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Mewburn: London silversmiths

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Abstract: Mewburn is a significant name in silversmithing, yet almost nothing has been written about those of them involved in the craft or their history. That leaves the question: who exactly were the silversmithing Mewburns and what were their origins and the ultimate fate of their line? Genealogical techniques have been used to fill the structural gaps and flesh out an understanding of the three generations in which there were members of the Goldsmiths' Company, and to trace their fortunes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the eventual end of the line in the early twentieth century. The article also shows how records from the Goldsmiths' Company can provide insights into the lives of nineteenth-century craftsmen – individuals and their families. London birth, marriage and death records and wills have enabled a sound family tree to be developed, while property and tax records have provided locational data. Migrations have been traced and Australian records used to document the final decline of the silversmiths. Some speculation on the earlier origins of the line is offered.

Introduction

Mewburns have lived in London since at least the beginning of the seventeenth century, though the name is predominantly associated with North Yorkshire and County Durham. What took them there in the first place and where the first ones came from is uncertain, but they may all have been closely related given the rarity of the name. The majority in London belonged to one family and within that family there were three generations of silversmiths – all Freemen of the Goldsmiths' Company and some also Freemen of the City of London. Two of them, John (1762–1830) and his son Barak (1800–1869), were distinguished makers whose work still regularly appears at auction. John was sufficiently important to have risen to become a Liveryman of the Goldsmiths' Company, while his first son, Henry John (1796–1836), Barak's elder brother, was a weigher at the Assay Office.*

The first generation

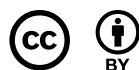
John Mewburn was baptised on the 6th of February 1762 at St Andrew, Holborn, an area near Hatton Garden.¹ He was the son of John and Rebecca Meaburn [*sic*] of Purpool Lane (today called Portpool Lane, off Gray's Inn Road) and was the youngest of their four children. Since he is known to have practised as a silversmith in London, he had to have been a guild member so records were explored at the private library of the Goldsmiths' Company in Goldsmiths' Hall on Foster Lane in London.² The Goldsmiths' Company records can be of great value to the genealogist, providing information about apprenticeship, subsequent history of practice (in the *Black Book*) and even pensions and other social support, and often naming parents and sometimes other family members.

John appears in the *Black Book* of the Goldsmiths' Company as:

Mewburn John; father John; Master Jn Crouch Vol 8, page 302; 1777
Bound in name of Nubron Freedom 4 Jul 1792; Livery June 1811, Goswell St;
died 27 Jan 1830.³

and appears also in their *Apprentice Book* where the entry reads:

*An earlier draft of part of this article appeared for a time on a trial website (<http://www.mewburnandmeaburn.com>), but has subsequently been removed.



1777, Febry 5th

Be it Remembered that I John Nubron Son of John Nubron late
of Fore Street London Mariner deceased _ _ _ _ _

do put myself Apprentice to John Crouch of Giltspur Street London

Silversmith _ _ _ Citizen and Goldsmith of London to learn his Arts of a

Silversmith _ _ _ for the Term of Seven Years from this Day

John Nubron.⁴

Much of this is repeated by Grimwade,⁵ in his compendium of London silversmiths, who describes him as:

Son of John Nubron of Fore Street⁶ London, mariner deceased, apprenticed as
John Nubron (? through some deafness of the clerk) to John Crouch 5 February
1777. Free 4 July 1792. First mark entered as plateworker, 2 October 1793.

Address: Hare Court, Aldersgate Street. Moved to Abingdon Row, Goswell Road,
undated. Livery, June 1811. Second mark, 24 March 1823. Died 27 January 1830.

Heal records him as Mewburn or Newburn (cf Nubron, Above), goldsmith, Hare
Court, 1793–6.

It seems to have taken some time for him to be made free, according to the *Black Book*, and there is no entry for the event in the *Freedom Book*.⁷ John registered marks twice with the Goldsmiths' Company:

John Mewburn, Plate Worker, Hare Court

Oct 29 1793

Aldersgate St

Removed Abingdon Row, Goswell Road

March 24 1823

In 1793, as shown in [Figure 1](#), his mark consisted of a coronet with five points each topped with a silver ball, over the initials IM (a Latinised version of his own). Two of his marks from around 1796–1797 are illustrated in *London Goldsmiths*⁸ and others by Ciceri.⁹



Figure 1. John Mewburn marks (with permission from Giovanni Ciceri).

