



St Martin's Church, Canterbury, looking towards the Cathedral.

of the modern church of St Peter lies at an angle to the medieval and modern road: but aligned, in fact, to the old Roman street. He thought it must have been repaired, or rebuilt, in such a way as to preserve continuity with the old Roman church site.

After King Aethelbert's baptism the Abbot Augustine crossed to Arles to be consecrated 'Bishop of the English'. Canterbury did not become an archbishopric until the reign of Archbishop Theodore in 668. The first to be designated 'primate' was Berhtwald whose tenure began in 693. Bede records that in November 597 Augustine was styled 'archbishop of the nation of the English' but in doing so he was reading back into the beginning of the Church in Kent the title and situation current in the Church at the time of writing of his history. To bestow the title of archbishop upon a newly-consecrated bishop was completely at variance with Pope Gregory's policy.

While Augustine was away in Gaul the work of conversion continued rapidly and to such an extent that Pope Gregory in a letter to the Eastern Emperor recorded a mass baptism of ten thousand people on Christmas Day 597.

So began the primatial see of Canterbury, never transferred elsewhere despite several attempts to do so.

THE BOURNE ESTATE, BISHOPSBOURNE AN UNHAPPY EPISODE IN A DISTINGUISHED HISTORY

By Ian Taylor

The imposing Manor of Bourne stands in superb parkland, surrounded by hop gardens, at Bishopsbourne, south of Canterbury. This grand house was rebuilt between 1704 and 1707 by Dame Elizabeth Aucher (née Hewytt), widow of Sir Anthony Aucher, who had died in 1692. It was during the years after Sir Anthony's death that the family of Aucher was to experience the most harrowing, and distressful chapter in its long and distinguished history, an account of which has only recently been discovered.

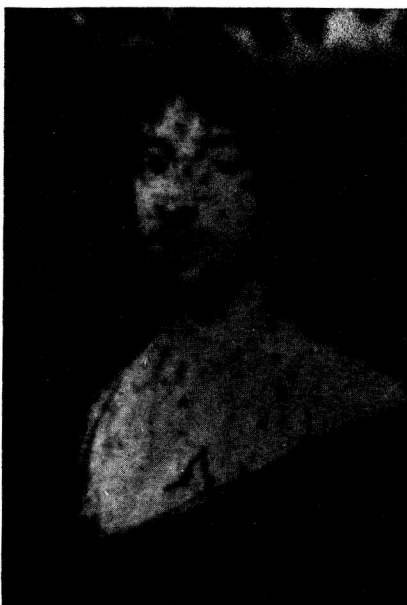
In 1666 Sir Anthony was created a Baronet, but in the later years of his life he ran up a debt of some £10,000. In 1692 his widow Dame Elizabeth, left to cope with four young children, must have wondered whether she faced ruination. The calamity was of such proportions, especially if caused by gambling debts, that many would have given way in grief and dread. However Dame Elizabeth fortunately was of stronger stuff. She set about the management of the 2,000-acre estate in her own indomitable style in such a way that, by the year 1704, she had settled £8,600 of the £10,000 debt, whilst at the same time improving the value of the estate and her own fortunes.

Dame Elizabeth Aucher was Trustee of the Estate on behalf of her 10-year-old son Anthony, who also inherited the Baronetcy. However, young Sir Anthony died in 1694 only two years after his father. The title and estate therefore passed to Dame Elizabeth's second son, Hewytt, who was then just eight years old.

To assist her in the management of the large estate she married her estate clerk, Mr Thomas Hunt, on 21st January 1694. Unfortunately he died about four years later and was buried at Bishopsbourne Church. To her credit Dame Elizabeth, recognising the delicate health of her eight-year-old son, Hewytt, engaged a tutor to educate him at home. Nothing is known of any arrangement for the education of the two daughters, Elizabeth and Hester.

When Hewytt was 13 years old (in about 1698) Dame Elizabeth sent him to Cambridge where he was admitted to the University. As was the practice in those days he was 'sponsored' by a tutor, the Reverend John Bowtell, Vicar of neighbouring Patricbourne, near Canterbury. But Dame Elizabeth was to rue the day she sent Hewytt to Cambridge.

It was in the early 1700s that Dame Elizabeth decided that the estate merited the re-building of the Elizabethan manor house. She had no difficulty in obtaining the approval of her son, Hewytt, who perhaps anticipated a newer, grander house



Sir Anthony Aucher, b.1614, d.1692, Dame Elizabeth's husband.



A distant prospect of Bourne House as it is today.

for his own occupation in 1707, when he would become 21, and come into possession of the entire estate. In 1704 the re-building commenced using some materials from the castle of Westenhanger, which had been pulled down in 1701. It is suspected, but not proven, that the new house was some 200 yards to the east of the old premises. Without doubt the new building, believed to have cost some £3,000, is a splendid example of Queen Anne architecture, which today stands as its own monument to its unknown designers and builders.

