

# The Cree Families of Newark on Trent

by Mike Spathaky

Cree Surname Research

## The Cree Families of Newark on Trent

by Mike Spathaky

### Cree Booklets

The Cree Family History Society (now Cree Surname Research) was founded in 1991 to encourage research into the history and world-wide distribution of the surname CREE and of families of that name, and to collect, conserve and make available the results of that research.

The series *Cree Booklets* is intended to further those aims by providing a channel through which family histories and related material may be published which might otherwise not see the light of day.

Cree Surname Research  
36 Brocks Hill Drive  
Oadby, Leicester LE2 5RD  
England.

Cree Surname Research

*First published in 1994-97 as a series of articles in  
Cree News by the Cree Family History Society.*

*This electronic edition revised and published in 2005 by*

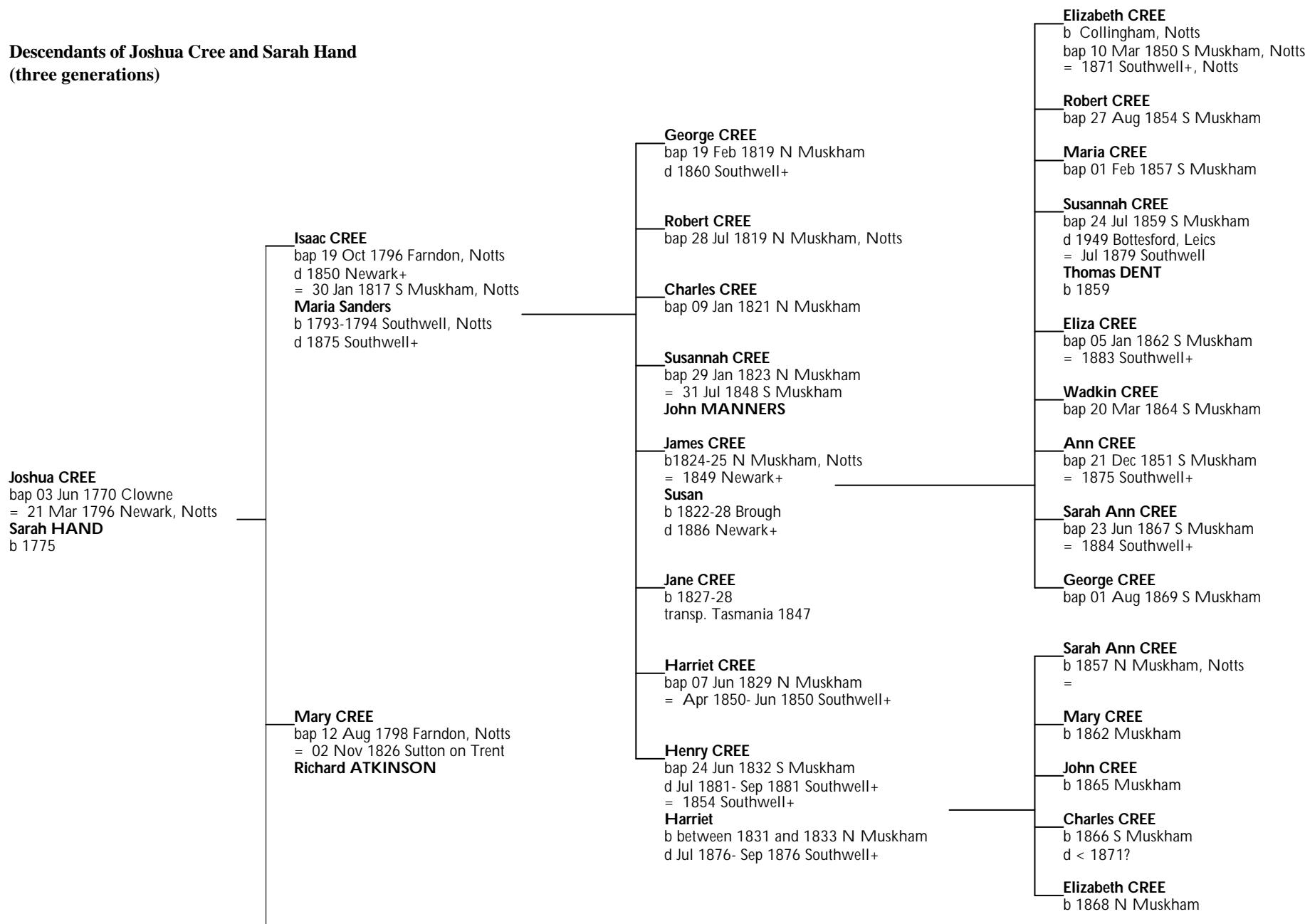
*Cree Surname Research  
36 Brocks Hill Drive  
Oadby Leicester LE2 5RD  
England*

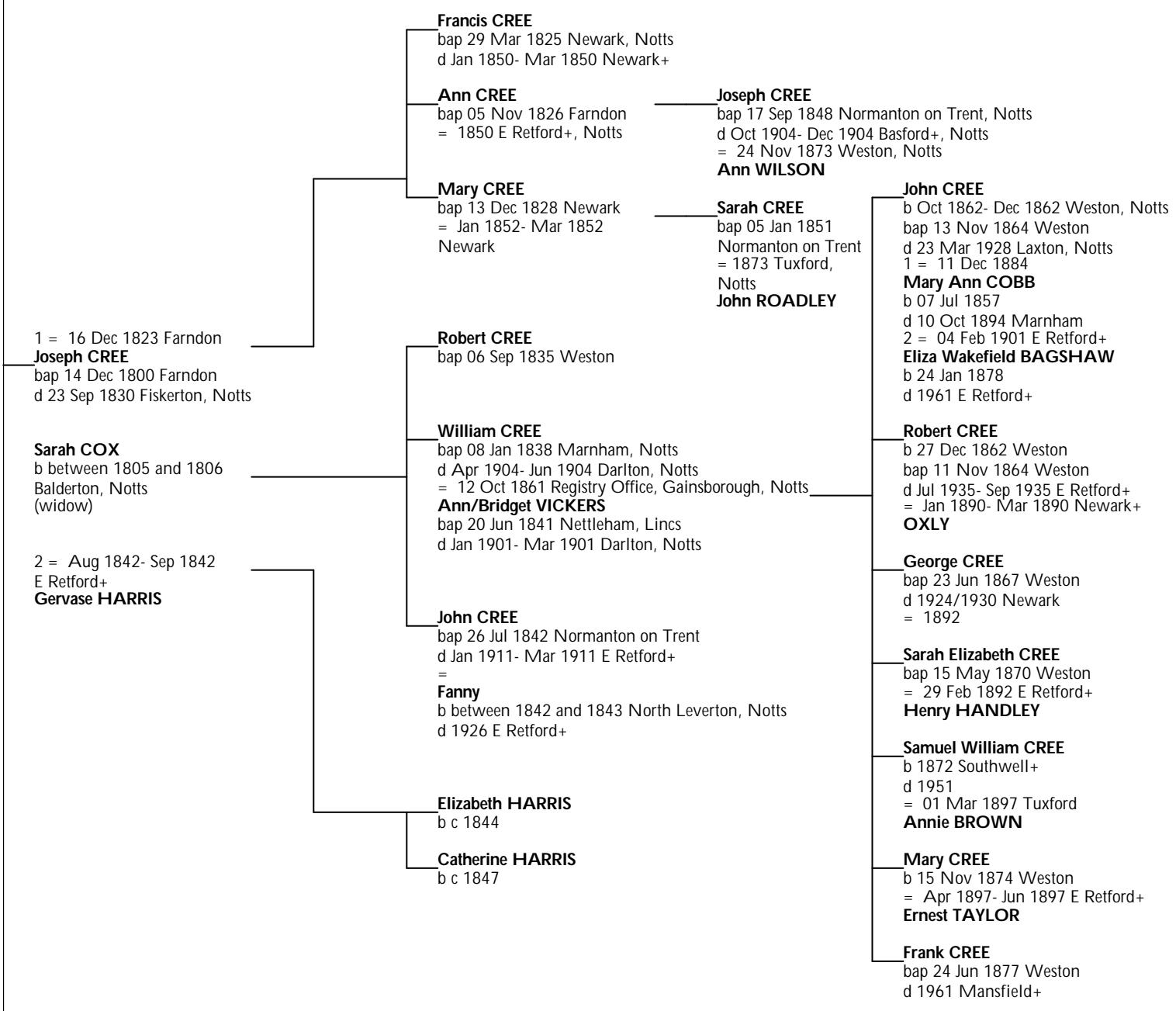
*© Copyright Mike Spathaky 1994-97, 2005  
All Rights Reserved*

## CONTENTS

- Chart of the descendants of Joshua Cree and Sarah Hand
- Joshua Cree and Sarah Hand
- Crees at the Muskhams - Isaac Cree and Maria Sanders
- The plight of single parents - the families of Joseph and Sarah Cree
- The open fields
- William Cree and Mary Scott
- More accidents - John Cree, Ellen and Thirza
- Maltsters and iron founders - Francis Cree and Mary King
- Fanny Cree and the boatmen of Newark

