

CHAPTER 3

Early Life of Eliza Lowe

WHITCHURCH

Eliza Lowe was born in 1803 in Whitchurch, Shropshire, the second child of Samuel Lowe and his wife Maria. Her father was a lawyer – or attorney, as he was referred to at the time. A record of 1799 in the *Chester Courant* shows that he was authorised to collect debts owing to one of his deceased clients:

Whereas Richard Pate Manning, late of Whitchurch . . . surgeon, hath, by letter of attorney, authorized Samuel Lowe, of Whitchurch aforesaid, gentleman, to collect and receive all debts due to him.¹

In the records of Whitchurch Museum there is a reference to Samuel Lowe being the ‘Captain and Company Commander 1st Co. of the Whitchurch Volunteers’. This may have been part of the volunteer movement during the Napoleonic wars when many areas set up home guards in case of invasion. Members were often members of the elite in the area. It would appear that Samuel Lowe was a respected member of the community.

The family lived in St Mary’s Street and there is a description of the house they lived in, from the details of an auction held on 14 August 1819 (see below). With nine bedrooms and generous accommodation on the ground floor, it was big enough for the family, which by 1819 had grown to ten surviving children. Interestingly, the notice of auction stated that the property was well adapted for use as a school. The property was sold with ownership of a family pew in prime position in the local church.²

A history of Hurstpierpoint College by Peter King maintains that Eliza ran a school in Whitchurch.³ The advert in the next page would seem to

1. *Chester Courant*, 10 December 1799.

2. *Chester Chronicle*, 23 July 1819.

3. Peter King, *Hurstpierpoint College 1849-1995: The School by the Downs* (Bognor

CAPITAL
Freehold House in Whitchurch.
TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,
By Lokin and Son,

At the White Lion Inn, in Whitchurch, Salep, on Saturday, the 14th day of August, 1819, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, subject to conditions then to be produced.

AVERY SUBSTANTIAL, and **COMMODIOUS** HOUSE, with the Stable, Brew-house, and other convenient buildings; Yard and Garden thereto belonging, situate in St. Mary's-street, in the town of Whitchurch, and late the residence of Mr. Lowe, Solicitor.

The House is well adapted for a genteel family, or a school.—It consists of a handsome entrance hall, and staircase, a dining room, 19½ by 17 feet, two good parlours, one 18, by 17 feet, and the other 16, by 15 feet, a spacious kitchen, a scullery, and pantry, on the ground floor, with three excellent cellars under; a drawing-room, 20, by 17 feet, and 5 good lodging rooms on the first floor, and 4 other lodging rooms in the attic story.

There is a good pump on the premises, from which excellent water is conveyed into the scullery and brew-house. There are also, an entire Pew, well situated in the middle aisle, and the whole (except one sitting) of another pew in the organ gallery, at Whitchurch Church, belonging to the property.

Immediate possession may be had; and for a view of the premises, and further particulars, application may be made at the office of Messrs Walsour, Brooks, and Loe, Solicitors, Whitchurch.

Fig. 6 Auction of the house in Whitchurch.

support the possibility of a school, although whether it was run by Eliza is less clear as she would have been only sixteen or seventeen years old when the house was sold. However, a later notice in the press reveals that Mrs Lowe ran a school with her daughter in Liverpool, so it is possible that Eliza was helping her mother at this earlier date.

BURTON-ON-TRENT

By August 1819 the family had moved to Burton-on-Trent, then in Derbyshire, where they had links. Samuel's sister Mary had married the Reverend John Clarke who, at this period, was headmaster of Rugeley Grammar School and vicar of the parish, some 20 miles from Burton. According to

family records, Eliza was chiefly brought up by her aunt in Rugeley where she received a very good education.⁴ The Clarkes had no children of their own. When Mary Clarke was widowed, she went to live with Eliza Lowe in Bootle and then in Mayfield, Middlesex (of which more later). It makes sense that she would go to live with a niece to whom she had given a home. In addition, when Edward Clarke Lowe was born in 1823, he was named after John Clarke.

