

THE STRAWS OF LINCOLNSHIRE

Introduction

In the 1950's Eric Straw wrote a detailed story about his grand parents, Thomas and Emily Straw, and also his own parents, Fred and Harriet Straw.

Eric's account was based on his recollection of stories related to him by his grand father and father, and also from his own personal knowledge of people and events.

The main part of Eric's story concerns the family after Thomas and Emily arrived in Australia in 1853, but the first part refers briefly to Thomas' early life in Lincolnshire, England, where he was born.

As a result of some recent research by Frank Ian Straw, a Straw relation living near Lincoln, the birthplace of Thomas, it is possible to add more to this early history of the family and to fill in some detail missing from Eric's story.

In the following account, as many of the Christian names are repeated from generation to generation, to avoid confusion I have provided the date of birth after the name. Then, if you have a copy of the family tree handy, it is relatively easy to keep track of individuals named in the text.

As far as possible I have tried to deal with each generation in chronological order rather than follow each line of the family through several generations before dealing with the next branch of the family.

As research into family history appears to be a never ending task, it is expected that this part of the Straw family history, will need to be amended from time to time, as new information comes to light.

CHAPTER 1

Walter Straw (abt.1650) to George Straw (1754)

The history of the Straw family can be traced back to about the middle of the 17th century with the birth of a Walter Straw. We know very little of this Walter (abt 1650) other than that he was a tailor and that he and his wife Jane are recorded as the parents of a second Walter Straw born in 1679

Both father and son were born at Nettleham a small village about 3 miles northeast of the city of Lincoln.

Walter Straw (1679) was a husbandman, ie a farmer, and married someone named Mary. Walter and Mary had four children, another Walter born 1712, George born 1713, John born 1718 and Noah born 1725.

Our interest in the family continues with the eldest son. Walter (1712), however we also know a little about the youngest son Noah (1725). Noah married Sarah Acland on 6 Feb 1753 at St Paul's Church, Lincoln. Their daughter Mary Straw, was christened on 3 March 1765 at St Martins, Lincoln and married James Ellis on 22 November 1794 at St Martins Lincoln. I have briefly corresponded with Anne Hartley of Southsea Hampshire, near Portsmouth, who is a descendant of James Ellis and Mary Straw.

Our ancestor, Walter (1712) was a farmer as was his father. He married Elizabeth (*surname unknown*) and they had seven sons and three daughters.

The first born was John (1740). Next came a Walter born 10 May 1741 but who probably died young as another Walter was christened on 17 February 1743, the same day as William who we must assume was a twin brother of the second Walter. Next came the first of three Georges. The first George was baptised later in 1743 but we assume he died young. The first daughter, Elizabeth was born in 1746 followed by Mary (1747) who we think died young. Then came the second George (1749) who also must have died when young. Then came a second Mary (1751), and finally the third George born in 1754, from whom our family is descended.

This third George (1754), was born on 19 December 1754 and baptised on 4 January 1755 at All Saints Church, Nettleham. He married Mary Walker in 1785 at All Saint's Church, Cold Hanworth, also a small village about 8 miles north east of Lincoln. Mary Walker was born in August 1763 at Normanby-by-Spital a village about 10 miles north of Lincoln. Mary's father was Thomas Walker, her mother Anne, was probably born in the same village in the 1730's.

George (1754) and Mary (1763) continued to live at Cold Hanworth until about 1795. Cold Hanworth is still only a small village but there is a row of cottages from that period still standing and we assume one of these was the Straw home. In 1797 the family moved into the Parish of St Benedict's in Lincoln. They had five sons and four daughters. The first six children, Robert (1786), George (1787), and Mary (1789), Elizabeth (1790), John (1792), and Lettice (1794) were all born at Cold Hanworth, while Maria (1797), Thomas (1798) and Frederick (1801) were all

born in Lincoln. George (1754) died in 1836 at the age of 81 and was buried at St Benedict's Church, Lincoln, on 31 December 1836.

CHAPTER 2

Robert Straw (1786)

Robert (1786), the eldest son of George Straw (1754) and Mary Walker (1763) was baptised in All Saint's Church, Cold Hanworth.

