

ART. XIII.—*The commercial interests of Wilfrid Hudleston.* By G. P. JONES, M.A., Litt.D.

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PRIVATE contemporary records relating to commerce in Cumberland in the 18th century are not abundant and a document of this kind, owned by Mr Nigel Hudleston of Hutton John, is therefore of no small interest and importance. It is a Letter Book,¹ running from 15 January 1700/1 to 19 January 1709/10, of Wilfrid Hudleston's. It consists in the main of copies, in no very clerky hand, of letters sent by him to merchants and others with whom he had dealings and of some letters received. Part of the correspondence relates to the tangle of family and financial affairs in which, as appears from other documents, Wilfrid's brother, Andrew Hudleston junior, played a somewhat shady part.

Wilfrid Hudleston (1673-1728) was the second son of Andrew Hudleston senior (1637-1706) of Hutton John and younger brother of Andrew Hudleston junior (1669-1724). His mother was Katherine, daughter of Sir Wilfrid Lawson of the Isell family and his aunt was Madam Bridget Hudleston of Millom Castle. Elizabeth Hutton, mother of the Mary Hutton who by her marriage brought Hutton John to the Hudlestons, is said to have been educated with Katherine Parr, sixth wife of Henry VIII, and Mary herself is believed to have been born at court and to have had Mary Tudor as godmother.² There is thus no doubt about the gentility of the Hudlestons of Hutton John, but it is evident that, like some other families, they could

¹ I am grateful to the owner, who very kindly agreed to deposit the Letter Book in the County Record Office, Kendal, for a long enough period for it to be studied, and to Mr C. Roy Hudleston for genealogical and other information about the Hutton John family.

² NB ii 367.

not, in the period following the Civil Wars, achieve the standard of living they desired merely by means of the rents of their lands. Andrew Hudleston senior had sixteen children to place in the world, and it is no wonder that he sought an income by means of the public service and that his sons also entered the service of the State, engaged in commerce or adventured in the West Indies. The Sen-houses are another instance of an armigerous family whose members turned to shipping and trade.

In 1696-98 Wilfrid Hudleston was Collector of Customs at Carlisle; from 1701 to 1704 he was in Workington and from 1705 to 1709 in Whitehaven. In entering the government service he was following the example of his father and his elder brother. The former was Receiver-General of Taxes for Cumberland and Westmorland in 1693, but in 1696 he was caught falsely endorsing Exchequer Bills, which could at that time be accepted in payment of taxes though Collectors could acquire them at a discount.³ Andrew Hudleston junior was appointed Collector of Customs at Whitehaven about 1696, but after some years he owed the Crown £1,600 arrears and was dismissed.

In some respects family connections helped Wilfrid Hudleston in his business. He relied, e.g. on his uncle, Richard Hudleston, in Newcastle to recommend a substitute for an unsatisfactory tobacco dealer in that town⁴ and he expected his younger brother, William, in Jamaica to help in disposing of goods in that part of the world.⁵ Moreover, relations and connections by marriage co-operated in financing individual ventures but not, so far as can be judged from the Letter Book, by joining in permanent partnerships. On the other hand, family disputes were probably a considerable hindrance. It is

³ W. R. Ward, *The English Land Tax in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 11, 45; *Hist. MSS. Com., Le Fleming* 349.

⁴ Letter Book (hereafter cited as LB) 37: 3 Sept. 1706.

⁵ LB 52: 6 Oct. 1707. William died in 1741, the owner of plantations worth £20,000.

evident from the Letter Book that relations between Andrew Hudleston senior and his eldest son were so bad that the father intended to disinherit his son. His plan in 1705 was apparently to make a settlement whereby Wilfrid was to have half the Hutton John estate at once and the other half after the decease of his parents; but in return he wanted £1,000, which Thomas Curwen of Workington, father of Joyce, Wilfrid's wife, was to raise.⁶

