

# Born in Minneth

## Introduction

On December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1875, the trial began in Wolverhampton Crown Court of 2 persons, Frederick Musson (b. 1852) and Anna Maria Hillman (b. 1854). They had been charged with the murder of a young girl, **Elizabeth Lowke** (b. 1868).

Although the events that led up to this trial took place some distance from the Curdworth to Minworth section of the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal, it brought to light a connection with the families who plied their trade along the length of canal that has been the focus for another research article by the author.

I am very grateful to Alan and Angela Hawks who run the excellent Spinningweaver web site. It is a treasure trove of information for those interested in the history of the canals. Through their devotion to uncovering stories and newspaper articles relating to the waterways of the Midlands system, another canal family with a connection to the Sutton Coldfield 'Cut' came to light.

According to a Court report in the Wolverhampton Chronicle, Elizabeth's father, **Joseph Lowke**, was a boatman who worked for the Shropshire Union Canal Company. Recently widowed, his wife **Caroline Gibbs** (1844-1873) had probably passed away in childbirth.

Prior to Caroline's death, she had given birth to Hannah (b. 1870) and William (1871-1958). It is this **William Lowke** who provided the information linking him to Minworth and this will be examined later.

Tracing the stories of canal based families is always a challenge. Much of the time they would be on the move, transporting cargoes around the network of canals that covered much of the country. Only occasionally might they be recorded in the censuses and then they could be uncooperative and provide sometimes misleading or obscure information, particularly relating to places of birth.

Parish Records of birth, marriage and death were frequently devoid of registration details that can link together and provide an insight into the lives of these families. The court proceedings reported in newspapers become a useful source of more accurate information on those who were, sometimes innocently, involved in an activity or crime that highlights the ebb and flow of human interaction through the harshness of life on the canals.

In attempting to create a picture of William Lowke's family and their life in the harsh conditions that they endured, a degree of conjecture has been used and that will inevitably lead to errors in tracing the family back through the 4 generations that are directly connected to William and other branches of the family who may go even further back.

Researching the manslaughter of Elizabeth, threw up an unexpected item. Why on her burial records, was her father named as William, not Joseph? (see below).

### **Elizabeth's father - Joseph Lowke (b. 1839)**

He was registered as being born in Foleshill, on the outskirts of what is now Coventry. His date of birth was recorded as 2 October (or 28 October) 1839 and he was baptised in the presence of his father, Thomas Lowke (b. 1811) and his wife, Martha (nee Woodhouse b. 1821) on 24 November in Bedworth, Warwickshire.

Joseph had 3 known siblings – Eliza (b. 1842 in Cheshire, probably near to the Shropshire Union Canal), Hannah (b. 1844, baptised in St. Michael's, Coventry) and William (b. 1845 or 1846 and baptised on 22 March in Willoughby).

At the age of 26 years, Joseph married Caroline Gibbs (Abt.1844-1873) in St. Laurence Church, Foleshill on 6 September 1865. The record showed that his father, Thomas, was a Boatman and that Caroline's father, John, was a weaver. The marriage was witnessed by James & Eliza Tedds. Only Caroline could write her own name in the Register.



*Image reproduced, with kind permission, from The Coventry Society web site*

Following Caroline's death in 1873, Joseph soon remarried. The wedding was held at All Saints Parish Church, Bedworth on 8 June 1874. His second wife was Elizabeth Harrison (b. 1834 nee Blick), whose first husband, Valentine Harrison, a coal miner, had died in 1870.

Elizabeth was some 10 years older than her second husband. She was a weaver and her father, Thomas was a labourer; Joseph was described as a Miner. They made their marks on the Register and were witnessed by a Thomas Hackett and a Jane Matthews.

This statement of occupation is interesting as, a year later, we find that Joseph is back to working on the canals.

### Elizabeth's uncle - William Lowke (b. 1845/6)

The Baptism Records for William, show that he was baptised on 22 March 1846. They help to confirm the origins of this branch of the Lowke family as they state that Thomas Lowke had also come from the small village of Willoughby in Warwickshire.



