

The Willoughby family of Brislington – revisited.



Wick House, a listed building, has gone through various incarnations, from a gentleman's residence to an Orphanage, to a hostel for the homeless. It can still be seen, through trees, set back from Wick Road, though is dishevelled these days.

In my Book, Brislington Bulletins no 5, 1775-99, the whole of page 37 is taken up by "The Willoughbys – a Catholic Family and a puzzle." You must know by now that I cannot resist those who ploughed a different furrow. The Willoughbys were the only Roman Catholics in Brislington – at least as far as I have ever come across – between the Reformation and the death, in 1802, of Robert Willoughby esquire, "of Wick", (which I believe must be situate somewhere on the present Wick Road). I cannot even be 100% sure that the above house is Robert Willoughby's "Wick", only that it resembles the famous gothic pile of Horace Walpole at Strawberry Hill in Twickenham. Robert and his family were clearly not members of the hoi-polloi but had settled in the parish

during Georgian gentrification period. In the light of all that has come to light, I even wonder if Brislington was a sort of holiday home, a Balmoral of the countryside. I niggled away at the why and wherefore of these various problems for some time, (the family kept a remarkably low profile) before I finally got fed up and forgot about them.

Something like thirty years passed. Oh dear. *Tempus fugit*. Then last year, out of the blue, a good friend sent me an article from “The Greenwood Tree” the newsletter of the Somerset & Dorset FHS dated February 2007, entitled “Somerset Families and Slavery – 200 years ago” by Ian Hunt, which she bought in a charity shop. “Brislington” in conjunction with the wider subject caught her eye. She knew I would be interested on both counts.

It transpired from the article that the Willoughbys of Brislington had been caught up in an imbroglio of litigation over debts accrued by the McGhie family, naming plantations “Hampstead” & “Retreat” (1,260 acres), and “Mount Lebanon”, comprising another nearly 1,000 acres at Trelawney, in the north-west of Jamaica.

In a flirtation with the Peninsular War (largely due to “Sharpe” on TV!) I had come across a Suttly Willoughby, (who on earth names their child “Suttly”?)¹ a Brislington soldier, discharged to pension in 1808. I noted my interest in his surname, but thought he might just have been a coincidence..... now Ian Hunt proved the contrary for he refers to Robert Willoughby’s will, dated 1802, where Robert “apart from having, by wives Cecile (*sic*) and then Lucy Mary, with orthodox English forenames he also left children called Suttly and Rousseau.” Time to go back to the beginning.

Robert Willoughby, born c1737, (he is allegedly the *Robert Bee* baptised 7 March 1737/8 at Coleby, Herefordshire, a printed volume, presumably mistranscribed (?) from the original.) According to a manuscript by “Lady Middleton”, he married Catherine Edge at St Michael, Felton, Herefordshire on 21 January 1763. By this marriage he had one son, Robert.²

¹ He appears as an addendum, on page 65 of another booklet, BB7, 1825-40. There is nothing to recommend his awful first name, but to my surprise it exists as a surname, therefore the rest is inevitable.

² <http://www.nottshistory.org.uk/articles/tts/tts1905/willoughby1.htm> quoting from “a manuscript by Lady Middleton”. I wish I had found this invaluable document earlier in my quest.

It is not known when Catherine died, but on 14 December 1772, Robert Willoughby esquire, the younger, of Yatton, Herefordshire married Barbara Bruce, "of this parish" by licence at St Augustine's, Bristol. The marriage was announced in the press (*Gloucester Journal et al*) which states Robert's abode as Rosmond, Herefordshire, and that "Miss Bruce" was the daughter of Captain Bruce of the 16th Regiment. Both names, "Barbara" and "Bruce" suggest that the bride's origins were in Scotland which is borne out by the death notice in the Caledonian Mercury, 22 February 1787 that "Mrs Willoughby, daughter of the deceased Captain James Bruce of the 26th (sic) died near Bristol on the 16th inst." The announcement implies they were so well known that explanation is superfluous.

