



Wilson Descendants In England: The Brothers of John Wilson

John Wilson of Tattenhall and Lincolnville had three brothers who remained behind in England: William, Richard and Sheen Wilson. The brothers relocated, one at a time, from Tattenhall to the Manchester area, just across the border from Cheshire County in Lancashire County, about 30 miles northwest from Tattenhall. William was there by 1793; Richard by 1805 and Sheen by 1822. There are several Richard Wilsons and William Wilsons in earlier directories but not at the same addresses, so their identities are uncertain; however, there are no Sheen Wilsons listed in the Manchester city directories for 1794, 1797 or 1816, therefore Sheen must have moved to Manchester between 1816 and 1822, considerably later than his brothers.

None of the Wilson brothers chose a rural life of farming like their father, but preferred to involve themselves in businesses in the big city. Nor were any of them as prolific; the three brothers between them produced eight children total, whereas John by himself had somewhere between 11 and 15 children. Consequently the descendants of John Willson the elder are today considerably more numerous in America than in England despite only one of his four sons having emigrated.

Manchester, in those days, was the focus of the industrial revolution in England and was the country's most important manufacturing town; it was particularly known for its fabric mills. The city, occupying a low tract of land on both sides of the Irwell River at the confluence of the Medlock and the Irk Rivers, consisted of Manchester proper

(including the suburbs of Hulme, Chorlton, Ardwick, Cheetham, Sale, Moss Side, Barton, etc. etc.) on the east or left bank, and the extensive borough of Salford on the right bank. An 1866 gazetteer describes the city as follows:

Communication across the Irwell River is maintained by eight bridges, several of them handsome structures: Victoria Bridge, consisting of a single elegant arch; Blackfriar's Bridge of three arches; the iron bridges of Strangeways and Springfield Lane, and the suspension iron bridge of Broughton may be specified as most worthy of notice. The almost unexampled rapidity with which Manchester has risen up has left it comparatively poor in architectural ornament, and yet it is superior to most manufacturing towns in general appearance. It has few of the narrow, twisted and crowded lanes by which all large towns of ancient date are more or less characterized, while it can point to spacious streets and squares, well paved and well lighted, and lined with houses which are generally of a most substantial, and, not infrequently, of a magnificent description. Market Street, continued in the line of the London Road, nearly across the center of town, towards the Irwell, is one of the finest streets out of the metropolis.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "W. Wilson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "W" and a long, sweeping tail.

William Wilson (1768-before 1855)

William Wilson, John's older brother, was born in Tattenhall on 14 July 1768 (Tattenhall Parish Records). He married Margaret Oldham in Manchester Cathedral in 1793, and together they had at least three children: John (1800), Esther (1802) and William (1804). All were baptized at the Mosely Street Independent Chapel, central Manchester. His marriage in 1793 is the earliest record of the presence of any of the three Wilson brothers in Manchester.

According to the baptismal records of his children, William was a "warehouseman" (1800, 1802) and a "calenderer," or cotton mill worker (1804). His 1793 marriage record also lists his profession as "calenderer." *Bancks's Manchester and Salford Directory* for 1800 lists seven William Wilsons, but only one of them is a "warehouseman"; his address is given as 18 Richmond Street, Manchester. An earlier Manchester directory, for 1797, also lists a William Wilson on Richmond Street and gives his occupation as bookkeeper (so this may not be him). The 1794 directory lists two shoemakers named William Wilson (who are not present in 1797), a tailor, a silk-drier and a grocer/confectioner. The latter, located at 8 Exchange Street, is a possibility for our William Wilson, considering that his brother Richard later opened a grocery business nearby.

William's sons John and William each had three children of their own who were still alive in 1854, but unfortunately they are only mentioned without being named in Sheen Wilson's will.

According to that will (dated April 1854), William's daughter Esther Wilson married a man named Gresswell and had two sons, Edward and Thomas. The birth of Esther's son Edward is recorded in Manchester Cathedral as 20 June 1827 (parents Thomas Gresswell and Easter). He married Ellen Wood (daughter of William Wood, bootmaker) on 2 June 1852 in Manchester. The birth of Esther's son Thomas (Jr.), is recorded in Manchester Cathedral as having taken place on 26 August 1835, his parents being Thomas (Sr.) and Esther Gresswell. According to the Manchester Cathedral register, Thomas Gresswell was a bookkeeper in Salford.

Thomas (Sr.) appears to have died in June 1859 (Civil Registration Index, Chorlton, vol. 8c, p. 589); Esther appears to have died in Manchester in March 1877 (CRI), and may in fact have died before 1871 (when she is no longer living with her son Thomas), and so neither is found on the 1871 or 1881 censuses. The 1861 census finds the family of Esther's son Thomas Gresswell (a warehouseman) living at 12 Milton Street, Hulme with his wife Hannah (born 1835/5), infant son Edward and his widowed mother Esther (born 1801/2). The 1871 census lists the family of Thomas (Jr.) Gresswell, a greengrocer, age 36 (born 1835 in Hulme, Manchester), including his wife Hannah Pinkney (born 1833/4 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne; married 1859), and children Edward (born 1860/1; died in 1895 at the age of 34; CRI vol. 8d, p. 210), Thomas (born 1861/2), Margaret A. (born 1863/4), George (born 1866/7) and infant William H. (born 1870), all of them born in Hulme, Manchester. The widowed Esther is not present. The family also appears on the 1881 census at 88 Park Street, Hulme; little William appears to have died, and Albert (born 1872/3) and Annie (born 1874/5) have been added. Thomas Jr. (head of the household) is listed as an unemployed printer, wife Hannah and daughter Margaret as shirtmakers, son George as a cabinetmaker, and sons Edward and Thomas III as "hookers" (probably a textile industry term). The 1891 census finds the family at 75 Park Street, Hulme, and lists Thomas (age 56) as "too ill to work." His son Edward is a "stamper cott," Thomas is a "painter," sons George and Albert are plumbers and Annie is a shirtmaker. Manchester directories list Thomas in 1877 and 1879 (occupation "packer" and "porter" respectively) as living at 110 Junction Street, Hulme. The 1883 and 1886 directories have him as a "porter" at 88 Park Street, Hulme.

