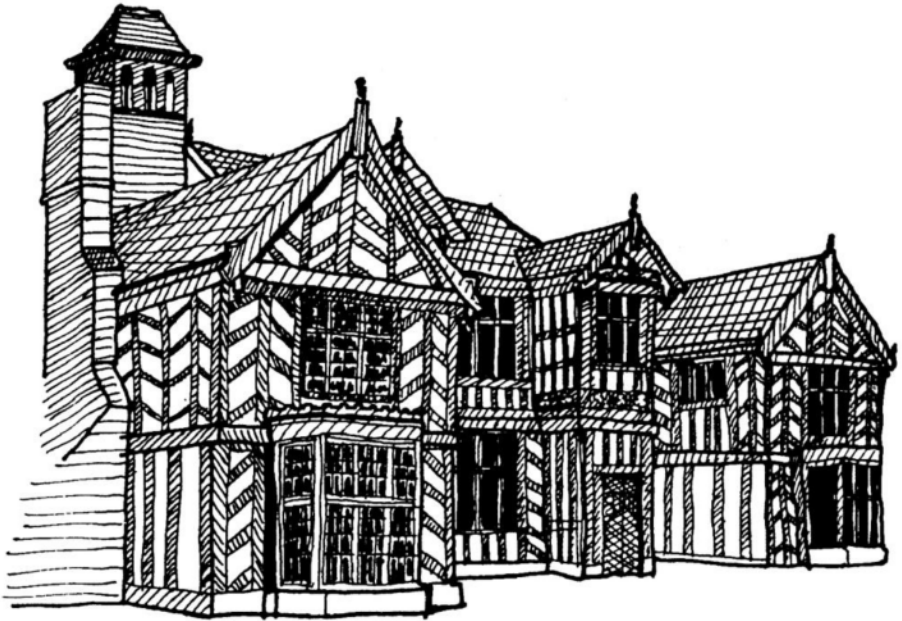


Ashton and Sale History Society Journal



Bill Newton

Salford Gas Scandal of 1887

**William Tatton of Wythenshawe and James I's
Szymaster**

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Front Cover: Wythenshawe Hall in the seventeenth century (drawing by Jill Groves)

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MEMORIES OF BILL NEWTON (1948-2021)

Alan Morrison

I first met Bill Newton in the 1970's when he hosted an exhibition of old photographs of Stretford, upstairs in the recently opened Local History section.

It was in the late seventies that I had an opportunity to clear up something that was niggling at me. That was the home of my great-great-grandfather Alpheus Thornley. I was informed by my grandmother, Nana Edith Morrison, that he was a painter and decorator and lived on Urmston Lane, in a 'big house'. I was interested as there are some old and very big houses on Urmston Lane and it could still be standing. That would be amazing to step in his footsteps.

I wondered if the local library could help me, so I went into the Local History section and met Bill. We got talking and when I had told him the suggested period of time, he stroked his chin and picked up this enormous volume which turned out to be a 'Street Directory' or 'Trade Directory'.

Having looked in the alphabetical section, he said, 'Yes. He is living at 52.'

'Is it still standing?', I asked, excitedly.

'Yes, I think it is', he replied. 'It will be opposite The Robin Hood pub.'

I was off like a shot. Sure enough it was there, but not a big old house as I imagined but a big old terraced house. It looked great, so I knocked on the door, but there was no answer. I walked around the back. It was quite unusual in that to access it you walked down an entry (now gated) and down a path to the left that was used by all the tenants and the gardens were to the right of the path. I had not seen that layout before.

I was really pleased and I went back to Bill to thank him. I was happy with that. But Bill was not yet finished. He stroked his chin again and looked in another directory, this was 1861.

He said, 'Oh look he is living in Hulme.'

'Hulme?', I echoed. 'What's he doing in Hulme?' As though Bill could tell me.

The library only had two directories. Fortunately for me, they were both relevant to my investigation. Bill then went on to explain that being 1861 I could check the 1861 census which would give his place of birth. I already knew his place of birth, but hadn't used the census before. A couple of years passed and it was 1982 so the 1881 census had just been released. Stretford still hadn't received the 1881 so I went to London to check the census. I wasn't expecting any surprises. (Little did I know.) But I discovered that my great-grandmother, who was born Mary Thornley, was listed as Mary Levy living with Alpheus her father on Chapel Lane Stretford. Thereby hangs another story.

