

Thomas Walker

(1813-1885)

5 May 2020

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Thomas Walker's life was one of poverty, frequent house moves, changes of employment, deaths of children, and ultimately the workhouse, where he died aged 72. He seems to have lived almost the whole of his life in one tiny area of Leeds, namely Bank, Quarry Hill and across the River Aire into Holbeck, only leaving the area when he entered the workhouse at Burmantofts.

Thomas was born on 21st December 1812¹ and was baptised at St Peter's, Leeds Parish Church on 8th March 1813¹. The baptism register showed his place of residence as Mabgate, Leeds. His father was Joseph Walker, a dyer, and his mother was Martha¹. Both these names were later given to Thomas' first two children^{9,10}.

Mabgate is the street where Mabgate Mills, a listed building converted to housing, is today currently situated. The word 'Mab' meant a prostitute and 'gate' related to a street². Not an auspicious area to be living in! However, Mab is also more commonly defined as 'a queen of the fairies who could control peoples dreams'³. The road, runs alongside a small river, Lady Beck, also known as Mabgate Beck, and in the 19th century became a crowded area with housing, foundries, woollen mills, and pubs along its length. There was also a cholera burial ground⁴. In 1813, however, the area was relatively uncrowded, but development here had started as early as 1790 with the woollen mill⁵. No doubt this is why Joseph Walker, a dyer, and his family were living and working in this area.

On 13th October, 1835 Thomas Walker, a bachelor, married a widow, Elizabeth Jones, at St Peter's, Leeds Parish Church after banns had been called on 27 September, 4 October, and 11 October 1835⁵. The parish record shows Thomas' occupation to be a dyer, like his father⁵. Both the bride and groom did not sign the parish register and simply made their mark. This suggested that they were unable to read or write⁵.

Elizabeth had been baptised as Eliza Maria Fisher on 9th August 1814⁶ and was shown as 'Eliza' in all documents except this marriage record. She too had been born in Mabgate to William and Eliza Maria Fisher⁶. Her father was a cloth dresser⁶ and was probably employed in the mill, like Thomas' father. Eliza married her first husband, Joseph Jones, a cloth dresser, in St Peter's Parish Church, Leeds on 15th September 1833⁷. Her husband died soon after, in March 1835⁸ and was buried on the 8th March 1835 at St Peter's Parish Church. The burial record showed his age to be 28 and noted that he was a married man living on the York Road⁸.

Between the marriage of Thomas and Eliza in 1835 and the 1841 census returns, the couple had three children. Martha was born on 28th August 1836⁹ at York Road in Leeds, and was baptised on 20th February 1837⁹. The baptism record shows Thomas, her father as a dyer. Joseph was born 10th August 1837¹⁰ and baptised at St Peter's Parish Church, Leeds on 10th June 1838. His father, Thomas Walker, was listed as a dyer, married to Eliza, and the family

now lived in the Bank area of Leeds¹⁰. Sadly, Joseph died in the third quarter of 1839¹¹. The third child born before 1841 was a son, William Walker. He was born on 5th September 1840 at Cavalier Street, Leeds¹². The baptism took place at St Peter's Parish Church on 27th June 1841¹². The parish record showed his parents to have been Thomas Walker, a dyer, and Eliza¹².

The 1841 census return showed Thomas Walker as a lab[ourer] living in Fawcett Street¹³, just down the road from Cavalier Street²⁶. The census showed that living with him were Eliza, his wife, and two little girls, Sophia (aged 3), and Wilhelima (aged 1). The misspelling of the children's names and sex was probably due to the illiteracy of the parents along with the enumerator's poor skills, because these two children were almost certainly Martha and William. Thomas was no longer working as a dyer and the area where the family was now living was in Quarry Hill and Bank, both of which were, even then, overcrowded, poorly supplied with clean water and no sewage so, consequently, disease was rampant. The sewage system was not built in Leeds until 1850 and was completed in 1855²⁷ following several outbreaks of cholera.

