

*A SMALL COG IN A
VICTORIAN WORLD
BY BRYAN ROBERTS*

“History is wound from many strands. The shortest and simplest of them are individual human lives, which on close examination turn out to be rather complicated. The largest skeins....are like huge cables, wound from [these] separate strands...”¹

Stonehouse in Gloucestershire was and remains an unassuming place. It lies below the Cotswold scarp, eleven miles south of Gloucester and 5 from the Severn estuary. In Victorian times (1872) it was described as a large village of 2,609 people adjacent to the Stroud canal. Since 1789 that canal had linked the coal from the Forest of Dean to the woollen mills of neighbouring Stroud, and more distantly London by means of the Thames-Severn canal. Stonehouse had also been an important junction since the railway mania of the 1840s with stations on the Midland and Great West Railways linking it to Gloucester, Bristol and Swindon. By 1872 it also had a branch line to Nailsworth, as well as a number of woollen manufacturers, twenty inns, mainly along its one turnpiked road, and what was described as a Head Post Office, albeit with a draper’s shop in the same building.² But I know from my own working experience how many small towns had Head Post Offices with administrative functions – even in the late 1950s there were sixty four in the South West Region alone.

It was here that Daniel Horsham was born in 1855, and here too he married, and obtained a sought-after job, so living out his life as a Post Office letter carrier (re-titled postman once the parcel service was added in 1883). However, he died aged forty-six – a fairly young age for a provincial postman – and the manner of his leaving this life was probably the most dramatic event during it. After a lengthy spell of sick absence from his job he was given ill-health retirement in 1901 and four months later committed to an asylum where he died within two days. His death certificate listed “Exhaustion from Melancholia” as the cause of death.

At this distance we cannot decipher what produced his breakdown. On recruitment to the Post Office he would have passed an entry exam and satisfied the physical requirements on height, weight and build. He would also have had access to free medical treatment from a doctor contracted to the Post Office (probably Dr Cooke in nearby Stroud).³ So it may not be too fanciful to imagine him buckling under the social pressures building during his lifetime.

Firstly, his job will have changed dramatically during his twenty five years in the Post Office. Over his lifetime national mail volumes grew eleven-fold,⁴ and during his working life the

¹ Norman Davies, *The Isles: A History* (1999 ed.): p.697

² John Marius Wilson, *Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales, 1870-1872*. [Link](#).

³ “List of Medical Officers in the Post Office (1901-1903)”, The Postal Museum and Archives (POST 64/13)

⁴ F.H. Williamson, “Post and Postal Services”, c.1920. The Postal Museum and Archives (POST 72/211)

population of Stonehouse increased from 2800 to 4090, swollen no doubt by movement from country to town as agricultural employment fell. This was the period of the “demographic transition” as life expectancy increased - through particularly the reduction in “early childhood mortality” and advances in public health, better medical treatment and improved nutrition which together more than compensated for a falling birth rate.⁵ The decline of agricultural employment, arising partly because of cheaper wheat imports from the 1870s, meant that rural job opportunities decreased. The jobs of those associated with Daniel reflect these changes. His father and his father in law started as agricultural labourers but later on they and the next generation turned to cloth working and railway employment.

The explosion in the volume of mail was aggravated by the frequent extension of deliveries to include more rural locations and the addition of parcels from 1883. Both increased the weight of mail considerably. The “tarmacking” of roads and the provision of bicycles still lay in the future, so he, and countless others, must for the most part have had to trundle unwieldy and heavily laden carts along rutted tracks.

The growth in economic activity, an indication of which was the huge increase in the volume of mail, was accompanied by extensions of the franchise for many adult working-class men. Extending the franchise and the growth of trade union membership, particularly from the 1880s and including Post Office workers, also underpinned the subsequent rise of the Labour Party. One of its precursors was the Fabian Society, founded in 1885, and one of its most influential members was Beatrice Webb who lived at Standish Hall, just two miles from Stonehouse

In the 1881 census Daniel and his wife were living alone in Stonehouse. By 1891 they had moved to an apartment in Bank Buildings in Regent Street by which time they had two children and were living also with his sixty-eight year old mother-in-law. Whilst by occupation she is recorded as a nurse, it seems she was herself sick. By 1901 the size of their household in the same building had grown to seven with the addition of his own mother (aged seventy-six) and his niece, a thirteen year “Nurse Child”. “Nurse Child” is often the description of an informally adopted infant in those less regulated times (my own mother was passed on for “a fiver” even twenty years later!) but she may equally have been used to care for her septuagenarian relatives.

