

# The Lost Sister

Susan Clifford (1888-1938) and her family in  
Derbyshire, County Durham and London

By [John Clifford](#)

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*Hill Square, Darley Abbey, just north of Derby, in the early 1900s. William Clifford and his family lived here in the 1880s, at No.4 and then No.3 Hill Square. His wife, Susan, died in January 1888 after giving birth to their fifth child, a girl, who William named after her mother. Little Susan should have grown up here with her siblings, but she did not. (From Up Darley Down Darley by Erica Perry, 2002)*



## Darley Abbey and Derby

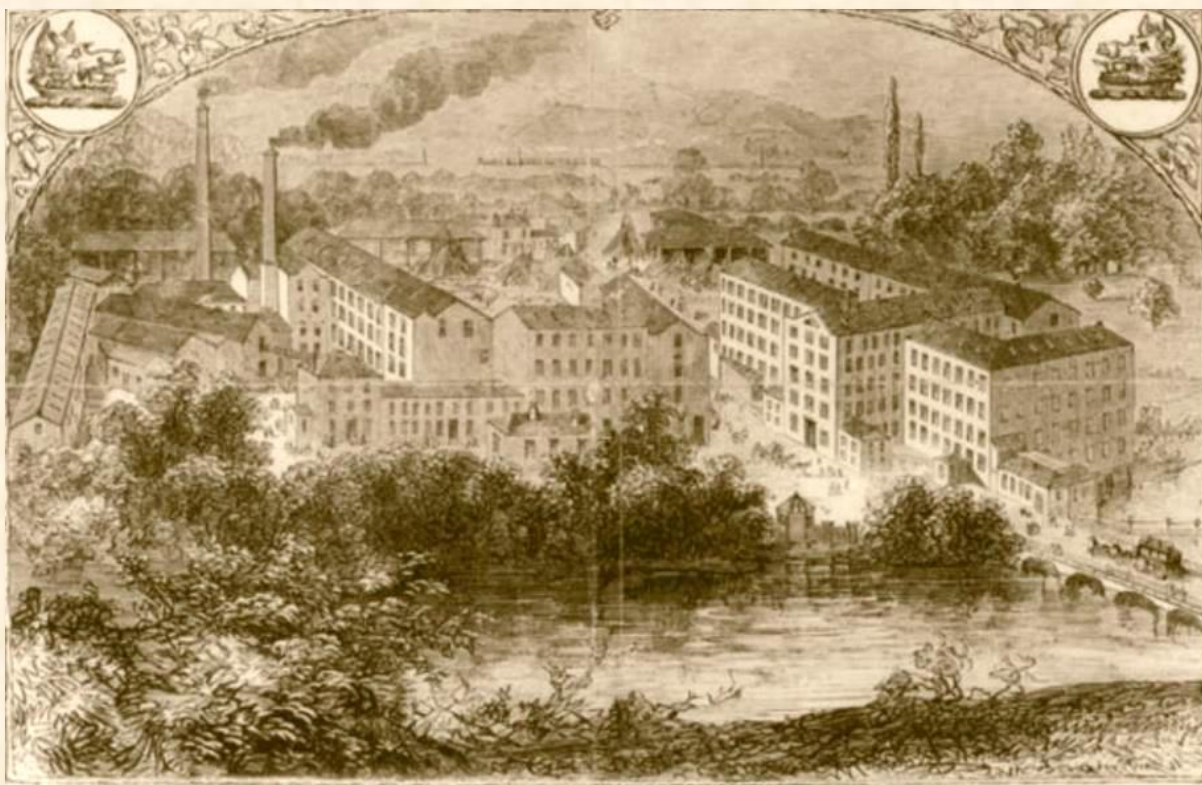
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### Growing families

Susan Clifford was born in January 1888 in Darley Abbey, just north of Derby. Her father, William Clifford, was a younger brother of Thomas Clifford, my great-great grandfather, so Susan was Thomas' niece.

The family had moved to neighbouring Allestree in the early 1850s. They were from north-west Leicestershire where Thomas had been born in 1850, as had his older sister, Helena, in 1847. William was born in Allestree in 1857. Unfortunately, their father, Charles, died that year aged just 34.

By 1861, Helena and their widowed mother, Catherine, were working in neighbouring Darley Abbey at the cotton mill owned by the Evans family. Catherine remarried at Darley Abbey St Matthew in 1863 and the family moved to the village. Many of the houses had been built by the Evans family for their workers.



*A mid-nineteenth century engraving of the Boar's Head cotton mills at Darley Abbey, owned by Walter Evans & Co. From the 1850s to the 1880s, several members of the Clifford family and their relatives by marriage worked here. (With thanks to [Darley Abbey Historical Group](#))*

Helena Clifford married Lewis Mather in 1868. Thomas was one of the witnesses. Helena and Lewis had eight children, mostly born in Darley Abbey. Thomas married Annie Norton at St Matthew's in 1875. Annie also worked in the cotton mill, as did several members of her family. Thomas had become a locomotive fireman with the

Midland Railway. They moved into Derby where their first child, Charles, my great grandfather, was born in 1876. They had three more children.

William Clifford was a factory hand at 14, probably also at the cotton mill. In 1879, he married Susan Slack in Derby registry office. Susan had been a bleacher at the age of 10, like her older siblings, at the cotton mill in Milford, 5 miles (8 km) north of Darley Abbey.

Susan had been previously married in 1868 when she was 17. Her first husband was Jesse Oldfield. Their daughter, Harriet, was born the following year. Susan became separated from Jesse and returned to using her maiden name. She and Harriet moved back in with her parents, Peter and Ann Slack, at their house on Hopping Hill, Milford. Susan was a 'factory twister' there in 1871. Jesse had moved to Chorlton in Lancashire, where he married again and started another family. It seems that Susan and Jesse were still legally married, which would have made both new marriages bigamous. Their subsequent children would have been declared illegitimate had the truth come out.

The Slacks moved from Milford to Darley Abbey where Peter became a 'factory spinner' at the cotton mill there. When William Clifford married Susan, they lived initially with her parents at 4 Hill Square. William had joined the Midland Railway as a labourer and Susan now worked as a hat maker or 'milliner'. Their first child, Ethel Annie, was born in 1880, followed by William jnr in 1881. Maggie followed in 1884 and Arthur in 1886. They now had their own home at 3 Hill Square. Ethel Annie and William Jnr were attending Darley Abbey's Walter Evans School.

Thomas Clifford had left the Midland Railway in 1880 to become a police constable in Norton Woodseats, 30 miles (48 km) to the north on the edge of Sheffield. He left the police in 1885 and returned to Darley Abbey, where his children went to school with their cousins, Helena Mather's and William Clifford's children. They would have enjoyed Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in the summer of 1887.

Date of Admission.			NAME, Christian and Surname.	Date of Birth.			Name and Address of Parent or Guardian.
D.	M.	Y.		D.	M.	Y.	
7	2	87	Ethel Clifford	28	3	80	William Clifford 3 Hill Square
7	2	87	Ellen Bladon	12	5	80	John Duffield Road
7	2	87	Lily Long	11	10	80	Robert Long 13 New Road
7	2	87	Annie Clifford	19	4	80	Thomas Clifford 1 The Street
6	2	88	Patience Elizabeth Mather	19	12	87	Lewis Mather 9 1/2 West Row

Extracts from a single page of the register for Walter Evans School, Darley Abbey, for admissions in 1887 and 1888. It shows three cousins attending together, an opportunity that little Susan would never have: William and Susan Clifford's daughter, Ethel Annie, little Susan's eldest full sister; Thomas and Annie Clifford's daughter, (Catherine) Annie, little sister to my great grandfather, Charles Clifford; Lewis and Helena Mather's daughter, Patience Elizabeth. Their brothers went to the same school. ([FindMyPast.co.uk](http://FindMyPast.co.uk))



## Widowhood and remarriage

Sadly, Susan died at age 36 on 16 January 1888 after giving birth to her fifth child – the subject of this piece – a daughter who William named after her mother. She had suffered ‘syncope’ or loss of consciousness, which may have been from a drop in blood pressure. Placental retention leading to catastrophic blood loss would have been a likely cause.

Susan was buried in the churchyard of Darley Abbey St Matthew. William may have delayed the baby’s baptism hoping that Susan would recover. Eight days after her death, no doubt in great sorrow, little Susan was baptised on 24 January inside the church, as her siblings and most of her cousins had been.



*Darley Abbey St Matthew, built in 1819 and seen here around 1900. It was a ‘chapelry’ in the parish of Derby St Alkmund, provided by the Evans family for their mill workers. Little Susan Clifford was baptised here on 24 January 1888, a few days after her mother, aged 36, had been buried in the churchyard. (With thanks to [Darley Abbey Historical Group](#))*

Who would look after William’s children while he was working? The three older ones were now aged 8, 7 and 4 years and the youngest, Arthur, was only 21 months. Both grandmothers had died. Their aunt Helena still had eight children at home, the youngest aged 10 months, so she hardly had room for her new niece.

Thomas and Annie’s four children were aged between 11 and 5 years. They had moved back into Derby when Thomas re-joined the Midland Railway as a locomotive fireman in 1887. He was an engine driver from 1889 until the end of his life. Thomas and Annie may have helped to look after William’s children. When his son, Arthur, was 10 and attending Peartree School, he would be living with his uncle Thomas.





*The place where William Clifford stood in the churchyard of Darley St Matthew in January 1888 as he contemplated the future of his newborn daughter, the youngest of five now without their mother. No doubt William's sister, Helena, and their brother, Thomas, my great-great grandfather, were standing beside him. (With thanks to John Bishop)*

In 1890, William was 33 years old. He was working away from home on the Leicester-to-Burton upon Trent branch of the Midland Railway. This line had a station at Castle Gresley in south Derbyshire, 15 miles (24 km) south-west of Derby and close to the borders with Leicestershire and Staffordshire. The national census of the



following year would describe him as a "Railway plate labourer". This involved laying or maintaining railway lines, including the iron plates which secured the rails to the wooden sleepers.

On 26 May 1890, William married his second wife, Sarah Jane Goodwin. She had been born in Thurstaston, 7 miles (11 km) west of Derby. She was now 30 years old and had not been previously married. Her family lived in Derby. In 1881, they had been in St Alkmund parish, less than a mile from Darley Abbey, and it is likely that William knew Sarah from then. The wedding took place at Christ Church, Linton, 1.5 miles (2.5 km) south of Castle Gresley. The church was new, having been built in 1881 to serve the growing populations of both villages. Sarah probably came down to Linton while William was working locally, as they were both noted as living in Castle Gresley at the time of the wedding.

1890. Marriage solemnized at <u>Christ Church Linton</u> in the <u>Parish of Church Gresley</u> in the County of <u>Derby</u>								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
37	May 26	William Clifford	33	Widower	Railway Labourer	Castle Gresley	Charles Clifford	Labourer
	1890	Sarah Goodwin	30	Spinster	—	Castle Gresley	William Goodwin	Gardener
Married in the <u>Christ Church</u> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by _____ or after <u>Banns</u> by me,								
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		<u>William Clifford</u>		in the Presence of us,		<u>John Varley</u>		
		<u>Sarah Goodwin</u>				<u>Harriet Varley</u>		
						<u>William Watson</u>		

*Registration of William Clifford's marriage on 26 May 1890 to Sarah Jane Goodwin at Christ Church, Linton, near Church Gresley, south Derbyshire. The witnesses were John and Harriet Varley. The Varleys would adopt little Susan if they had not already done so. (With thanks to David Clifford)*

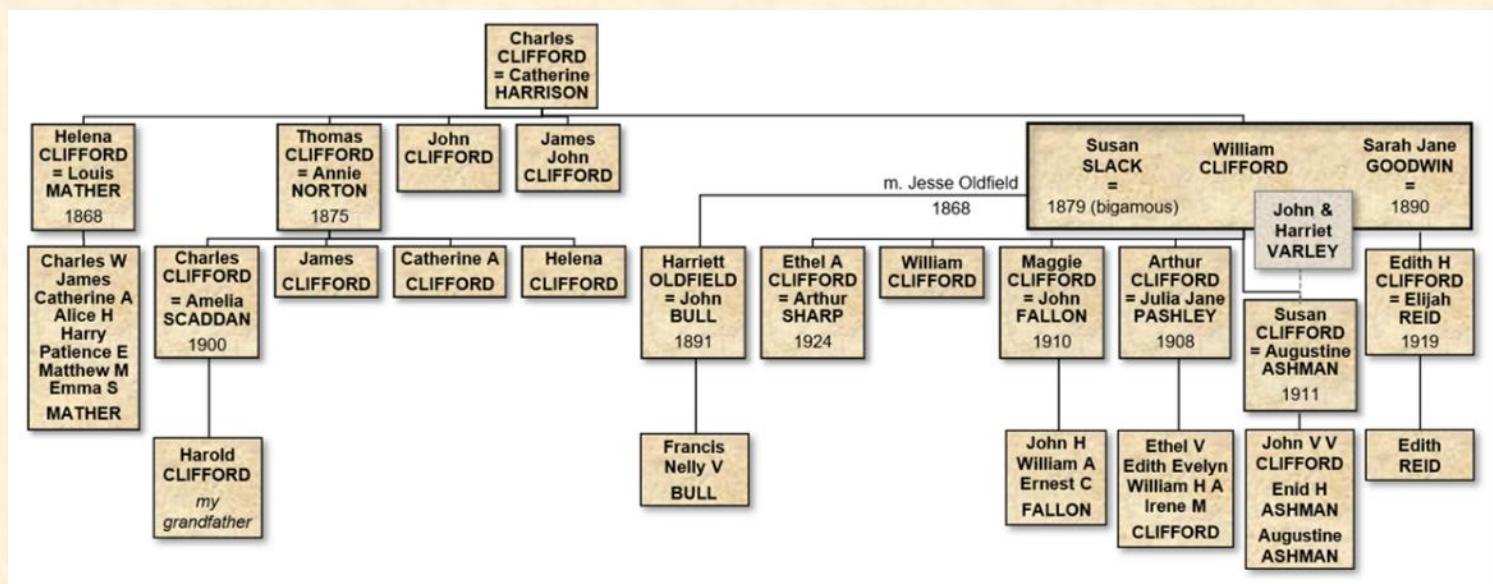
Little Susan was now 2 years and 4 months old. Two other very significant names appear in her father's marriage register entry. The witnesses were John and Harriet Varley. It seems that the Varleys never had children of their own and they would adopt Susan, if they had not already done so. This suggests that they were very close friends of William, who entrusted Susan to them. Adoption was a much more informal arrangement at the time, and was not regulated in the way that we are familiar with until the Adoption of Children Act of 1926. This covered England and Wales and was followed by equivalent Acts for Northern Ireland in 1929 and Scotland in 1930.

Susan may have been one child too many for William's wider family to absorb before he had the opportunity to remarry. This may explain why Sarah Jane did not become the mother to Susan that she could have been.

Harriet Varley was from Clay Cross in Derbyshire. John was from Selston in Nottinghamshire. His father and older brothers were coal miners and he followed suit. John may have met Harriet while he was working at a mine in Alfreton, Derbyshire, when he was lodging with a local family. They got married in Basford, Nottinghamshire, in 1868. By 1881, John was a miner at Belper in Derbyshire, 7 miles (11 km) north of Darley Abbey.



Thomas Clifford was also widowed when Annie, my great-great grandmother, died in January 1891 aged 35. Charles, my great grandfather, was coming up to 15 and was working as an iron moulder in one of the Derby foundries. This involved pouring molten metal into casts. His siblings were 12, 10 and 8. Thomas remarried in June of the same year. His decision may not have met with Charles's approval. In the August, Charles left home and travelled down to Devonport near Plymouth to join the Royal Navy. In a sense, Charles was now 'the lost brother' but, unlike Susan, he had at least grown up with his siblings and cousins. He would spend most of his career based in Portsmouth, which is why my immediate family is not from Derby.



Family tree of my great-great grandfather, Thomas Clifford, his brother, William, and their families, including William's daughter, Susan, who was adopted by John and Harriet Varley.

33 Warner St.	1	William Clifford	Head	M	34	Railway Labourer
		Sarah Jane	Wife	M	31	
		Ethel Annie	Daughter	F	7	
		William	Son	F	9	
		Maggie	Daughter	F	6	
		Arthur	Son	F	4	

Extract from the 1891 census showing Susan's father, William Clifford, living at 33 Warner Street, Derby, with his four other children, Ethel Annie, William, Maggie and Arthur, and his second wife, Sarah Jane. ([FindMyPast.co.uk](http://FindMyPast.co.uk))

By April 1891, William had also moved into Derby with Sarah Jane and his four other children. Sarah Jane's parents lived next door. William's step-daughter, Harriet Oldfield, married John Bull on 3 August. William was one of the witnesses, as was John Bull's sister, Nelly.

In 1893, Sarah Jane provided William with his sixth child, Edith Harriet. Thomas was widowed again in May 1896. He married for a third time that November.



A D M I S S I O N								
"Special care must be taken to obtain exact information on these points" the parents, former teachers, and registrar of births, if					(f), (g), and necessary."			
NAME IN FULL (c)		PARENT OR GUARDIAN. (d)			Whether exemption from religious instruction is claimed (e) (Yes or No.)	WAS BORN (f)		
SURNAME	CHRISTIAN.	NAME	ADDRESS. Enter Number of the House and Street (if any.)			On the (Day)	Of (Mth.)	18 (Yr.)
Clifford	Arthur	Uncle Thomas	12 Shaft. Cres.		1/1	24	4	86

Extract from a register page for Peartree School, Derby, showing Susan's brother, Arthur, attending in June and July 1896 while living at 12 Shaftsbury Crescent with his uncle, Thomas Clifford, my great-great grandfather. Thomas had been widowed for the second time in the May. ([FindMyPast.co.uk](http://FindMyPast.co.uk))



At back-left is Susan's uncle, Thomas Clifford. This is the only known photograph of him. At back-right is Susan's cousin, Charles Clifford, Thomas' son and my great grandfather. They are seen here at Charles's wedding on 11 June 1900 at Portsea St Mary, Portsmouth. The seated bride, Amelia Scaddan, is my great grandmother. I have no evidence that Charles had any further contact with his Derby family. Like Susan, he left the Derby area in the 1890s, which is why none of their descendants are from there. The chevrons on Charles's sleeve indicate his 'rating' of Leading Seaman. He was based at the HMS Victory barracks at the time, but he was also a member of the crew of the torpedo boat destroyer HMS Sylvia with the Medway Instructional Flotilla in the Thames Estuary. Charles and Amelia would have a granddaughter named Sylvia. In the centre, on Amelia's right shoulder, is Thomas' third wife, Matilda. They had travelled down from Derby for the occasion, no doubt by train. (Family collection)

## Lanchester Rural District

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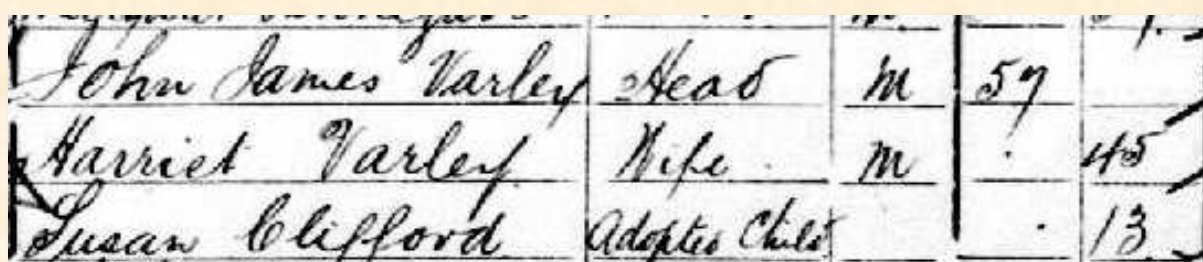
The 1891 national census does not reveal the location of John and Harriet Varley and little Susan but, some time in that decade, they moved 150 miles (240 km) north from Derby to County Durham.

The Varleys never changed Susan's surname, ensuring that she would not forget her natural family. She would in fact be able to maintain limited contact with them, so she was not lost to them forever. But her siblings did have to grow up without her, and she without them. This may have been to the advantage of her quality of life, since the Varleys would only have one mouth to feed, compared to William Clifford's five other children.

### Hamsteels Common

Queen Victoria died on 22 January 1901 and was succeeded by King Edward VII. On 31 March, the next national census was taken. We now find the family living on a ridge in the beautiful rolling countryside of Hamsteels Common, 7 miles (11 km) west of Durham city in the Deerness Valley area.

