

# The 13th and 14th Lords Willoughby of Parham: Typical and untypical members of a Dissenting family

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As has already been pointed out at length, the Lancashire Willoughbys and their line of Lords Willoughby of Parham, stretching from the 11th to the 15th Barons, displayed for the most part from 1640 to 1765 a remarkable continuity of allegiance to Presbyterianism and in due course to Whiggery.<sup>1</sup> There were two brief lapses in this continuity. The first occurred when the ambitious future 12th Baron gained his first taste of power by responding in 1688 to James II's overtures to Protestant Dissenters, after which albeit brief interval of collaboration he and his patron the 2nd Earl of Macclesfield were fortunate to survive the Revolution. At least, however, the 12th Baron's collaboration with an absolutist sovereign was motivated, if incongruously, by the desire to gain toleration for his fellow Dissenters who had suffered grievously through the repressive measures of the Clarendon Code. The second deviation from the family norm, occurring when the 13th Baron briefly held the peerage in 1712–13 and involving apparently good accord with Tory neighbours, seems to have had no nonconformist dimension whatever, although before he came to the peerage his role as a

<sup>1</sup> See my 'A neglected Revolution family: The Lancashire Lords Willoughby of Parham and their association with Protestant Dissent, 1640–1765' (PhD thesis, Univ. of Liverpool, 1970); also 'A Dissenting Northern family: The Lancashire branch of the Willoughbys of Parham, 1640–1765', *Northern History*, 7 (1972), pp. 31–53; 'Hugh, 12th Lord Willoughby of Parham, a leading Lancashire Dissenter at and after the Revolution of 1688–9', *THSLC*, 146 (1996), pp. 31–66; 'Hugh [15th] Lord Willoughby of Parham: A neglected Society President', *Antiquaries Journal*, LII part 1 (1972), pp. 169–84.



FIGURE 1 *Willoughby Farm, Haigh. Probable home of Francis Willoughby and birthplace of the 13th and 14th Lords Willoughby of Parham.*

soldier under Marlborough and apparently as a militia captain at the time of the 1708 Rebellion would have been agreeable enough to the Whigs. When, however, after his early death, he was succeeded by his also shortlived brother, dissenting associations in religion and politics unequivocally reasserted themselves in one who both continued his uncle the 12th Baron's forceful protection of dissent-

ing congregations installed in chapelries, and who impressed his Whig superiors in London with an uncompromising nonconformist conscience which he would bequeath to his distinguished son, the 15th Baron.

## I

The service of Edward, the 13th Baron, under Marlborough in Flanders had been in a very humble capacity; putting it politely in 1735 Collins' *Peerage* recorded that he had been a 'private gentleman'. As the younger son of a family which had inherited a title without estates, his father Francis had only been able to offer him in youth a yeoman lifestyle, probably at the old tenant farm which still bears the family name in Haigh, where the then Tory Bradshaighs were the dominant gentry. Either an austere early life of poverty complicated by puritanical abstinence, or perhaps some other factor, was to cause him and his three brothers—Thomas, Hugh, and Charles (the 14th Baron)—all to die young.<sup>2</sup> His lack of wealth and social aplomb probably kept him in the ranks of Marlborough's army, and perhaps the rigours of life at that level were beyond him, for by the early months of 1708 he was apparently in England again. Another factor promoting his return may have been that since the death of his father Francis in 1704 he had been the heir to his uncle, the 12th Baron. Whatever the cause of his return, it was recorded that on 19 March 1708, 'Edward Willoby Esqr' had with others visited the Roman Catholic squire Nicholas Blundell of Little Crosby, and selected for removal two of his coach horses.<sup>3</sup> This move was of course among the precautions taken by the lieutenancy and militia of Lancashire at the time of the threatened Jacobite invasion of Scotland, Edward's uncle the 12th Baron having been among those deputy lieutenants who on 16 March had signed a warrant ordering militia officers to arrest named 'Papists, Non-jurors and disaffected persons'.<sup>4</sup> It would seem probable that

<sup>2</sup> His uncle Jonathan, praised for his humility and for eating 'but one meal a day', had died at thirty-two. See *Letters of eminent literary men*, Camden Society, 23 (1843), p. 188.

