

SOME INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE ANCESTRY OF CHRISTOPHER & RICHARD PEERS. A NARRATIVE ACCOUNT.

Compiled by Christopher Peers. Updated 26th September 2016.

VOLUME ONE: THE PEERS BRANCH. Including Surnames:

ARNOLD

DONE/DONES

LATIMER

MULLIS

PEERS

SHILVOCK

SPARROW

WESTLEY

SOME INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

The following family history has been compiled by me, Christopher John Peers, son of John Arnold Peers and Violet Peers (nee Saul) of Birmingham, and represents in narrative form the outline of what I have discovered to date about my own family tree. (At this point I must record my gratitude to my wife Kate, who has put up with my obsession for far too long, and has even taken several of the pictures.) It is organised into two volumes, the first covering my father's side, and the second my mother's. Of course - as is inevitable with personal histories of this type - the whole thing is of direct interest only to a small group of people. I share all of this ancestry only with my brother, Richard Ernest Peers (currently resident in Melbourne, Australia), and my children, Megan Violet and John Alan Peers. But most of the branches of this tree have other living descendants, some of whom I am in touch with. I have therefore organised it under separate headings for each important surname, so that the relevant bits can be easily selected. This history is presented in reverse chronological order, and really starts (that is to say ends) with my grandparents' generation, though some brief notes on my parents are included. Apart from the usual personal details I have incorporated a few historical background notes where these seem appropriate. I have also been unable to resist including some information on particularly well known or interesting characters who share a surname, but may or may not be linked to our family tree. I hope that this makes the story a bit more entertaining and readable, without resorting to the common habit of wishful thinking regarding possible famous ancestors. In the majority of cases, however, I have avoided detailed discussion of living people. This helps to avoid any potential confidentiality issues as well as keeping the history to a manageable length.



The author, Christopher Peers, with his children, John Alan (left) aged 6 months, and Megan Violet, aged 3 years 9 months, photographed off Mallaig, Scotland, in May 2007.

Accompanying this narrative are several other files containing supporting information in the form of additional photographs, tree diagrams and other documents. These have been kept separate in order to make it easier to update any or all of them as necessary. Where I think it is helpful, I have included maps taken from the "British 19th Century Surname Atlas" CD, showing the distribution of the various surnames in the 1881 census. As this was before the modern era of mass migration around the country, it should theoretically give an idea of the places of origin of the names, and thus of the ancestral lines they represent. Some names are of course too common or widespread for this approach to be useful - Cooper, and the several variations on Gardener/Gardner, for example. Conversely others, such as Candelent - restricted in 1881 to one family in Birmingham, one in West Bromwich and one in Middlesex - are too rare.

Otherwise the sources used have been mainly the standard genealogical ones - living memory, censuses, parish and civil registration records, wills, internet indexes, etc. - though the section on early Peers ancestry does depend on some less conventional methods. In most cases I have indicated where my information comes from, and where it is potentially controversial I have set out my reasons for the line I have taken. Usually there is much more information available about recent ancestors than on the more remote ones, but I have not necessarily included every available detail, especially where it might be said to be common knowledge. On the other hand some of the individuals covered have never to my knowledge been documented before, and so I hope that there will be something here to surprise everyone. So far, though, I have just done the easy bits, leaving plenty of challenges for the future. No project of this sort is ever really completed, and there is always a lot more to find out. I fully intend to pursue it further myself when time permits, but if anyone else is interested in taking things further I am

happy to make my original research files available to those who feel up to unravelling the mess.

A final word on what might be called the philosophy of family history is perhaps in order. In my view many publications on the subject give a misleading impression of the level of certainty that can be achieved. Especially when we get beyond the start of civil registration (1837 in England) and censuses (1841), definite proof of the relationships between individuals is often hard or even impossible to establish. In most cases the cumulative probability of numerous uncertainties - each minor in themselves - makes it difficult to trace families back beyond the middle of the 18th century. I have discussed here a few lines which almost certainly include our ancestors, even though I cannot show proof of the exact line of descent. Allowing for this approach, the earliest precisely dated events which can be ascribed to our ancestral line so far are in the first decade of the 17th century (which is actually fairly good going by family history standards, as few non-aristocratic lines ever get further back than that). Paradoxically the very "oldest" source of all, the DNA data discussed under PEERS, is in a sense the most objective and reliable (though admittedly doubts have been expressed about exactly how reliable some testing laboratories are). It is interpreting it that is the problem.

Does any of this tell us anything about "who we are"? Not really. Even if all we are is the sum total of our inherited genes, I have barely scratched the surface of the past. Go back just eight generations, for example, and we each have 256 ancestors; of all these people I have currently identified only about half a dozen. But one interesting general point does arise. This family tree is very firmly rooted in the English West Midlands; in three out of the four grandparents' trees here, going back between five and thirteen generations, everyone was born either in Warwickshire or in an adjacent part of a neighbouring county. The general theme is exactly what we would expect from the history of a city like Birmingham, with the different ancestral lines drifting in from various corners of the catchment area - mostly Warwickshire, Shropshire and south Staffordshire - during the last two or three hundred years. The earliest ancestor so far known to have been resident in Birmingham was my four greats grandfather John Peers, who according to his marriage record was already a parishioner of St. Philips in 1765. The earliest ancestors in the whole tree whom we can identify so far, Richard Latimer and Dorothy Groutwich, were married in 1607 in Tamworth, less than ten miles from where I am writing this. By contrast my maternal grandmother Daisy Chubb's ancestry seems positively exotic, taking us as far afield as Wiltshire, London, and even Poland (see CHUBB and DAVIDSON). Few people nowadays, I suspect, would discover so many of their ancestors in such a small geographical area. Perhaps what it shows is how inbred and unenterprising we are, but at least to me (perhaps because I still live in this same region) it provides a satisfying sense of long-term continuity. It also makes consulting original documents a lot easier!

It has to be admitted, though, that most of our ancestors were fairly ordinary people. A possible connection to the Cheshire aristocracy is only speculation at this stage, and in any case is very remote in time. The handful of famous people named in these pages are only there because shared surnames suggest possibilities for future research, not because I know or even suspect that any of them were related to our line. We do have a few bailiffs and burgesses and the occasional self-styled "gentleman" in the family, but most of them were solidly working class, and some obviously lived very hard lives. Of course this is nothing to be ashamed of - in fact we have plenty of evidence of the toughness and courage of our ancestors in circumstances which few of us would cope with - but people like this tend not to be very well documented. Aristocrats at one end of the spectrum, and criminals at the other, have always generated huge amounts of paperwork, but the lives of ordinary respectable citizens have usually remained obscure, and insights into their experiences or personalities are inevitably scarcer than we might have hoped. Anyway, here (starting in the most recent times and working backwards) is the story so far.

1). PEERS.



Number 74 Carlyle Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, the home of John Arnold Peers, his wife Violet (nee Saul), and their sons Christopher and Richard Peers, from 1955 to 1985.

Photographed in 2006. The tower in the background is the Water Department chimney in Waterworks Road, said to be one of the inspirations for the "Two Towers" in Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings"- the other one being the folly a couple of hundred yards away on Monument Road. I never heard this story as a child, though I was covered in soot from this, the alleged "Mordor" chimney, when left out in the garden in my pram!

Starting with our own generation, I was born on 14th November 1956, and my brother Richard on 10th February 1959. The baptism register of St. Paul's Church, Hockley, Birmingham, records the following entries:

Baptised 13th January 1957, Christopher John Peers, son of Arnold John, plumber, and Violet.

Baptised 3rd May 1959, Richard Ernest Peers, son of John, company director, and Violet.

Both ceremonies were performed by Canon Stevens, of whom I remember Mom speaking very favourably (in fact I think it was because my parents already knew him that they went to St. Paul's, which was not their local parish church). Apart from the confusion over Dad's names in the first entry, his apparent change of occupation is worth noting. In fact he had not changed his job at all, and as he was the managing director of a plumbing firm, either was correct in its own way. The change from Dad's characteristically modest self description to something more important sounding may well reflect Mom's influence. I remember her telling me off for describing Dad as a mere "plumber" when I was asked about his job at school. Sometimes you can learn a lot more from these dry records than you were ever intended to!



St Paul's, Hockley, photographed in April 2008. The stonework has been restored to its original colour, but it did not look like this in the 1950s and 60s, when the whole building was black with centuries of soot.



From left to right: Marjorie Saul, John Arnold Peers, Violet Peers. Probably taken at Butlin's holiday camp, Clacton, c. 1957. At far right you can just see what I believe is the handle of the pram containing me!

Dad was born on 18th November 1904 at 129 Latimer Street South, Birmingham, from where his father Ernest ran the family business. He was christened John Arnold Peers at St. Asaph's Church on 5th January 1905, but was known to all as "Jack". Also christened there were his older sister, Lena Agnes, who was born on 19th January 1902, and a younger brother and sister, Francis (Frank) James and Edna May, who were twins, and were born on 3rd May 1909. The youngest of the family, our Aunt Joan, was born ten years later on 29th November 1919. In the 1911 census Ernest and Alice are found living at 54 Pershore Road, with children Lena Agnes (aged 9), John Arnold (6), Francis James and Edna May (both 1 year old). Ernest is described as a "Plumber's Manager", though I think this must mean that he ran his own plumbing firm, rather than that he managed it for someone else (unless of course that someone was his wife Alice).

Lena (she was really christened that, and not Selina after her grandmother as I had originally supposed), married Ralph J. H. Dolman in 1921. She died in Birmingham in April 1984. Uncle Frank worked with Dad for many years, interrupted only by service in the army in the Second World War, when - if I remember right - he fought in North Africa. I well remember him sitting in a high chair at the desk in the office at Marroway Street. He married Lily I. Williams in 1931, and they had at least three children: Betty (born 1933), David (born 1938), and Susan (born 1946). Frank died of a heart attack in the last quarter of 1972. Aunt Edna married Arthur R. Blackwell in 1931. After Uncle Arthur's death she lived in a block of flats on the corner of Yardley Wood Road (?), where I remember visiting her. I do not know when she moved to Lichfield, but she died there in February 1994. Joan married Ellis A. Sadler in 1943 and long outlived the rest of her generation, dying in Birmingham in May 2002.



Some of the descendants of John Arnold Peers, photographed in June 2006. From left to right, standing: Bob, Yvonne (wife of Richard), David (son of Bob), Matthew (son of Tony). Seated: Christopher*, Megan (daughter of Christopher), Olive (wife of Bob), Richard*, Andrew (son of Tony), Barbara and Katie (partners of Andrew and Matthew respectively), Tony*. Those marked with an asterisk are the surviving children of John Arnold Peers.*

The best source for Dad's early life is his own "jottings", as he modestly described them, one copy of which is in my family history file and another in Birmingham City archives (see the section on REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING at the end of this history). He does not say much about the rest of his family, however. He married Catherine Dowler in 1927, and had three children from that marriage - Bob, Tony and Betty (Betty died in January 2002). Dad was divorced some time in the late 1930s, and married Mom - Violet Saul - at Birmingham Register Office on 30th April 1955. From 1931 until he moved to Carlyle Road in 1955, he lived at 34 Borrowdale Road, Northfield. He died in Dudley Road (now City) Hospital on 14th November 1985.

The family business was originally known as Westley & Peers, Zinc Workers and Plumbers. Until about 1910 it is still listed in the telephone directory under that name in Latimer Street, but soon after that it moved (along with Dad) to 54 Pershore Road, and then to 83 Wheeley's Road, where it remained until 1945. The 1947 edition (there is no 1946 volume in Birmingham Library) of Kelly's Directory shows it at 67-69 Marroway Street, off Icknield Port Road, which is where I remember it and where it stayed until Dad wound up the business some time around 1970. (The office and yard at Marroway Street, incidentally, are still there at the time of writing.) By the 1920s, if not before, the company name had changed to A. Peers & Co, Plumbers and Decorators. The "A" apparently refers to Dad's mother Alice (for whom see under ARNOLD), who seems to have provided most of the finance. Our grandfather Ernest Peers ran the business from about 1901 until 1945, when he retired. I have not located any photographs of him, but Tony remembers him well. He describes him as a little man with a moustache. Dad's memoirs give us a quite detailed picture of his parents, his father especially. Ernest's death was recorded at Bromsgrove in the last quarter of 1947, when he was 67.



The former office of A. Peers & Co. at 67 - 69 Marroway Street, photographed in 2009.

My grandfather Ernest was the youngest of the six sons of John and Selina Peers, who appear in the 1881 census living at Number 129 Latimer Street, as follows:

John Peers	Head	44	Zinc worker employing 2 men and 2 boys
Selina	Wife	44	
Henry	Son	18	
Alfred	Son	15	
William	Son	11	
Albert	Son	9	
Walter	Son	5	
Ernest	Son	10 months	

All the above were born in Birmingham. John's age is wrong here, as we shall see shortly, but I can confirm that Ernest was born in 1880 (his birth was registered in Birmingham in the third quarter of that year) and his mother in 1837, so I assume the others are fairly accurate.

A Digression: The Missing Uncles.

When I started to investigate the family history I had no idea of the existence of the five other sons of John and Selina - Dad's uncles. Dad mentions in passing in his memoirs that his father had a brother in the army during World War I (this was presumably Walter, for whom see below), but I never heard him speak about any of the others. Their fate was therefore something of a mystery, but I have now managed to find some more information on what happened to them. The first item of interest is from the "Birmingham Daily Post" for Friday 5th September 1873, under the ominous heading of "School Board Prosecutions":

"At the Public Office, yesterday, the undermentioned persons were summoned for not causing their children to regularly attend school." Among a long list of offenders is John Peers, of 129 Latimer Street South, who was fined one shilling. At that date the children concerned were presumably Henry and Alfred. This appears to be the only occasion on which John was caught for this, and in view of the small size of the fine (even then most offenders had to pay two shillings) it was presumably a first offence.

Someone who may be Henry turns up in the 1901 census running the "Why Not?" Inn in Oldbury, married to Sarah, and with three children. A Henry G. Peers of the right age (65) died in West Bromwich in the last quarter of 1927, but this identification is provisional to say the least. In the 1891 census Walter was living with his parents at 129 Latimer Street, aged 15 and listed as a Zinc worker. This entry was very difficult to find in the indexes, because the surname was given as "Beers", but once located it raises a number of interesting points. Apart from John and Selina only Walter and Ernest were still at home, but also listed is "Olivia Hughes, Dom(estic) General Servant", aged (I think) 15. I had not realised that my great grandparents were prosperous enough to employ a servant! More mysteriously, next door, at 1/129 Latimer Street, we find the following:

Frederick Peers	Head	aged 25	Plumber and zinc worker	Born Birmingham
Sarah Peers	Wife	30		Cradeley, Worcs.
Ernest Peers	Son	age illegible		New York America

I am pretty certain that the name of the head of the household is Frederick, but I do not know who this is. There is no record in the BMD indexes of any Frederick Peers being born in Birmingham between 1850 and 1885. He does not appear (at least not in the Birmingham area) in any of the earlier censuses. It is highly unlikely that he is unrelated to our Peerses, in view of the fact that he is living next door to them and is in the same trade. And the birthplace of his son raises yet other questions to which there is as yet no answer. It is of course possible

that either his forename or the surname of this family has been entered incorrectly by the census enumerator.

