

RALPH STEPNETH«dau. and h. of Creasy.

WILLIAM, gent, of St. Albans,
op. 1485-1494 at St. Albans.

THOMAS, gent, of St. Albans ? wife Joan)
op. 1514-1542 at St. Albans, s. and h.
=Dorothy, d. of John Wynde or W. Hinde,
Master of the York Mint.

JOHN
op. 1527 St. Albans
and Northchurch.

I
JOAN
=Francis Lakyn,
of Ardley, Essex, gent.

1. ROBERT the elder, of St. Albans=? Alice,
sister of Wm, Lawrence of Fubowrne:
d. 1557: cousin of Fox of London.
Property, Aldenham from cousin Ralph,
West Ham, Redbourn, St. Albans. Left
five children, all minors. Active 1548 in
Aldenham, St. Albans and Northchurch.

ROBERT of East Ham Burnells.
Record of arms and crest
granted 1562. Purchased Alden-
ham from nephew John, 1572
=(1) Joan, d. of Thos. Markham
or Nicksoun of East Ham.
(2) a daughter of Thomas Myles
of Flamstead.

AFFABEL.

3. ALBAN of Prender gast, Pembs.
Confid. arms 1605, Sheriff of
Pembs. and Carmarthenshire,
Kt., of shire, 1603.
=Mary, d. and co-h. of
Wm. Philipps of Picton, Pembs.

Stepneth, Baronets.

MARY. ELIZABETH.

RALPH,
nephew of Thos. Cressy :
granted Aldenham
Manor. 1546
d. 1548 (s.p.), bur.
Aldenham.
= Joan,
dau. of Richard Rayn-
shawe.

JOHN=Anne.
Had livery of
Aldenham, 1558,
Sold it to uncle
Robert, 1572.

I
FRANCIS.
Inherited Red-
bourn property
and sold, 1565.

RALPH.
Heir to two parts
Aldenham under
Ralph's will.

RICHARD.
Inherited St. Albans
property and sold
1574.

CLEMENS.

JOAN.
Bap. Oct. 29.
Bur. Oct. 30, 1567,
at Aldenham.

I
PAUL.
=Sarah.
Sells Aldenham to
Edward Carey 1589,
and Watford pro-
perty 1590-1591.

I
JOAN.
=Robt. Blomfield
of Suffolk.

FRANCIS.
Frances Spike*.

MARY.
=Philip Boraston
at Aldenham,
Sept. 30, 1578.
She was **buried** at
Aldenham, Sept. 25,
1579.

ALICE.
d.s.p. 13 Feb. 1572,
bur. Aldenham.

PHILIP.
d.s.p. at the
Temple.

The Stepneth Family of St. Albans and Aldenham Manor, Herts

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THE text for these notes is supplied by a shield of arms, the only brass surviving on a slab which lies at the west end of the nave of Aldenham Church, Herts. The slab, which Cussans in his *History of Herts* (Dacorum Hundred, 1879, p. 254) says once formed the cover of an altar tomb, bears indents of another shield, a man in armour and an inscription. A portion of this second shield, which is a palimpsest and hangs in the vestry, bears on its back part of a group of boys, which from the fashion of their costume and hair evidently belongs to the early years of the sixteenth century. Its front has the same arms as the complete shield namely STEPNETH, *Gules a fess chequy Or and Azure, between three owls Argent*, impaling Quarterly 1 and 4. CRESSY, *Argent a lion rampant, double queued Sable*, 2 and 3 HUSSEY, *Ermine three bars Gules*. The shape of the shield dates them about the middle of the sixteenth century.

W. F. Andrews in his work on *Memorial Brasses in Hertfordshire Churches* (2nd. ed., 1903) mentions in conjunction with this brass an inscription noticed by Weever in 1631 (*Funeral Monuments*, p. 592), but a more correct and complete transcript is found in a MS. "Visitation of Herts, 1572," with additions by R. Mundy down to 1620.¹ It reads: —

"Heare under this stone lyeth buried ye bodye of Raphe Stepneth Esqr. lord of this lordship of Aldenham & patron of this church hee deceased ye 3 day of December in ye yeare of our lord God one thousand five hundred fortye & eight² on whose soule Jesus have mercye Amen."

