Ann, Arthur and George at Irby Hill Farm, Irby, Wirral, about 5 miles WSW of Birkenhead.
- Emma aged 14 living with her maternal grandmother Hannah (Ann) at Wall Hill Lane, Newbold Astbury.
- Fanny aged 13 living with the Bramalls at 6 George Street, Holy Trinity, Coventry.

It seems that Fanny would have had little contact with her parents throughout her childhood. The Bramalls had no children so she was brought up as an only child. They moved on every two or three years around Shropshire, Staffordshire and



Irby Hill Farm, January 2021

Worcestershire (and a spell in Coventry) – about nine moves until Fanny married.

We are bound to wonder why the Cookes' first three children – Emma, Fanny and Randle - lived with other family members for significant parts of their childhood. Did Mrs Cooke suffer from physical or mental illness? Or was their financial situation precarious? Their first seven children were born in five different places within an eight-year period – was George looking for work?

According to the Irby Chapel History [2], 'in 1869, [George and Harriet] decided to introduce Primitive Methodism to Irby and commenced to meet at their Irby Hill Farm each Sunday.' In fact, there had been a PM society at least as early as 1859: the [Liverpool Circuit Preaching Plan for 1859 Q2](#) shows a Birkenhead Branch which includes Irby. In the absence of a chapel at Irby, the members would have come together in 'cottage meetings'. The Society Steward in 1859 was Thomas Brown; he was also a lay preacher. Sometime before the 1871 Census, Thomas and his family moved away; George and Harriet Cooke arrived in about 1867 (between the births of their children Annie and Arthur) and, two years later, they took over or restarted Thomas's 'chapel' work.

In 1880 or 1881, having failed to find suitable land for a chapel elsewhere, George and Harriet offered a corner of their stackyard across the road from the farm and an 'iron chapel', having corrugated galvanised iron walls and roof, was built. It was opened in May 1881 at a cost of £130 and became known locally, with affection, as the 'tin chapel' (see Irby Hill Chapel).



*Irby 'Tin' Chapel, c. 1910?
Irby Hill Farm is across the road, just out of view*

The [Preaching Plan for Birkenhead Circuit of 1889 Q2](#) shows that the circuit consisted of seven chapels including Irby where Mrs Cooke was the Society Steward for over twenty years (was she the driving force rather than her husband?).

Fanny married [Rev John Dudley](#) in July 1880. It is not obvious how they might have met. John was stationed in Sunderland, Oldham and Liverpool from the mid-1870s whereas Fanny and the Bramalls were in Shrewsbury, Ramsor North Staffs (an important place in Primitive Methodist history [3]) and Stafford. [Rev J Travis](#), who wrote Fanny's obituary, would have got to know John when they were stationed together in Liverpool between 1878 and 1880. Between 1880 and 1882 Travis remained in Liverpool while John (now married to Fanny) moved over the river to Birkenhead (the circuit that included Irby). John and Fanny would therefore have been able to see much more of Fanny's parents and would certainly have taken part in the opening of the new 'tin chapel' in Irby in May 1881. Then in 1882 Travis and Dudley were again stationed together, this time for four years in Chester First Circuit. They were joined in 1884 by Bramall in Chester Second Circuit and he preached at the August 1884 anniversary services at Irby chapel. Therefore Travis probably knew Fanny well and would have been able to write at least some of her obituary from personal knowledge. John and Fanny (with children Emily and John) moved to Manchester in 1886; from then until Fanny's death following childbirth in April 1900, they and Travis may not have had much contact.

George Cooke died in 1892 Q1 aged 65 and Harriet died in 1905 Q1 aged 74, outliving her daughter Fanny by five years (so no doubt she contributed to Fanny's obituary).

References

1. See also Places>Cheshire>Woodley
2. <http://www.irbymethodist.org/page9.html>
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramshorn>

Christopher Wells, January 2021