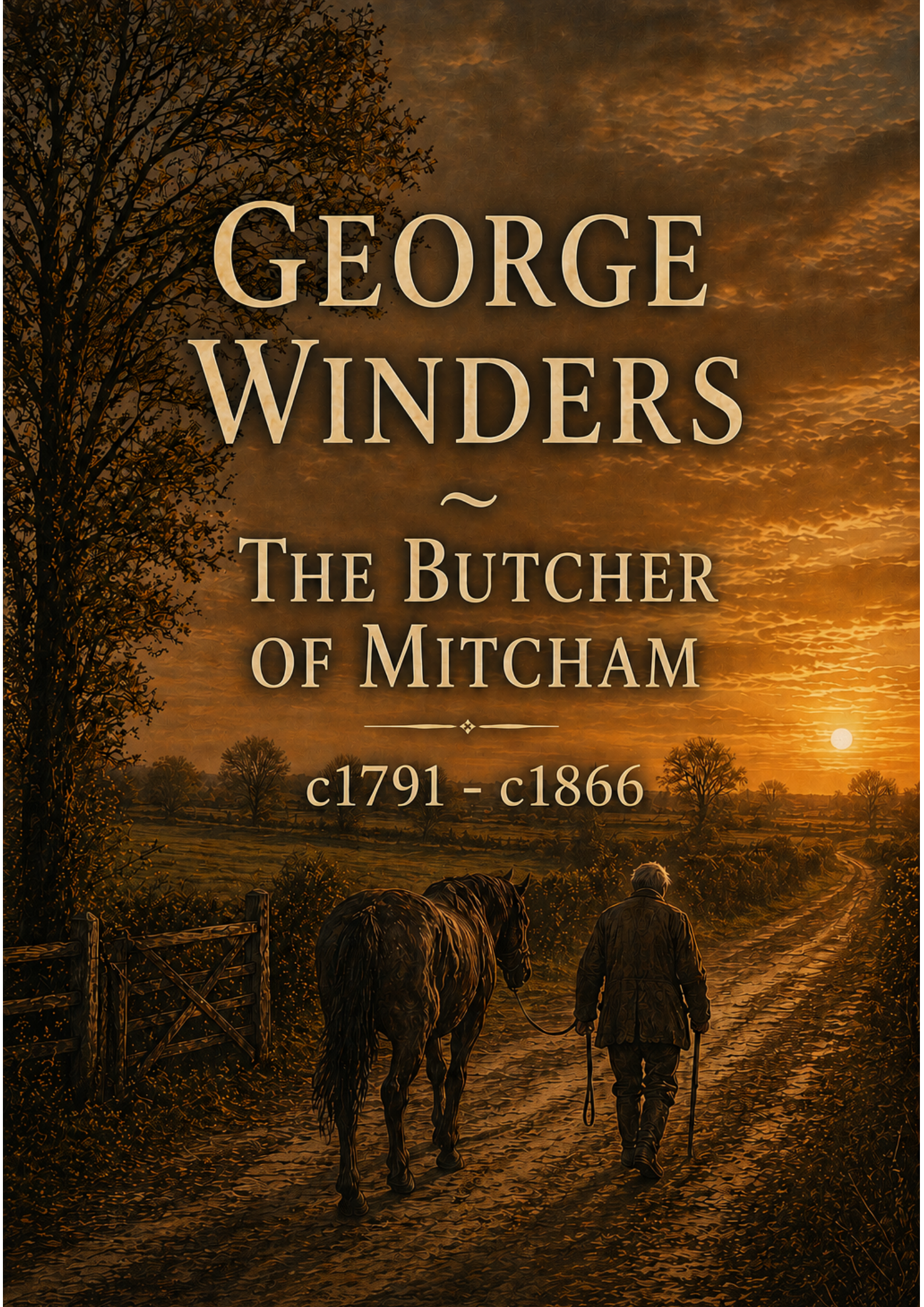


GEORGE WINDERS

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THE BUTCHER OF MITCHAM

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c1791 - c1866



The Butcher of Mitcham

The Story of George Winders and Elizabeth Hards,

THE FAMILY HISTORY STUDIO

APRIL 2026

CROYDON MAGISTRATES COURT — 8 MARCH 1862



Reconstruction

The magistrates do not take long.

They have heard from the young woman — she is sixteen years old, a servant, and she has given her account with a composure that clearly costs her. They have heard from the representative of the defendant, who has suggested she had other associations. The magistrates appear to find this line of argument both predictable and unpersuasive.

*The defendant is an old man. The newspaper will describe him as "verging on threescore" — a polite understatement; he is closer to seventy, possibly past it. His name is **George Winders**. He calls himself a butcher. He has been calling himself a butcher his entire life, which is now a very long one, and which has passed through places and losses that this courtroom will not hear about today.*

The magistrates find the young woman's account substantially correct. They order the defendant to pay five pounds eighteen shillings — the costs of the confinement, and the burial of the children.

