

The Calverts and Bexley

Two separate families named Calvert have had local connections.

One of them was closely linked with the state of Maryland, U.S.A., in its early days. We will refer to this family as the Maryland Calverts, and the other one as the Verney Calverts, since one of them married a Verney.

The Maryland Calverts

On March 2nd, 1606, a baby named Cecil Calvert was christened at St. Mary's Church, Bexley, the son of John Calvert and his wife Anne, nee Linne. The god-parents included the Earl of Cumberland and the Earl of Salisbury, who were represented by proxies, Sir Olliffe Leigh of East Wickham, and Sir John Leigh, two men with connections at Court.

The entry in the parish register is incorrect on one point: the father's uncle was George, not John, Calvert. He was then about 27. He had been born in Yorkshire, educated at Oxford, where he received his M.A. in 1605, and then became secretary to Sir Robert Cecil, the son of Queen Elizabeth's famous minister. Cecil was created Earl of Salisbury by James I in 1605. The fact that he was George Calvert's employer no doubt explains the choice of the name Cecil for the baby.

We do not know why the Calverts were in Bexley in 1606, nor where they were staying. Perhaps they were at Sir Olliffe Leigh's, in East Wickham - though in that case the christening might have been at the parish church there.

Later in the same year George Calvert was made Clerk of the Crown at Connaught in Ireland. In 1624 James I made him the first Lord Baltimore and in 1632 Charles I gave him by charter the "proctorship" of the proposed new colony of Maryland but he died before the charter received the Great Seal.

Cecil Calvert, his son, by then 26, inherited the title and succeeded in having the charter transferred to himself. He sent off his younger

brother, Leonard, to start the colony. A hundred years later, in 1743, a descendant of Cecil's, Charles Calvert, the fourth Baron Baltimore, after being governor of Maryland in the 1730's, bought a house in Erith and lived there until his death in 1751. This house was at Blink's Hill on the spot where the well-remembered Belvedere House was to be built by Lord Eardley.

The Verne Calverts

The second Calvert family's local links were with Hall Place, Bexley, and May Place, Crayford. Sometime after the death in 1755 of Sir Austen, the last of the Austens to live at Hall Place, Richard Calvert took a lease of the house. He was certainly there when Andrews, Dury and Herbert published their map of Kent in 1769.

This family came from Hertfordshire. Richard's great grandfather was Felix Calvert, of Little Hadham in that county. The name Felix was popular in the family, with resulting risk of confusion to researchers. Richard had married the widow of the Hon. John Verney, eldest son of the first Earl Verney. She had a daughter by her first husband, and this daughter, Mary Verney, later Lady Fermanagh, was to become heiress to the Verney estates. After marrying Richard Calvert she had three more children: two sons who died and a daughter, Catherine.

Richard died and was buried at Bexley in 1782. His wife continued to live at Hall Place until her death in 1789. The Kentish Traveller's Companion, published in 1794 gives the occupier of Hall Place as Miss Verney, no doubt Mrs. Calvert's daughter by her first marriage. Francis Dashwood, who inherited Hall Place in 1793, refused to renew the lease, although Mary Verney offered to spend £10,000 on repairs to it. She therefore went to May Place at Crayford, where Hasted reported in 1797 that she was living, having enlarged and modernised it at a cost of £7,000. By then she was Lady Fermanagh.

Richard Calvert had a cousin, Sir William Calvert, M.P. and Lord Mayor of London in 1749, who lived for some years at Mount Maschal. He died in 1761. The Kentish Traveller's Companion, edition of 1794, states that a Felix Calvert resided at May Place, Crayford. He has not yet been identified.

Sources

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