

LADY DENNY'S LOST DAUGHTER

During the lockdown I have had the time to continue my investigation of the missing daughter of Lady Denny. I was worried that the number of offspring did not tally with the representations on the family monument in the Abbey Church of Waltham Holy Cross & St Lawrence, Waltham Abbey. Lady Denny organized the elaborate memorial to her husband who died in February 1600, by having her own effigy laid alongside that of Sir Edward. She did not die for a further 48 years when she ordered specifically that she be buried, at minimal cost, in the chancel of St Michael's ... where she remains under the carpet to this day.

I discovered recently that the contract for the Waltham Abbey monument, with a well-known London firm of Atye and James in the parish of St Martin the Fields, had been found in 1920 in the Public Record Office, now at Kew, and transcribed in the Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society. Dated the 8th October in the 44th year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the widowed Lady Denny orders the dimensions (8 and a half feet by 13 and a half), the stones (Alabaster Touch, Rauncestone and Totternhoe) and the painting (of good quality with oil colours). She requires 2 pillars, a round arch and 2 pyramids and 3 escutcheons, 1 in the middle with the helm, crest and mantling.



Denny Monument, Waltham Abbey

By Richard Croft, CC BY-SA 2.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=13734086>

There are to be 10 kneeling figures 18 inches high of her children: seven sons and three daughters. At the time of Sir Edward's death in 1600 and recorded in her will nearly 50 years later, the girls were Elizabeth, aged about 14, Anne, aged 4 and Mary aged 2; the younger two born at Church Manor and baptised in St Michael's whereas the eldest children were born in Tralee in Ireland.

The boys, Arthur, Francis, Henry, Anthony and Thomas, are there on the left, with the addition of a second Anthony who died in infancy which makes six. Charles, her youngest, is on the right holding the hand of his twin Mary, alongside the other two girls. But no Honora.



Purvey Memorial, Wormley

<http://www.michael-milsom.org.uk/mdm/church/church.htm>

I reckon that Honora was probably the second daughter, the eldest being Elizabeth, named for the queen. Honora was most likely born about 1590 before they left Ireland. In 1600 she would have been 10 and possibly died before her father, necessitating the memorial in the church of St Laurence, Wormley, expressing her parents' grief. She had been adopted by the Purveys whose monument was added on top after 1617. The figure of the little girl would appear to be aged about 9. The puzzle is whether her parents paid for the Wormley monument to Honora, possibly made by the same firm of London sculptors, and subsequently had all seven boys and three girls included at Waltham Abbey, but not Honora. When faced with her loss she would not have anticipated that she would shortly have to face widowhood with nine small children and the commissioning of an expensive memorial to their father.

The poem at Wormley may well have been composed by Margaret, who also undertook to supply the firm with the text of the inscription about her husband, that she herself composed, to be cut and gilded.



The whole bill came to £64 to be paid in instalments with the finished sculpture to be delivered at a maximum of 12 miles from London by 22nd March following.

Over the years since I first became interested in 'The Lady under the Carpet' I have frequently considered her situation as a mother of nine aged from 16 to 2, confronting military campaigns in Ireland and the civil war, sharing her house in Parsonage Lane with a further seven fatherless grandchildren, in circumstances so different from her life as a maid of honour at the court of Elizabeth 1 ... and ending up in St Michael's Church under a plain slab less than a year before the execution of the king, followed by her neighbour Capel of Hadham Hall.

Here, we roll back the carpet and give a moment's thought to Margaret, Lady Denny.

Helen Gibson, July 2020



***Denny Memorial,
St Michael's Church, Bishop's Stortford***