

A man with a grey beard and mustache, wearing a black bowler hat, a dark suit, a vest, and a tie, stands in front of a flower shop. He has a white flower pinned to his lapel. The shop has a large sign that reads 'HENRY RICHARD WEAVER' and 'A LIFE IN FLOWERS'. There are many flowers in the shop windows and on the ground.

HENRY RICHARD WEAVER

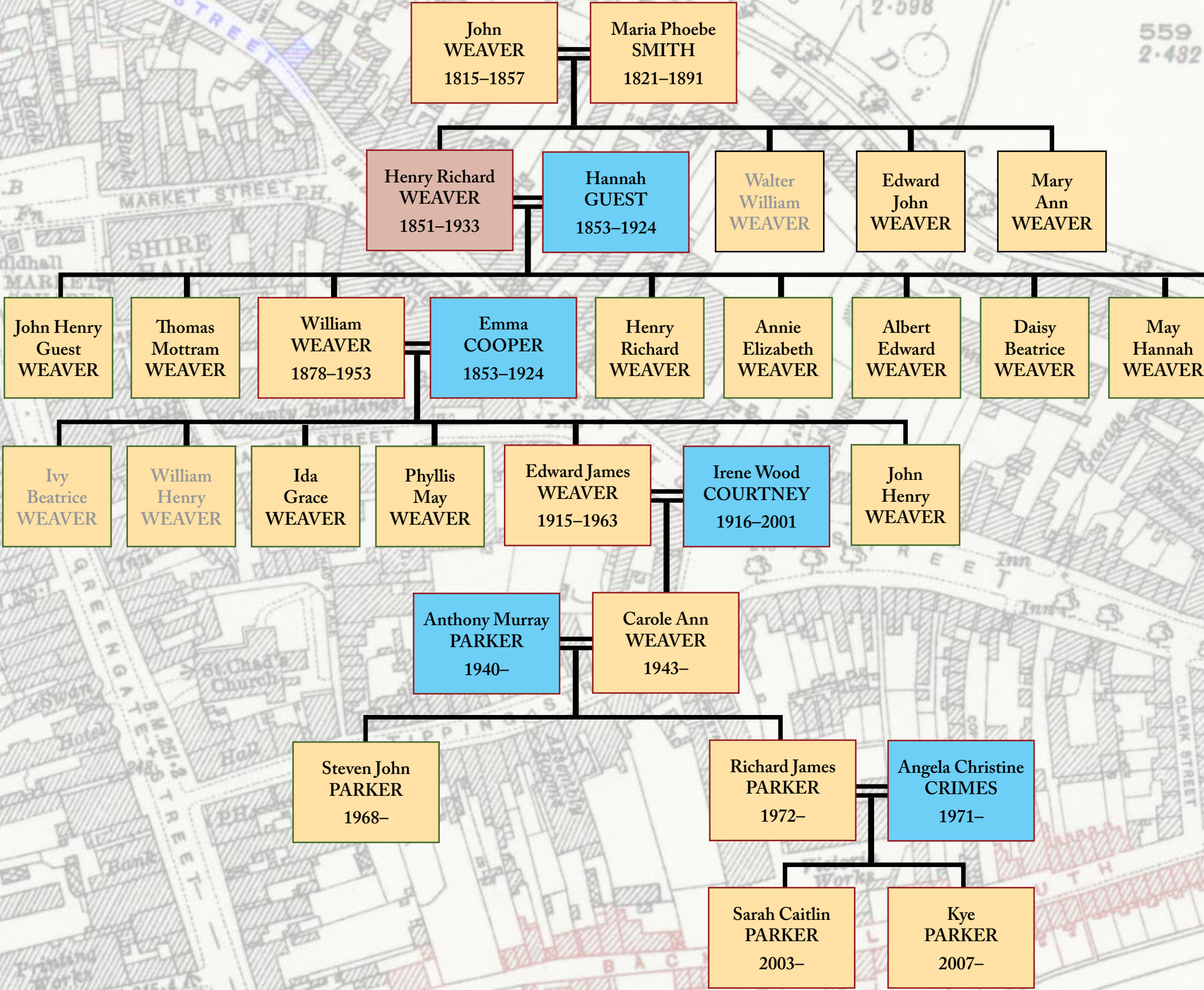
A LIFE IN FLOWERS

1851–1933

Researched by Steve Parker, using ancestry.co.uk
and the British Newspaper Archive with thanks to
Liz McAulay and Marilyn Arnett (both nee Weaver).

Narrative developed using ClaudeAI,
and images generated via Nano Banana, 2025.

FAMILY TREE AND MAP





Victor
WEAVER

Violet
Marie
WEAVER

MACCLESFIELD

PUDDINGTON

NEWCASTLE-
UNDER-LYME

STAFFORD

LITTLE
HAYWOOD

WOLVERHAMPTON

BIRMINGHAM

COVENTRY

LONDON

ERITH

BATH &
BATHEASTON

HIGHCLERE

PORTSMOUTH

HENRY'S JOURNEY

WEAVER CHILDREN
RESIDENCES

HENRY RICHARD WEAVER, 1851-1933



Covent Garden market, about 1850

COVENT GARDEN, 1851

On 22nd April 1851, **Maria Phoebe Weaver** was admitted to Queen Charlotte's Lying-In Hospital on Homer Place in Marylebone, heavy with twin boys. She'd travelled there by cab, from the rooms she shared with her husband John above his shoemaker's shop at 48 King Street, right in the heart of Covent Garden. The shop front faced the grand columned portico of the Royal Opera House across the piazza, and the market had already been alive with noise – traders wheeling barrows of spring cabbages and early potatoes across the cobbles, their shouts echoing off the neo-classical pillars that surrounded the market space. The air had smelled of earth and crushed greenery, of horses and coal smoke, and somewhere a street vendor was calling out the price of watercress.

Now a mile north of home, Maria joined dozens of other pregnant women, mostly working-class and respectably married, in the wards of this charitable lying-in hospital.

Founded in 1739 specifically to assist married women through childbirth, Queen Charlotte's was revolutionary for its time. In an age when home births claimed mothers and babies in horrifying numbers, the hospital offered women access to experienced midwives, physicians experimenting with antiseptic practices (though these wouldn't become standard for another two decades), and – critically for a woman carrying twins – immediate medical intervention if complications arose.

Twin births in 1851 carried double the risk even in hospital. There was no ultrasound to warn of complications, no antibiotics if infection set in, no blood transfusions if haemorrhage occurred. The hospital's physicians and midwives would have known, examining Maria, that she carried two babies. Through the long hours of labour, Maria would have been attended by the hospital's staff while John remained at King Street, working at his bench among the familiar

smells of leather and wax thread and boot blacking, waiting for word.

John Weaver was thirty-five years old, born and bred in Walcot, Bath, carrying on the shoemaking trade his own father had established before his death in 1839. He'd brought that expertise to London, to this corner of the theatrical district where opera-goers and market traders alike needed sturdy, well-made boots. Maria had been Maria Smith when John met her in Walcot. She was a local girl, daughter to a shoemaker's family, and she'd already buried one husband: Sidney Smith had died in 1846 aged just twenty-four, leaving her a young widow. It was Sidney who'd first brought her to London, seeking opportunity in the great sprawling capital. When John Weaver came courting – a fellow Walcot lad, carrying on his family trade – the marriage made sense on every level: companionship, shared history, mutual understanding of the shoemaking world. They'd married less than two years

earlier at St Martin-in-the-Fields, just two blocks away from King Street, and now Maria was bringing not one child but two into their modest rooms above the shop.

Both boys survived the birth. Maria would have held them in the hospital ward – **Henry Richard** and **Walter William** – two tiny, squalling infants who'd shared her womb for nine months. For a few days she remained at Queen Charlotte's, recovering her strength, learning to nurse both babies, before returning home to King Street with the twins in her arms. The rooms above the shop became a cacophony of twin cries, twin feedings, Maria moving between two cradles while the sounds of the market filtered up through the floorboards. Maria's eight year old child from her first marriage, George Smith, was living elsewhere when his half-brothers were born, perhaps with Maria's family in Bath, freeing up space in the cramped rooms for the new infants.

For three months, both boys thrived. One imagines Maria's exhaustion – nursing two babies, washing endless nappies, snatching sleep between feeding. John worked downstairs, the steady rhythm of his hammer on leather punctuated by infant cries from above. Covent Garden shifted into summer: the market busy with berries and lettuces, the Opera House preparing for the season, street hawkers selling strawberries and cherries.

Then, on 24th July 1851, Walter William began convulsing.

The death certificate records it starkly: "Convulsions – no medical attendant." He was three months old. Exactly what happened that July afternoon will never be fully known, but convulsions in infants suggested either epileptic seizures or, more likely given the sudden onset, the violent muscle contractions that accompanied meningitis or severe infection. Perhaps Walter had seemed fretful that morning, perhaps he'd been feeding poorly, or perhaps he'd seemed entirely well until the seizures began. Maria would have watched helplessly as her tiny son's body went rigid, his back arching, his limbs jerking.

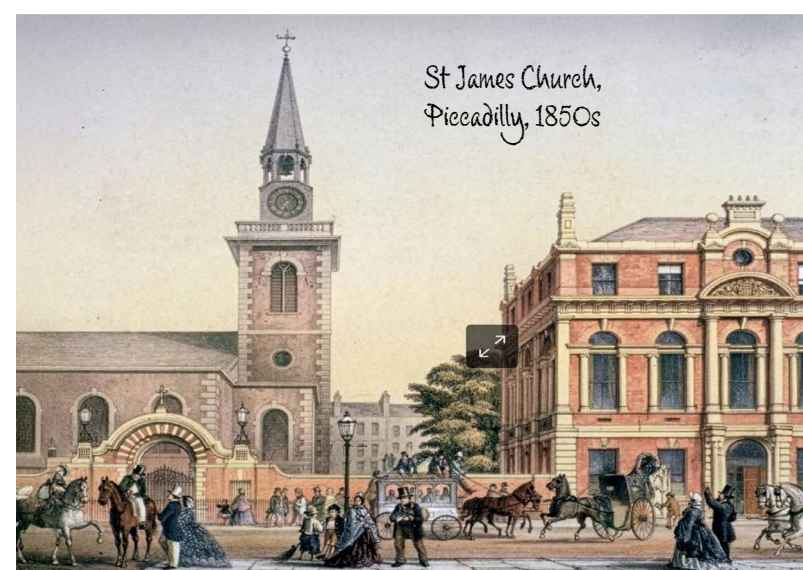
She would have held him, tried to comfort him, called for John from the shop below. But there was no time to fetch a physician, no time to do anything but watch as the convulsions wracked his small body. Within hours – perhaps even minutes – he was dead.

"No medical attendant" meant exactly that: Walter died so quickly that no doctor came, or could be afforded, or was thought necessary until it was too late. Maria herself served as informant for the death certificate, which meant she stood before the registrar two days later and described her son's death, gave the cause, confirmed the details. One imagines her exhaustion deepened by grief, still nursing Henry Richard, still managing the household, now preparing to bury Walter.

Walter was buried at St James Church, Piccadilly, in Westminster, beneath the shadow of Sir Christopher Wren's elegant spire. A small coffin, a small grave, Maria and John standing at the graveside in summer heat while somewhere nearby Henry Richard slept in his cradle. The cemetery at St James's was crowded with London's dead, particularly the infant dead. Walter's grave joined thousands of others marking children who'd lived weeks, months, sometimes only days.

In August, John and Maria brought their surviving son – Henry Richard – to the same church for baptism. St James's had been designed and built by Sir Christopher Wren himself in 1684, its interior celebrated for its elegant simplicity, its carved wooden reredos and font crafted by Grinling Gibbons. Sir Joseph Banks had been baptised here in 1743, William Blake in 1757. Now, on a summer morning in 1851, a London shoemaker and his wife stood before that same font while the rector spoke the ancient words over their remaining son. Maria must have held him tightly, this sole survivor, knowing how easily he too could slip away. She'd already buried one husband and one infant son. Death was no stranger.

London in 1851 was a city of extraordinary contrasts. While the Great Exhibition opened in Hyde Park that very



spring – its Crystal Palace showcasing the technological marvels of the age – the streets of Covent Garden remained much as they had been for decades. The market had been rebuilt in 1830 with its famous pillared design, but the surrounding lanes and alleys were still medieval in their narrowness, their lack of sanitation, their danger. Chamber pots emptied from upper windows, night soil carts rumbled through before dawn, the Thames itself was an open sewer. The Opera House drew the wealthy to Covent Garden's northern edge, but the area had been notorious for brothels throughout the 1700s, and though an 1813 Act of Parliament had officially cleaned these up, the streets still harboured gin shops and rough lodging houses. This was where Henry Richard Weaver drew his first breaths: in the shadow of high culture and desperate poverty, his father's craft sustaining the family, his mother's vigilance keeping him alive.



An impression of Panton Street, 1852

LONDON'S CHOLERA EPIDEMIC, 1852–1854

By 1852, the Weavers had moved just a few streets south to Panton Street, Westminster. John Strype had described Panton Street back in 1720 as “a good open street, inhabited by tradesmen,” and this remained largely true. Its eastern end opened into Leicester Square; Piccadilly Circus lay two blocks northwest, Trafalgar Square three blocks southeast. It was a respectable enough address for a skilled craftsman, and John continued his trade making and mending boots and shoes.

In December 1852, Maria gave birth to another son at Queen Charlotte’s Hospital: Edward John Weaver. In January 1853, he too was baptised at St James Church, Piccadilly. Now Maria had three-year-old Henry and infant Edward to care for, while George Smith – her son from her first marriage – was back home in Bath, making his own way in the world.

Then, in late August 1854, London experienced one of the most devastating cholera outbreaks in its history. It began in Soho, centred around a public water pump on Broad Street, less than half a mile from where the Weavers lived. Within the first three days, 127 people died. Within two weeks, over 500 had perished. The disease struck with terrifying speed: violent diarrhoea and vomiting, muscle cramps, dehydration so severe that victims’ skin turned blue-grey. People went to bed healthy and were dead by morning. Bodies were carried from houses by the cartload.