We can only imagine what consequences this had for Daniel as head of the household. Firstly, the quarters they lived in must have been cramped and privacy difficult to find. Whilst multi-generational households were common, their impact on the individual inhabitants must have varied considerably. Moreover, the expense of keeping the home running could well have weighed heavily on its only breadwinner. Finally, the health of his mother, the most recent arrival, must have concerned him. She may well have been ailing during Daniel’s final year as she died in the next one.

⁵ “Populations Past – Atlas of Victorian and Edwardian Population”, *CAMPOP*. [Link](#)

Whatever the reason, Daniel ended his Post Office employment with a continuous four month period of sickness, at the end of which he was retired. Presumably his condition must have worsened and three months later, on 16th July 1901, he was committed to Wotton Asylum in Gloucester. This would have required the joint authorization of a Justice of the Peace and his own doctor.

Wotton was the earliest of Gloucester's trio of 19th-century asylums. It was opened in 1823 in the fond hope that "lunatics would be cured and idiots taught" at minimum cost to the tax-payer,⁶ but in practice they were places in which troublesome individuals were often incarcerated under harsh regimes of physical restraint and repressive discipline. Slowly conditions mellowed so that by 1890 Needham, the one-time Medical Superintendent of Wotton, could claim in his inaugural address to the Medico-Psychologist Association that they had been consigned to history.⁷ As elsewhere the numbers of inmates grew massively over the century. From Wotton's original capacity of 200, numbers increased in the Gloucester Asylums to 1059 by 1900. This growth was accommodated by various extensions with yet a further block added in 1909.⁸

Daniel was diagnosed with melancholia, which can nowadays be loosely equated with depression, with many sufferers tending to have suicidal tendencies. Committals for such a reason constituted a quarter of all admissions, with a third of them dying within the first year.⁹ There must be a suspicion given that Daniel died within two days of admission that he was one of those that took his own life.

Whatever the truth of this, he lived through a period of intense change in which the pressures stacked up against him and countless others multiplied greatly. In this case they may well have contributed to a sad end for Daniel in spite of his secure pension earned from a regular and respected job.

⁶ Historic England, "The Growth of the Asylum – A Parallel World". [Link](#).

⁷ Frederick Needham, "Presidential Address delivered to Annual Meeting of the Medico-Psychological Association in 1887", *Journal of Mental Science*, No. 143 (October, 1887): pp. 343-363.

⁸ 'Gloucester: Hospitals', in *A History of the County of Gloucester: Volume 4, the City of Gloucester*, ed. N M Herbert (London, 1988), pp. 269-275. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/glos/vol4/pp269-275>

⁹ Hill, Simon A., and Richard Laugharne. "Mania, dementia and melancholia in the 1870s: admissions to a Cornwall asylum." *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 96, no. 7 (2003): 361-363.

Fact Sheet: Daniel Horsham

Pensioner Details
<i>Pensioner name:</i> Daniel Horsham
<i>Person ID:</i> GC1003
<i>Your name:</i> Bryan Roberts
<i>U3A group:</i> Sutton
Part One: Birth and Family
1: When and where was your pensioner born?
Daniel Horsham was born at Wheatenhurst in Gloucestershire in April 1855. He was baptised at the Church of England Church in Eastington, also in Gloucestershire, on 27th May of the same year.
2: Who were your pensioners' parents? Record any details you can find out about them here (e.g. occupation, religious affiliation, whether they could read or write)
<p>His parents were Daniel Horsham (the same name) and Louise Horsham (nee Ridler). His father was born in 1821 and was baptised at Eastington Parish Church on 10th June. I have found no record of his mothers' birth or Baptism but her own father was Thomas Ridler.</p> <p>They were married in December 1846, in Stroud when he was 25 and she was 20 years old. By the 1861 census he was recorded as being employed as an Agricultural Labourer. He died at nearby Wheatenhurst in April, 1873 at the age of 52. His mother outlived him and died aged 76 in 1902 when living in the household of Daniel, her son.</p>
3: Did your pensioner have any siblings? What were their names, and how old were they in relation to your pensioner? Use this space to record anything else you have found out about them (e.g. occupation)
<p>He had three older sisters, Ann, born in 1848, Eliza, born in 1849, and Fanny, born in 1853. These died in October 1935, 1893 and 1895 (in Cheltenham) respectively. Daniel was 7 years younger than Ann, 8 years younger than Eliza, and 2 years younger than Fanny. He also had one younger brother, Alfred, born in March, 1859.</p> <p>Ann is recorded as being a Woolpicker in the 1861 census. She married John Hooper (a cloth worker) on 26th Dec 1869 and had 3 children (Louise, John, and Daniel). She died on 30th Sep, 1935</p> <p>Eliza was married in the third quarter of 1868, at age 19, to George Thomas Lewis. She had 7 children by 1891 (Clara aged 20, Walter 17, Earnest 14, Frederick 13, Florence 11, Percy 8 and Mabel 6) and died in 1893. She is not recorded as having any occupation. Fanny married George Hooper on 26th Aug, 1875 (I am not sure whether he was related to John, Ann's husband). George is recorded as being employed as a Coal Dealer. They moved to Cheltenham (1 Hungerford Cottages) before 1881 and had had 4 children by 1991 (George, Kate, Frederick and Anna). She was employed as a domestic servant. She died in the third quarter of 1895.</p>