John's notable contribution to the craft was recognised when he was created a Liveryman of the Goldsmiths' Company in June 1811 (though there is no formal record of that event outside the *Black Book*). From then he was, and continued to be, noted in the *List of the Wardens, Assistants and Livery* of the Goldsmiths' Company up until 1829.¹⁰

The Company has records of six apprentices taken on by John Mewburn between 1795 and 1808:

- John Death; 7 Jan 1795. Vol. 9, p. 307. £5 from the Protestant Dissenters School, St Bartholomew Close, West Smithfield. John at Hare Court, Aldersgate St.
- Thomas Paine Dexter; 1 Jun 1796. Vol. 9, p. 332. £5 from the Protestant Dissenters' School, St Bartholomew Close, West Smithfield. John at Hare Court, Aldersgate St.
- Edward Edwards; 7 Nov 1797. Vol. 9, p. 352. Son of a silversmith. John at Hare Court, Aldersgate St.
- Thomas Layton; 3 Mar 1801. Vol. 9, p. 411. £5 5s from the Goldsmiths' Company. John at Hare Court, Aldersgate St.
- Jos Eldad Webb; 5 Dec 1804. Vol. 10, p. 41. Son of a watchmaker. John at Aldersgate St.
- Philip Williams; 3 Aug 1808. Vol. 10, p. 123. Son of a farmer from Herefordshire. John at Goswell St Road.

At least three of these were charity placements and two were from the Dissenters' School. That link with the school is part of a pattern. John's children were baptised at Nonconformist churches and he was eventually buried at Bunhill Fields so there can be little doubt of his Nonconformist beliefs. These may have become more pronounced over time, as his son Barak was baptised at Providence Chapel, the home of some particularly

individual beliefs.¹¹ The apprentice records suggest that, at least up until 1804, John worked from Hare Court, Aldersgate Street (where there was a Nonconformist chapel) and may have moved to Goswell Road between 1804 and 1808. There is also evidence that he was paying land tax of £1 6s 8d at Hare Court on Aldersgate Street in the parish of Aldersgate Without between at least 1798 and 1810 (with John Blunt and John Viner on either side).^{12,13} The discrepancy between the 1810 date and living at Goswell Road in 1808 when he took his last apprentice is intriguing.

John was successful and pieces by him are sought after today. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has a pair of his candlesticks, and others, such as those in [Figure 2](#), appear on the market occasionally.^{14,15} In June 2012 a decorative pair of salt cellars from 1820 sold at Christie's, New York.¹⁶ Silver salvers seem to have been a favourite (he was of course a plateworker). [Figure 3](#) shows a George III salver of his, carrying the arms of Charles Berwick Curtis, that was sold in November 2011.¹⁷



Figure 2. John Mewburn chambersticks (with permission from Robin Silverman).



Figure 3. John Mewburn salver of 1810 (photograph by M. Ford Creech, with permission).

John was living on Goswell Road (which continues north from Aldersgate Street) in October 1828 when he made a short will leaving everything in equal measure to each of his children. His son Henry John and John Vinery of Brixton were the executors, while Josh Marston and James Friend acted as witnesses.¹⁸ No value was indicated. He died in 1830 and was buried on the 2nd of February at Bunhill Fields.¹⁹ Probate was granted on the 13th of February 1830 (but adds no new information to that in the will).²⁰

John had married Susanna Colson on the 4th of November 1786 at St Giles without Cripplegate (John Crouch, presumably his former master, was a witness).²¹ There is no trace of Susanna's death or of any children, but on the 10th of April 1788 at Holborn, John, recorded as a

widower, was married for a second time to Ann Parsonson of Long Melford, Suffolk.²² John Mewburn and Ann Parsonson had six children, as shown in Figure 4.²³ Two further generations of silversmiths followed before the line petered out.

