RINGSTEAD PEOPLE

Final Stories

David Ball

Introduction

This booklet contains the biographies that, for one reason or another, did not make it into my previous Ringstead books or have been substantially revised. I have enjoyed all the time that I have spent over the years on this work but I think that now is the time to stop. I know that there will continue to be errors found and additions needed to most of the stories, but I hope that they will help future writers and family history researchers to tell a better story of the men and women of Ringstead. I am aware also, when I look through the books that I wish that I had had a good proofreader or been a better one myself.

David Ball

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Front cover picture with thanks to Peter Davies and Evelyn Bull

Contents

Chapter 1

Two Final WW1 Men

In the stories of the Ringstead men who served in the First World War I tried to record all those who served in any capacity. Since the books have been printed, I have found a few people who, for a variety of reasons, were missed. I have tried to correct this omission.

James Edward Austin (1880-1951)

Thomas Austin had been born in Podington in Bedfordshire but he moved some nine miles north to Ringstead and worked as a local carrier. In the *Post Office Directory* for 1869 he is shown as a carrier and shopkeeper. By the 1871 Census he had become a baker and grocer in Shop Street but in 1876 he had "petitioned for liquidation by petition". He appears to have carried on in business, however, for in 1879 he was found guilty of selling bread "otherwise than by weight" and fined five shillings. His wife, Sarah, died and in the 1881 Census he was shown as a "baker and outdoor beer house" [off-licence], just two doors from the Black Horse Public House. Thomas died in 1890.

His son, Charles Edward Austin, had first followed his father into the bakery trade. In 1871, aged 17, he was lodging with master baker William Cook at 39 Bridge Street in Northampton and working in the bakery. Eight years later he married Mary Jane Kisbee from Barnwell (where the marriage may have taken place). She was over 30 years old (although she tended to underestimate her age in Censuses etc.). By this time Charles had become a railway employee and by 1881 was working as a railway porter. They were now living back in Ringstead and Mary Jane was a dressmaker and their son, James Edward, was just six months old.

By 1891 the family had moved to Mary's home village of Barnwell and they were near to the castle and the station. Barnwell was only a couple of stops north-east of Ringstead, on the Northampton to Peterborough Line (London and North-West Railway Company). Charles was working as a railway policeman and James, aged ten, was still at school. The term "Railway Policeman" is a little confusing for originally this was a term used for a "Signalman" dating back to when he would use flags to control the rail traffic. By 1901 Charles and Mary Jane had moved to Titchmarsh, but James Edward, now 20, was working as a Brewer's Clerk in Peterborough and lodging with John and Clara Sergeant at 233 Gladstone Street. We learn later that he had started work with the *Northampton Brewery Company* at Thrapston, straight from school. We also find out that he was an athlete and footballer as a young man.

Soon after this, he moved to Rugby where he was the assistant to Mr. T. Muffey, the brewer's agent in Little Church Street. He moved again and he was living in Daventry High Street on the 13th October 1907 when he married Rhoda Amy Smith in Holy Trinity Church in Rugby. She was the daughter of Joseph Smith, a butcher in Dale Street, Rugby and his wife Maria.

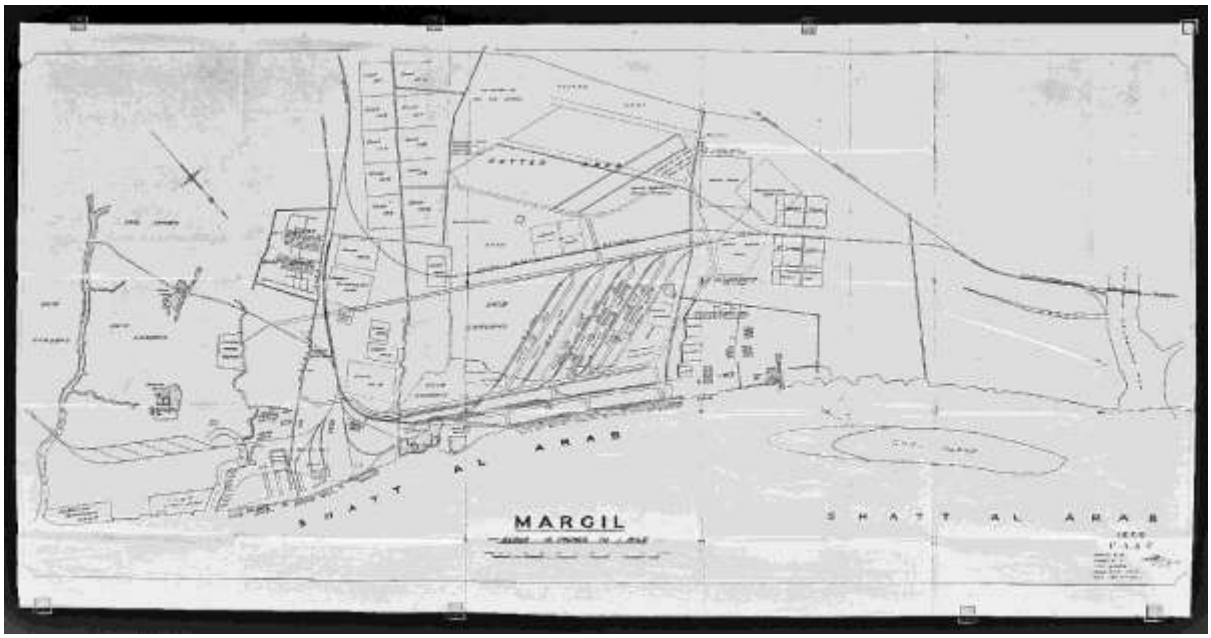
She had been born in 1878 in Sawbridge, a small hamlet between Daventry and Rugby.

By the 1911 Census, James, aged 30, was a Brewer's Agent. The couple were living at 8 High Street in Daventry. They had been married three years and had one daughter, Brenda Mary, who was two years old and born in Daventry. I believe that she was to be their only child.

War came in 1914 and on 15th December 1915 James enlisted in Daventry in the Army Service Corps (ASC) and was given service number M2/188290. It appears that he was not called up until the 16th of June 1916 when he was posted to Grove Park in London, which was the Number 1 Reserve Depot of the Mechanical Transport arm of the ASC. The ASC, among other things, supplied the troops with equipment and food and also transported them to and from the Front.

On the Imperial War Museum website, it records the memories of some of the men who served in the First World War. One of these was Walter Williams who joined the ASC as a driver in 1915: He remembered that:

> *Drivers in those days were not as they are today, ten a penny. It was quite an accomplishment to be able to drive. So, drivers were urgently required. I just went down to the recruiting office in Oxford Street, Weston-super-Mare, and went to the doctor. He passed me for the Army Service Corps. I had varicose veins and I don't think I would have got through for the infantry, but I was okay for the Army Service Corps. I went to Grove Park in London, passed a pretty severe test on a four-ton lorry, going up a steep hill and not letting it run back and so on. I was judged okay and so was mobilised to 14th M.A.C. right away and in three weeks I was in France!*



The medical that was taken when he enlisted showed that James was 5ft 6inches tall and weighed 191lbs (13½ stones or 86.6 kilos). He also had a 43inch chest with a four-inch expansion which was remarkable for the time.

James Austin did not go to the Western Front but, on the 13th March 1917, he embarked at Devonport for the Middle East. It was not until the 22nd of May that he disembarked at Magil near Basrah (Basra), in present day Iraq. A vast dockyard was being constructed to build vessels to carry troops and supplies for the war in Mesopotamia. Much of the boat and pontoon building was carried out by skilled mechanics and labourers recruited from Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai.

As we have seen in other WW1 biographies, disease was often the biggest threat to the British troops, especially outside Europe. James had arrived in Basrah on the 22nd of May 1917 and just two months later, on the 22nd of July he was admitted to Basrah Hospital with malaria. He seems to have been immediately put on the hospital ship H.S. Ellora. It may be that he was treated on the ship before sailing to Bombay (Mumbai) to the Victoria War Hospital, arriving there on the 28th of August. He was in Mesopotamia for 136 days (which may have included the voyage)

Victoria War Hospital, Bombay. c.1918. H12558. www.awm.au.

On the 17th of February 1918 he was posted to the ASC Personnel Depot at Bangalore. It is in the middle of southern India but, because it is on the Deccan Plateau over 900 metres above sea level, it is generally not too hot for Europeans. It may be that when he was deemed fit, he was taken on the strength of the 694th Company of the ASC at Peshawar on the 27th July 1918. This is on the North West Frontier some 100 miles east-north east of present-day Islamabad in Pakistan. James must have worked well for he was appointed an Acting Lance Corporal (without pay) on the 5th of November.

He remained in India after the war and moved up the ranks, finally becoming an Acting Sergeant (without pay) on the 29th of October 1919. On the 29th of November 1919 he embarked at Bombay for the UK on the *HMHS Marama*. He had been in India for 2 years 154 days and was finally demobilized at Woolwich Dockyard on the 20th of January 1920.

He returned to his small family in Daventry and his work as an Area Representative for the *Northampton Brewery Company*. He was now in his forties and all his working life was to be with the company. In 1957 it merged with the local *Phipps Company* and a few years later was taken over by *Watney Mann* and was closed soon after.

By 1927 the family had moved to Rugby and the *1939 Register of England and Wales* shows them at 196 Hillmorton Road. It is still largely a road of detached houses hiding behind high hedges and trees. James retired when he was 65 and spent his retirement enjoying angling and gardening. On the 30th April 1951 he was taken ill in his garden and died a few hours later. Rhoda died in the Hospital of St Cross in Rugby on the 17th August 1960. Their daughter, Brenda, never married and died in 2001.

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Alfred Percy Balderson (1880-1923)

In the *Ringstead People* books we told of the policemen who came into the village as part of the national service, organized county by county, that replaced the old village constables. One of these was Joseph Balderson who was the first Police Constable who was based in Ringstead following the establishment of the County Constabulary in 1840. There had been other constables who had Ringstead as part of their responsibility, but Joseph lived in the village. He had moved to the village to take up his duties in July 1868. He had been born in Spratton, some twenty miles west of Ringstead and, in the 1861 Census, he was living there with his parents and working as a farm labourer. Soon after arriving in the area he must have met Mary Elizabeth Boyfield from Raunds for they married there on 31st August 1869.

Mary's father, John had been a miller from Byfield. He had married Mary Beeby in Raunds on the 25th October 1847 and we see from the birth places of their children that they had travelled the country from Upwell to Leeds. John had died and in the 1861 Census Mary Boyfield was a widow and working as a school mistress in Raunds. John may have died in Manchester in 1857 when working in the large *School Flour Mills*.

Joseph was some ten years older than his new wife and, although in the 1871 Census for Ringstead he was only shown as 27 years old, he was nearer to thirty. They were living in Sivers Row and had a son, Edgar. Some five more children were to follow, one of whom, Mary, was buried in the churchyard. It is one of these children, Alfred Percy, born in Ringstead in 1880, who is the subject of our story.

The 1881 Census shows the family in Crick where Joseph had been posted as the local Police Constable. By the following Census, the family had moved do Badby but Alfred, or Percy as he was usually known was, aged 11, was a visitor, staying with William Reeves, a butcher, and his wife Sarah, in Crick. It may be that the family were in the process of moving but we cannot be sure. By 1901 his father, Joseph, aged 61, had retired from the County Constabulary and had become the landlord of the *Plume of Feathers* in Everdon. Next door was the Police Station House. Percy, aged 21, was with his family and working as a butcher, as was his elder brother, Leonard.

The following year Joseph died, aged 62, and was buried in the churchyard in Everdon on the 11th July 1902. By 1911, his widow, Mary, aged 61 was the owner of a dairy farm in Everdon. Percy, 31 and unmarried, was still working as a butcher and his oldest brother, Edgar was also at home working as a carpenter.

There was another part of Percy's working life not shown in the Census. On 28th March 1910 he had enlisted for four years with the Northamptonshire Yeomanry. This was a regiment that had been created in 1908 as part of the Territorial Force. It was attached for training to the Eastern Mounted Brigade and, like the other Territorial Regiments, was a volunteer force with weekly meetings and annual camps. He originally signed up for four years and was given Regimental Number 2298. On the 27th of March 1914 he signed up for another year. On the 25th of August of that same year Percy married Ellen Brown at Northampton Register Office

With the coming of war the Yeomanry had been formed into three full-time units and Percy was posted to "C" Squadron of the 2/1st which had been formed in September 1914. It appears that he had signed up for a further year's extension to his contract for he was finally disembodied on the 27th of March 1916. At about this time the 2/1st, which had never been posted abroad, began to be absorbed by other units. Perhaps surprisingly, soldiers in the Regular Army who came to the end of their time could elect to finish their service even in the middle of the war. The unit had been based near St Albans and this explains why Percy had been discharged from nearby Luton.

That was not the end of his service however for, on the 14th of October 1916, he was recalled to the colours. He was now 36 years 8 months old and shown as a farm labourer living in Everdon. He was 5ft 4 inches tall and weighed 154 pounds. The record is rather smudged and faded but it appears that he needed further dental extractions and was deaf in his left ear. His medical classification was "C2" which meant that he was free from serious organic disease, able to stand service conditions in garrisons at home, and, in addition, able to walk to and from work a distance not exceeding five miles and hear sufficiently well for ordinary purposes. His category meant that he would never be called for active service abroad.

He was first posted to the 3/1st Regiment of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry which was absorbed into the 3rd Reserve Cavalry Regiment at Canterbury. He was posted again to the Scottish Cavalry Depot which was at Dunbar on the 22nd June 1917 before being transferred to the Machine Gun Corps on the 6th July and then to the Machine Gun Training Centre at Belton Park.

Finally, on the 9th October 1918 he was attached to 436 Agricultural Depot at Northampton before being transferred to the Labour Corps where he was allotted service number 662748. You get a picture of a man who was being moved around wherever some help was needed. Perhaps some reason for this can be seen from a comment made on his discharge in 1916 for he was said to be hardworking and a *good butcher*. Was he being used in this capacity in the different units?

He was examined at Northampton on the 20th of February 1919 and now given medical category "B2". He was discharged and returned to life in Everdon. I think that the family had three children: John born in 1916 had died as a baby but Dorothy, born in 1920 and Percy, born in 1923 survived.

1923, however, was also a tragic year for the Baldersons. Percy's mother, Mary, died on Sunday 13th May 1923 and he followed her the next day. They were buried together on the following Friday at Everdon. He was 43 years old and left £104 in his Will. His widow Ellen had to find work as a domestic help. She died in 1959.

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Chapter 2

Ivy Elizabeth Adams (1892-1979)

In my account of the people from Ringstead, I have told the stories of the men who served in the forces. There were a few women, besides the ones who took over the roles that these men had previously held in farms and factories, who served as nurses at home and abroad. So far, I have only found one woman from Ringstead but there may have been others. I have already written a little about her in the biography of Stuart Dimbleby Bates who she later married but she deserves a place of her own to represent these women who, often voluntarily served the war effort.

Ivy was born on the 21st August 1892 to Harry and Elizabeth (née Childs) who were both born in Ringstead. Harry was a shoe rivetter in one of the local factories. The 1901 Census finds the family at 13 Carlow Road. By 1911 Harry had become an Insurance Broker and Ivy Elizabeth, at 18 years old, was a Pupil Teacher in a local County Council school. They were now living in "Ferndale" a six-room house in Denford Road.

War came in 1914 and by the end of 1916 most of the younger men of the village had been taken to serve in the war. Many of the men who went out were killed or came back wounded, ill or broken in spirit. As in the present Covid 19 Pandemic, the hospitals were soon filled with the casualties. The *Wartime Project* website records that:

> *The nature of the fighting during the Great War led to a huge number of injured soldiers and the existing military medical facilities in the United Kingdom were soon overwhelmed. A solution had to be found quickly and many civilian hospitals were turned over to military use, a large number of asylums were also converted to military hospitals, with the asylum patients being sent home, often to unprepared families. As demand for beds grew, large buildings such as Universities and hotels were transformed into hospitals and wooden huts sprang up in hospital grounds and at army camps to cope with the huge numbers. Additional nursing staff were needed and this was met by a mixture of qualified nurses and volunteers*.

The *Red Cross* and *St John Ambulance* had set up a Joint War Committee and they pooled resources under the *Red Cross* emblem which was internationally recognized. They set up V.A.D. (Voluntary Aid Detachment) hospitals, largely or entirely, staffed by volunteers. The Red Cross website describes how:

> *The buildings varied widely, ranging from town halls and schools to large and small private houses, both in the country and in cities. The most suitable ones were established as auxiliary hospitals. Auxiliary hospitals were attached to central Military Hospitals, which looked after patients who remained under military control. There were over 3,000 auxiliary hospitals administered by Red Cross county directors. In many cases, women in the local neighbourhood volunteered on a part-time basis.*

The hospitals often needed to supplement voluntary work with paid roles, such as cooks. Local medics also volunteered, despite the extra strain that the medical profession was already under at that time. The patients at these hospitals were generally less seriously wounded than at other hospitals and they needed to convalesce. The servicemen preferred the auxiliary hospitals to military hospitals because they were not so strict, they were less crowded and the surroundings were more homely.

The local V.A.D. Hospitals mainly took the men after their initial treatment who still needed care and rehabilitation. These hospitals were set up in Northampton, Wellingborough, Higham Ferrers and across the county. The Auxiliary Hospital in Higham Ferrers had been set up in the Parish Rooms with initially 16 to 18 beds (later increased to 22). It began in March 1915 and was largely staffed by St John Ambulance volunteers under the leadership of "Commandant" and Matron, Mrs. Clara Patenhall, with a local doctor in attendance.

Ivy Adams joined the hospital, as a nursing sister, assisting in the ward, on the 1st of July 1916 and she worked there until the 31st December 1918. In all, she completed 1200 hours service which would be about ten hours a week. At the end of December 1918, like many others of these temporary units, the Higham Auxiliary Hospital closed.

Ivy with Stuart on the farm (with thanks to Adrian Farr and Jon Abbott)

As the war was ending, the great “Spanish Flu” Pandemic swept across the world. In November 1918, a sister in charge of the Wellingborough Auxiliary Hospital for the past two years, died. I have not found if she was a relation of Ivy, but she was simply referred to as “Nurse Adams”. She had been infected either with flu or pneumonia, the reports vary, from one of her patients who had later died. The esteem that the nurses were held in, is shown by her funeral which was held with full military honours and attended by great crowds.