**Descendants of Joshua Cree and Sarah Hand  
(three generations)**





**William CREE**  
bap 02 Oct 1803 Farndon  
d 1850  
= 23 May 1831 Farndon

**Mary SCOTT**  
b between 1797 and 1798 Banbury, Oxfordshire  
d 1852

**John CREE**  
bap 13 Jul 1806 Farndon  
d Oct 1863- Dec 1863 Hull, Yorks

1 = c 1828

**Ellen**  
b between 1806 and 1807 Dunston, Lincs  
d Jul 1853- Sep 1853 Newark+

2 = 1855 Newark+

**Thirza**  
b between 1825 and 1831 Horncastle, Lincs  
d 1869 Newark+

**Lucy Ann CREE**  
bap 05 Jan 1834 Farndon  
d Jan 1854- Mar 1854 Newark+

**Caroline CREE**  
bap 04 Feb 1838 Newark  
d c 16 Apr 1844 Newark

**Mary Ann CREE**  
bap 08 Feb 1829 Farndon  
= 07 Mar 1848 Newark

**John SIMPSON**  
= > 1848  
**BRUNT**

**Fanny CREE**  
bap 31 Oct 1830 Farndon  
= 1851

**Joseph CREE**  
bap 24 May 1833 Newark

**Joshua CREE**  
b 1856 Newark+  
d 1902 Newark+  
= Oct 1878- Dec 1878 Newark+

**Mary**  
b 1859 Farndon

**Elizabeth CREE**  
b 1858  
d < 1861

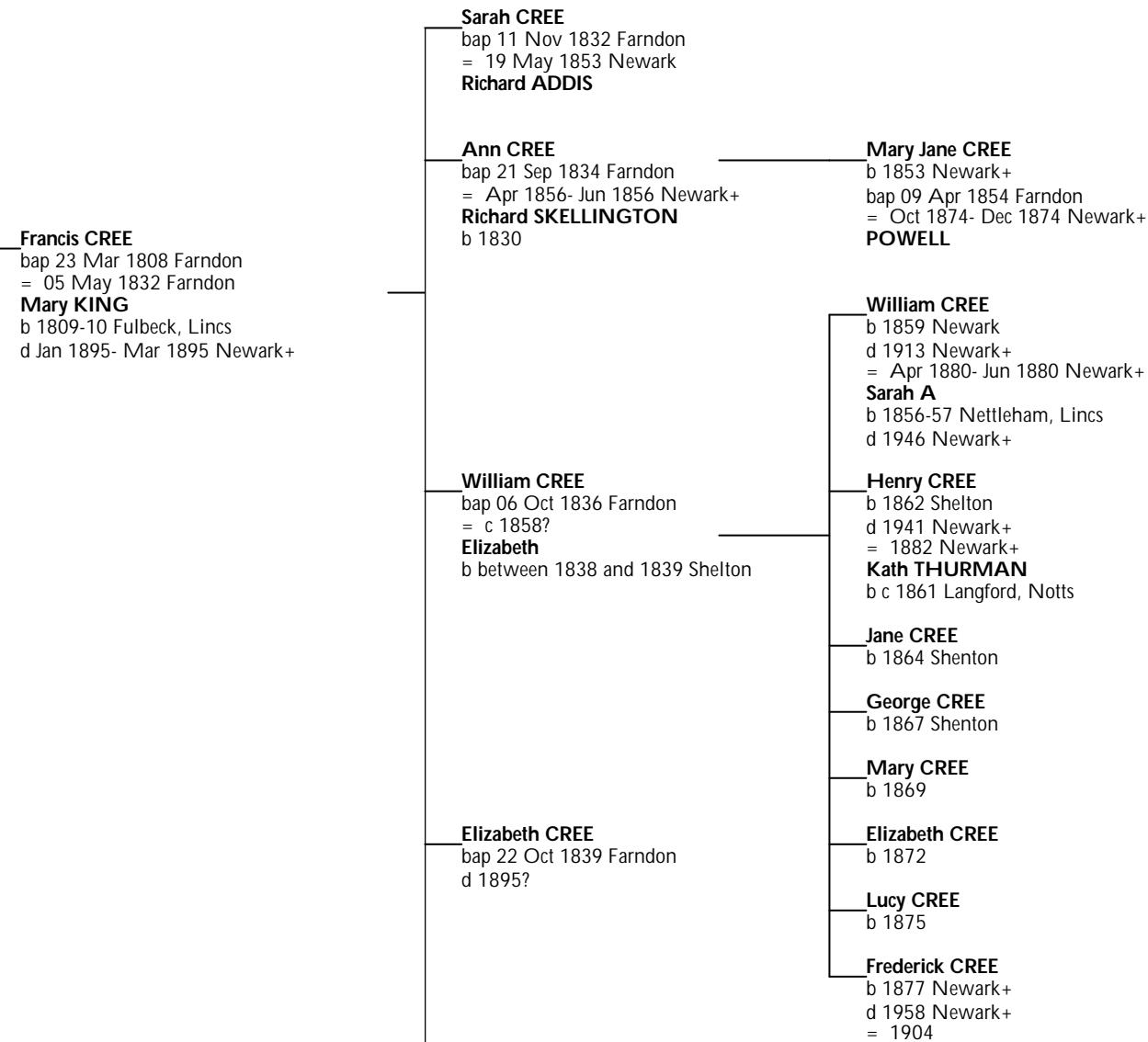
**Edward CREE**  
b 1860

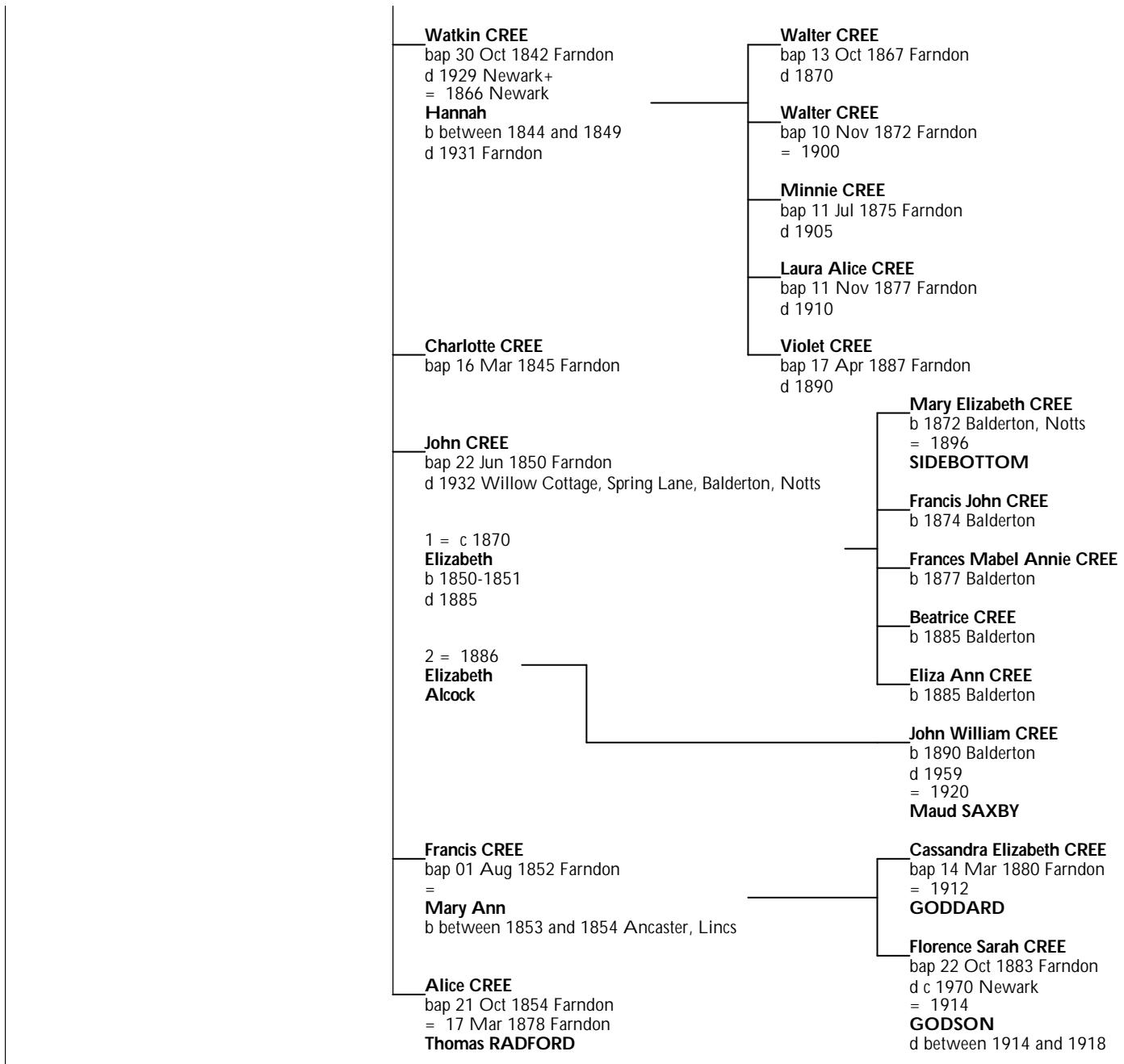
**Charlotte CREE**  
bap 22 May 1862 Newark  
= 1880 Newark+

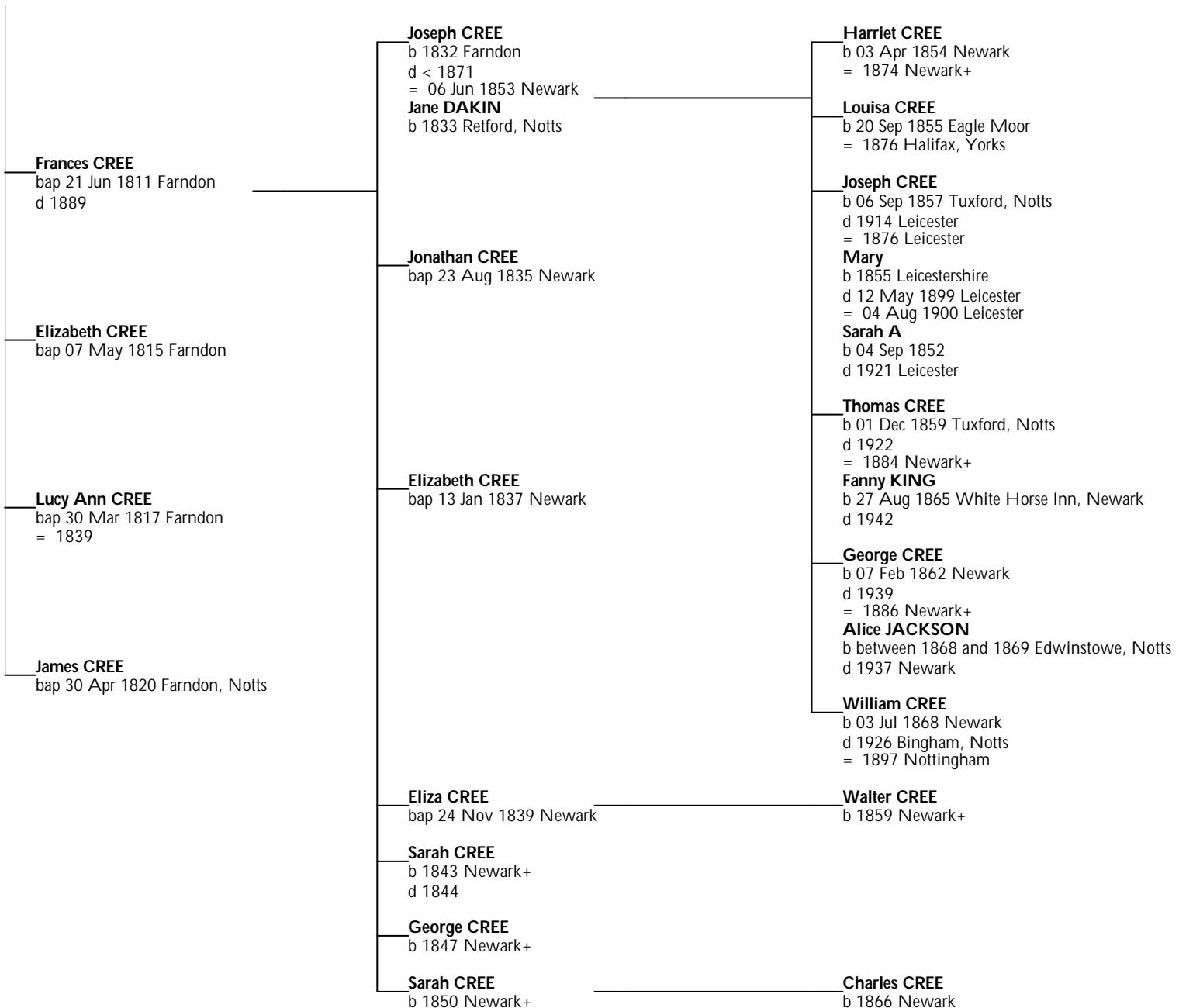
**Ellen CREE**  
b Apr 1864- Jun 1864

**Charlotte Elizabeth CREE**  
bap 09 May 1880 Farndon  
= Jul 1901- Sep 1901 Newark+

**Joshua CREE**  
b 1883 Newark+







## Joshua Cree and Sarah Hand

JOSHUA CREE was the first of his name to settle in the Newark-on-Trent area. Why he came we know not, but on 21st March 1796, at St Mary's Church in this ancient town, he and Sarah Hand were married. Sarah was just 21 years old. Joshua was 26 and from Clowne in Derbyshire, over twenty miles away to the north east. To-day there are 17 people listed in the local Phone Book as bearing the name Cree, a greater concentration than anywhere else in England, and all are descended from Joshua and Sarah.

Joshua was the youngest child of the large family of William and Gertrude Cree. His grandfather Francis Cree had also been a youngest son and the family almost certainly lived in some poverty, probably in or near the hamlet of Oxcroft in Bolsover parish or at Damsbrook down the lane in the parish of Clowne. No-one of this family stayed at home and we may guess that there was nothing to stay for.

Joshua was the youngest and moved the furthest. Perhaps he had obtained work as a farm labourer in the area, drawn there by Newark's well-known annual hiring fair. He is described as a labourer for most of this life. After twenty-four years of marriage, at the baptism of his own youngest son we will see Joshua described as a waterman. It might just be that he had started work on the boats in the Clowne area on the Chesterfield Canal, and had found his way to Newark in that way, along the winding route through Worksop and Retford to Stockwith on the Trent, and then south up the Trent through Gainsborough to Newark.