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the quarrel may have been, the disagreement must have tended to make Wilfrid's business difficult by distracting his attention and complicating his accounts. He had become bound for about £160 due from his brother Andrew to a Mr Ferryes, but the security offered fell short of the amount owing and Andrew had to be told that until the debt to Ferryes had been cleared he could not have what was due to him from the proceeds of a venture into which he had entered.⁷ It was family feeling, perhaps, which induced Wilfrid Hudleston to stand surety for his brother and to associate with him in ventures when it would have been wiser not to do so. Certainly the two were sometimes far from agreeing and in one letter Wilfrid suggested that they should submit their differences to an impartial arbitrator.⁸ From the Letter Book alone one cannot judge of Andrew's integrity and prudence, but there is one indication that in his brother's view he was rash or grasping.⁹

It is not known when and in what circumstances Wilfrid

⁶ LB 17: 27 June 1705.

⁷ LB 20: Oct. 1705.

⁸ LB 18: 25 Aug. 1705.

⁹ LB 83: 19 Jan. 1709/10 — "he has & doth commit great wast in the wood". From bills of complaint in 1710 and 1715 and the answers of Andrew Hudleston in 1711, 1712 and 1716, it would appear that after his mother's death in December 1709 he tried to evade the intention of his father's will and destroyed fences and cut down timber on the estate. In the end he had to deliver up the manor of Hutton John, but he claimed that though he agreed to a settlement at Penrith in 1713 in the presence of Gilfrid Lawson and the Dean of Carlisle he had been made drunk at the meeting and that the deed of settlement was altered after he had signed it. For transcripts of the papers I am beholden to Mr C. Roy Hudleston.

Hudleston first took to trading. In a letter to Lady Lawson at Isell in January 1702/3¹⁰ he mentions that he himself had been in Barbados and that he had "an idea of going abroad next year"; but in a letter of November 1707¹¹ to his brother in Jamaica he speaks of "haveing left over going to see and settling myself here", i.e. in Whitehaven. He would then be about 34 years old, still young enough to stand the hardships of travelling, but it may be that his business had prospered sufficiently to allow him to live comfortably ashore, and it is also possible that the situation at Hutton John after his father's death in 1706 required his attention. In July of that year he did indeed travel as far as Dublin, arranging that during his absence his wife should pay moneys due from him and receive money due to him.

She, it may be noted, occasionally traded on a small scale, probably as her husband's agent. In August 1704,¹² e.g., she wrote to Mrs Grace Hudson in Kendal to say that her husband had by him a quantity of good linen and she sent ten pieces which, she hoped, trustworthy local women could be found to sell. By November 1704,¹³ however, it appeared that sales were disappointing and Mrs Hudson was asked to return by carrier all that remained together with money for what, if any, had been sold. In January 1705/6¹⁴ Mrs Hudleston shipped "two men's nightgowns containing 18 yards apiece: 36 yards at 9d. — £1. 7. 0; to making and thread, 2s. 6d.; total £1. 9. 6". They were to be disposed of in Virginia to her best advantage: either the material was narrow or she thought of Virginians as full-bodied.

The earlier letters in the Book, dated in 1701 and 1702, relate mainly to sales of tar and deals. These were certainly imported and probably from the Baltic region.

¹⁰ LB 13.

¹¹ LB 52.

¹² LB 14.

¹³ LB 15.

¹⁴ LB 24.

Newcastle or some part on the East Coast would seem to have been more convenient for such a trade, but goods brought to the East Coast and intended for Cumberland would either have to be moved expensively overland or carried coastwise. Since Wilfrid Hudleston, in a letter dated 8 February 1700/1,¹⁵ said that he was about to freight a ship for Norway we may probably conclude that he brought deals or tar or both as a return cargo. In July 1702¹⁶ he wrote to Joseph Harbert of Ravenglass to say that tar would be very dear, little having been imported, and we may conjecture that trade was interrupted by the war waged by Charles XII of Sweden against Denmark and Russia. Another reason probably was the mercantilist policy of the Swedes, who, it was said, restricted supply and would not sell, even for ready money, unless the goods were carried in Swedish ships.¹⁷

