

A FORSTER FAMILY HISTORY

The Whitfield Story



*A tale of triumph over tragedy
joy and sorrow
hardship and success*

Ken Forster

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COVER: A copy of the pencil etching of Durham Cathedral that hung in the dining room of Whitfield Forster's home at 8 Sherwood Street, Lower Hutt, New Zealand.

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Dedicated to the family
that we almost never had,
and to my grandchildren
Toby, Gina, Abby, Liam and Max
so that you know a little of your history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First to my wife Judy for her patience, her lateral thinking and her memory! To David Forster: for asking the question in the first place. To Bill and Vera Thomas for having us to stay and running us all over County Durham when they are not even Forsters!! To my brother Paul (deceased), for taking the photograph of William Edward and Hannah Forster's portrait, way back in 1977. To my brother Brent for his research, photography skills and for having the nerve that I did not have to advertise in local Durham papers. To the people who replied: Maureen (*née* Forster), and Alex Cramman, Bill and Audrey Dowgray, and Enoch and Betty Forster, for their help and hospitality. Bill and Audrey again, Bill for his memory and Audrey for her patience driving us all around and around Castletown searching for the portrait in Paul's photograph. To luck, without which we could not have found it. To Renee and Alan McDonald for still having the portrait and letting us in!! To Avis Cornell, for restoring it and hanging it on her wall at the top of the stairs. To Enoch and Betty again for travelling to New Zealand to make Whitfield Forster's 100th birthday reunion special and for driving Judy and me all over Durham County once again to dot all the 'i's' and cross all the 't's'. To all the archivists, librarians, solicitors and staff of the organisations listed in the appendix at the back of this book who are too numerous to name individually, please accept my sincere thanks. To my son Murray and his partner Maria, for helping me to understand the vagaries of a computer. To all the family on both sides of the world who have helped and, finally, to all the friends who have not told me they are bored when I've told the stories.

Now, in 2009, to my previously unknown cousin's daughters, Shelley Martin and Anne Baker, for their input; Anne again for introducing me to Lesley Lynn, and Lesley for her enthusiastic interest and tenacity in tracing the earlier lines of the family tree and for proving which was the correct line to follow back before 1806!!

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PREFACE

It was 1996 and my wife Judy and I were preparing for our first trip to Europe and England. My nephew David Whitfield Forster and his wife Carole had not long returned from a similar trip and they had shown us all their photographs and maps and inspired us to go on our first big overseas trip.

David's second name Whitfield was also the second name of his father, (my brother), Paul Whitfield Forster, and the first name of his grandfather, (my father), Whitfield Forster.

David and Carole were expecting their first child, a boy, and David was keen to pass on the Whitfield name. He asked me if I could find out where the name Whitfield came from. I told him that I understood it was Whitfield's great-grandmother's maiden name, but I would try to find the proof which we were able to do reasonably quickly but the trail back begged as many questions as it gave answers.

In 2002 – six years later and four trips back to England – I was pleased to finally put pen to paper and tell the story.

It is now 2009 and after yet more trips back to England and a lot more research it is time for the second edition!! In this edition the story is basically the same as in the first edition but there is new information added, more information on the children of each generation, and many dates have been corrected. I have learned that church records often record the christening date and the burial date so where possible these have now been changed to the birth and death dates.

In July 2007 I was contacted by Lesley Lynn, the daughter of my cousin Hilda whom I had been unable to find. Lesley was also researching the Forster family and has provided so much new information and found the proof to take the history back into the 1700s with certainty, that the book just had to be updated.

Ken Forster
Hamilton, N.Z. 2009

THE PORTRAIT

In 1977, when my brother Paul visited England, he returned with a photograph of a lady and a young girl holding an old painted photograph (an oleograph) of William Edward and Hannah Forster. My father Whitfield recognised them as his grandparents (my great-grandparents).

Unfortunately the story of the photograph was never told as Paul was killed in a car accident shortly after his return from England.

In June 1998 my wife Judy and I returned to England in search of the original oleograph. My brother Brent had advertised in local papers around Durham looking for descendants of William Edward and Hannah Forster. Several people had replied – Maureen (*née* Forster) and Alex Cramman, Enoch and Betty Forster, Bill and Audrey Dowgray; with Maureen, Enoch, and Bill identifying William Edward and Hannah as their great-grandparents.

Judy and I stayed with Bill and Vera Thomas (Bill is Jane Alice ‘Jenny’ Shaw’s nephew). We met all the new found family but alas nobody knew of the oleograph.

While visiting Bill and Audrey Dowgray – (Bill’s grandmother was Elizabeth ‘Bessy’ Forster who had married William Dowgray) – we decided that we had found all the children of William and Hannah, and had met descendants of all of those who had children, except for Catherine ‘Kate’ Forster. Through this process of elimination we decided the lady in Paul’s photograph had to be Catherine’s daughter Hannah, whose married name was Hannah Richardson.

Bill Dowgray said he thought he could remember where Hannah Richardson used to live – opposite a cricket ground in Castletown, Sunderland, where he used to play cricket!! He also thought that she might be in an old folks home by now. He offered to drive us to Castletown – and then came an amazing run of luck.

Audrey – with the patience of a saint – drove us around and around Castletown, with Bill trying to remember exactly where Hannah lived.

We found the cricket ground then we came across an old folks home, so we called in and asked if there was a Hannah Richardson living there. The answer was no – but the office lady was very helpful and offered to enquire at all the other old folks homes in the area. Still the answer was no.

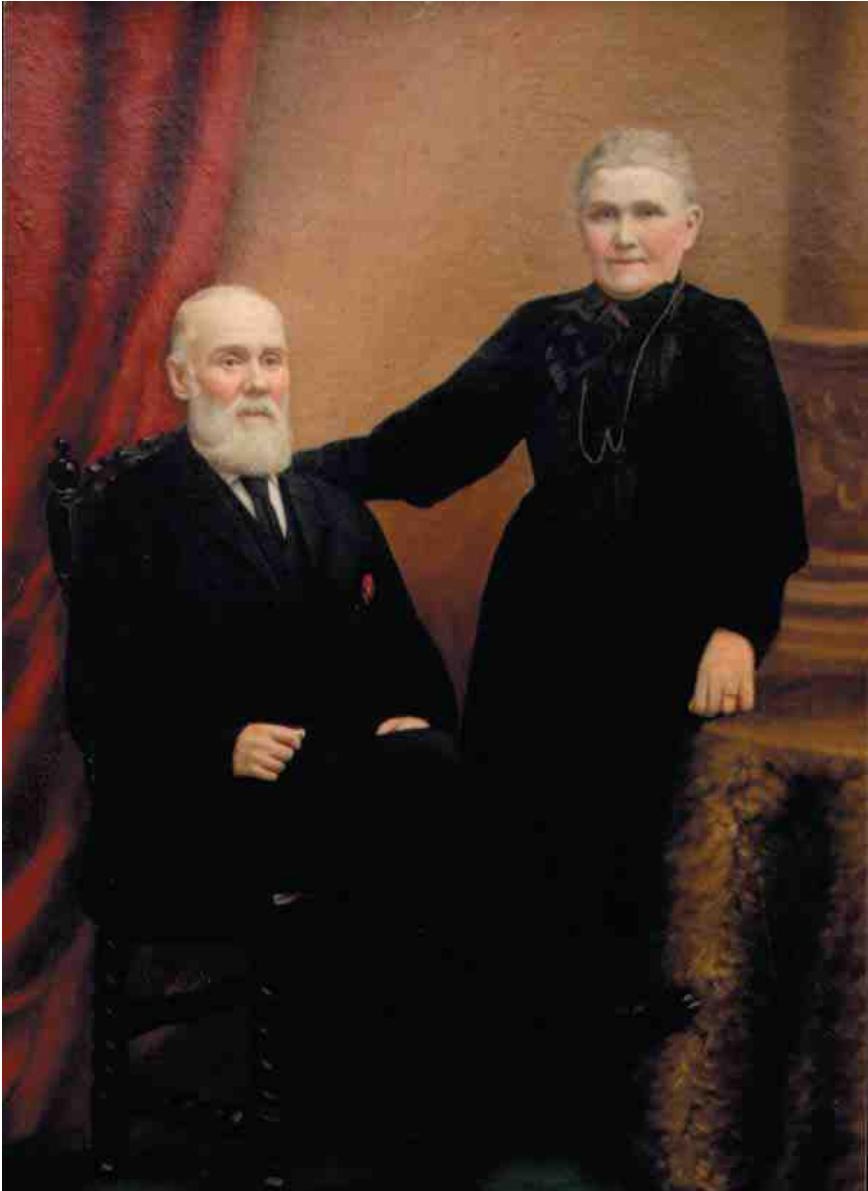
We all thought we had come to the end of the line when the office lady suggested that one of her part time helpers, Hazel, who had lived in the area all her life, may be able to help us. Unfortunately Hazel could not recall a Hannah Richardson. We thanked them both for their trouble and were leaving when, for some unknown reason, I wondered whether Hazel might remember the lady in Paul's photograph taken twenty-one years before. As soon as I showed Hazel the photograph there was instant recognition with an exclamation, "Why, that's Mrs Richardson and Renee's daughter Kaye." What excitement!! Hazel then explained that she had gone to school with Renee, who was Mrs Richardson's daughter, but sadly Mrs Richardson had passed away a few years earlier. However, Renee lived just a few hundred metres down the road – "in the first proper house", (the first two storeyed house – not a bungalow).

Off we went!!

Bill and I knocked on Renee's door. Bill was a total stranger to her but she recognised me immediately – but as my brother Paul, not me (Ken)!! I explained that I was Paul's youngest brother and Renee invited us in. We showed her the photograph that Paul had taken and with that Renee sent her husband, Alan, up into the attic to get The Portrait down.

So the last branch of the family had been 'found', and the original oleograph of William Edward and Hannah Forster was dusted off and now hangs on Renee's younger sister Avis' wall!!

A few days later Maureen Cramman, (*née* Forster), organised a family get-together for the descendants of William Edward and Hannah Forster. It was held at a pub just out of Durham called 'The Cock o' the North' with the newly rediscovered portrait taking pride of place. Twenty-three members of the Forster clan attended, including a grandchild, great-grandchildren and a great-great-grandchild of William Edward Forster.



The Portrait: William Edward Forster and Hannah Forster

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INTRODUCTION

William Forster, my great-great-grandfather, was born in Usworth in the Parish of Washington in 1806.

However on checking the records I discovered there were two William Forsters born in the Washington Parish in 1806. Which one is my great-great-grandfather?

The first William to consider was born on the 27th February 1806, the son of John Forster, pitman, of Birtley, Chester-le-Street, and his wife Dorothy (*née* Stephenson) of Washington.

The second William to consider was born in Usworth on the 31st October 1806, the son of Edward Forster, husbandsman, (farm worker), of Lanchester, and his wife Ann (*née* Weddel) of Stamfordham, Northumberland. Ann was also recorded as Anne (with an 'e') and her surname was variously spelt as Weddel, Weddell, Wardle and Waddle.

Documentary proof to determine one William from the other proved quite elusive and in the first edition of this book (May 2002) had not been found. Relying on the names of the children, the occupation of the parents and some confusion in a handwritten family tree as to whether William was William or John, I chose John as the likely father of William.

However, in 2007, with Lesley's enthusiasm and the aid of new searches available on the internet new information has been found to prove that Edward was the father of 'our' William.

The 1841 census records that John and Dorothy Forster were still living in Waggon Row, Usworth, whereas Edward and Ann Forster were living in Pithouse Lane, Pitlington. Pitlington was where their last two children and many of the next generation of Forsters were born.

The final proof was found with Edward's death certificate that records that the informant and person 'in attendance' was William Forster of Shincliffe. As 'our' William was the only William Forster living in Shincliffe at the time and Edward was the correct age we can be certain that William, my great-great-grandfather, was the son of Edward Forster, husbandsman, of Lanchester (son of Edward Forster and his wife Katharine *née* Smith) and Ann Weddel of Stamfordham, and was born on the 31st October 1806, in Usworth in the Parish of Washington.

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EDWARD FORSTER AND KATHARINE SMITH

Edward Forster was my great-great-great-great-grandfather. He married Katharine Smith on the 23rd December 1765 in All Saints Church, Lanchester. [Although they were of the Chapelry of Esh, the church there was in ruins at the time and was not rebuilt until 1770. Esh is five miles (8 kilometres) east and slightly north of Durham in the north east of England. Neither Edward Forster nor Katharine Smith were baptised in Lanchester so I must assume they moved to the area as adults.]

Both Edward and Katharine were illiterate and signed their marriage with an “x” for their mark. The marriage was witnessed by Thomas Wilkinson and William Bywater who both witnessed many marriages at All Saints Church, so were most likely employees (Church Wardens) of the church.

We can reasonably assume that Edward was born circa 1735 - 1740 and that he was either a farm worker or a peasant farmer. Birth records of his children record that he was “of Fellside”. Fellside was two and a half miles (4 kilometres) north of Esh and about three miles (5 kilometres) east of Lanchester.

Edward and Katharine’s first child was baptised at All Saints Church, Lanchester on the 26th November 1769 and was named Andrew. As there was a three year gap between Edward and Katharine’s marriage and the birth of Andrew it is possible that an earlier child did not survive. Their second son, Edward, (my great-great-great-grandfather) was baptised on the 13th October 1771, also at All Saints.

Less than nine months later tragedy was to strike the family when Edward Forster (senior) died. The burial record simply states Edward Forster, Langly. Langly is just a stones throw from Fellside. Edward was buried on the 4th July 1772.

Katharine was left with two children under the age of three to care for. I have no idea how she managed but assume that she was either given poor relief from the church or was in the employ of a local farmer, or a bit of both.

Ten years after Edward's death Katharine was to remarry. Her sons were now aged thirteen and eleven and would both be working. I do not know what Andrew was doing but Edward (junior) was later to describe himself as a husbandman (sic) which means a farm worker.

The marriage records show that Catherine Forster married Joshua Wray on the 16th December 1782. They were both recorded as being of the Chapelry of Esh. Both made an 'X' for their mark and the marriage was witnessed by John and Elizabeth Willis.

It appears that Joshua Wray was a widower with the death of his first wife, Elizabeth, being recorded on either the 24th or 26th April 1779. Elizabeth Wray was described as 'wife of Joshua, Front House'.

There were no further references for Catherine, Joshua, Andrew or Edward in the Lanchester Parish Records so I must assume they moved away from the area. As Edward later married in South Shields (which is north-east of Durham) it is probable that the whole family had moved north.

[Note: To date (2009) I have been unable to find out where Edward Forster senior was born or who his parents were so unfortunately at this stage he is the 'end of the line' going back.]

EDWARD FORSTER 1771-1858 AND ANN WEDDEL 1774-1846

Edward Forster (my great-great-great-grandfather) was baptised at Fellside, Esh, in the Parish of Lanchester on the 13th October 1771, the son of Edward Forster and his wife Katharine (*née* Smith).

Edward's father died before Edward was nine months old so he and his older brother Andrew were brought up by their mother alone, which cannot have been easy in the 1700s.

Edward became a husbandman [sic] (farm worker) and married Ann Weddel on the 14th July 1793 at St Hilda, South Shields, Durham. Edward signed his name but Ann signed by her mark 'X'.

Ann was the daughter of William Weddel and his wife Hannah (*née* Nicholson) of Stamfordham. Ann was baptised on the 21st November 1774, in Stamfordham, Northumbria.

William Weddel was from East Bitchfield and married Hannah Nicholson of Hartington Hall at St Mary's in Hartburn on the 14th June 1763. Hartburn is north of Newcastle and inland from Morpeth in Northumbria. William and Hannah produced five children who were all baptised in Stamfordham. First was John baptised on the 25th November 1764, followed by Hannah baptised on the 1st March 1767, then William, baptised on the 27th November 1768. Next came Isabel, baptised on the 7th October 1770 and finally Ann, baptised on the 21st November 1774.

Edward Forster and Ann produced ten children, seven daughters and three sons and their birth records show that the family moved around Durham quite often, presumably so Edward could follow available farming work.

Edward and Ann's first child, a son named Edward, was baptised at Ryton, near the River Tyne, on the 8th June 1794. He was followed by Hannah who was baptised in Edward's home town at Esh on 24th May 1795. Next was Catherine, baptised in Heworth (Jarrow, near the mouth of the Tyne) on the 5th November 1797, then came Isabella born in Washington on the 21st August 1799. A fourth daughter, Ann, was next, born in Biddick (just south of Washington) on the 18th October 1801.

The family then moved to Waggon Row, Usworth, Washington, where the next three children were born. First was son number two, William, (my great-great-grandfather) born on the 31st October 1806, then Elizabeth born on the 19th February 1809, followed by Jane born on the 3rd May 1811.

The family then moved for the final time to Pit Houses, Pithouse lane, Pittington, West Rainton, where the last two children were born. Mary was baptised on the 27th November 1814 and finally son number three, John, baptised on the 8th October 1815.

Young John's birth record is interesting in that his father Edward's occupation is recorded as labourer for the first time; he was previously recorded as husbandman. I presume he was still an agricultural labourer although the Rainton area had a lot of coal mining activity going on at this time so he could have taken a labouring job at the coal mine.

The coal mining industry was expanding rapidly and the need for coalminers was growing so wages were good. At the same time the Enclosures Acts were dramatically reducing the living standards of those who had made a living off the land for centuries before. The Enclosures Acts allowed the landowners to fence off their private land for their sole use, thus excluding all those who had previously been able to get some casual grazing on areas not currently being used by the landowner; and they could no longer scavenge for grain off the ground after the landowner had finished his harvest. They were then forced to look for paid work to purchase the necessities of life and the coalmines were seen as a godsend and men were joining the coalmining industry in droves.

[I can only assume this is why Edward and Ann settled in Rainton as there were several coalmines in the area so there would be work for their growing family.]

In 1841 the first official census was held in England. There was public outcry and protest at this intrusion into people's privacy and especially having to divulge one's age so the government of the day allowed adults to round their age down to the nearest five years.

In the 1841 census Edward and Ann were recorded as living in Pithouse Lane, Pittington. Edward at seventy was an agricultural labourer. Ann at sixty-seven rounded her age down to sixty-five. Their youngest son John, twenty-five, was a pitman. Also living in the house was their daughter Mary, who at twenty-eight was already widowed, and her two young children. Mary is recorded as Mary Gardener and her children, John, four, and Edward, two.

Also living in the same road, Pithouse Lane, was Edward and Ann's son William and his wife Mary (*née* Whitfield), and four of their children, Whitfield, William Edward, Mary and John.

Tragically Edward and Ann's widowed daughter Mary (Gardener) was to die at their home in Pithouse Lane on the 29th November 1844. The cause of death was recorded as Consumption (which was probably pulmonary tuberculosis). She was just thirty years old (although her death certificate records her as thirty-one) and was buried on the 1st December 1844. Her mother Ann Forster (*née* Weddel) was present at the death and registered the death by making her mark. To register the death of her daughter must have been a very sad time for her. Edward and Ann were left to care for their two young grandchildren, John and Edward Gardener, aged just seven and five.

Ann Forster (*née* Weddel) died at Pithouse Lane, Pittington, on the 30th October 1846 aged seventy-one years. Her daughter Ann Forster was the informant and the cause of death was recorded as 'Old Age Not Certified'. Ann was buried at West Rainton on the 1st November 1846.

In the 1851 census Edward, now seventy-nine years old, described himself as a potato merchant. Living in the house with him is his unmarried daughter Ann, fifty, and grandchildren Ann Forster, thirteen, John Forster, eleven, and Edward Gardener, eleven.

Edward Forster died at Pithouse Lane, Pittington, (West Rainton), on the 21st April 1858 aged eighty-seven. The cause of death was recorded as 'Diarrhoea Certified'. His son William from Shincliffe was at his bedside. Edward was buried at West Rainton on the 24th April 1858.