<sup>3</sup> *The Great Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell of Little Crosby*, vol. 1, Record Society of Lancs & Cheshire (RSLC), 1968, p. 166.

<sup>4</sup> Lancashire Record Office, Preston (Lancs RO), DDHo/475/1.

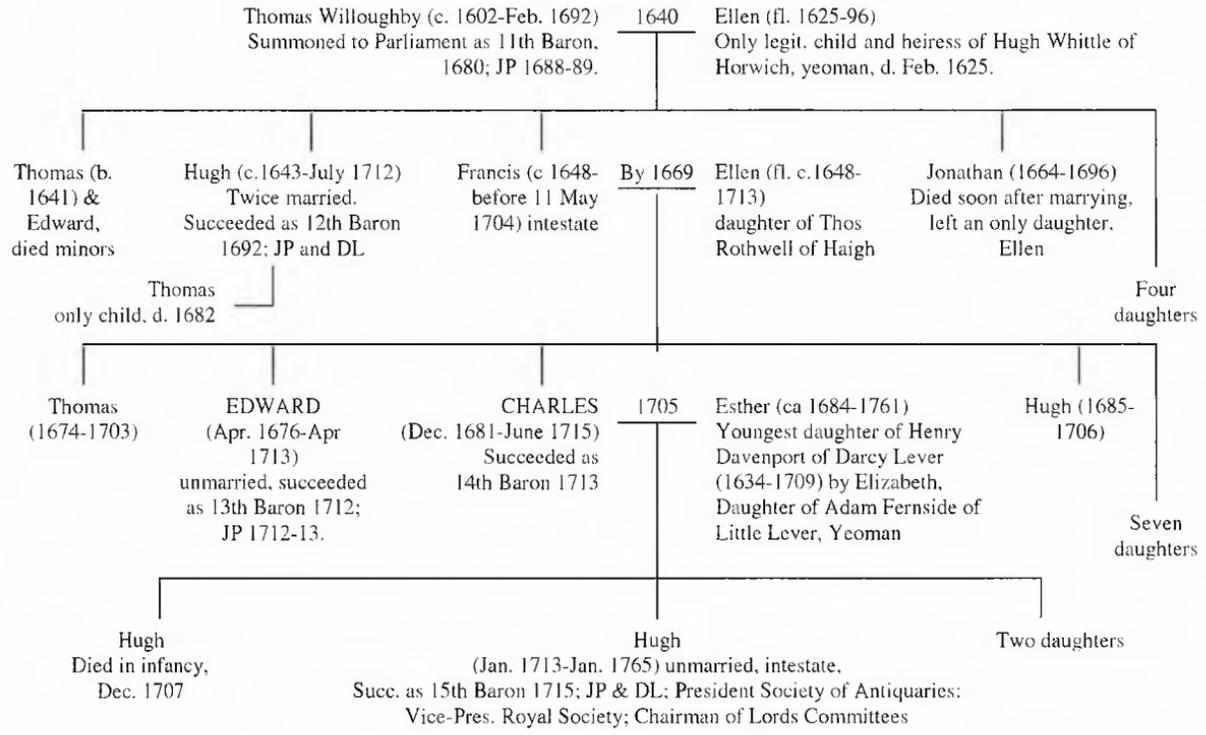


FIGURE 2 A brief pedigree of the Lancs Lords Willoughby of Parham

Edward, back from Flanders with some military experience and now heir to a peerage, was the 'Capt. Willoughby' payments to whom on 1 June and 22 August following are recorded in the Lancashire militia accounts.<sup>5</sup> It should be pointed out that the Willoughbys had been staunch supporters of the Revolution and opponents of Jacobitism ever since the passing of the Toleration Act in 1689.

