



BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL



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date 30 April 2012

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USA

Dear George

Thank you for your various emails regarding Thomas SHEFFIELD, thought to have been born in Bedfordshire around 1790, or thereabouts.

I have spent some time looking at various sources to see what I could discover about Thomas SHEFFIELD.

The surname SHEFFIELD, does appear in many of the Bedfordshire Parishes, but it is difficult to know exactly where to look.

I did find a baptism of a Thomas SHEFFIELD, who was baptised on the 11th July 1790, in the parish of Carlton, Bedfordshire, the son of Austin and Elizabeth SHEFFIELD. However, upon checking later, I discovered that Thomas SHEFFIELD, baptised 11th July 1790, died shortly after and was buried in Carlton on the 19th August 1790, the son of Austin and Elizabeth SHEFFIELD.

It might be that Austin and Elizabeth produced another son, whom they named Thomas SHEFFIELD, after this one died. I would doubt this however, as the Thomas SHEFFIELD, being researched would have to have been born around 1790, if he was producing children from 1812 onwards. Austin and Elizabeth, did go on to have other children, but none with the Christian name Thomas (at least in Bedfordshire). Can I ask, do you base Thomas SHEFFIELD'S approximate date of birth of 1790, from the age given at death?

I discovered evidence of a SHEFFIELD, family living in the County Town of Bedford, Bedfordshire, in the parish of St Paul's.

This was in relation to a Henry FOWLES, of St Paul, Bedford, who was a tailor. The document was in relation to a settlement dispute (Ref PUBZ3/5/40).

Henry FOWLES, appeared before the Overseers of the Poor of St Pauls, on the 1st May 1820, giving that he was about 28 years of age. Born in Dublin, Ireland. He left Ireland when he was about 16 and went to sea for three years then enlisted in the Royal Train of Artillery. Whilst employed in that service about five years ago in South America, he had his leg shot off and was discharged on a pension. He then came to Bedford and made an agreement with Mr William MacCreath of St Paul's tailor, to give him ten pounds to instruct him in the business of tailoring and to serve him for two years without any remuneration of any kind.

He served the whole of the two years in St Paul. There was no written agreement but a receipt for the ten pounds.

He then worked as a journeyman for John WOODS, of St Paul, Bedford. He married Ann SHEFFIELD, on the 31st April, 1820, at St Paul's Bedford.

A similar Settlement dispute arose regarding Joseph ROBINSON, who was residing at St Paul's Bedford, who gave evidence on the 8th October 1821, that he was about 33 years of age, born in Turvey, Bedford. About 16 years ago, he let himself out as a horsekeeper to Mr Austin SHEFFIELD, of Newton Blossomville, County of Buckinghamshire, Farmer. When he had lived in that service about one years and had removed with his family to a farm in Harrold. He continued in Mr SHEFFIELDS, service as horsekeeper, in Harrold for two years without any interruption. Last winter he was examined by John HIGGINS Esq at Turvey and removed to Harrold and the parish officers there set him to work.

I have included these individuals in this report to illustrate how easy it was for people to move around, and also that a family named SHEFFORD, had lived in the town of Bedford.

The last settlement involved Mr Austin SHEFFIELD, of Newton Blossomville, this surely must be the same Austin Sheffield, who produced Thomas SHEFFIELD, in Carlton, Bedfordshire, in 1790? The information given by Joseph ROBINSON, suggests, that Austin SHEFFIELD, moved back to Newton Blossomville, which is in the county of Buckinghamshire.

With no obvious clues to go on, it was important to look at all sources to see if they might lead to discover where Thomas SHEFFIELD, had been born. Had he any links with the county of Buckinghamshire?

Another settlement examination, on the 3rd October 1798, involved a John SHEFFIELD, Private Soldier serving in the Supplementary Militia of the county of Bedford. He gave that he had been born in Little Woolstone, Buckinghamshire, and was then aged 23. He had let himself out as a servant for one year to John KEMPSTON, of Shillington, farmer and had service one whole year and had gain no other settlement.

Settlement is a complex subject, but very simply, a person could gain parish of settlement by having been born there, served an apprenticeship there, had

worked for a whole year in a parish, or had enough money to provide for himself. This was to protect parishes for having to pay poor law payments to individuals who came to settle in a parish. If they did not have legal parish of settlement there, the Overseers of the Poor, would move them on or send them back to their proved parish of settlement. These are good examples of this system.

There was also another family living in Biggleswade. A John SHEFFIELD, of Biggleswade, tailor and widower, married Mary MAYES, of Biggleswade, in 1797.

As I had been unable to discover any obvious clues to where Thomas was born, I was trying to build up a picture of individuals who would have been of the age to produce children.

Another clue found, again referred to Newton Blossomville, Buckinghamshire and involved the will of one John STURGES, yeoman, of Newton Blossomville.

The will was proved on the 11th April 1807, and made the following bequests. He bequeathed his cottage in Newton, to his daughter Mary STURGES.

He gave his two cottages in Carlton, to his son Thomas for the term of his natural life. After Thomas's death, Thomas' daughter, Susanna SHEFFIELD, was to inherit the property. He bequeathed £30 to his daughter Susanna, and £5 to his granddaughter, also Susanna on her 21st birthday.

The document contained details taken from a Parish Register of Newton Blossomville, regarding the Burial of Susanna, the wife of Austin SHEFFIELD, who was buried on the 27th March 1803. Also a daughter Susanna SHEFFIELD, who was buried in 1812.

