

The Life and Times of Michael Yoakley (1631-1708)

Our founder, Michael Yoakley, started life as a farmhand on Drapers Farm in Margate. Despite humble beginnings, through hard work and good fortune, he rose to become a successful merchant based in London.

When he was a boy, agricultural wages were low and many working families were undernourished. Poor relief was administered by 'Overseers' under the 1601 Relief of the Poor Act. It was localised, variable and frequently harsh. A few devout and wealthy individuals did make provision for the poor. Michael Yoakley never forgot his humble origins and the struggles of his widowed mother. When as a young man his fortunes took a turn for the better, he was inspired to make a covenant with God to build almshouses for the poor if the opportunity arose.

The 17th Century was a turbulent time with the English Civil War (1642-51), Restoration of the Monarchy (1660), Plague (1665), Great Fire of London (1666), Glorious Revolution (1688), recurring religious persecution, and numerous wars with the French, Dutch and Spanish.

Yet it was also a time of innovation with developments in science, astronomy and navigation. For example, Christopher Wren founded the Royal Society in 1660, the Royal Observatory at Greenwich was completed in 1676 and Isaac Newton published his laws of physics in 1687. The colonies on the East Coast of America expanded and trade became an increasingly important part of the British economy. Merchants were more respected and Michael Yoakley's status in society would have risen accordingly.

We have no pictures of Michael Yoakley, nor any descriptions of his appearance. We can assume he was extremely strong to have been recruited onto a merchant ship as a boy and to have survived to the age of 77 when the average life expectancy was 35.



AGE	MICHAEL YOAKLEY	HISTORICAL CONTEXT
1631	Michael is baptised 15 th May at St John the Baptist Church, Margate. Although the church was altered and restored in Victorian times, the Tudor font is still there.	Charles I is ruling without Parliament - The 11 Years Tyranny which began in 1629.
1639	8	War between England and Scotland starts, ending in 1644.
1642	11	Michael is working at Drapers Farm Margate as a farmhand and shepherd earning 2 shillings (10 pence) a week, barely enough to live on.
1645	14	Michael starts work on a hoy boat taking produce from Margate to London. Around this time he made a covenant with God to build almshouses for the poor if the opportunity arose.
1647	16	The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) is established by George Fox.
1649	18	Charles I is beheaded.
1650	19	Golden age of piracy 1650-1680, mostly in the Caribbean.
1651	20	Michael is now an experienced seafarer.
1652	21	Start of first Anglo Dutch War. First coffee house opens in London.
1653	22	Oliver Cromwell makes himself Lord Protector.
1654	23	End of first Anglo Dutch War.
1657	26	Tea is sold for the first time in England in coffee houses in London. This was green tea.
1658	27	Oliver Cromwell dies. His son Richard succeeds him.
1660	29	Restoration of the Monarchy as Charles II becomes King. Samuel Pepys starts his diary writing detailed observations of events in 17th Century England. The Royal Society, dedicated to promoting excellence in science, is founded by Christopher Wren, Robert Boyle (scientist) and William Petty (economist).
1662	31	Michael is recorded buying property in Wentworth Street, Spitalfields, suggesting he is doing well and has relocated to London.
1664	33	Quakers officially persecuted by Quaker Act. Charles II marries Princess Catherine of Portugal who introduces Chinese black tea to England.
1665	34	Thomas Yoakley, Michael's uncle is imprisoned for being a Quaker.
1666	35	Further persecution of Quakers under Conventicle Act. Press Gangs started. While they would not have taken masters of ships, the crew were vulnerable.
1665	34	Great Plague in London. Start of second Anglo Dutch War.
1666	35	June: During the Anglo Dutch War sea battles rage off North Foreland, Thanet. Sept: Great Fire of London. Although the fire did not reach Spitalfields where Michael owned property, ships moored on the Thames would have been affected.
1667	36	End of second Anglo Dutch War.
1670	39	Throughout the 1670s and 1680s Michael is making regular voyages across the Atlantic to the New Colonies of America. These would have been dangerous journeys lasting at least 3 months each way. Navigation was by simple compass for direction, chip log, line & sand glass for speed, lead line for depth, and a quadrant, cross staff or astrolabe to measure latitude, longitude and time. The first reliable sea charts of the East Coast of North America were not published until 1689. The ships would have travelled in small convoys of about seven. Each ship was approximately 250 tons and carried a crew of 20 men. Their food would have been basic: salt beef, bacon, cheese, dried peas and beans (made into stews) hard ship's biscuits and beer.

