

# Elizabeth and Francis Trentham of Rocester Abbey

by Jeremy Crick

*Part Three of the family history of Edward de Vere Earl of Oxford's second wife and the strategic importance of the Trentham archive in the search for Oxford's literary fragments.*

## **Introduction**

When the thirty-four year old Sir Thomas Trentham (1592-1628) inherited the manors of Rocester Abbey and Castle Hedingham upon the death of his father Francis in 1626, there seemed every likelihood that the fortunes of the Trentham family would continue to prosper. Their wealth and influence had grown with each succeeding generation and, being the first member of the family to be knighted (at the age of just twenty-four), Sir Thomas' future and that of his family must have seemed very bright indeed as he stepped into his father's shoes as lord of the manor.

How tragic, then, that Sir Thomas' untimely death only two years after coming into his inheritance began a process of decline that would see the complete extinction of his family barely a generation later. The fall of the Trentham family was so sudden and complete that their very name has passed out of all knowledge among today's inhabitants of the village of Rocester. Within thirty years of Sir Thomas' death, the Trentham family residence of Rocester Abbey over the previous hundred and twenty years would be demolished with no vestige of it remaining today. And it's particularly tragic that when the parish church was completely rebuilt in the early Victorian period, leaving only the tower, all of the many tombs of the Trentham family were destroyed.

From the perspective of this research – tracing the whereabouts of the papers and heirlooms of the Trentham family in the hope of discovering evidence of Edward de Vere's literary activities – the task of charting the passage of the remaining heirs through the various houses in which they lived their brief lives is a convoluted business indeed. And, though this task has met with no success as yet in its primary aim, the lines of enquiry that have been pursued and continue to be pursued have shed important light in some unexpected places that will be of interest to Oxfordians. Perhaps the most interesting area of research in this respect resulted from my discovery of two direct links between the Trenthams and the Cokaynes of Ashbourne which offered tantalising new clues to one of the most hotly contested icons in the intense struggle between Oxfordian and Stratfordian scholarship – the 'Ashbourne' portrait of 'Shakespeare' which most Oxfordians believe is the 'lost' portrait of Edward de Vere by Cornelius Ketel. This line of enquiry proved so fruitful that I invited fellow DVS member Dorna Bewley, who I knew to be interested in this portrait, to join forces with me in the research, the results of which have now been published in the Summer 2007 edition of the DVS newsletter.

The Rocester estate of the Trenthams achieved its greatest expansion under Francis – the years that followed his death only saw the estate gradually diminish as it was broken up and sold off. But the wealth of this estate is a very important factor in understanding the events that follow, and so I have put together a downloadable four-page pictorial survey of the Rocester estate at the time of Francis Trentham's death in 1626. Also published here (and for the first time ever) is one of the most valuable heirlooms of a Trentham heir – the exquisite portrait of Elizabeth Trentham, Lady Cullen, painted by the celebrated Restoration court painter, Sir Peter Lely.

## The first of two wardships

The historical record is sparse indeed regarding Sir Thomas Trentham's life – it has been assumed by local historians in Leek that he was awarded his knighthood for military service, yet no record has been found of this. Sir Thomas and Lady Prudence took up residence at Westwood Grange on the outskirts of Leek from the date of their marriage in 1620 and, a mere five months later, on the 22nd of September, their son and heir Francis (1620-1644) was baptised.

High up in the Staffordshire moorlands and about fourteen miles up the River Churnett from Rocester, Leek was one of Staffordshire's most important market towns whose prosperity was, in part, founded upon the trade in wool and the manufacture of textiles. In later years, the founder of the Arts and Crafts movement, William Morris, came here to study the town's ancient and lost techniques of woollen dying. Even today, the town still has a street named 'Sheepmarket' though the market itself disappeared long ago.

Since the days of Thomas Trentham (d. 1587) the family had invested heavily in pasture land to the south and west of the town and, when his son Francis purchased the estate of Westwood Grange in 1604, it may well have sprung from a desire to facilitate getting their part-processed wool to market – for it is notable that the pasture land of the Rocester Abbey estate was chiefly given over to grazing sheep and that, of the four mills that were in the possession of the Trenthams at Rocester, three were corn mills and one was a 'fulling mill' which is described in the OED as "a mill for fulling cloth as by means of pesties or stampers, which alternately fall into and rise from troughs where the cloth is placed with hot water and fuller's earth, or other cleansing materials."

In 1622 Lady Prudence gave birth to Catherine who was baptised at Leek but, sadly, was buried at Rocester within the year. And then, following the death of his father Francis in 1626, Sir Thomas and Lady Prudence took up residence at Rocester where they had so little time to establish themselves as the lord and lady of the manor. For the next record of Sir Thomas is again found in the Rocester parish register – recording his burial on 18 January 1628 with the note, "Eques auratus et venerabilis ille vir", which is to say, 'Knight bachelor, and a worshipful man'.