Thomas Gresswell III appears to have married Elizabeth Frame in September 1893 in Chorlton (Civil Registration Index, vol. 8c, p.975), and is listed in the 1895 directory as a painter living at 30 Canning Street on Chorlton-on-Medlock. In 1903 his brother Albert is listed as a plumber living at 38 Heald Avenue, and in 1909 as a plumber living at 11 Collins Street, Hulme. Their brother George is also listed as a plumber in 1909, living at 19 Stanford Street, Hulme.

George Gresswell (Sr.)(son of Thomas Gresswell, Jr. and grandson of Esther Wilson and Thomas Gresswell Sr.) is also listed in a 1909 city directory as a plumber living at 19 Stanford Street, Hulme. He married Annie Pettitt in 1897 in Chorlton (CRI).

This family appears on the 1901 census, living at 9 Essex St., Hulme. George Gresswell, born 1866/7, a plumber, with his wife Annie (b. 1873/4 in Staffordshire) and his two children, George William Gresswell (b. 1897/8, listed in the CRI as born June-qtr 1898, and in the death index as born 11 April 1898 in Manchester, and died Jan. 1984), and Jessie Gresswell (b. 1900/1 in Manchester, probably the one shown in the CRI as having been born Dec-qtr 1901 in Chorlton and died June-qtr 1906). George had two more daughters thereafter: Hettie (b. 1902) and Lillian (b. 1908).

George William Gresswell, eldest son of George Gresswell and Annie Pettitt, married Eliza ("Ida") Gould, and together they had one child, Muriel Doreen Gresswell (born 11 Mar 1929), who is still living today. She married Clifford Sharp (d. 2001), and together they have been blessed with four children, ten grandchildren and (so far) four great-grandchildren.

George's eldest sister, Jessie Gresswell, married George Lowe and worked all her life as a textile machinist in Stockport near Manchester. Her husband George was an accountant in a hat factory. Jessie died in the mid-1980's; they had no children.

George's second sister, Hettie Gresswell, also worked in the textile industry, as a cutter. She married Chris Worsley, an engineering machinist for a machine tool manufacturer. They also lived in Stockport and had two children, Graham (b.ca. 1938) and Christine (b.ca. 1940). Graham married Sylvia ____ and they had two children, Gillian and Michael Worsley. Christine was born with Down's syndrome and never married. Graham and Christine both died in the late 1990's.

And George's youngest sister, Lillian Gresswell, married Thomas Stanley Lowth, a butcher, in 1936; they went on to have five children, all of whom are still living. Ian Lowth (b. 1936) has two daughters and one grandson; Anthony Lowth (b. 1939) has three sons and is currently living in Johannesburg, South Africa; Rodney Lowth (b. 1941), who supplied all of this information on Lillian's descendants, lives in Cheadle, Cheshire and has two sons and three grandsons; Adrian Lowth (b. 1947) has four children and six grandchildren; and Jennifer Lowth (b. 1950) lives in Glasgow, Scotland and has four children and three grandchildren.

It is interesting to note that the address for Richard Wilson's grocery business was 20 Market Place, and at 21 Market Street was the business of a William Willson (listed in the *England Commercial Directory for 1816-1817*, under the headings of "druggists etc." and "oil merchants and dealers"). This may be Richard's brother William, especially since this William chooses to spell his surname "Willson" like their father did, and also considering that only one other William Wilson (a linen dealer located at 2, Old Millgate) is listed in this directory of businesses. However, it is quite a large step up from a humble manual laborer ("warehouseman") to a druggist, so it seems unlikely for that reason. If "our" William was just a simple laborer and did not run a business he may not have been listed at all in this particular, rather abbreviated directory.

A William Wilson died without leaving a will on 15 April 1851; a sheet of administrative details mentions that he was a “commercial traveler” living on Dorset Street in Hulme, near Sheen Wilson. This matches an 1850 directory listing him at Dorset Street, Hulme, his profession given as “traveler.” However, his wife’s name is given as Mary (not Margaret); therefore he appears not to be our William, whose exact death date still remains unknown. All we know is that our William Wilson was alive and well at the time of Sheen Wilson’s 1838 letter to Mary Ulmer Wilson in America, and that both he and his wife Margaret were dead by the time Sheen Wilson wrote his will in 1854.

A number of indistinguishable William Wilsons are listed in the 1841, 1850 and 1853 commercial directories for Manchester and surrounding area, one of them being a grocer and tea dealer (like his brother Richard), but the census records for his address are unfortunately too faint to read. Another in 1823 is listed as a “warehouseman. And also in 1823 is a listing for Margaret Wilson, “widow” (William’s wife’s name was Margaret), but this cannot be our Margaret because William was alive in 1838 when Sheen Wilson wrote to his sister-in-law in America.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rich. Wilson". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first name "Rich." and the last name "Wilson" clearly legible.

