

# A Tale Of Two Germans



## **German Wheatcroft**

**1773-1841**

German Wheatcroft was Christened at Crich, on the 9 May 1773 and he was the son of Abraham Wheatcroft, a farmer, and his wife, Ann Turner. Abraham was born at Crich Carr in 1748 and he died on the 9 April 1812, aged 64 years. He was buried in Crich. Ann was born in 1747 at South Wingfield and she died on the 8 June 1824, aged 77 years. German was the eldest child of a family of six, the other siblings being Nathaniel (a merchant and carrier), John (a boat builder), Anne, Mary and Hannah.



## *Crich Derbyshire*

I often wondered why “German” as I always thought this a rare Christian name although there are 176 entries alone from the Wirksworth Parish registers 1600-1840. It is probably a variant of Jarman/Jarmon. and likely to come from the Latin “germanus“ meaning having the same parents or kin. and was often passed down generations perhaps indicating a sense of pride in bearing the name. "A Dictionary of English and Welsh Surnames", by Charles Waring Bardsley (1901), reprinted by Heraldry Today in 1988, p.314 states GERMAN, GERMON, GERMAIN- Baptismal name 'the son of German'. No doubt a personal name taken or given from the country; compare with Norman.

German married Elizabeth Sims, the daughter of a Stone Mason from Lea, Matlock. The couple had six children, William, Alexander, David, Abraham, Elizabeth and Mary Anne.

Willaim was born in 1794 at Wirksworth and described himself as a Mineral Agent, he lived at Museum Parade Matlock Bath with his

wife Elizabeth Higgett daughter of the local inn keeper.

Alexander, born in 1798, married Mary Cook at St. Mary's Nottingham on August 1<sup>st</sup> 1826.

David was born in 1802 at Cromford and was a merchant.. In 1851 he was living in South Wingfield. His wife was Hannah Godber, her father being a yeoman from Nottingham. The couple were married at Eastwood, Nottinghamshire on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1827. They also had a son they named German, but more about him later. David died in December 1863.

Abraham Wheatcroft was born in Crich Carr in 1806. The 1851 census says he was a boat builder living at Bull Bridge, Crich, with his wife Ann Gell. The couple were married at Wirksworth in 1835. Elizabeth was christened at St Mary, Cromford on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1814. She married Abraham Henry Cutts at South Wingfield in 1838. Abraham was from the Cheetham Hill district of Manchester. Elizabeth died in Eccleshall Brierlow in 1845 aged only 30 years. Mary Anne was the youngest of the children and married Thomas Danks, an ironmonger from Beast Market Hill, Nottingham, in 1832.

At the age of 21 German began his association with the Peak Forest Canal Company. On 5<sup>th</sup> November 1794 he was appointed as a servant of the company at a salary of £1.11s.6d per week and was

the first salaried employee of the company. He was appointed (Wharfinger) of Bugsworth Wharf and later his managerial responsibilities for the company extended to Whaley Bridge, Furness Vale and the limestone quarries near Dove Holes.



*Peak Forest Canal Company*

. When the Peak Forest Tramway and the Upper Peak Forest Canal opened for trade on the 31 August 1796, he must have become responsible for the operation of the tramway as well. Because of his wide ranging responsibilities he was provided with horses to better attend to his duties and a stable was built for them at Bugsworth. However, to begin with, there was no accommodation for him at Bugsworth and he would have had to take lodgings somewhere in the neighbourhood.

As soon as the upper level of the canal was opened he became responsible for gauging loaded boats before they left for their destinations and initially this was to the lime kilns of Samuel Oldknow at Marple, seven miles away. Gauging is the process of ascertaining the draught of loaded boats, compared to their empty draught and hence the weight of cargo on board could be calculated. Knowing the type of cargo being carried, the appropriate toll could then be determined and a permit (or ticket) issued. There seemed to be two methods of payment, either the boatman paid directly before leaving or it was on account to be settled, say, once a month. A safe was provided for monies received.

