

Will the real William Henshall please stand up?

By Paul Tubb



Henshall Basket (first period)

As most of you know by now, I have an interest in census returns arising from the use I can make of them whilst pursuing our family history. My wife Pat suggested that we use our current subscription to ancestry.co.uk to look for information on the various people who went over to Belleek from Stoke in the early years of our pottery. This website allows searches to be made of all the UK census returns from 1861 to 1901 inclusive, through an index which, in spite of some quite peculiar spellings engendered by the indexers, should enable us to follow a person or family through these fifty years at ten year intervals, provided of course that they remain within England or Wales. This availability saves us from having to visit the Family Records Centre in London to wind on the microfilm in the hope of finding the entries we need, which is how we have found most of our family history records in the past. The index, even given its quirks and inaccuracies, enables the kind of searches we have made about the Stoke potters to be done much more quickly and inexpensively.

We used the list of names from Lady Marion Langham's book and the brief details of their lives that we could glean from that and other sources. We have not yet exhausted all such names and decided to firstly concentrate on the better known names such as Henshall, Gallimore, Slater, Poole etc. It is with the first of these that this article is concerned – there will be more about the others later. Suffice it to say that we have found some references to William Gallimore, Frederick Slater, Joshua Poole, Samuel Scarlett, William Bromley and William Henry Kerr which we will flesh out further for later articles.

We know that William Henshall was alive and living in Belleek at the time of the 1901 census with his wife Elizabeth. Also, their daughter Rose was living next door and married to the pottery kilnman, Patrick Montgomery, who was a native of Fermanagh. William gives his age as 55 and Rose hers as 30 and all three say they were born in England. The rubric with the census did not ask for anything more specific than just the country if a person was born outside of Ireland. These ages led us immediately to the 1871 census on the reasonable assumption that if Rose were born in England it was a pretty fair bet that both William and Elizabeth were there too.

And so it proved for, living at 15 Granville Place, Burslem in 1871, were William Henshall aged 25, Elizabeth Henshall aged 24 and their daughter Rose aged 6 months. William's occupation is given as a Parian Figure Maker and Elizabeth's as a Painter. [Who said Victorian mothers did not work?]. Rose was born in Cobridge and Elizabeth in Hanley but the surprise and the real genesis of this article is that William gives his place of birth as Wales.

On then, to the 1861 census, and there is no sign of a William Henshall of the right age in Staffordshire and born in Wales. There are two 'possibles' for being our William and of the right age. There is a William Henshall aged 16 living at New Church Row, Longton with his father, also William, a Potter and mother, Hannah, a China Painter. This William's occupation is given as a 'Potter Presser' and he is said to have been born in Tunstall. There is also another 16 year old William Henshall living as a boarder with his sister Catherine in the house of Ephraim Locker at Swan Passage, 2 Dale Street, Hanley. This William is described as a 'Working Potter' and born in Hanley. Ephraim is a 'Potter's Decorator of China' and his daughter and Catherine are said to be 'Potter's Burnishers of China'.

So, what about Wales? The 1861 census of Llanelli, Carmarthenshire lists yet another 16 year old William Henshall living at Pottery Place, Pottery Road and born in Llanelli. He lives with his widowed mother who is aged 39 and was born in Haverfordwest, an elder brother, Joseph, also born in Llanelli and a 'Potter Hollow Ware Presser' and three younger sisters the eldest of which was born in Burslem, Staffordshire. William's occupation is said to be 'Attendant in Pottery'.

Before leaving this family to concentrate on William I should record that the elder brother, Joseph, remained in Llanelli and working in the pottery through all the subsequent census returns. He married a local girl, Caroline, and they had eight children, the last two probably twins. By the 1891 and 1901 census returns a question was being asked about which languages each person could speak and all the family, apart from 19 year old Bessie, one of the twins, admitted to speaking both Welsh and English. Joseph, therefore, looks to have become thoroughly at home in South Wales which was, after all, his birthplace. In 1901 two of his children are also working in the pottery the others as teachers, a hairdresser and a manageress of a confectioners. His eldest son, Frederick, married at Llanelli in 1894 to a girl born in Tunstall.

