

Jessie Brown's Lot: A London-Scottish Heritage Appendix

An update on the Lawrence family - Cowdenbeath, Cupar; Luton, Flamstead

I spent many fruitless hours searching for the death record of Mary Brown, née Lawrence. I had discovered her as a 48 year old Painter's Widow at 197, High Street Scoonie in 1851¹, with five of her children and five Beveridge grandchildren, but as she didn't appear as Mary Brown in 1861, I assumed she had died in the intervening years. Trawling through *Ancestry* trees one day, I was startled to find 'my' Mary Lawrence married to a Henry Pearson. Further investigation showed that he had also been married before, but his wife had died in 1851. Henry and Mary were living next door to each other in Leven, and maybe had each supported the other in their widowhood.



54 High Street Leven

The marriage certificate turned up a few more surprises:

On the 29th day of December 1856 at Manse of Kennoway Marriage (after banns) was solemnised between us according to the forms of the Established Church of Scotland.

Signed: Henry Pearson; 56; High St. Leven; Agricultural Labourer; Widower; David Pearson, Mill Weaver Dec^d; Elspit Martin Dec^d;

Signed: Mary Daylell Maxwell Laurence; 54; High St Leven; House Painter (Mistress) Widow;

No relationship; Matthew Lawrence, Betsy Lawrence, maiden name Barclay;

Signed: David Bell, Min^r, Thomas Mackis, Isabella Mackis, witnesses.

¹ <http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/> 456/00 001/00 039, 1851 census, Scoonie

Reg at Kennoway 31.12.1856

This was clearly the right Mary Lawrence – father’s name Matthew, mother’s Betsy or Elizabeth Barclay; Mary had listed herself as a painter’s widow, and son Nichol as a house painter on the census return, so House Painter (Mistress) was also right, but where did the names Daylell and Maxwell come from? There is no record of these names connected with either her or others in her family. Were these the names of others she had had relationships with? Or was she trying to increase her status in some way? Or was it just a mistake in the register? The name Maxwell appears on her death certificate as well, but without explanation.

She and her new husband Henry moved to Cowdenbeath, where they were recorded in 1861² aged 62 and 59 respectively. Ten years later³, their address was given as Bridgend, which suggests they were living near where Cowdenbeath Golf Course (founded in the 1880s) now is. She died in 1876, and her Scots certificate is full of detail:

Mary Maxwell Pearson married to Henry Pearson Labourer; 1876
September 20th 5 h a.m.; Cowdenbeath, parish of Beath; F; 69;
Matthew Lawrence Groom (dec) Elizabeth Lawrence M.S. Barclay (dec);
Disease of the heart 3 yrs, Dropsy 2 yrs, as cert by Robert Mungall MD;
Alex Dawson Neighbour; 1876 Sept 22nd at Oakfield, George Ferris Asst
Registrar.

Widowed a second time, Henry lived on until 1882, dying aged 85.

