

Allens from Coleorton

Jenny Dobson describes her search for the origins of her family and delight at finding a Coleorton connection.

I'm not a native of Leicestershire. This story is here because I decided to start researching my family history – something I'd talked about doing 'one day'! That day came in autumn 2009 when I joined a six week course at a local college on family history research using the internet.

I arrived at the class with a summary of what I knew about my grandparents. This story focusses on my paternal grandfather, William Henry Allen. My dad had remembered William's father, George and his wife Sarah, and said that they came from Birmingham.

Indeed, I soon discovered that William Henry was born in 1892 and registered at Birmingham. There's an idea that 'nobody went anywhere' in the past but William Henry's background shows just how much some families did move about even then – in his case, movements that surprisingly led back to Coleorton, just a few miles from where, quite by chance due to my husband's new job, I came to live in 1974!

I remember William Henry, though I was only 10 when he died. He was not very tall, slight in build and with a bad cough. What I understand now is that he was a shadow of the man he must once have been: a man lucky to be alive at all but at a terrible cost to his health and well-being.

My limited memories mean that it has been especially rewarding and instructive to learn more about his life and experiences. When I began researching, William's only surviving daughter told me that he had taught all his children how to knit – which gave me a very different picture of a man who seemed always rather gruff to me. She also remembered helping her mother to nurse him when he was ill and he hallucinated about struggling to survive in deep water, an experience which we now believe dates to WW1.

I traced William initially using census records, etc., and started a family tree on ancestry.co.uk, through which I contacted a second cousin, grandchild of William's immediate older brother. This cousin then put me in touch with a fourth cousin, whom I thank for much of this research. He had done much of it in person with his sister at Leicester Record Office and generously shared it with several other descendants of the family. It was he who provided that first big surprise: the discovery that the Allens did not come from Birmingham, as my father had believed, but before that, the family was in north-west Leicestershire!

Following established good family history practice, I've attempted to check information passed to me and would expect anyone looking at my contribution here to do the same.

Additionally, with the arrival of DNA testing and the discovery that there is a Guild of One Name Studies project to research those bearing the Allen surname, my 4th cousin has revealed a 'Y' chromosome match to another male Allen whose family appear to originate at Tideswell, Derbyshire. More work is needed hopefully to establish how they are linked and whether the first Allens recorded living at Coleorton did in fact arrive there from Derbyshire.

So now, back to what is, as far as I know at present, the earliest Allen marriage in Leicestershire.

The following traces a particular line of descent from the Allen family at Coleorton. All direct ancestors of the author are named in bold when they are first mentioned and occasionally when repeated, if that seems a necessary prompt. The author is Generation 1; her father, generation 2; and so on.

Paragraphs in italics give limited details relating to the women these male descendants married, such as where they were born.

John Allen - Generation 10, i.e. my 7x great grandfather

who may have been born about 1690 at Cole Orton, Leicestershire, where some of the earliest records are illegible.

The village¹ lies on the main route between Loughborough and Ashby de la Zouch, closer to Ashby than Loughborough. This position lends credence to a marriage of a John Alleyn to **Mary Bayley** at Ashby de la Zouch, 'by banns' on 28 Sep 1712² being that of 'our' John. There are a handful of John Allens baptised in Leicestershire within a few years of 1690, including one at Kegworth, who is also close enough to become the man marrying Mary Bayley. And as noted above, maybe John came from outside Leicestershire.

A number of records exist for the Bayley/Baily name at Cole Orton which look promising but none which can be assigned to Mary with confidence. There is a baptism in Dec 1696 but as it's followed by a burial in March this cannot be her. The Bailey name can still be found in this area today.

John and Mary Alleyne³ appear to have the following sons: **John**, (baptism untraced); William, bap. 11 Nov 1715; Edward, bap. 29 Mar 1719 and Joseph, bap. 15 Feb 1722, bur. 7 Feb 1723 – a choice of names which, whether deliberately or not, will echo down the generations. There was also a burial for a Rebecca Allen on 31 Jul 1731, daughter of Mary, widow, and this could be a sister whose baptism has not been traced. Given that Mary was noted as 'widow', it seems likely that John was buried in 1728, on either 2 or 20 August (figures unclear).

No one has yet found any written evidence of how John provided a living for his family.

Without any other information, it appeared reasonable to guess that most likely John and his sons as they grew up would have been agricultural labourers. However, my attention has been drawn to Robert F. Hartley's paper on *The Tudor Miners of Coleorton, Leics*⁴ and it must be equally possible that John may have been a miner.