"Mrs Willibe" (sic. no first name) was buried in St Luke's churchyard, Brislington, 19 February 1787.

A handwritten entry from a church register, written in cursive ink on aged paper. The text reads: "Feb 19 Mrs Willibe was Buried". The entry is written in a single line across the page.

Barbara is not mentioned by Ian Hunt.

Before discovering "Lady Middleton", I had not been able to establish Robert Willoughby's origins with any certainty, a conclusion shared with Ian Hunt who suggests he "may have been from the dynasty who spread across England from Lincolnshire before colonising various Caribbean islands". Likewise, I did not know of his first son, Catherine's child, Robert, born between 1763 and 1772. The discovery of "Lady Middleton" and her document explained the following entry in the St Luke's, Brislington parish register, of 23 February 1793, concerning Robert Lewis Willoughby, who was born "at Wick" and baptised a Roman Catholic on the following 2nd March:

A handwritten entry from a church register, written in cursive ink on aged paper. The text reads: "1793 Febr'y 23 at Midday was born at Wick Robert Lewis Willoughby the son of Robert & Cecilia Willoughby - baptiz'd March 2 following - Vide Register of Roman Catholic Phappel - Bristol -". The entry is written in a single line across the page.

It is obvious now that this baby Robert was the son of Robert Willoughby, junior! Cecilia (otherwise Cecile, according to Ian Hunt), tragically did not recover from the birth and was buried less than three months later, on 11th May 1793, the second "Mrs Willoughby" to be buried at St Luke's.

May 11th Mrs Willoughby was Buried

Willoughby wives passed from life to death quietly with hardly a whimper, minus even the dignity of a first name. (Like his father, Robert, junior married three times, according to Lady Middleton.)

On 23 June 1794 Robert Willoughby, (senior) of Brislington, widower, married for the third time, Lucy Mary Ferrers of Badgeley Clinton in the county of Warwick, spinster, at St Luke's. A licence in this case was required as one or both parties were Catholics, so it was impossible to countenance banns called on "three clear Sundays", in an Anglican church, much less attend St Luke's to hear them. A marriage could not be legally solemnized in a Roman Catholic church in this period either, though there was nothing to prevent a note of the ceremony in the St Joseph's RC register (witnessed by Frances Ferrers), (very helpful) as well as at Brislington, below.

Nos 64 Robert Willoughby of this Parish *Widower*
and Lucy Mary Ferrers of the
Parish of Badgeley Clinton in the County of Warwick *spinster* were
Married in this Church by *Edmond Ferrers*
this *Twenty Third* Day of June in the Year One Thousand Seven
Hundred and *Seventy Four* by me *Ed. Baker Vicar*
This Marriage was solemnized between Us } *Robt Willoughby*
In the Prefence of *Edward Ferrers* } *Lucy Mary Ferrers*
Frances Ferrers
Catherine Willoughby

The witnesses, Edward and Frances Ferrers, were relatives of the bride and Catherine Willoughby, represented the groom's side. Catherine Willoughby (as I believe from the will, proved 1802) was the spinster daughter of Robert by his first wife Catherine Edge and therefore sister to Robert junior. Edward, 1765-1794, & Frances Ferrers, 1771-1820, were most likely the bride's brother and sister, although Lucy's father, also called Edward, born in 1740, was nearer in age to the bridegroom. The two Edward Ferrers died in 1794 within three months of each other.



Badgeley Clinton, now in the care of the National Trust, is a moated English manor house.

