A Personal History of the Baker Family

Provided by

Peter Henry Gouldthorpe Baker JP

Introduction

This history of the Baker family is based on the direct descendants of William Baker, born in Nottingham around 1793, following a line to our present family of the grand children, great grand children and great great grand children of Henry Gouldthorpe Baker 1874-1949 and Eleanor Baker 1882 - 1931

I intend it to be more than a list of the birth and death dates of our ancestors, but rather to provide a personal and social insight into their lives and times.

Information has come from family letters, documents, newspaper articles and photographs, census returns and war records. One important source were the diaries kept by Henry 'Boy' Baker (1910 -1978), son of Henry Gouldthorpe and Eleanor Baker, for 1923, 1925, 1926, 1930 and 1931.

Much of the earlier history of the family comes from the research undertaken by Henry Baker (1905- 2000). Henry was a twin and grandson of John Baker (1843-1904 the founder of the family's engineering business), and son of John William Baker (1868-1956).

Henry was a graduate of Sheffield University and a qualified electrical engineer. He joined the family firm, John Baker & Co. in 1925 and started on the shop floor of the Kilnhurst Works. He became manager of the Wheel Forge there in 1930 and a director of the company in 1951 and in 1962 the last Chairman and Managing Director. The company (by now 'Baker and Bessemer') was taken over in 1964 by competitors. In later life he lived with his wife, Ruth, in Thrybergh in a detached house next to the entrance to the golf course.

Henry decided to research and write a history of the family. 'The Steel Bakers of Rotherham' was published privately in 1960 and distributed to members of the family only. In later life he did a great deal of research in the Local History section of Rotherham Central Library and many of his papers are lodged there.

He was a 'gentlemanly' individual who often visited our family. He did not take sides in the years after the family dispute involving Henry Gouldthorpe and his brothers. After the death of my father, he would call on my mother at regular intervals to make sure she was alright. They shared a common interest in gardening and garden plants and he would often bring her cuttings or small plants of unusual species.

On one visit in 1989, he gave me a handwritten paper headed ' Baker Family Matters'. It was a collection of family stories which I have used in this history. I have also included a great deal of the research from the 'Steel Bakers of Rotherham' but have drawn on my skills as a former lecturer to provide additional historical context and background

This personal history concentrates on the following of our ancestors:

William Baker born c 1793

His son John Baker (1) born c 1822 and his wife Harriet.

Their son John Baker (2) (1843 - 1904) and his first wife Mary Ann and his second wife Martha Ellen Gouldthorpe.

Their son Henry ('Harry') Gouldthorpe Baker (1874 - 1949) and his wife Eleanor ('Nellie') (1882 - 1931)

Their sons Henry ('Boy') Machell Baker (1910 - 1978) and John (3) Gouldthorpe (1920 - 1972) and his wife Hildegard (1927-1990)

As the story unfolds you will find that my sources provide a great deal of information in some parts but very little in others. None of the main characters are alive, so they cannot fill in the gaps. Neither are they able to deny or substantiate any personal views I express.

I would like to thank my relative and namesake Peter Baker for formatting the information and photos for this website.

The Bakers in Nottingham in the early 19th century

William Baker was born in Nottinghamshire about 1793. By 1812 he was a boot and shoe maker in the Radford district of Nottingham. He probably employed quite a few craftsmen and issued tokens as wages, some of which survive (His workmen were able to redeem these for coins. This practice was eventually outlawed, as some employers would only allow the tokens to be spent in their own shops or on their own products.





William married Elisabeth about 1805. They had a son William in about 1805/6. He too became a shoemaker living in Mont East Street Nottingham and by 1851 was referred to as a 'cordwainer', living at 56 York Street Nottingham. A cordwainer was someone who made shoes from fine soft leather, and as such was distinguished from cobblers who repaired shoes.

William and Elisabeth's second child, John, was born in 1811. John became a frame smith, that is a maker of knitting frames, indentured (put into an apprenticeship) by his mother in 1826. The fact that his mother was part of this process means that his father William had probably died by then.

By the early 1800's, of the 45,000 knitting frames in the country, ninety per cent were in the East Midlands. The frame was a little taller than an upright piano, but not as wide. The solid frame, incorporating a seat and foot pedals, supported a metal knitting machine. A row of fixed hooked needles held the knitting, whilst the operator worked on a new row. On the 19th century machines, five or six rows of knitting with 288 stitches to the row could be achieved in one minute. In Nottingham the machines were used to produce cotton garments and Nottingham Lace.

John married Harriet Wragg (born 1810) on 26th January 1833. They lived in Nottingham and had the following children, Thomas, born about 1836, (who was later to work for his brother as a foreman), Edward born 1838 (died at the age of one month), Lydia born 1840 and John (2) born 7th January 1843. In 1841 John and his family were living in Denton Street, Radford, Nottingham.

John Baker

Founding father of the 'Steel Bakers of Rotherham'

John (2) was a remarkable man, who was to become the founder of the family fortunes. He left school at the age of 12 in 1855 and became an apprentice in the locomotive department of Sharpe, Stewart & Co in Gorton near Manchester. He went to night school and studied hard. It was the age in which working men had opportunities to better themselves through Mechanics Institutes, which offered a number of day and evening classes in a wide range of subjects.

After completing his apprenticeship in 1863, John's talents were recognised and he obtained a foreman's job at Thomas Astbury's of Manchester. He was to work there for five years.

On December 26th (Boxing day) 1864, aged 21, he married his cousin, Mary Ann Baker. Mary Ann was the same age as John and was the daughter of his uncle George, the Railway Goods Agent in Nottingham. Marrying of cousins was not uncommon in the 19th century, but was made illegal in the 20th century.

Their first child, Lydia Ann, was born in 1866. Two years later, John decided to move again. At the age of 25 he became general manager at the North of England Carriage and Wagon Works, Preston, Lancashire. The huge expansion in railway building in the 1830's and 1840's meant there was an ever-growing demand for locomotives, rolling stock and rails. It was this boom that John Baker was able to exploit and which formed the backcloth for his entrepreneurial activities.

In 1868 John and Mary Ann had another child, John William. However, shortly after the birth of her son, Mary Ann and her daughter, Lydia, caught measles. Measles was a virulent disease well into the 20th century and could be both fatal or lead to severe side effects such as blindness.

Mary Ann died two days after the birth of John William and her daughter died shortly afterwards. John Baker brought his son and the bodies of his wife and daughter by train to Nottingham. Mary Ann and Lydia were buried in Nottingham General cemetery. John William was given into the care of his aunt Mrs Ann Waudby in Nottingham and he would stay with her for six years.

From management to ownership

John returned to Preston, where he worked for another year. He decided he needed to learn more about how railway wheels and axles were made and he took a lesser job as manager of T. Parker, Mersey & Co, Wheelworks, Derby.

By 1870 he decided to move again and took the job of manager at George Owens Patent Wheel, Carriage and Axle Company, Phoenix Steel and Iron Works, Northfield, Rotherham. He worked there for four years, learning the trade and then made the decision to set up in business on his own.

Although he had £300 of his own savings, he needed more capital. He approached his uncle George (his first wife's father) who lent him £800 - a considerable sum at the time. John looked around for a business partner.

Whilst working for George Owen's , John had got to know Thomas Burnett. Burnett's Wagon Works at Hexthorpe, Doncaster built railway wagons and John's firm had been supplying him with axles and wheels. Thomas agreed to go into partnership with John and put £1,100 into the business.

Together they founded Baker and Burnett, Railway Wheel and Axle Maker in Consiborough in 1874. Thomas Burnett was, however, little more than a 'sleeping partner' and took only a small part in the management of the business.



They advertised axles made of 'best double fagotted scrap', that is to say wrought iron reworked and welded together by a forging operation. However, the axles were actually forged elsewhere.

Some of the smaller wagons produced for carrying 30 cwt loads of coal can still be seen near the entrance to Beamish Museum in Durham. Underneath, on the cast iron bosses of the wheels, are the stamp ' Baker and Burnett & Co Conisborough 1874 '.

A new family in Conisborough

Shortly before the new firm was launched, John married again in 1873. He married Martha Ellen Gouldthorpe, born 16th March 1855 in Eccehall Bierlow in Sheffield. Together they moved into a sizable semi-detached house (which still stands) on the main Doncaster to Sheffield road outside Conisborough. The house, however, had no piped water and all water had to be carried by buckets from a trough alongside the main road. Like most houses of the time, there were outside earth closets and lighting came from paraffin lamps.

Here, between 1874 and 1884, the following children were born. Henry Gouldthorpe (Harry) 1874, Mary Ann (Sis) 1876, George (Dick) 1878, Ellen (Nell) 1880 and Edward (Ted) in 1882.

John William, John's son from his first marriage, joined the family in Conisborough in 1876 from Nottingham. He went by train each day to Doncaster Grammar school. At the age of 14 he left school and in 1882 became an apprentice at Baker and Burnett. John Baker made sure he did not have any privileges from being the son of the owner.

One bitterly cold day, John William was helping assemble a machine and the frost was so intense, the steel bolts were sticking to his fingers. John William complained to his father that he ought not to be doing such rough work. ' You're no different to any of the other men, lad!' was John Baker's reply.