Dr John Snow, a physician living nearby, began investigating even as the epidemic raged. He walked the streets, marking deaths on a map, interviewing survivors, and gradually concluded that the disease clustered around that single water pump on Broad Street. On 8th September, he

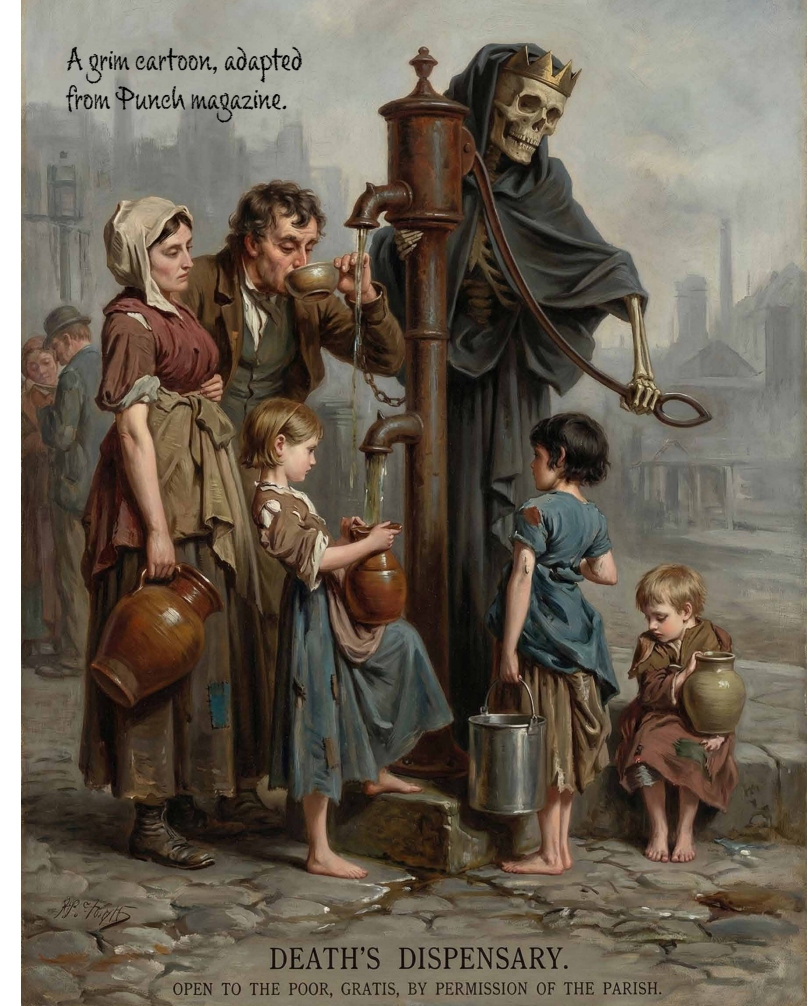
convinced local authorities to remove the pump handle, and the epidemic began to subside. It would take years for his theory – that cholera spread through contaminated water rather than “miasma” in the air – to be fully accepted, but his investigation was unfolding in real time as the Weavers contemplated their future in London.

Many of the infected were treated at Middlesex Hospital by Florence Nightingale and her team of nurses, fresh from their work in the Crimean War (where cholera had been rampant). The hospital was overwhelmed. Bodies piled up in the streets awaiting collection. Those who could flee, did. Trade collapsed as customers avoided the infected districts. For John Weaver, working in a shop dependent on foot traffic, watching the death toll without knowing the source, the decision must have crystallised: London was killing people, and he had a young family to protect.



There may have been another factor too. Tuberculosis – phthisis, as it was then called – was already taking hold in John’s lungs. The disease progressed slowly, its early symptoms easy to ignore: a persistent cough, some weight loss, fatigue that could be attributed to long hours at the workbench. But John would have seen consumption’s end stage in others – the bloody sputum, the wasting away, the fever that gave the disease its other name, “white plague.” He was thirty-eight years old. If he was going to die young, perhaps it was better to die in Somerset among family rather than in rented rooms above a London shop.

So in late 1854, John and Maria Weaver packed up their household and returned to the West Country. Henry was three years old, Edward barely one. They left behind the Opera House and the market porters, the coal smoke and the crowded streets, and travelled west to the River Avon valley and the familiar stone buildings of Bath. But they didn’t return to Walcot where both John and Maria had grown up. Instead, they settled three miles upstream in Batheaston, moving into Bathway House at 144 London Road West with John’s widowed uncle William Weaver.



Bathway House on London Road West, looking west towards Bath



BATHEASTON: HOME AND HEARTBREAK, 1855–1857

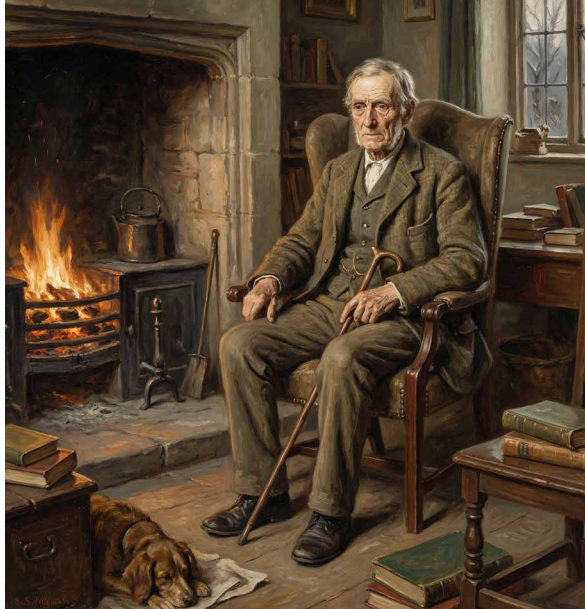
The living arrangement in Batheaston was both practical and precarious. William Weaver was seventy-seven years old, a gentleman of independent means, a retired farmer and landowner whose wife Rose had died in 1848. He had no children of his own, but Bathway House and its grounds were substantial enough to require housekeeping. The house still stands today: a handsome two-storeyed stone building with three chimneys, multiple outbuildings, and land that slopes down from the high street toward the River Avon's floodplain. For William, taking in his nephew John and family solved the problem of household management in his old age. For John and Maria, it provided immediate housing and support while John's health steadily declined.

John was able to continue his shoemaking trade from Batheaston. The village sat on the north bank of the Avon, 3.2 kilometres east of Bath city, overlooked by Solsbury Hill with its ancient Iron Age fort. Bathampton lay across the river, connected by a toll bridge, and Bathford bordered to the east. It was a community that still relied on craftsmen like John Weaver – the village needed boots repaired, horses needed shoeing, and a skilled leather worker could make a living. But the shadow of consumption was lengthening.

In October 1855, Maria gave birth to another child – a daughter this time, named Mary Ann. The baby arrived in Bathway House, probably attended by a local midwife, with Maria's family nearby to help. By August 1856, when Mary Ann was baptised

at St Saviour's Church in Bath, the Weavers had settled into the rhythms of village life. Henry was five years old now, Edward three, and baby Mary Ann completing the family. The baptism record confirms they were still living at Bathway House as tenants of John's uncle, now seventy-nine years old and increasingly dependent on Maria to manage the household.

For Maria, life at Bathway House must have been both a relief and a confinement. After the cholera-haunted streets of London, the Avon valley offered clean water, fresh air, and the safety of family. But she was no longer mistress of her own home. She was the poor relation, the widowed niece-in-law keeping house for an elderly bachelor, raising three small children in rooms that weren't



hers. Uncle William was a gentleman of means – he could afford to be generous, but generosity could also be withdrawn. Maria was dependent in a way that would have chafed, especially for a woman who'd already survived one husband's death and started over once before.

John continued his shoemaking – either on Batheaston High Street or in Bath, where his father had plied his trade – but the work must have grown harder. Tuberculosis is relentless in its progress. The cough deepened, became chronic. There were night sweats, fever, blood in the handkerchief. Weight dropped away. John would have struggled to maintain the hand strength needed for his craft – pulling waxed thread through leather, hammering nails, cutting and shaping. Perhaps he took on simpler repairs, work he could manage while seated. Perhaps younger, stronger craftsmen in Batheaston began taking his customers. Certainly Maria would have known, watching him deteriorate through 1856 and into 1857, that widowhood was coming for her again.

In September 1857, John Weaver died of phthisis – pulmonary tuberculosis – aged just forty-two. He was buried in St John the Baptist churchyard in Batheaston, in the shadow of the church's Norman tower, among other villagers claimed by consumption. For Maria, at thirty-six years old, it was her second husband buried before his time. For six-year-old Henry, four-year-



old Edward, and two-year-old Mary Ann, their father became a memory, then a story, then a name on a gravestone they might have visited on Sundays after church.

The family remained at Bathway House. Where else could they go? Maria had three young children and no income beyond what Uncle William provided in exchange for housekeeping. She was a skilled dressmaker –

that trade would resurface later – but taking in sewing while managing a household and three children would barely keep them fed.

William Weaver, now eighty years old, needed Maria as much as she needed his roof over her head. It was an arrangement of mutual dependency, but the power balance tilted heavily toward the man who owned the house and property.



Bathway House on London Road West, looking east towards London



BATHEASTON: THE WEAVER FEUDS, 1858–1869

The 1861 census captures the household four years after John's death. Nine-year-old Henry lived at Bathway House on London Road with his widowed mother Maria (now forty), his siblings Edward (seven) and Mary Ann (six), and great-uncle William (eighty-three). William's occupation is listed as "gentleman" – that designation meant he lived on income from property and investments, not from work. Maria's occupation: "housekeeper." She kept house for him, as she had since they'd arrived from London seven years earlier.

For Henry and his siblings, Bathway House would have been simultaneously spacious and confining. The stone building with its outbuildings and sloping grounds offered room to run, places to explore. The village sat beneath Solsbury Hill's ancient

ramparts; the River Avon wound through the valley behind the house. Henry would have known the river's moods through the seasons – its lazy summer flow, its winter floods that sometimes rose to threaten the lower houses.

London Road was lined with plant nurseries between Bathway House and the outskirts of Bath only 15 minutes distant, and it's possible Henry picked up some work at one. He would have walked to school, helped in the garden, learned the names of plants and flowers. These were formative years for a boy who would build his life around horticulture.

But there were tensions in the household that would eventually explode into public scandal. In 1865, Uncle William Weaver died aged eighty-eight. Maria's brother – Edward James Smith – witnessed the

death, suggesting the family maintained connections across the Bath area. William's considerable estate of almost £1500 – the equivalent of £230,000 in 2020s money – would need settling, and here the complications began.

Charles Weaver, a twenty-nine year old market gardener and relation of John's, lived nearby. Charles at fifteen had been servant and housemate to the recently widowed William Weaver in Bathway House, a position that might have been supplanted when John and Maria moved in with their children. Charles stood to inherit something from Uncle William's estate, or believed he did. But the Weavers remained at Bathway House for at least three more years, suggesting either that William had provided for them in his will, or that the estate's

settlement was delayed, or that they simply stayed on while matters were resolved.

What's clear is that by 1867, the relationship between Maria Weaver and neighbour Charles Weaver had deteriorated into open warfare. In June of that year, Maria – forty-six years old and still living at Bathway House – was summoned before the local Bench over an assault upon Ann Mathews, a servant to Charles Weaver. The details of the assault aren't recorded, but the court proceedings were. The magistrates "carefully considered the evidence, which showed a state of things which certainly did not redound to the credit of either of the parties." That delicate phrasing speaks volumes: both sides had behaved badly, and the Bench wanted the matter dropped. Maria was ordered to pay five pounds – a substantial sum for a widow without independent income – and to "keep the peace for three months."

She did not keep the peace. In February 1868, Maria was back in court, this time as the accuser. She claimed that Charles Weaver had assaulted her, and the incident's details reveal the household tensions. Maria testified that she'd sent her fifteen-year-old son Henry next door to Charles Weaver's

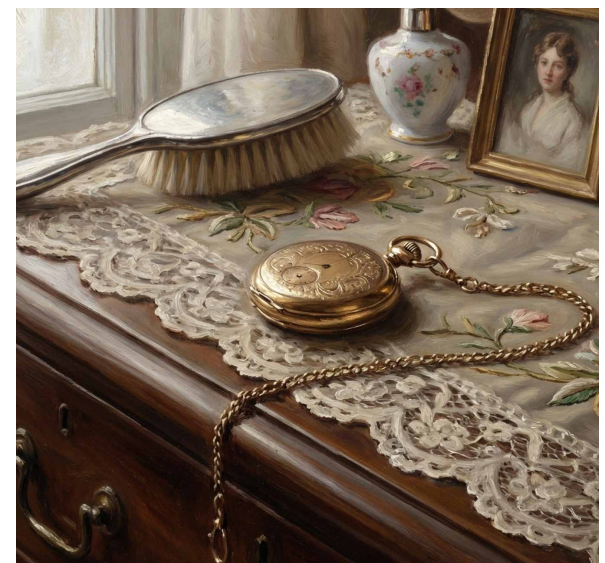
house with a bill for payment. This alone is telling: Henry was being used as his mother's agent in adult business matters, carrying bills to hostile neighbours. An argument erupted with "verbal abuse on both sides." Maria claimed Charles Weaver kicked a fence post in anger, which struck her. A witness stated Maria was "in a highly excited state" and that no blow had actually been struck.

The Bench found there had been "great provocation, and evidently an assault on both sides." Charles Weaver was fined five shillings and costs – a token penalty, really, suggesting the magistrates viewed this as mutual combat rather than one-sided violence. But reading between the lines of these court records, one glimpses a household under enormous strain. Maria was a widow with three children, dependent on the charity of dead relatives, living next door to a man who likely resented her presence or her claims on William's estate. She was proud, angry, desperate to defend her children's interests. Charles Weaver had his own grievances, legitimate or not. And young Henry, at fifteen, was old enough to be drawn into adult conflicts, carrying bills to hostile neighbours, watching his mother haul relatives to court.

The feud didn't end there. In December 1871 – three years later and now living in Bath proper – Maria's conflict with the Weaver clan reached new heights. This time the culprit was Susan (aka Susannah) Weaver, her late husband John's sister. Susan, unmarried at 52, had worked most of her life as a servant or ladies' maid in the houses of wealthy landowners. Now she's returned home to Walcot, much as Maria had.

Susan stole a gold watch and chain from Maria's house in Kingsmead Terrace, but first accompanied Maria to the police station to report it missing – an act of breathtaking audacity. Two days later, when police searched Susan's house, she confessed and handed the watch back. The charges were filed, Susan released on bail. At trial, the judge admitted "there was no felonious intent, but rather that there was spite in the matter." Spite. Years of accumulated resentment playing out in theft and counter-theft, court summonses and grudges nursed across kitchen tables.

For Henry, coming of age in this atmosphere, the lesson must have been clear: family was complicated, dependence bred conflict, and the only real security came from making your own way in the world.







Bath in the 1870s, viewed from Batwick Hill.

GROWTH AND RELOCATION, 1869–1873

By the late 1860s, Henry Weaver had embarked upon the career that would define his life. At some point in his mid-teens, he'd begun an apprenticeship in horticulture. Family tradition holds this was at the nursery of George Cooling, the cultivator who'd developed the renowned Beauty of Bath apple in 1864. George Cooling's nursery in Bailbrook was only 300 yards across the fields from Bathway House, and it's possible that Henry started there at quite a young age. Henry's apprenticeship represented a significant commitment – typically three to seven years of training, starting wages, long hours, and intensive practical education.

A horticultural apprentice in 1870 would have learned the full range of a nurseryman's craft. The work began before dawn in summer: greenhouses needed ventilating as

temperatures rose, plants required watering before the heat of the day. Henry would have learned to manage the greenhouse environment – the coal-fired heating systems, the careful balance of humidity and air flow, the precise temperature requirements for different species. Propagation was an art in itself: starting plants from seed, taking cuttings, grafting fruit trees, layering shrubs. He learned soil preparation and the mysteries of composting – what materials to use, how long to let them rot, how to judge when the resulting soil was rich and friable enough for potting. There were cut flowers to grow for the Bath market – roses, carnations, lilies, whatever was fashionable – and market garden vegetables to cultivate: cabbages and carrots, beans and potatoes, all grown in precise succession to keep produce flowing to market stalls year-round.

