

RINGSTEAD PEOPLE

The Lives of some Nineteenth Century People

From a Northamptonshire Village

David Ball

Ringstead People

By

David Ball

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Front cover shows a preliminary drawing of Ringstead Church by George Clarke (Probably February 1847). By kind permission of Northampton Record Office

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I am indebted to many people for the help and support over the last few years. The problem is knowing when to stop. Vivienne Marshall, Agnes Burton, Rachel Henderson, Janice Morris, and Jean Thomas have been great e-friends throughout this time. Others have helped tremendously on particular biographies and I have acknowledged them in the references for the individual chapters.

Crispin Powell and the staff of Northamptonshire Record Office have been unfailingly helpful. The Huntingdonshire and Leicestershire and Manchester Record Offices have also been of great help. The Northampton Central Library Local Studies staff have been of great assistance. Less used, but very important, has been the National Archives at Kew. All at a time when they are all under great strain because of budget cuts.

A number of commercial organisations have allowed me to use images at no, or very little, cost and almost without exception people have been willing to give me more time than I can reasonably expect from them.

As you will see from the references many other people, both in Ringstead and all over the world, have generously given me their time, knowledge and expertise and I would like, collectively, to thank them all. Of course, any errors are entirely my responsibility.

I would like to thank my wife, Betty for her patience and my three sons, Tom, Jack and Seth, for giving me the time by growing up and leaving home.

David Ball

References

I have given my main references at the end of each chapter for people who wish to follow up anything with their own research. I have omitted certain references which underpin all the chapters. These are the Parish Registers of Ringstead and the neighbouring parishes. These have been viewed mainly at the Northampton Record Office, (NRO), but more recently I have also used the transcriptions on the excellent Rushdenheritage website. I have also used the Censuses from 1841 – 1901 on Ancestry.co.uk and the 1911 Census on FindMyPast.co.uk, as well as at NRO. Every month more is becoming available on line But Record Offices are great places to visit and there is nothing quite like seeing the original documents and getting some expert guidance.

Website

Thanks to my son Tom I have a website www.ringsteadpeople.com on which these stories originally appeared. I hope to continue posting new stories once this book has been printed.

Introduction

This book started life as a website. I loved the ability to post stories in an unfinished state which people could correct and respond to. I am still old-fashioned enough, however, to think that the information needs to be put into a book before it is really finished.

Having said that, I realise that it is still unfinished. More information will emerge about the people that I have covered, either because I have missed it, or because it is newly released into the public sphere. Also I will have made mistakes or wrong assumptions. Family trees are notorious for catching out the confident. I have to confess that, although most of my father's ancestors came from Ringstead in all branches, I have never lived there. I grew up in Wellingborough but I have no local knowledge except from my reading, walking and the many helpful Ringstead people who have given me their time.

I have left the chapters roughly in the order that I wrote them rather than lumping all one kind together. I hope that by reading through the lives, or dipping here and there, you will get a sense of the life of Ringstead in the nineteenth century. As today, we see people, good and bad, steadfast and fickle, in happiness and sorrow.

When you wander along the streets you may see the people who once lived in the houses, or kept the shops, taught in the school or worked in the fields, preached in the church or chapel, or served at the inn. Also wander round the churchyard, Baptist burial ground or the cemetery. Do not see peeling gravestones but the villagers, the real breathing, fallible people, whose lives ended there. A community needs a vibrant present but also a proud past.

David Ball

October 2011

[Note a 'c' before a date in the text is short for circa meaning 'about' or 'approximately'.

I hope that you will see this book as the first part of dialogue. E-mail, ring or write to me if you see errors; or you have extra information or images; or you know of other Nineteenth Century, Ringstead people who had interesting lives. Hopefully there may be a second edition. In any case I will continue with my website. David Ball died in 2022; his books are now published in full online at www.ringsteadpeople.com.

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Chapter One

To New Worlds and Back

Elisha Ball (c1839 – 1908) & Sarah Elizabeth Childs (c1849 – 1936)

Elisha Ball is one of the those Nineteenth Century Ringstead people whose lives caution us not to think that all the villagers were born, lived and died in one small corner of Northamptonshire. It is by following the Censuses through the years, that we begin to discover a little of the truth about his years away from everything and everyone that he had grown up with and come to expect.

He was baptised in Ringstead Parish Church on 12 September 1841. Often a baptism is a good indication of a birth date but in this case he was baptised in a, not uncommon, 'job lot' together with his brothers, James, Thomas and Samuel so we must look elsewhere for a more accurate estimate of his coming into the small village world.

Elisha's parents were Daniel Ball, a shepherd and his wife Phoebe. Unfortunately I have not been able to find Daniel's baptism but I believe that he was the brother of John Ball who was killed when a wall fell on him during a fire at Denford in 1821. Daniel married Phoebe (or Phebe as she is sometimes called) Whittering, who came from nearby Denford, on August 7th 1817. The couple then had children on a very regular basis with some 11 baptisms, and one burial, in the eighteen years up to 1836. It was, perhaps, the large number of children that meant that some had to fly further from the nest.

In the 1841 Census, Elisha is two years old and living in Ringstead with his parents, and his siblings, John, James, Thomas and Samuel. Already the older children, George, Elizabeth, Anne, Sarah and Daniel have left home. By 1851 another child, Elizabeth, aged 8 is shown as a daughter but it seems odd that a second child should be named Elizabeth while the first is still alive. I can find no baptism for her although there is an Elizabeth baptised on 11 September 1842 the daughter of John Ball and Sarah Smith. Elisha is eleven years old and at this comparatively advanced age still a scholar.

In the 1861 Census Elisha is 21 years old, still living with his parents and there is also a granddaughter, Elizabeth aged 18, so it appears that the girl we met in 1841 was not a late daughter of Phoebe after all. But whose daughter was she? We have discovered that she is the illegitimate daughter of Anne born before her marriage to George Mayes. In the 1861 Census, Daniel senior is 71 years old but still a shepherd while Elisha is a humble agricultural labourer. All the rest of the family have left home and we meet them in later chapters.

Farming was constantly going through difficult years with the New World imports causing falling grain prices. In 1841 the common land around Ringstead, had been enclosed, as had already happened in the neighbouring Parishes, destituting many cottager families. The better wages in the

towns were also attracting the young labourers and throughout Victoria's reign there was a rapid drift away from the countryside into the new industrial towns and cities.

Elisha also had personal reasons for changing his life. His father, Daniel aged 73 was buried on 20th April 1863 and a few months later Elisha had married Elizabeth (or sometimes Sarah Elizabeth) Childs. His mother Phoebe also died at the good age of 79 years in 1868. Perhaps these events, together with his uncertain prospects caused him to make the great leap into the unknown. At first all we know is that Elisha and his new wife disappear from the Ringstead Censuses and parish registers.

Elisha does not appear in the 1871 and 1881 Censuses and it is only in 1891 that he suddenly reappears and some of the mystery of the missing years is solved. The 1891 Census finds the family in Carlow Street in Ringstead with their children Ida and Samuel. It is when we scan along the Census sheet to the children's places of birth that we realise that something quite momentous has happened. Samuel, aged 20 is a shoemaker and was born in New York State, United States. Ida aged 12 was born in Upper Canada. The world is changing and, even in small villages like Ringstead, people are seeking their fortunes far from home, although it seems that Elisha did not find his.

Perhaps we also ought to record that Ringstead had had, from the very start people, who left its tight little community and ventured into the unknown. William Tuttle was born on 26 December 1607 in Ringstead and, on a ship called the '*Planter*', he and his family, including three children also born in Ringstead, reached Boston, America in April 1635. They settled in Connecticut and never returned. If you Google 'Ringstead' you will find people from the New World tracing their ancestors back to this small Northamptonshire village.

Shoemakers have always been known for their radical tendencies and to 'infect' the communities in which they worked, so perhaps it was the democracy of the New World that beckoned. For some early settlers the reasons may have been religious. In the nineteenth century it is more likely that it was the same cause that drove village people into the slums of London and other big cities; the poverty and uncertainty of being an agricultural labourer in those changing times.

With Elisha, there is one more factor that we have discovered since we first wrote his and Sarah's story. Three of his older siblings had emigrated in 1852 and two of them, Daniel and Sarah (Nobles), had remained in New York State. One imagines that Elisha and his family may have stayed with one of them when they first arrived in that vast unknown country.

We now have to find out where the family had been in those missing years by looking at the 1870 American Census for the 3rd Ward of the City of Elmira in the County of Chemung in the State of New York. There we find Elisha Ball aged 30, born in England, with his wife, Sarah E., 26, and children, George, 7 and Samuel 3. George travelled with his parents to America but Samuel was born in New York State. Elisha seems to be a *C Laborer* or could it be G(eneral) Laborer. The ages do not quite match up but this is not unusual and this is undoubtedly our family.



Postcard of Elmira City in Nineteenth Century.
www.rootsweb.ancestry.com.



Early Elmira Photo from Stereoscopic View.
Submitted by (the late) Norma Jenkins to www.joycetice.com.

Elisha's neighbours were mainly from New York or New Jersey with a few born in Ireland. Of the forty people on their Census page only Elisha, Sarah and George are born in England. There are

labourers like Elisha but also painters and carpenters and a stone mason. George, who is seven years old, is shown as having attended school that year.

Mark Twain, who wrote many of his most famous books in Quarry Farm, overlooking the Chemung River valley, was often seen roaming the streets of Elmira looking for a billiards game or someone to chat to. Did the Balls stroll, unaware, past Elmira's most famous resident? Perhaps, they even passed the time of day.

Elmira City itself was a fast growing settlement. In the *Hamilton Childs Gazetteer and Business Directory for Chemung and Schuler Counties* for 1868 it tells us that Elmira City had four banks, two daily and two weekly papers, a book and printing office, 12 churches, a synagogue, a female college and a water cure establishment. It also had a number of public schools. It had changed its name from Newtown in 1828 and by 1870 there was a population of 20,538 the vast majority of whom lived in timber-framed houses.

Chemung County was still mainly rural with a vast range of crops and animal products from honey and maple syrup to corn, wool and from wheat, barley and oats to milk and butter and cheese. It also grew tobacco and made wine and cider. The county did have 346 factories including 32 saw mills, 17 flouring mills, 13 copper shops, 26 carriage and wagon manufacturers, 9 tanneries, 4 boot and shoe establishments and 4 woollen factories. There was also a rolling mill in Elmira.

It must have been a shock to Elisha and Elizabeth after Ringstead. At the moment we can only speculate as to why Elisha and his family ended up in Elmira which is some distance from the coast. It was a railway centre so perhaps this was the reason. It is also possible that he knew someone from the Ringstead area who had moved there, perhaps in the boot and shoe industry. It may be that it was always just a stopping off point, a place to gain funds and become acclimatised before the next part of their journey to a new life.

Whatever the reason, by 1881 we find that Elisha and his family have left the United States and he is now described as a 'farmer' in Southampton, on the shores of Lake Huron in Ontario (Upper Canada). This is a journey of some four hundred miles, not a huge distance by American standards but we do not know how he and his family made the journey. Did they travel overland to Buffalo and then by boat through the Great Lakes to Bruce or was it all by land, perhaps via the railroad which had been built to Southampton in 1872? We can only guess. It may be they were helped by the Canadian government for the emigration to Canada had slowed and it increasingly advertising for farmers and labourers, especially to the western states. The Census records that both Ida (now aged two) and Samuel were both born in Ontario but one would expect the 1891 English Census to be right. Why would Elisha bother to give two birth places for his children if it was not correct? His eldest son, George who was born in England just before they left, and is now 16 years old, is also recorded as a farmer.

The Bruce Peninsular was a territory controlled until the middle of the nineteenth century by the Saugeen Ojibway Nations which included the Chippewas who had defeated the Iroquois. Like many other Native American tribes they were pushed into signing away their land rights to the Peninsular in the period from 1836 onwards. The lands were divided up by the Indian Department and sold, with the interest from the sale going to the local tribes. The Saugeen Peninsula was ceded in 1854

with the 'Indians' retaining certain Reservation areas. The Chippewas believed that the white men would look after their lands. Settlers then poured in, attracted by the rich fisheries and the lush forests, both of which were destroyed over the next 70 years.

It may be that Elisha was granted a piece of land and set up a homestead there with his family. The Canadian County Atlas Project only records two E. Balls, one in 1876 in Norwich South in the County of Oxford, and one in 1878 in Clarke in the County of Durham. It seems unlikely that either is Elisha because the Gazetteer and Directory of Bruce County published in 1880 has Elisha in the village of Southampton as a 'labourer'. This lists over 200 people and as it only gives heads of families, unless a person also held land, it must have had some 800 inhabitants. Certainly the 1881 Census records 1,141 people in the village. (Ringstead had some 950 inhabitants at this time).

We see included in the list, 'laborers', fishermen, (and a fish inspector), farmers machinists, carpenters, coopers, tailors, teamsters; brakesmen, a station master and track inspector; a harbour master and agent for the Inman ocean steamers, a customs officer; a crown land agent, a postmaster, a meteorological station manager and a barrister; a brickmaker, a miller a printer, a weaver, butchers, confectioners, a grocer, two hoteliers, a cabinet maker and photographer. It also lists the land that people own. Elisha has none. It may be this was before he managed to acquire some but possibly he came too late to stake his claim.

Southampton had originally been called Saugeen and in 1848 the Crown Lands Department decided to lay out a town at the head of the Saugeen River. It was surveyed in 1851 and by the end of the year it was a small village of some dozen or more families. A storm on Lake Huron sunk the supply ship and it was a difficult first winter in the cold with the heavy snow falls of an Ontario winter. Nevertheless it grew rapidly and by 1871 it had a school and churches as well as banks and shops. The real pioneer days were over and land was not available as once it had been.

Under the advert for '*Strong's Lung Syrup which cures lung diseases*', D. Cascaden advertises as an agent for the 'North-West Transportation Co. and the Inman and White Star Line of Ocean Steamships'. He states that 'intending Emigrants for the North-West will find it advantageous to write for information which will be cheerfully given'. Already the movement is further away from the well established states into the newer, unclaimed areas. Certainly the *Northampton Mercury* was still continually advertising the opportunities for free farms in Western Canada in the early 1900s.

Whatever the truth, for some reason, it did not work out for the Ball family. Perhaps they were homesick for Ringstead or perhaps they could not make a living and they struggled in poverty away from their friends and family. Farming was not easy in Bruce County and it was mainly in logging and fishing that people made good money. It would be interesting to know when Elisha and his family left Southampton because on November 4th 1886, fanned by high winds, a disastrous fire broke out which destroyed fifty buildings and left over thirty families homeless. There was a collection made to help the victims but, for Elisha, was this the end of his dream?



Northampton Mercury 10th March 1905.

By permission of Northamptonshire Libraries and Information Service.

We know that, by 1891, the family were back in Ringstead and Elisha is a farm labourer, Samuel is a shoemaker and Ida a scholar. There is also a niece (probably great niece), Elizabeth Sykes aged 9, living with them. She is the daughter of Rachel (nee Ball) and the great granddaughter of John Ball, Elisha's uncle. It seems almost certain that Daniel and John were brothers as we thought.

One wonders how the family managed to return home and how they told friends and neighbours of their experiences of the strange peoples and places that they had encountered. Did they bring postcards back of the places they had been? Did they have their own photographs taken, before they left Southampton, by Thomas Davis, cabinet maker and photographer? Perhaps life seemed a little humdrum after the wonders of the New World.

By 1901 the whole family, including George, were living in 6 Barritt's Yard in Ringstead. Elisha and George are 'Ordinary Farm Labourers', Samuel is a shoemaker and Ida a boot closer. Living with them were two boarders, William Wyman and Henry French. Henry, at twenty-four, was two years older than Ida. He was a Railway Bridge labourer, born in Paulerspury near Towcester, who moved to Blisworth as a young child. Ringstead was on the railway line from Blisworth to Peterborough. Obviously the stranger appealed to Ida and they were married within weeks of the Census.

Elisha died, aged 72, on 3 September 1908 and his son, Samuel died just two years later on 6th April 1910. Sarah Elizabeth, Elisha's wife, has been somewhat overlooked in this account. It is often difficult to find details of women's lives through official documents. Luckily her great granddaughter, Rachel Henderson, was told a little about her by her own father. She was known as 'Air Granny' and,

by his account, she was one of those women that people send for in time of trouble. One can surmise that her time in Canada would have increased her natural hardiness and resilience. I will set down the tragic story, which is one example of how Sarah had to show this character, in Rachel's own words.

It wasn't until I was in my forties that [my father] told me of one instance [of being sent for in a time of trouble]. It was during WW1, that there was a man in Ringstead whose wife had recently died, leaving him with two small boys and a baby girl. In the midst of all this trouble, his call-up papers came. I think that at that time Ringstead was a singularly hard place to live; people were very poor, and the 'local gentry', such as they were, obviously were indifferent to his plight (he would have qualified for exemption). The night before his departure, his daughter was being looked after by relatives. He waited until his sons were asleep before cutting their throats and then his own. (All this is quite true!) Dad accompanied his granny to the house where she helped to wash the bodies and lay them out before taking the sheets home to launder.

Like many women who have had hard lives Sarah Elizabeth lived to a good age and was 85 when she died, on 2nd February 1936. She and Elisha are buried in Ringstead Cemetery although I have not yet managed to find a headstone.

The connection with Canada was not entirely lost because Henry French also went to work in Canada although it is not thought that Ida went with him. They also called their daughter Veve, a French name, perhaps recalling Ida's birth in Ontario. Could it have been a hidden pun? Long live the French!

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Ringstead, Northamptonshire, England.

Northampton Mercury 10th March 1905 (Northampton Central Library) Canada advertisement

Elmira City, New York State, USA.

www.cityofelmira.net.

www.joycetice.com (including digitalised text of book: History of Tompkins, Schuyler, Chemung, Tioga 1879 Chapters 35 & 46).

1870 USA Federal Census (via www.Ancestry.com).

Southampton, Bruce County, Canada

www.ourroots.ca which has digitalised versions of :

Gazetteer and Directory of Bruce County (published 1880).

The History of the County of Bruce: and of the minor municipalities therein, province of Ontario, Canada by Norman Robertson (Bruce County Historical Society).

1881 Canadian Census for Southampton, Bruce North, Ontario (via www.familysearch.org).

<http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/countyatlas>.

Also my thanks to Rachel Henderson, granddaughter of Henry and Ida French.

Chapter Two

Boston Workhouse

Sarah Manning (1809 - 1875)

When searching through the records for Ringstead you quickly discover that two factors try to thwart your progress up, or down your family tree. The families naturally link and interweave and the parents were rarely imaginative in the choice of names for their children. The boys are often John or Thomas or George or Henry and the girls are Rebecca or Sarah or Elizabeth or Hannah or Mary. The men then set about marrying women with the same names as their mothers or sisters or cousins. Suddenly the village is littered with Rebecca Mannings or John Balls. Some of the women will decide to use their middle name to help the family and enable them to keep some individuality but for us searching through those pre 1841 Census days an entry in the Parish Register is as likely to perplex as enlighten.

Sarah Manning was baptised on January 9th 1814, in a family batch, with her older brothers Isaac and Jacob. Luckily the parish register records that she was born on 4th April 1809 and is the daughter of James and Mary. Her eldest brother, James, was baptised on 7 March 1784 and is recorded as, 'James Manning Bosworth the Bastard son Of James Manning and Mary Bosworth. Relieved by the Parish". James and Mary married some two years later on 8 May 1786 but, surprisingly it appears that the next child, Rebecca was not born until November 1791, as it records at her baptism, on 24 October 1813. It may be that some children have come and gone unrecorded, or that James was away, or was it possible that they were in a local workhouse and segregated. Of their first child, James, I can find no further trace.

In all, James and Mary had ten children and Sarah was the eighth. I say eighth although it seems quite possible that her sister Rebecca, born in 1791, is the same person as Rose who appears in the 1851 Census as being born in about 1791 and whose birth or baptism cannot be found. If this is true then Sarah was the seventh child.

She next appears in the records when she marries Edward Chambers on 20 October 1832 at Ringstead. It is in the Parish Register and it states that 'Both are Of This Parish' (BOTP). There are no baptisms recorded for the couple and we never see Edward Chambers again. There are some Edward Chambers in the criminal records so perhaps he was transported. By 1841 Sarah is living with her older sister Rebecca and her brother Isaac. Also living with Rebecca is another Rebecca who appears from the 1851 Census to be the older sister's illegitimate child. The two younger women are shown as lacemakers but Rebecca is a 'pauper'.

We meet Sarah again in 1845 but now using her maiden name of Manning. The birth certificate of Charles Andrews, born on the 8th August 1845, records Sarah Manning as the mother and a William Andrews, a mariner as the father. William, in the 1841 Census, was recorded living in North street in

Boston. More surprising is that Charles has been born in the Union Workhouse in Boston, Lincolnshire and Sarah is recorded as living there. There may be a few explanations as to how Sarah ended up in Boston. She may have gone there for work and failed but there was a system where some unions sent their poor to other workhouses that could look after them more cheaply. Boston had a rather magnificent workhouse designed by George Gilbert Scott and built in 1837 which had an infirmary where Sarah could have had her baby in comparative luxury. For many poorer people the workhouse hospital was the only hope of medical attention.

At this time Boston was an important port and it seems possible that Sarah was in Boston when she met the mariner William, rather than going there to have his child. Perhaps she travelled there with the mysterious Edward Chambers.

On the 4th January 1847 Sarah married William Andrews, still a mariner, at the General Baptist Chapel in Boston. The witnesses are Michael Morgan and Elizabeth MacQueeney, and it records that Sarah and William live in North Street, Boston. William's father is given as John Andrews (deceased).

William, however, had not long to live and suffering from 'inflammation of the lungs' he dies just eighteen months later, on 7th June 1848. He was just forty-nine years old. The informant of the death is his nurse, the same Elizabeth MacQueeney and the 1851 Census for North Street records that 'Elizabeth McQueeney' is running a pauper's lodging house. Neither of Sarah's husbands seem to have survived long after marriage.

It is the next two Censuses which help us to tie the two parts of Sarah's life together. In 1851 a Charles Andrews, aged 5 and born in Boston, appears in Ringstead living with his Aunt Rose, a pauper unable to work, with her daughter Rebecca. Rose is shown as unmarried. With them is Rose's sister Sarah Andrews, a widow who is the main subject of this story. By 1861 Rebecca, the daughter, is head of the house and her aunt, Sarah Andrews and her nephew Charles Andrews are living with her.

By 1871 Sarah is shown as the head, living in London End, Ringstead and Rebecca, her niece is still living with her. Sarah, aged 62 continues on Parish Relief although Rebecca is working as a lacemaker. Charles has married Elizabeth Warren on 31 August 1866 at the Baptist Meeting House in Thrapston and by 1871 is living at 29 Shop [High] Street, Ringstead with his three children, Ada, Annie and George.

Sarah does not appear in the 1881 Census and checking back we find her death, aged 67 in October December 1875.

Sarah lived much of her life in poverty and we can only skim the surface of the difficulties and privations that she suffered.

References.

Boston BMD (Lincolnshire Record Office) (my thanks to Agnes Burton for this information).

My thanks also to Liz Smart for alerting me to other details of William Andrews in the Boston Census.

Birth Certificate of Charles William Andrews 18th August 1845.

Marriage Certificate of Charles William Andrews and Elizabeth Warren 13th August 1866. (Thrapston Baptist Meeting House).

Chapter Three

Hard Times?

Jedidah Louisa Abington (1837 – 1914)

Jedidah is something of an enigma. Her Christian name caused Census officials, and more recently *Ancestry.co.uk* transcribers a good deal of trouble. It is only with some effort that we can recover her from the official records and then we only get hints of the turmoils of her life. She saw the life of a shoemaking village with its gossip and interbreeding where most people had a reason to like or dislike a neighbour. She also saw life in one of the first great industrial cities of the world visited by people from all over Europe to study this wonderful but terrible new phenomenon.

She was born in Ringstead in 1837. The 1841 Census shows that her father, Herbert J Abington, was a tea dealer. [See a later chapter]. He had been born in 1809 in Sommerstown in Middlesex but her mother Kezia Bull was a local girl born some two years later. By 1851 there were five other children besides Jedidah: Leonard (abt 1839), Edwin (abt 1841), Mary Jane (abt 1843), Edmund (abt 1845), and Herbert (abt 1848).

Already in her first Census she is causing trouble for she is recorded as Julidah Abington but by 1851 she is transcribed by Ancestry as Isdadah although the Census writer has her right. We will use Jedidah in this story, the name that was mainly used and the one that is on her tombstone. Her father is recorded as a tea dealer **and** grocer and all his family is still around him. There are signs of the modern world intruding into Ringstead. The old system of parish constables was not able to cope with the ever more mobile criminals of the railway age and, in 1839, County Councils were allowed to form their own police forces. It was opposed by many because of the perceived great cost to the ratepayers but it survived. Superintendent Knight was appointed to the area which included Ringstead and he obviously took his role seriously.

One of his tasks was the important one of making sure that shopkeepers were not cheating their customers. Imperial standard weights had been introduced in the 1825/6 period and County Inspectors had been appointed in 1834/5. The new police force gradually took over this function. In 1843 alone four Ringstead shopkeepers were fined at Wellingborough Petty Sessions for 'deficient weights'. These included Thomas Lee, the baker; Henry Weekley, butcher and James Whiteman, grocer. Also fined twelve shillings was Herbert Joseph Abington, grocer, Jedidah's father. It was likely that some of the lawbreaking was caused by the sellers not keeping up with the legislation and not using the properly approved and stamped weights. There must have been much grumbling about government interference by the small shopkeepers of the village. Nevertheless some of them were not fined but only had to pay the 'cost of the summonses in cases where the deficiencies were trifling' which implies that the people fined were selling seriously short measures. Herbert's fine of 12s was small, however, compared to his grocery competitor in Ringstead, James Whiteman, who was fined £3 12s.

The same report, on the Wellingborough Petty Sessions, does give a small insight into the way standardisation was rapidly entering villagers' lives but, as yet, lack of access to the technology was still a defence:

Mr. Hill, a beer-shop keeper, at Ringstead, was charged with keeping his house open after ten o'clock. It was proved that the church clock at Ringstead was not going on the night in question, and the Magistrates gave Hill the benefit of this circumstance and dismissed the charge.

By 1861 Jedidah Abington had disappeared from Ringstead and it seems from England. Her sister, Mary Jane has become a servant to an old farmer John Williamson, who was 83 years old, and his three daughters. She has not moved far for the house is only three doors away from her parents. Herbert is now a plain 'grocer' and his wife a dressmaker. Herbert, their son, is, at thirteen, a baker and there are two more sons, Joshua, nine years old, and Samuel just four. Kezia had her last child when she was 46 years old. There is a gap of some five years so there is just the suspicion that Samuel could be the son of Jedidah and that is why she is away from village and the gossip.



View of Manchester 1850 by Lenz.

By kind permission of Manchester Archives and Local Studies.

This shows the countryside and the old country ways about to be swallowed up by the industrial city, the smoking chimneys of which can be seen in the distance. It does recall the first chapter of Mary Barton by Elizabeth Gaskell, where the Wilsons and the Bartons meet, away for the grime of the city, before tragedy strikes.

Finally, in the 1861 Census, we locate Jedidah in Manchester. Well not Jedidah but Louisa J Abington a servant at the house of Carlos Chamberlin. Manchester had become one of the first great industrial cities. In 1861 the parish of Manchester had a population of 529,245 people and the borough had some 300,000. Engels, who later helped write the Communist Manifesto, and many others came and wrote about this city where the sun never shone through the smoke pall, and cotton specks clouded the air: where the noise of the cotton mills started up at 5.30 in the morning like the boom of Atlantic breakers. A place where working people, crammed into substandard housing with little or no sanitation, lived in poverty and died young: where typhoid and cholera and infant diarrhoea meant that life was cheap. Elizabeth Gaskell wrote about it in *Mary Barton* and Dickens in *Hard Times*. One of the places where modern capitalism, as well as English socialism, was born.

It was also a time when men made great fortunes and gated estates of large villas were built for this new class of factory owners and professionals. One of the first to be built in the world was the Victoria Park Estate in the Rusholme area of Manchester. It was in parkland on the edges of the city, away from the prevailing smoke stream from the mills. The first residents moved in, in 1837, and in the 1861 Census we see living on the Victoria Park Estate, Henry Salomonson, a shipping merchant born in Holland, William R Callender, a JP and merchant, George Hadfield a Member of Parliament, Arthur Sief, a cotton manufacturer employing 950 men and women. Here also we see Richard Cobden the Chartist politician and Charles Halle, the German born founder of the famous orchestra. It was a radical stronghold where members of the Anti-Corn Law League and Whig politicians lived. Later, Emmeline Pankhurst and her husband lived in a Victoria Park villa. It was to here also that a wealthy American called Carlos Chamberlin and his family moved. He was a 'Commission Agent' buying and selling commodities for people and taking a percentage as his fee.



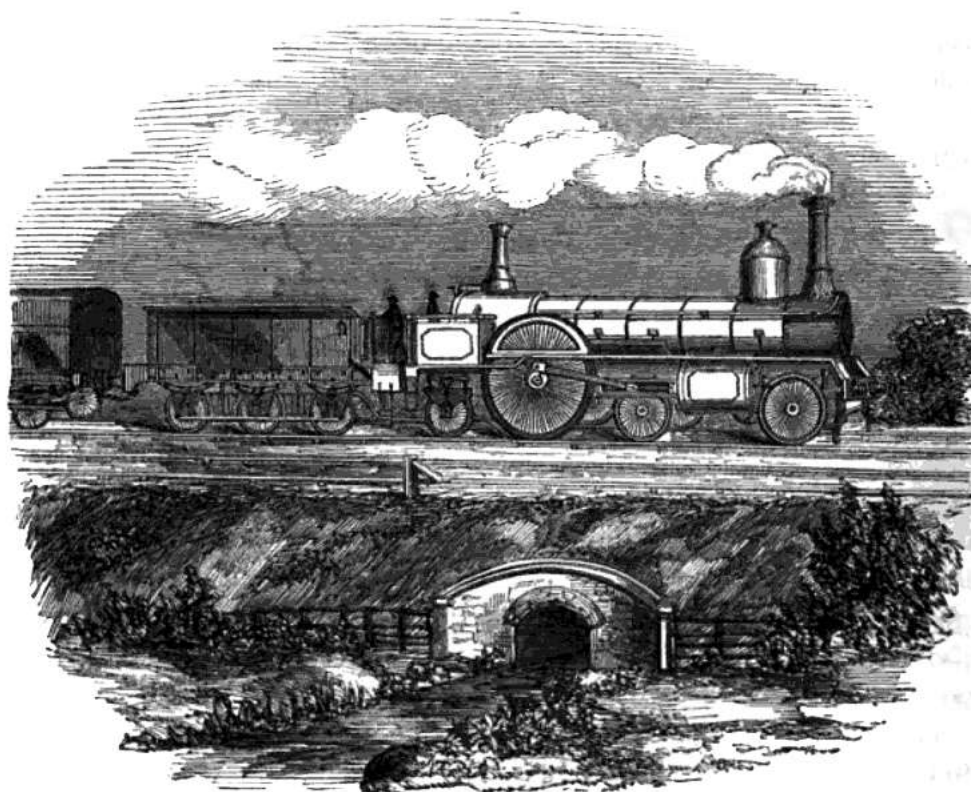
'Sunbury' or 'Vermont House' in Victoria Park, Rusholme

(Taken in the 1970s and looking in a rather sad state)

By kind permission of Manchester Archives and Local Studies

Carlos had been born in Vermont, USA, in 1811 and lived with his wife Elizabeth and their seven children in *Sunbury* from 1856 to 1875. I think that he re-named it *Vermont House* for so it is named in the 1861 Census. He had just become a naturalised British citizen in 1860 and business was doing well for he had five servants, including Louisa, living on the premises.

How do we know that Louisa Abington is our Jedidah? Well, she is shown as having been born in Ringstead, Northamptonshire, she is the correct age and, when she appears again in Ringstead with her father after missing two Censuses, she calls herself Louisa. It seems proof enough but we also have the diary of her younger brother Herbert [see later chapter] to confirm it as fact. One may also ask, how did she get there? We hear of the poor being shipped by canal boat up to Manchester for work. There would also be stage coaches which would take some twenty-four hours. It is more likely that she went by one of the wonders of the steam age, the new railway system which was becoming affordable to all but the poorest. The London and Birmingham Railway Company had built a line between Blisworth and Peterborough and as part of this Ringstead had its own station which was opened on the 2nd June 1845. A little earlier the London Euston to Manchester route had also been built by the same company and, bypassing Northampton, had a station at Blisworth. Lord Grafton had agreed to fund a new station at Blisworth as long as it was 'first class' which meant that all trains stopped there. In 1846 it had become part of the London and North Western Railway.



A LONDON AND NORTH WESTERN PASSENGER LOCOMOTIVE.

(<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons>)

In 1850 she could have left Ringstead at 7.35 am and, if travelling 2nd class, after changing at Rugby, would have arrived at Manchester London Road at 4.45 pm. Third class, which stopped at all stations, would have not arrived until 9.15 pm. By 1863 the times had been reduced by some two

hours and three-and-a-half hours respectively. Second class would have cost her some 20 shillings (£1.00) and third, 13 shillings (£0.65). To give some comparison £1.00 is roughly equivalent to £43 today (but five days of an 1860 craftsman's time because wages have risen more than costs). By this time the carriages were roofed and glazed although the third class would still have had plain wooden seats. The picture shows the type of engine, painted green, which would have pulled the train in 1852. One can only imagine that, although a long and wearisome journey, it would also have been an exciting one for Jedidah.

As we have said, Jedidah would probably have arrived at London Road Station, which was later rebuilt and renamed Piccadilly. Perhaps her new employer had arranged for someone to pick her up or arranged for a cab. Otherwise she would have had to walk nearly two miles or used one of the horse-drawn trams that you can see in the photograph of Piccadilly, below, taken towards the end of the century. Her route would probably have avoided the worst of the industrial and slum areas, with terraced houses giving way to the spacious surroundings of Victoria Park. She would have had to get past the gate keeper and then been confronted by the grand villas, including Vermont House.



Manchester Piccadilly in 1892 showing the horse-drawn trams, the crowds and the new tall buildings of the modern city.

By kind permission of Manchester Archives and Local Studies.

She had been fortunate in reaching Manchester after the building of Longendale reservoir and the provision of relatively clean water which had begun the elimination of the waterborne diseases, such as cholera, from the area although it was not until the end of the century that they were virtually eliminated. Manchester was also a place full of people equally as radical as the shoemakers of Ringstead. From 1845 there had been Ladies' Day Classes at the Mechanics' Institute for intending governesses, young wives and the daughters of respectable artisans.

Ten years later, 1871, the Census shows Carlos Chamberlin was still living in Vermont House with four of his children but there were only three servants and none of them remained from the original group. Louisa however, as she now is, is not far away. She is living with one of the older servants from her former employment called Elizabeth Spence who came from Dalton-in-Furness, and her daughter Mary Ellen and a one year old visitor Fanny Watterson. Elizabeth was the widow of William Spence, who had been a groom at Clayton Hall. She had become a grocer and around her small shop, at 45 Wilmslow Road Rusholme, are a basket shop, and an ironmonger and gas fitter. These were small local shops, a world away from the grand department stores and warehouses that were growing up in the centre of Manchester. Elizabeth Spence's shop is just a stone's throw from *Vermont House* but the two younger women are not shown to have any work. This would be a little concerning for her father and mother but, as we gather from Herbert's diary [See later chapter], they are progressive women who take part in the intellectual life available in Manchester. We also know from the diary that this was a time when she was constantly visiting her sick brother. It may be that the Census just comes at a time when she is not working and we know from the same source that Elizabeth Spence and her daughter were good friends to Jedidah and her family.

Herbert's diary tells us that in the 1869-1870 period Jedidah, usually with Herbert and the Spences, went to Belle Vue Gardens, Manchester Flower Show at the Botanical Gardens, saw *A Winter's Tale* and *Richard III at the theatre*, attended the Royal Institution and probably many other events where her brother just puts 'We went to . . . '.

At the same Census her father, Herbert, is shown as a grocer in Shop Street [High Street], Ringstead. He is now about sixty-two years old and his wife is a couple of years younger. Not far away, in Shop Street, John Ball is living with his wife and granddaughter, Florence E Smith. He is still a butcher but is also a farmer of 43 acres and has a labourer working for him. The troubles of the fifties and sixties, when his brother William had brought scandal to the family with his accusation and finally acquittal of the murder of his pregnant mistress Lydia Attley, are now in the past. John's wife, Rebecca (née Wilson), was the sister of William Weekley Ball's wife, Hannah, so it would have been difficult for the whole family. But William now lives and prospers as a butcher in Ramsey in Huntingdonshire and John too is doing well.

In 1879 Kezia Abington, Jedidah's mother, dies, but it may be that she has already moved back to look after her two brothers' last years as well as her ageing father. In 1881 Herbert is shown as a Chemist and lives in High Street with his daughter Louisa, as she is still calling herself. In the same Census John Ball is still living with Rebecca but she is shown as an invalid and there is a live-in nurse, Sarah Hackney, as well as a servant, Louisa Truelove. In the few months following the Census Rebecca died aged 62 years.

The grieving was not long for John because, that same autumn, he married 'Edidah' Louisa Abington. Her father dies a few years later in 1884. It seems that the newlyweds settled down for a comfortable retirement together. An advertisement in the *Wellingborough News* on 4th October 1884 gives notice of an auction on the Wednesday 15th ' . . . upon the Premises at Ringstead, the property of Mr John Ball, who is giving up his land.' The sale gives some idea of what a small farm would have looked like. It lists:

SHEEP - 30 half-bred two-shear down ewes, 13 theaves, 42 lambs.

BEAST - Three cows in-calf in-profit, 1 barren cow, ditto heifer, 1 heifer in-calf, 1 2¹/₂ year-old steer and 2 calves.

HORSES- Two active powerful cart mares.

IMPLEMENTS - Two Scotch carts, 1 cart, 1 narrow-wheel wagon, 2 ploughs, 2 set iron harrows (Page), Scuffler, 5-coulter drill, horse hoe, 12 doz hurdles, 10 sheep troughs, 2 turnip mills, cake mill, etc etc.

We see the end of one of the small farmer-butchers who were a feature of many villages. In 1891 John and Jedidah are still living together in High Street in Ringstead.

The Register for the Ringstead Cemetery shows the death of John Ball on the 26th November 1894 aged 75 and the burial some two days later. The service was conducted by the Baptist Minister, the Reverend J. Bates and under the heading 'Trade' he is classified simply as 'Gentleman'. On the same solid, respectable grave it also remembers 'Louisa, Jedidah Ball, beloved wife of the above who died on 24th July 1914 aged 77 years'. There is no sign of Rebecca. The Baptist Minister again took the service.

The two Wilson sisters who married John and William Ball were not productive by nineteenth century standards. Rebecca had two children, Hannah and Joseph and her sister, Hannah, had no children as far as we can tell. William, it appears had at least one child, (although it disappeared before birth with its mother, Lydia Atley). Jedidah also appears to have had no children. She, of course, married very late. Such things are not uncommon but one senses that there is somewhere, perhaps other unrecorded sadnesses.

What about Carlos Chamberlin, or 'Chamberlain', as he is named in some Censuses? He was part of the American 'aristocracy', one based on chronology rather than English bloodline, although perhaps both emanate from the claims of the principal invaders, one Norman, one English. His grandson, George Howard Chamberlin, was an architect in Yonkers, New York. George is listed in the Roll of Associates of *The Order of the Founders and Patriots of America Register* of 1911. To be an associate one had to trace ones ancestry back to the first colonists and to have forefathers, in the same male ancestral line, who served in the American Revolution. The qualifying generations are given, including Carlos and then back to William and Rebecca Chamberlin who must have been those 'first colonists'. Why someone in that revolutionary line should become a naturalised British citizen and live out his life in England is another story to be told.

By 1881, now some seventy years old, he is living in Dunham Road Altrincham in Cheshire with his wife Elizabeth and their daughter Mary now a spinster of thirty three. They have three servants, once again all different. It may be that they were bad employers but servants, because they had to live in, tended to be younger women. When they married they moved out and found other employment. It seems that he died in Hastings in 1890 and by 1891 his widow, Elizabeth is living at 39 Harrington Road, Kensington.

Although worlds apart both mistress and servant became the widows of 'gentlemen' who could live comfortably in their old age.

There is one final small mystery. If you walk down the cemetery toward the road from the fine headstone of John Ball and Louisa Jedidah (as she now finally is) you come to the grave of Benjamin Lovell and Mary Jane, his beloved wife. At the bottom of the gravestone it also remembers Louisa Jedidah Ball. Mary Jane was Jedidah's sister, who she is shown living next door to, in the 1901 Census. Benjamin Lovell died a few months after Jedidah and Mary Jane died some 7 years after, in 1921. Who wanted her remembered again?



Jedidah's grave in Ringstead Cemetery.
(Author's own photograph 2009).

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My thanks to George Turnbull, Co-ordinator of Heritage Information at Manchester Archives and Local Information (2006) for his help with the travel in Manchester and other local details.

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Chapter Four

Soldier of Empire

Thomas Ball 1835 – 1886

We first find Thomas Ball in 1841 aged seven living in Ringstead, with his parents Daniel, a shepherd, and Phoebe and his brothers, 'Daniel, John, James, Samuel and Elisher'. On 12 September of the same year he is baptised at Ringstead Parish Church with three of his brothers. Perhaps there was a reduction for a job lot. In 1851 he is still living with his parents but at seventeen he is now an agricultural labourer.

Then, like his siblings George, Daniel, Sarah and John and his younger brother Elisha, he disappears from the Censuses. Most have gone to the New World but George and Thomas prove more elusive to trace although fragments of George's and Thomas's life appear. Unlike Elisha, Thomas does not reappear again in Ringstead with children whose birth places tell of his travels.

There is one possible siting. On a Stray Marriages site I found the following:

BALL Thomas of Raunds, age 21 bachelor, father Daniel, shepherd Sarah GALE otp age 21, spinster, father Henry, carpenter 18 Oct 1855 Pertenhall BDF {Bedfordshire}.

It does give his home parish as Raunds rather than Ringstead but it seems too much of a coincidence: same name, same age, same father, and with same occupation! Also I cannot find any siting of another Thomas Ball in later Censuses to fit this same description. Assuming that this is the correct marriage there is more confusion because some five years later, in the 1861 Census Sarah is still living with her parents, Henry and Mary, in Pertenhall, and is surnamed Gale, not Ball. It appears to show her as married and certainly there is a marriage certificate. By 1871 she has disappeared and I have been unable to trace her. In 1881 her mother, Mary Gale, now aged 79 and a widow is visiting George Pearson, a labourer, living in 'The Bear, St. Mary's Street, St Neots in Huntingdonshire. George's wife is Sarah, aged 45 and born in Pertenhall. Could this be Sarah Gale? I have not yet traced any marriage. In 1891 George, now a gardener and Sarah are living in Yaxley in Huntingdonshire.

Of course this may all be a false trail but Thomas's story is one of alleyways and cul-de-sacs. If we have the right person, the fact that she is put as Sarah Gale and not Ball is a strong indicator that something has gone wrong. There is no sign of Thomas either in 1861 or 1871.

In the 1881 Census, thirty years after his last appearance, we find a Thomas Ball living at 1 London Wharf, High Street, Chatham, Kent. This Thomas is only 37 (not 47 as we would expect) but it does show his birthplace as Ringstead, Northants. His wife is Emily J Ball aged 31 and born in Cathrington, Hampshire. They have a son Edgar J aged two months old and born in Chatham, Kent. Thomas is also

shown as a Chelsea Pensioner so we know that he had been in the army. Although the Census describes them as married, I have been unable to find a record of the wedding.

Looking at the birth certificate for Edgar John Peter Ball we see that Emily's maiden name was Ellis. Emily too is something of a mystery and she variously is shown in the Censuses as coming from Cathrington, Chichester and Frogmore. It also shows Thomas as a labourer so he is still trying to earn a living. A Pensioner was allowed to work for a living, for his pension would not have been enough to live on. The great majority of Chelsea Pensioners received outpayments and did not lodge in Chelsea and wear the familiar red uniform.

With this lead we turn to the British Army Records for Chelsea Pensioners in the National Archives of the Public Record Office in Kew (and now increasingly online). Suddenly those missing years are filled in. Here is one of a number of Ringstead farm labourers who has left the security, and insecurity, of a Northamptonshire village for a world full of excitement and danger but one which gave him the chance of earning a living.

What we see are his discharge papers recording his service and his entitlement to a pension. It also tells us a little about the man. He was 5 feet 8 inches tall, of fresh complexion with grey eyes and brown hair. His only scar is from a cut on the end of the forefinger of his left hand. Few coming out of the army would have got away so lightly.

It also confirms that he was born in Ringstead and was a labourer before signing up. He 'attested' for the 48th, The Northamptonshire Regiment of Foot, at Northampton on 28th September 1857, at the age of 21 years 10 months which means that he was born in November 1835. Was his enlistment connected to his 'marriage' to Sarah, some two years earlier?

He had been in the army for 21 years so where had Private 2548, Thomas Ball, been up to his final discharge on 8th October 1878? We are told that for the first 7 years 14 days he had been a private in the 48th but that on 11th October 1864 he transferred to the 3rd Rifle Brigade with which he remained until his discharge. It is also recorded that he served abroad for 13 years 77 days of which 28 days were in Gibraltar and 13 years 49 days in India.

The Northamptonshire Regiment of Foot had fought in the Crimean War with distinction and when that conflict had finished moved first to Malta and then Gibraltar for about a year. The Northamptonshire Militia Regiment had re-embodied (re-formed) in 1857 when news came of the Indian Mutiny. It assembled on 27th October 1857 and proceeded by rail to Plymouth on 4th December. The militia remained in Plymouth until May 1858 when it received orders to return to Northampton to be disembodied. Did Thomas travel down with the Militia and then sail out to join the regular Northamptonshire Regiment in Gibraltar, perhaps as one of the replacements for the losses suffered in the Crimea? He was only there for a month when orders were received from London and the regiment embarked for India. Apparently, the 48th had behaved well in Gibraltar and they were given a hearty send-off by crowds of local people as they marched to the docks behind various regimental bands.

It was the 15th September 1858 when the regiment left Gibraltar on the steam transport ship *Jura* and a week later landed in Alexandria in Egypt. It was transported by rail to the terminus but from

there travelled by donkey across the desert to Suez. Thomas and the other soldiers would have seen the construction of the great canal in progress but it would be another 11 years before it was opened for shipping. At Suez they boarded the P & O Steamer *Hindostan* and after an unpleasant overcrowded voyage, (there were only enough bunks for half the men), arrived in Calcutta on 20th October. They had been at sea for a month and must have been grateful to get their own bunks in the barracks at Barrackpore. It was on the Barrackpore (Barrackpur) parade ground that a single sepoy had first refused to use the alleged 'cow and pig fat' bullets, the action that had triggered the rising.

The regiment had just missed the vicious fighting of the Indian Mutiny and it seems that its time in India was comparatively uneventful. They were stationed, over the next seven years, at Allahabad, Calpee, Cawnpore, Lucknow and Calcutta. These had had been places where the rising had been at its most ferocious. It is not for us here to allot guilt but, certainly, terrible massacres were carried out by both sides. Although armed hostilities were over it must have been a tense time both between British and Indian soldiers in the army but also between the army and the civilian population. It was because of the Mutiny that India came directly under the rule of the Crown rather than the East India Company.



Rifle Brigade Uniforms 1871

History of the Rifle Brigade (The Prince Consort's Own). William Henry Cope

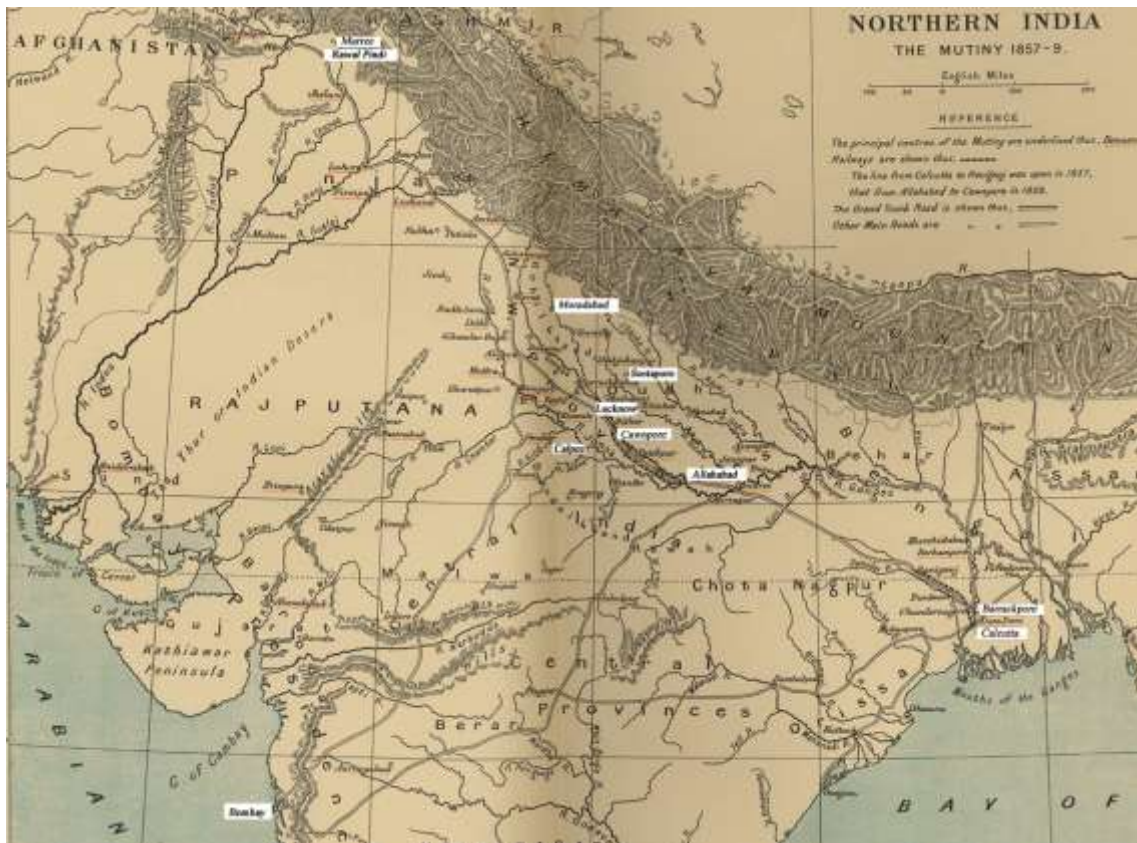
On 1st January 1865 the Northamptonshire Regiment of Foot sailed for home on the *S.S. Patrician* but Private Thomas Ball was not with them. Nearly three months earlier, on 11th October 1864, he had transferred to the Third Battalion of the Rifle Brigade. We can only speculate as to his reasons for this move. What seems certain is that he realised that this would prolong his time in India. Perhaps he enjoyed the life in the sub-continent and he seems to have been a model soldier. Although he was never promoted, he was never court-martialled and gained five good conduct badges and one good conduct medal in his career. There is also the possibility that we are right in our unproved theory that something had gone very wrong in his marriage and he wanted to keep out of England. The records we have do not help and give no details of his marital status or children.

The Rifle Brigade was a famous fighting force with its colonel being Field Marshall H.R.H. The Prince of Wales. Its title usually had 'Prince Consort's Own' in brackets after the brigade name. It had been formed in 1800 to make use of the new more accurate 'Baker' rifles in the Napoleonic Wars and was famous for having a green, rather than the usual red, uniform. It is difficult to work out if the two forces were stationed close to each other at the time of Thomas's transfer, but it does not seem likely with the 48th in the east near Calcutta and the Third Battalion of the Rifle Brigade in the west around Rawal Pindee (Rawalpindi). Perhaps Thomas, and others who elected to stay, travelled partly by the Indian railway system which was one of the legacies that the British left.



A Murree bridge in 1865. Could this be the road that Thomas worked on?

From <http://en.wikipedia.org>.



The 3rd battalion moved around the North-West area in what is now Pakistan: from the headquarters at Rawal Pindie to Peshawar and Nowshera. In 1866 and 1867 they worked on a road from Murree to Abbottabad. Thomas was probably one of these road-makers because on 26th April 1867 he was re-engaged at Rawal Pindie.

On January 10th 1869 the 3rd Battalion left Rawal Pindie and marched to Moradabad and Seetapore. From there they travelled by rail to Allahabad and on to Bombay. The tour of duty was over and on 21st November 1870 the brigade embarked on H.M. Troopship *Euphrates*. This time Thomas was on board.

On the way home they stopped at Aden for a week before leaving on December 7th on the final lap of their journey on the Troopship *Seraphis*. The brigade finally arrived in Portsmouth harbour on 30th December 1871. Even though they had spent much of the time in the cooler highlands of north-west India an English winter must have come as something of a shock. They occupied the Clarence barracks and were joined by the Depot companies from Chatham. Over the next six years the Battalion moved between Exeter, Dartmoor, Plymouth and Winchester before moving to its permanent barracks in Chatham. Each year there would be manoeuvres but Thomas would have no more active service. By luck he had missed both the terrible European and Indian conflicts.

One can only speculate as to Thomas's state of mind on returning home. There is no sign that he went to see his relatives and old friends in Ringstead but this type of evidence would rarely exist. Was he pleased to see his home shores after so many years or was he worried about just what awaited him in England.

Thomas left the army with a £5 gratuity and a good conduct medal for his years of service. He had a small 'Chelsea Pension' based on his years of 'good' service but, as we have said, he would also have to work as a labourer to make ends meet. It is probably about this time that he met a woman called Emily Ellis. The Censuses variously give her birthplace at different places in Hampshire so it is possible that they met while Thomas was stationed or on manoeuvres in the south west. They may have married abroad or it is possible that they never married because Thomas was never divorced from Sarah Gale. When he had first married, in 1855, divorce was not an option for most people because of the costs and procedures involved. The *Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act* of 1857 had begun the process of making it more accessible and a little fairer to women, but it was still not affordable for ordinary working class people.

On his discharge form, in September 1878, he gives his intended place of residence as No. 4 Lower Church Path, New Brompton, Chatham. As we have seen, in 1881, his residence is given as 1 London Wharf, High Street, Chatham and his son Edgar is just two months old so Emily and Thomas met, if not before he left the army, at least shortly after. It must have been something of a change for an army man in his forties, used to barracks and army discipline, to find himself with a wife and a young family. It is possible that his labouring work was in one of Chatham's military establishments so perhaps he did find an environment with which he was familiar.

Unfortunately for Thomas he was not long to enjoy his new life. After many years of living in the tropics and enduring the tough dangerous life of a soldier, on the 11th April 1886 at Old Luton Road, Chatham, he died, a civilian in England, aged just forty nine. His death certificate records that he is an army pensioner. It also records that he died of *Phthisis Pulmonaris* an old name for Tuberculosis (TB), a feared disease in the nineteenth century and one that is still a killer in the world today. It was rife in England at this time and much of the milk was contaminated with it.

For Emily his death also meant that she would have to struggle to bring up her young family. The 1891 Census shows Emily Ball, as a widow, aged 41, with her sons Edgar aged 9 and Charles aged 7, both of whom were born in Chatham. She now lives at Church Path, Chatham. Emily is a laundress, one of the occupations resorted to by women who feared the workhouse. This is the address (or close to it) given by Thomas at his discharge. Perhaps it was a friend or relative of his or Emily's which they stayed in for a time after he came out of the army and which she either rented or inherited some time after his death.

In 1901 Emily, now 50, is living with her two sons, Edgar (20) and Charles (19) at 10 Britton Farm Street, Gillingham. She also has a boarder, Jesse Woods, a sixty-five year old house painter from Leeds. It does not show Emily as working but the two sons are both Assistant Corn Factors. By 1911 Emily is aged 68 and shown as coming from Frogmore in Hampshire. She is living at 17 Albany Road Gillingham, still with her two sons, now 30 and 28 and unmarried. Edgar is a carter for the District Council and Charles a General Labourer at the Government Shipyard. For the first time, in 1911, the residents filled in the Census forms themselves. In this case it was Edgar, and we must presume that her age is correct and that she was born in about 1842, rather than the 1850 that we might expect.

Could Edgar have been wrong or had she lied about her age all these years? I believe that Edgar married Olive Trice in 1915 in the Medway District and that Emily died in 1920. Did Thomas tell Emily

and his sons of those times in India and have they become part of a family tradition or has Thomas's life, like most, been lost to his future family?

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Chapter Five

Will to Leave

Henry Manning (1791 - 1859)

Unless they commit some crime it is rare that the ordinary families of Ringstead appear in the official documents of the time except as brief entries of their births, marriages and deaths and, after 1841, in the ten-yearly Censuses. Henry, however, and his family became part of a case to settle a point of law on the 'Duty and Office of Magistrates'. His misfortune casts a little light into these lost lives.

Henry Manning was born in about 1791. I have not found any record of his birth but he was twenty-three years old when he married Rebecca Stevens on 3rd November 1814. His parents were Thomas Manning and Elizabeth Bugby and his grandfather was another Thomas Manning.

Unusually, Thomas Senior had a little property and on the 6th January 1800 he made a will. In this he left 'five acres of land, more or less, of copyhold meadow ground with their and every of their appurtenances lying and being dispersed in the open and common fields and meadows of Ringstead'. He also gave 25 shillings to his daughter Mary, the wife of Thomas Plant. He bequeathed to Elizabeth the widow of his late son, Thomas, 'all that part of a messuage or tenement with the appurtenances, which is now in the occupation of Henry Lawford situate in Ringstead aforesaid and adjoining the tenement in the occupation of Joseph Manning.'

Finally, he left to the four children of Thomas and Elizabeth, namely Henry, John, Thomas and Rebecca, on the marriage or death of their mother, this house as well as the house next door in which Joseph Manning lived together with the 'close or orchard lying about the said homestead on the north side of a back lane and now in the several tenures of Thomas Senior, Samuel Hackett and Mary Whitney.'

Henry must have moved to Wellingborough and become a pauper for, in about 1828, the magistrates there sent him back to Ringstead because they said that he had an 'interest in property' there. It was decided by the court that, because his mother had not died or remarried at the time, he had no interest in property in Ringstead and therefore this action was illegal.

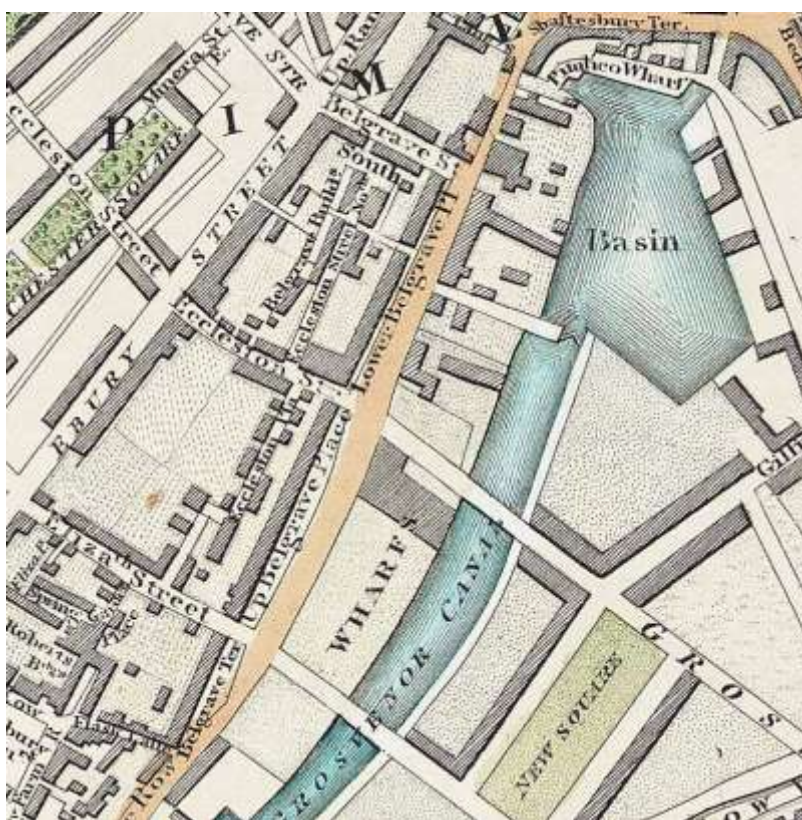
Unusually for the family historian a family tree for a working family is partially laid out. It also shows how the Poor Law operated with parishes eager to unload the cost of any pauper if at all possible. They were on the lookout for the 'illegal immigrant'. Henry himself, now 50 years old, is recorded in 'Harriotts Lane', [now Herriotts Lane] Wellingborough with his wife Rebecca and daughters Maria and Elizabeth. Also living with them is Hannah aged 50 who is probably the wife of his brother John. He is recorded as a shoemaker.

Here we get one of those surprising leaps when a family break through the parochial bounds and suddenly appear away from friends and family. In this case it was not unusual in the middle of the

nineteenth century for people from the villages, pauperised by the depressions in agriculture, to be drawn into the 'Great Wen'. Areas like Bethnal Green became terrible, overcrowded, stinking slums with neither clean water nor adequate sewerage. Ways of living, which had been sustainable in a rural setting, when continued in the cities, led to terrible living conditions and often to disease and early death.

Henry and Rebecca seem to have fared a little better than many because in 1851 we find them at No 28 Lower Belgrave Street in the Parish of St George, Hanover Square in the City of Westminster. I have not found the re-marriage or death of his mother, Elizabeth, but it is likely that this had occurred and Henry had his legacy. He is now 59 years old and Rebecca is 50. He is a bootmaker and Rebecca is a dressmaker. Elizabeth, now 21 is a ladies' maid and Mary Ann is a dressmaker like her mother. Next door lives Samuel Candy, a Master Mason employing 40 men and, two doors away at No 30, James Burrows, a coal merchant. Number 28 had four families living in it. There was a house painter and his wife from Gosport, a master tailor from Gloucester with his wife and four children, and a woman from Canterbury and her grandson who was 'supported by friends'.

There is some confusion here because in 1851 Lydia is shown not living with her parents but nearby as a visitor with Elizabeth Collins. In 1861 the two are again living together but this time Lydia is shown the sister of Elizabeth. Elizabeth is the correct age to have been Elizabeth Manning so who is the Elizabeth Manning living with her parents in 1851. It appears that Maria, who is about the same age, has changed her name to Elizabeth once the first Elizabeth has married. There may be another explanation but at the moment none is obvious.



*From Map of London (1827) by Christopher and John Greenwood
By kind permission of Motco Enterprises Ltd.*

Lower Belgrave Place was not one of the 'best' streets of this prosperous area being more Pimlico than Belgravia but it was pleasanter than most in the capital and seems to have had an artistic community. Allan Cunningham, the Scottish born writer lived at number 27 until his death in 1842. The sculptor, John Evan Thomas, who produced statues of the great and the good, especially from his native Wales, established a studio at number 7 from about 1834 until 1862. His most famous sculpture is 'The Death of Tewdic' and a bronze electrotype of it was exhibited by Elkington, Mason and Co. in the *Great Exhibition* of 1851.

It would be surprising if Henry and his family did not attend this grand display of Victorian confidence in industry and Empire. Hyde Park, where the Great Exhibition Hall, the Crystal Palace, was erected, was just a stone's throw away and, it seems the whole of England, regardless of class, clamoured to see it. One of its opponents in the House of Commons, railed against it being allowed to stay in Hyde Park, after the Exhibition had finished, in these words:

Unfortunately, however, for the people of this country, the erection of the Crystal Place took place; and what had been the result? The desecration of the Sabbath - the demoralisation of the people - a disunion of parties - and increasing poverty to a most serious extent; for he had heard and with pain, that the poor of this country had been seduced to come up to this Exhibition. All that they had saved and all they could borrow had been in many cases spent in this foolish journey; and he knew he spoke facts when he stated that not only had they borrowed money but pawned their clothes to enable them to come up to this 'World's Fair,' as it was called; and now they were left without a penny in their pockets.

Colonel Sibthorpe 29 July 1851.

Others were pleasantly surprised that the working class had behaved well and there had not been the terrible outbreak of violence and immorality that had been predicted. The more recent criticism of the Millennium Dome seems very mild by comparison.

A new world of invention and manufacture was being celebrated but one that neither Henry nor Rebecca lived long to see. Rebecca died on 26th October 1857 in Pimlico followed some eighteen months later on 14 June 1859, aged 68, by Henry.

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www.motco.com (1827 Map of London).

Chapter Six

The Butcher of Ringstead?

William Weekley Ball (1818 -1896)

It is with some reluctance that I set down the history of William Weekley Ball. I have tried in these brief biographies to show some of the ordinary people of nineteenth century Ringstead whose lives usually go unrecorded except by official statistics. William's life has had many a chapter in books on Northamptonshire and his story is well known by locals. Perhaps many would like to forget him because as one said to me, 'he did not come from Ringstead'. Well, certainly his father William came from that den of iniquity, Little Addington but William was christened in Ringstead on 19th January 1818.

I think that I must give his story because the court case gives us a glimpse not only into William's life but also into some other villagers who gave witness at his trial. I hope also that I can fill in a little detail about his later life which is often either omitted or wrongly described. By one of those strange coincidences I first came upon William before I knew of his notoriety. My wife had been doing our family tree and because of lack of progress wrote down all the Balls in Ringstead that appeared in the parish registers. (This was in the pre-internet days of long ago).. We had moved to near Ramsey in Huntingdonshire and someone lent me *Craven & Co.'s Directory for the County of Huntingdon* for 1855. There I found in the section for Butchers in Ramsey 'Ball, Wheatley, Great White'. In spite of the incorrect name I guessed that it might be the right person and then I saw, when visiting my mother in Wellingborough a local paper with an article written by Marion Pipe headlined 'The Ghost of Lydia Atley'. My father had always said that we had a murderer in the family. I had found him, although I still have not proved his connection with my own branch of the, (very common), Ball name.

As I have said, William Ball senior was born Little Addington in about 1773. He married Ann Weekley on 7th July 1814 in Ringstead and they are described as 'both of this parish' by that time. In the 1841 Census William is given as a shepherd but by 1851 when he was 78 he was described as a 'Greenwich Pensioner'. This reveals that he must have at some time been in the Royal Navy and this may explain his late marriage and the register describes them as bachelor and spinster so we must presume this to be the case. Ann was some 34 years old and William 42 when her first child, Mary, was born. At the birth of Henry, their last born child who did not survive childhood, she was about forty-three years old.

Looking back at William, Ringstead is a long way from the sea and one wonders where he spent those years before he enters the official records again. The Royal Greenwich Hospital had a fixed number of in-pensioners (like the more well known Chelsea Pensioners for the army) but it also gave out-pensions, a form of superannuation, for deserving applicants based mainly on rank and years of trouble-free service. They could be in work and did not have to have reached old age. The time when

the Hospital gained its biggest intake was during the Napoleonic Wars and it seems likely that it was in these that William fought before his marriage. [I have given a tentative biography of him in another chapter].

William Weekley Ball was born into a family that was probably more comfortably placed than most ordinary people in Ringstead. His father was a shepherd in 1841 but William, at 20 is described as a butcher. Also in Ringstead is Henry Weekley a butcher and probably William's uncle. By 1851 Henry has retired and is living next door to William Weekley Ball who is described once again as butcher. We have no proof at present but it looks as if William worked for his uncle and took over the business when he retired.

Of course something tragic had happened some nine months before the 1851 Census was collected. The story that we have is mainly from the mouths of witnesses in their depositions given in 1864, first to magistrates at a committal trial in Thrapston and then at the Lent Assizes in Northampton. We must remember that in a small close-knit village like Ringstead few had no connection with, or opinion on, the two main characters: alleged murderer and alleged victim. First, we will look at the alleged victim and murderer, as they were perceived by the newspapers at the time.

We must see Lydia Atley, Attley or Atlee as a person whose last act was, perhaps, to be a victim. What little we know of her leads us to suspect that she had not had an easy life. In the 1841 Ringstead Census she is given as 15 years old and is living with her sister Elizabeth, who is also given the rounded age of 15, and her mother, another Lydia, who is 50 years old and a pauper. The two girls are both lacemakers, a common occupation for the women of Ringstead at the time but not one which could support anybody without another source of income. The Census was taken on June 6th and just some two weeks before on May 23rd both Lydia and Elizabeth are baptised in the parish church. They are given as the daughters of William and Lydia and young Lydia is 'represented to be in her twentieth year' and Elizabeth is 'represented to be in her sixteenth year' It seems to show the father was a miller.

We do have a retrospective description of Lydia given in the February 29th 1864 edition of the Eastern Counties Gazette when William was brought to trial. It states that, in 1850, she was twenty-five years old (but she was probably some four years older).

.....Lydia Atlee...was of middle height, thin in person, and of rather singular appearance. Her hair was auburn in colour, nearly inclined to red, her face was slightly contracted on one side, and disfigured by a scorbutic eruption, which tinted her forehead and cheeks alike with a deep crimson. Besides this she possessed a pair of innocent eyes, and a remarkably fine set of teeth of ivory whiteness, which she frequently displayed, but altogether her physiognomy [sic] was decidedly of the plainest order. Her character was somewhat indifferent, from being of a weak intellect. She unfortunately became initiated into vicious practices and immoral conduct, which resulted in the birth of an illegitimate child.

You feel that the reporter is trying to be fair-minded but failing. He does, however, go on to say:

With this exception, the woman was of harmless disposition and was generally liked by the villagers, who regarded her with compassionate feelings. Lydia Atlee picked up her

precarious living in various ways; hawking nuts and oranges, acting as an errand woman, and occasionally assisting in housework. She resided as a lodger in the quarter of the village known as the 'London Road.'

Today we would see her as a vulnerable person and it is easy to see why the people of Ringstead were so antagonistic to William. Paradoxically we also see in the description of her why the men in authority or in the newspapers were generally supportive of him.

Having said that, the descriptions of William were mixed, to say the least. We must remember that these descriptions are 14 years after the two were lovers. A clipping from an unnamed Peterborough Paper is pasted into the Defence Brief in 1864 and it describes William as:

..a respectable looking man, 46 years in age and standing about 5feet 7 inches in height. He is of a rosy and pleasing complexion, is moderately stout with dark and straight hair and habited in a suit of light tweed cloth. He has pretty regularly for years attended various markets in the county of Huntingdon and his character for honest and straightforward dealing is unimpeachable.

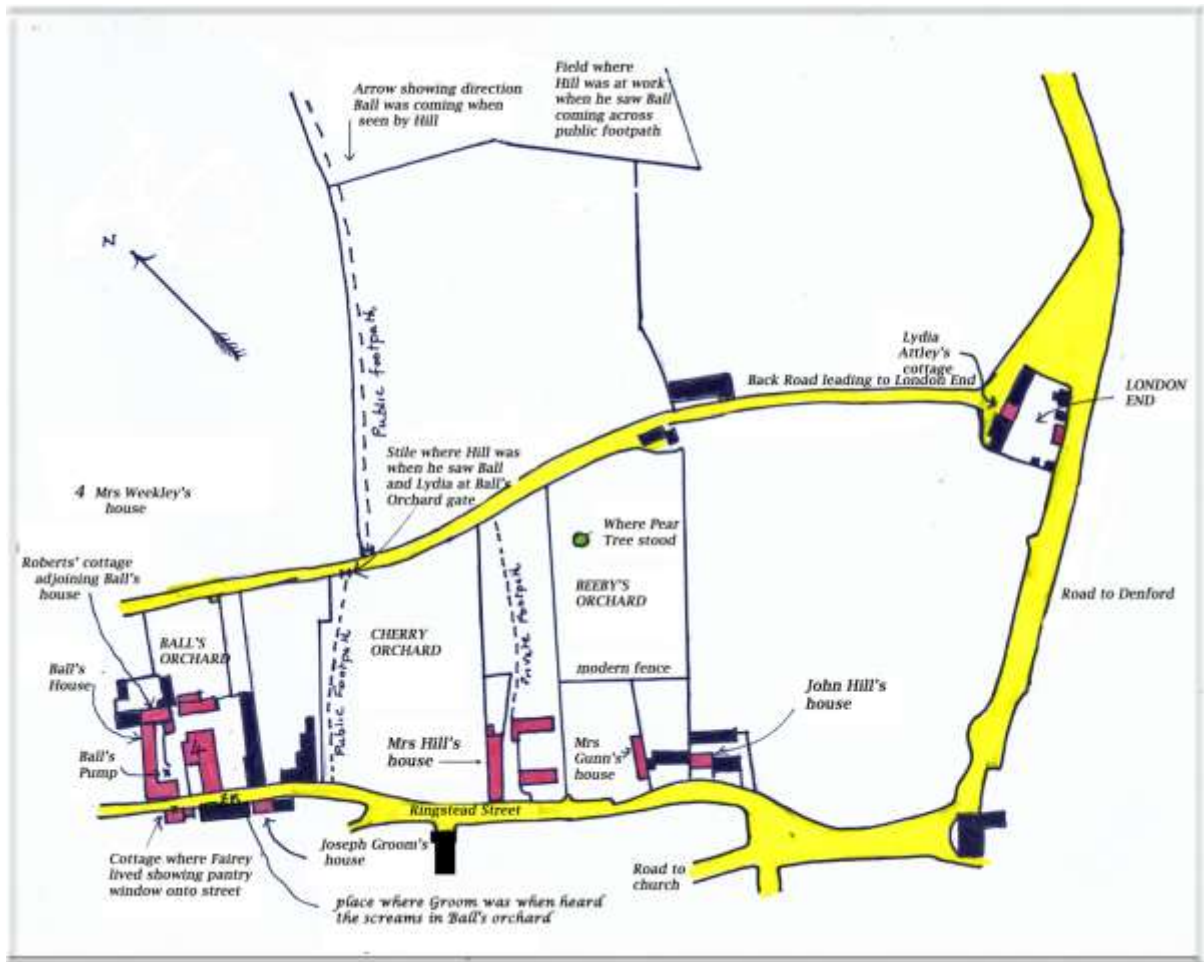
On the other hand the Northampton Mercury for 27th February 1864 gave a less favourable picture.

