

# *Silkstone Reflects on the Church Heritage*

*a joint project between*



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## **THE CUTLER EPITHALAMIUM**



### **What is an epithalamium?**

An epithalamium is a verse or a series of verses written in celebration of a marriage. Originating in Ancient Greece, the art form was revived during the Renaissance period, major exponents being Sir Philip Sidney, Ben Jonson and Edmund Spenser.

### **The Cutler Epithalamium**

This was written to celebrate the marriage of Sir Gervase Cutler of Stainborough Hall to Lady Magdalene Egerton. The wedding took place in 1633 at the Egerton family residence at Tatton Park in Cheshire. Gervase Cutler was 41 at the time of the marriage, having

first been married to Elizabeth Bentley of Derbyshire, who had died in 1624. Lady Magdalene was only 16 when she married.

The verses were composed by Abraham Darcie, with notes and annotations by others, including Gervase Cutler himself.

### The original manuscript

This is held in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, to whom we are grateful for the permission to display a digital copy. The original was acquired in 1917 by American railroad magnate and art collector Henry E Huntington. It was purchased at Sotheby's, London, along with the contents of the Bridgewater Library, which was sold by John Egerton, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Ellesmere.



Although not a miracle of English literature, the rarity of this

manuscript is undoubted. When we consider that it was written just 17 years after the death of William Shakespeare, yet scholars have spent centuries searching in vain for original



Shakespeare manuscripts. It is also remarkable for the beauty and the vibrancy of colour of the illustrations which have survived seemingly with little deterioration.

## **The family of Lady Magdalene Egerton**

Lady Magdalene was the 7<sup>th</sup> daughter of John Egerton, the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Bridgewater, Lord President of Wales. On her mother's side, she was of royal blood, being directly descended, via Mary Tudor, from Henry VII and Elizabeth of York.

She was, therefore, by some margin, the most illustrious person ever to have lived in the parish of Silkstone.

The Egerton family seat was at Tatton Park in Cheshire.

## **The family of Sir Gervase Cutler**

John Cutler, thought to originate from the Midlands, was a standard bearer for Sir Nicholas Wortley during the Wars of the Roses in the late 1400's. Following the Wars he returned to the district with Sir Nicholas and became a tenant farmer at Rockley Old Hall, Worsbrough. Following the Dissolution of the Priory of Pontefract by Henry VIII in 1540, his grandson Lawrence Cutler purchased, from The Crown, the freehold of Field Head, Dodworth, which now approximates to the land occupied by Silkstone Golf Club.

Lawrence Cutler's 3<sup>rd</sup> son, John Cutler, pursued a career in the law, and became a Serjeant-at-law (equivalent to a barrister in modern parlance). John Cutler lived at Falthwaite Grange, which is situated on House Carr Lane, between Silkstone Common and Hood Green. He became quite wealthy, and made a number of property investments,

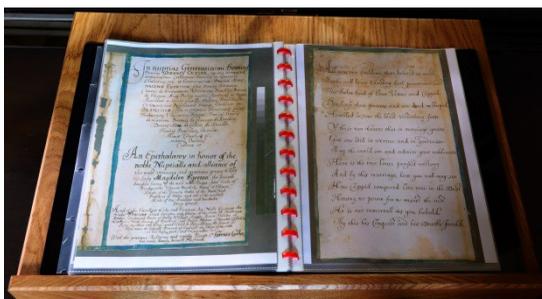
including Cubley Hall, Penistone and the Pule Hill estate in Thurgoland. He also purchased from the Crown the tithes of Dodworth and Stainborough. The tithes of Silkstone came into the Cutler family at a slightly later date.

John Cutler died in 1588 and is buried in the centre aisle of Silkstone Church, according to the wishes expressed in his will.

*“ .....my bodie to be buried within the parish church of Silkstone and in the alley there nere unto my stall.”*

John Cutler's eldest son, Thomas, inherited his father's ambition, and in 1602 Thomas purchased Stainborough Hall and its estates from Francis Everingham. Purchase of the Manor included "ten messuages, ten cottages and two water mills". Along with the lordship of the Manor of Stainborough came stewardship of St James's Chapel in Silkstone Church. In his will dated 1622, Thomas Cutler set up a trust fund for the relief of the poor of Silkstone Parish. In addition, he made provision for the purchase of lands in the North Riding, income from which would be used to support a preacher at Stainborough.

Thomas Cutler's only surviving son, Gervase (b. 1593), inherited the Stainborough estates, and studied and practised law at the Inner Temple in London. Whilst in London, he became associated with the future King Charles I, and remained a loyal supporter thereafter. In return, he was granted a knighthood.



## Sir Gervase and Lady Magdalene – a tragic love story

Following their marriage in 1633, Gervase and Magdalene set up home at Stainborough Hall. In the following years they produced nine children, seven of whom survived to their majority.