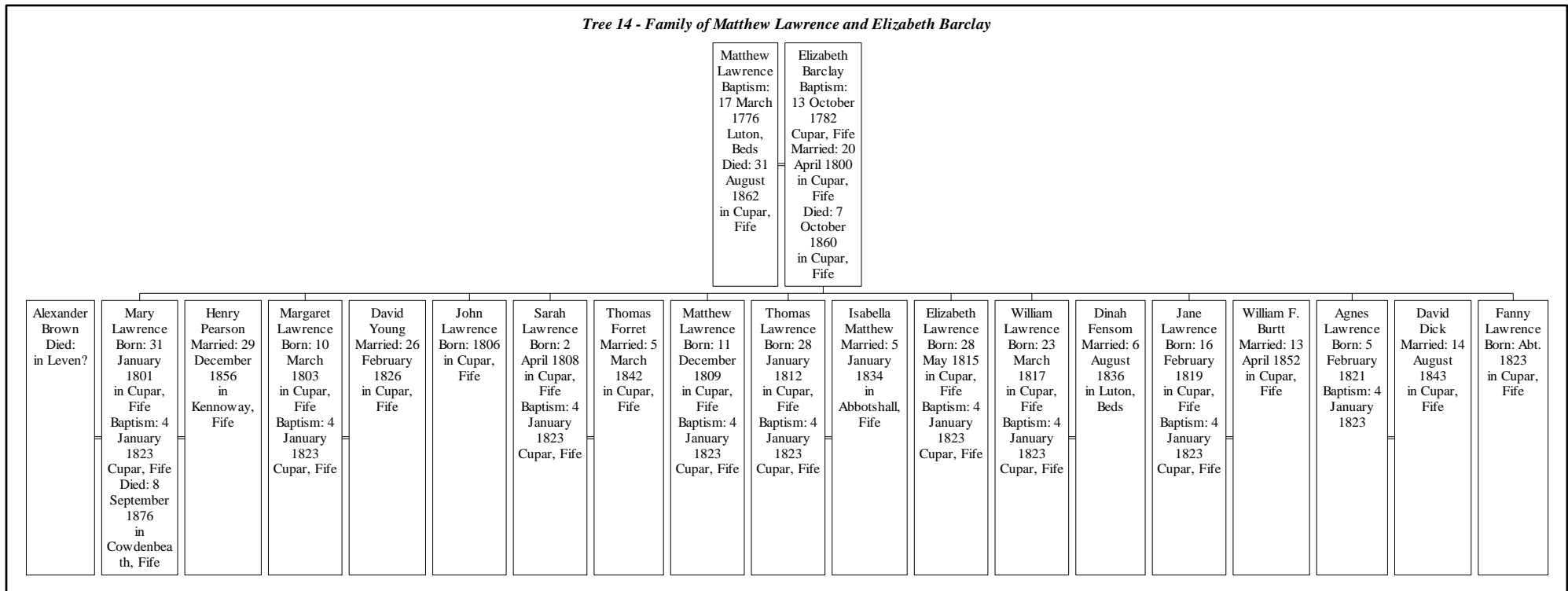
Given that all there was to go on to trace Matthew Lawrence’s ancestry was a reference to the Rutlandshire Cavalry, England given as his place of birth on the census returns and an approximate year of birth as variously 1772, 1775 and 1778, it seemed unlikely that his antecedents would ever come to light. Lawrence is not an uncommon name, and as nothing likely turned up in Rutland or nearby counties, I accepted that this was a brick wall which wouldn’t come down.

Then, out of the blue, I was contacted by a researcher I had been in touch with regarding Mary’s daughter Jessie Beveridge. He in turn had been approached by a researcher descended from Thomas Lawrence, one of Mary’s brothers. Thomas’ son, the researcher’s grandfather, had been called Freeman Lawrence, and the name was sufficiently unusual to surmise a link with a

² <http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/> 410/00 004/00 036, 1861 census, Cowdenbeath

³ <http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/> 410/00 004/00 021, 1871 census, Cowdenbeath

Tree 14 - Family of Matthew Lawrence and Elizabeth Barclay



Lawrence family in Luton, in Bedfordshire, which had named successive generations of sons Freeman.

Initially, this seemed like a long shot, but while checking to see if any other of Matthew's children had used Freeman in naming their offspring, (**See tree 14 - p. 115**) I discovered that William Lawrence, Matthew's son, had married his wife, Dinah Fenson, in Luton on 6th August 1836 and was recorded there on the 1841 census⁴ with his wife and children Lucy and Martha. He was a tinman – born in Scotland, and she a bonnet maker. Incidentally, this was the occupation given 10 years later by Dinah's sister-in-law Sarah Forret in Cupar. Bedfordshire was renowned for straw-plaiting for hats, which was an important source of income for women from poorer families. There seems to be no reference to this as a common occupation in Cupar in *The Statistical Accounts of Scotland*⁵ for the town, so it begs the question whether Dinah brought the skill with her and taught other members of the family when she and William eventually settled in Cupar, where several more children were born, each with their mother's name Fensom recorded in the register. James, Amy, Betsy, Wilhelmina, Charles and Mary Ann Lawrence had all made their appearance by 1861.

Of Mary's other siblings, Margaret probably married David Young at Cupar in 1826 and raised a family; Sarah married Thomas Forret there in 1842 – it was her daughter Cecelia who was living with her grandfather on census night in 1851. Thomas, whose descendant opened up this line of research, married Isabella Matthew at Abbotshall in 1834. At some point, this couple and their three children – Freeman, Elizabeth and Ann – moved to Australia. Jane married Walter Foreman Burt in 1852, either at Cupar or Ferry Port on Craig, where he was minister. This couple also went to Australia, with a son Thomas. Agnes seems to have married David Dick in Cupar in 1843 and had a son.

