

THE THOMAS SAFFERY LAWRENCE STORY

The Lawrence family have been in East Kent since at least the fifteenth century. The earliest record is the will made by William Lawrence of Folkestone on May 6th 1493. This tells us that he was a widower with three children, Alison, Elizabeth and John. Since no comment is made about them needing a guardian and no dowry is left for the girls, it is probable all were adult and married, one of the girls perhaps to Thomas Eden who served as executor along with John Lawrence. William held his land as a feoff from Robert Rigden meaning that he did not own it outright but held it in return for some service which could have been labour, or a share of the crop, or military service or maybe rent. After the usual bequests to the vicar and the upkeep of the church, William asks that his body be buried in the Anglo-Saxon church of St Eanswythe at Folkestone and that the prayers of John the Baptist be requested to speed his soul to heaven. To each daughter, he gives ten shillings. In modern American money, that is \$530 but then it was the equivalent of about six weeks wages for an agricultural labourer. John Lawrence gets the house and garden and a lodge for the horses. Since there is no indication that the Lawrences were knights with the right to own or ride horses, it may be that the service William owed his lord was to provide for the horses used in the frequent wars with nearby France, an obligation his son would have inherited.

William is a link back to the middle ages. Assuming he was around fifty when he died, he was born but a few years after Joan of Arc was burnt, before Gutenberg set up the first press, and before the Wars of the Roses began, the dynastic conflict between the Lancastrian and Yorkist claimants for the throne. There was little fighting in Kent but he would still have heard about the progress of the war and received news about the two events most famous today, namely the murder of the two princes in the Tower by Richard III or his henchmen, and the victory of Henry Tudor at Bosworth in 1485. Such information would have reached him maybe a month after the events through either travellers or pilgrims making their way to or from Westminster or officially through the pulpit, the vicar being the only newscaster. How he reacted, we do not know.

Following William, the trail goes cold for over a century. We see glimpses of the family through entries in parish records, but there is no coherent thread to link the tree. This is not surprising. Although the law requiring parish registers to be kept was passed in 1538, many churches in East Kent destroyed their earliest records. Both clergy and parishioners were afraid that if records showed their names, these could be used as evidence against them by the catholic party. The reign of Mary Tudor (1553-1558) was a period of bitter persecution when many people lost their lives or were forced to flee the country. Even babies at less than an hour old were thrown into the flames to be burnt alive because they were the offspring of women with Protestant sympathies. With no way of knowing how long the catholic ascendancy would exist or if Elizabeth I would survive (aside from plots against her and attempted invasions, she was ill with smallpox early in the reign), people aimed to comply with the law of registering births, marriages and deaths, and then to "accidentally" lose the evidence. Another reason behind missing records is that prior to the Restoration of 1660, they were generally kept on loose sheets of paper rather than in bound registers making it easy for odd years to be mislaid.

From the little that we do know of the Lawrence family at this time, it seems that they were Protestants. As early as 1544, John Lawrence married one of the Dutch refugees who had fled the persecutions of Charles V, and an Elizabeth Lawrence appears in the records of the Stranger church in Canterbury, a Protestant community based around Huguenot refugees. In support of this theory there are the Christian names. Early Protestants wished to demonstrate their faith by selecting Old Testament names for their children rather than Roman Catholic saints names, and we have amongst the Lawrences, a Job, Zebulon, Abel and Micah.

Another early record dates from July 1577 when Edward Lawrence, together with John Marsh, served on a jury at Canterbury. The twelve men selected at random for the jury were all local landowners and free men. They tried seven cases in their week's session:

- a spinster accused of poisoning another woman - found guilty and remanded

- a yeoman who stole money - found guilty and fined
- four labourers accused of highway robbery - found guilty and hanged
- a labourer who stole money and clothes - found guilty and fined
- a mariner who burgled a house - found guilty and hanged
- a hatmaker who stole a blanket - found not guilty

Edward may have been the father or grandfather of Thomas Lawrence who is the earliest known ancestor on Thomas Saffery Lawrence's direct line. Thomas was born around 1580, place unknown. He appears in the records on his marriage to Agnes or Ann King in Canterbury in January 1603, two months before the death of Elizabeth I.

Thomas had at least four children, three of whom we know about from marriage licences and only one of whom has a surviving baptismal entry. It is from Elizabeth's marriage licence that we learn that Thomas had a brother, Vincent. Elizabeth, aged 19, was set to marry a ward of Thomas Lawrence and the judge, clearly suspecting that the young girl might be in process of being forced into the union for inheritance reasons, asked her uncle to testify that she was entering the marriage of her own free will.

