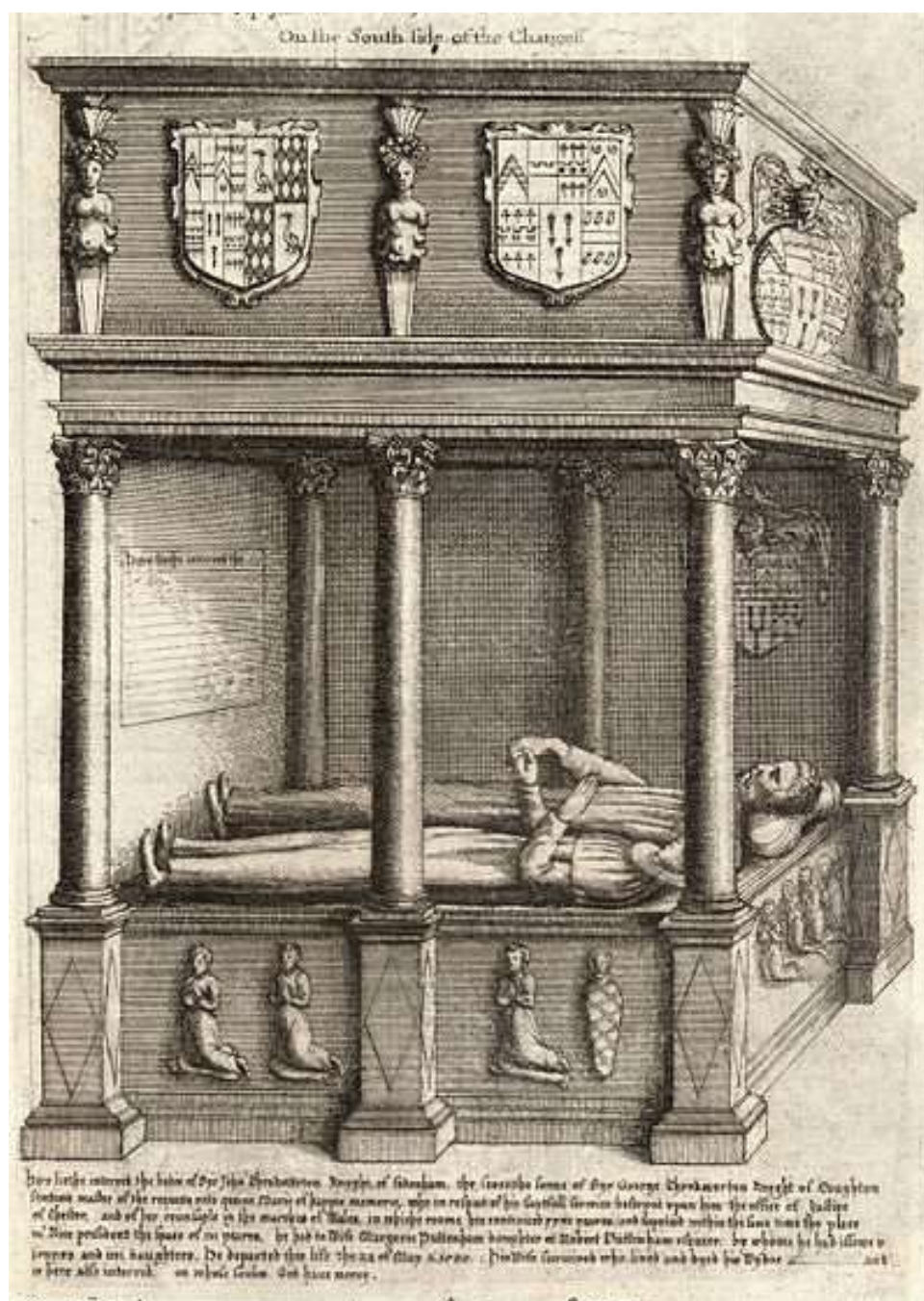


THE HIGH STEWARDS of SUTTON COLDFIELD

by

Kerry Osbourne



Sir John Throckmorton (1524-1580), first High Steward of Sutton Coldfield

October 2021

The High Stewards of Sutton Coldfield

The Charter of King Henry VIII dated 16th December 1528, which established the Warden and Society of the Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield, contained a clause which gave the new Corporation the power to appoint 'a fit person learned in the laws of the land to be Steward' and 'to keep the Court Leets and Views of Frank Pledge by himself or by his sufficient Deputy'. Frankpledge was the Anglo-Saxon system of justice whereby every man living within a tithing, or subdivision of a manor, was responsible for the good conduct of all others and for bringing suspected criminals to court. By the 16th century the term 'view of frankpledge' had evolved to mean a court appearance. There is no mention of 'High Steward' in the Charter, but in time the office of steward became an honorary one and it was the Deputy Steward who attended court and did the work, and the Steward became the High Steward. Deputy Stewards were replaced by Town Clerks in 1886.

The Charter gives details of the appointment of some of the crown officers connected with Sutton prior to 1528. In 1504 King Henry VII appointed Sir Henry Willoughby as Steward of Sutton Coldfield and Master of his Park of Sutton and the Chase. Sir Henry Willoughby (1451-1528), the head of the Willoughby family of Middleton Hall, was Knight of the Body to both King Henry VII and King Henry VIII. He was present at King Henry VIII's meeting with King Francis I of France at the Field of Cloth of Gold in 1520, and was at various times the Sheriff of Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire and Warwickshire, and Master-General of the Ordnance. He died at Middleton Hall (see below for the Willoughby family tree).

In 1512 Sir Henry Guildford (1489-1532) was appointed as Bailiff of Sutton Coldfield and Keeper of Sutton Park. He was Master of the Horse and Comptroller of the Royal Household to King Henry VIII. On the occasion of his marriage the King granted him the Manors of Hampton-in-Arden in Warwickshire and Byker in Lincolnshire; he was also Constable and Doorward of Leeds Castle in Kent and Keeper of the Parks at Leeds and Langley in Kent. Guildford gave up his Sutton posts in 1525 and King Henry VIII appointed Sir Walter Devereux and his son Henry Devereux 'and either of them' to the offices of Bailiff of Sutton, Keeper or Parker of Sutton Park and 'Keeper of our Bailiwick or Perambulation called Coldfield Walk within our Chase of Sutton' for their joint lives and for the life of the survivor of them.

