

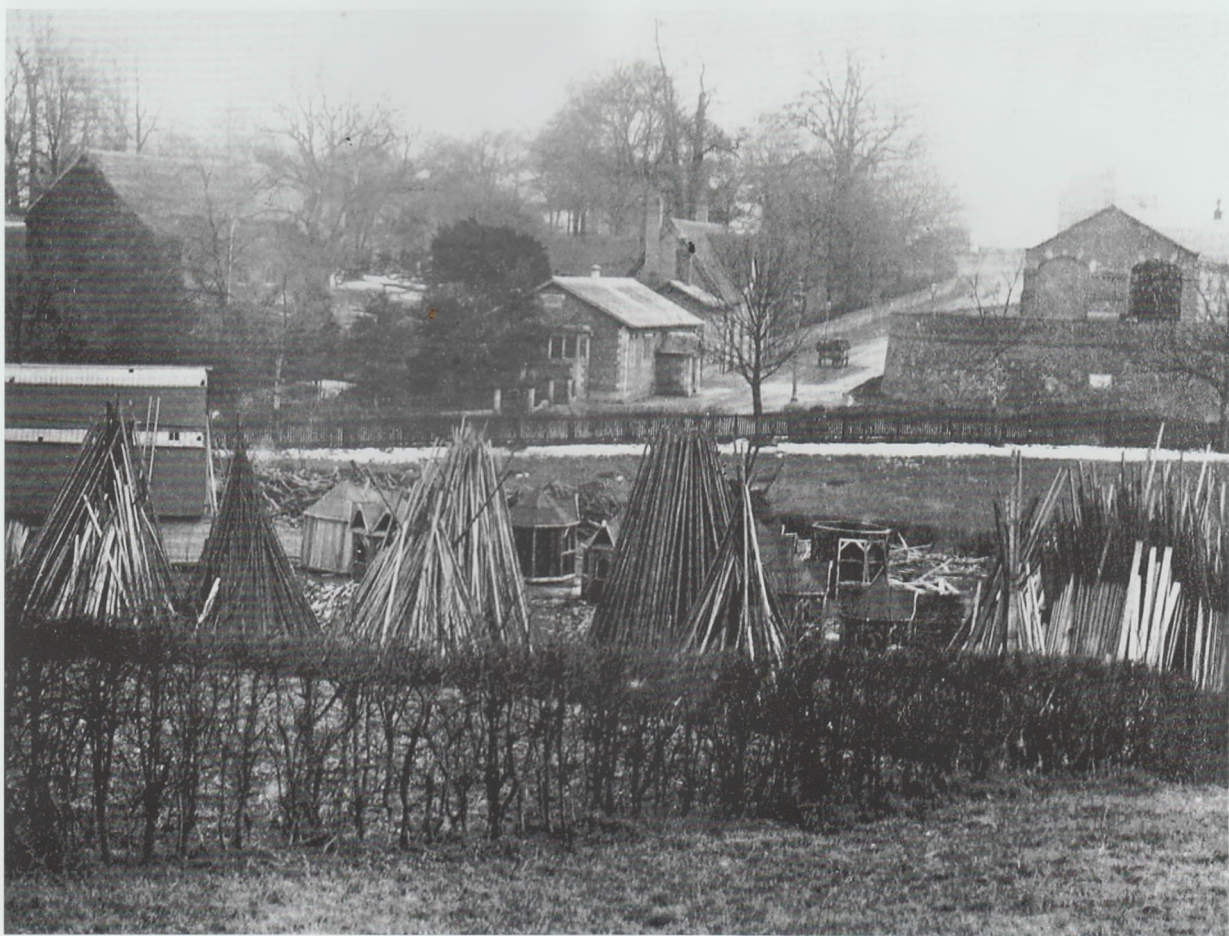
# Henry & Julius Caesar: Knutsford Rustic House Builders

Knutsford is a small market town in Cheshire, where a rustic summerhouse business was started in 1871 by a young man named Henry Caesar. His father, Augustus, from Chertsey, settled in Knutsford and married a local girl, Jane Acton. Census records show that they had five children, one of whom was Henry, born in Knutsford on 17 March 1853 in King Street, which is the main throughfare of the town. In the 1878 *Morris Directory*

Henry is listed as a joiner. Knutsford Heritage Centre has a number of trade catalogues which date the rustic summerhouse business as starting in 1871, when Henry was only 18 years old. These catalogues though are *c.* 1924–1927, there being no earlier ones when Henry was running the business. The name ‘Julius’ appears to be a sales ploy, introduced we believe sometime before 1900.

The Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace, in 1851, resulted in a proliferation of exhibitions all over the country, and Henry seized the opportunity to exhibit at many of these. The rustic buildings he created were designed to appeal to the more affluent members of society. His designs were diverse, including summer houses, tennis houses, rustic seating, porches, shelters and bridges. Some had stained glass windows and doors. An octagonal rustic house was supplied to Queen Victoria, and H. & J. Caesar were awarded over 200 medals and diplomas at exhibitions.

The earliest photographic evidence of the business is from the Henry Hill photograph albums *c.* 1875 in Knutsford Heritage Centre. This image shows a thriving rustic summerhouse business established in the open air in Brook Street, with the railway locomotive sheds above, and so must be sometime after 1862 when the railway came to Knutsford. It has been difficult to find surviving rustic buildings by Henry and Julius Caesar, but one good example is that at the Himalayan Garden, Ripon, which has a trade label. There is also a listed Caesar summerhouse at Courtlands, Pangbourne, of which we would like to know more.



Rustic Summerhouses being built in Brook Street c. 1871 or later. *Photo Knutsford Heritage Centre*





Rustic summerhouse at the Himalayan Garden, Ripon, by Henry & Julius Caesar.  
Photo Adam Bowett

Henry Caesar married Jane Dawber from Horncastle, Lincolnshire, at St Barnabas, Openshaw, South Manchester on 16 January 1878. Census records show that two of Jane's siblings moved to Knutsford somewhat earlier. Perhaps during one of Jane's visits to Knutsford she may have met, or been introduced to, Henry Caesar?

Henry must have had a very hectic life displaying at many exhibitions across the country, including one in Edinburgh in 1890 shortly before he died. By the time he was 35 he was already in poor health and had made a

will. He died on 17 April 1891, aged just 39, leaving a widow and five surviving children, three of whom were still living with her. Jane decided to carry on running the rustic summerhouse business until sometime after 1900, and in 1906 moved with three of her children, Dora, Ruth and Dorothy, to Vickerstown, Walney Island. It is believed that prior to her move she sold the business to the Power Brothers in Knutsford, who were carriage builders nearby in Brook Street. On the 1911 census they are listed as master rustic house builders, i.e. employers.

What happened then to the rustic summerhouse business is unclear, but we know that W. & R. Drinkwater, a local Knutsford family, were sometime later running the business. We have been able to learn more about the Caesar family by discovering living descendants of Henry's daughter Dora, who had the prestigious honour of being Knutsford Royal Festival May Queen in 1898. Henry's wife Jane lived to be 94, settling in the Lake District. The site where Henry and Jane started their business in Brook Street came to be known as 'Caesar's Place', but their cottage was unfortunately demolished, and is now the site of an Aldi store. We are awaiting the release of the 1921 Census, which may throw more light on what happened to the rustic business. It is research in progress as they say.

*David and Valerie Bryant*



Henry Caesar, photographed at the Edinburgh International Exhibition of 1890. Photo Knutsford Heritage Centre



Caesar's Place. Photo Knutsford Heritage Centre