Their address was 8 Marley's Houses, just south-east of the hamlet of Wilk's Hill. Within a radius of 1-2 miles are the hamlet of Hamsteels to the north, the village of Cornsay to the west, and the village of Esh to the east. See map on [page 11](#)



John James Varley	Head	M	59	1
Harriet Varley	Wife	M	45	
Susan Clifford	Adopted Child		13	

*Extract from the 1901 census for Lanchester rural district in north-west Durham. Susan Clifford and her adoptive parents, John and Harriet Varley, were living on Hamsteels Common at 8 Marley's Houses, between the hamlets Wilk's Hill and Quebec. ([FindMyPast.co.uk](#))*

Marley's Houses, originally ten or eleven of them, were built in the V-shaped corner created by the angle at which Steadman's Lane meets Front Street. Thirty children lived in these houses at the time. Those on the Front Street side of the 'V' are still there. At the apex of the junction was the Hamsteels New Inn. The houses were named after John Marley who had been the Inn's landlord in the 1880s. His successor, John Cockerill, a former policeman, was a locally famous exponent of shooting sports until his death in 1894. In 1901, the landlord who the Varleys would have known was William Suddes. The inn is now a private house.

The route of an old Roman road passes right in front of Marley's Houses, running in a north-westerly direction from York to the Antonine Wall in Scotland. The road was later known as Dere Street. 3 miles (5 km) to the north is Lanchester, itself originally a Roman fort.



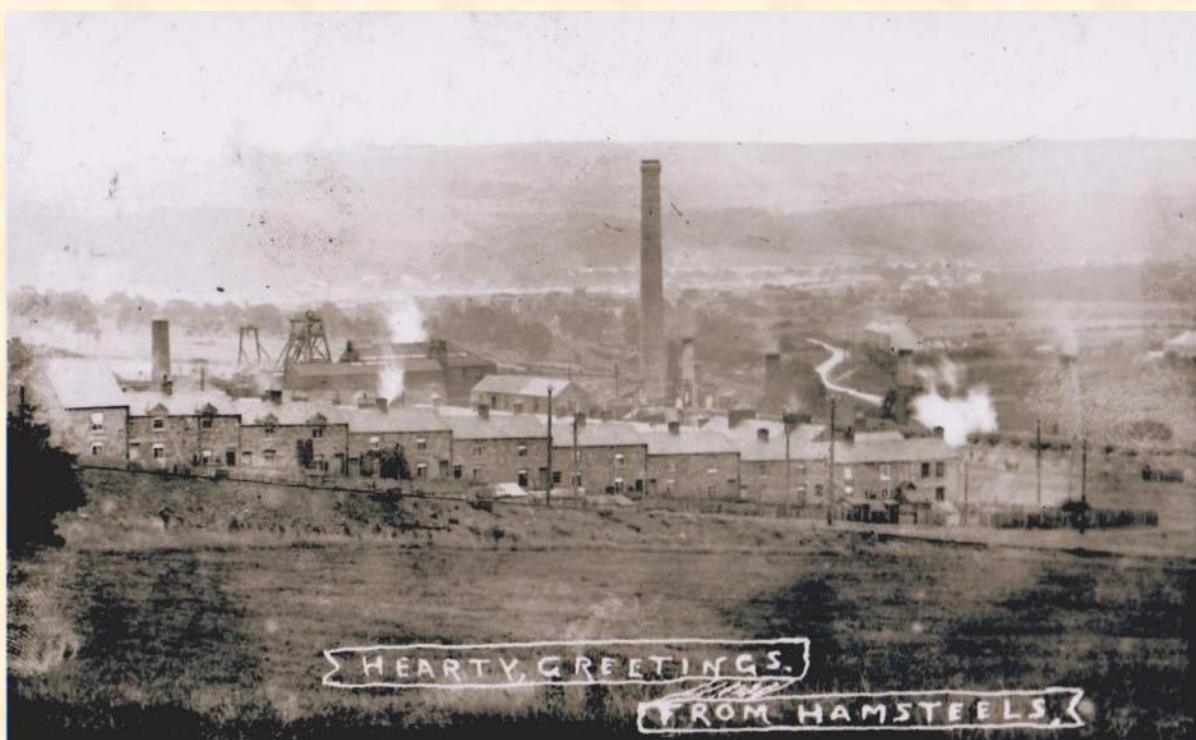
In 1901, Susan was 13. She probably attended the Hamsteels Church of England 'National School', built in 1874 to accommodate 240 children. This was diagonally opposite Marley's Houses, just east of the Steadman's Lane junction. The Marley's Houses children only needed to walk a few paces, past the Hamsteels New Inn and over to the north side of the Roman road.

Beyond the school was the Hamsteels church of St John the Baptist with seating for a congregation of 300. The church was built in 1875 to serve the local coal mining community which had been recently established. The vicarage was built on Steadman's Lane in 1890.

John Varley was working as a coal hewer at one of the mines nearby. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were twenty mines in the Deerness Valley area. The earliest ones had developed as the railway network expanded, beginning with the world's first public railway to use steam locomotives. This was the Stockton and Darlington Railway, which opened in 1825 to serve collieries around Shildon, 13 miles (21 km) to the south of the Hamsteels area.

### Hamsteels Colliery

Hamsteels Colliery, a 'drift' mine which opened in 1867, lay about half a mile (1 km) to the south-east of Marley's Houses. Drift mines are created by excavating into hillsides. The colliery site had its own village which included housing for management. Some of the managers came from collieries to the south and east of Durham – Whitworth, Spennymoor, Shotton, Haswell and Easington.



*Postcard of Hamsteels Colliery, mailed on 17 August 1907 from Esh Winning which is just visible in the background. The houses of Office Street are in the foreground. The view is from Clifford Bank looking south-east down the valley of Hedleyhope Burn. (Original postcard – with thanks to [George Nairn](#))*







*Previous page – Hamsteels Common in the mid-1890s.*

*TOP: the rural landscape around the original hamlet of Hamsteels.*

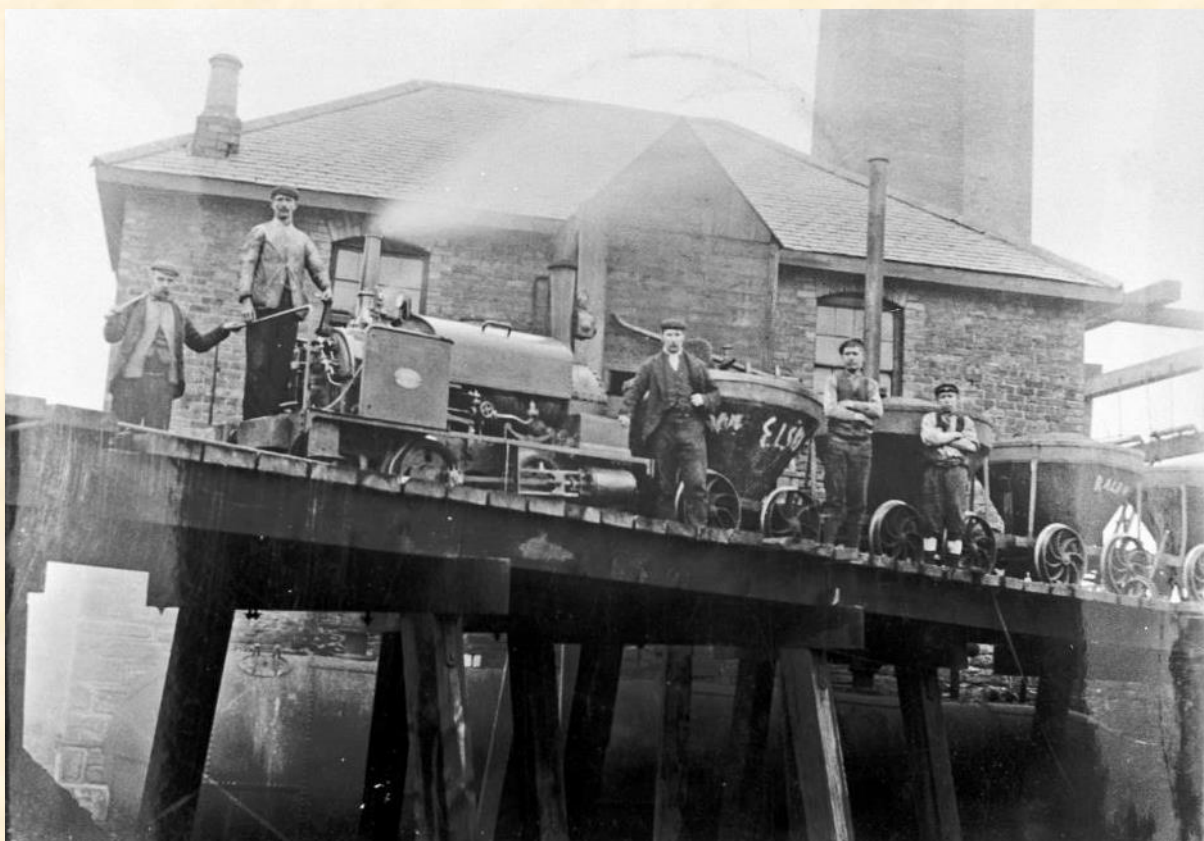
*LEFT: Cornsay Colliery and its new village.*

*CENTRE: Marley's Houses or "Cottages" where Steadman's Lane meets Front Street. Just to the east are the school, the church of St John the Baptist and the terraced streets of Quebec which housed miners and their families. Clifford's House and its farm are just below Quebec.*

*RIGHT: Hamsteels Colliery and the terraced streets that housed the management. The Roman road, known as Dere Street, runs from mid-right to top-left – marked in error as Watling Street on Ordnance Survey maps in the 1890s, not be confused with the famous Roman road further south.*

*BOTTOM: The Cornsay railway ran beside Hedleyhope Burn and the long rows of coke ovens at both collieries. The photograph on [page 13](#) was taken from just above Railway Terrace at bottom-right.*

*(Ordnance Survey County Series, Durham, revised 1895, published 1898, scale 6 inches to 1 mile or 1:10,560; © Crown Copyright; [Old-Maps.co.uk](#), Landmark Information Group Ltd)*

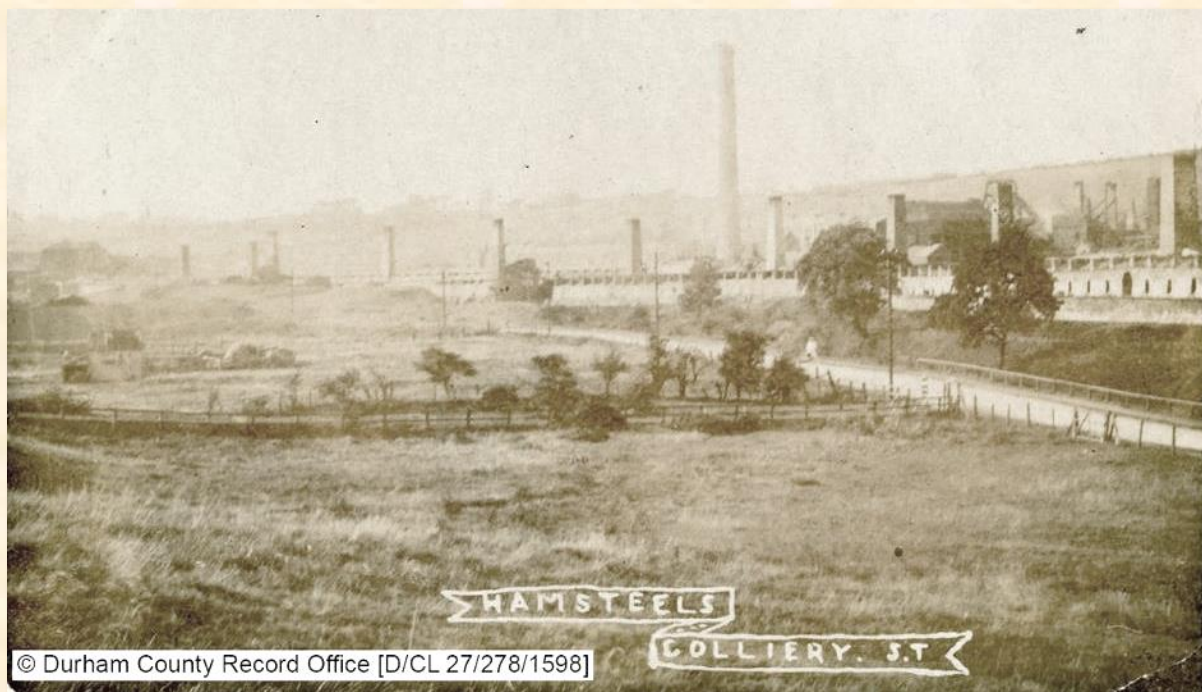


*Workmen at Hamsteels Colliery with coke wagons being pulled by 'saddle tank' 0-4-0 steam locomotive No.439, built in Gateshead by Black Hawthorn in 1877. (© 2021 Beamish Museum Ltd, ref. [NEG4608](#))*

The Hamsteels workforce totalled 680 men and boys. Some of the boys in their early teens managed the horses and ponies that pulled the coal trucks. The seams were between 20 and 42 inches thick (51-107 cm), into which the hewers crawled and worked lying on their sides. In the early 1890s, they were producing around 280,000



tons (254,000 tonnes) a year. Three quarters of this was converted into coke on-site in long rows of ovens, for use in industrial processes such as smelting iron ore. Fire clay was also extracted as a by-product of mining. This was used to produce bricks and tiles on the same site.



*Hamsteels Colliery around 1905, seen from the top of Railway Terrace bank looking north-west past the coke ovens. The horizon at top-left is around the position of Marley's Houses. (Original postcard – reproduced by permission of Durham County Record Office, ref. [DR 01366](#))*

Esh Winning Colliery, which opened in 1866, and the new village built for the workforce, was just over a mile (2 km) to the south-east of Hamsteels Colliery. Esh Winning had 180 coke ovens and employed 500 men. 'Winning' was a reference to the success of finding the coal seams.

Marshall Forster, Hamsteels' mechanical engineer, lived at the colliery with his wife, Isabella, and their family at 1 High Street. Like the Varleys, Marshall and Isabella also had an adopted daughter, Elizabeth Ann Fairless. She was 11 months older than Susan Clifford. Elizabeth's background could not have been more similar to Susan's. She was born in Haswell, 8 miles (13 km) east of Durham, where her father was a coal miner. She was his fifth child. Her mother had died in 1889 aged 32. Elizabeth was 2 years old when Robert gave her up for adoption. He remarried in 1891, had a further child and continued with family life. Susan and Elizabeth may have attended Hamsteels School together.

### **Quebec**

Most of the miners were accommodated just to the north of the colliery in a group of 'back to back' terraces built around 1870, perpendicular to Front Street. This created a new hamlet which was named Quebec, after the farm it was built on.



The farmland had been enclosed in 1759, the year in which a victory over the French had secured the Canadian city of Quebec under British control. Greenland Farm is just to the north-east.

Such events and places were often sources for the invention of new local place names. The village of Toronto lies 10 miles (16 km) to the south near Bishop Auckland. Waterloo Farm is a common name across England, from the British and Prussian victory over the French in 1815 in what would become Belgium. Susan's relatives in north-west Leicestershire lived near a colliery named 'California', opened at the time of the 1849 Gold Rush; and another named 'Califat', a modified spelling of the town of Calafat in Romania which was besieged by the Russians in 1854. Inkerman Colliery and its miners' village were 4.5 miles (7 km) south-west of Quebec. This was named after the Crimean War battle of 1854 in which the British and French defeated the Russians.



*Coal miners and their sons outside Hamsteels Colliery Inn, Quebec, seen here around 1905. John Varley may have known these miners personally. The building is still there, having recently become the Quebec Tea Room. (Digitally restored photograph – with thanks to Neville Bougourd)*

Many mining families were attracted to the north of England from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Mine owners in the Durham and Northumberland coalfield offered free housing. In the early 1870s, some families moved to Quebec from Blaenavon in South Wales. This may also be the reason that the Varleys moved there.

But the accommodation was of very poor quality, not least the sanitation. Hard living and working environments and an initial lack of community facilities created the



conditions in Quebec and other local villages for excessive drinking, gambling and violence. The focus of some of these misdemeanours was the Hamsteels Colliery Inn. In the 1870s, Lanchester police had prosecuted thousands of offences in the area, including hundreds of cases of drunkenness, assault and poaching. A magistrate commented that “Quebec was the most demoralising village in the neighbourhood.”

Facilities improved with the creation of shops including a butcher, garden allotments, a recreation ground and a Working Men’s Institute to advance their education and cultural interests. There was also a drill hall where members of the local army volunteer battalion met.



*Front Street, Quebec, looking east around 1910. To the left is the Working Men’s Institute for Hamsteels Colliery. The Wesleyan Methodist chapel next door was demolished by the 1970s but the Institute and houses remain. The terraced streets for miners and their families were ‘fronted’ by these buildings, hence the street name. The right turn down Clifford’s Bank is just before the bend. (Original postcard, Rolyat Series – with thanks to [George Nairn](#))*

The local physician, Doctor Kirkland, also lived there. He had arrived in 1873 and remained for fifty-four years until his death in 1927 at the age of 79. The Varleys and their neighbours would have become very familiar with him.

Quebec’s Wesleyan Methodist chapel, seating 400, was built in 1875 at the south end of the terrace named Chapel Street. A Primitive Methodist chapel seating 300 was built the same year at the north end of the same street. By 1890, fourteen Methodist congregations had been established in the area. Social behaviour was transformed among families who became committed Christians. Methodist evangelism continued into the early years of the twentieth century, helping to reduce the levels of alcohol abuse and gambling debt.



Nevertheless, when Hartlepool Rovers beat Hamsteels Rugby Club 77-0 at the recreation ground in 1902, the *West Hartlepool Mail* reporter said that Quebec was an "outlandish place".

### Clifford's House

Due south of Quebec on a lane named Clifford's Bank are Clifford's House and Clifford's Farm. This must have intrigued Susan.

The land may have once been owned by the Barons de Clifford. Their nearest castle was 40 miles (64 km) to the south-west at Appleby-in-Westmorland. In the fourteenth century, they held the manor of Hartlepool, 24 miles (39 km) to the south-east on Durham's North Sea Coast. Raby Castle, 17 miles (27 km) to the south of Quebec, dates from that period and has a 'Clifford's Tower'. I must add that I have no idea how or when our family tree might have connected to the Barons and I do not expect to find the answer.

Clifford's House was built in the early nineteenth century. It appears in the 1841 census as the home of farmer John Suddes and his family. The 1851 census says that the farm covered 200 acres (81 hectares) and employed eight labourers.



*Clifford's House, home of Hamsteels Colliery manager Thomas Lowdon and his family from 1888 until at least 1905. This photograph was used as a postcard in 1903 by Marshall Forster, the colliery's mechanical engineer. Forster's adopted daughter, Elizabeth Ann Fairless, was 11 months older than Susan Clifford. They may have attended Hamsteels School together, and may have been taught by Thomas Lowdon's daughter, Margaret. (With thanks to Alison Hepburn)*



South of the farm is the Hedleyhope Burn, a tributary of the River Deerness. Areas of woodland were planted next to the burn, one of them being named Clifford's House Plantation. The woodlands were cleared when the mines were developed.

By 1861, the Suddes family had moved away and Clifford's House was occupied by a succession of agricultural labourers. A second, smaller farmhouse had been built by 1871 which housed the farm bailiff, and the main house soon ceased to be used as a farmhouse.

By 1881, Clifford's House was the home of George Fletcher, and his family. He was a mining engineer working at Hamsteels Colliery. By 1891, there was a third dwelling on the farm. The Fletchers had been succeeded at Clifford's House by Thomas Lowdon and his family. He was the Hamsteels Colliery manager from 1888 until 1914. The Lowdons lived there until at least 1905.

In 1891, John Latue was the farm bailiff. Agricultural labourer James Thompson lived with his family in the third dwelling. Gamekeeper John Brownlees was living in the farmhouse in 1901 and the Nattress family now lived in the third dwelling.

A seam excavated at Hamsteels Colliery from at least as early as 1890 was named Clifford Drift. This was worked on by the largest proportion of the workforce for several years. Some of Quebec's streets were named after the drifts, including Clifford Street.

The Lowdons' daughter, Margaret, had been a school teacher in her teens in the 1890s. She may have taught Susan and the other Marley's Houses children at Hamsteels School. As she lived at Clifford's House, perhaps Margaret was equally intrigued by Susan's surname.

### **Cornsay Colliery**

It is more likely that John Varley worked at Cornsay Colliery. This was another drift mine which had been opened in 1868 within the neighbouring parish of Cornsay by Ferens & Love. They had previously developed the nearby Inkerman Colliery. Cornsay Colliery was just over a half mile walk from Marley's Houses, downhill to the south-west. John would have walked along Steadman's Lane and down Commercial Street, which was the boundary between the parishes of Hamsteels and Cornsay.

