



by

**Roger Cave**

## JOHN OTWAY CAVE (1834-1909)

John Otway Cave is notable in the history of our branch of the Cave Family for being the first member to have the name 'Otway'.

John Otway was born in 1834, and researches into family history conducted so far indicate that his male line can be traced back until 1666, i.e. just after the Restoration of the Monarchy under Charles II. The line goes back through six generations as follows, although a proviso should be added that I have not yet checked the primary sources myself, the information below being taken from the International Genealogical Index ('IGI')<sup>1</sup> and Hartopp's transcription of the Register of Freeman<sup>2</sup>.

Generation	Father	Dates	Wife
1	Thomas	1666 - ?	Sarah ? and/or Martha Lee
2	Thomas	1695 -	Mary Smith
3	Thomas	1722 - ?	?
4	Jarvis	1756 - ?	Elizabeth ?
5	Jarvis	1779 – 1864	Elizabeth Mowland
6	James	1802 – 1886	Elizabeth Freestone

1834, the year of John Otway's birth, is probably most famous in English history for the Tolpuddle Martyrs. William IV, the 'Sailor King,' had been on the throne for four years. It was not until three years later that the long reign of Queen Victoria commenced. The year was also in the midst of the run of Whig governments that predominated during the 1830s. The lethargic Lord Melbourne was Prime Minister as the year began, but was succeeded by the short lived ministry of Robert Peel that was to end the following year.

However, there can be little doubt that John Otway was born at a time when England was on the cusp of significant changes in its social, economic, and political framework:

- The population was growing rapidly. Between 1801 and 1851 the population of England and Wales doubled from 9 million to 18 million.
- The railway age was just beginning (the Liverpool to Manchester line had opened in 1830).
- 1832 was the year of the Reform Act which redistributed constituencies and increased the electorate by 57% to 217,000 and for the first time gave the middle classes a stake in government.
- Factory inspectors were first appointed in 1833, although it was not until 1847 that the employment of children under the age of 10 in textile factories was prohibited

---

<sup>1</sup> The International Genealogical Index is a record compiled by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) from parish registers and other records. It is said to contain the names of over 200 million people who were born or married generally before 1885. It is a 'secondary source', i.e. the reliability of the entries depends on the accuracy of the contributors; so any self-respecting genealogist will confirm IGI data by reference to the original records.

<sup>2</sup> Hartopp: 'Register of the Freeman of Leicester, 1196-1930'

- In 1833 the first government grants were made to the two main voluntary organisations sponsoring primary education.
- An act of 1833 abolished slavery in British colonies.
- In 1834 the Poor Law Amendment Act was passed with its basic principle being that outdoor poor relief should cease and that the poor should be placed into workhouses where conditions should be 'less eligible' than the worst conditions in the labour market outside.

These changes were also being reflected in Leicester itself. In size it was, of course, a lot smaller than the city of today. There were very few buildings west of the River Soar, south of the County Gaol on Welford Road, east of Rutland Street, and north of St Margaret's Church. However its population was rapidly rising, from around 17,000 in 1801 to about 45,000 in the mid 1830s who lived in 8,500 houses.

At the time of John Otway's birth the staple trades of Leicester were the manufacture of hosiery and worsted stockings. These manufacturers ranged from several large firms, which employed between four to five hundred knitting frames, to one man businesses. The 1831 census mentions 3,400 men employed in the trade, a figure which excluded the many women and children who also operated frames. A trade directory of 1835 mentions 119 hosiery firms with over 1,400 people employed in producing more than 18,000 dozens of hose, on over 2,500 frames, every week. Despite being born in Loughborough, John Otway clearly spent most of his life in Leicester. The Directory to Leicestershire & Rutland published by Pigot & Co in 1841, a few years after his birth, contains a description of the town as it was when he was growing up. The population of the borough in the 1831 returns was 39,306, and the directory describes some of its chief features:

*'The public edifices, exclusive of those appropriated to divine worship, are – the town hall, the exchange, the county gaol, the borough gaol (a commodious and suitable stone edifice), the new bridewell, the mechanic's institution, erected a few years since, and the town library. The places of amusement comprise assembly rooms, news and billiard rooms, and the theatre. Races take place annually, in September; the course, a mile in circuit, is situate on the London road; the stand is capacious, and at the meeting is most respectably filled.'*

The Directory also describes the industry which dominated the town at this stage in its history:

