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Biography of Sir Henry Willoughby (1451-1528)

Henry was the elder son of Robert Willoughby (d 1474) and Margaret Griffith (d 1491). His mother married Peter Leigh of Nottingham after Robert's death. Robert had inherited the Wollaton and Middleton estates from his half-brother Richard Willoughby in 1471, and they passed to Henry on his death three years later. However, Henry was unable to take full possession until the 1490s, since his mother Margaret Leigh had a life interest in Wollaton, and his grandmother Margaret Bingham (d 1493) had a life interest in the Middleton estate, the Dunsby and Wigtoft estates in Lincolnshire, and the manors of Gunthorpe and Lowdham in Nottinghamshire.

Henry was a servant of the royal household under Richard III and a knight of the body to Henry VII and Henry VIII. He was knighted at the battle of Stoke (East Stoke, Nottinghamshire) in June 1487, and served in Flanders in 1489. Sir Henry maintained his own retinue on behalf of the King, and took them to fight in Brittany in 1491 and to defend a rebellion at Blackheath in 1497. In 1512 he was master of the ordnance and raised a retinue of more than 800 men to fight in Spain. Sir Henry also fought in France in 1513, and he attended Queen Katherine at the Field of Cloth of Gold in 1520. He was a mourner for Henry VII in 1509.

Sir Henry was influential in the Midlands thanks to his great wealth, largely founded on the coalfields under the Wollaton estate, which Sir Henry exploited more vigorously than his predecessors. He was a Justice of the Peace in Nottinghamshire from 1492 until his death, was also a J.P. in Lincolnshire and Warwickshire, and served as Sheriff of each of the three counties.

Sir Henry was buried in Wollaton parish church, where his tombstone shows him with his four wives by his side.



Family

Sir Henry married 1stly, c.1470, Margaret, daughter of Sir Robert Markham (d 1490), and had:

- John (d 1549), m Anne Grey, daughter of Viscount Lisle (d 1514) in 1486
- Edward (d 1541), m Anne, daughter of William Filliol, in 1518/19 and had:
 - Henry (d 1549)

- Jane, m Sir Guiscard Harbottle (d 1513), and had:
- George Harbottle, ward of Sir Henry Willoughby
- Mary
- Dorothy (d c.1507), m Sir Anthony Fitzherbert of Norbury in 1507
- Margaret, m Sir John Zouche of Codnor in 1496, and had:
 - George Zouche, of Codnor (c.1498-1557)
 - Richard, William, Henry, Mary and Elizabeth Zouche

Sir Henry married 2ndly, in 1491, Elizabeth, Lady Fitzhugh (d 1507), daughter of Thomas Burgh, Baron Burgh, of Gainsborough, and widow of Richard Fitzhugh, Baron Fitzhugh
Sir Henry married 3rdly, by 1512, Ellen, daughter of John Egerton of Wrinehill, Staffordshire, and had:

- Sir Hugh (d 1553), 'the Navigator', m Jane Strelley
- Alice, m Richard Draycott (d 1544) in 1523, and had:
 - Henry, Edmund, George, Philip, Anne and Mary Draycott

Sir Henry married 4thly Alice Walleys or Walters

Archive Collections

- Title deeds, settlements, estate and legal papers relating to Sir Henry Willoughby's ownership of the Willoughby estates are part of the Middleton Collection held in Manuscripts and Special Collections at the University of Nottingham.

Published Sources

- Cameron, A., 'Sir Henry Willoughby of Wollaton', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society* , 74 (1970), 10–21 [King's Meadow Campus East Midlands Collection Periodicals]
- S. J. Payling, 'Willoughby family (per. 1362–1528) ', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* , Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [available online to subscribers]