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WILLIAM FORSTER 1806 - 1862 AND MARY WHITFIELD 1811 - 1883

The story mentioned in the sub-title of this book, “The Whitfield Story”, starts at this point almost two hundred years ago when Mary Whitfield was born in the north east of England, at Northmoor in the parish of Bishopwearmouth, County Durham, in December 1811.

The north east of England was a landscape barely imaginable to anyone living on the other side of the world in New Zealand, and unrecognisable to anyone living in the north east today. The area was industrialised heavily with ship building, steelworks, glassworks and collieries all creating their own scars.

It was bitterly cold when the wind swept in from the North Sea and the area was dotted with collieries belching black smoke and coal dust and each one with its huge slagheap (a large mound of waste matter produced from the mine, everything that was not good coal). In summer, the days were long with only about four hours of darkness and, in winter, they were short with not many more hours of daylight.

Each colliery provided its workers with tiny colliery houses, often built of wood with only two rooms. Later in the 1800s they were brick terrace houses with four rooms, a front room and kitchen downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs. Heating was by coal fire and cooking was done on the coal range. There was no running water and no sanitation. Water was fetched from the nearest supply, which was often at the end of the street. In the 1800s the toilet consisted of an ash closet, which had a wooden lid with a hole cut in it. The lid was lifted up to put in the ashes from the fire which helped sanitise the closet and kill any odours. These ash closets were either set up between the rows of houses or beside the coal shed in the backyard and were emptied by contractors known as ‘scavengers’. Sanitary conditions were not good to say the least and it is recorded that one coal mining village had one ash closet for scores of houses. Before the advent of the ash closet the toilet was just a pile of dung and ashes between the houses. By the 1900s the toilet was the ‘nettie’ in the backyard. The nettie consisted of a metal can which sat under a board with a hole cut in it; the cans were emptied each night by the nightcart.

These houses were for the mine working staff. The colliery officials lived in slightly better housing. They were still terrace houses, but with a third storey in the attic with a dormer window. Of course the mine manager, or 'Gaffer', lived in quite a grand house - fully detached, two storied, and with a yard and gardens. The mine owner was part of the landed gentry and lived away from the mine in luxurious style with a mansion and servants. They owned everything - including the people.

There were no telephones, no radios or television, no electricity, no cars, even a bicycle was a luxury - a different world indeed.

The colliery houses were 'tied' houses - that is they were tied to the job, and were provided by the landowner who also owned the colliery. It was normal practice when a coalminer died, or was killed in a mine accident, to evict the wife and children from the house and make the house available to another miner. This fact, combined with very small houses, and a total lack of birth control usually resulting in large families, often led to overcrowding and families being split up to live with other relatives or grandparents or friends that had no family. However, the overcrowding was accepted, as the benefit of extra income obtained by the men folk 'tipping up' their pay packets, improved the household income. ('Tipping up' was the custom of handing one's pay packet to the mother of the household.)

In the working class most of the population, and certainly the vast majority of women, were illiterate. Only those lucky enough to have someone in the family who could read or write would have a chance of being taught these skills.

Some forty percent of women died in childbirth and up to fifty percent of children died before the age of five.

It is in this context that the Whitfield story begins

— — —

William Forster (my great-great-grandfather) was born in Usworth in the Parish of Washington on the 31st October 1806. He was baptised on the 7th December 1806. He was the second son (and sixth child) of Edward Forster, native of Lanchester, and his wife Ann Weddel, native of Stamfordham.

William's father, Edward, was a husbandman (sic) (farm worker) and the family had moved often, presumably to go where there was work for Edward, before living in Usworth where William was born.

By the age of seven William had moved with his family from Usworth to finally settle in Pithouse Lane, Pitlington, West Rainton, Houghton-le-Spring, where his parents Edward and Ann were to live for the rest of their lives. William got a job in the local coalmine, possibly starting as young as six or seven years old.

William Forster married Mary Whitfield, the daughter of a local farm labourer, Robert Whitfield and his wife Mary (*née* Stephenson), on the 11th of February 1834 at St Michaels Church in the Parish of Bishopwearmouth.

Mary Whitfield was born at Northmoor in the Parish of Bishopwearmouth, twenty-two years earlier, on the 22nd of December 1811. The marriage records show that William signed his name but that Mary could not write so made an 'X' for her mark, which was witnessed by the parish vicar.

Mary's father Robert Whitfield was born in Trimdon, south-east of Durham, and married Mary Stephenson from Sunderland on the 18th May 1807 in Sunderland. Their children included Robert, born on the 19th May 1808, followed by Isabella on the 30th September 1809. Then came Mary, born on the 22nd December 1811. Anne was baptised on the 22nd June 1817, Thomas *circa* 1821, Margaret, baptised 26th July 1824, and Sarah, baptised 1st August 1827.

By the time of his marriage William was a corver at the coalmine, which was a corve (or corf) maker. A corve was a strong osier (willow) basket that was used to convey coal from the hewers to the bank (out of the coalmine to the surface). William was paid by the score of coals drawn. The corves were marked with the corver's tag, so if he was able to make a large

number of strong corves and keep them in good repair he could earn quite a good wage.

The following is a description of coal mining recorded about this time:

“A man called a corver is to be employed to make the corves or baskets to put the coals in. He must have a good quantity of young Hazel rods provided for that purpose, with young plants or sippleings (sic – saplings) as we here call them, of Oak, Ash, or Aller (Elder) of about three inches (75mm) thick, or better, for the corf bow. We buy the rods by bunch, each bunch containing about one hundred rods, at about six pence (NZ5cents) per bunch, and the bows, being better than two yards (2 metres) long, for half a crown or three shillings (NZ25-30cents) per dozen, or thereabouts. As the corves are “subject to clash and beat against the shaft sides” they will need daily repair. The Master is recommended to agree with his “hewers of coal or miners” to pay them “by the score of corves, by chance for ten pence or twelve pence (NZ8-10c) for each score, according to what the mine will afford, and not by the day or shift work”. The reason urged for this arrangement is that “it is common to give about twelve or fourteen pence (NZ10-12c) for each shift, when perhaps you will not have above thirteen or fifteen corves a man per shift: so that is clearly best to agree by the score, and then “Good hand, good hire,” as we say.

“Barrow-men or coal putters take the hewed coals from the hewers as they work them, or as fast as they can, and filling the corves with these wrought coals, put or pull away the full corves of coals upon a sledge of wood, and so – hauled along the barrow-way to the pit shaft. They then pull it by the corfe-bow to the cable, which, with the horses, is drawn up to the top, or “to day”, as it is their phrase, where the banksman, or he that guides the sledge-horse, has an empty sledge to set the laden corfe on.”

Often the streets in the colliery villages were named after the various professions and an old map of the West Rainton area shows a Corvers Lane, a Pithouse Lane, and a Sinkers Lane among others, and William and Mary were to live in Pithouse Lane, Pittington, West Rainton; the same street that William’s parents Edward and Ann were living. West Rainton is four miles northeast of Durham City.

William and Mary had eleven children in total with the first seven being born at Pithouse Lane. Their first child was a daughter who they named Isabella. Both William and Mary had a sister named Isabella. Young Isabella was baptised on the 14th April 1834, just two months after William and Mary were married. This was not uncommon at this time for several reasons. One was a complete lack of any form of contraception. Another was that a man did not want to marry a barren woman. Very often the reason was purely financial. A wedding in the church was quite an expensive exercise so often couples were married at the christening of their first child, the christening being provided free of charge.

William and Mary's second child was named Whitfield (Mary's maiden name), he was baptised on the 7th June 1835. Their third child, Mary Ann, was born on the 16th September 1836, but tragically did not survive dying just nine days later on the 25th September 1836. Next came William Edward (my great-grandfather), born on the 21st July 1838, named William after his father and Edward after his grandfather. The next child was again named Mary; she was born on the 19th September 1839, followed by John who was born on the 11th November 1840. Next was Robert, who was born on the 28th December 1841. Once again tragedy was to strike with Robert not surviving childhood. He died at Pithouse Lane from 'convulsions' at just eight months old on the 30th August 1842.

The next four children were born at Shincliffe. First there was Ann, born at 48 Shincliff (sic) on the 27th March 1846 who was only to live for thirty minutes. The cause of her death was recorded as 'Unknown – Not Certified' and her birth and death were registered on the same day three days later. Mary and William's next child, their ninth, was the second Robert born on the 23rd May 1849; he was followed by Thomas, who was born on the 13th August 1852. Three years later tragedy was to strike the family yet again when Robert died at just six years old, from 'effusion of the brain' (a brain haemorrhage), on the 26th September 1855. William and Mary's last child was born on the 19th February 1856 and was once again named Robert.

In the 1800s up to half the children died before the age of five and it was common to give a succeeding child the same name. In William and Mary's case the second girl Mary Ann only lived for nine days, the next girl being christened Mary. In the case of Robert there were three of them with the first two dying young. From eleven children, seven survived to adulthood.

With the advent of rails and steel tubs pulled by pit ponies to haul the coal out of the mine William's job as a corver came to an end and, by the time of his son John's birth at the end of 1840 William, at the age of 34, was effectively a labourer. He was then variously described as a trimmer, (a man who levelled the coals in the wagons before they were hauled to Sunderland), a screenman, (a man who screened the stone and other foreign material out of the coal before it was loaded into the rail wagons), and a banksman, (a man who attended at the bank [top of pit] controlling the loads coming up and down – both coal and empty tubs, and men and boys). The family was still living in Pithouse Lane, West Rainton, so William was probably employed at the Rainton Pit which was just on the other side of Pithouse Lane from the houses.

The 1841 census records William and Mary and four of their children, Whitfield, William Edward, Mary and John, at Pithouse Lane, West Rainton. Their eldest daughter, Isabella, was staying with her Aunt Ann Dobson (*née* Whitfield – Mary Whitfield's younger sister) on census day. Living next door were Mary's parents Robert and Mary Whitfield and their three youngest children, Thomas, Margaret and Sarah.

In 1841 a new pit was being sunk at Houghall, just one and a half miles south-east of Durham City, with the first coal being brought out in 1842.

This was also the year that the British Parliament passed the Mines Act on the 10th August of that year, forbidding women, and children under ten, from working underground in the mines. However, only one inspector was appointed to police the rules for the whole of Britain so it was quite a few years before women and children were out of the mines. Prior to 1842 it was quite common for a family to work down the pit so they did not have to pay wages to others. The father would hew the coal; the mother would haul the coal with a leather belt around her waist with a chain running back to the tub or corf of coal – often crawling on all fours to drag the coal out. The youngest child would man the trap (or air door), sitting for hours in the pitch black. Only the father would have a candle, the rest of the family working in total darkness.

Some time between August 1842 and March 1846 the family moved south where William took up work as a coalminer in Houghall Colliery. As there were no houses at Houghall, the Houghall miners first lived in three rows of

houses at the west end of Shincliffe village, which was just across the River Wear from Houghall. They were called the Houghall Houses. There was a double row and a single row, and the 1851 Census shows William and Mary, and their six children, living at Double Row, Shincliffe.

Houghall Colliery was owned by Messrs Love and Bell. Joseph Love was involved in many collieries in the Wear Valley. He started out as a pit lad but went on to become a ruthless employer. Although Houghall Colliery was to go on to produce three million tons of coal, it was a very primitive colliery. The first shaft was probably worked by a horse powered windlass or gin. Picks and shovels were the workers tools. Wagons of coal were rope hauled along the embankment from Houghall Colliery to Sunderland until 1886.

Houghall was a fairly shallow pit at only 150 feet deep. There were only two very narrow seams of coal. The first seam at about 100 feet was called the Low Main Seam and was only 32 inches, (81 cm), high, and the bottom seam, called the Hutton Main Seam was only 43 inches, (109 cm), high.

It must have been very difficult and dangerous to work such shallow seams. The men worked with picks and shovels so could only kneel, sit or lie to work. They often had to lie on their side to swing their pick and would place a small flat board, called a cracket, under their shoulder to prevent being grazed by the hard rough floor of the pit. When a pile of loose coal was formed they would push it back with their hands and feet. The coal would then be shovelled into a small tub (or possibly in this pit still a corf – corves were still in use until the late 1870s) which was placed on a board, called a sledge, that was then hauled along the tunnel to the shaft. By now pit ponies were being used in many pits to haul the coal to the shaft but this was not an option at Houghall because the coal seams were so shallow. The tub or corf of coal would then be hoisted to the surface, probably by the horse-powered windlass in these early days of the pit.

The type of extraction was the 'bord and pillar' method (or room and pillar). This meant they worked out large areas but left pillars standing to hold the roof up. The pillars measured about 41 yards by 17 yards, (37.5m x 15.5m). As the pit was worked out the pillars were reduced and eventually the roof fell in. It was extremely dangerous work and many miners were killed in mine accidents. Many men were killed over the years by a "fall

of stone from the roof". Some of the other accidents recorded at Houghall include, "run over by waggons", "crushed by horse and set of tubs", "burnt by explosion of gas", and "boy fell out of cage ... which was overloaded". These were all shocking deaths and give us just some idea of the conditions and the high human cost of coal. It was said at the time that there was more fuss if a horse was killed underground than if a man was killed – men came cheap – they had to pay for horses.

By now the Davy Safety lamp had replaced candles which drastically reduced the number of underground explosions. Most explosions were caused by 'Fire Damp' – a combustible gas given off by coal – chiefly methane, which rises to the roof of the coalmine. Miners tested for this gas with the safety lamp. The gas causes a blue glow above the flame of the lamp, if the glow is 2mm high it is time to get out – 4mm will explode!!

The safety lamp was also used to test for a lack of air. Carbon dioxide sinks to the floor of the mine and if the lamp was lowered to the floor and the flame went out it would indicate a lack of oxygen – so again it was time to get out. As well as the safety lamp it was common for miners to use a canary to test the air and act as an early warning signal. Canaries breathe twenty times faster than man and get agitated when short of air and so warn the miners to get out. Contrary to popular belief the canary rarely died as the miners took them out with them when they left and the canary quickly recovered once air was available.

Houghall Pit was a very efficient pit producing 96,953 tons of coal in 1875. The maximum number of workers employed was 281 men. This means the output was between six and seven tons per man, per week. There being no work on a Sunday, they worked six days a week, so this is over one ton per man, per day. All these figures do not take account of the fact that some of the employees would be employed on the surface, so in fact the miners at the coalface were shifting even more.

On the 30th October 1846 William's mother Ann (*née* Weddel) died at her home in Pithouse Lane, Pitington (West Rainton). She was 71 years old and the cause of death was 'Old Age, Not Certified'. William's older sister Ann was at her bedside and was the informant.

On Christmas Eve 1853 William and Mary's eldest daughter, Isabella, married a miner by the name of Robert Brown at St Giles Church in

Durham, which would have meant a three mile walk up over the High Wood to Durham in the cold of winter for all involved. Isabella, at not quite twenty years of age, was still a minor so would have required her parents consent to marry. She and Robert were both illiterate so 'made their mark' on the marriage register.

On the 21st April 1858 William's father, Edward Forster, died at his home in Pithouse Lane, Pitlington (West Rainton). William was at his bedside. Edward was described as 'Formerly an Agricultural Labourer' and was eighty-seven years old. The cause of death was recorded as 'Diarrhoea, Certified'.

On the 9th May 1860 William and Mary's twenty-year-old daughter Mary gave birth to an illegitimate daughter. She was christened Mary Anne. Tragically she did not survive childhood, dying from meningitis at just two years and nine months on the 26th February 1863. The informant was Robert Brown, Mary's older sister Isabella's husband.

The 1861 census records William and Mary in their Shincliffe Colliery house with six of their children and their granddaughter Mary Ann living in the house. Their eldest daughter Isabella was living next door with her husband Robert Brown.

By the time William was in his fifties he had started to suffer from heart problems and perhaps was no longer able to work as a coalminer. Whatever the reason, he ended up working on the surface as a screenman. Although this was lighter work it was still a dirty and dangerous job where a line of men stood outside in all weather removing stones, slate, brasses etcetera, from the coal as it passed over the screens. The screens were raised high above the ground and the stones were dropped down underneath, forming the slagheap. Being high up the men were very exposed to those bitterly cold winds blowing in off the North Sea and often snow and sleet as they sorted the stones from the coal.

William finally succumbed to a heart attack and died at Shincliffe at the age of 55 on the 9th March 1862, just four years after the death of his father (Edward). The cause of death was recorded as 'Morbus Cordis many years', (heart disease) and 'Syncope' – sudden death. William was buried at St Mary's Church in the Parish of Shincliffe on the 12th March 1862.

William's widow Mary was to suffer yet another blow just two months later when her third son John died on the 19th May 1862 aged just 21 years. The cause of death was recorded as 'Phthisis – not certified'. Phthisis literally means a wasting disease but almost invariably was pulmonary tuberculosis (tuberculosis of the lungs). Many coalminers died from consumption, which was effectively pulmonary tuberculosis caused by breathing in coal dust and gas.

In the early 1850s three streets of new brick houses had been built at Houghall Colliery; Garden Street, John Street and Cross Street, almost doubling the size of the village. There was a church and a school, but no shops and definitely no road, in fact there was no road to Houghall until 1930. There was a railway line to get the coal out and the building materials in. For the residents' needs there was a path over the hill through the High Wood to Durham City, a walk of about three miles to Durham's Market Place.

On the 17th February 1866, four years after William's death, his widow Mary Forster (*née* Whitfield), my great-great-grandmother, by then 54, married a 57-year-old widower by the name of Henry Collins. Henry was a coalminer at Houghall Colliery and, like Mary, was illiterate, both signing the marriage certificate with an 'X'. They were married at the Durham Register Office which meant a walk, possibly through the snow, along the path over the hill through High Wood to the Register Office at the top end of North Road in Durham City, and back, for all concerned.

Three of Mary's children were to live with her and Henry Collins at 7 Garden Street, Houghall Colliery. They were her daughter Mary, now aged 26, and two youngest sons, Thomas 14, and Robert 11. On the 13th June 1872 Mary's daughter Mary died at the age of 32, the sixth of her eleven children to pre-decease her. The cause of her death was Phthisis (pulmonary tuberculosis), the same as her brother John's ten years earlier. Her older brother Whitfield was the informant. The five surviving children were Isabella who was married to Robert Brown, Whitfield who lived next door at 6 Garden Street, William Edward (my great-grandfather) who lived at 12 Rose Street, Houghall Colliery, and the two boys Thomas and Robert.

Mary died at Houghall Colliery with Henry Collins at her side on the 21st May 1883 at the age of 71, although her death certificate only records her as being 70. The cause of death is certified as paralysis, (a stroke).