*'The staple trade of Leicester is the hosiery manufacture, particularly the worsted stocking branch: articles of this kind are manufactured here in greater quantities than in any other place in the world; there are more than two thousand five hundred frames in the town, all of which are employed in prosperous times, when upwards of eighteen thousand dozen of hose, etc., are produced per week; and it is estimated that nearly fifteen thousand persons derive support from the works in the town and the immediate neighbourhood....'*

The reference to 'prosperous times' in this quotation is somewhat ironic since the framework knitting industry in the 1830s was very depressed, a situation which would

have had profound implications for the Cave family, several generations of which, it is clear from the trades recorded against their names in the Register of Freeman, had been knitters and weavers. According to Elliott<sup>3</sup>: “the fortunes of framework knitting fell sharply in the years following the end of the Napoleonic wars, partly on account of a change of fashion which allowed mass produced ‘cut-ups’ (inferior imported hose cut from the cloth and seamed together) to compete with the traditional shaped stockings. Wages fluctuated around eight shillings (40p) a week in the three decades before 1850, and Thomas Cooper, the Leicester Chartist was told that the stockingers of 1842 might earn no more than four shillings and sixpence (22½p).”

John Otway is described in the Register of Freeman of Leicester as being the second son of James Cave. This immediately gives rise to a point of uncertainty. The Register names the first son of James as being another James, and the International Genealogical Index (‘IGI’) certainly includes a James, the son of James Cave and his



wife Elizabeth Freestone, as being baptised at St Mary de Castro on 6 June 1827. However, the IGI also shows William Freestone Cave baptised at the same church on 24 January 1825 (seven months to the day after James and Elizabeth were married). It was common in the first half of the nineteenth century for children to be given their mother’s maiden name as one of their forenames. This suggests that John Otway was the third son.

If, by the time James and John Otway came to be made free, William Freestone was no

longer alive, then this might explain why the latter was recorded as the second son. However, this does not appear to have been the case. John Otway was made free in 1856 and his brother James in 1853. There is no record in the Register as quoted in Hartopp that William was ever made free. However, another John Otway who was

---

<sup>3</sup> Elliott: “Victorian Leicester”

born on 10 May 1860 was the son of William Freestone Cave and his wife Harriet Caylow. (They married, according to the IGI, on 27 November 1843.) This indicates that William Freestone was alive at the time James and John Otway were made free, and so, for the time being, the reference to John Otway being the second son remains unresolved.

According to the IGI, John Otway was baptised at St Mary de Castro on 29 June 1837, the same day as two of his sisters, Emma and Mary Anne. It was frequently the case at this time that parents took more than one of their children to be baptised together, and therefore a few years could have elapsed since their birth. This certainly seems to have been the case as far as John Otway was concerned. For instance, the 1881 census gives his age as 47, and the 1891 as 57. It therefore appears that he was born in 1833/34 (i.e. before the commencement of civil registration of births.)

Another interesting aspect of his birth is that both the 1881 and 1891 censuses record that he was born in Loughborough. It is a matter of speculation as to why his mother should have been in Loughborough; at the time of writing Elizabeth Freestone has not been researched to see if she had any family connections with Loughborough which may have accounted for her being there.

As well as William Freestone, James, Emma and Mary Anne, the IGI indicates that John Otway had a third sister, Elizabeth, who was baptised at St Mary de Castro on 27 December 1829. The 1851 Census, mentioned below, also shows further members of the family as being George (born c.1838), Jarvis (c.1841), and Thomas (c.1846).

The really interesting matter to speculate upon is why John Otway was given the forename 'Otway'. It is obviously an unusual name, but one which became firmly established in the family. My great grandfather is always referred to as 'John Otway', not just 'John'. He made 'Otway' the second name of his own first son (Arthur), and his seventh child was named directly after him ('John Otway'). My grandfather (Edward Tom) named his eldest son Edward Otway (who was actually known as 'Otway' throughout his life). In turn I was christened 'Roger Otway', and my elder son is 'Jonathan Otway'. There has thus been five generations of Caves to date with the name. 'Otway' also passed as a name into other branches of the family. Two others of John Otway's sons (George and Charles) named sons George Otway and Charles Otway respectively. As mentioned above, John Otway's brother, William Freestone, named a son John Otway.

