

Searching for Sarah

I was first intrigued by Sarah Smith when looking at the 1839 Tithe Map for Abbots Langley. It was unusual, as most names were male. Further investigation of the Tithe Map indicated that she was a widow. She was the tithe and land owner of over 96 acres in Abbots Langley. She also held the tithes for Tanners Farm (about 43 acres). She was living in the house we now know as Abbots House, but also owned Causeway House, where Benjamin Toovey was living.

The Abbots Langley Census entries for 1841, 1851 and 1861 showed that she was a resident of Abbots Langley born in Hemel Hempstead. She usually had two servants, one male and one female. She usually had visitors, even when she was in her 80s. From this I could draw a mental picture of Sarah living as a very sociable Gentlewoman near the church in Abbots Langley.

From investigating the parish records for St Lawrence the Martyr, Abbots Langley I knew that she had 3 children baptised there: John Smith (who died in infancy), Mary Ann Smith and Sarah Allen Smith. Both her daughters married in the church. Her husband Mr Thomas Smith unfortunately died at 32 and was buried on the 28th June 1805 at the church.

Sarah herself was buried at St Lawrence on the 13th August 1866 when she was 88 years of age. Her death certificate states that she was the widow of Thomas Smith, Gentleman. Her estate was valued at under £4,000. This would be worth about £443,700 today. From the probate records held on line it was interesting to note that the executors were Benjamin Toovey, Farmer of Abbots Langley and John Edward Groome, Brewer of Kings Langley. From the 1839 Tithe Map I knew Benjamin Toovey had been renting her land. I did not find out the significance of the latter name until much later.

I had a great deal of difficulty finding more information about Sarah until I took another look at the census entries. In 1851 Sarah had a visitor, who was her niece called Sarah Matilda Adams. She was unmarried, 30 years old and born at Wing, Bucks. By tracing her through the census and Wing parish records I was able to find out that she was the daughter of Thomas and Martha Adams. Thomas, however, did not appear to have a sister Sarah, so Sarah Smith was not his sister. I managed to trace marriage of Thomas Adams and Martha to St Mary's, Hemel Hempstead on 13th May 1805. Martha Adams maiden name was Warren. From further exploration of the Parish Records for St Mary's I found her baptism. I then knew her father was Francis Warren, Baker and his wife Sarah. Francis and Sarah Warren had seven children baptised at St Mary's. The eldest daughter was called Sarah Warren and was born on 5th April 1778 and baptised on 3rd May 1778. Frances Warren appears in the Hertfordshire Militia Ballot Lists as a 'Town Baker' and as a Baker in the Hemel Hempstead Trade Directory 1797.

I still was unsure if Sarah Warren and Sarah Smith were the same person, as I could not find a marriage between Thomas Smith and Sarah Warren in Hertfordshire. I then wondered if they could have gone for a more fashionable marriage in London. I was then delighted to find the following entry in 1798 in the parish records St John the Evangelist, Smith Square, Westminster, Middlesex:

Thomas Smith of the parish of Abbots Langley in the county of Hertford bachelor and Sarah Warren of this parish spinster were married in this church by licence this twenty-eighth day of May 1798. Signed by Thomas Smith and Sarah Warren. Witnessed by Francis Warren and Ann Peacock Smith.

I was delighted to have Francis Warren as a witness, as I felt that this confirmed that I had the right family for Sarah Smith (nee Warren).

I had no idea who Ann Peacock Smith was or if she had a connection with Abbots Langley. Later I did find her marriage in the parish records for St Lawrence, Abbots Langley. Thomas Goodwin Groome married Ann Peacock Smith on 21st October 1801. Thomas Groome was a Brewer in Kings Langley. The witnesses were: Thomas Smith, J Toovey and W Hart. Interestingly John Toovey was Benjamin Toovey's father and Thomas Goodwin Groome was the grandfather of John Edward Groome. I now had my connection to Sarah Smith's executors.

I am now searching for further information about Thomas Smith (Sarah's husband) and Ann Peacock Smith!

References

Abbots Langley Then: 1760-1960 by C.W. Clark

Brewers in Hertfordshire by Allan Whitaker