

'To keep his master's secrets'

An account of Ruislip apprenticeships

by Melanie Winterbotham

If we could visit Ruislip in past centuries, we might be surprised to find how many teenagers, particularly boys, were not living under the same roof as their parents. 19th century censuses illustrate this pattern. Often a child is living only a few doors away and may well be related to the host family. In a small cottage, living space would be sparse, especially as more siblings arrived, but there does seem to be a tradition, which predates the middle class boarding schools, of farming out children at what might be considered an obstreperous age. Most arrangements were informal and of mutual benefit – an agricultural household with fewer working hands might need extra help and the youngster might learn skills other than those of his or her parents.

However, more formal arrangements were made for the better off, and sometimes for the very poor, who were apprenticed to a 'master' of a trade. This could range from training as a shoemaker or joiner to a costly education with a merchant with the Company of Drapers, Haberdashers or Grocers in the City of London. Girls were also apprenticed, but less often, either to the woman of a tradesman's household where she would learn housewifery and maybe shop management, or to a woman in the clothing industry. In 1719 Martha Wilchin from Ruislip was apprenticed to a Watford milliner.

Although in other parts of the country some children aged seven were taken on in some lines of work, usually low-skilled, this was not the norm. Those who were apprenticed in or from Ruislip were at least 12 and sometimes 18 years old; in London, apprentices were normally aged between 14 and 18 and bound by an indenture to their master for seven years. Seven years is a long time and far more than necessary to become skilled in a trade; fewer than half of apprentices (the Ruislip figure is about 44%) completed their term. Some died of course, but more of them fell out with their masters, found themselves unsuited, or simply learned the tools of the trade in three or four years and set themselves up in business in a location

where protective rules did not apply. John Clare of Ruislip, son of the erstwhile Rector of Ickenham, was apprenticed to the Ironmongers in 1657, but did not complete his term. It would appear that the Clare family came from the West Midlands¹, and John probably took his skills to Stourbridge where a John Clare, Ironmonger, left a will in 1705.

John and Peter May, sons of Thomas May of Ruislip did complete their terms and became 'free' of the Drapers Company in the 1640s and '50s, as did Henry Welsted. James Kirton was apprenticed to a confectioner in Snow Hill near Holborn in 1666 and took on his own apprentices until 1691. He was a member of the Clothworkers Company; companies did not necessarily represent their original trade.

Records are incomplete, and we know nothing of Ruislip apprentices before the second decade of the seventeenth century. There were strong links with the Tallow Chandlers Company: fourteen local men were apprenticed there, of whom half completed their terms; three were sent to Richard Redding who doubtless had also come from Ruislip. Richard Coggs joined the Wax Chandlers Company at the end of the seventeenth century. As with all apprenticeships, the rules were strict, and included no fornication, matrimony or gambling. See Fig. 1.

Edward Hawtrey, however, returned to Ruislip before completing his training with the Goldsmiths company in the 1640s. James Hawtrey was sponsored by relatives who paid the vast sum of £1,000 to the Drapers Company in 1661, but he did not complete his apprenticeship; whether through death or disinclination is not known, he could well have been a victim of plague.

James Wheeler's apprenticeship with Nicholas Challicombe of the Goldsmiths Co. was not a success. Although his father, a Ruislip timber merchant, must have paid a hefty premium, only four months into his term, the bond was made void by consent of parties in April 1652.

