

Part 2. ROBERT WILLOUGHBY: a short biography

PHILIPPA LANGLEY

In Part 2, as part of the project's person of interest investigation, Philippa Langley offers a short biography of Robert Willoughby (1452–1502), made 1st Baron Willoughby de Broke (c.1491)

Robert Willoughby was the son and heir of Sir John Willoughby of Clutton in Somerset, and the heiress Anne Cheyne of Broke in Wiltshire and Ottery in Devon, daughter and co-heir of Sir Edmund Cheyne. He was also the great-great-grandson of Robert, 4th baron Willoughby de Eresby (d.1396).¹ In 1475 Willoughby married local heiress Blanche, daughter and co-heir of Sir John Champernowne of Bere Ferrers in Devon and Callington in Cornwall. He was brother to Sir William Willoughby,² of Turners-Puddle; Richard Willoughby, of Silton;³ Edward Willoughby,⁴ dean of Exeter; Elizabeth Carrant; and Cecily Willoughby, abbess of Wilton.

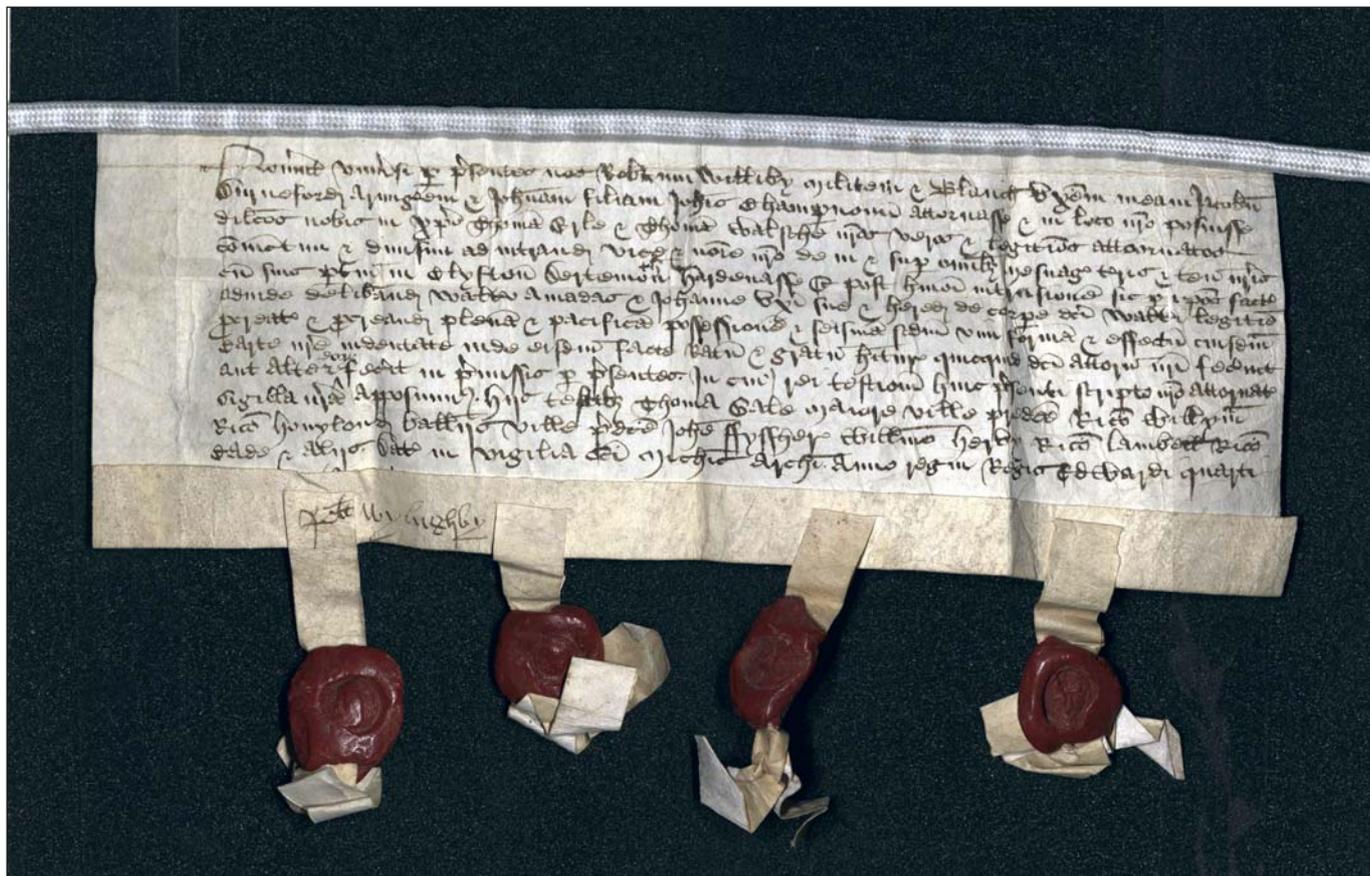
In February 1470, at the age of 18, Willoughby was appointed to arrest local rioters and six months later commissioned to array troops in Somerset, Devon and Cornwall in a possible response to the rebellion against Edward IV by Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, and George, duke of Clarence. At this time he seems to have attacked his neighbour, Sir Richard Edgecombe, a supporter of Clarence.⁵ In 1473 he was part of the force sent to St Michael's Mount to capture the Lancastrian rebel, John de Vere, earl of Oxford.