Durham County Record Office holds a plan, (ref. RD/La 143/222) for "6 privies and covered ash pit at Marley's Buildings of Cornsay Colliery, (plan no. 606), approved 4 June 1885". So it seems that Marley's Houses did indeed accommodate the families of miners who worked at Cornsay Colliery.

In the mid-1890s, the Cornsay workforce totalled around 700 men and the seams were producing 750 tons (680 tonnes) per day. Processions of thirty or forty coal wagons, known as 'tubs' in County Durham, travelled on rails to and from the drifts. They were pulled with haulage ropes made from hemp by a static steam engine in the 'hauler house'. The sounds of the tubs and the ropes passing over guide rollers could be heard across the countryside. Steel ropes hauled by electric motors were introduced in later years.

Half of Cornsay's coal was converted into coke in 270 on-site ovens. As at Hamsteels Colliery, fire clay was also used to produce bricks, tiles and sanitary pipes. A railway line ran from Cornsay Colliery, past Hamsteels Colliery, to Esh



Winning Colliery. From here, railway wagons loaded with products from all three collieries were taken to Relly Mill, just outside Durham city.

Durham's miners had endured a series of strikes and lockouts by mine owners over pay and working hours, culminating in a bitter three-month strike in 1892. They were already very poor and were resisting a cut in wages of 15 per cent. They finally accepted a 10 per cent cut.

The arrival in 1899 of colliery manager Michael Curry did not herald an improvement in relations between the owners and the miners. He could hire or fire at any time, and he resisted efforts to improve working conditions. The Curry family lived in the largest house in the colliery village. They also had their own pew in the village's Methodist chapel, as did other members of the colliery management. Curry remained as manager of Cornsay until retiring in his 70s in the late 1930s.



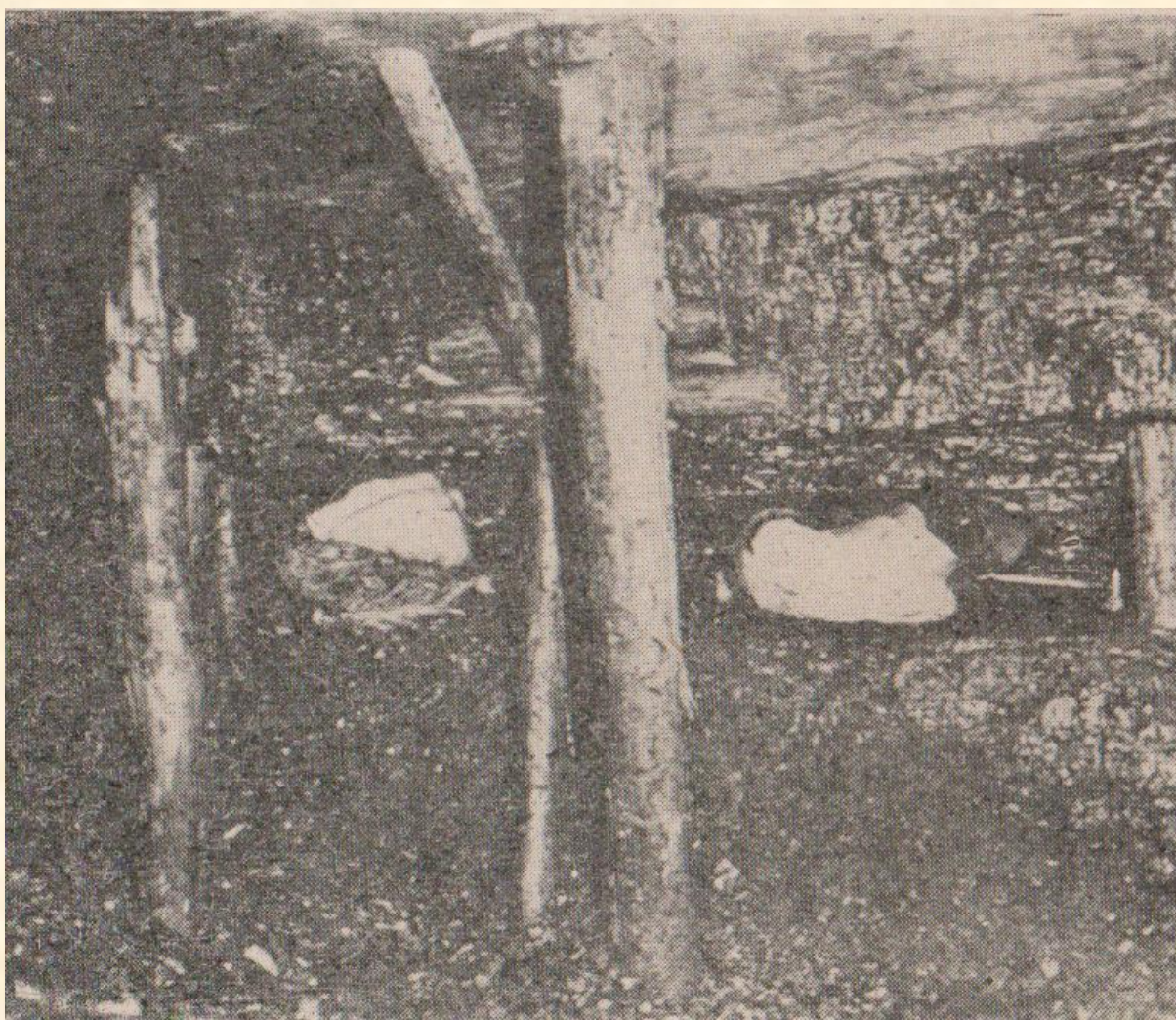
*'Sinkers' at the entrance tunnel to Cornsay Colliery's Chapel Flat Drift. This postcard was mailed from the village on 3 July 1910 with a message about enjoying the Coronation Day of King George V on 22 June. John Varley probably knew these men personally. (Original postcard, J W Rowlinson – with thanks to [George Nairn](#))*

John Varley's neighbours at Marley's Houses included six other coal hewers and a 'stoneman' who excavated material other than coal. John would have felt a great camaraderie with them. Other neighbours included a coke oven filler, a fire brick moulder, a fire brick setter, a sanitary pipe finisher and an iron works puddler. Most of them were either local or from neighbouring counties. But one of the hewers was from Ireland and another was from Essex, as was the stoneman. This was typical of the area where a range of dialects and accents could be heard.



Susan's playmates would have included three of the stoneman's children, Mahalah Dyer and her siblings, Mary Ann and John William. They were 14, 12 and 10. They would also have played with three of the hewers' children, Edith and Lena Jane Cloughton who were 12 and 10, and Margaret Archer who was also 10.

Two other neighbouring children were Annie and Joseph Suddes, aged 12 and 11. Their father was William Suddes, landlord of the New Hamsteels Inn. William had grown up on East Butsfield farm, 4.5 miles (7 km) to the west. He had been a coke oven filler at Cornsay Colliery as a young man and must have thought becoming a pub landlord was a step in the right direction. In September 1904, Suddes was charged with keeping his licenced premises open during prohibited hours. This may have been when he gave up his tenancy. By 1911, he was a coke oven filler again, this time at Hamsteels Colliery, living on Chapel Street in Quebec.



*Coal hewers stripped to the waste, lying on their sides as they worked a coal seam in the early 1900s. The roof is supported by timber props. John Varley would have been very familiar with such working conditions. The photograph is from a textbook owned by my Welsh maternal grandfather, Winston Edwards. He inherited it at age 11 in 1922 from his father, Ernest, who had received the book in 1906. Winston became a coal miner at 14. (Mining Reader, The Educational Publishing Co Ltd, Merthyr Tydfil, second edition, 1906; family collection)*



## Colliery village life

As at Hamsteels, the Cornsay Colliery site had several rows of terraced accommodation for families. Most had just three rooms. Downstairs was a kitchen-living room and upstairs were two bedrooms. At the back was a lean-to scullery with a single piped water tap and a sink in the back yard. Marley's Houses would have been very similar. The colliery officials' houses had sitting rooms and hallways, but some of the terraced houses didn't even have rear windows. Many people kept pigs for meat and slaughtered them in their own back yards.



*Postcard of Cornsay Colliery mailed from the village in March 1910. In the foreground to the left is the east end of the long row of coke ovens. Beyond are the rows of terraced houses built for miners and their families. To the right is Commercial Street which John Varley walked down from the Steadman's Lane junction, near the horizon at top-right. (Original postcard – with thanks to [George Nairn](#))*

The residents of Marley's Houses may have considered themselves fortunate in only having to share their ash pit and block of 'privy' toilets with each other. Down in the colliery village, residents of the terraced houses had to cross the street to use their ash pits and rows of 'earth closet' toilets, from which the sewage had to be collected.

Like the women in the terraced streets, Harriet had an endless list of chores to get through up at Marley's Houses while John and the other men were on shift. As Susan got older, she would have increasingly shared in the work. In a typical kitchen-living room, the fireplace incorporated an oven and a boiler. From the ceiling hung a wooden rack for drying clothes. On the floors were mats made from strips or clippings of old clothes, known as 'clippy' or 'proggy' mats. Lighting was provided by oil lamps. Many houses were infested with vermin, beetles and cockroaches, which



were possible to reduce in number but not to eradicate.

John would have come home black with coal dust and would have washed in a tin bath in front of the fire. After her own hard day's work, including scrubbing the front doorstep, washing clothes or baking bread, Harriet would have sat in her chair by the fire with her feet on the fender that kept the ashes in. She would still not have been idle and probably knitted or mended clothes with needle and thread by lamp light.

In addition to the shops in Quebec, the Varleys could choose from a good range of commercial goods and services in Cornsay Colliery village. They could buy shoes, clothes, fabrics, china and furniture. In addition to general stores, there were two butchers, a confectioner, a beer seller, a herbalist and a tobacconist. There was also a hardware store, a post office and a public house – the Royal Oak – which is still trading. One of the butchers was the official supplier for the colliery village. The Varleys may have been typical of local families in paying for their meat by deduction from the men's wages.



*Postcard of Cornsay Colliery Working Men's Institute and Club, of which John Varley may have been a member, mailed from Esh Winning in 1912. (Original postcard, H Coates of Willington – with thanks to [George Nairn](#))*

In the streets, grocery suppliers and travelling salesmen made door-to-door deliveries. Street performers provided entertainment in exchange for a few coins. Beggars were not uncommon, and some slept in the colliery ovens and kilns to keep warm at night.

The Temperance Hall, where abstinence from alcohol was encouraged, was used by the Salvation Army. It was built of wood from a dismantled ship and could seat 300. There was a stage for entertainment such as variety shows and talent competitions.



There was also a Working Men's Institute housing a library, a reading room and a club of which John Varley may have been a member.

Like at Quebec, there were football and cricket pitches which were well used. Susan may have enjoyed taking part in sporting and other activities for children on national celebration days with opportunities to win prizes and eat cake. These events took place on Whinney Fields between Quebec and Cornsay Colliery, just down the hillside from Marley's Houses.

One of the original colliery owners, Joseph Horatio Love, was a member of the Methodist New Connexion, and the community's chapel was of that denomination. It seated 400 and had originally been built as the village's first school. As in Quebec, the efforts of chapel members were instrumental in many conversions among the miners from lives of drunkenness, gambling and violence.

When the original school became too small, a Nonconformist 'British School' was built in 1876, catering for 400 children. A Roman Catholic school was also built for 220 children in 1874.

## Accidents

Thirty-five Cornsay miners and thirty-three Hamsteels miners died from work-related accidents and illnesses. Most were killed between 1870 and 1938 by the collapse of rock, being struck by railway locomotives and trucks, or falling from heights.

Allow me to illustrate by diverting from County Durham for a few paragraphs. My mum's family in South Wales also had first-hand experience of colliery accidents and their impacts. Her father, Winston Edwards, was a coal hewer, as his father had been. They worked at Graig Merthyr Colliery, a drift mine which opened in 1867 near Pontarddulais. Winston started in 1925 at the age of 14 as a hewer's helper filling the trucks, known in Wales as 'drams'. Excavation was advanced by hand, creating a void known as a 'stall' while leaving 'pillars' of coal in place to support the roof. Stalls became 'roadways' to reach new stalls that were being worked. 'Heading' tunnels were extensions to roadways to gain further access to a coal seam. Cutting machines and conveyors were then brought in to extract the coal.

Winston attended St John's Ambulance first aid classes and dreamed of becoming a doctor, but he could not continue his education because his family could not afford to go without his wages. He would otherwise have liked to study engineering but they could not afford the apprenticeship fees.

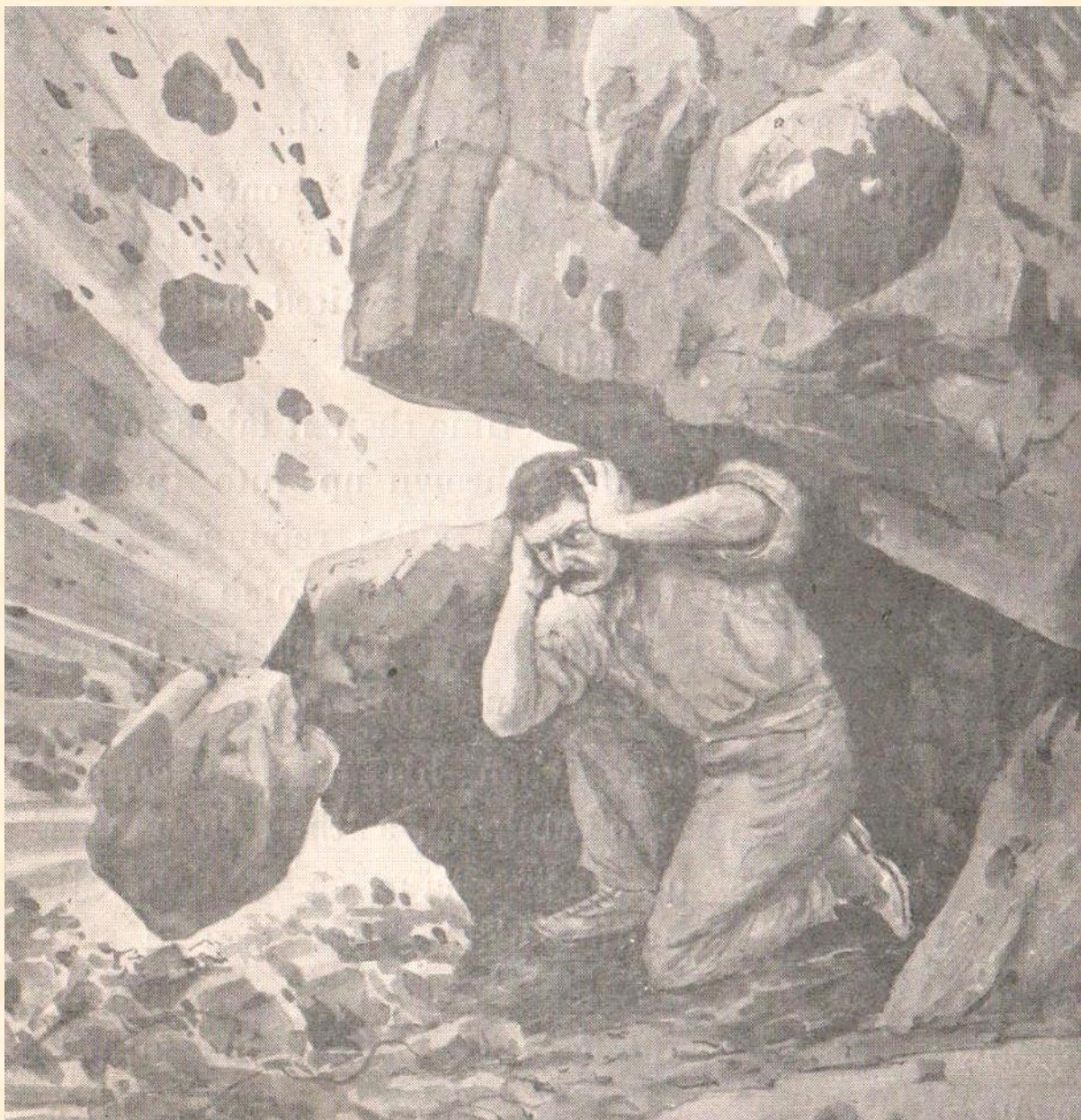
As a miner during the Second World War, Winston was exempted from military conscription, like those in other Reserved Occupations in agriculture, shipping, manufacturing and other vital industries. After working day shifts at the colliery, he travelled 7 miles (11 km) to Swansea to serve as an auxiliary fireman at night.

On 2 June 1958, Winston was crushed when a piece of coal the size of a kitchen table fell from the roof of the heading tunnel that he was working in. He was face-down and could hear his workmates shouting to him. They freed him and turned him onto his back so that he would not breathe in too much coal dust. But as another fall began, they had to leave him and he was crushed again.

Winston was 47. His two older daughters, my aunts, were in their early twenties. The eldest had given him a grandson – the accident was on his second birthday.



Winston's son, Malcolm, my uncle, was 16. My mum, Marian, was 13. I am the seventh of Winston's eleven grandchildren. Malcolm spent four years at Graig Merthyr from 1959 as part of his engineering apprenticeship. He and my mum have provided these details of Winston's life.



*An incident at Bargoed Colliery in South Wales in the late 1890s. William Bowen found a projecting rock to shield himself from a blast. Explosive shots had been placed in the coalface by the shaft sinkers. He was accidentally left behind after they had lit twelve fuses. He only had time to extinguish nine. They were amazed and relieved to find that Bowen had survived without a scratch. Rockfalls could happen without explosions. My grandfather was badly injured at Graig Merthyr Colliery in 1958 when the roof of the 'stall' he was in collapsed. Between 1870 and 1938, twenty-nine Cornsay and Hamsteels miners were even less fortunate. John Varley would have known some of them personally. (Mining Reader, The Educational Publishing Co Ltd, Merthyr Tydfil, second edition, 1906; family collection)*



Winston suffered a fractured spine and sternum, seven broken ribs and a punctured lung. Nobody thought he would be alive by the time they got him to the surface. Remarkably, he survived and lived another twenty-eight years. But he was left with a curvature of the spine, reducing his standing height by five inches.

The depression of his sternum limited his lung capacity. He was already suffering from pneumoconiosis – also known as anthracosis, ‘black lung’ or ‘miner’s lung’ – from inhaling coal dust for the previous thirty-three years.

Winston returned to work underground on the lighter duty of oiling the rollers over which the steel ropes passed as the electric motor in the haulage engine house pulled the drams to the surface. But the underground roadways to the drifts were so extensive that he struggled to walk the distance. He then became a colliery bathhouse attendant and a St John’s Ambulance first aid medic, and used a motorbike to get to work.

He was also a first-aider, referred to as a trainer, at Pontarddulais Rugby Club where he attended to sporting injuries and massaged sore muscles. He repaired clocks and watches, made some of his own tools, kept a vegetable garden and an allotment, and took pride in his elegant handwriting.

Winston had been very strong in his prime. He had a great sense of humour but could be gruff when frustrated that he could no longer do what he wished to. When short of breath in his final years, he used a mask with an oxygen cylinder while sitting in his favourite chair. He died in 1987 aged 76.

No doubt I have also just described many a much-loved grandfather in the former coal mining communities of County Durham.

## **Funerals**

My Welsh grandfather was one of the fortunate ones. John Varley may have known personally the eighteen miners who died at Cornsay and Hamsteels between 1894 and 1908.

Of the total of sixty-eight fatalities mentioned above, thirteen are buried in the churchyard of Hamsteels St John the Baptist. The Varleys would have seen many a funeral cortège from Cornsay Colliery pass by their front door. The hearse from the Methodist chapel, pulled by dark horses with black plumes, stopped just beyond Marley’s Houses at Hamsteels churchyard. They were followed by horse-drawn cabs and many residents on foot. After the burial service, the cortège returned the way it had come.

Harriet and Susan would have been no exception to all the women and children in the area, who wondered if there would be a shift from which their husband, son, father or brother would not come home alive, or would do so maimed. My Welsh grandmother no doubt had similar thoughts a few decades later, but she never expressed them in my mum’s hearing.

Back in Derby, by 1901, Susan’s natural father, William Clifford, was a stores assistant at the Midland Railway Signal Works. He was living with his second wife, Sarah Jane, their daughter, Edith Harriet aged 7, and three of William’s children. William jnr was 19 and a commercial clerk. Maggie was 16 and worked as a hand winder at the silk mill. Arthur was 14 and was working as a book binder.



