

THE
ANTIQUARIAN'S
FIELD GUIDE
TO
BRITAIN'S
HIDDEN HISTORY

A Companion to
THE WILLOUGHBY PAPERS

G. J. WADE

HISTORICAL MYSTERIES OF BRITAIN
garethwade.com

Archive Reference: WP/FG/001

WELCOME TO THE ARCHIVE

*To understand the present,
we must be willing to question the past.*

— Henry A. Willoughby

The Willoughby Papers began not as a grand project but as a personal quest—one that started in the quiet rooms of old houses, among the dust of archives and the fading ink of forgotten documents.

What I discovered was this: our history is not always lost by accident. Sometimes it is buried. Sometimes it is rewritten. And sometimes, it is deliberately concealed by those who fear the truth.

This Field Guide is your invitation to look deeper. Each chapter introduces a real historical mystery that lies at the heart of one of the Willoughby investigations. These are not the stories you learned at school. They are the questions that linger in the footnotes, the letters that never made it into the history books, the fragments that refused to stay hidden.

Across these pages, you will find the evidence, the doubts, and the enduring puzzles that continue to challenge historians today. More importantly, you will find the places where your own curiosity can lead you.

History is not a closed book. It is an archive—
and every archive is an open door.

Best wishes for your investigations,

G. J. Wade

G. J. Wade
Author



Caldworth Hall, 1969.

The beginning of another investigation.

ARCHIVE NOTE

The Willoughby Papers are a private collection of documents, correspondence, photographs and artefacts assembled and preserved by Henry A. Willoughby.

They form the foundation of the investigations recorded in this series.

This Field Guide distils the historical mysteries at the heart of those investigations, providing context, key facts, and leads for further exploration.



FURTHER INVESTIGATION

SUBJECT: The Willoughby Papers
NATURE: Historical Mysteries of Britain
PERIOD: From Roman Britain to the 20th Century
LOCATION: Archives, Libraries, Historic Places & Landscapes
PURPOSE: To question. To explore. To uncover what history would rather forget.
REFERENCE: WP/FG/001

THE TRUTH LEAVES A TRAIL.
CURIOUS PEOPLE FOLLOW IT.

BOOK I • THE MOLDWARP'S SECRET

CAN HISTORY BE DELIBERATELY ERASED?

THE HIDDEN STORY OF SIR ALARD, THE BATTLE OF TOWTON, AND A LINEAGE SUPPRESSED

In the spring of 1461, on the snow-streaked field of Towton, the bloodiest battle ever fought on English soil, the House of York was broken. The Lancastrian victory secured the throne, but it also unleashed something far less visible—an act of deliberate erasure.

In the weeks that followed, defeated knights were hunted down, their lands confiscated, their names struck from records. Monasteries with Lancastrian sympathies were closed. Charters vanished. Chronicles grew silent.

At Caldworth Priory in Yorkshire, the monks recorded the burial of a noble knight, Sir Alard de Brackenbury, killed at Towton while fighting for the Lancastrian cause. His effigy survives still, worn by time but not forgotten.

Yet by the reign of Henry VII, the priory itself was dissolved. Its archives scattered or destroyed. In the 1530s, Thomas Cromwell's agents swept through the region, seizing lands and papers, leaving gaps that no official history has ever fully explained.

Was this simply the passage of time, or was it something far more calculated? The surviving fragments at Caldworth suggest a story deliberately buried—the roots of a Lancastrian lineage that someone, somewhere, wanted the world to forget.



Effigy of an unidentified knight at Caldworth Priory, thought to be Sir Alard de Brackenbury (d. 1461). One of the few surviving witnesses to a lost world.

TOWTON: THE AFTERMATH

- ✦ The Battle of Towton (29 March 1461) left up to 28,000 men dead.
- ✦ Yorkist leaders were killed or exiled. Lancastrian authority was absolute.
- ✦ Lands, titles, and inheritances were forfeited. Families disappeared from the record.
- ✦ Monasteries were visited, suppressed, or dissolved for political reasons.
- ✦ Under Henry VII and his minister Thomas Cromwell, inconvenient histories were removed from view.
- ✦ Silence was not accidental. It was policy.



A marginal note from a 15th-century chronicle referring to the aftermath of Towton. Many such records ended abruptly.

ARCHIVE NOTE

Monastic houses across England lost far more than buildings in the Tudor period. Records, cartularies, and private correspondence were often destroyed.

What survives is precious. What is missing may be even more important.



