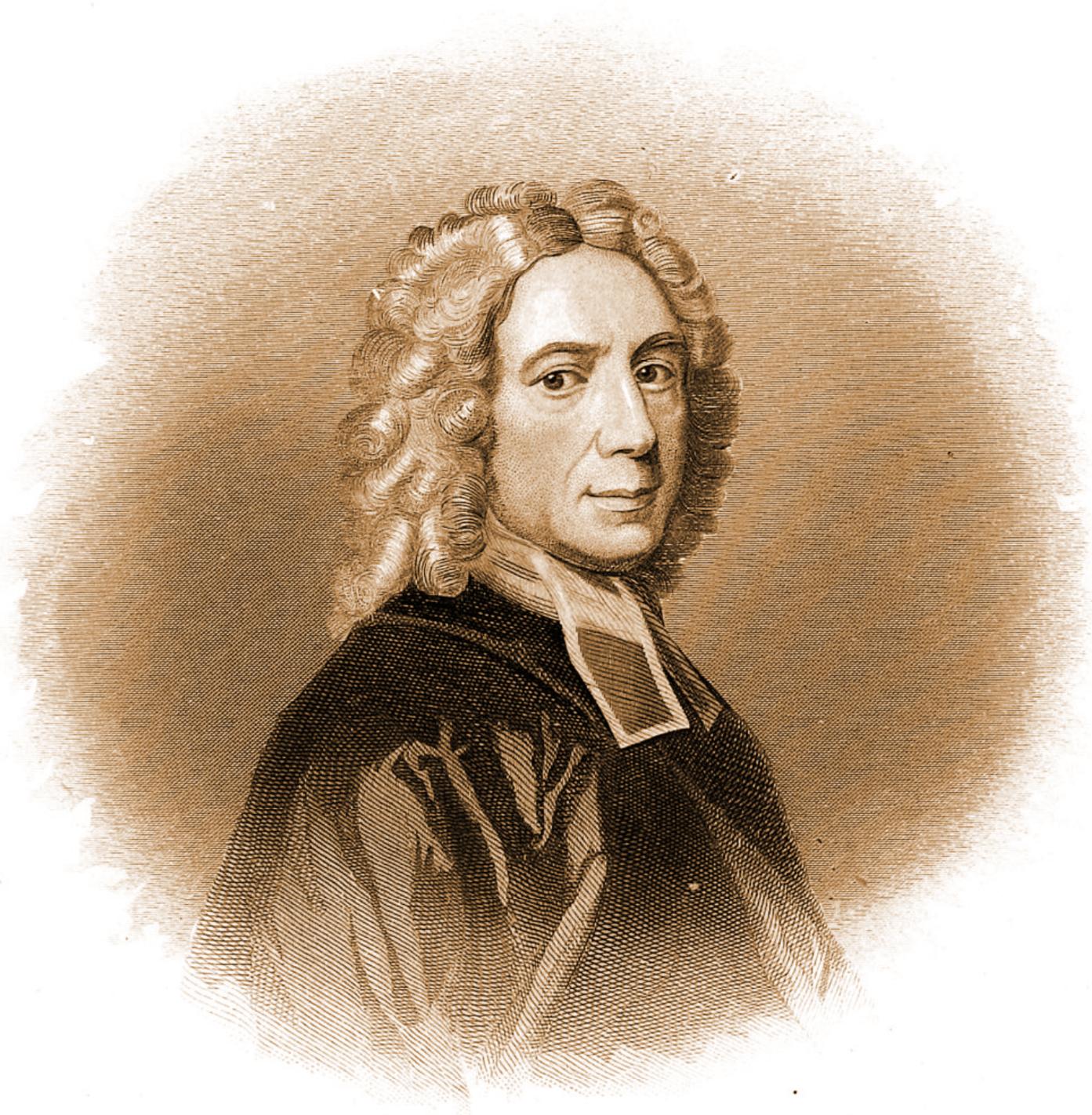


**ISAAC WATTS
AND HIS FAMILY**



John Hamilton

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Cover: A portrait of Isaac Watts. Originally published in Edwin Long's
Illustrated History of Hymns and Their Authors (circa 1882).

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Isaac Watts and his Family

Introduction

A celebrity during his life and for more than a hundred years after his death, enough has been written about Dr Isaac Watts to fill a library. This literature describes and praises not only his life and massive contribution to English hymn-writing, but also his religious, educational and philosophical works. These writings are overwhelmingly by those of his own religious outlook. Some of them cover his early life in some detail, but none attempts to put him and his work in the context of his family and the Southampton he came from. The purpose of this brief account, therefore, is to place Isaac in the family, commercial and social environment of his time, and, while not ignoring the hugely important part religion played in the lives of both him and his closest relatives, to consider him and them as citizens of their time.

1. The Southampton Background

By the time Isaac was born in 1674 Southampton had suffered a long period of decline from its important position in medieval England's trade and economy. "By the end of the first quarter of the sixteenth century we find the town's people complaining of ill times... Trade was falling off and... the carracks (from Genoa) and galleys (from Venice) were not coming as they used to." There was a partial recovery from the 1550s, when "the town obtained a monopoly in the landing of sweet wines... and the settlement of foreign refugees in 1567 did something in the long run for trade" But twenty years later the town was classed with Bristol and other towns as "falling into decay" and it was unable to supply the two ships and a pinnace which the Government had demanded to help in fighting the Spanish Armada. (*Victoria County History of Hampshire vol:3: The Borough of Southampton*)

The general poverty of the town continued into the next century. The contraction of the town from its medieval prosperity is clearly shown in the maps. John Speed's map of 1611 shows a greatly diminished built-up area compared with the map based on the Terrier of 1454. "In 1619 the mayor with difficulty provided £150 out of £300 required towards the suppression of piracy." The town seemed to be surviving on the wine trade and smuggling. After the Great Fire of London in 1666 "the Corporation advertised the attractions of Southampton with its many good houses with cellars

and warehouses then standing vacant”, inviting London businessmen to set up in the town. Again in 1683, as it tried to persuade the Government to renew its charter, which gave it considerable powers of policing and taxation, the Corporation “pleaded utter poverty. ‘The late rebellion [Civil War] had robbed [them] of all public money; the plague had consumed their inhabitants; the Dutchmen had had spoiled them of nearly all their ships [during the two Dutch Wars]; their looms were useless owing to the late Act of Prohibition.’” The town was clearly not thriving.

Only in the middle of the next century did its fortunes revive by establishing itself as “a fashionable watering-place,” featuring its spa and sea-bathing, balls and concerts to attract “retired military and naval gentlemen” and their families. In 1762 it was described as ‘one of the prettiest and healthiest towns in England, it is rather extensive and well-populated and possesses several fine houses’.
(Quoted by Tim Lambert: A History of Southampton)

Like every other English town at this time except for London, the population of Southampton was tiny by today’s standards, little more than a large village today. A survey in 1596 showed it had a population of 4,200. But the return of the plague in 1666 killed more than 1,000 people in the town, perhaps as many as 1,600. So the population had fallen by the time young Isaac was born and it was no longer in the top couple of dozen English towns, as it had been for much of the Middle Ages. In such a small place it is not surprising to find little evidence of economic activity.

Almost certainly the port, though of greatly diminished importance nationally from its medieval prominence, remained the key to the town’s economy. Imports probably consisted mainly of wine from France, but what exports were made up of is difficult to discover - perhaps that old basic, English wool. Coastal traffic also brought in heavy goods like coal and timber for onwards transport into the surrounding hinterland. To aid this construction of the Itchen Navigation, part river, part canal, was started in 1665. It was designed to improve the connection with Winchester just ten miles away, but it was not finished until 1710. The town was also home to some textile manufacturing, and doubtless the town’s tradesmen served the surrounding countryside as well as the townsfolk.

The “foreign refugees” who settled in Southampton were early Protestants, who had come in 1560s and 1570s. The first group were Walloons from the French-speaking part of what is now Belgium, then controlled by Spain, who were fleeing the Spanish Inquisition. The second group were from France itself after the St Bartholemew’s Day massacre (this was well before the main influx of French Huguenots into England in 1686 following Louis XIV’s revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which had allowed Protestant worship in France). They consisted mainly of skilled craftsmen with their own businesses as well as professional people. They were Calvinists in religion and established their own church in Southampton, licensed by Queen Elizabeth, as early

as 1567. The first church register lists a congregation of nearly 60, which is likely to be the full number of those based in the town at the time.

As a practical and useful addition to the Southampton merchant class at a time when wool and weaving were its dominant business, these refugees brought the technique for making Hamtun serge with them and employed many wool-combers and weavers. When this was seen to put local wool workers out of business they were regulated and began to take on English apprentices. *(Dr Cheryl Butler: Huguenot Immigrants in Southampton. Lecture, Lymington and District Historical Society November 2017.)*

As regards the state of religion in late seventeenth century England was internationally unusual. While most states, Catholic, Protestant, Moslem, were striving to ensure that Church and State were one, in England this was the aim only of the ruling classes. The crown and many citizens strove to ensure that a wide variety of religious beliefs and observances was allowed. As one historian has put it:

The English reformation settlements (of the Tudor monarchs) and the restoration of the crown and the episcopacy in 1660 assumed an identity between church and state: worshippers gathered in their parish church as the community gathered before God. However the Church's nature in terms of theology, ministry and worship was disputed. Was it radically Reformed or merely a reformed part of the Catholic Church? From the 1560s stricter Reformers and Catholics struggled to impose their interpretation and to exclude other views. *(Bill Jacob. Review of Ralph Stevens: Protestant Pluralism: The reception of the Toleration Act 1689-1720. The Chapels Society Newsletter 77, May 2021.)*

The conflict that this brought about culminated in the next century in the Civil War, followed by the restoration of the Monarchy. But this did not solve the problem. Too many did not wish to be part of the Church of England. They wanted control of their own religious governance and observance. By putting an end to the legal harassment of non-Anglicans and allowing them to worship as they wished, the Toleration Act of 1689 was a key moment in English history. It established a state and a society where religious issues and conflicts were largely put to one side. As an unexpected side-effect of this it allowed the British to get on with the work of transforming the world from largely agriculture-based small states ruled by dictatorial rulers to mainly larger industry-based nation states ruled by elected representatives.

It was into this final period of often violent religious dispute that Isaac Watts was born and grew to manhood.

2. The Watts Grandparents

Apart from a few basic family details little is known about Isaac's grandfather Thomas Watts. His date and place of birth are not known, but his marriage to Miriam Culverdon on 21st October 1647 at the parish church in Millbrook just outside Southampton is recorded. Their only known child was christened Isaac. He was probably born in 1651, that is four years after the marriage. This suggests either that Miriam and Thomas had difficulty getting children, or that there were other children we know nothing of. This latter is a possibility because of much later claims of descent from the family of the hymn-writer, which are examined below.

Thomas went to sea, which led to the two incidents of his life of which a record survives. His naval service took him to the East. Whether this was the "East Indies" or India, the reports of the incident in grandson Isaac's biographies disagree. This was at a time when French, Dutch and Portuguese merchants were competing with the British in trading and building relationships both with the subcontinent and with what we now call the Far East. This was of course long before the British began to govern India. Wherever it occurred, the story of the first incident according to a later family account is that Thomas was attacked by a tiger. He sought refuge in a river, but the animal pursued him there. Forced to face the beast, he managed to push its head under the water, causing it to drown. (*Milner: Life of Isaac Watts p.4*)

Thomas was well-educated, which indicates he came from a prosperous family. A note from grandson Isaac reads: "My grandfather Mr Thomas Watts had such acquaintance with the mathematics, painting, music and poesy etc as gave him considerable esteem among his contemporaries. He was commander of a ship of war 1656 and by blowing up of the ship in the Dutch war was drowned in his youth."

