

# Brixton Shopkeepers

William Fowles 1805-1858

Mary Ann Gatton b c1805

## Fowles of Croydon

**William Fowles** was the son of **William and Mary Fowles** of Croydon in Surrey, now suburban London but in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century still largely a rural area. He was baptised at St. John the Baptist church on September 20<sup>th</sup> 1805 at Croydon. William had three older siblings: Sarah, Elizabeth and Thomas. By 1817 he also had three younger siblings: Mary Ann, John and Henry. Like his father, William was a labourer, but eventually became a carman (a carter) and a shopkeeper.

## Sussex or Surrey?

Mary Ann's family background is harder to ascertain. Her parents' names and occupations are unknown as is her definite birthplace. On the 1851 and 1861 censuses she gives her birthplace as Lewes, Sussex, but on the 1871 census Godstone, Surrey is given. There are other Ann Gattons born at Cheam in Surrey around the same time.

## Marriage and eight children

By 1823 William and Mary Ann had moved much closer to London, to the borough of Southwark, south of the Thames river. On September 28<sup>th</sup> 1823 banns were published announcing the intended marriage of William Fowles to Mary Ann Gatton in the parish of St. George the Martyr, Southwark. The marriage took place on November 30<sup>th</sup> and the witnesses were Richard Hirst and Mary Whelan. The ceremony was performed by the curate W.G. Plees in the parish church<sup>1</sup>.



St George the Martyr,  
Southwark c1835 where  
William Fowles and Mary  
Ann Gatton married  
in 1823. Source:  
partleton.co.uk

Nearly a year later William and Mary Ann's first child was born: Sarah Ann on September 19<sup>th</sup> 1824. Two years later followed son William, June 9<sup>th</sup> 1826, and then Mary Ann on May 8<sup>th</sup> 1829. **Elizabeth Ellen** was born in 1834, and next came Alice in 1835, Henry in June 1840, John in June 1843 and Frederick on December 8<sup>th</sup> 1848. The baptisms were registered at Brixton. What happened to the eldest child Sarah is

unknown. She is not present with the family in the 1841 census, so she may have married by then or had died. Son William married Hannah Dean and migrated to Australia in 1849, became a farmer in the Geelong district and had seven children. Mary Ann married Mr. Fuller (first name unknown) and Elizabeth married **Henry Cecil Blunden** and migrated to Australia in 1854. Alice married John Lutchford in 1859, but little Henry died in childhood at the age of eight years. John became a wheelwright and Frederick was a hatter's warehouseman.

## Rural Brixton

Mention Brixton and we probably think of the Brixton riots of the 1980s, or today's active multicultural suburban Brixton. However, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Brixton was very much a semi-rural community, mostly small farms and little clusters of cottages. A distinguishing feature would have been the several windmills, but only one remains today - Ashby's Mill.



Brixton Windmill (Ashby's Mill)  
and Brixton in the 1860s.  
Source: London Borough of  
Lambeth, Archives Department

When the Vauxhall Bridge over the River Thames was opened in 1816, Brixton became connected to central London and as a result its population grew along the main routes leading to Westminster and the City. Brixton Prison, which bordered Lyham Rd where the Fowles were living c1851-8, was built in 1820 and housing began to cluster around that area of Brixton Hill. Perhaps moving here enabled William to take advantage of a growing population and to make the change from labourer to carman and shopkeeper.

Census records from 1841 show the family lived around a small area that centred on Brixton Hill, Lambeth. In 1841 William, a labourer at the time, Mary Ann and four of their children aged from 15 years down to 1 year were living at Retreat, Clapham parish. The next address from the 1851 census is 3 Nelson's Place, Brixton Hill. On William's death certificate eight years later, the address is more complete: 3 Nelson's Place, Lyham Road. Nelson's Place is not a street but a set of houses, and Lyham Road is the extension of Pleasant Retreat. Probably the addresses on the 1841 and 1851 censuses are the same residence, Clapham being adjacent to Brixton Hill.