Sir Walter Devereux 10th Baron Ferrers of Chartley (1488-1558) held various other high-profile and profitable posts: High Steward of Tamworth in 1510, joint Constable of Warwick Castle and Steward of the Manor of Warwick in 1511, High Steward of Hereford in 1514, Steward of the Household of Princess Mary and High Steward of Builth in 1525, and Chamberlain of South Wales in 1526. Several of these posts brought him into close contact with Bishop Vesey and it may well have been through Vesey's influence or recommendation that he obtained the posts in 1525. As Bailiff of Sutton his headquarters were at New Hall, at a time when Bishop Vesey was building Moor Hall for his own occupation.

The Charter also mentions the appointment of William Ridgley 'Page of our Wardrobe and of our Beds' as 'Keeper of our Chase of Hillwood' in 1511, following the death of Rowland Stafford, and the appointment of William Ridgley as 'Keeper of the Wood and Beasts of our outward Wood called Lynrich [Lindridge]' in 1524, following the death of Thomas Woolbaston. It seems likely that Ridgley, otherwise Rugeley or Ruggeley was the brother of Joyce Ruggeley, the second wife of Bishop Vesey's brother Hugh Harman (see *Bishop Vesey*). In 1520 King Henry VIII granted to Lodowick Windwood "the Herbage and Farm of the Herbage [the income from granting rights of grazing] of our Park within the said Manor or Lordship of Sutton".

A somewhat puzzling clause in the Charter referring to Sir Walter Devereux reads as follows (taken from a translation of the original Latin printed in 1836): 'We of our special grace and consideration of the Acceptable and Faithful Service which our beloved servant the aforesaid Walter Devereux Lord Ferrers formerly did for us and then daily did not cease to do, have given and granted to the said Walter the offices of Steward of our Lordship of Sutton and Coldfield and of Master of the Beasts of our Park of Sutton and of our Chase there.' No date is given for these appointments, whereas all the other appointments refer to precisely dated Letters Patent, which leads to a possible interpretation that the appointments are made by the Charter itself, especially as Sir Henry Willoughby, the previous Steward, died earlier in 1528.

A total of £58 was paid to the King each year by the various office holders, and subject to that payment they could manage their office by appointing deputies or other employees and retain the profit as a salary or emolument. Although the Charter changed the status of Sutton Coldfield from a royal manor under the old feudal system to a self-governing town, and the new Warden and Society were to take over responsibility of every aspect of the management of the town and the Park, the previous office-holders were allowed to retain their emoluments of office, as they had been appointed for life; as each office-holder dropped out by death or resignation the Warden and Society became liable to pay a proportion of the annual sum of £58 to the King, only paying the full amount when all the offices had been extinguished.

Sir Walter Devereux went on to serve King Henry VIII in Wales, where he clashed with Rhys ap Gruffydd (1508-1531) who plotted to overthrow the English government in Wales and to declare himself Prince of Wales. After Rhys's execution for treason Devereux was rewarded with grants of land and was appointed Custos Rotulorum (Keeper of the Rolls, equivalent to Lord Lieutenant) of Cardiganshire, and towards the end of his life he was created 1st Viscount Hereford, made a Privy Councillor and appointed Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire. His son Sir Richard Devereux predeceased him in 1547 (his son Henry also died before him), and Richard's son, another Walter Devereux (1541-1576) inherited his title; this grandson is well-known in Tudor history as the 1st Earl of Essex and a favourite of Queen Elizabeth I.

When King Henry VIII died in January 1547 all the appointments he made during his lifetime automatically came to an end; until the passing of the Demise of the Crown Act 1901 all crown offices became vacant upon the death of the sovereign. This meant that the Warden and Society could make their first appointment of a Steward. Although Sir Walter Devereux was still living the person they chose to fill the vacancy was John Throckmorton.

The first High Steward of Sutton Coldfield from 1547 to 1580, Sir John Throckmorton (1524-1580) was the seventh son of Sir George Throckmorton of Coughton Court Warwickshire, now a National Trust property. He was a barrister by profession, acting as attorney to the Council of Wales and the Marches from 1550. Later he had various judicial posts, including the Recorder of Coventry and a Master of Requests (appeals to the sovereign). He was the MP for several constituencies, including Leicester, Coventry and Warwick from 1545, and in 1558 he was one of the witnesses to Queen Mary I's will. He was knighted in 1565, but his career ended in disgrace when he was found guilty of giving a judgment in favour of a relative. His son Sir Francis Throckmorton (1554-1584) was executed for treason for his role in the Throckmorton Plot to overthrow Queen Elizabeth I and restore the Roman Catholic Church in England under Mary Queen of Scots.

