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# FINDING THOMAS HARDY

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## Introduction

The quest to confirm rumours that my family are related to Thomas Hardy has been a burning ambition of mine for a very long time, but my research only started in earnest a few years ago. The reason I had left it so long was due to other distractions: raising a family and following my own career path as a writer among them. There was also the problem of not really knowing where to start or how to carry out ancestry research. Finally, the internet, a local Family History class, and television programmes like 'Who Do You Think You Are?' all made it possible for me to take the necessary steps to find out once and for all if Thomas Hardy is indeed a relative of mine. It has been an interesting journey, full of obstacles, twists, and turns. Not only did I uncover the truth, but I also discovered some fascinating and amusing facts along the way.

## Rumours

Since I was quite young there had been various comments about Thomas Hardy. I was probably about eight years old, certainly in my primary school years, when I first heard his name mentioned. I remember a conversation between my mother and her sister, my aunt, about the likeness of one of my brothers, Eric, to a Thomas Hardy. I was intrigued to find out who this 'Thomas' was, but only during my teenage years did I find out that he had been a famous writer and that he may be related to us. My mother explained that she remembered visiting the Hardy family home in the West Country as a young child. She hoped it would be a place where she would live one day because it was so beautiful and boasted watercress beds, which she loved. Watercress became a favourite vegetable of hers and it would often be included in the Sunday teatime salads that she was well known for.

My mother was born in 1921, so she would have been quite young when she made that journey to Dorset. As Thomas Hardy died in 1928, she was probably no more than about 7 years old. There is a possibility that she also accompanied her family from south London to attend Hardy's funeral, since some family members are known to have been there. Sometime in the 1990s, I wrote to the Thomas Hardy Society

telling them of my mother's story and asking if they could give me any assistance in helping me uncover the truth about my family links. They found my mother's story intriguing and were able to confirm that watercress was indeed grown in Dorset, but other than that were unable to offer any practical help in my quest. I realised then that my mother's story was no real proof that our family were related to Thomas Hardy.

### **The Start of the Journey**

It was the BBC television programme 'Who Do You Think You Are?' that sparked my interest again. This series was first broadcast in 2004 and gave viewers an insight into how to trace one's family tree. It was both fascinating and inspiring to see how experts carried out their research. These programmes didn't just find out names and how people were related but were able to show other interesting facts that often shaped families' destinies. It would uncover dark secrets or very emotional events that revealed an unknown past. This really inspired me to continue researching my possible connection to Thomas Hardy and to find out what characteristics or traits my own family may have in common with the famous writer. The search was also helped by the internet and when Facebook came along it helped me make connections with my extended family who are now living in many different parts of the UK and abroad. I told them of my intention to find out the truth about our famous relative but explained how I was struggling to find out where to start. Most of the family members that would have still been alive during Hardy's time were no longer with us. This included my mother and all her siblings. Then one of my second cousins alerted me to some items her grandparents (my uncle and his wife) had come across when carrying out their own research into our family tree during their retirement years.

The items included a birth certificate for my maternal grandfather, his marriage certificate, and a photo of my maternal great-grandmother and great-grandfather (see Figure 1). These documents proved invaluable. The photograph was particularly useful as it had handwritten notes, describing who was in the photo and a list of their children's names. Under the photo of my great-grandmother, an inscription reads: 'Caroline Granma Floyd, Nee Hand of Piddletown, Dorset, cousin of Thomas Hardy'. The photo is dated 1889. The inscription under the photo of my great grandfather states: 'Thomas Floyd, grandad'. Again, whilst the photograph wasn't official confirmation of my family link it still gave me some leads to help take the next step forward. My mother's maiden

