



John Willson

Of Tattenhall, Cheshire County, England

John Willson (1740 - 1816)

The earliest definitely known Wilson in our line is John Willson (or Wilson...he signed both ways) of Tattenhall, Cheshire County, England. He is first mentioned on a marriage license [Tattenhall parish records at the Cheshire Record Office, Chester, England] for his marriage to Rebecca Faulkner, daughter of William and Catherine Faulkner, also of Tattenhall, on September 13, 1767. His age on the license is given as 26, and hers as 32. Therefore they must have been born between that date in 1740/1741 and 1734/1735 [actually she was born 11 Aug 1734] respectively. John Willson's death certificate shows that he was buried on 27 January 1816 at the age of 75 years (suggesting that he was born between ca. 24 January 1740 and 24 January 1741. The overlap of these two age indicators (age at marriage and age at death), presuming they are accurate, allows us to narrow down the possible range of his birth date to between 13 September 1740 and 24 January 1741. Baptismal records (Bishop's Transcripts) exist only for 1741, not 1740, and do not show his birth. Therefore, if he was indeed born in Tattenhall, it was in late 1740.

The marriage was by license rather than the more usual publication of "banns" (notices of intended marriage given three times in the parish church of each of the betrothed). Licenses tended to be favored by couples who did not both reside in the same parish, by couples who