Cold Hanworth is still a very small village but there is a row of 18th century cottages still in very good condition, which would have been there at the time of Robert's birth. It is therefore very possible that one of these cottages was Robert's birthplace.

We assume he was still living with his parents when they moved into Lincoln about 1795. At some stage after that he learned the trade of a joiner and all later records refer to his occupation as a joiner.

We know very little about the next three children of George (1754) and Mary Walker. They were George (1787), Mary (1789) and Elizabeth (1790), however the fifth child, John (1792), is also recorded as being a joiner. The two brothers Robert (1786) and John (1792) Straw married two sisters, Sarah and Hannah Martin.

The Martins came from another nearby village, Waddington which is about 4 miles south of the city centre. The Martins were an established family of yeomen farmers in Waddington, with the farm being handed down from generation to generation, and it would seem that the name George for the eldest son and inheritor of the farm, goes back a long time. Sarah and Hannah's father was a George Martin born in Waddington on 7 February 1732 and baptised on 22 March 1732 at St Michael's Church, Waddington. He married Sarah Marshall on 6 August 1776 at St Michael's Church. Sarah was baptised at Coleby, a village two miles south of Waddington, on 26 January 1749. She was the daughter of Freeman Marshall and Martha Picker. Freeman Marshall was baptised on 26 December 1719 at Scothern, a village adjoining Nettleham. He was married to Martha Picker at Coleby on 5 May 1743 and had a son, Freeman (brother to Sarah Marshall) baptised on 16 April 1756, again at Coleby

George Martin (1732) and Sarah Marshall (1749) had 10 children between 1777 and 1794. The two sisters, that are of most interest in this story of the Straws, are Sarah (born 2 December 1786 and baptised on 30 December 1786) and Hannah (baptised in Waddington church on 4 March 1794).

Let us now return to Robert Straw (1786) who was born at Cold Hanworth, moved to Lincoln with his parents in 1795, and became a joiner. He married Sarah Martin (1786) on 1 January 1809, at St Botolph's Church, Lincoln. Robert and Sarah would then have both been 23 years of age.

As related in Eric's story, Robert became "Master Builder of the Minster" but unfortunately the Cathedral has no records of its employees from the 19th Century and so we have not been able to confirm any details of his position at the Cathedral.

Eric refers to Robert's involvement in the rehung of "Great Tom" the large bell of the Cathedral. This bell had been cast in 1610 and had survived until 1827 when due to cracking, there was much deliberation as to what should be done with it until at last it was decided to recast the old bell. At the same time it was decided that the bell should be rehung with new quarter bells in the central tower. Previously it had been in the North West tower.

The bell was recast in London by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry. This firm was established in 1570, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, and has been in continuous business since that date. The firm lists Great Tom of Lincoln on its 21st Century website, as one of the historic bells cast by the company. The bell was recast in 1834 and weighed 5 tons 8 cwt and was one ton heavier than its predecessor. It is said to have been heard 13 miles away when first erected.

Much work of course had to be carried out in the tower before the heavy bell could be hoisted and rehung in its new position. This work was carried out under the supervision of a Mr E Betham who was Clerk of Works at the time.

The bell was rehung in the Cathedral in 1835. White's 1842 Directory records that "the new Great Tom arrived in Lincoln from London in April 1835 and was ushered to the cathedral from the South Bar by a numerous and splendid procession amidst the acclamations of the citizens and a vast crowd of people from the surrounding parishes".

To celebrate the event a special supper was held on 7 May 1835, and in the archives is a list of "Names of persons who attended the supper given at the Dolphin Inn on the occasion of hoisting up Great Tom o' Lincoln and the erection of the new floor in the Rood Tower of Lincoln Cathedral". Robert Straw is listed first of 14 names of carpenters attending the dinner, so we assume that the position of "Master Builder of the Minster" was in fact a position similar to a foreman carpenter, responsible for the team of carpenters employed by the Cathedral. This list of carpenters also includes John Straw who we assume was John (1792), Robert's younger brother who we know was also a joiner/cabinet maker by trade.

