

# The Children at the Mill



Once the family are settled in Repton, their lives are much more tangible. We are not witnesses ourselves, neither do we know anybody who knew them at first hand. But we do know where their bones lie in Repton Church yard, we sometimes read of their exploits in the local press, and in contemporary documents , and there is this blessed invention called photography that brings to us images upon which we can reflect.

When Ann died there were six of her children who would have attended her funeral in the chapel. After the prayers, the sermon and all the Victorian hymns, her coffin would have been put onto a horse drawn hearse or bier and wheeled the length of Repton High Street to St Wystan's church yard. The family and mourners would have processed solemnly on foot, and witnessed her interment in the same grave as Richard, with whom she had shared 43 years of married life. When she died her family were grown up - Annie the oldest was 42, and William Richard was 28. Of the six children, only two were married, Edwin and William R. Only Edwin had a family of his own, and no doubt all four children did that walk behind the coffin in March 1898.

Each of Richard and Ann's children, the children of the mill, have a tale to tell.

## Annie Sanders



Annie Sanders was born in Measham before the family arrived in Repton. She survived the devastating illness that killed her four sisters, perhaps by moving to Desford to stay with grandma.

As she grew up at the mill she would have helped in the home, looking after the poultry and helping her mother with an ever increasing family.

In about 1862, she probably attended the day school in the independent chapel, dressed in her pinafore dress, and mop cap, where she learned to read, learned her letters, learned her Bible stories, and listened attentively to the 'object lessons'. When the boys did some simple woodwork or horticulture, Annie was learning to sew, and would have created her first sampler.

We do not know when she left school, but it was probably at the age of twelve or thirteen, and she was soon seeking employment. At the age of fifteen according to the 1871 census she was working as a domestic servant in one of the school houses in the High Street. Annie is sharing the premises with cook, two other maids, a footman, and twenty four young teenage boys. But she is not far from home, and Richard and Ann can still look out for her every Sunday at chapel. She is received into membership at the chapel in 1873.

At the time of the 1881 census she is twenty five, but a long way from home, for now she is in Bowdon, Altrincham in Cheshire not so very far from Manchester. She continues to work in domestic service, as an assistant to the cook in a very large house. The head of the household is Mr Travers, aged 44, a bank manager, and he lives with his wife and four children, a cook, waitress (Annie) and three other maids. What a life! And what a house! At the beginning of the census schedule the enumerator lists some of the roads, as Rose Hill, Green Walk, The Firs. A very nice neighbourhood.

We have no records for Annie apart from what we can glean from the census returns. We don't know how long she stays with Mr Travers. We know that in 1891 she is now 35 and back living in Repton. She is in Long Street. She is unmarried, still a domestic servant and the housekeeper for Mr William Dakin. 'Where have I heard that name before?' asks the reader. The same Mr Dakin that is the deacon at the chapel with her father. Mr Dakin is somewhat older than Annie at 58. He has run a successful building concern, and is now able to retire. Ten years later, in the census of 1901, Annie is at the same address, but is now Mrs Dakin, and perhaps patience has reaped its own reward.



William  
though much  
older than  
Annie is a tall  
handsome  
Victorian, and  
with her  
loving care  
lives to be 78  
before he  
dies in 1915.



Annie lives another seventeen years, and dies in 1832. The Derby Evening Telegraph of August 2nd has a simple testimony. "Mrs Dakin , who was in her 77th year, was a prominent member and worker in the Congregational Chapel for many years.' The same cutting lists the members of the family who attended the funeral. The organ was played by her nephew William Kesterton Sanders, and the funeral arrangements were made by her nephew Richard Matthew Sanders - of whom much more later.

Annie left an estate of £1122 4s 3d, when she died. She had no children of her own, and left this money to be shared between her two sisters, Sarah and Mary.