Historical Notes on
Tattenhall

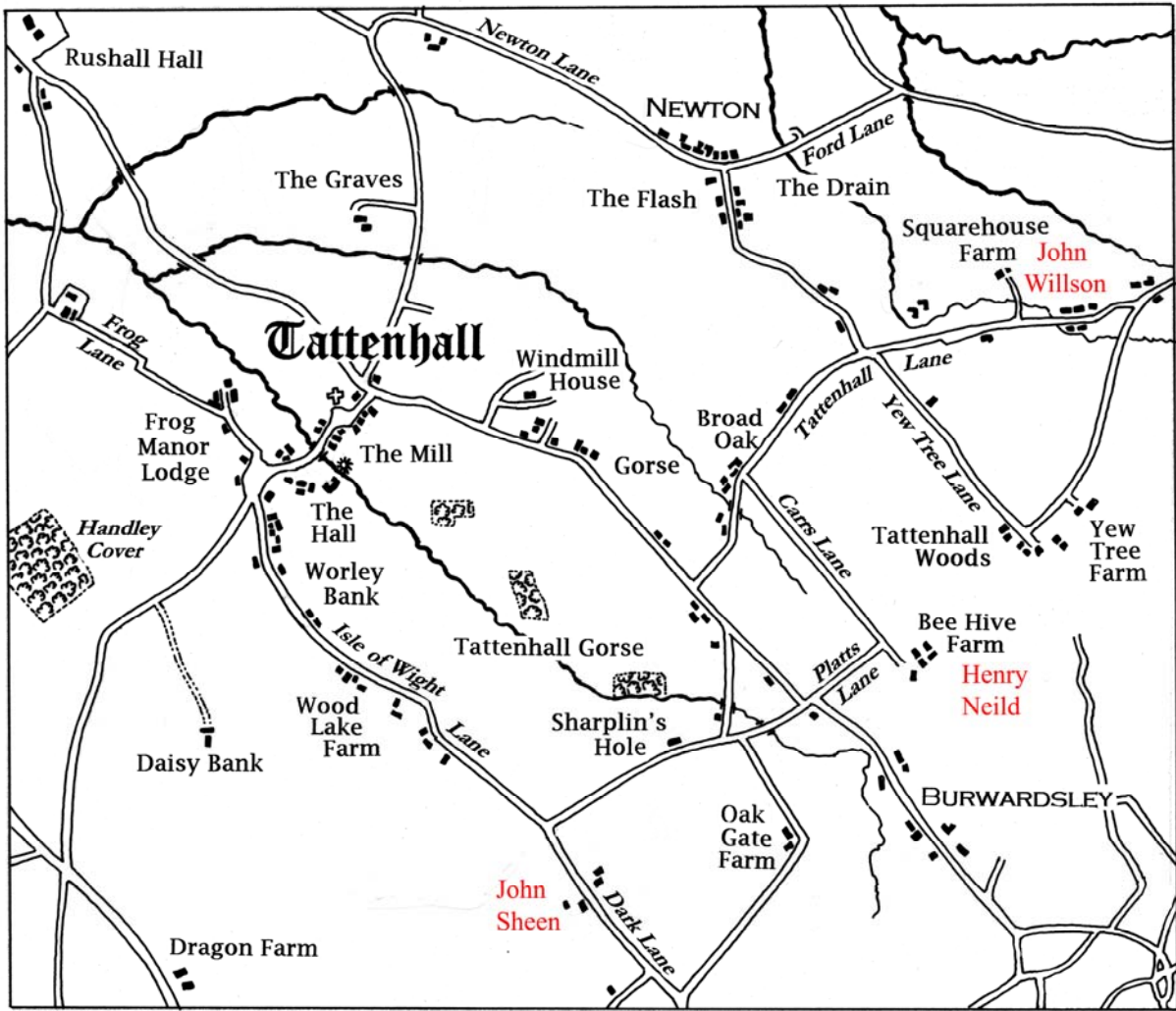

Tattenhall,* earliest known home of the Wilson family, is a township, a large village, and a parish which encompasses the towns of Golbourne Bellow and Newton as well. It is in the Eddisbury division of Cheshire County, in the lower division of Broxton Hundred, Chester district (until 1974 known as Tarvin Rural district), in the rural Deanery of Malpas, and the Archdeaconry and Diocese of Chester. Tattenhall village lies about 8 miles south-southeast of Chester; in 1971 the population was about 1,600 (500 families).

Over the centuries the spelling of the name has changed repeatedly; variations include Tatenhala (1280), Tattenhall (1289), Tatenhale (1308), Tatnall (1473), Tottenhall (1553), Totnall (1577), and Tettenhall (1649), probably due simply to differences in pronunciation as perceived by semi-literate writers. The town name (as “Tatenale”) is recorded in William the Conqueror’s census, the “Domesday Book” (1086). The name means “Tata’s Nook” or “Tata’s Meadow.” Tattenhall is thought to have become Christian in the second half of the 7th century. In 909 the Saxon army defeated the invading Danes, according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, at “Teotanheal,” perhaps Tattenhall, though no local archeological evidence of this battle has been found.

The first church was built at Tattenhall in 654 and endured until the Norman Conquest (1066). A charter of King Edgar of Mercia dated 858 lists a church at Tattenhall. The Tattenhall church tower which survives today was built in 1512.

Tattenhall today remains a quiet country village, as it has been for well over 1,300 years. Today it is home to a host of shops and businesses. The Main Street has three pubs (the *Bear & Billet*, the *Letters*, and the *Sportsman’s Arms*), and the community also supports two butchers, a fishmonger, a fruitshop, a newsstand, a pharmacy, a supermarket and three restaurants. The Tattenhall Sports Club has an excellent gym, squash court, tennis court, and cricket pitch. Many fine examples of old Tudor architecture survive, and a number of old farm buildings have been refurbished into offices.

*Information from Frank A. Latham’s *Tattenhall, the History of a Cheshire Village* (1977).



Tattenhall area as shown on an old map from the 1830's. The John Willson family occupied Squarehouse Farm, the John Sheen family lived on Darklane, and the Neild Family (probably related) ran Bee Hive Farm.



2566

K NOW all Men by these Presents, That we *John Willson* of the parish of *Tattenhall* and *Richard Braderton* of the parish of *Warrington* both in the County and Diocess of *Chester*

are bolden and firmly bound unto the Right Reverend Father in God *Edmund* by Divine Permission, Lord Bishop of *Chester* in the Sum of *one hundred* Pounds, of good and lawfull Money of Great-Britain, to be paid unto the said Right Reverend Father, his lawfull Attorney, Executors, Administrators or Assignes, To which payment well and truly to be made, we bind ourselves and *each* of us severally for and in the whole, our Heirs, Executors, and Administrators, and the Heirs, Executors, and Administrators, of *each* of us firmly by these Presents. Sealed with our Seals, and dated the *eleventh* Day of *Sept^r* in the *9th* Year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord *George the 3^d* King of Great-Britain, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, and in the Year of our Lord God, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Sixty *seven*

THE Condition of this Obligation is such, That if the above-bounden *John Willson* and *Rebecca Faulkner* now licenced to be married together, be neither of Consanguinity, or Affinity, the one to the other, within the Degrees prohibited for Marriage: If also there be no Let or Impediment, by Reason of any Precontract, entered into before the Twenty-fifth Day of *March*, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Fifty Four, or any other lawful Cause whatsoever, but that they may be lawfully married together, both by the Laws of GOD, and this Land: Moreover, If the Persons, whose Consent is required by Law in this behalf, be thereunto agreeing: And lastly, If the said Marriage be done and solemnized in such Manner, as in the Licence to them granted is limited: Then this Obligation to be void, or else to remain in full Force and Virtue.

