

# **CORDWAINING (BOOT & SHOE MAKING) IN OSGATHORPE**

*"A GENTLE craft, I sit so snug,  
With hammer, knife, and flippers;  
I thumb away, and cut, and tug,  
At boot, and shoe, and slippers.  
And if I can make both ends meet  
My awl, though no great treasure  
My work, though trodden under feet,  
I'll work for you with pleasure."*

**From Little Jack of all trades (London, 1823).**

**BY SAMUEL T STEWART - JANUARY 2024**

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## CORDWAINERS IN OSGATHORPE

	1841 CENSUS	1851 CENSUS	1861 CENSUS	1871 CENSUS	1881 CENSUS	1891 CENSUS	1901 CENSUS	1911 CENSUS
SHOE, BOOT MAKER / CORDWAINER /	1	1	3	4	1	2	2	0
JUNIOR SHOE MAKER	1	0	0	0	0	0		
APPRENTICE SHOE MAKER / CORDWAINER	1	1	1	3	1	0		

The above chart lists the number of Cordwainers / Shoe and Boot makers in Osgathorpe recorded in the 1841 to 1901 censuses. These have been confirmed in trade directories also.

For those wishing to avail themselves with personal details of those listed in the above chart, the transcribed censuses and trade directories are appended on the author's website. These local cordwainers would have seen little in the way of profit from their enterprises even though a pair of shoes would probably have cost the buyer at least a weeks' wages. They would have run other businesses in parallel like shop keeping, Baking, Public House landlords, farming, blacksmithing etc. in order to subsidise their wages.

It is thought that the term cordwainer entered the English language originally from the Anglo-Norman cordwaner, in turn developed from old French cordoanier / cordouanier / corduennier etc.

It apparently initially denoted a worker in cordwain or cordovan, which was a leather historically produced in Moorish Córdoba, Spain in the Middle Ages.

The descriptions Cordwainer, or boot and shoe maker was used in the census description and generally they were all male. However, instances of wives are recorded as boot binders, who obviously carried out the sewing / binding operations.

British tradition distinguishes the terms cordwainer and cobbler, restricting cobblers to repairing shoes. In this usage, **a cordwainer is someone who makes new shoes using new leather, whereas a cobbler is someone who repairs shoes.**

**It is an ancient trade and the first English guild who called themselves cordwainers was founded at Oxford in 1131.** "Cordwainers" was also the choice of the London shoemakers, who organized a guild before 1160, and the Worshipful Company of Cordwainers has used this title since receiving its first Ordinances in 1272.

In the British guild system, a cordwainer was distinguished from a cobbler because the guild tradition restricted the cobbler to repairing shoes. In fact, the cordwainers and cobblers had separate guilds.

Medieval cordwainers used cordovan leather for the highest-quality shoes, and these were located usually in the big cities, mainly London. Rural village cordwainers would have mainly used domestically produced leathers in the manufacture of boots and shoes for local villagers. The more wealthy in Osgathorpe village society would no doubt have visited the cities for their high quality designer shoes.

Apparently, it wasn't until the 1520s, that heels were introduced, but it is hard to imagine that it was another 250 years before separate left and right shoes were produced. The early 1800s saw the introduction of rivets and piecework was introduced for the larger manufacturers. In the towns and cities, several shoemakers often worked together and many of them employed outworkers. Shoemakers wives, as described by census enumerators, were often shoemakers in their own right.

By the mid 1800s, iron lasts were invented and machines were introduced which posed a threat to the rural shoemakers' livelihoods.



### **THE MAKING OF BOOTS AND SHOES ON VARIOUS SIZED METAL LASTS**

The names of people identified as being Cordwainers / Boot & Shoe makers in Osgathorpe from 1841 to 1908 are :-

**1841**

**Thomas Gilbert (senior)**

**Henry ????? (junior shoemaker to Thomas Gilbert)**

**Joseph Harrison (apprentice shoemaker to Thomas Gilbert)**

**1851**

**Thomas Gilbert (junior) cordwainer and farmer**

**William Goodman (apprentice to Thomas Gilbert)**

**1861**

**William Goodman (cordwainer)**

**Charles Wright (apprentice to William Goodman)**

**John Statham (cordwainer)**

**John Brooks (Lodging with William Rennocks family)**

**William Goodman (cordwainer)**  
**William Rennocks (cordwainer and Boot & Shoe wholesaler)**  
**James Brookes (apprentice to William Rennocks)**  
**George King (cordwainer)**  
**Sarah King (wife of above - boot binder)**

**1871**

**Thomas Jefcote (apprentice cordwainer - employer no known)**  
**John Rennocks (cordwainer)**  
**William Burbidge (apprentice to John Rennocks)**

**1881**

**William Goodman (cordwainer)**  
**James Lander (apprentice to William Goodman)**

**1891**

**William Goodman (cordwainer)**  
**John Statham (cordwainer)**

**1901**

**John Statham (cordwainer)**  
**George King (cordwainer)**

**The most well known & successfull cordwainer in Osgathorpe was William Goodman.**

As well as being a cordwainer (shoe and boot maker) and employer of cordwainer apprentices. William Goodman, was a grocer, baker, local preacher, steward of Osgathorpe Wesleyan Methodist Chapel and village overseer.