Edward Lawrence, Thomas' second son, married Jane Hambrook in Elham in 1632. They had at least six sons who survived to maturity, a remarkable achievement for the period. These were very difficult years with high taxation, religious persecution and eventually civil war followed by a short lived republican era. It is likely that Edward died at some time during the republican period for he does not appear in records after 1650 and on his children's marriage records, it is Richard - presumably his eldest son - who is listed as the family head. A younger son, James, moved to Folkestone and may have been a mariner judging by the long intervals between his children. Two of the six brothers died just three days apart aged 34 and 32 respectively suggesting they may have been sharing a home and fallen victim to the same illness.

Richard of Elham, the next link on the tree, married Ann toward the end of the republican or Commonwealth era. Since Oliver Cromwell had banned church marriage, we do not know the date or bride's maiden name although it seems likely that it was Giles, a farming family living in the same village. Richard and Ann had at least eight children. It is probable that there were others but the lack of records and damaged state of some surviving registers has made this impossible to aver. The children included Job whose family later settled at nearby Goodnestone and Sarah who married Thomas Veal of the Custom House at Dover. Mr Veal had achieved some notoriety two years before when his sister died and then appeared to a friend of hers. The story of the apparition became so famous that it reached the ears of Queen Anne who despatched Daniel Defoe to Kent to investigate and produce a report. An older child, Vincent, married Mary Marsh in 1682, the first of a number of Lawrences to marry into that family.

Thomas Lawrence was Richard and Ann's youngest son born around the time of their silver wedding anniversary and he grew up and moved to Folkestone where he married Susanna Haines on 20th August 1704. He was then 21 and she was 19, a native of Folkestone. His occupation at the time of marriage is not known but by the time he died in 1720, he was a husbandman, or small farmer, the same as his father. He probably held around ten acres and grew wheat, the main local crop. Owing to the almost unique inheritance laws of Kent, most farmers had very small holdings. The rest of England practised primogeniture, inheritance of the whole estate by the eldest son, but in Kent the system was gavelkind, inheritance of the estate by all the sons in equal part. The result was very few farmers with over a hundred acres but many with between three and twenty. It is likely that Thomas may have received three or four acres at time of marriage and built up his holding over time. Since neither he nor his father left a will, we cannot assess their incomes. Perhaps it was too low to make a will, or maybe both simply died suddenly intestate.

Thomas and Susanna had eight children, five daughters and three sons. The eldest son, William, became a mariner and drowned at sea aged 21 in a storm which also killed at least one shipmate. Their bodies were washed up a few days later. The eldest daughter, Susan, died a spinster. The next daughter, Elizabeth, died at only a few days old and the subsequent daughter was named after her. Sadly, she also died aged nine. Nothing is known of what became of the son born in 1712,

Thomas. John born in 1715 is the next link in the direct line. Of the last two daughters, Sarah grew up and married James Dryland when she was 21, and Mary (baptised just two days before Thomas Lawrence died) was buried aged three months. It is possible that some infection invaded the family for in 1720, father and two daughters died, an experience which must have been very traumatic for Susanna who at 35 was left with five children and no breadwinner. With no child old enough to run the farm, it is possible that the family moved closer to town where she might have been able to find employment taking in washing or mending fishing nets and that this is why subsequent generations went to sea. In 1728, Susanna married Adam Smith.

John Lawrence of Folkestone, Thomas' only known surviving son, married Mary Martin in the spring of 1735. He was 19 and she was 17, very young for the period. It may have been a "shotgun" marriage for the bride was five months pregnant. In the summer, their first daughter was born and named after John's mother, Susan. She grew up and at 22, married Francis Curry, after whom another Lawrence was named, suggesting that she and her husband preserved close links with her family. Another daughter followed in 1739 and she married Thomas Dimpsey when she was 19, another man after whom a Lawrence was named. A boy and girl followed both of whom died in infancy. In 1749, William was born and he grew up, married, and had seven children in the town, four of whom died in infancy. It is likely that William was a mariner because his two surviving sons followed this profession, John working as a fisherman and William junior on the coastal blockade in the Napoleonic war. John and Mary's next son was John and he too survived, married and settled in Folkestone. He was a mature 31 when he married. His bride, Mary Spearpoint, was 23 and they had two children who died aged 7 and 2 respectively. John lived until he was 64, dying shortly after the Napoleonic war had ended. Thomas Lawrence also survived and married Mary Marsh. He reached the age of 75 but there are no signs of any children of the marriage. The youngest daughter, Margaret, grew up and married John Graylon or Grayland and had eight children. The youngest son of John and Mary was Robert who is the next link on the family tree.

