

## 400 years of Yardleys in Coventry

By Annette Williscroft

As far as family tree research is concerned I am lucky enough to be at least 11th generation of Yardleys who lived in Coventry over the last 400 years. I have listed here some of the interesting facts I have found about my direct line.

### ROBERT YARDLEY ( -1659)



Although there are earlier records of Yardleys in Coventry the earliest ancestor I can positively identify is Robert Yardley who was a Miller. On 9<sup>th</sup> January 1641 a lease was granted to Robert Yardley for Bastille Mill etc. for 31 years.<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Starkey had surrendered the old lease. It was a provision that Robert should put the Mill into sufficient repair before the 29<sup>th</sup> September & keep it in good repair. In 1658 a lease was further granted to Robert Yardley for 20 years at the same rent provided he kept it in good repair.

Robert died in March 1659 and in a “nuncupative” oral will he leaves his goods and chattels to his wife Margaret and his son John who he says he has not provided for, he has other children but unfortunately he does not mention them by name, but just says that he has already “disposed of them” and that his finances are not such that he can give them more.

### JOHN YARDLEY (c1640-1716)

John wasted no time in taking advantage of his inheritance, he married Sarah Normington in Burton Hastings on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1659 and in September he took over the lease of Bastille Mill which comprised of 6 bays, with corn mills for wheat, maslin (a mixture of rye and wheat, rye and oats) also various adjoining pieces of land and cottages, to allow access from Bastille Gate to Spittlemoor. His terms were £6 per annum for 21 years and he had to allow the corporation access to draw water from the drain and amend the river bank. John Yardley also occupied a stone tower over Bastille Gate, as he was granted a 99 year lease from 25<sup>th</sup> March 1680 at a peppercorn rent with clauses which meant he had to keep it in good repair, allow pedestrians and cattle through the gate and allow the corporation to repossess the gate for the city’s safety. This appears to have been sold to George Lilley in 1781. There are many documents in Coventry Archive that refer to properties in and around Coventry that he leased.



John Yardley had become quite an important man in the city, a clothier (probably a cloth merchant who would buy and sell the cloth woven in the city) by trade, he became an Alderman, a sheriff in 1682 and was Mayor in 1689/1690 during which term he met William of Orange on the boundary of Coventry on the way to Ireland. He was connected with many charities including

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Wheatley's, Jesson's and Norton's . He was a trustee of Sir Thomas White's charity in 1712 and Master of the Weavers Company in 1686. He was a corporation feoffee (trustee) for New Buildings premises and of Caloudon Tithes, Keresley and a St Michael's and Holy Trinity churchwarden. He was also connected with the tithes of Bond's Hospital and Bablake Boys amongst many others.

John's wife Sarah died although I have found no record of her death as by 1666 he is married to Katherine Fairbrother, daughter of Edward Fairbrother who was also a prominent man in the City. He was also a bailiff and Sheriff and owned property in Coventry. John and Katherine had 9 children although it is not known if all the children survived as they are not all mentioned in his will dated 1714. At that time his son John is living with him at Bastille Mill and he leaves him and afterwards his heirs the mill and malt house and a brick building adjoining that of Mr Joseph Ashe, the orchard and garden and also a messuage and tenement in Great Butcher Row and a meadow outside Bastille Gate. He does not mention John's wife Frances but in a codicil dated 1716 he admits he was displeased with Francis when he wrote his will but now he has fostered a love for her he makes a provision for her as long as she does not remarry. He also mentions his daughter Margaret in his will who is married to Lawrence Wright to whom he leaves his property in Much Park Street This may have been the property which was left in trust by Edward Fairbrother and if she has no heirs to the children of Joseph. He leaves his property near to Bablake church to his daughter Martha who is married to John Vernon. To his son Joseph and afterwards his heirs he leaves his property in Walcott in Leicestershire. He also mentions his granddaughters Katherine and Elianor Poole who are the daughters of Mary, he leaves them £100 when they reach 21. If either of them dies then the share was to go to their brother John. He leaves further property in Mill Lane and any other he has not mentioned to Joseph and his friend and kinsman William Keeling. The rest of his goods and chattels he seems to share between them.

There was a memorial to John Yardley in the Cappers Chapel of St Michael's Cathedral "Here lyeth the body of Mr John Yardley, late alderman of this City who departed this life in the 29<sup>th</sup> day of November anno Dom 1716 aged 77 years. Here also lyeth the body of Katherine his wife who departed this life the 16<sup>th</sup> day of February anno Dom. 1713 the 72<sup>nd</sup> year of her age.