Richard Wilson (1774-1847)

Richard Wilson, John’s younger brother, was born in Tattenhall on 2 Feb 1774 (Tattenhall Parish Records). He married Ann Coultherd in Manchester, Cathedral in 1805; Ann, also called Nancy (a common nickname for Ann in those days), was born in 1774-1776 in Reeths, Yorkshire. Together they had six children: Eliza (born 1808), Richard (born 1812), Ann (born 1809), Lucy Ellen (born 1819), John Sheen Wilson (born 1822), and Alfred Wilson (born 1824 in Manchester).

Richard’s 1805 marriage record lists his profession as “grocer.” According to an 1838 letter bearing his return address, Richard was a grocer operating out of Market Place in Manchester. He is listed earlier in the *England Commercial Directory for 1816-1817*, under “Grocers,” at 20 Market Place, Manchester. In *Pigot & Dean’s New Directory of Manchester & Salford* for 1822-1823 he is at the same business address, but with his private residence listed as 15 Tib Lane. In other trade directories of 1841, 1843 and 1847 Richard is listed as a “Grocer and tea dealer of 10 Market Place,” with private residence at Wilton Terrace, Cheetham. An 1845 directory lists his private residence as York Terrace, Cheetham.

In 1805, the year Richard Wilson married and declared himself a “grocer,” he was 31. We don’t know how much earlier it was that he came to Manchester from Tattenhall, or for how long previously his business had been established at the address on Market Place. However, it is suggestive that in *Schole’s Manchester & Salford Directory* for

1794 and for 1797, the quarters at 20 Market Place were being operated by a John Wilson, “cotton manufacturer,” whose home address is given as 103 Green-gate, Salford. Could he be an uncle? The name could simply be coincidence, but that is hard to believe. A John Wilson continued to operate on Market Street, manufacturing cotton fabric, in 1816 and beyond, and was therefore clearly neither of our Johns, the father or the son who emigrated to America.

The Richard Wilson family appears on the 1841 census on Wilton Terrace, Cheetham. Richard Wilson (age 65, not born in Lancashire) is listed as a grocer, with wife Nancy (age 55, also not born in Lancashire). Also listed are his children: Richard Wilson Jr. (age 30, born in Lancashire), Eliza Wilson Grimshaw (30), Lucy E[llen] Wilson (20), John Sheen Wilson (15), Alfred Wilson (15)(John Sheen and Alfred thus appear to be twins but were actually born separately in 1822 and 1824, respectively); and his grandchildren, the daughters of Eliza Wilson Grimshaw: Lucy Ann Grimshaw (9) and Elin [or Eliza] S. Grimshaw (7). Also listed as members of Richard’s large household are several employees: Elin H. Taylor (15), Mary Donnely (25), Samuel Dawson (25, grocer), Thomas Gardner (15) and Charles Booth (15). Lucy Ellen Wilson ultimately married Thomas Gardner; he became a grocer on his own and part owner of *Beely & Gardner* on Springfield Road in Sale, Cheshire County (a few miles southwest of Manchester). Eliza’s daughter Elin (or Eliza) S. Grimshaw apparently never married; she appears on the 1871 census for Chorlton-cum-Hardy, living with her sister Lucy’s family, and on the 1881 and 1891 censuses for Chorlton-on-Medlock and Moss Side, Manchester (respectively), living with her Uncle, Alfred Wilson.

Lucy Ann Grimshaw (Eliza’s sister) married Edward Groome ca. 1860 and they had seven children: Ada Mary Groome (1861/2), Bertha Wilson Groome (1865/6), Lucy Agnes Groome (1864; died in infancy), Jesse Groom (1867/8), Edward Ernest Groome (1869/70), Mabel Groome (1872) and Arthur Reginald Groome (1873). The family lived first in Manchester proper (where Ada and Bertha were born), then moved to Barton-on-Irwell (where Jesse and Edward were born), before settling in Chorlton-cum-Hardy (where Mabel and Arthur were born. Lucy’s husband Edward was a “general draper” (retail dealer in cloth) by profession, and the cloth business must have been good to support such a large family, including a household staff of three (a governess, a cook and a housemaid). An 1879 trade directory (*Slater’s Directory of Manchester*) lists the company as “E. Groome & Son (the son being Edward Jr., just 10 years old), linen drapers, silk mercers, milliners, straw bonnet makers, shawl, mantle and family mourning warehouse and general understakers” located at 115, 117 and 119 London Road, Manchester. Edward’s private residence was listed as Alder Bank, Edge Lane, Chorlton-cum-Hardy. Edward Jr. married Edith Emily Rebeck in 1898. The elder Edward may have been a bit premature in declaring his son to be part of the cloth company (“E. Groome & Son”); Edward Jr. became instead an accountant. He is listed in trade directories for 1895 and 1903 as a partner in the accounting firm of Ramsdale & Groome (“accountants, auditors and estate and insurance agents and licensed valuers”), with offices at York Street Chambers, 8 York Street, and residence at Alder Bank, Edge Lane, Chorlton-cum-Hardy. Their son, Edward Groome III, was born in 1899 and represents the most recent generation thus far discovered; he may have lived well into the late

1900's. He appears with his parents on the 1901 census for Cambridge Road, Oakleigh, Hale in Chester County.

Bertha Wilson Groome married James Farrar in 1893 (they have thus far not been found on the 1901 census).

Arthur Reginald Groome appears on the 1901 census living in Chorlton-cum-Hardy at The Downs, Mountain View with his widowed mother Lucy, his unmarried sister Mabel (age 29) and a "visitor" or servant named Marion Heywood (age 31). Arthur married Marion two years later. A 1903 trade directory lists Arthur as an "architect and surveyor" at 2 St. Peters Square, with residence at Lincomb, Harrop Road, Hale. In 1914 a directory lists him as living at The Dene, Harrop Road, Hale, and his mother Lucy Groome (who was then 82) as living nearby at Lincomb.