John Lawrence died aged 63, Mary eight years later aged 69. Although it is not proof, the fact that most of their children grew up and lived longer than average lives, suggests that John and Mary were able to afford a reasonable standard of living with some basic hygiene facilities. Certainly by the 1750 and 1760s, John was working for the revenue service as a ship inspector, boarding vessels to look for contraband. This was a career which paid quite well, partly because it was felt necessary to reward the staff so they would not feel tempted to accept bribes or indulge in smuggling themselves, and partly because it was dangerous. The recognised method used by smugglers to punish informers or revenue men unwise enough to tackle a stronger crowd, was to coat them in tar and set them alight.

Robert Lawrence, born in 1760, the year that George III came to the throne, was also a mariner. He lived to the ripe old age of 86, becoming the first Lawrence to appear on a census. He married a local Folkestone girl named Mary Castle when he was 25 and she was 22. They had six children, the eldest of whom was the father of Thomas Saffery Lawrence. The second child died in infancy, the third aged nine and the fifth aged fifteen. The fourth child was Francis Curry Lawrence, one of the most interesting members of the family. The last child, Robert Martin Lawrence, was a mariner like his father. It was this generation of the family which made the move to the Isle of Thanet. We do not know when the move was made but it was certainly during the war with France. John may have moved ahead of family for he married on the island in 1810. In 1812 his sister died in Folkestone, but she was a teenager so may have died at the home of an employer rather than with her parents. Certainly, Robert and Mary were living in Broadstairs for over thirty years in Nelson Cottage beside the Nelson Inn. Robert continued to go to sea until he was over eighty, probably by this time on smaller fishing smacks. As a widow in her eighties, Mary worked in the Nelson Inn, succeeding in living independently until her death aged 90 in 1853. Nelson Cottage was just across the road from Robert's brother John's house at the foot of Crow Hill which in turn almost backed on to Robert junior's house in Tunis Row. Thomas Saffery Lawrence's sister, Elizabeth, lived with her grandparents prior to her marriage.

Of Robert Martin's six children, three died in infancy, one daughter married yet another member of the Marsh family, a second daughter stayed a spinster dressmaker and the eldest son followed his father to sea, also reaching old age, the third generation to do so.

Francis Curry Lawrence married aged 21 in June 1815 at St Laurence church on the Isle of Thanet, three days before the battle of Waterloo. His occupation at the time is not known but ten years later he was working as a baker with a shop of his own in the High Street, so it is likely that this was his trade and he married upon completing his apprenticeship. If so, this would mean he had been living on the island since 1810 supporting the idea that Robert and Mary moved from Folkestone around 1809 leaving their daughter behind in service.

Francis Curry remained a baker for some years. In 1841, the census shows he had become a confectioner, but the two trades were closely allied and carried on from the same premises. By 1849, he had changed completely and become one of only 158 licensed rectifiers or distillers in England. The reason for the change in occupation is probably the repeal of the corn laws in 1846. A product of the war, their effect had been to protect English farmers by keeping corn prices high, excellent for farmers but bad for the working classes for whom a loaf a bread cost a whole day's wages. The repeal of the corn laws ended the starvation of the masses but caused many farmers to go bankrupt. As a baker, Francis Curry Lawrence would have seen his customers and profits change and he evidently made the move before financial distress affected him. He was clearly a very astute and hard working businessman for in addition to the High Street bakery and Belle Vue Place distillery he owned a livery stable and coach house in Plains of Waterloo, an apartment building in Wellington Crescent, and property in La Belle Alliance Square and Irchester Place. His rate or local taxation bill in 1830 alone was over six times the weekly wage of the average labourer and that was before he had the distillery. His younger brother Robert who was later to settle in Broadstairs across the road from his parents, had a cottage in King Street and paid just 2/6 in the same year, a twentieth of his brother's bill.

Away from work, Francis Curry Lawrence was also busy, finding time to father twelve children by his wife Mary, five of who died in infancy. His eldest son, Robert, became a brewer with premises in Ramsgate High Street and then Turner's Place. His daughter Charlotte married a wine merchant. Widowed in her early 40s, she took on the management of the Royal Oak Hotel on Ramsgate sea front, a few doors up from the Queen's Head which her cousin managed. Charlotte managed the premises with the help of her two sons and sister Eliza. Another child of Francis Curry Lawrence, Francis junior, became a house painter and decorator, and his daughter married one of the first car mechanics in the town.

