

A Family of Substance

George Brigge of Wiveton and his relatives

Pamela Peake

Synopsis: the brass memorials for George and Anne Brigge and the earlier cadaver are the starting points for exploring this family that held a manor in Wiveton, now known as Wiveton Brigges, yet seemingly never lived in the parish. Early colour is provided by wills from the 16th century, highlighting a family of substance with property across the county. They were essentially medieval in outlook where values of honour, integrity of an inheritance and the permanence of the name were paramount. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in George Brigge's will, while his memorial is a lasting legacy to the family.

Introduction

The nature and structure of the family has changed and evolved over many generations and is not always easy to define. It has been argued that the family as we know it, where the intimate and private relations between parents and children are important values, only arose in the early modern period. Prior to this the important features were “Honour of the line, the integrity of an inheritance or the age and permanence of a name”.¹ At the same time the ‘big house’ would have identified a certain social stratum, it would have been the place where people met, talked, did business and socialised and consequently

there was little space for the ‘family’, and children became adults at a very early age.¹ While such a characterisation of the family may appear rather strange to us today, it does identify some of the important themes that must have exercised the minds not only of George Brigge, the key player in this paper, but also his family before him. It also draws attention to the time-scale in which he was living, the 16th century in Tudor England at the very end of the medieval period and beginning of the early modern.

George Brigge who lived at Old Hall, the ‘big house’, was according to the taxation lists of 1592, the chief landowner in Letheringsett replacing the Heydons and particularly William Heydon who died the following year. He had only recently moved to Letheringsett from Guist where his immediate family had lived for some time. Although Cozens-Hardy describes him as a man of substance, often called upon for assistance by those in financial straits, there is no evidence that he ever held public or political office, although he was linked to those who did.²

Consequently he escapes attention in Hassell Smith’s seminal account of government and politics in Elizabethan Norfolk.³ He is an exemplar of a level of society below the level of gentry – the minor gentry or ‘middling sort’ – who as Lord of at least three Manors held power at a local level.

As might be anticipated there are no surviving family archives, so how do we paint a picture of George Brigge, a man immortalised by a superb portrait brass of himself with his wife in Wiveton Church and whose family gave its surname to a manor, Wiveton Briggs? Although ironically George insisted on calling it the 'Manor of Wiveton'. Indeed this was a man of substance, who was concerned with his place in history and whose family had held substantial parcels of land in Cley, Wiveton and Letheringsett for some two hundred years since 1401.

There are only a few surviving documents that provide any clues to the nature of the man, the two most important being his will and that of his wife Anne. Additional clues to his background are provided by his brass and shield, as this throws open the door on his antecedents, and their activities begin to shed light on each other. Then through the actions of his daughters it is possible to follow the fate of some of the ancestral lands as they pass out of the family. Undoubtedly the paucity of the records ensures a number of gaps in this account, but it is a story worth recording given the importance of the Brigge family in the history of Wiveton.

George Brigge, "a man of his time" (Figs 1 and 2)

Last of the Line

The will of George Brigge provides an important insight into this Elizabethan man, it establishes a context and represents his views at a moment in time when death was nigh. He wrote his will when primogeniture

was the custom, that is, inheritance by the eldest son and when there is no male heir, daughters inheriting as co heirs.⁴ It was made at Old Hall, now Hall Farm Letheringsett, on 22nd February 1597/98, just three days before he died, a most complicated document addressing the issues that were troubling him at that time.⁵ It was presented before the Prerogative Court of Canterbury and the Norfolk Consistory Court and eventually confirmed at the latter, 4th November 1598, having been proved earlier on 16th March 1597/98 when probate was granted to his widow, Anne Brigge.

Foremost he wanted to ensure that his Manor of Wiveton and all of his other properties in Wiveton, Glandford and Bayfield or elsewhere within the County, not already bequeathed, stayed within the immediate family and that the Brigge surname continued to be associated with them. He did this in the certain knowledge that his youngest daughter Sara, as yet unmarried, had formed what he considered an unsuitable attraction to John Jenkinson, a local man who was not to his liking and not suitable for the honour of the family.

His eldest daughter Margaret had already made an advantageous marriage with William Hunt, son and heir of Thomas Hunt of Foulsham, a notable family in the area with extensive land holdings. Previous negotiations with Thomas Hunt are alluded to in the will and indicate that a marriage settlement had already been made or agreed, whereby the Manor of Callis in Guestwick would pass to Margaret and William after the death of her mother. This would complement the holdings the Hunts already



Figure 1. Brass memorial for George and Anne Brigge in Wiveton Church (rubbing by Kenneth Allen, mid 1900s).

held and exclude the Glaven lands.

