

Walter Bluer (1897 – 1938)

Walter Bluer was born in April 1897 in Pendlebury in Lancashire. His parents were Alfred Bluer (1864 – 1943) and Mary Cartwright (1868 – 1902). On the 1901 census, at the age of three, he was living with his parents at 7 Ramsden Fold, Clifton, Pendlebury. His mother, Mary died in 1902 at the age of 33.

On the 1911 Census, Walter aged 14 was already working at a local Pendlebury mine as a hand putter, which is 'a person who pushes wagons'. This was physically challenging work.

Around the late 1920s the mines around Pendlebury were facing the same fate as the Black Country mines in the 1880s; they were closing down. This was not only because the mines were becoming exhausted, but also the Great Depression was beginning. Walter was clearly in need of work and made the decision to move to Staveley. He moved from Pendlebury with his cousin, Herbert Bluer, who was also born in 1897.

Walter married Lily Hickman on 8 November 1930 in Staveley. A cousin of Lily's, Nellie Hickman (1903 – 1985), had married John Arnold Bray (1904 – 1938) in 1928. John Arnold Bray was also killed in the Markham Colliery disaster of 1938. Nellie's older brother was Joseph Henry Hickman (1894 – 1954) who married Eveline Fanny James. She was the widow of Wilfred Haywood (1902 – 1938) who was also killed in the 1938 Markham Colliery disaster.

In 1931 Walter and Lily had a daughter, Dorothy M Bluer (1931 -).

Walter was killed on the 5 May 1938 at Markham Colliery, along with 78 other men. He was employed as a ripper. At the time of the disaster, the family were living at 63 Poolsbrook Road, Duckmanton.

He was buried in Staveley cemetery on 14.05.1938

A newspaper article in the Sheffield Independent on 12 May 1938 showed the anguish Lily faced

19 Hours of Suspense

Sitting in her darkened kitchen, Mrs Bluer, wife of Walter Bluer (31), contractor of 63 Poolsbrook Road, Duckmanton, made this pathetic statement:

"For hour after hour I waited hoping against hope that he was alive.
At one o'clock this morning after 19 hours of suspense, I learned of my husband's death.
Twice previously I had been told that he had been taken to hospital
Only to find on each occasion that this was wrong"

"I heard of the accident at six o'clock yesterday" she said
"Then I went down to the pit head and waited. After some hours, I

Returned home to wait for more long hours. It has been terrible”

Parents

Father: Alfred Bluer (1864 – 1943)

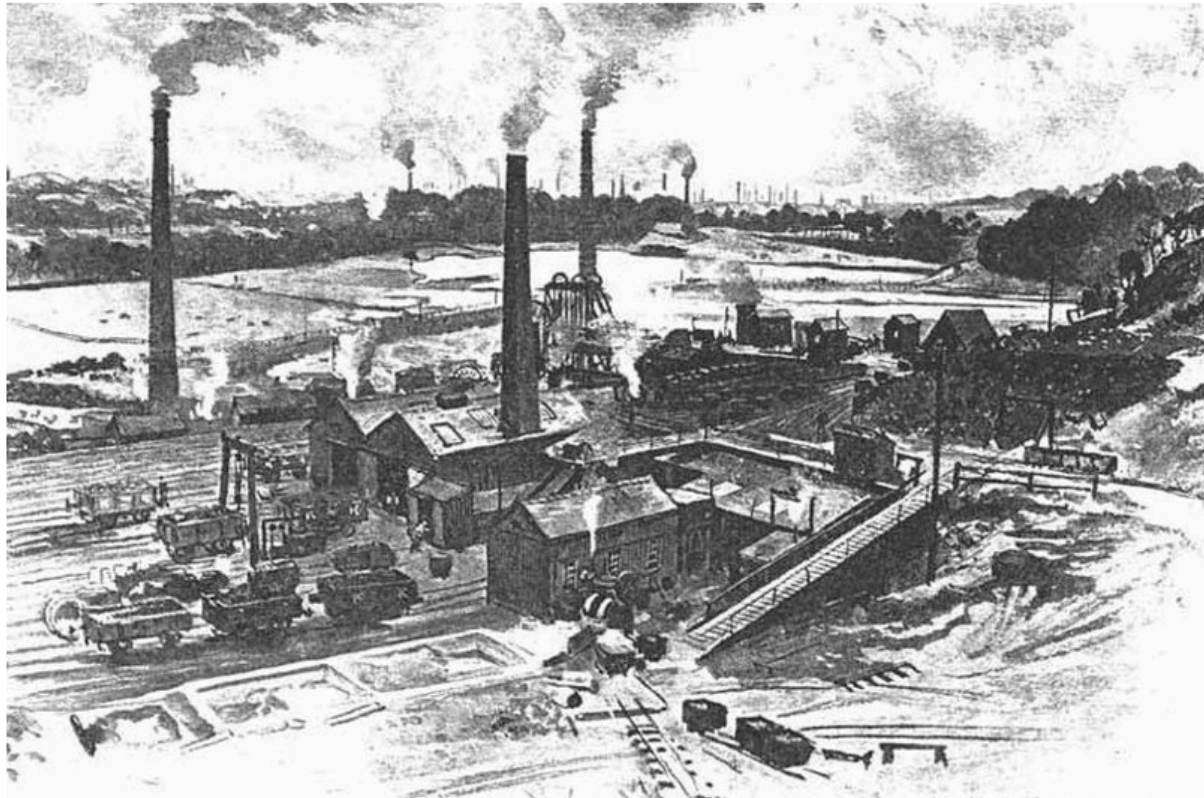
Alfred Bluer was born in Bilston in the Black Country.

