

THE MYSTERY OF A WHILTON STONE

The Local History Society met again on 13th November to hear about the mystery of a stone discovered by Gordon and Martin Emery in Whilton last year. The carved stone depicts the arms of Sir Fulwar Skipwith of Newbold Hall, Monks Kirby in Warwickshire, a member of an illustrious family, which first came to England with William the Conqueror.

It has been possible to find the original colouring of the carving and to identify most of the sixteen quarterings, each representing a family connected by marriage with the Skipwiths. Their estates were built up by marriages with heiresses, mostly from Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, from Norman times, with the last quartering representing the Redding family with three black boars' heads. Alice Redding was the grandmother of Fulwar Skipwith, born in 1628.

We followed the life of young Fulwar from his early education, boarding in the Covent Garden Academy from the age of six, and later moving on to learn with the schoolmaster, Mr Huddlestone at Bidford on Avon. He lived with and worked for Sir Simon and Lady Dorothea Clarke of Broome Court at Bidford on Avon.

His father fought for Charles I at the Battle of Edgehill near Banbury, and died in 1643, probably having been part of the Royalist attack on Cranborne House in Dorset. As a teenager Fulwar undertook an amazing voyage, embarking at Fowey in Cornwall in 1645 and sailing via the Canaries and the Cape Verde Islands to Barbados. Having sold plantations in Barbados, he sailed on a Dutch ship up the east coast of America, and from there across to Norway. After a spell in Norway he sailed on to the Low Countries, possibly linking with members of the Royalist cause there, before coming back to Gravesend.

We heard fascinating extracts from the diary he kept. Early on the first voyage they encountered enemy ships, and Fulwar wrote: "Wee mett with two Parliment ships with whome wee had a great fight, but wee beate them into the Canaries, where they laye under the Castell wales for safeguard till wee were gon." He also commented on the strange things he saw, including the onions in the Canaries, "of a large bignesse which they boyle and accompt a rare dish." In the Cape Verde Islands he passed Fogo. "The greatest part of this lland is a mountain which continually smoakes, and flameth out att the tope to ye bottom."

We followed the love story of Fulwar and Dorothea Parker during the interregnum including their three marriages kept secret from her mother, Lady Parker of Anglesey Abbey. Sadly Dorothea died a few months after the birth of their baby, Humberstone. Eleven years later Fulwar remarried Widow Elizabeth Cony and eventually his son Humberstone married his new wife's daughter! Skipwith was made a baronet in 1670, almost certainly as a reward for his services to the royal family during and after the Civil War. He died in London in 1677 and was buried, as he willed, in Monks Kirby Church in Warwickshire.

It is probable that his second wife erected a memorial to him, and the shield discovered may have been from that monument. Generations later Rev Randolph Skipwith became Rector of Whilton in 1856, and it must be through this member of the family that the stone came to Whilton. It is most likely that it had been thrown into the Rectory pond by later occupants. When the pond was dredged in the late 20th century, the stone may have been scooped up in the mud which was deposited in the field below the Rectory.



This is just a short account of a very long story, and we hope more will be revealed. If you know anything about this stone's recent story in Whilton, do let us know.