

RESEARCH ON SHIPLEY FAMILY ROOTS IN ENGLAND

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I would like to talk to you today about some research I did on the Shipleys in England. As he mentioned in my introduction, I go there a lot for professional reasons as well as personal reasons. I like to go there. Also, for seven years I directed a program of taking American undergraduates to Oxford for the summer. It seemed like a good idea at the time. When I was asked to settle in for a second appointment as director of the program, I felt that there was no force on earth that would make me take one hundred and fifteen adolescents abroad for the first time in their lives again. Nothing would make me do it, so I retired from that.

The circumstances were, though, that I did get over to Britain. I had been a graduate student there, so I knew the ropes -- the research facilities -- so I didn't have to learn that. I have also written a lot on family history in the context of economic history, and it struck me as rather odd that I would do for others what I had not thought of doing for myself yet. So, in the intervals of contending with adolescent pranks at Oxford, I could go down and work in London, off and on, as much as I could for several summers. To prepare comments for today was a major act of compression because I came across masses of material. All too often, when one does genealogy one finds the occasional stray fact and tries to string them together to say, "Well, it looks as though he or she may have..." or "We may assume that they did..." And it is very likely. But here, it is not necessary. There is so much here in the record, in the resources in Britain that it is difficult to sort it out.

My initial idea was to try and find Adam Shipley in England. I will tell you right out, I did not find him, but it was a good thing to start with, because it led me to a lot of very useful leads. I decided to try a very simple, a very direct approach. I could not get to Yorkshire very easily because my trips had to be something where I could come in and out. There is an hour and fifteen bus service each way between Oxford and London, so I would do that. I just could not get up to Yorkshire, but I had some good notions about what I should do. I went to London, and I surveyed every index printed and written that I could find for the Shipley surname, and then I recorded them. It came into the hundreds, literally. In printed sources alone, I came to nearly three hundred. In manuscript sources -- in the Guildhall for the City of London, which is where all of the city records are, where the livery company records, the various church records are kept, and then in Somerset House, which is where they keep wills and various legal documents, and in the Public Records Office, which is where they keep government records -- I found how many more I do not know. I stopped counting because they were mounting up again into the hundreds -- but I found a great deal of it.

Even, perhaps in many ways more useful was that I went to the University of London, where they have what is known as "The Local History Room". This is typical British understatement, since it is the whole wing of a building. They just call it the local history room. Here is the best resource area that I have ever come across for local history. It is not open to the public, but since I had gone there, they let me in. They have an entire section of this, floor to ceiling (about 20 foot ceiling) masses of material, everything that has ever appeared in print -- and even those things that have been printed for private distribution, on the County of Yorkshire. I found just masses of stuff there. I assembled all these -- just writing them down day after day. I decided then that I would try to make sense out of them later. Fortunately, sense does appear eventually when you do this. Some of what I have to say to you today will come as no surprise. I think it is pretty well understood certain elements of it, but I also had the difficulty in that I had not seen a copy of the 1968 Shipley family history. I had never seen a copy of that, and until after I had done this work I hadn't seen the memoir on their travel that Parks and Emily Shipley did, so I wasn't familiar with that until I had almost finished this and then Parks sent me a copy.

Some of this is going to be familiar to you but I am not always sure what is, so I will just tell you anyhow, and you can sort it out for yourself. The first thing that I did was to try and locate where all the Shipleys were. This was no problem. There are at least seven or eight different places that have, Shipley or Shepley as a place-name, but virtually as far as we can see, only one of them produces a family that took that name. They are all from exactly the same place. It is as the family history says. It is the West Riding of Yorkshire. That is where they came from and, to a remarkable degree, that is where they stayed with a couple of exceptions, until they decided to come to North America.

What is a "riding"? I think many people do not understand it. Yorkshire is the largest English county by far, and a long time ago, they divided it into three pieces for administrative purposes. And the word "thirthing" became the word "riding". So we are talking about the so-called West Riding of Yorkshire, the southwest third of the County of Yorkshire.

I put all these several hundreds of references together. Most of these, the overwhelming majority of these, said exactly where the person was from. They would give the name of the town and even sometimes, just to make sure you'd really got it, they would give you the parish. This was important, because these are all almost always legal records. They had to give you as many particulars as possible, so that the courts would sustain them later if there was ever a legal challenge. So, it was pretty easy to locate these people.

