

THE TALE OF TOMMY ADAMS

The Local History Society met on 15th July 2009 to hear "The Tale of Tommy Adams." Tommy was born in Whilton, 280 years ago, and baptised in the parish church on 11th April 1729. He was the middle child of Thomas and Mary Adams, probably descendants of the Adams family who had farmed in Whilton in Elizabethan times. His grandfather, another Thomas, had made money in London as a butcher.

By the time of Tommy's birth the family was wealthy, living in fashionable comfort in a large house in Whilton, with coach house, brew houses, stable, malt kiln and pump house, besides its orchard and garden. When his parents Thomas and Mary entertained, they may have used their silver spoons, ladle and salver, stirring their tea with silver teaspoons and lifting the sugar with silver tongs. Thomas had a choice of gold or silver watches and maybe the large crystal with two diamonds on Mary's ring glittered, while the sparkle of Thomas's silver sleeve buttons and buckles caught the candle light. Thomas would have looked smart, newly shaved by his barber Jonathan Cue, who also provided the powder to whiten his wig. Their visitors may have been from London, or have been squires and their families from local parishes, sometimes on business and sometimes on social occasions. Thomas's property extended to Warwickshire, other Northamptonshire parishes and London, providing a wide network for the family. Perhaps Mary and Thomas kept in touch with friends and connections writing at the escritoire in the "Best Room".

Sadly this idyllic existence ended with the death of both parents within a year, when Tommy was six. The three orphan children were then brought up under the care of three long suffering guardians, named in their father's will. The children stayed together at first, but after a year or two being looked after by the Taylors in Long Buckby, Tommy went as a boarder to Guilsborough School.

However, things did not work out well and by 1743 a guardian was writing: "*and as to T Adams, am of ye opinion 'tis time should learne writing and accounts and if he cannot be sufficiently taught att Guilsborough think ye master ...at Preston may be a proper one for him and ye sooner he is sent thither ye better.*" He was moved to a new master, Mr Jones at Preston Capes, but his interest in education did not improve. He was a constant worry to his guardians, one writing of him: "*if he proceeds in this manner he will be fitt for no manner of business and must be ruin'd.*" We heard of various traumas through his teenage years, and how by 1745 he had run away from his apprentice master in Daventry lest he be forced into the Pretender's army in 1745 — "*a likely story,*" as one guardian commented.

Despite his guardians' concerns, he finally joined the British army in 1747, and experienced his first battle at Maastricht, a disaster for the English and their allies, but a victory for France. Tommy "*escaped with only ye loss of his hatt, 'tho he was in ye hottest of ye battle and very much exposed.*" We then followed adult Tommy as he blossomed in his army career, with occasional periods of leave back in England, including one in 1750, when he finally sold his Northamptonshire estates and visited Whilton again to follow the coffin of his younger brother, who was brought back for burial here.

Tommy's career culminated in his victories in India, where he replaced Robert Clive while he was back in England. As one military historian wrote: "*Had Napoleon fulfilled his dreams and added such a campaign to his exploits in Europe, the whole world would still ring with it; yet the conquest of Meerccossim by a simple Major of Foot is forgotten. Nevertheless, be it remembered or forgotten, one of the great names in English military history is that of Thomas Adams of the 84th Foot.*"

Tommy was posthumously awarded the rank of Brigadier General, but had died in Calcutta from illness after a battle in 1764.

There is no memorial to Brigadier General Thomas Adams in Whilton, but the Local History Society reacted with interest and pride to hear his story.