

ONE THIRTY- SECONDT IRISH

Minnie Mahoney
from Clonakilty in County Cork

My Great-Great-Grandmother

Minnie Mahoney from Clonakilty.

My maternal grandmother was Nellie Plant. Her mother, my great-grandmother, was Ellen Frost. Ellen Frost married¹ George William Plant on Saturday 29th January 1894, at Holy Trinity Church², Hartshill. She was 21³, a 'spinster', of 8 Stoke Old Road, Hartshill, Her father was John Frost and one of the witnesses was William Frost, probably her brother.

As that was all that I then knew of great-grandmother Ellen Frost, I turned my attention to *her* mother, my great-great-grandmother "Miss Mahoney".

Minnie Mary Mahoney was Irish, born in Clonakilty, County Cork, Ireland in about 1852. That makes me one-thirty-secondth Irish. "Clonakilty is a busy market town, but is only 3 km from one of the largest and most popular beaches in West Cork and is the centre for family holidays in this part of the county. It is about 40 km from Cork City and to the west of the town the landscape dissolves into a succession of bays and peninsulas along the coast or increasingly mountainous terrain inland. It is a prosperous and bright town today but was notorious for suffering in the Irish Famine (1845-47) and was also the home town of Michael Collins, Ireland's lost leader, who was killed in the civil war, after concluding the Treaty of Independence with Great Britain in 1921⁴."

Minnie's family would have lived through the great famine of 1845-47. County Cork was one of the worst affected areas. A population of 854,000 in 1841 had fallen by 1851 to 650,000. Almost 150,000 people had died between 1845 and 1850 and thousands had emigrated. Today, the population is just over 400,000.⁵

"In the 80 years after the famine of the 1840s, more than four and a half million men, women and children left [Ireland] to build new lives far from home.⁶" Perhaps Minnie Mahoney was one of those. There is a family story that she came, not with her family, but alone, a teenage girl, as a "lady's maid". Although it is unlikely, now, we can know when she left her home in Clonakilty or why there might be some truth in the story. In 1871, Minnie, aged 19, was working and living-in as a domestic servant in the household at Avenue Villa, High Street, Wolstanton, of one John B Heath, a manufacturer employing 200 men. His mother, a widow aged 77, lived with him and had "income from property". With a wife, 2 daughters, a son and two domestic servants, it would seem to have been a wealthy household.

Incidentally, in the churchyard of St Margaret's, Wolstanton, is a grave with the monumental inscription:

John Bourne HEATH,
Of Wolstanton, 12 Nov 1877, 49⁷

¹ Marriages Mar 1894 Frost Ellen Stoke T. 6b 229

² Staffordshire BMD Index

³ Source: marriage certificate

⁴ Source: not recorded.

⁵ Source of statistics: not recorded.

⁶ Source: BBC - <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/646834.stm>

⁷ The 1871 census appears not quite clearly to record John B Heath's age as 35 – which does not coincide with the age of 49 on a gravestone 6 years later.

After much fruitless searching, I had eventually found an entry in the 1871 census copied by the ancestry.co.uk transcriber for someone named Minnie “Maconey”. Whilst the birth year was about right, the birthplace had been copied as a jumble of question marks and letters that looked like “???.Clooskiltin” and related to no place I could find near Cork. On close inspection of the magnified image of the census page, however, the name is most certainly “Minnie Mahoney” and the birthplace, although overwritten by a check mark, is undoubtedly “Cork”, although the town does look like ‘Clooskiltin’.

In 1872, Minnie Mary Mahoney married⁸ John Frost, a clerk, in a civil ceremony, registered at Wolstanton⁹. She was just 20 years old. The Frosts seem to have been a local family; his father and brother working in the pottery trade.

