

THE 114th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL, AYNHO
ON WEDNESDAY 24th APRIL 2019

Present:- Keith McClellan – Chairman
Peter Cole – Secretary

1) Secretary's Report

Peter said that he had a very successful tour of Aynhoe Park House and then the rest of the old village for 15 people from the U3A Buckingham. It was a very interested crowd, and they didn't seem to mind that the House was being transformed for a very big wedding at the weekend. So Peter only spoke briefly there and showed pictures of the Cartwrights and changes to the House. After seeing the icehouse and the Church Peter spoke for a bit longer than he had expected in the back room of the Village hall. He then took the group to the Grammar House, The Square, Skittle Alley, Blacksmiths Hill and the Almshouses. Having been on his feet and talking from 9.30 am to 12.45 he felt totally exhausted, but had really enjoyed the tour.

He said that the next day he was going to the AGM of the Northamptonshire Heritage Forum at Boughton House, Geddington, which was between Kettering and Corby.

2) Keith introduced **Martin Sirot-Smith to talk on "The Sheep That Ate Men."**

Martin was in costume and made up as a predecessor at Sulgrave, Lawrence Washington, who had built Sulgrave Manor. He said I had been born in 1500 in Warton in north Lancashire, but nine generations earlier the family name had lived in a small place in County Durham called Washington, from which they had taken the name. Prior to that the family name had been Heartburn. In fact that name had descended originally from Scottish kings Duncan and Malcolm, both of whom appear in Shakespeare's Macbeth.

In North Lancashire my father and grandfather both married into rich sheep rearing families. In particular my father John married Margaret Kytson, whose family married into the Spencer family, who later lived at Althorp, and are still probably the second richest family in England.

The reason for their riches is entirely due to the wool trade. From medieval to Tudor times life was dominated by good quality wool. We are lucky in this country that the weather permits sheep to live outdoors all year round. Grass grows throughout, and this gives us long stapled wool. We became the world's best producers of good long wool, and we were doing well out of it.

Why did I leave good employment in Lancashire in 1529 and move down to Northampton? Well I was bailiff of the baronetcy of Kendal, which was held by Sir William Parr. He was uncle to Catherine Parr, the last Queen of Henry VIII, who actually survived him. He was also holding the title of Marquess of Northampton. I was a mere bailiff, a land agent looking after his Kendal properties. In me he thought there was someone he could trust to manage all his land and estates in Northampton. For me this was a major promotion. Yet in six months I leave his employ. Why again? Well I discovered that my cousin, John Spencer, is making an absolute fortune out of wool. I thought "I can use this family influence to muscle in on the wool trade." So I buy myself a town house in the St Giles district of Northampton, and I set myself up as a wool merchant. Then with the advice of John Spencer and help of my younger brother Thomas we decided to sell wool abroad to the textile and tapestry makers of Flanders.

Within ten years I had amassed a personal fortune, aided and abetted by two fortuitous marriages to elderly rich widows.

In Northampton I met an elderly man called William Gough, who was a mercer dealing in the importation of exotic quality cloth. It was just the sort of business to be in at this juncture of English history. Richard III had brought two things to England, peace and strong central fiscal government. This enabled men like Spencer and me to make our way in the world other than by force of arms, by way of trade. Not only was Gough a businessman, but he also had a very good position on the Town Council, He owned a lot of property in and around Northampton, and he also had a young wife. We got on well and came to an agreement that on his death I should take over all his positions and properties and marry his wife.

Two years later he died, and this all happened. Within three years of moving to Northampton I, Lawrence Washington, was voted Mayor of Northampton! Together with my great friend Thomas Kytson I set up Northampton Grammar School, which still exists to this day. I had the terrible Market Square in Northampton paved at my own expense. (It was only repaved just 9 years ago – when I do something it is always done well.) Everything seemed to be going swimmingly for me. Sadly the next year my wife and child died in childbirth. This was the most common cause of death for a woman in Tudor days. Two out of every five women died this way. For children it was even worse – out of every 10 children born 4 died in their first day, two more in the first year. Out of the remaining four only one would live to the age of 40, which was an average life span then.

But I needed a wife to bear children, look after the house, deal with the kitchen and servants, etc. So I soon married again. This time it was to Amy Pargeter. She came from Greatworth. This is the next parish to Sulgrave. And the link there was wool. In Northampton I was responsible for setting up the Wool Guild, and vital to that were the Moulds and the Pargeters. This had all been organised before the marriage. She was given to me to ensure control of the wool industry by my new father-in-law together with the leases of Sulgrave and Stuchbury. This was leased as most land in England was owned by monasteries. Many of these in Tudor times had been neglected with only a handful of monks there living a life of Riley. They just parcelled up land and leased it to anyone who could pay for it. In that very same year Henry VIII dissolved the monastic orders, threw the monks out on the street, took all their money, and then sold off all their properties. So I was able to purchase outright the manors of Sulgrave and Stuchbury for the sum of £324. So now I was really part of the land owning gentry. It is now that I built my Manor House at Sulgrave for myself, Amy and our 11 children. From then on until the reign of Elizabeth 1st the Spencer's and I and our descendants grew and grew and grew on the back of wool. By the end of Elizabeth's reign in 1603 my family owned properties all over the counties of Northamptonshire, Warwickshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. We also had properties in London and Antwerp. For the second time I was voted Mayor of Northampton, and the final accolade was when I was appointed by Elizabeth herself as her representative for the County of Northampton. I had made it pretty big. Just to show how I am directly linked to the first President of the United States of America, my great great grandson Colonel John Washington emigrated to America after the Civil War in 1656. He settled in Virginia and started growing tobacco. He was George Washington's great grandfather. He went to America because all the Washingtons had been Royalists, and when Cromwell triumphed at the Battle of Naseby he attempted to round them all up on trumped up charges. John managed to escape just in time to flee to America.