The business expands in a new direction

Baker and Burnett assembled railway wheels and axles, buying the forgings, tyres, wheels and axles from the great forges of Sheffield and elsewhere. However, so successful was the firm, that it outgrew the existing buildings. In 1884, John Baker decided to move to premises in Brinsworth in Rotherham, where they also began to manufacture the

wrought iron wheel centres. The plant was powered by two large steam engines.

The equipment also included a 1000 ton hydraulic press and several hydraulic 'glutting presses'. These were used for a process of 'glutting', specifically designed by John, to manufacture a new type of railway wheel. This was known as the 'cold spoke' wheel.

Within two years the partnership with Thomas Burnett was dissolved and he was paid out. Thomas was said to be too fond of drink to be a satisfactory partner. John William had been given the task of taking Thomas back to Doncaster by train on a number of occasions when he was in no fit state to make the journey on his own.

The firm now became John Baker & Sons Ltd, a private limited company with capital of £40,000.

A photograph of the men working at the Brinsworth Works in 1895 shows John Baker in the centre, in suit and top hat, looking very much the late Victorian factory owner. One of the other figures in suits may be his brother Thomas who worked as a foreman. His son George is also in the photograph (aged 17) and dressed in working clothes.



As the business grew, so did John and Martha's family. A daughter, Martha, was born in 1885, Sydney in 1889, Stanley 1890, Arthur 1893 and Thomas 1896. They also moved to bigger and grander houses. From Conisborough they moved to 'Florenceville' in Park Field Road, Rotherham, from there to Stafford Villa in Moorgate and, finally, to Oakwood Grange in Moorgate.

This impressive Victorian mansion still stands as part of Rotherham District Hospital. In its days as a family home it was filled with a collection of china, paintings and antique furniture, carefully selected and purchased by a discerning John and Martha.

The 1901 census showed John (aged 58) and Martha (46) living in Oakwood Grange with all their children, Henry (26), Mary Ann (24), George (22), Ellen (20), Edward (18), Sydney (12), Stanley (10), Arthur (7) and Thomas (4).

The family also employed two housemaids, Charlotte Coward (aged 26) and Ethel Riley (aged 21), a cook, Ethel Taylor (19) and a further maid Henrietta Change (21). In the cottage in the grounds lived the gardener Arthur Woodward (35), his wife Charlotte (37) and their son, Mark (8)

John and Martha were members of Talbot Lane Wesleyan Chapel in Rotherham, which had opened in 1805.. This tells us something about their views on life and the world around them. John Wesley, who had emerged as the leader of the Methodists in the late 18th century, told the people who attended his meetings that if they loved God, in return they would "be saved from sin and made holy". Wesley also had a lot to say about personal morality.

In his sermons he encouraged people to work hard and to save for the future. Wesley also warned against the dangers of gambling and drinking. In the 19th century the Wesleyian Methodists were associated with the Liberal Party and the Temperance Movement. By 1901 the

membership of the church had reached 412,000 nationally and was strongest in the north of the country. The Wesleyan Methodist movement encouraged ordinary working people to be lay preachers and women to become involved in church activities. It challenged the Anglican church and the hold it had on schools and other institutions.

The Wesleyan views were probably reflected in the fact that John was a member of the committee of the Rotherham Hospital and Dispensary at a time when hospitals were privately and charitably funded. He was also known for giving to local charities and every year made a substantial donation to the inmates of the Rotherham Workhouse (later Moorgate hospital and still standing as the Florence - a Chinese restaurant). John, whilst very much the successful Victorian entrepreneur and inventor, had not forgotten his origins or what he saw as his Christian duty to others around him.

As his business prospered, John began to travel abroad, particularly to Russia and Scandinavia to obtain orders. On these business trips John would also indulge his passion for fishing and shooting. John William had taken over the management of the Brinsworth Works in 1888 and was running it in John's frequent absences.

When he was at home, John also became involved in property dealing, buying and selling and building in quite a big way. Such was the profit from the business in 1880's and 1890's (as much as 50% on a contract) that there was plenty of spare cash for property speculation. Some of the land and property was in the Moorgate area, which was not yet built up.



George Alexander



Mary Ann Baker

In 1901 John's eldest daughter Mary Ann got married. She married George Grover Alexander, a barrister, who had been living with his mother in Barnsley. George had been educated at the local grammar school in Barnsley and won an open scholarship to Downing College at Cambridge University where he completed his degree in 1882.

He read law and was later elected a fellow of his college and appointed a lecturer at the university. He became a distinguished academic lawyer and wrote a number of standard text and law reference books used by undergraduates, law students and solicitors until the 1920's. In the early 1900s he was a practising barrister in the West Yorkshire Bar.

George probably met Mary Ann around about the time that he had drafted John's will, and in doing so had already incurred his future father-in-law's wrath. The opening sentence of the drafted will appointed ' My stepson, John William Baker and my two sons Henry Gouldthorpe and George Baker as my three executors and trustees'. On reading this, John Baker tore up the draft will and said to George, ' You can start again, John William is not my stepson, but my natural son'. George may well have not been regarded as 'good enough' for John and Martha's daughter.



Henry (Harry) George (Dick) Martha (Tut) Edward (Ted) Ellen (Nell)
Mary (Siss) John & Martha Ellen Baker John William
Sidney (Tinny) Geoffrey (Geoff) Arthur (Bob) Stanley (Jim)

The Baker Family, Oakwood Grange, Rotherham 1901

However, George was not 'backward at coming forward'. On the evening of his marriage to Mary Ann, George went to see his father-in-law and told him he could not go through with the wedding unless John gave his daughter a sufficient dowry to enable her to live in the manner to which she was accustomed. John agreed, and it was probably the only time anyone got the better of him when it came to money.

A photograph on the occasion of the wedding shows John in the centre with his family around him and his daughter Mary Ann on his arm. Interesting is the fact that Harry on the far left looks to be almost disassociating himself from the rest of his family. Was this how he saw himself or was this a sign of what was to come?

The Kilnhurst Works and a tragic death

As there are so many lawyers in the family it is interesting to note that Joan Baker, who was born in 1906 as daughter of George and Mary-Ann, also went to Grammar School and won a scholarship to university. She went to St Hilda's College, Oxford, obtained a BA in History and a post-graduate Batchelor in Law with a First in 1929.

She became the very first woman barrister in England, being called to the Middle Temple in 1930. She had faced a host of prejudices, including a lecturer who would only start his lectures with 'good morning gentlemen'. She had enormous difficulty obtaining a pupillage, being rejected by one chambers because they had no female toilets. She eventually qualified in Birmingham. After getting married she gave up the law and devoted herself to promoting women's rights and charitable causes.

By the early 1900s, John saw that the manufacturers of railway tyres and axles would soon want to start assembling them as well. This could put his firm out of business.

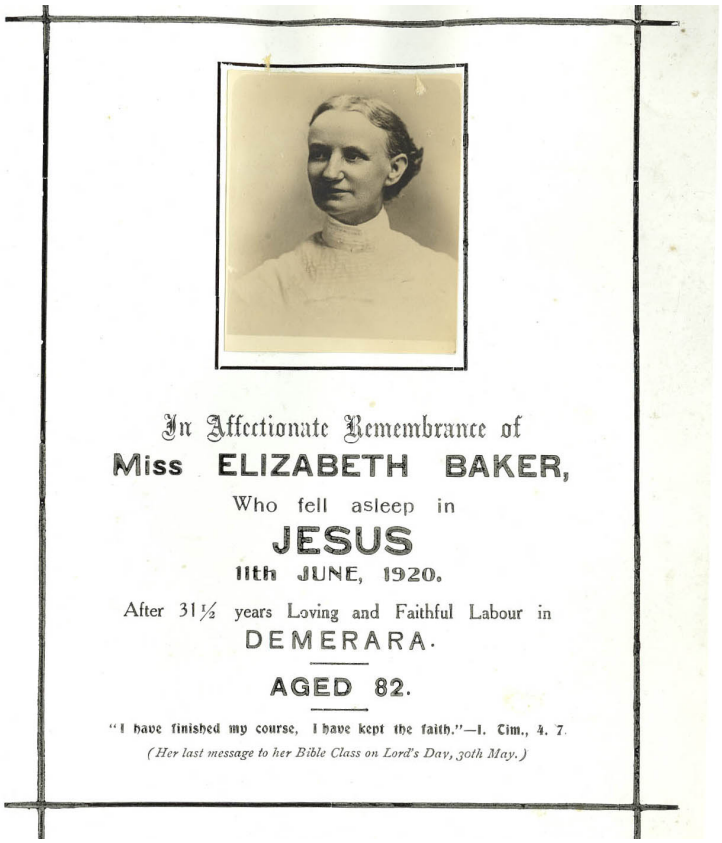
In 1903 he bought the site of Swinton Ironworks, next to the canal and Midland Railway line in Kilnhurst. He decided to buy the latest machinery and this would come from Germany. A 15,000 ton forging press and a disc wheel mill (the first to be established in England) were ordered from Haniel and Laeg and a tyre finishing mill from Breuer and Schumaker. Both firms were in Dusseldorf. He also ordered a 600 HP3 cylinder vertical steam engine from Davy Brothers in Sheffield.

