

# Leeanna's story ... continued

My Grandmother – Lucy Vipond (Adamthwaite) Mawson

I will refer to my maternal Grandmother as Lucy to avoid confusion, although my brother and I called her Nanna. My great Grandmother Leeanna was always known as Grandma.

Lucy was petite, only 5 feet 2 inches tall, with very small hands and feet, In fact her shoes were only size “2”, which meant that the only shoes she could ever find were salesmen’s samples. She was a very warm loving person with unusual blue grey eyes. Always well dressed she never went out with out a hat. She had fine white hair; “thin and miserable” was how she described it, and the bane of her life. As it was as straight as a poker, she slept with the sides twiddled up in rags.



The photo on the left shows Lucy at school – she is in second row down, fourth from right)

Although not strictly a Cockney, [she wasn’t born within the peal of Bow bells] she had the wit and humour for which they are renowned, no one ever got the better of her verbally. She would often play the piano, was an avid reader she loved the cinema and gardening. Her favourite flowers were fuchsias and roses. In the summer there was always a large hanging basket in the porch of our house full of red geraniums white alyssum and blue lobelia. Lucy was forever rushing outside with a bucket and spade when the coalman’s horse and cart passed

hoping to collect any steaming piles. Her other passions were Kenneth McKellar, particularly singing *My Love Is Like A Red Red Rose*, Lord Byron’s poetry and the Band of The Royal Marines playing *Sunset*.

Lucy was a good plain cook and for her size she had a ferocious appetite, (in that area I think I definitely take after her). She loved roast beef and Yorkshire pudding with lots of gravy. Tripe and onions or jellied eels and mash were other favourites, which I also enjoyed. I particularly remember she couldn’t abide anything fatty. As far as I know smoking was her only vice, she smoked DuMaurier Cork Tipped Cigarettes. The only alcohol consumed while I was growing up, was Port and Sherry, mostly for visitors at Christmas. She called me her Precious Lamb.



Lucy was born in July 1886 at Stockwell London, the eldest of **John Alexander Adamthwaite and Leeanna (Fairey)**'s four children. Her brother, **John Allen (known as Laddie)** followed in 1887, a sister **Florence** in 1891, (who died age 5 months), and a second brother **Lionel Willie** was born in 1894. Lucy loved reading which sometimes annoyed her mother, so she often hid behind long drapes on a window seat so her mother could not find her. At the time of the 1901 census, the family lived at 10 Earls Court Square (*see left*) not far from

Kensington Gardens and the Round Pond where Lucy and her brothers often played. At this time, her father John Alexander's occupation was described as 'musician and caretaker'.

Lucy attended St Mary Abbots Higher Grade School For Girls in Kensington, one of her achievements was a prize she won for French when she was 14 in 1900. [The prize was a French Dictionary published in 1899 which I have complete with the citation] She was also an accomplished pianist; she had the honour of playing for her school at the Albert Hall. I imagine she inherited her musical talents from her father, who was a military bandsman.

In her teens, Lucy suffered very badly at the hands of a dentist. Through infection caused by the lack of hygiene in his surgery she ended up in hospital and had to have a piece of her jaw removed. This left her with a facial scar and a great fear of doctors and hospitals that lasted all her life.

Some time after 1901, the family moved to Litlington, near Royston in Hertfordshire, where they ran a pub called The Royal Oak. This was where, in 1907 her brother John Allen died of TB, he was just 20 years old.

Around the same time of Laddie's death, Lucy's father John Alexander Adamthwaite deserted the family and it was believed he went off to America. It's possible he inherited money which paid for his passage. That year Lucy began work as a ledger clerk at The Dairy Supply Company in the City of London. It was here she met Percy Mawson who was a travelling salesman for the same company.

Lucy and Percy were married in April 1912 and later that same year, sick and penniless, her father reappeared. Her mother Leeanna wouldn't have him back so he moved in with the newly married couple at their home in Station Road in Finchley. **John Alexander Ridgeway Adamthwaite** died at the Workhouse Isolation Hospital in Barnet in September 1912, from TB. He was interred at St Pancras cemetery on 25th September in grave 137.