THE LAD

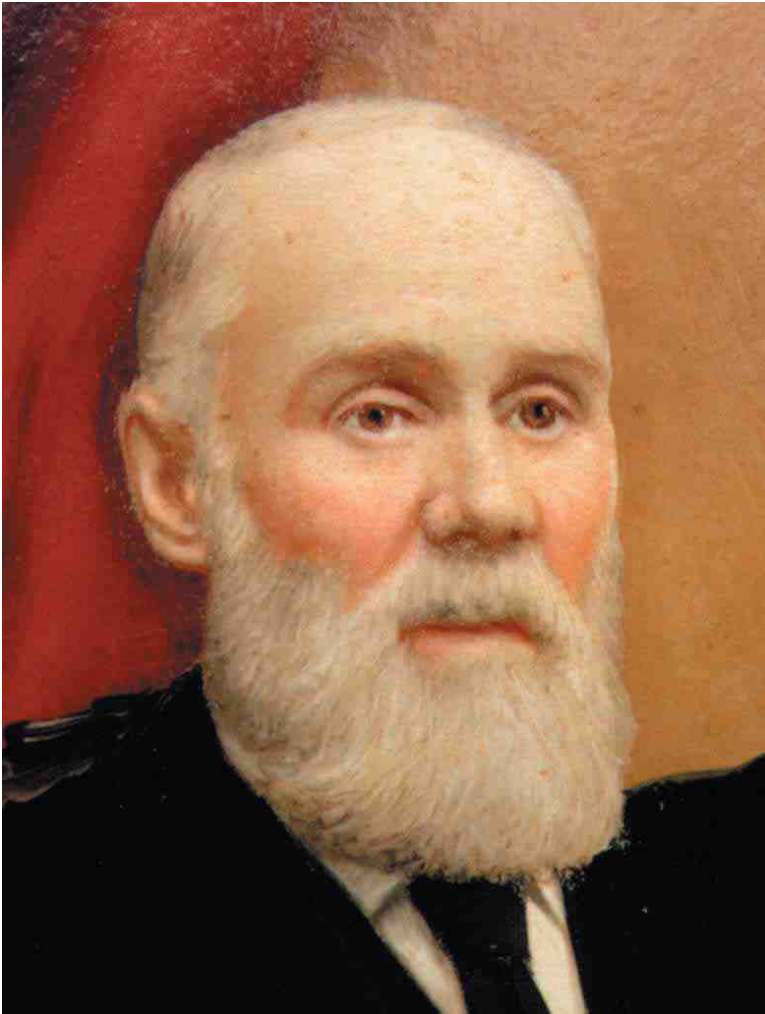
*They brought him up the pit shaft,
And took him out of the cage,
His face was covered with coal dust,
They could not tell his age.*

*In fact, he was a young lad,
On his first day down the pit,
He did not hear the noises,
Just before the pit prop split.*

*Down came the roof and crushed him,
Against the stone hard floor,
Squeezing out a young life,
That would run and laugh no more.*

*Who would tell his mother?
Who would tell his dad?
That coal had claimed another,
And this one just a lad.*

Ian Winstanley



William Edward Forster

WILLIAM EDWARD FORSTER 1838 - 1919

William Edward Forster, my great-grandfather, was the fourth child, (second son), of William and Mary (*née* Whitfield) Forster, and was born at Pithouse Lane, (Pittington), West Rainton on the 21st July 1838.

By the time William was seven years old his family had moved south to Shincliffe and at the age of twelve William Edward was working at Houghall Colliery, the same pit where his father William was now working. A new law had been passed in 1845 prohibiting the employment of children under the age of twelve (up from ten in the 1842 Act).

Four years after the death of his father and one month before his 28th birthday William Edward married 22-year-old Elizabeth Soulsby. Elizabeth, my great-grandmother, was born on the 24th March 1844 at Blaydon, County Durham, the eldest daughter (and second child of nine) of Blaydon pitman Nicholas Soulsby and his wife Mary (*née* Swinney).

Nicholas Soulsby was the son of Robert Soulsby and was born in Hepburn, County Durham, in 1815. Mary Swinney was born in Carlisle, Cumberland, in 1825, the daughter of Abraham Swinney. Nicholas Soulsby and Mary Swinney were married in All Saints Church, Newcastle-upon-Tyne on the 15th July 1843. Both gave their address as Dog Bank, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. They produced nine children the first being Robert born on the 20th March 1843, some four months before Nicholas and Mary were married.

Their second child was Elizabeth (my great-grandmother) born on the 24th March 1844, then Abraham on the 5th March 1846, followed by Mary Ann on the 26th March 1848. She was followed by Nicholas on the 20th September 1850, then Sarah on the 6th August 1853, John on the 27th June 1855, Martha on the 15th June 1858 and, finally, George in 1861.

Typical of the times the family was not without its tragedies with Abraham being killed in a coalmining accident in October 1861 at the age of fifteen. The cause of death was recorded as 'crushing of the body by stone accidentally falling from the roof'. Nicholas Soulsby died on the 30th August 1876 at Potters Row, St Giles, County Durham, and Mary Soulsby (*née* Swinney) died on the 1st July 1893 at 6 Henry Street, Hetton-le-Hole.

William Edward Forster and Elizabeth Soulsby were married at the Durham Register Office on the 23rd June 1866. As the Durham Register Office was at the top of North Road in Durham City the bride and groom, and any wedding party, would have had to walk the three miles up a steep climb over the High Wood from Houghall Colliery to the city and the three miles back home again after the service.

Elizabeth, like her mother-in-law Mary (*née* Whitfield), signed the marriage register with an 'X'.

Their first child, a daughter, was born at Shincliffe on the 12th June 1867. They christened her Mary after both her grandmothers (Mary Forster – *née* Whitfield, and Mary Soulsby – *née* Swinney), although she was affectionately known as Polly. Later, as she had no children of her own, she was to become the very popular 'Aunt Polly' to all her nieces and nephews.

William Edward, Elizabeth and young Polly then moved to live at 12 Rose Street, Houghall Colliery, Elvet.

Rose Street was one of several streets of houses first built at Houghall Colliery. The other streets were King Street, Queen Street, Wood Street and The Square. These houses were apparently the older wooden style often having only one or two rooms which were later described as 'shacks'.

On the 12th December 1869 Elizabeth, who was expecting her second child, went into labour. She had a terrible time. In the cold of winter, in a little colliery house at Houghall Colliery with no running water or electricity, lighting was by paraffin lamps and heating and cooking was done by coal. Her labour lasted forty hours until finally on the 13th December 1869 their first son, (my grandfather), was born. Like his father and his grandfather before him he was named William. Then for William Edward a terrible tragedy struck. Elizabeth never recovered from the trauma of an extended labour. Thirty hours after William was born, she died, on the 15th December 1869. She was not yet twenty-six. The cause of death was recorded as 'childbirth 40 hours, prostration and collapse 30 hours'.

William Edward, working long hard hours down the pit at Houghall Colliery, now had a new baby son and a two and a half year old daughter to fend for. No doubt family were called upon to help and we can only assume that William Edward's mother Mary (*née* Whitfield), who was by now married to Henry Collins and was also living at Houghall Colliery, would have been of great assistance at this time of need. William's older brother Whitfield and his wife and children were also living at Houghall. William also took on the services of a 16-year-old girl by the name of Margaret Stephenson from Coxhoe to help look after the children. Stephenson was William Edward's maternal grandmother's, (Mary Stephenson) maiden name so it is possible that young Margaret was a relation.

Nearly two years later William Edward, now 33 years old, married a 24-year-old widow (although the marriage certificate states she was 26 years old) by the name of Hannah Hunter from Shincliffe. Hannah's maiden name was Cummings and she was the daughter of a pitman from Thornley, William Cummings, and his wife Catherine (*née* Smith). Both Hannah, and her father, (who witnessed the marriage), could not write and signed the register with an 'X'. The marriage took place on the 21st October 1871 and, like William Edward's first marriage to Elizabeth Soulsby, was at the Register Office in Durham.

Hannah Cummings was born on the 23rd December 1846 at Thornley. The 1871 Census shows Hannah as a 24-year-old widow living with her parents in New Row, Shincliffe Colliery Houses. Hannah had married John Hunter in the December quarter of 1867. Tragically John died at Houghall Colliery just a few months later on the 26th May 1868, aged just twenty-one. The cause of death was Febris (feverish) Meningitis and Hannah's father, William Cummings, was present at the death. John's death had left Hannah a widow at the age of only 21.

William Edward and Hannah had eight children in all. The first, Catherine (Kate), being named after her grandmother Catherine Cummings, was born almost a year after they were married on the 16th September 1872. Next was John Thomas (Tom), who was born on the 4th April 1874 – he was never to be known as John Thomas, being called Tom or Thomas all his life and even his own daughter Hannah (who died in 1999) never knew his first name was John. He was followed by Elizabeth, (Bessy), on the 18th January 1876, then Whitfield on the 8th January 1878. Unfortunately,

they were to lose Whitfield when he died from scarlet fever at the age of only two and a half on the 23rd July 1880. Hannah Jane (named after her mother) came next on the 19th February 1880. Next, was the second Whitfield born on the 23rd December 1881, but again tragedy was to strike with Whitfield dying from convulsions at just two months of age on the 21st February 1882. William Edward and Hannah's next child James was born on the 22nd March 1883. Hannah's eighth child Robert was born on the 20th December 1885.

William Edward was a member of the Independent Order of Oddfellows and attended the Loyal Saint Oswald Lodge, No. 2582 who met at the Oddfellows' Hall in Shincliffe Village. The Oddfellows Lodge and other similar organisations were effectively the forerunner to modern day insurance companies and workers' advocates, or unions. The miners would pay in an amount out of each pay packet and, if they took ill or were killed down the mine, the Lodge would help the family financially and often the other members of the Lodge would help physically where they could. The Lodge also helped support the miners if they went out on strike.

The 1881 Census shows that William Edward and Hannah were still living at 12 Rose Street, Houghall Colliery. With six children at home (later to be eight), it must have been very crowded in that tiny house and no doubt the children had to 'top and tail' in the bed, and the boys would share beds with their brothers when they were doing their shift down the mine. The following is a description of a typical pitman's village recorded about this time:

Single rows have one principal apartment generally about six yards (5.5 metres) square. A pantry is attached behind and there is a half-storey or garret above. Double rows are about twice the size of single rows. They are divided into two principal apartments. The double houses are occupied by men who have grown-up sons at work in the colliery, the single ones by men who have young families. Married men with no families can scarcely be said to exist amongst them. The fire range is large, and fitted with an oven and a boiler for the constant supply of hot water. The pitman is allowed a constant supply of small coal and the fire, which is usually even in hot weather, of very large dimensions, is never allowed to go out. The space between the fronts of the houses, forming the street, is often unpaved and undrained, and the space behind the houses not unfrequently (sic) exhibits a joint stock dust-heap and dung-hill running along the avenue.

Generally the houses are clean and comfortably furnished. A four-post bedstead, an eight-day clock and a mahogany chest of drawers are essentials of a well fitted up house. All display the emblem of either the "Forresters", "Oddfellows" or "Free Gardeners" Benefit Society.

Hannah and the girls were probably kept busy looking after their menfolk and ensuring there was always a meal and hot water for a bath ready when they came home from their shift. Their working conditions were cramped and hot, with the fire kept going twenty-four hours a day and Hannah had to cope with almost always being pregnant or breast-feeding. Stories are told of the men having their hot bath in the little tin bath in front of the fire, either in the front room or the kitchen, whichever was free, and the girls scrubbing the coal out of the cuts on their back before being sent out, sometimes outside into the snow, so the men could wash their private parts.

By 1886 the narrow seams at Houghall had been worked out and the pit closed. It had been going for 44 years. For William Edward it was the only place he had ever worked, starting there when he was twelve years old in 1850: he was now 48 – too young to retire. With the pit now closed, William Edward was forced to move. The family first moved to the Ferryhill area where they lived in Post Office Street, Low Spennymore.

The 1891 Census records 133 houses as unoccupied in Houghall Village with only one occupied – by a farm worker.

By this time William Edward, Hannah and seven of their children, (all except Mary (Polly)), had moved to 8 School Street, Kimblesworth, three miles northwest of Durham. William Edward and his two eldest boys, William aged 21 and Tom (John Thomas) aged 17, were all employed as coalminers. The dwelling at 8 School Street was recorded as a two roomed house. Mary (Polly) was by now 23 and had presumably left home and was staying with friends of the family by the name of William and Elizabeth Lewins, at Plawsworth Gate, Plawsworth.

By 1894 the family had moved again, this time to 28 Viceroy Street, New Seaham. I can only speculate on the reason for the move. Was it because there was more mining work available for the boys, or was it to get a bigger house than the two-roomed house at Kimblesworth?

Over the next four and a half years while the family was living at 28 Viceroy Street, New Seaham, four of William Edward's children were to marry. All were married at Christ Church in Station Road, New Seaham.

First was the eldest son William, aged 24, who married a 20-year-old local girl by the name of Margaret Smith on the 29th August 1894. William's brother Thomas (John Thomas) and his sister-in-law to be Elizabeth Moore were the witnesses to the marriage. William took his new wife home to his parents' house at 28 Viceroy Street and their first two children were born there. Ethel, on the 31st October 1895, and William Edward on the 13th August 1897.

Next to marry was the second son Thomas, (John Thomas), now 21, who married 20-year-old Elizabeth Moore on the 28th December 1895. Thomas's younger sister Elizabeth and her husband to be, William Gray, were witnesses to the marriage. The following year the third daughter Elizabeth, 20, married a Scottish coal miner, William Dowgray (Gray), also 20, on the 6th August 1896. Elizabeth's older sister Catharine (sic) was a witness to the marriage.

Finally, on December the 26th 1898 William Edward's second daughter Catherine, 26, married George William Dick, a 25-year-old coalminer from 55 Castlereagh Street, Silksworth, Sunderland. Catherine's youngest sister Hannah Jane was a witness to the marriage.

Just ten months later another tragedy was to strike the family when William Edward and Hannah's youngest daughter, Hannah Jane, died at just 19 years and eight months old, on the 23rd October 1899. She passed away at home (28 Viceroy Street, New Seaham), with her father at her side. The cause of death was gastric ulcer perforation, peritonitis. Hannah was buried at Christ Church, Station Road, New Seaham, on the 26th October 1899.

This left just the two youngest boys, James and Robert, living at home.



William Edward Forster and Hannah Forster.
(Original photograph used to create the portrait.)



Mary (Polly)
1867 - 1948



William
1869 - 1916



Catherine (Kate)
1872 - 1951



John Thomas (Tom)
1874 - 1961



Elizabeth (Bessy)
1876 - 1965



James (Jim)
1883 - 1963



Robert
1885 - 1933

Sometime before the 1901 Census William Edward and Hannah's daughter Elizabeth (Bessy) and her family had come to live with them at 28 Viceroy Street. Bessy and her husband, William Dowgray (Gray), had already had two daughters, Minnie and Gladys May. Their third daughter was born at 28 Viceroy Street on the 5th January 1901. They named her Hannah Jane after Elizabeth's youngest sister who had just passed away.

James, now 18, was above ground on the screens. The others were all below ground. Robert, at 15, was "carrying compass in coalmine", which means he was the surveyor's 'boy'. William Edward, by now 62, was a shifter (labourer), and William Dowgray was a hewer.

In 1904 William Edward and Hannah, and their two youngest boys were to move back to Kimblesworth. I am unsure of the reason for this move but can only assume it was work related. William would by now be 66 years old and nearing the end of his working life.

William Edward and Hannah's youngest son Robert, now aged 20, married 20-year-old Mary Sykes on the 4th August 1906 at St Margaret's Church in Castletown, Sunderland. Robert's older brother James was a witness to the marriage and Robert was a miner at Kimblesworth. The following year James, 24, also a miner at Kimblesworth, married 26-year-old Mary Young on the 28th December 1907 at St Oswald's Church in Durham. For William Edward and Hannah this meant there were no children at home for the first time in forty years.

By the early 1900s some of the mine owners were starting to provide housing for retired miners, which came to be known as Aged Miners Homes. I am not sure whether William Edward was given an Aged Miners Home on his retirement, or whether his contact with the Oddfellows' Lodge in Shincliffe was the key but, by 1906, William Edward and Hannah had left Kimblesworth and returned to Houghall Village. They lived at 3 Cross Street, Houghall Colliery. I can only assume that the Oddfellows Lodge, and perhaps family, helped support them as there were no pensions in 1906 – it was a case of either destitution or the workhouse. In fact at the time of the 1901 Census most of the people in the workhouse were 85 and over! A small, means tested, old age pension was introduced in England in 1909 for the 'respectable elderly poor'!! Cross Street was later (*circa* 1940s) to become a colony for aged miners.



William Edward and Hannah outside 3 Cross Street.

On the 31st July 1910, Mary (Polly), William Edward's eldest daughter, married Robert Tindale at St Paul's Church in Sacriston. Finally, all the children were married. In 1916 William Edward's eldest son William, (my grandfather), died after a long illness aged just 46 years.

William Edward stayed at 3 Cross Street until he died on the 10th June 1919, just six weeks short of his 81st birthday. Quite a remarkable age for a coalminer in those times, as many succumbed to consumption, (tuberculosis of the lungs caused by coal dust), or accidents, early in their life. The average age of coalminers was about thirty-five years. The cause of William Edward's death was given as senile decay and chronic dyspepsia, meaning old age and long standing acid indigestion.



Cross Street, Houghall, about 1916-18. William Edward is the bearded gentleman standing fourth from the left. 3 Cross Street is third in from the far end.

After William Edward died, Hannah moved to live with her second to youngest son James, and his wife Mary, who lived at 7 Fowlers Terrace, Plawsworth, as they had no family and could accommodate her. Hannah lived there for nearly thirteen years and died there on the 21st April 1932 at the age of 85. The cause of death was cardiac failure and senile decay, which is heart failure and old age.

Both William Edward and Hannah are buried at St Oswald's Church in Durham City but unfortunately there are no headstones.

Just eleven months after Hannah's death her youngest son Robert, who was by then a Deputy at Kimblesworth Colliery, died at the County Hospital in Durham as the result of injuries received in an accident at the mine. The accident occurred on the 6th March 1933 and Robert died three and a half weeks later on the 30th March 1933, (although in the Forster Family Bible the date is recorded as the 31st March 1933). The cause of death was recorded as "Abscess of the brain due to shot wounds accidentally sustained in the Busty Seam Kimblesworth Colliery on the sixth March 1933 whilst following his employment there". His address was recorded as 1 Fowler (sic) Terrace, Plawsworth, and he was only 47 years old. His death left only five of William Edward's ten children surviving.

As for the families of William Edward's children ...

Mary (Polly) Forster, (12.6.1867 – 2.4.1948), the eldest, was a dressmaker and was living in Plawsworth Gate when, on the 31st July 1910 at 43 years of age, she married a draper, (who was also said to be a herbalist), by the name of Robert Tindale. They were married at St Paul's Church in Sacriston. The marriage certificate is interesting in that it states that Mary's father, William Edward, was deceased when in fact he did not die until 1919. Mary had earlier been staying with friends in Plawsworth by the name of Lewins, and William Lewins was a witness to the marriage. Robert was a 47-year-old widower, from Tan Hills, Nettleworth. His first wife was also a Mary. Her maiden name was Mary Emma Pill and she was born in Truro, Cornwall, in the September quarter of 1862. Robert Tindale married Mary Emma Pill in the December quarter of 1889. They had two daughters, Lilian, born in the September quarter of 1890, and Gertrude, born in the June quarter of 1892. Sadly Mary Emma died in the County Lunatic Asylum, Sedgfield, on the 3rd October 1909, aged 47. The cause of death was Congestion of the Brain, three weeks (which means a stroke, caused by a blockage, a haemorrhage, or meningitis). Mary Emma had been a good friend of Polly's and, knowing she was going to die, had apparently asked Polly to look after Robert. Robert and Polly lived at 3 Abbey Road, Pity Me, and had no children. Robert's daughter Gertrude apparently left home at the age of 18 and emigrated to Australia. Robert died in the March quarter of 1946 aged 82, and was buried in the Ropery Lane Cemetery at Chester-Le-Street, grave number J/257. Polly died on the 2nd April 1948 at 3 Abbey Road, Pity Me, Framwellgate, aged 80 years, and was buried with Robert. The cause of death was Myocardial Degeneration and Syncope (a heart attack), and Bronchial Chill and Senility (pneumonia and old age).

William Forster, (13.12.1869 – 19.6.1916), married Margaret Smith – see next chapter.