George Winders pays his five pounds eighteen shillings. He walks back to Carshalton. The newspaper moves on to other cases.

This is not the worst thing that ever happened to him. It is, in some ways, not even close.

Introduction

This is the story of **George Winders** (c.1791–after 1866) and his wife **Elizabeth Hards** (c.1790–1842) — a butcher, a Victorian village, a debtors' prison, and a long life that left its clearest marks on the record when things went wrong.

George was born into rural Oxfordshire in the last decade of the eighteenth century, learned the butchering trade, made his way to London, married Elizabeth, and spent the best years of his working life in Upper Mitcham, Surrey. He went bankrupt, possibly more than once. He ended up in the Marshalsea Prison. He lost his wife the same year. He disappeared from the records for eighteen years and then reappeared in his sister's cottage in Carshalton, still calling himself a butcher at the age of seventy. He is not a famous man. He is, in many ways, a completely ordinary man — which is precisely why his story is worth telling.

No one can know exactly what happened at every turn. This story stands on sound family research, drawn from census records, newspaper accounts, trade directories, baptism registers, and court reports. Where facts are missing, events have been interpreted and conclusions drawn, aiming to stay true to the people and the times.

The story can always be improved as more research surfaces. The priority for now is for it to be written in the first place.

The Winders of Northleigh

OXFORDSHIRE, 1762–C.1815

To understand George Winders, you have to start not with George but with a small village in west Oxfordshire and a father who had rather more children than he probably planned for.

John Winders was born around 1762, almost certainly in or near **Northleigh** — a quiet parish in the Evenlode valley, a few miles east of Witney, surrounded by farmland and connected to the rest of Oxfordshire by roads that were, depending on the season, either passable or decidedly not. Northleigh was not the kind of place that made the history books. It had a church, a handful of farms, and the kind of community where everyone knew everyone's business, which was both a comfort and, at times, a considerable inconvenience.

John married a woman named **Hanah** (her surname, frustratingly, remains unconfirmed) around 1778–1780, and together they proceeded to fill the parish register with considerable enthusiasm. By 1794, they had seven known children: **Edward** (c.1780), **Anne** (1781), **John** (c.1785), **William** (c.1787), **Thomas** (c.1789), and then our man **George**, born in 1791 as the sixth child. The seventh, **Samuel**, arrived in 1794.

LIFE IN RURAL OXFORDSHIRE, 1790S

England in the 1790s was a country under pressure. The French Revolutionary Wars (from 1793) drove up food prices and disrupted trade. The enclosure of common land — converting shared agricultural land into private holdings — had been steadily squeezing small farmers and rural labourers across Oxfordshire for decades, pushing younger sons toward trades rather than farming. In a village like Northleigh, a family that could establish itself in a practical trade — butchering, blacksmithing, carpentering — had a significant advantage over those dependent solely on agricultural wages, which were chronically low and highly seasonal.

What trade John Winders practised is not directly documented, but the fact that both George and his probable brother Samuel would go on to become butchers — independently, in the same Surrey village, at the same time — makes it overwhelmingly likely that butchering was the family trade. Trades passed from father to son in this period almost as a matter of course. A boy didn't choose his occupation the way we might today; he was handed one. George would have been killing and preparing animals from his early teens, possibly younger. It was hard, physical, bloody work — and it was also a trade that connected you directly to the community you served. The butcher knew everyone. Everyone needed the butcher.

Then, in 1794, when George was approximately three years old, his mother **Hanah** died.



NORTHLEIGH, OXFORDSHIRE — EARLY 1794



Reconstruction

The morning after Hanah died, John Winders was up before light.

Not because he had slept — he had not — but because the animals needed feeding regardless, and a man in his trade could not afford the luxury of grief on a market day. He pulled on his coat in the cold of the cottage and went out into the yard without waking the children. The eldest, Anne, had stayed up half the night and finally fallen asleep near dawn. Let her sleep a little longer. She would need the rest. From this morning, Anne, at thirteen, was effectively the mother of the household.

George would not remember his mother's face. He was too young for that. What he would carry — the thing that stays with a person even when memory fails — was the shape of a household where someone was missing. The particular quiet of a room that had held a woman and now didn't. The way his father moved differently after, more efficiently, with less noise, as if he were conserving something.

John wiped his hands and went back inside to begin the day. There were six children. There was a business. There was no other option but to carry on, and so he did.



John Winders managed. Families in this period did, because they had to — there was no alternative. The older children stepped up: Anne was thirteen and capable; Edward was around fourteen. John kept the business going and the children fed. Whether he remarried is not recorded, though it would not have been unusual for a widower with young children to do so. What we can say is that by the time George was old enough to learn the trade in earnest, the family was still functioning in Northleigh, still working, and still — just — intact.