Mary Lawrence's death certificate gave her father's occupation as groom – rather than weaver, which is what the census returns say. Given the fairly humble origins which have been discovered for Matthew Lawrence in Bedfordshire, I suspect it was in the role of groom that he served in the Rutlandshire Cavalry. The hasps outlined above make a convincing case for Matthew Lawrence baptized on 17th March 1776 at Luton as:

son of Freeman Lawrence and Sarah his wife

being the man who spent most of his adult life in Cupar. Earlier generations stayed in or close to Luton, making the search easier, but frustrating in that there

⁴ <http://www.ancestry.co.uk/> HO 107/4/19, 1841 census, Luton

⁵ <http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/sas/sas.asp?action=public>

are no surviving churchwardens' or overseers' accounts that might shed further light on them, and they left virtually no other paper trail that I have found outside the registers.

Luton began life as an agricultural market town but was later well-known for two major industries. One was brick-making, which began in the 16th century as brick-built houses became the preferred option. However, by the 18th century, straw-hat making, which had also begun two centuries earlier, was the dominant industry in the area.



St. Mary Luton

Lawrence, appearing in the records also as Laurence, Larrance and other approximations, was a common name in the Bedfordshire area. So although Freeman² Lawrence married Sarah Lawrence in 1772 at St. Mary Luton:

by banns this tenth day of August

there is nothing to suggest that they were related. Both made their mark and the witnesses, Thomas Glenister and James Jackson (who signed several entries) do not seem to have been family connections. Matthew was the couple's second child: Sarah came first - baptized 14th July 1773; Elizabeth followed Matthew on 3rd August 1777; Fanny was baptized on 4th November 1781, Thomas on 6th June 1784 (although erroneously recorded as the son of Lawrence and Sarah Freeman! At least the 3^d duty was paid!) and Freeman¹ - born on 6th June - was baptized on 24th September 1786. Their father was buried on 1st March 1829, when he would have been about 79 years old. Sarah, his wife, seems to have survived until 1837, when she was buried on March 22nd. There are a number of possible burials for this woman, but her recorded burial age of 85 is closest to the 82 that

would have been calculated from her baptism, and elderly people's ages were often inflated slightly.

I suspect this family struggled to make ends meet. Thomas (born 1784) appeared on the 1841⁶ census working in some kind of occupation involving straw hats, and in the 1851⁷ census as a greengrocer, but by 1861⁸, aged 76, he was recorded as a pauper, clearly not having managed to save enough for his old age. With him were his wife Mary and a lodger, both sewing bonnets. Freeman¹, born 1784, managed to get himself into trouble. In 1807, he married Ann Cheshire, and with nine mouths to feed – assuming all the children baptized survived – money was no doubt tight. Whether this was the reason or pure venality, on 14th March 1829, the 46 year old Freeman¹ – prisoner number 516 – was convicted and sentenced to seven years for stealing from a warehouse⁹. He seems first to have been sent to the Prison Hulk *Justitia* at Woolwich, but correspondence two years later in April 1831 suggests he should be removed to the *Discovery* at Deptford. By 1833 he was on the *Ganymede* Hulk on the Thames, and still under sentence of transportation. However, he had clearly behaved himself while in prison, so his name appeared on a list of men to whom the crown was:

graciously pleased to extend our grace and mercy...and to grant them our free pardon for their said crime [and they are] to be discharged out of custody.

The document is dated 8th November 1833 and ends:

By HM Command
Melbourne

In other words, the Prime Minister was acting on behalf of King William IV. The grounds given for clemency were that:

having served more than one half of their sentences with orderly and good conduct they have been selected as the best behaved men on the hulk deserving of the Royal Mercy.

By 1851¹⁰ he was back living with his wife and working as an agricultural labourer; 10 years later he was similarly employed¹¹.

