

TOM LOCK

No one in Taunton probably was more delighted at the prospect of a contest in Taunton than Mr Tom Lock, who is well known as the last of the potwallers. He is in his 93rd year and has



had the privilege of voting for Parliamentary candidates in the borough for almost 70 years. He is probably the oldest voter on the register in the whole of the county of Somerset, if not in England, who was able to record his vote during this election. Even now Mr Lock can read without the aid of spectacles.

Taunton Courier, 10 October 1900

POT WHALLERS

Taunton, as far as the matter can be traced, was a borough town as early as the common people became privileged with a representation. It sends two members to parliament.

The powers of election here are subject to the following restrictions.

This right is limited to the borough, the bounds of which, as to the rights of election, so far from co-extending with those of the town, do not coincide even with those of the parish of St Mary Magdalen, which lies with the town.

The right is further confined to parishioners, not be stated paupers, not receiving any share of the alms distributed from the funds of the respective charities left to the town.

*These restriction excepted, the right of voting is the privilege of all the inhabitants, who dress their own victuals in their own room, or keep a table to themselves. Hence they are generally called Pot walloners or pot walloper franchises and could be extremely unruly (as in Taunton where two men were killed in the election riots of 1754). **Joshua Toulmin***

In 1714 there was an election at Taunton. It was the first in the history of Parliamentary elections in the borough at which a petition against the return was presented. It was the election which brought about the consideration and settlement of the rights of pot-wallopers. Pynsent and Smith were the new candidates. Warre and Portman were the old representatives. The Mayor returned Sir Francis Warre with 637 votes and Henry Portman with 635. The votes for the defeated candidates were reckoned at 318 each.

A petition was lodged, and it was heard by the House of Commons on Thursday 28 July 1715. The House resolved

"That the right of election of burgesses to serve in Parliament for the Borough of Taunton in the County of Somerset is in the inhabitants within the said borough being pot wallers: and not receiving alms or charity".

These terms were precisely defined in 1774 when the House agreed that

*"A pot waller is a person who furnishes his own diet, whether he be a house keeper or only a lodger" and. "that to be a pot whaler qualified to vote at Taunton it has been always understood both before and since the determination in 1715 that such person must have a legal parochial settlement in the borough". **WG Willis Watson - May 1921***

Richard Thomas : I have been a potwaller 35 years ; I have voted often and often, talked about the right of a potwaller to vote ; he must have been a potwaller for six months previous to the election ; he must have a room ; one without a fire-place will not do ; he must furnish his own diet, he must boil it or bake it, or anything in that way ; I never heard that boarding with the landlord would do ; don't know whether dressing it at his landlord's fire will do ; if a man has a fire-place in his room and chooses to live on bread and cheese, I think that will do ; I recollect seeing Mr. Rogers and Mr. Tripp at the poll as assessors. From what I then heard that is my opinion.

A Potwaller giving evidence at Voting enquiry

FRIDAY.

A DETERMINED "PLUMPER."—This morning the revising barrister took two or three cases unavoidably deferred yesterday, in the course of which a well-known potwaller exclaimed—"I'll never vote for my party no more—(a laugh). No; I've voted for 'em seven and thirty years—I have—and I don't know whether I'll vote for 'em again. But if I do, mind, it shan't be a plumper—(laughter). "Never a plumper more!"—(renewed laughter). Turning to the revising barrister, he continued :—"As for you, sir, you be a — nice sort of an old gentleman—that you be, sir ; and if you'll stand for the borough, so help me — I'll vote a plumper for you." (Roars of laughter, in which his Honour heartily joined). "Well, my good man, though I am not eligible, I should like to take your name?" said his Honour. Voter—"My name is John Broom, an independent chimney-sweep ; and I've made up my mind to resign the blue hat to Mr. Trenchard from this time—(great laughter). There! I swore I would come down here and have it out, and now I've a' done it!" His Honour : I think you must stop now. Broom : Very well, sir—the storm's over now—(laughter).

