
Tales From the FamilyTree

Dedication

This story of my mother's extended family is dedicated to you, Harrison and Robin, our dear sons. May it illuminate in some small way the remarkable (not infallible) ancestors from which you come, give you pause for thought and encourage in you that which the best of your ancestors did — walk tall and embrace life with grace, charity, humility and wonder.

Contents

Introduction

‘Tales From the British Empire’ ferrets out notable ancestors of my mother’s extended family (Hester Spriggs 1905-2004), whose lives were shaped by the British Empire and whose actions shaped events of the day, in some cases, profoundly.

Why ‘Tales'

‘Tales’ is not an attempt to re-tell the story of the British Empire or even to relate any piece of that story in any depth. I leave that to the experts. Its focus is simply to shed light on a select group of ancestors and briefly describe the political, economic and social contexts in which they lived.

By telling the stories of our ancestors, I believe we bring them to life, see them as more than dry facts in a family tree. Rather, witness them as real people with talents, passions and faults, as folks with whom we could spend an afternoon, work alongside, share thoughts and stories around the fire.

That sense of connectedness fills me with…well, I suppose I’d call it comfort and more than that, with enormous respect and gratitude for all which they accomplished. My hope is that it does the same for you.

Tales, Part of Origins

‘Tales’ is one arm of my family website, Origins. The other arm of Origins is a family archive (under development), from which you will be able to download material and contribute material.

More Tales to Come

The next project, due for completion sometime in 2022, is ‘Tales From the Far East’ — the remarkable stories of my father’s extended family (Sydney Frank Bruce (1899-1970) during their years in St Helena, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and finally Canada.

Part 1: Britain Before Machines 1400-1600

Part 1 Highlights

- *The daughter of an aristocratic family elopes and enters the history books*
- *Carved alabaster effigies of my ancestors lie serenely in a country church*
- *A future king meets an untimely, mysterious death altering the course of British history*
- *A resourceful courtier breaches the Pope's grip on a key industry and invokes his wrath*
- *The courtier's son signs the death warrant of King Charles I, then leaves Britain forever*
- *The manor of a prestigious family becomes infamous for high level politics, manoeuvring and scandal.*

Inside Part 1

The Times

A Feudal Life

Tales

Haddon Hall

No Go At Ludlow

The Papal Pinch

Heads of State

Infamous Brocket Hall


The Times

A Feudal Life

For several centuries prior to 1600, Britain was fraught with wars including a civil war, political intrigues and power struggles between parliament and the monarch of the day. Life in Britain was a tumultuous affair, for those at the top as well as those at the bottom.

The Social Order

Historically in Britain, one's life was, to a great extent, shaped by the class system. What you did for a living, your access to education, whom you could associate with, your standard of living, where you could live, even the colours of your clothes (certain colours were reserved for royalty) were defined by the social order and the laws of the land.

The Upper Class

At the top of the heap was the peerage, a system of hierarchical and hereditary titles granted by the crown, titles which defined the status of its owner: Earl, Duke, Marquess, Viscount, Baron. Peers were always landed gentry, that is, they held extensive lands which provided income from tenant farmers. The income had to be sufficient to support a lavish lifestyle including a fine house in London and one or more country houses on their

estates and their land had to be the owner's only source of income. Business income was considered bourgeois, although this constraint eased over time.

The landed gentry, those with enormous estates granted to them at the whim of the monarch and confiscated just as readily, held the vast majority of power and wealth. The wealth was derived from the land through agriculture directly and from the fees of tenant farmers indirectly. Landowners also had mineral rights which, come the Industrial revolution and demand for coal, paid some owners handsome profits. Members of the landholding elite also held all positions of power. They monopolized all titles of nobility, the House of Lords, the High Court, the Clergy, military command and the position of the High Sheriff. Yet they were a tiny fraction of the population.

Economist Joseph Massie calculated that 310 of the largest landowners in Britain had estates of 10,000 to 20,000 acres and many of them were peers with the right to sit in the House of Lords for life.

Landed gentry were not always peers, but were nevertheless considered to be members of the upper class. Wealthy merchants could be considered for entry to the upper class if their family had held land and wealth for at least three generations. As well, untitled 'gentlemen,' 'esquires' 'clerics, and high-ranking civil servants and military officers were entitled to

socialize with and marry within the peerage. Each rank occupied a specific rung on the social ladder and came with a set of expectations which defined one's life.

Members of the upper class frequently assigned roles to their male offspring, according to birth order. The first born son inherited the vast majority of the estate and entered politics, the second born joined the military, the third born entered law and the fourth born became a cleric.

Precarious Times

When monarchs were king, so to speak (not constrained by parliament), the fortunes of titled peers lay entirely in the hands of the king or queen of the day. A court favourite of one monarch could find himself (it was usually a 'him') disenfranchised by the next. Should one fall into disfavour with his or her highness, the outcome could be heavy fines, confiscation of all property and titles, ejection from the royal court or protracted time in the Tower of London to ponder one's misdeeds. Treasonous acts got the axe.

The absolute power of the monarchy and the unpredictable, self-interested way in which monarchs often operated generated a great deal of political intrigue and backstabbing — people jockeying for the monarch's favour, plotting to destroy the credibility of competitors, negotiating favourable marriages for their daughters — marriages designed to grow the wealth and influence of the family and curry the favour of the

crown as a crucial ally. Life in the peerage was for many, a high stakes game requiring political acumen, social facility and an extensive network of family and friends in the right places.

How the rich got very rich…

Over time, as the powers of the monarch waned and Parliament became the true seat of government, the interests of the rich became protected by the rule of law and the laws of the land were largely determined by the House of Lords, that is to say, by the landed gentry. It was a self-serving boys club of immense advantage to its members.

Until the early 1900s, there were no income or inheritance taxes. What the landed gentry brought in, they largely kept. There was nothing modest about their estates. Many covered tens of thousands of acres, might incorporate one or more villages and required hundreds of workers to operate. For the landed, life was good. And for the tenants of the estate, life was at least predictable, barring crop failures.

Prior to 1700, agricultural methods were crude and inefficient. That changed dramatically in the 18th century. Animal husbandry upped the production of wool from one and a half pounds of wool per sheep to as much as nine pounds and he weight of sheep themselves doubled.

