
THE LAWTON & BRACEY FAMILY HISTORY

Contents

The family of Arthur George Lawton	3
Arthur George's siblings.....	3
Hephzibah Lawton	3
Ivy Maud Lawton	4
Georgiana Jane Lawton.....	6
George Lawton (1877-1934)	6
Thomas Lawton (1842-bef.1891).....	6
Eliza Cheetham (1848-?)	9
Jane Lizzey Bracey (1872-1919)	14
John Bracey.....	16
Emma Handscombe – or Campkin?	17
Appendix	19
Censuses	19
1841	19
1851	20
1861	21
1871	21
1881	21
1891	22
1901	23
1911	23
1921 census	23
1931 electoral register.....	23
1939 Register	24
Wills	24
Will of Thomas Priestnall of Stockport, silk manufacturer	24
Will of Abraham Lawton, formerly of Portwood within Brinnington, late of Churchgate, Stockport, beerseller	24

The family of Arthur George Lawton

Arthur George Lawton was born in Lemsford, Hertfordshire, on 28th January 1907. But a couple of years later, his family moved to Mucking in Essex, where the family appear on the 1911 census at 18 Lower Crescent.

Arthur's parents, George Lawton and Jane Lizzie Bracey, had met in Hertfordshire, the county of Jane's birth. George was from Stockport in Cheshire, just south of Manchester. Before meeting George, Jane had had relationships with at least one other man, as Hephzibah Emma and Ivy Maud were both born a few years before their mother's marriage to George Lawton in 1906.

The 1911 census was the first census where respondees were asked to provide information about their marriages. The Lawtons claimed that they had been married 16 years, and that they had had five children, all of whom were living at the time of the census. However, at least one of these facts isn't true. George and Jane married in 1906. I haven't been able to find George on the 1901 census, so *perhaps* he was living in Hertfordshire in the mid-1890s and actually was Hephzibah and Ivy's father, but the question is, if that was the case, why hadn't he married Jane before she'd had the girls? So on the one hand, it seems unlikely that he's their father. However, as we shall see later when we look back at the history of the Lawton family in Cheshire, there was another Lawton who had an unorthodox take on marriage.

Before we delve backwards, we shall go forwards, and take a look at George's siblings.

Arthur George's siblings

Hephzibah Lawton

Hephzibah Emma – sometimes in the records as just Hephzibah, or just Emma, sometimes with the surname Bracey and often with the surname Lawton, was born in Lemsford, Hertfordshire, on 24th November 1895. She was registered at birth with her mother's maiden name.

Her first name is unusual, an Old Testament name. In the Book of Kings, Hephzibah is the wife of Hezekiah, King of Judah. Later in the Old Testament, in the book of Isaiah, Hephzibah appears as a symbolic reference to Zion:

“Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall they land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.”

Or, to cut a long story short, “Hephzibah” is the Hebrew for “my delight is in her”, which is rather lovely, if rather unusual name to give to one's daughter.

In 1901, she was living in Lemsford with her mother (her name given as Emma on the census), her widowed grandfather John Bracey, her uncles William and George, and a sick nurse called Rose Hannah Shadbolt. In the days before hospitals were commonly used, when families could afford to, anyone ill would be nursed at home, and this would sometimes mean that they would pay for a nurse to stay in the house and look after their patient. This would avoid having to go to the workhouse infirmary. It's not clear from the census record who Rose had been employed to treat.

Then she appears on the 1911 and 1921 censuses in Essex, with her stepfather and siblings. The furthest I have been able to trace her is up to 1931, when she appears on the electoral roll at 10 Grove Road in Stanford-le-Hope, Essex. She was living with her stepfather, and two half-siblings, George and Georgeanna.

After that, Hephzibah simply disappears from the historical record. Despite searching by several different combinations of her name, and by her date of birth, I haven't found her on the 1939 Register, and I haven't found a marriage or death record for her. I've checked Australian and American records too, though of course, if she emigrated, it might not have been to either of those countries. And records for those countries are not as easily accessible as ones are in England and Wales. I've checked family wills which I've been able to find too, but to no avail. Hephzibah Emma is a mystery. Perhaps one day she will turn up!

Ivy Maud Lawton



Ivy was born on 1st July 1901 in Lemsford, just a couple of months after the 1901 census was taken. On the 1921 census, she was 19, working as a laundress at the Stanford-le-Hope Laundry company.

In 1926, she married Herbert Sidney Mayes. Originally from Dartford, Kent, Herbert was employed in heavy work. The couple had one daughter, Josephine I Mayes, in 1927. By 1939, they were living at 18 Springhouse Road in Thurrock, along with Ivy's half-sister Georgiana.



Sadly, Herbert died on 21st February 1956. Three years later, Ivy married Frederick Lettice. Ivy lived a long life, passing away in 1991. She was buried in the cemetery at Corringham, Essex.

Her daughter Josephine married Roy William Lane in 1947, and they had two daughters, Judith (born 1949) and Josephine (born 1953). If you would like me to find out more about them and, if I can, track down their contact details, let me know!

