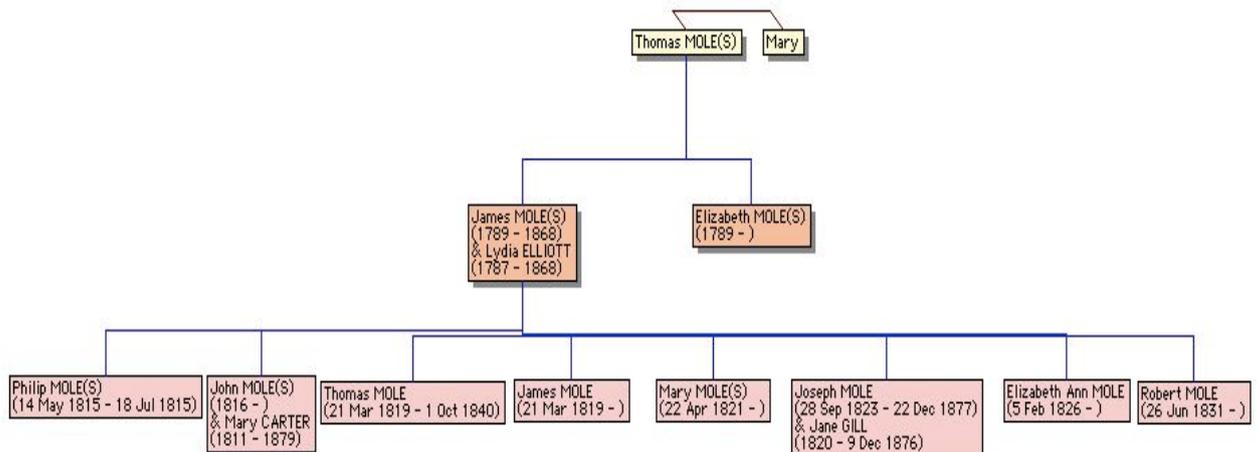


## The Moles



The earliest Mole we can name is Thomas our Great Great Great Great Grandfather. All we know for sure about him, from his son James' baptism record, is his name, that he was probably an agricultural labourer and that his wife's name was Mary.

James Mole (1789–1868) our Great Great Great Grandfather was baptised in Hutton on June 28th 1789. His sister Elizabeth was baptised there just 6 months later. Their dates of birth are not known but from age information in the census records James cannot have been born much before his baptism. James moved to Sussex as a young man working as a Broom Maker<sup>1</sup> or Labourer and married Lydia Elliot (1787–1868) in 1812. They had at least eight children. The first two were born in Slaugham the others in Hartfield. He later moved to Croydon, Surrey then back to Essex always as a Broom Maker.

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<sup>1</sup> Broom making was a specific craft separate from brush making. A broom (besom) was, indeed still is, made using trimmed birch (or similar) twigs attached to a handle made of chestnut, ash or hazel. Such brooms have been made at least since Saxon times, probably earlier, and are still available today mainly for use in the garden. Broom-makers often used assistants to work the local coppices (managed woods) for materials. Sussex, like Essex, was a centre for broom making since the local climate is naturally suited to birch which allowed the industry to prosper in the past.

On Saturday night last, Mr. James Mole, a broom-manufacturer, of Warley, went into a public-house in Brentwood, about eleven o'clock; he sat down in a room full of company, and, having travelled in the heat during the three previous days, was much exhausted, and soon fell asleep. While he was in this position he had his pocket picked of a canvass bag, containing 12 sovereigns, wrapped in paper, and a pocket-knife; in the morning the bag, containing a key and the paper in which the sovereigns were wrapped were found by the servant of C. C. Lewis, Esq. in a shrubbery opposite his house, but there is no clue to the thief at present. Mole is an unlucky man: some time since he took his purse from his pocket, in which were fourteen sovereigns, and laid it down in his wash-house. Two women found it and pocketed the money; they were discovered, and (our correspondent says), he will ultimately recover the whole of that, but of the restoration of his cash in the present case there appears but little chance although he has strong grounds of suspicion of the parties.

