

Archival Exercise

The archival material for this assignment has been chosen because it relates to historically important Quaker families at the heart of the early eighteenth century industrial revolution in Coalbrookdale, Shropshire: the Darby family and the Thomas family. These families were part of a strong Quaker community, which was highly organised and well documented. This research focuses in particular on the family of John Thomas who was apprentice to Abraham Darby I and who was instrumental in aiding the latter to cast iron pots successfully in sand moulds in 1714. This was a groundbreaking technological development with far reaching implications both economic, commercial, and domestic.

There are records of both the Darby and Thomas families written by Hannah Rose, née Thomas, born 1718 and died 1791, who was the daughter of John Thomas and his wife Grace Zeane. Hannah's writings have most probably survived since they document the history of the Darby family, however, a second family history also survives which documents her own ancestors. The two histories appear to have been written approximately thirty years apart. Hannah's Darby history has been dated to circa 1750 according to the archival catalogue of The Library of the Society of Friends. Given that Hannah was born in 1718 and in her Thomas family history writes that she begins her family history in her sixty sixth year, this would date this manuscript to circa 1784. These two accounts have been used as source material for Quaker historians and historians of the industrial revolution.¹

London, Friends House, The Library of the Society of Friends, MS BOX W1/12, Some account of the family of the Darby's by Hannah Rose

The full title for this item seems to be "Some account of the family of the Darby's, being what Hannah Rose has heard her parents, John and Grace Thomas, say concerning them". This

¹ Arthur Raistrick's book *Dynasty of Iron Founders* extensively uses Hannah's writings.

account is in one volume and is dated to c. 1750. It is not clear if this is a transcript of Hannah Rose's history of the Darby family or in her own handwriting.

London, Friends House, The Library of the Society of Friends, TEMP MSS 274, Transcript
of a family history of Hannah Rose

TEMP MSS 274 is a notebook containing an incomplete transcript of an account of the family history of Hannah Rose of Coalbrookdale with a copy of a letter from John Thomas to Grace Deane dated 2nd March 1713/14. Deane is a transcription error from the archive. Grace's maiden name was Zeane or Zane or Zean. This copy of Hannah's Thomas family history contains the details of how her maternal grandparents were convinced as Quakers and how she herself attended school in Bristol in the 1720s whilst living with her grandparents. These details give insight into the importance of female education in the Quaker community.

Coalbrookdale, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Library and Archives, Lab/LD/1-33,
Labouchère Collection: additional records, 17th-20th century (1662 – 1989)

The writings on the Darby and Thomas families by Hannah Rose are held in the Labouchère Collection in the archives of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum. The website of the National Archives advises that it is an extensive collection of papers and documents as well as personal items which has not necessarily been fully catalogued and recommends looking at transcripts and photocopies before examining the primary sources.

London, Friends House, The Library of the Society of Friends, MS VOL 310, Journal of
Abiah Darby

This is the journal of Abiah Darby, the second wife of Abraham Darby II. Abiah was a contemporary of Hannah and in some of the entries in her journal she refers to the everyday life of the Coalbrookdale Quaker community. She writes about attending the Womens' Meeting and also the funeral of John Thomas in 1760.

Shrewsbury, Shropshire Archives, XLS8073, Hannah Rose: MSS account of the Darby family and copy of a letter dated 14 July 1752 from Abraham Darby II to James Shaw

This contains another copy of Hannah's history of the Darby family. It is unclear from this archival entry if this is an original by Hannah or a later transcription.

Shrewsbury, Shropshire Archives, XNO/C/4, NO4430, Coalbrookdale and Broseley: Shropshire Meetings of the Society of Friends (Quakers)

Shrewsbury, Shropshire Archives, XNO/C/4/2/2/1, NO4430/MM/2/1, Shropshire Womens' Monthly Meeting minutes (1753-60)²

Shrewsbury, Shropshire Archives, XNO/C/4/2/2/2, NO4430/MM/2/2, Shropshire Womens' Monthly Meeting minutes (1761-84)

Shrewsbury, Shropshire Archive, XNO/C/4/2/2/3, NO4430/MM/2/3, Shropshire Womens' Monthly Meeting minutes (1784-1802)

