

`Curly' - LBSC

The following article tells who LBSC really was.
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WHO WAS L.B.S.C?

By **Geoff Johnson & Ian Pollard**

Introduction

Lillian “Curly” Lawrence - pen name L.B.S.C. - was definitely not born with that name. His marriage certificate records his father’s name as Mathieson, but again this was definitely not his birth name. In fact, research shows that Curly’s surname change to Lillian Lawrence at some point in the early 1900’s was the second name-change in his life.

The authors are both ardent fans of LBSC. Geoff lives in Cheshire and is building ‘Speedy’. Ian resides in Oxfordshire and is building ‘Bat’. Both of us have spent much time researching our own family history and have become fairly experienced in the research practices needed and pitfalls to beware of. The genealogy hobby has ‘taken-off’ in recent years and much more information has become available during the last decade. Indexes, search tools and the Internet have all made a big impact. We had both read Brian Hollingsworth’s book about Curly’s life and independently considered that his suppositions of Curly’s childhood-years were very questionable. Each of us researched the subject alone and considered our own research methods to be sound, accurate and provable. We then came together through contacts in the 2½” Gauge Association. Once we met, comparing notes showed that our findings were identical. We then carried on working together, and have now produced this article. Certified birth, marriage and death certificates corroborate all the central facts, and pages of the relevant censuses were used to verify the ‘links’.

Finding a way through all these changes and bringing the story together has, to say the least, been challenging and what follows are details of our research that established provable details of LBSC’s ancestry and his early life.

Early Suppositions

Model Engineers know LBSC informally as ‘Curly’ and are aware that he had the ‘unusual’ name Lillian Lawrence; often with much speculation as to how this came about. However, until now, little has been known about his early life and whether Lillian Lawrence really was his birth name or one that he chose for himself.

During his life, LBSC wrote countless articles and columns or as he called them “words and music”. These included describing the construction of over 50 miniature locomotives. Occasionally these technical descriptions included glimpses into his personal life, although often these comments were contradictory and sometimes, as it turned out, completely misleading. Brian Hollingsworth pulled together all of the information then available in his 1982 biographical book “LBSC his Life and Locomotives”. However his assumption about LBSC's early life can now be properly investigated with information only now available: especially in the 1881, 1891 and 1901 Census returns. His suggestions about LBSC's early life were in fact misplaced.

In his book, Brian Hollingsworth suggests that LBSC was born Lillian Lawrence on 12th December, 1882 at 12 Devonport Mews, and that his mother Eleanor Everett used the name of Lawrence instead of her own to disguise the fact that she was unmarried: also that,

although male, LBSC had been mistakenly identified as a female and carried the name Lillian Lawrence for the rest of his life.

The authors of this article refute this assumption, as there is no record of a Lillian Lawrence in the 1901 Census of suitable age. Certainly not one born in Paddington and working for the London Brighton and South Coast Railway as would have been the case with LBSC. We were able to confirm those doubts relatively easily as the Register of Deaths shows that the poor Lillian Lawrence, who Brian Hollingsworth assumed was LBSC, in fact died from convulsions on 28th October 1883: she was only 10 months old!

Initial Findings

So if he wasn't born Lillian Lawrence, what were LBSC's origins? On his marriage certificate he gave his father's name as Henry Mathieson. Using this name as a search parameter in the 1901 Census we easily identified a family living at 17 Calmington Road, Camberwell and matching many of the facts mentioned by LBSC in his writings. The father's name was Henry Mathieson, occupation Chemist-drug; wife Eleanor; eldest son William aged 17, working as a railway engine cleaner; a daughter Clemence, and younger son Rudolph. (See Figure 1). From these facts it appeared reasonable to conclude that the eldest son William Mathieson was almost certainly LBSC. The census also records that William was born in Bow, London and from his given age would have been born in 1882 or '83.

