

The Gells of Hopton.

SOME FURTHER NOTES AND CORRECTIONS.

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THE writer of the article on the Gells of Hopton in the preceding number (vol. xxxiv., pp. 145-152), setting forth the contents of "Sir William Gell's Book," has warned readers of the *Journal* that the correctness of the information therein contained is not guaranteed. The errors are, in fact, numerous, and for the guidance of those who may from time to time consult the *Journal* as authoritative, the following notes and corrections may be useful. They are based upon an examination of the wills, or "Inquisitiones post mortem," of the owners of Hopton from the fourteenth century to the death of Temperance Gell, 1730, which are preserved in the Public Records, and upon other sources of information.

"Sir William Gell's Book," as the article tells us, relates primarily to his paternal ancestors, the Eyres of Highlow,¹ and it is apparent that, in compiling the artistic skeleton pedigree which forms the kernel of the article, his purpose was limited. Through his great-grandmother, Catharine Eyre (*née* Gell), he belonged to a female branch of the Gell family, which for three generations (1730-1842) owned the Hopton estates and bore the name. Examination of the pedigree shows that its object was merely to trace the lineal descent of Sir William's grandfather, John Eyre, with occasional additions, when the arms of a titled or armigerous family might be introduced to decorate the page. As will

¹ Now represented by the Archer-Houblons, of Welford, Berks., who quarter the Arms of Gell of Hopton.

appear, the pedigree and annotations are far from trustworthy, even within these limits, while they make no pretence to be a general record of his grandfather's maternal family.

Thus the pedigree omits both Anthony, the eldest (born *c.* 1520, died 1583), and John, the youngest (born *c.* 1535, died 1564), brothers of Sir William's lineal ancestor, Thomas Gell, of Hopton (died 1594): though Anthony Gell (whose name has been added in a later hand) was a man of distinction. It also passes over another notable owner of Hopton (1719-1730), Temperance Gell, who founded and endowed the existing parish school for her people.

Again, Sir William, though an enterprising traveller and explorer, was evidently unacquainted with the authoritative public archives of his own country. The original wills, administrations, or Inquisitiones post mortem, of every owner of Hopton for at least five hundred years are extant, and, if they had been consulted, misleading errors would have been avoided. The following are the most important points requiring correction:—

I.—Katharine Eyre did not (as stated, p. 150) succeed to the Hopton estates on the death of Sir Philip Gell (1719). Nor did her son John (as twice stated, p. 145 and p. 146). These statements are mutually contradictory, and both are wrong.

II.—Temperance Gell, the unmarried sister of Sir Philip, the third and last baronet, succeeded to the Hopton estates under his will (1719), which gave remainders to the second surviving¹ son of his sister, Katharine Eyre, and to other kinsfolk. Temperance Gell did not die till 1730, and it was then that John Eyre succeeded and assumed the maternal surname which his descendants bore until the death of Philip Gell, of Hopton (1842). The latter's only surviving issue, Mrs. Thornhill, of Stanton-in-Peak, was disinherited during her husband's lifetime, but on his death she assumed the name of Gell. She died childless (1878), leaving the Archer-Houblons as the lineal representatives of Katharine Eyre.

¹ The eldest son, Robert, died aged 3.

III.—The lineal descendants of the Gells of Hopton are very numerous. Reference to the original wills of Ralph Gell (dated August 12th, 1562) and of Anthony Gell (1579) will show anyone interested that, out of a family of four sons and ten daughters, in 1562 there were living three sons and five daughters of Ralph, of whom the youngest son, John,¹ and the elder daughters were already married. Ralph appointed as executors (*inter alios*), Anthony, the eldest son of his first wife, Godyth Ashby, and John, the son of his second wife, Emma Beresford. He bequeathed the main estates, with Hopton Hall, to Anthony, the eldest, making provision also for Godyth's second son, Thomas, then settled at Bakewell; while to his youngest son, John Gell, who was married and had been established on land already assigned to him (1562) in the parishes of Wirksworth and Duffield (Shottle Park), he bequeathed further land and money, with a special legacy of "XXti Lambes" to Margaret Gell, one of John's young family. There was a remainder to John Gell and his issue in the bequest of the Hopton estates; failing heirs to his half-brothers. But his own portion was only that of a younger son—*i.e.*, lands to farm, and £100 "to store and occupy his Landes withall." Dying young, he left his widow and young children, including three sons, besides Margaret, in narrow circumstances; but the family prospered, and in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries his descendants in the male line owned mines and lands in Wirksworth, Middleton, Kniveton, Kirk Ireton, Ireton Wood, and Idridgehay, as well as at Kirk Langley and Dalbury Lees,² some of which remain in the possession of their lineal representative. John Gell's eldest son, Thomas, returned to Hopton during his cousin's minority. He bought land there from the Stone family (1614). At his death (1627) this land passed by will to his wife, Ellen (*née* Buxton), and to his son,

¹ John Gell and Agnes (*née* Robertson), his wife, were admitted to the Court Baron of the Bishop of London's Manor of Fulham in respect of the latter's inheritance, 1557-8.

