

The Life and Death of John Hampden Junior.

by
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A half-forgotten discovery may have uncovered part of the mystery of John Hampden's eldest son.

All accounts of Hampden's life mention that the eldest of his 9 children was a son, John, who was born around 1621 and was killed early on in the Civil Wars. Some writers have suggested that he was a captain in his father's regiment of foot, but a recent study of Hampden's Greencoats does not list him.

However, in his 1976 biography of the Patriot, Dr John Adair states that the young Hampden probably served as a gentleman volunteer in Col. Denzil Holles' Redcoat regiment.

No other information concerning this missing Hampden has ever come to light, but when I was researching John Hampden in the Bodleian Library in Oxford in the 1960s, I discovered a reference to the name in the parish register of Fritwell, which is between Banbury and Bicester. This contained an entry for the baptism of a John, son of John Hampden, in the 1620s.

For some reason I failed to make a proper note of the details and the reference number, and when I took up my research again after a number of years, I could not find the entry in question.

I had actually begun to believe that I had dreamed or imagined the whole thing, until recently. I was given a leaflet about the Buckinghamshire Genealogical Society, whose Secretary, Eve McLaughlin, lives at Haddenham, near Thame.

As there is always interest among some of our members about their possible descent from John Hampden, especially those in the Barbados line, I arranged with Mrs McLaughlin to call and have a look at her copy of the Hampden family tree when I was next in the area, in the hope that it might be more extensive than others I had seen.

It certainly was, and we spent some time discussing the various aspects of it. Needless to say, John Hampden Jr. was listed on it as having been born in 1621, and I told Mrs McLaughlin the story of my missing research material.

"Oh, I have most Oxfordshire parish registers on microfiche", she replied, and sure enough, Fritwell was among them. There was a wait of what seemed like hours while she loaded the relevant sheet of film into the reader, and then - bingo!

Under 'Baptisms' was the following entry:

<u>1623</u>	
Sep	17 KILBEE Ann d. Robt
Nov	6 HAMPDEN Jhon s. Mr. Jhon, born Oct 23
March	15 HUBCROFT Francis s. William
	17 FOX Mathew s. Thomas

just as I remember seeing it in the Bodleian many years earlier.

Mrs McLaughlin kindly gave me a printout of the page, and I later discovered why I could not subsequently find the information in the Bodleian. All Oxfordshire parish registers have been moved to the County Council archives in Westgate Street.

The re-discovery posed as many questions as it answered. Despite the common 17th century misspelling of the name, does this baptismal entry refer to the eldest son of John Hampden the Patriot and, if so, why was he born and baptised in this particular village?

Hampden certainly owned land in Oxfordshire, though none at Fritwell. In 1623 the two manors in Fritwell were owned by George Yorke and Richard Fermor - neither of whom appeared at the time to have had any connection with Hampden. However, Bob Hammond subsequently discovered that Sir Richard Fermor also

owned land at Great Kimble and Marsh, parishes adjoining Great Hampden, and subsequently sold some of it to John Hampden's cousin Alexander, who is said to have looked after the young Patriot when his father died. Furthermore, in the 1620s Fermor was a Freeholder of Wendover - the borough Hampden successfully campaigned to have re-franchised, so they must have known each other.

Bob posed some questions. Were John Hampden and his wife Elizabeth travelling when she suddenly went into labour and needed to stop for the child's birth with someone they knew? Had they travelled to Fritwell quite deliberately for a birth there? If so, where did they stay, if not with the local landowners?

It has to be borne in mind that Elizabeth Hampden's own mother had died two years previously and that this was the young woman's first child. At the time we didn't have a record of the maiden name of Elizabeth's mother (another Elizabeth), but Bob suggested that she might have been a member of the Fermor family and that the young Elizabeth wanted to have the baby where she felt at the greatest ease. Her rather formidable mother-in-law may have been in residence at Hampden House at this time. A subsequent discovery that Elizabeth's mother was formerly a Hobbs hardly affects the argument in view of the connection with the Fermors.