Chelmsford Chronicle 1852

He travelled widely and as shown in the extract from the Chelmsford Chronicle of 1852 earned a fair amount from his job. He died aged 80 of Cerebral Disease in the Union Workhouse, Romford Essex.

Lydia Elliott, James' wife was born in Slaugham, Sussex. All the census returns show James and Lydia apart from each other on the actual census date probably because of James' itinerant lifestyle as a Broom Maker. Lydia, like James moved from Sussex to Surrey, first to Dorking then to Croydon where for a while she worked as a nursemaid for a Professor of French. She ended her days in the Ellis Davy Alms Houses in Croydon. Like her husband, Lydia died in 1868. Her death certificate has the rather sad comment that 'husband's name and occupation not known to informant'.

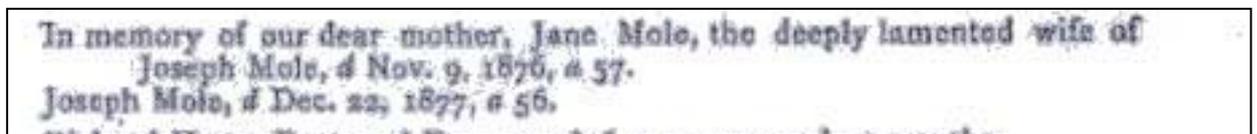
Our Great Great Grandfather Joseph Mole (1823–1877) was the third surviving son of James and Lydia, He was born in Hartfield and by 1841 had moved to Surrey where he came up against the law as that Census records him as in Guildford House of Correction<sup>2</sup>.

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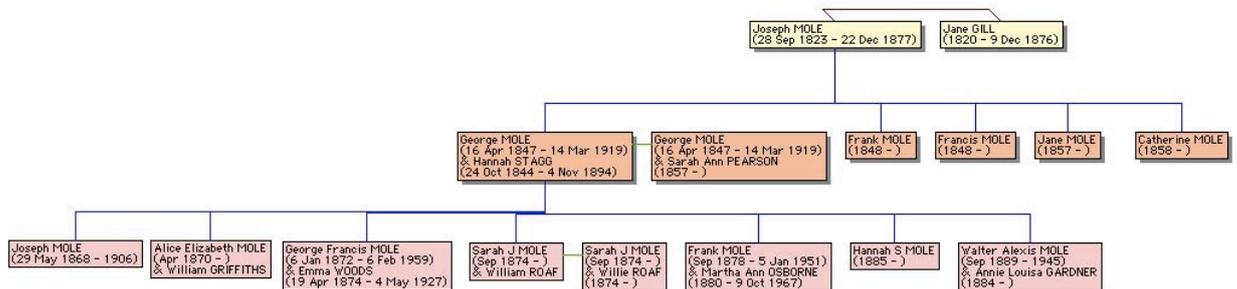
<sup>2</sup> The House of Correction, though part of the prison system was an institution where people who had committed crimes that were not serious were sent to improve their behaviour usually by hard labour. Sentences were relatively short but conditions were harsh.

Initially Joseph followed his father into broom making but later changed and became a baker. We have no idea about how he came to make this change and how in the decade between 1841 and 1851 he changed his life around so radically. What we do know is that he remained a baker and in addition even described himself as ‘flour dealer’ so had clearly become a respected tradesman.

Joseph married Jane Gill (1821–1876) in 1846 at the Parish Church in Croydon by which time she was already pregnant with their first child, George, who is our Great Grandfather. They had at least five more children. Both Joseph and Jane died relatively young and are the first members of the family who we know of who had graves with tombstones.