⁶ <http://www.ancestry.co.uk/> Ho 107/4/26, 1841 census, Luton

⁷ <http://www.ancestry.co.uk/> HO 107 1757, 1851 census, Luton

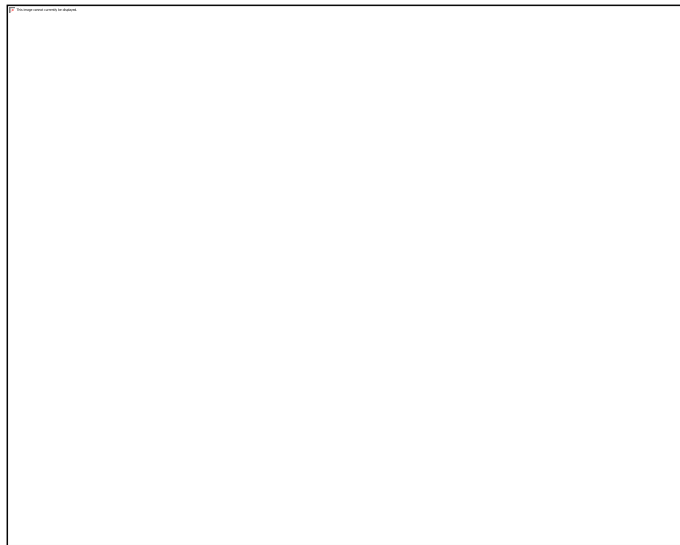
⁸ <http://www.ancestry.co.uk/> RG9/1013, 1861 census, Luton

⁹ <http://www.findmypast.co.uk/> HO 17/17/75 and other documents in the range.

¹⁰ <http://www.ancestry.co.uk/> HO 107 1757, 1851 Census, Luton

¹¹ <http://www.ancestry.co.uk/> RG 9/1014, 1861 Census, Luton

The line of Sarah Lawrence, Matthew's mother, does not go back very far with any certainty. She was baptized at Luton on 2nd November 1755, the daughter of Jennings and Elizabeth Lawrence, and the penultimate child of the family. Her two eldest siblings were baptized at Ridgmont, about 14 miles north-west of Luton. Mary and Ann were baptized on December 1744 and on 4th May 1745 respectively; Ann was buried on 7th April the following year. The rest were baptized at Luton: Elizabeth on 24th January 1747, William - 28th January 1749, Ann again - 16th August 1751, Thomas - 26th August 1753, Sarah in 1755 and Hannah on 31st August 1760. Jennings' wife Elizabeth was buried at Luton on 25th July 1762.