The prisoner, who appears to be between forty and fifty years of age, was dressed respectably in black, and had the appearance of a well-to-do tradesman. He has rather a high, bald forehead with a single lock of long dark hair drawn across it, a well-shaped nose, thin lips and eyes with many wrinkles about them. His face is peculiar from a complete absence of eyebrows.

We do know that William and Hannah had no children but we do not know whether this was due to inability or inactivity. The few signs that we have lead us to think that it may have been an unhappy match but Hannah was loyal to him throughout the whole saga and moved with him to Ramsey. It is her story which we do not hear and which might throw most light on the real events of that night. Where was she when all these events unfolded? Whatever the background it does not seem disputed that William and Lydia were lovers and she certainly claimed her unborn child to be his.

Statements were taken by the police at the time but it is only fourteen years later that the trial allows us to see how the events that unfolded that warm July evening in 1850 from the lawyers' Briefs and the newspaper reports.

For many years the only map to explain the alleged facts of that late evening was one drawn in the Defence Brief. It was a strange travesty of a map which is impossible to reconcile with the local geography. Within the last few years the solicitors, *Hunnybun & Sykes*, have deposited archive material in the Northampton Record Office which includes the *Brief for the Prosecution* for the case and includes beautifully clear maps drawn up by Law and Sons, Architects and Surveyors, of Northampton. My copies do not do justice to the originals but they do help to show what happened and help to bring that evening one-hundred-and-fifty years ago back into our imagination.



*Drawn from Maps attached to Prosecution Brief.
(Hunnybun & Sykes Archive 2009/16: Northampton Record Office.)*

Lydia was heavily pregnant and lodged with her brother John who had kept on the family house after their mother had died that May. At the time she was sleeping with Sarah Ann Phillips whose mother also had recently died. Sarah Ann told of the ordinary events of that day, Monday the 22nd July 1850. Lydia had gone down to the shop to buy some soap and rice ready for the next day. The rice was for dinner and the soap was to do some washing, probably to earn a little money. The two women took the tray used for washing and at about nine o'clock in the evening Lydia went out to confront William.

We also hear from Sarah Dicks, Lydia's married sister, who was also heavy with child. She asks Lydia to take her husband's dinner to where he was working in Mr. Freeman's hay field. Lydia at first says she is too ill but eventually goes but on her return again complains about feeling unwell. Sarah says that she too saw Lydia off at about a quarter past nine on the fateful night.

Lydia's sister, Elizabeth was housekeeper and then wife of Joseph Groom and she had been to their house in the Ringstead (High) Street [See map] while Joseph washed himself after finishing work at nine o'clock. He stated that she had said that she was going to, 'see Weekley Ball about some money and if she did not have some there would be a row that night.' Joseph left his house with Lydia at about a quarter to ten but after some ten yards he had stopped and leant against a wall in the street

to smoke his pipe, opposite the entrance to Ball's orchard while Lydia continued on to confront him. As Joseph quietly smoked his pipe he heard the two quarrelling in Weekley Ball's orchard although two boards, possibly a gate, prevented him from seeing inside. He heard Lydia say, 'Get off me for I believe you mean killing me tonight, Weekley Ball. The Lord have mercy on me, if I am going to die in the state that I am in'. He then heard a trembling noise like 'screaming from a human being' which was 'either going further away from him or getting weaker.' He thought that it was just a quarrel and did nothing. He denies that he 'had improper intimacy with Lydia', who was his wife's sister.

Another witness, John Hill, told how he was working in Mr. Beeby's orchard, making a chair for himself, when he hears William coming down the slipe (a narrow close, which probably refers to the private footpath from Mrs. Hill's house, *The Black Horse:-see map*). He sees Lydia with William in Back Lane and follows them to a new listening point, by a stile in a nearby cherry orchard. He hears them arguing and Lydia repeating loudly, 'I won't! It's yours and nobody else's'. She also protested that she did not want to go into the orchard but they did and he heard the latch go on the orchard gate. John Hill was supposed to be looking after his baby in its cot so he had to hurry back home.

As part of his evidence, he tells us that Ringstead Field was enclosed in 1840 and in 1850 the road to Keyston(e) was very bad with cart wheels often up to their hubs. John Hill also denied, when questioned at the trial, that he had been evicted because he had kept a brothel. Two young women, who he claimed were distant relations, had stayed with him a few days and he was unaware that one named Emma Bird came from a 'house of ill repute.'

Elizabeth Gunn, a widow, lived in a house not far from Ball's orchard (see map). She was an infant schoolmistress, possibly in some form of Dame or Lace School. She stated that:

About ten o'clock that night I was in my house; the house door was open. I heard screams which appeared to come from Weekley Ball's orchard.

When cross examined she told the court that:

There is great excitement in Ringstead about this. People are wild about it. I have not heard that in order to do Ball a great many people were ready to come up to say anything that was wanted.

The only other witness was Elizabeth Groom, wife of Joseph, and Lydia's sister who said that William had visited Lydia and had given her meat for her sister. She also saw him the next morning in the street and asked him if he had seen Lydia and he replied, 'No.'

So these were the witnesses of the alleged murder, who, it must be admitted, were mainly relations or an alleged brothel keeper who had not given evidence in 1850 when the magistrates in Thrapston had to decide whether there was a case to be heard. They had adjudged that there was insufficient evidence, especially with the lack of a body, for there to be a case for William to answer. The police, as we hear later from the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire at the later trial, advertised in the *Police Gazette* and circulated handbills offering a reward of £50 for any evidence leading to Lydia being found. No one came forward.

A letter was also received from a local man, then living in Northampton, who had seen Lydia after the time of her disappearance. Weekley Ball had shown the letter to Thomas Green the innkeeper at the *Axe and Compass* and this had rather allayed police suspicions.

Nevertheless local opinion was against him and most seemed to have believed that he was the murderer and all that was wanted was the body. Soon after her disappearance as the Eastern Counties Gazette recalls in 1864:

On the Wednesday the public excitement had reached such a pitch that the police were forthwith communicated with, and a diligent search was instituted over nearly all the parish and the adjoining one of Denford. Gardens were dug over and excavated, ditches woods and thickets pryed into, and the adjacent ponds together with the river Nene were carefully dragged.

Nothing was found but many were convinced of his guilt and a printed ballad was hawked around the streets, first at the October Fair in Thrapston in 1850 and probably at other fairs and feasts in the area. A copy is in the Brief prepared for the defence barrister in 1864. It is called, *The Cruel Butcher of Ringstead* and runs to nine verses with a chorus after every one. It also introduces some new 'facts' which do not appear to have been mentioned anywhere else and were perhaps part of the rumours flying around Ringstead. A few of the verses and the chorus will give a flavour of the broadsheet:

*About that time we all do know
Up to the Black Horse that man did go
And for to have a glass of ale
And there he told a dreadful tale*

Chorus *A cruel Butcher he hung should be
For killing of Lydia Atlee*

*And then from there he went straightway
To kill a sheep as he did say
To kill that girl it was his guile
Likewise to kill his lovely child*

Chorus
*When she got home and left her tray
To meet the man she went straightway
To get her bounty she did intend
Not thinking of her latter end*

Chorus

Obviously William decided that he could not stay in Ringstead. In 1851 he was still there with Hannah and a niece Hannah Ball, daughter of his brother John, but sometime soon after he has left and, as we saw earlier, by 1855 was established as a butcher in Ramsey. He appears in Kelly's

Directory of Huntingdonshire for 1854 as 'Ball, William Butcher'. In 1861 Hannah, William's wife is staying with William's brother John and his wife (Hannah's sister) in Ringsted, but we do not know if this is just a short visit. She does declare herself as a butcher's wife to the Census collector. Staying with William in Ramsey are his 16 year old niece Ann Ball and his nephew William Wilson from Oundle who is a butcher's assistant. It looks as if, at the side the entry, the Census Collector has written 'Mrs. Ball absent'.

William was building up a local reputation as a solid citizen who, as we have heard, was known for his 'honest and straightforward dealing'. We hear in the Brief written for the defence lawyer that, 'he has recently enlarged his premises and erected a commodious house on the site of his former shop'. There may be the sadness of having no children of their own but nephews and nieces are always staying with them as some compensation. Then in 1864 the past came again to haunt and humiliate him.

According to the Eastern Counties Gazette of February 20th:

On Thursday the 4th day of February inst., a man named Warren was engaged in cleaning out a dike which lies at the side of a lane leading from Denford to Keystone and opening into the Denford road near Mr. Peach's farm. As Warren proceeded with his work, his spade struck against a hard substance buried in the ground buried at about two feet from the surface. The man paused, and manipulating very carefully with his implement, soon unearthed first the skull (split by the spade), and secondly the weird form of a human skeleton, nearly complete and buried with the face downwards, the toes and front of the skull being pressed firmly into the soil. It is a remarkable fact that the heels of this skeleton were close together as if they had been originally and forcibly placed in that position. It lay facing nearly due north and south and in moist boggy earth which received and retained the impression of the bones.

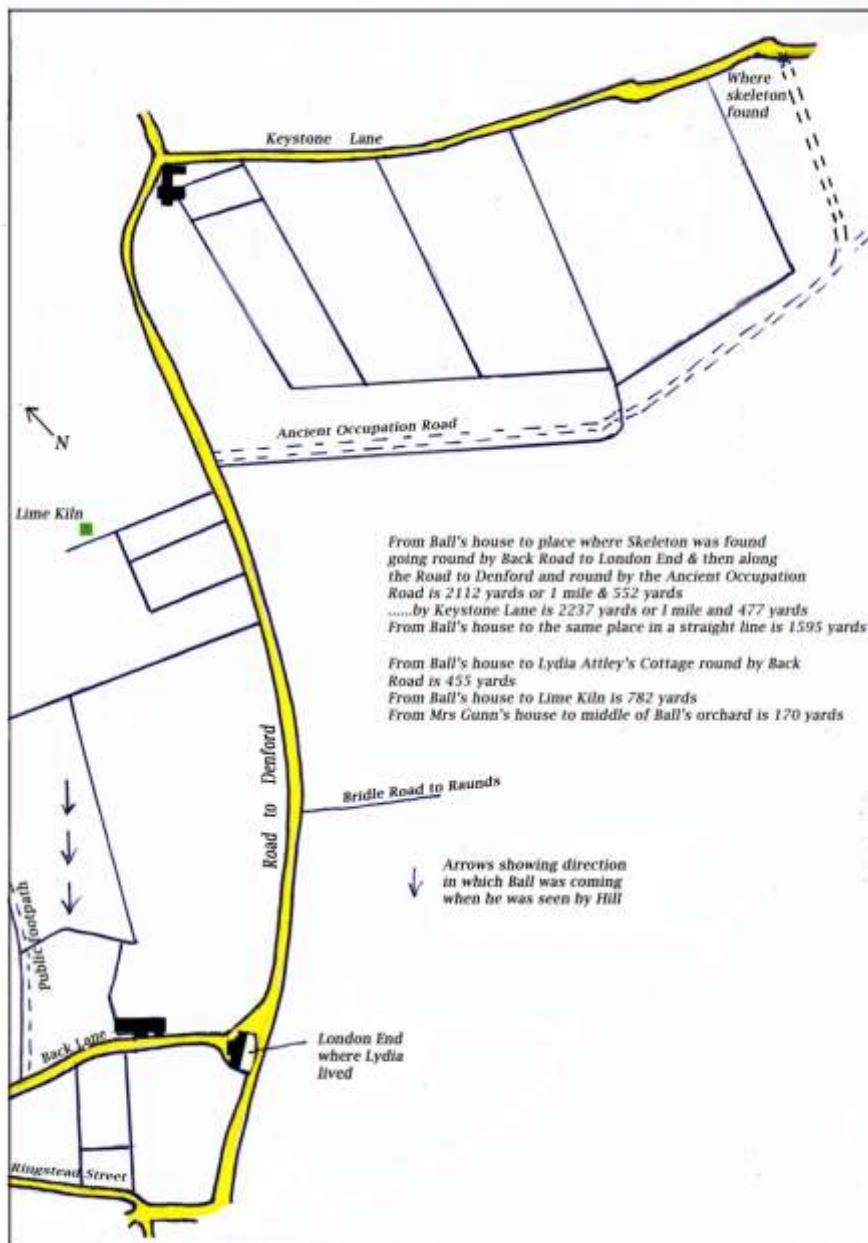
At the committal trial in Thrapston in 1864 Richard Warren, who was the labourer mentioned, said that he had dug up the skull on Wednesday 3rd February at about five o'clock in the evening. He said that it was about five feet from the stool of the hedge and about one foot from the side of the ditch. He tells the court that the road had been bad for many years after the common land there had been enclosed. He is also asked about a skeleton dug up in Little Addington parish which had also been thought to have been Lydia's. He knows nothing about this but it does show that people were convinced that Lydia was buried somewhere and were constantly expecting her body to turn up.

Warren ran to Denford Vicarage which was nearby and the Reverend Percival Sandilands sent a message to J. G. Leete, surgeon, at Raunds, who examined the skeleton and pronounced it a female of middle height who had been interred for a period of thirteen or fourteen years. Even today forensic scientists would not be able to be so definite. Obviously the good doctor had a very clear idea of who he thought it might be. The area was always boggy so was little used except by the farmer and, at the time of Lydia's disappearance, was a 'quagmire composed of an agreeable mixture of mud and water of a depth of several feet. The other clinching argument, that this was Lydia, was that the skull had a missing tooth.

Henry Dix, Lydia's brother-in-law, gave his account of the extraction at the trial. She had most of her teeth, and, as we have heard was proud of them. According to his testimony Lydia had come to him

about a fortnight before her disappearance to ask him to extract a tooth, the third one on the left hand side of her jaw. He was unwilling to do it because she was 'very large in the family way'. She insisted and he drew the tooth, which was double but he could not remember if it was fanged. 'She sat on the ground and I stood before her' and... 'I drew the tooth with a pair of nippers'. Henry stated that he told these facts to Inspector Williamson at the time of the discovery.

John Hill, who had stalked the couple the night before, also stated that at about six o'clock the next morning he had seen William coming from the direction of Ringstead lime kiln with a hoe in his hand



Drawn from Maps attached to Prosecution Brief

(Hunnybun & Sykes Archive 2009/16: Northampton Record Office)

We are not quite sure who said what, when, but we do know that the local magistrates, headed by Lieutenant General Arbuthnott, heard several witnesses in private and issued a warrant for William. Inspector Williamson of Thrapston left for Ramsey in a horse and gig at about 11.30 am. A Peterborough newspaper reported that during that morning, 'thronges of the poorer inhabitants of the villages of Denford and Ringstead, with other persons, were continually pouring into the town. This 'jostling, laughing, and impatient' mob managed to get into the courthouse but the rumours, that William was already there, were unfounded and they saw only the usual business of the day. The newspaper continues:

...the hall cleared the mob adjourned to the various public houses in the town from which they did not emerge until late at night. We must not forget to add that a strong party of 'roughs' walked up the road which leads to Ramsey, via Huntingdon, with the intention of meeting Inspector Williamson and his charge and saluting the latter with certain ugly looking pebbles which they appropriated on the way.

Inspector Williamson reached Ramsey late in the afternoon and went to the Constabulary depot and William was summoned, the warrant read and he was quietly taken into custody.

Although there was much excitement in Ramsey, he was well thought of, and the local reporter states, 'evidently a strong feeling here in favour of the accused'. The gig did not start back until 6 o'clock the next morning arriving in Thrapston at 11 am. He was greeted, 'in language which was more profuse than polite'. Wisely, the:

. . . prisoner jumped hastily off the gig and bolted into the police station with remarkable alacrity leaving Inspector Williamson to remonstrate with the crowd.

There were obviously very strong feelings against William locally and the discovery of the skeleton had revived this. On William's side was the lack of any foetal bones within the body. It was possible that Lydia had given birth before being buried but it did cast a doubt on William's guilt. William was described as being impassive throughout the case, only showing an interest when the details of the skeleton were given.

He had been worried, however, at the time of Lydia's disappearance. As we have heard, shortly after Lydia's disappearance, William had gone to Thomas Green's house and shown him a letter stating that Lydia had been seen alive in Northampton some time after her alleged murder. The letter had been from a William Weekley, living in Northampton, to his mother, who still lived in Ringstead. He had now admitted that William Weekley Ball had come to him in Northampton and asked him to write the letter. The mother, Eliza Weekley was summoned from her home to the court and then gave evidence that she had received such a letter from her son. A copy of the letter (wrongly transcribed as to 'Mrs. Ball' by a local policeman) was read out.

Northampton Aug 12th 1850

I write you a few lines to inform you that I saw L. Attley in Northampton. I was going down Castle Street at about eight p.m. or half-past eight pm on Sunday night. There was a man with her with a long frock coat on and a cape

William Weekley

One can see the little details of the man's dress and the vagueness of the times to give an illusion of reality but would a son sign a letter to his mother with his surname? Was this the clever ploy of a guilty man or a desperate attempt to clear his name by an innocent one? The evidence seemed to be piling up against William when suddenly news came through from Ringstead. On Saturday March 5th 1864 the Northampton Mercury had the following brief announcement.

The RINGSTEAD MURDER

As we were going to press we learnt that another skeleton was yesterday found lying by the side and partly beneath the spot where the former skeleton was found. The skeleton lay in a sloping position and the feet were 18 inches lower than the feet of the former.

The Prosecution Brief also has the news written in the margin which includes the note:

What effect it may have on the case is difficult to say.

A further note in the margin resignedly adds:

7th March 1864. Two more skeletons have been found in the same place.

The case collapsed and William Weekley Ball was discharged. Whatever the feeling in Ringstead, the press accepted the verdict and felt that William had been wrongly accused because of the rumour-mongering of a small village determined that he was the villain. The Mercury printed a letter from someone signed just *VERITAS* which started 'Satisfied that the withdrawal of the case against Weekly Ball is only an act of simple justice'. It goes on to tell of another woman who disappeared only to turn up many years later. Hopefully it was not written by another friend of William.

Archboulds, the prosecution solicitors, did seek legal opinion on behalf of General Arbuthnott, the magistrate whether he:

. . . would be acting properly and be justified in issuing a warrant for the re-apprehension of Wm Weekley Ball on his discharge should the General be of opinion he would be justified.

The reply from the counsel was that it would be justified, if 'the defects in the evidence that now exist could be supplied,' but he saw little chance of a conviction without a body. Legally, William was never troubled by the case again.

We see the villagers of Ringstead as perhaps people today imagine them. Almost all the prosecution witnesses were related to each other and rumour could turn possibility into fact. We also see people like Lydia trying to scratch a meagre living from selling oranges around the villages even though her sister said that she had a bad leg. All working people tried to stave off starvation and the workhouse. We also see the man in the evening sun smoking his pipe after a long day in the field. Cottages were generally dark, uncomfortable places to live in and children and adults alike tried to live outdoors as much as they could, making the most of the light. We also see that there were brothels and extra-marital activity. It was not a Jane Austen world.

William returned to Ramsey and seemed to prosper. 1871 finds him a butcher employing one man and a boy. His nephew Joseph Ball aged 22 and niece Margaret Wilson, 15, are staying with him and his wife Hannah. Looking at the local records we find that William has purchased two pieces of fen land on the outskirts of the town amounting to some seven acres for £540. On April 2 1874 Hannah dies aged 62 and is buried in the local cemetery.

Just two years later, in 1876 William married Catherine Cattling who was born in Birmingham. She was some twelve years his junior but has been married at least twice before. As Catherine Littleford she is shown in 1861 as a barmaid in the George Hotel an old coaching inn with links to the Cromwell family. It was a place where the local farmers would gather on market day. In March 1862 she married John Jackson in the parish of St Marylebone in Westminster. It seems a little odd that they chose to marry in London until we find that her father, a coach maker, was living close by the church in 1841. Perhaps, although born in Birmingham, London was her family home. John did not last long and as Catherine Jackson, a young widow of 38 was married to John Cattling in Ramsey on September 16th 1867 and the 1871 Ramsey Census shows her living in the High Street with John, a farmer of 28 acres and her son, Frank Jackson, aged eight. On October 24th 1873 John Cattling died. She and William are married in London. Perhaps it was a wedding near her family, or a romantic wedding in the capital, or, perhaps, both William and Catherine may have wanted it away from gossip and pointing fingers. Both had interesting pasts.

The 1877 *Post Office Directory of Bedfordshire, Hunts and Northants* records that Joseph Ball, William's nephew, has taken over the business. The following Census shows William is a farmer of 17 acres living in the High Street presumably in the house he built on the site of his first shop. Joseph himself soon disappears in a strange change of circumstances, [See separate biography]. By 1891, aged 74, William is described as a retired farmer and he dies some five years later on November 16th 1896. He is buried alongside Hannah in the Ramsey Cemetery where their stone can still be seen. Catherine dies on March 6th 1899 and she is buried elsewhere in the cemetery.

The *Hunts County News* for the 3rd November 1896 records his death, 'at his residence in the High Street on Monday morning at the age of 79. It also records that, 'for many years he followed the occupation of butcher in the town and was widely respected by a wide circle of friends'. He would certainly have settled for that as an obituary notice in 1864.

William had left Catherine (confusingly copied as Caroline in the registered copy of the will) an annuity of £50 per year from the rents of his land. On her death, John Bull, a tailor from Ringstead, the son of his sister Mary was one of two executors. Catherine's son, Frank Jackson and his wife and young child were living two doors away from William and Catherine in 1891: he is an 'iron turner.' William's land was sold to Lord de Ramsey and in his will he leaves a personal estate of £2729 17s 1d. After Catherine, the main beneficiaries are his sister, Mary Bull and nephew, Joseph Ball, and Edward Smith the husband of his brother, John's late daughter Annie (or Hannah). He also gives sums ranging from £10 to £100 to a bewildering range of relatives, some 31 in all. There are 4 nieces, 4 nephews, 4 step nieces, 2 step nephews, 3 great nieces, 5 great nephews, 3 step great nephews, 4 step great nieces, the two trustees and Frank, his wife's son by her former husband.

Despite all the information we have on William compared to most of his fellow Ringstead villagers we are really no nearer the truth of his guilt. He seems to have been a popular man in Ramsey who,

through his life and afterwards, looked after his extended family. Yet the people of Ringstead took against him with a virulence that makes you wonder as to whether there were old scores to settle. When we look at that fateful night in July 1850 can we assess the evidence and come to any conclusions? Unfortunately the answer is still no. The circumstantial evidence of the witnesses would seem enough to convict most men. He had the motive, the opportunity and was last heard with the victim in a heated argument. The other main options seem to be that she committed suicide or fell into the waters that make up a large part of the Parish. I think most people would judge him guilty.

On the other hand, how did he dispose of the body? As the solicitor who wrote the Defence Brief for his trial pointed out the distance to the original alleged burial site was a mile along muddy lanes and fields (and in fact as the Prosecution map shows it was more than that). Could he have carried the pregnant woman so far and undetected. Of course the site of the burial was discredited later but as Paul Harrison has pointed out in his book, *Northamptonshire Murders* another body in a shallow grave was found near the Thrapston Road in 1906. The body was declared to be a woman of about the right age. Harrison posits that William walked with her, pretending to discuss the problem, then murdered her and buried the body. It seems plausible but did no-one see them? Did he take a spade with him or rush back to get one later?

It is Hannah, his wife, who is a silent witness to all this. No mention is made of her at the trial. William did not forget her after her death, for even though he re-married, her nieces and nephews were remembered in his will. And, what of his brother John and the other members of the family? If he was the murderer, would William have needed an accomplice to dispose of the body? Unless, unexpectedly, further evidence comes to light we will never know the truth. Lydia's ghost is said to walk near the church yard. Is she still looking for justice?

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Chapter Seven

English Butcher & Canadian Musician

Joseph Ball (1849 –1920)

We have heard about the troubled life of William Weekley Ball and also, through the life of Jedidah Abington, of his brother, John Ball. Both men were described as ‘Gentlemen’ after their deaths so had gained a certain amount of property and prestige. The two Ball brothers had married two sisters from Thorpe Achurch, Rebecca and Hannah Wilson. The unions were not to prove fruitful by Victorian standards, for, as far as we can tell, William and Hannah had no children and John and Rebecca had two. Their names were Joseph and Hannah.

One might think that although by the judgement of the day they were not blessed with children they could have had happy lives together. We cannot be sure but this seems unlikely. We have heard the story of William and his pregnant mistress who disappeared under mysterious and damning circumstances. We also know that he quickly married a younger woman after his wife’s death. With John we only know that within months of his wife being in the ground he had remarried, also to a younger woman. Even allowing for the nephews and nieces that lived with the brothers it does not give the impression of connubial bliss.

But what of Joseph? He was born in about 1849 although he does not seem to have been baptised, at least in Ringstead. When John Ball, his father was buried many years later in 1894 the service was conducted by the Baptist Minister, the Reverend J Bates. Perhaps this is the clue, for Baptists do not believe in infant baptism. From 1837 every birth marriage and death had had to be registered so the infant christening in the parish church became a less important part of village life.

Although not directly relevant to Joseph’s story the state of affairs between the Parish Church and the Baptist Chapel at this time can be illustrated by an article taken from an English newspaper that was quoted in the 5th May 1843 edition of the New Zealand Colonist and Port Nicholson Advertiser. Under the headline ‘Intolerance’, it tells the story well, so I will quote it in full:

A worthy young couple named Thomas Stains and Mary Roberts residing at Ringstead, near Thrapston, in Northamptonshire, intending marriage, the banns were duly published in the parish church of Ringstead. The wedding day was fixed for the 12th October, on the very morning of which, the vicar of the parish, the Rev. Dr. Watson sent for the intended husband, and finding that he had not been ‘christened’ in the parish church, his parents being of the Baptist denomination, he refused to marry him, although his intended wife and her parents both belonged to the establishment. The disappointment was great; yet, as the wedding dinner was prepared, and the invited guests assembled, they kept the day as pleasantly as they could under the circumstances. The young man went to Dr. Watson to have his money returned; for it seems in that parish they demand the whole of the fees when the banns are

put in. 'Well,' says the Doctor, 'if Thomas Messer (the clerk) will give you up his share (half-a-crown) then I will return you my part of the fees.' The honest clerk instantly refunded his portion. Stains returns to the poor parson, saying, 'I am come for my money, sir' 'What!' says he, 'did Messer give you up his?' Reply:- 'Yes sir, he behaved like a gentleman.' The poor clerical doctor, on examining his treasury found it reduced to a solitary halfcrown. This sum he gave to Stains and with a note written by him, to the clerk, begging him to pay the remaining 3s 6d for him. But what was now to be done? The parties must be married somehow, and that legally too. Their characters were irreproachable. The whole parish cried shame on the vicar. The dissenters in the village, with several staunch church people, immediately raised the 3/- requisite for licensing the Baptist meeting at Ringstead as a place of marriage, which was instantly applied for, and obtained; and on the expiration of the twenty-one days' notice required by law, Thomas Stains and Mary Roberts will be the first couple married there. In the interim the bride elect returned to reside under the parental roof.

After four years of marriage, Hannah is born and Joseph arrives some four years later. There is not going to be another child. A little over a year later the world of the Ball family explodes. William's pregnant mistress Lydia Atlee is allegedly heard accusing William of wanting to kill her and promptly disappears. John and Rebecca must have been caught up in all the accusations and hate directed against his brother who is forced to leave the village. Nevertheless, life seems to carry on and in 1851 and 1861 the family are there in the butchery business with various nephews and nieces staying with them.

By 1871 the lives of the family have taken a new turn. John seems to be prospering being described as a butcher and farmer of 43 acres employing one man. There is however no sign of Joseph and we finally locate him living with his Uncle William and Aunt Hannah and two Wilson nieces in Ramsey in Huntingdonshire, some twenty five miles away. William has been acquitted of the murder of Lydia, the case collapsing some seven years earlier. Joseph is described as a butcher's assistant. One would have expected him to have worked with his father ready to take over the business when the time came. Perhaps, with William and Hannah being childless, it was intended that Joseph should inherit the business. It is a strange fact that the younger Hannah never appears in a Census with her parents, and at six and sixteen she is with William and Hannah. Joseph is only there once, as a young child.

By the 1881 Census the plan, if such it is, appears to be working because now Joseph is running the butcher's business in the Great Whyte, Ramsey and William has moved to the High Street and is a farmer of 17 acres. William is now 65 years old and living with his new wife Catherine, some 13 years his junior. Shortly after the Census Joseph's mother Rebecca dies and by the end of the years John has married Jedidah Louisa Abington (some sixteen years his junior).



Great Whyte, Ramsey, Huntingdonshire in about 1895.

The wide road, which I heard from a much later incomer led his wife to say that he had brought her to the wild west, is due to the culverting of the river under the road.

By kind permission of Keith Sisman (<http://sisman.net/greatw.htm>).

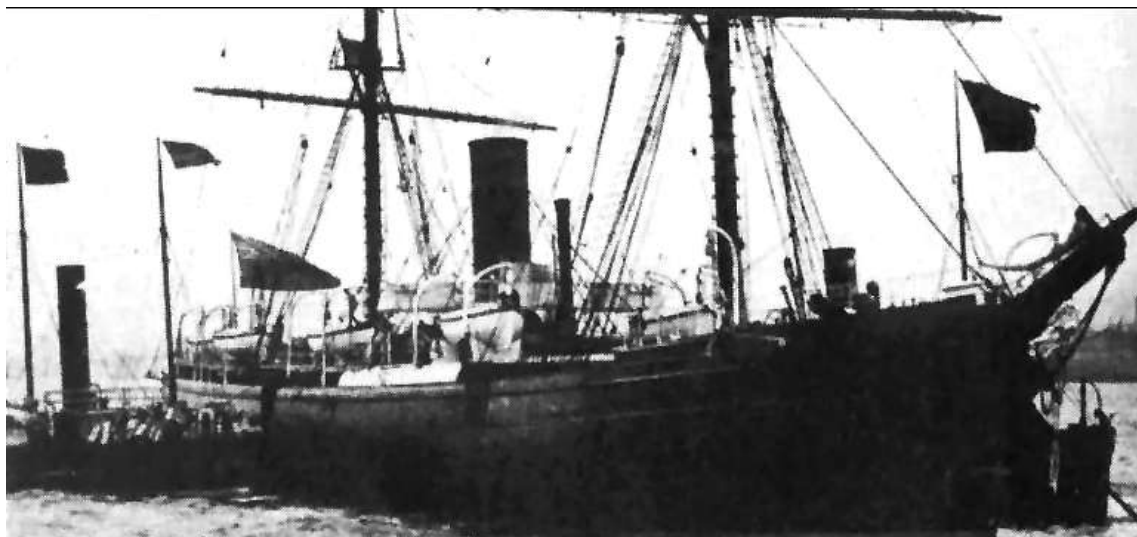
Joseph is now married with five children. His wife is some twelve years younger than he is and when we look at the children we see that Harry Arthur Ball is eight years old which means that Joseph's wife, Annie Judith, would have been twelve at his birth. It is possible but seems unlikely. On searching the Marriage Register we find that Joseph married Mary Elizabeth Housden in 1872 but she died on the 30th December 1878, aged just twenty five years, having given birth to four children in five years. He remarried to Judith Ann Sewell a local publican's daughter in 1880. She was already pregnant with Joseph's fifth child Sidney.

It had been a frantic few years and as the local paper, the *Peterborough Advertiser* of the 15th November 1879 reported, he had also been knocked off his horse on the road between Bury and Warboys in Huntingdonshire. Poor Joseph, returning slowly home, along the roadside, from Warboys, 'his horse having got some wheat', a Mr Edward Samworth rode straight into him. Mr Samworth had to be pulled by Joseph from under his horse which shortly 'expired'. The paper reported that Joseph was shaken and 'is suffering a good deal from the culpable and rash conduct of the other horseman'.

So, after the domestic turmoil of his father and uncle, as well as his own problems, he seems settled. He has a business with an assistant. There is also a general servant to help his young wife. There is perhaps one small hint of what is to come in the name of his youngest son Sidney, probably the only child of Annie Judith. His middle name is transcribed in Ancestry as 'Feninure' but it looks rather like 'Fenimore'. An unusual name, perhaps a family name from somewhere? There is another possibility, as we shall see.

We never see Joseph or his family on an English Census again. The next time we find him is in October 1883 and he has just disembarked from the *SS Samaria*, in Boston Massachusetts, having travelled from Liverpool via Queenstown in Ireland, a voyage of some ten days. The *Samaria* was made of iron with one funnel but also had two masts rigged for sail. There was a capacity for 130 first passengers and 800 third class passengers. Her last sailing to Boston was on 30th January 1896

and she was scrapped some six years later. The passenger list states that Joseph is in transit to Canada. Surprisingly he describes himself as a 'spinner' but there can be no mistaking the family even though the ages are somewhat astray. With Joseph there is his wife Annie, aged 25 and children, Henry aged 9, William 7, Gertrude 4, Fred 3 and Sidney 2. They have six pieces of baggage and are in 'Intermediate' class. This was 'quite separate from steerage and with superior accommodation and dietary scale', although 'very inferior to saloon.'



S.S. Samaria

The Samaria, built in 1868, was in the Cunard Line and was an 'intermediate ship' with an iron hull and steam engine but still with two masts for sail.

With the kind permission of www.ginnisw.com.

This was a time when many were leaving Britain, especially to Canada and the United States, or Australia and New Zealand. The population of Great Britain has been estimated at about 30 million by 1881 and of England and Wales at 26 million. The emigration figure for Great Britain for 1882 was about 29,000 so a little less than one percent of the population was leaving these shores every ten years. Emigrants' Guides were produced by *Pitt and Scott* who were passenger agents. These contained letters extolling the new land, 'for those willing to work', and gave practical advice on what to bring to their new lives. The emigrants were also given cautionary advice. John Hale writes from Manitoba, 'A man who drinks heavily is worse off there than at home' and, 'working men and their families must expect a little rough life for a few months until they get properly settled down'.

So looking back at that 1881 Census was 'Fennimore', as Sidney's middle name, a homage to James Fenimore Cooper who, in his 'leatherstocking' books and especially *The Last of the Mohicans*, had brought the pioneer glamour of America to England. Or was it not so much a sense of adventure but a realisation that with John and William marrying younger wives it might be many years before he would come into any inheritance. At this distance we cannot be sure but we do know that by 21st May 1891 his family were established in the St George's ward of Toronto in Ontario, Canada. Joseph was now forty-two years old and a 'piano tuner and musician'. His son Harry aged 18 is a confectioner and John, 16 is a fur cutter. They are all put down as Church of England. Their neighbours are tradesmen, railwaymen, servants and machinists and, immediately next door, is an Irish hotel keeper and his family.

Toronto had a mix of faiths and backgrounds with Evangelical Baptists and Irish Roman Catholics. There were some 22 riots or near riots between Catholics and Protestants of Irish origin between 1867 and 1892. It was on Lake Ontario and raw materials and people came by ship to the waterfront but the coming of the railway in 1855 and its development over the next half century turned it into a railway centre and, by 1891, into a rapidly developing large industrial city. In 1861 horse-drawn street cars first appeared and they were electrified in the 1890s. Telephone and electric lights in homes and businesses as well as on the streets arrived in the 1880s. Modern flush toilets came at the end of the century and the first skyscrapers, at first a modest seven storey Board of Trade building in 1889, were built.

This was the noisy bustling city that Joseph and his family came to. It is therefore even more of a surprise to find he was neither butcher nor spinner or in one of the new industries. When did Joseph Ball, butcher change into Joseph Ball, musician and piano tuner? What type of music did he play? Was he a classical musician in a local concert hall or did he earn a living in the Music Hall or even on the street corner? Of course we must not forget that pianos had their heyday in the Victorian era and most homes aspired to have an upright piano in the parlour. In a sense piano-tuning was part of a new industry.

By 1901 he was living in the centre of Toronto and, aged 52, he is just described as 'musician'. Annie, his wife is 40 and is not working. All the children except Sidney have gone and he is 20 and also described as a musician. Over the next years the children marry in Toronto and have children of their own. Harry marries in 1895 and is shown with his family in 1901. His job is given as an Auto Inspector Maker although I suspect this may be a mistranscription. His mother is given as Elizabeth. Frederick Gilbert marries in 1897. Sydney, the youngest marries in 1906 and his mother is given as Judith Annie Jewell [sic]. His middle name is recorded as Venimore so the idea that he was given the name in honour of the New World pioneers is probably wrong. Looking back at Ramsey we find that the local MP is a certain Venimore Sewell. It may be just coincidence but Judith Annie's maiden name was Sewell. It looks as if, after all, it was an allusion to a family name. Perhaps Joseph had always been a reluctant butcher.

Joseph and Annie had appeared in the 1911 Toronto Census giving their address as 258 Augusta. He was now 62 and still a musician. Joseph dies in July 1920 and Annie J Ball dies, some three years later, on 9 April 1923. All around their deaths you can see marriages of grandchildren. It is in the New World that the descendants of John Ball and vicariously of William Weekley Ball now live. The notoriety and tragedy of the Ringstead butcher is now long forgotten. Perhaps that was what Joseph and Annie Judith wanted when they took the brave step of making a new life for themselves.



Spadina Avenue from Queen Street.

From 100 Views of Toronto published 1900 -1910 with the kind permission of Benjamin Nagy.

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Chapter Eight

Farm Labourer

John Ball (1783 – 1821)

John Ball is one of those 'ag labs' nearly lost in the carelessness of history. He died before the first Census that began to put names and places and ages to our ancestors. Even the 1841 ages are often rounded to the nearest five and the place of birth is not given. We have to piece their lives together from scraps of information and the laws of probability. It surprises me that people confidently trace their ancestry back to some noble Norman lord when one wrong piece of information, one unrecorded 'one night stand' would send the roots off into much commoner soil.

At first I thought that he was the John Ball who married Sarah Lackson in 1807 in Ringstead but they were widow and widower and the children of our John and Sarah did not start appearing until 1817. Then I discovered another John Ball (one of many) who married Sarah Burkett on the 6th June 1816. I realised that for all those years I had the wrong man.

As was often the case in those comparatively contraceptiveless years the children then came tumbling one after another. John was baptised on the 18th May 1817, Thomas on the 19th July 1818, Ann on the 16th April 1820 and Daniel Clarke Ball on the 4th November 1821. Then just as suddenly the children stop. John and Sarah have no more baptisms recorded in the registers. It is only when we turn to the entries of burials that we see a possible reason. The register states in unusually full detail:

John Ball killed 13th March 1821 at Denford by the falling of a wall at a fire at Thos Fouscutts aged 38.

1830 was the year of *Captain Swing* when groups of agricultural workers and their sympathisers went around the countryside burning ricks and machinery of farmers who had brought in the new steam threshing machines. Wages were poor and the new machines threatened even this meagre income. Land was being enclosed and the family use of the common land, for animals or wood gathering, was disappearing. There was unemployment and pauperism. Even as early as 1816 there was some machine breaking and rick-burning. Northamptonshire was never as much affected as Norfolk but, as the book *Captain Swing* points out, riots were more prevalent where there was a large population of shoemakers. Shoemakers, like tailors, were known to include many dangerous radicals. Was John's death just an accident or was there insurrection in progress?

If the latter, on which side was John Ball?

Many may find that this is fanciful stretching of the known facts. There is, however, a bill which was posted around the district, a copy of which is in the Northampton Record Office. As the emerging police force was unable to cope with large scale problems Associations were set up. The wealthier

members of an area paid a subscription and, if one of their number suffered harm, the Association would send out reward notices and also pay the court costs. The 'Thrapston Association' sent out such a notice offering a reward of sixty guineas (including fifty from the County Fire Office), on the conviction of the culprits, to anyone (except the perpetrator) who shall 'discover' them. As Richard Cowley points out in his book 'Guilty M'Lud!', sixty guineas would pay an agricultural labourer's wages for at least two years. In this case someone had set fire to 'A Range of Hovels and Sheds partly covered with beans and partly with straw, standing in a Farm Yard in the Parish of Ringstead'. The date of the fire was 24th April 1824, just three years after John's death.

Northamptonshire Record Office

Arson.

Thrapston Association.

SIXTY GUINEAS REWARD.

WHEREAS some evil-disposed Person or Persons did, on the Night of SATURDAY the 24th INSTANT, WILFULLY and MALICIOUSLY

SET FIRE

TO A RANGE OF

HOVELS OR SHEDS,

Partly covered with Beans, and partly with Straw,

STANDING IN A FARM YARD IN THE

PARISH OF RINGSTEAD,

In the County of Northampton.

Now in the Occupation of Mr. W.M. COLEMAN.

Notice is hereby given, That whoever will discover the Offender or Offenders, so that he, she, or they may be brought to Justice, shall, on his, her, or their Conviction, receive a Reward of FIFTY GUINEAS from the COUNTY FIRE OFFICE, and TEN GUINEAS from Mr. BENJ. LEETE, of Twywell, the Treasurer to the Thrapston Association.

If two or more were concerned, the above Rewards will be paid, on Conviction as aforesaid, to any one (except the Person who actually set Fire to the Premises), who shall discover his or her Accomplice or Accomplices.

SHERARD & ARCHBOLD,
Solicitors to the said Association.

THRAPSTON, APRIL 20th, 1824.

HUGH & GIBSON, PRINTERS, PARADE, NORTHAMPTON.

With kind Permission of Northampton Record Office.

It is only the death entry in the Parish Register which gives us some idea of John's birth date because it means that he was born in about 1783. There are other John Balls in Ringstead and the villages around but none seem to be the correct year. Like the people of prehistory we only know a few details of their lives through their deaths.

On 25th April 1831 a Sarah Ball (widow) marries John Cheney (widower), 'Both of this Parish', at Ringstead. This I believe is John's widow. The 1841 Census now helps to offer some evidence for what we have so far surmised. John Cheney, (60) and his wife Sarah (50) are living together and it appears that John (20) and Thomas Ball (20) are living with them. Given the fact that the ages are

mostly rounded to the nearest 5 this seems to be compelling if not conclusive evidence for the pattern of events I have given being true.

John Cheney (72), tailor and his wife Sarah (62), tailor's wife are there together in 1851. By 1861 John is dead and Sarah has her granddaughter aged 14 living with her. By 1871 she is living on her own in Carlow Street, a few doors down from her son Thomas and his family. She is aged 81 and on Parish Relief. In 1873, aged 83 she dies.

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Chapter Nine

Quarries & Closing

John Ball (1852 – 1886) and Susannah Phillips (1855 – 1944)

Susannah Ball was one of those nineteenth century women, not uncommon, for whom marriage was a short interlude between maidenhood and widowhood. Her husband was born and died in the heart of Victoria's reign but Susannah lived to see another, more terrible, world emerge.

John Ball was the grandson of the other John Ball who had been killed in a fire in farm buildings in Denford some thirty years before his birth. He was baptised on the 16th January 1853, the fifth of seven children of Thomas and Ann Ball. His father was an agricultural labourer.



John and Susannah.

In the 1861 Census he is living with his family in Ringstead; parents, Thomas and Ann Ball and his six siblings, Sarah, Hannah, Esther, Rachel, Anne and Susan. Next door is another namesake, the butcher John Ball. Again in 1871 he is there in Carlow Street, now an agricultural labourer, with his parents and siblings. The older girls of the family who were doing lacework in 1861 are now doing shoe work.

On 14th September 1874 John married local Raunds girl, Susannah Phillips, in Ringstead Parish Church. Neither can write their signatures. He is stated to be a labourer which probably means he is still an agricultural labourer but at some point over the next decade John becomes a labourer in one of the limestone quarries in the area.

Limestone and ironstone quarrying had been carried on in the Nene valley since Roman times. There were quarries in the parishes of Ringstead and Woodford but it was at Islip that John seems to have obtained work. How and when this happened we do not know. Many agricultural labourers left the land at this time. Pamela Horn gives figures of a decline in agricultural workers for the forty years from 1861 of between 8.9% and 19.5% per decade. There were many reasons including mechanisation and a decline in agriculture leaving many farm workers without a job. Also important was that jobs in the new industries were often better paid and less tied to the whim of the 'master'. Education was slowly raising the aspirations of the rural working class.

So John walked each day, we must presume, from Ringstead to Islip, a distance of some three-and-a-half miles each way. The first thought would be that the quickest route would be along the road through Denford to Thrapston and across the old stone bridge to Islip. We must be careful, however, because the Islip quarries covered a wide area and were not in the village itself. Eric Tonks tells us that there 'was also a little quarrying in the middle 1880s between Thrapston Road and the main tramway - possibly when the Slipton area was difficult to access in winter storms - and a branch of the tramway was laid under the road to a limestone quarry on the north side. This was worked generally clockwise from 1883 onwards up to 17th January 1934 and was referred to as Peray Pit or Peray Hole.' It seems likely that John was working in the quarries close to the furnace and possibly in Peray Pit. He would have probably gone to work via Woodford, perhaps using the railway viaduct to cross the Nene. He would have often had smoke from the furnaces belching across the skyline to guide him on his way. It would have been a weary trudge home at the end of the day after a hard shift moving earth at the quarry.



Based on the 1871 Ordnance Survey Map showing the relative positions of Ringstead, the Peray Pit, Islip Ironworks, the Nene and the Railway. (The Kettering- Cambridge line is not shown). The 1884 – 86 Pit may have been the one where John Ball was killed.

As I have said, iron ore was mined in the area in Roman times but the cutting of the railways showed clearly to the mining engineers that good seams of ironstone lay close to the surface in the area. Also the railway gave another, easier, route for the ore, other than the poor roads and the Nene barges. There were a number of small local quarries including one at Ringstead owned by Thomas Walters. This, like many others, was soon exhausted and was only active from 1873 to 1881. The Islip area, however, contained good deposits and, but for the opposition of the local major landowner, it could easily have replaced Corby at the major steel town of the region. The Islip Iron Ore Company had a number of quarries in the Islip, Slipton, Lowick area. A Derbyshire coalmine owner, C. H. Plevins with his partner, John Kidner, formed the Islip Iron Ore Co. Ltd and four blast furnaces were planned. The coal came from Plevins' mines in Derbyshire using the new rail system. At first, the ore was transported also by rail, to be smelted elsewhere but quite quickly, by 1873, the first two blast furnaces were built and two more were added later. They were open-topped furnaces and only made pig iron in sand casts, 200 tons at a time. This became a real industrial site with, finally, 10 locomotives and 10 miles of track.

Mechanisation changed the work dramatically over the next fifty years but, at the time John was working, it was very labour intensive. In this period, as we have said, the main quarry was up the Slipton Road in Islip. After the initial trench or 'gullet' the gangs would work along the face removing the overburden, limestone and ironstone keeping a 'batter'. The overburden would be barrowed off across planks to the back of the gullet and dumped. Once an area of limestone or ironstone had

been uncovered by the labourers it would be broken up by a mixture of mechanical means and explosives and then loaded into narrow gauge horse-drawn trucks to be taken to the iron smelting furnaces.



Photograph by E.A. Ward from 'Northamptonshire' by Malcolm William Brown (1911).

(In the picture you can see the dark upper layers of the overburden, then the pale limestone and at the bottom the darker ironstone).

It is likely that John was part of a gang removing this overburden. The simplest, quickest way of doing this was to undermine the soil with picks and shovels rather as the sea undermines a cliff. Then the soil above would slip and fall and could be shovelled up and carted away. It was an easier as well as being a faster method of working, and the labourers would almost certainly be on very hard piece rates. In 1930, although working practices were safer, workers were still paid by how much they moved in a fortnight and if it rained, and they could not work, they would be sent home and were not paid. It was an inherently dangerous way of working forced on men trying to make a living. It is easy to see how there was always the temptation to remove too much from the foot of the overburden. Bill Warren, who has helped me with this chapter, has told me that his great grandfather's nephew, Lewis Warren, was killed on the 6th June 1881 by a fall of earth in the Slipton quarry. He was only 22 years old and he is remembered on a gravestone, in Twywell churchyard, erected by his fellow workers. We also know, from his death certificate that, on the 21st September 1886 at Islip, John Ball was 'accidentally killed by a fall of earth in a limestone pit'.

Searching the Northampton Mercury we find on October 2nd 1886 that a brief paragraph reports the Inquest. It was held just one day after his death. It states:

ACCIDENTAL DEATH. – An Inquest was held at the Bakers Arms, Woodford on the 22nd inst., before Mr. Parker, on the body of John Ball, labourer, who was accidentally killed by a fall of earth. It appears that the deceased, who was 34 years of age, was engaged in removing earth in a pit, in the parish of Islip, along with several other labourers. On the morning of the 21st he had undermined a piece of earth and several tons fell suddenly on him, killing him on the spot.- A verdict of accidental death was returned.



The Bakers Arms in Woodford in late 1930s (photograph kindly provided by Bill Warren).

The Baker's Arms is not far from the church in Woodford. There was a bakery in the building adjoining it. Today it is a private house but can be picked out by the large boulder, which was used for mounting horses, which stands beside it. There is also a large barn where, into the early twentieth century, drowned bodies found in the Lower Shott between Denford and Woodford would be brought by four men on a sheep hurdle ready for the Inquest. *[Information given to Bill Warren by his father.]*

Is this how John Ball was brought there? It seems more likely, given the distance, that he came on a cart but he too may have been left in the barn for the doctor's post mortem examination.

John, in his quest to better himself and his family had lost his life. For his wife Susannah there was not only the grief and emotional loss of a young wife with a young family but also the prospect of grinding poverty with the spectre of the workhouse hanging over their lives. It is her life we must now follow to see how she coped with this tragedy and its financial consequences.

In 1881 Susannah, or Susan, as she usually calls herself in the Censuses, had no paid job recorded but by 1891, some five years after her husband's death, she is an Army Boot Closer. In the early part of the century it was to lacemaking that the women looked to help them avoid the workhouse. As this declined they went on to the tough work of closing boots, for the Raunds and Ringstead area's main work was for the army and navy.



Closing Room 1869.

*(In Raunds and Ringstead most 'closing' was done at home).
With kind permission of Northampton Museums and Gallery.*

She had moved back to Finding Terrace, Raunds, where she lived with her three sons. George Henry, at 13, was an errand boy, but Thomas, aged 12, has as his occupation 'Rivetter and school' and John is at school. Her daughter, Eliza, is away in Knotting Bedfordshire where she is listed as a visitor and an 'Army Boot Closer'. It is likely that Susan, like most of the women would collect, or get one of her children to collect, the cut leather pieces, or perhaps they would be brought by a sort of outwork agent, and the completed uppers would be taken back to the factory.

H.E. Bates writes of this period in *The Feast of July*. He tells of family competing with family to get the available work in one of the depressions that the industry suffered between conflicts. The father sends his daughter to find them work:

By chance, every few days, Wainwright would hear of a hope of work in towns across the Valley: a pair or two in Orlingford, a dozen at Nenborough, something at Evensford, A chance at Addington, nine miles away. 'Git the truck out. Nip through Chapel Yard. Go down by Long Hedges or somebody will twig you. And git back before dinner if you can.'

There were factories that began at six in the morning and sometimes she was out in the darkness running with bread in her hands.

Bates was writing of the Higham Ferrers/Rushden area so we can only guess that it was a similar story in Ringstead and Raunds. Certainly, in Woodford, Richard Roe, who was born in 1826, was a 'sprigging boy' for his father at the tender age of 6, he was flat-seam sewing at 8 and putting tongues in jockey boots when nine. He walked each day to collect his work. Incidentally, Eric Humphries tells us that, later, Richard became a prominent politician in Northampton.

Susan continues until 1911 in Hill Street Raunds as a boot closer living with her two unmarried children Eliza, 36, a closer, and George, 33, a clicker and nephew Harold aged 9. Susan worked 'at home' but her two children worked in Boot Manufacture in one of the nearby factories.



This photo is wrong in many ways. It is the wrong county (Norfolk), is not army boots work, is a little later than our period and the woman is using a sewing machine which Susannah probably did not. Nevertheless it gives a feeling of the way women had to fit the work into the domestic routine - and such photographs are rare - so is worth including for that reason.

Norfolk & Norwich Millennium Museum (original believed to have been destroyed in fire).

She lost her son Thomas, who was killed in the First World War in Belgium, on Tuesday 15th October 1918 aged 38. George also died in 1932. Susan was my great grandmother and was known in the family as 'Little Granny' She died on 19th July 1944 and is buried in Raunds Cemetery with her son George. Her husband was buried in Ringstead but is remembered on the gravestone at Raunds. She lived with John for some ten years and without him for a further forty-eight.



Susannah in old age.
(Her younger self looks down on her).

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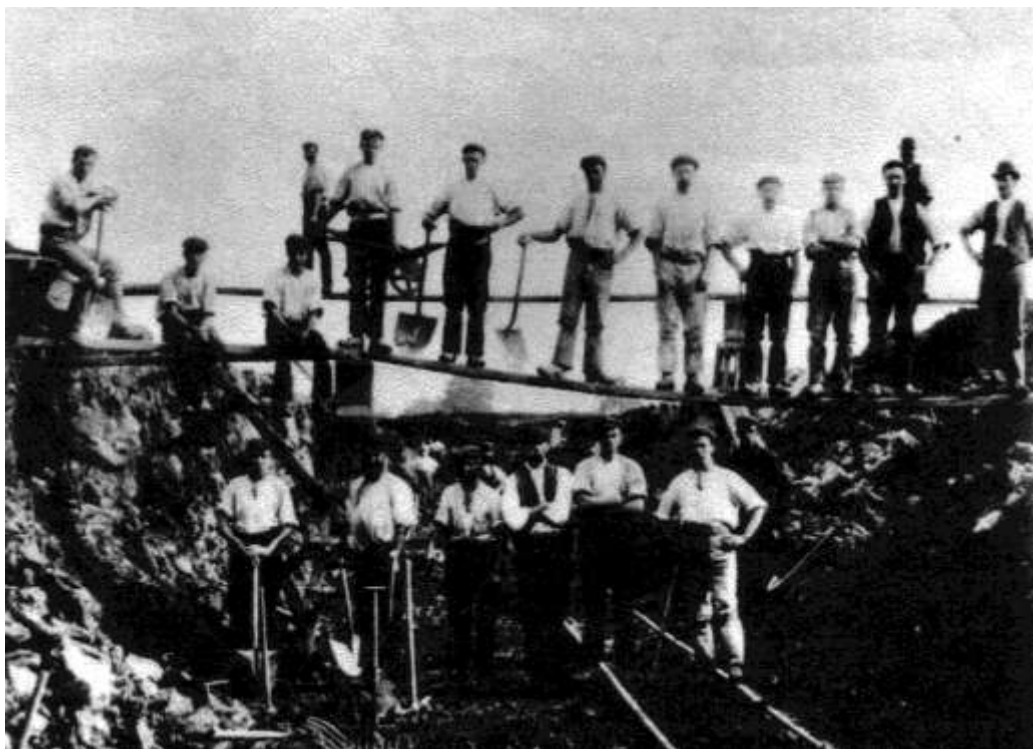
My thanks to Tom Love of Islip and Bill Warren of Barton Seagrave for all their help.

Postscript

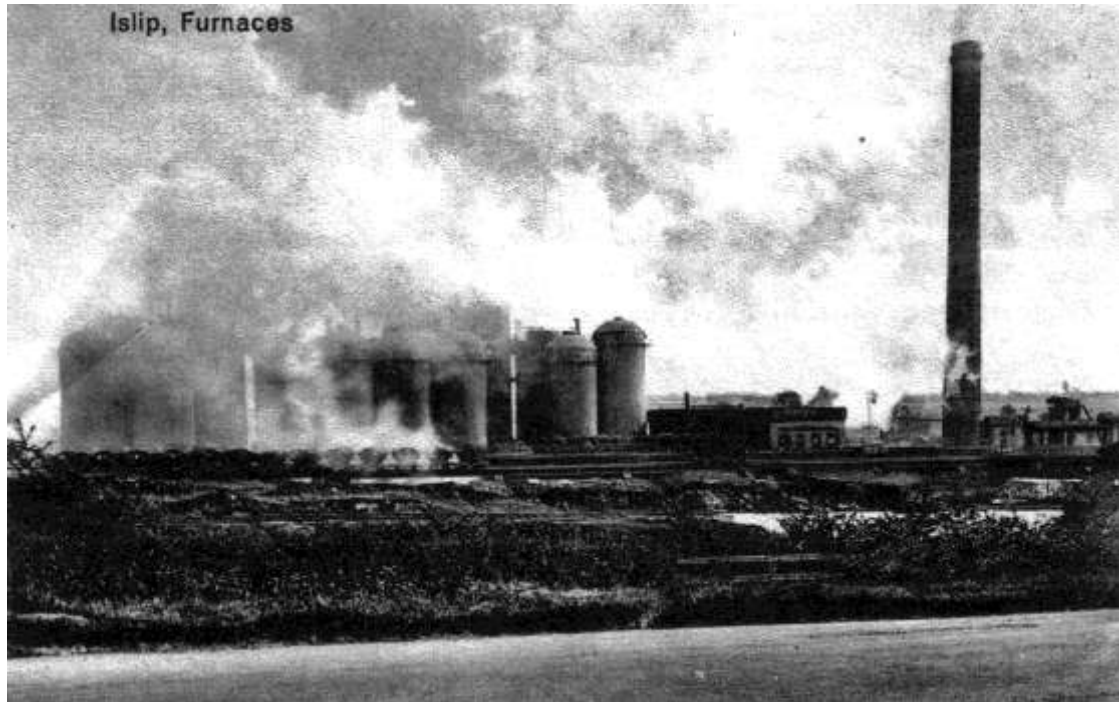
Bill Warren has kindly sent me some photographs of the quarries and furnaces which are a little later than the period covered in this life story but show the conditions that the men worked under. The captions are from Bill.



About 1910. This picture shows a large gang of men working in one of the quarries removing the overburden. There are a lot of trestles and planks bridging the quarry to provide access to the dump side where the overburden spoil was tipped from the barrows.



This later photograph (1930s) is at Long Hills Quarry at Weldon. You can see right at the back a man crossing the planks with a barrow.



Islip Furnace in the 1920s taken from the Thrapston to Kettering Road. The small 3 ft. gauge wagons loaded with ironstone were parked on top of the bays where they are tipped. The view shows the eight stoves with the four furnaces and two lifts behind them. The building to the right with the large water tank above is the blast furnace engine house.

Chapter Ten

Shoemakers not Thatchers

Benjamin Ebenezer Roberts (c1858 - 1925) & George Henry Roberts (c 1865 - 1941)

John Roberts was born in about 1791 and was an agricultural labourer. Perhaps more surprisingly his wife, Alice Page from Bythorn, who he married in Ringstead on 2nd August 1830, is described in the 1851 Ringstead Census as a 'Church Sunday School Mistress'. One cannot be certain but one would imagine that this meant that she could read and write. They had five sons, William, John, William, Thomas and George between 1831 and 1842. Their first-born, William, died at only eight months old but, as was often the case, a later son was also given the name. 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.



Shoemaker 1780.

(With kind permission of Northampton Museums and Art Gallery).

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 c1866 and finally Herbert, born c1868. 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).

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 conclude: '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.

Of course daily bread must be taken literally here. 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 work 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.

Certainly 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').



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 last 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 middle men 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 cannot find his name again in the following Censuses. There are many possible explanations for this but, perhaps, there is a story to be told.

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 of, and the profit from, the finished boots and shoes. The clicking was the first process 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. The reporter 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 carries 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, like Victorian kitchen devices, 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, has died before the 1871 Census, well before his fortieth birthday. His widow, Letitia, at 36 is living on Shop Street, on 'Parish Relief' Her oldest daughter, Elizabeth, now 17, is doing 'shoework' and Owen (15) and Benjamin (13) are 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 middle men 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. She is trying to make her 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. As we have said, George, at fifteen, is the exception and 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 help her because she is a vendor of patent medicines. Many would have had laudanum in them to dull the pain.

Letitia married John Smith in 1884 and the 1891 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 Benjamin's brother, the railway worker, but the son of Thomas, John's younger brother. These two cousins carried on as shoemakers but the industry went through increasingly difficult times as the nineteenth century drew to a close. In fact, 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 Some will leave the Union if they do not stop such interference.

(Boot & Shoe Journal 10th December 1892).

It was 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 Nonconformists and his younger brother, John, was a well known local organist. He also built organs for some of the local chapels. Mr Attley remembered 'blowing the organ' for John and particularly one occasion when his attention wandered and 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.

The Reverend A. C. Neely, who was the vicar of Denford-cum-Rngstead, 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 there is a hint of reservation:

*'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'.

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 rescue of the industry, especially in the Raunds area which was heavily dependent on military orders. 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 try to secure the diminishing orders. Suddenly the shoemakers' wages dropped as even the *Ringstead Britannia Co-operative Society*, which had been formed in 1891, cut costs to secure business.



Photograph by author April 2010. (It is no longer a factory).

This 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 unmingled 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. George Henry tried to carry on collecting his 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 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 Nonconformists. 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 is a shoe hand and also unemployed. Perhaps it was just the difficult times in the shoe industry a few years before some help came from a terrible source. I say. 'some help', because the War Office gave a mortal blow to the area when they announced that, for the first time, men would be going to war in machine-made boots. The handsewn craftsmen were now in desperate trouble and in 1922 the local papers told of their plight.

Benjamin died aged 67 and was buried on 21st September 1925 in Ringstead Cemetery. 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. Benjamin's house was identified by Wilfred Roberts in 1975 as one in Carlow Street which still exists today, set back on the

left, behind a fence, as one walks from the Axe and Compass. His workshop was at the back of the cottage.

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 children, one of whom was a clever girl called Margaret Hilda Roberts who made him 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. I do not know who 'Barrel' was and if this story is true but one wonders if her Great Uncle George's views and his experiences in 1905 had some effect on her attitude to unions nearly 80 years later.

Postscript



Photograph by kind permission of Vivienne Marshall, great-granddaughter of Harry Abbott Mayes

*The 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 vertical flute, is Benjamin Ebenezer Roberts.***

Although not strictly in the nineteenth century the Raunds March, as I have said, could not be omitted. 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. Above is a picture of the band, many of whom were, three years later, on that historic march.

Perhaps, as we look at Benjamin and the others in the photograph, we can see something of the spirit that 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.

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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.

My thanks also to Sara Sharman for checking in the Ringstead Cemetery Register on the death of Benjamin and George Henry.

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Chapter Eleven

Clicker

John Ball (1882 – 1953)

John, or Jack as he was usually known, was the third John Ball in a direct line, only separated by his grandfather Thomas. They span the years from 1783 to 1953 and he was the only one that I touched, in his old age. I did not know him well, for I was only seven when he died and it was a small part of an article in the *Rance Reunited* magazine that determined me to tell something of his story.

John was born the fourth child of John and Susannah, or Susan, Ball, in 1882. He followed Eliza, George Henry and Thomas. In 1881 his parents and his siblings were living in Carlow Street, Ringstead. His father was an ironstone labourer in the Islip quarries. As we have seen in his story, on the 21st September 1886 he was buried in a fall of earth in the limestone pit, where he was working, and killed. John junior was only some three years old.

We do not know how Susannah coped with four young children on her own but by 1891 she has moved back to her home town of Raunds. She had not been able to write her signature at her marriage in 1874 so opportunities must have been limited for her. She became an army boot closer, sewing the uppers, and her children also worked to help keep the family from the workhouse. Eliza is away from home, also working as a boot closer and the two older boys are 'Errand boy' and 'Riveter and School'. At nine years old, John is still a 'Scholar'.

By 1901 the whole family, including Eliza is living in Hill Street and all are engaged in the army boot trade. Susan, the widowed mother, and Eliza, her daughter, are both closers and Thomas is a riveter but John has followed his older brother George and is a clicker. It appears that all the family are working at home, except George and John. This is what we would expect because 'clicking' was considered the most skilled work and the one which cost or saved the employer the most money. The ability to match parts of the leather and cut the maximum from a hide were valued abilities. It was also true that it required room and was for all these reasons often centralised into a factory before the other shoeworking crafts. All around them in Hill Street are people in the boot and shoe industry, mostly working at home.

There is a photograph in *Old Northamptonshire in Photographs* of five men in the 'Rat Pit' of Adams Bros, Raunds in about 1908. My sister, who was fifteen years older than me and so knew my grandfather well, was sure that one was him He is finishing a boot as one of the 'handsewn men' so perhaps he could not get work as a clicker and had to settle for other work. He then decided, with his brother Thomas, to move to Wollaston where they both had been offered, or obtained, work.

So, by 1911, things have changed. George Henry and Eliza appear to be working in a factory, George a boot clicker and Eliza a boot closer, although Susan, now 56, continues to work at home. They still live in Hill Street. Two of the sons have left the nest. John has married Eunice Andrews on

23rd December 1905, some five months before the birth of their first child. They are living in Highfields Cottages, Marshalls Road, at the time of his birth. Thomas has married earlier, in 1902 to Charlotte Cade and the two couples have moved to Wollaston where they share York Cottages which had six rooms, excluding the scullery and any outbuildings. Thomas is now a 'Bottom Stuff Riveter' and John is a clicker. Both work in factory but the two wives are 'Hand Boot Closers' at home.



■ WINNERS . . . the Wollaston side which took the Wellingborough and District League title in 1909-10 - pictured from left, back, are W Bellamy, W Drage, W Holloway (secretary), F Rivett (chairman), A Nicholls, A Holloway. Middle: H Woodhams (trainer), V Martin, A Parkins, Dr Baxter (president), A Watts, P Simco and E Wooley (linesman) Front: F Partridge, H Pettit, C Shelton, J Bellamy, J Ball and T Means (treasurer). Sitting on ground: G Moberg

*Jack played for Wollaston in his time there. He is the last player, in kit, on the right of those on chairs.
Cutting provided by Brian Ball, Grandson of Jack and Eunice.*



John and Eunice with their sons (probably just after the First World War).

John and Eunice already had three children, the older two, Aubrey (4) and Sydney (3), born in Raunds and Ronald (5 months) born in Wollaston. It seems that they did not move from Raunds until after 1908 so he could be the man in the photograph of the 'Rat Pit'.

It is here that we come within the reach of living memory, or at least the memories of my father, who was Aubrey Ball, eldest son of John and Eunice, told to me in his last years. *Senile Dementia* was beginning to cloud his memory but I believe that the basic facts are true. He was born in 1906 and the first house that he remembered was in Thorpe Street next to the Blacks and opposite *Partricks Stone Masons*. If you look at the bottom of many of the gravestones in the cemeteries and church yards of Ringstead and Raunds you will see the Partrick name carved discretely at the bottom. John and Eunice moved back to Raunds but Thomas and his wife stayed in Wollaston and ran a fish shop. I know this because Aubrey went to stay with them for a time to help in the shop and was, he believed, treated badly by Thomas.

We must beware, however, of putting too much weight onto the slights suffered by a young boy, recalled seventy years later. This is particularly true of Thomas because the First World War took both brothers into the army. Soon after returning to Raunds, John and his family moved back into the new houses in Marshalls Road that had been built for workers of *R. Coggins and Sons* factory. It was locally known as 'The Colony'. My father said they were cheaply built and always cold but they are still there today. Before central heating and insulation most terraced houses were freezing cold in winter with one coal-fired room sucking icy draughts from the rest of the house.

Both John and Thomas enlisted. Thomas joined up first, in Wollaston in 1916. He became a private in the Northampton Regiment and later a rifleman in the *15th Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles*. John did not join up until 1917 and put his preferred option to be the *Essex Regiment*. He became a gunner in the *Royal Field Artillery* but I think that he was in the *4a Reserve Brigade* and never had to fight. Thomas was not so lucky and was killed on 15th October 1918 during the battle of Courtrai. Not only was he a few months from the end of the war but he was also resting, in reserve after being in the front line, when a shell hit the farm house where a group of the soldiers were sheltering.

John returned home and carried on with his life. He had been a talented runner and won many prizes over the years. He also played football until he was fifty. After his own career was over he trained some local runners including his youngest son Dennis who was born in 1917 and whose middle name was Verdun after the First World War battle., and his nephews, Harold and Len. This also shows another side of many shoemakers. He was an inveterate gambler. Amateur race meetings were organised but there would be a line of bookies also at the meets. My father told of one occasion which perhaps gives some insight into this:

I heard him say to a bloke once, 'Look, according to the stopwatch you've got the beating of my boy (my cousin Harold). If you let him win you can have the prize money – as long as we win.'

And the bloke replied, 'No, I'll run and I'll win the prize!'

'Well,' said Dad, 'I'll tell you now, before the race, you ent got a snowball in hell's chance of winning that race.'

And he hadn't, because when it came to the bend he was shut out. Dad bet on Harold of course and he won the race easily. It was around three legs – I suppose it was about half a mile, something like that. Dirty work! This was amateur athletics!

The meetings were organised to raise money. They charged so much to go in, you see. There used to be a lot of running – athletics – in those days. What killed it was the gambling. There was a lot of gambling on it. And my father was one of the worst!



John with his running trophies.

This rough independence and occasional disregard for the law can be seen in another incident which made the local papers. In 1908 a piped water system had been established in Raunds. Water was taken from a well to a huge concrete tank or reservoir in Hargrave Road. All went well until 1921 when there was a long drought. I will let my father's words tell, what happened next:

Well, the farm next to the well was sold. A man from the north bought it. He dug another well at his side of the fence and his well tapped the same supply so that the Raunds well began to run dry. So a group of men from the Woodbine Club got together one night and marched down to the meadows – with Sid and me behind them. They got the pumping machinery and threw it all down the well that he had dug.

It made the national press. 'Bolsheviks Cause Damage in Raunds', or something like that. But after that there was no more trouble with the water supply. They never found out who did it. We had two policemen in the town. Although the police must have had a good idea who was responsible they probably thought it wiser not to take it up. I mean, after all, they'd got to live in the town with the rest of us!

I have an original copy of a photograph which fills in a little more of John's history. It shows him standing in a clicking room. The same photograph is in *Raunds, Picturing the Past* and it tells us that it was taken in 1929 to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of *John Horrell and Son Ltd* of Wellington Hill, Raunds.



John (third from right) in Clicking department of John Horrell & Sons Ltd (1929).

The next glimpse of John came to me quite recently when I saw a copy of the *Rance Revisited* magazine in the local library. To my surprise I saw a piece on *Adams Brothers* by Paul Roberts. He movingly describes the clickers breaking into song as they worked. They would sing in harmony, with descant, songs from *Nellie Dean* to *Abide with Me* and *Crimond*, which was known locally as the 'Ringstead Hymn' because of its Dissenting associations. He goes on to tell of an incident involving Jack Ball (which seems to imply that he was working at Adams at the time).

They credited Jack Ball with causing Labour to lose the seat in the 1935 General Election. Wing Commander James, the Conservative candidate, had as his agent a Finendon man called Chapman, nicknamed 'Sugar Chapman'. They always introduced him at political meetings as a 'Conservative Working Man'. His presence at political meetings was like a red rag to some of the Raunds' Radical shoemakers. No one can recall hearing Sugar Chapman speak because of the uproar that his presence caused. As Wing Commander James left his Eve of Poll meeting in Raunds, Jack kicked his backside for bringing 'Sugar Chapman'. 'CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE ASSAULTED AT RAUNDS,' said the headlines in the next day's Evening Telegraph.

I first encountered John when I was a young child and I went on the bus from Wellingborough to Raunds to visit my grandparents. I remember my grandmother a little. She was a proud woman who

kept a neat house with polished brass jugs, full of wooden spills, in the fireplace. She had a special tiered plate for cakes and was mortified when I discovered a fly in my Tizer. Of my grandfather I have only two memories. One is of him standing in the workshop in his son Ronald's garden where he was still doing outwork. He did the old clickers' trick for me of taking a circle of leather, sticking it to the bench with a small curved knife and then pulling to make a shoelace. Magic and shoemakers are often associated. The other memory is of him sitting silently in the corner in Marshalls Road, as the grandfather clock beside him ticked the seconds slowly away.

