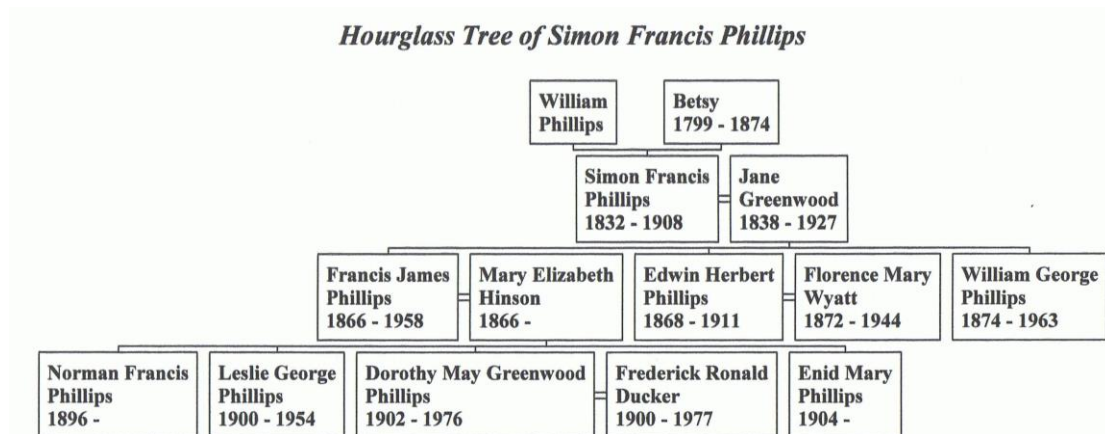


Simon Francis Phillips (1832-1908), Successful Draper in Dartford

Simon Francis Phillips came from a fairly humble background in Cornwall and founded a drapery shop in High St, Dartford, which developed into a large, successful business.

Simon was born about 1832 in St Columb, Cornwall. The village is 6 miles east of Newquay. He is listed (aged 8) in the 1841 census with his siblings William (12), Edwin (10) and Agnes (6) living at St Columb Major, although the names of his parents are not given. In 1851 Simon aged 19, a draper's assistant was living at Ferris Town, Kenwyn, Truro, which is about 15 miles south of St Columb Major. In the same household were his brother Edwin (21, a watch and clock maker) and sister Agnes (a draper's assistant) but again, no parents.

Simon moved to London and in 1861, aged 28, a draper's assistant, he was living at 87 Milton St, Marylebone with his mother Betsy (aged 63, a widow) and sister Agnes (25). In 1862 he married Jane Greenwood in Bodmin, Cornwall. He was 30 and she was 24, born in St Austell, Cornwall. They moved to London (Hammersmith) where their sons Francis James (b1866) and Edwin Herbert (b1868) were born.



(a more detailed family tree may be found in the “phillips42” database on RootsWeb’s WorldConnect Project website)

The 1871 census lists Simon (38), Jane (31), Francis (4) and Edwin (2) living at 5 Braemar Park, Hammersmith. Also in the household were Jane’s parents James (70) and Mary (70), as well as her sister Sarah Greenwood (29, a dressmaker). Simon’s occupation is given as warehouseman. According to his obituary¹, he was a buyer for a wholesale drapery firm, Messrs Spencer, Turner and Boldero.

In 1873, Simon founded a drapery business at 29 and 31 High St Dartford, a property called Luton House. His son William George Phillips was born in September 1874. In addition to their three sons, Simon and Jane had two other children who died as infants². Betsy, Simon’s mother, died in November 1874 aged 75 and Agnes, his sister, died in December 1874 aged 39, both in Dartford. They are buried together in East Hill Cemetery. The cemetery records state that Betsy was the widow of William Phillips.

The business prospered and Simon opened another shop on the opposite side of the road, at 54 High St. The 1881 census shows Simon (48, a draper), Jane (42), Francis (14), Edwin

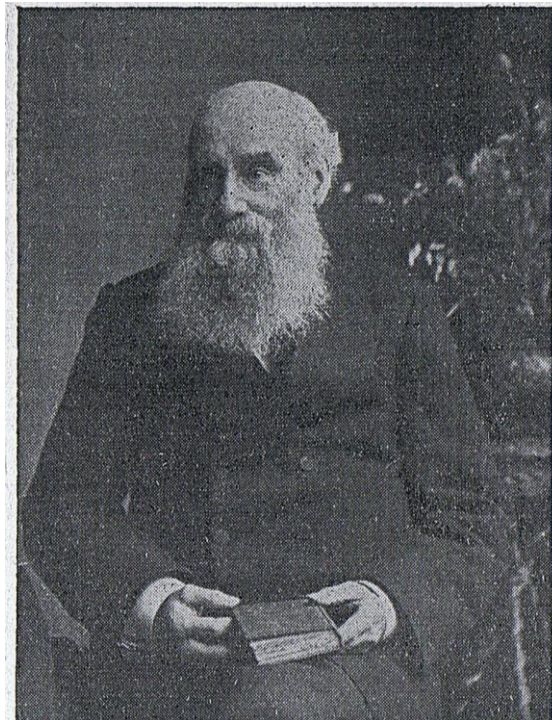
(12) and William (6) living at 29 and 31 High St, Dartford. Also listed at the same address were a draper's shopman, six draper's apprentices and a general servant.

