

JOHN GARDINER BRAMHALL (1816-1878) and CATHERINE BISHOP GRAHAM (1821-1851)

John Henry's birth certificate revealed that he had been born in Sheffield in 1843. His father's name was given as "John Bramhall a razorsmith" and his mother's as "Catherine Bishop Graham". Only a very little searching was needed to find that the marriage took place in November 1841 at Sheffield Parish Church - now the Cathedral. The full details were as follows:-

Groom: John Brammall - aged 24 - razorsmith of Sambourne Square
Father's name - John Brammall - a cutler

Bride: Catherine Bishop Graham - aged 20 - of Arundel Lane
Father's name - Richard Graham - a scissorsmith

It seemed that further progress must be straightforward but snags began to appear. The census return for 1851 showed that both John and Catherine were natives of Sheffield. His age was said to be thirty-four so we had to look for the birth of a John Brammall in Sheffield in 1816. This entailed a visit to Sheffield Cathedral to examine the parochial registers which - at that time - had not been indexed and contained details of more than two thousand baptisms every year.

We listed all the possible baptisms for a year or two either side of 1816 and, in addition, searched through other parochial registers now kept in the cathedral archives. On examining our findings we concluded that the most likely entry was as follows:

" July 5th 1816. John Gardiner Brammall son of Mary Brammall - a spinster."

The second name - "Gardiner" - immediately reminded us of father's favourite uncle Sydney whose full name we had discovered to be Sydney Gardner. But if Mary's illegitimate son was my ^agr^at-gr^at-grandfather why had he not used his second name at the time of his marriage or when registering the birth of his eldest son - John Henry ? Had we, perhaps, wandered on to the wrong trail ?

But subsequent searching proved that we had not been mistaken. In 1851 John's wife Catherine died in Manchester leaving him with three young sons to care for. In 1853 John married his second wife - Sarah Bayman - and in the register signed himself as John Gardener. In 1874 his youngest son Edwin Gardener was born and the father's name was recorded as John Gardener. The matter was put beyond all doubt when the old man died in 1878 for not only was his name given as John Gardener but his age - sixty-two - led unmistakably back to the baptismal record of 1816 - "John Gardiner, son of Mary Brammall, spinster."

Of John Gardiner's life we can give only the most sketchy outline. As his first marriage certificate gave his address as Sambourne Square we hoped that the 1841 Census for Sheffield might produce more evidence concerning his mother or perhaps a sibling or two. But we were disappointed. We found him living in Sambourne Square but he was named only as a lodger in the home of Joseph Thornhill and his wife Ann.

John and Catherine made their first home in a turning off Furnival Street in a very depressed slum area of Sheffield - now totally demolished - and it was there that John Henry, my great-grandfather, and his brother Ernest were born. By 1848 the family had moved to 19, Dearden Street, Manchester where George was born and where Catherine died in 1851 of remittant fever and meningitis. At that time John was working as a "calico web maker."

Two years later John married again. His second wife - Sarah Bayman - had come originally from Ramsbury in Wiltshire. Apart from the fact that John had, on this occasion, used his second baptismal^{name} his marriage certificate contains other points of interest. When he married for the first time he said that his father was "John Brammall, a cutler" but this time he changed it to "Gardener Brammall, a silversmith." Is it possible that one or other of these conflicting statements contains just a grain of truth ?

On the same occasion he claimed that he was thirty years old - a statement that was palpably incorrect but probably stemmed from the male vanity of a widower of thirty-five who was marrying a "dolly-bird" sixteen years his junior ! But who was he hoping to deceive - and for how long ?

But the same marriage certificate contains another puzzle. It is noteworthy that in the nineteenth century witnesses of marriages were very frequently unrelated to either bride or groom. In this instance they were "Thomas Bayman" - obviously one of the bride's family and "Jane Gardener" who, a year or two later, married yet another member of the Bayman family. Thus the name "Gardener" appears three times in this same marriage record -

- in the bridegroom's name,
- in the name of the bridegroom's (alleged) father, and
- as one of the witnesses

This puzzling circumstance has provided much food for thought but no definite conclusions can be drawn. The question remains - just who was John Gardener's natural father and just why did he leave Sheffield and move to Manchester? Was it just economics or was there another factor ?

In family history research the natural progression is from a birth to

the marriage which, in the ordinary course of events, should have preceded it but in the case of John Gardener's birth there was no marriage to look for. In choosing her son's baptismal names Mary may have been hinting at the identity of her partner in indiscretion - but there is no proof. We had no choice but to concentrate on the forlorn hope of pinpointing the birth and parentage of Mary herself. We quickly found that in Sheffield alone a great many Mary Brammalls had been born who would have been capable of producing a son out of wedlock by 1816. But our Mary could have been born anywhere. Indeed the details on John Gardener's second marriage certificate had planted in our minds the thought that his mother could have been a Manchester girl who had been packed off to a friend or relative in Sheffield to hide her shame.

Unless any further information comes to light we must, regretfully, draw a line under this search with the reflection that father's gloomy hints concerning the "skeleton in the cupboard" and the "change of name" were rooted in fact !

Concerning the slender story of John Gardener all that needs to be added is that he was later employed in Manchester as a maker of doctor-blades (devices for removing surplus ink and lint from calico-printing cylinders) and that by 1856 he had returned to Sheffield where the rest of his children were born. He resumed his work in the cutlery trade as a sawmaker and lived at Creswick Street, Nether Hallam and later at 30, Verdon Street, Brightside where he died in 1878.

Sources: General Register, St.Catherines House
Parochial Registers, Sheffield Cathedral
Parochial Registers, Manchester Cathedral
Census Returns for 1841 to 1871