
WILLIAMS, JOHN (1582 - 1650), dean of Westminster, lord keeper of the great seal, archbishop of York

Name: John Williams
Date of birth: 1582
Date of death: 1650
Parent: Mary Williams (née Wynn)
Parent: Edmund Williams
Gender: Male
Occupation: dean of Westminster, lord keeper of the great seal, archbishop of York
Area of activity: Religion
Author: Barbara Dew Roberts

Born 22 March 1582 at Conway, the second son of Edmund and Mary Williams. He was descended on his father's side from the declining houses of [Cochwillan](#) and [Penrhyn](#), and on his mother's side from the house of [Wynn](#) of Gwydir. From Ruthin grammar school he went, in 1598, to S. John's College, Cambridge. After ordination he continued his university career; and in 1611 a sermon preached before king James secured him the royal favour. In 1612 he became chaplain to lord-chancellor Ellesmere, his tutor in statesmanship. In 1620 the deanery of Westminster was added to his accumulation of benefices; and the next year the king appointed him lord keeper in succession to Bacon, and also bishop of Lincoln; he still retained the deanery.

With the death of king James, the years of eclipse began. He incurred the enmity of both Buckingham and Laud, and his views and character did not commend him to Charles. On the pretext that he had been appointed on probation, he was deprived of the Great Seal in 1625. The shifts to which he resorted to evade the Star Chamber prosecution initiated by Laud in 1628 were punished in 1637 by a heavy fine, suspension of his ecclesiastical functions, and imprisonment. He remained in the Tower until the Long Parliament met in 1640, when in November the Lords ordered his release and the king sought his advice. It helped to decide Charles to sign Strafford's death-warrant. Yet the historian Gardiner believed that if his counsels had been taken it might also have averted the Civil War (*Hist.*, vi, 340). In 1641 he became archbishop of York.

After his rash action in drawing up the ' *Bishops Remonstrance* ' on 30 December 1641, the archbishop found himself again in the Tower. Breaking the conditions on which the Parliament released him in May 1642, he followed the king to Yorkshire, and later in that year fled back to North Wales when the younger Hotham marched against his palace.

There he acted as intermediary between the English and Welsh Royalists and Ormonde in Ireland. At his own cost he repaired and fortified Conway castle, holding the king's written assurance that it should remain in his custody until his outlay was repaid. But owing to his unpalatable advice his influence with the king was waning; and in May 1645 he was

unceremoniously turned out of Conway castle by the Royalist, [Sir John Owen](#) of Clennau. Convinced that the king's cause was lost, and nursing this grievance, he negotiated with [Mytton](#), commander of the Parliament forces then invading North Wales, and took an active part in his storming of Conway in August 1646.

The Welsh cavaliers never forgave his apostasy, though there are indications that he repented of it after the execution of the king. He died 25 March 1650 at the [Mostyn](#) royalist house of Gloddaeth, and is buried in Llandygai church, near Penrhyn, which he had bought back during his prosperity. Hacket, his biographer, composed the epitaph on his monument; beside it hang Williams's rusted helmet and spurs. He was a good supporter of his college at Cambridge, and it was he who built the beautiful building which houses the library.

Author

Barbara Dew Roberts

Sources

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S.R. Gardiner, *History of England ... 1603-1642* (1883-4)

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

see also article on Williams family of Marl

Further Reading

Thomas Pennant, [Archbishop Williams](#), *A tour in Wales*, Cyf 4, tt.294-297

Wikipedia Article: [John Williams](#)

Images

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