Georgiana Jane Lawton

Georgiana was Jane's third daughter. She was born on 27th February 1908. She lived with her father until sometime in the 1930s when she moved to Thurrock to live with her half-sister Ivy. She moved away from Essex, and in 1949, she married Denis A Mather in Oxfordshire.

When Georgiana wrote her will on 22 September 1970, she was living at 5 Grove Terrace on Fobbing Road in Corringham. She appointed Alfred John Rigg-Milner and his wife Angela Ivorette Rigg-Milner, who lived at Lake House on Fobbing Road, as her executors and trustees, and left her house to the Rigg-Milner's children, Paul Adrian, and Elizabeth Samantha Jane, then gave all the rest of her estate to Angela. I am not clear who the Rigg-Milners were. I have tried to research them but I can't see any obvious connection to the Lawtons. They might be relatives of Georgiana's husband, or could merely have been friends who lived nearby.

Two years later, Georgina passed away.

George Lawton (1877-1934)

George Lawton was born on 14th August 1877 in Stockport, Cheshire, and was baptised a month later. His father, Thomas Lawton, was a grocer, and had married Eliza Cheetham, George's father, in 1869. The family lived at Higher Hillgate in Stockport. Hillgate is a long road which runs through the centre of Stockport, with a Higher, Middle and Lower section. This photo shows the Lower section – it's a view of the street that would've been familiar to George, taken c.1905-1910. In fact, Thomas – your great-grandfather – was living above the grocery he ran on Lower Hillgate in 1871.



Thomas Lawton (1842-bef.1891)

Thomas was born in Stockport and baptised on 20th November 1842 in the village of Prestbury. It's in sight of the Pennine foothills, just north of Macclesfield. He was the first child of Abraham Lawton, an engineer, and Mary Jones, a couple who never married, but lived as husband and wife, raising their children with Abraham's surname. This might explain why he was baptised in Prestbury, where his

parents claimed to live at the time of his baptism, to avoid anyone pointing out that his parents weren't married – although it could of course just be that the family really had moved to Prestbury, just after Thomas' birth. He could even have been born at his mother's parents' house.

By 1851, the family had moved to Brinnington in Cheshire, now a suburb of Stockport, living on Marsland Street. The road has been transformed by time, without a house to be seen. It's all car parks and supermarkets now, with the M60 running over it. But back in 1851, Thomas lived at number 20 with his parents, and his little sister Anne, who was only two months old when the census was taken. His brother Harry would arrive two years later, in 1853, and it was perhaps Harry's birth which prompted Abraham to write his will early in the following year.

Thomas left home and became a grocer and corn dealer. We catch up with him again in 1861, living on Market Street in Hyde in the home of a man who was – as a cotton-spinner, grocer, and corn dealer, presumably his employer.

Abraham Lawton and Mary Jones

When Abraham sat down to write his will in 1854, he had been living for at least fourteen years with Mary Jones as man and wife. They'd had three children, and even though their birth certificates were written to make it seem as if they were married, in reality they were not. And this presented a problem for Abraham, because if he died while his children were still young, what would happen to them?

This is no doubt something that all parents worry about, however, in Abraham's case it was more pressing. Under the law at the time, an illegitimate child couldn't automatically inherit their parents' property, and neither would Mary, Abraham's "reputed wife." So, by writing his will, Abraham legitimated his three children, and he ensured that his property would descend to his wife.

The potential seriousness of the situation can be seen in the 1862 novel of Wilkie Collins called "No Name", almost contemporary with Abraham's will. In the novel, two well-to-do daughters are left as penniless orphans after their father dies in a train crash (Victorian railways were very dangerous), and their mother dies in childbirth not long afterwards. Their father had written a will, legitimating his daughters, but because he and their mother had married just before the train accident, he hadn't had time to write a new will. Marrying meant the original will was invalidated, and because the girls weren't automatically legitimated by their parents' marriage (one of the parents had fled an unhappy marriage without getting divorced first, only marrying once their original spouse had died), her father's family automatically inherited everything. This being a melodramatic Victorian novel, of course the family refuse to do the right thing and give the property to the girls, so the novel charts one of the daughter's drastic attempts to reclaim what she saw as her rightful inheritance.

This begs the question, of course – why didn't Abraham and Mary marry? There are two possible scenarios: either one of them was already married, or they faced parental opposition. My great-great-grandparents, James Ashworth and Elizabeth Shrimpton, never married, even though there was no hint of this when I looked at my great-grandmother's birth certificate. But I couldn't find their marriage. My grandad's cousin (one of James and Elizabeth's granddaughters) told me that James and Elizabeth had never married, because Elizabeth had fled a brutal husband. With divorce being beyond the means of most ordinary people at the time, and frowned upon as immoral, Elizabeth had no option but to pretend

that she and James were married. They had several children, and my mother has a little chest of drawers that James made from cigar boxes for Elizabeth. She found a loving husband in the end.

Sometimes, a spouse could vanish abroad, and the one left behind in England wouldn't know what had become of them. The law allowed seven years with no contact before the abandoned spouse could remarry, assuming that after such a period, one might assume the vanished spouse had died. But given that Abraham and Mary never married, presumably that wasn't the case.