## Edwin Thomas Sanders

Edwin Thomas is the first born son at the Mill. That he should survive the epidemic when such a very small baby would be regarded as something of a miracle. he would have played as a child at the mill, attended services at the chapel, and also attended the day school at the chapel or the national school in the village. he then enjoyed a stroke of good fortune. Perhaps he had been noticed at the national school as a bright boy who exceeded his standard four/five before the normal leaving age. In any event, at the age of 11, in the April of 1871 he went to Repton School. What is now a very prestigious Public School, was always intended by its founder Sir John Port to be a school for the education of poor children in Repton. I have heard it said that Edwin was the last village boy to be admitted to the school under the terms of the original charity. The school have a record of his attendance from April 1871 until December 1873. The archivist at the school is unable to say whether he had scholarship. But, the oral tradition in the family was that his mother took in washing to support his needs at the school.

The school archivist also writes. ‘He was at Repton in the final few years of the headmastership of Steuart Adolphus Pears, who between the years 1854 and 1874 transformed the school from a rather old fashioned one of 49 pupils when he arrived to a much improved and forward looking institution of over 300 when he left’.

There is a certain irony in the fact that while Edwin was attending the school as a day boarder, his sister Annie was working in one of the school houses as a servant.

Edwin left Repton School when he was thirteen, and became a joiner. He would have been apprenticed for several years, but his education at Repton School would have given him a significant advantage over other boys going into the trade. Edwin Thomas is not destined to be a mere ‘hewer of wood and drawer of water’. Of all the trades in the building industry, that of joiner is supreme. the joiner is part of the process from beginning to end; he is the man who sets out the footings at the beginning of the project, and puts the roof on at the end. Thus by the end of his training he can call himself a ‘master builder’.

He lived at the Mill throughout this period of training, and like the rest of the family , much of his life revolves around the chapel. By 1882 he listed as a member of the congregation. There is also in the congregation a family led by Joseph Dolman. Joseph was friend of the family sufficiently trusted to be an executor of Ann Sanders’ will. Edwin was probably apprenticed to Joseph, also a master builder, who lived with his wife Martha in the High Street, and was ten years his senior. They were to become partners in a firm of builders, joiners and cabinet makers known as Dolman and Sanders.



*John Wathe Boss and his wife Susannah*

By the age of 24 Edwin had been introduced to the Boss family in Woodville, about seven miles from Repton. John Wathe Boss was also a carpenter and joiner by trade, and his elder daughter was Kate. Edwin and Kate married on the 16th September 1884. They were married in the parish church of St George and St Mary in the parish of Church Gresley, by the vicar Gilbert James, and the happy event was witnessed by Edwin’s sister Sarah and Kate’s elder brother John Walter. I imagine that there must have been a photograph that would testify to the union of the Boss and Sanders family. Sadly, I have not seen it. But no doubt the church was full of brothers and sisters, for large families were the norm. Edwin would have been supported by his five brothers and sisters, and his parents. Kate had eight brothers and sisters.

This charming photograph would have been taken at around this time. It may have been taken to mark the engagement off the couple. Edwin and Kate have gone into Burton to the photographer , where Mr Renwick has suggested this rural setting.

Both are to be seen at their best. This is an event to be remembered. Edwin is in his 'Sunday best' suit and his 'derby' hat. Kate is every bit 'comme il faut' in her dress for going out, her best hat, leather gloves and umbrella.



The next record we have of Edwin is that of the 1891 census. By then they were living in Long Street in what must have been quite a substantial property. It is three houses away from the school Sanatorium, which in turn is only a few houses from another school boarding house that can hold six staff and twenty six boarders. By 1891 Edwin's family is growing. He and Kate have two daughters, Susan and Kessie, and their first son, Richard Wathew. In fact they have three children under school age, and another child on the way. This may well explain why the in-laws are staying in the house at the time of the Census return. John W Boss , his wife Susannah, and their youngest daughter Sarah are to help in whatever way they can. Later that year Edwin (junior) is born, and the family appears complete.

He may have a young family and a growing business, but Edwin Thomas is still wholly involved in the chapel. When his father dies, he is invited to take on the role of deacon, but declines. He does accept the role of chapel secretary, an equally responsible job. And so we now see the life of the chapel recorded in Edwin's own fair hand. His is not the best copper-plate in the minute book, but it has a character that makes it distinctive.