Higham Parish Rooms before they were used as a V.A.D. Hospital.

By this time many of the servicemen were returning home and among them was Ringstead man, Stuart Dimbleby Bates, son of the local Baptist Minister, John Bates. Stuart and Ivy married in the Spring of 1920 and lived at first with Ivy’s parents in *Ferndale*. Stuart’s mother died in 1924 and his father in 1928 and in 1931 the couple moved to Yew tree farm in Ringstead High Street. They ran a small farm with hens, pigs and a small dairy herd.

They sold milk around the village from churns which they ladled into customers’ jugs. Older villagers also remembered that Ivy sold home-made ice-cream at the back door of Yew Tree Farm and that airmen from USAF Chelveston were appreciative customers.

The couple had one child, Janet, born on the 8th of May 1932 and, besides looking after her and the house, Ivy also helped on the farm and was a dressmaker. Janet married Cyril Farr and later gave up her work as a School Meals Supervisor to help her parents with the milk business. It would have been a busy life for all of them. Stuart died in 1971 and Ivy, aged 86, in 1979.

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Chapter 3

Henry Raymond (1606 – 1666)

Henry Raymond was a minister at Ringstead through some of the most turbulent periods of British history. In the time of Henry VIII, the Church of England had broken away from the Roman Catholic Church because of the Pope's refusal to allow the divorce of Catherine by Henry. Underlying this, however, was the increasing belief of the Tudor monarchs that the Pope was an outside political power and that the crown should be the ultimate authority in England. As we have seen in the world over the last sixty years, once you remove an overarching authority from an area it tends to break up into bitter disputes between rival interpretations of religion and nationhood.

With each new monarch the imposed religious practices changed and at a local level the services and the interiors of the parish churches would also change. The Church of England had become part of the bureaucracy of state from 1537 when each parish had to keep, by law, Registers of Christenings, Weddings and Burials.

During the seventeenth century religious divisions widened leading in part to the English Civil War, the Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell and then the Restoration of Charles II (which was not the end of the religious seesawing in the century).

Henry Raymond was a minister in Ringstead during this period of religious and civil turmoil.

He was born in 1606 (from his age at marriage), the oldest son of Francis Raymond of Dunmow in Essex and his first wife. In 1604 Francis had married Mary Eve of Maldon in Essex. They had three other children, John, Mary and Francis. After the death of Mary, Francis married Elizabeth Spilman and there were four further children, Hanna, Martha, Abigale and Francis.

In Easter 1623 Henry matriculated at, (became a member of), Emmanuel College Cambridge as a "pensioner" or "commoner" which meant that he had not gained a scholarship and so had to pay for his tuition and "commons" (board and lodging). At this time, with few exceptions students of Oxford and Cambridge had to be members of the Church of England and of the gentry. He gained his B.A in 1626-7 and his M.A. in 1630. Both awards were often largely a matter of payment and time rather than of any learning and examination.

Between these two awards he had been ordained as a deacon at Upton Chapel near Castor by Thomas Dove, Rector of Castor and Bishop of Peterborough, on September 3rd 1628 and a day later as a priest. The Doves owned most of the land in the Castor area before it was sold to the Fitzwilliams in the eighteenth century. Thomas was a noted preacher who had greatly impressed Elizabeth I. He died in 1630.

It seems that Henry became a curate at Ringstead in 1630 (or possibly 1628) and he was described as a Clerk from Ringstead on his marriage licence of May of that year, some five years after the accession of Charles I. The vicar of the joint parish of Denford with Ringstead was James Southwell (1617-38).

Charles the First began to reorder the church again, emphasising ritual rather than preaching. We cannot be sure how far each round of changes reached Ringstead but many churches prior to this had had a communion table lengthwise in the chancel with the seating around it on three sides. Charles, through Archbishop Laud particularly, had it moved back to under the East window as an altar and rails, communion wine, surplices etc., were reintroduced. They became more like churches before the split with Rome under Henry Vlll introduced changes, and to High Anglican churches today. In the Peterborough diocese these orders were rigorously enforced so it appears likely that the Ringstead Church would have undergone these changes. We get some sense that there was local resistance to this from an order given in 1631 to Ringstead Church to repair the chancel screen (which separated the clergy from the laity) and presumably Raymond replied by saying that the position of the pulpit had caused "inconveniences", (i.e., made this difficult to carry out).

James l had first issued a *Declaration of Sports* for Lancashire in 1617 and it was applied nationally in 1618. This had set down sports which were permitted on Sundays and holy days and those that were not. Those allowed included: archery, dancing, “leaping, vaulting, or any such harmless recreation” together with “May-games, Whitsun-ales and Morris-dances and the setting up of May-poles”. Recreations that were not permitted included Bear and Bull Baiting, “interludes” and bowling. On 18th October 1633 this Declaration was reissued by Charles with the addition of “wakes and ales” (countryside sports) to the list of sanctioned (allowed) sports. Although he denied it, the new *Book of Sports* was attributed to Archbishop Laud. Any parish priest who refused to read this declaration was to be deprived of his position.

The Puritans, who wanted to emphasise the keeping of Sunday "holy", led a Sabbatarian movement against this Declaration. Edmund Calamy, writing in the Eighteenth Century, stated that Henry Raymond was “an able Preacher and bold as a Lion” and Robert Woodford in his diary wrote that Henry Raymond “was a puritan divine who read a lecture at Ringstead sponsored by patrons from London in which he condemned the Laudian Book of Sports”. I am not sure when this lecture was read as obviously this has relevance to the bravery of his action.

In 1630, Henry Raymond, "Clerk of Ringstead, Northamptonshire", had married Susanna Eakins of Gumbley (Gumley near Foxton 5 mile north-west of Market Harborough) at Gumbley or Langton (St Peter’s Church, Langton is some five miles east) in Leicestershire. In the Marriage Licence transcription on the *Findmypast* website it states that Henry was 24, so born about 1606, and Susanna was 20. This seems to contradict the usual age of seventy given for his age at death. If the marriage transcription is correct, he was nearer to sixty.

Although, at her wedding, Susanna Ekins was said to be of “Gumbley” she was the “Susan daughter of Henrie Ekins” and his wife Susan (née Keyworth) christened at Ringstead on 12th February 1609. Henry was the son of Robert Ekins of Chelveston and Isabel, daughter of Alexander Travell of Weston Favell. His brother, Alexander Ekins, of Chelveston seems to have been the main heir. The country seat of the Ekins family was at Weston Favell, near Northampton (possibly through the Travells) with three generation of Alexander Ekins being the heads of the families in succession in the early 17th Century. [Looking at the family tree in *The Visitations of Essex, Vol.13* I think there was a brief interlude from about 1638 to1642 when Robert Ekins was the head.].

Henry and Susan Ekins had three other daughters, Elizabeth, Elinor and Isabell. Elinor had married John French of Gumley and it seems most likely that Susanna was staying with her sister and brother-in-law at the time of her wedding. It still may seem a little odd to have been married away from both of the couple's homes but perhaps the birth of a child quite soon after the marriage may have been another factor. The first child of Henry, now the Ringstead curate, and Susanna was christened “Marie” at Ringstead on January 25th 1630 which confusingly was some seven months after their marriage in May 1630, as the old calendar ran from Lady Day (25th March).

There followed regular entries into the *Ringstead Baptismal Register of Christenings* for the couple. I have included a couple of christenings of the children of Henry and Susanna Hayman although you would think that the children of the curate would have the correct surname written in the *Register*: Henry James (29/09/1633); Susan Rayman (26/12/1636); Francis Hayman (06/01/1637);Thomas (16/09/1639); Rebecka Ramone “daughter of Henry” (1641); Hanna Raymond (03/10/1643); John Raymond is recorded as born at Weston [Favell?] at the end of April 1645 and buried there ** months later [incomplete]; Marie again (26//09/1647); John (06/10/1647); Elizabeth (06/10/1648); Elizabeth again (04/05/1651) Finally there was another Hannah but no details were given although it appears to have been after 1651. There is a gap in the Ringstead Burial Register from March 8th 1639 to February 24th 1665 so we cannot check for infant deaths. The Puritan “Commonwealth” was from 1649 to 1660 and before this there was a tendency for parishes to lean towards Puritan or Catholic beliefs, within the Church of England, and it seems that Ringstead would have been in the former camp with Henry as the minister. It may be, therefore, that the two later entries are for adult baptisms.

The Vicar of the joint parish, Arthur Leonard, had been “sequestered” (removed from office) in 1647. In an article in the *History Review* of the 30th March 1998 John Morrill wrote:

> *Between 1643 and 1647 the Church of England was destroyed, its system of government by 'archbishops, bishops, deans, archdeacons etc.' (as a canon of 1640 expressed it) was scrapped; the Book of Common Prayer was proscribed and its use made a criminal offence; the celebration of the major Christian festivals – Christmas, Easter, Whit etc. – was also prohibited.*

The leaders of the church were all dead, in prison, in exile, or in hiding; the universities were ruthlessly purged; between a quarter and a third of the parish clergy were ejected from their homes and positions. Dioceses were replaced by county-wide ecclesiastical co-operatives, and cathedral churches were converted into prisons, shopping precincts, or large parish churches; and churchwardens and others were directed to remove all the 'monuments of idolatry and superstition' (stained glass, statues, carvings on fonts and other furnishings) which had survived the first reformation of images in the mid sixteenth century. The lands and revenues of the Bishops and of the Cathedral chapters were handed over to the creditors of the state.

Henry became Vicar of the joint parish of Denford with Ringstead in 1647 which Edward Calamy stated was worth some 40 to 50 pounds a year. During Henry's time as Vicar, witch trials were happening all over the country. Malcom Gaskill has written of John Stearne, the "Witchfinder" who worked with Matthew Hopkins, the self-styled "Witchfinder General" to find and see executed witches, both men and women. According to Stearne, a young man of Denford, 'who suffered for Witchery", confessed among other things to sending imps to kill the cattle of one Cockes (probably churchwarden Thomas Cox) of Denford.

The English Civil War had started in 1642 and 1647 was a brief pause before a short second conflict which culminated in the execution of Charles I in 1649. The Commonwealth lasted until 1660 when the monarch was "restored" and Charles ll returned to England in what is usually termed the Restoration. Much of the old church practices and ritual were again reinstated and in 1662 a slightly revised *Book of Common Prayer* was issued. Every incumbent of church office had to take an oath of loyalty both to the new Prayer Book and to the monarchy. Two thousand ministers refused and were ejected from their livings. In 1665 the *Five Mile Act* forbade the ejected clergy to come within five miles of the place where they had held a living. Arthur Leonard was reinstated as Vicar of the joint parish.

It appears that Henry was one of the "2000 Worthies" who were ejected from their posts in 1660. In Robert Woodford's Diary he records that "Alexander Eakins of Weston Favell, whose servants were accused of brawling in the belfry of St. Peter's Church in Northampton in 1634 "died in Ringstead in 1666 where his family owned property". He left money to his kinsman, Henry Raymond, a puritan divine. If this date is correct the bequest did not do Henry much good as, it appears that he may also have died at about this time. His burial does not appear in the *Ringstead Burial Register* and I have not yet found it definitely elsewhere. During the chaos of this period much of the recording was not carried out and there are only three burials listed in the Ringstead Register between 1665 and 1668. Surely some must have gone unrecorded.

Henry would have been a lesser member of the landed gentry and Susanna also had strong connections to the landowning class. The Hearth Tax return for Ringstead taken on 30th September 1662 records that Henry Raymond had a house with three hearths (Mr. Ekins had 6 and Alexander Ekins 4).

After Henry's death, in 1666 his widow still had three hearths (so presumably in the same house), the widow of Alexander Ekins had four and Mr. Ekins six.

On November 21st 1665 Henry had made his Will and it was proved on October 15th 1666. It detailed his various bequests with his wife Susanna as his executrix:

> *To wife Susanna house and homestead with all land &c., in Ringstead, and all goods remaining after wife's decease to son Henry and his heirs; to son Francis 40/= [£2]; son Thomas £10; dau. Susanna Raymond, house, &c., bought of Rich. Lileman, paying to her brother Henry's children £10 a child at 21, that is to say, to his son Joseph, his dau. Mary, his dau. Susanna £10 each. To daughter Susanna R. my silver tankard; 2nd dau. Rebecca R. £80; dau. Hanna £80; dau Mary land in Ringstead bought of Anthony Aborne; dau. Elizabeth R. that little close I bought of Robert Gilbert in R. [Ringstead] and £50. To son Francis's son£10; my 4 youngest daus. a silver spoon each; to dau. Raymond wife of Henry 10/=; cosen Samuel Ekins and his wife Mr.Hilderssham's book upon the 4th of St. John and the 51 Psalme; Poor of R. [Ringstead] 20/= [£1]; wife Susanna exec.*
>
> *Inventory taken 29th April 1666, £220 4s. 6d. including his library £14 0s 0d.*

The Inventory itself does fill in a little detail to the house and lands of Henry. It does not include the houses and lands:

	£	**s**	**d**
His wearing apparrell	*06*	*13*	*04*
His Library	*14*	*00*	*00*
All the goods in the Hall	*01*	*10*	*00*
All the goods in the Parlour	*04*	*10*	*00*
The goods in the Milk House	*01*	*03*	*06*
The goods in the Buttery	*00*	*10*	*06*
The goods in the two Chambers over the hall	*04*	*06*	*08*
The goods in the Parlour Chamber with the Linnin	*04*	*15*	*04*
The grain and the goods in the kitchen and milk house chamber	*02*	*05*	*06*
The Cowes	*06*	*10*	*06*
The grain in the field	*08*	*04*	*06*
The hoggs pullen [chickens?] Mannard [Mallard?] in the yard	*01*	*12*	*04*
The debts	*160*	*00*	*00*
Total	***220***	***04***	***06***

Henry also had a licence for a "birden piece" (a small-bore gun used for shooting birds) so we see that he would have probably enjoyed the hunting and fishing as many country gentlemen of the time. One of the sporting parsons caricatured and derided by later generations. Nevertheless, he made a stand and was one of the two thousand "Worthies" and it seems that after his ejectment he never preached again.

The local church was now irrevocably split and the Baptists of Ringstead and Raunds trekked each Sunday to Rowell

(Rothwell) and back to hear another ejected priest from Desborough preach. In 1714 the Ringstead Baptist Church was established.

Meanwhile we know that two of Henry's sons, Henry and Thomas, had gone into the ministry and both "conformed" and stayed within the Church of England. Interestingly both are shown as being educated at Ringstead. Was there a private school at Ringstead at this date or were they educated at home, perhaps by Henry himself or by a tutor? The eldest son, Henry was first at Little Oakley but spent most of his career as Rector of Warkton, where he was buried. The third son, Thomas, spent most of his working life as Rector of Hardwick in Northamptonshire. In 1668 Susanna Raymond of Ringstead married Abraham Syannon [?] of Kettering. Is this Henry's widow or, more likely, his daughter? The following year Abraham Green of Moulton married Mary Raymond. Abraham is recorded as being a husbandman "of Warkton", parish of brother Henry.

Postscript

The Tuttle (various spellings) family of Ringstead are known as one of the early families who migrated to America. Originally, they came from Woodford but in 1896 Symon Tuttle had bought a large property in Queen's Way in December 1596 We see in the Ringstead Baptismal Register the christenings of the children of his sons, John and Richard and William from 1623 to 1634. It seems probable that Henry Raymond, curate at Ringstead from 1630, officiated at the later ones of these and possibly at the burial of Symon on June 15th 1630.

John Tuttle had been set up in the mercery business (which included linens, silks etc.) in St Albans by his father and, in 1640 the Will of Francis Raymond of Danbury (father or brother of Henry?), was described as a "Linen Draper". Was this just coincidence? In 1634/5 Thomas, was the last of William and Elizabeth's children to be christened in Ringstead. The family sold their properties to John Bellamy and Richard, William and families, together with their widowed mother Isobel, joined brother John in St Albans. In 1635, aboard *The Planter,* they sailed for Boston in America. They were not a family escaping poverty so probably it was their religion that played an important part in their decision to take the dangerous voyage to this Puritan settlement. Did the preaching of Henry have anything to do with this? Certainly, one wonders if Richard and Anne Tuttle talked about their plans with Henry.

There seems some evidence that Richard Raymond and others of Henry's extended family from Dunmow also emigrated in the Seventeenth Century, but this needs more investigation.

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Chapter 4

Alfred John Sandilands (c1803-1862) and Anna Maria Bethune (c1800-1880)

I have written elsewhere about John Phillips, whose few years as a soldier had been hidden in the space between the parish records. Another reminder, of how much of a person's life is often beneath the surface of the local records, has been brought to my attention. It concerns Alfred John Sandilands who was Vicar of the joint parish of Denford with Ringstead from 1854 until his death in 1862.

In writing about the long list of rectors, vicars and curates that were incumbents during the nineteenth century I tried not to stray too far from their time in the parish. In the case of Alfred this meant that I missed his extraordinary behaviour and its consequences in the period just before he took up the Denford with Ringstead living.

I wrote, "He had just married a widow, Ann Maria Leggatt, on 11th April 1850 in Brighton and they came to Denford four years later". I was wrong because "they" never came. Anna Maria (there are various spellings) Bethune, the daughter of the Reverend G.M. Bethune, the vicar of Worth in Sussex, was born in 1800. On 6thSeptember 1821 she married Horatio Leggatt, some twenty years her senior. Horatio, from the Norfolk gentry, had been indentured to Attorney, George Whemer at Reepham in Norfolk in 1793 and in 1800 he had gained a post in the Office of Taxes. In 1820, he had become Solicitor to the Board of Taxes. He had a salary of £1500 a year, an official residence in Royal Terrace, Adelphi so that, with other "perks", his income was equivalent to some £3,000 a year. Then, in 1833 his department was merged with another and Horatio was made redundant with a pension of £1,300 a year (worth about £150,000 a year in 2020, although estimates will vary. All his furniture in Adelphi Terrace, together with his paintings, fine china and wines, were sold by auction. The sudden reduction in his income together with his loss of position drove Horatio into a deep depression with terrible consequences. The *Leicestershire Mercury* of 29thDecember 1838 reported:

> *SUICIDE. – Horatio Leggatt, Esq. late solicitor to the Commissioners of Taxes, cut his throat at Morley's Hotel, London, last week. The deceased was 65 years of age, was pensioned off in 1833, on a large allowance, and was constantly saying that he was the most wretched man in existence, for want of active employment*.

