DESCENDANTS OF WILLIAM VILLARS (b. 1799)
IN GREAT BRITAIN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

by Chris Villars

Note added 2021: These notes were written in 1991. Thirty years later, the original
digital version, in an obsolete format, was lost. Only a hard copy printout remained.
In converting this hard copy to a modern Word document format, some errors have
been corrected, and some new details and a few illustrations added. It remains a very
selective and incomplete account, focussing mainly on the principal male lines of
descent from William’s first son, William John.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Of the 230 Villars births registered in Great Britain between 1837 and 1988, the vast majority (177, or 77%) are descendants of a certain William Villars, who was born in 1799 and died in 1847. The remaining 53 fall into three groups: The first consists of 15 born in the Coventry area between 1837 and 1867. The members of this group appear to have taken to spelling their name with an “e” (“Villers”) around 1867. No further “Villars” births are registered in that area after this date. The second group consists of 17 descendants of a certain Robert Villars who was born in 1818 and died in 1887. This appears to be a completely separate group, having no known connection with the descendants of William Villars. Finally, there are 21 Villars births either currently unidentified or simply not belonging to any of the other main groups. The following notes are exclusively about William Villars and some of his descendants.

William Villars (1799 - 1847) was born, and spent most of his life, in the Finsbury and Shoreditch districts of London. Two of his sons married and had large families. These were, William John (1823 - 1896) and Joseph Henry (1830 - 1877). William John settled in Southwark, founding the Southwark branch of the family, and Joseph Henry eventually settled in Hackney, founding the Hackney branch of the family. At some time during the 1880s, a division occurred in the Southwark branch of the family. Two of William John’s youngest sons, Edwin and Herbert John, moved to South Wales, establishing a Welsh branch of the family.

2. WILLIAM VILLARS AND HIS DESCENDANTS

2.1 WILLIAM VILLARS (1799 - 1847) & HEPHZIBAH KIRBY (1796 - 1858)

William Villars was born on February 2nd 1799. He was baptised, aged 4, on July 8th 1803 at St Luke’s parish church, Old Street, Finsbury. His parent’s names were William and Elizabeth.

William married Hephzibah Kirby on May 30th 1819 at the church of St Bartholomew the Great in the City of London. Hephzibah’s parents were John and Susannah. Between 1820 and 1836, William and Hephzibah had nine children, five girls and four boys. Two of the boys, both named George, died in infancy, both when they were only one year old. The other two boys, William John and Joseph Henry, both married and had large families. Three of the girls, Ann Hephzibah, Ellen Elizabeth and Hephzibah, also married. The other two, Mary Ann and Lavinia, remained single and lived to great ages, 71 and 83 respectively.

William and Hephzibah moved house frequently. After their marriage, they first settled in Hatfield Street, Finsbury. Their first child, Ann Hephzibah, was born there in 1820. This was in the parish of St Luke’s where William had been baptised seventeen years earlier. In 1823, when their first son, William John, was born, they were living in Ledbury Place, St John’s Square, Clerkenwell. In 1826/7, they were living in the Soho district of Westminster. When Ellen Elizabeth was baptised at St Anne’s church, Soho, in 1826, they were living in Crown Court (now Diadem Court), a narrow lane between Dean Street and Great Chapel Street, close to Soho Square. Eighteen months later, when Mary Ann was baptised in the same church, they had moved to an address in the adjoining parish of St James’s, Westminster. In 1830, they were back in Finsbury, this time in Seward Street, still in St Luke’s parish. In
1832 and 1836, they were living in Britannia Gardens, Hoxton, and Richards Place, Haggerston, respectively, both districts of Shoreditch. Finally, both William and Hephzibah died at addresses in Shoreditch. Thus, despite the frequent moves, with the exception of the brief period spent in Soho, William appears to have lived all his life in the Finsbury and Shoreditch districts of London.

The parish of St Luke’s, Old Street, was a focus for much of William’s early life. The parish church was completed in 1733. It has an unusual, obelisk-like spire. The church was closed in 1959 due to subsidence. For safety, the roof was removed and the church was boarded up. The font and organ from St Luke’s were moved to St Giles parish church, Cripplegate, now enclosed within the Barbican Centre, where they can still be seen today. The font is particularly interesting. The lid is a beautiful, carved wooden dome, which stands on an ornate marble pedestal. William himself, and his children Ann and Joseph, were baptised at this font. In 2003, after being derelict for forty years, the renovated church building was reopened as a music centre run by the London Symphony Orchestra. Thus, it’s impressive spire and exterior can still be seen today.

In 1820, when his daughter Ann Hephzibah was born, William was a milkman. By 1825, he had become a table cover maker. Eventually, he seems to have specialised and become a piano cover maker. These piano covers were probably made of leather, possibly decorated sometimes with gold and silver.