The Ferrers, a gentry family, arrived with William the Conqueror in 1066, and later had a family seat at Badgeley Clinton. They had remained loyal to the Pope through the perilous times of the Reformation and Gunpowder Plot.³

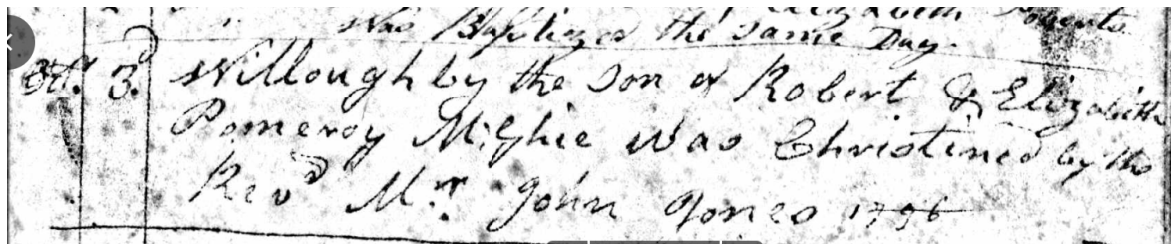
As the Willoughbys and their connections oddly and randomly turn up in Anglican parish registers I thought Robert Willoughby may have been an RC convert via Cecilia/Cecile, one of the otherwise ghostly Mrs Willoughbys, obviously a Roman Catholic, as witnessed by the baptism of her son in 1793, above.

The absence of most baptisms and burials, perhaps hidden away in Catholic registers caused me no end of bother.

On 3 October 1796, "Willoughby, son of Robert and Elizabeth Pomeroy McGhie was baptised at St Luke's, by the Rev Mr John Jones. They were not Catholics. Why Willoughby? I had previously suspected that Elizabeth was Robert Willoughby's sister, which turned out to be false, but there was definitely the

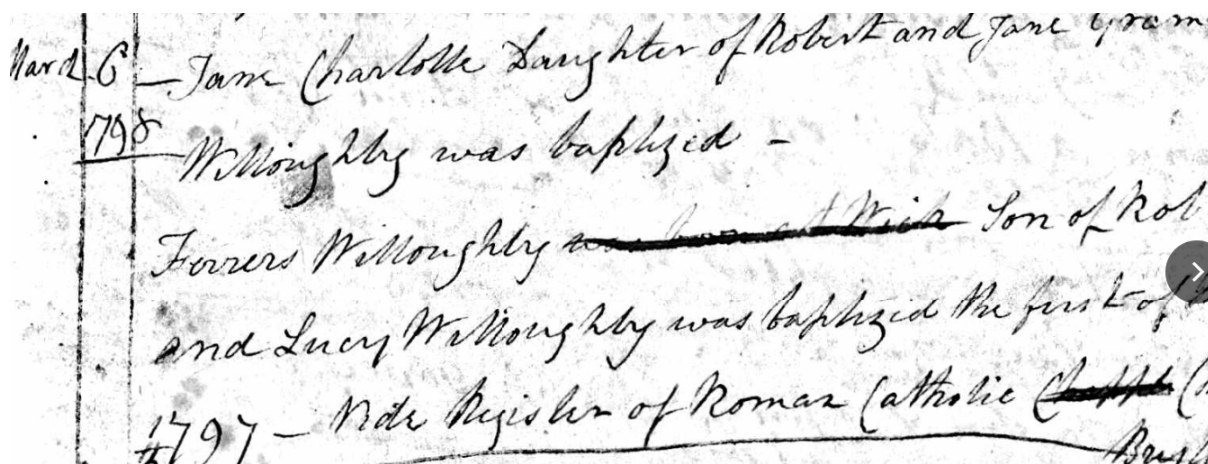
³ There are many online websites for Badgeley Clinton, including secret tunnels through which [riests could make their escape, and the Ferrers family.

McGhie/Willoughby business and baby Willoughby's name implies a warm friendship existed between the parties too. ⁴



Who Baptized the same Day.
3. Willoughby the son of Robert & Elizabeth
Pomeroy McGhie was Christened by the
Rev^d Mr. John Jones 1796

Jane Charlotte, daughter of Robert and Jane Grammer Willoughby was baptised 6 March 1798 at St Luke's (not a Catholic ceremony) was born of the marriage of Robert Willoughby junior, and Jane Grammer Gresley, married at St Mary, Lichfield, Staffordshire (Anglican) on 21 January 1795. Baby Jane had an uncle, Ferrers, only a year older than herself, the son of Robert senior and Lucy Ferrers. Robert senior, grandfather to one child and father to the other would surely have been in St Luke's for the christening and instructed the vicar of St Luke's to also record the RC baptism of his son, which had taken place on 1 May 1797, alongside the name of his granddaughter. I was tying myself in knots with religious conundrums.



