

## THE EARLY YEARS OF AN ARCHBISHOP

By JUANITA BURNBY

In the north west corner of New Square, Chesterfield, stands the house which is reputed to have been the home of Thomas Secker who in 1758 became Archbishop of Canterbury. Doubt has been cast on the veracity of this tradition by John Bestall in his *History of Chesterfield*.<sup>1</sup> There would seem to be a strong possibility that this doubt is justified as will be seen.

Although Secker was not born in Derbyshire, he spent some of the most formative years of his life in the county. His birth took place at Sibthorpe, Nottinghamshire on 21 September 1693 (O.S.). His father, of the same name, was the son of Leonard Secker of Marston, Lincolnshire, a butcher. Butchers frequently combined the occupation with that of grazier so becoming men of considerable wealth, consequently the Archbishop could write of his father, '... having some paternal income, though a small one, [he] followed no business.'<sup>2</sup> In fact Thomas Secker the elder was comfortably placed in life. His inventory at the time of his death in 1700 amounted to no less than £479 10s., and shows that besides sheep and cattle he had eight horses, and £40 of barley and £25 of wheat in the fields. Nor was the farm his sole source of income as his will proves. He held land and houses at Muscome (Muskham), Bathley and Bulwell, Nottinghamshire, and at Fulbeck, Lincolnshire as well as a paper-mill. His own home however appears to have been modest. There were only five rooms in the house including the kitchen and one called 'the men's room', presumably for resident farm labourers. The only luxury items specifically mentioned were a clock and 'a seeing glass'.<sup>3</sup> This simple life-style may have been related to his strongly held non-conformist beliefs. His estate was divided between his wife Abigail and their three children, Abigail Anna (born 1690), Thomas (1693) and George (1696).

Thomas Secker (I) had been married three times. By his first wife there were no children, and by the second, only one, Elizabeth. To her he bequeathed only £10, no doubt because of the settlement he had made at the time of her marriage to Richard Milnes of Chesterfield on 28 December 1697.<sup>4</sup> The younger Thomas Secker relates that after the death of his father's second wife his father went to live '... for some time with his friend Mr George Brough of Shelton, Notts., a substantial gentleman farmer, and married his youngest daughter Abigail' on 18 December 1688. It was certainly a marriage between June and December for Abigail was only 21 whilst her husband was the same age as her father, if not slightly older. He was seventy at the time of his death.

Still only 35, Abigail Secker married again on 31 December 1702. Her new husband was William Allen of Swinderby, Lincolnshire, and he came to live with her on the farm at Sibthorpe. There were no children of the marriage which in any case was not long as she died of 'a consumption' in 1707. At first sight it seems curious that the Archbishop could not remember the year in which his mother died but when more is known of his early life it is less surprising. In his autobiography he tells us that at least a year before his father's death he was sent to live in Chesterfield with his half sister Elizabeth and her husband. The Milnes were childless and no doubt Elizabeth was happy to have a six year old boy to mother. 'As soon as I was of sufficient age [I] went to the Free School there of which Mr. Rich. Brown, a Layman of irregular Life, but a good Scholar was Master and there I continued excepting short visits to my mother at Easter

till the latter End of Summer 1708'.<sup>5</sup> There would have been little, if any, schooling in a small village such as Sibthorpe so that the child if he had not gone to Chesterfield would have had to have been boarded out in a nearby town anyway.

Thomas, now nearly fifteen, was in the opinion of his foster parents being led astray, 'Some of my Acquaintance enticing me sometimes to drink and sometimes to go to church'.<sup>6</sup> The Chesterfield household was as strictly puritanical as his father's would have been had he lived, and the upshot was that Thomas was sent to the Attercliffe Academy of Timothy Jollie (1659-1714), a Sheffield Dissenting minister. This move was not a success. 'I carried with me a competent knowledge of Latin; and not only of the Greek prose writers, but of Homer and Hesiod, Aristophanes and Sophocles. But I lost much of this Learning there and acquired but little instead of it ... I spent my time idly and ill and after a stay of about 1½ years I came away of my own Accord to Mr Milnes at Chesterfield.'<sup>7</sup>

For some reason that he does not disclose, Thomas Secker had planned to go for further study to Glasgow, but in the event was 'disappointed of my expected Company'. Instead of travelling north, he went south to London because he received an invitation from a friend, John Bowes, with whom he had become acquainted at Attercliffe, to live at his father's house in Bishopsgate Street.<sup>8</sup> He went there 'about Lady day 1710' and was soon to be joined by another lodger, the famous dissenting divine Isaac Watts.