William died, aged 48, on March 4th 1847. He died of tuberculosis which he had suffered from for three years before his final illness. He died at 14 Mark Street, Shoreditch. His eldest daughter, Ann Allum, who was living round the corner at 91 Leonard Street at the time, was present when he died. His funeral was at St Leonard’s church, Shoreditch on March 11th. His widow, Hephzibah, died eleven years later, on November 6th 1858, at Leonard Street, Shoreditch.
3. THE SOUTHWARK BRANCH OF THE FAMILY

3.1 WILLIAM JOHN VILLARS (1823 - 1896) & MARY ANN FISK (1822 - 1898)

William John and Mary Ann, c.1890

William John was born in 1823. He was the eldest son of William and Hephzibah. After spending his childhood living with his parents in Finsbury and Shoreditch, he moved away and settled in Southwark. At the time of his marriage, he was living somewhere in the Walworth Road, Southwark.

William John married Mary Ann Fisk on June 4th 1846 at St George’s church, Bloomsbury. This was Mary Ann’s parish church. At the time, she was living at 5 Southampton Street (now Southampton Place), a road close to the church, joining the south side of Bloomsbury Square to High Holborn. The facade of this house still survives, in more or less its original form, though the interior has been converted into offices for a firm of chartered accountants. It seems likely that, at the time of her marriage, Mary Ann was a domestic servant in the household of Henry Walker, an attorney, and his wife Amelia, who were living at this address in 1846.

Mary Ann was born in St Pancras Workhouse on May 22nd 1822. She was the illegitimate daughter of Charlotte Fisk, who had been admitted to the workhouse on the previous day. In her “Sworn Examination” by the parish authorities, Charlotte named the father as Joseph Bembridge, Gentleman, of 2 New Street, Compton Place. She had been living at 9 New Street, working as a domestic servant, until April 23rd. Mary Ann was baptised at St Pancras Old Church, adjacent to the workhouse, on June 13th. Charlotte and her baby left the workhouse on June 21st, just a month after she had been admitted. When she married, Mary Ann gave her father’s name as Joseph “Fisk”. It is impossible to tell whether this is what she believed or whether she merely said this to conceal her illegitimacy.

After their marriage, William John and Mary Ann settled in Southwark. Over the next twenty years, they had eleven children, six boys and five girls. When their first child, William Alfred, was baptised in 1847, they were living in Hanover Street, just off the Walworth Road.
Soon after this, they moved further north, to 107 London Road. For the next 30 years, the London Road became a centre for the Southwark branch of the Villars family.

London Road, Southwark, runs south from St George’s Circus to the Elephant and Castle. A prominent landmark in this area in the nineteenth century was the obelisk which stood in the centre of St George’s Circus. This was erected in 1771, in the eleventh year of the reign of George the Third. It was moved in 1905 to its present position in Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, adjacent to the Imperial War Museum. In its original position, the obelisk was railed in and had four unserviceable guns put up as posts to protect it from damage by traffic.

William John and his family lived at 107 London Road from about 1851 to 1879. From 1851 until 1860, William John worked as a carver and gilder for the firm of THOMAS GRIFFITHS & CO., possibly making mirrors with ornate carved and gilded frames. He advertised under the company’s name from his home at 107 London Road. From 1860, he started to advertise from the same address under his own name. In 1861, he had an apprentice to assist him and was doing well enough to employ a domestic servant. In 1869, he took over the house next door, 106 London Road, and advertised himself as a “carver & gilder, looking glass manufacturer, wholesale & retail upholsterer & cabinet maker”. By 1871, his eldest son, William Alfred, had become a partner in the family business, which then also employed three other men and ten boys. In the same year, the advertised name of the business became WILLIAM JOHN VILLARS & SON and the business expanded again, taking over 109 London Road to use as a furniture shop, the retail outlet for the business.

In the early 1870s, WILLIAM JOHN VILLARS & SON obtained several contracts to provide the furniture and interior decoration for some London theatres. They provided the furniture for the Opera Comique theatre which opened in the Strand in 1870. This theatre was demolished in 1899. It stood where the Aldwych theatre is today. Around 1872, they also made the “decorations and luxurious interior arrangements” for the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, where popular entertainments and lectures were held at the time.

By 1876, William’s second son, Valentine, then still living in the family home at 107 London Road, also became a partner in the family business, and the advertised name became WILLIAM JOHN VILLARS & SONS. William Alfred moved into 105 London Road after his marriage in 1873. Thus, from 1873 to 1879, the family business occupied houses at 105, 106 and 107 London Road, a shop at 109, and, from 1877 onwards, also had premises, described in advertisements as a “manufactory”, at 1 Bath Street, a road adjacent to 111 London Road. It had taken William John just 20 years to build up this extensive furnishing business, which must have been a prominent feature of the London Road at the time.