What drove George to London is easy enough to explain without a single document. By his late teens and early twenties, George had the skills of a tradesman in a village that could not absorb many more butchers. The Napoleonic Wars had ended in 1815, releasing hundreds of thousands of men into a contracting economy. Bread prices were artificially high thanks to the Corn Laws, squeezing the wages of the working poor. London, by contrast, was nearly a million people and hungry in every sense. For a young man from Oxfordshire with a sharp knife and a practical trade, the city was the obvious answer. His brother Samuel would eventually do the same — heading not to London but to Mitcham in Surrey, where he would set up as a butcher in Lower Mitcham, just down the road from wherever George would land.

The two brothers probably went together, or in close succession. It is the most natural explanation, and it is almost certainly what happened.

A Marriage at St Andrews

HOLBORN, LONDON, 1819

On 5 May 1819, George Winders married **Elizabeth Hards** at the church of **St Andrews, Holborn**, in the City of London. He was approximately twenty-eight years old. She was approximately twenty-nine. They were, by Victorian standards, marrying at a perfectly sensible age — old enough to be established, young enough to be optimistic.

ST ANDREWS, HOLBORN

St Andrews is one of the great London parish churches — rebuilt by Christopher Wren after the Great Fire and standing at the junction of Holborn and Shoe Lane, just west of the City proper. The neighbourhood around it was a working mix: lawyers from the nearby Inns of Court, printers clustered in the lanes off Fleet Street, tradesmen servicing the coaching routes north, and craftsmen of every description packed into the tenements behind the main roads. It was busy, noisy, and very much alive. A young butcher and his bride would have been entirely unremarkable among the congregation — exactly the kind of solid, practical couple that kept the city's trade running.



About **Elizabeth Hards** we know frustratingly little, which is not unusual for women of her class and period — the historical record has a persistent habit of overlooking them until marriage gives them a documented connection to a man. One possible record suggests her mother may have been listed as a pauper at some point, which, if true, tells us something useful: Elizabeth was not from comfortable circumstances. She had likely worked for her living before marriage — domestic service was the default employment for young women of modest means in London, and it would not be surprising if that was where she and George had met, or at least where they moved in the same social world.

What we can say with confidence is that Elizabeth was a woman capable of raising six children in a Surrey village while her husband managed a butchery business — which, given the physical demands of that life, suggests she was tough, resourceful, and practical. It takes a certain kind of person to run a household on the proceeds of a trade that operates on credit, keep six children clothed and fed, and not appear in any document that survives except as "wife" in a census return and a date of death in a family tree. Elizabeth Hards was that kind of person. The records say very little about her, and that itself says something: she got on with it quietly, which was what life required.

The year they married — 1819 — was one of the more turbulent in recent English memory. In August, cavalry charged a crowd of 60,000 people gathered at St Peter's Fields in Manchester to demand parliamentary reform. Eighteen people were killed, hundreds injured. The newspapers called it Peterloo, a bitter reference to the recent glory of Waterloo, and the name stuck. The Prince Regent — the future George IV, deeply unpopular, famously self-indulgent — congratulated the soldiers. The country was not in the best of tempers. George and Elizabeth, one suspects, had more immediate things on their minds: a butchery to establish, rent to pay, and the substantial question of where they were going to live.

The answer was Upper Mitcham. Precisely when they moved south into Surrey is not recorded, but their first child was born around 1821, and within a year or two they were firmly planted in Mitcham. George had almost certainly scouted the territory — perhaps with Samuel — before the wedding. The decision to leave London for a Surrey village was not a retreat; it was a strategy. London had markets and customers but it also had competition from every direction. A butcher who could establish himself in a growing village on the London fringe could build a local reputation that the city's crowded trade wouldn't allow. George, it appears, thought this through.

The Butcher of Upper Mitcham

SURREY, C.1819–1834

Upper Mitcham in the 1820s was a village that hadn't quite decided whether it was still a village. It sat on the River Wandle about eight miles south of London Bridge — close enough to the city to feel its pull, rural enough to still have farms, market gardens, and the smell of livestock in the air. It was, in short, exactly the right place for a butcher with ambition and enough capital to set up a shop.

