

This is the Fifty-Third of an occasional series of articles by David Stone about incidents in the history of Swanton Morley and its church

TWO BRANCHES OF THE LOMBE FAMILY

I shall now give you a rest from WW1, although I do intend to return to some of the other names on the War Memorial in due course.

I have already written about the Rev. Edward Henry Evans-Lombe, and about the church that his widow founded in British Columbia. In fact, it was my friend Mel Coulson, one of the churchwardens of St John the Divine, Quick, British Columbia, who started me on this current investigation. He asked me what the connection was between the Rev. Edward Evans-Lombe and those members of the Lombe family who had built a silk spinning mill in the Derwent Valley and made a great deal of money. Since I had never even heard of the silk mill, I couldn't help him at the time, but I decided to look into it further, and I have now made some progress which may interest you.

So, what I propose to do in the next few articles is (i) to show you what I think is the link between these two branches of the Lombe family, (ii) to say something about the silk mills in Derbyshire and (iii) to say a bit about the Evans-Lombe family and the building of Bylaugh Hall.

Early members of the Lombe Family

The earliest member of the Lombe family that I have come across so far was an Edward who was living in Cawston around 1595 – 1605. There was a disastrous harvest in 1596 and there is correspondence about the operation of poor relief, and in particular how much corn Edward Lombe should be allowed to bring to the market. So Edward was presumably among the better off members of the village.

Now the Lombe family clearly became men of substance in Cawston and there are three memorials to them in Cawston Church. Unfortunately, these include two more Edward Lombes, which made it a bit tricky to identify them. In fact, it seems that it was the custom in this part of the Lombe family to name the eldest son 'Edward'.

Two Lombe brothers founded two different lines

What seems to have happened is that there were two brothers Edward and Thomas Lombe (dates as yet uncertain); Edward, the elder brother, duly named his son 'Edward' and this son married an Elizabeth. Although they lived in Weston Longville, and all their family were baptised there, there is a memorial to Elizabeth in Cawston church which shows that she probably died in November 1702 after giving birth to William, their sixth child. Edward, her husband died the following year. We shall see later that it was through their third son, John Lombe that the estates in Swanton Morley and elsewhere were eventually passed down.

The line which eventually built the mills in the Derwent Valley

Now we must go back to Edward's younger brother, Thomas, who was apprenticed to a master weaver in Norwich and eventually established a very successful worsted weaving business. He ended up buying a considerable estate in St George's Colegate. He died in Norwich in February 1674 and his will allows us to identify his family.

His oldest son was Thomas and his second son was Henry; there were also two younger sons, William and John. *However, you will see shortly that it is Henry whose fortunes we must follow.*

Now Thomas the oldest son was only 19 years old when his father died in 1674, and he inherited the business. He too prospered in business but he did not marry and when he retired he passed the business on to his brother Henry, who did have children. In fact Henry married twice. By his first wife, Margaret, Henry had two sons, Thomas and Henry. Then by his second wife, 'Wilmott', he had Benjamin (who died young) and John who was born in 1693. Henry himself died in 1695. And it is Henry's children who provide the three main characters who will come to play a major part in the story of the silk mill in Derby. These are:

The two older brothers Thomas and Henry, and their younger half-brother John

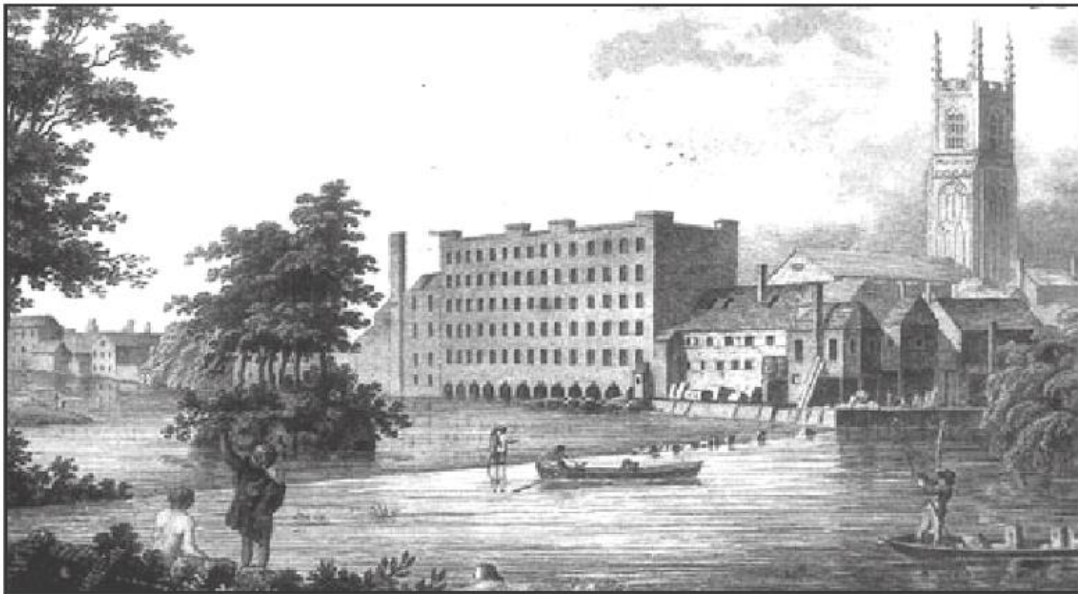
Now the life of Thomas is well documented. He was apprenticed to a London mercer called Samuel Totton and in 1707, aged 22, he was admitted to the Mercers' Company and made a Freeman of the City of London. He became an Alderman and then Sheriff and he gave a congratulatory address to George II on his accession to the throne in 1727. By tradition he was then knighted. Both his daughters married into the aristocracy.

Building and running the mill

It was Thomas and his uncle William who commenced the construction of their Derby Silk Mill in about 1715. However, it was John Lombe, Thomas's half-brother who managed the mill, but he died, aged only 29 in November 1722. He left the bulk of his estate to Thomas, but John's death nonetheless caused Thomas considerable problems. Not only did Uncle William decline to have any further financial involvement with the company, but Thomas was also faced with finding someone else to run the mill. He spent some considerable time during December 1722 instructing his brother Henry 'in every part of the business', only for Henry to shoot himself in June 1723. He was buried in St Michael's Church Derby.

The death of Thomas

He died in January 1739 and his will is available, but rather hard to read.



Lombe's Derby silk mill, 1793

Next time

I shall talk about silk weaving and the design and building of the mill. The story involves technical innovation, advanced engineering, industrial espionage and possible murder.

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