Crop rotation had long been practiced to allow fields to revitalize but the process was slow and

left one-quarter of arable land unused. Then the Dutch practice of planting nitrogen enriching crops in the fall was introduced and crop production soared.

About 1700, Jethro Tull, a Berkshire farmer, invented the seed drill, a device which eliminated the practice of broadcasting seed. Seed was expensive and broadcasting was inefficient. The seed drill planted each seed below ground at regular intervals, reducing the amount of seed required from three to four bushels to less than one and doubling and tripling crop yields.

The new agricultural methods might have raised the standard of living for tenant farmers dramatically, save for one thing — there was nothing in it for the land owner unless the land owner owned the production and production could be dramatically increased when the new methods were applied in large, enclosed fields.

The result was that landowners removed their tenant farmers and converted the small farms into more efficient large fields called ‘enclosures.’. It was a costly business for the owner, but the resulting profits made it unimaginably worthwhile. Enclosures carried on apace between 1750 and 1830, removing 6 million acres of arable land from the hands of tenant farmers and untold numbers of farming folk from agriculture.

Between 1786 and 1816 tenant farmers, particularly in Scotland and Ireland, were often dirt poor to

By the mid 1700s, the divide between rich and poor was unsupportable.

begin with. The enclosures left them unemployed and without a home. The resulting resentment among commoners is aptly expressed in this excerpt from a poem of the day:

> *They hang the man and flog the woman*
> *Who steals the goose from off the common*
> *Yet let the greater villain loose*
> *That steals the common from the goose*
> *The law demands that we atone*
> *When we take things we do not own*
> *But leaves the lords and ladies fine*

…then richer still

Many landowners found additional ways to add to their wealth. Some discovered lucrative coal seams on their estate. One built a system of canals and charged usage fees which returned a 40% profit each year.

The 3rd Earl of Burlington owned 42,000 acres of estates in Ireland…not once did he visit…

Those who were born as landed gentry often had no attachment to the land and might rarely visit the estate, preferring instead, the excitement of London. The 3rd Earl of Burlington owned 42,000 acres of estates in Ireland. Despite being the Lord Treasurer of Ireland, not once did he visit the estates or even the country. As the wealth flowed in, the excesses of the wealthy covered the countryside. Between 1710 and 1800 some 840 large country houses were built.

In the meantime, droves of displaced farmers and their families were moving to the cities to find work in the factories of the new Industrial Age. It was perfect timing, less so for the workers whose living and working conditions were abysmal than for the wealthy, who owned or held investments in those factories.

This enormous gap between the haves and the have nots multiplied ten-fold as the gentry and syndicates of investors redeployed their wealth into sugar plantations in the West Indies and into distasteful Far East trading ventures involving opium. These profits were made at the horrific cost paid in blood by African slaves and by millions of Chinese destroyed by addiction, profits effectively made at the business end of a British gun barrel.

The Working Class

Apart from a small merchant or middle class, the remaining population essentially lived to serve the rich. They were the farm labourers, household servants and soldiers who made everything happen.

Working for the rich was considered a privileged position, for if one meet expectations and better yet, pleased the employer, one was assured of long-term work Albeit, the work would assuredly be arduous, poorly paid, probably demeaning and, in the case of women, might well be dangerous. Worker rights of any description were non-existent. If a maid became pregnant, she was dismissed without a reference. She would never work as a servant again and barring unforeseen good fortune, she and her child to be would be reduced to living in a whore house or workhouse.

The ‘haves’ had complete control over their servant ‘have-nots.’ A better alternative for the ‘have nots,’ it would seem, was to work in the cottage industry.

The Cottage Industry

As there were no factories in pre-industrial Britain, goods of all kinds were produced by families. Families were contracted to make a particular item and did so within their own cottage, sometimes in a workshop attached to the rear of the cottage where several sub-contracted workers might be employed. People worked at their own speed with flexible hours in a friendly, social environment. Each

worker carried out multiple complex tasks requiring considerable skill and as such, derived a great deal of satisfaction and sometimes prestige from the work.

Workers were generally paid by the piece, that is, by the number of items they produced. The harder one worked, the more money he or she made. There were no overseers, they were able to employ their creative talents to the work and they could, to a degree, choose the kind of work they wished to do. It was little more than subsistent living, to be sure, but it was work on a human scale which reinforced family and community bonds.

Government

Much of the Crown's revenues were derived from taxes on the rich which largely went to support the monarch's lavish lifestyle and the military required to win wars in foreign lands. The budget to provide services to the people was minuscule, as were the services provided. Social good was left to people of conscience — the few wealthy who cared and religious groups.

Justice

There existed a significant body of criminal and civil law, however, the rendering of justice was hit or miss. The lower courts were presided over by lay judges who volunteered their services. Judges of the high courts were trained lawyers but the justice system as a whole was coloured by extensive

corruption, favouring, of course, those with money, title and influence.

In sentencing, judges of both courts relied heavily on a prescribed list of 200 offences which incurred the death penalty. For less serious offences, judges could levy fines, prison or ‘transportation.’

‘Transportation’ was the term used to describe a sentence of 7-12 years of servitude in the colonies, sometimes at hard labour. Stealing an apple from a cart was enough to ensure one free passage to the New World. A sentence of ‘transportation’ became more frequent over time as the Crown came to realize its distinct advantages: unlike prison, there was no ongoing expense; it populated the new colonies with settlers as there was no viable way to return to Britain; and the free labour helped incubate fledging colonial businesses, businesses that would one day be taxed and grow the Royal coffers.

Guilds

Merchants were heavily controlled by guilds. Guilds operated much like a union or professional college does today. In order to practice a particular trade, you must have served an apprenticeship and been accepted as a guild member. During the five year apprenticeship, the master was required to provide the apprentice with room and board, but little else. The apprentice, in turn, could expect

to work long hours under difficult conditions (poor light, cold, hunger) and be at the mercy of his master for the duration. Women were not eligible to join a guild.

Guilds served a very useful purpose. They ensured high quality workmanship and fair and consistent prices. However, by the 1660s, the expansion of trade and the movement to division of labour undermined the guilds which gradually disappeared.