Around 1878, the family business ran into financial difficulties and bankruptcy proceedings were instigated. A general meeting of creditors was held in June 1878 to discuss terms of liquidation. The last newspaper advertisement for the business appeared in March 1879. By July of that year, William John, William Alfred and Valentine, and their families, were all living at addresses away from the London Road. Though William Alfred moved back to No. 105 the following year, the other addresses associated with the business became occupied by other tradesmen.

After the dissolution of the business, William John retired. He described himself in the 1881 census as a “retired upholsterer” and was living in Hove, Sussex, with Mary Ann other
members of the family. In the same year, William Alfred and Valentine advertised again, this
time as THE SURREY PLATE AND LOOKING GLASS MANUFACTORY. They
identified themselves as “Villars and Villars, carvers & gilders, looking glass and picture
frame manufacturers”. This was clearly a smaller scale venture than the previous family
business, and occupied only one address, 105 London Road. Valentine appears to have
dropped out of the venture almost immediately. Only William Alfred’s name appears in
advertisements from 1882 onwards.

In 1874, when his furnishing business was still expanding, William John appears to have
attempted to diversify his interests by taking over a jewellery shop at 5 Lowther Arcade in the
Strand. The Lowther Arcade, designed by John Nash, was built in 1831 and originally
intended as an elegant and fashionable shopping arcade, similar to Burlington Arcade, which
had opened in 1819. It was situated on the north side of the western end of the Strand, the
Strand entrance being where Coutts bank is today (almost opposite Charing Cross Station).
The arcade ran through the triangular block of buildings, known as West Strand, to emerge
facing the church of St-Martin-in-the-Fields. Light was provided by attractive domed
skylights. Whatever the original intention, by the 1860s, the Lowther Arcade had become
famous for its toy stalls. It was described as “a children’s paradise full of toys”. The majority
of the shops were toy shops and toys overflowed onto stalls that lined the arcade. The shops
adjacent to William John’s jewellery shop in 1874/5 are all listed as “fancy repositories”. A
painting of the arcade, dating from about the time that William John was there, shows it
looking more like a street market than an elegant shopping arcade. The arcade was closed and
demolished in 1902. William John’s venture into the jewellery trade does not appear to have
been successful. The shop is listed in his name in 1874 and 1875 only. After this, whilst
remaining a jewellery shop, it seems to have been taken over by someone else.

William John was a freemason. He joined the Kent lodge in 1866. In 1879, William Alfred
also became a freemason, joining the, Middlesex based, Royal Hanover lodge.

During William John and Mary Ann’s lifetime, the streets of London were filled with horse-
drawn vehicles. As well as individual horsemen and horsewomen, there were the private
carriages of the rich, hansom cabs (in both two-wheeled and four-wheeled varieties), horse
buses and waggons. Few petrol-driven vehicles are likely to have appeared on the London streets before the late 1890s. The first petrol bus appeared in 1899. William and Mary are therefore likely to have seen few, if any, petrol-driven vehicles during their lives.

South of Central London, about 5 miles out, the land rises sharply in a ridge of low hills. These hills were once covered by a dense forest of oak trees, known as the Great North Wood. The village of Norwood, whose name derives from “North Wood”, formed there and developed quite slowly until the mid nineteenth century when the decision to site the Crystal Palace there, after its removal from Hyde Park, signalled the wholesale development of the area as a desirable Victorian suburb. Today, Upper Norwood is easily located because of the BBC television transmission aerial which stands there, like a miniature Eiffel Tower, and can be seen from all over South London. It was to Upper Norwood, described on a poster of 1900 as “The Fresh Air Suburb - 380 feet above the Thames and therefore out of the valley fogs”, that William and Mary moved sometime before 1888, when they were in their early sixties.

Their house was 5 Woodland Road, a turning off Westow Hill, the “High Street” of Upper Norwood. This house still survives. It is a large, four-storied Victorian terraced house, at the top end of the road. Woodland Road slopes very steeply downwards to the north. From the road outside the house, there is a panoramic view of central London, with St Paul’s cathedral clearly visible in the middle. From their house, William and Mary must have witnessed the Thursday night firework displays at the nearby Crystal Palace and have often seen balloons flying overhead, piloted by balloonists operating from the Crystal Palace Park. Perhaps they also attended some of the regular Saturday concerts for which the Crystal Palace was famous.

