

Samuel Conyers

(b.1817 – d.1891)

(The family name is shown as both Conyer and Conyers).

27th October 2019

Maureen Jessop

Samuel Conyer was born in Batley in 1817 and on 17th August that year was baptised at Dewsbury Parish Church (1).

His father William Conyer, a clothier, and his mother Elizabeth Conyer (nee Walker), married at Batley All Saints Church on 18th September 1814 (2). William was literate, as he signed his name in the register, but Elizabeth made her mark with an "X".

William and Elizabeth raised three other children - George, born in 1815, Ann, in 1819 and Ellen, in 1822, who was "deaf and dumb from birth" (3). They had a fifth child, Elizabeth, who was born in April 1824 but, sadly, she died in November of the same year (4).

The family suffered more loss when Elizabeth died just three months later, in February 1825, leaving Samuel motherless at only 8 years old (5). Elizabeth and her baby daughter were both buried in Batley All Saints churchyard.

William, however, wasted no time in finding a new mother for his young family and, on 25th May 1825, married Mary Terry, a spinster, at Dewsbury All Saints Church (6). William and Mary went on to produce two half-brothers for Samuel - Joseph in 1829 and William in 1832 (7).

By June 1841, the family were living at Murgatroyd Lane, Dewsbury (8). Samuel's job at that time was not recorded but William was still a clothier and listed under "Flushing, Drugget etc. Manufacturers" (9). These were companies involved in the production of new woollen fabrics from old, a thriving trade in the 19th century. This seems to be the area of work in which Samuel and William made their living.

Samuel, now also shown as being a clothier, married Sarah Bagshaw at Dewsbury Parish Church on 22nd September 1844, witnessed by Samuel's brother George Conyer (10). William had ensured that his children could read and write, as Samuel signed his name in the register, but Sarah made her mark with an "X".

Samuel and Sarah's first child, Ellen Conyer, was born on 23rd February 1846 and baptised at Batley All Saints Church on 5th April the same year (11). The family lived in Batley Carr and Samuel was still working as a clothier.

Interestingly, between 1847 and 1853 Samuel's father, William, had had a complete change of employment and was working as an attorney's clerk (12).

By March 1851, Samuel, Sarah and Ellen had made the move down to Gloucestershire, living in the Temple area of Bristol, where Samuel was a marine store dealer (13). This had nothing to do with the sea - a marine store was used for material acquired by rag collectors. In January 1852, it was reported that a man had received a six-month prison sentence for breaking into and stealing "a quantity of rags, bags and wrappers" from Samuel's warehouse (14).

On 16th May 1852, Samuel and Sarah baptised their son, Samuel, who had been born in the June quarter of the previous year, in the Parish of Temple, Bristol (15).

Samuel had a rag merchants' business with Charles Sheard but, in 1854, went into bankruptcy due to Sheard's debts (16). Sometime after, Samuel began living and working in Temple Street, as the publican of the Lamb & Flag but in November 1859, there was a transfer of licence to Charles Good (17, 18). However, in 1860 he was still the landlord for the premises (19).

Up until this point, the family must have been doing well enough as they had stayed in Bristol for quite some time. But by April 1861, something changed as they were back in Yorkshire but were not together. Samuel was living with his parents in Dewsbury, working as a woollen weaver and William also was back in the wool trade (20). Sarah was living in Bradford, where she was the housekeeper for an innkeeper (21). Their two children, Ellen and Samuel were with Sarah's sister, Amelia Robinson, also in Bradford (22).

On 12th November 1864, Samuel's daughter, Ellen, married John Steel (sometimes Steele), a grocer, at St Peter's Cathedral, Bradford, and they both signed their names in the register (23). Samuel's occupation at that time was warehouseman (23).

Samuel's father, William Conyer, died in Dewsbury in 1868, aged 75 (24).

Samuel's whereabouts in April 1871 are not known but he was not living with his wife or his children. Sarah was running a boarding house in Bradford and their son Samuel was living with her (25). Ellen and her husband, John Steele, were also living in Bradford, where John was a provisions merchant, employing one boy (26).

On 8th June 1872, Samuel married Emily Wood, of Morecambe, at the High Street Chapel, Lancaster (27).

In April 1881, Samuel, then aged 64, was an inmate in the Leeds Union Workhouse, Beckett Street, his occupation being shown as cloth manufacturer (28).

His wife, Sarah, was living in Bradford and had two lodgers, so appears to still be running a boarding house (29). Samuel, employed as a Prudential Assurance Agent, was living in Bradford with his wife and their two sons (30). Ellen and John Steele and their two daughters were living in Woodview Crescent, Bradford. John was still a provisions merchant and seemingly doing well, as he now employed six men (31).

That Samuel was living in the workhouse, when his wife and children all had homes and income and, on the face of it, would have been in a position to offer assistance to him, suggests some estrangement.

In particular, the Steeles were clearly in a good position financially. In February 1883, there was a sale by auction of all the contents of their home in Woodview Crescent, Bradford. The furniture and other items offered for sale were obviously of good quality and expensive, e.g. “a Spanish mahogany settee with cabriole legs”, “a French bedstead” and “an Italian walnut drawing room suite” (32).

The following month, John Steele, a long-standing member of the Loyal Philanthropic Lodge of the Independent Order of Oddfellows, received a gift from the Lodge, as he was leaving Bradford to move to New Zealand (33).

Ellen, John and their children did indeed emigrate to New Zealand and Samuel’s wife, Sarah, left her husband behind and went with them (34). How brave of them all, particularly Sarah, who would have been in her sixties, to make such a momentous move. What an adventure.

They made their home in Ashburton, Canterbury, South Island, where they appear to have flourished (35). John continued his trade as a storekeeper and their family increased (36). Sarah, Ellen and John lived in New Zealand until their deaths and it is highly unlikely that Samuel ever saw them again (37).

As for Samuel, in April 1891, then aged 73, he was sick and an inmate at the Leeds Union Infirmary, Beckett Street. He did not recover from his illness and died in the Infirmary, with his burial taking place on 20th May 1891 in the Anglican section of Beckett Street Cemetery (38, 39).

Samuel’s life ended in the place that he had been an inmate ten years earlier. Perhaps he had not left the workhouse since but, hopefully, this was not the case and some good fortune had fallen his way in the years between.

His children, Ellen and Samuel, had nine children between them and it is heartening to know that the branches of Samuel’s family tree continued to grow in his native Yorkshire and on the other side of the world.

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