William jnr, broke his arm while playing football in April 1907. His step-mother, Sarah Jane, decided not to call a doctor. They may not have been able to assess the severity of a fracture or anticipate any complications. With the National Health Service still 40 years away, they may not have been able to afford a medical fee. It was normal for ordinary people to try to deal with even open-wound fractures. A neighbour could have helped or told them to clean a wound, strap it up with an improvised splint or support it with a sling, and then hope for the best. People were also prepared to live with a slight deformity after a broken bone had healed.

William was an athletic young man of 25 but he began to decline very rapidly. This was as rare with bone fractures then as it is now. A doctor would have been able to identify the common causes of early deterioration. William may have had internal bleeding from a torn artery. Warning signs would have been fever, swelling and redness around the break, and possibly loss of circulation to the lower arm and hand. He may have been breathless with chest pain, even coughing up blood.

If William was developing blood poisoning or 'sepsis', the first antibiotics like penicillin were something else that would not be widely available for another 40 years. He may have developed a deep-vein thrombosis caused by swelling, leading to a pulmonary embolism, or a fat embolism emerging from the marrow in the broken shaft of the humerus.

William died a few days later. He had not married and had no children. Later events suggest that Susan probably received the news.



*Marley's Houses with the former New Hamsteels Inn beyond at the apex of the junction with Steadman's Lane, seen here in 2009. To the left is the former school which Susan Clifford probably attended. The road continues as Front Street as it enters Quebec. (Google Street View)*



## Jarrow and South Shields

[Top](#)

At some point in the first few years of the new century, John, Harriet and Susan moved away from the Hamsteels area. John was now around 60 and was probably no longer fit enough for mining. By 1909, the family had moved 18 miles (29 km) north-east to Jarrow on the south bank of the River Tyne. They had followed many others attracted from the countryside, swelling the population employed by riverside industries that expanded in the second half of the nineteenth century.

### **Palmers shipyard and *The Fifteen Streets***

Jarrow's main industrial enterprise was Palmers shipyard. The Palmer brothers had started their business in 1851, making a success of building iron- and steel-hulled ships as the age of wooden hulls was coming to a close. *The Engineer* magazine reported in 1863 that the shipyard was "the only works in England where every branch of manufacturing is done on the premises – from the delivery of [iron] ore at one end of the yard till it leaves the dock at the other in the form of a finished ship."



*Cargo ships at Palmers shipyard, Jarrow, seen here in 1897. In the background are the blast furnaces of the yard's own steelworks. (Photograph by Auty of Tynemouth; Newcastle Libraries, ref. [033085](#))*



# **PALMERS** SHIPBUILDING & IRON COMPANY, Ltd., JARROW-ON-TYNE.

Manufacturers of . . . .

**Every Requisite in connection with the Construction of Steamships.**

**Mine Owners and Iron Ore Importers.  
Manufacturers of Pig Iron.  
Manufacturers of Steel and Iron.  
Makers of Marine Engines and Boilers.  
Shipbuilders in Steel and Iron.  
Ship Repairers.**



H.M.S. "Bat" Steaming 32½ knots per hour.

GRAVING DOCK—Length .. ..	440 ft.
Width of Entrance .. .. .	70 „
Depth of Water on Sill and Flocks—	
Ordinary Spring Tides .. ..	18 „
Neap Tides .. .. .	15 „
PATENT SLIPWAY—Length .. ..	600 „

Works and General Offices - JARROW-ON-TYNE. | Liverpool Offices - 18, JAMES STREET.  
London Offices - 30, GREAT ST. HELENS, E.C. | Newcastle Offices - H, KING STREET, QUAYSIDE

Advertisement by Palmers from August 1899, featuring the torpedo boat destroyer HMS Bat, completed in 1897. ([GracesGuide.co.uk](http://GracesGuide.co.uk))

By the late nineteenth century, the business dominated Jarrow, employing most of the town's male population of working age. Seven thousand men worked on a site three quarters of a mile (1.2 km) long, covering 100 acres (40 hectares).

Sir Charles Mark Palmer, one of the brothers, was the Liberal Party's Member of Parliament for North Durham, and then for Jarrow, between 1874 and his death in 1907. He was also Mayor of Jarrow in 1875 and 1902-3.

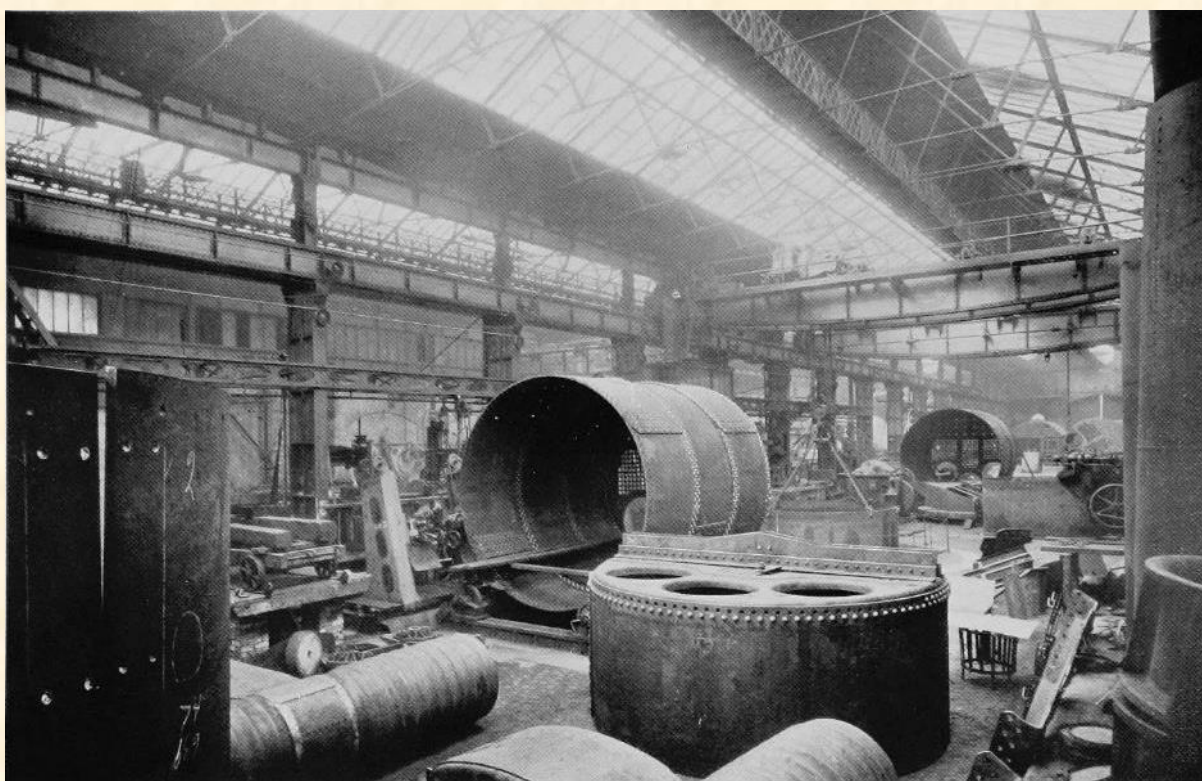
In 1851, the population of Jarrow had been only around 3,800. Streets of terraced housing with 'back to back' yards were built in the 1870s to accommodate the growing workforce and their families. A quarter was Irish, and Jarrow became known as 'Little Ireland'. By 1891, the population had grown to 52,000 and Jarrow was overcrowded.

This was the real-life environment and period which inspired some of Catherine Cookson's novels – in particular her first book, *Kate Hannigan* (1950), *The Fifteen Streets* (1952) and *The Round Tower* (1968). Catherine Cookson was born in 1906 at Tyne Dock, South Shields, 2.5 miles (4 km) from where the river meets the North Sea. The family soon moved to East Jarrow, and she remained in the area until moving south to Hastings in 1929.





Above: Cargo vessels at Jarrow in Palmers' dry docks. Below: Palmers boiler shop. (From *Some Account of the Works of Palmers Shipbuilding & Iron Co Ltd*, Malcolm Dillon, Co Secretary, 1900 edition; Cornell University and [Hathi Trust Digital Library](#))





In *Kate Hannigan*, it is possible to identify real blocks of streets which inspired Catherine Cookson's descriptions. She used them again in *The Fifteen Streets*. One was the area of South Shields bounded by Whitehead Street, Tyne Dock, the railway sidings and the North Eastern Railway (NER) line from Newcastle.

Another block of streets was the area of Jarrow just to the south of Palmers shipyard: as far as Grange Road to the south with Berkley Street to the west and Commercial Road to the east. Catherine Cookson names Palmers shipyard in *The Fifteen Streets*. The real streets included: Ellison Street, running north to Palmers main gate at Ellison Place; Ormonde Street with its shops running through the middle from east to west; Ferry Street, also named in *The Fifteen Streets*, running up the eastern side towards the landing stage for the regular ferry service to the north bank of the Tyne at Howdon. The ferry carried horses and carts as well as passengers. See map on [page 35](#)



*Electric overhead trolley cranes with elliptical gantries, standing 135 ft (41 m) on 'sheerlegs' above the berths at Palmers shipyard in Jarrow. These were installed in 1906 to speed up production. (From Some Account of the Works of Palmers Shipbuilding & Iron Co Ltd by Malcolm Dillon, Co Secretary; fourth edition, 1909; with thanks to John Bage)*

## Hardship

Proposals for better housing with improved sanitation were opposed by landlords who preferred to maximise their rental incomes. Jarrow became one of the most poverty-stricken and sickly places in England.



The men were employed week by week and had little job security. Strikes were common, often caused by disputes between different unions over who should do which job. Sometimes, employers locked the men out when in dispute with the unions. On 9 December 1912, two hundred platers went on strike over pay. They would have otherwise been working on completing the battle cruiser *HMS Queen Mary* and the passenger and cargo ship *City of Marseilles*. They were also in the middle of constructing the cargo ship *Kafue* and two destroyers, *HMS Leonidas* and *HMS Lucifer*, whose keels had been laid down six weeks earlier. The longer the men were out of work the harder it was for the unions to support them financially.



*Members of the United Society of Boilermakers and Iron and Steel Shipbuilders at the Ellison Place entrance to the Jarrow shipyard, locked out by Palmers during an industrial dispute in September 1910. They were supposed to be working on the Dreadnought battleship HMS Hercules at the time. This was the photograph used by The Sphere, a London-published illustrated weekly newspaper, for a report in its 10 September edition: "Considerable alarm is being felt by the wives as it is feared that the society's [union] funds will prove unable to stand the strain of a prolonged lock-out." (Kevin Blair Collection; with thanks to [TyneBuiltShips.co.uk](http://TyneBuiltShips.co.uk))*

As in the coal mining communities, the frustration of working long hours in tough and dangerous conditions for little reward drove some to seek relief in alcohol, with violence often being a consequence.

Catherine Cookson said, "Like a great sponge I'd taken it all in: the character of the people; the fact that work was their life's blood; their patience in the face of poverty; their perseverance that gave them the will to hang on; their kindness...and the women".

This was the environment in which Susan Clifford and the Varleys found themselves. Susan was still unmarried but, at the age of 21, she became pregnant. Her son was born on 14 December 1909. His father may have been Augustine Ashman, a



Palmers shipyard employee or one of his workmates. The baby's name was registered in South Shields as John Victor Varley Clifford, in affectionate reference to Susan's adoptive father. John's father was of mixed race and he inherited his darker colouring.

### The Varleys' kindness

John Varley was now in his mid-60s but he must have been a man of great energy. He was still earning a living by running a dining rooms business at 1 Nixon Street, where the family was living. This was one street east of Ellison Street's north end and diagonally opposite the Ellison Place entrance to the shipyard. Such establishments were popular and 1 Nixon Street was in a prime location.

Harriet and Susan were working for John, perhaps helping to cook and serve the food. A 16-year-old domestic servant, Sarah Keating, was also living with them. Sarah may have run the home and looked after little John while the family was busy running the business, with which she may also have helped. Having already experienced a tough working life, John would not have accepted any inappropriate behaviour from the men who came in to eat.

The *Jarrow Express* of Friday, 30 December 1910, reported on the annual "Christmas Day Treat" provided for children at the Mechanics' Institute on Ellison Street. Half of the 300 children entertained there on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> had lost their fathers. The "pies, peas and potatoes" that they greatly enjoyed were cooked and served by "Mr Varley of Nixon Street" and his staff, namely Harriet and Susan.

The 1911 census was the first to be completed by the head of each household, rather than by enumerating officers knocking on doors. John Varley recorded that Susan and little John were still living with him and Harriet. This suggests a kindness that not all young women in Susan's position benefitted from at the time.

John wrote the boy's second name as Edgar rather than Victor. Perhaps the South Shields registrar had made a mistake in early 1910. If John had helped Susan to register the birth, maybe the registrar misunderstood his Nottinghamshire accent. Young John would later use 'Victor'.

1	John Varley	Head	67	
2	Harriet Varley	Wife	-	55
3	Susan Clifford	adopted daughter		23
4	John Edgar Varley Clifford	son of Susan	17	-
5	Sarah Keating	servant		16

1911 census return completed by John Varley for 1 Nixon Street. Susan and her young son were living with John and Harriet. John was running a dining rooms business, assisted by Harriet and Susan. Sarah Keating was their domestic servant. ([FindMyPast.co.uk](http://FindMyPast.co.uk))





*Ellison Street, Jarrow, looking north in around 1907. The far end of the street ran parallel with Nixon Street, where Susan Clifford and the Varleys were living by 1910. In the murky distance is one of the crane gantries erected at Palmers shipyard in 1906. To the left is the Mechanics' Institute with its clock tower, given to the town by Charles Mark Palmer in 1877 as a community hall with reading rooms. The Varleys provided the catering for a children's party there on Christmas Day 1910. The building has been known as the Civic Hall since the 1940s. (Original postcard – Monarch Series No.157, R Johnston & Sons, Gateshead – thanks to [George Nairn](#))*



Catherine Cookson would certainly have considered Susan to be relatively fortunate. *Kate Hannigan* was semi-autobiographical. Known as Katie as a child, Catherine was the daughter of an unmarried alcoholic mother. She was brought up by her grandparents, thinking that her mother was her sister: "I just wanted to put down the background of my mother and my grandmother, from what I felt in the kitchen".

### **Augustine Ashman**

Susan would marry her son's father, Augustine Ashman, in 1911. Perhaps John Varley's dining rooms had quickly become Augustine's favourite place to get a hot meal, if he could afford one, when he discovered Susan there serving the food.

Augustine was born in South Shields on 3 May 1880. His birth was registered with the surname Teto. His father, Augustine Teto, was of African ancestry, born in 1833 in Havana, Cuba, probably into a former slave family. He probably met Augustine's mother, Mary Ann Ashman, after arriving in South Shields docks as a member of a ship's crew. Mary Ann had been born in South Shields in 1838. She already had seven children from her marriage to Joseph Ashman, who had died in 1875.

By 1881, Mary Ann and four of her children had moved with Augustine Teto to Bishop Wearmouth, now part of the west side of Sunderland city centre. He was working as a coal trimmer at Sunderland docks. This involved ensuring that a vessel sat in the water at the right angle or 'trim' by distributing the coal evenly by hand. Mary Ann was a housekeeper. Their daughter, Ann Marina, was born there in 1882.

By 1891, it seems that Mary Ann had been abandoned by Augustine Teto, who does not appear again in British public records. He may have joined another ship's crew, perhaps returning to Cuba. Mary Ann had moved to Jarrow with her sons Charlton and Augustine, who was now an 11-year-old schoolboy. Ann Marina was not present when the census was taken. Mary Ann now recorded young Augustine's surname as Ashman like his half-siblings. They shared rooms at 29 Ferry Street with a boarder, probably to bring in a little income. The building housed three other families. Another Ashman family, probably close relatives who could provide support, lived next door.

In 1897, Mary Ann married George Nash, described in the 1901 census as a "sea cook" who was a British subject from Jamaica, British West Indies. He too may have been of African heritage. George, Mary Ann, Augustine and Ann Marina were sharing 10 Curry Street with another family at the time. The street ran parallel with the north end of Ferry Street and Commercial Road.

Augustine probably started at Palmers in his early teens. He would be employed by the company for around twenty-five years, and would have worked on many of the 150 ships that were built during that period. Orders were placed by foreign navies as well as the Royal Navy. Cargo and passenger ships were ordered by customers based at British ports such as Glasgow, Liverpool and London, at European ports such as Rotterdam, Hamburg and St Petersburg, and others around the world.

On 13 November 1899 at age 19, Augustine joined the Jarrow branch of the United Society of Boilermakers and Iron and Steel Shipbuilders. The *British Prince* passenger and cargo ship had been launched the previous month and was nearing completion. The destroyer *HMS Peterel* had been launched earlier in the year and was still being worked on. The cargo ship *Manchester Merchant* was about to be launched. Still under construction were the cargo ships *Belgia* and *Abessinia*, and



the destroyers *HMS Myrmidon* and *HMS Kangaroo*.

According to the 1901 census, Augustine was now a "Ship riveter". At that time, the passenger and cargo ship *Artemisia* had just been completed. The battleship *HMS Russell* and the destroyer *HMS Syren* had both been launched and were being completed. Also under construction were the cargo ships *Huronian*, *Redhill*, *Reigate* and *British Empire*. The latter had refrigerated compartments as well as passenger accommodation. Augustine could have worked on any of these ships.



*Curry Street, Jarrow. Augustine Ashman and his mother were living here by 1901 and they were still there in 1911. The back yards are seen here in 1933 before these and the neighbouring streets were demolished. (South Tyneside Libraries, ref. [STH0002402](#))*

By the time of the 1911 census, it seems that Mary Ann had been abandoned once more, and had returned to using her original widow's surname of Ashman. Perhaps George Nash had joined a ship's crew and returned to Jamaica, as his death is not recorded in Britain. Augustine was still living with his mother on Curry Street, now at no.8. He had become a "Ship's plate holder-on".

The battleship *HMS Hercules* had been launched the previous year and completion was a few months away. Under construction were the cargo ships *Torilla* and *City of Lincoln*, and the keel of the battle cruiser *HMS Queen Mary* had just been laid down for construction to begin. She was named after the wife of King George V, who had succeeded to the throne on the death of his father, Edward VII, on 6 May 1910.





South bank of the River Tyne at Jarrow in the mid-1890s. TOP: line of the "Direct Ferry" from the "Howdon Landing Stage" on the north bank. CENTRE RIGHT: the "Landing Stages" on the Jarrow side beyond the top of Ferry Street, where Augustine Ashman and his mother, Mary Ann, were living in 1891; parallel to the right is Curry Street, where they were living in 1901 and 1911. LEFT: the eastern half of Palmers giant shipyard where Augustine worked; Palmers main gate is on Ellison Place at the top of Ellison Street, down which the dotted line of the ward boundary runs; parallel to the right is Nixon Street, where Susan Clifford and the Varleys were living in 1910-11. BOTTOM: Ormonde Street with its shops runs east to west. FAR RIGHT: Pearson Place, where Augustine and Susan were living in 1914. (Ordnance Survey County Series, Durham, 1897, scale 25 inches to 1 mile or 1:2500; © Crown Copyright; [Old-Maps.co.uk](http://Old-Maps.co.uk), Landmark Information Group Ltd)





*Ormonde Street, Jarrow, in the early 1900s. Susan Clifford, the Varleys and the Ashmans would have visited the street's shops, which were a few minutes' walk from any of the addresses they lived at – Ferry Street, Nixon Street, Curry Street and Pearson Place. (South Tyneside Libraries, ref. [STH0006178](#))*





*Nearing completion at Palmers shipyard in 1908, the battleship HMS Lord Nelson looms behind the Jarrow ferry landing stage. As a 10-year-old schoolboy in 1891, Susan's husband, Augustine Ashman, was living with his mother on Ferry Street. From the mid-1890s, he was employed at Palmers as a riveter and plater. He probably worked on HMS Lord Nelson, construction of which began in 1906. She was the last pre-Dreadnought battleship to be commissioned by the Royal Navy. In 1914, she would become flagship of the Channel Fleet and would cover the transport of the British Expeditionary Force to France. In 1915, she would participate in the Dardanelles Campaign against the Turks, and would remain in the Mediterranean for the remainder of the war. (Newcastle Libraries, ref. [031339](#))*

Susan and the Varleys would have become very familiar with such a scene as that filmed by [British Pathé](#) on 17 July 1928, when crowds gathered to cheer the launch of the heavy cruiser *HMS York*. The guest of honour that day, who smashed the traditional bottle on her bow, was the Duchess of York. The Duchess became Queen Elizabeth in 1936 and the Queen Mother in 1952.