This is a collection of official minutes of the meetings held in the Quaker meeting house in Broseley and also of the Women's Meeting, held in various locations in Shropshire. Of particular interest are the minutes of the Women's Meetings for the years when Hannah was in attendance. All four of these sources are indicative of how the Quakers ran their meetings and communities, advised their members, provided welfare and support for members who were widowed or were ill, as well as how they dealt with issues in the community. The minutes throw light on the role of women and the place of women within the Quaker tradition in contrast with mainstream society of the eighteenth century. During the meetings letters were read out from members not in attendance, either to apologise and explain why they cannot attend or from multiple locations across the world such as America where they were currently preaching. This is indicative of the

² On the Shropshire Archives website the archival entries are listed as Womens' Meetings rather than Women's Meetings.

religious role of the women within the Quaker community at a time when this would have been highly unusual for most Christian women.

With the exception of the Men's Meeting manuscripts, Hannah is a constant presence in these archival sources. She is either the author or is mentioned or is a participant. Hannah writes that she was prevailed upon by female members of the Darby family to write down what she knew and remembered of Abraham Darby because he had died young. In her family history of the Thomases she details how she feels beholden to write down these stories as her parents made sure she was educated in reading and writing and also for her relations to have the family history after her death. It is noteworthy that Hannah had no children of her own with whom she could orally share these stories, some of which were over a hundred years old at the time of her narrative. She also states that she is not writing for the sake of pride, which would have been sinful for her as a Quaker, but so that the history should not be lost to future generations.

In further study it would be interesting to compare the various manuscript copies of Hannah's two histories. The copy held in the Library of the Society of Friends in Euston in London, TEMP MSS 274, contains additional details to other versions, including details about her maternal grandparents, their conversion to Quakerism, their life in Dublin during the conflict between James II and William III, the roles played by her paternal and maternal family members in the establishment of Quaker communities in America and the foundation of Pennsylvania. Using clues and evidence from her manuscripts it would be interesting to see what further research could reveal about the early Quaker movement. In her writings Hannah details how she is recording family stories and oral histories but she also details how she has used documents in her writings. One such document is the will of her grandfather, Edward Evans of Welshpool. This will seems to have now been lost and has not been found in any archives during the research for this assignment. Hannah herself has thus provided further lines of investigation.

Reference List for Online Catalogues Used

‘Coalbrookdale and Broseley: Shropshire Meetings of the Society of Friends (Quakers)’, *Shropshire Archives*,
<https://www.shropshirearchives.org.uk/collections/getrecord/CCA_XNO_C_4> [last accessed 8th April 2025]

‘Hannah Rose: MSS account of the Darby family and copy of a letter dated 14 July 1752 from Abraham Darby II to James Shaw.’, *Shropshire Archives*,
<https://www.shropshirearchives.org.uk/collections/getrecord/CCA_XLS8073> [last accessed 8th April 2025]

‘Journal of Abiah Darby’, *Library of the Society of Friends Catalogue*,
<<https://quaker.adlibhosting.com/Details/archive/110002090>> [last accessed 8th April 2025]

‘LABOUCHERE COLLECTION’, *The National Archives*,
<<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/fae63492-f0de-4103-a5eb-f0d0e6f0976e>>
[last accessed 8th April 2025]

‘Shropshire Womens' Monthly Meeting minutes’, *Shropshire Archives*,
<https://www.shropshirearchives.org.uk/collections/getrecord/CCA_XNO_C_4_2_2_1> [last accessed 8th April 2025]

‘Shropshire Womens' Monthly Meeting minutes’, *Shropshire Archives*,
<https://www.shropshirearchives.org.uk/collections/getrecord/CCA_XNO_C_4_2_2_2> [last accessed 8th April 2025]

‘Shropshire Womens' Monthly Meeting minutes’, *Shropshire Archives*,
<https://www.shropshirearchives.org.uk/collections/getrecord/CCA_XNO_C_4_2_2_3> [last accessed 8th April 2025]

‘Some account of the family of the Darby's by Hannah Rose’, *Library of the Society of Friends Catalogue*, <<https://quaker.adlibhosting.com/Details/archive/110009328>> [last accessed 8th April 2025]

‘Transcript of a family history of Hannah Rose’, *Library of the Society of Friends Catalogue*,
<<https://quaker.adlibhosting.com/Details/archive/110011725>> [last accessed 8th April 2025]