I was expecting to find a lot in Yorkshire, but in fact, I found a really fascinating collection in London. I decided, therefore, to look at London first, since that is where Adam was said to have come from. As I said, I did not find him, but I found lots of potential material there.

It was not any difficulty deciding who was the first person to look at, because this person was the best known individual named Shipley in the 16th century. This was the Reverend Hugh Shipley, also Shepley. Now, I had never heard of Hugh Shipley before, but I gather that in the 1968 Shipley volume, and in Parks and Emily's memoir, he is mentioned. I had not heard of him before, but he was actually pretty well-known. The Rev. Hugh was rector of the Church of St. Nicholas in Newbury, in the county of Berkshire. This is approximately forty-five to fifty miles due west of London. Today it is an hour's drive. He was the rector of the local parish church, which is to say, of course, that he was a Church of England clergyman installed there in 1568. But I could find his background and, sure enough, he came from the north. He came from Lancashire, from a small village which is about thirty miles over the Pennines from the West Riding of Yorkshire. There is a small cluster of Shipleys over in Lancashire, just about thirty miles away from the big cluster of Shipleys in the West Riding.

The Rev. Hugh was born there probably in 1526, to a family that had been living there for a couple of generations. His parents were almost certainly Henry and Elizabeth Shipley, of that time. Hugh was one of several children. Being a clergyman, he went to university. I do not know which one, because the university records are incomplete, but these things tend to run in families, and he sent a grandson to Cambridge. So, it is likely that at some point in his career, he was sent from Lancashire to go to Cambridge University, where he took a divinity degree. He moved to Newbury in 1568 to take over what is really a very splendid church. This was very splendid church living.

Newbury, which is not that well-known today, was a big town, a big city, in the late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period. It was, apart from London, the principal wool center of all of southern England. And here is a connection with the West Riding, since the wool industry is the principal activity there as well, after agriculture. It was the main activity then, and it still is today. It is significant that this man from the north of England went to that town in England which was most closely associated with the wool industry. He was rector

there from 1568 until his death in 1596. He was a power in the town. All of the various records suggest this. He taught in the local school part of the time. Clergy often did that. It was also clear that he had the major voice in who was to teach there, because there are various references to his will being imposed on the school in the choice of books, and this sort of thing.

The Rev. Hugh had seven children: four sons and three daughters. His will still exists in the Public Records Office. (Oddly enough, it is in the Public Records Office and not where it is supposed to be, in Somerset House.) Of these children, we only know something about three. One, not the eldest, was John. John moved at a very early point due east into London, where he established himself in the textile trade. Again, a classic north country occupation. But it is interesting that he did not go into woolens, which was the big trade. Otherwise, he would have been in the Merchant Tailor's Company -- one of the most prestigious companies. He was in the very small company called the Broider's Company, that chartered company which dealt only with fine stuff -- in other words: cut velvet, velvet, silk, satin and any-thing to do with bullion (gold or silver thread). It is very clear that he dominated this profession, because I came across his letters patent by James I, appointing him purveyor of goods to the royal family. In Britain, you see the term "bespoke provider of tobacco" or "bespoke provider of clothing" used to describe certain people. John Shipley was bespoke provider of stuffs to the King himself. When King James died, the patent was immediately renewed. He held this position for many years. It was a highly specialized profession, and in his case, it appears to have been highly remunerative. He had a great deal of status in the community. He lived in the parish called St. Thomas the Apostle, which is in the western part of the city of London -- just south towards the River Thames from St. Paul's Cathedral. The family lived there at the time of John Shipley's death in 1632, and continued to live there some years later. I found references as late as the 18th century.

Members of this family moved out into what we would now call suburbia, and they still traveled in to London to be married at St. Thomas's Church. The church burned, but there still exists a St. Thomas's Church in that location. It is a very attractive building. I suppose that when it burned, it destroyed all references and monuments to the Shipley family. But this is where John Shipley was. He left descendants as well, some of whom remained in the trade, one of whom became a clergyman, and another one of whom drifted off into some other business which is not recorded.

