

# *A discourse of the warr in Lancashire:* Its authorship resolved?

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The *Discourse* is a prime contemporary source for the study of the Civil War in Lancashire.<sup>1</sup> The original volume was contained within a small quarto, four inches by six inches, of eighty-seven pages. When published in 1864, the whereabouts of the *Discourse* was unknown. Since then no further information regarding its location has surfaced. Beamont, its editor for the Chetham Society, reckoned it was a copy, being neatly ruled with few alterations, a view confirmed by the interpolations which refer to the coming of the Restoration—‘the same men are soone to be much altered and reduced into order againe when the power of Civill Government had place’ and again ‘bless and prosper the King in his government that under him we may lead and enjoy peaceable lives’. These additions were made after the date originally given for the writing of the *Discourse*, 29 December 1655, and date from 1660.<sup>2</sup>

After a brief introduction outlining the hostility between King and Parliament in early 1642, the main narrative of the *Discourse* begins with a description of the activities of James Lord Strange. Later 7th Earl of Derby, he raised a party to support the King in July 1642. The chronological narrative ends abruptly with the execution of Derby on 15 October 1651. The *Discourse* is not arranged in sections but has marginal notes emphasising key episodes. Due attention is paid to the main military events of all three civil wars. The author makes use of several primary sources such as Parliamentary declarations,

<sup>1</sup> William Beamont, ed., *A discourse of the warr in Lancashire*, Chetham Society, 62 (1864).

<sup>2</sup> Beamont, *Discourse*, pp. xxii, 3, 4.

orders of Charles I and contemporary pamphlets, all of which are printed *in extenso*.

The *Discourse* is not the only contemporary account of the wars. Some were military memoirs such as by Royalist commander Ralph Hopton. Others were individual relations, Henry Townshend's diary being a good example.<sup>3</sup> The *Discourse* is a unique work in that it is county-based, covers 1642–1651, and includes substantial local detail. The only similar effort is Thomas Malbon's 'Memoirs of the Civil War in Cheshire' that covers 1642–1648 and has a few additions up to 1657. Like the *Discourse* it is a chronological narration, but with small section headings. The main difference is that Malbon includes events outside Cheshire, mainly in Lancashire and the West Midlands. This gives Malbon's 'Memoirs' a wider context and a less introspective feel than the *Discourse*.<sup>4</sup>

Why was the *Discourse* written at the end of 1655? The main preoccupation of the county at that time was the harsh regime of Major-General Charles Worsley. From October 1655 he inaugurated a campaign in Lancashire against drunkenness, swearing, Sabbath-breaking and Royalist suspects that threatened to re-open the old wounds of three civil wars.<sup>5</sup> The author's conciliatory tone must be set against this background. In addition it must be remembered that some minor anti-governmental royalist activity under Sir George Middleton had occurred in February and March 1655 in the north of Lancashire.<sup>6</sup> This plea for county consensus is epitomised by the choice of two Biblical quotations on the title page. 'Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity' (Psalms 133.1), is an appeal for an end to recrimination and ill feeling; the second, 'that ye may know there is a Judgment' (Job 19.29), warns of the dire consequences that could follow if no reconciliation took place.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> C. E. H. Chadwyck Healey, ed., *Bellum civile: Hopton's narrative of his campaign in the west, 1642–1644*, Somerset Record Society, 18 (1902); J. W. Willis-Bund, ed., *Diary of Henry Townshend of Elmley Lovett, 1640–1663*, Worcestershire Historical Society (2 vols, 1915, 1920).

<sup>4</sup> J. Hall, ed., *The civil war in Cheshire*, Chetham Society, 19 (1889).

<sup>5</sup> For Worsley, see R. L. Greaves & R. Zaller, *Biographical dictionary of British radicals in the seventeenth century* (Brighton, 1982–84), p. 343.

<sup>6</sup> J. M. Gratton & P. H. W. Booth, 'Sir George Middleton of Leighton, a Lancashire Penruddock? Documents on preparations for a failed Royalist rising in north Lancashire, 1655', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 91 (1995), pp. 19–33.

<sup>7</sup> Beamont, *Discourse*, p. 1.