Perhaps the most interesting document to have survived regarding Sir Thomas is an inventory of the Rocester manor house taken on 12 April 1628. The only realistic conclusion that can be drawn from this four-page document is that, after his death, the house had been emptied of all its valuable furniture, pictures, tapestries, plate, carpets, books and family heirlooms. The inventory itself concerns itself exclusively with the various bed chambers, parlours and the kitchen - as well as giving a full accounting of the fairly substantial livestock of the manor's farm. It is a long list of household chattels like bedsteads, featherbeds, pillows, cupboards, old carpets, tables and chairs. That the larger communal rooms in the manor house had been cleared can be deduced by a comparison with some of the references in Francis Trentham's will in which he bequeathes to his son Sir Thomas all his books and "all those hangings which I have except such as furnishe the great dining chamber the mydle old dining chamber & the end chamber." There is no mention of a library nor of books, and there is no mention at all of a great dining chamber where we might assume all the family portraits had been hung.

The reason for abandoning the manor house at Rocester is easy to establish. As Sir Thomas' and Lady Prudence's son and heir Francis was just eight years old on the death of his father, he became a royal ward and, while the young Francis moved to the home of his new guardian, Ralph Sneyd II (d. 1643) of Keele Hall, his mother Lady Prudence returned to Leek having been Lady of Rocester for less than two years. Although widowed at the age of only twenty-nine, Lady Prudence never remarried and saw out her remaining years living in the manor house at Westwood Grange. This 750 acre estate provided Lady Prudence with a very comfortable living as her portion of the marriage jointure. It is likely that most of the land was worked by tenants and that the Grange's principal farm nearby the manor house was occupied by a tenant who was also employed to manage the estate on her behalf.

The royal wardship of young Francis is recorded in a later document (dated 9 June 1632) in which his great-uncle Ralph Sneyd transferred the boy's wardship to his eventual father-in-law, Sir William Bowyer: "Whereas our sovaigne Lord Kinge Charles (that now is) hath comitted and graunted to the said Raphe Sneyde & his assigns the Custody wardshippe & marriage off ffrancis Trentham his magestys ward (sonne & nexte heire of Sir Thomas Trentham knight deceased)...". The greater part of this indenture concerns itself with establishing that Ralph Sneyd had been charged with managing the estate of young Francis (in return for the annual payment to the Crown of £12), that he had the liberty to enter into any "graunts & indentures" concerning "the aforesaid hereditaments & premises ... without any suite to the law", and that the profits from this estate could be used howsoever he wished so long as the he took full responsibility for the boy's education and marriage. As will be seen later, this brief four year possession of Rocester Abbey and Castle Hedingham by the Sneyds would not be the last.

Of all the women who had married into the Trentham family, Lady Prudence has continued to fascinate local historians in Leek to this day. She was certainly one of the more notable Trentham wives though, like her husband, separating apocryphal legend from fact leaves the historian with precious little to record. With no indication that she had inherited Catholic sympathies from her Eyre family, one is left merely to wonder at the fact that on 8 September 1629 the widowed Lady Prudence was fined the considerable sum of £13 6s 8d under the recusancy laws. Having recorded the fine, the author of the *Staffordshire Catholic History (Vol XVIII)* then relates that "she conformed soon afterwards and attended the parish church."

But by far the most colourful anecdote that can be drawn from the historical record occurred when Lady Prudence was thirty-five years old and her son Francis a mere fourteen. The record is, "A list of the Trayned horse for the county of Stafford, taken at Stafford the fifth day of June and at Lichfield the second day of October in the yeare of our Lord God 1634" The combined list of these musters is quite comprehensive, noting the number of men and horses for each of the Staffordshire 'Hundreds' with the names of the principal landowners taking pride of place. Ralph Sneyd II (d. 1642) is there leading his men from the Pyrehill Hundred, and so is Sir John Stanhope (d. 1638), the son of Elizabeth Countess of Oxford's sister Katherine. Sir John's nominal family seat was at Elvaston in Derbyshire, yet the fact that he joined the Staffordshire muster under the Totmonslow Hundred list (which incorporated Rocester) is just one more indication that he may well have taken up the tenancy of Rocester Abbey during young Francis' minority – the Stanhopes also owned considerable tracts of land to the north of the Rocester estate. The entry that leaps out from this muster list, though, is the sole name of a horsewoman amongst the ranks of men listed under 'Curasiers' of the Totmonslow Hundred: "Lady Trentham and her sonne". Although two or three other mothers are listed here along with their sons, Lady Prudence is the only woman recorded as being a mounted curasier.