If the child was premature this might explain the 14-day gap between the birth and baptism, and the fact that the latter occurred away from the ancestral home at Great Hampden.

If the mother was unwell and the child not expected to live, it would be normal for an emergency baptism to take place immediately, and a more formal one later. Perhaps after a fortnight Elizabeth Hampden was still too ill to travel, and it was decided to hold the formal ceremony where they were.

There is no question that this entry refers to a member of the gentry, and not to one of the local villagers. It is the only one on that particular page where the father's name is prefixed with the title 'Mr', and where the child's date of birth is given.

The Hampden pedigree does not list another member called John at this time, and although it is possible, given the great age of the family, that there could have been another John Hampden around who was so distantly related as not to be included on the family tree, it seems too much of a co-incidence.

All the evidence suggests that this is the Patriot's eldest son, and the slightly later date of birth would still mean that he was nearly 19 at the outbreak of the Civil Wars, and old enough to serve in some regiment, if not his father's. It also means that his sister Elizabeth was the Patriot's firstborn.

Until someone proves conclusively to the contrary, I must assume that I have fitted another piece into the John Hampden jigsaw.

This discovery on his probable date of birth led me to then consider the circumstances of young Hampden's death.

Most accounts state that he was killed early on in the Civil Wars, but no date or place has ever been discovered. This is surprising, because the boy was the heir to the Hampden estates and name, and would one day have been the head of this ancient and wealthy family.

Even in the turmoil of civil war, one would have expected his very influential father to have arranged for the body to be transported back to Great Hampden for a proper burial, and for an entry to have been made in the parish register. The only explanation seems to be that young John died in circumstances in which his body was never identified or never found. The most likely scene for this tragedy would appear to be the Battle of Brentford.

Dr John Adair's suggestion that the young Hampden was probably a gentleman volunteer in Col. Denzil Holles' regiment seems highly likely, as Hampden and Holles were old colleagues. They were both among the Five Members whom the King had tried to arrest in the House of Commons, and their two regiments spent much of the early part of the Civil War brigaded together. What more natural that Hampden, perhaps fearing accusations of nepotism if his son served in his own regiment, would ask his close colleague to take the boy under his wing.

The evidence for this is in the letters of Nehemiah Wharton, a sergeant (and later ensign) in the Redcoats. According to these, on 20th August 1642, Wharton and some of his men killed a fat buck of Sir Alexander

Denton's and had it taken to Buckingham. 'With part of it', he wrote, 'I feasted my captaine, Captain Parker, Captaine Beacon, and Colonell Hamden's sonne'.

This is the last mention of John Hampden Jr. until 15th April 1643, when the Royalist paper *Mercurius Aulicus* published the following:

'It is advertised by some who have been curious in the observation that Mr Hampden, one of the five members so much talked of, hath had many great misfortunes since the beginning of the present troubles, whereof he hath been a principal mover: particularly that he hath buried since that time two of his daughters, one grandchild which he had by a daughter married to Sir Rob. Pye the younger, and his own eldest son and heir ...'

Following the Battle of Edgehill, the Greencoats and Redcoats fell back on London with the rest of the Parliamentary army. Hampden's regiment was stationed in Uxbridge and Holles', with some of Lord Brooke's Bluecoats, in the villages of Brentford and Old Brentford, on the banks of the Thames. Early on the morning of 12th November 1642, Prince Rupert's men, taking advantage of a thick mist, fell upon this little garrison.

'We marched up to the enemy', wrote the young Royalist soldier John Gwyn, 'engaged them by Sir Richard Winn's house and the Thames side, beat them to retreat into Brainford (Brentford), - beat them from one Brainford to the other, and from thence to the open field, with a resolute and expeditious fighting, that was after once firing suddenly to advance up to push of pikes and the butt-end of muskets, which proved so fatal to Holles his butchers and dyers that day, that abundance of them were killed and taken prisoners, besides those drowned in their attempt to escape by leaping into the river'.