So why 'Otway'? I have not come across any previous members of the Cave family sharing it<sup>4</sup>. It might be that there is a link with the Freestone family, but it seems more likely to me to bear some relation to events in the history of Leicester in the 1820s and 1830s. For many years prior to the reform of municipal corporations in 1835 Leicester was governed by a corrupt Tory administration. This was a self-electing body chosen out of the ranks of the Freemen. No Whig nor dissenter was allowed to

---

<sup>4</sup> The IGI shows an Otway Cave christened on 11 April 1831 at Craven Chapel (Independent), Marshall Street, Westminster (the son of William Cave and Martha Buckell). This could well have been the Otway Cave whose marriage was registered at Clerkenwell in the quarter ending June 1855. No connection with the Leicester Otway Caves has been identified.

participate in the corporation. Voting in General Elections was also the privilege of the Freemen, which meant that, since only the Corporation could confer the freedom, the choice of Leicester's MPs was for all practical purposes, the prerogative of the Corporation. Nonetheless the Corporation was not able to dictate to Freemen as to how they should vote and in the General Election of 1818 one of the official Corporation candidates failed to be elected. For the next election in 1826 the Corporation fought ferociously to win the seat back. Honorary Freemen were appointed on an unprecedented scale, and no doubt the usual forms of bribery were highly prevalent. One of the persons selected by the corporation party as their candidate was Robert Otway Cave, a member of the family resident at Stanford Hall, near Lutterworth,<sup>5</sup> and he was successful in winning a seat in an election in which 4781 Freemen (were James and Jarvis Cave among them?) went to the polls (these were the days before secret ballots)<sup>6</sup>.

This event brought the names 'Otway' and 'Cave' into juxtaposition. If we assume there is no reason by way of family connection for my great-great grandparents naming their son as they did, this suggests two possible reasons for the choice of name:

- 'Otway' was chosen to show support for Robert Otway Cave – much in the same way as some people these days name their children after the members of football teams. I think that this is unlikely in the case of John Otway, as, by the time he was born, Robert Otway Cave had left parliament. In any event James Cave was surely more likely to support the Freemen's side in local politics, not least because the 1830s was a time when many framework knitters encountered a great deal of economic hardship.
- James and Elizabeth Cave simply liked the sound of the name. For the time being, in the absence of any other evidence, this seems the most likely reason to me<sup>7</sup>.

The 1851 Census shows the Cave family living at 19 Attkin Street. The map of Leicester drawn in the same year shows this street, joining Renshaw Street and Jarrom