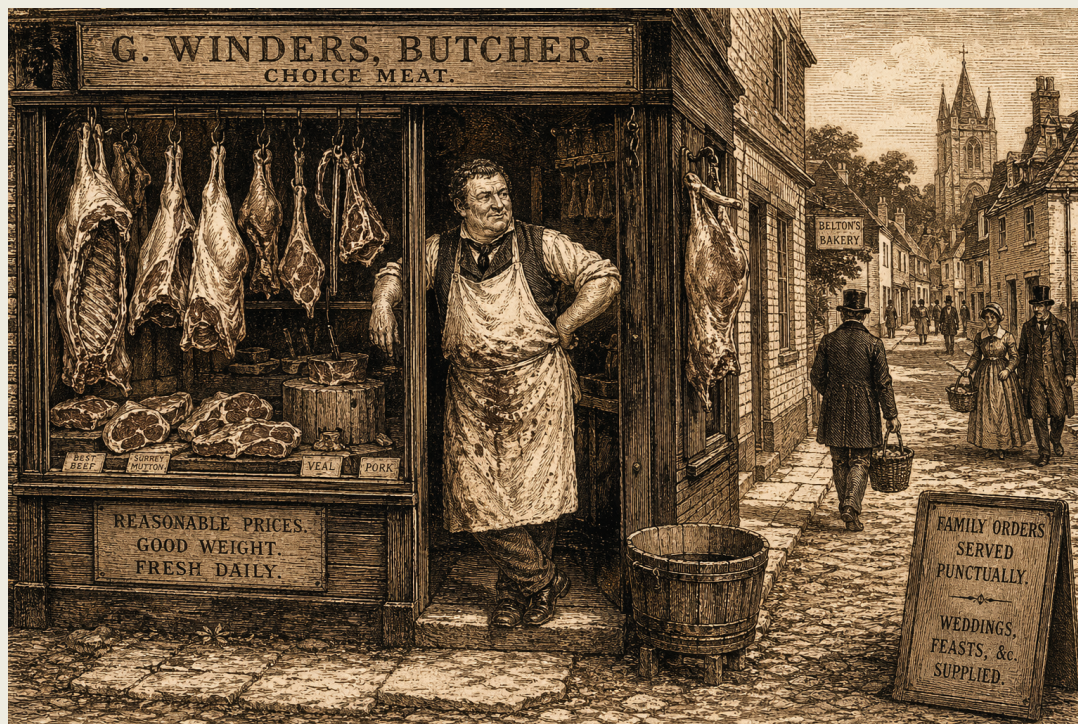
MITCHAM IN THE 1820S–1840S

Mitcham was famous across England for two things that sound unlikely together: lavender and cricket. The lavender fields along the Wandle supplied London's perfumers and apothecaries, and the Mitcham Cricket Club — one of the oldest in England — played on a green that had seen matches since at least the 1730s. The village also had calico and silk printing works along the river (the Royal factory at Phipps' Bridge appears in the 1839 directory), small breweries, and the full complement of trades you'd expect in a self-sufficient Surrey community. The 1839 Pigot's directory reads like a snapshot of a village that had everything it needed: bakers, blacksmiths, carpenters, surgeons, engravers, coal merchants, and — listed under Butchers — George Winders of Upper Mitcham and, just down the road, Samuel Winders of Lower Mitcham.

George set up his butchery and began doing what butchers do: sourcing livestock from the Surrey farms around him, slaughtering and dressing carcasses on site, displaying cuts in the shopfront, and supplying households across the village on account. The King's Arms and the other public houses near his pitch would have been reliable customers — a pub without a butcher's supply was a pub serving very disappointing meals, and neither party wanted that. George would have known everyone in Upper Mitcham within a year of arriving, because everyone needed him. That is the social position of the local butcher: central, trusted, and entirely impossible to avoid.

The children arrived steadily through the 1820s and into the 1830s: **Ann** around 1821, then **Ambrose** baptised on 15 November 1822, **Hannah** in 1828, **William** in 1829, **Daniel** around 1832, and finally **David** around 1836. Six children in fifteen years is not unusual for the period — it is, in fact, quite typical — but it represents a substantial financial pressure on a trade that was never going to make anyone wealthy.

UPPER MITCHAM, A TUESDAY MORNING, C.1830



Reconstruction

George is up at four. By the time the village is stirring, he has already been in the yard for an hour.

The arrangement with the Harwood farm on the Merton road has worked well this season — good fat lambs, which is what the better households prefer. He has two carcasses hanging, a third being dressed by his boy, and the first of the morning's customers already at the door before the sign is properly lit. Mrs Chapman from the lower road, who always wants the best cut and always argues about the price, as if arguing about it changes anything.

He wraps the mutton in paper and hands it over. She pays — mostly. The rest goes on her account, which George will collect at the end of the month, assuming she has it. She usually does, more or less.

Down the lane, Samuel is doing the same thing in Lower Mitcham. The two brothers have divided the territory sensibly: George takes the upper village, Samuel the lower. Whether this was agreed over a pint at the Swan or simply arrived at by instinct is not recorded, but the result is practical. Two Winders butchers in the same village might have competed themselves into the ground; one in each half suited everyone.

