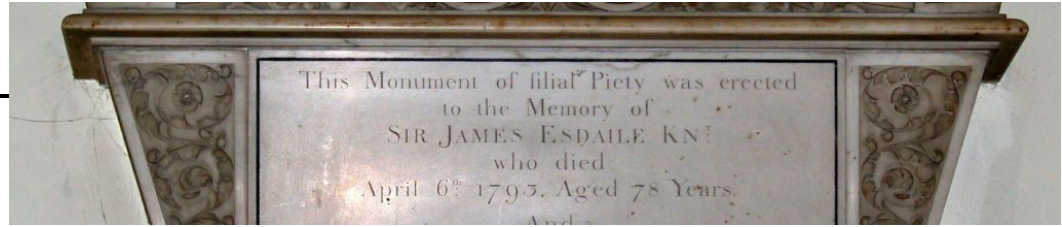


## Old Upminster

Tony Benton's Upminster History Site

### Who was Sir James Esdaile?

Posted on 15/05/2014 by hurdler46



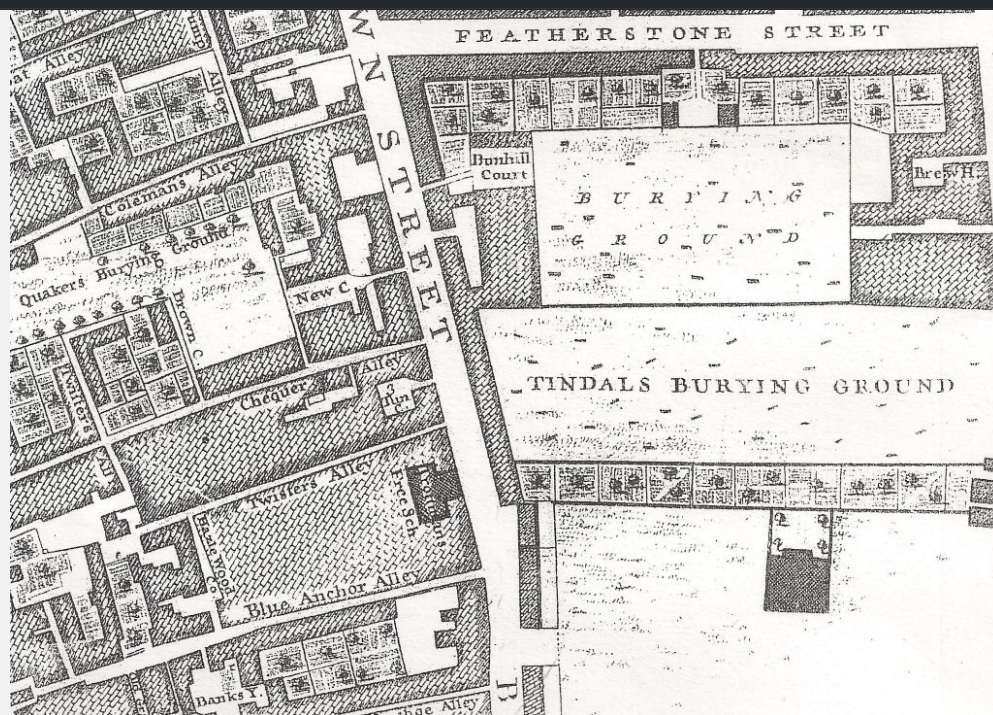
Those familiar with Upminster's history will know that Sir James Esdaile (c.1714 to 1793) was a major land-owner who was responsible for rebuilding many of Upminster's largest residences and buildings including Gaynes, New Place, Harwood Hall and the Bell Inn. They may also be aware that he served as Lord Mayor of the City of London and have read of his family's Huguenot origins but what else is known about him?

Let's start with what we don't know: there is no record of James Esdaile's birth or baptism which probably took place in the latter part of 1714, based on his age in later records.

The first definite record of James Esdaile comes from his apprenticeship indenture to Daniel Medbury, Citizen and Cooper of London for seven years from 5<sup>th</sup> May 1730 for a premium of just £5. His father was named as Peter Esdaile, girdler of St Giles Cripplegate. Daniel Medbury was an experienced London cooper of Northamptonshire origins, and James Esdaile completed his full term as an apprentice with him and received his Freedom of the City of London on 7th June 1737.

