



# *The Quarterly Journal*

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**Vachell, of Coley, Reading.**

*By Rev. G. P. Crawfurd, Curate of St. Mary's,  
Reading.*

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*(Continued from Vol. III., page 68.)*

Before passing to the successor of Thomas Vachell it should be remarked that a family of the ancient name, originally of Bath, towards which place some of the Vachells migrated on their abandonment of Coley, but now established at Cardiff, are accustomed to trace their descent from one of his sons, William Vachell named in the pedigree as baptized in St. Mary's, Reading, 26 Jan. 1671. One of their earliest ancestors was another William Vachell, who in 1776 and 1777 occupied a position of some importance at Bath as 'Pumper' or lessee at a large rent of the celebrated Pump Rooms. He died 26 Nov. 1789, at Bath, and his death is recorded in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. His portrait, showing a fine and handsome man decorated with the ponderous wig of that period, is preserved at the present day by his descendants. His eldest son, still another William, was one of those who on the occasion of a dinner at the

house of Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1776 addressed a round-robin to Dr. Johnson, concerning the epitaph which the latter was composing for the monument of Oliver Goldsmith. These gentlemen ventured to suggest to the great Doctor both that the epitaph should be composed in English and also that it should recognize the deceased with greater exactness as a writer, particularly as a poet. A facsimile of the round-robin is produced in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, edited by G. B. Hill, D.C.L. (1887); and in it the signature of William Vachell appears next to that of Sir Joshua Reynolds. It would be outside the scope of this notice, dealing with the family at Coley, to treat in detail the descent of the family at Cardiff and to test its point of annexation with the main stock; but genealogists and readers who have followed this memoir with any interest will be glad to be apprised of its existence.

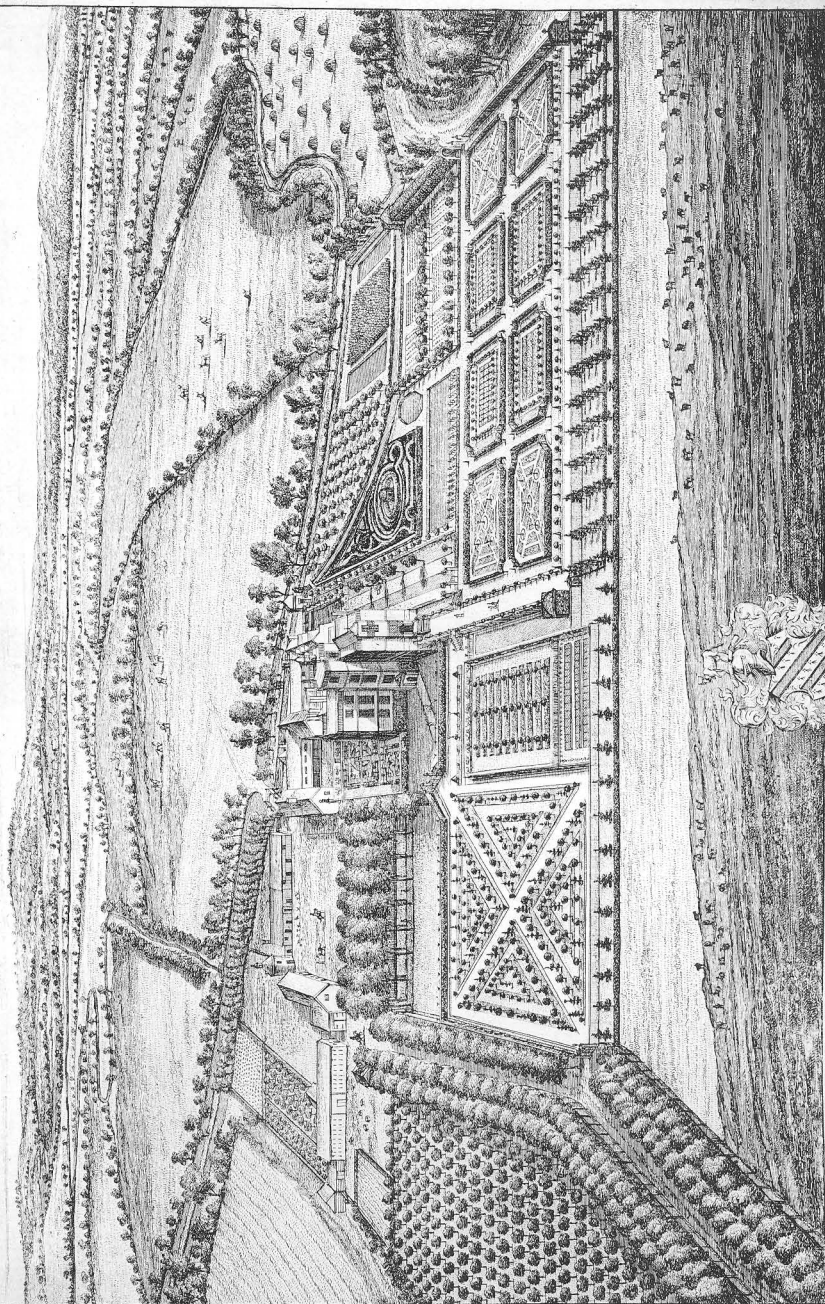
Tanfield Vachell now succeeded to the family estate and, in the capacity of High Sheriff for Berks and Member for Reading in two Parliaments, sustained the local prominence of his family. He married Dorothy, one of the daughters of Thomas Bretton, who is described as of London, a merchant, but who was possessed of property in the counties of Herts, Northampton, Surrey, Leicester and elsewhere.\* It may be supposed therefore that she brought with her some addition to the property of the Vachells; and it is clear from her will that in later life she had become possessed in her own right of considerable landed estate.

