

The Orphaned Children of the Shapcott Family

The large Shapcott family was probably not untypical of the time: the husband and father with a middle-class profession, most likely just affording his eleven children, struck down in his prime by tuberculosis, his wife soon to follow him. This personal tragedy inflicted on the children, orphaned when they were aged between 21 and just 5 years old, would be hard enough to bear in the 21st century, but imagine a time when the dependants were at the mercy of whatever family, friends, charities or institutions were willing to support them in the 1830s...

In January 1813, Edward Shapcott of Warminster, Wiltshire married Ann Clarke Rout of the parish of St Mary Le Bone at St Marylebone, Westminster. Three years later, Edward was running a private boarding school for boys in Milborne Port, and he and his wife were no strangers to the church where they baptised a growing brood of children. Then disaster altered the course of their lives forever.

Edward died of pulmonary consumption at the age of 44 in 1830 and Ann soon followed, aged 42... *after a very severe and protracted illness, death of Ann Shapcott widow of the late Mr Edward Shapcott, schoolmaster. She survived her husband only about four years and leaves eleven young children. (Sherborne Mercury July 1834)*

Read on to discover what happened to the poor orphaned children: do not expect many 'happy ever afters', though...

Ann Rout Shapcott 1813-1842

In 1841, Ann was a governess for the Attwater family at Bridge Farm, Britford, Wiltshire. Working as a governess was a common occupation for a genteel but poor spinster. Ann's death was registered at St Marylebone the following year; she was only 29.



Edward Fisher Shapcott 1814-1842

It was reported in a number of London newspapers that **Richard Rout Shapcott** had the unpleasant task of identifying a body found in a park under a tree; alcohol was involved. He confirmed it was his brother, Edward Fisher Shapcott, unmarried, who he recognised by a scar, other marks and his wearing apparel. On his person were a snuffbox, knife, pair of gloves, silk handkerchief, pistol and ball, 6d in copper, 14s in silver, a stamp with the name of E F Shapcott, five keys and a book. He died on 14th June 1842 and had been living in Old Kent Road; he was buried 23rd June 1842 at St Alphage, Greenwich. Another tragic, untimely death at the age of 27. It is intriguing to wonder why Edward carried a gun.

Sarah Rout Shapcott 1816-1882

Sarah married John Symes, a yeoman, in 1839 in Bridport, Dorset. In 1841, she was living in Chedington in Dorset with husband John and various relatives. She was still there in 1851

with her husband who was a farmer of 398 acres, employing 15 labourers, (no children). Also in the household were two nieces, a nephew, a servant and **Julia Shapcott** (23), Sarah's sister.

By 1861, Sarah was widowed and living in Beaminster – a 'landed proprietor'. By 1871, she was retired and living in Gillingham, Dorset; she was still living in Gillingham in 1881 and was described as an 'annuitant'. She died in 1882 and was buried after a coroner's inquest¹. At least she was a good age (65), for the time. However, the circumstances of her death were very saddening, as we learn from this report from the Salisbury and Winchester Journal on 4th February 1882:

GILLINGHAM.

INQUEST.—An inquest was held on Friday at the Phoenix Hotel, before Mr. J. W. Bell, coroner, on the body of a widow named Sarah R. Symes, who was found dead on the previous day. Edward C. Edwards deposed that deceased occupied a cottage of which he had the letting, and which adjoined his own residence. He had been in the habit of seeing her daily except when she took to drinking, at which times she would keep in doors for a fortnight together without showing herself to anyone. She had been in one of these drinking fits for nearly a fortnight past, during which time she had not to his knowledge left her house. The door was locked and the key taken out. He knew she was in because he had daily rattled the door until she answered. The last time she answered him was on Wednesday between 12 and 1 o'clock. On Thursday morning he could get no answer to his knocking, nor could he at 1 o'clock when he again knocked. He then procured a ladder and went up to the window and knocked, but could not get an answer. The blind was drawn, and beyond a heap of disordered bedclothes he could see nothing. He knocked again between 4 and 5 o'clock, and not getting an answer he sent for Police-constable Sprackling, and with his assistance burst open the outside door and went up-stairs, where they found deceased lying under the bedclothes on the floor (she had no bedstead) partly dressed and quite dead, with an empty jar by her side. Her drinking habits had become worse of late, and she had frequently told witness when he knocked at her door to mind his own business and that she should get up when she liked. Elan Sprackling, a police-constable stationed at Gillingham, stated that his attention had been called to the house on the preceding Saturday by the witness Edwards, and that on that day he had climbed up to the window by means of a ladder and rattled the pane. Although deceased returned no answer, he saw her leg move under the bedclothes. The witness Edwards then went up the ladder and received an answer to his calls. On Thursday witness was again called by Edwards, and this time could get no answer. Witness then detailed the circumstances under which deceased was found as given by the witness Edwards. Mr. Theophilus Woods deposed that he had that day made a *post mortem* examination of the body. He found extensive adhesion of the pleura of the left lung of old standing, which, however, had nothing to do with the immediate cause of death. One of the valves of the heart was thickened and the liver was much enlarged and diseased, as was found in cases of chronic alcoholism. There was no food of any kind in the stomach. From what he had found as the result of his examination, and from what he had heard from the other witnesses of the habits of deceased, he was of opinion that she died from a diseased liver, and that death was accelerated by want of proper care and nourishment. The jury returned a verdict in accordance with the medical testimony.