Henry also learned the business side: dealing with customers who came to buy bedding plants or rose bushes, calculating prices, managing accounts. Bath in the 1870s remained a fashionable spa town despite its Georgian heyday being past. Wealthy visitors still came for the waters, the Assembly Rooms, the civilised pleasures of a provincial city famed for its creamy gold stone façades.

Bath establishments hosting these visitors maintained gardens that required constant replenishment – flowers for summer bedding, shrubs for year-round structure, fruit trees for the kitchen garden. The nursery trade served both the gentry and the middle classes, and Henry was learning to navigate these class distinctions: deference to wealthy customers, solidarity with fellow working men, the careful dance of service without servility.

Kingsmead Terrace in Walcot, doomed for demolition in the 1960s.



Around 1870, Maria finally left Bathway House. Her children were older now – Henry eighteen, Edward seventeen, Mary Ann fifteen – and she moved them all to Walcot in Bath, the district where she'd grown up, where her mother and siblings still lived. It was a return to familiar ground. Maria took up work as a dressmaker, skilled labour she could do from home. She even took in her eldest son from her first marriage: George Smith, now twenty-four years old and deaf, worked as a cabinet maker. The household in Walcot represented Maria's hard-won independence – not prosperity, but at least autonomy from the Weaver relatives and their feuds.

The April 1871 census captures Henry's household at a moment of transition. He was nineteen years old, living at 8 Kingsmead Terrace in Walcot with his widowed mother Maria (fifty), his half-brother George William Smith (twenty-nine), and his siblings Edward John (seventeen) and Mary

Ann (sixteen). None of the children were yet married – they remained under Maria's roof, all contributing to the household economy.

Henry's occupation was listed as "market gardener" – confirmation that his apprenticeship had moved beyond greenhouse propagation into the commercial growing of vegetables and produce for Bath's markets. Market gardening was gruelling work: cultivating acres of cabbages, carrots, potatoes, and beans in carefully planned succession to keep produce flowing to market throughout the growing season. Henry would have worked outdoors in all weathers, his hands permanently stained with soil, his back aching from hours bent over vegetable beds. But it was skilled labour, building on his nursery training, teaching him the rhythms of commercial horticulture.

Maria supported herself as a dressmaker, working from home with needle and thread, taking in work from Bath's middle classes who needed garments made or altered. It was

respectable labour for a widowed woman, though the pay was poor and the hours long. George William Smith, Maria's son from her first marriage, worked as a cabinet maker despite being deaf. His disability would have made some trades impossible, but woodworking was visual work – he could read plans, measure precisely, join timber with skill, all without needing to hear instructions. That he maintained steady employment as a craftsman speaks to both his determination and his capabilities.

Edward John, now seventeen, had found work as a pattern maker at an iron works – skilled trade at the heart of Bath's industrial economy. Pattern makers created the wooden or metal templates used to form moulds for casting iron components. It required precision, mathematical ability, an understanding of how molten metal behaved, and the capacity to work to engineering specifications. Edward was learning a trade that would eventually take him away from

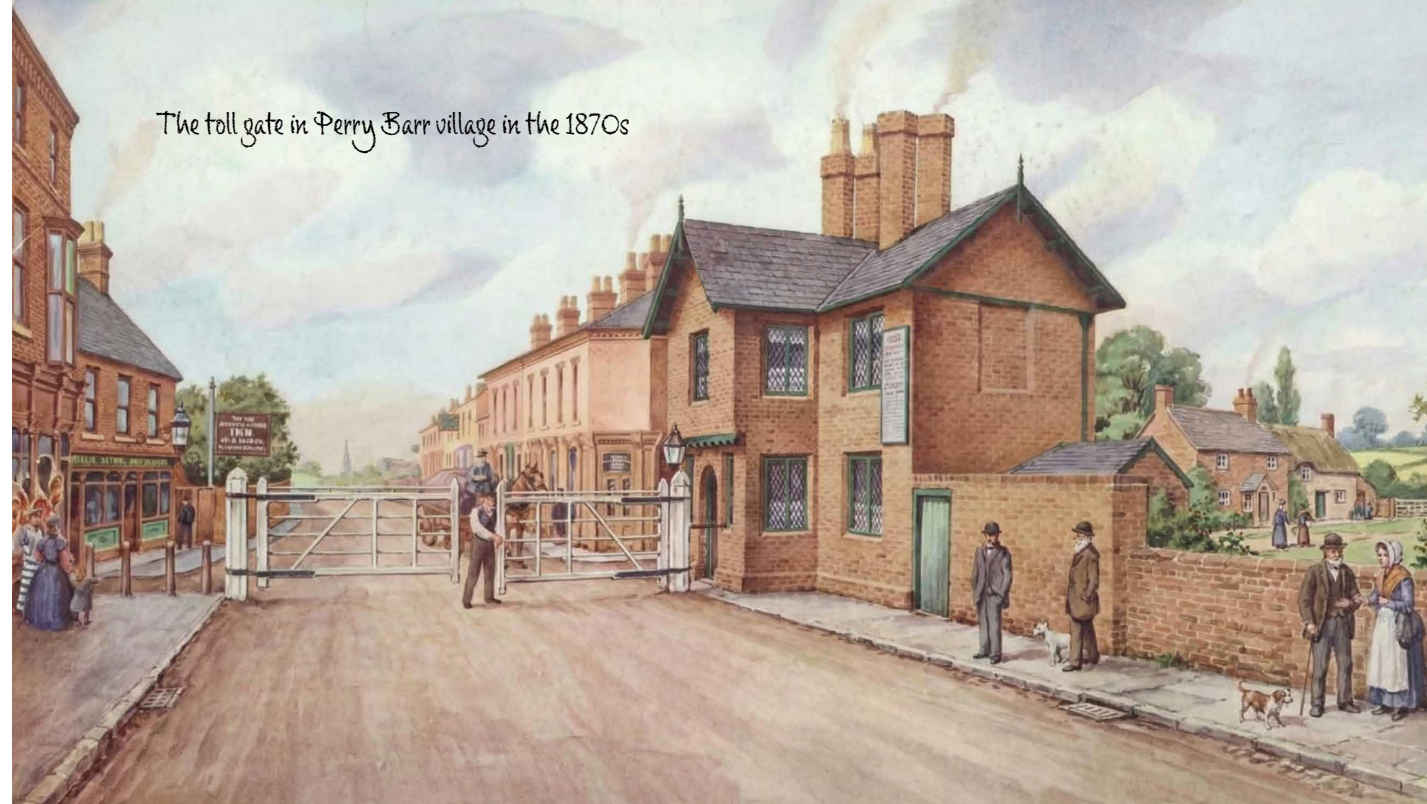
Bath, following Henry's trajectory of leaving home to seek opportunity elsewhere.

Mary Ann, at sixteen, had no occupation listed – she likely helped Maria with dressmaking or kept house while her mother and brothers worked. Young women of her class and age often worked as domestic servants, but Mary Ann remained at home, perhaps because Maria needed her help or perhaps because better opportunities hadn't yet presented themselves.

The household at 8 Kingsmead Terrace represented working-class respectability: a widowed mother supporting herself through skilled needlework, four adult children all either employed or helping at home, nobody on parish relief or charity. But it was also a household where nobody yet had their own family, where all remained in their mother's orbit, where independence was still years away. The feuds with the Weavers notwithstanding, Maria had built a life in Walcot, her childhood neighbourhood, surrounded by siblings and familiar streets. But for Henry at nineteen, Bath was becoming too small, too familiar, too tied to childhood. The wider world beckoned.

Around 1873, when Henry was twenty-one or twenty-two, he made a dramatic move: 102 miles north to Perry Barr, a village on Birmingham's northern outskirts. He continued working as a gardener, suggesting the move was connected to the horticultural trade rather than a complete change of direction. Birmingham had become the fulcrum of England's industrial revolution, and by the 1870s it was the terminus for major railway lines connecting it to London, the North, and all points in between. More relevantly for Henry's trade, Birmingham was a massive market hub for the distribution of fruit, flowers, and vegetables.

By the 1820s, an extensive canal system had been constructed giving greater access to



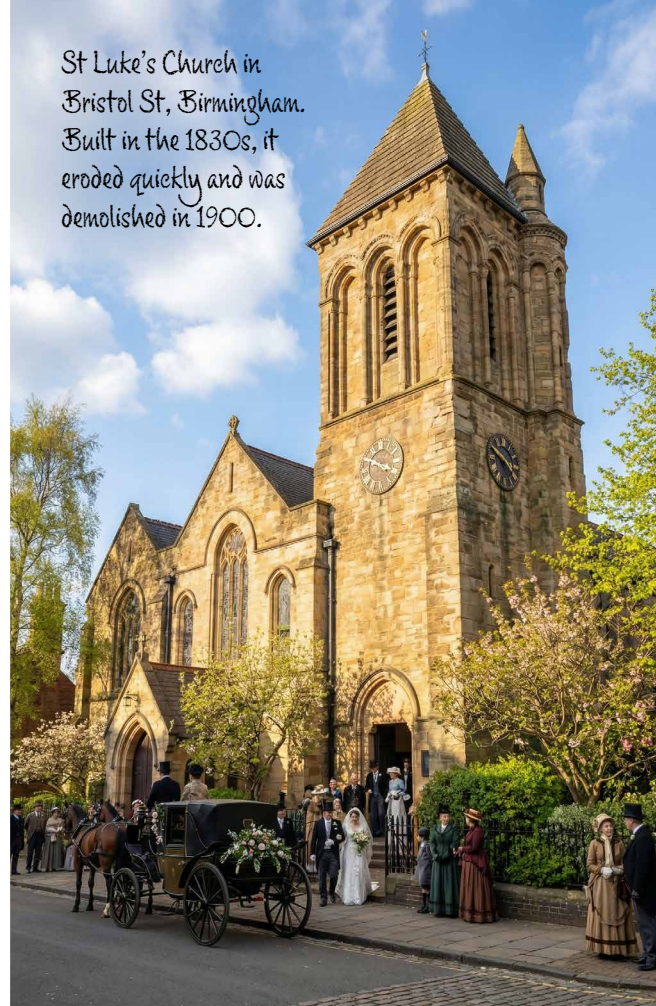
raw materials and manufactured goods. By the 1870s, the city's population had swelled to over half a million, making it England's second-largest population centre. All those people needed feeding, and Birmingham's markets – supplied by rail, canal barge, and cart – created opportunities for anyone in the agricultural trade.

Perhaps Henry had heard of positions available in the market gardens surrounding Birmingham. Perhaps he knew someone from the trade who'd gone north and prospered. Perhaps Bath felt too small, too connected to his mother's feuds with the Weavers, too tied to a childhood he was ready to leave behind.

Perry Barr itself was barely a village in 1873 – its name derived from Old English "pirige" (pear tree) and Celtic "barro" (hill top). Henry lodged on Franchise Street, which today has been entirely swallowed by Birmingham City University's campus, unrecognisable from its 19th-century incarnation as a street of modest workers' housing near the market gardens. This was the world Henry entered: industrial, expanding, anonymous in a way Bath never could be. And here, working among the fruit trees and flower beds of Perry Barr, he met a young woman named **Hannah Guest**.



Birmingham's Bull Ring market hall in the 1870s



St Luke's Church in Bristol St, Birmingham. Built in the 1830s, it eroded quickly and was demolished in 1900.



COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE, 1873–1876

Hannah Guest was twenty-one years old when she married Henry Weaver in April 1874. Her family came from Stafford, a market town in north Staffordshire, though exactly what brought her to Birmingham remains unclear. She'd been working as a nurse and servant in a Stafford asylum – perhaps she found a more attractive posting in the big city, or perhaps she had relatives in Birmingham's expanding suburbs. Whatever the path that led her to Perry Barr, she and Henry crossed paths in the gardens and streets of that industrial fringe, and a courtship began.

The wedding took place at nearby St Luke's Church in Birmingham on a spring day in 1874. Henry's mother Maria Weaver, now fifty-eight, travelled up from Bath to witness the ceremony – the first of her children's weddings she would attend. She would be present for all the others too,

this woman who'd buried two husbands, raised her children alone and fought her way to independence. But there was an urgency to this wedding that the guests might have noticed, even if they maintained polite silence: Hannah was over six months pregnant.

In working-class communities of the 1870s, this was scandalous but not uncommon. Studies suggest that around forty per cent of brides in this period were pregnant at marriage, though such statistics were never officially recorded. What mattered was that the couple *did* marry, that the child would be legitimate, that social forms were observed even if the timing was rushed. One imagines the whispers, the calculations of months, the sidelong glances at Hannah's figure beneath her wedding dress. But Henry stood by her, married her properly in church with his mother as

witness, and they moved into Franchise Street together as man and wife.

In June 1874, just two months after the wedding, Hannah gave birth to their first child in Wandsworth, the district adjacent to Perry Barr. They named him **John Henry Guest Weaver** – a name heavy with family significance. "John" honoured Henry's late father, the shoemaker who'd died of consumption when Henry was six. "Henry" honoured himself. "Guest" was Hannah's family name, a public acknowledgement of her lineage and perhaps a gesture toward her father Thomas Guest, who still lived in Stafford. The baby was baptised in September at St John the Evangelist's Church in Perry Barr, and the young family – Henry twenty-three, Hannah twenty-one, baby John just months old – began their life together in Birmingham's industrial heartland.

But they didn't stay. In October 1875, Henry's half-brother George Smith married Sarah Pullinger at St Luke's in Birmingham – the same church where Henry and Hannah had wed. Again, Maria Weaver served as witness, travelling up from Bath to see her deaf son from her first marriage finally wed at thirty-three. The Smith-Weaver clan was establishing roots in Birmingham, but Henry and Hannah were already looking elsewhere.

By 1876, they'd relocated to Newcastle-under-Lyme, a market town in north Staffordshire, stopping briefly at Walsall in March. The moves suggest restlessness, or perhaps Henry struggling to find a position that offered both steady work and prospects. In April 1876, their second son was born in Newcastle-under-Lyme: **Thomas Mottram Weaver**. "Thomas" honoured either Hannah's father or her older brother, both named Thomas Guest. "Mottram" was Hannah's mother's maiden name, another gesture toward her family. These naming patterns reveal how young couples negotiated family claims and obligations – Henry had honoured his father with his first son's name, now Hannah's family got their due.

But Newcastle-under-Lyme didn't hold them either. Before October 1876, they relocated again, this time to Hannah's hometown of Stafford. It was the fourth move in three years of marriage, a peripatetic existence that speaks to the precariousness of a young gardener trying to establish himself. Each move would have cost money they probably didn't have – carts to transport their possessions, deposits on new lodgings, the loss of established customers and contacts. But Stafford, finally, offered something the others hadn't: family support at a critical moment.

Hannah's widowed father Thomas Guest was seventy-two years old, living at 7 Back Walls South in the house where Hannah had grown up. Her unmarried brother, also named Thomas Guest, lived there too at thirty-one. The household had room for Hannah and Henry and their two infant boys, and more importantly, it offered free accommodation while the young couple got on their feet.