This account of his death is much quoted in biographies of Isaac, but none question its accuracy. Isaac gives the date as 1656, but the first Dutch War ended in April 1654 and the second war did not begin until 1665. Since Isaac never knew his grandfather, being born several years after his death, this is not a personal recollection. He must have been told about it by a family member, probably his father or his grandmother. It is possible that Thomas was given command of the ship in 1656 and died some years later in the Second Dutch war. But Isaac notes that Thomas died "in his youth," which, if he married in his 20s in 1647, would suggest he was born in the mid-1620s and died no later than the 1650s. So it seems the date is wrong. No independent record of the incident has been found.

Even less is known of Isaac's grandmother Miriam. She survived Thomas for many years. According to Thomas Milner, Watts's most important biographer, "she took a prominent part in

Isaac's early education." Details of this are not forthcoming, but to do this she must have been educated too, not common among women then. She lived until July 13 1693, when she is likely to have been about 70 years old. Her death was not easy. After she died, young Isaac wrote an ode about her. The first verse runs:

*I know the kindred mind. 'Tis she, 'tis she;
Among the heavenly forms I see,
The kindred mind from fleshly bondage free;
O how unlike the thing was lately seen
Groaning and panting on the bed,
With ghastly air, and languish'd head,
Life on this side, there the dead,
While the delaying flesh lay shivering between!*
(Milner p31)

3. Father Isaac Watts senior

Isaac senior is likely to have been born in 1651. No records of his birth or christening survive, but his age at death in February 1737 is given as 85, though such ages can prove to be inaccurate. Biographies of his son Isaac agree that like his father he too was well-educated. As this would have cost money and he was still a very young child when his father died, the family must have been well off, as Milner recognised. But as we have seen, nothing is known of the source of this wealth except that his father commanded a naval vessel, but died young, as described above.

Biographies of Isaac junior wrongly describe his father as a schoolmaster first and a "clothier" later (Samuel Johnson claims he was a shoemaker). But nowhere in official records is Isaac senior described as a schoolmaster. That he did run a school is correct, as described below. The biographies, however, take their information of him as a clothier well into his career. They get it from the records of his church, the Above Bar Congregational Church, in 1700 and again in 1709. Isaac is also described as a clothier in the records of the Thorner Charity, in which he was a long-standing trustee, in both 1692 and 1709. The key information, however, is to be found in the Southampton Apprenticeship Registers. These already describe him as such in 1672/3, and the following entry gives a more detailed indication of what this actually meant:

PENN Thomas son of Henry Penn of Broad Chalk, Wilts yeoman to Isaac Watts clothier for 7 years from 2 Feb 1672/3 to learn the art of serge-weaving in broad and narrow loom & wool-combing. Apprentice to have at the end 4 shirts, 4 bands, 4 handkerchiefs & two

sufficient suits of woollen apparel. Enrolled 24 Feb 1672/3. (*Southampton Record Series 1: A Calendar of Southampton Apprenticeship Registers 1609-1740 Entry 537.*)

The register also lists several other serge-weaver apprentices starting the same year. The company of serge makers, serge weavers and wool combers, dissolved earlier in the century, had been reformed in the town in 1657, just fifteen years before Isaac set up his business. Thus from the start of his career Isaac was a textile manufacturer making serge cloth. As he was only twenty-one years old and just of full age when he took on Thomas Penn as an apprentice, he must have been in the process of setting up in business on his own account. Since Isaac's father was a naval officer, either the family friends the Brackstones or the Taunton family, Isaac's future in-laws, seem the most likely source of his introduction to this business. These two families were at the top of Southampton's "rich list".

Isaac is unlikely to have been apprenticed to Richard Taunton, his future father-in-law, however, since Richard was a draper by trade, and probably not into manufacturing cloth. So from the age of fourteen, the normal age for starting as an apprentice, Isaac would have been apprenticed to Jonathan Brackstone, whose business was as a "clothier". On completing his apprenticeship, he must have set up in business on his own account, doubtless with financial assistance from his family. As mentioned, the manufacture of serge cloth had been introduced to the town (and indeed to England) by 16th century Protestant refugees from Walloon. They were noted for their skills in producing this distinctive high quality twill fabric, characterised by its diagonal pattern. (*Tim Lambert: A History of Southampton*)

It was thus as a "clothier" then that Isaac made his living and how he described himself. But, as we have seen, ten years later the town was complaining that "the Prohibition Act" had made their "looms useless." This Act has not been identified for certain, but it may be the Burying in Woolen Act of 1678. This required the use of English wool for shrouds to wrap the dead at burial, prohibiting the use of imported cloths. On the face of it this would not seem to stop the manufacture of serge cloth. But perhaps serge was classed as foreign, even though the Act was passed to support English textile manufacture. How permanent was the closing down of Southampton's looms is also not clear. As we have seen by 1692 Isaac is again described as a clothier. But the term had a spread of meanings. He could again have been manufacturing serge or other fabrics by this time, or he may have had a wholesale and/or importing business in textiles generally. Whichever it was, he flourished.

Like the Tauntons and the Blackstones, Isaac was a member of Southampton's merchant class. Today shopkeepers may not seem likely to dominate local politics and society in England's towns. But they had done so for centuries. Through the medieval guilds they controlled business activity

locally, deciding who was allowed to “set up shop” and what they could make and sell. These local very restrictive monopolies ensured there was little real competition between businesses, which was their purpose. These merchants were not shopkeepers as we would envisage them. They sold the goods they made in their workshops, as well as trading in imported goods and exports. They not only set the rules for trading and manufacturing: they also operated the legal system locally, the town’s mayor acting as chief magistrate. They comprised virtually the whole of the country’s middle class; for there were few professionals as we know them. They greatly outnumbered the town’s doctors, lawyers and ministers of religion, while there were no accountants, architects, engineers, civil servants and so on at all. Virtually all of them would have done a seven year apprenticeship acquiring the necessary skill and knowledge of their particular trade, starting at the age of fourteen. Having completed this, they were allowed to have their own business, be a “master” and have one or more apprentices themselves.

Having set himself up in business, Isaac became acceptable as a son-in-law. He quickly married Sarah Taunton at Millbrook, like his parents, on 11th February 1673. She was the daughter of a prominent Southampton businessman (we look at her family below). Sarah bore Isaac nine children, four boys followed by five girls. Isaac junior was the first, born in July 1674, then Richard in 1676, Enoch in 1678, Thomas in 1680, and then the girls - Sarah born in 1681, Mary in 1684 (she died in 1685), followed by another Mary in 1686, Elizabeth in 1689 (she died aged 2) and finally Martha in 1690. All the children were born in Southampton.

William Wordsworth believed that “the child is father to the man”. But Isaac senior was certainly father to his son, having a massive influence on almost every aspect of his life. He was devoutly religious and a committed non-conformist. He was an enthusiastic writer of both prose and poetry. He was also a keen educationalist, founding his own school. All this he passed on to his son. His enthusiasm for education may have arisen because his own was almost certainly curtailed. Nothing is known of it directly, but he knew enough Latin to start young Isaac at it. Latin was still the international language for all serious work whether philosophical, medical, scientific and more (Isaac Newton wrote his world changing *Principia* in Latin around this time). Anyone who wanted to study more widely needed to know it. But since he probably began an apprenticeship at the age of fourteen, his formal education must have been limited. Doubtless he continued his studies on his own initiative. As we have no knowledge of his parents’ religious leanings except that they were married in a parish (Anglican) church, it is presumably during his teenage years as an apprentice that Isaac turned to an Independent sect for his religious inspiration. Perhaps the Tauntons were instrumental in this.

In the turbulent times before and during the “Commonwealth” period, when Oliver Cromwell governed, many religious groups emerged. But the Church of England survived, and with the

return of Charles II as king, the new ruling elites were determined it should dominate, or preferably be the only approved religion. Charles, however, was eager to curry support as widely as possible: among other reasons, he was in hock to the Catholic Louis XIV of France. His Declaration of Indulgence in 1672 removed penal sanctions from both Dissenters, as non-Anglican Protestants were known, and Roman Catholics (known as Papists). But the wholly Church of England Parliament insisted on the withdrawal of the Declaration, and began to fine and imprison leading non-conformists. The precise charges brought against Isaac senior leading to his imprisonment in 1674 are not known. This was soon after his marriage the previous autumn, and with his wife pregnant. He was still very young, no more than twenty two years old, but strong in his beliefs, even to the extent of seeing his wife and new-born baby suffer.

The Independents (later known as Congregationalists), to which Isaac belonged, denied the possibility of a national church. They identified “the Church” as gatherings of the godly from the local community (for only the godly would be “saved”), which choose their own ministers. Independents “were composed largely of respectable middle-class persons”. They were often in business on their own account or the better-off yeomen farmers, who wished to control their own religious lives, not be subject to the Crown or the local gentry. “With the Presbyterians they constituted the conservative, dignified and strongly Calvinistic element of Protestant dissent. The group in Southampton with which the Watts family were connected was typical of the Independents at large.” (*Sotonopedia.wikidot.com*)

At first Isaac was part of a group led by Giles Say, who had Huguenot ancestry. After ejection for Dissenting views from the church in Southampton where he was vicar, Say obtained royal permission in 1672 to “be a teacher of his congregation” in his home in the town, in effect hold Independent services there. This quickly came to an end with the withdrawal of the Charles’s Declaration, leading to his and Isaac’s imprisonment. On release not surprisingly they seem to have kept very quiet about their religious activities, as nothing more is heard about them for some ten years. Then Isaac was imprisoned again in another drive by central government to put down non-Anglican religious worship. This time the punishment was more severe. In 1683, as his son Isaac noted later in his *Memorable Affairs of my Life*: “My father persecuted and imprisoned for nonconformity 6 months. After that forced to leave his family and live privately in London 2 years.” It is not clear whether on either occasion Isaac was fined as well as imprisoned, but quite possibly he was. Even if not fined, Milner believes “it is probable that the legal proceedings in which he was involved materially injured his private fortune.... This was a common case with Dissenters.... often they had to suffer ‘the spoiling of their goods’ to meet the expensive suits instituted against them in the civil and ecclesiastical courts.”

Soon after his return from London Isaac became involved with another Independent group. This was led by Nathaniel Robinson, earlier a close friend of Oliver Cromwell – he mediated for his son Richard on his marriage to a Southampton woman. A popular preacher, Robinson had been ejected as rector of one of the town's leading Anglican churches for his nonconformist views. In August 1688 his group of independents joined with one from Romsey, just a few miles to the north, to set up a “distinct and separate church.” Isaac leased land to the group for the new church, known as the Above Bar Congregational Church. “Above Bar” showed that it was just outside the town limits.

Isaac was secretary to the new group and as such “he entered his son Isaac's name as the first in the baptismal register” (even though the young Isaac was fourteen years old at this time). Isaac senior “was also elected Deacon and appointed one of the original trustees of Thorner's Charity.” A deacon was one of the ruling elders of an independent church. Thorner's Charity, which still exists, was set up at this time to provide almshouses for deserving widows. These positions show he was a leading and much respected figure in his community. (*Sotonopedia.wikidot.com*)

According to one of his son's early biographers Thomas Gibbon, who had consulted Isaac's daughter Sarah, Isaac ran a flourishing boarding school, to which gentlemen's sons came from as far away as America and the West Indies. The school's existence is confirmed by local tax assessments for the years 1695/6, which list no fewer than 29 boys as boarders living in the Watts' home. It is possible Isaac took to schoolmastering temporarily because of financial problems with his business. These could have arisen either because his imprisonment and/or fines for non-conformity or because of the closure of the towns' looms due to the “Prohibition Act” mentioned above. But it is more likely that he set up and ran the school rather than spending his time teaching in it. No official record describes him as a schoolmaster or teacher. He was undoubtedly keen on education. That many of the pupils came from across the Atlantic, however, is unlikely. To send a child to Britain from the New World would have been hugely expensive. But the school shows what an energetic and enterprising man Isaac was.