By mid-morning George has supplied three households, the inn, and a delivery to the Asprey ironmonger's family on the high road. Elizabeth has the accounts book open on the kitchen table. Six children are in varying states of usefulness. The youngest, David, is two years old and mostly a hazard. The trade is going — not brilliantly, not yet, but it is going.

The butchering trade operated almost entirely on credit, and this was both its great social strength and its chronic economic weakness. George extended credit to his customers — households paying at

the end of the month, inns settling quarterly — while simultaneously owing money to livestock dealers and market traders who expected more prompt payment. The gap between what was owed to George and what George owed to others was always precarious. A few bad debts from customers, a spike in livestock prices at market, a poor trading month through illness or bad weather — any of these could tip the balance. And when the balance tipped, it tended to tip fast.

THE CREDIT ECONOMY AND WHY IT BROKE BUTCHERS

The Panic of 1825 — a major financial crisis that collapsed dozens of banks across England — sent shockwaves through the entire credit economy. Small traders like George felt it not from the banking side directly, but from their customers: households that couldn't pay their accounts, inn keepers who suddenly needed more time, suppliers who became less forgiving about late settlement. A butcher sitting in the middle of this chain, owed money by people who couldn't pay and owing money to people who could demand it, was particularly exposed. Many didn't survive it. The ones who did typically had owned property — a shop, a slaughterhouse, some land — that could be sold or mortgaged to buy time. Those who rented, as George almost certainly did, had no such cushion.

The first crack in the record appears on 7 May 1834, when George's name appeared as a debtor in the *Morning Advertiser*. We don't know the amount, or who the creditor was, or how it was resolved. But the fact of it tells us the finances were already under strain a full seven years before the eventual collapse. George was, in the language of the trade, carrying more debt than was comfortable. He was probably, like most small tradesmen in his position, hoping it would come right. It often didn't.

Hard Times — Debt, Insolvency and the Marshalsea

SURREY AND SOUTHWARK, 1834–1842

George Winders' financial decline happened in three documented steps, spread over eight years, which is actually a testament to either his resilience or his creditors' patience — possibly both.

The first notice, in the *Morning Advertiser* in May 1834, was a warning. The second, in *The Era* in November 1841, was a formal insolvency — a public declaration that debts could not be paid, triggering legal proceedings that put creditors in control of his situation. The third, in *Perry's Bankrupt Gazette* in 1842, was the final reckoning: bankruptcy, and the Marshalsea.

WHY SMALL TRADESMEN FAILED IN THE 1830S AND 1840S

The 1830s brought a succession of pressures on small trade. The Reform Act of 1832 changed the political landscape but did nothing for the economic one. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 — the legislation that replaced outdoor relief with the workhouse — sent a chilling message to anyone teetering on the edge: failure was not just uncomfortable, it was catastrophic. From 1837, a fresh international financial crisis (originating in America) contracted credit across England. For a butcher running on tight margins and extended credit, the 1830s were a gauntlet. The wonder, perhaps, is not that George eventually failed but that he held on as long as he did.

The Marshalsea Prison, where George ended up in 1842, had been London's most notorious debtors' gaol since the medieval period. By the time George arrived, it had been operating in Southwark — just south of London Bridge, not far from Borough Market, with a rich irony given the proximity to the food trade — for centuries. Its most famous inmate had been John Dickens, father of Charles, who was confined there in 1824 when Charles was twelve years old. That experience shaped Dickens profoundly — he described it later as a catastrophe that "blighted" his childhood — and the prison appears in *Little Dorrit*, his novel of 1855–57, in considerable and affectionate grim detail.

The Marshalsea finally closed in 1842, the same year George arrived. He may well have been among its very last inmates. The Insolvent Debtors Act of 1842 — passed that year — was beginning to reform the law that had kept men like George locked up for owing money rather than committing crimes. The reformers' argument was straightforward: imprisoning a man for debt made it impossible for him to earn the money to repay the debt, which rather defeated the purpose. Parliament, moving at its usual pace, had taken some decades to grasp this point.

Conditions in the Marshalsea varied dramatically by means. Those who could afford to pay for a room on the "Master's side" had some comfort — a private space, the ability to receive visitors, perhaps to continue conducting business in a limited way. Those on the "Common side," the truly penniless, faced overcrowding, disease, and despair in equal measure. Where George sat on that spectrum is unknown, but a man who had just been through bankruptcy had probably arrived at the low end of whatever scale of comfort was available.

And while George was in the Marshalsea, **Elizabeth** died.

The exact date and cause of Elizabeth Hards' death in 1842 are not in the current records. She was approximately fifty-two years old. Whether she died before George's imprisonment, during it, or shortly after, we cannot say. What we can say is this: she had raised six children in a Surrey butcher's cottage through fifteen years of financial strain, and she did not live to see what came next. Her husband came out of the Marshalsea to nothing — no business, no wife, six children ranging from about six to twenty-one years old, and a name that had appeared in the bankruptcy gazette. It was, by any measure, a bleak moment.



