

John Butterworth, the man

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The patent for what became known as the Crane system of duet concertina was claimed on 1 October 1896 by one John Butterworth, who described himself as a ‘pianoforte tuner’, of 152 Crompton Road, Macclesfield, Cheshire. The 1901 census for Macclesfield shows a John Butterworth living at that address, but his occupation is given not as piano tuner but as silk weaver. The Census return is as given below:

152 Crompton Road, Macclesfield West

John Butterworth	Head	46	Silk Weaver	Macclesfield	Cheshire
Ann M Butterworth	Wife	47	Silk Weaver	Coventry	Warwickshire
John T Butterworth	Son	27	Silk Weaver	Macclesfield	Cheshire
Alice Butterworth	Dau’r	23	Silk Weaver	Macclesfield	Cheshire
Frances Butterworth	Dau’r	19	Silk Weaver	Macclesfield	Cheshire
Annie Butterworth	Dau’r	15	Silk Weaver	Macclesfield	Cheshire
Joseph Butterworth	Son	13	Box Packer	Macclesfield	Cheshire
Ethel Butterworth	Dau’r	11		Macclesfield	Cheshire
Percy Butterworth	Son	9		Macclesfield	Cheshire

Not only John Butterworth but his wife and children (except the youngest three), are all silk weavers. Macclesfield at that time was the centre of the British silk industry, and one of the main manufactories was in Crompton Road, surrounded by terraced housing for the workers.

John’s eldest son is also a John Butterworth, with the middle name of Thomas. He would have been 22 in 1896, and is unlikely to be the patentee of the concertina system. In fact there are at least four generations of the family called “John Butterworth”, which makes for confusion unless they are numbered.

So we can start with John (I) Butterworth. He was born about 1796 in Royton, south of Rochdale in Lancashire. It is probable that he is the John Butterworth baptised in Royton on 1 January 1797, in which case his father was yet another John, and his mother Sarah. There were however a lot of Butterworths in that area (Butterworth is one of the two ancient townships making up present day Rochdale) and John is a very common first name.

Anyway, we do know that John (I) joined the army on 24 July 1812. He was only 16, and was on reduced pay as a boy soldier for a year. He signed on at Rochdale to serve with the Royal Artillery, which meant moving to the barracks at Woolwich, Kent. His army record shows that he was posted to the Cape Colony in South Africa in 1822 as gunner/driver, but suffered two accidental injuries from which he never fully recovered.

At Spithead in 1822, whilst preparing to sail aboard the transport ‘Pilot’, he was 'severely hurt in his left thigh by the falling of a cask of flour through the hatchway'. In 1828, in the Cape, he 'received an injury of his right hand and arm in consequence of which the middle and little fingers of that hand were permanently contracted'. He returned to Woolwich with his unit in 1830.

Presumably he married there, though I have not found the record. All I know of his wife is that her first name was Ann and that she was from Witham in Essex. She was probably the

daughter of a fellow soldier. Their son John (II) Butterworth was baptised at Woolwich on 3 February 1833, the father being described as a gunner in the Royal Artillery.

John (I) Butterworth was discharged from the army on 7 July 1835, on medical grounds. In addition to his injuries, he had contracted rheumatoid arthritis and was considered 'permanently unfit for military service, but able to contribute something towards his livelihood'. He was granted an out-pension from Chelsea Hospital.

The next sighting is in the 1851 census, at 112 Crompton Road, Macclesfield. The census return reads:

John Butterworth	Head	55	Hand loom weaver, silk/ Chelsea pensioner	Royton	Lancashire
Ann Butterworth	Wife	53	Silk piecer	Witham	Essex
John Butterworth	Son	18	Hand loom weaver, silk	Woolwich	Kent

John (I) seems to have died in the 1850s, as Ann Butterworth marries a Richard Burgess in 1861. He is 73 to her 62, a Chelsea Pensioner and probable comrade of John's. They can be found in the 1861 Macclesfield census but are both gone by 1871.

Meanwhile, John (II) Butterworth had married, in 1853, a Sarah Ann Williams, daughter of another silk weaver, Thomas Williams, and his wife Ellen. In the 1861 census they are living at 151 Crompton Road, as follows:

John Butterworth	Head	28	Silk weaver	Woolwich	Kent
Sarah Butterworth	Wife	27	Silk weaver	Macclesfield	Cheshire
John Butterworth	Son	6	Scholar	Macclesfield	Cheshire
Thomas Butterworth	Son	4	Scholar	Macclesfield	Cheshire
Alice Butterworth	Dau'r	1		Macclesfield	Cheshire

The family are found in 1871 and 1881 at 247 Crompton Road, then in 1891 at 177 Crompton Road, always employed in silk weaving. The family grows by the addition of Joseph (1862) Frederick (1865) Annie (1868) Albert (1875) and Emily (1875). Sarah Ann Butterworth died in 1897 (the year the concertina patent was granted), and in 1901 John (II) Butterworth was living in Hope Street, Macclesfield, with his son Albert and family. John (II) died in 1906.

His eldest son John (III) Butterworth is the most likely candidate for the patentee of the Crane Duet. He lived with his parents until 1872, when he married Ann Maria George. She was from Coventry, daughter of Thomas George and Charlotte Bates, but by 1871 she was silk weaving in Macclesfield. In 1881 they are at 21 Bank Street Macclesfield, working as silk weavers as usual:

John Alma Butterworth	Head	26	Silk weaver	Macclesfield	Cheshire
Ann Maria Butterworth	Wife	26	Silk weaver	Coventry	Warwickshire
John Thomas Butterworth	Son	7	Scholar	Macclesfield	Cheshire
Arthur Butterworth	Son	5	Scholar	Macclesfield	Cheshire
Alice Butterworth	Dau'r	3		Macclesfield	Cheshire
Frederick Butterworth	Son	2		Macclesfield	Cheshire

John (III) is calling himself John Alma Butterworth (perhaps he was aware of the confusion) – the large silk manufactory in Crompton Road was called the Alma Mill. This is obviously the same family that was at 152 Crompton Road in 1901, though by then Arthur and Frederick have left, and the family has grown with the addition of Frances (1882), Annie (1886), Joseph (1888), Ethel (1890) and Percy (1891).

John (III) Butterworth does seem to have tried other trades apart from silk weaving. In the 1891 census, he is a ‘licensed victualler’ at the Wheatsheaf Inn, Stanley Street, although his son John Thomas is still a silk weaver and Arthur is a ‘soap maker’. In 1896 he is at 152 Crompton Road, describing himself as a piano tuner in the Crane Concertina patent, but by 1901, still at 152 Crompton Road, he is back to the silk weaving. I have found a trade directory for Cheshire covering 1896 – it lists piano tuners for Macclesfield but John Butterworth is not amongst them. Perhaps it was just a part-time job. He must have had a passion for music, even if he couldn’t make a living at it.

By 1911, the latest census to be released, John (III) Butterworth is living at 38 Roe Street, Macclesfield. He is still a silk weaver. Ann Maria is still with him, as is their youngest son Percy, now a ‘designer for silk’. He obviously wasn’t able to retire on the profits from his concertina system. He died in 1916, Ann Maria in 1931.

John Thomas Butterworth married a Mary Swindells in 1902, but she died 5 years later. John remarried in 1910, to Elizabeth McWilliams, a Macclesfield girl whose parents had come from Belfast. In 1911 John is a hand-loom silk weaver at 9 Exchange Street, Macclesfield. They had four daughters and a son, but the boy and one of the girls died in infancy. There would be no more John Butterworths in this line.