

William Bromley – Midwife of Parian?

It may be too strong to use this title for William Bromley but, wherever he worked, the production of fine Parian porcelain seemed to follow and his expertise appears to have been the catalyst that finally worked the magic for each factory in turn. Piecing his life together from public records has proved quite difficult and we are still not absolutely sure of his antecedents and descendants details. However what I shall present in this article is the best that I can do with the records that have been made available to me. I would like to record my gratitude to my wife, Pat, for her unfailing enthusiasm in these researches and for keeping us up to speed throughout the process. I must, again, record my thanks to Nan Brennan of Chicago and Faith Ann Dressler of Florida who have delved into records in Trenton NJ to come up with vital parts of William's story. On this occasion their efforts have been supplemented by Frank Roofe's investigations into birth, marriage and death records in County Fermanagh and others who have responded to requests for information through Roots-web message boards including members of the Trenton Historical Society.

As with some other subjects in this series I have had difficulty identifying the correct William Bromley from two possible men of that name who lived in Stoke on Trent at the time of the 1861 census. This census is invariably the starting point as the arrival of the Staffordshire men in Belleek is recorded as first happening in 1863 so that their presence at Stoke in 1861 is to be expected. There are, of course, clues to help determine which is the man we want and in the case of William I knew that he had a son William who in later life also became involved in the production of Parian ware. This clue was not as useful here since both possible Williams had a son of that name.

The 1871 census recorded one of them living in Bucknall New Road, Stoke but, since the accounts all talk of the men returning to Stoke quite quickly, this was not conclusive. As noted in an earlier article, Henshall had been living in Stoke in 1871 so there must be a prima facie case for William Bromley also being back in the Potteries. However Gallimore and Scarlett were not in Stoke and were, presumably, still in Belleek so that the census does not give any clear steer regarding which Bromley is our man[1]. As pointed out in these earlier articles, the advent of the railway to Belleek in 1867 made journeys to and fro, even with young families, much easier so that, like Gallimore, any of the men may have travelled to Belleek more than once. The census returns, being at 10 year intervals, are not a fine enough determinant of exactly when people moved about the country.

On, then, to the 1881 census where, again, there is only one William Bromley who turns out to be the same one as in the 1871 census return. This means, therefore, that one of our William Bromleys had possibly either stayed in Belleek or moved somewhere else and not returned to Staffordshire at all. There is a body of evidence from published histories of the American pottery industry that leads us to believe that William Bromley was in the USA by 1882 having followed his son over there to assist him in perfecting Parian ware at the Ott and Brewer factory in Trenton NJ. If this is so, and I have no evidence not to believe it, then it would appear that our William Bromley may have left Stoke in the 1860s and never returned there. Eventually he would have travelled to America directly from Ireland and this gives greater credence to the reference we found for a William Bromley aged 52 who sailed from Ireland to New York on the ship 'Anchoria' and arrived there on August 23rd 1882. In the passenger manifest he is recorded as being English and his occupation is given as Potter. He is accompanied by two Fanny Bromleys, one aged 52 the other just 17. We will later investigate who these might be.

The final consideration in determining which of the two William Bromleys in the 1861 census of the Potteries is our man comes from that census itself which records one as a Parian Manufacturer living at Mount Pleasant in Fenton and the other as a Potter and spending that night in prison. I do not know how long he was in prison, nor for what offence, but his wife and young children were in the Spittals Workhouse on census night so it is unlikely to have been for only a short period of time that he was incarcerated. Later census returns have him as a sagger maker and living in Hanley. It is tempting to think that the William Bromley who played such an important part in the story of Belleek and other potteries could not possibly have spent some time in prison but

there is no evidence it was not him only the expectation that his time would have been taken up in serious work for Goss and Peake in 1861.

With this quite tortuous preamble I am now in a position to say, with reasonable certainty, that the William Bromley living at West Parade, Mount Pleasant in the town of Fenton at the time of the 1861 census is the same man that worked for Goss & Peake, went to Belleek in the 1860s and finally to Trenton NJ in 1882 and in each position was massively instrumental in the development of Parian porcelain.