He died on the 8th February 1953 aged 70 years to be followed by his 'beloved wife' Eunice on 21st August 1956. They are buried in Raunds Cemetery . In 1919 *The Shoe and Leather News Illustrated Biographic Dictionary of British Shoe and Leather Traders* listed six boot and shoe firms in Raunds: *Adams Bros.*; *R. Coggins and Sons*; *Tebbutt and Hall Bros Ltd.*; *The St. Crispin's Productive Society Ltd.*; *Regulation Boot Co. (Raunds) Ltd.* and *John Horrell and Son*. All have fallen silent and many have been demolished. Most of the backyard workshops have also disappeared. What was once the vibrant lifeblood of the communities is now archaeology.

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Chapter Twelve

Papermakers

William Mitchell (c 1800 - c1863) and Others

This biography started out as the story of papermaker, William Mitchell, but like others before me, I soon became embroiled in the complex history of the various mills along the Nene boundary of the Ringstead Parish. The 1835 and 1871 Ordnance Survey maps show on the Nene, working from the south, a mill at Cotton near the station, a Paper Mill due west of Ringstead, and Woodford Mill between Woodford and Denford. There is also a windmill SSW of the village in Ringstead Field.

So far, all is reasonably clear but the mills are, at times, called by the same name and tenants come and go, sometimes hopping from one mill to the other. The mills may also run two wheels powering different processes. Finally the usages of the mills also changes. So what started out as a brief history of a papermaker has become also a short and rather confused history of two of the mills.

Woodford Bottom Mill also known as Allen's Mill was used in the nineteenth century by the Hill family until about 1863 when Samuel Allen took over the premises. This was later demolished and as it is not, even in part, in the Ringstead parish it has been omitted from the story.

Woodford Upper Mill is the same as Willy Watt Mill which is also sometimes called Willett's Mill, and, confusingly, also Ringstead Mill and it is still there. This is the Paper Mill on a number of maps (by the position). Although it is in Woodford parish some of the millrace is in Ringstead Parish and it is nearer to Ringstead village than Woodford.

Finally there is Cotton Mill (or also Ringstead Mill) which was also used for paper production.

To avoid confusion I will use the names Willy Watt Mill and Cotton Mill wherever possible.

*

My first sight of the water mills of Ringstead came from a strange source. The website *The Exeter Working Papers in Book History* lists historical insurance policies taken out by people in the book and paper trade. There are three references to a Francis Tidbury. One for 1782 for £600 has the address as 'Willett Mill, Ringstead –papermaker. Also Miller'. 1783 is similar but for only £400 but 1785/6 is for £1700 and has the address as Cotton House. This poses questions to be answered. Did he mill corn and make paper in the same mill, perhaps according to the time of year. Also did he move in 1784 to new larger premises or did he invest in new machinery? Perhaps he installed a second wheel as was often done.

Googling idly, seeing if I could find anything on Cotton Paper Mill, I came across a site which had extracts from a book on Jane Austen's letters. It listed the watermarks on letters written by one of

England's most famous novelists who would have been writing in the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first two of the nineteenth. It includes in the list:

John Hall, Cotton Mill, Ringstead, Northamptonshire.

It seems that Ringstead was producing good quality writing paper which was sold to clients far away from Northamptonshire. Perhaps we need to revise our preconception of a little cottage industry in a backwater of the Nene. It may help if we first we look very briefly at the craft of papermaking and its gradual but accelerating industrialisation during this time.

Paper is a commodity that we now take for granted. With newspapers, magazines, computer printouts, books, advertising leaflets, bags, wrapping paper, bills letters, envelopes, banknotes, till receipts, wallpaper, toilet and kitchen rolls, disposable nappies, etc, etc ,etc we now use more paper in a week than our ancestors would use in a lifetime. When we remember how John Clare, the Northamptonshire poet, had to use scraps of paper such as the backs of bills or envelopes in order to write we see how the access to paper has changed. For many centuries, and well into the nineteenth century, paper was made almost entirely from rags and it was the speeding up of the process of pulverising these rags by mechanisation that first changed the trade. Also high taxation on paper and even higher duty on imported paper kept its product out of the reach of ordinary people but these taxes were gradually relaxed and finally abolished. It was only as the century progressed that paper could be produced on continuous paper rolls so it was for many years labour-intensive.

In 1800 there were a little over 400 paper mills licensed by the Excise authorities, mostly driven by waterpower, and small in scale. These mills took in rags and, originally, the colour of the rags determined the colour of the paper. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century the only bleaching was by sunlight and by sprinkling with sour milk. One can only imagine the smell. They were steeped in water for weeks and then pulverised by a machine called a 'Hollander' before being laid onto wire screens and then put to dry into sheets of paper. This was a slow process taking some three months between the rags arriving at the mill and the finished paper leaving it The rags had to be sorted and graded, which was an unpleasant job, because different rags gave different grades of paper and a mixture would produce an uneven and blobby finish. Also at first only white rags produced white paper.

The paper was 'laid' by a man dipping an oblong, divided, wooden frame with a fine wire screen backing into a tub of pulverised fibre and water. He would swish it around and take it out so that he had left a thin layer of fibres laid on the screen. The mixture in the tub would gradually get thinner so he had to adjust accordingly. The size of the paper was limited by the distance a man's arms could stretch. In 1816 it was calculated that it was a day's work for three men to make 4000 small sheets of paper. This was after all the initial processing of the fibres. The amount of paper produced in the United Kingdom increased nearly five times in the forty years after 1820 and quicker mechanised paper production, printing and transport made it become affordable to an ever increasing circle of society.

Of course, as in many industries, the mechanisation and the cheaper prices tended to concentrate production into larger factories and the smaller mills, such as those at Ringstead, struggled to

survive. The new railways could bring cheap, good quality paper to the village, whether blue for the grocers to wrap the sugar in or white for the letters to go by the penny post.

When we look in more detail at the mills along the Nene we find that there was a history of paper making which lasted at least a century. As I have said, we shall have to consider both mills in order to get a clear idea of how the story unfolded for William.

Looking at Willy Watt first, there has been a mill on the site for over a thousand years. In the Domesday Book it states that (in translation):

In WOODFORD Roger holds 7 hides from the Abbot.

Land for 12 ploughs. In lordship 2½ ploughs; 4 slaves

12 villagers, 3 smallholders and 12 Freemen with 9½ ploughs.

A mill at 2s; meadow 20 acres

The mill was used for fulling cloth in the early eighteenth century. Before the Hollander was invented for mashing up the cloth for paper manufacture a system of water operated wooden hammers were used and it would not have been difficult to alter the fulling hammers for this process. A little earlier, in 1742, Henry Shuttleworth had married Catherine Bletsoe. She was the only child of Charles Bletsoe of Great Bowden. By the marriage, the couple had six water mills and one windmill (probably at Ringstead). We will hear a little more of this family later.

It was in 1765 that Francis Tidbury, who we first met obtaining his insurance, started making paper. He was married to Susanna and there is a floor slab in the tower of Ringstead Parish Church which has the epitaph:

In memory of SUSSANNA TIDBURY wife of FRANCIS TIDBURY who departed this life Nov'r ye 2d 1791. Aged 52 years

Francis remarried Keziah Loveday (Loveden in the record) on 4th April 1793. Unlike most of the tenants of the mills, Francis was a well-to-do man who also owned a mill at Southwick. He lived in Cotton House and, at his death, in 1814, his estate was estimated as worth £3,500.

His widow Keziah Tidbury, took over Willy Watt but within two years she was bankrupt and one son became a baker in Raunds and another a farm labourer in Woodford. This was not the last time that comparatively well-off families were brought low by the mills. Then James Fernelly (various spellings) took over the mill for paper production.

The earlier history of Cotton or Ringstead Mill is not yet so clear and it is not until 1814 that I have found the name of a tenant, although we do know that the Shuttleworths owned both mills from the middle of the previous century.

We have mentioned John Hall of Cotton Mill whose paper was used by Jane Austen. The Morgan Library and Museum in the USA has a collection of 51 of the surviving 160 Jane Austen letters (it is

estimated that she wrote some 3000). It has put online the watermarks of the paper used and they have John Hall and also have the date of 1814 as part of the mark. Whether this was the date that he started business in Cotton Mill or if he changed his mark each year, I am not certain. It does show, however, that he was making paper in Cotton Mill at this date.

The next glimpse of a tenant comes from a number of bills and letters that have been preserved which relate to the repairs carried out, and not paid for, at 'Mrs. Bull's Mill' in 1829. In one of the bills it also refers to it as 'Ringstead Paper Mill' The letters involve a John Fisher of Woodford, who appears to be the brother of Sarah Bull, for he pleads on her behalf to the agent of Mr Shuttleworth, the owner, not to expect her to pay the cost of some other associated repairs. I have tried to transcribe it as faithfully as possible.

Sir

The consult [import?] of my letter his to in form you that i have paid George Willson one pound in account on the 17th of October has he was so bad in wants of the money.

He continues later in the letter:

I ham showing you the diferent expence i consider it will be verry hard for my sister to pay in [?] to the whole amount. i shall take it a faviouir if you will do what you can for my sister. i hope Mr Shuttleworth will be at the expence of a new [pit?] well has the hold one will not last long.

The repairs carried out must have been quite extensive because the bill came to £127.13s.11d and included bricks, lime, wood and iron and oak, as well as the services of a mason, millwright, plumber, blacksmith and sawyer. There also appears an amount of £2 16s for beer from Mrs Allen and five shillings to repay him because he, 'Gave men drink by way of encouragement.'

John Fisher seems to have acted as the building supervisor for his sister and the slow payment by Shuttleworth gave him some difficulty. The millwrights sent him a threatening letter on 27th November 1829.

Sir

As our money is been due this 3 months wee think it is time it was paid and as you was our employer wee shall look to you to pay us. If you don't pay us or cause us to be paid between now and next Friday wee must see further about it As we had plenty of trouble About it.

Geo. John and Wm. Wilson

The years from 1829 to 1841 produce a large amount of documentary evidence, which although still sometimes confusing, does begin to give us some picture of the two mills. It is here that we first encounter William Mitchell, whose paper making activities straddled both mills but apparently, with no more success than most other tenants.

On 12th July 1840 William Mitchell wrote and signed a 'Declaration', although the language suggests that it was drawn up by a solicitor or Justice of the Peace. It was probably made to help the Shuttleworth family prove ownership ready for the Enclosure of Ringstead when all the parish was surveyed and allocated to specific individuals (and, more directly, for a sale to George Capron who bought up much of the land in the area).

In this Declaration, William states that he hired, of Nathaniel Shuttleworth, Willy Watt Mill from midsummer 1830 until midsummer 1834. He also records that it had previously been hired by Francis Tidbury and, on his death, by his widow Keziah Tidbury (although she may have had 'under tenants'). James Fernley (Fernelly) then took it over. All had used it as a paper mill. After William quitted in 1834 it was lived in by Henry Shuttleworth Bellamy for a year before being succeeded by George Ivens, although the rent was paid by his brother, William, who farmed some adjacent land.

At about this time (1835-6) part of Willy Watt was turned into a bone mill. These mills were used to render down the bones from local slaughterhouses (and perhaps whale bones from the blubber factory in Kings Lynn). The bones were boiled down to make them brittle and to remove the fat, which was used as grease on carts etc. They were then broken into small pieces by hand, or by feeding them through a toothed cylinder. Finally they were ground into a fine powder by millstones powered by the water wheel. At Narborough Bone Mill, in Norfolk, human bones from cemeteries in Hamburg in Germany were shipped to Kings Lynn for use in the Mill. I am not sure if any came up the Nene to Ringstead. The fine bonemeal was, and still is, a valuable fertilizer but perhaps the cycle is not so complete.

In the month following William Mitchell's 'Declaration', George Ivens drowned in the Nene while looking for his brother's horse. He left a wife and eight children. The Nene, even more than today, often claimed victims both from accidental drownings and from suicides. In the story of John Ball, the quarry workman, Bill Warren told of the barn in Denford where the bodies were taken on hurdles when found in the Nene. A son of one of the Twentieth Century owners of Willy Watt Mill tells that in the 1930s, during the Depression years, that, on his way to school in the mornings, he would look out for bodies washed down the river. He got 7s 6d for every body that he reported to the police.

After George Ivens' tragic death, John Smith, a coal and timber merchant from Northampton, took over the lease and continued with the bonemeal production, which he sold from his riverside wharves in Stanwick, Irthlingborough and Wellingborough.

Returning to Cotton Mill, *Pigots's Directory of Cambs, Hunts and Northants 1830*, lists two papermakers for the area, James Fernelly for Woodford Mill and Sarah Bull for Ringstead Mill. From the parish records we can deduce that Sarah was the wife of John Bull, and their children's baptisms are recorded. The earlier ones are in the Ringstead Parish Register but the younger children are baptised in the Ringstead Particular Baptist Register. We see that, by 1830, Sarah was a widow and trying to carry on the family papermaking business.

By 1835 Sarah had left Cotton Mill, which was then taken over by William Mitchell, and by 1841 she is acting as a nurse for Eliza, wife of Henry Hill, who has two young children. Eliza is the right age to be Sarah's daughter (born 28th October 1817) but this still has to be further researched.

It is here that other documents clarify the position a little more. If we look in the *Apportionment of Rent Charge in lieu of Tithes in the Parish of Ringstead (24 October 1838)*, we see that in Cotton there are 5 acres of grass owned by Henry Shuttleworth but occupied by William Mitchell and a little further down it talks of:

A certain mill called Cotton Mill of which Henry Shuttleworth is owner and also payed a Modus (?) of customary payment of six shillings and eight pence yearly in lieu of Tithes payable to the said Rector. . .

Soon after, in 1841, Ringstead was finally 'Enclosed' and all those who felt they had an interest in the land to be enclosed had to submit claims. We will look at this when we tell the stories of some of the agricultural labourers but there is one claim that is worth looking at here. George Capron, a London solicitor, bought up large areas of the land at this time, and also in 1841 bought Southwick Hall near Peterborough He put in a claim for:

*A water mill and offices and a windmill
A paper mill with dwelling house and offices and Mill Holliner [Hollander?] near or adjoining
/ Mitchel tenant
Mill Cotton Close / Mitchel tenant
Holliner [Hollander?] and meadow adjoining Lower Mill in the occupation of William Ivens.*

It still leaves open whether the paper mill was adjoining the corn mill, or a separate mill, although it implies the latter, it does make clear that William Mitchell was only the tenant, who, among other things, was a papermaker.

Below is part of the ' Inclosure Award Map' of 1840. Woodford or Willy Watt Mill is the small mark right at the top of the map where the straight yellow road crosses the larger island. (Cotton Mill is shown as award 129).



Part of the Inclosure Award Map 1840 (ML 1550 NRO).
With the kind permission of Northampton Record Office).

In the *Inclosure Schedule of Estates* it again lists George Capron as owning various lands previously owned by Shuttleworth which includes three islands, a (river) bank area, Cotton Orchard and homestead, and a 'Water Corn and Paper Mill' comprising 3 roods. Looking at the Inclosure map and the numbering it is clear that this refers to Cotton Mill.

I thought that I was beginning to clarify the usage of the two mills until I made another visit to the Northamptonshire Record Office. I read through a *Draft Schedule of Land at Ringstead [C(S)82]* which appears to be listing premises for a future sale, giving the rents payable and various acreages. Unfortunately there is no date but it appears to be around 1840. It includes:

The Royalty or Sole Fishery in the River Nene, otherwise Nen, on both sides of the River from a certain stone called the Red Stone in Raunds Meadow to the Mills called Willywatt Mills in the Parish of Woodford.

The Fishery at per annum £5 15s 0d

There is also the, 'Right of cutting Rushes in the said river at £3 3s 0d per annum'. More importantly for our present story are two other entries:

All the Messuage now divided into two Tenements with the Water Paper Mill, Closes, Lands and Premises situate and being at Ringstead Cotton at present therewith let, in the lane of Great Addington within the county of Northampton.....in the tenure or occupation of William Mitchell.

.....Also that Bone Mill situate and being at Ringstead Cotton aforesaid now in the occupation of John Smith.

This seems to prove that there was a Bone Mill at Cotton as well as at Willy Watt Mill. Certainly the reference to the Bridge over Mr Mitchell's Mill Head which we will look at in the 1835-6 repairs makes more sense if the Bone Mill is at Cotton.

Returning to William Mitchell, the Northampton Mercury for 20th January 1844 reports that he is prosecuted for trying to evade the excise duty on paper. As we have said there was a heavy duty on paper and the paper was watermarked, and put into wrappers which were stamped as duty was paid. Three charges were brought against William but he seems to have had a smart lawyer who argued successfully that two of them should be dropped for technical reasons. The nub of the case against him was that:

A ream of paper was found on the premises of Mr T. O. Beale of Wellingborough which had been permitted to Northampton twelve months ago. The grounds of the suspicion were that the defendant had got possession of an old wrapper and re-filled it and sent it out again, thereby evading the duty.

William's lawyer tried another technical challenge without success. He then called Thomas Beale who told the court that Mitchell would sometimes make up his order with paper that he would fetch from Northampton, if he did not have enough of his own manufacture. This was perhaps the way the wrapper had come to be there. The Bench, however, found William guilty and fined him £25 which was a large sum of money. It is difficult to compare with today's world because average incomes have increased so much faster than prices, but, according to the National Archives 'Currency Converter', in 1840, £25 would buy about 120 days of a craftsman's time (in the building trade), or 37 stones of wool, or 12 quarters of wheat, or 4 cows or 1 horse.

From the evidence we have, it is in Cotton Mill not Willy Watt Mill that William is producing paper in 1844. We have noted that Pigots Directory of 1830 gives two paper makers: James Fernelly at Woodford Mill and Sarah Bull at Ringstead (Cotton) Mill. We know, therefore that there were times when papermaking was carried out at both mills simultaneously.

The bills also, sometimes refer to it as a paper mill. It seems probable that William Mitchell left Willy Watt in 1834 and took over Cotton Mill for papermaking from Sarah Bull and her son Enos. Meanwhile Willy Watt (or part of it) became a bone mill. There was a long list of work done to 'Ringstead Flour Mill' by Edward Button in 1835-6 for H Shuttleworth Esq. These repairs were again extensive and include work 'on Mr Iven's house and Bone Mill,' 'a bridge over Mr Mitchell's Mill Head' and a laying of a new floor in the Flour Mill. Was this all done at Willy Watt (it was the year

after Mitchell had given up his tenancy of Willy Watt) or was work done at both mills and the bridge over the mill head was near Cotton Mill? Was the Flour Mill, Willy Watt? It is still very confusing.

Between 1829 and 1836 the water mills, Cotton Mill, Willy Watt Mill and the Bone Mill had extensive improvements and repairs. The letters and bills tell a story of estimates being questioned and reduced by Mr West, on behalf of his employer Henry Shuttleworth. Henry had married his cousin Eliza, daughter of George Shuttleworth, and on the death of his father, Nathaniel, he owned properties in Northamptonshire, Leicestershire and Gloucestershire.

We also see irate tradesmen complaining about late payment which caused some of them great hardship. William Mitchell also complains to the agent:

am sorry I have not got the balance by me at present and as rent day is soe near I pray let it be tel then. Sir, you promised me a new press and [???] there is great difficulty in carren on the business with out one.

William was plainly struggling, which may explain his attempt to evade the paper tax. What, perhaps William and the others were not aware of, was that Henry Shuttleworth was being destroyed by debt and that in 1839 he had to declare himself bankrupt. A junior line of an ancient family was brought down by his attempts to ride on the new wave of industrial enterprise. It was, perhaps, the Light-Poole Mills in Gloucestershire where Henry, with his partner had bought the patent to a new pin-making machine and hoped to make their fortunes, which really destroyed his empire. It appears that he had been a solicitor in Market Harborough and he had dealt with money matters in a way that some considered fraudulent so perhaps his holdings were built on dodgy foundations.

Henry and his wife both died within a short time of each other and left eight children. Eric and Mary Humphries record that a letter was written to ask for subscriptions for the orphans and hoping 'that the follies of the parents would not operate to the disadvantage of the children'. What exactly do these words refer to? If we look some ten years after his bankruptcy, at the effect on some of Henry's family, the effect is clear. In 1851, Nathaniel at 16 is on trial as a grocer with Joseph Roberts in Leicester St. Martin; Georgina, at 25, is a teacher in Norfolk and Edward, by the end of the decade, is living in Victoria, Australia. There is a further story to be told but Ringstead was only a small part in Henry's fall from grace and his family's troubles. We must leave their stories for someone else to tell.

If we now return to the 1841 Census which records that Enos Bull and George Lovell are living at 'Ringstead Mills' and that they are papermakers. In 1841 too, the Great Addington parish register records that Henry William Lovell, aged two years, the natural son of Fanny Lovell papermaker at Cotton Mill was scalded to death in a vat. Women worked in the paper mills sorting and treading the cloth ready for the Hollander to pulverise it into fibres. One can only imagine that Fanny had to take her child with her to work, with terrible consequences. At best it was an unpleasant, smelly job with the constant threat of disease from the stinking, often imported, rags.

This Census records that a further four papermakers are distributed throughout Ringstead. The four are Thomas Mundin, Thomas Stanley, Robert Phillips and Benjamin Mitchell. It does not discriminate between master and worker or craftsman and labourer. It seems likely that Willy Watt was now a

bone mill so all were working at Cotton Mill. As we have seen, there may have been other workers living in adjacent parishes.

It looks as if, after Sarah Bull was replaced, as tenant of Cotton Mill, by William Mitchell that Enos Bull, the son of Sarah, continued to work for William. William's son, Benjamin was not living at the Mill but was working there, perhaps learning his trade.

By 1851 Enos Bull has disappeared and another son of William Mitchell called Samuel, aged 22 and born in Great Addington, is the only paper maker listed in the Ringstead parish. I have not traced George Lovell, Thomas Stanley or Thomas Mundin. Robert Phillips, the oldest worker, is still in Ringstead but, aged 66, he is a 'Road Labourer and Scavenger'. It is possible that scavenging might include the collecting of rags for the paper mill but we have no proof of this.

By 1861 Enos Bull is still a 'Papermaker and Packer' but now living at 5 North Street, Spitalfields, Middlesex with his wife, Sarah and their three children.

Returning to the 1841 Census we find William Mitchell, aged 40 living with his wife Mary, some ten years his elder. He is listed as a papermaker. He originally came from Romsey in Hampshire (usually Ramsey or Rumsey in the transcriptions) which had a number of papermaking mills so perhaps he learnt his craft there before moving to Great Addington.

As we have seen his son Benjamin is also recorded as a papermaker in Ringstead and his profession is confirmed at the baptism of his daughter Charlotte on 20th March 1842. He had married Dorothy Bateman on 12th September 1836 in Ringstead but by 1851 he has moved to Northampton and has become a shoemaker. Of course, this is not as sudden as it may appear. The Censuses, coming every ten years, tend to condense time.

Another son of William, called Samuel, became a papermaker and by 1851 he is the one remaining person in the trade living in the parish of Ringstead.

William Mitchell, living in Great Addington, is recorded as a 'Victualler'. It may be that he is taking a back seat. But Samuel too, for some reason, leaves the business and by 1861 William is again a paper maker now lodging with Thomas Wadsworth and his family. Wadsworth is a Miller in Ringstead. It seems possible that William was making paper in the same mill, or an adjacent one to that used by Thomas Wadsworth to grind corn. It would be interesting to know how this arrangement worked for Paper Mills were known as messy unpleasant smelling places.

So William Mitchell carried on the paper business possibly doing it alongside the milling business of Thomas Wadsworth. Certainly the Tithe and Inclosure documents of the period around 1840 talk of a Corn and Paper Mill at Cotton. What we do know is that William's son, Samuel Mitchell, with his wife Naomi, moved to Stirchley in Shropshire as a Station Master and later became a railway guard on the London and North West Region Railway still living in Shropshire. In 1901 he is recorded as a retired Passenger Guard so it is unlikely that he returned to Ringstead to live. As an aside, in 1881, Samuel and Naomi are lodging with Thomas Gelson who was a skilled potter at the famous Coalport China factory. The factory had been taken into receivership in 1876 but Thomas Gelson became the General Manager and helped bring it back to profitability.

It seems most probable that William died in 1863 and some two years later Mary followed him to the grave.

In 1861, William, the eldest of William Wadsworth's sons, appears in Marylebone in London as a railway porter. Perhaps it is no coincidence that he followed the same route as Samuel Mitchell although in the opposite direction. If we look for Thomas Wadsworth, the father, he is 74 but still recorded as a 'Relief Miller' His wife is presumably dead but four unmarried children live with him and his sons Richard and George are now the Millers. Interestingly the residence is recorded as 'Flour Mill' and is sandwiched between Cotton Farm and the Railway Station in the Census. It seems that this must be Cotton Mill.

What happened next to papermaking in Ringstead? Did it die with William? The 1871 Ordnance Survey map still shows a paper mill but at Willy Watt. So far I have no evidence that paper was made there after William Mitchell left in 1834 so perhaps the map had not been properly updated. Plans of the two mills, drawn up for the sale of the two mills to Mr Eady in 1879, show that both existed at that date but, although they record the buildings, they do not tell us what state Cotton Mill was in and whether it was in use. We must look on the mills as power sources which were used in different ways as times and markets changed.

If we now look briefly at what happened to Willy Watt and Cotton Mills after the death of William we see the slow decline of both mills as first steam and then electricity, together with the new fast transport system made both mills uneconomic.

It seems possible that both mills reverted back to being corn mills. In Cotton Mill we have Thomas Wadsworth and his sons, Richard and George. In Willy Watt Moses Irons Eady became the miller. In 1841 a Moses Eady was living in North Mill, Burton Latimer. This was a windmill and in 1852 a thunderstorm destroyed one of the sails. In 1870 he was admitted to the Woodford Baptist Chapel as a Deacon but it appears that his membership ceased, possibly because he went to the Burton Latimer chapel. In 1884 a Mr Eady is advertising the North Mill for sale. Previously to this, in 1880, following the plans we have seen sketches of, Moses Eady had bought Cotton and Willy Watt mills.

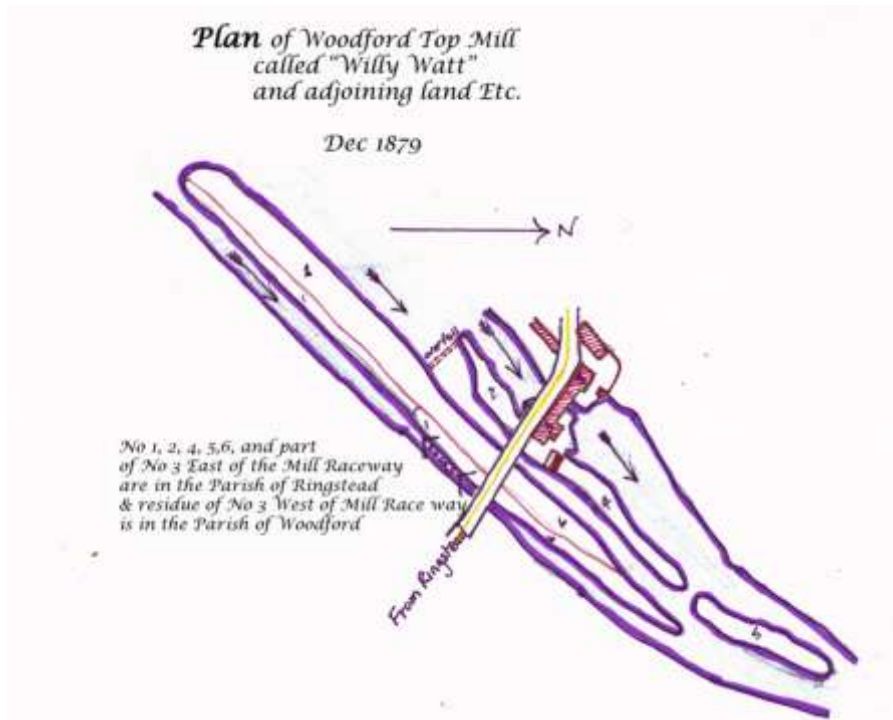


*Ringstead Mill (possibly early 20th Century: Source of photograph unknown).
The Muirheads lived in one of the Mill Cottages but were shoemakers.*



*What appears to be same bridge (September 2011).
It has a stone marked 1840 not visible in the picture.*

Something of their siting and working can be seen from the plans prepared for George Capron's sale to Moses Eady.



Sketch from Siddons map of Land sold to Eady 1879 [C(S)662].



Sketch from Siddons map of Land sold to Eady 1879 [C(S)662].

Could this be showing the presence of two mills with a subsidiary mill stream?

Both plans by kind permission of Northamptonshire Record Office.

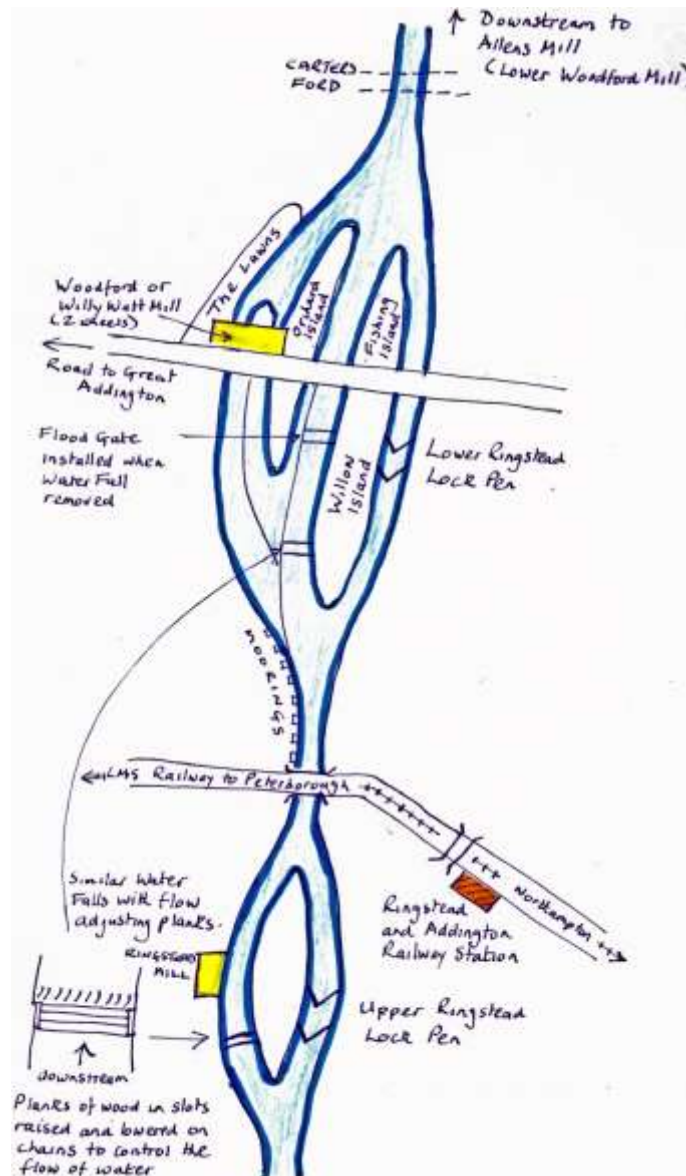


The owner, Mr. Hawes, carrying water outside Willy Watt Mill in the 1950s.

A tunnel from the church, built by Monks from Croyland Abbey in the 15th Century, was rumoured to emerge in the old elm tree which here casts winter shadows on the Mill.

When, in 1897, William Dodson bought the Willy Watt Mill it was to grind corn. He had been a baker in Great Addington, after previously running a public house and outdoor beerhouse in Little Addington. He bought Tithe Farm in Ringstead and Willy Watt Mill so that he owned the whole process from growing the grain to baking the bread. Before the First World War some 46 people were in the farm and mill. The last miller there was Frank Hart who was nearly a hundred when he died. It seems possible that both mills continued as flour mills alongside or adjacent to, the other activities such as paper making, throughout most of their working lives from the late eighteenth century.

By the time that William Dodson bought both mills, Cotton Mill was in a semi-derelict state. The only reason why he bought it along with Willy Watt was so that he could demand two heads of water (of about four feet each). This enabled him to run the Willy Watt Mill for much longer each day. It is possible that this was already the reality for the last part of the nineteenth century. The rough map below is based on one provided by a descendant of William Dodson.



This map simplifies the various arms of the Nene at Ringstead, with possibly two mill streams, so the position of Ringstead Mill should not be relied on. Writing in 1970 Geoffrey Stamer stated that Cotton Mill was reported as finally dismantled in 1920. It is also interesting to note that Carters Ford, near Willy Watt Mill, was, originally, the only crossing point before the railway came and new bridges were constructed. In the Twentieth Century the bridge outside Willy Watt Mill, which had only been built for horse-drawn vehicles, collapsed under the weight of lorry traffic.

It seems that Willy Watt Mill had had two wheels from the eighteenth century. In the twentieth century the smaller one was used to generate electricity from 1903 to 1947. Previously to this it had been used, probably by John Cave, who married Moses Eady's daughter Harriett, in the late Victorian period, for driving the mill machine shop which made cartwheels etc.

Today Willy Watt Mill is still there although the mill wheels have long stopped turning. It became increasingly difficult to make a living using waterpower and was used, among other things as a bed

and breakfast establishment. Ringstead Mills had been in ruins for many years by the mid twentieth century and now, apart from a few bricks and broken concrete among the tangle of bushes by the choked millstream show where once they stood.



***Is this part of the old millstream?
(Photograph June 2010).***

It may seem a sad end for the Mills but remember that both bone and paper mills were foul smelling places which polluted the streams that they used. It was more Dickens than Constable. In *Strapetona*, the magazine of the Thrapston District Historical Society, in 1989, one former resident of Willy Watt Mill told of his grandfather in about 1913 during floods following a snowmelt. The water almost reached the Dining Room ceiling, confining the family to the upper rooms. The drinking water was collected in an old milk churn from a well in Ringstead.

As the waters subsided a little his grandfather set out with the mill cart drawn by his largest carthorse. The strong current across the road took the horse and cart downstream and his grandfather had to jump for his life. Luckily the horse struggled out of the water near Woodford with the harness still attached to the broken shafts of the cart, which had probably acted as buoyancy aids. The cart was never found. Much later in the century, the writer returned home one Friday evening to find his parents, quite unconcerned about the rising water which was coming through the keyhole in the door.

If you have managed to struggle through all the confusion to this point I can only apologise for the lack of clarity. It is still unclear to me, at certain points in the history who was doing what in which mill. The river has changed but the many arms of the river lead us to believe that there were at least two mills at Mill Cottons. We do know that all have long ceased working, (although at the time of writing, in 2011, Willy Watt Mill is being renovated). As we walk or cycle or fish and look into the clear water perhaps, on reflection, they are better gone. Like many industrial places they are at their best in retrospect.

Postscripts:

1 *Films were made in Irthlingborough in the very early days of cinema and one, 'The Poacher's Sweetheart' described in an advertisement of the 8th July 1916 edition of the Poverty Bay Herald in New Zealand as a 'Three-Reel Masterpiece' featured a Ringstead Mill. Tony Ireson tells that, 'the villain imprisoned the heroine there but she escaped and swam the Nene, rushed to the courthouse on a newfangled motor-cycle and sidecar, saved the hero from the black cap and arranged the downfall of the villain'. Does the film still exist? Little of the more famous epic, 'The Battle of Waterloo' remains so perhaps it has gone.*

2 *A previous owner of the Willy Watt Mill also told of the past when it too was used for paper production. He remembers hearing that the workers would tread bark and rags to help soften it before it was made into a form of paper parchment. Two workers from Ringstead were said to have died as a result of working in this way, he believed from some disease or poisoning contracted from this treading process. Perhaps it was the bark itself but, increasingly, chemicals were used. Chlorine bleach was introduced to produce white paper and arsenic was also sometimes used to prevent mould from forming. In damp houses arsenic in wallpaper was known to poison people in Victorian times. It has even been alleged that this is what killed Napoleon in exile.*

3 *David Phillips states that Ringstead Lower mill - was demolished when the Blisworth - Peterborough railway was built in 1845 but all the three mills mentioned here are shown on both the 1835 and 1871 maps so was it another one?*

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Chapter Thirteen

Australian Journey

Susannah Arthur, formerly Lennell, neé Phillips (1826-1910)

Villagers in the nineteenth century wanted to emphasise continuity rather than difference when naming their children. This is the story of another Susannah Phillips who was the aunt of her namesake who married John Ball. In old age this Susannah was known as *Tiny Grandma* rather as Susannah Ball was called *Little Granny*. But there, the similarities end. This fascinating life story was sent to me by Robyn and Ned Knight and they have kindly allowed me to use it in this book. Susannah was born in Raunds but her parents came from Ringstead so she wins her place here.

Susannah, or Susannah Catherine as she was sometimes known, was born on 10th November, according to a family member's Birthday Book, and was christened on 24 December, 1826, at Raunds, Northamptonshire, England. Susannah always stated that she was born at Thrapston, which is about 4 kilometres from the village of Raunds. Her parents were John Phillips and Elizabeth nee Rands. At the age of 14, at the time of the 1841 Census, Susannah was working as a servant at a Public House called *The Red House* in Raunds.

On 16 October, 1843, at St. Mary's Church of England, Leighton, Huntingdonshire, England, Susannah married Edward Linnell, Labourer, son of Edward Linnell and Sarah (neé Coe). As far as can be determined, there were no children, for Susannah and Edward, born in England, prior to their departure for Australia, although her death certificate states that she had lost 5 sons and a daughter. Two sons were born and lost in Australia, leaving 4 children possibly born and died in England or on board ship.

Susannah and Edward travelled to South Australia on *La Belle Alliance*, initially leaving London on 28th February 1847. The ship proceeded as far as Madeira (Portugal), where a heavy gale damaged the upper rigging of the ship, forcing her return to Plymouth for repair. The voyage recommenced on 4 April, 1847, arriving in Adelaide on 5th July 1847, where she ran aground. She was refloated and arrived at the Queen's Wharf on the morning of 7th July 1847. On their arrival Edward and Susannah were recorded as 'Edwd Linnel and wife'. After arrival in South Australia, the name was mostly recorded as 'Lennell'.

Edward found labouring work at Pine Forest, South Australia, where their first two Australian children, John Phillips Lennell (1848) and Elizabeth Lennell (1850) were born. Unfortunately, John Phillips died as a result of Hydrocephalus (Water on the Brain) in 1850 at Enfield, South Australia. A second John was born in Munno Para in 1851, but he survived only 5 days, suffering convulsions. Another daughter, Sarah Catherine (Kate), was born at Little Para in 1853, and a son William was born at Munno Para in 1855. The family then moved towards Virginia, with son Frederick being born at Gawler Plains in 1857, however, their next son Thomas was born in Adelaide in 1859. By 1862, the family was living at Farrell's Flat, daughter Mary Ann being born at Mintaro. The last child, Matilda

was born in Kooringa (the original name for Burra, a major South Australian Copper mining town) in 1864, where Edward had found employment as a teamster.

Susannah was tragically left widowed in 1866, when Edward unexpectedly died from Pericarditis, in Kooringa. Her family ranged from 16 year old Elizabeth to 2 year old Matilda and the family were in dire straits. This situation was remedied on Christmas Day, 1866, when Susannah married, at Kooringa, recently widowed, Tribute mining team leader, George Arthur, a Cornishman, the father of six surviving children. George's youngest boy was also two years old. Susannah's 16 year old daughter Elizabeth married too that day to George Holmes, also a miner. The combined family then moved to Moonta Mines where George Arthur worked. (There is no recorded issue from this marriage, although Susannah's death certificate states that she had one deceased son from the marriage.)

Adopting the religion of her Cornish husband, Susannah became very active in her local church, becoming a Sunday School Teacher at the East Moonta Primitive Methodist Church. She had no formal education, and at the time of both her marriages, was unable to sign her name.

Tragically, in 1872, her daughter Elizabeth Holmes died at the Doora Mine, near Kadina, leaving two surviving children. Her son-in-law, George Holmes, who quickly remarried to provide a mother for his children, later died tragically in 1895, in a mine accident in Broken Hill, in which a number of former Copper Triangle miners were also killed.

Daughter Kate married, in 1872, James Henry Brown, who, although described as a miner on his marriage certificate, was a horseman of note, and who was eventually to take charge of the Wallaroo Mines' stables. James made the famous Easter horse and trap trip to Adelaide to register a mining claim for Captain Hancock, the mine manager.

Her son, William, married at Moonta, in 1877, Sarah Jane Medlen, known as Jane. Several of their children succumbed to Typhoid at Moonta Mines, and they moved, initially to Adelaide, and then to Kanowna, in Western Australia. Son, Thomas, was ambitious, and after his marriage to Susanna Coad in 1881 in Adelaide, and after working at various mines in South Australia, he moved to Boulder, Western Australia where he became a Mine Manager and a Councillor.

Frederick remained at Moonta Mines, after marrying Emma Jerram in 1877, and several of his children worked in the mines. His first born son, Edward Austin Lennell married Florence May Verran, daughter of John Verran, who became a Premier of South Australia. Two of Frederick's sons served in the First World War, one, Leigh Treweek Lennell lost an arm in the fighting, and the other, Fred Jerram Lennell, is buried with Susannah at the Moonta Cemetery.

Mary Ann married William Curnow, another Cornish Miner, in 1879 at Moonta, and, after George Arthur's death in 1895, Susannah lived with them in Wattle Street near the East Moonta Church. She was living with them at her death on 4 February 1910.

Six months after her stepfather's death, Matilda, Susannah's youngest daughter, at 30 years old, married Jonathon Sanders, a miner, at Wallaroo Mines. Jonathan, and later Matilda, was very active in the Salvation Army, and they moved to Port Pirie. (Jonathan's nephew, Charlie Sanders was a well known Moonta character, whose loss of an arm at 8 years old did not impede his active life.)



Susannah in old age

Susannah Arthur is remembered in her obituary as 'an old and highly respected resident of the district'. She became a legend in her family and was described by her family as tiny Grandma Arthur, and her photograph shows a short, but quite round lady. Susannah's family was very important to her and she would be proud of her family's achievements. She is the ancestor of war servicemen (one paying the ultimate sacrifice), doctors, nurses, lawyers, accountants, businessmen, miners, a Commonwealth Games gold medallist, three Mail Medallists (for Australian Rules football in South Australia), and a prominent Australian Football League (AFL) footballer. A significant number of her descendants were, and are, in community work in some way, and many are keen sportspeople.

Susannah was buried in an unmarked grave (Row 6, Plot 306) at Moonta Cemetery. Her descendants, after a family gathering in Moonta in 1997, placed a headstone to honour her memory.

*

We believe the above information is accurate, to the best of our knowledge. The research has been undertaken over 20 years and has been, where possible, verified by official records.

29 September 2008 Ned Knight, Great Great Grandson, and Robyn Knight.

Chapter Fourteen

New World Homes

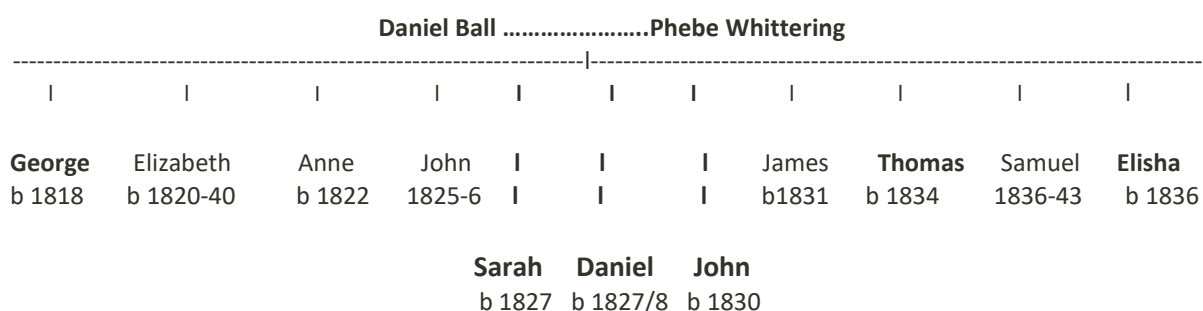
Ball, Daniel (c1827 -), Ball, John (c1825 -) and Nobles (nee Ball), Sarah (c1823 -)

Daniel Ball and Phebe Whittering were married on 7th August 1817 in Ringstead Parish Church. Daniel was a shepherd and over the next twenty years they produced their own flock of eleven children. It seems an ordinary, sedentary family welded to the country side of its birth but, as in the nursery rhyme, many of the sheep were lost, and it may be that only the youngest, Elisha, came home with his tale to tell.

George, the eldest, joined the Royal Marines and, perhaps, set the pattern for his brothers and sisters. Elizabeth, the second child was born in 1820 and I believe died in 1840. John, the second oldest boy, had been born in 1825 and died just one year later. Ann, the second oldest girl survived and married George Mays and stayed in the village Then followed Sarah, Daniel and a second John and it seemed that these formed their own group and took the leap together into the unknown. It is their story that we will be trying to piece together here.

It is worth remembering that, of the younger siblings, James born in about 1831 married Emma Storks and stayed locally and Samuel born in 1836 was buried aged just 7 on November 9th 1843 but that Thomas and Elisha whose stories we have also told left the nest before 1871, one to join the army and the other to seek his fortune in the New World and come back disappointed.

Chart to show where the three siblings of our story sat in family tree



*All birth dates are approximate (and vary through the Censuses in most cases).
I have noted the dates of those who died very early and have also highlighted George, Thomas and Elisha who also left the area (although Elisha returned).*

Of all Daniel and Phoebe's children, by 1861, only Ann (now Mays) and James were still alive and living locally. Why this scattering of the family? We can only speculate but we do know that in 1841 Ringstead was finally 'Enclosed'. It was a very late Parliamentary Enclosure but it had much the same effect as the earlier ones. Small farmers were bought out, cottagers and those with rights on the

common land lost them. The labourers lost the perks of the crops, the grazing and firewood that were part of their lives and became totally dependent on paid employment. Mechanisation also reduced the need for labourers and the new industrial towns and cities drew them in.

High prices and low wages were bringing many families to the breadline and the New World, a place of opportunity and goldmines, with cheap passages advertised in the local papers must have been an exciting if fearful prospect.

We know that, in the 1851 Census, Daniel and Phoebe are living in Ringstead with their children; Daniel, the son, is 22 and an agricultural labourer; Mary (24) is Daniel's new wife and a lacemaker; John (21) is an under gardener; Thomas (17), an agricultural labourer and Elisha, the youngest, is a scholar. We also know that Sarah (26) has married Thomas Nobles and is also living in Ringstead. She is an 'Ag Lab's wife' with her daughter Phoebe who is two years old. Thomas is away, possibly with his parents in Pilton.

By 1861 only Elisha is living with his parents and, apart from those we have mentioned, the others are nowhere to be found in England.

On 28th June 1852 the packet-ship *Jacob A Westervelt* arrived in New York from Liverpool. It had been built in 1849 and was a wooden hulled sailing ship named after the firm of its builder. It was part of the American *Black Star Line* and had first put into Liverpool on 10th January 1850. She was a large three-decker, able to take 900 passengers, and was well equipped with a surgeon's room, bath rooms and separate hospitals for men and women. We know that in 1852 it did its fastest run from New York to Liverpool of 14 days 12 hours but that was with the prevailing westerly winds. Journeys to the United States could be much longer.

The sailing packets, unlike most passenger ships, ran to a timetable, whatever the weather, and had three, rather than the usual two, crossings a year. These fast times, in sailing terms, meant that as much sail as possible was maintained in all weathers. This did result, sometimes, in crossings that could be rough and fraught with danger.

In the previous year, on 31st May 1851, the ship, with 800 passengers on board, bound for New York, grounded on the Old South Shoal within sight of Sankaty, (where a lighthouse had begun operation just a year earlier) in Nantucket. Luckily, the steamboat *Massachusetts* managed to put a pilot on board and she was guided to safety. In the following year, in December 1853, the *Jacob A Westervelt* foundered on the coast of Newfoundland but all 700 passengers survived. Later, on 12th April 1860, the *New York Times* reported on a fire, which had happened the day before on the ship while it was in the harbour, which it thought had probably destroyed it. In fact, it appears that in 1862 it was sold to the Black Bull Line and renamed *Southern Empire* and used on the long England to Australia emigrant route.

Incidentally, this report of the *New York Times* reveals something of the times, both the fear of new technology and the violence of the new cities. It, tells of one of the members of a fire service going to the blazing ship.

A brutal assault was made upon JOHN ROSS, a member of Manhattan Company No. 8 and a clerk in the General Post Office, who was running through Chatham-street to overtake his

Company. When near the corner of Pearl street, his uniform attracted the attention of a gang of 'Dead Rabbits', who are hangars-on of an Engine Company who entertain sentiments of envy toward the steam-engines and one of the scoundrels dealt him a blow from behind with a heavy club, that laid him prostrate on the walk . . .

Those that disembarked from that 1852 voyage were, therefore, lucky that they had arrived without serious incident. It still would have been an unpleasant and frightening journey for passengers, many of whom had probably not seen the sea before they reached Liverpool. There were conmen in Liverpool, known as the *Forty Thieves*, who preyed particularly on the Irish families that were escaping from the 'Famine'. They worked for crooked shopkeepers, money changers (for dollars) and landlords who tried to take what little money the emigrants had. The vast exodus of the Irish famine victims was beginning to wane and regulation was starting to improve the conditions for the waiting emigrants as well as the resident population. Liverpool, however, still had vast slums and cholera and typhus were rife. The emigrants had to keep their wits about them if they were not to lose their health and their money before they embarked on their journey.

Even the boarding of the ship could be a frightening experience, for some captains made sure the cargo was stored and the cabin passengers installed before they allowed the steerage passengers on board. The captain would also, by then, be making ready to cast off and there was often a mad scramble up the gangplank by the poor passengers, carrying their few boxes and possessions. Some did 'miss the boat' and some were drowned in the dock.

The crossing was planned to take between sixteen and thirty days according to the weather conditions. The 'Saloon' or 'First Cabin' of the *Jacob A. Westervelt* was lined with satinwood, zebrawood and rosewood, with brilliant pier-glasses, and painted white and gold. These fortunate few would be provided with meals and all services. The steerage passengers, on the other hand, were only provided with 'coals, water and bread stuff' for their £5 ticket. They were crammed together in the lower decks with fourteen square feet of space allowed per passenger (half that for children and nothing for infants). They had to cook their own meals in the few places provided on deck and generally fend for themselves. The *New York Daily Times* of 13 December 1891, comparing the new steamships with the old sail packets, describes the earlier accommodation:

The steerage occupied the whole of the 'tween decks. Single and double and upper and lower berths were arranged all around the sides of the ship. As far as possible families were placed together and the women passengers given all the privacy possible in the limited space available. The steerage was reached by ladders at the fore and main hatches which were always open except in bad weather, and ventilators through the deck and a windsail or two [a sail designed to funnel air to the lower decks] furnished the fresh air of the steerage. Should weather become stormy and the sea heavy the hatches were closed and the poor emigrant had to make the best of his surroundings until the weather moderated.

It was a harsh world where crew and stowaways could be flogged and beaten but certainly the Irish passengers were known to try to make the best of it, and help the time to pass, with music and dancing.

When they finally arrived, the emigrants would have looked at the new city with awe and, one would guess, with fear. It too had people trying to rob and cheat them but, by 1848, the State of New York had established immigrant reception centres and licensed boarding houses and in 1852 *Emigrants' Homes*, made from converted warehouses, were offering reasonable, clean temporary accommodation.

Among the passengers shuffling off that ship in June 1852 were a group of young country men and women who were noted briefly on the Passenger List. (it is not always clear to whom the 'Labourer' description applies.)

<i>John Ball</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Labourer</i>
<i>Eliza Ball</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Labourer</i>
<i>Mary Ball</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Labourer</i>
<i>Daniel Ball</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Labourer</i>
<i>George Ball</i>	<i>infant</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>5 months old</i>
<i>Thomas Noble</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Labourer</i>
<i>Sarah Noble</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>Female</i>	
<i>Phoebe Noble</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Female</i>	

As we have seen, Sarah Ball had married Thomas Nobles (13th June 1849) so here we have the siblings and their spouses together in the port of New York. There is only one problem. Who is Eliza Ball, aged 21? Unfortunately the list does not include the marital status so we do not know if Eliza is a wife or a relation. We know that Daniel's wife was Mary, born in Warmington, from the 1851 English Census but we can find no sign of a marriage for John. He had a sister, Elizabeth, who was baptised in 1820, so she would have been some ten years older and we also believe that she is the Elizabeth Ball who was buried on 15th December 1840 aged 20. The Register does not give parents but she does seem to be the only Elizabeth Ball of this age in the parish. There is an Eliza Ball, daughter of Edward Ball, born and living in Denford in 1851. She may be a cousin, although we have not proved this. Could she have gone with the Balls and Nobles? We must look to America, to see if it provides any answers.

As Eliza is an enigma at the moment we will look at the three siblings first, to see if we can find their progress in their new land. So far, their movements in those first eight years, has not been established. Had they made plans before they left? Did they stay together at first until they could decide what to do?

We first find Daniel and Mary in the 1860 Federal Census living in Schroepel, Oswego, New York State. Mary is 30 which is what we would expect but Daniel is 43 which is some ten years too old. With them is George, now 8, and shown, like his parents, as born in England. There are now two further children, Mary, 6, and James, 4, both born in New York State. Daniel is a described as a farmer.

The 1870 Census confirms our suspicion that the 1860 Census gives the wrong age, because he is now 44. Mary is 44 too, which is also the age we would be expect from the 1851 English Census. George is 19 and his occupation is now 'Farming', Mary is 17, with no occupation shown, but James,

aged 13, is also in farming. There are also Clara 7 and William 5 who are both at school. The family are living in the town of Palermo in the county of Oswego.

It seems that Daniel and Mary had found their home. In 1880 he is still farming in Palermo and all the children are still at home. George is at home in farming and his younger brother James is a labourer. Mary is a servant and the two youngest children Clara and William aged 16 and 13 are still at school. There is only one obvious cloud in that, beside George now aged 27, is the word 'Insane'. It may be that he had learning difficulties but we cannot be sure.

The 1890 USA Federal Census is largely lost, burnt in a fire, but in 1900 Daniel and Mary, both 73 years old, continue to live in Palermo Township. He is still a farmer and William, now 31, is a labourer and living at home. I have not found George. The Census records that Daniel cannot read or write but both Mary and William can. Daniel also has not naturalised but as the couple come up to their golden wedding anniversary it seems that the family is now American.

*

Let us now look at Daniel's brother, John. It seems certain, because of the evidence of his age and companions that John Ball did go to New York with his siblings. After his arrival the position is a little less certain than with Daniel and, at present, we have a lot of detailed fragments and like shards dug up from the past they could turn out to be from different pots. Gradually, however, the shape of a single human being seems to be emerging.

We will start with his early life. We first saw John at his baptism in Ringstead in 1830 when he was ten months old. The other details of the date of the christening are omitted. By the 1841 Census he is aged 12 and living with his parents and siblings, a few doors from the Vicarage, before the great dispersal of the family begins. He, like his older brother has followed his father as a shepherd. At first, Enclosure along the Nene valley had the effect of creating more pastoral land but sheep farming was not so labour intensive as arable in that time, still, mainly dependent on horsepower and limited but increasing mechanisation.

By 1851 he is aged 21 and an 'Under Gardener'. His older brother, Daniel, is married but he and his new wife are still living with the family. Only James has left to seek his living I believe - by a process of elimination - that he is wrongly put as John Ball, aged 19, born in Ringstead, a shepherd at Wold Lodges in Tansor which is downstream on the Nene, on the other side of Oundle. James moves first to Titchmarsh and then back to Ringstead by 1871.

John, on the other hand seems to disappear from all the Censuses. There is no sign of a burial either.

In desperation I began to scan the websites for news, however belated. Finally I came on a site, which had digitised a book called, *A memorial and biographical history of the counties of Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo and Ventura, California*. It was published in 1891 and in it I found the following short passage.

JOHN BALL, whose fine ranch borders the Santa Ynez River, was born in Northamptonshire, England in 1831.

His father, Daniel Ball, was a farmer, and subject lived at home until 1850, when he came to the United States and first settled at Lockport, New York, where for three years he was servant in a hotel. Then, in 1853, he went to Oswego County and farmed up to 1856, when he came to California, by way of Panama.

He then went to the mines in Nevada County and mined for three years with good success, but on account of failing health he was obliged to leave; so went to Monterey County where he rented from 200 to 400 acres and raised grain for sixteen years. In 1876 he came to Lompoc, and bought eighty acres of land, paying \$35 per acre. The land was covered with brush and timber, but is now cleared and highly improved. He carried on general farming up to 1885, but since then has been an extensive breeder of hogs, of the Poland-China, Essex and Berkshire breeds, keeping about 150 head and fattening for market. He is about reducing his stock, to return to the cultivation of beans and mustard, and thus change his farming. Mr. Ball was married at Castorville [sic], Monterey County, in 1863, to Miss Elizabeth Staley, a native of Missouri. They have but one child living, Charles Ball, who was born July 6 1869, and he still lives at home. They lost their two daughters in 1879, with diphtheria, dying within four days of each other.

On the balance of evidence it seems this is our John. The date of birth is a couple of years wrong and he emigrated not in 1850 but in 1852 as we have seen. On the other hand, his father was Daniel Ball from Northamptonshire. It says Daniel was a farmer but that is an understandable upgrade. We cannot be certain, but looking at the lives at some of his siblings, it does seem very possible.

His brother, Daniel was in Oswego County as a farmer, where John's biography says he also farmed. It looks as if the two brothers were together at the start but either they fell out or John decided to try his luck in California. In the biography it also states that he had been mining in Nevada County, California. It seems likely that he went to seek his fortune in the gold mines that were in the county. At this time, the use of water to separate and find the gold had begun, with devastating effects, as this extract from a University of California website makes clear:

The Gold Rush, positive for California in so many ways, had a devastating effect on the state's environment. Many of these problems were directly related to gold-mining technology. The process of hydraulic mining which became popular in the 1850's caused irreparable environmental destruction..... California's largest hydraulic mine {was} Malakoff Diggings in Nevada County.

Dams (such as the English Dam in Nevada County) . . . which were constructed to help supply water to the mines during the dry summer months, changed the course of rivers. The sediment washed away by hydraulic mining clogged river-beds and lakes, threatening agriculture throughout the Central Valley. Conflicts arose between mining and farming interests. Hydraulic mining essentially came to an end in 1884 . . .

Checking the American Censuses, I have not yet found John in 1860 but, according to the biography he married Elizabeth Staley in Castroville in 1863 and, in 1868, in Monterey County, he became a naturalized United States citizen. In 1870, we find the family in Castroville Township, in the county of Monterey. There is Elizabeth aged 39, with the children, Mary 6, Narcissa 4 and Charles 1. John is

away but all around are farmers and farm labourers. It states that Elizabeth was born in Kentucky but this is possible, although it does introduce some uncertainty. There is also the possibility that this Elizabeth is John's second wife although, as yet, we have no evidence except his late marriage and the enigma of the Eliza Ball who was on the Jacob A. Westervelt with him.

We know, from the biography, that John moved to Lompoc in 1876. It seems that Lompoc was only founded in 1874 when the Lompoc Land Company bought and sold 43,000 acres to establish a temperance colony. The Lompoc History site reports that:

A land rush ensued with fierce bidding forcing land prices to skyrocket in just one day. The temperance colony flourished, despite being located on the stage line midway between the 'wicked' cities of Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo. Liquor inevitably found its way into the town via passing stagecoaches. Local druggists were also known to stock alcohol 'for medicinal purposes'. The city of Lompoc was incorporated on August 13th 1888. At that time the courts ruled that the temperance clause included in all deeds to that time was unenforceable, since there was no reversion clause. The lands could not revert to the Lompoc Valley Land Colony, since it was disbanded years earlier. Temperance, therefore, ended with the incorporation of the City.

The biography tells us that in 1876 he bought land near the Santa Ynez River which he cleared and farmed there. The farm was on the river edge, west of Lompoc, and had a river crossing which is still called Ball's Crossing. By good fortune Armilda Carter Douglass also moved to Lompoc in 1876 and she has left her memories of that time. She tells of the droughts when, 'During that winter [1876-7] not enough rain fell at any one time to lay the dust'. and the floods that meant the early farmers lived, in those early years, on the edge of starvation. She also tells of the farmers' inexperience that caused them great hardship:

When first beans were planted in the valley, no one knew just how ripe pods had to be before they should be picked. Consequently, the farmers waited until the pods were so dry that the beans would pop out if any effort to pick them was made during the day time. In order to gather the crop, pickers waited until night fogs moistened the pods and crawled down the furrows on their hands and knees in the dark picking beans all night long.

She also tells, however, of people helping each other in times of trouble and sharing surpluses during those early years of famine.

In 1879 we know, from the biography, that John and Elizabeth's two girls died of diphtheria, which was during an epidemic which took the lives of other Lompoc children, and in the 1880 Census, Charley aged 10 is now on his own. We find him with his parents in Santa Barbara County, California. Elizabeth is 49 and born in Kentucky and John, now returned, is aged 50 and is a farmer. The Census was taken on 4th June 1880 so John must have been born between June 5th 1829 and June 4th 1830. This would mean that his birth comes within the time span we would expect from his baptism in Ringstead rather than the one quoted in the book. It is a small point but it does show that many dates in family histories are not facts but best guesses.



Lompoc 4th July 1909 West Ocean.

With the kind permission of Lompoc Historical Society.

There is at least one further twist in the story of John Ball. Myra Manfrina has informed me, from the Lompoc Local History resources, that Elizabeth divorced John in 1892 and took back her maiden name. On September 28th 1895 the *Santa Maria Times* of Santa Barbara reported:

MARRIED Mr John Ball of Lompoc and Mrs. Della Gale of Santa Maria, September 25th 1895 at the residence of Rev. Jas. M. Smith.

The Santa Barbara County marriage register 1887-1897 has been transcribed and digitised and it shows that John was 64, which is about the age that we would expect, and Della was 49.

In the 1900 Census a John Ball, aged 70, born in England in March 1830 is a widower and living by himself in Township 3, Santa Barbara, California. His marriage to Della was not a long one. The Census also records that he had come to the USA in 1850 and was now a teamster. His son Charles married Alice Brookshire in about 1890 and they had two sons and brought up their family in the Santa Barbara area. His first wife, Elizabeth, is buried in the same plot as her two daughters.

John died on March 9th 1905 and the Morning Press newspaper on the following day was a brief statement:

OLD RESIDENT DEAD

John Ball, an old resident of this county passed away yesterday afternoon at the county hospital at the age of 75 years. He was a native of England but had lived in this locality for many years. He has been confined in the hospital for two years, the cause of his death being the natural decline of old age. He leaves a widow in Lompoc and a son in Santa Maria.

I think that the assertion of a widow may be an error and may refer to Elizabeth. Two John Balls half a world apart who between them have crossed the Atlantic and then sailed around the USA through the Panama Canal to California. They have married and had the tragedy of the death of their two girls. It seems almost certain, with the evidence of the crossing with his brother and sister, the stated coming from Oswego County in New York State and his father being a Daniel Ball from Northamptonshire, that the two are in fact the same person.

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Let us finally look at Sarah and her husband Thomas Nobles (or Noble). In 1860 Sara aged 39, the age that we would expect from the 1851 Ringstead Census, was living in Lysander in Onondaga County in New York State. Thomas (34) is a Farmer and Phebe (13) has two siblings, William (6) and Elizabeth (6). By 1870 they are living in Avon, Livingston, in New York State. Thomas is still a farmer, Sarah is 'keeping house' and the two younger children, William T (14) and Elizabeth (13) are still at home, both born in New York State.

In 1880 they are at Henrietta, in the county of Monroe, still in New York State and Thomas is 53 and Sarah 58. William, their son, is 24 and a farmer, presumably with his father and Elizabeth is a dressmaker. Sarah is still keeping house. We next see Sarah aged 74, now a widow, living with William, and his wife and children, in Rush also in Monroe county. Thomas had died on July 13th 1892 in the Halineramin Hospital in Rochester. William, like his father, is a farmer and his son Elwin is a 'farm labourer'. Perhaps surprisingly, considering the hard life that she must have had that is not our last sighting of her in the Federal Censuses. In 1910, aged 87, she is living with her eldest daughter Phoebe (60) and her husband Mathew Flowerday apparently some ten years her senior (although only 6 years older in earlier Censuses), in Brighton, Monroe County, New York State. None of them are working and let us hope that they were able to live comfortably in the land they had played a small part in making. Matthew and Phebe have been married 40 years but have had no children.

*

We cannot be completely certain, but it appears that the three siblings, Daniel, John and Sarah all stayed in the United States and made their lives there in farming. The younger brother, Elisha, who came a decade later, went first to Elmira in New York State and then on to Canada. For some reason, he and his family returned to Ringstead. Perhaps, as we have speculated in his biography, he came too late to get the land and the life that he wanted.

There is another important fact that we have so far not mentioned. The American Civil War raged from 12th April 1861 to April 1865. The War claimed some 620,000 lives, which is more than the combined American dead from all other wars between 1775 and 1975. New York State was not in the area of conflict between the Union and Confederate forces but volunteers were recruited from the area and many died in the vicious battles that characterised the war. As the History of Oswego County, written in 1877, states:

No portion of the Empire State exhibited more patriotism or responded with greater alacrity to the president's call for Volunteers than the county of Oswego.

Many families in the area, as also in California, where John and his family were living, would have lost sons. The same book also reports on the boom years after the war and the great financial crisis which began in the autumn of 1873, and from which America was just emerging in 1877.

We cannot be sure how all this affected the Ringstead emigrants but certainly it would have been difficult times and any success in the New World would have been hard won. One wonders how their children and grandchildren fared but that is another story in another country and in another century. We must leave it there.

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My special thanks to Myra Manfrina who provided me with a raft of information on John Ball in the Lompoc area and to Helen Rydell in Santa Barbara who found details of his death.

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Chapter Fifteen

In Nelson's Navy

William Ball (c 1773 – 1852)

At the moment this is one of the biographies that is like one of those infamous cars that are really two entirely different vehicles which have been welded together. I have not yet managed to link the two parts of the story together completely. It just needs one more bit of information on either side of the story to be sure either way.

William Ball is one of the earliest of our Ringstead lives. He was born in about 1773 in Great Addington and crossed the Nene to get married and live. In his later years he was a shepherd with a family but the 1851 Census gives us the clue that his was not a life always spent in the pastures of Ringstead quietly looking after his flocks. In his old age, it describes him as a 'Greenwich Pensioner'. This was the naval equivalent of the more well known Chelsea Pensioner, which was a title reserved for men who had served in the army. There was a magnificent 'hospital' at Greenwich where those with in-pensions lived but the great majority of the pensioners lived at home and were paid a small 'out' pension based mainly on their years of service.

The records do have an entry for a William Ball giving his service so that his pension can be calculated. As there does not appear to be another of that name in the records we have to assume that he is our man. He was engaged on the 9th April 1796 as an Able Seaman acting as a Ship's Carpenter. His first boat was the *HMS Redoubt* which originally had been a civilian boat called the *Rover*. It had been purchased by the navy in 1793 and converted into a 20-gun floating battery and was intended to be used inshore to protect the coast. Its first task was to defend one of the east coast ports. The Napoleonic Wars had raised the fear of invasion. An alternative seat of government had been built at Weedon Bec in Northamptonshire in case London was captured. Also the coastline was fortified and the Martello towers built.

Kingston-upon-Hull, usually known simply as Hull, in the East Riding of Yorkshire was a major port where a citadel had been built in the seventeenth century to defend it against attack from the sea. Now the defences were reinforced and three ships, fitted out as floating batteries, were sailed to the Humber. The *Nonsuch* was anchored in White Booth Roads and the *Redoubt* and the *Nautilus* in the Humber.

We do not know exactly when the *Redoubt* was fitted out but it seems likely that William was helping with the completion of the changes needed for its new role. It does not seem that the three boats saw any action.

On 23rd September 1799, still listed as a carpenter, William was transferred to *HMS Ambuscade*. This was originally a French ship, *L'Embuscade* which had been captured on 12th October 1798 by Rear Admiral Sir J. B. Warren's squadron off the coast of Ireland. William was only on board for some five

months, until 14th February 1800. He is again listed as a carpenter and it seems likely that he was repairing and refitting the French boat ready for action as part of the British navy.

The wooden ships meant that often enemy vessels could be quickly recycled to become part of the British fleet. This, together with the purchase of ships from the merchant navy, which were also sometimes sold back when no longer required, meant that there were often a bewildering number of vessels with ever-changing names.



The Immortalité being captured by HMS Fisgard

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_frigate_Immortalit%C3%A9_\(1795\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_frigate_Immortalit%C3%A9_(1795))

On 15th February 1800 William transferred to *HMS Immortalité* which, unsurprisingly, was also a former French ship. This Romaine class frigate, *Immortalité*, had been captured on 20th October 1798 by *HMS Fisgard*, shortly after the Battle of Tory Island. It was a 42-gun 5th Rate ship and saw active service on the Home Station. Once again it seems likely that William was involved in the recommissioning of the vessel but he also remained on the ship for just over five years, until 27th May 1805. A year later, in July 1806, *HMS Immortalité* belied her name and was broken up.

Meanwhile, on 29th May 1805, William joined the *HMS Diomedé* which was a British boat launched in 1798 in Deptford. Soon after joining it appears that William was part of a secret operation far away from the main conflict in Europe. A small fleet carrying various regiments left Falmouth bound ostensibly for the East Indies. They stopped at Madeira and waited for a larger fleet which had left Cork, said to be going to the Mediterranean. It was under the protection of three ships of sixty-four guns, one ship of fifty guns, and two ships of thirty-two guns. The fifty-gun ship was the *Diomedé*. Altogether an army of six thousand six hundred and fifty four men was aboard.

The destination was not the East Indies or the Mediterranean but the Cape of Good Hope. Of course, at the time, events in Europe were distracting the French and the Battle of Trafalgar in October gave

the British supremacy of the seas and stopped the threat of invasion. The Dutch were in possession of the Cape and a century later a bloody war was to be fought over the same ground between the two nations. Strong gales stopped the intended landing which was some sixteen miles from Cape Town. Then the *Diomedé* with the transport ships of the 38th Regiment, the cavalry ships and a proportion of the artillery, preceded by *HMS L'Espoir* sailed to Saldanha Bay. The wind abated overnight and on the afternoon of the 6th January the troops were landed with the loss of one boat which had ventured beyond the protection of the bay.

The action led to the capture of the Cape and, we read that, on 9th February 1806 William was promoted to Acting Master Shipwright at the Cape of Good Hope. Was his worth recognised or did someone die or leave the ship?

Here his record becomes a little confusing. If we look at the *Diomedé*'s progress after the Cape of Good Hope we find that she was part of a strange action in South America where, without government approval, an attack was made in the River Plate region of South America. An unsuccessful attack on Buenos Aires was followed by the capture of Monte Video.

After the capture of Monte Video the *Diomedé* returned to England and was put out of commission in June 1807. The problem is that William seems to have left the service and possibly the *Diomedé* in February 1807. We need to check if the *Diomedé* had docked in England by that date. He then appears to lose his rank of Acting Master Shipwright and there also seems to be a break in his service record of some seven months. This may just be a confusion in the records.



Author's rough sketch of a ship's carpenter at about this time.

William joined *HMS Berwick* on 5th September 1807 and again there is something of a problem. The *Berwick* was commissioned in 1809 There seems to be at least three possibilities: he was stationed at a shipbuilding yard in Berwick-on-Tweed not on a ship; he was in commissioning the San Juan Nepomuceno which was a Spanish ship captured at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 and was briefly renamed HMS Berwick but was then named San Juan (presumably when the new Berwick was launched), and acted as a supply hulk in Gibraltar harbour; he worked on the HMS Berwick, a 74-gun third rate ship of the line launched in 1809, both before and after it was launched.

More research is needed before we make too many assumptions about William's final years in the navy. He remained in, or on, the Berwick until he finally left the navy on 3rd October 1816. There is one last document from the Public record office which gives us a little more information and perhaps clarifies the situation. It records that on a ship named the Berwick a William Ball 'Passed for Lieutenant', on 5th January 1815 and became a Lieutenant from 6th March of the same year. He seems to have remained so until 1st July 1816. There is a slight discrepancy in the discharge dates so there is the possibility that there were two William Balls on the Berwick who were discharged the same year but it seems unlikely. Underneath the main details it records 7/= [35 pence]. Was this his pay or the contribution to his pension?

Returning now to William's civilian life, we know that William married Ann Weekley on 7th July 1814 at Ringstead Parish Church with, unusually, three witnesses, Henry Weekley, Eliza Goodwin and Hannah Park. He is described as a bachelor and she as a spinster. It also states that bride and groom are 'BOTP', (Both Of This Parish), but that did not mean that he had been resident long in Ringstead. It could have been a matter of a week or two. If we look at the most logical scenario, that William was on the HMS Berwick that was launched in 1809, she had taken part in the action that brought about the surrender of Genoa in April 1814. It had then returned to Portsmouth for a refit.

It is possible, therefore, that William could have been on shore leave for his wedding day. He was about forty at the time of his marriage and his bride was around thirty-three years of age. I have not found Ann's baptism, unless she was christened Mary on March 30th 1783, daughter of William and Susannah Weekley. Certainly their witness, Henry Weekley, was christened, two years later, of the same parents. (At the wedding it states the Banns are 'with Consent of Parents' which usually implies that one of the parties is under the statutory age. Both William and Ann are well over this age so either it is a mistake or William married two Anns and we have taken them as one. I can find no evidence of this second possibility so we must take it as a small error).

