

## JAMES SHAW

James Shaw was a prominent and successful inhabitant of the town of Guildford in the final years of the reign of Elizabeth I. Four times mayor of the town, one of its Approved Men +, a woollen draper, merchant, landowner, farmer and also owner of the 'famous' Red Lion Inn, (whose celebrated asparagus Samuel Pepys cut for his supper during his stay there, and thought the best he had ever eaten). Married three times, with grandchildren, Shaw's life suggests a dynamic and talented personality, a master of the complex and sometimes dangerous milieu of Tudor business, society and the intricate social and business infrastructure where family, kin and patronage were honed and manipulated for social advancement, influence and wealth. But who was James Shaw?

His will was written in early June 1594, a few days before his death, and among the usual bequests to the poor, was £5 (a magnificent sum for this time) "*to the poore people of the parish of Cartmeale, county of Lancaster where I was born.....*" So James Shaw was not a native of Guildford, but from the wild and remote Cartmel.

Although long, running to several pages, the will does not mention furniture or personal possessions in the way that wills of this period often do – he rather impatiently bequeaths his last wife, Alice his "*howsehold stufte wherein I nowe dwell*", giving an impression of a man with little time for leisure. We do however know that James owned a black mare, as he left her, with tack, to his servant Miles. But Alice is also bequeathed forever "*all that peece or parcel of my garden aforesaid conteyning by estimacon one roode of land ...which lyeth from the corner of the Angell orchard pt pale...the bowling alley there westward as the same is staked and bounded owte*" The remainder of this garden was bequeathed to his daughter Joane and her husband.

James' will also left to Alice "*all the wood in my gate there, my three kyen my hogg and swine all my corne in my barne and my tenn acres of rye and barley in the fields*" demonstrating his interest in utilising his land and animal husbandry.

The will continues with bequests "*to be distributed amongst them by my twoe brothers Edwarde Shawe and Miles Shawe*" (another Miles Shaw, a servant (presumably the recipient of the black mare), resident in Guildford, but whose relationship is unspecified, is also mentioned). In the early part of the seventeenth century Shaws continue to be sighted in Cartmel Fell - A Myles Shawe of Cartmelfells was buried 17 Feb 1614/15: and an Edward Shawe of Cartmelfells buried 18 Jan 1611/12 (perhaps his two brothers). In 1613 Burplethwaite Hall and 64 acres were sold by Anthony Knipe to a Myles Shaw for £1500, then was sold again in 1632 (again by a Myles Shaw) for £450. (Cumberland & Westmoreland Arch. & Ant. Society 1962 p 171). The will of a Miles Shaw of Cartmel Fell, yeoman 1655 appoints Thomas Knipe of Burplethwaite as "*a true and faithfull friend*", so it seems there was an association between the Cartmel Shaws and the locally powerful Knipes. In 1631 a Myles Shaw was among five men compounded for £10 each for having refused a knighthood+++. This branch of the family clearly continued to live and work in the Ancient Parish of Cartmel throughout the century following James' death.

But trying to track the Shaws back to the Cartmel area around the time preceding James' possible birth date proves impossible because soon the trail goes cold. His first term as mayor of Guildford was in 1572 suggesting he was well established in the town before that: he married his first wife, Agnes Richardson, in Guildford in 1559, so these dates would suggest that he had been born in the 1530s. No baptism for James has yet been found. s Did he arrive in the town as a young man or as a child with his parents? Two other siblings, Richard ob 1573 and Agnes (married Henry Clifton 1574) were resident in Guildford. A James Shawe (an adult) was buried in St Mary's Guildford in 1555 and

it is possible, since there were no other Shaw families in Guildford at this time, that this could be James' father.

J C Dickinson in *'The Land of Cartmel'* described Cartmel Fell thus:

*"In the 15<sup>th</sup> century this area was studded with farms whose owners prospered not a little through the production of wool. Amongst them were the well-to-do and pious Briggs family who lived at Swallowmire. Evidently, just before 1504 one Robert Briggs and others built here the first chapel, wherat the local faithful could hear mass without involving themselves in the very exacting journey to Cartmel Priory, along tracks which were often rank bad in weather which could be very hostile."*

This chapel, the exquisite St Anthony's, was founded in 1504 as a chapel of ease for the Priory, by the local gentry, among them the Briggs of Cowmire, whose feud with the other powerful local gentry, the aforementioned Knipes of Burblethwaite lasted several generations. The church information tells us that in the time of Elizabeth, Mrs Briggs was *"assaulted and rendered unconscious in the churchyard by Knipe and his henchmen"* and that this matter went to court. Graffiti on the church window recorded that *"William Briggs has gone to London XI God fend him"*

The Briggs and Knipes were both merchants and traders, dealing in wool. This wool trade was centred on the town of Kendal, and by the reign of Elizabeth I *"the green druggets made at this and other places were the common clothing of the poor in London and elsewhere, for several centuries, so that 'Kendal Green' became proverbial"* (Kendal in A Topographical Directory of England; English History online) *"Kendal chapmen are known to have resorted as early as 1492 to the important centre of Southampton where by 1527 there is an established trade in Kendal cloth...in 1552-3 the accounts of the cloth hall there contain no fewer than 25 Kendal chapmen"* (Bouch & Jones, The Lake Counties).