Walter married an Elizabeth Hughes in Aston in the third quarter of 1893, and the appearance of "Eliza Peers" on his father's death certificate (see below) suggests that the couple were still around in 1896, but after that Walter disappears. My own theory is that he joined the army, which would explain both his omission from the 1901 and 1911 censuses in Birmingham, and his presumed service in the First World War, when he would have been a bit old to be a war service volunteer or a conscript. I have not yet found any trace of his service record, or of what unit he belonged to, but the Walter Peers who died in Birmingham, aged 62, in the third quarter of 1936 is the right age to be him.

The other four brothers all worked as plumbers in Birmingham. Alfred lived for a while in Floodgate Street, and later on in Yardley, opposite the cemetery. He married Clara Lloyd in 1892, and they had nine children - Mabel, Evelyn, Arnold, Arthur, Elsie, Horace, Alfred, William and Lucy. Clara died in 1935 and Alfred in 1946; they are both buried close to home in Yardley Cemetery. I am in touch with several of their descendants, some of whom are still in the Birmingham area. Malcolm Peers, a son of Arnold, lives in Solihull and has a large amount of information on this branch of the family. Arthur's widow Nellie lived in Solihull until her death on 11th November 2009 at the age of 103. Alfred's son John apparently emigrated to Australia. Another son of Alfred and Clara, William, moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and his descendants still live in the vicinity. I understand from Malcolm that there are other relatives in Florida and California.



*A local newspaper cutting recording the 100th birthday of Nellie Peers on 14th June 2006.
Nellie was the widow of Arthur Peers, son of Alfred and Clara of Floodgate Street.*

William (the son of John and Selina, not the William son of Alfred and Clara mentioned above) apparently joined the Navy. The 1891 census for Park Place, Aston Manor records a William Peers aged 21, born in Birmingham, living with wife Kate in the household of his father-in-law George Dyer. His occupation is "AB Seaman RN". He had married Catherine Dyer in Birmingham in the September quarter of 1889. The "FreeBMD" internet index (which is supposed to be 100% comprehensive for this period) shows only one William Peers - a William John - born in Birmingham between 1869 and 1871, and his age fits with both this William and the one living at 129 Latimer Street in 1881. A Catherine Peers died, aged 29, in Aston in the third quarter of 1900. In 1901 our William was a plumber living in Wheelleys Lane, married to Jane, and with one son. This might suggest that he remarried with unseemly haste, but there is no record of a marriage of a William Peers to a Jane during the relevant period. A William J. Peers of the right age (54) died in Birmingham in the June quarter of 1923.

In the 1891 census Albert was living in Edgbaston with his wife Maria and son Ernest, aged 6 months. In the 1901 Rate Book he was originally listed under 129 Latimer Street, but by the time of the census of the same year he had moved to Washington Street and was married to Ann, with a son, Walter, aged 6 years. In the same year Albert's mother Selina (now a widow) was living in Balsall Heath, alone except for "adopted son" Ernest, aged 10, who as we shall see is obviously the same person as Albert and Maria's son Ernest. Why he had been "adopted" we do not know (though at that time adoption was an informal business with no real legal implications). We do know of one pastime which the boy must have enjoyed in his grandmother's house, because Selina's will, drawn up in 1905, mentions only one specific bequest of property - "my walnut cottage Pianoforte by Joseph Riley" to her grandson Ernest Albert, son of Albert Victor. In 1911 the family were at Back 47, Cregoe Street. Albert was still in the plumbing business, and married to "Annie" as she calls herself this time. They claimed to have been married for 20 years (a new question asked in this census). The answer to this apparent inconsistency is in the "FreeBMD" index, which gives only one marriage for an Albert Victor Peers in the whole country between 1889 and 1893 - in Birmingham in the second quarter of 1890 - to an Ann Maria Hands. So Maria and Annie were in fact the same person. Their son Ernest, who had been adopted by his grandmother Selina, was back with his parents in 1911, aged 20, still single, and described as a "Billiard Marker".

Apart from Alfred, I have not so far established when and where these uncles lived the rest of their lives, and the possibility remains that they may have moved away from the Birmingham area. But Selina's will lists all six of her sons as beneficiaries, implying that they were all still alive when it was written.

Back to Latimer Street.

Dad was actually one of the fourth generation to live at the address in Latimer Street. The business, according to his memoirs, was started in 1837, and this date appeared on several documents produced by the firm over the years, at least one of which I remember seeing in the house at Carlyle Road. But, as I mentioned above, Kelly's Birmingham Directory shows that it was originally (or at least from c. 1861) Westley & Peers, zinc workers, and only later plumbers as well. Therefore the founder of the business must actually have been William Westley, the owner of the Latimer Street property. He is listed in early directories as a zinc worker at various addresses in Birmingham before moving to Latimer Street some time in the mid 1840s, when the street was first built (it is listed in the 1846 Birmingham Rate Book, but not in 1843). So 1837 was presumably the date when William (who would have been aged about 27 at the time - see under WESTLEY) started in business for himself.

The Peers connection dates from around 1861, when John (ie. Dad's grandfather) joined the business. He no doubt owed his association with the Westleys to the fact that he was William's son-in-law, having married Selina Westley at St. Bartholomew's Church,

Edgbaston, on 26th December 1859. John appears in earlier censuses as a brass founder, but by 1881, as the above entry shows, he was describing himself as a zinc worker. He had moved to Latimer Street by 1861, when Kelly's Directory lists him there, though I have not found him in that year's census. John died on 4th February 1896, at the age of 63 (though his death certificate says 62), and his will was proved in March 1898. Wills are usually dry affairs, but this document gives a vivid impression of the mutual affection and respect which he and Selina must have had for each other during a marriage which lasted for nearly 37 years. John repeatedly refers to his "dear wife", to whom he leaves everything, "free from the control or interference of anyone having the fullest confidence in her that she will make such disposition and arrangements in the interests of my children to take effect after my decease as will be just and right". The informant named on his death certificate was "Eliza Peers, Daughter-in-law", and her address was 2 Back 84, Cregoe Street. As discussed above, this was apparently the wife of John's son Walter. The cause of death, chronic nephritis, may well give those of us who are also descended from the Chubbs pause for thought. Another great grandfather of ours, William Chubb, died of nephritis in 1914 (see CHUBB, below). Nephritis is basically inflammation of the kidneys, which may be due to a number of causes including virus infection, but some factors are apparently hereditary. I know of no other cases in the family, but should any ever turn up this history should perhaps be borne in mind.

DEATH									
REGISTRATION DISTRICT <i>Birmingham</i>									
1896. DEATHS in the Sub-District of <i>St Martin Birmingham</i> in the County of <i>Birmingham</i>									
No.	(Col. 1.) When and Where Died.	(Col. 2.) Name and Surname.	(Col. 3.) Sex.	(Col. 4.) Age.	(Col. 5.) Rank or Profession.	(Col. 6.) Cause of Death.	(Col. 7.) Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.	(Col. 8.) When Registered.	(Col. 9.) Signature of Registrar.
482	<i>Fourth February 1896 129 Latimer Street W.D.</i>	<i>John Peers</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>62 years</i>	<i>Plumber (Master)</i>	<i>Chronic Nephritis Certified by J. St Johnston L.R.C.P.</i>	<i>Eliza Peers Daughter-in-law Present at the Death 2 Back 84 Cregoe Street</i>	<i>Fifth February 1896</i>	<i>Charles Preston Registrar</i>

The death certificate of my great grandfather John Peers, Master Plumber of 129 Latimer Street, February 1896.

1859. Marriage solemnized at the <i>Parish Church</i> in the Parish of <i>Edgbaston</i> in the County of <i>Warwick</i>								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
20	<i>26 Dec 59</i>	<i>John Peers</i> <i>Selina Westley</i>	<i>Full</i> <i>Single</i>	<i>Bachelor</i> <i>Spinster</i>	<i>Brass</i> <i>founder</i>	<i>Edgbaston</i> <i>do</i>	<i>John Peers</i> <i>William Westley</i>	<i>Brass</i> <i>founder</i> <i>Em. Worker</i>
Married in the <i>Parish Church</i> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by <i>James</i> or after <i>James</i> by me, <i>J. Sproul</i>								
The Marriage was solemnized between us, <i>John Peers</i> and <i>Selina Westley</i>			in the Presence of us, <i>John Westley</i> and <i>Roseanna Westley</i>					

Extract from the St. Bartholomew's parish register, recording the marriage of John Peers and Selina Westley in December 1859. The second witness is apparently Selina's sister Roseanna, who would have been only 15 at the time.

Selina Westley/Peers died on 6th August 1906, aged 69. At that time she was living at 73 Summer Road, Edgbaston. In her will she left the sum of £2,255 - a considerable amount of money for those days. She had inherited £498 from her husband, and apparently another £427 from her father in 1888, but these sums may exclude a substantial amount of property in the form of land and buildings, which were not included in the valuations of personal property attached to wills before 1898. All her goods and property (except for Ernest Albert's favourite piano) were to be sold, and the proceeds divided equally among her sons.



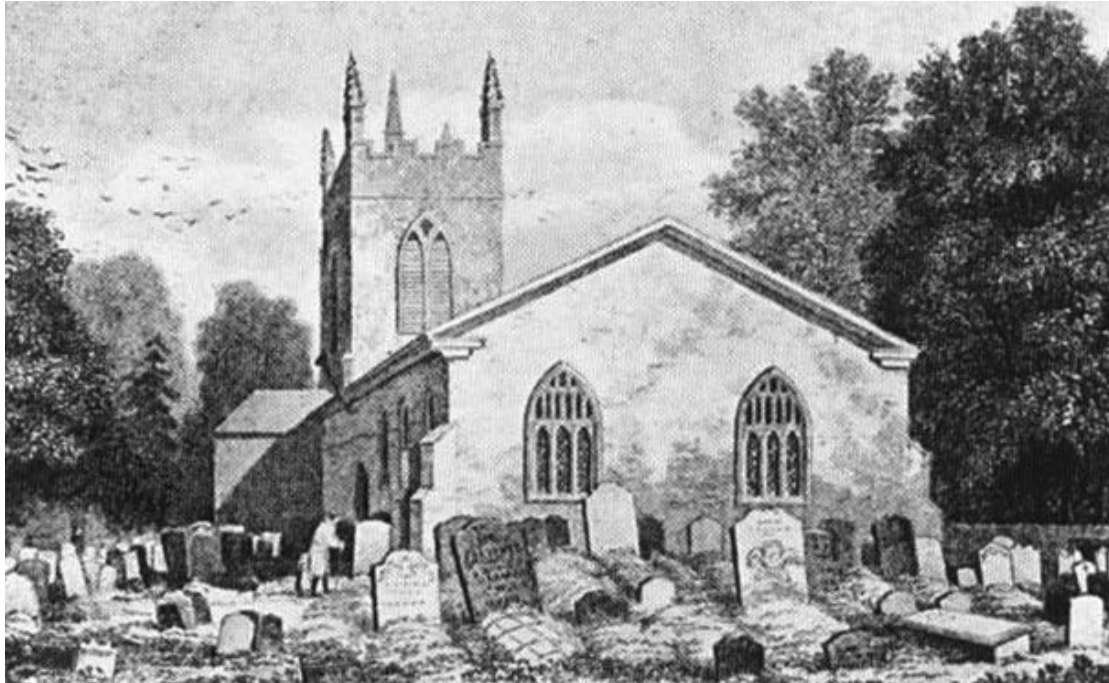
1/500 scale map of Latimer Street South, from the "Domesday Valuation" survey of 1910. The irregularly shaped plot at lower left marked "Court No 37" was the original site of the firm of Westley and Peers, and the birthplace of the six sons of John and Selina Peers. Dad was also born here in 1904.

In both the 1841 and 1851 censuses, John Peers was living in Bristol Street with his widowed father - our great great grandfather - who was also called John. (The name was misspelled "Piers" by the enumerator in 1841, but there is no doubt that they are the same family.) The entry for Court 12, Bristol Street, in the 1851 census reads:

John Peers	Head	Age 57	Widower	Coach Harness Dresser
John Peers	Son	Age 16		Brass Caster
Eliza Peers	Dau	Age 20	Unmarried	Warehouse Girl

Everyone here is listed as born in Birmingham. In the 1841 census John senior's occupation is illegible, but I think it is intended to be a ditto indicating the same as the entry for the previous individual, which probably reads "Journeyman". John junior's age is given there as 7, but I have found his baptism entry in the register of St. Martin's Church, which gives his

date of birth as 1st March 1832. This is definitely him, as it lists the address and occupation of his father exactly as it appears in the 1841 census. The baptism record shows that his mother was called Mary, but as I haven't yet been able to track down his parents' marriage I do not know her maiden name. John senior and Mary Peers were witnesses at the marriage of Thomas Bowen and Maria Haynes at St. Bartholomew's Edgbaston on 8th December 1828. Mary could not write her name and so made her mark instead. John's signature, however, is similar enough to the one on Mary's death certificate to make it fairly certain that it is the same person, even though they are not quite identical. So the couple were obviously married before the end of 1828, but not at any of the local churches. The earliest likely date would be 1824, when Mary was 18 - marriage was permitted earlier, but was extremely rare.



St. Bartholomew's Edgbaston ("Edgbaston Old Church"), illustrated in 1829. This church dates from the 16th century, and must have looked very similar when John Peers and Selina Westley were married in 1859, and even when Selina's parents William Westley and Caroline Johnson were married here in 1834 (see WESTLEY).

DEATH									
REGISTRATION DISTRICT <i>Birmingham</i>									
1838. DEATHS in the <i>District</i> of <i>St. Martin's Birmingham</i> in the County of <i>Warwick</i>									
No.	When Died.	Name and Surname.	Sex.	Age.	Rank or Profession.	Cause of Death.	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.	When Registered.	Signature of Registrar.
275	<i>Twenty-third of April 1838</i> <i>12 Great Bristol Street</i>	<i>Mary Peers</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>52 years</i>		<i>Consumption</i>	<i>Jhon Peers</i> <i>Widower</i> <i>Present at the Death</i> <i>12 Great Bristol Street</i>	<i>Twenty-third of April 1838</i>	<i>Paul Gardner</i> <i>Registrar</i>

The death certificate of my great great grandmother, Mary Peers, April 1838. Note the distinctive signature of "Jhon Peers", which may enable us to positively identify him in other records.

Apart from the Elizabeth and John junior who appear in the 1841 and 1851 censuses, John and Mary had other children. A Mary "Piers", aged 16, who is living next door at the time of the 1841 census, may be another daughter whose baptism I have not yet traced, and there was at least one son who died in infancy - George, whose burial was recorded at St. Mary's Church, Whittall Street, Birmingham, on 22nd March 1837, aged 6 weeks. Mary - my great great grandmother - died on 20th April 1838, aged only 32, and was buried with the rest of the family at St. Mary's Whittall Street. Her death certificate - probably the first appearance of the family in the new registration system for births, marriages and deaths, set up in the previous year - illuminates one of the most tragic episodes in this history. The cause of death is given as consumption (tuberculosis). This was not a quick way to die, and John and his children had probably nursed her for months in the cramped accommodation and filthy air of a tiny court used for brass casting. Probably they could not afford to have her admitted to a hospital. Note that the cause of death has not been certified by a doctor. This was quite common in those days, but it does mean that the only authority for it is an untrained witness - in this case John. Mary left behind at least two children, of whom the youngest (our great grandfather John) was only six.