The surname Groome is quite rare in Britain, and today only seven people of that name live in the greater Manchester area. Since the odds seemed to favor the possibility that at least some of these people are descendants of Edward or Arthur Groome, I wrote to all of them in September 2004 enquiring as to whether they are connected with this line and, if so, would they be interested in exchanging genealogical data. There were only two responses, neither of them related to Edward or Arthur. Apparently in order to be successful a mailing campaign will need to be of larger scope.

Richard Wilson died on 19 June 1847. His four-page will is dated 29 January 1845, and a codicil was added on 17 June 1847. The will is unrevealing for genealogical purposes inasmuch as it refers only to "my children" without naming them. His estate, however, was estimated as being something under £10,000, which was a substantial sum. In the will he orders his entire estate to be liquidated so that it can be divided between his wife and children. The estate includes a stock of trade fixtures, book debts, income-producing stock funds and securities, and "all effects employed in or immediately connected with the business which I now carry on in the Market Place in Manchester...and also my interest in the shop, counting house and warehouse, and the premises thereunto belonging which I occupy and hold in the Market Place aforesaid." His executors were "my friends William Woodcock of Great Desere Street in Cheetham aforesaid and James Geeves now residing with me." He signed his name, "Rich^d. Wilson," to each page of the will.

Richard's widow Nancy (mentioned by name in Richard's will and referred to as Ann in Sheen Wilson's 1854 will) appears on the 1851 census, age 66, living on York Street, Cheetham. Her birthplace is given as Reeth in Yorkshire. She is accompanied by her widowed daughter, Eliza Wilson Grimshaw and Eliza's daughter, Lucy Ann Grimshaw. Also in the house are her son, John Sheen Wilson (28, unmarried, a calico print salesman), her son Alfred Wilson (26, a grocer), her daughter Lucy Ellen Wilson (31), Thomas Gardner (29, a servant grocer), James Clark (18, an errand boy) and Mary Ann Clark (22, a household servant).

The family business at 10 Market Place, despite Richard's orders that it be liquidated for cash upon his death, is shown (in 1850 and 1853 trade directories) as being under the management of his widow Ann Wilson, her home address given as 108 York Street, Cheetham. Sheen Wilson, in his will, clearly refers to "Ann Wilson, the widow of my late brother Richard," whereas Richard's will refers to his widow as Nancy. In any case, within a few years the grocery business had ceased to exist at that address, presumably on account of the death or retirement of Ann ("Nancy") Wilson.

Richard's eldest son, Richard Jr., has not been located in other records, largely because the name Richard Wilson is too common and there is no way as yet to determine which of them, if any, is the right one. His name is written into the will of Sheen Wilson, but is then scratched out at some time between the original writing of the will in April 1854 and Sheen Wilson's death in January 1855. Therefore it seems likely that he died childless during that period.

Richard's unmarried son John Sheen Wilson also appears on the 1881 census, living in at 10 Springfield Lane in Sale. He is listed as a calico print salesman (age 58, born in Manchester), along with his sister Lucy Ellen Gardner (age 60, born in Manchester) and her husband Thomas Gardner (age 59, a grocer, born in Manchester), and Sarah Cooke, a widowed domestic servant (age 30). There is no indication that Lucy and Thomas had any children (she was 46 when they married in 1865). John Sheen Wilson (age 68) appears on the 1891 census living at 5 Cambridge St., Sale. He is accompanied by his sister Lucy Ellen Gardner and her husband Thomas Gardner ("retired grocer"). Also in the household is a live-in servant, Sarah Mason (age 19). Finally, in the 1901 census, John Sheen Wilson (age 78) is recorded as living on Darley Street in Sale with his widowed sister, Lucy E. Gardner (age 81) and one servant girl.

Richard's youngest child, Alfred Wilson, appears on the 1881 census living at 64 Churchill Street in Chorlton-on-Medlock. He is listed as a "coachman" (age 56, born in Manchester), with his wife Mary A[nn Shackles] (45, born in Ireland; married 1856), his son Alfred I. Wilson (age 13, "scholar," born in Bolton, Lancashire), daughter Lillian Wilson (age 5, born in Manchester), and his unmarried niece Eliza Grimshaw (age 47, a domestic servant born in Manchester). Judging by the birthplaces, the family was living in Bolton ca. 1868, moved to Manchester proper by 1876 (confirmed by his appearance at 64 Churchill Street, Chorlton-on-Medlock, in the 1877 city directory). The family appears on the 1891 census for Moss Side, Manchester. Alfred Wilson (66, coachman, born in Manchester) is accompanied by his 50-year-old (should have been 55-year-old) wife, "Annie" (surely the Irish-born Mary A[nn], even though it carelessly states that she was born in Manchester like everyone else in the family, instead of Ireland as stated in the 1881 and 1901 censuses), his daughter Lillian Wilson (age 15, and working as an "ironer"), and his unmarried niece, Eliza Grimshaw (age 57).