### George Mole (1847–1919)

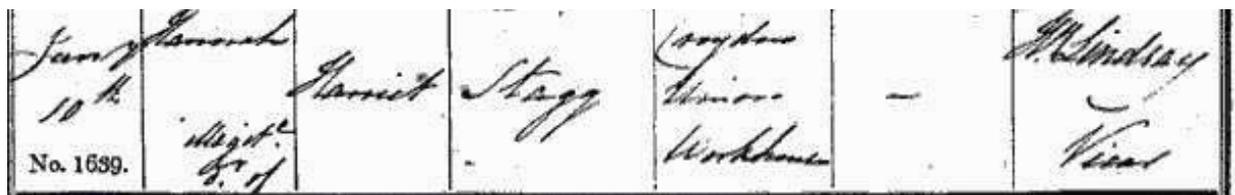


We know nothing about our great grandfather’s early life though given his father’s occupation and the fact that he had premises in the High Street they probably lived in reasonable comfort. As far as we know George never followed his father into the bakery trade. Our mother said that he worked as a gardener thus explaining the family ‘green fingers’ and passion for gardening, but all official records show his occupations as cattle dealer, cowman and labourer. From the few tales passed on by our mother George was considered a bit of a black sheep. According to her she and her siblings were sent upstairs when he visited since he was not considered a suitable person for them to meet! One reason given was that he drank, another, that he had ‘married a gypsy and been disinherited’ depriving our grandfather of his inheritance.

George’s first wife was Hannah Stagg (1844 –1894). He married her when he was just 20 and Harriet three years older. She was born in October 1844 in Croydon

Workhouse the illegitimate daughter of Harriet Stagg. At that time the workhouse had a Lying-in Room and provided the only midwifery and medical care in childbirth for many women at that time. Contemporary workhouse records show there were a couple of midwives and a Medical Officer. He had complained in the February of 1844 about the condition of the Lying-in Room saying that it was too small and badly ventilated and in his opinion was the cause of fever among the women. There were complaints also to the Board of Guardians that the system was being abused by women who asked for assistance when they had not made a proper submission for help previously.

As Hannah's mother, Harriet, was unmarried her situation was different. She would have had to go to the workhouse. Nothing is known about why she was admitted as there are no extant records of admissions and discharges for this period and unless an inmate brought themselves to the attention of the Board of Guardians, usually for some misbehavior, nothing about them was recorded in the Minutes of Board Meetings which are all that remain. Clearly however she was not alone in her predicament since the Baptismal Register of the local Parish Church show that Hannah was one of three babies of unmarried mothers christened on the same day Friday 10th January 1845<sup>1</sup>.



Hannah Stagg's entry in the Parish Register

It has been impossible to find out much about Hannah's mother except that her name was Harriet and her parents were William Stagg and Hannah Nicholls. From other family trees it appears that Hannah's father was a Waterman. They lived in Croydon for much of their married life and most of their children were born there so it is likely that she was too. Other Staggs also lived in Croydon at that time including one who was responsible for supplying goods on at least one occasion during the relevant period to the Workhouse. She was obviously very poor as she not only gave birth to Hannah in the Workhouse but was an inmate there in 1841. If the age information on the 1851 Census is accurate she was quite old (39) when Hannah was born. She continued to live in Croydon after Hannah's birth working, according to the 1851 Census. in a Washing Factory. However, by 1871 she was again an inmate in the Workhouse with a notation by her name saying 'formerly left baby'.

We do not know how long Hannah stayed in the Workhouse but given the difficulties of a single mother bringing up an illegitimate child at that time she probably

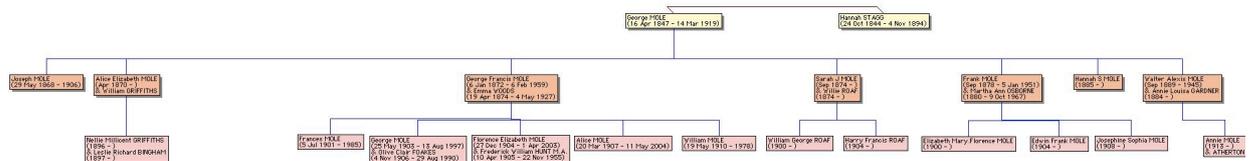
spent her first few years there. At some point things improved slightly since by the time she was six, she was living with her mother in Old Town. Her living conditions would have been poor since Old Town was a very overcrowded area and there were four families in the building. At that time Harriet was working in a laundry with Hannah being described as a 'scholar'. A decade later Hannah, aged 16, was working in Croydon as a general servant for an Elizabeth Bullen, a retired Stay Maker, so for an illegitimate child born in a workhouse she was doing well.