Fourteen permits, signed by German Wheatcroft, are known to have survived, the first of which is dated the 31 July 1797 and the last is dated the 30 April 1800. The next permit to have survived is dated the 26 February 1805 and this was signed by Richard Latham who succeeded him as the Wharfinger at Bugsworth. This permit confirms that by 1805 he was no longer working in his capacity as the Wharfinger

**PEAK FOREST CANAL.**

No. *1918* *21 Sep* 1799  
 PERMIT *John Ward* on Board *Samuel O'Brien Esq.*  
 Boat, No. *2* to navigate the undermentioned GOODS, for which the Tonnage is  
*Charged* for the Proprietors of this Canal. *J. Wheatcroft*

SPECIES.	Where loaded.	Where to be delivered.	Tons.	Distance in Miles.	Payment per Ton.	AMOUNT.	
<i>Limestone</i>	<i>Dunlop</i>	<i>Marple</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>7 1/2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Iron</i>					<i>11</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2 0</i>

*Peak Forest Canal Permit*

On the 16 February 1797 the Committee of the Peak Forest Canal Company authorised the construction of the Wharfinger's house

and office at the entrance to Bugsworth Wharf, the building to be used for the collection of tolls. On completion, German Wheatcroft would have moved in to take up residence. The first house and office for the Wharfinger was erected on the site of the present house and office but the circumstances surrounding its replacement are unknown.

Following his departure from Bugsworth by 1805, he next appears as the person in charge of the self-acting inclined plane on the Peak Forest Tramway at Chapel-en-le-Frith but there is no corroborative evidence to support this. However, on the 13 March 1809 the Peak Forest Canal Company discharged him from their service.

Evidently this was brought about as a result of a misunderstanding with James Meadows Senior who was the Joint Principal Agent of the Peak Forest and Ashton Canal Companies.

German Wheatcroft was an ambitious man and following his departure from the Peak Forest Canal Company he established his own family carrying business known as German Wheatcroft & Sons. Over the ensuing years his company developed into a large carrying business for the standards of the time and this was by road, water and rail. His career can be traced by an examination of Trade Directories and he next appears in Pigot's Directory for 1821.

His brother, Nathaniel, who was Christened at Crich on the 5 May



1777, also established his own carrying business as Nathaniel Wheatcroft & Son.



*Nathaniel Wheatcroft*

It is apparent that the two companies worked closely together. Nathaniel's son and business partner, also called Nathaniel, was born in Cromford on the 23 December 1816 and Christened on the 26 January 1817 at the Wesleyan Cromford Circuit. At the time of the 1851 Census, he described himself as a Carrier and Dealer in Coals, and at the time he was living at Willersley Farm, Willersley Lane, Cromford. His next-door neighbour was Peter Arkwright, a Banker, of Willersley Castle, who was the grandson of Sir Richard Arkwright.

In May 1833, German Wheatcroft & Sons operated the first

passenger service on the newly opened Cromford and High Peak Railway between Cromford and Whaley Bridge. This was under contract to the railway company and for the convenience of passengers travelling on the railway they also ran a coach service between Whaley Bridge and Manchester.



*Whaley Bridge Railway.*

It is not known when these railway and coach services ceased running.

In 1870 the Cromford & High Peak Railway Company, then leased to the London and North Western Railway Company, placed a notice in Bradshaw's Railway Manuel and this stated that one of the Auditors was Nathaniel Wheatcroft Junior, so as late as 1870 the Wheatcroft family still had an interest in this railway.

German died in Belper on the 11 October 1841.

The Will of German Wheatcroft was proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury on the 16 February 1842 where he is described as a Wharfinger and General Carrier of South Wingfield, near Alfreton, Derbyshire, Catalogue Ref. PROB 11/1958.

Nottinghamshire Archives also hold records of William Wilson (1800-1866) of Radford, Nottingham, and they contain six letters between German Wheatcroft, A Wheatcroft of Nottingham and William Wilson, Ref. DD/WR/25/29-34. They are dated between 4 February 1840 and 8 March 1841 and they seem to be concerned with tithes

## **German Wheatcroft 1829-1857**

German Wheatcroft was born in Crich, Derbyshire, and christened at Hague on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1829 only son of David Wheatcroft and Hannah Godber. He lived with his parents and two sisters Mary Elizabeth and Hannah Sophia in South Wingfield. His father, a merchant bought the regency stuccoed Wingfield Park Hall adjoining the ancient manor. The original farmhouse and the ballroom still remain and South Wingfield Park Country Fair is

held there.



*Wingfield Park Hall*

His father, German's grandfather, was also called German and built up a huge empire based on his haulage businesses with offices and agencies all over the country.

In June 1851 German married Margareta Francis Bicheno, at Saint Martins, where the family were living at the time. Margareta was the daughter of glover John and his wife

Harriet, from Cambridge.