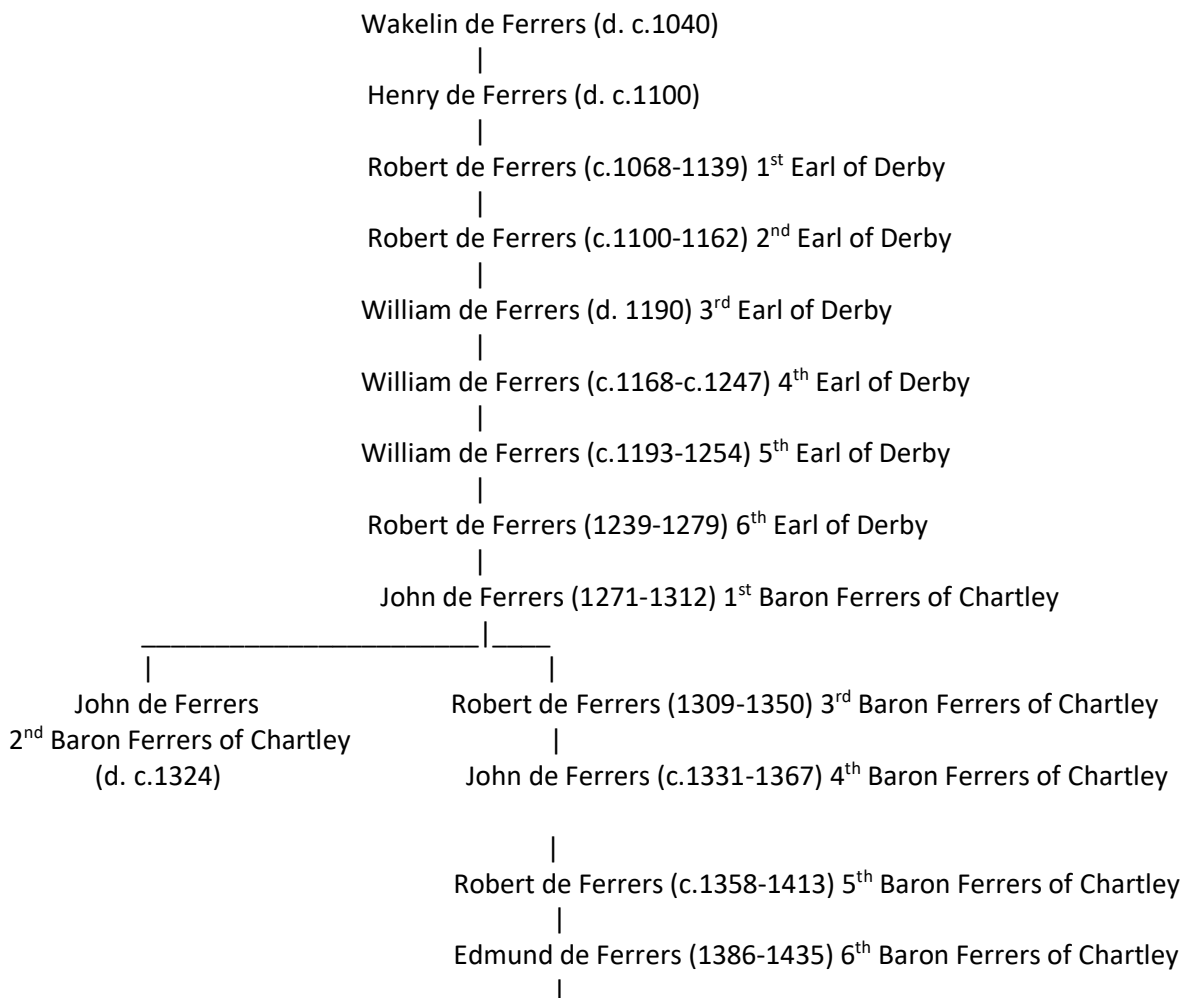
The second High Steward from 1582 to 1595 was Sir Henry Goodere (1534-1595), son of Francis Goodere of Polesworth Hall Warwickshire (demolished in 1870). He was the High Sheriff of Warwickshire in 1570. Polesworth Hall was a centre of culture in the later Elizabethan age; the Polesworth Circle included the playwright Ben Jonson, poet Michael Drayton and architect Inigo Jones,

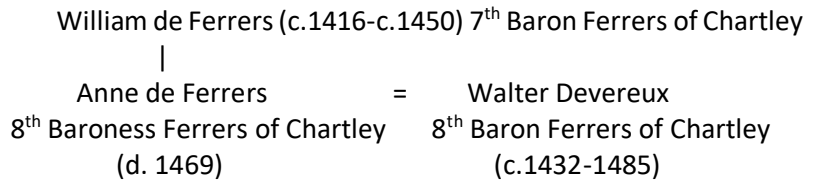
and possibly William Shakespeare. Goodere had a soft spot for Mary Queen of Scots and he invented a cipher for her use; in 1571 he was confined to the Tower of London on suspicion of treason, but after examination was released. He was knighted in 1588 and appointed as Queen Elizabeth I's chief bodyguard.