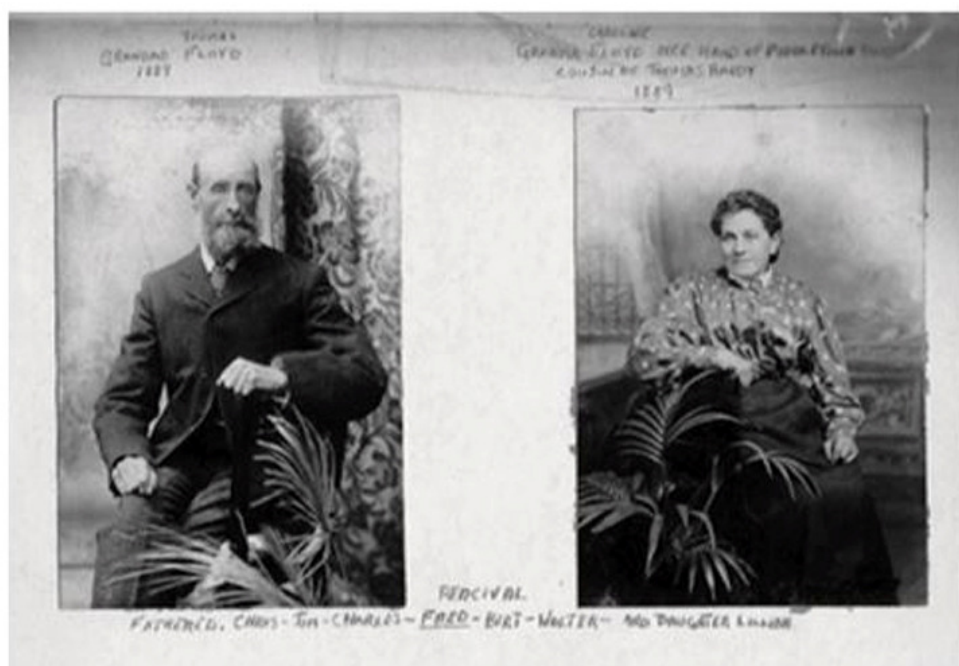


Figure 1. Great Grandma Caroline Floyd (Nee Hand) with Great Grandad Thomas Floyd. Photos contain the names of their children including eldest son Fred who was my grandfather. Handwritten notes on photo by Lesley Floyd, son of Fred Floyd. Image used with kind permission of the Floyd family.

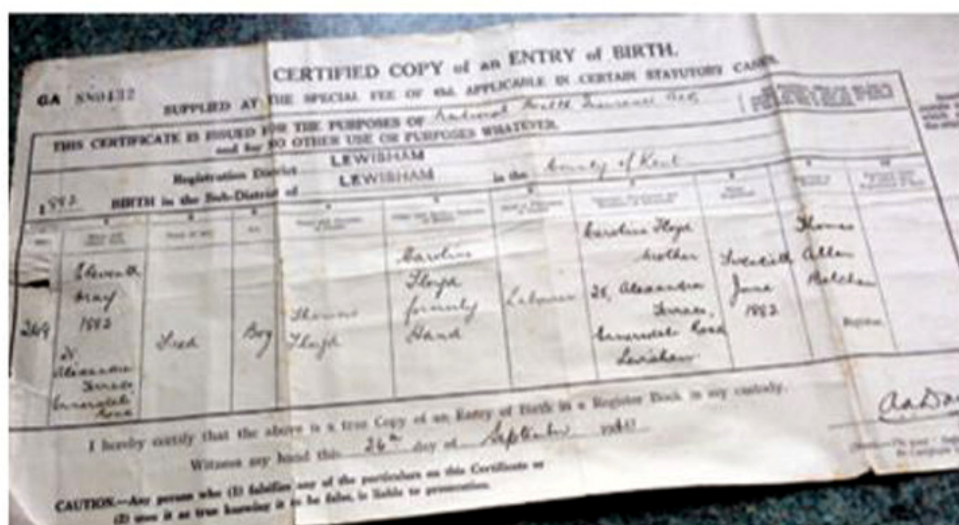


Figure 2. Original Birth certificate for Fred Floyd, eldest son of Caroline Floyd (nee Hand). Image provided by kind permission of the Floyd family.

name was Floyd, so I knew these documents were significant. There was a birth certificate for my maternal grandfather, Fred Floyd, which not only confirmed Caroline Floyd as his mother, but also recorded that Hand was her maiden name (Figure 2).

There was also a copy of my maternal grandparents' wedding certificate that now linked my grandfather Fred Floyd to his parents Caroline and Thomas Floyd (Figure 3).