Some guilds continued to operate for another hundred years. My 3x great grandfather William Knight (1757-1801), was a goldsmith in London. His son-in-law, William Spriggs (1776-1855) apprenticed to him as a chagreen boxmaker. Chagreen is a way of processing leather to create a pebbled surface. It was highly popular in the day for covering precious items such as jewelry cases and small chests, and for giving grip and a fine finish to knife handles.

It seems likely that both Williams made a good living as their crafts catered to the wealthy and in the mid-to-late 1700s, there was no end of wealth in the city of London. The proceeds of sugar and slavery, to be discussed here, made sure of that.

Right: A Georgian Chagreen drafting set. Note the characteristic pebbled surface of the leather. This set is identical to one I inherited. It may have been owned by William Spriggs (1776-1855) but was probably mass produced.


Tales

Haddon Hall

The Vernon Family 1350-1550

The little Derbyshire village of Bakewell sits amid picturesque rolling hills and small farms on the edge of the Peak District National Park. The park lies at the southern end of the Pennines, a range of high country running north-south that separates North West England from North East England. The first cotton mills of the Industrial Revolution were built on the streams emanating from these hills.

Today, it is bikes that roll off the hills and hikers who walk them. Tourism is big here for a reason. The landscapes are stunning and access is easy. Walking holidays are popular in Britain and the Peak District is a wonderful place to do it. The epicentre for all this activity is the little village of Bakewell.

On the edge of Bakewell lies Haddon Hall, the home of my medieval ancestors, the Vernons. Haddon Hall first came into my family in 1170, when my 26th great grandfather, Sir Richard de Vernon, married Avice Avenell, the heiress of Haddon Hall.

Feeling Connected

I am a fortunate man, for I am overflowing with grandparents. And so are you. I stopped to count once and quickly gave up. You see, all of us have two parents whether we like it or not. Each of our parents had two parents whether they liked it or not and so forth. Mathematically speaking, the number of grandparents we have increases by 2 to the power of n, where n = the number of generations we go back.

When I apply the above formula to the 26 generations since Richard and Avice, I discover I have accumulated 2 to the power of 26 or 268,435,456 grandparents. To give you an idea of just how many people that is, my grandparents, assuming an average height of 5.5 feet (folks were smaller then), when placed end to end, would stretch 36.2 times around Great Britain, no disrespect intended.

Some argue, my friends and family among them, that attempting to claim a relationship with someone who lived 900 years ago is a fatuous exercise, as staggering numbers of people may be related to any given individual who lived hundreds of years ago. As if to drive home the point, my cousin Bill tells me that David, his table mate at the retirement residence where he lives, is also related to the Vernons of Haddon Hall.

Frequently, I find myself putzing about in what I think is an obscure corner of my family tree. Then when I stop to check the connection to me, I am flabbergasted to discover they are my umpteenth great grandparents! And judging by the number of

claimants to my DNA and by the following facts derived from genetics research, I am hard-pressed to argue the point.

The facts are these: the amount of DNA we possess from our ancestors diminishes rapidly with each additional generation. By as little as five generations, we may have only 3% of each ancestor's genes and by the seventh generation, less than one percent. Yet despite the science, I still feel that sense of connection to my ancestors of centuries past, for good reason. If any one of those 268,435,456 individuals had made a different choice of spouse, I would not be here. I may not have much of their DNA, but each and every one of them allowed me to be on this planet. How can I not feel connected?

Vernons of Haddon Hall

The Vernon family called Haddon Hall home from the late 1100s to the mid 1500s. The family came from Vernon, France, in Normandy at the time of William the Conqueror and were known as de Vernon. As Norman nobility and a party to the conquest of Britain, they were granted extensive lands in the lush rolling hills of Derbyshire and neighbouring Cheshire – the Midlands of England.

Our family's entrée to the Vernon family came in 1510 with the marriage of William Fisher to Mary Vernon. We know little about William but his Fisher family is prominent in my family tree from the 1500s onward. Both the Fishers and the Vernons had the knack of doing well from the people they called their friends and importantly, from the

Haddon Hall near Bakewell, Derbyshire

carefully chosen marriages of their children.

The Vernon family seemed never in a rush to part with their wealth or position. On multiple occasions through the centuries, cousins married each other in order to combine two estates into one grand estate, doubling the wealth of the family with a mere two words -- “I do”. Power, influence and more wealth came with their strategically arranged marriages and connections. Among them were three High Sheriffs, two Chief Justices, two Members of Parliament, a Speaker of the House, two Treasurers of Calais (a British possession for one hundred years up to 1558), and a governor and treasurer to Arthur, Prince of Wales. Some were earls, dukes, barons and knights. You might say they were ‘plugged in.’

Sir George Vernon was the last male of the Haddon Hall Vernons. He owned a vast acreage and was appropriately referred to as ‘King of the Peak,’ a reference to his domineering character, wealth and power. King of the Poke, however, he was not, for he died without male heirs, a circumstance much dreaded in his day, for it meant that the family’s wealth and power would fall to the in-laws.

When he died in 1565 Haddon Hall passed to his daughter Dorothy who married Sir John Manners. The couple’s descendants are the Dukes of Rutland, who own Haddon Hall today. According to legend, Dorothy Vernon, a famously beautiful and kindly young woman, fell in love with John Manners. However, her father, the formidable Sir George Vernon, forbade Dorothy to see Manners,

Bakewell near Haddon Hall

perhaps because Manners was Protestant and the Vernons were Catholic or perhaps because John, as the second son, had uncertain financial prospects.

The couple, however, had a plan. During a ball hosted by Sir George, Mary slipped away through the garden. On the far side of a footbridge (still there today) Manners was waiting for her and away they rode to be married. This is hardly the script for a modern-day gripper but still, it was a touching love story that proved to have grip of another kind.

Novels, short stories, plays including a Broadway play, a light opera and a film starring Mary Pickford in1924 have all retold the legend of Dorothy and John. Along with his wife and daughter, the brother of the current Duke of Rutland lives somewhere in Haddon Hall beyond public reach.

