

Charles Towsey of Henley upon Thames in the County of Wexford Gentleman

Mary Harriet Sparks
H. B. Moorhouse

TOWSEY TALES

NAME: John Sparks

BIRTH DETAILS: Born circa 1674

DEATH DETAILS: after 1708

CHART REF: Towsey Chart C2

MARRIAGE DETAILS: 29 Dec.1697, Enfield

SPOUSE: Denise Carter

Edward Towsey

John Sparks

Denise Carter

John Sparks

Denise Carter

John Sparks

Denise Carter

John Sparks

Denise Carter

We have records of the Sparks family back to the end of the seventeenth century, (starting on Towsey Chart TC1), when they were living in Enfield, which is ten miles directly north of London, on the highway that passes by Shacklewell, Stamford Hill and Tottenham.

Our earliest record is of Mary Harriet Sparks' Great Great Great Grandfather, John Sparks, who married Dennis (Denise) Carter in 1697. The second of the documents reproduced below, saying that he had been an inhabitant of Enfield (then called Endfield), for the past thirty years, seems to indicate that he had moved to Enfield not long before his marriage.

This may be the case, but the large number of Sparks christenings and marriages in Enfield, dating back to the mid sixteenth century (to whom we cannot trace definite links), make it just as likely that he was from the immediate vicinity.

We see from the following two court documents, that in 1725, John Sparks was a constable.

Petition of John Sparks

Against

Henry Mackenzie

Referred to the County Day 14 October 1725

The court adjourned to the County Day of the next sitting & Mackenzie & Sparks to then attend.

To the Worshipful his Majesties Justices of the Peace assembled in the General Quarter Sessions of the Peace for the County of Middlesex aforesaid.

Sheweth

That about three years and a half since John Kervet one of the Constables of Endfield aforesaid the person appointed by this Court to convey Vagrants by passes to the next adjoining County during your petition did apply to succeed him and your petitioner by the persuasions of Henry Mackenzie and on his faithful promises to serve your petitioner did entrust the said Mackenzie to solicit the matter for him.

But the said Mackenzie instead of serving your petitioner or regarding his promises did make Interest and obtain the employment of himself. Telling your petitioner Self Interest guided all Men and doth (tho' a Man of very good Substance and Estate) continue to Convey the Vagrants

by persons hired for that purpose, being above doing the duty himself and doth receive from this County for his troubles and expenses the Salary of Sixty pounds per Annu.

That your petitioner by the Order of the High Constable of Endfield hath of his own Costs and Charges conveyed several Vagrants, And still doth keep a horse for that purpose. And can perform that Service cheaper than the same is done now.

That your petitioner is desirous and willing to Maintain the great Charge of his Family by his Labour and Diligence. And verily believes he might have succeeded the said John Keivett had he not relyed on the said Mackenzie's promise of Solliciting for him.

Your petitioner therefore most humbly prays the direction of this Court. And that the said Mackenzie may be debarred from Acting and that your petitioner may be appointed by this Court to pass the said Vagrants.

And your petitioner (as is duty bound) ever pray... etc...



We then see that at the next sitting of Middlesex magistrates, on 30th November, 1725, where they were dealing with County business, that the good citizens of Endfield have sent a letter of recommendation: a "Memorial and Certificate", endorsing John Sparks in his bid to transport vagrants...

To the Worshipfull his Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the County of Middlesex assembled in Sessions at Hirts Hall St. John Street in and for the said County.

The humble Memorial and Certificate of us whose names art hereunto Subscribed Inhabitants of the parish of Endfield and parts adjunct in the County of Middlesex.

That John Sparks out of the Constables of Endfield aforesaid and petitioner to this Court to pass the vagrants for the County of Middlesex is a very honest industrious and sober man and one who had been an Inhabitant of the parish of Endfield for Thirty years always taking care to provide and gett a maintenance for his family in an honest and commendable manner.

And that the said John Sparks is a man Qualified and fitt to Serve the County in passing vagrants and sturdy beggars from out of this County of Middlesex to other Counties and having assisted in that station for some years past having an horse fitt to retrieve vagrants and keeping an horse to convey them. In testimony whereof we have herewith sett our hands this thirteenth day of November 1725

John Hill
Thomas Hill
Edward Hunson
Daniel Phillips
Thomas Gesse
Evan Shores
John Piggot
Christopher Woodham
Edward Sibley
Samuel Wyburd

Samuel Bridges
Robert Piggott
James Elsome
William Herley
William Stern
John Aston
John Sedcole
Thomas Howard
Jos^a Galliard



**Mid C18th caricature of an over-fed
Parish Constable**

Middlesex and Essex, from the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries.

