

When the Messiah Came to Andover

Intro: Welcome to Hampshire HistBites. Join us as we delve into the past and go on a journey to discover some of the county's best and occasionally unknown history. We'll be speaking to experts as well as enthusiasts, asking them to reveal some of our hidden heritage, as well as share with you a few fascinating untold stories.

Julie: Imagine you're in Hampshire, it's 1649, and someone declares themselves 'Messiah'. What would you do? Welcome to this week's episode of Hampshire HistBites where I'm joined by Alex Beeton a second year PhD student at Oxford university studying early modern British history. We will be discussing the curious case of Messiah during the Civil War. Welcome to Hampshire HistBites. It's lovely to have you here.

Alex: Thank you very much for having me.

Julie: So today we are talking about something I find very interesting, especially the first time I heard it. Can you set the scene for the Civil War in Hampshire?

Alex: It's a pretty ghastly scene and it's a pretty miserable scene. So Hampshire is one of the counties in England which is affected by the Civil Wars. And what this means in practice is that the gentry who rule the County are divided between the King and the Parliament. They raised troops and over the sort of three or so years of the Civil War the County sees a lot of campaigns and counter campaigns. What this means in practice is usually a lot of disease, a lot of pillaging alongside a few big set piece battles, like at Cheriton, Basing House and Alton.

So parliament wins the Civil War and executes the King in 1649. Hampshire is within this kind of wider national context, so our story is happening in the first couple of years of the Republic, which succeeds the King.

Julie: So Messiah in the Civil War, what does that link to Hampshire? What is the story about?

Alex: So the story in essence is about a rope maker from London, called William Franklin, who proclaims himself to be the Messiah.

He gains a close companion called Mary Gadbury, who then just declares herself to be the wife of the Messiah or the Bride of Christ to be more precise. And they leave London under a bit of a cloud. They come into Hampshire, and they set up shop in Andover the reason being that William Franklin is originally from Overton, which is a small village near Andover, and potentially they are looking for some sort of familial support from Franklin's family. The reason they give is a religious one. They had a vision that they were meant to go into the 'Land of Ham', the biblical 'Land of Ham' and ham being the first syllable of Hampshire, they decide it means Hampshire.

So there's a couple of motivations, you can choose which one you believe. And while there they have a brief stint of notoriety, which is their undoing because the civil authorities and the County grow a bit alarmed at this sort of like this strange nascent cult developing. And eventually it all goes horribly pear shaped and they end up recanting quite quickly and then

disappearing from history forever. From start to finish, we're talking about something which lasts a matter of months between winter 1649 to spring 1650.

It's not as uncommon in this period, as you may think. There are a couple of people who declare themselves to be the Messiah in the 1640s and 50s in England. So there's the wonderfully named Arise Evans who declares himself to be the son of Christ in 1644, a farm labourer, or a small general labourer called Roland Bateman declared himself to be God's son. And in 1651 John Robbins claimed himself to be the Messiah and his wife as Mary, the bride of Christ. So it's not an uncommon phenomenon in this period which is perhaps indicative of this wider social political religious unrest, which comes about whenever there's a, you know, huge, massive Civil War effectively and political revolution.

But Franklin himself is really interesting because we have a lot of detail in the sources for this case, which describe Franklin and Gadbury's backgrounds. So Franklin is, like I said, a rope maker who lives in Stepney in London and up to the mid-1640s been noted as a very religious respectful man. He then has what can only be described as a series of mental and physical illnesses. So, his family is visited by the plague and he himself suffers from the plague. And in 1646, he begins to undergo these series of mental disturbances in which he comes to believe that he is the Messiah. And initially he sort of retracts from that at the sort of instigation of his, his fellow believers in the sort of religious community he lives in. And sort of seems to go back to normal, but then he goes back, he begins to become a changed man. He becomes increasingly abusive towards his wife, he begins to consort with other women, and he is eventually exiled from his previous community.

Gadbury has a sort of similar life of hardship. So she's a bit younger than Franklin who's in his forties at this time, Gadbury is described as being around 30. And she is married to a man who left her with their servant and went to Holland, leaving Gadbury with their young daughter in London. Gadbury did go to Holland, to try and track down her husband, but it didn't work out. And so she's back in London, living in Watling Street alone. And that's very significant because in early modern England single women were treated with great suspicion. There was an element of sort of life being centered around a patriarchal household. So having this floating person would make people suspicious. And Franklin and Gadbury are both in London at this time and they're eventually introduced by someone who lives in Gadbury's house.