If Cussans is correct in identifying the slab as the top of an altar tomb, this inscription does not go with it, as from the wording it evidently belonged to a floor slab. The only common ground of the two is the family which they commemorate.

¹ Harl. MS. 1546, fol. 87b.

² The Weever MS. has 1544.

Cussans in his *History of Herts* (Dacorum Hundred, 1879, p. 241) prints a pedigree of the Stepneth family from the same MS. Visitation, but being unable to reconcile it with the genealogical notes given by Clutterbuck in his *History of Herts* (I, 127)³ contents himself by saying that the details are not of much importance, since Clutterbuck and the pedigree which he gives agree that in 1588 Paul Stepneth sold the manor of Aldenham.

The Stepneth family became owners of Aldenham manor by grant from Henry VIII in 1546, so they retained ownership for only forty-two years: but St. Albans knew them for at least sixty years before that date. The printed pedigrees commence with a Ralph Stepneth who married an heiress of the Cressy family, presumably about the middle of the fifteenth century, and indicate him as father of William Stepneth of St. Albans, gent. From this point onwards records are available.

In 1485 William Stepneth was one of ten feoffees who leased the Clockhouse at St. Albans to Robert Grave, smith. The Indenture⁴ specifies that he shall look after the clock, so that it keeps "good time, and strikes the hours day and night. He is to ring the bell of the clock loud enough to be heard half a mile away between 8 and 9 at night and as near as possible at 4 o'clock in the morning, at his own cost. The feoffees undertake to keep the clock in repair but not the bell and clapper.

In 1488 and 1493 William Stepneth purchased a messuage and toft and a messuage and garden in St. Albans,⁵ and sold the messuage known as "le Pye," garden and shops there in 1494.⁶ His name appears in a Grant of 1544, when the king granted numerous messuages formerly held by him and many others to Henry Audeley and John Cordall.⁷

William's son and heir, Thomas Stepneth, gent., in conjunction with his wife, Joan, purchased three messu-

³ This is not surprising since Clutterbuck quoted incorrectly from a MS. note by Le Neve in Chauncy's *History of Herts*. (1700, p. 490), which is now in the library of the Society of Antiquaries.

⁴ *Herts. Genealogist*, i, 90.

⁵ Feet of Fines, *Ibid.*, i, 1, 3.

⁶ *Cal. L. & P. Henry VIII*, xix, pt. 2, p. 194: grant 340 (59).

Ibid.,

i,

4.

ages and a garden at St. Albans in 1514,⁸ and a messuage and land there in 1520.⁹ Apparently his wife died soon after and the printed pedigrees name as his (second) wife Dorothy, daughter of John Wynde or W. Hinde, a Huntingdonshire man who was Master of the Mint at York. In 1522 Thomas Stepneth purchased land at Sandridge.¹⁰ He held the post of steward of the Priory of St. Mary de Pré, at St. Albans, from 1515 until Pope Clement VII dissolved it in 1528. Thereafter an inquisition was held at Bishop's Stortford to enquire into the possessions of the Priory, and it was stated that on the death of its last prioress Eleanor Beale on June 4th, 1527, the remaining three nuns had deserted the place. The convent, by charter of 5 August, 6 Henry VIII, gave the office of steward of the priory to Thomas Stepneth learned in the law, with a rent of 20s. for life from their lands in Herts and Bucks.¹¹ In 1540, when the king granted Northaw, Cuffley and Childwick manors to William Cavendish, the grantee was charged to continue the annual payment of 20s. to Thomas Stepneth for life as steward of Northaw and Cuffley manors.¹²

A second son of William Stepneth may perhaps be identified with a John Stepneth who in 1527 sold four messuages in St. Albans and a messuage and lands at Northchurch, Berkhamsted, Herts.¹³ He is described as "hundareda⁵⁵ of St. Albans about the year 1521 in a Bill of Complaint before the Court of Requests in 1541.¹⁴ In 1509 on the accession of Henry VIII he, among many others, received a general pardon and is styled "of Wallingford and Bradfield, Berks., and Barnard's Inn, Holborn, gent., bailiff and hundreder of St. Albans, Herts., of the liberty of the abbot."¹⁵

It is conjectural also that this John Stepneth was father of Ralph, to whom in 1546 Henry VIII granted the manor of Aldenham. The grant of Aldenham manor, rectory and advowson of the vicarage, which

8 *Herts. Genealogist*, Feet of Fines, i, 77.

