

## **Henry Smithers, Mayor of Brighton 1861**

### **His ancestors and family legacy in Sussex and Australia.**

This story of the ancestry and family legacy of Henry Smithers 1807-1884, sixth Mayor of Brighton in 1861, begins with his Great Great Grandfather, born about 1654, and concludes by briefly touching on his Smithers Great Grandchildren in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It has drawn on BDM records and articles from the Sussex Family History Group; newspaper reports of the time, including as summarised in the Packham Index to Brighton and Hove in the Sussex Weekly Advertiser of 1746 to 1806; records held by the East Sussex Record Office (ESRO), particularly Wills, land and property transactions, for which I am grateful of the research assistance and guidance provided by Madeleine Dickens of "Past Generations"; and other information available from various authoritative sources on line, including articles by local historians Sue Berry relating to the family in Preston in the 1700s and 1800s and Judy Middleton relating to the family in the Brighton area in the early 1900s. In some of the records from earlier years, the family name is occasionally recorded as Smither or Smyther/s.

This story has a particular focus on the Smithers family's evolving agricultural and brewing interests over the generations and, reflecting that, largely confines itself to Henry's male ancestral line, with the notable exception of the ancestry of Mary Heaves and Maria Welsford. It has not attempted to be exhaustive in the information it captures (e.g. land transactions), but rather sufficient to understand the journey made by the Smithers family over the generations from humble beginnings to major landholders and brewers in Sussex, and some of the major events in their lives.

### **Henry Smithers c.1654-1730**

The earliest Smithers ancestor of Henry's about whom much is known is his Great Great Grandfather, Henry, who was possibly born in 1654 to Henry and Catherine Smither at Coates cum Burton, although there are many gaps in the records and other possible Smither/s families in Sussex. Henry was a "carrier" and married Mary Wood on 3 May 1683 in Falmer, at a time when there was an upsurge in people from outside that Parish marrying there. They had nine children together between 1684 and 1704, with some earlier children baptised in Rottingdean and subsequent children baptised in Lewes. Just two of these were boys, John, baptised 30 May 1691, and Henry, baptised 7 May 1695, both at St John the Baptist, Lewes. The family lived in Brighton in later years, although little is recorded about their life there.

While Brighton had prospered in earlier years, during Henry's lifetime it had become a depressed township with much poverty. The population declined from about 4,000 in the 1640s, to just 2,000 in the early 1700s. It began to pick up again from about 1730, however, when it became fashionable for people to seek health improvement by taking in the sea air and drinking and bathing in sea water.

Henry was living in Brighthelmston when he died, aged about 76, and was buried on 5 May 1730 at St. Margaret, Rottingdean, some 4 miles east of Brighton. Henry's Will had been prepared in 1727, with Henry barely able to write a recognisable signature. He bequeathed one shilling to each of his sons, John and Henry, and 21 shillings to each of his seven married daughters. He left the bulk of his estate to his wife Mary for her sole possession, or disposal at her discretion, including all his monies (less the bequests to his children) and all of his "stock of horses, waggons, carts, carriages" and other goods and chattels. He appeared to own no real estate.

If this list of conveyances gives a true reflection of the scale of Henry's business, it seems to suggest that Henry might have variously transported people as well as goods, and that his sons John (who had married Elizabeth Dean in 1718 and was aged about 36 at the time Henry wrote his Will) and

Henry (who was aged about 32 at this time), may have been working with their father in the business and might continue to benefit in that way after their father's death. The roads in Sussex were notoriously bad throughout much of this time and Henry may well have been away from home for periods of time during some of his longer journeys. It was not uncommon in that era for a token amount, such as one shilling, to be distributed through the Will as a means of formally identifying all the testator's children and to forestall later contesting of the Will on the grounds of disinheritance.

By the time Henry died three years later, however, it appears that he may have scaled back his carrier business (and possibly distributed some of the proceeds) as his Estate for probate purposes was valued at £55 and included only one cart and two horses. An inventory of his Estate and its valuation, which also provides a glimpse into living arrangements of the era, is at Endnote 1.

When Henry's widow, Mary nee Wood died in 1738, she was living at Rottingdean, and her estate was valued at £99. Mary had prepared her Will earlier that year and signed it by making her mark. To each of her nine children (who somewhat unusually for those times were all still living), she bequeathed various personal and household items and the sum of £11. There was no reference to any real estate, nor the items that had been involved in her late husband's carrier business, suggesting that they may have been sold at some earlier time, with some of the proceeds possibly being distributed to her sons John and Henry.

### **Henry Smithers 1695-1769**

Following his father's death in 1730, by 1732 youngest son Henry had apparently come into some money. Land records show that, in that year, he acquired four parcels of land in Preston, some 2 miles from Brighton, comprising more than 80 acres in total and including two barns a cottage, stable and garden. Either around that time, or sometime later, Henry acquired a further four parcels of land in Preston comprising more than 40 acres, including three barns, a croft and two gardens (ESRO ACC 3402/1/5/4/6).

These purchases took place at a time when the transition from community ownership of the fields to private ownership and "enclosure" was well underway, with progressive consolidation of land parcels into more economic parcels by a diminishing number of landholding families, boosting the value and output of the land. In the process, it gave rise to an active market in buying and selling land with a degree of speculation, and in farmers working land owned by the big landholders as tenants. Over the next century, the Smithers family were to become major players in this transition.

The population of the Parish of Preston around this time numbered only about 100, resulting in many residents marrying partners from other parishes (refer "Marriage Mobility in Brighton's Rural Hinterland 1661-1750", Sussex Family Historian Vol 3, Issue 2).

On 11 June 1735, aged 40, Henry married Mary Heaves, aged 27, at St. Nicholas, Brighton. At that time Henry was a "yeoman" living and farming in Preston. By the time of her marriage, Mary had already inherited considerable wealth.