So it was that Dame Elizabeth had planned and prepared for her own and her son's future at Bourne. And so it would have been except for the intervention of a lawyer, John Corbett, who was to upturn her plans and create the devastating family rift which marred the subsequent history of the Aucher family.

John Corbett hailed from Shropshire, where one of his relatives had been Sheriff. He attended Trinity College, Cambridge at the same time as Sir Hewytt Aucher. Corbett became a Doctor of Law in 1707, the same year that Hewytt gained the age of majority.

It was John Corbett who befriended the weaker young Hewytt, patiently enquiring into the family circumstances. He questioned the conduct of Dame Elizabeth and awakened in Hewytt a sense of injustice, and the determination to remedy the mismanagement of the estate which Sir Hewytt now accused his mother of perpetrating. During the years following 1707 Bourne was an unhappy place where anxieties ran high, tensions were extreme and bitterness acute.

The truth of what happened during that unhappy period will never be fully known, but certainly Sir Hewytt granted John Corbett the right to act on his behalf. Dame Elizabeth was required to vacate Bourne immediately — she took a small house in Canterbury. Without doubt John Corbett was able to exert extreme pressure upon Dame Elizabeth, whom he forced to deliver to him all the account books, and explanations of her alleged mismanagement of the Bourne estate, including the unnecessary rebuilding of Bourne House itself. It was John Corbett who examined the accounts and declared that Sir Hewytt was owed not less than £10,000 by Dame Elizabeth, and that the annuity of £660 per year bequeathed to her by her late husband was no longer a valid bequest. In future she could expect only £160 per year from Sir Hewytt's estate. The pain of the examination and the social, emotional and financial consequences are difficult to imagine.

It was later alleged that Corbett had treated Dame Elizabeth in a peremptory manner and that both he and Hewytt had adopted: 'a very unnatural and cruel attitude' towards her. Her attempts to have an unbiased party examine the accounts was refused, Corbett claiming sole right to determine the issue. Whether in fear or defeat Dame Elizabeth, on 5th April 1708, signed deeds as drawn up by Corbett precluding her from any income from the estate other than £160 per year, to be paid at £40 per quarter. However, the £160 was not regularly paid, and Dame Elizabeth was soon reduced to penury.

Corbett's determination was relentlessly pursued and, whether by ulterior design or sincere affection, he courted and married in 1711 Elizabeth, Dame Elizabeth's older daughter. Corbett's grip upon the family and its fortunes thus became even tighter.



Sir Hewytt Aucher, b.1684, d.1726. Print from an original oil painting whose present location is unknown.



Close-up of Bourne House, as re-built under the direction of Lady Elizabeth Aucher at the beginning of the 18th century.

Such was the poverty of Dame Elizabeth's situation that during 1711 she had to sell her personal possessions, and when this was inadequate to meet her needs, she was forced in 1712 to present herself at Bourne for accommodation and subsistence, not having received any of the money due to her for over a year.

The few months which followed must have been the most wretched in the life of the now elderly woman. She was treated with loathing by her son and daughter, with contempt and hatred by her son-in-law (who had not, in accordance with the custom of the day, even requested her formal permission to marry her daughter). Dame Elizabeth was an outcast in the very home she had built for her son. She had less status than the servants within the home. She had neither power nor position, she was: 'not permitted to eat at table', but survived from the left-overs from the meals of her own family, surreptitiously fed to her by anxious but sympathetic servants below-stairs (who feared for their security if discovered helping Dame Elizabeth). Had it not been for the kindness, the emotional support and the material generosity of the Reverend Dr George Thorpe, Rector of St Mary's, Bishopsbourne, who had been a family friend as well as the local parson since 1679, her poverty and wretchedness would have been even worse. He supplied her with meals on several days each week.

The dreadful state of affairs could not continue, and in 1713 Dame Elizabeth again left Bourne to reside in Canterbury, and with reluctance but necessity presented a petition in Chancery for the restoration of her entitlements under the clauses of her late husband's will, and for due compensation for the ill-treatment by her son, by Corbett, and by her daughter (Corbett's wife, Elizabeth). She was supported in this by her other son-in-law, the Reverend Ralph Bloomer, D.D., Prebendary of Canterbury.

The case eventually came before the Lord Chancellor and after a three-day hearing the Lord Chancellor decreed on 22nd June 1715:

'... that in the execution by the said Corbett to inspect and examine the accounts ... there appears very ill conduct by the said Corbett ...'

'... there are several circumstances of Partiality by Corbett ...'

'... that Corbett was a friend of Sir Hewytt and had no regard for the interests of Dame Elizabeth.'

'that Corbett used her (Dame Elizabeth) with great hardship ... by his demands and threats to her ... and terrified her ...'

'that Corbett did not draw up any proper account as promised ... and acted unfairly to Dame Elizabeth ...'