Henry remained a gardener, but in Stafford he began something new: a side trade as a florist. It was a smart business decision. Gardening meant growing things – vegetables, bedding plants, perhaps fruit. Floristry meant selling beauty – cut flowers, bouquets, wreaths, wedding decorations. It required taste, an eye for arrangement, the ability to deal with middle-class and wealthy customers willing to pay premium prices for perishable luxuries. Henry had learned the horticultural craft in Bath, gained experience in Birmingham's markets, and now in Stafford he would build a business that would endure for seventy-two years.

On 8th October 1876, little Tom Weaver was baptised at Stafford St Chad Anglican church, the ceremony confirming the family's arrival in the town that would become their permanent home.





STAFFORD: ROOTS AND GROWTH, 1876–1885

Stafford in the 1870s was an ancient town transformed by modern industry. It had been a centre of power since Saxon times – Lady Æthelflæd of Mercia had commandeered it in 913 to build a fortified burh – and King John had granted it a Royal Charter in 1206, establishing it as a medieval market town trading in cloth and wool. The playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan had represented the town in Parliament from 1780, bringing a touch of theatrical glamour to what was fundamentally a working town. But by Henry and Hannah's arrival, Stafford's economy had diversified.

The Grand Junction Railway, built in 1837, ran from Birmingham to Warrington right through Stafford, with connections to the Liverpool-Manchester line. Other lines followed, making Stafford a major junction that attracted industries beyond its traditional mechanised shoe manufacturing:

foundries, mills, engineering works, all feeding off the rail connections.

For Henry, this industrial growth meant customers with money to spend. The town's expanding middle class – engineers, factory managers, railway officials, solicitors – lived in increasingly substantial houses with gardens that needed tending and drawing rooms that required floral decoration. The wealthy still sent wreaths for funerals, bouquets for weddings, flowers for social calls. A skilled florist who could source quality blooms and arrange them tastefully stood to prosper.

But first there were children to raise. In September 1878, Hannah gave birth to their third son, **William Weaver**, a name identical to and possibly honouring the great-uncle whose Batheaston home Henry had grown up in. Uncle William had been the dominant

male presence from his childhood and early teens – his mentor and possible benefactor.

In March 1879, Hannah's father Thomas Guest died at seventy-five, the head of their Back Walls household gone. In June 1879, another son arrived: **Henry Richard Weaver**, his name identical to his father's, continuing a tradition that would occasionally cause confusion in later records. In November 1880, a daughter finally: **Annie Elizabeth Weaver**, who would later go by Elizabeth or Lizzie and would become central to the family story.

The 1881 census captures the household five years after their arrival in Stafford. They were still living at 7 Back Walls South, now with Hannah's bachelor brother Thomas Guest (thirty-six) as head of household. Henry was twenty-nine and Hannah twenty-eight. Five children crowded the rooms:

The ordnance map at right depicts Stafford in 1921, with most of the streets and buildings as they were in Henry's lifetime. Eastgate Street and Greengate/Gaolgate Streets define the commercial hub, centred around Market Square.

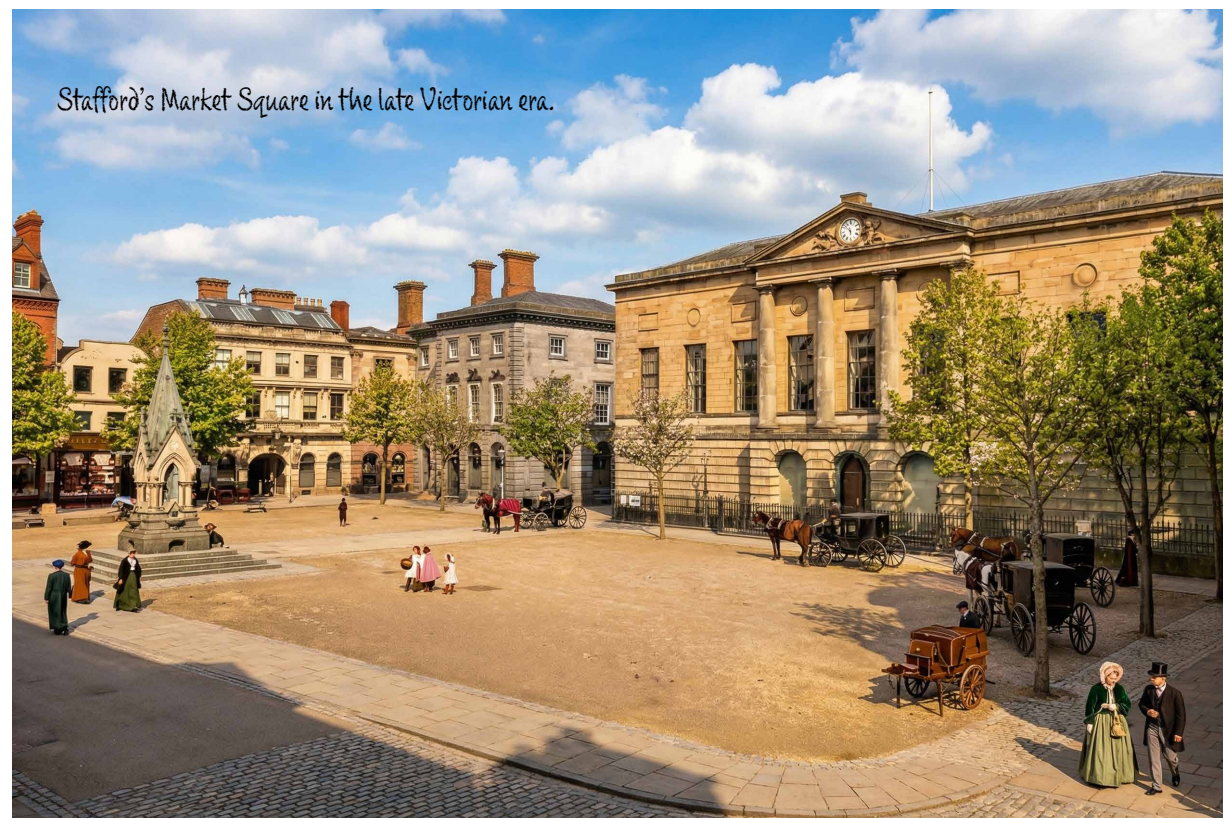
Back Walls South – Henry and Hannah's residence for nine years from 1876–1885 – is shaded red at the bottom. #7 was probably on the north side, close to the Greengate St intersection.

Salter Street, the curving continuation of Eastgate St, is in blue at the top. The locations of Henry's two florist shops are marked. #13 Salter St (1885–1901) is furthest east, while #2 Salter St (1901–1948) is close to the western (Gaolgate St) end.



John (six), Thomas (four), William (three), Henry (two), and baby Annie (five months). The census enumerator recorded Thomas Guest's occupation as "shoemaker" – like Henry's father and grandfather before him – but also as "putter up," which meant he took in lodgers for income.

This detail suggests the household was struggling financially. Back Walls South was not a prosperous address. The area consisted of narrow lanes behind the main shopping streets, gloomy and cramped, filled with lodging houses where poor families and recent immigrants – Irish especially, fleeing famine and seeking work – lived in close quarters. The "walls" in the street name referred to the ancient town walls, and these back streets had grown up in the medieval footprint, their layout unchanged since the Middle Ages. Poor drainage, shared privies, wells that might be contaminated by overflow from cesspits – these were the conditions in which Henry and Hannah raised five small children while Henry built his gardening and floristry business.





One imagines the daily chaos: five children under seven years old, all needing feeding, clothing, supervision. Hannah would have been pregnant or nursing almost continuously from 1874 to 1881, her body never quite recovering between births. Washing would have been done by hand, water heated on the stove, clothes scrubbed on a washboard, nappies boiled and hung to dry. The house would have smelled of boiling laundry, baby sick, coal smoke from the range. John, the eldest, would have been expected to help mind the younger ones while Hannah cooked or mended. There was no running hot water, no gas lighting in such poor accommodation, no privacy.



But Henry was building something. The 1884 Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire lists "Henry Weaver, nurseryman" conducting business from Back Walls South. He was growing plants to sell – perhaps in a rented garden plot outside the cramped back streets, perhaps on a piece of land connected to Thomas Guest's property. Nurserymen grew the bedding plants that Victorian gardeners required in vast quantities: geraniums and lobelias for summer displays, wallflowers and forget-me-nots for spring, chrysanthemums for autumn. They propagated shrubs and roses, grew vegetables for kitchen gardens, forced bulbs for early spring sales. It was skilled, labour-intensive work requiring knowledge of plant cultivation, a good eye for quality, and constant attention.



Then, around 1885, something changed. Henry made the leap from nurseryman to florist, and from Back Walls South to **13 Salter Street** in Stafford's main shopping precinct. This wasn't just a change of address – it was a transformation in business model and social status. Salter Street was the town's commercial heart, where respectable shops lined the pavement and middle-class customers came to buy goods. Number 13 was on the north side, just one door east of

the intersection with Malt Mill Lane.

The building had a shop at street level and rooms above for the family. After years in the cramped poverty of Back Walls, Hannah must have felt she'd ascended to another world. The shop would have had a proper front window for displays – cut flowers arranged in vases, potted plants, perhaps seasonal decorations. Inside, a counter, shelves, space for customers to browse. The rooms above meant the family finally had separation between business and domestic life, space for the growing children, perhaps even separate bedrooms for boys and girls.

But how did Henry afford this leap? Shop rent in Salter Street would have been substantially higher than lodgings in Back Walls. There would have been costs for shop fitting, for building up stock, for hiring help. Several factors might have contributed. Uncle William Weaver's estate, finally settled nearly twenty years after his death, might have yielded some inheritance. Hannah's father Thomas Guest had died in 1879; perhaps his estate provided a small legacy. Or Henry had simply built up enough capital through years of careful saving, investing every spare shilling back into the business until he could afford the move.

In July 1885, just as the family was establishing itself at 13 Salter Street, Hannah gave birth to another daughter: **Daisy Beatrice Weaver**. The name was perfect for a florist's daughter, and one imagines Henry, thirty-four years old and finally achieving business success, taking satisfaction in announcing to customers: "My daughter Daisy." It signalled optimism, whimsy, a sense that the family had emerged from poverty into something better.

A speculative impression of the flower shop at 13 Salter Street, Stafford, in the late 1880s.



SALTER STREET: BLOOMING PROSPERITY, 1885–1891

The years following the move to 13 Salter Street brought both expansion and stability. In May 1887, Hannah gave birth to another daughter: **May Hannah Weaver**, named for the month of her birth and for her mother. The 1901 census would later label May as “feeble-minded from birth,” suggesting an intellectual disability that was almost certainly Down’s Syndrome. In an age before special education or support services, May would spend her entire life cared for at home by her family, never marrying, always dependent.

The 1888 Kelly’s Directory confirms Henry’s transformation: “Henry Weaver, florist, 13 Salter Street.” No longer nurseryman – he was established now in the retail flower trade, serving Stafford’s middle

and upper classes with cut flowers, potted plants, and the elaborate floral arrangements that Victorian society demanded for every social occasion.

On 10th August 1888, an unusually hot day – ninety degrees in the shade – Henry found himself involved in one of those small tragedies that punctuated Victorian life. At a quarter past noon on Newport Road, he discovered fellow gardener John Willett lying on the footpath, insensible and “choked with blood and phlegm.” Henry lifted the fifty-nine-year-old man into a cab and sent him to the infirmary, where Willett died twenty minutes later. The post-mortem determined death by sunstroke, exacerbated by the fact that Willett was “addicted to drink, and would often refuse his food.”





It was the kind of working-class death that newspapers recorded in a paragraph – a man worn down by hard outdoor labour and harder drinking, collapsed in the heat while more fortunate citizens retreated to shaded drawing rooms. Henry, at thirty-seven, would have recognised his own mortality in Willett’s death: both were gardeners, both worked outdoors in all weathers, both were one catastrophic illness away from leaving their families destitute.

In December 1888, Hannah gave birth to their ninth child and sixth son: **Victor Weaver**. The family now consisted of John (fourteen), Thomas (twelve), William (ten), Henry Jr (nine), Lizzie (eight), Albert (five), Daisy (three), May (one), and infant Victor. The older boys were reaching working age; John and Thomas would soon join their father in the floristry business, learning the trade that would employ several of them for years to come.

By August 1890, Henry’s business had grown confident enough to compete publicly. He entered exhibits in the Teddesley Flower Show – “a cross and wreath of choice white flowers, and also some beautiful little button-holes and two bouquets.” He won second

prize in the “Open to All Comers” section, competing against professional florists from across the region. These competitions were important marketing opportunities: winning a prize meant newspaper coverage, enhanced reputation, and the attention of wealthy clients planning weddings or funerals.

The 1891 census captures the household at a moment of transition. Henry (thirty-nine) and Hannah (thirty-eight) lived above the flower shop at 13 Salter Street with their growing brood: John (seventeen), Thomas (fifteen), William (thirteen), Henry Jr (eleven), Annie (nine), Albert (seven), Daisy (five), May (three), and Victor (two). A visitor named Annie Allcock (sixteen) from Stafford was present on census night – she would later become the family’s long-term domestic servant, suggesting she was already helping Hannah manage the chaos of nine children.

Henry described himself as a florist; John and Thomas were listed as assistant florists, though both of them had been working on and off as junior postmen too. The shop was becoming a family enterprise, the older boys learning their father’s craft: how to judge

flower quality, how to create arrangements that pleased middle-class tastes, how to calculate prices and manage accounts. John at seventeen would have been capable of running the shop when Henry was out sourcing flowers or tending the nursery grounds. Thomas at fifteen was old enough to deliver orders, cycling through Stafford’s streets with carefully wrapped bouquets for customers’ drawing rooms.

In December 1891, Henry’s mother Maria Phoebe Weaver died in Walcot, Bath, aged seventy. She’d been living with her widowed brother Edward Smith for the past dozen years, that formidable woman who’d buried two husbands, raised children in London and Somerset, fought the Weavers through the courts, and witnessed all her surviving children’s weddings. Henry travelled south for the funeral, standing in a Bath churchyard one winter day as they lowered his mother into Somerset soil, not far from where his father lay in Batheaston. Maria had fought hard for her children’s survival; Henry’s success in Stafford was vindication of that struggle.





COURT FLORIST, 1892–1901



January 1892 brought tragedy of a different kind – national rather than personal, but one that transformed Henry’s business. Prince Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence and Avondale, grandson of Queen Victoria and second in line to the British throne, died suddenly during an influenza pandemic. He was only twenty-eight years old. The nation went into shocked mourning. A state funeral was quickly arranged, and towns across Britain sent official wreaths as tokens of respect and loyalty.

Stafford Borough commissioned Henry Weaver to create their wreath for the funeral. This was an extraordinary honour, a public acknowledgement that Henry was the town’s pre-eminent florist. Photos and illustrations from 1892 show just how central a role these floral tributes played in the prince’s funeral services and remembrances.

One imagines Henry working late into the night, selecting the finest white blooms

– lilies perhaps, chrysanthemums, roses – arranging them into the formal circular shape that signified eternity, adding the black or white ribbon that indicated mourning, ensuring every element was perfect for this most public of occasions. When the wreath was completed and shipped to Windsor for the funeral, Henry earned a new title that would appear on all his business materials from that day forward: *Court Florist*.