Llanelli pottery was in production between 1839 and 1922 and, like many others including Belleek, seems to have gone to Stoke to recruit skilled workers. On the page of the census recording William are 25 names, seven of which are recorded as being born in the potteries. Included is the family of Jeremiah Shufflebotham – one of whose descendants, Samuel Shufflebotham, was an important influence in a brief renaissance of Llanelli's fortunes in its later years – and another family of Henshalls whose head, Thomas, may have been William's elder brother, but born in Burslem, and a 'Platemaker in Pottery'. This Thomas had married a local girl from Haverfordwest and is still in Pottery Place ten years later but with six children and a 92 year old grandmother all being supported on his pay as a Potter. By 1881 he and the family are back in Stoke and his occupation is given as 'Pottery Manager'. It is infuriating that none of the Stoke pottery workers give any indication of which pottery employed them. Thomas must have done quite well for himself because in the 1891 census his wife, Sarah, now a widow is living on her own means in Hanley with four of the children all involved in the pottery industry.

Added to these Henshalls there is a Henrietta Henshall aged 20 and born in Burslem lodging further along Pottery Place in the house of Mary Richardson who herself was born in Hanley. Henrietta is a 'Transferer in Pottery'. All these Henshalls are closely connected with the pottery works but George, aged 22 and living in

Furnace, Hengoed, Llanelli is listed as a labourer although also born in Burslem. In subsequent census returns, up to and including 1901, George and his family remain in Llanelli but there is no connection in any of their given occupations between this family and the pottery industry in the town. However their eldest son, John Henshall, did return to the Potteries and married a Burslem girl with whom he was living at the time of the 1881 census in Wolstanton giving his occupation as 'Oil Refiner'. I have not been able to find either John or his wife, Margaret, in any subsequent census.

I think it possible that George, Thomas and Henrietta are all siblings or other close relatives of William. Henrietta helping out another young widow from Stoke is probably quite understandable in the circumstances. All this is, of course, surmise but there is no doubt that the William Henshall, born in Wales and starting his pottery career in Llanelli is a candidate to be the same as the William who married Elizabeth and fathered Rose back in Stoke, said he was born in Wales in the 1871 census return and, eventually, died in Belleek.

Our William married Elizabeth Ferneyhough in the parish church of Wolstanton on November 14th 1864 and both bride and groom are said on the certificate to be living in Silverdale. William gives his father as John Henshall whose profession is Modeller and Elizabeth says her father is George Ferneyhough a Potter. This marriage certificate gives rise to three problems as we seek to reconstruct William's life – firstly why did they wait for six years to begin a family? It could be, of course, that during this time other children were indeed born but died before the next census in 1871 and so were not recorded thereon. There are at least eight Henshall children listed as dying at either 0 or 1 year old between 1865 and 1870 in the registration districts of Wolstanton and Stoke-on-Trent. Or there could have been children born elsewhere – Belleek perhaps? – who remained there when the parents returned to Stoke for Rose's birth in 1870. This latter is unlikely as there is no census evidence of any other children born to William and Elizabeth at this time.

The second and, potentially most difficult, problem arising from the marriage certificate is the name of William's father. None of the three William Henshalls we have been considering and born in 1845 had a father named John. The one born in Tunstall on February 9th 1845 had a father named William; The one born in Llanelli on March 10th 1845 had a father named Joseph; and the one born in Hanley on March 3rd 1845 took his name from his mother Lucy Henshall in the absence of any father being recorded.

Our third problem is that both William and Elizabeth are stated to be "of full age" which at that time meant "over 21". If born in 1845 William was certainly not of full age in November 1864, but maybe sufficiently close for a compliant curate to allow a little license. However Elizabeth consistently gives her age as one year younger than William in the census returns and is only 24 in the 1871 census, 34 in 1881 and 54 in 1901, so that she was most certainly not "of full age" at the time of their marriage. It is not uncommon for ages to be 'elasticated' for a variety of reasons, not always nefarious, so that perhaps we can allow the couple this lapse from strict rectitude. What is certain, however, is that on Ruth's birth certificate her mother is stated to be Elizabeth nee Ferneyhough.