Newark owes its existence as a town to the River Trent and the Roman Fosse

Way. The river has been navigable from the Humber estuary into the heart of the North Midlands at Nottingham more or less continuously since Roman times. In the early eighteenth century Daniel Defoe observed that at Nottingham:

*the Trent is navigable here for vessels or barges of great burthen, by which all their heavy and bulky goods are brought from the Humber, and even from Hull; such as iron, block-tin, salt, hops, grocery, dyers' wares, wine, oil, tar, hemp, flax, etc. and the same vessels carry down lead, coal, wood, corn; as also cheese in great quantities from Warwickshire and Staffordshire.*

And when he arrived at Hull he noted that its trade included,

*all the lead trade of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire from Bawtry wharf... the cheese brought down the Trent from Stafford, Warwick and Cheshire, and the corn from all the counties adjacent, are brought down and shipped off here.<sup>1</sup>*

By 1740 navigation up to Burton had been improved and the breweries there were exporting beer via the Trent to the Baltic. The River also came to be a central feature of the lives of many Cree families in the Newark area. The 1790s are described by Beckett as “the years of canal ‘mania’ in England... the East Midlands was a leader of fashion because of the need to move its landlocked coal and iron.”<sup>2</sup> Certainly this was the motive behind the building of the Chesterfield Canal and it may have been the escape route for the youngest son, Joshua Cree.

In 1992 a new by-pass was built for Newark from the A1 Great North Road

on the north west edge of the town, round to the west to join the Fosse Way at a large roundabout just south of Newark at its boundary with the parish of Farndon. Farndon is near enough to Newark to share some of its activities as a small town serving a predominantly agricultural area. Thus it is noted in 1904 that ‘Malting is carried on here<sup>3</sup>’

From the roundabout on the Fosse Way, a narrow lane leads off to the west, ending in a few hundred yards on the banks of the Trent. This is Cree’s Lane, and is almost certainly where Joshua and Sarah Cree settled in 1796. A house in the lane is still called Cree’s House and in 1991 a neighbour, Mr Kirk, told me he knew of the last Cree who lived there. She was Mrs Florrie Godson (née Cree) who died in 1974, having been widowed in World War I and lived as a recluse almost all her life in Cree’s House. Whether this was on the same croft mentioned in Manor Court Records as being jointly occupied by Joshua Cree and Thomas Jowitt we cannot be sure.

We can trace Florrie’s ancestry back to Joshua and Sarah so it seems likely that Crees lived in Crees Lane for 180 years. The croft is not described in the court record and Joshua and Thomas were not the copyholders themselves but sub-tenants, described as occupiers as late as 1815. Mr Kirk, whose father used to own the farm at the bottom of the lane by the river, now Chestnut Cottage, said that he thought that Cree’s House had been owned by a Neddie Cree.

Joshua’s bride Sarah was two months pregnant when he took her to the altar. The baby was baptised Isaac on 19th October 1796 at Farndon parish church, followed by Mary in 1798, Joseph 1800, William 1803, Francis 1808, Frances 1811, Elizabeth 1815, Lucy Ann 1817 and finally James who was baptised in 1820.

---

<sup>1</sup>A Tour through the whole Island of Great Britain by Daniel Defoe, Penguin 1971, pp. 450, 454, 528.

<sup>2</sup>The East Midlands from AD 1000 by J V Beckett, 1988 Longman.

---

<sup>3</sup>Kelly’s Trade Directory, Notts. 1904

I shall now write what I know of the Cree descendants of Joshua and Sarah's children. I have no information about what happened to James. And the girls married so their descendants are not Cree with the remarkable exception of Frances. She was called Fanny which helps to avoid confusion with her brother Francis. So it was Isaac, Joseph, William, John, Francis and Frances who carry on the Cree story - Fanny most of all as it happens!

## Crees at the Muskhams - Isaac Cree and Maria Sanders

Joshua and Sarah Cree's eldest son Isaac married Maria Sanders in 1817 at South Muskham and settled in North Muskham. These villages are a mile or so north of Farndon on the opposite bank of the Trent. The marriage register shows that Isaac was "of this parish" and could write.

Mary Cree, Joshua and Sarah's second child also moved downriver. She married Richard Atkinson in 1826 at Sutton-on-Trent, and with her change of name moves out of our ken.

Isaac and Maria had eight children but the three eldest, all boys, may not have survived into adulthood - we have no record of them. James was next, missing from the baptism register but undoubtedly Isaac and Maria's son. Next came Susannah, born in 1823. She was in service at Edwinstowe in 1841 and at twenty married John Manners, a bricklayer from Lincoln. Next came James who we have seen living next door to his widowed mother in 1851.

The 1841 Census gives us an address. Isaac and Maria Cree are then living with their three youngest children, Henry aged 9, Harriet aged 11 and Jane aged 13 at Fish House, South Muskham.

If we were able to travel back a couple of centuries, a surprising aspect of the life we would find would be the predominance of children. Population studies are now telling us that the increase in population was not due to improved nutrition nor to any significant reduction in deaths due to medical advances. It was almost entirely due to a reduction in the ages at which people were

married, stimulated by a rise in real wages.<sup>4</sup>

However poverty returned with the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and families who, before the enclosure of the commons, would have eked out a passable existence keeping a couple of pigs and perhaps a cow, were now utterly dependent on day wages. Living at or below subsistence level older children would help with work, and girls in the house, but if there were too many mouths to feed some would be sent out as live-in servants to almost equally poor families who were short of a pair of hands. Rural poverty was to reach its peak in the 1840s and things did not really start to improve until after 1860.

The youngest of Isaac and Maria's children, Henry, became a farm labourer, then later a bricklayer's labourer, no doubt trying to accumulate enough savings to get married. He married at 23 and had five children. Harriet married at the age of twenty.

It is against this background of poverty that we should look at the experience of Jane Cree. At the age of about 17, in 1845, she appeared before the Quarter Sessions at Newark charged with stealing, "one bonnet value 1s. the goods and chattels of Isaac Cree, One cap, value 2d. One habity shirt, value 3d. One frock, value 2d. the goods and chattels of Susannah Cree, Maria Cree, Robert Dale. Edwin Upton."

She pleaded guilty and was sentenced to seven years' transportation, this for stealing items valued in total one shilling and seven pence! In April of that year however she was granted a Royal pardon perhaps because of her youth and a sentence of one years' hard labour was substituted. However a few weeks after she would have complete her sentence, she was again found guilty of stealing items of clothing from her family and neighbours; a bonnet, a cap, two dresses, a petticoat, a pair of stockings, a pair of boots and a pair of shoes,

two handkerchiefs, a collar, a comb, a brush and a bag. On this occasion, all the items (the total value was 15 shillings and sixpence) belonged to Jane's sister Susannah. The list of witnesses written on the back of the indictment include Susannah herself but the name Isaac Cree has been crossed out, apparently because he was not present in court. Jane Cree was again sentenced to transportation for seven years, and sailed from Woolwich in March 1847 aboard the ship "Asia." She arrived in Hobart on 21st July and within a year had somehow gained permission to marry. She married Samuel Daw, another transportee, on 12th July 1848. Her "criminal" life was not over however, as there are records of convictions for disturbing the peace (21st January 1850), Forgery (27 January 1853?) and absence from her authorised place of residence (26th March 1853).<sup>5</sup>

By a coincidence Susannah Cree, having got rid of her awkward sister, was also married in July 1848. Her husband was John Manners, while her brother James married the following year at Newark. His wife was called Susan.

By 1851 Isaac Cree had passed away and the Census return for South Muskham shows Maria Cree living alone, aged 60, and described as a pauper. James and Susan, on whose meagre support she is no doubt now dependant, are next door. He is now 26 and an agricultural labourer, Susan is 24 and the first of their children, Elizabeth, is just a year old.

With no land to call their own, people would move house quite frequently, though normally within a few miles. So in 1871 we find James and Susan Cree living in Newark Road, South Muskham. Elizabeth is now 21 and a domestic servant. Her sister Ann, at 19, is an apprentice dressmaker. The next two children, Robert and Maria were not at home. Maria, now aged 14 was already living out at Barnby le Willows as a general servant. There were five younger children to look after, Susannah, Eliza, Wadkin, Sarah and 20-month-

---

<sup>4</sup>Local family history in England by C D Rogers and J H Smith, 1991 Manchester Univ Press

---

<sup>5</sup> Pers. comm. Barry Holland 5th Oct 1997

old George. James's aged mother Maria Cree is now 80 and living next door, still described as a pauper. She was to die four years later.

Ten years later only George is still at home with his parents, who have now moved to Marsh Lane, North Muskham. Of the others, Elizabeth and Ann are now married, Robert is sixteen and living at Weston as an "Ag servant indoor" to Henry Chalmers "licensed victualler Blue Bell and farmer 25 acres". At the age of twenty Susannah had married Thomas Dent.

Susannah might now have disappeared from our view with her change of name, but for the fact that her great-granddaughter in Deception Bay, Queensland, Barbara Hafslund, decided to research her family history. Barbara tells us that her great grandmother Susannah "was just under five feet tall and was always remembered by all the family as being very reclusive." She and Thomas had five children of whom four were girls. The fourth was named Maria and was reputed to have been brought up for many years by her aunt Maria (Susannah's sister), who had married and moved to Nottingham. "This had made my grandmother very bitter," recounts Barbara.

Also in 1881, their uncle Henry Cree now a widower at 48, is living at Fillingate Lane, North Muskham with his eldest daughter Sarah aged 23 and Sarah's illegitimate son James Cree aged 11 months. Henry's youngest daughter Elizabeth was now 12 and described as a scholar. Of his other children we know that Mary, aged 18, was a general servant at the White Lion in Long Bennington over to the south of Newark, while John and Charles aged 14 and 15, were both indoor farm servants at Sutton-on-Trent, though to different farmers.

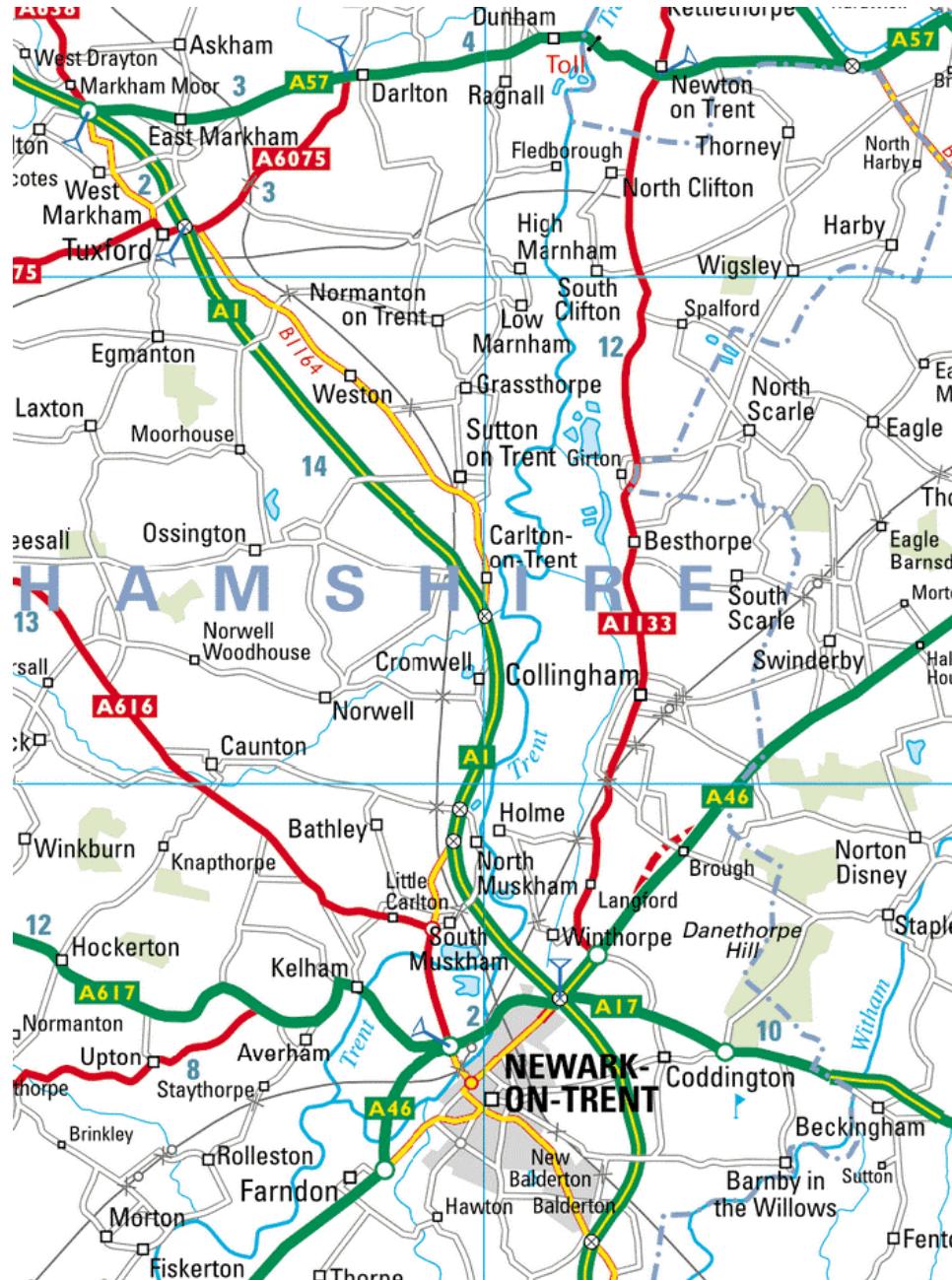
The Nottinghamshire Family History Society has done an excellent job in indexing the county's Census returns. It is surprising therefore that we can find no further records of Cree descendants of the Muskham Crees.