One of them might already have been married to someone else who was still in Cheshire, but it's difficult to know for certain as it would require hunting through many possibly marriages for them. Before 1837, no father's name was listed on marriage certificates, so it's difficult to know if the Abraham or Mary is your ancestor. Particularly with "Mary Jones", this is especially difficult!

Parental opposition could happen for several reasons. Often, it was a difference in social status or religion. By the early 1800s, there were many Catholics in Cheshire, and often a marriage between a Catholic and an Anglican or non-conformist was frowned upon. However, it seems that both Abraham and Mary were baptised at the same Anglican church in Stockport, so a difference in faith doesn't seem to be the reason.

The most likely baptism for Mary is in Stockport on 8th May 1814, the daughter of Thomas Jones, a blacksmith, and his wife Jane. They lived at Daw Bank. As children were often named after relatives, it would appear that Thomas Lawton was named after his maternal grandfather. But I'm yet to find out anything more about Thomas and Jane.

Abraham was baptised on 17th March 1813, the son of Samuel Lawton, a cotton spinner, and his wife Clara.

We obviously don't know when Abraham and Mary first "got together" but the year before their first child, Thomas, was born, they were living in Brinnington in Stockport. Abraham was an engineer. They remained in the Brinnington area, and Mary died before Abraham – he passed away on 5th June 1880.

Samuel Lawton (1776-1828) and Clara Cumberlidge (1791-1862)

Samuel and Clara married in Stockport on 13th June 1810. Samuel was a bachelor, however, on the 1861 census, the widowed Clara is listed as the "mother" of one Sarah Lawton, aged 60. But Clara can't be Sarah's mother as she'd be too old. Another mystery, it seems. In Samuel's will, written two months before he died in December 1828, he left £20 to his daughter Sarah. It seems that Sarah was born to Samuel before his marriage to Clara, presumably with another woman. It could be that there's an error in the marriage register and that Samuel was in fact a widower – he was 34 when he married 19-year-old Clara.

There are a lot of Lawtons in Stockport, so going back further on Samuel's line is possible, but might be difficult.

You would think that with a name like Clara Cumberlidge, we would quite easily locate her. However, this isn't the case. On all three censuses (1841, 1851, and 1861), Clara's birth county is Cheshire, but her place of birth varies. In 1851, it's Sidderton (or Lidderton), Cheshire, a place which I can't identify, though perhaps a Cheshire local would know where it is. On the 1861 census, her place of birth is Stockport.

Some other people have also been called Clara or Clare Cumberlidge – in 1781, Clare daughter of William and Elizabeth Cumberlidge was born in Upper Hulme, Leek, in Staffordshire, 26 miles from Stockport. She died the following year. In 1792, a Clare Cumberlidge married Daniel Ash in Prestbury – and this is interesting, given that Thomas Lawton was baptised in Prestbury, suggesting a family link with the place.

But there is no baptism for a Clare or Clara Cumberlidge in Cheshire around the time Clara was born. There could be a few reasons for this: the parish register hasn't been transcribed yet, or the parish register is lost. It could even be that she wasn't baptised at that time, for whatever reason. I have checked through Cumberlidge wills which are available, but no Clara popped up, I'm afraid.

However, Samuel and Clara both appear in an index of Cheshire memorial inscriptions, which means there are (or were) surviving headstones for them somewhere. Samuel was buried at St Mary's, Churchgate, and Clara was buried at St Thomas'. I haven't been able to find photos of their memorials online.

Eliza Cheetham (1848-?)

Eliza, your great-grandmother, was baptised in Stockport on Christmas Day, 1848, the daughter of Elkanah Cheetham, a pawnbroker who lived at Middle Hillgate at the time, and his wife Hannah Priestnall. She was the youngest but one of the couple's ten children.

The children's names are important as five of them have middle names indicating the wider family: Samuel Howard, William Thomas Howard, Hannah Priestnall, Joseph Priestnall, and Elkanah Howard. These are always handy clues! The naming is echoed in the middle names of some of the children that Eliza had with her husband Thomas Lawton: Arthur Cheetham, Harry Cheetham, Frederick Cheetham, Joseph Priestnall Cheetham and Herbert Cheetham.

By 1851, the family were living at 39 Lower Hillgate, and Elkanah describes himself as a mill owner. The eldest and third children, Samuel Howard Cheetham and George Cheetham, were cotton manufacturers, and Mary Ann, the second child, was a pawn broker. The family had one servant, which indicates that the Cheethams were doing fairly well.

So who were the Cheethams and Priestnalls?

Elkanah Cheetham 1801-1867



Elkanah has a very unusual name, although it's not unusual among people with the surname "Cheetham". He was baptised on 23rd October 1801 at Mellor in Derbyshire, 7 miles from Stockport. It's always surprising how close places like Stockport and Manchester are from the beautiful Peak District. In fact, these days, Mellor is now in Greater Manchester.

