

Notes on Joseph Baker and Harriet née Brooker

(Great-grandparents of Daphne, Laurence, Glenys and Lynette Hay)

Joseph Baker christened: 10 Sep 1837, Hunton, Kent, England.

Harriet Brooker born: 18 February 1842, Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

Married: 1 Jan 1862, St Philip's, Maidstone, Kent.

Arrived in NZ: 12 February 1875, Port Chalmers, in 'Gareloch'.

Children: Albert, 24 February 1863, Maidstone
Ellen Eliza, 15 March 1868, Linton, Kent.
William George, 10 October 1869, Linton.
Louisa Florence, 21 October 1871, Linton; died 21 Dec 1874, at sea.
Fanny, 21 July 1873, Linton.
Martha, 12 February 1876, Oamaru, Otago, New Zealand.
*Edith, 21 March 1878, Oamaru.

Harriet Baker née Brooker died: 12 Sep 1889, Oamaru.

Joseph Baker died: 16 May 1913, Oamaru.

*Grandmother of Daphne, Laurence, Glenys and Lynette Hay.

Joseph Baker's birth and parents

Joseph Baker was born in the parish of Hunton, Kent, England, and christened in the parish church, St Mary the Virgin, on 10 September 1837, the youngest of the seven children of John Baker, agricultural labourer, and his wife Harriet (born in January 1803 at Yalding, Kent, the daughter of Charlton and Ann Reader). John and Harriet had married at Mereworth, Kent on 3 January 1825. Their other children, Joseph's older siblings, were (with christening dates): John, 9 March 1825; Charlton, 20 May 1827; Harriet, 29 November 1829; Mary Anne, 28 June 1831; William, 24 January 1833; and Eliza, 5 March 1836.

Joseph's father John had been born in Hunton on 21 October 1799, the eldest child and only son of John Baker and Elizabeth née Turner of a Hunton family. The other children of John and Elizabeth were Jemima born 7 May 1801; Caroline, 2 July 1803; Louisa, 21 May 1806; Mary Anne, 11 January 1809; and Eliza, 18 September 1811. The names seem rather grandiose for the daughters of a poor labourer, but 'Jemima', the name of Elizabeth's mother, must have set the standard.

John Baker, Joseph's father, died (of 'Inflammation!'), aged 38, on 11 March 1838, the year after Joseph's birth. Harriet would be known as 'Widow' Baker for the rest of her long life.

In the census of 6 June 1841 Harriet and her young family are listed as living in Coxheath, a village in the north of the parish, possibly where she and John had lived since their marriage. Harriet's occupation is given on the census form as 'Ag Lab Widw'. This could indicate simply that she was the widow of an agricultural labourer, but is more likely to mean that she herself was labouring on a farm – no occupations

are listed for any of her seven children, all still living at home, from John aged 15 to Joseph aged 3.

Harriet lived on at Coxheath for the rest of her life, the children leaving home one by one until, in the 1871 census, she is shown as living alone, a pauper (i.e. supported by the parish). She is still there in 1881. Harriet Baker née Reader died in 1890 aged 87 years.

Joseph Baker's paternal grandparents

Joseph's grandfather John, was born on 23 June 1775 in the village of Marden, eight kms or so south of Hunton. There were a good number of Baker families in Marden, but John seems to have been the first of that surname in Hunton when he moved there, probably in the 1790s, to take up employment. He was, like his son after him, a farm worker, and spent the rest of his life in the service of Joseph Duddy, a large landowner in the Hunton parish. Invoices issued in 1832 and 1833 at a time when Joseph Duddy was a churchwarden include payments to 'Baker' for working in the churchyard; two shillings a day seemed to be the going rate for such menial work.

The tithe apportionment survey of Hunton, undertaken in 1838, shows John Baker occupying a cottage owned by Mr Duddy, and the 1851 census indicates that John, aged 75, a pauper and blind, was still living in the cottage then, with his wife, Elizabeth, 79, and their daughter Jemima Clarke, 41, widow, a dressmaker. Elizabeth died on 8 March 1853, while John survived for another eight years, until 28 April 1861; they are buried together in the Hunton churchyard along with their son John (Joseph's father) and daughter Mary Anne.

It is possibly an indication of the respect in which John and Elizabeth were held that a solid headstone was erected over their grave (by Mr Duddy?) with the inscription:

In memory of Elizabeth wife of John Baker of this parish died March 8th 1853 aged 82 years. Also the above-named John Baker died April 28th 1861 aged 86 years. Left issue 5 daughters. Near this place lieth the body of John Baker, only son [of the above Joh]n Baker, die[d....] Mary [Anne Baker] died September [....]

