

Wilford

The Wilford family were Merchants and Clothiers of Exeter, whose Coat of Arms was “Gules a chevron engrailed between three leopards’ faces, Or” and their crest “A leopard’s face per pale (or and gules)”. (John Hooker in 1587/99 (Harl MS 5827) recorded the arms as “Gules a chevron *ermine* between three leopards’ faces, Or”, which arms appear to relate to the Willesford family of Tavistock and Lancells, probably a mid 16th century offshoot of the Exeter family, *see later*. Was “ermine” a transcript error for “engrailed”?). The family appears to have originated in Nottinghamshire probably taking its name from the town of Wilford – in early documents individuals are termed “de Wilford”, and there was a branch in London in the 14th /15th centuries., *see later*.

Robert Wilford ??-1396

Robert Wilford of Exeter was recorded in a Grant of 1375 as “son of William, son of Robert and Elizabeth” (Trans Dev Ass, 1912, pp.480-511). His father was probably William Willford Sheriff of Bristol in 1338 whose brother *may have been* Gervase Wylforde, cleric, recorded in several entries in the Exeter Mayor’s Court Roll in the later 14th century. In this regard the Register of Bishop Berkley (fol.157b) records that Gervase was instituted Rector of St Petrock’s, Exeter 14 December 1326:

“Institucio Petroci, cum Dimissoriis, - Exonie, xiiij die Decembris Gervasius de Wylforde, clericus, admissus fuit ad Ecclesiam Sancti Petroci in Civitate Exoniensi, vacantem per Resignacionem; ad Presentacionem Capituli Exoniensis, vacante Decanatu: unde, jurata Obediencis, optinuit Lieras Induccionis et Institucionis. Eisdem die et loco, idem Gervasius, accollitus, optinuit Lieras Dimissorias ad omnes Sacros Ordines, in forma communi”.

On 7 March 1326/7 Gervase was ordained subdeacon by the Bishop of Winchester in Southwark Conventual Church (Reg: Stratforde fol 145). On 18 July 1328, at Paignton, Thomas Bilbury was admitted to the Church of St Petrock’s, Exon, by the free resignation of Master Gervase de Wilford the last Rector. On 16 October 1330 at Nottingham “Pardon to Thomas de Wilford and Gervase his brother, who aided the King in the late rebellion, for all trespasses before 18 March 1328/9” (CPR vol 2, M36). Given the timing, Gervase appears to have been the same who became an important official of the English Exchequer. He was Clerk to the King’s Remembrancer 1327-8 and Lord Treasurer’s Remembrancer 1329-41, Auditor of the Accounts of the Black Prince 1341-49, Baron of the Exchequer 1341 and Chief Baron in 1350 (Chapters in the Adm. Hist. of Med. England, 1928, vol.3 T F Tout). He resigned in 1361 and was given leave: “to retire and to enjoy his own house and serve God as he desires to do for his life, without exercising any ministry of the king or of his heirs” (CPR 1361-64 p.11). The 1368 Will of Gervase Wyllesford Rector of Barnack and Castre, Northants, was proved 18 June 1369 at Lidyngton, Rutland.

In the mid 14th century, Exeter with a population in excess of 3000, was severely impacted by the Black Death 1348/9, with some 1900 dead and losing over half the clergy. Work on the rebuilding of Exeter Cathedral was halted. Robert Wilford was first recorded at Exeter in 1363/5 as one of the five Bailiffs, by which time he had married Elizabeth Hull, the widow of John Hull (a wealthy and prominent draper and Bailiff of Exeter 1355 & 1357). The following year Robert obtained the profitable position of Customer of Exeter:

“2 July 1364. Westminster. Grant during pleasure to Robert Wylford of the office of controller of the customs of wines, wools, hides and fells as well as the custom of 3d of the pound, and of cloths and other merchandise liable to customs, in the port of Exeter, he taking in thereof as much as other controllers have taken; with the statutory proviso. One part of the “coket” seal in the port is to be in his keeping so long as he have the office” (CPR m47)

The Enrolled Customs Accounts further record that on 15 November 1364 “Robert de Wylford (through his attorney William de Wilford)” was appointed Controller (ECA: E356, p 1031). William de Wilford, possibly closely related, appears to have been a prominent attorney, representing, inter alia, Nicholas Halburton in 1347 on his appointment as one of the Customers of Exeter, Topsham, Kenton (*ibid* p.402); and the Prioress of Bokland at the King’s Court in July 1352 in her successful suite against the Sheriff of Hereford (“Med Nunneries in Somerset”, Hugo, 1867, p61).

