

The Haden-Darwin-Wright Connection

(© Phil Tunaley).

Introduction

There was already a close relationship between the Haden and Wright families even when the original Haden family was based in Wednesbury, West Midlands, Staffordshire.

Joseph Wright had painted a portrait of Thomas Haden with Thomas, born Wednesbury 1760, aged between 12 and 16 years and hence placing the year of the painting between 1772 and 1776.

("Portrait of Master Thomas Haden": <http://www.artnet.com/artists/joseph-wright-of-derby/portrait-of-master-thomas-haden-YUYoRlyDiZsLiBzl0IW0vA2>).

So Thomas Haden's portrait would have been created 15- 20 years before Joseph Wright painted portraits of Mary Tunaley and the twins Ann and Sarah Haden (born 1788).

Indeed the timing (1772-1776) of the painting of Thomas Haden as a boy by Joseph Wright indicate Wright being acquainted not only with the senior members of the Haden family (Thomas's father Joseph (1722-1799) and mother Ann (nee Bunn)) but also, as it transpires, with Thomas's elder brother Alexander Bunn Haden (1752-1829).

The aim of this article is to show how circumstances, some good, some bad, brought the Hadens into contact and later friendship with Erasmus Darwin and the Wright family.

Thomas Haden, his father Joseph and elder brother Alexander Bunn Haden

Thomas was the third son of Joseph Haden (b. 1722) originally of Old Swinford, Worcestershire and Anne (nee Bunn b. 1733) of Wednesbury, Staffordshire.

Joseph's 1751 marriage to Ann seems to have signalled a permanent move by Joseph to Wednesbury.

And, according to records, the Haden-Bunn marriage took place at the then rebuilt (1741) Anglican Church of St. Katherine Coleman, in Fenchurch Street, City of London.

In 1760, Thomas Haden was born Wednesbury, Staffordshire, West Midlands 1760. He married Sarah Wallis, 4th August 1785, at St. Luke, Old Street, Finsbury, London, the location and that of his father's marriage mentioned above indicating close links to the City of London even at that stage.

With regard to how Joseph Wright first came to meet the Hadens, little is known about Joseph Haden and his wife Ann, but the career of Thomas Haden's elder brother Alexander Bunn Haden, christened Dudley, Staffordshire 22nd July 1752 offers clues.

Ordination

After graduating at Christ Church, Oxford, Alexander was ordained by Bishop Brownlow North, as Anglican deacon in the diocese of Lichfield and Coventry 31/7/1774 and a month later appointed stipendiary curate at Rushall, situated approximately halfway between Wednesbury and Lichfield.

Then on 20th April 1775, Alexander Bunn Haden married Sarah Wastie at St. James Church, Cowley, Oxfordshire. Sarah was the daughter of Francis Wastie Esq, High Sheriff of the County of Oxfordshire for the year 1770.

With Alexander marrying a daughter of the wealthy Wastie family one would assume social norms at that time meant the Hadens must themselves have been at least moderately wealthy and influential.

And at that stage, Alexander Bunn Haden was aged 23 years and his brother Thomas aged 15 years.

Further Events

Significant and tragic events were soon to follow.

According to monumental inscriptions at St James Church, Cowley, Oxford, "Francis Wastie Esq., High Sheriff for the County of Oxon died May 16th 1775 aged 59 years". This was less than a month after Alexander Haden had married Sarah.

Even worse, the inscriptions then go on to say that "Sarah Haden wife of Rev. Alex. Bun Haden (sic) and daughter of Francis Wastie Esq and Hannah his wife, died Feb 17th 1776 aged 23 years". This was ten months after Sarah's marriage to Alexander. No record of cause of death has yet been found although one obvious possibility is death at, or following, childbirth but with no evidence found of the survival of a child of this marriage.

Darwin, Jackson and Boothby

The County of Derby was then the eastern archdeaconry of the large diocese of Lichfield and Coventry, later renamed the diocese of Lichfield (with Coventry becoming part of the diocese of Worcester).

And at the ecclesiastical centre of this diocese was Lichfield Cathedral.

It is well-known that Erasmus Darwin who then lived no more than 100 yards from the cathedral on Beacon Street was a founder member of the Lunar Society in the 1750s.

Less well-known is that around the time of Alexander Haden's marriage to Sarah Wastie, Darwin had formed the Lichfield Botanical Society.