We know that William was a Boatman, like his father, Thomas, due to the Parish Records for St. Editha's Church in Polesworth, Warwickshire. On 6 April 1863, he married Elizabeth Knibbs, the daughter of another Boatman, Edward Knibbs. Both were illiterate and made their mark on the Register.

### Elizabeth's Grandfather - Thomas Lowke (b. 1811)

The village of Willoughby is situated adjacent to the Oxford Canal, which was dug close by in the early 1770s. It is also just a short walk from the famous canal-based settlement of Braunston, situated where the Oxford met the Grand Junction Canal. It is therefore little surprise that, with its own wharf, Thomas Lowke sought a living from the 'barges' that plied their trade on this busy stretch of canal.

In 1841, Thomas Lowke, Martha and their first-born, Joseph, lived in a cottage in Church Street, Bedworth. Other boatmen lived nearby, but many neighbours were employed in the Ribbon Weaving trade, possibly in the factory illustrated here.



The next time they are found in a census is in 1861. Thomas, with his children, William and Eliza, is moored up at the famous Charity Wharf in Bedworth. Around them are 7 other boats with their crews. Both the children are noted as assistant Boatmen, born in Willoughby (contradicting the Cheshire birth record for Eliza).

It is possible that their mother, Martha (nee Woodhouse), has died but no records have come to light to confirm this.

We do know that Martha's parents were William (b. circa 1791) and Mary (b. circa 1791) Woodhouse, and that she was baptised on 5 March 1815 in Bedworth. In the 1841 census William Woodhouse was a Boatsman (sic) and they were living not far from Thomas Lowke in Congreve Row, with another daughter, Mary (b. abt. 1821).

20 years later, in 1861, William, Mary & Thomas, one of their sons (b. 1809), were living in Coal Pit Field, Bedworth, surrounded by an extended family named Dewis. There were some 22 members of this family, with many males working as Ironstone or Coal Miners and the females as Ribbon or Silk Weavers. But the Woodhouse family was also quite large with at least 4 other children.

### **Elizabeth's Great Grandfather - Joseph Lowke (1774-1848).**

Joseph was also a Boatman. Indeed, he was recorded as a Boat Owner in one record. Clearly the coming of the canal to Willoughby, together with its situation at a major junction, provided opportunities for families to find a living away from the land, should they choose, as appears to be the case with Joseph.

He married Mary Masters (1774-1819) and they had at least 6 children.

Studying the available records, including Warwickshire Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, provides a few clues about this Joseph's children.

Thomas, we know, followed his father into a life on the canal. His known siblings were Hannah (1797-1880), John (b. 1802), Joseph (b. 1804), Mary (b. 1804) & Millicent (b. 1811).

John appears to have stayed in Willoughby and worked as an agricultural labourer or shepherd.

Joseph married a Hannah Lake on Christmas Day 1827. Lacking other information, it is not clear what happened to him, but they may indicate that he spent his life on the canals, like his father, but was never recorded in the censuses.

The marriage record for their daughter, Millicent, does confirm that her father, Joseph, was a Boat Owner.

At present, this appears to be as far back as we can take the Lowke family with their connections to the canals.

Returning to the trial of Elizabeth in 1875, we can now get a sense of the pressures that canal families had to work under.

## The death of Elizabeth Lowke

There is no known information about where and when Elizabeth was born. The Civil Registration Death Index shows that her death was registered in Penkridge, Staffordshire and she was said to be 7 years old.

### A small mystery

Newspaper reports and other sources of information relating to the trial highlight a slight confusion regarding who exactly was her father.

The Wolverhampton Chronicle Court Report refers to Joseph Lowke as her father and the court proceedings appear to confirm this.

Burial records for Merridale Cemetery in Wolverhampton, however, record her father as William Lowke.

Surname	Forename(s)	Age	Date	Abode	Parish	Relationship	Occupation	Grave
LOWKE	Elizabeth	7years	4 Nov 1875	Canal, Littles Lane	St Mary	Daughter of William	Boatman	9979b

An error? Possibly and there are no other known records to say otherwise.

Little's Lane (see record) still exists today and runs down to Lock Street where the Wolverhampton flight of 21 locks takes the BCN canal down to Aldersley Junction

As has already been shown, we know that Joseph's first wife, Caroline (nee Gibbs), died in 1873 at the age of 29 years, 8 years after marrying Joseph in 1865 with her death registered in Foleshill, Warwickshire.