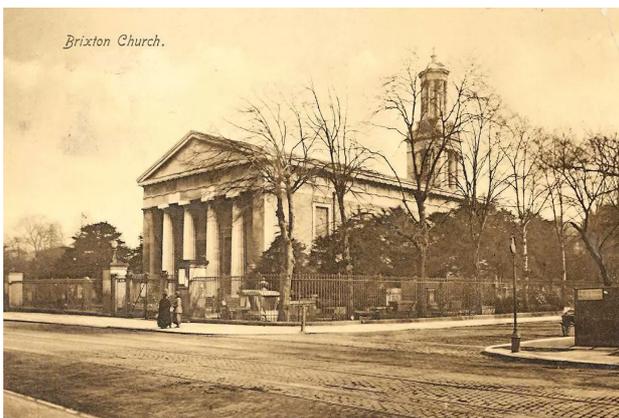


Lyham Road, Brixton, looking south. Nelson's Place where the Fowles family lived, would have been a row of houses on the left, demolished and replaced by the ones seen here in c1905. Source: London Borough of Lambeth

In 1851 William Fowles' occupation is given as a carman and shopkeeper. Wife Mary Ann and daughter Alice were assistants in the shop, and there were two other children, John and baby Frederick. On September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1854 daughter Elizabeth Ellen married baker Henry Cecil Blunden at St Mary's church Lambeth. Alice Fowles was one of the witnesses. Later that year Elizabeth would see her parents for the last time as she and Henry Blunden emigrated to Australia following older brother William and his family.

### **William Fowles' death**

Whilst living at Nelson's Place, William Fowles died from Bronchitis at the age of only 54 years. His daughter Mary Ann Fuller was present at his death on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1858. Her residence is given as the same as her father's. William was buried nine days later and the burial certificate was issued from the parish of St Matthew's Brixton. This burial ground is now beneath the St Matthew's Peace Garden next to the church of St Matthew<sup>2</sup>.



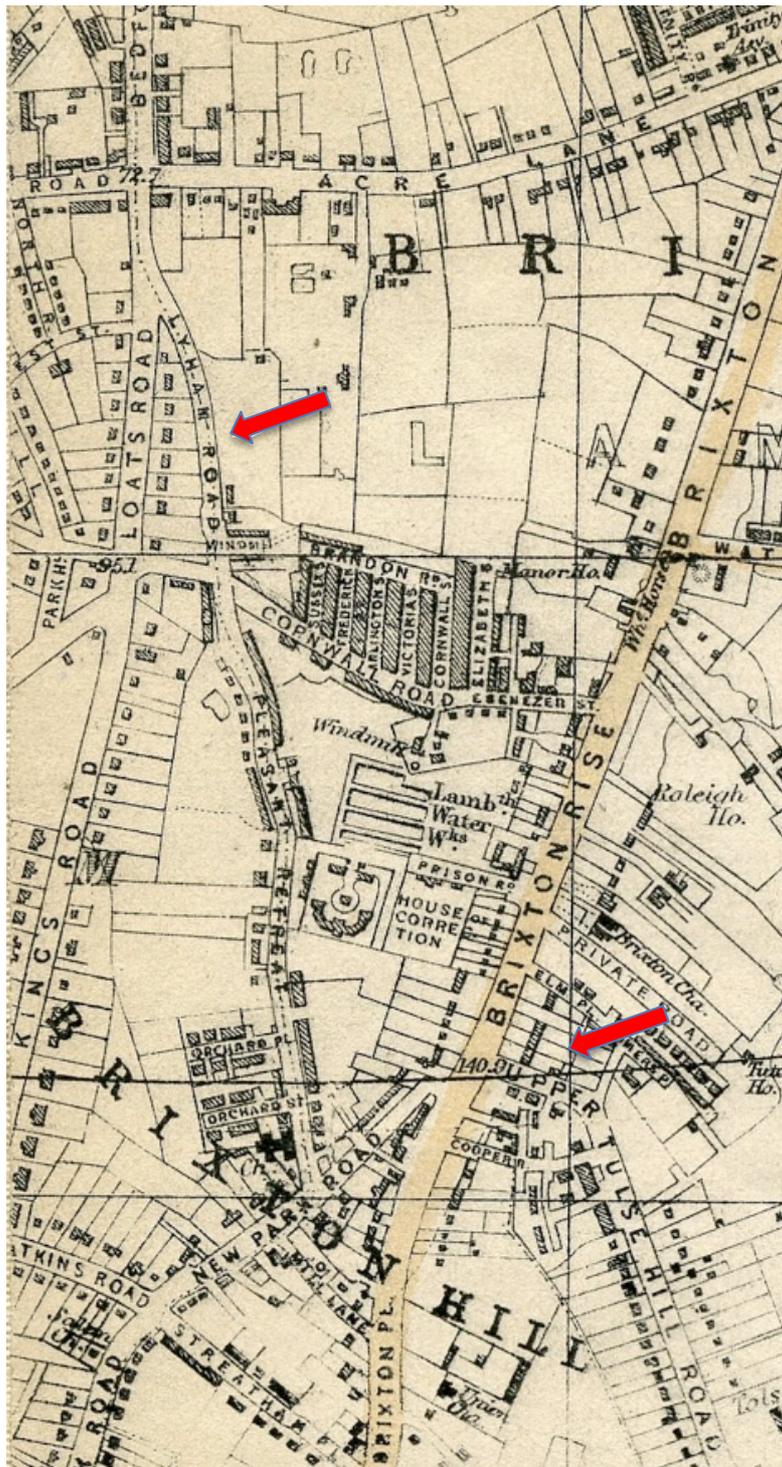
St Matthew's Church in Brixton, 1919, where William Fowles was buried in 1858 - the churchyard has been built over with a Peace Garden. Source: St Matthew's Brixton website

