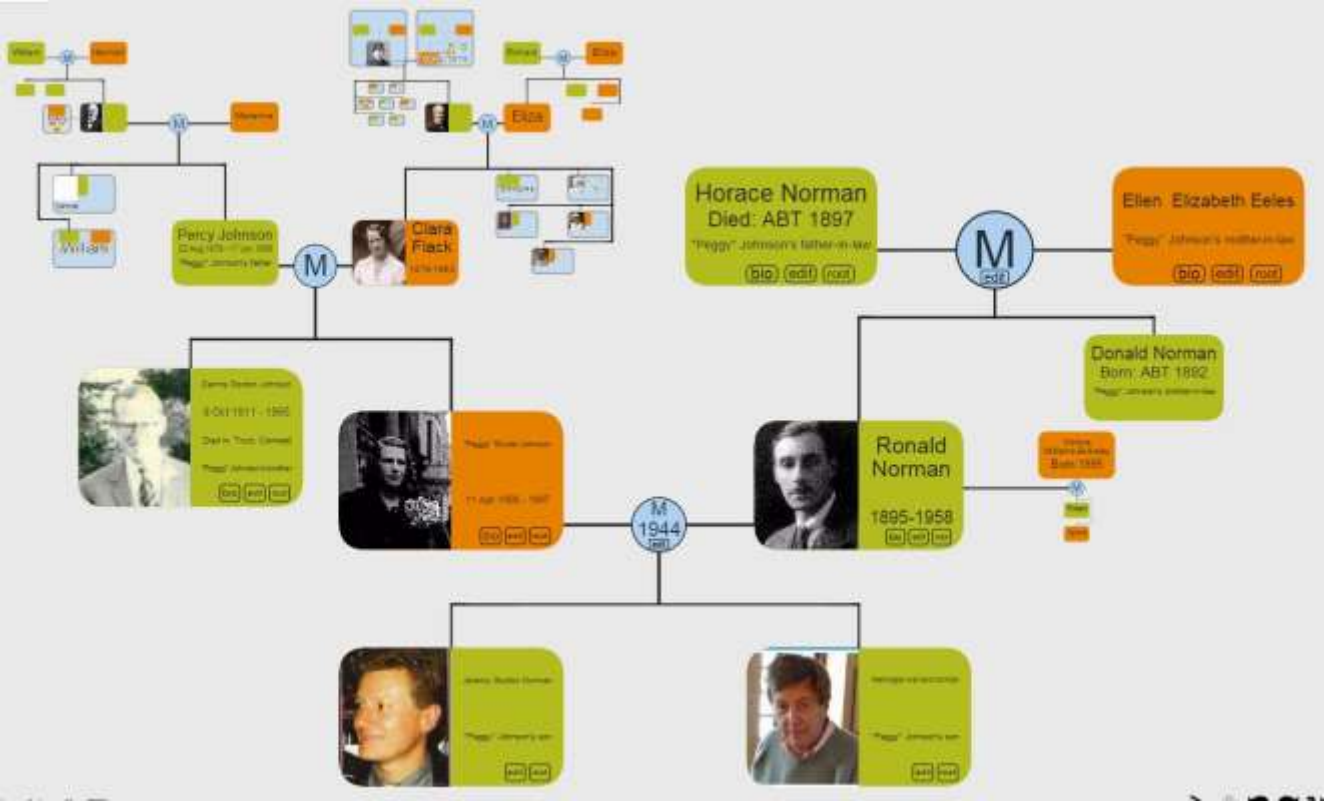
“Finding the ‘All Sorts’ in our Family History” - the Flack-Johnson Family Connection.



Every year in the early 1950’s, the large tin of Liquorice Allsorts sweets arrived for Christmas and my father (Dr Henry Edmund Douglas, ka “Douglas” Flack (1917-1985) would tell us kids that they were sent by one of his cousins who “used to own Bassetts”, the sweet manufacturers who made Liquorice Allsorts. When we were a little older, Gordon Johnson and his son Remington came to visit the family in Sydney, Australia in 1963 and our Mum whispered to us “He’s the Liquorice Allsorts man”.

Who were these people and how were they related to us?

The “Gordon” Johnson, who was our visitor in Sydney and the “cousin” my father was referring to, was Denis Gordon Johnson, the grandson of our great aunt on my father’s side, who we knew as “Aunty Clarice”. “Gordon” Johnson was the Managing Director of S. M. Johnson & Son, the makers of Liquorice Allsorts.

Our Great Aunt Clarice, as she was known, had married Percy Johnson (the son of Samuel Meggitt Johnson, who co-owned Bassetts) in 1907 and they had two children Peggy Muriel Harvard Johnson (born 1909) and Denis Gordon Johnson (born 1911).