## The plight of single parents - the families of Joseph and Sarah Cree

The third of Joshua and Sarah Cree's children was Joseph, baptised at Farndon in December 1800. He is the first to have stayed at Farndon, at least for a while. At the age of twenty-three he married Sarah Cox of Balderton. Joseph and Sarah had three children, Francis, Ann and Mary, and the baptismal record shows that Joseph was following his father's occupation as a boatman. It seems they were living in Newark although Ann was baptised in Farndon. On 2nd October 1830 the Nottingham and Newark Mercury reported that, "On Thursday week, Joseph Cree, a boatman, occasionally employed to Shardlow, was lowering his sail during the storm at Fiskerton, the cross-yard slipped and knocked him into the Trent. He was instantaneously drowned, and his body has not been discovered. We regret to add, he has left a wife and three children totally unprovided for."

Joseph was just 29 when he died. It took twelve days for the body to turn up, as the Mercury reported the following week: "The unfortunate man, Cree... was found on Wednesday in the parish of Thorpe near Newark. An inquest was held over the body on Thursday by P. R. Faulkner Esq., and a verdict returned of Accidentally Drowned."

From Newark to East Retford along the Great North Road there is a string of little villages. South and North Muskham we have mentioned. Then come Bathley, Cromwell, Carlton-on-Trent, Sutton-on-Trent and Weston. Just off to the right are Normanton-on-Trent and Marnham. After Weston there is a longer gap as the road swings north-westward to Tuxford, which was already a decayed market town by the mid-nineteenth century.



Tuxford was described by John Byng in the 1790s as “a mean and dirty place”.<sup>6</sup> Then there are West Markham and Markham Moor where the Great North Road was re-routed in 1766 with a new turnpike road through West Drayton (with Askham just off to the east), Gamston and Eaton to the market town of East Retford. Of these fifteen villages, the name Cree has been associated with all but four. And not far from the Great North Road we can also find Laxton to the west where Crees live to-day, and Darlton to the east where some are buried. These places can hardly be called isolated, lying on or near the main highway from England to Scotland, yet their poverty in the middle decades of the nineteenth century was probably as bad as anywhere in Britain. They were remote from any industrial area, the town of Newark was mainly a market town - its industries, malting and agricultural engineering, being dependent on agriculture. And as we have seen in previous chapters, people were in a bad way generally in the English countryside by the 1840s.

Widowed at 25 and with three young children, Sarah Cree moved first to Weston (or they may have been living there already), for in 1835 the parish register shows that she had a “natural son” Robert. Sarah is described as a pauper. In 1838 we find her in Marnham where she had another illegitimate child, William (of whom more later). By 1841 she had settled in Normanton-on-Trent where the Census describes her as “of Independent Means”, which is hard to believe, and a year later she baptised a son John Cree there. It is perhaps worth noting that her three illegitimate children all bore the name Cree although they had no direct Cree ancestry, she being a Cree by her marriage to the now deceased Joseph Cree.

By now, in 1842, she had six children, three by her husband Joseph Cree and three since his death. It was in this year that she married Gervase Harris, who was probably the father of her youngest two children, William and John. We think that her eldest, Francis, died unmarried in 1850 at the age of twenty-five.

<sup>6</sup>The Torrington Diaries Vol. 3, ed. C B Andrews, 1935 Eyre & Spottiswoode.

The next two, Ann and Mary, were now 15 and 14 respectively, when their mother had her third illegitimate child, and it is hardly surprisingly that before too long they were to follow her example. Ann was described as an “Inmate” (presumably of the workhouse) at the 1848 baptism of her illegitimate son Joseph at Normanton-on-Trent, while her younger sister Mary was a lodger, presumably at her mother’s house, when her daughter Sarah Cree was baptised in 1851.

The 1851 Census tells us how Sarah Cree (née Cox), now Sarah Harris, and her progeny were situated:

**Normanton-on-Trent folio 692 schedule 5:**

Gervase Harris	Head	Mar	48	Ag Labourer	Newark
Sarah Harris	Wife	Mar	45		Balderton
William Harris	Son		13		Marnham
Elizabeth Harris	Daugr		7		Normanton
John Harris	Son		8		do.
Catherine Harris	Daug		4		do.
Sarah Cree	Granddaugr		3 mth		do.

**Normanton-on-Trent folio 693 schedule 15 (House of John Atkin, farmer of 70 acres):**

Robert Cree	Servant	U	15	Weston
-------------	---------	---	----	--------

But for three-month-old Sarah Cree, we might never have located this Harris family record. It is from this that we can trace her grandmother Sarah’s marriage to Gervase Harris. William and John, who had been baptised as Cree, are now shown with the surname Harris, although both were to retain the name Cree in later life<sup>7</sup>. The two youngest, Elizabeth and Catherine would have

<sup>7</sup>William Cree features in the next section. In the 1881 Census John, an Agricultural Labourer, and his wife Fanny are found in Sebthorpe Place, Markham Moor, parish of East Markham. No descendants are known.

stayed as Harris since they were born after Sarah’s marriage to Gervase. The last entry is for the illegitimate daughter of Sarah’s daughter Mary Cree. Mary herself is at West Markham, about five miles along the Great North Road, a general servant in the house of a farmer of 100 acres. Baby Sarah was to grow up and marry as a Cree and at her marriage gave her father’s name as William Walters.

**West Markham folio 784:**

May [sic] Cree	Serv	U	22	General Serv	Newark
----------------	------	---	----	--------------	--------

Sarah’s eldest daughter Ann Cree (the one described as an “Inmate”) has not yet been located in the 1851 Census. Her son Joseph is now being brought up by his father Thomas White:

**Tuxford, Newcastle Street, folio 742**

Thomas White	Head	Mar	31	Journeyman Miller	Normanton-on-Trent
Sara White	Wife	Mar	24		Newark
Joseph Cree	Son		2	Scholar [sic!]	Normanton-on-Trent

Confirmation that Thomas White was Joseph Cree’s father comes from Joseph’s marriage record in 1873 at Weston. I think he cannot have lost touch with his mother however, since a witness at the wedding signed “X, Ann Cree, her mark”. Who else could she be?

Joseph had a son George Henry Cree who survived to marry in 1904 at Basford (near Nottingham), and he may have descendants alive to-day. [His

possible children George John b 1904 and Lucy b 1905.]

But it was William, baptised at Marnham on 8th January, 1838, recorded as William Harris in 1851, who was the only one of Sarah's six children who grew up to perpetuate the name Cree.

## The open fields

After the degradation and poverty which it seems clear were the lot of Sarah and her children, it seems that things started to take an upward turn for William Cree. In 1861 he married Ann Vickers at Gainsborough Register Office and they settled at Riddings Farm in Weston where they brought up seven children and where William was a farm bailiff. At one stage he was groom to Doctor Whitington (pronounced White-ington) at Tuxford, perhaps around 1874 when his daughter Mary was born there. The eldest son John Cree had taken over Vicarage Farm, Laxton, in 1924 and it then passed to Ron Cree who lived there until his death in 1994. Ron's niece Gwen Codd lives near Laxton and there is still a Cree farming in Laxton - Ron's nephew Colin.

To historians of agriculture Laxton is one of the most famous villages in England. It is the only place where the original communal open field system of farming survives under the jurisdiction of a Manor Court. The modern study of Laxton started with the Orwins' seminal work in the 1930s and, through the fortunate survival of medieval manor records and survey maps, that work is the cornerstone of our present knowledge of how the open-field system operated in the Middle Ages.<sup>8</sup>

We met Ron's elder sister, Olive Cockerton, a few days before her eighty-ninth birthday at Gwen's home at Ollerton, just down the road from Tuxford. Gwen and her husband Keith were most hospitable and next day took us the short drive to Laxton to visit Ron and his wife Gladys at their home, Old Vicarage Farm.

---

<sup>8</sup>The Open Fields by C S and C S Orwin, Oxford University Press 1938.

When we arrived Ron was sitting by the range in the living room, looking just as I imagined him, hands on his wide splayed knees, looking no older than in his photograph of ten years earlier<sup>9</sup>. His strongly featured yet friendly face reflected a lifetime in the open air, and his hands, his firm grip as we met, were still strong at 79. Only later, when he stood up, did the cruel effects of arthritis show themselves in the permanent crook of his back and knees, yet he showed no pain and proudly refused help to the sitting room where we were to discuss family matters and family history.

First I asked Ron how the Crees had come into Old Vicarage Farm. He told us he had taken over the tenancy of the farm at the age of sixteen when his father John Cree had died. John Cree had acquired it from William Bennett in 1924, and the Bartles had had it before that. William Bennett had married Elizabeth Bagshaw, sister of Ron's mother Eliza Bagshaw.

Ron had not known his grandfather William Cree but could tell us that he had been groom to Doctor Whitington at Tuxford. He told us of his aunts and uncles; Bob whose son Fred had joined the Grenadier Guards and been killed in World War II, (Bob also had a son Frank and three daughters); Sam who had lived at Cree's Cottage in Gamston near Retford and had one daughter, Polly who had married a Spriggs; Sally we knew had married Henry Handly at Marnham in 1892, the marriage certificate showing that William Cree was living at Skegby at that time and working as a bailiff; and finally Uncle Frank who had lived at Kirkby-in-Ashfield. When Frank's wife had died, Ron's mother had gone to Kirkby to fetch a sewing machine for Daisy (Ron's sister who married a Rushby). Frank was an outsider, said Ron, he never seemed to mix with the rest of the family.

I later found more details of Cree family history in J V Beckett's History of

Laxton<sup>10</sup>, including this about Ron's sister-in-law Annie Moody: "Girls were sent out to service as soon as possible... Annie Moody went as a maid to the vicarage in 1916 when Rev James Turbridge came to the village, and there she stayed until her mother died two years later when she moved back to look after her father and brother... When Annie Moody moved to Step Farm after her marriage to John Cree in 1929... she went by bus each week to Newark market. She too had regular customers for her butter and eggs, and any butter remaining at the end of the day was sold to wholesalers."

Then I asked Ron about the open fields system of farming at Laxton. He explained about the three big open fields, which he called West Field, Top Field and Bottom Field, each of which took its turn in a three-year rotation as the wheat field, the spring corn field and the fallows. When he took over the farm, he said, he had 101 acres of which 7 or 8 acres were in the open fields. (A later check through his tenancy agreement showed 15 acres in open fields at one time.) You had always to sow wheat in the wheat field, but you could sow any spring sown crop in the spring corn field. He mentioned oats, barley, clover, beans and peas. In the fallows you could "gyst" twenty ewes and lambs from after harvest till sowing time. In the crop fields you could graze without limit after the field was "broken" until ploughing. His use of the ancient phrases slipped off the tongue as naturally as the breath from his lungs.