Since its appearance in 1864 the vast majority of scholars have accepted William Beamont's identification of the authorship of the *Discourse* without question.<sup>8</sup> Beamont advanced several reasons why he considered the author to be the Parliamentarian Major Edward Robinson. Robinson was an active participant in the war and certainly had intimate connections with the parish of Kirkham, where he held land, and which features quite frequently in the *Discourse*. Beamont lays particular stress on the frequency with which Robinson's name occurs in the text and concludes that the case for Edward Robinson being the author of the *Discourse* is 'almost certain'.<sup>9</sup>

Far more information is now available regarding Edward Robinson so that an examination of Beamont's choice can be made. Edward was born in 1610, the son of Richard Robinson of Euxton and his wife Margaret, daughter of Adam Holland of Newton, near Manchester. Edward married Ellen Browne, daughter of John Browne of Scales, on 14 May 1629; she died in 1670.<sup>10</sup> Robinson settled in Scales. He was living there when his daughter Margaret was baptised at Kirkham in April 1633. The couple's eldest son John married Alice Birch, daughter of Thomas Birch of Birch, the virtual 'ruler' of Lancashire from 1649.<sup>11</sup>

After service as a Parliamentarian lieutenant to Captain Thomas Cheetham in Richard Holland's foot regiment, Robinson became a horse captain in the spring of 1643 serving in the regiment of Richard Shuttleworth.<sup>12</sup> He, along with Captain Edward French of Preston, constituted a 'flying column' of cavalry that plundered Royalist sympathisers, appropriating horses, food and equipment to swell Parliamentarian supplies. Robinson's troopers were involved

<sup>8</sup> Examples include B. G. Blackwood, 'Parties and issues in the civil war', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire (THSLC)* 132 (1983), p. 106; C. Carlton, *Going to the wars* (London, 1994), p. 407.

<sup>9</sup> Beamont, *Discourse*, pp. xxiv–xxx.

<sup>10</sup> *The Visitation of the County Palatine of Lancaster, made in the year 1664–65 by Sir William Dugdale, Knight*, Chetham Society, 84, 85, 88 (1871–73), part 3, p. 247; R. Cunliffe Shaw, ed., *The parish registers of Kirkham, part 2*, Lancashire Parish Register Society, 99 (1960), p. 211; W. S. White, ed., *Register book of the parish of Leyland 1653–1710*, Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 21 (1890), pp. 24n, 209.

<sup>11</sup> Shaw, *Parish registers of Kirkham, part 2*, p. 75; Beamont, *Discourse*, p. xxxii.

<sup>12</sup> National Archives (NA), Commonwealth Exchequer Papers, Account of Major Edward Robinson, 1646, PRO SP28/302/83; NA, Certificates as to the Sale of Crown Lands, PRO E 121/4/43.

in the collecting of 'proposition money' in 1643 and also carried out plundering at Rishton at the same time. Later they supervised the 'discovery' of concealed delinquents' estates.<sup>13</sup>

Captured by Lord Molyneux during his flight from Lancashire in June 1643, Robinson was quickly released and from 20 June 1643 served under Colonel Alexander Rigby. Robinson must have distinguished himself at the battle of Nantwich, for on the day of the engagement, 25 January 1644, he was promoted to major.<sup>14</sup> Robinson continued to serve in Rigby's regiment until 12 March 1645 when he became a captain in Colonel Nicholas Shuttleworth's horse. He served in that capacity until 7 July 1647. In the latter part of 1645 Robinson was involved in the siege of Chester to which he led a mixed force of horse and foot.<sup>15</sup>

In arms again in early July 1648 Robinson, again styled major, was wounded in the face near Bampton, Cumberland, while serving under John Lambert. This was almost certainly the same action that earned Robinson the description 'that never-to-be forgotten commander for his gallantry'. Commissioned horse major in the revamped militia of 1650, Robinson may have served in Scotland in the Dunbar campaign of 1650.<sup>16</sup> After the third Civil War Robinson was further closely identified with the Protectorate. He became an active justice of the peace and in 1656 was appointed a commissioner of assessment. On 13 July 1659 Major Robinson was confirmed as the commander of the militia troop in Lancashire and, along with Colonel William West, was recognised as the prime mover against dissident activity in the county. In addition Robinson was appointed as a commissioner of sequestration on 6 September 1659 in the wake of the abortive Booth's Rising, a further indication of his hard line credentials right up to the Restoration. He bought substantial amounts of forfeited Royalist land and, along with his Civil War colleague, Captain Edward French, farmed sequestered estates. Robinson lived at Euxton from 1652. He survived a

