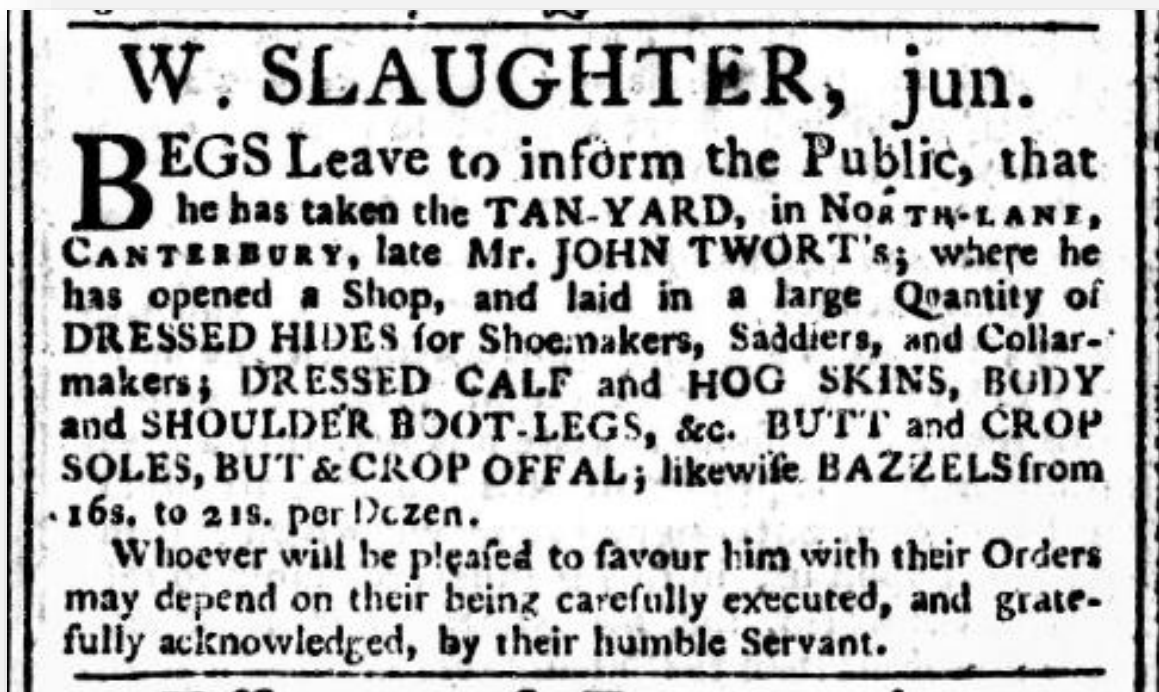


The Tannery on North Lane, Canterbury (1775–1820)

In 1775, William Slaughter, an ambitious 22-year-old tanner acquired the existing tannery on North Lane in Canterbury. William was a freeman of Sandwich. At the time, his father, William Slaughter senior, managed a family tannery in Sandwich, owned a ship and importing business, and served as a jurat (Mayor of Sandwich in 1776 & 1780). William junior—born into a long familial line of fellmongers, butchers, tanners, and leather cutters—would expand the tanning business into Canterbury.

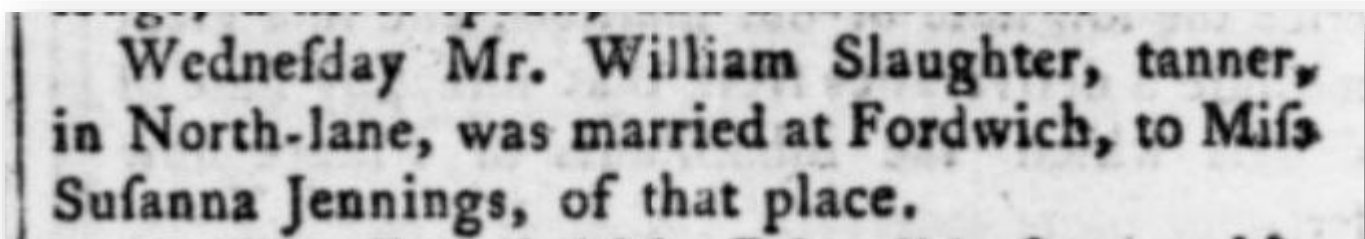
He announced his intentions in the *Kentish Gazette* (4 July 1775).