Mention of the house at Coley has been reserved for this point of the history. The accompanying illustration is re-produced from a print in the collection of Mr. Rowell, of Duke Street, Reading; and in the original as in the present copy is described as the "Seat of Tanfield Vachell, Esqre." There can be hardly any doubt that this person is the Tanfield Vachell who succeeded in 1683 and not his predecessor of the same name. It would be interesting to suppose that the place represented was the same which King Charles had visited at the beginning of the Civil War, and which Dame Lettice Vachell in a pleading of 1659 describes as having been plundered in the time of the war between the late King and Parliament†; but the style of the architecture and the Dutch character of the garden, even after making allowance in the latter for the conventional treatment of the artist, as well probably as (if it were known) the date of the artist, preclude this supposition and

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\* P.R.O. Chancery Proceedings, Bridges 301.

† Chancery Proceedings, Bills and Answers. Collins 146.



*Colley, Near Reading in y<sup>e</sup> County of Berker, y<sup>e</sup> Seat of Tanfield Vachell Esq<sup>r</sup>*



suggest a house consisting of brick and stone and built in the last quarter of the 17th century. The pillar previously mentioned as standing in the present stables and bearing the initials of Thomas and Ann Vachell with the date 1679 may have had a prominent place in the old house, and actually chronicle the date of the building with the names of those who built it. It is not difficult by the help of the picture, to recognise at the present day the site of the house, though any obvious trace of it has disappeared, and though the present Coley House occupies quite another position. The irregular surface of the ground in a corner of the present park betrays some past interference with it; but foundations, still visible at the side of the Holy Brook, and more particularly the pigeon-house, existing at the present day and represented in the picture at one corner of the quadrangle, make it possible to fix, with some accuracy, the site as having been near the present farm buildings flanked by the brook and having extended across the present farm-road into the corner of the park. The ultimate fate of the house is not known. It had disappeared at the end of the 18th century, when, according to a later print, Mr. Chamberlayne, the Attorney-General, was inhabiting another house on the same site.

With Tanfield Vachell began the decadence of the family's wealth which no doubt contributed to the sale of the property in the succeeding generation. It may only have been caused by the expense contingent upon a large family of sons and daughters; but a petition\* presented by his widow after his death to the House of Commons, mentioning his estates as heavily mortgaged, and himself as much more indebted than the sale of certain lands would rectify, certainly discloses an unsatisfactory condition of finance. He was anxious, however, that Coley should not pass out of the possession of the family and in his Will directed that the sale of other lands should be used to discharge liabilities to which this part of his estate was subject. He died in 1705, just after his election for the second time as the representative of Reading, and was buried in the family vault at St. Mary's Church. His Will [P.C.C. proved 11 Jan., 1705] is briefly as follows:—

I, Tanfield Vachell, of Coley, doe make my last will. I give . . . unto my . . . wife Dorothy Vachell, my mannors of Wheatley and Coley and my Farme called Battle Farme, and all my lands and tenements in Readinge, Tilehurst, Shinfield, Burfeild or elsewhere in co. Berks. I give £500 to each of my younger children, when 21 or on the days of their marriage . . . . After

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\* Journal of House of Commons, Vol. 15. 22 Nov., 1705.

such payments to convey the premises (&c.) unsold to my sonn Thomas Vachell and his heirs . . . I give all my goods and chattels to my said wife Dorothy Vachell, whom I make my Executrix. In witness . . . this 14 Jan., 1701.

TANFIELD VACHELL.

Witnesses { JOHN MERRICKE.  
SARAH GREENWAY.  
BEN. MORGAN.

His son, Thomas, a minor at the time of his father's death, succeeded to the estate, while the widow probably continued to reside in the house ; but he died whilst still a young man and unmarried. There is no record of his burial in the family vault, suggesting the probability of his having died out of England. By his Will\* he left the greater share of his property to his eldest brother William, though making bequests to his other brothers and his sister. The general tenour of it is as follows :—

I, Thomas Vachell, of Coley, in the parish of St. Marie's in Reading . . . eldest son and heir of Tanfeild Vachell, late of Coley, Esq., doe make this my last will in manner following. I bequeath all my lands, tenements, &c., and all my estates . . . and all my personal estate unto my loveing Brother William Vachell, his heirs (&c.), upon the several trusts . . . to sell and dispose of my real estate. To devide the residue into three equall parts . . . two third parts thereof to and amongst my other Brothers and Sister, Henry, George, Charles and Beatricia, or to such as shall be living at my decease. (His brothers William and Henry are again mentioned). I appoint my brother William Vachell Executor of this my last will, or the eldest brother living at my death. 16 December, 1718

THOMAS VACHELL.

