

Philip, Lord Wharton - Revolutionary Aristocrat?

*Being the 1990 Annual Lecture of the United Reformed Church History Society
subsequently published in the Journal - Volume 4 No 8 May 1991
and made available here with permission from the Society.*

Several branches of the Wharton family settled in North Lancashire and Westmorland some time before the Norman Conquest. About the middle of the eleventh century a Sueni de Querton is mentioned.¹ One hundred and fifty years later Gilbert de Querton acquired the manor of Wharton by inheritance from a relative and also the family arms of “a maunch argent on a field sable” (a long silver sleeve on a black ground)² He probably built the first Wharton Hall, much altered and added to in later generations.

His descendant Sir Thomas Wharton became the first Baron Wharton. He was raised to the peerage for services to the crown, particularly at the battle of Solway Moss in November 1542 when the Scots were roundly defeated - though perhaps more by weather than and the terrain than by the force or skill of English arms. Wharton was one of the new men chosen by Henry VIII to replace troublesome northern barons who had grown too great and powerful. He served as Warden of the Marches and as Captain of both Carlisle and Berwick Castles and was frequently engaged in forays over the border, sometimes of a rather personal nature. His appointment as Visitor of Monasteries in the northern counties and as Commissioner for the Discontinuance of Chantries and Mass Chapels probably facilitated his purchase of considerable monastic lands at the Dissolution, including property in Westmorland and much of Yorkshire.

The second and third barons made less mark and left little memorial. The third is reputed to have sat in the House of Lords for forty years without ever being moved to address the House.

The fifth baron³ was a creator and leader of the Whig Party in the English Parliament. He served as a Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. He wrote the words of Lilliburlero with which - he later boasted - he had sung a foolish king (James II) out of three kingdoms, and in the ranks of the peerage progressed to viscount, earl and marquis. Although a nominal Anglican he maintained a friendly attitude towards Nonconformity, perhaps both for political and sentimental reasons. In the House of Lords when the Earl of Oxford spoke bitterly against Dissenters Thomas Wharton said that he was surprised to hear him speak so, for “though we have none of their grace in our hearts, we have much of their blood in our veins”.⁴

The sixth baron⁵ became a duke, joined the Hellfire Club, lost (or so he claimed) £120,000 in the South Sea Bubble, along with most of the family's wealth and possessions, became a Catholic and a fervent supporter of the Old Pretender and the Stuart cause, and was finally condemned for treason after leading Spanish troops in an attack on Gibraltar. A few years later he died at a small monastery at Poblet in Catalonia.

1. E. R. Wharton, *The Whartons of Wharton Hall*, 1898 p20.

The principal sources on the Wharton family are -

Bryan Dale, *The Good Lord Wharton*, revised editions 1906

G. F. Trevallyn Jones, *Sawpit Wharton*, 1950

E.R. Wharton, *The Whartons of Wharton Hall*, Oxford U. P., 1898.

On Thomas, Marquis of Wharton -

J. Roberts, *Memoir of Thomas, Marquis of Wharton*, 1715

John Carswell, *The Old Cause*, 1954.

On Philip, Duke of Wharton -

J. R. Robinson, *Philip Duke of Wharton*, 1896

L. Melville, *Life and Writings of Philip Duke of Wharton*, 1903

M. Blackett-Ord, *Hell-fire Duke*, 1982

2. Bryan Dale, *The Good Lord Wharton*, p16 E. R. Wharton, pp20,21

3. For the Marquis see J. Roberts and J Carswell.

4. J. Roberts, *Memoir of Thomas*. pp101ff: see also Carswell, ch. 8.

5. For the Duke see Blackett-Ord and J. R. Robinson.

And that was the end - or very nearly the end - of the Wharton family and its story until the present century. So far I have omitted mention of the fourth baron.