The couple had had eight children, of whom two girls did not survive infancy and Anna Maria was left with six children under 18. A report in the *Newcastle Journal* of 7th March 1840 reported on a Parliamentary debate on another call for a pension for someone leaving office. In the debate the case of Anna Maria was raised. Horatio's pension had finished with his death and she was left with a "jointure" [provision made by a husband at marriage, for his wife after his death] of £300 a year for the support of herself and her six children, aged from 17 to 2 years old.

In recognition of his 34 years' unblemished service, she had "memorialised" first the Lord Chancellor and then the First Lord of the Treasury for a pension to relieve her state of destitution but had been refused as her case was not covered by the rules laid down by the House of Commons. On the 26th July 1841, the *Sussex Advertiser* carried details of Leggatt's house, called Oakfield Lodge in Worth, with its ten acres of land including gardens, orchards and a pair of cottages, which was to be auctioned under an order of the High Court of Chancery. On 10th February of the previous year the Court of Chancery had asked for all creditors of Horatio to come forward to prove their debts so perhaps the sale of the house was partly to clear these debts and the death duties.

Hugo Leggatt has kindly sent me a transcript of the Will of Horatio's brother, the Reverend Samuel Leggatt, made in 1841. In this he leaves bequests to pay Miss Gwynn £50 and £30 to the Miss Millers, who ran an academy in Brighton, to cover debts left by Horatio. In an 1847 codicil he revokes these bequests because Anna Maria had paid them. Samuel also left £500 pounds to Elizabeth Simpson, a widow, "*but if not then surviving the said sum of five hundred pounds to be equally divided between the several illegitimate children of my late brother, Horatio Leggatt or between their personal representatives."* It is not clear, but it seems that Elizabeth Simpson was his mistress, living in Gloucester Place in New Road, Marylebone and the children were hers. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find her in the Censuses. It seems likely that Horatio's, rather profligate, life unravelled when he lost his post with the Government and this led to his depression and death.

Anna Maria probably had gone to live with her father George Maximilian Bethune who was Rector of Worth and then, when he died, in December 1840, with her brother George Bethune who took over from his father as Rector. Certainly, she is there in Rectory House in the 1841 Census along with her widowed mother, also Anna. Her two youngest children Catherine (8) and George (4) were still at home with her. There were six servants for the small household. Her two older girls, Anna (15) and Georgiana (12) were in a small private school run by a woman with the Dickensian name of Susannah Grimley In Vassall Road in Lambeth. [Georgiana was wrongly named as *Georgina* Mary Bethune Leggatt in the Parish Register when she was christened at St. Martin in the Fields in Westminster even though the service was conducted by her uncle, George Bethune.]

Perhaps it was at Worth that she met another cleric, Alfred John Sandilands, for on 11th April 1850 she married him, just down the road, in Brighton. Alfred had been born on the 13th February 1803, the son of Richard and Jane (née Bradley), and christened in St George's Church in Hanover Square on the 27th of February. His mother died, probably in January 1810 and his father married Catherine Aleven on the 12th November 1816 at St Andrews in London. Richard had become a Minister of the English Church at St Omer, in France, where he died in 1836.

Alfred too, like most of the clergy, was linked to the gentry. He was ordained on 13th October 1827 and became a stipendiary curate at Heydon Bridge Chapel and then, in 1829, at Bishopwearmouth in Durham. In 1827 he had also been admitted as a "Ten-year-man" to Trinity College Cambridge. This was a type of mature student (over 24) who could become a Bachelor of Divinity after ten years without gaining a BA degree first.

It was criticised because the degree was awarded with no formal test of ability and was most used in the first have of the Nineteenth Century by men, who had already been ordained as clergy, and wanted to increase their status by taking a degree. It was also used by poorer men as a cheaper option.

In the 1841 Census Alfred was shown as 35 and still living at the Green in Bishopwearmouth and shown as a Church Minister. In 1845 he moved to the Vicarage of Darley in Derbyshire and in the 1851 Census for Cross Green in Wensley and Snitterton in South Darley, Alfred (48) is with his new wife Anna M. (49) and his step daughter Georgiana (21) together with two servants. There is also a mysterious figure, Jane L. Watson (29) the housekeeper, born in Rothbury in Northumberland, who appears regularly throughout the history of the family. Rothbury was not far from where Alfred had spent some time as a curate but this was some five years after her birth.

Unlike the poor of the nineteenth century, Anna Maria may not have had the imperative of desperate hardship to marry, but perhaps she needed security and did not want to be dependent on the goodwill of others: to be mistress of her own house again. Whatever the reasons, she soon regretted her decision, and any happiness seems to have been very short lived.

The newspaper reports on a case heard in the Queen's Bench on June 11th 1852 give some insight into what happened. The court was considering a case, *R. v. Horatio Leggatt,* originally heard in a lower court. Alfred Sandilands had brought an action of *habeas corpus* against Anna's son for withholding her from him. In the lower court this writ had been granted but the Queen's Bench judges confirmed that because she was living with her son of her own free will:

> "This court has no power to order a wife to be restored to her husband."

This was one of a number of important cases that established that a husband could not compel his wife to live with him, although he still retained the right to this power over their children.

The report of the case gives the bare bones of an unhappy wife desperately wishing to live apart from her husband. Hugo Leggatt, a descendant of Horatio, has written to me about the case and the light thrown on it by a letter sent to his father in 1957. The writer was Mary Nix who was 89 years old at the time. She had a note written by the wife of Anna Maria's brother, George Cuddington Bethune, which stated:

> *She (Anna-Maria) married secondly the Rev. Sandilands, curate of Worth, and they went to the west of England where he ill-treated her by locking her up in his house until she should make a will in his favour.*
>
> *She wrote this in her blood on a handkerchief, & dropped it out of her window, asking the finder to convey it to her father, then Rector of Worth, Sussex.*

> *The gardener picked up the handkerchief and took it to the Rector – who thereon took a trusty friend and a horsewhip & went to the rescue. He brought home Anna-Maria to Worth, where she eventually died. There is no further mention of the Rev. Sandilands.*

This sounds like an episode from one of the gothic novels that were popular in the first half of the nineteenth century. There appears to be some discrepancies and the reports on the court case describe what happened more prosaically:

> *Letters had been conveyed to the family, and her brother and son went to the husband's house in Derbyshire. They saw her and she left her husband's house with them. . .*

Alfred was the vicar of Darley in Derbyshire at this time which is hardly the "west of England". How far would the messenger gardener have had to travel? Further, the possibility of writing a letter in your blood on a handkerchief seems unlikely. Nevertheless, the essentials of the story appear to be true.

I had wrongly assumed that the couple came to Denford and Ringstead in 1854, but Alfred came alone, or at least without his wife. By 1861 we see Alfred in his house in Woodford (near Denford) with his stepdaughters Georgiana (31) and Catherine (28). There are also three servants, and Jane Louisa Watson (39) is a visitor. We know from the local newspapers that Alfred laid belligerently into the local gentry about the state of Ringstead Church and the Denford Rectory. Much needed work had started on the repair of the church when he died suddenly, aged 59, on 22nd September 1862 in Wodford House.

The summary of the probate on the 4th November reveals that he had "effects under £3000", a reasonably large but not huge sum. His executors were his brother Richard Samuel Butler Sandilands and Jane Louisa Watson, a spinster of Park Square in Middlesex.

There is a memorial monument to Alfred on the north wall in the tower. He had preached a sermon 26 hours before his death and the last words of this are inscribed on the monument:

> *He that has taken up the shroud and fought the good fight for a season, at the last day when the books shall be opened, and the hearts of all men shall be known, the sword of warfare shall be taken from him, and a crown of everlasting glory placed upon his head.*

He finished with a line taken from Revelations.

Anna Maria used the surname Sandilands all her life, although she is shown as just Anna Maria, relict of Horatio Leggatt on his memorial in Worth Church. In 1861 she was living with sister Catherine and her barrister husband in Slaugham in Sussex and in 1871 with her son Horace (Horatio) in Titchfield in Hampshire.

There is another twist to the story for, when Anna Maria died, aged 80, on 12th October 1880 at Brownwich in Titchfield, she left in her Will a personal estate of "under £10,000". She seems to have recovered from her "destitution" although much of this may have been from legacies from her parents. She bequeathed money to her children Horatio, Samuel and Anna Maria (Mence) but not to Georgiana, Catherine and George because she stated that they had "behaved to me most undutifully and improperly" She later, in a codicil, did leave something to George provided "he does not look like going bankrupt".

Can we infer that three children sided with Alfred? Life is rarely as clear cut as we would like it to be. A brief look at their lives may give us some clues as to why they were cut out of her Will.

Anna Maria remembered on the memorial to her first husband in St Nicholas Church, Worth.
With the kind permission of Charles Sale. www.gravestonephotos.com.
Photograph by Steve Lockwood.

George became a curate at Ilkeston and married Ellen Matthews, the daughter of a Farm Bailiff from Waltham in Leicestershire at St Marylebone Parish Church on 1st June 1867. In 1871 he is living with his in-laws and John Matthews describes himself as "formerly a farm labourer". In 1901 George and Ellen are together at Short Street in Rearsby in Leicestershire and written beside the entry for George there is a note, "paralysis". Ellen died in 1902 and George in 1904 in Essex.

Catherine Leggatt never married and became a governess in Mr. Tait's orphanage in Fulham and in 1911, aged 78 was a Sister in the Community of St Peter in St Peter's House of Rest in Woolverstone, near Ipswich. Woolverstone House was designed in 1901 by "Arts and Crafts" architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, and had gardens designed by Gertrude Jekyll. It was built for Mrs C. Berners, a lay sister of the East End Sisters of Mercy. Catherine died at St. Peter's House in Mortimer Road, Kilburn on 2nd April 1918, and her executor was solicitor Gerald Esdaile Winter. She left £326. 5s.

Georgiana in 1881 was an "annuitant", aged 52, living with Jane L. Watson (55 – her age varies from Census to Census) who "derives her income from property and dividends". They were living at 65 Blackett Street, St Andrews, Newcastle-on-Tyne. Georgiana's place of birth is shown as Crawley not St. Martin in the Fields as we would expect. But, in a previous Census, she had used Worth as her birthplace and Crawley was then a village in the very large parish of Worth, although it has now become the major settlement. It seems too much of a coincidence not to be the same person. Surprisingly, Georgiana is shown as Jane's half-sister so there must be a family connection of some sort.

Even more confusingly Georgiana had married widower Robert Young Rowley, butcher then cattle salesman, on February 14th 1873, at the Parish Church of St Peter in Newcastle. He was 45 years old, a widower and the son of Robert, a cork cutter. Georgina [sic] Mary Bethune Leggatt was 39 and the daughter of Horace Leggatt, a clerk in the Admiralty which is all almost correct - but not quite. Robert Rowley, at least from 1881 until his death on 28th November 1904, (a *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* transcription has death as 83 which seems wrong but his age too varies between Censuses), was living at 20 Eldon Place (or Street) and in 1891 Jane L. Watson was living just two doors away from him. But in 1891 Georgiana M.B. Rowley, "wife of R.Y. Rowley" aged 62 and born in St. Martin in the Fields is in the Union Workhouse in Newcastle.

A few months later, on 2nd June 1891, Georgiana Leggatt Rowley, aged **59** died in the Newcastle Registration District. The Death Certificate has the date of death as 28th May, aged **62**, and her name as Georgina **Matilda** Bethune Rowley and confirms that she died in Newcastle Union Workhouse. It seems inconceivable that this is not the same person. She died of "General debility, Diarrhoea and Exhaustion". Robert Young Rowley is shown as a retired butcher and his address is given on the certificate as 31 Ryehill, Newcastle. He was shown as living at 20 Eldon Street or Place in the 1891 and 1901 Censuses and in his probate summary. There is a widower, John Scott, umbrella maker, living with his widowed daughter and other family at 31 Ryehill in 1891. There is much still that needs explanation but I suspect that much of the confusion is down to clerical errors.

So, was it her three children's life choices or their attitude to her split with Alfred Sandilands which so angered Anna Maria?

Finally, looking at Jane Louisa Watson, there is another possibility for her connection to Georgiana which needs to be explored. Robert Young Rowley's first wife was Ann Watson who died in 1864.

In the 1851 census Robert and his wife were living in the Cloth Market in Newcastle. He was a butcher aged 28 and, in a part of the same house, was a widow, Jane Watson aged 65, also a butcher born in Harbottle in Northumberland. It seems likely that she was Robert Rowley's mother-in-law and possibly that Jane Louisa Watson was Robert's wife's sister. It is in this sense that Jane and Georgiana are "half-sisters". At the moment this is just one possibility, another being that Jane was one of Horatio's illegitimate children, so, once again, more work is needed.

As we have said, Jane Louisa Watson was shown in the 1891 Census living at 18 Eldon Street, St Andrews, Newcastle, with a domestic servant. She was an accountant which would have been unusual for a woman at this time. I think that she may have died on 31st December 1899 while living at Willow House, Longbenton in Northumberland but there are other possibilities. If this is the correct person, she left £5,938 7s. 5d. in her Will and her executors were Joseph Watson, brass finisher (and possibly Jane's nephew) and Isaac Freeman, collector of taxes. She seems to have been an independent, self-made woman who showed another side of the women's movement for equality.

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My thanks to Hugo Leggatt who sent me the fascinating information about the breakup of the Sandilands marriage and the Leggatt ancestry. Of course, any errors or assertions in the text are my responsibility.
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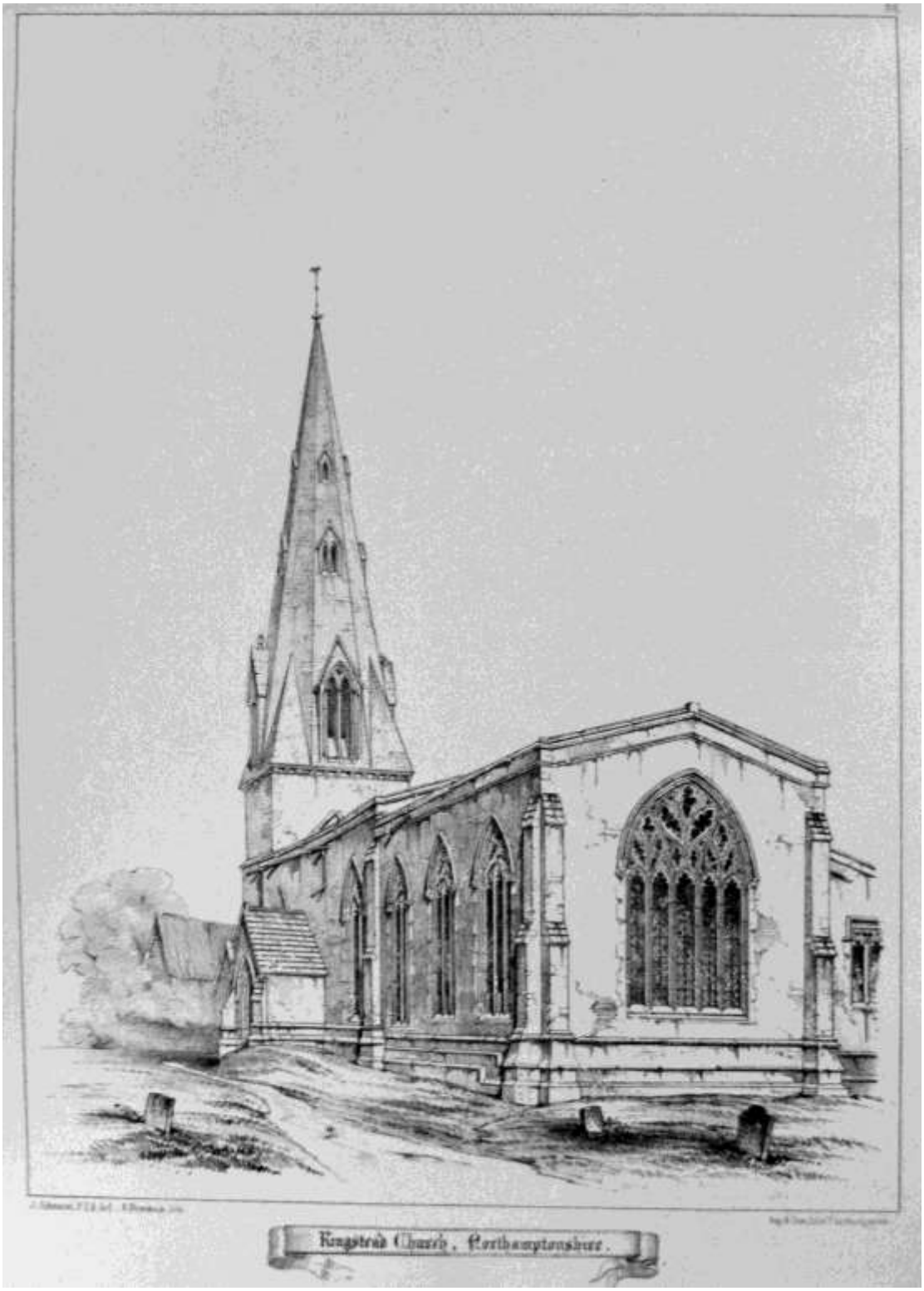

The Church from the south-east about 1858 showing the poor state that Alfred Sandilands saw when he came to the parish.

Lithograph after a drawing by John Johnson published in Reliques of Ancient English Architecture 1858. (own copy)

Chapter 5

JOSEPH SCOTT (1835– 1881) A POOR MURDERED STRANGER?

The story of Joseph Scott is one that reminds you of old folk songs and tales, or of the murder in *Cider with Rosie* by Laurie Lee where the village, or some part of it, closed round to protect its own.