It is difficult at this juncture to be sure which, if any, of the William Henshalls we have been discussing is 'our' William after whom the lovely Belleek basket is named and who, it is said, made most of the flowers on the famous centre piece for the Paris exhibition in 1901. He is buried at Mulleek in the Church of Ireland graveyard there. [Thanks to Brian Russell for this piece of information].



No. 46 Seaford Street, Shelton, Hanley – this is the only one of the many houses mentioned in Stoke which still exists!

The received wisdom about the potteries men who went over to Belleek is that few of them stayed for any great length of time, apart that is from William Henshall. However even he did not stay in Fermanagh initially because in the 1881 UK census he is back in Stoke at 46 Seaford Street, Shelton, Hanley with wife Elizabeth and three children – Rose aged 10 born in Burslem; Albert aged 8 and born in Ireland; William aged 5 and born in Burslem. A fourth child, Ernest, was born in Hanley the following year.

The father, our William, is a China Flowerer, which is exactly what we would expect from what is known of his career at Belleek but, clearly, he had been over to Ireland and returned to Stoke. Did he go in 1863 with the others from Goss? If so, he was back in Wolstanton to marry Elizabeth in November 1864. Was he, indeed, employed at Goss? The visit in the 1870s could not have lasted more than four years and the family may well have come back at the same sort of time as most of the other men. We know that William was back again in Belleek in 1888 and 1897 as he is recorded as being involved in a minor fracas in 1888 and listed as being among the 1897 workforce in John Cunningham's book "The Story of Belleek". He is probably there, too, in 1891 as there is no sign of him in the UK census for that year.

The one doubt is that William now claims to have been born in Hanley! But, he is still married to Elizabeth, the oldest child is Rose and he has spent some time in Ireland. As noted earlier, in the 1901 census of Belleek he says he was born in England.

One thing which seems clear is that skilled workers were able to and encouraged by rival employers to move around the country quite widely. Also, as evidenced in other industries such as the railways at Swindon, Cadbury's at Bourneville and Lever Bros at Port Sunlight, employers built housing for their workforce – I feel fairly sure that Pottery Place and Pottery Road were provided by Llanelli Pottery just as English and Irish Row were provided in Belleek. This was very attractive to workers with young families and a great aid to recruitment. At the same time people did not have to make lifelong and irrevocable decisions, such as those made by emigrants to America or Australia, as travel around the UK became possible with the spread of the railways in mid Victorian times. Henshall clearly took his young family to and from Ireland a number of times as work prospects changed.

The question remains as to which of the 16 year old William Henshalls is our man. I think it is unlikely to be the one who was a Pottery Presser as he is listed in the 1871 census as still a Pottery Presser and married to Alice. If it is the one born in Wales it fits up to the 1881 census from which point his birth place is always England and even as specific as Hanley. If it is the one whose trade in 1861 was that of a Working Potter, why would he say he was born in Wales at the 1871 census?

At this juncture, in order to throw some light onto the conundrum, we decided to work a little laterally and concentrated on another 'fact' from the 1861 census return, namely that the William who called himself a 'working potter' had a sister named Catherine and just a couple of years older than himself. From the International Genealogical Index [IGI] maintained by the Church of Latter Day Saints in Salt Lake City and available on the internet we discovered a baptism for Catherine in Hanley on April 5th 1843 giving her parents as John Henshall and Jane. Elated at the father being John we looked for William's baptism reference but, sadly, no luck. Wherever or if ever it had occurred it has not yet been recorded among all the parish and other registers so far transcribed in the IGI. But, on the index of civil registrations we did find a marriage for John Henshaw and Jane Blackwell in the Stoke on Trent registration district in the last quarter of 1842. The certificate gives the date of their marriage as October 10th 1842 and the place as Hanley Chapel in the parish of Stoke. Both John and Jane give their residence simply as Hanley and John styles himself as a Potter. So, too, according to the certificate is his father, also a John, whilst Jane's father, Ephraim, is a Painter.

