



Friends News

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Keeping in Touch during Covid-19

CHILD BRIDE /
WIDOW
COMES TO
COBHAM
HALL

by

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*Best wishes
for 2021 to
all our
Members*

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CHILD BRIDE / WIDOW COMES TO COBHAM HALL

Visitors to Cobham Hall - pre 2020 - would have become acquainted with its owner during the Civil War years (1642 -1648) i.e. the 4th Duke of Lennox and Richmond when being shown his portrait in the Dining Room, with his beloved dog. The Tour Guide probably told the tale of James, the Duke, having fallen into the Lake (at what is now the 'Inn on the Lake' but in those days was part of the Cobham Hall estate). James was unable to swim. The story goes that the dog, a Great Dane, rescued him. James showed his gratitude by presenting a magnificently jewelled collar to his pet and this can be seen in a nearly identical portrait hanging in the National Gallery in London.

Visitors will remember that this handsome young man was the eldest of the six sons of Esme, the 3rd Duke of Lennox who had succeeded, briefly, to the title, on his older brother, Ludovic's death in 1624, because Ludovic, the 2nd Duke, had had no children. Fortunately, Esme had married and had a family to ensure the line, but sadly, Esme died within a year of taking the title. So James stepped into the shoes of his father and uncle at 12 years old. King Charles I (distantly related to him) adopted James and arranged for him to be brought up at Court with his own family.

To refresh your memory of James, the 4th Duke's sib-

lings, as described in the Hall Tour, one brother, Henry, had died young in 1632; three other brothers: George, John and Bernard were all killed in separate battles during the Civil War fighting for King Charles I; Ludovic, the other brother, entered the Church to become a Cardinal on the Continent. The famous portrait of John and Bernard (as they were about to set off on 'The Grand Tour') prior to the Civil War, hangs above the fireplace in the Gilt Hall. George, fortunately, had married and produced the son who was to become – much later - the famous 6th Duke (who married 'La Belle Stuart') – after James' son had become the 5th Duke, but died as a young lad, of typhoid.

But rarely do the Tour Guides mention THE WIFE of James who was the mother of young Esme. Her name was Mary Villiers, born 1621, the eldest daughter of George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham.

Mary was adopted by King Charles I after the assassination of her father in Portsmouth in 1628, so she lived at Court from 7 years old with the children of Henrietta Maria. At 13 years old (in 1635) she was married to a 16 year old boy: Charles, Lord Herbert, eldest son of the 4th Earl of Pembroke. Shortly after the wedding, the bridegroom was sent to Florence in Italy in the service of the Duke of Tuscany. Whether Mary accompanied him or not, we do not know. Within a few months he contracted smallpox and died.

Fortunately a huge family portrait was painted before his departure, which shows this handsome young man and his bride in her silver gown, central in the picture, with the 4th Earl approvingly pointing to her, and seven other members of the family around them. This vast painting can be seen in the 'Double Cube Room' at Wilton House near Salisbury. Sadly, the marriage, of just a few months, must have left the family devastated. Mary would have lived on with her new family while they observed the restrictions of mourning.

Two years later, at 15 years old, she was married to James, the 4th Duke of Lennox and Richmond. They must have known each other when she was a child and he a teenager at Court, so maybe this was an introduction for them again, once she was a young widow. They had a son, Esme, and a daughter, and they all survived the Civil War, despite James pouring money into 'the cause' to help his patron, King Charles I. After the King was beheaded, it was James who organised the transference of the King's remains to Windsor for burial. The Cobham Hall estate was compounded, so the family went to live on the Continent, briefly. But Cobham Hall was restored after the capitulation of Oxford.

When James died in 1665, Mary married for the third time: Colonel Thomas Howard, the brother of the Earl of Carlisle and she continued to live until 1709 – a good old age!