

The Witches of Shropshire - the Wives of Richard and Thomas Garner

Was it about witchcraft or was it about gaining control of the Lion Inn?

Summary

John Garner, born 1578 in Solihul, Warwickshire, England had three sons - Thomas, John, and Richard. They had each inherited a 1/3 interest in the Lion Inn, a carriage inn at Shrewsbury, from their mother Joan Underwood's dowry about 1631.

Thomas married Mary Lacye. She was drowned as a witch in 1635 in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, England.

Richard married Katharn. She was drowned as a witch in 1636 in Shropshire, England.

Thomas and Richard took their children and immigrated to Virginia in 1636 and 1637. Richard "freely gave" his share of the inn to brother John, or so John said.

John stayed in England. It is assumed that he was married. He still owned the inn in 1643 and he wanted quiet title to it. For information about the inn, which still exists, see: <http://www.thelionhotelshrewsbury.co.uk>

(Richard Garner is the ancestor of Faye.)

The Witches:

"The Witchcraft Trial of **Mary Lacye Garner** - 1635. Thomas Garner's wife was tried by water for witchcraft in Shropshire, England. In a trial by water, the person was weighed down with stones and thrown in the river. If she was able to free her bonds and escape without drowning, she was deemed to have received help from the Devil and was consequently burned at the stake. If she drowned, as Mary Lacye Garner did, she was judged innocent and was given a christian burial at the expense of the Crown to amend for the wrongful death. After the experience of having his wife killed in this witch trial, Thomas Garner took his 2 year old son John and traveled to Northumberland Co., Virginia."

Katharn Garner, the wife of Richard Garner, "... Welshwoman, found innocent of Witch Craft in Trial by Water. ("2 pounds for burial in Christian ground;") Shropshire, England, 1636. Katharn was "tried by ordeal" with the dunking stool, and that she was acquitted because she obligingly died in witness to her innocence. Some kind of heresy or witchcraft was supposedly the charge. The following year, 1637, Richard Garner went with their four-year-old son to Farrar's Island in Virginia.

<http://shrewsburyforum.co.uk/ar/t844.htm>

Thomas and John, Immigration and death in Virginia, 1636 - 1643

Thomas lived in the “northern neck” of Virginia, Westmoreland County until he died in 1643, about the same time as Richard. His son John - same name as the child of Richard - is thought to have lived on in Westmoreland County, part of the “northern neck”, Virginia until 1702, but it is possible that he died before 1643.

Westmoreland was a sparsely inhabited, wild and woolly place in those days. Indian attacks by the Powhatan tribe continued. It is easy to conclude that Thomas and his son were both dead by 1643 when the money sent by Richard’s brother arrived.

Richard and John Immigration to Virginia - 1637

Richard Garner brought his young son, John Garner to Virginia from Shrewsbury, England in 1637. John had been baptized in St. Chad’s Church on September 2, 1633. The father and son first landed on Farrar’s Island in the James River very near modern Richmond. (Early Virginia Families along the James River, Foley, Vol.1, p. 6).

The death of Richard and young John’s inheritance

Richard died in 1643 and ten year old John was made a ward of William Farrar, Jr. John inherited 500 pounds, a substantial sum for that time, sent to him by his uncle John still in Shropshire. Part of the money came from the sale of the Garner’s business holdings in Shropshire, an inn, some land, a farm, and a (saw)mill .

This John also lived until 1702 in Westmoreland county. The similarities raise the question as to whether they may be the same person and whether one of the young Johns had died unrecorded many years before. That is certainly possible.

Court records of Henrico Co. VA in 1643:

“Jno. Garner to Wm. Farrar. The sum of 500 lbs. to pay for the education and to be the inheritance of my cousin John Garner, orphan, ward of William Farrar, Gent. 400 lbs being the balance owed my brother, Richard Garner, for the mill and land on Wenlock Edge and the farm in Action Scott, which was our mother’s dowry. The third interest in the Lion (a carriage inn at Shrewbury) was given me freely by my brother when he departed the Realm of England. Even so, for love I bear my brother and cousin, I include 100 lbs to quite title to same.” (Hen. C.O.B. 1643-1644, page 23)

The meaning of this is ambiguous because of the word “cousin” which might mean the son of Thomas. That he was sending the money to Wm Farrar could mean one of two things: He trusted Farrar to get the 100 pounds to the orphan of Thomas and the 400 pounds to Richard (not knowing that Richard was dead and not trusting Richard to send the money to nephew John), or that he knew that Richard, Thomas, and Thomas’ son John were already dead and that Farrar was the responsible magistrate to provide for the last remaining orphan, Richard’s son John. This last seems the most likely.

Was something going on besides just witchcraft?

Both Katharn and Mary were accused of being witches. Either these ladies had made some very serious enemies or maybe inheritance was in play.

Property:

PROP: Richard Garner of Shewsbury inherited a saw mill in Dorrington, a farm in Action Scott and other land on Wenlock Edge .

PROP: The Lion Inn, once owned by Richard Garner of Aston Botterell

Richard owned a sawmill and other property and had a 1/3 interest in the Lion Inn. When it became obvious that he needed to escape before he was also accused of witchcraft, he gave his interest in the inn to his brother John and had John sell the sawmill and other property. After Richard died in Virginia six years later, his brother John sent 100 pounds for the care of John the orphan and a very belated 400 pounds as Richard's share of the inn. That was a huge, sum of money in those days.

What was John doing and why?

There are several obvious questions: Was the 100 pounds for the orphan actually meant for the son of Thomas? Is that what he means by "cousin"?

That "the balance owed" was sent only after Richard died and some charitable money was also sent for the child might be great generosity, but if so, why was Richard's share withheld for so long?

Richard had a 1/3 interest in the Lion Inn. Maybe Thomas also had a 1/3 interest. Three sons - 1/3 each. When they fled, brother John was left with the inn free and clear. As they say in television dramas, "That sounds like motive."

Furthermore John did not send the brothers their share of the money until after Thomas and Richard had both died about six years later. This might speak against the "generosity" idea.

After both the wives were killed and the brothers fled, the talk of witchcraft seems to have suddenly stopped. Nobody seems to have accused brother John of witchcraft, nor his wife either (if he had one. It is not certain that he did.).

Perhaps John was trying to relieve some great guilt of his own by sending the money to the orphan and finally sending Richard his due proceeds from his properties.

Or maybe he was just being generous to the child.

Who arranged for the accusations of witchcraft to be made in the first place?

We will probably never know.