Although they married in Croydon George and Hannah spent the early years of their marriage in the nearby village of Beddington. Later they moved back to Croydon and finally, sometime between 1881 and 1885 to London. They had at least seven children, the first five were all born in either Beddington or Croydon, the last two in West Ham, London. Their first child, Joseph, was born only a couple of months after their marriage. George Francis, our grandfather was the third child. Hannah died at the end of 1894 from 'TB and exhaustion' by which time most of the children were grown up and independent.

Four years after Hannah's death George remarried to a Sarah Ann Pearson whose father is described as a China and Glass Dealer. Although 40 she was still a spinster. However, in neither of the 1901 and 1911 censuses were they recorded as living together. In 1901, George and his youngest son Walter are living as boarders in the household of Mary Alexander while his wife is listed under her maiden name as a housekeeper to her widowed sister. In 1911, George is alone while his wife is listed as living with her sister. George survived until after the end of the First World War dying, aged 71, in Leytonstone Workhouse of senility and bronchitis. Emma Mole, our grandmother, registered the death showing there was contact between our great grandfather and grandparents.

## Grandparents

### George Francis Mole (1872 – 1959)



All three of us Hunt children have some recollections of our Mole grandfather and our aunts and uncles. We know that little contact was maintained between Florence and her father for many years because of his disapproval of her further education ambitions and becoming a missionary. She did though keep in touch with her brothers and sisters especially Alice and her young daughter Doreen and of course her favourite brother George in Australia – they wrote to each other regularly and late in life she visited him and his wife there.

Grandfather George was born in 1872, the middle child of seven. We know almost nothing about his early life. They were unlikely to have been well off since his father was a cowman and labourer. In the 1881 census George Francis was listed as a scholar, schooling by then had become compulsory although not yet free. Then at some point between 1881 and 1885 the family moved from Surrey to London where they then stayed. George began work as a Crane Boy at Beckton Gas Works, Greenwich, the largest such works at that time.



Beckton Gas and Product Works and surrounding area in the 1890s

This may be where he came to know Will Thorne, a British trade unionist and activist