Francis Curry Lawrence died aged 76 and was buried at St George's church. His wife followed a decade later aged 85. He was the first member of the family to have the vote indicating he owned property valued at above £ 10 and probably the person responsible for training Thomas Saffery Lawrence as a baker. When Francis' brother, John (father of Thomas Saffery Lawrence) died, he permitted his widow to live in his Wellington Crescent house and to run it as a boarding house exploiting the growing tourist trade. In his retirement, Francis Curry kept an apartment building in Plains of Waterloo catering to sailors in particular.

With Francis Curry so evidently the success of the family, it must be wondered how his brothers reacted. Both were seamen working from Broadstairs. From their addresses, we know that they worked on the fishing vessels that spent the spring going far out into the North Sea in search of cod and the summer transporting coal to and from the northern ports of England. There is no sign of either of them ever joining a transatlantic vessel which would have taken them away from home for over a year at a time. The vessels on which they worked would be away for a matter of a few weeks. Although John appears to have been a sailor all his working life, Robert did experiment with shopkeeping when in his late 20s and early 30s. Presumably it did not work out and he moved from Ramsgate back to Broadstairs. Robert and John seem to have been very close. Their own houses were almost back to back and for many years afterward, their unmarried children were to be found living in the homes of their cousins, Robert's dressmaker daughter Jemima, for example, living with Thomas Saffery Lawrence's younger sister Elizabeth Gore and her husband.

It was John Lawrence, eldest son of Robert and Mary, who was to be the father of Thomas Saffery Lawrence. Born in Folkestone, he married Sarah Chapman in St Peter's on the Isle of Thanet on April 26th, 1810. She was 20 and he was 22. They had four children, two girls and two boys, all of

whom lived. It was probably while trying to give birth to a fifth that Sarah died in the summer of 1818 leaving her sailor husband with four children aged six, five, four and two. It is likely that John gave them to his mother to look after so that he could continue to earn a living at sea. The responsibility was also probably a contributory factor in his decision to remarry less than two years later a Birchington girl named Hannah Simmons. By her, he had a further six children, three of whom died in infancy. Hannah was clearly popular with the children of the first marriage because both sons named daughters after her.

John's eldest son was named Richard Castle Lawrence and he became a stonemason working, according to the trade directory, chiefly in marble monuments and statuary. St Peter's churchyard must include many examples of his work. He married Emma Farley another capable woman who succeeded in having twelve children whilst at the same time running her own greengrocer's business. Amongst the names chosen for their children were the father's (Richard Castle Lawrence junior), his mother's (Sarah Chapman Lawrence), his stepmother's (Hannah Simmons Lawrence) his brother (Thomas Saffery Lawrence the second) and the housemaid's (Mary Miller Lawrence). In the year after Thomas Saffery Lawrence's marriage, Richard Castle Lawrence and Emma gave their next daughter the middle name of Charlotte, Thomas Saffery's bride. Three of Richard's sons followed him in the trade although only one, Thomas, remained in the area to carry on the business. Thomas did not marry and his sister Sarah lived with him running her own florist's business, an apt accompaniment to a monumental mason. Richard is unusual in that he is the only member of the family found to be a skilled craftsman and it may be wondered if the cost of his training was met by uncle Francis. It is also curious that a man with twelve children apparently left no grandchildren to carry on the name.

The next child, Sarah, married John Nickson and settled in St Peter's where she had three daughters, one of whom died in childhood. Her husband was a farm labourer and Sarah herself was illiterate, an interesting reflection on the value of daughters, both John's sons receiving schooling and full apprenticeships.

Thomas Saffery Lawrence was the next child. We may presume that he behaved impeccably during his baptism for the parish clerk writing up the event later could not remember anything about him, even his name. He suffered the ignominy of being entered as Sarah, the child before! Nonetheless, he grew up and trained as a baker, most probably with his uncle Francis in Ramsgate. In the summer of 1837 he married Charlotte Scott. They had one child in Broadstairs before moving to Stepney in London and subsequently to the United States of America where, interestingly, he took up his father's occupation of fishing. Perhaps as a boy he had worked on some of the local fishing smacks.

Speculation is not proven history but we may be almost certain that the young Lawrence children went to see King George IV when he visited Ramsgate in 1821, standing in the harbour in their Sunday best waving flags. They were probably used to seeing the young Princess Victoria, only a little younger than themselves, who spent much of her childhood in the area. They may also have seen other famous visitors to the town such as Wellington and Nelson and Charles Dickens.