Despite the various occupations given for him in the censuses, John senior was (according to the register entry for his son's marriage) also a brass founder - perhaps specialising in horse brasses. Brass working was one of Birmingham's main industries at the time, generally carried on in small workshops in these "inner city" areas, and was not a healthy occupation. Its practitioners could usually be identified by their green hair, caused by ingestion of copper. This John is also the subject of confusion about his age - given as 59 on his death certificate in 1854, 57 in the 1851 census, and 40 in the 1841 one (though as the latter usually rounds adults' ages to the nearest five years you can't tell too much from that). A John "Pears" of Birmingham, aged 30, appeared in court at Warwick on 14th July 1828 charged with assaulting an Ann Griffiths; this could be him, but I cannot be certain. In any case - perhaps fortunately for the family's reputation - he was found not guilty and discharged. Finding out when he died has proved difficult and I have accumulated quite a stack of death certificates for John Peerses who turned out not to be him, but I am now confident that the one reproduced below is the correct one, even though the information it contains is rather unpalatable.

DEATH									
REGISTRATION DISTRICT <i>Birmingham</i>									
1854. DEATHS in the District of <i>All Saints Birmingham</i> in the County of <i>Warwick</i>									
No.	When Died.	Name and Surname.	Sex.	Age.	Rank or Profession.	Cause of Death.	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.	When Registered.	Signature of Registrar.
481	<i>Thirteenth June 1854</i>	<i>John Pears</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>59 Years</i>	<i>Brasier</i>	<i>Asthma</i> <i>Certified</i>	<i>J. Humphrey</i> <i>In Attendance</i> <i>Workhouse</i> <i>Birmingham</i>	<i>Seventeenth June 1854</i>	<i>W. Welch</i> <i>Registrar</i>

Certificate of the death of my great great grandfather John Peers in Birmingham Workhouse, June 1854.

He died in the Birmingham Workhouse on 13th June 1854, at which time he cannot have been older than 56 or 57, despite what the certificate says. (I assume this on the grounds that he can hardly have been around when his sister Eliza was christened in April 1797 (see below), or they would have done him at the same time.) Cause of death was given as asthma, but it would not be surprising if the real reason was the damage done to his lungs by the polluted atmosphere in which brass founders worked. It is sad to think that he ended up in the workhouse, but this may have been the only way in which a working class man at the time could obtain free medical care, and he may well have died in more comfortable circumstances than his wife Mary had 16 years earlier.

Back Into the 18th Century: Detective Work and Some Guesswork.

From now on yet more John Peerses enter the story, and things start to get complicated. To make my arguments clearer, I shall refer to the various Johns by the name of the street most closely associated with them in our documentation. So we have the following:

- 1). John of Latimer Street, 1832 - 1896. Our great grandfather. Husband of Selina Westley, father of Ernest Peers, and known from the 1841 and 51 censuses to be the son of:
- 2). John of Bristol Street, assumed to have been christened 1799, son of John and Elizabeth, and died in 1854. Married to Mary. His mother can be fairly certainly identified with an Elizabeth Peers who was living in the same court in Bristol Street when she died in 1837. His father was probably:
- 3). John of Tennant Street. Living there at the time of his death in 1818. Age at death 48, so probably the same as the John son of John and Elizabeth, christened at St. Martins in 1770. In that case his father was:
- 4). John of Wharf Street, coal dealer. Died in 1808. Married to Elizabeth Dones. Believed to be our four greats grandfather.

My evidence for constructing this tree is as follows. An Elizabeth Peers, widow, was living in the same court - number 12 - as John Peers of Bristol Street at the time of her death in 1837. There is good reason to believe that she was his mother. Like John's wife Mary (her presumed daughter-in-law) Elizabeth was buried at St. Mary's Whittall Street - on 7th September 1837 - and her age at the time was given as 68. Her will is at Lichfield Record Office, dated 11th August 1837. She left effects worth less than £20, all of which were to go to her granddaughter Mary Jackson, who also lived in the same court. It is a pity she did not also name her son John (or her grandson, also John), but this is in fact additional evidence that she was John of Bristol Street's mother. The 1841 census shows the Jacksons still living in Court 12 - including Mary, aged 20, and her presumed parents (this particular census does not give family relationships) William and Mary, both said to be aged 45. Ages in the 1841 census are notoriously imprecise, but in 1851 the last two are both given as 55, which tends to confirm their accuracy. The mother is therefore almost certainly the Mary Peers who was christened at St. Philip's on 6th April 1795, daughter of John and Elizabeth - the same church and same parents as the prime candidate for our John of Bristol Street, who was baptised on 25th March 1799. (It is difficult to prove conclusively that there are no other candidates for John, but the only one I have found in the Birmingham records was a son of John and Eleanor Peers, christened in 1798. A John Peers, widower, married Eleanor Harper at St. Philip's in 1792. But there is an inscription relating to Eleanor - who died on 10th June 1828, aged 57 - in St. Philip's churchyard, and this tends to rule her out as the mother of John of Bristol Street, as the only other names mentioned on it are a Mary Ann and Charles Peers - otherwise unknown to us.)

So if John of Bristol Street was christened in 1799 - and the date fits well with his age as given in the 1841 census, though we will have to assume that the figure given in 1851 is wrong - he was the son of another John, who can be fairly confidently identified with the John Peers who died in 1818 and was also buried at St. Mary's Whittall Street. He was 48 when he died, and his address was Tennant Street (in the then "Foreign" Quarter, near Five Ways). He appears there in the Rate Books from 1799 under the name of John "Pierce", but that is almost certainly just a misspelling. Tennant Street itself makes its first appearance in the previous year, and it was probably newly built then. I have checked the burial records of St. Mary's between 1808 and 1837, and have found no other likely candidates for Elizabeth's husband. I have not found a record of his marriage to Elizabeth, but I do not think he can be the widower who married Eleanor Harper; he would have been only 22 at the time, which does not leave him much time to marry, be widowed, and then remarry. We have established by inference from Elizabeth's will that she was the widow of a John Peers. She and John of Tennant Street would have been about the same age, lived in the same neighbourhood, and were buried in the same churchyard. And based on his age at death, John of Tennant Street is fairly certain to be the John Peers who was christened at St. Martin's on 29th September 1770; his parents were John (again!) and "Elisabeth" (again!). This last John is the one whom we shall refer to as John of Wharf Street.



St. Philip's church, now Birmingham's cathedral, photographed in April 2008.

A published index to baptisms at St. Philip's church between 1715 and 1812 is of interest in this context. The following children of "John and Elizabeth Peers" are listed:

Mary, 25/10/1775
 Thomas, 2/1/1778 (name given here as "Peirs")
 Sarah, 26/4/1780
 William, 16/5/1786
 Mary, 6/4/1795 (born July 1793. This is clearly the mother of the Mary Jackson named in Elizabeth Peers' will.)
 Samuel Downs, 28/3/1796
 Eliza, 17/4/1797
 John, 25/3/1799 (believed to be our great great grandfather)
 Lucy Ann, 6/4/1801
 Ann, /1/1810

The following deductions can be made from the above list. Firstly the christenings appear to fall into two distinct time periods, 1775 to 1786 and 1795 to 1810, which is what we would expect if they represent two successive generations. For some reason John of Wharf Street and his Elizabeth started off christening their brood at St. Martin's, but there is no reason why they should not have changed churches; St. Philip's was after all John's original parish church, according to the record of their marriage (see page 21). The only chronological difficulty is William, who would have been baptised when his mother was at least 44 (see DONES), though he could have actually been born several years earlier. If the second couple are who we think they are (ie. the John born c. 1770 and the Elizabeth who was 68 in 1837), their children would have been produced between the ages of 23 and 40, which is entirely reasonable.

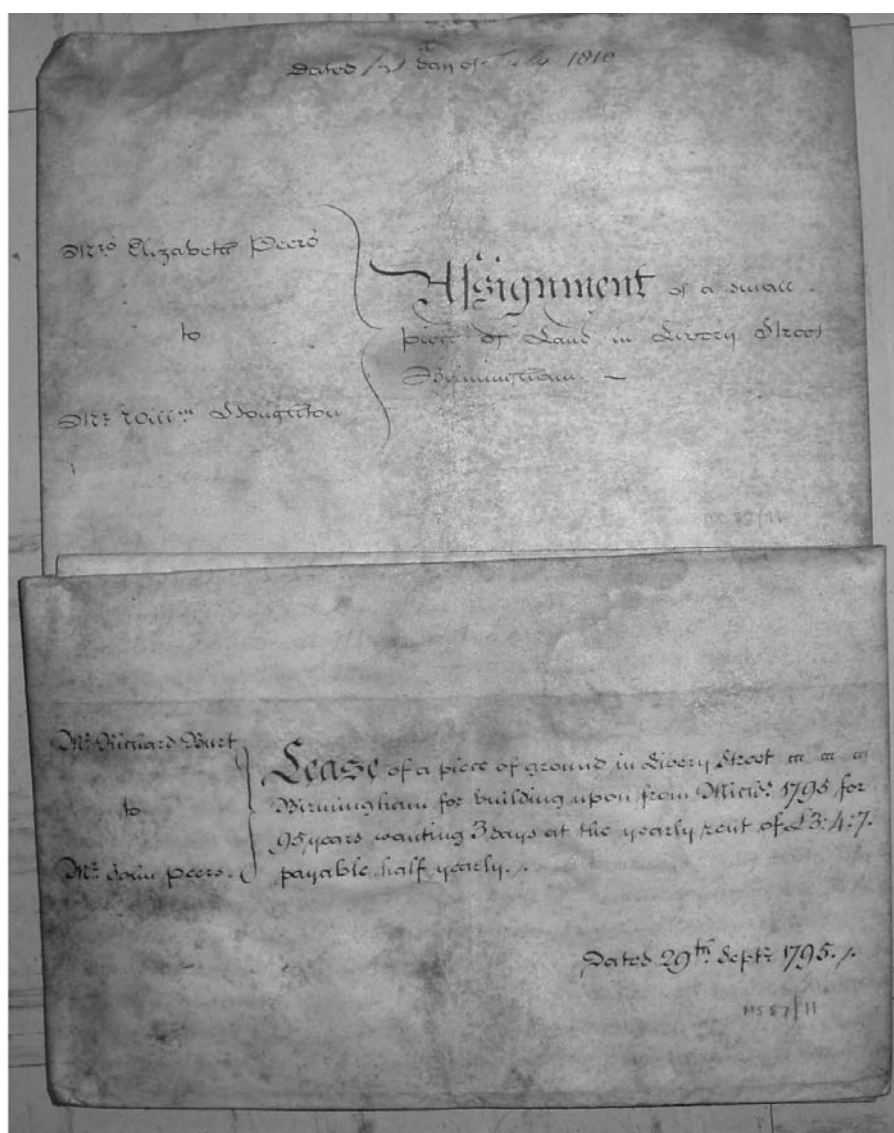


St. Martin's, the original parish church of Birmingham. There were Peerses buried here as early as 1560, but the building has (like the rest of the city centre) been remodelled repeatedly over the years, and the churchyard has now entirely disappeared.

The second deduction is that the unusually named Samuel Downs Peers is likely to have been named after a relative - perhaps his great uncle Samuel Dones, brother of John of Wharf Street's wife Elizabeth. It was common practice to acknowledge the kinship of another surname in this way (eg. our own father, John Arnold), and the difference in spelling need not necessarily be an obstacle to this identification. In fact Harrison's 1912 "Surnames of the United Kingdom" classes Done, or Dones, as a variant of the commoner Down and Downs.

This, then, is a strong indication that the two Johns whose children appear in this index are father and son. The appearance of the not very common name Lucy (perhaps named after her aunt, Lucy Peers/Court, for whom see below) is yet another pointer to a possible family link.

This makes the John and Elizabeth who appear in the St. Martin's register as parents of the supposed John of Tennant Street our four greats grandparents. Luckily we know quite a lot about this couple. In Birmingham City Archives is a bundle of deeds relating to a plot of land in Livery Street, Birmingham. The first of these documents is dated 29th September 1795, and describes the purchase of a lease on the land by John Peers of Birmingham, coal dealer. John agrees, among other things, to spend at least £100 improving the property, including paving the street frontage and erecting "one or more good substantial dwelling house or houses". He was obviously a man of some substance, if not wealth, though it is evident from later documents in the same collection that he never did build on the land, but eventually sold the lease on to a third party.



Two deeds from MS87/11 in Birmingham City Archives, relating to the lease of land in Livery Street by John and Elizabeth Peers. The earlier of the two documents (below) is dated 1795, and the later one 1810.

Most interesting is the note in the second of these documents to the effect that after John's death his widow Elizabeth was appointed by the Consistory Court of Lichfield and Coventry to administer the estate, as he had died intestate. John was buried at St. Mary's Whittall Street on 27th January 1808. The grant of administration survives at Lichfield Record Office, and is dated 15th August 1810. It is signed by Elizabeth Peers, Joseph Court - also a coal dealer and described as John's son-in-law - and by another John Peers, relationship not stated, but who is presumably John's son (as he is obviously not the deceased, and two Johns in the same generation of the same family seem unlikely). It gives the value of the deceased's estate as "under £300". Elizabeth died soon afterwards, and was buried at St. Mary's Whittall Street on 26th September 1810. So two years later a second grant was made, dated 25th June 1812, appointing John's daughter Lucy Court, together with her husband Joseph, as administrators. There is also a third grant, dated 6th April 1833, which tells us that Lucy Court had also died without discharging her duties as administratrix (her burial is recorded at St. Mary's on 17th November 1821), and in turn appoints "another natural and lawful daughter of the said deceased" (ie. of John of Wharf Street), Elizabeth Wilscombe.

Unfortunately this is the end of the story of the Livery Street site, and it looks as if none of the administrators ever produced the inventory of John's property which they were supposed to do. A search for it at Lichfield has proved fruitless. But these documents do tell us one or two interesting facts. John of Wharf Street had a daughter called Lucy, and sure enough a Lucy Peers, daughter of John and Elizabeth, was christened on 27th July 1768 at St. Martin's - the same church and the same parents as the presumed John of Tennant Street two years later. This, together with the appearance of a John as a witness on the first grant, must strengthen the case for John of Tennant Street being the son of John of Wharf Street.

Two of the witnesses to the third grant are also interesting. One was Thomas Parr of Birmingham, a brassfounder, which gives us a link to the business that John of Bristol Street was in. (By the late 18th century there was a close geographical connection between the coal and brass businesses, due mainly to the fact that the raw materials for both arrived by canal at the same wharves.) The other witness was Thomas Dones, a lawyer from Tamworth. Why bring in a lawyer from as far away as Tamworth? Perhaps because he was family - the maiden name of John of Wharf Street's wife Elizabeth was also Dones.

