

# The Cummins Family

The story starts with George Henry Cummins who was born in Hull in 1842. George had been in the army for 32 years, but when the family was living in Quorn in 1898, probably on Nursery Lane, he was a time keeper at Wright's elastic webbing factory in the village. His wife Emma was fourteen years younger than him and they had ten children plus George's daughter Ada from a previous marriage.



**Emma Cummins**

Life must have been busy for this large family, however early in 1898, disaster struck and both George and Emma contracted tuberculosis (TB). In the days, before antibiotics, TB, or 'consumption' as it was known, was extremely serious. Emma died at home on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> March 1898 (aged 42) and George died the following day in Loughborough hospital (aged 56).

The seven younger children were all girls. Twelve year old Agnes was unwell and was also in

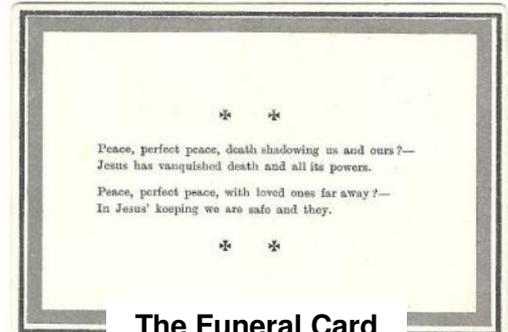
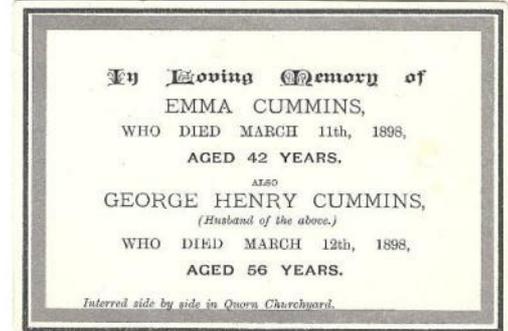
Loughborough Hospital.

The other six girls were immediately admitted to the Barrow on Soar Union workhouse in Mountsorrel. Despite this sounding a dreadful prospect, they were luckier than some, in that the new Quorn Baptist minister, the Rev W J Tomkins, stepped in to help them. Just three days after George's death, he wrote to the Muller Orphan Homes at Ashley Down in Bristol. His wife had herself been a resident there as child. His extreme concern came through in his first letter dated 15<sup>th</sup> March 1898, as he tried to support their case by stressing to the trustees his various connections, including that of his wife and that a mutual friend 'Miss Ward' was well known to both of them. By sad and unfortunate coincidence, the founder of the home George Muller had died that same weekend on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> March 1898. The Reverend Tomkins acknowledged this in his letter, which was addressed to the son in law, Mr Wright.

The Reverend William Tomkins was the Baptist minister in Quorn for only three years from 1898 to 1901. He lived at 'The Mount' on Leicester Road, Quorn, (now number 82), with his second wife Bridget and young son Eric

The following day (Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> March), John Shaw from Barrow, also sent a letter to Mr Wright at the Orphan Home. He pointed out that there were only distant relations and that none of these were likely to take the children in. He referred Mr Wright to the Quorn physician, Dr Unitt and also to the vicar, the Reverend Kelcey. He requested a reply by return of post.

The orphanage replied to Mr Shaw and we next pick up the correspondence as Dr Unitt writes to the orphanage on 22<sup>nd</sup> March, acknowledging Mr Wright's response to Mr Shaw and declaring how pleased he is that the girls have been accepted. He does however mention that Agnes (aged 12) is unwell and may have to follow later.



**The Funeral Card**



**'The Mount', 82 Leicester Road**

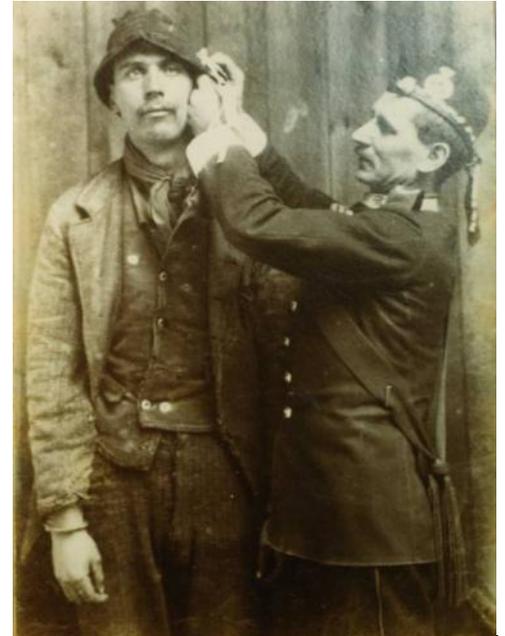
There is then a delay until May when the Reverend Tomkins again writes to orphanage. Somehow there had been a mix-up. The minister had originally not been aware of John Shaw's letter, but as soon as he was informed that others had got the matter in hand, he understandably left it to them. His letter dated 6<sup>th</sup> May 1898 indicates that nothing has happened and he is again taking up the case for the children. Sadly, during April, Agnes had also died; another blow for her brothers and sisters. There are also indications that the Reverend is beginning to struggle with the bureaucracy. He is having to obtain certificates to prove that all the children were born in wedlock and have been baptised.