In the 1881 Ringstead Census, Joseph was shown as a 41-year-old shoemaker lodging, together with Charles Mayes and William Manning, with the sixty-five-year-old widow, Eliza Bull and her son Julian. Joseph was not local but had been born in Towcester, in the west of the county. I have not found him definitely in earlier Censuses but it is complicated by the newspaper account of the Inquest into his death where the Raunds' police constable, Thomas West, is reported as saying that he known of him from his time in Towcester and he was 64 years old. At his burial, his age was given as 46 and I think this may be somewhere near the correct age and the "64" was just a newspaper typo. Thomas West also stated that Joseph had no relatives left in Towcester and in the 1881 Census he is shown as a widower. There is a John Scott, of approximately the right age from Paulerspury, who was a shoemaker, but he was still in the west of the County in the 1881 Census. We must leave it as a mystery until further evidence is found.

Eliza Bull said that he had not drunk for some two months when, on 26th December 1881 he went drinking in the *Bakers Arms* in Raunds. At some point the landlord, John Cobley, asked him to leave although he could not say that he was drunk, and he had not caused any trouble. The Coroner thought that this was odd and one wonders it was the actions of others in the bar towards Joseph was what the landlord thought might lead to trouble. The report of the Inquest makes clear that he was well known by the local police and pub landlords and that he had a tendency to turn nasty when drunk.

There can be little doubt that Joseph was a drunk and today we would recognize that he was suffering from alcoholism. The *Northampton Mercury* records many of his appearances in the Wellingborough and Thrapston courts for being drunk and sometimes drunk and disorderly. The dates when he was arrested were: 25th April 1879 at Rushden; 17th September 1879 at Ringstead;10th March1880 at Ringstead; 4th February 1881 at Ringstead: 1st April 1881 at Raunds; 6th July 1881 at Rushden. These usually resulted in fines with prison sentences in default. At the hearing for the April 1881 offence, however, the Thrapston Magistrates sentenced him to one month's hard labour, "as he had just been liberated from gaol for drunkenness".

This list of appearances in court for drunkenness starts in 1879 and, although the constable knew him from Towcester, I can find no sign of a Joseph Scott being in trouble before that date in Northamptonshire. Perhaps the loss of his wife started his drinking (I have not found her death) or perhaps some of the details he gave to the Census officer were deliberately incorrect.

Joseph was turned out of the *Bakers Arms* at about 6.15 pm on Boxing Day and it was already dark outside. John Cobley saw Joseph fall down immediately after leaving the pub but also saw him get to his feet up and go on his way. Again, rather oddly the landlord stated that Joseph did not fall down through illness. If he was not drunk and not ill, what was the cause? Later in the inquest Eliza Bull stated that he was subject to falling fits. It may be that Joseph was a drunk but that he also had other health problems.

Much later that evening, at just gone ten o'clock, Thomas Hall, a shoemaker saw Joseph, lying in the street, surrounded by a large crowd of boys and others and one or two in the crowd were pushing him about. Thomas shouted to them not to hurt Joseph. He called to his friend, Bradshaw Harris and, having heard that Joseph was from Ringstead, they agreed to take him part of the way home.

The two men walked with him up the hill towards Ringstead but, part of the way up the Ringstead Road, Joseph had said that he wanted to lay down. Although the gang of youths was still following them, the men decided to leave Joseph by himself. They were by a field called Butcher's Close which was owned by Mrs. Pentelow They took the locked field gate off its hinges and put Joseph on the ground in the field beside the hedge. They then replaced the gate and thought he would be safe.

The next morning a boot and shoe salesman from Raunds called John Bass was driving past the field in a horse and cart when he noticed a body lying in the ditch beside the road. The ditch was outside the field so Joseph would have had to climb over the gate to reach it. There was, John stated, a "good stream" in the ditch but that Joseph was lying on his back, bearing a little on his right shoulder. The stream was high enough to cover his shoulders, but his face was not under water. His face was dirty and his coat and shirt on his right shoulder were torn and his shoulder was bare.

At the Inquest John Crew, a surgeon from Higham Ferrers, stated that he had examined the body in the stables of the Cock Inn where it had been taken. He said that there was a great deal of dirt around his nose and mouth and he believed he had died of suffocation either from drowning or from his face being pushed into soft wet earth. The Coroner also concluded that Joseph did not fall into the ditch as a result of a fit. In spite of this, the Inquest Jury found that he had fallen into the ditch by accident and had died of exposure. The foreman of the jury, Henry Perkins, did add that, "We believe his death was caused by being treated more like a dog than a human being".

Joseph, aged 46, was buried in St Peter's churchyard in Raunds on the 29th December 1881 (immediately after the Inquest). Letters followed in the local newspapers condemning both his treatment and that he had been buried without being washed and decently clothed. Others defended the jury's decision and believed that drink was the problem and a proper verdict had been reached. We do know that Joseph had been sentenced to hard labour in the year that he died. What this entailed varied from prison to prison but in the 1820s a treadmill, and a crank mill for grinding and dressing corn, had been installed at Northampton.

This hard, debilitating work on a poor diet broke many men's health and would probably have worsened rather than improved Joseph's health even if it prevented his drunkenness for a time. The County Gaol closed at the start of 1880 and prisoners were then sent to the new prison at The Mounts in Northampton so further research, again, is needed.

In Ringstead and other local villages many people were incensed about his treatment and the verdict and a letter was sent to the Home Secretary. I have not found that anything happened as a result. Was he a vulnerable man with an underlying illness who was tormented to death by a mob? His landlady stated that he had many falling fits, sometimes two in a night. So, was it a result of an underlying illness or was his death even more sinister? Did some of his assailants take their secret guilt to the grave?

References

1881 Ringstead Census. I have searched for him in various previous Northamptonshire Censuses but there is not one John Scott who fits the known facts. The name does seem associated with Paulerspury near Towcester but for one reason or another not one seems to be the correct Joseph.
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Chapter 6

Avis Fairey (c1804-1887) and Mary Ann Jenkinson (c1839-1919)

Lyn Watson recently e-mailed me to point out that there was an error in my account of Herbert Abington, the young son of the village grocer and chemist, who kept a diary detailing the last few years of his short life. Lyn also asked if I knew about the son of a Mary Ann Jenkinson who she believed was the illegitimate child of Leonard Joseph Abington, brother to the young Herbert.

This sent me looking through the records and I found an interesting family which was new to me although some of their stories have been well documented by others.

Avis Fairey was baptised in Ringstead Parish Church on 20th June 1813 (although born in about 1804), along with her sisters Phebe (Phoebe: born about 1801) and Pearcy (born about 1797). They were the children of John and Elizabeth Fairey (or Farey).

Pearcy (or Peacy) married John Cheney on 23rd February 1826 in Ringstead Church but died in 1830. Phoebe had married John Miller of Marefield in Leicestershire on 3rd April 1823 in Ringstead Church. In 1851 she, like her younger sister Lucy, was living in Mancetter, a small village in Warwickshire, where John was a small famer with 15 acres and no farmhands. We see that he had been born there and had been baptised in 1798 with his twin brother, Thomas, who was also living in the village. Lucy was with her husband Samuel Miller, also born in Mancetter and working as a Groom. They had married in Ringstead on the 31st May 1830. The brothers were the sons of George and Elizabeth Miller.

It is Avis Fairey with whom we are mainly concerned. She was married in Ringstead Church to Edward Jenkinson from Kettering on December 26th, 1827. The witnesses were Edward's brother, John Jenkinson, and Lucy Fairey, Avis's younger sister who had been born in about 1806 but I do not think was baptised until July 16th 1820.

Edward's brother, John Jenkinson, wrote in his autobiography that Edward had been seriously ill in the February of the previous year with "Brain Fever" which was apparently cured by:

> *. . . shaving the head of the dear sufferer, applying a blister* thereto, assiduous nursing, the skill of the medical advisor and above all by the Lord's blessing on the user of these means.*

*The Victorians believed that the body could not have more than one illness at a time. They caused a blister by acid or burning to create this second "illness".

John Jenkinson also tells of the wedding and the journey he and his brother made to Ringstead.

On December 26th 1827, my brother was married in Ringstead parish church (Dissenters being at that time precluded from having the marriage services performed in their churches).

I accompanied him for the purpose of giving away the bride. Our journey from Kettering was literally through the darkness and the deeps.

We started from home before daylight and after travelling nearly six miles, we met a person who told us the flood was so great he did not think we should be able to get across Ringstead meadows, but as we had not time to go round by Thrapston we kept on our way and as a consequence got nearly up to our waists in water. However, on reaching Ringstead we presently dried our clothes, and were at the church quite in time to have the marriage celebrated within the canonical hours. I preached at Ringstead Baptist Chapel in the evening and returned home on the following day.

John Jenkinson was born on 7th June 1799 and Edward on 13th February 1803 in Hallaton in Leicestershire. Although little mentioned in John's autobiography there was also a sister, Lettice and. Their mother's father, the Reverend John Ayer, was a Baptist preacher and certainly John did receive some basic education at Hallaton Free School. Their father, Stephen, was a boot and shoe maker employing some four journeymen and apprentices. He lost much time and money pursuing his belief, which was wrong according to his son John Jenkinson, that he had a claim to a Derbyshire estate. His son described him as 'some times more enterprising than provident'.

The whole family was struck down by a fever, but they all survived except the father who died on 23rd June 1807 aged 32 years. John was eight and Edward four years old. All his stock in trade and the household furniture had to be sold to pay his debts and John states that an Uncle took this money to stave off his own insolvency.

The family were now very poor, and John went first to act as a "monitor" for his father's younger brother who was the master of a charity school in Tilton, some six miles away. John relates that he, at nine years eight months old, ran the school almost single-handed, his uncle being often away at his shoemaking business. John was then apprenticed to another uncle as tailor but after being poorly treated, he left and was finally apprenticed to his great uncle, William Stafford, a blind seedsman and market gardener in Kettering. (The Safford and the Ayer family trees were twined together.) His uncle treated John as his own and left him the business in his will. John's brother Edward then joined him in the enterprise.

They both attended the Little Meeting House in Kettering which was a renowned Baptist Church. It was famous for founding the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792 and in 1878, John Jenkinson's daughter died of typhoid in Madagascar in its service. Andrew Fuller was the main preacher at this time. When he died in 1815, it was taken over by Robert Hall but, as was common at the time, theological differences opened up divisions in the congregation and John led a small secession from the Little Meeting House and set up the Ebenezer Chapel. He became the pastor and main preacher.

John soon decided that he wished to become a full-time pastor and as, in 1825 he had purchased the gardens at auction off the bankrupted John Cooper Gotch, he rented the orchard and market garden to Edward who carried on the business. When John took up a new post in Oakham in 1848 it was also his brother Edward who tried to keep the Ebenezer Chapel going.

It appears that Avis and Edward had moved to Kettering soon after their marriage. Adult baptism makes it more difficult to work this out from the children's births but we know that daughter Caroline was born there on 2nd August 1831 (but baptised over 30 years later) In the 1841 Census they family were living there with Edward's brother, John, who was a Baptist Minister. John was a gardener and the couple had six children Caroline 12, John 10, William 8, Henry 6, Mary 4, and Alfred 1.

By the 1851 Census we see that Edward and Avis were in Meeting House Yard in Kettering. Older brother John had married Selina Ashford (whom, he tells us, he first met on April 2nd 1838 and that it was love at first sight), the daughter of a Baptist Minister of Harpole, in her home village and he had moved in 1849 to Oakham in Rutland to take up the vacant post of Baptist Minister. With Edward (48) and Avis (47) are John (19) a gardener like his father, William (18) a tailor, Henry (16) also a gardener, Mary Ann (13) Alfred (11) and Edward (7).

Alfred died, aged 17 years, and was buried on the 24th August 1856 and Edward, aged 55, died quite suddenly, on February 9th 1858, after a very short illness. His brother, John, had been a leading light in the local Chartists, Anti Corn Law League, Universal Suffrage Association, the Co-operative Movement (in 1829 he helped start the first, short lived, Co-operative Society in Kettering, and the Temperance movement (he spoke at the Northampton Temperance Union meeting in Ringstead on May 14th 1867). Edward's commitment to the Ebenezer Chapel and his membership of the Kettering Radical Association ((later Kettering Chartist Society), together with the warm relationship between the brothers suggests that they held similar views but we only know, from his brief obituary, that he was committed to the temperance cause. Perhaps his father's early death meant that he, as the younger brother, did not have even the limited educational chances of his John, and was always in a supporting role to his older brother. It also seems that Edward's son, John, was involved in the radical movement. He was a shoe manufacturer in a partnership which was dissolved in March 1874 and his life may have gone downhill after that. A John Jenkinson was involved in some fraud cases.

Life for Edward's daughter Mary Ann, with whom we are most concerned, changed rapidly at this time. In early 1859 she gave birth to an illegitimate child, whom she named Albert Abington Jenkinson. It seems likely, but is as yet unproved, that the father was Leonard Joseph Abington, the grandson of his namesake who had been the Ringstead Baptist Minister until his death in 1849.

If this is the case, he did not stay and "do the honourable thing" but escaped to London where in 1861 we find him, aged 24, staying with his uncle and aunt, John and Eliza (nee Bull) Edmonds, in Trinity Street, St Mary's, Islington and working as a journeyman butcher. Meanwhile Mary Ann had married John Plummer on the 19th November 1860 in Thorpe Malsor, near Kettering.

In the 1861 Census she was a milliner living with her new husband, a staymaker, in Job's Yard, off the High Street in Kettering. Next door is her widowed mother Avis with sons John, Henry and Edward and 85-year-old widowed "mother", (should be mother-in-law) Ann Whiting (she had remarried). There is also a grandson Albert A. Jenkinson aged two, who is Mary Ann's son.

John Plummer, Mary Ann's husband, was another radical, self-educated man who has written of his life and was an editor, pamphleteer and poet. He had been born in Aldgate and a childhood illness had left him partially deaf and lame. He lived with his parents in Royal Mint Street (then known as Rosemary Lane) where his father had a small business making stays (corsets). John writes with typical Victorian colour and prejudice about this area:

> *Near to the Tower of London exists a neighbourhood unequalled for squalidness, poverty and misery. I refer to the purlieus of Royal Mint Street as it is now ambitiously designated but which is better known by its ancient title of Rosemary Lane, although it is many, many years since it deserved a name which awakens the thoughts of sunny orchards, green meadows and all the glorious beauty of nature. Old clothes' shops, kept by persons of unmistakably Jewish extraction; dirty low places by courtesy termed "grocery stores", milkshops, potatoe[sic] sheds and flaunting handsome "gin palaces", line the main street which forms the chief artery of the labyrinth of long, narrow, filthy courts inhabited by Irish labourers and the lowest and most poverty stricken of the London poor; and where scenes are daily, nay hourly, enacted, which are sufficient to "make the Angels weep"; and to mock the proud boast of our vaunted progress in the path of civilisation.*

His father had a serious illness which left him unable to work for a time and his stay business failed so the family had to move into the attic of his grandmother and John was looked after by his uncle in St. Albans for a time. He had little education but taught himself to read from the old bookstalls in the East End, reading a few pages at a time. His father improved and became a foreman and then started up again with his own staymaking business and John worked for him as an errand boy. He started going to evening classes at the Spitalfields School of Design. He went straight from his work and was laughed at and bullied by the other students for his appearance but in spite of this did well and was presented with a prize by Earl Granville at Crosby Hall for "best online drawing from the flat".

Unfortunately, his father's business failed again, and he found a post in a Kettering factory.

John was offered the chance to continue his studies free of charge but could not afford to remain in London alone and so in 1853 he went with the family to Kettering. He found work in a factory on a steam cutting machine. He was offered a job as a local reporter on a penny newspaper, but his partial deafness meant that he could not hear well enough to follow meetings, but he did contribute verses and political letters to the local papers.

It was at about this time that he became acquainted with John Stuart Mill who was impressed by the way that he had educated himself. John also published *Songs of Labour: Northamptonshire Rambles and other Poems* in 1860 and, in the front, he gives an "Autobiographical Sketch" of himself...

He would not have been very popular locally because, when his brother was not allowed to work as a shoemaker, he wrote a pamphlet, called *Freedom of Labour*, attacking the monopoly of the union, and verses against the union were also printed in the *Songs of Labour*. It seems that he was a radical thinker but believing in self-help and co-operatives rather than trade unions. On the other hand, in a letter published in the *Northampton Herald* in 1863, which was the Tory newspaper, he stated that, 'the public house forms the alpha and omega of a working man's pleasure. "Most men went to the pub not to get drunk 'but for the pleasure of joining in social converse and sharing the pleasure 'of a bright fire, a joke, song or story.'" [A History of Kettering: R.L. Greenall.]

His mother died and John and Mary Ann moved back to London and, from a letter sent to him by J.S. Mill in 1864, it appears that John had become the London Correspondent of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. In 1866 the couple were living in Homer Terrace at the east end of Victoria Park. Homer Terrace was built on land leased by J.S. Mill to John James Homer in about 1858 so perhaps this was instrumental in the family's move. Elizabeth Crawford on her website *Woman and Her Sphere* has told how John was leading a campaign supported by John Stuart Mill to preserve and extend Victoria Park and to prevent the erection of a large Gas Works. In 1866 a group of women had organised a petition demanding that women should have the same political rights as men and J. S. Mill, as an M.P. had added on their behalf an amendment to the Reform Bill going through Parliament to this effect. It was defeated by 196 votes to 73.