² Marriage Settlement of Philip Gell of the Gatehouse, Wirksworth, with Honor Borough, 1747.

who died without male issue. It was sold after the outbreak of the Civil War, in which the elder and younger branches were on opposite sides. The male line was continued through the second son, Anthony Gell, of Middleton (1603-1689), who married Cicely Laverock (1643).

Anthony, the eldest son of Ralph and Godyth, never married. Thomas, the lineal ancestor of Sir William Gell, married in 1588, when he was advanced in years. There was no issue of this marriage until 1593, the year before his death, and the second son, Thomas, was posthumous; but Ralph's two remaining daughters, Dorothy, wife of John Ballidon, of Ashbourne, and Lucy, wife of Edward Lowe, of Alderwasley, married after their father's death, and all these seven married children had issue, represented to-day by Gells, Hurts of Alderwasley, Moores of Appleby Parva, Evans of Allestree and Darley Abbey, and the widespread ramifications of these families.¹

None of these seven marriages, except that of Sir William's own lineal ancestor, Thomas Gell, and none of the latter's brothers and sisters, are recorded in the pedigree.² Such omissions clearly indicate the limits of his knowledge, or of his concern in the Gell family, but a genealogist must not, in ignorance, jump at the conclusion that those who are unrecorded by him did not exist, and that the family of Gell is extinct. The known living descendants of Ralph and Emma are very numerous and widespread.³ Apart from recorded descendants,

¹ There were frequent intermarriages in later generations between the descendants of Ralph and Emma Gell, so that several existing families trace back to them through two or more lines, e.g., Thomas Gell of the Gatehouse, Wirksworth, married (1707) Cassandra Lowe, 4th in descent from Ralph's daughter, Lucy Lowe. Their daughter, Mary Gell, married (1751) her kinsman, Francis Hurt of Alderwasley, also descended from Lucy. In the next generation, their grandson, Philip Gell, of the Gatehouse, Wirksworth, married his cousin Cassandra Hurt (1776); and in the next generation, Major Thomas Gell, of the Gatehouse, married Anne Hurt, of Alderwasley (1832). Again, Catharine Gell (niece of Thomas first mentioned) married Thomas Moore, of Appleby Parva (circa 1740), and her descendants have intermarried with their Hurt kinsfolk.

² The name of Anthony Gell has been inserted out of place by a later hand.

³ See *Alderwasley and the Hurts*, by Mr. Louis Hurt. A genealogy recently printed by Mr. Lloyd Simpson, a Member of the Society, has added many fresh names to the list of the living descendants of Ralph and Emma Gell.

genealogists know that the extinction of any pre-Reformation family can never be presumed, especially when numerous cadet branches existed at the opening of the sixteenth century. The names of two, if not three, brothers of Ralph Gell (Roger, John, and (?) Richard), and of his uncles and great-uncles, are recorded, and numerous contemporary wills and documents show that Hopton was the centre of a closely-related family, with kinsmen living in Wirksworth, Ible, Bonsall, Youlgreave, and apparently overflowing into Staffordshire and the West Riding. In the general social movements which followed the Dissolution of the Monasteries and the Reformation, these offshoots found new openings further afield. Some can be traced in the Universities and the learned professions, but the removal of the family home to Kedleston during Sir John Gell's long minority (1594-1614) owing to his mother's marriage with John Curzon, his vindictive brutality towards his own kinsmen in the Civil War—(they appear to have been Royalists to a man)—his ill-treatment of his first wife, his intrigue with Lady Stanhope, and his ill-treatment of her after his marriage with her, and, finally, his long imprisonment, doubtless contributed to isolate Sir William's lineal progenitors, and to sever the ties of blood which were preserved amongst other branches of the family.

IV.—As regards the family before the Reformation, the book is honeycombed with inaccuracies. It is therefore perhaps advisable to warn readers that the first page of the pedigree, facing p. 145, and the genealogical information deduced from it on p. 147, contain errors in almost every line. In the first place, a whole generation has been omitted, as it has also been in the pedigree published in *Reliquary XI.*, p. 225, in which there are also three or four evident printer's errors in dates, and one in which the Curzons are called "Earls of" instead of "Barons" Scarsdale. John Gelle (called "Junior," 1467-8) was found heir to Hopton in 1508 (Inquisitio post mortem), in succession to his father. But his father's name was Ralph, not John (the husband of Ellene),

as stated in Sir William's manuscript. This Ralph was in possession for thirty-seven years, from 1471 to 1508; but of him, as of other members of the family whose omission has been already mentioned, Sir William knows nothing. Surely it would be obvious to any investigator that John Gell, who was alive in 1425, and is found in possession of Hopton at the "Inquest of Knight's Fees," 1431-2, could scarcely have survived for another seventy-seven years, and been (as stated) the father of "John Gelle, Junior," who then succeeded. If the *Inquisitio post mortem* of 1471 had been consulted, a generation would not have been overlooked.