There is also correspondence regarding money. It would seem that the children would all be provided with an 'outfit', with monies released from the estate. Solicitor's letters show that the orphanage had requested that the money for the outfits be paid directly to them, but the solicitors would not agree to this. George and Emma had an insurance policy, which together with the sale of their furniture, eventually left an estate of £126 3/- (£126.15).

It was June before the girls were finally taken down to Bristol, but it did not all go smoothly. Alice (who was 13) was refused because she wet the bed - and baby Dorothy was also deemed to be not well enough to travel. The admission form for 'New Orphan House No 2' for the four girls is a cold and unwelcoming document. Alice and Dorothy's names have been crossed out, and there are further instructions regarding declarations of the children's health - this is in addition to the certificates already required. It also states that the time to arrive is 'half past two o'clock precisely. A note has been added at the bottom saying:

*"NB The orphans must not on any account whatever, be brought on any other day or hour, than that named in the Admission Order"*

Reverend Tomkins wrote a very polite letter in reply, and had to point out that although they would leave at 8.00 in the morning, the trains were not direct so they may be a little later than 2.30 pm. Adelaide, Annie, Alma and Ellen finally arrived at their new home on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1898.



**George Cummins on the right, pinning a cockade on to a new recruit to the regiment.**

We can only imagine how the 13 year old Alice must have felt to have been parted from her sisters, especially after having lost her parents and sister only weeks earlier.

The Cummins Children		
Name	Age in March 1898	Year of Birth
Ada (half sibling)	22	1875
Arthur	16	1881
Albert	15	1882
Andrew (twin)	13	1884
Alice (twin)	13	1884
Agnes	12	1885
Adelaide	10	1887
Annie (known as Winnie)	7	1890
Alma	6	1892
Ellen	3	1894
Dorothy Ann	9 months	1897

Two months later on August 15<sup>th</sup>, Reverend Tomkins again writes to the orphanage. He says that Alice and Dorothy are well enough to travel and that Alice no longer wets her bed. Unfortunately it was not as simple as that. The orphanage insisted on a letter confirming that Alice had been 'free from incontinence' for three months. William Tomkins tries to say that Mr Wright had said that she could join her sisters as soon as she was declared as 'cured', and that they "cannot at present say she has been dry for three months". He even says that she could come back if there were problems. However the orphanage takes the following stance:

*"If the girl cannot be cured where she is we could not do it and therefore we should have to send her back. It is far better that she should be cured where she is now, than to incur the expense of sending her here, and sending her back again, as we must do if she wets her bed after she has been received."*

It seems amazing that Alice was made to suffer so harshly for something that today we would take in our stride and treat with kindness and sensitivity.

Eventually on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> November, Alice and Dorothy were delivered to Bristol to join their sisters.

Although the Muller Orphan Homes sound severe from their admissions procedure, the girls all received a good education and went on to lead successful lives.

Alma trained as a nurse, served with the Queen Alexandra's Nursing Corps during the second world war and later became a Matron in a London hospital.

Baby Dorothy also trained as a nurse, becoming an SRN, sister and midwife.

The three boys did not go into the workhouse. Albert, who was 15 when his parents died, went to live with his mother Emma's parents in Suffolk. It had been intended that he would have an Army career, but he suffered an accident whilst at the Duke of York's Royal Military School, which left him with a stiff leg. Instead he became an apprentice to Elliotts of Hadleigh, a firm of boot makers and repairers. He worked there for 68 years, finally retiring at the age of 86! He kept in touch with all his sisters throughout his life.

Andrew (Alice's twin) served in the army but went missing in South Africa about 1912, and was later officially declared dead.

Arthur the eldest, also went into the army, serving as a captain. He eventually married and managed a hotel in North Berwick, Scotland.

George's eldest daughter Ada, (by his first marriage), emigrated to Australia.

Rev William Tomkins, his wife Bridget and their 8 year old son Eric, moved to Whitstable in Kent in 1901, however their happiness was short lived. By a cruel coincidence, in 1902, 48 year old Bridget contracted TB and died. William had a stroke four days later and passed away within a week of his wife, leaving their son Eric an orphan. It is not known for certain what happened to the young Eric, but hopefully he was cared for by his older half brother who was also a Baptist minister.

This article was written by Sue Templeman and appeared in the Quorndon magazine in Autumn 2011. Since then, the Cummins family have very kindly provided the photographs below.



Sister Dorothy Ann Cummins,  
(the 'baby')



Albert and Jane Cummins in 1969.  
Albert was the middle one of the three boys. His grandson  
Andrew provided the information for this article.



Albert and Jane Cummins with their family,  
celebrating their diamond wedding.



Sister Alma Cummins,  
Queen Alexandra Nurse 1942



Dorothy Ann Cummins ('Auntie Dolly') in the 1960s  
with her dog Lady