

Chapter 4 Part 5 The 1910s

Reginald de Courtenay Welch at the Army College, Rowhills

My name is Emily Gunner, assistant matron at the Army College in Heath End. Let me carry on reading from my diaries. Where did I get to? I told you about the Army College students and tutors who were resident in 1911 and what happened to them later.

Then something very odd happened in 1911. Mr Reginald Welch, Principal of the Army College asked me if I would stay caring for his mother-in-law Mrs Compton for a few days?? He and his wife Mrs Adeline Welch had important business in London at the Courts for many days and the nurse caring for old Mrs Compton was away in Scotland for a funeral. There were two domestic servants at Sunningdale in York Crescent so the task appeared not to be too great. However I did know Mrs Compton was described as 'feeble minded'. Mrs Adeline Welch told me she had to complete the 1911 census form on behalf of her mother.

at this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature *Adeline Welch (on behalf of head)*

Postal Address *Sunningdale, Aldershot*

1	<i>Louisa Compton</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>widow</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>two</i>	<i>two</i>	<i>none</i>	
2	<i>Adeline Welch</i>	<i>daughter</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>married</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>one</i>	<i>one</i>	<i>none</i>
3	<i>Nurse to Head</i>	<i>nurse</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>Single</i>				<i>Hospital nurse 4?</i>
4	<i>Annie Taylor</i>	<i>servant</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>Single</i>				<i>Domestic servant</i>
5	<i>Maud Stone</i>	<i>servant</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>Single</i>				<i>Domestic servant</i>

This space to be filled up by the Enumerator.

Number of Registration District *36*

Number of Registration Sub-District *2*

Number of Enumeration District *4*

Name of Head of Family or Separate Occupier *M^{rs} L. Compton*

Postal Address *Sunningdale, York Crescent, Aldershot*

I knew the way from the Army College to York Crescent in Aldershot as I used to deliver documents to Cranmore House in Cranmore Lane. Cranmore House used to be the Military Department for the students rather than the Literary Department at the College although in 1919, the house was advertised as To Let. York Crescent was just slightly up the hill on the right.



UNFURNISHED.—Cranmore House, Aldershot; 3 reception rooms, 8 bedrooms, bath and offices, stabling.—Apply, T. White and Co., Ltd., Estate Agents, Union-street, Aldershot.

What a shock when I arrived. Old Mrs Compton had opened a large document chest, had emptied all the contents then ordered me to put them back! Her daughter's name before marriage was Adeline Charlotte Compton, born in 1855 in Sholapore, India. Mrs Compton was herself Louisa Gray Bridgens born in 1832 in Trinidad, West Indies with her father being a planter, a plantation owner.

I discovered a really distasteful document. I wanted to burn it but it was not my document to destroy. This was about the money that Mrs Compton's parents received from the British Government when slavery was abolished in British territories such as Trinidad.

	Enslaved Compensation
Richard Hicks Bridgens, a planter	£374 7/6d for 1 slave
	£1846 4/9d for 35 slaves
Maria Bridgens	£374 7/6d for 1 slave
	£1846 4/9d for 35 slaves
	£266 2/9d for 4 enslaved
Total	About £4706

It said that Richard Hicks Bridgens had inherited the plantation from his wife. He died in Port of Spain in 1846 so obviously never returned to his homeland. There was even a Slave Register belonging to the Bridgens.

<i>Bridgens for the Plantation called Saint Clair in the quarter</i>					
<i>The whole Number of Slaves brought forward from July 1st</i>					
					<i>Family of Jackson</i>
<i>Penaparte</i>	<i>Jackson</i>	<i>Negro</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>
					<i>Island of Trinidad</i>
					<i>Family of Grant</i>
<i>St. Paul</i>	<i>Grant</i>	<i>Negro</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1, 2</i>
					<i>Island of Trinidad</i>
					<i>Family of Gordon</i>

I hid all the slave documents at the bottom of the chest. Next, I saw a marriage certificate. When Louisa Gray Bridgens from Trinidad married Thomas Abingdon Compton in 1853, the profession of his father was Knight. What on earth did that mean?

Page 10.

