

ART. XIV. – *William Preston: an eye witness of the Jacobite invasion.* By CLIVE T. PROBYN.

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THOMAS Twining (1735-1804) achieved a considerable reputation in his lifetime as a translator of Aristotle's *Poetics*. He was a friend and correspondent of the musicologist Dr Burney and attended the funeral of Dr Johnson. He was rector of St. Mary's, Colchester, and his name is of course popularly known for its association with the distinguished family of tea-dealers. His half-brother, Richard Twining (1749-1824), was elected a director of the East India Company in 1793 and he headed the family tea business from its premises in the Strand. The letters of Thomas Twining were selected and edited for publication in 1887 by his grandson, Richard, under the title *Selections from Papers of the Twining Family*, a sequel to the earlier and better known volume *Recreations and Studies of a Country Clergyman of the Eighteenth Century* (1882). Among additional papers and some poems in the later volume there is a memoir of William Preston, employed by the Twinings as a book keeper for some thirty years. The memoir is as follows.

In the year 1764, William Preston, aged thirty-six, the son of an innkeeper at Burton, in Westmorland, entered the service of Messrs. Twining, in the Strand, as bookkeeper. His father was a most respectable man, and was highly esteemed in his native town. He had several daughters and the son of whom I write. Their parents had given them a sound, useful education, and they were a happy, united family. William Preston used to tell in after-life how he remembered being called in as a youth to assist his father in waiting upon the Pretender, who came to their inn with his suite – male and female – in 1745 on their way to Derby. They were all in high spirits and very jovial, ordering in stoups of claret and making merry. He also remembered how changed was the scene when they again halted on their return – a harassed, panic-stricken, shattered company, scarcely daring to stop for a hurried meal and needful rest. There was no ordering of wine then, but all was haste and confusion, so keen was the apprehension of the Duke of Cumberland and his troopers following up the pursuit. In after years the father died and the family home was broken up. William Preston then came to London in search of employment, and the eldest daughter became housekeeper to a City merchant (a Westmorland man) who lived with his family in one of the old-fashioned courts off Lombard Street.¹

Preston would have been seventeen years old when the van of the Jacobite army under Lord George Murray caught up with the advance guard of horse under the Lords Elcho and Pitsligo at Burton on November 23, 1745, before proceeding south to Lancaster. Some indication of the size of the Jacobite contingent which descended on the village (which at this time contained less than five hundred inhabitants) is provided by a report published in the *London Evening Post*, 23-26 November, which stated that the Jacobites “sent some of their Quarter-Masters to a place called Burton, which is but 8 Miles from hence [i.e. Lancaster], to demand Quarters for 100 Horse and 8000 foot which will arrive there this evening”.² Small wonder, then, that this event impressed the young Preston.

Burton at this time was a loyal place. Apart from the King's Arms and the Royal Oak, the inn at the northern boundary of the village was subsequently named after the Duke of Cumberland, second son of George II and instrument of English vengeance against the Scots at Culloden. Local legend states that the Pretender spent the night at Hutton House in the village, but Jarvis records with scepticism the *General Advertiser's* report of a letter sent from Burton on 17 November to the effect that the villagers had seized some of the rebels, together with "the Young Pretender's favourite Miss Jenny Cameron and Mrs Murray" after their coach had broken down nearby.³ I have not been able to identify the particular inn kept by the Prestons at this time, but given the size of the Jacobite contingents involved it is possible that the Pretender's entourage would have chosen the King's Arms for their carousing. It is centrally-located and certainly the most commodious. Under not entirely dissimilar conditions John Keats dined there in 1818, during a controversial election campaign in which the Lowther family, with two brother MPs representing Westmorland, had brought in the soldiers to keep the peace.⁴