He was certainly a great believer in the written word. “In the beginning was the word” became a key text for Protestants generally in their rejection of the doctrines and rituals that the Roman Catholic Church had added over the centuries to the text of the Bible. For Protestants and especially for those of what one might call a more left-wing persuasion, the Bible was the sole source of Christian truth: “The word was with God and the word was God”, as St John's gospel put it in the King James' version.

True to his Puritan worship of the Word of God, Isaac was the author of a number of poems and hymns, some of which were printed in error in his son Isaac's collections. His collection of books

was substantial enough to be worth being bequeathed separately in his will. His long letter to his children from “exile” in London survives, as does his lengthy will, both indicating the high quality of his writing.

One of his poems was composed shortly before his death at the age of eighty five. Entitled *The Soul's Desire of Remove*, the first two verses run:

*Long have I sojourn'd in this weary land,
Where sins and sorrows every where abound:
Soul-threat'ning dangers see how thick they stand!
Snares and temptations compass me around:*

*'Tis an unhealthy clime, where vapours rise,
Whose pestilential influences shed
Malignant fumes beneath the gloomy skies,
Which wound the heart, and stupify the head.*

One is struck by how miserable is his view of life. The second verse reads as his reaction to the terrible weather which he experienced throughout his life, this being the climax of the so-called Little Ice Age, when the Thames in London famously froze. But his gloomy view of the world is at odds with his actual life, which after his early problems seems to have been a successful and prosperous one. It is true he lost two of his nine children early, but this was normal for the times, while he and his wife Sarah survived the plague which must have killed at least a quarter of the Southampton's inhabitants.

En passant one wonders if John Keats was aware of this poem. The first line of his *On first looking into Chapman's Homer* seems to copy the structure of Isaac's: *Much have I travelled in the realms of gold*. Keats' feeling of joyous, almost ecstatic, discovery, however, is of course wholly different from Isaac's misery. Isaac on the other hand found joy in contemplating heaven, as the second part of his poem describes:

*“Oh! had I but some generous seraph's wing,
There's nothing should prevail to keep me here;
But with the morning lark I'd mount and sing,
Till I had left earth's gloomy atmosphere.*

*My soul directly rising upward still,
Till I should reach the glorious courts above,*

*Where endless pleasure my desires shall fill,
And solac'd be with my dear Jesu's love."*

He had earlier used his poems to set out his theology. As Milner puts it "The principles of the nonconformist are prominently developed" in his *On Ceremonies*. It points to the paramount place which the words of the Bible held for these groups of Christians. The poem begins:

*Why do our churchmen with such zeal contend
For what the scriptures nowhere recommend?
Those ceremonies, which they doat upon,
Were unto Christians heretofore unknown.
In ancient times God's worship did accord,
Not with traditions, but with written word;
Himself has taught us how he'll be adore'd.*

Isaac's vision of the Christian life is set out more fully in a long letter he wrote to his children while exiled in London in the 1680s. Well over two thousand words long, it is addressed primarily to his son Isaac, acknowledging that some of his other children were still too young to understand it. Isaac comes over as a very loving, gentle father, deeply concerned for his family during his enforced absence. It was written at a time when he was worried that he would never be able to see them again: "Although I am not altogether without hopes of seeing you again, yet I am nowise certain of it." "You have a father that loves you." he wrote. "though I cannot speak to you, yet I pray for you, and I hope that my God will hear me, and in due time bring me to live again amongst you." He was greatly missing his family and longing to be with them once more. His son Isaac reinforces this impression of a loving and very involved father: "Isaac had many sweet recollections of the loving care of both parents – of 'the wise counsels and impassioned advices which came daily dropping' from his father's lips." (*Milner:Life of Isaac Watts*)

But the letter is dominated by his wish for his children to be good, practising Christians according to his own religious beliefs.. "Read the holy scriptures ... get your heart to delight in them." he tells them. Though they did not yet know how to pray properly, "be not afraid nor ashamed to try.... Remember God is your Creator.. and as such, you are bound to worship him. [But] it must be in the right manner.... worshipping idols, images, pictures, as heathens do, or crucifixes and consecrated bread as papists do" is idolatry. They must avoid "popish doctrines [such as] praying to the Virgin Mary or any other saints... Their doctrine of purgatory is also abominable.... Their doctrine that the pope can forgive sins is a lie."

Though writing to his children, his concern for his wife is particularly striking: “Be dutiful and obedient to all your superiors,” Isaac told his children: “to your grandfather and both grandmothers and all other relations and friends that are over you, but in an especial manner to your mother to whose care and government God has wholly committed you in my absence... Consider, she is left alone to bear all the burden of bringing you up; and is, as it were, a widow. Her time is filled up with many cares, and therefore do not grieve her by any rebellious or disobedient ways, but be willing to learn of her and be ruled by her.” The clarity and simplicity of his language is remarkable. He must have taken special care to make his letter easy to read and understand by his young family. No wonder his son Isaac had such an ability with words!

For all his gloomy view of the world, the evidence indicates that Isaac had made a material success of it. The local tax assessments show he was one of the richest men in Southampton. Since the town was small and suffering from a number of commercial setbacks which had effected its prosperity, this does not mean Isaac was really rich. Nevertheless the family was certainly comfortably off. In February 1677/8 the minutes of the Borough council listed those due to pay “rates for the water pipes and conduits.” Only ten names are listed in five groups of two. Isaac and his pairing paid the second highest amount. In the 1711 “Assessment of rents for houses for land tax” in the parishes of St Michael and St John Isaac and Jonathan Brackstone paid nine shillings each. Only two men paid more: most paid one or two shillings.

The picture was much the same in 1715. These sums seem to be for houses that were let or leased out. As regards “personal estates” on these dates Isaac’s was valued at fifty shillings, on which he paid three shillings tax. Only three others were given higher valuations including Jonathan Brackstone and Richard Taunton, while most were at twenty five shillings. In the 1711 valuation Isaac is listed as an assessor, another indication of his status in the town. Later assessments (1719–31) give the same “rental” values, but the “personal” valuations are halved for reasons unknown. But Isaac kept his place in what we might term “the rich list” of the town.

Isaac’s will confirms his material well-being. It details his property at the end of his life. His home was “my Dwelling House called Little St. Dennis situate in the Parish of St. Michael in the Town of Southampton”, to which was attached a malthouse and garden. But according to the town’s website “The family home was at Hampton Court, a large house on the east side of French Street (now destroyed). Hampton Court is often cited as Isaac junior’s birthplace, but it is more likely that he was born in Above Bar Street, the family moving to the French Street house soon after his birth.”. (*sotonopedia.wiki.com*)

The family must have moved to Little St Dennis later in life. But Isaac had several other properties too. He leased a house in Southampton from Queen’s College of Oxford University, which came

with a stable and an orchard, He also owned a field known as St Bernard's Field, and three houses, one with stables, in Gosport, some 15 miles down the coast from Southampton, as well as some copyhold land (an old form of tenure close to freehold) in Pochwood – usually known as Portswood – on the edge of Southampton. He had a horse and carriage and left monetary legacies of several hundred pounds. Not surprisingly he called himself a “gentleman” later in life.

There is no mention in his will of property relating any manufacturing activity – unless the malthouse was a commercial venture supplying malt for local beer-making – but as he was in his 80s, he must have sold off his “clothier” business. The designation “gentleman” reinforces the impression he had retired. His will, however, provides evidence of other business activity he had been involved in. It refers to “my tenement... situate in South Street of Gosport now in the occupation of Mrs King formerly mortgaged to me by John Brissett deceased and for non-payment of principal and interest was by me taken up divers years past.” He had lent Brissett money to buy this property, but as the money had not been paid as agreed, Isaac took possession. With banks in their infancy or non-existent, lending money privately had been the norm for centuries, with property the only form of surety. So this was a typical form of investment for those with spare cash.

The will shows every sign of being produced by an old man. It is long and detailed, almost pedantic. It is repetitious, especially concerning Enoch's Bond, and contains changes of mind over who gets what and when. It not only lists his properties but also gives hints of family tensions. His wife Sarah had recently died, so his “dwelling house” was left instead to his son Enoch, but with a major condition. Enoch had lent his father £1,200, a very large sum of money in those days. Isaac was to pay back £200 within a year of his wife Sarah's death and then another £400 within three years. This would only cover half the loan even with no interest due. The whole matter is somewhat strange as this “bond or obligation” seems to have been set up when Isaac was already old. The will provides no explanation for the loan or its conditions. So we are none the wiser on the circumstances which led to it.

What we do know is that Isaac was very keen for Enoch to give up his right to any outstanding part of the loan if he wanted the “dwelling house”. He goes into the detail of this both early in his will and again towards the end. It was clearly important to him. But unless the malthouse was a valuable business or the house was very grand, which seems unlikely, he appears to be asking Enoch to be making a huge financial sacrifice. He also made Enoch one of his two executors, but again only on condition he gave up the loan. It is all rather strange and it is not known whether Enoch accepted the conditions or not. Whatever the background to this, Enoch was left the house probably because he was the only son left in Southampton. The two elder brothers had moved away and Thomas had died, as we shall see.

If Enoch failed to annul the bond as his father demanded, then the house was to go to Isaac's son-in-law Joseph Brackstone, husband of Isaac's daughter Sarah. But he was to sell it, to raise the money to pay for Isaac's other legacies. This was not needed if Enoch agreed to cancel his loan. The Brackstone family were also left most of Isaac's other properties too: these were all investments, let out to tenants. They were also left large monetary legacies. £300 was left to his son Isaac, but only £4 to the poor and £5 to the local minister. The very small amount to the poor is much in line with what other testators had given ever since the coming of Protestantism. One might have expected more from someone so religious as him. But we do not know what sums he had given to charity during his lifetime.

Favouring the Brackstones arose from several causes. They comprised the majority of Isaac's grandchildren. Isaac junior had no family, and though little is known of his finances, his father must have felt he had sufficient for his wants. Richard, the second son, had been set up as a doctor by his father and was acknowledged to be well off. Enoch appears to have been prosperous too and childless. The youngest son Thomas had died and his wife Mary may have already moved back "home" to Chichester, where she came from. Their married daughter Mary and young son Thomas were left small amounts. Nevertheless the feeling that his daughter Sarah and her family were Isaac's favourites is difficult to avoid.

Isaac died in Southampton and was buried on 10th February 1737.

4. Mother Sarah and the Taunton grandparents

Isaac senior's wife Sarah was a Taunton - the spelling "Tanton" was often used too. Her father, Alderman Richard Taunton, was an "an affluent and distinguished citizen of Southampton". The family had been driven from France by the St Bartholemew's Day massacre in 1572, having probably fled from Brittany. They must have joined Walloon refugees in worshipping at St Julien's church in the town, set up with its Calvinistic ritual with permission from Queen Elizabeth. This continued to function through the religious upheavals of the seventeenth century and on for another hundred years. Richard and his family must have remained faithful to this church, with the result that no records of the basic family events – births, deaths and marriages – have been found. From the 1680s however, they made use of their local parish church Southampton Holy Rhood for burials (the ruins of this church are now known as Holyrood: see note with the Taunton genealogy below). Perhaps Richard also attended services there, an action designed to allow him to become a member of the town council, which was confined to Anglicans. At all events he was made an alderman, a senior member of the council.