1871 Census					
Wheat Street, Wolstanton STS					
Name	Age	Rel to Head & Status		Birth Place	Occupation
William Frosh ¹⁰	45	Head	M	Wolstanton STS	Oven Man
Jane Frosh	41	Wife	M	Hanley STS	
John Frosh	20	Son	U	Newcastle STS	Clerk
James Frosh	19	Son	U	Hanley STS	Oven Man
William Frosh	14	Son	-	Hanley STS	Apprentice Turner
Ellen Frosh	11	Daughter	-	Hanley STS	Scholar
George Frosh	8	Son	-	Hanley STS	Scholar
Jane Frosh	6	Daughter	-	Hanley STS	Scholar

Minnie, now Frost, and John had three known children, a daughter, whom they named Ellen, (my great-grandmother) born about 1872-3 and two sons, William, born about 1875 and James A. born about 1878. The family, however, seem not to have been settled: whether because Minnie’s husband John Frost found getting work as a clerk difficult or for some other reason, the family appear to have moved home several times in the ten years following their marriage. Ellen was born in Newcastle, William in Wolstanton, and James in Wellington, Shropshire¹¹. By 1881, Minnie and the family had moved back to Newcastle, to Albert Street, where they were lodging with John’s brother James and his wife Mary Frost. Ominously, Minnie’s husband John was out of work.

1881 Census					
23 Albert St, Newcastle Under Lyme, Staffordshire					
Name	Age	Rel to Head & Status		Birthplace	Occupation
James Frost	20	Head	M	Newcastle STS	(?) ¹²
Mary E. Frost	28	Wife	M	Etruria STS	
John Frost	30	Brother	U	Newcastle STS	General Clerk (Unemployed)
Minnie M. Frost	28	Sister in Law	M	Cork County, Cork, Ireland	
William Frost	6	Son	U	Wolstanton STS	Scholar
James A. Frost	3	Son	U	Wellington SAL	

⁸ Obtaining this marriage certificate is a priority for further research.

⁹ Marriages Sep 1872 Wolstanton 6b 224

¹⁰ Spelling as transcribed by Ancestry.com I have no doubt from inspection of the original census image online that this should be transcribed as “Frost”

¹¹ There are other reasons that should be explored as to why Minnie might have been in Wellington when James was born: one perhaps that she had family there for instance, and was visiting.

¹² Not clear. It looks like “Fireman at Earthen’e Manfg”

Shortly after they had moved back to Newcastle, Minnie may have given birth to another daughter, Mary A, born about 1882¹³.

The indications that work was hard to come by and the restless signs that the family moved home several times, suggests that life was not easy for Minnie and John Frost. Then, by 1891, the family seems to have split up, Minnie and John living separately; Minnie with their son James at 33 St. Sunday Wells. (Minnie's neighbour at number 32, Ann Colgan, a widow with five working sons and daughters living at home, was also Irish.)

1891 Census					
33 St Sunday Wells, Newcastle under Lyme Staffordshire					
Name	Age	Rel to Head & Status		Birthplace	Occupation
Minnie Frost	38	Head	M	Ireland	-
James Frost	12	Son		Wellington SAL	-

John, meanwhile, was back at Wheat Street, Wolstanton, living with his widowed mother, younger brother George and, possibly, his and Minnie's daughter Mary A, aged 9 years.

1891 Census					
Wheat Street Wolstanton Staffordshire					
Name	Age	Rel to Head & Status		Birthplace	Occupation
Jane Frost	61	Head	Wid	Hanley STS	-
George Frost	28	Son	S	Etruria STS	Potter's Turner
John Frost	40	Son	M	Newcastle STS	Labourer
Mary A Frost	9	Granddaughter		Wolstanton STS	Scholar

At St Sunday Wells, Minnie is recorded in the census as "Head" of the Household, which rather suggests the arrangement was not temporary.

Minnie and John's other two children, Ellen (my great-grandmother) who would have been about 19, and William, about 16, were not living with either of their parents.

It is just possible that Ellen had found employment, or had employment found for her, as a domestic servant to two elderly, widowed sisters at Rugeley.

1891 Census					
May Bank, Horse Fair, Rugeley, Staffordshire					
Name	Age	Rel to Head & Status		Birthplace	Occupation
Louise Greensmith	68	Head	Wid	Tamworth	Living on own means
Frances Greensmith	29	Daur	S	Rugeley	-
Charlotte Cooper	71	Sister	Wid	Tamworth	Living on own means
Louise Cooper	30	Daur	U	Rugeley	-
(Cecie) Cooper	2	Granddaur		Manchester LAN	
Ellen Frost	15	Serv	S	Burslem STS	General Servant (Domestic)

It is also just possible that William was lodging with relatives at 81 Paddock Street, Hanley¹⁴.

¹³ Shown as a 'granddaughter' in 1891 census, may have been John & Minnie Frost's daughter. Birth certificate is needed.