Sealed and Delivered }
in the Presence of } *John Willson*
W. Harding

Richard Braderton

Marriage bond between John Willson (1740/1-1816) and Rebecca Faulkner (1734/5-1824)
Dated 11 September 1767, Tattenhall Parish, England [page 1 of 2]

The eleventh Day of Sep.^r
in the Year of our LORD One Thousand
Seven Hundred and Sixty seven

ON which Day appeared personally John Wilson of the Parish of
Gattenhall in the County and Diocess of Chester

and being sworn on the HOLY EVANGELISTS, alledged and made Oath
as follows, That he is of the Age of twenty six
Years and upwards, and a bachelor and intends to marry

Rebecca Faulkner of Gattenhall aforesaid

aged thirty two - Years and upwards, and a s.p.

not knowing or believing any lawful Let, or Impediment, by reason of any
Præcontract, entered into before the Twenty-fifth Day of March, One
Thousand Seven Hundred and Fifty Four, Consanguinity, Affinity, or
any other Cause whatsoever, to hinder the said intended Marriage; And he
prayed a Licence to solemnize the said Marriage in the parish Church of

Gattenhall

aforesaid, In which said parish the said
John Wilson further made Oath, That the said Rebecca Faulkner
hath had her usual Abode for the
space of Four Weeks last past.

The same Day the said
John Wilson
was sworn before me,

Wm Harding Currogate

Marriage bond between John Wilson (1740-1816) and Rebecca Faulkner (1734-1824)
Dated 11 September 1767, Tattenhall Parish, Diocese of Chester, England

Banns of Marriage _____

 N^o 23: John Willson of this Parish _____
 and Rebecca Falkner of this
 Parish _____ were
 Married in this Church by Licence this
thirteenth Day of September in the Year One Thousand Seven
 Hundred and sixty seven by me W. Bissell Curate
 This Marriage was solemnized between Us { John Willson
Rebecca Falkner
 In the Presence of Samuell Farright
Thomas Ratcliff

Tattenhall Parish marriage record for John Willson (1740/1-1816) and Rebecca Faulkner (1734/5-1824), on 13 Sept 1767