He is the subject of our present concern. Philip the elder son of Sir Thomas and Lady Philadelphia Wharton,⁶ was born in 1613, not at Wharton Hall (near Kirkby Stephen) but at Aske Hall near Richmond in North Yorkshire. Sir Thomas was the younger son of the third baron. He had purchased Aske from Lady Eleanor Bowes, a distant relative. He and his wife were both devout puritans who passed on their religious persuasions to their two sons. Sir Thomas died in 1622 and, as his elder brother had already been killed in a duel, young Philip inherited the barony when his grandfather died in 1625. At that time the family estates were in the hands of his cousin, Humphrey Wharton of Gilling Wood, who for some years had endeavoured to rescue the old baron's affairs from the disorder and debt into which they had drifted. It took young Philip ten years before he acquired effective control of his patrimony.

During a life which spanned almost the whole of the century (he died in 1696) he had many interests. In addition to the wide-spread northern property which he inherited, he received through his second wife large estates at Winchendon and Wooburn in Buckinghamshire. The lead mines in North Yorkshire brought in a useful income and absorbed time and thought, although he employed agents to manage the industry. He also took an interest in horticulture and architecture and in the collection of works of art, especially portrait paintings. Amidst all this busy life two central passions persisted - in politics and religion; his politics radical, his religion puritan.

The beginning of the civil war saw Wharton active in a military capacity - with little success and less glory. The family motto, probably devised by the first baron, was "Plaisir en faits d'armes". Suitable enough to the first baron, it had little relevance or appeal to the fourth. At Edgehill in 1642 he commanded a regiment of foot and a troop of horse which was ignominiously swept off the field before Prince Rupert's impetuous charge. Reporting to Parliament Wharton stated "Before there was any near excuse three or four of our regiments fairly ran away - Sir William Fairfax's, Sir Henry Cholmley's, my Lord Kimbolton's and, to say the plain truth, my own." Consequently Wharton was himself accused of cowardice - not merely running away but hiding in a sawpit. In his official report of the engagement to Parliament he accused Prince Rupert of wanton cruelty after the battle was won. In reply Rupert published a pamphlet with the sawpit accusation. Thus started the unpleasant nickname - Sawpit Wharton - which provided his enemies with a taunt for the rest of his life.⁷

After that Wharton withdrew from service in the field and quickly found his true métier in the skirmishes and more extended campaigns of Parliamentary struggle. There, says Trevallyn Jones, he supported the constitution but helped to change the constitution from personal rule to parliamentary rule.⁸ The source and ground of his political views was religious. The passage of time and some bitter experience only encouraged their development into more and more radical forms. Jones claims that "he was connected with all the revolutions of the century and always on the revolutionary side."⁹ Although an aristocrat he was ready to see the House of Lords dominated by the Commons. Not that his revolutionary mind approved the mind or the malice of the mob. If the rule he sought was neither royal nor aristocratic, it was not that of the general populace. His desire and aim was the rule of the saints, that is, of those committed like himself to a puritanism inclined towards Independency.

It may be asked whether even such moderate saints are to be trusted with the affairs of this world. They may be so sure of the end in view as to believe it justifies dubious means. This may have been true at times of Wharton. When the Habeas Corpus Bill came before the House of Lords in 1679, Wharton was teller for

6. For further details of the life of the Fourth Lord Wharton see Bryan Dale, E. R. Wharton and G. F. T. Jones.

7. Jones pp.60ff: Dale p.66.

8. Jones p.9.

9. Jones p.3.

the Ayes. And the Ayes clearly won the vote. Later Wharton was accused of being less than scrupulously honest in counting. Carswell admits that he “had indeed been much too hard in the numbers for the Lord who was teller on the other side. The story is that he counted one unusually fat peer as ten”.¹⁰ Roberts declares that “if it was a fraud it was a pious fraud”¹¹ And Trevallyn Jones agrees that his frauds were as pious as fraudulent, and Wharton himself was not a pious fraud.¹² Politically, it may be claimed, he was more honest than most in that age. More unusual, he was financially honest. Whilst he thought it proper enough to offer inducements to others to ensure the success of particular candidates in elections or to support causes of which he approved, he himself never accepted a bribe. So it was generally agreed, even by his enemies. Like his son - Honest Tom (so called by supporters in his own party but very different names by others) - he was consistent and faithful to his party. The son, however, was not so scrupulous as the father in regard to money. As Lord Lieutenant in Ireland he is reputed to have accepted bribes of £40,000 in a single year.