### **Moving on**

Susan and Augustine finally got married on 9 August 1911 at South Shields St Jude. She was 23 and he was 31. According to their marriage certificate, Susan knew her natural father's name and that he was a railwayman. Augustine claimed that his father's surname was Ashman rather than Teto, concealing his illegitimacy. For some reason, he also gave his age as 29 rather than 31.



Both Susan and Augustine gave addresses in South Shields, perhaps temporarily, rather than in Jarrow where they had been recorded just four months before in the national census. Susan gave her address as 89 South Palmerston Street, half a mile north-east of Tyne Dock. Augustine was another half a mile north-east at 80 Bythorn Street in the Westoe area of the town.



South Shields St Jude in 1983. Susan Clifford married Augustine Ashman here in 1911. (Photographer – Ken Lubi; [South Shields Research Through Imaging](#))

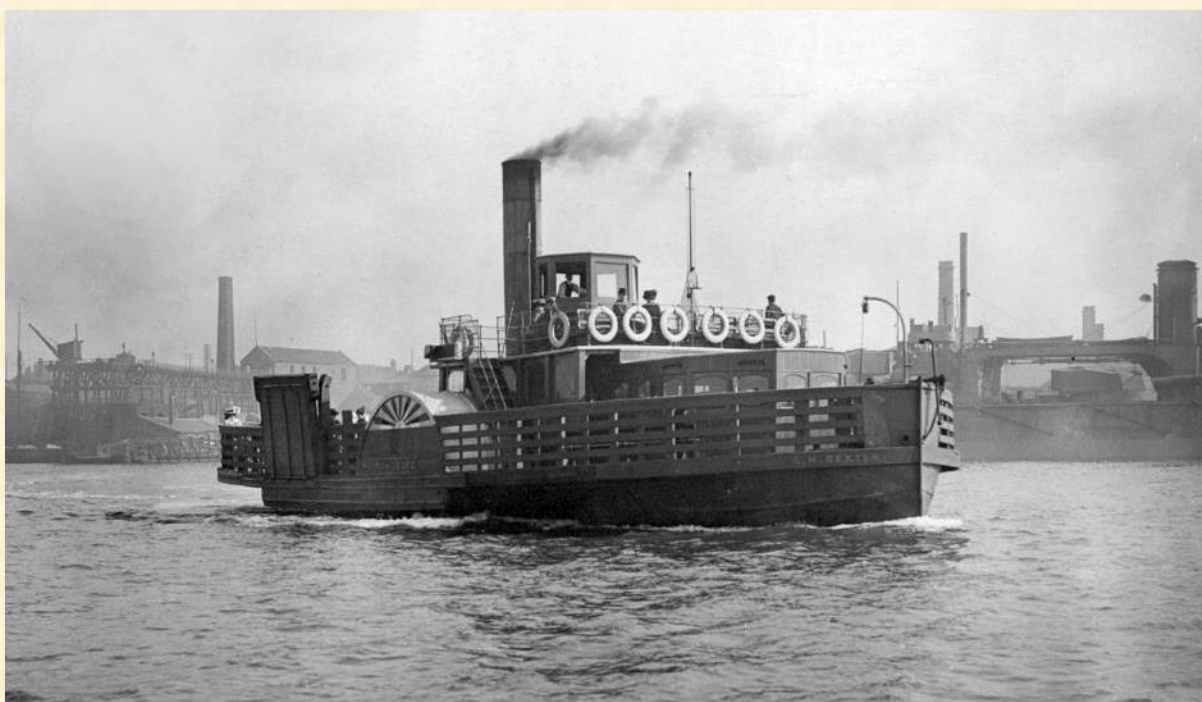
1911. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church		in the Parish of St. Jude, in the Counties of South Shields & Durham.						
Column No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
286	August 9 <sup>th</sup> 1911	Augustine Ashman	29	Bachelor	Boilermaker	80 Bythorne St.	Augustine Ashman	Boiler <sup>x</sup>
		Susan Clifford	23	Spinster	—	89 South Palmerston St.	William Clifford	Railwayman
Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England by <u>William St. John</u> or after Banns by me, <u>F. Anderson</u>								
This Marriage was solemnized between us, <u>Augustine Ashman</u> and <u>Susan Clifford</u>			in the Presence of us, <u>Henry Thompson</u>					

Certificate of the marriage at South Shields St Jude of Susan Clifford and Augustine Ashman on 9 August 1911. (With thanks to their grandson, Alan Brewer)



Their daughter, Enid, was born on 18 December 1913. Like her brother, John, Enid inherited her father's colouring. She was given the middle name of Harriet. It is likely that the name was partly a grateful acknowledgement of Susan's adoptive mother. But it was Enid's understanding later that she had been named primarily after Susan's older half-sister, Harriet Bull née Oldfield. This suggests that meaningful contact with the family in Derby had indeed been maintained.

Harriet Bull may have earned the honour of Enid's middle name by doing the most to ensure that Susan was not entirely lost to the family. Susan's oldest full sibling, Ethel Annie, was still just 7 when Susan was born, whereas Harriet was nearly 19. She and her mother had been separated from her father, Jesse Oldfield, around 1870, so she fully understood what Susan's situation meant. However, Harriet may have believed that her mother had been widowed. On her marriage certificate of 1891, Jesse was recorded as deceased when in fact he did not die until 1906; unless Harriet was perpetuating a deception to conceal the fact that her mother and stepfather, William Clifford, had married bigamously.



*The paddle steamer G H Dexter, built by Hepple & Co at North Shields in 1883. Until 1921, she was one of two ferries providing a service across the River Tyne from Jarrow on the south bank to Howdon on the north bank. Behind to the right is the Dreadnought battleship HMS Hercules, reported in the press at the time as the largest battleship in the world. Visible are her aft funnel, arched 'flying bridge' between the forward and aft deck houses, and starboard midships turret with a pair of guns firing shells of 12-inch (305 mm) diameter. She is seen here between launch in May 1910 and commissioning by the Royal Navy on 31 July 1911. Augustine Ashman probably worked on her too. Hercules participated in the Battle of Jutland in 1916. On 3 December 1918, she transported the Allied Naval Armistice Commission to Kiel, Germany, but soon became surplus to requirements. Ironically, she was towed to Kiel in 1922 to be broken up for scrap, as was her Jarrow-built predecessor, HMS Lord Nelson. (Kevin Blair Collection; with thanks to [TyneBuiltShips.co.uk](http://TyneBuiltShips.co.uk))*



By 1914, Susan and Augustine were living at 10 Pearson Place, just east of Curry Street and Commercial Road. John and Harriet Varley had now moved 4 miles (6.5 km) north-east to Market Place, South Shields. It seems that John had made a success of his business and still had an interest in Nixon Street. *Kelly's Directory of Durham* for 1914 lists additional dining rooms in Harriet's name at 9 Ellison Place, just around the corner and opposite Palmers gate.



*South Shields old town hall in the Market Place, looking north-west around 1904. John and Harriet Varley moved to a property here around 1913. This may indicate that their dining rooms business in Jarrow was doing well. (South Tyneside Libraries, ref. [STH0000531](#))*

The Varleys would have found the electric tram service very convenient for travelling back and forth. Under the Jarrow and South Shields Light Railway Order of 1901, the horse-drawn tramway had been converted with installation of overhead electrified wires. Jarrow and District Electric Tramway services had started in 1906. The Jarrow end of the line started on Western Road, ran along Ormonde Street and connected with the South Shields Corporation Tramways line at Tyne Dock.

### **Court case**

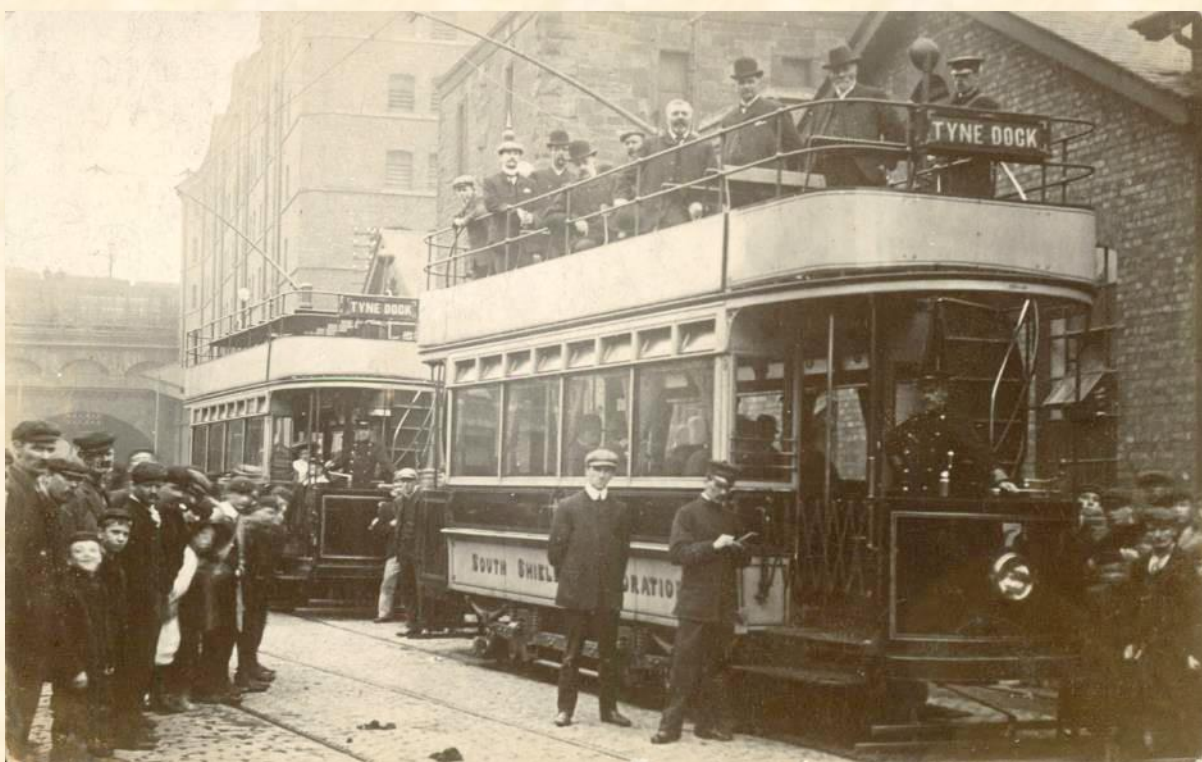
In July 1913, John Varley had agreed to buy a dining room and boarding house in Nixon Street from Mrs Esther Clark of 41 George Street, Newcastle. The property he bought may have been 1 Nixon Street. Mrs Clark may have been the landlady of the property in which the Varleys had been living, and from which John was running the business. He may have been 'buying out' Mrs Clark or expanding to a second property on the street.

On Wednesday, 16 July 1913, John had agreed a price of £10, equivalent to around £1,200 today, for the fixtures of the dining room and some beds and bedding. He



had paid Mrs Clark half of the value as a deposit, with a promise to pay the balance at the shop on Monday, 21 July. When she did not receive the remaining money, she took John to Jarrow's County Court.

The case was heard on Tuesday, 6 January 1914, and was reported on in the *Jarrow Express* on the following Friday. John argued that "he would have paid the money if Mrs Clark had called for it", but she had not. He also "alleged that on the Friday night a number of articles were removed", which was not part of the deal. As witnesses, Mrs Clark's brother and two lodgers at the property contradicted John's allegation. The judge ordered him to pay the £5 that he owed and also awarded court costs against him.



*Opening of the Jarrow-to-South Shields electric tram service on 29 November 1906 at the Tyne Dock railway arches. Note the local dignitaries on the upper deck. Catherine Cookson had been born a stone's throw from here at 5 Leam Lane on 10 June that year. John and Harriet Varley probably used the trams from South Shields to visit their dining rooms business in Jarrow. Services continued until 1929. (South Tyneside Libraries, ref. [STH0001844](#))*



## The Great War – Air and Sea

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### HMS Queen Mary

The first major naval engagement of the War was the Battle of Heligoland Bight on 28 August 1914. *HMS Queen Mary* participated, and was the fastest large 'capital' ship in the Fleet at the time with a speed of 28 knots (32 mph, 52 kph).

She had been launched at Palmers on 20 March 1912. The day was declared a public holiday in Jarrow to allow as many people as possible to witness the launch. A message from the Queen was read out by Viscountess Allendale: "I am so grateful to you for so kindly representing me at the launch of his Majesty's ship *Queen Mary* to-day, and sincerely hope all prosperity will follow the ship which has been named after me."



*The battle cruiser HMS Queen Mary being fitted out on 18 March 1913. Augustine probably worked on her too. The diagonal booms all along her hull swung out with anti-torpedo nets suspended from them. On the horizon at far-left is the giant crane at Armstrong Whitworth's High Walker shipyard. Queen Mary and most of her crew of 1,284 were lost during the Battle of Jutland on 31 May 1916. German shells had hit her ammunition magazines causing a massive explosion.*

*(Photograph by W Parry & Son, South Shields; © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, ref. [ALB0698](#))*

Capital ships were getting bigger and bigger in the naval 'arms race' with Germany. In addition to the London Times, newspapers from Aberdeen and Dundee to Exeter and Plymouth announced that *HMS Queen Mary* was the largest warship yet built in Britain. With a hull of 700 ft (213 m) in length, she was over 150 ft (48 m) longer than *HMS Hercules*. With a 'displacement' of around 27,000 tons, she was also over 7,000 tons heavier. Her main guns were also bigger, firing shells of 13.5-inch (343 mm) diameter.

The Queen's good wishes could protect neither the ship nor her crew. Her speed was achieved by saving weight with thinner armour plating. This was a well-understood and calculated risk in order to gain a tactical advantage. At the Battle of Jutland on 31 May 1916, shells fired with expert marksmanship by the German battle cruiser *SMS Derfflinger* hit *Queen Mary's* ammunition magazines. She exploded and broke in two. Only eighteen of her crew members survived. The other 1,266 were lost. Twenty-four were from Tyneside, including one from Jarrow and one from South Shields.

### **Zeppelin attack**

Death had also come to Jarrow. On 15 June 1915, the fitting and coppersmiths' workshops at Palmers had been hit by a Zeppelin bombing raid. Augustine probably knew the twelve workers who were killed.

The yard was working on seven vessels for the Royal Navy at the time: the battleship *HMS Resolution*, destroyers *HMS Negro* and *HMS Nonsuch*, monitors *HMS Marshal Ney* and *HMS Marshal Soult*, and submarines *E 39* and *E 40*.

### **Infant mortality**

War added to the normal struggles of life. Susan and Augustine had a baby boy in the late summer of 1916, who they named Augustine. Sadly, he died in early 1917.

Infant mortality in Jarrow at the time remained stubbornly high at up to 15 per cent. The national average was around 10 per cent and had started to improve permanently. The rate for Jarrow was not consistently below 10 per cent until the 1940s, and did not match the national average until the 1960s. By that time, this was thankfully down to 2 per cent.

Susan's cousin, Charles Clifford, my great grandfather, had married my great grandmother, Amelia Scaddan, in Portsmouth in 1900. Like Susan and Augustine, Charles and Amelia had also suffered the sadness of infant mortality, losing two baby boys in 1902 and 1903. My grandfather, Harold, was born in 1913. He was their only surviving child. His little sister, Ivy, was born in March 1917. Charles was sent to Tyneside to join the crew of a brand new ship in the June. Ivy died around six months later. It was Harold's understanding that his mother had several other pregnancies, but it seems that none of them were recorded as live births.

### **HMS Furious**

Just upstream from Palmers on the north bank was Armstrong Whitworth's High Walker shipyard. Their cranes were visible from each other's yards. Seven days before the Zeppelin raid hit Palmers, the keel of the battle cruiser *HMS Furious* had



been laid down at the High Walker yard. She was launched in August 1916 and completed in June 1917. By that time, her design requirements had changed, and she had undergone the first stage of conversion to become one of the world's first aircraft carriers with modern flight decks.

While Armstrong Whitworth was working on *HMS Furious*, Augustine and his work mates at Palmers were completing the cargo ship *City of Winchester* and the destroyer *HMS Urchin*. They were also building the destroyer *HMS Ursa*, the tanker *British Light*, the refrigerated cargo ship *Kent*, and the light cruiser *HMS Dauntless*.

Charles Clifford arrived at High Walker from Portsmouth and, on 26 June, he became one of 796 men who formed *HMS Furious*' first crew. Also onboard were 84 members of the Royal Naval Air Service. Charles had now served nearly twenty-six years in the Royal Navy. He had become a torpedo expert and had reached the 'rating' of Chief Petty Officer. He had participated in the Battle of Heligoland Bight aboard the destroyer *HMS Beaver*.

At the beginning of July 1917, *Furious* proceeded slowly down river, heading for the North Sea, the Firth of Forth and Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands. Palmers workers and local residents would have turned out to see her go by. They undoubtedly marvelled at the strange looking 228 ft (70 m) flight deck that had been constructed forward of her bridge. Her only main turret was mounted aft of the bridge, incorporating a huge single gun barrel firing shells of 18-inch (457 mm) diameter.



*HMS Furious as originally completed in June 1917 by Armstrong Whitworth at their High Walker shipyard, just upstream from Jarrow. Note the flight deck forward of her bridge. My great grandfather, Charles Clifford, was a member of her first crew. She passed Jarrow on her maiden voyage into the North Sea in early July 1917. (Surgeon Parkes Collection; © Imperial War Museum, ref. [SP89](#))*





*Susan's cousin, Charles Clifford, my great grandfather. He is seen here as a Chief Petty Officer around the time he left HMS Furious in 1919 and was 'demobbed' from the Royal Navy. He then joined the Royal Fleet Reserve (RFR) in his home town of Portsmouth. Note the crossed torpedoes on his lapels. (Family collection)*



With a hull measuring just over 786 ft (240 m), *Furious* was the length of two and a half football fields. At a speed similar to today's limit on the River Tyne of 6 knots (7 mph, 11 kph), she would have taken around 90 seconds to pass Jarrow's ferry landing stage. For that brief moment, Charles was almost within shouting distance of Susan, but it is unlikely that either of them realised, or knew anything about each other's lives.

Aboard *Furious*, Charles would have witnessed two world firsts. In August 1917, the first deck landing was made by an aircraft on a moving ship. In July 1918, aircraft from *Furious* made the first ever airborne attack launched from an aircraft carrier. They bombed Zeppelin sheds at Tønder on the Danish-German border.

The War ended on 11 November 1918. Charles served on *Furious* until February 1919 when he was demobilised or 'demobbed'. He then joined the Royal Fleet Reserve in Portsmouth, and ran a beer shop or pub owned by Courage & Company Ltd.

Charles finally retired from the Navy at the age of 50 in 1926 after nearly thirty-five years in the Navy. His son, Harold, my grandfather, became a naval cadet in the late 1920s.

Charles died in December 1932 aged 56. My great grandmother, Amelia, died in March 1935, also aged 56. Evidence suggests that, sadly, they both took their own lives.

## Meanwhile back in Derby

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### Susan's father

By 1911, William and Sarah Jane Clifford had moved to 29 Ponsonby Terrace on the west side of Derby. Edith Harriet was the last child to still be living with them. She was 17 and working in a factory as a hosiery linker.

William had progressed to 'storesman' at the Midland Railway Signal Works. He joined the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) from November 1916. He left the NUR in 1921 when he was 64.



*The Midland Railway Signal Works alongside the River Derwent at Derby. William Clifford worked in the stores from at least twenty years until he retired around 1921. The works closed in 1932 when manufacturing of signals equipment transferred to Crewe in Cheshire. (With thanks to Graham Warburton; V R Anderson Collection)*

### Roe Street

Roe Street in Derby was a focal point for the family for several decades. This was on the south side of the town, about 1.5 miles (2.5 km) from William and Sarah Jane at Ponsonby Terrace.

On 19 March 1908, Susan's brother, Arthur Clifford, married Julia Jane Pashley, known as 'Jinny'. The wedding at St Thomas, Pear Tree Road, was witnessed by Jinny's brother, Samuel, and Arthur's older sister, Ethel Annie. Arthur and Jinny made their home at 55 Roe Street. Their first child, Ethel Violet, was born in 1909.





*A brother who lost his little sister in childhood, but not forever. Arthur Clifford was born on 24 April 1886. He was 21 months old when Susan was born and their mother died. Arthur is seen here in Derby in 1912 with his wife, Julia Jane, known as 'Jinny', and the first two of their four children – Ethel and baby Edith Evelyn. At the time, Arthur was a tram car conductor with Derby Corporation Borough Council. (With thanks to Edith Evelyn's daughter, Sue Dickenson)*

In 1910, Susan and Arthur's older sister, Maggie, married John Fallon, known as Jack. They set up home at 49 Roe Street and then moved to Wyndham Street. They had three sons. John was born in 1911, followed by William Arthur in 1913 and Ernest Clifford Fallon in 1919. John jnr was also known as Jack, William was known as Bill and Ernest used Clifford as his first name.