I think that Austin SHEFFIELD, was married to Elizabeth (maiden name unknown) and that they produced a few children in Carlton (including the Thomas SHEFFIELD, baptised on 11th July 1790, buried 19th August 1790).

It is probable, that Elizabeth, the wife of Austin SHEFFIELD, died and he married again to Susanna STURGES, of Newton Blossomville. By 1803, Susanna SHEFFIELD, had died, and also a daughter Susanna, in 1812. Both presumably buried in Newton Blossomville.

From the settlement dispute regarding Joseph ROBINSON, we learn that he had worked for Austin SHEFFIELD, in Newton Blossomville, in 1805 (which ties in with the above information). However, Austin SHEFFIELD, and his horsekeeper, Joseph ROBINSON, and their families, had moved back to live in Harrold, Bedfordshire, around 1820.

I am not sure if Austin SHEFFIELD, himself is related to Thomas SHEFFIELD, but it might explain where Thomas SHEFFIELD, was born?

I studied the burial registers for Bedfordshire.

I discovered that a Joel SHEFFIELD, was buried on the 9th August 1820, aged 2 years of age, in Wilstead. Was this Joel SHEFFIELD, the same Joel who had been born around 1817, the son of Thomas SHEFFIELD, and his presumed first wife?

I then looked at the Baptism Registers for Wilstead and discovered the following entries:

9 th October 1821	Elijah son of	Thomas and Anne SHEFFIELD	Wilstead, Labourer
29 th August 1824	Elisha Stratton son of	Thomas and Anne SHEFFIELD,	Wilstead, labourer

No other entries were found for the family. I noticed that the Christian names of the children appear to have been biblical. I wondered therefore, if perhaps the family had been Nonconformists?

There was a lot of Nonconformity in Bedfordshire, there were Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists(Primitive and Wesleyan), and many more different sects.

As the Baptists are one of the more difficult religious sects to research, as their records keeping was not particularly good, I decided to look to see what had survived.

I looked at various Baptists Church and Chapels, without success. I then looked at the Cotton End, Baptists Church, which is in the parish of Cardington.

I discovered the following entries:

Benjamin SHEFFIELD	Son of Thomas SHEFFIELD and Ann SHEFFIELD, his wife of the parish of Wilshamstead in the county of Bedfordshire	Was born on the 28 th day of March 1828, present at the birth, Frances POTTER and Ursula FOX. Registered the 16 th day of October 1828. Registered by John HOLLOWAY, Pastor
Ruth SHEFFIELD	Daughter of Thomas SHEFFIELD and Ann his wife of the parish of Wilshamstead, in the county of Bedfordshire	Was born on the 13 th day of October 1832. Baptised 27 th February. Registered the 27 th February 1837 John FROST

I searched the Cotton End Baptist Church Book, for evidence of when Thomas SHEFFIELD, had joined the congregation.

I discovered that he had become a member of the church on the 1st June 1828, he was said to have been of the parish of Wilshamstead[now known as Wilstead]

One of the earliest Nonconformist church in Bedford was the Bunyan Meeting, founded in 1650, on Independent principals. Not strictly a Baptists church, nor was John BUNYAN, a member of the church.

The Nonconformists of all sects, were persecuted after Charles II came to the throne in 1660 and years of persecution were to follow. The Bedford congregation was arrested on Sunday 15th May 1670, and a few days after, Sir George BLUNDELL, of Cardington and William FOSTER, Justice of the Peace, visited Cotton End where a meeting had been held and where "*Thomas THOROWGOODS, house where he held a meeting, was destroyed and all his implements of his trade (he being a weaver), were taken away from him*". Thomas THOROWGOOD, and his wife left their house and went to live elsewhere. Others at the meeting at Cotton End, were fined.

By 1672, things became a little easier for Nonconformists and the houses of George COCKAINE and James WILSON, in Cotton End, were licensed as a Dissenting Meeting Place.

Cotton End, joined association with other Baptist groups, in Bedfordshire and elsewhere. The earliest Church Meeting at Cotton End appears to have been on the 7th May 1674. Many Baptists moved from congregation to congregation so they can sometimes be difficult to track down.

Unfortunately, as explained earlier, the Baptists were not particularly good at record keeping, unlike the Anglican Church, it did not believe in a church hierarchy. With no Bishop's overseeing the running of the churches, many records simply disappeared with the incumbent when he left the church.

Had Thomas' parents been Nonconformists? At least this search has proven without a shadow of a doubt that Thomas SHEFFIELD, had been in Bedfordshire, at least as early as 1820, when Joel, was buried in Wilstead.

More research needs to be carried out now we know what problems we are likely to encounter. Other sources could be used to see if it could be discovered where Thomas SHEFFIELD, was born. Perhaps he was born in Bedfordshire, but that the records have not survived to prove this. If his parents were Nonconformists, it would make finding records relating to him difficult.

If you would like me to carry on with the search, please let me know. However, I would suggest that a two hour search would be needed, as this is going to be a difficult search and many sources need to be checked and deciphered.

It may be that Thomas SHEFFIELD, came to Bedfordshire from another county, possibly Buckinghamshire, and that his parents were also Nonconformists.

I have taken copies of the baptisms, and register of births, and also a copy of a hand drawing of Cotton End Old Meeting by Robert P Hart, drawn in 1962. Also enclosed is a copy of our 6" OS, map, 1st edition c 1881, which clearly shows the parish of Wilstead and Cotton End, in Cardington. I have enclosed a map showing Bedfordshire Parishes and the surrounding counties.