Civic rewards and responsibilities from the Yorkist

regime seem to have been thin on the ground, with Willoughby being made sheriff of Cornwall in 1478–9 and Devon in 1480–1. The later years of the reign of Edward IV and early reign of Richard III were a particularly fallow period and unlike many of his neighbours and associates Willoughby was not present at King Richard's coronation on 6 July 1483.

It is not known why he joined the October rebellion some three months later.⁶ With his lack of advancement under the Yorkist kings, it might be that Willoughby saw an opportunity for increased rewards under a Lancastrian regime. Further factors may have been the location of his estates in the rebel counties of Devon, Cornwall and Somerset, and family connections with the Lancastrian cause, including the Cheyne families of Wiltshire and Kent, two further significant rebel counties. Another factor may have also been his family's connection with the dukes of Buckingham⁷ (see below). Whatever Willoughby's reason, following the collapse of the rebellion against Richard III in October 1483 he headed to Brittany, where he joined Henry Tudor. 'Robert Willoughby late of Bere Ferrers, knight' is named in King Richard's 1484 Act of Attainder as one of the ringleaders of the revolt in the south-west.⁸ His

The signature of Robert Willoughby on a deed of attorney, concerning lands in Dartmouth, Devon, dated 1478. © Kresen Kernow, ME/1423.





Above: Brook Hall, Wiltshire, birthplace of Robert Willoughby.
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Below: St Mary's Church, Callington, Cornwall, burial place of Robert Willoughby. Photo courtesy of John Bailey



estates were awarded to those loyal to the Yorkist king, including Edward Ratcliffe,⁹ Percival Thirlwell,¹⁰ Humphrey Stafford of Grafton¹¹ and Thomas and George Stanley.¹²

Willoughby is named by Crowland as one of the 14 'chief men' of Henry Tudor's army at Bosworth,¹³ and it is likely he was close by at King Richard's death.¹⁴ Willoughby would receive substantial rewards for helping to place Henry VII on the throne and, it would seem, for his successful mission to escort the royal children to London. On 24 September 1485 he was appointed steward of the king's gold and silver mines in Devon and Cornwall and granted the receivership of the

duchy of Cornwall.¹⁵ On 2 October he was appointed steward of all possessions in the county of Wiltshire of Cecily, duchess of York.¹⁶ By 15 June 1486 Willoughby was a knight of the body,¹⁷ accompanied Henry on his royal progress, and was admitted to the king's council, although it seems he rarely attended.¹⁸ At this time his estates were augmented by grants of land in Somerset and Cornwall, including those of John, Lord Zouche¹⁹ and John Kendall,²⁰ both of whom fought for Richard III at Bosworth, Kendall losing his life in the battle. In 1488 Willoughby was appointed steward to the king and afterwards ennobled.²¹ By 1491, he was summoned to Parliament as Lord Willoughby de Broke. He was also admitted to the Order of the Garter.