Among other documents sent to me from my cousin was a copy of a family tree for Jemima Hand, Thomas Hardy's mother. It was taken from the book by Michael Millgate *Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited*. I managed to get a copy online and it became a great source for guiding me through the names and dates of various family members for both the Hand and Hardy families. But checking the Hand family tree I came across my first obstacle. Two of Jemima's brothers, William and Christopher (Thomas Hardy's uncles), had daughters named Caroline. Duplicating Christian names for children in families was quite common and many named their first born after the father or mother. But this was not very helpful to me when trying to establish which Caroline Hand was related to me.

### **Family History Class**


Then, by pure coincidence, in December 2015 a leaflet came through the door from my local council, offering places on a Family History course at our local adult learning centre. So, I signed up. The course involved five sessions at weekly intervals and, using the centre's computers, we were introduced to all the basic methods needed to track ancestors. This included accessing free websites to find out details on birth, marriage, and death records as well as census information dating from 1841 to 1911.

The main website we used was FamilySearch.org, a service run by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, known as the Mormon Church. It declares that billions of records have been collected over the years by its members and therefore much of the basic research you need to do when tracing ancestors is probably on this website. Most of the other students on the course were flexible about what sort of information they wanted to find and had no goal in mind. But I had a specific mission to confirm and track down the correct family link to Thomas Hardy.

### **Census Records**

It wasn't until the third session of the course that I came across the information I needed to confirm my first link. I entered the name Caroline Floyd and found her listed on the 1891 census as being the wife of a Thomas Floyd, with her birthplace listed as Dorsetshire and her birth

**CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF BIRTH**



ISSUED BY THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE  
Application Number: 969958-1

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REGISTRATION DISTRICT: **DORCHESTER AND CERNE**  
1855 BIRTH in the Sub-District of **Piddletown** in the County of Dorset

Column:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No.	When and where born	Time of day	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
	11 January 1855 Piddletown			Christopher Hand	Ruth Hand formerly Holland		William Hand Piddletown		Thos. Johnes Parish Registrar 1885	

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Births in the District above mentioned.  
Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 5th day of November 2018

**BXCH 642478**

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Figure 3. Caroline was the youngest daughter of Christopher and Ruth Hand (Thomas Hardy's Uncle and Aunt) born in 1855. Image from Author's Collection.

year as 1855. Cross-checking with the Hand family tree from Michael Millgate's book, I was able to verify that Christopher Hand was her father and her mother was Ruth Holland.

Dates for the other Caroline Hand (William Hand's daughter) did not tally with the dates of Caroline Floyd's marriage and census information of 1891. This confirmed that the Caroline Floyd born in 1855 was the correct Caroline and that she was linked to Thomas Hardy via the Hand family (Figure 3).

But there was one further thing that I was curious to know. The 1891 census had Caroline Floyd living in Deptford, south London, and I needed to know how she ended up in London from Dorset. Interestingly, most of my own family who are connected to Caroline lived in south London too, including myself. I was born in Lewisham, not far from the address given on Grandad Fred Floyd's birth certificate. These were positive indicators that I was on the right track. Further searches of earlier census information revealed that Caroline had left home at 16. The 1871 census listed as being a servant in Weymouth and living with the Thoma family, which included a George Thoma, Head of Household (25 years) and a Professor of Music, along with his wife Martha Thoma (29 years) and daughter Madeline Thoma (age 10 months). Moving forward to the

census of 1881 Caroline is listed as working with a different family, this time in south London, and she is recorded as being a Cook. This is obviously when she re-located from Dorset to London. The Head of Household was George Barclay, a Wholesale Druggist, along with his wife Charlotte and their five children Sidney (21), Basil (18), Alice (25), Lucy (16), and Edith (14).

Checking the 1891 census again I noted the full details on the entry. Caroline Floyd (nee Hand) is married to Thomas Floyd, a widower with three older children living with them. These are James (19), George (16) and, Charles (14). I've assumed they are Thomas Floyd's own children, as their place of birth is recorded as Yorkshire and not south London as for the younger children are. The four younger children listed included Fred, aged 8, who I now know is my maternal grandfather, as well as Christopher (6), Percival (4) and Arthur (1). Fred Floyd's age of 8 years ties in with the birth certificate sent to me by my cousin. Census forms are generally recorded in March, which explains why Fred would've been logged as being 8 years instead of 9 years old for the 1891 census. His birthday is 11 May 1882.