This society, despite its name, was made up of just three people, Darwin himself, Mr. John Jackson, Proctor of Lichfield Cathedral and Sir Brooke Boothby (1744-1824) poet and philosopher and eldest son of Sir Brooke Boothby of Ashbourne Hall, Derbyshire .

One aim of the society was to create a botanical garden next to the home of Darwin - Jackson took over the garden after Darwin left Lichfield in 1781.

A further aim was to translate the works of the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus from Latin into English. Records state the final result of the project was the publication of two books "A System of vegetables" I (1783 and 1785) and "the Families of Plants" (1787) by which time Darwin had already been resident in Derby for several years.

Mr. John Jackson

As Proctor of Lichfield Cathedral, Jackson was representative for all clergy in the diocese of Lichfield and Coventry.

Given Alexander Bunn's proximity at Rushall after he'd been ordained as deacon together with his marriage to Sarah Wastie perhaps launching him into the higher echelons of society, it seems likely Jackson was well acquainted with Alexander Haden and also his family including the young Thomas Haden.

Sir Brooke Boothby

Wikipedia: "As a young man he (Boothby Jnr.) was a prominent figure in London society and a member of the literary circle at Lichfield which included Dr Erasmus Darwin, Thomas Day and Miss Anna Seward".

Boothby, like Darwin, was a friend of Joseph Wright and indeed there is a Wright 1781 painting of Boothby that can be seen at <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/wright-sir-brooke-boothby-n04132>)

Links to Darwin and Joseph Wright

Given any single event listed above regarding Alexander Bunn Haden, one might assume the latter would have become at least personally acquainted with John Jackson the proctor of Lichfield Cathedral

In fact there were three such significant events including one particular tragedy so that such an acquaintance might have turned into a personal family friendship firstly with John Jackson and later Darwin, Boothby and Joseph Wright.

Either way this confluence of events provides background as to how the Hadens became introduced to Jackson, then Darwin and Wright and later of course their associates.

Subsequent Events

In September 1776 Alexander Haden, stipendiary curate for Rushall, was ordained priest by Bishop Richard Hurd in the diocese of Lichfield and Coventry

On 22nd April 1779, Alexander married a second time to Mary Rotton, at Aston Juxta Birmingham, Warwickshire.

And in 1782, Alexander was appointed Vicar of Wednesbury based at the parish church of St. Bartholomew's, a post Alexander held until his death in 1829.

There were five known children by this marriage:

1. Mary Anne Haden bp. St. Bartholomew, Wednesbury 22/4/1780
2. Elizabeth Haden bp. St. Bartholomew, Wednesbury 28/1/1782
3. Alexander Bunn Haden bp. St. Bartholomew, Wednesbury 25/3/1783
4. Francis Wastie Haden bp. St. Bartholomew, Wednesbury 12/11/1784
5. Sarah Wastie Haden bp. St. Bartholomew, Wednesbury 25/3/1786

Alexander, who was appointed magistrate for Staffordshire and Shropshire, became something of a controversial figure, carrying out paid work in a number of other parishes whilst still vicar of Wednesbury using curates as substitute and paying them a proportion from these other incomes. Such other work included being Rector of Saddington in Leicestershire from 1802 until his death in 1829.

And another record has Alexander as Curate of Brewood and Brindley, Staffordshire, this of some significance because Alexander Bunn Junior (b. 1783) later became Vicar of the same parish.

Finally, an inscription on a memorial wall at King's Chapel Gibraltar confirms that Francis Wastie Haden (b. 1784) fought under Wellington for the whole of the Peninsular war and later served as Deputy Commissary General in Halifax, Nova Scotia where he died 13/3/1828 aged 42 years.

Alexander Bunn Haden Snr. died the following year.

Thomas Haden in Derby

Meanwhile, Darwin and Joseph Wright in particular appear to have taken younger brother Thomas under their wing with Thomas Haden following Darwin to Derby after the latter first left Lichfield for Radbourne, Derbyshire 1781 and a year later moved to the town of Derby itself. Thomas Haden then marrying Sarah Wallis (b. Derby 1762) on 4th August 1785 the marriage at St. Luke's Finsbury, London in what was possibly a society wedding.

And Thomas, now a qualified surgeon, entered into partnership with Joseph Wright's elder brother Richard (b. 1730), this arrangement lasting until 1806 when Wright retired at the age of 76 years.

The Haden-Wright connection further cemented with Thomas's fourth child being christened Richard Wright Haden at St.Alkmund, Derby, 4th July 1790.

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