FURTHER INVESTIGATION

- SUBJECT:** Sir Alard de Brackenbury and the loss of Lancastrian records
- PERIOD:** 15th Century (1450–1530)
- LOCATION:** Yorkshire, with links to Caldworth Priory and surrounding estates
- SOURCES:** Monastic records, chantry rolls, royal commissions, Cromwellian visitations, local charters
- FOCUS:** How and why records were removed—and what survives in the gaps

**FOLLOW THE CLUES.
QUESTION EVERYTHING.
THE ARCHIVE REMEMBERS.**



EXPLORE THE FULL STORY

In *The Moldwarp's Secret*, Henry Willoughby uncovers the fragments of a forgotten past—stones, charters, and a buried truth that refuses to stay hidden.

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*"Sometimes history
is not forgotten.
Sometimes it is
deliberately erased."*

BOOK I THEME

CAN HISTORY BE DELIBERATELY ERASED?

Towton, the Wars of the Roses, and the Vanishing of a Dynasty

On Palm Sunday, 29 March 1461, the fate of England was decided on the windswept plain of Towton in North Yorkshire.

The armies of York and Lancaster met in driving snow. When it ended, between 22,000 and 28,000 men lay dead. It remains the bloodiest battle ever fought on English soil.

Lancastrian power was broken. The House of Lancaster—descended from John of Gaunt—lost the crown, but for many of its supporters, the consequences were far more final.

In the weeks and months that followed, defeated knights were executed, exiled or forced into hiding. Lands and titles were confiscated. Records were altered. Names were struck from view.

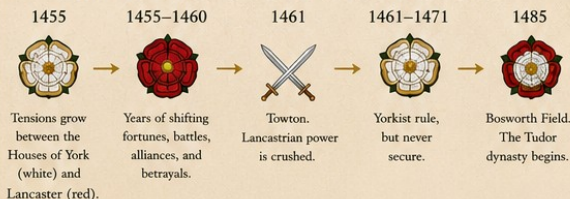
Towton was not simply a military victory. It was the erasure of a lineage.

History is not always lost by accident. Sometimes it is removed by design.



The field of Towton after the battle, 29 March 1461. Contemporary accounts describe a sight so terrible it was long remembered as a place of silence.

THE WARS OF THE ROSES: A CONTEST FOR ENGLAND



AFTER TOWTON: WHAT HAPPENED TO THE RECORD?



- ✦ Monasteries continued after Towton. Many houses held valuable records and supported both local communities and travelling wayfarers.
- ✦ It was during the Tudor period, under Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell, that monasteries were dissolved (1536–1540) and their archives scattered.
- ✦ Between Towton and the Dissolution, some records were lost, altered, or quietly removed.
- ✦ Fragments survive—in cartularies, parish chests, private collections, and in the lines between the words.
- ✦ The story is still there, if we know where to look.



A 15th-century chronicle of the Wars of the Roses. Many such records were ended abruptly, damaged, or deliberately left incomplete.

ARCHIVE NOTE

Many monastic and civic records relating to the Wars of the Roses survive. Many others do not.

When records were altered, removed, or rewritten, the truth was not lost—it was buried.

What remains is precious.
What is missing may be the most important evidence.

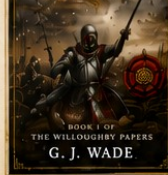


FURTHER INVESTIGATION

- SUBJECT:** The Battle of Towton and its aftermath
- PERIOD:** 15th Century (1455–1487)
- LOCATION:** North Yorkshire
- SOURCES:** Chronicles, monastic records, parish registers, inquisitions post mortem, land grants and confiscation rolls, royal pardons
- FOCUS:** Who lost, who survived, and how the record was shaped by the victors

**FOLLOW THE CLUES.
QUESTION EVERYTHING.
THE ARCHIVE REMEMBERS.**

THE MOLDWARP'S SECRET



EXPLORE THE STORY

In *The Moldwarp's Secret*, Henry Willoughby uncovers the fragments of a forgotten past—stories, charters, and a buried truth that refuses to stay hidden.

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BOOK II THEME

SPIES, SECRETS
AND DIVIDED LOYALTIES

The Jacobite Rising of 1745 and the shadows that walked both sides.

Britain in 1745 was a kingdom anxious for stability. The Hanoverian crown was secure, but not unchallenged. Across Britain—and within it—loyalties were anything but settled.

When Charles Edward Stuart landed in Scotland in August 1745, he ignited more than a rebellion. He exposed a country of divided sympathies, secret networks and whispered promises.