Perhaps it was this that enabled him to escape the imprisonment that Isaac suffered, since there is no mention of this in his grandson Isaac's biographies. It could also be that Huguenot worshippers were excepted from the general prosecution of Dissenters so long as they behaved themselves. Because of the lack of records, Richard's date of birth and the place and date of his marriage are unknown. Likewise the birthplace and even name of his wife as well as details of their children have not been traced. Apart from Sarah, however, they certainly had a son Richard.

Richard senior was a draper and maltster. A maltster turned barley into malt, an essential ingredient in beer making. This was done everywhere, and much of it was "small beer", a low-alcohol drink, which was widely drunk even by children, as it was considered nutritious and tasted better than water.

Richard's other business was as a draper, that is a seller of cloth. Many terms have been used over the years to describe those who made their business in textiles and the goods made from them. Apart from drapers there were clothiers like Isaac Watts, mercers, merchant tailors, haberdashers, not to mention simple tailors, hatters and glovers like William Shakespeare's father. It is difficult to be precise over the difference between all these activities as they seem to have overlapped considerably. But clothiers were involved in the manufacture and selling of cloth mainly for clothing, while drapers largely dealt in fabrics for household goods such as curtains and bed linen – four-poster beds were very popular at this time and were hung all the way round, doubtless for both privacy and warmth.

Richard was a prominent figure in Southampton. He died in 1697 and was buried in Holy Rhood church in Southampton on 12th June. He made his son Richard and Isaac senior the executors of his will, showing how close the families were. His wife survived him by three years, dying on 30th March 1700, as we know from a note her grandson Isaac made; "Grandmo' Tanto' dyed".

Son Richard took over the malting business and the family remained prominent in Southampton, his son, also Richard, being mayor in 1734/5 and again in 1743/4. This third Richard died a wealthy man, but childless. By his will in 1752 he left further bequests to the many relatives he had already given £500 to, including Enoch Watts, Thomas Watts' son Thomas, James Brackstone and other Watts cousins. He also left money to set up a school in the town for the training of boys for the seafaring life. Boys were often sent away to sea as young as fourteen or even less. The school bearing his name still exists, though now as a sixth form college.

Information on Sarah's birth has not been found, but probably she was much the same age as her husband Isaac senior. How many siblings she had and where she came in the family is also not known, but she certainly had a brother called Richard after his father, as mentioned. The first we

hear of her is her marriage to Isaac in February 1673 at Millbrook, where his parents had married. This was likely to be where Isaac's widowed mother lived, and perhaps where Isaac had moved back to after finishing his apprenticeship. Why they did not marry in her parents' place of worship, about which nothing has been found, is not known.

Their first child Isaac junior arrived eighteen months later and within weeks his father was imprisoned. This must have come as a terrible shock to Sarah and there is no doubt she found the period of his imprisonment hugely stressful. All the biographies quote the story that she sat outside the prison weeping while she suckled young Isaac. She was lucky to have both her parents close by to support her, as well as her mother-in-law. But Isaac junior grew up to be a notably small man. Could this have been the result of lack of sufficient nourishment in his early months, his mother being unable to feed him properly because of stress?

Once father Isaac was out of prison, they set about establishing a large family. As noted above, Sarah had a further eight children over the next fifteen years. This suggests she was a strong, fit and healthy woman. She must have felt the loss of two of their five daughters who died in infancy, but the fact that only two of them died so young and seven reached adulthood shows that this was overall a prosperous and thus healthy and well-fed family. Typically at this time one would not expect so many children to survive so long.

Other evidence of the family's affluence comes largely from Isaac's will. Apart from the family home Little St Dennis, Isaac owned several properties, both houses and land, as described above. At home there were "three best beds", which would have been four-posters with all the necessary curtains and other hangings. There was silver plate and silver spoons, and fine china. He had a horse and chaise (a light two-seater carriage) with stables as well as another stable in Gosport. Son Richard had been set up as a doctor expensively and legacies worth hundreds of pounds were made to grandchildren. Moreover the Watts employed several live-in servants: tax assessments of 1695 and 1696 list three female servants. This was by no means a poor family and Sarah must have enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle. But this does not mean she sat back like a lady and was waited on. She would certainly have been kept very busy bearing and bringing up the children and managing the household. (*Records of Southampton Corporation: SC14/2/69 & 74a Assessment St Lawrence parish 1695 & 1696.*)

Sarah was a loving and caring mother, overseeing a warm and happy home, full not only of her own children but of the other schoolboys. This is in marked contrast to the expected Puritan home ethos, where "spare the rod and spoil the child" seems to have been the guiding doctrine for bringing up children. Her son Isaac according to one biographer "had many sweet recollections of

the loving care of both parents: of the tender admonitions that his mother gave him ‘rising and going to rest, while she softened every word with a tear of love.’”

She also involved herself in the children’s early education. She “used to spend some hours daily in the nursery, and taught the young teachers to recite many a pretty passage out of the Bible, before they were capable of reading it themselves.” After school hours were over she got the boys to write some lines of verse, giving them a farthing as encouragement. This loving care for the children was doubtless a useful antidote to the basic Puritan beliefs that human beings are fundamentally wicked and life on this earth a misery. The opening line of a poem young Isaac wrote when some seven or eight years old reads: *I am a vile polluted lump of earth*. The other side of this coin was the urge, the demand even, for self-improvement, which would be acceptable to God. “I am horrible, so I must strive to be better whatever stands in my way” was the driving force of this philosophy of life.

Although Sarah bore nine children, only three of them produced grandchildren for her and Isaac: Richard, Thomas and her eldest daughter Sarah. Richard moved away from Southampton, but Sarah and Thomas stayed in the town. Thomas died young at the age of forty three however, and his wife took his children back to her parents’ home in Chichester. His mother Sarah also had the sadness of witnessing the death of a third daughter, the second Mary, at the age of only twenty nine. Sarah herself, however, like her husband enjoyed an unusually long life. She died on 23rd July 1732, some four years before her husband. She was close to eighty years old and had been married for nearly sixty years, which was very unusual for the time.

5. Dr Isaac Watts

The great hymnwriter’s life is covered in detail in the many biographies of him. His writings are also fully examined and explained in these and the other numerous publications on his theology, philosophy, and educational ideas as well as his hymns and poetry. Thus only an outline of his life and works is needed here. Born on 17th July 1674, he suffered from poor health, both physical and mental, much of his life, and he grew up to be only a small man, just five foot tall and with a large head. Perhaps, as mentioned above, the circumstances of his early months with his father in prison and his mother under great stress because of this, were to blame for this at least in part. Whatever the cause, this lack of good health did not affect his intellectual abilities and he showed prodigious intelligence from an early age.

For he was a precocious child. He began to learn Latin from his father at home at the age of four, was sent to the local Grammar School at six, started on Greek at nine, French at ten and Hebrew at thirteen. For clever boys at this time the only unusual thing about this was the study of French,

learnt no doubt because of his mother's Huguenot connections. Both his parents were enthusiastic about education, and he clearly enjoyed his schooling, becoming very close to the master of the Grammar School, although he was an Anglican. He must have been a joy to teach.

Encouraged by his mother he started writing verse young. She used "to make the boys at the school which the Watts ran at home write verses as a diversion." A farthing was offered for the best one. Isaac at the age of seven and presumably much younger than the other boys wrote:

*I write not for a farthing, but to try
How I your farthing writers can outvie.*

At this age his verses were so mature that his mother doubted that he had written some she had found. To prove they were his young Isaac produced an acrostic of his name Isaac Watts. The second verse shows not only his talent but also his (for modern day readers at least) astonishing immersion in the theology of his family:

*Wash me in thy blood, O Christ,
And grace divine impart.
Then search and try the corners of my heart,
That I in all things may be fit to do
Service to thee, and sing thy praises too.*

This vision of his future, being fit in all things to serve God and sing His praises, was with him from this very early age. By the time he finished school at the age of sixteen in 1690, Isaac was well-known among Southampton's leading inhabitants as a boy of great intelligence and they were keen enough for him to go to university that they were prepared to pay for this. Oxford and Cambridge, however, were only open to Anglicans, and Isaac was not prepared to give up his religion – or pretend to do so – for this opportunity. Instead he attended one of the first "Dissenting Academies" run by Thomas Rowe, a noted forward-thinking non-conformist teacher in north London. Isaac stayed here for four years, studying not only the classical and biblical languages as well as theology, but also philosophy, a specialism of Rowe's.

Returning home to Southampton, he began his hymn-writing at the age of twenty. At that time hymns were not sung in English churches, just metrical versions of the biblical Psalms. But these were "poetically crude and frequently ludicrous." (*Victor A Shepherd: victorshepherd.on.ca/Sermon/isaac.htm*). As brother Enoch said, they sent one to sleep! Returning from morning service one day, Isaac complained to his father about them. His father challenged him to do better. Isaac

immediately got to work and the local congregation sang his first hymn *Behold the Glories of the Lamb* at the evening service that day!

He remained at home for over two years, about which time little is known. He had been expected to train for the ministry, but instead seems to have lived more like a monk, spending time in “reading, meditation and prayer” according to Gibbon. He was never one to put himself forward or flaunt his intelligence and abilities. Some have seen this as timidity or shyness, and certainly he was always gentle and modest, virtues which would come to endear him to a wider set of admirers than just his fellow non-conformists. He composed a few hymns in this period, which were used by his local Southampton congregation.

Late in 1696 at the age of twenty two he moved back to London. The good impressions he had made during his time at Rowe’s school bore fruit. He was invited to become tutor to the son of Sir John Hartopp, a prominent member of London’s dissenting community. He stayed here five years, and during this time steadily developed a career as a non-conformist minister. He preached his first sermon in 1698, and from then on preached frequently in London and Southampton, being appointed assistant pastor at Mark Lane chapel in London the following year. In 1702 he succeeded to the pastorate here in spite of being seriously ill for months at a time. He thus found himself in charge of a distinguished congregation, which included the Hartopps, some of Oliver Cromwell’s descendants and most importantly Sir Thomas and Lady Abney. Sir Thomas, a prominent London businessman and one-time Lord Mayor, had a large house at Theobalds, and the Abneys invited Isaac to stay with them. The visit proved longer than expected. As he said later, he came for a night and stayed thirty years with the Abneys. In total he lived with them for thirty six years, from 1712 until his death in 1748, latterly at the Abneys’ other home in Stoke Newington.

Isaac had been invited to stay with them because of his poor health. Already in 1699 “my fever and weakness began” he notes in his *Memorable Affairs*. “I was detained from study and preaching for five months”. Again the next year he “paid another visit to Southampton of five weeks.” A year later he “went to Bath by the advice of physicians.” Tunbridge was another health resort he went to “for the waters”. “Stayed there 7 weeks with scarce any benefit... Thro’ some defect of my stomach, did not digest well.”

Illness incapacitated him for the four years up to 1703, due to “my great indisposition of body and weakness of head”. He was left frail, fragile and sickly, chronically ill. He suffered from psychological problems as well. Sometimes he could preach, but there were also periods when he was deranged and could not function at all. In the spring of 1710 “I bought a horse for my health” – presumably he had walked everywhere before then, this being a couple of years before he started living with the Abneys. In June “I rode to Southampton and back again, and according to the

account I kept, I rode above 800 miles from April 10 to September 28.” The next year he went to Tunbridge again for treatment, “being under a disorder of my stomach and frequent pains of the head.”

A more precise diagnosis of his medical condition does not seem to have been established. But his biographer Milner wrote that the “malady... returned with increased violence in the autumn of 1712, and so shattered his constitution and debilitated his frame, as wholly to suspend his public labours. He was seized with a violent fever, which induced a state of agitation” such that “he was unable to recognise the voices and features of his friends.” He seems to have suffered hallucinations: “his imagination was powerfully excited... fancies and chimeras haunted the couch of the invalid.”