Mar 26 1798 - Jane Charlotte daughter of Robert and Jane Grammer
Willoughby was baptized -
Ferrers Willoughby ~~son of Robert~~ son of Robert
and Lucy Willoughby was baptized the first of
1797 - Note Register of Roman Catholic Church in
Bristol

Robert and Lucy's daughter, Magdalena (Madeleine) is recorded in Latin, on 26 January 1802, this time only in the registers of the RC Chapel in Bristol (later St Nicholas on the Quay) "born at Wick, baptised at home in a private ceremony".

⁴ On the infamous Page 37, I had mistakenly recorded the boy as "Pomeroy Willoughby". *Mea culpa*.

1802. 26^a Jan^u hora quinta antemeridiana nata
Magdalena filia Roberti et Lucia Willoughby
in Wick. baptiz^a in domo privata completis
ceremoniis eadem die. Pater present^{er}.

The privacy was surely because Robert Francis Willoughby, the father of the family was already ill, and probably expected to die. He had made his will a few months before. He died of an unknown cause when baby Madeleine was only a few months old and was buried at St Luke's, Brislington on 29 May 1802:

May - 6 Mary Phillips -
26 Elizabeth Mac'Arthur
29 Robert Francis Willoughby

Lucy Mary Willoughby, his widow, survived him by 27 years and as far as I can tell had no further tangible connections with Brislington, though probably lived in the Wick house for a while with such of the surviving children who remained at home, which included her stepdaughter Catherine, and stepson Rousseau, as well as baby Madeleine. Lucy Mary was buried on 26 July 1829 at the Old Orchard Street RC Burial Vault, Bristol. (Source Find a Grave)

Robert's death in 1802 ensnared his sons, Robert and William in the affairs of the McGhie brothers. James, Robert and Jonathan, of Jamaica. Ian Hunt's article states that "the complexities of the relationships require unravelling." Not a task that I personally shall ever accomplish; the current one was complicated enough.

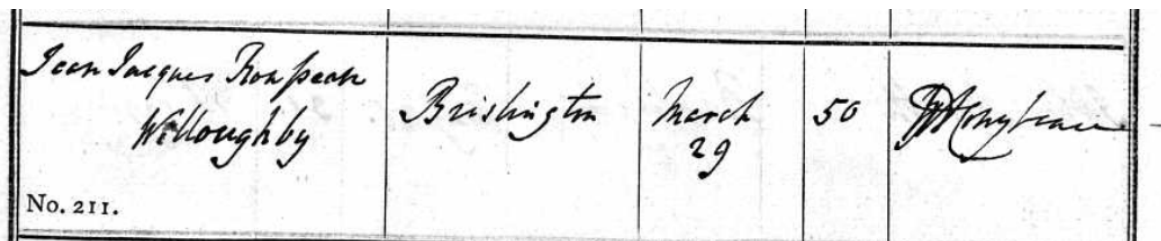
Somehow the McGhies held on to their West Indian lands and slaves and I was not surprised to see that various family connections are listed in "Legacies for British Slavery", and handsomely rewarded for the loss of their "property" after emancipation.⁵ Amazingly the "Legacies" answer one of my questions, for they include none other than Elizabeth Pomeroy McGhie, whose son Willoughby was baptised at St Luke's in 1796. She was "the widow of Robert McGhie, slave owner of Jamaica, and sister of James Bruce of St Vincent." So, Elizabeth Pomeroy was a relative of Barbara Bruce, not Robert Willoughby as I had

⁵ Legacies of British Slavery", <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/search/>

This was not available at the time of the BBs in the 1980s/90s, or to Ian Hunt in 2007. It is an absolute must for anyone who suspects either an enslaved person or a slave owner in their Family Tree. There are Willoughbys there, but none called Robert, and the family is too numerous to pin any of the names down. There are no Ferrers in the database.

thought! Elizabeth died in Bath in 1825; Willoughby McGhie, one of her five living children is named in her will,.