Elkanah's father, Aaron Cheetham, a cotton manufacturer, was baptised in Stockport, the child of William and Esther (William and Esther are your 4 x great-grandparents). They were non-conformists, and Aaron's baptism took place in 1771 at Hyde Chapel, a presbyterian place of worship. William was a linen weaver from Stockport, and had married Esther Haward on 15th December 1765 in Mottram-in-Longdendale, Cheshire. As you can see, those repeating middle names of "Howard" are harking back to Hester's family. One of the witnesses to the marriage was the appropriately-name Stephen Fullalove – the other was Aaron Heaward (as he spelt his surname), who must've been one of Hester's relatives, perhaps her father, and perhaps the person that Aaron Cheetham was name after. It might be possible to research

the Cheethams and Heawards/Hawards further back. The fact that they all signed at the marriage in 1765 indicates that they were fairly well-to-do.

Aaron's wife – and Elkanah's mother – was Nanny Beard. Aaron and Nanny married in Glossop, Derbyshire, 13 miles from Stockport, on 25th November 1792. I haven't been able to trace Nanny any further back, but there are of course clues in her children's names – for instance, George Beard Cheetham's name might indicate him being named after a George Beard, who could be Nanny's father.

Aaron wrote his will on 4th February 1828, leaving Elkanah a watch, and Blake Hall estate. He left property in Mellor to three of his children, George Beard, Samuel Howard, and Elizabeth. Nanny isn't mentioned in the will, which suggests that she had already passed away.

Blake Hall is a grade two listed house in New Mills, Derbyshire, which looks like it's from the pages of a Brontë novel. It doesn't seem that Elkanah ever lived there after inheriting it, so he presumably rented it out. But I think you're perfectly okay to view it as your family pile! How it came to be Aaron's would be interesting to find out.

But Elkanah definitely lived there as a child – when his youngest sister Abigail was baptised in 1813, her parents' abode is given as Blake Hall, Thornsett Hamlet, and Aaron was working as a yeoman at the time. Thornsett is part of New Mills.



Hannah Priestnall (1808-1867)



Hannah Priestnall, your great-great-grandmother, was born on 9th January 1808 in Stockport, and was baptised at St Mary's, Stockport, a few months later on 15th April 1808. She was the second youngest child of Thomas Priestnall and Esther Wood – their other children were Elizabeth, Mary Ann, Maria, Samuel, George, and Martha.

Priestnall is very much a Cheshire name, with Priestnalls living in the county as far back as the 1500s – perhaps they go back even further in that area.

Thomas and Esther married in Stockport on 4th January 1798, only a few months before Elizabeth, the oldest of the Priestnall brood, was baptised at Poynton, Cheshire. Poynton is on the edge of the Cheshire Plain, and a few miles south of Stockport, and it's where Esther was born and where her parents lived. It wasn't unusual for a woman to go to stay with her mother while she was readying herself for her first baby. However, all the rest of the Priestnall children were born in Stockport.

When Elizabeth, the eldest, was baptised, Thomas' occupation was given as "muslin weaver" but by the time he wrote his will in 1827 he was a silk manufacturer. He mentions a factory in his will, which he left to his executors in order to support his family. It seems as if in the 30 years from his marriage to his death, he had built up a business, going from being a weaver, to a mill owner.

In 1820, Thomas made the Morning Herald, when a man called John Bullock, from Macclesfield, bought a large amount of silk which he knew was Thomas' stolen property.

Then in 1826, Thomas got into a spot of bother himself when his son-in-law John Borlace Warren (husband of Thomas' daughter Elizabeth) became insolvent. In those days, debtors were sent to prison, and before being carted off, John had signed over some of his property to Thomas. They presumably did this so that people John owed money to couldn't make a claim on it. This was rather naughty, and was reported in a newspaper called the *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, on 20th July 1826.

When Thomas wrote his will, most of Hannah's surviving siblings had married. She would marry Elkanah Cheetham two years later. A widower called Samuel Priestnall married a spinster called Mary Cheetham in Stockport in 1834. I'm not sure if Samuel is Hannah's brother of the same name (the only son Thomas names in his will is George, not Samuel), but it's interesting to see another connection between the two families. It doesn't look as if Elkanah had a sister called Mary, but he may well have had a cousin or niece of that name.

Hannah's parents

When Thomas died in 1827, his age was given as 56, which means he was born in about 1771. There are two possible baptisms for him. The first was on 12th March 1769 in Adlington, Thomas the son of George and Martha Priestnall of Butley, and the second was on 17th August 1770 at Poynton, Thomas the son of Samuel (a wheelwright) and Martha Priestnall of Poynton. Sometimes the names of children can be a clue as to their grandparents' names, but Thomas' sons were George and Samuel, and he had a daughter called Martha too.

Esther is easier to trackdown. She was baptised at Poynton on 2nd October 1774, the youngest child of George Wood, a farmer, and his wife Betty. It's possible that George and Betty married in Stockport on 2nd April 1758, and that Betty's maiden name was Brook, but this would need further checking to be sure.

As we know that Esther's father was called Samuel, and that Thomas and Esther had sons George and Samuel, perhaps Thomas' father was George, who lived in Butley. It would mean that Thomas and Esther's two sons were named after the boys' paternal grandfathers.

Jane Lizey Bracey (1872-1919)

Jane's background was quite different from that of her husband, George Lawton. While George's family came from the clothmaking area in and around Stockport, and were well-to-do, Jane's family were agricultural labourers and straw plaiters from further south in the country.