Arthur and Maggie's older half-sister, Harriet, and her husband, John Bull, lived at no.69. If Susan was sufficiently connected with Harriet to name her daughter Enid Harriet after her, it is likely that she was also in contact with Maggie and Arthur.

Arthur's in-laws, Henry and Julia Pashley, lived opposite at no.68. This was probably where Arthur and Jinny's romance first blossomed. Henry was an engine fitter and brass finisher at the Locomotive Works, helping to build the brand new engines that Arthur's uncle, Thomas Clifford, knew as a driver.

By 1911, Arthur and Jinny had moved to No.8, which would be their home for the rest of their married lives. Arthur was now an electric tram car conductor with Derby Corporation Borough Council. They would have three more children. Edith Evelyn was born in 1911. William Henry Arthur was born in Darley Abbey in 1916. Irene Margaret was born in 1920.

### **Carriage and Wagon Works**

By 1914, Arthur was working at the Midland Railway's Carriage and Wagon Works as a painter. He became a member of the NUR in July of that year, sixteen months before his father. Arthur's brother-in-law, Jack Fallon also worked at the Works as a coach finisher for many years. He joined the NUR in September 1915.

Under the Railway's Act of 1923, known as the Grouping Act, the Midland Railway merged with the London & North Western Railway (L&NWR) and others to form the London Midland & Scottish (LMS) Railway. For some reason, Arthur left the NUR in June 1925, but he re-joined on 30 April 1926. By now he was a driller.

Arthur and Jack were employed at the Works as members of the NUR for the rest of their lives.

*Susan's niece, Edith Evelyn Clifford, Arthur and Jinny's second child. She was known in the family as 'our Ev', and is seen here aged 21 in 1932. When she was old enough, during her school dinner break, Ev would run down to the Carriage and Wagon Works to take her dad his lunch. (With thanks to Ev's daughter, Sue Dickenson)*





### Other family members

By 1911, Ethel Annie had moved from Derby to Surrey. She married Arthur Sharp there in 1924. Edith Harriet married Elijah Reid in Derby in 1919. They had a daughter named Edith Gertrude.

Susan's uncle, Thomas Clifford, was still working as an engine driver for the Midland Railway in 1911. But he was now 61 and had been transferred from Derby engine shed to lighter duties at the massive goods sidings at Chaddesden on the north-east side of the town. Thomas was living with his third wife, Matilda, on Nottingham Road near to the sidings. He died in March 1915 aged 65, and was buried with his first two wives in Nottingham Road Cemetery.

In Darley Abbey, Susan's aunt, Helena Mather, died in 1920 aged 73. When Helena's husband, Lewis, died in 1929 at the age of 86, he was noted in the *Derby Daily Telegraph* as the "grand old man" of the village.

Arthur and Jinny's eldest daughter, Ethel, was a shop assistant when she married Sidney Robinson in June 1929. Their first child, Sheila, was born in the December. Sheila had an earliest memory of sitting with other children on a Saturday evening eating fish, chips and peas. These came from the fish & chip shop in the front room of the house opposite 8 Roe Street. Sheila researched her family tree in later years and the information she collected has enhanced my own research.



*The wedding of Susan's niece, Ethel Clifford, Arthur and Jinny's eldest child, to Sidney Robinson on 1 June 1929. The wedding took place at St Thomas, Pear Tree Road, where Arthur and Jinny had got married 21 years before. Ethel and Sidney soon provided them with their first grandchild, Sheila. (With thanks to Sheila's daughter, Sharon Ryan)*





*The Peartree suburb of Derby, looking north-west in March 1935.*

*BOTTOM: The Vulcan Iron Works of Leys Malleable Castings Co, founded in 1874 by Francis Ley. Part of the 11-acre (4.5 hectares) site is seen here stretching along the London Midland & Scottish (LMS) railway line to Birmingham. The eastern end of the Works was on Osmaston Road. Arthur and Jinny's daughter, Ev, married John Aldridge about three months after this photo was taken. John and his brother-in-law, William Clifford, known as 'our Bill', worked at Leys from the 1930s until the 1970s. CENTRE: The Baseball Ground stadium used by Derby County Football Club from 1895 to 1997. The site was originally established in 1890 as a short-lived attempt to introduce American Baseball to the UK, and was part of Ley's Recreation Centre for the workers. The slightly curved street running along the north side of the stadium is Shaftsbury Crescent. My great-great grandfather, Thomas Clifford, lived there with his third wife, Matilda, from 1896 until 1911. Out of shot at bottom-right is the Carriage and Wagon Works where Arthur worked for nearly 40 years. His brother-in-law, Jack Fallon, worked there for over 45 years, later living on Osmaston Road. Running up from the north corner of the football stadium is Cambridge Street. TOP: Just visible at the north end of Cambridge Street, the penultimate left-hand turn is Roe Street, where several of the households of Susan's Derby family and their Pashley relatives lived during the first half of the twentieth century. TOP-LEFT: Pear Tree Road with the dark shape of St Thomas' Church on the right-hand side of the street. Arthur married Jinny there in 1908, and their daughter, Ethel, married Sidney Robinson there in 1929. The road which runs from just below St Thomas across to Cambridge Street is Becher Street. Arthur and Jinny's daughter, Irene, known as 'our Rene', lived there with her own family in later years. (© Historic England – Britain from Above, ref. [EPW046667](https://www.historicengland.org.uk/epw/046667))*



## London

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### The move south

Augustine's mother, Mary Ann, died in early 1920, shortly before her 82nd birthday. It may have been soon after this that Augustine and Susan decided to move with their children to London. They took John and Harriet Varley with them, and may have visited Susan's Derby family during their journey south of 285 miles (460 km).

By the time of the 1921 census, Susan and Augustine had moved into 5 Brunswick Street in the borough of Poplar in London's East End. They would live there for around 20 years. The street ran from just south of the Blackwall Tunnel's underground entrance and down the west side of the Midland Railway goods depot at Poplar Docks. The south end of the street met the north bank of the Thames at Blackwall Stairs. The street was renamed as Blackwall Way in the 1930s.

See map on [page 58](#)

			years.	months.			
1	<i>Augustine</i> A. Ashman	Head	40		M	Married	Thields Durham
2	Susan Ashman	Wife	35	5	F	Married	Varley Abbey Derby
3	John Varley Clifford	Step Son	11	6	M	Mother Dead	Jarrow Durham
4	Ernie Harriet Ashman	Daughter	7	6	F	Both Alive	Jarrow Durham

1921 census return for the night of 24-25 April, completed by Augustine Ashman for 5 Brunswick Street, Poplar. Due to industrial unrest, the census was postponed for two months until 19 June. Augustine calculated the ages of his family according to how old they were in June rather than April. ([FindMyPast.co.uk](#))

### Docks and shipyards

Poplar is just to the north of the Isle of Dogs. The 'island' is a peninsula formed by a U-shaped bend in the River Thames, separated by a canal, containing the districts of Millwall and Cubitt Town in the heart of 'Docklands'.

Augustine found employment at the Blackwall Yard ship maintenance facility of R & H Green and Silley Weir Ltd, with its dry 'graving' docks and mobile crane. This was five minutes' walk from Brunswick Street on the east side of the Midland Railway goods depot. Augustine described now described himself as a boilermaker. This also suggests that he continued his membership of the United Society of Boilermakers and Iron and Steel Shipbuilders, which he had joined in Jarrow in 1899.

If John Varley thought he had seen enough coal after leaving Cornsay Colliery in the early 1900s, he would see a lot more in Poplar. Steam locomotives continually came through hauling long trains of wagons to and from the docks. They carried goods

such as grain and timber, and thousands of tons of coal bound for ships. The goods were handled by 'stevedores', from the Portuguese word 'estivador' meaning a man who loads or packs a vessel or any kind of container.

Goods and coal depots at the Poplar Docks and the West and East India Docks were operated by the Great Western Railway (GWR), Great Northern Railway (GNR), London & North Western Railway (L&NWR), Midland Railway (MR) and North London Railway (NLR). Those of the Great Eastern Railway (GER) were just eastward of East India Dock on Bow Creek, the name of the meandering southern end of the River Lea as it meets the Thames. Each depot was run by management of the separate companies.



*Barges or 'lighters' laden with timber in the Poplar Dock operated by the London Midland & Scottish Railway (LMS). They are seen here on 13 July 1932 looking north-east. The cargo ship Swift had been built in Belfast in 1930. The houses beyond her to the left are on Preston's Road. Those to the right are on Norfolk Street, the end house being on the corner of Blackwall Way where Susan and Augustine lived in the 1930s. Between the two cranes on the right is one of the squat, cone-shaped air shafts above the Blackwall Tunnel. Beyond that is the former Midland Railway (MR) goods depot. At far-left is the goods and coal depot of the former London & North Western Railway (L&NWR). The dock had formerly been operated by the North London Railway (NLR). These companies had been merged with the MR and others to form the LMS under the Railway's Act of 1923. (© National Maritime Museum, Greenwich – LMS Railway Collection, ref. [G3691](#))*



At the dockside wharfs, goods were craned in and out of flat-bottomed barges known as 'lighters', which transferred their contents to or from visiting ships. The word may come from the Dutch word 'lichten', referring to the lightening of ships by unloading their cargos. Where the railway lines of the coal depots terminated at the wharfs, the wagons were tipped up on ramps or rotated in cradles to allow their contents to be poured out into the waiting lighters.

After the Railway Grouping Act of 1923, John Varley would have started noticing the railway companies' names and liveries changing. The L&NWR had taken over the NLR the year before, and was now merged with the MR and others to form the London Midland & Scottish Railway (LMS). The GNR, GER and others were combined as the London & North Eastern Railway (LNER). Management of their respective goods and coal depots would have been gradually amalgamated.

The General Strike of 1926 may have affected Augustine's employment. The *Evening Standard* of 13 May reported that police baton-charged a crowd of dock workers at Poplar who were protesting that the strike had been called off. Those injured were treated at Poplar Hospital.

John Varley's death at age 82 was registered in Poplar in 1926, followed by that of his wife, Harriet, at age 72 in 1927.



*Blackwall Way in 1936, looking south to the buildings on the Thames wharfs. Susan and Augustine lived at 5 Blackwall Way from at least 1921. (LCC Photograph Library, © London Metropolitan Archives (City of London), record no. [109605](#))*

A film of [Poplar Docks in the 1930s](#), published online by [Kinolibrary](#), includes footage of Poplar docks. This shows cranes, sacks being unloaded from lighters and loaded into LMS and North Eastern Railway (NER) wagons, timber being loaded into lighters, and men at work. Some of the dockers are 'lightermen', handling the barges. Others are railway goods yard workers.

### Putting down new roots

In addition to their mixed-race appearance, the Ashman family may have had difficulty in making themselves understood in their Tyneside accent when talking to Londoners.

Just as Susan had retained her Clifford surname after being adopted by the Varleys, her son John was never given the Ashman surname. In the 1921 census, Augustine confirmed that John was his step-son. This was either because he was not his biological father or simply because he was not legally registered as his father, since John had been born 20 months before Susan married Augustine. This would have burdened John with the additional social stigma of illegitimacy. In addition, Augustine stated that John's mother was dead, despite recording her in the census as very much alive on the line above. This may have been Augustine's way of concealing Susan's status as a formerly unmarried mother, but it denoted John unnecessarily as an orphan. There may be other explanations but the evidence remains inconclusive.



*C & E Morton Ltd's food preservative factory at Sufferance Wharf, Millwall, on the bank of the Thames on the west side of the Isle of Dogs, seen here in the early 1930s. Susan's son, John, worked for the company and its later owners for many years. (Photographer – A G Linney, Port of London Authority; [Museum of London Docklands Collection](#))*



The family's background was rarely spoken of in the family in later years. But these factors clearly did not prevent the romantic progress of John and his sister, Enid. In 1931, John married Amelia Alice Blunden, known as 'Min'. In 1936, Enid married Albert Brewer, known as 'Bert'. Both marriages were registered in Poplar, where they made their first homes.

John and Amelia provided Susan with her first grandchild when their son, Ronald, was born in 1932. John worked for the food canning business, C & E Morton Ltd. They had factories on the Isle of Dogs in Millwall and Cubitt Town.

Bert and Enid Brewer lived at 183 Brunswick Road, where Bert's family had lived since the 1890s. At the southern end of Brunswick Road, at the junction with East India Dock Road, stood Poplar Hospital. Opposite the hospital was the grand gateway at the north-west corner of the East India Import Dock. Over the crossroads was the equally grand archway at the head of the northern approach to the original, single-bore Blackwall Tunnel of 1897, which passes under the Thames to Greenwich on the south bank.

Bert worked as a commercial clerk for Strand & Interchangeable Signs Ltd of Covent Garden, 6 miles (10 km) to the west. Strand supplied illuminated displays for many theatres, cinemas and large retail stores.

*Page from the 1936 theatrical lighting catalogue of Strand Electric & Engineering Company Ltd. Susan and Augustine's son-in-law, Albert Brewer, worked for Strand in the 1930s. ([Backstage Heritage Collection](#))*

**STRAND SIGNS**

**DIRECTIONAL NOTICE SIGNS (Illuminated)      CRYSTALITE SIGNS**



Surface Mounting. Lettered Glass ... .. 17/9  
Surface Stencil. Backed Opal Flush mounting. Lettered glass ... .. 24/6  
Flush mounting. Stencil backed opal ... .. 22/6  
*All Prices excluding Lamps and Lampholders*



Surface mounting. Lettered glass ... .. Backed opal ... ..  
Flush mounting ... ..  
Flush stencil ... ..  
*Prices on application*

**CRYSTALITE EXIT SIGNS**



Single- or double-sided circular frame. Illuminated from two edges. Finished bronze or chromium, etc.  
*Prices on application*  
Please state if two circuits are required.

The standard colour of lettering is White, but coloured (Red, Green, etc.) can be supplied if desired. Engraved designs can be incorporated. Sketches and prices submitted for special signs.

These directional signs are strongly constructed of rustless metal. Finished black or bronze cellulose enamel. White interiors. Fronts fitted with lettered glass, or metal stencils backed white opal.

Standard 7 in. letters.

Conforming with requirements of the Licensing Authorities.

Special Designs  
Sketches and Prices on application

Exit Signs can also be supplied for gas illumination.

These signs are illuminated by one or more tubular lamps which are concealed in the frame supporting the glass panel.

The light is projected through the edge of the glass, illuminating the deeply engraved letters in an attractive manner.

Single- or double-sided

Finished in satin brass, cellulose bronze, oxidised copper, or silver. Also chromium.

Surface Mounting. Lettered Glass ... .. 17/9  
Surface Stencil. Backed Opal Flush mounting. Lettered glass ... .. 24/6  
Flush mounting. Stencil backed opal ... .. 22/6  
*All Prices excluding Lamps and Lampholders*



Circular frame. Illuminated from one edge, supported by chains and ceiling plates.



Moulded frame. Rigid bracket fixing. Illuminated from one edge.



Circular frame (rigid fixing to ceiling). Illuminated from one edge



Moulded frame. Supported by bracket. Can be supplied without metal-bound glass edges.

**STRAND ELECTRIC AND ENGINEERING CO., LTD.**  
Telephone 1: Temple Bar 7464 (6 lines).      Florial Street, Covent Garden, W.C.2      Telegraphic Address: Spottica, Rand, London.



*Susan's and Augustine's daughter, Enid, with her husband, Bert Brewer. They are seen here at Margate in the mid-1930s. (With thanks to Mike Curran, son of Bert's sister, Gladys)*







*Previous page – Poplar in the early twentieth century.*

*CENTRE: Just below the underground entrance to the Blackwall Tunnel is the northern end of Brunswick Street, running down to the north bank of the River Thames at Blackwall Stairs, near the tunnel's air shaft. Captain John Smith and his three ships had sailed from here in December 1606 for Virginia, where they met Pocahontas and established the settlement of Jamestown. Brunswick Street was renamed in the 1930s as Blackwall Way, when Susan and Augustine lived at No.5.*

*BOTTOM: The goods and coal depots and docks of the Great Western Railway (GWR), North London Railway (NLR), London & North Western Railway (L&NWR), Great Northern Railway (GNR) and Midland Railway (MR).*

*BOTTOM RIGHT: The dry 'graving' docks for ship maintenance at R & H Green and Silley Weir Ltd's Blackwall Yard. Augustine and some of his neighbours probably worked at the yard.*

*RIGHT: Between Blackwall Yard and the East India Dock is another of the GNR's goods and coal depots.*

*LEFT: To the left of the Blackwall Tunnel's approach road are the Grosvenor Buildings flats on the north side of Manisty Street. Augustine was re-housed in flat 243 after Blackwall Way was destroyed by incendiaries during the Blitz of 1940-41.*

*TOP: Poplar Hospital at the junction of Brunswick Road and East India Dock Road. Augustine died at the hospital in October 1942.*

*(Ordnance Survey County Series, London and Essex, published 1916, scale 25 inches to 1 mile or 1:2,500; © Crown Copyright; [Old-Maps.co.uk](http://Old-Maps.co.uk), Landmark Information Group Ltd)*

Political violence hit the streets a short distance from where the family lived. After mid-1934, support for the extreme views of Oswald Mosley and his British Union of Fascist (BUF) ebbed away among high-profile figures and ordinary voters. The BUF focused its diminishing resources on poorer London boroughs such as Poplar, Stepney and Bethnal Green. On 4 October 1936, a battle was fought at several locations across the East End, particularly on Cable Street which runs from Whitechapel through Stepney to Limehouse. A march by the BUF was attacked by various groups including trade unionists, communists and Jews. The police were caught in the middle.

The Government's response was the Public Order Act of 1936, which outlawed political uniforms and required police permission for large meetings and demonstrations. Britain's flirtation with fascism continued to decline.

## **The Jarrow March**

Back up in Jarrow, the town's future depended on the success of the shipyard, which was not sustainable beyond the 1920s. This may have prompted Augustine to move south to find work.

The Labour Party had been formed in 1900 and entered the coalition Government during the First World War. Labour formed its first government, albeit a minority one, in 1924. But any support that they might have been able to give to ensure continued employment at shipyards and in other industries was undermined by the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed. Unemployment in Britain



reached nearly 23% in 1933 before the situation started to improve, and the north of England, Scotland and South Wales took longer to recover. In response to the economic crisis, coalitions or 'National Governments', which included the Labour Party, continued throughout the 1930s.

Palmers closed in 1933. More than a thousand vessels had been built there in the preceding eighty years. Many of the buildings were demolished in 1935. The 715 ft (218 m) dry dock continued in use under Vickers-Armstrong ownership.

Labour's Ellen Wilkinson became the Member of Parliament for Jarrow in November 1935. In Parliament on 9 December, she said, "These are skilled fitters, men who have built destroyers and battleships and the finest passenger ships...The years go on and nothing is done...this is a desperately urgent matter and something should be done to get work to these areas".

For mixed reasons, 1936 was a royal year in which Jarrow shipyard workers made it clear that they felt royally let down. Poverty in the town was acute with unemployment exceeding 70 per cent. At the other end of the social scale, King George V died on 20 January and was succeeded by Edward VIII. For all his faults, the new king had expressed genuine concern for the plight of the poor, and had met the unemployed in the Northumberland and Durham coalfields in 1929.

On 5 October, the day after the Battle of Cable Street in the East End of London, a protest to the Government over the closure of Palmers shipyard began. This was the Jarrow Crusade, in which 200 of the workers walked all the way to London. Ellen Wilkinson accompanied them for the first 10 miles (16 km) as far as Chester-le-Street. She then attended the Labour Party conference in Edinburgh before re-joining the marchers at Harrogate in Yorkshire. She was with them again for the final part of the journey into London.

Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin's Government was accused of not caring about the Jarrow Crusaders and refused to meet them when they arrived in London. At a rally in Hyde Park on 1 November, Ellen Wilkinson stated that "Jarrow as a town has been murdered...What has the Government done? I do not wonder that this cabinet does not want to see us."

On 4 November, she presented to the House of Commons a petition signed by 11,000 Jarrow residents. The final lines read, "The town cannot be left derelict, and therefore your Petitioners humbly pray that His Majesty's Government and this honourable House should realise the urgent need that work should be provided for the town without further delay."

The king abdicated on 11 December in order to be free to marry American divorcée Wallis Simpson. He was succeeded by his brother, George VI, who now had to face a future he had not chosen. Jarrow also needed to face a new future as nothing was done to revive Palmers shipyard.