John Willson

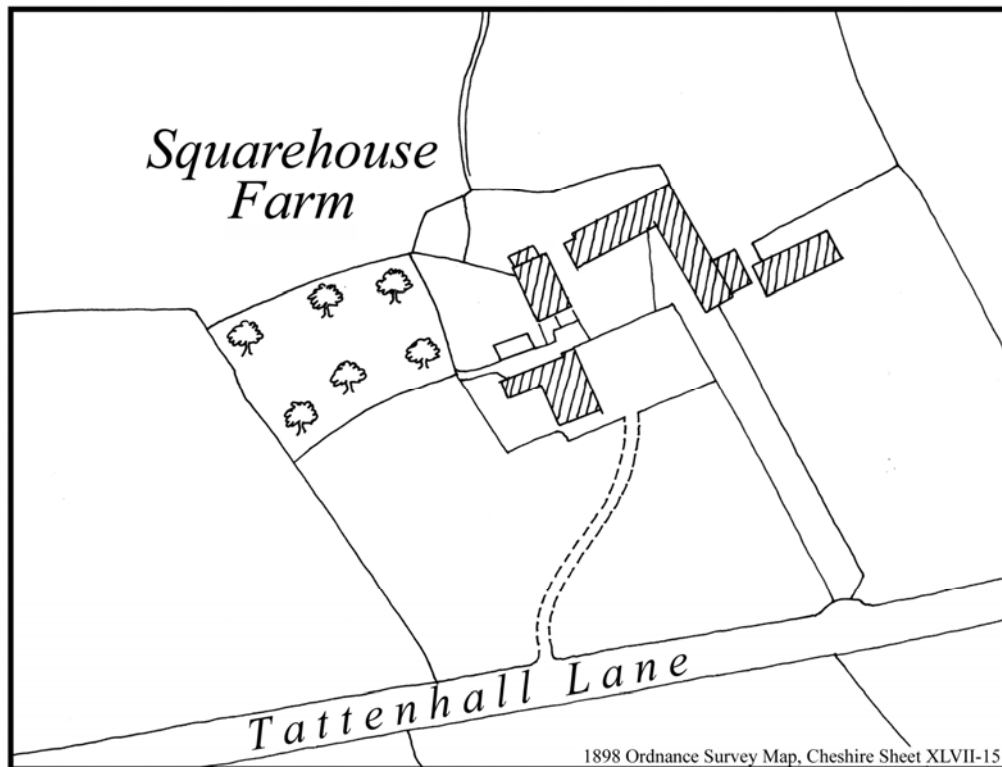
John Willson

John Willson

were “non-conformists” (not members of the Church of England), and by soldiers and sailors. Rebecca's parents were definitely from Tattenhall, but John's have yet to be found. John Willson was not a soldier or sailor, as far as we know, and he was a member in good standing of St. Alban's Church (Church of England) in Tattenhall following his marriage. He is stated on the marriage license to be “of this parish,” meaning Tattenhall -- but that may simply be because (as Land Tax Assessments show) he rented Squarehouse Farm, located a couple of miles east of Tattenhall village, from before 1781 (when the assessment records begin) until after his death in 1816. Records show that Wilsons held the property at least until 1818, the fact that Rebecca was still there at the time of her death in 1824 shows that the family was present there at least until that date. In any case. The use of a marriage license instead of banns is suggestive that perhaps he had not been born in Tattenhall.

The fact that John was able to clearly sign his own name on the marriage license (Rebecca signed with an “X”) suggests that he was better educated than many residents of Cheshire County were during the mid-1700’s. In the three examples of his signature that pertain to his marriage, one on each side of the license and one in the parish marriage register, he spells his own name “Willson,” rather than “Wilson.” However, in other parish records he signs his name with only one “l,” so we cannot be certain whether the double-l spelling has genealogical significance or was just an affectation dependent upon his mood at the time.

The marriage was conducted by William Bissell, curate, and witnessed by Samuell Wright and Thomas Ratcliff. The license indicates that the marriage bond was pledged by Richard Bratherton of Warmingham, a small parish between the towns of Crewe and Middlewich in southeastern Cheshire County. Bratherton was also an executor for the will of Rebecca’s father. John Willson and Rebecca Faulkner had at least five sons, all born in Tattenhall: William (1768), John (1769, who died in infancy), John (1771) Richard (1774) and Sheen (1775).



Squarehouse Farm (platt map, 1898)

We cannot be absolutely certain what John Willson and his father-in-law William Faulkner produced on their farms, but the raising of dairy cattle and the production of Cheshire cheese have always been important occupations in the neighborhood. Squarehouse Farm appears on the 1898 Ordnance Survey Map (shown above), and at least by that date include a substantial complex of buildings. The large elongated structures are probably for the housing of dairy cattle. A satellite image from modern times is shown below:



Squarehouse Farm, December 2005

In the mid-1700's the price of cheese ranged between 25 and 38 shillings per cwt (hundred pounds), and a 100-acre farm could produce 100 to 150 pounds of cheese *per day*. Pigs, chickens and sheep were also raised on many farms, and it appears that there was also an orchard on Squarehouse Farm. Tattenhall farmers liked to produce a variety of products, and enjoyed the independence this gave them. An old Tattenhall Farmers' Toast goes as follows:

Let the wealthy and great roll in splendor and state,
I envy them not. I declare it.
I eat my own lamb, my own chicken and ham,
I shear my own fleece and I wear it.
I have lawns. I have bowers. I have fruits. I have flowers.
The lark is my morning alarmer.
So jolly boys now, God speed the plow,
Long life and success to the farmer.

The Tattenhall Parish Church (St. Alban's) administered various community functions which today we would normally think of as governmental. There were at least four church offices in which the prominent men of the parish served (unpaid) on a rotating basis, usually two at a time, for a year or two: Churchwarden, Constable, Surveyor of Highways, and

Overseer of the Poor. John Wilson held the position of Constable in 1770, was Overseer of the Poor for Tattenhall in 1771 and 1785, Churchwarden in 1785-1786, and served as Surveyor of Highways in 1777 and 1778. He also signed his name (with one "l") to minutes of the Church Vestry Meetings in 1790. These were official positions. Overseer of the Poor functioned in the name of the County Justice of the Peace; usually two men held the post at any given time, and they were primarily responsible for the care of the community's poor, and for officially assigning indigent youths as apprentices indentured to householders in the community. One such document begins:

Witnesseth that John Wilson and John Wright, Overseers of the Poor of the Township of Tattenhall in the County of Chester, by and with the consent of His Majesty's Justice of the Peace, place John Spencer, age 11, poor child of the said township, apprentice to John Huxley of the said township of Tattenhall, farmer.