### The Heaves family

Mary Heaves (sometimes spelt Heeves) had been born to William Heaves, a "mariner", and Mary nee Roberts and baptised at St. Nicholas, Brighton, on 20 March 1708. She had two siblings, William, who also became a mariner, and Elizabeth. Mary's father William was based in Brighton, where he was appointed Constable in 1721, and appears to have been involved with the East India Company and South Seas Company. He had a brother, Napper Heaves (also known as Reeves) who was based in Portsmouth and who was mastering the 140 ton ship the "John and Thomas" from London to Carolina

in 1718 when it was bailed up and plundered off the Bar of Carolina by three heavily armed pirate ships carrying 500 men, under the command of the notorious pirate Black Beard.

When William Heaves died in Brighton in 1724, he had accumulated considerable wealth (for comparison purposes, the annual income of a farm labourer at that time was about £20). In his Will he left his dwelling and grounds in Middle Street Brighton to his wife. To his son William he left his properties at Hurstpierpont and Clayton, his share in the Brig called "The Joseph" of Brighthelmston, of which he had been Master, his share of two other vessels, and one India Bond of £100 (which were issued by the London East India Company). To his daughter Mary he left his lands in Keymer, one India Bond of £400, £300 of money, and his share of the vessel currently Mastered by his brother Napper. To his daughter Elizabeth he left his farming lands in Keymer and Preston, 3 India Bonds of £100, his annuities and shares in the South Sea Company being valued at more than £400, and his share of a vessel. The South Sea Company had a government granted monopoly on trade with South America and their stock had been worth ten times its current value only a few years before, with Sir Isaac Newton being one of those to lose his life savings in the bubble and crash. While no further records relating to Elizabeth can be found, "Pedigree of the Smithers Family" in ESRO ACC 10014/10 records that she died in 1725, well before reaching the age of 21 or marrying, which would have resulted in her inheritance being shared equally between her brother William and sister Mary as provided for in their father's Will.

William left the residue of his Estate to his wife Mary, which appears to have been considerable (see below), and following their daughter's marriage to Henry Smithers, Mary appears to have gone to live with or near the Smithers family at Preston.

William Heaves jnr had married Martha Roberts in Lewes in 1724. When he died in 1732, William bequeathed to his sister Mary his properties at Keymer, Clayton and Brighton.

#### The Smithers family-Henry Smithers and Mary Heaves

After marrying in 1735, Henry and Mary Smithers had four children who survived infancy, all baptised at St. Peter, Preston: Henry about 1737 (date inferred), Bartholomew baptised 12 September 1742, Mary, baptised 4 September 1743, and Elizabeth, baptised 29 May 1748. However, they lost five children in infancy, all buried at St. Peter Preston; John buried 17 September 1739, Mary buried 21 May 1741, John buried 3 October 1745, William Heaves baptised 24 December 1738 and buried 5 August 1746, and Elizabeth buried 20 September 1747.

When Mary Smithers' mother, Mary Heaves nee Roberts, died in May 1749, she was quite well off for those times. In her Will written in January 1748 and signed with an awkward, rudimentary signature, she distributed her Estate largely between each of her four young Smithers grandchildren (generally to be held in trust until they married or reached age 21). Eldest grandson Henry was bequeathed all Mary's land and fixtures in Clayton and a gold ring with a seal and the initials H.R.E. Bartholomew was bequeathed £50 (at age 18) and a gold ring with a seal and the initials W.H. Eldest granddaughter Mary was bequeathed all her grandmother's land and fixtures at Ditchling, and various personal and household effects including 4 silver spoons marked W.H.M. Elizabeth was bequeathed £350 as well as various household effects, including 4 silver spoons marked H.R.E.. The (unspecified) residue of the Estate was left to her daughter Mary Smithers, who was appointed the Executrix.

Mary Heaves' granddaughter Mary Smithers went on to marry Thomas Scutt, and granddaughter Elizabeth Smithers went on to marry Samuel Shergold, both of whom were, or became, prominent and wealthy citizens of Brighton. While her eldest grandson Henry Smithers went on to marry Hannah Tooth in Lewes on 19 February 1767, the marriage did not end well. It appears that he and Hannah separated, as Henry inserted a notice in the Sussex Weekly Advertiser (SWA) of 13 September 1773

from "Henry Smither of Preston, late of Brighthelmston" saying that he would no longer be responsible for his wife Hannah's debts. There is then a report in the same paper on 9 May 1774 that Henry had committed suicide (he had been buried at St. Nicholas Brighton on 7 May). No record can be found of the couple having any children, and all that is known of what became of the properties that Henry had inherited from his grandmother is that he had mortgaged one piece of land in Kent in 1768 (ESRO DAN 1343-1371), while one piece of freehold land and a barn in Preston passed to his brother Bartholomew (ESRO BH/P/ES/ET/136). This left Bartholomew Smithers as the only remaining son to carry on the family name.

Henry Smithers snr and family continued to farm at Preston. In 1758 Henry acquired some further property in Preston (ESRO AMS 6860/22/4/11) and in 1761 Henry sold some of his freehold land there which he described in the SWA of 13 March 1761 as "being suitable for a coffee house or public house". In 1764 Henry purchased Kemps Farm at Preston comprising 50 acres with two barns (ESRO ACC 3402/1/5/4/3).

In 1769 Henry died and was buried on 28 November 1769 at St. Peter, Preston. In 1785 his wife Mary nee Heaves died and was buried on 3 July 1785 also at St. Peter, Preston. No record of their Wills can be found; but some clues as to what they may have bequeathed to their son Bartholomew, or at least the relative value of it, might be gleaned from Bartholomew's own Will written in 1786, and subsequent documents. Document ESRO BH/P/ES/ET/136, for example, indicates that much of the lands in Preston inherited by Bartholomew, including those purchased by his father Henry in 1732, had been bequeathed by Henry to his wife Mary and had passed to Bartholomew after her death in 1785.