In the second part of his talk Martin illustrated with his projector the other side of the family history with a form showing the Key Pedigree.

You may remember that just after the start of Lawrence Washington's talk he mentioned that his father John had married Margaret Kytson. John's father Robert Washington and Robert Kytson both living in Warton, north Lancashire, became the power houses of the Kendal cloth trade, and did well out of it. Margaret Kytson was the daughter of Robert Kytson.

Robert Kytson's son was Thomas Kytson. His sister Katherine Kytson married Sir John Spencer. The Spencer line continues, and later is succeeded by John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim House, but his daughter Anne Churchill marries the son of Robert Spencer, who had been killed, so the Spencer name comes back again, and the 5th Duke of Marlborough, George Spencer decided in 1817 to assume the name of George Spencer-Churchill, and succeeding Dukes maintained this title. On 30th November Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill was born. So this Key Pedigree confirms that both George Washington, first President of the U. S. A. and Sir Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister, share exactly the same pedigree. Of course the Spencer line carries on to Diana who married Prince Charles.

We come back to the young Thomas Kytson, who Lawrence as Mayor of Northampton and a leading member of the Wool Guild linked up with to establish the wool trade with Antwerp. He became a merchant of cloth, in 1520 he becomes an alderman of London, and Sheriff of the City of London in 1533. He was Governor of the Merchant Adventurers in Antwerp, where he and Lawrence make a fortune in selling cloth. After being knighted Sir Thomas built a palatial mansion

Hengrave Hall in Suffolk. The Merchant Adventurers sole reason was to fund the building of ships which were sent round the world to plunder or bring back as much goods as they could worth millions. It was this investment of money from the wool trade that made London the commercial capital of the world at that time.

Sir Thomas made so much money that he lent the King a large sum to build the Navy. He becomes so rich that for 17 years running he was taxed by the King four or five hundred marks, which would be about a million and a half pounds a year in today's value. This great wealth was due to Henry VIII dissolving the monastic orders and selling off the land, thus creating a middle class that uses money to make money, and leaving the Catholic Church of Rome, which didn't happen in the rest of Europe, where the Church retained most land.

Thomas finished building Hengrave Hall in 1538, but died just two years later. His nephew Thomas takes over the business and continues it.

Now we come to the Spencer's.

The first one John was a grazier, renting land. By the next generation they have made enough money to lease Althorp. In the next generation by developing sheep and wool they buy Althorp. The next one Sir John Spencer marries Katherine Kytson. They are by now all buying up land. This part of England is known for its rich grasslands. His grandson Robert Spencer is created Baron Spencer of Wormleighton, the first baron not to have been created by force of arms. To show you how quickly they were buying up properties, between 1577 and 1633 they bought up no fewer than 21 places. It was said at its height that you could walk all the way from the Cotswold Hills to East Anglia without leaving Spencer land. Even today the Spencer's still control vast tracts of land. All this land has come through sheep.

Martin said that up til now he had not mentioned the title of his talk "The Sheep That Ate Men."

The rapid expansion of the wool trade led to a vast depopulation of the countryside. The Spencer's bought up all the villages, and if there were any peasants living there, they just threw them out, in order to have more sheep on the grass. Indeed Lawrence's son Robert Washington pulls down five local villages all now no longer existing. And even Stuchbury itself was demolished by him.

Sir Thomas Moore was so horrified by all this depopulation that he wrote "Sheep have now developed a raging appetite and turned into man-eaters. Fields, houses, towns, and everything goes down their throats." This is where the title of the talk comes from. It was happening all over the country, but our middle England was the most affected.

Many of the peasants were lucky if they were able to get on their bike as it were and go to a town to find work. Even more walked to a port and worked in the docks until they had made enough money to emigrate to America, Canada, Australia or anywhere that ships would take them. A chart was shown which indicated that Northamptonshire was the biggest offender in the loss of villages.

Keith thanked Martin for a fascinating talk.

3) Forthcoming Meetings

Wednesday 29th May – Victorian Inventors and Inventions of Northamptonshire by Jon-Paul Carr

Wednesday 26th June – The Life and Times of the Culworth Gang by David Hewitt

There are no meetings in July or August

Wednesday 25th September – Rainsborough, the Iron Age Fort by Andrea Gladden