For 200 years, starting in 1700, Haddon Hall lay vacant. The Manners still owned it; they just chose not to live there. They had other, more upscale castles at their disposal, with bigger fireplaces, fewer cracks and more doors. The hall must have fallen into dreadful disrepair but in the 1920s the challenge of bringing Haddon back to life was taken on by the 9th Duke and Duchess of Rutland. Today, Haddon Hall is touted to be “probably the finest example of a fortified medieval manor house in existence.”

Haddon Hall is open to the public. To approach the manor one walks through the arch of the designed-to-impress gatehouse and up the entry road through an expanse of grass field, past a

pond large enough to float the British Navy and up a rise to an extensive edifice, which to my ill-informed eye, seems much like a castle. To the left are the stables, converted now to a cafe. Ahead, is the manor's entry, its ancient wood doors with iron fastenings cast wide.

If you can, visit Haddon Hall. Find a you tube video on Haddon Hall narrated by Lord Edward Manners **here**.

Haddon Hall, Derbyshire

St Bartholomew's Church

A two hour drive from Haddon Hall is the village of Tong. In Tong, is a medieval church called St Bartholomew's. Centuries past, the Vernon family was the church patron, a nice way of saying they owned the church and all the people in it. Thus, a number of our ancestors are laid to rest here. Our guide, David Lewis, showed us about.

David Lewis was a good-looking, affable man in his 70s. He was dressed in a less than crisp sports jacket and casual shirt and had a manner that suggested he was equally comfortable in an office or the garden or just about anywhere. For an hour, David walked us through this medieval church of modest proportion, describing the life and the times of its parishioners.

In the middle ages, only the wealthy could afford to build churches and often it was the wealthy who owned them. When the title of the estate changed hands, the church went with it. Such was the case at Haddon Hall. During the period the Vernons owned Haddon Hall, St Bartholomew's Church was part of the package. Effectively, they owned its parishioners too, for they were largely tenant farmers, estate employees and others dependent on the good graces of the Vernons for survival. Attendance at church was mandatory, explained David. Any tenant who missed a service without good cause (e.g. death or the black plague) was removed permanently from the congregation and from the estate.

In the church are a number of sarcophagi in which I had a particular interest. They were my Haddon

Hall relatives. The Vernon family frequented the nearby church in Bakewell, but when they married into the Tong lordship, they chose to be buried at St Bartholomew's in the village of Tong. And there they were. Sir Richard Vernon (1394-1451) and his Benedicta de Ludlow (1392-1451), their son Sir William Vernon III (1421-1467) and his wife, Margaret Swynfen (1425-1471), and grandson Sir Henry Vernon (1441-1515) and his wife Anne Talbot (1445-1494). There lie my 16th, 15th and 14th great grandparents, who lived, loved and died near here over 500 years ago.

Their tombs are works of art, with elaborate stone carvings on the sides of each tomb depicting religious figures, events or family crests. On the top of each tomb lay effigies of the reclining couple, their hands placed as in prayer on their chests, the entirety magnificently carved in alabaster.

There is an unexpected resident in the churchyard – Little Nell, from Charles Dickens novel "The Old Curiosity Shop." In the novel Little Nell and her grandfather fall on hard times and move to a small village to become beggars. There, Little Nell dies and her grandfather sinks into mental decay.

Little Nell's burial plot is, of course, as fictitious as Little Nell. George Bowden, Vicar of the church in 1910, created the burial plot and entered Nell's name in the church register as a ploy to bring more tourism to the village. People came. However, the village economy seems to have dropped off again, as Little Nell's plot was recently moved to a more conspicuous location, right outside the church door.

St Bartholomew's was looking her age. She was yellowed and gray. On her north wall was a cannonball hole and impressions from lead shot, left over from the English Civil War of 1642-1651. The maintenance fund, it seems, has not been particularly robust. In the same war, her lead roof was stripped for cannon balls and ammunition and in recent years, stripped six more times by salvage thieves. A door on that same north wall was bricked up. It was once used as the final exit for the excommunicated. The tombstones in the churchyard, tilted at odd angles, have been defaced by time. She is what she is, St Bartholomew's -- an old lady from another time, a last vestige of a way of life owned and controlled by the very rich on the backs of the very poor. Yet even in her decrepitude, this old lady, still loved, still valued, continues to serve the people of Tong.

My 16th great grandparents Sir Richard Vernon VII & Lady Benedicta de Ludlow, St Bartholomew's Church, Tong

My relatives from the 15th century, with David Lewis, our guide. St Bartholomew's Church, Tong

Previous Page

Top Left:

Son of Isabel de Lingen. His mother (L), my 17th great grandmother, died 1446; her third husband (R), Fulke de Pembrugge, died 1409

Top Right:

Sir Thomas Stanley, husband of my second cousin 13X removed , St Bartholomew's Church, Tong

Bottom Left:

My 16th great grandparents Sir Richard Vernon VII & Lady Benedicta de Ludlow, St Bartholomew's Church, Tong

Bottom Right:

David Lewis, our guide at St Bartholomew's Church, Tong

No Go At Ludlow

Arthur, Prince of Wales

An hour's drive to the southwest of St Bartholomew's Church near the border with Wales is Ludlow Castle. Benedicta de Ludlow (1392-1451) is my 16th great grandmother and I assumed there was a connection between her family and the Castle. I know the Ludlows didn't build it, the Norman castle builder Walter de Lacey did around 1075.

Google tells me that the name Ludlow was attached to the castle before 1138. It derives from Old English and means 'a place on a hill (low) by loud (lud) waters.' Thus, it seems, 'de Ludlow' is a reference to the place where Benedicta's family lived, which may or may not have been the castle.

It was still called Ludlow Castle in 1501 when Arthur Tudor, Prince of Wales, Earl of Chester and Duke of Cornwall (just so you know, all three of those chaps are Arthur), eldest son of King Henry VII and heir apparent, moved in with his new bride Catherine of Aragon, a Spanish princess. It was a marriage arranged by King Henry and the King of Spain to cement the alliance between their nations.

Those were tumultuous years. England had been devastated financially and socially by the Hundred Years War (1337-1453). Two years later civil war broke out in England between rival factions of the long-ruling House of Plantagenet — the House of

Lancaster and the House of York. That messy business known as the Wars of the Roses carried on for 32 years, ending in 1487.