### **Bartholomew Smithers 1742-1791**

Following the death of his father Henry, Bartholomew continued the family's farming interests in Preston. It appears that he married his wife, Mary, probably about 1769, although, curiously, records of the marriage cannot be found and the maiden name of his wife is unknown. In that regard, it may or may not be relevant (although all the ages could fit) that on 21 July 1763 at St Cosmos and St Damian, Keymer, a Mary Heyward baptised a son, born out of wedlock, who she named Bartholomew Smithers Heyward, but who sadly died and was buried three days later. There are no records of there being any other Bartholomew Smithers in Sussex in that era, or anywhere else in England, other than "ours".

Bartholomew and Mary Smithers had six children, all baptised at St. Peter Preston: Bartholomew, who was privately baptised on 3 May 1770 before being baptised at St Peter on 8 June 1772 together with younger sister Mary; Elizabeth, baptised on 11 May 1777 at a later age, together with younger sister Susanna; Ann baptised 16 July 1779; and William Heaves baptised 13 May 1781.

The earliest newspaper reference to Bartholomew is in the SWA of 14 May 1770, when he was aged 28, where he and Samuel Shergold, his brother in law, advertised the auction of a "New Brewhouse etc., in lower part of West street, Brighthelmston- Details from Mr Bartholomew Smithers of Preston or Mr Samuel Shergold of Brighthelmston". It appears that this is where the Smithers family brewing interests had started, almost certainly by Bartholomew's father Henry who had died only 6 months earlier. The family move into brewing would have been encouraged by the growing popularity of Brighton which, by about this time, was developing into a fashionable resort.

Following his mother's death in July 1785, Bartholomew had become a major land holder in Preston and the wider district, and on 5 December 1785 he placed a notice in the Sussex Advertiser advertising the sale of his tenanted freehold of "100 acres of arable, meadow and pasture land (and

also the timber on the farm)...all of which premises are known by the names of Highfield's or Fry's, and are situate...in the several parishes of Hurstpierpont and Clayton".

On 16 October 1786 Bartholomew, aged 44, then wrote his Will, at a time when his eldest son, Bartholomew jnr, was still only 16. In February 1788 he mortgaged various parcels of land for £1,000 to Thomas Harben, Samuel Shergold, Thomas Scutt and John Rice, bankers of Brighton (ESRO BH 18/P/ES/ET/185). Then, on 28 December 1789 in the Sussex Weekly Advertiser, he advertised for sale "An Estate- 5-600 acres at Preston, now occupied by Mr. B Smithers, the proprietor" (Packham index summary).

It appears from later evidence that these land sales were part of a strategy for liquidating some of his substantial land holdings in favour of investing in the brewing industry and acquiring public houses. While his 1786 Will refers to owning a brewhouse (in the singular) and makes no mention of public houses (although some could have been covered by his generic references to his property holdings), by the time of his death in 1791, when his son Bartholomew jnr had just turned 21, he appears to have owned both the brewhouse in Preston and six public houses in Brighton and Preston (see below). The Smithers family were becoming businessmen to complement their agricultural activities.

Bartholomew was buried on 21 July 1791 at St. Peter, Preston. In his Will he bequeathed an annuity of £30 a year to his wife Mary. He also bequeathed £1,000 to each of his children Elizabeth, Susanna, Ann and William when they turned 21. All of these monies were to be paid out of his property holdings. Bartholomew left everything else to his son Bartholomew jnr. This comprised all of his freehold and copyhold land including brewhouse, barns, stables, buildings, gardens, orchards, farms etc. in the parishes of Preston, Brighthelmston, Clayton, Keymer and potentially elsewhere in Sussex. Bartholomew jnr. also inherited all of his father's household furniture, husbandry, tackle, farming utensils, and cattle stock on the farm, brewing utensils and stock, and all his financial assets and remaining personal estate. His wife Mary, son Bartholomew and Henry Bound were appointed the executors of his Will. Bartholomew's Estate was valued at £2,000 for probate purposes (which in those days was apparently calculated on all assets other than Freehold land).

Presumably Bartholomew's widow, Mary, lived on in the family home on the farm at Preston until she died in 1817, aged 70, and was buried at St. Peter Preston on 27 February 1817.

### **Bartholomew Smithers 1770-1833**

Following his father's death in July 1791, Bartholomew moved quickly to sell his father's brewing and public house assets and, over the years ahead, became a prodigious buyer and seller of land and properties. In the SWA of 9 April 1792 he placed a notice, as the proprietor, for an auction of a complete new brewhouse and all stock and equipment. in Preston, together with six affiliated public houses, being The Unicorn, Hen and Chickens, The Dolphin, and the Bell at Brighton, the Blue Anchor at Preston, and the Friar's Oak on the Cuckfield Road about 8 miles from Brighthelmston. While it is not clear that not all these properties were sold, later reports indicate that Bartholomew realised £650 for "The Dolphin" and £840 for "The Unicorn", although subsequent events indicate that he must have later re- purchased them.

Bartholomew also considered that he had civic duties to attend to. With the French Revolution still playing out, these were dangerous times in Europe, and Brighton had experienced many raids by the French over previous centuries (with virtually every building, other than St Nicholas Church, being burned to the ground in a devastating French raid in 1514). Triggered by these concerns, in December 1792 Bartholomew and many of the most prominent gentry had established the "Society at Brighton for the Protection of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers". The publication "A Peep into the Past: Brighton in the Olden Times", written in 1892, describes the

formation of this Society in these terms: "The Society had its title in the patriotic feeling of the time, which revolted against the horrible excesses that, in the name of Liberty, were then being perpetrated in France. It was, in fact, the beginning of the Volunteer movement, which afterwards was so spontaneously developed, not only in Brighton and the County, but in all parts of the kingdom".