1853 Marriage solemnized at *the Parish Church in the Parish of St. Marylebone in the County of Middlesex*

When Married	Name and Residence	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence at the time of Marriage	Rank or Profession of Father
26 th July 1853	Thomas Abingdon Compton	Full	Of Bachelor	Esquire	St Pancras	Herbert Abingdon Compton Knight
	Louisa Gray Bridgens	age 31	Spinster		St Marylebone	Richard Hicks Bridgens Planter

Married in the *Parish Church* according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by Licence or after

This Marriage was solemnized between us, *Thomas Abingdon Compton* in the Presence of us, *Louisa Gray Bridgens*

Henry Shaw
James William Sefton

The marriage of Bridgens' second daughter, Louisa Gray Bridgens, ended in sadness. The *Morning Chronicle* of July 30, 1853, reported that she married a lawyer, Thomas Abingdon Compton, of the Bombay civil service, on July 26 at Marylebone Great Church, London. Louisa was described as Louisa Gray, daughter of the late Richard Bridgens, a planter, "of the island of Trinidad," and the adopted child of the late Robert Gray, Esq., of the same place. Robert Gray, mentioned earlier in this work, was an Englishman who came to Trinidad in 1810 at 18, and died in 1838. He was the owner of the St. Clair estate just outside

The marriage of Bridgen's second daughter Louisa Gray Bridgens ended in sadness....she married a lawyer Thomas Abingdon Compton of the Bombay Civil Service on 26th July at Marylebone Great Church, London.

Another magazine cutting mentioned a sadness but what was the sadness? Her husband was listed in the East India register with his level of jurisdiction as a Civil Servant in Bombay.

1841	Archibald David Robertson, second	do	Surat
	George Grant, third	do	Poonah
	Thomas Abingdon Compton, second	do	Ahmedabad

There was also a cutting from the Bombay Times in 1862 which provided answers to my questions about the knight and the sadness. Old Mrs Compton's husband had drowned in a Bombay river when he was 42. It also said that Mr Thomas Compton was the son of Sir Herbert Compton, knighted by Letters Patent.

"Mr. Thomas Abingdon Compton, the judge of Poona, and second son of the late Sir Herbert Compton, was drowned on the 12th instant in the Moota-Molla river. The coroner's jury returned an open verdict of 'Found drowned.'

Next in the mound of papers was a bill from the London Charing Cross Hotel when 30-year-old widowed Mrs Compton returned to England with her two daughters Amy age 8 and Adeline age 7. It said in the documents that Amy and Adeline Compton were sent to a school in Portsmouth until they were nearly young ladies.

1871 England Census for Amy J G Compton					
Hampshire > Portsea > Landport > 43					
Amy J G Compton	Pupil	do	16	school	
Adeline J G Compton	do	do	15	do	



I never met Mrs Compton's other daughter Amy. She was married to Colonel Cochran and they lived in Kensington so were too busy to visit Aldershot. He was a Major in the 37th Regiment when they married in 1881 and he was a widower. He died in 1914.

Old Mrs Compton who was nearly 80 told me there was marriage trouble between her daughter Adeline and Mr Reginald Welch and that was why they had gone to London to court. I said nothing but I already knew this. Mr Welch left many documents on his desk, knowing that only he and I had a key to his study. I made sure nothing was revealed to others.

REGISTRATION DISTRICT				PORTSEA ISLAND				
1888 Marriage Solemnized at St. Jude's Church in the Parish of Portsea in the County of Hants								
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.
495	Dec. 22 1888	Reginald de Courtnay Welch	37	bachelor	Gentleman	6 Southwick Place Hyde Park Sq.	John Welch	Special Pleader
		Adeline Charlotte Compton	33	spinster	-	Templetown House Southsea	Abingdon Compton	Bombay Civil Service
Married in the Church of St. Jude according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by after Banns by me,								
This Marriage was solemnized between us, { R. de Courtnay Welch			in the Presence of us, { Louise E. Compton		J.S. Blake			
{ Adeline Charlotte Compton			{ G.H. Willis					

