

Leyshon family.

I have always known that my grandfather WILLIAM THOMAS LEYSHON had been a boarder in Cowbridge Grammar School in the late 19th century. Since he died about a year before I was born and my mother also died when I was quite young, I did not know much more about the Leyshon family.

When my youngest son, Matthew, was a pupil in the Lower School he helped to clear out some old cupboards in the library. There he came across a book dedicated "to the memory of DAVID JOHN LEYSHON". Matthew started asking questions. I had not heard of David John. On enquiry, it turned out that he was a younger brother of my grandfather who had also been a boarder at the school. David John died, aged about 14, whilst still a pupil at the school. The family story is that he died of pneumonia, following a chill caught during a cross-country run.

Later, as a member of an extra-mural class in the local history of Cowbridge, I helped to analyse the Parish Registers of Llanblethian, covering the baptisms and burials for the period 1840-1893. In so doing I came across a whole series of entries, relating to Leyshons - all children of David and Mary Leyshon of Pontypridd. These turned out to be brothers and sisters of my grandfather - a typically large Victorian family.

The baptismal entries were in three batches:

15th July 1880 - William Thomas (13 years old), Anne (12), David John (9), Alice Mary (6), Martha Jane (5), Edmund James (2).

14th September 1882 - Edward Robert and Margaret Helen - no dates of birth given in this entry.

29th September 1890 - Catherine Elizabeth (6), Edith Louise (4), Lilian May (2).

(Age at time of baptism in brackets)

Their father DAVID LEYSHON was born in Llangan in 1840. When he married MARY WILLIAMS (aged 17) in 1865 it was in Bethany Baptist Chapel in Cardiff. He was then described as a grocer. All their eleven children were born in Pontypridd. At the time of my grandfather's birth in 1867, David Leyshon was a commercial traveller.

The entries in the Llanblethian Parish Register describe David Leyshon as a brewer. What prompted a Pontypridd brewer to have all his children baptised according to the rites of the Church of England in Cowbridge? Did the then headmaster of the school, Revd MP Williams, put pressure on the father because his eldest son boarding at the school had not been baptised at the age of 12+? At that time it was customary, because of high infant mortality, to baptise children whilst still babies.

Why did he carry on doing so for all the younger children? The two younger sons did not attend Cowbridge School. My own idea is that even then Cowbridge was regarded as a more socially acceptable place especially for someone like a prosperous self made entrepreneur, who had risen from humble origins.

David Leyshon did not enjoy the company of his younger children for long. In 1897 he died, and was buried in Pontypridd.

Like so many researches into family history, this snippet raises more questions than it answers.

Liam Leyshon Ginn