He continued to be affected by both physical and mental problems for the rest of his life. In 1739 at the age of sixty five he suffered a stroke, and thought he was going to die, as his last letter to his father shows (see below). This left him able to speak but not to write, so he used a secretary. But he survived for another nine years. “In his later years for months his health was extremely precarious. At times he was so low that he might be said to gasp rather than live. He was still tortured by insomnia and could never sleep without opiates and at last even opiates were ineffective.” (*Thomas Wright: Life of Isaac Watts p.229*)

These weaknesses proved to be a major factor in his ministerial career. As early as 1703, just a year after taking over as pastor at Mark Lane chapel, he needed an assistant – the group soon moved, ending up in St Mary Axe in the City. Ten years later a co-pastor was appointed because of his “alarming illness”. Over the years he was often unable to function as a minister or preacher. He wanted to resign the post because of his health, but the congregation were most reluctant to let him go. He was well-known and well-loved.

Indeed “his recovery was a subject of public prayer with many metropolitan and country churches.” (*Milner: p608*) He had become famous. His “sermon on the ‘end of time... “has been translated into most European languages; and a large edition in modern Greek is now circulating in the Levant.” His growing fame was accompanied by a widespread admiration, not just among non-conformists, but among Anglicans too, and not only in Britain but across the Christian world. He was especially admired in the United States, a feeling which continues to this day. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, was also among his admirers, and in Presbyterian Scotland the universities of Edinburgh and Aberdeen awarded him honorary degrees in 1728, allowing him to add DD – Doctor of Divinity – after his name.

One of the early admirers of his *Horae Lyricae*, his first book of poetry published in 1706, was the attractive and vivacious Elizabeth Singer. She had much in common with Isaac. She was the same

age and a non-conformist; her father like Isaac's had been imprisoned for his religion and she wrote poetry. She fell in love with him on reading his poetry before even meeting him. But when she did so him, she saw "a minute, sallow-faced anatomy with hook nose, prominent cheek bones, heavy countenance, cadaverous complexion and small eyes." Put off by his appearance, she lost her feelings. But Isaac was hooked, and after some hesitation proposed. She turned him down with the words "Mr. Watts, I wish I could say I admire the casket as much as I admire the jewel." (*Thomas Wright: The Life of Isaac Watts p.74-6*) This seems to have been the extent of his love-life. He is not known to have fallen in love or proposed to any other woman.

His relationship with his parents seems always to have been warm and loving, though little direct evidence of his feelings for his mother remains. But his childhood home appears to have been a happy place. His father had an enormous influence on his life and not merely in his religious beliefs, as already described. This was rooted in a deep and lasting affection for his father. His last letter to Isaac senior survives, though sadly it seems that, as it is dated just two days before his burial, his father never saw it. It reads in part:

Honoured and dear Sir, 'tis now ten days since I heard from you and learned by my nephews you had been recovering from a very threatening illness. When you are in danger, I believe my sister is afraid to let me know the worst for fear of affecting me too much. But as I feel old age daily advancing on myself [he was sixty two at the time], I am endeavouring to be ready for my removal hence." He ends "The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let the garments of light be found upon us, and let us lift up our heads, for redemption draws nigh. Amen. I am, Sir, your affectionate obedient son, Isaac Watts. 8th February 1736/7.

Today this may now sound too respectful to be truly affectionate, but for its day there can be no doubt this is a very loving letter. It also shows how frail Isaac was at this time, almost as weak as his father. There is no suggestion that he should try to see him for one last meeting.

As for his siblings, Isaac's quarrels with his brother Richard are described below. Isaac's biographers give much space to these. But they happened very late in their lives, when they were both close to seventy years old and had only a few years to live. Before then they were in close contact – Richard and his family seem to have worshipped in Isaac's church. How warm the relationship was before the quarrels, however, is not clear, but there is some evidence it was strained. Isaac's relationships with his surviving sister Sarah and brother Enoch on the other hand appear to have been warm – the other three sisters had died young, as did brother Thomas in his early forties. It was to Enoch and Sarah that Isaac left most of his money in his will, with a few other minor bequests to younger relatives and friends. His library and household effects were left to Lady Abney and her daughter Elizabeth who had looked after him for so many years. (*Isaac*

Watts's Will 23 July 1747, with 3 codicils in 1747, probate 6 Dec 1748.) He died on 25th November 1748.

6. Isaac Watts' Legacy

"Few men have left behind such purity of character or such monuments of laborious piety." With these words Samuel Johnson summed up his assessment of Isaac's character and work in his *Lives of the Poets*. Johnson admired Isaac's almost saintly personality, though he realised he had his faults: "By his natural temper he was quick of resentment; but by his established and habitual practice, he was gentle, modest and inoffensive. His tenderness appeared in his attention to children and to the poor." (Once settled with the Abneys, Isaac gave a third of his modest earnings to the poor.) This admiration for his gentleness and piety and for his continual quest to bring Christians together rather than allow strongly held views on religion keep them apart appealed to both orthodox Anglicans and non-conformists alike.

As regards his hymns and other publications, if commentaries on his works are numerous, this is not only because of their interest and high intellectual quality, but also because of their quantity. His collected "Works", edited by Rev Dr David Jennings and Rev Dr Philip Doddridge, who both knew him well, were published in 1753 just five years after his death, and filled six quarto volumes. They were frequently reprinted. He wrote some seven hundred hymns – the exact number is disputed – and a volume of poetry; he published three volumes of sermons and twenty nine theological treatises; he wrote books on logic and philosophy, geometry and astronomy, writing English correctly as well as much for children - poetry, catechisms, a *Discourse on the Education of Children*.

From the start he was widely read and widely translated. His works appeared in dozens of languages from Armenian to Zulu. His industry, the great volume of his writings and their enormous range of subjects – his "monuments of laborious piety" as Johnson called them - were also rightly held to be remarkable in his day. As Jennings wrote: "I question whether any author before him did ever appear with reputation on such a variety of subjects as he has done, both as a prose writer and as a poet." His book of children's poetry went through ninety five editions in one hundred years. His hymns were quickly taken up by the early American colonists; Benjamin Franklin first published Watts' psalm paraphrases in America in 1729. But he was not the only American publisher to take an interest in Watts' hymns. In Boston his hymns were published in 1739. They were well-loved by Americans of the Revolutionary period and continue to be popular in the USA to this day.

His book on *Logic* in particular was widely admired. Influenced by the empirical approach of John Locke in his *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, he nevertheless developed his own philosophical ideas, being careful to distinguish between judgements and propositions for example. It was used as a textbook for up to a century at Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard and Yale universities. His follow-up to *Logic*, *Improvement of the Mind*, also went through numerous editions and in the next century inspired Michael Faraday. It was also widely used as a moral textbook in schools. (Victor A Shepherd victorsheperd.on.ca/sermons/isaac.htm: Isaac Watts) In spite of Isaac's early and long-lasting popularity, however, one must agree with Samuel Johnson in his judgement of the quality of his work: "It would not be safe to claim for him the highest rank in any singular denomination of literary dignity." For example as a philosopher he has not achieved lasting acclaim. Unlike his contemporary John Locke, his work is no longer studied.

But while it is easy to agree with Johnson's assessment of much of Isaac's work, it is difficult to do so, when it comes to his poetry and hymns. "As a poet, had he been only a poet, he would probably have stood high among the authors with whom he is now associated." Certainly in his day and for long afterwards, Isaac's poetry was greatly admired, and not just in Britain. His children's verses, as we have noted, were especially popular. Reading his poetry for adults as published in his *Horae Lyricae* in 1706, however, one struggles now to find any special merit in them except for their historical interest. "Had he been only a poet", he would surely have been wholly forgotten. His best-known verse is now a laughing stock and has been ever since Lewis Carol parodied it in Alice in Wonderland. In *Moral and Divine songs for Children* Isaac wrote:

Against Idleness and Mischief

*How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour;
And gather honey all the day
From ev'ry opening flower!*

*In works of labour or of skill
I would be busy still;
For Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do.*

Lewis Carol included his version in Chapter 2 of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. It reads

*How doth the little crocodile
Improve his shining tale*

*And pour the waters of the Nile
On every golden scale.*

*How cheerfully he seems to grin,
How neatly spreads his claws;
And welcomes little fishes in
With gently smiling jaws!*

Johnson is just as wrong about his hymns: "His devotional poetry is like that of others unsatisfactory." Johnson found them too simple: "The sanctity of the matter rejects the ornaments of figurative diction." He does not seem to understand the quite different demands of sung verse from that of poetry intended to be read or spoken aloud. Complexity of language is the death of song. Isaac's hymns are as complex as they can be to be understood when sung. Posterity rightly continues to praise his marvellous hymns. He stands at the very top of the tree of hymn writers in English. Only Charles Wesley is up there with him. The best known - *Our God, our help in ages past: When I survey the wondrous cross:* and *Joy to the World* – are still in frequent use for Christian worship

Finally it is worth comparing his lasting influence to that of his younger contemporary John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Famous, widely read and admired, and an excellent preacher, there can be no doubt that Isaac affected the lives of many people over a long period, if in a subtle way that is impossible to measure. More difficult is judging how far he fundamentally changed the lives of those who studied his works, sung his hymns or heard him preach. Wesley certainly did this. He travelled the country over the decades, bringing his message to anyone who would listen and thus arousing the religious enthusiasm of huge numbers of Britons. Isaac's health prevented him from moving far. Together with this, while no one doubted his piety, his intellectual approach to religion and the lack of "fire in his belly" meant that he had neither the energy, the charisma nor indeed the wish to inspire a wide section of the public in the way that Wesley did. Was he perhaps too comfortable with his wealthy friends?

Whatever his lasting influence, Isaac came to be accorded the recognition he deserved both in Britain and the USA while he was still alive. "By the age of 50 he was a national figure esteemed by Anglicans and Dissenters alike. John Wesley acknowledged his genius, discipline and piety." In Wesley's first hymn book one third of the hymns were by Isaac. His fame lived on long after his death. As we have seen, both his academic writings and his poetry, not to mention his hymns, were read and studied for a hundred years and more after his death. He was still so celebrated that writers could refer to him in their works confident that readers and audiences would instantly recognise him. In Charles Dickens' 1850 novel *David Copperfield* a school master quotes from

Watts' children's poem *Against Idleness and Mischief*. In 1884 Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera *Princess Ida* includes a punning reference to Watts' hymns. His hymns are still sung in churches to this day. His latest biography was published in 2013 and his book on *Logic* is also in print. On his death his papers were given to Yale University, which had been established by Congregationalists.

Isaac is buried with many other famous people in London's Bunhill Fields Burial Ground. In 1780 a monument to him was erected in Westminster Abbey. Even before then a statue of him was unveiled in 1761 in West Park, Southampton. There is another statue of him in Abney Park Cemetery, Stoke Newington, and a bust is installed in the nonconformist Dr Williams's Library in central London. "His greatest monument, however", as one admirer has put it "are the hymns to his God still used by Christ's church".

7. Brother Richard and Family

Richard, the second son of Isaac senior and Sarah, was born on 10th February 1676. He was named after his maternal grandfather Richard Taunton. Nothing is known of his education, but he must have had a good one with all his father's enthusiasm for it. According to the *The Roll of the Royal College of Physicians* he first set up a doctor (physician) in Lymington, a small port at the southern edge of the New Forest, just over the estuary from Southampton. What training he had for this is not known, but his father spent "for his first setting up and marriage portion a considerable sum of money". This would appear to be in his early twenties; for in June 1703, when he was twenty seven, he was admitted as an "Extra Licentiate" of the Royal College of Physicians. He stayed on in Lymington for a few more years more before moving to London in October 1709. But he retained a saltworks in Lymington, as his will mentions. Perhaps the paucity of medical patients had caused him to look for other business opportunities in the town.

