

DAY THE YOUNG JOSEPH RANK WAS MUGGED IN HULL

It is a little known fact that one of East Yorkshire's most famous sons, Joseph Rank, flour miller extraordinaire and father of film-maker Lord (J. Arthur) Rank, was assaulted and robbed in Hull when just a youth of fifteen.

A 144-year-old newspaper account of the court case which dealt with the aftermath of this event, came to light when I researched my own ancestral family connections with the Rank dynasty in the early 19th century

In its morning edition of 21st January 1870, the *Hull Packet and East Riding Times* carried a report of a court case, initially unfolding at the Hull Police Court, before a stipendiary magistrate, against Frederick Bacchus, aged 22 years, who was charged with stealing 18 shillings and 6 pence "from a youth named Joseph Rank."

The prosecutor said Rank was the son of James Rank, miller of Stepney (Hull), who the previous day went out to collect money for his father. "At about 1 o'clock he went to the shop kept by the prisoner's mother, in Argyle Street, St John's Wood, and there received £2. 8 shillings. When he got into the street, and was tying the bag, after putting the money into it, the prisoner (Bacchus) came up and seized it, struck him on the chest and face, and ran away down the street."

Joseph followed and caught up with Mr Smith, a butcher, who was in his cart. "Rank got into it and Mr Smith drove after the prisoner, who ran down Terry Street. They went down Margaret Street, Beverley Road, where they captured him and handed him over to Pc Palmer."

The constable said that on receiving the prisoner into custody he put the handcuff on Bacchus's right wrist, and the prisoner with his left hand drew the money out of his right-hand pocket, and attempted to throw it to Rank, saying: "Take your --- money." Pc Palmer, however, seized the prisoner's hand, and took possession of the money.

Bacchus, who had been convicted once previously – for entering a house and stealing wearing apparel – refused to cross-examine the witness, and did not make any defence. He was committed for trial at a higher court sessions.

Strangely, a biography of Joseph Rank, "Through the Mill," makes no direct reference to the court case, or to the fact that young Rank was assaulted. The author merely comments: "Sometimes he (Joseph) would be sent out to collect money, with the satchel strapped to his back, and on one occasion it was stolen. His father was furious and made him pay every penny of the money out of his own earnings, which were seven-and-sixpence a week. Out of that meagre wage he had to clothe himself, and he went without an overcoat in the bitterest weather because he could not afford to buy one."

Thanks to his entrepreneurial talents, which freed him from family dependency, Joseph revolutionised Britain's entire milling industry, setting up a national business which gave employment to thousands of people under the enduring name Rank

Hovis McDougall. He also amassed a personal fortune and became one of the richest men in England.

Several of my ancestral family were also East Yorkshire flour millers, with mills at Bishop Burton, near Beverley, and Patrington, going back into the 17th century. They had various inter-family connections with the Ranks in the 19th century.

Ann Hopper, born 1777, was the sister of my three times great-grandfather, William Hopper, a Patrington miller. Ann married John Wreghit, in Patrington, and the fifth of their 12 children was Margaret, later described as a “gentlewoman” in the 1823 Baines’s Directory for Patrington. The other four listed as “gentry” for the parish were all men.

It was Margaret Wreghit who started the link between our families when she married, by licence, John Rank, grandfather of Joseph, in Patrington, on 5th July 1828. They produced their eldest son James the following year.

In a rather sniffy aside about the Wreghit family, Joseph Rank’s biographer records, when referring to Joseph’s father, “Although upright in business, James was not as strong in character as his famous son proved to be. He came of the line of Wreghit of Patrington, on his mother's side - she having been Margaret Wreghit, born 1804, daughter of a Patrington watchmaker and engraver, and one of a family of nine girls.

“Joseph Rank once said: 'I can remember my grandmother saying there was a Mrs. Bonham living in the same place, Patrington, who had nine boys, and she said to Mrs. Wreghit that she would not swop her nine lads for nine lasses.' James Rank, however, took his pick from the nine lasses, and doubtless believed he had chosen the bonniest.

“How they met, and the circumstances of their courtship, are now forgotten, but the Ranks certainly had associations with Patrington, as in 1831 the Misses J. and M. Rank carried on a millinery business in the town. Moreover, in the chancel floor of Patrington Church is a stone, in fairly good preservation, with the inscription: 'Mary, daughter of Robert Rank, died October 1797', which suggests that the roots of the Ranks go a long way back into the history of East Yorkshire.

“The Hopper family... were also millers at Patrington. That perhaps helped to serve as an introduction between James Rank and his bride. 'I do not know where my grandfather first started milling', wrote Joseph Rank, 'but I presume at Patrington.' ”

Joseph Rank’s youngest son of his seven children (three sons and four daughters) with wife Emily (nee Voase) was Joseph Arthur, born in Hull in 1888. He was also to become just as famous, a world renowned film-maker of the 20th century, J. Arthur Rank, later Lord Rank.

By Peter Hopper