

*Charles Towsey of Henley upon Thames in the County of Wexford Gentleman*

*Mary Harriet Sparks*  
*H. B. Moorhouse*  
*Edmond Towsey*

# TOWSEY TALES

**NAME:** William Pearson

**BIRTH DETAILS:** circa 1710, place unknown

**DEATH DETAILS:** June 1764, Horton, Bucks.

**CHART REF:** Towsey Chart D2

**MARRIAGE DETAILS:** Circa 1731 possibly London

**SPOUSE:** Sarah (probably from London)

Charles Towsey, the attorney from Wantage and then London, married Susanna Pearson at Horton, in February 1767. She was the daughter of William Pearson who, as well as owning a sizable collection of properties, leased a large mill at Wraysbury, traditionally spelt *Wyardisbury*, just next to Horton, which was at the time in the bottom corner of Buckinghamshire, just to the west of what is now Heathrow Airport.

William Pearson does not seem to have been from that area. It is most likely that he had been in London prior to taking on the lease of the mill, but it is very difficult to trace his genealogy, partly because there was no shortage of Pearsons about the country in the 18th century, and partly because we can never be sure if the record that we are seeking went missing in the mists of time, the dusts of storage or the bombs of Hitler.

The first record of William Pearson in Wraysbury, is from 1734, stating that he was joint owner of the mill with the brothers John and Ralph Crowder. They were probably there from at least 1732, when we have a record of the birth of William's first child. All of his children were born in the Wraysbury/Horton area.

Considering these dates, the marriage of William Pearson to Sarah Stanley, on 30th October, 1731, at the church of Saint Benet, Paul's Wharf, London, might be that of our Pearsons. Then again, though a little less likely, the marriage of William Pearson to Sarah Ing, at Westminster on 27th August, 1727, could be the one. Or, it could have been somewhere and some time else, altogether.

When sorting out a family in a village somewhere, it is quite easy to figure out who was related to whom. The same does not apply in London. With so many parishes squashed into such a small area, and with the usual mobility of Londoners at that time, it is usual to see the growth of one family spread about several parishes, which, when dealing with a common surname, makes identification very difficult, especially as their first names were drawn from an unimaginatively small pool of options.



*What the Towseys and Pearsons were wearing in London in the 1760s. But at the Wraysbury mill?... Maybe not the wigs and silks.*

There are no obvious connections between the Towseys and the Pearson family in Buckinghamshire, so we can only speculate as to how Charles, from Wantage and living in London, met Susannah. It might have been through one of her brothers, who were just a bit younger than Charles and would almost certainly have been educated in London.

