Notes on two 17th century Londoners

By JOHN R. S. WHITING, M.A.

THE two Londoners with whom I am concerned in these notes are the Rev. Dr. John Whiting, prebendary of St. Paul's, and Thomas Whiting, Master of the Joiners' Company. Both left their mark on the history of London, each in his own way: one as a political interrogator, the other as a craftsman and prominent member of his guild.

The Rev. Dr. John Whiting was the son of the Rev. Giles Whiting, the puritan rector of Pansfield, Essex,[1] and uncle of the Rev. Nathaniel Whiting, the poet-parson of Northamptonshire.[2] He matriculated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 1592 as a scholar, and took four degrees in all, B.A. in 1595, M.A. 1599, B.D. 1615, D.D. 1615. He was also incorporated into Oxford University on 14 July 1618.[3] He held a number of livings: he was rector of South Luffenham, Rutland, 1606 to 1611,[4] rector of St. Martin Vintry, London (instituted on 17 June 1611), and prebendary of St. Paul's (Ealdstreet), 1615.[5] At the request of a senior member of Lincoln's Inn, Anthony Herrenden, he was admitted as a member on 6 August, 1620. He died about 1624.[6]

Two incidents in his life mark him out as someone to take note of: the Overbury murder trial of 1615, and the sermon he preached at Hampton Court in 1623. The murder of Sir Thomas Overbury in the Tower of London involved high court politics and the matrimonial affairs of the Countess of Somerset.[7] Sir Edward Coke, Lord Chief Justice, was in charge of the prosecution in this delicate case and Dr. Whiting became his right hand man in the discreet and necessary business of eliciting confessions from those involved. The confessions were vital if the trial was to develop as those in power wished. Dr. Whiting had already acquired a reputation for obtain-

[1] 1550–1627. John Nichols, *The history and antiquities of the county of Leicester*, 1815, vol. 4, p. 571. T. W. David, *Annals of Evangelical Nonconformity in the county of Essex*, 1863, p. 77 f. The Montague Musters Book A.D. 1602–1623, ed. Joan Wake and H. Isham Longden, *Northamptonshire Record Society*, vol. vii, 1935, pp. 38, 46 and 66.

[2] 1612–1682. See my paper 'A 17th century Northamptonshire Poet Parson', in *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, vol. iv, pp. 223–32.

[3] J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, 1887–91, vol. 4, p. 1622, col. 1.

[4] H. Isham Longden, *Northamptonshire and Rutland Clergy from 1500 . . .*, vol. 15, 1943, p. 51.

[5] J. Hennessy, *Novum Repertorium Ecclesiasticum Parochiale Londinense*, 1898, pp. 27 and 335. Eighteenth stall on right hand side of choir; his daily responsibility was reciting Psalms 93 to 101.

[6] Public Record Office, PROB/11/156 Clarke.

[7] Sir Edward A. Parry, *The Overbury mystery . . .*, 1925, p. 236–42, 249 and 253–60; William McElwee, *The murder of Sir Thomas Overbury*, 1952, p. 201–3, 208–13 and 234; Beatrice White, *Cast of ravens. The strange case of Sir Thomas Overbury*, 1965, passim.

ing confessions from condemned criminals, and he was therefore given the task of questioning the key witnesses, namely Mrs. Turner,[8] the countess's aide, Elwes, Governor of the Tower, and Franklin, the apothecary who supplied the poison for the countess to use in the murder of Overbury. Although Mrs. Turner had not admitted her guilt, she was condemned and Whiting was chosen to extract information from her by 'pressing her conscience'. He saw her on 10 and 11 November 1615.[9] The first day he had considerable difficulty with her, especially in overcoming her Catholic scruples. A memorandum of the conference between them reads:

'After a Christian exhortation given her by the Doctor to make a . . . confession, she confessed . . . a most vile, abbominable and murderous crime. And . . . exhorted to make a humble, low and particular confession of her crimes, she said, "Why should I confess to you that will not give me absolution?" "You (said Whiting) upon your firm repentance and lively faith, I can doe it as much as any priest, yea, as much as the pope himself" . . . And afterwards she . . . confessed that she knows of the poysonings of Sir Thomas Overbury before it was done.'[10]

Checking through Whiting's notes, Coke was not satisfied, so Whiting returned the following day and found her hysterical. After receiving Church of England communion for the first time in her life, she said

'I thank God and you for the comfort I have received from this good work of yours today; my conscience is much more eased than it was . . . I would to God I had known you sooner that I might have done you some good, for now, like an unhappy woman, I am not able to recompense you . . .'