This would have left Joseph to look after 3 children – Elizabeth (1868-1875), Hannah (b. 1870) and William (1871-1958) - as well as earning his income from the harsh life and conditions aboard cargo-carrying boats.

We know that when he married again, in 1874, he was working as a miner.

Did Joseph go back to the canal in 1875? Was he the father of Elizabeth? Most likely.

If, however, her father was William, Joseph's brother, then the evidence is very challenging to confirm this relationship.

We know that William was born in Willoughby and was baptised on 22 March 1846. We also see, from the 1861 census, that he assisted his father Thomas on his boat and that, when he married in 1863, he was a boatman.

Unfortunately, these are all the records that have come to light for him, so far. There are no birth registrations for any children. This is not a surprise, given the transient life that the boatmen led and their suspicion of any officialdom.

His wife, however, was Elizabeth, so it is possible, if unlikely, that the little girl Elizabeth, who died in 1875, was William's child and that she was named after her mother.

## The Court Case

### THE WOLVERHAMPTON CHILD MURDER



Appearing before the judge, Mr Baron Amphlett, on 11 December 1875, at Shire Hall, Stafford, **Frederick Musson (b. abt. 1852)** and **Anna Maria Hillman (b. abt. 1854)** were charged with the wilful murder of Elizabeth Lowke on 31 October 1875 in the Parish of Bushbury.



Her body was discovered at Aldersley Junction, on the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal, where Musson & Hillman's boat was moored up for the night, along with other boatmen and families.

It is more than likely that Musson had gone out drinking that evening, after stabling the horse, and his foul temper took the better of him on his return. Elizabeth suffered grievously once more on his return and, as events showed, for the final time in her short, desperate life.

As the first witness, Elizabeth's father, Joseph, said that he had known Musson for about 8 years and Hillman for 2 years. He stated that he was a widower and had 3 children.

Needing help, he had agreed that Elizabeth could live with the prisoners on their boat so that she could look after their infant child. He had last seen his daughter on 23 October, near Wolverhampton locks, when he noticed she had a black eye, caused, she said, by falling against the handle of a cupboard.

When he next saw her, Elizabeth was dead. On seeing her body, he said to the defendants "*I wish I had known last night, I would have come down*". Reduced to tears, Musson said that Elizabeth had gone to bed "*well and hearty*". The previous Sunday,

the boat's horse had trodden on her foot, but she had carried on playing, so it did not seem a problem.

Joseph stated that Elizabeth had been with the accused for some 4 months and had never complained of ill-treatment. Had she done so, he would have taken her away.

An interesting detail about Elizabeth emerged at this point from her father. She was a premature birth – *“weakly at birth being, in fact, a 7 months child”*.

Other boatmen or their wives were called to the witness box. Each had harrowing stories to tell. Sarah Johnson had seen Musson, some 5 weeks before, *“beating the deceased with a horsewhip”*, at least 6 times, while she was lying on a bed. She interceded and the beating stopped. Later she saw Elizabeth washing herself, showing that her neck and shoulder were covered with weals (sic), with blood running down her neck.

Several other boat people gave their accounts, one saying that he had seen how ill Elizabeth had looked, with marks on her body, while both boats were at Ellesmere Port.

The most harrowing account came from Frederick Beasley, a toll collector. Fetched by Musson, around 4.00 a.m., he found Elizabeth dead. Her eyes were blackened, her breast *“all cuts and bruises and the stomach was black and blue”*. One wound was big enough to put his thumb in while she had a bruise the size of the toll collector's palm. On her back was a ‘Substance’ as large as his fist that *“moved when it was touched as though filled with water.”* From the right knee to the foot were more than 30 marks or wounds, the flesh being cut away.

Other witnesses appeared, including the Police-constable, Edward Clayton, who arrested the prisoners and a surgeon, John Cooke from Tettenhall, who gave more harrowing details that had emerged from the post mortem he had carried out.

