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978-1-108-07648-7 - The Life and Letters of Gilbert White of Selborne: Volume 1

Edited by Rashleigh Holt-White

Excerpt

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THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF
GILBERT WHITE
OF SELBORNE

CHAPTER I.

THOMAS, brother of Gilbert White of Selborne, who, after his retirement from the cares of business in 1777, amused himself by writing letters on various topics (chiefly under the signature "T. H. W.") to the "Gentleman's Magazine" and other periodicals, wrote, in 1786, to the one just named regarding the early history of the Whites of Hampshire as follows:—

MR. URBAN,—As I value myself on being a descendant of the *Jutæ* or *Viti*, I am obliged to take notice of the reflection that Governor Pownall casts on my ancestors by calling them *pirates* ("Archæologia," vol. vii. p. 269). We Gutî or Viti were permitted by King Ina to settle in this kingdom on an equal footing with the rest of his subjects, because we are descended, as we can prove by record, "*de nobili sanguine Anglorum*," from the noble blood of the Angles,

VOL. I.—B

2 GILBERT WHITE OF SELBORNE

(*Leges Edovardi*) . . . give me leave to say that few families have so antient or equitable a title to their possessions in this island. They who came in with the ravaging Danes or with the Norman invader certainly have not; and if the early Saxons had committed any injustice in their first establishment, it was before we migrated hither, for we had the rare felicity to settle peaceably and to be admitted to all the privileges of fellow-citizens with general content. Where is the man, unless he can prove his descent from the *Armorici*, who can make it appear that his ancestors gained an establishment in this country on terms so respectable?*

RICARDUS VITUS BASINSTOCKIUS.†

It is true that the earlier Jutish colonies were founded by emigrants, as contrasted with those of the Angles, who came in a body as conquerors. The name of White is a common one, especially in Hampshire, Berkshire, and Oxfordshire, and this points to the probable conclusion that it is in its modern form a corruption of a tribal name. But however this may be, leaving early history, it appears from the Harleian MSS. that there were in the late Middle Ages four considerable families of that name established in Hampshire, who seem to have been related both by descent and intermarriage.

1. White of Swanborne, or South Warnborne.
2. White of Basingstoke.
3. White of Farnham.
4. White of Aldershot.

* “Gentleman’s Magazine,” 1786, vol. lvi. p. 17.

† The reason of the adoption of this name appears *infra* p. 6.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

THE WHITES OF S. WARNBOROUGH 3

Anthony a Wood's MS., now in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, after giving an account of Gilbert White's great-grandfather, Sir Sampson White, Knight, and his family, has a note (in Wood's handwriting, but added apparently at a later date) to this effect:—

“These Whites are descended from the Whites of South Warnborough, in Hampshire. The original of the White of Oxfordshire was steward or Baylier of Einsham Abbey.”*

This note rather conflicts with the account given previously in this MS., and it is to be regretted that no authority for the later statement is given.

The pedigree of the Whites of South Warnborough given in the Harleian MSS.† commences with one Robert White, born at Yatley, Hants, who was “Mayor of the Staple at Calais, lived at Sandwich and after at Farnham, and purchased the manor of Southwarnborne, co. Hants, of Sir Fulke Pembroke.” He died at Farnham in 1461.

His son John, who was knighted, married a daughter of Robert, Lord Hungerford; and their son Robert, who married a daughter of Sir Thomas Inglefield, the elder, Knight, was succeeded by his eldest son Sir Thomas White, Knight, Master of the Requests to Queen Mary and Sheriff of London and Middlesex, 1 Edward VI. He married Agnes, daughter of Robert White of Farnham and sister of John White, Bishop of Lincoln, and subsequently

* *Vide* note to Wood's MS., f. iv. p. 155.

† Nos. 1,544, 1,183, 1,139, etc.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 GILBERT WHITE OF SELBORNE

of Winchester in Queen Mary's reign, and of Sir John White, Lord Mayor of London in 1563. Sir Thomas's eldest son Henry possessed the manor of South Warnborough; but with him the family became extinct at South Warnborough in the male line, as his only children were three daughters, coheiresses, who married respectively Thomas Scudamore, Walter Gifford of Chillington, Stafford, and Henry Ferrers of Badisley Clinton, Warwickshire. John White, a grandson of Sir Thomas, was declared chief heir male.*

The manor-house of South Warnborough, though now much reduced in size and altered, existed in its original state until about 1830, and was a fine red-brick Tudor mansion. The chancel of South Warnborough Church is filled with brasses and monuments, some of them fine and interesting, of the White family, which intermarried with the Paulet, Gaynsford, Tichborne, and other old Hampshire families, and evidently occupied a position of some importance in the county.