At this time Robert (1786) would have been 48 years of age not 28 as reported in Eric's story. Perhaps Robert first started working at the Cathedral at 28, but at this stage we can only assume that Eric's memory of stories related to him many years previously, could not be absolutely correct in this sort of detail. However there is no doubt that Robert was very involved in this momentous work and therefore no surprise that the story has been passed on from father to son and eventually to Eric.

In the 1851 census Robert is recorded as a retired joiner by when he would have been 65 years of age.

Robert Straw (1786) and Sarah Martin (1786) had seven children between 1809 and 1828. Thus they would have both been about 23 at the birth of the first child, Mary (1809), and about 42 when the last child Thomas(1828) was born. Over the years they are recorded as living in various parishes within the city, but by 1841 were at 31 Bailgate, a substantial terrace house close to the cathedral and the historic Mint Wall.

The Mint Wall is located at the rear of the Castle Hotel on Westgate. It is one of the best examples of the wall of a Roman building surviving in Britain. It is over 20 metres long, 6 metres high and one metre wide, built of limestone with tile bonding courses at intervals of about 1.6 metres. It is thought to be part of the Roman basilica or town hall and was over 60 metres long when built. A passageway adjacent to 31 Bailgate leads to the Mint Wall.

This house on Bailgate is still in excellent condition today. The Lincoln Survey gives us the following information on 31 Bailgate. In a valuation dated 20 August 1827, No 31 was said to contain "an entrance passage, two lower rooms and three chambers (ie. bedrooms) with a small stable at the west end, all built with stone and covered with tiles." The premises were worth "in their present old and dilapidated state the annual rental of eight pounds". The survey then states "that the premises were subsequently rebuilt in brick after 1827". This rebuilding was probably completed about 1833 when it was leased for 40 years by a John George Willson. The Lincoln Survey also says "A passage is incorporated at the North end of number 31 (The Mint Wall Passage) whose facade employs vitrified headers in its brickwork: the tenement has been heightened or rebuilt in its upper courses."

More recently in 2001, the houses at 32 and 33 Bailgate, now joined together to make a single residence, have been offered for sale. The building, which must be similar to the adjoining No 31, is advertised as a Grade II Listed Building. It has two "tunnel design" cellars (presumably one for each house) and lounge, kitchen, dining, sitting and drawing room on the ground floor. The sitting room has "a built in range incorporating cast iron bread oven and open fire with grate" which was presumably the kitchen of one of the original houses. On the first floor are three bedrooms and two bathrooms, presumably two "chambers" in each of the original houses, and on the second floor a further two bedrooms (one "chamber" per original house). The garden at the rear appears surprisingly large, compared to the appearance from the street, with a rear access to the Mint Wall Passage. It is assumed that this description would provide a reasonable idea of what the adjoining No 31 house is like today.

We assume Robert (1786) rented the house in Bailgate from John George Willson soon after the rebuilding as he and Sarah (1786) are recorded in the 1841 Census as living there.

Bailgate, is on the alignment of the original main north south road through the city. Just to the north of No 31, the road passes through the "Newport Arch", one of the still standing gateways of the original Roman city walls.

The 1841 Census shows the following persons residing at 31, Bailgate.

Robert Straw	Head of household	Married	55	Joiner
Sarah Straw	Wife	Married	55	
Mary Straw	Daughter		15	
Thomas Straw	Son		13	
Martin Straw			15	Apprentice
Emily Straw			14	
George Johnson			8	

All are shown as born in Lincolnshire but actual places of birth were not included in this census

Also recorded on the same sheet of the 1841 Census, are the occupants of houses in the Mint Wall Passage which was then called Willson's Passage. These include a Sarah Straw (aged 35) with two young sons Robert (6) and George (11 months). This Sarah Straw (nee Barnett) was born in 1803 and married George Straw (born about 1811) the eldest son of Robert Straw (1786). Ian Straw has written the story of this branch of the family.

The ages recorded in the Census are not necessarily correct because in this census, ages above 15 were rounded down to the nearest five years.