<i>Census RG13, Piece 519, Folio 104, Page 29, Schedule 208 - St Marks Camberwell, 17 Calmington Road</i>							
Name/Surname	Relation to Head	Married ?	Age last Birthday		Profession or Occupation	Employer/ Worker/Own Account	Where Born
			Male	Female			
<i>Henry Mathieson</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>M</i>	43		<i>Chemist Drug</i>	<i>Own Account</i>	<i>London, Southwark</i>
<i>Eleanor Mathieson</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>M</i>		43			<i>London, Bloomsbury</i>
<i>William Mathieson</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>S</i>	17		<i>Railway Engine Cleaner</i>	<i>Worker</i>	<i>London, Bow</i>
<i>Clemence Mathieson</i>	<i>Daughter</i>			14			<i>London, Peckham</i>
<i>Rudolph Mathieson</i>	<i>Son</i>		6				<i>London, Kennington</i>

FIGURE 1: TRANSCRIPTION OF 1901 CENSUS

Working backwards, the 1891 Census shows the same family living at 35 Loder Street, Camberwell. Father, Henry Mathieson is a Lithographer, There is no Rudolph, as he has not been born yet. Key points that we clarify later are that William has the second-name initial 'M' and a birthplace of Mile End (adjacent to Bow). A further 1891 resident is Louisa Everett aged 60 – Eleanor's mother and Curly's Granny! Throughout his writings LBSC talks of his Granny more than any other person.

These two census entries seemed to clarify to us some of the mystery surrounding his birth, but there was a lack of confirmation from other record sources. In particular we could find no record of the birth of a William Mathieson around the relevant date, nor the birth of a Clemence Mathieson, nor is there any record of a marriage between Eleanor Everett and Henry Mathieson.

The Mathieson family to all intents and purposes seemed to have appeared out of thin air.

Finding the Hidden Clue

To solve this problem we trawled through the marriage records around the relevant period. We searched for any marriages involving an Eleanor Everett, as we knew this was Curly's mother's maiden name. Eventually we found that there was a Mile End Registry Office marriage on 6th December 1882 between Eleanor Adelaide Everett and a Morris Benjamin whose occupation was a Lithographer; the same as one of those ascribed by LBSC to his father. At the time of their marriage they were both living at 31 St Peter's Road, Mile End Old Town. Eleanor, who was born in 1856, gave her age as 24 rather than 26. Additional

facts about their relationship can also be gleaned from the 1881 Census which shows Eleanor Everett living with her widowed mother, Louisa, and that they had a lodger *Morris Benjamin*, employed as a 'tin-plate worker'. It would appear that Eleanor moved out to live with this lodger and then married him.

The Benjamins

The Records of Births go on to show that on 27th September 1883, ten months after their marriage, the couple had a son William Morris Benjamin, born at their marriage address in the Mile End Old Town Eastern registration sub-district. (See Figure 2). The eastern side of Mile End is adjacent to Bow and Poplar.

No.	When and where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name and surname of father	Name, surname and maiden surname of mother	Occupation of father	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
130	27th September 1883 Mile End Road	William Morris	Boy	Morris Benjamin	Adelaide Benjamin formerly Everett	Litho	M Benjamin Father 21st Mile End Mile End	27th September 1883	James Bromley Registrar	

FIGURE 2: CURLY'S BIRTH CERTIFICATE

On 17th January 1886 a daughter Clemence Benjamin was born to the same couple at 153 Queen's Road, Peckham. Could these children be the same as those described in the 1901 Census under the Mathieson family? Perhaps Morris Benjamin died and then Eleanor married Henry Mathieson with the children taking his name. This possibility is given some credence, as there is no entry matching that of Morris Benjamin in the 1901 Census. On the other hand in the period up until 1901 we could find no record of his death in the Register of Deaths. Nor could we find any remarriage of Eleanor Everett/Benjamin to Henry Mathieson. The Benjamin family seemed to have disappeared and been replaced by Mathiesons.

The Mathiesons

One possible solution is that for some reason Morris Benjamin changed his name to Henry Mathieson, and the whole family took on this new identity. Serendipity rules, and this theory can be substantiated from the 8th August 1894 birth certificate of LBSC's brother Rudolph. His surname was given as Mathieson and he has a second Christian name: Benjamin. Rudolph's father is Henry Mathieson. The certificate describes him as a Master Lithographer and lists as his full name *Henry Morris Benjamin MATHIESON*. Morris Benjamin and Henry Mathieson were indeed one and the same person. Rudolph's birth must have occurred about the time he started using his new name, and rejected the name of Morris Benjamin.

