



# EDWARD DE VERE NEWSLETTER NO. 28

Published by De Vere Press  
1340 Flemish Street  
Kelowna, B.C. V1Y 3R7 Canada

## **To whom was Humfrey Martyn, the recipient of the Langham Letter, related through his father, Sir Roger Martyn?**

Issue #27 of the *Edward De Vere Newsletter* explored Humfrey Martyn's connections, through his mother Letitia, with the Pakingtons of Westwood. It now remains to consider Humfrey Martyn's descent on the paternal side.

On his father's side, Humfrey Martyn was descended from an ancient English family, the Martyns of Athelhampton, Dorset, who came to England from near Bayeux in Normandy. Lands at Athelhampton came into the possession of the Martyn family in 1350 through the marriage of Sir Richard Martyn of Waterston, and a little over a century later, about the time of the Battle of Bosworth, Sir William Martyn built the beautiful manor at Athelhampton which still stands today. The last of the male line at Athelhampton was Sir Nicholas Martyn, who died in 1595, leaving his four daughters as his heiresses. The novelist Thomas Hardy wrote two poems about Athelhampton, and used it as the setting for one of his short stories (*Athelhampton*).

In the late 1300's, a branch of the Martyn family of Athelhampton, Dorset settled at Long Melford in Suffolk. The expanding wool trade in the 1400's made the Suffolk branch of the Martyn family wealthy, and in the latter half of the 15th century the family assisted John Clopton of Kentwell Hall in financing the building of the "wool church" of Holy Trinity in Long Melford, "one of the most remarkable and beautiful parish churches in England", with

its Martyn chapel and "one of the finest collections of medieval glass" in the country. Only a few miles away across the fields in Lavenham, a similar wool church was being built at this time by John de Vere, 13th Earl of Oxford, and the wealthy wool merchant, Thomas Spring (Wall 15, 16, 30; *Holy Trinity*).

The pedigree of the Martyns of Long Melford is given in the *Visitation of London, 1568* (2-3) and in Wall's *Long Melford Through the Ages* (82), from which the details in the following two paragraphs are taken.

Richard Martyn (d.1438) of Long Melford, a wealthy wool merchant had a son, Laurence (d.1460) who, in turn, had a son Richard II (d.1500). Richard II's son, Roger Martyn II (d.1542), married Alice Ford, by whom he had a son, Richard Martyn III (d.1572). Richard Martyn III married, firstly, Anne Eden, daughter of Thomas Eden, Clerk of the Star Chamber, by whom he had a son, Roger Martyn III, and, secondly, Elizabeth Crane of Chilton, by whom he had no children.

Roger Martyn III (1526?-1615), Richard's son by Anne Eden, inherited the family manor of Melford Place at his father's death in 1572, and married Ursula, daughter of Sir Thomas Jermyn. One of the things for which he is remembered is the detailed inventory he compiled of the possessions of Holy Trinity Church prior to the Reformation, to which historians are indebted for much of their knowledge about the original condition of the church in the pre-Reformation era. Queen Mary offered Roger Martyn III the position of Secretary of State, but he pre-

ferred to live quietly in the country. He died in 1615, at the age of 89. A brass commemorating him is still to be found in Holy Trinity Church.

Sir Roger Martyn, Humphrey Martyn's father, was a cousin of Roger Martyn III and was born at Long Melford, the son of Lawrence Martyn and Elizabeth Cheke (Rawlins 2). At some point he moved to London, and appears to have had a notably successful career as a city merchant. He was admitted to the freedom of the Mercers' Company in 1540 after serving an apprenticeship under Humphrey Pakington, his wife Letitia's father, and was Master of the Company in 1562, 1567 and 1572 (Kuin 13). Sir Roger Martyn is one of the few London merchants to be named in both charters of incorporation of the Company of Merchant Adventurers, that of Queen Mary under the governorship of Sebastian Cabot in 1555, and Queen Elizabeth's charter of 1564 (*CPR 1554-5*, 55-9; *CPR 1563-6*, 178-80). Sir Roger was also one of the first governors of Highgate School, and was involved for several years in civic office: he was elected Alderman of the City of London in 1556, Sheriff in 1559, and Lord Mayor in 1567 (*Mercers*).

Sir Roger was twice married. By his first wife, Letitia Pakington, he had four children -- Humfrey, Edmund, Susanna and Martha. His second wife was Elizabeth Castelyn, daughter of the London merchant William Castelyn, and widow of Thomas Knowles. By his second wife, Sir Roger had three daughters -- Mary, Joan and Anne (Rawlins 2-3).

Little is known of Humfrey Martyn, Sir Roger's eldest son and heir. He was admitted to the freedom of the Mercers' Company by patrimony in 1570 and, in October 1571 was one of a group of young freemen chosen to organise the Company's ceremonial for the Lord Mayor, for which, later, he and others complained they were out of pocket (*Mercers*). On November 11, 1572, he married Alice Pullison (*Guildhall*), daughter of Sir Thomas Pullison, a member of the Drapers' Company and an Alderman, Sheriff and Lord Mayor of London (Beaven, v.1, 341; v.2, 39). In 1574, the Mercers' Company granted him a twenty-one year lease of the mansion in Bassishaw in which his father had once lived

(*Mercers*). From 1576 on, however, at which time he took up £300 of the Queen's money at seven per cent interest (Kuin 14), historical records reveal little or nothing about Humfrey Martyn.

The relative obscurity of the London branch of the Martyn family during the latter part of Queen Elizabeth's reign is probably due to the fact that the family retained its Catholic faith. This was certainly true of the Martyns of Long Melford who, Wall says, "after the Reformation remained staunch Catholics in spite of deprivations, fines, and restrictions on their movements" (82).

At the time at which the Langham *Letter* was written, however, the London members of the Martyn family were wealthy and prominent citizens, and it is virtually certain that the Martyns would have been known to Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. Sir Roger Martyn's mansion in Soper Lane was only a short distance from the mansion of the Earls of Oxford at London Stone, and the Martyn family seat at Long Melford was only a few miles across the fields from Lavenham, where the Earls of Oxford had been lords of the manor for five centuries (Betterton 2). This latter point is of significance in determining the authorship of the Langham *Letter* since, in closing, the author calls Humfrey Martyn his "countreeman" as well as his friend. To the 16th century Englishman, the term "countryman" denoted the part of England from which one came. Oxford's family, and Humfrey Martin's family, both came from East Anglia.

Thus, Humfrey Martyn's background on his father's side, as well as his mother's, supports the hypothesis that Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, was the author of the Langham *Letter* by confirming that Humfrey Martyn's position, both socially and financially, was one which would have facilitated his acquaintance and friendship with Oxford.

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