At this stage we are unclear as to who Martin (aged 15) and Emily (aged 14) are. Because of the rounding down of ages above 15, Martin could be any age between 15 and 19. He is therefore most likely to be the son of Robert's brother John (1792), baptised 11 April 1824 (therefore 17 on the census date) and brother of Elisamon. He was probably an apprentice joiner working with his uncle Robert (1786). Details of John's (1792) family are provided later in this account.

The 1851 Census shows the following persons residing at 31, Bailgate.

Robert Straw	Head of household	Married	64	Retired Joiner	b.Lincoln
Sarah Straw	Wife	Married	64		b.Waddington
Robert Straw	Son	Married	33	Draper's Asst.	b.Lincoln
Martha Straw	Daughter in law	Married	30		b.Boston
Emily Straw	Daughter	Unmarried	29		b.Lincoln

The daughter Mary shown in the 1841 Census died in 1846. Thomas also shown in the 1841 Census, would have finished his apprenticeship by 1851 and was probably living in Louth by 1851. Again, as in the case of the 1841 Census, another Sarah Straw (now aged 45) together with son George (now aged 10) is shown as living at "No 2 Mint Wall Passage".

Robert (1786) died the same year as this Census and was buried on 6 November 1851, aged 65 years and Sarah his wife, on 10 September 1856, aged 70 years. Both were buried at St Nicholas's Church located a short distance from 31 Bailgate. There are no tombstones to mark their place of burial.

The 1861 Census records 31 Bailgate as a grocer's shop inhabited by Ann Taylor. By this date, Robert (1786) and Sarah (1786) had both died.

Before moving on to the details of Robert's (1786) children, we will consider his younger brothers and sisters. After Robert (1786) came George (1787) and Mary (1789). At this stage we have no more details of these two

After Mary (1789) came Elizabeth (1790) who married Robert Smith Harby at St Mary-le-Wigford's Church, Lincoln on 26 July 1819. We have no further details of Elizabeth.

Next came John, born 1792 at Cold Hanworth. John (1792) married Hannah Martin (1794), the sister of Robert's (1786) wife Sarah Martin (1786). John married Hannah in St Mark's Church, Lincoln, on 8 June 1815. Both were then residents of St Mark's parish. For a period both John (1792) and elder brother Robert (1786) and their respective families lived in the same parish (St. Mark's) - this is immediately to the south of St Mary-le-Wigford. The two families may therefore have lived very close together. John, like his elder brother Robert, was also a joiner and in 1835, was working with Robert at the cathedral.

John (1792) and Hannah (1794) had three children. The eldest Elisamon baptised on 26 April 1816 in St Mark's Church, Lincoln.

This Elisamon must have been named after the legendary "Fairy Godmother" who plays such a significant role in the early part of Eric's story. Although Eric refers to her as a sister of Robert (1786) there is no record of her amongst Robert's eight siblings who have been listed earlier in this account. I have carried out considerable research trying to find more detail about Elisamon, without success. I have written up some details of my research in another story I have called the Elisamon Saga.

The second child of John and Hannah was Elizabeth, born in 1820.

The third child was Martin, baptised on 1 April 1824 and is we assume, the apprentice joiner, living with his Uncle Robert (1786) at 31 Bailgate at the time of the 1841 Census.

We have no details of John's (1792) death but his wife Hannah (1794) was buried in St Mark's on 8 May 1828 at the age of 34 years.

The remaining siblings of Robert (1786) after John (1792) were Lettice (1794), Maria (1797), Thomas (1798), Frederick (1801) and Emily (1803). Maria (1797) was a witness at the marriage of her older brother John (1792) in 1815. She died in 1831; Emily died in 1823. Neither married. Thomas and Frederick both died young, Thomas in 1802, Frederick in 1801.

