

The Rev. Colonel John Wigan

JOHN Wigan was a clergyman of the Established Church, and held various posts both in the quiet times and in the early civil war. A chapelry at Gorton, one at Heapey, where Prince Rupert harried him on his way to Marston Moor, and one at Birch are the chief. When the Presbyterian system was legalised and erected, he declined to submit to the jurisdiction of the Manchester Classis, and they failed to coerce him.

The old Hall of the Barons of Manchester had been presented by the last of them, who became a priest, as the residence of the college of priests to serve the parish church. At the reformation, when priests were allowed to marry, they no longer needed a collegiate residence, and the property was leased to the Earl of Derby as a town house. As the Earl took the royal side in the Civil War and was beaten, his property came into the market, and John Wigan took over the lease. In 1649 he fitted up the large barn, close to the Gate-house, within sixty yards of the Parish Church, as a Baptist meeting—the first in North England. In 1650 he handed over the care of the congregation to J[ames ?] Jones, a minister, and Edward Gathorne, a prominent resident, while he himself took a commission as Captain in the cavalry of the New Model. When the second Scotch invasion took place in 1651, he scoured the county, and locked up all the royalists in jail at Lancaster and Liverpool, so that the Scotch found no local help, and were easily defeated. Wigan was promoted, and became Colonel of the Life Guards. But when Cromwell accepted the resignation of the Nominated Parliament, Wigan with many other Baptist officers laid down their commissions—or were cashiered. He returned to Manchester, with large arrears of pay as an officer, and with orders on the county ecclesiastical commissioners for £100 a year as a minister, which he drew regularly till the Restoration. He married off two daughters, to Daniel Dunbabin, of Warrington, of a substantial woollen-drapery, and to William Morris [of Ashton ?] another minister. His son, also called John, he trained at Cambridge for the ministry. His friend Humphrey Chetham left large sums to found a local charity, and the feoffees cast their eyes on the valuable property in the heart of the town. They easily came to terms for most of it, but the barn or Gate-House was still being used for Baptist worship, and Wigan got excellent terms before he gave up possession. The feoffees seem to have slightly remodelled the premises, and the barn is no longer to be seen, but a monument of 1653 marks the approximate site. The Church next worshipped at Cold-house, whence it migrated to Rochdale Road; seven daughter Churches exist of which the most important is Moss Side.

In 1657 Wigan acted with Thomas Holland of Warrington in some affairs of the Established Church, under its Cromwellian rule. And when Sir George Booth raised a royalist rebellion in 1659, Wigan took up arms and garrisoned Manchester till Robert Lilburne arrived with a regiment of Regulars.

In 1661 William Morris went to live at Grappenhall near Warrington, and acquired land there. One croft at Hill Cliff he leased out for three lives to Peter Daintith, of Stockton, a tailor. Next year he died, and his son John (Wigan's step-grandson) became his heir. In 1663, June, Daintith sub-leased the croft, and in September John Morris released the freehold as a burial place for Baptists and such others of the Congregational way in Cheshire and Lancashire as wish to bury there; with leave for the building to be converted as the free-holders may desire. To this deed, Wigan, his son John, and his daughter Lydia Morris were witnesses. When the farming tenant attorned to the new owners, John Wigan junior was again witness. In that year occurred the abortive rebellion, in which Wigan, Jones and Gathorne were all concerned; he was therefore committed to Lancaster jail.

From his own publication, at Devonshire House, comes the rest of the story:—On 23 February, 1663/4 he met Friends in jail, who challenged him to a debate, arranged for the Thursday after 8 March; but as the judges came then and sat till 16 March, it was not held. Query; why was not he tried then for treason? The debate came off on 17 March, centering on the nature of the Light Within. On 10 May he wrote out an account and gave it to the jailors. On 1 August 1664 he was urged to publish it, in a letter signed W. L., J. R., J. S., R. S. These may perhaps be William Leigh and John Rylance of Warford, John Sprogson, of Warrington, Roger Sawrey of Broughton on the edge of Cumberland. Also on 10 March 1664-5 two Londoners urged him to publish, H or J D., and N. S., probably Henry Danvers and Nathaniel Strange; three of these were brother colonels. As a result he did prepare for the press on 15 March 1665, dedicating to all the faithful followers of the Lamb in Lancashire, in and around Manchester, Warrington and Lancaster.

George Fox, or one of his editors, says that he died of the plague in London: I cannot corroborate or dispute this.¹

He is the founder of the Baptist cause in Manchester, and closely connected with the rise of that at Warrington, better known to-day as Hill Cliff.

Sources: *State Papers*; Shaw's *History of English Church 1640-1660*; Martindale's *Autobiography*, and other publications of the Chetham Society. Deeds of Hill Cliff. W. T. WHITLEY.

¹ See *Camb. Jnl.* i. 458, ii. 63, 64, 395, 475.

Joseph Taylor has sent to the Reference Library, from the Friends' Settlement, 96, Beadon Street, Calcutta, a copy of *Doctrine, Practice and Discipline*, 1861, which formed part of a library of Friends' books sent out to India in connection with the visit of Mariano and Cecilia D'Ortez to London Y.M. (see *Friends Beyond Seas; London Y.M. During 250 Years*). The book was evidently bound locally and bears a stamp "Society of Friends' Library, Calcutta."