An original barred window grille from the Marshalsea, now displayed at the Charles Dickens Museum in London — a surviving relic of the prison George knew in 1842.
Author's photograph.



Reconstruction

The Silent Years — and What Was Probably Happening

SURREY, 1842–C.1860

Here the records go quiet. For approximately eighteen years after the Marshalsea, George Winders leaves almost no trace in the documents that survive. This is not unusual for men of his class and period who had been through bankruptcy — they drop out of trade directories because they are no longer trading on their own account, they don't appear in newspaper notices because they are no longer doing anything newsworthy, and the census catches them only once a decade. If George appears in the 1851 census, that record has not yet been located.

We know two things that anchor this period. In 1850, daughter **Anne** is married — confirmed by her marriage certificate. And in December 1850, son **David**, aged approximately fourteen, signs a five-year apprenticeship in the merchant navy.

That second fact is significant for what it implies about George. A boy of fourteen entering a formal merchant navy apprenticeship in 1850 would, in all likelihood, have needed a parent or guardian to agree to the arrangement. The fact that David got his apprenticeship at all suggests George was present, functioning, and capable of acting on his son's behalf — not entirely collapsed, not institutionalised, not dead. He was somewhere, doing something, holding the family together well enough for one of his sons to get a start in a skilled trade.

THE MERCHANT NAVY IN THE 1850S

For a working-class boy with no prospects and a bankrupt father, the merchant navy was one of the better options available. Apprenticeships were formal, typically five years, and trained boys as able seamen on commercial vessels — cargo ships, passenger packets, coastal traders. The pay was modest but it was regular, the training was real, and a young man who came out of his apprenticeship with a competence certificate had a trade that was genuinely portable. Britain's merchant fleet was the largest in the world and its ships were everywhere. If you could sail, you could work.

David completed his five-year apprenticeship — or came close to it — and then, at some point, was injured. The details of the injury are not recorded. But he recovered well enough to sign on with another crew, and in 1855, aged approximately nineteen, **David Winders** left England for Australia.

1855 was an extraordinary year to be heading for Australia. The gold rush of 1851 — when gold was discovered near Ballarat in Victoria — had already transformed the colony from a pastoral backwater into one of the most dynamic places on earth. By 1855 the initial frenzy had settled somewhat, but Melbourne was still booming, migration was running at enormous rates, and a young, trained, able-bodied seaman was a useful commodity on any ship making the run south. David would not have been short of berths to choose from.



SURREY, DECEMBER 1850



Reconstruction

George watches David fold the papers and tuck them inside his jacket.

Fourteen years old, and already taller than his older brother William had been at that age. He has his mother's eyes — that particular steady look that Elizabeth used to give when she'd decided something and wasn't going to un-decide it. George has not seen that look in a long time. He is glad it survived.

Five years. The merchant navy. George knows what the sea does to men — he's heard enough from the traders who came to the Mitcham market with money from the coastal trade. Hard work, dangerous, poorly paid in the early years. But at the end of it: a qualification. Something that couldn't be taken away in a bankruptcy. Something portable.

He doesn't say any of this to David. He just nods at the papers and asks if he's eaten.

The boy is off before the week is out.



George himself, in these years, was almost certainly working as a journeyman butcher — employed in the trade rather than running his own business. After bankruptcy, starting again as a sole trader required capital he no longer had, suppliers willing to extend credit to a name that had appeared in the gazette, and customers prepared to trust a man whose previous shop had failed. These were not easily obtained. The far more practical option was to take employment with an established butcher, work for wages rather than profit, and quietly rebuild.

He was probably still in Surrey — the Mitcham area, or beginning to drift toward Carshalton where his sister Anne had long been established. His father John had been buried at Carshalton in 1826; the family's connections there went back thirty years. When the time came to stop being a lone figure in rented rooms and accept the shelter of family, Carshalton was where that family was.

The children meanwhile were dispersing in the way that Victorian working-class children did. **Anne** married in 1850. **David** was at sea and then in Australia. The others — **Ambrose, Hannah, William, Daniel** — leave no confirmed adult records in the current sources, which likely means they survived and settled somewhere unremarkable enough not to generate newspaper notices. William's marriage certificate in 1876 confirms at least one of them was still around. The others we simply do not know.

George, somewhere in the 1850s, got older. He turned sixty around 1851. He watched the Great Exhibition's preparations in the news — all that national confidence and industrial pride that had nothing to do with him — and he kept working with his hands in the trade he'd known since childhood. He was, by any reasonable assessment, a man who had been through the worst and come out the other side still moving. Whether he thought of it that way is not recorded. People in his position generally didn't have the luxury of reflection. They had the luxury of work, and that was enough.

