

COMMON PEOPLE - The History of an English Family - by ALISON LIGHT

Some months ago William Lindsay brought to my attention the book *Common People* by Alison Light. This history of an English family includes the family of Alison's grandmother Evelyn Whitlock. I contacted Alison Light and she kindly had her publisher send me a copy to review.

As a long time family historian I found this book amazing. Alison came to the realization fairly early that most of her ancestor's families were on the verge of poverty for most of their lives. She was not going to find an ancestral home, a cache of family documents or artifacts. If she wanted to get to know and understand her ancestors and the lives they lived, she was going to have to use her skills as a historian to uncover their stories.

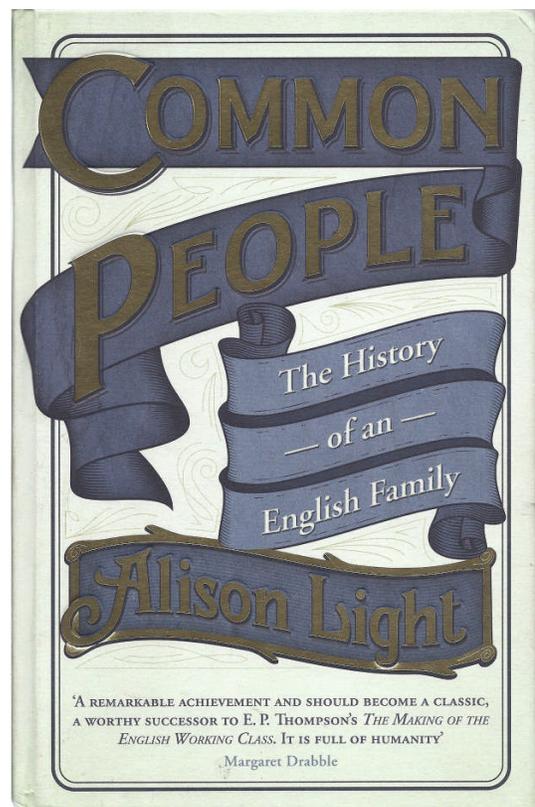
Most of her lines trace back to the 1700's and Alison works both forward and backward revealing the story of the Industrial Revolution of the early 1800's and its affect on the lives of the common English family. The endless struggle to provide for your family in an age of dramatic change. The move from rural to urban living, the change from cottage industries to factory work and the specter of the dreaded workhouse looming over it all. Alison makes her families real, using the information the census and other documents reveal about the community and the neighbours to tell her family's story.

Alison wipes away the family myths that people create for themselves and achieves the goal of all family historians - she provides a real and clear picture of the lives of her family members, and is able to meet and know them intimately. An inspiration to all family historians no matter how common or working class their family origins.

We think we know the history of this time but Alison uses her skills as an historian to tell a very readable and personal story of how working class families actually coped and survived the creation of the first truly industrial nation.

This Whitlock family is detailed on our WHITLOCK77 chart, The Whitlocks of Northamptonshire. Alison follows her family from Syresham NTH to Birmingham, WAR and eventually to Portsmouth HAM.

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