The designation was powerful marketing. In class-conscious Victorian Britain, any connection to royalty – however tenuous – conferred status. Henry could now print “H.R. Weaver, Court Florist” on his shop front, his letterheads, his advertisements. Customers understood that this was the florist the Borough trusted for royal occasions, the man who’d been deemed worthy to represent Stafford at a prince’s funeral. Business, already solid, would have increased.

In late 1892, Hannah gave birth to their tenth and final child: **Violet Marie Weaver**, another daughter with a floral name, and a middle name that probably honoured Henry's recently deceased mother, Maria. But Violet's life would be tragically brief.

On the fourteenth of October 1895 Violet died of meningitis in Stafford, after one day of convulsions. She was only two years old. She was buried in Stafford, and one imagines Henry creating his daughter's funeral flowers himself – the wreaths and crosses that he'd made for hundreds of other families' bereavements now crafted with shaking hands for his own child.

Hannah was forty-one when Violet died. Every family they knew had lost children before – Henry himself was a twin whose brother lived only three months – but that didn't make the grief easier to bear.

By 1893, both John (19) and Thomas Weaver (17) had graduated as town postmen, based in Stafford. It was steady employment with the General Post Office – a uniform, a regular wage, a pension at the end of it. But Thomas would later prove restless, seeking adventure beyond Stafford's boundaries.

In August 1893, Henry exhibited again at the Teddesley Horticultural Society Show, winning a certificate of merit for his "beautiful cross and wreath of white flowers." The descriptions in local newspapers suggest he'd developed a speciality in funeral work – hardly surprising given that death was omnipresent in Victorian life. Every family, wealthy or poor, tried to give their dead a decent send-off, and flowers had become essential to the funeral ritual. Henry's skill at creating these arrangements – crosses, wreaths, elaborate shapes made entirely from fresh blooms – kept the business thriving.

In March 1896, Henry's "charmingly draped flower stand" with "choice blossoms of greenhouse plants" appeared in an

Industrial Exhibition at the Borough Hall. In April, he donated plant displays to surround the pulpit of St Chad's church at Eastertide, and decorated the Borough Hall stage with "choice hothouse and other flowers" for the annual Typographical Association soirée. These public displays – sometimes donated for charitable causes, sometimes paid commissions – kept the Weaver name visible in Stafford's civic life. Henry was becoming not just a tradesman but a pillar of the community, the man called upon when public spaces needed beautifying for important occasions.

The 1900 Kelly's Directory confirms the business was still thriving at 13 Salter Street. But change was coming. In February 1901, an even greater royal death occurred: Queen Victoria herself, who'd reigned for sixty-three years, died aged eighty-one. Again, Henry Weaver supplied the Stafford Borough wreath for the Queen's funeral. For the second time in his career, his work would be part of a state funeral, his flowers lying among thousands of others sent from across the Empire to mark the end of an era.

Shortly after the Queen's funeral, in early 1901, Henry moved the business and the family down Salter Street to number 2, a larger premises with better visibility. The building no longer survives, but it stood on the north side, adjacent to Thorn & Co near the corner of Gaolgate Street. An alley separated the premises, opening up onto a yard at the rear, making the loading and unloading of florist supplies easier.

A greengrocer moved into 13 Salter Street after them, suggesting the old premises remained commercially viable. But Henry at fifty was thinking about the business's next phase, positioning it for maximum visibility as competition from other florists increased.



A speculative impression of the flower shop during the Edwardian era, in its ultimate location at 2 Salter Street, Stafford.



THE EDWARDIAN EXPANSION, 1901–1911

The March 1901 census reveals both continuity and change. Henry (forty-nine) and Hannah (fifty-two) lived above the new flower shop at 2 Salter Street with six of their children still at home: John H.G. Weaver (twenty-six), William (twenty-one), Lizzie (twenty), Albert (eighteen), Daisy (fifteen), May (thirteen), and Victor (eleven).

Henry was still working as gardener and florist – at forty-nine, he remained hands-on in the business, not yet ready to retire to management. John worked as a postman for the GPO, like his brother Thomas. William had taken a position as a grocer's warehouseman, possibly working for Frederick Smith at the old shop at 13 Salter

Street. Albert worked as an assistant in a bicycle shop, catching the wave of the cycling craze that was transforming British leisure.

Annie Elizabeth Weaver, now twenty, had started going by Elizabeth, though she'd be known as Lizzie to friends and family for the rest of her life. She worked as a florist, alongside her father. May, at thirteen, was listed as “feeble-minded from birth” – the census enumerator recording the disability that would keep her dependent on family care throughout her life.

Another Annie Weaver (twenty-three) from Stafford appears in the household as a general domestic servant. This seems to be an error – Annie Allcock had been living with





them in 1891 and would be there again in 1911 as their domestic servant, suggesting the census taker mistook her surname or misheard Hannah's explanation.

Thomas Weaver (twenty-five), still unmarried, was working as a town postman for the GPO in Birmingham, though he's elusive in the census records – perhaps working night shifts or away from his usual lodgings on census night. Henry Weaver Jr (twenty-one) was lodging as a single electrician at 80 Earl Street in Marylebone, London, with James and Sarah Lewis. He'd trained in the newest, most exciting trade of the age: electrical installation and repair. Five of Henry senior's children would eventually become electricians – John, William, Henry Jr, Albert and Victor – suggesting this was a deliberate family strategy.

Henry must have recognised that electricity was transforming British life, that skilled electrical workers could earn good wages, that this was the future while floristry remained tied to Victorian sensibilities.

In September 1901, Henry contributed a floral tableau entitled "Flora in Autumn" to a fundraiser demonstration parade for the Staffordshire General Infirmary. These public

charitable contributions kept the Weaver name associated with civic virtue while showcasing Henry's artistic skills.

In January 1902, Henry Richard Weaver Jr (twenty-two) married Annie Brain at Stafford, becoming the first of Henry and Hannah's children to marry. Annie was originally from Gloucestershire – how they met remains unclear, though Henry Jr's work as an electrician might have taken him to various towns.

In January 1903, Henry and Hannah became grandparents when Henry Jr and Annie had a baby girl, Violet May Weaver. The name honoured Henry's youngest sister Violet, who'd died aged two nine years earlier – a touching memorial, suggesting the family still mourned that little girl. Henry's surviving sister May (14) was also honoured.

In July 1904, William Weaver (twenty-five) married Emma Cooper (twenty-two) in Stafford. Emma's family came from the Manchester area, but she'd been working in Stafford as domestic servant to an architect when she met William. William, now living at 3 Tipping Street, had begun his own career as an electrician. The couple lived in Stafford for a few years before William's



trade took them south to Hampshire and the Royal Navy dockyards at Portsmouth.

In November 1904, Thomas Mottram Weaver (twenty-eight) married Alice Porton (thirty-one) in King's Norton, a southern district of Birmingham. A group family photo from this wedding is featured on the following pages, capturing this moment when the Weavers gathered – Henry and Hannah in their fifties now, alongside their adult children, seeing their second son marry.

Thomas and Alice settled in King's Norton, close to Alice's family. Tom was still working as a postman, but his life was about to take a turn toward military service.

The grandchildren began arriving more rapidly. In November 1905, William and Emma Weaver had a baby girl, Ivy Beatrice Weaver, in Portsmouth. But tragedy struck in July 1906 when Ivy died aged only seven months. That same month, Thomas and Alice Weaver had their first child, a boy named John Porton Weaver, in King's Norton.

In December 1905, Henry won first prize for "best-dressed and most attractive stall" at the Stafford Christmas Markets, competing against other traders for the most eye-catching display. At fifty-four, he was

in his prime – experienced enough to have perfected his craft, young enough still to work long hours during the busy Christmas season.

In July 1906, Henry sent "fine palms and dracaenas" to the St Paul's Institute Flower Show – showcasing the exotic houseplants that wealthy Victorians and Edwardians prized for their drawing rooms and conservatories. In January 1908, he decorated the Borough Hall with flowers for an Infirmary fundraiser ball, his arrangements providing the backdrop for Stafford's social elite dancing in aid of charity.

In 1907, Henry Jr and Annie had another child, Harold James Weaver, born in Puddington, Cheshire, where Henry Jr now worked as a domestic chauffeur. This career shift from electrician to chauffeur suggests Henry Jr was capitalising on the automobile craze sweeping through Edwardian Britain. Wealthy families were buying motorcars and needed skilled men who could drive them and maintain their temperamental engines. For a man trained in electrical systems, the mechanical and electrical components of early automobiles would have been comprehensible, and the work paid well.



Youngest son Victor Weaver (15) and eldest son John H.G. Weaver (29). John will marry in 1916, at age 42. For now, he's changing careers from a postman to an electrician. Victor works for his father in the florist business.



Second son Thomas Weaver (28) and his new wife Alice (nee Porton, 31). Thomas has been working as a postman and telegraph messenger, but will shortly embark upon an army career.



Fourth son Henry R. Weaver Jr (24) and his wife Annie (nee Brain, 22). The couple have been married almost three years, and have a daughter Violet (1). Henry works as an electrician, in Stafford.



A SNAPSHOT IN TIME: THE WEDDING PHOTO, 1904



Second daughter Daisy Weaver (18) and fifth son Albert Weaver (20). Albert is learning the trade of an electrician like most of his brothers. Both Daisy and Albert will marry within four years.



Third son William Weaver (25) and his wife Emma (nee Cooper, 22). They've been married only four months. William works as an electrician in Stafford, but they'll soon relocate to Portsmouth.



Eldest daughter Annie Elizabeth 'Lizzie' Weaver (23), a bridesmaid at the wedding. Lizzie is single, and works alongside her father as his assistant and apprentice in the florist business.





THE WEAVER CHILDREN DISPERSE, 1907–1914



In December 1907, Albert Weaver (twenty-three) married Hermione Dickin (twenty-seven) in Shropshire, where her family lived. Albert had followed his brothers into electrical work – a trade that offered not just steady wages but the possibility of prestigious positions. The newlyweds soon settled in Portsmouth, where William’s family already lived. Portsmouth meant the Royal Navy Dockyard, one of the largest employers of skilled electrical workers in the country. The dockyard was being modernised with electric lighting, electric cranes, electric machinery of all kinds. For men trained in electrical installation and repair, Portsmouth offered almost unlimited opportunity.

In June 1908, Thomas Weaver – now thirty-two and married to Alice for nearly

four years – made a surprising decision: he enlisted in the Royal Engineers, joining 5th Command as a signaller. This was unusual. Tom wasn’t a young man seeking adventure or escaping poverty. He had steady work as a postman, a wife, and a young son John Porton, born two years earlier. Perhaps the postman’s wage wasn’t enough to support his growing family. Perhaps he’d grown bored with the routine of delivering letters through Birmingham’s streets. Perhaps he heard recruiting sergeants speak of foreign travel, of learning new skills in military signaling and telegraph work, of a pension at the end of service. Whatever his motivation, Tom Weaver traded his postman’s uniform for the uniform of the Royal Engineers, and his life would never be the same.

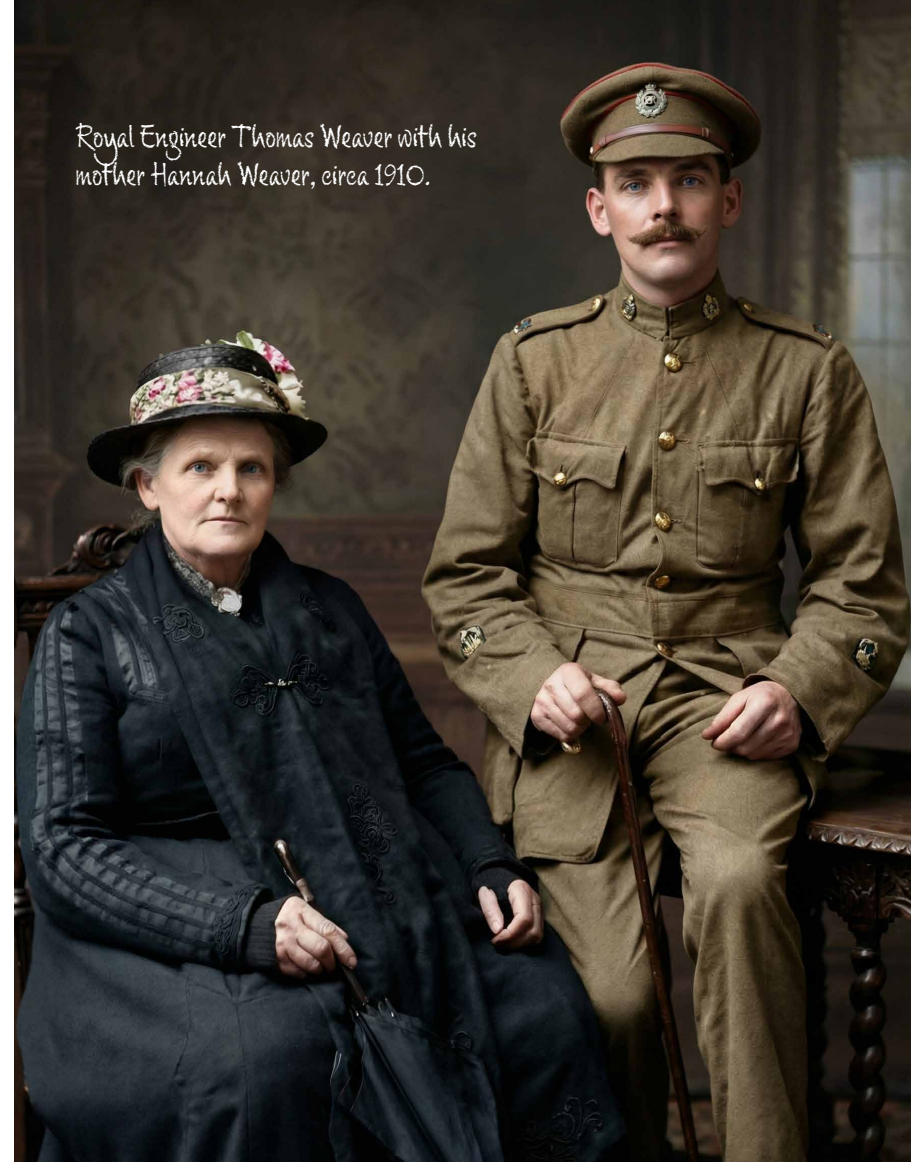
In July 1908, William and Emma Weaver had another child in Portsmouth: William Henry Weaver. After losing their first daughter Ivy in 1906, this surviving son must have been precious to them. But tragedy struck again on 15th September 1914 when William Henry died of diphtheria, aged just six. Of William and Emma's first four children, only Ida (born 1910) and baby Phyllis (born August 1914, just a month before William Henry's death) would survive. The infant mortality that had plagued earlier generations still claimed lives in Edwardian Britain, despite medical advances. One imagines Emma's grief – two children dead before her eyes, only two left to raise.

In October 1908, Albert and Hermione Weaver's first child arrived: Victor Charles Weaver, born in Portsmouth. In February 1910, a daughter followed: Mary Hermione Weaver. In August 1908, Henry's daughter Daisy had married Frederick Reynolds (twenty-three) in Coventry, Warwickshire. The couple settled in Coventry where Fred worked as an ordnance engineer's fitter – skilled work in artillery manufacturing, foreshadowing the vast munitions production that would consume Britain during the coming war. Daisy and Fred had a son, Frederick, in 1909, followed eventually by eight daughters – nine children in total, echoing Hannah's own large brood.