The SWA of 15 July 1793 then carried a notice by Mr Smithers of Preston offering for letting a "victualling house, sign of the Bell, in Russell Street, Brighthelmston". Throughout the 1790s Bartholomew suffered farm stock losses, variously posting rewards for strayed or stolen sheep and poultry; and on 2 February 1795 the SWA reported that Bartholomew had lost a great number of livestock at Preston resulting from extensive flooding in Brighton and surrounds occasioned by "a thaw".

On 6 October 1795, Bartholomew married Bridget Wheeler in Ardingly, Sussex. Bridget had been born to John and Ann (nee Inkpen) Wheeler and baptised at All Saints Lindfield on 7 December 1765. Following the death of her friend, Sarah Hamlin of Lindfield in 1788, Bridget had inherited 60 acres of farm land, with barn and premises in Balcombe in the Manor of Keymer (ESRO SAS- J/18/357). Bartholomew and Bridget had six children, all baptised at St Peter Preston: Mary Ann born 3 Jul, baptised 14 October 1796; Jane born 18 July, baptised 19 April 1798; Elizabeth baptised 15 June 1800; George Bartholomew baptised 3 October 1804, buried 9 October 1804; Bartholomew baptised 23 December 1805; Henry baptised 4 April 1807 (privately) then on 17 September at St Peter.

In May 1793 France had declared War on Britain and there was concern about a possible invasion by Napoleon in the Brighton area so that he could take the shortest route to march on London. On 12 August 1796, Bartholomew sold to William Wyndham, Secretary of State for War, 12 acres of land related to the site of Preston Barracks (ESRO ACC 3402/1/5/4/15), apparently for a cavalry barracks, with Bartholomew owning some 100 acres of adjoining land along the Lewes Road probably including the Bear Inn. Semi-permanent military barracks were also established around this time in Windsor Street, Brighton, next to the stables in the yard behind the Unicorn Inn. While Bartholomew would have undoubtedly entered into this arrangement with the highest of patriotic motives, it is evident that, with the influx of troops, he would have been aware that it would also be good for business.

By the early 1800s, Bartholomew was one of the three major landholders and employers of labour in Preston, owning as "copyhold" (a sort of leasehold) most of the farming land in the north of the parish and many of the properties in Preston village, which by then had a population of about 180. However, William Stanford owned the "freehold" for most of the parish and, over the years ahead, Bartholomew was concerned to purchase the freehold rights to his properties necessitating him raising the funds to do so.

This may have been the impetus for Bartholomew, in May 1803, mortgaging to William Johnson of Petworth, 16 properties for £1,200, including "The Bell" public house in Russell Street Brighton, the "Hen and Chickens" public house in North Street, and Kemps Farm and the associated Anchor public house (ESRO ACC 3402/1/5/4/6). Around this time the population of Brighton was some 7,000, with there being 8 brewers and 40 public houses or Inns.

Somewhat later, Bartholomew mortgaged all of his farmland property holdings in Preston to Thomas Harrington for £14,000 so that he could purchase the freehold rights to it from William Stanford, a move that was to prove too ambitious as it turned out.

Bartholomew's wife Bridget died, aged about 59, and was buried on 16 March 1825 at St Peter Preston. The family placed a death notice in the Bury and Norwich Post of 23 March 1825 which read: "On Saturday last, to the unspeakable affliction of her family, and the deep regret of her friends, Bridget, the wife of B. Smithers Esq., of Preston, near Brighton".

Around this time, as with other young men, eldest son Bartholomew was expected to serve for a period in the local militia as part of his civic duty. However, there was provision for those 'called up' in the ballot to arrange a substitute to serve in their place, and there were even advertisements in the local press from time to time calling for those prepared to serve as substitutes. ESRO L/L/A/7/1017 indicates that Bartholomew had contracted a John Hampshar, aged 18/19, to serve in his place, with his time served on Bartholomew's behalf expiring on 30 March 1826.

The only brother of Bartholomew 1770-1833, William Heaves Smithers, who was only aged 10 when their father died in 1791, became a school master, then grocer, then wax and tallow chandler in Brighton. In 1829, with his wife Susannah (nee Blunden) and younger children, he emigrated to the Swan River in Western Australia in one of the first ships of settlers to that newly developing area, where he became a significant landholder and an Inn keeper. They were later joined by William's nephew, Captain David Dring, who was the only child of David Dring and their sister Ann Smithers, and who also became a significant land holder and discovered the Hutt River near Geraldton. There are many references to William Heaves Smithers and family and to David Dring in the Western Australia historical records and on the National Library TROVE newspaper site, up until 1843 when William departed Western Australia. (After leaving Australia and a sojourn in South Africa, William died back in Sussex and was buried at St Peter Preston on 25 November 1852). While two of William's daughters married and stayed in Australia, several of his children subsequently emigrated to South Africa and perpetuated the Smithers name there, although they stayed in close contact with their Sussex Smithers relations. William's eldest son, who was also named William Heaves Smithers, had remained in Brighton and went on to publish "The Brighton Patriot" newspaper in the 1830s.