In 1904 as he was supervising the clearing of the site in Kilnhurst on a cold March day, he caught a bad cold. This quickly developed into pneumonia and he died three days later on March 10th 1904. He was 61. He was buried in Moorgate cemetery, in what was to become a family grave.

He left a will and an estate with a gross value of £132,260 16s 10d and a net value of £119,436 6s. The provisions of the will were as follows:

To Martha £1000 per year (to be reduced to £200 if she re-married). She was to have the use in her lifetime of Oakwood Grange, with its furniture, effects, horses, carriages etc.

To his brother Thomas an annuity of £65, to his sister Lydia an annuity of £52 and to his relative Miss Elisabeth Baker an annuity of £52.



In Affectionate Remembrance of

Miss ELIZABETH BAKER,

Who fell asleep in

JESUS

11th JUNE, 1920.

After 31½ years Loving and Faithful Labour in

DEMERARA.

AGED 82.

"I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."—I. Tim., 4. 7.

(Her last message to her Bible Class on Lord's Day, 30th May.)

Elisabeth was the sister of John's first wife and his cousin. She became a missionary and worked for 60 years in Georgetown, Demerera, British Guiana. She died there during the First World War.

John left all his shares in John Baker & Co in trust for all his children in equal shares. He also left the remainder of his personal estate in trust for the eventual benefit of all his children in equal shares.

Harry and Nellie Baker

The sons take over the family business

In 1904 on the death of his father Harry (Henry) aged 29, along with his half brother John William (36) and his brothers George (25) and Edward (21), found themselves with the business to run. Harry had been educated in Rotherham, then at Sheffield Technical School and had worked in the family business for a number of years. However, for Harry and his brothers it must have been quite a shock as John Baker had run the business very much on his own terms.

It was decided that John William would run the commercial side of the Brinsworth works. Because his father had kept him on the works management side, this was very much a learning curve for John William. He would have many disappointments as orders were not easy to come by and he would have many fruitless journeys to London in search of orders from overseas agents.

Harry became works manager at the Brinsworth site and George and Edward went to Kilnhurst. Here they had to establish the steel making and forging plant ordered by their father from Germany. This was not easy as the plans had largely been in John Baker's head.

However, by 1905, they had established the works and the first steel and railway tyres were being produced. Steel axles were being forged under a 3 ton steam hammer, five or six men and boys working hard to turn out between 20 and 30 axles per shift.

In about 1905 Harry met and later married Eleanor Machell Addy, who was known as Nellie. She had been born in 1882 in Wath-upon-Dearne. Her father was Horatio William Addy (born 1856 in Rawmarsh) a commercial cashier at Stanley's Oil Works in Wath. Her mother Hannah had been born in Notton, Yorkshire in 1855. Nellie had a brother, Geoffrey, born 1899, who was later to become a chemist's assistant in Wath.

Whether the Baker family approved of the marriage is unrecorded. In the days when social and family status mattered in marriage among the wealthy, and only a few years after his sister had married George the barrister, it would be interesting to know what Harry's mother, Martha Ellen, made of it. However Harry undoubtedly loved Nellie and doted on her, and the marriage went ahead. Unfortunately, no wedding pictures survive.

By 1909 Harry and Nellie were living at 4, Victoria Crescent, Doncaster, an imposing Victorian town house. There is a long inventory of items supplied by Cockaynes Ltd of Sheffield, 'Silk Mercers and General Drapers'.

This invoice, dated November 23rd 1909 , includes a wide range of household items, which suggests they were setting up a new home here. The list includes a work basket and sewing items, trays, washstand sets, towels, bedstead and bolsters, bedding, cleaning materials, bath tubs, kitchen equipment, fire place tools, cutlery, toilet sets, cups, crockery, plates and china.

Some of the items reflect the needs of a middle class household in the early 1900s:

Crumb brush and tray	6s	6d
Foot warmer	1s	10d
2 chamber pots	4s	
Carpet sweeper	14s	9d
Knife cleaner	1s	1d
Toilet set	3s	5d
Coal hammer		2d
Mincing machine	5s	
Fish slice	1s	1d
Egg slice		9d
Salt box	1s	9d
Lemon squeezer	1s	
Black lead brush	3s	
Serviettes	13s	9d
Table cloths	various	
Toilet covers	3s	1d
Bath sheets	17s	10d
Servants towels	3s	1d
Wash stand sets	3s	6d
Oval trays	3s	6d

They also bought from Cockaynes an oak carved dining room set, comprising a sideboard, extendable table and chairs (including 2 carvers) and a bedroom suite. These would eventually be passed down the family.

A photograph of Nellie taken by Harry, probably in 1910, shows her in the bedroom with numerous objects on the wall and around her.





In 1910, after two years of marriage, when Harry was 35 and Nellie 29, they had a son, who they named Henry Machell. He was also called Harry and, to avoid confusion with his father, was nick-named 'Boy'. There are a number of photos of Nellie with 'Boy' probably taken inside 4, Victorian Crescent.

The census for 1911 showed they had two servants to help them, Alice Broomfield (aged 27) and Martha Edlin (aged 19.)

By 1910 Harry (senior) was travelling abroad on business. In May 1910 he was in Portugal, staying at the Grand Hotel d'Italie in Mont Estoril on the 'Rivera de Portugal'.

He was travelling with Dr Graham. Was he a friend, translator or business associate? Harry was obviously missing Nellie and their new-born son. On hotel notepaper he wrote to Nellie:

> My beloved .....Very sorry to hear that you have had more trouble with your teeth. It was so brave of you not to mention it in your letter, but you really should have done so. Poor little sonny, he does seem to be having a rough time of it, but he is strong and fat, so he will soon recover. I suppose he will have quite forgotten me.....You know love, I simply long to see you again and I have written to Liverpool about tickets for you. So I shall see you very shortly. I'll write full details tomorrow.
>
> Dearie you have no idea how sorry I am to hear you have had a day in bed, but cheer up, I shall be home soon and all will then be well.
>
> With fondest love to all from your affectionate Harry.

After one of his trips, Harry received a letter from his mother at Oakwood Grange. She was obviously having trouble with her maids.

> 26th April 1910
>
> 'My Dear Harry,
>
> I do hope you had a good voyage... I am still busy cleaning ....I advertised last week for a maid and Francis wrote me to see if I would have her back. She does not care for the present situation. I don't care much to take girls again, but now she is away from Beatrice she will be alright and after the experience I have had with this one, I am rather inclined to try her .....
>
> Your affectionate Mother MEB'
>
> She signed herself with her initials for Martha Ellen Baker.

This servant problem must have been resolved for the census for 1911 showed that Francis Hancock, aged 26 and Beatrice Hancock (aged 24) were resident as servants at Oakwood Grange. They may well have been sisters in service together.

Martha was by then a widow of 57 years of age, living with her sons Stanley (engineer aged 20) , Arthur (metallurgical student aged 21) and Thomas Geoffrey (school boy aged 14). In addition to Francis and Beatrice, there were two other servants, Mary Barton aged 27 and Hilda Worth aged 18.

Harry and Nellie move to Swinton

About 1911 Harry and Nellie moved to Swinton. Harry had taken over as manager of the Kilnhurst works. They moved into Brookfield House on Fitzwilliam Street. There is a photograph taken at the front of the house in about 1912, with men from the works.



The young Harry (Boy) is being held up at the back near the front door. Harry, Nellie and servants from the house are also in the picture.

Brookfield House had been built about 1840 sideways on to Fitzwilliam Street and still stands today. In 1912 it had a long narrow garden running alongside Fitzwilliam Street, almost to the bottom of the hill. The Kilnhurst works was just over the next hill. From the front door there was a narrow hall with the drawing room off to the right. This was a large, sunny, pleasant room with a magnificent bay window looking out on the side garden. Further along the hall were stairs to the right leading to a half landing. Off this half landing was the small morning room, so-called because it caught the morning sun. At the end of the hall was the large kitchen. On the other side of the hall to the lounge was the dining room with French windows to the front.



At the back of the house was a yard with garages and access to the street. Above the yard there were a couple of terraced houses. In the first of these lived the Chapman family. Mr Chapman was gardener to Brookfield House and Mrs Chapman was the cook. There were other staff at the house as can be seen in a number of photographs taken in the garden with the family and their pet dogs.

There exists a handwritten, undated list of 'cook's duties' for the house. These duties involved much more than cooking.

Monday	Light kitchen fire Dust hall Clean brass and front step Prepare breakfast Ironing
Tuesday	Clean kitchen well Bake and cook
Wednesday	Clean drawing room one week, morning room and inside windows, downstairs alternate week
Thursday	Help turn living room out before breakfast
Friday	Clean kitchen and hall well
Saturday	(duties not legible)
	Clean cellars and cupboards when needed in spare time. When convenient to self get in own coal and sticks.

Harry's brother George had married Gertrude Liversidge in 1903 and in 1912 'Whites Directory' showed them living further up the road from Harry and Nellie at 95, Fitzwilliam Street, Greno House. This was a large Victorian house which had previously belonged to the Hattersley family, who had established the Hattersley Iron, Grate and Stove business in Swinton. Greno House had an imposing winding drive leading to steps at the front of the house and a portico. At the rear of the house was a yard with stabling and out-houses and beyond that an orchard, kitchen garden, tennis court and further gardens leading up to Picadilly Road.