John Wilson's signature on the indenture document matches that on his marriage license, except for spelling his name with only one "l." He also filed expense reports during his tenure as Surveyor of Highways (mostly for road repair). In 1814 and 1815, just before his death in 1816, the church Vestry meeting records also make note of his contributions of clothing and potatoes for the support of the poor.

John Willson lived to the age of 75, and was buried at Tattenhall on 27 January 1816. His location at the time of his death was given as "Eaton," probably referring to the small town of Eaton (66 inhabitants in 1831), situated about 5 miles west-northwest of Tattenhall. He may simply have been visiting someone there at the time, because he still retained his lease on Squarehouse Farm. Rebecca Faulkner Wilson died about eight years later on Tattenhall Lane, presumably at Squarehouse Farm, on 19 Oct 1824, at the age of 89 years.

Considerable effort has been expended, without success, in an attempt to discover the birthplace and parentage of John Willson. It is highly unfortunate that the Tattenhall parish baptism records for 1725-1742 as well as the Bishop's Transcripts (which sometimes carry duplicate listings) for 1740 are missing. Therefore it remains possible that the family was indeed of Tattenhall, or that he was born elsewhere. For the record, the following Cheshire parish registers have been checked without success:

Barrow (1738-1745)
Barthomley (1738-1745)
Bidston (1738-1745)
Bowdon (1738-1745)
Bruera (1740-1741)
Bunbury (1739, 1741-1742)(not 1740??)
Chester Holy Trinity (1738-1745)
Chester St. Johns (1740)
Chester St. Marys (1741)(not 1740?)
Chester St. Michaels (1735-1743)
Chester St. Oswalds (1734-1744)
Christelton (1735-1744)

Coddington (1741-1743)
 Coppenhall (1738-1745)
 Eccleston (1736-1744)
 Farndon (1735-1740)
 Frodsham (1738-1745)
 Gulden Sutton (1730-1739, 1742-1744)(not 1740/41)
 Handley (1730-1740)(not 1741)
 Harthill (1730-1744)
 Malpas (1739-1741)
 Nantwich (1738-1745)
 Sandbach (1738-1745)
 Shocklach (1735-1744)
 Tarporley (1738-1745)
 Tarvin (1735-1742)
 Tattenhall Bishop's Transcripts (1734-1738, 1741)
 Warmingham (1739-1741)
 Waverton (1733-1744)
 Witton (Northwich) (1738-1745)

These include all of the parishes within the vicinity of Tattenhall, plus others throughout Cheshire where Wilson families were known to be living around 1740. This leaves about 60 parishes in the more distant portions of Cheshire still to search. However, inasmuch as such a thorough search of the surrounding area has proven negative, the odds seem to increasingly favor the possibility that his birth record was indeed among those in the lost section of the Tattenhall records. Furthermore, his son John (who emigrated to America) was proud enough to have been from Tattenhall that he wrote it lavishly in the Family Bible and also had it recorded thus in the Lincolnville, Maine town records. It seems more likely that such pride would be a reflection of Tattenhall as a long-time family seat rather than as a one or two-generation family residence.

Another possible approach would be to try to identify siblings of John Willson, although the 17-year gap in the birth records could well house all or nearly all of his siblings as well as himself. The Bishop's Transcripts need to be re-examined with this in mind. Three or four candidates currently exist, by virtue of marrying in Tattenhall around the same time as John Willson (1767): **Elizabeth Wilson** married John Stubbs in July 1768; another (or the same?) **Elizabeth Wilson** married William Gregory in 1779; **James Wilson** married Mary Woodcock on 15 Dec 1760; and **Joseph Wilson** married Mary Sheen (!) on 16 Nov 1779. How might we gather evidence of whether or not they were siblings? Firstly, were they literate and did they sign their own marriage documents? Unfortunately no signatures have thus far been found.