9

Ibid., i, 82.

10 *Ibid.*, i, 83.

11 *Cal. L. & P. Henry VIII*, iv, p. 1860, No. 4220.

12 *Ibid.*, xiv, pt. 2, p. 115: grant 282, § 108.

13 *Herts. Genealogist*, Feet of Fines, i, 137.

14 *Ibid.*, iii, 174.

15 *Cal. L. & P. Henry VIII*, i, p. 238: No. 438 (3), memb. 6.

until then had been the property of St. Peter's Abbey, Westminster, was made on August 10th, 1546, to Ralph Stepneth and Joan his wife for the sum of £980 14d. The grant included lands in Newington, Surrey, formerly the property of Bermondsey Monastery, a meadow called Holmede at Midhurst, Sussex, formerly belonging to Tortington Priory, and Berye Grove and Cheney Woods (66 acres) and " lez Hedgerowes " (11 acres) in Aldenham, which has also been Westminster property.¹⁶ Two months later he received permission to alienate the lands in Newington to a person with the strange name of Eliseus.¹⁷ In 1545 Ralph was tenant of six acres of meadow at Lewisham, Kent, which the king granted to Sir Arthur Darcey.¹⁸

Ralph Stepneth lived only two years to enjoy his Aldenham property, and his will made on October 31st., 2 Edward VI (1548),¹⁹ records his desire to be buried at Aldenham. He wills two parts of Aldenham manor to his cousin and heir Robert Stepneth of West Ham,²⁰ Essex, and after to Robert's son Ralph. The will mentions his wife Joan, who had the Aldenham property for life, his father-in-law Richard Raynshawe, gent.,²¹ his uncle, Thomas Cressy and two young unmarried relations Joan and Besse Stepneth. It is evident that he died without issue. No mention is made of the third part of Aldenham manor, which he must have disposed of during his lifetime, as we shall see later.

The pedigrees also name Joan a daughter of William Stepneth who married Francis Lakyn of Ardley, Essex, gent.

Thomas Stepneth had six children all under age at the time of his death, and the fact that his two eldest boys were both named Robert has proved the stumbling block to genealogists. His third son was Alban, who founded the family of Stepneth of Prendergast, Pembrokeshire, Baronets : and his three daughters were

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xxi, part 2, p. 167: grant 332 (91).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xx, part 2, p. 121: grant 266 (20).

¹⁹ *P. C. C.*, 24 Populwell.

²⁰ This may be identified as East Ham Burnells manor, as that manor lay in both East and West Ham.

²¹ Richard Raynshawe is mentioned in a grant of 1544, when Henry VIII granted numerous messuages in St. Albans, then or formerly held by him and many others, to Henry Audeley and John Cordall. He also sold property in Berkhamsted and Northchurch to Robert Stepneth in 1550-1 (see below).

Affabel, Mary and Elizabeth. These are all named in the will of Robert Stepneth, which was proved on February 11, 3 and 4 Philip and Mary (1557),²² in which he himself is designated Robert Stepneth the elder, of St. Albans. He desires to be buried in St. Andrew's late the Abbey Church of St. Albans as near his kinsfolk lying there as may be. He leaves houses and tenements in St. Albans to his wife Joan. His eldest son John receives the third part of Aldenham manor which he had had from his cousin Ralph Stepneth. His second son Francis inherits property at Redbourn. His third son Ralph takes none of the estates because he is to have the two parts of Aldenham manor under his uncle's will. His fourth and youngest son Richard gets lands and tenements in St. Albans : and a daughter Clemens is to receive a sum of money on her marriage. His wife is instructed to sell his tenement called The Crane, in Hart Street, London. There are small legacies to his brothers Robert and Alban and to his unmarried sisters Affabel, Mary and Elizabeth, as well as to Richard and Mary Ewer. If his wife dies before his children are of age, he desires his cousin Fox of London and brother (-in-law) William Lawrence of Fubowrne to act as their guardians.