The population of Bilston had grown in the first part of the 19th century. However, the population had started to decline from the 1870s onwards, because the mining industry was almost at an end and the iron trade was in a deep recession. Consequently, Alfred’s father, Joseph Bluer (1834 – 1899), made the decision to move the family to Pendlebury around 1878. Lucy, one of his daughters was born in Bilston in 1877, but in 1879 a son called Edward was born in Pendlebury – which gives us a short period when they moved. What was the attraction of Pendlebury? In a recent article in ‘BirminghamLive’ the reasons for the move have been explored:

"In about 1869 the local miners in Pendlebury went on strike over safety conditions, but the owners stood their ground and refused to accept the miners’ claims. With no coal being extracted for several weeks and the company therefore losing money they called upon miners from the Black Country to fill the roles of those miners who were on strike. Messrs. Knowles sent two of his mining agents to recruit men from Staffordshire and Cornwall to come and work in his mines as - after the set up of the Lancashire Miners Union, which Knowles refused to recognise. A meeting was held at Hollingworth Lake, and any collier that was found to be at that meeting was locked-out, as a result of this there were more than 1,300 men locked-out from Pendlebury, Pendleton, Farnworth, Kearsley, Little Lever pits. Over 3,000 men came out on strike to support the men that were locked-out from Pendleton, Agecroft, Clifton Hall, Clifton Moss, Stoneclough, Little Lever and Clegg near Rochdale. The mining in Cornwall and Staffordshire at that time was in a depressed condition, Messrs. Knowles also placed ads in the local newspapers, one of the agents sent to Staffordshire got 20/- per man he recruited to the Pendlebury pits. He was well known for recruiting blacklegs. Knowles paid for the expenses for the people of Staffordshire and Cornwall to come up north to work in his mines. He provided housing by evicting miners who where on strike and placing the men from Staffordshire and Cornwall in their cottages. So many miners and their families left Bilston for Pendlebury, that part of Pendlebury became known as Little Bilston.”

Birmingham Mail, 16 November 2017, John Workman

Joseph was clearly not in the first wave of miners to leave Bilston for Pendlebury, but with the mines closing in the Black Country, the offer of employment must have been difficult to resist.



A drawing of Clifton Hall Colliery in Pendlebury

On the 1871 census, Alfred was a seven year old scholar. Joseph, his father, was listed as a coal miner. Interestingly, all the families living on the same street came from Bilston. No wonder the area in Pendlebury was called 'Little Bilston'.

On the 1881 census, at the age of 17, Alfred was a coal miner living in the Boardman's Building. On the 2 August 1890 at the age of 26 he married Mary Cartwright (1868 – 1902). Mary was the daughter of another miner from Dudley.

In the following year Alfred and Mary were living at 7 Ramsden Fold with their first son, John Benjamin Bluer. His father, mother and siblings were living next door at 5 Ramsden Fold.

In 1901 they were still living at 7 Ramsden Fold with five children, including Walter. Mary died in 1902 and in 1909 Alfred married Barbara Hannah France (1877 – 1955). In total Alfred had nine children, five with Mary Cartwright and four with Barbara Hannah France.

The first two sons of Alfred, John Benjamin Bluer (1889 – 1918) and Alfred Bluer (1893 – 1915) were both killed in WW1. John Benjamin was killed on 3 November 1918, only eight days before the Armistice. Walter, the third son to be listed on the 1911 census was later killed at Markham Colliery in 1938.

Alfred lived to be recorded on the 1939 Register and it listed him as living with his second wife and one daughter, Beatrice Maud Bluer. He died in Pendlebury in 1943 at the age of 79.

Mother: Mary Cartwright(1868 – 1902)

Mary Cartwright was the daughter of Henry Cartwright (1847 – 1928) and Mary Bennett (1850 – 1899). Mary was born in Dudley and was their first child. Her father was a miner and her mother was a nailer. The making of nails was a cottage industry in the Black Country and at its peak, some 55,000 people were employed making nails. This activity took place in buildings attached to their homes.

On the 1881 census Mary was a scholar and her father was still employed as a coal miner. They were living on Salop Street at 20 Court No 4. Sometime between 1883 and 1885 the family moved from Dudley to Pendlebury, following in the footsteps of the Bluer family. Mary married Alfred on 2 August 1890 and they had five children, including Walter. Unfortunately, Mary died at the age of 33 in 1902. Walter was only five years old when his mother died.

Wife: Lily Hickman (1908 – 1991)

Lily Hickman was born on 1 November 1908 in Staveley. Her father, Richard Walter Hickman (1872- 1928) and mother, Jane Williams (1872 – ?) were both from the Black Country. Richard was born in Dudley and Jane, in Kingswinford. Richard and Jane were both still single and living in the Black Country on the 1891 Census, but married in Staveley on 28 November 1892.

Lily was their second daughter and on the 1911 Census, Lily aged two was living with her parents and older sister, Jane Hickman (1897 - ?). The Hickmans had five children by 1911, but only Lily and Jane were still alive at that point. Her father was employed as a coal miner hewer. Lily married Walter on the 8 November 1930.

In 1947 Lily married Robert Bradley and had a further daughter, Kathleen Bradley.