

THE STORY OF MARY FAWCETT

This is the story of my 3 x great grandmother, Mary, who was born in Scorton, North Yorkshire, in April 1802. Mary and her twin brother, Philip, were the first children of George FAWCETT, a bricklayer (latest in a long line of George Fawcetts) and his wife Dorothy (probably Philips) and were baptised in the nearby church of Bolton-on-Swale, Scorton not having a church of its own. Sometime before their next child arrived, George moved his family to Brompton by Northallerton where he continued in his trade as bricklayer/mason. Of the five subsequent children born to him and Dorothy, three died as infants and only one, James who also became a bricklayer, is known for certain to have survived into adulthood.

In May 1818, at the tender age of 16, Mary married a widower, Nathaniel TYERMAN, a linen weaver who had buried his first wife eight months previously. Nathaniel was eleven years older than Mary and had already produced three children; two of these probably died in 1817 and it is uncertain if the other one survived childhood. Nathaniel and Mary wasted no time in starting a new family together - George was born only six months after their wedding day and was followed at fairly regular intervals by nine other children. Life must have been extremely hard and very cramped. The weavers cottages which cluster around St Thomas church in Brompton by Northallerton were small: a living room, scullery and two bedrooms. A lean-to or "shop" at the back housed the loom on which Nathaniel wove linen cloth under the "putting out" system. This was before linen weaving was mechanised and yarn was provided to the weavers by the manufacturers who then bought back the finish cloth for prices which fell steadily over the first half of the nineteenth century. Nathaniel's eldest brother, John, was described as a linen manufacturer in the 1841 census, so maybe Nathaniel got his work from him.

Redundant weavers from the wool and cotton industries, which had already become mechanised, flooded into the area and things became so difficult that the insufficient wages of the Brompton weavers lead them to strike both in 1818, when their leaders were prosecuted, and again in 1825. The price of provisions was steadily rising and this second action was successful; the weavers were granted higher prices for their work.

But not a very good time to be bringing up a large family! We can only imagine the struggle Nathaniel and Mary had to feed and clothe their increasing number of children but they did manage to keep body and soul together and all, except the last two, reached adulthood.

However, Nathaniel, like many other weavers, contracted consumption (TB) and in April 1839 the church rates on his "house and shop near the church" were "not recovered and not excusable"; he was obviously too ill to work. Mary was heavily pregnant again and we can imagine her distress when Nathaniel died on 2nd May. One week later her twin children, John and Emma, were

baptised. John died within the month and Emma in June and the rates remained unpaid.

In 1841 her eldest son, George, now 23 and also a linen weaver, was head of the household living with his mother, three brothers and two sisters. Two of his brothers were now also linen weavers and although the church rates were again recorded as not paid, perhaps things were getting a little easier. However, it was still another two years before George did pay the rates but what seems like an upturn in their fortunes was short lived as he too died in January 1845.

Mary was again left to fend for herself and her children and probably felt the need for some kind of comfort for she again became pregnant and on 8th June 1846, at the age of 44, had an illegitimate daughter, Jane, baptised at the Brompton church. Five days later Mary, described as a labourer, two daughters aged 14 and 12, her 10 year old son and baby Jane were admitted to the Northallerton workhouse. It was a short stay as Mary and her children were discharged "at her own wish" eleven days later and in 1851 she was still in the same house, High End by the church, with three children working as weavers, Jane, an illegitimate grandson and three lodgers. What a squash! Illegitimacy ran in the family, probably the consequence of not being able to afford to get married! One of Mary's daughters had one child out of wedlock, two others had two each and her last-born, Jane, had three possibly four. Mary's son, Simon, my 2x great grandfather, fathered his first child two years before marrying the mother.

So, after conceiving her first child at the age of fifteen and giving birth to a total of thirteen children over twenty eight years and struggling alone for seventeen of those years to look after her family, Mary died on 14th April 1856, at the age of 54, of "paralysis of the left side" (probably from a stroke) which she had suffered for eight weeks.

There is no record of Mary having worked as a weaver and although she was recorded as a labourer on admission to the workhouse, she was pregnant much of the time and probably relied on her working children for financial help. Taking in lodgers generated some income and perhaps her father helped until his death in 1848, but it must have been a very insecure, hand-to-mouth existence - unfortunately not untypical of the times.

Thanks to Sue Aldam for submitting this fascinating family story.

Here are some photos of my great grandfather Joseph Tyerman who lived at what is now number 18 Church View and worked at the Wilford mill.



The first photo is Joseph with all his sons: back row from the left - George Arthur, Gordon Smith, John William, Edwin Smith and Joseph Alfred (all from his 1st marriage) and front row - Stanley Roberts, Joseph and Frederick Ernest. The two smaller boys (and a daughter) were from his second marriage. You will see the names of George Arthur and Edwin Smith

Tyerman on the war memorial in the Church lych gate. See Steve Metcalf's excellent website at <http://www.northallertonmemorials.org.uk/>



The old couple are my great-grandparents: Joseph Tyerman and his second wife Mary Jane standing in front of the house (now 18 Church View).



The "framed" group is, from the left, Joseph (as above), his father Simon and his son Joseph Alfred (my grandfather) who was born in the house. (The baby is my uncle Reg.) In the census of 1861 and 1871 Simon lived at "High End" but I don't know if it was the same house that Joseph and family occupied in 1881, also in "High End" - Simon had by then moved to Cudsworth Cottages. Again, I don't know if the photo is in the garden, but probably. This photo was taken in 1905 just before Simon died of a tumour on his jaw - if you look carefully, you can see his jaw is mis-shapen.