Lilian Wilson (age 20, daughter of Alfred Wilson) married James Herbert Stelfox, age 25, son of Thomas Stelfox, on 26 May 1896 in Manchester (Lilian's father's address at that time was given as 89 South Street). (Although James was born in Wales, his father Thomas, also an iron-turner, was from Hulme, Manchester.) They appear on the

1901 census (at 15 Roebuck Lane, Sale, Altrincham) as the family of “Herbert Helfox.” This is an obvious mistranscription when the original page is examined; besides, there was no one else in England with the surname “Helfox” in 1901, but there were over 250 people named Stelfox. The original meaning of the surname is “foxy-faced,” that is, with red hair and beard. The census states that he was an ironturner born in 1870/1 in Harwarden, Wales, with wife Lillian (born in Manchester in 1875/6) and Lillian’s widowed mother, Mary Wilson, born 1835/6 in Cavan, Ireland. Herbert J[ames] Stelfox is still at the same address as of the 1903 and 1906 city directories, but the 1909 and 1911 city directories list Herbert Stelfox (now a “mechanic”) at 9 Salisbury Road, Broadheath, Altrincham. There are 25 Stelfox families living in the the greater Manchester area; I wrote to all of them on October 8, 2004, asking if they are from this line. There have been no responses as yet. The 1881 census shows James Stelfox’s family in Wales as follows:

<u>Thomas STELFOX</u>	Head	M	Male	40	Hulme Manchester, Lancashire	Iron Turner
<u>Mary STELFOX</u>	Wife	M	Female	38	Dublin, Ireland	
<u>Charles E. STELFOX</u>	Son	U	Male	21	Hulme Manchester, Lancashire	Engine Fitter
<u>Thomas STELFOX</u>	Son		Male	15	Hulme Manchester, Lancashire	Coal Miner
<u>Albert F. STELFOX</u>	Son		Male	13	Hawarden, Flint, Wales	Errant Boy
<u>James H. STELFOX</u>	Son		Male	11	Hawarden, Flint, Wales	Scholar
<u>Julia STELFOX</u>	Daur		Female	9	Hawarden, Flint, Wales	Scholar
<u>Walter STELFOX</u>	Son		Male	6	Hawarden, Flint, Wales	
<u>Daniel STELFOX</u>	Son		Male	4	Hawarden, Flint, Wales	
<u>Cordelia STELFOX</u>	Daur		Female	2	Hawarden, Flint, Wales	
<u>William H. STELFOX</u>	Son		Male	1	Hawarden, Flint, Wales	

The 1891 census shows an Alfred Wilson (23, fishmonger, born in Manchester) with his wife Marian M. (age 22, i.e. born 1868/9) living at 56 Lower Chatham St., Chorlton-on-Medlock; this is probably our Alfred I. Wilson, born 1867/8. I have been unable to track him thereafter.



Sheen Wilson (1775-1855)

Sheen Wilson, the youngest of the brothers, was born 10 September 1775 in Tattenhall, Cheshire. He was probably named after John Sheen, speculated to be his maternal grandfather (though this hypothesis remains unproven). Although his brother William had moved to Manchester by 1793, and his brother Richard by 1805, Sheen is not in the 1816-1817 city directory and does not appear in Manchester until *Pigot & Dean's New Directory of Manchester & Salford* for 1822-1823, wherein he is listed as a "brewer" located on Jenkinson Street, Manchester. An 1825 directory specifies that his address was Jenkinson Street, Chorlton Row, and that he was strictly a brewer of regular ale and not of porter, a heavier, darker ale (some brewers made both).

As of 1838 Sheen Wilson was living on Russell Street in Hulme, a suburb on the southwestern outskirts of Manchester in Lancashire. It was there where he entertained his visiting American nephew, William Faulkner Wilson, in 1838 and wrote a kindly letter to be carried back to his widowed sister-in-law Mary Wilson in Belfast, Maine. The text of that letter is as follows (courtesy of Ann Wilson Stark):

