

WILLIAM BELITHA, A TRUSTEE FOR GEORGIA.

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ABOUT William Belitha, who lived at Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, in 1732,¹ not a great deal is known. He was a chartered member of the Georgia Trust, but of all the original Trustees he took the least active part in the actual administration.

His surname, spelled variously as Beletha,² Belitho, Bolitho, and Belitha,³ may have come down from "belliter" or "bell-yetter," meaning bell-founder.⁴ It may be of no significance that there was a Roger le Belleyetere in the thirteenth century at Exeter and a William le Belyetere at Canterbury in the fourteenth⁵; or that Belet was a name in the Middle Ages associated with a manor of Combe, near Kingston.⁶

In the registry of the Bishop of London there is an allegation of 18 January 1630-1 of Edward Belitha to marry Mary Copp.⁷ This may have been a forbear of the Trustee. Two other seventeenth-century traces are probably of lesser value: Belitha is a name that occurs about 1650 in Buckinghamshire

¹ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, II, 1032.

² *Colonial Records of the State of Georgia* (hereinafter cited as *C.G.*), I (Atlanta, 1904), 14.

³ *Diary of Viscount Percival, Afterwards First Earl of Egmont*. Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont. Edited by R. A. Roberts for the Historical Manuscripts Commission (hereinafter cited as *E. D.*), III (London, 1923), index, p. 384.

⁴ *Notes and Queries*, 10th S., VI, 250.

⁵ *Ibid.*, VI, 206-07. For a Belliter's Gate at Exeter in 1563, see *ibid.*, VI, 298.

⁶ W. D. Biden, *The History and Antiquities of the Ancient and Royal Town of Kingston-upon-Thames* (Kingston, 1852), 96.

⁷ R. M. Glencross (Ed.), *A Calendar of the Marriage Licence Allegations in the Registry of the Bishop of London* (The Index Library), Vol. I, 1597-1648 (London, 1937), 91.

documents¹; and when the *London Directory* of 1677 was compiled, the goldsmith John Bolitho "at the Golden Lion in Lumbard Street" kept "running Cashes."²

At the opening of the eighteenth-century Edward Belitha, "a freeman of London," was living at Kingston. Among his children were Anne, Hannah, Elizabeth and William. Anne, after marrying Sir Swinnerton Dyer, Bart., died 21 August 1714; Hannah married Samuel Cox; but Elizabeth remained unmarried in 1725, when the two surviving sisters brought suit against their only and younger brother William, the executor of their father's will.³

For the then size of Kingston—it had a population of 3,295 in 1725⁴—there were a surprising number of endowed charities, some going back to the sixteenth and even earlier centuries.⁵ Kingston already had Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School,⁶ the oldest known English school to be called in set terms a Public School.⁷ But with the fashion all over England during the first quarter of the eighteenth century favourable to the setting up of so-called charity schools,⁸ Kingston was to be still further benefited from the bequests of public-spirited people.

¹ *Notes and Queries*, CLXXII, 329, citing Lipscombe "Bucks," iv, 604.

² *A Collection of the Names of the Merchants Living in and about the City of London* (London, 1677), reprinted as *The London Directory of 1677* (London, 1878).

³ *Notes and Queries*, CLXXIII, 87, note by James Seton-Anderson. *Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica*, 4th S., V, 181. Robert Masters, *The History of Corpus Christi College* (Cambridge), II (Cambridge?, c. 1755), 279.

⁴ H. E. Malden, "Answers Made to the Visitation Articles of Dr. Willis, the Bishop of Winchester, from the Parishes in Surrey, Excluding the Peculiars of Canterbury, 1724-25" (abridged and annotated from the manuscript formerly at Farnham Castle and now in the Cathedral Library, Winchester), *Surrey Archæological Collections* (1931), XXXIX, 95.

⁵ See Biden, "Charities—Charitable Institutions," Ch. VII in *The History and Antiquities of the Ancient and Royal Town of Kingston-upon-Thames*, 71-90.

⁶ Where the future historian Edward Gibbon was sent in his ninth year, January 1746. Edward Gibbon, *The Autobiography of Edward Gibbon*, ed. by Oliphant Smeaton (Everyman's Library), (London, n.d.), 26.