Alfred was a Clothworker in Mar, 1877 when he married Sarah Dunn in Stroud Parish Church. He had 3 daughters. He lived in Rock Cottages in Stroud, and survived till 1943, when he died there at the age of 84.

Boarders

Samuel Organ lived with the family for the 1861 census. He is recorded as a 29 year old Carpenter born in Whitminster, Gloucestershire. By the 1871 Census he had married Adeline, a Woollen Cloth Worker aged 39 year, and they had a 1 y.o. daughter, Fanny. They lived in Nastend. There are no details of the 1881 Census but in the 1891, 1901, and 1911 censuses he, his wife and his daughter, are still shown as living at Nastend and employed in the same jobs – his daughter is recorded as a Dressmaker. He may well have died at Wheatenhurst, Gloucestershire, when he was 91 but this is not proven.

George Hooper – he is shown as a 22 y.o. Railway Worker boarding with the Horsham household in the 1871 census – he went on to marry Fanny – see above.

Thomas Ridler – the 70 y.o. widowed father of Louisa also lived in the household at the date of the 1871 census.

Part Two: Marriage and children

1: Did your pensioner marry? What was their spouse's name, and when and where did they marry them? Use this space to record any extra details you can find out about their spouse (e.g. when/where they were born, their occupation)

In December 1875, when Daniel was 20 years old, he married Sarah Ann Perkins, who was one year his elder, in Stroud.

Her parents were Frederick and Sarah Perkins, of 1 Sheppard's Row, Stonehouse. They had married on 24th September, 1846 in Eastington. However her father died in 1858 when he was 36, leaving his wife as Head of the family by the 1871 census. (I can find no record of the 1861 Census). Her mother is recorded as a Laundress in 1871, and both Sarah Ann and Ellen as Wool Cloth workers that same year. During his life Frederick was recorded as an Agricultural Labourer.

Sarah Ann had 2 siblings, a brother named Albert born in 1850, and 4 years her elder, and Ellen, born in 1857 and thus 3 years younger. She herself died on 4th October, 1935 aged 82 at Stonehouse, with the Wesleyan minister officiating. She had continued to live in High St, Stonehouse after the 1911 census till at least 1928, but I could find no record of her between then and her death.

2: Did your pensioner have any children? What were their names, and when they were born? Use this space to record any extra details you can find out about them (e.g. occupation, where they lived later in life)

The couple had 2 children. The elder of the two was Percival Daniel Horsham born in December, 1887, and the younger Lilian Nellie on 22 February, 1890.

The son, Percival, died in 1969 in Stroud when he was 81 years old. His occupation is recorded as Insurance Collector. He lived out his life in High Street, Stonehouse, and died there on 21st Jan, 1969, leaving assets valued at probate of £4700. I have no information on whether he married or had offspring. At age 24 (in the 1911 census he was still living with his mother).

In 1901, in the March census – three months before Daniel died -- he had both his mother (Louise Ridler) and his mother-in-law (Sarah Perkins) living in his household. His wife's niece, Amy Isabella, also lived with them – though only 13 at the time she is recorded as a Nurse, possibly looking after the 70 year old widows. By the 1911 census she is recorded as working as a house maid (one of three domestic servants) in a 12 room house in Minchinhampton also in Gloucestershire. She does not appear to have married, dying in a Bournemouth Nursing Home in 1949, and leaving assets of £3547)

I have been unable to find anything about Lilian's subsequent life or death.

Part Three: Work

1: What occupation was your pensioner recorded as doing in census years? Please make sure to state clearly which year you are referring to

1861 and 1871 censuses show Daniel as a 6 and 16 year old scholar respectively

In the 1881 census he is listed as a Village Letter Carrier.

