

## **WELSH WINSTANLEYS**

**By Derek Winstanley**

Winstanley is an old English family and township name dating back at least eight hundred years. But in 1595 the head of the Winstanley family, Edmund, and his wife, Alice, sold Winstanley Estate and Winstanley Hall to James Bankes.

As a member of the Winstanley clan, I wanted to understand why Edmund sold Winstanley Hall and what became of him. Did he leave any offspring in the Wigan area? To get some answers, I had to dig deep into historical records.

Just to the north of Winstanley Hall are remnants of a moat that surrounded an old wooden manor house. This was the Winstanley family homestead; but not all the Winstanleys could have lived there, as about a dozen Winstanley families were scattered across the Wigan area in the 16th century.

Edmund's father was Thomas Winstanley and his mother Elizabeth, daughter of the high-flying Sir Gilbert Gerard of Ince, who served as Attorney-General to Queen Elizabeth I and Master of the Rolls. Thomas was born in Presteigne in Radnorshire, Wales, c.1500, and Edmund too was born there c.1535. Thomas' father, James, moved his family from Winstanley to Presteigne c.1491 to join John Bradshaw (Senior) from Bradshaw Hall in Bolton, who had established a successful wool-and-cloth trade in Presteigne. The Bradshaws of Bolton were of the same family as the Bradshaighs of Haigh and Ralph Bradshaw, Esq., was Mayor of Wigan in 1543. During the Tudor period, the woolen trade transformed Britain into a dynamic trading empire with a global reach and many merchants became wealthy. And it appears that the Winstanleys too became wealthy, for Thomas and Elizabeth, with Edmund, returned to Winstanley c.1555, consolidated the estate that had been held in trust, and built a fine Elizabethan hall to replace the moat house.

Bankes was a well-established family in Wigan, benefactors of Wigan Grammar School and closely connected with the Winstanleys: in 1561 Edmund Winstanley and William Bankes were present at an important ceremony in Wigan when the town's Royal Charter was confirmed. Joyce Bankes reported in 1973 that Edmund married a member of the Bankes family. However, some time after Edmund's father, Thomas, died in 1561 his mother, Elizabeth, married John Bradshaw (Junior) and with Edmund returned to Presteigne.

Once back in Wales, Edmund had no desire to return to Winstanley and his Uncle Ed – brother of Thomas and Steward of the Rector of Wigan – and Bailiff Robert Atherton looked after Winstanley Estate. James Bankes, who made his money in London as a goldsmith, and perhaps his father, William, lived in the hall from the 1570s. It appears that they wanted to purchase the hall, but the deal could be finalized only after Elizabeth passed away. Uncle Ed died in 1592 and preparations were made to sell the estate and hall. So Edmund sold Winstanley Estate and Hall to James Bankes simply because he preferred living in Wales – not surprising, since he was a Welshman!

In Wales, the lives of Edmund and his mother, Elizabeth, became rather complex! In Presteigne, with his first wife presumably having passed away, Edmund married his step-sister Margaret, daughter of John Bradshaw (Senior's) earlier marriage. Edmund and Margaret had a son, Charles, who died in 1578 and presumably was too young to have children. After Margaret's death and the death of James Bradshaw, the son of John and Margaret Bradshaw, Edmund married James' widow Alice; Edmund and Alice had two daughters, Elsbeth, who died young, and Jane. Edmund's mother, Elizabeth, and his step-father John, who died in 1588, had a son, William, who would be Edmund's half-brother. William married Elizabeth and they had a son, Edmund; but the identity of Elizabeth is not clear.

After spending time in Presteigne, Edmund moved to St. Dogmaels in Pembrokeshire, where he served as Sheriff in 1590. Again, there is strong connection with the Bradshaw family: Edmund's step-grandfather, John Bradshaw (Senior), had purchased land and the old Benedictine Abbey in St. Dogmaels and built a mansion. But Edmund must have returned to Presteigne, as he served as Sheriff for Radnorshire in 1592-3 and 1599-1600.

According to Thomas Winstanley's will of 1561, if his son Edmund died without male issue, Winstanley Estate was to pass to Thomas' brother James and his male heirs. If James died or did not have a son, the inheritance would pass to Thomas' other brother Edmund and his male heirs. Edmund's Uncle Ed did not mention any children in his will and I have found no evidence that Uncle James had a male heir. Edmund died in St. Dogmaels in 1612 without a male heir and at that time the male line of the main branch of the Winstanley family became extinct. As Edmund already had sold Winstanley Estate, his inheritance went to his daughter Jane. Jane married a true Welshman - Hugh Lewis. The last male descendant of Edmund through his daughter appears to have been Robert Evan Lewis Lloyd born April 6, 1895, a naval officer who drowned at sea on January 12, 1918. Today, Edmund can be traced some 15 generations through the female line.

Another Winstanley, Gerrard, was born in Wigan in 1609 and succeeded as a cloth merchant in London, but an economic depression in 1642 caused him to become bankrupt; he was forced to descend the social ladder and became a cowherd. This experience turned him into a radical social reformer and today he is remembered as a founder of socialism. James Winstanley of Hough Wood, a detached part of Winstanley in Billinge, ascended the social ladder, became a wealthy lawyer in London and bought Braunstone Estate in Leicestershire in 1650.

It seems likely, therefore, that Winstanleys living in the Wigan area and elsewhere today descend from the Winstanleys who stayed 'at wom', rather than moving to Wales in the 16th Century.

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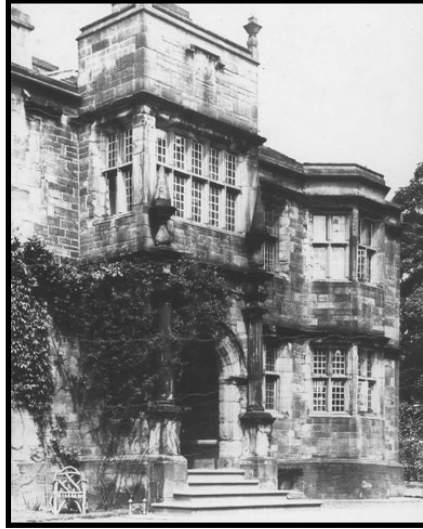


Winstanley Hall.



The Benadictine Abbey at St. Dogmaels.

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