The third High Steward from 1595 to 1612 was Sir Richard Repington. He came from a prosperous Staffordshire family who had owned the Manor of Amington since 1539 and later acquired the Manor of Atherstone. Nothing else is known about him. The last of the Repingtons, who was a Governor of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, died in 1837.

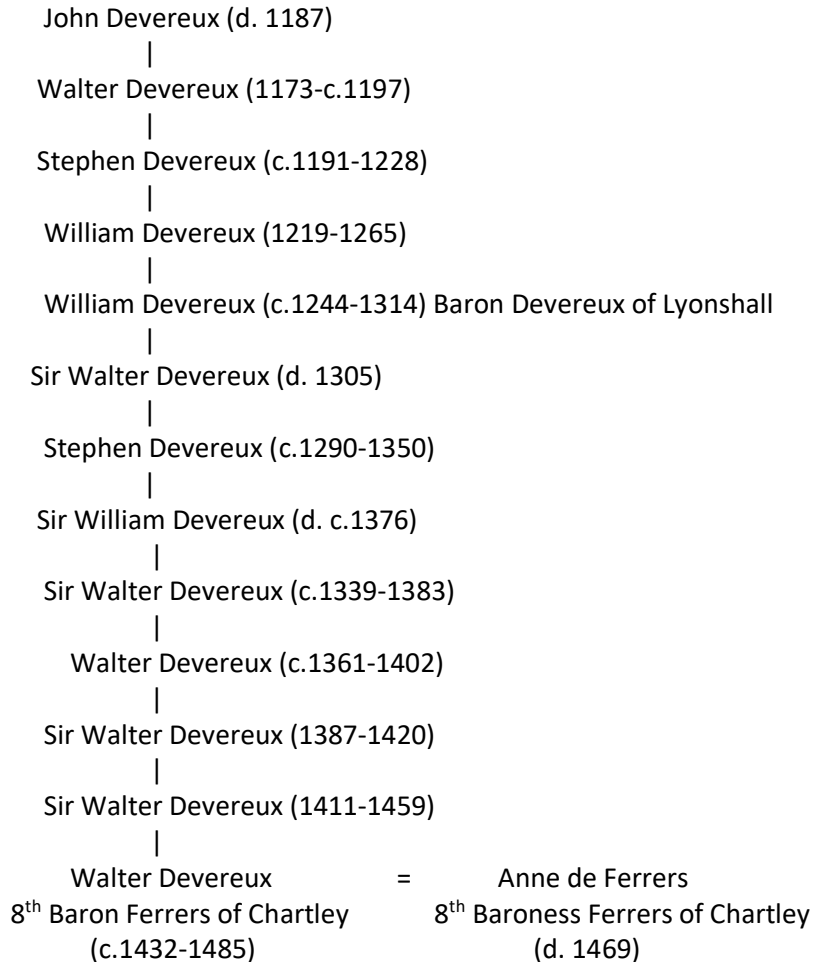
The fourth High Steward from 1612 to 1646 was Robert Devereux 3rd Earl of Essex (1591-1646). He was the Commander-in-Chief of the Parliamentary Army at the commencement of the Civil War in 1642, but he was unable, or perhaps unwilling, to inflict a decisive blow on the Royalist Army and, overshadowed by the ascendancy of Oliver Cromwell, he resigned in 1645, dying of a stroke a year later and leaving no heir. His first marriage had been annulled on the grounds of non-consummation and the only son of his second marriage, who was widely believed not to be his, died of the plague a month after his birth.