Houses in West Parade, Mount Pleasant, Fenton. William, Ann and their family would have lived in a house like this.



The census return shows that he himself, his wife, Ann, and their two oldest children were born in Worcester with the remaining four being born in Stoke on Trent. William and Ann are both 34 years of age, so were born before the beginning of civil registration in July 1837. Their marriage took place at the parish church in the village of Powick just outside Worcester on December 22nd 1844 when they were each only about 17 or 18 years of age. The marriage certificate shows them as 'Minors' with William a Potter and Ann a Dressmaker. The fact of them being minors may have influenced their choice of Powick village, three or four miles from the city, as the place their marriage.



The Parish Church at Powick, Worcester where the young William Bromley and Ann Hill were married in 1844.

Ann's full name is given as Ann Porter Hill although I have been unable to ascertain the provenance of the name Porter. Her birth and baptism are recorded on the International Genealogical Index [IGI] as being March 14th and 16th in 1825, the baptism taking place at St Helen, Pump Street, Methodist Chapel in Worcester. It is possible that the very rapid baptism, within two days of her birth, was occasioned by fears for her young life. Any such fears proved groundless as she lived long enough to bear William at least six children.

On the marriage certificate the couple's fathers are listed as John Bromley, a Potter like his son, and John Hill a Clerk. As minors they would have needed the consent of their parents to marry and this is presumably indicated by both fathers being listed as there is no other indication of the necessary consent being given. One witness to the marriage is a Josiah Hill who is Ann's younger brother and the other is a Mary Mantle, probably a bridesmaid. In the 1841 census Ann, Josiah and the family are living in Angel Street, St Nicholas, Worcester next door to the Horn and Trumpet. Parents are John and Elizabeth and the other children are Frederick aged 20, a cabinet maker, with Eliza aged 9 and Alfred just 6 months. At this time John gives his occupation as Horse Keeper.

In the same census William Bromley is living with his family at Park Place, St Martin, Worcester but his father is, I think, dead. He is not listed on the census return but the 1841 census did not ask any question about marital status. However, his wife, Frances, has six children with her and in the 1851 census she identifies herself as a widow. Often, when a father is deceased, this fact is stated on a marriage certificate along with his name but not in this case. I have to say that, at the time of writing, I have been unable to identify his death in the Office of National Statistics [ONS] indexes nor his presence elsewhere in the 1841 census index.

The children with Frances in the 1841 census are Elizabeth, aged 15; John aged 15; our William aged 15 – these last two give their occupations as ‘Potter’s Apprentice’ – Frances aged 13; Jane aged 8 and Eliza aged 5. The rubric with the 1841 census allowed householders to round ages down to the nearest 5 years for adults so that we do not have a case of triplets here. The IGI gives their dates of baptism as 1822 for Elizabeth; 1824 for John and our William was baptised at St Martin’s in Worcester on November 29th 1826. It is most likely that John and William’s apprenticeship was being served at Chamberlain’s works since, at that time, Flight & Barr were in decline and therefore possibly not offering apprenticeships in any great number.

John and Frances’ other children listed on the census return were all born before the advent of civil registration in July 1837 but, luckily for us in this research if not for George himself, a child George was born to the family in 1838 but died aged just 5 months. From this George’s birth certificate we discover that the mother’s maiden name was Frances Massey and the father, John, was a ‘China Modeller’. From George’s death certificate we get the information that the father, John, who was the informant, was still alive and gave his occupation as a ‘China Potter’. Both certificates give the family address as Tallow Hill in the registration district of North Worcester. Tallow Hill still exists but is today a main road linking St Martin’s Gate to Shrub Hill Railway Station and is flanked only by large warehouse-like stores.