None of these cartwheels led directly to Suttly or even Rousseau, full name Jean Jacques Rousseau Willoughby, though I did find that the latter was born in c1774, according to his burial at St Luke's, 29 March 1824, "aged 50".



Suttly, his age estimated from military records, was born about the year 1780 which state his place of birth was Brislington. No birth record exists for either, but both he and Rousseau were apparently Barbara's children. Barbara came from a well-known army family; she had several siblings one of whom, Forester Suttie Bruce, (female), was married to Dr William Moncrieffe in Edinburgh. The Moncrieffe's son David was baptised at St Augustine's Bristol in 1773, where Barbara and Robert had been married the previous year. Suttly Willoughby (Eureka!) would have been named after Forester Suttie Bruce. (Hindsight: Watch for that name "Moncrieffe"!)

Robert Willoughby, or a Bruce relative, may have purchased a military commission for Suttly, who joined the army as an Ensign in the 50th Foot Regiment. By 23 February 1797 he was promoted Lieutenant and transferred to the 44th (East Essex) Regiment.

The entry is followed by a note of his honourable discharge aged 28.

His discharge papers, in a separate record, show that unaccountably Suttly had grown one inch in height, and his complexion was now described "fresh". In the previous list his "brown" complexion suggested to me once that he might have been of mixed race, especially as another man in the list is undoubtedly "black". I would not get over the fact that there was something "different" about Suttly which set him apart from the rest of the family.

It was time to grapple with Robert Willoughby's will made on 4 October 1801 when he must have already been unwell. My troubles were not yet over, for the will runs to seven pages of densely handwritten script, exceptionally difficult to decipher and I hope that I have not come to too many false conclusions.

The main thrust of the will puts complicated trusts into place for the widow Lucy Mary and Robert's youngest son Ferrers, supervised by his eldest son Robert of Warwickshire, along with trusts amounting to lesser sums for other of his progeny, plus immediate legacies in cash for some. There are instructions concerning an attempt to recoup dividends from the large loan the testator had made to the McGhies, presumably during the fawning friendship at the christening of 1796 when Willoughby McGhie had been named after Robert Willoughby senior.

"Whereas Messrs Robert, James and Jonathon McGhie having applied to me for the sum of £10,000 on the security of their property in Jamaica promised by way of inducement they would pay annually for seven years 250 hogsheads of sugar which should have raised a profit of £400 per annum but refuse to make any payment to my executors in compensation for breach of promise...."

This appears to make a plea to the executors that if, in the unlikely event they can get any form of redress from the brothers, then it should be divided between Robert's wife Lucy Mary, his two daughters and son Rousseau to go with the other legacies left to them.

Names of the people mentioned:

Lucy Mary Willoughby, wife of Robert, nee Ferrers, £2,500 plus various trusts. To be guardian of Ferrers. No mention that I can see of the child Lucy was expecting.