In February 1910, Tom and Alice Weaver celebrated the birth of their second son, Raymond Weaver, in Harborne, Birmingham. Alice was living with her grandparents while Tom served with the Royal Engineers, probably stationed elsewhere in England or even abroad. This pattern of separation – the soldier away for months or years, the wife raising children alone or with extended family – was standard for military families. Alice, described later as “hopeless in a crisis,” managed as best she could, but the strain of single parenthood while Tom served must have been considerable.

In September 1910, William and Emma had a daughter, Ida Grace Weaver, in Portsmouth. In October 1915, they'd have another son, Edward James Weaver (known as Ted), and finally in November 1917, a fourth surviving child, John Henry Weaver. William's family was growing even as the nation plunged into war.

The April 1911 census captures the Weaver household at a pivotal moment. Henry (sixty) and Hannah (fifty-eight) still lived above the flower shop at 2 Salter Street with their unmarried children Lizzie (thirty), May (twenty-three), and Victor (twenty-two). Annie Alcock (thirty-five), the domestic servant who'd been with them since at least 1891, remained part of the household. Henry and Hannah had by now been married thirty-eight years. They were both described as florists, with both Lizzie and Victor assisting in the business. May had no occupation recorded, but crucially, she was no longer described as “feeble-minded from birth” – either the census taker didn't notice or



Royal Engineer Thomas Weaver with his mother Hannah Weaver, circa 1910.



Emma and William Weaver with their children William Jr and Ida, early 1911.

didn't ask, or the family deliberately omitted the designation to avoid stigma.

With six of their children now moved out and married, Henry and Hannah had taken in lodgers to fill the rooms and supplement income: travelling printer Frederick Abbott (forty-one), his wife Sarah (thirty-eight), and their daughter Florence (twenty). Lodgers were standard practice for families with space to spare – the extra income helped, and it enlivened the household with different voices and stories.

The children had established themselves across England. John H.G. Weaver (thirty-seven), still unmarried, was working as an engine fitter and boarding with the Wardle family in Dane Bridge near Macclesfield. Tom Weaver (thirty-four) was away with the army, while his wife Alice (thirty-five) lived at her grandparents' house with their sons John (four) and Raymond (one).

William Weaver (thirty-two) was living at 9 Carisbrooke Road in Milton, Portsmouth – a fairly basic-looking terrace house – with Emma (twenty-nine) and children William (two) and Ida (eighteen

months). William worked as an electrical fitter in the Government Dockyard, part of the army of skilled workers maintaining and modernising the Royal Navy's facilities.

Henry Weaver Jr (thirty-two) and his wife Annie (thirty) lived in Puddington, Cheshire with their children Violet (eight) and Harold (three). Henry still worked as a domestic chauffeur, driving motorcars for wealthy families who could afford both the vehicle and the man to operate it.

But the most remarkable position belonged to Albert Weaver (twenty-eight). He and his pregnant wife Hermione (thirty) lived in the grounds of Highclere Castle with their children Victor (two) and Mary (one). Albert worked as the on-site electrician for the 5th Earl of Carnarvon, George Herbert, whose appetite for all things modern and technological had ensured Highclere was among the first great estates to install electric lighting, back in 1900. The installation was extensive and sophisticated, requiring constant maintenance and upgrades. Albert had secured employment at the pinnacle of Edwardian society.

Highclere Castle in 1911 was at the height of its glory. Built in the 1840s in a grand Jacobethan style, it stood among 4,000 acres of parkland with views across Hampshire toward the chalk downs. Lord and Lady Carnarvon hosted regular society functions through the warmer months – shooting parties that might bag 320 hares and 132 partridges in a single Saturday, house parties where aristocrats and politicians mingled in the saloons and corridors. The family usually spent winters in Egypt, where Lord Carnarvon sponsored archaeological excavations and acquired artefacts for the castle's growing collection. Both Lord and Lady Carnarvon were away on census night in April 1911, but the castle staff – including Albert, Hermione, and their children – remained in residence, maintaining the great house in the family's absence.

The Weavers would live on the castle grounds for the next twelve years, through the birth of several more children: Albert Jr (1911), Lilian (1913), Elsie (1914), Ruby (1916), and Joyce (1920). During the war





years, when Egyptian excavations stalled, Lady Almina Carnarvon would convert a section of the castle into a hospital for wounded soldiers, helping with organisation and assisting as a nurse. The Weaver children grew up in this extraordinary setting, their father maintaining the electrical systems that powered a castle, their home on the estate grounds offering glimpses into a world far removed from their grandfather's flower shop in Stafford.

Back in Stafford, the business continued to expand. A July 1909 advertisement proclaimed: "H.R. Weaver, Court Florist, Vine Street, Greenfield Nursery and Market Hall, Stafford. Has a large quantity of bedding and other plants on hand; also choice blooms at reasonable prices. Wreaths, crosses, bridal and other bouquets a specialty. Designs of all kinds supplied at short notice. Mail orders attended to with despatch. *This establishment is the oldest of its kind in Stafford.*"

That last claim was significant – Henry was asserting not just quality but longevity, presenting himself as an institution. From

here on, 2 Vine Street appears as an alternative address for 2 Salter Street, likely because the Vine Hotel stood a few doors down from the flower shop. A December 1909 advertisement listed "Mr H.R. Weaver, Florist, Vine Street and Market Hall," confirming he now operated from multiple locations.

By 1912, Henry had added "Nurseryman" back to his business description alongside "Florist," with the Greenfield site expanding his cultivation capacity beyond the shop premises. He was sixty-one years old and still actively growing plants, not just selling them.

In September 1911, an incident revealed that Victor Weaver (twenty-two), working as a nurseryman for his father, spent time by the River Penk, at its crossing on the way to the Greenfield site. There he discovered the corpse of a newborn baby girl in the water. The inquest that followed never determined the child's identity or who had placed her there. Such discoveries were more common than official records suggest – desperate mothers, unwed and facing social ruin, sometimes abandoned newborns, and the



ivers kept their secrets.

Victor would have been shaken by the discovery, required to testify at the inquest, his name appearing in the newspapers in connection with tragedy rather than the family business.

In September 1912, tragedy struck the family when Tom and Alice's second son Raymond died aged just two in Birmingham. The cause isn't recorded – perhaps one of the childhood diseases that still killed despite medical progress, perhaps an accident. Alice buried her second son with whatever support her Birmingham family could provide, while Tom served with the Royal Engineers somewhere in England.

But there were happier moments too. In June 1914, Tom and Alice had a third child: Marjorie Weaver, born in Staffordshire. Perhaps Tom had leave from the army, or perhaps he'd completed his initial six-year enlistment and returned to civilian life. But if he had returned, it wouldn't be for long. By August 1914, Britain would be at war, and every able-bodied man of military age would be drawn into the conflict.



THE GREAT WAR, 1914–1920

When war broke out in August 1914, the Weaver family – like families across Britain – found their lives transformed. Thomas Weaver, already trained as a Royal Engineers signaller, would be among the first deployed. His brother William worked in Portsmouth's naval dockyard, contributing to the war effort from home. Albert at Highclere maintained the castle's electrical systems as Lady Carnarvon converted sections into a military hospital. The younger generation – John Porton Weaver, growing up during the war years – would barely remember peace.

In April 1915, Thomas Mottram Weaver (thirty-eight) departed for Alexandria, Egypt, aboard the *SS Minneapolis* with the Royal Engineers. He landed at Suvla Bay,

Gallipoli, as part of the August Offensive – one of the bloodiest campaigns of the war. The Gallipoli peninsula, where Allied forces attempted to force the Dardanelles and knock Ottoman Turkey out of the war, became a killing ground. Soldiers fought from trenches carved into hillsides under withering fire from Turkish positions above. The heat was unbearable, flies swarmed over corpses, dysentery ravaged the ranks. Water was scarce, and what was available was often contaminated.

Tom, as a signaller, would have been responsible for maintaining communications between units – laying telephone cables under fire, operating field telephones, sending visual signals when lines were cut. Signallers were essential but vulnerable, often

exposed while setting up communication equipment. The casualty rates were horrific. By December 1915, the campaign was acknowledged as a disaster and evacuation began. Tom was among those evacuated, returning to Alexandria.

The experience had broken his health. He'd contracted dysentery in the unsanitary conditions of the Gallipoli trenches, and septic poisoning had set in. In 1916, now a warrant officer, he was shipped back to Essex to recuperate in a military hospital. The Tom Weaver who'd left Birmingham as a postman in 1908, who'd trained as a signaller in peace time, had been transformed by disease and combat into an invalid in an English hospital ward, his intestines damaged, his weight dropped, his hands shaking with fever.

But the army wasn't done with him. In January 1917, recovered enough to be declared fit for duty, Tom returned to Egypt and then Palestine, fighting Ottoman troops in the desert campaigns that would eventually capture Jerusalem. He served until June 1917, then returned to England. In 1918, he was gazetted 2nd Lieutenant – a significant promotion, recognising his experience and capability. Officers were desperately needed as the war ground on.

In September 1918, with the war entering its final phase, Tom departed again for the Western Front in France and Belgium. By this point the Allied offensives were finally breaking German resistance, pushing them back toward their own borders. The cost in lives remained staggering – men still died in their thousands in the war's final months. After the armistice on 11th November 1918, Tom was placed in charge of the signal area in Dunkirk, managing communications as the army demobilised and occupying forces established themselves.

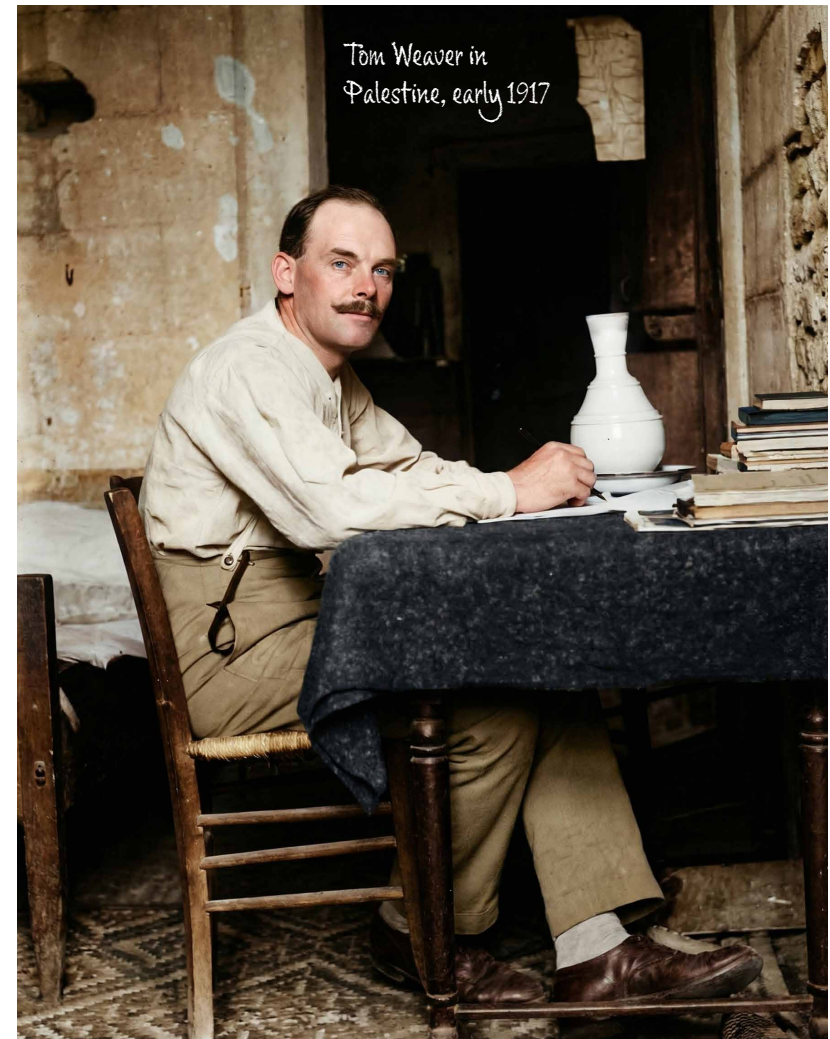
He finally returned to civilian life in November 1919 after eleven years of service. The man who came home to Alice and their children in Wandsworth, Birmingham, was not the man who'd left. He'd seen Gallipoli's beaches strewn with dead, felt dysentery wrack his gut, heard shells scream overhead in Palestine and France. His health was permanently damaged – the septic poisoning and dysentery would have lasting effects on his digestive system. But he was alive, which was more than could be said for hundreds of thousands of his generation.

While Tom fought, life continued in Stafford. Victor Weaver exited the family business, following his brothers into the electrician trade. He moved to Wolverhampton for work, and there married Martha Jane Madeley in spring 1915, while Britain mobilized for total war.

In September 1916, eldest son John H.G. Weaver (forty-two) married as well: to Florence Mary Leese (thirty-six) at St John's Roman Catholic Church in Great Haywood, Staffordshire. It was a late marriage for both – John had remained single while working as an electrician, perhaps helping support his parents financially, perhaps simply not finding the right woman until Florence. They settled in Stafford where John continued his electrical work. In September 1919, they had a son, John James Laurence Weaver, making Henry and Hannah grandparents yet again.

The 1921 Kelly's Directory confirms that Henry (seventy) was still conducting business as a florist at 2 Salter Street. There's no mention this time of the Greenfield Nursery or the Market Hall – in the economic hardship of the war, some consolidation may have been necessary, and Victor's change of career left only Henry and Lizzie running the family business. The Salter Street shop by itself still remained viable, and able to comfortably support the family behind it.

At an age when most men were dead or retired, Henry remained active in the trade he'd built over forty-six years in Stafford.





HENRY & HANNAH: TWILIGHT YEARS, 1921–1933

The 1921 census, taken in June of that year, captures the Weaver family at eight different addresses, revealing how Henry and Hannah's children had established separate households while remaining connected through trade and family ties.

In Stafford at 2 Salter Street, the census enumerator recorded a seven-room building housing **Henry Richard Weaver** (seventy), his wife **Hannah** (sixty-eight), and their daughters **Annie Elizabeth Weaver** (forty) and **May Hannah Weaver** (thirty-four). Henry's birthplace was listed as City of London – specifically Marylebone, where he'd entered the world seventy years earlier in rooms above his father's shoemaking shop. He still worked as a florist, "at home on own account," meaning he owned the

business outright, no partners, no employers. Hannah's occupation was "household duties," though at seventy-two she would have been slowing down, perhaps letting Lizzie take on more of the cooking and cleaning.

May was recorded as "unable to work (disabled)" – a more compassionate designation than the 1901 census's harsh "feeble-minded from birth." At thirty-four, May had never worked, never married, never lived anywhere but with her parents. She would remain dependent on family care for the rest of her life.