In the 1891 and 1901 censuses he is recorded as employed as a Letter Carrier

2: What occupations were people living with your pensioner (e.g. spouse, children, boarders) doing in the census years? Please make sure to state clearly which year you are referring to

In the **1861 Census** when Daniel Horsham was 6 years old, his father, also called Daniel, was Head of the Household and shown as employed as an Agricultural Labourer. Ann, the 13 year old daughter was listed as a Wool Picker. The younger sisters and Daniel (the son) are shown as scholars. His mother was not employed, nor of course was his 2 year brother, Alfred. They had a 29 year old lodger, Samuel Organ, recorded as a Carpenter, living in their household. Their address was Nastend, Eastington. The transcript for this census is inaccurate – it gives their name as Horshaw, rather than Horsham.

By the **1871 census**, the two elder sisters (Ann and Eliza) had married and moved out, leaving his father, now shown as a Railway Labourer, and Louisa, his mother (again not shown as employed). Fanny (his 18 year old sister was employed as a Woollen Clothworker). Daniel and his young brother (Alfred) were scholars. In addition George Hooper, a 22 years Railway Labourer lived with them as did the 70 year old Thomas Ridler (the father of Louisa), who was shown as a former Woollen Clothworker. The family was still living at Nastend, Eastington.

By **1881** Daniel had set up home with his wife, Sarah Ann at 48, High Street, Stonehouse. She was not shown as employed whereas Daniel was listed as a Village Letter Carrier. They had no-one living with them.

By the **1891 census**, Daniel and Sarah had two children (Percival and Lilian, aged 3 and 1 respectively) living with them. The wife is not shown as employed. Also living with them was Sarah Perkins, Sarah Ann's 68 year old mother. She is recorded as a Nurse, but she appears to have been sick herself. They were by then living in Bank Buildings, Regent St, Stonehouse.

In the **1901 Census** the family is still shown as living in Bank Buildings, Regent St, Stonehouse. Sarah Ann, Daniel's wife is again not shown as having any external employment, and the 2 children are shown as Schoolchildren. Sarah Ann's mother is still living with them and again she was recorded as a Monthly Nurse (but sick), as was Louisa Horsham (Daniel's widowed mother). Also living there was Sarah Ann's niece, Amy Isabelle Perkins, who at 13 years old was employed as a Nurse Child. It is not clear whether she was occupied in tending for her two 70 year old relatives or as a nurse elsewhere. In this March 1901 Census Daniel is still shown as employed as a Letter Carrier – in the next 4 months he was to be pensioned off with ill-health, and committed to an Asylum, where he died.

Following his death, his wife, Sarah Ann, is recorded as the head of the family in the **1911 census**. She lived in High Street, Stonehouse and is shown as a shopkeeper in a Hardware Store. She still had both children living there aged 23 (Percival) and 21 (Lilian). She also had a 50 year old sister (Ellen Abia Perkins) and 87 year old mother (Sarah Perkins) living there. There is some variability in the dates given for Ellen's birth in various records. At earlier censuses Ellen worked as a Needlewoman and as a Domestic Servant in 2 households in Stonehouse and near Stroud. Also living in Sarah Ann's household in 1911 was a lodger (William Edward Clayton). He was a Railway Signaller working for the Midland Railway. He originated in Nottinghamshire. Sarah Ann herself died in the 4th quarter of 1935, aged 82 - see also Part 2, Section 1.

Part Four: Anything Else

Please use this space to record anything else you have found out about your pensioner

As stated Daniel Horsham died at an asylum, at Wotton Village Asylum in Gloucester City, only days after his retirement. His death was attributed to "Exhaustion from Melancholia". by the informant, who was the Superintendent of the Asylum. This Asylum had a renowned Superintendent, Frederick Needham, in the decades before Daniel arrived. In later years he received a peerage, but he had moved on by the time Daniel's time. The value of Daniel's estate which went to his wife was recorded as £87.

The only other entry I have found relating to him is that he donated periodicals to the Infirmary Committee in 1887 – this from a newspaper article in the Gloucester Citizen of April, 1887.

Part Five: Your Sources

Please use this space to record the sources you have used

1861 Census: RG 9, Piece 1770, Folio 118, Page 6

1871 Census: RG 10, Piece 2627, Folio 54, Page 5

1881 Census: RG11, Piece 2541, Folio 27, Page 9

1891 Census: RG 12, Piece 2021, Folio 43, Page 8

1901 Census: RG 13, Piece 2434, Folio 49, Page 9

1855 Baptism – Gloucestershire Archives - Church of England Parish Register – Ref. No. P 127 in 1/13.

1875 Marriage - Gloucestershire Archives – Church of England Parish Records – Ref. No. Gdr/VI/464

Entry to Post Office employment – British Postal Museum and Archive Series POST 58; Ref. No. 87.

Lunacy Patients Admissions Register – Class MH 94, Piece 37. (National Archives of UK, Kew)