<sup>13</sup> Lancashire Record Office (Lancs RO), DDPt 23/89 (Petre of Dunkenhalth); NA, PRO SP 28/197/71; SP 211/287; SP 28/253B; SP 28/300/211, 213.

<sup>14</sup> NA, PRO SP 28/47/30; Liverpool Record Office (Liv. RO), Moore of Bankhall Deeds Papers, MD 1149; Lancs RO, DDPt 23/89.

<sup>15</sup> NA, E 121/4/43; R. N. Dore, ed., *The letter books of Sir William Brereton*, Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 2 vols, 123 (1984), 128 (1990), no. 792.

<sup>16</sup> Historical Manuscripts Commission, Report XIII, appendix 1, *Portland MSS* (1891), p. 471; *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 1650, p. 505; Beamont, *Discourse*, p. xxx; J. Hodgson, *The memoirs of Captain Hodgson* (Brighouse, 1882), p. 30.

temporary incarceration at the Restoration in 1660, but as late as the autumn of 1665 Robinson was suspected by the authorities to be 'the most dangerous person in our County'. Robinson was buried at Leyland on 7 January 1681.<sup>17</sup>

This is the man identified by Beamont as the writer of the *Discourse*. Robinson was a zealous officer with an active war record, who, like other officers, was able to capitalise on his reputation and his connection with Colonel Thomas Birch. He became a prominent member of Lancashire local government in the 1650s. However, the extensive nature of Robinson's wartime involvement and his subsequent career raise doubts concerning his authorship.

The basic objection to Robinson's authorship lies in the fact that as an experienced soldier he neglects to mention many issues of which he could reasonably be expected to have knowledge. Regarding the first war the author is unaware of the date of the important encounter at Westhoughton, 15 December 1642. He does not mention that substantial numbers of Lancashire soldiers who fought in the Edgehill campaign returned north with Lords Byron and Molyneux in autumn 1643.<sup>18</sup> The *Discourse* surprisingly confuses the Byron brothers, naming Sir John as governor of Liverpool after Rupert's capture of the town in June 1644 rather than the correct governor, Robert. Beamont makes much of Robinson's presence at the capture of Hornby Castle, but the writer is ignorant about the numbers employed in the attack and their casualties. He knows nothing extra about the circumstances of Colonel George Dodding's imprisonment, nor why such ill feeling existed between Sir John Seton, the Scots professional, and the Lancashire commanders.<sup>19</sup> The *Discourse* omits Robinson's campaigning in Cheshire in the autumn of 1645 and his role in 1648. Presumably

<sup>17</sup> B. G. Blackwood, *The Lancashire gentry and the Great Rebellion, 1640-60*, Chetham Society, 3rd series, 25 (1978), pp. 92, 94-95, 108, 128; Beamont, *Discourse*, pp. xxx-xxxii; White, *Register book of Leyland*, pp. 23, 24n; *Calendar of the Proceedings of the Committee for Compounding*, 1, p. 745; *Calendar of State Papers Domestic*, 1659, pp. 27, 45, 59, 69, 92; 'Sir Roger Bradshaigh's letter-book', *THSLC*, 63 (1911), p. 148.

<sup>18</sup> Beamont, *Discourse*, p. 20; E. Broxap, *The great civil war in Lancashire, 1642-1651* (Manchester, 1910), pp. 59-61; J. M. Gratton, 'The military career of Richard, Lord Molyneux c.1623-54', *THSLC*, 134 (1985), pp. 26-27.