John Broom, an "eccentric chimneysweep" Taunton Courier 1 Oct 1856

John Broom, an eccentric sweep, was charged with a breach of the peace the same day in the market. Defendant was found in the market addressing a crowd of disorderly people on the subject of the price of corn, when Inspector Samuels twice ordered him to go home, and defendant promised he would. Some time afterwards Mr. Stuckey found Broom again in the corn market standing on a tub, addressing a large mob filling up the roadway, in a loud tone, and the mob were hooting and hurraing. He was complaining of the price of wheat, saying the farmers ought to be put down and the poor ought not to submit to it. Defendant was making a great disturbance. Mr. Stuckey ordered him to desist, and Broom left the market and went to the other side of the road, where he began again, and the crowd again commenced cheering. Mr. Stuckey then went and took him into custody.—

Stuckey then went and took him into custody.—Defendant, who was very much excited, said "it was quite true, but he only spoke, and could they hurt him for that?"—Broom created some amusement by throwing a handful of mixed corn (wheat, barley, and cly) which a farmer had been offering in the market, on the Bench, and asking in a tone of triumph, "There, gentlemen, do you call that food for Christians? why you wouldn't give it to your pigs ; and they be asking 9s. 6d. a bushel for it!"—The magistrates ordered defendant to find sureties to keep the peace, and in default he was committed to gaol.

The "eccentric sweep" again

The 1832 Reform Act changed all this. However it appears that once registered as a potwaller the entitlement remained [whilst the potwaller was still in compliance with the rules] until he died. So the numbers of potwallers reduced year by year.

Numbers of Potwallers In Taunton

Wednesday, March 21, 1866.

THE ELECTORAL RETURNS.

TAUNTON.

Population in 1831	12148			
Population in 1866 (computed)	14919			
Increase	2771			
Inhabited houses in 1861				2899
Number of electors on Parliamentary Register:—				
	1832-3.	1865-6.	Increase.	Decrease.
£10 occupiers	588	843	255	—
Potwallers	361	54	—	307
Total	959	897	255	307
Net decrease, 52.				
Double entries on Register of 1865-6:—				
As £10 occupiers			31	} 58
As £10 occupiers and <u>potwallers</u>			27	

BOROUGH OF TAUNTON.

The register of persons entitled to vote at any election of member or members to serve in Parliament for the borough of Taunton between 1st January, 1880, and 31st December, 1880, both inclusive, supplies the following information:—

District No I. includes burgesses numbered from 1 to 349 (potwallers 6, lodgers 1).

„ II. 350 to 616 (potwallers 5, lodgers 1).

„ III. 617 to 1026 (potwallers 1).

„ IV. 1027 to 1270 (lodgers 1).

„ V. 1271 to 1570 (lodgers 1).

„ VI. 1571 to 1887 (lodgers 1).

„ VII. 1888 to 2225 (lodgers 2).

The gross total of 2225 voters, of course, includes some since dead, some removed, and some duplicate names. In 1873 the register contained about 1900 votes, of which 1105 voted for Mr Barclay, 918 for Mr Serjeant Cox, and 890 for Mr (now Sir) H. James.

...now annexed to church and chapel doors, and in other public places. We observe that in this borough the number of "Potwaller" voters is now only 12; in 1873 it was 29, and in 1824 the "Potwallers" numbered 574.

.....By 1881 there were only 8 remaining who claim to exercise their vote as belonging to this class.....Taunton Courier 30 November 1881

Election time in Taunton

ROWDY ELECTIONS
But I must retrace my steps to The Parade. My father used to talk of happenings there in the old days when hustings were erected for the return of two Members of Parliament. Elections in those days were no joke. The candidate had to address the voters from the hustings, and rotten eggs, dead cats, &c., were freely used. There were many free fights. In my day the unsuccessful candidate generally went away to the neighbouring town—Bridgwater—to explain why he had been rejected. Election petitions followed. These elections were a great hindrance to trade. Through passions rising so high many a tradesman lost good customers.
My father and uncle were the last but one of the old potwallers, Mr. Tom Lock being the last. It was an old qualification of boiling their own pots, and potwallers were, I think, what we should now term "Freemen" of the town. For weeks before the elections the town was flooded with leaflets, which raked up in poetry all the scandal from generations back of their opponents. These were supposed to have been composed by a tramp, and signed "Nickey Vilment"

Not Quite the last Pot Walloper

On Monday evening the death occurred of Mr William Garland of Bath Place, boot and shoe manufacturer aged 87. Mr Garland was one of the last of the old pot wallers – indeed there is only one, we believe, now remaining the town in the person of Mr Tom Lock, who is aged 83 but of vigorous habit, considering his years and erect as of yore. The venerable system of the "potwalloping" vote will there be extinct in the town at the death of Mr Lock, who we trust, may be spared for many years.