He then explained the workings of the Manor Court and its jury, of which he had been foreman for several years. The jury would inspect the fallows in November for encroaching or ploughing the sykes (pronounced sicks) and would present offenders to the Court, held at the Dovecotes Inn, where they were fined for their misdeeds.

J V Beckett writes, "In 1850 Thomas Bagshaw was excused a fine imposed the previous year and John Cree was let off 2s. 6d. non-attendance fine in

---

<sup>9</sup>The Farmers' Tale, in the Observer Magazine Section 22nd June 1980.

---

<sup>10</sup>A History of Laxton by J V Beckett (Blackwell 1989).

1915 and excused future attendance at the court on account of his delicate health.” It also appears that “women could attend... [the manor court]. Elizabeth Bagshaw [was] among the twenty-eight villagers present in 1881.” John Cree was of course Ron’s father and Elizabeth Bagshaw his maternal grandmother. “At the beginning of the [twentieth] century when John Bagshaw of Town End Farm was one of the foremen, he always ordered everyone except the jurors from the room before business commenced and all decisions were taken in confidence”.<sup>11</sup>

Ron also explained that he owned a “common right” which allowed him to graze one cow on the Town Common. There were only eight such rights in Laxton and Ron’s came not with the Old Vicarage Farm but with some cottages he had inherited from his grandfather John Bagshaw.

Gwen thought the Old Vicarage had been made into a farm in 1895 when the new vicarage was built. Later they looked it up in a village history and found it was in 1875.

I showed them the Orwins’ book “The Open Fields” and read out the names of the 1821 jurymen<sup>12</sup>. Many of the names sparked off comments about present-day descendants. When I came to George Bartle and William Bagshaw I said I had thought it must have been William Bagshaw who had passed the farm to the Cree family (Ron’s mother was Eliza Bagshaw), but Gwen pointed out that there were many Bagshaw families, including four at Tuxford alone in the nineteenth century. On hearing the last name, Thomas Jepson, Ron said one of his earliest memories was of going with his mother to visit Jemima Jepson. “I was only a little lad,” he said, “and could stand in the fireplace of their house and look up the chimney and see the birds flying over.”

I showed Ron some photographs in the Orwins’ book and he identified Sam Moody<sup>13</sup>, and his comment on the two photographs was “I’ve ploughed wi’ t’ horses and I’ve sown wi’ t’ hopper. Normally we’d have four working horses, or three and a foal. Of course we always ploughed with a pair.”

Then he continued, “Dad bought four horses, two mothers and two foals, the two mothers in foal, hoping he’d bought six you see. I was just a lad and rode home on one of the horses. They’d run on t’ common at the top of the hill. Lady’s mother turned out not to be in foal. Bob’s mother was, but the foal died, so he’d only bought four after all. My brother Jack had to come and break them in. They came in useful when we moved here.”

While we were talking, Ron’s wife Gladys had prepared a farmhouse high tea for us, and altogether we were most hospitably entertained. We returned to Gwen and Keith’s in the evening where we watched a video recording about Laxton and its open field farming system.

Next morning Gwen and Keith took us back over to Laxton. Ron had looked out various documents, the most interesting of which were his tenancy agreements with the lord of the manor. This was now the Crown who had bought the manor from Lord Manvers in 1952. Thirty-one different plots of land were listed, divided into three parts. Part 1 consisted of 17 “enclosed fields” totalling 67 acres. Part 2 listed “Former Open Fields enclosed in 1908”. This referred to the major re-organisation which was agreed in 1904, reducing the open fields by about a third. At the same time the strips were consolidated into somewhat larger blocks, so that each farmer had a more easily managed set of holdings. Ron’s enclosed land contained a further five fields in this category - two 2-acre strips formerly part of Mill Field and West Field, four acres of Little Field and two fields totalling nearly ten acres of South Field. Little Field (also known as East Field) had been a fourth open field, smaller

<sup>11</sup>ibid. p 33. A footnote states “Ex inf Ron Cree”.

<sup>12</sup>Orwin op cit p 153.

<sup>13</sup>Top photograph opposite page 141.

than the others, which had always been cropped in the rotation as if it were part of West Field. It was completely enclosed in 1904.

Finally Part 3 listed Ron's nine blocks of strips under the heading "Open Fields - subject to the rules of the open field system". These ranged in size from a half-acre block in the South Field to a block of over four acres in the Mill Field. The total of 101 acres was a fairly typical size for a Laxton farmer. Then we piled into Keith's car for a tour of Laxton. As we turned out of Chapel Lane into the village street, Ron pointed out the farm of his nephew Colin Cree, still an active Laxton farmer. Then we drove past the new (but unused) pinfold, the Dovecotes Inn and the fine large church, turning right up Toad Lane until it became just a stony track giving access to the West Field. Ron always called this the Top Field and pointed out the strips, including those which had been his. He could name instantly the holder of every strip. Having read about the medieval open fields I was rather surprised at the width of the strips expecting something only five or six yards wide, albeit consolidated into blocks, but still with the original drainage furrows dividing each. These were more like twenty to twenty-five yards and gave a much flatter appearance than the fossilised ridge and furrow landscape we see so often in Leicestershire.

Ron pointed out the grassy sykes which allowed access to each strip and at the same time gave turning room for the plough team. I noticed that, where lands abutted a stream, sykes were necessary on both sides, whereas in other places a single syke was enough.

Ploughing was under way in the Top Field suggesting to me that this was next year's wheat field, but Ron seemed not at all clear about this. He had been retired too long to have kept count of the sequence of rotations of course, but the confusion seems to stem mainly from the decline of mixed farming, that is of livestock farming. This had led in 1967 to the Court Leet allowing a forage crop to be grown on the fallow field. It seemed to me that once the fallow field was no longer reserved for grazing, the main *raison d'être* of the common field

farming system was lost. There is now no practical farming reason for an agreed communal crop rotation.

So the three open fields as we saw them in October looked very similar, with some strips in each freshly ploughed and some sown with winter wheat. Perhaps we would see a greater difference in the early summer.

Next we were taken across to Mill Field. The site of the old windmill was pointed out, fenced off to preserve it and newly planted with young trees. Ron remembers it was a Sunday that the mill had been blown down, never to be replaced. (We later found that this happened in 1916 when Ron was five years old!) Here a number of neat hedges showed those parts of Mill Field which had been enclosed in the 1904 re-organisation. The track down Mill Field crossed a very wide area of grass at one place and Ron described this also as a syke. Its function was simply to grow hay and he explained that the hay from all the sykes was auctioned amongst the Laxton farmers annually in June.

Formerly the sykes had been used for common grazing of tethered animals. "The tenants' rights to such grazing," writes Beckett, "was determined by the number of stints, or gait rights, in their possession. There were 312 of these and they were closely guarded... After Elizabeth Bagshaw's death in 1930, the freehold purchased by her husband in 1892 was divided between the daughters, one of whom told the Thoresby agent that 'we have a dispute between Mrs Bennet, Mrs Cree and myself. Can you tell me how many gaits belong to the smallholding which I have?'"<sup>14</sup>

Back down the village street we went, across the Town Common and on to Bottom Field (South Field). The track ran up a slope and turned left along an airy ridge. The sun had now fully dispersed the morning mist and shone in a clear sky. A mild westerly breeze blew the cobwebs away - it was very

---

<sup>14</sup>Beckett op cit p 46.

refreshing and the views were magnificent. The lands here were end-on to the track on both sides, with narrow grass sykes forming steep little banks on either side of the track. The sykes (though still not the strips) showed undulations about five or six yards wide which reminded me of the Leicestershire “ridge and furrow” fields. I said to Ron that I had expected the strips themselves to form narrower ridges with furrows in between, and he explained that that was how they were in Laxton up to the 1940s while ploughing was still done with horses. In fact he described the “riggs and furrows” exactly as I had expected to see them from seeing Leicestershire’s fossilised ridge and furrow fields. There the fields had been enclosed, some as early as the sixteenth century, as specialised livestock farming had become more profitable, and they had never since been under the plough, thus preserving their original form. Here in Laxton’s Bottom Field, just the undulations of the headlands had survived for the same reason, while the strips themselves had been smoothed out by the combined effects of tractor ploughing and consolidated ownership into blocks.

As we drove back over the thistle-decked Town Common I checked with Ron that this was the Common to which his common grazing right applied. We counted just eight cows, corresponding to the eight rights, and he was prompted to wonder out loud who he would pass his common right to “when my time is up.” His son Martin had no interest in farming. Colin Cree had only two daughters. Then there was Keith. Keith said he might be able to use it if he could keep a bullock on the Common!

Finally we went round to Ron’s favourite viewpoint, high on the Ossington Road, from where Laxton village is seen to perfection, the original traditional English village of church, inn, and vicarage, with the single village street lined with farms, nestling together for protection and sociability, and the open fields stretching for two or three miles on all sides to the remnants of Sherwood Forest at their edges. In the foreground, in front of the South Field, we could see Knapeney, one of the four farms created on the edges of the fields by an earlier enclosure agreement in 1729. Even to-day these are the only four farms

outside the village. In one of Knapeney’s fields sheep were grazing, completing a picture which, while unique in England to-day, differs little from the scene many Midland villages would have presented in the seventeenth century.

We left Laxton and drove to Weston and then on to Riddings Farm and the cottage nearby (the second one almost at the level crossing) where Ron told us his father, John Cree, had been born. He remembered being told that his Aunt Sally had played as a child with Sophia Butcher who lived across the railway at the cottage by the ruined windmill. On to Tuxford where William Cree (Ron’s grandfather) had worked as a groom to the local doctor, but Ron did not know which was the doctor’s house.

William had died in 1904, seven years before Ron was born, and his wife Ann in 1901. Gwen had found their gravestones in Darlton churchyard. It was their ages from the inscriptions that had enabled us eventually to link the ancestry of the Laxton Crees to the Newark branch, though William and Ann had led us a merry dance! I hypothesised about links to the Cree families in Mansfield and Newark and Worksop. The gravestone implied 1837/8 for William’s birth but nothing fitted in the St Catherine’s House indexes. The marriage index suggested a marriage in 1861 at Gainsborough and in the end we sent to the Gainsborough Registrar for the Certificate. This gave William’s father’s name as “John Cree (deceased)” which could only be John Cree the boatman who was baptised at Farndon on 1806. The bride’s name was not Bridget, but Ann Vickers.

It was about this time that I discovered the Nottinghamshire Family History Society Census indexes and was working through the Crees systematically in the 1881 Census. Eventually I came across William and “Briget” Cree at Marnham, a little parish near Laxton. This was definitely Ron’s grandfather because the five youngest children (Ron’s aunts and Uncle Frank) were still at home.

William’s birthplace was given as Marnham. It now remained to check this in

the Marnham parish register. Here was the big surprise, for William was not shown as the son of John Cree at all, but as the illegitimate son of Sarah Cree. As we have seen, she was the widow of John Cree's brother Joseph. William had invented a father John Cree to give himself some respectability at his wedding.<sup>15</sup>

The Census return also gave us Bridget's birthplace - Nettleham in Lincolnshire, where her baptism has been confirmed and the Vickers ancestry traced for several generations.

And so back to Laxton for lunch at the Dovecote Inn, where the jury and the Court Leet had met for time out of mind, and where the little exhibition centre shows an enlargement of Pierce's 1635 map of the manor from which so much of our knowledge of open field farming has come. Ron declined our offer of lunch and returned home.

Over the meal Keith and Gwen told us that Ron was reckoned the strongest man in Laxton in his day, thinking nothing of heaving full-sized bales of hay on to his back and up the stone steps to the hay loft we had seen above the old stables at the farm. One day, well after the prime of his life, he missed the post with his milk returns on which payment for his milk depended, so he jumped on his bike to catch the train at Tuxford, three miles away. He missed the train however, and so cycled on over the Trent at Dunham and delivered the milk return to the Milk Marketing Board in Lincoln. He was home for dinner by one o'clock having completed a forty mile round trip in a morning!