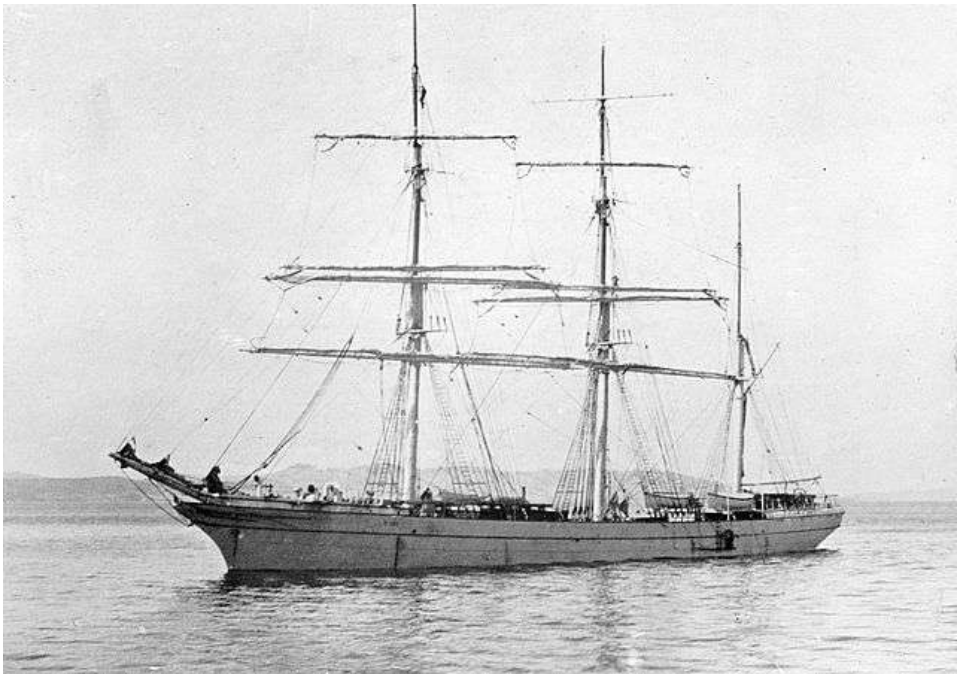
One of the women organising this petition was Mill's stepdaughter Helen Taylor and she approached Mary Ann who signed it. May Ann also approached some her neighbours and some of them signed the petition. Thus, Mary Ann had a small part in the Women's Suffrage movement.

There were many letters between John Stuart Mill and John Plummer and in Mill's replies he almost always gives his (or his daughter's) remembrances or kind regards to "Mrs Plummer". The couple were also invited to dinner at Mill's house on a number of occasions. We hear of John Plummer's lectures and of his various journalistic work, often aimed at promoting the cause of the working man. One project was a newspaper called *The Working Man* which soon failed.

We can only sense that Mary Ann was an active part of this scene but the fact that John Stuart Mill's daughter sent her regards via him seems to confirm that Mary Ann was well regarded, and perhaps particularly in the female suffrage movement. A typical reply, on February 9th 1867, from J.S Mill to John has information to show that it was a struggle for John and Mary Ann at times.

> *DEAR MR PLUMMER*
> *I have to congratulate you on the birth of your daughter, and at the same time to condole with you on the failure of the Working Man and on the termination of your engagement with Messrs Cassell. What have you in view for your next employment? I wish it were in my power to help you to a position of profit and usefulness.*
> *I am glad to hear of a local Jamaica Committee, and of your being a member of it. I think you should decidedly offer yourself as a witness to the Trades Union Commission. They will find few who know so much of the subject and feel so impartially on it. There must often be witnesses quite as hard of hearing as you are.*
> *With our kind regards to Mrs Plummer, I am [etc]*

In the 1871 Census John aged 39 was shown as a newspaper editor (possibly the London *Figaro*). Mary is 32 and there are two sons, Albert J (12) and George E[dward] (9). It looks as if, in Albert's middle name, that "A" for Abington has been replaced by "J" for Jenkinson. The Plummers had also had a daughter but on the 16th December 1870, aged four years and two days, Ada Mary had died of Scarlet Fever.



Auriga (barque) (In 1881 sold and renamed Sierra Blanca)
"Sierra Blanca (ship, 1875) - SLV H99.220-3260" by Unknown.
State Library of Victoria, Malcolm Brodie shipping collection.

On 6th August 1879 the *Auriga* from Liverpool arrived in Sydney, Australia. The 1591 ton boat had a crew of thirty men and carried just one family, John and Mary Ann, together with sons Albert (19) and Edward (16) and one other passenger, a Mr Dixon. It seems likely, therefore, that this was basically a cargo vessel which also carried a few passengers.

John Plummer c1885
Taken by J. Hubert Newman of Sydney: State Library of NSW P1/1365

It would seem likely that John already had a position lined up in Australia and he continued a long life of vigorous and respected journalism. On 4th June 1906 the Adelaide newspaper The Register reported that he had just had his 75th birthday. It continued:

> *He resides at Northwood, a lovely spot, on Lane Cove River, and is one of the most remarkable of literary men in the Common wealth. Notwithstanding his advanced years, he is as vigorous as most men of 40 and gets through an enormous amount of journalistic work daily. . .*

John Plummer died in March 1914 aged 84. His obituary in the Otago Daily Times records:

> *Johns's Notable Australians states that Mr. Plummer was born in London in 1831. For several years he was a member of Charles Knight's literary and statistical staff and one of the pioneers of the [Co-operative?] industrial movement. He joined John Cassell's staff in 1862, assisting in founding and conducting the London Figaro, was two years sub-editor of the Morning Advertiser, for two years associate editor with Mr Stephen Fiske, on the Hornet and Home Journal, editor of several trade papers and for 20 years English Social Affairs correspondent of the Sydney Morning Herald. He wrote a cantata and several ballads for the Tonic Sol-fa Association.*

He arrived in Sydney in 1879 and became editor of the Sydney Illustrated News and also of the Sydney Tribune and several minor papers. He was a member of the Town and Country Journal staff for some time and State drawing master for nine years [at Fort Street Training School, 1881 – 90].

For seventeen years he was a contributor to the Yearbook of Australia and other works of reference and was the Australian representative of various British and American commercial, mining, financial and

other journals. He was a member of the Japan Society, Royal Society of Arts and Institute of Journalists.

Obviously, we have only skimmed the surface of a very full (and this is a far from exhaustive list) and, considering his disabilities, an astonishing life. He was buried in the Anglican section of the Gore Hill Cemetery. The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* described him as a British Israelite but, if so, his Jewish faith does not seem to have been an important part of his life.

Mary Ann survived him. I believe that she died on 12th August 1919 in Sydney. The *Australia Death Index 1787-1985* gives her father as William, which is wrong, but her mother's name as Avis, which is correct and is so unusual a name as to seem to prove that it is our Mary Ann. As further proof she was buried in *Plot C of E Section M grave 80b* next to John in Gore Hill Cemetery in St Leonards Creek, Watcha Shire, NSW. Her son Albert J. (not A.) was buried in the same cemetery but in the Congregational Section.

Mary Ann's mother Avis Jenkinson had remained at 1 Meeting Lane in Kettering and in 1881 she was there, aged 75, with her unmarried eldest son John (48) who was now a shoemaker. She died on September 3rd 1887 and some seven weeks after the event the *Sydney Morning Herald* carried the following announcement:

JENKINSON – September 3 at Kettering, England where she had resided over 60 years, beloved by all who knew her, Avis Jenkinson, mother of Mrs John Plummer, Northwood, Lane Cove River, Sydney aged 83.

From birth to death she had travelled ten miles. Unfortunately, however far the distance travelled, history rarely records the lives of radical women.

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My grateful thanks to Lyn Watson for starting me on this biography, providing information sources, and for correcting some large mistakes in the first draft.

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Chapter 7

Charles Mawson Burgess (1868 – 1953)

Charles Mawson Burgess was born in Raunds in 1868, the son of Thomas and Ellen (née Breary) and baptised there, on the 26th January 1868. In the 1881 Census for Raunds Thomas had a tailor and drapery shop in Arnsby's Hill (Manor Hill near Rotton Row). Charles was a clever pupil and, in May 1883, the Queen's Prize was awarded to him by the Science and Art Department of the Council on Education in South Kensington (later this became Imperial College). A Charles M. Burgess was shown in the 25th February 1888 edition of the *Yorkshire Post* as being a first-year student at York Training College. Could this have been our man? By 1891, aged 23, Charles had left home and was an Elementary School Teacher lodging in Wakering Road, Barking in Essex.

The *Portsmouth Evening News* of 7th February 1900 reported that the Portsmouth School Board had appointed Charles Burgess as Assistant Master at Fratton Boys School and that he had previously taught at Wellington Place School. In the 1901 and 1911 Censuses he was still in the Portsmouth area and in the later Census he was 43, single, and still a "certified teacher" employed by the Town Council.

It seems that at some point he returned to the Ringstead and Raunds area for, in October – December 1925 he married widow Elizabeth Ann Wyman in the Thrapston District. She had previously been married to local farmer, Charles Wyman, who had been born in Great Addington in about 1850. They had farmed in Newton Bromswold but in 1901 Charles and Elizabeth Wyman had been living at 26 Church Street in Ringstead. In 1903 Elizabeth was presented with a marble clock in recognition of her devoted service as the church organist. Charles Wyman died on 10th June 1906 and left his widow £1841 4s. in his Will. By 1911 Elizabeth, aged 54, was a farmer in her own right, living at Middle Field Farm in Church Street, Ringstead. Living with her was her 93- year-old mother Mary Ann Smart.

Elizabeth's only remaining child (her other child may have been the Wallace who was buried in Newton Bromswold aged 7 months in 1880), William Beeby Wyman, had died on 1st April 1910 aged just 30 and her mother Mary Ann Smart died, aged 97, in 1914. Elizabeth had none of her family left alive. She was a churchwarden and, as Elizabeth Ann Wyman, donated a brass processional cross in memory of her husband and son to Ringstead Church on All Saints Day 1920.

In 1926 Charles Burgess bought the three cottages once owned by Chemist, Herbert Abington, (the ironstone cottages, now one house, on the left of the Post Office) from one of Herbert's descendants possibly for the couple to live in. It may be, however, that this was an investment for we know that they lived in Ringstead Cottage, a large building, now called Ringstead House, at the bottom of the hill from Raunds.

We get an odd glimpse of Charles Burgess when the *Northampton Mercury* of 15th September 1933 reported that he was summoned for aiding and abetting a 15-year-old boy without insurance in driving a car at Woodford on 18th August 1933. There was a collision, and the woman passenger of the other vehicle was thrown out and knocked unconscious. Charles was fined £10 with £1 5s 8d costs and had his licence suspended for 12 months. The boy was a shoe operative and does not seem to have been a relative. It raises a few unanswered questions although we know Charles was a good-hearted man and the boy (with insurance) could legally have driven at 16. He was only doing ten miles an hour at the time of the crash.

Charles in fancy dress (on the left)
In 1928 the Parish Church organised a fancy dress procession to raise money for the school. Could this have been the occasion? My thanks to Jon Abbott for this photograph

When they married, Charles would have been 57 and Elizabeth 68. Against the odds the couple were married for twenty years. Elizabeth died in Ringstead aged 89 on 28th May 1945 and left £3371 18s 1d with probate (Llandudno Probate Office?) to Charles. She was living in Ringstead Cottage at the time of her death.

There is a wooden plaque on the wall of the north aisle of Ringstead Church which states:

*Pray for the soul of ELIZABETH ANN BURGESS who worshipped here for 55 years and who died May 28th 1945 in her 90th year. Electric light was installed in 1946 as her memorial. Paravi Lanternam Christo Meo**

Paravi* **Lucernum *Christo Meo* is from an Ambrosian chant based on Psalm 131 and translates "I have prepared a lamp for my anointed".

It seems that Charles Burgess left the area soon after his wife's death. He would have been in his late seventies. Older residents remembered a sale at Ringstead House where Charles sold all his possessions. He laid out all his books on trestle tables and sold even the book he had been given as his Queen's Prize. He went as a Brother to Nashdom Abbey near Burnham Beeches in Buckinghamshire. Certainly, we know that he was living there when he sold the three cottages in the High Street on 25th August 1949. Nashdom was a large house built by Sir Edward Lutyens, which had been taken over as a monastery after the First World War. It was there that Charles Mawson Burgess, aged 85, died on 16th February 1953 leaving just £784 0s 6d. The executors were a solicitor and William Joseph Freeman, a road foreman.

Was he ever a teacher in Ringstead? Certainly, he was not a head teacher, but it is thought that he may have been employed for some supply teaching at the school.

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Unbeknown to me Jon Abbott had already done some research and writing up of this story so my thanks to him for sharing his research and local knowledge to improve this biography. Ringstead Censuses 1861-1911; England & Wales National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills) 1858-1966); Civil Registrations of Births, Marriages and Deaths. www.ancestry.co.uk. Northampton Mercury & Herald 15th September 1933; Yorkshire Gazette 25th February 1888: Portsmouth Evening News 7th February 1900. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk . www.RootsChat.com
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Chapter 8

John Ball (1817-1866)

John Ball (1) Abt1817 - 1866		Sarah Smith Clark(e) Abt1820 - 1902			John Sparks (2) Abt1841 - ?
Elizabeth Ball Abt1842R – 1882	George Daniel Abt1848R - 1920	Jeremiah John Abt1851 – 1880	William James 1859 - 1860	Ebenezer Thomas 1861 - 1926	*No children together* *Sarah was about 46 at time of wedding*

In a family tree littered with John Balls, I struggled, for many years, to find the details of this one's later life. He was born in about 1817 to John Ball and Sarah (nee Burkett). The Parish Registers record that he was baptised on May 18th 1817 in Ringstead Parish Church. They also record that he married Sarah Smith Clark[e] on 21st November 1841. I believe that the 1841 Census records him with his brother Thomas staying with his mother and her second husband John Cheney who she had married some 10 years after the death of her husband in a fire at Denford. (They are sometimes transcribed as John and Thomas Bull.)

Sarah Smith Clark[e], daughter of Jeremiah and Elizabeth Clark, was baptised at Barnwell St Andrew, 2 miles south of Oundle, in Northamptonshire on the 11th June 1818. She may be the farm servant Sarah Clark living in with Ringstead farmer Richard Freeman, his wife Elizabeth, and their family in the 1841 Ringstead Census. Unfortunately, this Census does not record places of birth.

They had two children baptised in Ringstead Parish Church, Elizabeth, on 11th November 1842, and George Daniel on 11 August 1848. I could find no further trace of them and some Ancestry trees had the deaths of John and Sarah locally in 1891 and 1901 respectively. In November 2015 I finally found some details on various websites of a family which matched this one very well, but who had lived in Australia, so I began to hunt around and now I believe that I have a much clearer answer as to what happened to John and his family.

At this time the use of Australia as a dumping ground for convicts was coming to an end and the demand for immigrants to provide labour was being encouraged. Below is a typical advertisement from the *Northampton Mercury* of 8th January 1848:

> *EMIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA. – FREE PASSAGES to NEW SOUTH WALES and SOUTH AUSTRALIA are granted by HER MAJESTY'S COLONIAL LAND and EMIGRATION COMMISSIONERS, in first-class ships, sailing at short intervals in succession, from London and Plymouth, to persons strictly of the working class. The Emigrants most in demand are agricultural labourers, shepherds, and female domestic servants, and dairy maids. A few country mechanics, such as blacksmiths, wheelwrights, carpenters &c. are taken for each ship.*

Undoubted testimonials, both as to character and ability in calling and occupation are indispensable.

At the time of the last advices, the demand for labour in both colonies was urgent, and the rate of wages considerably higher than in England. On the other hand, provisions generally were at a much lower rate. Clothing was about the same price as in this country.

On arriving in the Colonies, the emigrants are received by an officer of the government, who will give them information as to where they may obtain work: and they are at perfect liberty to engage themselves to anyone willing to employ them and t make their own bargain for wages. No repayment is required of any part of the expense of their passage out.

For further information apply to [Among the list are Mr. C.W Ibbs, Thrapston, Mr. J. Strange, Kettering].*

By order of the Board
S. Walcot, Secretary.
Government Emigration Office, 9 Park-street,
Westminster, Dec, 1847.
**C.W. Ibbs was a printer and stationer and later a postmaster*

John and Sarah, perhaps, saw these advertisements or the various letters sent by emigrants who had settled in Australia extolling its virtues, (one wonders if they were ghost written by the Emigration Office). Perhaps they heard by word of mouth. Certainly, soon after the baptism of George Daniel, the family emigrated. It seems very likely that they are the ones described as "John Ball, wife and family" who arrived on the *Stebonheath*, a 926 ton three-masted ship, that had sailed from London, via Plymouth, which it had left on 31st January 1949. Besides a few "cabin passengers", it had 373 "government emigrants" aboard in steerage (the poorest accommodation) including 106 children, some of them born during the voyage. As we have seen, these emigrants would have had much of the cost of the voyage paid for them, which was subsidised by the sale of land in South Australia to rich farmers and developers.

Besides the families there were some 56 single men and 39 single women. In an 1858 voyage of the *Stebonheath* to Adelaide a sick pregnant single woman was taken ashore and died in hospital. This led to the revealing of life on board, showing a lack of discipline and moral standards with much debauchery between some of the sailors and single men and some of the single women. We can only surmise if conditions were the same in 1849.

They arrived in Port Adelaide, South Australia on the 11th May 1849 after a journey of about four months (some records say 114 days). For those in steerage it would have been an unpleasant, smelly, tedious, and sometimes dangerous voyage. When they arrived in Port Adelaide conditions had improved somewhat compared to the first immigrant voyages.

Many Irish families were being assisted to flee the Great Famine (emigration being seen as a cheaper long-term option for the government and landowners than poor relief) and the Bishop of Adelaide wrote a letter on July 30th 1849, printed in various newspapers, including the Manchester Guardian, and the Ballina Chronicle in Ireland on December 5th of the same year, in which he gave the following advice to immigrants:

> *I will now detail what steps are taken in the colony for the assistance of the emigrants. Captain Brewer is the emigration agent, whose duty is to board the vessels as they arrive, and after examining the conditions and discipline of the passengers, to offer such counsel as may be needed for their guidance. In the case of persons destitute of means he is empowered to pay the expense of the journey to Adelaide (eight miles) and transport of their baggage. There is a row of cottages, built by the government, at Port Adelaide, for the temporary accommodation of emigrant families, should they fail to procure situations before compelled to quit the ship. Fourteen days are generally allowed on shipboard, after reaching the port, during which time they are provisioned*.

Port Adelaide painted by Samuel Thomas Gill c1848.
Gill was employed by the South Australian Commissioners to paint pictures to promote the province in London. It is a view across the Port River to the Port settlement and the ships berthed at the wharf. The large building on the left is the South Australian Company warehouse with the Customs House in the middle and the British Hotel on the right. The Stebonheath would have berthed in the middle of the picture near the Customs House.