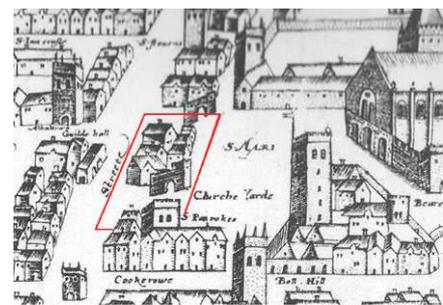
Robert became the richest and most active merchant in Exeter during the last three decades of the 14th century. From 1367 he regularly imported wine, dyestuffs, iron, oil, salt, herring, and other commodities, often transporting these goods in one of three ships he co-owned. He was heavily invested in the cloth industry, and was Exeter’s biggest woad importer, dealing with dyers, fullers and merchants in Devon, Somerset, Dorset and London. As Exeter’s leading citizen he lent money to the city on several occasions, to finance such projects as the construction of a new barge and paving the streets. An entry dated 4 July 1371 in the Issue Roll of Thomas de Brantingham, Bishop of Exeter and Lord High Treasurer records: “To Robert de Wilford of Exeter. In money delivered to him, in discharge of £195 13s.

4d. which he lent to the Lord the King at the receipt of the Exchequer, on the 25th day of June last past, as appears in the roll of receipts of the same day". He was Collector of Customs in 1364 and of a Poll Tax in 1377; again Bailiff of Exeter 1365, 1368, Receiver 1367/8, and Mayor of Exeter thirteen times between 1373 and 1394; MP for Exeter in 1377 and 1381; a JP and member of several commissions of Oyer and Terminer in Devon. He was closely connected with the Courtenays; paid expenses by the Earl of Devon in 1381-2; listed together with John Grey, Goldsmith, John Webber and Thomas Reymond MP and lawyer, (all wealthy Exeter citizens) as an esquire of Earl Edward (3rd Earl of Devon) in his livery roll of 1384/5, and named as an executor of Earl Edward's grandmother, the Dowger Countess Margaret Courtenay (1311-1391, wife of Sir Hugh Courtenay 2nd Earl, 1303-1377): "and for accomplishing this my testament I make and appoint as my executors my very dear sons Philip de Courtenay, Peter de Courtenay, Robert Wylford, Sir John Dodyngton, Otis Chambernoun and Stephen Denclive". The generic term "sons" is of interest. Otis Champernon was the second husband of Agnes Courtney (daughter of Philip), and Robert Wilford may well have had some marital connection with the extended Courtenay family. Among the many armorials on the 1589 monument of Sir Gawen and Sir Peter Carew at Exeter Cathedral, *see later*, is one, *requiring further research*, which depicts: "Carew 21 quarterings, impaling: 1. Courtenay and Redvers quarterly; impaling 2 Gules a chevron between three leopards' faces Or". This possibly suggests the marriage of a male Courtenay with a female Wilford. Robert's known apprentices listed in the Exeter Mayor's Court Roll (MCR) included Henry Archer ("16 January 1380 Henry Archer apprentice of Robert Wilford for nine years", made Free), Henry Hull ("24 September 1380 Henry Hull apprentice of Robert Wylford, made Free"), John Wilford ("5 April 1389 John Wilford apprentice of Robert Wilford for seven years", made Free), Robert Maskel ("25 July 1401 Robert Maskel apprentice of Robert Wilford, made Free"). Robert Wilford is recorded in the Exeter Corporation's "Compotus Roll", a list of expenses, for 1387/8: "In two galons of wine sent to Robert Wilford, the old mayor xvjd". In 1388 "Robert Willeforde of Exeter" was permitted to leave the port of London in his small balinger (a coastal vessel up to 120 tons, that could be rowed as well as sailed) with cargo (Close Rolls p.380/1).