Still thinking laterally we then looked in the registration indexes for possible further William Henshalls with birth references in and around 1845 and came across the registration of one William Blackwell Henshaw at Stoke on Trent in the final quarter of 1845. Given that things were written down by clerks in 'as heard' condition in the middle of the nineteenth century Henshall and Henshaw are sufficiently close when spoken for us to accept that this is probably our man. His birth certificate shows him born on September 20th 1845 with father, John, a Modeller and mother Jane nee Blackwell. The birth took place at Swan Street, Hanley.

In his favour is that the father is named John and is a potter's modeller; William is born in Hanley as he says on all but the 1871 census return; He himself is a 'working potter' in 1861 as we might expect from one of those recruited to go to Belleek a few years later. In no official document later in his life does he make any reference to his given middle name of Blackwell. Did he, perhaps, fall out with his mother's family or did he see it as an unnecessary affectation – he gave none of his own children more than a single first name. We shall probably never know.

In 1861, then, he is with his sister in the household of Ephraim Locker at Swan Passage, 2 Dale Street, Hanley and his father and mother were living at 12 Charles Street, Hanley with further children Ephraim, aged 9 [probably named for Jane's father]; Herbert aged 7; Jane aged 3 and Arthur aged 1. In 1871 the parents are still at 12 Charles Street but now have with them another child, John aged 23, a confectioner, with his wife, Annie and their own children, Jane aged 13, a potter's paintress; Arthur aged 10 and a part time Potter; Anne a scholar aged 6 and Emily also a scholar and aged 4. This son, John, we have found in the 1861 census as an apprentice Baker lodging at 14 Parliament Row, Hanley. Ephraim has not yet been found in the 1871 census but his brother Herbert is lodging at 26 George Street, Hanley aged 17 and gives his occupation as that of Potter.

One interesting sidelight on all this is that the father, John, consistently gives his place of birth as being Swansea, South Wales!! We have not been able to find any references to that birth, it would, after all, have occurred before the advent of civil registration in 1837 but it raises the intriguing possibility that William's father may have learnt his trade of modelling in the Glamorgan pottery and decided, when things closed down there, not to go to Llanelli but to return to Stoke to continue his career. Or he was working for the Cambrian pottery and was 'poached' back to Stoke as a young modeller of promise. Some further delving into archives will be needed.

I have learnt from Keith and Tina Treharne that, although the Llanelli pottery produced mainly earthenware pieces, they did produce a few lithophanes almost certainly between 1839 and 1855 and the only known porcelain products of the factory. Tina raises the intriguing prospect that John may have known of these products and could, conceivably, have introduced William to the idea which he, in turn, introduced into Belleek later in his life. It may be yet another possible indication of the inter-connection and cross fertilisation which went on amongst the workers and managers of the various pottery manufacturers of mid Victorian times.

Synopsis of William Henshall's life.

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| 1844/45 | Born - September 20 th 1845 at Swan Street, Hanley, as William Blackwell Henshaw, son of John. |
| 1861 | A 'working potter' living in Hanley with his sister, Catherine. |
| 1864 | Marries Elizabeth Ferneyhough at Wolstanton - November 14 th |
| 1870 | Birth of Rose at 15 Granville Place; Burslem - December 6 th |
| 1871 | Still at 15 Granville Place [the census] with Elizabeth and Rose. |
| 1872/73 | Living in Ireland at birth of son, Albert. |
| 1875/76 | Living in Stoke on Trent area at birth of son, William. |
| 1881 | Living at 46 Seaford Street, Shelton with Elizabeth and 3 children. |
| 1882 | Still in Stoke on Trent area at birth of son, Ernest. |
| 1888 | Engaged in fracas at Belleek during a strike, which he did not support. |
| 1897 | Listed among Belleek workers. |
| 1897 | Rose marries Patrick Montgomery. |
| 1901 | Living in Belleek with Elizabeth. [Rose next door]. |
| 1902 | Dies at Belleek and buried at Mulleek. |
| 1911 | Rose still in Belleek – no children to the marriage. |