Information kindly provided by Meredith Blundell of the Port Adelaide Enfield Public Library Service. Image courtesy of the State Library of South Australia

In the report of John's death in Mintaro 1866 it states that the family had been living there 17 or18 years so it seems that the family moved there soon after arriving in South Australia. If this were the case, they would have been some of its earliest settlers. Their first child born in Australia was Jeremiah John who was born on the 16th January 1851 "On the Wakefield" I am not sure if this means Port Wakefield or has some other local meaning.

Mintaro had been established about this time as a staging post along the Gulf Road, which was a bullock trail owned by the Patent Copper Company to take smelted copper from its mines in Burra to Port Wakefield for shipping. The bullock teams soon left for the richer pickings of the new gold fields and were replaced by mule trains. Then, in 1857, the town declined, for with the coming of the railways and a terminus at Gawler the trail was rerouted through Riverton. The town was saved by the finding and exploiting of good quality slate locally and the increasing importance of agriculture.

We know that John first worked as a labourer in the Adelaide district and that, by 1866, his eldest son (George) Daniel was a labourer in a Steam Flour Mill, established in Wakefield Street in Mintaro in 1859, by John Smith a substantial local property owner. It seems that his father, John, also worked there. This mill was used for grinding and dressing grain. On the morning of Thursday 26th April 1866 John, with the help of son Daniel, was taking a cartload of bran and pollards (a finely milled blend of bran and wheat middlings used for horse feed) from the mill to Burra.

The team of four horses had stopped at a creek on the edge of the Mintaro township and was unwilling to move on up the hill. Finally, John and Daniel got the team moving up the cutting but again, halfway up, the lead horses refused to go any further. They unhitched the lead two horses and tried to turn the other two around with the cart to go back to the creek at the bottom of the hill. John struggled in the confines of the cutting but told Daniel to go and wait beyond the creek out of harm's way. The horses suddenly swerved round and galloped down the hill knocking John over, and the cart wheels passed over his lower body and also hit his head. He was terribly injured, and he was carried to the Mintaro Hotel where he died soon after.

John was buried at 4 o'clock on Friday 27th 1866 and most of the Mintaro residents and many people from further afield were present at his funeral. The service was held at the Primitive Methodist Chapel which could not hold all those wishing to attend. The South Australian Register reported:

He was a quiet man and lived amongst us for the last 17 or 18 years respected by all.

In his Will he left "Lot 2162" to Sarah in trust for his children, to be divided equally, when the youngest reached 21 years of age.

Less than six months later, on 19th November 1866 Sarah married farmer, John Sparks, son of Simeon, who was some 20 years her junior. It was also held at the Primitive Methodist Church in Mintaro, where John's funeral service had been held.

In the marriage registration, Sarah's father was given as Jeremiah Clark, perhaps the final proof that this is the family who came from Ringstead. Sarah lived to be 83 years old and died on 20th September 1902 in Eurelia in South Australia some 105 mile north of Mintaro. She was registered as Sarah Clark Sparks.

The Children

Elizabeth (Bessie) Ball. One of the men who helped carry John to the Mintaro Hotel was called Jesse Smith. He was probably the man who had married John's daughter Bessie (Elizabeth) at Penwortham, some eight miles west of Mintaro) on 7th February 1859. Bessie was 17 years old. Jessie Smith died on 1st March 1869 in Mintaro aged just thirty years. Bessie remarried to James Greer Quinn, still in Mintaro. Bessie too died young, not long after the death of her 15-month-old son Thomas, on 7th November 1882 aged 39 and was buried on 9th November 1882 in Tarlee Cemetery where her gravestone can still be seen.

George Daniel Clark Ball, son of John Ball, married Frances, daughter of Joshua Jenner on 28th November 1877 at the residence of his stepfather, John Sparks, in Watervale, South Australia (Wakefield Registration District). Frances died, aged 27 on 27th July 1886 at Walloway in the Frome District. As was far from unusual, Daniel (or Dan) as he was usually known then married her sister, Susan, on 21st May 1888, again at John Spark's house but this time in Eurelia (5 miles north of Walloway) in the Frome District. When George's daughter, Frances Sarah, married Thomas Whittaker Vaughan on 27th December 1915, the marriage place was given as the residence of G.D.C Ball at Orroroo (14 miles south of Eurelia) in the Frome District. The Adelaide Chronicle of 27th March 1920 had a short notice in its Deaths Column:

> *BALL – On the 18th March at his son's residence, Broken Hill, George Daniel Clarke (Dan) Ball, the beloved father of S. Vaughan, E. Tate and E., G., F., J., A. And F. Ball, late of Orrero, S.A.*

Some of Daniel's children had died young. One of them, probably signified by the single "J" in the death notice was Joshua John Ball who died on 14th April 1918 at the battle of Amiens and was buried in the Bonnay Communal Cemetery Extension (A. 9). He had been in the 43rd Battalion (7th Reinforcement) of the Australian Infantry, enlisting on 9th November 1916 and embarking at Adelaide on 23rd June 1917, he had been a blacksmith's striker before joining up.

Jeremiah John was born in Little Para (On the Wakefield) on 16th January 1851 in the Adelaide District. He married Hannah Chapman, daughter of William, on 10th March 1875 at the home of Robert Smith in Manoora. Some trees have him dying in 1880 and it seems that Hannah remarried on the 18th December 1886 to August Dohnt. However, a John Jeremiah Ball born in 1851 died on 10th June 1902 aged 51 in Mintaro. It seems that John and Hannah had probably separated or divorced, for the *Adelaide Advertiser* of 14th June 1902 reported:

MINTARO

> J*une 11. - Mr. John Ball, 51 years of age. and an old resident of the locality, in the employ of Mr. Skewes. was found on Monday morning with his throat cut. The deceased had been very melancholy of late, and on the preceding Sunday had informed a resident of his intention of committing suicide, giving as his reason that he was without a home or friends, and tired of life. An inquest was held yesterday, and a verdict of suicide during temporary insanity was returned.*

William James was born on 17th July 1859 in Mintaro in the Registration District of Clare. He is shown as the son of John Ball and Sarah Smith Clark. He died the following year.

Ebenezer Thomas was born to the same parents on 24th May 1861 in Mintaro. I believe that he married for, in his will, he left his estate to be divided equally among his three children: Herbert David; Marjorie Clarissa Clark; Alexander Thomas. He appointed his son-in-law Archibald Clark as his executor so Marjory once again carried her grandmother's surname. Unusually he asked that the photographs and family relics be divided between the children. There is no mention of his wife Edith (nee Edwards), whom he had married in 1888, because she had died on 13th October 1922. She had left him her interest in the weatherboard, iron (?) and stone six-room house in Mica Street in Broken Hill. He died on 21st October 1926 in Broken Hill, New South Wales (some 240 miles north east of Mintaro). He was registered as a "Stableman" at his death.

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Chapter 9

SHOEMAKERS NOT THATCHERS

Roberts, Benjamin Ebenezer (c1858 -1925) & Roberts, George Henry (c1865 - 1941)

In this revised biography I have written about some of the Roberts family, particularly Benjamin Ebenezer and his cousin, George Henry Roberts, the son of his father's younger brother, Thomas. I have linked their stories to the shoemaking industry in Ringstead.

The Roberts family seem to have appeared in the Ringstead area in the late eighteenth century, probably from Wales. Our first sighting of the family in the village is when William Roberts married Ann Roberson on 12th October 1788. William's first wife and baby daughter, Lydia, died in 1790. He married again some seven months later, on 1st February 1791, to Elizabeth Jacks who was eight years his senior. They had four children; John, Mary, Samuel and Hannah but in January 1799 the three youngest were buried in the churchyard. There is some confusion in that a second Hannah was born on 3rd December 1798, twenty days before the death of the first Hannah. It may be that, when she was baptised on July 1st of the following year, it was decided to give her the same name as the daughter buried in January of that year.

On 18th August 1801 William killed another villager, Matthew Teat, with a scythe in a harvest field fight and spent some months in Northampton Gaol for manslaughter. Later, in 1805, a son William was born and a year later another son Thomas who died aged just 13 months. We see that from the seven children born to William only three John, Hannah and William survived into adulthood.

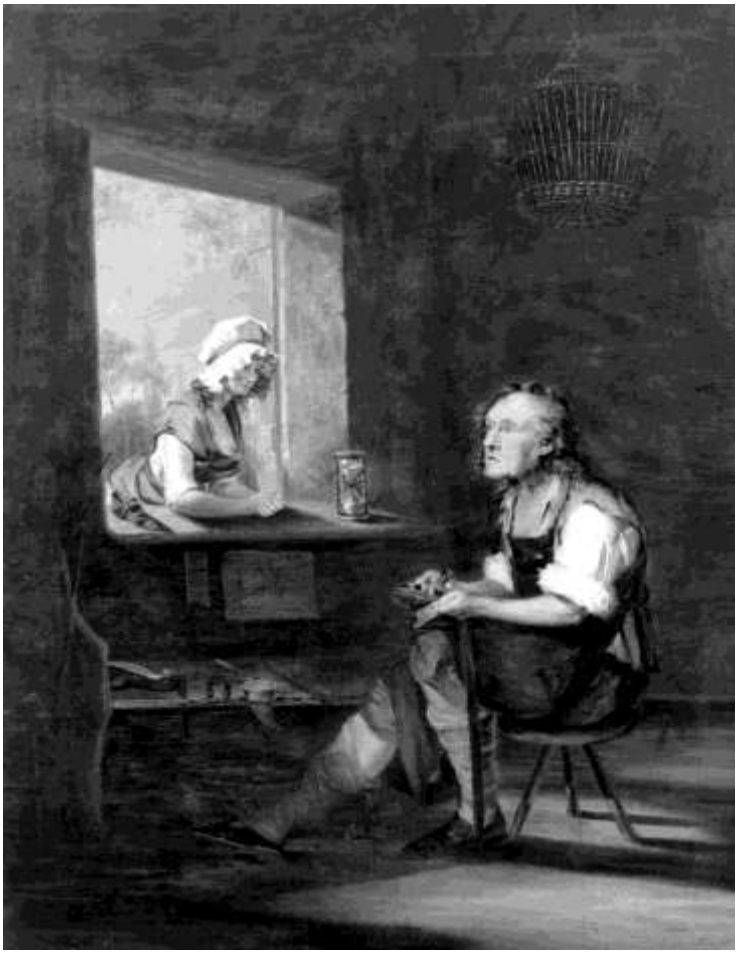
It is his son John Roberts who is the next link in his chain. His baptism was missing from the Parish Baptismal Register but is in the Bishop's Transcripts. He was born in about 1791 and baptised in Ringstead Parish Church on 15th June 1792. He too became an agricultural labourer. He married Rebecca Horsfield at Swineshead on 16th February 1818. It is possible that Rebecca had moved to Ringstead before the marriage, but they certainly settled in the village and had three daughters baptised in the local church. Mary was christened on March 18th 1821, Elizabeth, who died as an infant, on April 6th 1823, and Susan on April 29th 1826. Unfortunately, there were to be no others for Rebecca (or Rebekah) was buried on 13th March 1828. Looking at the timing of the other baptisms, it may be that her death was associated with a pregnancy.

As his father, like many widows and widowers with small children, had remarried two years after his wife's death on 2nd August 1830. She was some fifteen years his junior and was born in Bythorn. At their wedding both John and Alice had signed the Register with an "X". Nevertheless, in the 1851 Census Alice is described as a "Church Sunday School Mistress".

This certainly implies some literacy skills and usually some basic musical ability which may have passed down the generations.

John soon had a second family of five sons between 1831 and 1842: William, who died at eight months old, John, William 2, Thomas and George. All are shown as shoemakers in the 1851 Census. George, the youngest is only nine years old but he is already learning his craft. John, at 17 the eldest, is not living with the family but is lodging with another shoemaker, John Pearson and his wife, presumably as an unofficial apprentice.

The younger John was married just two years later in 1853, at the age of nineteen to Letitia Phillips, who was a year younger. The children followed quickly with almost all working in the shoe trade. Elizabeth, born c1854; Owen, born c1856; Benjamin Ebenezer, born c1858; John, born c1860; Alice, born c1864; George born c 1866 and finally Herbert, born c 1868. All are in the shoe trade in the 1871 and 1881 censuses, including the girls, except for George who is in 1881 a "Railway Employee". (In 1891 he is a Midland Railway Station Master at Asfordby in Leicestershire where, later, his nephew Alfred Roberts held property).



Shoemaker 1780
With kind permission of Northampton Museums and Art Gallery

The shoemakers, like the tailors and miners, were always known as a radical, freethinking part of the working-class population. In the book *Captain Swing* which looks at the agricultural riots of 1830, the authors compare parishes with and without shoemakers and concludes: “The average riotous parish had from double to four times as many shoemakers as the average tranquil one”.

If we look at the figures from the Censuses for Ringstead we find that there were some 36 shoemakers in 1841, 79 in 1851, 145 in 1861 and 186 in 1871. We must be careful in overstating this doubling of shoe workers every ten years in the early Censuses. Some of the increase is due to the lack of information on those who were not heads of families in the 1841 Census. Certainly, some of it is due to the movement of women and girls from lacemaking, which declined very rapidly from 1851 to 1861, although only 35 female shoe workers are recorded in the 1871 Census. There was a great increase nevertheless mainly based on the production of army boots and shoes. Some of this increase seems to have been the result of the various strikes in Northampton culminating in the ones of 1857, 1858 and 1859. The introduction of machinery, especially in the closing process where a form of sewing machine was introduced in November 1857 led to workers fearing for their jobs and strikes were held. The shoemakers refused to work on any boots and shoes that had been "closed" by machinery. At first there was no trade union, but the men belonged to benefit clubs to help see them through hard times. In April 1858, the *Northamptonshire Boot and Shoe Makers Mutual Protection Society* was established with the main objective of preventing the introduction of machinery and to protect, equalise and raise wages, as far as possible.

The writer of an 1860 report on the strikes, coincidentally a man called John Ball, a common Ringstead name, criticised the action but did concede that:

> *It is, however, undeniable that the improvements in machinery, when rapidly introduced into any branch of trade, sometimes deprive workmen and those depending on them of their daily bread*.

In this case “daily bread” must be taken literally. The strike ultimately failed and many men left Northampton seeking work. The writer of the report estimated some 1500, mainly young men, left the town. There was a movement of some of the shoe making production to the Leicester area which had accepted the new machinery, often in larger factories. There was also a movement of the “coarser” boots and shoe manufacture into the smaller towns and villages such as Raunds and Ringstead. In these cases much of the work was “outwork”, based on piece work with comparatively low rates.

Well into the twentieth century much of the shoemaking in the Ringstead area was done either at home or in small workshops. In his novel, *The Feast of July*, H. E. Bates writing of the end of the nineteenth century, based mainly on the Higham Ferrers and Rushden area, talks of the two-storey sheds behind the cottages where the shoemakers worked. His heroine sees one such first-floor workshop for the first time.

She looked round the small oblong, white-washed shop, with its crowded benches under the cobwebbed leather-dusted windows; the rolls of kip and calf and belly leather and the untidy mess of tins and sprigs and eyelets and brass tacks and wax-end. A glue pot was cooling on its burner. You could smell the hot breath of it and with it the close dark odour, almost the stench, of leather.

We know that Ringstead had such workshops attached to cottages as can be seen from the various sales in the Northampton Mercury (e.g., 19th December 1868 "Sale of cottages with shoe-makers shops"). A few still can be seen today.

This is South Place Works, Long Buckby in the early Twentieth Century but does give some of the atmosphere of a workshop and little had changed in the previous one hundred years. With kind permission of Northampton Museums and Art Gallery

Others did not have that luxury and would work in the living room or in one of the bedrooms. This was particularly true for the women doing the “closing” which involved mainly sewing. Doris Watts speaking of the early years of the twentieth century in Rushden remembers:

Mother was a “boot finisher” and I can see her now in my mind’s eye in that little back room of our house in Cromwell Road finishing a boot that was strapped on one knee and with the other foot tapping the cradle that had a baby in it. It was a wicker cradle on rockers. Women in those days with boots and babies all in one small house had a very hard time. It was drudgery.

We must remember that in the Rushden area it was less likely to be the heavier, military boots that dominated the Raunds and Ringstead production. Incidentally Doris remembers her mother telling her of when her mother planned to marry her father, a Roberts.

> *When my parents planned to marry, Dad asked Mum where they should marry. The Roberts were brought up Ringstead Baptist but moving to Raunds became Wesleyans. The Raunds Baptists were known at Ringstead as a quarrelsome lot; in Raunds they were known as the "Chosen ones". Mother said that they would like to be married at Rushden Church, where her mother had been christened. To mother's surprise my father replied that he was broad minded himself "but had Grandfather been alive he would have forbidden it".*

In the early Nineteenth Century there had emerged entrepreneurs who acted as middlemen and they began to organise small workshops where the clicking (leather pattern cutting) was done and they put out most of the other processes to home workers. In Raunds and Ringstead it appears that the workers would go to the factory to collect the work and then also take it back when finished. The middlemen had in effect become the factory owners.

We do know that in 1867 there was only one major factory in Raunds, Wm. Nicholls & Son, because of a letter sent by a shoemaker to the Co-operator. Isaac Burton writes:

> *.... Raunds is a large village containing about 2,500 inhabitants, who are chiefly occupied in the shoe trade, but all under the control of one employer, who resides in the place. He keeps a grocer and draper's shop, and if you don't spend your money at his establishments, you must go and seek for work at another village about four miles distant.*

Underneath the letter is an article, *Serfdom in the Shoe Trade*, by Daniel P. Foxwell who, as a result of this letter, went to Raunds and spoke at the Temperance Hall, trying to get the workers to form a Co-operative society. Isaac Burton may have expected that Mr Nicholls did not read the *Co-operator* but word got back and a few weeks later his indignant rebuttal of the accusations was printed, although he does not deny the statement about the "company shop". Incidentally I have found Isaac Burton, born about 1835 in Raunds in the earlier censuses but in 1871, the census after his letter appeared, his parents and siblings are there (his brothers wrongly transcribed as Barton), but Isaac has disappeared. I could not find Isaac but his descendant, Tracey Huff has informed me that, shortly before the 1871 Census, Isaac emigrated to the United States still working as a shoemaker.