Robert and his wife acquired extensive property holdings in Exeter and its suburbs, including shops in prime locations, and were recorded having paid in 1384 £40 (a considerable sum) for just one tenement in Exeter (DRO: MCR. 1384/5 m12 & ED/M/546). However given his position in the Exeter Corporation, care needs to be taken in differentiating his private and public property transactions, as possibly indicated in the following Grant:

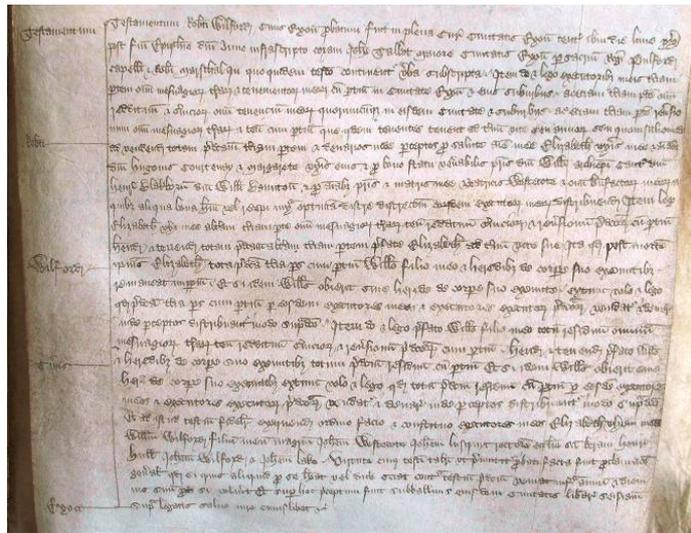
"Grant 22 January 1380 of Robert Wylford to Henry Westcote and his wife Beatrice of a message within the wall of the City of Exter, in the northern quarter in the parish of St Keranus (*Kerrien*), which they had inherited from John Wayfere. Witnessed by John Bede, John Russell, William Gerneys, Richard Bosonn (*Bosam*) "steward of the city of Exter" & John Talbot. 2 seals - Mayoral seal of Exeter, & Wylford: that of Wylford depicts a lion's head (*probably leopard, being the Wilford Crest*) and the legend "Sigill Roberti Wylforde" (M2283 Box1 Stanford Library). (NOTE: Henry Westcott was a Bailiff of Exeter 1380 & 1381. Will of Beatrice Westcote 1405 ,Exeter MCR 6 Hen IV m.44).

In 1377 Robert paid the highest murage tax in the City, at 15s. (DRO Misc Roll 72). From a series of records it is apparent that he eventually owned most of the properties on the south side of Exeter's High Street, from opposite the Guildhall down to St Petrock's Church. A section, outlined in red *see right*, from Hooker's 1587 Map of Exeter depicts this holding, being the group of buildings in the centre, between the "Guilde hall" projecting into the High "Streete", and the "Churche Yarde" of St Mary Major, with the Cathedral to the right, St Martin's gate to the east and Broadgate, *which is clearly shown just above "St Petrockes"*, to the west. The Broadgate was the major gateway leading from the Cathedral Close onto the High Street, virtually opposite the Guildhall. It was demolished in 1824 and a plaque marks its position. This range of properties, on both sides of the Broadgate, provides a consistent thread with regard to the Wilford family genealogy, *see later*. The range included "Eagle House" or "Hospitium de le Egle", a substantial ancient Inn or Hospice, opposite the Guildhall and built against, and possibly over, the Cathedral Close Wall: a site now occupied on the High Street by two Victorian structures, and on the Cathedral side by Whipples and the National Westminster Bank. In 1375 Alice daughter of Robert Bradeworthy (Seneschel and Receiver of Exeter, 1342) and widow of Maurice Lovecock, granted "to Robert Wilford, son of William, son of Robert and Elizabeth, a tenement in the occupation of John Elegh, and a shop with a cellar and solar, opposite the Guildhall, to the East of the entrance of John Elegh's house and all her share in her father's property in Exeter". This property, "Le Egle", had been granted to Bradeworthy in 1333 by William Hardewyne and his wife Beatrice, and was for some time the town house of the Wilford family, being acquired by the Exeter Corporation in 1437, *see later*, and from 1472 to 1555 housed the



