

William Carter

William Carter of Ledbury, England (Information taken from William Carter, First Plowman in Utah) Born 12 Feb 1821 in Ledbury, Herefordshire, England, William Carter was the son of Thomas and Sarah Parker Carter. His father was a laborer and, according to the 1841 British Census, a journeyman sawyer. Nevertheless, William trained as a youth to be a glassblower and blacksmith. At 19 years of age, William was invited to a religious meeting. Some of his family accompanied him. At the gathering, William was so impressed by the Gospel message, he went to the speaker after the meeting and asked for baptism into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also known as Mormons. He was told to wait and learn more about the Gospel before being baptized. He replied: "If I should wait a year, I would not be any more ready than I am now." His mother did not feel the same way. She forbade the other children to attend any more meetings. But, William felt deeply that he had found the true Gospel and was baptized on 27 December 1840 by Elder Edward Ockey. An older married sister, Elizabeth Carter Thomas, her husband Charles Thomas and their family also joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They and William desired to journey with many of the members to America to be with the fast-growing church who were building a city named Nauvoo in the State of Illinois. Therefore, they crossed the Atlantic Ocean and landed at Quebec, Canada, where they boarded another vessel and sailed through the Great Lakes to Chicago, Illinois. They wore out their shoes walking overland to Nauvoo where they were welcomed after three months travel by the Mormon Prophet, Joseph Smith. William was greatly impressed by Joseph Smith and agreed to work on the Nauvoo Temple. He bought a farm about two and one-half miles southeast of Nauvoo and began raising grain. While taking grain to a gristmill on a farm owned by John Benbow, he met John's niece, Ellen Benbow. As a girl, Ellen had lived with her Uncle Benbow near Ledbury, England, William's birthplace. Yet William and Ellen had not met before and they fell in love and were married. But, their life was soon filled with sadness. Their beloved Prophet, Joseph Smith, and his brother, Hyrum, were killed by a mob in Carthage, Illinois, on 27 June 1844. William and Ellen attended the viewing of the martyrs. In early 1846, the Carters and the bulk of the Saints residing in Nauvoo area were driven from their homes by mob action and migrated to Council Bluffs, Iowa, and then later across the Missouri River to Winter Quarters which later became known as Florence, Nebraska. Much hardship, hunger, and disease were experienced in this place. Over 600 people died. Then in the Spring of 1847, William was chosen to go west with the first company of pioneers. They traveled 27 miles and stopped to camp. There were 73 wagons, 143 men, 3 women, and 2 children. Their new leader, Brigham Young, and a few others including William, left the camp and returned to Winter Quarters. William found his wife, Ellen, very ill and not expected to live. He was upset and hurried to Brigham Young to tell him he could not leave his wife. Brigham said, "Go, brother, and I promise you that your wife will recover and drive her oxen across the plains." This promise was fulfilled for William went west and his wife recovered and followed in a later company. William's wagon was third in line on the trip across the vast American plains and rugged Rocky Mountains to the Great Salt Lake Valley. In the wagon he carried a plow which he used to cultivate the soil in many places so crops could be planted and harvested for travelers who followed. He entered the Valley 22 July 1847, two days prior to the ailing Brigham Young, and used his plow as quickly as possible to prepare the soil for planting potatoes. As the usual planting time was past, several men hurried to plow the hard ground without success. William decided to soften the soil first by turning water out on the land from a mountain creek. Therefore, he succeeded in plowing the first 1/2 acre of sod in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake of the American West. Later, William Carter was credited as the first Anglo-Saxon to use the practice of irrigation in North America. A medal honoring William, his picture, and his original plowshare are displayed in the Church Museum near Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA. He died 22 June 1896 in St. George, in southern Utah, USA, where he was sent to settle in 1861 and where he again plowed the first furrows and led in building an irrigation system in this desert area. He remained a faithful member in the Church of his choice which in 1999 consists of over 10 million members world wide. His numerous descendants are proud of LEDBURY'S NATIVE SON who courageously became the FIRST PLOWMAN AND IRRIGATOR OF THE AMERICAN WEST. Wm. Carter helped build temples throughout his life. He worked on the Nauvoo, Salt Lake and St. George edifices. As foundation foreman, he led the workers in pounding great slabs of lava under the St. George Temple for strength and material impervious to a spring of water under the structure. The Utah temples still stand mystically. Wm. worked some 14 years as a witness, sealer and patron in the St. George Temple. He made sure his relatives received their saving ordinances.