

## Where did Walter Live?

One of the more prevalent families in our area in times past was that of the Lane family. They were spread across the Parish of Wolverhampton, including of course, the Lane family of Bentley, who were instrumental in helping the future King Charles II to escape after the Battle of Worcester. Bentley was once part of the Parish of Wolverhampton, odd though it may seem to us nowadays. There are 2 Lane chest tombs lying inside St Peter's Church in Wolverhampton.



Tomb of Thomas & Katherine Lane at St Peter's, Wolverhampton  
Dated 1582, being the year of death of Katherine

Identifying the Lanes specific to Wednesfield is easy in some ways as many records describe Wednesfield people as being "of Wednesfield". However, gaps in some records can complicate things. One such complication is that of Walter Lane of Wednesfield who died in early 1707.

Walter was baptised at St Peter's (Wednesfield didn't have its own Church at that time) on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1641, the son of Humphrey Lane of Wednesfield. At the age of 21 he married Mary Greene of Bilston and they are known to have had eight children. When Walter passed away in 1707, he left a rather short Will in which he described himself as Walter Lane of Wednesfield, a Yeoman, which at that time would have meant a person who owned and cultivated land – a middle ranking member of society. He left all of his 'houses lands & possessions, together with all goods cattle & chattells' to his 'loving wife Mary' for the duration of her lifetime. After her death everything was to go to his 'right heir' – unspecified. The problem for Walter was that despite having had eight children he did not know at the time of his death who his 'right heir' (ie a male heir) might be. His three sons had predeceased him and of his five daughters who might have married and had male heirs, only three were still living and none of them seem to have been married at the time.

His Will was quite particular about the disposition of some of his personal goods:-

Transcription: "my will is that my Ring wach Silver Cann Silver hilted Sword Clock and Jack may Still Remyne in my dwelling house for ye use of my heyre after my wifes decease."

An Inventory of Walter's goods contains lots of interesting references and, helpfully, it is itemised by the rooms in his house in which the various items were located. This reveals that his house consisted of a kitchen, a hall, a parlour, a pantry, and various bed chambers containing six beds. This is quite a large house for the time and certainly not that of your average agricultural labourer or home-based trap maker. So, who actually inherited it? We don't know – because we haven't been able to trace who Walter's right heir might have been. Having said that, move forward twenty-three years to the death of another Walter Lane of Wednesfield in 1730.

This Walter Lane died intestate and administration of his estate was granted to his wife Sarah. Although there was no Will, there was an inventory of his goods, again itemised room by room. This Walter's dwelling house comprised a kitchen, a hall, a parlour, a pantry, cellars and bedchambers with two beds. Given that Wednesfield was probably not awash with multiple big houses and that the layout of the house

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is so similar to that of the first Walter, it is likely that they are the same house - where ever in Wednesfield it was situated, and however it came into the possession of the second Walter. The value of the goods in the inventory though, is far less than that of the first Walter, so some deterioration had taken place if it was the same house.

Walter number two also had a son named Walter\* (who had a son named Walter, who had a son named Walter, who had a son named Walter – who never married and didn't have any traceable children). Walter\* number three died in 1754, apparently a widower, and leaving five children aged 13 and under to the care of their uncle Walter Corbett. The eldest son was Thomas and in his father's Will of 1754, he was to inherit everything other than certain specific bequests to his siblings. In 1773, Thomas married Margaret (known as Peggy) Baker. They had nine children including another Walter, just to confuse things. Aris's Birmingham Gazette carried an announcement of their marriage:-

**MARRIED.] On Wednesday Se'nnight, at Wolverhampton, Thomas Lane, Esq; of Wednesfield-Hall, to Miss Peggy Baker, of Wolverhampton.**

Interestingly, Thomas is described as being of Wednesfield Hall, not to be confused with Wednesfield House which sat opposite St Thomas's Church. Wednesfield House appears to have had a pattern of ownership of both land and associated buildings that does not involve members of the Lane family.

Thomas Lane passed away in 1824 in his early 80s, without leaving a Will. His son, also Thomas, gained administration of his father's personal estate which was cited as being "*under the value of forty pounds*". As for any real estate, that would not have been dealt with through the administration process of a person dying intestate. The younger Thomas did not long survive his father, passing away in 1833. He did leave a Will in which he described himself as a Victualler, but with no mention of a specific dwelling house. (This is not the same Thomas Lane who later on kept The Pheasant along with several of his siblings). The younger Thomas left provision for his widow Margaret and his 8 children in the form of income from his real estate (not specified) put into the hands of trustees – William Tompson of Cannock, Grocer, and Thomas's second son Edwin John. After Margaret's death, and the youngest child having attained the age of 21, the estate was to be sold by the trustees and the proceeds used to pay off any remaining debts with the residue being split equally between the 8 children.

So, if the first Thomas's Wednesfield Hall was the same house as that of the first Walter (of the silver-hilted sword), where was it? Or indeed, if not the same, where were either of them?

It is tempting to say this may have been Neachells Hall, based on the sepia tint painting on the right done by Thomas Peploe Wood in 1837 and entitled 'Wednesfield Old Hall'. Wood's work shows a building with clear, if somewhat ruinous, Tudor features at the rear which would testify to the potential age of a dwelling on the site. It is generally thought that Wood's painting is of Neachells Hall for two reasons. Firstly, the trees in the lane to the left look like the old Twenty Trees area at Neachells; and secondly, the building became a public house for a while in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century called The Fighting Cocks, and the gate pillars on the painting definitely show cockerels.



And there the trail ends - for now. If anyone has any other ideas, please let us know.