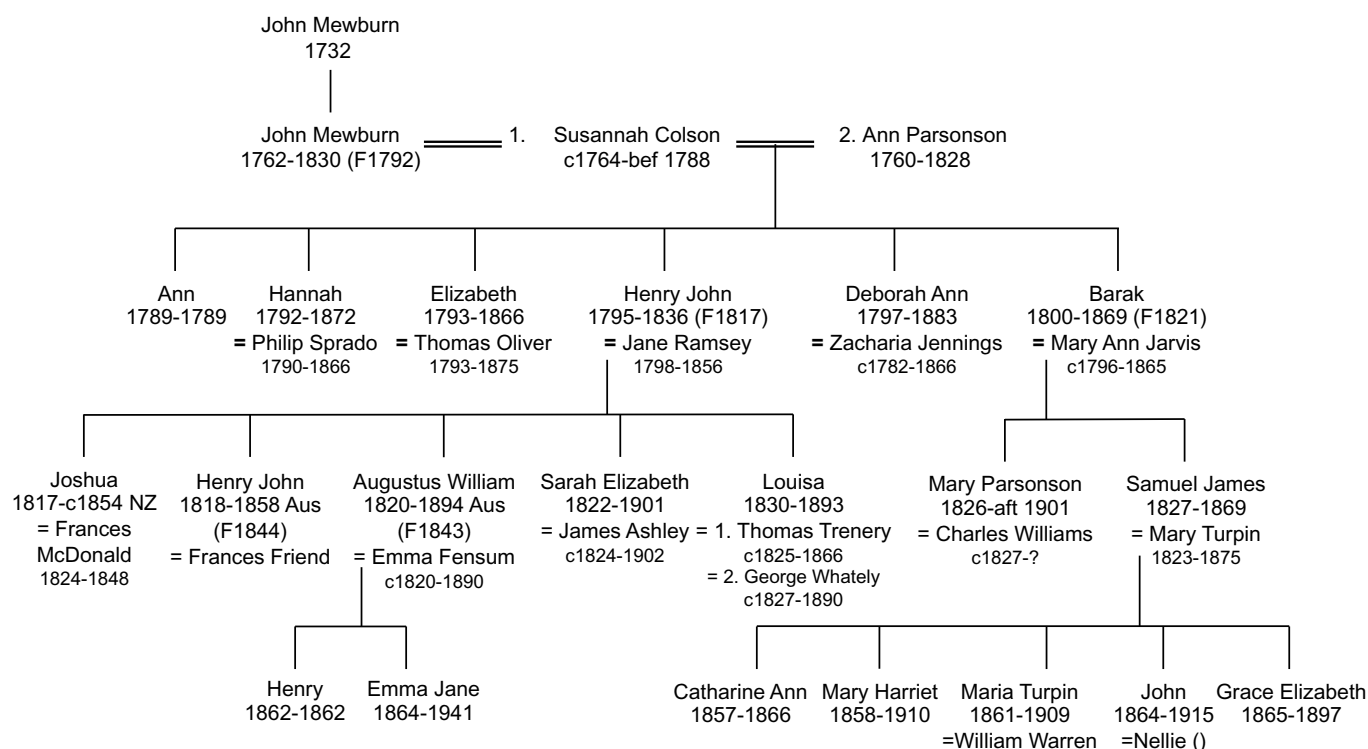


Figure 4. Family tree for John Mewburn, goldsmith (with Freedom dates).

