

IN COMMEMORATION OF A RUISLIP FAMILY OF COACHMAKERS

by Melanie Winterbotham

Accounts of roads in Ruislip even in the 19th century do not evoke scenes of elegant travel; yet our top families must have aspired at least to the hire of a London built coach, and one Ruislip family was making coaches in the late Stuart period.

Abraham Keene, a native of Warwickshire, was apprenticed in 1666 to a coachmaker belonging to the Company of Leathersellers in London.¹ In 1677, the Company of Coachmakers and Coach Harness Makers was granted its own charter, and the records of that company show that Abraham took on his own apprentices, two of whom were from Ruislip. In 1687 he took on Richard Ewell (Ewer?), son of John, yeoman; and in 1692 John Living, son of John, also a yeoman, who was probably a close relative of Abraham's first wife. Although John Living completed his term and became a freeman of the Coachmakers in 1701, neither apprentice appears in further records.

In 1681 Abraham married Mary, daughter of Richard Living of Ruislip.² Mary had no children, and died aged 48 in 1696.³ On the 30 October 1697, he married Hannah Wingfield⁴ in Ruislip, and they had a daughter Mary in 1699 who sadly was buried in Ruislip the same year. Hannah died in 1714,⁵ and Abraham in 1720,⁶ by which time he had retired to Bury Street in Ruislip⁷; he still had property in London, but had 'left off his trade' by 1706⁸ and his business is not mentioned in his will.⁹

A son Abraham was baptised at St Andrew Holborn in 1701, and was apprenticed in 1716 to John Sherriffe, also a Coachmaker, who ran a hackney coach and four horses.¹⁰ Alas, this master died the same year, and Abraham was apparently not transferred to either his master's widow or another Coachmaker. His father's will three years later provides that 'when he shall come to be an apprentice I desire he may have such clothes and tooles as may be useful for him during his

apprenticeship and to allow him fourty shillings yearly as my executors shall see needful for him during his apprenticeship.' Abraham junior is only to come into his property once he has reached the ripe age of 24.

Abraham did become a company member, possibly by patrimony (i.e. by virtue of his father's membership); there is no record of him as an employer. Like many second generation London craftsmen, he may have preferred life as a country gentleman, though not for long in his case, as he died unmarried at the age of 31 in 1732.

Abraham's will¹¹ is unusual in naming so many of those important to him in life, and informing us of his funeral and burial arrangements. He has clearly spent much time in London and has friends and relatives connected with his trade - other coachmakers, a tyre smith, an upholsterer, and a currier (who would prepare the leather work) - as well as other craftsmen.

His affinity with his mother's 'town' of Ruislip is strong. He has property here and is to be buried here. He remembers not only his peers, but labourers and brickmakers (who receive clothing). He has kept his mother's gowns - perhaps in the hope that a future wife could use the material (I hope they were not too musty after 18 years!). He is renting property in Ruislip from John Childs/Childe, where he has brewing equipment (this could be a public house); he also has a tenant, John Lyon.

Abraham signs his will on the 10 April 1732 and it is witnessed by William King, William Ambridge and Charles Lucas senior. While his father had a few fairly humble instructions - not more than £8 to be spent on his funeral, of which 25 shillings on bread for the poor; only those who draw the pall are to be given hatbands and gloves - Abraham junior adds remarkably detailed instructions to his executors:

He desires to be put in a yellow deal coffin two inches in thickness, and nominates six men to bear him to the parish church of Ruislip: Luke Angel sen'r, Charles Lucas, Henry Wright smith, Henry Jackkett, Henry Barringer sen'r, and Richard Merry sen'r. They are each to be paid five shillings. He notes that they are all married men, and 'chosen amongst them I leave rings to in my last will and testament'. Modest in words, but not in statement, he desires 'a large marble slab to be laid over our grave in commemoration of the death and age of us all together with the motto

Praises on Tombs are Trifles vainly spent

A Good Mans Name is his own Monument'

Joseph Wingfield is to be his undertaker, for which he has agreed a 30 guineas charge for his own work, and £12 to the masons for the 'Stone in Completion'.

There is to this day a black marble slab on the floor of St Martin's church, commemorating Abraham's mother and father as well as himself, with the motto as prescribed; also commemorated in the church is 'Mary, second daughter of Mr Richard Living of this Parish and wife of Abraham Keene citizen and coachmaker of London ...'