To Philip Wharton politics was never simply a game. Nor was it a polite exercise undertaken with kid gloves. It was a means to an end: the rule of the saints called and chosen to establish and carry out the divine will. Success was not only desirable, it was incumbent on those who were the chosen vessels of the Almighty and instruments of his purpose. It could, where necessary, justify even dubious means. It demanded patient and arduous labour: for Wharton the hours of detailed committee work at which he made himself expert. This was his role rather than the more open and flamboyant art of public oratory. Throughout the war, says Jones, he was a tenacious and indefatigable worker for its prosecution to a swift and decisive end. Towards political opponents he was harsh and unyielding. At the intricacies of administrative and legislative detail he was patiently persistent. He was largely responsible, for example, for the revision in simpler form of the Oath of Allegiance.¹³ In 1643 he was a member of the Committee chosen to treat with the Scots Commissioners for an alliance to make the war against King Charles more effective. This produced the Solemn League and Covenant. Thereafter he attended most of the meetings of the Committee of both Kingdoms for the Prosecution of the War. In Parliament he seconded a motion for the uniformity of religion between the two countries and later he gave useful and careful service as lay-assessor to the Westminster Assembly of Divines.

Wharton's interest in the Habeas Corpus Act was no doubt natural in one who narrowly escaped imprisonment immediately following the Restoration - perhaps thanks to the personal friendship of the Duke of York.

In 1677 he was less fortunate and suffered imprisonment in the Tower.¹⁴ The King's speech in April 1675 referred to the necessity of enforcing the law against Dissenters. When this reference was described in the Lords as “gracious” Wharton, Shaftesbury and others protested. An anonymous letter (possibly written by Shaftesbury) entitled “A letter from a Person of Quality to a Friend in the Country”, described speeches by Wharton and others during April and May especially in opposition to the Test Bill and its requirement that officials should take an oath against attempting in any way to change either Church or State. Wharton is described in the letter as “an old and expert Parliament man of eminent Piety and Abilities, besides a great friend of the Protestant religion and the Interest of England”. Wharton and his friends were threatened with the Tower for a breach of privilege. For the time being they escaped.

In November 1675 Parliament was prorogued and was not recalled until February 1677. Wharton and Shaftesbury argued that - because more than a year had elapsed - Parliament had been in effect dissolved, so that the recalled Parliament was in fact no Parliament. Refusing to withdraw and apologise for this claim they were judged guilty of contempt and were committed to the Tower in February 1677. Andrew Marvell,

10. Carswell p.50.

11. Roberts p.8.

12. Jones p.6.

13. Roberts p.8.

14. Jones p.225; Roberts p8; Carswell p.50.

poet and civil servant, noted: "Thus a prorogation without precedent was to be warranted by an imprisonment without example."¹⁵

Wharton eventually pleaded his age and illness and was set free on the 29th July. Others of the group also obtained their freedom after fairly short periods in prison. But Shaftesbury remained in the Tower for the rest of the year. A lampoon of the time declared:

What Cooper designs Sawpit dare not oppose,
And George leads soft Cecil about by the nose;
The first is a statesman, the second his tool,
The third is a d_____ atheist, the fourth is a fool.

Cooper is Shaftesbury; Sawpit, Wharton; George, Buckingham; Cecil, Salisbury.

The following year there was a further design to commit the group to the Tower once again. But they made their submission to the House and so avoided further imprisonment.