Catherine (Kate) Forster, (16.9.1872 – 17.9.1951), married George William Dick, from Sunderland on the 26th December 1898, at Christ Church, New Seaham. Catherine was living with her parents at 28 Viceroy Street, New Seaham. Catherine's younger sister, Hannah Jane, was a witness to the marriage. Catherine, like her older sister Polly, was also a dressmaker and George was a hewer in a coalmine. They lived at Hylton in Sunderland and had three children, William who died young, George William, and Hannah. Catherine died on the 17th September 1951, at 17 Grange Road, Castletown, just one day after her 79th birthday. She is buried in the Castletown Cemetery in Hylton Castle Road, Castletown, Sunderland, which is immediately opposite her granddaughter Avis's house. The cause of death was Cerebral Thrombosis (a stroke).

Catherine (Kate) Forster married **George William Dick**.
 b.16.9.1872 – d.17.9.1951 26.12.1898 d.5.5.1950

WILLIAM
 d. 3 days old

GEORGE WILLIAM
 m. Lavinia Hannah Redman
 (Vinnie) no issue

HANNAH
 b.7.10.1909 - d.13.11.1994
 m.18.6.1932
 John Edward Richardson
 b. 24.4.1905 - d.10.9.1960

JOHN KENNETH (KEN)
 b.10.5.1933
 m. 1.2.1958
 Norma Gregson
 b. 9.3.1940

CATHERINE DICK (RENE)
 b.25.9.1941
 m. 4.4.1959
 Alan McDonald
 b.27.7.1937 d.

AVIS LAVINIA
 b.4.4.1950
 m. 27.2.1971
 Brian Cornell
 b. 5.2.1952

DAVID JOHN
 b.7.3.1960
LYNN MARIE
 b.3.11.1962
SHAUN
 b.27.3.1966

KAYE
 b.29.10.1959
ALAN
 b.9.10.1960
KENNETH
 b.10.9.1961
JOHN
 b.16.3.1971

ANDREW
 b.19.8.1981

John Thomas (Tom) Forster, (4.4.1874 – 1.3.1961), married Elizabeth Moore on the 28th December 1895, at Christ Church, New Seaham. Tom's sister Elizabeth and his brother-in-law to be, William Gray, were the witnesses to the marriage. Elizabeth Moore came from New Seaham, which was where Tom was also living with his parents, at 28 Viceroy Street at the time. Tom was a coalminer hewer and after they were married he was working in the Kimblesworth area. They moved several times, their first three children being born at different places, William at Plawsworth, Edith at Nettlesworth and Norman at Kimblesworth. They had six children in all. The next three were Albert, Frederick, and Hannah Jane. Tom's sons were very good cricket players and Tom was persuaded to move to Horden so they could play in the local Horden cricket team. Tom died at the General Hospital in Sunderland on the 1st March 1961 just short of his eighty-seventh birthday. His address was given as 10 Aged Miners Homes, Horden, and he was a retired Coalminer Stoneworker. The cause of death was Ascites (abnormal fluid retention) with secondaries in abdomen. He is buried in Horden.

John Thomas (Tom) Forster

b.4.4.1874 – d.1.3.1961

married

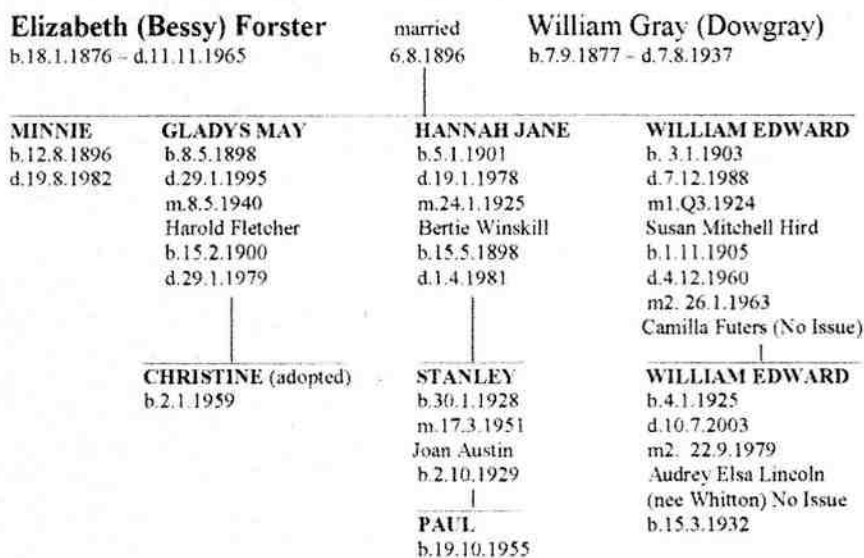
28.12.1895

Elizabeth Moore.

b. 1875 d.1949

WILLIAM b.20.6.1896 d.30.3.1977 m.Jane Hall b.20.10.1899 d.11.2.1987	EDITH b.6.2.1898 d. m.Robert Dowsey	NORMAN b.1899 d.1976 m.Elizabeth Wilford b.1900 d.1981	ALBERT b.10.10.1901 d.8.3.1970 m.27.2.1926 Ethel May Smith b.25.10.1906 d.13.5.1968	FREDERICK b.21.2.1904 d.9.6.1980 m.Lydia Anne Hindmarch b.8.5.1911 d.18.1.1993	HANNAH JANE b.19.12.1905 d.30.3.1999 m.John Hancock b.18.10.1903 d.??8.1991
MARGARET DOREEN b.7.7.1923 m.Q2 1948 John B. Blanckley	MIRIAM m.Q3 1947 Frank A Ward	KENNETH b.1922 d.1987 JEFFREY b.1924 d.1976 NORMAN b.1925 d.1977	ENOCH SMITH b.25.12.1928 GRETA b.17.11.1930 JEAN b.4.4.1934 ALBERT b.15.6.1937 d.17.1.1986 AUDREY b.11.11.1940 ETHEL b.9.8.1944	JOSEPHINE b.26.5.1936 PETER b.26.8.1939	JOHN b.25.4.1931 IRIS b.12.4.1934 ANN b.2.10.1939 ALAN b.20.5.1947
JUDITH G. b.Q2 1949 KEVIN F. b.Q1 1951 JENNIFER M. b.Q4 1954	MAX A.M. b.Q1.1950	BARRY b.Q3.1932			

Elizabeth (Bessy) Forster, (18.1.1876 – 11.11.1965), married William Dowgray (Gray). William was born in Scotland and was a coalminer hewer in the Dawdon and/or Seaham area. They were married on the 6th August, 1896 at Christ Church, New Seaham, where Elizabeth was living with her parents at 28 Viceroy Street. Elizabeth's sister Catharine (sic) was a witness to the marriage. Again the family moved several times with their four children being born at different addresses; Minnie at Dawdon, Gertrude May (Gladys) at Seaton and Slingley, Hannah Jane at 28 Viceroy Street, New Seaham, and finally William Edward. Elizabeth died on the 11th November 1965 aged 89, at 56 Finchale Road, Framwellgate Moor. The cause of death was Chronic Congestive Failure and Debility.



James Forster, (22.3.1883 – 9.12.1963), married Mary Young on the 28th December 1907, at St Oswald's Church in Durham. They lived at 7 Fowlers Terrace, Plawsworth, and James was a coalminer at Kimblesworth Colliery. They had no children. James died on the 9th December 1963, at 12 Aged Miners Homes, Nettlesworth, and was a retired coalminer. The cause of death was Acute Left Heart Failure, Hypertensive Myocarditis and Hypertension (a heart attack). He was 80 years old.

Robert Forster, (20.12.1885 – 30.3.1933), married Mary Sykes on the 4th August 1906 at St Margaret’s Church in Castletown and his older brother James was a witness to the marriage. They lived at 1 Fowler Terrace, Plawsworth, where Robert was a coalminer at Kimblesworth Colliery. They had seven children, James William, Doris May, Robert, Leslie, Mary Hannah, John Thomas, and Thomas Sykes. Tragically Robert was mortally wounded in a mine accident and died in the County Hospital in Durham on the 30th March 1933. The cause of death was recorded as “Abscess of the brain due to shot wounds accidentally sustained in the Busty Seam Kimblesworth Colliery on the sixth March 1933 whilst following his employment there”. He was a Colliery Deputy and was only 47. His widow Mary was left with seven children aged from 25 down to just 13.

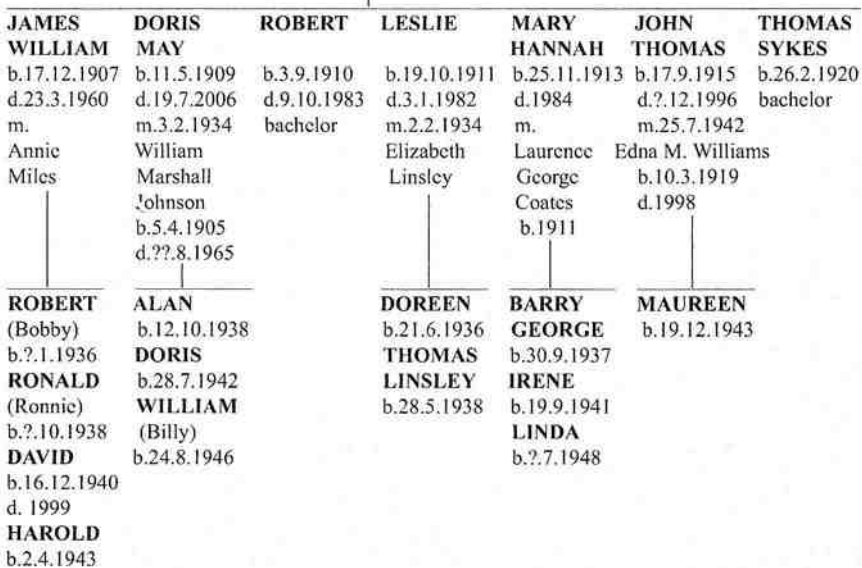
Robert Forster

b.20.12.1885 – d.30.3.1933

married
4.8.1906

Mary Sykes

b.7.3.1884 – d.23.4.1958



SCARS

*I remember well, those scars of blue,
That covered my Grandad's hands.
Hands that were gnarled and wrinkled,
The hands of a working man.*

*Many a man bears the scars,
From the work they had to do,
But only the working miner's hands,
Have the scars forever blue.*

Ian Winstanley

WILLIAM FORSTER 1869 - 1916 AND MARGARET SMITH 1874 - 1924

William Forster, my grandfather, the son of William Edward Forster and Elizabeth Forster (*née* Soulsby), was born at Houghall Colliery on the 13th December 1869. With his mother, Elizabeth, dying as a result of his birth, he was brought up by his stepmother Hannah (*née* Hunter formerly Cummings).

William probably attended the village school at Houghall Colliery.

Like his father and grandfather before him William became a coalminer. While I am not certain which pit he started in, it was most likely to be Houghall Colliery, the same pit that his father was still working in, and that his grandfather had worked in. He would have started work there at age 12 in 1882. With Houghall Colliery closing in 1886, William first moved with his parents and brothers and sisters to Post Office Street, Low Spennymore, and then, again with the family, to 8 School Street, Kimblesworth in 1891. Kimblesworth is about three miles northwest of Durham where William, now 21, was once again employed as a coalminer. Finally in 1893 the family moved to 28 Viceroy Street, New Seaham, and again William was employed in the mines.

On August the 29th 1894, when he was 24, William married Margaret Smith, the 20-year-old daughter of John Smith, a coalminer of New Seaham, and his wife Elizabeth (*née* Knox).

John Smith was born in Horton, Yorkshire in 1834, the son of James Smith and his wife Martha (*née* Fox) who were married in Bradford on the 24th June 1827. James and Martha were both born in 1811, James in Horton and Martha in Bradford. They produced four children, William in 1828, Hannah in 1830, John in 1834 and Isaac in 1840. Martha then died and James married for the second time on the 31st August 1844. His new bride was Ann Straker from Durham. James and Ann produced one child, Straker Smith born in Easington, Durham in 1846.

John Smith married Elizabeth Knox on the 1st December 1858 in the Parish Church at Kelloe, County Durham. Elizabeth was born on the 22nd August

1839 in New Thornley, Durham, the daughter of William Knox and his wife Jane (*née* Ledger). John and Elizabeth produced eight children: William in 1859, James in 1863, John in 1867, Jane A. in 1871, Margaret (my grandmother) born on the 11th November 1873, Elizabeth born on 6th October 1876, George born on the 8th June 1878 and Mary Emma born in November 1880. John Smith (senior) died from pneumonia just two years later on the 12th June 1882 at Seaham Colliery. He was only 48 years old. Elizabeth Smith (*née* Knox) died at Seaham on the 10th September 1907.

Margaret, their second daughter, (and fifth child of eight), was born at Seaham Colliery on the 11th November 1873.

William Forster and Margaret Smith's wedding was held in Christ Church, New Seaham. William's brother Tom (John Thomas) and Elizabeth Moore (later to become Tom's wife) were the witnesses to the marriage.

William and his new wife then went to live with William's parents at their home in 28 Viceroy Street, New Seaham. This was very common as single miners were not eligible for a house so, after marrying, would often have to wait for one to become available before they could have their own home. Houses became available either as new ones were built or on the death of a miner and the consequent eviction of his wife and children. Often miners shifted to a new mine to obtain a house.

William and Margaret's first child, Ethel, was born at 28 Viceroy Street on the 31st October 1895. On the 13th August 1897 their second child, a son, was born. He was named William Edward after his grandfather and was also born at 28 Viceroy Street, New Seaham.

William and Margaret then moved to 2 Elizabeth Street, Wheatley Hill where their second son, my father, was born. He was named Whitfield after his great-grandmother Mary Whitfield and was born on the 6th December 1898. William was again working as a coalminer.

William was obviously somewhat of an entrepreneur and wanted to break the cycle of working down the mines and was the first Forster male in our family history to do so.

By 1900, the family had moved to 58 Castlereagh Street, Tunstall, Silksworth, where William became a News Agent and General Dealer.

William and Margaret's third son, George, was born one month prematurely at 58 Castlereagh Street on the 28th October 1900. Tragically George did not survive, dying twenty-two days later on the 19th November 1900. The cause of death was recorded as "Debility from premature birth eight months". (George's birth and death were both registered as George Foster.)

On the 21st May 1901 William entered into a contract to take over the lease of a house and newsagency business at 58 Castlereagh Street, Tunstall, Silksworth, two and a half miles southwest of Sunderland. William leased the property from the Most Honourable George Henry Robert Charles William Vane, Marquis of Londonderry, and purchased the leasehold from a John Wilson for the sum of three hundred and forty pounds. William was to borrow one hundred percent of the price.

He took a first mortgage of two hundred and seventy five pounds at five per cent per annum from the Sunderland Working Men's Permanent Building Society, and a second mortgage of sixty-five pounds at seven and a half per cent per annum from a local farmer by the name of William Archibald Weightman.

Number 58 Castlereagh Street was on a corner and the shop faced into the side street. It is still there today and, in 2002, was a barbers shop. The rent on the lease paid by William was five pounds per annum.



58 Castlereagh Street (2002) showing barber's shop in foreground

William and Margaret's fourth son, Norman, was born on the 9th November 1901 at 58 Castlereagh Street, Tunstall, Silksworth, where William was running his newsagency business.

On the 4th March 1903 William sold the leasehold premises and business at 58 Castlereagh Street for the sum of four hundred and forty seven pounds ten shillings – a profit of one hundred and seven pounds ten shillings in less than two years.

William had taken up a position as Postmaster in Ryhope Colliery, Sunderland, and the family had moved to 39 Regent Terrace, Ryhope, Sunderland.

On the 6th September 1903 William and Margaret's fifth son was born at 39 Regent Terrace, Sunderland. They named him George Smith Forster. William gave his occupation as an Insurance Agent. I am unsure whether this was as well as, or instead of, Postmaster, but I do know that the Post Office also handled insurance in the early 1900s.

By October 1906 William was an Insurance Superintendent in Grangetown, Sunderland when, on the 1st October 1906, he took on the challenge of building a brand new house on site number 16 on the west side of Regent Street, Ryhope, Sunderland, (later to be known as 18 Royle Street). He leased the site for a ground rental of one pound seventeen shillings and six pence per annum from a Sunderland ship owner and Justice of the Peace, James Westoll.

On the 6th October 1906 William once again took a mortgage, this time for one hundred and fifty pounds at four and a half percent per annum from the Sunderland Equitable Industrial Society Limited.

The new house was built and William, Margaret and their five children moved in.

William and Margaret's seventh child, (sixth son), was born at 18 Royle Street,



18 Royle Street (2002)

Grangetown, Ryhope, Sunderland, on the 13th February 1908. He was named Septimus, which was a common name at the time for the seventh child coming from the Latin septem which means seven.

On the 23rd September 1909 William and Margaret's eighth child, another son, arrived and once again they were to use a Latin name to show his position in the family. He was named John Octavius Forster, Octavius coming from the Latin octo meaning eight.

By February 1910 William had rented the house at 18 Royle Street to a third party and moved south to rented accommodation at 1 Station Road, New Seaham. This house was right next to the railway station at the bottom of the road, and William was once again a Newsagent. I have been unable to find any business premises belonging to William and he often used his residential address along with his occupation as newsagent so I am sure that he was the distribution agent for the newspapers. This would tie in with stories in the family of his children collecting the papers from the station, presumably to then distribute to the retailers and paperboys.

On the 14th July 1910 tragedy was to strike the family again when William and Margaret's six-year-old son, George Smith Forster, died from diphtheria at 1 Station Road, New Seaham. Young George was buried at Christ Church in Station Road, New Seaham, on the 17th July 1910.

Just two months later yet more tragedy was to befall the family when their youngest son John Octavius died on the 11th September 1910, just two weeks short of his first birthday. The cause of death was recorded as diarrhoea. One cannot imagine the anguish that William and Margaret had to endure. From eight children there were now just five surviving, Ethel 15, William Edward 13, Whitfield 12, Norman 9, and Septimus just two.

By April 1911 the family had moved again and was living at 31 Nelson Street, New Seaham, in a house that William had rented from a Mr Arnold. The 1911 census shows William and Margaret and their five surviving children living at 31 Nelson Street, New Seaham. William is described as a newsagent working from home and William Edward and Whitfield are described as scholars and newsboys.

On the 10th May 1912 William entered into a contract to build his second

new house. The new house was at 3 James Street, Seaham Harbour, and he purchased the land from 'The Marquis of Londonderry and Others', for the sum of thirty-one pounds and the builder, a Mr Hugh Kirton, was paid two hundred and forty one pounds, making the total contract price two hundred and seventy two pounds.

The Title Deed is interesting in that it reveals that when one purchased a section or a house they not only purchased the house and land on which it was situated, but also half of the street immediately in front of the house and half the back street behind the house as well. In William's case, the Marquis of Londonderry reserved the right to mine under the house and the portions of James Street and the back street were reserved for public use as Highways.

The following conditions also applied to the contract:

- 1) The house had to be kept or rebuilt if necessary in the same elevation manner and style as originally built.
- 2) No windows or openings other than the original were to be made in the back or front walls.
- 3) The front yard had to be maintained in good order.
- 4) The sidewalls and fences of the house were to be party walls and the purchaser could obtain one half of the cost of them from his neighbour when neighbouring houses were erected.
- 5) No opening was to be made in the wall at the rear of the section except for the entrance gate and hatches for coals and ashpit.
- 6) The purchaser had to pay for any work done outside his property in either James Street or the back street including drains, footpaths, roading, sewers or repairs thereto, and would pay 5% per annum from the time of any demand for payment until such payment was made.
- 7) The purchaser was required to repair and maintain the streets in good order and pay for any such repairs and also for street cleaning.
- 8) The house was only to be occupied by one family at a time and could not be used for business with a penalty of ten pounds per month for any breach.

On the 26th October 1912 William acquired a mortgage from a Miss Alice Elliott of Ryhope, on his house at 3 James Street. The mortgage was for one hundred and eighty pounds at an interest rate of 4.5%, and was probably to pay for the house.