The second generation

Henry John Mewburn was born on the 6th of November 1795 and baptised on the 26th of February 1796 at St Giles Cripplegate Barbican Independent.²⁴ He is listed in the *Freedom Index* as becoming a Freeman of the Goldsmiths' Company on the 5th of February 1817.²⁵ The full entry in the *Freedom Book* reads:

1817, February 5th
 Henry John Mewburn Son of John Mewburn was sworn and
 made free by Patrimony on the testimony of Richard Sibley Citizen and
 Goldsmith and John Viney Citizen and Leather Seller.
 Goswell Street Road Silversmith²⁶

(John Viney lived next door to John Mewburn at Hare Court.) Whether Henry John worked much as a silversmith is not known but he described himself as clerk to the Goldsmiths' Company at the time of the baptism of his daughter Sarah in 1822 (he was living then at York Terrace).²⁷ In fact he worked at the Assay Office, as minutes from 1817 (the year of his Freedom) show:

14 May 1817 At a Court of Assistants
 Election of Assay Officers. Vacancy for Fourth Drawer
 There were three candidates. Each was interviewed and Henry John elected.

Committee Friday 25 July 1817.
 Mr John Henry Mewburn who was lately elected a Drawer in the Assay Office
 attended the Committee and proposed that his Father Mr John Mewburn of Goswell
 Street should be his Surety to the Company for the faithful discharge of his duty in
 the Assay Office and Mr John Mewburn being known to several Gentlemen of the
 Committee and being approved of, the Security was ordered to be taken
 accordingly.²⁸

The Library also has the bond dated the 6th of August 1817 showing that £100 was lodged as surety.²⁹ In it, Henry John guaranteed to 'carefully draw or cut and mark all such plate as he shall be required to ... to discover if the same be charged with any unnecessary Soder ... forward enough in workmanship ... all pieces be affixed together that are intended to be affixed together and if the same be marked ...'. We know that he progressed from drawer to weigher, the most senior of the working roles in the Assay Office. Forbes describes the role: 'The Weigher was additionally responsible for paying out the weekly wages of the drawers, for the purchase of materials and everyday requirements'.³⁰

Henry John married Jane Ramsey on the 9th of November 1815 at Hackney³¹ and they had five children. He died on the 19th of May 1836 at Kingsland and was buried on the 24th of May at Bunhill Fields.³² Minutes of the *Court and Committee Book* show he had been ill for some time:

At a Court of Assistants 30 Oct 1835

Mr Mewburn had of late been frequently absent from the Hall on account of ill health and was now confined to his house with very little prospect of his again returning to his duties.³³

(An attached letter from his doctor indicates that he had been suffering from consumption.) His will of the 19th of April 1836 was proved on the 12th of August, leaving £100 each to his wife and children and £50 each to his brother Barak and sister Deborah – a total of some £700 (perhaps a million pounds today).³⁴ Jane, though, petitioned the Company for further support:

24 June 1836

petition from Jane Mewburn the Widow of Henry John Mewburn late a Weigher in the Assay Office stating that she had been left with five children who were partly dependent on her for support, that her late husband had been employed in the office for nearly twenty years, and praying she might be considered an object deserving a pension.³⁵

However, she was only partially successful:

it appearing from the statements made by the petitioner who being in attendance was called in and explained her circumstances, that she is fully capable of maintaining herself, submit that she ought not to be admitted as a pensioner on the funds of the Assay Office but that a sum of £30 be allowed her as a donation³⁶

Barak Mewburn was born on the 7th of June 1800 and baptised on the 1st of September at the Providence Chapel, Titchfield Street.³⁷ He too became a silversmith, the third Mewburn to appear in the *Black Book*,³⁸ gaining his Freedom of the Goldsmiths' in 1821.

1821, August 1st

Barak Mewburn Son of John Mewburn was sworn and made free by Patrimony on the testimony of Walter Brind and Edward Sheldrick Citizens and Goldsmiths
Abingdon Row
Goswell Road

Silversmith³⁹

His apprenticeship has gone unrecorded but perhaps this was undertaken with his father. Barak registered marks on three occasions between 1826 and 1831:

Barak Mewburn, Plateworker, 19 Abingdon Row, Goswell Road	31 Aug 1826
New mark	1 May 1830
Removed to Ball Court, Giltspur St	
New mark	26 Jan 1831

His marks are shown in Figure 5.⁴⁰ The first was registered in August 1826 and used during 1827–1828 and the other registered in May 1830 and used during 1831–1833.



Figure 5a and b. Marks used by Barak Mewburn (with permission of www.silvermakersmarks.co.uk).