I will not write about these people, because many of them are famous enough to have their biographies readily accessible on-line.

In 1725, local government administration was still handled by parish officials. One of the duties thereof, was to look after the poor people of the parish. As we saw in the case of Wantage, funds for this purpose could be raised in a number of ways.

If you were unlucky enough to have no means of support – a vagrant, you might be inclined to leave your home village and seek work elsewhere. This might turn out alright, but if not, then you would be arrested by the constables (police officers appointed by the parish), and sent back to your own parish.

In earlier times, such vagrants might well have been whipped by the arresting parish officials, before being taken back to their own parish or, if necessary, carried to the border of the adjoining county, where they would be handed over to the relevant county constables. If the vagrants had strayed far enough, they might be passed through the hands of several county's constables, each of whom might whip the poor wretch, as an encouragement to not stray that way again.

You will notice in the above “Memorial and Certificate”, that they mention, as well as vagrants, “sturdy beggars”. Perhaps this indicates that those forced into a life of begging through genuine infirmity, might be treated more sympathetically than the despicable ‘sturdy’ characters who opted for beggary as an easy alternative to honest labour.

Looking at Chart TC2, you will see that the second John Sparks, a store keeper, married Sarah Wright, in Enfield in 1723 and, if you now look at Chart TC3, you will see that many of Sarah Wright's ancestors were prominent members of the gentry, particularly around

I will though, mention Sir John Wiseman, who was an auditor of the exchequer to King Henry VIII. Moving on to Chart TC4, we see that his wife was the daughter of Sir William Waldegrave, who was knighted at the coronation of Anne Boleyn and served the various monarchs up to Queen Mary.

Chart TC4 connects to Chart TC5 and although the links are not shown, some of the persons on these two charts are connected right back to many of the famous knights and aristocrats throughout the Medieval period, including some of the leaders of the Crusades, then back to the Norman period, thence back to all of the great names of ancient history.

I have made up these charts, but so have many other genealogists, so they will be easy enough to find, for those wishing to show their connection to, say, William the Conqueror or Charlemagne. Remember though, that considering that the number of our ancestors doubles with each previous generation and, considering the population of Britain in the year 1066, means that everyone alive today, with any British ancestry will, on average, be descended from every person alive back then, ten times over.

It might be fun to look out our connections with ancient notables, but the histories of our closer, more recent Sparks ancestors, are at least as interesting to us, as they played out their busy lives as successful merchants through the bustling streets of eighteenth century London.

By 1777, Thomas Sparks, born in 1749, the grandson of the younger John, had moved to Aldersgate Street in the City of London, where he conducted what must have been a very successful business as a merchant and distiller's chemist, apparently producing alcohol for the booming, and socially disruptive London gin trade. Various trade directories also list Thomas as Scientist/Inventor.

The greater part of Thomas Sparks' business seems to have been the distillation of juniper berries for the manufacture of gin, but he was also involved in the extraction of essential oils from other plants for other industries, mainly, one presumes, involved in the manufacture of foods, cosmetics and medicines.