In the church windows are several coats-of-arms, in stained glass, of the family and its alliances, which were formerly in the manor-house—probably

* MS. Harl., 1,544. He was living in 1593. In "Nature Notes," vol. iv. p. 106, this John White is represented as identical with John White of Coggs, near Witney, the father of Sir Sampson White; but this is an error, since Thomas (not Richard, as stated in "Nature Notes") White, the father of the former, in his will dated September 1st, 1558, describes himself as "of Downton in Wilts gentleman," and speaks of his son John as his only child, whereas John White of Coggs mentions a brother Henry in his will.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

THE WHITES OF BASINGSTOKE

5

in the large hall, now pulled down, which is said to have witnessed the knighting of one of its owners by Queen Elizabeth.

The arms of this branch of the family, the grant of which is duly recorded, are (with a slight difference, which evidently arose from a mistake on the part of the Oxfordshire family) the same as those which appear on the handsome monuments in S. Mary's Church, Oxford, to Sir Sampson White and his sons, and to his brother Henry in the church of Coggs, near Witney; viz. argent,* a chevron gules between three parrots or popinjays vert, collared or, a bordure azure besantée.

The Whites of Basingstoke and Farnham were descended respectively from Jenkin† and John, the two sons of Thomas White of Pernix, or Purvile, in Hants.

Of the former family the most celebrated member was Richard White, the son of Henry White of Basingstoke. He was educated at Winchester and New Colleges, of which latter he was admitted Fellow in 1557. Leaving England on account of his religious opinions, he went to Louvain, and afterwards to Padua, where he became D.C.L. Subsequently he was created by the Emperor a "Comes Palatinus," and by the Pope "Magnificus Rector" of

* In the Oxfordshire and earlier Selborne monuments the shield is *or*.

† A. a Wood states that Jenkin White "had almost half the town of Basingstoke in his possession."

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 GILBERT WHITE OF SELBORNE

Douay, at which place he died a canon of S. Peter's Church in 1611.

He wrote under the name of *Ricardus Vitus Basinstockius*, his principal work being a History of the British Isles, "ab origine mundi." He also wrote some orations; two of which, spoken at Louvain, were published by Christopher Johnson, Headmaster of Winchester College, about 1564, and commanded by him to be read publicly in the school by the scholars; also a geometrical treatise, entitled "Hemisphaerium Dissectum,"* and other works. With Richard White the Basingstoke family seems to have become extinct in the male line.

The Farnham branch of the family produced a man of some eminence in John White (son of Robert White of Farnham), who was born at that place in 1511. According to Anthony a Wood,† he was "educated in grammar learning at Wykeham's School, near Winchester, Fellow of New College in 1527, M.A. in 1533 (and about that time master of the said school), Warden in 1541."

In Queen Mary's reign he was Bishop of Lincoln, and subsequently of Winchester. He "helped burn Ridley, preached a black sermon on Queen Mary's death of Elizabeth, 'melior est canis vivus leone

* In the Imprimatur appended to this mathematical dissertation (which is gravely stated to contain "nihil contra fidem aut bonos mores") the author is described as "Richardus Albius nobilis Anglus praeillustri et antiquissima familia apud Anglos natus." In this book his arms are represented as those of the South Warnborough family.

† 'Athenæ Oxonienses' (Ed. Bliss), vol. ii. p. 118.

THE WHITES OF OXFORDSHIRE 7

mortuo,' and threatened to excommunicate the Queen, who committed him to the Tower in April, 1559, and deprived him of his bishopric." He was shortly afterwards, however, permitted to retire to his sister's, Lady White's, house at South Warnborough, where he died on the 11th January following.*

Another son of Robert White of Farnham, Sir John White, Lord Mayor of London in 1563, founded a branch of the family at Aldershot. His grandson Robert White, however, being the only surviving male member of his family and dying without issue, the family became then extinct in the male line. Robert White's two sisters married two brothers, Sir Richard Tichborne of Tichborne, Bart., and Sir Walter Tichborne of Aldershot, Knight.

It has been stated that according to Anthony a Wood the Whites of Oxfordshire, who were undoubtedly the immediate ancestors of the Whites of Selborne, were descended from a member of the South Warnborough branch of the family. Following, however, Wood's earlier account we find that he traced his contemporary, Sir Sampson White, Mayor of Oxford, from a family settled at "Cogges

* It may perhaps be of some interest to note that when, a few years ago, eight apostle spoons which had belonged to Bishop John White were sent to Christie's by descendants, in the female line, of Dame Agnes White, they fetched no less than 265 guineas. It was stated that had the other three spoons and the "king" spoon been also sold, the lot would probably have fetched 1,000 guineas.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

8 GILBERT WHITE OF SELBORNE

by Witney, where the name hath lived several generations.”

