

Bridge Hall and the Holts

Heywood Notes & Queries Volume 4 19 Feb 1909 page 178-181

In one of Canon Raines's notes, quoted in the Heywood Notes and Queries on January 22nd (No. 421), under the heading "Heywood and District in 'Notitia Cestriensis'" a volume published by the Chetham Society in 1849 – reference is made to Bridge Hall, near Heap Bridge, and the Holt family. It states:

Bridge Hall was the residence in the 22nd Edward IV of Roger Holt, gent. Described in the pedigree as a younger son of Holt of Gristlehurst, and continued in the same family in 1664, when Roger Holt, , gent , who married Jane, daughter of Thomas Greenhalgh of Bradlesome, Esq. recorded a short pedigree. His son, Richard Holt, married Sarah, daughter of the Rev. Robert Bellis, M.A. incumbent of Ince in the County of Chester and was living in 1705, having one daughter and heiress who married Nathaniel Gaskell of Manchester gent, by whom she had two daughter and co-heiresses: Rebecca, married Richard Clive of Styche in the County of Salop Esq. father of Robert, first Lord Clive ; and Sarah, married Hugh, eleventh Lord Sempill.

Exactly the same statement is made in Baines's History of Lancashire.

It was not a daughter of "Thomas Greenhalgh of Brandlesome" whom Roger Holt of Bridge Hall married, but a daughter of "Thomas Greenhalgh of Chamber" in later time called Chamber Hall – one of Bury's most historic buildings, the demolition of which, it appears is to be carried out shortly in order to provide certain accommodation for municipal electricity works which may become "out-of-date" in the time of persons now living. One of the things calculated to fill a future generation with wonder and indignation is the fact of the destruction of Chamber Hall being decided upon without any public protest or opposition in the native town of the great Sir Robert Pell – Bury's most famous son.

The Marriage of "Roger Holt of Bridge hall and Jane Grenehalgh of Chamber" took place at Bury Parish church on February 21st 1644-5. The christening of the said Jane Greenhalgh, described at the time as "daughter of Thomas Grinhalghe of Chamber" took place at the same church on May 21st 1626.

A more remarkable inaccuracy occurs in the statement that the aforementioned Roger Holt had a son, Richard, who "married Sarah, daughter of the Rev. Robert Bellis M.A., incumbent of Ince in the County of Chester and was living in 1706". As a matter of fact the Rev. Robert Bellis married a daughter of Richard Holt of Bridge Hall. In the church at Ince, near Chester, there is a brass with a Latin inscription which done into English reads thus:

Below are deposited the remains of Sarah , daughter of Richard Holt, of Hall beside the Bridge, in the parish of Bury, in the county of Lancaster, gentleman, the dearest wife of Robert Bellis A.M. pastor of the church; who, endued with distinguished gifts of mind, adorned with integrity of life, improved by genuine piety to God and ripened for Heaven through Jesus Christ, departed (alas! To our grief) to the blessed Immortals, to the Heavenly Father, to Jesus the Mediator, and general assembly of the Saints (with whom she makes perpetual triumph) endowed with glory, 25th day of June A.D. 1706.

The Rev. Robert Bellis was the son of John Bellis and was born at Barrow, Cheshire. After attending school at Mickle Trafford he was admitted at Christ's College, Cambridge aged 16 as a sizar under Mr Waterhouse 24th March 1684-5. He graduated B.A. at Christ's College in 1688-9 and M.A in 1695. He was married at Ince Church to Sarah Holt, described in the register as "of Cheshire" 7th January 1691-2 and there was issue of the marriage three sons and two daughters. Mrs Bellis dies in giving birth to a daughter (Sarah) and the burial of the mother her life died two months afterwards.

The three sons Samuel, John and Robert – who through their mother were descendants of the Holts of Bridge Hall and Gristlehurst Hall went to their father's college at Cambridge. (1)

Samuel, born in 1693 was admitted in 1712; graduated B.A. in 1715-16 and was ordained priest at York in June 1718. (2) John, born in 1695 was admitted in 1715 and was ordained deacon (by letters dismissory from Chester) February 1718-19, a month after his graduation as B.A. He was priest in June 1721 and rector of Coverham St. Mary, Lincolnshire. (3) Robert admitted in 1712 and was LL.B. in 1726 "probably" says Dr. Peile, the Master of Christ's College "he was curate of Ashton Lancashire 25th November 1726."

The Rev. Robert Bellis, who spent practically the whole of his ministerial life at Ince married again two years and a month after his first wife's death. His second wife was Dorothy Allen, daughter of Richard Allen of Bury, gentleman, by his wife Sarah Bradshaw a kinswoman of Henry Wrigley Esq. Of Langley Hall, not far from Heywood. Richard Allen was a son of Captain John Allen of Redvales – a zealous Royalist whose daughter Dorothy was the mother of that famous Manchester man John Byron, author of the immortal Christmas carol "Christians, awake!" And in addition to the Dorothy who became the Rev. Robert Bellis's second wife, Richard Allen had a younger daughter Elizabeth, who by her marriage with Dr. William Dawson of Manchester was mother of that ill-fated Jacobite, Captain James Dawson, the hero of Shenstone's pathetic ballad. There was a connection between these Dawsons and the Heywood district; for Dr William Dawson's mother was – in her maiden name Mary Wolstenholme of Hopwood.

The marriage of the Rev. Robert Bellis and Dorothy Allen took place at Bury Parish Church, July 30th 1708. Two months later the second wife lay in her grave! And a translation of another Latin inscription on a brass in Ince Church reads:

"Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of Life" (Rev. II, 10.)
Dorothea, dearest wife of R. Bellis A.M. minister of this church dies 8th day before the Kalends of October 1706. How quickly she fled; torn from my arms! The brief joys of the marriage bed she scarcely perceived (dead on the expiration of the second month). She now enjoys the uninterrupted joys of Heaven.

Mrs Dorothy Bellis dies on September 24th 1708 and was buried at Ince Church on September 28th.

It only remains to be added that the bereaved incumbent made still another venture into wedlock, his third wife being Margaret Wilbraham of Chester to whom he was married on September 13th 1713, that this lady was buried at Ince church on May 20th 1721 and that the Rev Robert Bellis himself who attained the age of 55, was buried at the same place on May 3rd 1724 having (in the words of the burial register) "prached 30 years."