

John Coltman (1727-1808)

John Coltman was born on 20 December 1727 in Leicester at Castle House (an "antique edifice" standing beside St Mary's Church). He was the eldest son by his father's first marriage. His father was a woolcomber from a prosperous yeoman background.

From the age of 16 until 19 he was educated at Kibworth under the tutelage of John Aiken, who kept a "dissenting academy" (a school for those who were not members of the Church of England) there. He studied Geography, French, Greek, Latin and Philosophy - a classical education was unusual for businessmen in this time.

After leaving school he moved in with his uncle (Mr Page) in London and worked in his distillery business. On a business trip he met Elizabeth Cartwright, and began corresponding with her in January 1763. Although both their families had other partners in mind for them, they were eventually married on the 10th of October in 1766 in Duffield Church. They moved into a house in St Nicholas Street, Leicester - a "stone's throw" away from the Jewry Wall (a Roman ruin). Of his parent's marriage, Samuel Coltman wrote in his memoirs "I have reason to believe my parents were peculiarly happy with each other's tastes and opinions; my mother's prudent and skillful management, combined with my father's high character in business, overcoming by degrees many adverse circumstances with which they began housekeeping at Leicester." They had 4 children - three boys (John, Samuel, Rowland) and a girl (Mary Ann).

John Coltman didn't have much of an inclination for business, preferring literature and philosophy. He met regularly with friends to discuss literature and philosophy and instituted a Book Society - other members were John Cogan (a surgeon), Richard Pultney (an apothecary, later a celebrated botanist) and John Lewin (son of a leading hosier). These were all members of the Great Meeting Presbyterian congregation in the town. He also had an interest in Roman history, and had an impressive collection of Roman coins, many of them probably dug up from the area surrounding his house.

Despite his disinterest in business, he was heavily involved in the Leicester hosier trade, introducing automated spinning machines into the city in the 1780s. This was not looked upon kindly by those involved in the hand-trade, and a 10 day long riot ensued in December 1787. Two machines were destroyed and his house was attacked. The firm's partners were forced to sign an agreement promising not to operate any worsted spinning machines within 50 miles of Leicester.

He lived until the age of 81, suffering a painful illness before his death in February 1808.

Rev. C. Berry from the Leicester Journal wrote "His unsullied integrity, enlightened candour, and warm philanthropy, have left indelible impressions of esteem and regret among the few friends with whom his modest and secluded habits permitted him to associate. He bore a very painful disorder with the most exemplary fortitude and resignation, and his whole life afforded (particularly towards its close) a striking illustration of the power of genuine Christianity."

Obituaries emphasised his love of learning and dislike of trade:

Sir William Heygate wrote the following, published in the "Gentleman's Magazine": "Hence, when his warehouse required his presence, he was more frequently to be found in his study, raised above the world by a contemplation of the works of Nature and Providence, or by a perusal of the writings of the poets and orators of Greece and Rome."

Sources:

"Catherine Hutton and Friends" by Catherine Hutton Beale. Retrieved from

<https://archive.org/stream/catherinehuttonh00beal>

The reluctant businessman: John Coltman of St Nicholas Street, Leicester (1727-1808) by

David L. Wykes. Retrieved from

<https://www.le.ac.uk/lahs/downloads/WykesvolumeLXIX-6sm.pdf>

Compiled by Raewyn Hooper March 2016

My descendency from John Coltman:

John Coltman > John Coltman > Sarah Coltman > Charles Septimus Clarke > Minnie Clarke

> Alma Torkington > Victor Smith > Vern Smith > Raewyn Smith