As industries across Britain stood idle, impoverishing their workers, [British Pathé](#) captured the contrast between the lives of the 'haves' and the 'have nots', including the Jarrow Marchers. Demolition of streets began with the north-east corner of Jarrow being cleared first. This included Pearson Place, Curry Street and part of Ferry Street. [British Pathé](#) also filmed the reduction to scrap metal of the iconic gantries at the shipyard in 1938.



*The 'Jarrow Crusaders' with Ellen Wilkinson, their Member of Parliament, marching through Cricklewood, north London, on 31 October 1936. They had walked all the way from Jarrow in protest at the closure of Palmers shipyard. This was the final leg of their journey to Marble Arch. Augustine Ashman had probably worked with them and their fathers. He and Susan would have followed the marchers' progress in the newspapers. Now living in Poplar, 11 miles (18 km) south-east of Cricklewood, they may have joined the crowd that lined the streets to cheer the Crusaders on. (Fox Photos Ltd; © National Portrait Gallery, London, ref. [NPG x88278](#))*



### Lives ending and beginning

Susan's father, William Clifford, died in Derby in late 1936. He was 79. His second wife, Sarah Jane, died about six months later aged 77. Susan probably received the news. The families were certainly in contact with each other in the 1940s.

Susan's second grandchild was born to Bert and Enid Brewer in late 1936. They named her Jean Gladys, her second name being after Bert's sister. Sadly, little Jean died in early 1937. Their second child, Alan, was born on 9 January 1938. He was a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday present for Susan.

Up in Derby, Arthur and Jinny's tally of grandchildren was also rising. Ethel had her second child, Maureen, in October 1936. Ethel's sister, Ev, had married John Aldridge in June 1935. They named their first child Clifford, born in April 1937. Maggie and Jack Fallon's son, Jack jnr, had married Winifred Smith in 1935. Their daughter, Barbara, was born in September 1938.



*Susan's brother, Arthur Clifford, flanked by his second daughter, Ev, and son-in-law, John Aldridge. Arthur's wife, Jinny, is seated with Ev and John's son, Clifford. They are seen here in the back garden of 8 Roe Street, Derby, in April 1937. (With thanks to Ev and John's daughter, Sue Dickenson)*



*Susan appears in the background of what may be the only photo of her to survive, taken in January 1938. The front door she is entering is that of their home at 5 Blackwall Way, Poplar. Susan had just turned 50 but she would die later that year. In the foreground is her husband, Augustine Ashman, aged 58. He is holding their grandson, Alan Brewer, who had just been born on 9 January. (With thanks to their grandson, Alan Brewer)*



From 1938, Arthur and Maggie had plenty of years ahead of them to enjoy their grandchildren. The next two babies arrived in 1939. Marian was born to Bill Fallon and his wife, Hilda Rigarlsford, who he had married in 1937. Ev and John Aldridge's second child, David, was born in December 1939.

Susan would not have that pleasure. In late 1938, it was the turn of her Derby family to receive sad news. Susan had died aged 50. It seems that she was in employment at the time. The family understood that she had fallen off a ladder at work and never recovered. Susan and Augustine had been married for twenty-seven years.

Augustine was now blind and receiving a pension. He shared 5 Blackwall Way with the Kelly and Clarke families.

Archibald Clarke was a shipyard fitter's labourer. John Kelly was a ship's scaler. Several of their neighbours were shipyard workers, probably at R & H Green and Silley Weir Ltd's Blackwall Yard. They included a machinist, a plumber and a 'boilermaker's holder-up'. Another neighbour, Frank Foweraker, was a paint grinder.

John Kelly and Frank Foweraker would have worked in a type of dry dock known as a graving dock. Blackwall Yard had two of them. A dry dock is a long, narrow basin, shaped to accommodate the hull of a ship which is floated in. The dock gates are then closed and the water is pumped out, leaving the vessel supported on blocks. The outside of the hull can then be inspected and repaired. The word 'graving' comes from an Old English word meaning 'to scrape away', as in sculpting, carving, engraving or digging, including graves for burial. In a graving dock, barnacles, rust and old paint are removed, ready for re-painting. Scaling involved cleaning ships' oil tanks, hulls and holds, inside and out. It was the lowest paid and dirtiest work in a shipyard.

Other neighbours included a deck hand on a dredger, a heavy works labourer at the docks, a 'heavy motor lorry driver', and a coal porter who may have loaded lighters at one of the nearby railway coal depots.

### **Rising international tensions**

Susan would have been aware of the threat of a new war. The Emergency Powers (Defence Act) was passed in August 1938. This gave the Government the ability to organise defence and maintain public order. Military reservists could be called up and Air Raid Precautions (ARP) volunteers could be mobilised. This was a contingency in case Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's declaration of "Peace for our time" under the Munich Agreement with Hitler of 30 September did not hold.

In December 1938, the intention was announced, in the event of a new war, to conduct a census and create a National Register. This would bring in a requirement for identity cards. It would also be used to manage the introduction of ration books, mass evacuations, military conscription and exemptions for Reserved Occupations.

The famous 'Anderson' air raid shelter accommodated six people. It was named after Sir John Anderson who was tasked with preparing air-raid precautions in the late 1930s. 1.5 million shelter kits were distributed to the population in the seven months before September 1939. Another 2.1 million would follow.



*Arthur Clifford with the 'Anderson' air raid shelter he had just completed at 8 Roe Street, Derby. This was made from 14 panels and had a drainage sump in the floor to collect rainwater. According to the plans, Arthur had to dig a pit 4 ft (1.2m) deep, 4 ft 6 in (1.4 m) wide, and 6 ft 6 in (2.0 m) long. The shelter was 6 ft high, and Arthur covered the top 2 ft with the soil he had excavated. Internal comfort was up to him to devise. (With thanks to Arthur's granddaughter, Pat Carroll)*



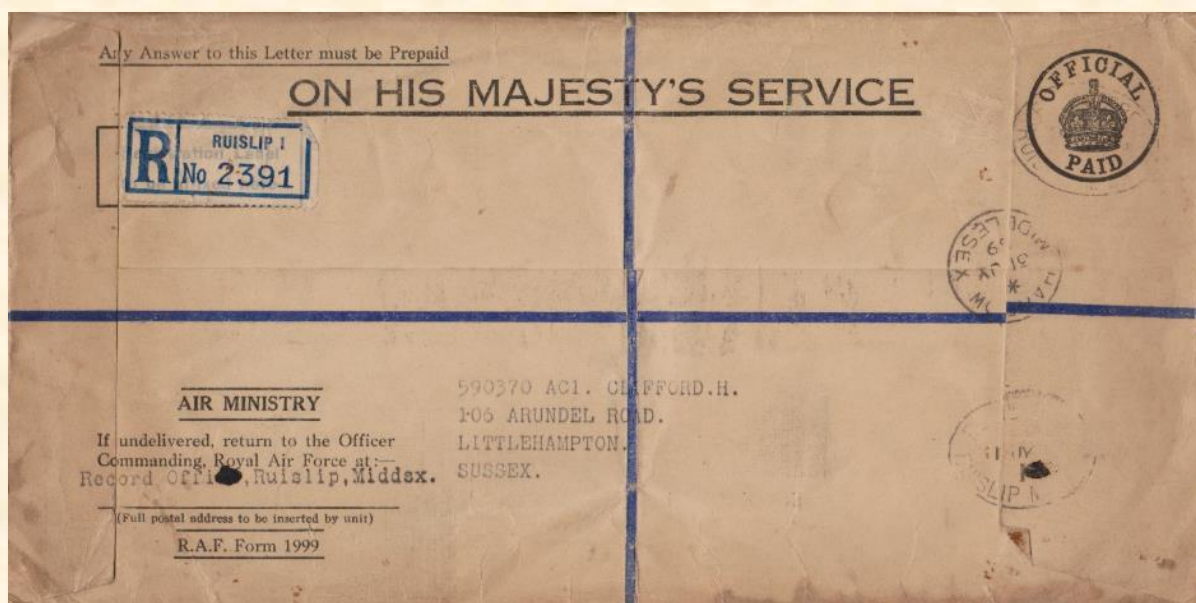
## The Second World War

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### Conscription

The Military Training Act of April 1939 only applied to single men aged between 20 and 22. The situation changed when Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939. Britain and France declared war two days later, and the National Service Act was passed on the same day. This applied to all men aged between 18 and 41. The planned National Registration Act became law on 5 September, and the census was conducted on 29 September. By the end of the year, more than 1.5 million men had been received into the British armed forces.

My grandfather, Harold Clifford, had married my grandmother, Olive, in Portsmouth in January 1936. He had joined the RAF in the early 1930s but left after a few years and worked as a vacuum cleaner salesman. Harold and Olive moved to Littlehampton, West Sussex, where my aunt, Sylvia, was born in July 1936. Being an RAF reservist, Harold's call-up papers landed on the doormat in Littlehampton in July 1939. Harold was posted to Farnborough in Hampshire, and was placed in an accountancy role due to his ability with mental arithmetic. He would reach the rank of Flight Sergeant.



*An envelope just like the one sent to millions of men across the country between 1939 and 1941. This one was received in July 1939 by my grandfather, Harold Clifford, containing his call-up papers as a member of the RAF Reserve. The papers have been lost but we have the Royal Navy service papers of his father, Charles Clifford, because Harold kept them in this envelope. (Family collection)*

Susan's son, John Clifford, was 'called up' to join the Army. He would rise to the rank of Sergeant. According to the National Register, John had become a foreman and storeskeeper with C & E Morton Ltd. He and Amelia were living 8 miles (13 km) to the east of Poplar at 55 Blackborne Road, Dagenham. Their son, Ronald, was attending school there. However, the family soon moved back nearer to Poplar, living

2.5 miles (4 km) to the east at 25 Haig Road, Plaistow. The birth of their daughter, Barbara, was registered in neighbouring West Ham in 1940.

In Poplar, John's sister, Enid, and her husband, Bert Brewer, moved a few doors along Brunswick Road to no.195. Bert was also called up to the Army and joined the Royal Artillery. He would serve in Egypt and became a bombardier, equivalent to a corporal.

Arthur and Jinny's eldest daughter, Ethel, and her husband, Sidney Robinson, were living with their daughters, Sheila and Maureen, on Burlington Way in Micklegate on the west side of Derby. Sidney had his own painting and decorating business before the War. In 1939, he was a maintenance painter at the Derbyshire County Mental Hospital in Micklegate. Sidney had the opportunity to help with rescuing men from the beaches during the Dunkirk evacuation of 26 May to 4 June 1940.

Sidney was then called up to the Royal Air Force on 30 July 1940 and served with various barrage balloon squadrons. From the October, he was based at Hull, protecting the city and the docks on the River Humber. Upstream at Grimsby, Sidney managed balloons tethered by cables to barges and buoys on the river.

In Derby, Arthur and Jinny's son, William, known as 'our Bill', was a 'progress clerk', monitoring manufacturing processes. He was also called up to join the RAF. Bill became a signaller, sailed to South Africa and served in Libya, Egypt and Palestine.

Jack and Maggie's youngest son, Clifford Fallon, also served in the Army for five years during the War, but he was able to marry Bessie Tupman in early 1941.

## **The Blitz**

The paint grinder, Frank Foweraker, was also an Air Raid Precautions (ARP) warden for Poplar Borough Council. He would be busy as one of about half a million people who volunteered to join the ARP. The London docks were heavily bombed by the Luftwaffe during the 'Blitz'. Between October 1940 and June 1941, around 1,300 bombs landed on Poplar and the neighbouring boroughs and districts including Bethnal Green, Blackwall, Bow, Limehouse, Millwall, Stepney and Whitechapel. More than 2,000 Eastenders died in the raids, which destroyed 47,000 houses.

Blackwall Way was reduced to rubble by incendiary bombs. We can only imagine what Augustine and his neighbours experienced. It must have been all the more frightening for him being blind.

Augustine was rehoused just to the west of the Blackwall Tunnel approach at 243 Grosvenor Buildings, Manisty Street. These buildings consisted of seven blocks containing 542 flats. They had been built to replace slums in 1885 by a charitable trust created by the Duchy of Westminster. They were originally promoted as "model dwellings" for nearly 1,400 people. Most of the flats had just one or two main rooms but each had a kitchen with running water and an indoor toilet. The blocks were soon home to over 2,000 people and developed a poor reputation. Tenants refused to pay rents to their landlords in 1915 and 1939. The blocks on the western side were destroyed during the War.

Towns and cities all over the country were also bombed during the same period. Around 400 were killed in Newcastle and around the Tyne docks and shipyards. In Derby, 3-4,000 homes were destroyed or damaged and 45 were killed.





*Prime Minister Winston Churchill visits bombed buildings in the East End of London on 8 September 1940. (War Office official photographer, Captain Len A Puttnam; © Imperial War Museum, ref. [H 3978](#))*

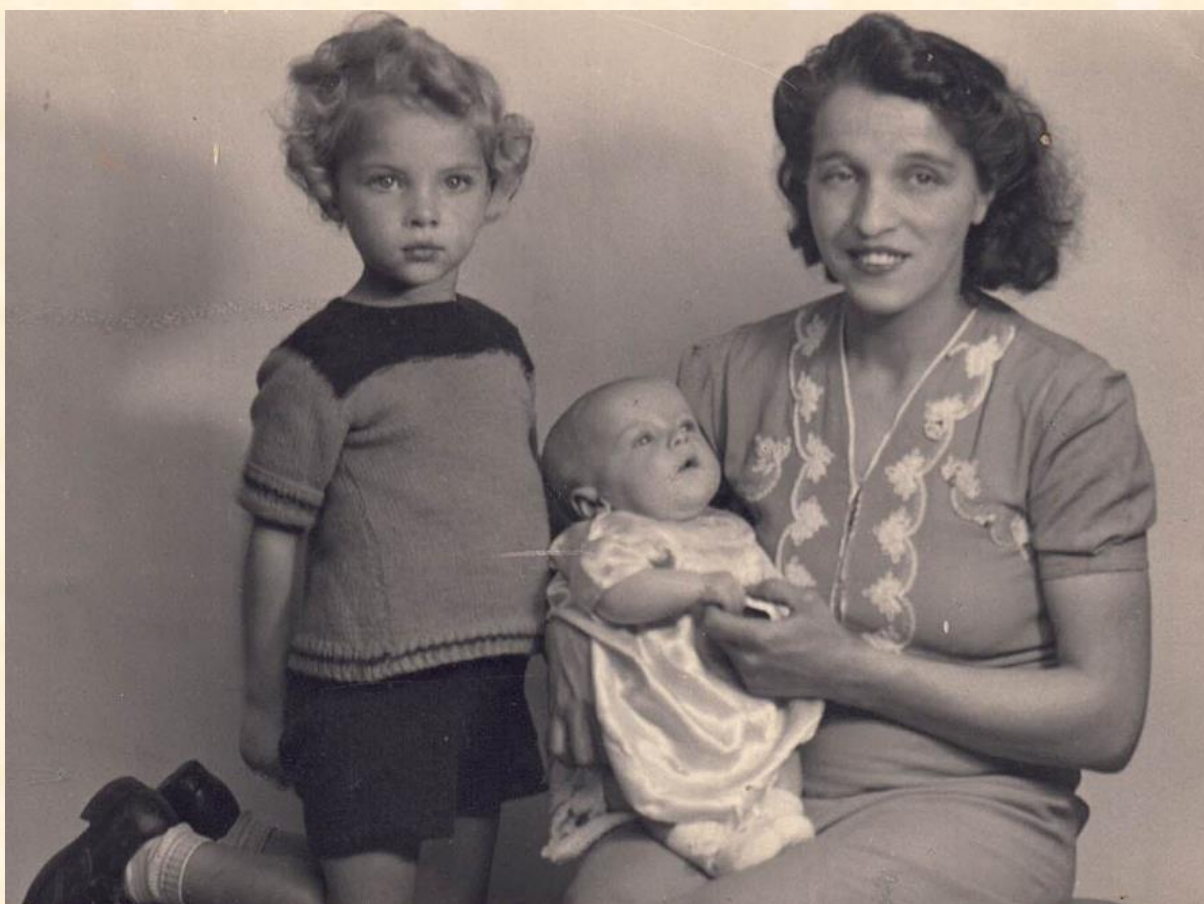


*The Grosvenor Buildings, Manisty Street, Poplar, seen here from Robinhood Lane in 1928. Augustine was rehoused in flat 243 after incendiary bombs destroyed Blackwell Way. (Bedford Lemere Collection, Historic England Archive, ref. [BL29455002](#))*

### A visit to Derby and Nottingham

In the spring of 1941, Enid Brewer made the 130-mile (210 km) train journey from London St Pancras to visit her relatives in bomb-damaged Derby. She took her son, Alan, with her. Alan has vivid memories of the visit even though he was only 3 years old. Enid was about six months' pregnant with Alan's brother, David. They stayed with Susan's sister, Maggie, and her husband, Jack Fallon, who now lived at 599 Osmaston Road. They were accompanied by Enid's sister-in-law, Amelia Clifford, John's wife.

While they were there, Enid and Alan took a 15-mile (24 km) bus trip to Nottingham to visit her aunt, Harriet Bull née Oldfield, Susan's older half-sister who was now 73. Alan remembers Harriet as wearing Victorian clothes. A few weeks later, bombing on the night of 8-9 May accounted for most of Nottingham's 178 deaths during the War.



*Susan and Augustine's daughter, Enid, with her sons, Alan aged 3 ½ and David, born on 16 July 1941. When she took Alan to visit their Derby family a few months before, his blonde curly hair was no doubt one of the reasons that he was so endearing to Enid's second cousins, Ev and Rene. (With thanks to Alan's paternal cousin, Mike Curran)*

They also visited 8 Roe Street, Derby, the home of Susan's brother, Arthur, and his wife, Jinny. Alan's great aunt Jinny was only 4' 8" (1.42 m) in height but she was also a very large lady, something which made an impression on the young lad.



Among several of the women in the family who were there that day were Ev and Irene, Arthur and Jinny's daughters. They made a fuss of Alan, who had blonde curly hair and blue eyes. Irene, known in the family as 'our Rene', took Alan to buy sweets at the Co-op a corner shop two doors away. He also remembers being taken to a nearby green area, which was probably Derby Arboretum Park.

Alan had four second cousins in Derby by this time – Ethel's daughters, Sheila aged 11 and Maureen aged 4 ½, and Ev's sons, Clifford aged 4 and David aged about 18 months. Alan does not remember them being there, but then he was only 3 himself. It was a weekday so Sheila was probably at school.

Neither does Alan remember meeting any of the men, who were probably at work or away in the armed forces. Arthur was still employed at the Carriage and Wagon Works as a machinist.

Ev and John Aldridge lived at 23 Repton Avenue, 1.5 miles (2.5 km) south-west of Roe Street. Like my mum's father mining coal in South Wales, John was in a civilian Reserved Occupation, continuing to work for Leys Malleable Castings. He had been an iron moulder before the War, pouring molten metal into casts; just like his father-in-law's cousin, Charles Clifford, had been before he left Derby to join the Navy in 1891. Leys products included chain belts, wheels and buckets for industrial elevators and conveyors. From 1937, Leys had been under contract to the War Office and other Government departments. From 1939, John worked as a caster, making heads for torpedoes. Over the next three years, he developed pneumoconiosis from breathing in the fine sand used in the castings. He had to take time off work and suffered long-term effects.

Alan Brewer also remembers that, in 1941, he was taken to visit one of Maggie and Jack's sons who had a model railway layout in his loft. This was probably the home of Jack jnr and Winifred. Alan remembers that they had a daughter of a similar age. This would have been Barbara who turned 3 in the September. They lived at 112 Field Lane in the Alvaston suburb on the south-east side of Derby.

Ev and John's daughter, Sue, was born in June 1942. Her brother, Clifford, has told her recently that he was aware of their relatives in London but he did not remember their names. Clifford and Bessie Fallon's first child, David, was born in late 1942. In 1943, Edith Reid, daughter of Maggie, Arthur and Susan's younger half-sister, Edith Harriet, married Reginald Wallis in Derby.

Enid Brewer corresponded with Maggie and Jack Fallon for a while, but they never met again and the families lost touch.

## **Down in Hampshire**

My dad, Alan Clifford, was born in December 1941 in Aldershot, Hampshire. He would have loved to see the Fallons' model railway, and has one in his garden office today. But he never had an opportunity to meet the wider family. He is a third cousin to the Aldridge, Brewer, Clifford, Fallon, Johnston, Mather and Robinson children of that generation, but he has been completely unaware of them until this year. This story about Susan is the first time that his family has been described in any detail alongside our Derby and London relatives.