3 James Street *circa* 1920



3 James Street 1999

Towards the middle of 1914 William started having health problems with memory lapses and amnesia, and was also neglecting his various business interests. He forgot to pay his mortgage on 18 Royle Street and eventually the mortgagee was to take possession and receipt of the rents and profits thereof. To make matters worse, on top of William's personal problems, Britain itself was thrown into chaos when war was declared on the 4th August 1914, the First World War.

In October 1914, just two years and five months after building his brand new house at 3 James Street, and two months before his 45th birthday, tragedy was to strike the family yet again when William called at the Seaham Harbour Police Station. Inspector Morgan of the Seaham Harbour Police quotes William as having said, "I have come to give myself up", and states that William "refused to give any explanation and sat for hours without speaking". Inspector Morgan contacted William's wife Margaret at 3 James Street, and Margaret told him that William had "been wandering about and stated that twenty policemen were waiting to arrest him". William's doctor, Doctor L.G. Dillon, stated that he knew William well but that William "refused to answer any questions and has a very depressed appearance".

On the 18th October 1914, William was admitted to Sedgefield Lunatic Asylum where it was noted that he had had one attack lasting "about two weeks" and, that he was "dull" and he "refuses to give any account of himself or answer any questions with exception of his name". He was diagnosed as having syphilis, although he denied it, and was very depressed and quiet.

In April 1915 William stated that he had had the "bad disorder about 12-14 years ago – caught it in Sunderland".

Margaret was to suffer yet another blow when, on the 5th June 1915, her eldest son, William Edward, joined the 3rd Northumbrian Royal Field Artillery (RFA), and was posted overseas.

On the 1st January 1916 William and Margaret's daughter Ethel, at 20 years of age, married Stephen Lumley Humphrey at St John's Church, Seaham Harbour. Stephen was a 20-year-old miner on military service so returned to the war and Ethel stayed at home with her mother.

As for William, things were not looking good. Penicillin was later to become the cure for syphilis, but was not discovered until 1928, and was not in general use until the Second World War. Syphilis, if not treated, progresses through the lymphatic system to nearly all tissues of the body, producing serious clinical manifestations, and often going to the brain.

In William's case, his health slowly deteriorated and, on the 23rd May 1916, he was transferred to Winterton Hospital where he died of Organic Brain Disorder (dementia) at 5.50pm on the 19th June 1916. He was only 46 years old. He was buried at Princess Road Cemetery, Princess Road, Seaham, on the 24th June 1916, (grave no. 2456 Consecrated). There is no headstone.

One can only imagine the impact this tragic turn of events had on William's family, and the stigma it created in the small coal mining community of Seaham. Margaret was left with four of the children at home; Ethel 20, and newly pregnant, Whitfield 17, Norman just turned 14, and the youngest, Septimus, 8. William Edward, at 18, was away at war serving with His Majesty's Forces. With four children at home and a newsagency business to run and Britain at war, it must have been an extremely difficult time.

On the 26th January 1917 Ethel gave birth to a baby daughter, Lilian Eveline, so Margaret now had a granddaughter in the house as well as her own children. No doubt it was a glimmer of joy among all the problems. Ethel's husband Stephen Lumley Humphrey had been discharged from the army as "unfit for military service" in 1916 and was described on the birth certificate as a "Cartman at Co-operative Store". However it seems that he was no longer living at 3 James Street.

Since William's incarceration at Sedgefield, Margaret, Ethel, and the two older boys, Whitfield and Norman, had had to take their turn at running the newsagency, the boys fitting it in around their shifts at the coalmine. Septimus was no doubt roped in – at least to help collect the papers or maybe as a paperboy. To make matters even worse for Margaret, because William died intestate, (without making a will), the house at 3 James Street was, by law, passed to their eldest son William Edward. William Edward returned from the war and, on the 20th November 1918, sold the property back to his mother for the sum of sixty-seven pounds. Margaret also had to take over the mortgage of one hundred and eighty pounds, making the total cost of the house to her two hundred and forty seven pounds.

On the 23rd June 1919 Margaret's son, Norman, joined the army. He was only aged 17 years and 226 days but told the army he was one year older. He joined the Royal Regiment of Artillery as a gunner but as the First World War was over he did not serve overseas.

On the 10th March 1920, Margaret repaid the one hundred and eighty pound mortgage that William had borrowed seven and a half years earlier, in full, and 3 James Street was freehold. I can only speculate how this was achieved. Was the business very profitable or did Margaret sell it, or was it an insurance policy that William had taken out while he was an Insurance Agent? We may never know.

On the 24th December 1920 Margaret's second son Whitfield married Hannah Carr, at the Tempest Place (Primitive Methodist) Chapel in Seaham Harbour. Things were obviously not right between them because by March 1921 Whitfield had left Seaham and was on his way to New Zealand on his own.

However Whitfield's bed at 3 James Street would not have been empty for long as his younger brother, Norman, was discharged from the army "at his own request" on the same day as Whit's marriage (the 24th December 1920) and returned home to become a coalminer.

On the 26th September 1921, Margaret's eldest son, William Edward, married a local coalminer's daughter by the name of Hilda Guy. Both Hilda and William were 24 years old and the wedding was at the Wesleyan Church, Tempest Place, Seaham Harbour.

Margaret now had just three of her children, Ethel, Norman and Septimus, and her granddaughter, Eveline, with her at 3 James Street.

On the 4th July 1922 William Edward and Hilda presented Margaret with her second granddaughter, Doreen. They were living in Back Stavordale Street East, Dawdon, just a short walk from Margaret's home.

Because of William's confused mental state even prior to his incarceration, his affairs were not in good order and in the case of 18 Royle Street it never became part of his estate. The mortgagee took possession and enjoyed the rents and profits from "a day prior to the fourth day of August 1914" (the day Britain declared war), and eventually sold the property on the 22nd May 1923 for the sum of one hundred and ninety pounds. A profit of forty pounds plus any principal that may have been paid off in the eighteen years the mortgage had been running. A handsome profit indeed – one that should have been part of William's estate. It appears that his estate was not thoroughly or properly administered. Perhaps it was assumed that William had been killed during the war, but it seems no effort was later made to find William or his successors, so his widow Margaret was therefore disadvantaged considerably.

Margaret Forster died from pneumonia at her home, 3 James Street, on the 28th February 1924, at just 50 years old. She was buried with her husband William in Princess Road Cemetery, Princess Road, Seaham on the 3rd March 1924, (Grave no. 2456, Consecrated). There is no headstone as this was not an option unless the plot had been purchased.



William Forster
1869 - 1916



Margaret Forster
1874 - 1924

Their children



Ethel
1895 - 1957



William Edward
1897 - 1950



Whitfield
1898 - 1982



Norman
1901 - 1987



Septimus
1908 - 1972

Margaret's will, written on the 14th November 1921, left the house at 3 James Street to her only daughter Ethel "for the term of her natural lifefor her sole and separate use free from the control of any husband". Ethel at this stage had a daughter, Eveline, and was apparently separated from her husband, Stephen Lumley Humphrey. If she remarried, the house was to be sold and the proceeds shared with her two brothers Norman and Septimus. William Edward had already had his share of the house. The balance of the estate was to be shared between four of the children: Ethel, William Edward, Norman and Septimus. Whitfield was not mentioned in the will at all. The reason for this is not apparent. We know that on the 31st July 1920 Whitfield had purchased commercial land in Queen Alexandra Road, Seaham, to build his own newsagent shop, and, by the middle of 1921, at just twenty-three years of age, had sold the property and business to his older brother William Edward and had the left sum of four hundred and fifty pounds in as a mortgage. So, had he told his mother not to worry about him, or had he, like William Edward, already had his share of the estate?

Probate of Margaret's will was granted to her daughter Ethel Humphrey and her son Norman Forster on the 23rd August 1924, with the "power reserved of making the like grant to" her son Septimus.

Following Margaret's death there was quite a bit of bad feeling between Ethel, Norman and Septimus and it seems they may have argued over the business or their mother's estate, or both. There is a story that Septimus started selling papers from the footpath. Their children today (1999) speak of bitterness and acrimony, and it has been stated they "do not want any mud stirred up".

Ethel remained in the house at 3 James Street until her death on the 2nd January 1957, some thirty-three years later, and this caused tension between her and her brother Norman because he could not get his share of the estate. When Ethel died it seems no one bothered to tell Septimus that he had the right to receive a grant from his mother's will. As he was only 16 years old when his mother died, and as such was a minor, he would not have been included in any official business relating to the will. The house was sold by Norman on the 20th May 1957 for the sum of nine hundred pounds, and because of the events outlined above; he had become the sole beneficiary.

As for William and Margaret's children ...

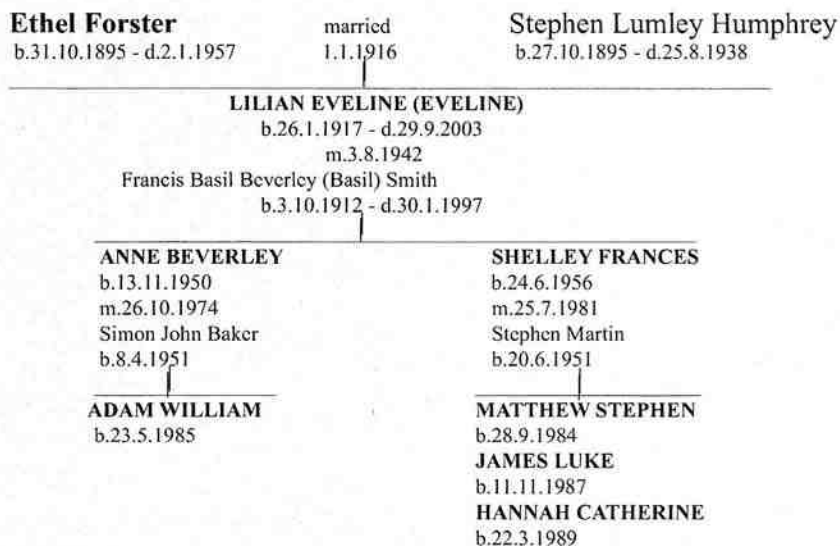
Ethel Forster, (31.10.1895 – 2.1.1957), the eldest child and only daughter, married Stephen Lumley Humphrey on the 1st January 1916 at St John's Church, Seaham. Ethel's brother Whitfield was a witness to the marriage. Stephen Humphrey was born on the 27th October 1895 the son of William Humphrey a railway porter from Gosforth and his wife Jane Elizabeth (*née* Lumley). Stephen was a coalminer but was on Military Service (1st World War) at the time of the wedding. He was medically discharged from the army in August 1916 and became a cartman for a local cooperative store. Stephen and Ethel lived with Ethel's mother Margaret Forster at 3 James Street, Seaham Harbour (Ethel's parents' house). They had one daughter, Lilian Eveline, (who was known as Eveline), born on the 26th January 1917. Stephen Humphrey did not stay in the marriage and was possibly even gone before Eveline was born. I have not managed to find him again until the 1932 Electoral Roll when he was living at 38 Turnerson Street, Salford, Manchester, with a shopkeeper by the name of Isabella Power. He died at Ladywell Sanatorium in Salford on the 25th August 1938 from pulmonary tuberculosis at the age of 42.

Ethel stayed at 3 James Street for the rest of her life. Ethel died on the 2nd January 1957 at her daughter Eveline's house at 67 Weston Crescent, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees, aged 61. The cause of death was Carcinoma of the Liver and Cervix Uteri. Ethel's will, written in 1954, opened up the old wounds caused by her mother Margaret's will. Ethel's brother Norman was angry that Ethel had stayed at 3 James Street all her life as he could not get his share of the house until it was sold. It seems that Ethel may have promised her mother Margaret that she would look after her younger brother Septimus because her will left all monies deposited in her Post Office Savings Bank to him. The result of all this was that Ethel's daughter Eveline did not receive this money and did not inherit 3 James Street as it did not belong to Ethel. Norman sold 3 James Street for nine hundred pounds and neither Ethel's estate or Septimus, received a share. Eveline then had to battle Norman through the courts to get what was rightfully her mother's share. No wonder then that the families will not talk to each other!! Ethel's estate was valued at 1335 pounds.

Ethel's daughter Eveline became a schoolteacher and married an engineer by the name of Francis Basil Beverley Smith on the 3rd August 1942.

Basil (as he was known) was born on 3rd October 1912 in Goole, York, the son of a draper's assistant Charles Henry Smith and his wife Elsie. Basil and Eveline lived with Eveline's mother, Ethel, at 3 James Street until 1951 when they moved to 67 Weston Crescent, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees. They had two daughters, Anne (Baker), and Shelley (Martin). Basil retired in October 1977 at the age of 65 and this, together with the affair he was having with a work colleague, proved to be the catalyst for him suddenly leaving Eveline in March 1978. Eveline subsequently moved to Huddersfield to live near her daughter Shelley. In the following years Basil made some unwise financial decisions which left him, at the age of 84, with little or no capital and no property of his own. He decided that the solution was to take his own life and he shot himself with the shotgun he used for clay pigeon shooting on the 30th January 1997. The cause of death was recorded as "Multiple head injuries, Shotgun blast, Verdict – Suicide".

Eveline died on the 29th September 2003, aged 85. The cause of death was a stroke. Her ashes were scattered opposite Durham Cathedral on the banks of the River Wear.



William Edward Forster, (13.8.1897 – 25.7.1950), was a stoneworker in one of the coalmines of Seaham, and joined the 3rd Northumbrian Royal Field Artillery in Newcastle on the 5th June 1915 (later he was in the 1st Northumbrian RFA) and served in France during the First World War (Service number 3072). He inherited 3 James Street from his father in 1916 and sold it back to his mother on his return from the war in November 1918 for the sum of sixty-seven pounds. He was discharged from the army on the 15th May 1919. On the 17th March 1921 he purchased the premises and newsagency business at 26 Queen Alexandra Road, Dawdon, from his younger brother Whitfield, for the sum of three hundred and fifty pounds. He took a mortgage from Whit for four hundred and fifty pounds. The extra one hundred pounds was probably for stock on hand and/or working capital.

On the 26th September 1921 he married Hilda Guy, the 24-year-old daughter of a Seaham coalmine Deputy Overman, John George Guy and his wife Mary (*née* Walker). Hilda Guy was born on the 4th April 1897 at 7 Seaham Street, New Seaham. William Edward and Hilda produced four children. The first, Doreen, was born on the 4th July 1922 but tragically died before the age of three from measles in the March quarter of 1925 just months before the birth of their second child Alfred Harvey on the 31st October 1925. William Edward sold the shop and newsagency business in September 1925 for the sum of five hundred pounds and returned to the pits. The reason for this was probably because the original purchase contract for the premises required the owner to build a dwelling house on the site by July 1926, so William Edward sold before having to meet this condition.

The next child was Hilda born on the 24th November 1927, followed by Malcolm on the 1st February 1931. They lived at various addresses in Seaham during these years and by 1934 were living at 194 The Avenue, Deneside, Seaham Harbour. Britain was gripped by the Great Depression and the north-east was hit very hard and many pits were closed. William Edward was out of work and moved alone to London in 1935 in search of a job which he found at the Woolwich Arsenal. He was later to say he was not going to sit on street corners playing marbles! He first lived at the Toc-H in Woolwich Common. The Toc-H was low cost basic accommodation for ex-servicemen (similar to the YMCA today). He later rented accommodation in Ripon Road, Plumstead, Woolwich. His family moved south to join

him in 1936. In 1938 the family was living in rented accommodation at 83 Eglinton Road, Plumstead, Woolwich, (London). William Edward died at this address on the 25th July 1950, one month short of his 53rd birthday. The cause of death was Coronary Occlusion (Atheroma), (heart attack caused by arterial blockage). His occupation was recorded as hospital porter, and his son Alfred Harvey Forster was the informant, who gave the place of death and his address as 83 Eglinton Road, Plumstead, (Woolwich, London). Apparently William Edward had been pruning a climbing rose up a trellis when he suffered the heart attack. He fell, breaking the trellis, and a neighbour rushed to help but it was too late.

Over the next few years the children were to marry. First was Hilda who married Peter Stuart Clarke, the son of Thomas Clarke and Agnes (*née* Burbridge), on the 26th August 1950, just one month after the death of her father. Peter was born in Woolwich on the 8th April 1924. He was a mechanical engineer and worked in Baghdad and Lagos. Hilda and Peter had two children, Lesley Jane born on the 19th May 1956 and Deborah Mary born on the 24th December 1961.

Hilda Forster (*née* Guy) died on the 23rd March 1952 just two weeks before her 55th birthday, and just six days before her son Alfred was to marry.

Alfred Harvey Forster married Sheila R. Povey on 29th March 1952. Alfred and Sheila took over renting 83 Eglinton Road and stayed there for about another three years and then moved to Slough, just west of London. The electoral rolls show that there were no Forsters at 83 Eglinton Road in 1955/56. Alfred became an insurance broker and had offices in Slough and Catford. Alfred and Sheila had no children. He died in August 1994 from stomach cancer.

Malcolm Forster married Margaret J. Smith on 31st October 1953 and they have one daughter, Wendy May, born in Woolwich on the 17th February 1956. Unfortunately the marriage was not to last and Malcolm immigrated to Australia in March 1966. In August 1976 he immigrated to America and married JoAn Hutchinson in September that year.

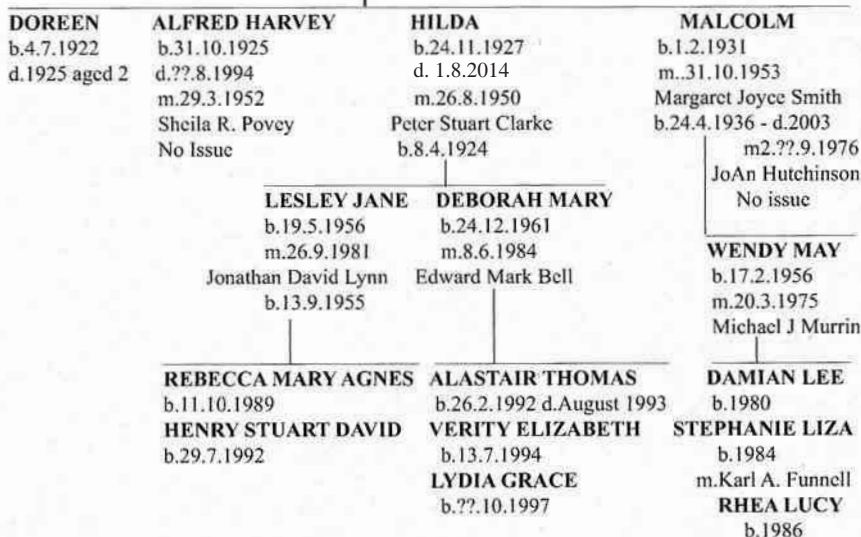
William Edward Forster

b.13.8.1897 – d.25.7.1950

married
26.9.1921

Hilda Guy

b.4.4.1897 – d.23.3.1952



Whitfield Forster, (6.12.1898 – 26.1.1982) see next chapter.

Norman Forster, (9.11.1901 – 25.3.1987), joined the army on the 23rd June 1919 aged 17 years and 226 days although he told the army he was a year older. He joined the Royal Regiment of Artillery (Service number 292885). He signed up for six years in the regular army and a further six years in the reserves. As the First World War was over he was not required to serve overseas and was discharged “at his own request on payment of 35 pounds” on the 24th December 1920. He returned home to 3 James Street and became a coalminer. He married Esther Green from Ryhope on the 27th October 1926. They had three children. The first two were born at 37 Regent Terrace, Sunderland, Norman on the 25th December 1927, and Derek on the 11th December 1930. Their third child, Ruth, was born at 56 Dalton Avenue, Seaham Harbour, on the 7th September 1934.