Edward disappeared into obscurity again after 1708, not reappearing until on 3 July 1712 he succeeded his uncle and became the 13th Lord Willoughby of Parham. During his nine months tenure of the title there appears to have been a quite exceptional lull in its long association with Presbyterianism and even with Whiggery. Following his succession, he was at once appointed a magistrate (if not of the quorum), even though the ill-fated Duke of Hamilton was still Lord Lieutenant of the county; and in September he participated in a local privy sessions, later attending the Michaelmas quarter sessions where those present also included his Tory neighbour, Sir Roger Bradshaigh, Bart. In March 1713, after Hamilton's death and shortly before his own, he would also be included in the quorum.<sup>6</sup>

By November 1712 he was in London, for on the 18th Sir Roger Bradshaigh reported to George Kenyon that on the previous Sunday 'my Lord Willoughby and I dined with Lord Berkley' and that prominent in the conversation had been Kenyon's prospects as parliamentary candidate for Wigan.<sup>7</sup> Evidently viewed by Bradshaigh as an amenable colleague, the 13th Baron was however given no opportunity to develop and demonstrate his political allegiances in the Lords. The three meetings he eventually attended in January and February 1713 were for prorogation only, and when on 3rd March a fourth such meeting was summoned, he, perhaps ominously, failed to attend.<sup>8</sup> On the latter date a royal warrant was issued for the payment to him of £400 'as of our free gift and royal bounty', an instalment of the pension which his family had been receiving since it gained peerage status without any estates in 1680.<sup>9</sup>

The 13th Baron never again attended the Lords, however, and seems indeed to have set off rather precipitately at about that time

<sup>5</sup> Lancs RO, QSP/978/3.

<sup>6</sup> Lancs RO, QSC/148-9; QSP/1043/14 & 19; QSR/106.

<sup>7</sup> Kenyon MSS, no. 1138.

<sup>8</sup> *Lords' Journals*, xix, 497, 499-500, 501.

<sup>9</sup> *Calendar of Treasury Books, Jan-Dec 1713*, vol. xxvii part II, p. 137, citing Queen's Warrant Book, xxv, p. 356.

for Lancashire, without even assigning his proxy to another peer—a move which might have cast additional light on his political sympathies. We are able to fall back on a further letter from Bradshaigh on 21 March, clearly seeing Willoughby as a potential political ally. But although he asked Kenyon ‘how do you stand with him since his coming down?’, he also imparted the ominous news that ‘He is in bad health; and does not intend to live at Shaw Place’, that being the seat acquired by his uncle the 12th Baron.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, death was then almost upon him for he was carried off on 13 April 1713, aged only 37, ill-prepared for the event and with his affairs in considerable disorder. He died intestate and the administration of his effects was granted to a creditor, the extremely cursory inventory then taken at Shaw Place contrasting pitifully with the very thorough one taken the year before on the death of the 12th Baron.<sup>11</sup> His far more methodical, staunchly Presbyterian, and staunchly Whig brother and successor, Charles, was to differ from him in almost every way.

## II

Unlike his brother Edward, Charles was a married man; and the bride he had taken in 1705 was a Davenport of Darcy Lever and formerly of Little Lever, said by descendants to have had Non-conformist connections and to have been related to the Rev. Oliver Heywood.<sup>12</sup> Although the bride’s father had long served as a churchwarden at Bolton, her mother belonged to a yeoman family, the Fernsides of Little Lever, which had links with active Presbyterianism and with Heywood; and the bride’s aunt, Elizabeth Davenport, had married a Presbyterian yeoman, George Brownlow of Rivington.<sup>13</sup>

While one has in mind the yeoman-led and independent-spirited

<sup>10</sup> Kenyon MSS, no. 1142.

<sup>11</sup> Lancs RO, Will & inventory of Hugh Lord Willoughby, 1711 & 1712; Admon. with inventory of Edward Lord Willoughby, 1713. Edward’s inventory yielded only £64 2s. 9d. as against his uncle’s £395 13s 4½d.