Enter King Henry VII, a Lancastrian (they got the last whack) who came up with the brilliant idea to marry Elizabeth of York, effectively joining the two houses and securing peace. Later, Henry upped the ante and arranged for his eldest son Arthur to marry Catherine of Aragon and secure an Anglo-Spanish alliance against France. Things were looking up. With Spain and Britain on the same side, the risk of French aggression would be considerably reduced. A state of peace meant Henry might even be able to stash a few gold ducets for a rainy day.

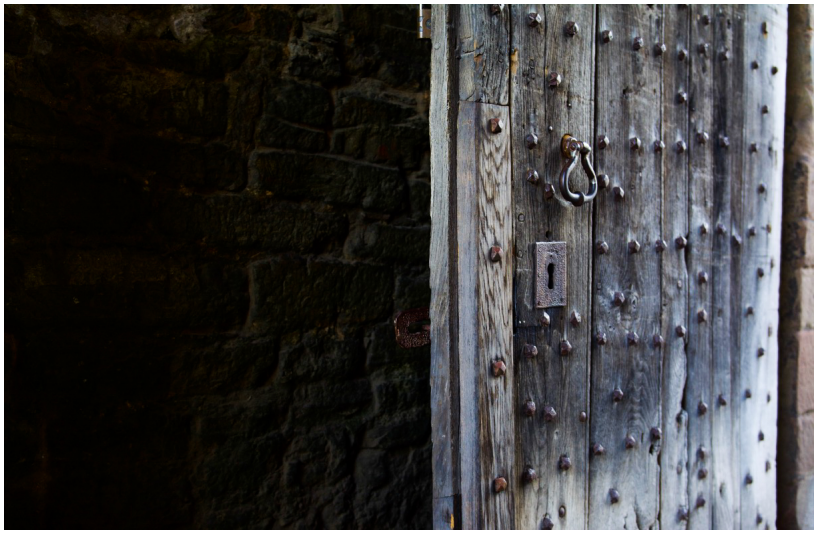
Hopefully he did, for it wasn't long before it rained. Arthur and Catherine set up housekeeping in Ludlow Castle but six months later Arthur died. The cause of death was either not known or not revealed. Either way, Arthur, a healthy, strapping young man was suddenly dead.

That put Henry in a bit of a pickle with the King of Spain who was counting on the alliance. Understandably, Britain and the rest of Europe were, by that time, sick to death (pardon the phrase) of blood, guts and rolling heads. Peace was in the air but marriages were needed to to serve as glue. Henry, resourceful soul that he was, quickly realized he had a groom in reserve — his other son Henry.

King Henry made the necessary arrangements for Catherine to switch horses. Her marriage to Arthur

was annulled on the basis of failure to consummate. Catherine swore up and down (pardon the phrase) that in the six months she lived with handsome, tall, affable, well-built Arthur, they never had sex. It seemed reasonable. Every one of Henry's courtiers nodded and agreed, as did the King of Spain.

Catherine lived to see another day, which, as it would later turn out, was more than two other wives of Henry VIII got to do. What she couldn't have known is that in front of her lay a lifetime of uphill sledding.




Please keep
to the
stone steps

Ludlow Castle, Shropshire

Ludlow Castle, Shropshire

King Henry VIII (1491-1547)

King of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales

Relation: father-in-law of 2nd cousin 6x removed of husband of 1st cousin 4x removed

Arthur Tudor, Prince of Wales (1486-1502)

Heir to the throne of Britain

Relation: 2nd cousin 15x removed

Catherine of Aragon (1485-1536)

Wife of the Prince of Wales; Queen Consort to King Henry VIII

Relation: wife of 2nd cousin 15x removed

The Papal Pinch

Sir Thomas Challoner 1559-1615

On our third and last day in Yorkshire (we could easily have stayed three weeks), we boarded a tour bus and headed for the North York Moors and the little town of Whitby on the east coast. It would be an eight hour day. That was my frustration limit for photos forgone to meet a schedule.

Guuisborough, in North Yorkshire, has a derelict priory built by King Robert the Bruce, to whom I must somehow be related. We intended to visit, as I held the feint hope that if I, a fellow Bruce, were to stand within the walls of this 13th century structure, I would assuredly be struck through the heart by a bolt of spiritual connectedness and this Bruce and King Bruce would be soul-mates forever.

Then too, somewhere in Guisborough was our ancestor, Sir Thomas Chaloner the Courtier (1559-1615). Now there was an interesting chap. The Chaloners have Welsh roots which go back a thousand years to William the Conqueror. Princes and princesses lay in their family tree. Their expansive estate in Guisborough was a gift from King James I for the military support Thomas's father, Thomas Chaloner The Elder, had provided in a successful campaign against the Scots. Curious, isn't it? The King of Scots and slayer of English on one side of the family and slayers of Scots on the

other.

Thomas Chaloner

Young Thomas the Courtier was well educated and intellectual, and possessed a magnetic, affable personality and noble bearing which allowed him to move in high circles. He was a favourite of King James I, who paid Thomas a princely sum for overseeing the education and well being of his son, Prince Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales. Sadly, for Prince Henry was bright, talented and popular with the people, he died of typhoid fever at age 18. His younger brother Charles became king, the infamous King Charles I who was ultimately beheaded for ignoring the people.

In 1580, aged 21, Thomas began making extended trips to Italy where he socialized with the nobility and with the learned men of the age. On his return, he quickly became a court favourite and married into an influential family.

Alum

On one of his trips to Italy, legend has it he visited the alum works in the Papal States. Alum was an economically important commodity in the day and Italy not only had high quality alum, it had plenty of it. Alum, short for ‘aluminum,’ was one of several naturally occurring salts. One form commonly used was aluminum sulphate. Alum was employed for preparing leather, for medicinal applications, as an astringent, as under-arm deodorant and most importantly, as a dye fixative in cloth.

The pope was no fool. He understood market economics. If you own all of something and everybody wants it, you will very quickly become filthy rich. He did — own it all and become filthy rich.

Thomas had a cousin named, yes, Thomas Chaloner, who was a naturalist and student of geology. Thomas the naturalist had noticed that where alum deposits lie, a particular clay is found and that the leaves of the trees which grow there are discoloured. He also discovered that there were several instances of this correlation on the Chaloner's Guisborough estate. In other words, they had the alum. They just needed to know how to process it and they would make themselves fabulously rich.