Julie: So they were not married to each other, but they went together to Andover. And I just assume in this period, this time, that would not have been very well accepted. What happened when they went to Andover?

Alex: You're completely right. From the beginning contemporaries would have thought this was very, very fishy business. They get in a lot of trouble from the moment they meet each other. So Franklin and Mary Gadbury are introduced and Gadbury sort of is told by Franklin that he is the Messiah. Her reaction is to laugh in his face initially. But then Gadbury seems to undergo a series of physical convulsions and fits, and also to experience a number of visions, which eventually convinced her that Franklin is indeed the Messiah.

It was so convincing and so sort of extreme as a physical event for her that after the first time she meets Franklin, she wakes up in the middle of the night and begins joyfully singing and sort of, you know, laughing and especially like, you know, utter joy flowing out of her to the

extent that her neighbour hearing her and also Gadbury's companion joins in the laughing and singing for reasons unknown. Gadbury's neighbour thinks they're witches and comes around to sort of think that they're having some sort of coven. And from there on sort of, there is this real sense of scandal about it. So Gadbury decides that she and Franklin are meant to be together in a spiritual nature, not as a physical man and wife, but more of a spiritual union. And so she goes to meet Mrs. Franklin and tells Mrs. Franklin that actually the man she thought she was married to no longer exists and instead has been replaced by a spiritual entity. And therefore, Mrs. Franklin is no longer Mrs. Franklin, she is just another woman and said Gadbury is now the bride of sort of the person formerly known as William Franklin. She then allows Franklin to come and stay the night with her. Again, she emphasises later on, in a purely platonic way, but her neighbours get wind of this and actually think she set up a brothel and get her pulled in front of the Mayor of London, though she manages to get off.

So before even they leave London, and the reason they leave London is probably because there's starting to be too much heat from neighbours who know about Franklin's wife, who disapprove of their spiritual camaraderie. They decide it's getting too difficult to be in London and they move to Hampshire after Gadbury specifically has this vision about the 'Land of Ham'. When they get to Andover, initially things go well, they set up at the Star Inn, they pretend to be man and wife. They come across superficially as very Godly. The real decisive moment and the real moment that Gadbury comes into her own, comes a little bit into this initial stay in Andover. When Franklin goes back to London, for business, whether for rope making or being a Messiah I don't know, I think the pamphlet implies it's more the earthly role than the spiritual. While he's away Gadbury begins to really spread the word. She starts telling people that she's seen Christ, she's seen the Messiah. And what does he look like? Well, he looks an awful lot like this man she knows as William Franklin. Though she's cunning enough not to say the name 'William Franklin'. She says 'I've seen him' and gives a physical description to match. So people start to hear about this Messiah in Hampshire, that he's coming back in two weeks, which coincidentally is when Franklin's due to come back from London and this rumour starts spreading. She's in a pub, which is a great social hub in a town. She's at Andover, which is a market town, so lots of travelers. And pretty soon a rumour is starting to go throughout Hampshire.

The most important thing she does though, is to get a couple of very specific people on board, including a man called Edward Spradbury, who's a cloth maker, I believe in Andover, but more importantly a Church of England minister called William Woodward and Woodward and Mrs. Woodward become very important followers of the 'Franklinites', as we shall call them.

Julie: So they actually managed to get a Church of England minister to believe Messiah was there. What type of consequences did that have? What is the next part of the story?

Alex: For Franklin and Gadbury, this is a real boon because a Church of England minister, especially in the 17th century, has enormous social standing and enormous influence over the local community. And it's a real sign of the fact that they've started to manage, to create something approaching a nascent following. More materially, though, he comes in great use for providing shelter because when Franklin comes back down from London news also comes back down through the waggoner, a Mr. Hunt, who has being approached by Mrs. Franklin, who's asked him if he's seen an errant Mr. Franklin. And the waggoner starts - tells everyone in Andover that actually, you know that couple staying at the Star Inn, they're not man and

wife, they're a very naughty pair indeed. And this is really bad news for them. The landlord of the inn, Mr. Rutney, immediately becomes much, much colder and tells them, in no uncertain terms to get out. Fortunately, then they can find shelter with the Woodwards who live at Crux Easton, which is a very small village nearby. So they go to Crux Easton, and we're now approaching the end game. So we're told they stay six weeks in Crux Easton. Franklin disappears back to London once more. And while they're there, they sort of seem to kind of make it the center and headquarters of their new following. They start to have multitudes, which is probably an exaggeration, but they start to have a lot of people coming to listen, coming to talk, interested in what's going on.