Another of the Rev. Hugh's sons, John's younger brother, Henry, also moved in to London and did the same thing. He proceeded to have children, one of whom he named John, presumably after his brother. You can see that it is sometimes difficult to find out who they are. They all lived near each other. The church records of St. Michael's Bathishaw and St. Thomas the Apostle Church are constantly flickered with the names of Shipleys. Tragically, they are often burials, because children tended not to live more than sometimes a week to six months. They had a very high mortality rate. But they had children annually from the 1620's to the 1640's. You find them in great numbers.

It is interesting that we are looking at the generation, here, from which Adam Shipley probably came. All things being equal, according to models created, he was probably born in the early 1640's. So these people could have been his forbears, could have been the generation that produced him.

There is only one other son that we know anything about, and he, of course, is an interesting one. We only know one thing about him. He did go into the cloth trade, and he did not go in to London. This is because he was the eldest son, and he inherited. He was a gentleman. (I was just talking to William Davis earlier, and I saw references here to a "Hugh Shipley, Gentleman".) Well, this is the Rev. Hugh Shipley's eldest son, Hugh, Jr. who was listed in the records and in his father's will as "a gentleman", which is to say, of independent means:

his father (this was a remunerative period), the occupation, the church his father was in ... and this is apparently the Hugh, the gentleman, who was listed as one of the incorporators of the Virginia Company in 1609.

The Virginia Company in 1609 did not really refer to today with Richmond and Charlottesville. These places, of course, did not exist. What they were essentially talking about is the western shore of the Chesapeake -- the Chesapeake area -- and it is highly interesting to speculate that Hugh Shipley, Jr. could have been the first one in this family who had any connection with the New World. Adam, possibly, was his son, or possibly his nephew or great nephew, and it might have been this connection between Hugh Shipley and the Virginia Company which prompted Adam, in 1668 to think of moving to find his prospects in the New World.

I might point out as well, that the Shipley family in London fell on hard times in the 1630's, because they were dependent on the Court. The Court went on strict economies in the 1630's, and the Shipleys did not have very great success after about 1632 selling materials to the Crown, because the Crown was on short rations. The Crown didn't want to raise taxes -- they couldn't raise taxes. And then the English Revolution began in 1640 and the bottom fell completely out of the trade. They began, also, to bring in cheaper Italian exports -- that is literally the case. The Italians made it cheaper and brought it in. So they were destroyed by unregulated imports. We read that all members of the Broider's Company were looking for alternative means of employment by the 1640's. This could have created a situation which would lead a young man looking for a career to think about the New World. There's a lot more that I'd like to talk to you about, and maybe someday I can. But I've got a lot of condensation to do here.

I wanted to inform you of one other thing that would be of great interest to everyone. It was to me. That is, that I think I probably found the first person who took the name Shipley as a surname. It goes back a very great distance. In the year 1180 approximately, there was an individual living in the West Riding of Yorkshire, (where else) who had the Christian name of Adam. The name seems to be continuous. But now this is the period in which people do not, as a rule, have surnames yet, because they have not come into common use. You are identified by different things: who your father was, where you live, what you do, or by some physical feature. So Adam was known as Adam, son of Roger of Barnsley. He was also known as Adam, the Steward, because he was steward of the Manor of Barnsley. He was also known as Adam Oldfield, which is a place name. And he was known as Adam of Shepley, because that too is a place name.

Now it is not unusual to have a few of these names, because, again, in legal records they want to be as precise as possible about who this person is. If he owns property, they do not want someone else coming in a generation later saying, "Oh, you have left it to the wrong person." So, they would try to pinpoint the guy as accurately as possible by saying where he came from, who his father was, what he did. If there was a distinguishing physical feature, this would be used. For example, the name Cruikshank indicates a short or lame leg. They would use these sorts of things to make certain that everyone knew who he was. So Adam had four names. Now, it is fine that his father was Roger of Barnsley, part of the West Riding. That makes that clear. But then it said he is also Adam, the Steward. He managed estates for absent noblemen who were usually in London, and sometimes for the king. But the other name -- why he would have two place names -- was unclear. It is like saying somebody was Adam of Westminster and Adam of Catonsville. These two things are not clear. Why would he have these? It was confusing. So, I thought I should find out.