William John died on October 5th 1896 at 5 Woodland Road. He was 74 and had outlived both his younger brother, Joseph Henry, who died in 1877, and his own eldest son, William Alfred, who died, aged only 42, in 1890. He was buried at West Norwood Cemetery on October 8th. In his will, he left the house in Woodland Road and its contents, to Mary Ann until her death, after which it was to be divided equally amongst his three, then unmarried, daughters - Louise, Helena and Matilda. Mary Ann died two years later, in March 1898, aged 75. She was buried at West Norwood Cemetery on March 31st.

3.2 WILLIAM ALFRED VILLARS (1847 - 1890) & HELENA ANNE LIGHTOWLER (1849 - 1904)

William Alfred was the eldest son of William John and Mary Ann. He was born on March 10th 1847 at Hanover Street, Newington, just off the Walworth Road. He was born the day before the funeral of his grandfather, William, who had died in March 1847 at Hanover Street, Newington, just off the Walworth Road. He was born the day before the funeral of his grandfather, William, who had died in March 4th. He was baptised on June 13th at St Mary’s church, Newington.

William Alfred married Helena Anne Lightowler on November 12th 1873 at St Mark’s church, Kennington. His sister, Lavinia Charlotte, had married in the same church four years earlier. Helena Lightowler was born on June 20th 1849 at Charlton in Kent. At that time, Charlton was a village with a population of under 5,000. Today, it is part of the London Borough of Greenwich. She was the youngest daughter of Thomas and Mary Lightowler. She had two older sisters, Mary Hannah and Sarah Jane, and an older brother, William. The family lived in the “Bullpits”, a group of servants quarters in Charlton Park, the extensive grounds of Chariton House. These quarters were probably so-named because they were close to a hollow depression which was formerly the site of a bull pit, used for the fashionable “sport” of bull baiting during the eighteenth century.
At the time of Helena’s birth, Thomas Lightowler was a groom in the household of Sir Thomas Maryon Wilson, 8th Baronet in the Maryon-Wilson Baronetage. The first Baronet had been Sir William Wilson, a distinguished cavalier in the civil war, who was made a Baronet by Charles II in 1660. Sir Thomas, the 8th Baronet, was a Colonel in the West Kent Militia. He never married and lived at Charlton House attended by 18 servants. Two of these were, Helena’s father, Thomas, and her brother, William, who was also a groom. Her father later rose to be butler to Sir Thomas.

Charlton House was built between 1607 and 1612, in the reign of James I, to a design by the famous architect, Inigo Jones. It is said to be one of the finest surviving examples of the domestic style of architecture and building of the time. It contained a consecrated chapel with stained glass windows and a large gallery containing many curious and interesting examples of natural history.

Thomas Lightowler died in 1866, when Helena was 17, and was buried at Charlton Cemetery. By this time, both of Helena’s older sisters had married and moved away. Helena still lived in the “Bullpits” in Charlton Park with her mother, who received an annuity from the Wilson family. In the years immediately prior to her marriage, Helena worked as a governess.

Between 1874 and 1889, William and Helena had nine children, four boys and five girls. Of the nine children, six were baptised at St Jude’s church in Richmond Street (now Colnbrook Street), Southwark, close to their home on the London Road. All their children, except one, were given the name “Lightowler” (Helena’s maiden name) as a last Christian name. The exception was their last child, Beatrice Alice, who died at birth. She was named after her ill-fated sister, Beatrice Lightowler Villars, who had been born four years earlier but had only lived for four months.

From their marriage in 1873 until 1887, with the exception of a brief period in 1879 when they lived at 8 Queen’s Road, Wimbledon, William and Helena lived at 105 London Road, Southwark. William Alfred followed his father’s profession as a carver and gilder and looking glass manufacturer. From 1873 until 1879, he worked with his father in the family business. After the disappearance of this business in 1879, William continued in business on his own. His business, THE SURREY PLATE AND LOOKING GLASS MANUFACTORY, specialised in looking glass and picture frame making. In 1881, two other men were employed in the business.

From at least 1881 until her death in 1885, Helena’s widowed mother, Mary Lightowler, who was blind, lived with the family. At this time, they also employed a young unmarried woman as a domestic servant. In 1887, when William Alfred was only about 40, he gave up the business and moved away from the London Road to Camberwell, where he died three years later.

William Alfred Villars died on January 22nd 1890 at 73 Crofton Road, Camberwell and was buried in his father’s family grave at West Norwood cemetery on January 28th. He was only 42 years old. He left seven children, all under 16. Helena lived at 73 Crofton Road for at least another 4 years. On November 7th 1896, she married Henry George Upton, a carpenter, himself a widower, who lived at 72 Crofton Road. By 1901, they had moved, taking Helena’s two youngest surviving children – Crips Hull Lightowler Villars and Alfred Christian.
Lightowler Villars – with them, to Tunbridge Wells in Kent. Helena died there on July 17th 1904 and was buried on July 20th at Frant cemetery, Kent. In 1906, Crips Hull and Alfred Christian emigrated to Canada.