Tar and pitch would no doubt be required by builders and repairers of ships in Whitehaven and elsewhere, but the tar sold by Hudleston to Edward Burrow of Kendal¹⁸ must have been for some other purpose and may well have been intended to be used, as tar had been for centuries, to combat scab in sheep. His deals were sold at prices ranging from £4. 3s. od. per hundred plus freight in Dumfries to £4. 16s. od., £4. 17s. od. and £4. 17s. 6d. in Carlisle, though in a letter of July 1701¹⁹ he claimed to have sold deals in Whitehaven at £5 and £5. 10s. od. In only one instance is the purpose of the timber known: at some date before 20 June 1701 he had

¹⁵ LB 2.

¹⁶ LB 9.

¹⁷ D. Macpherson, *Annals of Commerce* (1805) ii 724. The English government tried to overcome the shortage in 1706 by means of a bounty of £4 a ton on pitch imported from the American colonies and other bounties on timber and hemp (3, 4 Anne c. 10). Despite the extensive colonial forests, however, the Baltic remained most important as a source of supply long after Wilfrid Hudleston's time. There, according to Joshua Gee (*The Trade and Navigation of Great Britain Considered*, 1767, pp. 156-157) stocks of ready squared timber were always on hand, but this was not so in the colonies. "What timber we have had hitherto . . . has been rather put on board to fill up, when tobacco or other merchandize has not been to be had."

¹⁸ LB 1.

¹⁹ LB 7, 8.

sold deals, at £4. 5s. 6d., to a Mr Partis for use in building Annan Bridge, a work later taken over by the Earl of Annandale, from whom Hudleston hoped, by the mediation of Sir James Douglas, to get payment.²⁰

Hudleston was also concerned in the importation of Irish linen and yarn. In May 1705²¹ he offered "fine and coarse Irish linen yarn", bought of a Belfast merchant, to William Cook of Kendal, to whom he wrote anxiously about it in September of the same year. In 1704 or 1705²² he ordered from James Arbuckle, a Belfast merchant, a "pack of good linen" suitable for the North of England market. This was received on 11 May 1705, and the letter acknowledging receipt throws light on the method of trade. Arbuckle had been sent 2,923 lbs. of tobacco to be sold on Wilfrid Hudleston's account: against the amount received for this Arbuckle was to charge the cost of the linen, which came to more than the tobacco bill, and Hudleston agreed to pay the difference to Arbuckle or his order.²³

In the export of coal to Ireland, an important factor in the rise of Whitehaven, Hudleston seems to have played no very great part, at any rate in these earlier years. He had, indeed, in association with his brother Andrew, at some date before 20 January 1700/1 sent coal to a Mr Ryan in or near Dublin.²⁴ It was carried in the *Katherin*, a ship in which Hudleston had a share, probably on its way to Virginia and calling in Dublin to unload some goods and take others aboard. Ryan was a bad payer: on 29 April 1701 the amount which "should have been all ready money upon the delivery of the coales", at 17s. 6d. a ton., was still outstanding.²⁵

The commodity of most importance, probably, in Hudleston's dealings was Virginian tobacco, grown in

²⁰ LB 8.

²¹ LB 16.

²² LB 19.

²³ LB 19.

²⁴ LB 1.

²⁵ LB 4.

the region of the Rappahannock and Potomac rivers, brought to Whitehaven in the *Katherin* and sold to merchants and others scattered over a wide area which included Belfast, Dublin, Annan, Allonby, Cockermouth, Raby, Penrith, Newcastle and Cartmel. The quantities disposed of varied a good deal. James Arbuckle²⁶ of Belfast, for instance, was sent 26 cwt.²⁷ and William Montgomery of Dublin over 45 cwt.,²⁸ but George Fothergill of Penrith received only 60 lbs.,²⁹ Mrs Anne Foster of the same town only 39 lbs., and Mark Nicholson, smith, of Penruddock even less, 19½ lbs. It is, unfortunately not clear whether these customers were simply retailers, middlemen or people who prepared the leaf, by spinning or rolling, for smoking. Mrs Foster and Mark Nicholson were perhaps retailers and so, it may well have been, was James Thornthwaite of Allonby to whom Hudleston sent a small box of tobacco with the remark: "I doe not doubt but [it] will give good content & be very well approved of by those that smooks it."³⁰ Thornthwaite was charged 13d. a pound. Samuel Carter of Cockermouth, stuff weaver, who was sent by carrier no less a quantity than 426½ lbs. at 9d.³¹ a pound, may have been in a different category.