Willoughby never became one of the new king's close advisors and his local commissions fell mainly under the auspices of military rather than civic or diplomatic command. In 1489, he was commissioned with Sir John Cheyne²² to lead an expedition to Brittany, and on 16 July 1490 was appointed admiral of the fleet.²³ Later that year he was nominated marshal of the army for Henry's short campaign against France when the Treaty of Etaples was signed.

In 1494, Willoughby claimed the Latimer barony and lands of Snape and Well in the north, in Richmondshire, from Richard Neville, 2nd baron Latimer (c.1468–1530). These included Snape Castle.²⁴ Willoughby's claim came through his great-grandmother's brother, Sir John Willoughby (c.1400–1437).²⁵ However, his claim seems to have been considered tenuous at the time, with a herald recording that 'the Lord Brooke had made a wrong claim',²⁶ and Neville prevailed.

In September 1497, during the rebellion in the south-west on behalf of 'Perkin Warbeck', with a few of the Pretender's ships threatening the coast, Willoughby took command of the fleet. A few days later, he also took part in the relief of Exeter.²⁷ Previously that year, Willoughby had been commissioned to array a force against his local Cornish countrymen, which dealt with them at Blackheath, near London. An estimated 2,000 Cornish rebels died and their ringleaders were executed.²⁸ In October 1501, Willoughby's final role was the reception of Catherine of Aragon.²⁹

An intriguing story connected to Willoughby is his acquisition of a bed which may have belonged to his cousin Robert, Lord Willoughby, 6th baron Willoughby de Eresby (c.1385–1452). The bed is described as being adorned with the Buckingham arms in silver.³⁰

Robert Willoughby, 1st baron Willoughby de Broke, died on 23 August 1502, aged 49. He was buried in St. Mary's Church, Callington, in Cornwall and was survived by three children: Robert, his son and heir, Elizabeth, wife of John, Lord Dynham and Anthony Willoughby, knight. He also left a bastard son, Nicholas, whose mother was most likely Agnes Whitehead.³¹

The postscript to the Willoughby family story following Robert's (senior's) demise is sadly all too

illustrative of the new Tudor regime. In Willoughby's entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Dominic Luckett writes:

Although not a man of overwhelming ability, he [Willoughby] had given Henry VII solid and loyal service. His reward was a substantial fortune. Inquisitions *post mortem* show that he had lands in Wiltshire, Somerset, Cornwall, Gloucestershire, and Staffordshire. His many offices, leases, and wardships would have further swollen his coffers. Sadly, this wealth made his son an obvious target for the attentions of an increasingly avaricious king. Immediately after his father's death, Robert Willoughby was forced to agree to pay £400 for livery of his lands, 700 marks for a pardon for his father's executors,³² and a further £600 to acquire some of his father's local offices. By the end of the reign these exactions had clearly placed him in some difficulties, forcing him in November 1508 to borrow £2000 from the king.³³

The new Willoughby barony went into abeyance following Robert (the younger's) death in 1521 and would be terminated some 14 years later following the death of his sister, Elizabeth.³⁴

