

William Brockman was born on 14th March 1595, in to what would become one of the most turbulent times in British history.

He was educated well for the time, achieving a degree from Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and then moving on to study in law at the Middle Temple from 1614, aged 19.

We do not know how William filled his time professionally up until 1630, when following the death of his father, Henry, he inherited the family estate of Beachborough. However, we do know that by that time he had married Anne Bunce of Linstead in 1616 and went on to have 7 children.

William was awarded his knighthood in 1632, in response to a summons from King Charles I for landowners to compound to the crown. This was purely a means for the crown to raise funds and it could have cost William about £10 (£1390 to £47900, depending on what measure of historical valuation is used). An early use of cash for honours. Whichever way you look at it it gave William a better position within society at the time, although it was to carry a heavier price.

The first fighting of the English Civil War started in October 1642, at the battle of Edgehill. William was at home in Kent when this took place and had recently been appointed to be Sheriff of Kent; the king's representative in the County.

Charles sent William a commission of array, which instructed him to raise and equip a military force from amongst the men of Kent. It seems that William did not actually receive that instruction as according to work by Allan Everitt for his book, *The community of Kent and the Great Rebellion (1966)*, the letter was intercepted on route and the plot was uncovered.

It was probably this that led to William being arrested shortly afterwards, as he was first recorded as being in prison on 28th November 1642 and then being moved to be held in Winchester House, beside Southwark Cathedral in London. At the same time, his estate was sequestered by parliament, which placed it at direct risk of being confiscated completely.

It was here that family records first pick up on William's story. The boxes of papers that were rescued when Beachborough was cleared out for final sale in 1933 are now held in the British Library and available for public reference. This collection includes the series of 21 letters that open a window directly on to William's experience during that period. This collection of letters is considered in more detail in a paper written by Giles Drake-Brockman and published by the Kent Archaeological Society, *Sir William and Lady Ann Brockman of Beachborough, Newington by Hythe: a royalist family's experience of the civil war.*

In February 1644, William and his wife Ann started making formal applications to the various parliamentary committees involved in the affairs of prisoners to secure William's release. Most prisoners at this time seemed to be being held in detention without any form of trial or conviction and William's letters suggest that conditions were pretty poor, with new prisoners regularly coming in and many dying whilst still in captivity.

Interestingly, from the start William and Ann did not actually apply for him to be

released, rather they asked that William be transferred to a prison closer to his home. It was said that Ann was seriously ill and William needed to be closer to home. The letters record the interchange of communication between William and the different committees involved in the decision.

In March the Committee for Prisoners decided that William did not pose any danger to the county and agreed that he should be moved from London to be held at Westenhanger house in Kent, under the watchful eye of Sir Edward Scott. In a show of good faith, William took the Covenant whilst still in London, which meant he swore an oath to recognise the new order and behave himself.

The move to Westenhanger was a surely a blessing for William as it was only three miles from Beachborough. William was formally transferred to Westenhanger on 27th May 1644 and arrived there on 6th June. To add to the improvement in William's situation the sequestration order was lifted on his estate, which meant that he could start to reconstruct his life and business affairs.

In March the following year, William was formally granted leave to visit home three days a week under escort. Finally on the 16th August 1645, William received his full release order, on condition he paid whatever bill he had accrued whilst being held prisoner.

Nothing else was heard of William until that last fateful uprising by Royalist forces in 1648. This event had been building up in Kent over many months in response to parliament and puritan attempts to increase control in the county, especially in the move to ban the celebration of Christmas day and forcibly close the markets in Canterbury. In May this unrest developed into armed uprising. A force of over 10,000 Royalist troops rose up and took control of castles at Dover, Deal and Walmer. Parliament reacted quickly and ordered Sir Thomas Fairfax to take his troops in to Kent to put the uprising down.

William had become involved and was based in Maidstone, acting as a commander along side of Sir John Mayney. Fighting began around seven o'clock in the evening and lasted until after midnight. Although they had up to 2000 troops, they ultimately proved no match for Fairfax's trained and seasoned troops. Fairfax himself reported the fighting was fierce and this was corroborated by another eyewitness, Matthew Carter, who described a very bloody street fight that was not the set piece battle commonly associated with the civil war.

The Royalist forces, separated from any hope of reinforcement from their main body, were eventually encircled in a church yard and surrendered. Fairfax reported "about 200 of the enemy slain, many wounded, about 900 prisoners, 400 horse, and 8 pieces of cannon, and a great store of ammunition taken. Sir William Brockman and others of the Gentlemen are Prisoners."

William was a prisoner again. Only one record has been uncovered that confirms this. On 27th May, 1651, the proceedings for the Council of State records that the cases for "Sir William Brockman and James Newman, prisoners in Dover Castle be speedily examined and a report made, that further order may be taken concerning them."

On the 4th July 1651, Parliament formally declared William Brockman a delinquent

and fined him £500. Depending on how you apply the measure of historical value this is equivalent to about £37,780.00 at a minimum. William had a brother, named Zouch, who also lived in or around Newington. Zouch was also fined under the same delinquency order to the tune of £350 (£26,446.00 min). This is the only direct reference that has been found so far, that relates to Zouch in the same period. It is reasonable to assume that he supported his brother at Maidstone in order to have attracted such a heavy penalty.

We do not know whether William and Zouch ever paid all or any of their fines. They were undoubtedly heavy, but it did not result in the break up of the estate at that time. A couple of other general letters in the Brockman collection indicate that William was probably released from Dover castle around this time so he did at least get to spend his last few years at home.

William did not live to see Charles II restored to the throne in 1660. William died on 6th December, 1654 and his wife Ann, followed him in 1660.

This is one of those points in a family tree where the direct descendants of both William and Zouch Brockman need to count themselves most fortunate. If things had gone badly for either man, many of us would not be here today. William's story gives us a valuable insight to a terrible time in British history, when families and friends fought against each other; a glimpse in to the lives of people who were willing to take risks to fight for what they considered most valuable to them. It is not the story of glorious battle, but rather of dealing with the consequences of taking those decisions and enduring the results of bad fortune; the hardship of coping with imprisonment and the fear of losing everything you hold dear to you.

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