Henry Baker in formal dress c 1912

The brothers decided to expand the business of John Baker & Sons by going into railway wagon building. Harry was given the job of establishing a forge and a woodworking shop for producing wagons at the Kilnhurst works

In 1910 George Baker had bought a 15 ton drop hammer for the Kilnhurst works from Darlington Forge in Durham. This was a steam hammer, made in Glasgow in 1883 with an unusually wide space between its legs. It had been used to make ships' stern frames. When Darlington Forge decided to replace steam hammers with hydraulic presses, 'Tiny Tim' was put up for sale.

George Baker bought the hammer for only £250, which even in those days was very cheap, for it weighed over 100 tons. However, the reason could well have been the cost and effort involved in excavating it from its site and taking it by rail to Kilnhurst. It took two years to dismantle, transport and re-erect it. So powerful was it when it was working that it could be heard 600 yards below ground in Kilnhurst colliery and glasses in the Kilnhurst works canteen used to bounce off the tables with the vibrations.



The hammer was used to forge the railway wheel centres. ('Tiny Tim' was taken to Beamish Museum in Durham when the works closed in 1964 and now forms the entrance to the museum).

By 1912, under Harry's management, the Kihnhurst works was successfully producing railway wagons. However, by 1913, the firm was losing money, not in the production of railway wagons, but in the wheel and axle business. This was because those firms who were customers were also wagon builders, and they were no longer willing to buy their tyres and axles from a rival firm.

So much money was being lost, that the brothers were faced with the decision of closing the successful railway wagon works to save the wheel and axle business. There was a major difference of opinion on this. Harry, who had devoted much of his energy to developing this side of the business was opposed to shutting it down. However, George, who was four years younger than Harry, would seem to have had a stronger personality and persuaded the three younger brothers, Edward, Sydney and Stanley to vote with him for closure of the wagon works.

In 1914, Harry, at the age of 39, left the business and was paid out to the sum of £3,600. He may have been given some of this in shares. A dividend payment slip dated 1924 shows him owning 7,722 shares in John Baker & Co Rotherham (1920) Ltd.

Was this the right decision by the brothers? The business was on the verge of bankruptcy, but it was not the manufacture of wagon wheels which was to save it. It was the outbreak of war and the opportunity to produce munitions at a profit. The business would seem to have lost a brilliant engineer according to Harry's nephew Henry (author of 'The Steel Bakers of Rotherham'). He saw the plans Harry had drawn up for a new wagon-making shop. There was a length of railway track with platforms on each side from which the wagon bodies were to be built and assembled. This was a precursor of the modern assembly line, something Ford would develop in America for the production of cars.

With the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914, Harry's brother Arthur joined the Sheffield Battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment. He had previously been working at the Kilnhurst works with Harry, having been to Sheffield University. His personal details on his enlistment form give his age as 20 years and 309 days, height 5' 8", weight 140 lbs and his occupation as 'metallurgical chemist'. He wore glasses and had a scar on the right side of his chest. He enlisted as a private on 16th September 1914 and on 2nd November he was promoted to the commissioned rank of 2nd Lieutenant.



The regiment was sent to France and as the commitment of troops and casualties increased, other battalions were recruited in the South Yorkshire area, including the 'Barnsley pals'.

Arthur was wounded in 1916 and promoted to acting captain. There is a photograph of him in his officer's uniform (see photographs). In November 1917 he was awarded the Military Cross for bravery in action near Paschendale on 9th October 1917. The background to the battle was described as follows:

> By 5 October 1917, the British attempted to push back the German line east of Ypres in a series of 'bite and hold' operations had met with some success. However, this had come at a great cost. Thousands had been killed, died of wounds or wounded so badly they would never fight again.
>
> Moreover, between the Broodseinde ridge, where the attack of 4 October was so successful, and Ypres, a distance of about eight kilometres, lay a landscape pulverised by the artillery shelling of both sides. As long as the weather had held, the British had been able to bring up supplies and the all-important artillery. Artillery was the essential ingredient of the 'bite and hold' tactics for if the 'creeping barrages' could not protect the advancing British infantry they would be at the mercy of the enemy machine gunners.
>
> After 4 October 1917 the rain poured down and the battlefield, and all the approaches to it, became a sea of mud. To successfully bring up heavy war equipment under these conditions proved next to impossible. Many at the highest level recommended a halt to the 'Flanders

> Offensive' for the winter but General Sir Douglas Haig, the commander-in-chief, was led to believe that the Germans were near breaking point and he ordered the battle to continue.
>
> On 9 October 1917, British divisions, with the Australians in support, attacked in terrible conditions towards Passchendaele village. In the mud and rain the effort proved futile but the high command thought that enough ground had been gained to order a fresh assault on 12 October. Spearheading this attack were the Australian Third Division and the New Zealand Division, with the Australian Fourth Division in support.
>
> As predicted, the shells of the support bombardment mostly exploded harmlessly in the mud and little cover was available from that source. Men had to press forward in the quagmire against the German 'pillboxes' armed only with grenades, rifles and light machine guns.

The military cross had been created in 1914 for commissioned officers of the substantive rank of captain or below for acts of exemplary gallantry during active operations against the enemy on land. Arthur's citation reads as follows :

> For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty as officer commanding a reserve company in an attack. He pushed forward his company beyond the battalion objective. All the other company commanders having become casualties, he reorganised the greater part of the battalion and made a personal reconnaissance which was of the greater assistance to the commanding officer.

In view of the life expectancy of junior officers, who were expected to lead their men in attacks, it is amazing that Arthur Baker survived throughout the war.

On April 27th 1918 he was wounded again and the war diaries for the regiment describe the circumstances in which it happened. Captain Green of the 1/5th battalion describes an attack and counter attack in the region Sternwerk, Bailleul and Locre France.

> The attack was arranged as follows. A and B were the leading companies with A on the left and B on the right. C company formed the second wave. The total frontage covered 350 yards and the strength of the attack 3 officers and approx 200 regulars assembled for the attack in artillery formation .. Moved off at 5.20pm. We reached the battalion HQ of the Highland Light Infantry about 5.55 with very little trouble.
>
> I took on Company Commander of the right company (Captain Baker MC) and my own Sgt Major (left company) and went on towards the objectives..,. I sent an order to Lt Bagnall to bring on the 3 companies in artillery formation in the direction of the wood. I hastily explained the situation to Cpt Baker and arranged with him to send out a flanking party around the the farms on west side of the objective in the trees and ordered my Sgt Major to send a similar party around the east side. Both parties were to be about 10 strong and have lewis guns. I expected to find 2 machine guns and about 30 men in the trees and did not expect any resistance from the farm houses.

> Immediately after deployment we were heavily fired on from the farms and from a machine gun considerably left of the objective. The right flanking party got beyond the farms but could not make much headway owing to heavy machine gun fire from a post within the trees and trench mortars.
>
> The left flanking party suffered heavily in their endeavour to cross the road.. But they never-the-less got on and took an enemy machine gun firing from the left. We suffered most of our casualties in advancing the line of deployment...
>
> The barrage lifted according to our synchronzation during one and a half minutes before zero which was 6.30. And frontal attack commenced... the first line had much difficulty in crossing the support trench and Captain Baker was hit before doing so. The second wave moved immediately to give more impetus to the assault.
>
> I estimate we suffered 40% casualties before reaching the farms. .... Several of the enemy attempted to surrender but they were not given the opportunity '

Arthur was evacuated from Boulogne on 27th April and from Dover was taken to the ALS ward of the Royal Herbert Hospital in Woolwich.

His Medical Board report describes his wounds and treatment as follows:

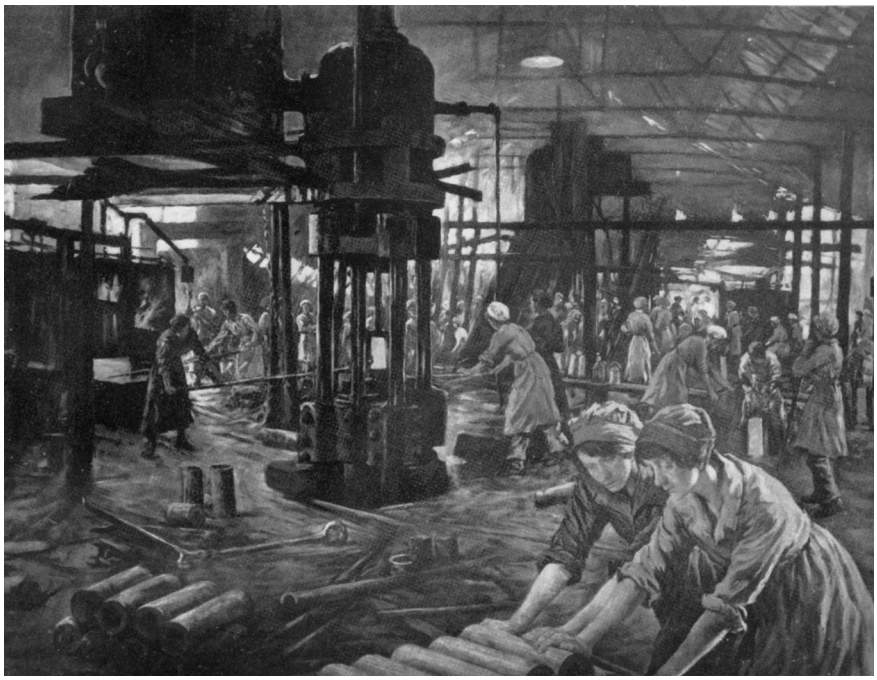
> T & T wound of the right arm, with fracture of the humerous and injury to the Ulnar nerve. X ray report showed comminution in the lower part of the humerous. Many large and small bone fragments detached.