Denis Gordon Johnson
(1911-1995)
“The liquorice man”

Clara Alice Johnson nee Flack was born on 25 August 1879 at Burnley, Lancashire. Clara was the third of six children born to William Henry Douglas Flack (1852-1936) and Eliza Alice Flack, nee Parker (1853-1900).

The 1891 Census shows Clara A Flack, aged 11, a scholar, resident at 15 Fair View Road, Burnley, Lancashire with her father, William H.D. Flack, aged 39, a Bank Cashier and mother, Eliza A, aged 37, her two brothers, Frederick H, aged 13, and Bertram aged 9 and her sister, Lucy, aged 4 and a general servant.

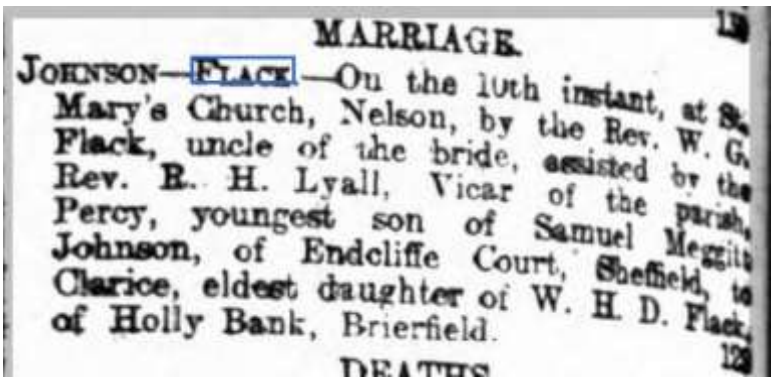
15 Fair View Road, Burnley would have been a relatively good address in 1891 with school teachers and a Baptist Church Minister as near neighbours.

15 Fair View Road, Burnley today.

The 1901 Census shows Clara A. Flack, aged 21, a School Mistress (Elementary), resident at 1 Hollin Bank Villas, 139 Colne Road, Burnley, Lancashire with her father W.H.D. Flack, Widower, Bank Manager aged 49, Lucy aged 14, Mabel, aged 6 and Lucy [Lucy Louisa Catherine Flack (1856-1912)], her aunty aged 44. The address, “1 Hollin Bank Villas” no longer exists, however it may have been the Bank Manager’s residence next to or above the Burnley Branch of the Manchester and County Bank in the main business district of Burnley.

“Clarice” Flack married Percy Johnson, son of Samuel Meggitt Johnson and Marianne E. Harvard at St Mary’s Church, Nelson on 9th April 1907.

The marriage notice appeared in the Burnley Express on 13 April 1907 as follows:



MARRIAGE.

JOHNSON—FLACK—On the 10th instant, at St. Mary's Church, Nelson, by the Rev. W. G. Flack, uncle of the bride, assisted by the Rev. R. H. Lyall, Vicar of the parish, Percy, youngest son of Samuel Meggitt Johnson, of Endcliffe Court, Sheffield, to Clarice, eldest daughter of W. H. D. Flack, of Holly Bank, Brierfield.

DEATHS

As can be seen from the clipping, the marriage was performed by her uncle, Rev. William George Flack.

Wedding photograph of Clarice Johnson.

Clarice's husband, and Gordon Johnson's father Percy Johnson was born on 22 August 1878 at Sheffield, Yorkshire, the second son of Samuel Meggitt Johnson and Marianne E. Harvard. Percy was the potential heir to the fortune made by his father, Samual Meggitt Johnson and his mother's father, George Bassett the founder of the Bassett Confectionery business.

Percy Johnson and Clara Alice Johnson nee Flack had two children – Muriel Harvard Norman, nee Johnson (known as "Peggy") born 11 April 1909 and Denis Gordon Johnson (born 8 October 1911).

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Clarice Johnson, nee Flack in 1932 (1879-1963)

14 Lawson Road, Sheffield today

Percy and Clarice Johnson (nee Flack) are recorded in the 1911 Census as living at 14 Lawson Road, Sheffield, Yorkshire with their daughter Muriel Harvard Johnson, aged 1, and four servants. Percy, aged 32, born Sheffield Yorkshire England, is recorded as a "Manufacturing Confectioner".

This was Percy Johnson's family home where his father and mother had lived and he had lived all of his life.

Aunty Clarice's daughter, Muriel Harvard Johnson married Ronald Norman (1895-1958) in London in 1944. This was Ronald Norman's second marriage, he having been married previously to Victoria (known as "Vita") Williams-Bulkeley, nee Legge, a widow, in 1921. The first marriage had produced four children, three daughters and a son, Robert, but ended in divorce in 1944.

