

Our ancestor John Haime

The soldier preacher of Shaftesbury

1709-1784

By Mark Wareham, updated 13th February 2012



JOHN HAIME

Early Days in Shaftesbury

My family's ancestor John Haime was the son of a John Haime (or Haymes) 'junior', and his wife Elizabeth. John's father was a gardener, a poorly paid occupation, and this John was son of another John who was a miller in what was then known as Mill Lane in Shaftesbury. Mill Lane is now called Haines Lane because of the old Haime family mill.

John was one of five surviving children of John and Elizabeth Haime, two others having died in infancy, including his sister Frances in 1698. John was the youngest child and probably had a difficult and unhappy childhood. In later life he admitted that he was very "undutiful" to his parents and engaged in much "cursing, swearing, lying and Sabbath-breaking" but he was aware of his problems and was "often afraid that the devil would carry me away".

Southey makes these remarks of John's appearance and outlook –



Picture of the south entrance of Haines Lane in Shaftesbury where John's grandfather had his mill. I understand that the mill was down the lane on the left where there is still a building called 'Mill Place'.

“Small inexpressive eyes, scanty eyebrows, and a short, broad, vulgar nose, in the face of ordinary proportions, seem to mark out a subject who would have been content to travel a jog-trot along the high-road of mortality, and have looked for no greater delight than that of smoking and boozing in the chimney corner ... and yet [he] passed his whole life in a continual spiritual ague.”

When of an age to labour John firstly became a gardener but disliked working under his father and he said that he "longed for some business that would allow me more liberty". He then tried button making with his uncle but after being content in the trade for a while he eventually tired of it and he was out of business when his uncle moved to Blandford and he did not follow him. John then had a number of other temporary jobs, such as a tanner (making leather), and he even went back to his uncle at Blandford for a few months. But he says that he "found no satisfaction in any thing, neither in working, eating, drinking, nor even in sleeping; though not even I myself, nor any of my acquaintances could imagine what was wrong with me". John had a severe depressive episode and later said "I was often on the point of destroying myself and was stopped, I know not how. Then I did weep bitterly: I moaned like a dove; I chattered like a swallow." He says that he engaged in "drinking, swearing, card playing, lewdness and the like works of darkness". For two years he faced these trials and it sapped his physical strength and this was noticed by his family including his mother.

Family and the army

John married in about 1729, although his memoirs make little reference to this important event, and he and his wife had their first child, called John, in 1730. He later enlisted in The Queen's Own Regiment of Dragoons, apparently after reading John Bunyan's autobiography, and he left with his regiment from Shaftesbury for Gloucester on Christmas morning in 1739. This was just seven months after our family ancestor, his daughter, Ann Haime (later Anne Hunt after her marriage to John Hunt at St James in Shaftesbury in 1754) was baptized at the Holy Trinity church in the town. I think though that Ann was born two years previously. John also had a second daughter Jane, who was baptized in 1744 whilst he was abroad. I think that Jane must have been conceived before he went abroad in 1742 and baptised later, similar to Ann. John wrote later of leaving his family that "... the thoughts of parting with all my friends, my wife and children were ready to break my heart... nevertheless when I came acquainted with my comrades I soon returned as a dog to the vomit". But those are the only comments about his family and they do not appear to have been his most immediate concerns in his life or at least if they were he did not write about it. John W. Haime in his book written in 1970 speculates that John's behaviour shows the "signs of escapism or defence against the phobias and the horrors which were to obsess him for varying periods during 20 years of his life". One can only imagine how his wife, Susanna, would have felt

being left on her own with a young family and not having her husband by her side. But if

John was in so much mental and spiritual angst and if with him joining the army meant a regular if poor family income, then it may not have been so bad for her.



A private of the 7th Royal Dragoons showing the type of uniform which would have been worn by John Haime 1739-49.