Taunton Courier 18 May 1892

THE LAST POT WALLER

Tom Lock was happy to relate to the Taunton Courier facts about old Taunton

Mr Tom Lock informs us that he remembers seeing the man Obediah dive from a very high ladder into the River Tone near Mr Trood's house. Before taking the dive he did several acrobatic feats on the top of the ladder, while a mate of his made a collection from the hundreds of people assembled, not only on the bridge, but in the boats on the river to witness the dive.

Taunton Courier. 11 May 1898

Mr Tom Lock informs us that whilst a drummer in the old Militia he has often gone with the Recruiting Sergeant beating up recruits. Sergeant Phillips, of the Coldstream Guards, was stationed in Taunton for recruiting purposes, and with the permission of Captain Healy, the then adjutant of the Militia, he often took drummers with him to the neighbouring towns recruiting. He also attended the Taunton Races and many club-walks in the neighbourhood. Mr Lock also informs us that he has always understood that the 2nd Regiment of Foot was colonel Kirk's original regiment.

Taunton Courier. 19 Jan 1898

ARTICLES ABOUT TOM LOCK

I notice that that perennial evergreen the last of the Potwallers is still *en evidence* and the sturdy old octogenarian exhibits few signs of bending with the weight of years. His stalwart proportions looms erect and comparatively vigorous from out the most of bygone local history. A generation must have passed since Mr Tom Lock performed the homely but not very scientific feat which secured him a vote for life viz. boiling his own pot, and there is not small consolation in the fact that Mr Lock has survived by many years the decease of so extraordinary and ridiculous a qualification for the exercise of the franchise.

Mr Lock was in his younger days a politician of considerable activity and his knowledge of the intricacies and the questionable method of the local political system of that time, combined with a retentive memory, renders a conversation with him at all times interesting and instructive.

He served for some years as warder in the Somerset County Gaol, in Shuttern, and it was only a few evenings since I heard him recounting the extraordinary sensation

which assailed him whilst keeping guard in the condemned cell in which the notorious publican Joel Fisher was confined previous to his execution for the murder of his wife at Weston super Mare. As Mr Lock says that on one occasion he was in the cell with Fisher from 7pm until 6am the following morning, one can hardly wonder at the tension of his nerves all that time. The execution took place in 1844 and caused a considerable sensation in the town.

Mr Lock who has been remarkably free from the ills that afflict humanity during his long life, and can even now see to read his newspaper without the aid of glasses, has lately been prostrated by an attack, I believe, of pneumonia, but his renewed health leads me to hope that he may long remain in the flesh, the last of the Potwallers.

Taunton Courier, 26 April 1893

“At the top of High street, Taunton, abutting on Vivary Park, between the site of the Savings Bank (formerly occupied by the Full Moon) and the entrance to Wilton House there stood at one time a group of small tenements. Through one of those houses ran a small stream of water. Another was dedicated to Bacchus, and this house bore the somewhat unique sign of “Hit or Miss”.

[information provided by Tom Lock]

Taunton Courier, 4 Oct 1899

Mr Tom Lock reaches his 92nd year today and his many friends in the town will still wish him happy returns of the day. Despite his great age, until within the last few days, Mr Tom Lock was to be seen walking about the main thoroughfares, his tall herculean frame being very little bent, considering the advanced age he has attained.

Taunton Courier 6 Feb 1901

Taunton Market Trustees



The Committee reported that they had received an application on behalf of Tom Lock, who is now 95 years of age, for some further assistance during a serious illness from which he is suffering and which necessitated special treatment. They recommended that 7s a week [instead of 4s as present] be paid him during the continuation of his illness. On the motion of Mr. Lewis, seconded by Mr Wickenden, it was decided to give him 10s a week instead of the 7s recommended by the Committee.

Taunton Courier, 9 Dec 1903

*Sadly Tom Lock passed away the following year - the announcement
in
The Taunton Courier was as follows:-*

A well-known personage of Taunton, who has been present at some stirring political scenes in the borough, some of which have become historic, has, we regret to say, just passed away in the person of Mr Tom Lock, who died on Tuesday morning last. Tom Lock, as he was familiarly called by all who knew him was a Tauntonian and had reached the great age of 95. For some years he had been living at the house of

his nephew, Mr Thomas Bosley, of High Street, Taunton, having been a widower for many years. He never had any family.

