

*1999 commemorates 150 years since the death of Miss Weeton, Governess, of Upholland. After his introduction to Miss Weeton in Past Forward 20, Alan Roby continues with the story of Miss Weeton's parentage and her early life at Lancaster and why, along with her mother and brother, she came to settle at Upholland, near Wigan:*

# ELLEN WEETON

(1776-1849)

## GOVERNESS

### From Lancaster to Upholland

A BRIEF entry of baptism in the registers of St. John's Parish Church, Lancaster, states: "Nelly, daughter of Captain Weeton, 29 January, 1777". Ellen Weeton (christened Nelly) was born on Christmas Day 1776. Thomas Weeton, her father, was born at Scale Hall, near Lancaster in 1748 and had married in 1770(?) Mary Rawlinson of Preston.

At the time of Ellen's birth Thomas was in the employ of the Rawlinsons (a very distant relation to his wife's family), who were a Lancaster family of shipowners and of no little importance in the city.

Before the American War of Independence, Thomas Weeton was captain of a merchantman employed in the African slave trade. At the outbreak of war in 1776 he was commissioned to command a privateer (a privately equipped war ship), with permission to engage the enemy. His ship's name was the *Nelly*.

#### Brave and enterprising

Captain Weeton clearly excelled in his captaincy,

which carried a Letter of Marque. This meant that in any successful engagements with the enemy there was the prospect of a share of prize money for himself. Brave and enterprising he took a number of prizes against American ships in the Caribbean and returned safely to Lancaster where he received many congratulations. Songs were composed in his honour and sung in Lancaster's



*A Privateer. Armed merchantmen carrying at least 18 guns and 40 men were licensed to attack and capture ships of enemy countries. The above sketch is of the Lancaster-built 22 gun privateer, the 'Thetis', based on a model in Lancaster Maritime Museum. The 'Nelly' commanded by Thomas Weeton in 1776 would have been very similar.*

streets; the songsters on occasions stopping outside his home at the top of Church Street to proclaim repeated cheers.

During this period his wife bore him four children: Edward was the first born who died aged three, next was

Nelly. The name was chosen by Mrs Weeton because her husband was en voyage in the *Nelly* at the time of her birth. Their third child was Margaret who lived but a fortnight and fourth was Thomas who was born in January 1781.

Captain Weeton's successes at sea had, by the year 1782, accumulated for himself the colossal sum of £12,000. He then decided to give up his seafaring activities but the idea was over-ruled by his employers. They promised him that if he would go to sea

strength, Captain Weeton was hit by a "chain shot" which "ripped off the side of his face whilst he was shouting orders through a trumpet to his men in the shrouds." Soon afterwards the American ship made off in a sinking state but the *Nelly* somehow remained afloat. The crew took him to nearby Jamaica where he lived for a few days. He was buried there on 11 September, 1782.

#### Defrauded

Mary Weeton's great loss was compounded by subsequently being defrauded of all her husband's prize money, as well as other property gained through his voyages. Though making many applications to the Rawlinsons, she never received a single pound, nor any information regarding the manner in which his property was disposed of. Suffering a deep depression of spirits and her health impaired through an accumulation of losses - in a period of six months she had lost her husband, her own mother and a fortune of at least £12,000. She then decided to plan a new life for herself and her two remaining children.

Now it so happened that Mrs. Weeton had, through her mother, a connection with the ancient village of Upholland, near Wigan. Mrs. Weeton's mother was a sister to an Upholland brewer by the name of Randal Smith. She had married a Preston butcher by the name of Richard



Rawlinson with whom she had three daughters: Elizabeth who married Mr. T. Ditchfield of Preston, Mary who married Mr. T. Weeton of Lancaster and Margaret who married Mr. T. Wigan of Wigan.

### Last days in Upholland

Prior to her death, old Mrs. Rawlinson (Mrs. Weeton's mother), had expressed a desire to spend her last days in Upholland, the place of her birth. Shortly beforehand Mrs. Weeton had promised that she would go to Upholland with her, but now alone she decided to continue with this plan. She was somewhat encouraged in this by her sister, Margaret, then living in Upholland who told her that "both rents and coals were much lower than in Lancaster."

Mrs. Weeton, with Ellen aged seven and Thomas aged three, came to begin their new life in Upholland in May 1784 and rented a little cottage in Church Street.