It is important to remember that shoemaking was not a single, uniform craft. Some master shoemakers made bespoke shoes by hand and did all the processes in their own workshops. Increasingly, most only did part of the process with the clickers being the aristocrats of the workforce. Their skill in cutting out the leather to produce matched pairs and to get the maximum from a hide was vital to the quality and the profit from boots and shoes.

The clicking was the first to be organised into workshops and factories because of the space needed and the importance of it to the whole process.

An article in *The Boot & Shoe Journal* in 1887 described the factories in Raunds, some of which appear to have had all the shoemaking processes within their four walls. He describes the factory of Messers W. Nicholls, for example, as "admirably arranged....The machinery which is of the best description, is driven by a gas-engine. The firm also curries the upper leather required and the whole factory is noticeable for completeness in every respect." Nevertheless, he goes on to say:

> *Commenting on the army trade generally, I look upon Raunds as the centre of the army-boot-and-shoe making in Northamptonshire and the village of Raunds reminds me of the old days when scarcely anything but hand work was in vogue. The prices paid for closing and making are far from extravagant. The closing of army bluchers is done by hand throughout, and occupies the female workers in the village. For closing bluchers the sum of 3¼d., on an average is paid per pair. A man must work hard to make ten pairs of boots per week and there are many who do not make eight pairs, yet the inhabitants are generally an enterprising class of people, thrifty and industrious, comparing favourably with operatives in the trade elsewhere.*

If we look in the *Art of Boot and Shoemaking: A Practical Handbook*, which was published in 1885, it describes many machines available for the shoemaking processes. These include the Upper Skiving Machine, The Rand Turning Machine, The Sole Moulding Machine, National Closing Machine, Welt or Forepart Stitching Machine, Mackay Heeling Machine, Inside Nailing Machine and Blake Buffing Machine. Many are like Victorian kitchen devices and are hand-powered mechanised processes. Raunds and Ringstead, however, tended to remain a cottage, outwork industry, reliant on the military's insistence on hand-sewn boots.

Our shoemaker, John Roberts, died on 27th December 1870 well before his fortieth birthday. His effects, which were less than £50, were granted to his widow. In the 1871 Census Letitia, was living at 36 is living on Shop (High) Street, on “Parish Relief”. Her oldest daughter, Elizabeth, now 17, was doing “shoework” and Owen (15) and Benjamin (13) were both apprentice shoemakers. She has four other children who are ten or under and are at school. It must have been a very difficult time for Letitia. Next door lives John Barritt and his wife Rebecca. He is a shoe maker and shoe agent. Perhaps after all there were still small middlemen who put out the work and collected it again for a commission. On the other side of her lives Sarah White who is fifty, also a widow, with two children, who is trying to make a living as a seamstress. All around are other shoemakers and their wives. We can only hope that she was helped and supported by the community in her hour of need.

By 1881 she was living in the High Street and is housekeeper for her family. Times are maybe a little better because Benjamin, John, and Herbert are all shoemakers and Alice is a shoe worker. Only George, at fifteen, is the exception and he is a railway employee. All her family will be bringing money into the house.

If she feels unwell, Emma Kitchen is only a few doors away and she can (possibly) help her because she is a vendor of patent medicines. Many would have had laudanum in them to dull the pain of what could not be cured.

Letitia married John Smith in 1884 and the1891 Census finds her living in Rushden with John who is a "Cemetery Caretaker" and by 1901 they are in Stanwick with John now a general labourer. Her children are all elsewhere. She dies in 1909 aged seventy-five.

We cannot follow all the Roberts family lines so we will select two, Benjamin Ebenezer, son of John and Letitia, and George Henry, not his brother, the railway worker, but the son of Thomas, John's younger brother. These two cousins carried on as shoemakers as the industry went through increasingly difficult times as the nineteenth century drew to a close.

As we have seen, in 1871, Benjamin was thirteen years old and already a shoemaker living with his widowed mother, Letitia. Ten years later he is still in High Street, living with his mother and siblings. Nest door, now, lives another widow and her twenty-three-year-old daughter. Catherine Smith is sixty-four years-old, born in Ireland, and working as a laundress but her daughter, Ellen, is a shoe worker. Although she was never to realise it, Ellen would play a part in the forming of history a century later.

Because of where this family line leads it is worth taking a detour to look at Ellen Smith's heritage. There is an isolated, ruined cottage, in a place called Dromanassig, some one hundred yards off the Kenmare to Glengariff road in County Kerry in Ireland. The windows have gone but the thick stone walls stand. Catherine Sullivan (or Selewin) was born in this cottage around the year 1811. It appears that she married a Thomas Smith and had two children in Kenmare; John in about 1840 and Mary some four years later. There are no records of the marriage, however, and some people assert that they were married in England. We do know that at some point between 1845 and 1853 they emigrated to England.

This part of Ireland was badly affected by the Irish Potato or Great Famine which began in 1845 and lasted until 1853. Estimates of deaths due to the famine vary between one and three million with a similar number emigrating. The main cause was the extreme poverty of much of the population, trying to survive on tiny plots of land. They grew potatoes as the staple of their diet and then the blight which, ironically came over from America, devastated much of the crop. The ineptitude and callous disregard of the British Government worsened the situation. Another name used in Ireland for this period is "The Great Hunger" because, as in many famines there was sufficient food but much of it was still exported and it did not get to those who were in desperate need.

An English Quaker called William Bennett, travelled round Ireland for six weeks to see the situation for himself. He wrote home to his sister who was a member of the Ladies' Irish Clothing Committee of London.

These letters were published in book form and one letter written in April 1847 tells of his visit to Kenmare, a beautiful, mountainous region. He arrived late in the evening and found:

> *The sounds of woe and wailing resounded in the streets through the night. I felt extremely ill, and was almost overcome. In the morning I was credibly informed that nine deaths had taken place during the night, in the open streets, from sheer want and exhaustion. The poor people came in from the rural districts in such numbers, in the hope of getting some relief, that it was utterly impossible to meet their most urgent exigencies and therefore they came literally to die: and I might see several families lying about in* the open streets, actually dying of starvation and fever, within a stone's throw of the inn.

Lord Landsdowne had a large estate at Kenmare and his agent, W. S. Trench, wrote later in "Realities of Irish Life" of conditions in Kenmare in 1849:

> *When I first reached Kenmare in the winter of 1849-50, the form of destitution had changed in some degree, but it was still very great. It was true that people no longer died of starvation; but they were dying nearly as fast of fever, dysentery, and scurvy within the walls of the workhouse. Food there was in abundance; but to entitle the people to obtain it, they were compelled to go into the workhouse and "auxiliary sheds" until they were crowded almost to suffocation.*

Trench persuaded Lord Landsdowne to offer free emigration to these paupers, who had to be in the workhouse, and some two hundred a week went via Cork to America, Canada and Australia. This could be seen as a humanitarian action, but Trench sold the idea to his master by pointing out how the scheme would quickly pay for itself by removing paupers from the parish rates immediately, and in future years.

Trench did admit that the people were a "motley type" who had tried to "break loose" from the ships not only in Cork but also in Liverpool where the ships called before leaving for the New World. The emigrants may have been volunteers but it seems that many went with heavy hearts.

It seems probable that Thomas and Catherine were part of this emigration, although we cannot be sure that they were in this scheme, for it seems they would have had to "break loose" at Liverpool in order to have remained in England. We cannot even be absolutely certain that Thomas was Irish, although it seems likely, as he has not been found in any Census. Could he have been an English soldier? Unfortunately, Catherine Sullivan and Thomas Smith are common name in Ireland and there are many Thomas and Catherine Smiths in England. There was even another couple with those names in Ringstead. On balance, however, it seems most likely that Thomas and Catherine, like millions of others, were forced by the famine to leave Ireland and seek a better life in England.

Tyler Anbinder, in an article in the *American Historical Review*, recounts that:

> *Landsdowne tenants were so desperately poor that they would often nail shut their cabins during the summer and walk a hundred miles or more through the counties of Cork, Limerick or Tipperary in search of work. "In autumn they go to the low country during the harvest" noted a Kerry resident, "and their wives then shut up their houses and go begging with their families until their husbands come home with their earnings" in time to harvest their own potatoes. After digging up the tubers some again went inland to find work before retiring home for Christmas.*

Tramping the road, looking for work, was common in the Nineteenth Century but we can see that the people from Kenmare would have been unusually accustomed to, trying to survive until they could find a place with more permanent work so that they could settle. It is said that the Smith family may have come via Bristol. We do know that the Irish came into Cardiff and Liverpool and swelled the numbers of paupers and it is likely that many west coast ports received desperate immigrants. I have found no proof of Thomas and Catherine's route, except that they came via Buckinghamshire. We do know that the family finally settled in Ringstead.

There is another family from Ireland shown in the 1861 Ringstead Census. The parents, Jeremiah Neal aged 44 and his wife Anne, 35, both were born in Kerry and the children were born in Cambridgeshire, Somerset and Kent before the youngest, who was born in Ringstead in about 1859. Both families seem to have wandered across England looking for work where they could find it.

Unfortunately, Thomas Smith died soon after reaching Ringstead and was buried in the churchyard on 27th August 1857 aged 47. Could it even be that it was his ill health and death and the imminent birth of Ellen that stopped the family's wanderings at Ringstead? His certificate just records his cause of death as due to "decay of nature" which tells us little but may indicate the hardships of his life in Ireland and on the road. The death was notified by Ann Barker which may seem odd. A possible explanation is that Ann, a widow, who is recorded as a lacemaker and pauper in 1851 and a charwoman in 1861, may have been an unqualified nurse and layer-out of the dead that most villages possessed.

In the 1861 Ringstead Census Catherine Smith, aged fifty, is a washerwoman, one of the first options for a poor widow, and the eldest son, John, aged twenty-one is a labourer on the railway. The eldest daughter, Mary Ann at seventeen has married agricultural labourer Richard Gidding. They are living with Catherine as well as the other children. Twin sons, Jerry [Jeremiah] and Thomas are just eight years old and are shown as born in Newport Pagnell in Buckinghamshire. Checking Jeremiah's birth certificate, we find that he was born at 3 pm on the 5th November 1852 at Moulsoe, a small village, now nearly swallowed up by Milton Keynes. Strangely there seems no sign of the registration of his twin brother Thomas. There are instances of twins being born weeks apart and the family may have moved in the meantime but, as yet, I have not found his birth. Of course, it may just be some discrepancy in the paperwork or my research.

There is also a daughter, Ellen, who is just three years old and was born in Ringstead. There is a large gap between Mary Ann and the twins, and it is possible that there were intermediate children who died in Ireland. Their long, hard time on the road from Kenmare, perhaps staying as casuals in workhouses, could have been another cause.

By 1871 the Smith family had moved into Church Street where Ellen, thirteen years old, is still a "scholar". By 1881 Ellen, now twenty-three, is a shoe worker and the only child still at home with her mother. Mary Ann has moved away with her husband Richard Giddings. Jeremiah has moved to Thrapston where he was an ironworker and had married Lavinia Medlow from Little Staughton (he later re-marries). I have been unable to find Thomas, perhaps because of his more common first name and the Smith children tend to change their places of birth to delete any Irish connection.

As we have said, next door to the Smiths lived Benjamin Roberts, with his widowed mother and it would seem that the two young people were attracted to each other for they married two years later. There is a slight twist in that the marriage was held at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Northampton on 2nd May 1883. Benjamin is recorded as living at 17 Laburnum Terrace which was on the Kettering Road in Northampton, but Ellen's place of residence appears to be Quinton which is a small village, some five miles south of Northampton. Benjamin is working as a shoemaker so may have gone in search of work but Ellen has no occupation shown. It is possible that she had been in service with one of the farmers or the rector in Quinton and had given up her place to get married.

Is it also possible that Ellen was a Catholic and she stayed with someone prior to the wedding in an Anglican church away from a disapproving mother? Certainly, it would have been unusual not to have married in their local Ringstead church. Once again, we have no evidence and there are many other possible explanations.

The witnesses to the marriage were Benjamin's younger brother, John Roberts, and Sarah Lockie. The couple were also to marry in Northampton some two years later.

Benjamin and Ellen moved back to Ringstead soon after the wedding and the 1891 Census reveals that their four children have all been born there. The oldest, Eleanor is seven years old, so was born in 1883 or 1884 which means that their time in Northampton was brief. Ten years later we see the family at 8 Carlow Street. Benjamin, now 43 is still a handsewn shoemaker, working at home as are Helena (Eleanor in 1891) aged 17 years, Harold 15, and Frances 13. George, aged 11, is still at school and Alfred, 8, Jessie, 6, and Edward, 4, have been added to the family. In the same house but having two rooms of her own is Ellen's mother, Catherine Smith now 82 years old. Benjamin's brother John and his wife Sarah are also back in the village with two children, Florence, 5, and John Owen, 3, both born in Ringstead. Perhaps as a portent, John's wife, Sarah Lockie had been the daughter of a grocer from Denford.

This is thought to be Benjamin with one of his sons outside his cottage in Carlow Street. He is wearing his shoemakers' apron (he worked at home)
My thanks to Jon Abbott and the Ringstead Heritage group for the use of this photograph.

Ellen's mother, Catherine, died in Ringstead on February 15th 1904 at the age of eighty-three and the 1911 Census reveals that Benjamin and Ellen had had eight children, one of whom had died. Four children are still at home; the three boys are in the shoe trade and Jessie aged 16 is an assistant dressmaker. It seems from the uncompleted column on homeworking that they all now working in local factories. The youngest child, Edward at 14, is a "Leather chopper in a Leather Lift Factory. A Heel (or "Lift") works had taken over one of the Ringstead boot and shoe factories, possibly the old Britannia Co-operative building. Eleanor, aged 27, and Frances, aged 23, are still single and working as Parlour Maid and Housemaid respectively, at Upton Hall in Northampton.

It is believed that Benjamin began married life in 18 Carlow Street and moved down the row to a larger house later. We know that the residents complained to the Sanitary Authority in 1880 about the state of the sewers. Two members of the authority had inspected the problem and reported. They found:

. . . a depression in the road immediately in front of the cottages, where, in all probability, after a heavy rain a body of water would accumulate and become stagnant, there being no sewer or drain to take it off. {Northampton Mercury 4th September 1880).

They found the old sewer from the cottages blocked and proposed a new one emptying into a cess pool and then emptying into Agutter Dyke which they recommended the parish should clean out. The "brook", which ran along the back of the cottages, was later culverted so it is difficult today to imagine the conditions at the time of Benjamin and Ellen.

Returning to the hand-sewn men they were in a difficult position, liking the control they had of their own lives and work but needing mutual support as the Government, via the employers, turned the screw on piecework rates.

Initially, many Raunds and Ringstead workers resisted unionisation because they had always made their own rules as to when they worked. Most would have initially echoed the words of an Irthlingborough shoe worker on the union's policy of speeding up the move from hand outwork to mechanised factory production:

The men do not thank the Union for doing so, they do not want their liberty meddled with, as they have shops to work in, and leading men will not go with their sons into such places as they know they will be. Some will leave the Union if they do not stop such interference.

(Boot & Shoe Journal 10th December 1892)

The shoeworkers and their families would also take time off to help with the harvest and earn some extra money for the family, especially when the trade was slack. The *Northampton Mercury* of 16th September 1882 reported in the Raunds section:

HARVEST OPERATIONS have been greatly facilitated by the brilliant weather of the past week. Most of the corn has been got in, stacked, and garnered. Gleaning is now almost entirely confined to the wives and families of agricultural labourers. The shoe trade being good this year, but few shoemakers' wives and families have turned out for gleaning purposes.

It was also a common practice to drink heavily at the weekend ("fuddling") and then take Monday off. It was known as Saint or Snobs Monday. It is no coincidence that Raunds had a Coffee Tavern a Temperance Band and a strong Rechabite movement.

It was recounted, many years later, by Major Henry Attley that the Roberts were a musical family and Benjamin played the flute and had a fine baritone voice. They were also staunch non-conformists and his younger brother. John was a well-known local organist. He also built organs in some of the local chapels. Mr Attley remembered "blowing the organ" for John and particularly one occasion, when his attention wandered, the pressure dropped. "Blow, boy, blow!" John hissed at him as loud as he dared without the congregation hearing.

The new unions saw the outworkers as undermining the rights, conditions and wages of workers in the factories. At the 1894 Conference of The *National Union of the Boot and Shoe Operatives*, a Stafford delegate complained about a navy contract being given to Raunds because non-union workers undercut the rates.

Nevertheless, more shoemakers were joining the *Amalgamated Society of Boot & Shoe Makers* and on the 10th October 1890 the *Northampton Mercury* reported that at the monthly meeting that the secretary had said that although a new section thirty more members had joined in the last month.

Benjamin Roberts at about 45 years of age

Taken from Ringstead Band Photograph with the kind permission of Vivienne Marshall.

The Reverend A. C. Neely, who was the vicar of Denford-cum-Ringstead, writes a poem some thirty years later about the Hand-sewn Boot makers of Ringstead in 1896. He tells of the first-floor workshop, reached by a ladder and of their disdain for "machine-mades". he also tells of the hard work of making the boots:

"Hard work?" Why, yes, of course it is. Just try to pull this thread.
Can't manage it? I thought not. Try something else instead.
Hammer this bit of leather, on this iron, on your knee,
It don't hurt me a blessed bit – but you just try and see!
"Don't want much of that" you say? Ah! You haven't learnt the trick,
I'll tell you about it sometime. Can't learn it all so quick.
You're right, it is hard work, sir and more than that, it's Art
To do it all yourself like, and fit in every part.
The missus sews the tops, of course, but then that's not so tough,
But if you had a day at that, you'd say you'd had enough.
.

Ironically, in view of what was to follow some ten years later the shoemaker is against strikes, although Neely gives a hint of what is to come:

"Did we go on strike last summer, when the chaps in town were out?"
No bless you, we don't want to strike; we get on best without.
I'm not going to say, though, that many would refuse
(If they chanced to get the offer) sixpence more a pair of shoes.