Grimwade's entry for Barak is as follows:

Son of John Mewburn. Free by patrimony 5 February 1817 as goldsmith. First mark entered as plateworker, 31 August 1826. Address: 19 Abingdon Row, Goswell Road. Second mark, 1 May 1830. Moved to Ball Court, Giltspur Street, and third mark entered 26 January 1831.⁴¹

In this case Grimwade made an error over the Freedom, giving the date for Henry John rather than Barak's 1821 date. At the same time, Barak was admitted to Freedom of the City of London.⁴² Barak is also known to have taken on two apprentices, so was clearly operating as a master craftsman from an early point in his career:

- James Friend; 6 Oct 1824; Vol. 10, p. 417. £10 Charity. Barak at 7 Abingdon Row.
- Jn Martin Newton; 1 Oct 1834; Vol. 11, p. 80. Father a tinplate worker. Barak at 5 Palmer Street, Stepney.

6 Feb 1839, turned over (having sued out his indenture).

Barak seems to have been another very capable craftsman and his pieces also appear regularly at auction.^{43,44} Barak married Mary Ann Jarvis of Rugeley, Staffordshire on the 25th of July 1824 at Clerkenwell.⁴⁵ They had two children. Although Barak was listed as living at Palmer Street in 1834 when he took his second apprentice, it seems that he still worked at Ball Court as he was listed there on the Electoral Register for 1837.⁴⁶ He does not appear in the registers after that so a decline in his fortunes must have started soon after. Some evidence for this may appear in entries in the *London Gazette* in 1837 and 1838. The first shows the dissolution of a three-way partnership:

... the Partnership heretofore subsisting between us the undersigned, William Newton, Barak Mewburn, and Lewis Chapman, carrying on the trade or business of Metal Flatters, at No. 6, Ball-court, Giltspur-street, in the city of London, was this day dissolved by mutual consent. All debts due to and owing from the said partnership will be received and paid by the said Barak Mewburn and Lewis Chapman, by whom the business will in future be carried on. – Witness our hands this 9th day of September 1837.⁴⁷

Why William Newton stepped down is unsaid, but the business continued. The second dissolution between the two remaining partners took place a year later and led apparently to no continuing business, though no detail of the cause is given:

... the Partnership heretofore subsisting between us the undersigned, Barak Mewburn, and Lewis Chapman, carrying on the trade or business of Metal Flatters, at No. 6, Ball-court, Giltspur-street, in the city of London, was this day dissolved by mutual consent. – Witness our hands this 9th day of October 1838.⁴⁸

Barak and Mary Ann appear in the census of 1841 living at Charles Street, Stepney⁴⁹ but by that time Barak was listed as a corn meter, a civil post carrying responsibility for weights and measures. Barak had retired from silversmithing, apparently because of asthma. By 1851 he and Mary Ann were living at 1 Stratford Terrace, Stepney⁵⁰ (with daughter Mary and son Samuel), with Barak as a deputy corn meter. In 1861 they were at 6 Robinson's Row, Hackney, without any children present and with Barak as a sworn deputy corn meter.⁵¹ By 1860, though, Barak had been in straitened circumstances and petitioned the Goldsmiths' Company for a pension:

1860

Mewburn, Barak aged 60. 6 Robinson Row, Kingsland
Silversmith, formerly in the employment of Messrs Bateman, Bunhill Row,⁵² latterly a
Deputy Corn Meter suffers severely from Asthma and unable to follow his
employment allowed £60 a year during sickness from the Corn Meters Sick Fund – he
lives in one room has a wife aged 65, a Son a Cripple with a wife and 2 children out of
work.

Petitioner states that his Father was a Liveryman and his Brother was for 20 years a
Drawer in the Assay Office.

Strongly recommended by Mr H. Bateman Liveryman, Mr Wright and Mr Hayworth.⁵³

Sad though the tale seems, he was not elected to get any pension. However, we can see how valuable these records can be for the genealogist. The comment about being employed by Bateman is interesting. Perhaps this happened late in his silversmithing after illness prevented him from running his own business? Mary Ann died late in 1865; Barak lived on and died early in 1869.^{54,55} No burial record has been found and he seems not to have left a will.