3.3 AMELIA VILLARS (1850 - 1863)

Amelia, the third child of William John and Mary Ann, was born on December 27th 1850 at 107 London Road, Southwark. She was baptised at St Mary’s church, Newington, on September 28th 1851. Sadly, when she was only ten years old, she contracted tuberculosis. The illness lasted two years, growing worse in the last three months. Towards the end, William and Mary sent her, in the care of her aunt, Lavinia, to Ramsgate on the Kent coast. They probably hoped that the fresh sea air, away from the London fogs, would relieve her suffering. She stayed in a lodging house at 25 Hardres Street, Ramsgate. It was here that she died on September 15th 1863, aged 12 years and 9 months. Lavinia was present when she died.

Amelia’s body was brought back to London and she was buried at West Norwood Cemetery on September 23rd 1863. At this time, William and Mary established a family grave in West Norwood Cemetery. The headstone of the grave consisted of a square base surmounted by a short obelisk with a pedimented lid which carried a carved urn with drappings. The base was 2 foot square and the total height of the monument was about 6 feet. The front of the obelisk bore the inscription:

Sacred
To the Memory of
AMELIA.
Second Daughter of
Mr W. J. Villars.
Who Died
September 15th 1863.
Aged 12 Years
and 9 Months.
A Flower Cut Off in its Bloom.

The front of the base was inscribed:

The Family Grave of
Mr W. J. Villars
of London Road, Southwark.

In all, five members of William John’s family, including himself, were buried in the family grave at West Norwood between 1863 and 1898. They were - Amelia (1863), William Alfred and Leopold (1890), William John (1896) and Mary Ann (1898). It seems that no further inscriptions were added to the monument after the original one commemorating Amelia.

West Norwood Cemetery, originally called the South Metropolitan Cemetery, was opened in 1837 on 40 acres of land close to the village of Norwood, in what was then open countryside to the north of London. It was one of eight cemeteries established at that time in the country immediately surrounding London in order to relieve the overcrowding of London churchyards. The collection of Victorian monuments in West Norwood Cemetery has been
described as “comparing favourably with those in St Paul’s or even Westminster Abbey”.
The cemetery has over 40 Grade II listed monuments and many famous people are buried there, for example, Sir Henry Doulton, the potter, Sir Henry Tate, founder of the Tate Gallery, Baron Paul Julius de Reuter, founder of Reuter’s press agency, and Mrs Isabella Beeton, author of “Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management”.

As of 1991 (when the author visited the cemetery), William John’s family grave still survived, though in a very dilapidated condition. The base and obelisk leaned over at about 10 degrees to the vertical. The lid and urn had fallen off and lay buried amongst the brambles and saplings which covered the grave. The incrition on the obelisk were very worn and almost illegible. The grave (officially, grave no. 8729) lies in square 76 of the cemetery plan, on the right hand side about two thirds of the way up the narrow path which crosses that square diagonally. It is on the side of the hill which rises up towards the crematorium and garden of remembrance and quite close to the spectacular listed tomb of Captain John Wimble. This tomb has ships and shipwrecks carved on its sides and is surmounted by a carved merchant vessel, unfortunately, at the time of the visit, dismasted.

3.4 VALENTINE VILLARS (1853 - 1918) & FLORENCE JANE BLISS (1856 - 1932)

Valentine was born at 107 London Road, Southwark in 1853. He was the second son of William John and Mary Ann. He was still living in his father’s house when he married Florence Jane Bliss on July 21st 1877 at St Jude’s church in nearby Richmond Street. After the marriage, Valentine and Florence continued to live at 107 London Road for at least a year. Their first child, Valentina Florence Maud, was born there in 1878, and baptised at St Jude’s on April 22nd. Soon after this, they moved out of Valentine’s father’s house to a house somewhere nearby. In the summer of 1881, they moved to 147 Great Dover Street, Newington, only about half a mile from the London Road. In 1894, they were living at 9 St George’s Road, once again close to the London Road.

Valentine and Florence had nine children, six girls and three boys. The girls included two sets of twins, Grace Eveline and Mabel Gertrude, born in 1879, and, Marguerite Hurlingham and Dorothy Hurlingham, born in 1894. One of the boys, Arthur Percy, died soon after birth. The other two boys, and all the girls except Valentina, eventually married.

