

A Parliamentary Stooge?

By Mark Wareham, July 2011

Anthony Casbert was one of my great x 10 grandfathers and he was a yeoman farmer who held Ashford Farm [modern picture of the old farmhouse below] which lies between the town of Fordingbridge and village of Sandleheath. He was born about 1600, married Jane Aldridge of Fordingbridge at St Thomas Church in Salisbury in 1623 and was buried in 1656. His part in the drama of the civil war comes at the same time as King Charles I's captivity on the Isle of Wight. At that time there were numerous attempts by Royalists to help Charles escape and Parliament was very nervous about losing their important prisoner. There was a very real concern that if that happened then a new war would start or that their authority would be difficult to maintain if he fled abroad and undermined them from further a field. In the book '*A narrative of the attempted escapes of Charles the 1st from Carrisbrooke Castle, 1852, by George Hillier*' there is reference to the story of Captain Burley. On 27th December 1647 Captain John Burley, captain of Yarmouth castle, attempted to help King Charles escape but he was apprehended and put on trial. According to Hillier, Burley was then tried for being –



The former Ashford Farm, near Fordinbridge, Hampshire

"... chief cause or incendiary for causing a drum to beat up for God and King Charles at Newport ..., and causing a mutiny there contrary to divers ordinances of Parliament made in that behalf."

Others refer to this attempt as a 'silly' scheme that was bound to fail, the aim being apparently to create a wide disturbance as a distraction to seizing the King.

On the jury which was convened from people of Hampshire at Winchester on 22nd January 1648 was 'Anthony Casberte', almost certainly my ancestor. Hillier describes the trial of Burley as being –

"... other than the trial of Charles' as '.. one of the most peculiar in English history'".

Judge of the assize was one John Wilde who had instructed a jury in a trial of a Major Edmund Rolph to ignore a bill of indictment against him for plotting to kill the King. Another person also involved in this infamous trial was a Sir Henry Mildmay, someone who was later to be one of the judges of King Charles I but who did not sign the death warrant.

People on the jury were almost certainly planted there by Parliament and people that they could rely upon. The Royalist journal '*Mercurius Dogmatiass*' even went as far as to attack each member of the jury in an edition of their pamphlet. But as far as Anthony was concerned they did not have too much to hold against him and just described him as –

"... a sharp man, sure".

This is not a bad report on a man which the Royalists would have disliked intensely for apparently being a Parliamentary stooge on a jury in a show trial. Captain Burley was found guilty and sentenced to be hung, drawn and quartered. After a very short reprieve he was hanged (I don't know whether he was also drawn and quartered) on 3rd February.

Nothing more is known of what Anthony may have done for Parliament in the civil war, but he would not have been on this jury unless he was a supporter of their cause. Anthony was also of that class of yeoman farmer that formed the large base of Parliamentary support and that Cromwell called for when he said “I had rather have a plain, russet-coated Captain, that knows what he fights for, and loves what he knows, than that which you call a Gentle-man and is nothing else”. He was also from a part of Hampshire that was overwhelmingly Parliamentary in affinity and he would have been at the right age to have been active in the war.

The line from Anthony Casbert to my grandfather is on page 27

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