I then started checking trade directories and census records for all my family and even went back to Bill to ascertain when they moved to Stretford. Bill responded again by getting the electoral registers from the cellar of Stretford Town Hall, and bringing them to the Local History section. He would bring one every so often. This was no small task as the registers were approximately 2

feet 6 inches by 18 inches and maybe 2 inches thick. Shortly afterwards the cellars I believe were flooded, and most of the other volumes were lost.

This meeting with Bill and his co-operation in providing me with more information started me on the Genealogist route, then teaching genealogy, then starting Ashton and Sale Local History Society.

I have since discovered that my name should be Levy, and they came from Denmark. I knew where they came from, but didn't know of the name change.

This would not have happened without the help of Bill Newton.

Bill was also a very valued member of the society. He bought books of local interest and sold them for very economic prices. He will be sorely missed.

R.I.P. Bill Newton

THE SALFORD GAS SCANDAL OF 1887

Jim Lougheed

I must at the outset pay tribute to John Garrard who when a Senior Lecturer at Salford University some thirty years ago unearthed this true story.

Let me take you back to 1887 and put this remarkable story into some context.

Queen Victoria celebrated her Golden Jubilee

St John's Ambulance Brigade was founded

Celtic football club played its first game

Construction of the Manchester Ship Canal began

L.S. Lowry and (General) Bernard Montgomery were born

The two main characters of this remarkable story are:

Samuel Hunter Esq., a chartered engineer, respected council official and Gas Manager for the last eleven years. He attended council meetings at Salford Town Hall dressed in hunting clothes ready to hunt in Cheshire once the meeting ended. His salary was £800 per annum, around £40,000 today. He owned an impressive house on Bolton Road, commuted in his own horse drawn carriage driven by a servant and regularly toured Europe and the Middle East for a couple of months at a time. Such extravagance raised no eyebrows with other council officials. Gas managers were seen as the 'bringers of light', gas made from coal being mainly used for lighting rather than heating as it is used today.

Ellis Lever Esq., a coal merchant who lived in Bowdon. He was one of the wealthiest men in the north west due to being one of the most productive merchants of coal.

Lever had repeatedly accused Hunter of accepting bribes for coal and gas equipment contracts such that other merchants failed to secure any contracts. In February 1887, after considerable prompting from other council officials Hunter sued Lever for criminal libel. The stage was set!

The case aroused considerable interest, not just in the Manchester and Salford press, but across the north west and even the London press. It also, due to Hunter's prominence in Cheshire's hunting fraternity, gained a mention in the *Sporting Chronicle*. Sir Edward Clarke, the Solicitor General no less, was engaged by Hunter. Lever recruited Sir Charles Russell MP to defend him. (He became Attorney General later in life in Gladstone's last administration.) The stakes could not have been higher.

At the end of a three day court hearing Lever was found not guilty. As a result, he was lauded in the press as a national saviour who had struck a blow for commercial ethics in a dirty and corrupt world. There was wild cheering outside Manchester Crown Court when the verdict was announced, Lever received

telegrams from all over the country. On going home, he was met by other business men and the Altrincham Brass Band played him to his front door. Needing a holiday, he retired to Colwyn Bay where he owned a second splendid mansion.

In the following months, using his cloak of invincibility, he alleged much corruption in Salford Council and indeed in other northern towns. After deliberating for some time, Salford Council dismissed Hunter. The council appointed an investigating committee to report on the extent of corruption in the gas department. Despite the unsavoury revelations, Hunter was not prosecuted, such corruption not being a criminal offence at that time. His life went on as if nothing had happened. He continued to attend theatres and hunt what was left of Cheshire's wildlife.

However, in February 1888 criminal proceedings were commenced against Hunter, the main charge being one of perjury at Lever's libel case. As it was thought an unbiased jury could not be found in the north west, the case was transferred from Lancaster to London where surprisingly Hunter pleaded guilty. Sentence was delayed as Salford Council had a civil action ongoing against Hunter for the recovery of money overcharged by Hunter on contracts. Hunter had the nerve to lodge a plea for clemency if he agreed to repay some of the money, but eventually negotiations broke down. Hunter thought they were demanding too much. The council official involved in the negotiations was the Town Clerk, John Graves, who was evidently held in the same high esteem as Hunter had been previously.