Valentine originally trained in his father’s profession as an upholsterer and furniture maker. He worked as an assistant in his father’s business at least until his marriage in 1877. For one year (1878), he was publican of the “Angel & Sun” public house at 285 The Strand. In 1894, when his second set of twins, Marguerite and Dorothy, were born, he was working as an auctioneers assistant. Valentine’s twin daughters, Marguerite and Dorothy, both married the same man. Marguerite married Ivo Clifford first, at Andover in 1916. She died he following year, aged only 23. Then, early in 1918, her sister Dorothy married Ivo Clifford in Lambeth. Soon afterwards, Dorothy and Ivo emigrated to Australia. Valentine himself died at about the same time, early in 1918, aged 65, and his widow, Florence, appears to have emigrated to Australia with Dorothy and Ivo.

Florence died on December 7th 1932, following a fall in which she fractured her thigh. She died in the hospital at Kogarah, New South Wales, where Dorothy was living at the time. Kogarah is a suburb of Sydney, not far from Botany Bay. Florence was 76 years old when she died.
4. THE WELSH BRANCH OF THE FAMILY

4.1 EDWIN VILLARS (1854 - 1914) & CHARLOTTE JANE DUCK (1854 - 1884) & SUSAN LEECH (1863 - 1940)

William John’s son Edwin was the first to move to South Wales, in the early 1880s. His brother Herbert John arrived there three or four years later, after his short career in the merchant navy. By the end of the 1880s both had married and settled there, founding a Welsh branch of the Villars family. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say, Welsh “branches” of the family, because Edwin settled in the area around Bridgend and Maesteg, to the west of Cardiff, and Herbert John settled about 30 miles further east, in the area around Cwmbran, just north of Newport.

Edwin was the third of William John and Mary Ann’s six sons. He was born at 107 London Road, Southwark, in 1854. Unlike his two older brothers, William Alfred and Valentine, Edwin does not appear to have trained as an assistant in his father’s furniture business. In 1871, when he was 17, he was working as a clerk and, in 1877, at the time of his first marriage, he is described as a “financial agent”.

Edwin married Charlotte Jane Duck on August 16th 1877 at the church of St Mary-at-Lambeth. This was the church in which Edwin’s uncle, Joseph Henry, had baptised his second son, Frederick William, in 1858. Edwin and Charlotte were both 23. He was living in High Street, Lambeth, and she in St Martin’s Road, Stockwell, at the time.

Edwin and Charlotte had two children, Stanley Edwin, born in 1878, and Ernest Albert, born in 1880. When Charlotte died in 1884, she was only 30. By that time, she and Edwin had already moved to the Cardiff area of South Wales. Five years later, in 1889, Edwin re-married. He and his second wife, Susan, had four children, three boys and a girl, though two of the boys died in infancy.

Edwin died in Bridgend in 1914, aged 60. Susan died in Cardiff twenty six years later, aged 77.

4.2 HERBERT JOHN VILLARS (1864 - 1948) & ELIZABETH CLAKE (1868 - 1941)

Herbert John was born at 107 London Road, Southwark, on April 24th 1864. He was the tenth child of William John and Mary Ann. When he was born, his oldest brother, William Alfred, was already 17 years old. A rift appears to have developed at some time between Herbert John and his father. As a result of this, he left home and initially went to sea in the merchant navy. Subsequently he settled in Cwmbran, near Newport, South Wales. That the rift with his father was never healed is suggested by the fact that Herbert John was the only one of William John’s surviving children who was not mentioned in his will. Even Edwin, who had also moved to South Wales, received twenty five pounds, but Herbert John was not mentioned at all.

When he left home, Herbert John went to sea as a merchant seaman. It is believed that, at some time, he was shipwrecked in the Bay of Biscay. Later, when he was living in Wales, he worked as a purser on paddlesteamers used for pleasure cruises in the Bristol Channel. Eventually, he became a gas fitter, working for the local gas company in Cwmbran.
Herbert John married Elizabeth Clake in the district of Newport in 1888, when he was 24. Elizabeth had been born in the district of Taunton in Devon in 1868. Over the next 20 years, they had nine children, seven boys and two girls. One of the boys, Ernest John, and one of the girls, Beatrice May, died in infancy. All the others survived and eventually married.

Herbert John and Elizabeth, c.1940

After their marriage, Herbert and Elizabeth lived first in a cottage in the village of Ty-Coch, just south west of Cwmbran. Later they moved to Oakfield Road, Cwmbran. In 1922, they were living at No. 41. Soon after this, they moved, just round the corner, to 214 Llantarnam Road, where they stayed for the rest of their married lives. Their house, known as “Lightwood House”, was next to a path, called the “Lightwood Path”, which joined Llantarnam Road and Oakfield Road.

Herbert and Elizabeth were members of the Brethren, a religious group which derived its views from the Plymouth Brethren. The Brethren held their meetings in the Gospel Hall, Oakfield Road, where they are still held today. It is believed that the connection with the Brethren originated from Elizabeth’s family. Herbert appears to have been associated with the group for some time, but later to have drifted away. All their children attended the Gospel Hall in their younger days and three of them - Herbert John, Reginald and Granville - became members and remained so all their lives.