Just six weeks after her father's death, Lucy gave birth to a son, Percy Gibson Mawson. He was born on 2nd November 1912 at 88a Station Road, Finchley and his father's occupation was described as Commercial Traveller (Dairy Utensils). But sadly, little Percy died of acute bronchitis and cardiac failure at the age of two months, on 7th January 1913. Lucy spent many weeks in bed before she gave birth to my mother in June 1914. By this time, Lucy and Percy had moved to Abington Rectory, Royston.

A couple of months later Percy came home with the news that he had enlisted in the Army to fight in the Great War. He joined the Bedfordshire Regiment, I'm not sure when but he was promoted to sergeant before leaving for France. Like so many others he was sure that "The War would be over by Christmas ". Lucy said goodbye to him on the platform at Ashwell Station in Hertfordshire. [Ironically my mother said goodbye to my father one station up the line at Royston during the Second World War when he was on his way to North Africa].



John Allen (known as 'Laddie')  
(1887-1907)



Lionel Willie (1894-1979)



Lucy (1886-1963)



Lucy and Percy at the Abington  
Rectory



*above are photos of Percy, Lucy and Percy's grave at Bienvillers*

Grandfather Percy did come home on leave once, Lucy said he was covered in lice, he had to undress outside and have a scalding hot bath before she could kiss him. I have a postcard he sent her from France, when he was wounded and recuperating in a hotel which served as a hospital. He was killed in 1916; his grave is at Bienvillers-au-bois near Arras in Northern France. There are many Military cemeteries in that area.

Until the end of the First World War, Lucy and my mother Joan lived at Cerby Avenue Royston, Hertfordshire where my mother was born. Fortunately my Grandfather left some money [I have a copy of his will], so she wasn't totally destitute, just heartbroken. Every Armistice Day I remember she was terribly sad; she always spoke of my Grandfather with great love and affection. If she'd had to survive on the Army War Widows pension she would have been in dire straits like thousands of other women.

When the war ended my mother was sent to live with her Grandma Leeanna, now a widow and housekeeper at the Rectory in Abington Piggots, a small village in Hertfordshire. This was done to avoid the Spanish flu which was killing thousands in towns and cities, plus Lucy needed to get back to work. Fortunately she was always able to find employment. Around this time she had her long hair cut into a fashionable "Shingle". The style created for safety, because of women working in factories during the war were at risk of having their hair caught in machines.



*Lucy, Leeanna and Lucy's daughter Joan, in the garden of their house at Ivy Road, Bedford – where they lived while Joan was at school*

In the early part of 1920 when my mother was old enough to go to school she returned to Royston to live with Lucy.

As a War Widow I think Lucy was given preference and was able to rent a brand new council house next to Royston Heath, where race horses were exercised early every morning. Their neighbours, a

jockey and his wife, had a large family. As an only child my mother loved having so many other children around after being very lonely in the Rectory with her Grandma. My mother went to Royston Convent and was often teased and bullied on the way home by the local jobs because she went to a "posh" school. One of the brothers from next door hid in the bushes when she was walking home and beat up a couple of her tormenters, she was never bothered again.

One thing I do remember clearly is my mother saying when she was at school day dreaming, looking out of the window, she saw a procession of nuns and a priest carrying a small white coffin through the convent garden to the chapel. It was rumoured that the dead child belonged to one of the nuns'.



Lucy with Joan

In the latter part of 1920 Lucy and my mother moved to Bedford, home of John Bunyan author of "Pilgrims Progress" and John Howard the prison reformer. Lucy believed education for women was very important and Bedford was and still is renowned for its' excellent schools. The high school my mother attended in 1927 was an independent fee paying school governed by the Harpur Trust. The Trust originated in the 16th century and was founded by Sir William and Dame Alice Harpur of Bedfordshire for the deserving and needy of the Shire. During the early part of the 20th century the Trust granted bursaries to deserving local children, particularly children of soldiers who had died serving with the Bedfordshire Regiment. The balance of the annual school fee was paid by the Army. During the latter part of the 1920's Lucy and my mother travelled to France to visit my Grandfather Percy's grave. They stayed in Arras on two or three occasions with a French family called Candlish who they kept in touch with for many years. Lucy's linguistic skills were very useful on their travels. When my mother finally left school in 1931 the Depression was in full swing, jobs were very scarce so they moved back to London where she was extremely lucky to get a three year apprenticeship at Marshall and Snellgrove a very reputable Ladies Modes Department store in Oxford Street. The first year she earned 7/6d a week, her train fare to and from work was 6/9d a week. As

my mother was quite tall and willowy she often modelled clothes for customers.