Looking back into earlier records of Tattenhall, a John Wilson, son of John Wilson, is recorded as having been buried at Tattenhall on 26 September 1691. Speculating that he might have had a son around 1660-1680, that still leaves at least a two-generation gap before the birth of our John Willson in 1740. Nevertheless, this could very well be our line. The earliest of our name that I have found in Cheshire County is Andrew Willsonne of Carden (just 4½ miles

south of Tattenhall), who was born around 1450 and married Ann Leiche around 1480. Ann was the great-granddaughter of Sir Robert Stanford, knight, Lord of Canaredon in the late 1300's. There were at least four unknown generations between Andrew Willsonne and the earliest Tattenhall John Wilson, so we can't yet be certain that he is in our line, but his family is no doubt the source of many, if not most, of the Wilsons and Willsons who lived in Cheshire during the 16th-18th centuries.

An Analysis of Naming Patterns

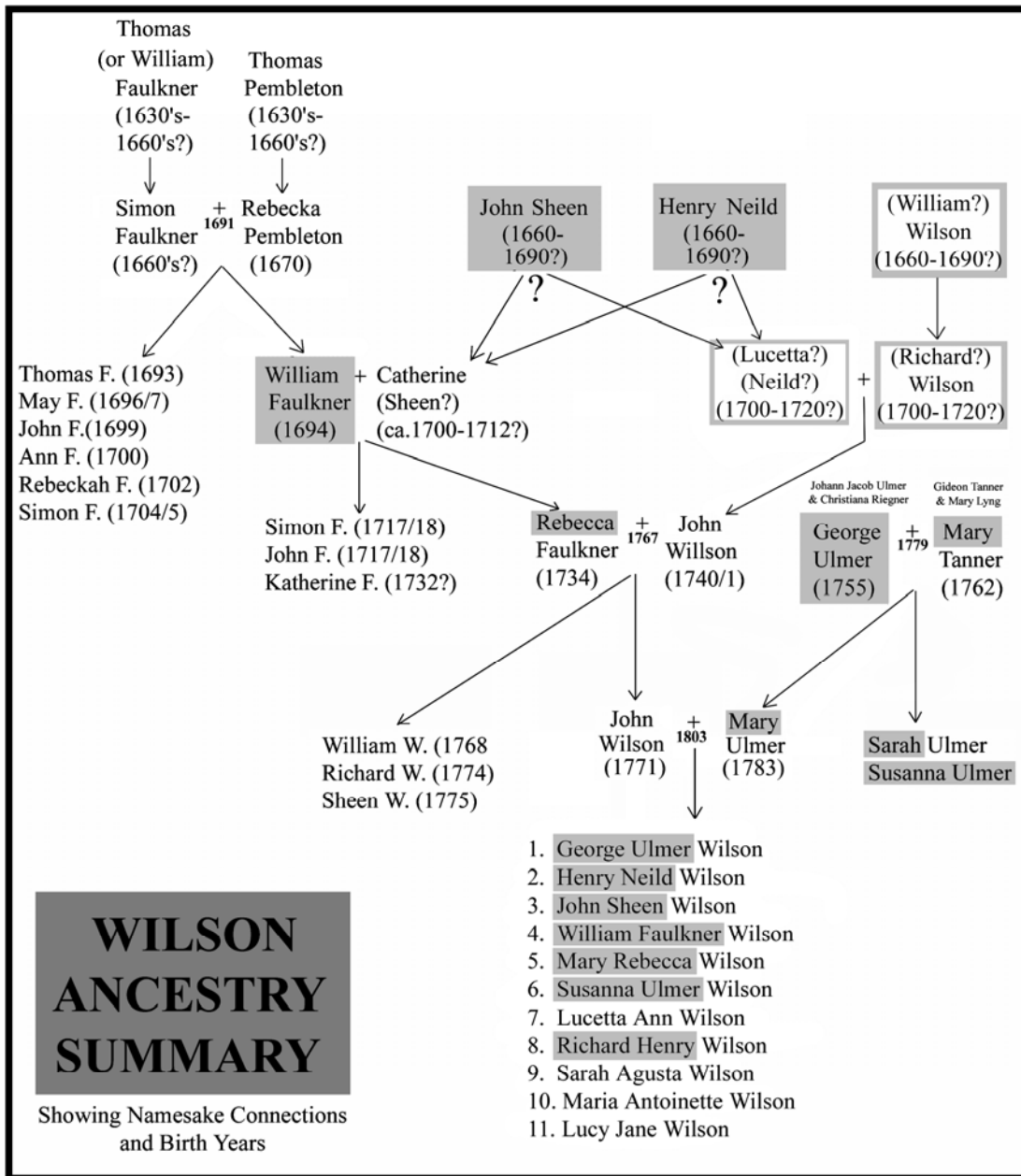
Genealogical clues about the ancestry of John Willson have been left for us thanks to the British tradition of naming children after ancestors. The chart shown above, labeled "Wilson Ancestry Summary," illustrates how this tradition has been expressed through several generations.