Meeting Rev. Charles Wesley

In 1739 John's regiment marched northwards to winter quarters in Berkshire and Wiltshire. In Banbury he bought a religious book 'Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners' which he said was "the best book he ever saw" and did much serious reading, attended church regular and prayed. At one point he says that he "was going to water my horse. Just as he entered the river, in a moment I felt the love of God flowing in my soul. Instantly all pain and sorrow fled away."

In London, after a traumatic sea voyage, he had a 'spiritual awakening'. But after an unfortunate experience with a Calvinist preacher at Deptford, who told him that "the work of the Devil is upon you" he fell into suicidal despair "yet" he said "I thought if I must be damned myself I will do what I can that others may be saved". He then heard the Reverend Charles Wesley preach near Brentford and received a lot of personal encouragement from him and he says that "his words sunk deep, and were a great blessing to me for several years after." Charles Wesley (1707-1788, pictured left) was a leader of the English Methodist movement and he is known for about six thousand hymns that he wrote including 'Hark! The Herald Angels Sing'.

To War in Europe

In June 1742 John's regiment embarked for Flanders to play its part in King George's War (otherwise known as the War of Austrian Succession) which was to be fought until 1749. During this time John continued a correspondence with the Wesleys who said he should follow his calling. Whilst in Flanders John formed a Methodist society with fellow soldiers and he was one of six preachers in a group of about three hundred men. On one occasion he is alleged to have reported on a fellow soldier for 'blaspheming' in his presence. The sort of action that Oliver Cromwell, a man of similar religious zeal after a comparable mid-life conversion, would have admired in his New Model Army!

When John was quartered in Bruges he was allowed by General Ponsonby to use the English Church there. But this was after first being turned down by his predecessor General Sinclair who was furious at his request. It is fair to say that John was not popular with many of his comrades or his superiors even though his congregation grew. He was seen as a threat by many in the army hierarchy and many of his fellow troops did not take kindly to his preaching and righteousness. John got comforting words in this letter from Rev John Wesley as John had obviously written to him complaining of opposition –

"It is a great blessing whereof God has already made you a partaker: But if you continue waiting upon Him, you shall see greater things than these. This is only the beginning of the Kingdom of Heaven, which He will set up in your heart. There is yet behind the fullness of the mind that was in Christ; "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." It is but a little thing that men should be against you, while you know that God is on your side. If He gives you any companion in the narrow way, it is well; and it is well if He do not. So much the more will He teach and strengthen you by Himself: He will strengthen you in the secret of your heart; and, by and by, He will raise up, as it were, out of the dust, those who shall say, "Come, and let us magnify His name together." But, by all means, miss no opportunity. Speak, and spare not. Declare what God has done for your soul; regard not worldly prudence; be not ashamed of Christ, or of His word, or of His servants. Speak the truth in love, even in the midst of a crooked generation; and all things shall work together for good, until the work of God is perfect in your soul."



The charge of the Light Dragoons at the French horse at the Battle of Dettingen.

John does not appear to have been popular even with some fellow Methodists in the army as evidenced by this testimony in a letter to the Wesleys from one of John's colleagues –

"So I continued till the Battle of Dettingen. The balls then came very thick about me, and my comrades fell on every side. Yet I was preserved unhurt. A few days after, the Lord was pleased to visit me. The pains of hell got hold upon me; the snares of death encompassed me. I durst no longer commit any outward sin, and I prayed God to be merciful to my soul. Now I was at a loss for books; but God took care for this also: One day I found an old Bible in one of the trainwagons. This was now my only companion; and I believed myself a very good Christian, till we came to winter quarters, where I met with John Haime. But I was soon sick of his company; for he robbed me of my treasure, telling me, I and my works were going to hell together. This was strange doctrine to me: And being naturally of a stubborn temper, my poor brother was so

perplexed with me, that sometimes he was resolved (as he afterwards told me) to forbid my coming to him any more.”

