

## The Ledger Stones at the West End of St Mary's Church Saffron Walden by John Read

(From the April 2015 edition of Saint Mary's Parish News.)



I often receive comments or questions about the group of ledger stones (memorial inscriptions set into the floor), which stretch across the floor of the church as you enter the nave through the west door, so I decided to try and find out something about those commemorated. The nine stones of this group commemorate people who died between 1662 and 1766, and are remarkably well preserved, considering the hundreds of people who walk across them every week. It soon became obvious from the church burial registers that these nine stones were not originally in this position, and had been moved during one of the major restorations of the church either in the 1790s or in 1860. The registers show that all but one of the burials had originally been in the chancel, the remaining stone coming from the north chapel. It would have been a great privilege to be buried in the chancel and it seems that to qualify for this, one would need either to be related to the Howard family of Audley End, be a member or wife of the clergy, or be very rich.

Into this last category came the Holgate family. Two of the stones commemorate William (d. 1672) and John (d. 1673) Holgate, probably brothers, and sons of another William Holgate (d. 1630), whose memorial can be found on the wall at the west end of the south aisle. The elder William's will of 1630 shows that he owned the *Rose & Crown* and *Angel Inns* in the Market Place, his own home in Cuckingstool End (top of the High Street), his son-in-law's house in Gold Street, some shops in the town, plus properties in Elmdon, Wenden Lofts, Chrishall, Arkesden, Great Chesterford, Hinxton, Duxford and Ickleton. Significantly, many of these he had

bought in his lifetime. His son John (d. 1673) was the principal beneficiary under the will. The other presumed son William (d. 1672) is not mentioned in the will, but the memorial stone says he was educated at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, and studied law at the Temple. This is probably the same William who, according to the Hearth Tax returns of 1670, had the largest house in the town. Also, when the heralds conducted their Visitation of the county in 1634, they concluded that the Holgates were entitled to the same coat of arms, and were from the same family, as Robert Holgate, Archbishop of York from 1545 to 1554. These arms are depicted on the two Holgate ledger stones. Archbishop Holgate was a protégé of Thomas Cromwell and the founder of Archbishop Holgate's Grammar School in York, but he lost his job after the accession of Mary to the throne.

Connected to the two Holgate stones is that of James Monteith (d. 1681) who had married Anne, daughter of William Holgate the younger. James Monteith is described on the stone as being from "the ancient family of Monteiths of Scotland".

Two stones connected to the Howards, are those of Colonel Thomas Walsingham and Sir John Osborne. Thomas Walsingham (d. 1691) had married Lady Anne Howard, one of the younger daughters of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Suffolk. Thomas and Lady Anne's daughter Elizabeth had married Sir John Osborne (d. 1713), third in a line of hereditary baronets created in 1629. The line still exists, and the present 17<sup>th</sup> baronet is the father of none other than George Osborne, the present Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is the heir to the title.

Also in this group are the stones of Rev'd John Crane, vicar of St Mary's from 1743 to 1766, Mrs Jane Drake, wife of Rev'd Richard Drake, Rector of Radwinter, Cornet Richard Mayo, a cavalry officer, and Edward Freeman (originally buried in the north chapel). I have been unable to find out any more about the last two.

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