Wharton's political activities, his stubborn determination and, perhaps, his very reputation, endangered his liberty on other occasions also. As well as the threat already referred to in the days immediately following the Restoration when his daughter, who was married to a Royalist peer, discovered plans to arrest him and the good offices of the Duke of York were called on, he was also suspected of direct connection with the Derwentdale or Farnley Wood Plot of 1663.¹⁶ In October of that year, says Trevallyn Jones, Wharton was seriously threatened by an attempt to deal severely with some people of high standing as a deterrent to plotters and opponents of the government. This followed the final collapse of the Farnley Wood Plot, a military rising in the north - in fact near Leeds. Bryan Dale (writing in Leeds, although very much later) cites Hunter as claiming that the whole plot had every appearance of being artificial - a contrivance of the government to strike terror into the disaffected. However that may be, twenty-two people were executed and many Nonconformist ministers and large numbers of other innocent victims were imprisoned.

The rebels were said to have met in Farnley Wood, four miles from Leeds, on the night of October 12th 1663. Sir Thomas Gower, Sheriff of Yorkshire, caught most of them and "wondered whether Lord Wharton might be implicated". Dale notes that a letter in the Public Record Office written by Captain Robert Atkinson of Mallerstang in Westmorland (near Wharton Hall) says that the plotters meant to force the King to fulfil the promises made at Breda with liberty of conscience in religious matters. He also asserts that Lord Wharton was privy to the plot.

Later on in 1685 after the abortive rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth, the old Lord went abroad. He may himself have been associated with the rebellion. His son Thomas certainly was. It was claimed that there was a large cache of weapons at Thomas's house. Shortly after the debacle of Sedgemoor Wharton made his health an excuse to leave the country for a year or so and so avoided the possibility of arrest.¹⁷ He had intended to take the waters at the spa at Aix but finding it too late in the season for taking the cure, he went to place himself under the protection of the Elector of Brandenburg. Or so he explains in a long letter of introduction to the Elector's representative, Freiherr von Spaen, with an account of his whole life and ideas and activities. He remained there until September 1686 when he felt it safe to return home.

There were two other occasions when he withdrew from active participation in the affairs of government and the life of Parliament. The former was for an extended period during the Commonwealth. After Pride's Purge he "withdrew from politics to country life and had nothing to do with the events leading up to the execution of Charles I".¹⁸ He himself wrote that "When the Army first invaded the House of Commons in

15. J. D. Hunt, *Andrew Marvell's Life and Writings*, p.181..

16. Jones p.192; Dale, pp.79,80.

17. Jones p.248, quoting *The Life of Thomas Lord Wharton*. On this visit abroad Lord Wharton wrote his long letter to the Graf von Spaen introducing himself and recounting his life and ideas - a sort of apologia.

18. Jones p.107; Dale p.74.

order to seek his [Charles's] death I declared against the horrid act and never came into the House after". The House of Lords was in fact summoned to attend on 28th December 1648, but only one Peer attended on that day. Others, including Wharton, sent excuses. Thereafter the Rump of the Commons assumed sovereign power, approved the death of Charles and abolished (for the time being) both the monarchy and the House of Lords.

In spite of Cromwell's personal pleas that he should return to public life to "complete the great work well begun", Wharton declined to do so and continued to lead the quiet life of a country gentleman on his own estate - happily improving house and gardens - until the Restoration was imminent. On the King's return Wharton, along with his friends Sir Philip Musgrave and Sir Edward Musgrave, went to Greenwich in their coach and came with the King to London. Wharton himself declared, "I spent no small amount in preparing for the event, and was careful to appear in the King's train on the day of his return to London [29th May 1660] and at his coronation". At that time Wharton was still in mourning for the death of his wife Jane but to give his blacks "a look of joy" he added diamond buttons. This display may well have been necessary in spite of Wharton's deep distaste for the execution of Charles I. He has indeed been accused of cowardice for not remaining in London and making more active resistance to the plan to execute the King instead of cultivating his garden at Wooburn. On the whole, and in spite of the Sawpit nickname, it would seem that cowardice was not typical, although political manoeuvring was part of his life and nature.

