

The origins of Samuel Wells, brewer of Biggleswade, and the Baldock and Biggleswade Bank

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The Wells family

For many years the origins of Samuel Wells, founder of the well-known brewery in Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, have been a mystery. We can now trace his roots right back to his birth in 1709 in Baldock, Hertfordshire, only seven miles away.

William Wells, baker of Baldock

William Wells I (1661-1723) was a baker with his shop at 7, High Street, Baldock. The premises were passed on to him from his mother¹ so presumably his father *William Wells* (1621-1665) held the premises before him.

His son, *William Wells II* (c.1683-1764) was a farmer at Radwell near Baldock. He married *Priscilla Foster* (c.1687-1764) at Biggleswade Parish Church by licence² in 1708. He inherited the bakers shop in Baldock High Street. We have not been able to trace the origins of *Priscilla*.

Samuel Wells the elder of Baldock, Radwell, Ashwell and finally Biggleswade.

Samuel Wells (1709-1781) was a son of *William Wells II* and born in Baldock. By 1733 he was a gamekeeper to *Catherine Pym* at Norton & Radwell.

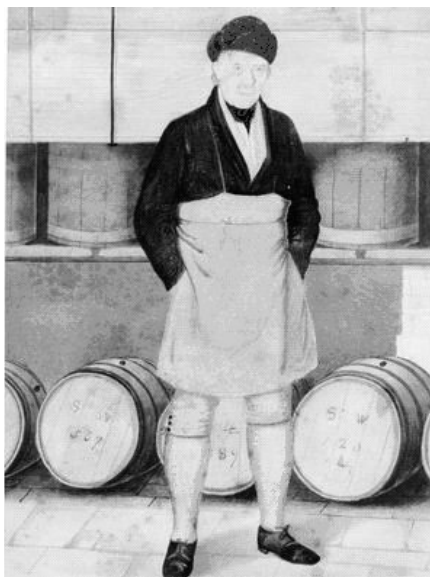


Figure 1. This watercolour now deposited in BLARS was discovered in the Wine & Spirit Stores at Biggleswade Brewery when it closed in 1997. With his apparent proprietorial air there is a distinct probability that it is of Samuel Wells the elder. He was a near neighbour of Samuel Whitbread at Southill who must also have used SW on his casks.

We presume he married Elizabeth before 1742 but we have been unable to trace the record of this marriage. Judging from her child-bearing years, Elizabeth was at least ten years younger than Samuel. Her maiden name is unknown but we know that she was the niece of William King of Caxton, Cambridgeshire³ who died in 1753.

Samuel and Elizabeth moved to Ashwell and three of their children were born there between 1742 and 1747. We do not know what prompted this move but Samuel may have learnt to brew there with one of the small family breweries associated with the larger houses and farms.

On 30th March 1749 Samuel Wells was appointed a Fen Reeve at Biggleswade⁴ (The qualification for a Fen Reeve was ownership of a common right attached to property in the manor). Their daughter Elizabeth was born at Biggleswade in the same year. He is mentioned as a Churchwarden at Biggleswade in 1757.⁵ So by then Samuel was well established in the town.

On 13th February 1764 Samuel Wells purchased the Kings Arms in High Street (now Lloyds Bank) together with a House, Brewhouse and Malting situated immediately behind in Back Lane (now Church Street) Biggleswade.⁶ As he was described as a brewer it is possible that he had rented the brewery previously.

Coincidentally, his father died in 1764. The inheritance he anticipated may have

persuaded him to buy the brewery, although he still needed a loan of £400 from Ter Marcia Luke.

Samuel died in 1781 owning the Brewery, former Kings Arms, four public houses and a house and pasture in Shortmead Street plus the bakery and shop in Baldock.⁷

The children of Samuel and Elizabeth Wells

From the parish registers, Samuel and Elizabeth had at least ten children but only one son and four daughters survived beyond their teenage years.