Robert Devereux was the great-great-grandson of Sir Walter Devereux 10th Baron Ferrers of Chartley who had been appointed as Bailiff of Sutton Coldfield by King Henry VIII in 1525 (see above). He had a long and illustrious pedigree, starting with a French nobleman whose son came to England with William the Conqueror:

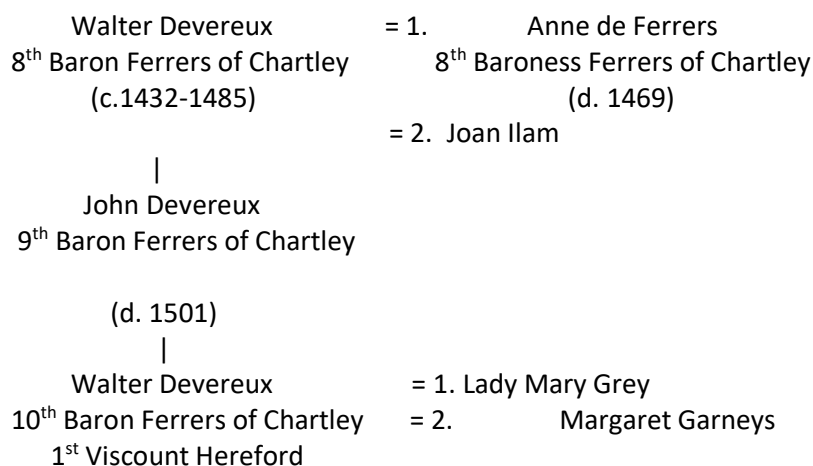


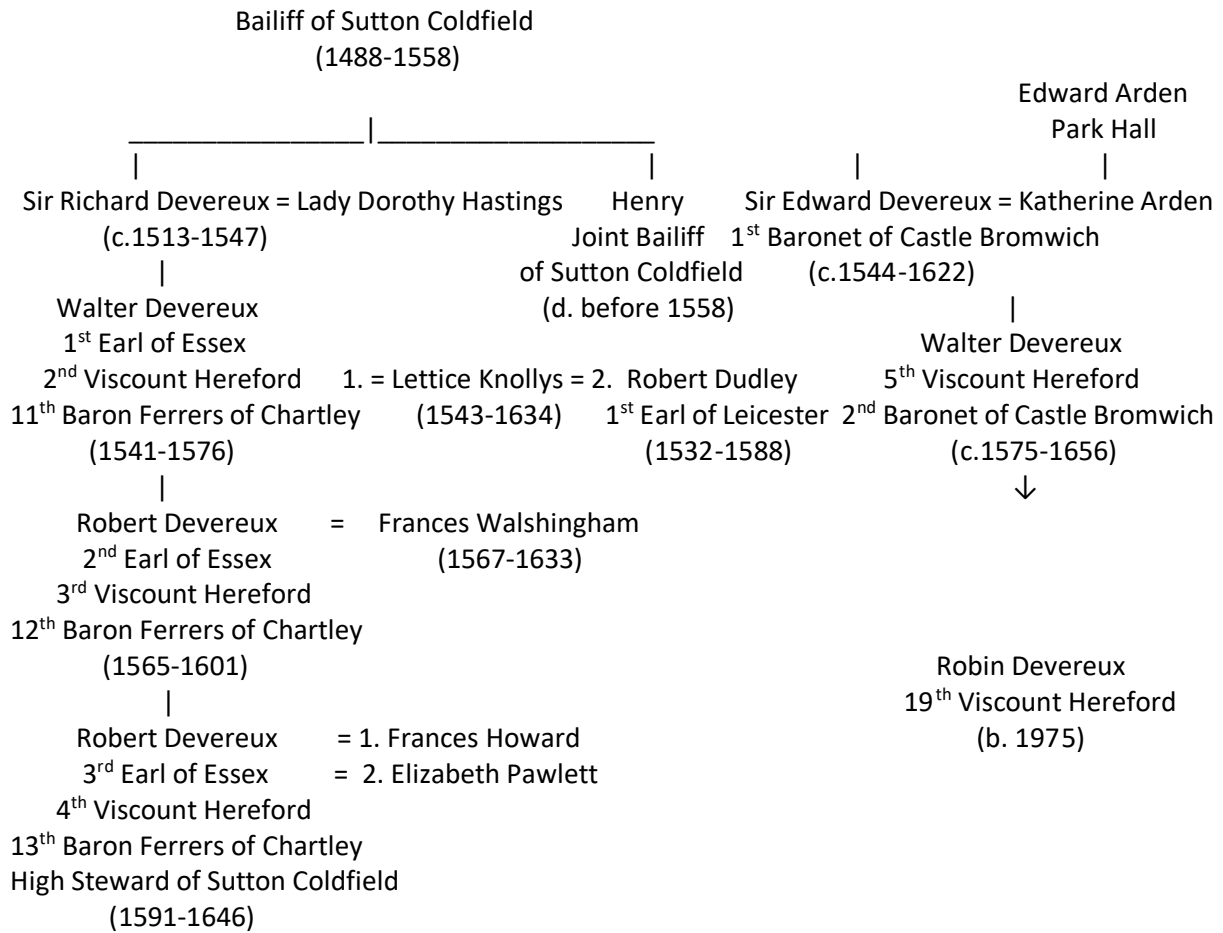


The pedigree of Walter Devereux 8th Baron Ferrers of Chartley was almost as long as his wife's:



The family tree of the 8th Baron and Baroness Ferrers of Chartley concluded as follows:





Katherine Arden's father was Edward Arden who owned Park Hall near Castle Bromwich, a second cousin once removed of William Shakespeare (see *Peddimore Hall*). Her mother Mary Throckmorton was the niece of Sir John Throckmorton the first High Steward of Sutton Coldfield.

The next High Steward, from 1646 to 1678, was Sir Richard Newdigate 1st Baronet (1602-1678). He was the younger son of Sir John Newdigate of Arbury Hall near Nuneaton in Warwickshire (now a Grade I Listed Building). Called to the bar in 1628 he had a successful legal career, culminating in being appointed Lord Chief Justice in 1660. In 1642 he succeeded to Arbury Hall on the death of his elder brother, and in 1675 he also acquired his family's ancient seat at Harefield in Middlesex. He was briefly MP for Tamworth in 1660 and King Charles II conferred a baronetcy on him in 1677.

The sixth High Steward, from 1679 to 1714 was Thomas Thynne 1st Viscount Weymouth (1640-1714) of Drayton Bassett, who was married to Frances Finch, daughter of Heneage Finch, 3rd Earl of Winchilsea. He was a direct descendant of Sir John Thynne (c.1515-1580) who built Longleat House in Wiltshire. He was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1664, was MP for Oxford University in 1674 and MP for Tamworth and High Steward of Tamworth in 1679. He became 2nd Baronet Thynne of Kempford in Gloucestershire by inheritance in 1679 and was created 1st Baron Thynne of Warminster in Wiltshire and 1st Viscount Weymouth in 1682. He was an active supporter of the Glorious Revolution and was appointed to the Privy Council in 1702. His final appointment was as Warden of the Forest of Dean in 1712. His four sons all predeceased him and he had no grandson.

The next four High Stewards for almost a century were members of the Willoughby family of Middleton Hall in Warwickshire and Wollaton Hall in Nottinghamshire. Thomas Willoughby (1672-1729) was the second son of Francis Willoughby - as he spelt his name - (1635-1672) of Middleton Hall

who had been a pupil at Bishop Vesey's Grammar School before going to Trinity College Cambridge in 1653, and who collaborated with John Ray, known as 'the Father of Natural History', in writing two seminal works, *Ornithologia* and *Historia Piscium*. His elder brother Sir Francis Willoughby (1668-1688) was created 1st Baronet of Wollaton in 1677, and when he died without issue Thomas inherited the baronetcy together with Middleton Hall and Wollaton Hall. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society from 1693, Deputy Lieutenant of Nottinghamshire in 1692, High Sheriff of Nottinghamshire in 1695, and Deputy Lieutenant and High Sheriff of Lincolnshire in 1699. He was Tory MP for Nottinghamshire and later for Newark from 1688 to 1711, but in 1712 he was raised to the peerage as 1st Baron Middleton to increase Tory support in the House of Lords. He was High Steward of Sutton Coldfield from 1714 to 1729, although he had lived at Wollaton Hall since 1688.