The third generation

Henry John and Barak were the only sons in the second generation so the Mewburn line and the continuation of any silversmithing tradition would have been perpetuated through them. Henry John Mewburn had five children and two of his sons did become members of the Goldsmiths' Company, though his eldest, Joshua, did not. Henry John Mewburn the second, and the second son, was born on the 18th of October 1818 and baptised at St Luke, Finsbury on the 24th of January 1819.⁵⁶ He appears in the *Black Book*⁵⁷ and is the only other Mewburn for whom we have a record of apprenticeship. He was bound to William Chawner, one of a notable family of silversmiths, on the 5th of December 1832:

1832, Decr 5th

Be it Remembered that I Henry John Mewburn Son
of Henry John Mewburn Weigher in the Assay Office Goldsmiths Hall
do bind myself Apprentice to William Chawner of Hosier Lane
Smithfield Silversmith _ _ _ _ _
a Citizen and Goldsmith of London to learn his Art of a Silversmith
_ _ _ for seven years from this day there being paid to my said
Master the sum of £40

Henry John Mewburn

3rd July 1839

Turned over by consent to Mary Chawner⁵⁸ of Hosier Lane Silversmith the
Widow of William Chawner late of the same place a Citizen and
Goldsmith of London.⁵⁹

And he was duly made Free of the Company in 1844:

1844, July

Henry John Mewburn Son of Henry John Mewburn was sworn and
made free by Patrimony on the testimony of Barak Mewburn Citizen
and Goldsmith and John Viney Citizen and Leatherseller of London
Rosemary Cottages Silversmith
Shepperton Street Islington.⁶⁰

This second Henry John never registered a mark and took no apprentices; however, he was admitted to Freedom of the City of London.⁶¹ Henry John married Frances Friend, daughter of jeweller Walter Friend, in 1845.⁶² There is no trace of them having had children. He then followed his elder brother Joshua to Australia. A Mr and Mrs Mewburn travelled steerage on the barque *Tam O'Shanter* leaving London on the 16th of November and arriving on the 8th of March 1848 at Port Jackson, New South Wales.⁶³ He did not pursue the craft of silversmithing and at some point set up as a shopkeeper in Sydney. Figure 6 illustrates a small advertisement from the *Sydney Morning Herald* in February 1857 that gives a flavour of his business.⁶⁴ Things went badly though, and on the 30th of October 1858 the newspapers, as shown in Figure 7, announced the bankruptcy of the business.⁶⁵ Soon after, his death was announced as having taken place on the 22nd of December 1858 at Pitt Street North, Sydney.⁶⁶ His widow, Frances, married a Christopher Bennett on the 1st of September 1860.⁶⁷

Augustus William Mewburn Son of Henry John Mewburn was sworn and made free by Patrimony on the testimony of Barak Mewburn Citizen and Goldsmith and John Viney Citizen and Leatherseller of London

Shepperton Street	Silversmith
Islington	

010

jewellery business there. By 1862 he was living at the seventeen-room Waratah House, Kiama, New South Wales, aiming to run it as a boarding house while also selling watches and jewellery. The boarding house did not work out,⁷⁶ though he continued with the other business. Latterly the *Sands Directory* shows him as a jeweller living at 14 Paramatta Old Road, Forest Lodge.⁷⁷ Various newspaper snippets indicate that he became a pillar of the community. He died in 1894⁷⁸ but appeared still in the *Directory* for 1895 at 106 Good Hope Street, Paddington where he had died.⁷⁹ Bill and Emma had a son, Henry William,⁸⁰ who died in infancy in 1862,⁸¹ and a daughter Emma Jane in 1864.⁸² She remained unmarried until her death in 1941⁸³ and is buried at Woronora Cemetery.⁸⁴