By the time the 1851 census was taken Thomas was working as a plaster's labourer¹⁸ and was living with Eliza and his three living children at 13 Boynton Street in the Quarry Hill area of Leeds¹⁸. A lot had happened to the family in the intervening 10 years. They had moved several times^{15,16,17}, Thomas had changed his job several times too^{15,16,17} and there had been several deaths and births in the family. Firstly, Thomas' oldest daughter, Martha, must have died before 1844 when her new sister, Martha Elizabeth was born and baptised¹⁵. It has not been possible to identify exactly when the first daughter, Martha, died.

Secondly, William must also have died as he was not to be found on searching the 1851 census returns. There are at least 5 possible deaths of a William Walker of the correct age who died between March 1841, when the previous census was taken, and June 1851. It is not possible to be certain which entry was Thomas and Eliza's son, William.

Thirdly, three more children had been born, namely Martha Elizabeth Walker in 1844¹⁵, Michael Walker in 1845¹⁶ and Thomas Walker in 1850¹⁷.

Martha Elizabeth Walker was born on 8th February 1844¹⁵ in Plane Street, off York Street³³ in Leeds and was baptised on 25th February 1844. The baptismal record showed her father, Thomas Walker, was working once again as a dyer¹⁵.

Michael Walker was born 14 September 1845¹⁶, and was baptised, like all his siblings, at St Peter's Parish Church, Leeds¹⁶. The family had moved yet again and were now living in High Street, near to St Peter's Square²⁶. Thomas, his father was still working as a dyer¹⁶.

Thomas Walker, the couple's sixth child, was born on 19th April 1850¹⁷. By now they were living in Somerset Street¹⁷ which was between Kirkgate Market and St Peter's Square²⁶. The baptism was on 20th May 1850, again at St Peter's Parish Church, and his father, Thomas' occupation was listed as a bricklayer¹⁷. So, once again, there had been a change of address and job.

Between the 1851 and 1861 census returns for the Walker family there were two further daughters born, Eliza (born in 1852)¹⁹ and Hannah (born in 1857)²². Their mother, Eliza was aged 43 when Hannah, her youngest child, was born.

When Eliza (Jnr) Walker was born on 22nd August 1852 the family had moved again and were living in Lemon Street¹⁹. Her father, Thomas was working as a plasterer¹⁹ by the time Eliza was baptised on 15th May 1853¹⁹. Little Eliza Walker died and was buried in Beckett Street Cemetery on 19th December 1854²⁰. She was described as the daughter of Thomas Walker and her place of residence was Marshall Court. This building is still in use today, being used as business units, and is off Water Street^{21,33}. A modern day photo of Marshall Court, numbers 1-6, can be seen on the Leodis website²¹. Two year old Eliza was buried in the Anglican sector of the cemetery in a shared common grave; number 5211²⁰.

4th March 1857 brought the arrival of Hannah Walker, the youngest child of Thomas and Eliza Walker²¹. Her baptism took place at St Peter's Parish Church in Leeds on 8th September 1857²¹. The parish record showed yet another new address and another job for Thomas. The family were living at Billett Street which was situated between Charles Street and High Street²⁶ and Thomas was listed as a labourer²¹.

The 1861 census return showed the family living at 5 Marshall's Court with Thomas working as a labourer²³. Eliza, his wife, was shown to be working as a charwoman²³. Their oldest living son, Michael (aged 16), was working as a mechanic. Thomas (aged 11), Martha (aged 17) and Hannah (aged 4) were all still living with their parents. Thomas was at school.

Thomas Walker and his family seemed to have settled for the first time and were still living in 5 Marshall Court in 1871²⁴. The family had moved across the River Aire to move into this new housing in Holbeck, where conditions were a little improved on Quarry Hill and Bank. Thomas was employed as a plasterer. Eliza had stopped her work as a charwoman, Michael was still employed as a mechanic and Hannah was working as a seamstress²⁴.