Gilbert White, the naturalist, a great-grandson of Sir Sampson, writing for the information of a nephew, Samuel Barker, of Lyndon Hall, Rutland, gives the following account of his ancestors:—

“The family of the Whites (our family) were in possession of an estate called Swan Hall, in the tything of Haley, parish of Witney, Oxon., as long ago as the reign of Queen Elizabeth; the mansion of Swan Hall is still standing. In the map of Oxfordshire bound up with Plot’s history of that county* are the arms of the Whites of Swan Hall, the same that we bear. We are lineally descended from Sir Sampson White, my great-grandfather, being the fourth son (born 1607), whose father was possessed of Swan Hall. This estate, by a female line, went into the family of the Ashworths, who sold it.”

As already stated the name of White is by no means uncommon in Oxfordshire. Among the names of the gentry of Oxfordshire returned by the Commissioners in the twelfth year of King Henry VI. occurs Johannes White.† One John le Whyte’s name occurs in Dugdale’s ‘*Monasticon Anglicanum*’ as a witness to a deed relating to Einsham Abbey.

It is certain that a family of that name was settled at Coggs in the reign of Henry VIII. In the Sub-

* ‘The Natural History of Oxfordshire,’ by Robert Plot, LL.D., late Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum and Professor of Chemistry in the University of Oxford, 1677.

† *Vide FULLER’S History of the Worthies of England.* Ed. Nicholls. Vol. ii. p. 235.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

SAMPSON WHITE OF COGGS

9

sidy Rolls for the hundred of Wotton, co. Oxon., of November 29th, 16 Hen. VIII. (1524), in the list of names for the village of Coggs occur—

	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
“Will ^m Whyght	vi.	viii.
Alicia Whyght, vidua. . . .	iiii.	
Thomas Whyght	iiii.”	

These names appear, from an examination of Alicia Whyght's will, made in 1531 and proved in 1553, to be those of a mother and her two sons, who were grown up, and householders in 1524. This family seems to have been amongst the most substantial people in Coggs, since there is only one person assessed at a higher rate.

The names of Thomas Whyte and Richard Whyte of Coggs are conjectured from an examination of their wills to be grandfather and father respectively of John White of Coggs, who made his will in 1628, and who had four sons and two daughters.

His youngest son Sampson, who was born in 1607, went to Oxford and became a mercer there. He prospered in business, and became, according to Wood,

“Baillive of the city of Oxon. 1642, turned out of the Councill House for his loyalty, restored upon His Majesties coming to the Crowne 1660, chose mayor y^t yeare, served as Butler of the Beer-celler at his Coronation, and then had the dignity of Knighthood confer'd upon him. In 1665 he was chose Mayor againe, being y^e yeare wⁿ the great plague raged in London.”

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[More information](#)

10 GILBERT WHITE OF SELBORNE

An interesting “account of the claim of the city of Oxford made at the coronation of King Charles the Second” is preserved in the city book.

It appears that “Certeayne Lords Com^{rs}” were appointed

“for the recieving the peticoñs & claimes of such as were to doe service on the said day. Hereupon Sampson White, Esq., Mayor of the City, by the advice of his Brethren and the whole Councill Chamber, took his journey to London to present from this city a peticoñ & claime to the Com^{rs} that the Mayor of Oxford and six of the Cittizens might be admitted to serve the King’s Ma^{tye} in his Buttelary on the day of his Royall Coronacoñ together with and in such manner as the Lord mayor and the cittizens of London doe.”

This petition, drawn up in Norman-French, was allowed by the commissioners. Whereupon the Mayor, “with 6 Cittizens appointed by the Councill chamber” and “5 others of the councill chamber who offered to habit themselves att their owne charge,” with the mace-bearer and sergeants, “rode up to Westminster for to doe the service afore-said.” Upon their application on the evening before the coronation, the Duke of Ormonde, “steward of his Ma^{tyes} household,” formally put “the Mayor and cittizens of Oxford into possession of the King’s Butelarryes.” When the King returned from Westminster Abbey to the feast in Westminster Hall,

“Mr. Maior accompanied with Mr. Ernley, Gent of the Buttery, went up in his scarlett gowne from the Buttery at the lower end of Westm^r Hall to the cubbard erected