As surmised above, the father, John, may well have died between George’s death and the 1841 census and this event may have necessitated the move from Tallow Hill to Park Place. Park Place no longer exists on maps of modern Worcester but Park Street is one of a number of streets on the south side of Tallow Hill which makes me think that Park Place may well have been in the same vicinity so the family had not moved very far. Interestingly, some members of the family give their birth place as Tallow Hill in subsequent census returns so that the early years there may have been particularly happy ones for the whole family.



This shows Park Street, Worcester with the sort of house the Bromleys may have lived in at Park Place after leaving Tallow Hill

Within a few years of their marriage William and Ann with their young family made an even longer move, away from Worcester altogether and into the bustling town of Fenton where we find them in Bridge Street at the time of the 1851 census. Their first two children were born in Worcester – Louisa in the summer of 1846 and Emily Ann in early 1848 – but Fanny had been born in Stoke on Trent and was aged just three months at the time of the census in March 30th 1851. William’s occupation is given as ‘Potter Figure Maker’ but there is no clue in the census as to which pottery company he worked for at this time. Bridge Street, Fenton, no longer exists but was probably in the vicinity of the Trent and Mersey canal which still separates Stoke from Fenton.

The families they left behind in Worcester had also moved and Frances is now living with three of her daughters in Claines, occupied as a launderess and noted as a widow. Frances was to die on January 3rd in 1856 at 117 York Place, Whistones, Worcester aged 57 and the widow of John Bromley a China Modeller. Ann’s

family were now also living in Claines just a few doors away from the Bromleys and her father, too, was now dead so her mother was working as a gloveress and Josiah as a gardener. Her elder brother, Frederick, was plying his trade as a cabinet maker in Richmond, Surrey with his wife Matilda and four children, the last two being 7 month old twin boys.

Through the 1850s William and Ann remain in Stoke and gradually add to their family with Eliza born in 1852; Jane in 1854 and eventually, after 5 girls, a son William is born at Mount Pleasant, Fenton on July 13th 1857. On the certificate the father, William, still styles himself a 'Potter Figure Maker' just as he did at the time of the 1851 census. It looks as if William and Ann were content with their family at this size because four years later, at the time of the 1861 census, the eight of them are still at Mount Pleasant in Fenton but William has had a change of job and now gives his occupation as Parian Manufacturer.

This change of job description may, of course give us a clue to the development of Parian at Goss as being completed some time between 1858, when Goss & Peake started their John Street pottery works, and 1861. It seems likely that Bromley joined them at the start of their endeavour and, as Goss himself had been with Copeland, so too may Bromley have been employed there. As the Pine biography[2] points out, the John Street works backed on to Copeland's Stoke factory. It is a trifle ironic for Goss to complain in 1863 about his workers leaving for Belleek when he himself had walked out on his benefactor, Copeland, just five or so years before.

In Chapter 15 of their book, the Pines record that the first parian bust to be made was that of Mr Punch in 1861[2]. That William Bromley could, in that same year, call himself a Parian Manufacturer demonstrates the probably important part he played in bringing those Parian Busts to fruition and, thereby, giving the Goss & Peake factory their first claim to pottery excellence. On a quick look through the census for this enumeration district only two workers mention Parian in their occupation – a Harry Snow aged 21 living in High Street, Mount Pleasant who calls himself an 'Ornamenter in Parian' and William Scragg aged 32 living in Bridge Street who describes himself as a 'Parian Figure Maker'.

It is from this point in their lives that the English public records fail us. This 1861 census entry is the last such entry for any member of this family of eight people. There is no sign of any of them in the on-line indexes of the 1871, 1881 or 1891 census returns. Nor have I been able to find any clear marriage or death references for any one of them in this time period.