Ronald Frank Norman (1895-1958)

Muriel Harvard Norman nee Johnson, known as "Peggy" (1909-1997)

Ronald Norman and “Peggy” Muriel Harvard Norman, nee Johnson had two children, Remington and Jeremy. Ronald died in 1958 and Muriel died in 1997.

Remington Harvard Norman

Jeremy Gordon Norman

Robert Norman, Ronald Norman’s son from his first marriage was killed in action in 1940 whilst serving in the Royal Navy.

The Flack, Norman and the Johnson connection with Bassetts Liquorice Allsorts is therefore through the marriage of Clarice Flack to Percy Johnson, the son of Samuel Meggitt Johnson the substantial owner of that company.

The 1881 Census lists Samuel M Johnson, Confectionery Manufacturer, employing 56 men, 40 women, 12 boys and 56 girls, resident at 14 Lawson Rd, Sheffield as follows:

Name	**Relation ship**	**Condition**	**Age last birthday**	**Occupation**	**Where born**
Samuel M Johnson	Head	Married	42	Confectionery Manufacturer	Yorkshire, Sheffield
Marianne Johnson	Wife	Married	33		Devonshire, Plymouth
Mary E. Johnson	Daughter		11	Scholar	Yorkshire, Sheffield
Samuel H Johnson	Son		6	Scholar	Yorkshire, Sheffield
William	Son		3		Yorkshire, Sheffield
Percy	Son		2		Yorkshire, Sheffield

Three servants, a cook, a housemaid and a nurse are also listed.

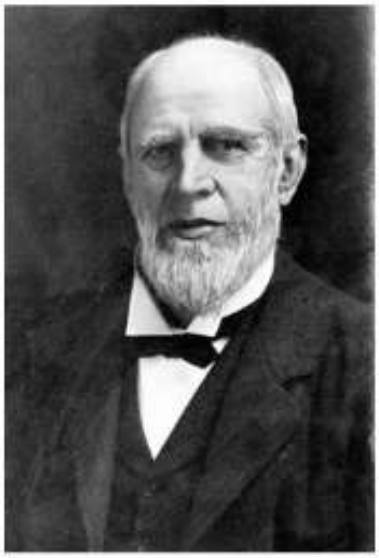
In his autobiographical book, “*No Make-Up, Straight tales from a queer life*”, Jeremy Norman, Clarice Johnson’s grandson, writes of his grandmother (known to him as “Gransie”) as follows:

Gransie was a frugal Lancashire lass, often walking a mile or more in order to buy vegetables a little more cheaply. Her attitude to servants was typical of her generation; she would ask a prospective servant: "Are you a nice clean girl?" (Pronounced, 'gal').

Her picture shows that she was a beautiful young girl and, like so many of the post-First World War generation, was the only one of her three sisters to marry. There was little choice for girls of her generation; most of the men had been killed in the war. She never had to work although she was bright and intelligent. She played bridge well and, like my mother managed to complete The Times crossword every day.

Gransie wasn't in love with her husband Percy Johnson. He was fine looking but cold, rather sexless and very rich. I can see so much of my brother Rem in the photos I have of him. Hers was a rather ordinary life; her father was a bank manager in Nelson, Lancashire. She was pressurised by her family into accepting the proposal from such an eligible Batchelor. I am given to believe that she had a number of affairs both before and after her divorce.

My grandfather Percy died at 71 Park Street Mayfair in 17 June 1936 and to everyone's shocked surprise left nearly all of his estate, close to a million pounds (worth £15M today) to a hospital charity with which he had no connection. I believe he did so to punish his ex-wife for her infidelity with the family chauffeur and the resulting acrimonious divorce. My mother and my uncle were mortified. My mother was left only £50,000 in a tight trust that dwindled to just £38,000 when the trust was finally wound-up in 1968.



Percy's father, Samuel Meggitt Johnson was born in 1836 at Sheffield, Yorkshire, the second son of William Johnson and Hannah Johnson nee Bagshaw. The Johnsons had five children – William (born 1833), Samuel (born 1936), Joseph (born 1837), Elijah (born 1851) and Susan (born 1853).

Marianne Johnson died 21 July 1922 at Sheffield and Samuel Meggitt Johnson died 29 November 1925 at Sheffield. They were buried at All Saints, Ecclesall, Sheffield.

Samuel Meggitt Johnson (1836-1925)

Graves of Samuel Meggitt Johnson and Marianne Johnson at All Saints Church, Ecclesall, Sheffield, Yorkshire, England.

Jeremy Norman wrote [in 2005]

"Percy and his brother, William, owned and ran Bassetts having inherited from their father, Samuel Meggitt Johnson, who was sole proprietor for much of the 19th Century. Percy left almost all of his share to charity on his death (Close to £1 mil in 1937) thereby disinheriting his two children; Gordon (who ran the company until the early 1970's) died about ten years ago without issue.