Barak Mewburn had two children. Samuel James Mewburn was his only son. He was born on the 20th of July 1827 at Goswell Road, in the parish of St James, Clerkenwell and baptised on the 4th of November.⁸⁵ In 1851 he was still living at home with his parents at 1 Stratford Street, Stepney, and working as a clerk.⁸⁶ He married Mary Elizabeth Turpin on the 10th of June 1856 at Clerkenwell⁸⁷ (she was a 'teacher of town children'). On one of the children's baptismal records in 1858 Samuel was described as a commercial traveller. Nevertheless, in 1860 when Barak petitioned for a pension, Samuel was described as a 'cripple' living with him in a single room. Despite that, by 1861 Samuel and his family were living at 5 Balmes Road, De Beauvoir Town, Hackney and he was styling himself 'gentleman'.⁸⁸ He appeared there in 1861 and 1862 on the Electoral Register⁸⁹ (so a man of some substance, or at least paying significant rent). Samuel died in 1869⁹⁰ and at probate was said to have been living at 151 Kingsland Road, with effects under £100,⁹¹ so in the end not the most prosperous of gentlemen.

Samuel and Mary had five children but only one son, John (1864–1915)^{92,93} who was with the family in the 1871 census and then vanished until 1911 when he turned up at Marylebone as an office cleaner. He had apparently been married for the previous fifteen years to Nellie, with no children. His disappearance could suggest emigration, and in 1884 a 20-year-old John Mewburn did ship to Sydney as a crewman working as a servant on the *Orient*.⁹⁴

And so the line ended with no further practitioners of the silversmiths' craft.

Ancestry of the silversmith John Mewburn

Entry to London's craft guilds was carefully guarded, so there must be a further question over whether there was anything in John Mewburn's background that might have smoothed the path. There have been Mewburns around London since perhaps the sixteenth century. The earliest baptism was on the 22nd of May 1603 at Aldgate, of a John Meborne, son of a John.⁹⁵ In 1696, on the 31st of January, Christopher Mewburne and his wife Margaret baptised their son William at Holborn.⁹⁶ William may have married a Mary and died in 1740. Christopher had another son, John, baptised on the 10th of September 1699,⁹⁷ who may have married Mary Fellows in 1728.⁹⁸ A third son, Thomas, was baptised at Cripplegate on the 20th of September 1702.⁹⁹

We cannot be sure about kinship links between families in the early eighteenth century, but the timing of births hints at possible descent. [Figure 9](#) offers a hypothetical tree for them. The start of this tree is highly speculative and Christopher's origins are unknown.

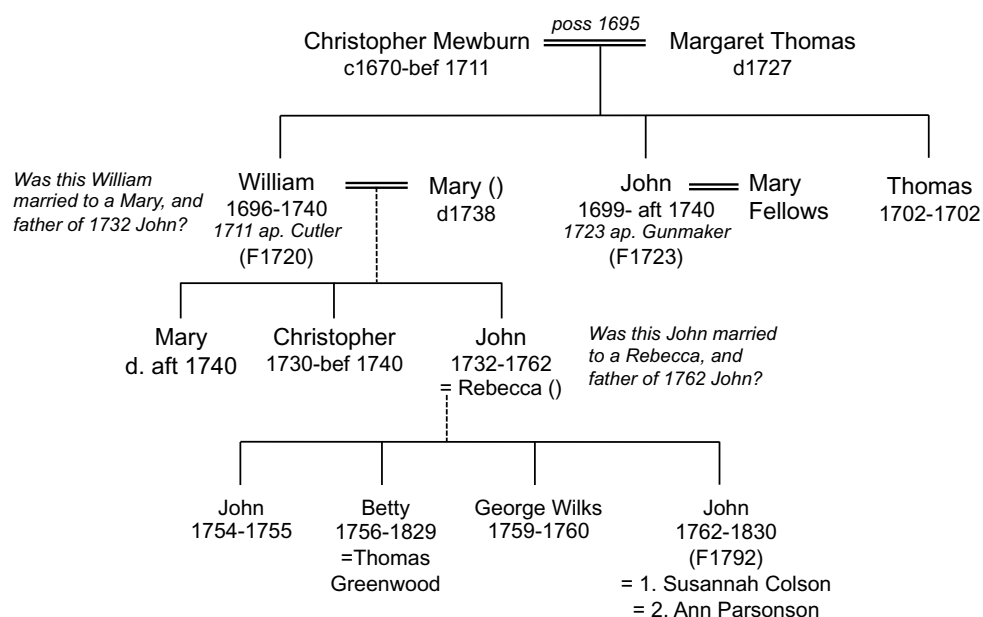


Figure 9. A possible tree for the first London Mewburn craftsmen.