It is commonly assumed that William Bromley and other pottery workers were induced by Armstrong to leave England for Belleek, starting in 1863 as recorded in the Fermanagh Mail of September 21st that year and noted in Neville Maguire's recent book[3]. It is almost certain that the English potters did not all come at the same time, nor did they all stay for the same length of time. Some came and went quite often, others came once for a short or longer period and then returned to England to continue their careers there. The opening of the railway to Belleek in 1867 meant that travel to West Fermanagh from the ports of Belfast or Dublin could be made inside a day so that the night boat from Liverpool and a day's journey across Ireland by rail was all that stood between the English workers and the pottery in Belleek. The lack of any further census record for William and Ann Bromley and their family may be negative evidence that they actually went to Belleek and stayed there for some time. We know that William Henshall went over for the final time in the 1880s and stayed until he died there in 1902 and that William Wood Gallimore also went over more than once[1]. We know, too, that a number of children were born in Belleek to the English potters such as Albert Henshall in 1873, Robert Astley and John William Astley in 1870, Edward Astley in 1876, Samuel Ellis in 1877 and Florence Ellis in 1879. My thanks go to Frank Roofe for this information and he is generously looking through the records for more.

Thus the human commerce between the English potteries and Belleek involved not only the male workers but, for some, their wives and children too. The possibility that William Bromley was one of the early ones and that he and his family stayed for nearly twenty years is borne out by the emergence of Parian Ware from the pottery almost as soon as he got there as well as the absence of the family from the English census records. As at Goss, William's contribution appears to have been crucial to the successful outcome. The Pines record that W H Goss welcomed the men back to his factory but not Bromley[2], although it is not clear whether this was because

Bromley did not want to return or because Goss set his face against taking back the man who he, perhaps, saw as the ring leader of the defectors. Certainly both Gallimore and Astley became favourite employees at Goss in their later careers, Astley in fact following Gallimore as chief modeller after Gallimore's departure for America[2].

It is recorded by various authors[4] that William Bromley Junior went to Trenton NJ, from Belleek, at some time around 1882 to use the experience he had gained at Belleek to help Ott and Brewer perfect their Parian production. Barber[5] records that his attempt was unsuccessful and that it was not until the father, William Senior, was sent for and arrived that success was achieved and that some of the ware produced was at least as fine as that which the Irish factory was producing. Once again our William's skill and knowledge appear to be the essential ingredient for commercial parian production.

Not content with this third successful launch of Parian products, William Bromley senior then went on to Willets and performed the same magic there in 1886, hence the title of this article. The evidence from Barber's work is important as he wrote his first account of the American Pottery industry in 1893, close enough to the events we are now recalling for him to have probably known the participants personally.

William Bromley died at his home, 354 Brunswick Avenue, Trenton, on Tuesday 21st February 1888. True to form he was not recorded in the 1880 US census because he only arrived there in 1882, nor in the 1890 and subsequent censuses because he died too early to be recorded. He was buried at the Greenwood Cemetery in Trenton but I have not yet been able to get hold of any record of a gravestone inscription[6].

The family, too, continue to defy the civil powers' recording processes and my army of helpers have not yet been able to identify any of the family with certainty in the US censuses. We think that William's arrival in America is recorded aboard the vessel 'Anchoria' which docked at New York on August 23rd 1882. There is a William Bromley aged 52 recorded as a Potter and accompanied by Fanny aged 52 and another Fanny aged 17. I think the first Fanny is a misheard Annie and is his wife, while the second one may be their daughter although the given age is out by 14 years and there is a possibility she is a granddaughter or that this is not the family at all.

There is a record in the 1900 US Census for Cumberland County – just to the South of Trenton – of a Louise Bromley aged 48 and born in England as a patient in the 'Home for Feeble Minded Women' there. The dates are not exact for her to be identified as William's eldest daughter with certainty, but it is a possibility.

In similar fashion there is an entry in the 1901 census of England and Wales for an Eliza Bromley, a single woman of 50 years of age born in Stoke on Trent and living at 30 Sun Street West in the Edgbaston/Harborne district of Birmingham. She is listed as a Milliner and Dressmaker and has two younger men lodging in her house. This time the age given is as it should be for William and Ann's fourth daughter but her absence from the official returns since the 1861 census makes it impossible to be certain that it is the right person.