Jane was born in 1872 in the village of Lemsford, Hertfordshire, the daughter of John Bracey, an agricultural labourer, and Emma Handscombe – or Campkin. There's a website with photos and information about Lemsford past here: <http://www.lemsfordhistory.co.uk/>



On the 1881 census, we find Jane living at home with her parents and her siblings Thomas, William, and Ellen. By 1891, Jane had left Lemsford and had headed to London for work. It's likely that a lot of girls in Jane's position would've left the village to find work in domestic service. Jane appears on the 1891 census as a housemaid, living in the household of Harriett Bartlett in Edmondton. Harriett was a governess, and a widow, with two daughters who were also governesses. The household also had a cook. Sometimes small schools were run from private houses, and it seems possible that the Bartletts were running a day school, as no boarders are at the address when the census was taken. That would mean that Jane would be tidying up a schoolroom as well as performing the usual jobs of a housemaid.



As Jane's first daughter was born four years later in Lemsford, we know that Jane headed back to Lemsford. It's possible that Hephzibah's father was a boyfriend Emma had while working in London, so Jane had to leave her post and return to Lemsford to have her baby. Of course, she may have decided to leave in order to go back to Lemsford anyway, and she met Hephzibah's father there.

As we know, Kate married George Lawton in 1906. There was already a connection between the Lawton and Bracey families, though. In 1898, George's brother Harry Cheetham Lawton had married Rosalind Ellen Gasking in St Luke's, Middlesex. Harry died, aged only 28, four years later, and in 1904, Rosalind married John William Bracey – Kate's brother.

We don't know how George found himself in Hertfordshire. His brother Harry was a wheelwright when he married Rosalind, and his residence was given as the Army Sunday School Barracks in Woolwich – it sounds as if Harry was a civilian wheelwright in the army. Harry and Rosalind's daughter Florence was born in Portsmouth, so he perhaps worked for the navy as a civilian wheelwright too. As George is missing from the 1891 and 1901 censuses, I wonder if he was in the military too in some capacity, hence why he drops off the radar then. But how did George get to Lemsford? How did John meet Rosalind? Was it John's marriage to Rosalind which led to George and Jane's marriage?

John Bracey

John was born in Hatfield, Hertfordshire, in about 1849, the son of Charles Bracey and Susannah Wren. In 1851, John was living at home with his family in Cromer Hyde (which is in Bishops Hatfield), next door to Susannah's parents, William and Ann. Then on the 1861 and 1871 censuses, John wasn't living with his parents, but with his maternal grandparents. I haven't found Charles and Susannah on those censuses, so they may have died before 1861. There is a possible death recorded for a Susannah Bracey, aged 27, in 1851 in the Hatfield registration district.

Then in 1872, John married Emma Handscombe and they lived in Lemsford, where they had nine children between 1872 and 1888. By the time of the 1901 census, John was recorded as a widower; he went to live as a lodger with Jane Crawley in Lemsford, which is where you can find him on the 1911 census. He was still there in 1921, so evidently he and Jane got on well, but who knows if there was a romance between them?

The 1921 census is interesting in that respondees had to give the name and address of their employer. While on all the other censuses, John has reported that he's an agricultural labourer or farm labourer, it's only on the 1921 census that we find out *which* farm he was working on – at least, at the time of that census. He says he worked for JW Horn esqr at Handside Farm. It would appear that the farm vanished beneath Welwyn Garden City. There's information here:

<https://www.ourwelwyngardencity.org.uk/content/topics/topics-cms/family-life/memories-of-bill-horn> as well as a photograph of JW Horn and his family, on his 80th birthday.

The family of Charles Bracey

Charles Bracey was baptised in Sandridge, Hertfordshire, on 8th August 1824, the son of Joseph Bracey and Susannah Currell. He was their youngest-but-one child, and all the children had been born in Sandridge.

Joseph was born in Hatfield, and baptised there on 17th April 1785, and died in 1848. He was the son of Joseph Bracey and Sarah Gibbs, who married in Sandridge in 1774. Joseph senior might be the son of John and Susannah Bracey, who was baptised in Gravelly in 1748.

Susannah was born in St Albans. She might be the daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Curral, baptised at St Alban's Abbey on 9th August 1789. After her husband died in 1848, she lived with their daughter Keziah, first at Flint Lodge in Sandridge, then on Fishpool Street in St Alban's in 1861. She died in 1864.

The family of Susannah Wren

Susannah was the daughter of William and Ann Wren. They are proving mysterious at the moment because I haven't been able to find their marriage, and although Ann appears on the 1851, 1861 and 1871 censuses, she is given a different place of birth each time: Barton-le-Clay in Bedfordshire in 1851, Graveley in Herts in 1861, and Welwyn, Herts, in 1871. As we don't know Ann's surname and as her place of birth is so unfixed, it's impossible to take her any further back.

William's place of birth is consistently given as Knebworth, Herts. He was born in about 1787, and the best match for a baptism for him in Knebworth at that time is – well, there's two children to choose from. William son of William and Elizabeth Wren baptised 20th January 1788, and William son of John and Sarah Wren baptised on 27th July 1788. It's possible the boys were cousins.

