Northumberland and Essex in Surrey: two register entries

The ancient site of the parish church of Guildford St Nicolas was more prominent in earlier years than more recently. The churchyard was close to the junction of the road descending the Great Mount, from Farnham and Winchester, with the road from Godalming and Portsmouth, about a hundred yards from the town bridge. This can be seen on John Ogilby’s strip road map, from London to Portsmouth, printed in 1675. The number of poor travellers led to the construction, some time before 1738, of Cook’s loft, a structure, porch-like but blind, on the north side of the church, with an upper room where temporary shelter could be given to poor sailors. Not only the poor used these roads, leading to London, and that may account for two unexpected entries in the earliest church register.

THE EARL OF NORTHUMBERLAND

The first of these entries is for the burial of ‘A child of the Earl of Northumberland’ in 1563. The exact date is not given, but the preceding and following entries are for 11 and 15 November. There is no mark on the page to draw attention to this burial. The rector at this time was William Saxey, 1546–67, a canon of Windsor, and probably mostly non-resident. There is no record of a curate. An enquiry in 1975 brought a reply from the then Duke of Northumberland that the family records could not identify this child. The Earl of Northumberland was Thomas Percy (1528–72). The 6th Earl, Henry Percy, died without a son on 30 June 1537. His younger brother, Thomas Percy, had been executed on the second of that month, implicated with Robert Aske in the Pilgrimage of Grace. Because of the attainder, Thomas’s son was unable to succeed to his uncle’s title, but it was restored to him by Queen Mary, as 7th Earl, on 1 May 1557. In the following year, on 12 June, he married Anne, a daughter of Henry Somerset, Earl of Worcester. From this marriage six children are known to have been born, one son and five daughters. The son, Thomas, died in 1560. Of the daughters there has not been a consistent account. The historian of the family, E B de Fonblanque, gives:

- Elizabeth, married Richard Woodroffe
- Mary, married Sir Thomas Grey
- Lucy, married Sir Edward Stanley
- Jane, married Lord Henry Seymour
- Mary, unmarried, and became a nun.

The list is on a pull-out sheet in volume 1. The first Mary does not appear in the index of volume 2, in which the marriages of the other three daughters are mentioned. De Fonblanque states that four daughters survived the death of the earl in 1572, namely Elizabeth (born 1559, died 1604 or later), Lucy, (born before 1565, died c. 1601), Jane (born after 1565, died after 1591), and the second Mary (born 1570, died 1642).

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1 The saint’s name in Guildford usually had an H until 14 May 1881; Taylor 1980, 33.
2 Reproduced in Margary 1974, sheet 4B.
3 Taylor 1980, 9.
4 SHC: GUN/1/1.
5 Duke of Northumberland to the author, 22 December 1975.
6 The most recent account of Thomas Percy is by Julian Lock, in ODNB: 43, 740–5.
7 de Fonblanque 1887.
8 Ibid, vol 1, 121. The dates are supplied by Lock 2004, 741.
There have been attempts to solve the confusion. In the Dictionary of National Biography, Sidney Lee mentioned only the first Mary, stating that she became a nun. But, according to de Fonblanque, it was the second Mary who became a nun. After the death of the countess her mother on 9 September 1591, she fulfilled her wish to enter the religious life. In 1597 she founded a Benedictine community in Brussels, becoming abbess in 1616. The community left Brussels in 1794, as the French revolutionary troops advanced, and came to England. After 63 years in Winchester the nuns moved to East Bergholt in Suffolk. The final years were at Woolmer Hill, Haslemere, until 1975, when falling numbers caused the abbey to be closed, and the thirteen nuns were welcomed in other communities.

There was discussion in Notes and Queries in 1935, where the baptism of a Mary is mentioned, on 22 August 1560 at Leconfield in Yorkshire. The Leconfield register is damaged, only part of the entry remaining:

... e doughter unto Thomas Percye Earle of Northumberland
... ed 22o Die mens. Augusti.11

It seems conclusive, therefore, that the child who was buried in 1563 was the elder Mary, whose name was later given to her youngest sister. Her death may have occurred during a journey to or from London. It is not likely that the Percy family stayed with the Protestant Sir William More at Loseley, in St Nicolas’ parish, whose house was still under construction. In his biography of Thomas Percy, M M Merrick does not mention the first Mary. He does, however, give information about the earl’s movements. In 1562 he travelled to Petworth, a southern house of the Percy family, while lengthy repairs were done at Alnwick Castle. He entertained Queen Elizabeth at Petworth in 1563, and was made a Knight of the Garter there on 23 May.12

The earl did not remain long in royal favour. His Catholic faith always kept him under suspicion, and he became implicated in the rebellion of the northern earls in 1569. He was beheaded in York on 28 August 1572, his last words being, ‘Remember that I die in the Communion of the Catholic Church, and that I am a Percy in life and in death’.13 Because of the religious aspects of his death he was popularly regarded as a martyr, and was declared beatified with eight others by Pope Leo XIII on 13 May 1895.14

THE EARL OF ESSEX

Thomas Percy was succeeded as earl of Northumberland by his brother, Henry Percy, whose son Henry, the 9th Earl, married Dorothy Devereux, daughter of Walter Devereux, the 1st Earl of Essex. Her brother Robert was the 2nd Earl, who married Frances [Walsingham], the widow of Philip Sidney, the poet. Their son Robert was the 3rd Earl, restored to the title on 18 April 1604, after his father’s execution in 1601.15

The son of the 3rd Earl was the subject of the second unexpected register entry (fig 1), written in large, prominent letters:

