

## Unfortunate Deaths in the Lane Family

Many people will know about the two Wednesfield Lanes, father and son, who were hung for their crimes at Shrewsbury on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1791. This was Walter Lane, a farmer who kept the Pheasant Inn in Wednesfield, and his son Thomas. Sometimes this incident is cited as relating to the Mason family, but all of the historic evidence points to it being the Lane family.

From newspaper articles it appears that Walter and Thomas had committed their crimes – or at least the ones that led to their deaths – at Newport and Tibberton in Shropshire. There's only about 5 miles between the two. Other people were also involved, of the surname of Danks, Furber and Grosvenor. Although there are minor variations in the reports, the records of Shrewsbury Gaol are more specific.

Walter Lane, No. 2. aged 47. DEATH. Charged upon the oath of Samuel Taylor, parish clerk of Tibberton, with a strong suspicion of having in the month of February, 1787, broke into the Chapel of Tibberton aforesaid, and stolen thereout a large silver flagon, a small silver cup, a silver salver, a damask table cloth, and a napkin, the property of the parishioners of Tibberton aforesaid: committed the 18th of May, by Thomas Eyton, Esq.

Thomas Lane, aged 20. DEATH. Charged upon the oath of Phebe Grosvenor, of Newport, with having on the night of the sixth of December last, burglariously and feloniously broke into the shop of Peter Bott, of Newport aforesaid, and stolen thereout a large quantity of corduroys, thicksets, velverets, and sundry other articles, his property: committed the twenty fifth day of April, by Thomas Eyton, Esq.

Neither of the above records indicate that Walter and Thomas were Wednesfield people, but the newspapers were quite definite about it. On May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1791, Aris's Birmingham Gazette published the article to the right.

Walter Lane, sen. of Wednesfield, has been taken up on suspicion of robbing the church of Tibberton, in Shropshire; a surplice and napkin, part of the property lost, were found in his possession.

The inhabitants of Shrewsbury were on Saturday the 3d inst. presented with a most heart-rending picture of human woe—a father and son (Walter and Tho. Lane) cut off from society, by the hand of the executioner, as ignominious violators of the laws of their country.

The end was reported in several newspapers. The one on the left is from the Northampton Mercury.

Walter and Thomas were buried at St Thomas's Church, Wednesfield, on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1791. At some time, someone has augmented the entry in the burial records with a sketch of a gallows.

**Walter's wife/widow** was born Elizabeth Grosvenor. Her father was Thomas Grosvenor and he seems to have been a bad influence on the Lane family. Seven years before the deaths of Walter and Thomas Lane, Thomas Grosvenor was himself in trouble.

In January 1784, Aris's Birmingham Gazette reported that Thomas Grosvenor the elder and Walter Lane the younger, both of Wednesfield, had been apprehended in Wolverhampton on suspicion of having stolen a whole heap of jewellery and other decorative wear "*many of which Goods were found in the Possession of the said Grosvenor, and others concealed in a hollow Tree, in the Neighbourhood of Wednesfield*". The Walter Lane mentioned was the

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eldest son of the Walter who was later hung in 1791. Walter junior was committed to Derby Gaol for burglary, but how long that lasted is not known at the moment. He was 18 years old. As for Thomas Grosvenor, he clearly could not face a possible future with the hangman, so he took matters into his own hands. According to Aris's Birmingham Gazette of 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1784, he *"hanged himself, with the Cord of his Bed. He was a notorious Offender, and suspected of being one of the Gang who have lately pillaged So many Churches in this and the neighbouring Counties."*

Young Walter returned to Wednesfield at some point where he married a lady named Betty. They had 9 children, one of whom was yet another Walter, born in 1802. At age 47 in March of 1849, he suffered a rather nasty accident. It was reported in the Wolverhampton Chronicle and Staffordshire Advertiser that the coroner held an inquest at The Pheasant in Wednesfield on the body of Walter Lane *"of that place"*. Apparently, Walter, a farmer, had gone on site to give instructions to his employees who were in the process of threshing the grain. For some reason that the witnesses could not account for, Walter had got himself *"amongst the levers near the box containing the frame and was knocked down and crushed between one of the levers and the box"*. He was reported as being *"very much in liquor"*. He died of his injuries a couple of days later. Being in liquor may have been a habit for this Walter. A couple of years previously he had been in Dudley Street in Wolverhampton where he was noted to be *"partly intoxicated"*. He apparently kicked the bottom of an itinerant confectioner's tray, thereby knocking 500 queen cakes into the *"dirt, broken and spoilt"*. Fined ten shillings and costs.

**Shooting back up** the Lane family tree to yet another Walter who died in 1730 and coming back down via a different branch than the Lanes above, we find Henry Lane (1823 to 1877). This is the Henry Lane who founded the world-renowned Trap making business. Like for many other trap makers, a considerable number of sales went to Australia. In 1920, the company opened Henry Lane (Australia) Limited to manufacture the firm's patents in Australia instead of simply exporting them. The manager was Arthur Edward Lane, grandson of the founder. In 1928 he met his death in a rather tragic way:

The Australian newspaper the Daily Examiner reported:-

*"Arthur Lane, manager of' Henry Lane (Australia) Limited, was killed by a shark while bathing at Merewether Beach, Newcastle, last night. He was terribly mauled. His right hand was bitten off, a large piece of flesh was taken out of his left thigh and calf, and his right shinbone was laid bare to the bone, and displayed the teeth marks of the monster. A feature of the tragedy was the heroism displayed by Miss Lucy Donaldson who swam out to Lane's assistance and succeeded in dragging him to the shore. Lane was well known and highly respected in Newcastle commercial circles."*