If my grandfather, Harold, knew anything about his Derby family, he never shared it

with my dad; other than that his own grandfather, Susan's uncle, Thomas Clifford, was an engine driver with the Midland Railway. It may be that Harold's father, Charles, never told him much, or perhaps he preferred to forget.

Harold knew a lot of sadness in his life. As an only child, he was aware of how many children his parents had lost in infancy, and no doubt of their sorrow. He must have been greatly affected when they both took their own lives in the 1930s. This may explain why he gave up his initial RAF career at the time. It may also explain why he did not share much of the family's past with my dad. More heartbreak would follow.

### **Augustine's death**

In October 1942, Augustine suffered a stroke. He was taken to Poplar Hospital on East India Dock Road, a few minutes' walk from where he lived in the Grosvenor Buildings. Having survived the Blitz, Augustine then developed pneumonia and died at the hospital on 20 October. He was 62 years old.



*Poplar looking north in March 1935:*

*TOP-CENTRE: Brunswick Road where Susan and Augustine's daughter, Enid Brewer, and her family lived.*

*CENTRE: Poplar Hospital at the junction of East India Dock Road, running left to right, and Brunswick Road. Augustine died at the hospital on 20 October 1942.*

*BOTTOM: Opposite the hospital is the grand gateway at the north-west corner of the East India Import Dock. To the left of the gate is the equally grand archway at the head of the approach road to the original Blackwall Tunnel of 1897, which passes under the Thames to Greenwich on the south bank. Running parallel to the left of the tunnel approach is Robinhood Lane. The large, white-roofed building to the left is the Grand Palace Picture Theatre of 1913, which closed after bomb damage on 22 September 1940.*

*(© Historic England – Britain from Above, ref. [EPW046629](#))*



REGISTRATION DISTRICT					Poplar				
1942 DEATH in the Sub-district of Poplar					in the Metropolitan Borough of Poplar				
Columns:-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
24	Twentieth October 1942 Poplar Hospital	Augustine Ashman	Male	62 years	243 Grosvenor Buildings Poplar a Boilermaker	Hypostatic pneumonia, which occurred after cerebral haemorrhage from W.R. Hedges at small amount of the arterial blood vessels P.M. Natural	London Eastern district Inquest held Twentieth October 1942	Twentieth October 1942	W. Ingram Registrar

*Certificate for the death of Augustine Ashman on 20 October 1942, aged 62. His cause of death was a stroke followed by pneumonia. (With thanks to Augustine's grandson, Alan Brewer)*

In probate, Augustine's effects were valued at £93 1s 6d, the equivalent of around £4,700 today. The only beneficiary was his daughter, Enid Brewer. This is another indication that her brother, John, was not Augustine's son.

Enid's son, Alan, was only 4½ when his grandfather died but he has clear memories of him, including that he was not very tall.

### Final year of war

In April 1944, Ethel's husband, Sidney Robinson, was posted to a barrage balloon unit at RAF Longbenton on the north-east side of Newcastle. This was 5 miles (8km) from Howdon on the north bank of the Tyne, opposite Jarrow where Ethel's aunt Susan and her family had lived until 20 years before. Within a few months, there was no further need for barrage balloons to be flown over Britain as the threat of aerial attack was sufficiently reduced.



*Susan's niece, Rene Clifford, Arthur and Jenny's third daughter, married William 'Bill' Johnston in 1944. (With thanks to their niece, Sue Dickenson)*

A record of the death of Susan's elder half-sister, Harriet Bull, has not yet come to light. Susan's eldest full sister, Ethel Annie, never returned to Derby. She died in Sutton, Surrey, in December 1944 aged 64.

Rene had married Scotsman William 'Bill' Johnston in Derby in February 1944. They met when Bill came to 8 Roe Street to visit his cousin, Mary, who was lodging with Arthur and Jinny. Mary had come to Derby to work in a factory, riveting parts for aircraft. Bill had joined the Army before the War. Rene and Bill made their first home at 21 Roe Street, Derby. Bill too was posted to the Middle East and served in Palestine. The War in Europe ended on 8 May 1945. Bill was in Germany that year and had become a sergeant.



*Arthur and Jinny with family members at 8 Roe Street in 1945. In the middle of the back row are Ethel, her tall daughter Sheila, and Bill Clifford's then-fiancée, Kathleen Collins. Standing at front-left is Rene. Jinny has her hand on the shoulder of Ethel's younger daughter, Maureen. In the middle, Ev is holding Sue. The younger boys are Ev's sons, David and Clifford Aldridge. The girl in Rene's arms, the older boy in front of Arthur and the ladies at either end are not identified, but the home was always full of visiting family and friends. (With thanks to Bill and Kath's daughter, Pat Carroll)*

The third and last child born to my grandparents, Harold and Olive Clifford, was their daughter, Helen. She arrived on 15 August 1945, the day on which Japan surrendered to the Allies. Helen was given the middle name of Victoria, in reference to Victory over Japan (VJ) Day.



## Postwar Postscript

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### Derby

Ethel's husband, Sidney Robinson, returned to work at the mental hospital at Mickleover, known as Pastures Hospital from 1948. Ethel worked there too. Sidney also taught night classes in painting and decorating at Mickleover's College for Art and Design on Uttoxeter Road. Their daughter, Maureen, married an American and moved to the United States.



*The Derby wedding on 12 January 1946 of Susan's nephew, Bill Clifford. His bride was Kathleen Collins. Bill's parents, Arthur and Jinny, are standing at far-right. The two bridesmaids to the right of Kathleen are granddaughters of Arthur and Jinny. The older one is Sheila Robinson aged 16, daughter of Bill's sister, Ethel. The little one is Susan aged 3½, daughter of Bill's sister, Ev Aldridge. To the left of Bill is his brother-in-law, William Johnston, Rene's husband. (With thanks to Arthur and Jinny's granddaughter, Sue Dickenson née Aldridge).*

As the men started returning home, families soon started growing faster. Due to the 'boom' in the birth rate, children born over the next several years were known as the Baby Boomers. In Derby, Rene and Bill Johnston's daughter, Wendy, was born in October 1945. They had two more daughters. Julia Jane was named after her grandmother, Jinny. Sadly, infant mortality returned to the family. Julia Jane lived for just six hours after she was born on 29 August 1950. Lesley was born in 1952. Ev and John Aldridge's daughter, Sue, remembers watching the present Queen's coronation in 1953 on Rene and Bill's small black and white television.



*Susan's nephew, Bill Clifford, with his wife, Kath. They are seen here on holiday in the early 1950s. (With thanks to their daughter, Pat Carroll)*



Sue, also remembers that Derby households had thick mats on the floors made from strips of old fabric, just like those in County Durham. In Derby, they were called 'peg rugs' as they were made with a tool like a large knitting needle. Jinny and her sisters, Doris and Hilda, and Jinny's daughters all made them. My Welsh grandmother made similar 'rag mats'. Sue remembers being shown the different fabrics – old trousers, coats, jackets and thick skirt fabric. Nothing was wasted. The fabrics were anchored to a hessian-type backing material. The rugs were cleaned by tossing them over the outdoor clothes line and beating them. They would be moved to make floor space for chairs when the extended family gathered, such as at Christmas, or when the tin bath was placed in front of the fire.

Maggie and Jack Fallon's fourth and last grandchild, Susan, was born to Clifford and Bessie Fallon in 1946. Susan remembered her dad telling her about her great aunt Susan.

Edith Wallis née Reid, daughter of Maggie, Arthur and Susan's younger half-sister, Edith Harriet, had two children with her husband, Reginald. Vincent was born in 1947, followed by Patricia in 1953.

Arthur Clifford did not live to enjoy his retirement. He died from cancer in July 1951 aged 65. Sue, remembers him as a kind man.

Bill Johnston worked in a clerical role for what was known as British Railways after the big railway companies were amalgamated and nationalised in 1948. Having survived the War, Bill died from cancer in April 1963 aged just 47.

Bill Clifford returned to being a progress clerk at Leys Malleable Castings. Bill married Kathleen Collins in January 1946. Bill and Kathleen produced Arthur and Jinny's tenth and last grandchild, Pat. She was born in March 1953.

Ev's husband, John Aldridge, also continued at Leys as a core maker. This involved packing a mixture of sand and oil around a shaped wax core in a metal casting box. When placed in a furnace, the wax melted and drained out, leaving the cast ready to be re-filled with molten metal. After cooling, the new metal shape was released and polished with a grinder. Sue remembers John taking her to see the workshop.

John took Sue and her brothers, Clifford and David, to the Leys children's Christmas party in the workers' 'mess hall'. They were entertained with a Punch and Judy show and a visit from Santa Claus. A sack was brought to each table containing presents to be handed out. Sue also remembers John taking them to see a Derby County football match in the early 1950s at the stadium next door to Leys. They had won the FA Cup in 1946. The stadium was known as the Baseball Ground due to its historical origins in the 1890s. There was always a match on Boxing Day and all the men would walk to the ground while the women prepared tea for their return.

Ev and John's last child, Steven, was born in July 1952. He has inherited his dad's love for gardening. In April 1973, John died shortly after unsuccessful surgery attempting to repair a ruptured aortic aneurysm. He was 61.

Jinny lived until 1967 when she was 80. Edith Harriet, younger half-sister to Susan, Arthur and Maggie, died in 1982 aged 89.

Maggie and Jack Fallon's three sons all worked at Rolls Royce's aircraft engine factory on Nightingale Road, where thousands of Merlin engines had been produced for Hurricanes, Spitfires, Lancasters, Mosquitoes and other aircraft which helped to

win the War. Jack snr died in 1956 aged 68, followed by Maggie in 1970 aged 86. Jack jnr, who had the model railway in his loft, died in 1977 aged 66. Bill Fallon lived until 1992 reaching 78. Clifford Fallon died in 1998 aged 79.



*Roe Street, Derby, built in the early 1880s, looking south-west from Cambridge Street in April 1976. These and the surrounding streets would shortly be demolished. The second door on the right, already boarded up, was no.8. Susan's brother, Arthur, and his wife, Jinny, lived in the house for almost all of the forty years that they were married. After Arthur died in 1951, Jinny lived there for another ten years. Visible on the pavement under the front windows are the positions of the cellar gratings that were lifted when coal deliveries were due. Susan and Arthur's older half-sister, Harriet, had been living on the street in 1911, further down on the other side at no.69. At that time, Arthur's in-laws, Henry and Julia Pashley, lived opposite at no.68. Two of their daughters, Doris and Hilda Pashley, would later live at the far end of the street in no.78. Also in 1911, Susan and Arthur's sister, Maggie, lived at no.49. Nearest on the right is the former Co-op corner shop. Arthur's daughter, Rene, took Susan's grandson, Alan Brewer, to the shop to buy sweets in the spring of 1941. His mother, Enid, had brought him from London, accompanied by his aunt, Amelia 'Min' Clifford, to visit their family at no.8. Alan remembers noticing that the houses were built from red bricks, something not seen in the East End of London. When Rene married, she moved into No.21 over the road. (PictureThePast.org.uk; Derby City Council, ref. [DRBY007425](#))*

Ev died in 1988, just before her 77<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her son, David, lived until 2020, just short of his 81<sup>st</sup> birthday. Rene died in 2001 when she was 80. Ev and Rene's half-cousin, Edith Wallis, died in 2007 aged 87.



Bill Clifford worked for Leys until he retired around 1980. The Works closed in 1986. Bill's wife, Kathleen, died in 1993 aged 73. Bill died in 2009 aged 92.

Ethel and Sidney Robinson retired from working at Pastures Hospital around 1970. Sidney died in 1997 aged 90. Ethel reached the grand age of 93, dying in 2002. Their daughter, Sheila, reached 91 before dying in 2020.

Some of them had clearly inherited a long-life gene!

## County Durham

Cornsay Colliery closed in 1953, as did Hamsteels Colliery in 1958. Today, there is little to suggest that either of them ever existed. Quebec's terraced streets were demolished, leaving little more than Front Street. Cornsay Colliery today is merely the name of the hamlet comprising its remaining houses. Esh Winning Colliery closed in 1968 but its village remains a substantial community.

The Hamsteels school building is still there but it became a meat factory in the 1970s. The footballer, Chris Waddle, was working there while playing for Tow Law Town when he signed for Newcastle United in 1980. The church of Hamsteels St John the Baptist closed in 2010. The church building, vicarage and school teacher's house have become private dwellings.



*Twilight of The Fifteen Streets, in this case James Street, Jarrow, awaiting demolition around 1970. The north end of Ellison Street ran parallel between Nixon Street to the east and James Street to the west. Nixon Street would have looked very similar to this and was demolished around the same time. The Bailey Industrial Estate now covers the area through which James Street ran. Nixon Street was replaced by Gowan Court. (South Tyneside Libraries, ref. [STH0011212](#))*

In Jarrow, Commercial Road and the south end of Pearson Place still exist as addresses but with modern housing and green space. Curry Street lies beneath an area of grass bounded by Tyne Street, Commercial Road and Priory Road. Nixon Street survived until the 1960s. Gowan Court was built over the demolished site.

The Tyne Pedestrian and Cyclist Tunnels opened in 1951, running beneath the ferry landing stages on the Jarrow side. The ferry service ended in 1967 with the opening of the first Tyne road tunnel. The A19 disappears underground half a mile to the south as the tunnel passes under central Jarrow, directly below where Curry Street had been. The new second bore of the road tunnel, opened in 2011, passes under where the back yards of Ferry Street once met those of Curry Street.

My dad has supported Newcastle United since he was 11. He was a Portsmouth fan until his dad took him to see them play Newcastle in an FA Cup match in 1952. Newcastle had won the Cup for a fourth time the year before, and beat Portsmouth on their way to another title; which they won yet again in 1955.

We moved to Tyneside in 1972, unaware that our relatives had lived there decades before. We lived in Low Fell, Gateshead, 6 miles (10 km) west of Jarrow along the south bank of the Tyne. One of my brothers was born in Newcastle General Hospital in December 1973. We moved to Norfolk in 1974.



*Looking north-west towards Newcastle on a lovely sunny day in 1974 from my dad's attic study window at 23 Stavordale Terrace, Low Fell, Gateshead. I was 4 ½ years old and this view is one of my earliest memories. We lived there from 1972 to 1974. At far-left is the bend of the River Tyne between Dunston on the south bank and Elswick on the north bank. These terraced houses are still there. They appeared on an Ordnance Survey map for the first time in the Durham revision of 1914, when the Varleys and the Ashmans were living a few miles downstream at Jarrow and South Shields. (Photographer – Alan Clifford)*



## Hampshire and Wales

My grandfather, Harold Clifford, died in September 1973 at age 59. He had a stroke while visiting his daughter, Sylvia, and her family in South Wales.

Harold's difficult early life may partly explain the fact that he had a succession of jobs after the War but was unable to develop a singular career. He worked for the Southern Electricity and Gas Boards, for a light engineering company called Microcell in their inspection department, and as a taxi driver and park attendant.

My grandmother, Olive, died from cancer in April 1960 aged 44. She never met any of her nine grandchildren, of which I am the sixth.



*To the left is Harold Clifford, my grandfather and a second cousin to the children of Susan, Arthur and Maggie. He is seen here in the summer of 1956 with my grandmother, Olive, and their three children – my aunts, Sylvia aged 20 and Helen aged 11, and my dad, Alan, aged 14. They were photographed at the Hog's Back beauty spot in Surrey's North Downs, between Farnham and Guildford. Harold had borrowed a Wolseley for a day trip from their home in Farnborough, Hampshire. Olive died from cancer in April 1960 aged 44. This is one of several photos of their children and grandchildren that Harold kept in his wallet. On the back of a photo of Helen, he wrote "Hole in Heart", which caused her death in March 1970 at the age of 24. (Family collection)*

My aunt Sylvia married David Clive Phillips in Aldershot in 1961 and moved to South Wales where Clive was from. He encouraged my dad to go to university. Dad chose Bangor in North Wales, where he met my mum, Marian Edwards. They were married in 1968 in mum's home village in South Wales, where my Welsh grandfather had been a coal miner.

Harold and Olive's daughter, my aunt Helen, died from a heart defect in March 1970 at the age of just 24. Sylvia died from cancer in May 2006 aged 69.

## London

Bert and Enid Brewer's third son, Peter, was born in September 1945. John and Amelia Clifford also had another son, Robin, born in 1946. The Brewers named their last child Clifford, born in February 1948. He was Susan's eighth and last grandchild. The Brewers clearly used Susan's Clifford family name as a first name; just as John and Ev Aldridge in Derby had done for their first child in 1937; and as Jack and Maggie Fallon had done when they gave it as a middle name to their third son, Ernest, in 1919, and he used Clifford as his first name in any case.

Poplar was the setting for Jennifer Worth's *Call the Midwife* (2002), based on her own experiences in the borough during the 1950s. Following a long-running dispute in the early 1960s, the Grosvenor Buildings were demolished and replaced by the Robin Hood Gardens development in 1965. That year, Poplar was absorbed by the new borough of Tower Hamlets.

The second bore of the Blackwall Tunnel opened in 1967. Brunswick Road, where the Brewer family had lived, was demolished to make way for the widened A12 to create the tunnel's multi-lane northern approach. Poplar Hospital closed in 1975 and was demolished in 1982.

C & E Morton, the company which John Clifford worked for, was taken over by the Beecham Group. He worked his way up to a senior position. Bert Brewer had a succession of clerical jobs, the final one being with the Lamson Paragon group.

John and Amelia moved to Ruislip in the north-west London Borough of Hillingdon. They later moved to Farnborough in the London borough of Bromley, which had been part of Kent until 1965. John died in Farnborough in 1980. He was 71. Amelia died there in 1996 aged 86.

Some members of the family members moved to Essex. Others moved to Kent.

Maintenance of ships continued at Blackwall Yard until closure in 1987. Since 1991, the Isle of Dogs and Tower Hamlets have been dominated by the soaring office buildings built on the Canary Wharf of the old West India Dock. The East India Docks, Blackwall Yard and the railway goods and coal depots have been replaced with modern offices, hotels, shops and residential blocks.

Enid Brewer died from cancer in 1988 in Romford, London Borough of Havering. She was 75. Bert died there in 1994 aged 80. John and Amelia's son, Ronald, died in Cheshire in 2000 aged 68. Their daughter, Barbara, died in Bromley in 2003 aged 61. Enid and Bert's son, David, died from cancer in Chelmsford in 2004 aged 62.

The surviving Blackwall Yard graving dock is being developed as a sunken garden with an open-air swimming pool at the river end.





*Susan's son, John V V Clifford, and his wife, Amelia, seen here on a visit to Lands End in Cornwall around 1970. It was Amelia who had accompanied her sister-in-law, Enid Brewer, and Enid's son, Alan, on their visit to Derby in the spring of 1941. (With thanks to their granddaughter, Kelly Bird)*

## The found sister

My dad visited the Derby and Leicester record offices around 1980 and discovered the core of his Clifford family tree. With kind help from various people, I have been able to expand this over the last three years.

Sue Dickenson inherited the research on our Derby family collected by her cousin, Sheila. Sue contacted me in 2019 and, in one of our early exchanges, she asked me if I knew what had happened to her great aunt Susan. This prompted the expansion of my research, resulting in this story. I am most grateful to Sue, and by extension her brothers and cousins, for helping to bring the parallel story of Susan's Derby family to life.

Arthur and Jinny's son, Bill, was the last male in the Derby family to carry the Clifford surname. His daughter, Pat, assumed that her surname was due to be lost after she got married in 1980. She discovered otherwise when Sue put her in contact with me in April of 2021!

In the final months of my research, I have had the pleasure of making contact with two of Susan's grandsons, Robin Clifford and Alan Brewer. It is a delight to be able to share with them something of the world that their grandparents and parents knew. Alan had already collected the essential details of their family history. In 2008, he made a useful contact with one of Susan's great nephews, David Fallon, son of Clifford Fallon and grandson of Maggie and Jack.

I am particularly grateful to Alan for providing me with the information he had collected, and for contributing his early memories. He has helped me to make Susan's own story as accurate and complete as possible.

I am also delighted to be able to reacquaint the various branches of the family with a little of each other's shared origins and history. Despite Susan's separation by long distances from her closest relatives throughout her life, she and her own family were able to maintain contact with them without modern technology. After 83 years since she ceased to play an active part, she has connected us once again.

*I have written also written a story about our Leicestershire relatives going back to the eighteenth century. This can be found on the website for the Parish Council of Breedon on the Hill, under Community > [Parish history](#).*

*My story about the police career of my great-great grandfather, Thomas Clifford, in the 1880s is available on the Derbyshire Family History Society website, under Data & Downloads > Downloads Area > [PC Clifford](#).*



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