In February 1743 the regiment moved from Ghent into Germany, from where he continued to correspond with John Wesley who gave him advice. On 27th June that year John fought at the **Battle of Dettingen** and in John W. Haime's book he gives John's account of his involvement –

“... [he] was ordered out on an advance guard and saw the French moving up towards a bridge. Soon afterwards, hearing the sound of cannon, he said “we shall have a battle today”, but his comrades did not believe him... Then he heard another discharge and a third, from which the ball fell near them. Many of the French had now crossed the river and many more were advancing rapidly towards it. The cannon fire became more intense and the battle was soon joined with small arms as well as cannon, with very heavy casualties on both sides. Haime's party had now fallen back on the regiment which was moving forward in line when his left hand man was shot dead at his side. The effect on him was instant and electric.... “I cried to God,” he said “in thee I have trusted! Let me never be confounded!... I stood the fire of the enemy for seven hours.”

His brush with death had apparently jolted him out of his lifelong nightmares.

“When [it] was over he was sent out with a party to retrieve the lost baggage wagons but returned unsuccessful, to find that the army had moved he knew not where.... He made his way back to the battlefield and then, as heavy rain was falling, set out at random until the beat of a drum led him towards his goal. He could not find his own tent or secure shelter in any other “so... being wet and much fatigued, I wrapt me up in my cloak and lay down and fell asleep. And though it rained upon me and water ran under me, I had as sweet a night's rest as ever in my life.”

The Battle of Dettingen was a great victory for the British and their allies. It has a special place in the annals of British military history as being the last time that a British force was to be led on the field by a reigning monarch; King George II. This is a description of the activity of the regiment at the battle from Wikipedia –

“... they were formed up in a disadvantageous position near the village of Dettingen near the valley of Maine. They spent the morning of the 27th June, standing next to the 3rd Hussars exposed to the devastating fire from the French guns, but in the afternoon, stationed with the 4th and 3rd Hussars they charged, pushing the French Cavalry back and eventually with the support of the foot, broke the enemy's ranks.”

One can see how this brief account mirrors that in John's memoirs and his recollections of the early part of the battle although John does not talk much about the later charge which broke the enemy. John later went on to recall the sight of corpses of the French soldiers floating in the river or washed up on its banks, “as dung to the earth”, after they had drowned attempting to cross after the English had cut down the bridge. The Regimental ‘Guidon’ (of the modern Queen's Royal Hussars) lists ‘Dettingen’ as the first of its battle honours. But this was to be the only victory of the 1742-49 wars that would gain this merit for the regiment as, despite its constant efforts, sacrifices and bravery most of the remaining battles were to end in defeat.

In May 1744 the regiment moved to camp near Brussels and John held open air services on a hill side where he usually had a thousand hearers: officers, men and civilians, often preaching four or five times a day. His regular preaching was helping him expand his knowledge of the Bible and developed him as a person. Gone was the depression and it was replaced with a religious fervour for conversion of ‘fellow sinners’. He said “I preach against swearing, whoring and drunkenness, and exhort men to repent of all their sins, that they may not perish.”

John next fought at the **Battle of Fontenoy** on 11th May 1745 which was a devastating French victory. John says that this battle was a “full trial of our faith”. John speaks of Methodist colleagues that he witnessed suffering awful wounds and being killed –

- William Clements – “had his arm broke by a musket ball” and was to be carried out of battle but refused as he still had one good arm “when a second shot broke his other arm and he said ‘I am as happy as I can be to be out of paradise.’”

- John Evans – had “both his legs taken off by a cannon ball” and he was “laid across a cannon to die; where, as long as he could speak, he was praising God and blessing him with joyful lips.”
- Soldiers Bishop and Greenwood were also killed in the battle.

John had his horse killed in the battle and it fell on top of him. When he tried to extract himself from beneath it he was addressed by an officer nearby, who is alleged to have said something like “where is your God now Mr. Haime”, when a cannon ball took off the officer’s head.