1742 Mary baptised 20th January 1742 Ashwell, married Thomas Green of Ampthill at Biggleswade on 29th April 1765.

1745 William baptised 28th March 1745 Ashwell, buried 11th June 1762 Biggleswade, aged 17.

1747 John baptised 1st May 1747 Ashwell, buried 29th April 1762 Biggleswade, aged 15.

1749 Elizabeth baptised 21st November 1749 Biggleswade, buried 6th December 1749 Biggleswade, aged only a few weeks.

1751 Elizabeth baptised 3rd May 1751 Biggleswade, married Thomas Gardener 28th September 1769.

1753 Martha baptised 20th June 1753 Biggleswade married William Race of Biggleswade 9th October 1777.

1755 Samuel baptised 21st March

1755 Biggleswade married Frances Hankin of Potton 2nd January 1784.

1759 Ann baptised 16th November

1759 Biggleswade married Robert Cooch of Huntingdon.

1761 A stillborn child buried 7th October

1761 Biggleswade.

1764 Thomas baptised 10th March

1764 Biggleswade, buried 7th October

1764 Biggleswade, aged about 7 months.

Samuel Wells the younger of Biggleswade

Samuel Wells (1755-1831) inherited Biggleswade Brewery and the bakery at Baldock from his father in 1781. His mother Elizabeth was granted a half share during her lifetime and there were monetary legacies to his four surviving sisters.⁸ On his mother's death in 1782 Samuel came into the whole business.

The Williamson family of Baldock

John Williamson (1742-1830) was born in Baldock, the sixth child of William (1710-1759) and Anne (1706-1781). They had at least nine children of which three probably died young. The militia lists for Baldock show that John and his only brother William were initially bakers presumably with their father at 16, Whitehorse Street, but John is listed as a maltster from 1778.

John seems to have been quite a phenomenon and what we would call an



Figure 2. A sketch of John Williamson based on a drawing by Samuel Lucas from Hitchin Worthies by Reginald Hine.

entrepreneur today. *Nothing for Nothing for Nobody* by Jack Parker describes how John Williamson acquired a little property and borrowed a considerable sum so that he could enter the corn trade in Hitchin, Baldock, Biggleswade, Letchworth and St. Ives. Although successful he was described as 'a man of mean appearance and never well dressed, his breeches much patched' When attending Hitchin market he often 'tied his horse to a post or hurdle in the cattle market to avoid the expense of putting up.'

John Williamson married Elizabeth Wells (1741-1818) of Baldock in 1764. Elizabeth

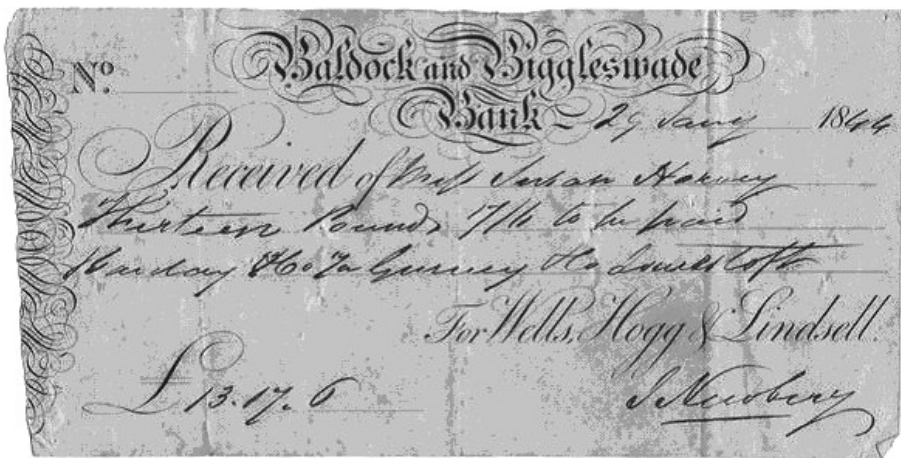


Figure 3. A cheque drawn on the Baldock & Biggleswade Bank of Wells Hogg & Lindsell on 29th January 1844 is signed by James Newbery The Biggleswade Manager. (Lloyds TSB Bank Archives)

was well connected; her father's family had been malting in Baldock since at least 1618; her mother was the sister of Robert Thurgood the brewer of Baldock; her sister, Mary, married William Barber, maltster of Baldock and her other sister, Sarah, married George Fitzjohn, maltster of Baldock. She had no brothers to carry on the family's malting business.