'She said, Franklin is so foul she hopes that she might not die that day he died. Well, Sir Thomas Monson it was that preferred Weston to his post in the Tower. "Ah", says Whiting, "then you can say what hand he had in the poisoning?" She cries, "If you will have me say so I will, and Monson will be one of them that will say I go to the devil in respect that I say it after I have received the communion". "But you must have known who were in the plot?" "If any were in it that I know it was the Lord Privy Seal." She heard say that the Prince (Henry) was poisoned at Woodstock with a bunch of grapes . . . that Northampton had committed suicide'.[11]

Her confused statements about the Earl of Somerset and others made Coke order Whiting to make a written report instantly 'with his own hand'. In fact these notes did not really help the prosecution's case.

On 14 November she was hanged at Tyburn, Dr. Whiting accompanying her in the cart, still exhorting her to further confession.

'This day Mrs. Turner between the hours of tenn and eleven, being brought to Tyburn in a cart was admonished by Dr. Whiting to say something for the people, which were an infinite number, concerning her faith. She sayd that she had deserved death and came thither to die for the faith for which she was confessed . . . She sayd she should dye a Protestant according to the Religion prophesied in the Church of England and that she had received the Communion whereby she found exceeding comfort . . . She sayd she had been in the hands of the Devil but God had released her from him.'

Whiting's account of her speech (which he probably wrote for her) and of her end was written as a report for Coke as soon as he returned home.[12]

[8] Born 1576; executed 1615.
[9] C[alendar] of S[tate] P[apers] D[omestic], vol. 83, no. 19, p. 327.
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] *Ibid.*, no. 21, p. 327.
[12] *Ibid.*, no. 33, p. 329.

Coke seems to have been well pleased with such confessions as Whiting had finally secured from her.

Sir Gervase Elwes had only just purchased the post of Governor of the Tower for £2,000 when the murder of the man in his care occurred. Found guilty of being involved in the murder, he was handed over to Dr. Whiting and Dr. Felton. Their task was easy since Elwes had always acknowledged his share in the initial plot, thinking that it would never be interpreted as murder. He broke down, and admitted all his letters, and confirmed that the 'Scab' was the nickname used by the plotters when talking of Overbury. He confessed that he had known of the intention to commit murder; that he had kept quiet about it for fear of Northampton; that he had co-operated in getting what he called 'tickets and writings' from Overbury at the instructions of the Countess and Northampton. But he did not incriminate Somerset, which was what Coke had wanted him to do.

Both Dr. Whiting and Dr. Felton accompanied him at his execution on Tower Hill on 20 November. When Elwes had completed his lengthy speech, a prayer was asked for. The two doctors showed such politeness towards each other as to who should say the prayer, that in the end it was the prisoner himself who said it, at the suggestion of Whiting: 'If you, Sir Jervis, can perform it yourself, you, of all men, are fittest to do it with efficacy both of soule and spirit'. This done, Elwes had to climb the remaining rungs of the ladder on which he had been standing. Dr. Whiting was anxious to help and suggested how he could change his position on the ladder. The sheriff interrupted him and said Elwes was all right where he was. Whiting then told the executioner to wait as Elwes was praying, but the executioner took no notice, and pushed the prisoner off the ladder.

Finally, there was Franklin, the apothecary, to interrogate. On 28 November, Dr. Whiting heard his confession which was confused and partially irrelevant. However, Coke must have had high hopes that Whiting might secure something from him, for he postponed Franklin's execution for ten days. On the day before the execution Dr. Whiting was with Franklin the whole time. Other prisoners in the jail sang psalms while they prayed together. When Dr. Whiting asked him how he felt, he replied that he thanked God for his (Whiting's) help and prayers.[13] He was then executed.