At various times he had made purchases of property. In 1548²³ in conjunction with William Cressy he bought a messuage and lands at Aldenham. The next year²⁴ he acquired a messuage " the Cheker " and land at St. Albans; and in 1550-1 four messuages, lands and rent in Berkhamsted and Northchurch from Richard Raynshawe²⁵ and his wife Alice. In 1553 he was a witness to a quitclaim by George Butler to Francis Watson, both of St. Albans, of all estate and right in Stone Hall there.

Thomas Stepneth's second son Robert, mentioned in the will of his brother Robert " the elder " as already stated, received various grants from the king. On October 12th, 1544, he thus acquired a tenement in Church

²² *P.C.C.*, 12 Wrastley.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, i, 203.

²⁵ See previous footnote, No. 21. The St. Albans Abbey parish registers record the burial of his wife Alice on January 19th, 1559-60 : his own burial is entered there on December 29th, 1569, as " Richard Ranshaw armiger ac serviens ad arma serenissimae Dominae Reginae Elisabethae."

²³ *Herts. Genealogist*, Feet of Fi

Street, West Ham, Essex, and lands in East and West Ham, formerly the property of Stratford Langthorne Abbey.²⁶ Two years later he received the post of bailiff and collector of the lands of Christchurch Priory, London, and of West Ham manor and all the lands there of Stratford Langthorne Abbey.²⁷ In 1562 he was granted confirmation of his coat of arms with the addition of a crest: namely, *a talbot's head erased Gules, eared and holding in its mouth a hart's horn Or, collared chequy Or and Azure,*²⁸

In 1572 he purchased Aldenham manor from his nephew John.²⁹ Sixteen years later he granted it to John Spurlynge and Richard Cuppige for the purpose of settling it on his son Paul.³⁰ The printed pedigrees name Robert's wife Joan, daughter of Thomas Markham or Nicksoun of East Ham. On the other hand the will of Thomas Myles of Flamstead proved in 1580 mentions him as son-in-law, and appoints him overseer of the will.³¹ In 1574 Robert Stepneth, Stephen Woodruffe, gent., and Edward Smith joined in purchasing a messuage and eight cottages in St. Albans.³²

Alban, the third son of Thomas Stepneth, migrated to Wales, where he was thrice sheriff of Pembrokeshire and once sheriff of Carmarthenshire. He was thirty-four years on the Commission of Peace, and sat in the first parliament of James 1 as knight of the shire for Pembrokeshire. In 1605 he received a confirmation of the coat of arms and crest which his family displayed, namely Stepneth quartering Cressy, with a mullet for difference as the third son.³³ He acquired the estate of Prendergast with his first wife Margaret, daughter and heir of Thomas Catharn. She died without issue. His second wife was Mary, daughter and coheir of William Philipps of Picton Castle, Pembrokeshire. Their son John, born about 1581, was sheriff of Pembrokeshire 1613-14, knighted 1618 and created a baronet in 1621.

²⁶ *Cal. L. & P. Henry VIII*, xix, pt. 1, p. 646.

²⁸ *B.M. Add. M.S.*, 16940, fo. 21b., and *Harl. M.S.*, 1546, fo. 87b.

²⁹ *Herts. Genealogist*, ii, 130.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, iii, 7.

³¹ *Ibid.*, ii, 30.

³² *Ibid.*, ii, 176.

³³ *Harl. M.S.*, 7025, fol. 200.