Elizabeth died on January 18th 1941, aged 72, and was buried in Cwmbran Cemetery. Herbert spent the last few years of his life living with his eldest son Willie Gilbert and daughter-in-law Elizabeth, who was always known as Ciss or Cissie and had a Millinery/Haberdashery shop in Cwmbran. He died on October 20th 1948, aged 85. He was buried in the same grave as Elizabeth. Today, the descendants of Herbert John and Elizabeth, many still living in and around Cwmbran, form the largest single group of descendants of William and Hephzibah Villars.
5. THE HACKNEY BRANCH OF THE FAMILY

5.1 JOSEPH HENRY VILLARS (1830 - 1877) & CAROLINE NOBLE (1832 - 1917)

Joseph Henry was the second son of William and Hephzibah. He was born in Seward Street, Finsbury, on December 27th 1830 and baptised at St Luke’s church, Old Street, on April 10th 1831. This was where his father had been baptised 28 years earlier.

Joseph married Caroline Noble on July 22nd 1855 at the church of St Martin-in-the-Fields. This is one of London’s most famous parish churches, prominently situated at the north-east corner of Trafalgar Square. Joseph was then 24 and living in the Haymarket, Westminster.

Like his older brother William, Joseph had a large family. He and Caroline had eight children between 1856 and 1874. Also like his brother William, Joseph first settled south of the river after his marriage, though in Lambeth rather than Southwark. His first three children, Joseph James, Frederick William and Amy Laura, were born in Lambeth. He was living at 16 Great Paris Street, near the gardens of Lambeth Palace (now, Archbishop’s Park, Lambeth), when Frederick William was baptised at St Mary-at-Lambeth parish church in 1858. Since 1977, this church has been in process of restoration. It now houses the Museum of Garden History, which commemorates the two John Tradescants, father and son, royal gardeners. Their tomb is in the churchyard. The tomb of Admiral William Bligh, Captain of HMS Bounty during the famous mutiny, is also in the churchyard. He lived nearby, in Lambeth Road. He died in 1817, so the tomb would have been there when Frederick William was baptised in 1858.

Joseph and Caroline were still living at 16 Great Paris Street, Lambeth, in 1861. They and their three children shared the house with two other families, the families of a carpenter and a dentist. Soon after this, they moved to an address in the Old Kent Road in Camberwell. Their fourth child, Albert Edward was born there in 1863. A year or two later, they moved north of the river, to Shoreditch. Thus, unlike his brother, Joseph did not settle permanently south of the river, but moved back to the north after about 10 years. He and Caroline lived briefly in Shoreditch, where Joseph may have lived at some time during his childhood. They were living at 59 Union Buildings, Shoreditch, when Amy Laura and Albert Edward were baptised at St Leonards church on August 13th 1865. Their son, William John, probably named after Joseph’s brother, was born in Shoreditch in 1866. They then moved further north, to Hackney, where they both lived for the rest of their lives.

Just as William John can be said to have founded the Southwark branch of the Villars family, so Joseph Henry can be said to have founded the Hackney branch of the family. For the 50 years from 1868 to 1918 the majority of Joseph and Caroline’s descendants lived in Hackney, in particular in the Homerton sub-district of Hackney, in the parish of St Barnabas, Homerton. Just a week after their seventh child, Laura Caroline, was born in 1871, they were living at 8 King’s Road, Homerton, a house they shared with four members of the Cooper family. Later in the same year, when Harriet Elizabeth and Laura Caroline were baptised, they were living at 16 King’s Road. King’s Road was later renamed, Digby Road. Digby Road, Homerton, played the same central role for the Hackney branch of the Villars family as London Road, Southwark, did for the Southwark branch. At various times between 1871 and 1896, members of the family lived at numbers 8 (Joseph Henry), 9 (Joseph James), 16 (Joseph Henry, again), 52 (Caroline and Frederick William), 69 (William John), 80 (William John, again) and 94 (Frank).
At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Hackney was hardly more than a village. The population in 1801 was only 12,730. During the century, the area was developed rapidly, houses being built on almost all the available land. By 1901, almost the only fields left were public parks and the population had risen to 219,110 (almost twenty times the 1801 figure).

One commentator, writing in 1862, described the area as “one of the handsomest suburbs of London”. Most of the people who rented the new houses belonged to the middle and lower middle-classes. Victorian Hackney was the proverbial home of the middle-class clerk. However, interspersed among the more fashionable streets were less desirable areas, with poorer housing, occupied by poorer, working-class families. Homerton, where Joseph Henry and his children lived, was one of these poorer areas, including, as it did, two workhouses and a smallpox hospital. That Joseph Henry was poorer than his older brother is also shown by the fact that, as late 1871, he was sharing a house with another family and does not appear ever to have been able to employ a domestic servant.