The household also included three others that June day. Daisy Beatrice Reynolds (seven), visiting granddaughter – this was Daisy and Fred Reynolds' daughter

from Kent, staying with her grandparents perhaps during school holidays. Charlotte Dangerfield (seventy-seven), widowed, born in Stafford, was listed as an "old age pensioner" – possibly a long-time friend of Hannah's, perhaps a distant relation, living with the Weavers for a while. And William Davies (forty-two), a boarder, married but living away from his wife, a Sergeant in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

The Great War had ended less than three years earlier, and Davies might have been stationed locally, needing lodgings while his family remained elsewhere. The Weavers' seven rooms above the shop had space for these varied residents, and the income from Davies' rent would have helped.



John H.G. Weaver (forty-seven), the eldest son, lived at Warter Croft on Coley Lane in Little Haywood, Staffordshire, about seven miles from his parents in Stafford. He'd married Florence Mary Leese five years earlier, and their household included not just their young son John James Lawrence (one year and nine months), but also Florence's elderly widowed mother Sarah Agnes Leese (eighty-two) and a twelve-year-old niece, Mary Elizabeth Kerrigan, whose mother had died. John worked as an electrician's foreman on installation contracts for W.O. Rooper & Co, Electrical & General Engineers. But the census records a stark reality: he was "Out of Work." The post-war economic downturn that followed the armistice had begun biting into the construction and electrical trades. Contracts dried up, building projects stalled, and skilled men like John found themselves unemployed through no fault of their own. The five-room house in Little Haywood sheltered three generations and two families trying to make do as the breadwinner searched for work.



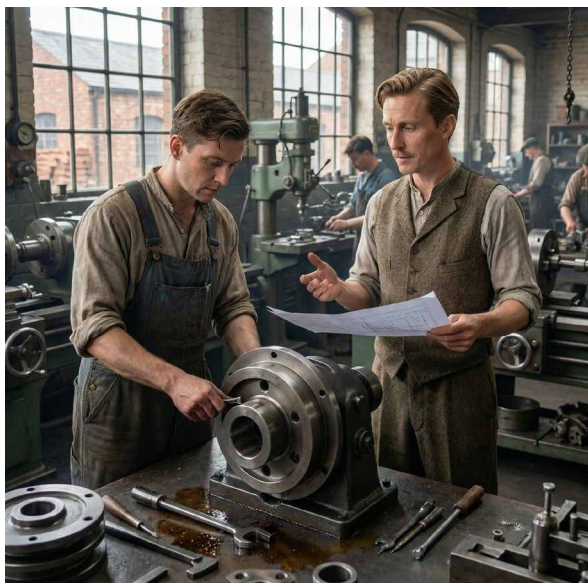
Thomas Mottram Weaver (forty-five), Henry's second son, had returned to civilian life after eleven years of military service spanning Gallipoli, Egypt, Palestine, and the Western Front. He and his wife Alice (forty-five) lived at 132 Rookery Road in Handsworth, Birmingham, in a six-room house with their two surviving children: John Porton (fifteen) and Marjorie (seven). Their middle son Raymond had died aged two in 1912.

Tom Weaver had found steady employment as a GPO Postal Clerk in Birmingham's central post office – civil service work, reliable and pensionable, a considerable step up from his pre-war days as a town postman. His military rank of 2nd Lieutenant and his years of managing signal operations in war zones had perhaps earned him this promotion into clerical work. But the physical toll of dysentery, septic poisoning, and years of combat would shadow him for the rest of his life.

In Portsmouth, **William Weaver** (forty-two) lived with his wife Emma (forty) and their four surviving children at 5 Tokar Street in Eastney. It was a modest five-room building in a working-class neighbourhood, but Tokar Street sat immediately adjacent to the Royal Marine Barracks at Eastney. William worked as an electrical fitter in HM Dockyard, and within a short time he would transfer his employment to the Marine Barracks right next door – perhaps better wages, and certainly the convenience of working minutes from home.

Emma's occupation was listed as "household duties," managing four children – Ida Grace (ten), Phyllis May (six), Edward James (five), and John Henry (three).

William loved motorcycles, tinkering with them in his shed at Tokar Street, and passed this interest in mechanical work down to his son Edward. The family would go on outings from Portsmouth in a Harley Davidson, all piled into a coach-built sidecar that somehow fit four people.



Henry Richard Weaver Jr (forty-three) had returned to Stafford, living at 50 North Street – a five-room house not far from his parents’ flower shop on Salter Street. He’d left behind his chauffeur work in Cheshire and now worked as Inspector of Mechanical Engineers for W.H. Dorman & Co, a Stafford engineering firm. His wife Annie (thirty-nine, born in Bristol) and their two children lived with him: Violet May (eighteen), who’d followed her father into Dorman’s, working as a clerk for the same firm, and James Harold (thirteen, born in Neston, Cheshire). The family had come full circle – Henry Jr, who’d trained as an electrician and worked as a domestic chauffeur for wealthy families, had parlayed that mechanical knowledge into supervisory work in Stafford’s industrial sector, and his daughter was following the same path of skilled office work in engineering.

Daisy Reynolds (thirty-five), Henry and Hannah’s fifth child and second daughter, lived furthest from Staffordshire – all the way in Erith, Kent, on the southern banks of the Thames east of London. She and her husband Frederick John Reynolds (thirty-six) occupied a house at 28 Alford Road with four of their six children: Frederick John (twelve), Doris May (ten), Louisa Hannah (nine), and Norah Gwendoline (one year and eight months).

Fred worked as an engineer’s fitter for Vickers Ltd, the massive armaments and engineering conglomerate that had manufactured everything from battleships to machine guns during the Great War. Erith was home to one of Vickers’ major facilities, and Fred’s skills as an ordnance engineer’s fitter – learned in Coventry before the war – had brought the family to this Thames-side industrial town. Six children with three more yet to be born meant Daisy spent her days managing a lively household far from her Stafford roots.

Victor Weaver (thirty-two) and his wife Martha Jane (twenty-seven) lived at 7 Fowler Street in Wolverhampton – a five-room house in the industrial heart of the Black Country. In contrast with most of Victor’s siblings, the couple had no children. Victor worked as an electrician for Smith & Billhouse, Electrical Engineers, at 28 Darlington Street, Wolverhampton. Like his brothers John, William, Henry Jr and Albert, Victor had recognized that electrical work offered better prospects than floristry. The trade his father had spent forty-six years building in Stafford couldn’t support all his sons, and the new technologies of the twentieth century beckoned.

But the most remarkable household was seventy miles south at Highclere. **Albert Edward Weaver** (thirty-eight) still lived at The Castle Cottage on the Highclere estate with his wife Hermione (forty) and their offspring: Vincent Charles (twelve), Mary Hermione (eleven), Albert Edward Jr (nine), Lilian Beatrice (eight), Elsie Gertrude (six), Ruby Emily (four), and ten-month-old baby Joyce Edith. Lord Carnarvon filled out the census sheet himself, carefully recording the names and ages of all Albert and Hermione’s seven children.

Albert’s occupation was listed as “electrician (own account), no fixed place of work.” This detail clarifies his position: he wasn’t simply the castle’s maintenance electrician as previously understood, but rather operated his own electrical contracting business from the cottage, taking jobs throughout the surrounding area while maintaining the castle’s systems as one client among others. It was an entrepreneurial arrangement, Albert leveraging his prestigious Highclere address and his connection to the aristocracy to attract other wealthy clients in Hampshire and Berkshire.

The cottage itself – substantial enough for a family of nine – stood on the castle



grounds, immediately behind the main building. In the 21st century, this same cottage would become the residence of the 8th Earl of Carnarvon during times when Highclere Castle was open to the public or being used for filming (most famously as Downton Abbey's fictional Grantham estate). But in 1921, it was home to the Weavers: Albert maintaining electrical systems for aristocrats and gentry, Hermione managing seven children ranging from teenagers to an infant, the older children attending the village school.

Next door in Highclere Castle itself, the census recorded the 5th Earl of Carnarvon (fifty-five), "Peer of the Realm," with his wife Countess Almina (fifty) and their daughter Evelyn Herbert (nineteen). But the most intriguing entry was Howard Carter (forty-seven, single), listed as a visitor and described as an artist/painter. Carter had been excavating in Egypt's Valley of the Kings under Lord Carnarvon's patronage since

1907, searching for the tomb of the obscure pharaoh Tutankhamun. By June 1921, he was at Highclere planning the next season's dig, discussing strategy with his patron, perhaps examining maps and artefacts in the castle's Egyptian collection. Fourteen months later, in November 1922, Carter would uncover the tomb's entrance steps. In February 1923, he and Lord Carnarvon would open the burial chamber and gaze upon treasures undisturbed for 3,000 years.

But all that was still ahead. In 1921, Albert went about his electrical work, his children played on the estate, and the Earl entertained Howard Carter while planning their Egyptian adventures, unaware that their greatest discovery – and Lord Carnarvon's death – lay less than two years away.

In April 1923, famous worldwide because of the Tutankhamun excavation, Lord Carnarvon died in Egypt of blood poisoning from an infected mosquito bite. According to legend, his dog Susie died at precisely the



same moment, back in Highclere. His death set in motion events that would end the Weavers' decade-long residence at Highclere.

Countess Almina, suddenly widowed, soon remarried – to Lieutenant Colonel Ian Onslow Dennistoun – and prepared to leave Highclere. But the transition was complicated. Her son, the new 6th Earl, took possession of the castle as was his right, and Almina moved temporarily into The Castle Cottage – the very cottage where Albert and Hermione had raised their children for over a decade.

The Weavers were displaced. After twelve years living on one of England's grandest estates, Albert moved his large family – Hermione and their seven children (an eighth, William Henry, would be born in June 1924) – back to Stafford, closer to his aging parents and the family businesses. He found ready work as an electrician, and eventually became qualified as an electrical engineer.



In July 1921, back in Stafford, Hannah Weaver employed a new domestic servant: Ethel Littlehales (twenty-four) from the County Industrial Home. Such institutions housed young women from troubled backgrounds – orphans, those born out of wedlock, girls deemed “troublesome” by authorities – and trained them for domestic service. Employing servants from the Industrial Home was seen as charitable, giving these women a chance at respectable employment.

In August 1921, Hannah left Stafford on holiday, possibly visiting William’s family in Portsmouth or checking on other children scattered across England. In September, while Hannah was still away, Ethel Littlehales stole a box containing cash and jewellery from Hannah’s bedroom and fled. Lizzie (forty), still living at home and helping run the business, noticed it missing. She immediately called her mother and the police, then made a formal complaint to the Matron of the County Industrial Home.

The police arrested Ethel and retrieved all the stolen valuables. Hannah and Lizzie testified as witnesses in court, and the incident was reported in the Staffordshire newspapers.

In August 1922, Henry Weaver (seventy-one) demonstrated he hadn’t lost his creative flair. At the Lotus Works Association’s Horticultural Show in Stafford, he won a Certificate of Merit for an extraordinary display: a replica portrait of Henry Bostock, head of the firm, depicted at work in his office. The portrait was created entirely from flowers and plant materials, encircled by a frame of real berries, resting on a miniature garden of moss and verbenas. One imagines Henry – his hands perhaps not as steady as they once were, his back aching from years of bending over workbenches – nonetheless creating this intricate piece, his artistic vision undimmed by age.

Then, in September 1924, Hannah Weaver died at home in Stafford aged seventy-five. Hannah, who’d married Henry in 1874, borne him ten children (nine surviving to adulthood), survived poverty in Back Walls South, seen the business rise to prosperity in Salter Street, and watched her children and grandchildren spread across England. She’d kept house through decades when running a household meant backbreaking labour – hauling water, scrubbing laundry, managing coal fires, cooking meals for a dozen people. She was buried in Stafford Cemetery and Henry, at seventy-three, became a widower.



In July 1927, another death: Henry’s daughter May Hannah Weaver died aged forty. May had been cared for in the family home throughout her life, never marrying, always dependent. She’d lived with Henry and Lizzie at 2 Salter Street to the end. Her death must have been both grief and relief – grief for the daughter lost, relief that her struggles were over. She was buried alongside her mother in Stafford Cemetery.

In December 1928, tragedy struck again when Thomas Weaver (fifty-two), sick with interstitial nephritis, was brought to 2 Salter Street by his son John Porton Weaver (twenty-two). Interstitial nephritis is a severe kidney disorder whose symptoms include fever, confusion, massive water retention, and violent vomiting. Its usual cause is an allergic reaction to medication. Tom’s wife Alice was reportedly “hopeless in a crisis” – perhaps paralysed by fear of losing her husband, perhaps simply lacking the practical nursing skills needed. John, recognising his father’s desperate condition, rushed him back to his grandfather and aunt Lizzie’s house, knowing they would care for him.

For four or five days, Henry (seventy-seven) and Lizzie (forty-seven) nursed Tom through his final illness. One imagines them in the rooms above the flower shop – cloths



to cool the fever, water to try to coax past his lips, watching his confusion and pain, knowing they were losing him. Tom had survived Gallipoli, survived dysentery and septic poisoning, survived the trenches of the Western Front. He'd lived through eleven years of military service spanning some of the war's bloodiest campaigns. Now, at fifty-two, kidney disease killed him just after Christmas on 27th December 1928.

Henry buried his second son in Stafford Cemetery. Tom lay alongside his mother Hannah, his sister May, and his infant sister Violet who'd died thirty-four years earlier. For Henry, it was another child gone before him – the natural order reversed, the agony of outliving one's children.

But Henry kept working. The 1932 Kelly's Directory lists him (eighty-one) still trading as a florist at 2 Salter Street, now in partnership with his daughter Lizzie (fifty-one). She'd never married, had cared for disabled sister May until her death, nursed brother Tom through his final days, and now ran the business alongside their aging father. Lizzie was the family's anchor, the one who'd stayed home while siblings scattered to Portsmouth, Birmingham, London and Cheshire.

That same year, Henry Weaver Jr (fifty-two) was working as an electrical contractor just down the road at 15 Salter Street – next door to the old flower shop at number 13. He lived on the premises, his business established near his father's, the two Henry Weavers both trading on Salter Street sixty years after the family had arrived in Stafford.

By 1933, Henry's health was failing. Eighty-two years old, he'd outlived his wife by nine years, buried three of his children, and watched his business pass to Lizzie's capable hands. On 31st August 1933, Henry

Richard Weaver died at home at 2 Salter Street, with Lizzie at his bedside.

The obituary in the Staffordshire Advertiser captured a life's work:

“He was much respected, and was one of the oldest tradesmen in the town, having carried on business as a florist for many years. He served his apprenticeship to horticulture with a firm at Bath, and his knowledge of the art was perfected by a study of botany in his younger days. Not only was he a successful cultivator of flowers and plants, which he loved, but he showed great taste and skill in their arrangement for decorative effect, and his services in this direction were always willingly placed at the disposal of those who organised charitable and other efforts. Mr Weaver, whose wife pre-deceased him nine years ago, leaves a grown-up family. The funeral takes place at the Cemetery on Monday 4th September at 3pm.”

He was buried in Stafford Cemetery on a late summer afternoon, laid to rest beside Hannah, May, Tom, and infant Violet. The flower shop at 2 Salter Street passed entirely to Lizzie, who became sole proprietress of the business her father had founded in 1885 – or 1876, if one counted from when Henry first began trading as a florist in Stafford.