The Pinch

The legend goes (now largely dismissed) that when Sir Thomas visited the alum mine in Italy, he convinced two key mine workers (with hard, cold cash in hand) to hide in barrels and return with him to England where the men would set up an alum processing plant. The legend is probably just that, but Thomas did visit the Italian alum mines and returned to England with the idea to locate alum in England, break the Pope's monopoly and make a great deal of money. That's just what he did.

When the Pope was informed of Chaloner's success, he was outraged, issued a curse on Thomas and excommunicated him.

The Challenge

With no church services to attend, Thomas had more time to spend on the alum project. Setting up the processing plant had its challenges. The procedure to reduce the salt to a usable form was involved and time-consuming. However, eventually, the alum rolled out and the money flowed in. Regretfully, when King Charles I noticed just how much money the Chaloners were making, he took over the operation, earning for himself a dungeon full of dough and an equally dark place in the hearts of the Chaloners.

Heady Days

Still, the Chaloners needn't have fussed. Poetic justice arrived. The English Civil War, fought between the Parliamentarians and the Royalists had just ended in favour of the Parliamentarians, headed effectively, by Oliver Cromwell, who, one year later, as head of the military, dismissed Parliament and declared himself absolute ruler. Cromwell was no monarchist. His view was to eliminate the institution altogether.

Charles I was charged with treason for taking up arms against his own people and for looking after his own interests at the expense of the nation. On 20 January, 1643, the case was brought before the high court in Westminster Hall. The occasion was unprecedented. Never before had a king or queen been tried for a serious crime (just wait).

A large crowd gathered outside the hall, pressed against partitions built to keep the crowd at bay. Guards were everywhere in numbers. The

Sergeant at Arms rode into the Hall on horseback carrying the mace. Behind him rode six trumpeters. The trumpets blared; the onlookers fell silent. History was about to be made: "Hear ye, hear ye, in the case of ..."Charles was seated facing the members of the High Court. His heart must have skipped a beat to see, seated opposite him, as a member of the high court, Thomas Challoner (1595-1661), nephew of the Thomas Challoner who brought alum to Britain.

Charles was a less than cooperative accused. Throughout his four appearances before the court, he refused to answer questions, repeatedly stating that the court had no jurisdiction to try him. Despite Charles unwillingness to cooperate, the result was never in question. The high court found in favour of the Parliamentarians. Charles was condemned to death by decapitation. Much to his dismay, he was refused any final words and taken forthwith to the Tower of London. Seven days later, the outcome was announced: "guilty" and the death sentence declared.

Eleven years passed, Cromwell had died by natural causes, the republic had collapsed and King Charles II had been returned from exile in France and placed on the throne.

Retribution was in order. The surviving regicides (signatories on Charles death warrant) were rounded up and tried. Ten were condemned and executed. Three of the key regicides including Oliver Cromwell, (Thomas was not one of them) were exhumed and their heads placed on poles atop Westminster Hall. Cromwell's remained there

for twenty years. It was a classic case of 'what goes around comes around.'

What happened to Thomas? Well, with the Royalists back in the carriage seat, it was clear that discretion trumped valour. Thomas left England for Holland never to return. But alum was in Britain to stay.

Sir Thomas Chaloner 1559-1615

Courtier

Relation: 10th great grandfather

Sir Thomas Chaloner (1595-1661)

Regicide

Relation: 9th great granduncle

Heads of State

Politics was a tricky business. As a noble desirous of the monarch's favour, it could be extremely lucrative to openly express views supporting those of his or her majesty. Castles, vast tracts of land, titles and influence could be yours, well, at least for as long as his/her royal highness is around to extend favour. The risk was that you might fall out of favour or that the monarch would die and another come to the throne. In the latter case, a new court is put in place and quite possibly, the new court does not include you. In that scenario, 'adjustments' to your assets might occur. When there was a significant shift in the politics of the throne, you might well be viewed as a threat. Time to pack a bag and head for France or run the risk that the asset 'adjustment' might include your head. Consider the following series of events.

The Nine Day Queen

Following the death of King Henry VIII, Henry's only legitimate son, Edward VI, became king at the tender age of 10. By age 15, Edward VI was dead of tuberculosis. Henry's daughter, Mary (Mary Queen of Scots), a devout Catholic was next in line. However, Robert Dudley, 1st Earl of Leicester declared his niece, Jane Grey(18), great great grand-daughter of Henry VII, the new Queen. Her hastily arranged husband, Guildford Dudley(18) was declared King. Outraged, Mary would have none of that and organized her sizeable number of Catholic supporters

Paul de la Roche: Execution of Lady Jane Grey 1834

to march on London. Mary was declared the rightful heir, took the throne along with the heads of Robert Dudley, Jane Grey (remembered thereafter in history as the Nine Day Queen) and my relative, Guildford Dudley.

Once Jane was out of the picture, Mary imprisoned Elizabeth, her Protestant step-sister, to ensure she was no threat. Several years of Mary's reign was enough to remind the British populous that a return to Catholicism was a bad idea. Mary was dethroned, imprisoned and years later beheaded. The long reign of Elizabeth I began.

Sir Robert Dudley's son and good friend of Thomas Chaloner (Courtier), Robert Dudley, was also condemned to death by Mary, but he was pardoned by Elizabeth. The charming and talented Robert became Elizabeth's close advisor and some say, her longtime lover.

There were a good number of heady days to follow. Elizabeth I died in 1603. She was followed by catholic James I (and VI of Scotland). James in turn was followed by his son Charles I in 1625. Charles I was extravagant and uncaring and brought on the English Civil War which resulted in the Great Republic under the guidance of Oliver Cromwell. Once Cromwell's forces prevailed, Charles I was beheaded.

After Cromwell's death, his son Richard inherited the office but proved a dismal failure. A year later, Charles II was returned from exile in France and given the throne. Quite unexpectedly (not really), Charles II ordered the heads removed from 10

signatories to his father's death warrant. Thomas Chaloner (Regicide) was not among the beheaded, for he had wisely removed his head intact with his body to Holland where he remained for the rest of his days.