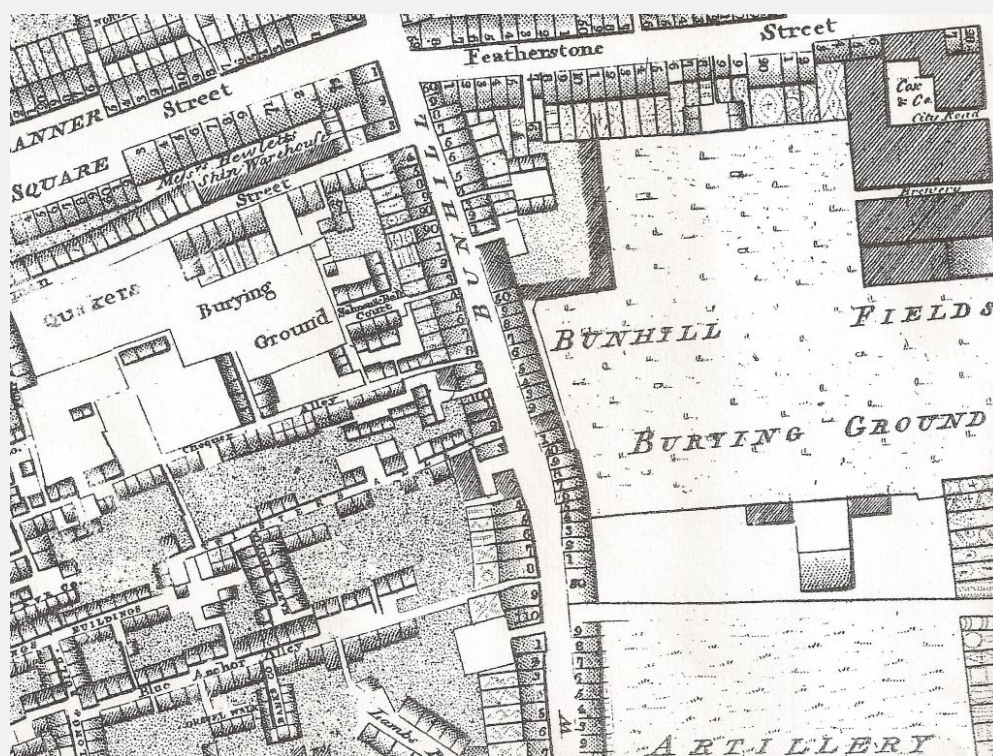
Was James' father the Peter Esdale or Easdill, a brushmaker of Cock Alley in Norton Folgate who had four children baptised at the Bishopsgate Presbyterian Chapel: – Katherine (31 May 1713), Peter (20 July 1716), Thomas (2 April 1718 and another Katherine (17 January 1719/20)? The latter baptism described Peter Easdill as “formerly” of Cock Alley, Norton Folgate, but “now over against the Kings Head in Chiswell Street” in Cripplegate parish. If James Esdaile was this Peter's son it's feasible that he was born in the Autumn of 1714, midway between the births of Katherine and Peter. “Cathrine” wife of Peter “Esdill, brushmaker” was buried at St Giles Cripplegate on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1724, so if the identification is correct James Esdaile's mother died when he was not quite ten years of age.

Rating records from 1734 onwards for St Luke Old Street show Peter “Risdale” rated for premises valued at £12 annually in Bunhill Row (now Finsbury, EC1). The records show variant spellings of Arisdel and Aisdell, but these are probably more a reflection of the clerk's lack of literacy. From 1737 Peter Esdaile was also rated for personal estate worth £50 and in later years also occupied premises nearby in Twisters Alley, just to the north of Bunhill Row. Were these two Peters one and the same? The address of Peter Easdill in 1719/20 was certainly close to Peter Esdaile's later Bunhill Row address. Had Peter Esdaile, brushmaker of St Giles Cripplegate in 1724, become Peter Esdaile, girdler of the same parish in 1730, with strong enough social connections to apprentice his son to a Citizen and Cooper of London?



Roque's map of 1746 – Peter Esdaile's house on Bunhill Row.

Peter Esdaile's house was at 110, Bunhill Row opposite the former Artillery Grounds and the famous non-conformist burial ground of Bunhill Fields (formerly known as Tindal's Burying Ground), where he was himself laid to rest in 1758. This house is numbered on Horwood's map of 1792 (see below) and its location can also be seen on Roque's map of 1746 (above); its site is now covered by Finsbury Tower, a block of flats (see photo below).







Looking north up Bunhill Row 2014 – the site of Esdaile's premises is on the left.

Peter Esdaile not only lived here but also developed his growing girdler's business in his workshop and manufactory where he and his employees made various leather girdles and accoutrements for the Marines under lucrative contracts with the Admiralty which made him a wealthy man by the time of his death in 1758.