Perhaps I'm being fanciful, but I simply cannot rid myself of the image of Lady Prudence upon a charger wearing a gleaming breastplate and carrying a shield emblazoned with the three griffin's heads of the Trentham family arms like a latter-day Joan of Arc. It is, perhaps, notable that when her father-in-law Francis Trentham made his will in 1619, thirteen of his bequests refer to various types of horse (mares, geldings, colts and 'nagges'). With the exception of Lady Prudence, all the horses he bequests to the females are mares. Yet, the entry, "Item I gyve & bequeath unto my good daughter the Ladie Prudence Trentham my grey stoned Colt." is, perhaps, suggestive that she was a capable and keen horsewoman. This entry is also notable for the fact that when Francis made this will, his son and heir Sir Thomas had yet to marry the then Prudence Eyre. In any event, she may have been a dilatory church-goer but, as we will shortly see, Lady Prudence and her son Francis were certainly devoted Royalists who took a keen delight in the mustering of companies of armed horse and foot.

Of apocryphal legends, it is widely believed to this day that Lady Prudence lies buried in the foundations of what is now Westwood High School and that her spirit somehow inhabits (though not haunts) the place even though her burial at Rocester is clearly recorded in the Rocester parish register. The rumour that circulates is that her untimely death was the result of foul play.

## The English Civil War

Having purchased the royal wardship of the twelve year old Francis Trentham from Ralph Sneyd on 9 June 1632 by a special licence from the “Rt Hon Sir Robert Hanton, master of his Majesty’s Court of Wards & Liveries”, Sir William Bowyer of Biddulph Hall (also known as Knypersley Hall and situated a few miles to the West of Leek), lost little time in marrying the boy off to his own daughter Elizabeth two years later – the wedding taking place at Biddulph on 21 October 1634. Six years after this, on 24 October 1640, their only child Elizabeth Trentham was baptised at Biddulph.

It is this Elizabeth Trentham who, as sole heiress of the Trentham family wealth, has become conflated with Elizabeth Trentham, Countess of Oxford, by generations of Oxfordians thereby leading them to the misconception that the second wife of Edward de Vere was herself a wealthy heiress.

Two years later, in 1642, England was plunged into one of the bloodiest periods in its history since the Wars of the Roses – the English Civil War. After years of inconclusive skirmishing in which the advantage gained by one side in the conflict was nullified by gains by the other in a different field of battle, in 1649 King Charles I was eventually tried and executed and in 1651 Oliver Cromwell declared himself Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland. The horrors of the war and the puritanical terror forced upon the country under Cromwell set father against son and brother against brother – as we shall soon discover. Hundreds of parish churches were despoiled by the rampaging puritans with the loss of much of England’s funerary heritage and, in his fundamentalist zeal, Cromwell even outlawed the theatre and banned Christmas.

The royalist Sneyds, while holding on to all their property, suffered a half-hearted attempt to capture Keele Hall – the resulting fire in one wing of the hall leading to the tragic loss of all but a few documents from the Tudor and Jacobean periods that would otherwise be found in the Sneyd archive today. This fire and the loss of a mass of family documents was recorded by the Victorian John Sneyd in a reply to a professional genealogist whom he had engaged to work on the Sneyd pedigree – John Sneyd explained in this letter that he’d handed over everything in his possession. Had any of Edward de Vere’s papers remained at Keele when the Trentham estate papers arrived with the wardship of the young Francis, it would seem that they befell a similar fate to what may have been a more significant archive of Oxford’s papers which perished in the great fire at Wilton – the family seat of the Herbert brothers who ensured the publication of the First Folio, Philip Herbert being Oxford’s son-in-law.

There is no doubt about whose side Francis and his mother Lady Prudence were on as England was plunged into this bloody conflict. Aged only twenty-two at the start of the war, Francis may well have seen action almost immediately when, in November 1642, a Royalist force attempted to take the strategically important town of Leek but was, according to the official history (*A History of the County of Stafford: Volume 7: Leek and the Moorlands*), driven away. Sadly, no record has survived of the composition of the Royalist force in this encounter. However, as a prominent young Lord of the manor who could exercise manorial authority over a wide area to call men to his standard, the award of a knighthood to Francis Trentham at this time was almost certainly recognition of his loyalty to the crown in a district where sympathy for the Parliamentary cause was growing by the day. With his possession of Westwood Grange, Sir Francis would have been able to provide the Royalist force with an easily defendable redoubt where they could muster and gather their strength before launching their assault.

Earlier in the year, Sir Francis’ mother Lady Prudence had died and was buried at Rocester on 10 February 1642 at the age of forty-three. The rumours which persist to the present day that she was most cruelly abused before being murdered may well indicate that her son Sir Francis’ valour in his first encounter with the enemy was driven by a desire for vengeance and that Cromwellian thugs were responsible for her brutal death.