<sup>12</sup> Willoughby memorial inscription in Rivington Unitarian (formerly Presbyterian) Chapel; and see will of Elizabeth Brownlow, née Davenport of Rivington, 1700 (Lancs RO, Wills proved at Chester).

<sup>13</sup> F. Bate, *The Declaration of Indulgence 1672: A study of the rise of organised dissent* (London, 1908), app. p. lxx.

community of Rivington, adjoining and similar in character to that of Horwich where the Willoughbys had first settled, one should note that there had been no abandonment of this spirit on the part of Francis, father of the two contrasting Barons considered here: he had staunchly resisted attempts by the Tory Bradshaighs to impose episcopal control on the neighbouring Blackrod School.<sup>14</sup>

It is in Horwich that one finds Charles living after his marriage, for he is said to have served as overseer of the poor there in 1707; and that year he and two Presbyterian neighbours (the Rivington schoolmaster John Bradley, and the Horwich yeoman James Hilton, prominent in the Dissenting congregation of the local chapel of ease) were appointed to supervise the repair of Anderton Ford Bridge.<sup>15</sup> Such evidence is not unimportant, for it indicates that Charles was a dependable character who participated helpfully in the life of the two Dissenting communities at Rivington and Horwich whose common border was straddled by Willoughby land.

An altogether more momentous drama had been enacted there, however, between 1707 and his succession to the peerage in 1713, for mortality had left Charles and his new wife no less a responsibility than that of saving the Lancashire Willoughby line from total extinction. The drama had begun with a tragedy, for in December 1707 their first baby son—optimistically named Hugh after the ambitious and acquisitive 12th Baron—was laid to rest in the chancel of Horwich Chapel. But in January 1713, three months before Charles became the 14th Baron, a second son was born to them whom they also named Hugh and who mercifully survived.

Once Charles had inherited the peerage he lost no time in taking his seat, and with equal promptness the spotlight of local gossip picked him out as it had done his predecessor Edward. On 14 June a Wigan burgess reported to that same George Kenyon who had coveted but now held the constituency: 'Lord Willoughby went to London on Friday; they say Bland, the late lord's gentleman, came down for him'.<sup>16</sup> Charles first attended the Lords on 18 June, but he did not appear there again before the end of the session, nor did he trouble to entrust his proxy to another peer.<sup>17</sup> However, he left some

<sup>14</sup> Manchester Diocesan Registry: Blackrod Bundle; Higson, 'A Dissenting North-ern family', pp. 49–51.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Hampson, *Horwich: Its history, legends and church* (Wigan, 1883), p. 158; Lancs RO, QSP/961/1; QSP/668/47.

<sup>16</sup> Kenyon MSS, no. 1150.

<sup>17</sup> *Lords Journals*, xix 578.

very important people in no doubt of the fact that, unlike his brother Edward, he was a chip off the old Presbyterian block, and that although the Government was now strongly Tory he was determined to align himself with the Whigs. History, too, has taken note of the ripple this caused:

In the middle years of Queen Anne's reign, when government policy had been comparatively congenial to the Whigs, it had been possible to call on the support of Court Whig peers including 'those lords who by the narrowness of their fortunes have depended on the Court'. The most striking indication that this was no longer possible came in September 1713 with 'the astounding news that the most beggarly of all the poor lords, the fourteenth Lord Willoughby of Parham, had preferred the patronage of Wharton and Sunderland to dancing servile attendance on the Queen's ministers'. This preference is hardly surprising as Willoughby was a Presbyterian and the Tory ministry had, *inter alia*, passed in 1711 the Act against Occasional Conformity.<sup>18</sup>

Nor was Charles's home county unaware of his staunch Non-conformity, for unlike his brother Edward he was pointedly omitted from the Lancashire commission of the peace; and, by the time the panic caused by the 1715 rebellion had brought about a mass readmission of Whigs, he was already dead. His known sympathies produced an equally dramatic change in the tone which Tory neighbours used when referring to the current Lord Willoughby of Parham. Thus that same Sir Roger Bradshaigh of Haigh who had written so deferentially about the 13th Baron changed to a blend of derision and indignation when confronted by the 14th.