### **The Hands**

It became obvious that my family are related to Thomas Hardy. The Family History course had come to an end, but I was addicted to researching my family tree and there were a few questions that remained. It wasn't just about finding dates and names but trying to find out the personal stories behind the information I was gathering. To enable me to continue I registered with the website Ancestry.co.uk (<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/>) and this gave me access to far more information than some of the current free websites will allow. There are lots of valuable details to be gleaned from birth, marriage, and death certificates, so I also needed to apply for official copies. These certificates must be ordered from the General Register Office (GRO) website (<https://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>). This is a government website and the main source for obtaining authorised copies of birth, marriage and death certificates. Some genealogy websites offer this service, but for an extra fee. Over the next few months I applied for copies of birth, marriage and death certificates for most of the key members of the Hand, Floyd, and Hardy families. Ordering certificates is quite easy, but it is important to ensure that one has the correct information to locate the correct person. There is a lot of advice available on the GRO website explaining what

is needed, with detailed guidelines to help. I was able to gather much of the information I needed, such as Index references, via the Ancestry website.

I remained intrigued as to why my great grandmother Caroline had left home at 16. Therefore, I decided to look back at census information for the years before she left home in 1871. The 1861 census when Caroline was just 6 years old revealed that her mother Ruth Hand was absent from the census records for that year. Caroline's brother George was also missing from the 1861 census. I knew from reading Michael Millgate's Thomas Hardy biography that Christopher Hand, during a drunken rage, had beaten up his pregnant wife, so my thoughts were that perhaps she had walked out of the family home. But then I noticed on Jemima Hand's family tree in Millgate's book that Ruth had died in 1859. I also noticed that one of Caroline's younger brothers, George, had likewise died a year earlier in 1858 at just 12 years old. I ordered copies of the death certificates for both Ruth and George and discovered that both had died as a result of bowel complications. Ruth's death certificate recorded an ulceration of the bowel and haemorrhage as cause of death, whilst George's certificate recorded inflammation of the bowel. Poor health was common at this time as was a high child mortality rate. Families also tended to be large; at least 6 children were recorded as belonging to Caroline between the 1891 census and 1901. I felt sad to discover that she had lost her own mother at such a young age; perhaps this explains why she was able to accept Thomas Floyd's older children living with them when she married him.

Caroline's father Christopher, a widower from 1859, subsequently found another partner, Fanny Applin, who took on the care of his children. Fanny and Christopher Hand were married on 7 November 1864. (7 November is also my own birthdate!) The next recorded census for 1871 lists Fanny Applin as Fanny Hand. Caroline is not listed on this census, which means she had by this time left home. But Caroline's brother Frederick, now 28, was still at home along with Alfred, now 19. There is also a new son, James Hand, added to the list of family members. Also recorded as living with them is Christopher's 63-year-old brother Henry Hand. By the time the 1881 census is produced both of Caroline's brothers have left home and the only child remaining is James Hand, Christopher and Fanny's child. Henry Hand, now 74, is also listed as still living with them. Sadly, Henry died on 2 November 1883 with the cause of death on the certificate simply stating 'Old Age'. The death



certificate also records as present at the death 'Sister in Law Fanny Hand. Puddletown'. Fanny died of Bronchitis in 1888 at the age of 62. Her son James was present at her death.

### **William, Henry, and Christopher**

The Hand brothers, Henry, William, and Christopher, were known for their excessive drinking habits. During my ongoing research, I discovered that both Henry and William had found themselves on the wrong side of the law as a result of their bad behaviour. Prison records reveal that on 24 June 1869, Henry Hand was arrested for being drunk and disorderly. He was fined five shillings plus six shillings costs. He also received a sentence of seven days in prison and was released on 30 June 1869. He was 63 years old and listed as a widower with one child.<sup>1</sup> William Hand was arrested on 1 September 1847 for Breach of the Peace. He was given six months, but was released early on 18 September. He was 37 years old. On discharge it was noted that he was "Found Lunatic".<sup>2</sup>

### **Mission accomplished**

By the time I had completed my quest to establish that I am related to Thomas Hardy I had also found that I knew very little about the great man himself. The work of Thomas Hardy had never been introduced to me at school or even when I went back to University as a mature student, aged 34, in 1984. I realise now, at the age of 68, I have a lot of catching up to do and I am very keen to read as much as I can about my famous relative. I've made a start, of course, by reading biographies such as Michael Millgate's *Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited* and Claire Tomalin's *Thomas Hardy: The Time-Torn Man*. I bought so many others that, in fact, I had to purchase a separate book cabinet to accommodate them.