AGE	MICHAEL YOAKLEY	HISTORICAL CONTEXT
1672	41	Start of third Anglo Dutch War.
1674	43	End of third Anglo Dutch War.
1676	45	Records show Michael in London, master of the ship "Hopewell", bound for Maryland America.
1678	47	Completion of the Royal Observatory in Greenwich which played a major role in astronomy and navigation.
1681	50	At this time tobacco was regarded as a medicine being chewed, smoked or soaked in water and laid on wounds. There were few ailments it was not prescribed for although some physicians were beginning to criticise its indiscriminate use.
1681	50	William Penn (a Quaker) receives ownership of Pennsylvania from Charles II.
1682	51	Records show Michael in London loading the "Hopewell" for Maryland on behalf of William Penn.
1684	53	Records show Michael is taking indentured servants to Maryland.
1685	54	Indentured servants were people who agreed to work for 4-7 years for no pay when they arrived, in exchange for their passage to the colonies.
1685	54	Michael marries Mary Munday, a widow aged 45. Early Quakers believed in women's intellectual capabilities so she would have been educated. By now he has established almshouses in Spitalfields, London and places his wife in charge of them.
1687	56	Charles II dies. His brother, James II, becomes King.
1687	56	Isaac Newton first published his laws of physics. Persecution of Quakers is relaxed by Declaration of Indulgence.
1688	57	Glorious Revolution replaces King James II with William III and Queen Mary (eldest daughter of James II).
1689	58	Bill of Rights passed - it limited the power of the monarchy, set out basic civil rights and bolstered freedom of speech. Persecution of Quakers stopped under Act of Tolerance.
1693	62	Michael is recorded paying tax on property and stock in Whitechapel confirming his status as a prosperous merchant.
1694	63	Regular shipments are taken to Pennsylvania including German people fleeing religious persecution.
1698	67	The Bank of England is founded to manage substantial debts caused by William III's wars with Ireland and Scotland. Queen Mary dies aged 32.
1698	67	Richard Colegate is recorded as agent for Michael Yoakley in Chesapeake, Virginia, suggesting his business is doing well but he is making fewer voyages to North America.
1701	70	Michael buys Drapers Farm, Margate, where he grew up and worked as a boy.
1701	70	Start of War of Spanish succession which ends in 1714.
1702	71	Anne (the younger sister of Queen Mary) becomes Queen of England Scotland.
1705	74	Treasury Records showing Michael as master of his ship the "Hopewell" being hired by the government to transport Her Majesty's (Queen Anne) Forces, ammunition and stores during the Spanish War of Succession. To have refused would have been regarded as treason. The "Hopewell" is taken by the enemy on 15 Dec. 1705. How this happened and how Michael returned to England is not known. His ship could have been taken by Privateers (licenced pirates) or the French or Spanish navy.
1707	76	Michael's will outlining his plans to form almshouses to be built at Drapers Farm with the proceeds of his estate is dated 31 March 1707.
1708	77	Michael Yoakley dies on 21 st April and is buried at Schoolhouse Lane, Ratcliff.
1708	77	On the north bank of the Thames, Ratcliff is now split between the modern day districts of Limehouse, Stepney and Wapping.
1709	78	May: The first meeting of Trustees at Tom's Coffee House, London, establishes Michael Yoakley's Charity.
1710	79	The first 8 Margate almshouses are completed and occupied, with Clockhouse for the overseer.