Further proof and substantiation of this name change comes from an unexpected source. LBSC has said that his father was often away from home and had died in Scotland when he was young. There must be some doubt about this as LBSC's marriage certificate records his father's name as Henry Mathieson and there is no mention of him being deceased. Tracing through the Register of Deaths shows that, rather than dying young, Henry Mathieson died in 1939 at the age of 80 (although recorded on the death certificate aged 83) at 80 Asylum Road, Peckham, the same house where Eleanor his wife died three years later. The death certificate records his name as "Henry Morris Benjamin, otherwise Mathieson": yet further proof of the change of name. Interestingly his occupation is given as 'former dentist': this was another occupation LBSC had mentioned for his father.

The Benjamin – Mathieson Link

So why did Curly’s father, Morris Benjamin change his name to Henry Mathieson? The records show that Morris BENJAMIN, was born in Southwark on 13th December 1858. His father was Joseph Benjamin a ‘General Dealer’ and his mother was Diana/Dinah Benjamin, formerly Davis. Joseph Benjamin and Dinah Davis were married in the Great Synagogue Chambers, Dukes Place, London on 9th September 1849 – “according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Jewish Religion”. By the 1861 Census they have a family of seven children and Morris now aged 2 has a 7-month-old brother. But in the 1871 Census the Benjamin family-group cannot be found! Nor can the individuals.

Much searching discovered that by the 1871 census Joseph Benjamin had died and his widow had remarried a Thomas MATHIESON! The Benjamin Children, including Morris, are all recorded with the Mathieson surname in this census. Thus Mathieson was the name of Curly’s father’s step-father. We present a simplified Family Tree in Figure 3. However as shown already, ten years later in the 1881 census, and just prior to his marriage with Eleanor, Morris has returned to his original Benjamin surname. Then another ten years later, husband and father Morris Benjamin fully adopted the name Henry Mathieson and abandoned his birth-name for the rest of his life. The reason for reversion to the Mathieson name may be that Morris Benjamin wished to distance the family and himself from the Jewish connection that was implied by his surname. Although he was born to a Jewish family Curly’s mum Eleanor, who he married in a Register Office in 1882, was not.

