

## The Kurtz Family – the German Ancestors to 1914

The earliest member of this branch of my family that I know of is Johann Heinrich Kurtz (a maternal Great-Great-Great Grandfather) who was born in Germany in 1823. He migrated to England in the 1870s and adopted the name Henry thereafter. His wife was called Juliana. One of Henry's sons, William (b. 1854), is recorded in the 1901 British Census as having been born in the village of Elpenrod in Upper Hesse; and it seems likely that the family originated from here<sup>1</sup>. In the mid-nineteenth century Elpenrod fell within the state of Hesse-Darmstadt<sup>2</sup>, but Upper Hesse was effectively annexed by Prussia in 1867 after the Austro-Prussian War.

The 1871 Census shows that Henry's eldest recorded son, Henry (junior b. 1850)<sup>3</sup>, was working for a German-born baker living at 53 Marsden Street, Kentish Town in North London. He is described as an assistant baker. Both the Henry (junior) and his employer are recorded as British subjects, which suggest neither had plans to return home.

Naturalisation without an Act of Parliament only became possible as result of The Naturalisation Act of 1870 so this can only have occurred very recently. William Kurtz had also moved to London by 1871 where the Census shows he was working as a journeyman baker for yet another German-born baker living at 238 Roman Road, Bow in East London. The moves to London may have been related to the political situation in Germany, particularly the introduction of conscription in advance of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. However, there was a long history of economic emigration from the region, much of it to North America. Henry (senior) and Juliana had four further sons, Adam (b. 1860), Adolf (b. 1864), Ludwig (b. 1866) and Frederick (b. 1869), and a daughter Maria (b.1857), all of whom are described in Census records as being born in Germany. Henry (senior), his wife and the four younger sons moved to England to join his sons Henry and William after 1871. Given that Henry (senior) was around twenty-five when Henry (junior) was born, and around fifty when he came to England, there may have been elder siblings that did not emigrate or went elsewhere. At least two family members moved to North America, and it is possible there were already relatives living there.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the spelling that appears in the 1901 Census which I have taken to correlate to the identically spelt German place name. There is a place called Alpenrod in Hesse but there is no particular reason to think that William, having specified an exact birthplace (for many of those born abroad only the country is shown), spelt it wrong or the Census officer transcribed in incorrectly. Only detailed examination of German archives may prove or disprove this.

<sup>2</sup>The ancient Landgraviate of Hesse was divided between several rulers in the late sixteenth century. In the nineteenth century the ruler of Hesse-Darmstadt was the Grand Duke of Hesse. The area is now part of the Federal State of Hessen.

<sup>3</sup> The relationship of this Henry to Henry (senior) and his other sons is not immediately obvious from the Census records. The proof is evident from the mention of a sixteen year old niece, Violet M Kurtz born in Hackney, who was visiting or living with Ludwig Kurtz in 1901 who appears to one and the same as the six year old daughter, Violet M Kurtz born in Hackney, of Henry (junior) recorded in 1891. Geneological records show that the wives of Henry (junior) and Ludwig were sisters. <http://www.tolliss.com/>



Figure 1: Elpenrod, Hesse

In 1881 Henry (junior), now described as a master baker, was living at 233 Well Street, Hackney, with his wife Elizabeth (née Packwood), three children, a domestic servant and Charles Sewell, a journeyman baker. William was now living at 8 Southwell Terrace, High Street, Leytonstone, with his wife Sally (née Blott – born in London, although perhaps of German origin), his two young children, his father and mother, two brothers, Adolf aged 18 and Frederick aged 10, and Herman Folgate, a servant also born in Germany. William, Adolf and Herman are all described as bakers. Adam was now living at 105 Well Street, Hackney, with his wife Hannah (née Blott - Sally's sister), a young daughter and his brother Ludwig aged 16. Both Adam and Ludwig are described as bakers. Their sister, Maria, was now living at 15 Percy Street, Hackney, with her husband John Ruhl. The Ruhls had a daughter Lina, aged one, who was born in Germany, so presumably they had only very recently moved to London. John Ruhl was also a baker.

