

Members of Manningtree Museum & Local History Group.

Please find here and enclosed stories on local history to help ease you through our current (social) suffering. Being 'history', inevitably these include a fair number of births; marriages and deaths, all intended to help keep you in good cheer!



Mrs Mary Burton, the lady of Manningtree, her pretensions, her Henrys, her Umbrella.

Some may remember the old 1910 Music Hall song 'I'm Henry the eighth I am'; revived in 1965 by Herman's Hermits, this Manningtree story has an echo of that.

It starts with John Scarpe who did really well out of the emerging maltings industry in Manningtree, he may also have inherited a small part of the local manor. He certainly gained from his first marriage to Rachel Cole, who also had possessions in the town, either obtained from her own family or from that of her first Husband. She died young in about 1682 and left her husband both money and the 'Clock from the Hall'. John Scarpe then married Elizabeth and they had at least five children, starting with a son John (Jn) in 1684 and later Mary, who becomes the focus of our story.

Her father's fortunes continued to rise and he became the Manningtree 'Esquire' and one of the few allowed to vote for parliament. There were however setbacks and after first losing one daughter in 1695 his daughter Hannah and son John(Jn) also died in 1706/7.

However their eldest daughter Mary survived her early years and was married in 1714 to a barrister, Henry Bishop esquire. He may have met Mary through relatives of the same name living in the town, also doing well as master maltsters. As a Q.C. and member of the Inner Temple, the couple were allowed to marry in one of the associated churches in the city, rather than Manningtree or Margaretting, where Henry was living at the time.

The couple's only child was a daughter Sarah whose baptism in 1717 took place back in Manningtree, though the family had by settled in Margaretting where Henry Bishop became an under-sheriff of Essex.

Mary's father John Scarpe died in 1728, his memorial on the eastern wall of Manningtree chapel recorded that he was a justice of the peace for many years, a gentleman of great probity and candour, zealous and devout in his religion. Having only two surviving children by then, a younger daughter having also married, John

decided leave the bulk of his considerable fortune to daughter Mary, and if anything happened to her, his Grand-daughter Sarah Bishop.

As well as interests in Bradfield, Lt Bentley, Gt Bromley and Lawford, the inheritance included Manningtree Quay, a number of granaries, the Packet Inn, Malthouse, a cherry garden, the Tainter Field, Tenements in the 'Middle Row' and rights over Manningtree market, fairs and customs.

The following year Henry Bishop died and he also left his estate to Mary and their daughter Sarah. This was mainly financial holdings, rather than property, including investments in the South Sea (bubble), plus a valuable collection of diamond Jewellery. He also passed onto Mary the Manor of Dale Hall in Lawford which he had purchased in 1722.

Mary soon found another Henry – Burton a wealthy vicar, also living in Margaretting. The couple married and moved back to one of her properties in Manningtree, the reverend Burton continuing as Vicar of West & South Hanningfield, most likely getting a curate to perform his day to day duties.

They settled back into life in the Town and then looked to the marriage of her daughter Sarah. Mary Burton, as she was then, clearly had social aspirations and plans were drawn up for Sarah to marry Richard Williams esquire, eldest son of Sir John Williams from Stoke by Nayland & M.P. for Aldeburgh (he was later Lord Mayor of London). This was clearly a step up by the urban family into the landed gentry.

Mary Burton and her second husband had to put most of their estates into a marriage contract, detailed in a 22 page legal document which involved both Richard's direct family and a long list of people who had an interest in the estates he looked to inherit, including Baron Thomas Onslow.

Richard Williams by then had some of his own estates, including Tendring Hall in Stoke by Nayland. Sarah and Richard were both just 21 years old when they married on the 21st December 1738 in Manningtree, before moving to live in London.

Things soon went wrong and a number of disputes broke out. The first in 1740 when Richard tried to force Mrs Mary Burton & Husband from her house in Manningtree, which he said had passed to him through the marriage arrangement. This was resolved but he then fell out with his Mother in law over other estate accounts. Richard was then suddenly declared bankrupt and it became clear his family had really only been interested in Sarah's money. His creditors then tried to seize Mrs Burton's other properties in Manningtree. A long legal case ensued, only resolved by an act of Parliament, which decreed that Sarah's dowry could not be claimed to cover husband Richard's debts. Mary Burton subsequently refused to have anything to do with her son-in-law who she thought had brought great dishonour to her and her family.

For a while Mrs Burton was however the first lady of Manningtree Town and highly regarded. Over a long period she collected rents and fees from locals for their use of her quay, granaries, warehouses, inns, maltings and tenancies, to name just part of her large estate.

Her other claim to fame was that she was the first person locally to be seen using an umbrella or parasol. Though fashionable in France for keeping out the rain or sun, they were not widely used in England, partly due to being regarded as common, a sign one could not afford a carriage. Mrs Burton was however a trend setter and would have had one or more designed to match her dress, gloves, hat and shoes, as they changed into the latest symbol of status and wealth. She may have faced some ridicule or not a little envy as she paraded out with her best parasol to Sunday church. According to one later local poet:- "pride it was induced an act so vain; And not ...protection from the rain" (see more below).

After her second husband Henry Burton died in 1754, his extended family also tried to extract his estate from Mary, which after a bitter dispute, including an issue involving a local grove of trees, she also managed to fend off.

Mrs Burton lived on in the Town reaching 85 years of age before passing away in 1778. In her will she left £1,600 to create a local charity to promote Christian knowledge and like her father a tablet was put up in St Michael's Chapel, Manningtree in her memory.

Her daughter Sarah then took full possession of their Manningtree estates which she started to sell off to Richard Rigby, including Dale Hall. She was not as fortunate in life as Mary, with no children and the early death of her husband about the same time as her mother. Following this Sarah moved back to Margaretting where she had been born. She died in 1782 and was buried next to her father Henry Bishop in the parish Church of Fryerning, near Ingatestone.

Despite the bankruptcy of her late husband Richard, she still had a small fortune, with farms in Lt Bentley and Bromley, which she left to a long list of people including some of her grandfather's (John Scarpe) relatives, plus £50 to the churchwardens to use for the poor of Manningtree.

The twists and turns carried on and Henry Burton's family continued to lay claim to some Manningtree properties that Sarah had already sold to Rigby. At one stage Cornelius Burton resorted to force of arms to eject Rigby's tenants from what he said was his property, again a matter only settled by another long and expensive legal case, with Rigby won in 1791.

See below for the full poetic comment on Mrs Burton.

Philip Cunningham – Manningtree Museum and Local History Group.

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This is what Miss Hilda Grieve had to say (in full) about Mrs Burton in the 1939 Historic Pageant she wrote and produced at Mistley Place School.

‘And now we will refer to what occurred

In the long reign of our King George the third,

And tell of Mistress Mary Burton’s fame, --

How good she was, -- how wealthy she became!

She would the tales of applicants attend,

And all esteemed her as a faithful friend.

With riches was she blessed, with honours crowned,

While nearly all of Manningtree she owned.

But some from envy would her conduct blame,

And cast a slur upon her spotless fame.

One Sunday morning, ‘twas at half past ten,

That courteous Madam Burton, there and then,

To this our Church, with the admiring throng, --

She held it open high above her head:

It was the first that had been seen, twas said.

At this some envious townfolks were agreed

It was at least a most presumptuous deed, --

That pride it was induced an act so vain,

And not, indeed, protection from the rain,

As was by some alleged, but ostentation,

And should be viewed by all with detestation!

They thought that some there were of higher birth

Would soon disdain to walk upon the earth, --

Indeed – were thankful that themselves were saved

From being proud, and lofty, and depraved!’