There is a marriage at the Chapel of the Fleet Prison on the 1st of October 1695 for a Christopher Newborne [*sic*] – a common misspelling – and a Margaret Thomas.¹⁰⁰ The timing is right but there is little other evidence that this is our couple except that the baptisms for William, John and Thomas indicate that their mother was named Margaret. The next intriguing scrap comes in the form of an indenture for William in 1711. It tells us that ‘William Mewburn son of Christopher Mewburn late of the parish of St Andrews Holborn in the County of Middx founder doth put himself Apprentice to William Child Citizen and Cutler’ and later that it was ‘put out by Charity School of St Andrew Holborn’.¹⁰¹ So his father had died, leaving his children poverty-stricken. However, since his father had been a founder, i.e. a member of the Guild of Founders, the Guildry and the parish rallied round to provide an apprenticeship, again in a metal trade. William died in 1740 and made a will that year.¹⁰² He described himself as of ‘Whitefriars Precinct London Sword Cutler’. He left a quantity of jewellery to his daughter Mary, the jewellery being at his lodgings in the house of John Mewburn at Whitefriars (presumably his brother). There is another indenture for John Mewburn, son of Christopher the founder. He was apprenticed to Thomas Jones, gunmaker.¹⁰³ John married Mary Fellows in 1728¹⁰⁴ but there are no records of any children. William (1696), however, was of a good age to be father to Christopher (born in 1730) and John (born in 1732), and no other William is known from London records to provide an alternative.

So far our snippets of evidence suggest linkage among these early principal characters. Subsequent records provide births of four Mewburns between 1754 and 1762 to a John and Rebecca. We cannot be certain that this was John born in 1732, even though the timing is good. The apprenticeship record for his son states that John was a mariner rather than any form of metalworker. However, the rarity of the Mewburns and the lack of any other candidate encourages the thought that John, born in 1732, was the father of John born in 1762, and that this is the point of origin for the London silversmiths. These are hypotheses for earlier ancestry and further work is envisaged to test them.

Conclusion

It has proved possible, using an array of records and systematic genealogical methods and analysis, to determine a history of the line of Mewburn silversmiths, and their eventual disappearance. It has answered the question: who were these Mewburns? For the first time a substantive account of the lives of the silversmiths John and Barak Mewburn is presented. This will be of value to researchers into the history of the silversmithing craft and of interest to those who wish to understand more about the lives of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century craftsmen. Key to the successful unravelling of that account are the records held at the library of the Goldsmiths’ Company in London and this article has demonstrated, through examples and references, the value that these records can offer to the genealogist and family historian.

What else might we glean from a study such as this? John Mewburn was a Nonconformist, so there may be an opportunity to examine that aspect of his life in greater detail as an example of the influence of these beliefs in the crafts and in guild affairs.

It is possible to suggest that these lives illustrate the old saw of riches to rags in three generations. Whether that notion has any real meaning must be doubted, but the article does perhaps show how a spark of genius such as the one that touched John Mewburn cannot readily be sustained in an unsupportive and harsh social milieu. It will be interesting to see whether this thought can be used to trigger wider studies across a range of family histories into the behaviour and dynamics of social structures and notions of continuity and sustainable capability within them. Can we identify factors that enable families and social groups to extend their existence over substantial periods? By asking these kinds of questions it may be that what on the surface is a relatively conventional study of family history can move our thinking in a different direction.

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6. Today this runs off London Wall though formerly was the first part of that road. It lies next to St Giles Cripplegate where the children were all baptised.
7. If an apprentice became a freeman, this would be recorded in a Freedom book. These begin in 1692.
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