The prices charged to customers are of very little help in settling the matter. They were, of course, higher than those charged to the importers at the port of entry.

²⁶ For James Arbuckle see Edward Hughes: *North-Country Life in the Eighteenth Century* ii (1965) 32, 61. James Arbuckle of Belfast married at Holy Trinity church, Whitehaven, on 4 December 1733, Mary daughter of Walter Lutwidge. Professor Hughes shows that Arbuckle ran into financial difficulties, and in 1738 Lutwidge borrowed £2,500 from Sir James Lowther in a vain attempt to keep his son-in-law afloat. Mr S. C. McMennamin of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland says there seem to have been two James Arbuckles, if not three. The *Belfast News Letter* of 1 May 1739 records: "Last week died in the Isle of Man, James Arbuckle, once an eminent merchant in this place." His dying in the Isle of Man suggests that this was Lutwidge's unfortunate son-in-law, who had gone to the Island to avoid the claims of his creditors. C.R.H.

²⁷ LB 19.

²⁸ LB 27.

²⁹ LB 12.

³⁰ LB 12.

³¹ LB 15.

William Stout of Lancaster reckoned, in March 1705/6, that the price was 2½d. a pound, in addition to which he would have freight and customs to pay. In 1707 the freight would raise the cost to a little over 5d. a pound and the duty on colonial tobacco was 5d. a pound,³² so that his tobacco leaf would cost him at that rate about 10d. a pound, but a discount was available for prompt payment of the duty and an allowance for damage might exempt some of the tobacco.³³ It is thus possible that the price charged to Samuel Carter, 9d. a pound, was for unmanufactured tobacco. In letters to George Fothergill of Penrith in October and November 1702, Hudleston says he has a stock good *leaf*:³⁴ on the other hand, the tobacco sent to James Thornthwaite in July 1706, and charged at 13d.³⁵ a pound, is described as "cutt and dry", which may mean that it was manufactured or part manufactured. As early as 1695 it could be said that "tobacco is cut by engines",³⁶ but this was a novelty which may not then have reached the North.

It is not possible to tell from the Letter Book, as it might be from an account-book, how Wilfrid Hudleston prospered in trade, but it is evident that he was beset with difficulties. There were times when the Virginia trade paid a lucky merchant well. In or about 1689, according to William Stout, John Hodgson of Lancaster "sent a ship with cargo about £200 value . . . by which he gained at least £1,500". On the other hand, in 1699, Stout himself, having imported 5,697 lbs. of tobacco, lost £39. 4s. od. by the venture.

One difficulty, at times, of the colonial trade was a lack of skill or industry in the agents employed to dispose of the goods sent out and to gather a return cargo, and it is not strange that, when he could, Wilfred

³² E. Lipson, *Economic History of England*, iii 142.

³³ "If but 1 lb. appeared [damaged] we got 10 lb. allowed, or if 10 lb. appeared, got 40 lb., and so in proportion."

³⁴ LB 12.

³⁵ LB 35.

³⁶ Lipson, *op. cit.*, iii 53.