A look through the surviving Birmingham Rate Books for the late 18th century tends to confirm what we have deduced so far. A John Peers owned property in Wharf Street (about where the Mailbox now stands) from 1786 until 1816 (it usually took a few years to update the records after someone died). In 1794 it was rated at six shillings, which indicates a substantial property. This area was the centre for Birmingham's coal dealers at the time, as it was situated on the town's first canal, which was opened in 1769 to connect it with the collieries at Wednesbury. Proof that this is our "John Peers, coal dealer" comes from the will of his sister-in-law Sarah Dones, dated 1804, which is also at Lichfield. She refers to premises in Wharf Street - including a Brewhouse "belonging to my Brother in Law John Pearce (sic) of Birmingham aforesaid Coaldealer", whom she appointed as her executor. I am not sure whether "brewhouse" ought to be understood as an actual place for brewing ale, as it originally meant, or - as the term came to be used later in the 19th century - as a communal wash house. But obviously our ancestor had his fingers in other pies besides coal dealing. Sarah owned three houses in Wharf Street, built on land which she rented from Sir Thomas Gooch, a prominent local landowner who may have been John's landlord as well. (This is certainly our John Peers, despite the spelling, as the will also names his wife Elizabeth, who was Sarah's sister.)

Also at Lichfield is the will of a William Peers of Birmingham, dated 1793, but an examination of this strongly suggests that he belonged to an unrelated (or only very distantly related) branch of the family. Personally I feel that a high degree of confidence can be placed in the links between John of Wharf Street and John of Tennant Street, and between Elizabeth

"of Court 12" and John of Tennant Street. But I am still slightly worried about drawing the conclusion that Elizabeth was the mother of John of Bristol Street. Certainly she was the widow of one John Peers and the mother of another, but can we be sure that we have got the right one? The only really solid evidence we have so far is that they were living next door to each other, along with another of Elizabeth's children. The reappearance of the name Elizabeth for John of Bristol Street's daughter is encouraging, but I am still looking for additional ways to check the relationship. The churchyard in Whittall Street is now underneath the Children's Hospital, and no headstones survive. Some inscriptions were copied in the 1880s, but unfortunately there are no Peerses among them. Nevertheless, every new piece of evidence collected so far has tended to strengthen the case for the family history as I have reconstructed it, and I am increasingly confident that it is correct as far back as John of Wharf Street - our four greats grandfather. Beyond that we are on less certain ground, though a few interesting conclusions can still be drawn.

Wilscombe: A Digression.

John of Wharf Street's daughter Elizabeth Peers/Wilscombe might be worth researching in her own right, though I have so far found no record of either her christening or her marriage. I think she is the Elizabeth who is found in the 1851 census living at 18 Ruston Street, in Christ Church Ward, Birmingham:

Lucy Marston	Head	52	Seamstress(?)	born America (Thrie River?)
Lavinia Marston	Dau	14	General servant	Birmingham
Elizabeth Wilscombe	Mother	85	Soldier's Widow	Birmingham

The entry for Lucy's marital status is illegible, but she was presumably also a widow. The bracketed portion of her birthplace entry is very hard to read, and the author of the digitised transcript on the Ancestry web site has it as "Thire River, USA", which is misleading. For a start the date would be c. 1799, which makes the presence of British soldiers in the newly independent United States unlikely. I suspect it should be "Trois Rivières", which is on the St. Laurence River in Canada. A place name in a foreign language, remembered by an old lady after more than 50 years, then conveyed verbally to a census taker who had probably never heard of it: no wonder they didn't get it exactly right!

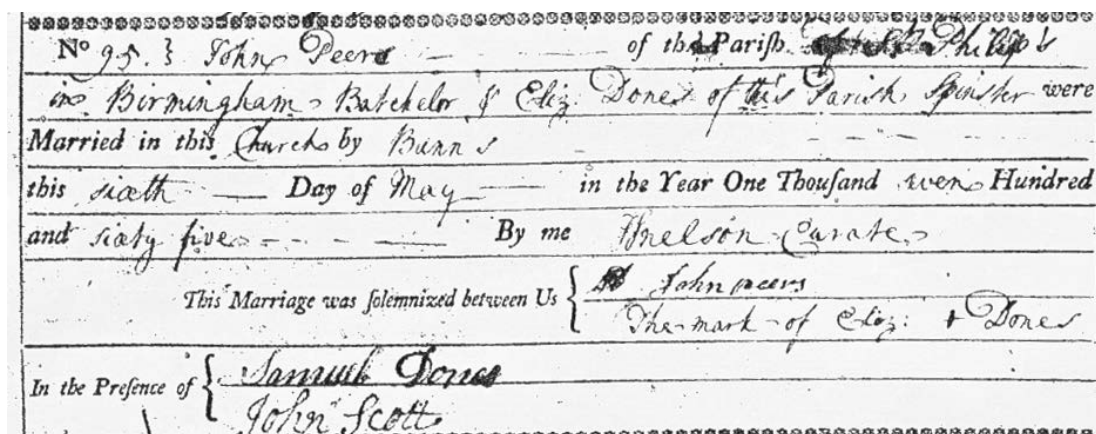
If her age is correct here, Elizabeth Wilscombe would have been the eldest known child of John and Elizabeth Peers, born c. 1766. The Rate Books show a Wilscombe living next door to the Peerses in Wharf Street in the 1780s, so I suspect she married one of their family, and went off with him to Canada and who knows where else. (Wilscombe is a very rare surname indeed; in fact I have not identified another family with the name anywhere in the country, and it had disappeared entirely by the time of the 1881 census). She was presumably still away in 1812, when her younger sister Lucy Court was appointed as their father's administratrix, but by 1818, when her daughter Lucy Wilscombe married Isaac Marston in Walsall, she was probably back in the West Midlands, where she lived into what would then have seemed extreme old age. She must have had some tales to tell the rest of the family - if they believed her, or could be bothered to listen to her!

Unfortunately it may be difficult to piece together much more of the story. Although there is a register of births of children of soldiers serving overseas covering this period, no Wilscombe appears there. This might of course mean that the father was no longer in the army by 1799, but the only likely candidate I have found in the discharge papers in the National Archives was John Wilscombe of the 26th Regiment of Foot (The Cameronians), who was not discharged until 1802. He had served for 27 years (ie. since he was 13), and is described as having been born "in the army". He was a Chelsea Pensioner in 1802, so no Birmingham connection can so far be proved, but in view of the rarity of the name there is a good chance that it is him. The 26th were certainly in the right places at the right times, serving in England

from 1780 to 1783, in Scotland till 1787, and then in Canada from 1787 until 1800. It may be significant that numerous marriages between local girls and soldiers from the regiment appear in the Tamworth parish register in 1780 - 81; frustratingly there is no Wilscombe/Peers match there, but it does imply that they were stationed locally for a time.

The Tamworth Connection.

In the marriage record for John of Wharf Street and Elizabeth Dones (see below), John is described as being of the parish of St. Philip, Birmingham, but I have not managed to identify his baptism there under any reasonable spelling variant of the name, and there do not seem to be any suitable candidates of the right date at St. Martin's either. There is a John son of Richard "Peerce" christened in 1728, but I do not think this can be him; Sarah Dones' will places certain constraints on his date of birth, as she is hardly likely to have appointed an executor who was older than she was, and by then approaching his 80th birthday! Of course John may well have had links with Tamworth before he married Elizabeth, a supposition given strength by the fact that the marriage entry in the St. Editha's register has evidently been altered: John was originally described as of "this" parish, but this has been crossed out and "St. Philip's Birmingham" inserted. Did the vicar recognise him as a former parishioner, and absent-mindedly put him down as still being one?



Entry from the marriage register of St. Editha's, Tamworth, for 6th May 1765. From this we see that John Peers of Wharf Street was already resident in Birmingham, though he was not christened at St. Philip's. The witness Samuel Dones is presumably Elizabeth's brother, known from their sister Sarah's will.

There were several families called Peers, Peares or Pears living in the Tamworth area, going back to the 16th century. These include a Thomas Peares who was exempted from the Hearth Tax on grounds of poverty in 1665 - 66, and died in 1671. The earliest in the St. Editha's register are a John son of Anne Peers buried in 1572, and a Humphrey Peers who married Ellin Bonnyvant on 4th November 1570. He might be the Homfrey son of Richard Peers buried on 10th September 1580, but the fact that his father's name is given suggests that this "Homfrey" was probably a minor. A few years ago Malcolm Peers was contacted by the vicar of a church in Tamworth, who was doing something to his churchyard and was trying to locate any relatives of some Peerses who were buried there. At the time Malcolm knew nothing about any Tamworth connection, so I do not know what happened to the graves. A recent look around the churchyard at St. Editha's failed to discover any Peerses, but it seems that this was not the church which contacted Malcolm.

A very strong candidate for our John of Wharf Street must be the John "Pears", son of Thomas, who was christened at St. Editha's on 24th May 1743. He was the right age, and obviously living in the right place to meet Elizabeth Dones. He had two brothers, William (christened 31st August 1744) and Thomas (11th February 1745), and the fact that John of Wharf Street's sons were christened John, Thomas and William is possibly significant in this context. Unfortunately definite proof is so far lacking, and I have not found any likely marriage for John's father Thomas, whose wife's name is not given in the register. He may be the "Thomas Peears" who was buried at Tamworth on 10th March 1760. A Thomas and Ann Peers had five children baptised at Tamworth between 1768 and 1786. This may be our John's brother, and additional information might be gleaned from documents relating to this line if they can be located. William, however, disappears without trace. There seems to be only one other Thomas Peers buried at St. Editha's in the right period, in 1798, but I have not yet conducted a search under variant spellings, which would probably produce some more candidates. It is also likely that there are records in some neighbouring parish which could help to take this line back further.

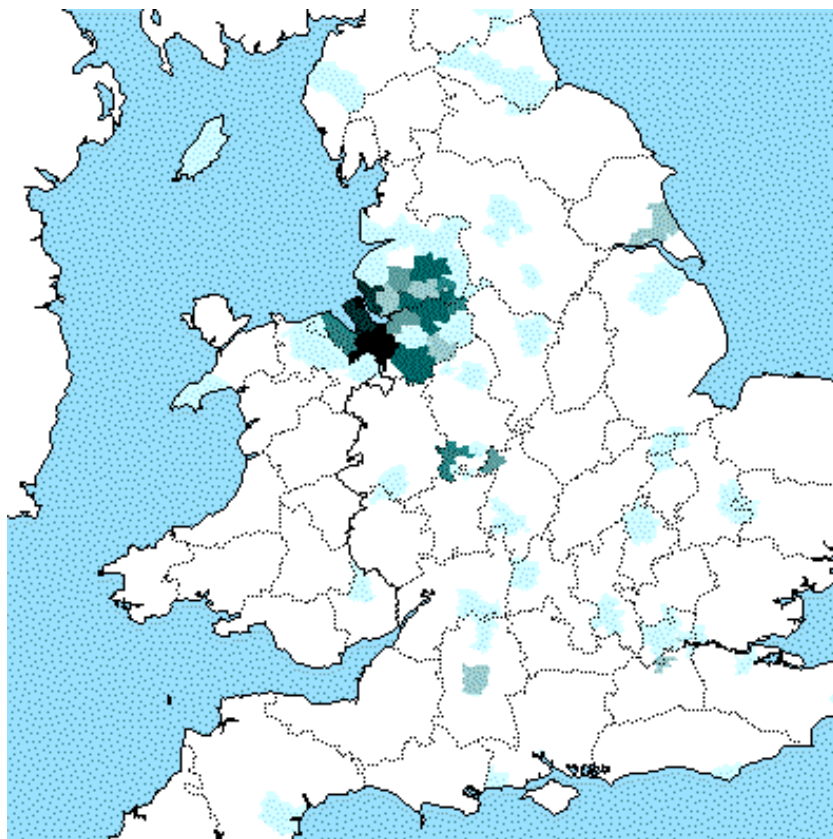
A Poll Book for Tamworth for the 1741 Parliamentary election survives in the Birmingham Archives (reference 328827), and contains the names of a Thomas and Richard "Pears" among the approximately 250 electors. Boroughs like Tamworth varied in the qualifications which were required to vote, but it appears that in this case all that was necessary was to be male, over 21, resident in the town, and paying the local church and poor rates. So this does not mean that these people were very well off, though they were obviously not destitute either. Richard gave his two votes to Lord John Sackville, a Whig, and John Floyer, a Tory (the eventual winners), but it is embarrassing to have to record that Thomas - our possible ancestor - voted for two Tories! Another interesting document from Tamworth is a petition in Staffordshire County Record Office (reference D5368/1/11), which was sent to Parliament in 1640. Signed by 87 of the burgesses of the town, it was a protest against what was alleged to be an illegal Parliamentary election at which only the two town Bailiffs and the "Capital Burgesses" (presumably a clique of the better off) had been allowed to vote. Not surprisingly Parliament closed ranks and ignored the petition, but the signatories include three names possibly relevant to this family history: William Peares, John Done and Hughe Latimer (see below under DONE & LATIMER).

The Peers Surname and its Early History: Background and Speculation.

So far, then, the conventional genealogical Peers trail ends in the 18th century, but there had been Peerses in the Midlands for very much longer than that. The Peerses of Alveston, near Stratford, are discussed on pages 30 to 32. As well as the Tamworth and Alveston branches, the name was fairly common in Bedworth, near Coventry, in the 17th and 18th centuries, and a court roll in the Birmingham Archives refers to a Peers in Brailes, south Warwickshire, in the early 15th century. The earliest instance of the current spelling of the name so far seems to be the Henry Peers who leased the manor of Belton, Lincolnshire, from the Abbey of St. Mary in York in 1394. The first record that I have found actually in Birmingham is "John Peeres fil Johis Peers" (ie. John Peeres son of John Peers), who was buried at St. Martin's on 9th December 1560. His age is not given, but the fact that his father's name is suggests that he was a minor. Spellings along the lines of "Peeris" or "Perys" can be shown to have been variants of the same name (eg. the will of Thomas "Perys or Peers" of Oxford in the National Archives, proved at Canterbury in 1533), and another Thomas Perys appears in the Subsidy Roll (a list of those liable to pay taxes for the war against the Scots) for Edgbaston in 1327. He was assessed at 12 pence, which makes him one of the less well off taxpayers, though by no means one of the poorest in the community. Unfortunately what is probably the same man or his heir appears 5 years later as Thomas "Person", making the continuity of surnames at this early date seem less likely. Elsewhere there was a cluster of Peerses or Peryses in Cornwall (apparently no longer there), and a much bigger one around Cheshire and Liverpool, which is still the main stronghold of the name. There were also some in North Wales and

along the border from Shropshire to Monmouthshire in the 17th century, and as we shall see there is other evidence of an ultimate Welsh origin. An independent argument based on surname origins points towards a similar conclusion; "patronymic" names like Peers (originally "son of Piers or Peter") are usually supposed to be Celtic, and ours seems to be unanimously regarded by the linguistic experts as Welsh. (Though the Welsh themselves did not generally adopt surnames until the middle of the 18th century, and Welsh type names attested earlier than that are usually thought to come from the English side of the Welsh border.)

A computer database produced at University College London has analysed many of the surnames which appear in the 1881 census and compared them with those in the electoral register for 1998. A number of interesting (if rather contentious) points arise concerning the name Peers. It is still predominantly rural (except of course in Birmingham), and the average "social status" of its bearers (based on an analysis of postcodes, occupations, health, educational level etc.) is in the bottom quarter of the population (77 on a scale of 0 to 99, with the lower numbers denoting higher status). This is possibly relevant to the family history because the authors of the study conclude that social mobility was actually much less than is commonly assumed, and that - despite some well publicised exceptions - most families have always been roughly where they are now on the scale. "Serfs you are, and serfs you shall remain", as Richard II once put it!



