

# BULSTRODE WHITELOCKE (1605-1675)

August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2005 was the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Sir Bulstrode Whitelocke. He was a man who planned to be remembered. As our most famous Whitlock, Bulstrode was keenly aware of his place in history and he used his writing skills to ensure the role he played would be remembered.

Trained as a lawyer with a father who was a Circuit Judge, Bulstrode learned to record daily events, including transcriptions of conversations. In an age long before reference books he created his own tools. He developed his own shorthand and if he needed a reference book he wrote it. Created Ambassador to Sweden in 1653 he wrote his own diplomatic phrase book in three languages. His *Journal of the Embassy to Sweden* chronicles the year he spent in the court of Queen Christina. His extensive *Dairies* were the last of the 17<sup>th</sup> century diaries to be published. Edited by Ruth Spalding that were published in 1980. They span the turbulent times of the Civil War and Interregnum and give great insight in to the effects of those times on a family with a foot in both camps. While a supporter of Cromwell, his brother-in-law was the head of the Royalist forces.

Some years ago Bulstrode's record of negotiations between Oliver Cromwell and Charles I during the Civil War came up for auction. They were determined to be literal records of the words said by both parties due to Cromwell's habit of emphasizing his point by ending his sentences with the expression "indeed it is". "This is an important issue, *indeed it is*". Luckily the British Museum was the successful bidder for these papers.

The *Dairies* also include interesting references to the plague of the 1665 and the great fire of London in 1666. As England was at war with Holland in 1666, people in the country first thought the Dutch had attacked London when they saw the flames in the distance. Bulstrode records his children's attempt to save some of the treasures from their London home on Fleet Street before the fire reached it. This included many of the old books and family portraits.

We once estimated that Bulstrode must have been one of those persons that can function on very little sleep. The volume of hand written material that has survived the three and one quarter centuries since his death in 1675 is prodigious. He re-wrote the seven volumes of his *Dairies* at least three times. The final version is more like a history of the times than a diary. They are even in the third person and were definitely meant to be read by the coming generations. Many issues are couched in language that makes it clear he wanted his children and grandchildren to understand his actions.

Family was very important to Bulstrode and he raised all his 17 children to adulthood. Quite a feat for the 17<sup>th</sup> century when infant mortality was much higher. He was married three times and while his first wife, Rebecca Bennet died after less than four years of marriage, Bulstrode referred the Bennet family as "brother" or "kinsmen" for the rest of his life.

Hopefully Bulstrode would be pleased to know he continues to be honored although I suspect he would likely expect the kind of public recognition accorded to someone like the diarist, Samuel Pepys.