Bartholomew Smithers died on 17 December 1833 aged 63, and was buried at St Peter Preston on 23 December. In his Will, Bartholomew left to his son Henry all of his victualling houses viz. "The Bear Inn" in Preston; the "Crown and Anchor" (freehold) in Preston; "The Dolphin", on the East Cliff, Brighton (copyhold); The "Lord Nelson" or "Nelson's Head" in Russell Street, Brighton (freehold); "The Unicorn" in North Street Brighton (copyhold); "The Friar and Oak" in Clayton (copyhold); with £3,000 to be paid to his daughter Mary Ann Smithers. All of the residual real and personal estate, which he proposed should be sold at auction at their discretion, he bequeathed to son Bartholomew Smithers and Thomas Isaacson, husband of his daughter Jane, subject to paying off his mortgage of £14,000 to Thomas Harrington and paying £1,500 to daughter Jane. His Estate was valued at £800 for Probate purposes, bearing in mind that this apparently excluded the value of any Freehold property.

Being otherwise unable to pay off the £14,000 mortgage, on 17 December 1834 Bartholomew and Thomas Isaacson then sold much of the land they had inherited to George and Thomas Harrington among others (ESRO SAS-E/14/163), with Bartholomew continuing to farm much of it as a tenant. By June 1842 Bartholomew was the occupier of some 34 contiguous parcels of land owned by the Harringtons, comprising some 467 acres in total, with some containing cottages, barns etc. (ESRO TDE/28/2/series). A tithe map showing the substantial Harrington landholdings being tenanted by Bartholomew, having previously been owned "copyhold" by his father, is contained in "Preston: Downland Village to Brighton Suburb", in a chapter on Farming in Preston by Sue Berry.

It seems that Bartholomew continued tenanting a deal of that land for the next few years before deciding, at age 39, to turn his back on farming in favour of moving into Brighton with his wife Eliza (nee Goldsmith) and their young family. His decision probably reflected, in part, the turbulent time that the agricultural sector had been going through. In the previous decade or so there had been agitation from agricultural labourers who had been dispossessed by farm aggregation and mechanisation which led to the Swing Riots, and there was a current tussle with the manufacturing sector over free trade provisions and the proposed abolition of the Corn Laws. This had led to the establishment of

Sussex Society for the Protection of Agriculture, which Bartholomew participated in, to lobby for the retention of protection for the agricultural sector.

Perhaps seeing the writing on the wall (the Corn Laws were abolished the following year), The Brighton Gazette of 25 September 1845 carried an advertisement for the sale of stock and farming items “belonging to B. Smithers, Esq., at Preston Farm, near Brighton” which gives a sense of the scale and nature of the Smithers family farming interests. For sale were: “The handy little Southdown flock of 220 ewes, and 60 ewe lambs, six serviceable cart horses, a well-bred riding horse, six waggons, seven carts, two donkey carts, two iron-cased rollers, a four wheel presser, harrows, ploughs, harness and the customary small farming implements”.

It seems that this marked the end of the Smithers family farming activities over several generations and spanning more than a century.

### **Henry Smithers 1807-1884**

By the time Henry's father Bartholomew died in 1833, the population of Brighton had grown to some 40,000 supporting 18 brewers and 89 public houses or Inns. Henry, who described his occupation as “brewer”, had been trading as a wine and spirit merchant in partnership with William Best until the partnership was dissolved in 1831. He then set about growing his brewing interests, aided by the fact that he had married “well”. Henry had married three years earlier, to Maria Welsford, at St. Nicholas Brighton on 8 September 1830.

#### The Welsford family

Maria had been born to Roger Welsford and Elizabeth nee Mills in Exeter, Devon, on 24 March 1812 and was baptised into a non-conformist Presbyterian church there (although, interestingly, Maria had herself baptised a second time, into the Church of England, in Brighton on 19 October 1837). She had one sibling, Frederick Mills Welsford, seemingly born about 1816 [Endnote 2]. Roger and Elizabeth had married in London on 14 March 1811 when Roger was about 50 years of age. Roger had had an earlier (childless) marriage to a (seemingly wealthy) widow, Mary Chesson Hills, who had died on 10 June 1810.

Maria's father, Roger Welsford, had been born on 10 December 1761 to Roger and Ursula Welsford and was the second youngest of their 13 children. The Devon Freeholders book of 1783 recorded the occupation of Roger snr as a sergemaker (manufacturer of woven woollen cloth) in Crediton. Maria's mother Elizabeth had been born to Thomas and Frances Mills and baptised into a non-conformist church in Brighton on 1 March 1789. While continuing to have interests in Devon, Roger Welsford appears to have been living and farming in the Brighton area from at least 1796 when he was described as being a grain dealer (National Archives HO 47/21/39), and the 1800 Directory of Brighton listed him as one of the “Principal Inhabitants” of the town. He appears to have become quite wealthy and a significant land and property holder. In August 1806, for example, Roger appears to have put up £1,000 of capital to Benjamin Scutt, in return for an annual lifetime annuity of £100 shared between himself and, seemingly, a Devon family relative of he and/or his then wife Mary (ESRO ACC 11182/3).

Roger Welsford died in Brighton on 26 August 1833 and was buried on 31 August at St Nicholas Brighton, aged 71. His Will, written in 1829 while his children were both under 21, bequeathed substantial assets to his wife Elizabeth and, after her death, they were to be equally divided between their children Maria and Frederick, or their children in turn if they had died (although relations of his first wife, Mary, contested their right to some of the assets that Mary had bequeathed to Roger 23



years earlier). Maria's mother Elizabeth died in 1850 and was buried on 24 November with her husband Roger in Woodvale Cemetery.