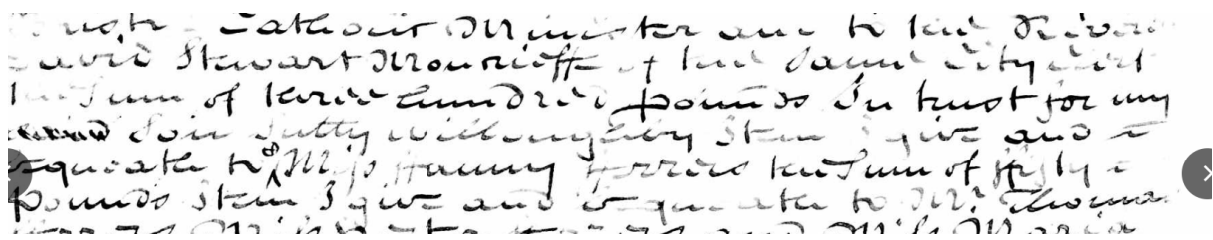
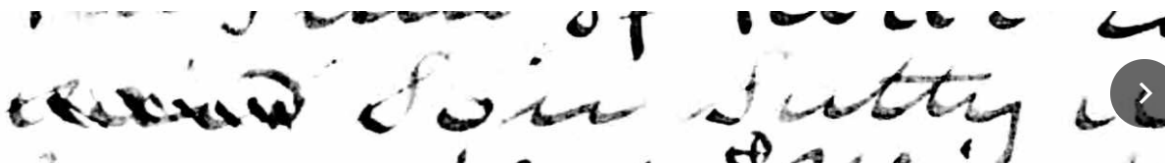
Ferrers Willoughby, son, (then about four years old), £2,000 when 25, his half-brother, the eldest son Robert, to pay him the interest meanwhile.

Robert Willoughby, eldest son, £8,000, as trustee & executor, of ????

William Willoughby, son, £1,050, also involved in a trust naming Robert Plowden (?) David Stewart Moncrieffe

Robert Paviour, RC Priest of Bristol, holding in trust for "my [illegible word] son Suttly Willoughby", £300.

I wish somebody would tell me what this word is!!!

A snippet of handwritten text in cursive script. The text is partially obscured by a black box on the left. Visible words include "David Stewart Moncrieffe of the same City", "the sum of three hundred pounds in trust for my", "son Suttly Willoughby", "and a", "bequest to Mr. Thomas Holden", "the sum of fifty", "pounds to give and bequest to Mr. Thomas".A snippet of handwritten text in cursive script. The text is partially obscured by a black box on the left. Visible words include "of the same City", "son Suttly", "and a", "bequest to Mr. Thomas".

Mr Thomas, Miss Hester & Miss Maria Ferrers. £25 each.

Catherine Willoughby, daughter, £145 for her immediate use, for mourning, plus furniture, £500 per annum

Molly, daughter, alias [illegible] Holden? Nolan? £110 p.a. for life

Rousseau, son £110, p.a. for life

Molly Weymouth, servant, £15

John Couch & Mary Maynard, servants, witnesses to the will.

& three additional sons who I had not previously encountered:

"I give and bequeath to my son Nesbit Willoughby £800."

"I have fully provided for my sons Moncrieffe and Charles Willoughby by purchasing commissions for them in His Majesty's Regiments."

(I could find no mention that Suttby's commission had also been bought by his father.)

So, from the will, we learn of Suttby's other brothers, the sons of Robert Willoughby, sometime of Brislington, though Moncrieffe, Charles, and Nesbit Willoughby probably never set foot in our village.

Nesbit enjoyed worldly success in his profession, a life at sea. He appears in the Dictionary of National Biography and the Naval Biographical Dictionary⁶ which states that Sir Nesbit Josiah Willoughby, Kt, CB, RN, Rear Admiral of the White, 1777-1849, is the son of Robert Willoughby Esq., of Cossall and Apsley Hall, co. Notts. and of Kingsbury Cliffe, Co. Warwick⁷ "by his second marriage to Barbara, daughter of James Bruce, esquire of Kinlock....." and that "one of [his] brothers Moncrieffe, a Major in the 27th Foot, died in 1840; a second, Charles, a Captain in the same regiment, perished in the West Indies and a third, Suttaby [*sic*] lost his life in Spain in 1812. Of his half-brothers, the eldest, Lieut-Col. Robert Willoughby, is now of Kingsbury Cliffe, another, Thomas Ferrers was lost in the *Sylph* sloop off Long Island 17 Jan. 1815."

The MBD entry for Nesbit is punctuated by the lineage of the family, equal in length to the Ferrers, full of Victorian awe for the entitled, the names of aristocratic connections and battle achievements, "distinguished service on the field at Crecy" – 1346, etc. all the way from Hastings to the present.