With the reading I have done so far, and having joined the Thomas Hardy Society and a Thomas Hardy fan club on Facebook, I have gained a sense of Hardy's character and I feel a real connection to him. Some of his traits I recognise in myself and other members of my family. They may just be coincidental but nonetheless they are there. For example, his passion for music and love for animals, his sensitivity to criticism and shyness, and his want and need to be accepted into a higher social class. The pedigree of his own family mattered to him and early in his life his mother Jemima, even though she had come from humble beginnings "wanted to keep them from mixing with those she considered socially inferior".<sup>3</sup> It was the same for my own mother. She encouraged us to do



*Family gathering in London October 2018. Relations of Thomas Hardy, related to the Hand Family. Photo by Bill Weedon, with permission for use by the Hardy Society Journal.*

well and took a great interest in our education and was particularly proud when I received my MBE in 1997.

Jemima was obviously a key influence in Thomas Hardy's life and it is his mother that provides the biological link to my own family. But it seems Thomas Hardy himself was reluctant, with a few exceptions to acknowledge his connection with the Hand family and his interest in ancestry concentrated mainly on the Hardy branch of his family tree. Whilst I feel a connection with Thomas Hardy, I have enjoyed finding out about the Hand family that I am directly related to and admit to having some affection for those members who were perhaps a little rougher around the edges than were the Hardy clan. There are shared themes with my own wider family. For example, many of them are in the building trade and associated professions. I don't know many, apart from myself, that became writers, but I do know some of the younger members are now taking a greater interest in Thomas Hardy and I can now pass down to them everything I have found out and make sure they don't miss out learning about the great works he produced.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> 'Descriptions of Former Prisoners', 1868–1971, Dorset History Centre, Ref No: NG-PR/1/D/3/3.

<sup>2</sup> 'Prison Registers', Dorset History Centre, Ref No: NG-PR/1/D/2/4.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 22.



CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF MARRIAGE

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number 9464519-1

1881 Marriage solemnized at *St. Christopher's Church* in the Parish of *Bermundsey* in the County of *SURREY*

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
6	August 1 <sup>st</sup> 1881	Thomas Floyd	34	Widower	General-fitter	167 Drummond Road	Richard Floyd	General-fitter
		Caroline Hand	26	Spinster	—	167 Drummond Road	Christopher Hand	Builder

Married in the *St. Christopher's Church* according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by *Banns* after *Thomas Taylor*

The Marriage was solemnized between us *Thomas Taylor* *William Brock* *Thomas Taylor*  
*Caroline Hand* *John Gunn*

