

Notes on the Benington, Manasseh, Wilson and Armistead families

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The U.K. government recently released digital versions of summaries of probate and administration records for the period 1861-1941, and these helped me fill in a few more details about our Benington ancestors in England, particularly concerning their contributions to the arts and their Quaker faith. These notes are intentionally short, without many references. I would be happy to provide them to anyone interested.

The Children of George Benington and Mary Hannah Wilson

I'll start with the children of George Benington (1836, Stockton-on-Tees, Durham-1916, Edmonton, Middlesex), and Mary Hannah Wilson (1842, High Wray, Windermere, Lancashire-1875, Stockton-on-Tees). Married in 1864 at the Friends Meeting House in Ulverston, in the Lake District, they are the parents of Arthur Benington, my grandfather and the Benington immigrant to Canada and eventually the U.S. George Benington was involved in a number of businesses, the main one being the import and wholesale distribution of tea. Arthur spent most of his life as a journalist in New York.

There were seven, all born at Stockton, of whom two, Theodore and Edith, died young. Arthur (1865-1924), the eldest, I will say no more about, except that, like his father, he attended [Bootham School](#) run by the Quakers in York.

George's probate record shows that his executors were Wilson Benington, merchant, Walter Benington, photographer and George Brown Burgin, author.

Wilson Benington (1868-1942, Westmoreland District) was the third child, and never married. He was the only one who spent his life in the family business. In the 1871 census, he is living with his

parents in Stockton. By 1881 they had moved to Edmonton, outside London, but he was at [Ackworth School](#) near Leeds, founded in 1779, the second oldest of the Quaker schools. Its [records](#) show it was attended by several Beningtons, as well as by members of most of the allied families mentioned in these notes. In the 1891 and 1901 censuses, he is again living with the family in Edmonton.

Wilson was a passionate amateur poet. Some of his works, several of which can be found on the British Library online catalog, were published by

TO ALBERT, KING OF THE BELGIANS.

KING, who art crowned with greater grief and glory
Than ever brows anointed yet have worn
Of Kings in song or story ;
Grief heavier to be borne
Than Priam's when he humbled his white head
To beg the bones of Hector ; glory higher
Than any man's since, when his country bled,
His towns were sacked, his minsters were afire,
The hunted, Alfred, holding faith unsold,
Won, winning back his kingdom ; thou,
Man among men, though now
Thy wasted armies and thy lands despoiled
Call thee their King in vain, this comfort take
And doubt not : fame and honour such as none
Of woman born has won
Are thine till the last thunders shake
This earth out of the heavens, and thou shalt reign
While grey seas beat the long, low Belgian shore,
In glory without stain
Among the hearts of men when Kings shall be no more.

WILSON BENINGTON

Scholartis Press, founded by [Eric Partridge](#), the lexicographer, who cites Wilson several times in his *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* and in *Usage and Abusage: A Guide to Good English*. I have found several references on the Internet to a poem of Wilson's titled *To Albert, King of the Belgians*, originally published in *The Observer*, from a collection titled *The Glory of Belgium a Tribute and a Chronicle* by Russell Markland. You can be the judge of whether he did well keeping his day job...

Walter Benington (1873-1936, Oxford) was a photographer, apparently quite successful in his day. The National Portrait Gallery in London has online [61 of his photos](#) as well as a short biography and a link to the studio of [Elliott and Fry](#) where he worked.

The portraits are mainly of writers, artists and scientists. His [portrait of Albert Einstein](#) was taken during Einstein's visit to London and Manchester in 1921. If you have seen the recent film "Einstein and Eddington", this was when Einstein first met in person [Arthur Stanley Eddington](#), the astrophysicist who had recently shown, during a full solar eclipse in the Maldives, that the light of stars is bent by the sun, one of the first confirmations of general relativity. Walter also shot a [portrait of Eddington](#), a fellow Quaker.

One of Walter's earlier photos is "[Among the Rooftops](#)" for which the going price seems to be over 2,000 pounds!

Ann Lenhard Benington has on her online [family tree](#) portraits of Wilson and Henrietta Benington that look to me as if they were taken by Walter.

In 1905, Walter married Kathleen Inez Whitwell (b. 1873, Edmonton District), daughter of George Whitwell, a commercial traveler in the woolens trade, and his wife Frances Stopher. The Whitwells had moved to Edmonton in the 1870s from East End London, where George was born. There were Whitwells in Stockton, so it is possible the families knew each other earlier. After living in London, Walter moved to Oxford to open a branch of Elliott and Fry, and lived there till his death. I could find five children.