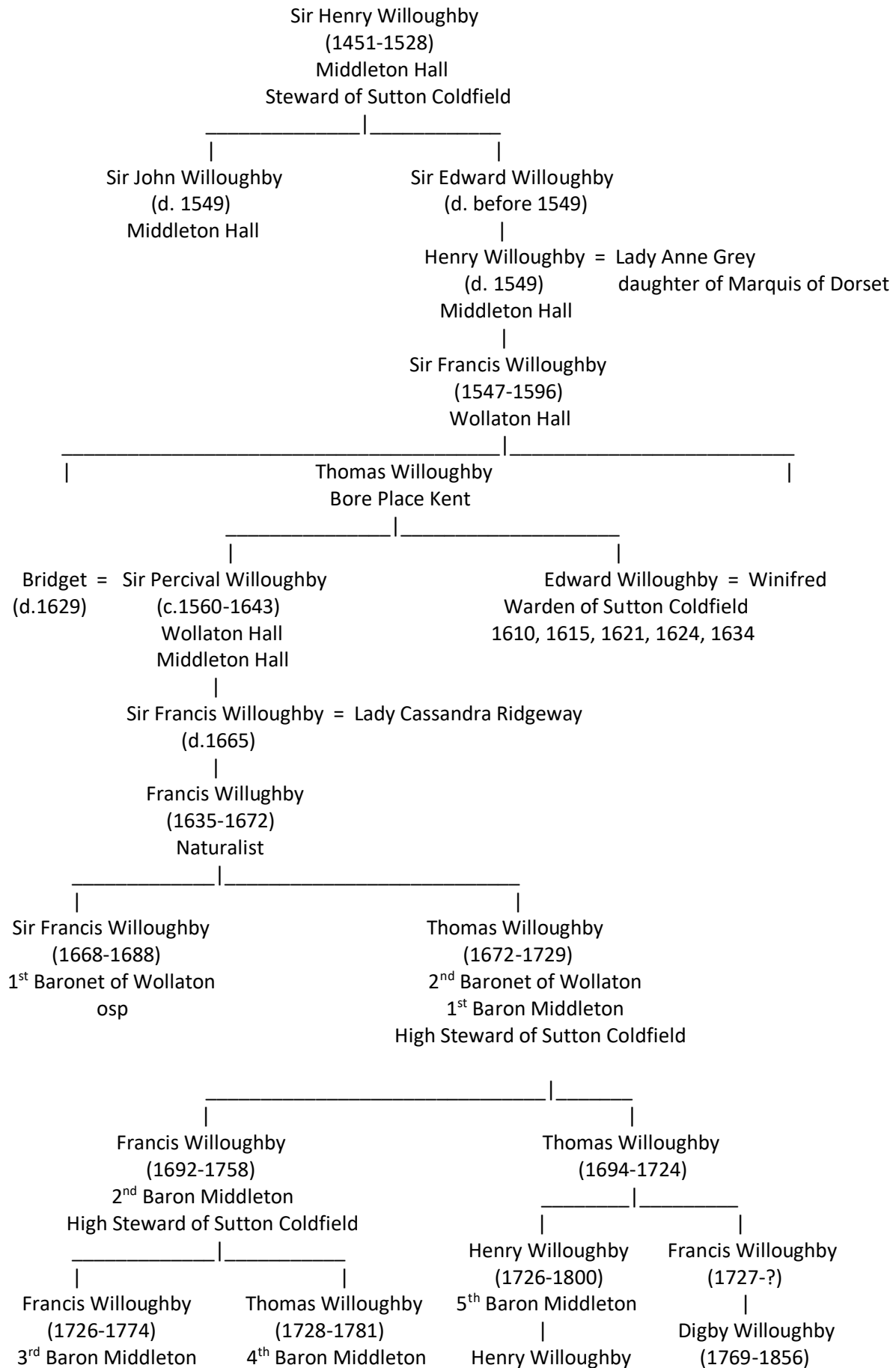
Francis Willoughby 2nd Baron Middleton (1692-1758), the elder son of the 1st Baron Middleton, was the High Steward of Sutton Coldfield from 1729 to 1758. He was the MP for Nottinghamshire from 1722 to 1727 and, like his father, he lived at Wollaton Hall. His elder son Francis Willoughby 3rd Baron Middleton (1726-1774) was the High Steward from 1758 to 1774. He also lived at Wollaton Hall, but unlike his father and grandfather took no part in national politics. He died unmarried and his younger brother Thomas Willoughby (1728-1781) succeeded him as 4th Baron Middleton and also as High Steward of Sutton Coldfield. He was MP for Nottinghamshire from 1762 to 1774, living at Wollaton Hall. He was married but had no children, and the title passed to a cousin (see family tree below).

The eleventh High Steward of Sutton Coldfield, from 1781 to 1796, was Thomas Thynne 1st Marquess of Bath and 3rd Viscount Weymouth of Longleat (1734-1796). He was the eldest son of Thomas Thynne 2nd Viscount Weymouth (1710-1751), whose father, another Thomas Thynne (died 1710) was the nephew of the 1st Viscount Weymouth, the sixth High Steward of Sutton (see above). He became the 3rd Viscount Weymouth in 1751 and was Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1765 and a Secretary of State from 1768 to 1770 and from 1775 to 1779. He was created Marquess of Bath in 1789. His wife, Lady Elizabeth Cavendish, was the sister of William Henry Cavendish Cavendish-Bentinck, Prime Minister of Great Britain in 1783 and from 1807 to 1809.

The twelfth High Steward, from 1796 to 1812, was Heneage Finch 4th Earl of Aylesford (1751-1812), the namesake but only distantly related to the sixth High Steward's father-in-law. Finch was the MP for Castle Rising in Norfolk and then for Maidstone in Kent from 1772 until he went to the House of Lords on inheriting his father's title in 1777. He was Lord of the Bedchamber to King George III from 1777 to 1783 and Steward of the Royal Household from 1802 to 1812; he was appointed to the Privy Council in 1783. He was also an artist of some repute, specialising in English landscapes, including some views of Sutton Park; Tate Britain houses fifty of his water-colours and drawings. He was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1773 and was a trustee of the British Museum from 1787.

The next High Steward, from 1812 to 1835, was Henry Willoughby 6th Baron Middleton (1761-1835). He was the only son of Henry Willoughby 5th Baron Middleton (1726-1800) who had inherited the title from his cousin Thomas Willoughby, the tenth High Steward. He married Jane Lawley the daughter of Sir Robert Lawley of Canwell Hall near Sutton Coldfield. He lived at Wollaton Hall and he was a keen fox-hunter, acting as Master of the Warwickshire Hunt from 1811 until a bad fall from his horse caused him to resign. He had no children and the title again passed to a cousin.

The family tree of the Willoughbys, going back to Sir Henry Willoughby, Steward of Sutton Coldfield in 1504 (see above) and taking in Sir Percival Willoughby, who lived at New Hall in 1586 (see *New Hall*), and his brother Edward, five times Warden of Sutton Coldfield, is as follows:



High Steward
of Sutton Coldfield
osp

High Steward
of Sutton Coldfield
osp

(1761-1835)
6th Baron Middleton
High Steward
of Sutton Coldfield
osp

7th Baron Middleton
osp

The fourteenth High Steward of Sutton Coldfield, from 1835 to 1859, was another Heneage Finch, 5th Earl of Aylesford (1786-1859), son of the former High Steward. His appointment was not uncontested as was usually the case. George Browne, Warden in 1833 and 1834, Charles Barker, Headmaster of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School and Warden in 1836 and 1837, and Rev William Riland Bedford, Rector of Sutton Coldfield and Warden in 1822, proposed Shirley Farmer Steele Perkins, a barrister who lived at Moat House and had been Warden in 1804, to fill the vacancy, but they were outvoted. Sarah Holbeche commented in her Diary 'the three big Bs beaten – we never had such excitement'. Finch was MP for Weobly Herefordshire from 1807 to 1812 and on inheriting the title in 1812 he sat in the House of Lords. He moved the Address of Thanks on the Prince Regent's Speech at the Opening of the Session of Parliament in 1818, particularly referring to 'the sufferings of our venerable king [the madness of King George III]' and 'the untimely loss of Princess Charlotte [only child of the Prince Regent who had died in November 1817]'.