In July 1888, Hunter was sentenced to five years penal servitude and he was transferred from Strangeways to Leeds prison. The story now becomes even more remarkable.

Six weeks later John Graves resigned from the council. He first moved to Folkstone, then Paris and eventually San Francisco along with £800 of the council's money plus £15,000 he had in trust for a family in Peterborough. Could no one be trusted?

Some time later, the council resumed negotiations with Hunter. In August 1889 a curious deal was agreed whereby Hunter would deposit £10,000 in securities in a bank account and begin naming those merchants who had bribed him. This kind of out of court settlement meant the council would threaten to sue the culprits, but their action would be stalled if each firm would pay an agreed amount of money into the bank account where Hunter had deposited his money. They, in turn would be absolved from all further legal action. At the conclusion of all this, the council would draw their £10,000 and Hunter would keep the remainder. In the meantime Hunter pleaded for a reduction in his sentence but this was not forthcoming.

To his credit, Hunter kept his side of the bargain and, you guessed it, Lever was one of those named by Hunter. Many of the firms named were persuaded to pay up as the council had hoped. An exception was made for the council's main tormentor. Lever was sued in a Leeds court. Ironically, the bitter court proceedings were interrupted by a failure of the new electric lighting system but

the outcome saw Salford Council relieve Lever of £2,300. Evidently, Lever had been paying Hunter bribes for more than ten years and been one of Hunter's most generous merchants.

The story should have ended there having aroused considerable interest beyond Salford's boundaries. It had rocked Victorian society and prompted closer examinations of other industries across the country. Despite a well supported petition the Government rejected calls for an independent inquiry into local government corruption.

Having served his sentence Samuel Hunter was released from prison, creamed off the money left in the bank account and disappeared from view for many years.

However, some years later, a longstanding Salford Councillor and Alderman, Abe Williamson, was invited to address a conservative party meeting in a Cheshire village. Abe knew all about the gas scandal so imagine his surprise when he found the meeting was to be chaired by the local squire, none other than **Samuel Hunter**.

You couldn't make it up, could you?

WILLIAM TATTON OF WYTHENSHAWE AND JAMES I'S SPYMASTER

Jill Groves

What was the connection between William Tatton of Wythenshawe, esquire, and Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, Secretary of State and spymaster to Elizabeth I and James I? This was the question I asked when reading the Will of William Tatton, proved in 1611.

You may remember the article I wrote for ASHSJ24 on the feud between William Tatton and his only son Robert from the 1590s to 1611, and that between Robert and his eldest son William. I knew that William Tatton senior's will did not mention his son Robert. It mentioned his grandson William (the main heir and eldest son of Robert and his first wife Eleanor) and granddaughter-in-law Katherine, his wife Mary, even his illegitimate son, John Tatton alias Manley, and servants and tenants, all of whom were left sums of money. William's executors were two Cheshire aristocrats, Sir Peter Leigh of Lyme and Sir George Leicester of Toft (William the grandson's father-in-law), and Mary Tatton, the wife. All very normal.

Then William senior nominated as the overseer of his Will, Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury. The role of an overseer of a will was to make sure that the



Wythenshawe Hall as it might have looked in the seventeenth century. (Drawing by author.)

executors were doing what a testator ordered in his/her Will. It wasn't a sign of a lack of trust in the executors, which the testator had themselves appointed, but an acknowledgement that performing of the Will could be complicated. But when William appointed Robert Cecil, one of the most powerful people in the UK, to oversee his Will, he was both honouring someone who whom he owed something (unspecified in the Will) and making sure that whatever difficulties might face the executors were smoothed over. William even left £100 to Robert Cecil. This was a large amount of money to 90% of the population in 1611. It would not have been a trivial amount to William Tatton. But to the Earl of Salisbury it possibly meant nothing more than the purchase of a couple or more of top quality stallions or mares for his stable. But it was what William could afford. (Cheshire Archives and Local Studies (CALs), Will of William Tatton of Wythenshawe, esquire, 1611.)

The questions I want to answer in this article are:

1. What was the something that William Tatton owed to Robert Cecil?
2. How had William Tatton come to know Robert Cecil, whom he calls 'my honourable good Lord'?