Later accounts state that Peter Esdaile was the son of Baron d'Estaile or d'Esdaile, a French Protestant who fled from his native land along with many others of his faith after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 made Protestantism illegal there. It's said that his property was confiscated and he was forced to live and die in obscurity. It's certainly true that the Peter Esdale or Easdill mentioned above – who may or may not be the father of James – lived at the heart of a Huguenot community in Norton Folgate, near Spitalfields, but I've yet to find any trace of this shadowy ancestor Baron d'Esdaile. What we do know from Peter Esdaile's will is that he had a brother Garrett, whose son James was later of Beccles, Suffolk and Hoddesdon, Herts but again as yet my research so far has found no other reference to Garrett Esdaile either.

Suggestions in other sources link James Esdaile to an Archibald Esdaile (c.1687-?1769) of the Island of St Christopher's (St Kitts) who married Rebecca John at St Paul's Cathedral in 1726. This Esdaile family were established on St Kitts as early as 1696 and in January 1708 John Esdaile, aged 43 (i.e. born c.1664), was listed as living there with his wife, four sons, three daughters and seven slaves. Was this John Esdaile the father of Peter Esdaile and grandfather to James? Further detailed research would therefore be needed to confirm or disprove the Esdaile family's origins but to me the St Kitts connection seems more plausible than the French Protestant tradition.

The terms of James Esdaile's apprenticeship indentures in 1730 meant that he could not "contract matrimony" within his seven-year term. On 24<sup>th</sup> August 1738, twelve months after receiving his Freedom, he married at St

His marriage licence application described him as aged 24, of St Luke's (Old Street), and his bride was two years younger. Interestingly, James was described as a girdler, not a cooper, the trade in which he had just qualified, so it's likely that he was already in business with his father.

The couple settled close to James' father Peter and may even have lived with him in Bunhill Row. Two children died in infancy and were buried nearby at Bunhill Fields but Elizabeth bore three healthy offspring, Ann (born around 1740), Peter (born 1743) and Louisa (born 1744) before her death in April 1747 aged 31 and was herself laid to rest in Bunhill Fields. James Esdaile was left without a mother to his three young children and in the circumstances it's surprising that he waited over eighteen months to remarry.



Entrance to Bunhill Fields, from Bunhill Row

His new bride Mary Mayor was just 17, born in August 1731, half the age of the 34-year-old widower James. Mary was an heiress, bringing with her a substantial dowry, including the rights to inherit the 65 acre [New Place](#) estate in Upminster, thus providing James Esdaile's first links to the parish. The couple married by licence from the Archbishop of Canterbury's Faculty Office in St Paul's Cathedral on 29 November 1748. Mary was the daughter of John Mayor, Citizen & Lorimer of London, who had died five years before but her inheritance came from her guardians, her childless uncle and aunt, Joseph and Sarah Mayor of New Place who endowed her with freehold estates in Upminster and Hornchurch through a marriage settlement.

It must have been a daunting task for the teenager to take on three young children aged between four and eight, but the family no doubt had servants to take care of things. Mary Esdaile soon had a family of her own, and after losing an infant daughter within a few years of marriage, Mary gave birth to eight healthy children in the next 16 years. Their marriage was to last until Mary's death in 1792, aged 60.

James Esdaile was certainly in partnership with his father by April 1748 when the business was described in a contract with the Admiralty as Peter Esdaile & Son. This required them to supply 1,000 sets of leather

was for slings and belts.

Throughout this period the growing Esdaile family continued to live in Bunhill Row but in 1757 and the following year their fortunes were to change. On Sarah Mayor's death in July 1757, Mary Esdaile inherited New Place and other estates, and less than a year later in June 1758 James' father Peter Esdaile died, with his son his principal beneficiary of his substantial estate, which also included large bequests to James' children and other relatives totalling £8,000. James was his father's joint executor, along with John Serocold, merchant, who was married to the Anne Pate, the younger sister of James' late wife, Elizabeth.

On 23 May 1760 James Esdaile bought from George Montgomerie, the Lord and owner of the Manor of Gaynes, two strips of the manorial waste, one in front of his house at New Place, and the other running along what is now Corbets Tey Road, to the south of High House and adjoining his property. The strip in front of New Place allowed him to create an in and out entrance, as part of his major redevelopment of New Place a few years later, while the strip on Corbets Tey Road was developed to become the site of Esdaile's Post Office Cottages.

It seems likely that the Esdailes split their time between their London house in Bunhill Row, where James Esdaile continued to run the profitable business, and their new country estate in Upminster, particularly after New Place was completely rebuilt in the early 1770s. Esdaile was by now at the height of his business career and from 1766 onwards came to prominence in the City of London. He was elected as Sheriff of London in 1766, after difficulties in attracting candidates and during his year in office he was elected as an Alderman of Cripplegate Ward in February 1766 and also became Master of the Coopers' Company. Ten years later in 1777 he achieved the highest civic honour when he was elected as Lord Mayor of London and in June 1778 during his year as Mayor he was knighted by the King for bringing forward a scheme to raise a subscription to fund the forces, who were engaged in the American War of Independence.