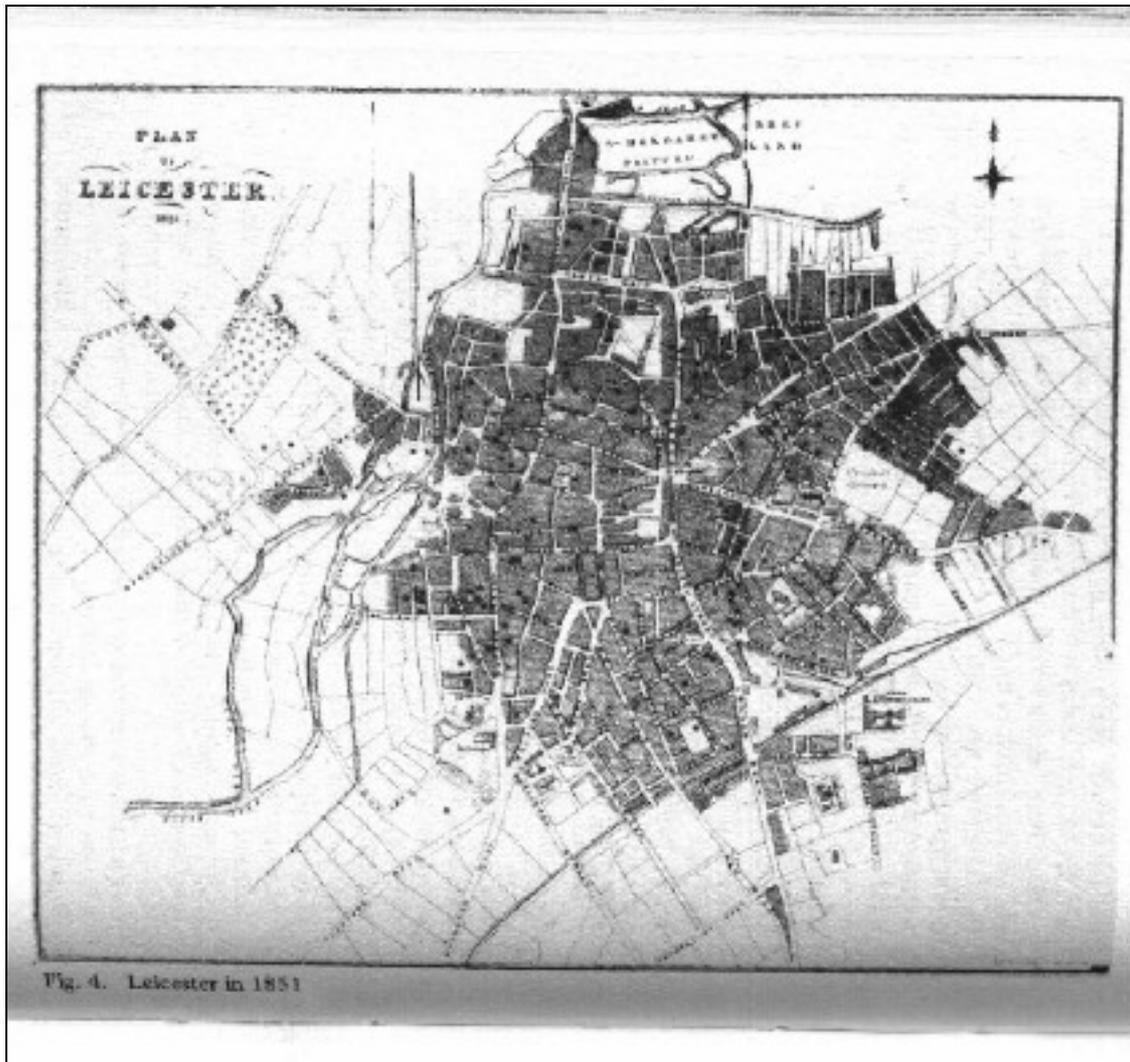
---

<sup>5</sup> The Cave family, who originally came from Yorkshire, farmed the land at Stanford Hall as tenants of Selby Abbey from 1430 until the dissolution of the monasteries when they bought it from Henry VIII. Following the death of the seventh baronet in 1792 the estate passed to his sister, Sarah Cave (3<sup>rd</sup> Baroness Braye) who had married Henry Otway in 1790 in London. He was a member of a family with land in Ireland, with their seat called Castle Otway at Templederry in County Tipperary. Sarah and Henry's children took the surname 'Otway-Cave'. Robert Otway Cave, one of their children, was born in 1796. There is a splendid monument to him in St Nicholas church, Stanford-on-Avon, adjacent to the Hall. The Hall also contains some mementoes of his election campaign.

<sup>6</sup> Cave's victory at the hustings was as far as the Corporation's success went since a squabble arose over the payment of his election expenses which were said to amount to £40,000. Cave as a result became so opposed to his former supporters that in the Parliament in which he sat he not only voted for Catholic Emancipation, but also became the spokesman for Leicester Liberals who favoured the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts which excluded non-conformists from public office. Cave did not stand again at the next election.

<sup>7</sup> By chance I came across an entry in the IGI recording the christening in Blaby in 1836 of Otwaycave Bennett, which odd name I can only explain by surmising that the name was picked for the same reason as 'John Otway'.. Interestingly this person's father was one of a number of Cave Bennett's recorded in Blaby in the eighteenth century.

Street, on the edge of the borough, close to Infirmary Square where John Otway's grandfather, Jarvis Cave, lived.