North America
Mrs. Mary Wilson
Belfast, Maine

[written at] Russel Street, Hulme, Ap[ril]. 16, 1838

Dear Sister,

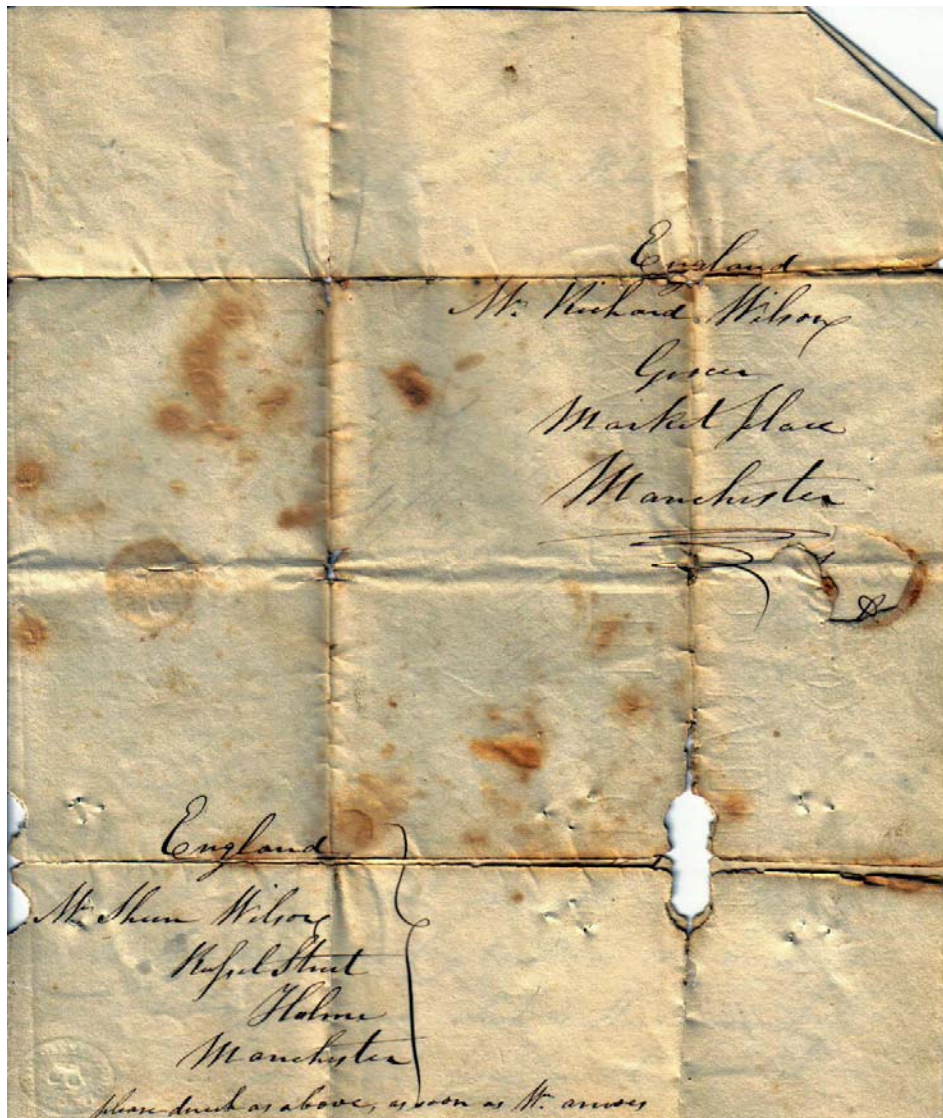
I have but a few minutes allow'd me to say to you how happy I am to see one of your family, William Faulkner Wilson, at my house, and he informing me how comfortable you and all your family being, in thriving circumstances, and brightening prospects. I should have been very glad could he have staid a little longer with me, but he is wishful to go back with Capt. Pendleton who is bound for New York and thinks he will be ready for sea tomorrow the 17th inst. Wm. Can tell you all about Manchester and the news here more lazily than can be said in a letter from me which is the excuse I offer for a very short amt. from me at present. Wm. Can tell you how I am situated at present respecting my available finances which are rather tite for a short time, or I should have sent you something more by way of remembrance. You will please accept from me a Chenelle Shawl as a small token of my respect. I hope you will approve

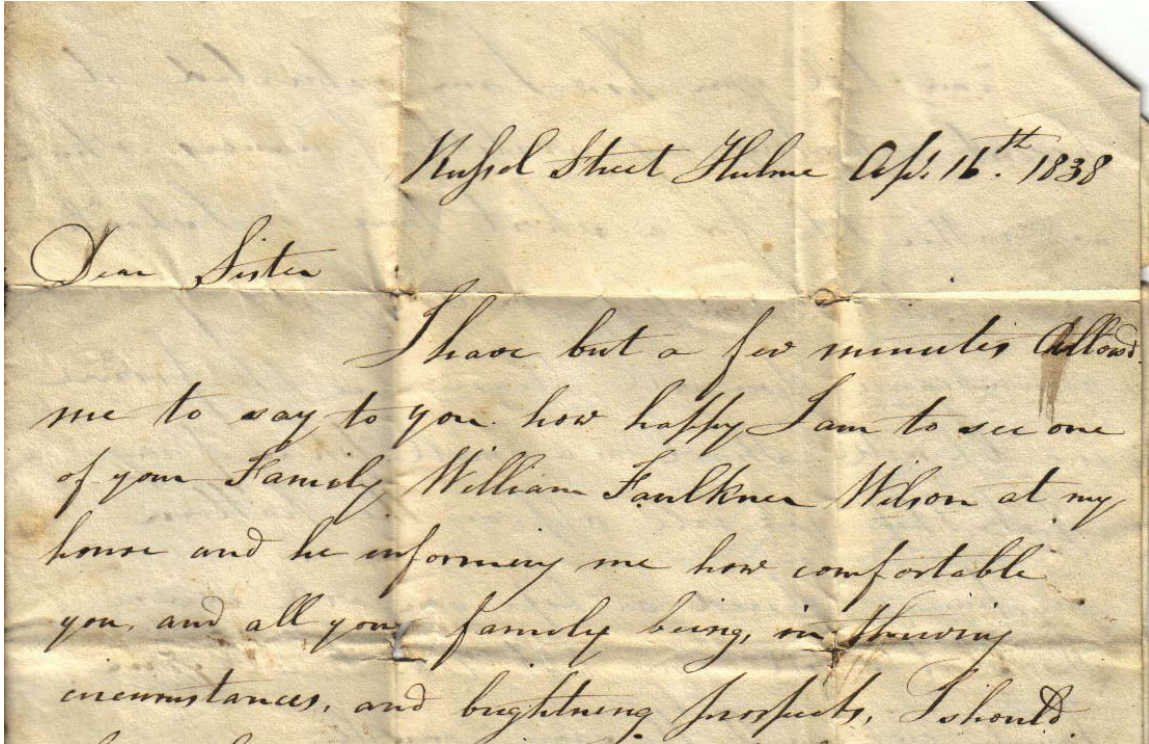
the pattern. My time is expired and hope you will excuse this short scroll.
My best love to all your family and accept the same yourself,

I am Dear Sister your affectionate bro,
Sheen Wilson

P.S. My brothers and families are all well and desire to be remembered to
you and all the family.