We also hear that any boots which were rejected by the War Office for minor defects were sold locally very cheaply and the good vicar had invested in a couple of pairs himself. He also liked to go to the workshop and sit and talk to the shoeworkers about "all sorts of things".

Taken April 2010 by author (no longer a factory)

The Ringstead Britannia Co-operative Society was possibly formed in 1891 according to some sources but moved into its new building in Denford Road in 1895. It was hoped that it would help the local shoemakers survive the industrialisation of shoemaking and poor prices for their work by sharing the profits. Unfortunately, the venture folded in 1897 and all its equipment and machines were sold off and it was only the later formed Ringstead Unity Co-operative Society that survived into the 1920s.

At this time, it was a campaign in Egypt which they had made boots for, but it was the larger conflict of The Boer War at the turn of the century (1899 – 1902) which came to the temporary rescue of the industry, especially in the Raunds area which was heavily dependent on military footwear. The orders flowed in and the agreed price for making a pair of boots was met by the War Office and the factory owners. Once the war finished, however, the orders dried up and the contractors tried to undercut each other to secure the diminishing orders. Suddenly the shoemakers' income dropped again.

The Ringstead Band included many from the Mayes family.
Back Row in the middle, holding a trombone, is Len Mayes; the two men on the left of the second row down are Benny and Ernest Mayes; the man, second left, on third row down is Harry Abbott Mayes. On the right of the front row, lying down, is Bill Mayes who later emigrated to Australia. Behind him on the right holding a flute is Benjamin Ebenezer Roberts
By kind permission of Vivienne Marshall, great-granddaughter of Harry Abbott Mayes.

Queen Victoria died in 1901 and there followed the Edwardian postscript before the modern age blasted the world apart. In 1902 the Ringstead Band played for the celebrations in the village for the coronation of Edward VII. Below is a picture of the band, many of whom, three years later, were on that hi9storic march.

Perhaps as we look at Benjamin, and the others in the photograph above, we can see something of what H. E Bates was describing in his autobiography:

> *The impression I chiefly gain from the recollection of those shoemaking men is not exactly one of coarseness; they lack the sheer belted belching muscle and guts of what used to be known as labouring men; they do not exhibit the beer-spitting swagger I remember of navvies, bricklayers or those wild-eyed drovers of cattle I sometimes used to see drunk and rosy-eyed, on Midland market days. Their roughness is of rather different order, and I find it difficult to describe. If I use the word rude, in the sense of uncouth, the impression will be a shade too strong.*

Nor are they loud; nor, in Rupert Brooke's words, excessively "black of mouth". Nor are they as forthright, or as blunt or as self-opinionated as Northern men. The impression I really get is of a dry, droll, unshaven independence and it is not at all an unlikeable quality.

The reduction in the piece-work rate led to a strike of the army boot and shoe makers and to the Raunds March of 1905 where 115 men (selected from the 300 who volunteered) marched to London to petition the War Office and Parliament. The views of the Union and the local workers were as one. Well nearly! All this is covered in J. Betts' excellent book which anyone interested should read. I will just quote, from The Times of May 15th 1905, to show what a considerable event this was at the time:

THE RAUNDS STRIKERS IN LONDON

A demonstration organised by the Social Democratic Federation in support of the Raunds bootmakers who are on strike, was held in Trafalgar-square yesterday afternoon; and an audience of between 8,000 and 10,000 persons was addressed by Socialist and Labour leaders from three sides of the plinth of the Nelson column. The deputation of strikers assembled under the Charing-cross railway arch about half-past 2 and were there joined by contingents from Socialist and Labour organisations. A procession was formed and, headed by a brass band with twenty or thirty banners unfurled, the men marched to the square, where they met with an enthusiastic reception from the crowd. One of the 115 men who have marched from Raunds, a cripple who walks with a crutch, headed the strikers as they marched into the square to the strains of the "Marseillaise," and was loudly cheered..... The crowd was the largest which has been seen in Trafalgar-square for some years and it showed its practical sympathy with the strikers by throwing coins, not unmixed with silver, upon the plinth for their benefit. In this way a sum of about £10 was collected.

But what of our two Roberts' cousins? Some twenty of the marchers were from Ringstead including over half the brass band that accompanied them on the journey. Most were young men but Edward Bird from Ringstead at 59 was the oldest marcher. There were no Roberts on the march, but the conflict split the family. As we have seen from the more recent Miner's Strike of the 1980s bitterness can brew up in communities when some go hungry and others continue to work. Some, including George Henry tried to carry on collecting work from the factory in Raunds in defiance of the strikers and violence ensued.

It appears, although as yet I have no proof, that George Henry Roberts was the only one in his family who was a strike breaker. Certainly, his own younger brother, William, appeared on behalf of one of those accused of violence against George. Was it all quickly forgotten after the march or did it make George a pariah in the community? David Saint has reported that George was a church man unlike the rest of the Roberts clan who were non-conformists. He also says that George ran a welfare club to help members get health care but that his great nephew, Paul, insisted that he was a narrow-minded bigot and he had never heard anyone say a good word about him.

There is no real evidence in the official records except, perhaps, a hint in the 1911 Census in that Benjamin's children are all put down with one Christian name but George and Mary's all have two listed. Does it mean nothing at all, is it Mary's influence, or is it evidence of someone the locals would see as "putting on airs and graces".

All we can be sure of, is that in the 1911 Census, Benjamin is described as a “Handsewn Army Bootmaker” and George Henry is also a “Handsewn Army Shoemaker.” After George, however, is added the word, “Unemployed” Was this an indication that George was frozen out by the community. On the other hand, Benjamin has a son, called George too, who was a shoe hand and also unemployed.

When we look at the *Valuer’s Field Book* from the early Twentieth Century, which valued property and land for tax purposes, we see that in 1914 Benjamin owned a house in Carlow Street and in 1902 had bought freehold land in Denford Road which he had as grassland and allotment. He also had some 30 young fruit trees planted there. We see that although not a rich man he was by now comfortably off for a handsewn man.

Perhaps, for George Henry, like many others, it was just the difficult times in the shoe industry a few years before some help came from a terrible source. Jeremiah Smith, Ellen’s brother had been in the Northamptonshire Regiment since about 1904 and had served five years in India. He left the army but remained as a reservist and signed up again at the outbreak of the First World War. He was shot in the jaw at Contalmaison on 22nd July 1916 and died in the Queen Alexandra Military Extension Hospital in London and was buried in Thrapston. Many Ringstead families were to see their young men killed or wounded but it was the First World War that gave the hand-sewn men a little respite. Millions of military boots were needed, although the Government announced that for the first time men would be going to war in the cheaper machine-made boots. Although it gave them temporary respite, it was to be a mortal blow to the handsewn men of Raunds and Ringstead and shoemaking of all types in the area suffered a slow decline and death.

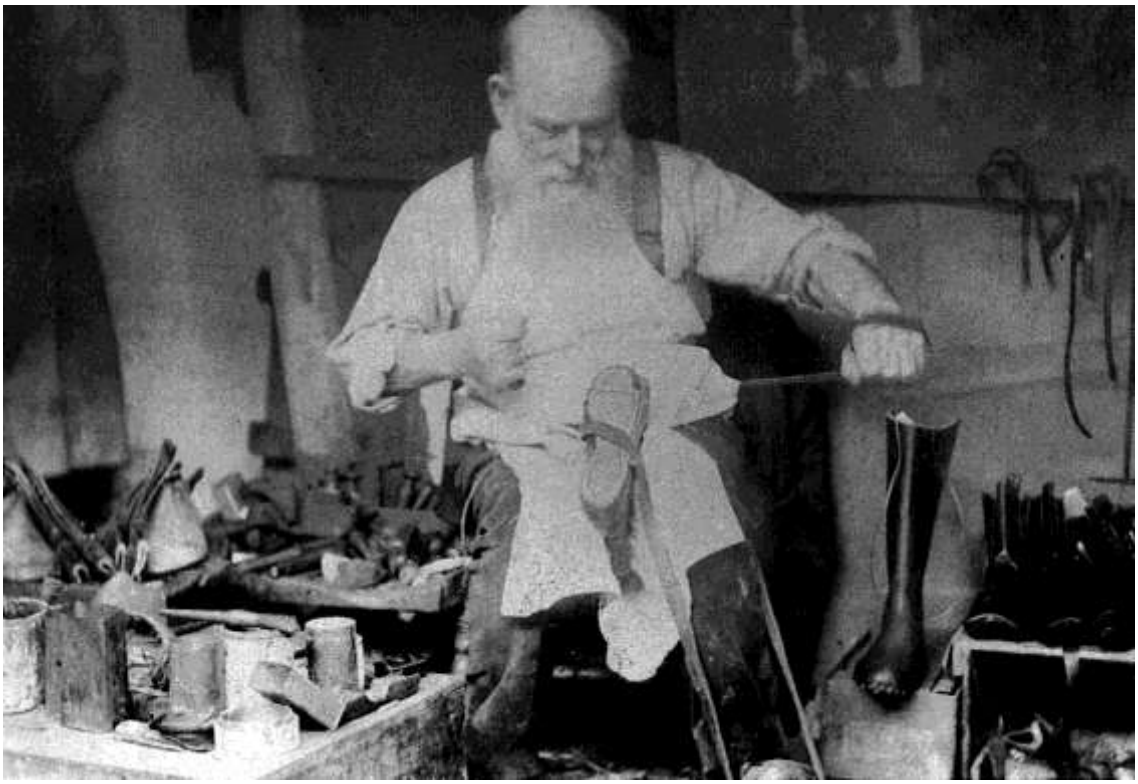
In 1922 the local papers told of their plight. In the *Northampton Mercury* of 5th May the monthly report of the Shoe Operatives Union stated that there had been a slight improvement in the shoe trade in March but:

> *At Ringstead employment was very bad owing to the completion of Government contracts.*

The industrialisation of the shoe industry and the dependence on the Government’s need for military boots and shoes was to see the end of the hand-sewn men and the death of a way of life that had sustained the village for a century.

We see the evidence of the effect on the handsewn men in the life of Benjamin Roberts foreshadowing in a small way the blight on the mining communities after the destruction of the industry in the 1980s. The *Northampton Mercury* of Friday 10th April 1925 reported that:

A dangerous accident occurred at Irthlingborough Station (L.M. and S.R.) on Tuesday afternoon when Benjamin Roberts, an elderly man whose home is at Ringstead apparently fell on the line in front of the Northampton-Peterborough passenger train which was drawing slowly into the station.



Thomas Amos of Long Buckby (early Twentieth Century)
With kind permission of Northampton Museums and Art Gallery

In a later edition, on the 29th May, we discover, however, that it was no accident. At the Wellingborough Police Court, Benjamin was charged with trying to commit suicide by throwing himself in front of a moving train at Chelveston (there was a one-field wide strip of the Chelveston parish in which the Irthlingborough Station was situated). It tells us that:

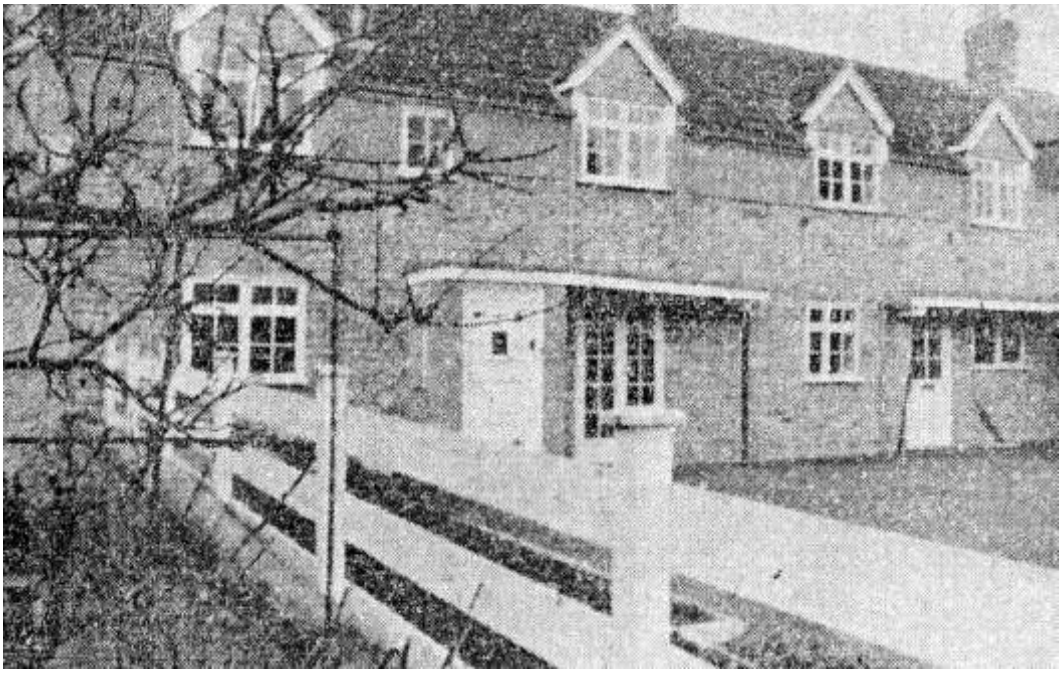
Roberts, an elderly man, crippled, and evidently very ill, was accommodated with a seat.

Walter Sydney Hern a railway porter gave evidence that he saw:

Roberts come from behind an oil shed on his hands and knees and place his head on the rail in front of a train travelling from Peterborough to Northampton. The engine at that time was about 15 yards away and was slowing down preparatory to stopping at the station. The lifeguard in front of the wheel of the engine caught him and dragged him along the road for some yards. Witness as soon as he saw the man going to the line gave a signal to the driver, who pulled up immediately. Roberts, who was severely injured was taken to Northampton Hospital by ambulance.

We hear from John Roberts, Benjamin's brother, that he was a skilled handsewn bootmaker and that there was little work for him. He had been suffering with a septic hand and this had caused lack of sleep and a severe nervous depression. He had tried to get his brother treated at St Andrews Hospital, a charitable institution opened in Northampton in 1838 for the "humane care of the mentally ill". John Clare, the poet, had spent the last twenty-three years of his life there. Only one doctor would certify Benjamin, however, so he could not be admitted.

Benjamin, who at first tried to say he was not aware what he was doing now admitted that, "he was irresistibly impelled to take his life because of his state of mind". The Baptist Minister, the Reverend Bates, gave him a good character reference as a "steady, religious, honest man" who was a "most useful member of the church and choir". Benjamin's wife, who was a St John Ambulance nurse, appealed to the Bench to let her take her husband home. They agreed and he was put into the care of his wife and his brother, John.



House in Carlow Street said by Wilfred Roberts to be where Benjamin and his family lived. His workshop was at the back (house much altered)
Chronicle & Echo 1975

Benjamin had not long to live. He died on 17th September 1925, aged 67, and was buried four days later in Ringstead Cemetery. He left all his assets of £237 7s 5d to his widow, Ellen. George Henry lived to be 76 and was also buried in the Cemetery on May 1st 1941. That part of the cemetery has been levelled into green anonymity and no headstone marks either grave.

One of Benjamin's sons, Alfred, was not able to follow his father into the craft. He was too short-sighted to do the work and was later said to have worked in Palmer's Grocery Stores in Raunds.

In 1911, aged 19, he was a grocery assistant in Oundle, boarding with a widow and her elderly sister. He moved on to Grantham, married and had two daughters. A few weeks after the death of Benjamin, Alfred's wife gave birth to a girl in a room over a small grocer's shop in Grantham.

She was a clever girl called Margaret Hilda Roberts who made Alfred one of the most famous shopkeepers in England. My Uncle, Dennis Ball, told me that he saw her, a very well-dressed little girl, visit her uncle "Barrel Roberts" in Marshalls Road, Raunds. Terry Collins has confirmed that "Barrell" was Harold Roberts, brother of Alfred and that he lived on the opposite side of Marshalls Road at number 58. One wonders if her Great Uncle George's views and his experiences in 1905 had some effect on Margaret Thatcher's attitude to unions nearly 80 years later. Certainly, it was not that of her grandfather.

Benjamin's brother, John, had been shown in the 1911 Census as living in *Mozart House* in the High Street. He had begun his working life as an army boot maker but had saved up and bought a second-hand piano, and later a harmonium, and took them apart to see how they were constructed. He began his business and. by his death, in 1933, was a well-known local businessman who had tuned, repaired, made, sold and installed organs of many types in churches and chapels across the country. The house is shown as having seven rooms. Ellen's granddaughter, Margaret Roberts, seems to have rarely visited her grandmother during those ten years but, in her autobiography, she tells of being thrilled to be allowed to play on one of the two organs that John had in his barn. She remembered her grandmother as a "bustling active little old lady who kept a fine garden". She also remembered how large John's house seemed, compared to Ellen's humble cottage.

Ten years after Benjamin, on 1st May 1935, Ellen, aged seventy-six, died. Judging by the churchmen officiating at their funerals, whereas Benjamin was a Baptist, Ellen was a Wesleyan, like Alfred her son, perhaps a compromise with her Catholic heritage. On her death the *Grantham Journal* of 4th May reported:

> *Councillor A. Roberts, a much-respected townsman of North-parade, has suffered a severe loss by the death of his mother, which occurred at Ringstead, Northamptonshire on Wednesday.*
>
> *Mrs. Ellen Roberts, who was 76 years of age, had she lived another day would have celebrated the 52nd anniversary of her wedding. She was the widow of Mr. Benjamin Roberts, well known as a singer.*
>
> *Mrs Roberts was never actively identified with public work but took a keen and lasting interest in the affairs of the Wesleyan Church.*
>
> *St. John Ambulance Brigade work claimed much of her time, and she had gained all the certificates. She was the first in the village of Ringstead of which she was a native, to take up the work.*
>
> *She had brought up a family of seven.*

Benjamin had not received an obituary in the *Grantham Journal*.

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My thanks to: Rebecca Shawcross, Shoe Resources Officer at Northampton Museums and Art Gallery for her help with research and the illustrations: Sara Sharman and Nicki Phillips for checking in the Ringstead Cemetery Register; Martin Curley in Ireland and Agnes Burton in Raunds for alerting me to Ellen's story; Jon Abbott for the newspaper references to Benjamin's attempted suicide.
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