

Mary Ann Vaughan, (H.E.'s paternal great-grandmother)

(C1838-C1930)

A likeness of Mary Ann Lawrence appears in the [The Maker of Coffins](#) and [The Gleaner](#). The Wainwright family in [The Feast of July](#) is based on the Lawrences.

Mary Ann came from Orlingbury. When she married she worked as a shoe closer, plain sewer and leather cutter in the workshop at the back of the house. Her husband, William Lawrence, died when he was only 52 leaving Mary Ann to support herself and her surviving 9 children, which she did by 'an eternal process of scheming, shirt-making, gleaning, cleaning, sewing, pinching, even weeping'.¹ It was usual for the women of Higham and the surrounding villages to supplement the family income by gleaning and Mary Ann could be seen 'gleaning frenziedly from dawn to dark, when the final gleaning bell sounded: a custom so rewarding that on one occasion she and her family gleaned enough corn to justify hiring a threshing machine'.²

It was said it was Mary Ann who prevented her son, Charles, from marrying Deborah Bates when she became pregnant by him, and that she tried to stop the marriage of another of her sons by objecting in church when the bans were called.³ However, Mary Ann was a much loved figure in H.E.'s young life. In his autobiographical book [Flowers and Faces](#) he recalls with great affection Sunday evening visits to her cottage for family gatherings after chapel: 'My great-grandmother was between seventy and eighty when I knew her. She was a tiny woman: most frail in appearance and so delicate and light that she was almost transparent'. He recalls the sweetness of her gentleness toward him, the sugared mince-pies, the fragrance of cut flowers and the warmth and scents of her tiny garden. 'It was a time of extraordinary pleasure and suspense for me'.

1 Flowers and Faces

2 The Vanished World

3 Mary Fennell