We were interested to know if Elizabeth Wells was related to Samuel Wells as Elizabeth's husband and Samuel Wells the younger formed a business partnership in 1807 (see below).⁹ We traced Samuel Wells' family back through six generations and Elizabeth's family back through five generations but the Wells (bakers) and Wells (maltsters), both of Baldock, seem completely unrelated. This suggests that the business partnership

was not driven by family connections, just business convenience.

John and Elizabeth Williamson had four children. Sadly their only son, Thomas Wells Williamson died aged 18 leaving the three girls. Sarah married William Alington and much of John's property ends up with her son.¹⁰ Elizabeth married John Booth; distiller of Red Lion Street, Clerkenwell (Booth's London Gin) and Mary married William Booth, presumably a relative.

The Baldock & Biggleswade Bank

There are numerous local branches of Lloyds Bank and some of these originated through the partnership of Williamson & Wells at Baldock exactly 200 years ago.

This bank, in common with many others, was begun with money derived from the profits of malting and brewing.

The Baldock Bank

In 1807¹¹ John Williamson, maltster and mealman, established the Baldock Bank in partnership with Samuel Wells the younger, brewer, under the style of Williamson & Co. From a very early stage, it was located at 3, High Street (now Lloyds TSB Bank).

Soon afterwards John Izzard Pryor, brewer of Baldock, joined them¹² and the style briefly was Williamson, Wells & Pryor.

Nothing for Nothing for Nobody describes how John Williamson stood up to John Pryor, a hugely powerful man locally, to stop his son Vickris Pryor, a maltster, joining his brother John Izzard Pryor in the Williamson & Wells bank enterprise. This resulted in John Izzard Pryor leaving the firm in 1810. The Baldock Bank was then restyled Williamson & Wells.¹³

The Biggleswade Bank

Samuel Wells converted the former Kings Arms, High Street, Biggleswade into premises for the bank, possibly as soon as 1810.¹⁴ Williamson & Wells (branch of the Baldock Bank), High Street.¹⁵

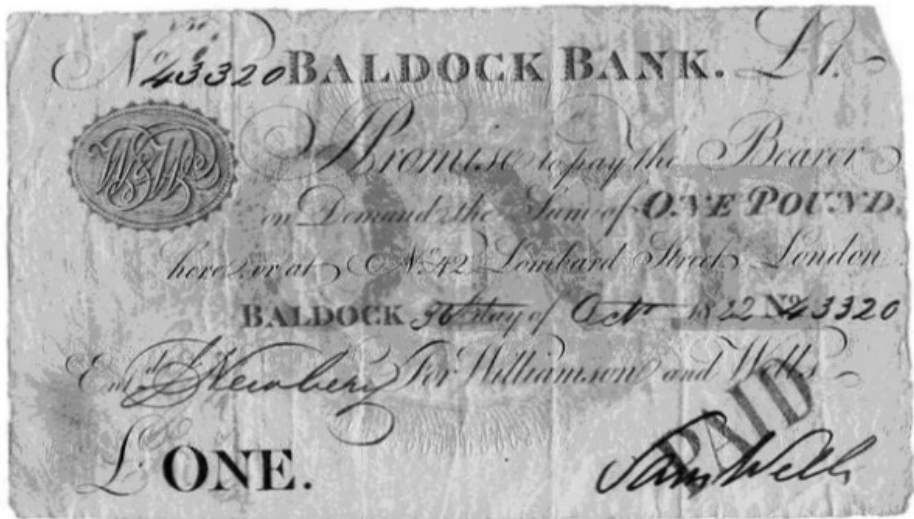


Figure 4. This banknote issued on 30th October 1822 by Williamson & Wells Baldock Bank is signed by Sam (Samuel) Wells and countersigned by James Newbery who managed the Biggleswade Bank. (Lloyds TSB Bank Archives)

Hogg and Co.