After William's death, if the Fowles still had a shop, it was gone by 1861. This census shows the widow Mary Ann as housekeeper to her sons: 18-year-old John, a wheelwright and 12-year-old Frederick. They were living at 2 Kendles Cottages, Water Lane in Brixton. Ten years later in 1871, Frederick had married and was living with his mother, his wife Mary Ann (nee Stow) and their six-month-old daughter Miriam. Their address was 5 Archbishop Place Brixton, very close to their previous residences. Frederick was employed as a hatter's warehouseman, and his mother was an annuitant. Perhaps the sale of the shop or business provided her with an income in her old age.

## Mary Ann Fowles' death

Mary Ann is not to be found in the 1881 census. There is a record of the death in Lambeth of Mary Fowles aged 76 in the April quarter of 1876.

1850s houses in Archbishop Place, Brixton. Source: urban75.org



Water Lane

Archbishop's Place

The map on the previous page shows Lyham Road (top left), Pleasant Retreat (its continuation south), Water Lane (off Brixton Rise to the right) and Archbishop's Place (not named, to the right off Brixton Rise above Upper Tulse Hill Road) in Brixton from *Whitbread's Map of London 1865*. Source: mapco.net

Ann Hurley

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See my story **A Drowning in Cundletown** for more about their daughter Elizabeth Ellen Fowles.

[hurleyskidmorehistory.com.au](http://hurleyskidmorehistory.com.au)

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> The parish church of St George the Martyr is a Georgian building designed by John Price and consecrated in 1736. This church had a new ceiling added in 1897, and had much restoration carried out on it after bomb damage in WWII. There has been a recent restoration project and the crypt has become a community resource area.

<sup>2</sup> St Matthew's church, designed by C. F. Porden in the Classical Greek style, was consecrated in 1824. It had seating for 904 in rented boxed pews and 1,022 free seats. In 1829 the *Gentleman's Magazine* described it as 'one of the few chaste specimens of classical architecture to be found amongst the various new Churches in the environs of the Metropolis'. Today large sections of the church have been sold off to become a pub and a nightclub. The gravestones in the churchyard have been removed so the area is now a Peace Garden notoriously frequented by drinkers from the pub and club.

Other resources:

Birth Death and Marriage certificates - General Register Office England

Brixton history <http://www.urban75.org/brixton/history/history.html>

*England and Wales Census Records* (Ancestry.com)

*England and Wales Civil Registrations Death Index* (Ancestry.com)

*England, Births & Baptisms 1538-1975* (Ancestry.com)

*England, Select Marriages, 1538-1973* (Ancestry.com)

*England, Select Marriages, 1538-1973* (Ancestry.com)

Hawkins, Cathy - Tas. Australia, Blunden descendant

Historic maps [www.mapco.net](http://www.mapco.net)

History of Lambeth [www.ideal-homes.org.uk/lambeth](http://www.ideal-homes.org.uk/lambeth)

Lambeth history and information [www.landmark.lambeth.gov.uk](http://www.landmark.lambeth.gov.uk)

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St Matthew's Brixton Burials (Ancestry.com)

[hurleyskidmorehistory.com.au](http://hurleyskidmorehistory.com.au)