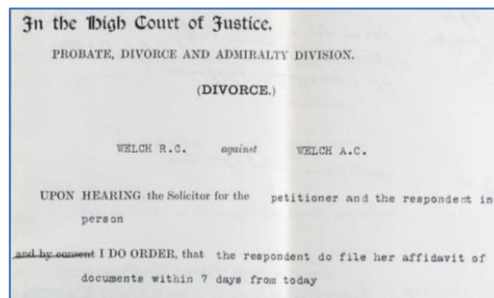
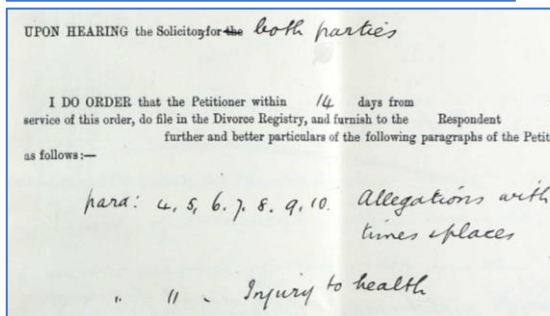
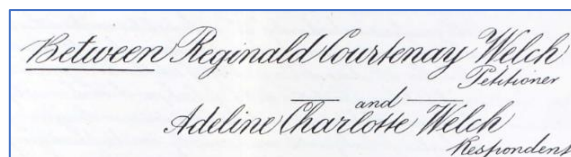
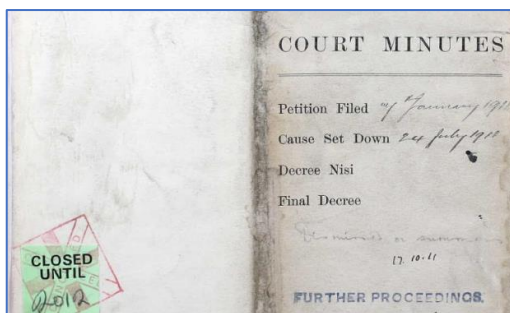
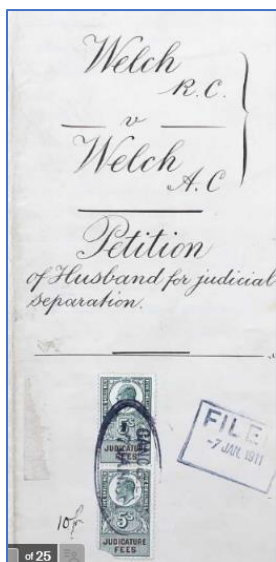
I found the marriage certificate of Welch and Compton in Portsea Island in 1888.

The butler at the Army College had a journalist friend who reported on Divorce cases and so tittle-tattle quickly came from the Divorce Courts to our servant's hall. The reporter said Divorce documents would not be released for 100 years. Fancy that!

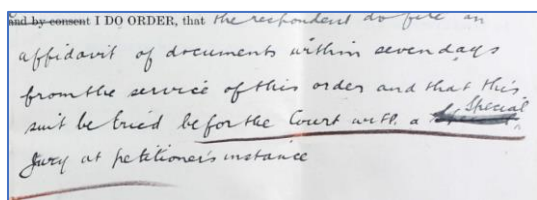
I had seen Mr Welch writing page after page about his marital problems, stating how abusive his wife was. He was a lawyer and so he knew how to present evidence to a divorce judge. His father was a Special Pleader, having a large law practice which took on many pupils. Mr Welch himself had been a law tutor at the Inner Temple. I am sure Mr Welch wasn't without money but he did not own the Army College freehold. He had it leasehold, house and land while it was still owned by Colonel Wilkinson Shaw.

Surrey, England, Electoral Registers, 1832-1962 for Reginald Courtenay Welch			
Guildford > 1912			
Welch, Reginald Courtenay	Army college, Heath end, Farnham	Leasehold house and land	Army college
Wells, John Henry	Woodlands, Row Hill estate, Hale	Freehold house and land	Rowhills

As a single lady, a spinster, I knew nothing about divorce but it seemed to me to all be one-sided. Was there another side to the story from Mrs Adeline Welch that was never heard? Could she afford to pay a lawyer to represent her own case? Did men get an easier time in the Divorce courts than women? It was called a Judicial Separation but what did that mean?



I had seen the one document from the High Court of Justice; it was twenty-five pages long. I did read some of the document while I was cleaning in Mr Welch's study and quite honestly, some of the adult words in the 'apparent accusations' from Mrs Welch made me blush. These accusations seemed vicious, malicious and venomous. Not only were there terrible accusations hurled at Mr Welch but about her son too. Unpalatable, if any of it was true.



"This suit to be tried before the Court with a special jury at the petitioner's instance." To me, this was another world.

The first paragraph was bad but many of the accusations sunk really low when others were mentioned. I knew the male tutors accused, I knew the woman accused of unacceptable friendship with Mr Welch and it felt fanciful.

As to paragraphs 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10.
1. From the month of January 1908 to the month of August 1908 at Cranmore House Aldershot in the County of Surrey the said Adeline Charlotte Welch habitually used violent and abusive language to your petitioner calling him a liar swindler and a brute and habitually and maliciously threatened to ruin him and the College.