London offered a vastly larger number of affluent patients than little Lymington, and Richard was successful in establishing a lucrative practice. His brother Isaac stated in his will that he was "blessed with wealth and plenty above the rest of my relations." He kept up with the latest medical knowledge, and as a result was able to pass "the usual examinations" of the College of Physicians and "present himself at its "Census Board" in 1710. So that on 26th June that year he "was admitted as a Licentiate." This would have given him an important qualification, enabling him to attract a wider - and perhaps, wealthier - range of patients. But he did not stop there. Eighteen years later in June 1728 he "was created Doctor of Medicine at Cambridge University. Further recognition quickly followed. In September that year he was made a "Candidate" of the College of Physicians and the next year a Fellow. He had become one of the leading doctors of his day. (*W. Monk: The Roll of the Royal College of Physicians 1861.*)

Richard's wife was called Mary, but her maiden name is not known, They married in August 1704, but where this was is also not known. Richard was 28 at the time and still living in Lymington. Although he had already obtained qualification as an "Extra Licentiate" of the College of Physicians, he still needed financial support from his father to get married. Perhaps there was not the medical demand in the small town to make a good living. Moving to London a few years later proved the making of him. He and Mary probably started their family while in Lymington, though the dates and place of the births of their two children Mary and Jemmy are not known, evidence that the family remained faithful to the non-conformist church of Richard's parents..

Richard was not the most popular member of the family. The brief, almost dismissive, way his father dealt with him and his family in his will speaks volumes. Isaac senior uses only a few words to leave Richard and his wife Mary "unto each of them a guinea to buy them rings". Their daughter Mary is left only "ten pounds to buy her a piece of [silver] plate in remembrance of me". This contrasts with the long paragraphs dealing with his legacies to his daughter Sarah and her family. Like his brother Isaac, Richard was not made an executor of his will. Instead Isaac appointed Richard's younger brother Enoch and Sarah's husband James Brackstone. Presumably this was because both Enoch and the Brackstones still lived in Southampton and could more easily deal with Isaac senior's complex estate, whereas son Isaac and Richard had moved away.

There is also the row Richard had with his brother Isaac. In fact there were two rows between the brothers. The first was started by Richard's son Jemmy in 1745. Isaac wrote to his brother Enoch about this: "My last gave you notice of our last conference with Dr. R.W. and his son in which Lady Abney told him that there were yet further accusations against him. Jemmy conscious of his guilt got his father to come with him and there acknowledged what dreadful curses he had uttered against me. This was reserved [that is, held back] to have been published to our church till his wife was out of her childbed. But the Dr. was anxious to know what it was and to ask my forgiveness, and that his son might not be so publicly exposed. Jemmy showed as far as words and tears could go great signs of repentance." So Isaac agreed "not to expose him to the church who would certainly have cast him out."

It is striking that Isaac in writing to their mutual brother refers to Richard as "Dr. R.W." and "the Dr.". This sounds like a very cold relationship between the two, though both at this stage are anxious not to create a complete family break. Richard was also keen to ensure the family's good name amongst his fellow worshippers remained intact. Reputation was given a high priority at that time, and apart from the humiliation of being "excommunicated", this could have lost Richard valuable business. He may well have also been influenced by the special respect that was given in those days to the oldest brother and sister by their younger siblings. Jemmy comes over as an immature

young man, irritated maybe by his uncle's piety and perhaps holier-than-thou attitude. But he too was anxious to avoid the shame of being "cast out" by the church.

This special respect, however, did not prevent a second, seemingly more vicious, row between the brothers. In the first row there is no suggestion that Richard was to blame. He appears as a mediator between his son and Isaac, and most anxious to keep in his brother's good books. This second quarrel was started by James Brackstone junior, Richard's son-in-law and nephew (his daughter Mary had married her cousin). A close associate of Isaac, Philip Dodderidge, wrote: "His nephew, once so great a favourite, has done something to vex him [Isaac], and his poor weak spirits cannot bear it; so that he is quite amazed and even stupified with it." Isaac's biographers blame both Richard and James for the quarrel. They vilify Richard's conduct, but confess they have no knowledge of the cause of the row. It is likewise unclear how and why Richard got involved. Whatever it was, Richard is accused of "crooked conduct."

This was in August 1746. The upset was the more painful because Isaac had promoted James's bookselling business to friends. The Rev. John Barker, for many years minister at Salters' Hall, is quoted as writing in the following February: "The behaviour of Dr. Richard Watts and the wretch Brackstone is a most marvellous, infamous, enormous wickedness." Strong words indeed! Isaac's friends tried hard to protect him, "keeping his enemies at a becoming distance" from him. Isaac himself wrote to friend at this time: "As for my nephew James Brackstone I would have you for the future neither send nor write anything to him relating to me. He has dealt so wickedly and shamefully with me that our church has cast him out a great while ago and I have done with him entirely."

In his will made in the year following this second quarrel, Isaac claimed Richard was "blessed with wealth and plenty above the rest of my relations" This was surely no more than the truth. Their father Isaac senior was also aware of Richard's wealth when he had made his own will just ten years earlier. He left Richard, his wife and daughter almost nothing in his will, as mentioned above. In addition the old man forgot or perhaps deliberately omitted Richard's son Jemmy from his will. Isaac junior for his part did not want his quarrels with his brother to be the last word on their relationship. So he left Richard just £10 in his will, having reduced this from £50 by a later codicil.

Richard died in 1750, just a couple of years after his brother, aged seventy four. Nothing is known of his wife Mary except that she outlived him. Richard made a will leaving nearly everything to her. Apart from the saltworks at Lymington she received "£5000 capital stock in the Bank of England." Their daughter Mary had married her cousin James Brackstone, son of Richard's sister Sarah. They were probably not very well off, so the large sum of £2,000 Richard left his daughter must

have been welcome indeed. His son Jemmy is not mentioned in the will, though he was still alive, as we know from the row with brother Isaac, but still in his father's bad books.

8. Brother Enoch

Little is known about Enoch, the next brother. He was born in March 1678, but never married. He continued to live in Southampton, though one account claims "he went to sea." This was probably while he was still very young – it was not unusual for boys as young as eleven to join a ship as a cabin boy or similar. He certainly went on a voyage when he was fourteen, because his brother Isaac wrote him a poem in Latin dated September 1791 addressed to *Fratris E.W. olim navigaturo* (*To my brother Enoch Watts going a voyage*). One of Isaac's biographers Gibbons took the trouble to translate this. His version of the first verse runs:

*Brother, may heaven vouchsafe to bless
And crown your voyage with success!
Go, in the planks of pine immurr'd,
And from surrounding harm secur'd;
Go, and with sails expanding wide
With pleasure plough the placid tide.*

Isaac's Latin original, written when he was seventeen, is considerably less flowery. Some years later in March 1700 Enoch wrote to Isaac on his getting his hymns in print. Enoch reminded him that this was something he had been urging Isaac to do for some time without success: "I have frequently importuned you to it before now, and your invention has often furnished you with some modest reply to the contrary, as if what I urged was only the effect of a rash and inconsiderate fondness to a brother." He goes on to compare Isaac's hymns to other hymn-writers and finds these tend to send one to sleep: "There is, therefore, a great need of a piece, lively and vigorous as yours, to quicken and revive the dying devotion of the age. He continues with a quotation in Latin and signs off most lovingly: My dear brother, your most affectionate kinsman and friend Enoch Watts."

He shows himself to be not merely clever and well educated, but warm-hearted and eager for his brother to do well. He was also intellectual and religious. These sides to his character are shown by a request he made to Isaac around this time. He asked for definitions of the many variants of religious belief and practice then followed. Isaac began his reply with descriptions of a full dozen of them. He started with Atheists and continued through Socinians, Papists and Anabaptists to

Antinomians, giving a clear, if biased, description of each. He was certain Enoch would find this all of interest.

The unexplained condition of his father's will, that he could inherit the family home if he gave up all rights to his loan to his father, suggests that Enoch had made a good deal of money. But unlike his younger brother Thomas he is not listed as an apprentice, so we know nothing of his work. A local tax assessment of 1715, when he was 37 years old, taxes him on an "office of profit £40". This was not a negligible sum for those times, but not enough to make one wealthy. He does not appear in the other tax assessments around this time. Later in life he was left the lease of the Custom House in Southampton by his cousin Richard Taunton. Was his "office" collecting dues on imported goods? None of this provides evidence of how he might have accumulated such a large sum to lend to his father.

As for his father's demand that he give up his rights to the repayment of his loan, there is a hint that he did not do this. A legal document drawn up in April 1737, just a couple of months after his father died, concerns some property owned by the Barrington family of the Isle of Wight, though it is not clear if the property involved was on the island or the mainland. The document is concerned with the "surrender of copyhold by way of a mortgage" and names "Enoch Watts of Southampton, gent". The Barrington family were in the process of building themselves a grand mansion on their estate on the island; so perhaps they were taking out a mortgage on some of their lands to raise money for this. Enoch seems to have supplied some funds on surety of this, which suggests he had received the outstanding money from his loan to his father and invested it in this way. If so, the Barrington mortgage must have been repaid, as there is no mention of the property in Enoch's will. (*Barrington/Simeon Families of Swainston ref: JER/BAR/3/12/248 13 April 1737. Isle of Wight Record Office*).

Earlier Enoch had also inherited from his father – without conditions - "the bed with the bedstead, bolster, pillow and all the covering and furniture thereunto belonging which is in his lodging chamber", also three silver spoons and two pair of sheets. This was a modest bequest. Enoch died in 1755, aged 77, and his own will reinforces the picture of him as financially comfortable, but not rich. It also shows how close he remained to his sister Sarah even after she and her husband James Brackstone had moved to London. For his bequests were all to the by now widowed Sarah and her daughters. As well as the remaining lease on the Custom House, the three nieces were left £200 each. Their brother Joseph was in effect left the same sum: "To my nephew Joseph Brackstone of Covent Garden, London £50 (having already given him £50) and I forgive him a debt of £100 lent to him when he begun trade". Their mother Sarah, Enoch's sister, was left the residue of his estate and made executrix.

9. Brother Thomas and Family

The youngest son Thomas's life is no better recorded than Enoch's, but he married and had many grandchildren. He was born 1680. In October 1695 at the age of 15 he was apprenticed to a tallow chandler in Southampton for the usual seven years. At the end of his apprenticeship in September 1702 he was enrolled in the local tallow chandlers' register. This allowed him to set up in business. The job of a tallow chandler, however, was a rather lowly occupation. It comprised turning animal fat, mostly from farm animals, into candles, a messy and smelly procedure. As a result chandlers were often forced to operate in less smart areas of towns. Of course candles were an essential commodity, being the only means of lighting buildings at night, so there was always a demand for them. Tallow was the normal ingredient. It was cheap and plentiful, unlike beeswax, which though giving a better and sweet-smelling light, was much more expensive and required a large number of bee hives to produce sufficient amounts of wax.

Demand for candles was obviously greatest in the darker times of the year, and since there was always a major cull of animals in the autumn, the business was very seasonal. In some places this led to chandlers having other strings to their bows. In London certainly from late medieval times tallow chandlers got involved in a wide range of domestic products which used animal fats, including sauces, vinegar, soap and cheese. How far this was true of Southampton's chandlers is not known. But the introduction of new materials such as spermaceti and paraffin wax had begun to replace tallow for making candles by the late 1600s. Thomas appears unaffected by this; but it took him some time to become fully established in business. For it was not until 1712 that he took on an apprentice. In 1715 the local tax assessment lists him as having a warehouse valued at one shilling, a typical amount.