John Allen - Generation 9

may have been born before this couple married, if the above marriage is the correct record because his estimated year of birth is 1709. However, given that he is thought to marry **Jane Hibbert** at Coleorton on 30 Sep 1734, he could have been a child of the marriage.

*Though the marriage entry states 'both of this parish', there is no baptism for Jane at Coleorton before 1718, nor is the Hibbert name very common in this parish.*⁵

¹ Coleorton was, of the Leics villages I checked in the Victoria County History books, the earliest to experience enclosure, initially in 1511. It was fully enclosed by 1638, well before John's birth and before any Acts of Parliament concerning 'Inclosure'.

² (source: confirmed, Leics parish records)

³ An interesting early spelling which sounds more like the Norman name it may once have been.

⁴ Robert F. Hartley, *The Tudor Miners of Leicestershire*, Bulletin of the Peak District Mines Historical Society, Vol. 12, No.3, 1994.

⁵ *She may have had a brother John who married Dorothy Robey in 1749.*

This couple had seven children: Rebecca, b. 1735; **William**, bap. 22 Jun 1741: Anne, bur. 7 Apr 1742; Mary, bap. 2 Jul 1744; John, bap. 3 Mar 1746; Sarah, bap. 22 Jul 1750 and Jane, bur. 19 Nov 1752, all at Coleorton. The apparently missing baptisms of the children who are buried could have been performed at neighbouring parishes though none have so far been traced. Plausible marriages have been traced for Rebecca, Mary and Sarah.

William Allen - Generation 8

He married **Dorothy Thorpe** on 31 Jan 1767/68 at Coleorton and we have traced four children for them: **Richard**, bap. 6 Nov 1768; Mary, bap. 13 Oct 1771; Esther, bap. 3 Apr 1774 and William, bap. 15 Mar 1777, all at Coleorton. As this marriage took place after Hardwicke's Act, we obtained more information from the register: William was recorded as a labourer and, interestingly, he signed his name.

Richard Allen - Generation 7

married **Mary Varley** by banns on 10 Nov 1794, at Coleorton and he also signed his name. One of the witnesses was Simon Varley, who may be either father or brother of Mary.

They had a son **Joseph**, bap. 30 Aug 1795 at Coleorton, though he later gave his birth place as Thringstone. They probably also had two more sons and two daughters.

Evidence from a later Quarter Sessions case suggests that Richard died when Joseph was aged about 7 yrs, thus about 1802, though his burial has not been traced in the Leics records on findmypast.

There are entries for the Varley name at Coleorton but none of the right date to be 'our' Mary. The Varley name can be found at Worthington and Mary may have been baptised there. Worthington is only a few miles away, roughly north of Coleorton.

Joseph Allen - Generation 6

is the common ancestor shared by my 4th cousin, another line and 'our' line, shared by myself, and other first and second cousins – plus a lot more that I don't know about!

Joseph first married Mary Willson, (though her surname is rather unclear), who came from Austrey, Warwicks. They were married, after banns, on 12 July 1812 at St James, Twycross by Joseph Phillimore. Joseph Allen made his mark but it appears that Mary signed, as did a witness named William Willson, possibly her father or brother.

Though it was thought they may have had seven children, records have only been found for six, all at St. James, Twycross: Thomas, bap. 22 Aug 1813; John, bap. 28 Jan 1816⁶; Frances, bur. 3 Jan 1823, 'age 4 yrs & 8 mos'; Joseph, bur. 16 Feb 1823 'age 2 yrs'; Fanny, bap. 29 Jan 1826 and William who was baptised on the day his mother was buried, 23 Feb 1827. Unusually for the time, baby William appears to have survived and went on to have a family of his own - though there are other instances of this happening elsewhere in my genealogy.

Both children's burials gave their parents' abode as Little Orton, a detached part of the parish of Merevale and Mary's burial shows the family lived at Lea Grange, also a detached part of the parish of Merevale. Checking the map shows that Twycross was much closer for taking babies to be baptised, etc., but these records suggest that Joseph was moving about for work. There appears at least the possibility that his moves are all associated with lands belonging to the Ferrers family.

Our line descends from **Joseph's** second marriage, which took place with **Sarah Newman**, on 18 Feb 1828 at Merevale, near Atherstone, now in Warwickshire. He was recorded as 'widower' and they were married by banns, both making their marks.

⁶ Possibly the John Allen to be found at Coleorton in 1841.