Possibly the answer to the first question lies with William's wife Mary, who had Catholic relatives in Lancashire. William's will was written in 1608, only three years after the Gunpowder Plot was uncovered by Robert Cecil and his spies.

The answer to the second question possibly lies in William Tatton's relationship with the Stanley family.

The Sixteenth Century System of Patronage

The system of patronage in sixteenth century England was very like the patronage system of the late Rome Empire – the client would give the patron gifts of loyalty or military service or even money and in return the patron would reward the client with official positions, or introduce them at court or protect the client.

The Tattons of Wythenshawe seem to have been long term clients and tenants of the Stanley family (Earls of Derby) from the 1490s onwards for lands in Flintshire. In 1557 Robert Tatton, William's father, sub-let part of the Flintshire lands to two men from Northenden or Etchells, Robert Royle and Reginald Paulden. (Cheshire Inquisitions, William Tatton Esquire, 1619.)

In 1592, or thereabouts, William was a Gentleman Usher at the funeral of Henry Stanley, 4th Earl of Derby. A Gentleman Usher was a higher servant in an aristocratic or royal household. As such, a Gentleman Usher had control over lower servants. They would also accompany their lord and master at ceremonies and on journeys, acting as entourage and bodyguard. The sixteenth century was a dangerous period in which to travel, even for the Earl of Derby. There were thieves and travelling criminal gangs everywhere. So travelling with well-armed bodyguards trained in the arts of war was a must. William

would have been a Gentleman Usher to Henry (then Lord Strange of Knockyn) in his teens and early twenties, even when he was married.

Henry, Earl of Derby, was roughly the same generation as William, although about ten years older. By the time Henry inherited the earldom and the Lord Lieutenancies of Lancashire and Cheshire in 1572 he was forty-one and William was in his early thirties. Henry became a member of the Privy Council in the 1570s and an ambassador in the 1580s. Being a Gentleman Usher was probably a young man's job, but William would have been called on to attend the Earl as a loyal servant and member of his household from time to time, perhaps when the Earl was at Chester or at court in London, or even at the French court when he was the English ambassador there – although the latter is less likely. (Wikipedia – Henry, 4th Earl of Derby, accessed 5 April 2021.)

William Tatton and the Exchequer Court of Chester

The connection to the Earl of Derby did William no harm. By the late 1570s William had been appointed 'Barcus', or Collector, of the Exchequer Court in Pepper Street, Chester. On 22 March 1578 William was walking back from Chester Castle with Alexander Cotes, gentleman, Controller of the Customs and John Yerworth, another 'Barcus', when they were insulted (could be assaulted) by Fulke Edwardes of Chester, servant to William Glaseor, esquire, Vice-chamberlain of Chester. (CALs, QSF/31/128.)

William was still working as a Collector for the Exchequer at Chester in the 1580s, even though by then he had inherited his father's land and had an estate to manage. There were good reasons for this.

1. There wasn't a salary, but he was allowed 'expenses'.
2. It meant he was often in Chester networking amongst friends and peers and probably keeping connections with the Earl of Derby. And even with the Chamberlain of the County Palatinate of Chester, who was Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, no Less.

However, it does seem that William might have been doing more than claiming too large expenses. There may have been overcharging on fines and bribes taken. The usual, casual financial malfeasance expected of every official from the Overseers of the (local) Highways upwards in the sixteenth century. But perhaps William and his friend Alexander Cotes had taken it just a tad too far. On 7 June 1588 a warrant for their arrests for debt was issued. The debts probably being the moneys they had 'creamed off' the Chester Exchequer. A General Pardon was granted to William in 1603 for this and other misdemeanours. William could still get friends in high places to do him favours. (John Rylands Library University of Manchester (JRLUM), Tatton of Wythenshawe Muniments, TW/871, TW/872, TW/374 and TW/375.)

Was this payment for William acting as informant to Walsingham, Lord Burgley and his son Robert Cecil, passing on information on North-west Catho-

lics? Perhaps William was even passing information on his old patron's eldest son, Ferdinando, who, through his mother, was the great-grandson of Henry VIII's youngest and favourite sister Mary and thus in line to the English throne. Ferdinando was suspected of Catholic sympathies.