A year later, in December 1643, a Royalist force under the command of Lord Eythin was able to take the town of Leek but their victory proved short-lived. Such was the strategic importance of the town, by the following March a Parliamentary force had not only retaken the town but had also established a

new Parliamentary Committee (one of only three in Staffordshire) in order to impose their writ upon the moorlands – and the town would remain loyal to Parliament for the rest of the war.

It was not long before the Parliamentary commanders based at Leek concluded that if they were able to encompass the death of Sir Francis Trentham then the threat from Rocester – one of the last remaining Royalist strongholds in the moorlands – would be eliminated. When one learns the name of the commander who planned the ambush, it becomes clear that, actually, the man's prime motivation in what follows was utterly venal – he was none other than John Bowyer of Biddulph, son of Sir William and brother of Sir Francis' wife Elizabeth, who was now Colonel John Bowyer in Cromwell's army.

John Bowyer and Sir Francis Trentham had been brought up in Biddulph as brothers – perhaps Bowyer had bitterly resented the wealthy young heir coming into his family as his father's ward, seeing him as a rival for the affections of his father. One thing, however, is certain – Bowyer concluded that, with Sir Francis' death, the entire Trentham estate would fall into his hands once he claimed wardship over his sister's daughter, the four-year old Elizabeth Trentham, there being no male heir. It is impossible to know where Lady Elizabeth's loyalty lay – with her husband or her brother – but it is significant that before setting out on his final journey, on 11 April 1644 Sir Francis made out his will which indicates that he knew that he was about to face the enemy in battle.

On 15 April 1644, just four days after signing his will, Sir Francis was buried at Rocester at the age of only twenty-four. And less than a month later, according to *A History of the County of Stafford: Volume 7: Leek and the Moorlands*, Colonel John Bowyer received his reward for having encompassed the death of his brother-in-law – he was appointed Governor of Leek.

Sampson Erdeswick, in his *Survey of Staffordshire*, quotes a fascinating document which records the events that followed, and the apparent leniency of the Parliamentary Committee only makes sense when one knows that the "Mrs Trentham" in the document was the sister of one of the senior commanders of Parliamentary forces in the region:

“April xxvjth [26] 1644, it is ordered that upon Colonell Rugeley's desire, on behalf of Mrs Trentham [Lady Elizabeth, née Bowyer], Mr Anson, the lawyer, shall have libertye to-morrowe to goe to Mrs Trentham's house at Rocester, to advise and assist her touching her late husband's estate; he first givinge good securitye to return to prison againe to Stafford, upon Saturday, the fourthe of Maye next, and shall not in the meane tyme goe to any of the enemies garrisons, nor to any other place than to Rocester aforesaid.”

Once the widowed Elizabeth had tidied up the affairs of her late husband, she and her four-year old daughter Elizabeth then returned to her family home of Biddulph Hall along with the Trentham estate papers. She was the last member of the family ever to reside at Rocester. And with the Trentham heirs having moved so often in such a short time, the scattering among the various houses like Keele Hall, Biddulph Hall and Westwood Grange of their heirlooms like the family portraits and also of their personal papers is the reason why they are so difficult to locate today.

In his will, Sir Francis had named his daughter Elizabeth his sole heiress and yet, under the strict entail of Sir Francis' grandfather Francis Trentham, the family estate was to be the inheritance of successive male heirs and, in default of any male heir, it was decreed that the estate would pass down the line of successive younger sons. Prior to his death, according to the introduction in the published Rocester Parish Register, “Sir Francis ... tried to cut off the entail, by levying a fine and suffering a recovery, so as to leave all to his daughter, but his uncle Sir Christopher found such error in the recovery that he succeeded to the estate.”

Just a few weeks before Sir Francis' death, Sir Christopher Trentham (who had been admitted to the Inner Temple in 1615 and knighted by the year 1627), had been placed under house arrest at the Dairy House at Horton Hay on the outskirts of Leek, recorded thus by Sampson Erdeswick, in his *Survey of Staffordshire*:

“By the Committee of the Sequestrations at Stafford, March 26 1644, it is ordered, yt Sir Christopher Trentham shall hold the Dayry House for this yeare to come, paying fifteen pounds in hand and fifteen pounds more at Michaelmas, giving security for the rent, and repaying unto this committee before he enter it.’ The dairy house belonged at this time to Sir Christopher Trentham, and is in the parish of Haughton [sic Horton]. It was afterwards the property of the Biddulphs of Biddulph.”