In the last few years of his life he again ceased to attend in person on the affairs of Parliament. His health had begun to give trouble and he was distressed by family bereavements and by an unhappy breach with his old friends the Harleys following his stepson's marriage to Brilliana Harley and the domestic and financial troubles associated with that unhappy union.

If politics was one half of Wharton's life, the other half was religion, although indeed the two were combined and intermingled. In this he was no doubt typical of the age in which he lived. Something of this fusion of politics and religion may be seen in the work of the Westminster Assembly. Wharton as one of the lay assessors associated with the 121 "divines" took an active part in the Assembly's work.¹⁹ But at one time, perhaps frustrated by theological and political wrangling, he proposed (in the House of Lords) the suspension of the Assembly. At first, we are told, "he took a zealous interest in its proceedings and appeared to favour the proposals for the establishment of a national Presbyterian Church."

Wharton himself was a Presbyterian but came to sympathise more and more with the Independents whose five representatives were so outnumbered in the Assembly. Trevallyn Jones notes that in Wharton's papers there are many notes on the subject of church government and particularly on the Independents and on toleration. He appeared to sympathise with the ideas of Independents in regard to authority, for example of the whole congregation as against Church Officers and Elders. Jones claims that "he seems to have had none of the rigidity of the true Presbyterian, and none of the fervent religiosity verging on fanaticism common with numerous Independents. He thought that the local Congregation should be advised but not ruled by a higher church body. However he did not believe a local gathering of Christians and their chosen pastor to be a church".²⁰

This kind of half-way position between formal Presbyterian conciliar government and the separatist atomism of pure Independency may have made Wharton unpopular with both parties. Jones says that his close association with leading Independents of both Houses of Parliament hastened the change in his beliefs from Presbyterianism to Independency, and adds that it is impossible to say at what stage he actually became an Independent. It is questionable whether he did in fact ever do so. During the Commonwealth he appointed both Presbyterians and Independents to pastorates and livings. After the Restoration he gave help and encouragement to ejected ministers of both persuasions. In the earlier period of the Civil War

19. Dale p.70. The Westminster Assembly comprised ten Lords and twenty Commoners as well as 121 Divines.

20. Jones p.86.

Parliament was predominantly Presbyterian and the army Independent. After Parliament was purged, and Cromwell became Protector, Independency became more influential politically. Many Independents, and Wharton certainly, were influenced by the ideal of liberty of conscience and the possibility of toleration. In Parliament most of the leaders of the “godly party” supported the Independents against Scottish influence and the wish to enforce a strict Presbyterianism on England.

Wharton seems to have made a serious attempt to act as peacemaker in bringing together the opposing ecclesiastical factions of the Assembly. Benjamin Hanbury affirms (in his *Historical Memorials relating to Independents*) that Wharton sought to “bring three of the five Independents into agreement with the majority, but that Nye [one of the famous five] spoiled this by seeking to show from Matthew 18 that a Presbyterian National Assembly is a danger to the state”.²¹ In the end, when the majority refused to allow toleration for “gathered churches”, Wharton supported Goodwin, Nye and other dissenting brethren in their contention for “larger liberty” and was therefore described as “one of the prime leaders of the Independent Juncto”. It was at that time (December 1645) that he moved in the Lords the adjournment or suspension of the Assembly. “You know his metal”, wrote Baillie, the Scottish Presbyterian, “he is as fully as ever for that party.” Baillie continued, “The majority however prevailed and at their advice numerous ordinances were passed for the setting up of classical Presbyteries but, owing to the triumph of the Army, the Presbyterian discipline was never endowed with coercive authority and remained a mere Parliamentary project.”²² The last meeting of the Assembly took place in February 1649.