Witnesses { RICHARD CAPPER.  
THOMAS STAFFORD.  
JOS. STANYNOUGHT.

The widowed mother survived her eldest son for some years, dying in 1726, and was the last member of the family to be buried in the vault at St. Mary's Church. Her will, of which the substance is given below, directs that the property which she held in her own right at Ellington, in the County of Northampton, should pass to a younger son George.

6 Nov. 1719, 6th of George I. I, Dorothy Vachell, of the parish of St. Mary in Reading in the co. of Berks, widow . . . My body I order to be interred in my late husband, Tanfield Vachell, Esq., his family vault in the north isle of the parish Church of St. Mary, as privately as with decency may be. I do bequeath the sums in manner following. I give my mannors, messuages, lands, tenements and hereditaments in Ellington, *alias* Eltingdon, co. Northampton, or any other town in the countyes of Leicester and Huntingdon . . . unto my son George Vachell, his heirs, &c., for ever, also to him all my personal

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\* P.C.C. Shaller 45; proved 25 Feb., 1719.

estate ; with Legacyes, unto my eldest son Thomas Vachell, Esq., one Guinea in Gold ; unto my son William Vachell, the sum of £50 ; unto my son Henry Vachell, £100 ; and unto my son Charles Vachell, £100. Also unto my daughter Beatricia, £50. Unto Anne Sheppard, wife of William Sheppard, and my late servant, £5 ; and unto my maid-servants at the time of my decease 20s. apiece. George Vachell sole Exor.

DOROTHY VACHELL.

Witnesses { BAR. PENNY.  
RICHARD WARD.  
THOMAS BLAGSATE.

Proved P.C.C. 28 Nov., 1726.

Her death became the opportunity for disposing of the old estate, now encumbered with trusts ; and certainly possessing less attraction for an owner who was already established in another property. William Vachell who succeeded to the main estate of his brother, had married Catherine, daughter of Edward Chester, Esqre., of Cockenhatch, in the parish of Barkway co. Herts, and probably in her right had become possessed of a considerable estate at Great Abington in the county of Cambridge. It is not surprising therefore that in 1727, the year after his mother's death, he should have disposed of the Coley estate and been the means of its final alienation from the family who had possessed it through the changes and chances of four centuries.

Richard Thompson, Esqre., or Colonel Thompson, who purchased it, had probably occupied the house and estate before he became the owner, as he is described 'of Coley' in the year 1717 when he was High Sheriff of Berks.

It is very natural in every age to pass a sigh over the disappearance of 'old families' from their ancestral holdings ; but it must be remembered that other interests of the community are generally involved in the fortunes of land-holders, and that the alienation is to be deplored the less, if by a law, inexorable but really beneficent, they are relieved of responsibilities which they cannot any longer discharge from an impoverished exchequer.

It remains only for the writer to acknowledge his indebtedness to Lieutenant-General Henry Tanfield Vachell, who at considerable expense of labour and money has provided the material of this memoir, as well as the illustrations which have accompanied it. The connected account of the family history will not be carried further ; but it may interest some readers to see the pedigree extended to the present time, and for this purpose its continuation will be prepared, and, with the Editor's permission, inserted in a future issue.

It is interesting to note that Lieutenant-General Meredith Read lately visited St. Mary's Church, Reading, and immediately recognized the escutcheon on the Font bearing a chevron between three garbes, to which reference was made in the first notice, as the arms of his own family with which Thomas Vachell allied himself in 1546. The three incised escutcheons therefore bear the arms respectively of Reade, Vachell, and Knollys; the fourth is plain.

*(To be continued.)*

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## Swallowfield and its Owners.

*By Lady Russell.*

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*(Continued from page 74, Vol. III.)*

In October, 1715, Thomas Pitt writes to tell his son that a ship from St. George has brought him the news that "poor Benyon and Mr. Fleetwood\* are dead," and adds, "In the former I have had a great loss, which delays my leaving town till Monday."

In 1714, Thomas Pitt and his son Robert were returned for Old Sarum, and again in 1715. In this year Pitt was named one of the Commissioners for building fifty new Churches. Amongst those he built was St. Mary's at Abbott's Ann,† near Andover, where he had just bought an estate. It is a sad specimen of the debased taste of the day. In it there is a window to his memory.

In 1716 he was appointed Governor of Jamaica, and wrote to his son Robert, "with what you have wasted of my estate that I consigned to you, what settled, and what I permitt you to possess, what bestowed on your brothers and sisters amounts to upwards of 90,000*l*. I have been at great expenses at home, the great diamond unsold, so in my 64th yeare of my age, I am travelling to retrieve this, and

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\* Mr. Fleetwood, Governor of Fort St. George about 1686. His daughter Elizabeth married in 1726 Richard Shelley, son of Sir John Shelley, and was great-great-grandmother of the present owner of Swallowfield.

† The present Rector of Abbott's Ann, the Rev. T. Burrows Fenwick, is descended from a cousin of Governor Pitt's.