As to the documented careers of Charles and Moncrieffe, all I can find for them is an entry from the Army List, which shows that both were in the 27th Inniskillings. One as a Captain in 1795, and the other as a Lieutenant, 1796.

⁶A Naval Biographical Dictionary, by William Richard O'Byrne

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/A_Naval_Biographical_Dictionary/Willo

⁷ No mention of Brislington in the eulogies but Kingsbury Cliffe, Warwick must be the place in the will I could not read.

154 Twenty-seventh (or Inniskilling) Regt. of Foot.

Rank.	Name.	Rank in the	
		Regiment.	Army.
Captain	Thomas Chatterton	26 Oct. 1793	
	Lemuel Warren	2 Jan. 94	12 June 93
	John Stewart	4 Sept. 95	10 Mar. 94
	John Fawcett	6 do.	12 Feb. 94
	George Massey	19 do.	
	Moncrieffe Willoughby	26 do.	
	Alexander Keith	14 June 96	Major 1 Mar. 94
	Archibald M'Murdo	11 July	1 June 96
	John Chatterton	5 Sept.	
	Ralph Darling	6 do.	
Captain Lieut. and Captain	Edward James Woolls	20 July 1796	
Lieutenant	Samuel Smyth	3 Dec. 1794	
	William Howe Knight	3 Sept. 95	
	Charles Henry Sillery	11 do.	31 May 93
	C——Thompson	13 do.	
	Robert Campbell	26 do.	
	Timothy Hamilton	21 Oct.	3 Dec. 94
	—— Lynch	do.	3 Dec. 94
	John Crosbie	do.	15 Dec. 94
	Hugh Clarke	16 Dec.	
	George Crowe	6 Jan. 96	
	Henry Standish	20 do.	
	John Alloway	2 Feb.	
Geo. Lattenden Elliot	19 Mar.		
Charles Willoughby	23 do.		

When he left the Army, Moncrieffe Willoughby made an appearance in Bell's Weekly Messenger, (2 Jan. 1814) when he is described as "a Merchant, of Bishopsgate Street, London". Under the heading of "Bankruptcy Enlarged", he

was (oddly) expected at “the Guildhall from Dec. 28 to Feb. 15, at tea”. I have no idea what this means.

I have no other information about Charles who we are told “died in the West Indies”.

Nesbit Josiah Willoughby, commander of HMS *Nereide*, lost an eye at the Battle of Grand Port, during the Mauritius Campaign, 1809-1811 when 222 men out of his crew of 281 were disabled before he surrendered. (Obviously laudable.) Following his impairment, when the Royal Navy had no further use for his services, he joined the Russian Navy. At first, I sympathised, as I have only one eye myself, but all fellow feeling swiftly evaporated at the discovery that he was a noted Flogger, apparently “taking great delight in inflicting punishment” for which he was admonished by Court Martial in the West Indies, though acquitted, (as was often the case) in 1809.



Nesbit Josiah Willoughby with eye patch.

