

**RECORDS OF THE ENGLISH
CATHOLICS OF 1715:
COMPILED WHOLLY FROM
ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS**

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Records of the English Catholics of 1715: Compiled Wholly from Original Documents by John Orlebar Payne

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EDITED BY

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PREFACE.



LITTLE, perhaps, need be said by way of introduction to this volume of *Records of the English Catholics of 1715*.

Apart from the great interest and importance attaching to a collection in abstract of nearly four hundred wills and letters of administration with which it opens, the genealogical value of such unpublished and authentic documents will be at once apparent, while the Index, of course, will illustrate this in a way which nothing else can.

Of the two dates given at the end of each will, the first is that of *execution*, and the second that of *probate*. Where not otherwise stated, it may be assumed that probate was granted in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, Somerset House being naturally the chief source of information. I am also under an obligation to H. F. Burke, Esq., *Somerset Herald*, and to Dr. J. J. Howard, for permission to inspect a MS., the property of Sir John Lawson, Bart., now in course of publication, to which occasional reference is made, and which at the present time is deposited at the College of Arms.

The collection of wills from the Probate Court at Lincoln is of some interest, while from the bulk of the others it is difficult to know what to select as the more noteworthy. Charles Eyston of East Henedred, *e.g.*, gives us a pious confession of faith, and the bequest to

his eldest son, of "Bishop Fisher's Staff," possesses a peculiar attraction for us who are now rejoicing at the recent beatifications. The mention, however, of relics, works of art, church plate, valued heirlooms, &c., in such wills as those of Elizabeth Lady Dormer, Walter Fowler, Anne Markham, Francis Prujean, John Vaughan, Frances Progers, Lady Dunbar, and of many more, is frequent enough. We note, too, the bequest of Cardinal Pole's cross by John Pole, to his cousin Francis; that of Belle-tree House to Giles Hussey the artist, by his father John, and "the hanging of green velvet, wrought by the hand of Mary, Queen of Scots," named in Lord Stafford's will.

Then we have the eccentric testators, such as William Plowden, Thomas Hawkins, George Kingsley, &c., notably so the first-named. Lady Gerard would like to remain unburied as long as possible; Mary Porter's daughters must not go to their mother's funeral lest it should injure their health; and the unhappy Lord Waldegrave despises his daughter Henrietta, the widow of seventeen, for marrying John Beard the comedian.

The wills of such as Lord Aston, Robert Needham, Richard Bostock, &c., are pleasing, which is certainly more than can be said of that of Henry, Lord Stafford, whose sole bequest to his widow, of "45 brass half pence to buy her a pullet for her supper," is followed by some observations on her character, and on that of her parents, the notorious Count and Countess de Grammont, which it is still less pleasing to repeat.

There are, of course, many bequests for masses, often enough couched in studiously concealed terms, as in the case of Edmund Adys; while the poor are not forgotten by the Minshull family, and many more, or by John Weston, who regards "the miserable condition of

the poor Catholics of England as very deplorable"; and, lastly, the disconsolate Lady Derwentwater gives to "all such as were servants to her dear Lord, and were prisoners on account of the *unhappy rising* . . . for their great sufferings, £20 each".

In passing, however, attention might be called to the wills of two apostates—Francis Poole and Dr. John Purcell. Of the latter, it is worthy of notice, that no less than eight members of his family occur in Cosin's "List," so that the fact of his *own* name thus conspicuous by its *absence* from it affords an indirect proof of the Catholicity of the whole. This, however, touches a question on which we shall have more to say presently. A few early Catholic Mission Registers, and other original documents in private hands, such as the Derby M.S., the will of Dorothy Thorold, &c., have kindly been placed at my disposal; and my thanks are due to others also, who have generously helped me with information not otherwise accessible.

A different class of interest, however, unhappily attaches to the greater number of the documents selected from the "Forfeited Estates" Papers at the Record Office, which make up the latter half of this volume; for in many cases the "information" which they afford is supplied by those who, either wearied out by the long course of pains and penalties under which for generations they had been crushed, or—what is more unaccountable—dazzled by the temptation of a paltry reward, bartered the faith to which their forefathers had so gloriously and perseveringly adhered. Indeed, it would almost seem that that mysterious apostacy which so darkens the eighteenth century history of the Church in England, dates its commencement from the proceedings of the Forfeited Estates Commissioners. And

the unmitigated contempt with which the adherents of the Old Religion regarded such obscure apostates as Hitchmough, Thomas Fletcher, Edward Shaftoe, William Gibson, and others, is but paralleled by the odious clamouring with which some of these unhappy men from time to time besieged the Commissioners for their reward. Still more revolting, for example, is it to find a mother offering in cold blood to sell the souls of her children for a farm! For we read that the widow of Mr. Richard Butler humbly proposes to become farmer of the estate of her uncle Richard Butler of Rawcliffe, on behalf of her two infant sons, "*whom she offers to be educated Protestants*".