Intelligence was the lifeblood of both sides. Governments relied on informers, code breakers and intercepted letters. The Jacobite cause depended on trusted messengers, disguises and silence.

Some served for conviction. Others for coin, or for the simple desire to survive in dangerous times.

Behind every battle and proclamation lay a hidden struggle for information—where friend could become foe, and loyalty was never absolute.



Letters, seals and ciphers—tools of a hidden war where silence could be as dangerous as a drawn sword.

ARCHIVE NOTE

The Jacobite Rising generated an enormous trail of letters, reports and testimony.

Much of it was hidden, destroyed or altered to protect reputations and conceal divided loyalties.

What survives today offers only fragments of a far more complex story of loyalty, betrayal and hidden allegiance.



FURTHER INVESTIGATION

- SUBJECT:** The Jacobite Rising of 1745 and intelligence networks
- PERIOD:** 18th Century (1743–1746)
- LOCATION:** Scotland, the Highlands, England and Europe
- SOURCES:** Government archives, private letters, intelligence reports, trial records, newspapers
- FOCUS:** Who was watching whom? What information mattered? What was concealed—or deliberately misunderstood?

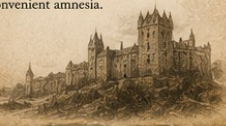
**FOLLOW THE CLUES.
QUESTION EVERYTHING.
THE ARCHIVE REMEMBERS.**

A NATION DIVIDED



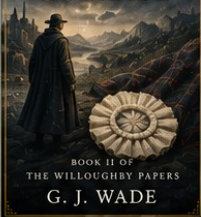
CLUES TO LOOK FOR

- * Hidden correspondence and invisible ink.
- * Disguises, aliases and assumed identities.
- * Divided families and conflicting loyalties.
- * Intercepted letters and code systems.
- * Gaps in official records and convenient amnesia.



FIELD GUIDE TIP

Look beyond the official account. In times of rebellion, governments shape the record. Seek out the marginalia, the trial testimony, the private letters—and the silences between them. That is where the truth often hides.

THE
WHITE
COCKADE

EXPLORE THE STORY

In *The White Cockade*, Henry Willoughby uncovers a web of deception, courage and divided allegiance, where honour and survival often demanded impossible choices.

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BOOK III THEME

ROMAN BRITAIN AND BOUDICCA'S REBELLION

*Empires rise. Tribes resist.
And the land remembers.*

The Romans arrived in Britain in AD 43, bringing order, roads, baths—and inevitable resistance.

For nearly a century, the Iceni, a powerful tribe in East Anglia, lived under the growing weight of Roman rule. Then came a breaking point.

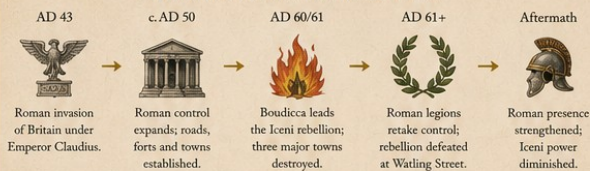
In AD 60 or 61, Boudicca—queen of the Iceni—led a rebellion that burned towns, destroyed colonies and shook the empire. Roman writers called it a 'rising'. The Iceni called it justice.

The truth lies not in the proclamations of victors, but in the soil, the objects they left behind, and the voices history tried to silence.



*Beneath every barrow, a story endures.
Objects speak where chronicles fall silent.*

A TIMELINE OF POWER AND RESISTANCE



FIELD NOTES

- ✦ Boudicca's rebellion in AD 60/61 was one of the most serious uprisings against Roman rule in Britain.
- ✦ The Iceni were based in East Anglia, with their stronghold at Venta Icenorum (modern Caistor St Edmund, Norfolk).
- ✦ Towns destroyed included Camulodunum (Colchester), Londinium (London) and Verulamium (St Albans).
- ✦ Tacitus and Cassius Dio provide our primary written accounts—but from a Roman perspective.
- ✦ Archaeology continues to reveal new details that challenge or enrich the ancient narratives.



WHAT TO LOOK FOR

-  Pottery and brooches that reveal trade, identity and daily life.
-  Coins that mark the reach of Rome—and the economic pressures of rule.
-  Burn layers and destruction horizons—evidence of violent events.
-  Inscriptions, altars and dedications that reveal loyalty, resistance or survival.
-  Burials that may hold the untold stories of those who chose not to be remembered.

THINK LIKE AN ANTIQUARIAN

Who wrote the history—and who lived it?
What evidence is missing?
What was destroyed, and what was hidden?