William and Ann were quite old to be starting a family but they lost no time and the children soon followed. Mary may have been the result of the same shore leave for she was christened on June 12th 1815 (worryingly William is described as a labourer in the Register). The records show that William's naval career possibly ended in 1816 and William Weekley Ball was baptised in 1818, John in 1821 and Henry 1824. By the time of the christening of John, William is described as a shepherd.

In general the two lives of William, although they overlap, do fit together reasonably well. The 1851 Census for Ringstead has William Ball, father of the head of the house, John Ball, aged 78 and a Greenwich Pensioner. Ann too, is still alive aged 76.

William and Ann both died within the next few years. William's death certificate tells us that he died of 'old age' on 15th June 1852 at Ringstead aged 78 years. At least he did not end up in the workhouse. Perhaps the pension helped them both enjoy a decent old age. He is recorded as a shepherd so we have no clue as to his naval past. Their youngest son, Henry had died as a young child but they had seen their other children, Mary, William and John prosper and join the Victorian middle class. However, the tragic affair of their son William and the disappearance of Lydia Attley would have soured their final years.

There are some worrying holes in the story of the, as yet, two Williams. The parish register never records him as a sailor, even when he was still in the navy. On the other hand there has been a story within my family that one of my ancestors was a sea captain and William is one of only two possibilities for this role. [Family stories often upgrade the importance of an ancestor]. We must wait to see if that elusive last piece of evidence needed emerges from the archives.

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Chapter Sixteen

Musicians, Baptists and Chemists

Abington, Leonard Joseph (1763-1842) and Herbert Joseph (1808-1884).

We have told the story of Jedidah (or Jedidah or Louisa) Abington who went to live in Manchester and then returned in middle age and married the butcher, John Ball. We also mentioned her father Herbert and this is his story but also, briefly, that of his father and two of his brothers.

Let us start with the father, Leonard Joseph Abington, who was born on the 11th June 1763 in St Marylebone, London. He was the son of another Leonard Abington who was a violinist and bass singer, possibly singing at Westminster Abbey. He also composed songs for Vauxhall Gardens, a notorious place of pleasure for the upper classes. Titles such as *The Luckless Lover*, *A Midnight Thought*, *Phillis's Resolution* or *The Power of Love* give some clue to the content of these songs. It seems, however, that he wrote the music to other people's words. In *The History of our Abington Ancestors*, Ian and John Abington reveal that, in the notes, written much later by Leonard Abington Vessey, Leonard by his first marriage 'had a good estate but by negligence and intemperance it was lost'. Leonard Joseph was the only offspring of this second marriage, in 1762, to Elizabeth Jenkins.

Not only was Leonard's father a musician but his grandfather, Joseph Abington Junior (1698 -1774), was a trumpet and harpsichord player (and a lawyer according to his great grandson's Memoir) and his great grandfather, Joseph Abington Senior (1668 – 1745) was one of *His Majesty's Band of Music*. All three are listed in *Mortimer's London Universal Directory (1763)* under the heading 'Masters and Professors of Music'. Leonard's address was given as, 'Great Putney-street', Joseph Junior as 'Compton-street, St Anne's, Soho' and Joseph as 'Beauford Buildings'.

We know, therefore, that the Leonard Abington who came to Ringstead is the one listed in *A Musical Directory for the Year 1794* as his father had died only some three years after Leonard's birth, in 1766, of typhus fever. His mother was a widow for 56 years, although she 'enjoyed an ample annuity', as her grandson tells us later, which came as a result of her husband's membership of the *Royal Society of Musicians*. Nonetheless, his father's early death must have had an impact on the family, for Leonard, the only son, was apprenticed as a wood carver to a furniture maker from the age of 12 for seven years, which had been also sponsored by the Society. There is no evidence, however, that he ever followed this trade.

In 1794 Leonard was living at 6 Gilbert Street, Bloomsbury, London and his occupation was given as bass singer and musician. He was also a member of *the Long Acre Society*, *of the Choral Fund* and the *Surrey Chapel Society*. Some ten years before this entry, on 15th October 1784, Leonard had married Jane Bollard in the parish of St George, Holborn in the City of London. Jane was born on 28th February 1764 in Finedon, just a few miles down the road from Ringstead. Was it coincidence or was Jane the link that drew the couple back to Northamptonshire in their old age? How and where did they meet?

The fact that the wedding was in Holborn perhaps makes it more likely that it was Jane who had moved to London rather than the reverse. Jane came from an ordinary labouring family and many of her siblings died before reaching maturity and are buried 'in woollen'. This practice came from an act of Charles II designed to protect the English woollen industry, with a fine if any other cloth was used. Most churches would keep a coffin for use by the poorer parishioners to take the body to the graveside but it would be buried only in the woollen shroud and the coffin taken back to the church ready for the next body. [Another royal Charles is today advocating the use of woollen coffins].

Whellan's History, Topography and Directory of Northamptonshire for 1874 gives a brief biography of Leonard Joseph as being an important personage associated with Ringstead. It tells us:

He was of an ancient family and was a classical scholar of fair repute and the author of the works entitled, 'Letters from the Dead to the Living', 'Consummation' a poem, 'The Living Temple', 'The Rebellion of Korah', a sacred drama, etc.

This does not mention any musical abilities but it does indicate a creative person. It also states that he was from an 'ancient family', so it may be that he had visited among the network of halls and mansions that the upper classes of the day moved among. Could this be how he knew of Northamptonshire or how he met Jane Bollard?

At this point we must introduce Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon. In 1739 she joined the first Methodist Society in Fetter Lane, London. After the death of her husband in 1746/7 she threw all her energies into the revivalist movement of the Wesleys and others and George Whitefield became her personal chaplain. She reluctantly broke away from the Anglican Church and founded the *Countess of Huntingdon's Connection* which was a Calvinistic movement within the Methodist Church. Her family home was at Donnington Park in Leicestershire so around that area particularly, but also elsewhere, she founded some sixty-four chapels. In particular, in 1780, she took over a building called *The Pantheon* adjacent to her London home in Spa Field, Clerkenwell and converted it to a chapel. It had been opened some ten years earlier as a 'place of amusement' selling tea, coffee, wine punch, etc.

The complexities of the coming together and separating of various Nonconformist groups need not concern us here. The important point is that the 'New Connection' came to believe in adult baptism and that only some (not all) people could be saved. In this they were similar to the Particular Baptists.

This relevance of this to our story is that after Leonard James (born 27 November 1785) whose baptism we have not yet found, the next five of Leonard and Jane's children were christened at Spa Fields, Lady Huntingdon's, Clerkenwell. These were Benjamin [Edmund] (born 24 Sep 1787; baptised 16 Dec 1787), Jemima (born 6 May 1791; baptised 29 May 1791), Letitia (born 27 May 1793; baptised 30 June 1793), Ebenezer (born 8 August 1795; baptised 20 Sept 1795), and Rebecca (born 18 May 1800; baptised 14th Sept 1800). As both the birth and baptism dates are given we can see that these are infant christenings.

There is another son, Edwin, born in about 1803 in London whose birth or baptism we have not yet traced and then Emma Jane born on 3 January 1806 and Herbert Joseph born on the 28 October

1808, both of whom had adult baptisms in Ringstead Particular Baptist Chapel. It seems therefore that at some time after 1800 Leonard Joseph became a believer in adult baptism, perhaps, as part of the movement of the 'New Connection' to this belief, or perhaps he was accepted into the Particular Baptist Church.

The Ringstead Particular Baptist Church Book records that Leonard came from 'Mr Stevens' Church of London'. This probably refers to the Rev. John Stevens, a leading preacher of the Particular Baptists, who until 1813 worshipped in Grafton Street, Soho, then in Duke Street, St James and from 1824 in Salem Chapel, Meard Street, Soho. As we have said, the Nonconformist sects were very fluid at this time and changes were often associated with specific preachers forming new congregations. There is evidence that Leonard helped his son, Leonard James, with the restoration of the Baptist Chapel in Hanley and he certainly preached around the area. I have found no proof that he moved completely to the Potteries but that is the belief within the family.

We know from later Censuses that Leonard and Jane's youngest children, Emma, who married shoemaker Samuel Farey and moved to Rushden, was born in St Pancras and Herbert in Somers Town (which is essentially the same area).

Somers Town, by the middle of the nineteenth century belied its name and was a notorious area around St Pancras. For most of the eighteenth century this large triangle of land between the Hampstead, Pancras and Euston Roads was mainly pastoral. Towards the end of that century the rapid covering of the area with, mainly badly built, houses began and by the 1820s it was just another part of the metropolis. Earlier it had been filled with French artisans escaping from the *Reign of Terror*. By the middle of the century the area contained some of the worst housing in London with overcrowding, crime and disease. Plonked in the middle of this was Billingsgate with its street sellers and hucksters: a heaving mass of people from all nations and backgrounds trying to survive on their wits.

What was it like when Herbert was growing up? It was certainly well built-up by 1823. The earlier children of Leonard and Jane had been born in London but whether Somers Town represents a change of home is not clear. Did his father, Leonard Joseph, continue as a musician and scholar or had he become a full-time Baptist Minister or was there another intermediary job? It is possible that he was a man of 'independent means'.

Perhaps surprisingly, it is recorded that his son, Leonard James, who became a well-known radical minister in the Potteries was influenced in his path by his grandmother Elizabeth Abington (nee Jenkins), not his father. She had been converted to Christianity under the ministry of George Whitefield. It was about the year 1800, when he was some fifteen years old, that Leonard James joined the Baptist church. This may be that it was part of the same family conversion, in 1802, that saw Leonard Joseph, his father, become a Baptist and so decide not to give his younger children infant christenings.

Leonard Joseph probably moved to Ringstead, aged 67, to take up the vacant ministry at the Particular Baptist Church. His gravestone in the small Baptist Burial Ground records:

Here are laid the bodies of Leonard Joseph Abington 17 years [sic] Pastor of the adjoining Chapel who died April 12 1842 aged 79 years. Also Jane his beloved wife who died December 24th 1849 aged 85 years.

The Ringstead Baptist Church Book states that Leonard 'was received into this church on 26th Sep 1830...' so the gravestone should read 12 years for his time as Pastor. Certainly the memorial in the schoolroom confirms the lesser time.

It seems likely that Leonard and Jane's youngest children, Emma and Herbert came with their parents to Ringstead as both married local people. Herbert married a local girl, Kezia Bull on 13th September 1835 in Ringstead Parish Church (The Baptist Church did not yet have a licence to conduct marriage ceremonies at that time). Kezia was the daughter of John and Sarah Bull who had been paper-makers at Ringstead Water Mill (not Willy Watt – see the William Mitchell biography). She had been baptised on September 11th 1814 at the Parish Church with her sister Susannah. By 1835 John had died and Sarah had just given up the mill to William Mitchell. As we have described in the Mitchell story, a paper-making mill was a far from idyllic place to live. It was noisy, damp, smelly and dangerous. The Bulls became involved in a number of shops and life in a village grocery shop probably seemed a great improvement for Kezia.

Herbert's eldest brother, Leonard James, who we mentioned earlier, had been a co-deacon of the Baptist 'Little Wild Street Church' in Bloomsbury. Little Wild Street is now called Keeley Street and is a few streets away from Gilbert Street where his father was recorded as living in 1794. [You can still see on Amazon.co.uk individual copies of the famous sermons preached there during the eighteenth century]. Leonard James had become a pottery modeller and worked on the decoration of Drury Lane Theatre and the Bank of England. His first wife had died just a year after their marriage and he had then married Sarah Sandys, the daughter of a Baptist Minister.

In 1819 he had moved away from London for health reasons and settled in Hanley in the Potteries. This would seem an odd choice if 'health' was the real reason. The Potteries, with the smoke belching from the close-packed, coal-fired bottle kilns, as well as the usual housing, water and sewage problems of the nineteenth century industrial towns, meant early mortality was higher than the national average. Even up to the 1920s respiratory diseases were the commonest cause of death.

The local Particular Baptist Church in New Street (now Goodson Street) had closed down in around 1803 but Leonard James bought it and re-opened it in 1820 in an attempt to revive the Baptist movement in the area. He became a radical Baptist preacher and his father Leonard Joseph, also preached in the New Street Church. Is it possible that the family, including his parents and brother Herbert also moved to Hanley before Ringstead? We have no proof and certainly Leonard Joseph appears to have come from London to Ringstead according to the Church Book.

Leonard James became a well known local figure in Staffordshire, editing the *Pottery Mercury* newspaper and, in partnership with two generations of the Ridgeway family, he ran an important pottery. The Ridgeways were 'New Connection' Methodists and with them, on New Year's Eve 1819 he helped set up the *Pottery Philosophical Society*, 'for the purpose of propagating and extending useful and scientific knowledge'. The nineteenth century was the one when science and religion met

head-on, most dramatically with the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Ascent of Man*. Devout Christians, especially those who proclaimed the absolute literal truth of the Bible must have found it a difficult line to walk. Leonard James was a Baptist Minister, but he also gave many of the lectures at the Society and in less formal settings. Steven A Shapin reports that he lectured on:

....geology, mineralogy, metallurgy, conchology, entomology, chemistry, astronomy, heraldry, pottery, the chemistry of pottery, Egyptian antiquities, meteorology and (pausing for breath) revealed religion.

Shapin also relates that the writer of his Memoir tells us that:

While many good and able men trembled for the safety of the Ark of God, and shuddered lest the facts Geology was unfolding should conflict with the Mosaic Record, he looked calmly on, reposing in the assurance that the investigation of Science would strengthen rather than weaken the evidence of its Inspiration. From this steadfast conviction he never swerved and lived to see his fond anticipations fully realized.

In fact he found it more difficult as time went on to support the new discoveries and theories of science and still believed the Mosaic view, that the earth came from water, rather than in the geologists' assertion that it was from 'fire'. Leonard James embodies the two aspects of nineteenth century life, religion and science struggling through unsettling but dynamic times. One imagines there were long conversations between Leonard James and his father, musician and classical scholar as well as Baptist minister.

In the 1851 Census Leonard James is listed as 'Earthenware Manufacturer employing 438 men' and there are two female servants He has also become the Pastor of the Hanley Baptist Church and in 1834 was appointed Chief Bailiff of Hanley. Altogether he seems to have had a very full and busy public life.

As an interesting aside, George Whitefield, who had first converted his grandmother, was probably the most famous preacher of his time, both in England and the United States of America and is, by many, considered the founder of the Evangelical Movement. He held views, however, which most people today would find difficult to reconcile with his charitable work and Christian faith. He lived much of the time in America and was a slave owner and actually helped persuade the state of Georgia to re-legalise slavery in 1751.

A little over a hundred years later in about 1858 Leonard's firm of *Ridgway and Abington* produced a fine stoneware jug. It depicted scenes based on the hugely popular book of the time, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' and is often called the *Anti-slavery jug*.



'Anti-slavery jug' by Ridgway & Abington .
© 2011 Leicester Arts & Museums Service.

Some aspects of Leonard James' life may give clues to the lives of his Ringstead relatives. In the story of his niece Jedidah, we told how she suddenly appears in the Manchester Census as a servant of Carlos Chamberlin (Chamberlain). The *Manchester Guardian* of 25th May 1840 reports on the Anti-Corn Law Conference being held in Manchester. One of the delegates, a Mr Abington, had just arrived from the Potteries and told of the violent strikes there. This was Leonard James, or perhaps more probably, his brother, Edwin Bollard Abington. This may give a clue to the connections that took Jedidah to Manchester later. Manchester in general, and Victoria Park (where she worked), in particular, was closely bound up with the Anti-Corn Law League. It seems possible that it was through her uncles' connections that Jedidah's position was secured.

The other piece in the family jigsaw, that Leonard James may give some help with, is to do with his work. As well as being a partner in the firm he was also the 'Works Chemist' from 1831. His brother Edwin was also an 'operative chemist' in the Hanley pottery industry. This may have some connection with their younger brother, Herbert's later career, as we shall see.

Although his links with Ringstead are tenuous, Herbert's brother, Edwin Bollard Abington, had a life story that is, briefly, worth the telling.

Like his brother, Leonard, Edwin was also a 'Corn Law repealer'. We know this because he gave evidence against the Chartist lecturer and firebrand Wesleyan preacher, Thomas Cooper who, on Friday March 24 1843, had been accused of setting fire to a magistrate's house in Hanley as well as sedition for his preaching in the market square before serious riots and arson took place. The troubles in the area arose from industrial disputes by the coal miners and pottery workers. At the meeting Cooper had read out his poem which included the lines:

*Shout as one man, - 'Toil we no more, renew
Until the Many cease their slavery of the Few!'*

Edwin had, at first not come forward with his evidence because:

*There was a good deal of excitement in the town, and many threats were used towards
persons coming forward to give evidence on the part of the Crown.*

As far as we can tell this may have been the end of his political career but, some eight years later, more domestic matters brought his world crashing down. On 18th March 1851, at Stafford Assizes, he was found guilty of, 'feloniously attempting to procure the miscarriage of his child by Emma Williams'. Judge Thomas Noon Talfourd sentenced him to ten years transportation for his crime.

Edwin was fortunate in that he was sentenced at a time when the Tasmanian and Australian authorities were refusing to receive any more convicts. To find a place, in England, for all those prisoners who were previously transported, a number of convict establishments were built. The first was on the Isle of Portland on the south coast, which was designed 'for the employment and reformation of offenders'. The *Penal Servitude Act* of 1850 substituted prison sentences for all crimes formerly visited by sentences of transportation to a period of less than 14 years. Thus, it was to Portland that Edwin was sent, rather than Australia.

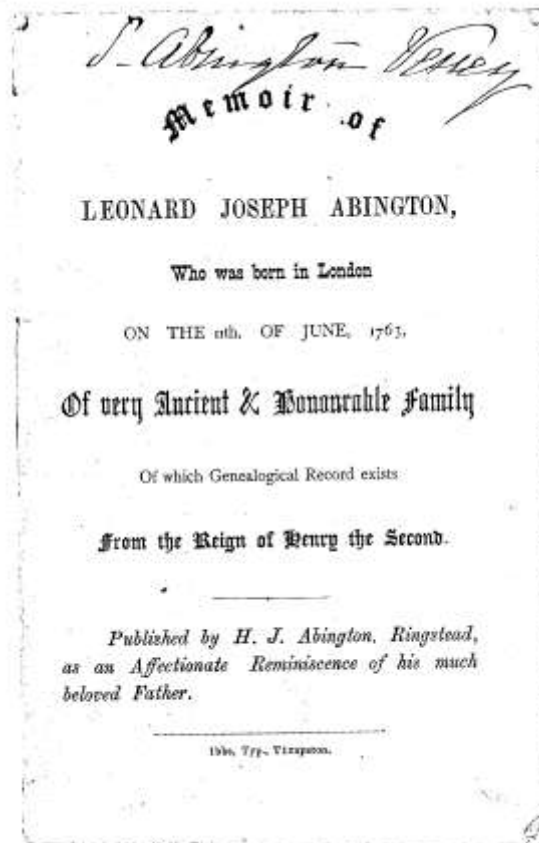
On 5th June 1855 a licence was granted for Edwin's early release after just four years in prison. He was then, it seems, head-hunted by Petrus Regout who had, in 1836, opened a modern mechanised earthenware factory in Maastricht in the Netherlands. The factory struggled to match the quality of the English earthenware but, significantly perhaps, it started to improve at the time when Edwin replaced William Crisp, who was from Sunderland, at the factory. His job was to teach the owner's son, Lodewijk Regout, how to produce quality earthenware. Edwin's pay rose to 432 guilders a month when the average pay was 100 guilders so his worth to the company was recognised. The *Regout-Sphinx* company then went from strength to strength. It may be that Edwin played a vital part in this and it probably would not have helped him to be welcome again in the Potteries. He finished working for Regout in 1873 and died in Maastricht, aged 77, on 18th November 1881.

Our story must return to Ringstead and the brothers' father, Leonard Joseph Abington. It seems likely that, as we have said, he was a classical musician and came from generations of musicians. It is possible that he moved with two of his sons, Leonard James and Edwin, to Hanley, but certainly we know that by 1830 he had moved with his wife and Herbert to Ringstead to take up the post of pastor. It is also possible that he only visited Hanley to preach at his son's chapel. He was already, by the standards of the time, an old man when he came to Ringstead and he became frail during his time as Pastor and in his later years was allowed to preach only, 'when he felt able'. He was still paid £4 a quarter and received a gift of £10 from the Baptist Fund.



Photograph by Agnes Burton (with her kind permission).

The memorial to Leonard, shown above, is on the wall of the schoolroom of the chapel. Someone, unused to Baptist rhetoric, might read into the words of the memorial that Leonard's life had perhaps once been ungodly but that he had been saved and become a good man. In fact the inscription was dictated by Leonard before his death and tells of his gratitude to Jesus Christ for his conversion. His son, Herbert, described it as 'rather unique and striking'. We know this from a little booklet that Herbert published after his father's death. It is a strange 'Memoir' to modern eyes. It is titled as, *An Affectionate Reminiscence of his Much Beloved Father*, but most of it is concerned with listing his father's, (and his), connection to a, 'very Ancient and Honourable family' dating back to Henry II. Perhaps he wanted to make clear to the people of Ringstead that the frail old man that they had seen at the end of his life was a man of importance and breeding. He tells us of Leonard's irreproachable life and that at his funeral there was an 'extraordinary assemblage of people'.



Leonard and Jane had, we believe, nine children. Leonard James, as we have heard, moved to Hanley as a potter. Benjamin Edmund, the second eldest, was born in 1787 and died on 29th May 1830 in London (His son, *Cousin Samuel*, figures prominently in Herbert's son's diary). Could his death have been one of the reasons why, a few months later, his parents moved to the Northamptonshire countryside of his mother's birth? Their two elder daughters both married, Jemima to John Cooper and Letitia to John Winter. They seem to have remained in the London area.

Herbert Joseph, the youngest of the family, is the child who made Ringstead his home. He and his wife Kezia had, like his parents, nine children although one I have not yet confirmed. These were Jedidah, Mary Jane (who probably died in infancy), Leonard, Ebenezer Edwin, Mary Jane, Edmund, Herbert, Joshua and Samuel. Herbert Joseph became a shopkeeper in Ringstead for some forty years and his sons became butchers, bakers, publicans, pawnbrokers and tailors. One daughter, the second Mary Jane, married a shoemaker and Jedidah, later, a local butcher. Henry II was a long time ago. [the Memoir of Leonard James tell us that the main [male] Abington branch of the family lost its lands during the reign of James II when a sister, Mary Abington, married Walter Compton and became a Roman Catholic and obtained *the inheritance of estates in the counties of Worcester, Salop, Hereford, Cambridge etc.*]

We first see Herbert in 1841 as a 'Tea Dealer' living with Kezia and three of his children, Jedidah, Leonard and Edwin. Two years later, as we have told in the story of his daughter Jedidah, Herbert was brought before Wellingborough magistrates and fined 12 shillings for having deficient weights and measures. He was not alone for many shopkeepers were fined for similar offences at this time. It was part of the centralising and standardising of all measurement from Greenwich Mean Time to the

scales in small village shops. Before this many shopkeepers and street traders used deliberately inaccurate scales as well as contaminating foodstuffs to add cheap bulk. It was the poor that mainly suffered. In this case the police and then a Weights and Measures inspector began to check all premises for the first time. Herbert was probably just caught by this new bureaucracy rather than any deliberate wrongdoing. A grocery competitor in Ringstead, James Whiteman was fined £3 12s 0d, some six times greater, so perhaps his reputation was not harmed too much.

By 1851 he is a 'Tea Dealer and Grocer' in Shop Street and there are three more children Mary Jane, Edmund and Herbert. In the 1861 Census two more children are recorded, Joshua and Samuel, but all the older children except Herbert, who is, at 13, a baker, have left home. Mary is only a few doors away working as a servant to the elderly widower John Williamson and his three daughters. Jedidah is now in Manchester. Herbert, aged 62, is still a grocer in 1871 and living with Kezia. Only their son, Herbert, is living with them. As we will see in a later chapter, Herbert junior was very ill and he dies in 1872 aged just 25 years.

Their youngest son, Samuel Edmund also died, aged 18 years, in 1875. He had been working, with his cousin Sarah Vessey and her husband as an apprentice pawnbroker, in Bristol. His death was on the 8th April 1875 of *Phthisis pulmonalis* (T.B.) in Ringstead. It seems that, like his brother, he had come home to die. At least Herbert would have been in a good position to alleviate his suffering, but he would also have had to accept the limitations of his patent medicines. Even the best hospitals had few weapons in the fight against tuberculosis at this time. [See later chapter on Herbert]. The death is reported by his sister Jedidah who was present at his death. It seemed, at first, that she had come home later to look after her widowed father but perhaps it was Herbert and then Samuel who first brought her home from Manchester. Three years after the death of Samuel, on April 1st 1878, Kezia, aged 67, followed Samuel to the grave. Her death certificate records that she had suffered from dementia for five years prior to that. It must have been a difficult and tragic time for Herbert.

A Conveyance of 1874, in which the Joseph Driver estate sold two cottages in the High street to Herbert Abington makes no mention of a shop. It does state, however that Herbert was occupying one cottage and Widow Cottingham the other. We know that this document refers to two ironstone and limestone cottages next door to the present post office. These are now made into one house but much of the original building can be seen. Was it Herbert's shop as well? There is no evidence that it was, although the present owner has found many medicine bottles in the garden. It may be that the shop was elsewhere in the High Street and he moved into this cottage in his old age. On the other hand he may have been a tenant who took the chance to purchase the property. Although he had previously been put down as Shop Street, this was just an alternative name for the High Street. We do know that Herbert had to take out a mortgage to buy the houses; £100 from local farmer David Beeby and £60 from Oundle grocer John William Bullivant.

In 1881 Herbert, now 73, is living in High Street with his daughter Jedidah, a 43 year old spinster. It must have been a surprise when, just a few months after the death of John Ball's wife he married Jedidah. Was John the reason she went away to Manchester in the first place? We may never know for official records rarely record much about the unofficial human heart.

Herbert's profession is now 'Chemist'. He is not in many of the century's Directories for Northamptonshire but *Slater's Directory* of 1862 and *Kelly's Directory* for 1869 describe Herbert as a

'Chemist and Druggist'. The *Slater Directory*, which wrongly calls him John, also has him as a 'Shopkeeper and Dealer in Sundries'. This quick trip through the Censuses tends to underplay what would be today a large leap from 'Tea Dealer and Grocer' to 'Chemist and Druggist'. Tea was considered then to be a leisure drink but also to have medicinal properties, not least because it was not alcohol or opium based and the making necessitated the boiling of water which was an important preventative measure in itself. Tea Rooms and especially Coffee Taverns were an important part of the temperance movement. [There was one built in Marshalls Road, Raunds which is now a private house].



Herbert's house in High Street which he purchased in 1874 but may also have been his shop.

It was originally two cottages and has been much altered, (2011).

With the kind permission of Lynn Harris.

It is possible that Herbert was not the first 'Druggist' in Ringstead for the 1841 Census has Jabez Gulliver, aged 25 (approximated to the nearest 5 years), 'Druggist', with his wife Catherine and their baby Catherine, just six months old. They are living next door to Catherine's widowed mother Catherine Cox, who is of independent means. The new baby Catherine was born in Ringstead but at the couple's wedding on 9th July 1839 in Ringstead, Jabez, or Walker Job Gulliver, to give him his correct name, is stated to be a druggist and chemist of Lutterworth (and Catherine is a 'lady' daughter of a 'gentleman deceased'). Certainly, by 1851 Walker J Gulliver, aged 38, is a chemist and Druggist in High Street, Lutterworth, Leicestershire. Walker and Catherine have only the one child, but there are two apprentices and a servant. 1861 finds them with two assistants and two servants at 24 High Street, next to the Town Hall in Lutterworth. Walker died on 24th September 1868, a comparatively rich man.

It seems most likely that Walker may have traded as a druggist for a time in Ringstead before returning to the larger town of Lutterworth to earn a better living. It is even possible that he worked for Herbert Abington but, at the moment, this is just speculation.

The nineteenth century saw the gradual rise of professional and medical practitioners, together with an increasingly scientific approach to treatment. Yet, as Hilary Marland has pointed out:

...rich and poor alike continued to resort to a variety of 'unqualified' or 'fringe' sources of medical aid. For some, such forms of medical treatment supplemented treatment by a 'regular' practitioner; for others, with limited access or money, or with a preference for fringe methods, these were the sole means of medical relief.'

If you look on the front page of most local and national newspapers at the time what you may notice first are the advertisements for a whole range of medical remedies to cure most of the diseases known to man. Herbert himself also used the small ads to sell his wares. In the December 14th 1872 edition of *The Lady's Own Paper*, nestling among the advertisements for Killiwicke's Embrocation; Four Hundred and Eighty-One Questions selected from the History of France; Frampton's Pill of Health; Inexpensive Hair Restorer; An Essay on the Admission of Women to the Electoral Franchise; Akhurst's Golden Lotion - Positively cures Scurvy, Ringworm, Itch, Redness etc. is the following small box:

<p>...ment... man has in her... numbered, a MONOPOLY of... value. £1,000 to £1,500 is... only before the public. The... are calculated by a competent... than from £2,000 to £3,000 per... Solicitors only may address... : advice. Egrec, care of the... Dr. n Paper, 3, Shoe-lane, E.C.</p>	<p>Published Fortnightly, Price 1d. THE ANTI-GAME LAW CIRCULAR, AND ORGAN OF THE ANTI-GAME LAW LEAGUE. Office: 13, BEAUFORT BUILDINGS, STRAND, W.C.</p>	<p>KILLIWICKE'S EMBROCATION INSTANT RELIEF ARISING FROM Being an Infalible Cure for Sore Throat, Facchae, Is the month of Septe... under the count... a desperate battle with... when he eventually cap... crew and captured ma... re of Captain Killiwicke... M... came within a... he at once gave chase, a... ders for the engagement... and of last it ended in th... ship, and during a dece... loss of Captain Killiwicke... (who was a Russian) th... had to be amputated. I... great favourite of the Ca... gave him (Captain Kill... Embrocation known a... advised in his native cou... self being a great suffer... give this wonderful Embu... bened to any that he val... much as he did the great... tain Killiwicke after war... George II to Hanover, at... suffering from a very se... duced this Embrocation... much ease and comfort... that on his return voyag... tain Killiwicke with a ail... the Captain with a ngh... recipe for the above Embu... publically advertised. M.</p>
<p>DISEASES. GOLDEN LOTION RY, RINGWORM, ITCH, RED... TUBES, BRUPTIONS, ECZEMA... disease with absolute and infall... of poisonous or in the slightest... Hair or Skin. Testimonials in and... each bottle. 2s. 6d. and 4s. 6d... of Chemists EVERYWHERE: rictoria, W. E. AKHURST and... omists and Merchants, 4 Lamb's... W.C.</p>	<p>AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY BY A CHEMIST. THE CARBOLIC CHEST PROTECTOR. The Proprietor having suffered for years the most... excruciating pain in the Chest and Liver, as a Chemist... he tried all means in the way of medicine and outward... application, and had advice from eminent physicians... but all of no avail. Since wearing the Carbolic Chest... Protector, his recovery is so complete as to appea... almost miraculous. The Protectors have proved bene... ficial to all who have purchased them. Testimonials... give astonishing facts. Price 1s. 6d. post-free for 22... stamps. To be had only of H. J. ABINGTON, Dis... pensing Chemist, Ringstead, near Thrapston, North... amptonshire.</p>	
<p>PILL OF HEALTH. This Medicine is the most effec... tionable, bilious and liver complaints... appetite, drowsiness, giddiness... re of the stomach and bowels, or... erent is required, nothing can be... Pills are truly excellent, removing... treasuring headache so prevalent... ion of spirits, fullness of sight... ness, pimples, and sallowness of... dily return to the complexion... dore, price 1s. 1 1/2d. and 2s. 6d. per...</p>	<p>PRICE NINEPENCE. FOUR HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-ONE QUESTIONS SELECTED FROM THE HISTORY OF FRANCE. CALCULATED TO GIVE YOUNG PERSONS CLEAR IDEAS OF THE Leading Events, Institutions, and Political... Changes which have taken place...</p>	
<p>OLD STARCH</p>		

Herbert had obviously seen the opportunities that the post office and the railway could bring to his business. It also probably tells us that he had endured some ill-health through his life although it seems very unlikely that a *Carbolic Chest Protector*, could have much effect on 'excruciating pain in the Chest and Liver'. A descendant, Will Abington, recorded later that he was 'the originator of the locally famous *Abington's Pills* which became popular in the district as a panacea for most of the ills afflicting the human race'. Significantly, perhaps, we do not hear them mentioned in the treatment of his son, Herbert's, illness.

Another hint at the way country people still had to try to gain relief from their ills is given at the trial of William Weekley Ball, where labourer Henry Dix told how he pulled one of the teeth of the heavily pregnant Lydia Attley shortly before her alleged murder. We also see Emma Kitchen in the 1881 Census who is described as a 'Vendor of patent medicines'. Every village would have its person selling herbal and other folk remedies (and in earlier days some would have been hung as witches). By the mid nineteenth century, however, Chemist and Druggists had become the most important first points of call for many sick people who could not afford the doctor and had managed to stay outside the workhouse.

From this time the Chemists began to become more professionally organised and under the 1868 *Pharmacy Act* compulsory training standards were introduced. Just where Herbert stood in terms of professional expertise we cannot be sure. With his background it is almost certain that he would be literate probably in English and Latin and have some scientific knowledge. Did he make up prescriptions for a local doctor or did he sell his own concoctions alongside the increasing number of patented and pre-packaged remedies. It seems most likely that it was the over-the-counter trade that provided the bulk of his work and income although he almost certainly also prepared prescriptions and his own concoctions. Hillary Marland, again, states that:

...a typical chemist's shop of the nineteenth century would, in addition to a wide range of pharmaceutical preparations, stock a selection of toilet articles, tobacco, snuff, tea, coffee, herbs and other foodstuffs, oils, candles and dyes. In some cases the chemist combined with his pharmaceutical enterprises the activities of a grocer, bookseller, insurance agent, tea or lead merchant.

[We should not be too surprised about this list. A walk round any small town or village chemist shop today will usually show a bewildering range of non-medical items for sale].

This list is written, looking particularly at two large industrial northern towns but one can imagine how Herbert gradually expanded the range of his business from tea merchant, to grocer, to chemist and druggist. Nevertheless we must not forget that in the advertisement he describes himself as a 'Dispensing Chemist' which implies that he made up prescriptions from doctors.

Of course there was a darker side to the chemist's trade because many of the nineteenth century medicines contained opiates. Large quantities of *Godfrey's Cordial*, *Atkinson's Infant Preservative*, *Peace and Steedman's Soothing Powders for Children* and other laudanum and opiate based products were sold. In the summer of 1871, Alfred Mayes, aged one month died from an overdose of *Syrup of Poppies*. Further, it was common practice, in some areas, for opiates to be sold for, what we would now class as, 'recreational' use. The men would buy a 'pennyworth' tab on pay day and have it with their beer.

Nevertheless, the village Chemist and Druggist became a respected member of many communities and it is likely that Herbert fell into this category. It is possible that his brothers, Leonard James and Edwin, assisted him in his transition to Chemist although they used the science in a very different field.

Herbert died on January 18th 1884 aged 75 years and was buried in the Baptist Burial Ground with his wife Kezia and their two sons who had died as young men. Jedidah is buried with John Ball and also remembered on her sister's grave in the new 'Council' cemetery. Leonard James had died in 1867 and is also recorded as being buried in Ringstead although I have not found his grave. The *Wellingborough News* for 26th January 1884 gives a moving obituary of Herbert. It tells us that.

Mr. Abington had followed the business of chemist and druggist and grocer, and by his skill in the treatment of various diseases had obtained a wide reputation in the surrounding country, and his loss in this aspect will be much felt.

It also states that he came to Ringstead between fifty and sixty years ago which confirms that he probably came with his father in 1830. We learn that he had been an officer in the local lodge of the Oddfellows and a Superintendent of the Baptist Sunday School. We also discover that in his last years he had endured a long and painful illness.

He had maintained his strong faith until the end and, in great pain, he had, on his 75th and last birthday, just a few months before his death, written a poem telling of his enduring belief:

*Thou hast not forsaken me, O God
now I am old and grey headed.
Dear Lord at thy footstool I bow,
And own thou hast led me till now;
When tempests may beat at my head,
And all earthly comforts art fled,
Afflicted, pain'd, pursued to Thee I flee
For succour and comfort O Jesus to Thee.*

Joseph Abington, musician and classical scholar and two of his sons, Leonard James, newspaper editor, pottery works owner and chemist, and Herbert Joseph, Grocer, Druggist and Chemist, span much of the nineteenth century. They had very different lives, reflecting the changes during the century but they were finally united by the Ringstead Particular Baptist Church.

On his death, Herbert's Will stated that his properties should be sold and the proceeds divided between three of his four children still living. Jedidah was singled out to be left just £100 (which was probably the largest bequest). Was this to recognize a loan from her, or her nursing of him in his last years? Without knowing the full story we cannot be sure. We do know that his son, Edwin Ebenezer, purchased the two houses at auction for £240 and this sum was divided between Edwin, Mary (Lovell) and Joshua. It seems that the house stayed in the Abington family until 1926 when it was sold to Mr. C.M. Burgess.



***Grave of Herbert Joseph Abington and his wife Kezia and their two sons who died young).
The face of the stone is slowly peeling away (Photograph: September 2011).***

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My thanks to Vivienne Marshall for her help with this biography: to Lynn Harris for the chance to read and copy the old deeds to the Abington cottage. (I feel that there is more to learn from them): also to Ian and John Abington for the privately published The History of Our Abington Ancestors 1668-1923 (May 2011) which I have used to amend and add to the original story. Any errors are mine alone. Jane May of the Leicester Arts & Museums Service kindly photographed the 'Anti-Slavery jug' and allowed me to use the image.

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Chapter Seventeen

Enclosure

William (c1781 - 1849) & Richard (1817 – 1900) Warren

At the trial of William Weekley Ball in 1864, for the murder of Lydia Attley, one of the witnesses was a farm labourer called Richard Warren. He was the man who found, in a ditch, the bones that were first thought to be the remains of Lydia. In his testimony he tells of his find but he also, perhaps, betrays a nostalgia for the times before Enclosure came to the parish.

His testimony was recorded in the *Northampton Mercury* on 27th February 1864:

I am a labourer at Ringstead and have lived there forty-seven years. I recollect the Ringstead fields before they were enclosed. I know the road leading from Mr Peach's house towards Keyston. That was in an open field state long before the enclosures, with a hedge of the Denford side but none on the Ringstead side. For a long time after the enclosure was a very rough bad road. In the present month I was in the employ of Mr Peach. On Wednesday 3rd, I was set to digging out the ditch on Keystone Lane. I was digging the ditch on the Ringstead side, which, with the hedge, was made after the enclosure.

John Hill, another labourer who gave evidence, also recalled that the field was enclosed in 1840. It was obviously a change that was still an important event in their lives.

In some ways the changes to the world that the Ringstead villagers inhabited in the nineteenth century was even greater than in the following hundred years. Change, although not necessarily predictable became expected, as the way of the world in the years after Victoria. For those agricultural labourers who had grown up with the settled certainties of rural life the industrialisation of the English landscape came as a profound shock.

A young man, writing in 1820 some thirty miles downstream in the land between the Nene and the Welland bitterly wrote of the impact on the village life:

*There once were lanes in nature's freedom dropt,
There once were paths that every valley wound –
Inclosure came, and every path was stopt;
Each tyrant fix'd his sign where paths were found,
To hint a trespass now who cross'd the ground:
Justice is made to speak as they command;
The high road now must be each stinted bound:
- Inclosure, thou'rt a curse upon the land,
And tasteless was the wretch who thy existence plann'd.*

This attitude is important because it is the voice of one of those affected. It is a rare report from an agricultural labouring man, even if a very unusual one. He goes on to say, 'And parish—slaves must live as parish-kings allow.' It is little wonder that John Clare's rich patron preferred the descriptions of nature and found verses like this too radical.

Ringstead had originally been mooted for enclosure in the late eighteenth century but it was not until towards the middle of the nineteenth that it finally happened, although all around them had earlier succumbed.

One by one the parishes all around had fallen: Woodford in 1764, Denford in 1765, Raunds in 1797, Great Addington in 1803, Islip in 1804, and Little Addington in 1830. Of these the large parish of Raunds put up the most resistance and its smaller commoners and landowners counter-petitioned. When they were ignored there were riots led by the village women and shoemakers who pulled down fences and dismantled gates with which they made huge bonfires and celebrated long into the night. Nevertheless the enclosure went ahead and, finally, only Ringstead stood alone.

The Ringstead Commons came under the aegis of the Raunds Manor Court and Ringstead men railed against the orders and fines that were imposed upon them for overstocking or releasing their stock from the pound without paying the fine due. A recent study of 'Commoners', much of it based on Northamptonshire, by J.M. Neeson has shown that right up to Enclosure there was a sophisticated system of rights and obligations which affected most of the villagers. There were *haywards* and *fieldsmen* who tried to ensure that land was not overgrazed and that stock was kept healthy and also to ensure that ancient rights were protected. In the mid eighteenth century a number of Ringstead men were fined in the Raunds Court. Neeson records that James Weekley was regularly fined both for trespass and for pound breach and two Ringstead farmers were fined for neglecting and refusing to scour the watercourse running from Lubering Spring in Ringstead to Oak Ditch in Raunds 'to the very great detriment and damage of the Meadow ground belonging to the inhabitants of Raunds'. It was not a free-for-all and even the disputes were part of the fabric of village life. Enclosure supporters naturally tended to disparage the old agriculture. What even some of these supporters did allow was that enclosure brought many of those who depended on the commons into destitution and the workhouse.


We can only guess at what Richard and the other villagers would have made of all this. What was life like for agricultural labourers before enclosure? What changed in their lives as a result? The first thing to say is that it is sometimes alleged that it was the end of the peasant farmer in England. What the term 'peasant' really meant was that paid employment was, at most, only one strand of the work that a 'commoner' family did to keep from want and starvation. So the shoemakers and lacemakers might keep a cow on the common or have a small piece of the arable common land or a woman might collect firewood. Also men and women would take rabbits and birds as well as mushrooms and berries. Suddenly these 'rights' were taken away and, as Clare writes, the land was protected by the law from those who thought it was part of their birthright. This is why poachers were often supported by the villagers. They saw it as a man taking his due.

I picture it rather like an old woman living in the house that she and her ancestors had lived in for generations. It is rather tumbledown and has few modern conveniences and she is cajoled or forced to leave it and go into a residential home. Now she is well fed and warm but she has lost her


independence, the thing that gave her life meaning. This is only a partial analogy for, at enclosure, many lost not only their independence but their livelihoods as well.

These changes were imposed by the wealthy on the poor and, at the same time, they also brought in more and more terrible punishments for those who challenged the new order. Of course at the same time we have the steady mechanisation of farming, meaning fewer workers on the land. The lot of the agricultural labourer, never an easy one, became desperate.


SMITH BROTHERS,
Engineers, Agricultural Implement Manufacturers,
COAL, COKE, OIL CAKE, AND TIMBER MERCHANTS,
NENE SIDE IRONWORKS, THRAPSTONE.



Smith Brothers'
New Patent
Independent Tined
HAYMAKER.
Price £15 15s.



Smith Brothers'
Improved Portable
STEAM ENGINE.
8-Horse Power, price
£80, complete.
44-Horse Power, price
£120, complete.



Smith Brothers'
Latest Improved
HORSE RAKE.
No. 1, to work by side
of horse as well as be-
hind, price £7 10s.
No. 2, price £7 15s.

All kinds of Agricultural Implements on Sale. Manufacturers of Bean Mills and Cake Mills.
An Illustrated Catalogue sent post free on application.

An advertisement in Directory of Northamptonshire 1861 by Melville & Co.

Smith Brothers were a few miles down the Nene in Thrapston.

We see the increase in horse drawn implements and the coming of steam

(By kind permission of Northampton Record Office)

As a result there was, throughout the century, migration to the large towns and cities, emigration to Australia, Canada and the United States and insurrections by agricultural labourers which reached

their height in the Captain Swing riots of 1830. Northamptonshire, although not at the forefront of these riots, which were centred along the south coast and as far north as Buckinghamshire, was affected by the unrest. A group of ten men from Finedon were brought to trial in 1831 for breaking up a farmer's threshing machine. There were also isolated cases of rick burning and other damage throughout the early part of the century as demonstrated by the 1824 'Arson' poster that we showed in the first John Ball biography.

That poster offered a reward of sixty guineas, a considerable sum of money. It would be the equivalent of some £2,500 today, or, because incomes have increased faster than costs, the wages of a craftsman, in 1824, for some eighteen months. It must be remembered that the French Revolution was not too far in the past and risings throughout Europe were not so distant in the future. Many people in the Establishment feared that England was on the brink of revolution.

Now let us return to Richard Warren who we left giving evidence at the trial of William Weekley Ball in 1864. He had been baptised in Ringstead Parish Church on 1st February 1817 the son of William and Ann. William was an agricultural labourer, born in about 1781, near the time when the first Ringstead enclosure was mooted.

As I have tried briefly to show it was a very different world from that after Enclosure, both in the look of the countryside and in the way the agricultural community went about its day-to-day business. It has been described by J.L. & Barbara Hammond in the following words:

The old village was under the shadow of the squire and the parson, and there were many ways in which these powers controlled and hampered its pleasures and habits: there were quarrels, too, between farmers and cottagers and there are many complaints that the farmers tried to take the lion's shares of the commons but, whatever the pressure outside and whatever the bickering within, it remains true that the common field system formed a world in which the villagers lived their own lives and cultivated the soil on a basis of independence.

There had been Warrens in Ringstead in the early eighteenth century but they seem to disappear from the Parish records after 1723. I have not yet found William's baptism or marriage but we know from the Census that he married Anne, who was born in Irthlingborough. We also find Richard, born to William and Anne, and baptised on 1st February 1817 in Ringstead Parish Church. Other children followed and, at each, William is described as a labourer but at his daughter Mary Ann's baptism on November 5th 1830 he has become 'cowkeeper'. He was now approaching fifty years old and perhaps his experience had been rewarded or perhaps he was growing old and not up to the hard physical labour of arable farming. The cowkeeper is likely to have been employed as part of the commons system to look after the cows of the individual villagers who were entitled to use the common. The commons would usually consist of three types; the arable land (often divided into strips), the common meadowland and the common or waste. The 'waste' might be woods or roadside verges or common in the sense we use it today.

William would collect the cows from the closes and fields of the villagers and herd them on to the common grazing for the day. At the end of the day he would bring them back. The routine would vary with the seasons but it was an important part of village life.

Enclosure was still hanging over Ringstead and some ten years later the inevitable happened. When we look at the Enclosure map of 1841 we see the names of the old fields. There are Ham Meadow Short Meadow and Great Meadow along the Nene. There are also Middle Field and Round Field where presumably the arable strips had been. A survey of Ringstead in 1837 gives us some idea of the small strips of land in these Open Fields. We see Backride Furlong, Dicks Willow Furlong, Page's Corner Furlong, Crawl Hill Furlong Crook Slade Furlong, Woollen Slade Furlong, Long Witch South Furlong and Plug Dug Furlong. We also see the Water Lands, the Strong Red Lands and the Tongue of Full Stone. There was an intimacy with the land which did not disappear overnight but the Enclosure was the start of its rapid decline.

The execution of the 'Inclosure Award' was:

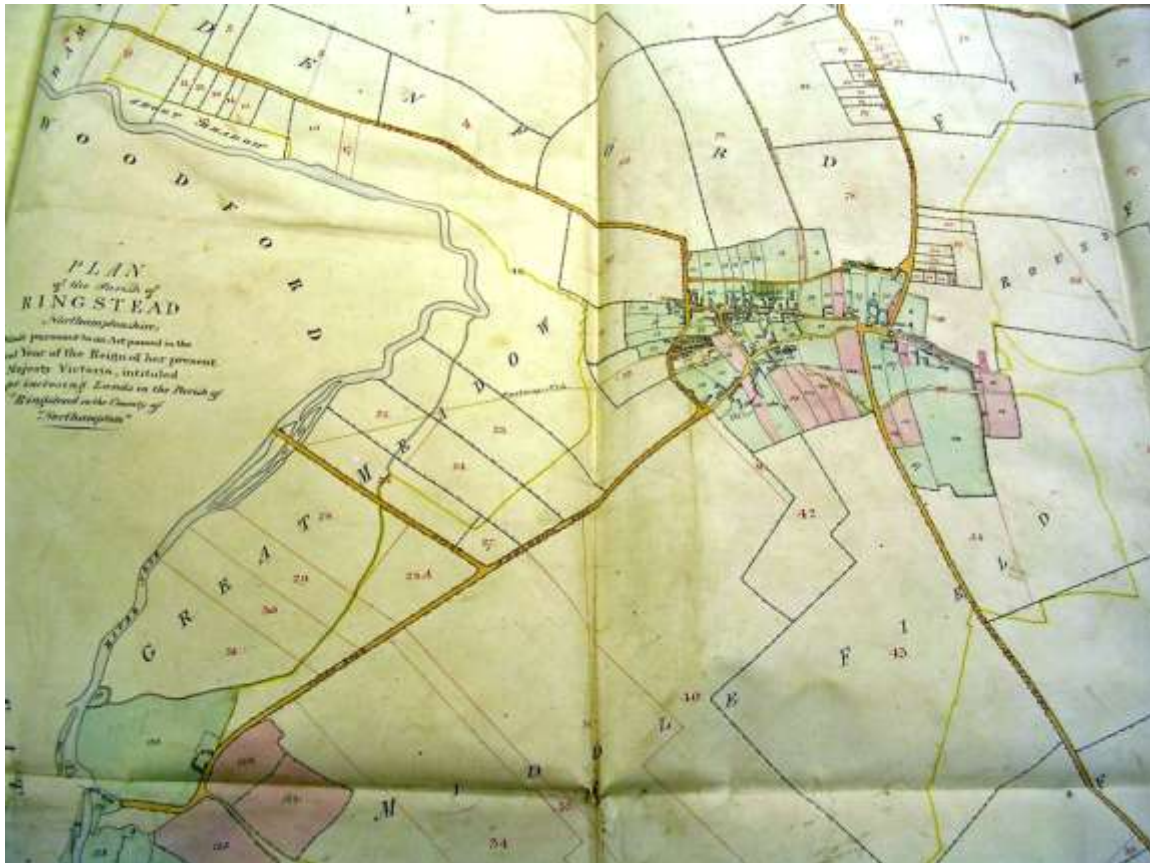
Proclaimed on Sunday the seventh day of March one thousand eight hundred and forty one at the Outer Door of the Church of the said Parish of Ringstead immediately after Divine Service as required by the said Local Act by me

*Jno Baker
Clerk to Mr Archbould
Solicitor Thrapston.*

The parish had some 1,982 acres and by 1841 some 1,594 of these were owned by eight people. The Lord of the Manor of Ringstead, Thomas Burton had 122 acres 1 rood and 32 perches and Charles Sackville-Germain, 5th Duke of Dorset, who was soon to die without heirs, some 227 acres. The largest landowner however became George Capron a London solicitor who held 802 acres and 3 perches. He had bought the former holdings of Coy, Disbrave, Shuttleworth (Lord of Cotton Manor), Blake, Lady Booth, Coleman, Sheepshanks, Bland, and Ringstead Charity. He also bought Southwick Hall in 1841 and had acquired the manor of Stoke Doyle some ten years earlier.

Can we see what effect that this had on William and the other villagers because, we must remember, it was not necessarily only those whose main work was on the land who would be affected? Other would also use the common fields for stock, firewood, wild food, including rabbits and other meat. They would also by custom glean the field after harvest picking up the lost ears and grains. It was said that some families could feed themselves until Christmas on the gleanings.

What many expected, including some supporters of the Enclosure movement, was increased poverty for some agricultural workers, an increase in those who became reliant on the Poor Law and a flight from the land. Unfortunately without further evidence it is not usually possible to attribute any one event to Enclosure. For this, far more detailed research would be needed, although in general, looking at England as a whole, historians agree that these hardships did occur, even though they may disagree on the degree of hardship and whether it was an essential change.



Ringstead Inclosure Map

By kind permission of Northampton Record Office (Ref ML 1550)

The three arable fields (Middle Field, Round Field, Denford Field) can be seen with the meadows (Great, Short and Ham). No clear sign of common 'waste'.

We have seen, in other biographies, that Daniel Ball was a shepherd with a large family, most of whom were connected to the land. We have also seen that the majority of them had either emigrated or left Ringstead forever over the next twenty years. It seems unlikely that they were the only ones. How far this was due to the natural movement of population or to the increased mechanisation of farming will be difficult to assess. Perhaps by the accumulation of separate individual events we may get some idea of the truth.

When we read in the Parish Register for May 20th 1840: the following burial:

Thomas Bates otp aged 61 Buried in the churchyard without any service – fallen by his own hand on Sunday 17th May by cutting his own throat in a most deliberate manner. Verdict unsound mind.

Do we see someone who sees little for himself when Enclosure takes away his livelihood or could it be that life had become intolerable for other reasons? We can only guess. A surer measure would be to look at infant mortality, a good indicator of poverty in the twenty years either side of 1841. The burials of children under 16 years of age in the Ringstead Parish Register are set out in the table below:

Census	Burials	Totals
Decade	(under 16yrs)	
1820 -1829	34	
1830 - 1839	37	71
<i>1841 Enclosure</i>	<i>Enclosure</i>	<i>Enclosure</i>
1840 - 1849	39	
1850 - 1859	51	90
	Total	161

Does it show an increase in child mortality due to Enclosure? One would expect health to be generally improving during the century away from the industrial cities but 1852 had 13 deaths which really skews the results and that could be due to one of the epidemics that still carried away many children. All we can say is that it is possible that Enclosure had some effect but we cannot be sure, without further research.

William was buried on May 13 1849 aged 69 years and His wife, Anne, followed him on June 20th 1852 aged 63. Richard, his son had married Elizabeth Hilson on 16th October 1837 in Hargrave Church. Both are shown as twenty years old. Elizabeth was born in Stanwick where her father was a farm labourer. She was a lacemaker like many women in the local villages in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The 1841 Census for Ringstead finds the young married couple in Ringstead with their daughter, Ann, who is just eleven months old. Then, as the decades pass, the Censuses give no clue to any changes except that five children are born and leave their home in London End, Ringstead. The only time that Richard seems to have come into the public arena was when he gave evidence at the trial of William Weekley Ball in 1864.

In 1891 Richard is shown as a retired farm labourer aged 74. It is quite unusual for labourers to be shown as having retired so perhaps he was now incapable of work. He just saw the start of the new century for he died on 13th January 1900 and in 1901 his widow Elizabeth, aged 85, is living with her granddaughter Elizabeth Ellen at 10 London End. At some stage after this she was forced to go into the Thrapston Union Workhouse where she died on 20th November 1902.

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'squally' north-west winds which raked across the country. All over England, from Liverpool and Hull to Bath, London and Portsmouth a trail of destruction was reported. Scaffolding collapsed in Lett's Wharf Lambeth where the City Commissioners of Sewers were erecting buildings for the sorting and storage of the dust and refuse collected in the city of London. One woman was killed and many injured.

Also on January 31st, the *Manchester Guardian* recorded some of the devastation that had been caused when the storms had hit the north in the early hours of the previous day. In Manchester itself, part of the roof of the *Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway Company's* Potato Market gave way and the River Irwell was some 8-9 feet above its normal level. The force of the winds can be seen by its description of the damage done at a local public park:

A large semicircular iron roof which covered the grand stand at Abbey Hey Gardens, Gorton was carried away by the wind. Such was the violence of the gust that it lifted the foundation stone at the bottom of the solid iron columns, the wall plates to which it was fastened and the whole roof intact over the adjoining wall. Three men who were under the roof escaped.

Similarly, at Preston, at 7.15 am:

A terrific gust of wind.....tore off the whole of the western side of the [railway] booking offices, which had been previously loosened, and turned it upside down, broken into fragments.

Two men were killed at Milnrow when a mill roof collapsed and at Liverpool boats and the pier were damaged. It was at sea in the west that the greatest loss of life occurred. In the Irish Channel the steamer *Alexandra* of Glasgow sunk with the loss of twelve lives. Everywhere across the country there was a similar pattern of damage and deaths. The national newspapers at the time missed the worst of the tragedy which was the loss of many fishing smacks from the Norfolk and Suffolk ports. It was only later that the full story emerged as vessels failed to return to port.

The *Norfolk News* for the 10th March 1877, in a sentence reveals the terrible happenings of that January night when it reported:

An appeal for the Widows and Orphans of men lost in fishing vessels in the Gale of 30th January 1877; 116 men and boys: 50 widows, 11 aged parents and 115 children destitute.

These storms, which continued into February, were part of a winter of wind and rain. An observer at Castle Ashby noted for January 1877:

Excessive rainfall, which, following the very heavy fall in December 1876 of 5.42 inches produced almost continuous floods in the Nene Valley.

It would have been a miserable time for farm labourers, slogging away in the cold wet mud to earn enough to survive the winter and help keep their families from the workhouse. Three of these families concern us in this story and we need to briefly tell a little about them.

Pearcy (or Peacy or Piercy or Pearsy) Childs had been baptised in the local Baptist Church and married Thomas Craxton (or Scraxton) in 1853. Unfortunately they seem to disappear from the 1861 Census and are certainly not recorded in Ringstead but we know that they had at least four children. The older two boys were baptised in Irthlingborough, Thomas Robert on 3rd April 1859 and Benjamin on 4th August 1861, but the two younger children were both baptised in Ringstead, Samuel on July 25th 1864 and Ellen on May 21st 1868. It seems likely, therefore, that the family had moved to Irthlingborough and returned to the village in the early 1860s. Then tragedy struck and Thomas, the father, died on July 21st 1869 aged just 39 years. The 1871 Census shows newly widowed Percy on Parish Relief and living in Butcher's Lane in Ringstead. All her children, even Robert who is thirteen, are put down as scholars. The 1870 Education Act had just made attendance compulsory at school until the age of twelve years for all children. It may be that Robert was just finishing his time at school or it is also possible that he had not managed to obtain work because of the poor state of farming. Benjamin was just ten years old and presumably attending the National School which had been erected in 1867 at a cost of £860 and was further enlarged in 1874 when it had an average of 100 pupils attending.

It must have been a difficult time for Percy and perhaps she hoped the worst was over and her life might gradually return to some sort of normality as her children got older and could help support the family.

In 1861, Stephen and Charlotte Fensom, lived at New Road, Denford with their son John. By 1871 they had moved to Spring Gardens in Ringstead. Stephen was now 35 and Charlotte 31 and they already had five more children, Thomas, Albert, Herbert, Amelia and Joseph. Stephen was a shoemaker and his eldest son, Thomas, aged 12 was a 'Shoe Boy', probably helping his father as an assistant, errand boy, and perhaps fetcher and carrier to the factory. The other children are not put down as scholars, even Albert who is 8 years old. Other children, on the same page of the Census, who are eight are called 'Scholars', (a term that sometimes merely meant, 'not working'). This could be an oversight or perhaps they did not go to school. At this early stage, after the 1870 Act it was patchily applied. Denford had built an Infants School in 1872 for 60 children and had an average attendance of 40 in 1885. The older children, however, had to walk to Ringstead. Albert would have been born too late to attend the new school. He would have had to walk the flat but often flooded road to Thrapston or, more likely, the steep climb up the hill to Ringstead.

Another mother and her family were living further up the Nene at Rushden. Sarah Bailey, daughter of a mat maker, had married William Clayton, a labourer on the 27th September 1853 in St Mary's Church, Rushden. The 1861 Census shows the couple in Church Lane, Rushden, with their children, Mary Ann, Elizabeth, Hannah, and William who was just one month old. By 1871 William, the father, is a gardener and they have moved to Duck Street. The oldest girl Mary Ann has presumably left home but Elizabeth (16) and Hannah (15) are in shoe work. William, now 11 years old, and his younger siblings, Eliza, Herbert and Fred are still 'scholars'. There is also another baby, Emily just five months old.

At the end of January in 1877, boys from each of these families found themselves together in that miserable winter of rain and wind. Benjamin Craxton and William Clayton were sixteen and Albert Fensom was just fourteen years old. The older boys had probably been at work for a number of years. They may have enjoyed the outdoor life but must have wished, on a day like this, that they

were working in the dry with their siblings, many of whom were in the shoe trade. The three of them had managed to get some work with William Dearlove the young farmer who had taken over the farm on the death of his father, Joseph on November 5th 1874. Joseph had been born in Yorkshire of a well known 'County' family and had moved from a farm in St Neots to one of 500 acres in Ringstead. He was a widower in 1871 with a family who seemed in no hurry to get married and leave home. His death at the early age of 60 had left William running the farm although it is more likely that, Mr. Warren, his bailiff, would have been the man the boys would have been hired by. They were working in what would have been part of the old Ringstead Field before the Ringstead Enclosure Act some 38 years earlier. They would have made their way through the dark of the early morning and were probably soaked to the skin before they arrived at the field to work. Below them the Nene valley was flooded and the field would have been wet and muddy and facing into the driving north-westerly winds. There was a large group of men and boys working on the field so what could they have been doing on that January day?

The *Handbook of Farm Labour* by John C. Morton, written in 1861, gives a calendar of operations on a farm. For January it lists:

Drainage operations; carriage of manure to heaps in fields, also of lime and marl, also of grain to market; threshing grain for sale; ploughing, probably the last of the stubbles for root crops; applying clay and marl, carrying lime etc; attendance on cattle and sheep road and fence mending; to-dressing pastures.

The list for the farmworkers, for the early part of February, is not very different, with the addition of 'gathering stones off the meadows which are to be mown'. Of course it is possible that the bad weather had delayed operations. The *Victoria County History* in 1937 records that much of the parish was under grass but the chief crops were wheat, beans, barley, oats, turnips and roots. Looking back at the various Directories there was little change from the nineteenth century. The *1885 Kelly's Directory* gives the same list but without the oats. Could they, like the tragic heroine of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, have been harvesting turnips and swedes, after the sheep had eaten off the tops?

We can only guess at the work they were doing in Ringstead Field. We do know that on that Tuesday morning the storm began to increase in fury. The *Northampton Mercury* of the 3rd February later reported:

Tuesday last will long be remembered in this village [Ringstead] as a day of hurricanes, for storms of wind, hail, rain and snow came rapidly one after the other with scarcely any intermission. Trees were uprooted and large branches blown off others along the Ringstead-road, and many pranks played during the height of the various gales. In fact it was with difficulty that people keep on their legs and maintain their equilibrium.

About 9 o'clock on that Tuesday morning of 30th January 1877 the men and boys working in the fields decided to have what the *Northampton Mercury* called a 'luncheon break' although it was an early hour for lunch even for farm workers. It is likely that the force of the wind and rain had made working almost impossible and they hoped that things might improve later. Certainly the *Peterborough Advertiser* reports that they had 'taken refuge from the rain.'

They all made for the shelter of the farm buildings and gathered in a small hovel and watched the rain lashing down in the increasing gusts of wind. They had not been there long when 'the wind blew such a gale as to take the tiles from the roof'. The younger ones decided that it was time to move and five of them, ranging in ages from 12 to 17 years ran into a nearby barn where they hoped that they would be safer. It seems as if it was a substantial structure because the *Advertiser* describes it as 'stone built and thatched and stood in an exposed position.' The *Mercury* continues the story:

This barn stood with its frontage to the south-west and with the doors open. No sooner had these boys and young men got into the barn than the storm had attained the terrific force of a hurricane; a few moments more there came a whirlwind of such force as to at once take the roof completely off the barn, and threw it into the farm premises beyond. One of the gable ends immediately fell in and also the side walls burying three of them in the ruins.

High winds and hidden fears often produce high spirits in young men and you can imagine them joking and jumping about as they watched the gale lashing about them. Then, in an instant, their small world fell in on them. Those still in the hovel saw the barn cave in and they rushed to the scene as the storm still raged.

Two of the boys had managed to escape. One was near the door and got out uninjured. Charles Scraxton, Benjamin's younger brother, had been injured but also managed to get out of the ruins. Three of the lads, Benjamin, William and Albert, were buried under the debris of thatch, beams and masonry. The storm would still have been howling across the valley and one can imagine the group, with the wind catching and driving loose debris about them, as they desperately dragged aside the fallen timbers and masonry to find the boys. Someone was sent to fetch Dr. McIntyre from Raunds while they searched frantically for the three who were buried. The *Advertiser* tells us that:

The news of the accident speedily spread and a force of men from the adjacent ironstone diggings at once set to work to clear away the rubbish.

Albert Fensom and William Clayton were first pulled out but seemed already dead. Finally Charles's elder brother, Benjamin Scraxton was drawn out, still alive but with a fractured skull.

Dr McIntyre, when he arrives, seems to have gone quietly about his business among the chaos of the storm. He checked the two boys and pronounced them dead from suffocation. The *Mercury* says that the bodies of the two boys were taken home to their families. Benjamin and Charles were also taken home. Charles was not too badly injured and soon recovered but Benjamin only lingered a few hours, possibly until the Wednesday morning, when he also died of his injuries.

A week later the *Northampton Mercury* reported on the inquest that had been held the next day, on the three deaths, at the *Axe and Compass Inn* in Ringstead. A verdict of 'Accidental Death' was returned. It also reported on the funeral.

On Friday the bodies of William Clayton, aged 16; Benjamin Scraxton, aged 16; and Albert Fensom, aged 14, were interred in the parish graveyard in one wide grave side by side. Amongst the followers were Mr. W. R. Dearlove and his farm bailiff, Mr. Warren; also the Misses E. and M. and A. Dearlove. There was a very large number of people present, estimated at not less than 500, and many were the tears of those who witnessed the last

tribute of respect paid to those who had been cut off in the morning of life by that melancholy tragedy. Wreathes of immortelles were placed on each coffin by the Misses Dearlove as the coffins were lowered side by side in their last resting place.

The old bass bell, cast in 1682, would have been tolling out from the church tower, rattling the windows of the school next door. The inscription on the swinging bell read, '*I to the Church the Living Call, I to the Grave do Summon All*'. The funeral is not mentioned in the School Log Book but one cannot believe that the children did not, in some way, acknowledge the deaths.

In the national press, the death of the three boys does not appear to have been reported. Perhaps notice of the deaths came too late to be considered 'news' among all the terrible loss of life caused by the hurricane across the country. Locally, however, they made a deep impression on the local communities and sermons were preached on the tragedy at Ringstead Parish Church on the following Sunday afternoon and at the Wesleyan Chapel in the evening, on both occasions to packed, weeping, congregations. The Reverend Oyston also preached at the Raunds Wesleyan Chapel the following Tuesday.

A Committee was formed for defraying the funeral expenses and £23.11s was raised, any surplus to be distributed among the families. The reports of the funeral and the collection only mention the great and the good. It is the three Misses Dearlove, unmarried daughters of the late Joseph, who place the 'wreathes of immortelles' on the three coffins in what must have been a touching scene. We hear nothing of the grieving families or even whether they were at the funeral. We hear nothing about the boys who were killed.

A few days after this tragedy a young boy aged 12 called John Ball, from Denford was also killed in the driving wind and rain. After finishing his work at Woodford Lodge he was walking along the *London & North Western Railway* towards where it crossed under the *Midland Railway*. He was going to meet his father who worked on the *Midland line*. In the noise of the wind and rain he did not hear the train coming behind him and was killed instantly.

In the turmoil of the three boys' deaths, his single death almost went unnoticed, as did the death of Ambrose Fensom, aged 4 months a little over three weeks later.

Some deaths seem to affect a community or a nation and stir them into grief whereas others leave the families to grieve alone.



Photograph of the grave near the gate into the church yard taken September 2010.

The quotation at the base of the headstone reads:

***'What is your life. It is even a vapour that
Appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away.'***

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This story was prompted by an article written by Janice Morris for Strapetona (Thrapston District History Society) which she kindly sent me).

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Chapter Nineteen

Blood on the Stubble

William Roberts (1767 – 1836)

William Roberts was born in about 1767. He does not show up in Ringstead Registers and it is rumoured that he came from Wales. We first see him in Ringstead when, on 12th October 1788, he married Ann Roberson in the parish church. Ann was soon pregnant and the couple must have looked forward to the beginnings of a happy family life.

Their first child, Lydia, was baptised on 3rd June 1790 but it must have been a difficult birth and, for William, tragedy was to be his companion for some twelve years. His wife, Ann, died on 8th June 1790, just five days after the baptism. Some six weeks later Lydia too was buried. William was just twenty-three years old.

He met Elizabeth Jacks, some eight years his senior, and married her on 1st February 1791, just seven months after the death of his wife. Elizabeth too, was quickly pregnant and their first child, John, was baptised on 15th June 1792. He was followed over the next few years by Mary, Samuel and Hannah. 1798 came and went with no recorded incident but then, in January 1799, a terrible tragedy struck the family. Mary was buried on the 6th January and Samuel and Hannah followed just three days later.

What an unhappy few years the young couple had had and only John, the eldest child, remained of their family. They had another daughter and, as was often the custom, she was also baptised 'Hannah', some six months later, in honour of the baby girl whom they had recently buried. We do not know what effect all these deaths had on William, nor do we know what caused them, exceptional even in those days when infant deaths were common. In Ringstead another infant had died in the previous December but there was not a spate of other deaths to suggest an epidemic. Perhaps it was a cottage fire. We may never know.

What we do know is that less than two years later William was in a dispute. It was on Tuesday 18th August 1801 and the harvest was in full swing. At some point William and another labourer, Matthew Teat, began to row. Whatever the cause of the argument, it soon became heated and burst into violence. Was Elizabeth also there? The harvest field was known as a place of flirting and ribaldry. A line of men with scythes needed to work together in a rhythm if they were not to get in each other's way or cause injury. It may be in the heat and toil of the cutting, one of the men, either as a joke or by accident clashed scythes with the other. Whatever the reason, the two men began to strike at each other with their scythes which would have been sharpened like razors to make the work as easy as possible. In *The Feast of July*, H.E. Bates tells of a similar fight between two brothers in the harvest field. In Bates's account one knocks the blade from the head of the shaft to use it like a sword. Did the novelist know, through local folklore of this case, over a century earlier, or was it a

not uncommon occurrence. In the novel the fight is stopped by the mother coming between them but nobody intervened in the Ringstead field, possibly taken by surprise by the sudden eruption of violence.

We can only surmise at the exact way that the men fought but we do know that the two of them hit out at each other just two or three times with their scythes. This was not two hot-headed youths fighting, for William was about 34 and Matthew was some eight years older. A newspaper reporting the later case stated that:

Teat, unfortunately received a deep cut across the inside of the lower part of one leg and bled to death in the space of a few minutes.

The nature and place of the injury seems to indicate that the two men were using the whole scythes and not just the blades. Can we imagine William, suddenly distraught, watching his adversary's life blood staining the just cut stubble? Were any final words exchanged as the wounded man lay there, slowly dying?

Matthew Teat was buried two days later, on August 20th 1801, in the Ringstead churchyard but the parish register records nothing of how he died. He left a widow, Hannah and four children.

At the inquest, also held on that grim Thursday, by the Coroner, Thomas Marshall, William was charged with *feloniously killing and slaying Matthew Teat*. He was committed to gaol where, it seems, he had to stay until the Lent Assizes in Northampton some six months later. Possibly on March 2nd, but certainly before 3rd March 1802, William was found guilty of criminal homicide. Looking through the Northampton Mercury for the months up to the trial one sees the banknote forgers and burglars hung and sheep stealers transported for seven years. It comes as some surprise to see, on Saturday 6th March 1802, that the Mercury sums up the Lent Assizes and briefly lists William's sentence, together with that of another killer.

William Roberts and John Holmir[?], convicted of manslaughter were severally fined one shilling and ordered to be imprisoned in gaol, the former for two and the latter for one calendar month.

This seems amazingly lenient, especially when we see it in the context of the other cases. William had probably been in custody for the five or six months leading up to the trial which would have been taken into account. This was a long period from offence to trial, for the criminal law was often quick if not always fair. Why was the sentence so lenient? Was it felt that the provocation was extreme, or that it was done in the heat of the moment with both men equally involved? Was it because it was a scrap between two labourers that went wrong? If William had killed a 'gentleman' in similar circumstances one suspects that he may have paid with his life? It may be that, along with the other extenuating circumstances, that the history of William was laid before the court and it was felt that he and his wife had suffered enough?

It must have been a difficult winter for Elizabeth without William or much of the harvest money. Unfortunately, the couple's suffering had not finished with the release of William because a son, also named William, was born to them in 1805 and died a year later and another son, Thomas, was buried on 24th June 1808 aged just 13 months.