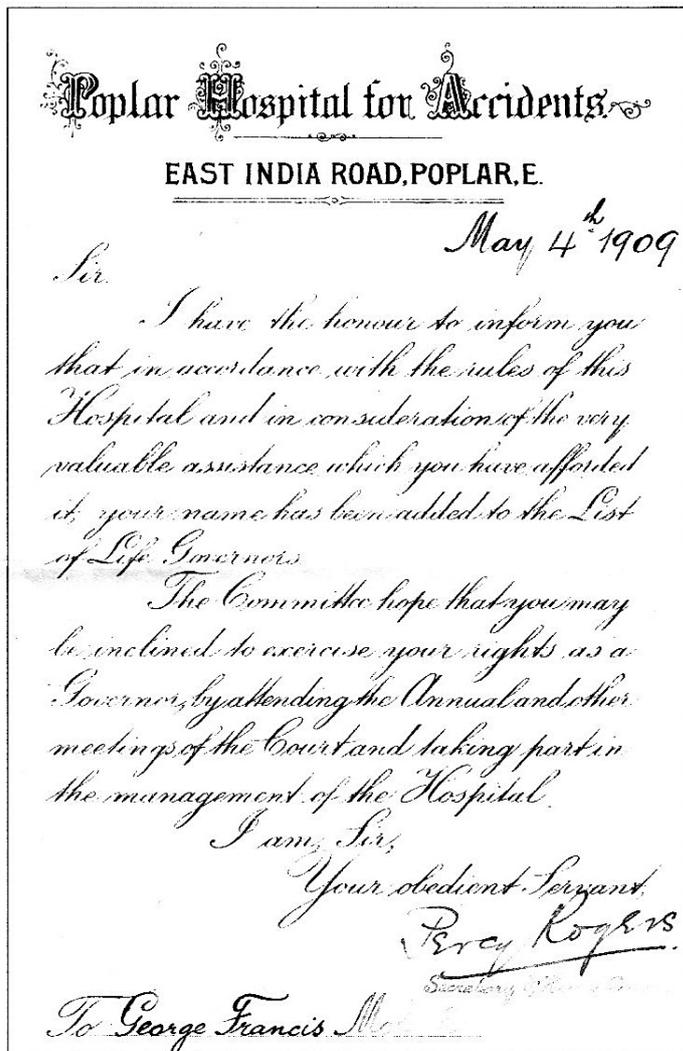
who also worked there during this period. Will Thorne later became a founding father of the Trade Union movement and one of the first Labour Members of Parliament. At 16 George went to work for William Webster, on a major Thames project at Crossness where, at the age of 21, he obtained his 'full ticket'. He worked on the construction of the old Canning Town Bridge and Folkestone Harbour. He became more skilled moving from being a Chemical Labourer (1891) to Engine Driver (1897) to Crane Driver (1901). His last employer was the Redpath Brown Company, (structural steel manufacturers and constructional engineers) based in East Greenwich. He retired from that job in 1947 aged 75.

Grandfather Mole was a founder member of the National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers which he joined aged 17 at its first meeting in Canning.



Gas workers in Peckham

He remained a committed union man all his life and 'devoted all his spare time to promoting and strengthening the cause which brought to him many interesting experiences spoken of and related with pride almost to his last days'. These included organizing committees and arranging street demonstrations. In 1949 the union presented him with a medal at its Diamond Jubilee Dinner. He was also a keen fundraiser for hospitals and was made a Life Governor of Poplar Hospital, an early medical facility opened in East India Dock Road in 1855. The hospital was established and funded by dock workers.



After his retirement he was for a time, chairman of the West Ham Trades and Labour Council. His main hobby was gardening. He was a member of the South-West Ham Horticultural Society which 'invaded the quiet little village of Rainham in 1920' when it bought up land from Bight's Farm. Grandfather bought half an acre in Lambs Lane where he grew vegetables and flowers. We visited him there on at least one occasion and Jennifer remembers the amazing lavender hedge which grew there.



George with Florence



Gold medal

In 1922 he was awarded the Gardening Illustrated medal which John has in his keeping.

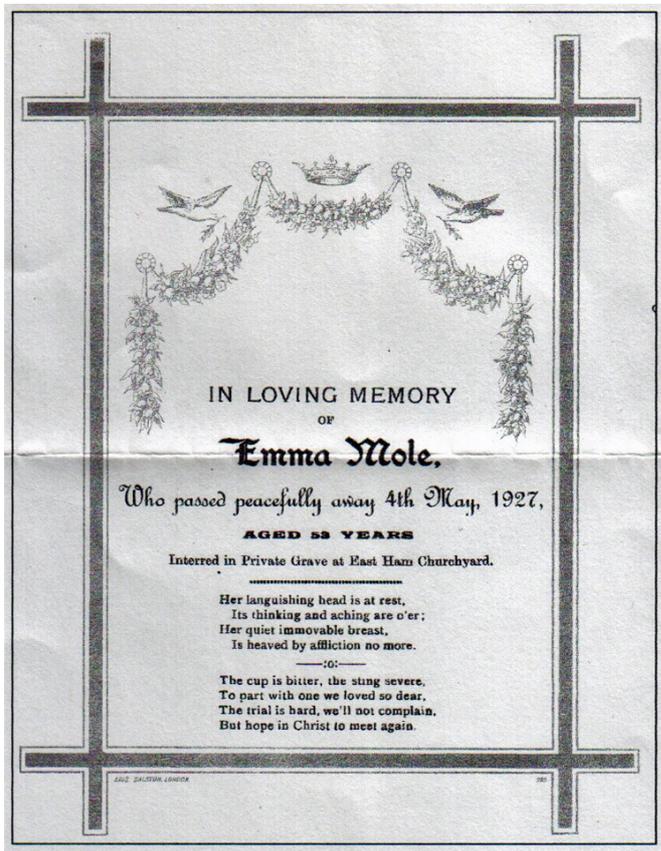
In 1933 Rainham Smallholders and Horticultural Society was formed, (now the Rainham Horticultural Society) and grandfather was elected to its committee. He continued to participate in the Society for many years and won a lot of prizes at the annual show. The year before he died he was made an Honorary Life Member.