The two young men taught themselves French and read philosophical books such as the essays of John Locke and attended the classes of John Eames.<sup>9</sup> From Eames they learnt subjects which had been forbidden at Attercliffe, geometry, conic sections and algebra. After a year and on the advice of Isaac Watts, it was decided that Thomas's next step should be for him to attend the Academy of Samuel Jones (1680-1719) recently set up in the house of a Mr Wintle, a distiller in Gloucester. It had been his father's wish that his elder son should train for the dissenting ministry, and Watts recommended this Academy.

It was at this time that William Allen, the step-father of the Secker boys, renounced the administration of his late wife's estate in favour of Richard Milnes of Chesterfield, tanner, and Samuel Wildboare of Brewhouse Yard, Nottingham, dyer, and at the same time granted them the guardianship of his step-sons.<sup>10</sup> A year earlier on 16 May 1710, Thomas's full sister Abigail Anna had married Samuel Wildboare at Bulwell, Nottinghamshire.<sup>11</sup> It is probable that the younger boy, George, lived in the Wildboare household in Nottingham. George became a grocer in Coventry where he married into the Oldham family. His son, also named George, like his Uncle Thomas became a clergyman in the Church of England, although his father appears to have remained a Dissenter.

Samuel Jones, termed by Secker 'A Dissenting Layman' had been educated at the university of Leyden, and gave a first rate education at his academy. 'There I recovered my almost lost knowledge of Greek and Latin; and added Hebrew, Chaldee and Syriac. We had also lectures on Geography ... the Critical Study of the Bible and a course of Jewish Antiquities, besides Logick and Mathematicks.' There were only sixteen pupils at the school so that individual attention was assured. Here he made a number of friends which he was to retain throughout their mutual lives, men such as Joseph Butler (1692-1752), later Bishop of Durham, and Daniel Scott (1694-1759) who was his bed-fellow.<sup>12</sup>

The students were very diligent as was their tutor, and all went well until Jones moved the academy to Tewkesbury in the late spring of 1713. He borrowed £200 from Secker towards the costs of the remove which he re-paid 'by Degrees in the course of several years'. Unfortunately Jones '... began to relax of his Industry, to drink too much ale and small Beer, and to lose his

Temper. And we most of us fell off from our Application and Regularity, more or less.' In 1714 Thomas began to have doubts 'concerning Conformity and many other religious matters', so much so that he left Tewkesbury in June of that year and returned to Richard Milnes for some fifteen months, for he always seems to have regarded Chesterfield as 'home'. These doubts arose during long discussions with Joseph Butler who was a year older than himself. Butler was also intended for the Dissenting Ministry but in about 1714 decided to join the Church of England, eventually persuading his father to send him to Oriel College Oxford in the March of 1715.

During this period at home he delved deeply into theological matters, particularly those relating to the rival claims of non-conformity and conformity, with '... various Fluctuations and Changes of Mind...' Hall writes that Secker worked for a time as a temporary minister at the chapel at Bolsover, but there is nothing in the autobiography to confirm this.<sup>13</sup> In the winter of 1714/15 he spent some months at Nottingham in order to help his sister Abigail Anna during the illness and death of her husband Samuel Wildboare. The Wildboares were attenders of the Independent Castle Gate Meeting in Nottingham, and their two children, Samuel and Martha Ann were baptised there in July 1711 and July 1713 respectively.<sup>14</sup>

After his return to Chesterfield, Thomas Secker saw on 22 April 1715, '... the noble Spectacle of the total Eclipse of the Sun. The first emerging of the Rays out of the Darkness was inexpressively reviving.' Whilst he was at the Milnes, 'A small share was given me in a Lead mine, the Title to which was doubtful but it proved good. And I received from it, some years about 40<sup>li</sup> a year which was a great Help to me. Afterwards it gradually diminished to nothing.' He had a fortnight's sojourn in Scarborough returning via Hull, and then decided to return again to the metropolis. He left Chesterfield at Michaelmas 1715 for London by way of Coventry where he saw his brother George, now nearly nineteen and presumably almost out of his time as an apprentice.

