

Some Early Chaddesden Landowners



fitz Nicholas



Pipard



de Twyford

England is fortunate in possessing a wealth of archives from the earliest times which help historians work out the frequently confusing way in which estates have been passed down the centuries. In this article I shall take a brief look at three inter-related families who held land here in Chaddesden for many generations, yet their names – fitz Nicholas, Pipard, and de Twyford – will be unfamiliar to many people.

At the time of Domesday Book (1086), Nigel de Stafford held various manors in Derbyshire and Staffordshire and two of his descendants became founders of the Gresley and Longford families. Another of Nigel's posterity was Ralph fitz Nicholas, who served variously as Steward to William de Ferrers, Earl of Derby; Governor of Horston Castle (to the south of Horsley village); Sheriff of Hereford; Steward in the King's household; and Sheriff of Nottingham and Derby. If the King was so-minded he could reward favoured individuals by making or confirming grants to them and recording the details in a royal charter, and in April 1230 the Charter Rolls note a grant to Ralph son of Nicholas (i.e. fitz Nicholas) and his heirs, by which certain of his land-holdings, including his Derbyshire estates in Thurvaston, Kirk Langley and Spondon, "shall be quit of suits of shires and hundreds and of sheriffs aid."

Ralph fitz Nicholas was a wealthy and influential man and sometime around 1246 he added the manor of Twyford in Buckinghamshire to his property portfolio. He also had landed interests in many other places including Rotherfield Peppard and Fritwell, Oxfordshire, as well as an estate at Stretton Baskerville, Warwickshire, which today is nothing more than the site of a deserted mediaeval village a few miles east of Nuneaton. Ralph had at least four sons, but the two which concern us are Robert and Ralph. Robert, the eldest, married Felicia and about 1242 Ralph married Alice, an heiress of the Pipard family, but would later die before his brother. After the death of their father in 1257, Robert naturally inherited the family estates but he died childless in 1272. A sworn inquiry was held at Derby in January 1273 to establish exactly what lands he held in the county at the time of his death, and one of the entries reads as follows:

"Spondon and Schaddisdene – A messuage, 80 acres land, 26 bovates in villenage, 8 acres meadow and pasture, 28 shillings rent, a place called Gothay, and a windmill, held of the said Sir Edmund [Earl of Lancaster, the King's son] in chief, service unspecified."

This estate and all the other properties descended to Ralph and Alice's son, another Ralph, who had taken up his mother's ancestral surname of Pipard. In passing, it is interesting to note that both the fitz Nicholas and Pipard families also had landed interests in Ireland. Apart from Ralph their son, Ralph and Alice fitz Nicholas had two daughters – Margaret and Isabel. Margaret, it is believed, married Sir John de Twyford, whose family apparently originated from either the Leicestershire village of Twyford (a few miles south of Melton Mowbray) or the similarly-named Buckinghamshire village, the latter probably being more likely bearing in mind that Ralph fitz Nicholas had an estate there. Ralph Pipard eventually went on to become Lord Pipard and in 1302 he was made governor of two Derbyshire castles at Bolsover and Horston. Pipard died a few years later, and another inquiry held at Derby in November 1309 reveals that his Spondon and Chaddesden properties still included the windmill and the place called Gothay listed amongst his uncle's possessions a generation earlier.

In the fullness of time, many of Ralph, Lord Pipard's estates in Derbyshire passed to his sister and her husband, Sir John and Margaret de Twyford, and a comparison of the two families' coats of arms shows them to be very similar. Sir John possibly died around 1347 – the very year in which our church here in Chaddesden is first mentioned – and his descendants included at least one Vicar of Spondon. Sir John's eldest son, Sir Robert de Twyford continued in possession of the family estates, while his second son, Sir Edward de Twyford, kept up what was by now becoming a family tradition and served as Governor of Horston Castle. He seemingly held the castle from at least 1363 until his death in 1375, for the Patent Rolls show that in the former year the executors of Henry de Chaddesden's will granted to the newly-established "chantry at the altar of the Virgin Mary in Chaddesden chapel" some 19 acres of land in Horsley "held of Edward de Twyford as of the manor of Horston which Edward holds for life of the king's grant." Isabella de Twyford, who seems to have been Robert and Edward's sister, married Sir Edward de Chandos (yet another Governor of Horston Castle), who is recorded in the Close Rolls for 1340 as being one of four commissioners instructed to enquire into the terrible fire which destroyed Spondon church and much of the village in April that year. Sir John and Margaret de Twyford's third son, Nicholas, also apparently went on to become a favoured servant of the king, since he can be credibly identified with an affluent London goldsmith of the same name.

