

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

THE BEEVOR FAMILY

It was while he was still living in Melton Hall that Sir John Lombe Bart. resolved to build an entirely new house at Bylaugh, and he put £20,000 in trust for that purpose, but no plans had been drawn up by the time that he died in 1817. His will is a long and complicated document but the essence of it was that he left his estates to Edward Beevor, a barrister and a member of the Middle Temple. Of course the provisions of Rev. John Lombe's will still held, so Edward Beevor in turn had to change his name to "Lombe" in order to inherit. This he duly did by Act of Parliament in 1817. (His son, Edward Beevor the Younger, changed his name at the same time.)

Why did Sir John Lombe Bart. leave his estate to Edward Beevor?

I have found in more than one place the suggestion that Edward Beevor was probably Sir John Lombe's illegitimate child by the wife of a Norwich doctor, and I think that I have now found this doctor. There was a John Beevor who was baptised in Norwich on 13 April 1727, who was awarded his M.D. in 1764, and who practised as a physician in Norwich. He died aged 89 in April 1815 and in his will he appointed his sons Edward and Charles as his executors. Both of these sons were barristers.

There seems no doubt that it was this elder son, Edward Beevor, to whom Sir John Lombe left his estate, and who then changed his name to 'Lombe'. The will does not give any reason for this, but it would certainly be consistent with Sir John Lombe being his father. (We shall see later that Charles Beevor (Edward's younger brother) also, in due course, inherited the estate.)

The new Edward Lombe's ornithological collection

Now, the new Edward Lombe (the Elder) seems to have been quite happy living at Great Melton Hall, and over the years he built up a renowned ornithological collection. Of course, in those days if you came across a rare bird you shot it and had it stuffed! A General History of Norfolk, written in 1829, said that Edward Lombe's collection "was not only the most complete in this county, but probably in Great Britain, and had been collected by Mr Lombe over the last twenty-six years." Thus he must have started collecting in about 1803. It was eventually presented to the Norfolk & Norwich Museum by his daughter, Mrs E.P. Clarke, in 1873, and it can be seen in the Castle Museum today.

Edward Lombe (the Elder) delays building the house at Bylaugh

However, he was not at all keen on building the new house. In fact he delayed the starting of the building for many years by arguing with the executors of Sir John's estate and stating that, even if they built the house, he would not live in it. By 1828 the money in the trust had grown to £43,000 and Edward went to the Court of Chancery to ask whether he could overturn the provisions of the will. The case was still undecided in 1839, by which time the fund had grown to over £63,500. He made a final appeal in 1841, but this was rejected.

A couple of snippets of information on Edward Lombe, the Elder

As part of his inheritance, he must have acquired the advowson of All Saints' Church, Swanton Morley for he appointed Henry Tacy (of whom you have already heard quite a lot) as rector in September 1825. I wonder why he chose him, for I have found no suggestion that Edward was interested in Tacy's evangelical work.

A merchant ship named the *Edward Lombe* was launched in Whitby in 1828. She was a three-masted barquentine of 347 tons and was owned by Robert Freeman. Now Robert Freeman of Swanton Morley and Edward Lombe Esq. of Great Melton both appear in the Register of Electors for Swanton Morley in 1837, so they certainly knew each other, but it doesn't explain why Freeman named his ship after Edward Lombe. Anyway, the ship was wrecked in Australia in August 1834.

Edward Lombe the Younger

Now Edward Lombe, the Elder, died in February 1847 and was buried in Great Melton. He was succeeded by his son Edward Lombe, the Younger (b.1799), who had been MP for Arundel from 1826 to 1830. He then moved abroad and he married a French lady, Marie Rozer de St Julien, in Berne, Switzerland, in November 1831. At some stage he then moved to Florence.

Now work on Bylaugh Hall was started in about 1849, under the supervision of the trustees, and there are a few letters in the Manchester Archives from "Edw. Lombe of Great Melton Hall, residing in Florence." One of these was dated October 1851 and it authorised a payment to Gurney & Co.

He died in Florence in March 1852, which is in the same year that Bylaugh Hall was completed. There is an obituary in the *Norfolk News* of 13 March 1852 which includes the cryptic sentence; "We shall not refer to those unpleasant details which probably caused his withdrawal from his own country, and prevented much of the good which he might otherwise have accomplished." Anyway, he died without issue and the estate devolved upon Mr Charles Beevor who was living in Upper Harley Street, London. You may recall that he was the younger brother of Edward Lombe the Elder, who had changed his name from "Beevor" in 1817.

Charles Lombe

At this time Bylaugh Hall was virtually complete and it would appear that the first thing that Charles Beevor did was to arrange an Act of Parliament to change his name to "Lombe" so that he could inherit. It was presumably also he who, in July 1852, made an appeal to the Court of Chancery for a re-hearing of the case of *Lombe v Stoughton* which had been decided in 1841. At that time the Vice-Chancellor had directed that the accumulated fund must all be spent on building work. The 1852 appeal noted that the surplus in the fund after the house was complete would be about £20,000 and suggested that the tenants-for-life were entitled to this fund. However, on 31 July 1852, the Vice-Chancellor rejected the appeal.

Continuing on this topic for a moment, the final cost of the house itself when it was completed in August 1852 was £29,389. By 1869 it was stated that some £38,000 had been spent on the project; this would have included further work on the estate buildings and landscaping. A significant sum still remained, but the court continued to demand that it be spent on bricks and mortar, so a 4-mile long perimeter wall was built.

Whether or not the newly-named Charles Lombe lived in the new Hall I do not know, but I saw a report of his death which said that "Charles Lombe of Great Melton died at Upper Harley St., London, on 21 September 1860 and was succeeded by Mr Edward Evans, formerly of Norwich." This implies that Charles Lombe was living in London and at Melton Hall.

The Evans Family

To understand why the estates next went to Edward Evans we need to go back to the will of Sir John Lombe, Bart., who died in 1817. This is a somewhat complicated document but, after specifying Edward Beevor and his issue as his heirs, and then further specifying Charles Beevor as a fall-back candidate for his heir, Sir John next said, "In default of such issue then subject as aforesaid it should be held on trust for, and for the benefit of, my great nephew Edward Evans, the second son of my late deceased niece, Mary - the wife of Thomas Brown Evans Esq - and the youngest daughter of my late deceased brother Edward Hase." Sir John Lombe must have been prescient for that is exactly how it turned out.

All this sounds rather complicated, but I found the marriage of Mary Hase to Thomas Browne Evans at Salle on 11 January 1787, and I also found that their second son, Edward Evans, was baptised at Kirby Bedon on 24 May 1791. In due course, he was ordained and became the Rev. Edward Evans.

We shall look at Edward Evans and the Evans family next time.