Look first at the children of Simon Faulkner and Rebecka Pembleton. Son Thomas is named after the mother's father and perhaps also the father's father. And there is a Simon named after the father and a Rebeckah named after the mother. Son John is probably named after the father's grandfather, as yet undiscovered, and daughters Ann and May are probably named after their parents mothers.

Next look at the children of William and Catherine Faulkner. There is a Simon and a Rebecca, named after the father's parents, and a Katherine named after the mother (and perhaps also the mother's mother). Now look at the four known sons of John Willson and Rebecca Faulkner. Son William is named after the mother's father or, perhaps more likely, the father or the as-yet unknown grandfather. Son John may be named after the father himself or a grandfather. I believe that son Richard is named after the father's father, and son Sheen (a surname used as a first name) must honor either the father's or the mother's maternal grandfather (as yet undiscovered).

And now the most revealing series of names: the eleven children of John Wilson and Mary Ulmer of Lincolville, Maine. Clearly John was steeped in the old naming tradition because he appears to have followed it meticulously, to the point of using both first and last names of ancestors as the first and *middle* names of his children—very helpful to the genealogists of later generations. His first son he names **George Ulmer**, obviously after his wife's father—not a bad person to curry favor with, since he and his wife were wealthy and were the only living ancestors in America. His second and third sons I believe he named **Henry Neild** and **John Sheen** after grandfathers of his mother and father (both of whom have yet to be discovered; Neild and Sheen are both obviously surnames, and Sheen repeats a name already commemorated in the name of the father's brother, Sheen Wilson). His fourth son he named **William Faulkner**, obviously after his maternal grandfather. His fifth child and first daughter, **Mary Rebecca**, may at first appear to be named after his wife, Mary Ulmer, but I think instead she was purposely named after his mother Rebecca *and* his wife's mother Mary (otherwise she would simply have been named "Mary Ulmer" after the mother). The second daughter, **Susanna Ulmer**, is clearly named after his wife's sister—perhaps they were especially close. The third daughter's name, **Lucetta Ann**, may well be original, however the father's unknown paternal grandmother, a Sheen or a Neild, is as yet unaccounted for in the naming scheme, so the third daughter may, in fact, be named after her. Now the eighth child

and fifth son, **Richard Henry**, appears to be named after both the father's father and the father (Henry Neild) of a grandmother. But wasn't this ancestral Henry already commemorated in the naming of the second son? Yes, but that son had died tragically in a childhood drowning accident, and so the name was again available. Aside from failing to use the name of the father's maternal grandmother (Catherine), these eight children pretty much cover the nearest ancestors and relatives. The names of the last three daughters, Sarah Augusta, Maria Antoinette and Lucy Jane, are probably all original.



Most interesting in all of this are the implications regarding the names of as-yet undiscovered ancestors. Note that **Richard** is suggested *twice* as the name for John Willson's as-yet undiscovered father: by John Willson's son Richard and grandson Richard Henry. Note also that an ancestor named **Sheen** must be a certainly, considering John Willson's son Sheen *and* grandson John Sheen. So **Henry Neild** and **John Sheen** can only be the names of the parents' (John Willson and Rebecca Faulkner) maternal grandfathers. But which is which?

On the one hand, the odds would seem to favor John Sheen being the father of William Faulkner's wife Catherine because they named a son John (and have no son named Henry). This is strong evidence, although on the other hand, John Willson himself might be named after a grandfather John Sheen, and unfortunately we do not yet know the names of John Willson's siblings, if any. Nevertheless, the lack of a son named Henry on the Faulkner side is very suggestive. And John Wilson named his *second son* Henry Neild (after naming his first after his wife's father), so this was John's first opportunity to honor one of his own male ancestors. It seems much more likely to me that he would choose to first honor his father's grandfather, in the Wilson line, rather than his mother's grandfather.