The fourth child of John's first marriage was named Elizabeth and she married Robert Gore, a baker. It might be imagined that this was another contact made via uncle Francis. Robert Gore prospered and in his retirement took on a lodging house at 21 Paragon overlooking Ramsgate harbour where he employed two live in domestics to help look after the tourists who came to stay.

It is not certain when exactly Hannah started her family for the next four children were baptised en masse in 1832 by which time George was five and Eliza three. The reason for the group baptism is not known. It is quite unusual. Most parents had a certain superstition about their children going to hell if they died unbaptised so were quick to have them christened. Perhaps John was still angry at God for the death of his young wife some years before. The two children which followed seem to have been baptised close to birth.

Nothing is known of what happened to John and Mary save that they were baptised in 1832 and had died by 1841. No burial record exists. It is possible that they drowned. The family did live on the

cliff top itself close to the old naval battery (surely a popular haunt for the young boys) and Bleak House.

George, born in 1827, had left home by the time he was 14, probably to go to sea. Boys generally started work around thirteen, a bit younger in poorer families. In 1856, he found himself a wife named Sarah Shackleton who was born in Pontefract, Yorkshire. Most men married women born in the same area, frequently those with kinship links to their own. To find a wife from almost three hundred miles away was extraordinary. Pontefract was relatively close to the Humber so it seems probable that George was working on the steamers transporting coal from the northern collieries to the southern coastal towns. His early married life was spent in Lambeth, South London, whether as a sailor or in business, we do not know, though the former is likely since the area was full of docks from which much international trade was carried. By the mid 1860s, they had moved back to the Isle of Thanet where they settled in Ramsgate. They bought a house in Albion Place, the road where Queen Victoria had once lived and also Jane Austen. It was a prestigious address suggesting that George must have done reasonably well in London. On the 1871 census, George was away from home, either at sea or on business. His wife was letting part of the house to lodgers as was common. On both the 1881 and 1891 census, they are listed as having live in domestic servants. George by this time was a bathing machine proprietor with his own business, Lawrence's Bathing Establishment, on the Sands which lasted for some fifty years right into the mid 1920s. The business consisted of horse drawn bathing machines which would take the swimmer out into the water, enabling them to change into a provided swimsuit in private before clambering down a ladder into the sea, and also allowed them to take refreshments after- teas, coffees, ice creams etc. People would pay a shilling a day for the hire of the machine from 6 a.m. to noon. Bathing in the afternoon was prohibited as unhealthy. For a further shilling a week, hirers could avail themselves of the reading lounge which held the local and London newspapers. Following his death, the business was divided between the two sons, John and Francis, the former who had been a mariner before his father's ill health caused him to return to Ramsgate and join the business, the latter who had been a market gardener at Vincent, near Margate. It is unknown how they survived the Great War when the beaches were closed for defence reasons. Perhaps they took their food stands underground as the population moved into caves and tunnels to avoid the heavy bombing and shelling. Their old home in Albion Place was destroyed.

Eliza Lampard Lawrence, named after her mother's niece, lived with her parents all her life, dying aged 32 in the house in Wellington Crescent but being buried in St Peter's.

Frederick William Belsey Lawrence, born in 1833, also began his career as a sailor. He married Jane Martin in 1864 but they had no children. Shortly after this, he became a publican and took over the Queen's Head on Ramsgate sea front, a job which he held for over twenty years. Retiring to run a guest house, he and his wife are buried in Ramsgate cemetery.

The final child of John and Hannah, William Simmons Lawrence, was born in 1837 and died just before his second birthday.

John himself died at the close of 1847 being buried on 2nd January 1848. His widow died in 1866.

The Lawrence story has thus spanned almost four centuries from small farmers in the reign of Elizabeth I to Victorian entrepreneurs. Forced to adapt by changing circumstances, they have worked both land and sea and served to defend the country in time of war. The Robert Lawrence who moved his family from Folkestone to Broadstairs was almost certainly involved in the coastal blockade. Moving into a front line town at the height of the war would have been almost impossible if he did not have a pass showing he was a member of a Cinque Port defence vessel and it is improbable that he could have afforded the move if he had only been earning a fisherman's wage. In more recent times, his descendants lived in "Hellfire Corner" facing bombardment by zeppelins in the great war and the Luftwaffe in the Second whilst across the ocean, other descendants fought in other battles and built their own businesses and families. One wonders what Edward Lawrence, contemporary of Shakespeare, would have made of it all.