

BULSTRODE WHITELOCKE'S CHILDREN

David Griffiths sent in a copy of the painting by William Frederick Yeames (1835-1918) entitled "*And when did you last see your Father?*" [Walter Art Gallery, Liverpool] The painting depicts the children of Sir Bulstrode Whitelocke (1605-1675) being interviewed by parliamentary soldiers. The artist wrote: "I had at the time I painted this picture living in my house a nephew of an innocent and truthful disposition and it occurred to me to represent him in a situation where the child's outspokenness and unconsciousness would lead to disastrous consequences. A scene in a country house occupied by the Puritans during the Rebellion in England suited my purpose." "The 'and' in the title indicates how subtly the interrogator introduced the treacherous question. Yeames carefully stages his drama. The boy's older sister weeps. Aware of the imminent catastrophe. But her upright little brother cannot understand the violent conflict. The Parliamentary soldiers appear gentle and considerate, comforting the weeping girl. Everyone - except the boy - knows what is at stake."

Unfortunately attributing the painting to Sir Bulstrode's children is historically incorrect as Bulstrode was a parliamentarian and reluctant supporter of Oliver Cromwell. It was the Royalist forces who came upon his unprotected children in the way Yeames portrayed in his painting. Ruth Spalding recounts the tale in her book *The Improbable Puritan - A Life of Bulstrode Whitelocke 1605-1675*.

The year is 1642, Britain is embroiled in a Civil War between the forces of Charles I and Oliver Cromwell. In November of that year William Cooke heard that Prince Rupert was descending on Henley where the Whitelocke home at Fawley was situated. Understanding the risk to the family of his prominent Parliamentarian landlord, "He gathered up the Whitelocke children, took them to his farm on Fawley hill and told his wife to pass them off as grandchildren." The Royalist forces looted Bulstrode's home, Fawley Manor and powerless to stop the destruction William Cooke returned home "frightened and angry, to find Sir Thomas Byron paying undue attention to the Whitelocke children. Eventually Cooke had to confess that they were his landlord's, but he begged that they should not suffer on their father's account. To his relief Sir Thomas petted and kissed them, saying it would be barbarous to hurt the pretty infants."

Bulstrode notes in his Diary: "Wh[itelocke] having removed his wife & two eldest daughters to London, & left 5. of his younger children with his tenant W[illiam] Cooke att Fawley, he sent to him to be carefull of them, & of his house & goods att Fawley Court, in case the King should match that way..." the children in the care of William Cooke and his wife were William age near 6, Mary, Anne and Cecilia, age 3, 2 & 1 and Hester born in August.

Sources: PH0664: R370/86,87