Distribution of the Peers surname, based on registration districts, from the 1881 census. Darker shades = more Peerses. The highest concentration is in rural Cheshire (a similar map based on the 1998 electoral register shows very little change in the distribution). The total number of Peerses in England & Wales in the 1881 census was 1755. All authorities seem to concur in considering it to be a name of Welsh origin, meaning "son of Peter".

The name also remains extremely localised, even though this is not a pattern you would usually expect from patronymic names, which are supposed to have arisen independently in many different areas. Neither would you expect this if it was simply a spelling variant of "Pearce" etc. I admit that I still find the whole question quite puzzling. I had expected that the Peers name would quickly become untraceable as we went back in time, because it had originated as just such a variant. But the modern spelling is at least 600 years old, and despite occasional mistakes it seems to have always been independent of "Pearce" and other similar names, even in the days before the spelling of names was expected to be consistent. Bearing in mind the lower class, rural nature of many of the people concerned, this can hardly be because they were highly literate, so it may once have been pronounced distinctively enough to make errors by clerks etc. fairly uncommon. Alternatively, it may have been well enough known in its original "homeland" to avoid "drift" due to constant wrong spelling, while those who took it elsewhere were of sufficiently high status to insist on keeping their distinctive name. Another implication is that the Peerses had a sense of collective identity which may well reflect a genuine common ancestry.

So, putting all this together, you might expect all Peerses to have had the same ancestor at some point in the Middle Ages. This might be confirmed - or otherwise - one day with the advent of DNA testing, even without us ever knowing who that ancestor actually was. The family may have come originally from Cheshire, Flintshire, or further west along the coast of North Wales. This theory tends to be supported by the DNA results discussed below. The date when our branch moved to the Midlands is harder to guess, but it could have been not long after the English themselves began to take on permanent surnames - in other words as long ago as the 13th century. (If it had been earlier, of course, they would not have brought the Peers name with them but would have adopted a local Midland name instead.) William Dugdale, in his *"Antiquities of Warwickshire"*, tells us that the Alveston Peerses were of Welsh origin. Welsh immigrants were a familiar feature of medieval Birmingham, Tamworth and no doubt other Midland towns, and many of them came originally as cattle drovers bringing their hill-bred beasts to the markets. Dad tells us in his "jottings" that as a child his ambition was to be a cattle drover; would he ever have guessed that that might have been how his distant ancestors got to Birmingham in the first place?

DNA Analysis and "Peers" Prehistory.

In the last couple of years there have been a number of genetic testing projects which have aimed to shed light on the early population history of Britain. Their methods and assumptions have varied widely, but the following results come from my involvement with what I think is one of the more useful ones. The approach used here, pioneered by Dr. Stephen Oppenheimer from Oxford University, identifies between 40 and 50 genetic "signatures" in the present UK population, each of which is based on mutations derived ultimately from a single ancestor. In this case these are derived from the Y chromosome, and so the results are only relevant to the direct male line of ascent, ie. our father's father's father's father, etc. This is why I have called it "Peers" prehistory, even though the events it illuminates long predate the adoption of surnames, and many people with other names will no doubt share the same results.

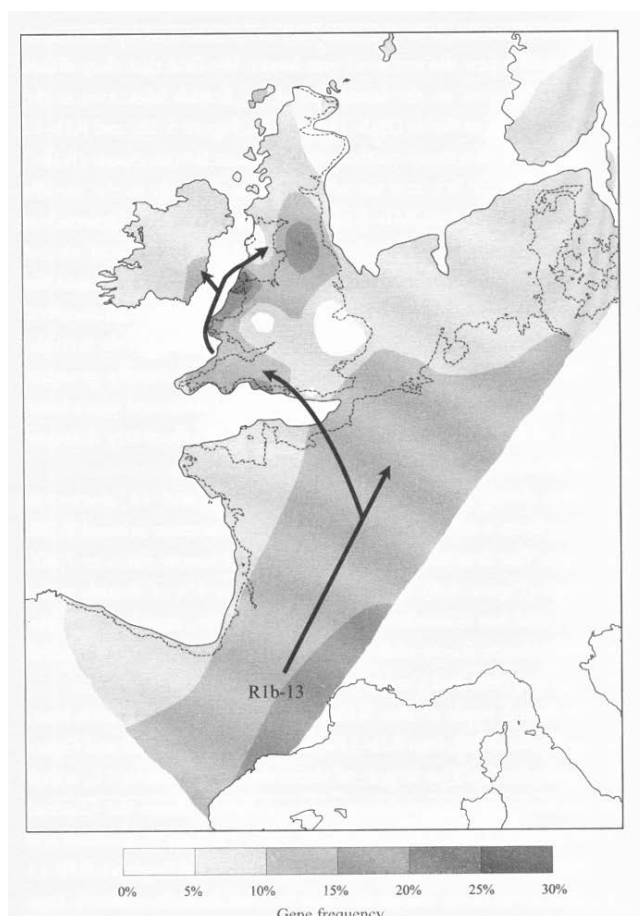
So everyone sharing one of these signatures belongs to what we might call a "clan", descended directly from one man. (Though it is only the Y chromosome that is passed on essentially unaltered, and all his other genes have probably been diluted out of existence long ago.) From the number of lesser mutations accumulated within this clan, this ancestor can be given a very approximate date (to within a thousand years or so), and by looking at where his descendants are concentrated it may be possible to pin down a location where he lived. Y chromosome tests are believed to be more accurate as regards location than they are about dating, but we can usually say roughly when a person's ancestral line is likely to have arrived in this country.

Some background may be useful to help place the results in a historical perspective. It is now fairly well established that the great majority of the people of British origin are descended from the first settlers to arrive after the Ice Age, during the Late Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods (ie. the Old and Middle Stone Ages). Most of these came ultimately from one of three refuges in southern Europe where people had sat out the big freeze: the Basque country south of the Pyrenees; the Balkans; and the Ukraine. The later migrations familiar from our history lessons had little effect in comparison. The "Celts" of western Britain have probably been here all the time, rather than moving in from Europe during the Iron Age as used to be thought. The Anglo-Saxon invasion, which was once regarded as sort of a massive "ethnic cleansing" replacing the Celts with the modern "English" people, turns out to have been a rather mild affair, probably involving no more than 4% of the existing population, even in East Anglia. The Viking impact may have been slightly greater, but of the Romans and the Normans there is no genetic trace at all. There are differences in this study between the west and the east of Britain, but these derive mainly from the two different routes taken by Stone Age colonists - along the Atlantic coast or across the North Sea - rather than from Saxon genocide at the expense of the indigenous "Celts". These common sense conclusions from Oppenheimer's work - in contrast to the sensational claims of mass rape and murder sometimes made elsewhere - tend to increase my confidence in his results. I should however emphasise that although this scenario makes sense historically and archaeologically, I am not qualified to evaluate the genetics, so for now we will have to take this on trust.

It turns out that we belong to the "clan" labelled by Oppenheimer as R1b-13. This places our origin in the Basque Ice Age refuge, from which the first post Ice Age inhabitants of Britain moved up the Atlantic coast between 15,000 and 13,000 years ago. These first settlers, however, stuck to the ancient coastline, which was a long way west of the present one, and their descendants are now found mainly in Ireland and western Scotland. R1b-13 seems to have originated in the Basque country somewhat later, around 6000 BC. The group carrying this marker apparently travelled from the eastern end of the Pyrenees up through France to the English Channel (which was finally submerged around that time), then round the southern and western coasts as indicated on the map, dropping off groups of settlers along the way. Of course they would not have made this trip in one go, and it may have taken several generations to complete. At some point around 6000 to 5800 BC, then, the first Peers ancestor reached Britain (about 300 generations ago!) At this date he would have been a Mesolithic hunter-gatherer, probably living partly on shellfish and other coastal resources, and perhaps travelling at least part of the way by boat - though their overland route from Spain suggests that his people may have been less dependent on the sea than their predecessors. We cannot even guess how many of them there were at this point, but there was obviously more than a single nuclear family, as people carrying the same genetic marker managed to colonise widely separated spots in southern England, Cornwall, North Wales and Cumbria. They seem to have avoided areas already settled by early arrivals, but in those days there was plenty of spare land for everyone: the total population of Britain at the time has been estimated at around 5,000.

In general terms this story is probably fairly typical of most British ancestors, of whom maybe 75% arrived before the introduction of farming in this country. But the specific details of the R1b-13 "clan" enable us to draw some more conclusions. Overall it comprises about 3.8% of the British population, which means that about 2,280,000 people in the UK (plus an unknown number of people overseas) are descended from this same ancestor. Of this number the Peerses (even if we do all belong to the same "clan") represent about 0.1%, so it is perhaps a bit arrogant to call him an early Peers! But these people are not evenly distributed throughout the country, as the map reproduced below shows. They vary from a maximum of 11.4% of the population in Llangefni (on Anglesey), and 8.9% in Penrith, to virtually none at all in a broad band across the Midlands from mid-Wales to East Anglia. And this, remember, is the current distribution, after centuries of migration have blurred the original one. So although R1b-13s are not especially rare in Britain as a whole, they certainly are (and must always have been, given that historically migration has been from rural Wales to the English

towns, and not vice versa) in the Midlands. This tends to support my theory of a North Welsh origin for the Peerses, and also implies that the Birmingham branch really is related both to the cluster in the Cheshire area and to the "antient family in Wales" which settled in Alveston.



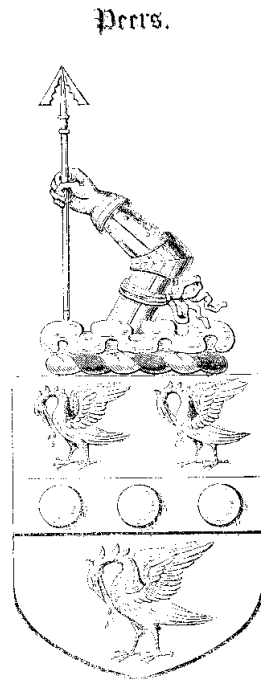
Distribution map of the R1b-13 gene cluster, from Oppenheimer's "The Origins of the British". The arrows show the likely migration route from the point of origin south of the Pyrenees, starting around 6000 BC. The solid coastline is the reconstructed one for around that date; the dotted line is today's shoreline.

2). A FEW (SLIGHTLY) FAMOUS PEERSES.

I was brought up with the idea that the name Peers was exceptionally rare, and of course we all still encounter people who find spelling it an insurmountable challenge! But there were quite a few Peerses who played documented if minor roles in history, and although I cannot demonstrate that any of these are related to our own line, I thought it might be of interest to mention some of them.

The only Peers to make the Dictionary of National Biography (so far at least) was Richard, an author and translator at Christ Church College, Oxford. He was born in Lisburn, County Antrim, in 1645, son of another Richard Peers who was a humble tanner. Richard junior ran away to Bristol, caught the eye of an influential patron, and somehow ended up as an undergraduate at Oxford. After graduating he stayed at Oxford and wrote several books, including "The Description of the Seventeen Provinces of the Low Countries". He was also

commissioned to translate into Latin the "History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford" by Anthony Wood. Unfortunately Wood did not like the translation, and a lot of what we know about Richard comes from his writings. He refers to him as "sullen" and a "rogue", and says that Richard missed the visit of King James II to Oxford in 1687 because he was too fat to walk or even ride far. But then Wood was a notoriously ill tempered and miserable character, who according to another contemporary "never spoke well of any man". Richard died in 1690. He had a son, another Richard Peers (1685 - 1739), who also went to Oxford, and became Vicar of Faringdon in Berkshire.



Coat of arms of Peers of Alveston, from the Herald's Visitation of Warwickshire of 1619. Granted by James I in 1605, the arms are blazoned as "Azure, on a fess argent between three pelicans or vulning themselves proper as many ogresses". The latter are described elsewhere as "three roundels gules". The pelican in heraldry was a symbol of parental self-sacrifice, as it was supposed to feed its young on its own blood.

The best known of the "extended family" in the Midlands were the Peers family of Alveston, near Stratford on Avon. They were descended from Robert Peers, brother of the Prior of Worcester, who started off as the bailiff of the manor of Alveston around 1540, and somehow ended up owning the place. His heirs were lords of the manor there from the late 16th to the early 19th centuries. The present manor house was built in 1689, and was featured in "*Country Life*" magazine in May 1945. It is now known as Alveston House, which is not to be confused with the better known Alveston Manor Hotel in Stratford. It is situated in the middle of an extensive park at the north-eastern end of the village, and appears to be still privately owned. The Alveston Peerses are written up in some detail in the 1725 edition of Sir William Dugdale's "*Antiquities of Warwickshire*". As he have already remarked, according to Dugdale they were "descended from an antient family in Wales" (his spelling). The direct male line of this family died out in 1803. Notable among them was Newsham Peers, who was born in 1684. He was commissioned into the Royal Regiment of Welsh Fusiliers (later the Royal Welch Fusiliers) in 1706, survived being wounded at the Battle of Malplaquet in 1709, and

was appointed Colonel of the Regiment in 1739. A memorial to him survives in the Old Church at Alveston, and neatly sums up his career:

"To the memory of the Honble Newsham Peers Esq. Colonel of His Majesty's own Royal Regiment of Welch Fuziliers. He had been a commission officer 40 years and distinguished himself in most of the sieges and battles during the reign of Queen Ann. He dyed July 28th 1743 of wounds He receiv'd at the battle of Dettingen. He was buried in St. Philip Rues Chapl near Hanau in Germany. Regretted by his king, lamented by his country."

[35]

Colonel PEERS'S Regiment of WELSH FUSILIERS.		Dates of their pre- sent Commissions.	Dates of their first Commissions.
Colonel	Newsham Peers	23 Nov. 1739.	Ensign, 25 April 1706.
Lieutenant Colonel	Cuthbert Ellifon	ditto.	Captain, 11 April 1723.
Major	John Waite	4 Sept. 1739.	Ensign, Mar. 1719-20.
Captains	George Jackson	25 Dec. 1726.	Lieutenant, 1 Jan. 1707.
	Roger Lort	16 July 1739.	Lieutenant, 11 April 1708.
	William Hickman	23 Mar. 1730-1.	Ensign, 1 July 1717.
	Richard Bendyshe	1 Nov. 1733.	Ensign, 17 Sept. 1721.
	James Carey	10 Aug. 1737.	Ensign, 1 May 1710.
	John Sabine	28 Dec. 1738.	Ensign, 24 June 1712.
	Henry Hickman	3 Sept. 1739.	Ensign, 24 Dec. 1710.
Captain Lieutenant	Arthur Taylor	ditto.	Lieutenant, 21 Aug. 1718.
First Lieutenants	Alexander Johnson	14 May 1720.	Ensign, 23 May 1712.
	James Drysdale	24 Sept. 1730.	Ensign, 1 Aug. 1707.
	John Bernard	25 Nov. 1731.	Ensign, 13 Mar. 1718-19.
	John Weaver	8 Nov. 1732.	Ensign, 25 June 1722.
	John Pryce	10 Aug. 1737.	Ensign, 16 May 1729.
	Thomas Rodd	3 Sept. 1739.	Ensign, 24 Dec. 1720.
	William Izard	17 Jan. 1739-40.	Ensign, 7 Feb. 1735-6.
	Gregory Barners	16 Jan. 1739-40.	Ensign, 10 Dec. 1735.
	Arthur Forster	18 ditto.	
	John Gregg	19 ditto.	Ensign, 31 Jan. 1735-6.
Second Lieutenants	Thomas Baldwin	3 Mar. 1735-6.	
	Nathaniel Bateman	17 ditto.	
	Charles Goodall	23 July 1737.	
	German Pole	10 Aug. 1737.	
	Joseph Sabine	17 July 1739.	
	William Bolton	31 Aug. 1739.	
	William Aubrey	2 Feb. 1739-40.	
	Phineas Bowles	3 ditto.	
	Horatio Sharpe	4 ditto.	