*Map of Leicester in 1851*

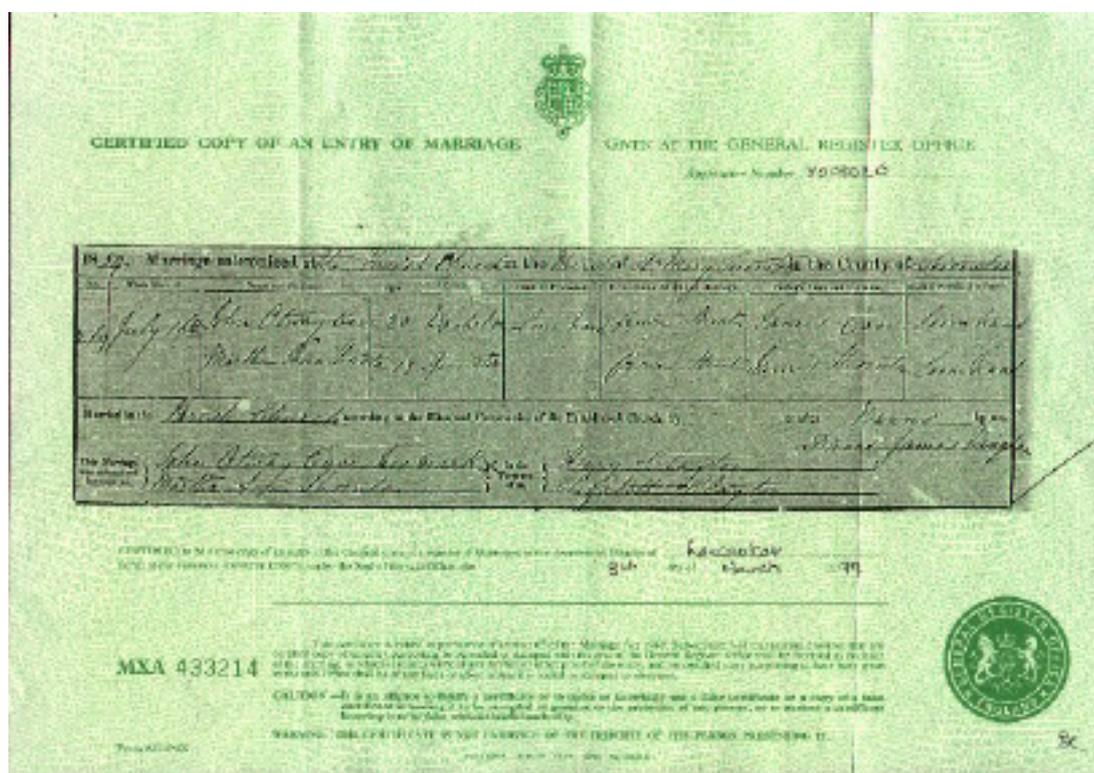
*Atkin Street is in the south west corner of the borough, just above Infirmary Square*

This area of the city was the north west of the Southfield, one of the three medieval fields of Leicester, which was enclosed in 1811 after which it was sold off in pieces by the Corporation. This part of the Southfield was mostly developed between 1850 and 1865 with streets of red-bricked terraced houses. So, it could be that the family moved into one of the new houses shortly after it was built. The census shows John Otway's mother and father (described as a warp loom hand and a straw bonnet maker respectively) as living at the house with five of their children, John Otway (loom hand), Mary Ann (warehouse girl), George, Jarvis, and Thomas.

John Otway was 20 when he married Martha Ann Thornton – not the last Otway to marry a Miss Thornton! (It does not appear that there was any connection between this Thornton family and that of my mother, since my preliminary researches into the

Thornton line of the latter indicate that her grandfather came from a family which had been resident in the Swineshead (near Boston) area of Lincolnshire for several generations.) The 1851 Census shows Martha as living with her family at 24 Crown Street, which was in the same neighbourhood as Attkin Street. Her occupation is given as warper. Her parents were James and Sarah Thornton. James was born in Lutterworth in 1808, and his occupation was a warp loom hand. Sarah was born in 1810 and her employment was as a pillow lace worker. There were five siblings of Martha also living at the house, Sarah (1840), Margaret (1843), Ann (1846), Elizabeth (1850), and James (1850).

Martha was 18 when the wedding took place at St Mary de Castro on Sunday 16 July 1854. The marriage was by banns rather than by licence, the witnesses were Henry and Elizabeth Clayton, and the priest was Rev D J Vaughan.



Marriage Certificate of John Otway Cave and Martha Ann Thornton 16 July 1854

Interesting features highlighted by the marriage certificate are:

- The fathers of both bride and groom are described as ‘loom hands’. This is presumably another term for framework knitter. That both were in the same trade is unsurprising given the large numbers of framework knitters in Leicester in the first half of the nineteenth century.
- John Otway is also described as a ‘loom hand’. Whether or not he worked alongside his father is not known. Martha has no occupation shown, which is somewhat surprising as it might have been expected that the daughter of what was presumably not a well-to-do family might have been employed well before she was 18, and she had been described as being a warper in 1851. However, as noted below, she was six months pregnant.