August 9th 1918 - at an operation division of the ulnar nerve was found. The neuropath were removed and the nerve freed and sutured.

To remain in Royal Herbert Hospital pending transfer to Officers Covalescent Hospital.

Back in England the rest of the family had became involved in the war effort in a different way. By 1915 the country was shocked to hear that the troops were short of high explosives at the front. Partly as a result of this scandal a new government was formed. One of its first actions was to set up a Ministry of Munitions. Headed by David Lloyd George, it quickly brought most munitions production under state control.

John Baker & Co was adapted to produce munitions. George Baker realigned the Hydraulic presses to produce shells. Women were recruited to operate the process, particularly when conscription took away the remaining male workforce. It was extremely hazardous work. The women workers hands and faces turned yellow through handling TNT and they were nicknamed 'Canaries'.



George Baker commissioned Stanley Forbes, the artist, to paint the women working on the production of shells. His painting featured real women at the works.

During the course of the war the factory produced over six million shells. At the end of the war John William and George were awarded the OBE for their part in the war effort.

Harry joined the HM Inspectorate and for four years was a Chief Inspector of Munitions, based at Sheffield University. This gives testimony to his knowledge of metallurgy. An Income Tax return for 1917-18 shows him employed by the 'National Ordinance Factory' and earning £337 10s and paying £50 12s 6d in tax.

At the end of the war the family were keen to have Arthur Baker returned to civilian life and a job within the works. George Baker wrote the following letter to the Commanding Officer, Records, York on July 22nd 1918.

> Dear Sir,
>
> With reference to Captain Arthur Baker 1/5 York and Lancaster Regiment who is at present in the Royal Herbert Hospital Woolwich.
>
> We have made an application to the Ministry of Munitions that this officer may be transferred to these works for 12 months and it is necessary that the form be signed by his Commanding Officer.
>
> Captain Baker is under the impression that since he was wounded he is attached to the Reserve TF Battalion .....
>
> We shall be very much obliged if you will kindly tell us who is Captain Baker's Commanding Officer
>
> Thank you in anticipation
>
> We are, yours faithfully,
>
> George Baker Director

This was provided and Arthur was discharged from hospital and demobilised on 18th January 1919.

After the end of the war in 1920, Harry and Nellie had another son, John Gouldthorpe. Although Harry's brother George only lived further up the road at Greno House, they did not speak. However, John William, who was working at the Rotherham works, remained on good terms with Harry.

Other members of the family also lived in Swinton. White's Directory showed Harry's brother, Sydney, living at 'The Lodge' on Fitzwilliam street in 1924 and in 1925 moving to Milton House, Milton Street. Harry's younger brother, Arthur, after his return from the war, lived at 53, Fitzwilliam street. Harry probably did not have much contact with these brothers, after the family rift.

Nellie was far more publicly and politically active than Harry's mother, Martha, had been in her era. This perhaps reflects the fact that before the war the Suffragette movement had campaigned for the vote for women and during the war women had contributed heavily to the war effort. It was probably the latter that eventually persuaded Parliament to relent on the issue.

On 28th March, 1917, the House of Commons voted, 341 to 62, that women over the age of 30 who were householders, the wives of householders, occupiers of property with an annual rent of £5 or graduates of British universities should have the right to vote. MPs rejected the idea of granting the vote to women on the same terms as men.

Women had their first opportunity to vote in a General Election in December, 1918. Nellie, aged 36, and meeting the set criteria, no doubt voted for the first time in her life. At a by-election a year late Nancy Astor the Conservative candidate, became the first woman to take her seat in the House of Commons.

Nellie joined the Conservative Party and Nancy Astor was, no doubt, a leading figure for her. Over the next few years Astor campaigned for women's suffrage at twenty-one (not achieved until 1928) and equal rights in the Civil Service.

From 1918-1922 the Government was a coalition of Liberals and Conservatives, with the newly formed Labour Party emerging as the opposition. By 1923 Labour had harnessed the votes of women and industrial workers sufficient to form a minority government.

At a local level, Nellie was instrumental in the formation of a Women's Section of the Swinton Conservative Party in about 1924 and she became its secretary. All the main political parties had women's sections, a tradition which continued into the second half of the twentieth century. The constituency in which she was active was Rother Valley, which was held by a Labour MP, Thomas Grundy, from 1918 -1935. Nellie was obviously very active in the local Conservative Party, becoming vice -president of Rother Valley Conservative Association and chair person of the constituency women's section. As well as attending meetings, canvassing and organising support, Nellie would also be engaged in fund raising for the party. A local newspaper article shows that she would also rope in her son, 'Boy' Baker.

> "The women of the Conservative Association now well known for their social efforts , excelled themselves last Thursday in the organising of a supper and whist drive which was held in the Masonic Hall .....125 sat down to a well-served and enjoyable supper. The room was cleared and whist began at 8.30; 24 hands were played and a happy evening concluded ..... Miss F I Gillott presided.....Mr H M Baker (pianist) and Mr F Hinchcliffe (violinist) played selections during supper and provided a very pleasing accompaniment to whist. Mrs Ogley presented the prizes given by Mrs H G Baker, Mrs Verity, Miss Trowbridge and Mr Penny"

Miss Gillott owned a drapers in Swinton and was a good friend of the family. The Masonic Hall still stands next to the Co-op in Swinton and Harry Baker senior was a Freemason.

Whilst Harry no doubt supported his wife, he was not himself a political animal. He was probably apolitical, but if pressed would have described himself as Liberal.

In addition to her politics, Nellie was also involved with local charities. Like her politics, she was not just a contributor, but an organiser and leader. For many years she was an organiser and representative of a local charity known as the Filey Homes. This organisation provided a holiday opportunity for the children of parents who could not afford holidays. Each year she personally raised the funding for the holiday clothing and a fortnight's stay for a group of local children.

For some years she was the Secretary of the Ladies Committee of the Montagu Hospital in Mexborough. The hospital had been built by donations from local people, in particular miners, to provide a local hospital and avoid the need for injured people to be taken on a long journey to Rotherham or Doncaster. The hospital was still funded from voluntary contributions from local working people, in the days before the National Health Service.

Family life at Brookfield House in the 1920's is recorded through the schoolboy diaries of Harry 'Boy' Baker. These very much concentrated on his own teenage lifestyle as a member of a middle class family, but they do give an insight into the family's activities.

In the days before television, the main sources of entertainment for the family were the cinema and the radio, along with local dances and whist drives. Having a car, a real luxury at that time, meant that the family could tour round the local area and take holidays in Scotland.

In his diary for 1923, Boy, aged 13, describes going to school at Highfield School, Wath. This was probably a private school and the building still stands as Highfield House just off Sandygate. He records exams in French, History, Hygiene, Latin and Geometry. After school he would go to his grandfather and grandmother Addy, who lived at 14, Fitzwilliam Street, Wath. He would then catch a bus to Swinton and home.

On 26th April he records the death of his grandma, Hannah Addy. She was aged 68 and was buried in Royston, Barnsley. His grandfather, Horatio, would then become a regular week-end visitor to Brookfield House.

He describes a variety of entertainment, which no doubt he was exposed to by Harry and Nellie. These included a public lecture on 'A visit to Central Africa' by J W Willington at the Welsleyan Chapel, Wath, a talk on 'Comets' by Profesor G Brodeski of Leeds University at Swinton Church Hall, a pantomime at the Theatre Royal, Sheffield, 'Jack and Beanstalk' at the Sheffield Empire and the film, 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' at the Mexborough Hippodrome.

His reading include 'Huttons Adventure Stories Annual' and 'British Boys Annual' (his copies of which I still have). The family went on an Easter trip by car to Kings Lynn, Norwich, Newmarket, Ely and Saffron Walden.

In his diary for 1924, there is a similar programme of entertainment. At the Mexborough Empire there were a series of films of the day, including 'Manslaughter', 'Harold Lloyd in Safety First', 'Adam's Rib',' If Winter comes' and 'A Prodigal Knight'. There were pantomimes at the Theatre Royal, Sheffield and the Mexborough Hippodrome. He went to a lecture on Switzerland in Mexborough with his Grandad and an exhibition about Missionaries. Boy had a bicycle and pet rabbits. He listened to the radio, played football and golf.



Henry 'Boy' Baker in his teens posing in the garden of Brookfield House

A birthday card sent to his brother, John, shows a young boy listening to the radio through headphones dressed in the sailor suit that was fashionable for young well-off boys.

In May the family went to Bridlington by train and rented a cottage. There are photos of the family on the harbour and the beach. Boy describes going to the Pavilion cinema, listening to a band, and going to the amusements.