The family of Robert Stepneth the elder has already received attention in dealing with his will. All his five children were under age at the time of his death in 1557. John, the eldest son, inherited the third part of Aldenham manor. He had livery of his property in 1568,³⁴ and four years later, in conjunction with his wife Anne, sold Aldenham to his uncle Robert. Francis, the second son, inherited property in Redbourn and, while yet a minor, sold it in 1565, in conjunction with a widow Alice Stepneth,³⁵ to Richard Rede, kt. Ralph, the third son, inherited two thirds of Aldenham, but apparently he died unmarried before 1568, and his share of Aldenham reverted to his elder brother John, who sold the whole of it to his uncle Robert in 1572. Richard, the fourth and youngest son, inherited lands and tenements in St. Albans: Clemens, the only daughter, was left a sum of money on her marriage.

Of the family of Robert Stepneth the younger nothing remains to be said beyond the information contained in the printed pedigrees. Paul, his eldest son, inherited the whole of Aldenham manor, and forthwith in 1589, with his wife Sarah, sold it to Edward Carey, the father of Lord Falkland,³⁶ and so Aldenham knew the Stepneth family no more. Paul and Sarah followed up this sale by disposing of considerable property in Watford in 1590.³⁷

It remains to place correctly the shields of arms, noted at the commencement of this paper, as surviving at Aldenham church. They exhibit STEPNETH *Impaling* CRESSY, while the arms as borne by Robert Stepneth the younger bear STEPNETH *quartering* CRESSY. It is evident therefore that the Stepneth who married the Cressy heiress was ancestor to both Ralph Stepneth (d. 1548) and his cousins; for if, as the printed pedigrees state, this Ralph had married her, his cousins would have had no right to the Cressy quartering. This ancestor who married Cressy died not later than the second half of the fifteenth century and was

³⁴ Le Neve's MS. note in Chauncy's *History of Herts.*, 1700, p. 490.

³⁵ She was probably his mother, sister of William Lawrence mentioned above.

³⁶ Cussans's pedigree calls Paul's wife Sarah, daughter of . . . Patyn, but in the original MS. (*Harl MS.*, 1546, fol. 87b) the word "patyr" (i.e. father) "of ye Lord ffaukland" is so placed beneath her name that it may be thus mistaken.

³⁷ *Herts. Genealogist*, iii, 94, 97.

inherited two thirds of Aldenham, but apparently he and yet the form of the shields belongs to the middle of the sixteenth century, and the boys on the back of the palimpsest to the early years of the same century. The only conjecture that may explain this anomaly is that Ralph Stepneth erected an altar tomb to the memory of his ancestor placing on it shields of arms of Stepneth impaling Cressy, but was himself buried in another grave.

In preparing this paper various Stepneths or Stepneys have been met with, who were not immediately related to the St. Albans and Aldenham family, but may have been distant connections. A Subsidy Roll of 1545³⁸ includes the name of Henry Stepney of Hertford who was assessed at 40s., and paid a subsidy of 2d. In 1592 Robert Stepney was purchasing property in Ware.³⁹ In 1570 a Leonard Stepneth, clerk, bought a messuage and lands at Caddington.⁴⁰ When the House of Bonhommes at Ashridge was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1539 the Master and brethren received pensions from the royal purse. One of them was Joseph Stepneth or Stepney, who received annually for life. This was paid to him regularly for at least eight years, as the *Calendar of Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*, records.⁴¹

In a collection of drawings made about the year 1800, purchased by Baron Dimsdale, and now the property of Lieut. T. E. Dimsdale of Meesden Manor, Herts, is a view of the "Front of Aldenham House: East part of the house."⁴² This has been identified as the home of the later Stepneths.⁴³ It was built apparently by Robert Stepneth soon after the year 1576. In that year there was a dispute between him and the parish. The parish claimed to have two thousand acres of common land • Stepneth admitted only half that area, and that he, having no convenient house, proposed to enclose fifty acres and build a house.⁴⁴

³⁸ *Herts. Genealogist*, i, 261.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, iii, 143, 144.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, ii, 79.

⁴¹ Vol. xiv, pt. 2, p. 97: No. 261 to Vol. xxi, pt. 2, p. 443, No. 775, fol. 29.

⁴² Reproduced as frontispiece to the *Parish Registers of Aldenham, 1559-1659*, transcribed by Canon K. F. Gibbs: edited by W. Brigg: 1902.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁴⁴ *Parish Registers of Aldenham*, p. 197.