That sad wretch my Lord Willoughby was to make me a Visitt last week. He has been very impertinent to his Power att our Elections, but he looks so ill that I beleive he will scarce venture on an other London Journey this Winter. He has at this time a Governour to take care of him, appointed by my Lord Wharton & Ld Sunderland with an allowance of 30 li pr: An, & his Lordship was supplied with all necessarys att London by them with large promises of future favours.<sup>19</sup>

In accordance with Bradshaigh's expectations Charles did not reappear in London before the following spring, taking his seat in mid-April 1714 and again ceasing to attend after 1 May.<sup>20</sup> This time

<sup>18</sup> G. Holmes, *British politics in the Reign of Anne* (Macmillan 1967), pp. 401–2.

<sup>19</sup> BL Loan 29/127; Bradshaigh to Chancellor of the Exchequer Oxford, 20 Sept. 1713.

<sup>20</sup> *Lords' Journals*, xix, 658.

however he entrusted his proxy to the emphatic Whig Wharton, himself of Presbyterian background, who had also been given that of Sunderland. Doubtless the immediate context of this giving of proxies was the Whig desire to resist the intolerant Schism Bill in the Lords, where it was passed by a very narrow majority that June.

Meanwhile, back in Lancashire, Charles was about to be drawn into one of those disputes between Dissenters and the Established Church, regarding the control of chapelries, in which his uncle the 12th Baron had played such an active and uncompromising part. To his Uncle Hugh's involvement in controversy about Horwich, Rivington, Ellenbrook, Hindley and St. Helens chapels was added in 1714 the involvement of Charles in the destinies of that at Coppull. The present author has already published an account of the Coppull Chapel case, so a much shortened version will here suffice.<sup>21</sup> Built during the Interregnum and afterwards Nonconformist-influenced, the chapel became a subject of controversy after the Dissenter Samuel Crooke, former close colleague of the 12th Baron as JP and DL, had persuaded its surviving trustees to assign their role in September 1713 to him alone. Clearly Crooke soon decided that more powerful weaponry was needed to defend the unconsecrated chapel and its minister against pressure from the diocese. That preparations to this end were in hand was indicated when on 30 June 1714 Henry Prescott, Deputy Registrar of the Diocese, found 'Major Crook' dining with the 14th Baron at the Swan in Bolton. 'The Lord seems an open plain man', he wrote in his diary, 'the other cautious'.<sup>22</sup> Three days later Crooke formally made over his right to Charles, who (as Bishop Gastrell noted) 'enjoyed a great reputation amongst the Presbyterians'. The deed transferring sole trusteeship to him stated that he was willing to assume it, 'for the advantage of the Neighbourhood and for God's worship and service'.<sup>23</sup> Late in August a very carefully worded memorandum was sent informing Chester that, whereas certain local inhabitants had requested Lord Willoughby to allow the usual minister to

<sup>21</sup> See Higson, 'Some leading promoters of Nonconformity and their association with Lancashire Chapelries following the Revolution of 1688', *Transactions of the Lancs & Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 75 & 76 (1965-6), pp. 146-49.

<sup>22</sup> *Diary of Henry Prescott LLB, Deputy Registrar of Chester Diocese*, ed. John Addy & Peter McRiven, vol. 2, RSLC, 1994, pp. 393-94.

<sup>23</sup> *Notitia*, ii, 395-97; Blackburn Diocesan Registry: deed dated 3 July 1714 in Coppull Parish Bundle.

officiate at Coppull, Willoughby had 'condescended' that he should remain there during his pleasure and thanks to no other authorisation.<sup>24</sup> There was no talk of consecration or of the need for an Episcopal licence; and, although the bishops of Chester were to license later incumbents, nomination remained in the hands of Nonconformists for most of the eighteenth century.<sup>25</sup>