Thomas maintained his theological studies and became '... pretty well satisfied with the Lawfulness of Conforming to the Church of England as a Layman, but not equally of becoming a Minister in it ...', and therefore in the late autumn of 1716 he decided to apply himself to the study of medicine. 'I went through some courses of Anatomy with Mr Cheseldon that winter and read the usual Books in the preparatory Sciences.' William Cheselden (1688-1752) was the foremost English surgeon of the day. He had become a Freeman of the London Company of Barber Surgeons in 1711 and almost immediately began to teach anatomy in his own home on Cheapside close to Saddlers' Hall.<sup>15</sup>

Secker passed the summer of 1717 in Nottinghamshire and Chesterfield from where he made an excursion to Buxton Wells as he called it. Then '[I] returned in Autumn to London with my sister who was married on the Road at ... [blank] within a few miles of Chesterfield to Mr John Frost to whom she soon went back'.<sup>16</sup> As usual he had gone to lodge in Mr Bowes' house in Bishopsgate Street, but soon moved to '... the House of Mr Bakewell, apothecary at the corner of King Street, Cheapside, for the advantage of acquainting myself with medicines, prescriptions and practice.' Apothecaries were by this time recognised to be the 'doctors of first instance', who diagnosed, gave advice and prescribed their remedies, they were no longer only dispensers of physician's prescriptions, compounders of physic and sellers of drugs. There was no better place than an apothecary's shop for Secker to have gone in order to gain insight into the medical practice of the day.

John Bakewell (1687-1755) had only been established in London since early in 1713 when he had obtained the Freedom of the London Society of Apothecaries by redemption.<sup>17</sup> He had been apprenticed to a substantial Leicester apothecary, Josiah Coleman, until the latter's death

in 1704 and then had completed his training elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> The London company gave him certain positions of responsibility; in 1753 he was made one of the searchers for defective drugs, one of the duties of the Society, and the following year he became a member of what we would now call the Finance Committee. His shop was always considered highly satisfactory when it was visited by the Censors of the London College of Physicians. Like many apothecaries, especially in London, he could charge considerable premiums for the binding of an apprentice to him, such as when Thomas Price came in 1724 he received £80, and his own brother, Robert Bakewell, had to part with £100 when his son William came in 1748.<sup>19</sup> His most interesting apprentice however was John Devaynes who started his apprenticeship in 1740. He succeeded to Bakewell's shop after his death and was appointed as apothecary to Queen Charlotte's household on her arrival in England in 1761, due it is said to the influence of Archbishop Secker.<sup>20</sup>

Secker may have first made the acquaintance of John Bakewell in London, but he had probably heard of him before when in Nottingham. A cousin of indeterminate degree, Joseph Bakewell (1679-1739) was a wealthy apothecary in that city who bequeathed his shop and £500 to his son Thomas and a £1,000 to his daughter Joanna; it is a measure of his affluence that the administrators of his estate had to sign a bond for £5,000.<sup>21</sup> The ramifications of the 'cousinage' in the 18th century are infinitely entangled and their importance difficult for us to appreciate two centuries later.

By January 1718 Secker was on his travels again, this time to Paris which justifiably had an enviable reputation for teaching anatomy, surgery and midwifery. Here he was able to carry out anatomical dissections himself something which was very difficult to do in London owing to the small number of corpses allowed for that purpose. In Paris obstetrical knowledge was making considerable advances and Secker was able to study under the famous M. Gregoire. Midwifery was until the end of the 18th century a branch of medicine which was regarded with the greatest contempt, so much so that it was interpreted as an insult to suggest that any man, especially an archbishop, had ever practised as a man-midwife. This is the accusation made by Lord Orford, so that Secker's chaplain, Beilby Porteous, flew to his defence and denied — wrongly — that the Archbishop had ever been 'in the midwifery line'.<sup>22</sup>

He finished his five years of medical study, although he had already decided not to pursue medicine as a career, with two and a half months at Leyden where he received his M.D. on 7 March 1721. His thesis was on the relationship of perspiration to physiology which he attempted to explain in terms of the new Newtonian science based on mathematics and mechanics.<sup>23</sup>

It was in the November of 1719 whilst he was in Paris that his sister Elizabeth Milnes died. In its chronological place in the autobiography he makes no reference to the event, merely remarking on an earlier page that she had died 'before 1720'. Her death seems to have severed his connections with Derbyshire although he certainly met Richard Milnes again.