A study of German migrants in Nineteenth century London shows that the many young Germans moved to London and worked as journeymen bakers for other German immigrants, saving money until they could set up in business on their own, and in turn employing other Germans as assistants<sup>4</sup>. These journeymen had a reputation for working hard, over seventy hours a week, and for less pay than the locals. The migrants were not

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<sup>4</sup> Panikos Panayi, German Immigrants in Britain during the 19th Century 1815-1914 (1995), *passim* but especially pp.130-131.

originally bakers by trade, many were farm labourers<sup>5</sup>. A disproportionate number appear to have been Hessians and Hanoverians, and an estimate of the number of bakers in London in 1887 was that there were 4,000 of whom 2,000 were German. The Census records indicate that the proportion of German migrants was around two males for every one female so that marrying local women was quite normal; and since they were also Protestants, marriage was uncontentious on religious grounds. The situation of the Kurtz family therefore appears to be entirely typical.

Juliana Kurtz died late in 1880 and other family circumstances changed substantially in the next few years. Adolf seems to have set up business on his own in 1881, appearing in the Kelly's Directory for that year as operating in Leyton Road, Leyton. In September 1882 Adolf married Catherine Cardo, whose family lived at 9 Southwell Terrace. Family tradition records that she was a teacher<sup>6</sup>. She was four years older than him so this may be the case. Adam's wife Hannah died in early 1884 a year after giving birth to a son. Adam disappears from the British Census record after this and William had moved to 105 Well Street by 1891. It appears that Adam moved to the United States as the Philadelphia Marriage Licences Index show that Adam Androv Kurtz married Mary Mast in Philadelphia in 1888<sup>7</sup>.

In 1891 Henry (junior) was still living at 233 Well Street, Hackney, with his wife Elizabeth and four daughters. In 1891 William was living with his wife, four children and a domestic servant. Henry (senior), described as a widower and shoemaker, was lodging nearby, and died in 1900 aged 77. In 1891 Adolf was living at 4 Field Terrace, High Street, Walthamstow, with his wife and the first five of his ten children. In 1891 Ludwig was living at 1 Markhouse Road, Walthamstow, with his wife Lavinia (née Packwood – Elizabeth's sister), two sons and a domestic servant. He is described as a baker/confectioner and his wife was described as his assistant. I have not been able to find Frederick in the 1891 Census but I assume he was still living in East London as he appears in 1901. The Ruhl family had moved to 94 Chatsworth Road, Clapton Park.

In 1901 Henry (junior) had moved to Bromley by Bow and was living at 71 Empson Street with his wife, and five children. He is now described as a general shopkeeper. He died two years later. In 1901 William had moved again to 95 Arkley Road, Walthamstow, living with his wife, five children and a domestic servant. His eldest son, another Henry, had joined the Imperial Yeomanry and in March of that year and was sent to serve in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Boer War<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Johann Heinrich Kurtz is described as a shoemaker in 1891 although this was a presumably a skill picked up in London. On the marriage certificate of Adolf Kurtz and Catherine Cardo he is described as a farmer.

<sup>6</sup> This article includes recollections by my mother, Manda Dace (ne Bulling), and recollections and research done by my cousin, Sarah Bulling. They are respectively the daughters of the eldest and youngest sons of Esther 'Ettie' Bulling, Adolf Kurtz's second surviving child.

<sup>7</sup> It is not clear how the two children were cared for although the son, another Adam, was living in Lambeth as a boarder in 1901 and had moved to Derbyshire by 1907 where he got married.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.britishmedals.us/files/iyk.htm>

Ludwig had moved to 34 Markhouse Road, Walthamstow, living with his wife, six of their own children and Frederick Jackson, a servant also described as a baker. Ludwig's 16-year-old niece, Violet Kurtz, son of Henry (junior) was either living with him or visiting. Frederick was living with his wife Mary (née Hale) and six children at 36 Markhouse Road, Walthamstow – the property next to Ludwig's. He is described as a general shopkeeper. The Ruhl family were still living at 94 Chatsworth Road, Clapton Park.