W. SLAUGHTER, jun.
BEGS Leave to inform the Public, that he has taken the TAN-YARD, in NORTH-LANE, CANTERBURY, late Mr. JOHN TWORT'S; where he has opened a Shop, and laid in a large Quantity of DRESSED HIDES for Shoemakers, Saddlers, and Collar-makers; DRESSED CALF and HOG SKINS, BODY and SHOULDER BOOT-LEGS, &c. BUTT and CROP SOLES, BUT & CROP OFFAL; likewise BAZZELS from 16s. to 21s. per Dozen.
Whoever will be pleased to favour him with their Orders may depend on their being carefully executed, and gratefully acknowledged, by their humble Servant.

But just a month before acquiring the North Lane Tannery, William married Susanna Jennings of Fordwich (7 June 1775). Susanna's family were coal merchants and prominent civic leaders. Her great-grandfather, father, and brothers had served, or would serve, as mayors of Fordwich for 80+ years in total.

The marriage was announced in the *Kentish Gazette* (13 June 1775).



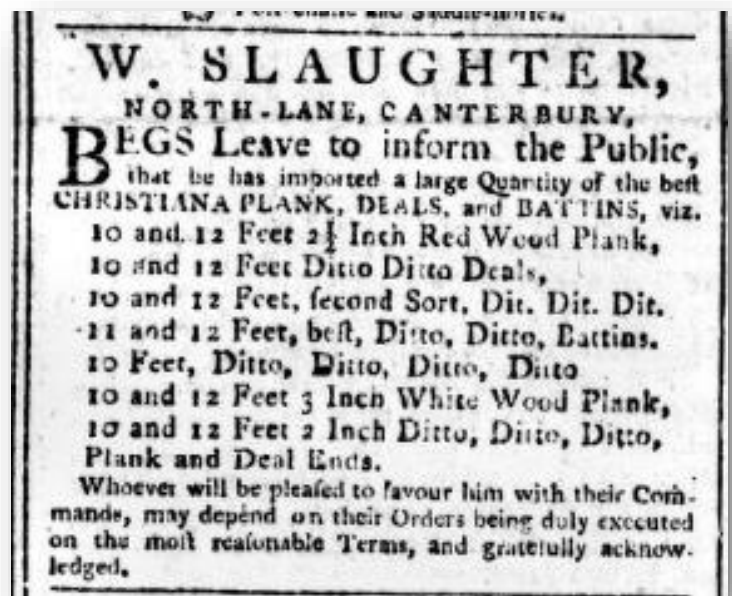
Wednesday Mr. William Slaughter, tanner, in North-lane, was married at Fordwich, to Miss Susanna Jennings, of that place.

The tan-yard occupied a stretch of ground on North Lane in the parish of Holy Cross Westgate Without, lying just beyond the city's great stone gate and beside the slow bend of the River Stour. Workshops, sheds and sunken tanning pits for soaking hides stood near the river, with gardens and open ground nearby. Here the river's water ran close along the property, feeding the tanning processes.

Being close to the water had its advantages for the tanning business, but it could also have its disadvantages. William and Susanna had not lived in Canterbury for a year when trouble found them. On Monday, 8 January 1776, the waters of the River Stour swelled in such a sudden and surprising way that it filled the streets of Canterbury, causing much damage, including to the Slaughter property. The *Kentish Gazette* (10 January 1776) reported:

Canterbury January 10. By the heavy rains which fell on Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday last, the river Stour which runs through the city, was swelled to such an amazing degree, that the oldest inhabitant does not remember such a sudden and surprising inundation, as happened on Monday morning, and continued rising till between five and six o'clock in the evening, which broke the banks in many places above the city, making free passage through houses and gardens, so that all the houses in the streets next the river where upwards of four feet deep in water. It came on so suddenly that many of the cellars and low rooms were full before any of the movables could be taken away. The inhabitants were obliged to betake themselves to their bedchambers for safety, and many families were under the necessity of leaving their habitations. Stour-street, Lamb lane, Best lane, Beercart lane, Hawke's lane, St. Peter's street, St. Dunstan's and Cock lane, with part of the High street, was one continued river of water; and the current ran so extremely strong through North lane, that it has done considerable damage to the pavement, as likewise to the foundations of several houses, particularly to that of Mr. Tilbie, grocer, at the corner, (whose goods are much damaged) and the two adjoining houses toward the gate. Mr. Slaughter, tanner, and Mr. Brown, currier, have likewise suffered much by the waters breaking in at their storehouses, and tearing down the buildings adjoining the river. Most of the outhouses in North lane were torn to pieces. Had this flood happened in the night, the consequences would have been of the most alarming nature.