<sup>19</sup> Beamont, *Discourse*, pp. 27, 39-40, 44, 49, 53; 'Letter from Sir John Seton, Manchester ye 25 M'ch 1643', Chetham Society, 57 (1862).



this is because of the author's declared intention to include material relating solely to Lancashire. A minute account of the 1651 Wigan Lane campaign is offered, yet Edward Robinson played no part in this final episode.<sup>20</sup>

What of the tone of the *Discourse*? It favours Parliament but attempts to be equitable. There is no kindness shown to those Roman Catholics who participated in the war, and the writer refers to 'their spirits and malice against the Protestant religion'. Moreover he criticises the Royalists' behaviour at Lancaster on 18 March 1643 and Bolton on 28 May 1644, and repeats the account of the Earl of Derby's killing of Captain Bootle. However, the overall account of Rupert's capture of Bolton has little of the vitriolic character of other contemporary accounts.<sup>21</sup> Instances of Royalist plundering are reported extensively, but the writer is not averse to the inclusion of examples of Parliamentary soldiers' poor behaviour. He points out the futile damage to Preston during Parliament's successful attack on 9 February 1643. The subsequent explosion at Hoghton Tower, 14 February 1643, is seen in the *Discourse* as accidental rather than the reporting of another pamphlet, which blamed it on the Royalists.<sup>22</sup> Such even-handedness, even of a limited nature, was not to be expected from a committed firebrand such as Edward Robinson, whose plundering, zealous collection of military contributions and subsequent radicalism were well known.

Sufficient evidence, therefore, exists to throw doubt on Edward Robinson's authorship. But if it was not Robinson, then who did write the *Discourse*? The work itself yields some clues as to its authorship. Obviously the author survived the Restoration. The detailed accounts of incidents in the Fylde area of Lancashire point to someone with an intimate knowledge of that area. The writer was also a landowner in Kirkham parish. Edward French from Preston fulfils some of these criteria. A close associate of Edward Robinson in the first war and a captain right through to 1651, French was a staunch Parliamentary activist and was appointed to the Committee for Sequestration in September 1659. He died on 3 October 1661. He also had literary experience having compiled 'A True

<sup>20</sup> Beamont, *Discourse*, pp. 1, 70–90.

<sup>21</sup> Beamont, *Discourse*, pp. 14–15, 25–29, 50–51.

<sup>22</sup> Beamont, *Discourse*, pp. 23–24, 25; G. Ormerod, ed., *Tracts relating to military proceedings in Lancashire during the great civil war*, Chetham Society, 2 (1844), pp. 79–81, 127–28.

Relation of a great and wonderful victory' in April 1643. However, the doubts already raised about Robinson's ignorance over military matters apply equally to French. Moreover, French does not appear to have held land in Kirkham.<sup>23</sup>

Thomas Robinson of Westby, no relation of Edward, is an altogether stronger contender. The probability that Thomas Robinson wrote the *Discourse* was first raised by R. Cunliffe Shaw, although Shaw presented no evidence to support this claim.<sup>24</sup> Thomas was the son of William and Mary Robinson of Westby and was baptised at Kirkham 26 July 1587. His mother Mary, nee Cowburn, was the sister of Isabel Cowburn, later Wilding, the benefactor of Kirkham grammar school. In his aunt's will Thomas became the principal feoffee of the school and on 19 December 1641, on the resignation of John Parker of Bradkirk, received all the school's deeds and bonds.<sup>25</sup> He was one of the Thirty Men of Kirkham and also a churchwarden. Robinson transcribed all the entries for 1539–1618 in the Kirkham parish register. To add to his literary background Robinson is credited with writing the short history of Kirkham grammar school in 1663 and producing a treatise on the Clifton and Westby Chapels at Kirkham Church. Thomas Robinson died in late 1667. His inventory dated 4 November 1667, totalled over £86 and includes the entry 'bookes in the studii' valued at three pounds.<sup>26</sup>

Other evidence points to Thomas. Beamont emphasises the detailed account of the Royalist attack on Edward Robinson's horse at Westby Hall and claims that only someone with an intimate knowledge of the area, that is, Major Robinson, could have written the passage. But the account of the attack indicates that Edward Robinson was not present at the incident. Thomas Robinson, who hailed from Westby, could have been privy to the event.<sup>27</sup> In the introduction to the *Discourse* the author makes plain his anger at having been 'plundered deeplier' than any man of his rank. This is

<sup>23</sup> Ormerod, *Tracts relating to Lancashire*, pp. 95–98.