Extract from the Army List of 1740 in the National Archives.

An account written by an officer who was present, and reproduced in the regimental history, describes the circumstances of the Colonel's death at Dettingen on 16th June 1743, when a British army led by King George II fought its way out of a trap laid by the French. His regiment advanced "in close order, as firm as a wall", reserving its fire until the enemy were within 60 paces, and by these tactics routed four French units in succession, themselves losing only 15 dead and 28 wounded. Unfortunately one of the casualties was Colonel Peers, who fell in the first attack, "shot in the mouth, and out at the neck". The writer considered that the

Regiment's success was due to "advancing near the enemy ere we fir'd", rather than opening fire at 100 paces as many other regiments did, "for the French will stand fire at a distance, tho' 'tis plain they cannot look men in the face". It is reasonable to suppose that they had adopted these tactics on the orders of their commanding officer, who can therefore take some of the credit for the British victory. King George is said to have called the regiment the finest he had ever seen. (Incidentally this was the last occasion that a British monarch took the field with his armies, and also the last time a Colonel of the Royal Welch Fusiliers marched into battle at their head.) Newsham died from the effects of his wound six weeks later, having added a codicil to his will (which survives at Stratford's Shakespeare Memorial Trust) distributing his "double shot pistols" and other effects among his fellow officers. He also gave a new shirt to the soldier who had carried him off the field, and who had torn up his own shirt to bind the Colonel's wounds.

Obviously related to the Alveston Peerses were two brothers, Henry Newsham and Augustus Richard, sons of a Captain H. Peers, who were born in Lymington, Hampshire and entered the service of the Hudsons Bay Company in the early 1840s. Both their journals apparently survive in the archives of British Columbia and are quoted on the web site of the Canadian historian Nancy Anderson (www.nancymagueriteanderson.com). The Dictionary of Canadian biography has an article on Henry (17th March 1821 to 27th March 1864), who explored an overland route to Fort Vancouver and established Fort Hope in what is now British Columbia. In 1855 he raised a troop of 39 cavalry to assist in the Indian war in Washington, USA, for which the Americans never paid him. He later became a successful farmer. His brother Augustus married Christina Bell, the daughter of John Bell the famous Arctic explorer, and died at Peel Post in north-western Canada at the age of 33 in 1853. The redriverancestry.ca web site has a section on his son Augustus John Peers (1848 – 1901). Augustus Richard is the posthumous "hero" of a ghost story, "Marche!", published in "Lord Halifax's Ghost Book" (1936). Given that we can confirm most of the facts in the story it is an unusually convincing one, so we can reasonably claim to be distantly related to a ghost!

Another branch of the Peerses ended up in London, where a couple of them attained high office during the 18th century. Sir Charles Peers was Lord Mayor in 1715 - 16, and bore a coat of arms blazoned as follows: "Sable a chevron between 3 lions' heads erased argent, a chief or". This is obviously the basis of the "Peers arms" which are popularly associated with the name by modern genealogy firms, and can be obtained printed on place mats etc., though of course none of us are likely to be entitled to bear them. Another Peers, Richard, was Sheriff of London in 1767. His arms were: "Vert a bend argent cotised or". Whether he was related to Sir Charles or not I do not know, but I did once encounter a Mr. Anthony Peers in the Birmingham Archives, who said that he had been told that he was descended from the London Peerses, one of whom had once been Lord Mayor.

The mother of the famous Birmingham pioneer industrialist Matthew Boulton (born 1728) was a Christina or Christiana Peers, the daughter of a "Mr. Peers of Chester", but again I have not been able to find any connection to our family. Not related either, as far as I know, was the John Peers, a skilled metal worker from London, who together with his wife was framed by Isaac Newton, threatened with hanging, and forced to give evidence against the alleged forger William Challenor in a celebrated case in 1697.

When I was a child, anyone hearing the name Peers would inevitably ask if we were related to Donald Peers, who seems to be largely forgotten now but was a very popular singer in the 1940s and 50s. He was best known for the song "By a Babbling Brook". He was born in Ammanford, Dyfed, in 1908, and died in Brighton in 1973.

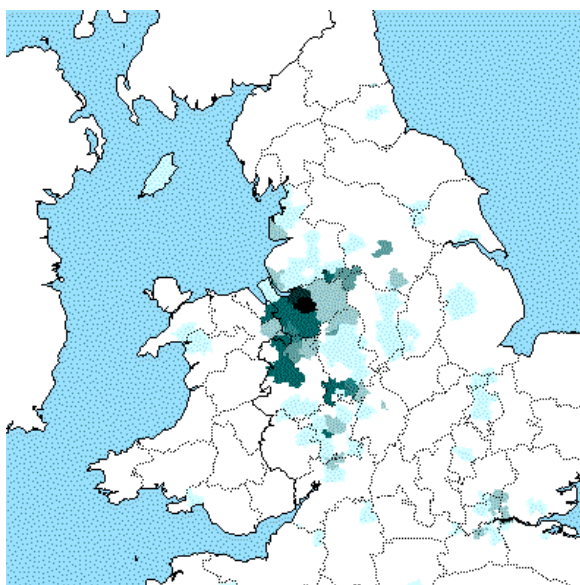
In the USA, General William R. Peers hit the headlines when he was appointed to investigate the notorious My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War. He was born in Iowa in 1914. He served in Burma in World War Two, where he was involved in secret operations behind

Japanese lines, and rose to command the 4th US Infantry Division in Vietnam in 1967. In November of that year he defeated the North Vietnamese in the Battle of Dak To. Despite his army background his report into My Lai was strongly critical of the perpetrators of the massacre, and of the higher ranking officers who had tried to cover it up. General Peers is apparently being played by Bruce Willis in a new film about the affair made by Oliver Stone.

The best known Peers across the Atlantic, though, was a George Thomas (1830 - 1908), the son of Thomas Russel Peers and Mary B. Petty of Virginia. George was the County Clerk based at Appomattox Court House in 1865 when Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia was cornered there by Grant's Federal forces and forced to surrender, marking the effective end of the American Civil War. The rebels fired their last shots from the vicinity of George's place, which is now known as the "Peers House", and in front of which the official "Surrender Ceremony Marker" is located. George witnessed the actual surrender and described it in detail afterwards, making him quite a celebrity among local historians and Civil War buffs. Apparently nowadays there are "living history" events starring a re-enactor in period costume as our George!

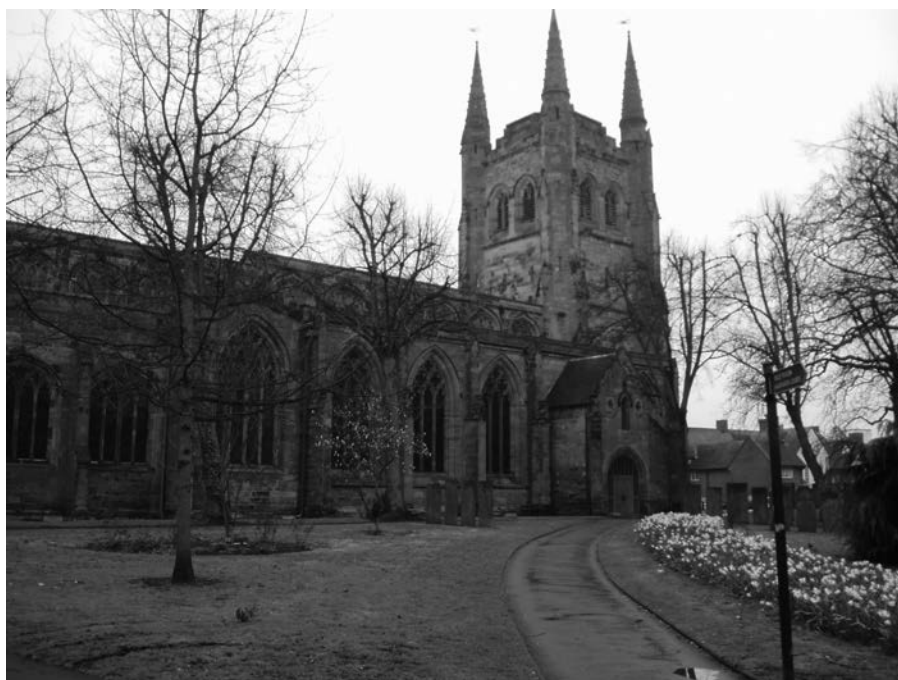
3). DONE/DONES.

Returning to our own family, and emerging from the mammoth-haunted steppes of prehistory, we find ourselves back in 18th century Tamworth. The will of Sarah Dones, mentioned above (page 20), enables us to identify her sister as the Elizabeth Dones who married John Peers at St. Editha's, the parish church of Tamworth, on 16th May 1765. Sarah's will also names her other brothers and sisters, Mary, Samuel and Thomas, which ought to make it easy to identify their father. A Sarah, Elizabeth (christened in 1739) and Mary, all daughters of a William Dones, are to be found in the Tamworth parish records, but there are also a Sarah, Elizabeth, Mary, Thomas and Samuel, children of Thomas Dones - giving him five out of five as opposed to only three for William, and confirming as surely as we can ever expect that our Elizabeth's father was Thomas.



1881 distribution map for the surname Done, which was still considerably more common than the variant "Dones", with 1035 instances nationwide. Note the concentration in Cheshire and north Shropshire.

At first the evidence seemed to rule him out nevertheless, as the Elizabeth daughter of Thomas Dones who was baptised on 9th November 1742 is said by the Mormon IGI to have been buried on the same day. In fact there is no entry to this effect in the parish register, so it is probably a mistake and we cannot dismiss the possibility that this Elizabeth survived to marry John Peers 23 years later. The date of baptism of her presumed youngest child, William Peers, in 1786 (see page 17), is one reason to favour a birth date of 1742 rather than 1739 for Elizabeth. Another factor is the christening dates of the respective Sarahs - 25th April 1732 for Thomas' daughter, and 2nd March 1750 for William's. If Sarah was the daughter of William she must have been 11 years younger than her sister Elizabeth, while if they were Thomas' children she would have been 10 years older. The latter makes more sense in view of the fact that she not only died earlier, but appointed John Peers as her executor, suggesting that he and his wife were expected to outlive her. So the evidence strongly favours Thomas Dones rather than William as Elizabeth's father. Unfortunately, though, there is no mother's name in any of the baptism entries.



St. Editha's, the ancient parish church of Tamworth, photographed in March 2008. Our four greats grandmother Elizabeth Dones married John Peers here in 1765. She was probably also christened here (in 1742), as were several other generations of Doneses. The earliest dated event in this history, the marriage of Richard Latimer and Dorothy Groutwich, took place here in 1607.

The record of Elizabeth's marriage to John Peers is witnessed by a Samuel Dones who is presumably her brother. He was christened on 12th June 1730, and his baptism entry is especially valuable as it gives Thomas' occupation and place of residence, viz : "Thos. Dones of Tamth. Carpinder". Thomas the carpenter was probably the son of Thomas and Ann who was christened at Tamworth on 11th May 1703. (There are several other Thomases in the parish registers, including one who was a schoolmaster and died in February 1742, but all are either too old or too young to be our ancestor. Only one Thomas Dones appears in the 1741 Tamworth Poll Book (see above, under PEERS), but there is no way of knowing which one this is.) Thomas senior married Ann Blith, also at Tamworth, on 24th April 1699. He left a

will which was proved in February 1725. His occupation is given as "shearman"; this would not be anything to do with sheep, but referred either to a cutter of metal or to someone who sheared the nap from cloth. Either way it was a skilled trade. He left all his property - valued at £7 17s 4d - to his wife, who signed herself "Ann Doons". In view of the rarity of the name locally, it is highly likely that he is either the Thomas son of Richard and Izabell Done who was christened at Tamworth on 3rd December 1669, or the son of Samuel Done who was baptised at St. Mary's Lichfield on 31st May 1680. (A Richard "Deane" or "Done" married "Isbell" Alcock at Tamworth on 1st November 1655, but the groom's surname is hard to read, and I cannot be absolutely certain that this is the couple we are interested in. A Richard "Dones" and Elizabeth Seal were also married at St. Mary's Lichfield on 2nd March 1680.) Either Richard or Samuel is therefore a good candidate to be our seven greats grandfather (note the recurrence of the name Samuel down to Samuel Downes Peers, for whom see page 18), but everything before Elizabeth's marriage in 1765 is still subject to further investigation.

The wills of another Done, George (probably the son of Samuel or Jonathan), and George's wife Mary, who owned a haberdasher's shop worth more than £90 on her death in 1735, are at Lichfield. (Out of this small fortune Mary left a shilling each to her sons George and Jonathan, and all the rest to her daughter Mary!) George's name is Dones in the parish register entries but is given in his will as Done, which proves that these are just variations on what is basically the same surname, but by the middle of the 18th century the "Dones" version was predominant.

Going still further back we are admittedly on increasingly shaky ground, but there is reason to believe that whichever ancestry is correct for Thomas Done/Dones, we can link it up with the same family and take it a couple of generations further. Also at Lichfield is the will of Elizabeth Done, widow of Tamworth, drawn up in 1664 and proved 30th June 1665. (Her burial was recorded on 1st June.) Here she names her brother John "Latimar" (more commonly Latimer, thus giving us her maiden name), daughters Dorothy, Ann and Elizabeth, sons John, Samuel, Jonathan, Thomas and Richard, and Richard's son, also Richard. So whoever Thomas' father was, he is highly likely to have been the son of this Elizabeth (ie. Richard or Samuel), bringing us back to the same grandparents. This is confirmed by the fact that the Hearth Tax returns for the years 1662 to 1673 list only one Done household in the whole of the Tamworth area. The accompanying family tree diagrams explain all this better than I can in words. So despite the uncertainty regarding Elizabeth's exact relationship to our family tree, I thought it worth including a transcription of this exceptionally informative will, old fashioned spellings and all.

The Will of Elizabeth Done reads as follows:

March 13th 1664.

In the name of God Amen. I Elizabeth Done of Tamworth in the Countie of Warwicke wid being sike in bodie but of good and perfect memory, Blessed be Almighty God for it, doe make and ordayne this my last will and Testam^t in Manner and form ffollowinge. And first I bequeath my soule into the hands of Almighty God my maker trustinge in the Miretts of Jesus Crist my Saviour for pardon and forgivenes of all my Sinnes and utterly renouncinge all worthynes of my selfe whole relie uppon merritts of my blessed Saviour.