Surely the flood was a disappointing setback to William's business. It would take some time to rebuild. In the meantime, he had an idea: William's father, in Sandwich, was importing timber from Denmark. William Jr. decided to join his father and add the sale of timber to his leather business. By the summer, William was selling timber from his property. An announcement was placed in the *Kentish Gazette* (6 July 1776).



W. SLAUGHTER,
NORTH-LANE, CANTERBURY,
BEGS Leave to inform the Public,
that he has imported a large Quantity of the best
CHRISTIANA PLANK, DEALS, and BATTINS, viz.
10 and 12 Feet 2½ Inch Red Wood Plank,
10 and 12 Feet Ditto Ditto Deals,
10 and 12 Feet, second Sort, Dit. Dit. Dit.
11 and 12 Feet, best, Ditto, Ditto, Battins.
10 Feet, Ditto, Ditto, Ditto, Ditto
10 and 12 Feet 3 Inch White Wood Plank,
10 and 12 Feet 2 Inch Ditto, Ditto, Ditto,
Plank and Deal Ends.
Whoever will be pleased to favour him with their Com-
mande, may depend on their Orders being duly executed
on the most reasonable Terms, and gratefully acknow-
ledged.

More trouble came in June 1780 when “a fire broke out in a workshop belonging to Mr. Slaughter, of North-lane, near this city, but by a timely discovery, and assistance being procured, it was got under without any considerable damage” (*Kentish Gazette*, 21 June 1780).

Nevertheless, the business appeared to have been steadily expanding, with yard buildings repaired or put up afresh and new equipment brought in to support the work, while the growing trade in timber and building materials added another strand to the tan yard’s income.

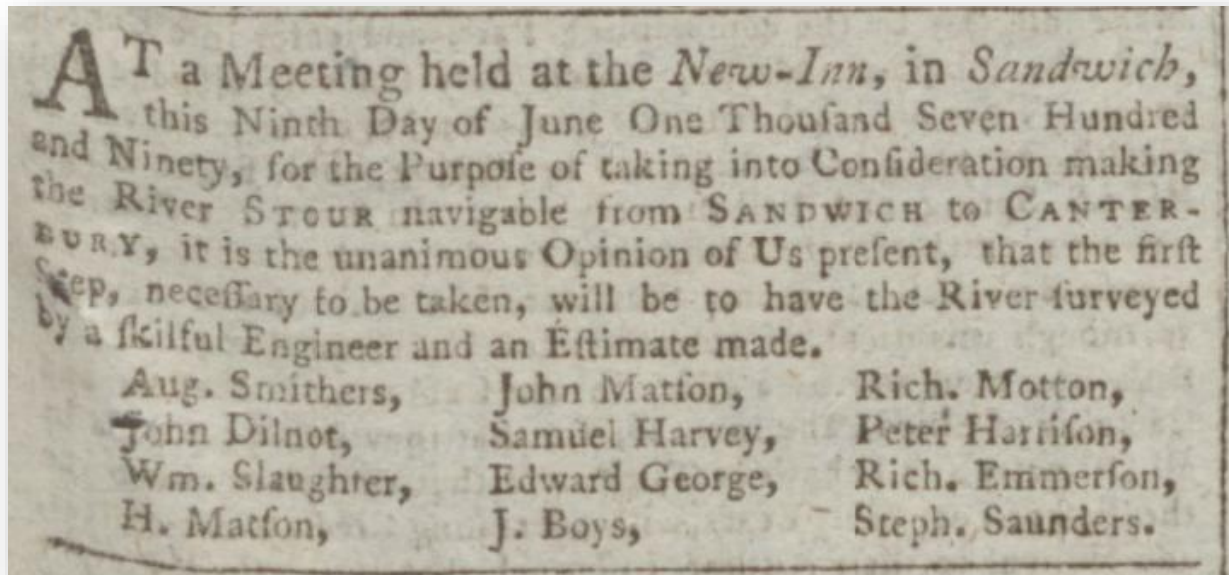
By 1786, William felt a desire to move his family to Sandwich and take over his father’s tannery in Sandwich. His father would have been 60 years old that year. They tested the market by putting an advertisement in the *Canterbury Journal* (1 August 1786).