### The Smithers family-Henry Smithers and Maria Welsford

The first of Henry and Maria Smithers' children, Elizabeth Smithers, was baptised at St Nicholas Brighton on 29 June 1831. Their second child, Frederick Smithers, was born on 3 October and baptised at St Nicholas Brighton on 17 November 1832. It seems likely that Frederick had been named after Maria's brother, Frederick Mills Welsford, who was a chemist and druggist in Brighton, as there are no known ancestors of Henry who had that name. Three more children followed: Henry Welsford Smithers, baptised at St Nicholas Brighton on 25 September 1834; Edward Smithers baptised at Chapel Royal Brighton on 6 May 1836; and Maria Smithers baptised at St Peter Brighton on 29 May 1840. At the time of the 1841 Census Henry, Maria and family (mis- transcribed as Smithey) were living with Maria's widowed mother Elizabeth Welsford in Henfield, 13 miles north-west of Brighton.

By 1834 Henry was operating the Sussex Brewery at 44 Essex Street, having acquired it from a William Smithers about whom little is known but who does not appear to have been a close relative. By 1836 Henry was operating the North Street Brewery in partnership with his recently bereaved brother in law, Thomas Isaacson (husband of Henry's late elder sister Jane who had died in 1835), with the firm referred to in newspaper notices as "Smithers & Isaacson". They subsequently expanded the role of the firm to include also trading as coal merchants.

Henry was moving up in the world, establishing himself as a prominent citizen of Brighton, and in 1839 he was elected High Constable for Brighton for a one year term. Sadly, on 28 October 1841, his wife Maria died in Brighton, of Hepatitis, aged just 29. She left assets valued at some £1,500. However Probate was not granted until January 1860, perhaps because aspects of her father's Will, of which she had been a beneficiary, were still being contested.

Henry remarried to Ellen Mary Evatt at Lambeth, Surrey on 1 February 1843. Ellen had been born on 5 July 1808 in Brighton to Henry Evatt, a lawyer, and Mary Elizabeth nee Grenville. Henry and Mary had two children together: Mary Bridget Smithers, baptised on 2 June 1848 at St. Peter, Brighton, and George Cordy Smithers, baptised on 9 May 1851 at St. Andrew, Hove.

Henry's profile in the local community continued to grow. In April 1845 he had been appointed the Returning Officer for his Borough and in 1846 he built the imposing, 22 room Regency villa residence, Montpellier Hall, which still stands today. Over the course of 1845 and 1846 "Smithers and Isaacson" seemed to have been particularly active in acquiring further public houses, including: the Anchor in Lavender St.; the Butchers Arms in Edward St.; the Castle Inn in Castle St.; the Feathers Tavern in Queen's Rd.; the Green Dragon in Sydney St.; the Nags Head in Queen St.; the Robin Hood in Cross St.; the Travellers Joy in Preston; and the Waggon and Horses in Terminus St. The coming of the railway in 1841 had been a boon for the publican business as it had brought Brighton within reach of day trippers from London and, by 1851, the population had grown to some 65,000, supporting 18 brewers and some 200 public houses or Inns.

When Thomas Isaacson died on 27 May 1846, Henry inherited his share of the business which included the North Street Brewery and a range of public houses in Brighton, Preston, Southwick, and Wivelsfield. The firm continued to trade under the name of "Smithers and Isaacson" for a number of years after Thomas's death. In 1849 Henry had also become a Trustee of the Brighton South Coast Building Society.

Tragically, in May 1854, Henry's youngest son from his first marriage, Edward, drowned fully clothed, in the sea one night in Brighton, aged 18, after a visit to his local public house. During the inquest into his death his doctor described him as being in fair health, but not having a strong constitution and as being a person with a highly nervous character. An open verdict of death by drowning was returned (Sussex Advertiser 30 May 1854) and later reports seemed to establish that he had been unwell at the time and had recently taken up smoking cigars, causing dizziness, resulting in him fainting at the water's edge into the receding tide (Brighton Gazette 1 June 1854)

In November 1855 Henry was elected to the Town Council and was elected as an Alderman in November 1856. In November 1861 he was elected by the Town Council as Mayor of Brighton for a one year term. The vote was decisive but not unanimous, with one Councillor voting against and two abstaining. While expressing their utmost respect for Henry, several Councillors were concerned at the potential conflicts Henry, as a brewer, would have when, as Mayor, he would be required to serve on the Bench of Magistrates and pass sentence on the many cases of drunkenness which came before it. After the vote was declared, Henry assured the Council that he abhorred drunkenness as much as any man and would exempt himself from the Bench were any potential conflict might arise. He set out his objectives for his term as Mayor to include beginning significant improvement to the town's streets and drainage and the erection of an abattoir (Brighton Guardian 13 November 1861).

From at least late 1860, Henry had begun grooming his second son, Henry Welsford Smithers, to follow him into the brewing business and inherit his brewing interests, with the two men entering into a formal partnership under "Smithers and Son". While Henry continued as an Alderman for several years after being Mayor, bringing his son into the business allowed him to expand his other involvements.

In 1863 Henry became an inaugural Director of the Brighton West Pier Company Ltd., assuming the role of Chairman for several years from 1868, with his earlier brother-in-law, Frederick Mills Welsford, fulfilling the role of Company Secretary. The West Pier was a commercial operation designed to attract tourists to Brighton to enjoy the fresh sea air. Construction commenced in 1863 and the pier was officially opened on 6 October 1866. It was 340 metres long and fitted with gas lamps and a glass screen at the pier head to protect visitors from the weather. Patrons were charged to 'promenade' on the pier and to hire deck chairs and obtain programmes when listening to the band performances.

In April 1862, Henry's son Henry Welsford Smithers married Emily Jane Allfree in Kent and they had three children together who were all baptised at Chapel Royal Brighton: Mary Clelan Smithers baptised 24 June 1863; Edward Allfree Smithers baptised 16 June 1865; and Herbert Welsford Smithers baptised 6 June 1869. At the time of the 1871 Census the family were living at 89 North Street, Brighton, seemingly adjacent to, or across the road from, the Smithers' North Street Brewery.