Secondly I bequeath my bodie to the Earth of whence it was made to be buried in a decent and orderly manner as becometh my ranke and as my Executo^s and Overseers hereafter named shall thinke fitt.

It(em). I give unto my Daughter Dorothy Done Twentie pounds to be payd her by my Executo^s hereafter named that is to say ten pounds after her daye of marriage and ten pounds at the birth of her first child.

It(em). I give unto my Sonne John Done ten pounds, five pounds to be payd to him within six mounthes after my decease and the other five pounds within one yeare after my decease.

It(em). I give unto my Daughter Anne Done ffortie pounds to be Employed for her p(re)sently after my decease.

It(em). I give unto my Sonne Samuel Done Twentie pounds to be sett forth for p(re)sently after my decease and to be payd him when hee cometh forth of his apprenticeship.

It(em). I give unto my Sonne Jonathan Done the rent of that annuitie I have in (?illegible) duringe the tearme yet to come, and I doe give unto him fourtie pounds to be sett out for him p(re)sently after my decease, and to be payd him when he cometh to age of one and Twentie yeares, or if he shall have occasions to use it sowner for his p(re)ferm^t then to be payd him before, and further my will and meaninge is that if it shall please god any of my three children (that is to say) Anne Done Samuel Done or Jonathan Done shall departe this life before they come to age or shall have their portons payd them by my Executo^s, that then it shall be equally devided amongst the longer liver of them.

It(em). I give unto my Sonne Thomas Done five shillings and to his children Twentie shillings apeece to be payd them within one yeare after my decease.

It(em). I give unto my Sonne George Done five shillings.

It(em). I give unto my Grand Child Richard Done five pounds to be sett forth for him, and to every of Sonne Richard Dones Children Twentie shillings apeece.

It(em). I give unto my Sonne in Law John Dawes his twoe Children which he had by my Daughter Elizabeth Done Twentie shillings apeece to be payd them within one yeare after my Decease. And further my will is that if my estate shall amount to more then my Legacise and funerall charges beinge discharged, That then the Overplus shalbe equallie devided betweene my Daughter Anne, Samuel and Jonathan as is before exprest.

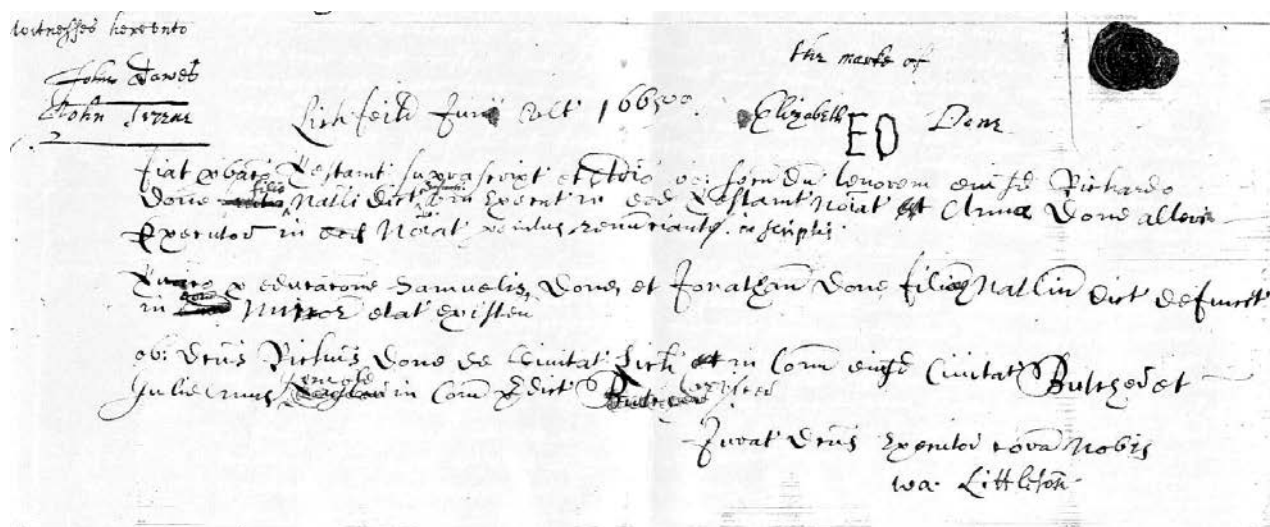
It(em). I give unto my Sonne Richard Done my house wherein I live duringe the life of my Sonne John Done which I have taken by lease of the Right Honorable the Marques of Harford and appoint my loveinge Sonne Richard Done and my Daughter Anne Done Executo^s of this my Last will and Testam^t, and I would intreat my Executo^s that they would take the care and charge of there brother Jonathan Done untell he shalbe able to goe to prentice haveinge the use of his Annuitie and portion for his Scoolinge and mayntenance, and I doe intreat my brother Mr. John Latimar Mr. William Dane(?) my sonne John Dawes and John Treene to be Overseers of this my Last will and Testament givinge them five shillings apeece for there paynes. In witness whereof I have hereunto sett my hand and Seale the day and yeare above written.

*Witnesses hereunto
John Dawes
John Treene*

the marke of Elizabeth Done

The inventory attached to this will is unfortunately too fragile and badly damaged to be copied, but her assets totalled £128 3s 4d, including £70 worth of "bonds" and other miscellaneous debts owing, and £6 worth of wearing apparel. She was clearly a woman of some wealth. The Hearth Tax return for 1662 lists her as having three hearths in her house; this is almost certainly the same property occupied by her son Richard in 1666, and which is referred to in the 1673 return as being in Market Street.

The "marke" (consisting of the initials ED), of Elizabeth Done, widow of Tamworth, on her will, together with her seal. This document was drawn up on 13th March, 1664.



We can identify Elizabeth's husband as the Richard Done whose will was proved at Canterbury on 25th January 1658 (or 1657 as it was dated then, the new year not officially beginning until March. During the Commonwealth period all wills had to go to the Prerogative Court of Canterbury to be proved, whereas usually it was only the rich, or those with property in more than one diocese, who applied there). He is fairly certainly the Richard "Doan" who was buried at Tamworth on 25th May 1657. Richard is described as a "salter" of Tamworth - ie. in the salt trade, either making or importing it. There was an ancient salt route going through this area, and there is still a "Salter's Bridge" across the Tame near Alrewas. This will tries to provide for all possibilities and ends up as a legalistic tangle not really worth reproducing here, but Richard mentions his wife Elizabeth and the same list of children, confirming that he is the right man. He seems to have provided for his family already, and much of Elizabeth's will merely confirms her husband's bequests. This couple were married at Tamworth on 2nd July 1632.

Unfortunately, although no Done appears in the parish registers before this date, no other place of origin is given for Richard. This does not necessarily rule out a continuing link to Tamworth, however, if we accept the likelihood that variant spellings may refer to this line. So we have an Isabell Dones buried at St. Editha's on 20th December 1631, and a Henry Downes who had two children christened - Barbara in 1573 and Henry in 1577 - before being himself buried there on 17th November 1577. The will of a Thomas Done, yeoman of Dudley, was proved at Canterbury in 1657, but it does not mention anyone who can be linked to the Tamworth branch of the family. A John Done signed the petition of 1640 (see under PEERS), but I have not so far identified him - he can hardly be the son of Richard and Elizabeth, who were married only eight years before.

However earlier mentions of the name in 17th century documents suggest a possible link with the town of Wem in Shropshire (a few miles north of Shrewsbury). The rarity of the name suggests that ultimately the family is likely to be related to the Dones of Utkinton, who were among the ancient gentry of Cheshire. Pedigrees of the Done family taken from the 1580 Herald's Visitation of Cheshire are reproduced in the "Documents" file accompanying this history, and the recurrence in them of names familiar to us from the Tamworth family - most notably Richard - is certainly suggestive of a relationship. (Could it also be significant that Cheshire was the source of most of the salt imported into the north Midlands? The other

nearby source was Droitwich, but I have seen no evidence that Droitwich salt was traded further than Birmingham.) According to the IGI a Richard son of "Philippe Done" was baptised at St. John the Baptist, Chester on 20th August 1608, which would make him about the right age to be Elizabeth's husband. It should be pointed out at this stage, though, that although this source can be useful for indicating directions for research, as we have seen with the Peers/Dones connection, it is not comprehensive enough to prove a link on its own. It covers an unknown but probably quite small proportion of the surviving parish records for this period, so although it might be reasonable to proceed on the assumption that a Done found in the same parish is connected to our line, we cannot jump to the conclusion that one in a different parish (let alone county) is the only possible candidate.

So without proof it would be pointless to take this line of investigation any further, and so far I have looked at a number of Done/Dones wills and other possible sources without success. I have also contacted a Martin Done who has written a book on the history of his family, the Dones of Utkinton. He agrees that we are very likely to be related, but has not so far come up with any evidence (despite the incentive of me promising to buy his book if he does!) It is, however, worth briefly mentioning the background to this potential line of enquiry. The Dones of Utkinton were "hereditary foresters and keepers of the Baylywick" at Delamere Forest in central Cheshire. They traced their office and their ancestry back to one Ranulph de Kingsley, who was apparently a contemporary of the first Earl Ranulph of Chester (fl. c. 1120 to 1129) - though there do not seem to be enough generations in the 1580 pedigrees to cover all this time span. The family was very well connected, to judge from their extensively quartered coat of arms. If we could be proved to have a connection with them, it would open up all sorts of avenues for tracing our ancestors back well into the Middle Ages.



The arms of Done of Utkinton from the Cheshire Visitation of 1580, illustrated on the Cheshire heraldry web site. The original blazon reads as follows: "Quarterly of four - 1).

Azure, two bars Argent, over all on a bend Gules three arrows of the second (for Done). 2). Vert, a cross engrailed Ermine (Kingsley). 3). Gules, a lion rampant Argent (Leigh). 4). Azure, crusily, and three eagles displayed Or (Somerville Lord of Alphram). Over all an escutcheon of pretence Argent, a bugle horn stringed Sable (within the knot of the string a cinquefoil). 1 Crest - Eight arrows in saltire Or, barbed and fletched Argent, banded with a riband Gules. 2 Crest - A buck's head erased proper, attired Or. The inescutcheon is the Armes of ye forestership and is in ye seals of the office." All this quartering indicates the merging of some fairly important families. It is also very old; the intermarriage between Done and Kingsley dates from the mid 14th century. The double crest is fairly unusual in English heraldry, though its significance here is unclear.

4). LATIMER.

Another will at Lichfield Record Office enables us to identify Elizabeth Done's parents (and hence our probable nine greats grandparents) as Richard "Lattimer" and "Dorothe" Groutwich, who were married in Tamworth on 27th June 1607. (Their first child, Richard, was baptised on 2nd July, so it might have been something of a shotgun wedding!) Elizabeth was christened at Tamworth on 26th November 1609. Other known children of this prolific couple were Hugh (baptised 7th July 1608), Margaret (10th January 1613), Dorothy (17th July 1614), Alice (17th January 1619), William (19th November 1620), Thomas (9th October 1625) and Anne (23rd November 1628). We know from both Richard's and Elizabeth's wills that there was also a John, but I have not so far traced his baptism. John Latimer's will was proved in 1669, and mentions his wife Marie and unnamed children. He had possibly been married twice, since a John Lattimer, saddler, married an Elizabeth Jackson at Tamworth in 1655, implying that he started off in the same trade as his father (see below). But in his will he is described as a gentleman, and in the meantime he had obviously gone in for farming. His effects were valued at the substantial sum of £156. 18s. 4d., and included grain, livestock, carts, ploughs and other farm equipment.

According to his own will, Richard Latimer senior was also a saddler by trade. Like his son John he had obviously prospered, although there was a good deal of poverty and disease in Tamworth at this period, with plague recurring frequently in the 70 years before 1626. In 1627 "Richard Lattymer" was listed as one of the two Bailiffs of the town, a position also held by his son John in 1662. Richard's name does not appear on the petition of 1640 (see under PEERS), but that may well be because he was one of the clique of Bailiffs and Capital Burgesses whom the petitioners were complaining about. "Hughe" Latimer was, however, one of the signatories, though if there was a family argument about it, it cannot have lasted long because Hugh still features in Richard's will! This document, "signed" with the initials "RL", was drawn up on 22nd October 1646, and the inventory of his household goods following his death was made on 20th April 1648, so he must have died some time between those dates. Derbyshire Record Office have a grant made by "Hugh Latimer of Tamworth sadler" to a John Snowe of St James Clerkenwell, dated 29th April 1647, an expression of financial independence which makes it likely that his father was already dead by this time. Richard senior describes himself as "nowe in my ould Age" in 1646, though this need not mean that he was much more than 60. The will is less informative about the family than that of his daughter Elizabeth Done, but as the oldest document in this history so far it gives us some interesting information about Richard's life and times, and so I have transcribed it in full.

In the name of God Amen. The two and Twentieth daie of October in the two and twentieth yeare of the raine of our Sovereigne lord Charles by the grace of god kinge of England Scotland ffrance and Ireland defender of the faithe ?? in Ano Dm 1646 I Richard Lattymer of Tamworth in the Countie of Warwicke Sadler beinge of good and pfecte memorie I prayse god therefore; and nowe in my ould Age consideringe the estate of mortall man, and for the better

establisshinge of these goods which it hath pleased Almightye god to lend me I doe ordayne and make this my last will and Testament in manner and forme followinge: ffirst of all I give and bequeath my soule into the hands of Almightye god my creator and maker hopeinge of his infinite mercie through the meritts death and passion of Christ Jesus to be made ptaker of his heavenly kingdom prepared for his Elect from the beginninge of the world, and my bodie to the earth from whence it came to be buryed in Christian decencie in the upper end of the Ladies Chappell in Tamworth church. And for my worldly goods I give and bequeath as followeth. In p^rmis I give and bequeath unto Hugh Lattymr my sonn my new dwellinge house wherein I live situate and being in Tamworth in a streete commonly called broad street with the backside and Orchard thereunto belonginge, uppon this condition; that he the said Hugh Lattymr shall paie or cause to be paid unto John Lattymr my sonn Thirteene Pounds six shillings and eight pence of Lawfull money of England; And Twentie Pounds of Lawfull money of England unto Thomas Lattymr my sonn; And Thirteene Pounds six shillings eight pence of Lawfull English money unto my daughter Dorothy Chesterfield; And alsoe six pounds thirteene shillings and 4^d of Lawfull English money unto Alice Jackson wyfe of Thomas Jackson; And my will and mynde is that he the said Hugh Lattymr my sonn shall paie and fully discharge all these legacies before bequeathed after the decease of me the said Richard Lattymr and Dorothy my wyfe and not to enter uppon the aforesaid house nor any pte nor pcell thereof before the said legacies be fully paid and discharged. Item my will and mynd is if it please god that any one or more of my children shall depte this lyfe before they shall receve their porton or portons; That then his her or their pte or porton shalbe equally devided amongst the rest of them w^{ch} shalbe livinge; Item I give and bequeath unto my said sonne Hugh Lattymr one cubbord w^{ch} standeth in the hall; Item I give and bequeath unto my sonne John Lattymr my shopp and presses wth all the wares therein for and during the naturall life of Dorothy my wife; Item I give and bequeath my longe land in Spittel fiede to my said sonne John Lattymr and to his heires and Assignes for ever. Item I give and bequeath to my sd sonne Thomas Lattymr the Some of Twentie Pounds of Lawfull English money to be paid when he shall come forth of his Apprentishipp. Item all the reste, residue of my goods cattels chattels redie money and debtes my funerall charges defrayed and my debtes being paid if any there be I whollie give to my lovinge wyfe Dorothy Latymr whom I make executrix of this my last will and I doe nominate and appoynt my lovinge frends Henry Ensore and Christopher Erpe to be Overseers of this my will and I doe give to either of them one silver spoone and hereing this my will payne(?) read unto me I doe ratyfie and confirme everie thinge therein conteyned acordinge to my desire and doe annull frustrat and make voide all former will and wills by me heretofore made to be void frustrate and of none effect. In witness whereof I have hereunto sett my hand and seale the daie and yeare first above written.