His instructions were then emphatic "Whereas I have had a purpose and desire of long time if it please God to match Sara Brigg with Erasmus Brigg the eldest son of Thomas Brigg of Lowestoft in the County of Suffolk", in other words Sara should marry Erasmus, her second cousin. If this marriage failed to take place then Erasmus Brigg was to inherit Sara's share and his male heirs and for want of issue then it was to pass to his younger brother William and his male heirs and for want of his issue, then and only then, Sara and her heirs or kindred nominees providing she had married a person agreeable to his wife and that it was not under any circumstances John Jenkinson! For Sara, "should she be persuaded to consent privately or publickly to any contract of marriage with one John Jenkinson or to any secret agreement whereby he may be benefited or relieved" was to be disinherited and all her bequests were to be



Figure 2. George Brigge. detail from the brass memorial.

"utterly forfeit void and of none effect".

This type of will, where a new line of succession was named, was known as an entail. It was a device used to break existing lines and transfer ownership of a property that was predetermined by law.⁶ The new line was to be through his nephew, Erasmus, and his nephew's male heirs. However by the end of the 16th century, entails were becoming unattractive to recipients because conditions were often attached, while lawyers and courts were also finding ways of breaking them for the disinherited family.

George was consumed with anxiety about the loss of the Brigge name for the Manor of Wiveton and equally determined to put every obstacle in Sara's way. Clause after clause covered every conceivable eventuality. This was censure in full operation and George was being true to his time in taking this action, as 16th century family behaviour was characterised by strong elements of deference, patri-

archy and authoritarianism. The power of a father over a daughter was not questioned and the rights of a child to select their own spouse were often strictly circumscribed. Marriage was a contract to protect property, personal feelings counted for little.⁶ Cozens-Hardy attributed modern sentiment when he suggested that Sara was a difficult daughter! Nonetheless one begins to see the determination that was characteristic of both father and daughter. He was the product of his medieval upbringing where values of family honour came before self and expressions of feelings.²

He then made due provision of dower for his widow for the rest of her life as was custom which included the foldcourses and liberties of foldage for the Wiveton and Glandford flocks. These rights were an essential requisite for successful sheep-corn husbandry on the light sandy soils of coastal North Norfolk and increasingly zealously guarded by Lords of the Manor during the latter half of the 16th century.

The extent and regard for the remainder of his family can be seen with an annuity granted to his brother Edward, small bequests to his married sisters and their children and finally instructions for his wife to provide for the feeding and clothing of his sister Mary for the remainder of her life. Mary Brigge was subsequently buried at Wiveton, 30th July 1616, the last Brigge by name of this line to appear in the Wiveton registers.⁷

George wrestled with yet another problem which was the matter of a debt for “£800 odd” which he and Robert Stileman of Field Dalling had stood surety for when Sir Christopher Heydon had mortgaged some land. The outcome of this

venture is not recorded but George left instructions in case his Executor was driven to pay his portion and so bequeathed all interest and title of this land to his wife and her heirs. This was a considerable amount of money that could not be ignored.

The Heydons and Brigges were well acquainted having exchanged and purchased lands from each other in the previous generation. Edward Brigge, George’s father, had made an alternative bequest in his will to his younger son Edward in case, as he feared with good reason, Sir Christopher Heydon might claim fourteen and a half acres in Guestwick that were destined for Edward when he came of age⁵.

Then, rather tellingly George, unlike his father and grandfather, left £4 be distributed to the poor of Wiveton, Blakeney, Glandford and Letheringsett. Not Wood Norton where he had been brought up as a child, nor neighbouring Guist where he had started family life with his wife and children. Another sign of his determination to identify himself with the Glaven Valley and Wiveton in particular.

His will followed the custom of the time and he was exercising all the rights of a late medieval head of family. George Brigge died 25th February 1597/98, presumably at Old Hall, and was buried the next day in Wiveton Church.⁷

Anne Brigge, his widow (Fig. 3)

One has to wonder how Anne viewed her husband’s will, both as an obedient and compliant wife, whilst he was still alive, and then as a mother, when she was widowed and freed from his constraints. She made her will in 1616,⁵ when her sentiments



Figure 3. Anne Brigge, detail from the brass memorial.

became abundantly clear for she not only appointed John Jenkinson Gent. as her sole executor but also left the "Manor of Wiveton with the appurtenances to him and to his heirs for ever". In addition Anne left property to Sara's eldest son, Brigg Jenkinson and his heirs that was to pass to his younger brother Henry if there were no heirs and then onto the three daughters of Sara. This property was described as "one Tenement or Messuage called Bases with barn, dove houses and Crofts thereunto adioyninge situate and beinge in the Town of Wiveton".

Anne, Elizabeth and Sara Jenkinson, Sara's three daughters, were left substantial sums of money, whilst Anne was also to have "one chest of Linninge standinge in the lible parlor and one bedd standinge in the parlor full furnished as it stand to have at the dayt and day of her marriage". In stark contrast, Margaret Hunt's three daughters were left a house in Wiveton, Dawbers, the grandsons, nothing.

