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JOB MASON OF ROMNEY, HAMPSHIRE

William Wallworth

Job Mason (1809-1866) was the father of a William Mason who later lived in Southampton, Hampshire. The grandchildren of William Mason were involved in Co-Freemasonry and knew Gerald Gardner and Edith Woodford Grimes ('Dafo') of the New Forest Coven. In his book *Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival* (Capall Bann 2000), Philip Heselton believes the Masons were a 'witch family'. He mentions a place called Toothill, which was several miles from Southampton, and is a place where witches gathered. Through my genealogical research I have found that William Mason of Southampton was born in Romsey, Hampshire and was the son of Job Mason, born in the same town. Romsey is only a couple of miles from Toothill.

In 1827 there is a record of Job Mason being fined ten shillings for letting of fireworks on Guy Fawkes Night (November 5th). In the local newspaper the *Hampshire Chronicle* for Monday, November 19th it says that he appeared in court with a Henry Leach of Romsey, who was fined forty shillings (two old pounds). Then in April 1830 the same paper reported that Job Mason had been convicted of stealing cabbage plants from the garden of John Withers in Middlebridge Street, Romsey and fined forty-five shillings. Four months later he was committed to the county jail for receiving a quantity of stolen shoemakers' lasts belonging to John S. Jackson and valued at twenty shillings.

According to the 1841 census Job and Elizabeth Mason were then living in Middlebridge Street, Romsey and he was working as a chimney sweep. The couple were both aged thirty-five and had four children whose ages ranged from ten months to nineteen years. The oldest, Henry Homer Mason, was also a sweep. Elizabeth Mason died in the fourth quarter of the year 1847 in the Romsey registration district. Three years later Job Mason married a woman called Harriet or Harriot Ford from Charlton in Dorset. In 1851 the couple were living at Baileys Hold, Romsey and he was still employed as a chimney sweep. Only their ten-year-old son Charles is recorded on the census form as living with them.

Then in April 1852 the *Hampshire Chronicle* reported that Job Mason and two other men, Job Gannaway and Charles Southwell, had been convicted for stealing turnip greens (the top of the plants) from an address in East Wellow. Each of the men was sentenced at the Romsey Petty Sessions to twenty-one days imprisonment. In 1861 Job and Harriot Mason were living in Latimere Street, Romsey and he was still working as a sweep. However, five years later in the second quarter of 1866 Job Mason's death was recorded in the registration district of Southampton, Hampshire aged fifty-seven. In the 1871 census, Harriott Mason, a sixty-eight-year-old widower, was living with her daughter and son-in-law, Eliza and James Russan in Middlebridge Street, Romsey. She was listed as a pauper or 'very poor person'. The fifty-year-old James Russan is described as a railway labourer and there is also a niece living in the house called Fanny Russan, who is listed as a 'scholar.' As she was aged eleven this probably means she was at school.

I have not found a relationship between the Mason family in Romsey and the Toothill Mason family yet. It is possible that they may be related earlier on. The two locations are only about two miles apart. It is more than likely that Job Mason knew the Toothill family. He was a chimney sweep and that is an occupation or trade that does not confine a person to a location as being a farmer would for instance. Job Mason would certainly have gone to nearby villages to find customers so it is likely he ventured to Toothill and met the Mason family living there. I do not know how 19th century minds worked, but if among strangers you met someone who shared your last name, would you be more likely to become friends and associates even if a kinship is not known?