The memoir of Preston provides a lively testimony to the involvement of ordinary people in national politics. But his own biography is not without interest. Twining had evidently appointed a man whose education was of sufficient quality to enable him to work in a busy London commercial enterprise. Whether or not William and his sisters were formally educated is not known. A free-school had been established in the village by the terms of John Hutton's will, dated 16 July, 1657, though the schoolmaster was generally insolvent and educational establishments in the village tended to be somewhat precariously financed until 1827, when a petition to the Lord High Chancellor improved matters.⁵ Even so, local educational resources produced at least one distinguished educator. William Cockin (1736-1801) was writing-master and accountant at the grammar school in Burton and at the Free School in Lancaster and produced the once-famous *Rational and Practical Treatise on Arithmetic*, signed as from Burton, December 23, 1763. His poems were published in 1776 and include pieces on Newton's theory of gravity and a verse epistle to Cockin's friend, the Kendal painter George Romney. Cockin's *Art of Delivering Written Language, or An Essay on Reading* was dedicated to the most famous actor of the day, David Garrick, and appeared in 1775. Preston would not have been taught by Cockin, but he could have known his published works and might well have been proud of the educational standards achieved by one of Burton's educators. Preston retired to Burton in 1795, six years before Cockin's death, although there is no evidence to suggest that they ever met.⁶

Preston worked for the Twinings for thirty years. On retirement Preston expected to support his sisters with the aid of an annuity. But the sisters outlived his resources and the annuity expired. The Twinings promptly assured him of funds for his and his sisters' support. Thomas Twining's memoir adds a further paragraph which suggests that Preston's social and economic mobility did not mean that he lost touch with his roots:

The only indulgence which this worthy man allowed himself was an annual attendance at the meeting of the 'Westmorland Society', on which occasion he delighted to meet his old friends and neighbours from his native county, thankfully supporting its objects in his own unassuming way, and never failed to return home in good time without any infringement of the strictest rules of sobriety.⁷

South Westmorland, it seems, had come to Town. But it is also clear that Preston managed visits to his home village on an almost routine basis. But when he retired from

the Twinings' employ in 1795 he took an unusually circuitous coach journey home.⁸ It was not the quickest route because Preston was clearly sight-seeing. He left London for Bath, Bristol (to see the Hot Wells and to climb the rocks at Clifton), Newport ['I believe, in Somerset'], Gloucester, Worcester, Birmingham, Stone, Winslow [*sic*: Wilmslow?], Manchester, Bolton-in-the-Moors, Lancaster. A grand tour of fittingly modest proportions. Preston's description of the homecoming is given in his own words, transcribed by Richard Twining. The letter is dated as from Burton August 9, 1795, and provides a perfect epilogue to the story of the local boy made good:

I have had the whole town, I may say the parish, to see me. I have sat down fifty times, and have been nearly two days in writing this poor and trifling epistle.⁹

Searches have not revealed Thomas Preston's will, if indeed he left one when he died in 1818. A Thomas Preston died at Burton in that year, worth £800 and describing himself as "gentleman": but there was no family link between the two. To the historian, however, William Preston's life is more significant than any legacy. In a modest way his ordinary experience successfully bridged the provincial educational resources of a small Westmorland market town and the commercial expertise demanded by the nation's capital. His chance witnessing of the Jacobite invasion also kept alive for others a first-hand memory of a time when a dynasty was threatened.

Notes and References

- ¹ Richard Twining, ed., *Selections from Papers of the Twining Family* (London, 1887), 248-249. For the Twining family, see *Dictionary of National Biography*.
- ² Quoted in Rupert C. Jarvis, *Collected Papers on the Jacobite Risings*, 2 vols. (Manchester, 1972), II, 9.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 32. See also Jarvis's *The Jacobite Risings of 1715 and 1745*, Cumberland County Council Record Series, Vol. I (1954), 31.
- ⁴ See Hyder Edward Rollins, *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-21* (Cambridge, 1958).
- ⁵ Further information on Burton's educational facilities may be found in Clive T. Probyn, *A Guide to Burton-in-Kendal: the Parish and its History* (Civic Society, 1970), 14-15 and *passim*. Subsequently referred to as *A Guide*.
- ⁶ See further, *A Guide*, 13-14.
- ⁷ Richard Twining, *op. cit.*, 250.
- ⁸ Cf. J. Melville and J. L. Hobbs, "Furness Travelling and Postal Arrangements in the 18th and 19th Centuries", CW2 xlvi 83-84. I am grateful to Dr A. Harris for pointing out this reference.
- ⁹ Richard Twining, *Selections*, 252-256. Twining regards the letter already as a historical curiosity, providing "a pleasant account of his simple habits of life, an amusing sketch of the difficulties of a stage-coach journey in those days between London and Westmorland".