Thomas married in May 1706 according to his brother Isaac, though like so many of the other family events no other record has been found. This suggests the marriage was in a non-conformist church. His wife was Mary, daughter of John and Eleanor Barnes. John Barnes is described both as a yeoman and as a gentleman of Chichester. Chichester is more than 30 miles from Southampton; so the question arises as to how Thomas and Mary met. In the 1720s a Thomas Barnes "haberdasher of hats" lived in Southampton and a Robert Barnes was "Officer of the duties on salt" in Lymington, where brother Richard lived for a time and owned a saltworks. Thomas and Robert appear together on a document originated by Richard Taunton; so they were likely related to each other and quite probably to the Barnes's of Chichester.

At all events Thomas and Mary set up home in Southampton, where their daughter Mary was born nine months later. They had a further five children, of whom two died in infancy and a third in his early twenties. Both daughter Mary and a later son Thomas (see below) married and had children

and grandchildren. Father Thomas, however, did not live to see any of these: he died in 1723 at the age of 43. The widowed Mary moved back to Chichester with her remaining children, doubtless to get the support of her family.

Her daughter Mary's husband was John Caldicot or Chaldecott. He was described as a "gentleman of St Clement Danes parish" in London, but they set up home in Southampton. John's occupation is not known, but later members of the family are described as cutler, goldsmith, jeweller and banker. So he can be firmly placed in Chichester's merchant class, like the Watts in Southampton. Mary and John had a son called John after his father. He in turn married another Mary, who bore ten children, all baptised at Christchurch Presbyterian chapel in Chichester between 1759 and 1774. At least another eight Chaldecott children of the next generation of the family were also baptised here in the 1790s.

Thomas senior and Mary's fifth child was the next one to survive to adulthood. Called Thomas after his father he was born in 1715. He was only 8 years old when his father died. Luckily for him his grandfather Isaac Watts senior left him £100 when he reached the age of 23. This was much less than Isaac left to his Blackstone grandchildren (see below); but Thomas may well also have inherited something from his Barnes grandfather. Even more fortunate was the £500 given to him by his wealthy but childless cousin Richard Taunton. This enabled him to set up in business. When he died in 1752 Taunton left Thomas a further highly generous £1,500. As Thomas was then 37 years old and with a family, this must have been most welcome. By this time Thomas had already taken on his Chaldecott nephew, his sister Mary's eldest son, as an apprentice.

This younger Thomas had married Ann Skinner in Chichester on Christmas Eve 1736, and they continued to live there. They certainly had a son and may have had more children. This side of the family continued to live in Chichester, but unlike the Chaldecotts, who remained non-conformist, they became Anglicans, using the parish church of St Pancras in the town. Thomas and his son yet another Thomas, born in 1741 were in business as whitesmiths, Whitesmiths finished and polished tin-plate and iron implements and containers. Tin-plate was much used at this time, as unlike other metals it did not react to fat, making it the essential for storing food. Thomas died in 1770 in Chichester

10. Sister Sarah and the Brackstones.

Sarah, her parents' fourth child and first girl, was born in 1681. Nothing is known of her childhood, not even whether she received an education. However, since her father was so keen on education and showed such favouritism to Sarah and her family in his will, she probably was taught at home. Teaching girls so that they could at least read and write English and do accounts was becoming

more common among the merchant class to which the Watts belonged. This was particularly true of the non-conformist religious, who as noted were especially keen on the written word.

She married Joseph Brackstone in January 1708 at the age of 26. The Brackstones were closely associated with the Watts. They were another family from Southampton's merchant class, and the records show they were among the wealthiest there. In the 1711 tax assessment John Brackstone was described as "Commissioner", which must have been an official position, and his "personal estate" was valued at £100, the highest in this assessment together with Richard Taunton and twice Isaac Watts' valuation of £50.

But not all the Brackstones were as honest as the religious Watts would surely have wished them to be. The records of the Southampton Council for 18th January 1677 note that:

William Brackston brought in 4 Tunns of French Wine, a prell [quantity] of Corke and a prell of rosin & made entries in the customs house in his own name & as his own goods, which were the proper goods of one Hilary Renew of Bordeaux an alien - and so [he was] disfranchised. (*Borough of Southampton minutes 18 Jan 1677.*)

William had broken the law on the import of French wine, presumably to avoid paying duty on it and thus being able to sell it more cheaply or make more profit on it. But what actual privileges he lost by his disfranchisement is not clear. Doubtless these included the right to vote for Council members and to be a councillor himself. But it does not seem to have put him out of business; for in April the following year the Council records minuted that: "Mr William Brackston asked to be readmitted to his Burgesship. This was agreed if he confessed the justice of his disfranchisement, which he did, & served such offices as chosen for, & submitting to a moderate fine which he refused & continued disfranchised". (*Borough of Southampton minutes Die Veneris [Friday] 5 April 1678.*) If disfranchisement meant that he could not carry on in business, he would surely have paid the "moderate fine". As it was, he seemed content to continue without the privileges of Burgess status. William's tax assessment in 1711 and again in 1715, however, was only 2 shillings, much less than Isaac Watts' 9 shillings, so perhaps this refusal had a long-term effect on his prosperity.

William's relationship to Sarah's husband Joseph is not known, but he could well have been an uncle. Joseph seems to have been the son of the John Brackstone mentioned above and his wife Martha. John was a clothier like Sarah's father Isaac, and like Isaac a trustee of the Thorner Trust. The family were also members of the Above Bar church of which the Watts were prominent members, The two families seem very intimate. Perhaps because of this Sarah, Joseph and their children were close to Isaac senior's heart and he left much of his property to them on his death.

As we have seen, he also made Joseph the executor of his will, being prepared for him to act as such on his own if Enoch did not do as his father wished.

Joseph probably followed his father into his business as a clothier. But financial success appears to have eluded him. When his father-in-law Isaac died in 1737, Joseph would have been in his mid-fifties and should have been at the height of his earning powers. But he still owed Isaac money, which the old man forgave in his will. He also left Joseph a property in Gosport and £100 “towards the repairing and new building the forepart of his now dwelling house in Southampton”, suggesting that Joseph could not afford to do this out of his own pocket.

No doubt it was at least partly because Joseph and Sarah were less well off than Sarah’s brothers Richard and Thomas, who both had children, that Isaac was particularly generous to Sarah and her family in his will. In addition to his legacy to Joseph, he left “my Daughter Sarah Brackstone my Horse and Chaise with the Harness and Stable Implements and all things belonging thereunto together with the Stable and the Lease whereby I hold the same of the Provost and Schollars of Queens Colledge in the University of Oxon”. Sarah was also to have the income for life from the various properties Isaac left to his granddaughters, Sarah’s daughters. She died in April 1756 at the age of seventy four.

Sarah and Joseph had five children together, two boys and three girls; Joseph, James, Sarah, Mary and Martha. The two sons moved to London. Nothing is known of Joseph junior except that he married late, taking Ann Watts to wife at St Katherine by the Tower in 1754. They had no children, and Joseph died just three years later. Over time Joseph had received £1,000 from his wealthy cousin Richard Taunton, and this must have left Ann a wealthy widow. Not surprisingly she soon remarried, moving to Southampton to do so. Her second husband was Richard Taylor, a deacon of the Above Bar church in Southampton where the Watts worshipped. She may well have been related to our Watts family, as there were other Watts in Southampton at this time, but no family link has been established.

The second son James set up as a bookseller in London, being given some help from his grandfather Isaac who left him £200 in his will. His uncle Isaac also used his influence to recommend the bookshop to his friends. He married his cousin Mary, the daughter of his uncle Richard Watts, and as already noted, got into a dreadful row with Isaac, which also involved Richard. This caused his ejection from his church community, a blow which could well have resulted in considerable social and financial problems for both him and Richard. It is notable that unlike his siblings his only bequest from Richard Taunton’s will was “one piece of Gold Coin value five Guineas”. He was still in the family’s black books. He and his wife Mary had two children, but both died in infancy. He died in 1757.

The three sisters Sarah, Mary and Martha were left both money and property by their grandfather Isaac, Apart from £200 each at the age of 21, they were to share much of his household goods: “All my Plate Rings and China” and “my three best beds with the Bolsters Pillows Bedsteads and Coverings and Furniture belonging to them”. Much of his landed properties was bequeathed to the girls too, once their mother had died. That was in 1737. Fifteen years later they each received a further £400 from the will of the wealthy but childless Richard Taunton. No doubt this enabled them to live comfortably without getting married. They stayed in Southampton, and all died in the 1770s.

11. The other sisters

Mary, the next daughter after Sarah, was born in February 1683, but died in December the following year, less than two years old. The next girl was also called Mary – it was common at the time to repeat the name of a child who died in infancy. She was born in April 1686 and died unmarried just before her 30th birthday. She was followed by Elizabeth, born in 1689, but died at the age of two. Finally Martha was born in November 1690. She died unmarried in Southampton in August 1727 at the age of 36. Early death, especially among small children, was common. Diseases we now consider mild or which have been eliminated by vaccines took a great toll on little ones, there being nothing parents or doctors could do to help them.

12. A wider family?

There were other Watts living in Southampton in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries apart from the family of Isaac and Sarah. Records of at least three families have been found. One of these, a Mrs Elinor Watts, had been a member of the Watts's Above Bar church, but had moved away by 1726. The records of the others are to be found in the local parish (Anglican) churches. There is however no direct evidence that any of them were closely related. There was also Ann Watts, whom as mentioned married Joseph Blackstone junior in London, but moved to Southampton for her second marriage after Joseph's early death. This suggests she may have come from the town, but there is nothing to confirm this. There were also many Watts in Southampton from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, but again no evidence of a link to Isaac and Sarah.

None of the voluminous literature on Isaac the hymn writer refers to any member of a wider Watts family. Isaac himself lists a “cousin John Chapman of Portsmouth” as dying in 1698/9 in his *Memorable Affairs*. John could have been related on his mother's side, and even if not, the absence of any mention of any Watts relative suggests that there were none.

This is relevant because in the nineteenth century two families claimed a connection with the great Dr Isaac and produced evidence to back up their claims. A surviving typescript headed *Record of Captain George Edward Watts (taken from Bryan's Naval & Biographical History)* describes the naval exploits of the said George Edward. From its contents the original appears to have been written in the 1830s; for it does not mention any of Watts' later career, which was very successful – by 1856 he had been promoted all the way to Vice Admiral. The opening paragraph of this extract reads:

Geo. Ed. Watts, a native of Scotland, is the only son of the late Jno Watts Esq (an officer in the Army who fell while serving under the D[uke] of Kent: at the storming Ft. Bourbon, Martinique, 1794) by Miss Agnes Skene, a lady nearly related to the family of Skene of Skene, Co Aberdeen, whose father married a sister of Malcolm Canmore, King of Scotland and received from that king the name by which his descendants are now known. Capt. Watts' paternal grandfather, a Captain of Infantry who fought under the D[uke] of Cumberland at the Battle of Culloden, was himself the grandson of Capt Jas Watts of the R[oyal] N[avy] (1686), and 1st cousin to the celebrated Dr Isaac Watts.