Not satisfied with removing heads, Charles II felt compelled to display them on poles placed on the roof of Westminster. Alas, Oliver Cromwell had died of natural causes two years prior. However, in a flash of creative thinking, Charles II ordered Cromwell's head dug up and placed among the others in the most prominent spot. There it remained atop Westminster for a full 20 years.

Although the heads of political prisoners and criminals continued to roll with regularity, Charles I

had the dubious honour of being the last British monarch to get the chop.

Type to enter text

Infamous Brocket Hall

The Brockets joined the family, when, in 1539, Elizabeth Brocket (born about 1522) married Thomas Fisher (1510-1556) to become my 11th great grandmother. The Fishers are closely tied to the Vernons of Haddon Hall (Thomas Fisher's mother was Mary Vernon) and they are also connected to the Chaloners by marriage.*

The Brockets are an ancient English family of the landed gentry. The earliest record we have of them is Thomas Brocket, born about 1363. Thomas married Dionice Sampson with whom he had two sons. They built the original Brocket Hall in Yorkshire. Their son Edward married Elizabeth Thwaytes who inherited a manor in Hertfortshire which also became known as Brocket Hall and which is the subject of this tale. A second connection to the Brockets occurred when Etheldred Frodsham, mother of Thomas Chaloner, the Courtier, married her second husband, Edward Brocket, in 1562.

Elizabeth I

---

* It seems the aristocracy of Britain, as elsewhere, operated largely as one big extended family, acrimonious, even blood-thirsty at times, but nevertheless, family.

Brocket Hall today

In the late 1500s, Sir John Brocket (1540-1598) was a popular and capable Hertfordshire MP, High Sheriff and after the ascension of Queen Elizabeth I, Captain of her personal guard. He and his family lived in Brocket Hall which he had inherited from his father, also Sir John Brocket.

It was 1554, a time of great political upheaval. It was a dangerous time for those involved in affairs of the royal court. Following the death of young Edward VI, King Henry VIII's eldest son, there was a power vacuum. One faction, headed by Henry Grey and Robert Dudley, placed Henry's daughter Jane Grey on the throne to ensure Britain remained a Protestant nation (and to ensure that Dudley had substantial influence with the Queen). Catholic Mary, sister to Edward and properly the next in line, was enraged and garnered enough support from the populous to dethrone Jane, behead Jane (17) along with her young husband Guildford Dudley (17) and take the crown for herself.

When Queen Mary usurped the throne from Lady Jane Grey, she promptly placed her step-sister Elizabeth under house arrest at Hatfield House, next door to Brocket Hall. Hatfield House was a familiar haunt for Elizabeth. She had spent much of the first 25 years of her life there, including this and a previous period under house arrest. To occupy her time, Elizabeth would often walk along the banks of the River Lea to visit John Brocket with whom she had a much valued friendship. I

Brockett Hall is now a luxury hotel and conference centre. Above: the grand staircase

Present day golf course on the Brockett Hall estate

One day, in 1558, after four years of house arrest, Elizabeth was sitting under an oak tree on the Brocket estate. A messenger on horseback from London galloped up, dismounted, bowed deeply and said “Your Highness, I bring news from London. You are the Queen. God save the Queen.” In gratitude for his friendship during her stay at Hatfield Hall, Elizabeth knighted John.

Lord Melbourne

The manor remained in the family until 1776 when it was sold to Peniston Lamb, 1st Viscount Melbourne. Lord Melbourne was a Whig (liberal) politician. His wife Elizabeth, Viscountess Melbourne, was one of the most influential political hostesses of the era. She also had an ongoing affair with the Prince Regent, who became King George IV on his father's death in 1820.

The Arrangement

It was an agreed upon arrangement (How do you say ‘no’ to the king?). Architectural changes were made to allow the Viscountess easy access to the prince, where he languished “in a nearby suite of his own design, with hand-painted Chinese wallpaper, a view of the stables and an exotic three-tiered pagoda bedhead tricked out in red-and-gold lacquer and golden bells.”

Arrogance

For some reason, the cuckolding prince and Lord Melbourne were not on the best of terms. The Prince commissioned Sir Joshua Reynolds to paint an enormous portrait of himself standing beside his horse, a gift to his mistress. The horse's rump is facing outwards — a middle finger to Lord Melbourne or perhaps a reference to something intimate. To the Prince's credit, it was likely he who secured the barony for Lord Melbourne.

Brocket Hall passed next to the 2nd Viscount Melbourne, who was Queen Victoria's Prime Minister from 1835-1841. The Queen was a regular visitor.

Different Strokes

The 2nd Lord Melbourne's wife, Lady Caroline Lamb, had an infamous affair with the well-known womanizer, Lord Byron, a matter which caused him much embarrassment. For one of Lord Melbourne's birthdays, Lady Caroline held a state banquet in the halls salon, at which she arranged to be served from a silver platter, naked.

Lord Palmerston

On Lord Melbourne's death, Brocket Hall passed to his sister Emily whose second husband was Lord Palmerston, twice Prime Minister under Queen Victoria. Palmerston held office as Foreign Secretary, Home Secretary and Prime Minister almost continuously from 1807 until his death in 1865, dominating British foreign policy at a time when Britain was at the height of its imperial power.

Distrusted

First a Tory, then a Whig, Palmerston was highly popular with the British public and became the first Prime Minister of the newly-formed Liberal Party in 1859. Although an astute politician and strategist, he was distrusted by the Queen and the political leadership.

Disgrace

The low regard Lord Palmerston was held in by his peers may have had something to do with an event which occurred in 1847, the worst year of the Irish Potato Famine. Palmerston owned an extensive estate at Mullaghmore and North Sligo, Ireland. Anxious to drive up the income from his lands, Palmerston decided to join other landowners by invoking the Enclosure Act to evict tenant farmers and improve agricultural efficiency and income.

Without the slightest regard for the welfare of his tenants who were already on the edge of starvation, he removed them from the land and shipped them like cattle to Canada. Here is one account:

“During the summer and autumn of 1847, nine vessels, carrying over 2,000 persons left Sligo port with tenants evicted and “shovelled out” from his Sligo estates. They arrived in Canada half naked and totally destitute. The city of St. John in the Canadian province of New Brunswick had to take many of Palmerston’s evicted tenants into care and, outraged, sent a scathing letter to Palmerston expressing regret and fury that he or his agents, ‘should have exposed such a numerous and distressed portion of his tenantry to the severity and privation of a New Brunswick winter .....unprovided with the common means of support, with broken down constitutions and almost in a state of nudity ..... without regard to humanity or even common decency.’ The graves of many of these unfortunate victims can be seen today on the old quarantine station, now a museum, at Grosse Ille near Quebec .