In 1870, Henry's wife Ellen Mary died in Brighton and was buried on 17 November at St Peter Preston. In January 1872, Henry married for a third time, to Delia Harrup in Windsor, Berkshire, and in November 1874, aged 67, he retired from the Town Council.

Throughout his time as an Alderman Henry had been a Governor and prominent supporter of nearly every charitable institution in the town. On 9 November 1874 the Brighton Council passed a resolution recognising the contribution that Henry, and another long serving Councillor, W. Alger, had made to the town and presented the testimonial to them at a formal event in their honour at the Royal Pavilion. It referred to the "invaluable services rendered by both of these gentlemen to the Town of Brighton by the active interest they have taken in all that has been calculated to promote its best interests, and by their disinterested devotion to these duties as members of the governing body of the town during a great number of years" (Brighton Gazette 11 March 1875).

Henry died on 17 November 1884 and was buried in the family vault at St Nicholas' Churchyard where his first wife Maria and son Edward were also buried. He had outlived five of his seven children. One of the obituaries for Henry commented: "It is said of him that he was one of the best Mayors Brighton ever had; one of those few broad-hearted citizens which the poor of the town can ill afford to lose" (Mid Sussex Times 25 November 1884).

In the years leading up to his death, Henry had written his Will in January 1875 and added Codicils in 1878 and 1879, each time increasing the financial legacies to his beneficiaries. By the time of his second Codicil in 1879, Henry had provided for all household effects and some £4,200 to his wife Delia; some £2,600 to his daughter Maria Rigge and £100 to her husband William; £500 to his son George Cordy Smithers and £100 to his wife Alice nee Bowey; £100 to his niece Jane, daughter of his brother Bartholomew; £100 to his son in law Joseph Dixon; and £500 to each of his Dixon granddaughters and to grandson Frederick Smithers in Australia. Everything else, including all real estate and business interests etc. was left to his son Henry Welsford Smithers, who was appointed sole Executor.

However, with death approaching, Henry added a final Codicil in May 1884 rescinding all previous instructions, indicating that he had made "other provisions" for the pecuniary legacies to those previously named. That had included formally dissolving his partnership with his son Henry Welsford Smithers a few months before he died and transferring all his brewing interests to him, including the freehold on 8 public houses and the leasehold on a further 28 public houses, predominantly located in Brighton, but also in Preston, Hove, Keymer, Wivelsfield, Portslade, and Southwick (ESRO HOW 11/7/1) . Following this, Henry's remaining Estate for Probate amounted to £626.

Henry Welsford Smithers then brought his two sons into the brewing business, Herbert Welsford Smithers and Edward Allfree Smithers. In April 1901 it appears that Henry Welsford, at age 64, then passed on the full business to his sons as Herbert and Edward entered into a formal partnership in respect of the business which, by this time, included more than 60 affiliated public houses taking in Brighton, Preston, Hove, Clayton, Wivelsfield, Southwick, Hurstpierpoint, Uckfield, Plumpton, Fletching, Barcombe, Nuttley, Maresfield and High Hurstwood.(ESRO HOW 11/7/2).

In 1906 Smithers & Sons was then incorporated as a limited company with the amalgamation of the North Street Brewery and Bedford Brewery. The brothers, who were unusually close to one another, were active workers for the Unionist cause and Freemasons. Edward was an accomplished batsman for the Brighton Cricket Club and later became Chairman of Sussex County Cricket Club. Herbert died on 9 June 1913 (leaving an estate valued £96,000) and his brother Edward was so distraught at his loss that he died on 5 February 1914 (leaving an estate of £87,000), leaving their father with only a daughter, Mrs C Somers Clarke. In memory of his sons, their father gave two stained glass windows in the north aisle of All Saints, Hove. Then Edward's only son Lt. Edward Henry Keith Smithers died in WW1 on 11 July 1916 while Herbert's son Capt. Reginald Cuthbert Welsford Smithers was killed in action near Ypres on 16 August 1917 aged 19, with a striking memorial to him also being erected in All Saints, Hove.

In 1920 "Smithers and Sons" produced 43,213 barrels of beer and paid £129,383 in duty; they ceased brewing at their Brighton plant and expanded their recently purchased Portslade brewery. However a rise in beer duty and the economic crisis of the times led to a decline in demand. In 1929 the company was taken over by Tamplins who acquired all the ordinary shares in the company and "Smithers & Sons" went into voluntary liquidation.

Henry Welsford Smithers J.P, the last connection to the Smithers family brewing activities stretching back some 160 years, died in Brighton in 1931, aged 97, leaving an estate valued at £98,000.

## Henry's Australian legacy

By the time Henry began grooming his second son, Henry Welsford Smithers, to follow him into his brewing business, Henry's eldest son, Frederick Smithers, had become estranged from the family and been "cut off". After commencing his Articles of Clerkship in 1851, it appears that he did not complete these and by 1856 Frederick had no trade or profession and had become an insolvent debtor. He had then entered into a relationship with Frances Goodwin, in London, who was the daughter of a shell fishmonger and reputedly an "actress" (a term often having more sordid connotations in that era). Frederick and Frances had a child together, Maria Cecilia, on 13 July 1860, before they married on 20 October 1860. They had one further child together, Frederick, born at St. Martin in the Field, London, on 8 December 1861. Frederick snr was the Secretary of a Steam Cooperage Company when he died of TB on 6 June 1869, aged 36, leaving to his wife Frances an Estate valued at some £200. Frederick Smithers jnr then attended, as a boarder, the charitable school Christ's Hospital, in Hertfordshire, with his grandfather Henry helping out his mother, Frances, with a small living allowance.

