

## ROBINSON family, of Conway, Caernarfonshire, Monachdy, Anglesey, and Gwersyllt, Denbighshire

This family was descended from a Cheshire knight, Sir William Norris, who married a sister of **Owain Tudor** and whose grandson, Henry (son of Robin Norris), took the surname of Robinson.

### NICHOLAS ROBINSON (c. 1530 - 1585), bishop of Bangor

The younger son of John Robinson of Conway (son of the above Henry Robinson) by Elin, daughter of the Rev. W. Brickdale of the Wirral and his wife Marsli, a descendant of the family of Conwy of Bodrhyddan. Entering Queens' College, Cambridge, in March 1545, he was elected Fellow at the instance of Edward VI's Protestant visitors (c. 1548) before proceeding to his M.A. (1551). In Mary's reign he signed the Roman Catholic articles of faith imposed on the University (1555) and was ordained acolyte, deacon, and priest on three successive days in March 1557, by **bishop William Glynnne**, of Bangor, under special faculty from cardinal Pole; the only evidence for Strype's allegation (*Parker*, i, 464) that he 'suffered much from the Papists' during the reign is that he then held no college or university office as in the preceding and succeeding reigns. On Elizabeth's accession archbishop Parker made him his chaplain and licensed him (20 December 1559) to preach throughout his province, whereupon he took his divinity degrees (B.D. 1560, D.D. 1566). A sermon of his at S. Paul's Cross in December 1561 (extract in Strype, *Parker*, i, 465-6) attracted the notice of Grindal, bishop of London, who suggested his name for the provostship of Eton next day; filling this, he was presented to two rectories in Grindal's diocese and the next year to that of Northop, Flintshire, and the archdeaconry of Merioneth (26 August and 16 June 1562). The last gave him a seat on convocation, where he voted for the thirty-nine articles and against the proposed Puritan articles (1562); he also supported the episcopal proposals on vestments (1564). He was still resident at Cambridge on the queen's visit in 1564, and she made him one of her Lenten preachers next year. The see of Bangor then falling vacant, **Cecil** (to whom he had been previously recommended for the headship of a Cambridge college) put his name forward as 'a person well known in that country, and a Welshman ... a grave learned man,' as against **Pembroke's** nominee, the lay lawyer, **Dr. Elis Prys**, and, the archbishop concurring, Robinson was consecrated in 1566.

As bishop, he took a strong line against images, pilgrimages, and other 'superstitions,' voted in the convocation of 1571 (when he was proxy for the South Wales bishops) for the disciplinary canons, conducted a visitation of his diocese with **Dr. Thomas Yale** in 1576, and in 1578 sat on two special commissions: in February (with the bishop of St Asaph, two judges, and five laymen) to root out 'superstitious usages' from Denbighshire and Flintshire, and in March to investigate the Caernarvonshire contacts of the Roman Catholic refugee, **Hugh Owen (1538 - 1618)**. Despite all this he had to defend himself in 1582 against charges of 'popery.' An active administrator in both ecclesiastical and civil affairs, he was not free from the prevailing vices of pluralism and nepotism. He clung to all his preferments save one English living (resigned, 1574) and the archdeaconry of Merioneth (exchanged for that of Anglesey, 1573); his kinsman and fellow-Cantrabrigian Humphrey Robinson succeeded him in Merioneth, having previously been admitted by him to the rectory of Llanengan (1570) before he was either priest or graduate, and re-admitted both there (1573) and at Llanbedrog (1572) after graduation (1571) and ordination (1572). On the other hand the Anglesey properties of Mynachdy (Llanfair-yng-nghornwy) and Skerries, which the bishop is commonly said to have alienated from the temporalities of the see, were almost certainly a legitimate purchase from the secularised estate of Maenan abbey. He had a high reputation as a preacher (**Sir John Wynn of Gwydir** thought his extempore sermons best) and as scholar and linguist; at the request of **Sir John Wynn's** father he translated into Latin the Welsh life of **Gruffudd ap Cynan** (printed *Archæologia Cambrensis*, III, xii, 30, 112), and wrote an unpublished treatise on Welsh church history. He died 13 February 1585, and was buried in his cathedral; the memorial brass, plundered in the Civil War, was replaced by another in 1843. He has been called 'one of the chief pioneers of the Reformation in North Wales,' and his successor, **bishop Humphrey Humphreys**, sums him up as 'a learned and diligent man and an excellent governor.' His literary remains are listed in Cooper, *Athenae Cantabrigienses*, i, 505.