<sup>24</sup> R. Cunliffe Shaw, *Kirkham in Amounderness* (Preston, 1949), p. 657n.

<sup>25</sup> R. Sharpe France, ed., *Parish registers of Kirkham, part 1*, Lancashire Parish Record Society, 83 (1944), pp. 102, 165; Shaw, *Parish registers of Kirkham, part 2*, p. viii.

<sup>26</sup> R. Cunliffe Shaw & Helen G. Shaw, *The records of the Thirty Men of the parish of Kirkham in Lancashire* (Kendal, 1930), p. 131; France, *Parish registers of Kirkham, part 1*, p. 1; Lancs RO, WRW A 1667 (Thomas Robinson of Westby).

<sup>27</sup> Beamont, *Discourse*, pp. xxxvii, 61.

supportive of Thomas Robinson's authorship for in the history of Kirkham School, written by him, Thomas describes in some detail his misfortune. Soldiers of Sir John Girlington, the prominent Royalist commander, plundered his house taking 20s, linen sheets, and a flich of bacon. Returning the next day the soldiers were given the school's books and returned some bacon but nothing else.<sup>28</sup> Major Robinson's house of Westby Hall was attacked, but later he was able to receive more than adequate compensation through his land acquisitions. Thomas Robinson was unable to seek redress in this way and the complaint in the introduction to the *Discourse* could reflect this experience.

The two main candidates for the authorship of the *Discourse* shared common experiences. Edward and Thomas Robinson both had close connections with Kirkham parish and the Fylde area of Lancashire. The *Discourse* includes the following passage as a marginal note, recording the activities of the Royalist Colonel Cuthbert Clifton: 'he robbed my pore tenants his neighbours of their bedding' in Kirkham parish. Major Robinson was a landowner in Kirkham parish and acquired Westby Hall there. Thomas Robinson also held land in Kirkham and so the note could equally refer to him.<sup>29</sup> Both were staunch opponents of Charles I and had much to gain from a Parliamentary victory. However, substantial differences divided the two men. Edward was a prominent officer and an active participant in the 1650s for Parliament and especially in the autumn crisis of 1659 when he clearly had the trust of Parliament during the Booth insurgency. Thomas was a trained band soldier who contented himself with office in Kirkham's local government, church matters and the running of the local grammar school. If either of the two was to exhibit ignorance of military facts it is more likely to be Thomas. Thomas had substantial literacy experience while Edward's literary output was restricted to the habitual scribblings of the Civil War officer—signing accounts and warrants and issuing orders. As an active JP, Edward Robinson's literacy skill is not in question and he was probably quite capable of writing such a work as the *Discourse*. It is the content of the text that acts as the discriminator between the two main claimants. The moderate and conciliatory tone of the *Discourse* is in direct contrast

<sup>28</sup> Beamont, *Discourse*, p. 4; Shaw, *Records of the Thirty Men*, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> Beamont, *Discourse*, p. 53; Shaw, *Kirkham in Amounderness*, p. 295.



to the confrontational and acquisitive stance of Edward and more in tune with Thomas Robinson's life.

A further piece of evidence, referred to by Beamont, seems to be decisive. The original edition of the *Discourse* has a fragment of a bond posted inside the cover. Dated 1647 it mentions three people—James Ryley of Clifton, William Robinson of Kirkham and Thomas Robinson. Ryley, having married Margaret Robinson, was Thomas Robinson's brother-in-law. William Robinson was the brother of Thomas. If Edward Robinson were the author it seems strange that he should affix a bond in which he had no interest. It is more likely that Thomas Robinson inserted the document.<sup>30</sup>

It is the writer's contention that Beamont's identification of the author of the *Discourse* is flawed. In view of the additional information now available the weight of evidence leads to the conclusion that Thomas Robinson of Westby, not Major Edward Robinson, wrote *A discourse of the warr in Lancashire*.

<sup>30</sup> Beamont, *Discourse*, pp. xxv–xxvi.