Wharton also served on the Commonwealth Committee for removing “scandalous” incumbents and filling their livings with godly and devoted men. In a letter written in February 1645 to Ferdinando, Lord Fairfax,²³ he expressed the desire that “an honest, faithful, godly man - a bold spirit and an able body - be put in” to the Vicarage at Grinton in Swaledale. Most of the dale - he said - was in his hands, and for that reason as well as general principles he would be glad if it could be well supplied. Bryan Dale maintains that Wharton “like Cromwell . . . was chiefly concerned that ministers of the parish churches, whatever their sentiments might be as to church government and discipline, should be able ministers of the New Testament”.²⁴ He had, says Carswell, as many as thirty church livings in his own appointment.²⁵ Among such appointments were John Gunter, an Independent, who went to Waddesdon in Buckinghamshire and later to Bedale in Yorkshire. Matthew Hill went to Healaugh and then to Thirsk, John Rogers to Croglin in Westmorland. All of these were ejected in or about 1662. So also was Thomas Gilbert, the incumbent at Upper Winchendon who, after ejection, often preached privately in Lord Wharton's own house.

After the Restoration Wharton laboured in Parliament to protect Dissenters and to further Puritan interests. He helped many ministers financially, both Presbyterian and Independent. For a time he tried to persuade them to conform, “reluctant to accept the unpalatable fact that the revived Anglican Church would be fully episcopal and even Laudian in form and doctrine”.²⁶ Typically he favoured “comprehension” and is known to have preserved a tract of Richard Baxter who earnestly pursued such a policy.

When it became evident that comprehension was impossible he was active in giving practical help, both financially and in other ways. He made a regular allowance to a number of ministers, including the celebrated Oliver Heywood, who was ejected from the chapelry of Coley near Halifax in West Yorkshire.²⁷ He also maintained six poor scholars at the school started by Heywood, allowing twenty shillings each per year. Heywood dedicated his book, *The Best Entail*, to Wharton and said of him : “His morning star of early

21. Benjamin Hanbury, *Historical Memorials relating to Independents or Congregationalists*, 1839, p.428.

22. Dale p.70. Dale quotes Thomas Fuller: “The Parliament kept the coercive power in their own hands, not trusting the Presbyterians to carry the keys at their girdle.”

23. Dale, p.70.

24. Dale. p.71.

25. Carswell. p.31.

26. Jones, p.192.

27. Dale, p.98.

piety continued shining bright in good old age, and hath cast many resplendent beams of favour upon indigent persons to spread the savour of divine knowledge amongst ignorant souls.”

As well as direct financial gifts Wharton provided employment for several ejected ministers as agents on his estates and managers of the lead mines in Yorkshire. He enabled Christopher Jackson, ejected from Crosby Garrett in Westmorland, to build a meeting house at Ravenstonedale and left £100 in trust to purchase land in the dale to provide an income for him and his successors.²⁸

Similarly he gave two parcels of land near Kirkby Stephen to endow the meeting house which he provided for miners and others at Smarber in Swaledale. The land remains to this day in the hands of the church and provides a useful income.²⁹

Wharton also employed his political and legal skill to help Dissenters. He drew up a plan to show friendly Justices how they could get round the rigours of the law and avoid disturbing or prosecuting Dissenting ministers in spite of information given against them.³⁰ He also drew up a paper to show how fines might be avoided by means of various delaying tactics and similar devices. “After the Restoration”, says Jones, “for some years he was the only peer to remain in open opposition on behalf of . . . dissenters, and he played a leading part in opposition to the Conventicle Acts”.³¹ When the Test Act required kissing the Bible on taking the Oath, Wharton objected to such an idolatrous worship of a book, even the Bible. He himself only consented to do this in combination with a solemn declaration that such an act in no way intended or implied the worship which is due only to God.

