

Edward Winslow's English Origins

The Road to Kempsey: Volume one of two, by Liam Donnelly, a new publication 2022

History remembers Edward Winslow as a leading figure in the foundation of New England: still in his early twenties in 1617, Edward joined the English Separatist church in Holland. By June 1620 this devout group of Pilgrims resolved to make the arduous expedition to the New World, landing in Plymouth Massachusetts in November, and the *Mayflower Compact* was signed on arrival to establish terms of governance within ultimate allegiance to the English Crown. Edward was selected to foster relations with local native American leader Massasoit Sachem, and the resultant friendship based on mutual respect and cordiality contributed greatly to the Pilgrim's very survival in the early arduous winters and include the establishment of the enduring festival of *Thanksgiving* in 1621.

Edward served three terms as colonial Governor, and by 1643 became a commissioner of the *United Colonies*. Finally leaving Plymouth in 1646, Edward represented its interests as Governor General before promotion under Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell to become one of England's leading diplomats, widely respected both for his ability and integrity. Edward successfully concluded peace between Holland and England through the 1654 Treaty of Westminster before being sent to handle related diplomatic issues in the West Indies. Taken sick on the voyage in 1655, Edward was buried at sea with full military honours.

By any reckoning Edward Winslow had enjoyed a spectacular career, but historians have always struggled to explain his family origins. Evidence shows that he was born in Droitwich in 1595 and educated in Worcester, and that that he was grandson of Kenelm Winslow. Historian Eugene Stratton was noting in 1986 *that no one has been able to discern Kenelm Winslow's ancestry with any certainty*. Brandon Fradd's 2007 study including the Kempsey Manor Court books establishes that the Winslow family had resided in Kempsey in Worcester for some generations stretching back to the early 1430s, but no earlier, and Fradd's proposal that the family may have originated near Bromyard is not substantiated by evidence. Fortunately the real truth is easy to establish when underlying facts are re-checked.

One persistent obstacle has been that successive historians have accepted and systematically recycled inaccuracies about the Winslow family narrative. While hundreds of references to Winslow family members are found in medieval records up to 1432, no fewer than twenty of the twenty seven Winslow individuals share the same three forenames: John, William and Thomas, a fact not universally appreciated. Furthermore crucial evidence such as the *Gesta* of St. Albans Abbey has been ignored, and the invaluable *Winslow Manor Court Books* were not published until recently. Author Liam Donnelly has spent fifteen years re-examining the prime evidence and impartially collating the extant medieval prime records in search of the truth. Now the Winslow heritage can be traced back to the 1250s; the family surname derives from the Buckinghamshire town of *Winslow* where the Winslows acted as leading local feudal landowners, later expanding into St. Albans and Hunsdon in Hertfordshire, and to Hempstead in Essex as well as into London. An extensive Winslow medieval social network connected them to the judiciary and the military, and to royal circles where several occupied offices of prominence.

Many colourful Winslow characters can be identified. Thomas Winslow receives royal pardon for homicide due to his meritorious service in France; while William Winslow, operating at senior level in the military, is attended by the king's physician after a botched suicide attempt. Agnes Poure's husband is William the prominent Salisbury lawyer excommunicated by the Archbishop of Canterbury; John Winslow is humiliated by the Abbot of St. Albans before a meteoric rise to prominence in the City of London, at which point he switches career and joins King Richard on military campaign in Ireland as a member of the royal entourage. Meanwhile another William Winslow, son-in-law of dowager Queen Joan's adviser Sir John Tibbay, is renting farmland from Shakespeare's John Falstaff before his premature death during the Agincourt Campaign, while Sir John Tibbay has the misfortune to be murdered.

What is especially apparent is the close-knit structure and the tremendous family loyalty that the Winslows share, evident in the aftermath of the Black Death of 1348-49. What emerges strongly from the individuals' life stories is the background to why the Winslows moved to Kempsey in Worcestershire around 1430. All the pieces of the jigsaw start to interlock, including reasons why the family Winslow later begins to disperse from Kempsey and engage in the Droitwich Salt industry, and why they still retained strong links with London and St Bride's church.

The qualities and merits of Edward Winslow himself are evident, and have justly deserved recognition. But equally gratifying is to find that the Winslow family had possessed these attributes from the earliest times, and that Edward was continuing an illustrious tradition that Winslows had long enjoyed. A truly remarkable family indeed.

Copies of Liam's book are available for £20 plus postage: contact him through Winslowgov@icloud.com.