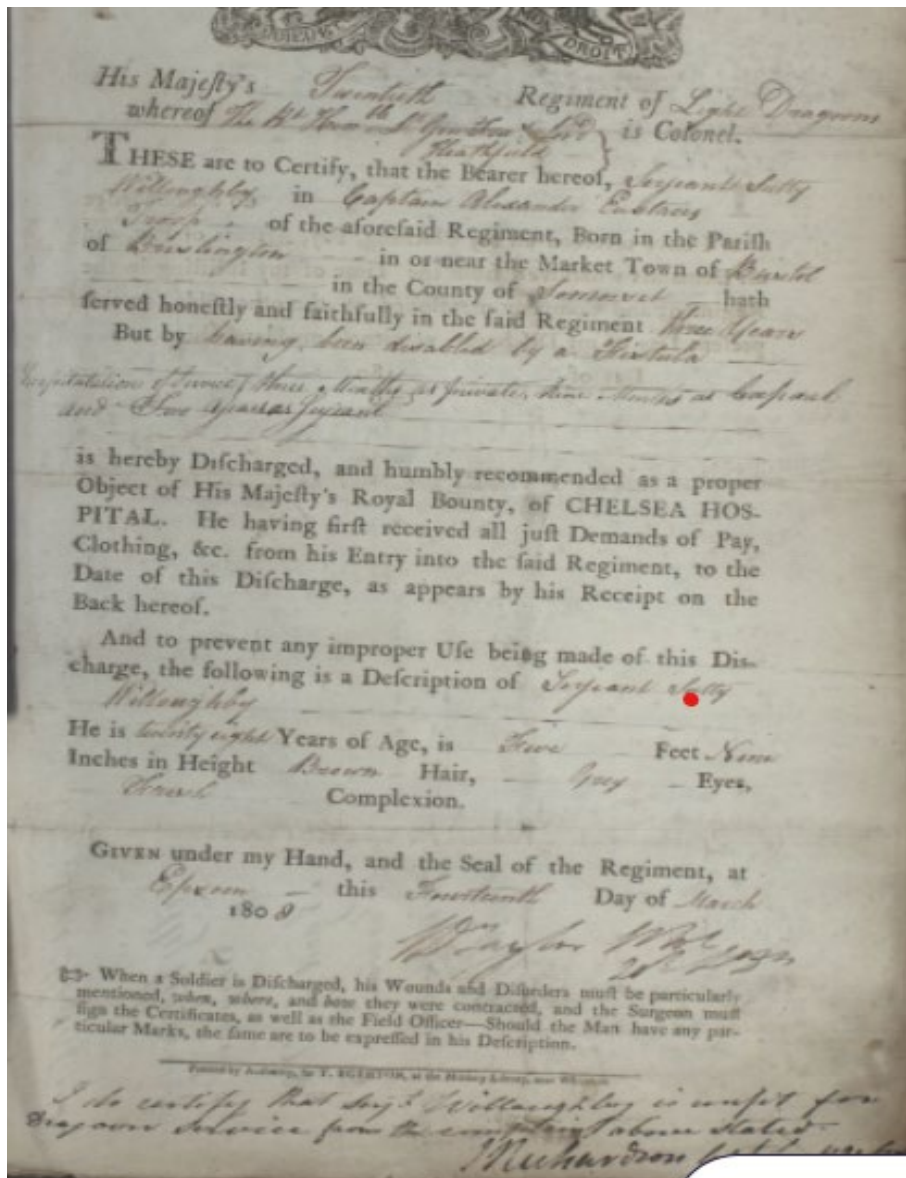
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nesbit_Willoughby

What eventually happened to the Willoughby daughter, Catherine? Who did Molly (Margaret perhaps?) marry? Was there a mystery about Rousseau, who remained single, died in 1824, (with no obituary) and seems to have been the last Willoughby in Brislington?

If only Roman Catholic church registers were more generally available.

As to Sully, he joined the Colours aged about eighteen in 1798. He is probably the “Lieut. S. Willoughby” who was in Gibraltar with the 44th Foot in 1800. Perhaps he was bad at writing home? Perhaps nobody knew where he was when Robert made his will in 1801? Did it rankle that that his legacy was smaller than that of his siblings? By 1803 he was a “substitute” in the Army of

Reserve. Did he come back to Brislington? If so, nobody seemed bothered that he was working as a labourer when he joined up again as a private soldier. Lumbered from birth with an atrocious first name, I think Suttly was the odd one out.



He was invalided out of the army in 1808 aged 28 and became a Pensioner of the Chelsea Hospital on the 14th March that year. His disablement was through “a Fistula”, an anal abscess or tumour. I can find no further trace of him, and sadly, he probably died soon after. Unless, that is, he recovered and joined up for a third time (for which there is so far no evidence.)

Being (ambiguously) “killed in the Peninsula in 1812” which is the story put about in the printed expositions, would have been so much more respectable.

With thanks to Ian Hunt who I have tried to contact without success
and to
Miss Rose Sutton whose sharp eyes spotted Ian’s article.