At Rugeley Grammar School Eliza is not found in the list of pupils kept by John Clarke at the school between 1817 and 1822. However, her elder brother Charles was a pupil there in 1817 and her younger brother Samuel arrived at Christmas 1817, aged twelve, and was still there in 1822.⁵ The school was for boys, of course. It is quite probable that Eliza and one or more of her sisters were educated there on an informal basis. This sort of arrangement was quite common. For instance, when Edward Lowe was headmaster of the Woodard school at Hurstpierpoint, his wife's much younger sister, Alice Mary Coleridge, was educated there.

Regis: Phillimore, 1997), p. 14.

4. *Lucy Landor Memorandum*, notes dictated by Lucy Landor to Walter Noble Landor, Tim Tomlinson, private papers.

5. *List of boys at Rugeley School, c. 1817-1822*, Staffordshire County Record Office, Ref No: D(W)1788/P10/B6.

John Clarke is credited with restoring a classical education to Rugeley Grammar School and enlarging the buildings to allow for both improvement and expansion.⁶ There is an amusing record of an invitation to a friend to come to dinner written by his wife Mary, followed by a longer one by Clarke to show that he too could write verse.

From Mrs Mary Clarke to Mrs Thomas Landor

My dearest Friend	This note I send
in hopes that you,	and your husband too,
will come to dine,	if the day be fine,
with us tomorrow;	nor cause the sorrow,
which the perusal	of a refusal,
will give to both,	upon my troth.
And so I pray,	you'll not say nay.
Adieu from me,	your true M.C.

Rugeley Wed: evening
 Make us your debtors, for Peter's Setters⁷
 and in a crack, we'll send them back.

From John Clarke to Thomas Landor

Dear Tom
 I won't allow my rib,
 Exultingly to cock her jib,
 As if none else could rhyme it:

So I'm resolved for once to see
 And you shall judge twixt her & me –
 If I can't also chime it.

We've had today a sumptuous feast
 – Quite unbecoming in a Priest –
 To treat Dame Hopkins' palate

Fish, flesh, & fowl, & sav'ry jelly
 With soup that's made from Vermicelli
 And parmesan & sallad

6. Ernest Toye, *Rugeley: 150 Years of a Country Town* (Landor Local History Society, 2018), pp. 91 and 113.

7. Possibly this is a reference to a painting by the contemporary artist Johann Wenzel Peter titled *A Pointer and Two Setters*.

Pitchford & Letty Embrey came,
 And many a beau, & many a dame,
 To eat our grand collation.

Our Colwich friends agree to stay,
 To pass with us another day,
 Sans any hesitation.

Now, if your wife and you, quite snug,
 Will come & taste the hash & jug,
 Making from Hare & Pheasant;

Remnants of creams, & custards too,
 And other dainties not a few,
 T'will make it wondrous pleasant

I've often heard it said, at least,
 The next day's better than the feast,
 And who shall dare dispute it.

If choicest dainties are set by,
 And choicest friends, & gaity,
 Succeed to pomp & pageantry
 No one will sure refute it.

Then come – our pleasures to increase;
 Soon must my social comforts cease
 Nor think that I am humming

Tis not because my heart grows cold,
 Tis not because I'm growing old,
 Black Monday is forthcoming!

Yours truly J.C.

These amusing and cleverly crafted poems give an insight into life in the Clarke household, fun, good food and sociability but also powers of literary expression, a household in which Eliza grew up and, as will become clear later, emulated.

Samuel and Maria Lowe's thirteenth child, Charlotte, was born in 1819 and baptised in St Modwen's Church, Burton-on-Trent the same year. An obituary for Mary Manley Lowe, their third child, records Samuel as having lived at The Abbey, Burton.⁸ The Abbey, close to St Modwen's Church, had originally been used as an infirmary on the edge of the extensive grounds of

8. *Wellington Journal*, 16 September 1876.

the monastery, which escaped destruction under Thomas Cromwell. The picture below shows The Abbey and the church shortly before they moved there. It looks an idyllic scene.⁹



Fig. 7 Former monastic infirmary and St Modwen's Church from the 1790s.