Of all the eight children of William that we know of, only two survived into adulthood. Their second child named Hannah married William Barfield on 2nd February 1823. John, their eldest child, married Rebecca Horsford in Swineshead in 1818. They had three girls before the untimely death of Rebecca, on 13th March 1828, aged just 38. One of them, May married Thomas Stains in the first wedding held at Ringstead Baptist Church. [See the chapter on Joseph Ball]. Like his father, John married again, to Alice Page, some two-and-a-half years later and had six further children. One of these was also christened John and he was baptised on 19th May 1833. It is this John's son, Benjamin Ebenezer Roberts, whose story is also told in another chapter.

William died on 3rd April 1836 aged 69 years and Elizabeth followed on 2nd May 1838 aged 79 years.

Looking back, at the end of their lives, they must have wondered if they had been cursed, losing almost all their family as infants. It is strange how history is made by such small chances. It was John Roberts, the only son to reach maturity, whose descendant would become the first woman Prime Minister of England.

The readers must make up their own minds as to what this tells us about the universe.

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My thanks to Carol Jones for the information on William's marriage.

Chapter Twenty

Modern Times

Cottingham, Edwin Turner (1869 – 1940)

Edwin Cottingham would not have wanted to be a man before his time. He was a man on time. He also has a strong claim to be the most eminent man born in Ringstead in the nineteenth century. His story may not have the elements of tragedy like that of William Weekley Ball and Lydia Attley but by intelligence, skill and hard work he became an important and respected man within his chosen profession. On his death he was praised for his work by Cambridge University but during his lifetime he was also cursed by some of its students as we shall hear.

William Cottingham was born in Ringstead in about 1828, the son of Thomas and Susannah. Thomas was an agricultural labourer and the 1851 Census has the couple living with their five children. It is a family similar to many others in the village except that William, the eldest at twenty-three, is described in the Census as a 'Cordwainer'.

A cordwainer is often said to be just another name for a shoemaker. In the Ringstead Census, however, it is only used on a few occasions among all the shoemakers. An alternative view is that a cordwainer was a maker of fine or luxury shoes. Perhaps William, or his father, is emphasising that he is a craftsman and something above a jobbing shoemaker. Living next door, on one side, lives John Roberts with his wife Alice, a 'Church Sunday School Mistress'. On the other side lives Herbert Abington, son of a Baptist Minister, a 'Tea Dealer' and later to be a Chemist. These are likely to be families with learning and aspiration.

Some time after this, it seems, that William junior spends some time in London for he marries Harriett Frost at St Mary's Church, Whitechapel in Middlesex on 1st November 1859. Harriett had been born in Langford in Norfolk in about 1837 and in 1851 she is living in Whitechapel with George Weston and his wife as a 'Monthly Nurse'. George is a delivery clerk yet, although they have no children, he has a general servant as well as Harriett in his household. They seem to disappear in 1861 but by the 1871 Census George, at sixty-four years' old, is alone and an 'Almsman' in the Licensed Victuallers Asylum' in Peckham. He was born in Kent and there are number of entries in that county's criminal records for a 'George Weston'. Is it the same man? Whatever the truth, there seems to be a story to be told – but by somebody else.

A 'monthly nurse' was usually an untrained helper, often an older woman, who looked after a woman for a short period after the birth of her baby (i.e. a month). This does not seem to be the case here but as we have not found the Weston's in the 1861 Census we cannot be sure. Did William meet Harriett when he went up to Whitechapel to get work or to improve his skills? There is a long established shoe-making industry in the area and we know that other shoemakers from Ringstead

ended up in London In 1851, Henry Manning, another shoemaker was living in Lower Belgravia Street just a mile-and-a-half across town.

However they met, by 1861 William was back in Ringstead with his young wife and their two sons, Joseph and William. Joseph is five years old so, if the marriage is correct, he predated the wedding by three years. Ten years later and Joseph is not with the family but there are three new additions. William is called Willie Frost Cottingham and there are also Letitia (7), Herbert C. (4) and Edwin T. (1). Later Jessie and Annie completed the family. William, the father, is now a shoemaker among shoemakers.

It is Edwin T Cottingham whose life is our subject and it is made all the more remarkable by its start which was not unlike many others in the village.

Perhaps we ought to first clear up the 'Turner' which was the Christian name of his mother's brother and is likely to have been a family name. He was born on 9th April 1869. It is said that after leaving school he was apprenticed to a tailor. The phrase 'after leaving school' seems an obvious one but it was just two years before Edwin's birth that:

Close to the church there was built, in 1867, a very handsome and commodious school, with master's residence which serves for this and the adjacent parish of Denford, the site being presented by George Capron Esq. and the expense defrayed by contribution, assisted by Government grant.

An Education Act was passed in 1870 which was the first step in bringing in compulsory attendance for children between the ages of five and twelve. It was also unusual in that female householders could stand and vote for the School Boards that were set up where there insufficient school places provided by the churches and other charitable organisations. Edwin was possibly one of that first generation of working class children to benefit although he may have attended the Wesleyan School in Raunds. Whichever school he went to, it seems that he made the best use of his opportunity. He was not the only one, for his brother, William Frost Cottingham is shown in the 1881 Census as, at twenty years old, a teacher in Gloucester.

The story of William is a rather sad one. The Wellingborough and Kettering News reported on 4th April 1885 that on the previous Sunday a service of presentation and farewell was held for William. He had been living in Sleaford but had just been accepted for missionary work in the Congo. He had been a scholar and teacher in the Sunday School and the president, Mr. G. Smith, said:

. . . that he had known the school for something like 60 years. Some who had belonged to it had turned out very badly, a great number had turned out well and some had gone forth to preach the Gospel but, so far as he knew, this was the first time that one who had belonged to them had gone forth to be a missionary.

William sailed the following Wednesday from Liverpool. He arrived in the Congo on May 15th 1885 and died on June 8th: a missionary life of twenty-three days. On Sunday 2nd August, the Reverend I. Near preached a special sermon, to a large congregation, in remembrance of William.

How long Edwin's career in tailoring lasted is not clear but it was not the measurement of cloth and inside legs that was to be his life's work. By 1891 he and his older brother, Herbert had moved to Thrapston and were lodging with a widow, Elizabeth Read and her two grown-up children. The two brothers were both 'Watch Makers'. Herbert, soon changed his career and by 1901 he had moved to Corby where he is a 'Commercial Traveller in the Boot Trade'. Edwin, however, had found his life's work.

The brothers had been working for Augustus Allen, a Watch and Clock Maker in Thrapston. He had been born in Kenninghall in Norfolk in about 1811 and married an Alice Clark, who was born in North Shields in 1839. We do not know how or when Augustus came to Thrapston but he is already there in 1841 and his trade is set. Through a series of Post Office and Kelly's Directories he continues as a watchmaker and jeweller for over forty years. The last time I have found him as a watchmaker, 'employing one man', is in the 1881 Census where he is living by himself in Market Place, two doors away from the White Hart. A little mysteriously, Alice is living as a lodger in Twywell and shown as a retired tradesman's wife. In the meantime they have had a large family of some eight children including four boys. For whatever reason none of them took over the family business and by 1890 Augustus is shown as a 'Private Resident'.

There seems to be a gap of some ten years in this for Edwin was only some eleven years old in 1881. It may be that Augustus employed a manager to whom the two boys worked initially. At the moment we can only guess at the exact path of Edwin's remarkable rise to competence and maturity.

In 1894 Edwin married Elizabeth Smith and locally people would have said that he had made a 'good marriage'. The Smith family were Engineers and Iron Founders, originally from Stamford, who traded under the name of *Smith & Grace*. Elizabeth's father, George was a partner in the family firm which was a significant local employer. He was a man of some wealth.

Mr Allen retired and Edwin took over his shop and business. It seems likely that Smith money was involved in the name 'Cottingham' going over the shop window in Bridge Street and in the purchase of 3 Midland Road, *The Limes*, as Edwin and Elizabeth's family home. The 1911 Census, completed by Edwin, tells us that it had seven rooms, excluding any bathroom or scullery. The house was just around the corner from the shop and he could go from one to the other through his garden, which also contained his workshop.

Many of the life stories on this website, such as those of Herbert Abington, William Mitchell and Richard Warren show the way the new science and thinking moved the old established rural world into the new industrial age. With Edwin Cottingham, we see the move from Victorian science into the world of Einstein.

Edwin must have looked set fair to continue a comfortable life as a small town watch maker, repairer and seller. It was a life and a standard of living that many people in Ringstead would have envied. He had made good. But Edwin was a more ambitious and talented man than that. His skill and reputation would take him half way round the world and make him a figure of national importance in his chosen field. His story takes us well out of the nineteenth century so we will tell it briefly.

We cannot be certain as to the extent of Edwin's education but must presume that it started and ended at Ringstead School. Nor do we do the training he received under the guidance of Mr Allen. We do know, however, that he must have been a gifted and diligent pupil for he rapidly became a clockmaker of note and one well away from the normal domestic field. In this the engineering influence of his in-laws must have been important. It seems likely that he also had some influence of their business. Although never a shareholder of the family firm he was party to an agreement to form the new company of *Smith & Grace Screw Boss Pulley Co. Ltd.* As part of its new incarnation it took the power to:

....carry on at Thrapston in the County of Northampton and elsewhere in England the business of an Electric Light Company.

It was the bringing together of his clock-making, engineering and electrical skills that led him to comparative fame and fortune.



Edwin outside his shop with the clock he designed for Thrapston Church. The Rector is on the left and I believe that Edwin is the man standing next to him (or could he be the man in the white coat?). With the kind permission of the Antiquarian Horological Society.

One of his first ventures in this new field was to make for Thrapston Church a clock, with a chime regulated electro-magnetically. He also became fascinated by astronomy, one of the most ancient sciences but reinvigorated by the new discoveries of chemistry and physics. It was also one in which the very accurate measurement of time became of paramount importance. On March 12th 1905 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society.

By 1909 he was being asked by the Society to report on the state of a Harrison Clock. This was published in the Astronomical Society's monthly newsletter and in the *Horological Journal*. It must be remembered that Harrison's great importance had been that he had designed and made a chronometer which was so accurate that it could be used in precise navigation and in the scientific measurement of the earth and particularly of longitude. Cottingham was from similar roots to Harrison and had the same mixture of theoretical and practical skills. He made a clock for Edinburgh Observatory around the year 1916 which had electrical components. He was helping to move time measurement to the next stage of accuracy and reliability.

It was an exciting time for scientists and engineers and Edwin must have spent most of his waking hours in reading, inventing and making clocks and scientific instruments. He was fascinated by everything mechanical and in 1910 bought a second-hand motorbike. It is suspected that he took this to bits and was involved in the design of the Clyno Motor Cycle, originally an offshoot of the Smith family business. He also designed, made, and had manufactured, scientific recording instruments.

It must have been at about this time that Edwin cleaned the clock of Trinity College Church in Cambridge. There had been a tradition for students on the day of the Matriculation Dinner to try to run around the Great Court of Trinity, some 341 metres, while the clock struck 12 o'clock (in fact it struck 24 times). This event was made famous worldwide by the film *Chariots of Fire* which told the story of the future Olympic athletes, Liddell and Abrahams, racing each other. The *At Random* column of *The Observer* later observed:

To change the pace of a public clock is akin to the sin of removing one's neighbour's landmark and the famous horologist who has just died, Mr Edwin Cottingham, played at least a small part in deranging records. In tending the clock of Trinity Church, Cambridge, he speeded it up slightly, spoiling the sport of the undergraduates...

In fact, no-one was then able to beat the chimes until Lord Burghley in 1927. That is why we must assume that E.T. Cottingham's careful work was cursed by a generation of students.

Where was his wife, Elizabeth, in all this? The couple had one child, Leslie Guy Cottingham, born in 1897. Was she a clock widow while her husband beavered away in the shop and workshop or attended the Masonic Lodge meetings? Did time pass slowly for her?

The nature of time itself had changed. In 1843 Mr Hill a beer-keeper in Ringstead had escaped a conviction at Wellingborough Petty Sessions for selling beer after ten o'clock, when it was found that the church clock had not been working on that evening. In 1910 Edwin is paying Thrapston Post Office an annual rental of £5 for the 10 a.m. time signal to be transmitted by a single wire circuit to his premises. He was also the second person in Northamptonshire to be granted a wireless licence so

that he could receive a time signal from the Eiffel Tower. In 1914 his set and aerial, along with all other domestic radios across the country were confiscated for security reasons, whereupon Edwin started making a crystal set.

He continued to work on Greenwich and Admiralty chronometers during the First World War and also became more and more involved with Cambridge University Astronomy Department. This led to a project that was, perhaps, the pinnacle of his career. Rather as Captain Cook had gone to the South Seas as part of an expedition to view the transit of Venus across the Sun in order to discover the true distance of the latter from earth, Edwin was to go as part of a Cambridge University expedition to prove, or otherwise, Einstein's Theory of Relativity.

Cambridge University and the *Royal Astronomical Society* had set up a *Permanent Eclipse Committee*. This had decided to send a party to Principe, a Portuguese island in the Gulf of Guinea to view the eclipse of May 28th/29th 1919 to test:

...the deflection of a ray of light by a gravitational field. As predicted by the theory of relativity.

Professor A. S. Eddington and E.T. Cottingham were the observers. Edwin was responsible for much of the calculation and for the clock mechanism on which the camera was mounted. Although, on the day, they encountered some thundery weather there was enough clear sky for the measurement to take place and Einstein to be proved correct.

On 14th July 1919 Edwin, with Professor Eddington, returned home on the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company's ship *Deseado*. In November 1919 H. H. Turner from the Oxford University Observatory wrote to *The Times* about the expedition in which he recorded:

...And it is a pleasure to acknowledge the great assistance of Mr. E. T. Cottingham, a clock enthusiast of great skill with mechanical parts.

Edwin was fifty years old. Through the inter-war years he continued to work on scientific clocks and instruments including a new clock for the Royal Observatory at Greenwich. He retired from active business in 1928 but continued to dabble in clock making.

He died on March 20th 1940. His obituary in *The Times* concentrated on his technical achievements:

He had a wide reputation for scientifically built instruments with special pendulum compensations and airtight temperature-controlled cases. One such clock, which was used as standard timekeeper at Greenwich Observatory, had a guaranteed mean daily variation of not more than one-hundredth of a second. In partnership with Messrs. C. Mercer and Sons, St. Albans, noted chronometer makers, Cottingham produced three more astronomical clocks. One went to Hong Kong Observatory, and one was exhibited at the Palace of Industry in the first British Empire Exhibition at Wembley. The clocks are believed to be the only English reffer escapement clocks in existence.

Other obituaries were by friends and colleagues and said more about him as a man. His great friend David S. Torrens wrote in the *Horological Journal*:

He was the most modest and unassuming of men, who had never learnt the art of displaying his accomplishments to the crowd. He was at his best in the workshop in the company of some appreciative friends.

The obituary in the Royal Astronomical Society journal was written by Professor Eddington, who first wrote of his work for the University:

To Cambridge Observatory he was a good friend and benefactor. For more than thirty years he was in fact, if not in name, an honorary keeper of the clocks, visiting them regularly and freely undertaking their cleaning, repair and adaption for varying needs.

He also records in a sad but revealing note:

The first clock which he made was the Thrapston church clock, including the whole chiming mechanism. It was his favourite 'child' and his last exertion, though ill at the time, was to put it forward for Summer Time in 1940.

Postscript

On a sunny autumn day, in late October 2010, I wandered the streets of Thrapston looking for the shop of Edwin Cottingham. I tried the coffee shop, the library, the solicitors, the jewellers, the street cleaner who was known to have a lot of old postcards. None knew where the shop had been. In fact, none of them had heard of Edwin T Cottingham. Eventually a man did confirm that he had vaguely heard of him and he might have had the last shop before the mini roundabout.

*The shop, somehow, did not look substantial enough and I could not find the tiles with his name on which were supposed to be on the floor of the doorway. They were not under the large doormat but there seemed to be some slabs beneath that. Perhaps they were under them. I took a photograph of the premises without much hope but at home that evening I compared it with the picture shown in the text which is from Dennis Jones's booklet. Sure enough the features matched: the split front windows; the loaf shaped top to the columns; the high wall at the side. **Cottingham, Watchmaker and Jeweller** is now (2011) the **Bonoful Balti Hut**. I must go back and peek underneath the slabs laid under that doormat to see if E.T Cottingham still has a foothold in Thrapston.*



Edwin Cottingham's former shop (taken 27th October 2010)

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Chapter Twenty-One

Wifebeater

Korah Dicks (Dix), (abt 1813 – 1873)

Korah is not a common boys' name in nineteenth century England. This may be, in part, because people better understood the context of biblical names. Like our Korah, the ancestry of the biblical Korah is confused. He was either the son of Esau and, or, the son of Izhar. Both are remembered for rebellion against Israel and for being punished. It is Korah, son of Izhar who rebelled against Moses, disbelieving that the Ten Commandments actually came from God. The earth opened up and swallowed him.

In the Jewish version of the story, Korah told a parable of a poor widow to his followers which was a tale of the greed of the church and the establishment:

At the time of the harvest the widow had to leave unreaped the parts of the field prescribed by law while the harvested grain she had to give the priest the share due to him. The woman sold the field and with the proceeds bought two sheep. But the first born of these she was obliged to give to Aaron the priest and at the time of shearing he requested the first of the fleece also. The widow said, 'I cannot hear this man's demands any longer. It will be better to slaughter the sheep and eat them. But Aaron came for the shoulder, the two cheeks and the maw. The widow then vehemently cried out, 'If thou persisteth in thy demand I declare them devoted to the Lord.' Aaron replied, 'In that case the whole belongs to me,' whereupon he took away the meat, leaving the widow and her two daughters wholly unprovided for.

Is it too fanciful to believe that Korah Dicks was deliberately named because of the name's association? At a time when Little Addington and many other local parishes had been enclosed and the church still took its tithes did his parents knowingly christen him with a rebel's name? It is possible that his father, William, later became the Ringstead Parish Clerk. I say, 'possibly', because, like the biblical Korah, the ancestry of Korah Dicks is difficult to entangle. This is not necessarily due to any problems within the family. It may just be the product of large families, same name couples and multiple marriages.

William Dicks was the son of Joseph and Mary and was baptised on 21st March 1762 at Little Addington. He married Ann Smith at Cranford St. John on 26th September 1785. The young couple had one child, William, baptised in Little Addington on the 20th August 1786. Sadly, Ann died a few months after the baptism. William then married Martha March, also from Cranford St John, on 27th November 1787 in Little Addington Church. They lived in Ringstead and had three children, John (baptised 14 June 1789), Daniel (baptised 7 April 1793) and Thomas who was born 25 March 1802 and baptised in September of the same year. Was the gap of some nine years in the children

anything to do with military service in the Napoleonic Wars or did the couple move away for a time. At present we have no way of telling.

What we do know is that Martha died on 15th December 1808 aged just 41 and was buried in Ringstead. So far the family line is reasonably clear but from now it becomes difficult to untangle. If only William and Ann had not named their son after his father. Perhaps, more importantly, if only father and son had not both been carpenters, and married women of child-bearing age with the same Christian name and in the same year. Had they no thought for their genealogist descendants?

William senior was first and just six months after the death of Martha he married Sarah Eakins (or Ekins) on 30th May 1809 at Ringstead Church. William was still a comparatively young man, of around 47 years of age, and his new bride was some sixteen years his junior. His son, William, then married Sarah Wyman at Irthlingborough on 4th December 1809.

Suddenly, the Ringstead Parish Register is littered with the children of William and Sarah. Altogether there are fourteen christened in the twenty years from 1810. In the early years particularly, the children came thick and fast. In 1810 itself, two were born some eight months apart (the birth dates are given in the parish register). It seems clear that father and son were both producing children, at least through the earlier part of this period. Some births have the father as William, 'Parish Clerk' and some have William, 'Carpenter' but the first 'Parish Clerk' reference is not until 1825 so it does not seem a clear way for separating the two Williams.

When we come to Korah, whose story we are really telling, the birth is shrouded in further mystery because we know, from later Censuses, that he was born in about 1812 in Leicester. Of all the children of the two Williams he seems to be the only one who was baptised away from Ringstead. He was christened on 16th October 1812 in Leicester St Margaret's, the parish where the union workhouse was later built. Is this significant? The Register shows him as the son of William and Sarah Dicks and appears to have his name as 'Korias' but it seems certain that he is our man.

Korah's marriage to Sarah Ann Atley (Attley) was on 8th November 1835 so by 1841 he is head of his own household. If his marriage had been two years later we might have a certificate to prove his parentage. As it is, it is only on balance that we can say that he is the son of one of the Williams. Time may change that opinion.

Sarah Ann Attley also came from a difficult family, one which might have attracted the attention of Social Services today. We must beware of jumping to hasty value judgements and, certainly, few families went through the nineteenth century without having a least one child 'born out of wedlock'. And yet . . . Her sister Elizabeth had six illegitimate children before marrying Joseph Groom and having one more (and her daughters, Hannah and Mary Ann had seven illegitimate children between them). Another sister, Lydia, had one illegitimate child and was bearing another when she disappeared suddenly, leading to the trial for murder of William Weekley Ball. At this trial Joseph Groom was accused by the defence of having an 'improper intimacy' with Lydia.

None of this is conclusive evidence of a 'problem family' but it is an indicator that Sarah may have not had the best of upbringings. We know no more about Sarah and she may have been a good and

hardworking wife and mother. What we do know is that Korah Dicks turned out to be a bad husband who bullied and victimised his wife.

Their first son, William, (what else!) was born in about 1836 followed by John and then David, who is the first one to be baptised in the parish. In the 1841 Census Korah is shown, as an 'Agricultural Labourer', with his young family. There is no hint of the troubles that were assailing Korah and spilling into the lives of his wife and children.

It is in 1841 that Korah first appears in the *Northampton Mercury*. It reports that he was sent to the 'House of Correction' for one month for assaulting Henry Hitchcock, a young blacksmith living with his wife and child in Ringstead. Unfortunately, we do not know the cause of the assault. Was it a crime of passion or of drink?

It is another five years before Korah, once more makes the official records for the wrong reason. The *Criminal Register for Northamptonshire* records that he was tried on 1st July 1846 at the Northampton Quarter Sessions and sentenced to six weeks imprisonment for larceny. His 'degree of instruction', which means his ability to read and write, is described as 'Imperfect'. The *Northampton Mercury* had, some five years earlier, given a brief report of a talk on Education and Crime, given at the *Greenwich Society for the Acquisition and Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* by Dr. Murdoch in which he stated:

It is calculated that the chances of a person without education becoming a criminal were 2,200 to 1; those of an individual with an average education 10,000 to 1; and those of men having received a superior education 50,000 to one.

Dr. Murdoch would have found evidence to back the influence of education for, on the same page as Korah in the *Criminal Register*, seven have had no education, eleven imperfect education and one was well educated. Among other reasons, this was part of the driving force towards establishing a compulsory Primary Education system.

The *Northampton Mercury* also reports briefly on the case. The 'larceny' was at Tansor, a few miles north-east of Oundle and involved the 'stealing of a pig's cheek, the property of John Siddons'. The *Mercury* has his sentence as six **months** hard labour but one would expect the *Criminal Register* to be correct.

John Siddons was a young farmer and, perhaps, Korah was in the district looking for work, or perhaps he was roaming the countryside trying to make some money any way he could. Certainly he seems to be wandering far from home when he is once again guilty of larceny at the Hertfordshire County Court Session of 14th February 1848 and imprisoned for two months. These wanderings or 'tramps' and their consequences may explain a stretch of years without children for which Sarah may have been grateful. It was not unusual for small groups of young men to go on the 'tramp' looking for work and to see a little of the world. It was the labourers' Grand Tour.

At first, Ringstead Parish Register, apart from David, shows no sign of children for the couple but then, suddenly, on the 29th July 1849 all five of Korah and Sarah's children are baptised in a, not uncommon, family pack. We can only estimate their birth years from the 1851 Census. The children

were William (1835), John (1837), David (1839), Noah (1841) and Lod (1843). In fact David appears to have already been baptised already on 19th March 1840 but better safe than sorry!

Was this a sign of a return home and reconciliation? We cannot be sure, but certainly Hod (or sometimes Odd or Had) appears as eight months old in the 1851 Census and was baptised on 4th January 1852. All are together in the 1851 Census with all the children as 'ploughboys'.

It was a large family, all boys, but on July 11th 1852, David, just thirteen years old, was buried in the local churchyard. At about the same time, however, Sarah must have been pleased to finally give birth to a girl who they named Sarah Jane. She must have also looked forward to some help with the domestic chores when her daughter grew older.

It must not be forgotten that in 1850 Sarah had had the sadness and turmoil of the disappearance of her sister Lydia and the strong possibility, which was certainly believed by many villagers, that she had been murdered by her lover, the local butcher. People searched the parish for her body and there were even predictable rumours that she had ended up in the meat pies.

Korah seems to have returned but it was, at best a mixed blessing. It may be that Sarah had had to endure many years of unrecorded abuse by her husband before she finally snapped. The first sign is in the *Northampton Herald* for 30th December 1854:

These sessions commencing Wednesday next [i.e. 3rd January 1855] Ringstead. Korah Dicks 43 for want of sureties in a breach of the peace towards Sarah Dicks.

The January 6th issue of the *Herald* records that he was 'discharged there being no prosecution'. The *Herald* also recorded the Crime Statistics for Northamptonshire and on 13 January 1855 it tells us that in 1854 there was a total of three crimes which took place in Ringstead which were brought before the Quarter Sessions. This does not take into account the Petty Sessions but it shows that either Ringstead was a far from lawless place or matters were sorted out outside the legal system. Perhaps both statements are true.

Korah had been taken to gaol in Northampton on December 5th 1854 and this led to one other, almost comical incident. He was taken there by Samuel Figgis, the Ringstead Parish Constable. The rural police force was still in its infancy and the constables were not yet a professional force. In the 1861 Census Samuel is shown as 'New Inn and Carpenter'. William, Korah's father was a carpenter and one imagines that Korah was no stranger to the inside of the New Inn. It seems likely that Samuel knew him well and, perhaps, that led him to give a character like Korah too much rope.

The *Northampton Herald* later reported on a case of the 26th January 1855 when Constable Figgis found himself up before the Wellingborough Petty Sessions. The magistrates gave a caution to:

Samuel Figgis, Parish Constable of Ringstead for neglect of duty on 5th December, by allowing Korah Dix, a prisoner, to remain at a public house at Northampton two hours before taking him to gaol, in a state of drunkenness. Mr Bayly, the Chief Constable said he would not press charges for a heavier fine; the evidence was laid as a caution to other parish constables who are not aware that they ought to take the prisoners to gaol immediately on arriving in

Northampton. Mr Grant, governor, provided that the prisoner was drunk when delivered into custody.

Poor Figgis was convicted in the mitigating penalty of 10s and costs. One wonders where Korah got his money from to get himself drunk. Did it come from the long suffering Sarah's meagre income or did Samuel treat him. Was Samuel Figgis with Korah in the public house helping the condemned man enjoy his last hours of freedom for a time?

The *Calendar of Prisoners* for Northamptonshire and the *Northampton Herald* for 1855 reveal that Korah was a regular guest at the County Gaol. He appears at the Quarter Sessions in January, April, July and October of that year. Each time the charge is 'No surety to keep the peace' and he is discharged. It appears that he is mistreating his wife, Sarah, who complains of her treatment and he is taken to gaol. When the case comes around, however, she relents and does not bring any evidence and so the case is dropped and he is freed.

It may be that his heavy drinking had got out of hand and he was taking his drunken rages out on Sarah. Whatever the truth of this, Korah is finally convicted at Wellingborough Petty Sessions and it may be that she had a friend in high places that brought the matter to a head. The *Northampton Mercury* of 2nd December 1855 reported that:

Korah Dicks, labourer of Ringstead, was charged with beating his wife Sarah Dix in a violent manner and turning out of doors on the 14th November. The defendant, who behaved rudely in court, was committed to prison for six months hard labour.

Things had obviously turned sour in their marriage. The trial was at the Wellingborough Petty Sessions on 19th November 1855 and the chairman of the magistrates was T. Wilkins Esq.. This is relevant because at the later trial of William Weekley Ball in 1864, Sarah states that in 1850, at the time of Lydia's disappearance, she was staying with Mr Wilkins.

The 1851 Ringstead Census lists Thomas Wilkins, aged 64 as a 'Landed proprietor and one of HMJP'. With him lives his son, a 'Clerk, Clergyman and curate of Slipton' and his unmarried daughters together with a footman and three house servants. Was Sarah Dicks there as a servant or was she given sanctuary from her husband. Where were her children? Was it this relationship, however innocent, that was the cause Korah's rudeness to Thomas Wilkins in court?

After 1855 Korah does not appear again in the criminal records. Had he learnt his lesson or was he just lucky? Did Sarah forgive him and they became a happy middle-aged couple or was she forced to grudgingly accept him back into the family home. Without his income it must have been a difficult time for her and her children.

In 1861 Korah and Sarah are together in Ringstead with their children. William, the eldest at 26 is a shoemaker but Noah (18) and Lod (12) are agricultural labourers and Hod is a ploughboy. Sarah Jane, the only girl is eight years old and still a 'scholar'.

Sarah was to receive another blow when Sarah Jane, still only eight years old, died a few months later on July 26th 1861.

By 1871 Korah and Sarah are living in Carlow Street and he is unable or unwilling to work and, at sixty years old, is a 'Pauper'. Sarah is trying to earn a living as a needlewoman and Hod, the only child at home is now 20 years old and a labourer. The Criminal Register tells us that on 8th March 1869 Hod had been imprisoned for two months hard labour for house breaking.

It may be that Korah was genuinely unable to work for in the spring of 1873 he died, although there is no sign of his burial in Ringstead . His drinking partner and guard, Samuel Figgis, died soon after, on 1st May 1873 aged just 52.

In 1881 Sarah, now a sixty-seven year old widow, is living with her two unmarried sons, John (44), an ironstone labourer and Lodd (36) a drover. Two doors away is her son Noah (38) a farm labourer with his wife Emma and their five children.

Old Dicks, [most likely Hod or Had, for his widow, Sarah, and her children are staying with his older brother, John] died on February 24th 1886 aged thirty-five years and a few months later his mother, Sarah died aged seventy-five. It must have been 'a good age' considering the life that she had been led.

After the death of Korah, his son, Noah, named his own son James Korah Dicks in honour of his father. So, even though he was petty thief, drunkard and wife-beater, strangely Noah wished him to be remembered. It may be that, when sober, he had other good qualities. We have no way of knowing. Sadly, James Korah Dicks, just six months old, died on 1st July 1879.

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Chapter Twenty-Two

The Railway Children

William Leveratt (1813- 1893) & family

The railway, along with the bicycle, the great enlarger of many villages' gene pools, came quite early to Ringstead. *The Liverpool and Manchester Railway*, the first really successful railway opened in 1830. In the next twenty years railway fever laid an irregular web of lines across the country, with London at its centre. Ringstead became part of this network just fifteen years later.

Not every landowner was pleased to see this new driver of trade and prosperity cross his land. Many saw it as a noisy, dirty despoiler of their view and, without the sepia glasses of nostalgia, one can understand their concern. It was rumoured that the large landowners around Northampton forced the railway around the town so that Blisworth, some five miles away, became its nearest station on the Euston to Birmingham line. In fact, opened in 1838, it was engineered by Robert Stephenson and he by-passed Northampton because it would have involved steeper climbs than he thought that the locomotives of the time could bear.

Northampton businessmen realised that, without the railway, they would not be able to compete with other towns. Accordingly, in the autumn of 1842 *the London and Birmingham Railway Board* was approached with the idea of a line from Blisworth, via Northampton, Thrapston and Oundle to Peterborough. The first notification of the intention to build the line was in November 1842. Events then moved with an astonishing speed.

It was realised from the start that the line would not be profit-making by itself but it would give the LBR a way into the east of the country as well as feeding traffic into its main line. Surprisingly, Peterborough was not yet part of the network but it was obvious that it would be on a major line from London to the north very soon as well as being a possible hub for traffic to the East Coast.

There was, initially, strong opposition by some local landowners, including Lord Lilford and Mr Archbould, the Thrapston solicitor who had steered the Ringstead Enclosure through only a couple of years earlier and who was also a landowner. The six main objections included one which modern day protest groups against new developments may have some sympathy with. They argued that:

The aim of the proposal was not really to benefit the area but to produce more profit for the London and Birmingham main line.

Nevertheless, The Times could report on January 1843:

LONDON AND BIRMINGHAM RAILWAY. – On Monday a special general meeting of the proprietors was held at the Euston Hotel, Euston-station, for the purpose of authorising the directors to make a branch line from the Blisworth-station in the county of Northampton, to

the city of Peterborough.....All the large landowners were in favour of the line.... A series of resolutions was then passed to carry out the objects of the meeting.

By the 4th July 1843 the necessary Bill had passed through three readings of the House of Commons, the Committee Stage and a further three readings in the House of Lords and had received the Royal Assent. Of course the fast movement of stock, agricultural produce, iron ore and limestone from the area and the transport in of coal, fertilizer, oil and other goods must have been a great incentive to the business side of a landowner's thinking.

Construction on the line, under the overall control of Robert Stephenson, started almost immediately. The level route along the Nene valley was a comparatively simple engineering task although it did include 26 level crossings, 13 bridges and a 616-yard tunnel at Wansford. By the summer of 1844 there were some 1000 navvies working on the line many of them on the construction of the tunnel. This of course caused local problems but it was over remarkably quickly.

The speed of construction came at some cost and injuries and deaths were not uncommon in the rush to complete in an age of few safety rules. Ringstead lost one of its sons to the line before it had opened. William Wittering (Whittering) was killed on the 6th March 1845 at Titchmarsh. He had been a shoemaker but is shown on his death certificate as a labourer. It seems likely that he had taken the opportunity of the building of the line to earn more money. The cause of death is just listed as, 'Accidentally killed on the Railway'. At this late date, with the opening of the line just two months away, it seems most likely that he was killed by a train or truck rather than a fall of earth. He was 44 years old and the 1851 Census finds his widow, Mary, aged 58 and daughter, Ruth, 16, trying to survive as washerwomen.

The 38-mile line had twelve stations and Ringstead, as one of the lesser stops, probably had only a wooden building, in the Tudor style. If this was the case, it was quite soon replaced by a substantial brick building. The whole branch line cost some £70,000 under the original estimate of £500,000 and. on the 3rd May 1845. a special train, carrying company directors and other officials, made an inspection tour of the line.

The Times of June 2nd 1845 reported that on the previous Saturday (30th May):

A special train conveying a party of the directors and their friends left the London terminus on Saturday morning at half past 9 o'clock for the purpose of opening and inspecting this additional line of traffic which is, we believe, the longest branch yet made from any trunk-line.

At Northampton the party:

. . . received an accession by the arrival of the mayor and other corporate authorities; and the train, now increased to 15 first-class carriages, proceeded on its route.

The article also describes the route in glorious terms but also reveals that not everything was yet completed.

By a rather circuitous course, following the meanderings of the beautiful river Nene, through a country picturesque and highly cultivated, studded with pretty villages and churches of architectural pretension, we passed unfinished stations at Castle Ashby, Wellingborough, Ditchford, Higham Ferrers and Ringstead and again paused at Thrapstone.

The *Northampton Herald* of 7th June, rather disparagingly, states:

Between Wellingborough and Thrapston, a distance of eleven miles, there are three stations. Ditchford, which may be called a third-class station, or mere booking office, at which trains only stop when there are passengers to be taken up . . . and Ringstead, another third-class station.

The Grand Opening of the line to general passenger traffic was just three days later on Monday 2nd June 1845. This was a chaotic occasion because of the large numbers wanting to travel on the line as well as the throngs of sightseers on the platforms. Some did not relish the heaving mass of humanity and had their ticket money refunded. All along the line were crowds of people cheering and waving flags.

The *Herald* again reported that:

It would seem too, that along this new line the population, men, women, and children, do not yet stand sufficiently in awe of the terrific monster steam. They have the hardihood to gather directly in his path, as if his dashing among them would not, before you could say Jack Robinson, crush every bone in the skins of rash hundreds.

The speed, with which the project was conceived, designed and built, using only explosives and manual labour is astonishing. It was less than three years between the company being approached by the landowners and the railway being open for traffic.

The canal and river authorities realised that the railway posed a threat to their livelihood. The same edition of the *Northampton Herald* that reported on the opening of the new branch line also had an advertisement from the Commissioners giving notice of a 'Reduction of Tonnage River Nen Navigation' between Thrapston and Northampton. It gives the cost per ton at each lock, including:

	s.	d.
<i>Cotton Mill Lock</i>	0	2
<i>Paper Mill Lock</i>	0	2
<i>Woodford Mill Lock</i>	0	2

The railway line passed some distance from the main village at Ringstead but one suspects that many villagers would have walked down past the church to see the progress, especially during that spring of 1845 when the line and the station were being completed. Among those interested onlookers must have been William Leveratt, his wife Mary and their young family.



*Drawing produced for George Capron by George Clarke and now at Southwick Hall
(With the kind permission of Christopher Capron)
Telegraph wires connected the stations along the route only 7 years after its invention.)*



Taken from approximately the same spot on 27th October 2010. (Gate as if across track)



The site of the original track bed, looking towards the road bridge near Willy Watt Mill.

This is on the horizon in the original 1847 drawing

Photograph taken 27th October 2010

William had been born in Thrapston in 1813, the son of Charles John Leveratt and his wife Sarah. He was one of twelve children and often we see that some of the children of such large families have to leave home early and look away from their local area for work. We see in other biographies that many, such as the children of Daniel Ball, had to seek their fortunes in Canada, the USA and Australia. William did not travel so far. At the time of his marriage in St Giles Church, Northampton to Mary Agutter on 9th July 1838, he was a servant living in Whitechapel in Middlesex. His wife, Sarah is variously said to be born in Lowick and Islip. She is living in St Giles Street, close to the church and is not shown as having any occupation although her father is shown to be servant. As both groom and bride were from the Thrapston area, it is probable that they had met each other there, rather than in Northampton, but we cannot be sure..

By the 1841 Census the young couple are shown, with their two young daughters, Mary and Rebekah, staying with Thomas Agutter, a farm bailiff and his brother John, a labourer, at Ringstead Lodge, which is beside the road from Ringstead Mill and the future station. Thomas is probably Sarah's brother and it may be that they are staying there between jobs as no occupation is shown for William.

In 1849 a *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Northamptonshire* has the entry, *Leveratt, Wm. station master*, so it looks possible that he was in the post from the very start. The 1851 Census has him as a 'Station Clerk' but it is likely that this is a misunderstanding of this new work title. He would now be working for the *London & North Western Railway (LNWR)* formed by a merger between the London and Birmingham Railway and a number of other companies in 1846. The line of his life was now set and a number of his children also followed along the same track.

PETERBOROUGH BRANCH.												
Down Trains (except on Sundays)										Sunday.		
	a.	m.	a.	m.	p.	m.	p.	m.	p.	m.	a.	m.
Leave Northampton	9	30	11	15	1	0	3	6	8	40	10	35
Billing Road	9	37	11	23			5	8	8	48	10	43
Castle Ashby	9	41	11	30			8	15	8	56	10	51
Wellingborough	9	52	12	38	1	20	5	22	9	5	11	0
Ditchford	9	59					5	30			11	7
Higham	10	5	1	40	1	32	5	37	9	16	11	14
Kingstead	10	12	1	50			5	44	9	24	11	22
Thrapston	10	20	2	0	1	46	5	52	9	32	11	30
Thorpe	10	27	2	10			5	59	9	40	11	38
Barwell	10	35	2	20			6	5	9	49	11	47
Oundle	10	41	2	30	2	5	6	14	9	58	11	54
Elton	10	52	2	37			6	25	10	7	12	3
Wansford	10	57	2	45	2	20	6	30	10	12	12	10
Stamford				42			7	36				
Castor	11	2					6	36			12	16
Overton	11	8	2	55			6	43	10	22	12	23
Peterborough	11	15	1	1	2	35	6	50	10	30	12	30

The 11 15 a.m. train from Northampton takes 3rd class passengers from the south to Peterborough.
The 5 0 p.m. train from Northampton takes 3rd class passengers from the north to Peterborough.
† A coach leaves Wellingborough at 1 30 p.m. for Kettering.

Up Trains (except on Sundays)										Sunday		
	a.	m.	a.	m.	p.	m.	p.	m.	p.	m.	a.	m.
Leave Peterborough	6	30	10	15	1	20	4	0	3	30	12	45
Overton	6	36	10	21	2	26	4	5	3	36	12	51
Castor	6	42			2	33			5	42	13	57
Stamford			9	38					4	47		
Wansford	6	47	10	28	2	38	4	13	5	47	1	3
Elton	6	53	10	34	2	45	4	19	5	53	1	8
Oundle	7	3	10	43	2	56	4	28	6	3	1	16
Barwell	7	12	10	53	3	6	4	37	6	12	1	27
Thorpe	7	20	1	3	3	14	4	44	6	20	1	35
Thrapston	7	27	1	10	3	22	4	51	6	27	1	42
Kingstead	7	35	1	20	3	31	4	59	6	35	1	50
Higham	7	42	1	28	3	39	5	6	6	42	1	57
Ditchford	7	49			3	46			6	49	2	4
Wellingborough	7	56	1	40	4	53	5	15	6	55	2	10
Castle Ashby	8	4	1	50	4	3	5	24	7	4	2	19
Billing Road	8	11	1	0	4	10	5	33	7	11	2	26
Northampton	8	20	1	10	4	20	5	42	7	20	2	35

The 6 30 a.m. train from Peterborough takes 3rd class passengers both north and south.
On Saturdays a market train leaves Wellingborough for Northampton at 10 30 a.m.

Timetable in Northampton Herald 17 February 1855.

By permission of Northamptonshire Libraries and Information Service.

In 1861 William is a stationmaster, probably living in the station house with Mary and their children, Ann, William, Martha, Samuel, Elizabeth and Charles.

The job of a stationmaster varied with the size and importance of the station. The smaller the station the more 'hands-on' and jack-of-all-trades he would have to be. John Farrington, in *Life on the Lines*, gives some idea of his duties.

In the case of the smaller stations as well as his duties in running the station and its goods yard, level crossing, etc., he was responsible for acting as the railway company's agent and

for securing traffic for his company in competition with other companies and, later, with road transport. His station would deal with both passengers and goods traffic.

As we can see from the timetable shown above, there were basically only five 'up' trains and five 'down' passenger trains and one of these each way did not stop at Ringstead. There were, however, also goods trains and the station, in 1871 also gained a network of sidings on its south side. In *The Nene Valley Railway*, John Rhodes explains:

Butlin's ironstone mines were near Ringstead village. At first, 1000 tons of ore a week were produced here and transported in horse-drawn trucks [i.e. on rails] where it was transferred to standard gauge wagons. The system closed down after 20 years and was then dismantled.

Other ironstone workings had sidings leading to the line between Ringstead and Denford which lasted for a short period in the last years of the nineteenth century.

Although it might have felt isolated and lonely, especially on wet winter days, it would have been a busy life and not always a quiet one. Besides the trains, the crossing gates, and the noisy, dusty loading of iron ore there was the call of his clients. The upper and middle classes would have expected preferential treatment and might also treat him as an equal – unless they did not get it. He was also 'living on the job' and people would tend to call on him when it suited them, with little regard to his nominal working hours. John Farrington quotes from *Memoirs of a Station Master* which was published in 1879 and shows, unintentionally, the view of many in society.

.... the clerks and stationmasters were for the most part supplied from the middle class of society and able to hold their own in a gentlemanly way.... At the present day they are, for the most part, the descendants of the porters and policemen who, having been educated at the British and Free schools, have been drafted into the Telegraph Office and thence to the clerk's appointments. There is nothing sharpens the wit of a lad like a telegraph office, but it cannot be expected that the associations of their homes will make them conversant with the habits and manners of gentlemen.

Where did William sit in all this? He was the son of a shoemaker and his wife's father is shown on the marriage register as a servant. Nevertheless one senses that the Agutters were of farming stock and many of her children are given the middle name Agutter. She may have been aware of her middle class associations. Whatever the truth, in his work, William would have had to walk the tightrope between authority and deference.



*Stone sleepers did not prove suitable and were replaced by wooden ones. The original ones were laid as stepping-stones from the station area to Addington through the water meadows.
(Taken 4th March 2011).*

In the 1871 Census William and Mary are still in the Station House but only their nineteen-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, remains at home. On the 14th May 1878 Mary Leveratt died, aged sixty-five, and was buried in Ringstead churchyard. Her epitaph bears the text:

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

While understanding that many Christians would believe that, before God, the best of us must recognize our inadequacy, it is not an obvious epitaph to put on a loved one's gravestone.



A later postcard of Ringstead & Addington Station (Frederick George is now the stationmaster). It looks as if the station house extends at the back. When the second line was constructed a second platform was built on the other side of the crossing. By 1957 only the shack to the left of the building (or a similar replacement) remained. The original had probably been demolished after a fire.

*Photograph from Railways in Northamptonshire by Andrew Swift (Reflections of a Bygone Age).
With the kind permission of the publishers.*

1881 finds William's railway career over. He 68 years old and living in Chapel Road, Ringstead with his unmarried daughter, Rebecca (40), acting as his housekeeper. She seems to be also looking after her sister, Martha's eight-year-old son, John C Hill. Martha had married a soldier and followed him to Aldershot. It appears that she had died, perhaps with complications after the birth of her second child.

William is now a 'poulterer'. It was not unusual for stationmasters to rent a small plot of land from the railway company to grow some vegetables and keep a few chickens to help their income, and the Agutters were local farmers, so perhaps he saw an opportunity to earn a little money in his retirement. Old age could be a difficult time for the poorer middle classes who were not of substantial independent means. By 1891 he is aged 78 and is just shown as a retired stationmaster, still living in Chapel Road and being looked after by Rebecca. He was obviously beginning to decline in health for on 4th June 1893 he died of 'Senile Decay' aged 81 years. Rebecca was present at his death and his occupation is given simply as 'house proprietor'.

Perhaps surprisingly, he was not buried with his wife in Ringstead but, rather, in Denford churchyard. It may be that the local churchyard had ceased to be used and only the public cemetery was now available. This would have been close to where he had lived his life but perhaps his daughters wanted him buried in a churchyard and the Agutter connection gave them the opportunity.

The 'family business' had continued, however, and his son, Charles Agutter Leveratt, had taken up the position of station master at Ringstead. Charles had been baptised in Ringstead church on 29th September 1866 aged thirteen but disappears from the Census some five years later. We learn from later railway records that he started work first at Northampton Station on 27th December 1868 as a (possibly 'parcel') porter. By 20th April 1869 he had moved to Harrow, still as a porter. There he met Elizabeth, 'Betsey', Johnson and on 10th January 1874, aged 21, he married her in the Harrow Parish Church.

He returned with his new wife to Northamptonshire and became the station master at Higham Ferrers. This may have happened as early as 1871 although the records are a little ambiguous. His sister, Elizabeth, worked with him there as a booking clerk at least from 5th May 1872. The staff records show him as earning £50 from 1st February 1877 and his sister, by July of the following year, £25. If this is a year it is very poor pay so could it be per quarter? This seems too much!

It is possible that Charles and his family moved back to Ringstead, while working at Higham but usually the stationmaster would need to live on the job. Certainly, he had moved back to Ringstead and taken over from his father by 1877. His daughter, Martha Eva, was baptised at Ringstead on March 17th 1877 and Charles is noted as the 'Station Master' and this is reinforced by the *1877 Post Office Directory of Northamptonshire*.

Although the 1881 Census does not give his residence, it is next to the miller, Richard Wadsworth. As Charles's father was earlier recorded as the neighbour of Thomas Wadsworth, it seems certain that he too was living in the station house. Betsey is there and, looking at the children, Elizabeth is six and born in Harrow and Annie is three and born in Ringstead so they moved back to Ringstead between 1875 and 1878. Probably, as William retired, his son took his place. Charles received a bonus for signalman's duties, for which he required a police certificate of competency after May 1887.

Ten years later Charles, now thirty-eight, is still the stationmaster with Betsey (42) and the children Annie, Nellie, Frederick, Christopher and Florence. Also lodging with them is James Mayes (25), a signalman. Altogether the couple had twelve children three of whom died in infancy. It must have been a sad blow when the twins, Arthur and George died on 29th March 1890 aged just five months. The couple then, almost immediately, had another set of twins, Herbert and May, baptised in Ringstead on 27th May 1891, and this time they survived.

It would have been a hard and lonely life for Betsy in the station house with all her children and few close neighbours. Did she hanker for the life of the town again? We know that Charles was not well and that, when he improved, he transferred to Euston Station, between 26th December 1892 and 31st January 1893. He was once again ill and moved to Shilton.

William Bodger replaced Charles as station master on 23rd December 1893 so there may have been a temporary station master in the interim. *Kelly's Directory* for 1898, records William as still the stationmaster.

Charles, at some point after 1893, gives up the railway, perhaps forced to do so by his ill-health. The 1901 Census shows Charles Leveratt, and his family, living in Queen's Terrace in Harrow-on-the-Hill, Middlesex, running a 'General Grocery Store'. This is where they were married so perhaps Betsy has

inherited it from her parents or a relative. Of course, William Leveratt had died in 1893 so perhaps the links with the past were cut for Charles and he looked for a new life, and one not too strenuous, as he does not seem a well man.

By 1908, at his daughter Nellie's wedding, Charles is 55 and the couple are running the Royal Oak Coffee Tavern in Crown Street, Harrow. By 1911 they had moved to 168 Cricklewood Lane in Hendon and are running a small boarding house. Just a month later, on 4th May 1911 Charles died of a heart attack: ('Morbus Cordis' on the death certificate, which was a catch-all medical term).

William and his son, Charles had worked at Ringstead station for some fifty years, possibly from its opening and almost to the end of the century. The railway had been an important part of the industrial transformation of England into the first modern industrial nation although it was already being superseded by the USA by the end of the century.

The other children of William and Mary had varied lives. Mary, the eldest, married a groom, Martha married a soldier and died young, Rebecca became a servant before moving back to the village to look after her father, William and Samuel probably emigrated to America and the first John and Edwin died in infancy. We will briefly look at the second John and Elizabeth who also followed their father onto the railway.

In 1893 William had left a will in which he was described as a 'yeoman'. He had effects to the value of £233 19s. 7d. The two trustees were John Agutter, farmer and John Leveratt, railway guard.

John was born in about 1843 and is with his parents in 1851 but seems, like many young men, to have disappeared from the 1861 Census. He married Sarah Rebeccah Frankton, a dressmaker from Long Lawford, at Newbold on Avon in Warwickshire. His sister, Elizabeth, was one of the witnesses. He is noted as living in Peterborough and the 1871 Census confirms him as a railway porter and living at 4 Highbury Place, Peterborough. His wife, Sarah Rebecca and their seven-month year old son, Thomas William are living with her parents in Newbold-on-Avon in Warwickshire. It may be that she was there temporarily while her husband found suitable lodgings.

The Newbold on Avon Register has the christening of John Frankton Leveratt on 26th May 1872, [he probably dies in infancy], and shows that John has been promoted to Guard. Certainly, by 1881 they are together in 35 Delhi Street, Finsbury, Islington and Thomas has two sisters, Edith and Lizzie, both born in Islington. It confirms that John has been promoted to Railway Guard. Just before the Census, on 9th February 1881 John had been involved in a frightening accident. The early railways had many accidents and only gradually were signalling and braking improved. The Rail Inspector's Report, on April 30th 1881, tells us that:

In this case the 7.35 p.m. passenger train from Moorgate Street to High Barnet, - consisting of tank engine and 10 vehicles, - which left King's Cross suburban platform at 7.54 p.m. came into collision at 7.56 p.m. with a train of 12 empty carriages which had left King's Cross for Holloway at 7.50 p.m., and had been brought to a stand at Belle Isle starting-signal waiting until the line was clear, with the break-van at the rear of the train about 25 yards outside Maiden Lane tunnel.

The engine of the passenger train left the rails and the break-van of the train of empties was broken up.

John Leverett [sic] was the guard in that 'break-van' and gave evidence:

After standing at Belle Isle two or three minutes I looked out on the right-hand side, and saw the white head-light of a train coming from King's Cross on our line of rails. I said to Swan [a shunter driver getting a ride in the break-van], 'For God's sake, jump; here is a train coming.' I jumped and Swan followed.

The driver of the second train had gone through a signal which he had not seen change. John and Swan both escaped with minor injuries and ten passengers complained of being 'shaken'. John had had a lucky escape.

The Newbold on Avon Parish Register show a that as well as a John Frankton (Thomas ?) in 1872 Edith Ann was baptised on 1st September 1878 and Florence Nelly and Lily Frankton were christened on 14th September 1884 and 18th September 1887 respectively. The register records, for the last two christenings, that the couple were living in Leicester.

By 1891 they have moved to Doncaster, another great railway town, and are living at 36 North Street. He is still a guard. It also confirms that Florence and Lily were both born at Leicester.

1901 finds them still in Doncaster and living at 62 Somerset Road. All the family are still at home. Thomas, the eldest is 30 years old and a 'Carriage Pickup Labourer' which one would guess is a job on the railway, while Eliza and Florence are dressmakers. His life then follows the pattern of his brother, Charles, for he moves back to his wife's parents' area, in this case Long Lawford near Rugby and sets up as a greengrocer. By 1911 his wife has died and, aged 67, and he runs the shop with the help of his unmarried daughter, Edith, who is thirty-three. He dies in the Rugby area in 1917.

Perhaps the child of William, whose life most shows the new world that is coming, is his youngest daughter, Elizabeth Agutter Leveratt. She was baptised at the same time as her brother Charles on September 29th 1866, aged 15, and we learn, from her railway record, that she was born on the 1st September 1850. In 1871 she was the only child living at home and, at nineteen, has no occupation given. The February 10th 1877 edition of the *Peterborough and Huntingdonshire Standard* had the following short news item.

Some of our railway companies have it in contemplation to take a leaf out of the book of the Telegraph offices and employ respectable females as clerks at stations. The work is such that delicate females can perform it just as well as men. At several of the Metropolitan railway stations female clerks are already employed and the practice is found to answer.

Elizabeth was one of the trailblazers for these 'delicate females'. As we have seen, it is likely that she started work as a booking clerk on 5th May 1872, first at Higham Ferrers and then at Ringstead with her brother, Charles, as the station master. In the 1881 Census her father has retired, her mother has died and her older sister, Rebecca is now looking after the house. Elizabeth is 29 and still a 'Railway Station Clerk'.

Railway workers were considered among the aristocracy of the working classes. John Farrington in *Life on the Lines* has pointed out that when a boy [or girl] applied for job as a railway clerk he [or she] had to show a keen intelligence and have references from persons of good standing such as a local clergyman or Justice of the Peace. He also makes clear that in the nineteenth century it was a demanding job and was not well paid. He tells us:

In the second half of the nineteenth century the nominal working day of the clerk might be from 9am to 6pm with a half day on Saturday and the pay might be between 15s and £1 per week.

In 1891 Elizabeth is staying with her widowed sister, Mary Ann Robins, a grocer in Wellingborough. She is still a booking clerk on the railway but whether this was now at Wellingborough is not clear.

In the Census she is thirty-seven years old and people must have presumed that she was a confirmed spinster. Then, a few months later, in the summer of 1891 Elizabeth Agutter Leveratt married John Agutter. She was now Elizabeth Agutter Agutter. John was probably her cousin and a farmer in Ringstead, not far from the railway station. Unfortunately their time together was limited and just before the next Census, on 4th February 1901 John died, in his fifty-first year. He was buried in Denford churchyard and the grave also remembers, 'Bessie Mary, their infant daughter who died September 9th 1893 aged 5 months'. We understand now that her father, William Leveratt was buried next to what was to be an Agutter grave for his son-in-law and daughter.



Tithe Farm (Now two cottages: September 2011).

It was originally thatched and had fallen into disrepair.

The 1901 Census reveals Elizabeth as a widow aged 49 years, living at Tithe Farm, Ringstead, and with her only living child, Frances aged six years. She also has a farm manager and a general servant.

Elizabeth, too, died on February 1907 aged just fifty-five and was buried with her husband and infant child in Denford.

It was usual for children to follow their parents into work on the network so we would expect to see some of William and Mary's grandchildren also working on the railway but we must leave the dynasty here. In the 1950's Ringstead Station was described as 'merely a couple of platforms, a hut and a cast-iron lavatory a few yards down the permanent way'. In 1964 the station and the line closed.



William Leveratt's grave in the foreground with the cross of his daughter Elizabeth (and her husband and baby daughter) standing next to it in Denford Churchyard.

Photograph taken 27th October 2010.

Postscript

We have seen in the story of Elizabeth how women were overcoming prejudice and were gradually gaining access into traditional male jobs. Although we are straying away from the railway, the story of another Elizabeth Leveratt, the eldest daughter of Charles and Betsey is worth the telling. Born in Harrow in 1875, Elizabeth Emma Leveratt was living in Ringstead with her parents in 1881. The family returned to Harrow and in March 1895, aged 20, Elizabeth travelled to the island of St. Vincent in the West Indies to work for the Governor-General, Sir Harry Thompson. She met Joseph Dopwell in the Botanical Gardens there and they were married in 1898 amid great scandal as it was a 'mixed' marriage.



Elizabeth Emma Dopwell (nee Leveratt).

1875 – 1903.

They had three children but Elizabeth died of Typhoid in 1903 aged 28. It is believed, in the family, that Elizabeth's parents had disowned her after her marriage but, at her death, they offered to look after the three children. Joseph Dopwell, with some reason, felt that they would not be treated well because of their mixed race. He went to Kenya to work and the children were raised by his mother in St Vincent. It seems likely that Joseph did go to visit his wife's mother in Cricklewood Lane in 1915 (her father had died by this time). One wonders just how that meeting went.

[My thanks to Liz DeCaul in Grenada for the photograph and the story of her great grandparents].

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My special thanks to Neil Leveratt of California who has allowed me access to his very authoritative family tree to back up my research (there are some incorrect ones on Ancestry.co.uk).

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Chapter Twenty–three

Village Schoolmasters

William Harding, John Bannister, Albert Crew & Thomas Johnson.

The schoolteachers who came to Ringstead in the second half of the nineteenth century were part of a new breed of young professionals who emerged from the working and lower middle classes. They came to Ringstead from all over England, served the community for a time and then, usually, moved on to another step in their career. Some stayed for less than half a year and some for half a lifetime.

It would be wrong to think that Ringstead did not have any schools before the building of the National School that still serves the village today. In 1818 the Select Committee on Education of the Poor reported that there was:

A Sunday school supported by voluntary contributions in which about 40 boys and girls are taught. Two day schools kept by women in which about 24 children are taught, at their parents' expense.

It does, however, add:

The generality of the poor cannot afford the means of education for their children, and would be glad to possess them.

There is no sign of a schoolteacher in the 1841 Census but this is probably due to the general lack of female occupations given, unless they were head of the family, and any men teaching would probably have been attached to the church or chapels and would have done it as part of their other religious duties. The more comprehensive 1851 Census gives us a better picture. We have Alice Roberts aged 45, wife of agricultural labourer John, who is a 'Church Sunday School mistress', Louisa Hannah Weekley, 31, wife of Shoemaker William, a Daily Schoolmistress and Elizabeth Gunn, 54, wife of Isaac, a gardener, who is an 'Infant teacher'. We can only guess that we have a mixture of Dame and Sunday Schools in the village.

The Dame Schools varied greatly in worth. Some were merely child-minding places, held by a woman in her cottage and were overcrowded and with little or no teaching or learning taking place; others were an early form of trade school where lace or straw plaiting would be taught in, what was often, a junior sweatshop. Some, however, did teach the basics of reading and writing with perhaps some religion instruction as well. With no qualifications needed for the teachers, they varied from the Dickensian to the enlightened.

Ten years later, in 1861, Elizabeth Gunn is still a Schoolmistress and, although Alice Roberts is no longer shown, next door to her, Sarah Cunnington is a schoolmistress. Hannah Weekley also is not recorded as a schoolmistress but perhaps it is because she has another child, just three years old.

William Kitchen, soon to marry again after the death of his first wife, is put down as a 'Particular Baptist Minister and School master'. There was a battle during much of the nineteenth century between the Nonconformists and the Church of England to provide schools for the working classes. The two organisations, The British and Foreign School Society (Nonconformists) and the National Society (Church of England) competed with each other to found schools across the country and this rivalry may explain some of the local animosity that surfaced in Ringstead towards the end of the century. It may be that William Kitchen was teaching at a Baptist Sunday school in the Manse but it is just possible that he was running a day school and this is one factor that spurred the local church into the founding of the Ringstead and Denford School. Another important factor was the increasing national pressure for the state to set up a secular 'Board School' system to replace or complement the religion-based schools.

Although the Church of England *National Society* was by far the largest provider, this tussle over the schools was evident throughout the century and in some parishes, open warfare broke out between the sides as this report from *The Times* of 8th April 1897 illustrates.

A VILLAGE SCHOOL IN DISPUTE. - *An extraordinary dispute has occurred at Sulgrave, in South Northamptonshire, where the village school, owing to the proceedings of contending parties is little more than a wreck. Two committees, differently appointed, are contending for the control of the school, and a week ago one of these bodies gave public notice that the school, which had been closed for about six months, would be reopened. The opposite committee, however, had the keys and refused to give them up. The aid of the police was sought without effect, and the place remained unopened. The next morning the iron gates were battered in, and, a window being broken, entrance was effected and the doors were opened from within. School was formally begun, a lady teacher from a church school at Northampton being installed as the mistress. During the night the opposite side fastened the doors with iron bars and screws, so that in the process of reopening in the morning the doors like the gates were seriously broken. Fresh locks were put on the door and the vicar of the parish followed up this by effecting an entrance into the school at the rear, having a hole made through the brick wall into which a wooden door was promptly fixed. One of the church wardens, as a manager of the schools, has obtained two summonses against the vicar for damaging the building, and, in reply, a numerously signed document is going the round of the parish expressing the greatest confidence in the vicar. The dispute appears to have arisen largely from the uncertainty of the right of control of the school owing to the deed by which it was transferred by purchase to a responsible committee only ten years ago being lost. The schools were closed for nine months during a similar dispute four years ago.*

Whatever the driving force to the new school, it began under William Harding, and the first entry in the school Log Book is dated September 18th 1865. The school started in the Temperance Hall which had been 'Erected to promote the Temperance, Intelligence and Happiness of the People' in 1861.

It is possible that the school had started earlier with other 'Non-Certificated' teachers but for the moment we must presume that this was the start for Ringstead School. William, the pioneer, tells us that he was 'Certificated Teacher 4th Class 2 Div. Prov.'. Gradually, during the nineteenth century the training and accrediting of teachers was codified and improved. Often the career route was from

Monitor or Monitoress, to Pupil-Teacher, to Certification with a mixture of experience and examination at each step. It is a system that is beginning to find some favour again.



William came from Marlborough, near Salisbury in Wiltshire, home of a famous public school. One might imagine a classically trained, middle-class young man descending on the labourers and shoeworkers' children of Ringstead, but one would be wrong. The new Elementary School teachers almost all came from the social classes which they taught. He was a shoemaker's son, himself and in 1861, aged just fifteen, he was already a pupil-teacher. In fact his father did employ one man and the household had a young girl, of William's age, living in as a general servant so he had already taken a step up the English class ladder. Was it the shoemaking connection that led William to Ringstead or did his background recommend him to the school managers?

By 1865, and not yet twenty years old, he is running the new Ringstead School, albeit in temporary premises. On the first day he records that there were thirty-five children present. Over the next few years the pages are filled with his clear, brief entries. If we select a few from that first year it gives a good flavour of what was to come.

Oct 2nd Four boys and three girls admitted

4th Decided that the girls should be instructed on needlework from ½ past 2 till 4 o'clock instead of from 2 till 4

5th Gave the first class a lesson in Geography

11th Found the 2nd class very deficient in Notation

20th Found a few of the first class backward in the multiplication tables.

26th Several of the Denford children absent owing to the bad weather

The recurring themes were: the lateness or absence of children, especially those from Denford; Scripture lessons given by the Vicar or Curate; the giving of home-lessons; new work; and the general results of various tests. The shared accommodation also had its problems:

March 19th 1867. Holiday given. Room wanted for a tea party.

For the most part it is surprising how little the outside world intrudes into the Log Books but occasionally it hints at troubles in the wider community.

March 19th 1865 Fast day for the Cattle Plague.

All this time, and unrecorded in the Log, the school buildings were being planned, financed and built.

George Capron, who had bought up much of the land just prior to, and during, the Ringstead Enclosure and now living in the comparative splendour of Southwick Hall, gave part of 'Pound Close, next to the church, amounting to 3 acres 1 rood 10 perch, leasehold for a term of 1000 years from the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel 1620', for the building of the school. The great and the good raised subscriptions and the Reverend Percival Sandilands of Denford Vicarage applied for a grant from the Lords of the Committee of Council on Education on their behalf.

It was, of course, in many ways, a noble enterprise but the villagers of Ringstead may have had mixed feelings about the stated purposes of this new school:

. . . intended for the instruction of the children of the labouring poor in the united parishes of Denford and Ringstead which are three miles in length and two miles in breadth and which are chiefly employed as shoemakers and agricultural labourers.

We are told that, 'the school is to be in connection with the Church of England' and is to be called the *Denford and Ringstead School*. Perhaps more controversially, the submission alleges that:

Two thirds of the families of the labouring population within the area from which the children will daily attend the proposed school from their own homes are members of the Church of England.

The grant application form asked the applicants to state any *special* reasons for the grant to be given. Now, as somebody who, more recently, has had to apply for a National Lottery Grant, where rural deprivation is an important criterion, I can sympathise with the need to make a compelling case. However, the Reverend Sandilands might have found life a little difficult locally if two of his stated reasons for assistance in building the school had been revealed generally to the villagers.

The third special reason given is that the parishioners have spent all their money, 'having within the last 14 months all but rebuilt their dilapidated Parish churches'. This seems reasonable enough but the other two reasons would certainly rankle with many locals. They are:

- 1 *The extreme ignorance and low moral tone of the population, particularly of the inhabitants of Ringstead.*

- 2 *The absence of any resident Gentry to exert a healthy influence on the lower orders.*

This was not just said to procure the grant, however, for on December 6th 1864, Percival Sandilands wrote to the 'chief Inhabitants of Ringstead', asking them to work with the landed proprietors and

him to establish a Parish School. It is worth quoting his letter at length for it gives some facts about the village and the opinion of the vicar to the ordinary people.

You perhaps know, better than I do, the grievous want of education among the young of the labouring classes in this Parish; but I must say that with my varied experience in country parishes of other counties, I have never met, in the youth of both sexes, with such appalling ignorance, such defiance of parental authority, such impatience of restraint, moral and religious, as we daily witness in Ringstead. But there are other evils, touching most closely the interests of all, which a good school, if it cannot directly cure, will gradually and indirectly assist in remedying.

The chief of these are -

1. The high rate of mortality.

2. The excessive poor rates.

1. According to received statistics the average annual number of deaths in a moderately healthy place is 20 in the thousand. In Ringstead it has of late been 29 in the thousand, or nearly fifty per cent in excess of the average. The local medical men I have consulted attribute this in a great degree to thriftlessness, dirt and drink. Surely a school would do something to counteract these fearful banes of human health and happiness.

2. Again, the Ringstead poor rates are exceedingly high compared with those in other Parishes of similar size and population. Now the causes of pauperism are very much the same as those which produce disease and death, and poor rates must be high when the lower orders have no means afforded them of rising morally, socially, or intellectually; or of bringing up their children otherwise than in ignorance and sin.

Whatever we may think of Percival Sandiland's attitude, he put a great deal of energy into the project. George Capron and others received constant black bordered letters about progress. He tried to persuade him to not insist on a wall between the school and his remaining land but accept railings (which were cheaper) and was obviously exasperated at the slow progress in signing the lease for the land.

His efforts were successful and a grant of £186 5s 0d was given by the Committee towards the total cost of the building. As this was £907 15s 0d you can see one reason why the government did not want to move over to a totally state funded system. Of this sum, £543 18s 6d was raised by local voluntary contributions and £27 3s 6d by collections in the church. The school was opened on 13th November 1867 and by May 1868 there were 85 pupils. We know this because, on 'Certificate A', a 'majority of the Committee appointed by the Subscribers to superintend the erection of the School house and Teacher's House' wrote to the Committee to say that they had carefully inspected the building and everything had been completed 'perfectly satisfactorily' to the specifications deposited in the Council Office. It was signed by:

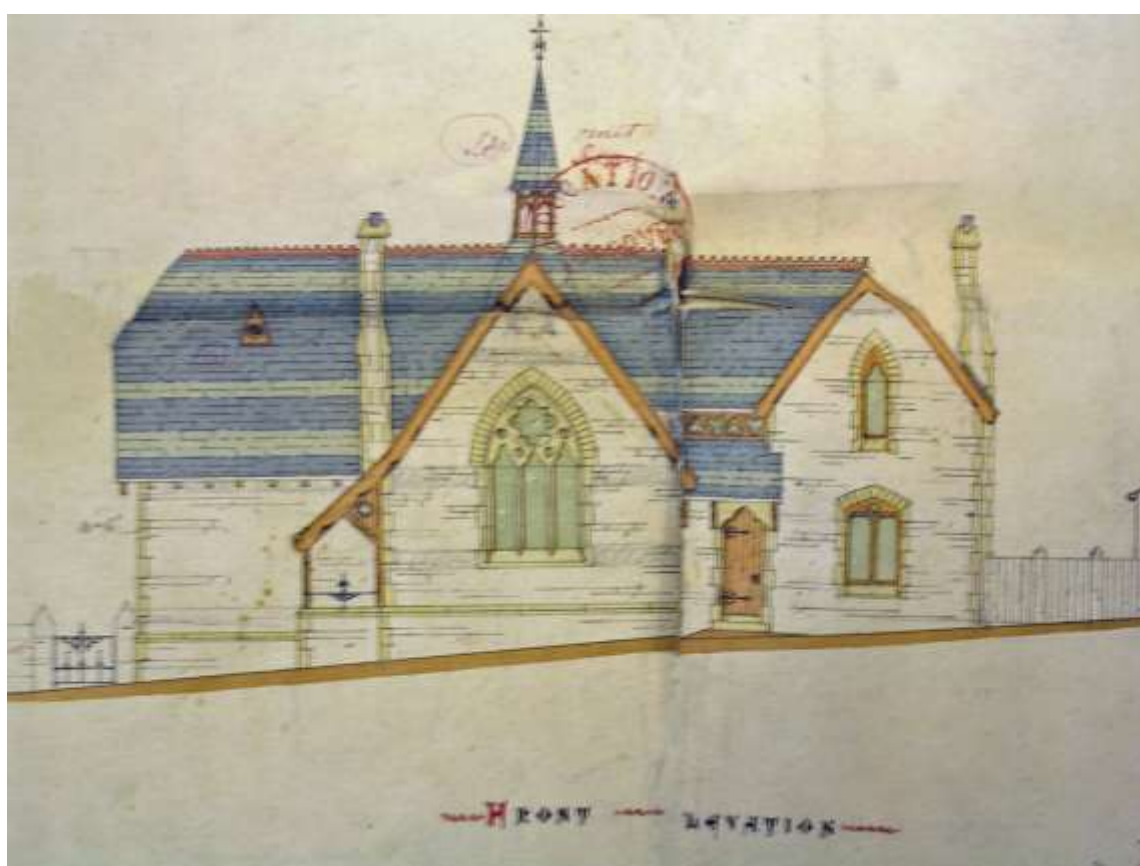
<i>Percival Sandilands</i>	<i>Trustee and Manager</i>
<i>Thomas Freeman</i>	<i>Trustee and Manager</i>

Thomas Peach Trustee and Manager
William Briggs Trustee
Edward Kitson Manager

The original grant application made clear that the school was for boys and girls, including infants, that a certificated master would be appointed and that:

Arrangements will be made for the master's wife to teach the girls sewing and cutting out.

It must have been exciting for William and his young wife Annie to move into the well-built house and also to have now their own purpose-built school to work in. I say that it must have been exciting but you will search the Log Book in vain for any sign of the move or William's feelings about his new home and workplace.

