

THE WINTERS TALE

Following on from Marion's talk about resources available to Family Historians, and Eileen's talk about the use of Wills to assist in research, I thought I'd share with you my own experiences as I looked into our Family Tree. I'm afraid I don't have any tales to relate, such as Carol's story about Lalla, but the line I'm going to talk about was quite difficult for a novice genealogist, and it demonstrates how, by making use of the many resources available, it is possible to solve some very challenging problems. I started researching our Family Tree in January 2009, shortly after I retired, when the weather was particularly bad and I was looking for something interesting to do. I began researching the line I'm going to talk about quite early on, but I think it shows that persistence eventually pays off.

My husband's great-grandmother on the maternal side was one Charlotte Winter Barker. According to her marriage certificate she was born about 1842, lived at Walton, Chesterfield, her father was called Winter Barker, and he was a farmer. I couldn't find Charlotte on either the 1851 or 1861 censuses, I couldn't find a baptism for her, and I couldn't find her father, Winter, on the censuses either. Then I came to my first meeting at the Chesterfield and District Family History Society, which happened to be a research evening, and there, among the transcripts of St Thomas' at Brampton, was a baptism record on the 15/4/1858, when she was 16, for Charlotte and three of her brothers – Robert Winter Barker, Samuel Winter Barker and William Winter Barker. Their father's name was recorded as Robert Winter Barker, a cattle dealer, and mother's name as Charlotte, which I later discovered is incorrect.

Armed with this information, I went back to the censuses and on the 1841 census found Robert Barker, a butcher, with his wife Hannah and nine children (one of whom was called "Winter", so I knew I had found the correct family), all supposedly born in Derbyshire. On the 1851 census I found Robert Winter, born in

Norfolk, with his wife Hannah, born in Matlock, and eight children, including this time, Charlotte. Some of the children from the 1841 census had by this time left home, but John, the eldest of those left at home, had been born in Darley, so now I knew that I had to search the records at Matlock for baptisms of the earlier children there. These revealed a previous marriage for Robert, and seventeen children in all (two of whom were named "Robert", and both were alive at the same time, although the eldest had left home before the younger was born)! The 1861 census for Hannah revealed why I hadn't been able to find Charlotte before – her name had been mis-spelt as "Scharlotte".

By this time her father, Robert, had died. His headstone, in St. Thomas' churchyard, reveals that he passed away on the 29/8/1858, aged 80, giving a year of birth around 1778. However, the 1841 census gave his age as 50 (born around 1791), and the 1851 census gave his age as 67 (born around 1784). So, I was looking for a baptism in Norfolk for Robert Winter Barker born between around 1778 and 1791! Fortunately the FreeReg website (www.freereg.org.uk) already had transcriptions of most of the Norfolk parish registers, and a search revealed several Robert Barkers born between these dates. I checked them all out, recording parents names, then checked marriages until I found a likely couple – Henry Barker and Sarah Winter, who married 28/1/1783. Robert was baptised 15/4/1787, and it seems that he was the firstborn, so 1784 is probably the correct year of birth.

Henry and Sarah died within weeks of each other in 1823, both aged 71, giving birth years of around 1752, and both were buried at Gressenhall. Trawling FreeReg again showed a baptism for Sarah on 17/3/1754, parents William and Mary Winter. Sarah's brother, also called William, became a master butcher, and Henry Barker was apprenticed to him, as can be seen on the Register of Duties Paid for Apprentices' Indentures. Convinced this was our family, I entered the information on to my Ancestry Tree and was

inundated with possible links to other users. It was obvious that some had copied from others, but one in particular looked convincing, with details that could only have been obtained from the parish registers. This suggested that William Winter, from Longham, married Mary Sizeland at Beetley in September 1743, his father was Robert Winter, from Longham, son of Ambrose and Catherine from Longham, son of Ambrose and Mary, son of Edward and Mary, son of Thomas and Elizabeth, taking the Tree back to the mid-1500's.