'that his Lordship finds that the rebuilding of the Mansion House was at Sir Hewytt's desire and with his full approval, Dame Elizabeth never having had any interest or design upon the House, except for her son's interest.'

'that Dame Elizabeth's agreement (to sign her consent to receiving only £160 per year) was caused by her being a moaning and grieving woman from all the hardships she had endured.'

'that this £160 per year was not in any event paid to her and caused her to petition ...'

'that his Lordship decrees that all accounts be examined by the Master of the Court' ... 'so that due recompense be made to Dame Elizabeth Aucher ...'

Unfortunately, Sir Hewytt and John Corbett did not present proper accounts to the Court, and on 16th May 1717 that matter again came before the Lord Chancellor who ordered:

'For as much as it appeared at the Hearing that the Appellant (Sir Hewytt) and Corbett have been guilty of *Foul Practises* towards the Respondent (Dame Elizabeth), and Sir Hewytt and Corbett had used all possible delays, and had not then proceeded to provide the accounts, a Receiver be appointed by the said Master of the Court to receive all rents and profits of the estate, and pay the same to Dame Elizabeth Aucher.'

This Court Order was more easily made than implemented. After much financial investigation and consideration the Master of the Court, in March 1716, awarded Dame Elizabeth a total of £24,695. A considerable sum in the 1980s; in 1716 it was indeed a fortune and reflected the work and financial entitlement of Dame Elizabeth. This award so angered Corbett and Sir Hewytt that the latter had the temerity to appeal to the House of Lords. This appeal was dismissed in March 1718.

Dame Elizabeth Aucher had won back her financial security. Her misery, grief and suffering arising from her bereavement and broken family, induced by a weakling son and the unscrupulous Corbett, had been endured by her with commendable fortitude.

Nevertheless the fact remained that beyond the £24,695 award, the estate and the Bourne Mansion House was the property of Sir Hewytt Aucher, who with John and Elizabeth Corbett's assistance then managed its operation.

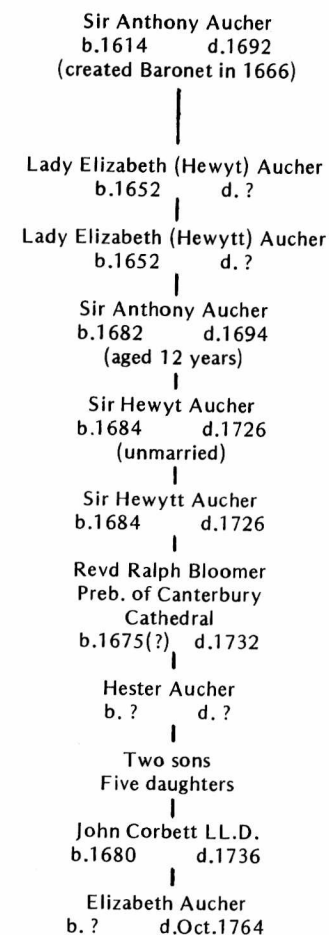
Lady Elizabeth Aucher never returned to Bourne. It is believed that she lived in financial comfort in Canterbury until her demise at an advanced age. She was not permitted to be buried at Bourne and her resting place is not presently known.

Lady Aucher's weakly and foolish son died unmarried in 1726, aged only 40. In his will he bequeathed the Bourne Estate to his sister Elizabeth. In accordance with the then law, the estate came into the possession of her husband — the unprincipled John Corbett. Thus it was in 1726 that John Corbett became master of Bourne, a situation which must have delighted his greed and encouraged his arrogance.

After only 10 years in control of Bourne he died in 1736, aged about 55. He was buried in his native Shropshire. Elizabeth, his widow, continued at Bourne until her death, at the age of 82, in September 1764. Elizabeth and John Corbett had five children, all girls, and all married well. The Bourne Estate devolved down this female line of descendants of Sir Anthony Aucher for another 80 years, during which a Corbett daughter married a Beckingham and tenants, including Sir Horace Mann, occupied the Mansion House, known then as Bourne Place.

It was in 1844, 300 years from the time the Auchers first acquired the estate, that Bourne passed out of the possession of descendants of the family. In 1844

the estate was purchased by a country gentleman, Mr (later the Honourable) Matthew Bell. At this juncture a new and exciting phase in the remarkable history of the Bourne estate commenced. The name of Matthew Bell is perhaps better-remembered than that of Aucher. But that is a story for another time . . .



Note: Readers will have noticed some discrepancies in the spelling of the name Hewyt, Hewit or Hewitt. The name is spelt in all three ways in the documents upon which this article is based. Similarly, Dame Elizabeth Aucher is also referred to as Lady Elizabeth Aucher. She was Sir Anthony's second wife. Sir Anthony's first wife, Elizabeth Hatton, died on 19th September 1648.