It is a wonder that Sir Christopher Trentham – who surely knew the truth about the circumstances of his brother’s death – didn’t meet a similar end to his brother for frustrating the avaricious expectations of Colonel Bowyer regarding the Trentham estate but he seems to have died a natural death and was buried at Rocester on 6 August 1649, leaving two daughters, Winifred and Marie, from his marriage to Winifred, daughter of John Biddulph. Under the strict entail of his father Francis, the Trentham estate then passed to Sir Christopher’s younger brother William whose only daughter had died in infancy. When William himself died and was buried at Rocester on 18 Jan 1652, the Trentham line had finally run out of male heirs and the twelve year old Elizabeth Trentham became one of the wealthiest heiresses in the country under the guardianship of an uncle who now stood to profit greatly by having encompassed the death of her father.

### **The Cokaynes of Rushton**

Having at last seen the Trentham estate, comprising both Rocester Abbey and Castle Hedingham, return to Elizabeth Trentham, perhaps it was hardly surprising that Colonel John Bowyer concentrated more upon the marriage of his niece and ward than upon her education. Quite how the prospective husband Bryen Cokayne came into the picture history does not record, but in an extraordinary document dated 24 September 1653 when Elizabeth was just thirteen years old, it is possible for the first time to assess the value of the estate that her great-grandfather Francis Trentham had so adroitly accumulated – and, to the everlasting gratitude of Oxfordians, had been so willing to invest in securing the financial health of his noble brother-in-law Edward de Vere in the final thirteen years of his life. The document is a prenuptial agreement confirming that Elizabeth Trentham will settle her inheritance upon the sons of her proposed marriage to Bryen Cokayne:

“Know all men by these present that we Charles Cokayne of Rushton in the Countye of Northampton esq lately called Charles Viscount Cullen of the Realme of Ireland and Bryen Cokayne sonne and heir apparent of him the said Charles do stand and are firmly bounden and obliged unto John Bowyer of Biddulph in the Countye of Stafford in the sune of twentye thousand pounds of good and lawfull money of England to be paid to the said John Bowyer ...” After referring to a set of ‘articles’ bearing the date of 14 September, the document then sets out “The Condition of the present obligation” between the contracting parties, “that the true intent and meaning of that covenant or article and of the parties thereunto which concernes the present meanes of the said Bryen Cokayne for life and of Elizabeth Trentham his intended wiffe for joynture ... that in case the said Elizabeth shall within one yeare next after shee shall accomplish her full age of one and twentye yeares settle her estate in Rocester Alton Denston Quicksill and Combridge in the Countye of Stafford and in Henningham and elsewhere in the Countye of Essex upon all and everie the sonnes which shee shall have by the said Bryen and the heires males of the bodies of such sonnes respectively ... then immediately after such settlement the two hundred and fiftye pounds [presumably mentioned in the ‘articles’ and to be paid annually by Charles Cokayne] ... for addition of joynture and in full recompense of dower for the said Elizabeth ... is to be in addition for present maintenance of the said Bryen and Elizabeth ...”

There is a brutal finality to the way that the life’s work of nine generations of the Trentham family, as we have seen, came to John Bowyer in the form of a lump sum of £20,000 (worth around £3.5 million today), and of Bryen Cokayne who would soon become the Lord of Rocester and Hedingham simply by virtue of marrying his beautiful teenage bride – leaving the Trentham family effectively extinct.

There is evidence that, for Charles Cokayne, concluding this very expensive deal was something of a gamble – the Cokaynes of Rushton were a family that suffered substantial financial losses during the Civil War.

In a Private Act of Parliament dated 29 November 1663, three years after the accession of Charles II, Bryen Cokayne, 2nd Viscount Cullen, seeking permission to sell the former de Vere estate of Elmsthorpe in Leicester in order to raise urgently needed funds, explains, "...and whereas Charles late Lord Viscount Cullen, father of your suppliant, by reason of the unhappy troubles lost above the value of £40,000 and was afterwards forced to pay £10,000 more for his composition and thereby involved his estate and died before freeing it having first caused your suppliant to secure £4,000 to be paid to your suppliants sister Mary daughter of the said Charles for her portion...". And on it goes – as did the Elmsthorpe estate itself, eventually, to none other than William Sneyd of Keele Hall, grandson of the great Ralph Sneyd, and to a certain Thomas Cokayne – the indenture being dated 24 November 1673.

It should be pointed out, however, that the Cokaynes of Rushton had a well-deserved reputation for both high living and for profligacy. And it is particularly notable that Elizabeth Trentham seemed bent, if anything, on outdoing the Cokaynes in their excesses so much did she revel in the life of a noted beauty at the glittering Court of Charles II. And who can blame her really, with such wealth coming to her at such a young age?