It could be tempting to take this at face value, but even as a novice researcher I realised that if you go down the wrong route not only have you wasted valuable time, but your work is incorrect. So I made a note of the Longham details, went to the records office in Norwich, and checked out the transcripts of the parish records held there, noting all the Winter references. I didn't have the time to look at the actual images of those records, but did look at the Gressenhall records and William and Mary's marriage. I also found the church at Gressenhall and photographed headstones which I thought may be relevant, including one for a William and Mary Winter, where William's age differed from that recorded in the Longham records, and anyway I had already found a burial for a William Winter, the supposed father of Sarah, at Longham.

When I got home I started sorting out all my findings, and realising that some dates didn't match, I began to have doubts that the other AncestryTrees were correct. The Longham William (parents Robert and Ann) died in 1752, whereas William and Mary had Sarah baptised in 1754 and Rosamund in 1756, in Gressenhall. Also, the Longham William would only have been 17 at the time of the marriage to Mary. If the William and Mary on the headstone at Gressenhall were ours, then William was born around 1709. A search of FreeReg came up with nothing, but the Ancestry link which at first had looked promising did have a baptism for a William Winter, in 1709, in Scarning. This William

was (apparently) also descended from Ambrose Winter in Longham. Ambrose and his first wife, Alice, had a son whom they also named Ambrose. He married Margaret Alexander, and their firstborn was William. However, William had married Elizabeth Kemp in 1739, and they had a son, named Ambrose. If William had gone on to marry Mary in 1743, then Elizabeth must have died between the birth of their son in 1740, and 1743.

At this point I thought that I would have to wait until I could get back to Norwich, but then I discovered that images of the Norfolk parish records are on the Family Search website : -"<http://www.familysearch.org/search/image/index#uri=https%3A//api.familysearch.org/records/collection/1416598/waypoints>". Everything checked out ok, but, although I could find no more children for William and Elizabeth, neither could I find a burial for Elizabeth, and unless she had died, William would not have been free to marry Mary. So although I was convinced this was the correct William, I needed to prove it. By chance I found, on the internet, an image (and a transcription) of a Will made out by William's mother, Margaret, in which she bequeathes to "Ambrose Winter my Grandson the bed he now useth to lodge on as it stand", so it seems that William and Elizabeth's son, Ambrose (then aged 20) was living with his grandmother at the time. The fact that Margaret Winter had left a Will lead me to look in to the possibility that her son William may also have made one, and indeed I did find that, not only had he made a Will, but that his father and grandfather had, too! I ordered copies from the Norfolk Archives, and hoped they would hold some clues.

I couldn't have wished for more! William mentions his second son, William, his third son, Robert, his eldest son, Ambrose, and his daughters, Mary and Sarah (Rosamund had died in infancy). In addition, he also names his "Son in Law", John Seel, who must have been his step-son, Mary's child by her first husband, as neither of William's surviving daughters were married at the time (Rosamund had died in infancy). I understand that, at this time,

the term "in-law" was used in the same way as we now use "step" So this one document proved the relationship, and solved the question of Mary's surname .

I hope this illustrates, especially to anyone new to researching Family History, how it is possible to trace your ancestry by using various resources. One which I haven't mentioned, but which helps throw light on to what was happening at the time, is the use of Newspaper reports. According to advertisements in the Norfolk Chronicle in 1787 and 1788, Sarah's brother William was selling off his land and property. In 1785 he was still working as a butcher, because the Apprentice indentures show that he had taken on a "trainee" named David Cooper. His burial record in 1802 gives his occupation as "Farmer, formerly butcher". So if he was still farming, why did he sell off some of his land? I'm no social historian, but it seems that around that time grain prices may have been low, which squeezed farmers profits, so it's possible that William was unable to continue farming on the scale he had been doing. Such information not only adds interest to your story, but helps you appreciate the lives your ancestors were living – even if you uncover something you would rather not know!