

BULSTRODE WHITELOCKE

As the most prominent member of the Wokingham, Berkshire family, there is a vast amount of information about Bulstrode Whitelocke (1605-1675). He was a prodigious writer and historian and we are fortunate that a great deal of his work has survived to the present day. The collection of Whitelocke documents held at Longleat in Wiltshire is enormous. The task has been to sift out the essence of the man from the sea of available material.

Ruth Spalding, Bulstrode's biographer and editor of his Diaries, felt there was much more to this man than the historian's image of a stiff and pompous Puritan. She set out to get to know the man and soon discovered a person of strong intellect and discipline. An artistic and emotional man who understood both the times he lived in and his part in shaping them.

Ruth comments that Bulstrode's confidence in his own abilities has been interpreted by those only taking a cursory look as boasting or self-serving. In fact if you look deeper you find a man who possessed humility, untainted by mock modesty.

Bulstrode was a lawyer, parliamentarian and English ambassador to Sweden. A colleague of the major political players of the time, Pym, Hampton and Cromwell. His habit of recording verbatim his conversations provides invaluable insight into both the man himself but also many of the political figures of the day.

Bulstrode was a resolute champion of freedom of conscience and his papers on religious tolerance are unfortunately as applicable today as they were in the 17th century. He lived through a period of great political instability and was a major participant in shaping the political course of the day. He was also acutely aware of the part he was playing. While his advice was sought by those on both sides of the political spectrum, it is his connection with Cromwell for which he is most noted. Anyone who reads his dialogue and exchanges with Cromwell particularly those opposing Cromwell's aims to declare himself either King or Protector would find it hard to accept Bulstrode was a 'fence-sitter', unwilling to take a position. His removal from the powerful position of Keeper of the Great Seal and banishment to Sweden as Ambassador was his 'punishment' for this opposition. In the 17th century an appointment as Ambassador was often a death sentence as many of Cromwell's Ambassadors were assassinated by royalists. Bulstrode's success in Sweden is evident by the respect he is still given in that country and by the fact the trading treaties he negotiated are still in effect 350 years later.

On a personal level Bulstrode was married three times and fathered seventeen children who all lived to adulthood. His first marriage in 1630 to Rebecca Bennet was a disaster. By all accounts a loveless affair that ended with Rebecca's death in 1634. Bulstrode kept an alliance with his Bennet brothers-in-law for the rest of his life and records show that Bulstrode's cousin Thomas Whitlock of Rappahannock Co., Virginia was sent to America by Richard Bennet in 1638.

Bulstrode's second marriage was an elopement with Frances Willoughby the daughter of William 3rd Lord Willoughby of Parham. Bulstrode's devotion to Frances was complete and their fourteen year marriage appears to have been the happiest period of his life. His third marriage to the widow Mary (Carleton) Wilson in 1650 appears to have been happy one but not on par with his marriage to Frances. The fact he had ten children appears to have been a bit of a surprise to the new bride!!

Bulstrode's later career was tied to the fortunes of Oliver Cromwell and with Cromwell's death and the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 the last fifteen years of his life were hard. Lucky to escape with his life during the state of near anarchy following the restoration, Bulstrode returned to being a lawyer but the

earnings were meagre for a ex-Cromwellian supporter. His last years were devoted to recording the times he had lived through and supporting his large family as best he could. His personal motto of 'Whatever happens is best - if I make it so' expressed his wry and invincible view of life. Bulstrode died in 1675 after a long and varied career.

Interwoven with the political events of the day, Bulstrode's Diaries portray the day to day family life. His eldest son, James, the only child of Rebecca appears to have been a bit of a wastrel whose correspondence with his father is a series of pleas for money. The name Whitlock survives in the Trumpington area of Cambridgeshire as a place name given to fields once owned by James and now developed into a senior's residence called Whitlocks.

Despite living to adulthood, many of Bulstrode's children died either before him or shortly following their father's death. His daughter Frances died at 19 in 1654, Anne Whitlock died at 21 in 1661, Cecely died in 1662 following the death of her young husband and child. Bulstrode's account of their eviction by the Bishop of London from his former home and their subsequent deaths is one of the few times bitterness shows through in the Diaries. His son Willoughby Whitlock died about 1679 at Iskenderun, Turkey within a week of taking a post there with the Levant Company. Bulstrode Whitlock (1647-1679?) trained as a Doctor in Leyden, Holland and served in the Navy. He appears to have died while serving on the ship "Speedwell". His daughter Mary married George Neville and their son George became the 13th Baron Bergavenny but it appears the current line of Earls of Abergavenny do not descend from the marriage with Mary Whitlock. There appears to be no known descendants of Bulstrode's first ten children. We are still working to confirm there are present day descendants of the eleventh child, Samuel Whitlock (1651-1690).