- Both bride and groom are shown as living in Crown Street. Had John Otway moved in to 24, or was he staying at another house in the street?.
- The certificate indicates that John Otway signed the register with his mark, thereby indicating that he was illiterate. This is not the case with Martha, who therefore, could sign her name.

It was not long, a little over three months in fact, before the couple's first child, Arthur Otway, was born. Martha must have been six months pregnant when she and John Otway married. Arthur's birth certificate indicates that he was born at 23 Crown Street. So perhaps John Otway and Martha had moved into a house in the same street as her parents lived in.

On 27 May 1856 John Otway was 'made free', that is he took the oath upon admission as a Freeman of Leicester. The Freemen of Leicester can trace their origins back to medieval times, the first recorded induction of Freemen being on 9 October 1196. Freemen are admitted under the 'law of custom' which dates from before 1188. The law was modified by the Municipal Corporation Act of 1835, which forbade local authorities from selling or making a free gift of the freedom to anyone who is not entitled to be made free. From that date the freedom could only be granted to hereditary Freemen or men apprenticed to Freemen. Thus it was through the hereditary right that John Otway became free, as it appears that all his direct male ancestors were Freemen. It would be interesting to ascertain the circumstances in which the first Cave became free – was this because he was a substantial tradesman in Leicester, or was it through being an apprentice of a Freeman? John Otway was, of course, able to pass on the hereditary right to his sons, several of whom became free. Edward Tom made the oath on 6 June 1901; Edward Otway on 21 November 1938; and I did on 8 May 1979.

It seems that Arthur was the first of thirteen children born to John Otway and Martha between 1854 and 1882, a span of 28 years, the last being born when Martha was 46. How long the growing family lived at 23 Crown Street is as yet uncertain. The census of 1881 recorded the family as living at 45 Laxton Street; but they were not at this address in 1871. The 1876 Post Office Directory, however, shows that John Otway was living then at the 45 Laxton Street address, so the family must have moved there between 1871 and 1876.

As the map copied from the Ordnance Survey map of 1902 as revised for the Inland Revenue in 1911, shows, Laxton Street ran between Havelock Street and Grange Lane in the area of the city to the south of The Newarke and north west of the Infirmary. Crown Street was just to the south, being the continuation of Asylum Street to Victoria Street. These streets disappeared around the 1970s with their sites now occupied by the extensions to the Leicester Royal Infirmary. It is difficult to understand how so large a family could have been accommodated in the sort of house likely to have been involved. In 1881 at 45 Laxton Street, not only was there the thirteen family members recorded in the census, but the record also shows a boarder, Kate Byrne, a 22 year old. Even in 1891 there were still ten people in the family home, which by then had become the neighbouring house, 47 Laxton Street. By the time of the 1901 census there were only four of the children remaining living there.



*Part of 1902 Ordnance Survey map of Leicester as revised for the Inland Revenue in 1911. Crown Street and Laxton Street can both be clearly seen.*

The cramped conditions were probably accentuated by the fact that John Otway carried on his business from home, so presumably there were several looms or knitting machines. By 1876 he was described as a ‘fancy hosiery manufacturer’, which sounds like an advance from a ‘loom hand’. His occupation on his death certificate was recorded as ‘a fancy hosiery loom hand (master)’. Given the occupations recorded for some of his children in the censuses, it seems quite likely that they were employed in the family business.

The following table shows the family members recorded in the censuses of 1881, 1891, and 1901 as living at the family home:

<b>Individual</b>	<b>1881 45 Laxton Street</b>	<b>1891 47 Laxton Street</b>	<b>1901 47 Laxton Street</b>
John Otway	Fancy Hosier (47)	Fancy Hosier (57)	Fancy Hosiery Manufacturer (67)
Martha Ann	Wife (44)	Wife (54)	Wife (64)
Arthur	Son (26)		
Elizabeth Harriet <sup>8</sup>			
Anne	Daughter (20)		
Charles	Butcher (17)		
Sarah Ann	Hosiery Winder (15)	Fancy Hosiery Warper (25)	Fancy Hosiery Hand (36)
George	Wharehouse Boy (14)		
Martha Ann	Scholar (12)	Fancy Hosiery Warper (22)	
John Otway	Scholar (7)	Auctioneer's Articled Clerk (17)	
Emma	Scholar (5)	Fancy Hosiery Winder (16)	
Fred	Son (4)	Warehouse Boy (14)	
Amy	Daughter (3)	Scholar (13)	Fancy Hosiery Hand (23)
Edward Tom	Son (10 mths)	Scholar (10)	Gas Inspector (20)
Ernest		Scholar (9)	Commercial Clerk (19)

Of the thirteen children this project is primarily concerned with Edward Tom, my grandfather, and so no particular research effort has been put into establishing the history of his brothers and sisters. Charles, George, Fred, and Ernest all became Freemen.