"A blackguard, a thief, dishonest, cruel, a liar" then accusing Mr Welch's relations of "low conduct, fraud and dishonesty".

"... habitually used violent and abusive language calling him a swindler and a brute and habitually and maliciously threatened to ruin him and the College".

petitioner of adultery and threatened to denounce him.
97. That in a letter written about the end of the year 1910 the said Adeline Charlotte Welch threatened to get the College closed.

Were these 97 paragraphs of dates, times, places and accusations, truthful or fabricated?

Under paragraph 11 of the Petition.
98. The petitioner's rest has been broken, he has been and still is unable to sleep at night, he has also suffered from loss of appetite and energy and finds it impossible to concentrate his mind on his work and college duties, is worn out, and suffers from almost incessant headaches.

Certainly paragraph 98 seemed true that Mr Welch's health had become poor. I knew he was unable to sleep at night, suffered loss of appetite and energy, worn out and suffered from incessant headaches. Out of all of this, the most difficult sections to read were the accusations against Mrs Welch's son and trying to ruin his Army career.

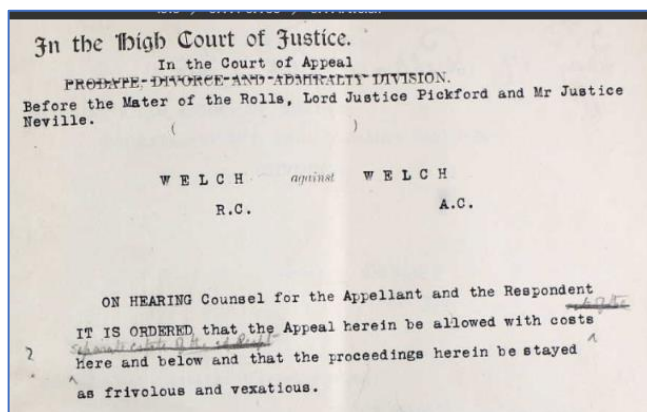
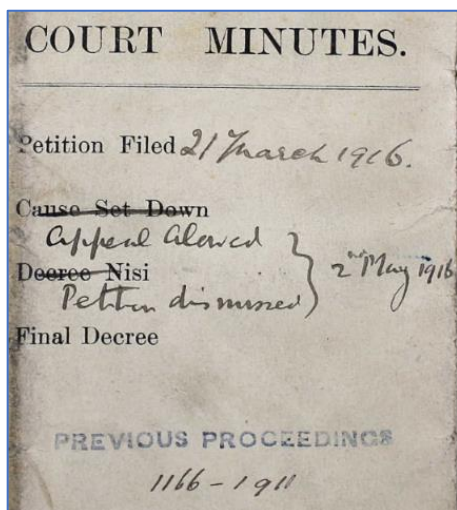
7. That during the years 1909 and 1910 the said Adeline Charlotte Welch has frequently threatened to ruin her said son Walter George Frederic Welch and make his career in the Army impossible.

Mr Welch had presented some twenty pages and Mrs Welch just one paragraph in her answer, that she never committed the acts of cruelty and she prayed that his Lordship would reject the plea from Mr Welch.

(1) That she never committed the acts of cruelty or any of them alleged in the said Petition.

It is difficult to be neutral with a case only presented by one side. My understanding is that even if a woman wanted to have a divorce, it had to be presented from the husband's point of view.

What was the 1911 outcome? There appeared to be some sort of settlement which both sides had to sign but then in 1916 it was back again to the Divorce Division of the High Court of Justice. All their fancy words "frivolous and vexatious" on court documents!



This time it was Mrs Welch wanting some restitution of the marriage but it was thrown out by the judge, with costs. Adeline had to pay £70, 7 shillings and 5 pence. It seemed to be all about money but there were pages and pages of mud-slinging in the document. Adeline claimed that she was made to sign the 1911 document under undue pressure, coercion and threats. One threat was that Adeline's mother Louisa Gray Compton who had suffered from a paralytic stroke would be taken away from Adeline. (I know that Mr Welch was paying for the rent for old Mrs Compton until she died in November 1911.) Mrs Welch claimed that she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

Mr Welch had to pay his wife £150 per year or one quarter part of his income, whichever was the greater. Mrs Welch claimed that the payments had stopped in 1914 "not paid one penny piece towards her maintenance" and she needed somewhere to live. The court documents quoted Section 19 of the Married Woman's Property Act of 1882 but what do I know about the law?