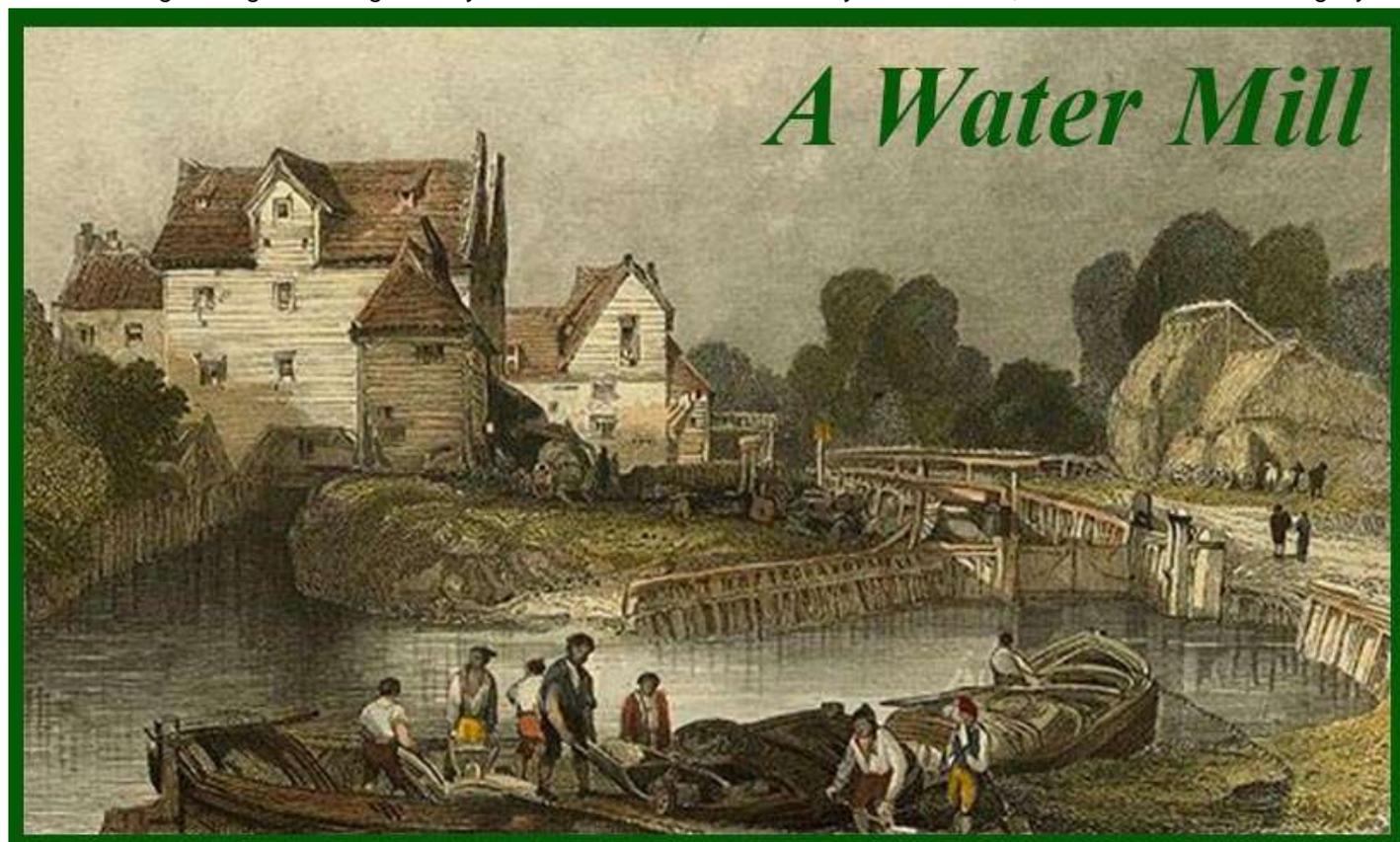
William Pearson ran a paper making business in the mill, which had been there for many years and been used for different purposes, before William leased what must have been an already thriving business. We know that the mill was already manufacturing paper in the 1660s, because at that time it was the old rags, brought out from London and used in paper making, which brought the plague to the area.

William Pearson is listed as a gentleman, so he would not be getting his own hands dirty either in the mill, which ground corn (wheat), as well as producing paper, or on the surrounding farmland, some of which he leased and some that he owned as freehold.

William also owned or leased a number of other properties around Horton, as well as in Staines, a little way to the east, in Middlesex, and one leasehold property in Kent.

Being a solid citizen, William Pearson served as a church warden in 1734/5, and again in 1748/9.

Sorting through the fragmentary records of the Pearson family in that area, is made more confusing by the



presence of another William Pearson, obvious a relative and undoubtedly older than Susanna's father. It might have been our William's father, but more likely an uncle, because when he died in 1760, there was no mention of the younger William or his family. All references are to relatives of his wife, Elizabeth Aldridge.

Both of these Pearson families are on Towsey Chart D2, as are the details of the older William Pearson's will.

The lack of any mention of our William Pearson in the will of the older William, probably means that he was not the father, but not necessarily. It could be that the younger William and his sister, Isabella, were products of an earlier marriage and that he had given substantial assets to them before marrying Elizabeth Aldridge. It might be also, that the older William had gained control over substantial assets through his marriage into the wealthy Aldridge family and felt obliged to pass that estate back to them after his death.

This is all possible but unlikely. It is certainly more likely that the connection to the older William was not that of a father. On the other hand, there is a record of a property transfer from a member of the Aldridge family to the younger William, which strengthens the case for some sort of familial connection.