When he married Caroline, in 1855, Joseph was a waiter. Shortly afterwards, when he lived in Lambeth, he was a warehouse porter, and later, when living in Shoreditch and Hackney, he became a carver and gilder, and eventually, a looking glass fitter and silverer. It is possible that this latter work was connected in some way with his brother’s furniture business, which specialised in the manufacture of looking glasses.

Joseph Henry died in Hackney, aged 47, in 1877. He died before any of his children had married. His eldest child, Joseph James, was only just 21 when he died. His widow, Caroline, continued to live in Hackney for another forty years. In 1881, four years after his death, she was living at 52 Digby Road. Albert Edward and William John, then 18 and 15 and working as a dyer and a plumber, respectively, were still living at home, as was her youngest child, Frank, then still only 6. Her second son, Frederick William, and his wife, Maria, and their first child, Frederick George, were also living in the same house at that time. Caroline died in 1917, aged 85.

5.2 JOSEPH JAMES VILLARS (1856 - 1929) & CATHERINE ANN GIGGINS (1858 - 1946)

Immediately after their marriage in 1855, Joseph Henry and Caroline settled south of the river, in Lambeth. It was here that their first child, Joseph James, was born in 1856. The first nine years of his life were spent south of the river, first in Paris Street, Lambeth and, later, in the Old Kent Road, Camberwell. Then, when he was about ten years old, his parents moved north of the river, first to Shoreditch and finally to the Homerton district of Hackney, where they stayed for the rest of their lives.

Joseph James’s father died in 1877, when he was 21. Three years later, on September 5th 1880, he married Catherine Ann Giggins at the church of St John of Jerusalem, South Hackney. Catherine Ann was born in Homerton in 1858. She was baptised on July 4th at the church of St Barnabas. She was the daughter of William and Elizabeth Giggins. William was a labourer who later became a corn chandler. Joseph was 24 and Catherine was 21 at the time of their marriage. Six months after the marriage, in April 1881, they were living at 37 Loddiges Road, Hackney, a house they shared with five members of the Head family, and Catherine was expecting their first child. By the time the child, Joseph Henry, was born on July 19th 1881, they had moved to 31 Loddiges Road. In the years that followed, they had
three other children, Alfred Edward (born 1883), William Frederick (1886) and Catherine Ann (1890).

By the time he was fourteen, Joseph was already working as an errand boy. Later in life he worked as a coach painter. He died in Hackney in 1929, aged 72. His widow, Catherine, died in Wokingham in 1946, aged 87.

5.3 WILLIAM JOHN VILLARS (1866 -1904) & JESSIE PALFREY (1864 - 1887) & EMMA JANE CARTER (1865 – 1920)

William John Villars was the fifth child of Joseph and Caroline. He was probably named after the Southwark William John, Joseph’s older brother. He was born in Shoreditch in 1866. By the time his sister, Harriet Elizabeth, was born in 1868, his parents had moved to Hackney. It was here, in the relatively poor parish of St Barnabas, Homerton, that he grew up.

From the age of two until he married, William John lived in Digby Road, Homerton. His father died when he was eleven. By the time he was fifteen, he had already started work as a plumber, the trade he was to follow for the rest of his life.

William John married his first wife, Jessie, in 1836. Their only child, Emily, was born on August 12th 1887 and baptised on September 18th at the church of St John at Hackney. They lived at 105 Overbury Street, Lower Clapton. As well as working as a plumber, William also advertised as a paperhanger at this time. In 1887, shortly after Emily was born, Jessie died, aged only 23.

About 18 months later, William re-married. His second wife was Emma Jane Carter, the daughter of a fishmonger. They married on May 25th 1889 at the parish church of St Barnabas, Homerton. From the time of their marriage until William died, they lived in Digby Road, Homerton, the same road as William had lived in throughout his childhood. Until 1892, they lived at No. 80. Then, for the rest of William’s life, they lived at No. 69. Throughout this time, William worked as a plumber, advertising as such in local trade directories.

William and Emma had seven children, though, sadly, five of them died before they were one year old. Only Percy Harry, born 1892, and Sidney, born 1898, along with William’s daughter, Emily, by his first wife, survived into adulthood. Emily and Percy both eventually married. Sidney died in action in the World War 1, aged 20.

William John died in 1904, aged only 38. Emily would have been just 17, Percy 12 and Sidney only 6. His widow, Emma, re-married four year later, in 1908, and died in 1920.