Nellie loved deep sea fishing and would go out in all weathers. There are photos of her holding up one of her catches.

At the beginning of July 1924 the family drove to London. They visited London Zoo, Wembley, Madame Tussauds and the British Museum. At the end of July the family went to Scotland for a month, staying in Strathyre in Perthshire.



They would go there virtually every year. There are photographs of the family car and local villages. Nellie loved Perthshire and knew every glen.

There is a wonderful photograph of her roped together with other climbers. Harry's main passion on holiday here was fly fishing. He was an expert and I still have some of his beautifully illustrated reference books.

In 1925 Harry invited his nephew Henry to join them on their Scottish holiday. They had rented a house on the banks of Loch Voil in Perthshire for a month. Henry had completed his degree in electrical engineering and had had a promise of an apprenticeship with a firm in Rugby.

However, Britain was entering a severe depression and the apprenticeship did not materialise. Instead Henry went to work on the shop floor at the Kilnhurst Works of John Baker & Sons. Because of the rift in the family, Henry sought advice about whether he should take up his uncle Harry's offer.

Henry wrote:

> 'Uncle George had to be consulted as to the wisdom of my going and fortunately granted his consent. On this holiday I developed an affectionate and lasting regard for my uncle Harry. I found him a real gentleman and further an outstanding craftsman, cultured and generous'.

At some point Boy left school. Whilst there is a brief reference to school days in his diary for 1923 (when he was thirteen) there is no mention of it in his 1924 diary. There is no mention of going into training or looking for full-time employment in the later diaries. Obviously Harry and Nellie were supporting him, but his relationship with them was to become more and more acrimonious.

His brother John was to go through Highfield school, Technical School and then an engineering course at College. We can only speculate as to why Boy did not do something similar. He was certainly literate, as evidenced by his diaries, and talented as a musician. He had violin and piano lessons and, as we shall see, he was later to play the piano on a semi-professional basis.

One view was expressed by Louie Chapman who lived next door. Her mother and father worked at Brookfield House and she grew up with John (who was the same age as her) and Boy. She later became a District Nurse, working with children and parents. She believed that Boy had some condition that today would be diagnosed and labelled for support at an early age. Whether this was a mild form of autism or some personality disorder it is difficult to say.

One other explanation for his behaviour could be that he was over-indulged by his parents and that the long illness and premature death of his mother, Nellie, had a profound effect on him.

Boy had an almost obsessive interest in clocks and watches. In his diaries he listed all the clocks he came across, including those in churches. He took clocks to pieces and revelled in presents of watches. He was also very fond of detective novels, particularly those by the author JS Fletcher. He lent me his Sherlock Holmes collection when I was young, and I still share his fascination for Conan Doyle's creation.

Nellie obviously involved Boy in her fund raising activities including her support of the Filey Homes. Many of these events were held at the Carnegie Library in Swinton. This had been opened in 1908 and the building still stands at the top of Manor Road, now converted into apartments.

One such event was described in a local newspaper:

> Churchmen's Dance
>
> 'A delightful social function, a subscriptive dance and one of the most successful of its kind held in the township for some time .....the object the raising of funds towards defraying the cost of the erection of the recreational hut in the grounds of the vicarage.... The hall of the library had been transformed by tasteful decoration, the hanging of curtains and other innovations into a very gay ballroom and the landing was made into a lounge for the benefit of fatigued dancers. A very good programme of dance music was played by Mr. C W Taylor's Syncopated Orchestra (Doncaster).....It is estimated that the proceeds will amount to £20 which will be increased by the enterprising efforts of Master H M Baker who realised £2 10s through the disposal of surplus ham'

In June 1925 Harry and Nellie bought Boy, aged 15, a motorbike. It was an Omega bought from Brown's garage in Maltby. This obviously gave him the freedom to travel alone all over the place. In July he went to Scotland, staying in the Golden Lion Hotel in Sterling. The motor bike seemed to break down at regular intervals.

In October Boy went to his first music lesson with J E Beech and in November to his first dancing lesson with

Miss Helene Whitworth in Nether Edge Sheffield. On December 6th 1925 he was sixteen and got as presents, £1 10s, 3 records and a Holiday Annual.

In December the family went to Scarborough for Christmas and stayed in the Manor Hotel. Boy recorded in his diary going to dances in the ballroom, buying a box of chocolate whirls for his mum and winning third prize in a fancy dress ball, dressed as a parson.

The family went out in their car after Christmas to Filey, Bridlington and Flamborough. They also went to see Harold Lloyd in 'College Days' at the Futurist cinema in Scarborough.

The following year Boy was bought a new motorbike, a Raleigh HP Registration WT8707 for £35. It was not long before he was in trouble. A newspaper article, perhaps confusing him with his father, gave the details:

> 'For driving a motorcycle without due care and attention Harry M Baker, engineer, of Swinton was fined £3 at Doncaster today..... Inspector Wolfe said that at about 11.50 on Saturday August 1st two cyclists were riding along the Doncaster-Sheffield road near Warmsworth crossroads towards Conisborough. Their cycles were fitted with lamps and reflectors. Suddenly without the slightest warning, one of the cyclists was knocked off his machine by a motorcycle driven by Baker. Baker said that just before the accident a motor vehicle coming in the opposite direction dimmed its lights and he was obliged to do the same. Through his headlamp being dimmed, he never saw the rear light on the bicycle and the next thing he found himself in the road'.

By 1931 Boy was 21 and he had acquired a car, registration number ET 5536. Whether it was the his or the family car it is difficult to say. His diary records him running members of the family backwards and forwards for local trips and shopping. He took his mum and dad to a 'Brighter Swinton' dance at the Masonic hall on 14th February 1931 and also to see two classic films 'The Blue Angel' and 'All Quiet on the Western Front'. He took his brother John to school (he had started at Mexborough Secondary school aged 11) and sometimes fetched him home.

The car was also driven by Harry (senior) and an undated Newspaper Article headed 'At the crossroads' records a major accident in the days when there were fewer cars on the road.

> 'A car driven by Mr Henry Goldthorpe Baker, a retired engineer of Swinton Rotherham collided at the Darrington crossroads on the Great North Road near Pontefract yesterday with a car driven by Mr John Thomas Allsop, Haulage Contractor of Glass Houghton.'

Both cars were badly damaged. Mrs Baker, who was riding with her husband, sustained a cut to one knee and Miss Marian Routtlidge, daughter of Mr John Routiledge, Clerk of the Peace for Pontefract, who was accompanying Mr Allsop, received a nasty wound on the head. The injured ladies and their friends were taken home in taxis. '

Boy was still having piano and violin lessons and was playing the piano publicly at a number of events. He had discovered girls, or at least was mentioning them for the first time in his diary:

10th February 1931

> 'went to a dance club do at Danum Doncaster with Molly Styles of Maltby (aged 17) called at Maltby for her - took her home in car - she asked me to a dance on Thursday .....

> Went to dance in Maltby with Molly Styles and Delia O'Neil and played piano in band'

He had also discovered alcohol ..... 'drinking and was sick' ..... beer was fetched to Brookfield House from the Sportsman Pub just along the street by him, for his friends Hulse, Cooper and Leslie Johnson.

By May of that year Harry was reported as suffering from 'muscular rheumatism' and there was worse news to come.

May 22nd 1931

> 'mum told me she had cancer'.

Boy's friends Hulse and Cooper were told by Harry or Nellie to keep away from Brookfield house. They obviously thought they were a bad influence. His friend Leslie Johnson got a job and his attitude towards Boy may have changed.

May 17th

> 'went over to Johnsons in the afternoon in car, stopped to tea. Left 6.45. Leslie was not very cordial in this welcome as he had expected me the day before'.

Life at Brookfield house seemed to continue as usual. A new cook, Sarah Ann Harper, came in May and a new electric cooker was installed. Boy played cards and dominoes with John, Louis Chapman (the house keepers daughter) and Sarah the cook.

However, by June, Boy was becoming somewhat disturbed.

2nd June

> ' Spent day in house. Had a row with John over dominoes. Dad said he was very pleased to hear I had decided to go away'.

June 14th is headed ' Week of trouble' .

June 15th

> 'went over to Wath to Grandads on bike... had a terrible row with Hannah and Geoff .. They fetched Mrs Stanley round. Heard mum had to have an operation' .

June 16th

> 'A letter came from Mrs Stanley of Wath in afternoon to Dad saying I had insulted her'

June 17th

> 'Letter received from Grandad to my father saying about Monday and telling me not go again'

In the back of his diary Boy had copied out another letter from his cousin Geoff Addy to his father which explains what the incident was about:

> Dear Mr Baker,
>
> Have you got the letter concerning Boy, when with his disgusting language he insulted Mrs Stanley, our house -keeper and her sister and myself? If you have not got them, then information on Boy or your wife or you he says he did not assault Mrs Stanley he had done it before. If you are making light of it then I think you had better come over and find the truth. I have noticed for years that our family are not wanted. If Boy is a XXXXX (illegible), God help you. Your wife could have come to see Father, but I suppose they are alike.
>
> G. M. ADDY
>
> I have not forgotten your insults to me.