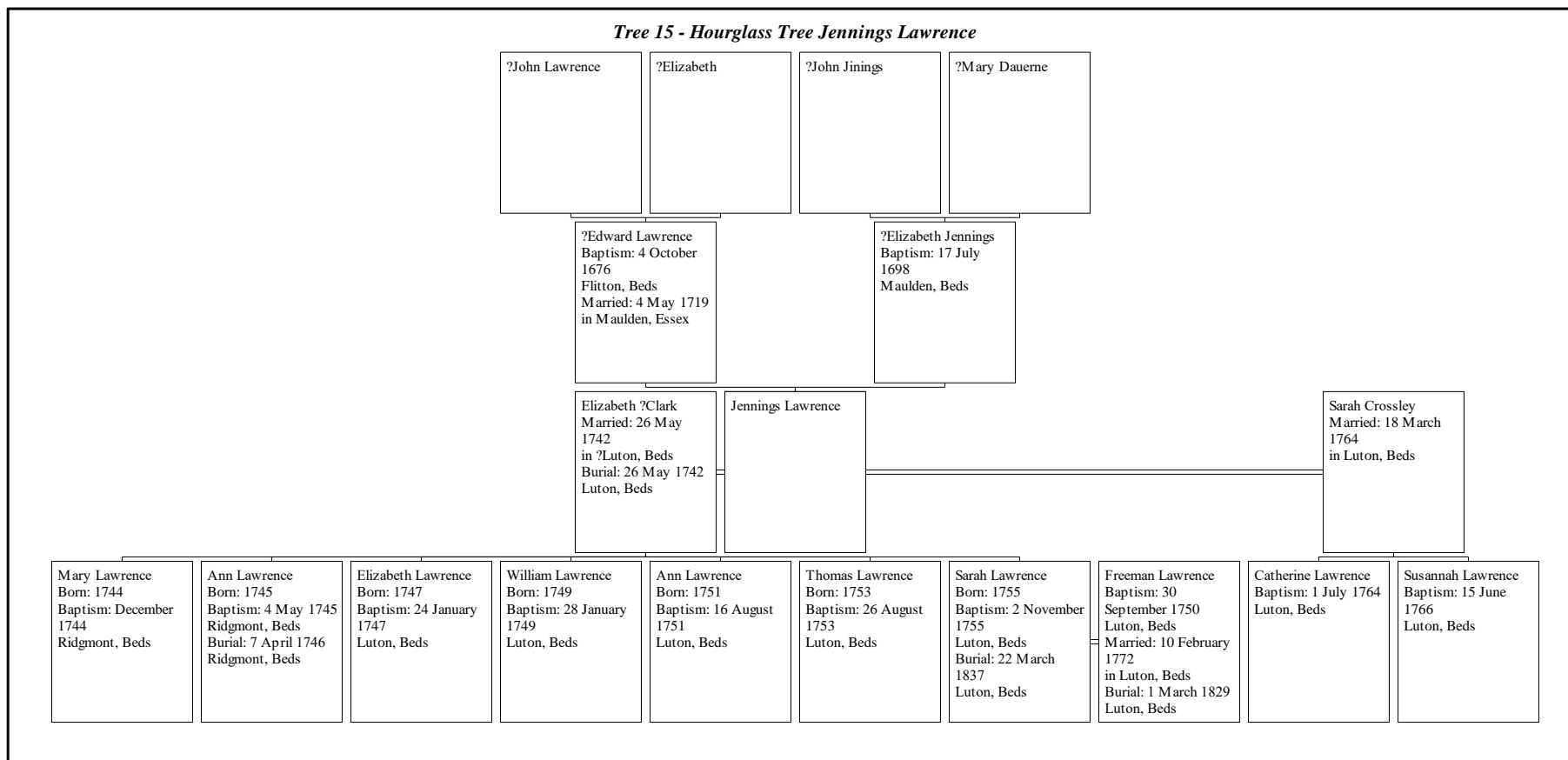


All Saints Ridgmont

No certain marriage has come to light for Jennings and Eliza; I have found reference on a tree to a marriage between Jennings Laurence and Elizabeth Clark at Luton on 26th May 1742, which sounds feasible, but I haven't verified it. After her death, though, he married again, to Sarah Crossley, at St. Mary's on 18th March 1764, and fathered two more daughters, Catherine - baptized 1st July the same year, and Susannah on 15th June 1766. His burial has not come to light.

Nor has his baptism. A likely parentage, which would explain his unusual first name, would be Edward Laurance and Elizabeth Jennings, who married at Maulden, about 6 miles from Ridgmont, on 4th May 1719 (See tree 15 - p.120). Between 1721 and 1724 this couple baptized 4 children at nearby Flitton - Edward, Elizabeth, Mary and William. Could Jennings be this couple's eldest son, baptized at his mother's home parish? After his first wife's presumed death, Edward married again - to Sarah Bruer at Clophill on 14th February 1725 - and had three more children, Sarah, John and Thomas.

Tree 15 - Hourglass Tree Jennings Lawrence



If my surmise about Jennings' parentage is correct, then Edward enters the line of descent probably as the son of John Lawrence and Elizabeth, baptized on 4th October 1676 at Flitton. Elizabeth seems to have been baptised on 17th July 1698 at Maulden as Elizabeth Jinings or Daurne or Daburne, daughter of John Jinings and Mary Daurne or Daurne. This entry suggests an illegitimate birth; maybe Elizabeth then jumped the gun with her own first pregnancy – but of course this is all speculation.

The line of Matthew's father Freeman² can be followed for several generations. He was baptized on 30th September 1750 at St. Mary's as the son of:

Freeman Laurance and Ann

and like Matthew was the second child in the family. Sarah came first, baptized on 13th July 1748. An unnamed son was baptized on 5th March 1761, followed by Martha – 9th June 1765, John – 4th June 1769 and another Martha on 5th January 1772.

The register gives a final daughter Ann on 29th August 1779. By this time, Freeman² junior was also producing children, and I have wondered whether there was a transcription error and in fact this was a child of Freeman² and Sarah rather than Freeman³ and Ann. There is a gap between Elizabeth and Fanny which would support this hypothesis; Freeman³ senior would have been 61 by this time, and his wife 53, which stretches credulity somewhat. It is also just possible that Ann was an illegitimate daughter of elder 'sister' Sarah, born 1748, and was baptized as the parents' child to avoid a scandal. However, attitudes to illegitimacy were less harsh in the 18th century than later, and also I suspect that this Sarah is the one who married one John Walker at Luton on 29th January 1769.

