



How little we know of our forebears. I like to look at this old photograph, my grandma watching me, 'minding' me, a kind of invisible family tree line from her to me.

Clara was born on December 10th 1882, the daughter of a grocer, Francis Greaves. I don't know much about her mother or father, though I do know that by the time she got married in 1906, at the age of 23, her father was dead. The records of St.Paul's Church in Royton show that, at the time of her marriage, Clara was a cardroom operative in a cotton mill. Her new husband, Frank Schofield was just a year older, a piecer in the mill.

I often think of my grandma's life, and compare it to mine. She left school when she was twelve years old. Did she go straight into the mill? Probably. The years from when she left school to when she married, I know nothing of. I like to think that they were happy and carefree. I imagine her joking and having fun with the other mill girls, having a lark with the lads. After she married, her life was anything but carefree. She had nine children, only five of whom survived further than two years old. My mother was her youngest. Clara's life must have been drudgery; a constant round of pregnancy, child-rearing, cooking and cleaning.

By the time I was born, grandma was already 73. She lived with us, and I like to think of her at that time as having it a bit easier, her main work over, enjoying her grandchildren. I remember that she always wore a 'pinny' as she does here. She spoke Lancashire dialect, and called us 'childer'. She kept a tiny leather clog belonging to one of her dead children. She drank what seemed like huge amounts of strong tea, and the odd snifter of brandy. She used snuff. Along with her pinny, she always wore heavy brown stockings and bedroom slippers. At weddings, she wore her one pair of best shoes, which I can see now, black flat leather shoes with a strap. She had a lovely lined face and kind watery eyes.

I like to look at this photo of my grandma watching me, as if dreaming of what my life would become. Dreaming of how different, how much easier it would be than hers.