

[http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/collectionsindepth/family/middleton/biographies/biographyofsirthomaswilloughby,1stbaronmiddleton\(1672-1729\).aspx](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/collectionsindepth/family/middleton/biographies/biographyofsirthomaswilloughby,1stbaronmiddleton(1672-1729).aspx)

## Biography of Sir Thomas Willoughby, 1st Baron Middleton (1672-1729)

Thomas was the second son of [Francis Willoughby](#) the naturalist and his wife Emma, and was initially brought up on the family estate at Middleton in Warwickshire. His father died when he was still an infant. His mother married Sir Josiah Child, in 1676 and the family moved to Wanstead in Essex. In 1683 Thomas was removed from his stepfather's house by his older brother Sir Francis Willoughby, in conspiracy with their sister [Cassandra](#), and was placed at St Catharine's College in Cambridge. In 1685 he entered Jesus College in Cambridge under the tutorship of his father's friend Dr Man. Thomas succeeded his brother Sir Francis Willoughby as 2nd Baronet in 1688. After coming to a settlement with Sir Josiah, Sir Thomas settled down to life as a country gentleman at Wollaton Hall, restoring and re-furnishing the house, and taking an interest in local political affairs. In 1689 he became a J.P. for Nottinghamshire, and acted as High Sheriff in 1695-1696. He was Deputy Lieutenant of Nottinghamshire in 1692, and took the same role in Lincolnshire in 1699. Sir Thomas entered Parliament in 1698 as M.P. for Nottinghamshire and served until 1702. He did not stand in the 1702 election, possibly because of the troublesome and expensive lawsuits he was engaged in with the widow of Sir Beaumont Dixie, over estates willed to him by Sir William Willoughby of Selston. He served again for Nottinghamshire from 1705-1710, and for Newark from 1710, acting as a consistent supporter of the Tories. He was raised to the peerage as Baron Middleton of Middleton, co. Warwick, by the Lord Treasurer, Lord Oxford, on 1 January 1711/2, upon which he pressed for his son, the Hon. Francis Willoughby, to be elected to Parliament. He died on 2 April 1729 at Middleton.

### Family

He married Elizabeth, daughter and co-heir of Sir Richard Rothwell, Baronet, of Stapleford, Leicestershire, in 1691, and had, among other children:

- [Francis, later 2nd Baron Middleton \(d 1758\)](#)
- Thomas (1694-1742) m Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Southby of Birdsall, Yorkshire (d 1752), and had:

- [Henry, 5th Baron Middleton](#)
- Francis Willoughby of Hesley (b 1727), m Octavia, daughter of Francis Fisher in 1762, and had, among other children:

- [Digby, 7th Baron Middleton](#)
- James Willoughby (1731-1816), Rector of Guiseley, m Eleanor, daughter of James Hobson, and had:
  - Henry Willoughby of Birdsall, father of:
    - [Henry, 8th Baron Middleton](#)
    - [Captain Francis Digby Willoughby](#)
  - Elizabeth (d 1858), m John Savile Foljambe
  - Emma (d 1859)

## Archive Collections

- Title deeds, settlements, estate and legal papers relating to the 1st Baron'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

Correspondence and details relating to the 1st Baron are contained within Cassandra Willoughby's two-volume history of the Willoughby family, part of the [Middleton Collection](#) held at Manuscripts and Special Collections at the University of Nottingham (reference Mi LM 26-27), and published as :

- Chandos, Cassandra, Duchess of, *History of the Willoughby Family* . Published in Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *Report to the Commissioners on the Manuscripts of Lord Middleton Preserved at Wollaton Hall, Nottinghamshire* (1911) [King's Meadow Campus East Midlands Collection Em. D2 HIS]
- Chandos, Cassandra, Duchess of (ed. Wood, A.C.), *The Continuation of the History of the Willoughby Family* (The University of Nottingham, 1958) [King's Meadow Campus East Midlands Collection Not 4H.V38 WIL]