

Harriet and Eliza Lane

A Cautionary Tale. By M Lane.

You never know what you are going to find when looking for ancestors. I found Harriet & Eliza. Actually, they are my cousins several times removed, as I think their father John Lane, was my 5x great uncle.

Be that as it may, John & his wife Sarah, had many children, among them Harriet, born in 1817, and Eliza born in 1822. Alas for poor Harriet. On what would have been her 22nd. Birthday in 1839, we find the baptism of Henrietta Treadwell Lane, daughter of Harriet Lane, whilst the very next day, in the same church, the unfortunate Harriet was buried, having presumably not survived the birth. Her little daughter followed her to the grave some five months later.

Did Eliza learn from her sister's misfortune? She did not, as in 1844 we find recorded the baptism of Henry Ludlow Lane, son of Eliza Lane. History continued to repeat itself grimly. Eliza does not seem to have survived the baby's birth very long, and the child too died when she was about six months old.

To add to the families troubles, the burial of John Lane, at the age of 54, is also recorded in 1844, and it seems likely that this was the father of Harriet & Eliza. The dates and ages tally.

Why all these deaths? Well, infant mortality was high, and these babies were deprived of their natural food when their mothers died, though I expect a wet nurse could have been found – at a price and these were hard times. As for the mothers – again childbirth was a hazardous time in those days, taking place in cottages overcrowded and insanitary by our standards. Presumably the death certificates might give a cause of death. Possibly, too, there might be bastardy documents in respect of the children's fathers.

The family were living in Betsom at the time of the 1841 census. If this was the case, there would have been walking funerals, the coffins being carried over the church path from Betsom to the village.

I was unable to trace Sarah, the mother, on the 1851 census, though it may be the burial, which is recorded in 1864. Again the age tallies, but there were a number of Sarah Lanes.

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