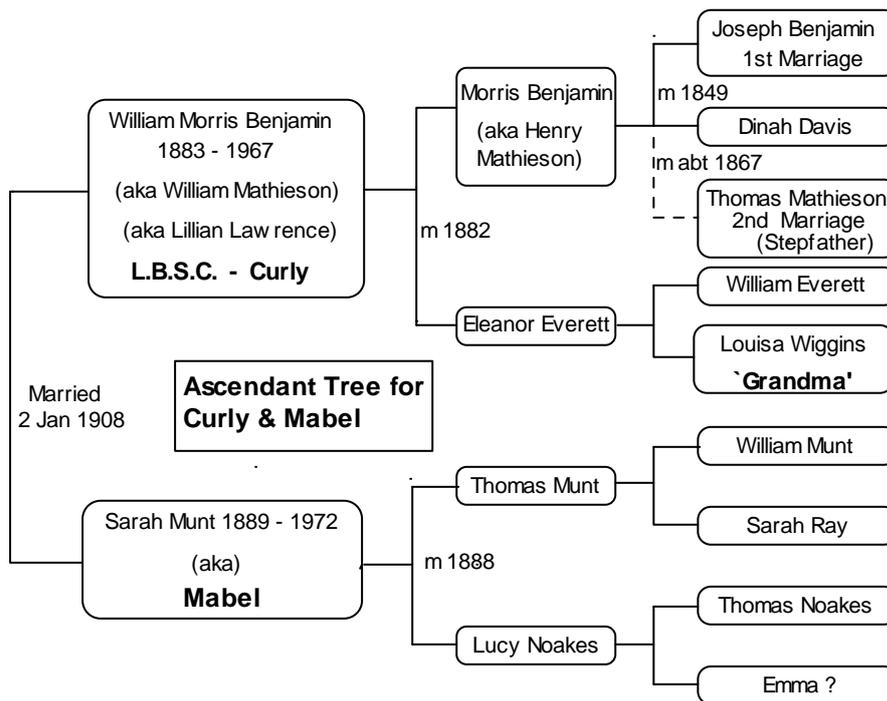


FIGURE 3 – FAMILY TREE

William Benjamin–Mathieson to Lillian Lawrence

The above information provides incontrovertible proof that LBSC was born on 27th September 1883 as William Morris BENJAMIN and that, after his father’s decision to change his and the family’s name around 1894, he became William Morris MATHIESON. It was only later that he took the name Lillian LAWRENCE.

So where did LBSC get the name Lillian Lawrence which he used for most of his adult life? Obviously it was his own choice and not a chance of birth that led him to assume that name. The change must have occurred sometime between May 1902, which is the last record of

William Mathieson in the LB&SC Railway archives, and his marriage in 1908, which took place under the new name of Lillian Lawrence. There is no obvious reason why the name was chosen but the name Lillian is only two letters away from William – Bill became Lill!

Lillian Lawrence the Enigma

There can only be speculation as to why LBSC decided to change names. It may have been at this time in his life that a feminine side of his nature came to the fore and he decided to change his lifestyle and name. Whether he chose the name Lillian Lawrence from the register of births, marriages or deaths or whether he had some knowledge of a Lawrence family is again open to speculation - perhaps along the following lines:

The 1901 census identifies a Lawrence family living just two streets away from Curly's family. The father, George Lawrence, is a Railway Policeman. It is highly possible that he operated at New Cross, and could well have been a colleague of Curly: in 1881 he had been a "plumber-tinman"; i.e. a bit 'handy'. More significantly in 1901 he has a 10 year old daughter called Lilian Lawrence. The name Lilian can be spelt with one L or two: the single-L version is by far the most common. Curly preferred the double-L, but that's more in-line with his real name, William. Lilian was 7 years younger than Curly, and no trauma can be found such as a young death. Did Curly just adopt this family's name and the daughter's Christian name? It seems we shall never know.

As mentioned above, returns from the 1901 census show that Curly was working as a railway cleaner. We searched the records of the London Brighton and South Coast Railway at the National Archives at Kew and these shed some light on his career with this company. Three sets of records could hold relevant information on that career; the first of these is the *Changes of Staff with Rates of Pay*. The first entry in these in the name of William Mathieson is when he joined the LB&SC Railway in the week of 7th September 1899, just before his 16th birthday. This records that he started as a cleaner at 2/- a day: at New Cross. In December 1900 his pay was increased to 2/2d per day and in June 1901 to 3/4d per day when he became a "washerout". The final entry in these records is for May 1902 when his pay was reduced, along with several colleagues, to 3/- per day when he returned to being a cleaner. In this set of records there is no entry listing William Mathieson as either a fireman or a driver with the company.

The second set of records of interest lists *Engine cleaners passed as fireman and firemen passed as drivers*, these contain no entries at all for William Mathieson. The final set of records are the *Registers of staff* listing the careers of staff above a certain grade, for instance staff are entered into these records on promotion from cleaner to fireman. Again there is no record of William Mathieson in the grade of fireman or driver. It looks very much from these records that LBSC was never in fact a fireman or driver with the LB&SC Railway, although of course he may well have travelled on the footplate as a cleaner training to be a fireman. This observation gives support to Brian Hollingsworth's comment that virtually none of LBSC's reminiscences of the LB&SC railway are described directly, but are impersonal descriptions. We of course made checks to ensure that there were no entries in any of the records related to a Lillian Lawrence.

The change of name and lifestyle may well have caused some sort of rift in the family. We have both concluded that 'all was not right', and if one reads between the lines of Hollingsworth's book he does too. There are intimations that Curly had little to do with his parents. He certainly spoke much about his 'Granny', and available diaries indicate normal connections with brother Rudolph and Mabel's family in later years.

Curly also mentions needing to find a new job to earn more money, perhaps a sign that he

needed to leave home and make his own way in the world. He makes few references to his father and, where he does, they seem to infer that he has died. Many of Curly's references to his own life seem to be making it either hard to track his past or were perhaps aimed at developing the new identity.