Sir James Esdaile by Sir Joshua Reynolds (1789). Held by Mildred Lane, Kemper Art Museum, Washington DC.

It was during this period from the 1760s onwards that Esdaile spent considerable sums in acquiring and redeveloping many of Upminster's buildings. In May 1770 he bought the manor and estate of [Great Gaynes](#) for £5,250 from the Trustees of the late Lord of the manor, George Montgomerie, who had died in 1766. James Paine was employed to design for Esdaile a Palladian-style mansion, in which he specialised, at a cost of some £20,000 between 1771 and 1774. His acquisition of the farm to the south – later known as London's – allowed him to transform the farmland to form a 100 acre park, damming the stream which ran through it to form what is now known as Parklands Lake. Having spent so much money and effort it seems extraordinary that in July 1774 soon after its completion Gaynes, described as a “new-built, superb mansion” with a noble “plan and elevation”, was advertised to be let.



Around 1771 he acquired the estate called Harwoods on which Harwood Hall was built by 1782 for his daughter Mary, who married George Stubbs in 1777. Esdaile's acquisitions continued when around 1780 he bought Tadlows Farm, south of Hunts, probably rebuilding the farmhouse, by which time he already owned Hoppy Hall to the north of his Gaynes estate. He acquired Bushes Farm around 1782, in a purchase which also brought Esdaile the farms called Snows and Elders.

From 1760 onwards the Esdailes entered another stage of their life as his elder daughters by his first wife were married, while he and Mary were still having children of their own. In 1760, in a marriage that may to our eyes seem extraordinary, James' eldest daughter Ann, aged 20 was married at Upminster to the widower John Hopkins of Bretons in Hornchurch, who was over 50 years her senior and over 30 years older than his father-in-law. Five years later Louisa Esdaile, just 21, married Benjamin Hammett, a London merchant, who in 1781 joined with his father-in-law James Esdaile and brother-in-law William Esdaile (James' son) to found Esdaile, Hammett & Esdaile Bank in Birchin Lane, moving to Lombard Street the following year.

We know very little about Sir James' life. Around 1787 he became the owner of a share of the major Rose Hall Plantation in Jamaica. His other interests included serving as Colonel of the Green Regiment of the London Militia from 1763 to 1789 and in an obituary he was said to be a great collector of prints, which were then at the height of their popularity.

Mary Esdaile died on the 21<sup>st</sup> February 1792 and was interred at Upminster, where she is commemorated on the same wall tablet in the parish church as her husband, who died at his house in Bunhill Row a year later, aged 78. His lengthy will, which established a complex series of trusts for his children and grandchildren, was in later years to provide lawyers with much work, no doubt well paid.



Memorial tablet to Sir James Esdaile & his wife Mary in Upminster Church



with Upminster did not last beyond 1820 and proved to be a disappointing postscript to Sir James Esdaile's remarkable career and strong influence on the parish.

Although the other sons of Sir James Esdaile went on to success, the Esdaile family's ongoing connections with Upminster had proved to be a disappointing postscript to Sir James Esdaile's remarkable impact on the parish.

*Revised & updated 13 December 2020*

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Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills: Sarah Mayor (1757) PROB 11/831; Peter Esdaile (1758) PROB 11/828; Sir James Esdaile (1793) PROB 11/1231; James Esdaile (1812) PROB 11/1530; Peter Esdaile (1817) PROB 11/1598.

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**Guy Harding** *says:*  
28/01/2016 at 4:58 pm

Hello. who wrote this please? I would love to speak to you. Guy  
[guy.harding@sky.uk](mailto:guy.harding@sky.uk)

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**[hurdler46](#)** *says:*  
28/01/2016 at 6:40 pm

Guy, I will email direct.

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**Thomas Esdaile-Bouquet** *says:*  
20/07/2016 at 3:59 pm



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additional information available on their arrival in England and all elements leading up to the birth of Sir James Esdaile.

Also it would be very interesting to compile the spellings variants until 1740.

Anyone interested can contact me directly at [thomas.bouquet@gmail.com](mailto:thomas.bouquet@gmail.com)

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**Mark McDermott** says:

29/05/2018 at 8:04 am

Could you supply me with a reference for Sir Benjamin Hammet's connection with a plantation in Jamaica? I would also like to know more about a visit which he made to America. Can you help?

[Reply](#).



**hurdler46** says:

29/05/2018 at 8:36 am

Can you email me on [tony-Benton@ntlworld.com](mailto:tony-Benton@ntlworld.com) please?

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