

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story



This story was written, in July 2025, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who were born in the same year as Queen Victoria.

Hannah Collins' Story

Born in the rural village of Aldershot in Hampshire, Hannah was baptised at the Church of St Michael the Archangel on Palm Sunday, April 4th, 1819.ⁱ

A Family of Potters

Hannah was the third child of William and Sarah Collins, born into a local family of potters. Her father had also been baptised at St Michael's Church, in 1875.ⁱⁱ Her mother had been baptised at St Peter's in Ash, her residence noted as Worplesdon, about eight miles away from Aldershot, just north of Guildford. That was where her parents married at St Mary's Church in 1813, William able to sign his name in the register, Sarah making her mark. William then said to be 'of this parish' indicating perhaps that he was then working in a pottery nearby.ⁱⁱⁱ

There were potteries all across the Hampshire/Surrey boundary, defined by the course of the Blackwater River: from Yateley, Cove, Farnborough and Aldershot in the north of Hampshire and across into Ash, Frimley and Pirbright in Surrey. In centuries gone by, these produced utility crockery, referred to as Borderware, which was widely sold in London and beyond, now even found as far away as Jamestown, Virginia. The rise of industrialised potteries and improved transportation was beginning to undermine the economics of those craft-based businesses.

Families owning potteries exchanged their offspring as apprentice potters, adding to the turnover in employment of journeyman potters. By the time of Hannah's birth, her father was working as a potter at one of the four potteries then operating in Aldershot.

The Collins family then had their own pottery, originating as a bequest in the will of William's maternal grandmother, the property had passed from one member to another.^{iv} It was William's younger brother Charles who eventually became the owner of the pottery at which William worked.

However, in 1836, William had inherited adjacent property from his older brother Richard who had earlier established himself as a potter in neighbouring Frimley.

Birth Order

Hannah had two elder siblings, Mary (b.1815) and John (b. 1817). Her mother would have three more children after Hannah, also baptised with two-year spacing: Henry (1821), William (1823) and Jane (1825).

Sadly, Hannah was to experience loss all too soon, with the death in 1827 of both her mother Sarah^v and her infant sister Jane.^{vi} They were buried, respectively, in February and May. Hannah was then barely eight years old. The cause of those deaths is not known as this was before death registration and certificates became compulsory.

- In that same year, Princess Victoria became third in line for the throne, following the death of her father, the Duke of York. Two years later, in 1830, Victoria became the heir presumptive. Her German-born mother lived, keen to become regent.

As Hannah's father would not re-marry, the supposition is that her sister Mary, as the eldest child, assumed a leading role in the household on Malthouse Lane. Birth order became significant for Hannah when it came to housework as she was now the youngest of the daughters in the household in support of their father and brothers.

Leaving Home

Hannah changed that by marrying at age 17, recorded as a 'minor' in the parish register on 28 December 1838.^{vii}

- Victoria had succeeded to the throne in 1837 on the death of William IV, her uncle, her coronation as Queen Victoria in June 1838. She married Prince Albert in 1840.

Both Hannah and her husband James Kellsey could sign their name in the marriage register, so too her sister Mary and brother John as witnesses.

James was four years Hannah's senior, listed in the marriage register as a labourer, resident in Aldershot. He had been baptised in Weybridge, about 18 miles away, further up on the road up to London which lay about 40 miles from Aldershot.

The couple moved closer to the outskirts of London, recorded by the 1841 Census as living the household of a farmer on Mill Lane in Streatham. James was listed as an agricultural labourer.^{viii} Their son William was born later that year.

The next year, back in the village, Hannah's elder brother John died on January 24th, 1842.^{ix} Mary was present, registering the death over two weeks later in Farnham, the nearby market town which had been designated in 1837 as the Registration District for all births and deaths in the surrounding area. The cause of death was recorded as Pulmonary Consumption. He was aged 24.

Hannah's younger brothers fared much better. Henry had left home, marrying in 1845 at the age of 23 to Elizabeth Hatt.^x The wedding took place at St John's Church in Cove. Henry had married well: she was the daughter of a Daniel Hatt. Recorded in the 1841 Census as a farmer in Bramshot Lane, Yateley, he passed on in February 1847. By 1851, the couple were based at White Hall Farm,^{xi} Henry then operating his own pottery.

William had also married, in 1846, to Charlotte Hore when he had been working in Farnborough as a potter; she had been a servant there, the daughter of a farmer from Mapledurham by the Thames in Oxfordshire. William and his wife had moved back to Aldershot, recorded as taking on the other pottery in the village, located by the Beehive Inn; both potteries now worked by the Collins family.

Hannah's sister Mary had remained in the family home, unmarried and becoming housekeeper for her father, his younger brother Charles and the other brother William, all potters. By 1851, Mary also recognised as a potter alongside her father and her uncle Charles, the latter listed as "Master Potter".