Nothing else is known about Freeman² Lawrence other than the fact that he was buried on 1st March 1829.

His parents, Freeman³ Lawrence and Ann Green married:

both of this parish by banns

on 30th September 1747. Ann was a local girl born and bred, daughter of Robert and Elizabeth Green, baptized on 4th February 1726. A sister Elizabeth was baptized the following year, on 11th June. The parents were married at her mother's home town of Leighton Buzzard, about 13 miles to the west. The register reads:

These were married Anno Domini 1724

Robert Green of Luton and Elizabeth Perrin of this town Dec 31

but nothing more is known about them.



All Saints Leighton Buzzard

Ann's burial has yet come to light, although Freeman³'s entry in 1784 reads:

Feb 9 Freeman Lawrance Parish

The final word appears in the register at this time as an alternative to 'duty paid' and is attached to perhaps half the entries, suggesting a relatively poor community overall.

Freeman³ had been born over the county boundary, 6 miles away, at Flamstead in Hertfordshire. The register there notes:

Freeman son of Freeman Lawrance and Ann his wife was born the 16th day of June and baptised the 29th day of the same month in the year 1718.

His parents are perhaps the most shadowy of the whole line. No marriage has been found for Freeman⁴ and Ann; nor have their burials been found. They did, however, baptise two other children at Flamstead: Ann on 24th March 1716 and John on 25th October 1719.

Freeman⁴ Lawrence was also born in Flamstead, probably in 1683. The year is in some doubt as three of the children are listed together in a register which was presumably written up some time after the events. The register shows:

Ann dafter [sic] of John Larance and Anne his wife was baptised

June the 12th 1682

Joseph sonne of John Larance and Anne his wife was baptised

April the 28th 1684

Freeman sonne of John Larance and Anne his wife was baptised

April the 14th

Unfortunately, although 168 is clear, there is a blob of ink obscuring the final numeral, and only the top is visible. This, though, judging by the writing in other entries, looks most like the top stroke of a figure 3. A firstborn son is recorded as:

Jamas s of John Larrances and Ann his wife was baptised

July 13th 1679 of Popshall End

I suspect this is an idiosyncratic spelling of Pepsal End, part of a hamlet called Pepperstock, which is described by the *Victoria County History*¹² as:

in the extreme north-east of the parish [Flamstead] the hamlet of Pepperstock forms a small settlement on the Luton road and near is Pepsal End Farm

so it would seem that the Lawrences hadn't moved far from their Luton roots, less than 3 miles.



St. Leonard's Flamstead

It is with this generation that the mystery of the unusual surname finally resolved itself. Before moving to Flamstead, John and Ann had baptised two