Her will was highly irregular in many respects. First it was signed without witnesses then a codicil was added, witnessed but not signed. Secondly and more surprisingly, Anne was making a statement that quite clearly contradicted her husband's intent, and moreover, in the knowledge that she had already rendered the property in Wiveton to her late husband's executor, although probably retaining the use of it for her lifetime. This was done in 1604, shortly after Sara came of age and married and presumably this was Sara's inheritance which she had forfeited by her actions.

The sequence of events that followed are confusing as there is no clear evidence. Anne had property and wealth in her own right that was hers to disperse to family and servants, but what had she hoped to gain by writing John Jenkinson and the Manor of Wiveton into her will? Possibly in an age where emphasis was placed on honour, Anne was making in her will a public statement showing her acceptance and approval of the marriage and singling out John Jenkinson by making him the sole executor of her will. It suggests that, at least, in the years since George's death, this part of the family was united.

Anne Brigge was buried in Wiveton Church on 18th July 1616, just twelve days before her sister-in-law, Mary Brigge.⁷

The Elizabethan brass (Figs 1, 4 and 6)

The status of the family is graphically demonstrated by the unique portrait brass that commemorates George and Anne Brigge, this is monumental art, the finest surviving portrait of

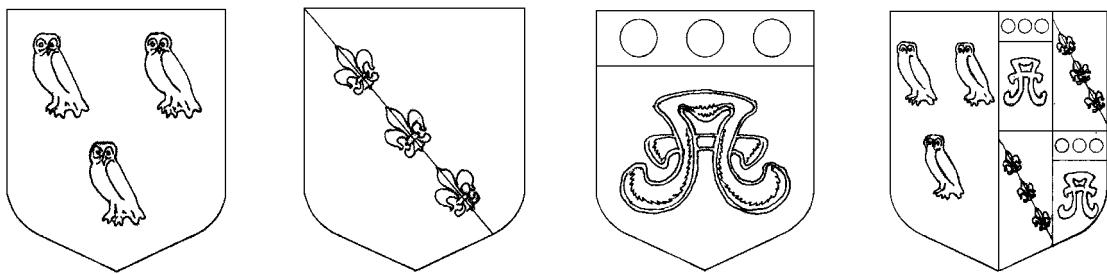


Figure 4. Family Arms: from left to right they are, Brigge, Cocket, Johnson, then George Brigge's Arms, quartered with Johnson and Cocket (F Hawes, 2003).

a civilian couple in the Holt Hundred complete with shield. Figure 1 shows a rubbing of the brass without the shield while in Figure 6 it can be seen positioned centre top, between the effigies of George and Anne. The brass makes a powerful statement about George Brigge's view of wealth and his position in society.

The brass was made in the workshop of Garat Johnson in Southwark, (south of the River Thames) 1597/98 and in addition to the two portraits and shield, there is an engraved plate with a brief biography.⁹ Originally, these brasses were designed to be set on top of a raised tomb for in 1614 it is described thus "The tombe where Mr Briggs was buried in the chansell where the high alter stood is to be taken down and the grave stone to be laid even with the ground".¹⁰ This placed the original tomb in the most prominent position imaginable, for parishioners would look to the altar and be reminded of him. It must have looked magnificent, as the brasses were also originally coloured. Today the memorial is nearby the chancel arch and laid flush with the floor. The brasses were set in a new sandstone base in 1977, replacing an older, much damaged and cracked slab of Purbeck Marble.⁹

Each effigy measures 32.5 inches tall by 12 inches wide and both are standing on cushions with hands together in prayer and are depicted in fashionable Elizabethan dress of the day. George wears a loose gown with hanging sleeves, doublet and hose underneath and the ruff around his neck; Anne is dressed in a farthingale with stomacher, ruff and brocaded petticoat and on her head, a small cap with the hint of a widow's veil at the back.

The shield has the arms of the Brigge family quartered with the Johnson arms for his wife who was, Anne Johnson, the daughter of George Johnson, and the Cocket arms for his mother who was, Katherine Cocket, the daughter of Edward Cocket.⁸ This is George Brigge's pedigree, his lineage for all to see and a reminder of advantageous family alliances made by himself and his father.

The various arms (Fig.4) are described as follows, where argent is silver, sable is black and or is gold. The Brigge arms: Argent, three owls sable beaked and legged or; the Johnson arms: Or a water bouget sable on a chief of the second, three bezants or, and the Cocket arms: Per bend Argent and Sable three Fleur-de-lis in bend counter charged.