Mr. Plowden proceeded to a summing up before inviting the jury to retire to consider their verdict. His words were quite interesting as he gave his reasons for the jury to *“dismiss from their minds”* anything they might have heard or read as cases, such as this one, inevitably to drawing other in with a morbid curiosity leading to speculation and rumour by unskilled persons that found an outlet in the public press.

Within half an hour of retiring, the jury returned with a verdict of *“manslaughter”* and censured Joseph Lowke for his neglect of his child.

It was clear, in his summing up, that Mr. Baron Amphlett considered that they were as close to being guilty of *“murder as it possibly could”* and he would have considered execution as their punishment. Each was therefore sentenced to penal servitude for 20 years.

Thus, the horrific circumstances surrounding Elizabeth's death came to a judicial end.  
**Frederick M Musson**



Musson was registered as being born in Wolverhampton in the first quarter of 1851. He appears to have had at least 3 other siblings – George (B. 1841), Alfred (B. 1846) and Ellen (1848-1899).

His father was Thomas Musson who had married a Sophia Skinner (1848-1868), as recorded in Family Trees on the Ancestry Web Site, but no sources are shown to support this, just birth registrations for the eldest 3 children.

His mother, Sophia appears to have died in an accident at the Top Lock near Runcorn, Cheshire, noted in one unsourced family tree. Here, boats once moved between the Bridgewater Canal and the River Mersey, prior to the opening of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894. It was a very busy stretch requiring 2 sets of staircase locks to cope with the traffic.

Frederick appears in several censuses, unusually for those who worked the canals.

In 1871, at the age of 19, he was moored up at the Grand Junction Company Wharf in Leicester. The boat he was working on, as an Assistant Boatman, was "*Form & Thought*". His Captain was an Ambrose Rayson (b. abt. 1841 in Foleshill and there was another Assistant, William Hampton (b. abt. 1846 in Sandbach, Cheshire).



Parkhurst Prison, Isle of Wight c. 1847

Frederick was registered in the 1881 Census as a prisoner in "The Convict Prison", Parkhurst, on the Isle of Wight, following his conviction for manslaughter, and is shown as a boatman from Wolverhampton.

In that same year, his son, Frederick junior, was living with relatives while his father was in prison. These were Edward Williams, a Coal Boat Hauler born in Shropshire around 1828 and his wife, Susannah (nee Musson) born circa 1833.

Their 2 sons, Thomas and George were out of work but their occupation was said to be connected with coal boats.






The Census form had been completed by Annie M Musson and she had initially entered another son, George, as living with them before crossing the entry through. One researcher believed the barge was called "*Rachel*".

# CENSUS

OF

## ENGLAND AND WALES,

1911.



(Schedule for Vessels in Inland Waters.)

### SCHEDULE.

*Prepared pursuant to the Census (Great Britain) Act, 1910.*

This space to be filled up by the Enumerator.	
Number of Registration Districts	369
Number of Registration Sub-Districts	45
Number of Enumeration Districts	15
Name of Master or Person in charge of Vessel	J. Wilson
Name of Vessel	Emma
Tonnage on Census Night	Mar Spring Vale Works Carlisle

Interestingly, however, there is another 1911 Census record, this one signed by Frederick.

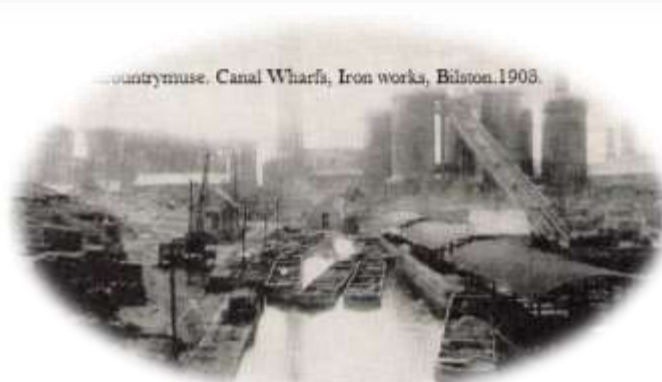
This provides a little more information but only shows Musson and his son, Charles, (now shown as born in 1892).

It appears to be related to their occupations and records that they were working on a 'vessel' possibly called *Duna(?)*.