LIZZIE'S LEGACY, 1933–1948

Annie Elizabeth Weaver – Lizzie to everyone who knew her – was fifty-two years old when her father died. She'd spent her entire adult life in the family business, learning floristry from Henry, helping her mother Hannah manage the household, caring for disabled sister May, and gradually taking over the shop's day-to-day operations as her father aged. Now the business was entirely hers.

The work was demanding. Lizzie rose at 4am each morning to catch the early train from Stafford to Birmingham, where the wholesale flower markets opened before dawn. She'd move through the market stalls with a practiced eye, selecting the freshest

roses, carnations, lilies, and seasonal blooms, negotiating prices with the wholesalers who knew her as Henry Weaver's daughter. By mid-morning she'd be back in Stafford, unpacking flowers at 2 Salter Street, trimming stems, arranging them in water-filled buckets in the shop's cool back room.

Then the day's business began: customers ordering wedding bouquets, funeral wreaths, birthday arrangements, flowers for church altars or hospital visits. Lizzie knew all her customers' preferences, remembered which flowers they'd ordered for their mother's funeral five years earlier, could suggest arrangements that matched their budgets without making them feel cheap.

Her nephew John James Laurence Weaver – son of John Henry Guest Weaver and Florence – was particularly fond of his Aunt Lizzie. As a boy at Stafford Grammar School, John would pop into the shop at lunchtime for a bite to eat. Lizzie always had something ready: bread and cheese, perhaps some soup, a cup of tea. These lunchtime visits created a bond that lasted throughout John's life. He remembered his aunt as cheerful and generous, a woman who'd sacrificed marriage and a family of her own to keep the business running and care for relatives who needed her.

By the 1939 census, Lizzie (fifty-eight) was head of household at 2 Salter Street,



living above the shop with five unrelated single women – lodgers, some of whom also worked for her in the florist business. The arrangement echoed her parents’ practice of taking in boarders, and it made practical sense: the seven rooms above the shop were too large for one person, the lodgers’ rent helped with expenses, and having assistants living on-site meant the business could operate more flexibly.

Through the 1930s and into the war years, Lizzie maintained the business her father had built. When young men went off to fight in the Second World War, Lizzie created patriotic displays in the shop window. When they didn’t come home, she arranged funeral flowers for grieving families. When they did return and married their sweethearts, she crafted wedding bouquets. The florist business marked all of life’s milestones, and Lizzie – well known in the town for her cheerfulness and tasteful arrangements – became part of Stafford’s social fabric in a way her father would have recognised and approved.

In April 1948, Lizzie became suddenly ill. The details of her illness aren’t recorded, but within a week it became clear she wouldn’t recover. On 10th April 1948, Annie Elizabeth Weaver died peacefully at 2 Salter Street, aged sixty-seven. She’d never married, never had children of her own,

never lived anywhere but the rooms above the flower shop. But her obituary in the Staffordshire papers captured a life of service and skill: “Well known in the town for her cheerfulness and for her tasteful choice and arrangements of flowers for all occasions... Had many friends... Lifelong association with the florist’s business, founded by her father in 1876. Proprietress of the oldest-established florist business in Stafford.”

The business was allowed to lapse following her death. After seventy-two years – from Henry’s first florist work in 1876 through Lizzie’s death in 1948 – the Weaver name disappeared from Stafford’s commercial directories. No one in the family took over the shop. Perhaps none of Henry’s grandchildren wanted the 4am journeys to Birmingham market, the long hours on their feet arranging flowers, the constant negotiation with customers and suppliers. Perhaps the business model itself was changing, with supermarkets beginning to sell flowers alongside groceries, making independent florists less viable. Or perhaps it was simply that Lizzie had been the last one willing to sacrifice marriage and family for the business, and without her dedication, the shop couldn’t survive.

The building at 2 Salter Street – where Henry had lived from 1901 to 1933, where Lizzie had lived her entire adult life –



eventually passed out of family hands. But for those seventy-two years, three generations of Stafford residents had bought their flowers from the Weavers: Henry Richard, who’d learned horticulture in Bath and brought his skills north to Staffordshire; Hannah, who’d raised nine children above the shop while helping with the business; and Lizzie, who’d never left, who’d risen before dawn for decades to bring fresh flowers back from Birmingham, who’d kept the family business alive through two world wars and into the modern age.

Henry Richard Weaver’s life had spanned eighty-two years, from Covent Garden in 1851 to Stafford in 1933. Born when Victoria was queen and London still feared cholera, he’d lived through the transformation of Britain from a Victorian empire to a modern nation. He’d fled an epidemic, learned a trade, built a business, raised a family, and created something that lasted nearly three-quarters of a century. When Lizzie died in 1948, closing the shop for the final time, she was laying to rest not just her own life’s work but her father’s legacy – the Court Florist of Stafford, the man who’d supplied wreaths for royal funerals, who’d won prizes at flower shows, who’d taught his daughter everything he knew about beauty, cultivation, and the art of making things grow.

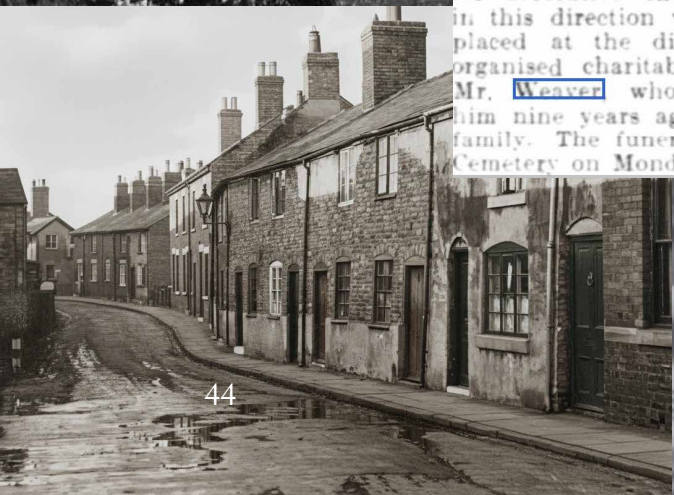


THE LATE MISS A. E. WEAVER
The funeral took place at Stafford Cemetery on Wednesday, following the death which occurred after a short illness at the Staffordshire General Infirmary on Saturday, of Miss **A. E. Weaver**, who for many years carried on business as a florist at 2, Salter Street. Miss **Weaver**, who was 67, was a native of Stafford.

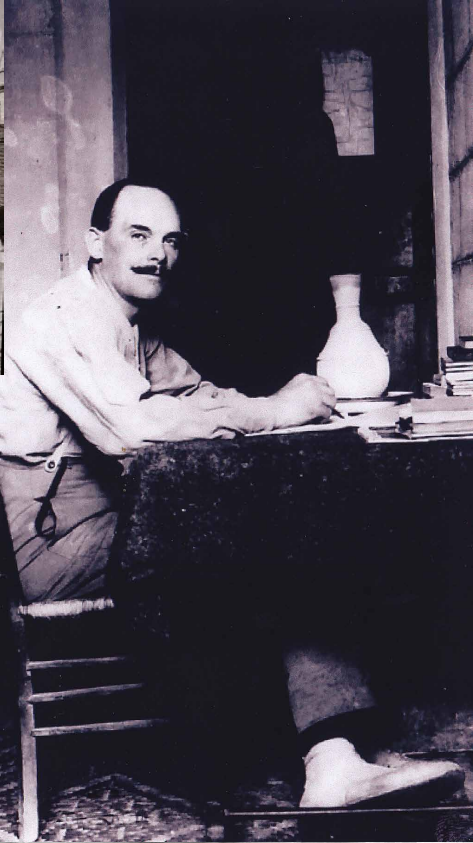
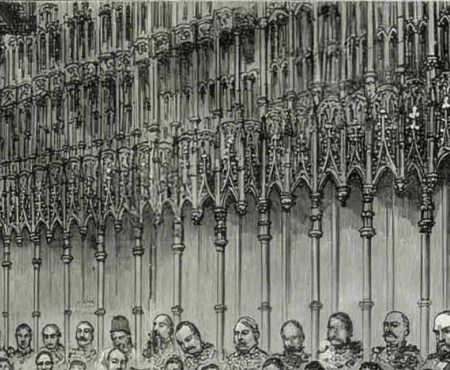


DEATH OF MR. H. R. WEAVER

The death occurred on Thursday evening at his residence, No. 2, Salter Street, Stafford, of Mr. **Henry** Richard Weaver, florist, who had been in failing health for some time. Deceased, who was 83 years of age, and was much respected, was one of the oldest tradesmen in the town, having carried on business as a florist for many years. He served his apprenticeship to horticulture with a firm at Bath, and his knowledge of the art was perfected by a study of botany in his younger days. Not only was he a successful cultivator of flowers and plants, which he loved, but he showed great taste and skill in their arrangement for decorative effect, and his services in this direction were always willingly placed at the disposal of those who organised charitable and other efforts. Mr. **Weaver**, whose wife pre-deceased him nine years ago, leaves a grown-up family. The funeral takes place at the Cemetery on Monday at 3 p.m.

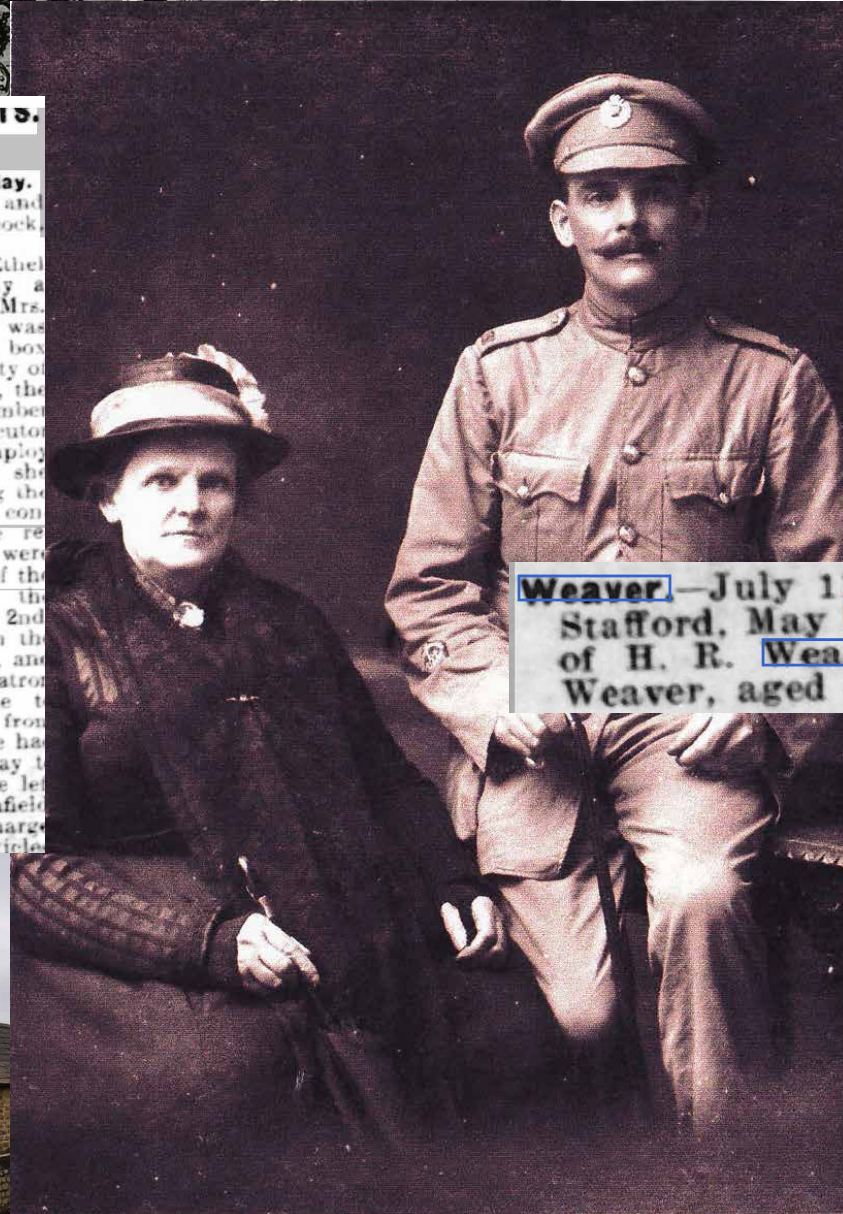


River Mystery.—Mr. S. W. Morgan, deputy-magistrate, conducted an inquest at the Trumpton, Radford, on Wednesday, on the body of a 15-year-old female child which was discovered in the River Penk on Monday by **Victor Weaver**, a fisherman, of Vine-street, Stafford. Police-constable W. Smith said that inquiries had been made in the neighbourhood without result. Dr. Chas. H. Smith stated that on account of decomposition it was impossible to say whether the child had had a separate existence or been born alive. He estimated that the body had been in the water for three or four weeks. The jury returned a verdict of natural death.

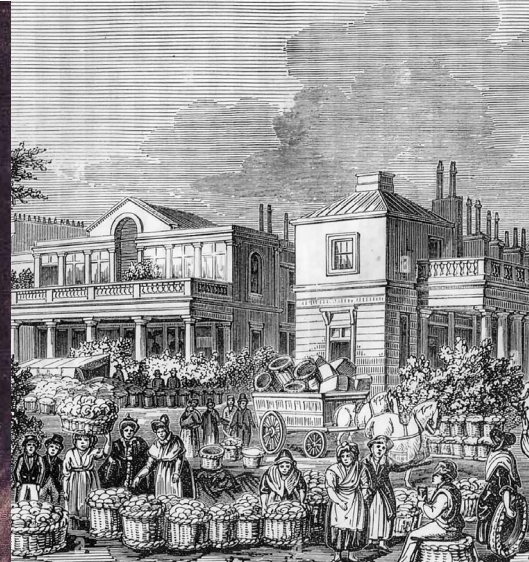


LOCAL POLICE COURTS.
(Continued from Page 8).

STAFFORD (BOROUGH).—Thursday.
Before R. E. Meade, Esq., Mayor, and W. Peach, F. Amies, J. C. Mycock, Esqrs., and Mrs. South.
DOMESTIC SERVANT'S THEFTS.—Ethel Mary Littlehales, aged 24, formerly a domestic servant in the employ of Mrs. **Hannah Weaver**, of Salter street, was charged on remand with stealing a box containing £3 10s. in money, a quantity of jewelry and other articles, value £18, the property of Mrs. **Weaver** on September 2nd. Evidence was given by prosecutor that the prisoner came into her employ in July last and four weeks later she (witness) went for a holiday, leaving the box mentioned in her bedroom. In consequence of a communication she returned home and found the articles were missing. Annie **Weaver**, daughter of the last witness, said she last saw the prisoner in the house on September 2nd. Prisoner, added witness, came from the County Industrial Home at Stafford, and witness made a complaint to the Matron of the Home. P.C. Lloyd spoke of receiving the prisoner in custody from the Ironbridge police. She said she had left the box in a train. On the way to the Police Station prisoner said she left a watch with a Mrs. Lyons, of Lichfield. Prisoner made no reply to the charge. He had recovered all the stolen articles.



Weaver.—July 11, 1927, at 2, Vine Street, Stafford. May **Hannah Weaver**, daughter of H. R. **Weaver** and the late **Hannah Weaver**, aged 40 years.



HENRY RICHARD WEAVER, 1851-1933