⁷ *V. C. H. Surrey*, II 155.

⁸ See M. G. Jones, *The Charity School Movement* (Cambridge, at the University Press, 1938).

On one of the pillars in the middle aisle of the church of St. Dunstan in the East, London, appeared a marble tablet with this inscription :

Near this Place lieth interred, expecting the joyful Resurrection (whose Works shall follow him) Edward Belitha, Esq. ; Citizen of London. He died April the 1st 1717, in the 76th Year of his Age.¹

By will of 26 March 1717 Edward Belitha left £400 for the bailiffs and freemen of Kingston to purchase lands and tenements in the vicinity of Kingston as an investment, the proceeds to be used in "employing some honest reputable woman, a legal inhabitant of the said town, who should be able to read and work plain work well, to teach twenty poor persons' daughters of the said town to read and work plain work well." The school was established before Edward Belitha's death ; and it was his wish that his executor, his son William, should support the school by retaining the £400 and paying interest.²

William Belitha, who seems to have been made Sheriff of Surrey for 1720,³ carried out his father's direction. And in 1724 or 1725 when Kingston had a separate charity school for thirty boys, the charity girls were about twenty-five in number, "entirely supported by Mr. William Belitha by the interest of £400."⁴ His sisters Hannah and Elizabeth evidently did not agree with the way in which he executed Edward Belitha's will, for William was made defendant in an action of 1725 involving the paternal property.⁵

A bridge across the Thames at Kingston connected Surrey and Middlesex. On the Middlesex side lay the parish of Teddington where the Reverend Dr. Stephen Hales, scientist and inventor, served his distinguished rectorship from 1709 to 1761.⁶ Hales though a minister had much of the entrepreneur's initiative ; and it was probably through his influence

¹ Robert Seymour, *A Survey of London and Westminster, Borough of Southwark, and Parts Adjacent*, I (London, 1734), 298.

² Biden, *op. cit.*, 78.

³ (6 George I), O. Manning and W. Bray, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey*, I (London, 1804), xlii.

⁴ Malden, *op. cit.*, *Surrey Arch. Collections* (1931), XXXIX, 95.

⁵ Year 1725, Cox and Belitha *v.* Belitha, 2 P.W. 272, cited in "Genealogical Digest of Old Cases," *Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica*, 4th S., V, 181.

⁶ See the biography of Hales : A. E. Clark-Kennedy, *Stephen Hales, D.D., F.R.S.* (Cambridge, 1929).

that his Kingston neighbour William Belitha happened to become one of the original Associates of Dr. Thomas Bray, founded about 1724 to perpetuate Bray's interest in converting negroes and establishing parochial libraries in the British plantations in America.¹ Bray, of course, had been a leading organizer of the two more famous English missionary societies—the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Other than Hales, Belitha, and Bray, the remaining first Associates were John Lord Percival and a brother of the Teddington rector.²

Again no doubt it was mainly through his friendship with Hales, and through the Associates that William Belitha was led to become one of the persons who petitioned for the Georgia Charter,³ in which Belitha was named one of the nine first members of the Common Council of the Trust.⁴

After attending seven of the early official meetings of the Council,⁵ Belitha found that coming in from the country a dozen to fourteen miles was a burden that would affect the regularity of his attendance.⁶ The official minutes give ill health as the cause of his resignation from the Council,⁷ 15 March 1733, at the Anniversary Day of the Georgia Trust.⁸ He continued as a Trustee, doubtless relying upon Hales to keep him in touch with what was going on; for, including the Council meetings, Belitha attended a total of only 32 Georgia meetings while Hales attended 300.⁹

¹ V. W. Crane, art. "Bray, Thomas," *Dictionary of American Biography*, II, 610-11. V. W. Crane, art. "The Philanthropists and the Genesis of Georgia," *American Historical Review*, XXVII, 63-69. Rev. Richard Rawlinson, "A Short Account of the Life and Designs of Thomas Bray, D.D.," in B. C. Steiner, *Thomas Bray, His Life and Selected Works Relating to Maryland*, Maryland Hist. Soc. Fund Publication, No. 37 (Baltimore, 1901), 40.

² *E. D.*, II (London, 1923), 173. See also Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont, *H.M.C. 7th Report*, App. I, 242.