We can also get a glimpse from newspaper cuttings of the life of this family. Edwin takes an interest in politics locally. In 1895 there is a report in the Derby Mercury of the first Parish Council held under a new Act of Parliament, held in the National Schoolroom, and attended by over fifty of the parish worthies. All was going well in this meeting until the chairman called for a vote. In the press report it is not clear what the vote was about. It is clear that virtually everybody who attended was very unhappy about the chairman's ability to count, for there are over fifty signatories to a

letter to the Mercury demanding a recount. High drama at the Parish Council, and our Edwin was there - a signatory to the letter.

in 1900 he is doing his bit for the big society, and has his name in the Derby Telegraph. He is involved in both the village Flower Show and a Six a Side Football competition to be held at the end of the summer. He is possibly the secretary, advertising across the district for teams to enter the tournament. Perhaps this kind of community service stood him in good stead when in 1909 he stood for a vacancy on Repton Rural District Council and the Burton Board of Guardians. There are two candidates who put themselves forward for this position; Edwin and a farmer called Thomas Stevenson. The telegraph describes them both as 'well known and esteemed'. The curious thing is that they choose to hold the election on December 30th, New Years Eve, and then complain that the turn out at the polls had been low because of inclement weather. In the end Edwin won his first election with a comfortable majority of 119 to 95.

Now his exploits are recorded in the Minute Book of the Repton Rural District Council. The January meeting records his successful election, and his name appears among 'those present' for the next fifteen or so years. Most of the work of the Rural District Council is to do with highways and public health. From time to time the councillors get excited about the movement of a footpath, but most of their energies are invested in public drains and sewers.

Edwin was always said to have been a Liberal, though whether he was a party member is unknown. There is an interesting report of 1911 which gives some indication of his political sympathies in a report of a meeting of district council. It is a report in the Derby Telegraph of a proposal that the council roadmen work a five and half day week. This proposal is hotly debated and most of the council believe that since farm workers have to work a six day week, the road men should do the same. Others argued that Roadmen would only spend their money in the ale house. The proposal is easily defeated. But three members voted for the motion; Rev L.S.Staley, Mr Chagnell and Mr Sanders.

The family are very involved with the congregational chapel in Pinfold Lane, and much of their social life would centre around this non-conformist community. Attendance at service would be expected morning and evening. Children probably attended Sunday School in the afternoon. There was probably a men's society, as well as a sewing group for the ladies. This was the centre of the world for many Victorian families, the centre for their spiritual betterment, but also their social world. Here a group of like minded neighbours could have fun together, show off their talents, their children and their clothes. The outfits shown in all these photographs all reflect their 'Sunday best'.

The Annual Public Tea and Ham Supper was still going strong long after Ann Sanders died. The Derby Telegraph records a social evening at the chapel in 1911, to celebrate the new year with an excellent supper and cups of tea! It is worth reproducing here just to show how many members of the family were there and were taking part.

### REPTON CONGREGATIONAL CHAPEL.

In the schoolroom on Thursday evening the annual social evening took place after the church meeting. The pastor, Rev. Ebor Dukesell, presided. Miss Bertha Collyer as before provided an excellent supper, to which 38 persons sat down. Then followed a far more elaborate entertainment than usual, one of the principal items on the programme being an amusing sketch with scenery, entitled, "The new slavey," the characters being well sustained by Miss Dukesell as the Slavey and Miss S. Sanders and Mr. Jos. Dolman, jun., as the Mistress and Master. Miss Richardson, of Derby, sang splendidly "Dolly's revenge," and Mr. Harry Boss, of Church Gresley, with Mrs. Wm. Sanders contributed a duet. Mr. E. Sanders recited in character "Mary's little lamb" (a parody). Mrs. Boss (Church Gresley) played a pretty piano solo, and Mr. Lewis Dukesell was most successful with a German piece, "Jacob Strauss." A thoroughly enjoyable evening was brought to a close by votes of thanks to the performers and helpers proposed by Mr. E. T. Sanders and seconded by the Rev. E. Dukesell.—Miss B. Collyer briefly replied to the thanks awarded her, as did Miss Richardson, of Derby.

Thus it is that Edwin and his family prospered both materially and by reputation. He continued in partnership with Joseph Dolman until 1920, when the London Gazette records the dissolving of their partnership. Both Edwin and Joseph retired and passed their shares in the business to their sons, who would carry on the business separately. Edwin passed his share to Richard Wathew.

