

HENRY DANVERS, HIS WIFE AND THE "HEAVENLY LINE"

In his recent valuable article on Henry Danvers¹ Professor Richard Greaves did not actually say "who" Danvers was, or whether Danvers had links with any notable families of his time. Since such links not only existed but serve to elucidate points made by Professor Greaves, a brief supplementary note may be welcome.

Henry Danvers was the son of William and Elizabeth Danvers of Swithland, near Loughborough, Leicestershire, where the Danvers family had resided for several generations. He was born in 1619 or a little earlier. His father was a cousin of Sir John Coke, of Melbourne Hall, Derbyshire, correspondence between whom and Danvers' parents has been preserved. The Coke family was divided in its political and religious interests. One of Sir John's sisters was married to a bishop of Exeter. His brother George was bishop of Bristol and later of Hereford and had three sons in Herefordshire livings from which they suffered sequestration. Sir John himself, a Secretary of State notable for his absolutist monarchical principles, was a pronounced Protestant and eventually turned to Puritanism and the cause of Parliament. His younger son, M.P. for Leicester, was a royalist, but his elder son, M.P. for Derbyshire, supported Parliament, as did his son-in-law, Sir Edward Hartopp, 2nd Bt. This elder son was the Sir John Coke on whom Richard Baxter was quartered for three weeks in February-March 1647, when he "began to contemplate more seriously on the Everlasting Rest". Relations between the Coke and Danvers families were close: when the Civil War broke out, there was an abortive plan for Sir John *père* to remove from Melbourne to Swithland for greater security. The links were strengthened when Henry Danvers became the second husband of Sir John's daughter Anne.

In 1658 Sir Edward Hartopp died, and in 1664 his widow became the third wife of no less a personage than Charles Fleetwood, the former Major-General and member of the Cromwellian House of Lords. Fleetwood's first wife was named Frances Smith (d.1651); his second was Cromwell's daughter Bridget (d.1662), the widow of John Ireton (d.1651). On marriage with Lady Hartopp Fleetwood removed into her house in Stoke Newington. With him he brought two children by his first wife, Smith and Elizabeth Fleetwood; two by his second wife, Cromwell and Mary Fleetwood; and also Ireton's three daughters, Jane, Bridget and Elizabeth Ireton. Lady Hartopp's two children by her first marriage, John and Mary Hartopp, were already there. Two years later the families enjoyed a double wedding: Smith Fleetwood married Mary Hartopp, and her brother John, now Sir John Hartopp, 3rd Bt., married Smith Fleetwood's sister Elizabeth. At first sight these weddings of the nephew and niece of Danvers' wife appear to have little or no bearing on his own story, but this is the Sir John Hartopp with whom, as a "prominent radical", Professor Greaves tells us Danvers was acting as Militia Commissioner in

1659. Sir John and Lady Hartopp continued, moreover, to live in part of the family house in Stoke Newington; and here, we learn from Professor Greaves, Danvers also lived - it is not quite clear whether actually in the house or elsewhere in Stoke Newington, but in any case with the Fleetwood-Hartopp family entourage. He is also known to have attended the conventicles which were held in the house.

Though not a Baptist, as Danvers was, Fleetwood had favoured and protected Baptists when Commander-in-Chief in Ireland in the 1650s, and like Danvers he was an unwearied proponent of freedom of conscience. After the collapse of the Wallingford House affair in the confused year of 1659 he remained politically in obscurity, and he was not involved in plots, as Danvers was; but that his sympathies with radicalism in religion and the Good Old Cause were not affected appears from his will (1689). In it he remembers not only his son Smith Fleetwood, his daughter Lady Hartopp and her husband, one of his children by Ireton's widow ("deare daughter Carter") and even a son-in-law of Ireton ("my son Bendish", he generously calls him), but three ejected clergy now all ministers of Congregational churches, the son of Cromwell's brother-in-law, Major-General Desborough ("Samuel Desborrow, Doctor of Physic") and another Major-General ("my ancient friend James Berry"). Fleetwood himself was a member of the church in the City ministered to by John Owen (who had preached Ireton's funeral sermon and had been involved with Fleetwood in the Wallington House affair), as were Sir John and Lady Hartopp and Major-Generals Desborough and Berry; the Carters and the Bendishes were members of the influential Congregational church at Great Yarmouth. What we see is a strong family base for a close-knit and loyal community. As time went on, the community became a firm tradition. Three years before he assumed office, the minister who succeeded Owen as pastor, Isaac Watts, was invited by Hartopp to become tutor to his son John (the future fourth Baronet). Later Watts preached Sir John's funeral sermon and also Lady Hartopp's, as he did those of their daughter Frances and her husband Sir Nathaniel Gould, who in their turn lived in the family house in Stoke Newington. Watts also addressed poems to several members of the family. One to his pupil John begins:-

HARTOPP, I love the Soul that dares
Tread the Temptations of his Years
Beneath his youthful Feet;
FLEETWOOD and all thy heavenly Line
Look thro' the Stars, and smile divine
Upon an Heir so great.

This was written in 1700, some years after Danvers had died. The next generation, in the persons of Sir John Hartopp's second wife and the daughters of Sir Nathaniel Gould, found a place in the story and correspondence of Philip Doddridge. It was now a different world from the ostracism and plots of the Restoration period, but the old days were not forgotten. Gould's daughter, Elizabeth Cooke, published sermons by John Owen in the shorthand version she had inherited from her grandfather Sir John

Hartopp, and gave to Homerton Academy magnificent rubricated copies of Owen's Works which it is thought Owen had presented to her grandfather. It is piquant to reflect that the "heavenly Line", now so respectable and affluent, had once included, in Henry Danvers, a revolutionary who died in exile. But the links with Baptists were not broken. Mrs Cooke also presented Homerton with two books by John Brine, which Brine had given to her himself.

NOTES

- 1 "The Tangled Careers of Two Stuart Radicals: Henry and Robert Danvers", *Baptist Quarterly* 29 (January 1981) pp.32-43.

Basic references:-

The visitation of Leicestershire, 1619, by William Camden (Harleian Soc., ii, 1870).

Joseph Hunter, *Familiae minorum gentium* (Harleian Soc., xxxvii-xl, 1895-6).

Historical Manuscripts Commission *Twelfth Report, Appendix, Parts i-iii, 1888-9.*

A. J. Shirren, *The Chronicles of Fleetwood House, 1951.*

G. F. Nuttall, *New College, London, and its library, 1977.*

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The Annual Meeting of the Society will be held on Monday 28th April at 4.45 p.m. in the Institute Hall of Westminster Chapel.

Dr Michael Watts of Nottingham University is to be the Guest Lecturer, and he will speak on "Spurgeon versus Clifford: The Thermopylae of Christendom".

As last year there will be no tea arranged by the Society as the Baptist Union is making special catering arrangements.