His sister, my mother, Peggy, died in 1997 leaving two sons, Remington Harvard Norman and myself - neither of us has issue. Clarice died in about 1963 I think. On her death her income ceased and the capital went to charity.

My uncle Gordon, a serious man not much given to humour, when asked in his 80s what he would say to his father, when they met in Heaven, replied, "How in hell did you get in here?""

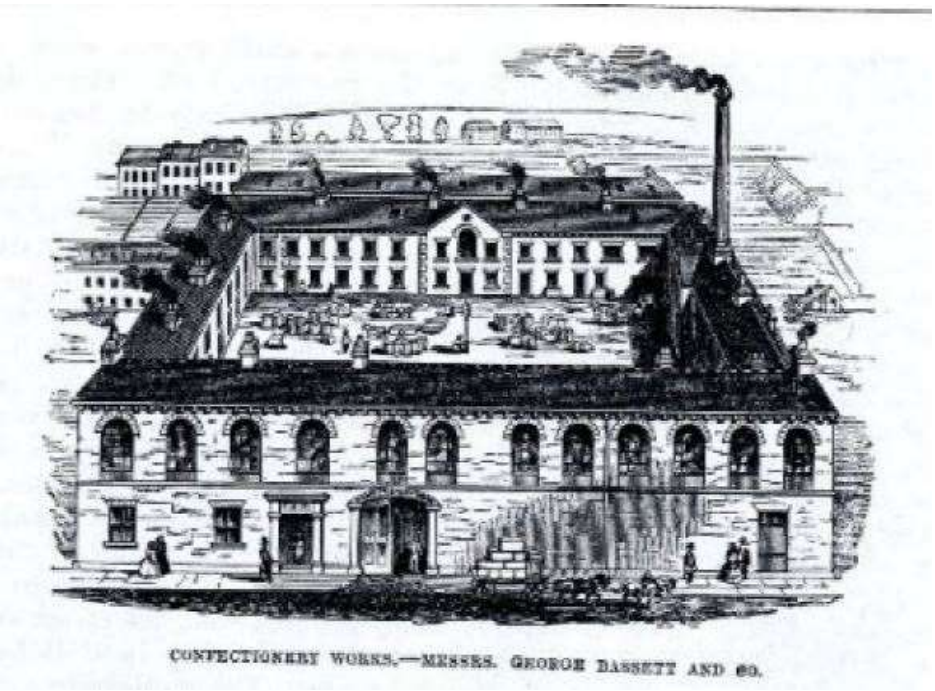
The following narrative is extracted from The Sweet Village Shop web site at http://www.sweetvillage.co.uk/bassetts-sweet-company.html

George Bassett was born in Ashover in 1818 and at the age of 14 took an apprenticeship with a confectioner and fruiterer, William Haslem of Chesterfield. George stayed for three years

before buying a small confectionery and wine business in Broad Street, Park.

George Bassett had eight children with his first wife Sarah Hodgson whom he married in 1842. When Sarah died, George married again and had a further two sons.

In 1851, George took on a 12 year old apprentice, Samuel Meggitt Johnson. Samuel's mother had died and Samuel went to live with the Bassett family. However, at the end of his apprenticeship, Samuel went back to work for his father, a furniture retailer. Meanwhile George Bassett had taken over larger premises at Portland Road and in 1860, after an unsuccessful partnership with William Lodge, a local grocer, George persuaded Samuel to return to the confectionery business. In 1863 Samuel became a partner and later, the sole proprietor.



Bassetts Portland Road Factory 1862

Samuel's rapid promotion in the firm was no doubt aided by his 1868 marriage to George's eldest daughter. Sadly she died in childbirth in 1870.

By 1876 with his business prospering and his premises expanding, George Bassett had become interested in politics and that year became Mayor of Sheffield. Whilst Mayor, he had US President Ulysses S. Grant as a house guest.

Just two years later in 1876 George suffered a stroke, severely disabling him. He died at the age of 68 in 1886.

The business continued to prosper under the leadership of Samuel M. Johnson despite a serious fire in 1892 that caused a family dispute over inadequate insurance

resulting in Samuel having a nervous breakdown. By 1900 an additional factory had been built in Owlerton where candied peel, gums and other lines were being manufactured. Liquorice Allsorts continued to be made on the older site at Portland Street. The business was now trading under the name of S.M.Johnson & Son.

In 1934 a larger factory was build close to the Owleton works and all manufacturing was relocated there. In 1989 Bassetts sweet company was taken over by the Cadbury-Schweppes multi-national.