

Three BREACH Siblings

by Geoffrey Barber

Three siblings, John, Thomas and Sarah Breach, having lost their mother and their grandmother, and deserted by their father, were removed from Burwash to Lewes St Michael in 1738. Three years later they were separated and apprenticed out at the ages of 12 years, 13 years and 9 years respectively, no longer a burden on the parish. This is their story, and it serves to illustrate the value of the parish records of the Overseers of the Poor.

Their father John Breach was born at Burwash in 1698 and at some stage, perhaps to serve his apprenticeship as a shoemaker, moved to the parish of Lewes St Michael where he gained settlement. He moved back to Burwash, probably in the 1720s, carrying a certificate of settlement from Lewes St Michael stating that they were responsible for him should he fall on hard times and need parish relief. With this he was permitted to reside and work at Burwash. There he met Sarah Skinner and they married at the neighbouring town of Dallington on 6 January 1728/29. Three children followed:

John Breach: baptised 4 July 1729 at Burwash
Thomas Breach: baptised 20 April 1731 at Burwash
Sarah Breach: baptised 15 May 1733 at Burwash

Tragedy followed the birth of the fourth child in December 1735, when the mother Sarah died together with her newborn daughter, Mary. At this point the records hint at the grandmother, Elizabeth Breach, stepping in to keep the family together, but this was not to last with her death in December 1737. This created a problem for the Overseers of the Poor at Burwash as the father had left town, for whatever reason, and the children now required support from the parish.

On 27 March 1738, the Overseers of the Poor sent the following letter to Lewes St Michael:

Gentlemen
There was one John Breach a shoemaker came to our towne by a [settlement] certificate from you and he having now left his family they come to us and desire relief. We therefore send to you that you may fetch them to you, or we must bring them with an order from your brother officer
J Butler
Burwash
March 27 1738

Subsequently on 11 April 1738 a removal order was issued¹ (Fig. 1) and two days later the children were taken to Lewes St Michael, where the Overseers of the Poor were presented with the following invoice² (Fig. 4):

¹ Removal order for John, Thomas and Sarah Breach, from Burwash to Lewes St Michael, 11 Apr 1738. (ESRO: PAR 414/32/3/3)

² Removal invoice for John, Thomas and Sarah Breach, from Burwash to Lewes St Michael, 14 Apr 1738. (ESRO: PAR 414/32/3/5)

The Parish of Saint Michael in Lewes. Indebted to Burwash.
 1738 April 13
 for keeping 3 children of John Breach from 28th of March: £0-14-0
 for the charge of the order to remove them to Lewes: £0-04-0
 for the charge of horses and men in bringing them to Lewes: £01-0-0
 £01-18-0

April 19: 1738
 Received in full of this bill
 J Butler.

The Overseers of the Poor at Lewes St Michael continued to support the children over the next few years until 1741 when they began to find apprenticeships for them. This was a common approach taken for orphaned children as it provided a family for the child and they learnt a trade. It also removed the child as a financial burden on the parish – a win/win you might say – however in this case it meant that the three siblings were widely separated which must have been very hard on them. The children were apprenticed as follows:

22 Aug 1741: John Breach (12 years) apprenticed to John Hemsley of East Chiltington in Westmeston, yeoman, for 12 years to learn “the art and mystery of husbandry” (Fig. 3).³

6 Feb 1741: Sarah Breach (9 years of age) apprenticed to John Edwards of Cuckfield, husbandman for 12 years to learn “the art of housewifery”.⁴

17 Sep 1743: Thomas Breach (13 years of age) apprenticed to George Gibson, St Sepulchre, Middlesex, cook, for 11 years to learn “the art and mystery of a cook”.⁵

One wonders “where was the father?” during all this. Did he truly desert his children, never to see them again? Did he provide some support to them through the Overseers of the Poor at Lewes St Michael? Why didn’t he marry a second time and keep his family together, as many men did? So many questions for which there are no answers.

The records do give a hint that the brothers John and Thomas Breach were later able to make contact as both were married at Fleet Prison⁶ in London:

31 May 1750 Thomas BREECH batchelor of St Andrews Holborn cook and Eliz. McGINNIS of the same parish.

24 April 1753 John BRICH taylor of Westminston [Westmeston] Sussex; Ann HILDROP spinster of Ditchling.

Was this coincidence or had they managed to find each other? I suspect the latter.

³ Apprenticeship between John Breach and John Hemsley of East Chiltington, 22 Aug 1741, Lewes St Michael, Sussex (ESRO: PAR 414/33/38)

⁴ Apprenticeship between Sarah Breach and John Edwards of Cuckfield, 6 February 1741, Lewes St Michael, Sussex (ESRO: PAR 414/33/36)

⁵ Apprenticeship between Thomas Breach and George Gibson of St Sepulchre, Middlesex, 17 Sep 1743, Lewes St Michael, Sussex (ESRO: PAR 414/33/41)

⁶ Prisons like the Fleet and the King’s Bench Prison became popular destinations for couples interested in quick, no-questions-asked nuptials because of the number of clerics imprisoned for debt who were willing to conduct the marriages for a fee. The clerics often paid for the privilege of living outside the gates of the prison so they could conduct these services.



Suffex, to wit. WHEREAS Complaint hath been made unto Us, Two of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace of the County of *Suffex*, (whereof One is of the Quorum) by you the Church-wardens and Overseers of the Poor of the Parish of *Burwash* in the said County, That *John Breach* is lately come to Inhabit in the said Parish, endeavouring to settle ~~him~~ self there, contrary to Law; and that *John Breach, John, Thomas and Sarah his Children* are

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now likely to become chargeable to the said Parish: And whereas upon Examination touching the Premises taken before Us upon Oath, we the said Justices do adjudge, That the said *John Breach, John, Thomas, and Sarah, his Children* are

now likely to become chargeable to the said Parish: and do also adjudge, that the *Parish of St. Michael in Lewes* in the County of *Staffers* is the Place where the said *John Breach, John, Thomas, and Sarah, his Children* were last legally settled.

Richard May

THESE are therefore in His Majesty's Name, to command you the said Church-wardens and Overseers of the Poor of the said Parish of *Burwash* to remove and convey the said *John Breach, John, Thomas, and Sarah, his Children*

from the said Parish of *Burwash* to the said Parish of *St. Michael in Lewes* and them to deliver to the Church-wardens and Overseers of the Poor there, who are hereby required to receive and provide for them according to Law. Given under Our Hands and Seals the Eleventh Day of *April* in the Year of Our Lord, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Thirty *Eighth*.

To the Church-wardens and Overseers of the Poor of the Parish of *Burwash* in the County of *Suffex*: And to the Church-wardens and Overseers of the Poor of the Parish of *St. Michael in Lewes* in the said County and to every of them.

E.S.R.O.
PAR. 414/32/3/3.

April 1738

Fig. 1. Removal Order for John Breach and his three children to be removed from the parish of Burwash to the parish of St Michael in Lewes, issued 11 April 1738.

Unfortunately, the trail stops there for the siblings Thomas and Sarah Breach. However, there is some more to add for their brother John, my 6x great grandfather. He and Ann Hildrop had two children, John and Joseph, baptised at Ditchling in 1754 and 1755 respectively. At some stage, the family moved to Hamsey where the children John and Joseph both married and had family. John's first child was named Sarah, my 5x great grandmother, and one would like to think she was named after her orphaned aunt.

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PS The records of the Overseers of the Poor can often be found online by searching for the relevant parish on Familysearch.org.