The founder of the Rushton branch of the Cokayne family was Sir William Cokayne (d. 1626) one-time Lord Mayor of London. It was his son and heir Charles who was elevated to the peerage by Charles I right at the start of the Civil War, becoming the first in a line of Viscounts Cullen. The family seat of Rushton Hall in Northamptonshire, bought by Sir William, had been the possession of the Catholic Tresham family since the fifteenth century and it was Thomas Tresham who had built the extraordinary Triangular Lodge at Rushton in 1592 in a brief interlude in his adult life when he had not been holed up in Fleet prison for his indomitable work on behalf of the Catholic cause (such as harbouring the Jesuit Campion).

The day of the wedding between Elizabeth Trentham and Bryen Cokayne has passed into legend. I have discovered so many accounts of this day – both in prose and in doggerel verse – and the following is an additional telling of the story to the one I included as a postscript to the Trentham Family pedigree chart published with the first part of this Trentham family history.

"At one time or another, the wedding feast has witnessed many a strange and truly romantic occurrence, in some instances the result of unrequited love, or faithless pledges, as happened at the marriage feast of the second Viscount Cullen. At the early age of sixteen [sic: twenty-two] he had been betrothed to Elizabeth Trentham, a great heiress; but in the course of his travels abroad he formed a strong attachment to an Italian lady of rank, whom he afterwards deserted for his first betrothed. In due time arrangements were made for their marriage; but on the eventful day, while the wedding party were feasting in the great hall at Rushton, a strange carriage, drawn by six horses, drew up, and forth stepped a dark lady, who, at once entering the hall and, seizing a goblet 'to punish his falsehood and pride' to the astonishment of all present, drank perdition to the bridegroom, and, having uttered a curse upon his bride, to the effect that she would live in wretchedness and die in want, promptly disappeared to be traced no further.

"No small consternation was caused by this unlooked-for contretemps; but the young Viscount made light of it to his fair bride, dispelling her alarm by explanations which satisfied her natural curiosity. But, it is said, in after days, this unpleasant episode created an unfavourable impression in her mind, and at times made her give way to feelings of a despondent character. As events turned out, the curse of her marriage day was in a great measure fulfilled. It is true she became a prominent beauty of the Court of Charles II, and was painted with less than his usual amount of drapery by Sir Peter Lely. It is recorded also, that she twice gave asylum to Monmouth, in the room at Rushton, still known as the 'Duke's Room'; but, living unhappily with her husband, she died, notwithstanding her enormous fortune, in comparative penury, at Kettering, at a great age, as recently as the year 1713."

The reference in the above to a portrait of Elizabeth Trentham by Sir Peter Lely, the most prominent of the Restoration Court painters, initiated one of the most frustrating but ultimately successful lines of

enquiry that I have pursued in this present research. I began, naturally, with a visit to the National Portrait Gallery in London where Lely portraits are well represented. No record whatsoever. And I've lost count of the hours I've spent trawling the internet in the search for this painting. And then, on May 2nd this year, a fascinating article appeared in The Times about new research into Sir Peter Lely's 'Chiddingstone Venus' that suggested that the sitter for this portrait was not, as had been previously thought, Nell Gwyn, but that she may have been Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland. Yet it was a letter published in The Times a few days later by the Director of Collections at Chiddingstone Castle (who are selling the portrait at auction) that got my antenna buzzing. Nicholas Reeves' closing paragraph included the following: "In the absence of any alternative candidate for the painting described by Vertue, or of any evidence that Lely produced paintings of other deshabbillé royal courtesans...", we should continue to accept Nell Gwyn as the sitter.

Seizing my chance, being armed with an impeccable reference to Elizabeth Trentham being "painted with less than his usual amount of drapery by Sir Peter Lely", I wrote to The Times proposing Elizabeth Trentham as the sitter. The letter duly appeared on May 16 and, that very evening, I returned home to find a message from the owner of the 'lost' portrait of Elizabeth Trentham by Lely in my inbox. Just one week later I had the enormous pleasure of visiting the owner and photographing the portrait which I reproduce on page four of the colour insert. On the back of this painting is a note which says, "Portrait by Sir Peter Lely of Elizabeth 'the beautiful Lady Cullen' wife of Brien 2nd Viscount Cullen which formerly hung at Rushton Hall ... The house in the background may be Elmsthorpe, Co Leicester". The owner of this most valuable Trentham family heirloom is both a charming man and also a direct descendant of the Viscounts Cullen who can, thereby, trace his family line right back to William Trentham of Shrewsbury who died in 1420.