Over the years the firm will have repaired, extended, maintained and built many properties in Repton and the surrounding district. Much of this work is of course anonymous. With one exception. There is a row of houses on Milton Road called Desford Terrace. This was built by Edwin Thomas Sanders before the turn of the century, and while 'Sanders' is not imprinted anywhere on the building, the terrace got its name from Desford in Leicestershire, where Edwin spent the first few weeks of his life with Grannie Newbery.

There is of course another property that bears witness to four generations of the Sanders family, and this is 81 and 82 High Street. It has been known as The Nook and Chez Nous respectively, and certainly this is where Richard Wathew and Edwin were in 1925 according to Kelly's Directory of that year.



Before that Edwin was living in Gordon Villas. He was there in 1901 and in 1911, and his son Edwin gives Gordon Villas as his address while on active service in 1916. This must surely be a property built by Dolman and Sanders? where else would a successful builder live with a growing family but in one of his own house? at the turn of the century, this would have been the height of modernity, with all the services coming into the house; gas, electricity and plumbing. This is Edwin's show house with its bay windows, recessed front door and lobby, fancy brickwork, nicely set off with ornamental iron railings at the front.

Soon a plot of land becomes available on the other side of the road, quite close to Gordon Villas. At the turn of the century, it is used by the council for storing all the things that the council must store. Perhaps Edwin had his eye on it for some time, and that becomes the builders yard, and also the site for 81 and 82, The Nook and Chez Nous, a home for Edwin and his closest family for most of the twentieth century.

Edwin served on Repton Rural District Council and on the Burton Board of Guardians. In 1924 he was chairman of the council and of Repton Hospital Committee, and he was a Justice of the Peace. He must have sat on the bench of Repton Court House on many occasions, and administered the Poor Law Charities in Burton. The Poor Law Institution met every month at twelve noon on a Thursday, and their duty was to supervise the administration of the Workhouse.

In 1924 this wife Kate died at her home in Repton after a few hours illness. She was 65 years old. Her funeral was held at the congregational chapel led by two ministers. One was the Rev Ebor Dukeswell who had been at the celebratory supper all those years before. All the family were there to sing 'There's not a grief' and 'Light after Darkness', accompanied by Mr W Sanders on the organ and the occasion was marked by many beautiful wreaths.

Edwin continued to live at Chez Nous. He had his daughters Susan and Kessie to look after him and his son Richard was living next door with a wife and a growing family. But in 1927 Edwin died aged 67. he was the first of the miller's children to die that had survived the epidemic of 1860; much loved by his family, and highly esteemed by the community. The funeral was at the chapel and the same two ministers officiated. The interment was in Repton churchyard, after the mourners had progressed down the village High Street. At this stage there were members of the family who owned a motorcar, and so they may not have progressed on foot. His estate worth £5141 3s 6d was administered by Flint, Marsden and Bishop, solicitors in Derby.



*These two portraits of Edwin and Kate were displayed in the homes of their children for thirty years after their death. They were probably taken around 1914. Edwin's photograph is perhaps taken in the council chamber of the Rural District Council, where he looks wonderfully comfortable and confident, dressed as a man of the twentieth century. Kate's portrait looks very much more Victorian. It is almost certainly taken in a photographers studio, in a set that suggests a lady in her conservatory. Just like her mother and father-in-law all those years earlier, she is holding her book to show that she too is a lady of letters.*

# Sarah Sanders



Sarah Sanders was born at the Mill in 1862. her education would be very similar to that of Annie. Like Annie, she also went into service. we can only be certain of one position, and curiously this is also in Altrincham, near Manchester. While Annie was working for her wealthy bank manager, Sarah is working as a general servant for a Scottish widow who rejoices by the Robina Mainprice. It is an entirely female household. She lives with her daughter, and a cook and Sarah who is nineteen years old. She is , of course, a long way from home, but has her big sister living close by. They are actually in the same parish, and perhaps met on Sundays at church or chapel.