Franklin apparently is quite a convincing spiritual leader. We're told he speaks slowly, using lots of spiritual expressions. He also in the past has spoken in tongues. So Franklin plays his role well, Gadbury comes across as the more dynamic of the pair, though that's perhaps due to the nature of the sources, I think we might come on to a bit later.

So Gadbury says that she undergoes the pains of giving birth and she emphasises they're spiritual pains i.e. she has the spirit of God in her. She undergoes a birthing experience to the new followers where she gives birth to the spirit of Christ, which then imbues the followers who now converted to the 'Franklinite' cause with the Spirit of Christ. It's a metaphorical, almost like a baptism, if you will, sort of the moment where they are converted into this new following. She also manages to get some white linen off Mrs. Woodward, which is quite a funny moment. Gadbury says she has a vision that she needs to have a nice new white linen robe. She says to Mrs. Woodward, can you give me the cloth for it? And Mrs. Woodward is initially quite loath to lose her lovely cloth, but is eventually convinced into it. At this point in the story, things are going well, because the more people hear about it, the more people who don't like them hear about it and the people who really don't like them, local authorities and I think that's where we get towards the quite quick fall of the 'Franklinites'.

Julie: The fall of the Franklinites. I love that. So tell me more about that.

Alex: The problem is they're becoming too notorious, and the issue is that early modern England and especially Civil War England is terrified of heresy. So in this period, toleration is a dirty word. People don't want to tolerate difference. People think difference leads to error, error leads to the damnation of souls. So there's an innate suspicion in early modern England against anyone who goes against the grain. And especially innate suspicion against people who go against the grain in a really individual way, which overthrows social orders and hierarchies. And if you have someone who says, I'm the Messiah, everyone should quit what they're doing and join me. When people hear about Franklin doing his Messiahing in Hampshire, the authorities immediately think, ah no, we have a heretic on the loose, and he's gaining traction.

So quite quickly, the authorities swing into action and warrants are issued by the Justices of the Peace of the Hampshire Quarter Sessions, which are the local judicial hearings, which happen quarterly in the year. And they issue warrants to bring Franklin in. As the constable will later relate, he arrives, he finds Franklin and Gadbury in bed together. Their reaction is to tell him to take off his shoes because he is standing on Holy ground. His reaction is not noted. He brings them down to be examined by the Justices of the Peace in late January 1650. It's important to note this isn't a trial, it's an examination. If there is more to answer for seriously then they get bound over to be heard at the Assizes, which are a series of legal trials, which

decide matters of life and death. And that is in fact what happens to them. Specifically it's the men who are brought by Warrant, but the women come of their own volition, and they make the event into more of an event than an examination. So one of the followers, a Mrs. Waterman, is told by a spectator to please stand back because her breath did stink to which she replies, my breath doth not stink, it is the breath of God. And at one point Miss Mary Gadbury, who is by this account very beautiful, is thought to be wearing makeup. Now that's important because again, going back to the social stigma about unmarried women, if you were wearing makeup, it would indicate that she was a prostitute. So the judge, for this trial is happening at night, grabs a candle to go and look closer at her face saying that she couldn't be this beautiful naturally, to which Mary Gadbury who clearly had a great sense of showmanship leaned in towards the candle and declared that she was pleased that the sort of beauty of God did shine so clearly in her face that it had overwhelmed this stupid old man judge. Therein lies the problem, they're being difficult. And one of the things which these people being examined, the Franklinites, do which is a cause of annoyance, is they say, because they've been spiritually reborn, their physical entities, their physical bodies no longer exist. So when you're asked, give your name, your profession and your address, which is, you know, the standard sort of legal requirement, they say I don't have one because I've been spiritually reborn. This makes them basically rogues under the law and rogues under the law get sent to something called the House of Correction and being at the House of Correction is a very miserable place to be indeed, because you basically go and do physical tasks and get whipped.