Bear in mind also that John Willson named his *last* son Sheen, suggesting that the name came from his wife's side rather than his own. His first son he named William, and I believe it's more likely that he named him after his own paternal grandfather, the father of our proposed Richard Wilson, rather than after his wife's father (though either is feasible)—otherwise Sheen will have been named after his wife's father in preference to his own grandfather. This rationale seems reasonable but it is nevertheless just supposition, not proof. It must be admitted that in broad terms the Faulkners seem much more closely associated with the Neild family in Tarvin parish, and the Wilsons seem much more closely associated with the Sheen families in the Tattenhall area.

Therefore, my highly provisional hypotheses are that John Willson's father was named **Richard Wilson, son of William Wilson**; that John Willson's mother was named **Lucetta Neild, daughter of Henry Neild**; and that Rebecca Faulkner's mother was **Catherine Sheen, daughter of John Sheen**. As a professional genealogist once told me, genealogy is as much an art as a science, and sometimes this kind of circumstantial evidence is all that we shall ever have, so we must make out best judgements and hope that firmer data will ultimately turn up to confirm or refute our conclusions.

The Sandbach Wilsons—a connection?

It seemed at first that the most likely possibility outside of Tattenhall was the prominent Wilson family of Sandbach. One of these was "John Wilson now of Broxton" [Tattenhall is within the boundaries of "Broxton Hundred"] ... "but late of Sandbach, gentleman." He was an attorney-at-law. A later (1794) document specifies that he was from the town of Breerton, near Tattenhall. We will call him "**John Wilson I**" (of Sandbach). According to his 1761 will he married twice, first to Adrian Forde (of Newcastle-under-Lyne, Staffordshire) on 28 December 1733; she died and he then married Jane, whose maiden name is not mentioned, on 29 October 1755. Jane was probably considerably younger because the 1794 document states that she was predeceased by her stepson John II—but had also died by 1794.

John Wilson II was John I's eldest son by his first wife (John I also had sons William and Robert; William became the Rev. Lord Bishop of Chester). John Wilson I died 8 December 1766. According to the 1774 will of John Wilson II, and the 1808 will of his wife Rebekah [Rebekah Furnivall, daughter of Peter Furnival of Liverpool], John II had two sons: John Wilson III (born before 1770) and Thomas Needham Wilson (1770-1837). John II died 7 March 1775 and Rebekah died 19 November 1809. Was John II's son, John III, our 1740/1-born John Willson of Tattenhall? They have approximately the right ages. John II, incidentally, bore a coat of arms containing the golden Wilson wolf ("sable, a wolf rampant or, in chief three estoiles of the second; impaling, or, a bend gules between six martlets of the second").

Unfortunately for our theory, **John Wilson III** died intestate and apparently childless, because the family estates then passed to his nephew Thomas. There is, furthermore, no evidence that John Wilson III "of the Commons House, Sandbach" ever left Sandbach. The wills say nothing else about John Wilson III that would help connect him to our John Willson, but since he would have to have been born 29 years before his brother Thomas it is probably too much of a stretch. This appears to be a false lead.

But wait! According to *Burke's Peerage*, John Wilson I had three brothers who, not being the eldest sons, were unable to inherit the family estates: Robert Wilson (1697-1729), Joseph Wilson (born 1706), and **Richard Wilson** (born ca. 1710?). We have determined through a study of naming patterns among the descendants that the father of our 1740/1-born John Willson of Tattenhall was very probably named Richard Wilson. And Richard Wilson of Sandbach is exactly the right age to be his father. Unfortunately the Sandbach baptismal records show no baptism of a John Wilson, son of Richard, in 1740/1. But Richard may have moved to Tattenhall by then. It is still possible that Richard Wilson's marriage record, if found at Sandbach in the 1710-1741 period, could confirm the connection if he married a daughter of John Sheen or Henry Neild. This remains to be investigated.

BURIALS in the Parish of <i>Tattenhall</i> in the County of <i>Cheshire</i> in the Year <i>1816</i>				
Name.	Abode.	When buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
<i>John Wilson</i> No. 33.	<i>Eaton</i>	<i>Jan^y 27th</i>	<i>75.</i> <i>years</i>	<i>John Sheenell</i> <i>Curate</i>

Tattenhall Parish burial record for John Wilson, aged 75, buried 27 January 1816.
The abode given at time of death ("Eaton") may refer to a house; there is no town of Eaton near Tattenhall.