The handwriting is not clear and a trawl through fleet lists of the time provide no boats with similar names at that time.

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED										DATE 10/10/2013 BY 60322			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	William M. Moore	Moore	22	Moore						Boatman		4	Refined manner
2	Chas	22	19	Single						1		1	" Staff

We can, however, see that his boat was moored alongside the Spring Vale Works Bilston, opened by 1780, due to the canal.



Musson's death was recorded in the summer of 1920. We will never know if he reformed after his conviction, whether he gave up alcohol and treated his family any better than he had the young Elizabeth Lowke.

[In a book entitled “A Grim Almanac of the Black Country”, the author, Nicola Sly writes a detailed account of the murder of Elizabeth Lowke, but incorrectly names Frederick as James Musson.]

## Anna Maria Hillman

Musson’s partner, later wife, is only briefly mentioned in other official records. She probably came from a canal family as other Hillmans are recorded as earning their living from their boats.

Cemetery records for Merridale show a burial for a Richard Hillman, a boatman, who was buried on 30 April 1863, aged 57 years. He was recorded as dying of dropsy. His wife was Maria.

The 1861 census does not record Anna Maria, but does show a line of other children whose parents are Richard & Maria Hillman. Their dates of birth range from 1842 to 1855, so this could be Anna Maria’s family. Richard is a Boatman and the children have been born across the canal network including Chester, Brierley Hill, and Kidderminster, with Anna Maria said to have been born in Wolverhampton.

At the time of the census the family are recorded as living in Lower Stafford Street, Wolverhampton, very much in the same canal community that has been explored through this paper.

The first official record found so far for Anna Maria, other than the Court proceedings, was dated 6 December 1875 where she, along with Frederick Musson, were recorded in a Criminal Register for Gaol Delivery.