When Civil War broke out in 1642 between Charles I and

the Parliamentarians under Oliver Cromwell, Gervase Cutler helped to finance the Royalist cause. It is reported that he contributed some £4000, as well as large numbers of troops. He even took the Cutler family silver, valued at £1000, to Pontefract Castle to be melted down for coinage.

During the second siege of Pontefract Castle in 1645, Sir Gervase Cutler contracted a fever, and the besieging Parliamentarians would not allow fresh provisions to be made available to him. Hearing of her husband's plight, the distraught Lady Magdalene rode from Stainborough to Pontefract with her maid and chaplain, to offer him comfort. At first the Parliamentarians refused her

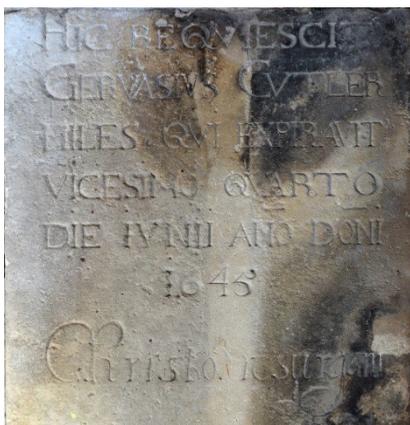


admission to the castle, but she was eventually allowed to take him one chicken and one joint of veal.

Two days later, on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> June 1645, Sir Gervase succumbed to the disease. He was 52 years old. The following day, his supporters prepared to bury the body. It was first placed in a coffin of wood which was then wrapped in lead, with the intention of a temporary interment in the chapel at the castle to be followed by removal to Silkstone when circumstances permitted. At the end of the funeral service, the garrison fired three volleys over the grave in honour of their brave commander.

After the funeral, the enemy did not immediately allow Lady Magdalene to leave the castle to return to her young family at Stainborough. Eventually, on 28<sup>th</sup> June, a letter of safe conduct was given to her by the Parliamentarian governor, allowing her to return to Stainborough. When she presented the letter to the siege guard, she, her maid and chaplain were arrested on suspicion of bearing

secret intelligence on behalf of the Royalists. They were subjected to a strip search and held for 24 hours without food or water. They were then sent back to the castle but were unable to gain entry. They remained outside the castle walls without shelter until night fell. Eventually they entered the town of Pontefract, and made their way back to Stainborough.



The body of Sir Gervase Cutler was eventually reinterred in St. James's Chapel in All Saints Church, Silkstone in 1648. The grave is marked with a stone.

As if the loss of her husband and the responsibility of raising seven small children alone were not sufficient burden for the 29 year old Lady Magdalene, in 1646 the Parliamentarians exacted retribution on her late husband by imposing a fine of £792, or to forfeit the Cutler lands in Stainborough, Dodworth, Barnsley, Cawthorne, Darton and Gawber.

Sir Gervase Cutler's crimes were set out as follows.

*" That he was a Commissioner of Arraye for the King's Partie.*

*That he sett fortye men and horses for the King's Partie against the Parliament's Partie.*

*That he was at Sheffield Castle and there taken prisoner by the Parliament's Partie.*

*That he went from thence to Pontefracte Castle ( another of the King's Garrisons) where he continewed in Armes till his death."*



In mitigation, Lady Cutler petitioned that Sir Gervase's personal estate had been plundered by both sides to the value of £4000, and there was now little left for her to provide for her seven infant children.

As a result of Lady Cutler's petition, the court reduced the immediate fine from £792 to £492, with the balance to be paid to the Church of Barnsley at the rate of £30 per annum. Unfortunately, in 1650, it was reported that the church in Barnsley had not received any payments, and the Parliamentarian Committee insisted that the £300 be paid forthwith, with interest.

Lady Magdalene Cutler succeeded in holding the estate together and raising her large family of five daughters and two sons at Stainborough, and died there in October 1664, aged 48. She is buried alongside her husband in St. James's Chapel in All Saints' Church, Silkstone.

Her elder son, Sir Gervase Jr. (b. 1641), inherited the Stainborough estate. History has not been kind to Sir Gervase Cutler Jr. He is variously reported as a drunkard, womaniser, spendthrift and gambler. He did, however, succeed in holding the Stainborough estate together, albeit much mortgaged. He had kept the wolf from the door by the disposal of all the peripheral assets outside Stainborough. To his credit, he undertook substantial rebuilding works at Stainborough Hall, and the present-day north façade is his work. He died in July 1705, aged 64.

By this time, financial pressures had caused the Cutler grip on Stainborough to become untenable, and in 1708 the Stainborough estate was sold by Henry Cutler, eldest son of Gervase Jr., to Thomas Wentworth, Lord Raby, for £14,000.

**The Wentworths were made Earls of Strafford of the 2<sup>nd</sup> creation,** and, after considerable expansion and remodelling, Stainborough Hall was renamed Wentworth Castle.

***This booklet produced by 'Silkstone reflects on the Church Heritage' Researched and written by Paul Davies who also made the desk lectern on which the facsimile Cutler Epithalamium is displayed***

10 September 2014



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**The National Lottery**  
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