George Brown Burgin (photo by Walter Benington)

The third executor of George Benington's estate was **George Brown Burgin** (1856, Croydon – 1944, St. Albans, Hertfordshire), author, journalist, critic, and subject of one of Walter Benington's portraits. The British Library catalog lists over 100 of [his works](#).

Burgin married **Georgiana Benington** (1866 – 1940, Islington District, Middlesex), George's second child. They lived at 8 Holly Terrace, West Hill, Highgate, London and her probate record shows that she died at the Bethanie Convent Nursing Home, Hornsey Lane, London. They had no children.

The last of George and Mary Hannah's surviving children was **Henrietta**, b. 1874. Henrietta became a medical missionary to Syria where she married **Antonius Yussef Manasseh** whose probate in London says that he died on

October 31st 1929 in Brummana, Lebanon, Syria¹, leaving his estate to his widow Henrietta Manasseh and George Antonius Manasseh, salesman.

I have been in contact with Tony Manasseh of Beirut, a great-nephew of Henrietta's, and Philip Manasseh of England, a grandchild, and his wife Pam. They told me that the story of the Quaker Manassehs begins with Beshara Manasseh, the son of a Beirut silk merchant, who graduated in 1877 from the first promotion of the medical school at [American University of Beirut](#), then known as the Syrian Protestant College, founded by missionaries. Beshara met [Theophilus Waldmeier](#), a Quaker



Henrietta Benington Manasseh and her daughter Dorothy, taken in July 1930, probably in the garden of her sister-in-law, Rosa Waldmeier Manasseh, in Brummana (courtesy Philip and Pam Manasseh)

missionary who went to Lebanon in the early 1870s. Beshara became a Friend and took his brothers Antonius, known as Tanius (Philip's grandfather) and Spiridon (Tony's grandfather) to Brummana (in the hills east of Beirut) where he founded the first hospital and where Antonius and Spiridon went to [Brummana High School](#), a still-existing Quaker school founded by Waldmeier.

Tanius followed his father and brother to American University, where he qualified as a pharmacist and returned to Brummana to support his brother's medical practice. In 1887, the mission sent him to study the University of Leeds, then Yorkshire College. There he lived in the household of John and Rebecca Whiting, and strengthened his ties to the Quaker faith. He returned to Lebanon in a year, with a qualification in Pharmacy. In 1892, at the age of 28, he went back to Leeds, where he took his B.Sc and then to London to complete his medical training. He obtained the degrees of M.R.C.S and L.R.C.P in June 1897. It was in London that he met Aunt Hettie, as she is remembered in the Manasseh family, where she was training as a nurse. He returned to Brummana to which she travelled with her father in 1899. They were married there at the Friends Meeting House on November 1st 1899 and the marriage was registered at the British Consulate in Beirut. Their children, George Antonius and Dorothy, were born in Lebanon in 1900 and 1911.

Most of the facts about the Manassehs in Syria are drawn from a biography of Antonius, titled *Antonius Manasseh. The beloved doctor of the Lebanon*, written by Christofer Naish, onetime principal of Brummana High School, and published by the Friends Service Council in 1931. It is not listed in either the Library of Congress or British Library catalogs, though the English Manassehs own a copy. A review of it appears in the *British Medical Journal* of August 15, 1931:

A short but detailed and attractive biography of Dr. Antonius Manasseh has now been prepared by C. G. NAISH, principal of the Brummana High School in the Lebanon; for the many friends in this country and in Syria a medical pioneer who won high esteem as superintendent of the medical work of the Friends Foreign Mission Association, and in

¹ Lebanon was a part of Syria under French mandate from the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 to when it became independent in 1943 during the German occupation of France.

connexion with the Syrian and Palestine Relief Fund. He was once described in the British Medical Journal as “a bridge between individuals and peoples who misunderstood one another.” Dr. Manasseh was largely concerned with the introduction of modern medicine into a country where the age of magic was still continuing. The biography indicates how he was able to achieve his great success; it will be welcomed by many who had no previous knowledge of a very humble and most energetic member of the British Medical Association, who was equally at home in the East and in the West.

Henrietta, Dorothy and George returned to London at the onset of WW I, but Antonius stayed in Lebanon and practiced medicine till his death in 1929. Henrietta must have returned to Brummana after the war as there is a photo of her and Dorothy taken there in July 1930. She must have taken Syrian nationality on her marriage as she and Dorothy took British nationality in June 1931.

From 1934 to 1960, Henrietta Manasseh lived in London at 3 Temple Fortune Court NW11, not far from Edmonton. She died after a long illness at St. Albans, Hertfordshire in late 1960 at the age of 86. I'm not sure what the connection to St. Albans was, although that is also where George Brown Burgin died 16 years earlier. It is possible that a house of his had stayed in the family.