### JOSEPH YARDLEY (1681-1718)

My family Line is descended from John (I) 's younger son Joseph. Joseph married Mary Hawarde in Styvechale in 1697. Joseph and Mary had 9 children, 2 of these died in infancy, both named Elizabeth. On his will it says he is a clothier and Mary was a starch maker. There was also an inscription in the Cappers Chapel to Joseph, his wife Mary and several of their children.

### JOHN YARDLEY (1699- )

John Yardley married Mary Smeeton in Wootton Wawen on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1720. At the moment I have not found much information about John.

### JOSEPH YARDLEY (1721- )

This is the person who gave me the most trouble! For many, many years I had only managed to get as far back as Joseph's son Thomas Wallis Yardley. All I knew of Thomas Wallis was that he was married to Ann Hodierne and was apprenticed to his father Joseph in 1783. Luckily I was searching on line one day and I came across a marriage for Joseph Yardley of Coventry marrying Mary Wallis in Kettering. I had also found previously reference to a document that mentioned the Yardley and Wallis names amongst others with reference to a property called Bishop Blaze in Far Gosford Street. The other names mentioned were all names connected with the earlier Yardleys in Coventry so contacting a third cousin who is also working on the tree I found that we had both come to the same conclusions, magic ! Little is known about Joseph, he married Mary Wallis in Kettering on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1752 and he was a weaver by trade. They had an earlier son called Thomas who died in 1753 and another son John who was born around 1764. I have estimated the birth date of Thomas Wallis at around 1771 as he was apprenticed in 1783.

### THOMAS WALLIS YARDLEY (After 1768 - )

Thomas Wallis Yardley was apprenticed as a weaver to his father Joseph in 1783. He married Ann Hodierne on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1793 in Coventry. One of Ann's sisters was Jane who married a John Hinton. Little did they know that when they waved off Jane and John's daughter Harriett with her new husband Thomas Monk that their 4x G Granddaughter Hillary Rodham would be married to the president William Jefferson Clinton and go into politics in her own right.

Thomas Wallis Yardley had 7 children that we know of, the youngest of which was John Yardley who was born on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1811.

### John Yardley (1811- 1863)



Watch case by John Yardley

John was born into a time when weaving was on the decline so instead he was apprenticed in the new Coventry trade of watch making. In June 1825 he was set as an apprentice to Edward Walker as a watch case maker. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 1831 he married Catherine Taylor at St John's Church in Coventry and they went on to have 11 children. They lived in Thomas Street for a while, later moving to Craven Street and finally to Poddy Croft. His makers mark J.Y. was registered in Birmingham in 1841. John was a skilled man and I have been fortunate enough to find the following passage in a book, the Autobiography of Joseph Gutteridge, a Coventry weaver who was also a naturalist and lover of science.

*"About this time I became acquainted with a friend, by the name John Yardley, a watch case maker, one of the most remarkable mechanics I had ever met. Inventiveness was with him an intuitive*

*faculty, and he was able to carry to a successful issue whatever he set himself to produce. From him I gained my first practical lesson in the art of grinding and polishing lenses for telescopes and microscopes. Never have I found a man more diffident of the powers he possessed. There is no one whose memory I can recall with greater pleasure than this simple-hearted, but talented friend, in his business as a gold and silver watch case maker he had no superior. He had the practical knowledge not only of alloying metals to a certainty, but the chemical skill to assay them, and to regain from the soot and cinders of the furnace flue the gold and silver lost by sublimation. He was one who thought little of his own time where the spending of it would be the means of helping others.*

*He was a prodigal of his time and labour for the benefit of others as he was provident of the precious metals with which he worked. But for this circumstance he might have become possessed of an ample fortune. I revere his memory because of self-abnegation and the readiness with which he ministered to the wants of others without thought of pecuniary recompense. He taught to some the art of electro-plating and gilding, to others photography, to others he elucidated technical and trade difficulties where he saw the lack of knowledge curtailed the means of living. He died August 28<sup>th</sup> 1863 aged 52. His life and death often brought into my mind many thoughts respecting a probable future."*

He then goes on to explain, when he had difficulty with lenses John showed him and objective microscope he had just made with plano-convex lenses and he was able to go on and sort out his problem.

John and Catherine had 11 children. Most of them stayed in Coventry but Thomas Wallis Yardley was living in Kings Norton when he died. Son John moved to Hoxton where he married Eliza Hills in 1859. He stayed in the London area where his descendants live today. Henry married in Islington but must have returned to Coventry as he died in the work House Hospital. Frederick was the most adventurous as he moved to New York. Firstly he worked in the watch trade but later he set up his own funeral parlour which is still going today. Several members of the family visited them over the years.