By the time Charles Lord Willoughby had asserted control at Coppull and championed the minister Ingham, Queen Anne's death had resulted in the reappointment in August 1714 of the 10th Earl of Derby as Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire. It had been following his dismissal from that post in 1710 that a mass exclusion of Whigs and Nonconformists from the county's commission of the peace had occurred, but this exclusion was not immediately reversed. However, soon after George I's arrival in September the new anti-Jacobite Treasurer, Shrewsbury, reported that Charles amongst other indigent lords was to 'have something given them in present till his Majesty was ready to make some competent provision for their maintenance'.<sup>26</sup> Waiting again, nevertheless, until the following spring before he reappeared at the Lords, Charles attended regularly from 11 April until the end of May. During that period of attendance, however, although only thirty-three years of age he added his signature to a carefully prepared will, and, before leaving the Lords and London for ever, he entrusted his proxy to the Earl of Clare who, as Duke of Newcastle, would become one of the great Whig leaders of Hanoverian England.<sup>27</sup> Charles is said to have died at Shaw Place on 12 June 1715, and to have been buried like other Lancashire Willoughbys in Horwich Chapel of Ease—then still in Presbyterian hands with the Rev. John Walker of the Street as minister.

Under Charles's will Walker became, with his widow Esther, joint guardian of his infant son and heir Hugh, the 15th Baron, who was to prove the most eminent of the Lancashire Willoughbys. In the meantime, however, his long minority, lasting until 1733, would

<sup>24</sup> Blackburn Diocesan Registry, Coppull Parish Bundle.

<sup>25</sup> Blackburn Diocesan Registry, Coppull Parish Bundle.

<sup>26</sup> *Calendar of Treasury Papers, 1714-19*, p. 14 (PRO vol. CLXXXI, 8). On 3 June 1715 instructions were issued for the payment to him of £200 in royal bounty, *Calendar of Treasury Books, Aug. 1714-Dec. 1715*, vol. xxix part II, p. 535.

<sup>27</sup> Lancs RO, Will dated 12 May, proved Chester 6 Aug. 1715; House of Lords Record Office, Proxy Books.

reduce the family's influence; thus for example Horwich Chapel soon fell under Anglican control again. Sadly, the 14th Baron had died a few months too early to benefit from that restoration of Dissenters to magisterial and other office which early in November 1715 was triggered by the Jacobite rebellion. Among them was Charles's collaborator in the Coppull Chapel affair, Samuel Crooke, once more a magistrate and also active as a Deputy Lieutenant in 1715 as he had been, with the 12th Baron at the time of the 'Eight.<sup>28</sup> The 15th Baron's joint guardian, Walker, was for his part one of those Presbyterian ministers who in November 1715 offered their much appreciated services to Major General Wills when he advanced through Lancashire to resist the Jacobite rebels.

Minority or no minority, the 'organic filaments' of continuity held firm. Walker sent the young 15th Baron to be educated first at the still Presbyterian-dominated Rivington Grammar School, then to Taunton Dissenters' Academy. The young Baron would acquire an excellent patron in Chancellor Hardwicke, and go from strength to strength in the capital, while remaining true to his family's traditions and becoming in time 'the only English Dissenting peer'.<sup>29</sup> Most important of all, he would retain for life that staunch Nonconformist conscience already displayed by his father the 14th Baron. When in the 1760s the Whig oligarchy collapsed, he would cause Hardwicke to marvel in a letter to Newcastle (the same man to whom the 14th Baron had given his proxy in 1715) at his 'so honourable' reluctance, despite his slender independent means, to draw his government pension once Bute was in power.<sup>30</sup> By then the 13th Baron's brief deviation from politically-active Presbyterianism, occupying a mere nine months out of more than 120 years, would have become as if it had never been.

<sup>28</sup> Lancs RO QSC/155 & 156; Higson, 'Some leading promoters of Nonconformity', diagram following p. 160.

<sup>29</sup> E. E. Beardsley, *Life and correspondence of Samuel Johnson DD*, (New York, 1874), pp. 281–83.

<sup>30</sup> British Library, Add. MSS. 32941 ff. 210–11, 304; 35595, f. 147.