---

<sup>15</sup>It might just be that John Cree was indeed William's father; that is he could have been fathered by his mother's brother-in-law who had also been widowed by 1838. He did not re-marry until 1855 and would certainly have known his sister-in-law Sarah. But it seems far more likely that William's father was Gervase Harris who married his mother in 1842.

## William Cree and Mary Scott

William was the fourth of Joshua and Sarah Cree's ten children. He was born in 1803 in Farndon and married Mary Scott there at the age of twenty-seven. She was five years older than William and may well have been a widow with at least one child already. There is quite a mystery about her daughter Elizabeth, which I am unable to solve at present:

### Census 1841: Newark, piece 868/district 9/folio 7

Clarks Yard

William Cree	35	Ag Lab
Mary do.	40	
Elizabeth do	9	
Lucy do.	7	
Mary do.	5	
Caroline do.	3	

### Parish Register, Farndon, 1848, Dec 25th.

after Banns

John Mayfield	25	bach	Labourer	Farndon
father's name and occupation:			James Mayfield	labourer

Elizabeth Cree	25	Spr	-	"
father's name and occupation:			William Cree	labourer

[both signed with a mark.]

**Census 1851: Farndon, folio 13:**

Mary Cree	Head	W[idower]	53	Charwoman	Oxfordshire, Bambray
Mary Cree	Daur	U[nmarried]	16	A[t] home	Notts, Farndon
Sarah Scott	G'Daur		7		Lincoln, Claypole

So when was Elizabeth Cree born? And who were Sarah Scott's parents, bearing in mind that Mary Cree senior was a Scott before her marriage to William.

William's death in 1848 (aged 45) was a cruel blow to Mary, leaving her with three daughters (Caroline had died in 1844) and a granddaughter to look after. She may have been forced to return to her parish of settlement to seek poor relief from the parish overseers, which is probably why she is back in Farndon by 1851. Lucy was away from home, either in service or in the workhouse, and it seems that she died at the age of twenty in 1854. Mary married in 1852 at the age of sixteen. At least she had learnt to sign her name.

With no sons to carry on the Cree name we lose touch with William and Mary Cree's descendants.

## More accidents - John Cree, Ellen and Thirza

John Cree was baptised at Farndon on 13th July 1806. He is consistently described as a boatman or waterman over a period of at least twenty-one years, so we can be sure it was his main occupation. We have not traced the record of his first marriage, though we have to admit not having looked in the parish of Dunston in Lincolnshire where his wife Ellen was born. John and Ellen had three children, Mary Ann, Fanny (named after John's younger sister) and Joseph, and on Census night 1841 they were all at home in King Street, Newark.

Mary Ann left home in 1848 to marry John Simpson, a shoe-maker. In the 1861 Census they are living at 6 Taylor's Yard, Albert Street, Newark. Mary Ann is described as a shoe-closer and they have two children. The late Elizabeth Naylor of Ilkeston identified their daughter Elizabeth, then aged five, as "my husband's maternal great grandmother".

In 1851 we find John and Ellen living at 122 Parliament Street, Newark. Fanny has just got married so only their youngest child Joseph is still at home aged 17 and described as a railway labourer. The Census returns have a column at right hand edge which I have found is rarely used. It is headed "Whether Blind or Deaf and Dumb". In Joseph's case the word Deaf appears in this column. One wonders whether his deafness was caused by his work. It must have been a danger if he worked on the line. Perhaps his workmates, four of whom were staying at the Cree home on Census night, kept a good look-out.

Ellen died in 1853. She would have been about 46 years old. Two years later, at the age of forty-nine, John married his second wife, Thirza, who was from

Horncastle in Lincolnshire and was at least twenty years younger than her husband. By the 1861 Census they had four children and were to have three more. In this record John is described as a labourer; perhaps he had given up the nomadic life of a waterman for a while.

However in 1863 John Cree was in Hull, presumably still plying his trade as a waterman on the Trent barges which were quite capable of navigating the estuary waters of the Humber, even as far as Grimsby. For it was there that he died at the age of 57. (It is possible though it seems unlikely, that the Hull death was some other John Cree.)

In 1869 John's second wife, Thirza died, probably from the strain of bringing up seven children on her own. She was even younger than Ellen when she died - only about forty. So by the 1871 Census her seven children have been split up, which seems to confirm that John was also dead. The eldest, Sarah, is shown as an inmate of the Union workhouse at Claypole, aged 16, no occupation, birth place not known. Joshua is now thirteen or fourteen and staying with his Aunt Fanny at Queen Street (of whom more later). Of the under-twelves, Edward is boarding out in the house of an elderly couple, John and Elizabeth Cobb, in Cherry Holt Lane, where his cousin once removed, Charles Cree,<sup>16</sup> is also staying, while Charlotte and Ellen have been taken in by a widow, Ann Moody, in Beacon Road.

By 1881 Joshua has been married three years and is living at 1 Fishers Yard (off Parliament Street) with his wife Mary and one-year-old daughter Charlotte Elizabeth. Ellen seems to have found her way to her father's parish of Farndon where at the age of eighteen she is shown as a General Domestic Servant in the house of her uncle, William Tow. Charlotte had married the previous year while Charles, the youngest appears at 7 Queen Street (two houses away from his Aunt Fanny) in the house of Sarah Johnson a young widow of thirty. He is

described as her son, and an iron moulder by occupation. Since he is now fifteen it seems that the description "son", is a mistake, and she is probably his cousin Sarah, the daughter of his Aunt Fanny, of whom more later

Although four of John Cree's ten children were boys, it appears that the name Cree has not been passed on to any of the next generation, apart from a son of Joshua Cree, also Joshua, who seems however to have died young.

---

<sup>16</sup>Charles was the son of Edward's cousin Sarah Cree, but only five years his junior.

## Maltsters and iron founders - Francis Cree and Mary King

We have now reached Francis Cree, the sixth of Joshua and Sarah's ten children. Only one of the previous five, Joseph, has passed his surname down to the present day. But in Joseph's case it was not passed to direct descendants. This is because, as we have seen, Sarah Cox acquired the name Cree by her marriage to Joseph, and passed the name on through her son William born at least three years after Joseph's death.

Let no one suggest however that those descendants are not "really" Crees however. If we look back far enough every one of us will see that our surname has been passed down on ways other than the "normal" inheritance from father to sons. It is only ten generations or so back to the time when the name was changed to Cree from Mackree. Are all the Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire Crees "really" Mackrees? And another ten generations before that time none of us had surnames at all. So what's in a name? We should certainly not confuse our genetic inheritance with the way we have acquired our surname.

Joshua and Sarah Cree probably named their sixth child Francis after one of Joshua's brothers back in Clowne, Derbyshire. But Joshua's grandfather was also Francis Cree, who was born in the 1690s, so the name goes back to the earliest Cree family in Derbyshire. And as we shall see there is a continuous chain down to present-day descendants called Francis Cree.

Francis was baptised at Farndon Church in 1808 and married Mary King in 1832 at Farndon, his sister Elizabeth signing as a witness though Francis himself

could not sign his name. Although Francis followed the occupation of many of his brothers as a waterman, none of their nine children did so, with the possible exception of Sarah, the eldest.

By 1841 Francis's four elder brothers had all moved out of Farndon. Isaac was in South Muskham, Joseph had died and his widow Sarah was in Normanton-on-Trent, William and John were both bringing up families in the centre of Newark.

But Francis and Mary stayed on in Farndon all their lives, perhaps even in his parents' home. He and Mary are shown in the 1841 Census at Athies's Row with four children aged one to eight.

In 1851 Sarah and Ann are away in service (Sarah at the Red Lodge in Screveton and Ann on a farm at Thorpe) and there are five children from baby John aged nine months to William aged fourteen years. At eighteen Sarah married a waterman, Richard Addis, the only one of Francis's children to follow his occupation. Ann married Richard Skellington, a railway station labourer, but not before having a daughter Mary Jane who would later (in 1875) have an illegitimate daughter herself, naming him George Powell Cree, though she had married George Powell in 1874.

Francis and Mary's third child, William Cree, became a maltster, probably in Farndon itself as we know that malting was carried on there. He married around 1857.

By 1861 the fourth child Elizabeth is twenty and "living in" at the home of her cousin John Hand, a retired butcher in Balderton, so Watkin is the eldest still at home in Crees Lane, Farndon. At eighteen he is described as a labourer. He was to marry in 1866. Charlotte was also still at home at sixteen, while John is shown incorrectly as nine years old (he was nine months at the previous census). The family was now complete with Francis junior aged seven and

Alice aged five.

Ten years later Francis and Mary have survived in spite of everything. He is described as a "Cottager, 8 acres" aged 66 and Mary is sixty. The house at Farndon is less crowded so the two youngest sons are still at home, John working as an iron founder and Francis as a labourer. The two older sons William and Watkin are married and living in Newark and we shall complete the story of their descendants before continuing with Francis and Mary's family.

In 1871 William, the maltster and his wife Elizabeth have four children (and a boarder) at 4 Ward Row, Newark, but the eldest, also William, is living back at Farndon with his grandparents. Perhaps it was thought he would get a better education there - he is described as a scholar - as the Newark Magnus School did not have a good reputation for serving the needs of the townspeople.<sup>17</sup>

By 1881 William is a foreman maltster and he and Elizabeth have moved to 9 Meyrick Road, Newark. Six of their eight children are at home, while the eldest, married with a five-month old daughter was at 5 Gordon Row. The second-born, Harry married a Thurman and their children - Annie, Bill, Frank, George and Ruth - were remembered by Harry's grandson, another Francis Cree (b 1909) who told me in 1989 that he was proud to be the son of Francis Thurman Cree. He remembered how he used to visit his grandfather (though baptised Henry he was always known as Bill) at the Cottage on Lincoln Road. Bill was, like his father, a maltster working at the kilns. Later he worked for Quibels the fertiliser and disinfectant manufacturer. Francis told me that he himself also started at the malt kilns at the age of fourteen but only stayed for nine months. Then he became a joiner as his father had been and worked in a

---

<sup>17</sup>The Newark Magnus Grammar School, although founded under a trust for the benefit of the sons of tradesmen of the town, was under the dictatorial headmaster Rev Herbert Plater. He attempted to change the school into a preparatory school for the sons of the gentry and was known to be unmerciful in his corporal punishment, though only of day boys! (See "Newark Magnus" by N G Jackson, Nottingham 1964.) By co-incidence three Cree brothers attended the school as boarders but they had no connection with any Newark Cree families, nor even with Derbyshire-Notts group of Crees, being from Beckenham, Kent. Their father was related by marriage to Herbert Plater.

business making caravans. He married the owner's daughter and eventually the business was his own. They made the old horse-drawn caravans used by showmen and other travelling people. He showed me one in the garden that was now being used as a shed.

His grandson James Francis (b 1979) is the tenth generation from Francis Cree of Oxcroft (Bolsover parish, Derbyshire) with a Francis in every generation but one.

We return now to Francis and Mary Cree's second son Watkin, who was 29 in 1871. Watkin Cree was a fitter in one of the foundries, and lived with his wife Hannah at 46 Mill Gate. Although they had been married for five years, their only child had died the previous year at the age of three. However they were to have a son and three daughters in the next six years and by 1881 had moved back to Farndon. Their eldest, Walter had a son Cyril Cree (born in 1907), and Cyril's son Dennis is believed to live in Surrey (1989).

Watkin Cree is presumed to be the W W W Cree who gave evidence in about 1892 in connection with a dispute over a right of way:

“W W W Cree who has been in the employ of the Wellington Foundry for over thirty years, remembers the gates that wee put up by the Midland Railway Co. in the place of ones belonging to Midworths and they supplied keys to Messrs Midworth. He also remembers that certain people would not be stopped from using that way as a right of way to the Old Dock Yard and Plaster Mill.”<sup>18</sup>

Watkin Cree died in 1929 though his death certificate records his name as William. He was 86. Hannah died two years later.