By then, Hannah was a mother of three. Seven year old daughter Phoebe, like William, had been born in Streatham. Newly born Emily was born in West Norwood where the 1851 Census records the family at Woodcote Place, in the parish of St Mary's in Lambeth.^{xii} James 'Killsey' is listed as a Turncock, Hannah as a Turncock's wife.

There had been significant building upon what had been fields and common ground in the general area of Norwood, stimulated by the erection of Crystal Palace. This was occasioned by the relocation to nearby Sydenham in 1854 of the huge glass and cast-iron building which had been erected in Hyde Park to house the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Change & Bereavement

The village that Hannah had left behind was about to change. The gathering at the parish church in Aldershot for the funeral of Hannah's Uncle Charles in June 1853 might be taken as marking 'a time before', both for the village and for the Borderware potteries.^{xiii}

The Government bought a large part of Aldershot Heath in 1854 to establish a military camp. Her father William Collins and older sister Mary had continued to work in the family pottery but within three years there were thousands of incoming townsfolk as well as soldiers in North and South Camp, many returning from the War in the Crimea which had taken place between 1854 and 1856.

- Queen Victoria and Prince Albert visited Aldershot many times after the Camp opened in 1855, often staying at the especially-built Queen's Pavillion thereby to review the troops.

In November 1856, Hannah became a widow, aged 37, with three children to raise, Emily the youngest at age five.^{xiv} Her husband James had died of Pleuritis (also known as pleurisy),^{xv} his death certificate stating that he had died in the Surrey County Lunatic Asylum in Wandsworth.

- Five years later, Queen Victoria would also be widowed by the death of her Consort Prince Albert in December 1861, then going into an extended period of mourning.

Hannah and the family had remained at Woodcote Place by Curnick's Lane in West Norwood, listed by the 1861 Census as a dressmaker. It was now son William who was listed as a turncock, as had his father been; daughter Phoebe, by then aged 17, was listed as a pupil teacher.^{xvi} The youngest daughter Emily was not present in her mother's household, she was instead enumerated in Aldershot, listed as aged 10, with her grandfather William Collins and her Aunt Mary.

Hannah's father died the following year, aged 77, in September 1862, buried at Aldershot's parish church.^{xvii} Her older sister Mary inherited the family property, both the pottery and cottages which could be let for rent. This massive influx of townsfolk into Aldershot after the opening of the Camp had caused a severe shortage of accommodation; the population of the village had increased almost tenfold, to over 7,600 as later recorded by the 1861 Census.

Next Generation

Hannah became a grandmother in 1871. Her eldest daughter Phoebe had married a year before in June 1870.^{xviii}

It is unclear whether Phoebe was then still in the family home at the time she wed Charles Hudson, the marriage registered in Leyton, Essex which was where the couple had set up home by 1871, Charles listed in the Census as working in the furniture business.^{xix}

Their son William Charles Hudson was baptised in Leyton in October 1871.^{xx} Next came granddaughter Emily, born in 1872.

- Hannah's son-in-law Charles was the son of a farm labourer; he was aged 2 when recorded by the 1851 Census in Thurning, Norfolk.^{xxi} His birthplace was given as Wood Dalling although he was baptised in Aylsham, his mother's place of birth. The family had then moved to London, their youngest child born in Spitalfields in 1857. By 1861, Charles' father had become a carman, the family living in Bethnal Green, Charles then aged 12.^{xxii} His parents continued in Bethnal Green in 1871.^{xxiii}

By 1871, Hannah had moved with her son William and daughter Emily, now aged 20, to Ivy House, on Knight's Hill, in West Norwood (Lambeth).^{xxiv} Hannah's occupation was listed as a china dealer.

Further Sadness

Four years later, the widowed Hannah suffered the first of another set of bereavements. This was the death of her daughter Emily, at age 25 in March 1876, from what was certified as a Cerebral Effusion, after 11 days of "inflammation of the brain".^{xxv} Her occupation was recorded as a schoolmistress, as her older sister Phoebe had been, the address given as Knight's Hill.

A year later, Hannah's elder sister Mary dies, aged 62, in November 1877.^{xxvi} One consequence was that Hannah then inherited the Collins family cottages in Aldershot, providing her, at age 58, with additional income from rent.^{xxvii}

Next came the shock of the death of Hannah's son William, aged 39, in December 1880;^{xxviii} the cause was recorded as "Congestion of Lungs, Dropsy". The death certificate describes William as a turncock employed by the Lambeth Water Works, his address given as "The Reservoir, Brown Lane, Upper Norwood" with a W. Veness present at death.

Hannah had now experienced the loss in adulthood of her husband and two of her children, that of her sister and father; that adding to childhood loss of her mother and young sister.