Generations of Lords

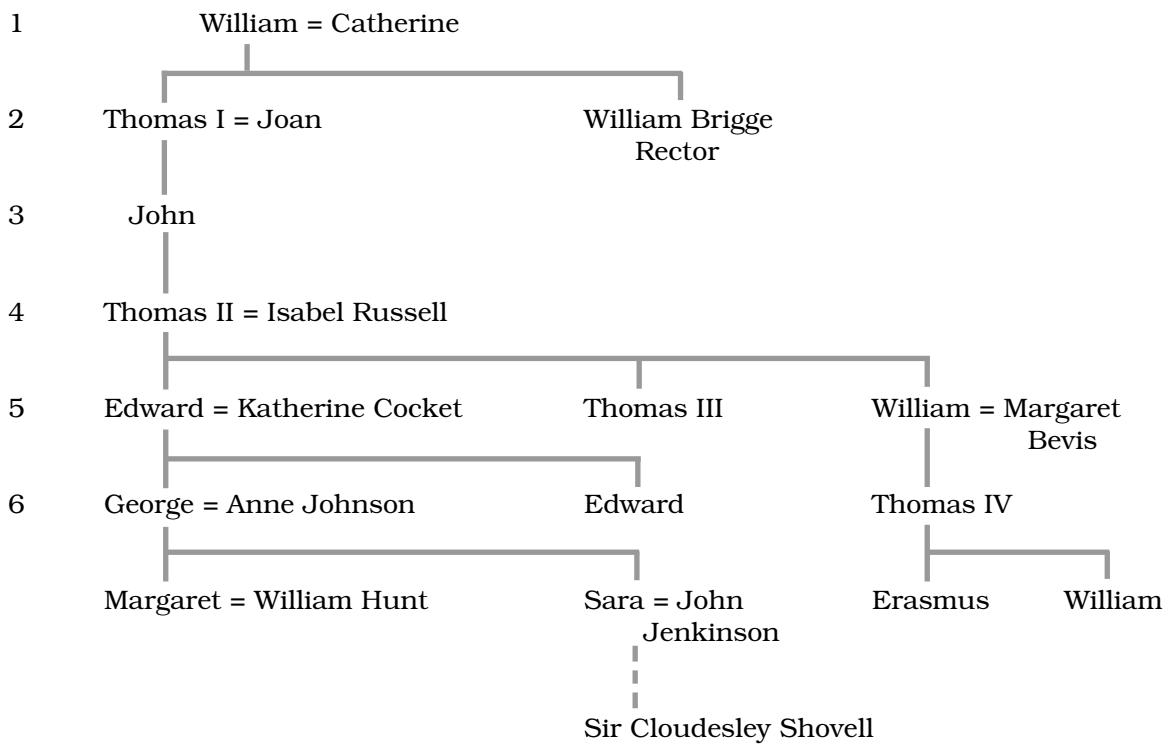


Figure 5. Lords of the Manor: the six generations of Brigge to hold the Lordship of Wiveton Brigges, with other key members of the family.

The Antecedents (Figs 5 & 6)

The origins of the family are far from clear, but various authors have suggested a link with the Briggess of Salle, sometime towards the end of the 14th century.¹¹ Brygges or Atte Brygge, as they were then styled, appear in this area, first in Holt then a little later in both Cley and Wiveton. Thomas Brygge of ‘pilgrim fame’ from Holt may even have been a brother of William Brygge, the first Brygge to be recorded in Wiveton in 1401 as Lord of the Manor. This manor extended across the marsh and into Cley and had been created from Stafford lands.¹²

Blomefield¹² identified the succession of six generations of the Brigge family to hold the Lordship of the Manor of Wiveton Brigges

and the rectors appointed by them and this was elaborated further by Linnell⁸ who identified John Brigge as the missing third generation in the succession. This information is summarised here in Figure 5.

Interestingly one of the very few pieces of documentation regarding William Brigge is found in the Close Rolls of 1406 which refer to him as “William Brigge, Steward of Clay co. Norfolk” when he, Lady Roos and her bailiff were ordered to return to John Valence and Robert Valence their ship together with all the contents that had been impounded when the vessel was blown ashore during a gale.¹³ Within twenty years William was dead and it was Catherine his widow who became the first member of the family to present to the living of Wiveton, the Advowson having been acquired by her hus-



Figure 6. Interior of Wiveton Church looking towards the altar, showing position of brasses with the Cadaver in the foreground, William Bisshop Rector in the chancel beyond, and George and Anne Brigge's memorial to the left.

band some time after 1417.

Catherine presented Edward Hunt in 1426 and then her son, William Brigge the following year.¹²

The brothers Thomas I and William, sons of William and Catherine Brigge, Lord of the Manor and Rector respectively, were pivotal to developments in Wiveton during the middle years of the 15th century for this was a period of great activity in the parish, indeed for the whole of the lower Glaven. By 1435 a new nave had been built for St Nicholas in Blakeney, then in 1437, John

Hakon, a wealthy ship owner of Wiveton left 200 marks in his Will to build a new church for Wiveton. By all accounts building was rapid, the church being completed without major interruption.