In 1871 Francis and Mary Cree's third son John Cree was still at home with his

parents at the age of twenty-one, described in the Census as an iron founder. So far we have followed him through in Farndon from the age of nine months at the 1851 Census, and it is surprising to find that he is remembered vividly by present-day descendants, though with nothing resembling affection.

John Cree married for the first time at twenty-one, and he and his wife Elizabeth (who was from Gainsborough) settled in Bullpit Lane, Balderton and started to rear a family. Again this was a generation who are remembered today and John's grandson, John Dennis Cree, gave me their names as Lizzie, Frank, Mabel, Beattie and Annie. Their mother died in the year of Annie's birth and it would not have been unusual for her death to be directly related to the childbirth. In order to provide for his children, as was usual in those days John re-married fairly soon, in 1886 and in that year he built and moved into Willow Cottage in Spring Lane, Balderton. His second wife was also called Elizabeth<sup>19</sup>, and she too had children of a previous marriage so Willow Cottage must have been quite full. There was one further addition to the household, Jack, who thus had two sets of step-brothers and sisters to contend with.

The eldest of the Cree children was Lizzie and her story was told me by her granddaughter, Sybil Priestley, who explained that she was great-granddaughter of John Cree of Balderton. She knew nothing of the Farndon connection, having only heard of Willow Cottage.

“At the age of twenty-three, grandmother became pregnant. John Cree was a very strict father and Lizzie was forced to run away from home and got a lift to Bolsover in a cart to stay with a cousin called Polly Coupe in Church Street or High Street, Bolsover. It was a real shotgun affair,” Sybil said, “as Lizzie was literally shot out of the house by her father.”

The child was born at Bolsover and Lizzie called him John Edward. He was

---

<sup>18</sup>Nottinghamshire Archives DDH 149/164.

---

<sup>19</sup>A family Bible in the possession of Dennis Cree suggests that she was the widow of John Alcock.

Sybil's father. Lizzie then married a man called Sidebottom in order to give the child a father, and had two further children, Alicia and Olive, but always regretted the marriage. John Edward was apparently brought up as a Sidebottom, but when he came to marry in 1916 he was obliged to marry under the surname Cree. This was something of a shock to the family.

John and his wife Lillian Tipler settled in Shuttlewood, Bolsover, where Sybil and her elder brother Albert Edward were born at 21 Pretoria Street, later living at 84 Chesterfield Road. They bore the name Cree as do Albert's children and grandchildren, some of whom live in the Mansfield area to-day. Sybil was unaware that the place where she was born and brought up was within a mile or so of Oxcroft where her Cree ancestors had farmed from the seventeenth century.

We shall probably never know who John Edward Cree's father was. There is a family story that he was a "man of quality" and the birth certificate is said to show the name John as the father but with no surname.

At some stage, Sybil told me, Lizzie's sister Beattie discovered the circumstances of Lizzie's leaving home (she would have been only ten at the time and the implication is that the matter was kept a secret from the younger sisters) and this caused her to leave home too. At the age of seventeen she ran away from home to London and became a suffragette.

In 1911 she married Charlie Bilton back in Newark and they moved to Shuttlewood where Charlie was a miner at Oxcroft Colliery.<sup>20</sup> So Sybil knew them quite well, together with her other great-aunt, Mabel, and also Frank and Jack.

In October 1992 Diana and I visited Willow Cottage in Balderton and had a long conversation over a lovely cup of tea with Dennis and Elsie Cree. Dennis had previously told me some of the family history on the phone - about Mabel and Charlie Bilton moving to Bolsover. Annie too had gone there, marrying someone of the name of Elliott. He mentioned a Lizzie but said her name was Alcock, so it seems his father had two step-sisters called Lizzie, one from his mother's and one from his father's previous marriage. Mabel had also had a son out of wedlock:

"He was called Bert and he died in 1978," said Dennis, "He used to break in horses. He worked at the back of the Chesters Inn (formerly the Cock Inn) - he had a blacksmith's shop there - he was a farrier and a horse breeder."

Mabel had Bert when she was twenty-four. It is implied that Bert was brought up by his grandfather John Cree, who perhaps had repented of shooting Lizzie out of the house. Mabel later (1909) married someone called Elliott. Her son Bert (Herbert Victor Cree) married Mary Robinson and they had a daughter Betty who married a Brown in 1924.

It was Dennis who had told me of his grandfather building Willow Cottage and moving there in 1886. Although John Cree had lived in Bullpit Lane Balderton after his first marriage, Dennis was sure he had originally come from the old cottage in Cree's Lane Farndon, which he thought might still be there. He certainly seemed to indicate that John had occupied the present Cree's House.

He told me much about John Cree which confirmed the character which Sybil Priestley (née Cree) had implied in her story of the "shotgun affair". For John had survived into his eighties and was well remembered by his grandson. Dennis started by saying how John liked his ale and was once sick all over the front path of the cottage. "Oh I remember him all right! He was a cruel, hard man," said Dennis. "I remember the way he used to kill a pig. I used to have to make the fire in the brazier to cook it. The hams were hung from the beams in

---

<sup>20</sup>Oxcroft Colliery was not in Oxcroft but down the valley beyond Stanfree. The levels may well have been driven under Oxcroft however.

this kitchen.” John Cree was also something of a wanderer. “A bit of a tramp” was Dennis’s description. “He would take off in May and come back in October.”

Then he indicated the hearth. “At the age of eighty-three he died a terrible death, which cruel man that he was, I wouldn’t wish on anyone. He was alone at home here and fell back into the fire in the open hearth here. He couldn’t get up and, with no-one to hear his shouts, he was burnt to death.” That was in 1932 when Dennis was eleven.

Dennis said that Mabel also moved to Bolsover. In fact he seemed to think that all John’s children had moved there, apart from Dennis’s own father, Jack Cree. Frank however had moved down to Rochester, where he and his wife had adopted a daughter. Dennis said that he himself went to live with Beattie and Charlie Bilton at Bolsover Hill Top and went to school in Bolsover for a while. “I then went to Technical College. I was fifty years a foreman at the engineers Worthington-Simpson. They make marine pumps.”

Finally I asked Dennis about other Crees in the Newark area, in particular the families of boatmen. He recalled, “A relation came to see grandad when I was little - she was on the boats.” This reminds us that Dennis’s grandfather was of a generation when all the Crees in Newark were first cousins. The most likely guess at the identity of this visitor would Alice the wife of boatman George Cree who would have been a son of John Cree’s cousin Joseph. The occasion may have been on George’s death in 1939 when Dennis would have been eighteen.

We return now to Francis and Mary Cree’s youngest son, also Francis who we left in 1871 as a nineteen-year-old labourer.

Ten years on in 1881, we see that Francis has married and is now described as a maltster like his eldest brother William. His wife Mary is from Ancaster in

Lincolnshire. (It really is amazing how many Cree men married Lincolnshire brides!) His father, Francis Cree senior, has passed away and they are living in the house of his mother Mary Cree now aged seventy. In the absence of evidence to the contrary this is probably the house now named Cree’s House in Cree’s Lane, Farndon. They have a one-year-old baby Cassandra. Since his three elder brothers had all moved away from Farndon, it seemed that Francis and Mary took over the house at Farndon and stayed there all their long lives as his parents had done. In 1883 they had another daughter Florence.

Cassandra and Florence both married just before the Great War, but Florrie’s husband, a Godson, never returned. She must have continued to live with her parents until they died, her mother Mary Ann in 1924 and Francis in 1933, and it was Florrie who was remembered as the last Cree inhabitant of Crees Lane, living as a recluse until her death in a Newark nursing home in 1974 at the age of ninety. She was buried in Farndon alongside her parents, her sister Cassandra and Cassandra’s husband Herbert Goddard.<sup>21</sup>

The ninth and last child of Francis and Mary Cree was Alice, born in 1854, twenty-two years younger than her eldest sister Sarah. She was almost exactly the same age as her niece Mary Jane Cree who had married George Powell mentioned previously. In 1878 at Farndon parish church Alice married Thomas Radford, a coach builder, and witnesses were Francis Cree and Mary Jane Powell. Bride, groom and both witnesses all signed the register.

---

<sup>21</sup>Notts FHS Record Series: MIs Farndon Cemetery and Farndon St Peters.

## Fanny Cree and the boatmen of Newark

We have now described the Cree descendants of each of the six sons of Joshua and Sarah Cree, who were married at Newark in 1796 and settled in Farndon. Of the three daughters we think that Ann married in 1839. And as this is a book about Crees we have not followed up daughters and their descendants after they have married. Elizabeth signed the marriage register as a witness at the wedding of her brother Francis when she was seventeen and we have not found any later record of her.

There is one Cree daughter whom we must follow however, for hers is a remarkable story which has something to tell all of us, perhaps especially those who deprecate the supposedly increasing number of children now being born out of wedlock. As I write in January 1993, government has mounted a concerted attack on single parents, trying to make them the scapegoats for society's ills and the failure of current social policies, and a government minister has resigned for creating a single-parent family through his extra-marital affair at a Party Conference. What would they have made of Fanny Cree? I cannot help feeling she was something of a character, definitely a survivor, but I will try to withhold moral judgements either way, and see what we can learn of the perhaps rather closed society of the boat people of Newark in the mid-nineteenth century.

Fanny was the seventh child but only the second daughter of Joshua and Sarah Cree, baptised at Farndon on Midsummer's Day 1811. Despite her gender she has passed the name Cree on to more descendants than any of her six brothers.

I spoke to the youngest of those great-grandchildren, Horace Cree, on the

telephone in March 1989. Horace, then seventy-six years of age was most forthcoming. He had an old family Bible and was able to tell me the dates of birth of all the brothers and sisters of his father Tommy Cree. He also told me that his grandparents were Joseph Cree born in 1832 and Jane Dakin born 1833. I rushed off to Nottingham Archives and fairly soon found a baptism record of Joseph Cree in 1833, son of John and Ellen Cree, and a then a marriage record of Joseph Cree and Jane Dakin:

**Newark PR, 1853, June 6th**

Name and Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Professn	Resid- ence	Father's name and Surname	Rank or Professn
Joseph Cree	a minor	Bachelor	Miller	Newark	William Hitchcock	Labourer
Jane Dakin	a minor	Spinster	-	Newark	Thomas Dakin	Labourer

This was in the early days of my family history researches and I was not really aware of how many Crees there were in the Newark area at that time. So I was quite puzzled that Joseph had given his father's name as William Hitchcock. I thought perhaps that, being a minor, he was somehow evading a parental refusal to allow him to marry. I checked the year of birth with Horace, but it was some time before I discovered that there was indeed a Joseph Cree born in 1832 as well as the one I had found born in 1833. They were in fact cousins. Eventually, a year later, in the Newark Census returns for 1851, I found both Josephs, the 17-year-old railway labourer at home with his parents John and Ellen Cree in Parliament Street, and the 18-year-old miller's man with his mother Fanny Cree in Queen Street. Fanny openly declared her "Condition" as "Unmarried" and I was somewhat amazed to find five children in the Census return, Joseph, Elizabeth, Eliza, George and Sarah. Fanny appears to have had two other children, Jonathan (baptised 1835) and an earlier Sarah, who died as

infants. After the Victorian sexual strictness of John Cree of Farndon, this was permissiveness with a vengeance, though it was nearly fifty years earlier.

We are uncertain where Fanny was in 1841 as we have not found a census return containing her name. In the 1851 Census, mentioned above, she is described as a lace hand, as is her eldest daughter, fifteen-year-old Elizabeth. By 1861 the house at 5, Queen Street is occupied by three of Fanny's children Sarah aged ten, George aged twelve with Eliza aged twenty as the Head of Household, together with *her* illegitimate son Walter. Meanwhile at 2, Queen Street, Joseph and Jane are bringing up their family having clearly moved around a bit since their marriage eight years earlier, as shown by their children's places of birth:

**1861 Census, Newark, RG 9/2480/folio 41: 2 Queen Street.**

Name	Rel.	Con.	Age	Rank etc.	Place of Birth
Joseph Cree	Head	Mar	29	Brewer's Labourer	Farndon
Jane Cree	Wife	Mar	28		Retford
Harriett			7		Newark
Louisa			5		Eagle Moor
Joseph			3		Tuxford
Thomas			1		Tuxford

So where is Fanny? At forty-six years of age she is now earning a living as a housekeeper to Terence Fitzpatrick, a travelling draper in Lombard Street, Newark. He is a widower of fifty with three children. Fanny is described in the census return as a widow.