Now at some point during these examinations, Franklin is clearly told about this, and he's also told, look as a rogue under the law, if you keep on refusing to give your details, you're going to get whipped in the House of Correction. As a blasphemer, you are running the risk of being executed. Blasphemy in this period is a bit murky and there is an existing law from 1648 about blasphemy, that hadn't actually thought about what to do with people who declared themselves to be the Messiah, perhaps because people hadn't expected that to happen. So Franklin is actually in a bit of a gray area, but he's probably being told, do you really want to take the risk of like the peoples, of the judges at the assizes deciding that actually this is a matter of Blasphemy?

Franklin starts to crack. Franklin agrees to be examined, initially. And then after being leaned on even more Franklin recants, Franklin draws up a confession, probably drafted by one of the judges, saying that I'm not actually the Messiah and it's all an error. And the great thing is we actually know what Gadbury's reaction is, we have the moment that it's read in court. Because when it's read in court Gadbury, and I'm quoting "With a very angry countenance, demanded has thou done this? Is this thy hand? At which he remaining some time silent, at last answered: you see what the times are, or you see what condition we are fallen into".

It's a wonderful moment of drama and that's the moment sort of that everything cracks. So the leader of the cult has cracked, Gadbury and all his followers see it. And Gadbury's reactions is not singular. Another of the followers goes to punch him 'though stops or, doesn't quite make it. One other of the followers, Mr. Woodward, the Church of England minister, immediately says quite comically trying to get out of trouble, he thought there was something dodgy about them. He never really trusted them. I think in fact, his exact words are to say, he thought they were witches. So everything unravels. This is sort of the moment things end, but events continue thereafter.

Julie: I find it quite fascinating that the minister blames William and Mary for witchcraft when it was mostly women at this time, especially, I know the witch hunts kind of declined after I think, 1640, but you have the East Anglian witch hunts in 1645, 47. But it's quite interesting that he says, Oh, it's both not just a woman.

Alex: Woodward's reaction really shines through as an example of someone trying to get out of a burning house. When Woodward and his wife were examined at the same time and asked about Franklin, Mrs. Woodward, who clearly is a devout follower of the cause, says that Franklin is her Lord and her King, you know, she's standing by her previous convictions. Whereas Mr. Woodward clearly realizing, oh no, we're in trouble, just says that Franklin and the woman called Mary Gadbury who came with him, did call themselves man and wife, and that they lay together in one bed in his house about a fortnight. In other words, he just goes with the bare details to try and avoid trouble. I think there's a real sense in this, that Woodward is flailing when he sort of starts accusing people of witchcraft, he realizes that things are really starting to sink and that he needs to get out of the ship.

Julie: Yeah, because this is not just a time of political tensions, but a lot of religious tension so what were the consequences basically for everyone involved?

Alex: Well, this is where the story becomes quite depressing because Gadbury has really been conducting herself at this stage of the examinations really defiantly, refusing to budge an inch. And because of that, she is sent to the House of Correction, which I mentioned earlier, and after a week of receiving corporal punishment, she's broken in spirit. She comes before the judges, she's crying. She too sort of bends and is examined and, and recants.

Now, the question is what to do with Franklin and Gadbury and the issue is, as I mentioned, the blasphemy law is quite unclear about what to do about someone who calls themselves the Messiah. There is a question of bigamy. Now, bigamy is very important in this case because Franklin and Gadbury have been living together as man and wife. The justices decide that probably the best thing to do after the examination is to put them both in prison. Let them wait for the Assizes and then let superior judges come. There's also an attempt at these trials to try and work out whether Gadbury might be guilty of infanticide because her spiritual birthing pains, the judges are curious to know whether they might've actually been real birthing pains and whether a child might have been produced, who Gadbury got rid of, but that doesn't seem to have actually had much sort of traction, but it pops up now and again, as something that judges are interested in investigating.

So post this examination, they're stuck in prison. And this is one of the stranger moments because if the entire purpose of this had been to kind of crush Franklin and Gadbury, quite to the horror of the authorities, loads of people start coming, bringing supplies, support, you know, necessities, to the couple to the extent they actually have quite a comfortable life. They are also not short of curious people who want to come and see what the Messiah looks like. Not necessarily as converts or as followers but just interested people. And so you get lots of Church of England ministers going to interview these people to see how the Wiles of Satan work and to figure out how the machinations of evil manifest themselves.

Also while there they seem to reconcile. So Gadbury, as you can imagine, is quite angry with Franklin after he led her down the garden path and got her whipped and thrown into prison. But she seems to oscillate between angry feelings of betrayal, and also at times saying

actually I still hold by my original belief that he is the Messiah and that my visions were all true.