In the Overbury case Dr. Whiting had succeeded in allying himself with the emerging political group which triumphed with the fall of Somerset. Much of the importance of the case was the part it played in the struggle at court over Somerset's position. In contrast to his reasonably successful efforts in this difficult case, Dr. Whiting's sermon at Hampton Court early in October 1623 was to involve him in political trouble. It was preached at a time when Prince Charles was returning from his abortive trip to Spain in search of a bride. It would seem Whiting voiced the feelings of the average Englishman a little too obviously when he chose as his text

[13] *Ibid.*, no. 74, p. 334.

'Remember Lot's wife'. England was against the Spanish match, but that did not mean that it was wise for a court preacher to say so. On 3 October, a Dr. Meddus wrote to Rev. J. Mead,

> 'Mr. Dean Hall, on Sunday sennight, was at Theobalds; so likewise, did Mr. Whiting worthily the last Sunday at Hampton Court: his text, "Remember Lot's wife'. But the ill hap was, his majesty came not abroad, whereupon, though many thanked him much, yet some others went expressly and accused unto the King, whom the Spanish ambassador, as it is said, seconded; they having been, Wednesday morning, long private with his majesty all alone, the doors on all sides shut. But yet, I hope he will come off fairly, when his majesty hath heard the sermon read, which yesterday he was to deliver up to my Lord of London, to carry it to the King.'[14]

Unfortunately I have not been able to trace the sermon itself. But on 6 October, a report was issued by those ordered to investigate the case:

> '. . . According to your majesty's command we have called before us Dr. Whyting to give accompt of those offensive passages which are found in his late sermon. And although his carriage before us and his answer was full of penitence and submission, with an humble acknowledgement of his error and this day by reason of his highness most happy arrival here, this day properly fit only for matters of grace and gladness, yet in regard as his offence doth require some exemplary course of justice thought fit to comit him and doe humbly crave that your Majesty will please to signify unto us your farther command touching cause.'[15]

This document was signed by a large number of men appointed to carry out the interrogation. On 10 October, the Bishop of London was ordered to keep Dr. Whiting from preaching until the King's pleasure was known further.[16] The next day, Secretary Conway wrote

> 'The Spanish ambassador requests the liberation from prison of Dr. Whiting, but the King commands him to abstain from preaching during pleasure'.[17]

The same day John Chamberlain wrote to Sir Dudley Carleton

> 'Dr. Hall made a neat sermon of late at Theobalds but Dr. Whiting went further and dealt more plainly, at Hampton Court, for which he was convented before the council and in danger of being committed; but he hath passed it over with being suspended from preaching.'[18]

Two days later, on 13 October, Alvise Valaresso, the Venetian ambassador, wrote to the Doge and Senate a report on the breakdown of Charles' marriage arrangements, and said

> 'The King proposed to punish one of his preachers who spoke in his sermon about the "idol of the mass", and he caused the pardon of the Catholics signed and sealed to be taken to the Ambassador Inoiosa.'[19]

Shortly afterwards on 24 November, Dr. Meddus again wrote to Mead, to say

> 'Dr. Whiting is freed of his confinement and hopes, at his majesty's coming, to be discharged of his suspension.'[20]

Finally on 3 January, 1624, it was announced,

[14] Thomas Birch, *The Court and Times of James I*, 1848, vol. 2, page 419 f.
[15] *C.S.P.D.*, vol. 153, no. 20, p. 89.
[16] *Ibid.*, vol. 153, no. 38, p. 92.
[17] *Ibid.*, vol. 153, no. 39, p. 93.
[18] Birch, *loc. cit.*, vol. 2, page 424.
[19] *Cal. of State Papers, Venetian*, vol. 17, 1623–25, no. 168, p. 131.
[20] Birch, *loc. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 420.

'Dr. Whiting, silenced for preaching at court, is restored.'[21]

One curious reference to Dr. Whiting, or possibly to a William Whiting, scholar of Emmanuel College, is to be found in the Admonition Book of that College, where an entry dated 31 May 1599 says that

'Mr. Chomley and Mr. Whyting his puple, weare admonished for divers and sundry misdemeanours but especiallie for contempt of the Master's commandment by vertue of their oathe who commanded them to deliver the key of the said Whyting's study in the presence of the Deane'.[22]

Unfortunately the archives of Emmanuel College do not contain any further evidence about this incident.

