

Who was Leicester GATAKER and how long was he in Weston?

This question was asked in a query posted to me via the Web Site in January

*“My great grandfather Alfred Wills worked for many years with a water diviner or dowser known as **Leicester Gataker**. He was based in Weston-Super-Mare from around 1890 “*

This was written by Stephen Tollyfield and an article by him about his great grandfather, Alfred WILLS, can be read on page 16 of

[www.britishdowers.org/dt_archive/2004/Main doc 24pp March 04b.pdf](http://www.britishdowers.org/dt_archive/2004/Main_doc_24pp_March_04b.pdf)

If anyone has additional information about GATAKER I would be pleased to pass it on.

I did discover that John Bailey had included a comment about him in one of his articles for the Weston Mercury in which he wrote:

“Weston diviner Mr Leicester Gataker developed the art [of water divining] so successfully that he could gauge not only where water could be found but also the depth at which it would be reached. Mr Gataker had a chief assistant to help with the divining, and a staff of men to sink wells and provide necessary services. His work took him all over the British Isles, and overseas.”

Although referred to as a Weston diviner his connections with this town do seem to be rather short lived.

It's always worth using A2A (Access to Archives) for any name you are researching.

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/

There are 4 entries showing the advantage of this search because it picks up references to County Record Offices as well as the National Archives itself.

1 Prospectus of Leicester, Gataker, of Weston Super Mare and Bath, water finder, with photographs (mainly in Africa).

These documents are held at: Somerset Archive and Record Service

2 Miscellaneous records relating to Minehead, Weston super Mare and Bath - Leicester Gataker, of Weston super Mare, Somerset, water finders;

These documents are held at: Somerset Archive and Record Service

3 Letters from Leicester Gataker of Weston-Super-Mare, waterworks contractor, to the Panshanger Estate Office reporting on his visit to Tewin Hill Farm and Coltsfoot Farm to ascertain how better water supplies might be arranged for the farms and estimating the cost.

These documents are held at: Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies

4 'The Water under the Earth', brochure and supplement publicising Leicester Gataker of Bath, water diviner. Sent to Mr (William) Sparks,1901.

These documents are held at: Dorset History Centre

During the late 19th century there was a need to find a good water supply for the developing urban areas and people like GATAKER were in demand. Water diving was also used locally on the Mendips to assist with the lead mining.

Further investigation showed that Leicester GATAKER had been born Melmoth Leicester Swale GATAKER in Bath in 1874 (see www.bathbmd.org.uk) and that his mother's maiden name was

Bath Birth indexes for the years: 1874					
Surname	Forename(s)	Sub-District	Registers At	Mother's Maiden Name	Reference
GATAKER	Melmoth Leicester Swale	Bathwick	Bath	WOOD	BWK/11/306

Bath Birth indexes for the years: 1875					
Surname	Forename(s)	Sub-District	Registers At	Mother's Maiden Name	Reference
GATAKER	Reginald Henry Winchcombe	Bathwick	Bath	WOOD	BWK/12/009

WOOD.

In an article in the Bristol Mercury of November 1896 - obtainable by using your North Somerset library ticket to access the 19th Century Newspapers online - from www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Leisure/Libraries/Onlineservices/ - there is mention of an interview with “Mr GATAKER of Weston-super-Mare on the subject of water finding or dowsing. Mr GATAKER’s father is a gentleman resident in Bath, although his father comes from the east of England, but the water finder’s mother is of Somerset descent, which is curious as these dowsers seem to be nearly all west countrymen”

In 1899 Melmoth Leicester Swale GATAKER married Annie Madeline YOUNG at St Margaret's Westminster and it was stated in the Bristol Mercury Feb 18th 1899 that on their return from honeymoon in Italy and the South of France that they would take up residence in Weston-super-Mare.

At St. Margaret's, Westminster, on Tuesday, by special license, Mr Melmoth Leicester Swale Gataker, eldest son of Capt. Melmoth Gataker (Indian Staff Corps, retired), of Bath, was married to Miss Aunie Madeleine Young, eldest daughter of the late Mr and Mrs George William Young, of Branksome Manor, Bournemouth. The bridegroom was attended by his brother (Mr R. H. W. Gataker) as best man. After the ceremony the bride and bridegroom left to spend their honeymoon in Italy and the South of France (Riviera). They were the recipients of a large number of presents from relatives and friends. On their return Mr and Mrs Leicester Gataker will take up their residence at Weston-super-Mare.

Extract from the 1901 Census

Branksome Manor, The Avenue, Branksome, Bournemouth

<u>Name</u>	<u>Rel</u>	<u>Con</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Where Born</u>
GATAKER, M Leicester S	Head	M	27	Expert Water Discoverer And Water Works Contractor	Bath Bathwick Somersetshire
GATAKER, Annie M	Wife	M	32		London
GATAKER, Violet De M L	Daug		11mths		Weston S Mare, Som
LEGGETT, Arthur	Serv	S	25	Butler	Redenhall, Norfolk
BAILEY, Eli	Serv	W	65	General Help	Dinton, Wiltshire
MELROSE, Elizabeth	Serv	S	24	Parlour maid	Newcastle on Tyne
FISHER, Naomi	Serv	S	40	Nurse	London
HARRIS, Florence	Serv	S	22	Cook	Hungerford, Berkshire

The 1901 census of Bournemouth shows that their daughter Violet Louisa De M GATAKER was born in Weston-super-Mare in 1900 and that they appeared to be well set up financially. But the address at which they are living was the one given in the newspaper account as the address of the Bride. Their next child was born in 1904 in Bournemouth so although Leicester GATAKER was said to be "of Weston" I'm not sure how long he was actually here.

I realise that I haven't checked the Street Directories for 1900 for Weston-super-Mare, or found a christening for Violet, either of which might indicate where they were living in Weston when she was born.

On Historical Directories www.historicaldirectories.org he is to be found in Kelly's Directory of Somerset for 1897 at 2 Crescent Gardens, Upper Bristol Road, Bath. His address in a 1903 Telephone Directory was 25, Forester Avenue, Bath.

420 THE ESTATE BOOK.

DO YOU WANT WATER?

WELLS SUNK ON SPECIAL TERMS OF *No Water—No Pay.*

Approximate Depth and Yield Estimated.		Unsatisfactory existing Supplies Tested and Advised on.
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Mr. Gataker prospecting in Upper Egypt for the Egyptian Government.

T. R. CAFFEY, Esq., Belfast, says:—'I should have saved hundreds of pounds had I consulted Mr. GATAKER in the first instance.'

Address: **LEICESTER GATAKER,**
WATER EXPERT AND CONTRACTOR, BATH.

An advertisement for Leicester GATAKER dated 1905 does not mention Weston-super-Mare, but the picture states that he had been prospecting for water in Egypt!