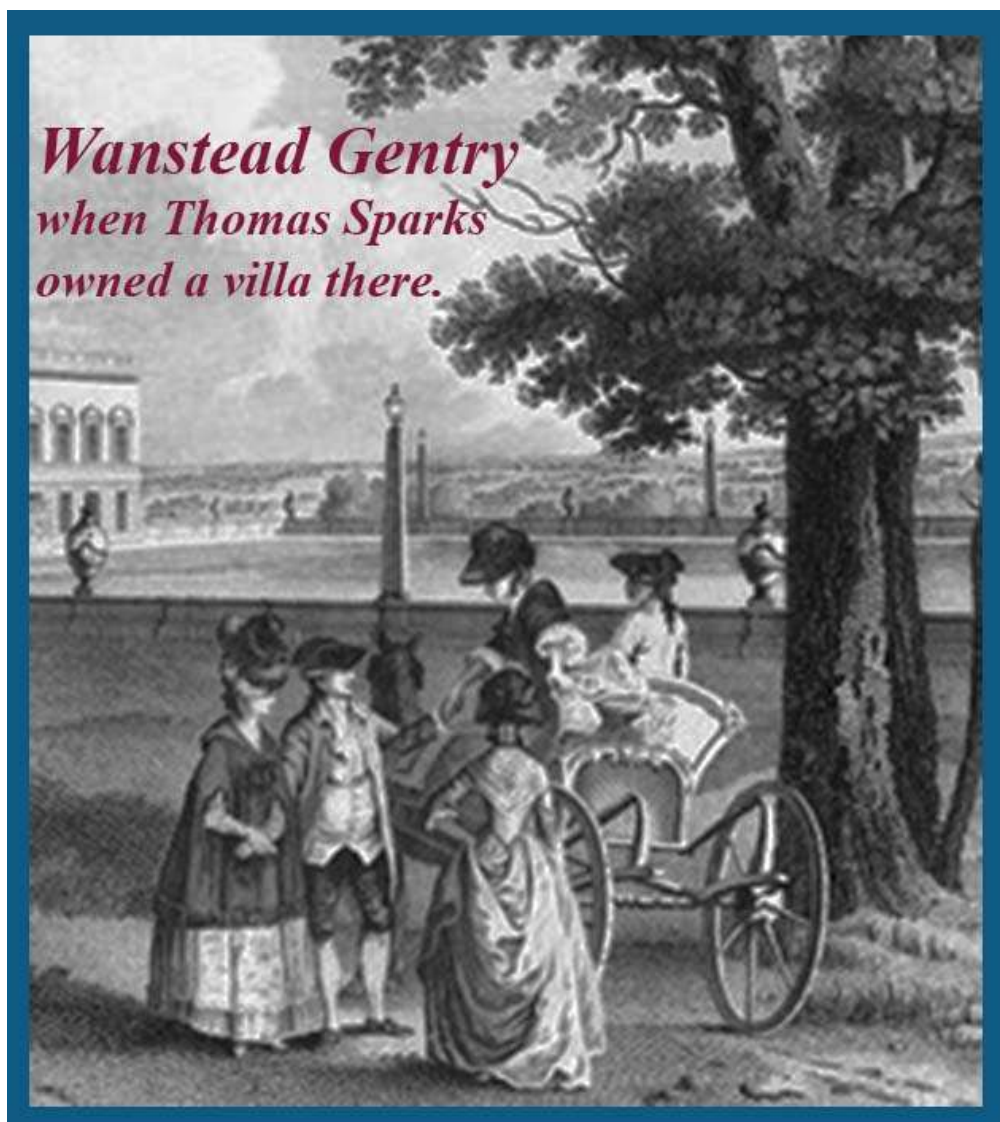
When looking at an account book of the company from the 1830s, the purchase of large quantities of juniper berries was listed.

During this time, Thomas also owned a villa at Wanstead, which is a couple of miles east of Stoke Newington and about four miles south-east of Enfield.

Thomas's wife Sarah James, the daughter of an Enfield butcher, was born around Aldersgate Street in 1758, lived in both the Aldersgate area of London and at the villa in Wanstead, then died at 112 Aldersgate Street, in 1821. This whole part of Aldersgate street has long since been redeveloped, much of it by World War Two bombs.

When Thomas Sparks died at the Wanstead villa, after a long illness, in November 1821, he left sums of money, totalling about £1,200, to various friends and the children of his only child, Robert Harry Sparks, who was probably born in 1773.

To his wife, Thomas left *"the use of houses at Aldersgate St and Wanstead, carriage & harness, furniture, linen, china, wines and all other effects. £800 per year out of estates of son, R H Sparks (with whom arrangement was made earlier), of St. John St. Islington and at Tottenham."*



Although Thomas left his wife the carriage and harness, he apparently did not leave her a horse, or horses, with which to pull the carriage. It might be that considering the amount of effort required in maintaining horses, that it was easier to hire them when needed, from a local stable. You will see later, that one of our ancestors, Donald Mackay, from Scotland, ran just such a business at one time. The business with horses and carriages though, was rendered irrelevant by the fact that Sarah had already died, eight months before her husband. It would seem that Thomas had either been too sick, or had simply not bothered writing a new will.