

RIGBY, THOMAS (c. 1783 - 1841), publican and barber

Name: Thomas Rigby
Date of birth: c. 1783
Date of death: 1841
Spouse: Mary Rigby (née Richards)
Child: George Rigby
Child: Mary Ann Rigby
Child: George Rigby
Child: Alexander Rigby
Child: Thomas Rigby
Child: Elizabeth Rigby
Child: William Rigby
Child: Jane Rigby
Child: Caroline Rigby
Gender: Male
Occupation: publican and barber
Area of activity: Miscellaneous; Business and Industry
Author: Rita Singer

The man known as Thomas Rigby or 'Reggbey' was born c. 1783 and abducted by slave-hunters to an unknown destination in the West Indies when he was about eight years old. His parentage, name at birth and birthplace are unknown. It is possible that the Rigby surname is linked to Richard Rigby, MP (1722-1788) of Mistley Hall, Essex, who owned several sugar, cocoa and coffee plantations in Antigua, Grenada and Jamaica. In 1817, Thomas Rigby arrived in Kidwelly in the company of the Rev John Norcross.

On 19 January 1819, Thomas Rigby married Mary Richards (1801-1854), a local young woman who had grown up on a farm near Llanelli. Presumably neither one of them could write, leaving their mark instead of a signature on their marriage certificate. Mary's younger sister, Elizabeth Richards (1806-1886), would much later become the mother of the musician [Joseph Parry](#) (1841-1903). In the following years, Thomas and Mary ran several public houses in Kidwelly and Llanelli. Occasionally, Thomas also held other occupations, such as 'Gentleman's servant' or barber.

Thomas and Mary had nine children, but not all of them survived into adulthood: George (1819-1822), Mary Ann (1821-1878), another boy named George (1824-1844), Alexander (1826-1833), Thomas junior (1829-1844), Elizabeth (1834-1834), William (1838-1892), Jane (1839-1840) and Caroline (1840-1876). Mary Ann became a cook, working in service in a Swansea doctor's family. William became a cabinet maker and moved to Merthyr Tydfil.

Thomas Rigby died on 8 March 1841 in Llanelli, where he ran the Union Tavern, and was buried two days later in Saint Mary's cemetery, Kidwelly. Announcing his passing, [The Cambrian](#) included the briefest of life sketches and stated that Thomas 'was an industrious and harmless man'. Mary continued working as a publican and remarried three years later.

While Thomas Rigby was one of only very few Black people in the district in the first half of the nineteenth century, he was by no means the first who can be traced through historical records. A young Black man called Jack of St Christopher (d. 1738) was baptised at Pembrey in 1723. In 1738, Sabacon Gambia (d. 1784) was baptised at St Peter's, Carmarthen, and in 1742 was granted a license to marry Candace de Gambia (d. 1760) in Kidwelly. Their surname 'Gambia', in addition to notes in the baptismal, marriage and death registers, identified them as Black people.

Author

Rita Singer

Sources

Archives Wales; Wales; Carmarthenshire Baptisms, Marriages and Burials; Reference: CPR/70/13

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Additional Links

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