By 1660, Cromwell had died and a glittering new Royal Court was established under Charles II. Just one year later, following the death of his father, Bryen became 2nd Viscount Cullen while his wife Elizabeth became a Lady of the Bedchamber to Queen Katherine. The Cullens had already secured their succession with the future 3rd Viscount Cullen being born on 15 November 1658. And the Rushton Parish Register, on the occasion of the baptism of their second son, is one of the more notable parish records that I have found: "Trentham the son of Brien, Viscount Cullen and Elizabeth his wife was baptised Nov 14 and borne Nov 5 a little after three of the clocke in the morning being Wednesday 1663." How loyal that Elizabeth should choose her family name for her son's Christian name, and how unusual that not only the day but also the hour of the birth was recorded.

The most notable pattern in the record of the Cullens over the coming years is the mortgaging and selling of their estates in order to fund their lavish lifestyle. The first Trentham estate to be sold off for cash was Westwood Grange, on 28 February 1658, being sold to the notable Leek family of the Jollifes of Botham Hall for £2,200 (The Jollifes and Botham Hall will feature in the 'Ashbourne Portrait' essay that follows). Yet the most extraordinary document that I have discovered in my search for the Trentham family papers is an indenture, signed and sealed on the same day as the Elmsthorpe indenture, the 24th November 1673, in which Bryen and Elizabeth Cullen sell the manors of Rocester and Castle Hedingham to William Sneyd of Keele (1612-1695) and Thomas Cokayne, identified as a London merchant. This indenture (located amongst the Sneyd Papers at Keele University) is a fascinating document in that it gives an extremely detailed account of the extent of "the Honour mannor Castle and Borough of Hedingham alias Henningham alias Hedingham at Castle" as well as what remained of "the mannor of Rocester alias Roceter".

The following is a brief extract of an extremely detailed survey of the estate of Castle Hedingham:

"And alsoe all that Parke and ground called the Greate Parke to the said Castle called Hedingham at Castle aforesaid belongings or appertaininge conteining by estimation six hundred acres and all that Parke and ground called the Castle Parke with one orchard the garden called the Hopgarden with one dovehouse ... And also all that little parke and ground with the meadow called Little Parke Meade and Constable Meadowe to the said Castle of Hedingham ... And all and singular those other lands tenements franchises libertyes profitts comodities and hereditaments whatsoever scituate lieinge or

beings in or within the parishes of Hedingham at Castle and Hedingham Sybley in the said County of Essex ... which late were the possession and inheritance of Edward Earle of Oxenford. And also all those mannors messuages lands tenements and rents called Grayes and Prayors alias Bowers Hall pevers and peppers in Hedingham Sybley ... late parcell of the possession and inheritance of the said Edward Earle of Oxenford together with those rents called Bouchers alias Bouerchers rents in Hedingham Sybley aforesaid And all other the lands tenements ffranchises libertyes profitts ... within the Villages feilds parishes or hamblets of Hedingham at Castle and Hedingham Sybley ... late parcell of the possession and inheritance of the said Edward Earle of Oxenford And alsoe all that ground scyte walke circuit and precinct of all that howse and Pryorie of the blessed Mary of St James and the holy crosse of Hedingham ad Castrum ... And all that the Church Steeple and Churchyard of the same late Pryorie And also all those messuages howses edifices barnes Granges dovehouses ... of the said late Pryorie ... late the possession and inheritance of the said Edward Earle of Oxenford And alsoe all those Rectories of the parish Churches of Hedingham ad Castrum and Gosfield ... And those advowsons and patronages of the Rectoryes and Viccaradges of Hedingham ad Castrum and Gosfield ...”

One fascinating discovery for Oxfordians found within this indenture is the fact that Thomas Cokayne who bought the manors of Rocester and Castle Hedingham, along with William Sneyd, represented the much older and senior branch of his family – the Cokaynes of Ashbourne. It was this discovery that prompted me to begin a separate line of research into the provenance of the so-called ‘Ashbourne’ portrait of Shakespeare – a portrait which is broadly believed in Oxfordian circles to be the lost portrait of Edward de Vere by Cornelius Ketel. This research, undertaken jointly with fellow DVS member Dorna Bewley, has brought some significant new evidence to light which has now been published by the De Vere Society.

As previously noted, on the same day that Bryen Cokayne Lord Viscount Cullen and his wife Elizabeth sold the manors of Rocester and Castle Hedingham to William Sneyd and Thomas Cokayne, they also sold the manor of Elmsthorpe (formerly part of the inheritance of Edward de Vere from his father, the 16th Earl of Oxford) to the same two gentlemen. This second lengthy indenture among the Sneyd Papers at Keele University can be read alongside a letter to William Sneyd (dated 8 March 1676) in the same archive in which Bryen Cokayne refers to the Act of Parliament already cited and adds, “By this settlement mencioned in the Bill you and Mr Thomas Cokayne have an interest in Elmsthorpe (which in this Bill I desire may bee disengaged from the Entayle) and Rushton for 99 yeares to raise porcions to be payd to them [his daughters] after my death if I shall not dispose of them in Marriage in my lifetime.”