After his death Catherine must have found it necessary to move to the courts in Spon Street. As she got older she moved in with her son Henry and family who was the innkeeper at the Leopard Inn in Smithford Street where she died in February 1897.

### [William Yardley \(1850-1903\)](#)

William followed in the same trade as his father and was apprenticed to Rotherhams in 1862 as a watch case maker. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1867 he married Frances Nicholls and they had 8 children. William and Frances started their married life in the Spon Street courts but later moved to Albion Street and then Thomas Street. In 1901 they are living at 43 Croft Road which they are running as provision dealers but sadly in 1903 he passed away aged 53. The same year their son William died. William, his wife Elizabeth and their 2 children William Edgar and Elizabeth Alice had been living at Croft Road with them. This must have been a very sad time for Francis as her son Albert's wife and 3 children all die between 1901 and 1905. In 1908 Williams's wife Elizabeth died in Hatton. Francis continued to run the shop until she died in 1920. Sadness again was to strike as Elizabeth Alice died

on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1917. Not many days later Frances would be informed of the death of her son at Passchendaele. This must have taken its toll on Frances who passed away in 1920.

### Albert Yardley (1872-1960)

Granddad Albert must have had an adventurous spirit. Family stories say that in his late teens he ran away to London, probably to his family there. His parents brought him back but he swore that when he was 21 he would travel again. The ship's manifest for the Auriana shows an Albert Yardley travelling to New York bound for Brooklyn. He is travelling with Edward Darrah who is related by marriage so there is a most likely chance that this is our Albert. He also has family living in Brooklyn who had emigrated there some years earlier, Brooklyn being a centre for watchmaking in the US. Albert must have returned to the UK before 1900 as he married Kate Coles in November of that year and had 3 children but Kate and the 3 children were all to die before 1905. Albert lived with his mother in 43 Croft Road and later married Sarah Edith Tubb from Shipton under Wychwood on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1914 and they lived at 204 Melbourne Road where they had 2 children, Albert Charles my father in 1916 and Kathleen in 1918. Sadly again Sarah died in 1935 in Birmingham Hospital after an illness.

### Albert Charles Yardley (1916-2003)

Albert (Bert) was born to Albert and Sarah in 1916. He went to Centaur Road School which he left when he was 14. His first job was at the Co-op Bakery as a van boy which involved fetching the horse and attaching it to the van and then going out with the driver. After 18 months he went to work at Alfred Herbert and then on to the Winfray Tool Company. Around this time his mum died. He then went on to work at the Gauge and Tool. When war broke out he was in a reserved occupation so for the duration he was sent to the Jaguar in Browns Lane and he was in charge of the gear cutting. He joined the Special Police at the Arden Road Station. After the war he decided he had had enough of factory work so he went to work for Coventry Corporation on the buses, starting as a conductor and then they taught him to drive so he became a driver. In 1948 he went to work for Suttons Bakeries where he stayed for 33 years, retiring in 1981.

Bert met Joan Franklin while he was working at the Gauge and tool and they were married for and had been married for 58 years when Bert died. Bert and Joan were on the parents committee for the 32<sup>nd</sup> scouts in Beake Avenue and spent many years running a bingo night in the scout hut to raise funds for the scouts. They also helped at the Monday bingo at the Coachmakers Club in St Nicholas Street for many years. Bert was a quiet unassuming man and I can't help but compare him with his G Grandfather John mentioned earlier. He would sit in his chair and smoke his pipe. He enjoyed pottering about in his greenhouse, playing the organ in his own special way. He bought a knitting machine for Joan and when she decided she preferred hand knitting he started to use it and turned out some lovely knitted garments. Perhaps he inherited some weaving skills from his ancestors. Bert and Joan had 3 children and unfortunately it is this generation who have ended the connection with Coventry and have all moved away.

## Bastille Mill and Gate

These properties feature well through the history of the Coventry Yardley family so here is a little of the history of these fascinating buildings. Bastille mill or Earl's mill or Lilly's Mill can first be found in records be found in records in 1227 but may have existed before then. In that year it was granted by Ranulf Earl of Chester to Henry Aldithele. It changed hands several times until it was given to Coventry Priory in about 1286. It was definitely Priory property in 1411 when it was described as a water and horse mill, under one roof and probably for fulling. In 1544 among many other properties including St John's Hospital and Whitefriars John Hales bought the Mill. He had no family and he bought some of the Monastic Possessions exposed to the sale at the dissolution on easy terms.