The 1881 Census places Hannah the household of her daughter Phoebe and family in Collingwood Street, Bethnal Green,^{xxix} likely having earlier moved in sometime after the death of Emily. Phoebe was listed as a schoolmistress, son-in-law Charles Hudson as a furniture grainer. She herself, listed as "income derived from houses", was now aged 61 and living with her grandchildren: William (9), Emily (8), Charles (6), Louisa (1) and newborn Beatrice.

Sadly, she would not be at peace as tragedy struck again, five years later. This time it was daughter Phoebe her death at age 42 on 29 March 1886 attributed to Bronchitis and Chronic Asthma, said to have had a "Fatty heart". The address given was 40 Jacobs Street, Bethnal Green,^{xxx} suggesting an earlier move from Collingwood Street.

Charles remarried, as might have been expected for a widower with three young children. His marriage to Annie Elizabeth Barklem is recorded in Q1 1888,^{xxxi} their first child born later that year, in the September quarter (July-September).^{xxxii}

Charles' bride was aged about 26, the eldest of seven children of a blacksmith, as recorded in Bethnal Green in 1881.^{xxxiii} Emily, Charles' eldest daughter, was aged 15 at the time of the marriage. By 1891, Charles had moved to Marlborough Street, Shoreditch with his three children, his new wife and two year old Ada.^{xxxiv}

Return to Aldershot

It is not known when and under what circumstances, Hannah had left the household of her three grandchildren, her widowed son-in-law and his new bride. However, by 1891, having outlived all of her three children, Hannah had moved back to Aldershot, recorded as living on her own household in one of five dwellings now referred to as 'Kelsely Cottages' on Malthouse Lane.^{xxxv}

Hannah died six years later, aged 78, in September 1897.^{xxxvi} At Probate, the effects in the estate of Hannah were valued at £727-10s, presumably the Aldershot properties; these were made over to her eldest granddaughter, "Emily Harriet Sweeting (wife of George)."

Emily had married George Sweeting a year earlier, in 1896, when aged 23. They would later move to Walthamstow, listed there in 1901 with two daughters, aged six and two, who had been born in Shoreditch. George was listed as a horsehair drawer.^{xxxvii}

Life had come circle for this daughter of a potter. At age 78, she had returned to her birthplace, having outlived her siblings, her husband and her children. When Hannah had left Aldershot, the population of the village had been less than 685, as recorded in the 1841 Census; on her return, the place had been completely transformed into a garrison town, the very much larger population of 21,797 recorded by the 1891 Census.

- Queen Victoria died just over three years later than Hannah, aged 82, in January 1901.

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Sources (& Notes)

All referenced below were accessed via FindMyPast.com unless otherwise stated.

ⁱ Baptism. Hannah Collins. 4 April 1819. Aldershot, St Michael the Archangel. Surrey History Centre. ALDM/3/1
Aside: Signing himself in the Baptismal Register as the "Perpetual Curate", "Rev. John West", the celebrant at Hannah's christening would set sail the next year to take up the post of Chaplain to the Hudson Bay Company, later to be remembered in the Canadian Prayer Book of 1959 as "John West, missionary, Red River, Canada. 1845."

ⁱⁱ Baptism. William Collins. 10 Apr 1785. Aldershot, St Michael the Archangel. Surrey History Centre. ALDM/1/2

ⁱⁱⁱ Marriage. William Collins. Sarah Hamarton. 10 Jul 1813. Worplesdon, St Mary. Surrey History Centre. WOR/2/3

^{iv} The following is based on transcriptions mad by Sally Jenkinson from the Crondall Court Roll which is held at Hampshire Record Office. [references being sought]

As first reported in 1800, the will of Anne Couls (nee Baigent) bequeathed the "messuage or tenement and potkiln and potshops with the land and appurtenances known as Park," to John Collins (William's father, Hannah's grandfather). With his early demise, the properties passed to John's eldest son Henry Collins (William's brother, Hannah's uncle). This was confirmed in 1822.

At Henry's death in 1827, the family property passed to his wife Elizabeth who mortgaged this property for £150 to Henry's brother Richard. In 1835, Elizabeth sold the pottery and other property to William's younger brother Charles (Hannah's uncle).

With obligation to pay £100 to their sister Ann (wife of John Smith) and £20 to Mary (Hannah's older sister), Richard left William (Hannah's father) his copyhold property in Aldershot: "All that messuage divided into tenements with fuelhouses buildings and gardens ... together with a piece of meadow and orchard (½a) lying behind and ... One messuage garden orchard and three farlinglands and two cottages." William had mortgaged the property to John Allen Ward of Farnham, auctioneer.

