

JOHN CALLAWAY, a Master Silk Weaver.

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Born in the Spitalfield area of London in 1739, Callaway died on July 15 1807 in Northgate Street, Canterbury.



John Calloway, Silk Weaver and a Founder of the Canterbury Philosophical and Literary Institution by Stephen Hewson (Canterbury City Council Museums and Galleries)

Callaway with his wife and children moved to Canterbury in early 1769¹. This was a period of tension between different groups of weavers, and journeymen with their masters. The number of weavers in Canterbury during the eighteenth century had been steadily reducing and by 1786 only twenty remained². Whereas Callaway moved to Canterbury, many of the weavers of this city had migrated to London. The general decline of weavers was a result of cheaper imported silks and the American war.

¹ Barber, A. Uncovering, The Beane Backstory. (Canterbury 2013) p8.

² Gregory, E.W., Canterbury Weavers 1564-1905 (London 1905) p9.

His obituary (*in italics*) in the Kentish Gazette on July 17 1807 gives a comprehensive view of his life. It stated that he was '*an ingenious and formerly eminent silk weaver, from whose looms some of the most beautiful and costly fabrics have been produced and adorn the palaces of royalty.*' Hasted wrote that 'in the year 1789 I saw in Mr Callaway's silk looms, the richest and most beautiful piece of silk furniture for the Prince of Wales palace of Carlton House'³.

'On the abundant introduction of cottons, and consequent decline of the silk trade, he successfully invested that mixture of those materials, known by the names of Canterbury damasks, Chambery and Canterbury muslins, & C. The latter part of the eighteenth century was a time when cotton mills were being erected in large numbers around the country. It is believed that Callaway travelled north to inspect the mills, possibly even to visit Richard Arkwright, and inspect the processes used to combine the threads on the machines. Early in the 1780s John Callaway erected a mill to the west of Rough Common Road in Stock Wood, but the small stream had insufficient flow and during the summers the mill was only able to work for three or four hours in two days which meant he had to lay off about a hundred people⁴. He asked for permission to build another mill in Shaol Oak, Hackington, in the back stream leading from Dean's Mill into the River Stour a little below Barton Mill. This water mill was for making cotton twist, which Calloway then combined with the silk on his looms. In October 1790 the commissioners looked at the site and agreed he could build his mill. A man called Thomas Marshall⁵ who emigrated to America in 1791 stated in a letter applying for a position that he had worked for Sir Richard Arkwright at Masson Mill and also that 'I last winter erected the cotton mill in all its branches for a Mr Callaway of Canterbury Kent. This gentleman was the inventor of the muslins that bear the name of the above town and which there is such a rapid demand for now all over England'. Callaway ceased using his mill by 1798, but his will confirmed continued ownership.⁶ The secret of this fabric was believed to have died with Callaway. However, in 1896 two ladies, Miss C F Phillpotts and Miss K Homes revived the weaving industry in Canterbury. Initially their premises were at 39 High Street but in 1899 they moved to The Weavers on the Kings Bridge and by 1905 they had thirty weavers. A small piece of Calloway's muslin had survived and this was analysed and the secret of its construction discovered and some of the gauze was made. When the premises called The Weavers was being renovated for the new weaving industry, pieces of raw silk, pieces of looms and bobbins were discovered under the floorboards.⁷ It is believed that John Callaway lived or worked in this building.

In 1803⁸ his address was given as late of St Peters, but no actual address was given to corroborate this idea, however, he definitely had a manufactory in St Alphage Street, as this appeared in an advert in the Kentish Gazette dated April 3 1779 and in his will

³ 'Canterbury: Silk and other manufactures', The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent: Volume 11 (1800) pp. 91-98.

⁴ CKS/S/EK/S/M/4 Records of the East Kent Commissioners of Sewers, Minute Book 1784-1792

⁵ <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-08-02-0504> This piece of information cannot be confirmed at present.

⁶ CKS/S/EK/S/M/5 Records of the East Kent Commissioners of Sewers, Minute Book 1793-1801

⁷ op.cit. Gregory p.14

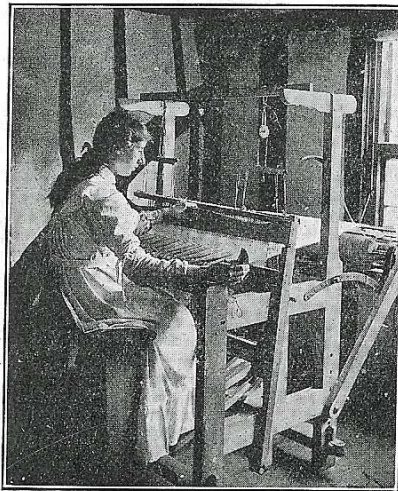
⁸ CCA-CC-J/Q/box 87 1800-1805 Court of Quarter Sessions

he says that his shop was adjoining the Prince of Wales Public House in St Alphege Street.

His obituary continues by saying ‘of a strong, though uncultivated mind, he was indefatigable in the acquirement of science, and being equally desirous of communicating what he thought good to others, he founded in 1768, an Historical Society, at first principally among that class of ingenious mechanics with whom he was associated, but which has been since extended and strenuously supported by his mental knowledge and personal abilities’. The date 1768 and the title Historical Society is not quite correct. The Friendly Society (which in 1802 became the Historical Society) was founded in 1769. The front of the rulebook for this society states ‘founded by the advice and assistance of John Callaway’⁹. Members of this Society were allowed to borrow one book free for one week. This Society later changed its name to The Philosophical Society, which, as well as a library, also housed a museum. Following various municipal changes and, of course, the donation by James Beaney, Canterbury now has a well-used library and museum in the centre of the city.

Advertisement which appeared in Canterbury Official Guide (about 1915) ed. Francis Bennett-Goldney

Canterbury Weavers, Ltd., King's Bridge, Canterbury.



One of the Looms at King's Bridge, Canterbury, where Canterbury Tweeds are made.

Open to Visitors
daily, from 10 to 12.30
and 2 to 5.30.

Thursdays, 10 to 12.30
only.

When the looms may
be seen, and the
materials inspected
in the course of
manufacture.

Manufacturers of the following hand-woven materials—

Canterbury Tweeds. Made of pure Kent wool. Soft to handle, comfortable to wear, and with durability extraordinary.

Canterbury Silk-Finished Linens. In all the newest shades. Will not fade. Wash and clean well.

Goods manufactured on the premises, and can be purchased at the above address.

⁹ op.cit. Barber p9.