

Thomas Skelton – “The Fool of Haigh?”



At Muncaster Castle hangs a full-length portrait of Tom Skelton, “The Muncaster Fool” dressed in fool's motley and holding a staff, with a document, in the form of a will, hanging beside him.

Skelton moved to Haigh from Muncaster in 1659, following the death of Joseph Pennington of Muncaster, whose young heir William became a ward of Sir Roger Bradshaigh of Haigh, who had married Joseph's sister Elizabeth in 1647.

Once young William Pennington came of age, and returned to Muncaster, about 1676, he was offered the original, and the Bradshaighs had the copy made for their own collection.

The cruder version of the portrait, unsigned and dated, used to hang at Haigh Hall, but was sold to the Shakespeare Institute in 1957 (see above).

There is reference to Thomas being the character “Tom Fool” in Shakespeare’s play King Lear, however Thomas lived a long time after Shakespeare, so not the Bard’s inspiration.

It is not known the amount of time Thomas spent at Haigh, records are scarce, as he would have been considered to be a family servant. However, his will was written at Haigh.

There is a burial of a Thomas Scelton of Haigh recorded in the Wigan parish register on 13 January 1668.

Thomas. Skelton late fool of Muncaster last Will and Testament

Be it known to ye, oh grave and wise men all,
That I Thom Fool am Sheriff of ye Hall,
I mean the Hall of Haigh, where I command
What neither I nor you do understand.

My Under Sheriff is Ralph Wayte you know,
As wise as I am and as witty too.

Of Egremond I have Burrow Serjeant beene,

Of Wiggan Bailiff too, as may be seen

By my white staff of office in my hand,

being carried straight as the badge of my
command:

A low high constable too was once my calling,

Which I enjoyed under kind Henry Rawling;

And when the Fates a new Sheriff send,

I'm Under Sheriff prick'd World without end.

He who doth question my authority

May see the seal and patten here ly by.

The dish with luggs which I do carry here

Shews all my living is in good strong beer.

If scurvy lads to me abuses do,

I'll call 'em scurvy rogues and rascals too.

Fair Dolly Copeland in my cap is placed;

Monstrous fair is she, and as good as all the
rest.

Honest Nich. Pennington, honest Ths. Turner,
both

Will bury me when I this world go forth.

But let me not be carry'd o'er the brigg,

Lest falling I in Duggas River ligg;

Nor let my body by old Charnock lye,

But by Will. Caddy, for he'll lye quietly

And when I'm bury'd then my friends may
drink,

But each man pay for himself, that's best I
think.

This is my Will, and this I know will be

Perform'd by them as they have promised me.

Sign'd, Seal'd, Publish'd, and Declared in the
presence of

HENRY RAWLING

HENRY TROUGHTON

THS. TURNER

THS. SKELTON, X his Mark