Hunton

What was Hunton like in the late 18th century when John Baker walked the six or so kilometres from Marden to begin his new life in the village? The rector of Hunton (also bishop of Chester) at that time was one Beilby Porteus. In the summer of 1784 a visitor to the Hunton rectory wrote, describing the view from his bedroom window:

I do not see a single speck of ground that is not in the highest degree cultivated. The lawns in the neighbourhood, the hop grounds, the rich verdure of the trees and their infinite variety, form a scene so picturesque and luxuriant, that it is not easy to fancy anything finer.... O traffic-free roads! We see neither travellers nor carriages, and indeed hardly anything in motion; which conveys such an idea of peace and quiet as I think I was never conscious of before.

The bishop obviously felt the same, as each summer for 20 years he returned to Hunton from Chester, and on finally having to give up the Hunton living (when he became bishop of London) he was deeply regretful.

Concerning the people of Hunton, both Bishop Porteus and his visitor speak highly of the 'small but select' group of gentry, and the visitor records that nowhere else

had he seen 'so little appearance of poverty, and such indications of competence and satisfaction in the countenance and appearance of the common people, as in this part of Kent'. The bishop concurs:

Most of the farmers were in easy and many in affluent circumstances,... [while the cottages of the farm labourers] were most of them comfortable, neat and white, in the midst of a little garden or orchard which supplied them with vegetables, enabled them to keep a pig, and supplied them with apples sufficient to pay their rent. Some of them even aspiring to the dignity of keeping a cow.... I believe no peasants in any part of England live more comfortably or experience less distress.

We have no record, however, of what the farm labourers thought of their cottages or of their employers, or, indeed, of Bishop Porteous and the local gentry!

Whatever the case in the 1780s, matters changed for the worse during the next decade. From 1787 to 1802 the rector of Hunton was Rev'd Lord George Murray (a son of the Duke of Atholl) who noted in the parish register that the high price of staple foods was causing hardship in the area. Probably the disruption to trade by the French Revolution and the wars that followed can be blamed. In 1789 Lord George recorded that there were 81 houses in the village and a total of 474 inhabitants.

The next rector, Rev'd Robert Moore, held the Hunton living for 63 years. As the son of an archbishop of Canterbury he managed to gather for himself three lucrative church livings bringing in a total of £9,000 per year (as against an average of £32 for a labourer). For his greed, laziness and hardness of heart Robert Moore was roundly denounced by *The Times* of London – apparently to no effect.

The 'Swing' riots

As the 19th century progressed, the living standard of farm workers steadily decreased, over-population plus the introduction of labour-saving machinery being chiefly to blame – along with the iniquitous 'Speenhamland' poor law system, introduced from 1795, that relieved farmers of the need to pay their labourers a living wage by exacting a rate from all householders to support the pauperised peasants with relief payments or supplies.

In June 1830 the distress of the rural population became acute resulting in a spontaneous outbreak of rioting in Kent, with ricks and barns being burnt and threshing machines destroyed. Threatening letters demanding higher wages were sent to farmers, the letters often being signed 'Captain Swing'. The riots soon spread to the other southern and eastern counties, but were put down with great harshness by the frightened establishment. Whether members of the Baker family were actively involved is not known, but they would certainly have been aware of the disturbances, and no doubt shared to some extent in the depressed circumstances that motivated the rioters.

It is interesting to learn that Edward Gibbon Wakefield, founder of the New Zealand Company, watched rioters in East Anglia, and later wrote:

What is that defective being, with calfless legs and stooping shoulders, weak in body and mind, inert, pusillanimous, and stupid, whose premature wrinkles and furtive glance tell of misery and degradation. That is an English peasant pauper; for the words are synonymous.

Joseph Baker and Harriet Brooker

To return to Joseph Baker: In St Philip's (Anglican) church, Maidstone (not the present building), on 1 January 1862, Joseph, aged 24, married Harriet Brooker of Tunbridge Wells. Both Joseph and Harriet are stated to be living in Tovil Road, Maidstone, at the time, and Joseph is described simply as 'Labourer'. Joseph was able to sign his own name in the marriage register; Harriet merely placed her mark. *[For Harriet's life before her marriage see Notes on Harriet Brooker.]*

Harriet's father is named as James Brooker, 'Fly Driver', possibly the James Brooker of Frant Road, Tunbridge Wells, 'Coach and Fly Proprietors', listed in Bagshaw's 1847 directory of Kent *[but see endnote 1]*.

At some time between the birth of their first child, **Albert**, in February 1863 and their second, **Ellen Eliza** (apparently known as Lilly), in March 1868 the family moved the six or seven kilometres south to the village of Linton, where Joseph was employed as a gardener, probably at Linton Place, the large estate over the road from the semi-detached, two-storied, stone cottage where the family lived. Three more children were born to them in Linton: **William George** on 10 October 1869, **Louisa Florence** on 21 October 1871, and **Fanny** on 21 July 1873 (christened 12 October 1873, Church of England, Linton).