The back side of the letter (shown below) bears two return addresses: “England, Mr. Richard Wilson, Grocer, Market Place, Manchester,” and in the opposite corner “England, Mr. Sheen Wilson, Russel Street, Hulme, Manchester.” Written in small letters under Sheen’s address it says: “Please direct as above as soon as W arrives.” (The “W” probably refers to the arrival of their nephew from America, William Faulkner Wilson, who was to carry the letter back to his mother Mary in Belfast.)





The 1841 census lists Sheen Wilson as age 65, retired and living with one female servant named Sarah Hill (45). Directories for 1850 and 1853 list him at 66 Russell Street, Hulme. The 1851 census lists him as a “retired brewer” (age 76, born in Tattenhall, Cheshire) living with his housekeeper Sarah Hill (57). Apparently he never married; he died in Chorlton in January 1855. Though he had no children of his own, his will provides information on the families of his brothers William and Richard. Sadly, by this time he had lost all contact with his nieces and nephews in America.

It is interesting to note that Sheen Wilson’s will refers to him as “Gentleman.” In England, the “gentry” were the class under the nobility, well-born and well-bred non-nobles who were entitled to a coat of arms. The concept of the Victorian “gentleman” encompassed social class status and moral code; John Ruskin's definition of a gentleman was a man with the following characteristics: "perfectly bred. After that, gentleness and sympathy, or kind disposition and fine imagination." In addition, the definition of a gentleman eventually evolved to reflect a certain type of education. The fact that all of the Wilson brothers were literate and apparently well-educated, as was their father, John Willson, suggests that the family was not of typical underclass commoner ancestry.

Will of Sheen Wilson

Dated 12th April 1854
Will of Mr. Sheen Wilson

Pro: issued

Dated 13th February 1855
Hall, Stockport

This is the last Will and Testament of me, **Sheen Wilson** of Hulme in the County of Lancaster, Gentleman.

First I direct all my just debts and funeral and testamentary expenses to be paid and discharged by my executors, hereinafter named, as soon as conveniently may be after my decease.

I bequeath the legacies or sums of money following (namely) to the Treasurer or Treasurers for the time being of the Unitarian School, Lower Moseley Street, at Manchester, the sum of one hundred pounds –

To the Treasurer or Treasurers for the time being of the Deaf and Dumb Assylum or institution situated at Old Trafford near Manchester the sum of one hundred pounds –

And to the Treasurer or Treasurers for the time being of the Blind Assylum or institution at Old Trafford aforesaid the sum of one hundred pounds –

And I direct the said legacies respectfully to be paid in precedence of the other pecuniary legacies hereby bequeathed out of such part of my personal estate but not specifically bequeathed as the law permits to be appropriated by Will to charitable purposes and that the sum shall be applied to the purposes of the said institutions respectively and the receipt of the said Treasurer or Treasurers respectively be a sufficient discharge for my executors for the same --

I bequeath to my sister-in-law **Ann Wilson**, the widow of **my late brother Richard**, the sum of two hundred pounds in cash. –

I bequeath unto the two children of my niece **Eliza Grimshaw** (whose names I believe are **Lucy Ann** and **Eliza Sarah**, the sum of fifty pounds in cash to be divided equally between them –

I bequeath unto my housekeeper Sarah Hill the sum of one hundred pounds in cash, and also the furniture now standing and being in her bedroom (namely) the Bed, Bedsteads and Bedding, and also the Secretarie, Table Glass, Washstand and Chairs for her own absolute use and benefit –

I bequeath unto my friends John Roberts of Hulme aforesaid Lower and William Rountree of Manchester aforesaid Flour Dealer (my Trustees and Executors hereinafter named) the sum of twenty-five pounds apiece, as an acknowledgment for the trouble they will have in the execution of the trusts of my will –

I give, devise and bequeath unto the said John Roberts and William Rountree all my several messuages or dwellinghouses, buildings, hereditaments and premises real and Leasehold Estates whatsoever and wheresoever the same may be situated, lying and being, and which I have power to dispose of by this Will and all my ready money, money out at interest and securities for money and the remainder of my household Goods and Furniture and residuary personal estate chattels and effects whatsoever and wheresoever and of what nature or kind soever to hold the same unto

them, the said John Roberts and William Rountree their Heirs, executors administrators and assigns upon the trusts following – (namely) upon trust that they my said Trustees or the survivor of them his heirs, executors administrators or assigns or other the trustees or trustee for the time being acting hereunder do and shall with all convenient speed after my decease (but so nevertheless as not under any circumstances to delay or postpone such sale more than two years from my decease) to sell and absolutely dispose of my said Messuages or dwellinghouses, hereditaments and real and leasehold estates either by public auction or private contract and together or in parcels and under and subject to such conditions and stipulations as they or he shall think proper, with full power to buy in the same or any part thereof when offered at such sale and again to sell the same and to rescind or vary any contract for the sale thereof without being answerable for any loss occasioned thereby – And also do and shall sell and dispose of the residue of my household goods and furniture and call in and convert into money all my residual personal estate and effects. And upon further trust to stand possessed of the clear moneys arising and be received as aforesaid and the ready money of which I shall be possessed at my decease and the rents and profits of the said trust estate and premises and residuary estate and effects (after payment of my debts and funeral and testamentary expenses and the said legacies hereinbefore bequeathed), In trust to divide the same into *seven equal parts or shares* and to pay one of such seventh parts or shares unto each of my nephews and nieces, **Eliza Grimshaw**, [**Richard Wilson**” scratched out], **Lucy Ellen Wilson**, **John Sheen Wilson**, and **Alfred Wilson** (the children of my late **brother Richard**) who shall be living at the time of my decease -- And in case any of them shall be then dead, then to pay one of such seventh parts or shares unto and amongst his, her or their respective issue then living equally share and share alike. –