Tragedy was then to strike the family. On the 26th November 1934, at just forty years of age, Esther was to take her own life, dying from "Lysol poisoning self-administered while of unsound mind." (Lysol was a disinfectant commonly used as a douche at the time.) Baby Ruth was adopted by Mr and Mrs Jackson from Southwich, Sunderland. Four and a half months later, on the 17th April 1935, Norman remarried. His new wife was a widow of thirty-five by the name of Doris Miller (*née* Andrew).

Doris Andrew was born in Oldham, near Manchester, in the September quarter of 1899. In the December quarter of 1922 she had married Harold Miller and they had a daughter Joan, born in the March quarter of 1923. Harold Miller died from pulmonary tuberculosis at the age of 33 on the 8th October 1934. Norman and Doris first lived at 56 Dalton Avenue, Seaham Harbour where their first child, John Andrew (Jack) was born on the 9th January 1936. Their second child, Dorothy Patricia was born at 27 Yoden Avenue, Horden on the 27th February 1937. Doris Forster (late Miller, formerly Andrew) died at 27 Yoden Avenue on the 20th September 1960 at the age of 61. The cause of death was Myocardial (heart) Failure and Bronchial Asthma.

In 1964 Norman was to marry for the third time. His new wife was Mary Jane Pyle, a 63 year-old widow from Horden. Although I had been told that he did not marry her, the marriage certificate shows that they were married at Horden Methodist Church, Blackhills Road, Horden, on the 15th February 1964. Norman's son Derek was a witness to the marriage. Norman was a coalminer in Horden Colliery where he retired as a Colliery Deputy Overman. He lived at 27 Yoden Avenue, Horden, until he died on the 25th March 1987 aged 85 years. The cause of death was gangrene of small bowel due to mesenteric thrombosis - natural causes [tuberculosis of the abdominal glands causing a clot]. Norman's will was similar to his mother Margaret's, in that he left the house to his wife Mary Jane for the term of her life, when finally sold the proceeds were to be shared equally between his son Derek and his daughter Dorothy. His estate was valued at 63,507 pounds.

Norman Forster married 1 Esther Green married 2 Doris Miller(Andrew)
 b.9.11.1901–d.25.3.1987 27.10.1926 d.26.11.1934 17.4.1935 b.1899 d.20.9.1960

married 3 Mary Jane Pyle
 15.2.1964 No issue

NORMAN DEREK b.25.12.1927 b.11.12.1930
 d.18.5.1977 d.11.11.2008
 m.Q3.1954 No issue
 Joan Whitehurst
 d.1995

RUTH b.7.9.1934
 adopted by b.1923
 Maggie & John
 Jackson
 m.
 George S. Hopewell

JOAN (Miller) b.1923
 (known as Jack)
 b.9.1.1936
 d.??.10.2001

JOHN ANDREW b.1899 d.20.9.1960

DOROTHY PATRICIA b.27.2.1937
 m.30.3.1957
 Kenneth Douglas Varley

PETER NORMAN
 b.9.9.1955
 m.1982
 Barbara Anne Veevers (Anne)

JOHN HENRY
 b. 4.1991
ALICE ESTHER
 b. 1.1996

REBECCA
 b.Q2.1964
 m.May 1988
 Neil K. Bissell
GRAHAM
 b.Q3 1968

HELEN PATRICIA
 b.20.6.1959
 m.20.5.1989
 Michael Altringham
 (No issue)

ANDREW DOUGLAS
 b.18.2.1963
 d.??.6.2000 (aged 37)

KAREN ELIZABETH
 b.1961
 m. 5.1987
 Philip Young

JONATHAN PHILIP
 b. 11.1988
ALEX GRAHAM
 b. 4.1995

PAUL DARREN
 b.9.12.1968
 m.?? 8.2002
 Louise Sanderson

ETHAN ANDREW
 b.6.8.2004

Septimus Forster, (13.2.1908 – 9.5.1972), continued to live in his parents house at 3 James Street, Seaham Harbour, with his older sister Ethel and her daughter Eveline until, at age 32, he married a 38-year-old widow from Seaham by the name of Hannah Newton (*née* Brown). They were married in the Register Office in Easington on the 9th November 1940. Septimus and Hannah had no children of their own but Hannah had children from her previous marriage (possibly two). Septimus was an omnibus driver and drove buses to Sunderland; he also described himself as a garage mechanic (probably with the bus company) and was also an auxiliary fireman during

the Second World War. The family stayed in the Seaham area and at the time of his death on the 9th May 1972, at age sixty-four, he was living at 1 Malcolm Street, Seaham. His occupation was recorded as garage mechanic and the cause of death Myocardial infarction due to Arteriosclerosis and Diabetes Mellitus (heart attack caused by hardening/narrowing of the arteries and diabetes). His stepson Walter Newton was the informant. Septimus's estate was valued at 1862 pounds.

WHITFIELD FORSTER 1898 - 1982

Whitfield Forster, my father, the second son of William and Margaret Forster (*née* Smith), was born at 2 Elizabeth Street, Wheatley Hill, Durham County, on the 6th December 1898, where his father was working as a coal-miner.

Before Whitfield was two years old, his father had given up working down the mine and was operating a newsagency shop at 58 Castlereagh Street, Tunstall, Silksworth, Sunderland, so Whitfield would have had no memory of his father ever being a coalminer.

In early 1903 when Whit (as he was known) was four years old the family moved to Sunderland where Whit was to live until he was eleven years old. The family first lived at 39 Regent Terrace, Ryhope and then in 1906 moved into their brand new house at 18 Royle Street, Grangetown, Ryhope, Sunderland.

By the time Whit was eleven years old (in 1910) the family was on the move again, this time moving south to Seaham where Whit attended Church Street School. They were initially to live in rented accommodation, first at 1 Station Road, New Seaham and then at 31 Nelson Street, New Seaham.

The 1911 Census taken in April 1911 shows the family living at 31 Nelson Street, New Seaham and describes Whit as a Scholar and Newsboy. Both Whit and his older brother William Edward were working part time in their father William's newsagent business either selling or delivering newspapers.

Towards the end of 1912 the family moved into their second brand new house at 3 James Street, Seaham Harbour. Young Whit was now fourteen years old and was about to start work.

Dawdon Colliery was just over half a mile (800 metres) down the road and it was here that Whit started work. I do not know what work he was doing at the mine but I am certain he was not hewing coal. He was probably employed as a boy to one of the more experienced workers at the mine as a labourer of some sort, perhaps helping with the pit ponies or doing maintenance work around the mine.

In August 1914, when Whit was in his fifteenth year, Britain declared war on Germany and the country was embroiled in the First World War. It was just six weeks before Whitfield's 16th birthday when his father was admitted to Sedgefield Lunatic Asylum suffering from the manifestations of syphilis.

The trauma and stigma caused by this turn of events must have had a huge impact on young Whit and the rest of his family. With his father incarcerated and his older brother off at war Whit was forced to assume the mantle of 'head of the house' at a very young age.

Whitfield was seventeen and a half when his father died and was by now a shifter in the coalmine. A shifter was an employee who repaired the horseways and other passages in the mine, and kept them free of obstructions. They normally worked a permanent shift – usually 10pm till 8am – and were paid a weekly wage for whatever work they were put to around the mine; as compared to a pieceworker who was paid by the amount of work they got done. The miners were pieceworkers, being paid by the weight of coal they got to the surface. Whitfield told the story that they were paid “a bob a ton”, (a bob being one shilling, or ten cents N.Z.). Records of pits about this time show that coal hewers were paid one shilling and two and a half pence (1s 2½d or 12.5c N.Z.) per ton. The average weekly wage for a face worker was 26 shillings per week (\$NZ 2.60c) and, if married, free coal and a house. There are also stories in the family of Whit helping with the pit ponies and working in the carpenters shop.

During this time Whitfield and his brother Norman were also helping to run what had been their father's newsagency business when they were not working down the pit. Dorothy, Norman's daughter, tells the story that if there was a big news story breaking about the war, Whitfield and Norman would travel in to Durham City, (a ride of nearly thirty miles return), to get the papers off the train from London so they could get them back quickly to Seaham, and be the first to sell the news.

It was during these teenage years in Seaham that Whitfield met, and probably fell in love with, Jane ('Jenny') Alice Shaw. It was well known in the town that they were 'walking out together'. Jenny Shaw was born on the 7th June 1901 at Monkwearmouth, Sunderland, and was the eldest daughter of Thomas and Thomasena (*née* Bell) Shaw.

Because her mother had died she was fully employed looking after her younger brothers and sisters. Jenny's family was strict Primitive Methodist, so we can assume that her relationship with Whit was restricted to 'walking out'. Later Jenny was to go and Nanny for Mr and Mrs Wright and their two children. This took her to Hendon in Sunderland, as Mr Wright was the Vicar of Hendon.



Whitfield Forster *circa* 1918



Jenny Shaw *circa* 1918

Whitfield, having lost his father in 1916, was very close to his grandparents and was most upset at his grandfather's (William Edward's) death in June 1919, just six months before his own twenty-first birthday.

On the 31st July 1920, at only twenty-one years of age, Whitfield purchased a piece of commercial land in Queen Alexandra Road, Seaham, for the sum of one hundred and twenty pounds from the Marquis of Londonderry and others to build his own newsagents shop. The contract required Whit to complete the building of his 'lock-up shop' within one year and, within six years, erect a 'dwelling-house', or face 'liquidated and ascertained damages and not by way of penalty the sum of One Pound for each and every day' that these conditions were not met. We must therefore assume that Whit built his newsagents shop immediately.

Had Whitfield inherited some money from his father's estate, or had he somehow made good money over and above his mine wages? Or was it a case of Whitfield seeing an opportunity to start his own newsagency business. This seems the most likely answer but whatever the truth it is obvious that Whitfield had inherited his father's entrepreneurial skills, and at just 21 years old was going to get out of the mine.



Whit's original shop in Queen Alexandra Road, Seaham.



The shop in Queen Alexandra Road, Seaham in 1999. Whit's original shop can be seen at the rear of the premises, down the side street.

Later the same year (1920), Whit was again to have turmoil in his life when Hannah Carr, the 19-year-old daughter of John Carr, a colliery official at Dawdon Colliery, named him as the father of her unborn child. Stories have been told that Whitfield denied paternity, and it is possible that because of his financial position he may have been seen as 'a good catch'. Whatever the truth Hannah Carr gave birth to a son, Clifford, on the 28th November 1920, just eight days short of Whitfield's 22nd birthday.

A month later, on Christmas Eve, the 24th December 1920, Whitfield and Hannah were married at the Primitive Methodists Tempest Place Chapel, Seaham Harbour. Whitfield recorded his address as 3 James Street, Seaham Harbour – his mother's house.

Seventy-five years later Jenny Shaw's former employer, Mrs Wright, was to tell us that Jenny had been 'jilted'. (Jilted means to be left without any previous warning.)

Clifford's birth was not registered until the 12th January 1921 and records Whitfield Forster as the father. Both Whitfield and Hannah gave their address as 12 Helen Street, Dawdon, Seaham Harbour – Hannah's parents' house.

However, things between Whitfield and Hannah were obviously not right. Several stories, rumours and suppositions abound. Among these are that he was forced to marry under threat, that he denied paternity, and Whit himself has been quoted as saying that he went to Paris on his honeymoon on his own. Again we may never know, but on the 17th March 1921 Whit sold his property and newsagency business in Queen Alexandra Road to his older brother William Edward for the sum of three hundred and fifty pounds, loaning him a mortgage of four hundred and fifty pounds at an interest rate of 3.5% per annum. Presumably the extra one hundred pounds was for stock on hand and/or working capital.

Just four days later on the 21st March 1921 Whit arrived in London and was heading south. His mother Margaret had given him a half sovereign for good luck that he never spent and later put on the gold chain of his pocket watch. By the 14th April 1921 Whit was in France and promised to let his mother know his new address shortly. He indicated he was on his way to Holland. Whether he went to Holland or not is uncertain but we do know that on the 1st June 1921 Whit boarded the New Zealand Shipping Company's steamer *Ruahine* at Southampton and, sailing via Newport News on the east coast of America and then through the Panama Canal, arrived alone on the other side of the world in Auckland, New Zealand, on the 13th July 1921 – not quite a year after purchasing his property in Queen Alexandra Road, and just six and a half months after his marriage to Hannah Carr. He recorded his forwarding address in New Zealand as Westport GPO, (General Post Office).

On arrival in Auckland, Whitfield, along with the other southern passengers, immediately boarded the Main Trunk Express and travelled south to Wellington. He apparently did not go to Westport but was quick to find work in New Zealand, starting with the Council in Levin. In October

1921 he moved north to the Huntly coalmines. The 1922 Raglan Electoral Roll records Whitfield's occupation as miner and his address as Hakanoa Street, Huntly. Here he continued to make extra money, over and above his wages. Whit himself told a story of lending other mine employees a quid (one pound) on the promise they would pay him back one guinea (one pound one shilling) on pay day. Not bad, 5% interest between paydays!!

With this skill he soon got out of the coalmines and, by 1925, had moved south to Palmerston North, where Whit said he was able to persuade the local manager of the Bank of New Zealand to loan him six hundred pounds at an interest rate of 3% – which he promptly lent to others at 6%. Thus was born the career of 'finance agent' that he was to use in various forms for the next sixty years.

In February 1924, just two and a half years after leaving his home country, friends and family, Whit received the news that his mother had passed away. Whit, at only twenty-five years of age, had now lost both his parents.

On the 22nd April 1925 Whit organised a Power of Attorney for his younger brother Norman to handle his affairs back in England, as Whit's older brother William Edward wanted to sell the newsagency business and property Whit had sold him four years earlier. The shop was finally sold to a Mr G.A. Douglas on the 23rd September 1925 for the sum of five hundred pounds and the four hundred and fifty pound mortgage was repaid to Whit. Mr Douglas was to keep the shop for many years and Jenny Shaw worked there before she went to Nanny for the Wrights.

About this time Whit set himself up in business acting as a Finance Agent, Moneylender and Debt Collector from premises in C. Smith's Buildings, Broadway, Palmerston North. He used to advertise for business in *The Manawatu Evening Standard*. The advertisement, right, is from the edition of Tuesday the 3rd November 1925.

NDARD. TUESDA

MONEY TO LEND

ON Household Furniture, Pianos, etc., without removal. Short term loans arranged. Easy repayments. Lowest interest rates in the Dominion. Consult

FORSTER

Room 3, C. Smith's Buildings,
Phone 5582, Palmerston North.
Open Daily 9 a.m. till 5 p.m.

During his earlier time in Levin, Whit had been befriended by Louisa (Louise) and Alf Allen, and was a frequent visitor for Sunday lunch. When Whit required board and lodgings in Palmerston North, they put him in touch with Louisa's mother, Mrs Elizabeth Ann (Annie) Partridge, who lived at 281 Featherston Street, Palmerston North. Mrs Partridge was the widow of George Arthur Partridge, who had died while serving in the First World War.

Whit obviously enjoyed his time at Palmerston North and his business did very well, to use his own words, "he was a canny lad". He was also popular with the ladies. There is a story told of Whit being one of the few young people to own a motorcar and of him driving down the street with all the girls standing on the running boards of the car. We do know that he once owned a 1931 Pontiac. However, his popularity with the ladies was to lead to trouble for Whit.

It was while living at the Partridge home that Whit met and fell in love with his landlady's daughter Hazel Audrey Partridge. Audrey (as she was known) was born at Featherston Street, Palmerston North on the 24th September 1904.



Phyllis, Annie and Audrey Partridge

In 1926 Whit was faced with yet another hurdle, when it was alleged that he was the father of a child born to Muriel Vera Taylor.

On the 1st September 1926 Muriel gave birth to a daughter, Gweneth Muriel Taylor. Muriel was 25 years old and the Birth Certificate shows no record of 'Fathers details'. Under the heading 'Parents Where and When Married' is written 'illegitimate'.

Muriel and her new baby lived with Muriel's mother Mildred Elizabeth Ann (Annie) Taylor at 10 North Street, Palmerston North. Muriel's father, Herbert Taylor was a Traveller (Travelling Salesman), and in the 1928 Palmerston General Electoral Roll gave his address as 176 Featherston Street, Palmerston North.

About this time Audrey Partridge announced that she was also expecting Whit's child. What was Whit to do now? We can only imagine his dilemma.

Whit knew that Audrey Partridge was the one for him and they were very happy together, but unfortunately they could not get married as Whit was already married to Hannah Carr in England, and there was the added complication of Muriel Taylor.

On the 13th September 1926, Herbert Taylor made a complaint on Oath to a Justice of the Peace in Palmerston North that his daughter Muriel was the mother of an illegitimate female child born on the 1st September 1926, and that Whitfield Forster was the father. It was a claim that Whitfield absolutely denied.

The case was heard at the Palmerston North District Court on the 11th and 12th October 1926 and, on the 22nd October 1926, an Affiliation Order (now called a Paternity Order), was made against Whit at the Palmerston North District Court. Whit was ordered to pay maintenance of twelve shillings and six pence per week, (\$NZ1.25c), until the child attained the age of sixteen years. Whit was also ordered to pay expenses including, "Dr McKay six pounds six shillings, Nurse six pounds six shillings, and clothes for child six pounds eighteen shillings and six pence". On account of costs Whit was ordered to pay "three pounds three shillings solicitor's fee; witness's expenses, Wyatt fourteen shillings and Miss Healy ten shillings, and past maintenance four pounds ten shillings".

Whit vigorously and persistently denied paternity and even took the matter to Appeal in the Supreme Court in Palmerston North. The Appeal was dismissed on the 26th November 1926. Two weeks later on the 10th December 1926 Herbert and Mildred Taylor tried to sue Whit for one thousand pounds damages. This action was settled out of court.

The innocent party to all of this, the daughter Gweneth Muriel Taylor, was never told the truth. She was brought up believing that her grandparents, Herbert and Mildred, were her parents and that her birth mother, Muriel, was her older sister.

On the 12th March 1927 Audrey and Whit's son John was born in a residential maternity home at 49 Nelson Crescent, Napier. As both Whitfield and Audrey were residing in Palmerston North at this time we can only assume that Audrey had been 'sent away' to have her baby, possibly to her Uncle 'Jack' White (John Hambleton White) and Aunt Clara in Napier. Jack and Clara had no children (they had had one son, Charles, who had died at just ten months old) and Jack was a Billiard Room Proprietor at 18 Tennyson Street in Napier at that time. The birth certificate records the birth as illegitimate, but Whitfield Forster was the informant 'authorised in writing by mother' (Audrey). The address was recorded as 281 Featherston Street, Palmerston North; Audrey's mother's address (Elizabeth Ann 'Annie' Partridge).

Whit then sold his business in Palmerston North to a Mr Cronin and started afresh in Wellington. He first set up in business at 12 Panama Street, opposite the General Post Office.

Then Whitfield and Audrey did something very daring for the time – they lived together – at 25 Omar Street, Khandallah, Wellington. Whitfield purchased 25 Omar Street, a brand new house, on the 25th October 1927.



25 Omar Street, Khandallah, Wellington

Just six years after sailing from England and leaving his coalmining job and the terrace houses behind him, Whit had a brand new detached three-bedroom house, a car, and his own business in central Wellington.

His advertisement in *The Evening Post* on the 2nd December 1930, is depicted on the right.

MONEY TO LEND

ON HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE, Life Insurance Policies, Interest under Wills, and other Approved Securities, in sums from £5 to £500.

I can arrange a STRICTLY PRIVATE ADVANCE WITHOUT PUBLICITY of any sort on the easiest terms of repayment in Wellington City.

NO COMPANY DIRECTORS TO REVIEW YOUR POSITION.