More than that, Lord Burghley suspected that Catholics were planning to put him on the English throne. One of Ferdinando's retainers (Gentleman Usher?), Richard Hesketh, tried his best to persuade the young Earl that his claim to the throne would be strongly supported. Ferdinando held private meetings with Richard Hesketh and took him to see his mother, but finally rejected the idea. Hoping to curry favour with Queen Elizabeth, he then handed Richard over to Lord Burghley. Richard was tortured and executed. But Lord Burghley, his son Robert and the Queen continued to have suspicions about the young Earl.

Which brings us round to Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury in 1608. £100 was a good sized gift, but was it good enough? William wanted the way smoothed for his estate to pass to his grandson William, by passing entirely his son Robert.

But perhaps this was payback time. If William Tatton had been acting as an informant with access to the Stanley family for the last three decades, then yes £100 was enough.

Why would William be an informant for Walsingham and the Cecils on a family he was supposed to be loyal to?

1. Because they could make the charge of fraud against the Exchequer of Chester and the threat of arrest go away in 1587
2. Because for his second wife William married Mary Tyldesley, from a well-known Lancashire Catholic family. Walsingham and the Cecils could make life very difficult for the new wife and her family.
3. Because they could help with a tricky local dispute between William and a Northenden family, who happened *not* to be his tenants, which had been rumbling through the Star Chamber Court in the 1580s, but which came to a very violent head in 1587.

William Tatton Versus Robert Thomasson alias Brownell of Northenden

This dispute is quite a shocker and make me very glad I will never get the opportunity to meet William Tatton on a dark night.

The dispute first began its life in Star Chamber in 1582-1583. (The National Archives (TNA), STAC 5/T12/2, 17 November 1582-16 November 1583.)

Robert Thomasson alias Brownell of Northenden, husbandman, leased a tenement in Northenden by right, he said of a lease made between William Brereton of Handforth, esquire (grandfather of the Parliamentarian General Sir William Brereton of Handforth) and Thomas Robinson alias Brownell and Thomas Brickell. Probably since the date of the lease William Brereton had sold the land to the Tattons, but still Robert, probably a son of Thomas Robinson alias Brownell, had rights, as a customary tenant, to 'have the quiet possession of one messuage and certain lands in Northenden'. (CALs, QJF 17/1/20 (1587).)

William Tatton begged to differ and made his opinions clear. So Robert Thomasson alias Brownell again sued William in the Star Chamber. (TNA, STAC 5/1394/37, 17 November 1585-16 November 1586.)

This didn't quite do the trick. Probably Star Chamber referred it to the Exchequer Court of Chester in 1587, nominally presided over by Robert, Earl of Leicester as Chamberlain of the Palatinate of Chester. It seems that Earl Robert might have taken a personal interest in the case and signed the order that Robert Thomasson alias Brownell was the rightful tenant and William should leave him be.

At this points it occurs to me that Robert Thomasson alias Brownell and William were small pawns in a game of power between the Earl, Sir Francis Walsingham and the Cecils.

Now the affair turns really nasty. After the order was signed by the Earl of Leicester, William showed his vicious side. No peasant was going to get the better of him – three times.

These were very violent times when men could be murdered in the streets of Chester for nothing.

William mustered together a band of servants and tenants. Robert Brownell alias Thomasson named them – John Brough yeoman, John Button yeoman, Thomas Martin of Kenworthy yeoman, Henry Thomasson of Wythenshawe yeoman, Henry Boyle [probably Royle] yeoman, John Boyle [ditto] yeoman, John Gibbon yeoman, Ellis Kemp yeoman and Henry Coppock of Sharston yeoman. Nine in all, ten including William himself.

Robert and a friend Christopher Sindrells were bundled inside Robert's house. William ordered his men to board up the doors 'to thintent to shut up in and to famish them within the same'. Henry Coppock and Ellis Kemp were posted to watch the house and besiege it, 'and keep them from victuals and sustenance to the great terror of many of the Queen's majesty's subjects'. This was in late April/early May 1587. On 7 May William Tatton stood up in the parish church of Northenden and told the parishioners not to let Robert or Christopher onto their lands which they leased from William.

After this Robert Thomasson alias Brownell petitioned Cheshire Quarter Sessions and told the Justices of the Peace there that 'William Tatton is a very desperate person and he and his servants have been diverse times indicted of diverse riots and heinous misdemeanours' and 'for God's love' grant warrants to arrest William Tatton and his servants.

