

A HISTORY OF ROSE HALL MANOR AND THE KINGSLEY FAMILY

The history of Rose Hall Manor in Sarratt, Hertfordshire, can be traced back to 1166 when it was owned by the Abbots of St Albans Abbey and held by Geoffrey de Siret as tenant. It was held by a number of people until 1583 when William Kingsley bought it. In 1595 Kingsley also bought Goldington's Manor, Sarratt so that he became the major landowner in the district.

The present building stands a mile North West of Sarratt village, 430 ft above the bed of the river Chess. The house was built in brick in the 17th century of two storeys with a cellar and a tiled roof. Later additions and restorations have included plaster rendering to the West Front above a brick plinth. The invention of the flue system in around 1600 required chimneys at the wall and was a force for change in architectural design, inspiring house-owners to rebuild as at Rose Hall.

A 17th century English manor house, although owned by a wealthy family was simply furnished. At its heart was the flagged kitchen with an immense fireplace. Contemporary Sarratt wills and inventories reveal that the hearth at Rose Hall was furnished with spits, cauldrons and numerous pots and pans. Food was stored in wooden troughs and tubs with tables and stools completing the room. The three other rooms all contained tester or truckle beds, tables and forms. There were few chairs but an abundance of storage chests - furniture with drawers only became widespread in the next century. Painted cloths hung on the plaster walls and rugs covered the oak floors.

The Kingsley family lived at Rose Hall from 1583 until 1659, an Elizabethan, Jacobean and Stuart era of exploration, commercial and legal opportunities. William Kingsley was a lawyer, whose ancestry is unclear, a cursitor at the Court of Chancery. Cursitors were paid to write "writs of course", sealed with the Great Seal, setting out allegations allowing an action to be started. Having bought the office of Cursitor he married Katherine Tothill, sister of Richard Tothill who held a monopoly of the printing of law books on the new Caxton Press during the transition of French to English as the standard language of law.

Kingsley appears to have considerably enriched himself through his legal practice, an influential marriage and a large circle of friends including the family of Sir Thomas More. As well as houses in Sarratt he owned property in Fleet Street (London) and estates in Ormsby and Walkington (York), Ishendon (Bucks), Chislehurst (Kent) and Burneham and Tolleshunt (Essex).

William and Katherine had five sons, Thomas, Francis, George, Edward and William - also a daughter, Katherine. The 12th century Church of the Holy Cross, Sarratt, stands just over a mile away from Rose Hall and it appears from the fragmentary church records that several of the children were baptized there in the Norman font. When William died in 1611 he was buried in the churchyard and his

wife, Katherine, erected an alabaster memorial on the South wall of the Chancel which depicts him kneeling at a prayer desk with their sons behind. Facing him is Katherine, also at prayer, in front of their daughter. The neck ruffs and Katherine's head-dress confirm a 17th century date rather than 1502 as painted on the memorial.

The effigies are surmounted by the Kingsley coat of arms and below them a winged hourglass referring to a latin inscription, reading in translation:-

"Learn thus, poor mortal, as you vainly dream,
How life speeds downwards like a rushing stream,
Kingsley, the knight, has died, as all men must,
His rank is nought, his dust will lie on dust".

The verse, a "memento mori", is a typically Elizabethan response to the vanity of ambition, the fragility and impermanence of earthly life. It also reminds us that the Kingsleys at Rose Hall lived through a unique flowering of matchless poetry in the English language.

The link is clear between William Kingsley and Holy Cross Church. Of all his estates he chose to have his children baptized at Sarratt church and to be buried there. He would have been expected to observe religious practice and to distribute charity to the poor. The Kingsley's Christian allegiance is confirmed by a small 17th century cottage in the grounds of Rose Hall called The Monastery which was probably the monastic cell in Sarratt, established by the Abbot of St Albans Abbey, where a monk led a life of contemplative prayer.

An apocryphal story has been circulating in Sarratt, since at least the 19th century, that a tunnel leads from the cellar at Rose Hall to Holy Cross church. However, current research reveals that there was no tunnel entrance in the cellar but there is evidence of a short tunnel from the orchard at Rose Hall to the woods behind. It would seem that this was an escape route, possibly used by William Kingsley's grandson, also William, who was a Royalist during Cromwell's Interregnum and arrested in Amersham in 1658.

The last person who carried the name of Kingsley to own Rose Hall was William's great-grand-daughter, Dorothy who married Robert Gilbert and in 1659 the title was passed to him. Their daughter married into the Williams family who held the title until the 19th century when the Clutterbuck family came to own Rose Hall, Goldongton's and a third manor, Sarratt itself. The present owners of these manor houses have no connection with the Clutterbuck family.

References:-

The Victoria History of the County of Hertfordshire, Vol.11 (Ed. Page)

Historical Antiquities of Hertfordshire, (Chauncy)

History of Herts (Cussans)

Inventory of Monuments of Hertfordshire

Sarratt Parish Magazines (Rev. Gilbert Ryley)

Pots, Platters & Ploughs (Buller)

Kingsley of Sarratt (Whyman)

Hertford County Records

Doris Rollinson

October 1996