*Sarah was baptised on 12 Feb 1805, at Austrey, Warwicks, the daughter of **Thomas Newman** and his wife **Elizabeth Pollett**, (Gen. 7) who were married on 7 Jul 1802 at Orton on the Hill, Leicestershire.*

It's believed that five of Mary's children, including William, were living at this time, two: Frances, b.1818 & Joseph, b.1821 having died in 1823.

Then Joseph and Sarah had together: **James**, b. 1828, Merevale (Gen. 5); Charles, b. 1832, Leics; Mary, b. 1838, Merevale; Susannah / Hannah, b. abt 1841, Merevale and George, bap. 5 Apr 1844, Norton Juxta Twycross.

After his marriage Joseph became the subject of a court case, dated 9 Feb 1829, which concerned the provision of Poor Relief and their family's entitlement to it or not in the parish of Merevale. The issue concerning the parish is that because Joseph, together with his mother & siblings, received poor relief in the parish of Coleorton after the death of his father, Richard, this established that the parish accepted the family as settled there. Therefore, Merevale parish claimed it had no responsibility to provide them with poor relief and could order their removal to their parish of settlement, i.e. Coleorton.

Settlement was generally conferred by birthplace and certificates of settlement might be given to journeymen tradesmen, who upon completion of their apprenticeship, might move to another place in search of work. The settlement certificate would be lodged in the parish chest at the new parish and if at a future date they appeared likely to be in need of poor relief, it would be returned to them as evidence to prove settlement in their birthplace parish when they returned there in need.

The case went to appeal (I believe in 1830) when three Justices quashed the removal order, quoting other cases which had established that providing parish relief to paupers was no evidence as to their settlement. Joseph and Sarah with their five children were ordered to be removed to Coleorton and this begs the question as to who were the children? We know from his christening date, 15 Jun 1828, that the first child of this second marriage, James, must have numbered amongst the family but their next child, Charles, was not baptised until 1832. It seems likely that Thomas, the very first of Joseph and Mary's offspring, baptised 22 Aug 1813 at St James, Twycross, was not with the family at the time of the removal. He would have been 16 years old and so quite possibly was already in live-in employment away from his father – but the numbers still don't add up from what we currently know. I believe there aren't any surviving Poor Relief records for this period for Coleorton which could have added detail to the end of this episode.

By the 1841 census Joseph, Sarah and family were back at Lea Grange, between Orton on the Hill and Twycross. The only child of Joseph's first marriage still with them at that time was William, aged 14.

In 1851 they were at Norton Juxta Twycross and living with them, besides William and their younger children, were James and his wife Elizabeth and their first child, Joseph, though he appears to be recorded as the son of Joseph and Sarah.

Joseph senior died on 29 Apr 1860, causes of death recorded as kidney disease and congestion of the brain. Sarah died on 6 May 1874 at Norton Juxta Twycross.

James Allen - Generation 5

As already noted, James, his wife and first child, were recorded as living with his parents in the 1851 census, where James gave his occupation as agricultural labourer.

James was married by banns at Norton By Twycross on 27 Mar 1849 to Elizabeth Miller. James was aged 20 and they both made their marks.

On the marriage record at Norton By Twycross, Elizabeth gave her age as 26 years and employment as a house servant. In 1841, she may be living with a widowed woman, Dinah Miller, who may be her mother but this census doesn't note relationships. A possible baptism exists for her at Norton on 27 Jan 1822, daughter of Thomas Miller and Sarah – which mother's name could be a recording error. There is scant information to support the idea that this is 'our' Elizabeth, despite the differing mother's name, but if we have the correct census record for her, perhaps it isn't too big a stretch of the imagination to notice that their second daughter, born about 1856, was named 'Dinah'. Given that this wasn't one of the more common female names, it may not be fanciful to think this girl was named for Elizabeth's mother.

By 1861, James and Elizabeth lived at Ashby Woulds, Ashby de la Zouch. Their first born, Joseph, born at Norton, had been joined by Susannah, b. 1852 at Norton and Dinah, b. 1856 at Appleby, Derbyshire, (though not far from Ashby); then Thomas, b. 1858 at Ashby Woulds and John, just one month old, also born at Ashby Woulds. Interestingly as it's before the 1870 Education Act, their daughters are both shown as 'scholars' (but so also is 3yr old Thomas), which at least suggests there was perhaps a local school.

The family had a different location again, ten years later in 1871, residing at Hall Farm, Shustoke in Warwickshire, which still exists today. The older children were all elsewhere, only John and our ancestor **George, (Gen. 4)**, b. Fillongley, Warwicks, their last two children, were living with James and Elizabeth.