Cloth Market in Exeter (Trans Dev Ass, 1912, pp.480-511) . In a Grant dated 6 January 1392/3 the Dean and Chapter of Exeter confirmed “to Roberte Wylforde, citizen, their former Grant in addition to a New Tenement newly constructed by him towards the Cathedral Cemetary, a site 53 ft long, 21 ft at East, 12 ft at West, for making a doorway open towards the said Cemetary, and a stone wall of the length and width above expressed and thereon raise a Chapel upon the same Wall. To hold of the Dean and Chapter for 100 years at 2 shillings per annum. Right of distraint on the whole of the tenements built behind that tenement and in the shops in the High Street opposite the Guildhall and in all other tenements of the said Robert. Seal: - Lion’s Head (*actually probably a Leopard’s Head being the Wilford crest*): “Roberti De Wylforde”, *see picture earlier* This deed also granted Robert a messuage near Broadgate with two shops and the solars built over them with a certain cellar under the said messuages and shops called “La vautor siler”. About one hundred years later (27 July 1481) a lease of this property records that it was “a tenement once belonging to Robert Wilford sited in the High St of Exeter opposite the Guildhall and lying towards the Cemetary of St Peter”. (Trans Dev Ass, 1912 pp.480-511).

Robert Wilford citizen of Exeter died between 7 July and 28 August 1396 on which date “William Wilford, son of Robert Wilford” was made a Freeman of Exeter “by succession”. Robert’s Will was enrolled into the Exeter “Mayor’s Court Roll” during the mayoralty of John Talbot (8 January 1396/7 MCR 20/21 Ric II m.17). This enrollment, *which requires a full translation, see right and Appendix*, does not appear to be the complete Will nor is it specifically dated. However it records that he left one third of his estate to be sold for prayers for his soul, another third to his wife and a third to his son William, who was to receive his mother’s share at her death (*sometime between 1399 and 1404, most probably the former, see below*);



Robert provided for masses for the souls of himself, his wife Elizabeth, Sir Hugh Courtenay (*2nd Earl of Devon*) and his wife Margaret and their son the venerable William Courtenay Archbishop of Canterbury (*died 1396*), Robert’s father and mother, Henry Blakborne *see below*, William *Banntson*, Beatrices Westcote (*wife of Henry see earlier & below*). Robert’s executors were his wife Elizabeth, son William Wilford, Master John Westcote, John Lusquyt Rector of the church of St Kerian (*who died by 14 Dec 1398*), Henry Hull (*his step-son and apprentice*), John Wilford (*his apprentice & apparently illegitimate son*), John Lake. The Accounts of the Earl of Devon for 1396/7 record: “The feoffees (*executors*) of Robert Wyllefford for the performance of his Will: 35s” (D&C Rec Soc. 1977 vol.22/24). Robert was buried in Exeter Cathedral (where the last major rebuilding phase, being most of the Nave and the West End, had been completed by the 1370’s). The archives of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral record that the Bells of the Cathedral were rung for him in Christmas Term 1396/7 and a sum of 20s. was paid to the Cathedral between Michaelmas 1397 and Michaelmas 1398 for stone for his tomb (D&C 2657). The archives further record that a sum of £2 was paid to the Cathedral by his widow Elizabeth Wilford between Michaelmas 1397 and Michaelmas 1398 for her tomb and for permission to be buried in the Cathedral with her husband. Elizabeth appears to have continued aspects of his business, and as “Elsota Wilforth” is recorded, together with Henry Hull, Peter Stret/Sturt, William and John Wilford, among the most important cloth merchants in Exeter in the Aulnager’s Returns at the turn of the 14/15th century. She appears to have died in 1399 and the Cathedral Bells were rung for her in that year (D&C 3773, f70r).

Henry de Blakeborne (from Lancashire) appears to have been a Lieutenant of William Norwell 1345-1349 and 1349-1355; Treasurer to the Black Prince in 1349, and Comptroller of the Prince’s Household 1352-1359. Collated priest 6 Dec 1357 at Chudleigh, and as “Canon Henry de Blakeborne” was instituted by Bishop Grandisson, Exeter, to the living of Stokenham 7 Dec 1357. Recorded at his death, by 22 Jul 1399, as Canon of Exeter Cathedral, Rector of Stokenham and of Newton Ferrers, and of Slapton. The Executors of his Will were John Dodyngton, Thomas Barton Canon of Exeter, John Ulveston, perp vicar of Stokenham, & John Dene (see “Household Black Prince”, D. Green, 1998, & Reg Grandisson).

John Westcote STB. (*Speculatively son of Henry and Beatrice Westcote? see earlier*). Rector of St Petrock’s, Exeter, Canon of Exeter Cathedral, Will 20 Jul 1411, pvd 23 Jun 1418 (Stafford Reg p.418/9) records “£10 to a priest to say Mass for his soul (& others including) for Rob Wilford and Elizabeth his wife”.