DEAL WITH THE LENDER PERSONALLY

FORSTER FOR FINANCE,
12, Panama street, opp. G.P.O.
Tel. 43-579. P.O. Box 206.

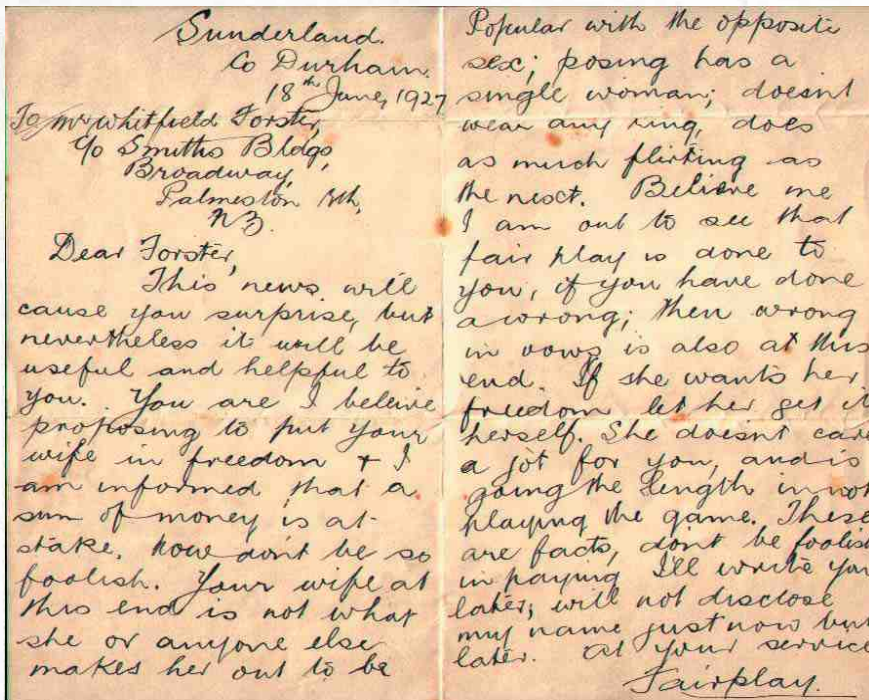
Whit then set about trying to obtain a divorce from Hannah Carr and, on the 7th November 1929, he remitted the sum of two thousand seven hundred and fifty pounds, (\$NZ5500.00) to a bank account in England. This was an extremely large amount of money in 1929. On the following day, the 8th November 1929, Whit boarded the Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand Limited's SS *Marama* bound for Sydney, Australia, on the first leg of his voyage to England. He arrived in England just in time for Christmas 1929. On this visit he stayed with his sister Ethel, in what had been his parents' house, at 3 James Street, Seaham Harbour. Ethel was living in the house with her 22-year-old brother Septimus and Eveline, her 13-year-old daughter.

During his stay Whit visited family and friends and no doubt enjoyed displaying his new wealth and status as a 'gentleman'. He particularly made the point of spending some time with his ageing step-grandmother Hannah, (although Whit himself was never aware that she was not his true grandmother), who was ailing at her son James' house in 7 Fowlers Terrace, Plawsworth, where she had been staying since moving from the colliery house at 3 Cross Street, Houghall Colliery.

Never being one to miss an opportunity Whit also used the trip very successfully to advance his business. He exported quantities of New Zealand produce such as butter and wool to England and on his return brought English, Danish and German products back to New Zealand. Having arranged the importing rights he added Importer/Exporter to his business description and it is said to have more than paid for his trip!

The Petition of Hannah Forster (*née* Carr) for Dissolution of Marriage applied for on the 20th January 1930 is interesting in that she states there is no issue of the said marriage. Did Hannah finally admit that Whitfield was not the father of her son Clifford, or was it simply that Clifford was born before the marriage? The grounds for divorce were adultery by Whitfield with Muriel Taylor “in or about the early part of 1926 at Palmerston North, New Zealand”. The petition also states that, “on or about the 22nd day of October, 1926, the said Muriel Taylor obtained an Affiliation Order against the Respondent (Whitfield Forster) in respect of a child born to her by him”. So true or not, Whit was finally able to use the earlier court case in Palmerston North to his advantage.

Earlier, in July 1927, Whit had received a strongly worded letter addressed to “Dear Forster” from someone in Sunderland calling themselves ‘Fairplay’, alleging that his wife Hannah’s behaviour did not deserve a pay out on divorce and urging him not to “be so foolish”. However, there was eventually a financial settlement of some kind.



The mystery letter from ‘Fairplay’.

By the end of February 1930 Whit had finished his business and set sail for New Zealand, arriving in Auckland on board the Huddart Parker Limited's SS *Ulimaroa* from Sydney, Australia, on the 15th April 1930. On this trip Whit travelled Saloon Class.

From Panama Street he was to move his business to Rooms 309-310 in the Colonial Mutual Life (CML) building in central Wellington, where he remained until he 'retired' to his home address about thirty years later.

Whit was a tough, but fair businessman. He was always prepared to give someone a chance but did not tolerate being used. My cousin, Len Allen, remembers staying with Whit and Audrey in Khandallah when they went into the city to collect money Whit was owed. Whit came out with the whole cash register, put it on the seat next to Len and told him to mind it!

Before his divorce came through Whitfield was to suffer a terrible tragedy when Audrey, who was rumoured to be expecting their second child, died suddenly from heart failure on the 19th April 1931, at the age of only twenty-six. Whitfield was shattered. Audrey had been very musical and could sing and play the piano beautifully. The house at Omar Street was suddenly silent. Audrey was buried at Karori Cemetery (Lot 571, Path Y, Division P2), and her headstone reads 'Sacred to the Memory of Audrey, Died 19th April 1931; The Voice We Loved Is Still'.

Ironically Whitfield's divorce was finally granted on the 2nd September 1931 – just four and a half months after Audrey had passed away. Their son, John, was just four years old. Audrey's younger sister, Phyllis, and their mother Elizabeth Ann (Annie) Partridge helped care for both John and Whit during these troubled times.

In April 1932 Whit received news from 'the old country' that his step-grandmother Hannah had passed away aged 85. His visit 'home' to England had been well worthwhile in that respect.

Three years after Audrey's death, Whitfield, at age 35, married Phyllis Partridge (Audrey's younger sister) – three months after her 26th birthday. (Phyllis was born at Featherston Street,



Whit and Phyllis on their wedding day.

Palmerston North, on the 31st May 1908.) The wedding was held at the Palmerston North Baptist Church on the 11th August 1934, and Phyllis' best friend, Moyra Idalys Craven, (later to be affectionately known by the family as 'Aunty Moy'), and John Hambleton White (Phyllis's Uncle Jack) were the witnesses to the marriage.

On the 19th October 1934 Whit and Phyl applied to adopt young John who was by then seven years old. The application was granted on the 9th November 1934 and the three of them lived in the house at 25 Omar Street, Khandallah, Wellington.

They were happy times. John recalled an occasion when Whit brought home helium filled balloons for one of his birthdays and a few of the balloons escaped from his grasp and sailed away over the Khandallah hills.

In September 1935 Whit and Phyl set about building a new home at 8 Sherwood Street, Lower Hutt. It was to be a grand house, two storeys, architecturally designed by local architect C.A. Martin, and on a large section. Whit took a mortgage with the Mortgage Corporation of New Zealand for the sum of one thousand six hundred and fifty pounds over a term of thirty five years at an interest rate of four and one quarter per cent. True to character, Whit managed to obtain a subsidy of two hundred pounds under a Government scheme designed to create employment after the Depression of 1933. At first Whit was refused the subsidy as it was felt that if he could afford such a grand house he did not need it. Whit calmly suggested that he did not need to build the house! The subsidy was granted!

The total contract price for the house was one thousand eight hundred and eighty six pounds. Whit had already purchased the land comprising 2 roods 1.06 perches, (over half an acre or 2050 square metres) on which stood a billiard room from the neighbour, Mr Dymock, who had subdivided it off. The builder was Wilfred E. Jones.

It should have been a very happy and exciting time but tragedy was to strike yet again when Whit and Phyl's first child, Josephine Charlotte, was born prematurely on the 1st November 1935, at Avon Hospital, 12 Penrose Street, Lower Hutt. She was to live just eighteen days – dying of cardiac failure on the 18th November 1935. She is buried at the Old Taita Cemetery in Lower Hutt, Plot 31A, Methodist. There is no headstone.

Whit, Phyl, and young John moved in to their new home during March 1936, but Whit did not sell 25 Omar Street in Khandallah, Wellington until the 19th October 1938. It was probably rented out in the meantime.



8 Sherwood Street, Lower Hutt

Life then settled down for Whit and Phyl. They lived in 8 Sherwood Street, Lower Hutt, a beautiful detached two storeyed home with

large grounds. It was a far cry from the succession of colliery and terrace houses that Whitfield had been brought up in back in England. No doubt Whit was driven by the events of his past and the house was everything the 'Gaffer' had in England, plenty of space, a separate billiard room, large lawns and gardens and a croquet green. They set about furnishing it with lots of brass and imported pieces and a grandfather clock.

In 1937 Whit was to travel to England once more. This trip was both business and pleasure. Whit furthered his export and import business and once again stayed at 3 James Street with his sister Ethel, her daughter Eveline, who was now 20, and his 29-year-old brother Septimus. During his time there he went to Denmark for two weeks over Easter and took his niece Eveline with him. He arrived home in New Zealand bearing gifts for everybody and a cousin on my mother's side, Frank Allen, can remember the gift he received, but especially can recall the prized Hornby train set that Whit brought home for young John.

Whitfield worked hard to provide well for his family with various occupations, sometimes several at once. These included Finance Agent, Debt Collector, Importer, Exporter, and Real Estate Agent to name a few, and he played the share market with uncanny success. Whit often took a risk with his moneylending and sometimes had to resort to strong measures to recover his money. One occasion was when he had lent money to a circus operator in Wellington and his money was not repaid. Whit turned up at the circus and took the takings for that night's show! On another occasion he came across a car he had loaned money on parked in Featherston Street, Wellington. As the debt had not been paid he had the car jacked up and removed all four wheels!

Whit and Phyl produced six more children – Claudia Marie on the 28th January 1939, Paul Whitfield on the 4th October 1940, Anna on the 24th February 1942, Brent Vincent on the 30th November 1943, Bronwen Margaret on the 8th January 1946 and finally Kenneth Garry (the author) on the 12th August 1949. They were all born at the Avon (maternity) Hospital, 12 Penrose Street, Lower Hutt. The building is still there today but is now a private dwelling.



Paul, Whit, Phyl, Brent, Claudia and Anna

At the end of 1947 Whit set up a company that he called Whitfield Forster Limited with himself and Phyllis as the only two shareholders.

Unbelievably, tragedy was to strike Whit yet again. Phyl was never to recover from the birth of her youngest son, as it was discovered she had ovarian cancer. Although great care was given to her convalescence, sadly she passed away on the 1st November 1950, at Longmynd Private Hospital, Western Hutt Road, Lower Hutt,

at only forty-two years of age, and just fourteen and a half months after the birth of her youngest child, Kenneth. Phyllis was buried at Levin Cemetery on the 3rd November 1950, near to her mother (my maternal grandmother), Elizabeth Ann (Annie) Partridge who had passed away just three months earlier on the 24th July 1950, aged 81 years.



Ken and John



Claudia, Paul, Anna, Bronwen and Brent

Whitfield was left a solo father with six of Phyl's children (all under eleven years old), and John from Audrey. John was twenty-three years old and Kenneth (Ken) just fourteen and a half months.

During the long period of Phyl's illness Whit had employed several different housekeepers with various amounts of success and failure. Mrs Maddock was the most permanent housekeeper but was not very popular with the children. Stories have been told of the children being locked out of the house and of frogs being hidden in the housekeeper's bed!!

Whit was finding it more and more of a struggle to cope and, by December 1949, was pleased to get some relief as the children were sent to various friends and relatives homes for the Christmas school holidays. When the holidays were over, and on the advice of a well meaning friend, Whit arranged to send the four younger children; Bronwen, Brent, Anna and Paul, to the Whatman Home in Masterton, that was run by the Salvation Army. They arrived there on the 29th January 1950. Claudia went to stay with friends of Phyllis, the Judd's, who lived in Waterloo, Lower Hutt. John had already left home to follow his teaching career, and the baby, Ken, was sent to St Barnabas Babies' Home in Seatoun, Wellington.

Whit had only arranged for the children to stay at Whatman Home for 'three months approximately', and neither Whit nor the children were particularly happy, so on the 8th April (Easter) 1950 they all came home, and housekeepers were once again employed. The children all came home with sores so were off school for some time.

Salvation was to come in the form of Jane Alice (Jenny) Shaw, Whitfield's loyal friend from Seaham Harbour, North East England, from thirty-five years earlier. She arrived at 8 Sherwood Street in November 1950 – just a couple of weeks after Phyllis had died.

Jenny, as Whit called her, had never married and, after caring for her brothers and sisters after her mother's death and then being a nanny for Mr and Mrs Wright's two children, had heard about Whit's plight. So, at almost fifty years of age she arrived in New Zealand and took on the challenge of Whit's children. Slowly Whit's family was to return to some form of normality with the children being collected from their various temporary homes.



Jenny 'Nan' Shaw with Paul,
Bronwen, Brent and Ken

Jenny, who the children called 'Nan', kept the house immaculately and there was always good wholesome food on the table, baking in the tins, and every year a magnificent traditional English Christmas dinner with all the trimmings. There was never a sock with a hole that was not darned, a shirt without a button that was not repaired, worn collars and cuffs were turned, and everything was always clean and tidy.

Whit had continued to run his business all these years from Rooms 309-310 in the CML building in Central Wellington. In 1966, at the age of sixty-seven, he relinquished his lease of the offices and 'retired' his business home to 8 Sherwood Street, where he set up office in 'the Den', a room attached to the billiard room.

John, being a lot older than the rest of the children, had apparently been advised by Phyllis before she died to go and make a life for himself and not get tied down looking after his younger siblings. Maybe Jenny Shaw had a word in his ear too!

With John away and Ken home, Whitfield's life once again slowly settled down. With six children to bring up Whitfield and Jenny Shaw were very busy. Whit provided well for his family, both by earning well and by being largely self-sufficient with hens for fresh eggs and a large and productive vegetable garden.



Whit and Jenny

After all the children had grown up and left home and married, and with old age catching up with them, Whitfield, now seventy-nine years old, sold 8 Sherwood Street in mid 1977. He and Jenny (Nan) moved north to a smaller home at 150 Taupo Road, in Taumarunui, where his two youngest sons, Brent and Ken, were then living.

On the 22nd May 1978 Whitfield was devastated to receive the news that his son Paul Whitfield Forster had been killed in a car accident at the age of thirty-seven, leaving his young daughter-in-law, Elizabeth, a widow and four of his grandsons without a father.

Paul had made contact with Clifford Forster in England the year before and after Paul's death Clifford had tried to contact Whit. Whit's solicitor, W.V. (Bill) Gazley urged Whit to write a will, which Whit finally did on the 25th November 1978.



Clifford Forster (1981)

Bill Gazley had had a long association with Whit going back probably forty years. Bill was both a business associate and Whit's solicitor. It is fair to say that it was a mutually beneficial association: Whit gave Bill advice on what shares to buy and sell, and in return Bill looked after Whit's legal affairs.

In early 1981 Whit received news from Clifford in England that Hannah Forster (*née* Carr) had died on the 6th February 1981, aged 79 years.

Jenny, 'Nan' Shaw was by now suffering from emphysema and her health was slowly deteriorating. She was admitted to Taumarunui Hospital in 1980 for permanent care. Whit found it increasingly difficult to manage on his own and, in 1981, sold the house at 150 Taupo Road, Taumarunui, and moved to Palmerston North to live in a self-contained flat at his eldest daughter, Claudia's house. Once again Jenny and Whit were parted. Jenny died at the age of eighty on the 8th September 1981. She and Whit had been together for thirty-one years. They had been lifelong friends and great companions. At Nan's request, her ashes were sent back to Seaham, England, to be buried with her parents, in Princess Road Cemetery, Princess Road, Seaham – the same cemetery that Whit's parents are buried in. Once again there is no headstone.

When Jenny died, Whit said, “My anchor’s gone, my anchor’s gone”, which alluded to a song he was often heard to quote – “Will your anchor hold in the storms of life?” He had surely had more than his fair share of storms throughout his life.

With his anchor gone Whitfield’s health deteriorated rapidly and, after a short stay in Palmerston North Hospital, he died just four months after Jenny on the 26th January 1982, aged 83 years. The cause of death was recorded as carcinoma of the stomach (stomach cancer). He was cremated at Kelvin Grove, Palmerston North, and his ashes are buried at Levin Cemetery, with Phyllis.

In spite of all the tragedies throughout his life Whit maintained a sense of humour and enjoyed a joke and especially a practical joke. He dismissed stupid behaviour of others with the comment “There’s nowt (nothing) so queer as folk.” He was a hard worker and was extremely good at managing his money. On managing one’s affairs his solution was again simple: “Keep your overheads underfoot.” If he did not agree with someone’s actions, rather than criticise he would simply say “Everyone knows their own know best.”

Whit was extremely proud of all his children and even more proud of his grandchildren. He used to joke that he could not go back to England because he had a record, and he could not become a New Zealander until he lost his Geordie accent. There was an element of truth in the first, and he never did lose his accent!!

As for the children of Whitfield ...

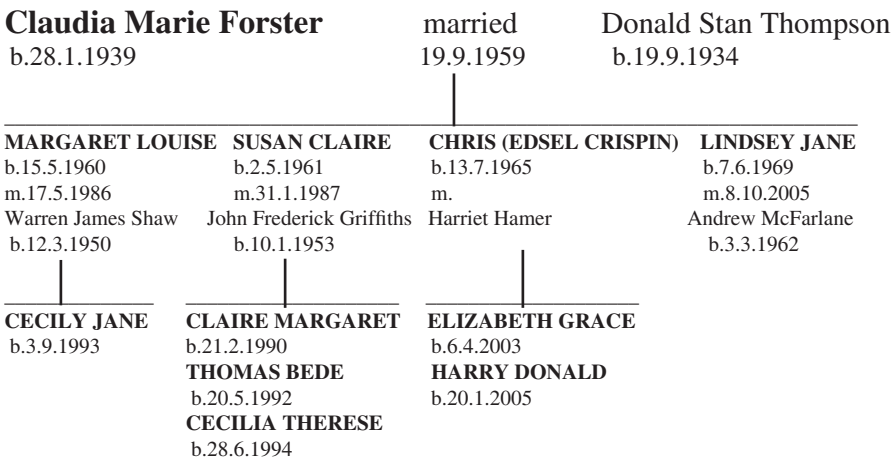
John Forster, (12.3.1927 – 23.9.1982), was the only child of Whitfield Forster and Audrey Partridge. He was born in Napier on the 12th March 1927 and was christened John Partridge. He spent his early years at 25 Omar Street, Khandallah, Wellington, and attended Khandallah Primary School. His mother Audrey died when he was just four years old and he was then to share his time between Omar Street and Ngata Street in Palmerston North where his grandmother Elizabeth Ann (Annie) Partridge was renting a house. Whit and Phyllis Forster adopted John on the 19th

October 1934. (Phyllis was Audrey's younger sister and she and Whit were married in August 1934.) In 1936 the family moved to 8 Sherwood Street, Lower Hutt. John's education continued first at Eastern Hutt Primary School and then Hutt Valley High School. On leaving school John trained as a teacher at Wellington Teachers Training College. He then taught at various schools, Waiwhetu Primary, Rauamoia out of Te Awamutu (Country Service), and Karori Normal. In 1951 he went to America and stayed with his Aunt Stella Kokenderfer (*née* Hesketh, Audrey and Phyllis's step sister), where he completed a university degree in sociology. He then moved to Hawaii to do his Masterate. It was here where he met and married Nora Chan. John and Nora had three children, Janet born 2nd August 1957, Paul Whitfield born 22nd July 1959, and Carol born 18th July 1965. John's career saw him move several times, first to Berkley, California, then to St Paul, Minnesota. From there he returned to New Zealand in 1965 to work at Victoria University in Wellington. It was while in New Zealand that his youngest daughter Carol was born. The family then moved to Edmonton, Alberta, Canada where John became Dean of the Graduate Department at Edmonton University. John died in Edmonton on the 23rd September 1982, aged 55 years, after a long battle with bowel cancer.