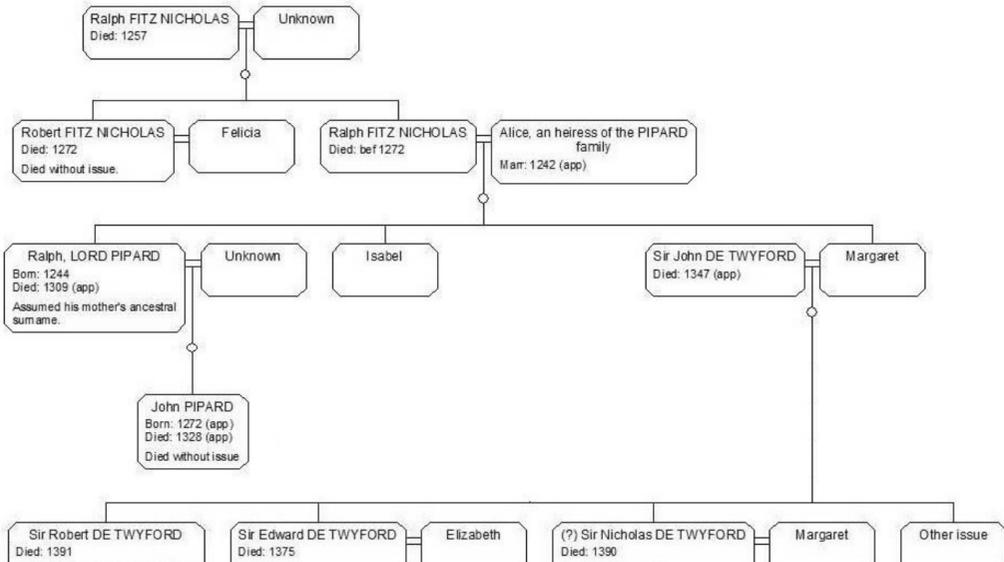
Nicholas de Twyford, the goldsmith, was not only an astute businessman, but also managed to survive the various intrigues that were so much a part of the London political scene at the end of the fourteenth century. During the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 he and others were with the Mayor of London, William Walworth, at Smithfield as the latter struck down and fatally wounded Wat Tyler, and when a grateful King Richard II knighted Walworth, it was only a short time before de Twyford was similarly honoured. As a member of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, de Twyford was a frequent visitor to both Goldsmiths' Hall in London at the junction of Foster Lane and Engaine Lane (later Maiden Lane) and the Company's church of St. John Zachary a few yards to the north. This unusually-named church was, in fact, originally dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and there are two differing accounts as to how it acquired its distinctive title. An early land transaction involving the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's and a local man called Zachary is usually given as the explanation, but then some say that in order to differentiate it from other London churches with similar dedications, the name Zachary was added simply because Zacharias was the father of John the Baptist.

Sir Nicholas de Twyford and his wife Margaret lavished their own money in restoring the church of St. John Zachary and would have needed a close working relationship with its priest, and here we meet a local man, Henry de Spondon, who served as Rector of the church from 1366 to 1383. Surely de Spondon's presence can hardly have been a coincidence, since Nicholas de Twyford was apparently a scion of the family which owned extensive estates in Derbyshire, including property in both Chaddesden and Spondon, so Henry de Spondon may well have known Nicholas long before he moved to London – perhaps they were even related.

In late 1382, Henry de Spondon was aware his health was failing and on 12 December he made his will. He left instructions that his body was to be buried in the middle of the church of St. John Zachary and a marble stone laid over his grave, on which should be placed a brass representation of his image (from the breast upwards). This memorial brass was inscribed with the following words: "Hic jacet Henricus de Spondon, Rector istius Ecclesiae qui plura bona contulit isti Ecclesiae. Cujus animae propitiatur Deus. Amen." Now, my Latin is not up to much, but I think that the inscription means something like "Here lies Henry of Spondon, formerly Rector of this church, who contributed much to it. May God have mercy on his soul. Amen."

Sir Nicholas de Twyford continued to prosper throughout the 1380s, eventually becoming known as the King's goldsmith. He served as Mayor of London in 1388 but died just two years later and, like Henry de Spondon, he too was buried in the church of St. John Zachary "between the two South Pillars next the high Altar." By his will, dated 11 June 1390, and proved that December, he bequeathed lands to his kinsmen as well as a legacy to the ceremonial sword-bearer who assisted him during his mayoralty. Sadly the Great Fire of London in 1666 destroyed the church of St. John Zachary, which was never rebuilt. Somewhat surprisingly the corpse of Sir Nicholas was discovered in the early eighteenth century "immured in a cavity of the ruined wall on the south side of the altar." Today the site of the church at the corner of the modern Gresham Street and Noble Street is a much-appreciated small garden, where Londoners can take a break from the hustle and bustle of city life.

Sir Robert de Twyford (the probable brother of the goldsmith) died in 1391 and his descendants held on to their Chaddesden and Spondon estates for a few more generations until apparently selling them to the Curzon family. The remainder of the de Twyford's Derbyshire property now passed to Thomas Gregson of Sharrow Hall, Thurvaston (between Longford and Trusley), whose second wife was seemingly a Twyford heiress. Here it is worth recalling that Ralph fitz Nicholas, whom we met at the beginning of this article, also possessed lands in Thurvaston, perhaps the same estate that was now in the hands of Gregson. Oddly enough, there is one final Chaddesden connection to recount, for in June 1566 when Richard Newton, a Chaddesden husbandman, whose descendants would soon own much of the land in the village, drew up his will he requested that his brother-in-law, Thomas Gregson of Thurvaston, should act as one of the supervisors of his will, to see it "truly performed and done."



PFC, 2012

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