³ *Cal. of State Papers, Col. Series, Am. and W.I.*, 1730 (ed. by Cecil Headlam) (London, 1937), 357.

⁴ *C. G.*, I, 14.

⁵ J. R. McCain, *Georgia as a Proprietary Province* (Boston, 1917), 35. See the index to *E. D.*, III.

⁶ Rev. William B. Stevens, *A History of Georgia, from its first Discovery by Europeans to . . . MDCCXCVIII*, I (New York, 1848), 465.

⁷ *C.G.*, II (Atlanta, 1904), 36.

⁸ *E.D.*, I (London, 1920), 343.

⁹ McCain, *Georgia as a Proprietary Province*, 31-39.

Though he participated but little in the administration of Georgia affairs, Belitha nevertheless aided the Trust financially more than did many of his colleagues. Besides collecting Trust subscriptions from two or three benefactors, Belitha personally contributed around fifty pounds in no less than five separate donations,¹ one of which he sent in by Hales.²

William Belitha was a member of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts as early as 1735 and as late as 1758, and also perhaps during the intervening years.³

On 26 February 1735 he was one of the persons who became trustees for County Surrey of the premises of the former White Lion Inn at St. George, Southwark, used for a county gaol and house of correction.⁴

As the executor of Edward Belitha's will, William Belitha until 1758 paid five per cent interest on the £400 left for support of a charity school for girls. At this date, the principal with a balance of £20 12s. 6d. "then in hand" was converted into £500 three per cent Consols.⁵ The Belitha Charity is probably still in existence,⁶ but in 1930 no documents concerning it were known other than those in the Kingston Municipal Records.⁷

William Belitha's address in 1741 and 1742 was given as Kingstreet, Surrey⁸; but this is evidently a mistaken way of meaning Kingston. He at one time leased the Manor House

¹ C.G., III (Atlanta, 1905), *passim*.

² *Ibid.*, III, 110.

³ John Chamberlayne, *Magnæ Britanniae Notitia or the Present State of Great Britain* (hereinafter cited Chamberlayne) (1735), ii-iii, 239; (1736) ii-iii, 167. William Belitha's name was among S.P.G. members listed in connection with the following printed sermons—"A Sermon Preached before . . ." (the S.P.G., 21 Feb. 1745) by Matthew (Hutton) Lord Bishop of Bangor (London, E. Owen, 1745), pp. 60-73; "A Sermon Preached before . . ." (the S.P.G., 23 Feb. 1759), by Anthony Ellis, Lord Bishop of St. David's (London, E. Owen, 1759), pp. 80-98.

⁴ W. H. Hart, "Further Remarks on Some of the Ancient Inns of Southwark," *Surrey Arch. Collections* (1865), III, 205.

⁵ Biden, *op. cit.*, 78.

⁶ In 1852 the dividends were being used in educating thirty children. *Ibid.*, 78.

⁷ Miss D. L. Powell, *Records of Schools and Other Endowed Institutions* (Guide to Archives and Other Collections of Documents Relating to Surrey), Surrey Record Society No. XXXI (Kingston and London, 1930), 93, footnote.

⁸ Cardanus Rider, *An Exact List . . .* (1741), 37; (1742), 38.

of Teddington,¹ across the river, but whether as his own residence or for business reasons is not clear. Since Dr. Hales was so long connected with the locality and since it is clearly established that he and Belitha were friends, other details about this founder of Georgia may come to light in any close investigation of Hales material.

Belitha probably outlived the Georgia Trust.² Because of the shift in the investment funds of the Edward Belitha Charity in 1758,³ one may conclude that William Belitha died about that year.⁴

¹ Clark-Kennedy, *op. cit.*, 44.

² The Trust records do not indicate that he ceased being a Trustee before the Charter was surrendered. *C.G.*, I, 27.

³ Biden, *op. cit.*, 78.

⁴ In 1736 the Spaniards seized a vessel, the *Don Antonio*, of which a Warren Belitha was commander and owner. *Cal. of Tr. Books and Papers, 1742-1745* (London, 1903), 139. On 25 April 1740 a Warren Belitha was commissioned a lieutenant in the Royal Navy. Chamberlayne (1741), ii-iii, 157.