Aged 24, German joined the famous Enniskillen 6<sup>th</sup> Dragoon Guards, known as the Carabineers. In 1854, Great Britain and her allies, France and Turkey, went to war against Russia. An army was sent to the Black Sea to destroy the Russian naval base at Sevastopol in the Crimea. The 6th Dragoons were part of the Heavy Brigade. On the way out fire broke out on one of the transport ships. The commanding officer, Lt Col Willoughby Moore, 16 men and all the horses were lost. A further 75 horses were lost in a gale and cholera ravished the men. The regiment arrived in the British base at Balaclava much diminished.

He bought his promotion from Lieutenant to Captain in 6th Regiment of Dragoons on 20th October 1854. On 25th October the Russians attacked the British base. The Heavy Brigade, some 700 men from five Dragoon regiments, faced a Russian cavalry force of about 2000. The Brigade, commanded by Brigadier-General Scarlett, charged uphill at the enemy. Such was the ferocity of the attack that the Russians began to falter and then to retreat. The whole action took only eight minutes. The Enniskillen's lost two men killed and 14 wounded. Though ordered to follow the Light Brigade later that day in its disastrous charge, the Heavy Brigade

was stopped in time when the mistake was realised. In spite of the fact that the Enniskillen's saw no further action in the campaign the death toll rose to over 120 – a testament to disease and hardship



*Charge of the Heavy Brigade, Balaclava*

The Indian Mutiny began on 10th May 1857 when sepoys from Meerut rebelled and marched on Delhi. On 23rd May 1857 Sir Henry Lawrence began preparing the Residency at Lucknow for a siege, collecting supplies, fortifying the walls and offering shelter to the British civilians from the region. Amongst those defending the Residency and its 1280 non combatants, Lawrence had the

32nd Regiment of Foot and some locally recruited pensioners (a force numbering roughly 855 British soldiers, 712 Indians and 153 civilian volunteers). On 30th May 1857 the native troops in Lucknow rebelled and the siege began. Lawrence died in action on 4 July 1857 and Colonel Sir John Inglis, 32nd Regiment of Foot, took command.

Major General Havelock captured Cawnpore from the rebels on 16 July 1857 and it is from here that the attempts to relieve Lucknow which lay 48 miles away were launched. Havelock's first attempt with 1500 troops on 20th July 1857 failed as his strength was effectively halved after a battle at Unao. He pressed on after receiving reinforcements but could not reach the besieged Residency and was forced to retreat.

Havelock launched another attempt on 18th September 1857 after Major General Sir James Outram arrived at Cawnpore. His new force had six battalions of British Infantry (including the 78th Highlanders) and one Sikh battalion (a total of 3179 soldiers). 87 Days after the siege began, the relief force reached Lucknow suffering heavy losses. The defenders of the Residency had suffered greatly and their fighting strength had been reduced to 982. Taking into account their combined losses, Major General Sir James Outram decided that he could not evacuate the non-combatants which included hundreds of women and children, sick

and wounded, therefore the defensive perimeter was enlarged and they prepared to be besieged. This second siege was to last a further 61 days.

The new Commander-in-Chief of the Bengal Army, Lieutenant General Sir Colin Campbell arrived in Cawnpore on 3 November 1857. Deciding against pacifying the surrounding area, he left 1100 soldiers to defend Cawnpore and he led a relief force heading straight to Lucknow. The force consisted of 3500 infantry (including the 93rd Highlanders and the 4th Punjab Regiment), 600 cavalry (including the 9th Lancers) and 42 guns. Upon reaching Cawnpore from England Captain Wheatcroft volunteered for the relief column. He approached Colonel Wilson of the 9th Lancers (the Delhi Spearmen) but his request was at first refused.

Eventually he was accepted and joined Lancers in the Military Train heading to relieve the siege of the Lucknow Residency. (The relief of Lucknow was one of the three major events in the Indian Mutiny and the 9th Lancers played a part in each of them).

The force they were marching to engage has been estimated to be between 30,000 and 60,000, including trained sepoy regiments. At dawn on 14 November 1857 the successful relief of Lucknow, which resulted in a mass evacuation began and of course it is in this battle that Captain Wheatcroft lost his life. It is worth noting that for actions taken during the fighting to relieve Lucknow on 16



November 1857 a total of 24 Victoria Crosses were awarded, the largest number for a single day.