DARTFORD, SATURDAY, JUNE 18, 1881.

S. F. PHILLIPS,	
FAMILY DRAPER,	
HOSIER, HABERDASHER,	
& General Furnisher,	
29, & 31,	
HIGH ST.	
MILLINERY	LUTON HOUSE, DARTFORD
AND	
MANTLES.	
Ladies', Children's,	
And Infants' Outfits,	
54, HIGH STREET.	

Advert in Dartford & West Kent Advertiser (1881)

Simon was an ardent Methodist. He attended the Wesleyan Church in Spital Street, Dartford where he was Sunday school superintendent. His son, Edwin, was choirmaster and organist at the church from 1894 to 1911. Simon was also a member of the Dartford School Board and a manager of the Wesleyan day schools¹.



Simon Francis Phillips, date unknown

In 1891, Simon (58, a draper), Jane (51) and William (16) were again listed at 29 and 31 High Street. Also living at this address were Simon's widowed sister Elizabeth Brokenshaw (72), a dress milliner, a porter, two servants, three draper's assistants, a draper's apprentice and a dressmaker. Simon's sons Francis and Edwin (both listed as draper's assistants) were living next door at 27 High St, which had been acquired in 1889³.

A fire occurred in 1900, which completely destroyed the S F Phillips drapery store. It was described by S K Keyes³ thus:

The fire which broke out in the drapery department of Messrs S. F. Phillips, High Street, about 11.20pm on Tuesday night, January 9, 1900, was probably the worst experience in Dartford. Mrs Phillips and the young lady assistants who had retired to their rooms over the shop, were rescued by a long ladder brought by Mr Tom Martin of the Bull and George Hotel, while waiting for the Fire Brigade. When Captain Butler of the Dartford Brigade saw the extent of the fire he summoned assistance from Bexley, Bexleyheath, Lamorbey and Northfleet.

The ancient house, which contained much timber, burned fiercely, and about midnight the whole of the building where the fire originated, collapsed. It was then discovered that an old lady of 80, a Mrs Forrest, who was staying with Mrs Phillips, was missing. Her body was not recovered until two days later.

The damage occasioned by the fire was over £20,000. The premises on either side, - Mr Message (butcher) and Messrs Upson (boots and shoes) – had to be rebuilt, and the present "Luton House," was built by Messrs Phillips on the site of their burnt out premises. As a result of this fire, the Urban District Council had emergency fire ladders placed in various parts of the town.



The remains of the shop operated by S F Phillips & Sons, after demolition following the fire in 1901.⁵

The premises were reconstructed in 1901 as a four storied brick building. The property still exists, the ground floor is now occupied by Savers and Coral Bookmakers.

The 1901 census shows Simon (68) and Jane (61) Phillips living at 28 Tower Road, Dartford with his son Edwin (32) and his wife Florence (28). Edwin is described as a furniture salesman.



The store of S F Phillips & Sons rebuilt in 1901 (this photo was taken c 1920).⁵

In 1906 Simon received a special diploma and bronze medal recording his 61 years honourable connection with the drapery trade⁴. This indicates that he started work in 1845, when aged 13.

Simon died in 1908. An article in the West Kent Advertiser¹ stated that he had been an invalid since the fire and had died “of senile decay and influenza”. It also said that “The deceased gentleman was held in the highest estimation in the community, alike for his business integrity and enterprise, his Christian character, and his kindliness of heart and generous disposition.”

He was buried in East Hill Cemetery. The gravestone is inscribed
*In / loving memory / of / SIMON FRANCIS PHILLIPS / who entered into rest / on Sunday
 March 1st 1908 / aged 75 years / And ever near us, though unseen / the dear immortal spirits
 tread / for all the boundless universe / is life – there are no dead / Also of JANE PHILLIPS /*

who entered into rest / on September 29th 1927 / aged 88 years / Also of WILLIAM GEORGE PHILLIPS / born 1874 – died 1963. / Greatly beloved

Simon left £10,322 (equivalent to about £4.2 million now⁶). Probate was granted to his widow Jane and his three sons.

Shortly before Simon's death, his eldest son Francis moved away from Dartford to set up a business in Southsea (near Portsmouth). His son Edwin died in 1911 so it was left to his youngest son William to run the business in Dartford. His mother took an active role - in 1921 (aged 82) she was supervising one of the departments⁴. Jane Phillips died in 1927 and in 1928 the business closed. William was a member of Dartford Council for 12 years and was Mayor of Dartford 1945-6.

If you have any additional information about Simon Francis Phillips or his family, please contact me.

Philip Taylor (email PhilT42LQS@Yahoo.co.uk)

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References

1. *W Kent Advertiser* 6th March 1908.
2. Information from the 1911 census return for Jane Phillips.
3. *Dartford Further Historical Notes* by S K Keyes (1938).
4. Information from the Souvenir Programme of the 1921 Dartford Shopping Carnival.
5. These photos are from *Yesterday's Town: Dartford* by Geoff Porteus (1981).
6. Calculated with respect to average earnings using the website "Measuring Worth" www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/