The new church in Wiveton faced Cley not across the present day meadows but over the busy medieval harbour and it must have been built at about the time Cley Church was completed. The latter had begun a hundred years earlier and came to a halt before work was resumed in the middle of the 15th century, maybe even stimulated by

watching St. Mary rise on the opposite bank. The three churches attest to the prosperity of the Haven and provide a glimpse of the activity and populace of the time. Wealth, prosperity, merchants from near and far, trade both coastal and overseas, this was the arena that the Brigge brothers, Thomas I and William, were operating in.

Then in 1445, Thomas Brigge I made a gift to his brother, William Brigge chaplain, for the duration of his life of £4 yearly to be taken from the following lands that he held in Norfolk, namely: "Poors", a piece of ground in Letherynsete (Letheringsett), C[ll]okwode in Cleye (Cley), Godewyns in Eggefelde (Edgefield) and Caleyshalle in Guestwith (Guestwick). This was witnessed by William Yelverton the King's justice, John Bacon esquire and John Heydon and followed by a Memorandum of acknowledgement by the parties on 18th November, 1468.¹³ Clokwode in Cley and Callis Hall in Guestwick together with Wiveton Brigg's were core assets that remained central to the family's income until the seventeenth century, when all were eventually lost.

Presumably Thomas I was providing William, the first Rector of the new church, with additional income for living expenses to facilitate his incumbency or maybe he was making it possible for William to contribute to the rebuilding of the chancel. For whatever reason, it does provide a picture of financial support for the church by the Brigg's and a glimpse of the family lands.

William Brigge was Rector for 48 years, 1427-1475, giving a life time of service to the parish. His memorial stone in the chancel at Wiveton was noted by Blomefield when vis-

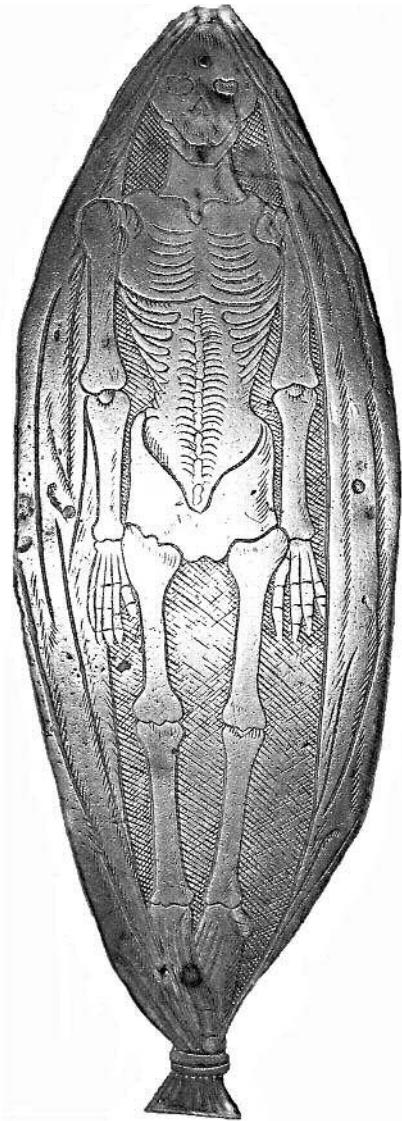


Figure 7. The Cadaver brass.

iting the area, probably in 1734.¹⁴ He recorded the inscription as "Orate p' a'i'a William Brigg quo'da' rectoris istius ecclie". Where did he see it, what caused it to be removed or which area of Victorian tiles and wooden pews has since covered it up for it is not there today?

And one has to ask why is there no memorial for Thomas Brigge I, Patron of this new church? Surely he would have desired a premier position for himself and his wife Joan. Does the enigmatic cadaver brass provide the clue? Positioned at the east end of the centre aisle

of the nave just before the chancel, Figure 6, a prime position and with the appropriate style being a shroud rather than a knight in armour, which Thomas was not, it is certainly a strong candidate.

In the event, Joan Brigge outlived both her husband and brother-in-law and presented William Bisshop to the living in 1475. He also enjoyed a long period of service till 1512 and his brass memorial survives set in the centre of the chancel floor, much worn but still visible, showing a priest in mass vestments that lack both stole and maniple.

The Cadaver Brass, but which Thomas? (Fig. 7)

This brass is a male skeleton wrapped in a shroud and bound both top and bottom. A matching brass (on the right side) is now missing, as is the rectangular inscription plate which would probably have identified and dated the couple. We know that the remaining portion of damaged brass represents a man because, when viewed with your back to the altar, it is on the left, the conventional position for a male, and it has a rib missing! The brass is set in a large stone slab measuring 9 ft. by 4 ft. 4 ins. and in each corner a small 3.5 inch square matrix indicates a possible setting for the four evangelistic symbols.