To be SOLD by Private Contract,
A FREEHOLD DWELLING HOUSE,
Two TAN YARDS, a TAN-HOUSE, MILL
HOUSE, and other useful Buildings, all very con-
veniently fitted up for carrying on, in an extensive
Manner, the BUSINESS of a TANNER, in all its
Branches; also two Hop Oasts, a Stable, and large
Garden, inclosed with a Wall; which Premises are
situate and being in NORTH LANE, in the Parish of
HOLY CROSS WESTGATE, near and without the
Walls of the City of Canterbury, on the Banks of the
River Stour, and are now occupied by Mr. William
Slaughter, or his Undertenants.
Also, one other FREEHOLD TAN-YARD, con-
tiguous to the above Estate, a Field of about an Acre
adjoining, a Cottage, and three small Gardens, like-
wise in the Occupation of Mr. Slaughter, or his Un-
dertenants.
The present Tenant of the Premises intending
to remove from CANTERBURY to SANDWICH, to carry
on the Tanning Business there, it is proposed, for better
accommodating the Purchaser, that it shall be at his
Option to buy the Stock of Leather and Utensils at a
fair Valuation, to be delivered at MICHAELMAS or
CHRISTMAS next, or to take in Goods during the
Time of drying and parting with the present Stock, &c.
For further Particulars apply to Mr. C. R. BUNCE,
Attorney at Law, in Canterbury.

The Canterbury Journal, 1 August 1786, vol. XVII, no. 933

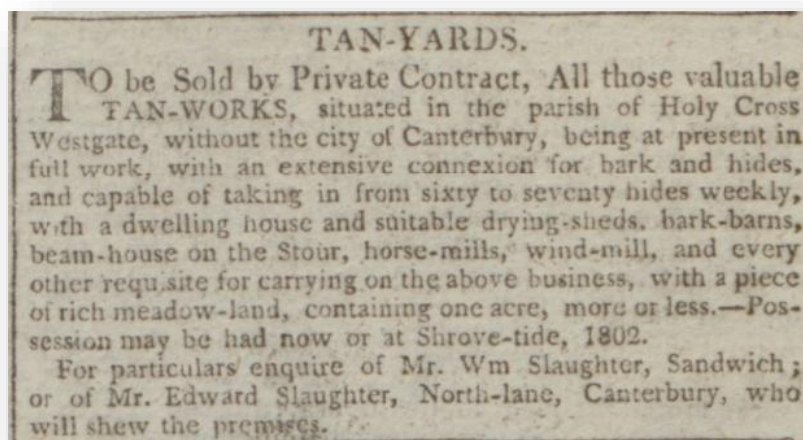
When the tannery on North Lane did not sell as quickly as they hoped for, another plan was devised. William had a cousin, Edward Slaughter, who agreed to take over and manage the North Lane tannery. The switch was made in 1790—Edward (24) moved to Canterbury and William moved to Sandwich. Just a year later, Edward married Susanna Moulden, of Rochester (10 March 1791). She was the daughter of Thomas Moulden (master sailmaker), whose sister, also Susanna Moulden, had married William Slaughter Sr. in 1748.

Once back in Sandwich, one of the first things William did was to gather helpers and find a way of “making the River Stour navigable from Sandwich to Canterbury.” A meeting was held for this very purpose on 9 June 1790. The opinion of the council was “unanimous” in affirmative (*Kentish Gazette*, 11 June 1790). William was not just a passive trader but was engaged in wider commercial and infrastructural thinking along the Stour. It is true that William had tanning interests in Canterbury and Sandwich, as well as his family’s import business, but he was also civic minded and cared about improving the community for everyone, serving as mayor of Sandwich in 1797, 1798, and 1821.



At the time of the move, William and Susanna had three living children—William (14), Thomas (13), and Susan (10). William stayed in Canterbury and worked at the tannery under the tutoring of his uncle Edward. Thomas, however, went with the family to Sandwich where he worked as an apprentice under his father at the Slaughter Tannery.