Notes and references

1. The Willoughby family of de Eresby in Lincolnshire being the senior branch of the Willoughby family.
2. Sir William Willoughby (c.1455–1512) was the second son of Sir John Willoughby and fled with Robert to Brittany. He was knighted by Henry Tudor before the battle of Bosworth. For the knighting see Louise Gill, *Richard III and Buckingham's Rebellion* (1999), p. 138, and also Bob Pritchard, *Battle of Bosworth: noble and knights profiles* (2018), p. 93.
3. William Campbell, *Materials for a History of the Reign of Henry VII* (1857), vol. 1, p. 530, for Richard Willoughby's reward under Henry VII.
4. Edward Willoughby was appointed dean of Exeter Cathedral, Devon, from 1496 to his death in 1508. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dean_of_Exeter [accessed 12 August 2019]. For Edward Willoughby's rewards under Henry VII see Campbell, *Materials*, pp 530–1.
5. Gill, *Buckingham's Rebellion*, p. 42.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 38. A John Willoughby is listed as a supporter of Margaret of Anjou but it's not clear if this is Willoughby's father (d.1478). Also see p. 90 for the blood affinity between the leading rebel families.
7. *Ibid.*, pp 30–1. See also Arthur Kincaid (ed.), *The History of King Richard the Third by Sir George Buck Master of the Revels (original ms 1612)* (Alan Sutton, 1979), p. 64. Willoughby is named as one of the (eight) 'chief friends' of the earl of Richmond whom Henry, duke of Buckingham entered into 'consultation and conjuration with' for the rebellion against Richard III in October 1483. See also Campbell, *Materials*, p. 222. On 26 December 1483 Willoughby was awarded the wardships, marriages and reliefs of the manor of Calilond, Cornwall, during the minority of Edward, son and heir of the late Henry, duke of Buckingham.
8. *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England (PROME)*, Richard III, 1484 January, vi 246. Willoughby is similarly described 'Robert Willoughby late of Bere Ferrers, knight' in the reversal of his attainder in Henry VII's first parliament of November 1485. See *PROME*, Henry VII, 1485 November, part one, vi 273.
9. Rosemary Horrox and P. W. Hammond (eds), *British Library Harleian Manuscript 433* (1980), vol. 2, pp 59–60. Edward was the brother of Richard Ratcliffe (the 'Ratte' of William Collingbourne's famous rhyme) and received Willoughby's manors of Broke and Southwick in Wiltshire.
10. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 204. Thirlwall became the legendary standard-bearer for Richard III at the battle of Bosworth.
11. Dominic Luckett, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 'Robert Willoughby, 1st baron Willoughby de Broke (1452–1502)' (Oxford University Press, 2004) [accessed 22 June 2016].
12. Horrox and Hammond, *Harleian 433*, vol. 1, p. 196. On 2 November 1483 the Stanleys were granted Robert Willoughby's tenements in the parish of St Peter by Paul's Wharf [Powleswharf] in London, a location directly on the river beside Baynard's Castle (residence of Cecily, duchess of York) and a short distance (a mile) from the Tower of London.
13. Nicholas Pronay and John Cox, *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations 1459–1486* (1986), p. 181.
14. Raymond J. Skinner, 'Thomas Woodshawe, "Grasiour" and Regicide', *The Ricardian*, vol. IX, no. 121 (June 1993), pp 417–25. Lynda Pidgeon, 'Who Killed Richard III? The debate continues', *Ricardian Bulletin*, March 2013, pp 27–9. The history of the Ley family – 'The Declaration of the Family of Ley' – was written in the early seventeenth century for James Ley, first earl of Marlborough, and describes how Thomas Woodshawe, a tenant of the Willoughby family, was responsible for the death of Richard III and that Henry Tudor had witnessed it. James Ley's great-great-grandfather Henry had fought at Bosworth for Tudor and was Sir Robert Willoughby's tenant and man-at-arms.
15. Campbell, *Materials*, pp 46–7.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 468.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 454.
18. Luckett, *ODNB* [accessed 22 June 2016]. See also Campbell, *Materials*, p. 467. Willoughby is named king's councillor on 20 June 1486. Henry VII's first royal progress began in the spring of 1486.
19. Campbell, *Materials*, pp 467–8.
20. *Ibid.*, pp 489–90.
21. *Calendar of the Patent Rolls of Henry VII*, vol. 1, 1485–1494 (HMSO, London, 1914), p. 282 for Willoughby as steward of the household, 27 December 1488. See p. 415 for Willoughby described as 'lord of Broke' on 29 November 1492.
22. A key Lancastrian rebel, John Cheyne was famously part of Henry Tudor's bodyguard at Bosworth. Reputedly 6ft 8in., he was unhorsed and wounded by Richard III in his cavalry charge so that he no longer took any part in the battle.
23. Rymer, *Foedera*, vol. 12, p.381–97 [accessed 30 August 2019]. My very grateful thanks to Dr Betty Knott for her translation of this entry (1 September 2019). 'Governator' = Admiral. Willoughby is awarded extensive powers,