Hudleston wished to use the services of a trustworthy relation, his brother William. Another difficulty lay in uncertainty with regard to payment. A Mr Thomas Taylor, e.g. merchant, of Choptunke, to whom a parcel of goods had been sent in 1705, paid for them with bills of exchange which were protested, so that in January 1705/6 Wilfrid Hudleston was threatening him with legal proceedings.³⁷ A third difficulty lay in competition by other importers, who might inconveniently bring in enough tobacco to lower the price. In December 1706 Hudleston wrote to Mr Montgomery in Dublin, to whom he had sent seven barrels of tobacco, thus: "Would advise you to dispose of it as soone as you can for this reason here is a ship from Pensilvania loden with Tob. who will bring most part of her loding with her to your place in 4 or 5 dayes time which will be the occasion of glutting your market . . . Soe I thought fitt to acquaint you (but keep this to yourself) that you may as you see occasion to dispose of the Tob."³⁸ Fourthly, besides the danger of storms at sea, there was a risk from enemy action. In April 1705 Hudleston asked James Arbuckle of Dublin to send some linen promptly "by the bearer Jno. Hodgson, . . . for after this, now summer coming on, Privat[eers] will be stirring".³⁹ The risks could indeed be reduced: in September 1705 he reports that "all our Virginia ships are coming home under convoy of 3 men of warr;"⁴⁰ and in November 1707 he informed his brother William that he had had "very good success not being consern'd in any ship that miscarry'd either by sea or enemy".⁴¹

The conditions in which Wilfrid Hudleston had to carry on his business were, compared to those of later times, very inconvenient and restrictive. For information

³⁷ LB 21-2.

³⁸ LB 27.

³⁹ LB 19.

⁴⁰ LB 23.

⁴¹ LB 52.

he had to depend on conversation and slow correspondence, and for transport of goods on carriers' carts moving slowly on rocky and rutted roads or on ships subject to delays because of wind and tides, all of which meant that he could not keep in close and constant touch with some of his agents and customers. Moreover he had not, as London merchants had, a good choice of banking institutions near at hand to make easier the discounting of bills and to provide temporary credit at need, and though this disadvantage could be overcome the method was sometimes rather roundabout. For instance, in February 1700/1 a Scottish customer owed £3. 4s. od. on a bill of £16: Hudleston requested Nicholas Robinson, a Carlisle merchant, to receive this for him and direct the money to a man in Penrith who would send it to Hutton John.⁴² Ordinarily, no doubt, he relied like others in his time, for banking services on merchants, lawyers or revenue collectors.⁴³

His major anxieties probably sprang from the difficulty in getting punctual payment from customers so that he could meet his own liabilities, especially when a ship was expected from Virginia. A customer, when he received goods, gave him a note, i.e. an acknowledgment of the obligation to pay, and when payment had been made in full the note was returned to the customer. He too, no doubt, had his difficulties and had either to delay payment until he had collected what was due from his own debtors or to pay piecemeal as the goods were sold and paid for. That is perhaps the reason why Nicholas Robinson and Joseph Parker, of Carlisle, who had given Hudleston a note, dated 25 October 1700, for £27. 14s. 4d. still owed £15. 4s. 10d. on 22 April 1701.⁴⁴ The note was perhaps not on account of goods sold to them personally but on account of money which they, as

⁴² LB 3.

⁴³ T. S. Ashton, *Economic History of England : The Eighteenth Century*, pp. 180-182.

⁴⁴ LB 5.

agents, collected from others. The piecemeal nature of payments, and the large amount which might be outstanding, are evident in a statement of account between Hudleston and William Procter of Newcastle,⁴⁵ who had been a customer since July 1708. In October 1710 the account⁴⁶ stood as follows:

<i>Dr.</i>		<i>Cr.</i>
Nett proceeds—		By cash per self at
5 packs Tobacco	. £36 17 7½	Whitehaven
5 " "	. 33 7 3	By Jno. Hughs bill on
7 " "	. 48 17 10½	Jno. Golding
		By ball[ance]
	£119 1 11	. £10 0 0
		. 20 0 0
		. 89 1 11
		£119 1 11

In several instances bad payers were threatened with prosecution. In January 1709/10, e.g. Ralph Wensley, merchant, of Darlington is told: "There still remains £34. os. 7d. which ought to have been paid the 7 October last; therefore desires yo'll forthwith either pay it here in Speccie or send a good bill on London for the said £34. os. 7d.; otherwise must take some other course to compell you thereto haveing been longe out of my money."⁴⁷ Another unpunctual customer was Thomas Menzies of Annan, to whom tobacco had been sent in September 1705.⁴⁸ In November 1706, in a letter signed by Wilfrid Hudleston and Peter Senhouse, a George Blair is instructed, if Menzies does not pay, to use all diligence against him: on 28 December 1706, Blair's efforts having presumably been fruitless, Hudleston declares that Menzies "will not take care to pay me till he is forced thereto".⁴⁹