Living conditions

But what was life like for an agricultural labourer at this time? After the poverty and rioting of the 1830s, the 1850s and '60s came to be known as the 'Golden Age' of English agriculture. The demand for food grew with the steady rise of population in the industrial cities. Rollo Arnold comments:

Squires and farmers prospered as never before, but the labourers' share of the wealth they toiled to create increased very little. Socially, the country world remained a class-ridden hierarchy There is ample evidence that the villagers over large areas of England had frequent experience of an empty stomach. This was particularly the case in the 'corn' counties of the south and east of England ... [where] the men had largely become day labourers, taken on as required, and turned off in large numbers in the slack times of the agricultural year, and when wet weather held up farm work

While the villagers craved for meat, they saw the wild creatures about them protected by the Game Laws to provide sport for their 'betters'. Hunger and resentment drove many labourers to flout these class laws [O]ne of the greatest indignities imposed on the labourer was the Poaching Prevention Act of 1862, which gave rural police the right to search without warrant any person whom they suspected of poaching.

Then, from the mid '60s on, returns from arable land fell, and wage rates, particularly in the 'corn' counties, came under strain. At this very time the labourer saw the economic advantages of a large family begin to disappear with the passing of laws prohibiting the employment of children

This simultaneous trend to reduced wages and loss of children's earnings proved to be the trigger for the rising of the agricultural workers of England in what came to be known as the Revolt of the Field, a militant movement that lasted from 1872 to 1879 by which time the farmers had once more gained the upper hand. The two main farm workers' bodies, the National Agricultural Labourers' Union and the Kent and Sussex Labourers' Union, both at various times strongly encouraged and facilitated emigration as a solution to the problems faced by their members – and this at a time

when New Zealand was desperate for just such men, and with Julius Vogel having launched his ambitious scheme to promote migration to the colony.

Migration, and life in Oamaru

The possibility of better prospects in the colonies must have finally persuaded Joseph and Harriet to take the risky and irreversible step of emigrating. So, on 23 November 1874, they boarded the ship 'Gareloch' at Blackwall, London, as a family of assisted immigrants. In her book *The Origins of New Zealand Diplomacy* Raewyn Dalziel describes the situation faced by immigrants even before boarding ship. She writes:

At first Featherston hired depots shared with other colonies. This was inconvenient and unhealthy and with the great increase in the number of immigrants in 1874 New Zealand was forced to lease its own depot at Blackwall, near the docks used by the Shaw Savill and New Zealand Shipping companies. Even then the conditions were never very sanitary. Hundreds of emigrants could be huddled together for days at a time, forced to live in a few square feet of space and exposed to all sorts of diseases which could be later carried on board ship. Later Francis Dillon Bell described the scene as he saw it: 'I don't suppose you ever saw an arrival-day of a cargo of men women girls & children assembled for a ship. Some of 'em swarm with vermin, & have never known what it was to be without lice in their life: others come with itch from head to foot; others smelling of every conceivable ordure. Dont imagine that these things are 'contracted' in the Depot; they are brought there. Yah! It was at times horrible beyond words.'

The voyage of 82 days was marked indelibly for the Bakers by the loss of 3-year-old Louisa to scarlet fever on 21 December 1874. The 'Gareloch' anchored in Port Chalmers on 12 February 1875.

On arrival, all 305 immigrants were transferred to Quarantine Island because of the scarlet fever amongst them. After 10 days in quarantine, they were ferried to Port Chalmers by steamer and from there to the Caversham immigration barracks in Dunedin. The verdict of the *Otago Daily Times* was that 'they appeared to be a healthy, strong, respectable lot of people'!

The Bakers' stay in Caversham was brief, as the very next day, 23 February 1875, 60 new immigrants, including the Baker family, were taken by the steamer 'Comerang' to Oamaru. There Joseph's gardening skills stood him in good stead, and he soon found employment planting trees in the cemetery; he was promoted to the post of sexton on 8 November of that first year. In Oamaru, two further children were born to the Bakers: **Martha** on 12 February 1876 (died 8 July 1934) and finally **Edith** on 21 March 1878.

The 1881 electoral roll gives Joseph Baker's voting qualification as freehold ownership of Section 1, Block 94, Oamaru town (on the western corner of the Test/Mersey streets intersection). By 1882, according to the official *Return of Freeholders*, this land was worth £160. However, the family lived in the sexton's house on the western corner of the Test/Till streets intersection. In 2013 this house was still occupied and in good condition, easily identified by the fancy woodwork edging the steep-pitched roof of the front porch, facing Test Street.