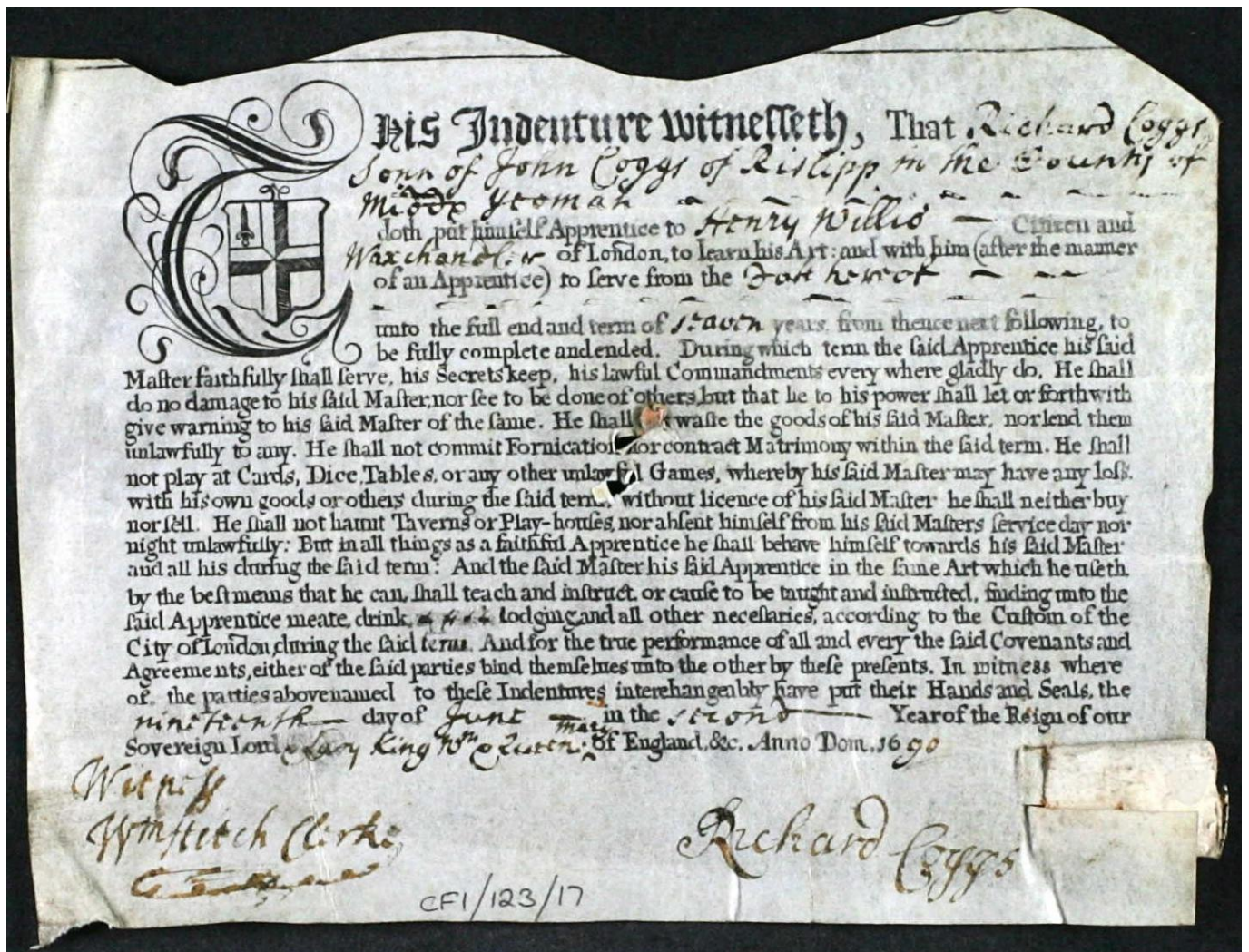


Fig. 1 - Ancestry.com. UK Register of Duties Paid for Apprentices' Indentures, 1710-1811
© The National Archives

The problem must have lain with James Wheeler, as it did not deter three others –Henry Hale, a turner, Richard Wheeler, a miller, and Robert Duck, a husbandman - from apprenticing their sons to Challicombe's widow. Henry Hale and Henry Duck both became freemen of the company.

All three apprentices to the Upholders became free; William Dunton and Thomas Dobbins become Masters of the Company. Robert Long completed his apprenticeship with the Company of Wyredrawers, but then went off on an adventure with the Hudson's Bay Company and had to explain why he had never worked at his master's profession of laceman when he later applied for citizenship on London.

One of our Ruislip lads seems to have had a half-hearted approach from the start: Abraham Keene was apprenticed to a coachmaker in London in 1716. This had been his father's trade. However, his master soon died; he could have had

his apprenticeship transferred to another master, but did not do so. He was able to become a member of the Company of Coachmakers by patrimony, i.e. because his father had been a member, but preferred the life of a gentleman in Ruislip where his mother came from. Indeed it was not unusual for sons of successful tradesmen to live as gentlemen; however, the money rarely lasted into the next generation, so that the grandchildren would be sent back into 'trade'!

Over the years many boys and some girls will have been apprenticed by the Ruislip overseers, but few records survive. We do know of two in the 1630s. Samuel Wheeler must have impressed the overseers, for in 1632 at the age of 14, he went into the service of Sir John Bankes in London. Sir John was Attorney General under Charles I, and married to Mary, daughter of Ralph Hawtrey of Ruislip. Lady Mary is famous for her defence of Corfe Castle against the Parliamentarians; one wonders if Samuel Wheeler took up arms in his master's service and what was his fate.

This Indenture Made the thirtieth day of December In the fourth
 Year of the Reigne of our Sovereigne Lord George by the Grace of God of Great Brit-
 tain France and Ireland King Defender of the Faith *1717.*
Witnesseth That John Hart and John Bonnett Churchwardens of the parish
 of Ruislip in the County of Middlesex and Henry Robins and Henry Wright overseers
 of the poor of the same parish by and with the consent and allowance of S^r Tho:
 Franchlin Barro^t and Ralph Hawtrey Esq^r two of his Maj^{ty} Justices of the peace
 of the same County have placed and by these presents do put place and bind Charles
 Long a poor parish boy as an Apprentice to Ralph Bugberd of the parish and
 County aforesaid Husbandman, to dwell from the day and date of these presents
 untill the full end and Term of Five Years. During w^{ch} time the said Apprentice
 his master faithfully shall serve his secretts keep his Commandments lawfull
 and honest every where willingly shall do, he shall do no Damage to his said
 Master nor consent to be done of others, but to his power shall tell the same or
 forthwith give notice to his said master thereof, he shall not waste the goods of his
 master nor lend them to any person without his consent he shall not frequent Ta-
 verns Inns or alehouses (except it be about his masters business there to be done) he
 shall not During the said Term play at cards dice or other unlawful Games he shall
 not either day or night absent himself from his masters Business but in all thin-
 gs as a good and faithful serv^t shall demean himself towards his said Master
 and his, And the said Ralph Bugberd his said Apprentice shall during the Term
 aforesaid Educate or bring up or cause to be educated in his Employment with due
 reasonable Chastiment & live and allow unto him during the said Term sufficient
 wholesome & competent meat drink washing & lodging Apparel & all other Necess-
 saries meet for such an Apprentice, and in the end of the said term shall find provide
 for and deliver unto his said apprentice Double Apparell (that is to say) Apparell meet
 for him to wear as well on the Lords days as on the working days both of Linnen woollen
 hose shoes and all other necessities meet for such an Apprentice to have and wear,
 In Witness whereof the parties abovesaid to these present Indentures their hands and
 seals Interchangably have set the day and year above Written,