The Wrythe, Carshalton — Coming Home

SURREY, C.1860–1861

By 1861, George Winders was seventy years old — or close enough — and living in his sister's cottage in Carshalton. The 1861 census records him at 10, 11 Leavett's Cottages, The Wrythe, listed as "Brother" to the head of household, **Ann Leavett** (née Winders), his occupation still given, with admirable stubbornness, as Butcher.

A man who has been a butcher for fifty years does not stop being a butcher because of a thing like turning seventy. He might no longer be slaughtering cattle himself, but he knew the trade, he knew the people in it, and as long as he could buy and sell meat — advising, sourcing, supplying in some capacity — that was what he called himself. And why not. It was all he'd ever been.

THE WRYTHE, CARSHALTON

The Wrythe was a small hamlet within Carshalton parish — a cluster of working-class cottages and terraces set back from the main village, close to the Wandle and the watercress beds that ran along the river. Carshalton itself had been a pleasant Surrey village for centuries, known for its ponds, its lavender fields (now largely passed), and the river. By the 1860s it was beginning to feel the southward expansion of London — the Sutton railway had opened in 1847, and Carshalton's own station would follow in 1868. The 1861 census shows the neighbourhood around The Wrythe as solidly working — labourers, paper factory workers, gas workers, carpenters. Leavett's Cottages were not grand. They were the kind of homes where people worked hard and died without much fuss.



Reconstruction

Anne Leavett (née Winders) had been in Carshalton since at least 1812, when she married near the village. She had outlasted her husband — she is listed as head of household in 1861, which almost certainly means she is widowed by then. She is eighty years old and managing a household that includes her daughter-in-law **Maria** (born Kensington) and her granddaughter **Jessie**, eight years old and going to school. And now, in addition to all of this, she has her brother George, aged seventy, under her roof.

Family connections in the Victorian working class operated as a form of social insurance — the only social insurance that reliably existed. There was no pension, no state support beyond the dreaded workhouse, no safety net for an elderly man without savings. You fell back on family, and family took you in. George moving to Carshalton was not a sign of defeat; it was an entirely rational and honourable arrangement. Anne had space; George needed it. He had, one imagines, helped family members along the way in his more prosperous years. Now the favour returned.

Also in the household — working as a servant, sleeping in the back room or in a shared space — was a girl named **Ann Farrage**, approximately sixteen years old. She had been in the service of Mrs Leavett for four years, which meant she had started at around twelve — entirely typical for a girl of her class in the period. She came from local Surrey, had done a year in service with a Mr Wallace elsewhere in Carshalton, and was by all accounts a capable and hard-working domestic servant. She appears on the census page just below the main Leavett household, noted as a servant. She is a background figure in the 1861 record. She would become something else entirely in 1862.



The Croydon Times, March 1862

CARSHALTON AND CROYDON, 1861–1862

The *Croydon Times* of Saturday, 8 March 1862 gave considerable space to the local magistrates' court, as Victorian newspapers invariably did. Court reporting was the tabloid journalism of its day — factual, detailed, and read with avidity by people who would have been quite embarrassed to admit how closely they followed it.

Among the cases reported that week was a claim brought against **George Winders**, butcher, late of Mitcham.

The paper reported it in full. **Ann Farrage** — the servant in Mrs Leavett's household — alleged that Winders had seduced her, and was the father of twins she had subsequently borne, both of whom had since died. The complainant said she had been in the service of Mrs Leavett of Carshalton for four years. Mr Winders had come to live there about two years previously. On one occasion, approximately eleven months before she left the household on 26 November 1861, while she was making the defendant's bed, he had come into the room. Although she resisted all she could, the newspaper records, he succeeded in seducing her. Repeated incidents followed. She did not say anything until she was confronted about her pregnancy, at which point she disclosed that the defendant was responsible. He had subsequently sent her ten shillings via a man named Lovel, some meat, and had promised to hire a room for her.

George's representative at the hearing attempted to suggest that Ann had been intimate with the young son of the Wallace household during the year she spent there — an effort to discredit her account that the magistrates clearly found unpersuasive.

The magistrates found her account "substantially correct." They adjudged the defendant — described in the newspaper as a man "verging on threescore," which would make him approaching sixty, though he was actually seventy or thereabouts — to pay the costs of the confinement, the funeral of the children, and related expenses. The total was £5 18 shillings.

THE LAW, SERVANTS, AND POWER IN 1862

In 1862, a young servant girl who had been assaulted by a member of the household in which she worked had almost no legal recourse. There was no criminal prosecution for rape brought in this case — the civil claim for maintenance costs was effectively the only mechanism available to Ann Farrage, and it was a weak one. The legal system treated this as a financial matter: who would pay for the consequences. It did not treat it as a crime against a person, despite the fact that Ann had stated clearly that she had resisted. A girl of sixteen, in service, dependent on her employer's good opinion for her livelihood and reference, had every reason not to disclose — and did not, until she was confronted about the pregnancy. The fact that the magistrates believed her and ordered payment was, by the standards of the era, a reasonable outcome. It was not justice in any modern sense of the word.