This incident seems to have ended with a warrant signed by Elizabeth I in February 1588 appointing several neighbours and others – John Warren, esquire, George Brereton (of Ashley), esquire, John Warde, esquire, and Robert Hide, esquire – to 'take several obligations from William Tatton, esquire, lately one of the Collectors of the Exchequer'. (JRLUM, Tatton of Wythenshawe Muniments, TW/374.)

William frequently had disputes with neighbouring landowners. When he had a dispute with Edward Vawdrey of Riddings Hall, Timperley, esquire, in 1603, the arbitrators were Sir George Leycester of Toft, William Brereton of Ashley

(later father-in-law to Robert, William's grandson), and Alexander Barlow of Barlow, esquire. No sign there that this turned violent, but Edward could call on his own servants and was a much younger and healthier man than William.

William Tatton's Will

William senior had cut his son out of his will probably as a result of Robert's second marriage to Susan Stubbs, daughter of William Stubbs of Watchfield, Berkshire. It was a perfectly reasonable match. Susan's family were quite well-to-do, but Robert's father-in-law later claimed in a Star Chamber case that the couple eloped just a few days before Susan was due to marry another man of 'great worth and reputation'. (GeneSurfing – <https://genessurfing.wordpress.com> – Robert Tatton's second marriage.)

This partly explains William Tatton senior's reaction and the way it was erased from the official family tree presented to Heraldic Visitations in the seventeenth century. However, there were persistent rumours of Robert's second marriage.



Portrait of a man by Cornelius Janssen van Ceulens, believed to be of Robert Tatton. The painting was done about c.1620. Robert would have been in his late fifties/early sixties. He is dressed in a slightly old-fashioned style (white neck-ruff), but with modern touches (white lace cuffs). His doublet and breeches are black, as befits an elder gentleman of the court. Robert and his wife Susan were back living in London in the early 1620s.

William senior might also have cut his son out of his will because he was determined that the grandson he had groomed to be his heir would get everything, not any sons of Robert's slightly tainted second marriage. However, between 1605 and 1608 a reconciliation between father and son had been negotiated by local friends and relatives. But then in 1608 Robert's in-laws came for a visit to Wythenshawe Hall. Which might have gone so well William wrote his 1608 will cutting out Robert. (GeneSurfing – <https://genessurfing.wordpress.com> – William Stubbs.)

When Robert heard that his father was ill again, and also his daughter Margaret (by his first wife), he travelled post-haste to Wythenshawe Hall. Margaret died in late 1610 and her grandfather in May 1611. (www.familysearch.org; Stockport Heritage Library, Northenden Parish Registers, Book 1.)

How Did Robert React to Being Written Out of His Father's Will?

Not well. When Robert realised he was not even mentioned in his father's will, he went

ballistic. He went straight to the Consistory Court (diocesan church court) in Chester and accused his father's servants of stealing and influencing his father against him.

He tried to prove that his father's will was altered by someone else, or William had made another later will, even a nuncupative (spoken) will. And that one of his father's trusted servants, Francis Shelmerdine, stole from his father. (Francis's son, also Francis, would become a curate and later Presbyterian minister in Mottram-in-Longdendale during the English Civil Wars.) (CALs, Codicil/Allegations to the Will of William Tatton of Wythenshawe, esquire.)

From what happened next it does seem that there was a compromise between Robert and his son William – possibly brokered by Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury. Robert got Wythenshawe Hall and William got Sharston Hall. But it didn't last long. The feud began again in about 1615 and only stopped when William accidentally drowned in the Mersey in January 1617. (Stockport Heritage Library, Northenden Parish Registers, Book 1.)

Robert and his wife Susan left Wythenshawe Hall for London and Southwark, where Robert died in 1623 and Susan in 1624.

Robert was probably not allowed by his widowed daughter-in-law, the Leicesters of Toft and the Court of Wards to play any part in the guardianship of his grandson.

Robert's sons by his second marriage, George and Thomas, inherited the Flintshire lands on their father's death. Possibly the Flintshire lands were part of the compromise between Robert and his son William in 1611.

**Ashton and Sale History Society
promotes the study of local and family history in the
towns of Ashton-on-Mersey and Sale. Many of its members
are involved in local family history research
projects.**