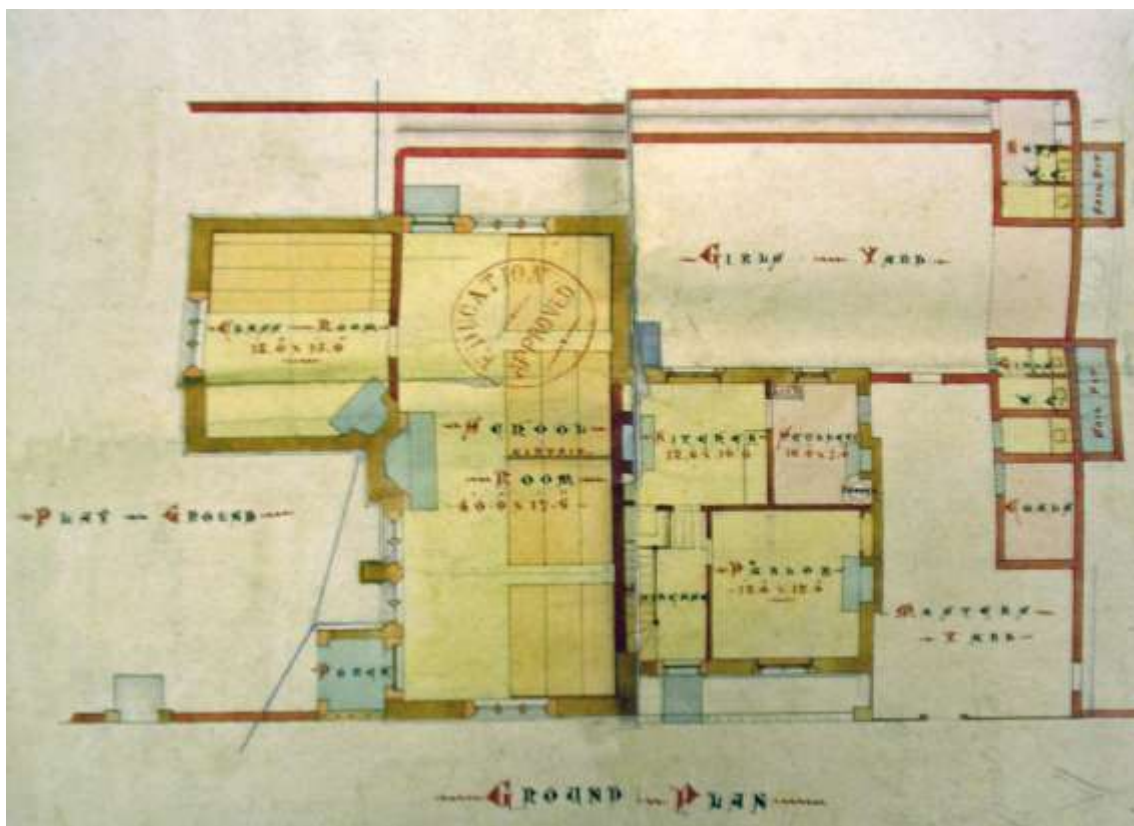


Plans of Ringstead School 1865 (SBD61)

With the kind permission of Northampton Record Office

These delightful plans, which make even the soil pits look attractive, are stamped 'Education Approved'. In the main School Room we can see the central fireplace facing the three tiers built for pupils' desks. There is a curtain shown across the room to separate the classes, while still allowing the master to see both sides. This large room is 40ft by 17ft 6inches, with a classroom off for the infants, 18ft by 15ft 6inches. The ceiling is fashionably high to allow any unhealthy miasmas to rise and it is well provided with windows which was important in those days before the electric light. The

'Girls Yard, is separate from the 'Playground, which is presumably for the boys, who have an alleyway to their outside toilet.



Plans of Ringstead School 1865 (SBD61)

With the kind permission of Northampton Record Office

The master's house has a kitchen, 12ft by 10 ft, a scullery with a sink, and what looks like a cooking range with a clothes boiler, next to it in the corner. Upstairs there are three small bedrooms each provided with its own fire and small window. He also has a garden some fifty feet square.

The front of the school faces the church rather than the road and its main window mirrors its gothic east window.

In November 2010 I met a lady in Denford Church (and whose name I am sorry to say I have forgotten) who told me that her great grandfather had helped move the furniture from the Temperance Hall to the new school. It would have been a busy time and certainly Annie would have had little time for the 'sewing and cutting out'. Fitzherbert Colin Harding was baptised on December 25th 1865, Emmeline on May 26th 1867, Amy Helena on October 25th 1868, Agnes Ann on November 14th 1869 (who sadly died on February 24th of the following year), Hugh Llewellyn on January 1st 1871 and Leopold Geoffrey on June 11th 1872.

All this passes by without an entry in the Log to indicate this great change in the life of the village. There was a grand opening by the Bishop of Peterborough on Wednesday 16th November 1867. He preached the sermon stating:

The interest of religion required that knowledge should be widely extended. Druids, priests and hierophants ruled only where ignorance existed.

To the Mercury reporter it was obviously a marvellous occasion but slightly marred.

The only drawback was the coldness of the church, which was in no way mitigated by the door being left open during the whole of the service.

In all this, there is no mention of William, the new headmaster, so perhaps he decided to concentrate on his work with the pupils. We hear that on February 14th 1868 Charles Leveratt, the son of the Station master, and a future station master himself, began compound division.; or that the first class, which is, confusingly, the top class, wrote dictation on paper. Chalk on slate remained the cheapest form of writing and expensive paper was not used most of the time. It may be also that the youngest children used sand trays in which to form their early letters.

It seems that William was a thorough if unimaginative schoolmaster but he had given a solid start to the new school. The Inspector's Report for 1873 which put in the Log in his successor's time states:

The Reading of the Upper Standards is very mechanical and devoid of intelligence. Spelling is rather weak, arithmetic is good in the First and Second Standards but defective in the Higher ones. The Discipline is good.

We must remember that school attendance was very much a hit-or-miss affair, often dependent on the needs of the parents, and also their means, because there was still a small charge of a penny or tuppence a week for each child and some families could not afford the loss of a child's income or the payment.

William leaves as clearly and briefly as ever. On January 29th 1874 he writes:

Resigned the charge of the school after eight years and four months duty.

It was not the end of William's school teaching career but just the beginning. Later Censuses find him and his family on the south coast at Portsea where he is still pursuing his profession. The new 'certificated' teachers were part of the movement of people into villages following their jobs or professions around the country.

Immediately under William's last entry is one by John Bannister on February 2nd 1874 which simply states:

I commenced my duties as master of this school.

John had been born at Oakworth, near Keighley in Yorkshire. He was a 'Certificated Teacher of the second class'. Perhaps he had seen the earlier entry by William. He was not married, so had no wife to do the sewing classes. He brought with him, instead, his older sister, Martha Bannister who had been a worsted weaver in 1871. Just a day after he first signs himself in, he reports:

The girls were instructed in needlework by M.A. Bannister for the first time.

Besides the two Bannisters there were also two pupil-teachers, Martha Cave, a pupil-teacher of the 4th Year and Beatrice Morris, pupil teacher of the 1st year. It is the former woman who appears most significantly in the Log Book. We have the usual entries:

May 4th 1874 A small attendance in consequence of the Club Feast. Holiday given in the afternoon

May 5th Thrapston Fair Holiday in the afternoon

May 25th A small attendance on account of the festivities in the village. Gave a holiday

At this time there was not really compulsory attendance as there were so many loopholes, especially for the older children during harvest times, that one must surmise it was thought better to keep discipline by awarding holidays than have a nearly empty school.

In 1874 also, the school was extended to cope with the increasing numbers. The only reference is that on June 30th a holiday was given, 'on account of workmen being in school'. One cannot be certain but judging by his inspections and other documents on record Mr. W.E. Curry, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, seems a rather sour character. In September 19th 1872 he wrote making a case for there being no need to extend the school. He also states that 'there is a school kept by Mrs. Abbott in the Temperance Hall which may be improved if required and would accommodate 40 or 50 children'. He concludes:

I consider that there is no deficiency in the District.

This does beg the question, what was the school being run by Mrs Abbott? She does not appear in the School Log so it may be that it was an alternative school. Was it being run on behalf of the Nonconformists? An Infants School had been opened at Denford in 1872, probably to solve the problem of the Denford children's poor attendance, especially in bad weather. By August 1873 it accommodated 74 children. Despite Mr Curry, the Rev Sandilands wrote on 23rd September 1873 to say that the Managers are prepared to provide for thirty-two more children but:

...they do not propose building until the Harvest Holidays of 1874 on account of the interruption and disorganisation of the School which alterations at any other time would occasion.

To return to Martha Cave, the pupil teacher, on October 2nd 1874, following the giving of a 'Holiday all week on account of the Ringstead Feast' on September 18th, John Bannister notes:

M Cave not at school this week. Taking charge of Denford Infants School.

On October 30th we have a more puzzling entry:

Martha Cave was removed from her office of pupil Teacher by Stephen Cave her father who paid the penalty of £6.

This, unusually, was written and signed in the Log Book by Edward Sandford. On November 6th 'Miss M.A. Bannister [John's sister] left off teaching Needlework.' On November 9th and 10th there was a 'Holiday on these two days', and on November 12th Mrs Bannister began duties as 'Sewing Mistress'.

Was this the reason for Martha Cave's removal? Her parents Stephen and Sarah Ann had moved from Lincolnshire to Denford at some time between 1861 and 1871 and the latter Census finds them in a farm house there with Martha, aged just 14, a 'Scholar and pupil-teacher'. It looks as if she was working with William Harding although he does not mention other teachers in the School Log. John Bannister and Martha Cave married during that two-day school holiday. He was still only some twenty years old and Martha only seventeen, or just eighteen. Perhaps her father had heard rumours of an attachment and considered her too young and had removed her from her post. 1881 finds Stephen, a Farm Bailiff, back in Lincolnshire and it may be that he moved up there in 1874 and just wanted his only daughter to go there with him.

Did she go home and the distance convinced the young couple that they could not bear to be parted? If so the whole process was very rapid. The young couple were married and their first child, Maud Emily, was baptised on 26th September 1875. Cyril John follows on the 19th January 1879 and Ella Margaret on 10th September 1882. Was there any local disquiet about this marriage? The vicar and his family, the Sandfords, did visit the school very regularly in the period following the marriage. For example, in November 1874 members of the family visited and sometimes tested children on the 10th, 12th, 16th and 18th. Edward Sandford had only taken over the incumbency in 1874 so it may be that this was just the enthusiasm and support of someone new in post. (Confusingly, his son, also Edward, took over from him, in 1880, for a further five years.)

It must have been a great help to John, to have Martha as a support both at home and in the school. If the pupil-teachers were absent she would sometimes miss out her teaching of the sewing class and take over the absentee's class. Of course there were also the problems of having a young family (Ella followed in 1883). There were also the annual epidemics of diseases, which today we have largely conquered, both for the pupils but also for the staff and the staff's children and at times this dominates the entries in the Log:

January 8th Beatrice Morris absent all day on account of sickness.

March 5th A great many children away on account of the whooping cough.

April 16th Several children away on account of measles (pupil teacher S. Griffin got measles)

There were other reasons for absence, however, some more allowable than others:

April 30th 1875 Only a few children at school this morning because a menagerie was coming through both villages. No school was kept.

May 21st The week being very wild and wet many children stayed at home – also on account of Whitsuntide many were absent all the week. Average low.

We must not underestimate the problems of weather because many roads were badly surfaced and lacked proper drainage. It did not always deter, perhaps less welcome, visitors:

July 21st 1875 Very wet about the time for closing school in the afternoon and the streets were much flooded. Most of the younger children were carried away [not by the water one hopes]. All the children did not get away until a few minutes after five o'clock.

July 22nd W.E. Currey Esq., H.M. Inspector came to school this afternoon at ten minutes to four o'clock. Prevented by floods from coming sooner. He examined the Pupil Teachers in Reading, teaching and needlework. Heard one give a lesson on the snail. Only about seventy children present owing to the heavy rains and continued floods.

In general we find that the school broke up in the second week in August and returned about the third week in September for the 'Harvest Holidays'. In fact the various harvests were obviously very dependent on the weather and many older boys would be away before school broke up for the barley and grain harvests and at the start of the new term for the potato harvest. The girls too could often be away, one suspects, to help their mothers. On November 22nd 1875 John notes wearily:

Re-admitted Annie Saddington, Ellen Ball. Both children come for a few weeks and then stop at home for a few weeks.

Among all the illness and absence, admissions and re-admissions, there are notes on the work done.

January 19th 1876 First class did their composition well especially fourth and fifth standards. Subject 'Dignity and Impudence' – a tale.

April 4th Many children in the Second Standard spell very badly – not able to spell correctly words of one syllable

April 7th Home lessons were very well done by the 1st class.

June 13th Three boys and one girl began to learn vulgar fractions

Sept 26th Taught Domestic economy to the 1st and 2nd class girls

The grant the school received was dependent on a number of factors including the number attending and the Inspector's Report. Initially this was based almost entirely on the 'Three Rs', although Religious Instruction and Needlework (for the girls), were also compulsory. At the time that the school was built specific grants were also offered for English Grammar, Geography and History. From 1875 it was the performance of the whole class, rather than individual tests, which were judged. On 22nd July 1876 the school received the unwelcome news that:

The grant is reduced by one tenth for the defective instruction of the Infants

Is it just coincidence that the Inspector's Reports improve when another Inspector takes over from W.E. Currey? Some Inspectors were known to be autocratic bullies but we may be doing him an

injustice and the teaching was rather mechanical and dull. Pamela Horn has recorded that in 1875 Curry wrote of the schools in Northamptonshire:

Geography and history are generally got up in the 'cram' system... The revision of papers in history is about the most monotonous that an inspector has to do. . .

Perhaps the Inspector was championing more relevant, stimulating teaching and his criticisms were fair and valid.

The years roll by with little mention of the outside world. On 30th January 1877 the Log records:

A very stormy morning in consequence of which numbers were low.

There is no mention of the death of the three boys in the barn that day, and the large public funeral, or of its effect on the children. In 1878 there seems a subtle change in the Log with much more emphasis on lateness and also of cleanliness, or lack of it, among the boys and of the punishments for these misdemeanours. Attendance was increasing with, on May 20th, an attendance of 144 in the afternoon. And on June 18th 1880 an average attendance for the week of 157.4. John's brother, Smith Bannister, had joined the school as a pupil-teacher and progressed well. We also have much more reporting of 'Object lessons' given by one of the teachers and drawing, (technical rather than artistic), becomes an important part of the curriculum, especially for the boys.

On September 22nd 1882 John writes:

Gave notice that the school would commence in the Afternoon at 1.30 pm instead of 2pm during the winter months.

The school was carried on during the week by the Pupil-teachers – the Vicar calling several times and taking occasional lessons - owing to the illness of the master.

On September 25th he reports:

I resumed my duties after a week's illness.

These brief, stoical, statements cover a personal tragedy for John, which was to affect the rest of his life, but was never mentioned in the Log Book either at the time or later.

It is when we look at the local newspapers that we find out what happened to John that caused his 'illness'. In 1882, Ringstead Cricket Club was formed and had played its first season. The last quarter of the nineteenth century was when many of our national sports became codified and, in some cases, professionalised. Many of the major football clubs were formed and working people, for the first time, had the time and the money to play and watch sport on a regular basis.

John Bannister was playing for the Ringstead team in a game late in the season, on 13th September 1882. During the century underarm bowling had gradually given way first to round arm (at shoulder height). At the Oval, in 1864, each ball of an over of overarm bowling was no-balled by the umpire. The professionals in the England team walked off the field as they had planned before the game. The

cricketing establishment gave way and overarm bowling was officially recognized. The earlier forms of bowling persisted, however, especially at local level. My father told me that his Uncle Harry, who lived locally, was one of the last of the underarm bowlers. Nevertheless, by 1882, overarm bowling was likely to have been the norm, especially among the younger players. For John, just at the start of the academic year, the result was a personal tragedy. The Wellingborough News for the 23rd September 1882 tells the story:

CASUALTIES AT CRICKET – *The 'National Game' yearly claims its list of victims, due possibly in some measure to the terrific style of modern bowling. We regret that during Feast Week the master of the National Schools, Mr Bannister, was hit on one eye by a cricket ball, and after suffering severe pain for some days travelled up to London to consult an eminent oculist. The latter found the eye irretrievably destroyed and advised its removal in order to prevent the other one becoming affected. We understand that the operation has been effected and that the sufferer is doing as well as might be expected. It is stated that the accident resulted from a medium pace ball. We regret also to report that, one of the Grafton team was badly injured whilst playing with Ringstead, a ball striking him in the lower abdomen when batting. We are, however, pleased to be able to report that the injury is not so serious as had been anticipated.*

A month later, at the Cricket Club Annual Supper, after various toasts, the Chairman presented John with a purse containing £8 3s 6d:

...as a small token of their esteem, and as an expression of their sympathy with him in the serious loss he had sustained.

Mr Knight also spoke of the presentation and stated that:

...it had been his lot to take part in several public subscriptions but he had never known one that had been so heartily and cheerfully responded to.

John thanked him for his sympathy and also for the gift, as 'his loss had been attended by great expense'.

We can see that the Bannisters had become part of the community. John's younger brother, Smith was treasurer of the club and John and Martha, as well as Smith, took part in singing at various village events. On Thursday December 28th in the same year as his accident, among the other party pieces at the Church Tea and Entertainment were:

Mr J Bannister song, 'Who's that tapping at the garden gate' (encored), Mrs J Bannister; song 'The Midshipmite'...duet (encored) Mr and Mrs Bannister, song, [The list is a little confusing so I may have matched the Bannisters to the wrong songs.]

Similarly, at a concert given at the Temperance Hall, 'for the purpose of supplementing a subscription to pay for the expenses of lighting the village with oil lamps during the winter' the young couple sang an encored duet, 'Money Matters', and they and Smith also sang solos. Singing was obviously an important part of their life and for most of his time at the school he reports on the songs that he is teaching to various classes.

His brother, Smith left on December 20th 1883 but it seems that John just got on with his work again. Each year we have the list of Recitations for the examinations. In 1891 these were:

Standards I & II	The Beggar Man
Standard III	The Wreck of the Hesperus
Standard IV – VII	Richard I Shakespeare

Object lessons for the year included:

<u>Animals</u>	<u>Vegetables</u>	<u>Miscellaneous</u>
<i>Camel</i>	<i>Flax</i>	<i>Candle</i>
<i>Ostrich</i>	<i>Mustard</i>	<i>Looking-glass</i>
<i>Cuckoo</i>	<i>Rice</i>	<i>Sponge</i>
<i>Whale</i>	<i>Wheat</i>	<i>Honey</i>
<i>Hive-Bees</i>	<i>Barley</i>	<i>Chalk</i>
<i>Owl</i>	<i>Cocoa</i>	<i>Coal</i>
<i>Lessons on form and colour</i>		

He also records on September 21 1891:

School fees not taken. The first school meeting since the free Education Act came into force.

The usual business of the school continues with notes on lessons, attendance and the Attendance Officer's visits, examinations, his own and outside ones. On October 13th 1891 he opened a Night School at which, perhaps among other things unrecorded, he taught Reading, Arithmetic and Shorthand. Martha now seems more often away through unspecified illness, neuralgia and an injured right knee but John seems to have settled into his post and the Inspector's Reports are generally very good.

We do get a few more examples of boys being rude or stubborn and being caned for it. On November 29th 1887 he reports that:

Gave a short lecture to all the school in the morning on 'Good Manners'.

This was done because several boys have lately showed a sad deficiency in this part of the education.

It may be that although in 1891 it became 'free schooling' it was also becoming 'compulsory schooling' over this period and tensions were beginning to build. Incidents include:

July 3rd 1888 Permission to leave school at 10.45 refused to Flossy Childs for the purpose of attending Raunds feast. She was afterwards taken away without my leave. Warned the parents that such a thing must not occur again.

July 30th 1889 For a very bad case of insubordination after many others not quite so bad a character William Bates dismissed from school.

On a happier note On July 7th 1890 the Log tells us that:

Holiday given on account of most of the children being away at the seaside (Lowestoft). [Presumably on a rail excursion].

On August 10th 1892 we have a minor incident when:

Several girls in the first class seem very anxious to evade the rule of making curtseys when marching out of the room at the end of the school day. When questioned about this they answered 'father told me not to'.

When we search other sources we find, as often the case, there is a great deal going on which goes unrecorded and this refusal to curtsy is part of a much bigger problem which was debated in the House of Commons. On 30th May 1892 Mr Channing, the MP for Northampton East, asked Sir W. Hart Dyke, the Vice-President of the Committee of Council on Education:

. . . whether he has received a Memorial from certain parents of children attending the National School at Ringstead, Northampton, stating that they have withdrawn their children from the religious instruction at the school under the Conscience Clause, and that their children have been in consequence treated as absentees and placed at the bottom of the class; and asking redress of their grievance; whether this putting down of children to the bottom of their class is a violation of the 7th clause of The Education Act 1870, providing that children may be withdrawn from the religious instruction without forfeiting any other benefits of the school; and whether he will have directions sent to the school managers to discontinue the practice of imposing this penalty on the children of Nonconformists?

Not satisfied with the answer that he received, he raised the issue again in the House of Commons Questions on 10th June of the same year. The Vice-President of the Council tried to answer the question by alleging that it was those who had wanted no religious education who had been so punished and that they should be provided with alternative secular education, and the school had been so informed.

An important side issue of this dispute was that the marking of children as absent, as latecomers, could have consequences as to when the child was allowed to leave school. From September 4th 1892, no child between the ages of 13 and 14 was allowed to work unless he or she had reached the exemption Standard (usually IV or V) or held the, nicknamed, 'Dunces Certificate' which, Pamela

Horne tells us, allowed a child to leave at the age of thirteen if they had made 250 attendances a year for the five years prior to reaching that age.

Sir W. Hart Dyke did, finally, admit that the rules had been broken at Ringstead and that a 'condemnation of the practice had gone forth. Later, in 1899 when a dispute arose at Northampton about the wearing of Nonconformist 'medals', the Ringstead judgement was cited in support of their case. Of course, much more recently, the wearing of clothes and badges connected with a pupil's religion has been a matter of great controversy.

Looking at John Bannister's time at the school he seems a competent teacher and disciplinarian who attempted to introduce his charges to the wider world. He also started evening classes to help those who needed to make up for their failings at school or who wanted to learn shorthand and gain one of the increasing number of office jobs. He seems a well-respected member of the community who helped raise funds and who put on school entertainments to benefit pupils and the village. He also was a sportsman and had borne his accident with stoicism and did not allow it to interfere with his calling.

When the Bannisters finished on December 31st 1892 they had been at the school for some eighteen years. As we have seen, John's entries were brief and did not always tell us all that was happening but we do see, from all the evidence, that he was increasingly having to hold the lid down on pupil and parent reluctance to observe the old deference to the accepted hierarchy. Trade unions in the Boot and Shoe and Agricultural industries were growing in power and the shoemakers were known to radicalise any community that they lived in. The Bannisters followed the Hardings to the softer climes of the south coast, this time to pretty village of Waldron in East Sussex where, in 1901 and 1911, John and Martha are still schoolteachers and Emily, their daughter is a pupil-teacher. One can imagine that many children and parents were sad to see the, still-young, couple leave but it was clear that for anyone taking over that it was going to be a difficult time.

Two days after John Bannister signed off, on January 2nd 1893, the Log records in a new hand:

I - Albert Crew – commenced duties as the Headmaster of this school today. Miss Emily Crew (Art 50) commenced duties as 1st Assistant Mistress.

Albert and his sister Emily were, once again, the children of a bootmaker. They were born near Bath and the 1891 Census has their father, Edward, now the 'Manager of a Boot Warehouse'. At the time Albert is 19 and a student in a training college and Emily at 17 years old, is a pupil-teacher. Less than two years later they have the responsibility for a village school. One can imagine the excitement when they were given the positions and the pride of their parents. One can only surmise that they came by rail and they and their baggage were brought by cart up the long, straight road from the station to the schoolhouse. They had little time to settle in and Albert obviously wanted to put into practice the training that he had so recently finished.

The attendance was 'very meagre' on the 2nd January when Albert, Emily and Miss Dickenson, the '2nd Assistant Mistress (Article 68)', with two young girls as monitoresses re-opened the school. On the 5th the Managers granted a day-and-a-half holiday to enable the Headteacher and the Assistant Mistresses to 'review the books, apparatus etc for the work of the coming year'.

The 5th must have been a Thursday for it was not until the 9th January that the school again re-opened and the Headmaster decided not to follow the normal timetable but to:

... organize and classify children and make arrangements for drawing up a new timetable.

Some 80 children were absent and notes were sent home to parents, 'enquiring the reasons for their children's absence.' Children, used to the familiarity of repetition and routine, had had it disrupted by this new young schoolmaster and, before his arrival, as we have seen tensions between some parents and the school had already worsened.

The die had been cast and Albert was on a collision course with part of his community. He tries over the next few months to write in the Log about his proposed school museum which was to include:

... specimens showing the process of the manufacture of different articles and other objects of interest. The headmaster had decided to lend weekly a few curios from his own private collection.

But it is the serious conflicts with children and parents that now take over the Log Book. To make matters worse heavy snow had fallen. Just one week after Albert had declared his presence in the Log, the first battle broke out:

During the dinner hour about 1.15 the school children were snowballed by a party of youths from the village. When the Headmaster entered the school at 1.20 to commence afternoon school he found the school floor near the entrance hall exceedingly wet and quite unfit for any children to stand upon. It appears that when they were attacked they sought refuge in the school room and were followed there by these youths. A quantity of snow was found against the south wall and one of the maps was damaged and discoloured by the snow which had been thrown in. When the school-door was opened to admit the children they were found huddled together and frightened at the ruffianly conduct of these youths.

As a result of all this the Managers and the Vicar were called and the police summoned. He writes after this entry:

Pupil –Teacher lessons will be held every morning from 7.30 – 8.30.

It is clear that is not through any lack of effort or enthusiasm of Albert's part that the problems came, but they did come with a sad regularity. On January 13th he writes:

The Headmaster has found that the manners of the children generally are exceedingly lacking in respect – they often omit the usual forms of politeness and courtesy as 'sir' etc. The children are exceedingly restless, talkative and much concerned about other children's work.

The scene was set and it was only going to take small incidents to bring Albert's hopes and dreams come tumbling down. The older boys were expected to salute the master as they left school. As we have seen John Bannister who had set this rule had already had trouble with the girls. George Archer, one of the older boys, did not salute and laughed as he left, knowing what he had done.

Albert called him back but George tried to run away. Now the Log Book explodes into long essays charting increasing mayhem.

He was brought back to the classroom, took the cane and broke it up.

Archer refused to receive any punishment and the master was compelled to resort to force. Archer lay on the ground and refused to get up. He was punished with a small cane, which was split halfway, as left by the late Headmaster. This cane has not and will not be used until after the 24th Inst.

The master had to use forcible means for administering punishment as the boys was extremely violent. After he was punished he (Archer) stood and returned the usual master salutation – with a salute of ‘Good morning, Sir’.

Once again one of the Managers was sent for. George’s mother then came into the school and demanded her child. Her talk was also, ‘very violent’ so she was ordered off the premises. She went, but only to summon reinforcements, for George’s father and elder brother then appeared and the brother became, ‘extremely violent’ and:

. . . threatened the Master with assault and endeavoured to take from the Master’s person a key – the property of the school. He thereupon seized the Master and violently forced him (backwards) from the master’s door (school playground side) to the school itself, a distance of about 20 yards. Miss Emily Crew being witness to the assault. No doubt other violent means would have been adopted, had not by this time (Mr Wyman) a manager arrived.

George Archer was expelled and perhaps it was hoped that life would begin to return to normal but on January 17th another minor incident escalated into crisis.

Percy Roberts was the illegitimate son of Rebecca Roberts and was brought up by his grandparents, William and Fanny Roberts. The *Wellingborough News* for 24th February 1883 reported on a case in the Thrapston Police Court where Rebecca had claimed against G. Bull of Leicester for the upkeep of her illegitimate child who was born on 2nd October 1880. George Bull had paid 2s 6d a week but had stopped paying in the previous September. He was a tailor, the son of William Bull, and perhaps had gone to Leicester to get away from Rebecca. He had obviously considered it ‘hush money’ but Rebecca, like her mother, was a feisty woman. Mr. Rawlins, the defending counsel, contended that the:

. . . complainant publicly insulted the defendant at Ringstead Feast, and had also written him abusive letters. Mr Rawlins also asked for a reduction in the sum paid, as his client was unable to continue payments of 2s. 6d. The Bench made an order for the defendant to contribute 2s per week toward the support of the child with the ordinary costs, 16s. 6d.

By 1891 both parents had married: George Bull, still living in Leicester, to a Birmingham born girl and Rebecca to local shoemaker, Luther Mayes. At the Census she is living with Luther and her young family next door to her parents, William and Fanny, who are looking after Percy. William was a coal merchant and shoe agent living in Shop Street.

The School Log tells us that Percy had been repeatedly warned for 'talking in school and was placed in a classroom so as not disturb the work of the school.' Albert emphasises that, 'no corporal punishment was administered to him in any way.'

It appears that he went home after school and told his story for, soon after, a 'relation, probably his grandmother, Fanny Roberts, came to the school house and, 'abused the Master and the Managers'. He writes in the Log that she said that:

. . . she would not allow her child

I To be caned (She dared the Master to do this).

II To do any Musical Drill (which is very popular amongst the boys and girls).

III To say 'Sir' to anyone in school or to perform the usual forms of politeness to anyone who entered the school.

IV To obey any rules of the school which she did not deem fitting.

She also said that if he was expelled she would send him to this school.

The next day Percy came to school and promised the Chairman and Managers to obey the rules of the school.

On Tuesday January 24th, at the Thrapston Petty Sessions, four of the village lads who had taken part in the snowballing were accused of damaging a map of the Holy Land, (which was produced in court). One child was acquitted and the other three, Oliver Rowlatt, Leonard Smith and Earnest Whittering, were fined five shillings with four shillings costs. George Archer withdrew his charges against Albert Crew who in turn withdrew his charges against George's older brother, William. The case was on the 24th and we now understand the significance of why Albert had earlier pledged not to use the cane before this date. We hear that the accused boys refused to apologise because they maintained that they were innocent, even though the Reverend Leadbitter said that if they did no further steps would be taken, because, they said, they were not guilty. Among the evidence we also hear that these snowballing fights between the village lads and the schoolboys were 'the usual practice'. Perhaps the most significant sentence of the *Northampton Mercury* report comes at the end. 'There were between 200 and 300 people from Ringstead in the Court'. We can imagine that many in the village would have thought that this should never have come to court for 'a bit of snowballing fun'. It would have been a largely hostile audience for Albert Crew in the court that day.

He then received a police summons to appear before the Bench on a charge of unlawfully assaulting and beating George Archer. All the time, his tormentor, George Archer keeps appearing at school and is sent home again with a note until finally he signs a statement.

Geo Horace Archer promises to obey all the rules of the school and if he at any time disobeys them the Headmaster will punish him as he thinks fit (cane or otherwise).

On February 24th Horace [George] Archer refuses to receive punishment and is sent home.

The Log Book deals at length with the fracas with George Archer but rather skates over the problems with Percy Roberts but it was this case which reached Government level and is now housed in the National Archives at Kew. Albert Crew had written a letter to the Reverend Leadbitter (now Vicar of

Denford and Ringstead) which details much of what he had written in the Log Book about Fanny Roberts's diatribe. He tries to draw in the Managers by stating:

I told her that I would inform the managers which remark she sneered at, calling them anything but complimentary names.

As a result of this, on January 18th 1893 the Reverend Leadbitter wrote to the Secretary of the Education Committee enclosing Albert's letter, about Percy Roberts, aged 12 Standard V telling him of the expulsion. In his letter it is the grandfather William who roundly abused the Managers and the Master. It is perhaps worth remembering that William's mother was Alice Roberts who in 1851 is listed as a Church Sunday School mistress. He may have heard her views on teaching children.

We do not hear what happened when Albert came up before the Bench, and he continues teaching, but it is obvious that his position was irretrievable. On May 27th 1873, less than five months after he has arrived he writes, briefly for once:

A and E Crew terminated their engagement as Master and Mistress respectively.

How did he fare after all this turmoil? 1901 finds Albert with his wife, Nellie Queenie, still a 'Certified master' living in Huish Episcopi in Somerset. It seems that he has made a new start in his career.



Grave of Percy Roberts in Ringstead Cemetery.

It was obviously a great loss to his family and there is something almost defiant in the inscription:

MISSED MOST BY THOSE WHO KNEW AND LOVED HIM BEST

Percy Roberts had little chance to make use of any learning that he had gained for on 16th February 1899, aged just 18, he died and was buried in Ringstead Cemetery.

Flora Thompson writing of about this time on the Northamptonshire-Oxfordshire border tells of boys such as Percy and Horace George Archer. With a little updating it is a truth that many teachers and parents would recognize:

Boys who have been morose or rebellious during their later schooldays were often transformed when they got upon a horse's back or were promoted to driving a dung cart afield. For the first time in their lives, they felt themselves persons of importance. They banded lively words with the men and gave themselves manly airs at home with their younger brothers and sisters.

Some three weeks after the hasty departure of the Crews, on June 19th 1893 Horace William Johnson and his wife Frances came to the schoolhouse. Following the turmoil of the last five months life in the school began to settle back into normality as they re-established order and routine.

One of his first acts was to re-admit George Horace Archer. George, unlike his alleged partner-in-crime, Percy Roberts, was to lead a full life, serving in the 498th Siege battery Division of the Royal Garrison in France and Germany. He survived the Great War and died in 1962 at the good old age of eighty years. I wonder if he ever told of his school days and Albert Crew.

Thomas William Johnson was, comparatively, a local boy, He was born a few stops up the line in Peterborough in 1867. His father, George, worked on the railways, first as an engine fitter and then as a foreman for the Great Northern Region. Thomas was the third oldest of the family of eleven children of George and his wife Priscilla. By 1891, now aged twenty-three, he had moved to Seaton, near Uppingham, in Rutland, where he is a 'Certified Schoolmaster'. Living with him is his sister Agnes, at 21, an Assistant Teacher, and his younger brother Arthur, still a scholar.

Somehow, during this period he met Frances Charlotte Beardmore who was the daughter of a Staffordshire farmer, overseer and Registrar. George Beardmore was a widower in the 1881 Census and soon after he too died. I have not yet managed to find her in the 1891 Census but, in the Uppingham area, in the summer of 1892, she married Thomas Johnson who, a year later, announces himself in the Ringstead School Log.

Thomas's introduction of himself is much more informative than those of the previous schoolmasters:

June 1st 1893 I, Thomas William Johnson take charge of this school. Pupil Teacher Great Northern Railway School, New England, Peterborough. Trained Carmarthen 1887-8. Last school Seaton National, Rutland.

Thomas has had the advantage over his predecessors of having held a similar position in a village school so he has had a chance to make his mistakes and to be not too naive about the problems and pitfalls of being a head teacher. At first we may worry that he is going to be engulfed by the problems of the past few years. On June 23rd he reports:

The time table has not been kept during the past week, the Master spending much time teaching the children orderly habits. He has also cautioned the children about climbing about the school premises as they have already made sad work with the school buildings. The whole of the work in the school is very backward.

The residual problems of the 'Conscience Clause' dispute also rear their heads for just five days later he writes:

Five parents came to school this morning to ask permission for their children to leave school at 11.25 viz when the Instruction in religious Subjects commenced. The Master told them that we could not grant their request as the Bye-laws stated the children must attend school the whole time the school is open but that their children would take secular work as Time-Table.

One imagines that the Vicar had briefed him as to the possible problems and he had prepared his response carefully. On August 1st Frances, his wife, starts her teaching duties as an Article 68 mistress.

We hear very little more of either ill discipline or the Conscience clause so it seems that Thomas manages to settle the pupils and their parents to the normal routine of the school On 1st June 1894 the Infants moved into their new room as the school was being once more enlarged.

Local man, Roy Dickens, dug up, in his garden in Ringstead, a School Attendance Token, which may date back to the nineteenth century. Sometimes these tokens, elsewhere, had a penny value on them so perhaps they could be redeemed for money, or for the school charge before it was made a 'free' education system in 1891. In this case it was issued every week rather than being, the more usual, attendance medal for a term or year.



By kind permission of Roy and Sheila Dickens.

Photograph by Janice Morris.

We do notice during this period the epidemics that pass through the school and community. These include Scarlet Fever, Whooping Cough and Measles. These may not be very different to those that had already been noted earlier but, possibly, the increased mobility of the population made their

spread more rapid. Certainly the way of dealing with them became more drastic, perhaps because the Medical Officer of Health now has an important role. On February 8th 1897 Thomas received:

. . . notice from Dr Elliott that he had advised the Thrapston Rural District Council to close schools until March 1st owing to epidemic of Measles. School accordingly closed.

Returning to 1895, on 15th March the annual summary of the Inspector's Report is written into the Log book and the first few sentences tell us that Thomas and his wife have quickly brought order and good learning to the school:

The promise of improvement made by the School last year has been amply fulfilled and the children have now passed a very good examination. Reading is becoming more intelligent, writing is good. Arithmetic deserves high praise.

Very little fault is found although it is noted that:

Needlework is well taught but buttons should not be sewn so near the rim.

The male Inspectors notoriously found it difficult to judge the standard of the sewing and perhaps this is one trying to show his mettle. The Infants class of Miss Belton is also praised, the children being 'intelligently taught' and are, 'attentive and well behaved and take interest in all their work'.

The whole staff seems to have quickly pulled the school back from the brink. There are still the interruptions of the feasts (including now the Baptist and Wesleyan School treats) as well the harvest time falls in attendance. On 11th August 1896, for example, Thomas writes, rather wearily:

More children away owing through illness and as only my children are present school closed for the usual harvest holiday.

I think 'my children' must refer to the children in his class as I can only find one child for Thomas and Charlotte. Their son, George William Beardmore Johnson, was baptised on 1st May 1899.

A more surprising reason for low attendance is given on October 1st 1896 when there is an, 'Ambulance Demonstration in the village'.

It may be, now that he had found his feet, rather than needing the support of the vicar, Thomas sometimes found his visits not always helpful. Are the two entries below to be read together?

July 23rd 1897 The Vicar was present from about 2 o'clock until 3.30 pm on Wednesday. Before leaving he made a few remarks about Miss Standen's and Miss March's work

July 30th Miss March terminated her engagement today.

In fact, a number of the young assistants came and went very rapidly, some only lasting a matter of weeks. We also note that Miss Belton, the Infants Mistress is travelling each day from Northampton for she keeps arriving late, having missed her train. Apart from these staffing problems the Log is mainly about the small everyday matters of school life, of examinations and Inspections, of the

regular outbreaks of diseases and summer feasts. The Nineteenth Century and the Victorian Age were drawing to a close. In the week of May 25th 1899 there was a half-day holiday for the 'Relief of Mafeking' and three days later for the Queen's birthday. It was to be almost her last.

The end of the century was in the Christmas holidays and goes unrecorded. We too must leave Ringstead School in the capable hands of Thomas William Johnson. Ahead lay the First World War the coming of the age of the car, the aeroplane and the wireless. Little of this will be reflected in the School Log Book. We do know that he was a strict disciplinarian, as was expected at the time. An anonymous poet writing years later told of Thomas Johnson's teaching style, in the years after the First World War

*The school where I once learned to read
I stood outside awhile
And thought of Daddy Johnson
Who seldom wore a smile*

*His cane was always near at hand
And often it would fly
If arms unfolded did become
Or one but blinked an eye.*

(My thanks to Roy Dickens for this: Poet not yet discovered.)

Thomas's last entry is as clear and brief as most of his others:

30th September 1927 I, Thomas William Johnson cease duties today as Head Teacher after having held this office for 34 years 4 months.



Ringstead School. (Date unknown).
With the kind permission of Ringstead School.

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My grateful thanks must go to the Head teacher and staff of Ringstead C. of E. School for allowing me to view the School Log Books and for their hospitality.

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Chapter Twenty-four

First Post

Noah Green (1799 - 1887), William Bradshaw (1826 - 1879) and John Green (1840 - 1913)

'Posts' were first set up by Henry VIII. They were a series of places along a few strategic routes to enable the royal messengers carrying letters to change horses and so deliver the king's message as rapidly as possible. Post roads were maintained along these routes (only four for many years). Charles I allowed the public to use this service and the places, where the horses and later mail coaches were changed, developed into coaching inns and those running them into the first postmasters.

This connection between innkeepers and the postal service continued through the eighteenth century. The service was still out of the reach of most of the population but, gradually, the penny post was introduced into the major towns and the mail coaches began to cover much of the country. In 1840 Rowland Hill's famous nationwide 'Penny Post' was introduced and the 67 million letters posted in 1839 rapidly increased to 242 million. The era of the modern postal service had begun.

There were some rural post offices throughout the nineteenth century but it was mainly in the towns and was very hit-and-miss and it was not until 1854 that Ringstead had its first sub-post office. Before this, in the 1847 *Post Office Directory*, it states that, 'Letters received through Thrapston'. The 1854 Kelly's Directory does not name the postmaster but, it seems likely, that it was Noah Green who was entered below as a grocer and draper.

The Green family had once been important landed gentry whose principal seats had been at Greens Norton and Lowick but, like many such families they lost much of their standing and land during the religious turmoil of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They had owned land in Ringstead and continued as yeoman farmers locally. In the second half of the nineteenth century a branch of the Green family went to Africa, endured the Siege of Mafeking and produced some distinguished military men. Incidentally, Samuel Wells Green, as caretaker, turned the cemetery for the diamond mine workers in South Africa, into a 'little paradise', albeit a coffin-shaped one.

It is not with these Greens that our story is concerned. We will be looking at some of the family who stayed in the village to serve the community. Thomas Green, who was born in 1759, was probably a yeoman farmer. He married Jane Meadows in 1783 and the couple had eight children. A double page spread of the 1841 Ringstead Census is a sea of Greens. Living next door to each other we have the families of five of the sons: Noah, draper; Thomas, vitter; Edward, farmer, Lot, farmer and John, butcher.

Each has a story to tell but we will only tell of two here. Noah, first and then, later in the century, one of the sons of his brother Thomas, called John.

Noah was born in Ringstead on 16th October 1799 and baptised nearly a year later. His parents John and Jane Green were both Baptists and were buried in the Ringstead Baptist Burial Ground. Whether their faith was the reason for the tardy church christenings is not clear for late christenings were not unusual.

Noah married Sarah Wells, across the river in Woodford, on 7th June 1821 and their first child, Ann, was born on 3rd September 1822. She was followed by Eliza Ellen (born about 1825), James (about 1832) and Mary Jane (about 1846). Ann's baptism is a Nonconformist one and the others have so far eluded us so it is possible that they never took place. The long gap between the final two children may be just one of those surprises that nature has in store for us, or because there are missing siblings through infant mortality or, perhaps, the grandparents have taken a grandchild as a daughter.

We also have not discovered how Noah made a living at first. We do know that in 1841, at some forty years of age, he is recorded as a draper and in 1847 and 1854 Directories he is also put down as a grocer. One suspects that the village shops were fighting to make a living and, as still happens today and they 'poached' each other's stock in trade in order to make a better living. By careful selection a grocery has a fast turnover and not too much money is tied up on stock for long periods. Drapery, on the other hand might have a longer period between wholesale and resale. A village draper's shop would vary from place to place. In 1847 he is listed as a 'linen draper' but one suspects that his shop might include clothes and hats as well as fabrics. There would probably also be a 'beer trade' of haberdashery: ribbons, buttons, cottons, needles and pins.

It seems likely that Noah decided that the new Penny Post offered another opportunity to increase his profits a little. We know from the Kelly's Directory of 1854 that in Ringstead, 'Letters through Thrapston arrive at 9 am dispatched at ½ past 3 pm.' As we have said, it seems likely that this was via Noah's shop and certainly by 1861, in Melville's Directory, Noah Green is the postmaster.

After the Penny Post was introduced in 1840, a simplified fee was paid, by the sender to replace the old system which required the recipient to pay according to the number of sheets of paper and the distance travelled. In the new system, which was nationwide, the sender paid one penny (1d) per half ounce, whatever the distance. This led to a huge increase in mail and ordinary people in small villages like Ringstead now found the sending of letters was within their means.

In 1843, Sir Robert Peel had laid down the principle that, 'All places, the letters for which exceed one hundred per week, should be entitled to a receiving office and a free delivery of letters'. Later, the new criterion for the establishment of a 'post' was its chance of financial success and between 1851 and 1857 Post Office surveyors went around every village and hamlet to review the postal arrangements. New postal routes were established and it seems likely that Ringstead was one of the new sub-post offices that was authorised as a result. The surveyors also set area boundaries and the local postmaster was responsible for ensuring that letters were delivered within that area at no extra cost to the sender or recipient. In order to become a postmaster one had to provide references but one would imagine that a man from a well-connected family such as the Greens would have had no problem with this.

The sub-postmasters were appointed by the Treasury if the cost to the Government was less than £175 per year and by the Paymaster-General if more than this figure. It would have nearly always been a local shopkeeper, of good character, who could provide some counter space. They also had to provide a slot in a window or box, initially locally made, for the letters to be handed in. At first the service would only have been for the receiving and distribution of letters and Noah would have been paid a small annual sum based on the number of letters that he dealt with. It could not have been a business by itself and there were grumbles throughout the century that the allowance was not enough to cover the expenses and work done by the sub-post masters.

In the 1861 Census Noah's entry seems to be 'Draper etc' which perhaps indicates that he did not see the post office as the major part of his income. We do not know when he gave up the post office and drapery business but it may have been when he was sixty-five which would have been around 1865. We do know from an 1869 Directory that by that date the Post Office had been taken over by a William Bradshaw.

The 1871 Census has Noah, now aged 71, as a 'retired draper', living with his wife Sarah. Ten years later he is still retired but his wife Sarah, at 79, together with their widowed daughter Eliza, are working as milliners. Eliza had married her cousin Luke and, it is believed, taken her sickly son John Lot Green to South Africa. But, as we have said, that is another story. It seems likely that the draper's shop had also sold hats and now the two women were, once again, having to earn a little to help them all survive in the couple's old age. Some indication that they, like most other people were finding it hard in their old age can be seen from the *Ringstead Gift Charity* books which shows that the couple received nine shillings, the couple's rate, in December 1879 and 1880. The charity used one quarter of its income for the 'the inhabitants of Ringstead, over the age of 60 who are, in the opinion of the Trustees, deserving and necessitous'.

Noah and Sarah died within months of each other in 1887. They were buried in Denford Churchyard, like a number of other Ringstead people, once the small Ringstead Churchyard (The Baptist Burial Ground finally closed for burials in 1894) had stopped being used. Their epitaph reads:

Sacred to the memory of Sarah the beloved wife of Noah Green of Ringstead. Born Feb 8th 1803 died January 20th 1887. Also of Noah Green Born Oct 16th 1799 died Nov 12th 1887. 'Here they bore the cross. There they wear the crown.'

Although they were buried in the churchyard of a parish church, the use of the birth dates and of the biblical text perhaps hints at a Nonconformist background.

If we go back to William Bradshaw, he had been baptised on 30th April 1826 in Thrapston, the son of John Bradshaw, blacksmith, and his wife, Sarah. The 1841 Census finds them living in Titchmarsh Lane, Thrapston with William's six siblings. We must guess that William is following his father's profession for the Census only tells us the work of the 'Head of the Household'. We do know that in a few months in 1850 the family is turned upside down. On 10th July, Sarah Bradshaw dies and within three months John Bradshaw, the widower has married again, to Emma Parsons, a farmer's daughter from Little Addington. She is some twenty years his junior.

In the following year the Census informs us that the newly married couple are still living in Titchmarsh Lane. John is not only a blacksmith but also an occupier of 23 acres of land. Living with them are three of his children, a nephew, a grandson and eight lodgers. By 1861 the couple have five new children. Mysteriously, Emma has only aged three years. Perhaps the age gap between her and her stepchildren was, originally, deliberately widened. The only two of John's first family now living at home are Thomas (32) who is a blacksmith and Susan (22) who is put down as a 'general servant'. Is this last description just the enumerator's shorthand, did she work elsewhere, or an indication of how the older family were treated by John?

The family appear to be living in the same house as before but now the Census tells us it is the 'White Hart' and there are five lodgers. Next door are a number of houses in 'Bradshaw's Yard' so perhaps John has developed some of his land or outbuildings. John dies soon after the Census and by 1871 Emma has remarried and, as Mrs. Hubbard, has three more children.

What William made of all this we can only guess at. William had set up himself as a blacksmith in Ringstead by 1847 and had married Ann Beeby of Raunds before his mother's death. By 1851 the couple were living in Ringstead. Did he decide to leave because he saw what was happening around him or, perhaps the more likely explanation is that he needed to move to set up on his own. Certainly, Flora Thompson records that it was usual for the sons of blacksmiths to leave the family forge and become journeymen smiths, learning and earning a living, before returning to the family business. Of course it was not far from Thrapston and it seems that there was a need for a new blacksmith in the village.

There were other blacksmiths recorded in the village during this time including John Tomlin, Charles Hitchcock, and a local journeyman called John Fairey. We write a little more about these in the biography of John Fairey. Some of these did not have their own blacksmith's shops and may, at one time, have worked for William.

William Bradshaw seems to have been an energetic and talented man who realised that he would need to diversify for his business to survive. In 1861, he is listed in the Census as, 'blacksmith, parish clerk and grocer employing one man and one woman'. His wife, Ann is not recorded as living in the house but perhaps she is visiting relatives. A stonemason and his wife from Doncaster are lodging with him. It is about this time that the Ringstead and Denford churches were being repaired so perhaps that is why he was lodging there. It may be that William was taking in the lodgers as part of his parish clerk duties.

This was before the establishment of the secular Parish Councils in 1894 as part of the elected local government of England. Before this date the parish clerk was part of a church system going back a thousand years. He was appointed by the rector, approved by the archdeacon, and acted as clerk to the rector and, sometimes, to the vestry. In some parishes he also assisted in church services and led the congregation's responses. A few pulpits still remain that have lower tiers where the clerk stood. He might also act as the sexton and even dig the graves and look after the churchyard. One can imagine that a blacksmith would be very useful in these practical capacities. William would have received a small annual fee for his clerical duties and presumably would have also been paid for any graves that he dug.

The sub-post offices were subject to inspection twice a year by the head postmaster of the area and also by higher officials in the Post Office hierarchy. Flora Thompson tells of one such 'Surveyor' who arrived in a top hat and immaculate morning suit. After inspecting the post office, he then interviewed one of the postmen who was refusing to work on a new Sunday evening collection on religious grounds. It was a brave stance for he was not a young man and 'knew that his post and his pension he had so nearly earned hung in the balance'. Despite the Surveyor's report the man was allowed to not work on Sunday evening. It must be remembered that, as is still the case, the sub-postmaster was self-employed, running a business, but the postmen, who were earlier called 'letter carriers', were employed directly by the Post Office. Post women, like Laura in Candleford Green, began delivering letters towards the end of the century.

A blacksmith's shop and a post office may seem an odd combination but it is just this same joint enterprise in Candleford Green that Flora Thompson writes about. Dorcas Lane did not run the blacksmith's shop personally but she employed the blacksmiths and fed and housed the young journeyman smiths. It seems likely that William too, could not have done both jobs.

The 1871 Census has William as Parish Clerk and Sub-Postmaster but also records his wife Ann as Sub-postmistress. This is an unusual recognition of the increasing role of women in such businesses, although far from unique, and one suspects in this case that Ann did much of the work. It seems that the couple did not have any children so perhaps she had more time than many Victorian wives. Working for the Post Office was not taken lightly as Flora Thompson, perhaps the best source for what working in a rural post office was like in the last decade of the nineteenth century, tells us about her first day at work:

Once, when there had was a brisk demand for penny stamps . . . she tried timidly to sell one, but she was pushed gently aside, and afterwards it was explained to her that she must not handle a letter or sell a stamp until she had been through some mysterious initiation ceremony which Miss Lane called being 'sworn in'. This had to take place before a Justice of the Peace, and it had been arranged that she should go the next morning to one of the great houses in the locality for that purpose.

Laura duly goes to see 'Sir Timothy' and, before signing, she had to read out the oath:

'I do solemnly promise and declare that I will not open or delay or cause to suffer to be opened or delayed any letter or anything sent by the post', it began, and went on to promise secrecy in all things.

William and Ann were living in Chapel Road and next door, Frederick Bradshaw, probably William's nephew, was a 'master blacksmith'. He is just 22 years old and living with his young wife, Emma and their baby son. It seems that William has passed on the role of blacksmith and it is possible that he was beginning to have health problems. Blacksmiths do not seem often to have lived into old age which, when you consider the atmosphere that most worked in, is not so surprising.

The 1877 Post Office Directory records that William is still the postmaster. Everything is much as before but there are now two deliveries a day, at 7.15 am and 2.20 pm. There is still only one collection time, at 4.55 pm.

William died on January 30th 1879 aged just 52 and was buried in the churchyard although no stone now marks his grave. He left a will with a value of under £100. He is listed in the National Probate Calendar as, 'shopkeeper and parish clerk' only. Ann became a housekeeper for a farmer in Brigstock and then lived with her nephew, Harry Beeby, and his wife Ellen in Raunds. Ann died in the spring of 1907 aged 83 years.

The post office was taken over by John Green, a nephew of Noah, the first Ringstead Postmaster. Noah's brother, Thomas, had been an innkeeper or 'vittler' (victualler). He had married Katherine May from Oundle and John was their youngest child, born in about 1840. The other children had been apprenticed to a number of trades including dressmaking, carpentry and butchery. John, himself, had first become a shoemaker and the 1861 Census has him living in his family's public house, the *Axe and Compass* but still working at that trade.

In 1865 he married local girl, Mary Weekley, and the 1871 Census has the couple living in Shop Street (as High Street was sometimes called) and still a shoemaker. They also have a six-month-old son, John Albert. All around them are shoemakers and farm labourers, apart from widow Matilda Wilson (43), who is 'mangling' to try to keep her, and her elderly mother, out of the workhouse.

It seems very likely that John took over the Post Office on the death of William Bradshaw in 1879. Certainly, the 1881 Census has John's occupation as 'Postmaster and Shoe Agent'. He and Mary now have three children, John A (10), Charlie (8) and Lizzie (5). A young local bootmaker, Joseph Smith, is also boarding with them. Perhaps he is working for John. Next door are his Uncle Noah and Aunt Sarah. Noah is now 81 and, as we have said his wife and daughter are working as milliners to earn some extra money. The elderly couple would have been still able to offer some advice although the work might have changed a little since they had run the post office.

Kelly's Directory of 1885 records that letter still arrive from Thrapston but now at 6.55 am and 2.15pm and are dispatched at 5.25 pm. The working day has been stretched further although there is still no delivery on Sundays. It also records that the nearest money order and telegraph office is at Raunds. The telegraph first came to Ringstead in 1845, which was very early in its history, but it was only for the use of the railway. It looks as if this usage had not been extended.

Originally there had been a mishmash of companies, small and large, offering telegraph services. They tended to only offer their services in the profitable places and rates tended to vary widely. Many argued for a comprehensive service across the whole country and under Government control. In 1868 an Act of Parliament enabled this to happen and telegraphs were added to the Post Office services. Nevertheless Ringstead remained too small to be linked to this system during the nineteenth century.

John continues as a shoe agent so, as is the case in many places today, the sub-post office had to piggy back on to some other retail business.

By 1891 John remains 'Shoemaker and Postmaster', and his sons, John Albert and Charles, are shoe riveters and his daughter, Lizzie May, a closer. Again, one suspects that John's wife, Mary would have run the shop for much of the time but we have no way of telling. The 1894 *Kelly's Directory* entry for the Post office is very similar to the 1885 version although the second delivery is now 1.15

pm. It also records that Post orders are issued but not paid. As with the telegraphs, the money order business first started as a private venture, in 1791, to help prevent the frequent theft of letters containing money. It became part of the post office business in 1838 and by 1879 twenty-nine million pounds was sent in this way. During the century postal orders began to be issued at Ringstead but were never redeemed locally. For that you had to go to Raunds. One guesses that the Greens did not want to have to hold too much cash for this purpose.

In 1901 the couple are still running the Post Office. John Albert is the only child still at home and working as a shoemaker. Ten years later, John and Mary, both 70 years old continue to serve in the Post office. John Albert, their son, is 40 years old and still single. He is now an Insurance Agent and one wonders if this is part of the scheme introduced by the Post Office in 1864 to offer small life insurance policies (£5 to £100) and annuities aimed at the poorer people in the community. The charges were less than those of commercial companies and the scheme had some success in helping ordinary working class people to make their lives a little more secure.

The Enumerator's Schedule for the 1911 Census tells us that the Post Office was at No. 3 High Street, next to some farm buildings, and a few houses before Chapel Yard. There is a photograph which, judging from the clothes, was taken at about this time. It shows John and Mary standing outside the shop where they had lived and worked for well over thirty years. It may be that it was taken when John retired at 70 years old and handed over the business to his son, John Albert.



Ringstead Post Office with John and Mary Green in the doorway.

(Probably taken in about 1911.)

With the kind permission of Martin Parfett.

John died, aged 73, in 1913. The directory of 1914 tells us that John Albert Green is now the sub-postmaster. It also records that there is a wall letter-box near the New Inn which is cleared twice a day. We know that letters would be delivered over the next few years to families which they had desperately hoped that they would never receive.

As anyone who has read, or watched on television, *Lark Rise to Candleford* will know, the post office became, through the latter half of the nineteenth century, a trusted and respected institution which was the hub of many villages. It was one of the few institutions that had an integrated network across the country and revealed itself in the day-to-day lives of villagers like those in Ringstead. It has continued in some villages in this role to this day but the internet and recent Governments' thinking has put the existence of many under threat.

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Note: I think John Green (vittler, victualler or innkeeper), the brother of Noah, is the one mentioned in the case of the stolen will in Eric Jenkins's book (see below).

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Chapter twenty-five

The Village Blacksmith

John Fairey (1804 - 1869) and Elizabeth (1800 - 1885) and their daughters.

The art, if you want your descendants to find you, is to have an obscure Christian name and, most importantly, an unusual surname. When you come across the name Fairey it would seem that it is likely to meet this second requirement. Unfortunately, in Ringstead in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, you would be wrong. Every garden seemed to have one at the bottom and, just to confuse matters a wide range of variations were used including Feary, Fairy, Farry and Farey. Even more annoyingly, the various families seem to keep their distance from each other and we end up with a shrubbery rather than a tree.

It appears that there were at least two lines which may be completely separate or join sometime in the seventeenth century. Broadly there were the blacksmith Faireys and the shoemaker Faireys and it is with the former that we will be looking at in this story and, in particular, at a black sheep member of the blacksmiths.

The Faireys were an old Ringstead family which reaches back at least into the seventeenth century. We will start with John and Elizabeth who married in Ringstead Parish Church on 1st January 1700. We are in the reign of William and Mary and a new century has just begun. They have a son, Samuel who is baptised on 19th December 1703 and lives long enough to have three wives. He first married Elizabeth Desborough on 12th November 1730 and has at least one child, a daughter, Elizabeth. His wife dies in June 1735 and within six months he has re-married, to Ann Jones, and has a further four children. It seems likely that Ann died in giving birth to her fourth child, Joseph in 1754. Just two months later he marries again, to Keziah Pell and has two further sons.

We do not know Samuel's profession but his son, the oldest child of his marriage to Ann, who is called William was a blacksmith. He was baptized on 12th September 1737 and married Ann, probably when he was about twenty, although I have not yet found their marriage. They had at least five children before Ann died in 1774, but it may be that only one girl, Mary, survived into adulthood. William re-married on 3rd May 1779 to Mary Wright and had a son, William who was baptised on 25th December 1780. It is at the death of William, the father, in 1784 aged about 47, that we find him described as a blacksmith. His widow dies some twenty years later in 1804 so we have to wonder how she managed until her children grew old enough to work. Did she employ men to run the forge or did it pass into other hands?

When we look at these rapid re-marriages we may see it as callous and perhaps sometimes it was. We must remember, however, that, unless there were available older children, aunts or parents to take on the raising of a young family, a father, or mother, often had a choice of re-marriage, child neglect, or pauperism.

Whatever happened in the intervening years we know that William, the son, continued with his father's trade and married Elizabeth, probably some time after the turn of the century. Again I have not yet found the marriage but we know, once again from his entry in the Burial Register that he was a blacksmith. They had some six children, four of them were girls and the youngest son, William, born in 1811 died just twenty years later. In fact, one wonders at the sudden burst of deaths in the family. After William's death on 17th November 1831, his father died aged 53 almost exactly a year later and, in the following month Elizabeth his mother also died aged 52. Was it from these clusters of deaths in a family that Ringstead's reputation for witchcraft grew?

Before these sudden deaths, John, the eldest child had married, on 24th December 1828 to Eliza Betts, across the Nene, in Woodford Parish Church. By the end of 1832 he was a husband, a father and the head of the family left by his parents, although even Lucy, the youngest surviving sister, would have been nearly eighteen. Unfortunately he was not equal to the task. We must be careful in defining someone's character by a few bad actions but it does appear that John was a feckless man who literally ran away from his responsibilities.

As Henry VIII looked to succession and wanted a son, so a blacksmith would have hoped for a boy to learn the trade, to help his father and, finally, take over in his old age. We see the sadness of Joe Gargery, in *Great Expectations*, when Pip blithely leaves the forge to become a 'gentleman'. John, like Henry, struggled to father boys and he had between 1830 and 1839, six girls in quick succession, none of whom were christened as children. Is this a sign of Nonconformism or negligence? One also wonders at the mindset of parents with the surname Fairey who call their first child Mary (and their last child Fanny). Perhaps it may indicate that they pronounced their surname more like 'Farry' or 'Feary'.

As might be expected, the Faireys struggled to feed and clothe their family. The Ringstead Charity Account Book reveals that in 1837 John received 8yards of cloth at 9½d a yard and 3yards at 13d a yard: also one handkerchief. In 1838 he again received sheets and other cloth items.

It is when we get to the first personal Census, in 1841, that we realise that something is really amiss in the Fairey family. We find Eliza aged 35 with her six girls; Mary (11), Emily (9), Louisa (7), Sophia (5), Hannah (4), and Maria(h) (2). There is no sign of John, and Eliza is described by that feared word, 'Pauper'. When we search for John, we finally find a John Fairey (34) blacksmith, living in the small town of Thorney, on the edge of the Huntingdonshire fens. With him live William and Mary Wood and Henry Harvey.

It is possible that he is away getting work to feed his family but when we look at the Northampton Mercury we find the truth. It reports that John Farey from Ringstead was sent to the House of Correction for running away and leaving his wife chargeable to Ringstead. Perhaps absconding once, overcome by the recent deaths and his responsibilities, we might excuse his inability to cope. The following year, in 1842, it happens again. John is sent, this time, for two months 'to the House of Correction for neglecting to support his wife and family, whereby they became chargeable to the Parish of Ringstead'. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 had attempted to stop outdoor relief and force recipients into centralised 'Union Workhouses' where conditions should be harsh enough to deter paupers using them. The local workhouse was at Thrapston but the Parish would still have to pay for their upkeep and, as the vicar Percival Sandilands pointed out in 1864, Ringstead

considered that it paid a very high Poor Rate. William Howitt, who was no radical, was appalled by this new harsher regime and, writing in 1838 in the *'Rural Life in England'*, stated:

... Every poor man's family is liable, on the occurrence of some chance stroke of misfortune, to have their misfortune, bitter enough in itself, added the tenfold aggravation of being torn asunder, and immured in the separate wards of a POVERTY PRISON. The very supposition is horrible; and, if this system, this iron and indiscriminating system, - a blind tyranny, knowing no difference between accidental misfortune and habitual idleness, between worthy poverty and audacious imposition, between misfortune and crime, - be the product of Philanthropy, may Philanthropy be sunk to the bottom of the sea!

John would have been called one of the 'undeserving poor' and it was his wife and children who suffered.

When we look at the blacksmiths that worked in Ringstead a pattern emerges of a group of young men travelling around the countryside and sometimes getting into mischief. Flora Thompson writing of the blacksmiths tells us:

...it was the custom at that time that after apprenticeship, a young smith should travel the country and work in various shops to gain experience. That was why they were called 'journeymen', Miss Lane said, 'because they travelled about.'

This may not be the whole story. Certainly for some young smiths it was part of their apprenticeship where they gained skills working away from the 'home forge' before returning to the family business. These groups of travelling young men were not uncommon in a number of professions, from agricultural labourers to shoemakers. Most travelled to find work rather than to improve their skills. In those days when holidays, as we know them, did not exist for working people the 'tramp' would also be a time when the young men saw the world and perhaps sowed their wild oats. In this they were not so different from the rich young men who went to Italy. It is also true that, although some blacksmiths prospered, many found life increasingly difficult.

Of course there were horses to shoe but this was not always work for the blacksmiths. The 1851 Ringstead Census has George Buckby, 'farrier', living with William Teel, a gamekeeper from County Fermanagh in Ireland. Many larger farmers brought in specialised farriers to shoe and attend to their horses. The blacksmiths' other stock-in-trade had been the production of all the ironware for the home and farm. The agricultural implements became increasingly more mechanised and were produced in centralised factories. The well-named 'Smiths of Thrapston', was a large local producer of farm implements for horse and, as the century progressed, for steam engine. The home and garden goods; the gates, door furniture, tools, nails, kitchen implements, etc. were likewise made cheaply in the new industrial cities or imported from abroad. The village blacksmith was left mainly with minor repair work and some horse-shoeing and, for many, this was not enough to make a good living.

Going back to the 1841 Census we find two young blacksmiths, John Hitchcock (25) and his wife, Sarah (nee Hewitt) with their young son, John; and John Jeffrey, with a Mary Jeffrey who is only shown as fifteen (although this has been probably rounded down) who may be his sister or wife.

It is in the life of another black sheep, Korah Dicks, that we first met Henry Hitchcock. Korah was sent to the 'House of Correction', for one month for assaulting Henry. He was an outsider, from Kimbolton and one wonders if this is part of the reason for the assault. By 1851 Henry and his family have disappeared from Ringstead and we find him, by 1861, in Plaistow, London and still a blacksmith.

Returning to John Jeffrey, he too disappears from Ringstead and possibly moves to Linton in Cambridgeshire. We cannot be sure because the 1841 Census does not give places of birth and 'John Jeffrey' is a popular name for smiths from Cornwall to Scotland.

Our final example is John Tomlin who is listed as a blacksmith in Ringstead in Whellan's 1849 Directory. It also records that a 'blacksmith's shop has lately been converted into a Methodist Chapel'. John Tomlin is one of those elusive people who seem to dodge between the official records. He is, almost certainly, the John Valentine Tomblin who married Caroline Wallis on 12th September 1847 in Alconbury-cum-Weston in Huntingdonshire. The couple have a child, William, who was baptised in Ringstead on 25th April 1849 and buried two years later in Thrapston. It seems possible that John had already left Ringstead for there is no sign of him in the 1851 Census. On 30th November 1856, a John Valentine Tomlin, 'a travelling Blacksmith Aged 35 years', was buried in Lincoln.

John Fairey was, therefore, part of a constant movement of young men around the countryside but he was no longer so young and he had many dependants. It seems that John did return home and the couple were, to some extent reconciled, because another daughter, Fanny, was born in about 1845 and baptised on 12th August 1849 with her older sisters, Louisa, Hannah and Maria. Is this a sign that John has finally become a proper family man? Certainly, the 1851 Census has John with his family in Ringstead. He is working as a blacksmith and Eliza is making lace, as many women in the area did in the first half of the nineteenth century. Her daughters, Sophia (16), Hannah (14) and Maria (12) are also lacemakers and Fanny, the baby of the family is just five years old.

By 1861, however, we find the rift between John and Eliza has opened up again. He is a journeyman blacksmith which, at 56, means that he is still working how and when he can. He is living by himself. Meanwhile, Eliza, and her youngest child, Fanny, are living elsewhere in the village. She is still trying to earn a living as a lacemaker.

John dies in 1869, aged 64, which seems a reasonable age for a nineteenth century blacksmith. Perhaps his lack of time in the blacksmith's forge added years to his life. If we look at some of the blacksmiths that we have encountered, we see that many died in middle age or earlier. John Fairey's grandfather, William, died when he was about 47 and his father William was 53: William Bradshaw, who later became the postmaster, was 52 and his nephew Frederick 53, and John Tomlin just 35 years old.



Former Blacksmith's shop taken by Roy Dickens in 1980s.
(Carlow Road end of High Street).

Roy remembers Mr Davies working there and, with few horses to shoe, finally having to spend his day making rods with screw threads each end to reinforce ladder rungs.

(By kind permission of Roy Dickens).

It is easy to have an idealised view of the village blacksmith (albeit from America) 'under the spreading chestnut tree'. Richard Jefferies, another lyrical writer of the countryside from the Victorian era, gives a more realistic picture of what a typical smithy would have been like.

Twisted iron, rusty from exposure, lies in confusion on the blackened ground before the shed. Coal dust and the carbon deposited from volumes of thick smoke have darkened the earth, and coated everything with a thick crust. The windows of the shed are broken, probably by the accidental contact of long rods of iron carelessly cast aside, and some of the slates of the roof appear gone just above the furnace, as if removed for ventilation and the escape of the intense heat. There is a creaking of stiff leather as the bellows rise and fall, and the roar of the blast as it is forced through the glowing coals.

A ceaseless hum of wheels in motion comes from the rear, and the peculiar crackling sound of a band in rapid revolution round the drum of the engine and the shaft. Then the grinding scrape of sharp steel on iron as the edge of the tool cuts shavings from the solid metal rotating swiftly in the lathe. As blow follows blow the red hot 'scale', driven from the surface of the iron on the anvil by the heavy sledge, flies rattling against the window in a spray of fire. The ring of metal, the clatter, the roaring, and hissing of steam, fill the air, and through it rises now and then the shrill quick calls of men in command.

This may have been a larger blacksmith's shop than the ones in Ringstead but, like the water mills we have written about elsewhere, they were not always the fragrant, healthy places that the poets and artists depict.



Interior of a Forge

(Country Life Journal March 1904. MERL P DX1091/8)

With the kind permission of The Museum of English Rural Life

The 1871 Census finds Eliza, aged 69, a visitor at 20 Russell Street Cambridge. It is the house of Alfred Pateman, a railway servant and his wife Emma (38). It seems likely that 'Emily' is Eliza's daughter Emma. Eliza may be already losing her sight, perhaps, like many other women, through the making of lace for years by the dim light of a candle. Certainly in 1881 she is, I believe, in Thrapston Union Workhouse, although it gives her home town as Stanwick, and it records that she has been blind for eight years. On 25th September 1885, aged 85, she dies at Thrapston Workhouse but is buried back in the Ringstead churchyard.

Postscript: The Daughters.

Eliza Fairey had had a hard life, with a large family of girls which she had to bring up, it seems, with little help from her wandering husband. I wondered what had happened to these daughters. Did they manage to shake off the effects of their difficult childhoods and enjoy a fulfilled adult life? We can only look for hints that the records give us.

Mary, the oldest child, probably married John Hale in 1855 in Meldreth in Cambridgeshire, and the 1861 Census finds her living in nearby Melbourn with their two sons, John and George. It is difficult to find her after that as there are a number of alternatives, none certain. It could be that her

widower, John, with his children, George and Eliza, is in the Cambridge 1881 Census but we cannot be sure.

The life of Mary's sister, Emily, is also somewhat confusing at present. She is probably the Emma Fairey who married William Stockridge in 1857. William died a year afterwards and just a few months later she married railway servant, Alfred Pateman. We have seen that Eliza, her mother was staying with her in Cambridge in 1871. There is also a niece, Emma, the daughter of Mary. They are together in 1881 but Emma died in 1883 aged about 52, the same age as her grandparents. In 1891 Emma Hales, aged 27 is Alfred's niece and housekeeper.

Louisa, after working as a farm servant for Henry Gale at Denford, married John Underwood in 1856 and moved to Finedon. She spent the rest of her life there. Her husband, John, was an agricultural labourer and it would have been a tough life. She had six children and also worked as a charwoman. Her husband became a railway labourer, then a 'higler's labourer' (perhaps for his brother-in-law) and finally, in 1901, a farm labourer again. In this Census we find her and John in Pear Tree Row, Finedon. She died in 1905.

Sophia Fairey married John Griffin in 1855 in Ringstead and she was the only daughter to remain in her home village all her life. Her husband was an agricultural labourer and we finally find the couple in 1881 with John an unemployed waggoner and Sophia a laundress. In 1911 she is a seventy-seven year old widow visiting Leonard and Laura Bryant at 28 Regent Square, Northampton. She probably died a year later.

Hannah, the fifth child, had one of the most interesting lives. She had been born in about 1837 and was the only daughter never to marry. In 1871, she is with her mother visiting her sister in Cambridge and her profession is given as a 'domestic servant'. By 1881, her mother has gone blind and is in Thrapston Union Workhouse. Hannah, however, has moved to London and, at 44, is a 'Matron' in Reverend C.H. Spurgeons's Orphanage in Clapham Road, Lambeth. She is still there, in 1891, where she is one of seventeen 'matrons'.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was a charismatic Baptist preacher in London. By 22 he was the most popular preacher of the day who regularly preached to crowds of 10,000 people. A clergyman's widow who was a member of Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle Church had seen an article in the *Sword and Trowel* (the Tabernacle magazine which is still published) for August 1866 advocating the establishment of schools for 'our poor adherents'. The widow, a Mrs. Hillyard wrote to Charles Spurgeon telling him that she would fund an orphanage where boys could be 'trained in simple Gospel principles'. Spurgeon went to her modest house with another man and said that they had called about the £200 she had mentioned in her letter. In his biography of Spurgeon, W.Y. Fullerton continues with the conversation:

Did I write £200?' exclaimed the lady. 'I meant £20,000.'

'Oh yes,' said Mr. Spurgeon, 'you did put down £20,000, but I thought perhaps there was a nought or two too many.'

