

## Sawbridgeworth's own 'Who do you think you are?'

For those of us who are either current, or (as in my case) former Leventhorpe students, the centuries old family name kept alive by our school will probably remain etched in memories, whatever our age and wherever we end up living. So, who were the Leventhorpe's, and what did they do to inspire a school to be named after them, together with a number of historically significant commemorations in our parish church?

The first LEVENTHORPE to move to Sawbridgeworth, which was around 1400, was Sir John (d.1435). He was from Leventhorpe Hall which was located in Swillington Yorkshire and was married to Katherine (d.1437). Now here things get interesting because, John was one of the most powerful and influential figures of his day, rising to prominence through as historical records show, his 'loyal service to the house of Lancaster'. In fact, from the date of his coronation in October 1399 until his death 14 years later, Henry IV remained aware of the great debt which he owed to Leventhorpe, who was described as one of his 'most loyal and able servants'.

But the reasons for John's rise to power and his becoming the founder of the Hertfordshire Leventhorpe's, are shrouded in mystery. Why the younger son of an unimportant Yorkshire squire was to be singled out by both Henry IV and V to be one of the executors of their respective wills in company with great men like the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishops of Winchester and Durham and the Duke of Exeter, has been lost in time, but the degree of confidence and trust in him was extraordinary. His election to Henry VI's first Parliament as an MP was chiefly due to his 'exceptional position' as executor of the two previous kings of England.

Within Great St Mary's Church are memorials to the Leventhorpe family, starting with brasses of Sir John and Katherine, and continue commemorating the family 'dynasty' in Hertfordshire for several centuries.



Fast forward 200 years after the original Sir John died and we find another Sir John Leventhorpe living in Sawbridgeworth. He was a much less important historical figure than his namesake, however, from a reference to his military service in his epitaph, it's likely he was the " Captain Leventhorpe " who commanded a band of 300 Hertfordshire men between 1588 and 1595. He was also Sheriff of Herts in 1593 and 1607, 'knighted at Theobalds by James I on the 7th May 1603' and created a baronet in 1622, so not a complete failure..!

In his Will, Sir John directed that he should be buried in the South aisle of Sawbridgeworth in a vault among his ancestors, and that 'some small monument be erected to his unworthy self and loving wife and children with portraitures'. This instruction was carried out and a very impressive alabaster and marble monument to Sir John (d 1625) and his wife Lady Joan (d 1627) was built. In case you've not seen it, do drop in to the Church when you have a few minutes, and you'll find John and Joan resting above their 14 offspring, gazing across the interior of Great St Mary's Church atop their 'small monument'. In fact, so important is this monument which was constructed during the 1620's that a detailed conservation is currently underway. This is the latest in a series of major projects in our Church generously undertaken by the Friends of Great St Mary's, which is also being supported by a grant from ChurchCare with the Radcliffe Trust. The work is being overseen by Dr David Carrington of Skillingtons, one of the UK's foremost conservation experts. Anyone wishing to find out more about this highly specialised and truly absorbing project is very welcome to chat to the team working on the monument – they will be onsite until the middle of February.

Of course, what would complete the picture is to find a living relative of the Leventhorpe family. Can anyone help?

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