By 1871 the youngest daughter Sarah has had her first child, an illegitimate son, Charles Cree, who is boarding out along with his mother's cousin Edward Cree as we have seen, possibly under the control of the Overseers of the Poor.

Fanny Cree is now back in Queen Street (at number 7), again passing herself off as a widow, and at sixty occupying herself as a charwoman. Her son George is there, now a maltster aged twenty-three, and so is her nephew Joshua, her brother John's son who had been orphaned two years earlier. At thirteen he was a labourer at a brick-yard.

Fanny's eldest son Joseph had died by 1871 and Jane, his widow at forty, was also a charwoman, living at the Castle Inn in Mill Gate. Her children, all six of them from Harriett aged seventeen to George aged nine and William aged two, are at 3, Cotton Square, with the note on the census return saying, "Head of Family temporary absent."

However I sense that a sea-change in the fortunes, or at least in the sexual behaviour, of this branch of the Cree family is about to start. Clearly things are difficult for Jane Cree, a single parent having to leave her children alone in order to earn a living. Perhaps religion played a part - the family Bible seems to have been first owned by Joseph and Jane. Perhaps it was the force of character of Jane herself and her will to ensure, against all odds, that her children would have a better deal than she had had. Seeing all the children there together is for me a sign of hope. I do not think that things improved materially for many years, but the pattern of illegitimate births was broken and, as far as we know, all six children married and brought up families.

In 1881 we find Fanny, now a great-grandmother, proudly (I like to think) unmarried once again at seventy-one<sup>22</sup>, a domestic servant and still at 7, Queen Street. At number three is her daughter Sarah, now Sarah Johnson, a widow of thirty described as a general labourer, and Sarah's fifteen-year-old son Charles, an iron moulder, that is a foundry worker.

Jane Cree re-married in 1877 and we lose sight of her, though I doubt if she

---

<sup>22</sup>The Census says 76 but this must be in error.

lost touch with her children. The eldest three, Harriet, Louisa and Joseph, had already married too, Joseph moving to Leicester where he became a builder. We cannot locate Tommy who is now twenty-two but I suspect he is somewhere on the River Trent. When inspecting the census returns for the little village of Marnham, I found the words "End of the parish of Marnham" had been deleted and a list of three boatmen had been inserted, Henry Pacey, simply a boatman, George Jones, Captain of Boat, and George Cree aged twenty, Captain's Mate.

William, the youngest at thirteen, is still living in Cotton Square in the house of Henry Baker an agricultural labourer. Henry is probably Jane's new husband, but I didn't get round to checking this.

We suspect that William eventually married in Nottingham in 1897 but have not traced any ancestors. By contrast his three elder brothers had twenty-nine children between them, and we will now relate their stories in turn.

I first heard of Joseph Cree from the Leicester end of things. I made a list of births registered in Leicester from Trevor Cree's book *Cree Volume I*. The earliest names, starting in 1877, were Joseph, Thomas, Harriet, Louisa, George, Jane and William with the normal spacing of a pre-twentieth century family. There was a marriage record of a Joseph Cree in 1876 so it seemed likely that he was the father. When I looked around to see where he might have some from I soon noticed an almost identical list of names in Newark: Harriet, Louisa, Joseph, Thomas, George and William - the children of Joseph, the miller's man, and Jane Cree. Joseph Cree couldn't choose the order in which his sons and daughters were born, but otherwise he used exactly the same names in the same order, adding his mother's name Jane for the extra girl.

Why or how Joseph Cree moved from Newark to Leicester no-one knows. In 1989 I contacted his grandson George A Cree, who runs a delicatessen and patisserie in Glenfield near Leicester with his son Michael. He never knew his

grandad, he said, but he was told that he was a builder in East Bond Street in the city centre, and certainly remembered a sign “Joseph Cree, General Builders” painted on the side of a building there, which he said was still visible a few years ago. (It isn’t there now.)

“My Dad, George Cree, and his bother Tom were apprenticed as builders to their father,” George told me, “but he sacked Dad at twenty-one. He would have had to pay him a full wage otherwise you see.”

Some years ago, someone brought to George a Cree family Bible together with a photograph of a woman, which he still has. In the Bible was written,

*Joseph Cree born Sep 6, 1857.*

*Sarah Ann Cree born Sep 4, 1852.  
married Aug 4, 1900.*

The was also a Certificate of Death of a person over ten years:

*Mary Cree, age 46, died 12 May 1899, 33 Pasture Lane, Leicester, wife of Joseph Cree, bricklayer journeyman.*

“I remember I once went to see someone in Pasture Lane alongside the churchyard,” George added, “I lived in Navigation Street and Uncle Tom lived in Sanvey Gate.”

Using *CREE VOLUME 1*<sup>23</sup>, I was able to confirm that Mary Cree was Joseph’s first wife, the mother of the seven children who were the first Cree family in Leicester. The youngest, Jane would have been eleven when Mary died (William died as an infant), and Joseph’s re-marriage was a practical solution to the problem of child-care.

---

<sup>23</sup>by Trevor Cree, op cit.

George suggested I contact Hilda Cree, the widow of his cousin Joseph, who would be able to tell me more family history. I knew that her husband had been born in Manchester and I asked Hilda if she knew why. It seems that his father (George’s Uncle Tom) had gone there in search of work. Joseph had been born in King Street, Manchester and had been wheeled all the way to Leicester in his pram when he was only a few days old. Tommy had apparently had an argument with his father. Perhaps he too had been sacked like his brother George, or maybe there was a rift because Tommy and his wife had had a child before their marriage. The child was called Joseph, but they were advised that if they called a legitimate son Joseph, he would inherit some money. That is why there were two brothers both called Joseph, Joseph Truslove and Joseph Cree. To distinguish them Joseph Cree, Hilda’s husband, was often called Bill.

Tommy Cree was a master builder and built the old City Cinema in Leicester Market Place and a wing of the Leicester Royal Infirmary. He and his wife had seven children, of whom one died in infancy. His son Joseph and his wife Hilda had four children, and their youngest, Rowan Cree, who lives near me in Oadby, carries on the family tradition as a builder. Some years ago Rowan’s daughter Samantha Cree was a student at the College where I work, and although I once mentioned my Cree connections to her, we did not realise that we are related. Our common ancestors are James Cree and Elinor Edson who were married at Bolsover in 1687 and we are in fact seventh cousins.

Several people in Newark have told me of the two great families of boatmen in Newark. I think it was Thomas Jim Cree of Balderton who first talked in this vein. I had phoned his son Graham in Chesterfield thinking he might be a fairly close unknown relation of mine as my Cree grandparents were from that area, but he said he was from Newark and that his father Thomas Jim Cree would know much more about the family.

Thomas Jim was the first of many Newark Crees that I spoke to on the phone in 1989. He confirmed that his father was Jim Cree, born in 1886 son of

Tommy Cree. They lived in King Street when Thomas Jim was eleven years old.

“We often had to go down to see our grandparents,” he said, “All Dad’s family were boat people on the Trent except Dad who went into fitting with Wakes and Lambs the millwrights. They used to make watermills. I started as an apprentice there at fourteen.”

When we spoke again, Thomas Jim gave me the dates of birth of his grandad Thomas and Grandma Fanny. (I knew that this was Fanny King daughter of John King of Newark’s White Horse Inn, because John had named Fanny in his will.) Thomas Jim also gave me a full list, with dates of birth, of their five boys and seven girls.

“I remember Tom and Frank in particular,” he said, “as they were a similar age to Dad. Tom had his own boat, the ‘A Success’. He worked for the Trent Navigation. Frank also worked on the boats He had an accident with the tiller which resulted in a permanent injury.”

He told me that William had fallen into a lock and been drowned on 7th April 1913 at the age of eleven. The youngest boy Ernest was also a boatman and had gone to live in Hull. His children were all girls. Thomas Jim was very clear and precise about his knowledge of his family. It seems he had written records although he said there was no family Bible as such. His mention of five girls was therefore a surprising error - Ernest’s five children were in fact all boys.

“There was another load of Crees in Millgate - that’s off King Street - they were all boat people too. They were my second cousins - Dad’s cousins. Another Cree has a barber’s shop in Balderton Gate. They are not related to us. One day I went in and by chance my youngest son was in the chair. As I got in the chair another Cree walked in. That was three Crees in one barber’s shop plus the barber who was a Cree. The barber has a brother in Balderton who

has a bookie’s shop in Queen Street.”

Ernest Cree had died in 1968 but I managed to locate one of his sons in Hull, Ernest A Cree. He confirmed that his father came from Newark and that they were boat people, but he said he had lost touch with his Newark relations.

Finally Thomas Jim told me a little of where his own brothers and sisters had got to. Ernest, the eldest, had been born in Bingham (where their mother, Emily Singleton had originated) but had later married and settled in Kent. The youngest two Lewis and Mary had been evacuated to Canada in 1941, to Fanny’s aunt, he said, presumably referring to Fanny King. Lewis had returned but had died at the age of about forty, survived by a son, Norval Cree.

[Some years after writing the above, I was contacted by Harold Singleton of Blaby, Leicestershire, who had grown up in Newark alongside this Cree family. Harold was the adopted son of Walter Singleton, who was a son of Emily Singleton. Harold explained that Walter’s surname was Singleton - and hence Harold’s too - because Walter was born to Emily before her marriage to Jim Cree.]

I also contacted that “other load of Cree boatmen” who had lived in Millgate. I spoke to Harold Cree and his cousin Anthony Cree. They told me about George Cree’s children.

Harold’s father was another Ernest Cree the eldest boy. He had married Charlotte Parker, Harold’s mother who, I was surprised to find, had only recently died. She was ninety-eight. George the next brother was also a boatman. There was also a brother who was always referred to as ‘Scan’ whom I eventually identified as Cyril. Inevitable this family also mentioned the “other lot of boatmen, Tommy Cree’s family who lived in Parliament Street.”

Anthony’s father Horace had lived on a barge and didn’t go to school until the

age of twelve. He nevertheless became Newark's chief fire officer. Anthony told me that Grandad George owned the first motorised barge on the Trent.

I spoke to Horace himself several times on the telephone. He was then seventy-six and the youngest of nine children. It seems difficult to make the connections sometimes between our researches into nineteenth century archives such as census returns and present day descendants. It needed a special effort of will to keep telling myself that I was speaking to the son of the George Cree whose name had appears in the 1881 Census as a "Captain's Mate" on a boat moored for the night at Marnham. I asked him about his brothers and sisters, so when I rang the second time he had all the details ready from the family Bible and added a lot of detail to the information his son and nephew had given me.

I asked him why his brother Cyril was called 'Scan'. Horace laughed. 'I'm not sure if I should tell you this,' he said, 'It was because he was such a scandalous liar! And Harman's the millers at Harman's Mill in Newark called one of their sons Horace. That's why I was named Horace.' He didn't know that his parents had named an earlier son Horace who had died at the age of three.

"Being the youngest of a large family, I didn't know my grandparents. We knew Tommy's family however as we lived in Millgate and they lived in Parliament Street. At two months old I was taken on the boats. We went down river as far as Hull and even Grimsby. Dad was skipper of the first tug on the upper reaches of the Trent."

He mentioned the 'Invincible' and the 'A Success' so the Invincible was indeed the first motorised tug.

It is to my great regret that I never met Horace Cree face to face. Even on the phone his warm character came across and he had no hesitation in inviting me, a complete stranger, to his house. It was he who first told me that there was a Cree's Lane in Farndon, though he was unaware that his great-grandmother

Fanny Cree had been born there, a member of the first Cree family in the Newark area. When I finally phoned to take up this invitation, I found that he had passed away in July 1990 at the age of eighty-seven, the last of the Cree boatmen of Newark. I felt that a link with the past had been broken.