Which stories are we still choosing not to hear?

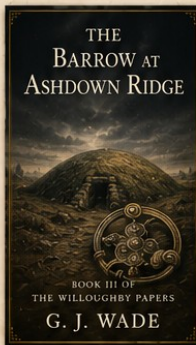
*Follow the clues.
Question everything.
The archive remembers.*

KEY ICENI FIGURES

BOUDICCA (*Boudicca*)
Queen of the Iceni.
Led the rebellion against Rome after personal and tribal wrongs.



PRASUTAGUS
King of the Iceni.
His death and the Roman seizure of his lands helped ignite the uprising.

THE
BARROW AT
ASHDOWN RIDGE

EXPLORE THE STORY

In *The Barrow at Ashdown Ridge*, Henry Willoughby follows fragments of Roman Britain and the Iceni rebellion into the landscape itself. From forgotten barrows to overlooked records, he uncovers voices that refuse to be silenced.

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BOOK IV THEME

THE FORTITUDE FILE

DECEPTION THAT SAVED A NATION

The greatest trick was making the truth believable.

In 1944, the Allies faced a brutal problem. Hitler knew an invasion was coming—he just didn't know where.

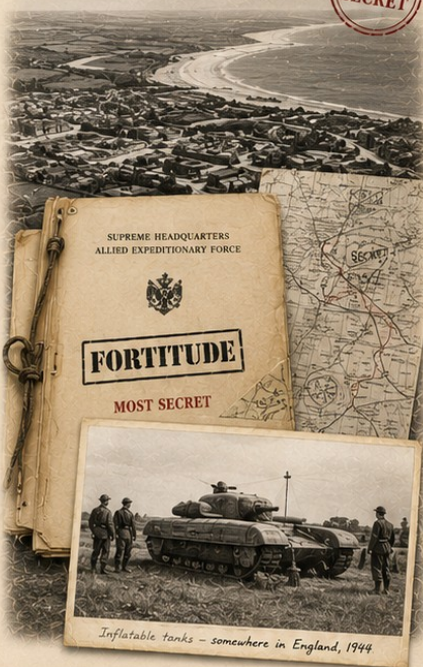
Operation Fortitude was the answer: a vast, carefully crafted deception that convinced the Germans the main attack would land at Pas-de-Calais.

It wasn't guesswork. It was theatre, misdirection and a flood of convincing evidence—radio traffic, fake armies, inflatable tanks, forged documents and agents who played their parts to perfection.

Fortitude North fixed German eyes on Britain.

Fortitude South, working with Operation Mincemeat, buried the idea of an attack in Greece.

When the real invasion came on 6 June 1944 in Normandy, the enemies best-informed generals were still looking in the wrong place.



Inflatable tanks – somewhere in England, 1944

A TIMELINE OF DECEPTION



THINK LIKE AN ANTIQUARIAN

Who benefits from this version of events?

What evidence is too convenient?

What remains unseen?

*Follow the clues.
Question everything.
The archive remembers.*



KEY FIGURES



DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER
Supreme Commander. Approved and supported the deception plan.



JOHN BEVAN
Director of MIS. Architect of British deception operations.



WILLIAM "TATE" DONOVAN
Head of OSS. Master of unconventional warfare and deception.

ON THE GROUND



From radio stations to road signs, every detail was designed to tell the enemy a story that was not true.

FIELD NOTES

- ✦ General George S. Patton was fully aware of Operation Fortitude and played his part—publicly confident, privately informed.
- ✦ Double agents codenamed GARBO, BRUTUS and TRICYCLE provided plausible reports that fed German expectations.
- ✦ Inflatable tanks, dummy airfields and convoy traffic created the illusion of an army that did not exist.
- ✦ Operation Mincemeat used a body, planted papers and a false story to convince the Germans the attack would land in Greece.
- ✦ Deception was so successful that German intelligence reported the Normandy landings as a diversion—well after Allied troops were ashore.



WHAT TO LOOK FOR



Phoney radio traffic and message logs that suggest a force in Kent.



Inflatable tanks, aircraft and landing craft used to build false strength.



Captured documents, forged papers and personal effects—planted or fabricated.



The story told to the enemy—and the quiet work that ensured they believed it.



How the truth of the invasion was protected by a wall of clever lies.

EXPLORE THE STORY

In *The Fortitude File*, Henry Willoughby uncovers the hidden records, personal accounts and forgotten objects behind one of the greatest deceptions of the war.



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“Deception is not the opposite of truth. It is the shield that protects it. When the time is right, the truth will land where it should.”

—Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery

BOOK V THEME

THE GLYNDŴR CHRONICLE

*A rebellion remembered...
or removed?*

CAN A NATION LOSE ITS OWN HISTORY?

In the early 15th century, Owain Glyndŵr led the last great attempt to win independence for Wales.

For a few extraordinary years he built an administration, raised an army and was acclaimed Prince of Wales.

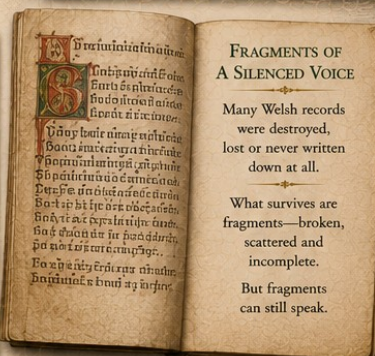
And then—almost as suddenly as he had risen—he vanished.

What happened next?

THE QUESTIONS REMAIN

- ❖ Who was Owain Glyndŵr really?
- ❖ Why do contemporary Welsh and English accounts tell such different stories?
- ❖ Why are so few Welsh chronicles from this period still surviving?
- ❖ What happened to Glyndŵr after 1412?
- ❖ Was he betrayed, did he die, or did he choose to disappear?
- ❖ How much of Wales's past has been lost—or deliberately left out?

*Strata Florida Abbey, Ceredigion.
A centre of learning. A keeper of memory.*



FRAGMENTS OF A SILENCED VOICE

Many Welsh records were destroyed, lost or never written down at all.

What survives are fragments—broken, scattered and incomplete.

But fragments can still speak.

STRATA FLORIDA ABBEY:
A CENTRE OF LEARNING

Founded in the 12th century, Strata Florida was one of the most important Cistercian abbeys in Wales.

It was a library, a school, a scriptorium and a refuge for knowledge in uncertain times.

During the rebellion, many monks and lay scholars were expelled or fled.

Manuscripts were hidden, moved, or—too often—destroyed.

What did Strata Florida keep?
What did it lose?

A KINGDOM IN THE MAKING

Glyndŵr set up a parliament, a legal system, taxation and a network of support.

He issued coins in his own name and used the title:

**"OWAIN REX
PRINCEPS WALLIE"**
(Owain, King, Prince of Wales)

For a brief, extraordinary moment, Wales stood as a nation.

The records that prove it are tantalising—and tragically incomplete.

Gwynedd



Powys

Ceredigion

Deheubarth

Seal of Owain Glyndŵr
used on royal letters.
c. 1400–1412

EXPLORE THE STORY

In *The Glyndŵr Chronicle*, Henry Willoughby pieces together scattered fragments to uncover what history has tried to forget.



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*"True history is not always written by the victors.
Sometimes it is hidden by them.
And sometimes, it is the land
that remembers."*

— H. A. Willoughby



WHERE SHOULD YOUR INVESTIGATION BEGIN?

History leaves clues in the most unexpected places. Some are written. Others are waiting to be found.

The past is not locked away. It is scattered—in archives, in landscapes, in objects, and in the stories people tried to forget.

If these pages have sparked your curiosity, here are some places to begin.



PLACES TO LOOK

ARCHIVES & LIBRARIES



National and local archives hold manuscripts, maps, estate papers, letters and court records. The British Library. The National Archives. Your county record office. Start there.

LANDSCAPES & PLACES



Walk the land. Stand where events unfolded. Earthworks, abbeys, roads and ruins often hold the memory that documents do not. The landscape keeps its own records.

CHURCHES & PARISH RECORDS



Baptisms, marriages, burials—and sometimes, much more. Parish registers, churchwardens' accounts and memorials can reveal lives that never made the chronicles.

MUSEUMS & COLLECTIONS



Objects tell stories. A brooch, a coin, a shard of pottery—each can open a window onto the past. Look beyond the label.

LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETIES



Often overlooked, often invaluable. Local societies gather fragments others have missed—and share them with anyone who asks.

OLD MAPS & NEW PERSPECTIVES



Compare maps over time. Boundaries shift. Names change. What was once important may have been forgotten.

A GOOD INVESTIGATOR ASKS QUESTIONS

Start with questions, not answers. The best ones are often the simplest:

- ✦ Why is there so little record?
- ✦ Who wrote the history—and why did they?
- ✦ What sources were lost, destroyed or ignored?
- ✦ What do local traditions remember that chronicles do not?
- ✦ What might survive if we look more closely?