The orphanage was opened in 1869 with a girls' wing added ten years later. Hannah, who one would have expected to have become a recipient of the charity given by the great Victorian philanthropic

movement, became, instead, one of its agents. If we judge from the experiences of Peter Paterson, who was a boy there much later, in the years before it was bombed in the Second World War, it was a harsh and cruel regime with regular beatings but one where the 3 R's were taught. We can only hope that Hannah was a kinder matron than the one that he encountered.

It is possible that Spurgeon had preached in Ringstead and this had inspired Hannah, although he was, perhaps, too big a fish for the Ringstead pond. Certainly, Rev C, Spurgeon Junior, his son, preached in the Baptist Chapel in May 1882 and again in 1883. We do not know just how long Hannah worked at the orphanage but, in 1901, she is still in Marylebone, staying as a friend, with a woman 'living on her own means' and her lady companion. She does not appear in the 1911 Census.

Maria married Thomas Smeathers Pettit in 1859 and, like her sister Louisa ended up in Finedon. Thomas was, a carter in 1861, a General Dealer at Wilby in 1871 and a 'Rag and Bone Buyer' in 1881. By 1891 they are living in a 'Railway Carriage' with their four children, in Finedon, next to the Co-operative Field. Thomas has a 'Dealer Shop'. By 1901 he is a 'Rag and Bone Merchant' again and they are living in Thrapston Road, Finedon. Maria dies in 1904 aged 65. Thomas was obviously a colourful local character for a rhyme about him, under his nickname of Tom Tottles, was recorded in a local book.

*Tom Tottles breaks bottles
Sifts cinders, mends winders,
Goes round with his bags
To collect your old rags.
He mumbles and moans
As he buys your old bones
And kicks up a din
As loud as sin
When he hollers 'Rag-bone!'
Rag-bone! Rabbit skin!*

[From 'Pageant of Finedon'.]

Finally we come to Fanny, the last girl, perhaps a product of John's temporary return to the bosom of his family. She married Charles Frederick Coggins from Raunds in 1864 when she was just eighteen. Seven years later she has four children between two months and six years old and is in Thrapston Union Workhouse. I have not yet found Charles (or Frederick as he is usually called) in 1871 but perhaps he is away looking for work. In 1881 Frederick, Fanny and their family are living in St John's Place Marylebone and he is working again as a shoemaker. 1891 finds them still there, and with two extra children, bringing the total that Fanny has given birth to, to at least nine. They are now living at 87 Devonshire Street, Marylebone with three other families. Charles Frederick Coggins died in 1892 and the 1901 Census finds Fanny a widow at 54 and having to work as a charwoman, with her youngest daughter, May, who is just 14 years old. She is probably the Fanny Coggins who died in the Paddington District in 1911 aged sixty-five.

So it is that names come and go. William Feary baptized in 1737 had six children and his son William had six also and his son John had seven more, yet by the end of the century no-one from that family branch was named Fairey. Such is the power of the male name in ancestry.

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Chapter Twenty-six

INNKEEPERS & BEERSELLERS

Thomas (c1775 – 1837) & Mary Hill (c1777 – 1842): James (c1785 – 1856) & Ann (1787 – 1871) Hill.

We usually view the nineteenth century as the great time of the temperance movement. An era when the 'demon drink' was confronted and the Coffee Taverns, like the one in Marshalls Road, Raunds, were established to help save the working man. But it was not quite as clear-cut as that. For many reformers it was cheap gin that had been the ruin of mothers and fathers alike. For some, even in the temperance movement, beer was seen as a wholesome drink and part of the English labourers' tradition.

As William Cobbett tells us, in *Cottage Economy*, which was written in 1821, up to the 1780s almost every labourer, who had the space, would brew his own beer. Cobbett saw beer as a healthy and nutritious drink and was scathing about the new tea-drinking fashion.

I view the tea drinking as a destroyer of health, an enfeebler of the frame, an engenderer of effeminacy and laziness, a debaucher of youth and a maker of misery in old age.

He blamed the heavy taxation on malted barley and hops which had stopped the home brewer from producing, 'the cheapest drink that a family can use except milk'. Instead, he alleged, the labourer tended to drink less beer, but it was the much more expensive ale sold at a public house where young men might be corrupted and the beer contaminated with chemicals. Of course we must remember that both beer and tea were ways of making water of uncertain purity, safer to drink and much of the home-brewed beer was very weak.

It was to encourage the small, 'beer or cider only', establishments that the 1830 Beer House Act was passed. This enabled anyone to brew and sell beer, ale or cider, whether from a public house or in their own homes, upon obtaining a moderately priced licence of just under £2 for beer and ale and £1 for cider. Nor did they have to go to the Justices of the Peace to obtain one. In the six months after it came into force nearly 25,000 excise licences were taken out. This is the reason that we see so many *King William* or *King William IV* public houses today.

We cannot be completely certain what impact the new law had on the local sellers of alcohol. It does seem likely, however, that until at least 1828 there were only two recognized alehouses in Ringstead and that they were the *Axe & Compass* and the *Swan*. *The Ale House Keepers Recognizances* had to be taken out every year until 1830 before the local Justices of the Peace. Unfortunately the Wellingborough Quarter Sessions did not record the name of the alehouse. Looking at the names of the people concerned it does seem most likely that the *Black Horse* came after the 1830 Act and the *New Inn*, as its name implies, came later still. There are, however, other sellers of beer who crop up in the Censuses and other sources which we cannot link directly to one of these four named houses. Some may have been innkeepers of the main houses who, because of missing details, we are unable

to allocate. It may also be that some were beer-shops, which, after 1830, as we have heard, could be in somebody's front room, had no name, and may have been short-lived.

In his eulogy to the English Inn, William Howitt makes a clear distinction between the two types.

There is nothing more characteristic in rural life than the village ale-house or inn. It is the centre of information, and the regular, or occasional rendezvous of almost every-body in the neighbourhood. You see all sorts of characters, or you hear of them. The where-about of every-body all around is there perfectly understood. I do not mean the low pot-house – the new beer-shop of the new Beer-bill, with LICENSED TO BE DRUNK ON THE PREMISES blazoned over the door in staring characters - the Tom-and-Jerry of the midland counties – the Kidley-Wink of the west of England. No, I mean the good old-fashioned country ale-house; the substantial well-to-do old country ale-house- situated by the village green or by the road-side, with a comfortable sweep out of the road itself for carriages or carts to come round to the door, and stand out of all harm's way.

When we look at the records of the 1795 *Ale House Keepers Recognizances* for Ringstead there are only two names. One is John Green, almost certainly at the *Axe & Compass* who gave a surety of £10 and was supported by 'Richard Whiteman of Ringstead' who had to put up a similar amount. If the house was run properly during that year, the money was returned or taken forward into the next year. If the innkeeper was found to have allowed 'disorder or unlawful games', then the money could be forfeited. The other alehouse keeper, probably at the *Swan*, was John Mason, supported by Charles Chapman of Wellingborough.

In 1800, John Green is again there, with John Colby who is probably at the *Swan*. This time both are 'seconded' by John Mason of Rushden (presumably the *Swan's* innkeeper in 1795). Ten years later, it is still John Green at the *Axe & Compass* and John Mason is back at the *Swan*. (Of course we could have a father and son here).

John Green died in 1821 and when we look at the 1822 *List of Licensed Victuallers* for Ringstead it gives four licensees with Thomas Green, son of John, at the *Axe & Compass* and Thomas Hill at the *Swan*.

Thomas Green	Axe & Compass
Thomas Hill	Swan
Lot Green	-
Thomas Lee	-

The Hills and the Greens form a double helix of bloodlines in Ringstead. We have Lots of Green and Hill and, not far away a Green Hill. In this 1822 List, Lot Green is the brother of Thomas at the *Axe & Compass* and by 1841 is shown as 'Independent'. It may be he was brewing for his brother or for his own needs. Thomas Lee was a baker and, again, brewing was probably something of a sideline.

The Justices met at the *Hind Inn* at Wellingborough and almost all the innkeepers seem to have attended the session because, occasionally, one is recorded as not present. One imagines that it was something of a social occasion with all the innkeepers, from across the district, having an annual get-together. In the early *Recognizances* the innkeepers had to agree to, 'suffer no disorder or unlawful games,' but by 1825 this had developed into a lengthy inventory of wrongdoings to be avoided. It authorizes the named persons to sell:

. . . Bread and other Victuals, Beer, Ale and other Liquors in his, her or their house and shall not fraudulently dilute or adulterate the same and shall not use in uttering or selling thereof any pots or other measures that are not of full size and shall not wilfully or knowingly permit drunkenness or tippling, nor get drunk in his, her or their house or other premises nor knowingly suffer any gaming with cards, draughts, dice, bagatelle, or any other sedentary games in his, her or their house or any outhouses, appurtenances, covernments [?] thereto belonging by Journeymen, Laborers, Servants or Apprentices, nor knowingly introduce, permit or suffer any Bull, Bear or Badger baiting, cock fighting or other such sport or amusement in any part of his, her or their premises, nor shall knowingly or designedly and with a view to harbor and intertain such, permit or suffer men or women of notoriously bad fame or dissolute girls and boys to assemble and meet together in his, her or their house or any of the premises thereto belonging, nor permit or suffer any drinking or tippling in any part of his, her or their premises, nor shall keep open his, her or their house during the usual hours of Divine Service on Sundays nor shall keep his, her or their house or other premises during late hours of the night or early in the morning for any other purpose than the reception of Travellers . . .

Much of this is humane and right but many suspected that the local J.P.'s were using their powers to create a cosy cartel and restrict the growth of beerhouses for working men. The reference to 'Journeymen, Laborers, Servants or Apprentices', may give some credence to this view. Notice also the lack of 'u's, in words such as 'labor', which the emigrants to America retained. At first both versions were used and the divergence seems to have come partly from the different choices of the early dictionary writers (Samuel Johnson and Noah Webster), in the two countries.

As a small village, off the main turnpike roads, Ringstead did not have one of the larger coaching inns such as *The George* at Huntingdon. It seems, of the three main contenders, that the *Axe and Compass* was the nearest to the traditional alehouse that Howitt praised. Before the advent of the village hall, it was often in the inns that inquests took place, house and land auctions were held and Enclosure committees met. In the case of the Ringstead 'Inclosure' it was in a Thrapston Inn that the appointed Commissioner met claimants and decisions were made. A poster advertising an 'Auction of the Freehold Property' of John Green (occupied by Josiah Groom) is said to be happening at the *Cross Keys Inn*, Ringstead but I have not found any evidence that such a public house existed and I think it was a mistake and should have been the *Axe & Compass*. Later in the century, on 2nd December 1882, an inquest for the stillborn child of Rhoda Warren was held at the *Black Horse* and two years later an inquest into the sudden death of Mary Barker was held at the *New Inn*.



Axe & Compass

The left side of the building is the original. Notice the beer barrel over what was once the front entrance. (But was it the original entrance?)

Photograph 29 March 2011 with the kind permission of the owner.

As we have seen, Thomas Green, born in about 1795 in Ringstead is the 'victualler' of the *Axe & Compass* from before 1822, until at least 1871 where, in the Census, at the age of seventy-six he is still shown as the innkeeper. His wife Katherine died soon after, in 1872, and Thomas followed her some five years later. It is not the lives of Thomas and Katherine Green that we shall be looking at here but those of the Hill family to whom they are linked. We will also not be looking at the Figgis family, first landlords of the *New Inn*, which, as its name implies, was built later, probably in the 1860s. It is worth briefly showing here just how interrelated the innkeepers were. Samuel Figgis had married Maria, the daughter of James Hill (who kept the *Black Horse*) in 1852. James himself had married Ann Green who was the sister of Thomas Green (innkeeper of the *Axe & Compass*). It seems very likely that Thomas Hill of the *Swan*, born about 1775 and James Hill, born about 1785 were brothers or at least cousins.

Let us start with the *Swan Inn* in Carlow Lane, on the edge of the village but facing down the High Street and but a stone's throw from the *Axe and Compass*. Its name may be derived from the arms of the Creed family of Oundle who were lords of the manor in Ringstead in the eighteenth century. Their shield showed, 'Azure a chevron between three swans argent'.



The Swan (Now a private house).

*Notice where the pub sign was once fixed. It once had a steeper roof, probably with thatch.
(July 2005) Used with the kind permission of Andy and Chris Havers.*

Thomas Hill was born in about 1775. We only know this from the Burial Register which gives his age. I have found no other sign of his birth and it may be that he was christened elsewhere. Perhaps surprisingly, for innkeepers, the Greens and Hills have Baptist connections and this may be the reason for them not appearing in the Parish Baptism Register. He married Mary Richards on 27th February 1797 in Ringstead Parish Church and it appears from the Register that they had four children: Lot (baptised 11 Sept 1798) – who later married Lydia Green (sister of Thomas Green of the *Axe and Compass*); Susannah who died in infancy; John; and Elizabeth.

At present, the first we hear of Thomas is in the *Licensed Victuallers' List* of 1822 but he may have been the landlord there for many years before this date. Fifteen years later, on 9th September 1837 Thomas died and was buried in the churchyard. The 1841 Census records Mary Hill on her own at the *Swan Inn* with just a fifteen-year-old servant girl to help her. She would have walked up and down many stairs for, Alan Clipston remembers that, in the middle of the Twentieth Century, The *Swan* had no beer pumps and the landlady had to go down into the cellar every time to draw a pint from the barrel.

Also, in 1841, the *Northampton Mercury* records that William Barnard from Brampton in Huntingdonshire was sent to the House of Correction for two months for, 'wilful damage and injury to certain windows in the house of Mary Hill, Ringstead. It may be that this was revenge for her not having paid a bill, for William was a carpenter, but the wording is ambiguous.

On 23rd March 1842, Mary too died aged sixty-five and within six months, her son, John, aged just forty years old also died. The *Mercury* writing of his death, records that John Hill of the *Swan Inn*, son of Mr Thomas Hill and Mary Hill, 'died on Sunday last after a short illness'. The newspaper also states that this is the third death in the family in the last twelve months. Thomas had died some five years earlier so who is this third death? The Burial Register gives no obvious answer.

That is the end of the Hill family at the *Swan*. The inn does not appear again in the Trade Directories until 1861 when the landlord is Ekins Dickens. The *Northampton Mercury*, of 22nd August 1863, has a notice advertising *The Swan* for let with about seven acres of pasture land and three acres of arable land. Potential lessees are directed to ' Mr Woolston, Brewery, Wellingborough', so it looks as if it was a tied house perhaps to *Dulleys* who started in 1840 and were taken over by *Campbell Praed* in 1920. Amos Mason and Samuel William Bull followed as landlords and the latter is there as the century draws to a close.

The *Swan Inn* is now a private house in Carlow Road but if you look carefully you can still see the square on the bricks where the pub sign once hung. Inside, the old beer cellar is now blocked up.



The New Inn.
(February 15th 2011).



*The Black Horse (now a private house).
The single storey part was a butcher's shop.*

February 2011 (with the kind permission and assistance of Alan Clipston).

The *Black Horse* is also now a private house, towards the other end of the High Street, nearly opposite the *Temperance Hall*. It does not appear by name until an 1847 listing in the Post Office Directory. It is likely, however, that James Hill who is in the 1841 Census, aged 55, with his wife Ann, and described as a publican is living at the *Black Horse*.

James Hill had been born in 1785 and married Ann Green (sister of Thomas of the *Axe & Compass*) on 1st March 1810 in the Parish Church. It is likely that the *Black Horse* was always more of a Beer-House than a traditional inn and that James did other things as well as being a landlord, in order to make a living. His will describes him as a horse dealer and we know that, on some occasions at least, that it was Ann who ran the bar by herself.

The first time that the newspapers talk of James Hill, it is of a lucky escape. The *Northampton Mercury* of 13th May 1843 reports that, at Wellingborough Petty Sessions:

Mr. Hill, a beer shop keeper at Ringstead, was charged with keeping his house open after ten o'clock. It was proved that the church clock at Ringstead was not going on the night in question, and the magistrates gave Hill the benefit of the circumstance, and dismissed this charge.

The church clock must have been visible from the *Black Horse* window but it also implies that there was no clock in the house. It is likely that this incident was part of the new county police force flexing

its muscles and we have also seen that it prosecuted a number of shopkeepers for having incorrect weights. James, perhaps, made overconfident by his clever defence, was caught once more. Superintendent Knight again charged him with 'serving beer after the stipulated hour', and this time he was found guilty and fined forty shillings.

One suspects that keeping a public house would, almost inevitably, lead you to minor skirmishes with the law. They may also arise from the publican's problems with the customers. In an incident, a few years later, we learn a little about the strength of Mary's character and also about her physique.

The *Northampton Mercury* for 5th July 1845 reports on the case of two young men, John Watts aged seventeen and James Allard, aged eighteen, who believed that they had discovered a foolproof scam to make some money while enjoying themselves.

They started off their travels at Islip on 28th April where James Allard went into the shop of a Mrs. Clark and asked for an ounce of tobacco. He paid with a half-crown piece and was given his change. At this point Watts came into the shop and asked Allard why he had used his half-crown, when he (Watts) had the coppers needed to pay for it and he put them on the counter. He asked Mrs Clark to give Allard back his half-crown who then returned her two shilling pieces and the rest of the change. She took up the coppers and all seemed fine.

It has some of the elements of a famous Abbott & Costello sketch of the twentieth century. It was, however, in the various movements of the coins that the trick was played, not in the amount of money which she received for the tobacco, which was correct. All this elaborate playacting was to confuse the shopkeeper so that, when Allard gave her back two shilling pieces, she did not notice that one of them was counterfeit. If they had given a single shilling at the beginning she might have realised that it was a dud coin.

They played the same convoluted trick on Abigail Talbot who kept a shop in Denford and, warming to their game, went to a public house there and bought a pint of beer each and went through the same routine. They must have been feeling more confident because this would have involved more time for the person behind the bar to discover the counterfeit coin. Continuing up the Nene they arrived in Ringstead and successfully played the same trick on Mrs Major who kept a beer shop there (I am not sure which one). The *Mercury* tells us, however, that, 'their career was drawing to a close because they went to a second beer shop kept by a shrewd little old lady named Hill'. This must have been Ann Hill at the *Black Horse* who would have been about fifty-eight years old at the time. Here we will let the reporter tell the story:

. . . they had a pint of ale, gave the same half-crown, received the change, and repeated the request that the half-crown might be returned as on the former occasions. But Mrs Hill had taken a keen look at her customers. She had lived long enough in the world to know that all is not gold that glitters, nor all half crowns of silver. It was her custom therefore, to examine all monies offered to her carefully, and the habit of examination had so grown that she also examined those she had paid as well as those she received. In the present instance this habit stood her in good stead: she observed that the two shillings which she gave in change for the half-crown were coined, one in the reign of William IV., and the other in that of his successor, our present sovereign lady. Her parting glance at her coin had not escaped the notice of the

prisoners, and it seems to have instantly struck them that a little variation of the patent name would be necessary. When, therefore the request to restore the half-crown was made, it was not deemed safe to substitute for one of the old lady's well examined respectable shillings one of their own base coin, lest the exchange should be at once detected. Watts, therefore offered the bad shilling in place of the half-pence. Mrs. Hill, however, who evidently had her wits about her examined this shilling also, and when she had done she refused to alter the character of the dealing and give back the half-crown. The prisoners grew angry and some altercation followed, which ended in Allard boldly charging Mrs Hill with having given him a bad shilling back. She admitted that the shilling was bad, but insisted that it was the one which the prisoner had given her, and that she had refused his request precisely for that cause. This renewed the altercation in the course of which Mrs Hill's husband came home and having learnt of the quarrel expressed a wish that he had possession of the shilling as in that case he would transfer both the shilling and its owners into the presence of a magistrate.

The young men left but were later apprehended by the constable. He found some bad shillings on Watts but, when he tried to get the bad shilling from Allard, he:

. . . thought it more prudent to get rid of such a witness against him, so he swallowed it; at least so the constable presumed for he did not think it prudent to carry his search within the range of the prisoner's well-armed jaws.

Allard and Watts were found guilty and were sentenced to twelve months imprisonment with hard labour.

It seem that Ann was nobody's fool and perhaps her carefulness had been increased because, not long before, she had seen one of her children nearly robbed of some money. James and Ann had eight children. One of these was named Green Hill in honour of her maiden name and he was baptized on 10th January 1813. One gets the idea that he was, perhaps, a little simple-minded but this may be unfair.

What we know of the incident comes from *The Times* of 19th July 1844 which has a report on a Crown Court case. It appears that, on the 6th July, Green(e) was sent by his master to Bythorn, to take, to the wife of Mr Ashby, her Sunday bonnet. He carried out the errand and Mrs Ashby gave him some beef and ale before he set off home. She handed him some money in a sealed envelope which she told him to give to his master. She also gave him 2d to buy a pint of beer at the public house at Keyston on the way back. The report continues:

Thus furnished, he set out, and to be sure, he did not forget that part of Mrs. Ashby's instructions which went to his procuring a pint of beer. At the public-house at Keyston it was his misfortune to meet the prisoner whom he had known in years gone by, and who offered to treat him to more beer than he seemed inclined to bestow upon himself. He, however, remembered the parcel wherewith he was intrusted, and, like a faithful messenger, declined to drink with the prisoner, but, like an imprudent one, told him the reason for declining – namely, that he was the bearer of a sum of money of which he must take especial care. The prisoner thereupon asked him some questions relative to the money, in which pocket he

carried it and so forth; and not only got all the verbal information that he sought, but induced the simple man to show him the wondrous parcel; and soon afterwards the prosecutor[Green] took his leave. The sun had gone down o'er the lofty fir-trees of Keyston when the prosecutor left the public-house and, like a prudent and well-furnished traveller, he pursued a noiseless tenor as he continued his course towards Ringstead, fearing lest he might attract the attention of some thief. The prisoner accompanied him through one or two fields and bade him good night at a stile which parted two 'lonesome' closes. In a few minutes the prosecutor was aware of the approach of some person from behind, but before he could turn round the prisoner had come upon him and threw a handkerchief over his head, and effectually blinded him. The traveller struggled in vain to get free and presently felt one of the assailant's hands at the pocket which contained Mrs. Ashby's letter and money; and with the hope of saving the treasure, he threw himself on the ground, dragging the prisoner down with him. A struggle then ensued, and the prisoner took out his knife and 'jabbed' it into the face immediately under one of the eyes of his opponent. Fearing for his life, [Green] now exerted his utmost strength, threw the prisoner from him and wrenched the knife out of his hand receiving, however a severe cut on his own at the same time. The prisoner, finding that he was getting the worst of it, then ran away, leaving his knife and handkerchief in the possession of the true man, who in due time arrived at Ringstead and delivered into the hands of his master the letter it had cost him so much to preserve.

The attacker, who was called John Elliot was apprehended and at the trial was found guilty and sentenced to be transported for 15 years. Green Hill might have been a rather simple, trusting young man but he was also a brave one.

James and Ann Hill continue at the *Black Horse* and the 1851 Census shows them still there. James is now sixty-six years old and Ann is sixty-four. Living with them are their four unmarried children, Green is thirty-seven, Harriett is thirty, Lydia is twenty-eight and Maria, the youngest is twenty-four. There is also a visitor Elizabeth Sharman who may be the daughter of their married daughter, Elizabeth. Green is put down as a 'publican's son, Harriett and Lydia are straw-bonnet makers and Maria is a milliner. Is it possible that Green Hill's delivery to Mrs Ashby was connected with the hats produced by his sisters?

On 16th May 1856 James Hill died, aged seventy-one years, and his will reveals that he was a horse-dealer. Perhaps surprisingly, by 1861 all the unmarried daughters have now left home and Green, still unmarried is working as an agricultural labourer. A sixteen-year-old girl is living in as a house servant to help Ann.

We know from an 1869 Directory that Ann is still selling beer then but just a few months before the next Census, on February 22nd 1871 she died. She was eighty-four years old and we can only surmise from what we have seen of her life that she was a tough, hard-working little woman.

The *Northampton Mercury* for 25th February 1871 advertised the *Black Horse* for sale, freehold, by auction at the *New Inn* on March 13th. We see from the details of the sale that James and Ann certainly were more than just publicans. Like many innkeepers they needed other income to survive or prosper. Besides the house containing: 'Parlour, tap-room, kitchen, cellar, five chambers and private sitting room,' there were also listed:

barns, stables, piggery and out-offices thereto belonging together with the Paddock adjoining, the same containing with the site of the building three roods and one pole, more or less.

A second lot contained' three roods and one pole, more or less', of arable land.

The son, Green Hill, by 1871, has become a drover, lodging with William Bull and his wife, Susannah. William is a shoemaker and grocer and the Bull family are dominating the High Street almost as the Greens and Hills controlled the public houses. Green too dies on 28th December 1878 aged sixty-five years.

The *Black Horse* is now run by the Robinson family. First it is Elijah and his wife Sarah Ann. He is a carrier, born in Denford, and at some time between 1871 and 1879 he becomes the innkeeper at the *Black Horse*. 1881 find him still there, publican, farmer and carrier, with his family. By 1891 he is just described as innkeeper and three years later his oldest son, William has taken over the business and Elijah has become a shepherd. He dies a year later.

We have taken the Ringstead public houses through to the end of the century. By the end of the next century, as with the local shop, the changing world was removing many of these village meeting places that help to make a collection of houses into a community.

Below is a list of Innkeepers and Beer Sellers. (Note: Abbreviations – fuller title when first used). It is not complete.

House & Date	Name	Source	Is Pub Named?	Notes
Swan Inn				
1822	Thomas Hill	L Victualler's List (LVL)	No house name given (NHNG)	
1837	Thomas Hill died	Burial Register	NHNG	
1841	Mary Hill	N Mercury (NM)	NHNG	'Broken widows' court case
1842	Mary Hill died	Burial Register	NHNG	Son John also
1847	John Fox	Directory (D)	YES (Y)	
1861	Mr Dickens	D	Y	
1862	Ekins Dickens	D	Y	
1871	Amos Mason	C	Y	Innkeeper farming 9 acres
1877	Amos Mason	D	Y	
1881	Jane Mason (widow)	C	Y	In Butchers Row
1885	Samuel William Bull	D	Y	Also Brazier and shopkeeper
1897	James Braybrook	Letter to G Capron	Y	
1901	James Braybrook	C	NHNG	Coal Merchant & Inn Keeper

1910	William Robinson	D	Y	'S. M Bull :beer retailer' but no inn
Black Horse				
1841	James Hill	Census(C)	NHNG	
1845	James Hill	NM	NHNG	'Counterfeit shilling' case
1847	James Hill	D	Y	
1851	James Hill	C	NHNG	
1854	James Hill	D	Y	
1856	James Hill died	Burial Register	NHNG	<i>Will Register</i> calls him horse dealer
1861	Ann Hill	D	Y	
1862	Ann Hill	D	NHNG	
1869	Ann Hill (Mrs)	D	Y	
1871	Ann Hill dies	Burial Register	NHNG	
1877	Elijah Robinson	D	Y	And Carrier
1885	Elijah Robinson	D	Y	And Carrier
1894	William Robinson	D	Y	
Axe & Compass				
1822	Thomas Green	LVL	Y	
1841	Thomas Green	C	NHNG	Licensed 'Vitlor'
1847	Thomas Green	D	Y	
1854	Thomas Green	D	Y	
1861	Thomas Green	D	Y	
1862	Thomas Green	D	Y	
1871	Thomas Green	Census	Y	
1877	Thomas Green died	Burial Register	NHNG	
1877	Joseph Whittering	D	Y	
1885	Amos Mason	D	Y	
1894	Freeman Gaunt	D	Y	
1901	Harry G Bailey	D	Y	
New Inn				
1869	Samuel Figgis	D	Y	And Carpenter
1877	Henry Figgis	D	Y	
1885	Henry Figgis	D	Y	
1894	Arthur Archer	D	Y	
1910	Arthur Archer	D	Y	
No Inn Name				

1822	Lot Green	LVL		
1822	Thomas Lee	LVL		
1841	Elizabeth Forscutt	C		Beerseller. Nephew Henry shoemaker
1843	William Dolby	NM		Selling beer after hours
1845	Mrs. Major	NM		Counterfeit shilling case
1847	Henry Forscutt	D		Beer Retailer
1851	Thomas Austin	C		Tailor/Publican
1894	Alfred Sawford	D		Beer retailer & Carrier
1910	S. M. Bull	D		Beer Retailer but no inn

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Chapter twenty-seven

Lacemakers

Mary Dicks (nee Bates) (c1818 – 1859)

In 1919 Thomas Wright called his book, which concentrated on hand-made lace of the East Midlands including Northamptonshire, *The Romance of the Lace Pillow*. We also see photographs, from around this time, of old women sitting outside their cottage doors, in the Indian summer of the hand-made lace industry. Ten years after Wright's book, Miss C. L. Dalton, in the *Northampton County Magazine*, wrote:

Once upon a time the wayfarer passing through Northamptonshire villages would always find pillow-lace makers at the cottage doors in summer; at other seasons, if he had the curiosity to peer through the lattice, they would be seen by the fireside; the pillow spotlessly clean with its gay print drawter, worker and cover, supported on the well-made stand of oak, ash or beechwood, familiarly called the 'The Maid'. On the dull gray parchment a fairy web would be growing, minute by minute, as the shining beads, twist and turn, the linen thread dexterously kept in place by a forest of pins.*

[a 'drawter' was a cloth to cover the finished lace because grubby lace was unsaleable.]*



Hannah Peach. Taken in Photographic Studio 1884 -1900

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It has been written that, at one time, the lace worker could earn more than the agricultural labourer, so that women would make more at lace than the men working on the land. I have found no sign of this. Rather, we see poor home-workers, paid a pitiful piecework rate, trying to keep themselves and their families from the workhouse. Writing earlier, on July 8th 1780, the poet and hymn writer William Cowper, told his correspondent, Joseph Hill that:

If you ever take the tip of the chancellor's ear between your finger and thumb you can hardly improve the opportunity to better purpose than if you should whisper into it the voice of compassion and lenity to the . . . lace makers. I am witness to their poverty and do know that hundreds in this little town [Olney] are upon the point of starving; and that the most unremitting industry is but barely sufficient to keep them from it.

There would have been little romance for Ringstead lacemakers, although there may have been some pride in their work.

Lace was, an unusual craft in that, from the start, it was seen as a genteel occupation for upper class ladies and a useful money-earner to teach paupers. Northamptonshire was not as renowned as Buckinghamshire or Bedfordshire, but it did have a significant lace industry from the early seventeenth, stretching into the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth, centuries.

Why these Midland counties together with Devon became the heartlands of the lace industry is not clear. Theories, from the influence of Katherine of Aragon, to the migration of Flemish workers fleeing the Inquisition, have been put forward but none have any hard evidence. But, as G. F. R. Spencely points out:

. . . the common feature among all rural workers, no matter what the time or region in which they are employed was poverty. Poverty had always created the necessity to supplement family income and in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century this situation did not change.

Where there was not sufficient other work for women and children, lace became a way of keeping off 'the Parish' and some workhouses encouraged the craft. Daniel Defoe, writing in 1730 wrote of lacemakers coming from:

The most idle, useless and burthensom part of our people, viz the younger women and female children. These were a real charge upon the diligent poor such as the husbandsmen, the farmers and the handicrafts of other trades . . . and were now made able to provide for themselves.

I wonder what Mary Dicks and her fellow workers would have made of such a comment.

The *Northampton Militia list of 1777* states that there were between nine and ten thousand young women and boys employed in lace making around Wellingborough and about nine thousand involved in the trade around Kettering.

As we have heard there were concerns about the plight of the lacemakers in the eighteenth century and this continued into the nineteenth with concerns expressed about the effect of cheap foreign imports.

Our particular story starts with a marriage, on 23rd December 1813, at Raunds Parish Church. John Bates married Susanna Shaw and it seems likely that they are our subject's parents. John, we learn later, came from Piddinton or Paddinton or Puddington or Podington. On balance it is likely that he was the John Bates baptised on 27th December 1789, in Puddington or Podington, near Rushden although it is just over the county border in Bedfordshire. There is also some uncertainty about his bride but the best candidate seems to be the Susanna Shaw baptised in Brigstock on 23rd November 1788, the daughter of William and Elizabeth.

What we do know is that a John and Susanna(h) Bates had children baptised, and probably born, in Denford. The first child was Dinah, baptised on 17th September 1815 and again on 16th June 1816. Either the first child died (although her burial is not recorded), or she was baptised twice, the first one being a private one, as sometimes happened. Mary, the second daughter was baptised on 1st February 1818. Then followed twin girls, Susannah and Hannah, baptised on 1st July 1821.

If there was happiness at the birth of the twins, it very quickly turned to tragedy. Their mother, Susanna died some ten days later on the 11th July and the twins quickly followed, Hannah on August 18th and Susannah on 2nd September.

At some stage John had become a shopkeeper. We are not sure when this happened, or if it was a way of coping with his two young daughters while making a living. Unusually, for a man with a young family he did not marry again and we know that, on 14th April 1838, at his daughter Mary's wedding at Ringstead Parish Church, he was described as a Denford shopkeeper.

It is Mary who is the main subject of our story and she was marrying Henry Dicks, a farm servant, from Ringstead. Mary is described as a lacemaker and one wonders if she was taught by her mother or at a local 'Lace School'. Her older sister, Dinah had married in 1837 to Thomas Crane so John had no help for the shop or house and in 1841, now aged about fifty-three, we find him living alone and a labourer. Whether the loss of his daughters as helpers had any part in this we may never know. It is likely that he would have found labouring hard after his time as a shopkeeper and certainly by 1851 he is living with Mary and her family and is classified as, 'unable to work'. Ten years later he dies in Thrapston Union Workhouse. His death certificate states that he died of *Hydrothorax*, a condition which can still be dangerous, mainly in babies and old people, where the lung cavities are filled with liquid. It can often be a result of kidney or heart problems. He had probably been sickly for some time and the best hope he would have had of nursing and medical care was in the workhouse. It is the Bates women, however, who tend to die young and, unusually for the nineteenth century, it is the men who have long 'widowerhoods'.

In 1841, Mary is in Ringstead with her husband, Henry Dicks, and their first child, Susannah, just two years old. Unfortunately this Census does not usually give the woman's work unless she is the head of the household but we would expect Mary to have to continue with her lacemaking as long as her young child allowed her the opportunity.

Is it a coincidence that Henry and Mary's first child, Susannah, is baptised in Leicester on 12th April 1839 just as her uncle, Korah Dicks, had been baptised some twenty-seven years earlier?[see separate biography of Korah] Was there a family connection? Other children soon filled the house and Mary's time. First there were twin girls, Elizabeth and Mary Ann, baptised on 11th November 1841 followed by John on 28th January 1844, Joseph on 31st December 1848 and Thomas in 1850.

It was in 1850 that Mary's husband, Henry, had pulled out the rotten tooth of Lydia Attley shortly before her disappearance and probable death [see story of William Weekley Ball]. Henry told the court that:

I am a labourer at Ringstead and have lived there all my days.

He also reveals that he was, 'in the habit of drawing teeth', so it may be that he earned a little extra income by this work. Lydia, who in the 1841 Census is shown as a lacemaker, was a regular visitor at his house so perhaps the women would talk while they looked after the children or worked at their lace.

By the Census of 1851 Mary was thirty-four years old with six children, aged from eleven years to three months. Mary is now shown as a lacemaker, as are the three eldest children, Susannah (11), Elizabeth (9) and Mary Ann (9). It may be that they were taught and worked with their mother, perhaps also helping to look after the younger children. It is also possible, however, that they worked at one of the unofficial lace schools which were usually run by an older woman.

The 'National School' had not yet been planned but, as we saw in the story of the schoolmasters, there were, possibly, some 'Dame Schools', run by local women. In the main lacemaking areas these schools were often 'Lace Schools', where young children were taught the rudiments of lacemaking and sometimes a few basic letters and arithmetic. In some areas boys and girls would have attended, the boys usually even more unwillingly than the girls. In Ringstead the only record of a male lacemaker, that I have found, is one five-year-old boy, called Joseph Saddington in 1851. It was considered important to start the children working on the lace as young as five in order to get their fingers nimble enough to do the work.

A Mrs Roberts, who had lived as a child in Spratton, told of her experience of the lace school, which the children attended from the age of eight, in the middle of the nineteenth century:

. . . here the hours were from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. in the summer and from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. in the winter. Half an hour was allowed for breakfast and for tea, and one hour for dinner so that there were ten hours for actual work. The girls had to stick ten pins a minute, or six hundred an hour; and if at the end of the day they were five pins behind, they had to work for another hour. On Saturdays, however, they had a half-holiday, working only to the dinner-hour. They counted to themselves every pin they stuck, and at every fiftieth pin they called out the time, and the girls used to race each other as to who should call out first.

They paid twopence a week (or threepence in winter) for lights, and in return they received the money realised from the sale of the lace made and they could earn sixpence a day. Pay-day was a great event; it came once a month.

In the evenings eighteen girls worked by one tallow candle, value one penny; the 'candle-stool' stood about as high as an ordinary table with four legs. In the middle of this was what was known as the 'pole-board', with six holes in a circle and one in the centre. In the centre hole was a long stick with a socket for the candle at one end and peg-holes through the sides so that it could be raised or lowered at will. In the other six holes were placed pieces of wood hollowed out like a cup and into each of these was placed a bottle made of very thin glass and filled with water. These bottles acted as strong condensers or lenses, and the eighteen girls sat round the table, three to each bottle, their stools being upon different levels, the highest nearest the bottle which threw the light upon the work like a burning-glass. In the day-time as many as thirty girls, and sometimes boys, would work in a room about twelve feet square with two windows, and in the winter they could have no fire for lack of room. The makers of the best lace would sit nearest the light and so on in order of merit.

There are one or two schoolmistresses in Ringstead who may have run lace schools, such as Elizabeth Colston, originally from Sudborough (a lace-making village), who became the second wife of Isaac Gunn on 27th July 1840 when she was about 43 years old. In 1851 she is shown as an 'infant teacher' but we have no proof that she kept a lace school. (Elizabeth gave evidence at the trial of William Weekley Ball).

It may be, as in Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise*, that the children learnt their lace within the community of women:

Queenie, in her childhood, had been 'brought up to the pillow', sitting among the women at eight years old and learning to fling her bobbins with the best of them. They would gather in one cottage in winter for warmth, she said, each one bringing her faggot or shovel of coals for the fire, and they would sit all day, working, gossiping, singing old songs, and telling old tales till it was time to run home and put on the pots for their husbands' suppers. These were the older women and the young unmarried girls; the women with little children did what lacemaking they could at home.

Even if the children were at home it is likely that they sang the little rhymes or 'tells' to help the hours pass and establish a rhythm for the work. Thomas Wright tells us that the:

Northants tells have none of the gruesome features that characterize those of Buckinghamshire and they are less hoydenish and more sentimental than those of Bedfordshire. The Northamptonshire maidens do not gloat over ghosts, corpses, black coffins and gibbets, not do they throw turnips at the heads of inoffensive gentlemen who happen to be passing on horseback.

I would be surprised if, given the chance, the Ringstead girls would not do all of these things. He does quote from some Northamptonshire 'tells' including this one which does help you picture the girls all working together:

*Twenty pins have I to do,
Let way be ever so dirty.
Never a penny in my purse,
But farthings five and thirty.*

*Betsy Bays and Polly Mays,
They are two bonny lasses;
They built a bower upon the tower,
And covered it with rushes*.*

*[*Custom of carrying rushes and garland to church on Rush-bearing Day.]*

For all the customs and mythology that surrounded the craft, it was tedious work for children. Pamela Horn records that many were only able to read or write very little, and their bodies were weakened by the bent posture they had to adopt over the bulky 'pillow'. Some girls even wore a wooden busk in their stays to support them in their work and this distorted their young bones and contracted their chests for life.

The people who might make good money from lacemaking were the dealers, who would usually own the patterns, provide the materials and buy the finished product (if it was satisfactory). In lace centres, such as Olney, some dealers became rich men. We do know that Ringstead had a lace-dealer in 1837. This fact emerges because the dealer, William Smith, left a will in which his profession is given. The will was read to the family by Mr Williamson, a local farmer. When he reached the part where William Smith had bequeathed the house, orchard and, 'all that pertained to it', to the son of his daughter, Mrs Partrick, his son, also William exploded in fury. Being the younger son, he would not have expected to inherit, himself, but he was furious that his eldest brother, who was married with three children, had not been left the property. William snatched the will and left and it is likely that he destroyed it as he threatened.

He was tried and sentenced to seven years transportation. Luckily for William, and to the great annoyance of Thomas Wilkins, the magistrate, the sentence was commuted to three months imprisonment.

After the death of William I have not found another lace dealer but it is possible that a shopkeeper, such as Noah Green, the draper, carried on this work as an addition to his main source of income. On the other hand, a dealer from Wellingborough may have taken over the village. The 1840 Pigot's Directory does not show one in Thrapston but there are three 'Lace Manufacturers and Dealers' in Wellingborough and one of these, William Sears is definitely described as a 'dealer'. Flora Thompson tells us that in 'the hamlet', on the Northamptonshire/Oxfordshire border, Queenie used to store her lace away in blue paper and sell it once a year to the dealer at Banbury Fair.

Returning to 1851, the Census came at a time when handmade lace was struggling to compete with machine-made lace and foreign imports. The original Northamptonshire lace was a version of Buckinghamshire lace but there were subtle differences. Miss Dalton, writing in 1929 tells us:

Northamptonshire had its own characteristics. The clothwork of the Mechlin lace was utilised for small designs of conventional trend and geometrical shapes combined with the vagrant thread of Lille. The little points d'esprit, which also hailed from France, took the fancy of our county and we called them leadwork or plaits.

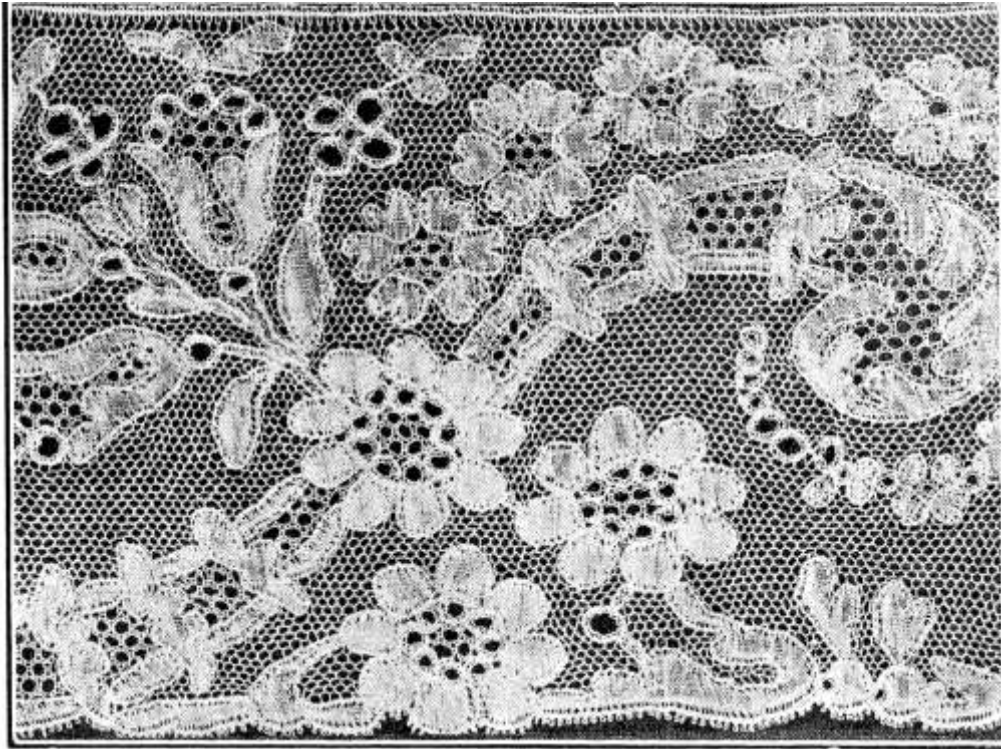
I have found it difficult to find a clear illustration of Northamptonshire lace showing these characteristics and the local lacemakers would have made what the market, and their dealer, demanded, as far as they had the skill to do so. The lace and photographs that we have are almost entirely from the end of the century, or early in the next, and may not reflect the piecework products that Mary, and her like, made in Ringstead.

The first photograph below shows lace which, to my untrained eye, is chunkier and coarser than the fine Mechlin type lace produced earlier. It is perhaps a form of Bedfordshire Lace influenced by Maltese lace. It was probably produced by Mrs Jacques, or her daughter-in-law, of Rushden in the late nineteenth century. The donor had had to learn lace from Mrs Jacques, who was her grandmother, 'which she did not enjoy'.



With the kind permission of Northampton Museum & Art Gallery.

The second illustration is from Mrs. Dalton's article and shows fine Buckinghamshire style lace. This would almost certainly have been much more complex and finer than Mary and her children would have produced. It was made by Jane Onions (nee Storey), a shepherd's wife born in about 1842 in Upper Dean Bedfordshire, which is only some eight miles from Ringstead. At nine years old Jane was already a young lacemaker like Mary's children, as is her mother and sister. After marriage she lived in Newton Bromswold in Northamptonshire (although further away from Ringstead). She made lace for the infant robes of the future King Edward VIII which would have been some time after 1894. The piece below was made by Jane as she sat in a large shop window in London demonstrating her craft.



Buckingham Lace by Mrs Onions of Newton Bromswold.

From Art and Industry by Miss C. L. F. Dalton.

Much of the lace in the nineteenth century was for baby's clothes and pillow edging and, after 1840, for wedding dresses. The wedding of Queen Victoria had helped revive the declining lace industry. She had worn a white dress and had lace trimmings as well as a lace veil. Perhaps surprisingly, white had not been used for wedding dresses prior to this as it meant the dress was almost unusable after the event. Although the lace for the Queen's dress was Honiton lace (from Beer in Devon) it started a new fashion which helped the whole industry. It is reported that men began to make lace, because they could earn more from its production than their other work, but I have found no evidence of this in Ringstead. The trade was boosted again when Maltese lace, a form of plaited lace, was shown at the Great Exhibition in 1851. This was a rather showy, but quicker to make, type of lace and versions of this were produced in the East Midlands to meet this new demand.

Pamela Horn records that in the 1851 Census for Northamptonshire there were 10,322 female lacemakers of whom 754 were aged five to nine years and 2,124 aged ten to fourteen and that this is probably an underestimate as some part-timers would not have been recorded. This is a surprising figure, twice that quoted elsewhere but appears to be the correct one. It makes the Northamptonshire workforce on a par with Buckinghamshire and twice that of Bedfordshire and Devon. The 1841 Census, which only recorded seven lacemakers for Ringstead, the majority of them fifteen-year-olds, is not a reliable source, for most women's and part-time jobs went unrecorded unless the woman was the head of the household. In 1851, however there were 79 lacemakers (including eight hair lacemakers). This figure was made up of 6 aged five to nine years; 27 aged ten to fourteen; 17 aged fifteen to twenty; 27 aged twenty-one to sixty and 2 over sixty. In Ringstead, therefore, over 40% of the lacemaking workforce was under fifteen years old and almost entirely female. For most it was an additional family income and when a woman is a lacemaker and head of

the household she is often also a 'pauper'. Thus it is with Ann Barker aged 52, Elizabeth Fairey, 78 and Jane Childs, 36, (whose husband is 'away').

By 1861 the fashion peak had passed again and machines were beginning to produce a type of Maltese lace and there are only six lacemakers shown in the Ringstead Census and shoemaking (mainly 'closing') had become most working women's profession of choice. Mrs Bury Palliser, in her History of Lace, reported that:

In the Juror's Report of the International Exhibition of 1862 the number of lacemakers in the counties of Buckingham, Northampton, Bedford and Oxford is estimated as 25,000.

If this figure is correct, it is also true that, in the case of Ringstead, this does not reflect the sudden decline in laceworkers in the years before 1861 and, one suspects, that this was true across much the shoemaking areas where homeworking was the normal practice.

The Census figures for Northamptonshire mirror this decline in lace workers, until, by the end of the century there were only a few hundred left in the whole county who were earning a living by the craft.

Returning to the Dicks family, after the 1851 Census, more children kept arriving. There was William in 1853, Sarah in 1856 and finally Ellen in 1858. Mary was giving birth, on average, every two years. In their small cottage there would have been some six children for much of the time, with Mary trying to produce lace, while feeding and looking after her children, unless she could afford to send them to one of the small Dame Schools. Nevertheless, Thomas was her only child to die very young, being buried in November 14th 1854 aged three years. The Register also records that their house was in London End which was where many of the poorer villagers lived.

It would have been a hard, tiring existence. It is important to remember the conditions that Mary would have lived in, with almost certainly a communal dirt toilet outside; no running water or sewerage; probably only one room heated by an open fire or stove which would have served also for cooking; earth, brick or stone floors. Add to this poverty and then imagine being pregnant and ill in these conditions in cold wet weather. It must have been a miserable, debilitating time for Mary as she came to termination of another child towards the end of 1859. We know that the birth went wrong and that on 25th November 1859 Mary died and was buried in Ringstead churchyard. Like too many women at the time, including her own mother, she died from childbirth. Her death certificate records that she was forty-five years old and that she 'died of exhaustion, parturition, [childbirth] 44 hours'. It would have been her tenth child.

The older children would naturally have been, by this time, marrying and leaving the nest but, perhaps, their mother's death accelerated this process. Mary had lived long enough to see the wedding of her eldest child, Susannah to William Samuel Bull, a shoemaker and grocer, in the spring of 1859.

The 1861 Census finds Henry a forty-eight year old widower with his daughter Mary, aged 19, acting as his housekeeper. His son John, aged 16, is a shoemaker and Joseph (12) is an agricultural labourer. There are still three children, William (7), Sarah (5) and Ellen (3) for the younger Mary to look after.

In 1863 Elizabeth married a shoemaker called James Braybrook and a year later, Mary, who had been looking after the house for her father, married George Bird Warren. John, the first son to leave, wed Caroline Stanner (or Starmer) in Kettering in 1866 and his brother Joseph married Sarah Ann Major early in 1871. The two younger daughters also left the family home to work as servants, Sarah Emma, aged sixteen to a Higham Ferrers grocer and Ellen, just thirteen years old, to the *Forester's Arms* in Thorpe End, Raunds.

So it was that in the 1871 Census, Henry, aged fifty-eight is living with only his son William still at home. His son John and family live next door and most of the rest are still living in the area.

Sarah married Josiah Branston in the year after the Census and Ellen married James Foskett in 1878. Finally William, the youngest son married Mary Ann Manning in 1879. By 1881, aged 68, Henry, Mary's widower, is living with his widowed daughter Elizabeth Braybrook and he is a 'rag and bone gatherer'. Henry died in 1890 aged seventy-eight.

Nowhere, among Mary's children, is there a sign that any of them continued to earn a living by lacemaking. In Ringstead, it had probably disappeared as a paid craft by 1870. The 1867 Factory Act had severely restricted the use of child labour and from 1870 a procession of Education Acts gradually forced children out of the workforce. Perhaps some people still made lace for friends and family but, probably, it had to wait to be revived, both as a craft and as a hobby, in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century. Following on from the work of William Morris and others hand crafts became popular again as a reaction to industrialisation and many books were written of its practice and history during this period.

In the Pall Mall Magazine of March 1896 Alice Dryden was able to write:

The custom of wearing lace, which has lain dormant for many years was revived in 1893 because Her Gracious Majesty has so often appeared in her own costly lace, or from a mere caprice of fashion; certain it is that lace is now a very important item in a well-dressed woman's wardrobe.

She asserted that a woman with a family to look after could still earn between fourpence and sixpence a day, enough to pay the rent of her cottage. For the elderly, frail and 'crippled' the work could be done when they were able and so provide some income when little else was open to them. It is from this later flowering of the craft that the pictures of old ladies outside their cottages mainly come.

This Indian Summer of pillow lace came too late for Ringstead and the homeworking tradition was carried on into the boot and shoe making industry until that also declined and died because of mechanisation and cheap imports. In a sense, for all their drawbacks, the two crafts carried on the independence of the home and family-based peasant tradition.



From Pillow Lace in the Midlands by Alice Dryden.

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My special thanks to Brenda Hazel for information on the Bates and Dicks families. Also to Janice Morris for her article on Traditional and Modern Crafts: Lace-making.

Victoria Davies at the Northampton Museum and Art Gallery could not have been more helpful and went to great trouble to show me the relevant lace collection and photographs for which I am very grateful.

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Chapter Twenty-eight

Transported ?

John Hardy (c 1796 -?) & George Smith (c 1802 -?)

The two men whose stories we are telling in this piece are like figures caught by a car's headlights in a dark country lane. We are unable to see where they came from, and after their brief time in the headlights, they disappear into the darkness again. It may be that other people may recognize their stories and tell us a little more about who they were and what happened to them.

*

Among those who were born, worked and died in the village, Ringstead had other people who stayed there for just a short time and moved on: the navvies for the railroad, the men who repaired the church and its bells, the vicars and schoolteachers. There would also be the drift of hawkers and gypsies, itinerant labourers and vagrants. And there would be those looking for easy money, the thieves and vagabonds.

We are not sure if John Hardy came into this last category for, as yet, we have failed to find him with any certainty either before the events in Ringstead or after he left Portsmouth some four years later. We know that he was born in about 1796 but we are not sure how local was his place of his birth.

We learn from a report in the *Northampton Mercury* of 21st October 1837 that a James Smith, who was a cordwainer, living in Ringstead but working for Mr. Mark Sharman of Wellingborough, took some leather goods to his own home. He saw them safe on Monday 21st August but then went harvesting on the Tuesday and did not return until the Wednesday. It was on the Thursday morning that he realised that the leather goods were missing. It appears that John Weekley who was a shepherd employed by Mr Hill, a local farmer, had seen the 'shop' (probably workshop) broken open on the Tuesday and found a pair of tops lying on the threshold of the door.

It was alleged by Ezra Weekley that he had also had leather goods stolen. He had been in his 'shop' on the Sunday 20th and then, like James Smith, went harvesting with his son for two or three days. When he returned he found a quantity of leather and shoemaking materials had gone. His son, John Weekley, found the shop door open on the Tuesday morning at 7 o'clock. [The newspaper states the Monday but I think this may be wrong] and some pieces of leather belonging to Mr Sharman lying on the threshold.

So we discover from this evidence that the men were collecting their leather, from a factory owner or dealer in Wellingborough, and making up the shoes and being paid presumably on a piece-work rate. It may be that James Smith acted for Mr Sharman and was the carrier and middleman. We also see that they combined the shoemaking with working on the harvest. One would imagine that they

were working in the Ringstead open fields, soon to be enclosed, but the fact that neither returned home could imply that they had gone to a nearby village to earn extra money by bringing in the harvest.

Ezra Weekley might well have needed to earn extra money. His first wife, Susannah Major, with whom he had six children, had died in 1834 and just before the theft, on 20th June 1837, he had married Mary Bates. Mary was just twenty-five and half Ezra's age. It seems possible that Henry, a child born to Mary two years before Susannah's death, was Ezra's child and certainly he has the surname Weekley in 1841. Ezra went on to have five children with Mary before his death. In 1841 Ezra is put down as a labourer although in subsequent Censuses he is a 'shoemaker'. Did the Ringstead Enclosure of 1841 make it difficult for him to combine his shoemaking with other jobs as he had done previously?

John Hardy, the alleged thief, after leaving Ringstead had travelled to Tansor, further up the Nene beyond Oundle, and tried to sell the leather goods in the *White Horse* there. Unfortunately for John, the person he tried to sell the leather to, was John Garner, the local constable. Garner may also have been a shoemaker for he realised that the goods were worth some three times the fourteen shillings that Hardy was asking for them. He told John that they must be stolen by him or by somebody else. Hardy insisted that they were his own property and, in some desperation, offered them for ten shillings. The constable whereupon took the goods off him and detained Hardy while he made enquiries.

The jury did not believe his story, that he had found the goods, and he was found guilty. On the 19th October 1837, he was sentenced to transportation for seven years and taken back to the Northampton gaol. Later, all those men so sentenced, were taken from Northampton to Portsmouth ready for transportation. Along with John were John Sykes and George Baker sentenced to life, John Bird and Matthew Brown for ten years, John Clare for fourteen years and Samuel Clare, James Sutor, John Tirrell, James Coalbeck, Joseph Loveridge, George Butler and Joseph Tomlinson for seven years.

We are not sure how they were all taken to Portsmouth although it is possible that for part of the journey at least they were taken by the new 'railroad' for we know that in 1833 this method was used. On the 8th November 1837 they were put on a prison hulk called the *Leviathan* to await transportation. The *Leviathan* had been launched in 1790 and fought in the Napoleonic Wars. At the Battle of Trafalgar, she had been near the front of the line led by Nelson in the *Victory*. When the wars finished she, like many others, was taken out of service and she would have been sailed to Portsmouth and anchored and much of her gear taken away. As always, it seems, the prison population was too large for the normal gaols and these hulks were used as floating prisons, especially for those who were to be transported.

Most people's remembrance of the hulks will be from the episode of the escaped convict Magwitch, near the beginning of *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. Luckily we also have a firsthand account of the *Leviathan* by a man who was a prisoner on the hulk, in the summer of 1833, some four years earlier than John Hardy boarded her in chains. J. F. Mortlock in *Experiences of a Convict* writes:

At any rate I was no longer shut up in gaol, to me the most dreadful of punishments, now, I hopes, done for ever. This, however, as will be seen, turned out to be a mistaken expectation. The hulk, an old (Trafalgar) ninety-gun ship being very full, contained more than six hundred convicts (from starvation and discipline, tame as rabbits), housed on the three decks, which were divided into compartments, separated from each other by bulkheads, and from the gangway down the centre, by iron bars giving the appearance of a menagerie. Owing to the height of the wharf, alongside of which she lay, the larboard row of cells on the lower deck, was nearly in darkness and insufficiently ventilated. 'New Chums' therefore in their location down below breathed very foul air. . . A pernicious habit also existed of sluicing out all the decks every morning with salt water. . . The chilly dampness arising from this proved a fertile source of sickness.

. . . As a reward for three months of good behaviour, a light ring (called a basil) above the ankle, scarcely to be felt, succeeded the irons. Upon losing the weightier decorations my foot in walking used to fly up in an odd manner for some time afterwards, till the muscles got used to their lighter load. . . I found the carrying of timber and other hard work very irksome at first, although labour is not a severe punishment to a strong man well fed; but we suffered from a lack of sufficient food... Hence the mortality was great, it being whispered that the head doctor at the hospital ship, enjoyed a contract for supplying surgeons in towns with bodies for dissection at six guineas a piece.

The *Prison Hulk Register* for the *Leviathan* tells us that John Hardy was single and that he could both read and write. It also confirms that he was a labourer. Under the heading, 'Gaoler's Report', it just states, 'Unknown'. This may mean 'not known' but it may also be that this was John Hardy's first offence. When we look on the same page of the register we see the prisoners described as:

*As bad as can be
Bad. In Prison before
Character and Connections bad
Before transported*

If John was new to crime and prison this must have been a daunting experience, locked up with hardened criminals in a rotting hulk of a ship. J. H Capper, who was Superintendent of the convict hulks, when answering questions from members of the House of Lords on 17th March 1828, gave the official view of the strict daily routine on the hulks in Portsmouth harbour. A gun was fired at a quarter to six to summon hands, followed at six o'clock by the prisoners lashing up their hammocks and breakfast a quarter of an hour later. When the dock workers started work the convicts were sent ashore although some remained on board to clean the ship for inspection at half past nine. The convicts were:

. . . mustered out of the ship in gangs, and received on shore by the officers, quarter-masters and guards; the latter (under the inspection of the two former) strictly searching their persons to prevent the concealment of anything tending to facilitate an escape, or contrary to the rules and orders of the ship.

So the day continued with the prisoners going back on board for dinner at half-past twelve (taken, it appears, in their cells). They started work again at a quarter to twelve. Supper was at quarter past six and, in 'divisions', the men then went to evening prayers in the chapel. The last group attended prayers at quarter to eight and all the prisoners were locked up in their cells for the night.

The work they did was:

. . . everything that is most laborious the Navy Board give them to do and at the Ordnance, the painting of ships in the harbour, removing ballast out of and into the ships, cleaning all the ships out, taking up the mooring chains, removing the timber, clearing the mud from the docks, etc.

To do this work each convict had a weekly allowance of 1lb 12 oz of barley, 1lb 5 oz of oatmeal, 8lb 12 oz of bread, 3lb 8oz of beef, 12 oz of cheese, 3½oz salt and 7 pints of small beer. There seems a good deal of beef and a complete lack of vegetable and fruit. In general, the food was probably served as stew or 'slop' and the beef would be the least desirable parts of the animal.

The prison hospital in Portsmouth dealt with the diseases that the conditions in the hulks worsened or caused. At times, the nineteenth century can seem very close to us but occasionally a statement, like the one given below in July 1831 by the chaplain, William Tate, in the half-yearly Parliamentary Report on Conduct of Convicts in Portsmouth Harbour, reminds us that it was a different age.

In the Hospital the mortality has been greater than usual; but in nearly all the individuals whose cases were considered dangerous, the marks of deep remorse and sincere penitence were very striking and consolatory.

The Register also records that John was pardoned in 7th May 1841. Most of the others have VDL, (Van Diemen's Land now Tasmania, in this column so it seems that he was never transported but stayed on the hulk for four years before being freed. How this might be so was answered by J.H. Capper in the House of Lords. When asked whether all those sentenced to seven years transportation were sent, Capper replied:

Those that have been on the hulks before, or have been in gaol more than once, are usually sent abroad; but those who are not known to have been convicted are generally detained for employ in the dock-yards, and remain in the hulks for certain periods, till the Secretary of State thinks fit to recommend them to the King for pardon.

Mr Capper goes on to say, however, that many men sentenced to seven years transportation were sent abroad because they formed a high proportion of the total convicts on the hulks. The 'Not Known' on the Hulk Register was significant in keeping John Hardy in this country. The Superintendent also states that:

No prisoner is discharged till he has served one moiety of his sentence; and it is very rare that this is prior to four years.

He reveals that the officers on the hulks recommended a certain number of the convicts quarterly, on the basis of exemplary conduct throughout, vouched by the chaplain and the officers. John Hardy

had obviously kept out of trouble and worked well on the docks, for he seems to have served the minimum period possible. This policy of not transporting those sentenced for the shorter period may seem a humane one but actually the Governor of New South Wales had found the seven-year convicts less tractable and more troublesome than those sentenced to longer sentences. He stated that they believed that they would get home after some six years no matter how well they worked whereas those with longer sentences were hoping good behaviour would give them some mitigation of their sentence.

What happened to John Hardy next? He would have only been some forty-five years old although life on the hulk may have injured his health. Did he return home? He should be in the 1841 Census somewhere but so far I have been unable to trace him, in this or later Censuses. This may be due to our lack of knowledge of the origins of a stranger who, one day, may have passed through Ringstead while the men were away harvesting and decided to look for easier money than labouring provided.

In 1833, some four years before John Hardy's fall from grace another man was caught stealing in Ringstead. This was a more complicated case and our man was almost certainly a more practised thief than John. His name, among others, was George Smith and there are two George Smiths born in Ringstead about the right time: one was the son of Thomas and Dinah who was baptised on 15th September 1800 and the other was George Peter Smith the son of William and Sarah born on 21st February 1802 and baptised a few months later. We cannot be sure that either is our man.

William Coleman, a farmer in Ringstead had a mare which he kept in a fenced yard close to his house. The gate was not locked and on the 7th (or 9th) of January 1833 he found that she had gone. He had bred the mare and knew that she had a distinctive mark on her leg which he recognized when he went to Guyhirn, in the Isle of Ely, to see a mare in the constable's possession. He had once employed a certain George Smith to take this mare and three others to market in Higham Ferrers although Coleman insisted that Smith was not authorised to do anything but get them to the market. Two of the three were sold but the mare and another one were brought back. He had wanted twenty-five pounds for the mare and would not have accepted anything less than twenty-four.

Leonard Freeman, who lived at Leverington, gave evidence that on 9th January a William Foskett had come to him saying that he had a horse to sell. Freeman went to Guyhirn, where Smith and Foskett had the horse and bought the mare for fifteen pounds. The *Northampton Mercury* report of the trial is a little confused but it appears that, at this point, Robert Oldfield, the constable at Guyhirn impounded the mare and took Smith into custody. At the trial, in the Isle of Ely Lent Assizes, Smith claimed that Coleman had told him to sell the horse as he 'had not a shilling left'. Foskett, on the other hand, made no defence but called two witnesses to give him a 'good character'.

It seems that Foskett's policy was the right one for he was acquitted whereas George Smith was sentenced to transportation. It is almost certain, however that the jury thought that George Smith was the prime mover in this theft and also that this was not his first offence. A George Smith was given three months imprisonment in 1831 in Northampton for, with eight others, feloniously breaking a threshing machine. This was part of the agricultural riots which started in 1830 and often known as the 'Captain Swing Riots' in protest against the new machines and farming methods that were impoverishing many farm labourers. We do not know if this is the same George Smith and he was not the leader of the machine-breakers because other accused men received 12 months in gaol.

The reason that it seems likely that he had indulged in criminal activities before is that at his trial, he is said to have an alias, John Allen, and, later, we see that he was also known as John Hill. A law-abiding farm labourer would have been unlikely to have had two aliases. There is a story to be told here but for the present we can only infer his criminal past.

The court sentenced George to transportation for life. He was just thirty years old when, on 13th April 1833 he was received on the prison hulk, *Justitia* on the Thames at Woolwich. The *Justitia* had originally been built in Calcutta and named the *Admiral Rainier*. She was taken into the Royal Navy in 1804, re-named the *HMS Hindostan* and fought in the East Indies where she carried out escort duties. She became a store ship and then a troopship again and saw action at Charlestown before taking troops, in 1809, to restore order after the Rum Rebellion in New South Wales. In 1811 she again became a store ship and in 1819 was renamed *Dolphin*. In 1824 she was hulked as a prison ship at Woolwich and finally renamed *Justitia*. This list is a simplification of her many incarnations but this was not unusual at this time, with constant changes of name and function often happening, especially among the smaller ships. Wooden ships were much easier to fit and re-fit than their steel descendants.



Convicts being rowed out to a prison hulk, probably the *Justitia* c. 1835.

(After work by George Cook, Samuel Prout).

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Conditions on the *Justitia* for George Smith would have been similar to John Hardy on the *Leviathan* although George would have probably have been more severely treated. We know that the hulks were unhealthy places to be, as J. F. Mortlock told us in his *Experiences of a Convict* and we have further proof of this in the Surgeon's Report of one of the Convict ships taking men to New South

Wales in 1833. A. Ferguson, Surgeon on the convict ship *Jupiter*, kept a *Medical and Surgical Journal* from 24th December 1832 to 1st June 1833. His report includes the following:

There were 28 cases of herpes and 16 of itch among the convicts in February 1833. The diseases appeared to have been brought from the hulks, particularly the Justitia.

The convicts were in [tolerably] good health and [mostly] middle aged but weakened by diarrhoea. Cholera existed in both the hulks at Woolwich and was probably the source of the bowel complaints.

We know from the *Hulk Register* that George was transported with many of his fellow inmates on 10th June 1833. It is likely that the ship would have sailed round to Portsmouth to pick up further convicts from the hulks there and there may have been some delay before they finally embarked on the long journey to Australia.

On August 25th of that same year the convict ship *Amphitrite* ran aground at Boulogne. The female prisoners, who were battened down under the hatches broke away the half deck hatch and rushed on deck, pleading with the surgeon and captain to let them go ashore in the longboat. The captain, who had refused assistance, did not feel able to liberate prisoners entrusted to his care. The broadside of the disaster continues:

About seven o'clock the flood tide began. The crew, seeing that there was no hopes, clung to the rigging. The poor 108 women and 12 children remained on deck, uttering the most piteous cries. The vessel was about three quarters of a mile from shore, and no more. Owen, one of the men saved, thinks that the women remained on deck in this state about an hour and a half.

All the women and children and many of the crew were drowned. But in all only five convict boats were wrecked, so it seems unlikely that George was lost in this way, and, unfortunately, this is where our story of George must end. Of course, there are many George Smiths who were transported during this period but none of them seem to fit the facts about our George, as we know them. Did he escape, or die, or are his records lost?

So we have two men convicted of stealing from people in Ringstead in the 1830s who were sentenced to transportation. John Hardy was pardoned but we have been unable to find him again and George Smith seems to have disappeared from the records.

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Chapter Twenty-nine

Last Words

Herbert Abington (1847 – 1872)

For most people in these biographies we only catch glimpses of them, as through cracks in a fence, from the official records. A number of the Abington family have featured because they have left more of their lives behind than their neighbours. We see mainly a family of shopkeepers, tailors and craftsmen, usually with a strong Nonconformist faith. The Abingtons, however, as the little *'Memoirs'* of Leonard Joseph and his son Leonard James are at pains to emphasise, were from an old family of landed gentry from Cambridge, dating back to the Norman Conquest. They had owned estates in Worcestershire, Shropshire and Herefordshire and suffered for their Catholic sympathies during the Tudor and early Stuart periods.

The estates eventually passed by bequest, on the death of Thomas Abington, to the Crompton family of Hartpury in Gloucestershire. The ancestors of the Abingtons of our story had become lawyers and musicians at the Georgian royal courts. Unmentioned in the *Memoirs* is Mrs Francis Abington who was briefly married to one of the Abingtons on her way from flower girl to famous actress and notorious celebrity before dying in relative poverty. It was into this line of musicians that Leonard Joseph was born but his father died when he was very young and, although he was also a musician, he had to be apprenticed to a trade [see chapter on Leonard and Herbert senior]. He later came to Ringstead as the Baptist pastor and his son Herbert Joseph became the village tea dealer, grocer and chemist.

We see the children of Leonard Joseph spread across England and beyond from London to the Potteries, Bristol and Northamptonshire. Their children, too, often looked beyond their home towns or villages for work. We have seen the sons and daughters of the village's agricultural labourers emigrating across the world but the regular visiting and links across long distances was something unusual in Ringstead at this time. Of course they were helped by the new cheap national postal and railway networks. The diary of Herbert Abington junior reveals people visiting relatives in Ringstead from London and returning home within the course of a long day.

Herbert Joseph Abington had married Kezia Bull who was from a local family also with a strong Baptist tradition. Her mother and father had kept the Ringstead Paper Mill and after her husband's death his widow had continued for a time with the work [see biography of William Mitchell]. Both Herbert and Kezia came from large families and this web of uncles and aunts and cousins provided the network that the main characters moved along in this story.

Herbert was the couple's sixth child, born in Ringstead on 28th July 1847. He followed Jedidah Louisa (1837), Leonard Joseph (1838), Ebenezer Edwin (1840) and Mary Jane (1843). A brother, Benjamin Edmund, had been born two years previously to Herbert and died when Herbert was some five years old. Another brother, Joshua James, was born two years later but died within a few months. His

namesake was born in 1851 and finally the youngest child, Samuel Edmund was born in 1856. With cousins often having similar names it is a complex family tree in which a name like Jedidah stands out as a welcome certainty.

Herbert, like his brothers and sisters had to learn a trade and in 1861 he is recorded as a baker. His uncle, Andrew Bull, was the village baker so it is likely that Herbert was learning his trade with him. He is only thirteen and it is unclear how long he carried on with this work.

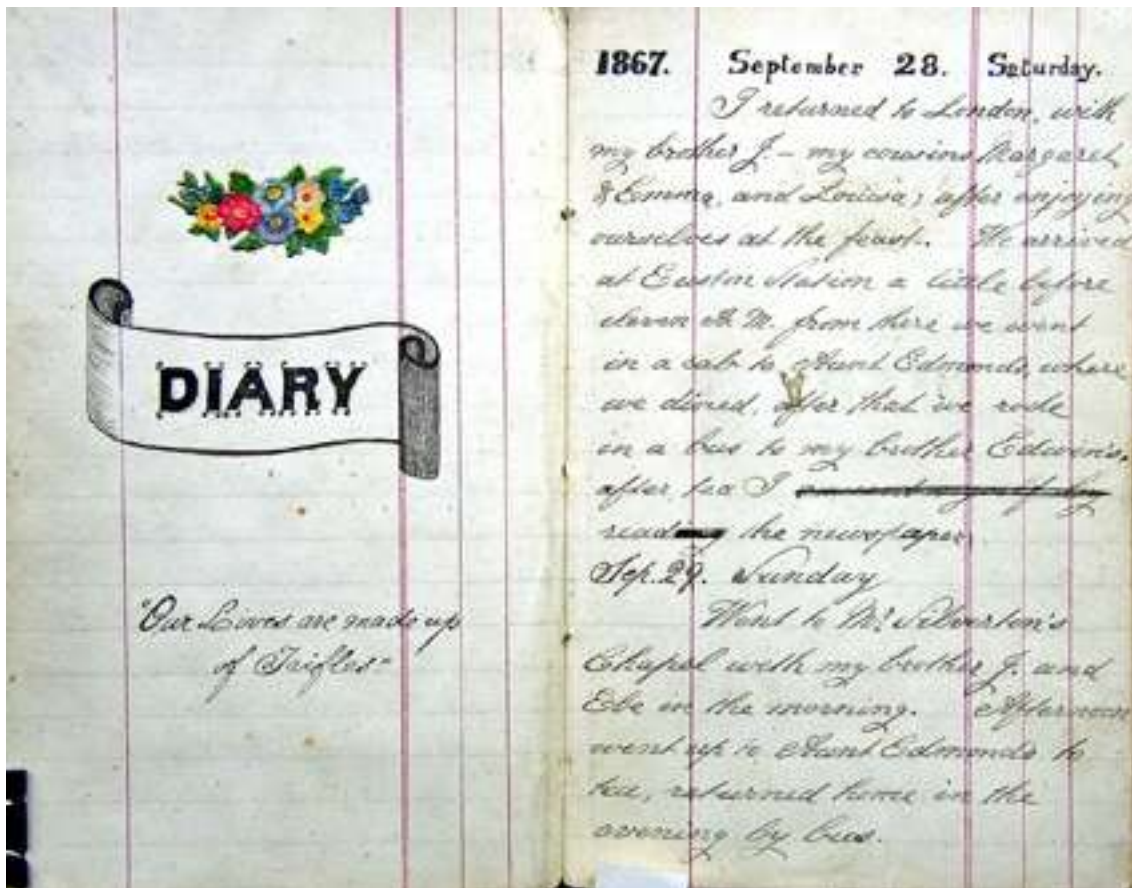
In September 1867 he took a small brown cashbook and on the second page he wrote his name, 'Ringstead 1867', and a short verse telling people to keep out.