What a to-do! By 1914 Mrs Welch was living at Queen Anne's Mansions in London, then 60 Cromwell Road, London and then by 1918 she moved in to rooms in the Army College. It's all beyond me.

In 1919, the housekeeper said she needed more staff now that the Army College had expanded in Heath End.

UNDER-HOUSEMAID Wanted at once, three kept; age about 17; wage £18; usual outings and 4 weeks' holiday per year.—Apply Housekeeper, Army College, Heath End, Farnham.

KITCHENMAID Wanted at once, good wages; usual outings and 4 weeks' holiday per year.—Apply Housekeeper, Army College, Heath End, Farnham. a786

UNDER-HOUSEMAID Wanted at once, age about 16; wages £18; very good holidays.—Apply Housekeeper, Army College, Heath End, Farnham. 2209ac

HOUSEMAID Wanted, equal of two; under-housemaid kept; age not under 20; good wages and 4 weeks holiday in the year.—Apply Housekeeper, Army College, Heath End, Farnham.

I can leave all that for others to deal with. But, look what I have found falling out of my diaries. An 1898 photograph of the Army College tutors, gentleman boarders and Mr Welch the Principal.

ARMY COLLEGE, FARNHAM 1898



After all that reading of my diaries, I might treat myself to a Sunday matinée at the Queen's Avenue Cinema, with an eight pence ticket. Leah Baird is my favourite in these silent films. She played opposite Douglas Fairbanks, senior, a swashbuckling man to make any woman swoon. It's time to enjoy myself. It is quite a walk from the Army College to Queen's Avenue Cinema in Aldershot but I walk briskly and it gives me time to think.

QUEEN'S AVENUE CINEMA
 QUEEN'S AVENUE (NEXT TO SWIMMING BATH).
 (Under the direction of the Navy and Army Canteen Board.)
THURSDAY, FRIDAY, & SATURDAY, October 16th, 17th, and 18th. "GABY."
 Drama in 7 Reels. Featuring Gaby Deslys and Harry Pilcer.
MONDAY, TUESDAY, & WEDNESDAY, October 20th, 21st, and 22nd. "MORAL SUICIDE."
 Six-reel Drama, featuring Leah Baird and John Mason.
 Sunday, October 19th, "KIDNAPPED," drama in 4 acts.
SPECIAL NOTICE.—Saturday Matinees discontinued until further notice.
TWICE NIGHTLY, at 6 and 8. **MATINEE: SUNDAY,** at 2.30.
 Prices—4d., 8d., and 1s. 3d., including Tax. Seats can be reserved by Phone: No 307.
LATE PASSES, authorised by the Military Authorities, available until 11 p.m., are issued to Service Men at the conclusion of the Second Performance.



I told you that Mr Welch wanted to pay for a World War shrine in Hale. He paid for the land and arranged for a wonderful small green with six trees planted. These trees were from seeds from Verdun, the region where his son Walter had died in 1914.

The Recreation Ground Committee recommended that permission be given to the Hale War Memorial Committee to enclose the triangular piece of the Hale Recreation Ground now unfenced, near the Institute, for the purpose of erecting thereon a monument to commemorate the men of Hale who had fallen in the war, subject to the Hale War Memorial Committee bearing the cost of fencing, gates, and laying out, and that a plan showing their proposals, be submitted for the approval of the Council.—The recommendation was adopted.

Aldershot News, Friday 06 June 1919



Hale (Surrey) Parish War Shrine.

DEDICATED DECEMBER 30th, 1916.



The two side Panels contain the names of 821 Hale Men and Residents in Hale (25 per cent. of the entire population) who are serving, or have served, voluntarily in the Great War.

The centre Panel gives the names of those—53 in number—who have already made the supreme sacrifice.



We have all been told that after the terrible war in Europe, there will be no more wars but we must never forget those who sacrificed their lives for us. It would be wonderful if children in the future reflect on those who gave up their lives for us. From Emily Gunner



1. <https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/164049/>

Hale War memorial is a hexagonal stone cross on a three level triangular stone plinth. It bears metal tablets of names for the two world wars. It is set back from the pavement at the road junction and is surrounded at the back by a low hedge. Behind the memorial is a small green enclosed by six trees planted by Mr R Courtenay Welch of Heath End from seeds taken from Verdun.

2. Thanks go to Guy J. Singer for the photograph of the 1898 Army College, Farnham which is in his collection.