Among the few references LBSC makes about his family are his "Scottish ancestors". In the opening paragraphs of 'Mona' construction he implies that he is half Scottish, and mentions a tendency to meanness. He also refers to having married a Scottish lassie. The first of these inferences has only one piece of evidence to support it. Whilst his mother and father were both of straightforward London parentage, we have established through censuses that Curly's Step-Grandfather Thomas Mathieson does seem to be of Scottish descent. It seems that Curly either took this fact as a convenience or did not know the details about of his real grandfather Joseph Benjamin. Curly's wife Mabel certainly had Scottish 'connections': she was born there, but had English parents!

The Munts

With Mabel there is yet another name-change! 'Mabel' was born at Maryhill near Glasgow, but her parents Thomas Munt and Lucy Noakes had both been born in Islington. They moved north of the border in the late 1880's and married at Maryhill. Their first child was registered as Sarah Munt, born 2nd January 1889. They went on to produce Emma in 1890 and Alice in 1894. By 1901 the family had returned to Rotherhithe in 'the big smoke' where a young Thomas had been born.

By 1908 one of their daughters had set her heart on our hero. The couple were married on 2nd January and she called herself 'Mabel', ----- but Thomas and Lucy Munt did not have a daughter Mabel! The wedding date was exactly on Sarah's birthday and the bride's age given as 19 – exactly right for Sarah on that day. A witness to the wedding was James Noakes, younger brother of mum Lucy. Sarah had become Mabel! She could certainly claim to be Glaswegian although she only lived there for about ten years. We found the birth records for Sarah and Emma relatively easy to find, but searching for baptisms in the Glasgow area appears to be daunting. It could be that Sarah was baptised with a second name. Perhaps a Scottish ME/Genealogist can take this one on-board!

Children

To the best of anybody's knowledge Curly and Mabel had no children. It may be that they didn't want any, but Curly periodically mentions youngsters, including a niece. Indeed there are many indications that both Curly and Mabel were very fond of children. We have attempted to track any likely births with early deaths to no avail. Stillbirths are another possibility, but it is impossible to access records unless one is of the direct line – and there is no direct line!

Other Family Members

Curly's sister Clemence married Leo McDowell at Camberwell in 1916. Leo had been born in Leeds in late 1891. His mother died the following year and it seems his father who re-married put him into care. Leo was in a 'home' in 1901 and was then seemingly shipped out to Canada. He enlisted with the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force in 1914 and came back to fight the Great War, whence he presumably met-up with Clemence who would have been in her late 20's. Before joining up Leo was a 'Loco fireman' and perhaps LBSC also gleaned some information from this source.

Brother Rudolph also married in 1916 to Beatrice Sansom. He lived to 94 and died in 1989.

The Hollingsworth Biography

The authors thoroughly recommend any reader who finds the subject to be of interest to read Brian Hollingsworth's book. It contains a wealth of good information about Curly and his designs. The foregoing only sets down the facts that can now be accessed 25 years after Brian struggled to find that 'hidden clue' as outlined above.

Conclusion

Although these new facts about Lillian 'Curly' Lawrence might be interesting, they by no means alter the debt owed to him in the field of miniature engineering. His ability to describe technical and constructional information in easily understood terms has rarely been surpassed. His "words and music", apart from some changes in nomenclature, remain as fresh as the day they were written. Perhaps it is a sign of this tremendous contribution that people are still interested in the life of this very private and somewhat elusive man - Lillian 'Curly' Lawrence -- otherwise William Morris Mathieson -- otherwise William Morris Benjamin.

The story is not complete and perhaps never will be. We would be pleased to hear from anybody who can shed any further light on this subject, or has any reminiscences to recount. It would be a shame if any information about this remarkable man were lost to posterity.

Acknowledgments

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We very much accept that this article is by no means the type of material that readers normally expect to be published in Engineering in Miniature. However, we hope that the purists amongst you will show forgiveness as the authors feel that, with LBSC's close association with model engineering magazines over so many years, this is a fitting place for publication. The Editor of Model Engineer declined the offer to publish this article!