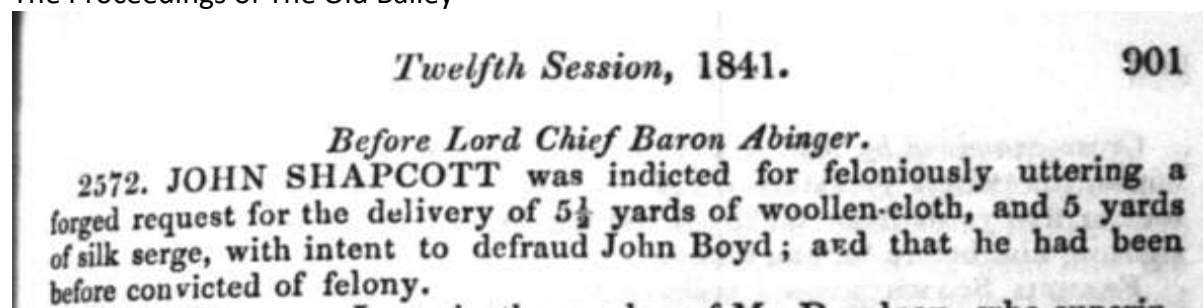
¹ Western Gazette, Somerset, England 3 Feb 1882

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John Shapcott 1817-1845

Unfortunately, John's fate is well recorded, but for all the wrong reasons.

The Proceedings of The Old Bailey



On 25th October 1841, John Shapcott, tailor, born in Milborne Port, was charged with feloniously issuing two forged orders for the delivery of goods with intent to defraud John Boyd (not his first conviction). He was found guilty and sentenced to be transported for life. On 16th November 1841, he was committed to the prison hulk *Fortitude*², moored at Chatham. He left English shores, never to return, on 25th June 1842 aboard the ship *Emily*, together with 239 other convicts and arrived in Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania), 24th November 1842.³

The Royal Naval Medical Journals for 4/6/1842-30/11/1842 tell us that John *was received from the Fortitude Hulk at Chatham 20/6/1842 where he had been eight months. Reports his right lung to have been diseased for two years past. Was four months in the hospital at the Hulk, that he had not complained here before now. Disease phthisis pulmonalis (tuberculosis). John received treatment which was recorded every few days. There are notes of his medication and food (rice, wine, tea) and his general condition. There was a lot of 'purging'. John seemed to be improved and had a leg of a fowl for dinner. Landed 30th November 1842 in a much better state than when he embarked ...still improving, was landed this morning along with the other prisoners and inspected by the Governor Sir John Franklin in the yards of the Prisoners Barracks at 2 pm. I have seen him frequently since and he continues pretty well.*

John died 15th September 1845 in the hospital, Hobart, Tasmania on the cusp of his 27th birthday.

²HMS Cumberland was a 74-gun third-rate launched in 1807. She was converted to a prison hulk in 1830 and was renamed *Fortitude* in 1833.

³ <https://thomasnevin.com/2021/10/10/captains-emigrants-and-convicts-the-summer-of-1842-3-in-hobart-vdl/>

Thomas Shapcott 1819-1891

Thomas' trade was that of a currier⁴, a skill he may well have learnt in Milborne Port. Census details tell us that he had lived in Penrith, Nottingham and Northampton by the time he died in the District General Infirmary in Northampton in June 1891, aged 72. He had married Maria and had three daughters.



Mary Shapcott 1820-1848

In 1841, Mary was living at the Tisbury Union Workhouse where she worked as a school mistress, and again this is how she is recorded in 1845 when she married Thomas Loder. The couple had a son, Edward William, the following year, but Mary died in 1848 at the age of 29.



James Palmer Shapcott 1822-1855

In 1841, James aged 15 was living in Preston Plucknett with his brother **George** aged 14, George having survived his time in Wincanton Workhouse. James was an apprentice woolstapler and George an apprentice printer and bookbinder. By 1851, James, still living in Preston, had married Mary Ann Crocker and they had daughters Mary Ann and Julia, and a 14-year-old servant, Ann Hann. It was all going so well, but it didn't last; James was buried in 1855 in Yeovil aged 32.