William was clearly an astute businessman, being able to combine being a cordwainer (boot and shoe maker) and his baker and grocer businesses together with his other village responsibilities. He trained at least two apprentices to be cordwainers. William certainly appeared to live up to his name of "Goodman" as did the rest of the family, evidence suggests.

William, who was born in Knight Thorpe, near Loughborough, and is first recorded as being in Osgathorpe in the 1851 census as a twenty year old "Cordwainer Apprentice" articed to Thomas Gilbert, a cordwainer, and also a farmer of 27 acres.

By the time the 1861 census was taken, William is married to his wife Martha aged 20 who was 10 years younger than him. She was born in Coalville. Being non-conformists, their marriage is not recorded in the church parish registers. By this time, they had two daughters, Isabella and Elizabeth aged 2 and 1 respectively. He is recorded as being a cordwainer, baker and grocer employing 1 woman and 1 man.

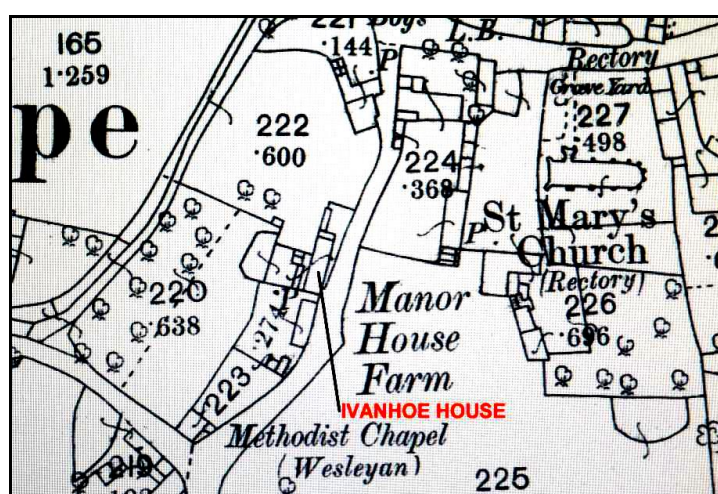
By 1871, William and Martha had two more children, John (9) and Agnes (2). He had employed a "cordwainer apprentice" named James Lakin, aged 20, who was born in Osgathorpe.

In 1881, they had another daughter Edith, aged 8. Only John (19), now a railway clerk, and Agnes (12) of their previous children are living at home. **He has employed another apprentice cordwainer James Lander, aged 20. James was born in Loughborough and had been deaf and dumb from birth. This is further evidence of what a compassionate man William Goodman must have been.**

In 1891, William now aged 60, is still listed as a cordwainer, grocer and baker. Daughter Edith is still living with them and she is recorded as being an elementary school teacher, probably teaching at the National School in Osgathorpe or the Griffydam Wesleyan Day School. Their married daughter Elizabeth Parr (31) and her son William Parr, born in Alsager, Cheshire are now back living with William and Martha. She is shown as being married and not a widow, but there is no mention of her husband, which was likely to be a mistake by the enumerator. Interestingly, Robert T. Hance who was headmaster at the Griffydam Wesleyan Day School at Peggs Green for 26 years is lodging with them.

The enumerator for the 1891 census records their residence as "Ivanhoe House" situated on Chapel Lane (see the map below). From the location indicated on previous census returns, it seems that this was William and Martha's only residence in Osgathorpe following their marriage. The map below shows the actual location of the cottage in 1881.

[Ironically Ivanhoe House was adjacent to William Gilberts blacksmith's shop referred to in the previous article, and their workshops were almost next to each other. It must have been really noisy in that area of Chapel Lane with both men hammering away in their respective trades.](#)



There is no record of William and Martha in the 1901 census, as William died in 1899. However, their son John, aged 39 and still a railway clerk and local preacher on the Ashby circuit, is living with his wife Sarah, the daughter of Hannah Farmer, a widow aged 69, living on her own means. They have a daughter Edith aged 16. The enumerator has given their residence as Manor House, Osgathorpe. They are still all living together in the 1911 census.