I knew where Shepley was. I think this is where they all came from. Shepley is a little village. I tried to find "Oldfield", but there was no luck. I went to every gazetteer, every magazine I could find, looking for a town in Yorkshire called Oldfield. No luck. I found a building called the Oldfield House, but that was from two hundred years later. I thought I was doing a dry well here.

Then I had an idea that seemed completely off the wall. A number of years ago, a professor of the University of London named Nicholas Pevsner did a comprehensive survey of every architectural fragment in England and Wales. He got a big team of graduate students, and they just covered the ground. Anything that looked like it had any artistic significance -- a destroyed building, an old stone that looked like it had been carved -- they recorded. They asked what it was, and told where they had found it and what they thought it meant. I checked this with the Pevsner book. Sure enough, Pevsner had the place of Oldfield. He had found an old fragment of an arch there which he described. He is the one who told me where it was. It does not appear on maps, because it is not officially a town. It is not even any form of a political entity. It is an off-shoot. If you look at Shepley, in Yorkshire, there is a town called Homeford. It is a small town. It was then, and it is now. Apparently, for convenience -- on working in their fields, which were very extensive, for farming, grazing, and all that sort of thing -- a number of houses were set up along the road about a mile and a half south southeast of the town. This eventually got the name of Oldfield, to distinguish it from the earlier place.

So, Oldfield is officially a part of Homeford, but everybody knew that Oldfield was different. It did not have a church or a manor house. I do not think that, even yet, it has a general store or a post office, but it is there, and it still has the name. The fascinating thing is where it was located, because its fields and the fields of the village of Shepley were side by side. The only thing that separated them was a footpath, which is now a road and probably a few hedge rows. So what happened, it seems to me, is that at some point around the year 1180, somebody was saying, "Where does Adam, the Bailiff come from?" and they answered, "He comes from Oldfield." And someone else said, "No, no, it's over here. He comes from Shepley." And he was known by both of these. These are two hamlets side by side to each other, and their fields run into each other. It is difficult to tell where one ends and the other begins. Hence, he carried both names. It was specific to within a couple of hundred yards of the place from which he took his name.

But it does better than that, because Adam, who had all these names, had four children, and here is where it gets very specific. He had three sons and a daughter. The daughter married very well. An indication: she became Lady Craven, marrying Baron Craven of an old Yorkshire noble family. They survived on to the 18th century. But he had three sons, and to each he gave a different surname. This was the point at which people in England realized that you really had to have a surname to make it. And he gave each of them a different name. The oldest son was named John and his descendants carried the name John of Oldfield. His youngest son was Hugh, and he was named Hugh of Baghill. His descendants, the Baghills, did not last very long. I have never been able to find Baghill -- nobody has. But the second son was Robert, and he was given the name Robert Shepley. That is all he was ever known as. It looks very clearly as if the three sons were differentiated so that their inheritances would not be confused. There was John of Oldfield, Robert of Shepley and Hugh Baghill. Descendance here is a little bit difficult to trace exactly, but it is significant, I think, that we are talking around the 1180's to the 1190's.

In the period 1215 to the 1230's, which is to say, at the end of the reign of King John, in the same area Sir Matthew Shepley lived. He was living within a couple of miles of this spot. He was doing the same job. He was bailiff on the estates of absentee aristocrats. He was an estate manager. In other words, he was the contact man for somebody living in London. He managed the estate, he handled the political and the other interests for this man. I am not positive that Matthew was a descendant of Robert Shepley, but it sure looks that way: same place, same job, the generations are right. But from Matthew Shepley onwards, you get a long, fairly continuous thread.

Sir Matthew had several sons, all of whom were not only known as Shepley, but were distinctly referred to as the descendants of Matthew Shepley or Shipley -- it was spelled either way. I do not think they made a distinction between the two until the 18th century. (I was saying here this afternoon that my own great great

grandfather's name was spelt alternately Shipley or Shepley down until the 1830's when he finally make a decision that he wanted Shipley for the spelling, and he corrected the records in Pennsylvania. Henceforth, he would be Shipley, and not have this Shepley creeping in, and since he was a Judge at that time, it stuck. So that is what we have been ever since.)