So unfortunately, Susannah's family remains somewhat of a mystery. As more parish registers become available online, it may be possible to further identify them one day.

Emma Handscombe – or Campkin?

Emma was the illegitimate daughter of Hephzibah Handscombe. She was born in 1853 in St Albans, her surname registered at birth as Handscombe. She was baptised in the Abbey church there on 31 July 1853, just a few months before her mother married an agricultural labourer called Thomas Campkin. At her baptism, Emma's surname is given as Andscombe, which might give us an insight into Hephzibah's accent – she presumably dropped her aitches.

It's impossible to know for sure whether Thomas was her father. It's certainly not unusual that a child could be born before their parents married, but we also have to bear in mind that a woman could fall pregnant by one man, and end up married to another, who was willing to take on another man's child.

When Emma married John Bracey, she went by the name Emma Handscombe, but the maiden name she gave on her children's birth certificates varies between Handscombe and Campkin – she was Emma Campkin on Jane Lizzie Bracey's birth certificate. On her marriage certificate, she gave Thomas Campkin as her father – whether he was or not isn't entirely clear.

What you may have noticed here is that Jane Lizzie Bracey had a mother called Emma and a grandmother called Hephzibah, which is presumably where your aunt Hephzibah Emma's name came from – she had been named after her grandmother and great-grandmother.

What is slightly confusing is that Hephzibah's brother Thomas had a daughter called Emma at the same time as Hephzibah – so I had assumed *your* Emma was Thomas' daughter, rather than Hephzibah's. But Thomas' daughter never married and can be found on the 1921 census living with her brother, so we have the right Emma for your great-grandmother.

In the 1861 and 1871 censuses, Emma was living with Thomas and Hephzibah in Lemsford. She's described as Thomas' daughter which could be evidence for him being her father, but could also be evidence that he took her on as his own. Emma had two younger sisters, Mary Ann Lizzie and Sarah. In fact, Mary Ann's middle name might've suggested Jane Lizzie's middle name to Emma.

A year after the 1871 census, Emma married John Bracey. She had died by 1901, and the only potential death in the index for her is for 43-year-old Emma Bracey whose death was registered in the Hatfield district in 1892. This would give her a birth year of 1849, but "your" Emma was born in 1853. It's possible, however, that whoever registered the death wasn't sure of Emma's death, hence the error. Without sending off for the certificate, we won't know for sure.

Thomas Campkin

Even if Thomas wasn't Emma's biological father, he played the role of her father in her life, so his background is worth exploring.

We have to be careful though as there are two Thomas Campkins! One was born in about 1838 in Cromer Hyde, which is part of Lemsford, and therefore, part of Hatfield – and our Thomas Campkin was born in Hatfield too. And they were both sons of men called Thomas Campkin, so it wouldn't be surprising to learn that they were related. Our Thomas was baptised in 1833, the son of Thomas, a labourer, and

Esther Campkin, whereas the other Thomas was the son of Thomas, a farmer, and Jane. Unfortunately some trees online have muddled up the two families, but they are separate!

In 1841, Thomas was living at home with his parents, but in 1851, he was a farm servant, at a place called Handside. This is possibly Handside Farm, where, as mentioned above, John Bracey was working 70 years later, in 1921.

Thomas Campkin senior

Thomas' father, Thomas, was born in Aston End, part of the parish of Aston in Hertfordshire. He was baptised at Aston on 29th March 1795, the son of Thomas Campkin and Ann Pratt, who had married in 1780. Thomas' father signed the register when he married Ann, which indicates that the Campkins had some money back in the 1700s.

Thomas moved to Hatfield, where he met Esther, and he remained there for the rest of his life, until he died towards the end of 1871, several months after Esther.

Esther Maddams

Esther was born in Ayot Green, and baptised in Hatfield on 10th April 1796, the daughter of George Maddams and Sarah Sprigs. George and Sarah had married 11 years earlier, in 1785. Esther died in early 1871, which is why her widower, Thomas, is living with their son Thomas and Hephzibah on the 1871 census, which was taken a couple of months later.

It might be possible to go further back, looking at the ancestors of Thomas Campkin senior and Esther Maddams.

Hephzibah Handscombe

Hephzibah was born in St Alban's in 1834, the fifth of James Handscombe, an agricultural labourer, and Charlotte Perkins. We find the family on the 1841 census living in Christopher Yard in St Alban's. The letters "pl" appear after the names of James and Charlotte's children, from 25 year old Ann down to 6 year old Hephzibah, but not beside the name of another Ann, Ann's 4 year old daughter. Straw plaiting was common across Hertfordshire at the time (as you will see from the census transcriptions in the appendix), and this is perhaps what "pl" means. It seems incredible that a child as young as six would be involved in the work. The children may well have attended school, but outside of school hours were working as plaiters.

Ten years later, 17-year-old Hephzibah was working as a nursemaid in St Albans, in the household of George Beamont, a miller. And two years later, she married Thomas Campkin.

James Handscombe

James was born in about 1775. On censuses, his place of birth is given as "Shiplane" in Bedfordshire, but this might be Sheep Lane, a hamlet of Potsgrove, which is in Bedfordshire, just a few miles north-east of Leighton Buzzard. Unfortunately, Bedfordshire's parish registers aren't online so I haven't been able to follow James any further back.

