

MERCHANT TAYLORS' SCHOOL - FOUNDED 1561

Between 1574-1782 several members of the Whitlock family in London attended Merchant Taylors' School. When Joan (Colte) Whitlock's husband Richard died in 1570 while on a trip to purchase wine and cloth in Burgundy, Joan invested the funds her husband left her wisely and by the time her sons were grown she had the funds available to ensure they were well educated. At this time this meant attending Merchant Taylors' School for boys aged about 10 to 18.

Founded by Sir Thomas White (1492-1567) in 1561, he provided that pupils from this school could be nominated to attend St.Johns college, Oxford which he also founded. This access to Oxford ensured the new school would attract students from the country's gentry. Sir Thomas also chose the staff for his new school wisely.

The first Headmaster was Richard Mulcaster (1531-1611). His theories on the education of children were well ahead of their time. He felt the schools should be situated close to nature and that children learned through play and sports and interaction with the countryside. At this time Latin and Greek were the languages of education and Richard Mulcaster was instrumental in raising the profile of the English language and insisting it be codified and taught as Latin was.

He also took the game boys played kicking a ball about and organized the boys into teams and introduced the concept of referees and coaches to games. He felt it promoted both health and strength. Richard Mulcaster gave the name "football" to the game. The concepts of referees and coaches were unknown until Richard Mulcaster introduced his students to them and wrote about them.

Sir James Whitlock (1570-1632) talks about he and his elder brother Edmund being sent from about age 10 to Merchant Taylors' school and learning under Richard Mulcaster. Latin, Greek and Hebrew were the languages of education with further study at Cambridge or Oxford. Sir James was also instructed in music, both voice and playing instruments. There was an annual event in which the students presented plays to the court of Queen Elizabeth. James felt this experience taught him "good behaviour and audacity". He thrived in this environment and on June 11, 1588 was elected from the school to attend St.John's college, in Oxford. He went on to become a lawyer and later a Judge. He mentions that the first summer at St.Johns college "was the terrible shew of the sea armada from Spayne, whiche was a little distemper to the quiet course of studyes, the countryes being all up in armes."

James' brother Edmund went to Cambridge after leaving Merchant Taylors' in 1581. He then attended Lincoln's Inn to become a lawyer but left and traveled widely in Europe for about twelve years. He became the captain of band of soldiers in France and was known as Captain Whitlock from that point. His friendship with the Earl of Essex led to his being implicated in both the 1601 plot against Queen Elizabeth and the 1605 Guy Fawkes Gunpowder plot.

The next to attend Merchant Taylors' was Sir James' cousin Richard Whitlock in 1603. He became a wealthy merchant in London and acquired the Manor of Beches from his cousin William Whitlock. He was the grandfather of James Whitlock (1650?-1716) who went to Virginia.

From 1616-1620 Sir James' son Bulstrode was a student at Merchant Taylors'. Bulstrode recounts in his Diaries that he was chosen to negotiate a peace agreement between the students of Merchant Taylors'

and St. Pauls whose competition had led to numerous street riots. Bulstrode “made a Latin Oration, setting forth the miseries of Civill warre, & the benefits of peace, and propounds a firme amity, with a League offensive & defensive betwixt those two smalle Commonwealths the Schools” The proposal was accepted by both parties and the “war” between the schools brought to an end. Bulstrode comments that this event could be taken as an omen for the life he was to live later. Bulstrode became a lawyer and a diplomat was the Ambassador to Sweden during the Civil War. He attended and recorded many of the negotiations between King Charles and Oliver Cromwell. He comments that the plays and “publique shews” put on by the school in which he participated taught him elocution and behaviour and gave him the confidence to be the public figure he became. Bulstrode also went from Merchant Taylors to St. Johns College, Oxford.

There is a James Whitlock who attended 1706-08 who we have not yet been able to place.

The last two Whitlocks to attend Merchant Taylors’ School were Peter Whitelock b.1736 and his son Richard Hutchins Whitelock (1772-1833). Peter was a student 1744-49 and Richard 1782-89. Peter lived in St.Leonard’s Shoreditch, London and his son Richard became a minister at Charlton on Medlock, Lancashire. Richard married Frances Storer and their son Hugh Anthony Whitelocke went to live in Jamaica.

The school has survived, moving in 1933 out of London to Hertfordshire and it remains one of the top 10 private boys schools in England. The influence the school had on the Whitlocks who attended is reflected in their accomplishments throughout their lives.

SOURCES: GH20; R0063; R0467