And as to one of the seventh part or share of and in the said trust moneys and premises and residuary estate and effects. Upon trust that the Trustees or Trustee for the time being acting hereunder do and shall invest the same on government or real security (to be changed and transferred from time to time at their or his discretion) and pay the interest and annual income arising therefrom as and when the same shall become due but not to be aliened, mortgaged or otherwise disposed of by way of anticipation, unto my niece **Esther Gresswell** (the daughter of my **late brother William**) during the term of her natural life for her own sole and separate use and benefit independently of any husband she may happen to have – And on her decease or at my decease in case she shall die in my lifetime, Upon trust to pay, distribute and divide the same one seventh part or share unto and equally between **Edward Gresswell** and **Thomas Gresswell** (the two children of the said **Esther Gresswell**) or such of them as shall be then living and the issue then living of such of them as shall be then dead, such issue nevertheless then taking amongst them the part or share to which their respective parents would have been entitled if living. –

As to one other of such seventh parts or shares of and in the said trust moneys and premises and residuary estate and effects, Upon trust that my said trustees or trustee do and shall invest the same on government or real security (to be changed and varied at their or his discretion) and pay the interest and annual income thereof during the life of my nephew **John Wilson** (son of my **Brother William**) unto and amongst such of the **three children of him the said John Wilson** as shall from time to time be living – as joint tenants – And on the decease of the aforesaid John Wilson or at my decease in case he shall die in my lifetime – Upon further trust to stand possessed of the same one-seventh part or share in trust for such of them the said **three children of the said John Wilson** as shall be then living and the issue then living of such of them as shall be then dead, such issue nevertheless only taking amongst them the part or share to which their respective parents would have been entitled if living.

And as to the remaining one seventh part or share of and in the said trust moneys and premises and residuary estate and effects – Upon trust that my said trustees or trustee do and shall invest the same on government or real security (to be changed and varied at their own or his discretion) and pay the interest and annual income thereof during the life of my **nephew William Wilson** (son of my said **Brother William**) unto and equally amongst such of **the three children of him of my said nephew William Wilson** as shall from time to time be living – as joint tenants-- And on the decease of my said **nephew William Wilson** or at my decease in case he shall die in my lifetime. Upon further trust to stand possessed of the same seventh part or share in trust for such of them the said three children of my said nephew William Wilson as shall be then living and the issue then living of such of them as shall be then dead such issue nevertheless only taking amongst them the part or share to which their respective parents would have been entitled if living--

I declare that the part or share both original and accruing to which every person being a female shall be or become entitled under this my Will shall be for her own sole and separate use and benefit and for which her receipt alone shall be a good discharge to my trustees and executors –

I also declare that the part or share both original and accruing to which every person having an infant shall become entitled, shall be placed out at interest or government or real security (to be changed and varied as shall be deemed expedient) and the interest thereof and also the capital or principal of each such share may in the discretion of my trustees or trustee be applied in the maintenance, education and advancement of such infant during minority or be paid to his or her parent or guardian to be so applied but for the application whereof my trustees or trustee shall not be responsible.

And I direct that my trustees immediately after my decease shall open an account with the Bank of Sir Benjamin Heywood Bart and Company in Manchester and deposit therein the rents and profits of my said real and leasehold estate until sold as aforesaid and all other surplus moneys coming to their hands by virtue of this my Will until the division and distribution thereof pursuant to the trusts thereof contained. –

I devise to my said trustees All estates vested in me as trustee or Mortgage Subject to the trusts and equities affecting the same respectively – And I empower the trustees or trustee for the time being acting under this my Will to give receipts to purchasers and others for all moneys and effects to be paid or delivered to such trustees or trustee by virtue of my Will and declare that such receipts shall exonerate the persons taking the same from all liability to see to the application or disposition of the moneys or effects therein mentioned –

And I declare that if my said trustees or either of them or person or persons to be appointed under this clause shall die or be unwilling or incompetent to execute the trusts of my Will it shall be lawful for the competent trustees or trustee for the time being (if any) whether retiring from the office of trustee or not or if none for the Executors or Administrators or either or any of the Executors or Administrators of the last surviving trustee to substitute by any writing under his or their hand or hands any fit person or persons in whom alone or as the case may be jointly with the surviving or continuing trustee my trust estate shall be vested --

And I exempt every trustee of my Will from liability for losses occurring without his own willful default and encourage him to retain and allow to his Cotrustee or Cotrustees all expenses incidental to the Trusteeship --

And I appoint the said John Roberts and William Rountree to be Trustees and Executors of this my Will –

And I revoke all other Wills by me made --

In witness whereof I have hereunder set my hand this twelfth day of April One thousand eight hundred and fifty four.

Sheen Wilson

Signed by the said Sheen Wilson as his last Will and Testament in the presence of us present at the same time who at his request in his presence and in the presence of each other have subscribed our names as Witnesses. The word “Sarah” on the first page, the words “aliened” & “unto and” on the second page and the words “the” and “the Bank of” on the third page having been first respectively interlined.

Elizabeth Crouther 52 Russell Street, Hulme

Wm. Smith clerk to Mr, Hall, Joh, Stockport

The 26th day of January 1855

John Roberts and William Rowntree (in the Will written “Rountree”) the Executors of this Will named were sworn in common form and they further made oath that the personal estate & effects of the Testator at the time of his death within the Diocese of Chester were under the value of Eight Hundred Pounds.

Before me J. W. Hollister, Surrogate

The Testator [Sheen Wilson] died Jan. 19th 1855