Thomas Secker was ordained in 1722 by his friend Bishop Talbot recently promoted to the See of Durham, and who later made him one of his chaplains. In July 1723 they made the journey from London to the North. En Route Thomas stayed one night at Barnston with his sister, now Abigail Anna Frost. He does not give the exact date of their return south but writes that they returned via Nottingham, and 'Mr Milnes of Chesterfield came to see me there upon the Road.'<sup>24</sup> What the thoughts of Mr Milnes were concerning his late wife's young brother are not even hinted at. Richard Milnes was still an ardent non-conformist and here was a man who had long been a member of his household and yet had not only changed to Conformity but was an ordained priest and travelling in the company of a bishop!

The Milnes of Chesterfield originated in Ashford-in-the-Water, Derbyshire. Richard (a

favourite family name), the elder son of William of Ashford, was a lead merchant and ironmonger who rose to becoming alderman and mayor of his adopted town.<sup>25</sup> A younger son, James, came to live at Tapton Hall and at his death in 1651 left three sons all comfortably placed. It is with the son, Richard, we are concerned. He is said blandly to have been 'successful in commerce' but in fact was a tanner. It has been noted that tanning, in spite of its noisome nature, was a highly remunerative occupation,<sup>26</sup> and Richard was no exception for his inventory of 19 June 1706 was appraised at just over £1,000 including £306 for leather, tanned and untanned.<sup>27</sup> Two of his five sons followed him in his craft, the younger, William, apparently in a loose form of partnership, and the eldest, Richard, independently.

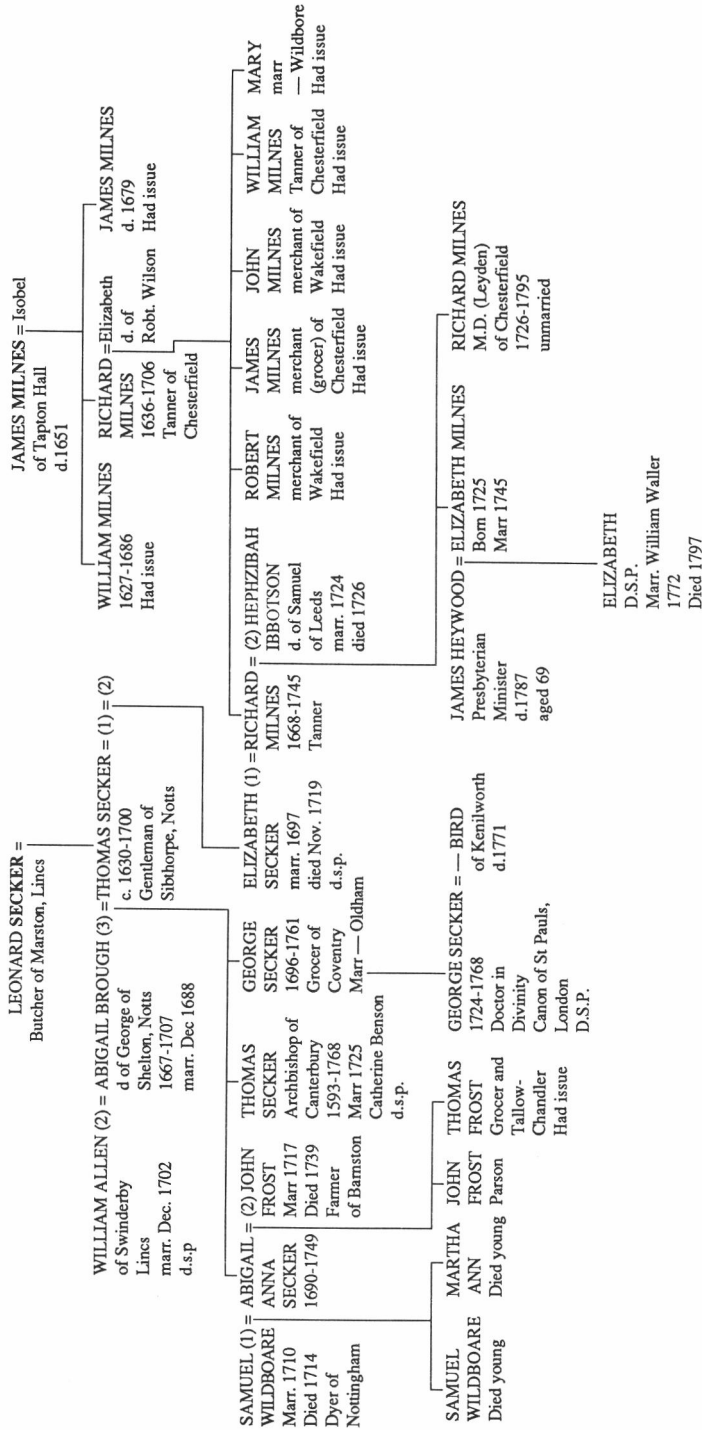
Five years after the death of his wife Elizabeth (née Secker) Richard Milnes married again at Armley Chapel, Leeds.<sup>28</sup> On 22 July 1725 a daughter, Elizabeth, was born to Richard and Hephzibah, to be followed fifteen months later by a son almost inevitably named Richard. Elizabeth was to marry James Heywood (c. 1718-1787) the Presbyterian minister at Chesterfield who was described as 'coming out of Lancashire.'<sup>29</sup> They had but the one child, Elizabeth, who was to become her uncle's heiress.