If this is a copy of the actual letter it shows a real rift in the family. Particularly as Harry was Geoff's uncle and Nellie, his sister!

Whatever had happened, there is also in the back of diaries a list of resolutions which Boy had adopted for himself. Or had they been imposed by his mother and father as a result of this and other incidents ?

> 'Never to go to Grandads or have anything to do with Geoff or Hannah.
>
> Never to recognise or have anything to do with Mrs Stanley.
>
> Not to go to any more dances at High Melton.
>
> Not to bother with Mrs Wilson.
>
> Not to go against John.
>
> No music to be lent to Archliffe.
>
> Not to go to pubs in Doncaster.'

Boy's diary records events that no doubt had a profound effect on him and may explain his behaviour as the situation worsened. Nellie had breast cancer and the family doctor Dr Huey referred her for an operation

Nellie becomes seriously ill

18th June 1931

> 'heard mum had to go into Nursing home... went over to Sheffield in car in morning to Walshes for clothes for mum. Dr Huey called, took mum to Sheffield in car after tea. Dad went too

20th June

> 'mum operated on by Colonel Connell. Miss Gillet came and told me everything was alright'

There is a bill for Sister Needhams Nursing Home, 3 Clarkehouse Road Sheffield dated 20th June 1931 for £47 5s for the consultation, operation and anaethetist.

There is also a letter from Gertrude Baker, wife of George (Harrys brother)

> Greno House
> Swinton,
> Telephone Mexborough 94
>
> Dear Harry,
> I am so very sorry to hear about Nellie. Emmie has told me today. I called to see you but found the house shut up. I should like to send Nellie a note so will you let me know her address. I do hope she will get well soon and be out of her pain'

The following days Boy and Harry visited Nellie in the nursing home and then fetched her home on 10th July. On the 15th July Harry and Nellie went to Frank Ogley's (their solicitor) wedding in Conisborough. However, Nellie returned to Sheffield Infirmary for treatment and a further operation on 17th July.

Boy was having rows with his brother John. By early August the doctor was coming every day and Nellie was deteriorating. Boy's diary records her decline and his own inability to cope with the situation.

26th August

'mum had to go to Sheffield for an X-ray of spine'

27th August

'Mum unable to walk'

29th August

mum very bad in bed unable to move her legs

30th August

an anxious day mother very ill. Mrs Chapman stayed night

1st September

had a row with John over not coming out of mum's room. Dr Gemmel and Colonel Connell came. Had electrician in house to have bell fitted in mum's room. Slept with dad.

2nd September

A terrible day. Row over music and having my breakfast in kitchen. I went for my father. He told me mother would not live long. Doctor came to tell me I was another Geoffrey (his cousin who had written the letter). Insulted was leaving for Scarborough.

From 3rd September until 10th October he seems to have gone by motor cycle to stay in Scarborough. He had returned by the 12th.

12th October

Aunt Mary and Eleanor came over. More rows. Row over Guiness bottle at dinner time. Left on bike to go to Aunt Marys in Ossett.

There are few entries in his diary until 30th October

a terrible day .. Mrs Chapman told me my mum was worse every day .... Row with father over going to dance in Lofthouse'

By December things were coming to head

15th December

> A horrible day. Dad told me mum was frightfully ill. Maids said they did not want me in the kitchen. Dr Gemmell came and said mum was sinking. Dad went for Dr Huey. Mum became unconscious in afternoon. Mum died just after ten.

16th December

> - a terrible day. Went to Hanleys Rotherham on bike to be measured for suit. Grandad came. Went over to Wath for a photograph of mum and took it to the Times office (South Yorkshire Times - the local paper)

17th December

> a very foggy day .. Many letters of sympathy came. Never went out of the house.

19th December

> Grandad, Miss Gillett and Miss Emmerson came. Saw mum in coffin. Coffin rested in drawing room. Mum buried in Swinton churchyard 1pm

The South Yorkshire Times' obituary for Nellie records that all Harry's brothers came to the funeral, John William Baker (his elder half brother) Mr and Mrs George Baker, Mr and Mrs Edward Baker, Mr and Mrs Sydney Baker, Stanley Baker, Arthur Baker, Geoffrey Baker and Henry Baker (nephew). There were also representatives of local Conservative groups. Many left wreathes containing Nellie's favourite flower, a deep pink carnation.

After the funeral, relationships deteriorated at Brookfield House

27th December

things come to a climax at home

28th December

Row with dad. Dad told me he was selling up

29th December

A terrible day. Asked dad about insurance money. He refused to give me bank book. .. Dad told me to get out

There the diary ends and there are no further diaries. You obviously have to draw your own conclusions from these diary entries.

Boy's behaviour was equally as extreme when his brother John died suddenly on holiday in Germany in 1972.. He could not accept it, and accused his sister-in-law, quite seriously, of poisoning John.

Boy came back to live with his father and brother in Brookfield house. In the 1930's he was playing the piano in a professional capacity at various pubs, clubs and hotels throughout the area.

There is a programme for the Sergeants Annual dinner of the 5th Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry at the Danum Hotel Doncaster for Saturday 2nd October 1937, which lists ‘at the piano Mr Harry M. Baker’. He also played piano for Eliza Glennon who lived in Denaby and who was singing to help earn a living when her husband Dick was no longer able to work .

They used to meet up at a variety of venues and he took her home to Denaby in his car. Eliza remembered him as a kind and charming man. Her grand-daughter Janet was eventually to marry Boy's nephew Peter.



Harry would, no doubt, have been very upset by the illness and death of his wife. He certainly shared many interests with Nellie, including their love of Scotland and fishing and they had spent a lot of time together after he left the family business.

It may be that Nellie had been better at deíaling with Boy than Harry and this could partly explain the series of arguments and rows that Boy's diaries document.

After her death, Harry devoted a great deal of his time to local history and industrial archaeology in particular, applying his deep understanding of engineering ad metallurgy. He was a member of the Institute of Mechanical Engineers, a Fellow of the Society of Arts and a Freeman of the Cutlers Company of Hallamshire. He became a member of the Yorkshire Archeological Society, the Sheffield Trades Historical Society, the Sheffield Trades Technical Society and the Newcomen Society.

On December 13th 1944 Harry presented a paper at the meeting of the Newcomen Society at the Grand Hotel Birmingham on 'Blast Furnace Construction and Costs in 1740' which he published as a pamphlet. He also published pamphlets on 'Samuel Walker and Partners' and 'Hallmarks of Silver Church Plate'.

He was to become President of the Society for the Preservation of Old Sheffield Tools and, shortly before his death, was presented with a plaque for his work in this area (which I still have). Shortly before his death too, he presented his notes plans and photographs to Sheffield City Library, where they can still be found.

I have a number of Harry's items which reflect his interests and his enquiring mind. He had a large collection of texts on local history, metallurgy and fishing. He possessed a fine microscope with a huge collection of slides covering minerals and flora and fauna.

He was a keen photographer and had two bellow cameras and all the equipment for developing photographs and making slides. He had a wonderful brass slide projector which Boy kept in a cupboard after his father's death.

Harry also enjoyed fishing, golf, billiards and bowling. He was a member of Wath and Thrybergh Golf clubs and Chairman of Swinton Athletic club, bowling section. He was also a Freemason and a member of the Rockingham Lodge. He was a founder of the 'Brighter Swinton' movement, whatever that was!

Although his brothers attended Nellie's funeral, Harry was never reconciled with them and indeed the continued acrimony, particularly with George, had a detrimental effect on the provisions of their fathers will. Harry consistently refused to sign any documents whatever. As a consequence, all the property accumulated by John Baker in property dealings was let and managed by a firm of estate agents.

In his will John Baker had left a capital sum equally divided between all his children in trust and they would have the income for their lives, then the capital would go to the grand children. However, as the children died the property would have to be sold. These properties were in Moorgate, St Leonards Road and Doncaster Road and represented a substantial portfolio.

With the outbreak of World War 2 the Baker Factories once again began producing munitions. In particular mountings for anti-aircraft guns, catapult pulleys for launching aircraft, armour piercing nose caps for shells, rocket shells for anti-aircraft batteries and bogie wheels for the Churchill tank.

Although Sheffield was bombed heavily, none of the munitions factories were hit. It is said that the bombers were misled by the lights of the trams and bombed areas of shops and housing rather than the industrial targets they wanted. Any bombs falling near to the Munitions factories were probably being jettisoned by returning aircraft, such as the bomb which fell at the end of Blackamoor Road between Swinton and Rawmarsh.

Harry was now too old to take an active role in the war and Boy too, aged 30 was either too old to be called up or found unfit for military service.

It is said he became a special constable.

John, however, was at the right age, 19, when war broke out, to eventually be called up. He had trained as an engineer at Rotherham College of Technology (where Harry was a Governor and President of the Model Engineering Society) John qualified in mechanical engineering and joined the Fife and Fofar Yeomanry. This was a tank regiment with Churchill tanks. John was in a support unit repairing and maintaining the tanks and other vehicles.

Prior to D Day a variety of devices had been developed to attach to the Churchill tanks, including rollers with an articulated track for going over soft ground, flails which spun round to explode land mines and water proofing for the D Day landings and for crossing rivers.