Deaths

On 12 September 1889, Harriet died – of ‘Morbus Cordis’: heart disease – at the age of 49, leaving Joseph with three daughters at home, aged 11, 13, and 16, and possible an older son or two as well. Edith was attending Oamaru South school at this time, having been enrolled there in March 1883. She left school to go to work in February 1892.

Joseph survived his wife by 23 years. He didn’t remarry. Joseph died at home on 16 May 1913, a few hours after suffering a massive stroke. He was 75 years old. Joseph and Harriet are buried together in the Oamaru Cemetery, Block 128, plot 27.

Joseph was buried by Rev Mr Mill of the Baptist chapel. However a very appreciative obituary was published in the Salvation Army’s weekly *War Cry*, speaking of Joseph as ‘one of Oamaru’s best known men’, and ‘a devoted Christian, always ready to speak a word for his Master’. The obituary also mentions that ‘quite a number of the members of our dear old friend’s family are well known salvationists’.

Joseph’s obituary published in the *North Otago Times* of 19 May 1913 tells that

on Friday last he was at work in the Cemetery, and carried home his tools, and died at the end of his journey. In the 37 years that Mr Baker has filled the position of sexton it is estimated that he has assisted to lay to rest a little over 5000 of those who have joined the great majority.... [A]ll through his long period of usefulness at the cemetery he has given reverent care to the solemn duties of his office.

Though one must add that, judging by the difficulty of now finding specific grave sites, his organisation of the cemetery left something to be desired.

Was it worth it?

Had that risky and costly decision to migrate to New Zealand been worth it for Joseph Baker? In monetary terms, the answer must surely be ‘yes’: on his death he left liquid assets to the value of £1,576 – a princely sum. And ‘yes’ also in terms of job satisfaction and personal dignity: Joseph quickly found secure and congenial employment which allowed him a fair degree of independence of action and carried with it some status in the small community to which he now belonged. The fact that he could publish an entry for himself, complete with photograph, in the 1904 *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* (Vol.4, p.551) is testimony to the confidence and self-respect he had gained by living in a society where class distinctions were few and fudged, and a man was as good as his master.

Endnote 1: re the name of Harriet’s father.

The father of Harriet Baker née Brooker is identified by three different personal names:

- in Harriet’s and Joseph’s marriage register entry of 1862 (and elsewhere) her father is identified as ‘James Brooker, Fly Driver’;
- in Harriet’s death register entry of 1889 (with information provided presumably by Joseph) her father is ‘Stephen Brooker, Cab. Proprietor’. (Also, this entry identifies Harriet’s mother as Ellen.); and
- in Joseph’s entry in the 1904 *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* Harriet’s father is named as ‘the late Mr William Brooker of Kent’.

As reliable documentation makes clear, Harriet's parents were, in fact, James and Lucy Brooker. The confusion is due to memory lapses on Joseph's part – understandable, in that both James and Lucy had died by 1851 and Joseph didn't meet Harriet until 1861, and then far from her home.

Endnote 2: re Jemima Baker

The life story of Jemima, Joseph Baker's aunt, is full of sadness – but is not, I imagine, uncommon for the time. An entry dated 5 March 1828 in the Hunton parish register of baptisms reads: 'Sales Charlton Clark, son of Jemima Baker, Single woman' [*sic*]; Jemima was 27 years old at the time. The stigma of having borne an illegitimate child was not, I would think, fully erased by her soon marrying Joseph Clarke, the child's father. Possibly only Jemima's bold act of giving her child the father's surname shamed him into marriage – if so, not a good start. The wedding took place on 16 March 1828 in the village of Leigh, north of Tunbridge Wells – a long way from home.

By the time of the 1841 census Joseph Clarke had died – or at least was no longer in Hunton. Jemima, with 'Silles', is listed as living with her parents in their small cottage: two aged paupers (one blind), a widow and a 13-year-old fatherless boy.

The next sad episode in this story is recorded on a tomb-stone in Hunton churchyard:

In memory of SILLS CHARLTON CLARKE son of Joseph and Jemima Clarke of this parish. Died March 31st 1855 aged 27 years. Left a lone mother to deplore the loss of her only child and most faithful son.

We next hear of Jemima six years later. On the night of the 1861 census, Jemima (mis-transcribed on-line as **Semima**), designated as 'Servt – formerly Dressmaker', was alone in Tovil House, in the hamlet of Tovil, west of Maidstone. Her blind and now widowed father, aged 86, was also alone that night, in Hunton in his West Street cottage. The old man died three weeks later, Jemima herself dying on 7 September the next year (1862), aged 61 years, to be buried with her beloved son.