

ENGLISH RESEARCH – CHASING MY RICHMAN FAMILY

By Randy Seaver

Linda and I spent three weeks in England on vacation in 1993, and had a marvelous time sightseeing and chasing family history. We spent three nights in London, three nights in Edinburgh in Scotland (with a side trip to St. Andrews), three nights in York (and I went to the town of Richmond one day), a night with friends near Derby, three nights in Oxford (with a bus trip to Stratford-on-Avon), one night in the country village of Ashton Keynes in northern Wiltshire, six nights in Bath (Linda went one day to Wales, and I spent three days in Trowbridge doing research, with a trip to Salisbury and Stonehenge), and back to London (to see Buckingham Palace) for one night. We traveled by train everywhere, and then used the bus or taxi within the towns. We stayed in Bed and Breakfast guest houses in every place but London; they typically had 4-10 rooms, done quite elegantly, and with a full English breakfast each morning.

The night in Ashton Keynes (in northern Wiltshire), was in the manor house (now a Bed & Breakfast) of the Richmond family from the 17th century. There are some legends associated with this house which was obtained by the Richmonds in about 1650. The owners claim it was the birthplace of the John Richmond who came to America in about 1637 and settled in Taunton MA, moving later to Newport RI. I have this John Richmond of Taunton in my Seaver ancestry. They also claim the house was the site of the incident where a John Richmond (a Royalist) killed his brother Henry Richmond (a Roundhead) before the battle of Newbury of the English Civil War in 1643. They even re-enact the incident every five years, with the master of the B&B playing the part of John. There is no irrefutable proof that John Richmond of Taunton is the John who killed his brother Henry, nor that the incident happened in Ashton Keynes. Better genealogists than I have done lots of research over the last 100 years and have not able to solve the puzzle.

My main goal for the trip was to tie my James Richman (Richmond after he came in 1855 and settled in Connecticut!) to some Richman/Richmond family further back. I searched quite a few parish registers, the wills, land and tithing apportionment and several other resources in the Wiltshire County Record Office (CRO) in Trowbridge. I did gather as much as I could in two and a half days on Richman and the three collateral families (Rich, Marshman and Hill). When I got back, I input all of the collected data into a computer database. It appears that the parish registers have periods when they are incomplete - either the vicar didn't write things down or the folks didn't have their kids baptized. I have not searched all of the parish registers, so there may be records available that I have not found.

The parents of James Richman were John and Ann (Marshman) Richman, which I knew before I left. I found the baptism and marriage records for James Richman and Hannah Rich in the Hilperton parish records - so Hilperton is the "ancestral" church. Interestingly, the families of Hilperton and Trowbridge used Richman almost exclusively - and the first Richman records were in the 1620's. The name may be derived from either Richmond or Rich - it is unclear now and probably won't ever be clear! In any case, very few of them were rich people - they appear to be mainly masons, blacksmiths, farmers, weavers, mill workers, or laborers.

One day I went out to the Hilperton church and roamed around the graveyard - the gravestones are really corroded, and the earliest stone I found was about 1860. There were only two Richman stones, and they were later than the ones I was looking for.

On Sunday, we took a cab to church (15 pounds fare from Bath) in Hilperton and met a Mr. Potts who remembered that other folks from the USA had come twice to find the same Richman ancestors we were looking for. He also remembered that he had gone to the CRO and found vestryman's records that indicated our James Richman had been accused of stealing coal, was acquitted, and then emigrated to America after the incident (so that answers the question "why did they come to America?"). When I returned, I wrote to my cousins Chester and Barbara Richmond who live near Seattle, and learned from them of my cousin Roma Challis who lives in Hilperton, and from her my cousin Doris Beasley in Winchester.