The "Rebellion," however, of 1715 was not only followed by a vigorous punishment of all Catholics who directly took part in it, but it also afforded the Commissioners an additional pretext for seizing any Catholic property upon which they could lay their hands, more particularly of any who had died immediately before the outbreak of the "Rebellion," and whose executors had the administration of an estate that was worth the trouble of sequestration. The lengthened statement of the apostate Francis Brooke relative to the will of Catherine Winford, and the almost romantic story of Sir Henry Fletcher, have been recorded somewhat fully in these pages, not merely because of the interest attaching to the narrative itself, but on account of their connection with so many names that occur in Cosin's "List". Indeed, a more suggestive theme for the novelist than that afforded by the circumstances surrounding the life and death of the good convert baronet could not well be desired. Little appears to be known of him beyond what is told us by Dodd, or is briefly recorded in the baronetage. Assigning by deed of gift his Hutton estate to his Catholic

relative Thomas Fletcher in 1710, he retires to lead the life of a recluse in a small apartment adjoining the Franciscan Convent at Douay ; having first, also, temporarily deposited with Thomas Hickin, a London goldsmith, some rich altar plate, of which an elaborate description is given, but which, alas ! failed to reach the destination for which his piety had designed it. Everything he appears to have given to God. "The English Rector at Douay," he says, "is to have my two large silver payles I used to sett my bottles in . . . to make two Holy Water potts." Sir Henry, however, did not long survive ; his will is dated 10th May, 1712, and in nine days more he was dead. Next comes the apostacy of Thomas Fletcher, the man on whom he had lavished all his estate. On the 12th September, 1716, this unhappy man informs the Commissioners at Preston of the altar plate that was in the custody of Hickin the banker-goldsmith in Holborn, and in five more days it was seized, the poor goldsmith in his fear escaping meanwhile by a back door, leaving his wife to tell the sheriff where he could find it. The banker's daughter we meet again in Cosin's "List". The plate is sold under the hammer, and even the money that Sir Henry left to the Scotch Jesuits and others to say masses for his soul is seized—all, in fact, but a watch and chain bequeathed to the Bishop of Arras, and £400 to the poor of his diocese, whom the Commissioners tried hard to rob also, and—judging by their printed report—eventually succeeded in accomplishing, despite counsel's opinion as to the propriety of the act which they thought it best to take, but the receipt of which must have made them blush.

The system of bribery, moreover, which the Commissioners worked so well, appears to have inspired some of the "informers" with a like policy. And of this we

have a most droll illustration. A servant of Lord Molyneux, who had informed against his master, was evidently anticipating a rich reward. Accordingly, to intensify their obligation to him, he despatches to one of the Commissioners four bottles of brandy, with a regret that lemons did not accompany the gift, at the same time gently expressing a hope of increased favour! The wounded dignity and consequent perplexity of the Government official is in delightful contrast with the insolent familiarity of the servant. It is to be questioned, however, if the unopened brandy remained long unclaimed.

But if the Commissioners had a velvet paw with which to caress the informer, they had also another with sharp talons in it for any on whom their wrath descended. An aged dame of fourscore is turned out of her home for no other reason than that she was the mother of the Jesuit Father, Thomas Eccleston, who, with just indignation, demands of them some explanation of the outrage; the Ladies Radcliffe, two nuns, "in years and very infirme"—sisters by birth as in religion—appeal for some guarantee that their annuities may always be paid them, "being all their subsistence"; and John Crook is sent to prison for being too stupid to stand the cross-examination of the Commissioners; while the many anxiously-worded petitions, Richard Towneley's urgent letter to his attorney, and the obsequious language of another attorney, Edward Ward, who "hopes he has not incurred the displeasure of the Commissioners" by acting on behalf of his Catholic client, all go to prove the terror in which they were held. Suspicion even on one occasion appears to have attached to their Accountant-General, Chambers Slaughter himself. Altogether, then, this combination of apostacy and