DETAILS OF THE WILL OF THE ELDER WILLIAM PEARSON, HUSBAND OF ELIZABETH ADRIDGE, DIED 1760. PROBABLY NO CHILDREN: *Left his estate to his wife and then to nieces, Ann and Mary Aldridge and their brother, John Aldridge. He owned lands at Uxbridge and Staines Moore. Also land at Yeoveney, Staines (east of Wrybury).*

The younger William, our ancestor, wrote his will in March of 1763 in which he specified to whom each of his properties would go.

William left to his wife, during her lifetime, the Manor & Lordship of Grove Barns, spread over the parishes of Staines & Laleham, Middlesex, just to the south of Horton, as well as all his various properties, freehold & leasehold in the parishes of Staines & Laleham, purchased from Godolphin Rooper of London and someone called Kirkman. She would have to keep the properties in good repair, including the renewal from time to time, of the leases from the Dean and Canons of Windsor. In other words, these lands and the Lordship, belonged to the church, who would let them out on long leases.

As mentioned earlier, owning the Lordship of a Manor, or area of land of a certain size, which would include whatever villages might be situated thereon, gave the person holding the Lordship certain legal rights to sublet properties and receive rents. These Lordships could be bought and sold.

Out of the income from those properties, Sarah would have to pay £20 per annum to William's sister, Isabella Carr, throughout Isabella's life. After Sarah's death, the properties would go to her son James, but out of that particular estate, £500 would go to each of William's two daughters, Susanna and Sarah, if they had reached 21 years of age or had already married, and £500 to his other son, Thomas.

William left to William Gill, a stationer in London, in trust, an estate held by Copy-of-Court-Roll of the Lordship of the Manor of Wraysbury. Also a freehold estate in the parishes of Horton & Wraysbury. Rents and income would go to William's widow, to use to educate and bring up his children. When their daughter Susanna reached the age of 21, or married, William Gill would then hold that property in a new trust, from which the income would then go to Susannah throughout her life. On her death, that estate would then be surrendered to her lawful heirs. If she died without children, then the income from that estate would go to William's other daughter, Sarah, when she reached 21, at which time the income would go to her, then the estate be surrendered to her children. As was common practice in those days, the reason that the estate was not signed over to William's daughter, was so that no husband could ever get his hands on that capital.

William left to his son James, the Freehold messuages in the Parish of Barton (probably in Oxford), recently purchased from Mr. Phillip Garden, as well as freehold messuages in the Parish of Staines, lately purchased from the Reverend Beighton that was first left to his wife during her lifetime. It was this land bought from Reverend Beighton in 1758, that had come through the Aldridge family, as mentioned earlier.

A messuage is a piece of land and all of the buildings and other structures thereon.

William left to his wife, during her lifetime, the Leasehold Estate at Chartham in Kent, held from the Church of Canterbury. That property would then go to their son Thomas.

William left to his Nephew & Niece, William & Christian Carr, £50 each.

William then ordered his executors, William Gill and Sarah, to take from whatever money he had in public funds, enough to make up £4,000, which would be invested in public funds or other secure investments, the interest therefrom going firstly to his widow then to Susanna and Sarah when they each reached 21 or married. If one died, the other would get it all.

William left to his sons, James & Thomas, the lease on the house where he was then residing, which was close to the mill, along with the mill and everything associated with those businesses, all leased from the charmingly named Mister Holland Cooksey, of Worcestershire. William also stated that James and Thomas should receive within twelve months, £500 each, to help with the running of the businesses. However, William's widow should be allowed to have control of all aspects of the property and businesses for six months after his death, in order to give her time to dispose of the stocks of paper, meal and corn. He also said that if she needed more time, that the period of her control should extend for a further 3 months. So, William was obviously confident that his wife could competently manage the business.

William also directed that on top of the legacies aforesaid, that each daughter should receive a further £500 upon turning 21 or marrying, but that that £500 would not be paid if they married under the age of 21 without their mother's consent.

Three months later, probably as a result of rapidly declining health, William Pearson had handed the mill over to James and Thomas and on 1st July, 1763, added a codicil to his will to reflect that changed circumstance.

William removed the provision that James and Thomas should each receive £500 to help with their taking over of the milling business. He might have done this because the boys would have had immediate access to the stock of paper, corn and meal to which he had referred in his will (leaving it originally for his widow to sell for her own advantage). An interesting provision of the codicil to William's will, was that if James and Thomas did not get along amicably as business partners, then James would take over the whole business and pay Thomas for his half share.