Tom Lock had become well known as being the last of the "Pot Wallers" by which term is know that a person was entitled to the franchise by reason of renting a room with a fire-place sufficient capacity to boil a pot.

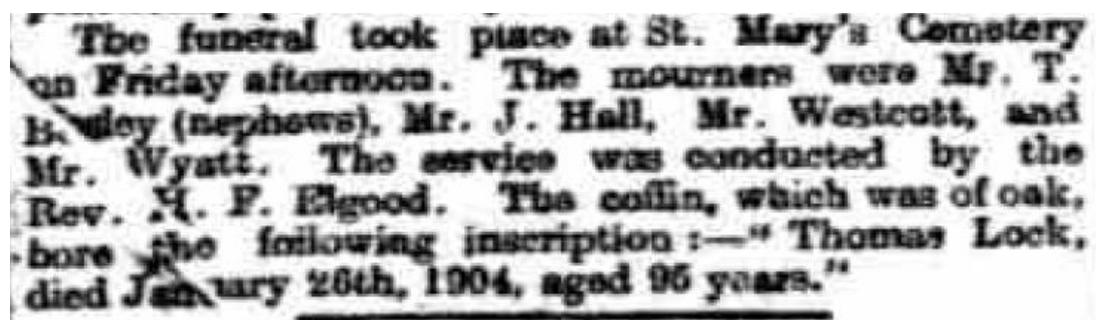
The last time he voted in this capacity was in the General Election of 1900 when Colonel Welby was opposed in Taunton by Mr Walker King. The Radicals subsequently object to his vote and Mr Lock's name, as a result, was afterwards struck off the register.

Some years ago Mr Lock contributed some interesting items to our "Notes and Queries" columns, and we had it from him himself that on the historic occasion when Mr Benjamin Disraeli contested Taunton against Lord Taunton, Tom Lock was sent post haste to Dunster Castle to inform the then head of the House of Luttrell, who at that time was a Conservative, the Mr Disraeli had arrived at Taunton. It was on this historic occasion that Benjamin Disraeli as he then was, after being defeated, spoke from the portico the Castle Hotel, Taunton, and after being twitted by his opponent, Lord Taunton as being "a young unknown man", retorted "I shall be remembered long after you are dead and forgotten."

During his long life Mr Lock filled many offices. He was for 18 years a warder at the old Taunton Prison and for 35 years was toll collector to the Taunton Market Trustees, gaining the esteem and regard of the members.

In politics he was a staunch Conservative. For many months past Mr lock had been in failing health, and notwithstanding the attention and skill of his medical adviser, Dr Macdonald, he passed away as the result of old age.

Taunton Courier, 3 February 1904



The funeral took place at St. Mary's Cemetery on Friday afternoon. The mourners were Mr. T. Bosley (nephew), Mr. J. Hall, Mr. Westcott, and Mr. Wyatt. The service was conducted by the Rev. M. P. Elgood. The coffin, which was of oak, bore the following inscription:—" Thomas Lock, died January 26th, 1904, aged 95 years."

TOM LOCK



Tom Lock was born in about 1810 in Bristol, Gloucestershire. There are no further details available about his parents or where exactly he was born.

Tom Lock was a member of the Somerset Militia and served as a drummer. The article lists details of the Somerset Militia circa 1834.

Chard. The drummers were William Lock, Joseph Davey, G. Creedy, J. Totterdell, Tom Lock (the old Taunton pot-walloper), Robert Sansom, Lewis Modley, and John Pearce. Of the foregoing names only two are now living, namely, Mr. Tom Lock and Mr. George Stuckey (who is now living at Burnham). The pay per week then was:— Sergeants, 10s 6d ; corporals, 8s 2d ; drummers, 7s. The staff used to attend St. Mary's Church every

