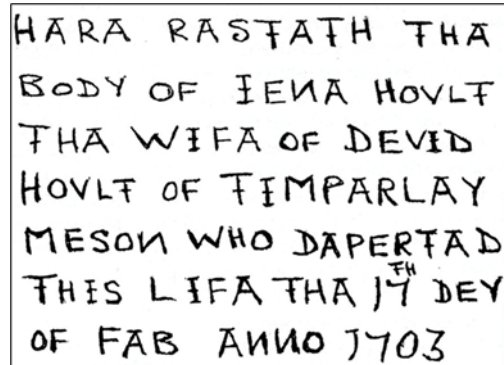


A Strange Gravestone. Number P406

Jane Hoult 1703

Maybe we are sometimes too quick to see a fault in people who lived in the past without having a clear understanding of their life and times. That is why studying history can be so fascinating. One of the oldest gravestones in the churchyard often creates hilarity because of the strange wording of the inscription. Most people assume that the mason who carved it must have been illiterate and perhaps not very intelligent. This is the gravestone of Jane Holt, the wife of David Holt, which can be found just to the East of the South porch of Bowdon church.

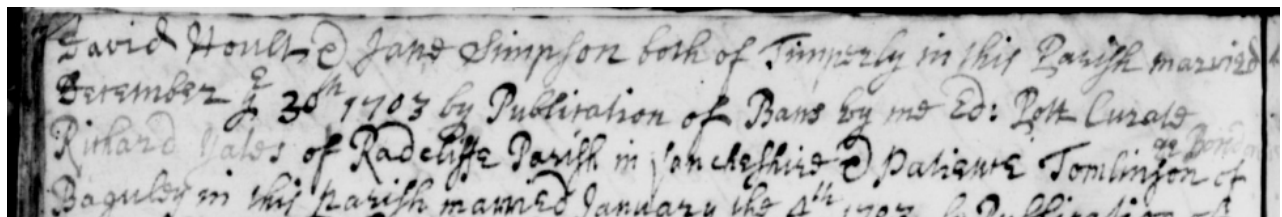


HARA RASTATH THA
BODY OF IENA HOULT
THA WIFA OF DEVID
HOULT OF TIMPARLAY
MESON WHO DAPERTAD
THIS LIFA THA 17TH DEY
OF FEB ANNO 1703

Here resteth the

***body of Jane Hoult
the wife of David
Hoult of Timperley
mason who departed
this life the 17th day
of Feb Anno 1703***

Extensive research by local historian Hazel Pryor has failed to reveal the exact identity of the above named David Holt of Timperley. In a paper on his possible origins Hazel writes that she first spotted the gravestone when she attended Altrincham Girls Grammar School, and the sixth form were allowed out at lunch time to go for a walk. She and a friend often walked to Bowdon Church and explored the graveyard. The stone by the South porch, with its strange inscription, fascinated her at the time. Hazel noticed other Holt/Hoult gravestones further to the West and in later years she gathered more information from several sources, including parish registers, probate documents and leases from the Bulkeley estate. It proved to be a confusing story with many of the same Christian names recurring in various generations, a regular problem for historians. One piece of evidence was that a David Holt married a Jane Simpson at Bowdon on 30th December 1703. Both were "of Timperley" – see register below.



David Hoult & Jane Simpson both of Timperley in this Parish married
December 30th 1703 by Publication of Banns by me Ed: Lott Curate
Rector of Radcliffe Parish in Lancashire & Patience Tomlinson of
Baguley in this Parish married January the 4th 1704 by Publication of Banns
by me Ed: Lott Curate Rector of Radcliffe Parish in Lancashire

It is possible that this is the same couple because Jane died in February 1703 old style (ie. 1704 in the new calendar). Did he lose his wife of only a few weeks?

An apocryphal saying which is often attributed to Einstein is that “everybody is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid”. Whoever it was who so carefully carved the gravestone was certainly not illiterate. The definition of illiteracy is the inability to read or write but the person who carved this inscription was clearly able to communicate his meaning in text. There is a difference between illiteracy and ignorance. The carver of these words was neither illiterate nor ignorant in the modern sense of the words. It is possible that it was Jane Holt’s grieving widower who carefully carved the inscription on her stone. Despite the spelling being strange to our eyes his words are easy to understand.

Born and raised in the 17th century it is inevitable that the carver was “ignorant”, or unaware, of our modern, standard and accepted way of spelling words. This lack of knowledge did not prevent him from making his message clear to subsequent generations of visitors to the grave. Jane’s name appears to begin with the letter I but we should remember that at the time the letter J was not generally used in our alphabet; it was still common to see I instead of J well into the 18th century. The letter U was also represented by a V. Spelling in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not standardised and in documents of the time it is not unusual to see the same word spelled differently on the same page. Words were thought of as sounds rather than written forms and one word could be spelt in more than one way within a single document. Many words were written phonetically, so that sometimes a confusing word can be understood if it is read aloud. Local dialect also played a significant part in the spelling of words.

Brasenose College in Oxford had been founded in 1509 by Sir Richard Sutton of Prestbury and William Smyth, Bishop of Lincoln who was born in Prescott Lancashire. The statutes of the college ordained that it should consist of a Principal and 12 Fellows born in the diocese of Lichfield with preference to those from Lancashire and Cheshire. Whilst the ties of some Oxford colleges to particular places fell into disuse the links between Brasenose and Cheshire continued. Bostock suggests that, “the enduring regional affiliations were due, to some degree, to the need to find a tutor and fellow scholars familiar with a boy’s manner of speech, given the range of local dialects.... For many generations it provided Cheshire men the opportunity to learn without being encumbered by their Cheshire chatter”.¹

We read the gravestone and laugh today but we all understand the words perfectly because in the process of understanding the written word it is the brain which takes the lead and thus is more important than the eyes. So we should not be so ready to mock the work of a talented 17th century stone mason.