Mary Weeton and her two sisters, Elizabeth and Margaret had, considering the time in which they lived, received a good education. Mary in particular had been fortunate enough to have had a good grounding in the social graces. In an effort to improve her mind and manners she had read much and became a lady's maid to a Miss Hoghton, sister to Sir Henry Hoghton of Walton Hall, near Preston. For 12 months she and Lady Hoghton had travelled together to various southern counties of England.

### Pretty cottage garden

Now drawing on her past experience, Mary Weeton soon became acquainted with the principal families of Upholland and neighbourhood. In her pretty cottage garden, which was on a steep incline at the rear of the property, on "many occasions she entertained Mr. Braithwaite, a clergyman and

his wife; Mr. J. Clayton, likewise a clergyman and his wife (a sister of Mrs. Braithwaite); the Rev. R. Braithwaite and Captain Taylor and his wife."

The views from the cottage and garden "were extensive, romantic and beautiful", so wrote Ellen Weeton in her *Retrospect* in 1809. Both Ellen and Thomas were very happy but Mrs. Weeton was increasingly unhappy. Her little income, which had been via a very small estate at Sunderland, near Heysham, Lancashire, even with the strictest economy,

was found inadequate to support the three of them.

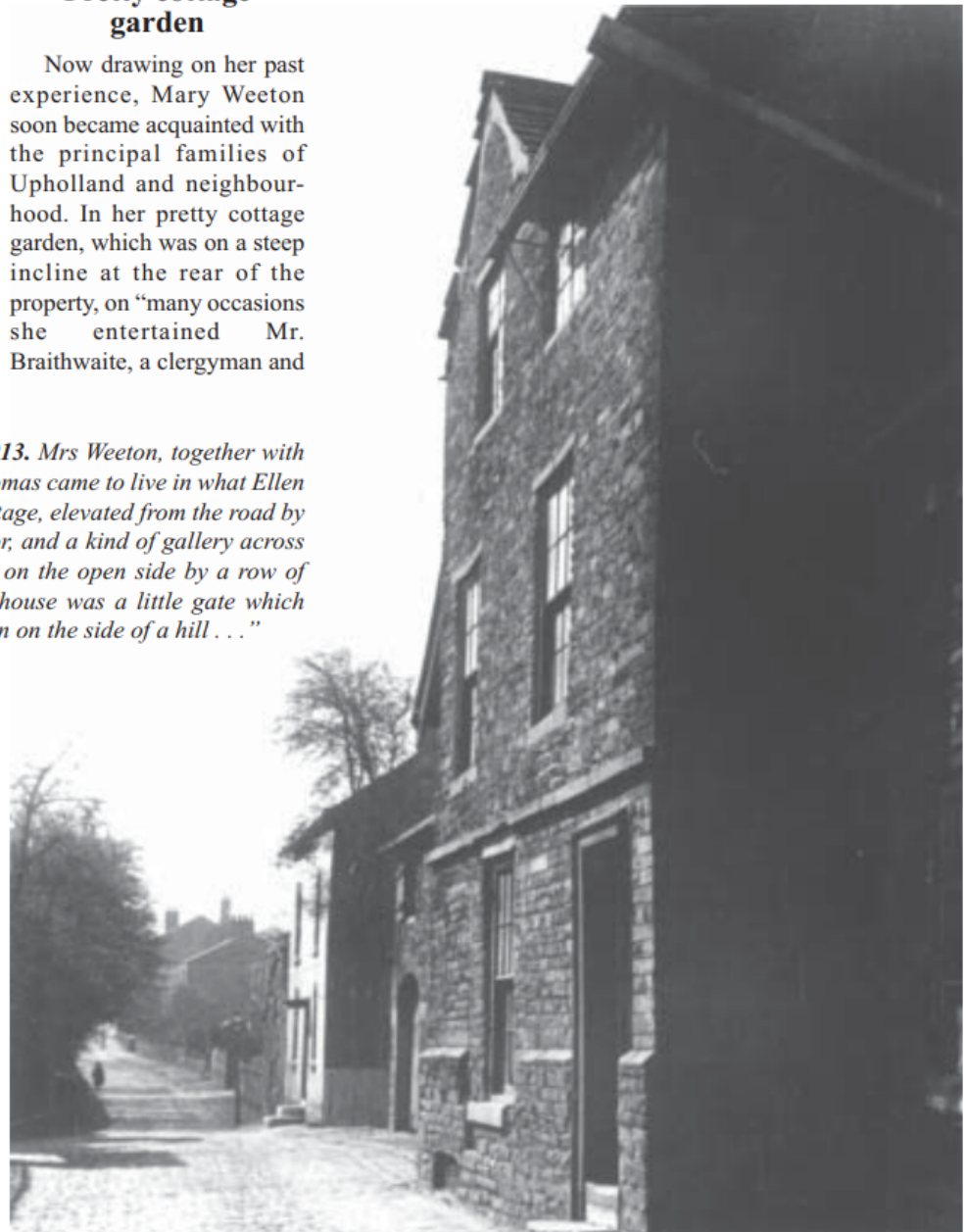
Thomas had been sent to Mr. Braithwaite's nearby "most excellent" school for boys at. He was a day scholar there until his education was complete. Ellen herself did not attend a school but was an avid reader and was also taught by her mother. In addition an usher from Mr. Braithwaite's school regularly attended Mrs. Weeton's home to teach writing, grammar, arithmetic and a little geography. Ellen