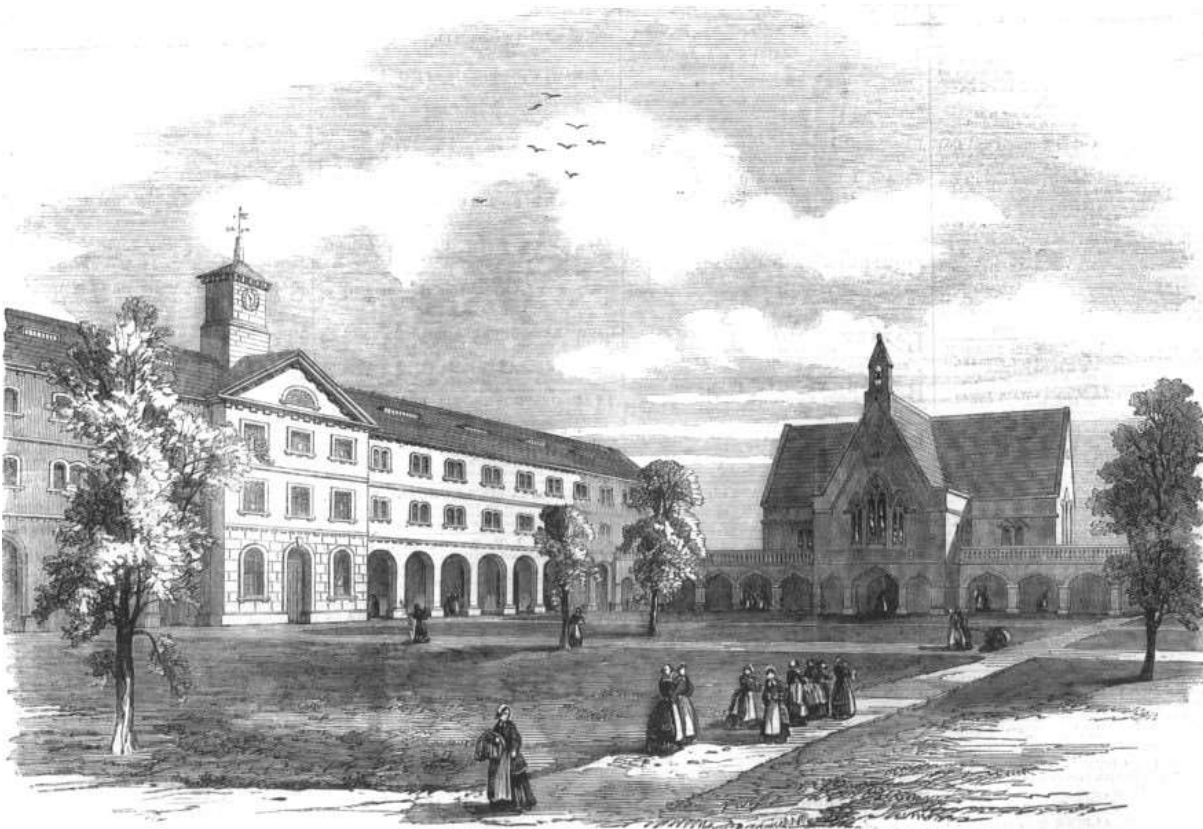
County of *Stafford*

76

Returns of all Persons Committed, or Bailed to appear for Trial, or Indicted at the *Gaol Delivery* held at *Stafford* on the *6<sup>th</sup>* day of *December* 1875, showing the nature of their Offences, and the result of the Proceedings.

No.	NAMES	Offence of which these were Convicted or Acquitted, and of which those discharged without Trial were charged on Indictment or Conviction	Convicted and Sentenced				Acquitted and Discharged
			Death	Penal Servitude	Imprisonment (note if also Whipped or Fined)	Term of Police Supervision	
1	<i>William Hancock</i>	<i>Wilful murder of Thomas Goodwin</i>					
2	<i>Frederick Musson</i>	<i>Manslaughter (Indicted for murder)</i>					
3	<i>Annis Maria Hillman</i>	<i>The Larc</i>					

In a Black Country Muse Forum, it is stated that Anna Maria served her sentence in the Female Convict Prison, Burlington Lane, Fulham, London.



*The Fulham Refuge (above) became a female prison between 1856 and 1888.*

By 1891, she was living in Brunswick Street, Wolverhampton with her husband and son. She was noted as an aunt, Frederick as the uncle. They were living with William Henry Edwards, his wife Mary and their 5-year-old daughter, Emma. To whom they were related and therefore 'aunt' and 'uncle' cannot be ascertained.

We know that she was living in Wolverhampton with Frederick in the 1901 & 1911 censuses.

She died around June 1938.

## The Minneth Connection explored a little further

We know that Elizabeth Lowke, the victim of that terrible crime, had at least 2 siblings.

Her sister, Hannah, was born on 16 February 1869 in Bedworth and was baptised on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1870. The parish record describes her parents as having no fixed abode and Joseph was a Boatman by occupation.



It is not confirmed, but it is possible that Hannah was adopted by a William and Anne Weall by the 1881 Census and was living in West Ham, London. There is some doubt about this, as her name is given as Anne Lowk, but her given age and place of birth fit.

It would also be conceivable that Hannah was given to the Wealls, and later adopted, following the death of her mother, Caroline in 1873, in the same way that Joseph had passed her sister, Elizabeth, to Musson & Hillman, to relieve him of caring for them, despite his remarriage to Elizabeth Blick in 1874.

No other records have come to light regarding Hannah.

**William Lowke** (1871-1958), said to be born in Minneth, has slightly more to tell us about himself. No birth records have come to light yet, and where he grew up is not known, as no census records have been discovered for 1871 & 1881.



In 1891, he was lodging in Court 1, No. 1, Lock Side in Tipton amongst a large canal community. His Captain was Thomas Hixon (b. 1823) and sharing their accommodation were his wife, Hannah (b. 1831) and their son Richard (b. 1861) and their grandson, also called Richard (b. 1880). Thomas, his son and William were all described as Barge Boatmen. In this census, however, he stated that he was born in Coventry.

He married a Harriet Lemm (1874-1935) in 1893 and, by the next census, 1901, they had 4 children – John (b. 1894), William (b. 1896), Thomas (b. 1899) and Hannah (b. 1900). The family lived in 6 Malthouse Row, Tipton. Unfortunately, the Enumerator placed a large cross across his occupation column, but it appears that William is recorded as a Boatman Captain. His place of birth was recorded as Mineth, Warwickshire, the Enumerator struggling to make sense of his answer, no doubt.