Our story now returns to Robert (1786) and his children. By the time of his marriage in 1809 to Sarah Martin (1786), Robert was living in St Benedict's Parish in Lincoln. Robert and Sarah lived in or near St Mark's parish after their marriage at St. Botolph's Church in 1809, moving to 31, Bailgate, in the 1830s. Daughter Mary (1809) was baptised at St Peter-at Gowts and probably died young as another Mary was born in 1825. George (1811) and Maria (1814) were baptised at St. Mary-le-Wigford. Both these churches are immediately to the south and north of St. Mark's respectively. Robert (1817) and Emily (1821) were then baptised at St Mark's. We have no record of the baptism of the second Mary who was born in 1825. Thomas (1828), the youngest son was baptised at St Benedict's in 1828. These churches (and small parishes) are all close to one another and it is possible that Robert and Sarah lived continuously in St Mark's before moving uphill to Bailgate. Christenings were not carried out in St Mark's in the early years of the century for some reason, so would have taken place at neighbouring churches.

CHAPTER 3

The Children of Robert (1786) and Sarah (1786)

We have some more details of these six children of Robert (1786) and Sarah(1786).

The first child was Mary born in 1809. She died the following year, on 19 July. .

Next came George, born in 1811. He married Sarah Barnett (born 1803). George is the ancestor of our English cousin who has carried out all the detailed research into the family history which has been included in this story. George died about 1851. Ian Straw has written the story of this branch of the family from which he is descended.

Then came Maria, born 1814. Maria married Thomas Green, a bricklayer, on 6 January 1847. Thomas was the son of William Green, labourer. We have no further details of Maria.

Then came Robert, born 1817. Robert married Martha Peart on 8 March 1849. Martha, born in Boston, Lincolnshire, about 1821, was the daughter of John Peart, Land Agent. Martha's mother was Elisamon Straw, but unfortunately to date we have no other information about her. Could she have been the fairy tale godmother of Eric's story? This seems unlikely, however she must be related to our Straw family somehow apart from being Robert's mother-in-law. Robert was a draper and therefore may have been the inspiration for his younger brother Thomas (1828) to follow the same trade.

Robert (1817) had been a Draper's Assistant in High Street, Lincoln, in 1841 and was recorded in the 1841 Census as living above the draper's shop at 196 High St Lincoln. White's Directory of 1842 records a Robert at 31, Bailgate, Lincoln, as a shopkeeper. It is possible that this Robert was not the son Robert(1817) but the father Robert (1786) who may have been running a small joinery business from the home at Bailgate. However at the time of his marriage to Martha in 1849, Robert (1817) is recorded as a draper of Newark.

The 1851 Census shows him as a Draper's assistant and he and Martha are recorded as living with his parents at 31 Bailgate Lincoln. Whether he was actually working at Lincoln at this time or just visiting from Newark is not known.

Whites 1853 Directory lists Robert (1817) as a Draper's assistant at Brunswick Street, Newark and in April 1853, Robert (1817) and Martha (1821) gave their address as Newark when signing an autograph belonging to Emily Osborn of Horncastle who married Robert's younger brother Thomas (1828) in March 1853. Robert (1817) and Martha (1821) had four children, as far as is known. The eldest Alisamon was born in early 1850, dying shortly after birth. Maria was born in 1853, Mary in 1856 and Thomas in 1859. Maria's birth is also recorded in Emily Osborn's autograph book.

From various other records it appears that Robert went on to have his own business in Newark and apparently was quite prosperous.

Kelly's 1855 Directory lists him as Draper, Bridge Street, Newark.

Slater's Directory of 1857 and White's Directory of 1864 both list him as a Linen and Woollen Draper, Bridge Street, Newark, and also Morris's Directory of 1869 which gives his actual address as 7 and 8 Bridge Street.

The 1861 Census records for Bridge Street are missing but the following persons are recorded in the 1871 Census as living at 1 Barnby Gate, Newark.

Robert Straw	Head of household	Married	53	Draper employing 3 assistants	b.Lincoln
Martha Straw	Wife	Married	50	Draper's wife	b.Boston
Mary Straw	Daughter		15	Scholar	b.Newark
Thomas Straw	Son		12	Scholar	b.Newark
Thomas Peart		Unmarried	27	Draper's Asst.	b.Spilsby Lincs.

Thomas Peart may have been a nephew of Martha.