Jane Holt’s gravestone was reused at a later date by the Blimeley family. It is not known whether the Holts were related. Above the dedication to Jane Holt is the following inscription.

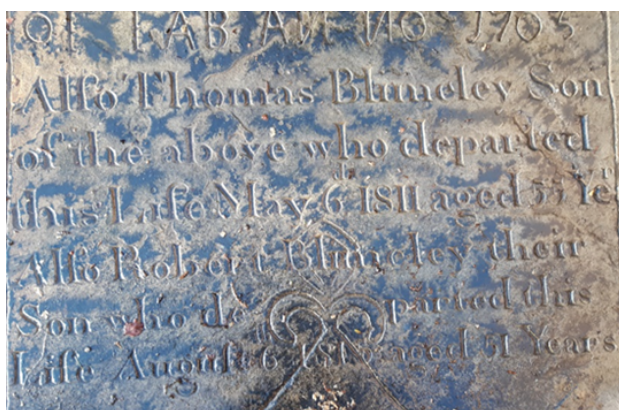


Here lieth the body of Hugh Blimeley of Northen who departed this Life March 11th 1788 aged 74 years Also Ann his wife who departed this Life March 21st 1799 aged 69 years

A further inscription was added to the bottom of the stone in 1815.

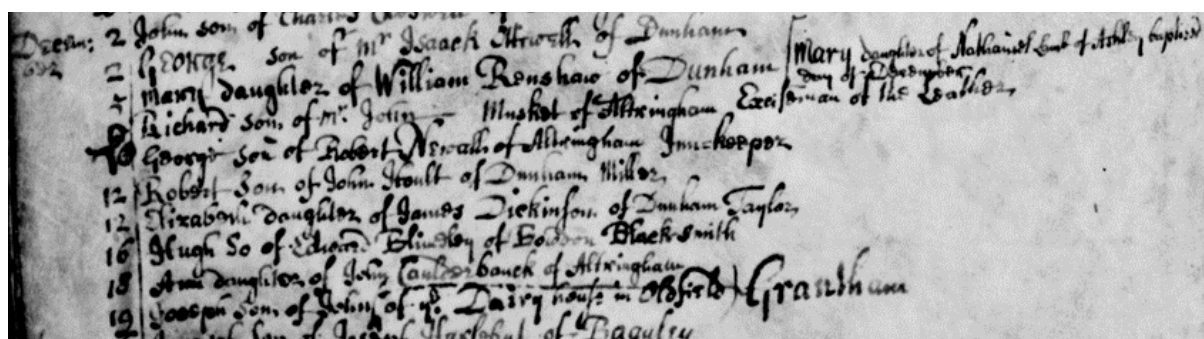
Also Thomas Blimeley Son

¹ “Cheshire’s Seat of Learning: Brasenose College, Oxford” by Tony Bostock p56 In *Cheshire History Number 56* 2016-2017 Pub Cheshire Local History Association 2016

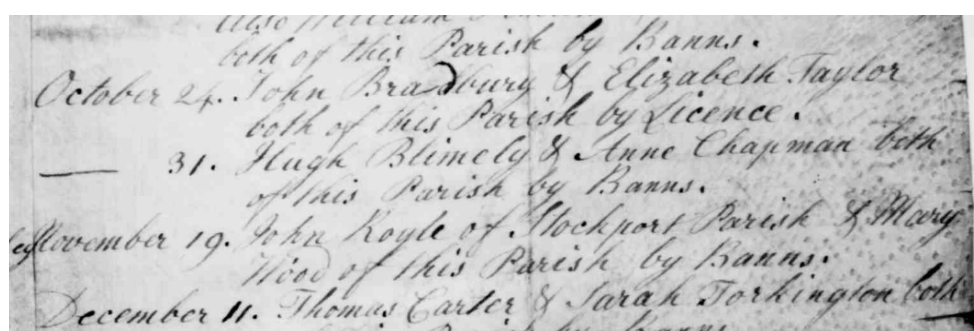


**Of the above who departed
this life May 6th 1811 aged 55 years
Also Robert Blimeley their
Son who departed this
life August 6th 1815 aged 51 years**

Hugh Blimeley whose burial is commemorated on the top of David Holt's gravestone was the son of Edward Blimeley, a Bowdon blacksmith, and his wife Alice Johnson. They were married at Bowdon on 12th February 1712. Bowdon church register, below, shows that Hugh was baptised at Bowdon on 16th December 1714.



On 31st October 1754 Hugh Blimley of Bowdon, aged 40, married Ann Chapman, aged 24, at Bowdon. He made his mark but she was able to write her name in the register of banns.



The Bishop's transcript of the marriage register 31st Oct 1754

Hugh Blimeley of Northenden died on 11th March 1788 and he was buried on the 14th. His son Robert Blimeley, was baptised at Bowdon on 17th June 1764 and it is he whose death in 1815 is recorded at the bottom of the gravestone. Further details of Thomas Blimeley the other son, who was born c.1756 and who died in 1811, have not been found.

With many thanks to Hazel Pryor for generously sharing her research.

Ann Nosowska July 2022