Brasses of this design were fashionable from the mid 15th century, although fading by the early 16th century, in each case the body was shown either as a skeleton or an emaciated corpse wrapped in a shroud. In addition the figures were often grinning and there were even examples where worms were shown devouring the

corpse. The Wiveton cadaver brass was described by Mill Stephenson as a rather crude example of local workmanship, not dissimilar to that found in Aylsham for Richard and Cecily Howard, 1499.⁸ Salle Church has a shroud brass with a naked and emaciated figure, dated 1451 for John Brigge, but the Will of his son Thomas 1494, left a sum for the purchase of a stone for his father so that the brass cannot then be earlier than 1494.⁵ Another example altogether is the Symondes shroud brass of 1511, which can be found just across the Glaven valley in Cley.

Parkin (in Blomefield) made no reference to this brass in his account of Wiveton, suggesting that the inscription plate had already disappeared.¹² Two hundred years later, Linnell was happy to suggest that it was for "Thomas Brigge I whose wife Joan presented (the Rector William Bisshop) to Wiveton Church in 1475", a suggestion that has been accepted and perpetuated in all the church guides ever since.⁸ There is much to commend this viewpoint.

In contrast Mill Stephenson gave a date for the cadaver of c. 1540, a time when cadavers were out of fashion and went on to suggest that it was "possibly Thomas Briggs II, who died in 1544", the grandfather of George Brigge.⁸ Subsequent documentary evidence shows that this Thomas died 8th February 1530/31 and in his will he expressed a desire to be buried within the church at Heacham throwing further doubt on this identification.⁵

The West Norfolk Connection

The third generation represented by John Brigge is virtually without record. It is possible, though unlikely, that he could be the John Brygges on the Cley Muster Roll for 1525, but he was not the John Briggs censured in 1567 at Cley for not frequenting his parish church and subsequently absolved by paying 2d to the Poor Box “pixi di pauperum”.¹³ Apart from buying land in Heacham in 1515/1516, when he was referred to as John Brigge of Cley, all we know of him with any certainty is that he was the father of Thomas Brigge II, grandfather of Edward and great grandfather of George Brigge, the three generations of Briggess that lived throughout the sixteenth century in times of religious upheaval and change.

However the Heacham connection is intriguing because it led to the discovery of a will made by Thomas Brigge II of Heacham dated 10th February 1527/28 which was proved ten years later.⁵ This is the earliest will for any member of the family and is typical for Catholic England in respect of provision for his soul, bequests to the high altar for tythes and offerings forgotten and the services of a priest to sing for the souls of his good friends, but atypical in many other respects. Furthermore, it provides clear evidence that the family was not living in Wiveton, a fact substantiated by subsequent family wills and a trend that continued until George returned in 1592 to spend the last five years of his life in the Glaven Valley. Thus we have a long period of absentee Lords, whose affairs in the ancestral holdings of the Glaven parishes were probably managed by stewards.

Thomas Brigge II continued to acquire additional land in Heacham and in the neighbouring parishes of Snettisham, Ringstead and Sedgeford, both “free and bonde”. A pattern of enterprise emulated by his son and grandson, for it ensured that there were sufficient holdings to provide for younger sons and settlements for daughters at the time of their marriage, leaving the integrity of the ancestral lands in Wiveton and possibly Callis for the heir. It also raised their status as a family, building a position of some consequence in their communities and thus enhancing the marriage prospects of daughters and younger sons. This was a family where the men were concerned with the honour of the line and strengthening close kinship.

The significant feature of his will is that many of these newly acquired pieces of land were identified with such precision and detail to size, name of previous owner and with sufficient topographical features to suggest that Thomas was buying into an open field landscape with closes. Furthermore, his descriptions allow some pieces to be identified in the Sedgeford Field Book of 1546.¹⁵ The total area held by the Brigge family in Sedgeford alone was just over 41 acres. Edward Brigge, Thomas II's heir, retained his properties in Heacham and Ringstead until he died in 1562, while the fate of the land held by his younger brothers, Thomas III and William, is not clear.

Edward was the first Protestant Brigge to be Lord of the Manor and his family began to make their appearance in early parish registers.⁷ For the first time we get hitherto unrecorded details such

as names of daughters, death of heirs and an awareness of infant mortality, names of spouses, second marriages, cousins, ages at death and of course the parish in which these events were recorded.¹¹

Cisilye Brigge made an auspicious entrance being christened on May Day, 1558; she is the first name in the first baptismal register and the first Brigge in any of the Wiveton registers. Was she Edward's daughter who he brought back to Wiveton to be baptised in the church where he was patron?

