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Richard Bigland of Frocester

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At the Christie's sale in June 2004 the cups were acquired by John Bourdon-Smith and were sold on behalf of the Pearson family trust of Parham Park. It is thought that the Pearsons, who had been great collectors of silver in the 1920s and 1930s, had owned the cups for a long time, so they probably had bought them directly or indirectly from Simmons. It is remarkable that the cups have survived together. I am happy to report that they have been purchased by Gloucester City Museum and Art Gallery with financial assistance from the National Art Collection Fund and the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund.

Notes

1. For help in unravelling this tale I thank J. Juřica, author of the section on nonconformity in the Victoria History's volume on Gloucester (*V.C.H. Glos. IV*), and H. Williams-Bulkeley of Christie's, London.
2. *V.C.H. Glos. IV*, 323.
3. Gloucestershire Record Office, D 4270/4/1/5.
4. *VCH Glos. IV*, 323–4; T.J. Lander, *History of Southgate Congregational Church 1660–1972* (1976).
5. Gloucestershire Collection (Gloucester Library), N 6.18.

ANTHONY SALE

RICHARD BIGLAND OF FROCESTER

The antiquary Ralph Bigland probably became acquainted with Frocester and with Anne Wilkins, his future wife, in the early 1730s through his business as a cheese factor in the Berkeley Vale. Her father John Wilkins, also a cheese factor, was the tenant of one of the largest holdings on the Greville family's estate in Frocester. He appears to have lived at the place known as Ferribeas (now Frocester Manor), which his family had held for three generations.¹ The house, which was fairly large in 1737,² was described in 1803 as 'a substantial and well-built Mansion House...suitable for the accommodation of a genteel family'.³ Ralph married Anne in Frocester on 13 June 1737. She died, aged 25, on 3 April 1738 after the birth of a son, Richard, who was brought up by his maternal grandparents. Letters dated between 1738 and 1758 give some details of his upbringing. One of 1753 indicates that 'John Wilkins has come to a Resolution of keeping [Richard] to himself and to learn his own employment'.⁴

John Wilkins died in 1758, and a tabletop family memorial, erected in Frocester churchyard by his daughter Sarah, wife of Miles Oatridge, in 1760⁵ is situated close to the north side of the surviving tower of the demolished church of St. Peter. The memorial includes a coat of arms devised by Ralph Bigland, by then Somerset herald. Ralph wrote that he did not know how John Wilkins had settled his affairs, but hoped 'his uncle & Mr Oatridge' would allow Richard to continue in the cheese trade 'with a reasonable sallary'.⁶ Richard actually inherited from his grandfather a legacy of £200, his plate, furniture and household goods and 'all that Messuage or Tenement in Frocester aforesaid wherein I [John Wikins] now live and all those two messuages or tenements ...in the possession of John Partridge & the widow Aldridge and all that close next adjoining to my said dwelling house and all those two closes called Stanley Leazes and...one acre of land in Nutfield'.⁷ The dwelling house was certainly Ferribeas, listed in 1763 as a messuage with a meadow or pasture named Home Close (17 a.), Stanley and Upper Stanley Leaze (17 a.) and three ridges of arable (1 a.) in Nutfield.⁸

Richard Bigland continued to live in Frocester. As a young man he served as churchwarden between 1760 and 1763, but he later considered himself to be above such mundane local matters.

In 1768 he married Mary, daughter of William Raymond of Thornbury, and she produced three daughters, who were christened at Frocester in 1769, 1774 and 1775. The family lived at Ferribeas, and Richard was in business as farmer and cheese factor, leasing a further ten acres of a pasture called Oldlands, a close called Dudbridges and eleven acres of arable in the open fields. Over the next twenty years he appears to have taken every opportunity to increase his acreage, so that by 1782 he held over 270 acres in seventeen scattered holdings. The churchwardens' accounts also record that from about 1780 to 1795 he rented two and a half acres of Frocester church lands in Coaley, paying up to 50s. a year rent.

Gray suggested that Richard Bigland may have once lived at Frocester Court farm, owned by Lord Ducie.⁹ This cannot be confirmed, but George and Henry Garlick tenanted Frocester Court from 1770 to 1800 and they were followed by Drinkwater Hayward. All three were Richard Bigland's distant relatives. Land-tax records for the period show that Richard, as well as other Frocester tenants, occasionally occupied some of the sixty six acres of outlying land belonging to this holding.¹⁰

In the course of his investigations into Gloucestershire farming William Marshall wrote that in 1783 he was 'led to a modern dairy...that of Mr Bigland of Frocester: the man most capable of giving me information, in every department of the subject I was investigating. As purchaser of, perhaps, half the cheese which is made in the vale of Berkeley, he is, of course, intimately versed in the quality of cheese. As proprietor of a dairy of more than fifty cows, the business of a dairy farm is familiar to him'.¹¹

This must have been one of the highlights of Richard Bigland's farming career. After his wife died in 1792 his acreage decreased until, in 1797, his business came to an abrupt halt when he was declared bankrupt. Ferribeas was described in 1800 as the messuage 'which Richard Bigland lately inhabited, now void'; the other holdings, also managed by his assignees, were sublet.¹² His affairs may have been put in order by 1803 when he became the year-to-year tenant of a property including his cheese warehouse. Known as Hoskins (now Brooke House) it comprised a tenement, warehouse and garden (1 a.) and a home close and tenement (5 a.), sublet to Richard Burford.¹³

Richard Bigland died in 1811 and was buried in Frocester churchyard alongside his wife. A freestone wall memorial, decorated with tassels and drapes and once kept inside the church, was recently found broken in a pile of displaced tombstones against the north wall of the churchyard. Almost all of the inscription survives: it reads

In
 this [pl]a[ce]
 are deposited
 the remains
 of
 Richard Bigland Esq
 and
 Mary his Wife
 who lived well beloved
 in this Parish
 She died August 13th 1792
 He died August 11th 1811.

Notes

1. This note is based in part on I. Gray, 'Ralph Bigland and His Family', *Trans. B.G.A.S.* 75 (1956), 116-33. For Ralph Bigland, see also *Oxford D.N.B.*

2. *V.C.H. Glos. X*, 172.
3. Gloucestershire Record Office (GRO), D 1889, Frocester estate sale particulars 1803.
4. GRO, photocopy 1549.
5. Ralph Bigland, *Historical, Monumental, and Genealogical Collections Relative to the County of Gloucester*, I (1791), 607.
6. GRO, photocopy 1549.
7. The National Archives (Public Record Office), PROB 11/1837.
8. Warwickshire Record Office, CR 1886, unnumbered lease.
9. Gray, 'Ralph Bigland and His Family', 122.
10. GRO, Q/RE1 1, Whitstone hundred.
11. William Marshall, *The Rural Economy of Gloucestershire* (1796), II, 106.
12. GRO, D 1889, abstracts of title.
13. *Ibid.* Frocester estate sale particulars 1803.

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