George paid his £5 18 shillings and returned to Carshalton. The newspaper moved on to other cases. Ann Farrage disappears from the record at this point, which is exactly what happened to women like

her — they resolved their situations as best they could and left no further trace. We do not know where she went, whether she found other work, or what became of her.

What the case tells us about George Winders is something the trade directories and census returns never could. He was a man who had lost almost everything by the time he arrived at his sister's house: his business, his wife, his independence, his reputation. What he had not apparently lost was the willingness to exploit the vulnerability of someone weaker — a girl forty or fifty years younger, in a household where he was a dependent guest with no particular standing, who could not easily refuse him and could not safely speak. Whether that says something particular about George or something broader about the assumptions of men of his class and generation is a question worth sitting with. Probably both.

The Long Farewell

CARSHALTON, 1862–AFTER 1866

In 1866, a brief notice appeared in a Carshalton newspaper: **George Winders**, butcher, of Carshalton, had been fined 9 shillings and 10 pence for allowing his horse to stray.

He was approximately seventy-five years old. He still had a horse. He was still calling himself a butcher. There is something almost magnificent about this — a man who had been bankrupt, imprisoned, widowed, through court twice, and was now in his mid-seventies, maintaining a horse in Surrey and being fined for its wandering tendencies. The horse, one imagines, had developed opinions of its own by this stage.

After 1866, George Winders disappears from the record entirely. His sister **Anne** had died in 1863, three years before. George outlived her. He was most likely still in Carshalton — it is difficult to imagine him having either the resources or the energy to move again — but without a death certificate or a burial record yet located, the final chapter of his life is unwritten.

He had outlasted almost everything. The Marshalsea had closed. The Surrey villages had become London suburbs. The railway had arrived in Carshalton two years after his last recorded appearance. The world he had been born into — rural Oxfordshire, livestock markets, village butcheries, handwritten accounts settled monthly over a handshake — had been substantially transformed around him. George had simply kept going, in the trade, in Carshalton, with his horse, until the record stopped keeping up with him.

Of the six children George and Elizabeth raised in Upper Mitcham, we can confirm only fragments of what followed. **Anne** married in 1850. **William** married in 1876. **David** went to Australia in 1855, aged approximately nineteen, and presumably built a life there — his departure in the peak years of the Victorian Australian migration gives him every chance of having done so. **Ambrose**, **Hannah**, and **Daniel** have left no confirmed adult records in the sources currently available. They either died young, lived quietly enough to avoid newspapers, or are waiting in a record set not yet searched.

George Winders' life traced one of the most common arcs in Victorian England — the skilled tradesman who rose as far as his class allowed, ran aground on the credit economy, suffered the full force of a system that punished poverty rather than addressed it, and rebuilt as best he could on whatever remained. He was not a villain, though he did a villainous thing in his old age. He was not a hero. He was a butcher who was born in Oxfordshire, married in Holborn, built a life in Mitcham, lost it in the Marshalsea, and died in Carshalton having still, against all probability, called himself a butcher to the end.

That is not nothing.



CARSHALTON, LATE 1860s



An old man on a Surrey road, leading a horse.

Not an unusual sight — there were plenty of old men and plenty of horses in Carshalton in the late 1860s. But this one has a particular quality of self-possession that comes from decades of the same trade. He knows how an animal should move, what it weighs, what it is worth at market. He has known this since he was a boy in a yard in Northleigh, watching his father work.

He is seventy-five, perhaps older now. His sister Anne is dead. His wife has been dead for twenty years. His son David is somewhere in Australia — last news was good, or good enough. The other children have their own lives. The butcher's shop in Upper Mitcham, where he was someone, where his name was in the directory, where he knew every customer and they knew him — all of that is a long time ago.

He leads the horse back through the lane and ties it up. Tomorrow there will be something to do. There always is.

And then the page goes blank.



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Site Visit

- St Andrews, Holborn, London — photographs taken on location, 2025
- Holborn / Winders London area — photographs, 2025

The Butcher of Mitcham



George Winders' life traced one of the most common arcs in Victorian England — the skilled tradesman who rose as far as his class allowed, ran aground on the credit economy, suffered the full force of a system that punished poverty rather than addressed it, and rebuilt as best he could on whatever remained. He was not a villain, though he did a villainous thing in his old age. He was not a hero. He was a butcher who was born in Oxfordshire, married in Holborn, built a life in Mitcham, lost it in the Marshalsea, and died in Carshalton having still, against all probability, called himself a butcher to the end.

THE FAMILY HISTORY STUDIO

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