According to Lord Nugent, John Hampden and Lord Brooke made strenuous attempts to relieve the Parliamentarians in Brentford, charging five times. If his son was fighting with the Redcoats that day, one can imagine Hampden's feelings as he strove to reach him.

The following day saw the inconclusive stand-off at Turnham Green, but it would appear that the Royalists kept a presence in Brentford for another fortnight before the King withdrew to Oxford, so the Parliamentarians had no opportunity to identify their dead before burial. Some must have been buried in Brentford itself, but many of those who drowned would have been swept downstream and buried elsewhere - or their bodies never found.

It seemed likely to me that the younger John Hampden was among this number, until I had a conversation with fellow committee member Bob Hammond just prior to a meeting in Thame.

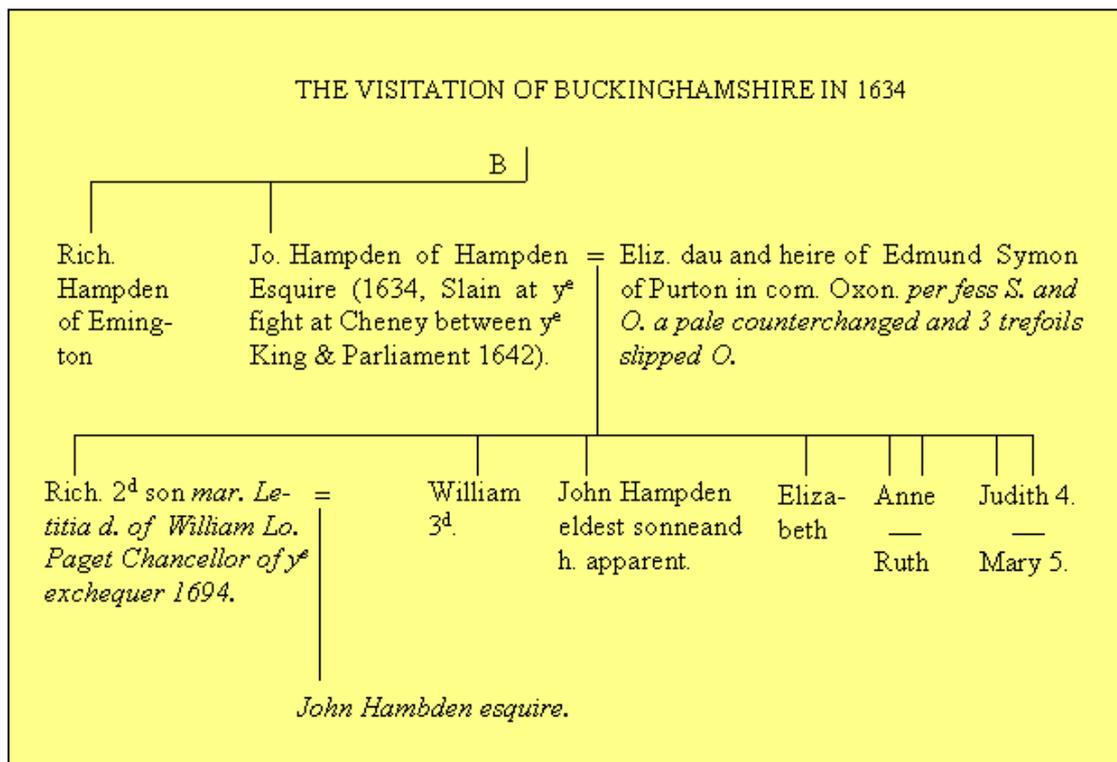
My efforts to pinpoint the date and place of the young man's death had included contacting the Archivist at St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, because of an extract from *Memoirs of the Reigne of King Charles I* by Sir Philip Warwick, included by Professor John Adair in his 1976 biography of Hampden. This refers to the visit at the King's command by Dr Nathaniel Giles, former parson of Chinnor, to the mortally wounded Hampden in Thame in June 1643.