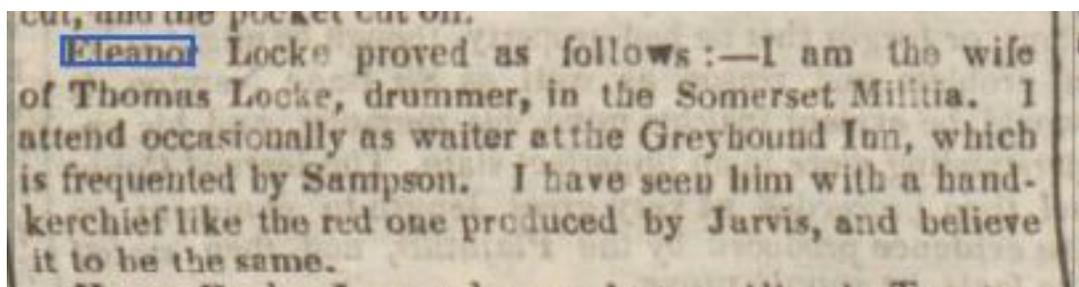
Family

Tom's wife was Eleanor, who was born in 1803 in Luppit in Devon.

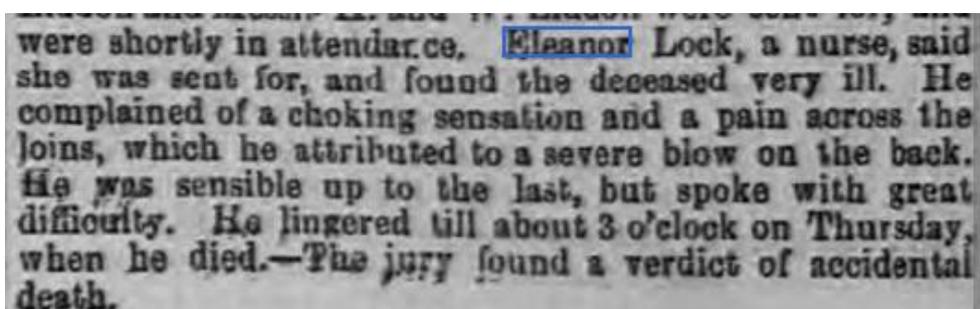
[There is a record of the baptism of an Eleanor Fowler, daughter of George and Betty Fowler, on 9 September 1804 at St Mary's church Luppitt, Devon]

No record of when the marriage took place.

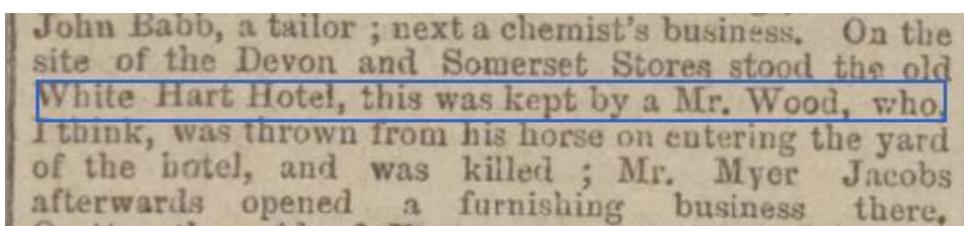
There are various mentions of Eleanor Lock or Locke.



Taunton Courier, 20 August 1834 – Giving evidence in court.



Taunton Courier – 10 July 1861

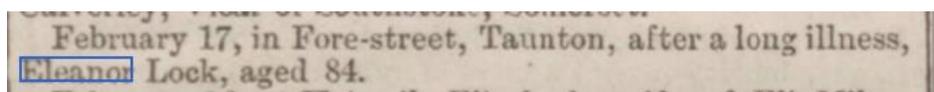


The owner of the White Hart Hotel was injured in an accident. Eleanor Lock was, of course, living in Cox's Court not far away -

In the 1861 census Tom was living alone at Cox's Passage [Court], Eleanor was living as a nurse to a family in Staplegrove. However with Tom was a "granddaughter" Ellen Eliza Locke, born 1846 in Taunton. Tom's name was given as "Thomas Locke". *[Not sure who Ellen Locke actually was.]*

[An Elizabeth Eliza Locke was baptised at St Mary Magdalene on 14 Dec 1845 – her parents were Charles (born Bishops Hull in 1812) a cabinet maker at Shuttern and Matilda Locke (born Ireland 1819), A Charles Locke spent a month in Wilton Gaol in 1830 for being an unruly apprentice]

By 1871 Tom and Eleanor [described as a monthly nurse] were joined by a William Boseley, who was variously called, boarder, nephew, adopted son. Eleanor died in 1884, and was buried at St Mary Magdalene 21 February 1884,



Tom moved with William, William's wife and family to No 10 Court, High Street and was there by the 1891 census.