Though, in the end, things come to a head at the Assizes, which I think happened in March. And at the Assizes everyone is now recanting saying that actually Franklin isn't the son of God. The only new moment is a sort of quite sad moment where Gadbury is being quizzed again by the judges about the nature of her relationship with Franklin. Was it sexual or was it purely platonic? And Gadbury is maintaining that this is just the platonic relationship of like-minded souls and she declares that Franklin was just a fellow feeler in her misery at which the entire court burst out laughing. It's a moment sort of where Gadbury is - really bears the brunt of most of this retribution, and that's manifest in the charges. So Franklin and the male followers having recanted are merely sent to prison until someone pays security, as in someone stands the security for them with money so that they could be released.

So the people who live in Hampshire, their followers, get released quite easily. But no one wants to pay for Franklin because no one wants to pay for a heretic. So when the pamphlet, which is the source for this story, when the pamphlet's written in May 1650, Franklin's still in jail, Gadbury on the other hand, because she's seen by the judges as a lewd woman, she is sent back to the House of Correction for another few weeks and the final sighting of her again broken by this period of intense physical hardship and punishment is a few weeks later when she appears before the Justices of the Peace pleading to be discharged. And the last we see of her is going off in a wagon back to London on the 22nd of April 1650.

It's the women who come off much worst in the Franklin story and throughout the source material as well, they're treated as being gullible and simple, simple enough to fall for Franklin's claim to be the Messiah, but also the writer of the pamphlet, Humphrey Ellis, who's a minister, a preacher, I should say, actually, at Winchester Cathedral, he also clearly sort of wants to make the real drivers of evil in the story be the women. It's Gadbury who drives most of the operations and it's Mrs. Woodward who convinces her husband in his telling. And there's an element that he says this explicitly at times where he treats the women in the story as being akin to Eve in the Garden, bringing about the destruction of the Garden of Eden and there's this curious dichotomy in that depiction, because there's an element to which, they're both simple and passive and tricked, or they're extremely cunning and active and dynamic and that in turn leads to these very negative consequences, such as for poor Mary Gadbury at the House of Correction.

Julie: So this story, the source of this, you mentioned a pamphlet. Can you tell us more about that pamphlet?

Alex: The reason this is such a wonderful story is because it's so detailed and the reason it's so detailed is because we have an incredibly thorough pamphlet written by a man called Humphrey Ellis. What we know about him is that he did not like heresy. In fact in 1647, he publishes these sermons he's delivered where he attacks heretics, especially as what he saw as heretics being Baptists. He also engages in a public disputation at Basingstoke in 1649 against Baptists. And it's just worth pointing out just for the specific point that in the 1640s, those who argued against infant baptism were very controversial and aroused a lot of suspicion. He therefore is quite a natural choice to write this, but also because he seems to have taken a great personal interest in the events. The pamphlet is from start to finish an extremely detailed account. We have details about the people involved's backgrounds. We have details about the

events, we have details about the trials. The only bit we're lacking is a sort of aftermath. And the reason it's so detailed is because Ellis throughout, both personally and through correspondence and other sources, went about trying to get every piece of information. So if you remember earlier, I talked about, Gadbury going to see Franklin's wife, and telling Mrs. Franklin she was no longer married, we know this because Ellis interviewed her or at least he says he heard it from her with her shedding many tears. The main thrust of this entire pamphlet comes from Mary Gadbury's confession, that is to say her examination before the Justices of the Peace or the justices at the Assizes where Ellis took down what she said, probably in shorthand. Ellis throughout has correspondents, loads of people around the local area who give him details about what's going on at all times, he gets documents and has a look at them. And this reflects a little bit what the mission behind the pamphlet is. So Ellis is trying to sort of write this warning text, this is how heresy happens, this is what its consequences are. And he says explicitly that he's actually put up to this to an extent beyond his personal interest and stake. And the result is text, which is not unrivaled, but certainly notable for its detail. All these wonderful sorts of notes about who said what, where, what people were, how they acted, it's a wonderful, wonderful source. And it's full of these stupendously personal details.

Outro: We hope you enjoyed listening to today's episode. If you would like to find out a little bit more about what we've been talking about, then please visit the website, www.winchesterheritageopendays.org, or click on Hampshire HistBites, and there you'll find today's show notes as well as some links to more information.

Thank you.