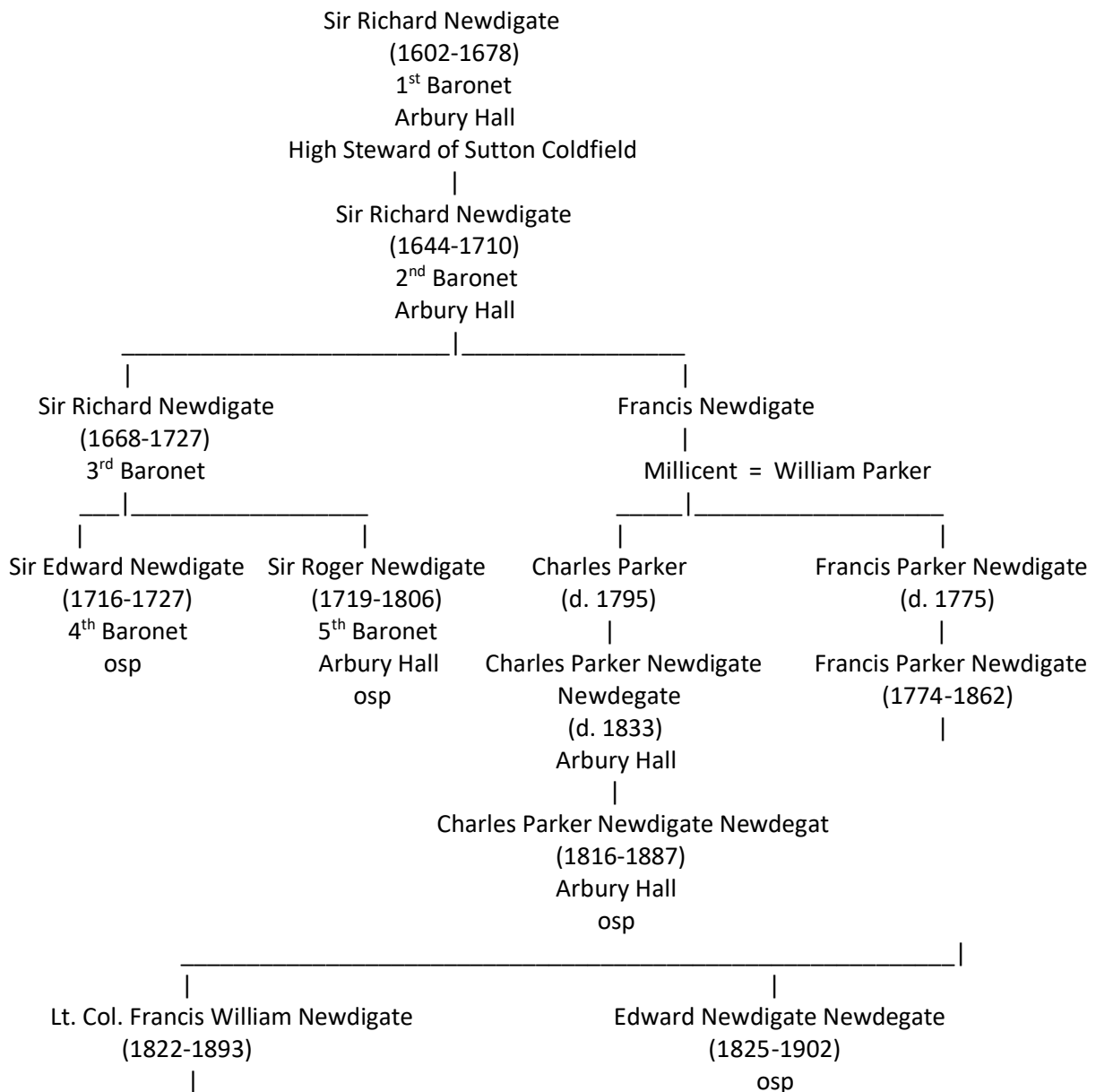
The next High Steward was William Henry Leigh 2nd Baron Leigh of Stoneleigh Abbey (1824-1905). He was appointed in 1859, the same year that Sutton's third Town Hall was built in Mill Street, and he visited Sutton Coldfield for the first (and possibly the last) time to attend a banquet to mark the opening of the new Town Hall and his own appointment as High Steward. There is a well-known photograph of the occasion showing a large overhead banner festooned across the High Street proclaiming 'Long Life to Lord Leigh' in capital letters. Lord Leigh was a Governor of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School from 1861 to 1882 without attending a single Governors' meeting, but always sending his written apologies that his 'other engagements prevented his attendance'. When a new headmaster was to be appointed in 1863 Lord Leigh's secretary wrote that 'Lord Leigh does not propose attending the Meeting not having hitherto taken any part in the Management of the Grammar School'. Leigh had many interests: he was Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire from 1856 to 1905, a Colonel in the Third Battalion of the Warwickshire Regiment, a Justice of the Peace for Gloucestershire, an honorary Doctor of Laws of Cambridge University, and Provincial Grand Master for the Freemasons of Warwickshire from 1852 to 1905. He married Lady Caroline Grosvenor, the daughter of the 2nd Marquess of Westminster.

The Charter of King Henry VIII dated 1528 was revoked and replaced by a Charter of Queen Victoria in 1885, and as the new Charter made no mention of the office of High Steward it was assumed that the post had been abolished. A few years elapsed before Lord Leigh ceased to be High Steward in 1892, but following the death of Queen Victoria the post was revived and in 1902 Lord Leigh was again appointed at the age of seventy-eight; he died three years later.

