

# Historical Notes on the North Chapel of Saint Mary's Church Saffron Walden by John Read

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The North Chapel where we hold many of our services, contains much of historical interest. It used to be known as the North Chancel, and is referred to by this name in the Revd William Gretton's notes on the church repairs in 1793, where he gives it the alternative name of "Parish Chancel" to distinguish it from the South Chapel or Chancel, which was associated with the family at Audley End Mansion.

The chapel is dominated by three things, firstly the copy of the Correggio painting hanging above the altar, which was donated by Lord Howard de Walden in 1792. Secondly the magnificent stained glass window above the painting, which was erected in memory of the 5<sup>th</sup> Lord Braybrooke, who died in 1902 and his daughter who died in 1904. At the bottom there is a charming little cameo scene of Lord Braybrooke in his ermine robes kneeling in prayer with his wife and daughter and thirdly the tomb of John Leche, vicar from 1489 to 1521, during the period when the church was being rebuilt, and responsible for raising much of the money needed.

But there are other interesting things to see in the chapel. High up on the north wall between the two windows is an elegant memorial to William Cayley surmounted by the Cayley family coat of arms. A translation of the Latin inscription runs as follows: "WILLIAM CAYLEY esquire, eldest son of Sir Arthur Cayley, baronet of Brompton in the County of York, lies near this spot. His mother was Lady EVERILDA CAYLEY, daughter of GEORGE THORNHILL of Fickesby in the same county, esquire. He died the 16<sup>th</sup> day of August AD 1719 in the 19<sup>th</sup> year of his age."

What was this young man of 19 doing in Saffron Walden, so far from his Yorkshire home? A member of the Cayley family tells me that William enrolled at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, at the age of 17. As a Cambridge student far from home, it is plausible that he might have been lodging with someone in Walden during the university vacation in August. But with whom? The fact that the name of William's mother is given such prominence on his memorial, could suggest that his host was a connection of the Thornhills. Alternatively just below William's monument is a most attractive little monument consisting of a brass plaque on wood with a wooden roof, commemorating Mrs Fridiswed Robinett (died 1706), the wife of James Robinett. The Robinetts were a very prominent local family at this time and James' father had been the first mayor of Walden under the new charter of 1694. Could William have been staying with the Robinett family? This is all very speculative, but whoever he was staying with must have had something to do with the erection of this costly looking memorial in our church.

William, as the eldest son, would have succeeded to the baronetcy but for his premature death in Walden. The family were Royalist supporters during the Civil war, and Charles II rewarded William's great-grandfather with the title after he was restored to the throne. The title passed to William's younger brother, whose grandson was Sir George Cayley (1773-1857), a pioneer of aeronautical engineering. He worked over half a century before the development of powered flight, but modern aircraft design is based on his discoveries, and he actually designed the first successful glider to carry a man aloft.

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