Accounts could sometimes be settled when Hudleston's business required him to travel to his customer's neighbourhood. Robert Browne, a Dumfries merchant,

⁴⁵ A wealthy merchant, who died in 1719.

⁴⁶ LB 37.

⁴⁷ LB 83.

⁴⁸ LB 18.

⁴⁹ LB 38.

e.g. was informed by a letter of 19 February 1700/1⁵⁰ that Hudleston would call on him about 1 March, by which time he was asked to have ready all money due for tar and deals. Sometimes payment could be made when the customer had occasion to come to Whitehaven. William Singleton of Allison Bank in Scotland, e.g. is informed in April 1701⁵¹ that he may pay an account of £6 to Hudleston's attorney in Carlisle "but I would rather you bring it here". Thomas Menzies of Annan and his partner were expected, according to a letter of 24 December 1705,⁵² to be in Whitehaven in a fortnight or twenty days, bringing with them money due to Senhouse and Hudleston, who added "which pray fail not".

Whether they paid their accounts at such meetings or by remitting to Charles Smithson, attorney in Carlisle or to some other agent, Hudleston's customers commonly used bills of exchange, more easily portable than coin. William Cock of Kendal, e.g. was told in October 1705⁵³ that Hudleston would like payment for tobacco by means of a good bill on someone in London or Whitehaven. No doubt, even if Wilfrid Hudleston himself had no bills to pay in London, there were other Whitehaven merchants who had and who would rather send bills than cash. Moreover, it is likely that the customs' officers in Whitehaven, who had to remit revenue to London, would find it convenient to buy locally good bills on London and send those. Hudleston, in January 1709/10, disposed of a £20 bill to the Whitehaven collector of customs.⁵⁴ A good deal, naturally, depended on the price of such bills: if they were scarce and dear, merchants and others might find it cheaper to send coin. James Lufley, a Belfast merchant, is requested to settle his account by means of a good bill if he could get one at 6 per cent or less, but otherwise to send guineas.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ LB 3.

⁵¹ LB 4.

⁵² LB 21.

⁵³ LB 20.

⁵⁴ LB 83.

⁵⁵ LB 23.

Whether, and for how long, after 1710 Wilfrid Hudleston continued in the Virginia trade is not known. He was then about thirty-seven years of age, young enough to look forward to many years of activity, but too young, perhaps, to have acquired a competence on which he could retire. He died, at the age of 55, in 1728. By that time, though the end was not in sight, the trend had started as a result of which Whitehaven was superseded in importance as a tobacco port by Glasgow. Following the Act of Union in 1707, Glasgow merchants, thereby freed from earlier restrictions and prohibitions, began to engage eagerly in the colonial trade, and as early as 1709 it could be said that Glasgow was gaining at Whitehaven's expense.⁵⁶ It is true that a shortage of shipping on the Clyde compelled Glasgow merchants to use Whitehaven vessels, so that there might still be plenty of work for Hudleston and others to do. In November 1707 he informs his brother William: "being concern'd both in ships & merchandize I can fright [freight] ships much cheep[er] here than in any place of Great Brittain, our ships being frighted by merchants of London, Liverpoole & most parts of Scotland".⁵⁷ In any event, despite the competition of Glasgow, Whitehaven was still perhaps the third port in importance "in the tobacco way" as late as 1745,⁵⁸ though a marked decline was observable about 1750.

⁵⁶ J. E. Williams, "Whitehaven in the Eighteenth Century" (*Econ. Hist. Rev.* April 1956) 401.

⁵⁷ *LB* 52.

⁵⁸ J. E. Williams, *op. cit.*, 397.