Of the bishop's children by his wife Jane, daughter of Randle Brereton and granddaughter of **Sir William Griffith of Penrhyn**, the heir,

### WILLIAM ROBINSON (1576 - 1644)

entered Hart Hall, Oxford, in 1592 (11 February), was sheriff of Denbighshire (1630) as owner of Gwersyllt Uchaf (bought by his father) and of Anglesey (1632) by virtue of Monachdy, served as commissioner of array for Denbighshire, September 1642, and married Jane, daughter of **John Pryce** of Newtown Hall.

### HUMPHREY ROBINSON (1577 - 1621), rector

entered Hart Hall, Oxford, with his brother but graduated from University College (B.A. 1596, M.A. 1598), adding a Cambridge M.A. in 1600, when he became rector of Aber and probably of Llanbedr-y-cennin (with the vicarage of Caerhun)

### HUGH ROBINSON (1584 - 1655)

was educated at Winchester (1596-1603) and New College, becoming Fellow of the latter in 1605 and 'Informator' (headmaster) of the former, as well as holding several English livings from which Parliament extruded him in 1647 till he took the Covenant and was compensated elsewhere. Either he or a kinsman of the same name also succeeded Humphrey Robinson at Caerhun and Llanbedr in 1613, to which he added the living of Trefriw (with Llan-rhychwyn and Betws-y-coed) in 1617, keeping them all, in spite of complaints of neglect in 1618, till he was ejected under the Propagation Act in 1650 - just after making himself useful to **Owen Wynn** of Gwydir by reminding the dying archbishop **John Williams**, of a promised legacy to his niece Grace, **Wynn's** wife.

### JOHN ROBINSON (1617 - 1681), royalist commander

The eldest son of the above William Robinson. He entered Christ Church, Oxford, in 1634 (26 September) and Gray's Inn in 1637 (23 December). After service in Ireland he was commissioned as lieutenant-colonel in the royal forces at home, defending Holt castle, Denbighshire, against the Roundheads in November 1643, commanding a company at Rowton Heath (24 September 1645) and signing the articles of capitulation for Chester the following February, then helping in the defence of Anglesey, where, after seizing the coastal fort of Lleiniog (Pen-mon), he had once more to sign terms of surrender. He also took part in the Anglesey revolt of 1648, but arrived with reinforcements too late to save the Royalists from defeat outside Beaumaris. His flight to the Isle of Man and France, and his attempt to establish a Royalist privateering base on Bardsey (March 1650), led to his inclusion (26 September 1650) in the Bill for sale of delinquents' estates, but the lands were bought in by the family and through an intricate web of leases and mortgages (which left the estate fatally crippled) kept intact for Robinson on his return after the Restoration. He was named for the abortive order of the Royal Oak, took a considerable part in the political life of Anglesey (as Member of Parliament for Beaumaris, 1661-79), Caernarvonshire, and Denbighshire, succeeded **Sir John Owen** (1600 - 1666) as vice-admiral for North Wales, and married a Norris of Speke, the parent stock of his house. In Parliament he supported the Court, from which, according to official figures, he was drawing £200 a year in secret service money in 1679. As a militia colonel he was active in harrying the Dissenters and Quakers of Denbighshire. He died on 22 March 1681, and was buried at Gresford, his epitaphs there are in **Pennant**, *Tours*, iii, 286, and **Palmer**, *Gresford*, 60. Contemporary miniatures of colonel Robinson and of his father are preserved at Nantlys, Tremeirchion, in the possession of Mr. A. D. H. Pennant.

His son:

### WILLIAM ROBINSON (1668 - 1717)

served Denbighshire both as sheriff (1690) and in Parliament (1705-7), but the line ended with the drowning (1690), off Skerries in 1739, of William's grandson and namesake, when the estate was found to be so encumbered that it had to be sold to meet the accumulated debts. From a younger grandson of the royalist colonel, who adopted the surname Lytton after a cousin under whose will he inherited the Hertfordshire estate of Knebworth, was descended Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1st baron Lytton of Knebworth (1803 - 1873), the novelist.

## Author

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