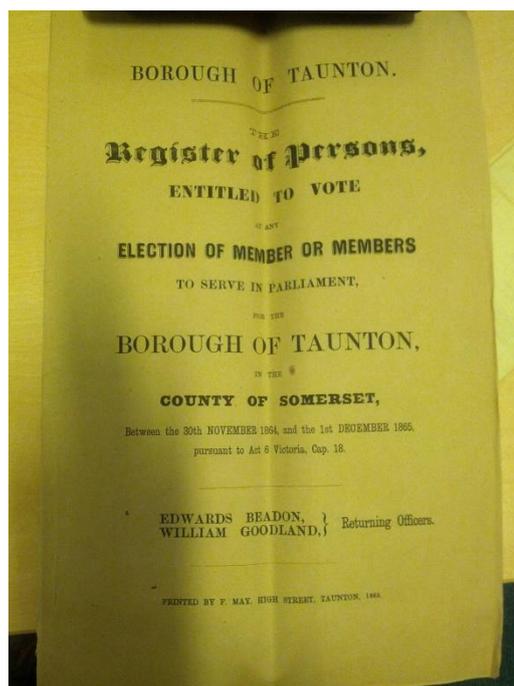
Occupation and Address

He first appears in Taunton in the 1851 census when he was living in Upper High Street, Taunton and was employed at Wilton Gaol as a warder. He was a warder for 18 years and he therefore entered this profession sometime between 1833 and 1843. Whether he had been a full time member of the Militia or part time in 1834 I'm unable to say.

By 1861 he had moved to Cox's passage behind the Old Angel Inn and his profession was given as porter., In 1871 and 1881 he was still living in the same "cottage" and was a Collector of Market Tolls. He worked for the Taunton Market Trustees for 35 years.

He is listed in the 1864 list of voters.

Lake, Frederick	... potwaller ...	East-street, north
Leigh, Oliver	... potwaller ...	North-street, east
Liddon, Henry	... potwaller ...	Church-square
Locke, Thomas	... potwaller ...	Fore-street, west
London, Thomas	... potwaller ...	Upper High-street north side



Map of Fore Street and the High Street before Corporation Street was built



Called Cox's Court in 1861, and 1871 then called Elworthy Court in 1881

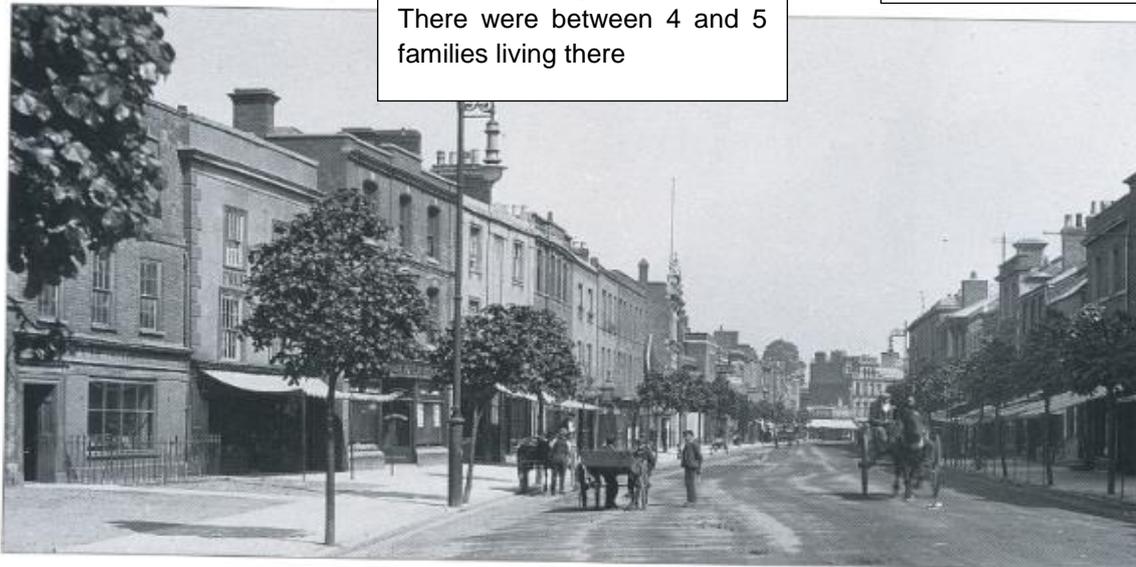
Shop first owned by Mr Edward Cox as an ironmonger after him Mr Myer Jacobs and then by Mr Samuel Elworthy as a Boot and Shoe Dealer.

