

## **“Members Hidden Gems”**

### **Andrew Harris**



As an only child, born in 1946 and living in High Wycombe, it was a little disturbing to be told at age 7, that my parents were not my parents. They were in their 50's as after the war, almost anyone could adopt a baby.



All they knew was that my real Mother was 16 when I was born, she came from Margate, her name was Beryl Turner, and my birth name was David Francis Turner. They didn't know who my father was, but suspected he was an American serviceman. My Mother had been told that she had to get rid of me and had been despatched to High Wycombe to have me and immediately to have me adopted, which happened when I was 7 days old.

I told my “parents” that it didn't matter, as I loved them. Six months later my “Father” died, and life was then a real struggle and a very lonely existence, living in a Council House on social security, with few friends.

We were so poor when I passed the 11 plus exam, I couldn't go to Grammar School with all the other children in my class the uniform was too expensive, and the school were told I couldn't accept a place if I passed. I vividly remember sitting on my own

in a classroom while all the other 23 of my peers were allowed home to tell their parents their good news. My “Mother” subsequently died in 1986.

However, times change: O Levels, engineering apprenticeship, local politics, Becoming the 695<sup>th</sup> Borough Mayor of High Wycombe and the youngest in the Town’s history. World travel, CEO of a group of Companies and finding Probus.



In 2002 at a dinner party, one of the guests who spent his time investigating lost families convinced me how easy it was to check your history from microfiche records at the Council offices. Off I went next week and found my own birth record, and then going back 16 years I found my mother’s birth. Moving forwards for 18 to 24 years from that date I found her marriage to a Dennis Francis Robert Clifford when she was age 24.

Further detection and I then found that they had had 2 children, both girls, so hey ho, I had 2 half-sisters.

But what to do next, I checked with the local church, but they had no records of my family. The house she had lived in had been demolished. Directory enquiries next, but no record of a DFR Clifford. 3 weeks of wondering what to do next. Then my wife Yvonne (who was my girlfriend at that time) said, what if your father has died, why not check enquiries again to see if there is a

Beryl Clifford in the Margate area. Another check found a Mrs B Clifford and a telephone number. A sleepless night followed and then a decision.

The next day I rang the number, a lady answered. I asked if she was Beryl Clifford who had married Dennis Clifford and had two daughters Susan and Sharron. She said yes, but she also had Gary just after Susan and the Simon sometime after Sharron, with her husband dying in 1986.

I then stuttered my thanks as I realised that I was speaking to my birth mother, and I had 4 half siblings. I told her that I was checking my family tree and thought we may be distantly related. No problem my dear she said, I hope I have been able to help!!!!!!!

Next day I wrote to her, enclosing my adoption certificate, telling her I hoped she now understood the strange telephone call from yesterday and said I would leave it to her if she wanted to contact me.

The following day she rang me back in floods of tears saying she had thought of me all her life and always remembered my birthday. Then came the bomb shell, she had eventually married my father, who was a local lad, when they were both 24, so I had 2 full sisters and 2 full brothers. Francis was a family name for my father's family, and she had given it to me.

She contacted the four of them which was a massive shock for them and then followed a few days of frantic telephone calls from them to me. During the next two weeks we all met up in separate locations and finally I met my mother at my brothers' house in Margate. She arrived on a lambretta wearing a noticeably short white lace skirt with low cut matching blouse and wearing a round

white crash helmet and goggles. We got on well, but she said I couldn't publicise the story as she was 73 and had a 55-year-old boyfriend and me being 56 would be difficult to explain, as she had told him she was 60. She died 2 years ago and all 3 of us brothers carried the coffin.

I see my brothers and sisters regularly and I rejoice in having a family at last.



**Andrew Joined Probuc in December 2018**