James and Charlotte married in St Peter's church, St Albans, on 14th November 1814. James was living in St Albans by that time, which is 24 miles from Potsgrove. James died in St Albans in 1854.

Charlotte Perkins

Charlotte was born in St Albans, and was baptised at the Abbey church there on 9th November 1788. Her parents were Thomas and Mary Perkins, but I haven't been able to find a marriage for them. It could be that they originally came from Bedfordshire, hence the lack of their marriage online.

Thomas and Mary had at least seven children, the first, Thomas, was baptised at the Abbey church in 1781. I haven't been able to trace Thomas and Mary Perkins any further yet.

Appendix

Censuses

1841

Lemsford, Hertfordshire

Thomas Camkin 40 ag lab

Esther 45

Sarah 15

John 12

Thomas 7

William 5

All born in Hertfordshire

Christopher Yard, St Albans, Hertfordshire

James Hanscombe 60 ag lab Not born Herts

Charlotte 55, not born Herts

Ann 25 plaiter

Mary 19 plaiter

Thomas 13 plaiter

Amy 11 plaiter

Hephzibah 6 plaiter

Ann 4 plaiter

(children all born Hertfordshire)

Cromer Hyde, Bishops Hatfield, Hertfordshire

William Wren 50 ag lab

Ann 50

Sarah 20

Susannah 10

Johnathan 5

All born Hertfordshire

Hollybush, Sandridge, Hertfordshire

Joseph Bracey 55 ag lab

Susan 50 plaiter

Kesiah 20 plaiter

Emma 13 plaiter
All b Hertfordshire

1851

20 Marsland Street, Brinnington, Cheshire

Abraham Lawton 38 engineer, b Stockport
Mary 34 wife, b Stockport
Thomas 8 son, b Portwood
Ann 2 months daughter, b Portwood

Park Street, St Albans, Hertfordshire

Hephzibah Hanscombe 17 nursemaid, b St Albans
[in the household of George Beamont, a miller]

Handside, Hertfordshire

Thomas Campkin 18 ag lab b Hatfield. Farm servant for Mary Ann Horn
[perhaps Handside Farm, where John Bracey worked in 1921]

Lemsford Mills, Hatfield, Hertfordshire

Thomas Campkin 54 ag lab b Aston End, Herts
Esther 56 wife straw plaiter b Ayott Green, Herts
John, son, 22, ag lab, b Hatfield, Herts.

Cromer Hyde, Bishops Hatfield, Hertfordshire

William Wren 66 ag lab b Kneworth, Herts
Ann Wren 65 wife, straw platter b Barton, Beds [Barton-le-Clay]

Cromer Hyde, Bishops Hatfield, Hertfordshire

Charles Bracey 25 ag lab b Sandridge
Susan 24 wife straw plaiter b Hatfield
Children:
Sarah 3, Jonathan 1, both b Hatfield.
Lodgers: Wm Field & family.
Next door: Susan's parents.

Flint Lodge, Sandridge, Hertfordshire

Susan Bracey widow 60 straw plaiter b St Albans
Daughters, b Sandridge:
Kesiah 30 straw plaiter
Emily 23 straw plaiter
Grandchildren, both b Sandridge:
Jane 10
Charles 4

1861

Market Street, Hyde, Cheshire

Thomas Lawton, 18, grocer and corndealer, b Stockport

[boarder in the home of Thomas [?], cotton spinner, grocer and corn dealer]

Lemsford, Hertfordshire

Thomas Campkin 28 ag lab b Hatfield

Hephzibah 27 wife b St Albans

Emma 8, daughter, b Hatfield

Mary A 1, daughter, b Hatfield.

Lemsford, Hertfordshire

Thomas Campkin 65 ag lab, Hatfield

Esther 66, wife, b Hatfield

Fishpool St, St Albans, Hertfordshire [St Michael's parish]

Susan Bracey widow 82 b St Albans

Daughter: Keziah Wells 42 widow straw plaiter b Sandridge

Granddaughters, both b Sandridge:

Edith 7

Elizabeth 3

1871

68 Lower Hillgate, Stockport, Cheshire

Thomas Lawton 28, grocer employing 2 assistants, b Stockport

Eliza 22, wife, b Stockport

Arthur 4 months, son, b Stockport

Lemsford, Hertfordshire

Thomas Campkin 41 ag lab b Hatfield

Hephzibah 39 wife b St Albans

Emma 19, daughter, b Hatfield

Mary 12, daughter, b Hatfield

Sarah 9, daughter, b Hatfield

Thomas Campkin 76, father, ag lab, b Hatfield

1881

200-202 High Hillgate, Stockport, Cheshire

Thomas Lawton 38 grocer and provision dealer

Eliza 32? Wife

Arthur 10, son

Henry 7, son

Frederick 6, son

George 3, son

Walter 2, son

Joseph 4, son

Herbert 1, son
All born Stockport

Lemsford, Hertfordshire

John Bracey 34 ag lab, b Cromer Hyde
Emma Bracey 29 wife b St Albans
Jane Bracey 8, daughter b Lemsford
Thomas Bracey 6, son b Lemsford
William Bracey 4, son b Lemsford
Ellen L 1, daughter b Lemsford.