No record of Captain James' birth has been found, but Royal Naval records confirm that he was promoted to Captain in 1686. This suggests he was born around 1650, at just the same time as Isaac Watts senior, who could thus have been his brother. This would make James an uncle rather than a cousin of Dr Isaac. Alternatively James could have been descended from a brother of Isaac senior's father Thomas, who was also a Captain in the Royal Navy. The record of another naval Watts from this time, however, does exist. This is the registration of the marriage of Jonathan Watts to Jane Benham on 26th October 1688 and intriguingly this was at Millbrook, where Isaac senior and Sarah were also married. (Jonathan was promoted Lieutenant the following year, and Captain in 1696, but died a couple of years later.) It is difficult to believe there was no connection between Jonathan and Isaac. Likewise the relationship of James to Isaac's family also looks probable. Isaac, however, makes no mention in his writings of wider Watts relations.

A further claim by another Watts family, however, looks less plausible, but not impossible. It was this family that kept the record of George Edward. In 1922 William Henry Watts senior, former Lord Mayor of Liverpool and shortly before his death at the great age of 99, claimed Dr Isaac Watts was his great-great-grandfather's grand uncle. His great great grandfather was most likely Edward Watts who married Elizabeth How at Winchester in 1724, but lived and died in Romsey just a few miles north of Southampton. Edward is as far back as this line of the Watts can be traced, for no record of the birth or baptism of an Edward Watts in the years around 1700 has been found in this part of England.

But William Henry produced other evidence. Thomas Wright, one of Isaac's biographers, wrote in his introduction to his *Life of Isaac Watts* published in 1914 that William Henry "lent me a copy of Milner's *Life of Isaac Watts* with valuable insertions including pictures and unpublished letters." William Henry also owned "an ancient-looking volume" containing Isaac's poems and bearing the inscription "presented to my dear sister Mrs.S. Brackstone June 9th 1725". Moreover he had the sword claimed to have been presented to Capt. Edward Watts, mentioned above. How He obtained these items and what has happened to them since is not known On their own unsupported by genealogical evidence they cannot be considered firm evidence of a family connection to Dr Isaac. But this cannot be ruled out.

While the uncertainty remains, what is most interesting about both these claims is that two quite different but successful families wished to be closely connected with the great Dr. Isaac a hundred years and more after his death. Descent from him was still seen as a feather in the cap of his claimed descendants long after he had died.

Genealogies

1. The WATTS family

Thomas WATTS *naval commander*

m Miriam CULVERDON 21 Oct 1647 at Millbrook just outside Southampton

A? Isaac WATTS *clothier* bn c.1652 at ?Southampton d 10 Feb 1736/7 at Southampton

m Sarah TAUNTON (d 23 July 1732 at Southampton dau Richard TAUNTON) 11 Feb 1673
at Millbrook, Hants

B1 Isaac WATTS D.D. *hymnwriter etc* bn 17 July 1674 at Southampton d 25 Nov 1748 at London
unm.

B2 Richard WATTS *physician* bn 10 Feb 1675/6 at Southampton d 14 Apr 1750 at London
m Mary - 31 August 1704

C1? Mary WATTS

m James BRACKSTONE *bookseller* son of Richard's sister Sarah & her husband Joseph
Brackstone - see below

C2? James (Jemmy) WATTS

B3 Enoch WATTS bn 11 March 1677/8 at Southampton bu 21 Oct 1755 at Southampton unm.

B4 Thomas WATTS *tallow chandler* bn 20 Jan 1679/80 at Southampton bu 14 Apr 1723 at
Southampton

m ?Mary BARNES (dau John & Eleanor BARNES *yeoman* of Chichester) May 1706

C1 Mary WATTS bn 5 March 1706/7 at Southampton

m John CALDICOT/CHALDECOTT *gentleman* of St Clement Danes, London, later of
Chichester *For further descent from Thomas Watts see below*

B5 Sarah WATTS bn 31 Oct 1681 at Southampton will as widow 23 Apr 1756

m Joseph BRACKSTONE (d 4 Apr 1742 at Southampton) 27 Jan 1707/8 at Southampton

C1? Joseph BRACKSTONE

C2? James BRACKSTONE m Mary WATTS - see above

C3? Sarah BRACKSTONE d 29 Jan 1771 at Southampton 'aged between 40-50', unm

C4? Mary BRACKSTONE d 8 Feb 1778 in London bu at Southampton unm

C5? Martha BRACKSTONE d 27 Nov 1772 at Southampton aged 50 unm

B6 Mary WATTS bn 13 Feb 1683/4 at Southampton d Dec 1685 at Southampton

B7 Mary WATTS bn 10 Apr 1686 at Southampton d 3 March ?1714/15/16 at Southampton

B8 Elizabeth WATTS bn 15 Aug 1689 at Southampton d 11 Nov 1691 at Southampton

B9 Martha WATTS bn 4 Nov 1690 at Southampton d Aug 1727 at Southampton

2. The TAUNTONs

Richard TAUNTON *Alderman draper/maulster* bu 14 June 1697 at Southampton Holy Rhood*
m – d as 'Grandmo Tanto' 30 March 1700

A1? Sarah TAUNTON m Isaac WATTS 11 Feb 1673/4 at Millbrook, Hants d 23 July 1732 at
Southampton

A2? Richard TAUNTON 2 *maulster* bu 2 Nov 1722 at Southampton Holy Rhood
m(1) Mary - (bu 1 June 1684/5 at Southampton Holy Rhood)

B1 Richard TAUNTON 3 bp 29 March 1684 at Southampton Holy Rhood d 28 March 1752
m ? Lucy - bu 22 Aug 1728 at Southampton St Johns

m(2) - ?bu as 'Mrs Taunton widow carried to Nunton' 25 Nov 1729?

B2 John TAUNTON bp 10 June 1687 at Southampton Holy Rhood bu ?1687 at ?Southampton
St Johns

B3 child TAUNTON bp 28 Feb 1688/9 at Southampton Holy Rhood ?bu as 'a son' 9 Oct 1703 at
Southampton Holy Rhood

B4 John TAUNTON bp 26 July 1693 at Southampton Holy Rhood bu 10 Feb 1695/6 at
Southampton St Johns

B5 William TAUNTON bp 7 Apl 1698 at Southampton Holy Rhood bu 6 March 1745/6 at
Southampton St Johns

B6 Elizabeth TAUNTON bp 7 Feb 1701/2 at Southampton Holy Rhood bu 17 Apl 1702 at
Southampton Holy Rhood

B7 Elizabeth TAUNTON bp 10 March 1702/3 at Southampton Holy Rhood

B8 Thomas TAUNTON bp 12 Oct 1703 at Southampton Holy Rhood

* Note: Southampton Holy Rhood church. This is now known as Holyrood church, though the name Holy Rood has also been used. But during the time covered by this account the records always give it as Holy Rhood. The church was seriously damaged by bombing in the Second World War and is now a ruin dedicated to sailors of the Merchant Navy.

3. The family of Thomas WATTS, youngest son of Isaac and Sarah WATTS

B4 Thomas WATTS bn 20 Jan1679/80 at Southampton bu 14 Apl 1723 at Southampton
m Mary BARNES (dau John & Eleanor BARNES *yeoman* of Chichester) May1706

C1 Mary WATTS bn 5 March1706/7 at Southampton

m John CALDICOT/CHALDECOTT *gentleman* of St Clement Danes, London later of
Chichester

D1?John CALDICOTT

m ?Mary

E1 Mary bp 24 Sept 1759 at Christchurch Presbyterian

E2 Ann bp 6 Jan 1761 at Christchurch Presbyterian

E3 Elizabeth bp 1 March 1762 at Christchurch Presbyterian

E4 John bp 3 Jan 1763 at Christchurch Presbyterian

E5 Thomas bp 13 May 1764 at Christchurch Presbyterian

E6 John bp 7 July 1765 at Christchurch Presbyterian

E7 Watts bp 3 Aug 1766 at Christchurch Presbyterian

E8 Isaac19 Oct 1767 at Christchurch Presbyterian

E9 Stephen bp 6 July 1769 at Christchurch Presbyterian

E10 Barns bp 14 Oct 1774 at Christchurch Presbyterian

C2 Isaac WATTS bn 9 Feb 1708/9 at Southampton d 25 June 1731 at Southampton

C3 Thomas WATTS bu 24 March 1712/3 at Southampton

C4 Elener/Elianer WATTS bu 3 Dec 1714 at Southampton

C5 Thomas WATTS bp 18 Sept 1715 at Southampton, later of Chichester d c.1770 in
Chichester

m Ann SKINNER 24 Dec 1736 at Chichester

D1 Thomas WATTS bp 21 Dec 1741 at Chichester St Pancras

m ?Anna - c.1765

E1? Thomas? WATTS

m Martha - ?1790

F1 Elizabeth WATTS bp 2 Dec 1790 at Chichester St Pancras

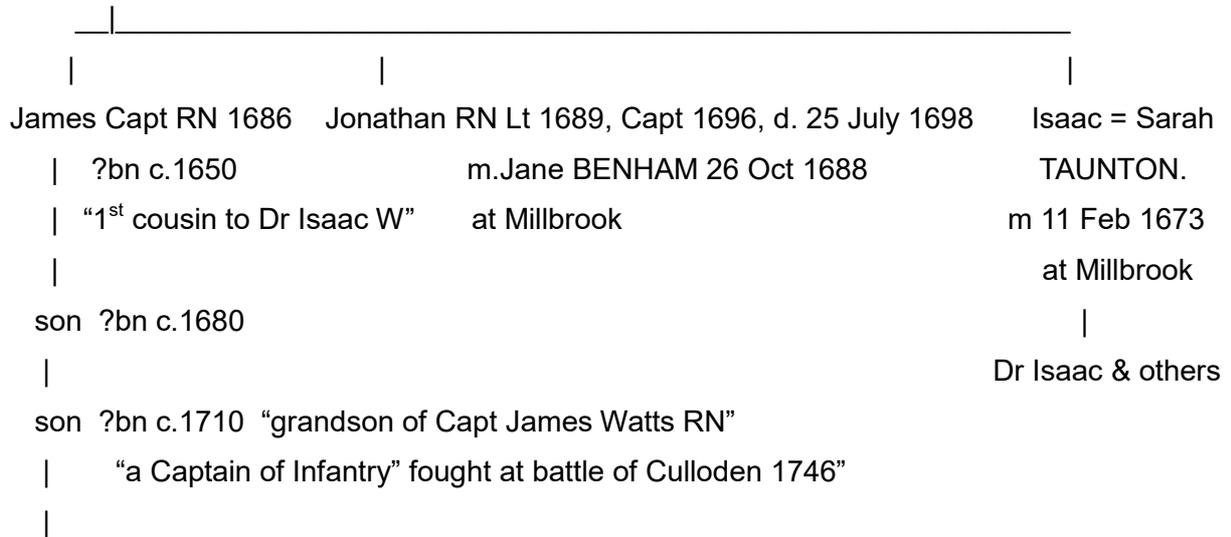
F2 Jane WATTS bp 28 Dec 1793 Chichester St Pancras

F3 Mary WATTS bp 30 March 1796 Chichester St Pancras

C6 Sarah WATTS bn 3 Oct 1722 at Southampton

4. Possible family tree of a “1st cousin of the celebrated Dr Isaac Watts” deduced from “*Records of Captain George Edward Watts*” and other records

Thomas WATTS naval commander ?bn c.1620 d. 13 July 1693



Jonathan officer in the army, died 1794 at Martinique bn ?1740 m Agnes SKENE

George Edward born Halifax, Nova Scotia 1786, d 2 Dec 1860

Captain RN 1814, Rear Admiral 1849, Vice Admiral 1856

m(1) Jean dau of George WALDIE
 m. 20 Oct 1820
 d. 6 July 1826

m(2) Elizabeth FOULIS
 m. 18 June 1830
 4 sons & 3 daughters

Note: bn born m married
 bp baptised unm unmarried
 bu buried - not known
 d died ? uncertain
 dau daughter

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