The Abbey (in 2020, The Winery) was a separate, detached annex built in the time of William de Bromley who was Abbot of Burton from 1316 to 1329. As well as a great hall, it is known to have included an infirmary.¹⁰ Remains of the medieval building are still incorporated in the present-day building but most of what exists now is a mock Tudor facing constructed at a later date. This is clearly visible in the modern-day photograph below. The building is still impressive. The large chimney can be seen on both images.

LIVERPOOL

The family were still in Burton-on-Trent in July 1822¹¹ but before the end of 1823 the family had moved to Liverpool where Samuel continued as an attorney with offices in Exchange Street.¹² Exchange Street led into

9. www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol9/pp48-53, accessed 24 December 2020.

10. <http://www.burton-on-trent.org.uk/burton-abbey-structural-history>, accessed 9 April 2019.

11. The date is found in articles signed for son Samuel's solicitor training.

12. Gore's *Directory of Liverpool, 1825* lists him at 7 Exchange Street. The first ever printed directory of Liverpool was published in 1766 by John Gore (1738-1803). It contained an alphabetical list of the merchants, tradesmen and principal inhabitants of the town of Liverpool with their respective addresses. Initially quite irregular, it became biennial in 1803 until 1870, when it began to appear annually.



Fig. 8 The Abbey, where Samuel Lowe and his family lived.

Exchange Flags, a grand piazza in the centre of the town where merchants transacted business in the open air, absolutely the right address for an attorney. We can have no certainty about why Samuel Lowe moved his family and business as he did. However, one may speculate. Whitchurch was a small town on the Welsh border; Burton was not big either, but it was growing and had a major role to play in the build-up of industry and must have seemed more progressive. The move to Liverpool cemented the advance. Liverpool was shortly to be at the height of its success, with a rapidly increasing population and many opportunities for attorneys. Below is the signature of Samuel Lowe taken from articles signed with his son:

Fig. 9 Samuel Lowe's signature.

EVERTON

The first place in Liverpool where the family lived was the village of Everton on the outskirts of the city. It was here that the fourteenth child, Edward Clarke Lowe, was born in December 1823 and baptised in Holy Trinity Church, Wavertree on 16 January 1824.

Everton was a fashionable, desirable area for the burgeoning professional and commercial classes. The family, despite having to provide for twelve children, must have been comfortably off. Liverpool at this time was a thriving commercial city where merchants earned vast sums and lawyers could expect plenty of work and, if they were good, handsome fees.

Liverpool Picturebook Online says of Everton: 'In more peaceful times the wealthier merchants of Liverpool chose it for their country mansions', and in 1824 it was described as follows: 'This village has become a very favourite residence of the gentry of Liverpool, and for the salubrity of its air and its vicinity to the sea, may not inaptly be called the Montpellier of the county.'

The family settled in 1 Everton Crescent. The Crescent was formed of sixteen houses, construction began in 1807 following the purchase of two fields along what was to become the main thoroughfare from Everton into Liverpool. Samuel Lowe would have had to travel only three kilometres from the Crescent to his office in Exchange Street. According to Robert Syers who wrote a history of the area, the houses were 'well calculated for the reception and uses of large, respectable families, most of the mansions affording . . . ample space and fitness to entertain expensive parties'.¹³ Other much smaller buildings were later built behind the Crescent to its detriment, robbing it of the many advantages it had at the outset.