In 1891 Tom Lock had moved to 10 Court, High Street [in 1894 Corporation Street had been driven through where Cox's Court used to be] and there he remained until he died in 1904.



Court No 10 High Street
There were between 4 and 5 families living there

Eastment - furniture shop



The top end of the High Street, c. 1905. This is in the days before pedestrianisation. The three shops on the left are Eastments furniture dealers, Dickenson's bakery at no. 42 and William Nash's greengrocery in the centre with the blind.



High Street, 1925

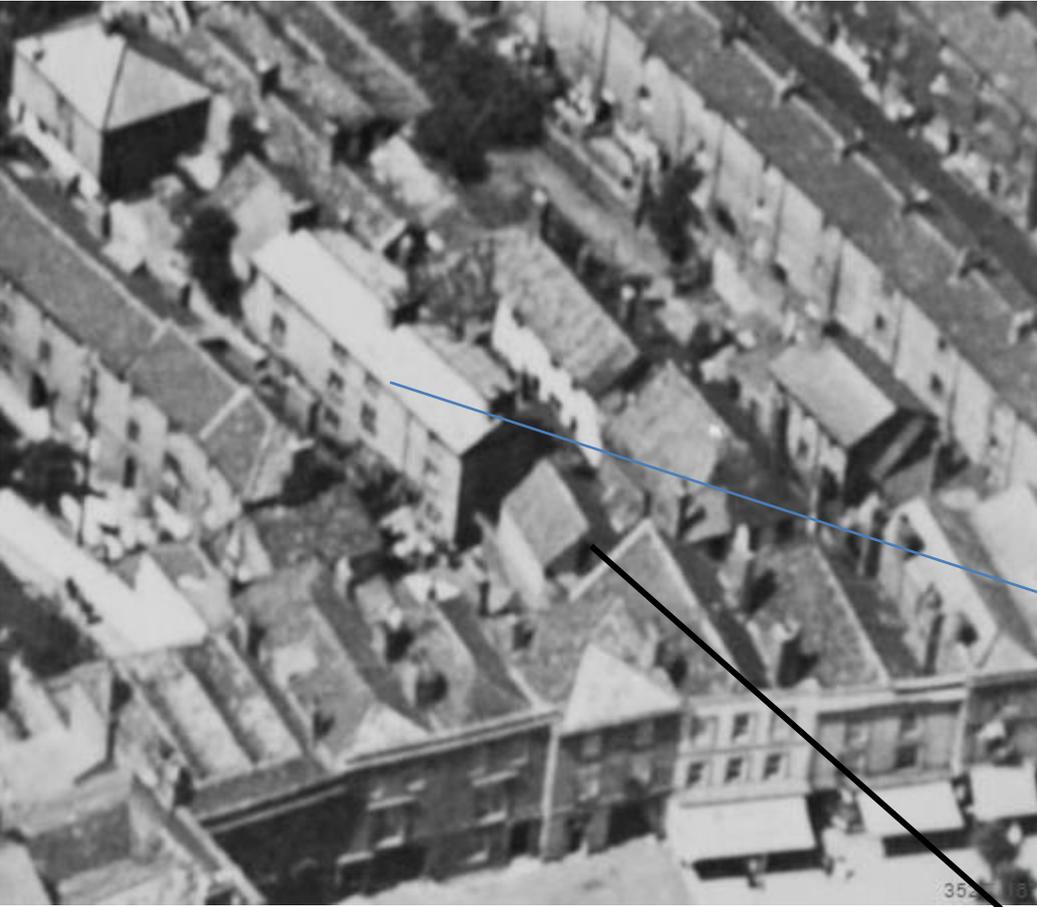
No 10 Court, High Street



This building is still standing



Entrance to No. 10 Court today



The buildings behind
have all gone.

Window is still there,