In August 1870 Henry's youngest son, George Cordy Smithers, aged 19, travelled to Australia, arriving in Queensland on the "Young Australia" on 25 August 1870. He may have been encouraged to do so by the mariner Capt. David Dring, who was Henry's cousin, being the son of Henry's aunt, Ann Smithers and her husband David Dring, and who by this time was resident in Brisbane. George joined the gold rush there and once sparked a manhunt when he fell ill and went missing in the bush for a few days, with David Dring joining the search. By 1876 George had moved to Geelong in Victoria where he married Alice Bowey on 6 June 1877. The couple then travelled back to England in September 1877 to visit Henry and other relations. A few months after arriving back in Geelong, their son, Henry George Albert Smithers, was born on 19 August 1878. Sadly, George Cordy Smithers died of TB just a year later, on 1 August 1879, aged 27.

Henry's 19 year old grandson, Frederick Smithers, then emigrated to Australia in an attempt to improve his deteriorating health occasioned by lung congestion (his father and sister both having died of TB), arriving in Melbourne on 19 December 1881 on the Sabraon. Frederick wasted no time in looking up his uncle's widow, Alice, in Geelong and, after they each moved inland to Echuca to further Frederick's recovery, they married on 14 September 1882 in Geelong. The occasion gave Frederick the opportunity to publicise his family connection to his grandfather Henry, with the wedding announcement reading in part: "Smithers-Smithers...Frederick, eldest grandson of Henry Smithers of Brighton, Sussex, England, to Alice, relict of the late George Corby Smithers, of Geelong, son of the above" ("Weekly Times", Melbourne, 23 September 1882).

Sadly, just seven months later Alice died in Echuca of acute dysentery on 28 April 1883 aged 27, three days after delivering a pre-term still born child. Frederick was still only 21. Frederick remarried to Rachel Cocks nee Spearritt, a widow, in Echuca on 18 December 1884 where Frederick worked as a piano tuner. They had five children together who survived infancy: Frederick Henry Smithers, 24 August 1885; Herbert Welsford Smithers, 21 June 1887; Edward Charles Smithers, 1889; Arthur Tennyson Smithers, 30 June 1894; and Reginald Allfree Smithers, 3 February 1903. From the close correspondence of naming patterns, it is apparent that Frederick was staying in close contact with the family of his uncle, Henry Welsford Smithers, in Sussex. Both of Frederick's youngest sons went on to receive Knighthoods, becoming Sir Arthur Smithers and Sir Reginald Smithers.

The Smithers male line descended from Henry lives on in Australia to this day through the descendants of Frederick Henry Smithers and Reginald Allfree Smithers, with Henry Smithers, Mayor of Brighton 1861, having two 5 x Great Grandsons born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century who carry the Welsford middle name and Smithers surname.

Wayne Smithers Brooks Jackson  
GGGGrandson of Henry Smithers  
Per his son Frederick  
29 October 2017

## ENDNOTES

1. Transcript from ESRO PBT/1/10/2236, Henry Smithers of Brighton, carrier; probate inventory (with thanks to Madeleine Dickens):

**True inventory of all singular Goods Chattells and Credits List of Henry Smithers late of Brighthelmston Carrier taken and appraised by us whose names are subscribed this 13<sup>th</sup> day of May AD 1730**

His wearing apparel and money in his purse £7/5/00

Sundry debts, bills and books mostly dubious £20/0/0

Item In the Kitchen- one clock, with its Case, 1 Corner Cupboard, Three tables, 1 Dresser, a Couch and 6 Chairs, Two Spitts, 1 Dripping pan, a pair of Iron Doggs, pot hangers, Fire Shovell, tongs and bellows, 1 screen, 3 pewter Dishes, six plates, Warming pan, 3 Joynstools and other small things  
£4/10/6

Item In the Warehouse- one Table, one Frying pan, one Jack, one pair of Blades and Weights, some old packsaddles and other Lumber £2/0/0

Item In the Cellar- two Tubbs, one Cask and about a Dozen glass bottles £0/4/00

Item In the Best Chamber- feather Bedd and Bedstedle and appurtenances, one Chest of drawers, 2 chests, 1 Close stool, 1 trunk, 1 looking glass £5/0/0

Item 5 paires of Sheettes- 2 pair of pillowcoates, 4 table Cloths, half a Dozen Napkins, six Towells  
£1/10/00

Item in the Warehouse Chamber- feather Bedd and Bedsteddle, 1 Joynstool and 1 Bos £1/0/0

Item in the Garrett- Firewood and old Lumber and old Iron £1/0/0

Item- one Cart and some old Wheels and other Lumber £2/0/0

Item- Two horses, one of which has lately been sold £11/0/0

Item- things unseen and forgotten £0/7/6

Names of Appraisers: James Willet, Thomas Bowell

2. Maria Welsford's brother Frederick Mills Welsford, who was a chemist and druggist in Brighton, went on to be appointed auditor of the Brighton Savings Bank in 1864 and was Secretary of the Brighton West Pier Co. when his earlier brother-in-law Henry Smithers was President from 1868. Frederick Mills Welsford died on 2 January 1892 leaving an estate valued at £27,000 which went to his sons, Henry Mills Welsford and Robert Mills Welsford, who were both solicitors.

Henry Mills Welsford had visited Melbourne during a gap year in his studies, arriving on the Sabraon on 1 January 1881 (the same ship that Frederick Smithers arrived on later that year). It is very likely that he had met Alice Smithers nee Bowey when she had visited Brighton and looked her out in Geelong. From an 8 February press notice notifying that there was a telegram awaiting him at the Launceston Post Office, it appears that he had then visited Tasmania shortly before returning to England.

Robert Mills Welsford was appointed President of the Law Society in 1928-29 and was Knighted in 1929 for services to legal education.