Claudia Marie Forster, was born at the Avon (Maternity) Hospital, 12 Penrose Street, Lower Hutt on the 28th January 1939, and lived at 8 Sherwood Street, Lower Hutt. She was educated at Eastern Hutt Primary School, Hutt Intermediate and Hutt Valley High School. On leaving school Claudia first took a job with the Bank of New Zealand as a Junior Assistant. This was only ever going to be a temporary job, as Claudia wanted to be

a nurse but was too young. As soon as she was the required age she got a job as a trainee nurse at Lower Hutt Hospital where she graduated in 1959. One of her nursing friends was Cecily Thompson and it was through her that Claudia met her husband to be. On the 19th September 1959 Claudia married Cecily's brother, Donald Stan Thompson. Donald was the son of Edward and Louise Thompson, dairy farmers from Foxton, and was born on the 19th September 1934. Claudia and Don had four children, Margaret Louise on the 15th May 1960, Susan Claire on the 2nd May 1961, Edsel Crispin (Chris) on the 13th July 1965, and Lindsey Jane on the 7th June 1969. Don's job took him south to Otematata where he worked on the Benmore Dam for the Benmore Power Project. Claudia and Don's two eldest daughters were born at Otematata. The family then moved north to Foxton where Don farmed his father's farm, and the two younger children were born. The next move was to 22 Manson Street, Palmerston North where Don first worked for Poultry Research and later for the Wanganui Catchment Board. Claudia re-trained as a teacher and later opened an antiquarian bookshop in Palmerston North that she ran until her retirement in 2004. Don and Claudia moved to a new house at 14 Sierra Court, Palmerston North, in 2001. Don finally retired in 2009 at the age of 74!



Paul Whitfield Forster, (4.10.1940 – 22.5.1978), was born at the Avon (Maternity) Hospital, 12 Penrose Street, Lower Hutt on the 4th October 1940, and lived at 8 Sherwood Street, Lower Hutt. He was educated at Eastern Hutt Primary School, Hutt Intermediate, and Hutt Valley High School. He was a keen rugby player and continued playing after he left school for Hutt Old Boys. On leaving school Paul took on a joinery apprenticeship with Grimes, Browning and Horler Joinery in Naenae, a trade that he excelled at. When he finished his apprenticeship he did further studies and qualified as a Master Builder, and was self-employed for several years building many houses around the Whitby, Plimmerton and Paremata areas. On the 15th July 1961 Paul married Elizabeth Ann Burdan, the eldest daughter of a sheep and cattle station (St Albans) owner from Coast Road, Wainuiomata, Eric James Burdan and his wife Noreen Marjory. Paul and Elizabeth had five children in all, sadly their first child, and only daughter, was stillborn. The eldest boy, David Whitfield, was born on the 19th April 1963, next was Phillip Eric on the 18th November 1964, and followed by Shaun Malcolm on the 8th August 1968 and finally Eric James on the 10th June 1971. Paul built a lovely home at 28 Taupo Crescent in Plimmerton with magnificent views out over the beach and sea. Later the family moved to another new home at 13 Spey Place, Papakowhai, and Paul took a job as a salesman for Industrial Steel and Plant in Petone, selling tower cranes, large machinery and ERF trucks. Tragically Paul's life was cut short when he was killed in a motor accident while driving home from work on the 22nd May 1978, at just 37 years of age.

Paul Whitfield Forster

b.4.10.1940 – d.22.5.1978

married

15.7.1961

Elizabeth Ann Burdan

b.15.10.1941

m2. 25.8.1985

Vinzenz Richard Steinbauer

b.12.2.1934 – d.6.11.2008

DAVID WHITFIELD

b.19.4.1963

m.3.6.1989

Carole Gail Scrivener

b.24.8.1965

PHILLIP ERIC

b.18.11.1964

d.19.10.2006

No Issue

SHAUN MALCOLM

b.8.8.1968

m.21.10.1989

Tracey Anne Perry

b.6.12.1969

ERIC JAMES

b.10.6.1971

m.27.3.2005

Malenya Jane Taylor

b.17.5.1974

BRADD WHITFIELD

b.1.10.1996

TAINE MICHAEL

b.8.7.1998

KATE HANNAH MOANA

b.13.7.2000

JACOB PAUL

b.14.5.1990

DANIEL ROBERT THOMAS

b.14.12.2000

HANNAH LOUISE

b.13.3.2004

ELLA LOUISE

b.19.5.1999

SARAH LEANNE

b.28.5.2002

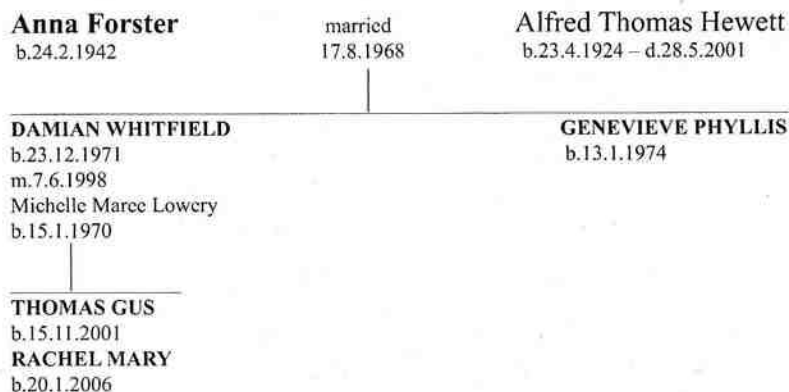
PENELOPE JANE

b.6.2.2007

AMANDA MARIE

b.8.1.2009

Anna Forster, was born at the Avon (Maternity) Hospital, 12 Penrose Street, Lower Hutt on the 24th February 1942, and lived at 8 Sherwood Street, Lower Hutt. She was educated at Eastern Hutt Primary School, Hutt Intermediate, and Hutt Valley High School. Anna trained as a shorthand typist and worked in the Education Department until 1962 when she travelled to England where she spent three years working and touring. She returned to New Zealand in 1965 and attended Wellington Teachers College graduating in 1967. Anna taught in Lower Hutt and Wellington. While walking the Milford Track Anna met Alfred Thomas Hewett and they were married on the 17th August 1968, at 8 Sherwood Street. They were to live in Christchurch and it was here that their son Damian Whitfield was born on the 23rd December 1971. Their second child was a daughter, Genevieve Phyllis, born on the 13th January 1974. The family then moved north to Ohau where Anna was teaching and Alf worked in Levin. Later the family moved to 2 Thomas Hook Street, Linden, near Wellington and then to 16 Harvard Grove, Totara Park, Upper Hutt. Alf died on the 28th May 2001 and Anna rented the house out and went to England to work for a few years returning in 2007.



Brent Vincent Forster, was born at the Avon (Maternity) Hospital, 12 Penrose Street, Lower Hutt, on the 30th November 1943, and lived at 8 Sherwood Street, Lower Hutt. He was educated at Eastern Hutt Primary School, Hutt Intermediate and Hutt Valley High School. On leaving school Brent took on a plumbing apprenticeship with E.A. Bailey Plumbing in Lower Hutt. In 1961, at age 18, Brent followed his dream and became a

farm worker for Barry Plimmer. This job was almost to cost Brent his life when he had a terrible accident while operating a tractor. It rolled down a bank and crushed Brent on the way down. His pelvis was shattered and he had serious internal injuries. Nobody expected him to survive and certainly not to walk again. He proved us all wrong and when he recovered he worked in the clerical sector of the Department of Agriculture at their Head Office in Wellington. He transferred to the Horticultural Research Centre in Levin and spent the next six years between the Research Centre and Massey University where he earned a Diploma in Horticulture. He returned to the Research Centre as a technician in plant and pest diseases where he developed a lifelong interest in this area.

In 1970 Brent trained as a teacher at Palmerston North Teachers College where he met his wife to be, Valerie Jean Watkins. Valerie, (born on the 9th November 1950), was also a teacher and they were married on the 4th September 1971 in Palmerston North. They first lived in a house Brent had purchased at 136 Cook Street, Palmerston North. It was also while at training college that Brent met Graham and Alice Keen. Graham was a land-use advisor to the King's Hill Tribe Project in Thailand. The project needed a Horticultural Advisor and this was Brent and Val's first sojourn as volunteers. In 1973 Brent was given a collection of native Thai orchids as a token of gratitude for his work and this was the start of a lifelong passion for orchids. Brent and Val returned to New Zealand in 1973 where they taught at Manunui, just south of Taumarunui in the King Country. Here they built their dream home at 116 Miro Street, Manunui. It was set on a small acreage and they built two glasshouses to house Brent's growing collection of orchids and a large shed. They established Microtech (NZ) involving micro-propagation and plant tissue culture and started breeding deciduous azaleas.

Brent and Val had two sons, Duncan Rhys Forster born on the 13th October 1977 and Warren Ashley born on the 15th April 1979. In 1986 they moved to Tauhei, just out of Hamilton, where they took teaching positions. In 1987 Brent and Val took an opportunity to work for N.Z. Volunteer Service Abroad in East New Britain, Papua New Guinea. In 1989 civil war erupted in Bougainville and Brent and Val went to England for a year's teaching. They returned to New Zealand in 1990 and taught in Palmerston North before returning to the Pacific to teach briefly in Honiara in the Solomon Islands, eventually settling in Townsville, Australia. Here the boys attended

Secondary School, Brent was teaching and Val was an Education Officer for the Prison Service. In 1997 they came back to New Zealand and in 1998 went to teach in Buka, North Solomon's for a year before going to work for the United Nations in Bougainville. It was then back to Townsville and in 2002 to England for eighteen months teaching. They returned to New Zealand in 2003 and retired from teaching to live in the warmer climate of Northland. In 2006 they returned to Townsville where they purchased a home with their eldest son Duncan.

Brent Vincent Forster

b.30.11.1943

married

4.9.1971

Valerie Jean Watkins

b.9.11.1950

DUNCAN RHYS

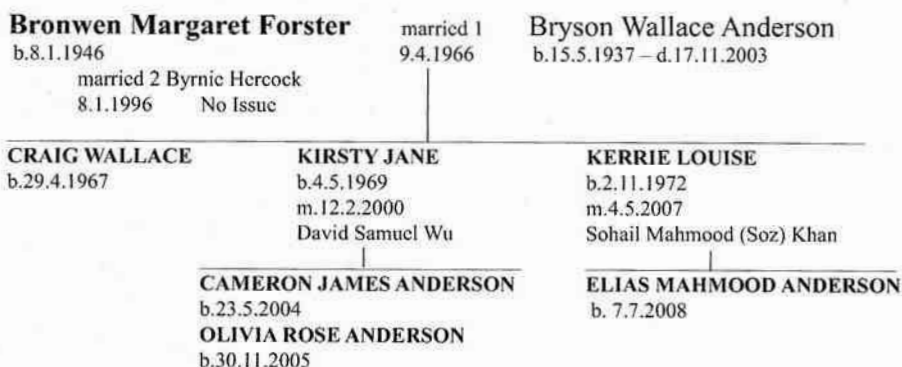
b.13.10.1977

WARREN ASHLEY

b.15.4.1979

Bronwen Margaret Forster, was born at the Avon (Maternity) Hospital, 12 Penrose Street, Lower Hutt, on the 8th January 1946, and lived at 8 Sherwood Street, Lower Hutt. She was educated at Eastern Hutt Primary School, Hutt Intermediate and Hutt Valley High School. Bronwen had one ambition in life, and that was to be a teacher. This was influenced by a very special teacher she had during her time at Eastern Hutt Primary School by the name of Mrs Robinson. On leaving school she trained as a teacher at Wellington Teachers Training College graduating in 1964 and taking up a teaching position in Levin. It was here that Bronwen met Bryson Wallace Anderson, a fellow teacher in Levin. Bryson was born in Palmerston North on the 15th May 1937. They were married at St James Church in Lower Hutt on the 9th April 1966. They had three children, Craig Wallace on the 29th April 1967, Kirsty Jane on the 4th May 1969 and Kerrie Louise on the 2nd November 1972. The family moved several times following job opportunities for both Bryson and Bronwen and they first lived in the Koputaroa schoolhouse while teaching in Levin. Their jobs then took them to Raumai (north of Ashurst), Taupo, Waituna West (north of Feilding), and Feilding where Bronwen purchased a house. After obtaining a divorce from Bryson, Bronwen moved to 1 Rodney Avenue, Te Horo, right on the beach. On the 8th January 1996, on her 50th birthday, Bronwen married John Byrne (Byrnie) Hercock. Bernie later suffered major health problems and in 2003 moved to a flat in Otaki. Bronwen's first husband, Bryson Wallace Anderson died from cancer on the 17th November 2003. In June 2005

Bronwen sold her Te Horo house and moved to 6 Kenef Road, Paremata. In 2006 she moved again to 37 Bolton Street, Petone and is still teaching (in 2009) and loves the job as much as ever.



Kenneth Garry Forster, (the author), was born at the Avon (Maternity) Hospital, 12 Penrose Street, Lower Hutt, on the 12th August 1949, and lived at 8 Sherwood Street, Lower Hutt. He was educated at Eastern Hutt Primary School, Hutt Intermediate and Hutt Valley High School. He left school in 1967 and took a job with the NIMU Insurance Company in Wellington. To Ken it was just a job and he could not see himself shuffling pieces of paper around for the rest of his life!! After about six months he headed off on his big OE – to Australia by boat!! He returned in 1969 and took a temporary job as a truck driver while he looked for a ‘decent job’: he had been told by his high school sweetheart’s father that he could marry her if he got one. He then went to work for the New Zealand Geological Survey, a job that was very exciting and that he loved, out in the field with the surveyors and travelling all over New Zealand, often by helicopter.

On the 7th February 1970 he married his sweetheart, Judith Lorraine Richards, (who was born on the 16th November 1950), the youngest daughter of Neal Maclean and Grace Patricia (Trix) Richards, of 69 Whites Line East, Lower Hutt. Sadly Judy’s father had died from a massive heart attack just six months earlier on the 20th July 1969. Ken and Judy rented a house at 133 Normandale Road, Lower Hutt. On the 13th August 1970 Ken

and Judy's first son was born in Lower Hutt Hospital. He was named Ian Maclean Forster. With a young wife and a baby Ken realised that his job took him away from home too often so he went to work for Todd Motors as a computer operator – and the pay was better too! In February 1971 Ken and Judy purchased their first home, at 42 Lees Grove, Wainuiomata.

On the 14th July 1972 their second son, Murray Whitfield Forster, was born at Lower Hutt Hospital. They were then to move to 26 Ocean Road, Paekakariki, when Todd Motors moved their factory to Porirua in 1973. Judy and Ken had often dreamed of living in the country and in December 1975 they moved to Taumarunui where they purchased a small sheep and cattle farm and Ken got a job with the Taumarunui County Council running their computer. The farm was in Echolands Road and Ken and Judy rented a house from the Council at 22 Makere Street while they built a new house on the farm. Ian and Murray attended Matapuna Primary School. In 1980 Ken resigned from the Council and purchased a double Rural Mail Contract, RD1 and RD2 Owhango and a milk delivery contract. Ken and Judy built the business up to a stage where it was really too much so they split it in half and sold half – then proceeded to add a freight business to National Park and the Chateau and a franchise for New Zealand Couriers. Again the business had grown too big and Judy had taken a job as 'Girl Friday' at the local radio station. So the second rural delivery run was sold and Ken picked up an Education Board school bus run that fitted in well with the courier business.

In 1984 the family moved to Hamilton, primarily for the benefit of the children's education. Judy managed to get a transfer with Radio New Zealand so the farm and businesses were sold and a new home was purchased at 2 Perendale Drive, Hamilton. Ken started a career in Real Estate and, as he was determined not to work until he died, set about investing in real estate culminating in the development of the Flagstaff Shopping Centre in 1992 and the Flagstaff Community Police Station in 1997. On the housing front they had also been busy, selling Perendale Drive and moving to 38 Pulham Crescent which they subdivided and built a new home on the rear section of and consequently changed address to 62 Herbert Road. They had also purchased a beach house at 507 Ocean Road, Whangamata, that they moved to the back of the section and built a new beach house on the front. In 1994 Ken decided to semi-retire and they sold Herbert Road and moved to Whangamata, leaving both the boys in

their own homes in Hamilton. At the end of 1996 Judy and Ken returned to Hamilton and built a new home on five hectares (twelve and a half acres) at 258 Vaile Road just out of Hamilton City. In 1998 Ken and Judy sold the Flagstaff development and fully retired!! In 2006 they moved to Alandale, a lifestyle village in Hamilton, which gives them the freedom to enjoy their retirement which they spend travelling all over New Zealand in both their 1928 Ford Model A vintage vehicles and their Mazda MX5 sports car, travelling overseas and enjoying their grandchildren.

Kenneth Garry Forster
b.12.8.1949

married
7.2.1970

Judith Lorraine Richards
b.16.11.1950

IAN MACLEAN
b.13.8.1970
Partner
Ursula Hafliger
b.24.2.1964

MURRAY WHITFIELD
b.14.7.1972
Partner
Maria Dianna Smith
b.8.11.1971

TOBY MACLEAN
b.2.2.2003
GINA THERES
b.30.1.2005
MAX HERRMANN
b.7.1.2010

ABBY GRACE
b.25.8.2006
LIAM JON
b.7.4.2009

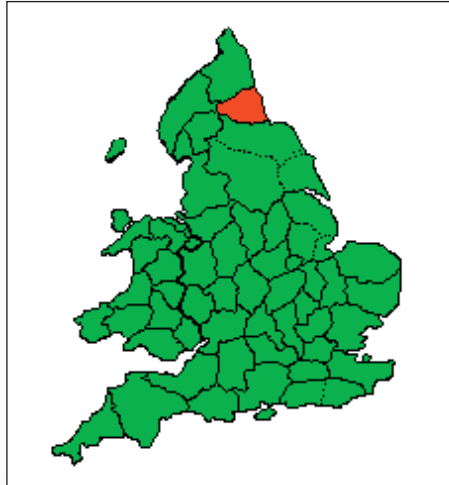
KEEP YOR FEET STILL

*Keep yor feet still Geordie Hinney
Let's be happy for the neet
For Aa may nit be so happy thro' the day.
So give us that bit of comfort keep yor feet still Geordie lad
And dinnet drive me bonny dreams away.*



Forster family members at Whitfield Forster's 100th birthday anniversary (held on the 6th December 1998) including five of his children, nine of his grandchildren and three of his great-grandchildren.

APPENDIX II



England – Showing County Durham



The area of County Durham relating to this story, showing the towns and villages mentioned

APPENDIX III

Every effort has been made to ensure the details in this story are as accurate as possible. Where exact dates and or facts are stated they have been verified from among the following sources:

Durham County Record Office.
Durham University Archives - Bishop's Transcripts.
Roger Norris - Durham University.
Michael Richardson - Author, Gilesgate, Durham.
Various Sunderland Solicitors - Title Deeds.
The Family Records Centre, London - Birth, Death and Marriage
Certificates, Censuses.
Principal Registry Family Division, London.
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If any person has any information or photographs that they feel may add to, enhance, or enlighten aspects of this story in any way could they please contact the author.

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