My searches in the English, Irish and American records have not identified any marriages for the girls or for William Junior so far. A number of possibilities for some of the girls exist but these are not yet firm enough to record here. Similarly I have not been able to ascertain for certain that the family was complete with the birth of William in 1857. No other children are listed in the 1861 census but Barber[5] makes reference to William senior coming to America 'with his brother John' to help his son. *"Encouraged by partial success, however, Mr. Brewer induced Bromley Jr to send for his father, William Bromley, and his brother, John Bromley, who, with two or three other hands, came over in the following year from the Belleek factory in Ireland."*

It is not absolutely clear whether this refers to William senior's brother John or a brother of William Junior. Either way this John shares the family reluctance to be recorded in the census returns of any country, but Barber's proximity to the events he records leaves the question very much open. That William Senior's brother, John, was also an apprentice with him in Worcester, as recorded in 1841, at least puts him in the pottery industry but the lack of any further reference in any census leaves it somewhat up in the air, particularly because, as noted earlier, there are a number of John Bromley deaths in the Worcester registration district

between 1841 and 1851, one of which might be for him. In like manner there are a number of John Bromley births in the Stoke on Trent area during the 1860s any one of which might be for a son of William and Ann. Only the indexes are free to access and without other indicative evidence, which usually comes from the census returns, it could prove to be an expensive and possibly fruitless search through the actual entries.

I have entitled this article 'Midwife of Parian?' to emphasise the central role William Bromley seems to have had in the production of Parian ware at Goss, Belleek, Ott & Brewer and at Willets but the Trade Directories for Staffordshire in the 1860s mention many manufactories which list Parian among their production. In the 1860 Directory there are 4 firms of 'Parian Figure Makers' listed and 22 firms, including W H Goss of Ashfield Cottage, listed as Parian Manufacturers. It would appear, then, that whatever form of fine porcelain was at that time called 'Parian' it was not unique to Goss & Peake. As we have noted earlier, references to Parian amongst people's job titles already existed in the 1861 census returns and it appears, therefore, that the production of Parian ware in Stoke on Trent was quite widespread at this time. What William Bromley managed to do during his career seems to have been to export the knowledge of ensuring commercial production of the very finest Parian porcelain to Ireland and to New Jersey.

To add a final piece of uncertainty to this article I should record that in Slaters Commercial Directory of 1862 the firm of Bromley, Turner and Hassell of Liverpool Road, Stoke on Trent are recorded as Stoneware and Parian Manufacturers. There is no way of knowing at this time whether this is our Bromley although he calls himself, as noted earlier, a Parian Manufacturer in the 1861 census. In the Keates and Forde Directory of 1867 the firm is listed as Turner, Hassell and Peake of Copeland Street and Liverpool Road. The replacement of Bromley by Peake is probably just coincidence but could be the result of Bromley leaving Stoke for Belleek at some time between 1862 and 1867 and the break up of the Goss & Peake partnership in the later 1860s[2]. There is the further replacement of Peake by Poole in the Kelly Directory of 1872 which lists the firm as Turner, Hassell and Poole at Albert Works, Copeland Street and at Liverpool Road.

At this stage of my knowledge, as recorded in this article, there are a number of questions that remain unanswered. These concern the lives of the Bromley family between the 1861 census return and the reappearance of the two William Bromleys as recorded by Barber at Trenton in 1882. Details of Bromley's funeral in 1888 might help to fill in some gaps as would more detail from the birth, marriage and death certificates in England during the same period. An investigation into the firms of Turner, Hassell & A.N. Other would also, perhaps, help to answer a few questions. The connection, through the professional life of William Bromley, between Chamberlain's of Worcester, Goss & Peake, Belleek, Ott & Brewer and eventually Willets is a chain which will intrigue every lover of Belleek and Belleek type wares and I hope that this interest may lead to others also seeking answers to the questions raised by this article.

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