Richard (1726-1795) never married. He decided on medicine as a career and in 1750, like Secker, went to Leyden University. He gained his M.D. on 7 May 1751 and for the remainder of his professional life practised in Chesterfield. In June 1788 he sold to John Cartledge, surgeon, for £420 two dwelling houses on the south side of the New Market Place, together with the yard, garden and adjoining croft, a stable and other outbuildings lying to the south of the houses and extending to the River Hipper.<sup>30</sup> The agreement recites that all this property was formerly the estate and inheritance of Richard Milnes of Chesterfield, tanner, grandfather of the seller, who purchased it from Barbara and George Clay in 1660, and that it descended to Richard Milnes, tanner, the father of Dr Milnes.<sup>31</sup> Tanning had long been concentrated along certain sections of the River Hipper, large volumes of water being a necessity, and this inclines one to the view that it was in one of these houses where Thomas Secker spent his boyhood.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. J. Bestall, (ed. D.V. Fowkes), *The History of Chesterfield*, vol. iii, Early Victorian Chesterfield, 1978, Borough of Chesterfield, p.6.
2. Lambeth Palace Library, Secker autobiography, MS 2598 f.2. (The full transcript is MS 1729.)
3. Nottinghamshire Record Office, bond, inventory and will of Thomas Secker, October 1700
4. The marriage took place at Sibthorpe; Richard's surname is given as 'Mills'.
5. The usual entry to a grammar school was about seven and frequently qualifications of literacy were imposed. It is probable that Thomas Secker attended the preparatory or 'petty' school in Chesterfield set up by the Charity of Cornelius Clarke where he would have learnt reading and writing.
6. MS 2598 f.4
7. Timothy Jollie's Academy was started in 1691 and by 1700 was said to have sent out forty ministers, but the school had its limitations. Mathematical studies were prohibited 'as tending to scepticism and infidelity', and an ex student, Benjamin Grosvenor, D.D., whilst commending Jollie's discipline and eloquence added that it was 'his exemplary character (which) compensated for his shortcomings in learning'. See J.H. Turner (ed), *The Reverend Oliver Heywood of Northowram, Yorkshire, 1666-1702*, Brighouse, 1882-85, vol. iv, p.164.
8. John Bowes, (1590-1767) was subsequently Lord Chancellor of Ireland but initially trained as a non-conformist minister.
9. John Eames, FRS, (died 1744). He was assistant tutor in classics and science to the Fund Academy, Tenter Alley, Moorfields which was supported by the Congregational Fund Board. Eames was a