He was an indefatigable correspondent, although in later years he made use of an amanuensis when troubled by arthritis. Many letters were addressed to prominent and learned ejected ministers, such as Owen, Calamy, Mather and Alleine. With them he shared both political and ecclesiastical concerns.³²

As well as direct help to ejected ministers and the endowment of Ravenstonedale and Smarber meeting houses, he made numerous other charitable gifts including benevolent provision for poor people near his birthplace in Yorkshire. Calamy states that he left large sums for religious and charitable purposes in his will.³³ John Roberts makes a similar claim. In fact in Lord Wharton's will there is no provision for Nonconformist ministers or similar legatees. Bryan Dale deduces that such provision for ministers and others was made in a separate arrangement through certain trustees, and he mentions a number of particular ministers who did receive annual amounts of money for at least some years after Wharton's death. Such a fund may have existed and was perhaps later diverted to other purposes or was swallowed up in the general dispersal of Wharton funds after the defection and death of the Duke. Roberts baldly states: “Mr Edward Harley was one of the trustees for this charity which was reported in late times to have received a very great interruption if not misapplication”. And he adds, “Especially about the time of elections!”

Harley was also a trustee of the Bible Charity which certainly did suffer remarkable changes. I conclude with a brief description of this charity and its surprising later history.³⁴

During the last years of his life Lord Wharton arranged for the distribution of large numbers of Bibles and also catechisms and “reward books” among poor children in the counties especially associated with his family - that is, Westmorland, Cumberland, Yorkshire and Buckinghamshire. His aim in this was at once

28. W Nicholls, *History and Traditions of Ravenstonedale*, Manchester 1877 Vol 1 p.47.

29. Dale. p.86, p.98.

See also T. Whitehead, *History of the Dales Congregational Churches*, Keighley 1930. p.151.

30. Jones. p.216.

31. Jones, p.266.

32. Caswell, p.33, Jones p.212.

33. Roberts, p.11, Jones pp.104ff.

34. E. R. Wharton gives a brief account of the Bible Charity on p.46. Dale in the third chapter or section of his *Good Lord Wharton*, pp.11 - 202, gives a full and detailed account of the trust and its story up

religious, educational and charitable. As well as the books, “coal money” was to be given to parents of the children who were required to learn and be able to recite the psalms. Two shillings and sixpence was to go to each of the “examiners” and ten shillings to preachers giving appropriate sermons in a number of specified towns. The distribution was in the hands of Nonconformist ministers and a few laymen.

In 1692 - just a few years before he died - he drew up a deed of bequest conveying land at Synithwaite near York to certain trustees who were to use the income to purchase Bibles for children who were required to learn by heart certain psalms (numbers 1, 15, 25, 37, 101, 113, 145). The Bibles were to be bound with calf leather, to be fastened with a strong brass clasp, to be bound up with the “singing psalms” (the metrical version) and to contain a note stating that this was by the will of Lord Wharton. So the trust was established and from the first about a thousand Bibles were distributed, the precise numbers for particular towns throughout the four counties being specified in the trust.

The original trustees were Sir Edward Harley, Sir Thomas Rokeby, John White, Edward Harley MP, Thomas Bendlows, William Taylor and William Mortimer. Most of these were personal friends who, like Wharton himself, were of mature years. Most of them had died before the eighteenth century was much advanced and thereafter the appointment of further trustees was largely in the hands of the Harley family who had turned their backs on Dissent. Before the end of the eighteenth century not only were all the trustees members of the Established Church, the whole distribution was in the hands of Anglican incumbents and all the recipients were children of Anglican communicants. The only exception to this was a score of Bibles which were still sent to Swaledale in North Yorkshire to be distributed by the Presbyterian or Independent minister because of Lord Wharton's association with Swaledale and Smarber. Not only so, but instead of the metrical psalms the Book of Common Prayer was now bound up with the Bibles and a notice within the cover stated that this was by the express will of Lord Wharton. Other “reward books” were still given as well as Bibles and for a time at least, copies of the Church's catechism - although the catechism Wharton had originally specified was Lye's Commentary on the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly.