We do not know what happened to Sarah for the next twenty years of her life. We know that at some stage she learned dressmaking, and by , and by 1901 she is back at the mill, perhaps making some of the dresses we have so admired in the photographs of the time. We know also that she stayed single until 1906, for this is when she married Walter Evans. We know this from her Census return for 1911, where they record that they have been married for five years. Walter is nine years younger than the now Mrs Evans, and they live at a Grocer and Tobacconist's shop in Pybus Street in Derby. She would have been 44 when she married Walter, presumably at the chapel in Repton. In 1932, she was a beneficiary of Annie's estate, aged 70. She lived another eight years and died in 1940.

# Alfred Henry Sanders



Alfred Henry is the next son of the Mill, born in 1864, and he never seems to have lived in any other property in the village. Having attended the National School, he learned his father's trade and became a miller. When Richard died in 1891, Alfred Henry, was 27, trained by his father and practised in the skills of milling and the art of maintaining the mill.

Like Sarah and Annie before him, he seems to take his time in choosing a partner and a bride. He also married 1906. a girl from Derby called Eliza Alice Hassell. She is thirty and he is forty two. They are later to have two children, two girls Dorothy and Edith, born in 1908 and 1912.

Alfred Henry was the last miller to work Repton Mill. It is unlikely that he was grinding fine flours for the kitchens of Repton. In 1911, he describes himself as a miller grinding for farmers; in other words he was grinding cereals to make meal for animals. He had a small parcel of land sufficient to graze his horse, and the yard seem to be constantly full of poultry and the house pig. If you live in a mill there is always feed stuff.

Eliza Alice died in 1932, aged 66. Alfred died six years later in 1938, aged 74. There had probably been a mill on the site of Repton Mill since Doomsday, but that long history ended with Alfred Henry. All the premises and plant gradually deteriorated over the next thirty years until the Mill was finally demolished in 1967. All that remains now is some stonework alongside the mill stream.

I never met any of the children of the mill, but I remember Dorothy and Edith with great affection. They never married and lived together in a cottage at 106 High Street. Both were very short sighted and wore spectacles with very heavy lenses. Both were life long supporters of the chapel, and took a keen interest in all their family, whether in Repton itself, or those who had moved far away.

## Mary Jane Sanders



Mary Jane grew up in the Mill like the rest of the family, and soon after leaving school she is working as a domestic servant. She was living at home with the others in 1881, and is still living in the Mill in 1891; but now she is a laundress probably working for the school.

In 1901 she is still living at the Mill, and has not listed an occupation. Mary Jane is a tall striking looking lady to be seen feeding the chickens in the Mill yard in the postcard photograph. Curiously she never married, and it is impossible to believe that she was not found attractive. When Alfred Henry married in 1906, she is 41, and she moves out of the mill to make way for his bride.

She was not on the Census return for Repton in 1911, and it does seem that she may have left the village for a while to take up a position elsewhere. She lives to a good age however, for she is eighty one when she dies in 1946. By then she has moved back to Repton, and is living at Chez Nous, the house that had been the home of Edwin. In her old age she would be looked after by Edwin's two daughters Kessie and Susan.

She died a few days before Christmas, and her estate of £466 8s 4d was left to Edwin's son, Richard Wathew, the next generation of builders, who would manage her funeral and interment in the churchyard.

## William Richard Sanders



William Richard, was the youngest child to be born to Richard and Ann in the Mill. He grew up there and played there, and like his brother and sisters he went to the village National School. He would have left the school at about twelve or thirteen years of age, and he too was apprenticed as a joiner, and he worked with his brother Edwin and Joseph Dolman for several years.

William married when he was 28. He married a girl whom he must have observed over several years. She was called Susan Kesterton Boss, a sister of Kate Boss, who Edwin had married thirteen years earlier. Thus two brothers married two sisters.



When they were first married, William and Susan rented one of Edwin's houses in Desford Terrace, and it was there that his two sons were born. William Kesterton was the eldest, born in 1898, and then Harry Bertram born in 1899.

They moved to 10 Main Street in about 1905, and this was the time that William decided to work independently for himself. His landlord gave permission for him to extend the house at 10 Main Street, and the outbuildings that went with the property were useful in setting up his own business. The cottage was almost a small-holding with stall for cattle, stabling, a large kitchen garden, and a paddock for grazing; sufficient for a family to be almost self sufficient in the first part of the twentieth century.