And so, within a mere twelve years of coming into her inheritance at the age of twenty-one, Elizabeth Trentham and her husband Bryen Cokayne had not only sold off the entire Rocester estate including the manor of Rocester Abbey and the manor of Westwood Grange, but also the manor of Castle Hedingham, the manor of Elmsthorpe and had, furthermore, mortgaged the Cokayne family seat of Rushton Hall as well. Maintaining one’s position as one whose “loveliness was a theme for the gallants at Court” was clearly an expensive business.

Prior to selling and mortgaging the manors described above, there is evidence that Bryen Cokayne had already squeezed out of the estates as much ready cash as he could raise. One of his first acts upon inheriting from his father in 1661 was to travel up to Rocester where he appointed Jonathan Woodnoth his land agent in order to manage the rents and land sales from the 2,000 acre estate. He then gave instructions for the old abbey buildings and the Elizabethan manor house within the precinct of the former abbey to be demolished and the valuable stone to be sold off. The Hearth Tax Returns of 1666 make interesting, if not a little confusing, reading. “Rocester Hall” is listed as being divided between two tenants, John Adams and Richard Sale and they are taxed for fourteen and ten hearths repectively. The odd thing about this list is that it describes the taxable hearths as “in Rocester Hall which is clearly taken downe.” How they counted twenty-four hearths in a demolished building complex is uncertain.

In a letter dated 12 October 1663 to Walter Chetwynd, the Staffordshire Sheriff who was organising a county muster, Jonathan Woodnoth explains in vivid detail why “I have a particular order from his

Lordship [Lord Cullen] not to send in any” horses. He goes on to explain that, although his master Lord Cullen is the lord of the Rocester manor, “Mrs Bowyer [widow of Sir ffrancis Trentham who had since married her second cousin John Bowyer] his Lady’s mother hath a much greater revenue by dowry besides what she purchased from my Lord and she never yet since the King came in contributed one penny...” and that “My Lord Cullen hath sold eight thousand pounds worth of land in this county to Mrs Bowyer and others.”

The three corn mills and the fulling mill at Rocester were also sold off. In leasehold deeds dating from 1669 it is clear that Nicholas Mynors of Uttoxeter had taken possession of these from Thomas Henshawe – a direct descendant of George Henshawe who was both servant and signatory of the will of ffrancis Trentham, brother-in law of Edward de Vere.

Although I have yet to discover any documentary evidence to support this proposition, I have no qualms about advancing the notion that it was Bryen Cokayne 2nd Viscount Cullen who ordered a similar act of demolition of everything visible in Burghley’s 1592 survey of the buildings at Castle Hedingham (see last issue) except for the central keep, which he ordered upon the abbey and manor house at Rocester – in the latter case leaving not a single stone standing above the ground. The rate at which the Cullens divested themselves of their joint inheritance, and the reckless destruction they wrought for short-term profit is, quite simply, staggering.

The record is unclear quite when Bryen Cokayne Viscount Cullen died though his ancestor, the great Victorian genealogist GE Cokayne, made extensive notes from the Rushton parish register and recorded the 2nd Viscount’s passing thus: “Burials: N.B. a large blank is left in the Register from 3 Feb 1687/8 to Aug 5 1688 in which it is to be presumed that the then Rector intended to insert the burial of Bryen, 2nd Viscount Cullen who died.”

His widow Elizabeth, great-grandniece of Elizabeth Countess of Oxford, died at the great age of seventy-three on 30 November 1713. She was buried at St Peter’s Rushton in Northamptonshire and, when this church was demolished, her gravestone – alone of all the Cokayne memorials – was removed to All Saints Church, Rushton where it lies today. It reads:

“In hopes of a blessed resurrection

Here lyeth the remains of the

Lady Elizabeth Cullen

relique of Bryan Lord Viscount Cullen

She was daughter and sole heir of Sir Francis Trentham  
of Staffordshire and from him derived the Rich Lordship of Rocester  
in that County, and of Castle Hennigham in the county of Essex

Though this was a fair and valuable Heritage yet that which  
came to her from the Lord was more fair and much more valuable

viz. 3 sons and 2 daughters

Charles, Trentham, George

Elizabeth and Mary

This Lady was left a Widdow about the 50th year of her age and continued a Widdow indeed above 25 years; when having for so long a time been a bright example of fervent piety to her God, of tender affection to her children and of real charity to the poor, she began to breathe after another Spouse, who might eternaly reward her for her good and faithful service here: and she entered into his joy and was Received into his Embraces on the 30th day of November, Anno Domini 1713