In 1871 the “Bible lands”, as they were called at Synithwaite, were sold and the capital invested in stock. This was probably a wise move and brought in a higher income.

In 1895 Bryan Dale, Secretary of the Yorkshire Congregational Union, had his attention drawn - by chance - to the Bible trust. With his historical interests and expertise he unearthed the origins of the trust and carefully traced its long and twisted history. After this a memorial was addressed on the subject to the Charity Commissioners. After prolonged legal argument the Court of Chancery laid down that a new trust should be made. Nine trustees should be appointed, five being Anglican and one each from Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians. The net income was to be equally divided, half used for Anglican Bibles, half for Nonconformist Bibles, or rather, for distribution to children associated half with the Established Church, half with Nonconformists.

Not all Nonconformists were satisfied with this settlement, but the court held that the long enjoyment of the trust by the Anglican Church constituted a just claim. As Lord Wharton favoured “comprehension” one should no doubt be happy with this wider distribution. It still continues. Modern versions of the Bible are now available and children are now “encouraged” to learn the psalms rather than actually having to give evidence by recital that they have them by heart.

Lord Wharton died at Hampstead on February 4th 1695/6 and was buried in the Parish Church at Wooburn. The Latin inscription above his grave may be translated -

In hope of the resurrection

Here await the second coming of Jesus Christ the remains of Lord Philip Wharton, Baron of Wharton, who, sprung from the noble race of the Whartons in the County of Westmorland, proved at length their heir and their glory, his honours shedding lustre on his worth, his worth on his honours; for, indeed, about three and sixty years he held and graced his place in the House of Lords, was an active supporter of the English constitution, a loyal observer, advocate and patron of the Reformed Religion, a model alike of good works, and of a true and living faith. His doors stood open to outcast ministers of God's Word, affording them

shelter and hospitality; nay more, he dispensed his gifts with liberal hand from year to year to such as toiled in anxiety and want; and setting a noble example of munificence, he directed by his last will that a sufficient share of his estate should be devoted to truly pious uses. Thus he lived, and at length, after manifold troubles endured for God, country and Church, he fell peacefully asleep in Christ on February 4th 1695, aged about eighty-three.³⁵

Such a generous judgment was not shared by all; certainly not by political opponents who called him Sawpit even into his old age. His own family, especially in their youth, found him a stern parent who clearly believed that sparing the rod might spoil the child. In his business affairs he drove a hard bargain. But he acted justly, was never rapacious and he could be generous towards those in genuine need. “Competent and industrious, without greed, vanity or personal ambition” is the judgment of Trevallyn Jones,³⁶ Perhaps the best type of Puritan. Jones thinks that Wharton behaved shabbily towards the Stuart Kings who showed him personal favours on numerous occasions and even presented him with their portraits by the best painters.³⁷ But principle mattered more to Wharton than personal liking and friendship - even of monarchs. He would not approve the execution of Charles, but he was happy enough to see James II ousted from throne and kingdom. He also withdrew his support from Cromwell when Oliver insisted on the death of the king, but he remained a friend.

“A painful and fanatical follower of Master Calvin” (the phrase is Bernard Manning's - of himself) might be aptly enough applied to Lord Wharton. But he loved gardens and flowers, architecture and portrait painting. Even in old age he remembered that in his youth he had loved dancing and his handsome legs had been much admired. A Puritan and also a man of feeling and of taste, yet “connected with all the revolutions of the century and always on the revolutionary side”. Perhaps more naturally conservative than revolutionary he spent his life resisting the political and religious innovations of the Stuart monarchs, as he also resisted Cromwell's harsh way with kings. In so doing he was himself pushed into innovations which had far-reaching implications for both religion and politics.

K. W. Wadsworth

35. Dale, p.103.

36. Jones, p.266.

37. Jones, p.238.