^v Burial. Sarah Collins. 21 Feb 1827. Aldershot, St Michael the Archangel. Surrey History Centre. ALDM/4/1

^{vi} Burial. Jane Collins. 23 May 1827. Aldershot, St Michael the Archangel. Surrey History Centre. ALDM/4/1

^{vii} Marriage. James Kellsey. Hannah Collins. Aldershot, St Michael the Archangel. Surrey History Centre.

ALDM/2/4

^{viii} 1841 England, Wales & Scotland Census. HO107/1068/2/32. Hannah Killsey. Mill Lane, Streatham.

^{ix} Burial. John Collins. 14 Jan 1842. Aldershot, St Michael the Archangel. Surrey History Centre. ALDM/4/1

^x Marriage. Henry Collins. Elizabeth Hatt. 4 Feb 1845. Cove, St John. Surrey History Centre. COVJ/3/1

^{xi} 1851 England, Wales & Scotland Census. HO107/1595/159/7. Henry Collins. White Hall Farm, Yateley.

^{xii} 1851 England, Wales & Scotland Census. HO107/1575/527/10. Hannah Killsey. 4, Woodcote Place, Norwood

^{xiii} For more on this and on the Aldershot potteries, see <https://aldershotvillage.net/june-1853/>

^{xiv} Burial. James Killsey. 5 Dec 1856. West Norwood, St Luke. South London Burials Index 1545-1905

^{xv} Death Certificate. General Register Office. James Killsey. 1856/Dec/Wandsworth/01D/262

<https://www.gro.gov.uk/>

^{xvi} 1861 England, Wales & Scotland Census. Hannah Killsey. Woodcote Place West, Curnicks Lane, Norwood

^{xvii} Burial. William Collins. 27 Sep 1862. Aldershot, St Michael the Archangel. Surrey History Centre. ALDM/4/3

^{xviii} Marriage. Charles Hudson. Phoebe Collins. 26 Jun 1870. Leyton, St Mary the Virgin. Essex Record Office. D/P 45/1/17

^{xix} 1871 England, Wales & Scotland Census. RG10/1634/77/4. Charles Hudson. Thornhill Road, Leyton, Essex.

^{xx} Baptism. William Charles Hudson. 30 Oct 1871. Leyton, Essex

^{xxi} 1851 England, Wales & Scotland Census. HO107/1810/9/10. John Hudson. Thurning, Norfolk

^{xxii} 1861 England, Wales & Scotland Census. RG09/250/69/6. John Hudson. 3 Boundary Street, Bethnal Green

^{xxiii} 1871 England, Wales & Scotland Census. RG10/474/83/5. John Hudson. 3 Boundary Street, Bethnal Green.

^{xxiv} 1871 England, Wales & Scotland Census. RG10/693/54/1. Hannah Killsey. Ivy House, Knights Hill, Norwood, Lambeth <https://norwoodstreethistories.org.uk/street/knights-hill/>

^{xxv} Burial. Emily Killsey. 30 Mar 1876. West Norwood, St Luke. South London Burials Index 1545-1905

Death Certificate. General Register Office. Emily Killsey. 4 March 1876. <https://www.gro.gov.uk/>

^{xxvi} Burial. Mary Collins. 14 Nov 1877. Aldershot, St Michael the Archangel. Surrey History Centre. ALDM/4/2

^{xxvii} Court of Probate. Mary Collins. The National Archives. IR27/400

^{xxviii} Death Certificate. General Register Office. William Killsey. 2 December 1880. <https://www.gro.gov.uk/>

^{xxix} 1881 England, Wales & Scotland Census. RG11/433/24/42. Charles Hudson (Hannah Killsey). Collingwood Street, Bethnal Green.

^{xxx} Death Certificate. General Register Office. Phoebe Killsey. 13 March 1886. <https://www.gro.gov.uk/>

^{xxxi} Marriage. Charles Hudson. Elizabeth Barklem. Q1 1888. Bethnal Green. Vol 1C/308

^{xxxii} Birth. Ada Annie Hudson to mother Barklom. September Quarter 1888. <https://www.gro.gov.uk/>

^{xxxiii} 1881 England, Wales & Scotland Census. RG11/428/93/12. Robert Barklem (Annie E). Tyrell Street, Bethnal Green, Hackney.

^{xxxiv} 1891 England, Wales & Scotland Census. RG12/255/79/50. Charles Hudson. Marlborough Street, Shoreditch.

^{xxxv} 1901 England, Wales & Scotland Census. RG12/564/43/33. Hannah Killsey. 'Kelsely Cottages', Malthouse Lane, Aldershot.

^{xxxvi} Court of Probate. Hannah Kelsey. Death 9 Sep 1897. : £727-10s – left for Emily Harriet Sweeting (wife of George) The National Archives. IR27/554

^{xxxvii} 1901 England, Wales & Scotland Census. RG13/1631/6/3. George Sweeting (Emily). 497 Forest Road, Walthamstow.