

## John Walker

(1818-1887)

12 July 2020

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John Walker was a common name amongst Leeds residents in 1881 so he has proved hard to research and some of the evidence facts for his life are likely, but not certain.

What *is* certain is that in 1881 he was an inmate at the Leeds Union Workhouse, on Beckett Street in Leeds<sup>1</sup>. He was listed as being 63 years old, and an unemployed quarry labourer, born in Leeds, Yorkshire. He was listed as being married, but there is no evidence of any lady in the 1881 census of the Workhouse or Leeds Union Infirmary who could be his wife.

The records show that a John Walker died in July 1887<sup>2,3</sup> and was buried in the non-conformist sector of Beckett Street Cemetery on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1887<sup>3</sup>. His grave was a commonshared grave and his place of death was listed in the burial register as "The Workhouse, Leeds"<sup>3</sup>. He was a labourer<sup>3</sup>. Perhaps John continued to live in the workhouse, but there are no records to confirm this.

Research about his early life has been based on the premise that his date of birth was 1818 as shown in the 1881 census and that he was born in Leeds and surrounds. Consideration has also been given to his stated occupation of a quarry labourer.

There was a John Walker born in Moor Allerton on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1818<sup>4</sup>. He was baptised at St Matthew, Chapel Allerton on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1818<sup>4</sup>. His father was James Walker whose occupation was shown on the baptismal record as a 'sand man'. John's mother was named as Eleanor on that record<sup>4</sup>.

In 1851 the family were living in Chapel Allerton Parish. At this time Chapel Allerton, Meanwood, Black Moor, Alwoodley, and Moor Allerton were all tiny rural hamlets<sup>5</sup>. The main businesses at that time were farming and quarrying, and, in Meanwood, along the beck, tanneries existed. Today they are all part of suburban Leeds, but the names remain in the area such as Blackmoor Road, Moor Allerton Shopping Centre, on the Outer Ring Road, and the hamlets are now the names of the suburbs that have replaced them. The quarries shown on the 1851 map are all sandstone quarries and, in High Moor Allerton there is a 'sand pit' shown<sup>5</sup>.

The 1851 census showed James Walker, aged 73, as a farmer and sand dealer<sup>6</sup>. He must have been running both businesses with the help of his two sons, John, aged 32, Samuel, aged 30, and also a servant. Both were listed as farmer's sons. John was listed as being married<sup>6</sup>. There was no wife shown on the census return living with him on the farm, and no marriage has been found. Perhaps the marriage failed very early on, but divorce was not an option so John may have returned to his life as a single man though he was not free to remarry, unless his wife died.

The 1851 census also does not give an exact address of where the family were living. The description of the enumerator's route gives a clue<sup>6</sup>." Township of Chapel Allerton. Part of the Parish of Leeds. This is the district and so much of the Ecclesiastical District of Meanwood as is within the Registrar's district of Chapeltown. All that part of Chapel Allerton comprised within the Boundaries. Commencing at the point called Alwoodley Road, leading to Stonegate. Continuing the same Westward to the middle of the road, then along Addle Beck and thence Eastward to the Leeds and Harrogate Turnpike Road then Westward to Backhouse Hill"<sup>6</sup>. [This description has had some modernisation to make it easier to understand] The Walkers' census return was on the first page after the Ecclesiastical District of Meanwood, which suggests the farm was just outside the boundary of the Meanwood, roughly where the Outer Ring Road lies today.

In 1858 John's father, James Walker died<sup>8</sup>in the Leeds District, followed in 1859 by his mother, Ellen who died in the Dewsbury District<sup>9</sup>. Perhaps she had gone to live with one of her children after James died. The 1841 census<sup>10</sup>had showed James and Ellen with a daughter, Hannah, born in 1816, living with them. Samuel, John's younger brother, was also shown in this census, but not John<sup>10</sup>. Perhaps Hannah was living in the Dewsbury district in 1859 as she was not shown in the 1851 census<sup>6</sup> with her family and may have got married.

Samuel, John's younger brother, married Charlotte Richardson on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1851 in St Matthew Church, Chapel Allerton<sup>10</sup>. They went on to have at least 5 children. By 1881, the year that the census showed his brother, John, in the workhouse<sup>1</sup> Samuel was working as a carter<sup>12</sup>, carrying coal, but his son Thomas (born in 1856), was working in a quarry as a labourer<sup>12</sup>. On 12<sup>th</sup> December 1881 Samuel was buried in a shared grave in the Anglican Sector of Beckett Street Cemetery<sup>13</sup>. These two records show that Samuel was in no position to help his older brother, but also show that the family links with quarries was still there.

John's absence from so many census returns was surprising. However, an explanation for absence from the 1871 census return could be explained by an appearance on the Criminal Register from the Epiphany Quarter General Sessions of the Peace, in Leeds, on 28<sup>th</sup> December, 1871<sup>14</sup> where he was convicted of larceny, and sentenced to 7 years of penal servitude (imprisonment with hard labour)with 5 years of police supervision. This must have been a significant theft, because others convicted of larceny and shown on the same page were receiving sentences of imprisonment for only a few months <sup>14</sup>. There is no further information available to confirm if this is the correct John Walker, and the document does not give his age or occupation.

In summary, therefore, the research on John Walker is based on 'most likely' rather than fact. He seems to have had links to quarrying through his father and brother, so it would seem probable that he would describe himself as a quarry labourer in the 1881 census return. The mystery of his marriage is unresolved, but a likely scenario is that his marriage failed early on. He appears to have had a criminal record and eventually landed up in the workhouse, dying there, and being buried in Beckett Street Cemetery in a common grave. The family were not wealthy as his brother, Samuel's life history demonstrated, also being buried in a pauper's grave, despite working all his life.

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