Fate took a hand in 1933 when Lucy decided they should spend Christmas at a small boarding house in Eastbourne on the south coast of England. My mother and father met for the first time as they passed on the stairs, it was love at first sight for my father. He found out where my mother worked, the following week he was waiting outside for her.

Another coincidence, my father had grown up and gone to school in Bedford at the same time as my mother. He went to the Bedford Modern School for Boys run by the same Harpur Trust which governed the school my mother attended. He also worked in London near Oxford Street, at Morleys a well known Gentleman's Outfitters. My father had always wanted to be a Vet but his father wanted him to follow in his footsteps so began his working life apprenticed in the drapery trade !!!

My parents married in July 1937, they lived in part of the house my grandmother Lucy now owned in Greenford Middlesex. It was at 373 Whitton Avenue and was called '*Bienvillers*'.

Towards the end of the war my grandmother Lucy and mother, who was now also a war widow, moved to Bedford where my brother and I went to school. Lucy was retired and stayed at home. Her time was occupied with household chores, gardening and reading. The occasional day in London was

spent visiting Somerset House researching the Adamthwaites, most of the certificates I have are dated 1949.

In the summer of 1959 Lucy was at home alone while my mother, a school friend and I were away on holiday. My brother was serving with the British South Africa Police in Rhodesia. It had been a very hot summer with bedroom windows open day and night. One evening when Lucy put on her bed side lamp a swarm of angry wasps flew out at her; the shock caused pleurisy which later developed into pneumonia. Her recovery was very slow.

My mother decided a complete change of scenery was needed so in 1961 we all moved to Saltdean near Brighton, where a new estate of bungalows had been built. My mother hoped the seaside air and warmer climate would help Lucy's recuperation, it did. This was when she was occupied writing to solicitors trying to solve the Adamthwaite will puzzle. (right) one of several letters written to Lucy when she was searching for the death of her grandfather John Allen Adamthwaite junior

In late 1962 my grandmother needed an emergency hysterectomy, the shock to her system plus her great fear of hospitals was a death knell; she never recovered and rarely left her bed. She died on 5th January 1963.

The funeral was a very sad affair just me, my mother, brother, my grandmother's brother Willie [Lionel] and his wife Clarice. Her grave is at Brighton and Preston cemetery which is situated at the top of a very steep road.

When we got home I switched on the radio, the music playing was "I don't want to play in your yard" sung by Peggy Lee. It's an old song from the late 1800s. Lucy used to play and sing it when my brother and I were small. I have never before or since heard it played on any radio program.

**POSTSCRIPT 1:** back in 2010, I was contacted by the churchwarden of Litlington church, concerning the condition of the memorial stone to Leanna and her son Laddie's grave, which was in such a state of disrepair that the church was having to consider removing it altogether. This very conscientious and enterprising churchwarden had managed to find Mary's article about Leanna on this website, and wrote to ask if it would be possible to be put in touch with her (he also provided some updates and corrections to some of the information for which I am most grateful). I was able to put Mary in touch with the churchwarden and she arranged to have the the memorial stone repaired, so that he could remain in the graveyard. I am certain that Lucy would have been delighted! Sue

**POSTSCRIPT 2:** When searching the Death Duty records at the National Archives for John Allen Adamthwaite (senior), I was astonished to come across the name 'Lucy Mawson' written on the ledger, next to some dates and correspondence reference numbers ... it was an official record of Lucy's similar attempt some sixty years earlier to discover what exactly became of her grandfather. Sue