* * *

Thomas Whiting, Master of the Joiners' Company, was born about 1617 and died shortly before 24 November, 1679.[23] He became a liveryman of the company in 1660 and Master in 1677,[24] and lived in the parish of St. Botolph without Aldgate. One of a number of joiners employed by London churches on restoration work following the Great Fire, his work consisted of the following[25]

St. Edmund the King, Lombard Street, for which he was paid £45 in August 1670, out of a total repair bill of £5,207;

St. Mary le Bow, Cheapside, for which he received £112. 6*s*. 1*d*, out of a total bill of £8,033. He was paid £34. 4*s*. 9*d* for 124 yards 6 inches of fronts at 5*s*. 6*d* and £6. 1*s* for 40 yards of plain insides for the gallery at 3*s*. For work done on the gallery pews consisting of 375 yards of wainscotting at 3*s*, he received £56. 5*s*. He was also paid £9. 3*s*. 4*d* for 490 ft of benching and £7. 12*s* for 304 ft. of desk;

St. Olave, Jewry, for which he received £100 in December 1769 out of a total repair bill of £5,580.

These undertakings made him the third largest contractor out of thirteen joiners engaged on church repair work after the Great Fire.

One somewhat ominous mention of Thomas Whiting is made in the Middlesex Session Rolls for 12 Charles II, 15 December 1660, where it is recorded that a recognisance was taken before E. Chard, J.P., from Thomas Whiting of St. Botolph, Aldgate, joiner, of £50 for being at a meeting where treasonable words were used. This would suggest that he did not favour the return of Charles to the throne, but in a paper by Eric Halfpenny, 'The Citie's Loyalty Display'd' which deals with the expenses of Charles II's coronation on March 2, 1661 (*The Guildhall Miscellany*, vol. I, no. 10, September 1959), several references are found to payments made to Thomas, amounting to £400 for 'all the several workes'. He appears to have been the sole joiner employed on this occasion.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 444. *C.S.P.D.*, vol. 158, no. 5, p. 144.

[22] *H.M.C.*, IVth Rep., 1874, App. p. 420.

[23] P.R.O., PROB/11/1679/151; *Wren Society*, vol. 10; Robert Seymour's (*pseud.* for John Mottley) extended edition of *Stow's Survey of London*, 1735, vol. 2, p. 385, col. 1.

[24] H. L. Phillips, *Annals of the Joyners' Company*, 1915, passim.

[25] *Wren Society*, vol. 10, pp. 48, 50, 66, 89.

His accounts as Master of the Joiners' Company are preserved with the Company's records in Guildhall Library.[26] The Company spent £370. 2*s.* during his year of office, which ran from 23 August, 1677, to 22 August, 1678. Items of expenditure included such things as:—

mason, £15; glazier, £1; rent for the garden, £9. 10*s.*; parish poor at Easter, £1. 14*s.* 8*d.*; water supply, £1. 10*s.*; chimney money, £1; bellman, 1*s.*; clerk's salary, £10; beadle's salary, £8; distiller and upholster, £1. 6*s.* 10*d.*; choosing of sheriffs, £4. 0*s.* 2*d.*; bill for St. James's day, £2. 3*s.* 1*d.*; bill about defective wares, 10*s.* 6*d.*; parson of All Hallows (the Great), £5. 8*s.*; paid on making up accounts, 10*s.*

Further references to Thomas appear in H. L. Phillips, *The Annals of the Joyners' Company*, 1915, including the following: In 1658, 'Mr. Whiting is arrested and a foreigner whom he set to work'. In 1661, 'Paid for Mr. Whiting at the Candlemas dinner £1. 5*s.*' In 1674/5, 'Paid Mr. Whiteing, joyner, £18. 2*s.* 6*d.*'. Finally, in 1679, 'Mr. Whiting, one of the Court, dies'.

