

Henry Weston Alcock

In some families, there is often a central figure that has a big influence, not only on their children, but on the future of their descendants as well. Henry Weston Alcock was such a man. He worked to become a successful merchant and wealthy 'gentleman' in Lincolnshire, then emigrated, as a widower with a large family, to start a new life for himself and his children Australia. There are now over XX descendants of Henry Weston and his wife Mary now living throughout the country.

Henry was born on 29 April 1845 in Barton, located along the Humber River in northern Lincolnshire. He was named after his father Henry (Snr) Alcock and mother Mary, whose maiden name was Weston, which was a common tradition in those days. The doctor attending his birth was possibly Dr John Morley, who registered the birth two days later on 1 May and who, coincidentally, would end up to be his farther-in-law. Henry was baptized on 15 May at St Marys Church in Barton (register entry no. 11573). At the time of his birth Henry's father listed his occupation as 'gentleman' on the baptism records, which probably meant he had some wealth and respectability in the town.

Henry's father would later own a brick and tile manufacturing business at Hoe Hill, on the banks of the Humber River near Barton. His property and name are listed on the Barton Town Map of 1855. His father died in 1864 when Henry was 18, leaving behind his estate 'to his wife to convert same to money, and use for maintenance of dear son Henry Weston Alcock till he is 21'. His father was buried at St Peters Church (register entry no. 15003) and left just under 1500 pounds, most likely passing claim to the business onto young Henry, who would have worked with his father.



The town of Barton was growing quickly in the Victorian era, helped by the coming of the Grand Central Railway in 1849. By 1856 there were 12 inns and taverns, and 6 beer houses amongst the other shops and industries. The buildings in Barton were mostly made of brick, due to the close proximity of many brick and tile works along the Humber banks, which were bringing wealth to the town. By 1842 there were five brick makers and by 1851 it had grown so much that there were 78 men and boys working full time in the industry. By 1892 there were 13 brick and tile manufacturers along the riverbank. When tile and brick making was at its peak, clay was dug in the winter when it was wet and tiles were made in the spring (after the last frost) and summer.

According to the trade directory for Barton on Humber, by 1882 when Henry was 37, he had built several businesses, taking advantage of industrial developments and trade opportunities in the region. He owned the brickworks at Barton and had become a 'wine and spirit merchant, material dealer and coal merchant' based in Grimsby, using the river to transport materials up and down. He would have hauled coal into Barton by a sloop, a type of boat, and the finished bricks and tiles were removed the same way. The 1881 Census¹, records him

living at 6 Market Place, Grimsby, with his family, had a domestic servant (Miss I.J. Phillips) and employed two men in his wine business and 13 men and two boys in his brick making business.

Henry married Mary Letitia Morley in 1866 (in the District of Glanford Brigg when he was 21 - no record of marriage yet –apparently they went to same school). Mary, who also grew up in Barton, was several years older than Henry, and was baptized there on 1 September 1839. They started what was to become a large family. Their eldest son John Henry was born in 1867. Then along came Helen Mary (1870), Frank Morley (1872), George Frederick (1873), Walter Weston (1876), Isabel May (1877), Alice Letitia (1879), Margaret (Annie) (1887) and Jessie Morley (1889). Two of their children died in infancy: Gilbert in 1874 and Wilfred (?). Obviously needing a large home, they also owned a grand three story private residence called ‘The Limes’ at (could be 49, 51, 53, 55) Welholme Road, in Grimsby, which is still there today.

In 1886 when Henry was 41, he sold his brick and tile works at Hoe Hill to William Blyth². Today, it seems strange walking around the William Blyth Tileries, as not much has changed since it was first owned by the Henry Snr and his son. The company still makes bricks and tiles the traditional way, using old-style arched kilns, drying yards and no modern technology. The land is flat and hard, with a heavy clay soil.

Walking over the site, you can still imagine workmen hauling the coal from the ships in the mid-1800s, building open kilns over the soft bricks, firing them up, then loading the hardened bricks and tiles back onto ships for nearby markets along the coast. The large, wide Humber river stretches for kilometres to the over side at Kingston. The old, red brick buildings of William Blyth Tileries, like the brick making technique itself, haven’t changed in over 150 years.

In April 1891 Census for Barton³, Henry (44) is recorded as being at their Barton brickyard with daughter Mary (20), Frank (19) an articled law clerk, and daughter Jessie (6), with Sarah Fryer, a domestic servant. Other brickmakers and their families are also living at the site including the Espin family (4), Thompson family (4), Hare family (5), Hedley family (5) and Davidson family (3). Some were farm labourers and one a captain of a sloop.

Later in 1891, after Henry’s wife Mary had died aged 50, he started to make plans for his children’s future. His eldest son John, who had by now married Louisa Tong and with two young children, took over the wine and spirit business in Grimsby. John was also listed as ‘a wine, spirit, ale, porter and stout merchant’ in the 1892 trade directory⁴ and would later be registered as ‘proprietor of the Golden Ray scotch whiskey and invalid port’ at 5 & 6 Old Market Road, Great Grimsby. Like most eldest boys then, he inherited the family business.

George Frederick, interested in the labour call to join the burgeoning colony of Victoria, was assisted by Henry with a ticket to immigrate to Australia in the early 1890s, possibly 1891, to take up work with the Chaffey Brothers, who were developing a vast irrigation project for farming in the Mildura region. He was the first to leave home at 17.

The attraction of a new life in another British colony, and the promise of opportunities for his children, must have been strong, particularly after the death of his wife of 25 years to ‘cancer of the gall bladder and peritonitis’. So in July 1895, Henry, aged 48, and his seven children, sailed to Western Australia aboard the Orizaba, saying goodbye to his remaining family. The Public Record Office of Victoria lists the children’s names and ages on the voyage as Walter (20), Mary (24), Jessie (10), Isabel (17), Frank (23), Annie (13) and Alice (16).

Henry settled in Perth and helped his children to become established in their careers, particularly the boys, who took up farming properties in the Maddington and York districts. He probably lived with his son Walter at their family house at 15 Kelvin Road (Henry’s address is listed as ‘Maddington’ the Post Office Directory between years 1908-12 and he’s mentioned as ‘farmer’) until 1914.⁵ At some stage, he moved to live in Sydney, where he died on 6 August 1927, aged 82, and is buried at the Congregational Cemetery, Woronara.

¹ 1881 UK Census, Grimsby St James, page 35, schedule 3267

² Letter from William Blyth Company, March 2003

³ 1891 Census, Public Records Office

⁴ 1882 trade directory for Barton, Lincolnshire Council research – letter

⁵ Henry Weston Alcock's address on WA Post Office Directory 1908-12 is Maddington