Sealed and delivered in
 the presence of

Ralph Bugberd His Marke

wittness
 Rob: Hockly
 Charles Lucks

We whose names here in Subscribed Justices of the Peace of the Parish
 And County aforesaid, Do hereby Consent to the putting forth of the aforesaid
 Charles Long According to the True Intent & meaning of this Indent^r abovesaid
 Tho: Franchlin Ralph Hawtrey

Fig. 2 - Ancestry.com. London, England, Poor Law and Board of Guardian Records, 1430-1930
 © City of London Corporation Libraries, Archives and Guildhall Art Gallery Department

In 1634, Hugh Fisher was apprenticed to Matthew Child of Ruislip, who was probably a farmer (the only Child family in the late 17C registers are farmers). Like Samuel Wheeler, he appears to have been 14 years old and bound for 10 years to the age of 24. His master was to keep and maintain him, with convenience, meat, drink, lodging and apparel, and 'all other things necessary'; at the end of the term, Hugh was to be given two suits of apparel, one for Sundays.

The apprentice must keep his master's secrets, willingly do his lawful and honest commandments; do no damage to his master, nor allow damage by others; nor waste his master's goods. Moreover, he shall not frequent taverns, inns or alehouses, although this is allowed if it is on his master's business (which was no doubt frequent if an apprentice could arrange it!); he may not play at cards, dice or other unlawful games.

In return, the master shall educate or bring up the apprentice in his employment with due and reasonable chastisement, and provide sufficient wholesome and competent meat, drink, washing and lodging, apparel 'and all other necessities meet for such an apprentice'. At the end of the term, he is to supply 'Double apparel (that is to say) Apparell meet for him to wear as well on the Lords day as on the working days both of Linnen, woollen hoose, shoes and all other necessities meet for such an apprentice to have and weare'.

In 1717, the overseers bound Charles Long, aged about 12 or 14 (two poor families had a Charles; the one born 1705 is more likely, as his father was 'very poor'), for five years, to Ralph Bugberd, a Ruislip husbandman. See Fig. 2.

Apprentices to Ruislip

Many youngsters were brought up in a family trade without a formal apprenticeship. From 1710 a tax was imposed on apprentice indentures,

which is a blessing for historians, yielding a fascinating set of records at The National Archives in Kew, but like all taxes was also honoured in the breach, and we cannot see the many informal arrangements. Those in Ruislip who did pay the tax were wheelwrights, bakers and those in the construction trade – bricklayers, carpenters, a joiner and a labourer.

In the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, several apprentices were funded by a Trust set up by John Lyon, founder of Harrow School.² These were not necessarily on the poverty line, but were sons or daughters of tradesmen who had died and whose widows could not raise the apprenticeship fee. Poorer children were placed by the Parish. In 1658, 1659, and 1661, a Ruislip shoemaker William Hampton took three apprentices from Harrow. He might have required three assistants, but I fear a poor health prognosis at his premises. The first apprentice, John Jackett, and the second named Tylyard appear to have been 18 years old.

A tailor William Lawrence took on John Boddimeade, son of William in 1677. This maybe the John Boddimeade who had a son William baptised in Ruislip in the 1690s, but he is recorded as a labourer, not a tailor. Perhaps the training was not a success. In 1678, 18 year old John Goldsmith from Wembley, whose father Symon had died, went to Ruislip blacksmith Richard Haggard; there is no further record of him in Ruislip, but a possible burial in Harrow in 1690.

There is actually a chimney sweep recorded: in 1833 Harrow orphan Thomas Read was apprenticed to John Hill of Ruislip. Thomas was only 10 years old and presumably diminutive, and was bound to the age of 16. Fortunately Thomas fared better than the 'water baby' of Charles Kingsley's book, for he lived to the age of 85; he was still describing himself as a sweep at the age of 78, and was a freeholder in Pinner High Street.

¹ The birthplace of John's father Andrew Clare is not recorded. An Andrew Clare was baptised at Uttoxeter in January 1596/7, but this is probably too early and few records have survived from the turn of the 17th century. Andrew Clare joined King Charles I and even joined him in exile in Paris; a slightly older Ralph Clare of Worcestershire was also university educated and in Charles's entourage.

² I am very grateful to the late Jim Golland of Pinner Historical Society for collating records of apprentices from Harrow.