John Otway died at 47 Laxton Street on 18 March 1909 of cardiac failure brought on by chronic bronchitis. The death certificate records his age as 75 years, confirming that he was born in 1834. He had made his Will on 26 June 1905.

---

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Harriet does not appear on the 1881, 1891, and 1901 censuses, but the IGI indicates that she was born in 1859. Whether she did not survive until 1881, or had already left the family home by then, has not yet been established.



The grant of probate (which interestingly gives the date of death as 17 March 1909, the day before that shown on the Death Certificate) indicates that the gross and net value of John Otway's estate was £260:5s:0d (£260.25p).

He was buried on 22 March 1909 in the Welford Road cemetery<sup>9</sup> in Leicester, the service being conducted by Rev Jackson. The interment was number 51657 and the grave was number A473 in the consecrated area of the cemetery. The register maintained by Leicester City Council indicates that the purchaser and owner of the freehold brick grave was William F Cave, presumably his elder brother, William Freestone. The grave holds four other interments, John Otway's father and mother James (interred 12 March 1886 and 27 December 1887), and Mary Ann Kent<sup>10</sup> (5 March 1889).

The fifth interment is John Otway's widow, Martha Ann, who was buried on 29 December 1914, having lived to the age of 78. Interestingly, the register records her address as 48 Laxton Street.

John Otway's tombstone still stands, as the photograph alongside, which I took in April 2001, shows. It records the burial of his widow, but not those of his father, mother and sister. It honours the memory of one of his grandsons, Charles



Otway Cave, who was killed in action in France during World War I on 17 October 1914. Since the Register does not record that Charles Otway is actually interred there, presumably his remains are in a war grave in France.

John Otway's life completely spanned the reign of Queen Victoria, and, indeed he died just before the end of the Edwardian era at the beginning of the twentieth century. Leicester – and England – was a very different place at the end of his life compared to that which it had been at the beginning of it. Between the censuses of 1841 and 1901 there was a tenfold increase in the population of the borough, which

---

<sup>9</sup> The Welford Road cemetery in Leicester was opened in June 1849. The site on Knighton Hill was originally intended to be a cemetery for Dissenters. In the event the Borough took over the project and opened a cemetery, half consecrated, for the use of Anglicans, and half left unconsecrated for the rest. The cemetery quickly filled so that, in 1870, the Municipal authority bought an adjacent brick works and plaster pit raising the area to 30 acres. Today there are over 213,000 people buried there in about 40,000 graves. Not all have memorials. The cemetery is now effectively full.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Ann Kent's age at death is given in the register as 53. This implies that she was the Mary Anne who was John Otway's sister baptised with him in 1837.

was only in small part due to the absorption of Aylestone, Knighton, Belgrave, and West Humberstone within its boundaries in 1891. During his lifetime the Town Council had established a museum, recreation grounds and parks, a cemetery, and free public libraries. It had purchased the previously privately owned gas, electricity, and tramway companies. The town had been at the forefront of tackling social problems, being the first in the country to appoint Medical Officers, and the issues of sanitation and housing had been tackled with particular vigour, through the construction of sewerage systems, the purchase of a water company with reservoirs in Charnwood, and the construction of the first council houses. After the reform of municipal corporations in 1835 the Liberals had dominated the Council, but in the 1890s the first members of the Independent Labour Party were elected to it, and in 1909 the Liberals lost their majority. In 1903 a pact between the Liberals and the ILP resulted in them taking the two Leicester seats in the General Election of that year, the ILP candidate being Ramsay MacDonald.

I cannot recollect ever hearing any family references to John Otway, other than that he was the father of seven sons. Nonetheless, as the first of the 'Otways' he is a noteworthy character in the Cave Family history, and it would be nice to think it will prove possible to put more flesh on the bones of his history as recounted here.