In 1901 Adolf had moved to 189 High Street, Walthamstow (see Figure 2 below) and was ostensibly a successful business man. His children were all taught bookkeeping, probably by his wife. Family tradition says that he took his family to visit relatives in Germany, although I do not know who they were<sup>9</sup>. His interests were horses - supposedly he had a side line in selling mounts to the British Army - greyhound racing and whippet coursing. Adolf's brother Ludwig was clearly involved in horse trading. In 1898 he was a witness at a rather confusing Old Bailey trial, identifying himself as "a baker of Walthamstow". His evidence was that he used three or four horses in his business and bought a pony for 50s from William Gibbs, who he had known for some years, but found it to be lame and sold it on for £5. Gibbs was accused of having stolen the pony from John Bush, a horse knackerer, and was arrested by the police in Wood Street, Walthamstow, but he was found not guilty.



Figure 2: 189 High Street, Walthamstow



Figure 3: Adolf Kurtz c.1890

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<sup>9</sup> My great grandmother, Ettie Kurtz, supposed developed a taste for hock in Germany (although the traditional local brew in Hesse is cider).

However, in 1906 Adolf Kurtz went bankrupt. The official records show that he owned £336 and 2s, and his creditors included both his brother-in-law, John Ruhl - £26 - and his brother Ludwig - £25 – for loans made. According to his own account he was a journeyman baker (i.e. an employee) prior to setting up in business in Montague Road, Edmonton in 1902. He sold this business on and set up another in Fore Street, Edmonton; selling this in turn to set up another in Bushill Park, Enfield. He seems to have got deeper and deeper into debt and was then accused of stealing or receiving a governess cart, but was acquitted. It seems likely that he may have already been in financial difficulties in 1901 and had to sell up the business at 189 High Street as a result. Oddly, Adolf stated that he was born in England but moved back to Germany aged 2 and returned to England aged 14, which contradicts the information in the Census records. It is not clear why he would have claimed this to be the case if it was not true but possibly he feared that, being foreign-born, he was at risk of deportation. Ludwig Kurtz and his wife Lavinia also became bankrupt shortly after Adolf did, perhaps as a result of not being repaid the money owed to them by Adolf.

In Adolf's bankruptcy documentation, it is recorded that he was now living at 12 Myrtle Street, Walthamstow but his wife and family were living in rented accommodation at Mossford Green, Barkingside, with half the property let to his son-in-law, George Winter. Family tradition records that Adolf left his wife to move in with his mistress, a Mrs Alphonse at about this time. Certainly, Adolf had deserted his wife by 1915 when he was summonsed for abandonment, when he offered to pay her 15s. a week and had to pay £2 in costs. He is described as living in Littlewick Green, near Maidenhead in Berkshire, and may already have been living with Alice Alphonse, the widow of a wine merchant.<sup>10</sup>

In 1911 Henry's widow, Elizabeth, and her family were living at 63 Elmfield Road, Walthamstow. She is described as a housekeeper. William Kurtz and his family were living at 699 Seven Sisters Road, Tottenham. He and a servant, Henry Schmetzer, were described as a baker and baker's assistant. A daughter, Alice, was described as a bakery shop assistant. Ludwig and his family were living at 62 Markhouse Road, Walthamstow. He is described as a baker with a daughter, Lavinia, assisting in the business. Frederick was living with his family at 2 Downsfield Road, Walthamstow and is now described as a butcher. Catherine Kurtz was living at 34 Pelly Road, Plaistow. One son, William, was a baker and she is described as assisting in the business. I have found no trace of Adolf in the 1911 Census although Alice Alphonse was boarding in Ealing.

Adolf and Catherine Kurtz had three sons and seven daughters. The eldest son, also called Adolf but known as Sonny, moved to Canada in 1909. He married Emma Brett, his teenage sweetheart whose family emigrated, in Ottawa and then moved to Vancouver but returned to the UK for a while in the 1920s. He then moved back to Canada before settling in the United States<sup>11</sup>. His younger brother William remained in East London and married Emily Collins in 1912. He later moved into construction work and was killed in an accident in the

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<sup>10</sup> Adolf and Alice were living at Cookham, near Maidenhead, in 1939. She died in 1942.