There is no information on when Edward Brigge moved away from Heacham, but eventually his activities were centred around Wood Norton, Guestwick and Guist where he held another manor. Katherine, his widow, held court for the Manor of Dele in Brygge there shortly after he died, then again seven years later when she was widowed for the second time.¹⁶ When he died, Edward had ten children to provide for, a married daughter, three underage sons and six more daughters, again all underage. His will made provision for everyone of them, leaving the advowson and patronage of Wiveton to his youngest son

Edmund with instructions that his wife was to protect it from being taken over by George.⁵ George would have been about 18 years old when his father died and you can't help thinking that his character was already noted. In the event Edmund died and George inherited the advowson of Wiveton being the last Brigge to exercise his right when he appointed James Poynton to the living in 1591. Edward Brigge died 22nd January 1562/63 and was buried at Wood Norton.¹¹

William, Edward's younger brother, moved across the county

to Bradfield, near North Walsham, where he married Margaret Bevis the daughter of Thomas Bevis of Bradfield. This is interesting for earlier Brygges had held lands there in the 13th and 14th centuries which they subsequently sold to the Harbord family, the Barons Suffield of Gunton Hall.¹⁷

William was succeeded by his son Thomas IV whose interests extended to Lowestoft in Suffolk whilst he retained a base at Bradfield. Thomas Brigge IV was thus nephew of Edward and first cousin of George Brigge and it was Erasmus Brigge, his son and heir, that George Brigge instructed Sara to marry.

This complex and sometimes confusing saga of George Brigge's antecedents demonstrates the mobility of the landed class with representatives in the west of the county around Heacham and Sedgeford, in the east at Bradfield, Holt, Wiveton and Cley and south into Suffolk at Lowestoft, besides the strong representation in the centre around Wood Norton, Guist, Guestwick and Thurning.

The Co-heiresses (Fig. 5)

The story returns to the children of George and Anne Brigge, for this couple had four daughters and a son, of which only the eldest and youngest daughters survived to adulthood. The first daughter Margaret was baptised at Guist 1575, Richard, the son and heir at Guestwick while the three younger daughters were baptised in Wiveton.⁷ George was undoubtedly 'operating' across his sphere of influence, reinforcing his family links with Wiveton when he brought his youngest daughters back.

Margaret Hunt

Margaret married William Hunt of Sharrington in Letheringsett Church 20th November 1596, the son and heir of Thomas Hunt of Foulsham, a soap boiler and successful London merchant, Lord of the Manor of Foulsham whose magnificent memorial is in the parish church. The impact of this marriage on the Brigge Manor of Callis lands would have been impossible for George to foretell, but he must have felt that they would be secure for his grandchildren.

Her husband, William Hunt, died in 1644 and within the same year Margaret was adjudged a lunatic at an inquisition, and the Manors of Sharrington, Holt Hales, Geyst, Wichingham and various others, which she was holding at the time, all passed directly to her son, Thomas Hunt.¹² Certifying an individual as a lunatic was a much used ploy at that time to break agreements and enabled relatives to seize control of an inheritance. In the fullness of time, the Callis lands at Guestwick and Thurning which George Brigge had described in his Will as "lands meadows pasture feedings rents services and other hereditments thereunto belonging" were amalgamated with Hunt properties and conveyed to Thomas Newman in 1688.¹³ The deeds of this conveyance show that the Brigge portion had consisted of "all those closes sometime the closes of George Brigges called Inpins, the Fir closes and Buntings lying in Guestwick aforesaid and all those the five acres of arable land late also of the said George Briggs".

The location of these holdings is illustrated on an estate map of 1726 that has long horned cattle depicted on the pastures and is full of descriptive field names such as

'Milkers Meadow' and 'Dairy Closes'.¹⁴ A later, nineteenth century map allows these lands to be located today, in spite of subsequent topographical changes.¹⁵

Margaret's final resting place was in Little Walsingham where she was buried on 15th March, 1652 having reached the age of 77.¹⁶

Sara Brigge

Sara was a teenager of some 15 or 16 years at the time of her father's death and being resolved to marry John Jenkinson, she duly contested his will. For some unknown reason, Sara did not persist with her suit and when she failed to appear at the hearing, the will was duly promulgated. The consequence being that the Manor of Wiveton, the minor Manor of Cloc[k]wode and other property in neighbouring parishes went to her nephew, Thomas Hunt. He then sold it to his father just after Anne Brigge died and it was not long before it passed out of the family.⁸ Cozens-Hardy identified Cloc[k]wode through his family papers with Locker Breck, also known as Cley Watering which is in the south of Cley parish where today, Water Lane meets the Cley – Holt Road. It appears to have been a small parcel, no more than an enclosed Close of 30 acres.¹⁷

The Jenkinson name appears in Wiveton, Cley, Cockthorpe and Morston Parish Registers for some years after and a picture of Sara's life begins to emerge although where and when she married John Jenkinson is still unknown, as is her final resting place. Her children were baptised in both Wiveton and Cley churches and using information from her mother's will, we know that there were two sons and three daughters by 1616 and it

would appear that she lived in Cley, presumably supported by her husband, his family and quite possibly her own mother who seems to have had an affection for her grandchild, Anne Jenkinson. This reflects a sentiment, an expression of early modern family where private relationships counted and were recognised.