As for coachmaking, another apprentice Robert Hedger was bound in 1706 to a Thomas Burges of the Company of Coachmakers. Unfortunately, Robert died and was buried in Ruislip in 1715; his sister Jane married the nearest thing in Ruislip to a coachmaker - wheelwright Luke Angel (one of Abraham Keene's pallbearers).¹²

Apprenticeship records for the Company are incomplete, and we are reliant on transcriptions by earlier historians, as most of the records were destroyed in the Second World War. So it is just possible there were others, but not until three-quarters of a century later in 1772 do we find a Ruislip entry: John Robinson, son of William, gentleman, was apprenticed to Justus Olney

of Moorfields. This must have cost a pretty premium, as Olney became Master of the Company that year, but no more is seen of John, bar a possible burial in Ruislip in 1782. So any coaches that negotiated the Ruislip lanes to reach the grand houses were sadly built by strangers.

1732 will of Abraham Keene:

Executors: John Alder of St A Holborn tailor,

John Perry of St A Holborn tyre smith

£20 to godson William Marsh of Portugal Street, St Clement Danes, at age 21

£50 to Thomas Sparkes of St Brides upholsterer

my watch of £5 to Joseph Stone of Harefield "wich he shall elect"

my bureau standing in my room to Edmond Jay of Newteners Lane in St Gyles in the Fields currier"

£5 p.a. to uncle John Wingfield

the clock in my room to John Lyon my tenant in Ruislip

all my linen to John Alder

the two silk gowns and petticoats which were my late mother's to Abigail Jaques¹³ and Sarah

Wingfield- Abigail to elect which

my brewing vessels ... and my best suit of cloaths

to John Childs of Ruislip towne; rest of clothes to

Henry Jackkett of Ruislip labourer) & George

Scott brickmaker - to be divided equally between them

a 1 guinea ring to each of: Mr Marsh of Bishops

Gate Street coachmaker; Mr Onyon of Aldersgate

Street coachmaker; Mr Mawhood of Smithfield

draper; Mr Lintour in Shoe Lane baker and Sarah

his wife; John Readding of Ruislip, Captain

Dayer my tenant and his wife; Edmond Jay;

Peter Miller in Southwark hatter; Weyman Lee

esq; John Childe my landlord and his wife;

Henry Wright smith of Ruislip towne; Edward

Living of Dux Hill Ruislip; James Puddifant

of Norwood.

3 silver spoons & 3 rings to Susannah Perry

sister of John.

References

- ¹ Leathersellers Archives: Abraham Keene (son of Abraham Keene of Coaton, Warwickshire, 'coleminder') was apprenticed on the 20 June 1666 to William Fowler, Leatherseller, for 7 years.; Free by Servitude on the 14 October 1673; Liveryman 1703
- ² 2 Jun 1681 St Martin Outwich, London (by Faculty Office licence)
- ³ Mary Keene died 5 December 1696; buried at St Martin's 8 Dec; commemorated on brass plate in St Martin's church; in her 49th year.
- ⁴ Hannah Wingfield had brothers Joseph (d. Dec 1709; London will 1710), John & James; Joseph m Elizabeth Dunton 1701 Northolt, then Hannah Wheeler 1708 Ruislip (when he is Joseph Wingfield the elder)
- ⁵ Hannah Keene was buried in Ruislip on the 30 September 1714
- ⁶ Abraham Keene was buried in Ruislip on the 9 January 1720
- ⁷ Leathersellers Livery Lists for 1714 and 1718
- ⁸ Ancestry.co.uk - LMA: COL/CHD/FR/02/0416-0422 - Freedom Admission of George Mason/Masson; Leathersellers archives: in 1704 he paid a fine of 20 guineas to be excused office in the Company in respect of his age and infirmity.
- ⁹ Ancestry.co.uk - LMA: MS 9172/117; Will Number: 21; written 1719, proved 1720.
- ¹⁰ The National Archives (TNA): PROB11/581 will of Katherine Sherriffe, 1721.
- ¹¹ TNA: PROB11/652 will of Abraham Keene, 1732
- ¹² Ruislip parish register; Stanmore parish register 1716; will of Richard Hedger yeoman of Ruislip 1719; LMA MS 9172/116 will Number: 46.
- ¹³ Abigail Wingfield married William Marsh in 1722, and then William Jaques. No birth has been found for Abigail.