The next High Steward, from 1905 to 1914, was Sir Benjamin Stone (1838-1914), who was Sutton's first Mayor under the new Charter for five years from 1886. He was a successful Birmingham glass manufacturer, a Justice of the Peace and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. He was Tory MP for East Birmingham from 1895 to 1909 and he wrote books about his travels to Spain, Norway, Brazil and Japan. He is best remembered as a pioneer photographer. He was President of the Birmingham Photographic Society and the National Photographic Record Association, and was the official photographer for the coronation of King George V in 1911. He left behind a collection of 26,000 photographs as a remarkable record of his life and times, many of them of great interest to local historians. He lived at The Grange in Grange Road Erdington from 1877 and was knighted in 1892.

Three weeks after Sir Benjamin Stone died the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, triggered off the First World War. As a consequence the post of High Steward was left vacant and it was not until 1925 that Sir Francis Alexander Newdigate Newdegate (1862-1936) of Arbury Hall near Nuneaton was appointed as Sutton's eighteenth High Steward. He was MP for Nuneaton from 1892 to 1906 and for Tamworth from 1909 to 1917, and Governor of Tasmania from 1917 to 1920 and of Western Australia from 1920 to 1924. On his retirement he was appointed a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St. Michael and St. George. He was the great-great-great-great-grandson of Sir Richard Newdigate, Sutton's fifth High Steward.

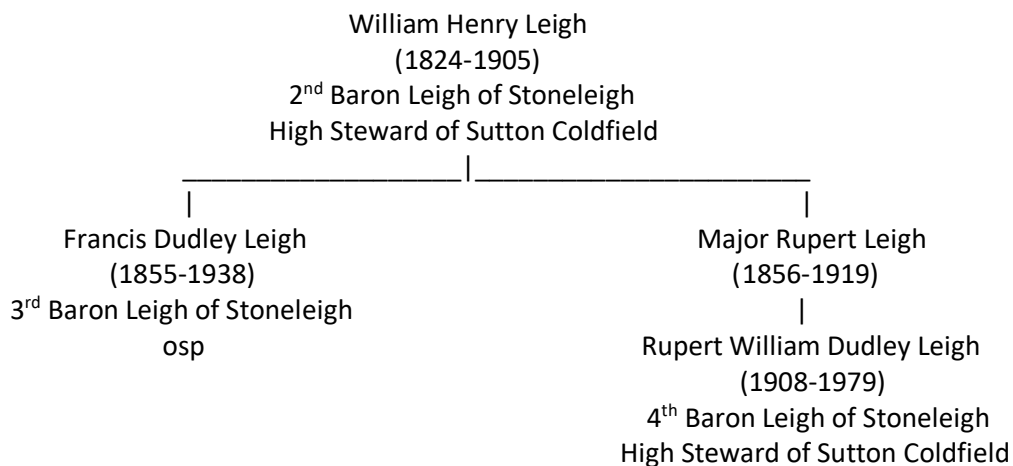
Arbury Hall passed from the childless Sir Roger Newdigate 5th Baronet to his cousin's grandson Charles Parker and Parker adopted both Newdigate and Newdegate as additional surnames. This possibly arose because different members of the family had spelt their name in different ways and, not knowing which was correct, he decided to adopt both, either in a fit of whimsey or because it sounded impressive. His son, another Charles Parker Newdigate Newdegate, made it a condition in his will that his heirs assumed both names. Arbury Hall passed to his second cousin Edward Newdigate Newdegate, and then to Edward's nephew, Sir Francis Alexander Newdigate Newdegate. The family tree looks like this:



Sir Francis Alexander Newdigate Newdegate
(1862-1936)
Arbury Hall
High Steward of Sutton Coldfield

The next High Steward, from 1936 to 1944, with a quadruple-barrelled surname, was Sir Henry William Cameron-Ramsay-Fairfax-Lucy 3rd Baronet (1870-1944). His wife was Ada Christine Lucy of Charlecote Park Warwickshire, now a National Trust property, and he added her surname to the others which his ancestors had acquired. After joining the army as a young man and fighting in the Boer War he was admitted as a barrister in 1902, but took up a career as a Parliamentary Private Secretary. He resumed a military career during the First World War, rising to the rank of Major in the Life Guards and Honorary Colonel of the Royal Army Service. After the war he was President of the Civilian Advisory Board and Chairman of the Territorial and Auxiliary Forces Association. He was Deputy Lieutenant of Warwickshire and a Justice of the Peace for the county, and was honoured with the award of CB (Companion Order of the Bath).

When Sir Henry died in 1944 the outcome of the Second World War was still uncertain and, as happened in 1914, the post of High Steward was left vacant until 1951, when Rupert William Dudley Leigh 4th Baron Leigh of Stoneleigh (1908-1979) was appointed as the nineteenth, and as it turned out the last, High Steward of Sutton Coldfield. He was the grandson of the 2nd Baron Leigh, the fifteenth High Steward, inheriting the title from his childless uncle:



He followed in his father's footsteps with an army career, as a Lieutenant in the 11th Hussars and Lieutenant-Colonel in the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars. He was the Deputy Lieutenant of Warwickshire in 1946 and a Justice of the Peace for the county.

The post of High Steward of Sutton Coldfield ceased to exist in 1974 when the Borough Council of Sutton Coldfield within the County of Warwickshire was abolished and Sutton came under the control of the newly-formed Birmingham Metropolitan District Council of the West Midlands.

The names of several of the High Stewards are recalled in street names in Sutton Coldfield: Ferrers Close, Repington Way, Devereux Road, Newdigate Road, Weymouth Drive, Finch Drive, Aylesford Drive, Leigh Road, Stone Avenue, Fairfax Road. As most of these roads are on the Falcon Lodge Estate, it seems likely that Goodeve Walk was intended to remember Sir Henry Goodere, an understandable mistake. Middleton Road in Streetly takes its name, not from the Willoughbys of Middleton Hall but from a local landowner, Clara Middleton; however there is a block of flats in Springfield Road called Willoughby Court.

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