The family were living in a large canal community. The adjacent boat was called *Stour*. Next to them lived Harriet's mother, Hannah Lemm, and her 5 children ranging from 1 year to 20 years old. Her husband, John, was possibly out elsewhere on the canals at the time of the census.



**William Lowke (from a Family Tree on Ancestry)**

The final census record, 1911, for William shows that there were 2 more children, Lydia (b. 1902) and Joseph (b. 1907). Another child had died, probably in childbirth. Unusually, perhaps, all the children still lived at home. William was still a Boatman (Canal (Capn) and his 2 eldest sons, William & Thomas, were Boatmen Canal (mates). All 3 were noted as working for Corn Factors, which would have been the main cargo that they transported. William was unable to write his own name so he made a mark.

In the same house, 19 Hurst Lane, Tipton, there now lived Harriet's parents, Hannah and John, also a Boatman Capn (sic) working for Corn Factors. The census records that they had been married for 39 years with 11 children, 4 of whom had died. Hannah was said to be 53 at the time of the census, so this would have meant that she was married at 14.

In this census his birthplace was recorded as Minneth, Nr. Birmingham, Warwickshire.

Minworth, like many canal-side settlements, was often referred to as Min'orth, Minn'orth, Mineth, Minneth by the boat crews. In the same way Curdworth became Curd'orth, Tamworth was Tammeth etc. Even today locals will demonstrate their dialect and pronounce these villages and towns in their abbreviated form.

In 1970, a highly regarded former boatman, canal historian and folk song writer, David Blagrove, wrote a song called "The 'Orrible Trip. One of the verses reflects the boatmen's dialect –

*Down Curd'orth and Min'orth we hadn't a penn'orth  
Of sunshine; so much did we lack it  
That we followed a star which led to the bar  
Of a pub called the 'Dog in a Jacket'.*

Harriet & William had one more child – a daughter, Selina, who was born in the autumn of 1911, no doubt named after her own sister, Selina (b. 1889)

William died in 1958, his death being registered in Wednesbury, Staffordshire.

Harriet had died in 1935, her death recorded in Dudley.

### **The Lemm and Timmins Families**

Harriet's family records provide another interesting puzzle. Her father was **John Lemm** (1855-1934).

John clearly grew up in the canal tradition. By managing to avoid most of the censuses, no doubt out on the 'cut' somewhere, we know little about him or, indeed, his parents.

His birth was recorded, but this presents a mystery.

He was registered in Dudley Registration District but no father or mother are known.

The next records discovered, relate to his marriage to Hannah Stokes in St. Paul's, Tipton on 30 May 1874. It is these 2 records that provide the puzzle as it lists his father as **Abraham Timmins** (b. abt. 1828). John's surname is written as Lem, but that would be a commonplace error.

Just 2 more records come to light about John. As has already been examined, the 1911 Census notes that John and his wife, Hannah, were living with William Lowke and they are shown as Father and Mother-in-Laws.

Finally, we know that John died in late 1934, his death being recorded in Dudley.

At what point, then, did John become the 'adopted' son of Abraham Timmins? Was he 'farmed' out to Abraham because his parents could no longer afford to keep him or had there been a tragedy and he lost his parents?



## The Timmins Family Tree

Examining the records for John Lemm and the record indicating that his father was Abraham Timmins, led to a family tree that can possibly be traced back to the mid 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

Abraham was part of a family that lived in the Tipton & Dudley Port areas of the Black Country and had followed previous generations of Boatmen.

He appears in the 1841 Census. His father, Noah (b. abt. 1785) was a Boat Loader who had come from another County. With his wife, Sarah Walker (b. abt. 1787 in Birmingham) they lived in Birchyfield Lane, Oldbury with 5 children, one being Abraham.