It shouldn't surprise us to see the offspring of agricultural labourers being born and baptised at different places because their fathers regularly moved from one employer to another, often being employed for only one year at a time. Movement patterns often revolve around the location of hiring fairs⁷.

By 1881, James and Elizabeth had moved to 8, Clive Place, Church Lane, Aston, a suburb of Birmingham. James gave his occupation as 'navvy', as do both his sons, John and George. This shortened version of the word 'navigator' crept into the language during the great period of canal building. Given the amount of digging required to create a canal, it shouldn't surprise us that the term quickly came to refer to anyone who laboured in the construction business, including the next major network – that of the railways. This period in Birmingham would have seen a building boom as the city grew. Former farm workers may well have been better paid in the building trade than at farm work. With three men in the household working, perhaps this was a better time for them, which may help explain why the family also included a 10 year old grand-daughter, Elizabeth⁸, who had been baptised at Shustoke on 28 May 1871.

Elizabeth Allen, James' wife, possibly died in 1886 at Aston, either Mar Q or during April that year.

By 1891, James lived with his youngest son, George, (Gen. 4), and his family. James was a widower, age 66, working as an Excavator. This may simply be a smarter term used by the enumerator than 'navvy' but alternatively, it might signify that James worked with a steam shovel team. The first patent for a steam shovel was granted as early as 1839. The full-swing, revolving shovel was developed in England in 1884 and became the preferred type, soon becoming commonplace. One can imagine that an expanding city such as Birmingham was in the 19th century would have needed steam shovel technology and the men to operate them.

⁷ A modern witness suggests such fairs continued into the 20th century.

⁸ Born in Meriden workhouse, the illegitimate child of James' daughter Susannah.

James appears to have died whilst living at Aston. Four possible matches come up but of these, three seem either much too old or too young. The best fit by age is in the Jun Q of 1894, with age at death given as 68. Assuming this is correct, he would have been still alive when his grandson **William Henry, (Gen. 3)**, George's second son, was born in 1892. Maybe it was only after James had died, that George felt able to leave Birmingham.

George Allen - Generation 4

George was his parents' last child and was born on 13 Apr 1863 at Fillongley, Warwickshire⁹, his birth certificate confirming his mother's maiden name as Miller. He was baptised 10 May.

George has already been noted on his parents' 1871 (Shustoke) census record, aged 7 – because he hadn't yet reached his birthday. By 1881, he worked as a 'navvy' like his father.

In 1891 George was employed as a carter, probably also a job associated with construction work. At the time, this haulage work would have been done by horse power.

George was married on 13 Sep 1885 to **Sarah Hobday** at the parish church of Holy Trinity, Bordesley, Warwickshire. They both gave the same address, '5 Ct, 9^h Floodgate Str, Deritend' though this need not be interpreted as evidence that they already lived together. Rather, it was fairly common to give a single address to avoid paying two fees for banns, one for each parish of bride and groom. George signed his name – so perhaps his parents were truthful when they recorded him as a 'scholar' in the 1871 census – while Sarah made her mark.

By the 1891 census, besides having widower James living with them, George and Sarah have their daughters Lilly, b. 1886 and Elizabeth, b. 1889 plus baby Tom, just 8 months old, all at 88 Francis Street, Aston.

Then **William Henry, (Gen 3)**, was born in 1892, Neechells, B'ham; Nellie, born at Edingley, Notts in 1894; then George jnr, b. 1896, John, b. 1898 and Joseph, b. 1900, all at Newark-on-Trent, Notts.

In 1901 they lived at Tenter Buildings, George gave his job as 'Labourer' and there is anecdotal evidence that he moved to Newark to work for the town Water Department, supported later by Sarah's obituary in the local newspaper.¹⁰

George and Sarah's family continued to grow. The 1911 census showed that Lilly and Elizabeth have left home but Tom, William Henry, Nellie, George, John and Joseph had been joined by Sarah, 1901; James, 1904; Violet, 1907 and Charles, 1908. However this census gives information which has not been required before: besides asking how long a couple had been married, they were also asked how many children they have had who were born alive, with separate figures for those still living and those who since died. This reveals that George and Sarah had been married 25 years and that they have had 15 children in that time, three of whom have died¹¹.

With 2 adults and 10 'children' - though four old enough to be working - in the household, it isn't surprising to find that the family have moved to 5 Lindum Street, a house which still survives.

George died in 1932, aged 69. Sarah died in March 1946.