The 1871 Census also records another draper's assistant, a housemaid and a cook, all resident at 1 Barnby Gate, Newark.

White's 1874 Directory says Robert (1817) was a Linen and Woollen Draper and Hosier and Smallware dealer still at 8 Bridge Street.

The Post Office Directory of 1876 gives his residential address at Barnby Gate, and occupation as Draper at 7-8 Bridge Street, Newark.

By 1879 the business had expanded and in Wright's Directory he is shown as General Draper at 8 Bridge Street and as Carpet Dealer and Upholsterer at 1-2 Barnby Gate Newark.

Both the shops at 7-8 Bridge Street and 1-2 Barnby Gate are still there today and in good condition. The latter has recently been renovated (see Barnby Gate2 photo in Pictures/Places).

Kelly's 1881 Directory lists Robert (1817) as a private resident. He would have been aged 64 by then and may have retired.

We have no record of either Robert's (1817) or Martha's (1821) deaths.

The next child of Robert (1786) was Emily born in 1821. Emily, at the age of 29, was still unmarried and living at home with her parents at 31 Bailgate at the time of the 1851 Census in March of that year. . Emily(1821) married Thomas Ashling in the Newark Registration District on 18 December 1851. In April 1853, Emily (1821) and her husband Thomas were both living in Newark and they both signed Emily Osborn's autograph book at the same time as Robert (1817) and Martha (1821). This suggests that perhaps Thomas Ashling and Robert Straw were working together at the time, however we have no other evidence to support this possibility. There is no mention of Thomas or Emily Ashling in any of Newark Directories or the 1861 Census.

Another entry in Emily Osborn's autograph book dated September 1858, is by Jonathan Ashling. This entry must have been made soon after Thomas (1828) and Emily (1827) returned to England after their first period in Australia, see later in this story. White's 1853 Directory lists a Jonathan Ashling as a railway gatekeeper living at Northgate, Newark, but we have no other details of him in England. A more interesting record has however been found in the Victorian Shipping Records which show a Jonathon Ashling, aged 22 years, arriving in Melbourne on the "John Barrow" in August 1853. This is the same ship and arrival date as for Thomas Straw and Emily Osborn. We can only assume therefore that Jonathon Ashling was the brother of Thomas Ashling and that he decided to try his luck in Australia with the Straws. The date of his autograph however suggests he returned to England either with or before Thomas and Emily returned to England in 1858.

In a note left by Eric Straw, he records that a daughter of Robert (1786) "married a man named Ashling. – They went to USA and when her husband died – Thomas Straw (1828) went to America and arranged for his sister to come to Melbourne". This daughter was therefore Emily (1821). Although the details on this note are not included in Eric Straw's story, he does refer to Thomas (1828), in about 1866, traveling through America and the continent to England. Although Thomas made several trips back to England there is no other mention of him visiting America and so we could possibly assume that it was about 1866 when Emily's husband died and she came to Melbourne.

In a later part of Eric's story he relates that Fred, the son of Thomas (1828) was helping to support an "old aunt" after Thomas (1828) died. Thomas died in 1898 and so this period would be about 1900 when Emily Ashling would be approaching the age of 80 years and would fit this description of an "old aunt".

The Victorian Edwardian Index records that Emily Ashling, daughter of Robert Straw, died at Brunswick in 1904 at the age of 83. This record shows Emily's mother as Mary Martin, but this must be an error as Robert's wife was definitely Sarah Martin (1786) born in Waddington. Emily Ashling's death certificate records she had lived in Victoria for 21 years making it about 1883 when she arrived. This date does not seem to agree with the visit by Thomas to America mentioned above, however Eric's story is not specific with regards to exact dates of the various travels by Thomas. The death certificate records Emily Ashling had no children

A record has been found of a Mary Straw, resident of Bailgate but no street number given, who was buried in St Paul in the Bail on 9 December 1846 aged 21 and therefore born in 1825. We assume this is the daughter Mary, aged 15, shown as living at 31 Bailgate in the 1841 Census.

We therefore assume she was born in 1825 but to date no record of her birth or baptism has been found.