Dorothy did not marry. She worked as a midwife in London and took care of her mother. George went to the [Friends School at Saffron Walden](#) in England from age 8 and took British nationality in March 1923. He married Eunice May Harper in 1925 and they had three children, Meriel Benington, Anthony Wilson and Philip George.

That sums up what I now know about George and Mary Hannah's children. It is rather interesting to note that, after Arthur's business failure in the New World, only Wilson, in his day job, had anything to do with the family business, though the others led full and accomplished lives. With Wilson leaving no children, it would be interesting to find out what happened to the family business.

Helen White Miller

After the death of Mary Hannah Wilson in 1875, George Benington remarried in Stockton in 1880 to Helen Miller. I had never been clear as to her origins. I now believe that she was born Helena White in 1843 at Newcastle-on-Tyne, daughter of Richard White, a ship-owner, and his wife Mary. Helena first married Richard Cleghorn Miller (1843, East Indies-1877, Chelsea, London), a law student, and they had two children, Leander (1868-1887) and Helena (1869-). Leander was living with his mother and the George Beningtons in Edmonton in 1881. George and Helena had one daughter, Beatrice Katherine Mabel, b. 1881 in Edmonton. She married James Mills Travis (b 1871) at the church of St Edmund the King and Martyr in 1907. Helena died in 1921 in Hastings, Sussex.

The Wilsons and The Armisteads

Mary Hannah Wilson Benington was from the Lake District where her father, William Wilson (1807-1889) was a Quaker landowner and chemical manure manufacturer. Her mother was Sarah Binns (1809, Liverpool – 1880, Ulverston District, Cambria), daughter of Thomas and Sarah Binns of Liverpool, also Quakers. Details of the Wilson family up to 1871 can be found in Joseph Foster, [*The Pedigree of Wilson of High Wray and Kendal and families connected with them*](#), 1871. However, more recent sources reveal interesting details about the Wilsons' Quaker connections.

William Wilson and Sarah Binns had four children, all born at High Wray, Hawkshead, Lancashire, just west of Lake Windermere.

Henry Wilson (1840-) was a surgeon who practiced all his life in Wavertree, Liverpool. In 1851, he is a student at Robert Doeg's Quaker school at Harraby, with several other Wilsons. He married Isabella Procter in 1869.

Mary Hannah Wilson married George Benington.

Sarah Binns Wilson (1847-) married Dr Joseph Graham Burne in 1869.

Anthony William Wilson (1845-1927, Bentham, Yorkshire) was a manager of several chemical plants in Kingston-on-Hull. He married Sarah Maria Armistead (1849, Leeds-1929, Settle, Yorkshire), daughter of **Wilson Armistead** (1819, Leeds-1868, Leeds) and his wife Mary Bragg.



Victoria House in Leeds, Wilson Armistead's residence

Wilson Armistead (we will get back to the Wilson part later) was a Quaker oil merchant and mustard manufacturer, who was an active abolitionist. He wrote widely on slavery and other topics as can be seen from the [list of his books](#).

One of them, [*A Tribute for the Negro: Being a Vindication of the Moral, Intellectual, and Religious Capabilities of the Coloured Portion of Mankind; with Particular Reference to the African Race*](#), is widely cited in American works on slavery and abolitionism. The New York Times reports a visit by Harriet Beecher Stowe to Leeds in 1853

where she met with Armistead.

Back to why Armistead was named Wilson: he was the son of Joseph Armistead (1793, Leeds-1861, Leeds) and Hannah Wilson (1792, High Wray-1827, Leeds), and Hannah Wilson was the daughter of Anthony Wilson (1758, High Wray-1841, High Wray) and Mary Barrow (1768-1824), the parents of William Wilson who married Sarah Binns, which makes Wilson Armistead related to Arthur Benington not only by marriage but by blood.

Victoria House, Wilson Armistead's residence in Leeds mentioned in his probate record, still exists and has been converted to flats. This picture of the house is from a recent real-estate ad!

There are Armisteads in the U.S. today. Some I know are related to the family from Leeds and immigrated in the 19th century. But there were also Armisteads in the Virginia colony in the 17th century, and I don't know what the connection is.

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Change History

100830 First version

100905 Corrected George Manasseh's birth date. Deleted comment on Whitwells not being Quakers.

100929 Added note about George and Arthur Benington's businesses, and corrected "anti-abolitionist". Elucidated relation between Wilson Armistead and Arthur Benington.

110211 Corrected some details about Antonius Manasseh and added details and photo of Henrietta.