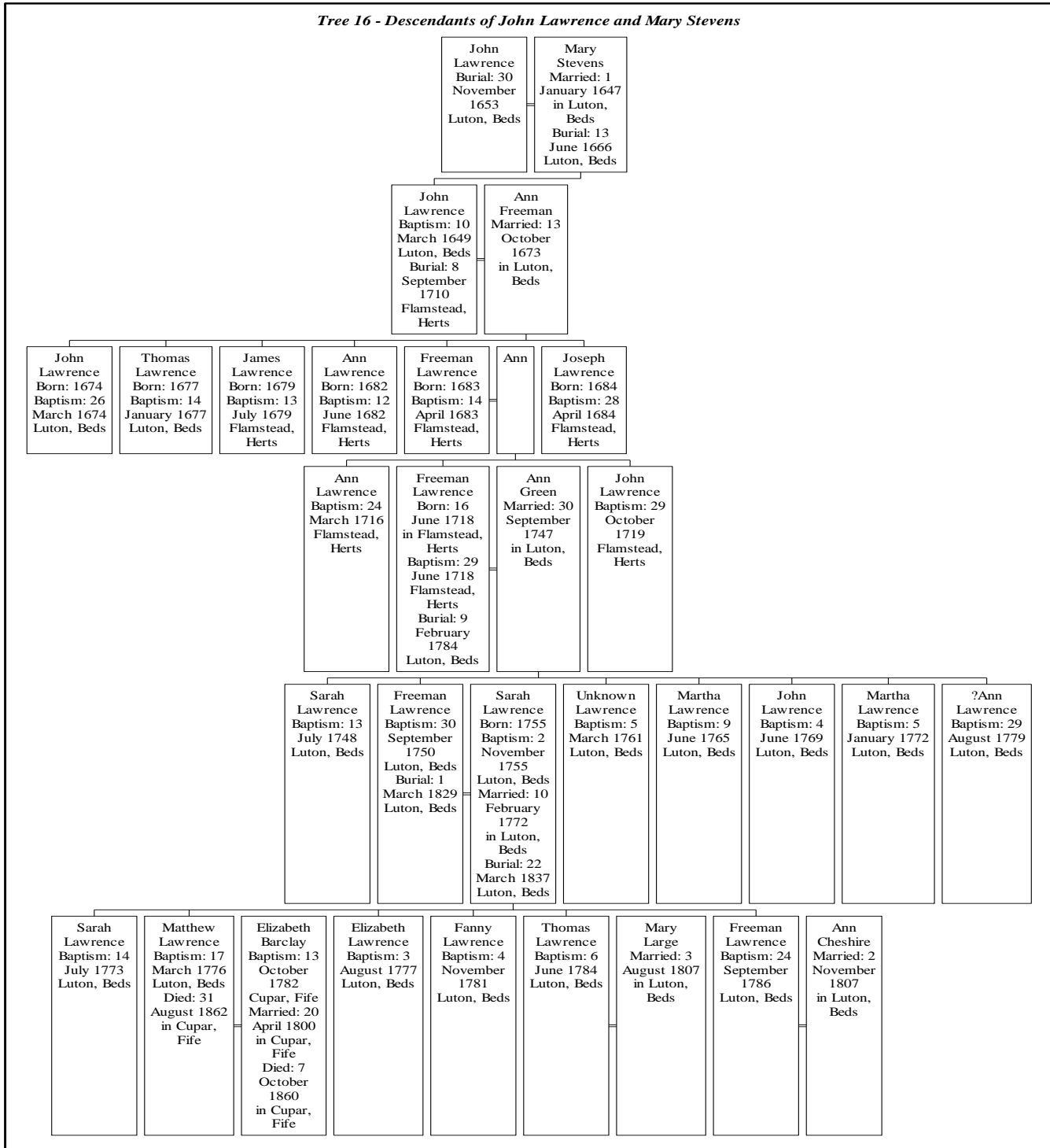
¹² <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/herts/vol2/pp193-201#p3>

earlier children at Luton: John - 26th March 1674 and Thomas - 14th January 1677.
Also at Luton, on 13th October 1673:

John Lawrence and Ann Freeman was married

Little could this couple have known that their use of the wife's surname as a Christian name would survive into the 20th century.

Tree 16 - Descendants of John Lawrence and Mary Stevens



John Lawrence/Larance seems to be the only one of his line to have left a will. It's not very informative, but describes him as a husbandman, which suggests a better standard of living than that enjoyed by some of his descendants. The only people named are:

Anne Lawrence my loving wife

who receives:

all the rest and residue of my personal estate moveable goods and chattels whatsoever unbequeathed my debts being paid and my funeral expenses discharged

and son Thomas, who is appointed executor. The only other bequest is as follows:

I give and bequeath unto all my children one shilling apiece of good and lawful money of Great Britain to be paid to each of them by my executor within one month after my decease

It sounds like there wasn't a lot to pass on, and often, the shilling bequest is a device to stop any of the heirs making a fuss. The will was witnessed by Timothy and Thomas Smith and John Birchmore and proved at Great Gaddesden on 18th September 1710. John was buried at Flamstead on 8th July 1710:

John Larance was buried in nothing but sheepswool only according to act of parliament...

It is possible to take this story back one further generation, as John was baptised at Luton on 10th March 1648 to another John Lawrence and his wife Mary Stevens (See tree 16 - p. 124). They had married there on 1st January 1747, but John seems to have been the only child. Maybe the fact that his father died only 5 years later, and was buried on 30th November 1653 had something to do with it. Mary Lawrence, widow, was buried on 13th June 1666.

A map of the area around Luton shows a number of hamlets with 'End' as their second element - Pepsal End has already been mentioned, but there are also a Church End, Slip End, Clement's End and Ansell's End to name but a few. Just south-east of Luton, not far from the airport, is a hamlet named Lawrence End. Is it too fanciful to imagine that this is where this branch of the family may have originated?