Martha Elizabeth had died in 1862, aged 17²⁵. She was buried on 5th September 1862 in the Anglican Sector of Beckett Street Cemetery in a shared common grave; number 1487. Her place of death was in the optimistically named House of Recovery²⁵. The House of Recovery was a hospital for infectious diseases and, at the time of Martha's death, was situated near the Workhouse, and conveniently close to the Cemetery on Beckett Street²⁶. This was the second site for the hospital as previously it had been built in the area of Vicar Lane in 1804²⁷. It opened in about 1850 and took all infectious disease victims as well as offering vaccination against smallpox²⁷. It is not known what Martha Elizabeth died from without access to a death certificate.

In the 1881 census returns Thomas Walker was shown as an inmate of Leeds Union Workhouse, aged 68²⁸. He was a plasterer but at the time had no occupation. He was listed as still being married²⁸. However, there are no obvious 1881 census returns to show that Eliza was alive so perhaps she had died. There is a possible death for an Eliza Walker in Leeds 1878²⁹ who was listed as being aged 64 at the time of her death. There is another possible death for Eliza Walker, aged 70, in Leeds in 1884³⁰. A death certificate would clarify which lady was Thomas' wife.

9. 'Martha Walker baptism' (1836) Baptism record of St Peter's Parish Church, Leeds 1836 Pg.703 *West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1910. West Yorkshire Archive Service; Wakefield, Yorkshire, England; Yorkshire Parish Records; (1837)* Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> Accessed 4 May 2020
10. 'Joseph Walker baptism' (1838)) Baptism record of St Peter's Parish Church, Leeds 1838 Pg442. *West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1910. West Yorkshire Archive Service; Wakefield, Yorkshire, England; Yorkshire Parish Records; (1838)* Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> Accessed 4 May 2020
11. 'Joseph Walker death'(1839)*Certified entry recording death on the Civil Registration Index Jul-Aug-Sep 1839* Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> Accessed 4 May 2020
12. 'William Walker baptism'(1841) baptism record of St Peter's Parish Church, Leeds 1841. Pg 429. *West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1910. West Yorkshire Archive Service; Wakefield, Yorkshire, England; Yorkshire Parish Records; new Reference Number: RDP68/3A/12 (1841)* Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> Accessed 4 May 2020
13. 'Thomas Walker' (1841) *Census returns for Fawcett Street, Leeds, Kirkgate, Yorkshire. Public Record Office: PRO HO107/1343/book4 Folio:13 Pg:18 (1841).* Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> Accessed 4 May 2020
14. 'Thomas Walker' (1851). *Census return for 13 Boynton Street, Leeds, North Leeds, Yorkshire. Public Record Office: PRO HO107/230 Folio: 803 Pg:12 Schedule:55. (1851)*Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk>
15. 'Baptism Martha Elizabeth Walker' (1844) St Peter's Parish Church, Leeds Pg:328. *West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1910. West Yorkshire Archive Service; Wakefield, Yorkshire, England; Yorkshire Parish Records; New Reference Number:RDP68/3A/13 (1844)* Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> Accessed 4 May 2020
16. 'Baptism Michael Walker' (1845) St Peter's Parish Church, Leeds Pg:60. *West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1910. West Yorkshire Archive Service; Wakefield, Yorkshire, England; Yorkshire Parish Records; New Reference Number:RDP68/3A/14 (1845)* Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> Accessed 4 May 2020
17. 'Baptism Thomas Walker' (1850) St Peter's Parish Church, Leeds Pg:454. *West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1910. West Yorkshire Archive Service; Wakefield, Yorkshire, England; Yorkshire Parish Records; New Reference Number: RDP68/3A/15 (1850)* Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> Accessed 4 May 2020
18. 'Thomas Walker' (1851). *Census return for 13 Boynton Street, Leeds, North Leeds, Yorkshire. Public Record Office: PRO HO107/230 Folio: 803 Pg:12 Schedule:55. (1851)*Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> Accessed 4 May 2020
19. 'Baptism Eliza Walker' (1853) St Peter's Parish Church, Leeds Pg: 387. *West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1910. West Yorkshire Archive Service; Wakefield, Yorkshire, England; Yorkshire Parish Records; New Reference Number: RDP68/3A/16 (1853)* Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> Accessed 4 May 2020
20. 'Burial Eliza Walker' (1854) *Leeds, England, Beckett Street Cemetery, 1845-1987, burials-Nonconformists. RefLC/CEM(B)/1/1, Numbers 1-18,747, 1845-1862. (1854).* Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk>. Accessed 4 May 2020
21. 'Marshall Court' (date recent) *Water Lane showing Marshall Court. Leodis: A photographic archive of Leeds. Subject ID:2010511_170665 Class No: Mil70/14 Leeds Library and Information Services.* Available at <http://www.leodis.net/> Accessed 6 May 2020
22. 'Baptism Hannah Walker' (1857) St Peter's Parish Church, Leeds Pg: 571. *West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1910. West Yorkshire Archive Service; Wakefield, Yorkshire, England; Yorkshire Parish Records; New Reference Number: RDP68/3A/17 (1857)* Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> Accessed 4 May 2020