The Queen’s Own Dragoons achieved their task at this battle by charging many times. But despite these valiant efforts the battle was lost with the allies losing 10-12,000 men. The British dead numbered 1,237 and the wounded numbered 2,425. The result of this battle was a rapid French advance and the capture of Tournai.

After Fontenoy, John noticed that the religious sacrament had not been delivered to his fellow troops for some time and he complained openly of this neglect. This displeased the regimental chaplains but the Duke of Cumberland (King George’s 2nd son) hearing of John’s complaints recommended that it should be administered every Lord’s Day to one regiment or the other. This made John rather more unpopular with some and contrary complaints were made against him that the Duke investigated. However on interview John said that the Duke “... seemed so well satisfied with my answers that he bade me go, and gave out a general order that I might preach anywhere, and no man should molest me.” The Duke even later went to hear one of John’s sermons and in it, despite apparently not being aware of the Duke’s presence, he made sure to tell his congregation that they fought “a good cause, and for a good King and in defence of your country. And this is in no ways contrary to the tenderest of conscience, as many of you found at the battle of Fontenoy: when both you and I did our duty and yet were all the time filled with love, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

The Methodist theologian Adam Clarke wrote about John Haime in his work –

“It is worthy of remark how seldom God employs a soldier in any spiritual work, just for the same reason as that given to David; and yet there have been several eminently pious men in the army, who have laboured for the conversion of sinners. I knew a remarkable instance of this; I was acquainted with Mr. John Haime, a well known preacher among the people called Methodists. He was a soldier in the queen’s eighth regiment of dragoons, in Flanders, in the years 1739-46. He had his horse shot under him at the battle of Fontenoy, May 11, 1745; and was in the hottest fire of the enemy for above seven hours; he preached among his fellow soldiers frequently, and under the immediate patronage of his royal highness the Duke of Cumberland, commander-in-chief; and was the means of reforming and converting many hundreds of the soldiers. He was a man of amazing courage and resolution, and of inflexible loyalty. Once having expressed a wonder “how he could reconcile killing men with preaching the Gospel of the grace and peace of Christ,” he answered, “I never killed a man.” “How can you tell that? were you not in several battles?” “Yes, but I am confident I never killed nor wounded a man.” “How was this, did you not do your duty?” “Yes, with all my might; but when in battle either my horse jumped aside or was wounded, or was killed, or my carbine missed fire, and I could never draw the blood of the enemy.” “And would you have done it if you could?” “Yes, I would have slain the whole French army, had it been in my power; I fought in a good cause, for a good King, and for my country; and though I struck in order to cut, and hack, and hew, on every side, I could kill no man.” This is the substance of his answers to the above questions, and we see from it a remarkable interfering Providence; God had appointed this man to build a spiritual house in the British army, in Flanders, and would not permit him to shed the blood of his fellow creatures.”



The Queen's Own Dragoons c 1750

On 6th April 1746 John says that he was “off my watch, and fell by a grievous temptation. It came as quick as lightening; I knew not if I was in my senses; but I fell and the spirit of God departed from me.” He speaks then of indulging the ‘lust of his eyes’ and ‘looking at and coveting pleasing things’. He was in Antwerp and “several of my comrades desired me to buy them some things, which I accordingly did.” His reaction to his apparent breach was so great that he was taken to hospital and after this event his self confidence fell away and he reproached himself dreadfully. Unless there is more to this tale than merely the apparent breaking of the Sabbath breaking it shows the depth of John’s religious conviction and in these days it is hard to comprehend the affect that this had on his soul.