'Although Hampden and Giles had been neighbours and friends before the outbreak of the Civil War, Dr Giles was reluctant to go because, as he said to Warwick, "I have seemed unlucky to him (Hampden) in several conjunctions of time, when I made addresses to him in my own behalf: for he having been formerly so kindly my friend, before I came to Oxford, we the Prebendaries of Windsor being all turned out of our houses, in the carrying off of my goods my wagons were robbed and plundered, though warranted by passport, and I addressing to him for release, my messenger came in that very instant in which the news of his eldest son's death came to him.'

I had hoped that the Archivist could give us an exact date for Dr Giles's unfortunate experience, but the records do not appear to exist, so I could find out exactly when Dr Giles and his colleagues were evicted.

The good Doctor also goes on to say how, on the second occasion he sought redress from Hampden, the latter had just received news of the death of his eldest daughter Elizabeth, who was married to Sir Richard Knightly of Fawsley, Northamptonshire. Enquiries to Northants Records Office revealed that they had no record of either Elizabeth Knightly's marriage or burial, suggesting that both had taken place elsewhere. Since Dr Giles places the two deaths in the above order, information as to Elizabeth's death would have given us the latest possible date for young John Hampden's, and therefore narrowed down the place.

However, while we were having a drink just prior to a committee meeting, Bob Hammond made a fascinating announcement. He had been studying records in the County Archives in Aylesbury, and had consulted the Visitation of Buckinghamshire. This was a record of visits at various times by heralds from the College of Arms to ascertain the right of gentry to bear coats-of-arms. The following entry was on page 71:



Bob was greatly puzzled at this, since the entry referring to John Hampden did not make sense. He was not slain at anywhere called Cheney; he was not, strictly speaking, slain in battle but died later of wounds; and his death occurred in 1643, not 1642. It was obvious that ‘Cheney’ referred to Chenies, on the borders of Bucks and Hertfordshire and formerly the property of the Dukes of Bedford. I recalled from my Sealed Knot days that there had been some kind of skirmish at Chenies during the Civil War, and Derek Lester, commanding officer of Col. John Hampden’s Regiment in the English Civil War Society, later confirmed this, adding that it had been the site of a Parliamentary magazine. The skirmish had occurred when the Parliamentary Army was en route from Edgehill to London, i.e. between 24th October and 7th November 1642. Records show that the Earl of Essex was at Woburn on 4th November and reached London 2 or 3 days later. The action at Chenies must have occurred between these two dates.

Bob Hammond suggested initially that the heralds may have made hasty notes and then written up the Visitation later over very strong coffee, thereby getting Chenies confused with Chalgrove because of the similarity of the first syllable, and entering the wrong date! I suggested that something much stronger and more alcoholic than coffee led them to confuse the two John Hampdens, father and son, and ascribe what was basically correct information to the wrong one. We know John Hampden Jr. was in the Parliamentary Army and was killed around this time, and we must assume that this death entry refers to him, and not to his father.

The really amazing part of all this is that when Bob and I had finished retailing all this to the committee, our Chairman, Lord Hollenden said, “You have spoiled my story now! We had dinner the other night with the owners of Chenies Manor, who are friends of mine, and they told us this same story”.

Bob Hammond subsequently procured a copy of the Chenies Manor guide book, and drew my attention to the following entry:

‘The 4th Earl [of Bedford] resided mainly at Chiswick, but visited Chenies where much local activity was centred prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. The patriot Hampden was a close friend and near neighbour and when war broke out, it was a detachment of Hampden’s regiment that was quartered

in the house. A skirmish took place there in the autumn of 1642, in which John Hampden's son was killed.'

This slightly contradicts some of our previous research, which suggests that the young Hampden was a gentlemen volunteer in Denzil Holles' regiment. What is amazing is that no previous biographer of Hampden discovered this piece of information, although the guide book was published some years ago.

I made contact with the Archivist of the Bedford Estate at Woburn Abbey but she was unable to find any documents relating to this matter, so there, for the present, it rests.

August 2004