

William Masterman (1722-1786) Solicitor, Political Agent and Member of Parliament

The only surviving son of Thomas and Catherine Masterman of Little Ayton in Cleveland, Yorkshire, he was born in 1722. His father, a prosperous tanner, died in 1727 bequeathing him lands in Little Ayton and neighbouring parishes. In 1743 Masterman, then living at Stokesley attained his majority and was granted cessate or double probate as executor of his father's will. At this time he was serving his articles as apprentice to a local solicitor. He went to London and was admitted a solicitor on 4th July 1745, his address being Old Southampton Buildings. By 1750 he had been taken into partnership by William Luke. He was a London solicitor with west country connections. He became connected with John Robinson, a secretary to the Treasury, who managed election business for Lord North and gained as a patron Lord Edgumbe. In 1764, he acquired or inherited the Trinity and Restormel estates in Cornwall. He continued his London practice for several years by then in partnership with John Lloyd at least until 1779. In 1774 he drew up the new charter for Saltash and thereafter continued to act the government agent for that borough. Occasional payments were made out of secret service funds to him on account of Saltash.

In 1780 he secured election as the member of Parliament for Bodmin. and at about this time he gave up his active work in the London practice which had provided him with a "very independent fortune". However, he came to the House too old (he was 58) to make his mark. He joined the silent ranks of the "party of administration" and was classed as a supporter. No speech by him was ever reported. In 1783 he went over to Pitt but in the general election of 1785 he lost his seat but continued to be involved in Cornish politics up to his death in July 1786. He was buried in Lostwithiel Churchyard on 4th August. After his death his properties, which spread over six counties, were valued at £125,000.