1891 Census					
81 Paddock Street, Hanley, Staffordshire					
Name	Age	Rel to Head & Status		Birthplace	Occupation
Joseph Read	24	Head	M	Burslem STS	Potter
May Read	24	Wife	M	Congleton CHE	Dressmaker
Laura Read	12m	Daur		Hanley STS	
Fredrick Read	3	Son		Hanley STS	
Isabella Frost	18	Sister in Law	S	Congleton CHE	-
Thomas S Frost	20	Boarder	S	Hanley STS	Potter's Warehouseman
William Frost	20	Boarder	S	Hanley STS	Tobacconist's Shopman

Minnie and John's separation, for whatever reason, proved permanent. By 1901, the precise circumstances of each household had changed, both had moved to new homes, Minnie moving in with her son, William, by then a greengrocer; John Frost's mother had died; John was no longer a labourer, but once more a clerk.

1901 Census					
17 Castle Street, Newcastle under Lyme Staffordshire					
Name	Age	Rel to Head & Status		Birthplace	Occupation
William Frost	26	Head	U	Wolstanton STS	Greengrocer
Minnie Frost	49	Mother	M	Ireland	
Walter Hughes	40	Boarder	U	Tipton STS	Tailor

1901 Census					
18 Lunt Street Wolstanton Staffordshire					
Name	Age	Rel to Head & Status		Birthplace	Occupation
George Frost	38	Head	M	Etruria STS	Potter's Turner
Sarah Frost	27	Wife	M	May Bank STS	
Albert Frost	5	Son		May Bank STS	
Reginald Frost	3	Son		May Bank STS	
W Arthur Frost	1	Son		May Bank STS	
John Frost	50	Son	M	Newcastle STS	Colliery Clerk

Minnie and John's daughter Ellen Frost had married George William Plant on Saturday 29th January 1894, at Holy Trinity Church¹⁵, Hartshill. Ellen and George lived until around 1896 in Stoke, then moved to Gloucester; before moving to Newhall, near Swadlincote in Derbyshire about 1900¹⁶ and then returning to Stoke, perhaps by 1905. Altogether, Ellen and George had thirteen children, one of whom was adopted, though how often the children they saw their grandparents, Minnie and John Frost, before the family returned to Stoke, cannot even be guessed at.

John Frost may have died¹⁷ aged 56 in 1907. Minnie Frost, nee Mahoney, may have died¹⁸ aged 61 in 1913. It would be interesting to have both death certificates.

¹⁴ Against the identification is the given age and birthplace; in favour is the occupation, not so far from William's occupation given in the 1891 census: "Greengrocer". Much more research needed.

¹⁵ Staffordshire BMD Index

¹⁶ Deduced from their children's birthplaces, recorded in the 1901 census.

¹⁷ Deaths Jun 1907 Frost John 56 Wolstanton 6b 51. Source FreeBMD. The most suggestive of the options. Check first.

¹⁸ Deaths Jun 1913 Frost Minnie 61 Newcastle L 6b 58

UNCERTAINTIES

In all family histories, all details need to be confirmed from 'primary sources', such as birth, marriage and death certificates or parish registers, before they can be regarded as established facts. This is not the case in this account. Very few facts have been confirmed in this way.

That the individuals who appear here, notably in the censuses from 1871 to 1901 are the same family, seems reasonably certain. That Minnie Mahoney is the same person as Minnie Frost, seems a very reasonable assumption (but is not yet certain).

I have a handwritten note, told to me by my mother, of a family story that 'Miss Mahoney changed her name'. There is no evidence for that here and it would only have been true in the very ordinary sense that she took her husband's surname on marriage. However, that the story is untrue is equally not certain. Perhaps, after she and John lived apart, she chose to call herself "Mahoney" again, and it is that which has been remembered?

Several puzzling questions remain:

- In the 1881 census, why is Minnie Frost shown as married and John Frost shown as unmarried?
- In the 1891 census, why was Minnie shown as 'Head' of the Household in 1891, yet not a widow?
- In the 1881 and 1891 censuses, when she would have been about 8 and 18 years of age respectively, where was Ellen Frost, my great-grandmother?
- Are Minnie and John Frost the parents of Mary A Frost, recorded as a 'Granddaughter', living in 1891 in the household of her grandmother Jane Frost?