

## William Butler's 2<sup>nd</sup> Wife

*He married his son-in-law's sister!*



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### Butlers' Tar Works

As you walk along the River Avon in Crews Hole, St George you are likely to see moorhens, mallards, swans, perhaps a cormorant and if you are very lucky a kingfisher. But there is very little evidence of the area's industrial past. There are some old bollards poking out of the grass between the path and the river and two strange metal troughs at the river's edge.

The biggest clue is the occasional smell of tar, there are also the road names 'Butlers Walk' and 'Butlers Close'. This area was the site of Butlers Tar Works that was established in 1843 to produce creosote to preserve the timbers of the Great Western Railway and other broad-gauge lines being built by Brunel in the South-West at that time. The creosote was produced by distilling coal tar, which was a by-product of the production of town gas from coal.

The tar works was established by Brunel's contractor, George Hennet, owned by Roberts & Daines and managed by William Butler. Butler moved to St George in February 1843 at the age of 24 years, already an experienced railway worker. In 1860 he moved on to set up his own works at Gloucester; but a major fire at the Crews Hole Works in 1863, meant that the owners wanted to sell and Butler bought the remains of the Works to rebuild it. His family-run company then owned and managed both the Crews Hole and Gloucester Works through until 1962, with William Butler handing the business over to his sons on his retirement in 1889. In turn some of his grandsons and great-grandsons became owners and managers in later years. Ownership of the Crews Hole Works passed to the South West Gas Board in 1962 and then British Steel in 1970 before it closed in 1981.



*1 Crews Hole Tar Works 1880/90s*

The story of the Butler Company from 1843 to 1953 is told in a book produced by the company that is now available online - [troopers-hill.org.uk/history/ButlerBook.htm](http://troopers-hill.org.uk/history/ButlerBook.htm) There is also a book with more about the Butler family written by Brian Vincent and Raymond Holland and published by ALHA Books in 2019.

### **William Butler's Family**

William Butler married Ann Boam in 1839 and when they moved to the area in 1843 they had two children. The family grew, with their 11<sup>th</sup> child being born in November 1863. Two sons died as infants but five daughters and four sons grew to adulthood and all married, to create a large extended family. They made their home at Summerhill House in St George.



*2 The Butler Family in the 1880s*

*William Butler with his white beard, the lady to his right is believed to be his wife, Ann*

William Butler retired from the Tar Distilling business in 1889. By that time he had also become involved in a lot of other activities in the local area. He was chairman of the St George Local Board (from its formation in 1874 until 1889) and also chairman of the Bristol Tramway Company until his death in 1900. For most of his life he was very much involved in the United Methodist Free Church; giving them substantial gifts for building new chapels.

William Butler's wife Ann died in 1886 and was buried in Avon View Cemetery, in the grave overlooking the Tar Works where William would join her when he died in October 1900. It is reported that all the trams in Bristol came to a halt for one minute as a mark of respect to their chair when he was laid in his grave.

But prior to August 2025 all the many accounts of William Butler's life and work had missed a significant part of the story.

William Butler remarried just over a year after his first wife died.

## William Butler's second wife, Elizabeth

This first came to light when I read a transcript of William Butler's will, which is on the Wikitree website. The second clause of the Will says:

*"I bequeath to my Wife Elizabeth Butler for her life the Testimonial presented to me by my Workmen on my retiring from business in August 1889 and also the large oil Painting in which I am represented in my Robes as a Town Councillor of Bristol"*

BUT William Butler's wife was Ann! AND she died before he retired and received the testimonial and painting! Is this the right William Butler? – yes, it refers to *"my Sons William Henry Butler and Thomas Butler and my Son in law Robert Bird"*

William's will also left Elizabeth *"such part of my furniture plate and other articles of personal domestic or household use or ornament to the value of Five hundred pounds as she may choose such choice to be made within six calendar months after my death"* but no money or company shares and no rights to live in the house in Clifton or any other Butler property.

Further research was clearly needed, and the British Newspaper Archive provided the answer. The wedding was reported in the Western Daily Press of Thursday 28th July 1887.

*"BUTLER - SHELLARD - July 27, at the Free Methodist Church, Redland Grove, Redland, by the Rev W Redfern. William Butler of Clifton Grove, Clifton, to Elizabeth, eldest daughter of Mr Joseph Shellard, Avonside House, Keynsham. No cards."*

Further research found more references to 'Mrs W Butler' which post-dated the death of Ann Butler and so must have been his second wife, Elizabeth. Given that her first name is never used, the fact that this was Elizabeth and not Ann is something that would only be picked up if you have the date of Ann's death in mind. Mrs W Butler was present at the opening of the first electric tramline in Bristol in 1895 (which ran to St George & Kingswood from Old Market). She is also mentioned in the reports of the death of William Butler on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1900. The Bristol Times & Mirror of 13 October 1900 says

*"Mr Butler had been unwell for some weeks, and at one time was confined to his bed in Clifton while his wife was, as she still is, lying critically ill at Weston-super-Mare."*

So who was Elizabeth Shellard?