John talked of his experiences of going through Belgium and into Germany in fierce winter conditions (presumably the winter of 1944/5). He remembered driving over endless cobbled roads and badly buried bodies, which sprang up when you drove over them.

He told of the horror of working on battle damaged tanks where there were the remains of the crew still inside. He was once working on a tank which caught fire and only just managed to escape.

A member of a tank crew described the uniform they wore in the regiment.

> Being in the 1st Fife & Forfar Yeomanry Tank Regiment our uniform was the same as everyone elses but with a few embellishments.
>
> Khaki battledress comprising of khaki trousers and blouse, I had a belt for my waist as it was home to my weapon which was a revolver. The belt was actually optional in our squadron. The driver and co driver had a sten gun (small machine gun) which was quite dangerous because if you dropped or banged it accidentally it would fire a round of ammunition. There were a few near misses! The radio operator who was also the gun loader also had a Sten gun.
>
> On our heads we wore a black beret, this originated from the first world war when the French gave the Royal Tank Regiment the honour of wearing their black beret.
>
> Towards the end of the war whilst we were in Germany, we stayed at Geillenkirken. On arriving at the town, a unit of the Guards, (I don't know which regiment) saw the regimental badges on our shoulders and assumed that we were officers, they walked by and saluted us. We of course saluted back. It was a short while after when they got closer they realised that we were the same as them!
>
> Our berets, collar badges and shoulder badges also had an adverse reaction from the native German people as they were very similar to a German SS Regiment who.had treated their own people very badly. On entering the town, the German people gave us a very wide berth.

At some point towards the end of the war the regiment was occupying an area in Westphalia, Germany near to the Dutch border. John's unit was in a town called Emsdetten and they were billeted in a hotel called 'Unter der Linden', which still stands at the entrance to the town on the road from Rheine.

Here they were being friendly with local girls and John fell for a 17 year old called Hildegarde Vostrizanski.

Hildegarde's father was Rudolph Vostrizanski, who was born 8th October 1900 in Sandhoven near Mannheim in Germany. His family were Czechoslovakian. His father was Johann Vostrizanski and his mother Maria (maiden name Veith). He had a brother called Wezel and a sister, Maria.

Rudolph worked before the outbreak of World War 2 as a factory worker and at some time met Gertrude Wessling. Gertrude was born 13th December 1905 in Metelen (not far from Emsdetten). Gertrude's mother was Franziska (maiden name Vocke) and her father, Gerhard. Gertrude had three brothers Herman, Heinrich and Josef. Gertrude later moved to Emsdetten and she and Rudolph married.



They lived on Hansa Strasse and there is a photograph of them both sitting on a garden seat at the house, in the long garden which led down to the river Ems.

Rudolph was a keen fisherman. They had three children Hildegarde Franziska, Giesla and Rudolph (known as Rudi).

With the out-break of war, Hildegarde was forced to leave school and work in the Land Army. She had wanted to be a teacher, but this put paid to her education. She had a soldier boy-friend who was sent to the Russian front. He made her a wooden box with inlaid straw decoration and the inscription 'Russland 1943', which we still have. He did not come back from Russia.

Rudolph senior was at some point employed as an interpreter working in the prisoner of war camps. He felt sorry for the prisoners and smuggled food in for them. The family say that if the war had continued he would have ended up confined or worse because of his eastern European origins. He was a gentle man, a self-taught artist, able to produce character sketches in pencil on whatever paper lay to hand.

Rudi, his son, was a young boy excited and shocked by the war going on around him. When bombs and incendiary devices started dropping in the area some of his friends were killed when they tried to poke and prod them.

He remembered american airmen hanging dead in their parachutes from trees and one black airman whose parachute had not opened, embedded in the ground.

Giesela's boy-friend, and eventual husband, Kurt Schmidt was a 'Kriegsmarine' and was assigned to the Baltic area. He worked on midget submarines and was not the most enthusiastic sailor. He once fired the torpedoes on one mission at a non-existent target in order to return home.

When eventually his unit surrendered to the English, he volunteered to guard his fellow marines, as the English captors could not spare sufficient guards.

Whilst undertaking the duties of an occupying force, John would also regularly call for Hilda at her family home in Hansa Strasse. He would appear in a range of vehicles to take her out, whatever was available and he could borrow, motor bike, lorry, jeep and even scout car.

John's German was very basic and Hilda's English was probably non-existent. However, love triumphed and at some stage John must have proposed to her. It is difficult to imagine the reaction of John's friends and family when he returned to England and told them he intended to marry a German girl.



His father was probably supportive, though Boy may have been less than enthusiastic. Swinton was hardly a cosmopolitan place in the 1940's and most peoples' view of Germans was shaped by newsreels which showed the atrocities committed by Hitler and the Nazis.

Bravely, Hilda travelled to England on her own. She took a train across Holland, but it was so over-crowded she travelled on the front of the engine. John was de-mobbed with the rank of acting-sergeant and he and Hilda married in 1947.



Harry's death

Harry Baker died April 6th 1949 3pm in Brookfield House at the age of 74. Towards the end of his life he may have developed dementia. This was not recognised or treated as it is today. There are stories of him wandering off to the Sportsman pub in his slippers. He may also have become rather difficult to get on with, as an article written on his death by an acquaintance to the local newspaper testifies :

> "Mr Harry Baker may not have been 'everybody's money', as the saying is, for he was somewhat eccentric, but I knew him for forty years and liked him better with every meeting. Our common interest in industrial history brought us together quite a lot; indeed he infected me with some of his enthusiasm, though he could never get me to join his expeditions in search of hidden 'bloomers' (furnaces).
>
> He was a man of great acuteness and penetration as well as engineering erudtion. No doubt he had some of the defects of his qualitative and these would have been the better for understanding him. I am glad he took care a few months ago to pass a great deal of his patiently acquired data to the local history department of Sheffield Libraries for the benefit of students of both history and industry"

Harry's funeral took place on 9th April at Swinton Parish Church, conducted by Rev H W Quarrell. (Reverand Quarrell was later to publish a history of Swinton using a lot of the research carried out by Harry) At the funeral were Boy, John and Hilda, Harry's brothers George, Edward and Stanley and Henry Baker, his nephew. Mr and Mrs Chapman, Mr Mace (representing Sheffield Trades Historical Society and the Hunter Archeological Society) PC Chappell , Sergeant Black and Frank Ogley, from Oxley and Cowards, were also there.

Harry had not made a will. He left £33,914 (£32,206 after death duties)



Henry Baker in later life. One of only a few photos of him as he was usually on the other side of the camera

On Harry's death, John and Boy received £15,000 each. Boy stayed at Brookfield House and John and Hilda moved to 66, Fitzwilliam street across the road. This house had been built in the 1930's for a cousin of John's. It had been built with servants in mind, as there was a push bell in most rooms with a board in the kitchen to show which bell had been pushed. It had a modern bathroom, a downstairs inside toilet, next to the coal house, and an integrated garage. The lounge and dining room had fashionable coal fire-places. Outside there was a lawned garden with borders. The French windows from the lounge looked out onto a paved area with a rockery. Behind a privet hedge close to the boundary with Greno House, next door, was a private concrete air raid shelter with bunks and a ventilation shaft.

John and Hilda took with them a share of the furniture and china from Brookfield house. This included the oak dining table, chairs and sideboard and a bedroom set bought by Harry and Nellie from Cockaynes in Sheffield in 1910. Hilda always maintained that Boy kept the lion-share of the china and furniture and that John accepted this for a quiet life. They did, however, acquire some china, particularly Rockingham, that was originally collected by John Baker for Oakwood Grange.

John and Hilda decided they would be able to live off the income from the stocks and shares inherited or purchased from the inheritance. John had obviously learned survival skills in the army and they kept chickens and rabbits and grew their own vegetables and fruit. Many food items were still on ration until the early 1950s.

On 16th October 1949 Peter Henry Goldthorpe Baker was born at the house. 'Oma' Gertrude came over from Germany after the birth with her friend Frau Michael. John and Hilda would then travel annually to Germany to visit the parents. Hilda gradually learned to speak English, mainly from listening to the radio. However she spoke only German to Peter until he was two years old.

There were no roll-on roll-off ferries or motorways to the continent in the early 1950's. The family travelled by car to Harwich and it was then lifted by crane into the hold of a passenger ship.

At the age of two baby Peter was taken on a tour of the Rhineland with his grandmother, staying in bed and breakfast guest houses. Nappies were dried on the car's radiator.

Back in England, John, to some extent, became his brother's minder. Boy similarly lived off his investments and no longer played the piano for a living. However he still liked to play the Bechstein in his lounge. He enjoyed horseracing and would travel to Doncaster, Market Weighton and Beverley. He still enjoyed visiting churches (he would eventually leave a good proportion of his money to Beverley Minister). He also liked to drink, often in some surprisingly insalubrious places. He would then drive home and John, on many occasions, had to go and rescue him. John also maintained his car for him.

Boy would not always be pleasant when drunk and one occasion came to John and Hilda's when drunk and banged on the door to be let in. When John refused, he broke the glass. This may be the reason why John became teatotal.

On 28th January 1955 Monica Gerda Baker was born, and that is where this very personal story ends, at least for the time being.

Peter Baker November 2010