Richard Rout Shapcott 1824-1850

In 1842, Richard was lodging with a Mr Winter, a law stationer in Chancery Lane. In 1847, he married Eliza Ann Pears at St Margaret's, Westminster; he was living at 10 Parliament Hill, Westminster. They had two daughters: Harriet Ann Hookham Shapcott, baptised at St Andrew's, in Holborn 1848 and Sarah Julia Henrietta Shapcott, born 17th February and baptised 18th August 1850 at St James, Clerkenwell. Richard's abode was 58 Chancery Lane and he was a law stationer.

But something went horribly wrong. Eliza was soon a widow with two small children; Richard's death was registered in the September quarter of 1850 in West London, he was barely 26.

George Rout Shapcott 1826-?

On the death of his mother in 1834, George was admitted to Wincanton Workhouse. By 1841, aged 14, he was living in the Randall household in Preston Plunknett as an apprentice

⁴ Currying was the name given to the process of stretching and finishing tanned leather, thus, rendering it supple and strong for the use of a saddler or cobbler.

printer and bookbinder with his brother **James**, aged 15, who was an apprentice woolstapler. George arrived in New York, USA aboard the ship *London* in 1848. He then disappears from the records.

Julia Shapcott 1827-1913

We first meet Julia in 1841 in the Lambeth District Female Orphan Asylum aged 13, her occupation 'an orphan'. Happily, in 1851 she was living with her married sister **Sarah** in Chedington. In 1857, she married local hay merchant Alfred Wildern. They moved to Stoke-sub-Hambdon, had no children, but by 1871 Julia was a governess. Alfred died in 1873 and in 1874 widow Julia married widower Mark Ricketts, a carpenter. Mark died in 1895 and in 1901 Julia, now 74, was in the Yeovil District Union Workhouse working as a housekeeper and domestic. She was still in the workhouse in 1911, occupation 'schoolmistress'. She died in November 1913, aged 89.

It is touching that Julia was a popular name for baby girls in the extended family.



And now for the baby of this very large family, **Henry Septimus Shapcott 1829-1888**.

In 1841 Henry, the seventh son of Edward and Ann, had left Wincanton Workhouse and was living at The St Ann's Society School, Brixton; he was just 10 years old. At the age of 19, he departed from Liverpool on the ship *Endora* and arrived

at the port of New Orleans in February 1851. Was he hoping to find his brother **George**?

Henry (28) appears in the 1860 census for Elyria Township, Lorain, Ohio with wife Diana (47) and daughter Susan (8); he is a shoemaker. From 1861-1865, he is a Private in the Confederate Army, 1st Special Battalion Louisiana Infantry (Rightor's)⁵. In 1870, Henry (39) is back in Elyria but living on his own, occupation blacksmith. He married Catherine Ayers in

⁵ 1st Infantry Battalion completed its organization at New Orleans, Louisiana, during the spring of 1861 with men from Jackson, Orleans, and Caddo parishes. Its six companies moved to Virginia and for a time served in the Department of the Peninsula. Later the battalion was placed under the command of General Griffith and in April 1862, totalled 315. In June it disbanded and the men transferred to other Louisiana commands. Lieutenant Colonels Charles D. Dreux and Nicholas H. Rightor, and Major James H. Beard were its field officers.



1872 and he dies in The Infirmary⁶, Lorain, Ohio in March 1888, still a shoemaker. In 1890, Catherine is listed in the United States Census of Union Veterans and Widows of the Civil War but the powers-that-be *can find no record of Henry Shapcott's service, this lady is his second wife and the soldier died in our County Infirmary.*

Henry and Catherine appear to have had two children. William, 'imbecile', died 1900, cause of death – epilepsy. Emma, born in 1876 died, in 1939 of terminal exhaustion. She was an inmate of The Institution for the Feeble Minded, probably in Columbus.



How the Shapcott children coped with the loss of their parents and the impact of that bereavement on their lives we will never know; we can only imagine. The vagaries and relative fortunes of their lives do not appear to be connected with their ages at that point in 1834 when their lives were thrown into chaos. What we see is an extraordinary mixture of how life played out for these eleven Shapcotts: some periods of being settled and happy, perhaps; more than their fair share of trials and tribulations; many dying young, even by the standards of the time. One wonders to what extent they kept in touch and supported each other, and whether their children knew of the family's sad history and kept it alive in the generations to follow.

Valerie Jackson and Nathalie Hetherington August 2023

⁶ Also known as the Lorain County Poorhouse,
https://www.cleveland.com/avon/2017/04/a_sad_but_interesting_place_th.html