Ironically George Brigge would probably have been proud of the eventual outcome of this union for Sara's youngest son Henry married Lucy Cloutesley (also spelt Clowdesley) the daughter of Thomas Cloutesley of Cley and their daughter Ann, married John Shovell the son of a farmer at Cockthorpe and great grandson of a Norwich Sheriff. Sir Cloutesley Shovell, the great Stuart Admiral and Norfolk naval hero, was Sara's great grandson by this marriage of John and Ann Shovell.⁷

Sara's prospects as she married John Jenkinson may not have been as promising as George had intended for her, but her family survived. Sir Cloutesly Shovell, his great-great-grandson, who had died tragically after his ship foundered and been buried in the Isles of Scilly, was returned to England as a national hero and buried in Westminster Abbey at Queen Anne's expense – an indication of the esteem in which he was held.

Conclusion

The brass to George and Anne Brigge has lain in Wiveton Church for 400 years as a monument to a craftsman's skills and a lasting testament to the family. Strong ties of Patronage and Lordship held the Briggses to Wiveton even though three successive generations, at least, lived

away from the parish, including George Brigge himself.

Their story is still unfinished, for the 16th century wills that have formed the basis of this article, although illuminating, are at the same time misleading through omission, posing yet more lines of enquiry. In dealing with their spiritual and temporal affairs, each member of the family in turn provided an insight into their responses to religious upheaval and personal circumstances throughout the century. Each demonstrated that they were operating and controlling properties across the breadth of Norfolk and were well able to provide for all their children, probably not unlike their forebears in the 15th century. They were men of substance.

However, wills have to be tempered with caution for rarely do they mention inheritance, marriage settlements, endowments and bequests that have taken place before death. Indeed the Callis lands disappear for some 150 years before they are mentioned again in George's will, while the lands in Guist, which Edward owned, were lost from sight for 70 years till his grand-daughter's inquisition, suggesting they had been part of her marriage settlement.

The inherited lands of Thomas and Edward, who both had sons, were safe with an heir but for George and Anne who had lost Richard, their only son, the outlook was quite different. Everyone of his antecedents back to his three times great-grandfather had produced a son to inherit the Wiveton lands and it befell George to face the prospect of this two hundred year link coming to an end. Was he overcome with melancholy at the disappearance of the ancestral

lands from the family and the loss of his Brigge name?

His will, in spite of all its complexities, was a vain attempt to safeguard against these eventualities. In doing so he demonstrated that right to the end, he continued to be a late medieval man valuing honour, integrity and name above all else.

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to Paul Rutledge for alerting me to interesting and obscure sources, nuances of word meaning and generally opening my eyes to the hand of 16th century scribes; to Frank Hawes for his help with the Arms and Linda Nudds's generosity in sharing her research.

References

1. M. Drake editor, 1994 *Time, Family and Community - Perspectives on Family and Community History*, The Open University with Blackwell
2. Cozens-Hardy, 1957 *The History of Letheringsett in the county of Norfolk*
3. A. Hassell Smith, 1974 *County and Court - Government and Politics in Norfolk 1558-1603*, Clarendon Press
4. D. Hey, 1996 *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History*, Oxford University Press
5. Wills: 1494 Thomas Brigge, Salle PCC 202 to 205 Wolman
1528 Thomas Brigge II, Heacham PCC 285, 286 Attmere
- 1563 Edward Brigge,
Norton PCC 10 Chayre
- 1597 George Brigge,
Letheringsett PCC 27 Lewyn
- 1616 Anne Brigge,
Wiveton NCC 97 Sayer
6. R. A. Houlbrooke, 1993 *The English Family 1450-1700*, Longman
7. NRO, Parish Registers of Cley, Wiveton, Letheringsett, Blakeney, Cockthorpe, Wood Norton, Guist and Guestwick
8. C. L. S. Linnell, 1952 *Wiveton Norfolk*, Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society, Vol. IX, Part I, No. LXXI
9. H. K. Cameron, 1977 EDP
10. Transcript by Mary Grace
11. M. J. Sayer, 1972 *Eynsford Hundred Families 1550-1700*, Norfolk and Norwich Genealogical Society, Vol 4, page 62
12. F. Blomefield, 1808 *An essay towards a topographical history of the county of Norfolk*. Continued by C. Parkin, Vol. IX
13. K. Allen Papers, NRO MC/106/5 and 6
14. W. N. Dew, 1885 *The Monumental inscriptions in the hundred of Holt, in the county of Norfolk*, edited and indexed by W. Rye, Norwich
15. Information from Linda Nudds, 2003
16. M. J. Sayer, 1973 *Eynsford Houses*, Norfolk Archaeology Vol. XXXV, page 229
17. P. Rutledge, 1997 Report on family and estate papers of the HARBORD FAMILY, BARONS SUFFIELD, 13th-20th Century deposited in Norfolk Record Office. Royal Commission On Historical Manuscripts
18. NRO, BRA 723/1/1-27 and BRA 723/3/11