In Holland John appears to have gained some strength and says “I had now and then a spark of hope. Whatever my inward distress was, I always endeavored to appear free among the people. And it pleased God to make me fruitful in the land of my affliction. He gave me favour in their sight and many children were born unto the Lord. Indeed I could speak very little Dutch, with regards to common things, but when we came to talk of things of God I could speak a great deal. And after I had been at prayer, many have told me that they could understand every word that I had said.” In winter quarters John struck up an acquaintance with a ‘gentlewoman’ of the town who asked for him by name. “I went to her house and she bade me welcome. After a little conversation she asked me “do you believe Christ died for all the world?” Upon my answering, “I do”, she replied “I do not believe one word of it. But, as you know he died for you, and I know he died for me, we will only talk of his love for poor sinners.” Soon her house became his home and after becoming involved in the trials of her family members which led to their conversion their parting was unhappy for both of them but “... we took our leave of each other to meet no more till the morning of the resurrection.”

Later John was quartered at a young woman’s home at Meerkirk in Holland and he tells a remarkable story of the affect that he had on this woman’s life which led to her having the same spiritual angst as John himself. She became so unwell and bedridden in her torment after strong words from John about her “lack of living faith” that neighbours and friends enquired what was the matter with her. But she took to praying for her neighbours and to converting them to religious ways and John was content at his work in saving ‘poor sinners’.

John talks frequently in his works at this time of ‘temptations’ without enlarging on what exactly they were other than the incident of the Sabbath breaking. One can only guess at what ‘temptations’ these may have been lodging with single women on two occasions or more, one of these women having recently lost both her parents and the other with whom he obviously struck up a very strong bond and close friendship. John had been separated from his wife and family for several years. I may be guilty of reading this with modern eyes and being unfair to my ancestor. But one can but read into John’s words and his experiences and history what he may mean by these words and also accept that people today are really not that different from our ancestors. He says for example that “I thought I was worse than Cain; that I had crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to open shame.” This may be the criticism of a Godly man looking at himself as a sinner, judging himself against the standards of his religion and being naturally disappointed. This is precisely the sort of inner conversation expected by people of this persuasion where we have to believe that the only route to salvation is complete exposure of self and mind to God leaving nothing of vanity and self satisfaction without having satisfaction in God. But it may also testify to the feelings and experiences of a normal man and a soldier in foreign lands and there is enough evidence from many sources, even from those days, about what those ‘temptations’ may be.

Most British regiments withdrew from the continent later in 1745 to suppress the Jacobite uprising at home but John’s regiment remained and was involved in the **Battle of Roucoux** on 11th October 1746 at which the French were again victorious and as a result they broke Austrian and allied control over the Netherlands. In 1747 the regiment saw its last action at the **Battle of Lauffelt**, which was another French victory but one at which the British cavalry saved the allies from a more serious defeat. In 1748 the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle ended the war and in the regiment landed back in England in 1749.

Back in England

On return to England John was discharged from the army and the first thing John says that he did in his memoirs was to speak to Mr Wesley about becoming a traveling preacher. We find again that John’s family were not at the forefront of his considerations or at least he chose not to write about those if they were. He fell

into a miserable state of mind which was to last seven years after the European wars but he continued his religious preaching. He was admitted by Wesley as a traveling preacher but he remained ill at ease and was unable to become settled. Wesley once took him on one of his preaching rounds knowing his state of mind.