*Sealed and delivered in the presence
Ric; Beardesley
Thomas Botte his marke*

The testators marke and seale

It is a pity that his daughter Elizabeth (among others) is not named here, but it was common for some children to be omitted from wills. They had usually been provided for in other ways before the testator's death. It is interesting to speculate whether Richard's allegiance to Charles I was genuine, or whether the reference to him was only for form's sake. In late 1646 the Civil War in the Midlands was winding down, after the capture of Lichfield by Parliamentarian forces based at Tamworth. Tamworth itself had been under the control of Parliament since the capture of the castle in 1643, and in the summer of 1645 had been host to a Scottish army which "liberated" large quantities of food and poultry. (The town had around 300 households at this time.) It was customary in those days to draw up a detailed inventory of a deceased's effects, even though it was not necessarily intended that they should be sold. The inventory attached to Richard Latimer's will is of particular interest if we want to envisage the way of life of our ancestors of this period, so I have transcribed it also. As usual

I have retained the quaint and inconsistent spelling, but most of these items are easily identifiable if you pronounce them phonetically (though I am no wiser about a few of them myself). It reads as follows:

*An Inventorie of the goods and Chattels of Richard Lattymer late of Tamworth deceased
taken the 20th day of Aprill Anno Dom 1648.*

<i>In primis in the nether parlor one feather bed 2 bouldsters a sett of cortens one coverlid 2 blanquetts one seeld bed</i>	4 - 0 - 0
<i>It(em) one table with a carpet 6 herth stooles 3 low stooles 2 cheeres 1 little table 8 cushens 1 forme 1 landiron</i>	2 - 10 - 0
<i>It(em) in the kitchen for brass and pewter</i>	10 - 0 - 0
<i>It(em) 1 spitte 1 payre of racks 1 pare of cobbords 1 dripping pan 1 landiron 1 brand iron 2 pesles</i>	1 - 0 - 0
<i>It(em) for wooden ware</i>	0 - 2 - 0
<i>It(em) in the new plor 1 table 1 forme 2 stooles 6 cushens</i>	0 - 14 - 0
<i>In the hall and the attic parlor 1 cubbord 1 skreene 2 tables 3 cheers 5 stooles 1 forme</i>	1 - 10 - 0
<i>It(em) 1 landiron 1 fire shovel 1 pare of tonges pott handles</i>	0 - 8 - 0
<i>It(em) 2 flichins of bacon</i>	0 - 16 - 0
<i>2 candlesticks 1 brush 2 payre of ???</i>	0 - 3 - 0
<i>It(em) in the butterie 1 safe and other lumber</i>	0 - 10 - 0
<i>In the painted parlor and the ould ??? 2 tables 2 frames 1 Ould bedsted, a settee forme</i>	0 - 15 - 0
<i>In the kill(?) house 3 ould steepinge fatts 1 malte mill and the woodware and 1 iron crow(?)</i>	3 - 0 - 0
<i>It(em) brass furniss</i>	1 - 10 - 0
<i>It(em) for wood and coles and sum bords</i>	3 - 10 - 0
<i>In the seller 5 barrells 1 ??? fatt 1 little table</i>	0 - 10 - 0
<i>In the new chamber 1 fether bedd 2 bouldstars 2 blanquetts a coverlidd and a beddstidd and curtens</i>	3 - 0 - 0
<i>It(em) 1 table 2 stooles 4 cushins a cort cubbord 1 seeld chest</i>	1 - 5 - 0
<i>In the ??? chamber 1 flockbed 2 blanquets 3 bouldsters 2 bedsheeds 2 ould coffers</i>	1 - 0 - 0
<i>In the chamber over the hall one fetherbed 1 flockbed 2 bouldsters 1 pillow??? 3 blanquetts 1 rugg 1 bedsheed 1 sett of curtens</i>	4 - 10 - 0

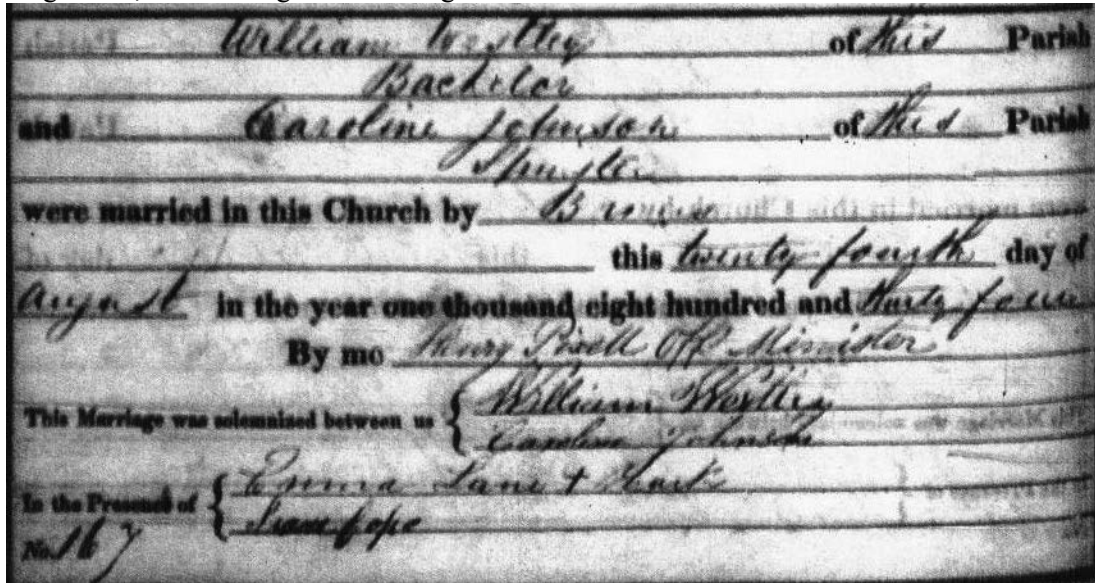
<i>It(em) one press 1 cubbord 6 ould coffers 1 box</i>	<i>2 - 14 - 0</i>
<i>It(em) 22 pare of sheetes</i>	<i>7 - 0 - 0</i>
<i>It(em) 15 table clothes</i>	<i>3 - 0 - 0</i>
<i>It(em) 3 dussen and halfe of napkins</i>	<i>1 - 0 - 0</i>
<i>It(em) 4 pillow ??? 3 cubbord clothes</i>	<i>0 - 18 - 0</i>
<i>It(em) 13 quarter of mault</i>	<i>26 - 0 - 0</i>
<i>It(em) in money number</i>	<i>10 - 0 - 0</i>
<i>It(em) debts oweinge</i>	<i>10 - 0 - 0</i>
<i>It(em) debtes oweinge by severall persons about such which are desperate and will hardey ever be gayned</i>	<i>-</i>
<i>It(em) his waringe apparell</i>	<i>8 - 0 - 0</i>
<i>It(em) in Lumber</i>	<i>0 - 10 - 0</i>
<i>Summa total</i>	<i>114 - 15 - 0</i>

Several points of interest arise from this list. Richard was obviously a man of means, and his house seems to have been a comfortable one. It was not unusual for vats ("fatts"), barrels, supplies of malt and other brewing kit to comprise a significant fraction of the value of someone's goods, because most brewing was done at home, and in those days nobody drank water. Whether the furnace was used for this purpose I do not know. The list is rather unusual in not including any livestock or dairy products, as you would expect most people to have a few cheeses around, and perhaps a pig or two in the yard. Richard does not seem to have even owned a horse, but this is unlikely. Other portable items like tableware, silver and candlesticks, which you might expect to find, also seem to be conspicuous by their absence. Probably the family had already helped themselves by the time the inventory was made - or perhaps some of the blame should be laid at the door of the Scottish soldiers.

Evidently Richard was survived by his wife Dorothy. I have not yet traced either family further back than this. Earlier entries in the Tamworth parish register do not reveal any Latimers, so Richard presumably came from elsewhere. Another Richard Latimer was vicar of Polesworth, Warwickshire, early in the 17th century, though his will (dated 17th November 1624) does not mention any familiar names. That of Margaret Latimer of Aldridge (4th June 1611) does mention a son Richard, and Henry Latimer of Shenstone (will dated 25th March 1626) refers to a brother of the same name - though this does not prove that it is the same person, since Margaret inconveniently fails to mention a son called Henry! There is of course always the intriguing possibility of linking our Richard to his son's famous namesake, Bishop Hugh Latimer of Worcester (c. 1485 - 1555), who was burned at the stake by Queen Mary (and after whom Latimer Street in Birmingham was named). Bishop Hugh was born in Thurstaston near Leicester, only about 20 miles from Tamworth. Groutwich (and its numerous variations) was a local name, found only in Staffordshire and around Derby, and was well known in 16th century Tamworth. The earliest mention in the register of St. Editha's is the baptism of Margaret, daughter of Hugh Groutwich, in 1566, but no Dorothy appears there.

5). WESTLEY.

William Westley (the father of Selina who married John Peers of Latimer Street) was another of my great great grandfathers; he married Caroline Johnson, also at St. Bartholomew's Edgbaston, on 24th August 1834. Edgbaston must have seemed like a different world to these



inner-city metal-bashers! To judge from her elegant signature in the marriage register Caroline was well educated, which seems unusual for a girl from a working class family, but from her reported age in 1851 she is fairly certainly the Caroline Johnson who was born on 27th February 1816, and christened at St. Martin's on 18th March. She was the daughter of William Johnson, a sword cutler, and his wife Ann, who lived in Bartholomew Street. However at least five William Johnsons married Anns in Birmingham or Aston between 1805 and 1815, and I have not yet been able to determine which is the right couple.

Marriage entry for William Westley and Caroline Johnson at St. Bartholomew's, August 1834. Comparing the signatures of Caroline and her daughter Selina (see page 11), it is a reasonable guess that Selina learned her elegant handwriting from her mother.

William Westley was born on 17th September 1810 (I have eliminated the only other known candidate born in Birmingham at the right time, who never married and ended his days in London), and his parents are listed in the baptism register at St. Philip's for 26th December 1810 as William and "Leyney". I have never come across "Leyney" elsewhere, and I suspect it is a mishearing of a rendering in a Brummie accent of "Lena" or some such abbreviation of Selina - a name which we know is in the family. In that case William's parents were probably the William Westley and "Silena" Appleby who were married at St. Martin's on 13th March 1806. This tends to be confirmed by other Westley baptism entries from St. Philip's, which presumably refer to William's brothers and sisters, and document the evolution of their mother's name:

John, 11/8/1806, parents William and Selina.

Samuel, 29/8/1808, William and Selany.

Mary Ann, 30/12/1814, William and Layney.

Henry, 7/5/1821 (born 1816 according to the IGI), William and Layney.

I have not, however, found a baptism for Selina Appleby - though it is of course possible that this name business had plagued her all her life, and that she was recorded under some unrecognisable variant.

In the 1841 census William and Caroline were still living in Bartholomew Street, but by 1851 they had moved to 129 Latimer Street, where they are recorded as follows:

William Westley	40	Head	Zinc worker
Caroline	34	Wife	
Selena	14	Eldest daughter	Scholar
Rosanna	7	Daughter	
Isabella	5	Daughter	
James	1	Son	

All of these were born in Birmingham. In the previous census (1841) there was also a son, William, aged 2 months, who probably died before 1851. (There are three possible William Westley deaths in Birmingham between 1842 and 1849, but as the index gives no ages it would be necessary to send for the death certificates for sort out who is who. This could be an additionally rewarding exercise as it might also help to identify William senior's father, though no one who could realistically be him appears in the 1841 census for Birmingham.)

Caroline's death was recorded in the June quarter of 1856, and William was still in Latimer Street in 1861, described as a widower. In the 1871 census we find him living in Moseley village with a new wife, Anne, who was 20 years younger than him, and with his unmarried daughters Roseanna and Isabella living next door. Roseanna's death is recorded in Kings Norton (the registration district which covered Moseley) in the last quarter of 1871, when she was only 27. Isabella married a Henry Gloster in 1872, also in Kings Norton. Her death, aged 34, was registered in Birmingham in the first quarter of 1880. An "Ann" Westley of the right age (48) died in Kings Norton in 1877. William died on 27th February 1888, at the age of 77. At that time he was living in Birchfield Road, Perry Barr, and had been widowed for a second time. Administration of his estate was granted to Selina Peers, who is described in the Calendar of Grants of Probate as "the Daughter and only Next of Kin". If this is correct, he had outlived two wives and at least four children.

That is as far as the Westley line goes at the moment. There are several late 18th century Westleys who deserve to be investigated, but an examination of wills at Lichfield has not turned up any who are likely ancestors, though several Williams do appear. At least one of them is connected to the well known local gun making firm of Westley Richards. Most intriguing is another William Westley who was a carpenter and architect in the early 18th century. He worked on St. Philip's Church, designed the original Old Square - once the poshest part of Birmingham - published the town's first street map in 1731, and drew the famous "East Prospect of Birmingham" which appears in most books on the city's history. There is a portrait of him in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Any link with our Westleys, however, is still conjectural. A map of the distribution of the name in 1881 suggests an East Midlands origin, with the densest concentration in Northamptonshire, but it is too widespread (and too easily confused with "Wesley") to reach any definite conclusions on this basis.

Houses in Latimer Street photographed in 1961, shortly before demolition. They were built in the 1840s, and when William Westley lived here this must have been a fairly upmarket area. The entrance to Court 37 may have been similar to the white-topped archway at centre left. (From the Warwickshire Photographic Survey in Birmingham Central Library.)



6). REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING:

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Malcolm Peers; Tree of Descendants of Alfred Peers and Clara Lloyd.

Census transcripts and birth, marriage and death indexes, mainly via thegenealogist.co.uk
Also see www.spatial-literacy.org for further surname analysis data.

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The British 19th Century Surname Atlas (on CD-Rom); Archer Software, 2003.

Postscript September 2016: Peers DNA.

Historical genetic studies have multiplied since the above was written, and although I do not think anything I have read since has undermined the Welsh connection for the Peerses, some of Oppenheimer's conclusions about earlier population movements might have to be revised. Researchers are not as sure as they were that the origin of R1b in Britain dates back as far as the Mesolithic, but this is of course not likely to be the last word on the subject. There has recently been a craze for autosomal genetic tests which purport to tell you all sorts of things about your ancestry, but I do not think they are actually any use. If you want to know why not, I can recommend "A Brief History of Everyone Who Ever Lived" by Adam Rutherford (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2016). I will update this history as and when I learn more.