Again, the statement made as to the sons of John Gelle and Ellene is haphazard guesswork. Their grandsons are confused with their sons, as is often the case in the *Heralds' Visitations*, while Ralph Gell of Hopton and Ralph Gell of Ible are rolled into one. The recorded sons of the marriage were Ralph of Hopton, already mentioned, and Thomas. "John Gelle, Junior," and Ralph Gell of Ible were grandsons.

V.—The legendary marriage of Robert Gelle, of Carsington (*temp.* Ed. III.), with "an heiress of the De Hoptons of Hopton," the imaginary blank shield of the "De Hoptons," the account of the branches of the "De Hopton" family, etc., display a complete misconception of the local conditions prevailing in the fourteenth century. There was no room for such a family in Hopton. The township of Hopton formed part of the royal manor of Wirksworth, and owed fealty to no lord but the king, or his grantee, usually some member of the royal house. Exclusive of Griffe Grange, it consisted of a tract of arable land, hill-pasture, and wood about 1,500 yards wide, stretching back from Scow Brook to the moorland, and amounting to about 700 acres in all. The result of an *Inquisitio post mortem* in 1508 confirms this rough measurement. It was declared that all the tenants in Hopton held their lands from the Gells, and that they extended to nineteen oxgangs, which may be taken to represent about 300 acres of cultivated land, with rights of pasture in addition. The whole would

not amount to a single knight's fee, which would embrace anything from 480 to 2,000 acres of cultivated land, with rights of common (Vinogradoff, *Villainage in England*, pp. 239-253, etc.).

In the fourteenth century the township was occupied by different cultivating owners, who possessed properties of no great size, held not by military tenure, but by payment or by services.¹

It is probable that in many cases such owners had held their land immemorially from father to son, and the tendency to identify a family with its home was prevalent throughout Derbyshire, as is shown by scores of local surnames. But "de Hopton," "de Khersintun," "de Wyrksworth," "de Hognaston," etc. (which abound among the witnesses to early deeds), were not titles: they were descriptions added to the baptismal name, and would be used in successive generations, or even in the same document, to identify any established householders in the township without implying any family relationship between them.

Dismissing the myth suggested by the "De Hopton" shield in the pedigree, the point to realise is that, six hundred years ago, the ancestors of the Derbyshire gentry, however substantial and ancient their families, lived the lives of yeomen, as their younger sons live to-day in the Colonies, cultivating their own lands and selling their own wool and lead. Amongst families of this rank there was, in the fourteenth century, a distinct family of Hopton of Hopton² holding lands in Carsington and Hopton under the Royal Manor. Joanna, an heiress of

¹ These Tenants of the King or of the Royal House were liable to serve their Lord in war, but it was not Knight-Service. At the bidding of the Lord they sent men-at-arms for the Agincourt campaign and other wars, and in particular the "King's Field" provided skilled miners for sappers' work in sieges. In times of peace the King called on Wirksworth to supply miners for royal mines in other counties (*Victoria History of Derby*, vol. ii., pp. 168, 327). The families of the gentry and yeomanry of the district are often found (like Anthony Lowe of Alderwasley) amongst the personal officers and retinue of the Lancastrian and Tudor kings.

² See vol. xxvi., p. 168 of this *Journal*, where the families of de Hopton and de Carsington are discussed.—EDITOR.

this family, conveyed her land in 1422 to Ralph Gell, who was himself a man of substance, and that appears to be the sole fact on which Sir William Gell's legend is founded.¹

VI.—In conclusion, the following mistakes are perhaps too obvious to mislead any careful reader. Still they may be corrected. The date assigned (p. 148) to Sir John Gell's command of a body of horse (1671) is wrong. He died in that year, aged 78, when the wars were past and gone. Wrong also is the date (1640) assigned for the election of his brother, Thomas Gell, as M.P. for Derby. He was a "Recruiter," and was elected in 1645.

The age assigned to the second baronet (p. 149) would, if correct, raise curious questions. It is certain that his father was born in 1593. If the son was (as stated) fifty-four in 1662, he was born in 1608, and the father was only fifteen years old at his son's birth. As a matter of fact, he was born in 1613, as may be calculated from his coffin-plate referred to in the article, and was baptised at Kedleston.

There is some mystery about this boy-and-girl marriage of the first baronet with Elizabeth Willoughby. But its date, January, 1609, is carefully recorded in more than one local church register. The husband's age was then 15½, a year before he was entered at Magdalen College, Oxford.

It is, however, unnecessary to go further, provided that readers of the *Journal* realise, from the errors and omissions noted, that the value of the article lies in its attractive pictures and in some modern details, but that the pedigree and the comments thereon are incomplete and unreliable as a record of the family previous to the establishment of the Eyres at Hopton in 1730.

¹ There is no doubt that the Gells held some intermediate authority between the Royal Lord of the Manor and the actual copyholders in Hopton. "30/- soc" was found in 1431 to be payable annually to the Crown on this head. In the next century they became lords of a moiety of the Manor of Wirksworth by buying the Crown's rights from the thriftless Ministers of Edward VI. The wealth of the House was founded upon lead rather than land, until the Reformation, when they purchased Tithes and Church lands, and also Royal rights, on easy terms.