- including the death penalty for serious crimes.
24. Following the death of George Neville in May 1483, Richard, duke of Gloucester's, key Neville lordships of Middleham, Penrith and Sheriff Hutton reverted to life interest only, with Lord Latimer becoming his heir (Latimer was 14 or 15 at the time). When Richard became king the estates reverted to the crown. On Richard's death at Bosworth (and Willoughby's urgent mission north) it is possible that the fate of these key northern lordships may have been unclear. However, any hope Willoughby may have had of securing them was dashed when they reverted to the crown under Henry VII. Latimer reached his majority in May 1491 but these key Neville estates remained with King Henry. For the Latimer inheritance see A. J. Pollard, *North-Eastern England During the Wars of the Roses* (1990), pp 322, 341, 384.
 25. John was the son of Sir Thomas Willoughby and Lady Elizabeth Neville, half-sister of Ralph Neville, 1st earl of Westmorland through their father John Neville, 3rd baron de Raby's second marriage, to Elizabeth Latimer, heiress of William Latimer, 4th baron Latimer. As stated in Part 1, it is interesting to note that in his early career as a lawyer William Catesby had been the legal advisor to Elizabeth, Lady Latimer.
 26. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Neville,_2nd_Baron_Latimer Richard Neville, 2nd Baron Latimer, [accessed 10 August 2019]. This places this event in 1494. However, George Edward Cokayne (1929), *The Complete Peerage*, Vol XII, revised and enlarged by Vicary Gibbs (London, St Catherine Press), pp 481–2, places it within the October Parliament of 1491. Gibbs also records an incomplete seventeenth-century transcript of the case in Lambeth Library, MS 318, f. 3566.
 27. Francis Bacon, *The Reign of Henry VII*, p. 191.
 28. Max Retallack, *From the Lizard to Deptford Bridge – a guest post* (murreyandblue, 17 June 2019). The rebels included 50 priests and 69 women. A statue of the 1497 Cornish Rebellion leaders, Michael Joseph and Thomas Flamank, was sited at the entrance of the village of St Keverne in Cornwall to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the uprising. See: <https://murreyandblue.wordpress.com/2019/06/17/from-the-lizard-to-deptford-bridge-a-guest-post>.
 29. James Gairdner, *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Reigns of Richard III And Henry VII* (1863), vol. 1, p. 406. Willoughby's escorting duty from Exeter as steward began on 17 October 1501 and continued into November, see pp 411–16. See vol. 1, p. 393, for Willoughby's role as steward from 1 November 1494. Also as steward, Vol 2, p.104.
 30. Gill, *Buckingham's Rebellion*, pp 26, 152, fn19. I've been unable to find a mention of the bed in Anne Sutton, 'The Court and its Culture in the Reign of Richard III' in *Richard III: a medieval kingship*, Gillingham ed. (1993), p. 81. The National Archives (TNA) at Kew has also been unable to locate the source for the bed from Gill from the footnote but the search continues. My very grateful thanks to Dr Sean Cunningham, Head of Medieval Records. See also Carol Rawcliffe, *The Staffords, Earls of Stafford and Dukes of Buckingham 1394–1521* (1978), p.153, for a Thomas Willoughby on the first duke's council (1438). For Robert Willoughby's rewards with regard to Buckingham's young son and heir see my note 7 above.
 31. Judith Ford, *The Will of Robert Willoughby, 1st baron de Broke (1452–1502)*, on behalf of The Missing Princes Project (21 May 2019).
 32. *Ibid.*, see the forthcoming Part 3 in the June 2020 *Bulletin* for an analysis of this intriguing statement.
 33. Luckett, *ODNB* (as above). Willoughby's will indicates that he held land in additional counties to those listed here. For his will, see Part 3 coming in the June *Bulletin*.
 34. Both ancient titles of Broke and Latimer were able to be passed to females. Thus Elizabeth's son Fulke Greville would in turn have inherited from her as 4th baron Willoughby de Broke and 12th baron Latimer. But this right was not established in law until 1696, by his great-grandson, the 11th baron Willoughby de Broke. See: Sir Fulke Greville, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_Fulke_Greville [accessed 12 September 2019].
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