Little is known about this bank. George & William Hogg were merchants trading by river between Biggleswade and Kings Lynn. They owned a bank in Shortmead Street Biggleswade that was established in 1810¹⁶ 'Hogg George & William, Shortmead Street.'¹⁷

Wells, Hogg & Lindsell

John Williamson died in 1830. Then Samuel Wells, who became the sole owner with a payment of £10,000, continued the joint business with his two sons in law as co-partners as the Baldock & Biggleswade Bank (styled Wells, Hogg and Lindsell). Presumably this incorporated Hogg & Co.

They rebuilt the premises of the Biggleswade Bank and commemorated the event with a set of lead tablets and coins which were discovered in a small box embedded in brickwork when offices at the rear of the present Lloyds Bank at High Street, Biggleswade were demolished in 1909.

The four tablets are about 4½ inches square and read:

Baldock and Biggleswade Bank of the firm of Wells, Hogg and Lindsell established October 11th 1830. Benjamin Christian, George Newbery, James Newbery, Clerks.

This bank erected October 20th 1830 by

Samuel Wells of Biggleswade, Banker and Brewer in the first year of the reign of William IVth.

Coins deposited in this box, one shilling, one sixpence, one penny, one halfpenny.

Price of funds, October 19th 1830 Consols, 85/86 Bank Stock, 211/219.¹⁸

Samuel Wells died in 1831, only one year after John Williamson. *Pigot's Directory* of 1823 had described the Bank as a respectable firm. Perhaps, bearing this in mind, the title of Wells, Hogge & Lindsell remained even after Samuel Wells' death.

In 1852 the firm bought the freehold of the original building at 3, High Street, Baldock.¹⁹ New premises were built in 1861 and remain almost unchanged today.

The premises at Biggleswade stayed virtually unaltered until 1965 when the manager's original residence was incorporated into the bank and the original Portland stone facings, hardwood doors and window frames were replaced by marble, bronze metal and plate glass whilst retaining the Georgian character of the building. Considerable alterations and extensions have been continually made to the rear in recent years.

On 14th November 1860 an agreement²⁰ was drawn up between the current partners William Hogge, his son Frederick Hogge, Robert Henry Lindsell and his son

Charles Samuel Lindsell. This confirmed that the profits of the bank would be shared equally between the two families irrespective of any inequality of the number of partners between the two families. Frederick Hogge, the son of William Hogge inherited half of the business after his father died.²¹ He changed his name to Archdale by Royal licence in 1866. He moved from Ivel Bury, Biggleswade to The Wilderness, Baldock. A.W. Watkin in his book *True Tales told of Biggleswade of Old* recalled

Mr F. Hogge rode from Baldock to Biggleswade every morning on a horse. So much so that that his horse's hooves wore a track in the grass verge of the Great North Road the whole of the way and was called Hogges Track.

Lloyds TSB Bank Archives tell a slightly different story;

Over the years it became customary for a member of the bank at Biggleswade to ride to Baldock on horseback and to stable his horse at The Rose & Crown where a special seat and table were kept for him to conduct the bank's business. In time the horse wore a path on the grass between the two towns and this became known as both Hogge's ride and Archdale's path.

Capital and Counties then Lloyds Bank

In 1893 the banking business, with branches at Baldock, Biggleswade,

Hitchin, St. Neots and Sandy, was sold to The Capital & Counties Bank Ltd. Total Assets were £227,631. The purchase price of the business was £8,000 and although profits were divided equally between the Lindsell and Hogg (Archdale) families, Frederick Archdale provided 75% of the partners' capital of £35,031.²²

It appears that the purchase price was for the business, not the properties as The Bank premises at Biggleswade were still owned by Wells & Co when they were conveyed to Capital & Counties Ltd in 1898.

Capital & Counties amalgamated with Lloyds Bank Limited in 1918. All the branches sold by Wells, Hogg and Lindsell are still trading. In addition, the branch at Baldock is celebrating its 200th anniversary; all of those 200 years have been on the same site.

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3. BLARS W905.
4. Biggleswade Manor Court Book (BLARS).
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7. Baldock Manor Court Book for 1782 (Baldock Museum).
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for Nothing for Nobody.

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