At age 81, the ever-dynamic Lord Palmerston was found dead on the billiard table He was apparently teaching the chambermaid the ‘rules of the game.’ Rules of decency were, it seems, beyond his purview.

The Playboy: 3rd Baron Brocket

Brocket Hall was not finished with entertaining the nation. Charles Nall-Cain, 3rd Baron Brocket, inherited Brocket Hall at age 15, while still at Eton. He became a playboy in the 1980s and a collector of classic cars, once owning 42 Ferraris. He was sentenced to 5 years in prison for insurance fraud in 1996. From that, like a Lord Byron reincarnate, he emerged a celebrity, earning a considerable sum from television appearances and a best-seller autobiography. Some folks just have a way of landing on their wheels.

Charles Nall-Cain, 3rd Baron Brocket

Lord Mount Stephen (1829-1921)

There was a Scots-born man who spent a good portion of his adult life shaping the very fabric of Canada. He is not a relative, but he did retire to Brocket Hall for more than 20 years — but not before he accomplished the impossible.

His name was George Stephen, 1st Baron Mount Stephen. He did not inherit the title. He earned it. George was born in a crofter's cottage to a carpenter and his wife in the highlands of Scotland. He left school at 14 to work as a stable boy, shepherd, draper's apprentice and in a wholesale dry goods house.

George's cousin, William Stephen, had an established wholesale dry goods business in Montreal, and invited George to join him. That was the beginning of George's meteoric rise in business, fuelled by his strong work ethic and extraordinary business acumen. By the late 1860s, George was one of the foremost financiers in Montreal. In 1876, aged 47, George was named President of the Bank of Montreal. In 1877, George and his cousin Donald Smith, brought together a syndicate of investors to purchase and build railways.

The syndicate's success at turning around the moribund Saint Paul and Pacific Railroad earned them the contract to build the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) for the Government of Canada. George was named as the CPR's first president.

The task of putting together and managing the project was massive. George's job was to find investors, keep them happy, repeatedly seek additional financing and manage cost overruns, the withdrawal of partners and politics. It took every bit of George's banking and business experience, powers of persuasion and sheer energy to keep the project rolling. Finally, on 7 November, 1885, at Craigellachie, British Columbia, George's long-time partner and cousin, Donald Smith, drove home the last spike. It had been an enormous gamble. George's entire fortune had been placed on the line (pun intended). Overnight, the gamble had paid off. George had risen from shepherd boy to the richest man in Canada.

Despite George's Scots heritage, he was far from tight with his wealth. He gave much of his fortune away over the years, notably to hospitals, both in Canada and Britain. In 1888, George retired to Britain, splitting his time between his London home and Brocket Hall.

George was twice married. His second wife Georgina Tufnell, had been Lady-in-Waiting to the Duchess of Teck, the mother of Queen Mary. Through that relationship Georgina became a close friend of Queen Mary and thence King George V, who were regularly entertained at Brocket Hall.

George was made a Baronet in 1886 — First Baron Mount Stephen after the mountain named in

his honour. He was the first Canadian elevated to the peerage of the United Kingdom.

Type to enter text

From Their Ranks…

This must seem a gloomy account of the rich of Britain during this period. For the most part, I believe it ought to be. The rich were outrageously rich. Their displays of wealth and their extensive direct and indirect involvement in slavery were unconscionable (more on that topic to come). They thought little of those who had little. They were arrogant, haughty, self-interested and spoiled. As a group, they wielded almost complete control of the British Empire which they did largely for their own benefit.

Yet there was one undeniable redeeming feature of the aristocracy. Apart from the self-interested, it produced individuals who were highly educated with the luxury of time and money to do whatever they wished, who chose to dedicate their lives to the betterment of society.

From the ranks of the aristocracy came lawyers, philosophers, poets, essayists, politicians, social activists, engineers, inventors, scientists and educators who made improvements which advanced, sometimes dramatically advanced, the common good. Their contributions helped lift society out of the middle ages and ultimately, into a new, more humane era of enlightenment which, to a significant degree, diminished their power and privilege.

Prince Regent

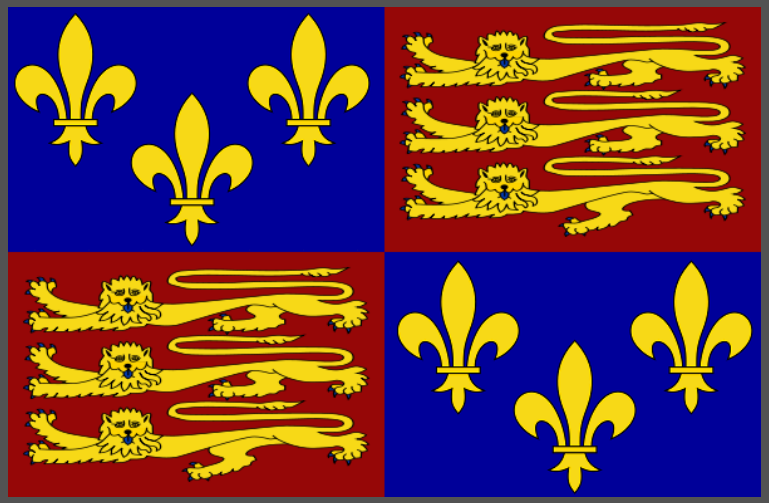
In 1820 crowned King George IV

Lord Melbourne

Prime Minister of Great Britain

Lord Palmerston
Prime Minister of Great Britain

Lord Mount Stephen
Industrialist, Canadian Pacific Railway



Sir John Brocket (1500-1558

High Sheriff of Herfortshire

Relation: 13th great granduncle

Sir John Brocket (1540-1598)

MP, High Sheriff of Hertfortshire

Relation: 12 great granduncle

Elizabeth Brocket (1522-)

Relation: 12th great grandmother