23. 'Thomas Walker' (1861) *Census returns for 5 Marshall's Court, Leeds, North East Leeds, Yorkshire. Public Record Office: PRO RG9/3381 Folio:92 Pg:33 Schedule:183.* (1861) Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> Accessed 4 May 2020
24. 'Thomas Walker' (1871) *Census returns for 5 Marshall's Court, Leeds, North East Leeds, Yorkshire. Public Record Office: PRO RG10/4554 Folio:15 Pg:24 Schedule:122.* (1871) Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> Accessed 4 May 2020
25. 'Burial Martha Elizabeth Walker' (1862) *Leeds, England, Beckett Street Cemetery, 1845-1987, burials-Anglicans Ref LC/CEM(B)/1/2, Numbers 18748-38168, 1862-1874.* (1862). Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk>. Accessed 4 May 2020
26. Old ordinance Survey Maps. Leeds North East (1890). The Godfrey Coloured Edition Yorkshire Sheet 218.02. Pub: Alan Godfrey Maps. Personal copy. Available for purchase at <https://www.alangodfreymaps.co.uk>
27. 'Leeds House of Recovery' by S.T. Anning. Published on the National Centre for Biotechnology Information . Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1033950/pdf/medhist00138->
28. 'Thomas Walker' (1881) *Census returns for Leeds Union Workhouse, Becket Street, Leeds, North Leeds, Yorkshire. Public Record Office PRO RG11/4524 Folio:106 Pg:18 Line 5.* (1881) Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> Accessed 4 May 2020
29. 'Eliza Walker possible death' (1878) *Certified entry recording death on the Civil Registration Index GRO reference:1878 qtr: Apr-May-Jun District: Leeds Vol:9b Pg:314.* (1878) Available at <https://www.gro.gov.uk/> Accessed 7 May 2020
30. 'Eliza Walker possible death' (1884) *Certified entry recording death on the Civil Registration Index GRO reference: 1884 qtr: Oct-Nov_Dec District: Leeds vol:9b Pg:321* (1884) Available at <https://www.gro.gov.uk/> Accessed 7 May 2020
31. 'Thomas Walker' (1885) *Certified entry recording death on the Civil Registration Index GRO ref:June 1885 Qtr Apr-May-Jun District:leeds Vol (b Pg:281.* (1885) Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> Accessed 4 May 2020
32. 'Thomas Walker' (1855) *Leeds, England, Beckett Street Cemetery, 1845-1987, burials-Nonconformists. RefLC/CEM(B)/1/8, Numbers 18750-38800, 1873-1889.* (1885). Available at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk>. Accessed 4 May 2020
33. Old ordinance Survey maps ; Leeds (SE) 1890 Yorkshire Sheet 218.06. The Godfrey Coloured Edition. Pub: Alan Godfrey Maps. Personal copy. Available for purchase at <https://www.alangodfreymaps.co.uk>