CHARLES Vicount Hereford, Lord Ferris of Chartley, sonne and heire of Robert Lord Devereux and Earle of Essex, and Elizabeth his wife was borne at Losely in the Countie of Surrey, and parish of St Nicolas the fifth day of November between seven and eight

10 Notes and Queries: vol 169, 165–6, 231.
11 ERYARS: PE 116/1.
12 Merrick 1949, 52, 59. There is a portrait of Thomas Percy, wearing the Garter, at Petworth, in the north gallery, number 501.
13 de Fonblanque, 1887, vol 2, 119.
14 The text of the papal decree was printed in the supplement to The Tablet, 8 June 1895.
15 The most recent account of Robert Devereux is by John Morrill, ODNB: 15, 960–9.
There was a chapel in the north wing, now demolished, at Loseley, licensed for worship in 1605. The rector at the time was the sociable and High Church Nicholas Andrewes, who was to be ejected by Parliament in 1643. The owner of Loseley was Poyning More.

Earl Robert did not have a happy married life. His first marriage was at the age of fifteen, in January 1606, to Frances Howard, daughter of the Earl of Suffolk. This marriage was annulled, on 25 September 1613, on the petition of Frances, who married Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset three months later, on 26 December. The Guildford-born Archbishop of Canterbury, George Abbot, dissented from the divorce commission’s verdict.\(^\text{16}\)

Essex remained single until 11 March 1631 – a Friday in Lent – when he married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir William Paulet of Edington. This union was no happier than the first. They did not live much together, and Essex became increasingly suspicious of Elizabeth’s faithfulness.

The climax came early in 1636. In March the countess was staying at Netley Castle, the home of the earl of Hertford. Sir William Uvedale was with her one night. This was discovered when she sent her maid down for some beer. Sir Walter Devereux, the cousin of

\(^{16}\) There is an account of the case in Welsby 1962, 57–63.
Essex’s grandfather, went up, and found Uvedale ‘sitting on the bedd side with his cloathes on’. Devereux reproved her for causing scandal, as her friendship with Uvedale was being talked about. He wrote to Essex, telling him what had happened, and Essex replied that his wife should be told to leave the house. Essex very soon decided to seek a separation from the countess. Edward Rossingham wrote on 30 March to Sir Thomas Puckering, ‘Saturday last all treaties of composition were broken off between the Earl of Essex and his Lady, but very much against her will’.

The Countess then announced that she was pregnant. Essex, who believed the charge of adultery with Uvedale, said that he would accept the child as his own if it was born by 5 November. Later, Essex doubted the reality of the pregnancy, and asked the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, for his advice. Laud replied ‘To the Rt Honble my very good Ld the Earl of Essex’:

I could not give you anye answear – till I had spoken wth his Majestye; because yor wife beinge as yett honored wth yor priviledges, cannot be proceeded against bye me without the Kings leve first obtayned. And howsoever, I cannot comand her to be searched by womē Wheather shee be with-child or not, till there be some pceedings against hir in a legall waye wch hath not yett bine done.

Upon Sundaye last att Windsore I acquainted his Maiestye wth what yor L: had written, and took ye boldness to have yor hnable friend mye L: of Holland bye. The Kinge is as Carefull for you as maye be, but wase as all to seeke what is fittest for you to doe, but his Maiestye bid me tell you, your L: shall have all Justice done you that maye be. At last this was resolved. That it is most fitt for yor L: to go psrentlye to hir, and take mye L: of Harford and some other frends with you, and see hir, for it is impossible if shee be with childe, but that it must needs Shewe it selfe. And if you suspect anye Cushin-greatnes you may yor selle wd the right of a Husband requyer of hir for yor satisfaction to submitt himselfe to search bye honest and grave Women. And if she refuse soe to doe yor L: must the thinke of farther Counsells.

In the mean tyme, yor L: is advised to take Counsell of some Civill Lawyers what course is fittest for you to hold against hir. And his Maiesty hath commanded the L: Keeper and yre Atornye generall to advise what maye be done by the Comon Lawe. And hath farther givē me power to call hir unto the Highe Comission if anye by yor L: appointment will Ansr against her.

Though I heare some Jealousyes cast out, and fears, lest you have some-Waye wronged yorselle; I hope not, and I praye God, wd you a good end of these evills. To his Grace I leave you and rest

Your L: Lovinge friend to serve you

W: Cant.20

In the event, the child was born on the deciding day, 5 November, and was accepted as legitimate, as the baptism entry recorded. However, his life was short. On 26 December 1636 Essex’s cousin, Dorothy [Percy], Countess of Leicester, wrote to her husband from Penshurst: ‘I forgot to tell you last week, that my Lord of Essex’s son was dead’. He was buried at Drayton Bassett, in Staffordshire, the home of Essex’s grandmother, Lettice [Knollys], the widowed Countess of Leicester, who had died in 1634.

18 Williams 1848, vol 2, 239.
19 The deteriorating relationship of Essex and his wife is discussed in Snow 1970, 192–4.
20 LPL: MS 2872 f 30.
21 In Gibbs & Doubleday 1926, vol 5, 45, the birth is recorded of Essex’s only son ‘b. 5 Nov [1632 ?] d.v.p. at the age of 5 years’. The error is repeated in Mosley 1999, vol 1, 1378: Essex and his wife ‘had an only s (decd aged five)’. 
Essex lived until 1646, when he died on 14 September, after suffering a stroke while hunting in Windsor Forest. The earldom of Essex became extinct, but his cousin, Walter Devereux, inherited the viscountcy of Hereford. From him the viscounts of Hereford have descended.

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