Well the Shellard name rang a bell. Didn't one of William Butler's daughters marry a Shellard? Further research by myself and my wife, Susan, has put together some of the story.

## The Shellard Family

William and Ann Butler's fourth daughter, Ellen (b1852), married Edwin Shellard (b1844) in 1870. Edwin was the son of Joseph and Susannah Shellard of Avonside House, which was in the Parish of Bitton but close to Keynsham. Joseph's father, Daniel, had farmed the land in

that area. In 1861 Joseph described himself as a farmer and stated that he also kept the White Hart Inn (now 'The Lock Keeper').

Joseph's brother, Daniel, had married Mary Gully (b 1817) who had a brother Thomas Gully (b 1824) this could be the Thomas Gully who was described by George Eayrs (in his book about Wesley and Kingswood) as William Butler's 'dear friend' who was associated with him for 'almost 50 years'. They were both involved in the split in the Wesleyan Church in 1849 that led to the establishment of what became the United Methodist Free Church – this may have been how the two families met.

Later Joseph and his son, Edwin worked together in partnership. In a court case in 1887 three men were accused of stealing hay from them, Edwin stated that it was necessary for him 'to buy large quantities of hay for his own use and for the supply of the Tramways Company and others'. Edwin's father-in-law William Butler was Chairman of the Tramways Company.

By this time Edwin and Ellen Shellard were living at 'Fylton House' and farming surrounding land. This was the Old Filton House that was purchased by the Bristol Tramways Company in 1911, became offices for the newly created British and Colonial Aeroplane Company and remains in use by Airbus, with its original gates still visible on Gloucester Road.

Edwin and Ellen had two children, Edwin (b 1873) and Ellen (Nellie) Ann Susannah (b1876) – Nellie's second and third names being those of her grandmothers.

Elizabeth Shellard, who became William Butler's second wife, was Edwin Shellard's older sister. She was born in May 1840, so at the time of her marriage to William in July 1887 she was 47 years old; William was 68. As far as we can tell she had not previously married, if she had then her surname would no longer have been Shellard.

Elizabeth and Edwin also had a younger brother Joseph Thomas Shellard (known as Thomas) and two younger sisters Fanny and Emily Julia.

Clearly William (and the rest of the Butler family) would have known Elizabeth from at least 1870 when her sister became his daughter-in-law and probably earlier if the Thomas Gully connection is correct. It does seem strange, perhaps, that he remarried so soon after his first wife's death but second marriages were common, indeed Elizabeth and Edwin's father had taken a second wife; after Susanah died, he married her sister Grace.

### **Mediterranean Voyage**

The reason our previous research into the Butler family had not found this second marriage, is partly explained by the fact that Mr & Mrs W Butler were out of the country at the time of the census in April 1891. The 1891 census would have been the only one where Elizabeth would have been recorded as William's wife.

William (who was 72 at the time) and Elizabeth (51) were in fact on a pleasure cruise in the Mediterranean in March and April 1891 with William's daughter Ada Boam Brain. They were

onboard the Orient Steamship Company's SS Garonne. Places visited included Damascus, Nazareth, Jerusalem and Bethlehem. William wrote an account of his visit to the Holy Land as 'Notes of a Voyage' which was published by Allen, Davies & Company – which had links to the Butler Company.

Ada also wrote her own account which was published in the same book as 'Our Pilgrimage'.

Ada joined the ship at Tilbury but due to 'important public duties' William and Elizabeth were unable to join until Nice; Ada's sister Ellen Shellard and brother Joseph Beaumont Butler took their parents' berths for that first part of the voyage.

Ada's account is much less formal (she was 28) and mentions some of the other passengers and some of the characters they met. Whereas William Butler refers to Mrs Butler, Mrs Shellard, Joseph Beaumont and Mrs Brain. Ada has 'Father' or 'the Dad', 'Lizzie', 'Nellie' and 'Joe'.

Ada reports that *"our fellow-passengers held very varied notions of the relationship Nellie, Joe and I bore to each other, and when Father and Lizzie appeared on the scene things got still more complicated"*.

### **Death of Elizabeth Butler**

Elizabeth Butler died on the 17<sup>th</sup> June 1901, only 8 months after her husband. She had moved out of William Butler's house at Clifton Grove, Clifton Hill and was then living at 2, Buckingham Villas in Keynsham, very close to the Shellard family home at Avonside House. Clifton Grove was sold in April 1901.