Emma, in early and later life

He married Emma Woods (1874–1927) on December 18th 1897 in the St. John Baptist Parish Church in Folkestone. Emma was born and brought up in Plaistow. The way that her birth certificate is documented shows that she was probably the illegitimate daughter of James Garret Woods and Emma Roworth her father probably being already married with one child. Although her mother, and James' wife had the same first name birth records of Emma's siblings suggest that James remained living with our grandmother rather than with his wife. Emma attended school then became a domestic servant. Although her parents lived in Plaistow her father was born and brought up in Kings Lynn, Norfolk.

Emma according to Florence was a marvelous needlewoman and cook. In none of the official records does she have any profession or occupation. In her early photographs one can see how attractive she was but in the photo taken just before her death she looks older than her years. Jennifer remembers Florence, her mother saying that Emma knew members of the Cadbury family and it was through them that she learned how to make sweets such as the toffee and humbugs that she made for us on Bonfire Night. It is said too that she was related to Will Thorne's first wife and it may be through this connection that she met her husband.



Despite both being brought up in West Ham our grandparents got married in Folkestone with the marriage being registered in the district of Elham. This was probably when Grandfather was digging out Folkestone Harbour. The fathers' names and professions are given as: George Mole, Cattle Dealer and James Woods, Labourer. George and Emma had five children: Frances (1901), George (1903), Florence Elizabeth (1904, our mother), Alice (1907) and William (1910). Emma was interred in a Private Grave at the Norman Church East Ham Churchyard which was said to have been the Mole family grave for three generations although it is difficult to reconcile this with the fact that records show it was only the preceding generation that had moved to London.

George was a strict father. Florence used to say that she was told not to play outside in the street and when she did so would be warned by the other children of her father's approach. He was totally opposed to alcoholic drink and card playing. He certainly seems to have born a grudge against his father, who was the eldest son, for 'losing his inheritance'. From his work history and involvement in union activities it is clear that he worked very hard and certainly our mother never described any real poverty. He used to repair all his family's shoes and had a wonderful set of tools kept in immaculate condition. John has his tool box. The house they lived in, so Florence remembered, the front room was full of ornaments and our grandparents and the children well dressed.



Grandfather remained in the East End all his life. He maintained his interest in his major activities namely the union and gardening until his death. He never changed his attitude towards alcohol. We do not know if he owned his house but do know that after his death it was compulsorily purchased by the local council so that the area could be re-developed. He never visited the Hunt family although they did go and see him occasionally.

### **Conclusions**

The Moles were a surprisingly itinerant family moving from Essex to Surrey and finally to London. This was due probably to the craft they followed, that of broom making. Like the Hunts they moved from the countryside and agricultural labouring to town and city although apart from Joseph they stayed very much as blue collar workers. Certainly neither our great grandfather nor grandfather could have had the security in terms of work enjoyed by our Hunt forbears. So, although brought up in the same area of the East End our parents had somewhat different backgrounds.

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