

THE RISHWORTH FAMILY

Thomas Rishworth was born in about 1772 in Hemsworth, a parish several miles to the south east of Wakefield, in the west riding of Yorkshire, England. His father was James Rishworth, a tanner; his mother Mary Townend.

The Rishworth family can be traced back to the sixteenth century in Hemsworth and the name appears in Yorkshire records as early as the thirteenth century.

Thomas' father appears to have died some time in or before 1778 for, on the 4th May of that year, Mary Rishworth married John Clarkson, a shopkeeper. John died in 1781, after fathering two of Mary's children, both of who died in childhood. In 1794 Mary married John Harrison. Mary died in November 1841 and is buried in Hemsworth. Her third husband had predeceased her in 1825.

Thomas married Sarah Marsh (or March) on 29 September 1793 in All Saints Church, Wakefield. They had at least eleven children: Elizabeth (born 1794), Thomas (1796), James (1798), Richard (1799), George Townend (1803), Henry (1804), Charles (1805), Septimus (1807), Edward (1808), Edwin (1811), and Sarah (1814).

Thomas was appointed the first clerk at the bank of "Ingram, Kennett Dawson and Ingram" which opened in Wakefield in 1794. In November 1802 he formed his own bank in partnership with Townend of York. This firm was known as "Townend and Rishworth".

Shortly after surviving a run on its resources in January 1812, the bank amalgamated with that of Wentworth and Chaloner of York, and became "Wentworth, Chaloner and Rishworth".

Thomas Rishworth's banking activities made him an extremely wealthy man. In 1826, he estimated his worth at £100,000, a fortune in those days, stating that he had but a hundred pounds to begin with. This was the result of having been "a slave for 36 years".

Thomas and his family lived in Birthwaite Hall, near Darton, and were apparently pillars of the Wakefield community. He built Rishworth house in Bond Street, Wakefield, for his son Thomas, who was also a partner in the bank. In 1805 Thomas senior was the Chief Constable of Wakefield, forerunner of the office of Mayor. He also served on the Poor Relief and Watch Committees and was elected Governor of the Wakefield Grammar School.

However, the family fortunes suffered a severe reversal following the collapse of the bank in December 1825, an event from which the economic health of Wakefield took years to recover. Thomas was declared bankrupt the next year and was forced to sell Birthwaite Hall and his extensive library of rare books.

Thomas returned to Hemsworth where he died on 24 June 1843. His wife Sarah died in Camden Town, London, on 14 October 1831.

Of Thomas' children, we have only fragmentary knowledge at this stage. George married Jane Dibb in Leeds in 1824 and after the bank's collapse returned from India where he was serving in the army. In old age he was recalled, "shuffling along as he came into Wakefield dressed in beggar's rags, an unkempt, broken-down old man".

Mary died in infancy and James married Emma Holdsworth in 1820. Henry died in 1844 in the Wakefield Workhouse, and his widow Emma moved to Sydney, Australia, where she died in 1860. Septimus died in 1832, leaving a wife and child. Thomas died in Surrey in 1875, and Sarah died, unmarried, in London in 1886. It appears that Edwin died in Yorkshire in 1849.

Richard Rishworth, Thomas and Sarah's third son, was admitted to Emmanuel College, Cambridge University in 1820. He was awarded a Bachelor of Arts in 1824.

Nothing further is known of Richard's movements until he set sail in 1852 for Australia aboard the ship "Success", which arrived in Geelong, in the colony of Victoria, at the end of May. It is recorded that he had arranged employment in Geelong, but by 1854 he had set up business at Bakery Hill, Ballarat, as a "sign painter and fancy decorator" with a Mr Douglas.

On 2 September 1856 Richard Rishworth married Harriett Ann Durant, the daughter of a Devonshire jeweller, and thirty-five years younger than her husband. After living for a time in Bakery Hill Road, Bakery Hill, the Rishworths were by 1868 living in Burnbank Street, Ballarat. It was here that Richard and Harriett died, on 19 December 1883 and 8 January 1887 respectively. They are buried in the Ballarat Old Cemetery.

Richard seems to have been a man of many talents, his occupations being recorded variously over the years as schoolmaster, decorator, taxidermist, naturalist and artist. Unfortunately nothing else is known at present about what appears to have been a fascinating old gentleman.

Richard and Harriett had seven children, three of whom died in infancy. Three of the four remaining children died relatively young. The eldest son, Arthur, was born in 1857 and died in 1903. William, born in 1859, died in 1898, while Clara Rishworth, my great great grandmother, was born in 1870 and died in 1902.

Ada Sarah, the youngest daughter, was born in 1875. She married Albert Richards in 1896 and moved to Broken Hill, New South Wales, in about 1906. Albert died in a mining accident in 1910, but Ada lived on until her death in October 1959 at the age of 84.

Gary Kent, Canberra

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