*[A note of caution needs to be added. There is a marriage record, registered in Dudley, that shows a Noah Timmins marrying a Sarah Walker on 10 April 1808. There is a record for a Sarah Walker who was baptised in St. Philips Church, Birmingham on 20 March 1787. Her parents were Thomas & Mary Walker.]*

*The 1851 Census notes that Noah's wife had been born in Birmingham (shown as Birmm, Warwickshire) around that date.*

*It may well be that recording these as the correct individuals, is in fact false.*

*At present, there is a gap between their marriage date and the birth of their first child, William, in 1819. 11 years without a child seems unusual, possibly, unlikely, but lacking other evidence, this may nevertheless be the correct information.]*

Their eldest son, William (b. abt. 1816) was also a Boat Loader and Abraham had followed his father and brother by 1851. Noah was now a Victualler and Boat Loader (coal), William was a Labourer now, as was his brother, Thomas (b. abt. 1823). Their next brother, Noah (b. abt. 1826) was a Boat Loader (Coal), probably working for his father while Abraham was a Boatman.

It was on 1 September, 1856 that Abraham married Ann Bissell and records confirm that his father was Noah.

When Abraham died is another mystery. A record exists for an Abraham Timmins dying in Birmingham in late 1868 with no other information discovered yet.

However, there is apparently a daughter, Emma, living with her mother, Ann, and her brother Joseph Timmins, in the 1881 & 1891 Censuses. As Emma was born on 16 July 1872 and baptised on 25 October 1878, it does not fit with the date of Abraham's death being 1868.

Tracing back Abraham's father, Noah, leads to his father Moses. There is record for a Noah Timmins baptised on 25 December 1785 at St. Thomas Church in Dudley. Moses is shown as his father; Hannah was his mother.

Moses had married a Hannah Fletcher (1751-1845) on 17 April 1781 in Tipton. Apart from Noah, their other known children were – Jesse (b. 1781), Ann (b. 1788), Stephen (b. 1791), Joseph (b. 1793), Moses (b. 1795), Mary (b. 1799 & Sarah (b. 1799). A gap between 1781 and 1788 would suggest there were other children.

Other researchers have concluded that the parents of Moses and any siblings, were John Timmins (b. 1727) and Rachel Standley (b. 1725).

John Timmins was baptised on 16 April 1727 at St. Martin's in Tipton. His parents were Aaron Timmins and Elizabeth. On 10 November 1747, he married Rachel in Sedgley in Staffordshire.

Was he the father of Moses? No one can be sure but the places mentioned in records do cover a small area in the Black Country.

If John was indeed the father of Moses, then records allow us to take the line back even further.

Aaron Timmins (b. abt. 1690) was probably born in Tipton. There is a record showing that he married Elizabeth Downing (b. abt. 1696-1729) on 10 August 1713 in this township that now consisted mainly of small hamlets. The Parish Register is entitled "*Burying in Woollen Began*" and covers the period 1513-1736. It is a treasure trove for those researching families in Tipton over this time span.

Apart from John, they had at least 5 other children – Sarah (b. 1714), Joseph (b. 1716), Elizabeth (b. 1718), Aaron (b. 1720) & Jane (b. 1724).

Aaron's wife, Elizabeth, has a little more to tell us. Her parents were John Downing (b. abt. 1660) and, interestingly, an Elizabeth Bissell.

John came from Rowley Regis and was baptised on 13 January 1662. His parents were John Downing (b. abt. 1640) and Elizabeth Price B. abt. 1640) who married in Rowley Regis on 8 December 1660.

Errors may well have been made in tracing William Lowke, born in Minneth, back beyond the 1841 census. It would be interesting, nevertheless, if his family can be taken back to the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. If this were the case, then they would have joined many others who fully embraced the enormous changes that were to come to this part of the Midlands. As ironstone and coal were discovered, together with a vast network of canals to move these and other minerals and cargos around the country, they would have contributed to a country that changed beyond all recognition with the coming of the Industrial Revolution.

Certainly, he was part of a family that earned their wages from the waterways in the 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. How sad, then, that one of his nieces should die so tragically at the hands of such a brutal person.

## **Credits & sources**

Census, parish and other records accessed through the Ancestry web site.

Spinningweaver web site. (Run by Alan and Angela Hawks)

R. H. Davies - Canal Crimes

The Murder of Elizabeth Lowkes & Corroborating Information – author unknown, discovered through the internet.

Black Country Muse Forum re: More ghastly murders

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