Follow the questions. The answers may follow.



A PRACTICAL GUIDE

- 1 Keep a notebook. Record everything—sources, ideas, places, even dead ends.
- 2 Photograph or copy. What you find today may be different tomorrow.
- 3 Check and cross-check. Consider more than one perspective.
- 4 Respect the past. Treat documents and places with care. You are only the next custodian.
- 5 Share what you learn. History thrives when it is discussed, questioned and passed on.

THE QUEST FOR HISTORY IS A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION. ENJOY THE PURSUIT.

“The past is not silent. It speaks in fragments. It is for us to listen.”

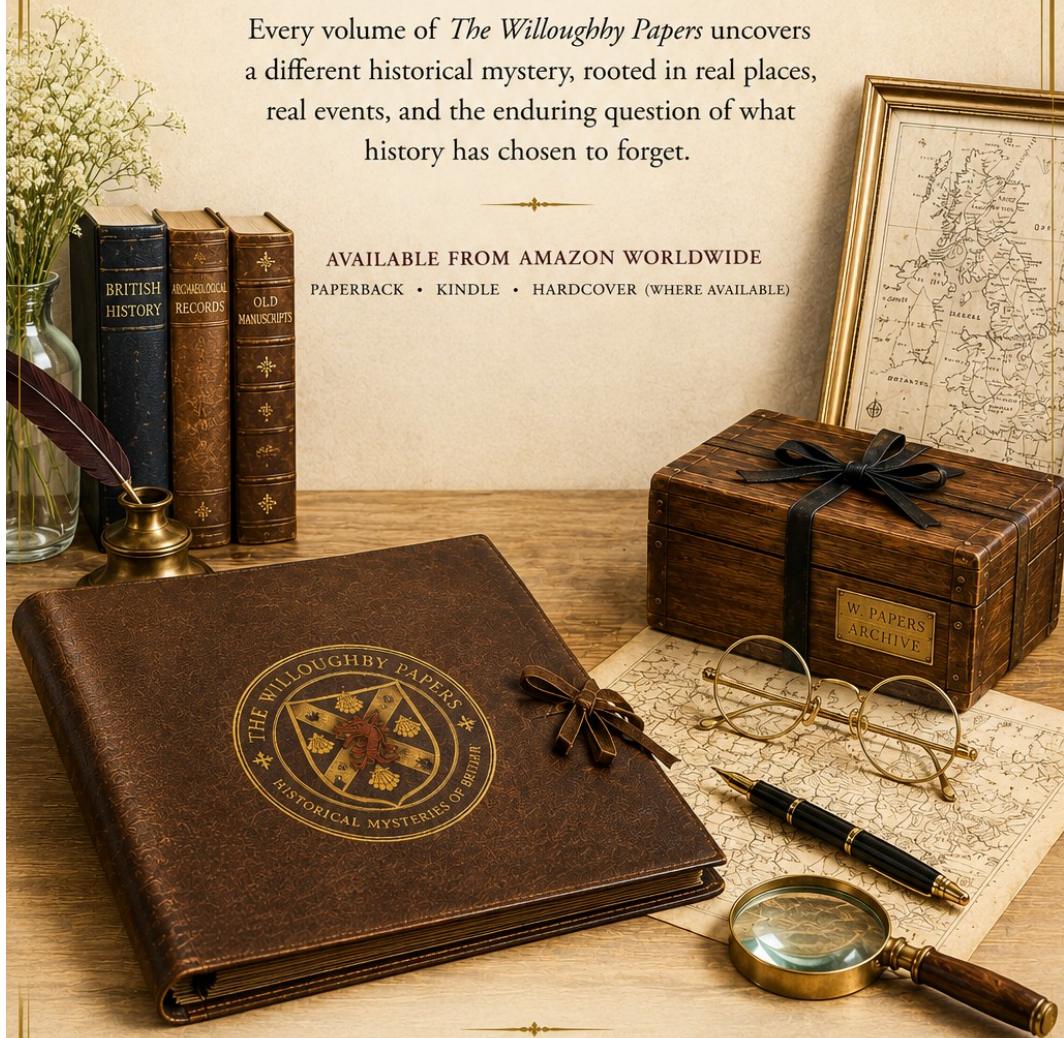
— H. A. Willoughby



CONTINUE THE INVESTIGATION

Every volume of *The Willoughby Papers* uncovers a different historical mystery, rooted in real places, real events, and the enduring question of what history has chosen to forget.

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Historical Mysteries - Forgotten Archives - Hidden Truths