- friend of Sir Isaac Newton and abridged the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society.
10. Notts. Record Office, renunciation of administration and guardianship 28 March 1711. The boys' surname is erroneously written as 'Sellars'.
  11. Abigail Anna's surname is spelt as 'Seachar'.
  12. Daniel Scott was to become a well known writer on theology. It was usual in schools and hospitals for people to sleep two to a bed.
  13. G. Hall, *The History of Chesterfield*, 1839, 2nd. ed., p.119
  14. Samuel died soon after baptism, and Martha Ann only survived her father a few years.
  15. He was the first to insist not only on the importance of anatomy to a surgeon but upon the active participation in dissection. He wrote *The Anatomy of the Humane* [sic] *Body* (1713), a manual for students which proved immensely popular.
  16. The marriage was at North Wingfield, Derbyshire on 8 October 1717. John Frost was a yeoman farmer at Barnston in the Vale of Belvoir.
  17. The Freedom of a London Company could be obtained by Servitude (a full term and correctly registered apprenticeship), Patrimony (in right of his father or mother who must have been Freemen at the time of the child's birth) and Redemption. To all intents and purposes the last was a question of buying one's Freedom and the entrance fees were considerably higher. The Apothecaries' Society was unusual in as much that it imposed an examination as to the applicants' training and ability.
  18. Guildhall Library, Apothecaries' Society Court Minutes, MS 8200/4 f.390 '12 February 1712/13 Mr Bakewell who served part his time in Leicester for 5 years and his Ma[s]ter dying came to London and has lived with Mr Lukin about one year and a half and about five years with Mr Tod and Mr Berrow desired his Freedom and submitted to the Court for a Fyne, and a Fyne being set ... of 25<sup>h</sup> and passing an ex[amination] he be made free next private court' which was 3 March.
  19. Public Record Office (Kew), Inland Revenue Apprenticeship Records, MS IR/1/10 and I.R./1/18.
  20. L.G. Matthews, *The Royal Apothecaries*, London, Wellcome, 1967, p. 152. He was also apothecary to George III 1778-1800; Master of the Society of Apothecaries 1795-96. He was a friend of Samuel Johnson and Boswell referred to him as 'laughing Jack Devaynes'. The Archbishop's great niece, Abigail Anna Frost, records in her diary that Devaynes married a Miss Hallowes who was sister to her aunt Abson and to Mr Hallowes of Glapwell, Derbyshire.
  21. John Bakewell was the son of John and Eleanor of Normanton-le-Heath, Leicestershire where he was baptised in June 1687. Joseph Bakewell was baptised in October 1679 in the same village the child of Thomas and Mary. In his will Joseph asks to be buried at Normanton the place of his parents burial although his son Thomas indicates in *his* will that the family came from Tollerton, Nottinghamshire.
  22. Beilby Porteous (1731-1808) Bishop of London. He married Margaret the eldest daughter of Bryan Hodgson, landlord of the George Inn, Stamford and afterwards of Ashbourne, Derbyshire
  23. J.R. Guy, 'Archbishop Secker as a Physician', *Studies in Church History*, (ed. W.J. Sheils), vol. 19, pp.133-4.
  24. MS 2598, f.13
  25. He died 1629 aged 43; bought Dunston Hall near Chesterfield.
  26. D. Hey, *An English Rural Community: Myddle under the Tudors and Stuarts*, Leicester Univ. Press, 1974, p.86
  27. Lichfield Record Office, Inventory and Will of Richard Milnes, 1706
  28. He married Hepzibah (or Hepsheba) Ibbotson on 15 April 1724
  29. It is probable that James Heywood (c.1718-1787) was a member of the famous non-conformist divine, Oliver Heywood's family, as one of his sons, John, was for a period of Sheffield, and the other, Eliezer, was a minister at Dronfield for many years
  30. John Cartledge had been an apprentice of William Burton, surgeon and apothecary of Sheffield for six years from 1773; the premium was £100.
  31. I am indebted to Mrs Rosemary Milward for this important piece of information. The deeds are in the custody of the Chesterfield Civic Society. (1986)



THE MILNES AND SECKER FAMILIES