We know that James was a woollen draper, and think that at least two of his brothers remained in Cartmel suggesting that a strong connection between the families continued, and that there was a healthy wool trade between Kendal and Guildford. The will of Thomas Mile of Chiddingfold, woollen draper, 30 May 1569 confirms this connection *"to my son Henry Mile my best bed and its trappings, a cupboard, a table, form in parlour, lesser brass pot, great brass kettle.....all wood in the shop, my debts per my shop book paying all I owe to the 'Kendlemen' viz Thomas Bough and Miles Shawe....."* (SW/15- 440)

But James Shaw's presence in Guildford was not by chance, for Guildford was also a wool town. Surrey's soils were not fertile, but suitable for sheep grazing, and clothiers – the town was well-known for its kersey, often dyed blue with woad, and known as 'Guildford blue'.

In another Cartmel connection, the Guildford court books reveal that in 1572 James took an apprentice, Christopher Poole, son of Robert Poole of Cartmel. James was to teach him to be a woollen draper and at the end of 9 years give him a sum of money and *"double apparel"*. Christopher was not a success though, and in 1576 the records note that he was often absent and *"lewdly myspent his master's goodes. partly in Barbatinge (bear-bating) and ...in buying of apparel very undecent for a servant of his degree..."* As a result of his misbehaviour he was put in the stocks, and his apprenticeship ended.++

It seems then that the migration of one branch of the Shaw family to Guildford was economic in interest – wool is the thread that connects his place of birth and adopted town - Kendal Green and Guildford Blue.

But the story would not be complete without the political context, for the years around James' birth saw momentous events nationally which played themselves out to tragic effect in Cartmel. Its priory was suppressed in 1536, and hard on its heels, the Northern Rebellion resulted in the Commons

restoring the Canons to their house. Following Henry VIII's crushing of the rebellion, the canons and ten laymen of the district were executed the following year and the site of the priory and its land were in the course of time granted out.....British History On-Line tells us that on the secular side the suppression of the Priory led to the subdivision of the land among a number of yeoman families.

The area must have felt scarred by the events of these years, the impact of ten executions to ten local families in a sparsely populated area must have been deeply shocking and " *the poor provision for divine worship by the new service in a fragment of the roofless church cannot have been inspiring*". By 1597 plague had swept the area.

The questions are tantalising and the answers probably unknowable. Were the Shaws one of the yeoman families who benefited from the suppression and the division of the Priory land? Or did James and his two siblings leave the area out of necessity, perhaps as infants with the older children remaining in Cartmel with relations? Could James's father have been somehow involved in the events of the 1530s and found it prudent to leave the area (it is interesting to note that taxation related to wool was one of the economic causes of the Pilgrimage of Grace)? Or did James and his brother and sister set out for Guildford as a pre-conceived plan to establish a family wool dynasty straddling the entire length of the country between Cartmel and Guildford? The parallel with Richard Whittington, another rural boy, is compelling. Both were from remote and wild areas (Whittington from the Forest of Dean), both dealt in wool (Whittington in broadcloth and other fabrics), both rose in spectacular fashion to become mayor four times.

But James remains a shadowy figure and we hear his voice directly only in his will – perhaps he can be glimpsed riding home from his 'woollen drapers shoppe' on his black mare, and relaxing in his garden, or perhaps enjoying a game of bowles or some of the fine asparagus of the Red Lion.

+ Guildford Corporation was known as 'The Mayor and Approved Men' (Mary Alexander)

++ Guildford court books (see below)

+++ British History On-Line

*Elaine Edge v1 Feb 2016*

With acknowledgement and thanks to Judy Smith, researcher

Mary Alexander – Guildford Museum

Pat Rowland – Cartmel Peninsula Local History Society

## SOURCES

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St Anthony's Church visitor information

PCC Will of James Shaw of Guildford 1594

Will of Thomas Mile, Surrey Archdeaconry Court 1569

Guildford court books (SHC BR/OC/1/17 pp3. 19)