Lemsford, Hertfordshire

Thomas Campkin 52 farm lab, b Lemsford
Hepzibah 42 wife char woman b St Albans
Daughter: Sarah, 20, domestic servant, b Lemsford
Granddaughter: Katie L Bracey 1 b Lemsford.

1891

41 Carruthers Street, Manchester

Eliza Cheetham 42, widow, draper
Arthur 20 tailor, son
Harry 17 printer's assistant, son
Frederick 16 engraver for calico printer, son
Joseph 15 errand boy, son
Walter 13, son
Herbert 11, son
Florence R 9, daughter
All born Stockport
One boarder

[Either Eliza had decided to go by her maiden name, or the enumerator had got confused. Several of the boys had her maiden name "Cheetham" as a middle name, and this could have caused a mixed up].

10 Western Villas, Edmonton

Jane Bracey 18, housemaid, b Lemsford, Herts.

[in the household of Harriet Bartlett, a widowed governess, and her two daughters who were also governesses. There was a cook in the household too. It's possible that the Bartletts ran a day school from their house and didn't have borders, or perhaps that if they did have borders, the girls weren't in the house on the night of the census.]

Lemsford, Hertfordshire

John Bracey 40 ag lab b Hatfield
Emma 39 wife b St Albans
Thomas 16, son, ag lab
William 14, son, ag lab
Ellen 11, daughter

Edward 9, son
George 3, son
Children all born Lemsford.

1901

Lemsford, Hertfordshire

John Bracey 52, widower, farm labourer, b Cromer Hyde, Hertfordshire
Jane 38, daughter, housekeeper, b Lemsford, Herts
William 24, son, gravel pit labourer, b Lemsford, Herts
George 12, son, b Lemsford, Herts
Emma 5, granddaughter, b Lemsford, Herts
Rose Hannah Shadbolt, 46, sick nurse, married woman, b Hatfield, Herts.

1911

18 Lower Crescent, Mucking, Essex

George Lawton 36 carpenter explosives factory, b Stockport
Jane, wife, 40, married 16 years, 5 children, all living, b Lemsford, Herts
Emma 15, b Lemsford, Herts
Ivy Maud 9, b Lemsford, Herts
Arthur 5, b Lemsford, Herts
Georgeana 3, b Lemsford, Herts
Alfred 4 months, b Mucking, Essex

Lemsford, Hertfordshire

John Bracey 62 widower, boarder, farm labourer, b Hatfield.
[in home of Jane Crawley and her son Charles]

1921 census

North Road, Lemsford, Hertfordshire

John Bracey 71 years 7 months, widower, born Hatfield, farm labourer working for JW Horn Esqr,
Handside Farm.

[lodger in home of Jane Crawley, her son Charles, and daughter Mary Jane]

1931 electoral register

Stanford-le-Hope

10 Grove Road
George Lawton
Arthur George Lawton
Emma Hepzibeth Lawton
Georganna Jane Lawton

1939 Register

Thurrock, Essex

18 Springhouse Road

Herbert S Mayes b 6 June 1901, heavy worked, married

Ivy M Maybe b 1 July 1901, unpaid domestic duties, married

[one closed record – presumably their daughter]

Georgiana J Lawton b 27 Feb 1908, laundry maid, single

Wills

Will of Thomas Priestnall of Stockport, silk manufacturer

- Factory in Stockport
- Wife Esther
- Son George
- Daughter Elizabeth wife of John Warren
- Daughter Mary Ann wife of Enoch Rawlinson
- Daughter Maria wife of Joseph Davies
- Daughter Hannah Priestnall
- Executors: wife Esther, son George, son-in-law Joseph Davies
- Thomas left £500 each to Maria, George, and Hannah, to make them equal with Elizabeth and Mary Ann who had already been given £500. He left Esther a £2-per-week allowance, and a £1-per-week allowance (each) to Elizabeth, Mary Ann and Hannah.

Written: 4th April 1827, probate 24th July 1827

Will of Abraham Lawton, formerly of Portwood within Brinnington, late of Churchgate, Stockport, beerseller

Died 5th June 1880 at Churchgate, “bachelor without a parent.”

Probate 14th July 1880 to James Lawton of 26 Crowther Street, Middle Hillgate, Stockport, pipelayer, the testator’s brother

Mary Jones, spinster, the reputed wife, and John Swindells of Stockport, beerseller and gardener, two of the executors and residuary legatees in the will since departed this life.

George Thomas Lowndes Davidson, insurance agent, the other and surviving executor and residual legatee renounced probate, as did Thomas Jones, Ann Barnes (wife of John Barnes) and Harry Jones “the reputed children”.

Will written: 1st February 1854

- Mary to receive income from stocks and shares etc for life, bringing up and educating their children. After her deceased, after their 21st birthdays, the children to receive the income.
- If none of the children reach 21, the trust fund to be divided among testator’s mother Clare Lawton, and testator’s brothers: John, James, Samuel and William.