In his will John Hales conveyed the site of St John's Hospital with lands and messuages belonging to the Priors of the City of Coventry & Kenilworth together with White Friars, Bastille and Hill Mills. John Hales died in 1572. The rents of these properties were to pay for a Schoolmaster to teach grammar, an usher, a music master & a Bailiff to collect the rents.

Robert Yardley took over the lease of Bastille Mill from Elizabeth Starkey in 1651 this was renewed in 1658 for 20 years provided he kept it in good repair. On his in death in 1659 John Yardley took over the mill. It comprised of six bays, with cornmills for wheat, for maslin (a mixture of rye and wheat) and rye and for oats and several pieces of land and an orchard. He was granted a lease for 21 years at £6 per annum. His lease was further extended for 31 years in 1676 when he agreed to set up 2 further bays. This was a lease of Bastille Mill & the messuages adjoining, a piece of ground by the town wall, a piece of ground lying between 2 streams, a garden adjoining the mill, tenements and cottages & gardens adjoining in Mill Lane and of the tower near



Site of mill & Gate

the said Mill. Later in 1681 it was agreed that he should pull down 3 bays of the building which was his dwelling house and set up three new ones of brick and his lease was extended to 99 years . He put the date of 1681 on the wall. Then in 1693 when he was an Alderman the premises were sold to him in fee-farm (a permanent & absolute tenure in land with freedom to dispose of it at will) for a £10 fine and an annual rent of £6. This is why when he died in 1717 he was able to will the property to his eldest son John. It appears to stay in John's family until his grandchildren transfer it in 1751 to Thomas Cater. The Mill was purchased by the Corporation and pulled down in 1845.



Bastille Gate 1840

## JOHN YARDLEY (II) AND FAMILY

Although not my ancestors the eldest son of John (I) and his family have interesting stories so I have included them. John's eldest son continued to live at the Mill and he became a surgeon. John (II) had 2 children by his first wife Alice, John and Henry. He then had a further 5 children with Francis who John (I) had come to love. He also became an alderman and continued in his father's footsteps. His son John (III) also prospered. He was only blessed with 3 daughters with wife Dorcas Vere but the eldest Mary married Thomas Penn Vernon an apothecary. Dorcas Vere had a brother James who was a wealthy merchant tailor of London. He was very rich and unmarried so he left lands to in Hillmorton Rugby including Hillmorton Manor to Joseph, Mary's son and also rents and profits to his 3 nieces. <sup>2</sup> John (III) was a Surgeon and Man-midwife. He must have been well respected as an inscription appeared in The Gentleman's Magazine Vol. XIV *Mr Urban: Coventry June 11 1744*

*It is the Desire of some of your Readers here, a desire proceeding from gratitude to the deceased that you'll insert the following monumental inscription.*

Here lieth the body of JOHN YARDLEY of this City

Surgeon & Man-midwife

Whose practice was attended with uncommon success

In cases most difficult

His mind was endued with all social virtues

His compassion alleviated those pains

Which art could not remove

And the gloomy hours of declining life

Were made supportable to many by his charity

Great integrity and knowledge in his business

Occasioned such numbers to apply him for assistance

That too assiduous an attention to the health of Others

Prov'd fatal to his own

He dyed May 14<sup>th</sup> 1742 in the 49<sup>th</sup> Year of his age

A loss not only inexpressibly afflictive

To his disconsolate Widow and Family

But felt and regretted by the Publick.

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<sup>2</sup> Three sisters and a Lunatic, Rugby Family History Society.



The son of Thomas Penn Vernon and Mary Yardley also sounds quite a character. An article in the Examiner dated 21<sup>st</sup> March 1841 states "A few days ago a man of very eccentric habits departed this life at his home in Broad Street buildings, London. In the 84<sup>th</sup> year of his age. His name was John Yardley Vernon and he had a fancy for always appearing in the streets in the garb of a beggar man. He was a stock-broker many years ago and realized upwards of £100,000 and yet cut such a miserable figure in the streets that people have dropped alms into a little bag which it was his custom to carry. He never appeared to be offended at the mistakes which were thus made by the compassionate donor. Mr Vernon attended church regularly, but never entered a pew. He sat amongst the poorest parishioners, but frequently put upon the plate as much as would pay for a suit of the best clothes amongst the whole congregation, and there was not a charity in the ward to which he was not a principal contributor."