John Wilford, probably Robert's illegitimate son, was a highly successful Exeter merchant, member of the Exeter Corporation 1399-1418 (being a Bailiff five times), Constable of the Staple in 1413 and MP for Exeter in 1414. He was possibly the "John de Wylford de Exonia" (*of Exeter*) who on 5 June 1414 granted a messuage in "Long Rowe", Nottingham, to Nicholas and John Alastre. A witness was Henry Wylford, later Mayor of Nottingham (Burgess Pleas, Nottingham, 97 enrolled). John died without issue by 6 March 1418. His Will, "John Wilsford citizen of Exeter, 28 February 1417/8" was enrolled in the Exeter Mayor's Court Roll 25 April 1418 during the mayoralty of John Cook (MCR 5/6 HV. M.30, also Reg Ed Stafford, Hingeston, App p480/1) in which no member of the Wilford family is mentioned. His executors were Thomas Poleworthy, Baker, and Walter Leys:

"In the Name of God, Amen.—On the penultimate day of February, in the Year of the Lord 1417, I, John Wilsford, citizen of the City of Exeter, comp mind, make my will in this manner. First of all, I recommend my soul to the Almighty God Who earns the precious blood of Sao, and my body to sacred burial Also, I give and bequeath to John Melbury and Thomas Montegu, to the guardians of the Church of St. Kyrany (*Kerrian*), in Exon, one acre of my land with the appurtenances in Velewil, lying outside the Boreal (*North*) Gate of the aforesaid City of Exon, in the suburbs of the same City, between the land of the late Roger Askerswille, which William Shaplegh holds, on the west side, and land late of John Sleghe on the east side, and land called Starcombe on the north side, and a lane leading towards Starcombe on the south side. Also, I give and bequeath to the same John Melbury and Thomas, to the aforesaid keepers, one of my tofts with a garden adjoining belonging, on the hill of St. David outside the aforesaid Gate, in the suburbs of the same City, between the tenement of Robert Hoigge on the south side, and the land of John Lange on the north side, and the royal road leading towards Coulegh (*Cowley*) on the east side, to have and hold the aforesaid land, toft, and garden, with all the trees growing in the same ground, the toft, and the garden, together with each and every one of their appurtenances, to his guardians, and theirs to the successors who were for the time, from the day of the making of these presents until tcompletion of the term of ninety-nine years in the next sequence, paying thence annually to the principal Lords of those fees, and the services which are due therefrom; under this condition, however, that the aforesaid guardians, and their successors for the time being, shall hold my anniversary in the aforesaid church of St. Kyran every year on the Tuesday next before the Feast Kyran Bishop, with the Rector of the same Church and with five other priests and two clerics: so that the Rector from there has, if he is present at the funeral than at the Mass, iijjd., and any of the said priests thus present iiijd. and every one of the clergymen thus present ijd. ; and for the light burning there iiijd., and every warden of the said Church present there for his work iiid. And after at the end of the aforesaid term of ninety-nine years I will that the aforesaid toft land and garden with its appurtenances be sold by the guardians of the said Church who for in time, and I want the proceeds of the money to be for the use of the said Church be converted Also, I give and bequeath to the undersigned executors all the remainder my messuages, lands and tenements with the appurtenances which I have in the City of Exon and in the suburbs of the same to be sold in perpetuity; and the money from it therefore I desire that all my debts be first and foremost in full paid And of the residue of the same money, after my aforesaid debts have been thus fully paid, I will that Walter Leye shall have thence ten marks of sterling, if so much remained at that time; and this under the following condition, namely that the executors of Thomas Poleworthy, | Baker, for the aforesaid sum decern marks all the debt which the same Walter owes them for the acquisition of that tenement of the late said Thomas Poleworthy, which of the aforesaid executors he recently inquired whether they wished to forgive him completely and relax under thirty days after the sale and settlement of the same messuage of my aforesaid lands and tenements. And if the said executors Thomas Poleworthy if they do not agree to this, I will that my executors below write among other remainders to dispose of the aforesaid ten marks of my goods well and faithfully, as they shall think best expedient. But the remainder of my goods not bequeathed above I bequeath to my executors to find one priest celebrating in the aforesaid church for my soul and the souls of those to whom I owe it, as long as the said residue may last. For the good and faithful execution of this will, I order, make, and appoint my executors, Thomas Cooke, clerk, and Edward Langyuow".