William Henry Allen - Generation 3

William was born on 18 Feb 1892, at 2 Melvina Place, Gt Francis Street, Duddeston, Aston and his mother registered his birth on 30 March, father's occupation 'Road labourer'. He was baptised on 13

⁹ Birth registered in the Meriden district.

¹⁰ March 22 1946.

¹¹ These were twin boys and a son, all born during the family's time in Birmingham.

Mar 1892, parish of St James, Ashsted, 'in the County of Birmingham'. In 1901, William was a scholar but by 1911, living with his parents at Lindum Street, Newark, he was a maltster, the same occupation as his elder brother, Tom. By this date, the town had several malt producers, a natural complement to its brewing industry. Then came WW1.

Photos survive of William in uniform so initially it was disappointing to be unable to find a military record for him. Presumably it was lost during the Blitz of WW2. However, William's medals are in the family. The custom of engraving these with the soldier's army number (no. 13357) meant that eventually it was possible to identify that he was a Private with the 9th Service Battalion of the Notts and Derbys Regiment, otherwise known as the 'Sherwood Foresters'. His medal index card (MIC) also gave a small detail which confirmed how early he was in the war and where, information supported by John Steven Morse's account of the battalion's story¹².

William fought at Gallipoli, where he was injured in the side and hospitalised. He rejoined the battalion whilst they were in Egypt. On 26 Jun 1916, the 9th entrained for Alexandria, from where they sailed to France. Their journey included a stop-over at Malta on 1 Jul 1916, the day that the Battle of the Somme began. Arriving at Marseilles, they entrained for an uncomfortable 28 hour ride through France.

Events continued with the 9th fighting in the Battle of Thiepval on 26-28 Sep 1916, a major action in which William was wounded in one leg and taken prisoner. The date of his capture, 26th, is confirmed by a report in the Newark Herald newspaper for 26 Oct 1916 where his parents described the whereabouts of their five enlisted sons.

The next photograph of William Henry is his wedding photograph, showing a changed man whose suit hangs upon him, a man not yet recovered from the exigencies of war and imprisonment. He married Violet Beedham on 26 Oct 1920 at Long Bennington, Lincs.

Together William and Violet had six children who lived and the baptismal records at St. Leonard's, Newark shed a useful light on the work that William was doing at the time, as follows:

Charles Henry	born 1 Feb 1923	bapt 23 Feb 1923	William was a malster
Grace Margaret	10 Jan 1925	bapt 30 Jan 1925	" a general labourer
living son	1931	bapt 1931	" a labourer
living daughter	1933	bapt 1933	" a labourer
Joan	18 Sep 1936	bapt 3 Oct 1936	" a pipe jointer
living son	1940	bapt 1940	" a brewers' labourer

William and Violet also had another daughter, Violet, whose birth was registered in the Mar Q of 1930, but who only lived a few hours. No baptism was found for her at St. Leonard's.

William and Violet lived at 8 Elgin Place¹³ when all their children were born and the house must have been fairly crowded. In the spring of 1942, however, their eldest son (& my future father) Charles was called up into the army. Given the contemporary situation, the family would probably have preferred to remain over-crowded and to have kept him at home.

William Henry died on 18 Oct 1957 and was buried in the London Road cemetery, Newark-on-Trent, in grave number 363/L/West.

¹² 9th Service Battalion, The Sherwood Foresters, John Stephen Morse, Tommies Guides, 2007.

¹³ Also confirmed by the 1939 National Register.

Charles Henry Allen – Generation 2

My father was his parents' eldest child and on leaving school in 1937, aged 14, he went to work as a clerk for Warwick & Richardson's, then one of the town's largest breweries.

However, Charles had wanted to be an engineer and his army service in WW2 eventually gave him the chance to embark upon that career.

He was in the Royal Tank Corps, amongst a unit which landed on Gold beach, Arromanches, Normandy on 13 Jun 1944. They spent the winter of 1944-45 in the Belgian Ardennes before moving into Holland. He once described to me how they crossed the Rhine at Nijmegen when the Germans had left the bridge unfit for vehicles.

Charles returned home on leave to marry Patricia Dale on 10 April 1946 at Newark and he was later demobbed in January 1947. He worked as a diesel engineer for a number of years but ended his working life employed by a company making engineering teaching equipment. His job also resulted in travel to some interesting places, such as the Caribbean, Libya, Kuwait and Australia.

His work took him to live at Stafford, Leicester, Rugby (Warwicks), Newton-le-Willows (Lancs), Newark again, Nottingham and Long Eaton. Eventually he retired to Loughborough to be close to my family.

Charles died on 17 July 2007.

Jenny Dobson

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