William then died eleven months later, in June 1764.

There are several documents over the next couple of years, dealing with the transfer of William's properties, as per his will.

We can assume that the mention of what would happen if the boys could not work harmoniously together, was inserted into the codicil through William's insight into the character of his presumably disputatious sons, because on 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1766, the partnership was dissolved.

This was just five weeks after James and Thomas had launched litigation against their mother and William Gill, the trustees of their father's will, arguing that the codicil (which cancelled their receipt of £500 each), was not genuine; was a forgery. Of course a line of witnesses came forth to attest to the authenticity of William's signature to that codicil and the case went nowhere.

All of this tends to crystallize in the mind, an image of James and Thomas Pearson as a couple of rich, spoilt brats who had probably felt much more at home in London, where they may have passed the time that they should have been studying, in spending their allowances on the pursuit of pleasures of the flesh. All idle speculation of course, but the alternative is that they were just a couple of miserable, incompetent wastrels.



It would seem that without that originally promised £500 in cash from his father's will, James did not have enough money of his own with which to pay off his brother, so he borrowed £450 from his mother, out of Susanna's inheritance, in November, 1766.

By this time, the marriage of Susanna Pearson to Charles Towsey, had already been arranged, so a condition of James being allowed to borrow what was in fact, Susanna's dowry, was that he would enter into a bond to repay £900 to Charles Towsey.

Charles and Susanna were married in Horton, three month later and between that date and August 1767, Charles lent James a further £1,143/18/-, leaving James in debt to Charles for £1,593/18/-, in return for which Charles received a half share of the leasehold property and the paper making, milling and farming businesses conducted thereon.

Charles and Susanna also moved into the house that was a part of that leasehold and their first child, Amelia Sarah, was born there, probably at the end of 1767.

James presumably lived with his mother and other sister at another of their properties in Horton.

If Charles and Susanna thought that they were settling into a stable lifestyle for decades to come, then they were quickly disabused of that notion, when James was declared bankrupt on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1767.

The rent on the mill and associated property, was £210 per annum, paid half-yearly and a standard clause of the lease stated that if the lessee did not pay the rent within a certain time, the lessor was entitled to take possession. And this is precisely what Holland Cooksey did on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1768.

Charles had apparently said that he would pay the outstanding £105, but Cooksey refused and tricked Charles and all of the servants out of the house by some stratagem that, if it were as Charles later stated in court, makes him look somewhat gullible.

In court arguments that went on for at least the next six years, Charles claimed that under William Pearson's management, the value of the property had been greatly increased by the upgrading and addition of various buildings. He also said that Cooksey took the property, using the excuse that it had sunk into a state of considerable disrepair, which Charles denied, saying that Cooksey had merely erected scaffolding in the house to give the impression of large scale repairs taking place.

Cooksey's counter claim was that he was required to spend more than £900 to restore the property to a sound condition and that tenant farmers had been complaining that due to neglect, the banks that channelled water into the mill, had collapsed in places, resulting in the flooding of their farm lands.

It is difficult to ascertain the truth in all of this, but it cannot be denied that to be declared bankrupt within three years of taking over a solid, thriving business, one would have to be a hopeless businessman.

We do not know the eventual outcome of the litigation brought by Charles Towsey, nor have I found any further references to the fate of the hapless James Pearson, other than his marriage, in Horton in 1767 (where he had been Church Warden four years earlier), to Sarah Maxwell of Langley Marish, Bucks.

William Pearson's widow stayed on in the Horton area on one of the family's freehold properties, until her death in 1781. It was stated at the time that she was "of Henley", but this might just have been because she had spent her final days with Charles and Susanna Towsey, who had moved to Henley in 1777.

As mentioned, the executor of William Pearson's will was William Gill: a London stationer, who was also responsible for the ongoing management of the properties from which the income would go to Susanna and Sarah during their lifetimes, then be handed to their children. It might be that Gill was a bit slow in fulfilling the last part of his duty, because Charles and Susanna's only son, William Augustus Towsey, took him to court as soon as he turned 21, in 1791, and recovered the property. It might have been though, that it was necessary for William A Towsey to go to court to prove his claim on the Pearson inheritance.