A Memorial at Sedbergh School, Sedbergh, Cumbria, reads "To the memory of Captain German Wheatcroft of the Inniskilling Dragoons and the 6th Dragoon Guards who charged with the Heavy Brigade at Balaclava and, having offered his services during the Indian Mutiny, was killed at Lucknow on the 14th November 1857 while gallantly leading a squadron of the 9th Lancers."

There is also a handsome monument erected in Crich Parish Church.



*Monument, Crich Parish Church*

The story doesn't end there. The account of German's death has appeared in many supernatural periodicals and books. The earliest appeared in *The Scientific Aspect of the Supernatural* by Alfred Russel Wallace in 1866 as follows:-

In the month of September, 1857, Captain German Wheatcroft, of the 6th (Enniskillen) Dragoons, went out to India to join his regiment. His wife remained in England, residing at Cambridge. On the night between the 14th and 15th November, 1857, towards morning, she dreamed that she saw her husband, looking anxious and ill; upon which she immediately awoke, much agitated. It was bright moonlight, and looking up she perceived the same figure standing by the bedside. He appeared in his uniform the hands pressed across his breast, the hair dishevelled, the face very pale. His large dark eyes were fixed full upon her, their expression was that of great excitement, and there was a peculiar contraction of the mouth, habitual to him when agitated. She saw him, even to each minute particle of his dress, as distinctly as she had ever done in

her life; and she remembers to have noticed between his hands the white of the shirt-bosom, unstained, however, with blood. The figure seemed to bend forward, as if in pain, and to make an effort to speak; but there was no sound. It remained visible, the wife thinks, as long as a minute, and then disappeared. Her first idea was to ascertain if she was actually awake. She rubbed her eyes with the sheet, and felt that the touch was real. Her little nephew was in bed with her; she bent over the little child and listened to his breathing; the sound was distinct, and she became convinced that what she had seen was no dream. It need hardly be added that she did not again go to sleep that night. Next morning she related all this to her mother, expressing her conviction, though she had noticed no marks of blood on his dress, that Captain Wheatcroft was either killed or grievously wounded. So fully impressed was she with the reality of that apparition, that she henceforth refused all invitations. A young friend, urged her soon afterwards to go with her to a fashionable concert, reminding her that she had received from Malta, sent by her husband, a handsome dress cloak, which she had never yet worn. But she positively declined, declaring that, uncertain as she was whether she was not already a widow, she would never enter a place of amusement until she had letters from her husband (if indeed he still lived) of a later date than the 14th November. It was on a Tuesday in the month of

December, 1857, that the telegram regarding the actual fate of Captain Wheatcroft, was published in London. It was to the effect that he was killed before Lucknow on the fifteenth of November. This news, given in the morning paper, attracted the attention of Mr. Wilkinson, a London solicitor, who had in charge Captain Wheatcroft's affairs. When, at a later period this gentleman met the widow, she informed him that she had been quite prepared for the melancholy news. She informed him that she had felt sure her husband could not have been killed on 15th November, inasmuch as it was during the night between the 14th and 15th that he appeared to her. The difference of longitude between London and Lucknow being about 5 hours, three or four o'clock a.m. in London would be eight or nine o'clock at Lucknow. But it was in the afternoon, not in the morning, as will be seen in the sequel, that Captain Wheatcroft was killed. Had he fallen on 15th, therefore, the apparition to his wife would have appeared several hours before the engagement in which he fell, and while he was yet alive and well. The certificate from the war Office, however, which it became Mr. Wilkinson's duty to obtain, confirmed the date given in the telegram, its tenor being as follows: WAR OFFICE, 30th January 1858 These are to certify that it appears, by the records of this office, that Captain German Wheatcroft, of the 6th Dragoon Guards, was killed in action on the 15th of November, 1857.

(Signed) B HAWKES Mr. Wilkinson called at the office of Messrs.  
Cox &

Greenwood, the army agents, to ascertain if there were no mistake in the certificate, But nothing there appeared to confirm any surmise of inaccuracy. In the month of March, however, 1858, the family of Captain Wheatcroft received from a fellow officer a letter, dated from Lucknow on the 19th of December 1857, informing them that Captain Wheatcroft had been killed not on the 15th of November, as reported, but on the fourteenth, in the afternoon. This officer was riding close by his side at the time he saw him fall, struck by a fragment of shell in the breast, and never speaking after he was hit. The War Office finally made the correction as to the date of death. Thus, the appearance of what is usually termed a ghost proved the means of correcting an erroneous date in the despatches of a Commander-in-Chief, and in the certificate of a War Office.