At Home in Shaftesbury

John went to Shaftesbury to see 'my friends' (again no mention of wife and children) and says that "when one and another came and asked me "what news?" I told them, "Good news, Christ died to save sinners." But it seemed to them as an idle tale, they "cared none for these things". Then on a Sunday he decided to preach "in a place at the end of the town, where four ways met" (this must be the junction at angel square where Coppice Street meets Salisbury Street, High Street and Angle Lane). "The town and villages were then alarmed, and at the time appointed I believe there were three or four thousand people. My inward trouble seemed suspended. I got upon a wall about seven feet high, and began with prayer. I gave out my text ... Surely I preached that sermon with the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven... In a few weeks, fifty persons were joined together in society. I now preached in a room several times a week. But the people were eager to build a house and appointed a time of meeting to consider the means: but on the same day I was taken up and put into prison, two men having sworn against me that I had made a riot. After I had been in prison a night and part of a day, I was taken to a public house. It was soon full of people: I immediately began preaching to them; and the lions quickly became lambs. A messenger then came to let me know that I must appear before the mayor and aldermen, I did so. The town clerk told me, "they would not send me to Dorchester jail if I would perform a miracle" I told them "that is done already. Many swearers and drunkards are become sober, God-fearing men". A lawyer said "well if you take my advice, you shall not go to prison." I replied "I suppose you mean if I will give over preaching. But I dare not do so." I was then, without any more ado rushed off to Dorchester." In prison John preached to his jailor and said that the jailor in turn preached to the prisoners. After eight days two Quakers from Shaftesbury paid the prison fees and collected him from jail and when he was back in Shaftesbury he began preaching again. A gentleman in London then sent him a letter of support and offered him money and employment of counsellors and attorney. With this support the local magistrates took a more lenient stance and John's local Methodist society grew to eighty in number.

He did not stay long in one place though and he went to Ireland twice as a preacher, saying that both times he was almost shipwrecked. On 27th October 1751 John preached at Mountmelick and the next day he had a serious psychological episode where he says that he forgot who he was and where he came from. When recollection returned he says that he wept but "the tender mercy of God supported me therein, that my spirit might not fail before him."



Holy Trinity Church in Shaftesbury

There is then no evidence about John's travels between 1751 and 1766, but by September 1766 he was in Shaftesbury again and whilst there Rev Wesley persuaded him to go and dwell with a family called Hoskins in St Ives in Cornwall as they wanted a live-in preacher. In March 1766 John had buried his wife Susannah at the graveyard at Holy Trinity in Shaftesbury. His children were all over 30 and probably married. My ancestor, his daughter, Anne had married at St James church in Shaftesbury in 1754 to a John Hunt.

Cornwall and Hampshire

Despite employment and living accommodation John continued to be mentally distressed for some time, in fact worse than before, but one day it is reported that he 'instantaneously recovered' after about twenty years of

illness and appeared to find inner peace. He was living in Whitchurch in Hampshire by 1778 and he was still in regular contact with the Wesleys. A clue to his presence in Whitchurch may be judged from this letter to a Methodist preacher by Rev John Wesley in 1782, "You did exceeding well in adjusting matters at Whitchurch; but I am sorry for poor sister Haime. I am sure she was a good woman once." I am not sure what the relation of

this 'sister Haime' was to John Haime but a family connection must have existed. She may have been a daughter in law or a daughter of John or maybe even a second wife?

John Haime died of a fever and was buried at Whitchurch in 1784.

Whilst I cannot claim to be an active Churchgoer myself I am very proud to have an ancestor like John and most pleased to be able to read of and tell his story to others. He was a remarkable man and I can identify with his life's work. His Methodist following does appear to have been passed to his daughter and her ancestors because whilst they were all baptised, married and buried according to the rites of the Church of England they had to be because it was the law at the time. It was not until later that Methodist ceremonies had the same status as those in the established church. Therefore records of Methodist society membership in its early days are not complete. But the fact that John's chosen religion was followed by his ancestors right up to some fairly close ancestry is indicated by the fact that in 1888 John's great x 3 granddaughter (my great x 2 grandmother) Rose Morgan was married at the Methodist chapel in Shaftesbury to James Kelly of Berwick St John. The choice of the chapel was almost certainly from the Morgan family as opposed to the Kellys and in later 1888 and 1889 James and Rose baptized their children at both the established church at Berwick St John and the Methodist chapel at Shaftesbury. The former Methodist church where James and Rose married is pictured below.



The information for this essay above comes from –

'The Life of John Wesley by Robert Southey'

'The experience of several eminent Methodist preachers; with an account of their call to and success in the ministry ...' 1837

'The Haimes - a Dorset Family by John W Haime 1970'

The family line from my grandmother to John Haime see page 5