Elizabeth was buried with her father Joseph in St. Mary's Churchyard, Bitton.

She is not mentioned on the Butler grave in Avonview Cemetery where William Butler was buried alongside his first wife, Ann.

Elizabeth's will indicates a falling-out with William Henry Butler. Her will was dated 17<sup>th</sup> January 1901 and appoints her brother-in-law Henry Marten (husband of Fanny) and William Henry Butler (oldest son of her late husband) as executors and trustees.

However, a codicil, dated 16<sup>th</sup> May 1901 (only a month before she died) says

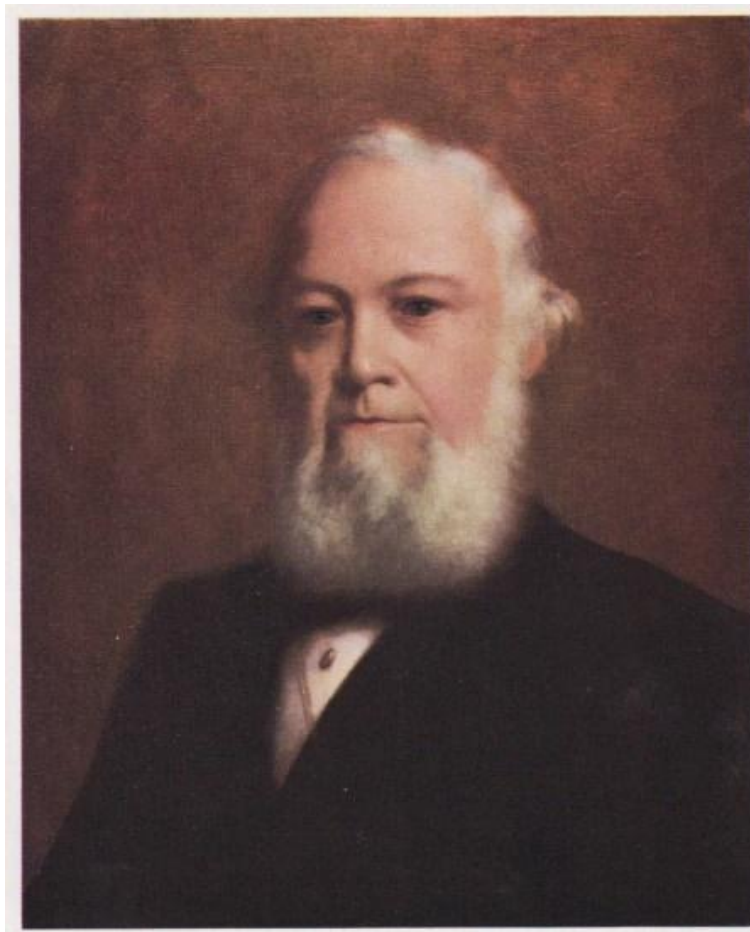
*"whereas the said William Henry Butler lately refused to deliver up certain goods and chattels which were in my late husbands dwellinghouse and which belonged to me and also addressed to me a certain unpleasant letter referring to such articles dated the thirteenth day of May one thousand nine hundred and one and I do not think therefore that the said William Henry Butler should act in the trusts of my said Will now I hereby revoke the appointment of the said William Henry Butler as such Executor and Trustee.."*

William Henry Butler later followed his father's example in marrying for a second time. His first wife, Esther, died in 1907. In 1912 William Henry Butler, then aged 62, married 30-year-old Cordelia Ruth Williams. She had been employed as his Housekeeper since his first wife's



death. They had a son together; George Beaumont Butler. As Brian Vincent reports in his book, a legal notice was published in 1928 withdrawing any authority from William Henry Butler's second wife. This included authority 'in any way to pledge my credit' and also stated (in block capitals) that W H Butler would not be responsible for her debts.

Ada's reference to Elizabeth Butler as "Lizzie" implies a more friendly relationship with her step-mother. Ada was only 7 when her sister Ellen married Lizzie's brother, so would have known her as a child.



*3 William Butler*

### **Can You Add to the Story?**

So William Butler's second marriage at the age of 68 to his son-in-law's sister who was 21 years younger than him - part of the story completely missed until now.

Are there any other Butler tales we have missed? Please let us know.

Read more about Butler's Crews Hole Tar Works - [troopers-hill.org.uk/history.htm#tar](http://troopers-hill.org.uk/history.htm#tar)

Images 1 & 2 from Butler Family Album 1880/90s - [troopers-hill.org.uk/history/ButlerAlbum.htm](http://troopers-hill.org.uk/history/ButlerAlbum.htm)

Image 3 from The History of Wm. Butler & Co - [troopers-hill.org.uk/history/ButlerBook.htm](http://troopers-hill.org.uk/history/ButlerBook.htm)