*Continued on page 8.*

**Church Street, Upholland c.1913.** *Mrs Weeton, together with her daughter, Ellen and son Thomas came to live in what Ellen later described as "A pretty cottage, elevated from the road by a flight of steps to the front door, and a kind of gallery across the front of the house guarded on the open side by a row of white rails. At one end of the house was a little gate which opened into a pretty little garden on the side of a hill . . ."*

*Edward Hall, editor of Miss Weeton: Journal of a Governess suggests that 'the cottage' pictured right (now demolished) with the white front, answers the description. It was sited immediately opposite the garden of 'The Priory', home of Rev and Mrs J Braithwaite.*

*The three-storey building in the foreground is thought to have been taken at some stage by Mrs Weeton who started her dame school after four years in the village shortly before its demolition earlier this century it was known as 'the ghost house'. The site is now the car park to the White Lion inn.*





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Continued from page 7

showed a natural ability for reading and scribbling rhymes.

The family had been resident in Upholland for four years when Mrs. Weeton was forced to increase her income. She decided to start a dame school. From then on mother and daughter began a life of "virtual slavery".

● **The next issue of *Past Forward* will detail Miss Weeton's life in Upholland and her temporary removal from 1808-1809 to Liverpool. In addition will be a profile on Miss Weeton the great walker; also two of Miss Weeton's loyal Upholland friends, the good, but worldly Rev. and Mrs. J. Braithwaite, of 'The Priory'.**

**MARGARET BARTON (1752-1813)**

MARGARET Barton was one of Miss Weeton's two aunts on her mother's side of the family. She was the youngest of three sisters born to Mr and Mrs Richard Rawlinson of Preston. Margaret married firstly Mr T Wigan, a solicitor, of Wigan, who predeceased her. There was no offspring. She married secondly Mr T Barton, a saddler by trade, of Wigan, who, upon retirement, decided to settle at Upholland. Again there was no offspring.

It is clear from Miss Weeton's letters that her Aunt Barton was financially very comfortably off and loved money for its own sake. The fact that she had no children of her own meant that her "concerns were but small". At a time of personal crisis for Miss Weeton, through no fault of her own, and in need of moral and financial support, her Aunt was not very helpful. After the death of her mother, Miss Weeton had been playing with some little children, at which time she received a violent bruise to her ankle. After a few days the wound began to "gather". Her Aunt went to see her niece and said: "Why do you not get a poultice?" Miss Weeton blushed and confessed that she had no money. At this

her Aunt loaned her a penny. Unfortunately the wound became badly infected and caused her to be confined for four months with thoughts that she might have to lose her leg. During this period her Aunt only very occasionally called to see her and never once suggested that she should receive medical assistance. That would, of course, have meant her providing the money for doctor's fees.

Miss Weeton ultimately benefited in her Aunt's will by receiving the sum of £5. Margaret Barton died at the age of 61 in 1813 and was buried alongside Mrs Weeton, her sister. Her gravestone removed from its original position, is now one of many old gravestones relaid as flagstones to form a paved area at the foot of the main entrance steps of Upholland churchyard. (See photograph below).

Thomas Barton outlived his wife by 17 years. He died on 21 October 1820, aged 78. Thomas had been more charitable towards his niece than was his wife. Miss Weeton benefited in his will by the sum of £60 (less legacy duty). The whole amount was immediately forfeited to her then husband, Aaron Stock.

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