Frontispiece of Diary
With the kind permission of Muriel Pack

On the first double pages he carefully wrote 'DIARY' on another carefully drawn scroll and beneath it the quotation, 'Our Lives are made up of Trifles'. On the opposite page he wrote in bold lettering '1867 September 28. Saturday' and underneath the first entry:

I returned to London with my brother J [Joshua] – my cousins Margaret and Emma [Edmonds] and Louisa [Bull]; after enjoying ourselves at the feast. We arrived at Euston a little before eleven A.M. from there we went in a cab to Aunt Edmonds where we dined, after that we rode in a bus to my brother Edwin's. after tea I amused myself by reading the newspapers.



First Entry in Diary.

With the kind permission of Muriel Pack.

As we have said, Herbert's mother, Kezia's, maiden name was Bull and she had at least six brothers and sisters. As Baptists they believed in adult baptism which can cause siblings to be hidden from our view but the family included Sarah, Susannah, Kezia, Eneas (Enos), Eliza, William, Andrew and Samuel. Two sisters, besides Kezia, had stayed locally. Sarah had first married Thomas Cheney and, on his death, George Smith: Susannah had married Noah Abbott. However, a younger sister, Eliza, had moved to London where she had married John Edmonds in 1849. John was a carpenter who had been born in Willoughby in Warwickshire and the couple lived in Clerkenwell in London. They seem to have been a very welcoming family and from the start, aunts, nieces and nephews are staying with them. In 1861 Herbert's brother, Leonard Joseph, a journeyman Butcher, is staying with his uncle and aunt and their daughters, Selina, Margaret and Emma.

At this time Ringstead was on the Blisworth -Thrapston (Bridge Street) - Peterborough line so villagers had many choices and could pick up trains going north or south to London at Northampton, Wellingborough or Peterborough. From Thrapston's Midland Road station, via part of what is sometimes called the *Varsity Line*, they could get to the main lines at Huntingdon and Cambridge or go north through Kettering.



Entrance to Euston Station (now demolished).
© British Library Board (074019).

When the young people arrived for the first time at Euston Station it must have been something of the shock with the large classical style Great Hall some 126 feet (38m) long, 61ft wide (19m) and an incredible 64ft (20m) high. Outside, they would have left through the great Classical archway. We know that some of his companions would already have seen it but we are not sure if Herbert had already been in London. The phrase 'I returned to London with my brother' could be read either way. He was staying with his brother Edwin (Ebenezer) who had married Elizabeth Barringer and at this time was probably living in Riley Street, Bermondsey with their small daughter Louisa. Within the next two years he had acquired a tailoring business in Kimbolton, not far from Ringstead).

There were other relations in the area on whom Herbert could call. 'Ebey' (Ebenezer) Smith, the son of his mother's eldest sister Sarah and her second husband George Smith, was living in the area. So Herbert had places to stay and people to see. It would have been an exciting if rather daunting experience for any young man with, close at hand, magnificent buildings and opulence but also the terrible poverty and dangers of Dickens's London.

Two days after he arrived we see that there is a serious reason for his move to the capital.

Sept. 30 Monday

Went to Brompton Hospital and got a supply of medicine and oil, commenced as an outpatient August 5. I rode there and back by steamboat. Edwin brought the harmonium home.

So Herbert had already been to London although whether he had been working or for treatment we cannot be sure.



Brompton Consumption Hospital.

From Old and New London by Edward Walford (Cassell 1880).

With the kind permission of www.lookandlearn.com.

Earlier in that same year of 1867, John Timbs, in *Curiosities of London*, tells us that Brompton Hospital:

. . . fronting the Fulham-road was commenced in 1844, June 11 when Prince Albert laid the first stone; the site was formerly a nursery garden and the genial moist air of Brompton has long been recommended for consumptive patients.

The Hospital is in the Tudor style of red brick with stone finishings; Francis, architect; it was opened in 1846. In 1850 was attached an elegant memorial chapel and in 1852 was added the western wing of the Hospital . . . The Hospital is ventilated by machinery, worked by a steam engine and is warmed by water heated by two large Arnott stoves. In the kitchen steam is used for boiling caldrons of beef-tea, mutton-broth, arrow-root, coffee, chocolate etc; and the provisions are wound up a shaft to the respective wards. The patients take exercise in the well-ventilated passages: and the wards are tempered by warm fresh air which enters at the floor, and escapes by valves in the ceiling.

That Herbert was going to Brompton Hospital tells us that he was almost certainly suffering from Tuberculosis (TB), Phthisis pulmonalis or Consumption, one of the greatest killers of the Victorian age which could strike all classes. It was the equivalent of today's Cocaine-chic with the loss of weight, pallid complexion and the slow death endowing it with a romantic, poetic aura that it did not deserve. Byron had said that it was his chosen way of death.

What we now see in the diary are visits to various chapels and churches, walks to the Elephant and Castle and Billingsgate but also visits to a show which was part of the great Victorian interest in the occult and the paranormal.

October 1 Tuesday

Began to learn the harmonium, in the evening went to a Mesmeric entertainment, and saw a young lady in a clairvoyant state.

Mesmerism had been particularly popular in the 1840s and was popularised by Franz Anton Mesmer who believed that an occult force, called 'animal magnetism', could be channelled to effect trance-like states and healing. It may be that Herbert was also hoping that it offered some relief for him and certainly it was used as a form of hypnotherapy to calm and ease the symptoms of patients. In this case it was probably more of a stage show but, as his cousin Samuel Abington reveals some years later the paranormal was taken very seriously even among some devout Nonconformists. The scientists were producing a magical world of dinosaurs and electricity and suddenly everything seemed possible.

Herbert also reports that London is sometimes very cold and foggy which would not have helped his breathing. On October 10th he reports:

Leonard called early, had breakfast with us, then I went to the Elephant and Castle Station with him. In the evening I received my notice to go into hospital.

On Monday October 14th he went into Brompton Hospital accompanied by his brother Joshua. Unusually he writes in detail both of the hospital and its routines and it is worth quoting his first few days there in full:

. . . I arrived there about 3 and found myself possessed of a comfortable little bed, a little cupboard called a locker, with a pink mug, a spittoon and butter dish. I ought to have taken a knife, fork and spoon, butter and sugar, but as my notice did not express that I went without and found to my grief when tea time came, there was no sugar in the coffee, or butter to the bread, so I did without. I could easily have borrowed what I wanted but being a stranger, I did not like to ask any of the patients, and none of them noticed me. After tea four of us had a game of dominoes and I got on better at supper time. I had half a pint of beef tea with what bread I liked, after supper we went to bed, but it was just beginning morning before I could get to sleep, hearing the strange noises so many people coughing and one young man in our ward sat propped up all night, he was too ill to sleep, but at length most of the noises were hushed, and I sank into the arms of Morpheus and slept until six in the morning.

There are four meals a day here, breakfast at half past eight, consisting of bacon or eggs and coffee or cocoa according to the doctor's orders; Dinner at 1. Meat vegetables and pudding. Tea at 5, coffee or cocoa and bread and butter or marmalade. Supper at 8 beef tea or milk and after that barley water for those that like to drink in the night. Patients (that are able) have to rise at 8 in the morning in winter and half past seven in the summer, and be in bed by nine at night. There are [no] fires allowed in any of the wards, but the temperature is kept up to 65 degrees by pipes. Patients (that are able) have to take all their meals in the gallery, and each one has to take his own mug, knife, fork and spoon with him, and keep them clean. The hours for visiting are from 2 to 3 on Tuesdays and Fridays and from two to four on Sundays.

Cod liver oil is brought into the gallery on a tray, twice a day, and all have to go there and take it together. Divine service is held in the chapel at 11 and half past six on Sundays and at 11 in the morning on Wednesday and Friday.

Oct 15 Tuesday

I got up between six and seven, had a wash and went down in the grounds, to ask the gatekeeper to get me some butter and sugar, which he did. About 10 o'clock the clinical assistant (Mr Young) came to examine and sound me, and soon after that Mr Edwards the house doctor came to sound me again, and just as we were sitting down to tea Dr Thompson came and I had to strip again for another sounding. In the evening the nurse came and put me a blister on, which I kept on till morning. Slept pretty well.

Oct 16 Wednesday

After breakfast the nurse clipped my blister, and dressed it with ointment to keep it open. I saw Richard Adams for the first time. There was a service in the chapel at eleven this morning. It is Church of England doctrine and patients who are not members of the church are not obliged to go, if they are very ~~old~~ ill, they can have their own minister to see them. In the evening the chaplain gave a lecture on the 'birth of Christ'.

October 17 Thursday

Had my blister dressed again. It was our day for setting tables and clearing away. Bought some wool and began to make a mat.

The main breakthroughs, in the nineteenth century, in cutting TB deaths were the improvement in living conditions and the recognition in the 1890s that milk from infected cows was one of the major sources of infection. Nevertheless the new hospital at Brompton did help patients. As John Timbs reported in 1867:

The deaths in this new Hospital have never exceeded one in every five in-patients, whereas in the former Hospital they were one in four.

We know that statistics can be manipulated by clinical practice but Herbert was probably in the best hospital in England for treatment of tuberculosis. It had been founded by Philip Rose, a young solicitor, as many London hospitals, because of the long-lasting and frequently terminal nature of the disease, had rules specifically excluding consumption sufferers. Nevertheless, unlike Smallpox

which had virtually disappeared by the end of the century, really effective treatment did not come until the middle of the twentieth century when effective antibiotics were discovered.

Even the best Victorian doctors could only use treatments that seemed to have some effect without really understanding the nature of the disease. The use of 'blisters' like those given to Herbert was really a leftover from an earlier practice. From the early 1800s it was believed that the body could only contain one illness at a time: when a second illness entered the body, the first would be forced out. Hot plasters were put on the skin to burn it and form a blister which was then opened and drained. Any effectiveness seems to have stemmed from the pain of the blister focussing the mind away from the chest and so reducing coughing.

Herbert also 'bought some wool and began to 'make a mat'. My own brother was in hospitals and hospices much of his life and the making of plastic wicker trays and Readicut rugs were an important part of his keeping busy and passing of time. The mat is never mentioned again so perhaps Herbert quickly wearied of it.

On Monday October 21st he was weighed and was 8 stone 10½ pounds (we later discover that he was 5 feet 7½ inches which would have been an average height for a man). On the Friday of that week Jedidah, with her friend and landlady (and perhaps employer) Mrs. Elizabeth Spence had visited Herbert. Elizabeth Spence and Jedidah had been in service together with Carlos Chamberlin (or Chamberlain) in the wealthy Victoria Park area of Manchester. [see separate biography of Jedidah.] Elizabeth, a widow, opened a grocer's shop in Rusholme in the 1860s and it seems that Jedidah may have worked for her (although in the Census she is not shown with a profession). Elizabeth and her daughter Mary Eleanor, usually put as M.E. in the diary, had become great friends of Jedidah and, through her, of the Abington family.

Herbert was allowed to leave the hospital and stay with his brother Edwin and his family in Southwark for a few days. He went to Madam Tussauds with his two Manchester visitors and on the Sunday his brother Leonard, Aunt Edmonds and Margaret Edmonds all came to tea with him at Edwin's house. On the Monday he bought a muffler for 2s 6d (12½p) and in the afternoon he returned to hospital. Away from his friends he dwells again on his illness.

Oct 29 Tuesday

I read that it is computed that 78,000 persons are constantly suffering from consumption in England and that the deaths among those patients are as many as 39,000 within that year. In the last report of the Registrar general it is stated that in the metropolis the deaths annually from consumption are 7,500, the average number of sufferers from the disease being 15,000.

On most days he went to church in the Hospital (which may have been held, at the beginning of his stay, in the Committee Room during repairs to the chapel), and had occasional visits from Jedidah, Leonard, Edwin, and Selina and Aunt Edmonds and Mr Kitchen. On Tuesday 5th November he wrote on the Gunpowder Plot. Did he know that an Abington had been involved?

The next day he reveals that he now weighs 8 st. (stone) 13 lbs (pounds) a gain of 2½ pounds. His thoughts, however, naturally still dwell on death.

November 8th Friday

Milton died on Sunday 1674 in his 66th year and so tranquil was his departure that his attendants were unable to determine the hour of his death.

November 9th Saturday

Patrick O'Shea the soldier that attempted to commit suicide by opening a vein in his arm about three months ago, died this morning.

The visitors are not quite so frequent now and, when they do not come on a Sunday, he admits to feeling, 'rather dull'. We hear that the ward had a selection of books which were changed on a regular basis and that he enjoyed reading a volume of *Sunday at Home*. This was a weekly 'Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading' published by the Religious Tract Society which was often bound into annual volumes. It contained a miscellany of short stories, quizzes, coloured illustrations and short discussions of biblical texts.

He reports that he has gained 1½ pounds and is now '8 St. 0½ lbs'. Then he has a relapse

Dec 6 Friday

Felt very poorly, had the headache very much. The assistant came to see me and gave me a draught of Mist Salic. Felt a little better in the evening. Dr Williams visited us.

Salicylic Acid was derived from willow bark and relieved headaches, although it could affect stomachs as a side effect. It was not until 1900 that it was further refined and patented as *Aspirin* by the German company Bayer. Herbert feels better the next day and begins to take an interest in the world again.

Dec 13 Friday

Went to church. Jedidah came to see me. This afternoon about a quarter to four o'clock an attempt was made by the Fenians to rescue Burke and Casey who were confined in the House of Detention, Clerkenwell. By blowing down the outer wall with a barrel of gunpowder.

The late edition of the *Globe* newspaper that day, under the headline '**Twenty lives sacrificed**', reported that there had been:

. . . great alarm in consequence of a terrible explosion taking place. Within a radius of half a mile all the windows were shattered into pieces and the greatest confusion prevailed at the time . . . Before the catastrophe, attention had been excited by the suspicious appearance of several Irish roughs – types of the class which represents Fenianism – loitering on the outskirts of the prison.

Soon, however the four walls around him take over:

Dec 14 Saturday

I was reading that the Hospital was founded in 1841 [on another site]; it accommodates 211 in-patients and constantly affords relief to some thousands of out-patients. There are besides 20 more patients in the experimental sanatorium at Madeira [I believe that this happened in 1864 and as the returning patients showed no improvement the experiment was discontinued] and 20 more are received at the 'Home' Manor House Chelsea.

Dec 15 Sunday

Went to church. Had no visitors. I had the hump.

Then with sure knowledge of his own condition, he writes:

December 20 Friday

Jedidah came to see me. I was reading that Brompton is a neighbourhood where formerly more than now, consumptive invalids were wont to repair. Thither many a parent has conveyed his child as a last hope. Edmond Burke had a son he loved with his whole heart. Disease laid him low and the father took him to Crowell House at Brompton. Here he sunk and died. That blow nearly broke the great man's heart. He never recovered from it.

Had Herbert's father managed to get him into the hospital through his family connections? Was this at the back of his mind when he read this?

He had lost a little weight again but gets 'leave of absence' over Christmas:

December 25 Wednesday

This morning the yellow fog lay thick and dim o'er London city far and wide. Father, Jedidah, Edmund, Joshua, Edwin and Bessie [Edwin's wife] and the children all came over to Aunts to spend a Merry Christmas.

Dec 26 Thursday

Very thick fog all day. Father, Jedidah, Joshua, Edmund, and Edwin came to Aunt's to tea.

Dec 27 Friday

Went over to Edwin's in the morning, had dinner there and started back to the hospital. Father and Edmund [brother] accompanied me to the bus at London Bridge, arrived at the hospital a four p.m. My companions who spent their Christmas in the hospital told me they had Champagne with their dinner and some again in the evening, and Plum-cake, Biscuits and tea at the evening meal. The gallery was decorated with evergreens and artificial flowers. The Chapel adjoining the Hospital was opened on Christmas Day, it had been closed for some time undergoing repairs, so that service has been held in the committee room.

Dec 29 Sunday

Went to Church twice. I entered the church (or Chapel as it is called) for the first time this morning. It is a comfortable place; the seats are all cushioned. The windows are very pretty,

all of stained glass; there are two sun-lights hanging from the roof, each one has 29 jets of gas, so that the place is very light when the gas is lit up.

Father and Edmund came to see me in the afternoon.



Chapel in Brompton Hospital (this is a special Confirmation by Bishop of London).

Illustrated London News January 3rd 1874 (author's copy).

Dec 31 Tuesday

I weighed 9 stone lost 1 lb since last weighing. Heard the Chelsea Bells ringing the old year out and the New Year in.

1868 *Wednesday Jan 1*

We had quite a tragical commencement to the New Year here. A young man named Cavill committed suicide this morning about 8 o'clock. He went into the closet and cut his throat and was almost dead when one of the patients found him. The Doctor was immediately sent for, but it was too late. The poor fellow had done his work too well. We had noticed for about a week previous, how restless and fidgety he was, he appeared to have something on his mind, but he would not tell us what it was.

Jan 2 Thursday

Dr. Quain visited us. The Committee of the Hospital commenced to give us butter, each patient is to be allowed half a pound of butter weekly, from the hospital instead of having to buy it. And four daily newspapers to each Gallery.

Jan 3 Friday

In the evening there was held in the Committee Room, the first of a series of Readings to be continued weekly throughout the season. The first gentleman read David Coombe, the Cobbler and another piece of poetry. It was very interesting and amusing.*

[*This may be a short moral tale in a booklet called *Trapping Sunbeams* by Floyd Foster Barnes].

There was also a lecture on electricity 'with experiments which made it interesting and amusing'. Certainly we can see that it was a hospital where great attempts were made to make the patient's stay as bearable as possible. On Wednesday 15th he left hospital for the last time. It is not said why he was discharged but it was the practice at Brompton to keep patients in for two months? It was presumably felt that the hospital had done all it could, whether the patient was cured or not. To keep them longer would block the beds for new sufferers.

As always, he walked to places of interest and visited friends and relations He also sampled some of the entertainments of the capital city;

Jan 23 Thursday

Had a walk in the morning. In the evening I went with Joshua and Emma to the Agricultural Hall to see the grand spectacle of 'St. George and the Dragon' and the Egyptian State Procession etc. etc.

On the 26th he sees Aunt Winter, his father's sister Letitia, who was the widow of shoemaker John Winter whose early death seems have put the family into very hard times. At about this time, his uncle, John Edmonds had become a beer retailer at the *Red Lion*, 41 Hoxton Street, Shoreditch (Herbert's brother, Leonard, later marries John's daughter, Selina, and becomes a publican at the Mermaid Tavern, Mare Street, Hackney). Not far away, at 64 High Street, Hoxton, was McDonald's Music Hall where comedians such as Arthur Lloyd, William Lingard and William Randall plied their trade. He writes:

Jan 28 Tuesday

Went to Aunt Edmonds in the evening with Leonard, Selina and Emma to MacDonal's Music hall.

In some ways this is the most surprising visit of them all. *The Tomahawk* on September of the previous year had an article entitled, 'An Opinion of Music Halls. It notes that the former operatic selections had largely disappeared and adds, acidly that they were anyway, 'badly sung and vulgarly accompanied. It continues:

Nothing is listened to now-a-days but the so-called 'comic songs' and, in sober earnestness, we must express our astonishment that human beings, endowed with the ordinary gift of reason, should be found to go night after night in order to witness such humiliating exhibitions. It is quite impossible to name anything equal to the stupidity of these comic songs unless, indeed it is their vulgarity. A man appears on the platform, dressed in outlandish clothes, and ornamented with whiskers of ferocious length and hideous hue and proceeds to sing verse after verse of pointless twaddle interspersed with a blatant 'chorus' in

which the audience is requested to join. The audience obligingly consents and each member of it contributes to the general harmony, a version of the tune which he happens to know best.

It all seems pretty harmless but it certainly would have been very raucous and probably not an entertainment that would have gone down well in Ringstead Baptist circles. He does not give his opinion of the evening and, two days later, he has returned home to Ringstead where he is met at the station by Edmund and Jedidah. Once home, it is not the Music Hall but the Temperance Hall which dominates his social round.

Feb 11 Tuesday

A meeting of the Temperance Society was held consisting of singing and speaking and a collection was made on behalf of the poor in the East of London. £1. 1. 0. was collected.

We also briefly meet, along with Herbert, some of his other aunts and uncles on his mother's side. There are Uncle and Aunt Smith on February 9th, Uncle Andrew [Bull] on the 16th, Uncle William [Bull] on the 17th and Uncle Noah [Bull] on March 8th. He also is still interested in the world outside.

March 3 Tuesday

Went to Thrapston to see a panorama of Captain Speke and Grant's travels to the source of the Nile.

We have to remember that 'darkest' Africa was a source of excitement rather like the Moon in the 1960s and an altogether more interesting place. In 1859 John Hanning Speke had gone with Richard Burton to discover the source of the Nile. Burton had become ill and Speke had carried on to identify the source as Lake Victoria. Burton questioned Speke's judgement and the two became bitter rivals. In 1862 Speke went with a new companion, Captain James Grant, where they discovered the outreach of the Nile from Victoria which they called Ripon Falls. In 1864 Speke was accidentally shot and killed. For Herbert, like many others the simple panorama in a village hall would have conjured up the mystery and danger of another world. There was little available to Ringstead villagers in 1868 to tell them of the great places and events of the world, No films or television, very few photographs and virtually nothing in colour. These travelling dioramas, panoramas and models were toured around the country and people would pay a small fee to see them. The panoramas would either be around the walls or more often on a large roll which slowly unrolled before the viewer. The dioramas tended to be semi-circular sets with a background and figures set in them.

On March 12th, his sister Jedidah returned to Manchester where she still lived, at least some of the time. On April 6th Herbert papered the parlour (a good Music Hall occupation). We hear nothing of his illness and when he weighs himself on April 18th he is 9st. 5 lbs. One wonders if his father Herbert had a set of scales in his Chemist shop as many did until late into the Twentieth Century.

On May 4th he went to 'Thrapstone' (in the nineteenth century there was usually an 'e' on the end of the name) to the Petty Sessions. Joseph Ball, (son of the butcher John Ball who Jedidah was later to marry), was tried for shooting two tame ducks in mistake for wild ones. He was discharged. [We told Joseph's story in an earlier biography.]

The Baptist Sunday School Treat had been on April 15th and, on Whit Monday, June 1st, the Annual Temperance Festival was held. Herbert describes the scene.

The Band played round the village at 5 o'clock in the morning. I beat the drum for them. I beat the drum for them. At 2pm the Band of Hope and Friends of the cause marched round the village in procession, stopping to sing at intervals, then the children went and had tea in Mr Ball's orchard [John Ball]; after teas they went up to Mr Dearlove's garden. A Public Tea was held in the Hall at 5 o'clock. In the evening Thomas Whittaker delivered a lecture. He spoke from the direction a little girl gave him while seeking a Temperance meeting in S6t Giles. A little higher up on the right hand side through an iron gate, next door to the sweet shop. Cousin Samuel came to Miss Williamson's.

June 3 Wednesday

He [Cousin Samuel] gave a good lecture on tobacco and snuff and their effects on the human system.

His 'Cousin Samuel' was a fascinating character who deserves a biography of his own. He was the son of Benjamin Abington and was born in about 1817 so he was a generation older than Herbert. In 1843 he worked in the Custom House in London but, perhaps as part of his duties, he went to live in Cape Town. It may be there that he met and married his wife, Catherine and certainly two of his children were born there. The family then went on to the United States in 1854 and, in 1858, they are recorded as travelling from Venezuela to Philadelphia. Presumably he was a businessman and the 1858 Passenger List records him as a 'planter'. He returned to England where his wife died and he quickly married again to Mary Ann Mills on 30th June 1859. She too died in 1865. He had become the 'Secretary of a Philanthropic Institute' according to the 1861 Census and judging from later Censuses and Herbert's diary, this was the *British Anti-Tobacco Society* which had been formed in 1853 by the Reverend Thomas Reynolds. This pressure group had originated in the United States where it had emerged from the Baptist Church and it is probable that, like the Temperance Movement, it was also closely linked to Nonconformism. The Reverend George Trask, who founded the American Society in 1848, wrote, as his last publication, a tract to the Reverend Charles Spurgeon in which he said:

The project of converting the world by the Gospel of Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost, and by man's free agency is not a humbug, but a natural, scriptural, glorious project eclipsing every other. The idea of converting the world whilst rum, opium, and tobacco are its masters, is a humbug.

At the time that Herbert writes of Samuel he was some fifty-four years of age and Jane Williamson, the middle-aged daughter of a local farmer was soon to become his third wife.

On Thursday June 4th Herbert simply records:

Dear little Leonard was buried, he died on Friday night May 29th.

The death, at three years old, of the son of his brother Leonard and his wife Selina (daughter of Aunt Edmonds and also his cousin) would have hit him hard. Nevertheless he knew that he too probably had a short life to live and tried to stay active in spite of his illness.

June 16 Tuesday

In the evening a small party of us went a boating.

June 22 Monday

Went to Warmington with the band; there were only eight of us; we marched through Oundle, arrived at Warmington half past eleven. It was very wet in the morning, but it cleared up after dinner, and was fine the remainder of the day. We arrived home at half past two the next morning.

July 9 Thursday

In the evening we went boating.

July 13 Monday

Edwin and I walked to Denford and Woodford in the morning. In the evening we went to Raunds.

July 14 Tuesday

We had a fine pic-nic party; took tea at the bottom of Ham Lane.

July 21 Tuesday

Very hot. 92 deg at back of the house.

July 22 Wednesday

I and Edmond went fishing from 4 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon; had a bath in the Scour.

Then on the '8th July he notes:

My 21st birthday. Received a present of Longfellow's Poetical Works from M.E. Spence.

Did he not receive other presents, was it just that it came from post or he had a particular affection for Mary Spence, his sister's friend in Manchester? Certainly on Friday July 31st he receives a letter from Jedidah informing him of a situation in Manchester. It seems a long way to go and Manchester would not have been a first choice for someone suffering from TB but perhaps it was just that his sister would be there.

August 3 Monday

Went to Manchester. Jedidah and M.E. Spence met me at the station and I went with them to Rusholme; stayed there the night.

Aug 4 Tuesday

Entered J. Patterson's service.

Unfortunately Herbert, as so often, does not give us enough detail. What was J Patterson's first name? Where was the business? What did it do? Was Herbert still a baker? There are two possible candidates with the surname Patterson or Paterson (Herbert uses both) in 1871. One is a letterpress printer living at 73 Marshall Street with a connecting shop at 34 Rochdale Road and there is also a J Paterson who is a linen draper at 37 Rochdale Road. Could it be father and son (or daughter or wife)?

He makes no mention of his work and during August, September and October 1868 he mainly gives his Sunday activities which comprise his attendance at various chapels including the Zion Chapel, Cavendish Street Chapel and Grosvenor Street Baptist Chapel and visits to Jedidah and the Spences. His cousin, Elizabeth Smith, who was in service locally visited them at Rusholme and they, 'passed the afternoon very pleasantly singing together'. Also Cousin Samuel, who was living in Manchester at the time, came to see him.

On December 3rd Mrs Spence opened her new shop but whether this was a move or an additional one is not said. All we know is that sometime between 1861 and 1871 she moved from service with Carlos Chamberlin to her grocer's shop in 45 Wilmslow Road, Rusholme.

On the 24th his father came to Manchester and for the second year running spent Christmas away from his wife. Cousin Samuel seems to have been the life and soul of the party and on the 27th he writes:

Dec 27 Sunday

Went to Rusholme in the morning; Cousin Samuel came in the evening, and after supper he told us some of his adventures and hair-break escapes. I stayed there all night with Father; went to the station with him in the morning, and returned home in time to open shop.

He had to work on New Year's Day, but records:

1869 *Jan 1 Friday*

Closed the shop at one; went to the Royal Institution; in the evening to the Free Trade Hall to hear Butterworth's Christy's Minstrels.

We may now wince at the idea of white people 'blacking up' to perform in a bizarre parody of black performers but in the Victorian era it was very popular entertainment (and continued in various forms until the last quarter of the Twentieth Century). The *Christy Minstrels* were formed by Edwin Pearce Christy in Buffalo in 1843 and the name became synonymous with any 'blackface' group. Rather like aging rock groups the name became a matter for dispute:

Soon four new companies were formed each claiming to be the original 'Christy Minstrels because each boasted one or two members of the old troupe.

Herbert would have watched one of these travelling companies and we would be wrong to impose a retrospective morality on him. On March 3rd he went to see *Professor Pepper's Entertainment of* which he records, 'It was very good'.

John Henry Pepper was an unlikely showman. He was a Chemistry professor at London Polytechnic Institute who built the first full-size version of the illusion. The magic lantern shows had become popular in the 1860s and new gimmicks were used to bring in the crowds into the theatres (motion pictures later started in this way). The illusion was produced by a large sheet of glass placed at an angle to the audience which could reflect a person or object to the audience. By clever use of lighting it produced an effect similar to that when one looks out of the window of a dimly lit room at dusk. The audience saw through the glass but also saw the reflection of an object or person carefully placed out of sight. By the use of cabinets and ghostly story lines an entertaining show was put together and taken round the country.

It seems likely that Cousin Samuel was in Manchester as part of his role in the 'philanthropic institute' because on Herbert records:

May 12 Wednesday

Went to hear Cousin Samuel deliver a lecture on 'Tobacco and its Physiological effects' in the Hulme Working Men's Institute, City Road. Heard him state that he was the Representative of the North of England Anti-Tobacco Society.

A week later he writes:

May 19 Wednesday Whit Week

I had leave from business after tea, so I went to have my Portrait taken.

Throughout the diary we see various family friends and family having their 'portrait taken' as the new photography came into the reach of ordinary people even in small towns like Raunds.

The entries in Manchester often have long gaps between them and it may be with his work he was finding it too much to keep up his diary. He does report some highlights:

May 21 Friday

Half-day holiday. Went to the Flower Show at the Botanical Gardens. Old Trafford; met Jedidah, Mrs and Miss Spence there.

July 21 Wednesday

The day of the visit of their R.H. the Prince and Princess of Wales to the Royal Agricultural Show, Manchester. I had a good view of them as they passed along Stretford Road.

On August 4th he received his 'fourth quarter salary' and then a calendar month later he states baldly:

Sep 4 Saturday

Left J. Patterson's at 5 pm. Went to Town, called for my box as I returned and went to Rusholme.

It is only later that we realise that he has finished his employment there but we get no clue as to the reason for his leaving.

On September 7th he and Jedidah go to Ringstead by Midland Railway. He writes with some bitterness:

Arrived at Thrapston at 3.10 in the afternoon. No one to meet us.

Was it an oversight or was he in the doghouse? Edmund was at home and Joshua also returned. There is one curious entry for the 15th September:

Sep 15 Wednesday

Leonard came home. We met him at Ringstead Station a little after ten. In the afternoon he and Uncle Andrew, Joshua and I walked to Chelveston. Met father there, came back to Ringstead and Leonard returned to London the same evening.

This seems somewhat mysterious. Why did Leonard come from London just for the day? What was Herbert doing in Chelveston? Perhaps it is just Herbert's brevity that creates the mystery.

Herbert seems well and he walks, goes boating and gathers blackberries. On the 24th he also went to Raunds to see the schoolmaster so it may be that the Abington children attended the Wesleyan School there, although there was also a church school and various small private schools. On October 6th he visits Edwin's family and unusually his mother accompanies them:

Oct 6 Wednesday

Mother, Jedidah and I went to Kimbolton; left Ringstead at 7 a.m. Walked to Raunds Station, from there by train, arrived at Kimbolton a little before 10. Found Edwin and Bessie there with the children. Joshua and the goods had not arrived, so we all went for a walk round by the castle and through the park, by the chestnut ridings; came back and all dined at 'The Bell'. Left Kimbolton a quarter before three; got a ride to the station and were only just in time for the train. On our way from Raunds Station we stayed and I took tea with S.A. Roberts [he or she may have been ill]. Reached home a little after six. Went to meeting and then to bid our friends 'good bye'.

It may be that it was at this time that Edwin and his family finally moved to Kimbolton. His grandson, William Abington, later wrote that Edwin's and his wife's health were suffering from the fogs and pollution of London and his doctor advised him to seek relief in the 'pure air of the countryside'. He also says that he had already established a 'good class tailoring trade.' It may be that the suffering of Herbert also had some effect.

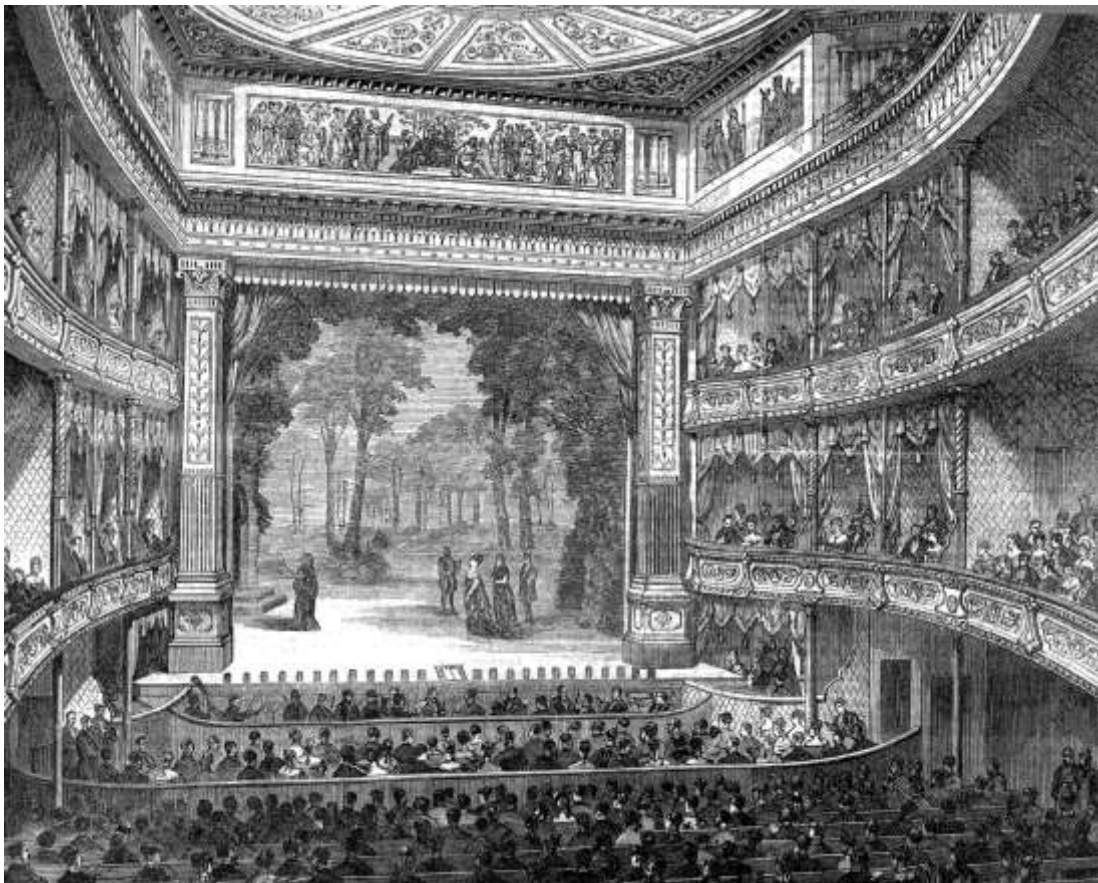
The following day he was back in Manchester:

Oct 7 Thursday

Came back to Manchester. Father and W.K. [William Kitchen] accompanied us to Thrapston Station; left there at 9 a.m. had a pleasant journey; I arrived at London Road 2.45. M.E. Spence and J. Fisher met us there; had a cab to Rusholme.

He was obviously looking for work but he was still taking advantage of the chances to learn that the large cities offered. He went to a lecture on Sirius at the Birch [Chapel] schoolroom, to the free library and to Readings in Rusholme Public Hall. On October 12th he reports:

Went to Binyons and Co. (received a little encouragement) to Red Bank and Deansgate. In the evening we went to see 'A Winter's Tale' a play of Shakespeare's. It was excellent.



This is a scene from The Winter's Tale in the actual production that Herbert went to see in 1869 at The Prince's Theatre (Illustrated London News).

With the kind permission of the Manchester Archives and Local Studies.

Binyons and Co may refer to Binyons, Robinson and Co. who were tea and coffee merchants. Herbert's father had been a tea dealer originally on a village scale and Jedidah's former employer probably had some connections with the tea trade. He was not offered a job and went to Oldfield Road after an unnamed post. In brackets he puts 'not good enough'. Was it Herbert or the post? Suddenly his old employer offers him his old job back:

Oct 22 Friday

Received a note from Mr. Patterson asking me to go back again.

Oct 23 Saturday

Entered his service again.

Still we hear nothing of his employment and it seems to have been a means of earning a living and something which he did not find, for whatever reason, congenial. Just a few weeks after starting work he is again taken very ill.

Nov 21 Sunday

Felt unwell in the night; very restless, pain in sides and difficulty of breathing.

Nov 22 Monday

Very ill; No appetite; dullness in head. Had Must. Plast. On right side and feet in hot water for 30 minutes at bed time.

Nov 24 Wednesday

Worse; breathing very difficult; pain in left side; kept on work until evening; obliged to give up, and go to Mrs. Spence; had Must. Plast. On left side and feet in hot water again.

Nov 25 Thursday

Worse. Sent for Dr. Gregory; he pronounced it a slight attack of Inflammation and Bronchitis; ordered hot bran in flannel to my back continually until better, and to keep in bed.

Nov 28 Sunday

Better, but much reduced; came downstairs to tea.

He stays inside and seems to improve slowly. On Sunday December 12th he enjoys reading *Adam Graeme* a novel by Mrs. Oliphant. She was one of the most popular writers of her time, churning out books in order to maintain her family after the early death of her husband.

He begins to go out for short walks and on Monday 20th December he notes, 'Resumed my occupation. On Christmas Eve he is awakened:

. . . by hearing a band of musicians strike up the old tune of 'Christians awake'.

*It was very sweet in the stillness of the night as
'The midnight moon serenely smiles
O'er natures soft repose
No low'ring cloud obscures the sky
No ruffling tempest blows' and t'was such a night as this
'That while they watched the shepherd swains
Heard angels strike to angel strains
The song of heavenly love
Blest harmony that far excels
All music else on earth that dwells*

*As e'er was tuned above
T'was while they watched the sages traced
The star that every star effaced
With new and nobler shine
They followed and it led the way
To where the infant Saviour lay
And gave them light divine.'*

After the brass band had passed out of hearing another vocal and instrumental came and sang Christians Awake to another tune, that was very nice; when that had gone I went again to sleep and did not awaken again until 10 o'clock. When the bells were pealing out merrily as a reminder that it was Xmas Day morning.

Dec 25

It was a nice morning, quite an unusual treat for us such an one as the poet described 'Sweet day, so calm, so bright'. As soon as I had dressed and breakfasted I bent my steps toward Rusholme. Had a very nice dinner, turkey etc. Spent the day very quietly, like a Sunday, no company there except Mr. Thornhill. I stayed there all night it being Sunday the day following.

Dec 31 Friday

Stayed up until New Year, listening to Holy Trinity Bells.

On New Year's Day, however, he was back at work and on the 2nd Mrs Spence presented him with 'a respirator' On the Monday he writes:

Jan 3 Monday

Kept open all day. Walked to St. Peter's in the evening; met J. and M.E. coming from Royal Institute.

We see that, especially in progressive cities like Manchester, women were involved in, (and being admitted to!), many educational opportunities which before had been largely denied to them. On February 20th he went to hear about something that was a trouble to all believers in the Bible as literal truth and one that his Uncle Leonard James had struggled with.

Feb 20 Sunday

Went to chapel in morning. In the afternoon to hear a lecture on 'The antiquity of the human race' by Dr. G. Sexton M.A. He stated in the course of his lecture, that there were records of the Chinese showing that they as a nation existed in a state of civilisation 300 years before the time of Abraham, and he also said there were Geological facts which led to the supposition that there were men living upon this earth 100,000 years ago. Went to Rusholme; arrived just in time for tea.

The scientific discoveries in geology and archaeology were undermining the traditional view that all things were created at once. It is a debate that still divides the Christian community, especially in the United States.

On March 9th he went to a diorama of the Holy Land. Such travelling exhibitions would often be visited by local schools. In *Jude the Obscure*, Thomas Hardy tells of schoolchildren being taken to see a model of the ancient city of Jerusalem and the showman pointing out the various places described in the Bible. Like this model of Jerusalem in the novel, we can guess that many owed a great deal to the imagination of the maker.

The model of the ancient city stood in the middle of the apartment, and the proprietor, with a fine religious philanthropy written on his features, walked round it with a pointer in his hand, showing the young people the various quarters and places known to them by name from reading their Bibles; Mount Moriah, the Valley of Jehoshaphat, the City of Zion, the walls and the gates outside one of which was a large mound like a tumulus, and on the mound a little white cross. The spot, he said, was Calvary.

'I think,' said Sue.....'that this model, elaborate as it is, is a very imaginary production.'

On Sunday March 3rd Cousin Samuel came to tea and had been unwell with inflammation of the lungs for five or six weeks. The air of Manchester, thick with factory and house chimney smoke and often laced with other chemicals and the fine fibres from the cotton industry was not good for anyone with respiratory problems. On Sunday May 8th he wrote:

Went to Rusholme in the morning (through the fields) as I was impatient to hear all the 'good' news from home. Cousin S. came in the evening after chapel.

We do not learn what the 'good news' was but Herbert seems once more in good health and he writes one of his longest entries:

June 9 Whit-Thursday

Rose at 6 o'clock, opened shop, swept out and dusted, had my breakfast and went off for a day's holiday. Strolled about town until 11. Met M.E. and Jed. (Jedidah) at London Road Station and went to Alderley Edge. We enjoyed it very much, scrambling up the hill, then pausing to view the delightful scenery on the grassy slopes at the bottom of the hill groups of children were at play, as happy as could be, and to make it still more enjoyable, a brass band was playing in the distance. We took tea in the cottage at the bottom of the hill, and returned to Manchester by the 7 train, when to finish the day, we went to see the Diorama of Ireland.

His employer's wife died on June 11th and on July 18 Monday he writes:

We removed to the shop in Medlock Street.

Presumably this refers to Patterson's shop. There are no entries for August and on September 13th he writes:

Jedidah and I came home by the L and M.W. Railway. Arrived at Ringstead Station at 12.40. Father was there to meet us with Austins van. Edwin and Jos. E, Smith and Benjamin took dinner with us. Ebe Smith returned to London the same evening.

Early September seems to have been the time when the family got together for:

Sep 14 Wednesday

Went to Kimbolton, I and Josh, Jedidah and Margaret Edmonds. Leonard and uncle Edmonds came from London in the evening.

Sep 15 Thursday

We all returned to Ringstead by the first train in the morning; before we came home we went for an hour's ride on the water at Denford. Leonard and uncle went back to London in the evening.

On the 19th he returned to Manchester. From there he reports that his sister Mary Jane was married to Benjamin Lovell, a local shoemaker. Perhaps this was the good news he referred to on May 8th. On October 21st he left Pattersons for the second and final time and he had time to enjoy himself. On October 24 he went with Jedidah and Mrs Spence to see, 'the tragedy of Richard III'. On the morning of October 25th he went to the Assize Courts, as a spectator, one presumes, and saw the Aurora Borealis in the evening.

On November 8th:

I returned home again. Mrs. Spence accompanied me in a cab to London Road Station. Father met me at Ringstead Station.

Soon after, William Kitchen was taken ill with haemolysis and six days later he died. His uncle George Smith, the second husband of his mother's sister Sarah preached at the funeral.

Nothing is said of Christmas and it appears that the New Year is spent at his brother's house in Kimbolton:

Dec 31 Saturday

Mr. G. Barritt called in at Edwin's. At half past ten pm Jos and I went to the Moravian Chapel to the watch meeting. Had tea and bun. Commenced the New Year with singing. Stayed until half past twelve. Reverend C.H. Spurgeon farewell to the old year:

He adds the rather sad and resigned verse:

*'Departed year what records dwell within thine hallowed scroll,
Of joyous hopes and golden dreams yet blighted at their goal
Of visions bright as morning dawn as vesper fragrance sweet
Fair idols shivered, shattered, all in fragments at thy feet.
So be it changeful year, farewell thy sunshine and thy shade,
Thy rainbow hues of loveliness, thy joys not doomed to fade
Thine anguish and thy weariness bid all their deep woe fell
In saddened shrines of human heart departing year, farewell'.*

On Tuesday February 28th:

The Members of the Temperance Society gave an entertainment in the Hall consisting of singing a 'piece' entitled the 'Trials and Troubles of an aspiring publican' which was well represented and with respect to the singing, men of Harlech and The Red Cross Knight were heartily applauded. The Hall was crowded to excess and the amount taken for admission was £1 10s 1d After paying expenses, we had £1 left to give towards flooring for the hall with boards.

He also reports on the happiness and tragedy of village life:

March 2 Thursday*

Bradley Weekly and Bessie Phillips were married

**Samuel Saddington attempted suicide about 1 pm by cutting his throat in four places; he is expected to recover.*

On March 28th there is another entertainment in the Temperance Hall and Herbert pasted a newspaper cutting into his diary:

Ringstead – On Tuesday evening another entertainment was given in the Ringstead Hall, by members of the temperance Society. The programme was as follows: - Glee 'Awake Æolian Lyre,' the company; song, 'The Slave Ship,' Mr. J. Warren; song, 'I'm lonely since my mother died,' Mr. W. Abbott; song, 'You've been a friend to me,' Miss Knight; dialogue, 'Troubles of a Publican', duet, 'The Minute Gun at Sea,' Messrs. Warren and Dyson; song, 'Wrap the Flag around me, Boys,' Mr. T. Phillips; dialogue, 'Buy your own Cherries;' song 'The Death of Nelson,' Mr. J. Warren; reading, 'Darby Doyle's Voyage to Quebec,' Mr. Dyson; song, 'Ring the Bell Watchman,' Miss E. Abbott; dialogue, 'Breach of Promise;' song 'One Faith, One Love,' Miss Knight; song 'Babylon is Falling,' Mr. Lockie; dialogue, 'Next Morning,' song, 'I am a Prussian,' Mr. W. Abbott; 'God Save the Queen.' The attendance was very good, and the whole passed off very agreeably.

One gathers that it was a mixture of the patriotic, sentimental and the moralistic: our stereotype of the Victorian era. On Monday April 3rd 1871 he reports:

April 3 Monday

Census taken. Father, Mother and I at home. Will any of us three be living when it is taken next time?

We know that his father suffered from bad health and that his mother had dementia for the last years of her life but it was perhaps himself of whom he was most thinking. It is at this time that he starts using initials as a sort of code although the meanings of some are obvious.

March 20

Received P.K.'s P.OAT. X.L.N.T.

April 20

P.W.T.L.B.I.B: C.B.

June 9

J.K. B.D. 18.

On April 26th he went to another temperance lecture which, 'abounded with humorous anecdotes and illustrations some of which were heartily cheered'. For the first time for a long time he writes that he has weighed himself. He is 8 st. 7 lbs. (On April 18th 1868 he was 9 st. 5 lbs.). No more is said and he seems to have struck up a greater friendship with J Knight and they visit his brothers in Kimbolton. The days and weeks pass with walks and visits to and from friends and relations:

May 16 Tuesday

Mrs. Spence came to Ringstead; arrived 12.30. Met her at Station with W. Bull's horse and trap.

May 17 Wednesday

Had a walk down to the Mill in the morning; to Denford in the evening.

May 19 Friday

Edwin came early; went home after dinner. Mrs Spence and I walked down Ham to the railway bridge in the evening.

May 20 Saturday

Went as far as Raunds turn in the morning. Joshua came in the evening.

May 21 Sunday

Mr. Pates of Aldwinckle preached here all day. We all went to tea with Mary Jane. Joshua went home in the evening. J. Phillips and I accompanied him a little way.

May 22 Monday

I went to Aldwinckle with Mr. Kitchen in the afternoon with pony and trap; enjoyed the ride very much; arrived in time for the sermon (by Mr. Islip of Brigstock). Public tea at half past four which was excellent. Address in the evening by Messrs Ackhurst, Kitchen, Islip, Smith and Bristow. Mr Pates in the chair. We went into Mr. Batson's after meeting; they pressed us very much to take some refreshment so after a nice slice of leg of mutton and a cup of Iceland Moss cocoa, we went on our way rejoicing; got home soon after ten.

On June 15th, while out at J. Knight's house he seems to have had a fainting fit (Syncope) but otherwise we hear nothing of his illness. A few days later he notes:

June 18 Sunday

Ebey's wife, Uncle and Aunt Smith, Mary J and Benjamin came to tea with us. Our first acquaintance with Mrs. E. Smith. First impression very favourable.

His cousin Ebenezer Smith who he had seen often in London had recently married Sarah and I think the E in Mrs E Smith refers to 'Ebey' in a jokingly formal way. His mother had gone to Raunds with

Mrs Spence to have her 'portrait taken' and on the 21st Herbert in true texting style pronounced it XLNT. We see sometimes the normal Ringstead life with glimpses off the outside world and sudden tragedy.

June 27 Tuesday

Went down Ham for a stroll in the morning; met J. Knight down there with his gun and J. Groom the mole catcher; had a long chat with them. Patti came home. Baptist Missionary Service in the evening. Mr. Kitchen presided; after singing a hymn, Mr. Childs of Raunds offered up a short prayer. Mr. Bradfield (of Rushden) gave a short address, and Mr. Fuller a coloured man of the Cameroons, Western Africa gave some interesting facts in relation to his work in Africa, and to give us an idea of the native tongue, he repeated a text of scripture and sang several verses of well known hymns in their tongue with pleasing effect. Mr. Silverton concluded with prayer.

Inquest held over the son of Alfred Mayes, aged one month, who died from the effects of an overdose of Syr. Poppies. Verdict accidental death from overdosing.*

[*Syrup of Poppies would have been a medicine containing opium and laudanum and similar opiates were used in many medicines including those for children. It is very likely that Herbert would have had such medicines to control his pain.]

On Saturday July 1st he gives the statistics from the 1871 Census. Even in such dry figures one can sense his own mortality is in his mind. It is obvious that the family are worried about him. On the Sunday he tells of a simple enjoyable day:

July 9 Sunday

He [Joshua] went class with me in the morning and chapel. In the afternoon we went to tea with Patty Knight: S.A. Bull, J. Butt and Emma Edmonds were there. And with a few anecdotes we enjoyed our tea very much. Afterwards singing until chapel time.

The following Saturday, however, he goes to seek treatment:

July 15 Saturday

Father and I went to Peterborough by the 10.15 train from Ringstead Station, to see Dr. Pailey. He examined my chest with stethoscope. Pronounced right lung sound, but left diseased. Ordered cod-liver oil to be continued, Tinct. Quinine Co. to be taken twice a day and half glass of porter with dinner, plenty of milk and nourishing food, and to be in the air as much as possible without exertion. Fee for advice two shillings.

We went round and through the Cathedral, sitting to rest a few minutes, while we admired the beautiful stained windows. Returned home by the 5 train. It was a very hot day and I was very much fatigued with the journey.

Immediately, the illness comes to the fore in the Diary:

July 16 Sunday

Felt weak and low – did not go out until evening – (as it was very hot) and then sat in the vestry to hear the sermon. [Was this because of the heat or his coughing?] Uncle Smith preached. Text – ‘It is appointed unto all men once to die, but after death the judgement’. After meeting went up with Uncle Andrew; stayed supper with them.

He again has to stay mainly in the house with little sorties for tea with people in the village. We hear that he takes a magazine which may be the source of the texts and poems that he starts to use.

July 18

Little better. Josh came unexpectedly with Mr. How; went Thrapston Market. Father with them and paid the half years magazine bill for me. Uncle Smith came home from market with them – stayed to tea with us. Father bought some shrimps which we enjoyed very much. Josh went home with Mr. How in the evening.

July 21 Friday

S.A. Bull’s birthday. I took tea with them.

July 27 Thursday

Received a small hamper from Mrs. Spence containing Bot. Carbon, Lobster, Bloaters etc.etc. Commenced antiseptic treatment.

On July 28th he celebrated his 24th birthday and on August 2nd, his sister, Mary Jane Lovell was safely delivered of a son named Herbert William. Was he named after Herbert or his father? Also Aunt Fairey (Emma Jane Abington had married a shoemaker, Samuel Fairey who had died in 1869), who was now a housekeeper in Irthlingborough, came to see him.

Suddenly Herbert became very ill again.

Aug 8 Tuesday

Much worse. Pain in right side, difficulty of breathing – cough painful; very weak and low. Had two Must. Plasters on right side and feet in warm water at bedtime; breathing little easier; restless night.

Aug 9 Wednesday

About the same; two Must. Plasters on back; rose about nine; felt little better. Received a letter from Mr. Feaver. Said he had no doubt if I continued Carbon treatment for six months, I should be alright. Time will show, if I live to prove it.

We see Herbert’s correct scepticism about his treatment. M E Spence came to visit and slowly through August he improved, although with some relapses. His father, who had been in Yarmouth on holiday, came home on September 2nd.

He knows, as he suspected would be the case, that the treatment is not working but still tries, weak as he is, to enjoy life.

Sep 8 Friday

I wrote to Mr. Feaver. No better than when I commenced taking Carbon, if so well. Josh came in the evening; also Uncle Sam and Freddy and Louisa Knight.

Sep 10 Sunday

Feast come. Went to meeting in the morning. Evening all gone to meeting but me. Feel a little better than I did last Sunday. Great many strangers parading the street.

Sep 11 Monday

I walked down to the Feast with Benjamin in the evening. Called in at Mrs. Knight's.

Sep 12 Tuesday

Aunt Fairey came for the day. Leonard, Selina and Jedidah came by the 12.30 train. Had quite a large dinner party – eleven of us. All here but Edwin; he arrived in time for tea. Went up to Uncle Andrew's in the evening; Mr. Abbott from Raunds, J. Patrick and uncle Sam there, besides several others. Had some singing, but made more noise than harmony.

On October 1st:

Cough and breathing very bad; could not get out to chapel at all. Jedidah stayed with me afternoon and evening.

He is now mainly telling what others are doing while he stays at home.

Oct 17 Tuesday

This evening, Mr. Kitchen gave a lecture in the Hall, on coal, coal mines, illustrated by a panorama of twenty coloured views of objects in nature and art. I was very sorry I could not be there; those who were, said it was exceedingly interesting.

He still sometimes manages to get to the chapel but rarely moves from the house. When he tells us on October 31st that 'Margaret and Selina took tea with us, and bade us goodbye' there seems a greater emphasis on the 'bade us goodbye'. It is not a phrase that he uses before this time. He still has retained his sense of humour, as he tells of his friends' and brother's attempts to help him.

Nov 2

Received a letter from Manchester saying they had sent me a rocking chair. And one from Leonard in the afternoon to say he had sent me an easy chair.

Nov 3

Received the one from London.

Nov 4

Received the one from Manchester.

On November 15th Joshua went to Thrapston and became, 'a member of the Odd Fellows Society' in which his father was locally a leading light. We also hear that Mr Meckley and a man started building

a new room adjoining the back of the shop. On November 16th he simply puts J.K. Syn. Which seems to imply that it was J Knight who had the fainting fit although it may be code for something else. A few days later he receives the sad news that so many Victorian households had to endure as urbanisation and increased mobility produced annual epidemics which ran ahead of the scientists and doctors' advances

Nov 20 Monday

Edwin's babe named Leonard James died. Aged nearly six months

'Sweet babe, why should we weep for thee?

From sin and suffering, thou art free'.

On November 22nd he states. 'Went to a situation in Bradford, Yorkshire.' This seems very unlikely that we must wonder if he referring to somebody else in the family; or should it read 'Sent' or 'Went for'?

On November 25th Herbert's father went to *Philadelphus Jeyes* [who invented Jeyes Fluid] in Northampton perhaps to get pharmaceutical supplies for his shop. Mr Spurgin called on Herbert and we discover what medicines he is taking:

Nov 25 Saturday

Father went to Northampton to Philadelphus Jeyes and Co. Mr. Spurgin called; sat down and took a glass of wine; asked me several questions respecting myself and what I was taking.

Told him Oil., Tinct. Quinine, and Chloric ether. Said he did not know that I could take anything better.

Nevertheless Herbert knows that the drugs are not working. He sometimes has a better day but he knows that worse ones are to follow:

Dec 3 Sunday

Evening. I have had a comfortable day – not much cough. Joshua, Benjamin, George Bull and Robert Knight stayed with me this afternoon. I am quite alone this evening excepting Charlie, who is sleeping before the fire, which is blazing brightly, and as I sit writing, I can hear the bells chiming sweetly.

Dec 12 Tuesday

Finished Feaver's Carbon. I have been taking it for nearly 20 weeks, and as I am not any better, I shall now discontinue the use of that, and take Bragg's for a time.

He also puts in a piece to show that all were susceptible to the great killers of the age, Typhoid Fever, Cholera and TB.

Dec 14 Thursday

It is ten years today since Prince Albert died of typhoid fever. And at this time the Prince of Wales is lying in a precarious state suffering from the same disease.

On Christmas day we see the mix of Christianity and spiritualism that gripped many Victorian minds and once again Cousin Samuel held centre stage:

About 3 o'clock this morning the band played a tune called 'Prince of Light' very harmoniously underneath my window; and another ('Sovereignty') a short distance off.

At 10 o'clock am Jabez Abbott and Anne Maria Bull were married; after the ceremony the Band preceded the bridal pair up the street.

Benjamin and Mary Jane came to spend the day with us, and Elizabeth and Eliza Abbott, Herbert Dodson and Eliza Smith to tea with us; whilst taking tea Cousin Samuel came in and entertained us for about an hour by talking of spiritualism, what he had seen, heard and felt at séances. His opinion of spiritualism is that it is the work of evil spirits. In answer to a question of mine as to whether these spirits could influence anyone who did not wish to be influenced by them, he said he would relate a fact of his own experience, which I will give as near as I can in his own words. 'At a certain place where I used to attend the meetings regularly for the purposes of investigation, there was usually a spirit present known to us by the name of Estelle, who made communications through a medium named Miss Hart. So one evening I said to her, 'Why do you always play upon Miss Hart? Why not influence someone else? Influence me'. She replied -'I will next time'. The next week I went to the meeting as usual, having forgotten the circumstance just mentioned. At the time and seating myself in an easy chair, waited patiently for the commencement. I had not been sitting many minutes before I felt a very strange sensation creeping over me, as though sensibility were being withdrawn. I endeavoured to rouse myself by opening and shutting my eyes, clenching my fists and sticking my nails into the palms of my hands. A person sitting near noticed me and asked if I felt ill. I replied that I felt very queer, at the same time rising from my chair and walking a few steps to and fro in the room. I then began to feel better and directly after Miss Hart began to communicate, then the thought of Estelle flashed into my mind, so drawing near, I said, 'I thought you were going to influence me tonight'. She said, 'Well, I did try. But you resisted me, and one cannot make a clock go with a watch spring'.

On December 31st this year there are no parties or celebrations. His brother, Edwin stayed with him in the afternoon and his sister, Mary Jane in the evening. He then writes 'End of 1871'.

He starts the New Year with a text as motto for the year:

'Fear not' for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour. I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

On January he has obviously been looking through his diary and sees his failings:

Jan 20 Saturday

I have often thought I should like to be able to write something in my diary every day, but I appear to be so deficient of the faculty of language, that I cannot write of every day

occurrences in an interesting manner: nevertheless from this time I will try to write something, though it be but a sentence, a thought or a text of scripture.

This he tries to do, so 1872 has many entries, but most are texts rather than personal observations or thoughts. On January 23rd, however he does reveal himself and the thoughts that he has kept away from the diary for so long.

Dum spiro, spero. This is my Motto – ‘While I breathe, I hope’. I have been asked once or twice by friends whether I think I shall recover my health and strength. Now this is a question I scarcely like to ask myself, much less being asked by others, for if I reply, ‘I hope so’ – I fancy they think to themselves, if they do not speak out, just these words – Ah poor fellow that is one of the symptoms of his disease, to flatter the poor victim to the last: although I am aware of all this, still I would wish to hope against hope, for ‘tis this that buoys the spirits up. ‘Though hope for me had smiled but to deceive; and disappointment still pursues her blandishments’.

Evening. Mr Eady has just been in to see me and asked me the question I have been alluding to.

In his heart he knows that it is just a matter of time and, with good reason, he allows himself a little self-pity:

Jan 26

Restless through the night, face much swollen this morning [he was suffering with a gumboil]. Joshua came to bid us goodbye. Going to Bristol in the morning: How I envy him, and then it makes me feel wretched. Oh that I were blessed with health and strength as my brothers are.

‘Why am I so weak and weary?

Why to me is life so dreary?

While to others, all is fair’

Jan 27

Face a little better. Received Edmund’s indenture to be signed, binding him for 4½ years from this time, dated Jan 26/72.

Of course, he was not to know that his brother (Samuel Edmund) would not live to complete his apprenticeship and would die on 8th April 1875, also of TB, aged just eighteen.

Herbert is true to his word and most days puts in some texts which look to the next world and his own salvation as a sinner.

Jan 31

‘Sinning and suffering’.

Feb 3

‘Hope on, tired heart, hope on.

On the same day he received 'Dr. Niblett's treatise' which was obviously about a cure for TB for he wrote back to him and, on February 7th, he received, with faint hope a case of medicine. The good doctor sent a note with the medicine:

. . . 'I have given your case my earnest consideration, and am satisfied that this balsam will be of great benefit to you, and if persevered with will I hope soon restore you to health and strength'. I hope so too. May the Divine blessing accompany it.

We know something of what the treatise that was first sent to Herbert by Dr. Niblett because of an editorial in the *British Medical Journal* on April 6 1878, following a spate of letters about the 'cure'. It quotes from the pamphlet:

Treatment of Consumption. – In recommending the following treatment, I trust that I am actuated by an earnest desire to benefit those who cases it may serve to illustrate. My aim is to lessen human suffering and to prolong human life.

'Blessed art of healing, once again divine.'

*The specific medicine which I have so successfully prepared for every form and variety of consumption, and all diseases of the lungs and air-passages, is called **The Restorative Balsam**. There is not a single symptom this balsam will not take hold of and eradicate. Its action is immediate; it will also remove chronic bronchitis, asthma, sharp pains in the chest, difficult expectoration, sore throats, coughs and colds, also general debility. It will nourish and strengthen the vital organs by purifying the blood and removing all nervousness; it will greatly assist the digestive organs and increase the appetite; it will itself nourish patients for weeks at a time.*

The article finishes:

The profession will be interested to know whether the licensing bodies in question are disposed to allow this to pass unnoticed much longer.

We tend to laugh at the Victorian quack and patent medicines but the sellers were often preying on the weak and vulnerable and slowly the medical profession was beginning to demand the prosecution of the charlatans.

Before this he wrote on Tuesday February 6th:

Eliza Abbott's A of B.D. [Anniversary of Birth Day] 21. Mother went to her party. Mary Jane could not go as her little boy was poorly. I remember going 19 years ago to her birthday party, the day after Uncle Andrew's wedding

On many days there is just a short text but he still sometimes tells of his problems amid the trivia of everyday life:

Feb 13

'Bright days are often followed by dark ones'. Not quite so well; cough very bad. Headache and weariness. Father paid the Magazine bill.

He does manage to write a long piece on a relative's death:

Feb 18 Sunday

Uncle Eneas died suddenly. We learned from letters we received afterwards that Uncle S. Bull and his wife were with Uncle E. at his house, on Sunday evening from seven to quarter to nine. They then left him apparently well in health and cheerful in mind. He wished them to stay until his boys got home, but they wanted to get home to their family. When Uncle E's two boys went home between nine to ten, they found their father lying against the door unconscious. They immediately ran off to Uncle Edmund's and he and Leonard went back with them. They at once procured a doctor and he pronounced life quite extinct.

Uncle Eneas (Enos in Census) Bull was Kezia's brother and the only one in the family who seems to have followed the parent's trade of paper-making. He is at Ringstead Mill in 1841; a porter in 1851, lodging with his brother Samuel Bull in Southwark (who is a Police Constable like Herbert's brother, Edwin, a little later): he married Sarah Ann Petty in 1854 and is a packer in a paper works in 1861 and living at 5 North Street, Spitalfields with his wife and three children.

Herbert struggles through March and even ventures out briefly:

Mar 4

A beautiful day, mild and bright; I ventured out, after being a prisoner in the house for over three months; walked to the top of the garden; the sun was shining, trees budding, birds singing and violets coming into bloom, but I felt too weak to enjoy the pleasant prospect.

March 5

*'The darkest hour precedes the dawn
And the longest night must end in morn'.*

March 6 Wednesday

Wrote to Dr. Niblett for another case of medicine although I cannot say that it does me any good.

Mar 7

Went up the garden again, but did not feel any better for it; very weary after it; cough troublesome and head ached. Edwin came in evening.

His cousin Samuel, who is about to depart for Nebraska and Vancouver, comes to see them and attend the wedding of J Phillips and E Roberts'. And as usual, 'we enjoyed his company very much'. His father is also ill and on Sunday he 'stayed with me all day, suffering together'. On the previous day when Mr Spurgeon came to see his father he had asked to go 'on the club' which seems to show that Herbert Joseph's finances were not good.

His friends and relations still came to see him. First Jedidah and then Elizabeth Spence come down from Manchester to visit. Herbert is in increasing pain and his cough, throws him, 'into an

indescribable agony of suffocation. On April 11 Mrs Spence took, in a telling phrase, 'a last farewell' of him. He does tell of the death of Mr Williamson, father of Jane who becomes Cousin Samuel's third wife, at the great age of 93. On Sunday April 21st he writes:

*I got down into the parlour after tea, after staying upstairs for ten days. Mr. J. Green and Uncle Noah came in to see me and at my request they with Father and Edward sang two or three hymns; whilst they were singing I thought 'if with our own discordant voices we are able to make such harmony here on earth',
'What must it be like to be there
Where angels strike to angel strains
The song of heavenly love'.*

Edwin carried me upstairs in his arms.

Through May he receives visitors and writes texts into his diary.

May 10

*'The path of sorrow and that path alone
leads to the land where sorrow is unknown'.*

May 11

*'A home in heaven, as the sufferer lies
On his bed of pain and uplifts his eyes
To that bright world, what a joy is given
By the blessed thought of a home in heaven'.*

On May 15th he records:

Services were held at Staughton for the ordination of Mr. C. Warren. Several friends went from Ringstead.

By a strange twist, on the death of Charles Warren, his second wife, Ada, became Herbert's brother, Joshua's second wife.

On May 27th he writes one of his last longer pieces:

May 27 Monday

Father brought Mr. Farrer home with him to see me, and I enjoyed his company for nearly two hours. We sang with Father's assistance.

*'When I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies
I'll bid farewell to every fear
And wipe my weeping eyes'.*

And I think we all felt what we sang; then Mr. F. read and prayed, and they sang again. Mr. F. saying he could continue 'till midnight his soul was so full of the love of God and joy unspeakable, that he could say with the psalmist 'Bless the Lord, Oh my soul and all that is within me, bless his holy name'.

On June 6th he writes his last daily entry:

Anniversary services held. Mr. Anderson of Deptford preached two sermons. Very wet day. Edwin came and went home same evening. I felt very sad and dejected; breathing difficult all day.

'My flesh and my heart faileth' but O God, do thou be the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. In Thee, O Lord do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. Forsake me not O Lord, O my God be not far from me.

There is just one last entry which may have been written earlier and then, later, signed:

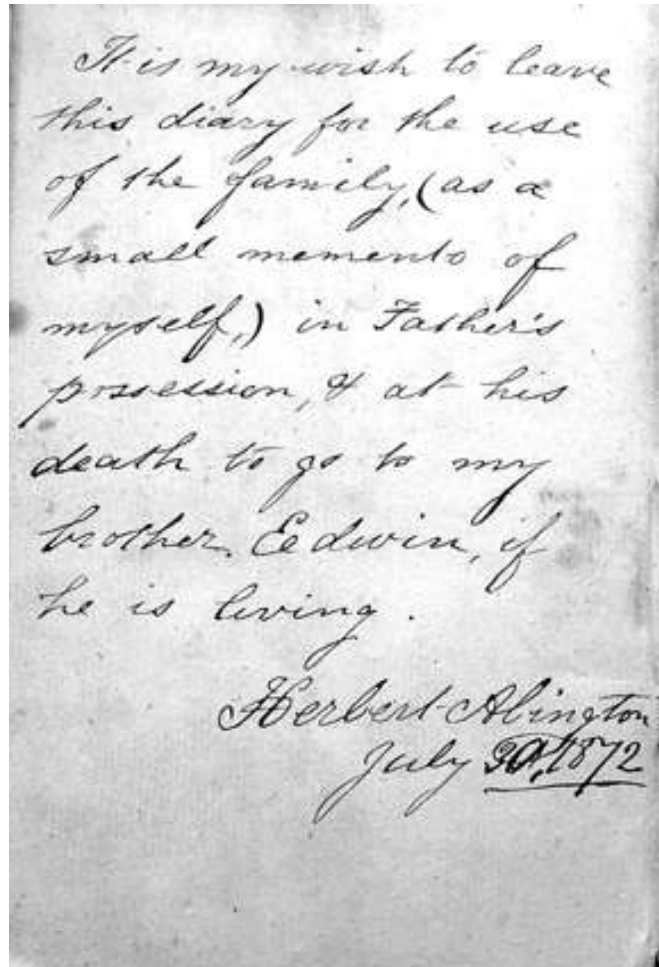
Here endeth this miscellaneous collection of facts and scraps, and although it may not interest anyone else to read it, yet it hath well repaid me for the trouble of writing, by the pleasure it hath afforded at many times in looking over

It is my wish to leave this diary for the use of the family (as a small memento of myself) in Father's possession, and at his death to pass to my brother Edwin if he is living.

*Herbert Abington
July 30th 1872*

Herbert died, less than one week later, on 3rd August 1872. He was buried in the small Particular Baptist churchyard where the stone, now moved to the edge of the garden, also records the deaths of his parents and his brother Samuel Edmund, who was soon to follow him. We see a family which was close-knit, with many friends. I have omitted much of the coming and going of family and friends but, even so, we can see that there is a constant interaction between brothers and sisters, cousins, uncle and aunts and we see relatives being taken into family businesses. It was also a family bound and sustained by the Baptist faith. We soon realise that this faith is not a narrow one for Herbert and he attends churches and chapels of various denominations and faces up to the challenges to his faith that the new scientific discoveries were producing. It is very sad to see a young man interested in the great issues of the day and in the future, a future which he knows he will not share.

He rarely gives the details of life and people in his diary that we would now want, partly because he was writing it for his family. There is much that is left undescribed, unmentioned and unsaid but for that reason the times when we do get a glimpse of Herbert, the young man, are the more affecting.

A photograph of a handwritten note on aged paper. The text is written in cursive and reads: "It is my wish to leave this diary for the use of the family, (as a small memento of myself,) in Father's possession, & at his death to go to my brother Edwin, if he is living." Below the main text, it is signed "Herbert Abington" and dated "July 30, 1872".

It is my wish to leave
this diary for the use
of the family, (as a
small memento of
myself,) in Father's
possession, & at his
death to go to my
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Herbert Abington
July 30, 1872

References.

I would like to give my grateful thanks to John and Ian Abington and Muriel Pack for allowing me to use the transcription of Herbert's Diary and the three illustrations from it. My special thanks to John (who did the transcription), for sending me the copies of the pages from the diary and for carefully correcting my text: also for the detailed booklet of the Abington family history researched and written by Ian and John. Any errors remaining are, of course, my responsibility.

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