The frontispiece of Phillips' *Annals*, reproduces a picture of the master and wardens of the company examining the plans for a new Hall, which are being placed before them by two men. Those seated are wearing hats, while the two presenting the plans wear robes, but no hats. This picture appears to be an artist's sketch for the large painting on wood which is now in Guildhall Art Gallery. According to Robert Seymour's edition of Stow's *Survey*, vol. II, this picture shows Mr. Whiting and his man laying a plan before the liverymen. It has also been suggested that Whiting is seated in the Master's chair in the picture. Presumably the picture recalls the rebuilding of the Hall in 1671 following its destruction in the Great Fire. If so, Whiting could not be in the Master's place as he was Master in 1677. It also seems doubtful that he would be the man presenting the plans, for that man would be the architect and not a member of the company's Court of Assistants. It is true that the man seated in the Master's chair has the large nose often found in members of the Whiting family. Unfortunately the company's records contain no information regarding such a painting being commissioned or the payment for one. Consequently it is impossible to date the painting accurately, and Whiting's presence in it is open to doubt. An entry in the Wardens Accounts for 1694 records the payment of £1. 10*s.* to 'Mr. Hanwell for his panel'.[27] The price at least fits the picture, but no other evidence has been found.

In St. Botolph's Church, Aldgate, there is a magnificent cartouche of Thomas Whiting's coat of arms,[28] and underneath are the words: 'This organ is ye gift of Thomas Whiting to the hole parrish, 1676'.

The burial register has the following entry:

[1679 November]

. . .

24 Mr. Thomas Whiteing Joyner in Hounsditch: he gave us our organs.[29]

[26] Guildhall Library, MS. 8041/1.

[27] *Ibid.*, MS. 8041/2.

[28] Per saltire azure and ermine a leopard's face or, in chief three bezants.

[29] Guildhall Library, MS. 9232/1.

The organ presented three years before its donor's demise was intended for Thomas's fine house in Houndsditch, but he gave it to the church after his wife's death. It was built by Renatus Harris and the carving on its case was by Grinling Gibbons. The colours of the keys are the reverse of the normal. It originally consisted of one manual: trumpet, 8 ft; cornet, treble 5 ranks; furniture, 3 ranks; sesquialtera, 4 ft; fifteenth, 2 ft; twelfth, $2\frac{2}{3}$ ft; principal, 4 ft; stopped diapason, 8 ft; open diapason, 8 ft. It is thus one of the few remaining instruments in England suitable for the authentic performance of Renaissance and Baroque organ music. When St. Botolph's church was rebuilt between 1740 and 1744, the organ was stored in a neighbouring tavern. By the end of the nineteenth century it consisted of: Great—open diapason 1 and 2; stopped diapason, 8 ft; principal, 4 ft; harmonic flute, 4 ft; fifteenth, 2 ft; mixture, 4 ranks; trumpet, 8 ft; Swell—bourdon, 16 ft; open diapason, 8 ft; stopped diapason, 8 ft; viola da gamba, 8 ft; voix celeste, 8 ft; principal 4 ft; oboe, 8 ft; cornopean, 8 ft; clarion, 4 ft; fifteenth, 2 ft; mixture, 3 ranks; tremulant; Choir—stopped diapason, i ft; dulciana, 8 ft; principal, 4 ft; flute, 4 ft; bassoon, 8 ft; Pedal—bourdon, 16 ft; open wood, 16 ft. Badly damaged by enemy action in the Second World war, it has been thoroughly restored and is now regularly used for recitals.

Finally, Thomas Whiting appears to have been a kinsman of John Whiting, of the parish of St. Bartholomew the Great, West Smithfield.[30] John was a member of the Drapers' Company, but he worked in the Tower of London Ordnance Office for a salary of £75 per annum. In 1689 the church was robbed and two chalices were stolen. John Whiting and the rector, the Rev. Anthony Burgess, decided to replace them. Both chalices, silver-gilt with conical covers, are still used. Both chalices, silver-gilt with conical covers, are still used. Both bear, besides the donors' arms—John using those of Thomas—the date mark for 1689 and the makers' mark PM and are inscribed 'S. Bartholomew the Great'. One is inscribed 'Ex dono Johannis Whiting 1690'. The other 'Ex dono Antonii Burgesse 1690'.[31]

[31] Edwin H. Freshfield, *The Communion plate of the churches in the City of London*, 1894, p. 20; E. Aston Webb, *The records of St. Bartholomew's Priory and of the church and parish of St. Bartholomew the Great, West Smithfield*, 1921, vol. ii, p. 325.