Around the corner from Everton Crescent, at 14 and 15 Everton Terrace, Miss Anne Sharp ran a private girls' school. Anne Sharp was a close confidante of Jane Austen whom she had met while working as a governess for Jane's brother Edward in the south of England. Claire Tomalin, in her biography of Jane Austen, says that Anne wrote plays for the children to perform. She was asked for advice by Austen and they kept up a correspondence after Anne left her employment in the south. One source says that by 1823 Sharp was running a boarding school in Everton.¹⁴ According to the 1841 census she was still there with two teachers, three servants and eleven pupils, the latter mostly aged fourteen and fifteen. Syers' description of Everton suggests a lot of neighbourly activity and it is inconceivable that the Lowes did not know Anne Sharp. Anne Sharp, highly respected by Jane Austen, must have had remarkable gifts. She clearly ran a successful school. This begs the question as to whether she inspired Eliza Lowe.

13. Robert Syers, *The History of Everton* (Liverpool: G. & J. Robinson, 1830), p. 238. See digitised version on the Everton local history website: www.evertonhistory.com, <https://archive.org/details/historyofeverton00syeruoft>, accessed 11 Feb, 2021.

14. <https://losttribeofeverton.com/histories/jane-austens-everton-link/>, accessed 27 January 2021.



Fig. 10 Map of Everton, 1851.

Everton Terrace and Everton Crescent are long gone but the 1851 Ordnance Survey (OS) map of Liverpool shows that they were but a short walk apart. Everton Crescent is shown at the bottom of the map opposite, facing south, and Everton Terrace, facing west, is nearer the top of the map. This map, surveyed well after the Lowes left the area, shows that smaller properties had multiplied in the area. Note the long gardens of the Crescent, compared with the neighbouring houses. The

properties on Everton Terrace look to be grander, with properties widely spaced and large gardens back and front.

Everton Terrace stood further up the hill from the Crescent and properties there would have had a stunning view over the Mersey to the Wirral, and out to sea. The photo below gives a feel of the elevation, taken close to where Everton Terrace was located. There is still a section of the road and walling in existence today.¹⁵



Fig. 11 Everton Terrace view.

The first picture below shows Everton c. 1820 and the second c. 1843, both were the work of W.G. Herdman who lived in Everton and painted many fine pictures of Liverpool in the nineteenth century. The buildings show very little difference but what looks like a pall of smoke rises in the background of the later painting. The family were shortly to move out of Everton and so avoided the unpleasant effects of industrialisation.

15. Photo taken in summer 2019 with author in the foreground.



Fig. 12 (top) Everton Village, c. 1820.



Fig. 13 (bottom) Everton Village, c. 1843.

BOOTLE

In the summer of 1824 the family moved three miles north to Linacre, the part of Bootle closest to the sea, close to the Mersey estuary and the port of Liverpool. In 1774 it was described this way:



Fig. 14 *The North Shore.*

Bootle cum Linacre lies near the sea on a very sandy soil and contains some well-built houses. A very copious spring of fine, soft, pure water rises near it, which about half a mile below turns a mill and soon after falls into the sea at Bootle Bay. Linacre, a pretty rural village, is a distinct township, but a member of the manor of Bootle. It lies adjacent to the sea, on the west.¹⁶

In 1812 the tourist's guide, *Stranger in Liverpool*, reported: 'The ride along the beach was, in the summer, remarkably pleasant and much frequented. The sands were hard and smooth, and the wind, especially if westerly, cool and refreshing.' In 1824 Baines' *Lancashire Directory* called Linacre: 'A pleasant marine village . . . much resorted to in the summer season as a sea bathing place.'

The lithograph above by W.G. Herdman shows a scene from 1790. Bathing machines are visible on the shoreline and ships can be seen entering and leaving the port of Liverpool. Bootle lay slightly to the north.

So, a desirable area in which to bring up the twelve surviving children of the family. However, there is evidence that Samuel Lowe had incurred debts.¹⁷ A later chapter relates how family friends (the Langtons) moved to Bootle and rented property there because it was cheaper. The Lowes may have moved for similar reasons.

16. William Enfield, *An Essay towards the History of Liverpool* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1774).

17. Tim Tomlinson, private papers.