But there was a series of people, Sir Matthew, Sir John and others, until it becomes very clear. For instance, in the 1330's there was a major lawsuit which embroiled half of Yorkshire. There was a prominent family which became extinct in the male line, which meant that all their lands were up for grabs. This, of course, meant that everybody wanted in on the act. They thought they had reached a settlement until the Shepleys got involved. Sir Matthew the third waded in and insisted, played out how he was related -- that they had married into the Hobroyd family. It was a real donnybrook of a lawsuit. It lasted for six years, from 1334 to 1340, and Sir Matthew came out in triumph, bearing off a large amount of booty from the family. From this, you learn about a lot of family relations and a lot of property they owned. By this time, it was a very widespread and ramified family.

To recapitulate, it looks as though the family name originates in the late 12th century in a corner of Yorkshire, in the vicinity of Huddersfield and Wakefield, and that it was chosen by the first Adam Shipley. He wanted to distinguish one of his sons as specifically a Shipley. We can see his descendants well down into the 13th century -- into the reigns of John I and Henry III -- when they were very well-known and leave loads of records. After this, the family ramifies out in every direction. Within a hundred and fifty years you find Shipleys dense on the ground in this area -- so dense, so thickly settled, that they occupy practically every niche on the social scale. Most of them tend to be farmers or what we would call "franklins", which is to say small, prosperous, independent farmers or "yeomen" types. Many of them were landowners, and there was a heavy concentration of clergymen in the family.

I could go on considerably longer. I do not know that I should. I will also, just in concluding, say that I took an ordinance survey map of Yorkshire. This is the most detailed map you can get, short of the actual military maps which are not available. I decided to pinpoint on the map every location I found a Shipley. I put a mark at every place. I did not differentiate between Shepley and Shipley. The earliest records of Shipleys that I found referred to the Shipleys of Thurstonland, the Shipleys of Shelley, and the Shipleys of Clayton. I looked those up, and they were all tiny little fields and villages immediately to the east of the village of Shepley. This dates back to the 12th century. It is in this area that you find them all concentrated, around Shepley. Parks and Emily, I think, also found this, because we were communicating about it. Later, it looks as though there was a large shift in Shipley concentration north to the village of Mirfield. I believe they visited Mirfield in 1977.

This looks like where a great number of Shipleys lived. In fact, they lived here so densely -- and this is an interesting point which I ran past a colleague who is a church historian. I came across a record from the 16th century of a Miss Shipley and a Mr. Shipley marrying. She was a Miss, she was not a widow. They married without church dispensation -- I mean, they were allowed to marry. In other words, there were so many Shipleys that lived there, and they had been there for so long, that the line had diverged enough that there was no longer the problem of consanguinity. Clearly, they seem to have the same line, but they were considered far enough removed that the church did not have to give them special dispensation to marry. My colleague in church history said this was not easy to do, because the church liked its fee. They charged for doing this. I had expected a more elevated reason. He told me that this is pretty good evidence that this is a group which has been on the ground for a long time in the area. They had become so divergent that they no longer even conformed to the church's rather wide net.

In the whole area of local history and in the printed records in the University of London, I found only one reference to the town of "Shepley"-- it was now called "Shipley". That one, I looked into a great deal, and I found a fascinating fact. The editor of this (a distinguished lawyer, as this was a legal text), had quoted the thing exactly, in Latin. It turns out that it was "Shipley" all right, but came from the parish of Kirkhamstead. The town of Shipley is not in that parish, but the town of Shepley, to the south, is in Kirkhamstead parish. He had made a mistake. So that the one exception I found proved to be wrongly attributed. I should, in concluding, say that it is hardly surprising, because Shipley and Shepley were virtually indistinguishable sounds in the Middle Ages, and that these two villages were equally obscure. They had no particular distinction of any sort until the 19th century. Then the town of Shipley became better known. Largely by circumstance, they took the "i" and the village kept the "e" spelling.

I really think that it is most likely that this family originates in that southern section of the West Riding, in the arc between Huddersfield and Wakefield, and not terribly far from the great urban mass of Leeds. I gather, from what I have heard of the area, that it is still a pleasant part of rural Yorkshire -- bleakish, stern and austere, but attractive countryside.

I will pursue this research, and I hope I can come up with some more relevant material. If I do, everyone here will be the first to know about it. Thank you very much.