Once Thomas finished his apprenticeship (1799), he moved back to Canterbury and worked with his brother, William, in the North Lane tannery. With William and Thomas working the tannery, their uncle Edward was free to return to Sandwich. But the plan was still not to hold on to the tannery. An advertisement was once again placed in the *Kentish Gazette* (24 July 1801).



Although William, Edward and Thomas Slaughter were freemen of Sandwich rather than Canterbury, their tannery stood just outside the city gate in Holy Cross Westgate Without, where suburban tradesmen could own premises and sell hides and timber to city customers without holding Canterbury freedom.

Until the property sold, William and Thomas would work the tannery. But sometime after 1811, Thomas took his family to Seal, where he acquired a tannery there. His brother, William, would continue to manage the tannery in Canterbury. But by 1817, William took his family and returned to Sandwich to work the family tannery there. He and his brother, Anthony, 19 years his junior, would run the Sandwich tannery together. They even took one of Thomas' son, Edward, to apprentice.

On 1 May 1820 the capital drying shed, bark mills, pumps, carts and other equipment, together with large quantities of timber and building materials at the North Lane tannery, were offered for sale by auction on the premises.

TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,

By Messrs. WHITE,
ON MONDAY next, the 1st of MAY, 1820,
on the premises of Mr. SLAUGHTER, North-lane,
Canterbury :

A capital large DRYING SHED, well framed, with king posts and story posts, on stone plinths, calculated for tanners or a barn 80 feet by 30 with one floor; two steel bark mill, complete, by Weeks, of Plympton; iron and tin pumps, for tanner's use; large water vat, four wheel truck, cart with iron arms, sundry shoots, lungers, barrows, coppers, baskets, sail cloths, timber jack, timber chains, scales, weights, harnesses, working tools, &c. &c. also, a

Quantity of BUILDING MATERIALS,

Consisting of planking, and various scantlings, doors, sashes, stone pavement, bricks, and other effects, as will be enumerated in Catalogues, to be had of the Auctioneers, Canterbury, on Saturday next.

TO BE SOLD BY PRIVATE CONTRACT,

A small WIND MILL, about 14 feet diameter, used as a bark mill, but easily converted for a grist mill, in good preservation, having been lately built at a considerable expence.

Also a strong framed tiled roof with plates and tie beams, suited for a stable or lodge, 20 feet by 36: and a large circular shop-front, glazed, with cornice, columns, and glazed door, with fan-light to ditto, nearly new.

For particulars, apply, to Messrs. WHITE, St. George's, and Sun-secret, Canterbury.

At its height, the North Lane tannery formed a compact industrial estate running back from the lane to the River Stour: a freehold dwelling house fronting the street, with tan-house and mill-house behind, and two tan-yards laid out with rows of sunken pits for soaking and tanning hides. Around these core buildings stood hop-oasts, a stable and a large walled garden, with a contiguous tan-yard, an acre of meadow-like field, an adjoining cottage and three small gardens, all in the same occupation, so that houses, workshops and cultivated plots were closely interwoven across the property. By the early nineteenth century the site also carried a capital drying shed eighty feet by thirty, steel bark mills, pumps, water vat, trucks and carts, together with stacks of planking, scantling, doors, sashes, stone pavement and bricks, reflecting a busy yard where timber and building materials were traded alongside leather, and where enough men could be employed to keep sixty or seventy hides a week moving through pits, sheds, gardens and stores from raw skin to finished goods.

By the time the machinery, sheds and timber at North Lane were finally offered for sale in 1820, more than forty years of Slaughter family effort had been worked into that riverside ground: through flood and fire, shifts of ownership, apprenticeships and ambitious schemes to link Sandwich and Canterbury by water. The tannery itself has long vanished, but its advertisements, newspaper notices and parish records still allow us to glimpse the rhythm of life along the Stour—carts creaking in from the lane, hides hauled from the pits, timber loaded for sale—and to remember the generations who made their living in that narrow strip of land between city and river.

This article has been organized by James E. Slaughter of Bakersfield, California, USA. He is the 5th great-grandson of William Slaughter, junior and the 4th great-grandson of Thomas Slaughter. (Date: 22 July 2026)