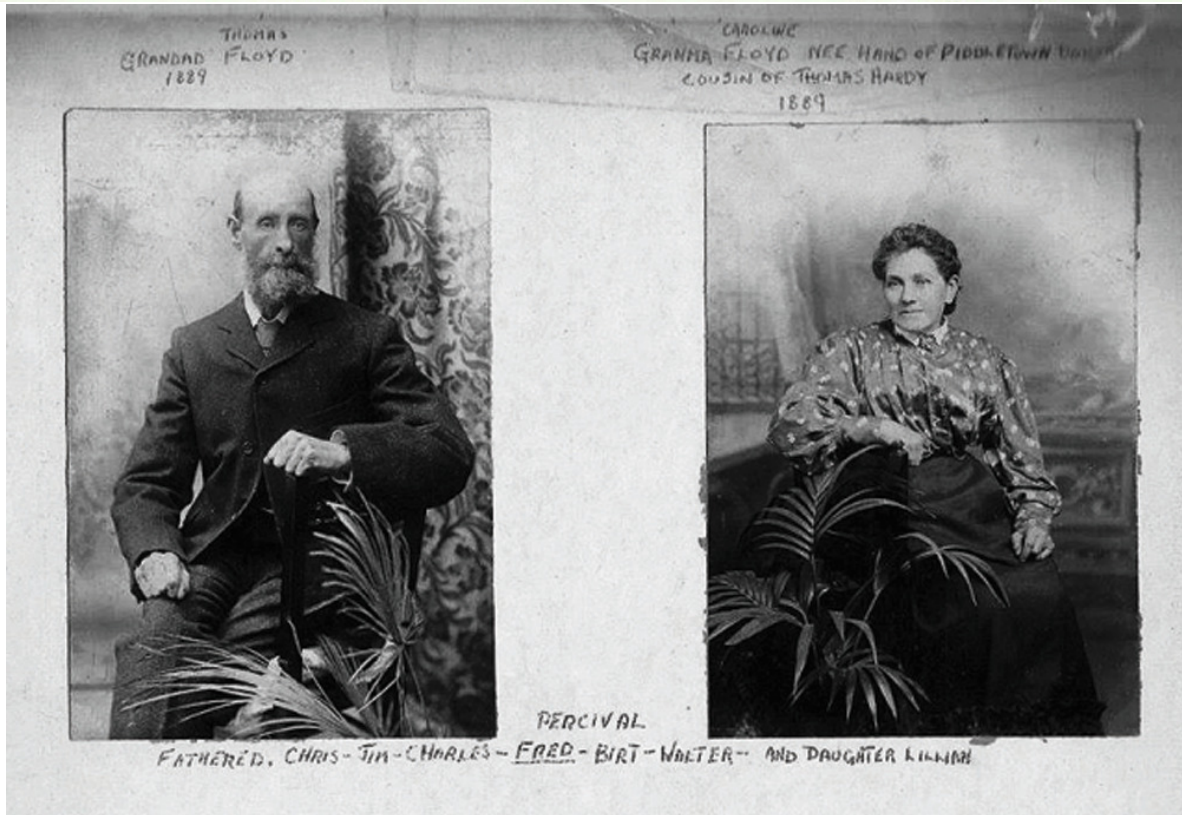
CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a register of Marriages in the Registration District of St Olave Southwark Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 11th day of September 2018

MXH 444310

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GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number 9649058-1

REGISTRATION DISTRICT	DORCHESTER AND CERNE
1855 BIRTH in the Sub-district of Piddletown	in the County of Dorset

Columns:- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
 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

30th Jan 1855 Piddletown	Caroline Jane	Female	Christopher Hands	Mrs Hands formerly Holland	Builder Master	Mrs Hands Mother Piddletown	March 1855	John Cox Registrar	
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CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Births in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 5th day of November 2018

BXCH 642478

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GA 880432

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SUPPLIED AT THE SPECIAL FEE OF 6d. APPLICABLE IN CERTAIN STATUTORY CASES.

THIS CERTIFICATE IS ISSUED FOR THE PURPOSES OF National Health Insurance Act and for NO OTHER USE OR PURPOSES WHATEVER.

Registration District LEWISHAM in the County of Kent

1882 BIRTH in the Sub-District of LEWISHAM

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No.	When and where born	Name (if any)	Name and Surname of Father	Name and Maiden Surname of Mother	Rank or Profession of Father	Signature, Description and Residence of Informant	When Registered	Signature of Registrar	Baptismal Name (if added after Registration of Birth)
249	Eleventh May 1882 25 Alexandra Terrace Innersdale Road	Fred	Thomas Floyd	Caroline Floyd formerly Hand	Labourer	Caroline Floyd Mother 25, Alexandra Terrace, Innersdale Road Lewisham.	Twentieth June 1882	Thomas Allan Belcham Registrar.	

I hereby certify that the above is a true Copy of an Entry of Birth in a Register Book in my custody.

Witness my hand this 26th day of September 1941

CAUTION.—Any person who (1) falsifies any of the particulars on this Certificate or (2) uses it as true knowing it to be false, is liable to prosecution.

(NOTE.—The word "Super" the Certificate is



**CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF BIRTH**



GIVEN AT THE **GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE**

Application Number **9681686-1**

REGISTRATION DISTRICT	LEWISHAM
1882 BIRTH in the Sub-district of Lewisham	in the County of Kent

Columns:-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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

249	Eleventh. May 1882 28. Alexandra & Winifred Emmetts Road	27 Fred.	Boy	Thomas. Floyd.	Caroline Floyd. formerly Hand.	Labourer	Caroline Floyd Mother 28. Alexandra Emmetts Road Lewisham.	27. Wontwell June 1882.	Thomas. Belau Registrar	
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CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Births in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 3rd day of December 2018

**BXCH 665225**

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