<sup>11</sup> My cousin Sarah has re-established contact with his descendants and has visited them in the US.

1920s. The youngest son George also remained in London. Adolf and Catherine's daughters were Catherine (known as Kate) who married George Winter, Esther (known as Ettie, and born in 1884) who married Alec Bulling, Juliana (known as Lulu) who married David Parrish, Ida who married Sidney Quaife - killed in action with the British Army in 1918 - and then Horace Saywell, Lina who married Alfred Bonfield, Louise (known as Dora) who married Simon Oliver and Mary who married William Marsh.

Family tradition records that some of Adolf's daughters set up bakeries, one in Deptford and another Edmonton. The Deptford bakery was run by Lina Bonfield and the Edmonton one by Lulu Saywell. The latter may be the premises in Fore Street where Adolf was living before he went bankrupt. Supposedly Adolf also owned a general store in Wood Street, Walthamstow. It appears that one of these properties, or the Plaistow premises run by William and Catherine, was vandalized by anti-German rioters during the 1911 Docks Strike or in the widespread violence that took place after the sinking of the Lusitania in May 1915<sup>12</sup>. Large scale internment of German-born males who had not taken British citizenship took place during the Great War - although I have not tried to trace the impact on the Kurtzes here - and Adolf Kurtz formally changed his name to Short in 1919. The use of the translated form of the surname post-dates the 1911 Census and was clearly a result of the War, although some members of the extended family never adopted it. Ironically it appears that several of the younger, British-born male members of the Kurtz family served in the British armed forces under that name in the Great War.

Ettie Kurtz had married in 1908 and gave birth to her eldest son, Alec, a year later. Her husband, Alec Augustus, was born in Ollerton, Nottinghamshire, and he worked in the construction trade, eventually becoming a specialist contracts manager in concrete work. He worked on the Art Deco OXO Tower in central London built in 1928-29. In 1911 he and his family were living as boarders in Salford, Lancashire. Ettie had six surviving children and during her third pregnancy started to lose her sight, losing it completely a few years later. This was blamed on being kicked by a horse when she was a teenager. She moved to Muswell Hill in North London and despite the disability, raised the family increasingly without help from her husband. By all accounts Alec Augustus was a mercurial character. He was supposedly locked up in the Tower of London after picking a fight with a recruiting sergeant after being refused enlistment by the Foot Guards in 1914 because he was under 6' tall, but eventually ended up in the Royal Fusiliers. He eventually left his wife and started a second family with another partner. Ettie outlived him by half a century or so and died within a few months of her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Being long lived appears to have been a family trait. Although Adam Kurtz had died quite young and Henry junior died in middle age the remaining Kurtz brothers were unusually long-lived for their time. William died in 1928, Adolf in 1947, Ludwig the following year and Frederick in 1952. Adolf's wife Catherine died in 1935 and was buried in Queens Road

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<sup>12</sup> There were many dock strikes at the time and it is always possible that the vandalism may have occurred in the Great Docks Strike of 1889 or in the riots that followed the first Zeppelin raids of 1916.

Cemetery, Walthamstow. Adolf died in 1947 and, rather improbably, was buried alongside Catherine. Of his family, only Ettie Bulling and Ida Saywell seem to have attended his funeral.

For my part I was born and brought up in other parts of England. I moved to the area just to the north of Walthamstow in the mid-1980s because I had moved to London to work and house prices here matched my wallet. A small number of my maternal grandmother's family were living in East London (and some still are) but I was largely ignorant of this local connection at the time. Given the size of the families of the Kurtz brothers, it seemed likely that I have some distant cousins living locally of whom I was unaware and vice versa. This has proved to be the case as, based on earlier versions of this brief history, I have been contacted by descendants of both William and Frederick Kurtz.



Figure 4: Manda Dace (née Bulling), Richard Dace, Ettie Bulling (née Kurtz), Alec Bulling - 1960

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