

The Pierrepont Family

As the Pierrepont family virtually ‘owned’ Cotgrave for a lengthy period of time, it seems appropriate that our website should include a brief summary of their history, the data for which is taken largely from the University of Nottingham Manuscripts and Special Collections website. Their history is a long one and it would be impracticable to attempt any detailed account – we therefore provide a bare outline of their early history, together with a little more detail of the individuals involved during the nineteenth century.



As suggested by their French-sounding name, the Pierreponts can trace their origins back to the time of William-the-Conqueror. They acquired land in the northern part of Nottinghamshire, where they flourished. Then, towards the end of the thirteenth century, Henry de Pierrepont married Annora de Manvers and this brought the Holme estate into the family. It also introduced the name of ‘Manvers’, later to be chosen as the title ‘Earl Manvers’ by Charles Medows when he

was ennobled in 1806. Holme Pierrepont Hall is of interest as the first house to be built in brick in Nottinghamshire. This was in 1500 and it is still occupied by descendants of the Pierrepont family. The much grander house at Thoresby was bought by Sir Robert Pierrepont (First Earl of Kingston-upon-Hull) in 1633 but has now declined in status to that of a health spa!



In 1690 Evelyn Pierrepont succeeded to the Estate and in 1715 he was elevated to the rank of 1st Duke of Kingston-upon-Hull but the male line died out in 1773 with the death of the 2nd Duke (another Evelyn Pierrepont) and the Estate (though not the title) was inherited in 1788 by his nephew Charles Medows, on the death of the Duchess.



Charles Medows (1737 – 1816) was the second son of Philip Medows, Deputy Ranger of Richmond Park and, in case this appears to downgrade him to the level of ordinary citizen, let it be said that Richmond Park was a Royal park and held very much in regard by the King, George III, who personally appointed the Ranger, with whom he worked closely. Even his deputy was therefore of some considerable status and this appears to be confirmed by his having married Lady Frances Pierrepont, the daughter of William, Earl of Kingston-upon-Hull. It was clearly a result of this relationship that Charles Medows came to inherit the Pierrepont Estate – it was left to him in the will of the 2nd Evelyn Pierrepont - (though there was an interesting – but unsuccessful - challenge from Charles’ brother on the grounds of the Duchess’s bigamous marriage!).

Following an Oxford education, Charles entered the Royal Navy and saw considerable active service, rising to the rank of Captain before resigning from the Navy in 1769, aged 32. In 1774 he married Anne Orton Mills, daughter of William Mills of Richmond, with whom he had five children. On inheriting the Pierrepont Estate in 1788, Charles changed his name to 'Pierrepont' and moved to the Holme Pierrepont address. However, knowing that his Uncle had made him his heir in 1773, Charles had already made a move to establish himself in Nottingham and became its MP from 1778 until 1796, when he was ennobled as Baron Pierrepont and Viscount Newark. He was not regarded as an outstanding member of Parliament, though he clearly bettered himself by supporting the Whig politician Duke of Portland (Prime Minister in 1783 and 1807-1809) who promoted Charles' elevation to the rank of Earl Manvers in 1806. While a member of the House of Lords, Charles took up the cause of Agricultural Reform and was a prime mover behind several Enclosure Acts. In 1803 he was appointed to the office of Vice President of the Board of Agriculture.

With regard to his influence on Cotgrave, he was largely responsible for the Inclosure Act of 1791 and began the gradual absorption of the majority of what agricultural land remained in private hands into the Pierrepont Estate. In particular, he bought Cotgrave Place, together with its associated farm lands, from Thomas Ianson in 1808. In a very different sphere, he (together with the then Rector of All Saints, Rev Nathan Haines) was also responsible for discouraging the arrival of Methodism. The early Methodists, intent on building a chapel in the village, were told they could not build on Pierrepont land, while local labourers were advised against any involvement in the construction on pain of losing their right to work on Pierrepont projects. (Nevertheless, the Methodists still found a way of circumventing all such discouragement and built their chapel in Chapel Yard on land not belonging to the Estate.)



When Charles Pierrepont died in 1816 the Estate passed to his second son, Charles Herbert Pierrepont (1778 – 1860) (his elder brother having pre-deceased his father). Charles Herbert followed his father's example in joining the Royal Navy and, like him, reached the rank of Captain, having seen some thirteen years of service. On resigning from the Navy, he took his brother's seat in Parliament and remained an MP until his ennoblement in 1816, when he became the 2nd Earl Manvers. As an MP, he is on record as voting against Parliamentary Reform and also against Catholic Relief – in other words, he was an arch conservative, whether or not an arch Conservative.

In 1804 he married Mary Laetitia Eyre, eldest daughter of a neighbouring grandee, Anthony Hardolph Eyre of Grove Hall (near Retford) with whom he had four children. He devoted most of his life to local affairs in Nottinghamshire and gained a reputation as 'a Good Landlord'. He undertook a considerable amount of restoration work on his Cotgrave properties and was recorded (as noted by William Lewin in his (1944) 'A Short Story of Cotgrave') as: "leaving his mark on the village to this day." In passing, we may note that the Rector of All Saints from 1858 to 1873, Rev Evelyn Hardolph Harcourt Vernon, a somewhat colourful character, was also a member of the Grove family and later inherited the Grove Estate.



On Charles Herbert's death in 1860, the Estate was inherited by his second son, Sydney William Herbert Pierrepont (1825 – 1900). The 3rd Earl enjoyed an Oxford education before returning to Holme Pierrepont and being elected, unopposed as MP for South Nottinghamshire, a post he retained until his ennoblement. His local activities involved his appointment as a Magistrate, as a Deputy Lieutenant of Nottingham and Hon. Colonel of the Notts Regiment of Yeomanry Cavalry. Less locally, he married Georgina Jane Elizabeth Fanny de Franquetot, daughter of Augustin, Duc de Coigny (Coigny being a Commune in the Manche Department of Normandy). They had five children, the eldest son, Charles William Sydney, becoming the 4th Earl in 1900 and a second son, Evelyn Henry, whose own son Gervas Evelyn became 6th Earl in 1940.

The 3rd Earl was noted for his generosity in supporting Cotgrave activities. When it was decided to build a new school (the present Church School in Plumtree Road) in the 1860s, the Earl not only gave the site but contributed a large share of the building expenses. Similarly, when the Rector, Alfred Hensley launched his grand refurbishment of All Saints Church in the 1870s, Earl Manvers contributed £1,000 towards the cost. Whilst we should remember that the Manvers family held the right to appoint the Cotgrave Rectors, so there would always be a close relationship, such generosity went well beyond the need to maintain good relations – it represented a genuine interest in and concern for the welfare of the village. However, such interest was gradually to waste away, as the Manvers family became less centred on Holme Pierrepont. While considering the relationship between Earl and Rector, we might note that it was the 3rd Earl who bought the whole of the Rector's land (acquired at Inclosure) for the Pierrepont Estate, thus ensuring that very little land remained in private hands – this was the culmination of a tendency started at the time of the Inclosure Act and continued steadily throughout the nineteenth century.

The 4th Earl, Charles William Sydney (1854 – 1926) was Conservative MP for Newark from 1855 until 1895 and again from 1898 to 1900, when he inherited the Estate and Title. His principal interest seems to have been in hunting and he was master of the Rufford Hunt from 1900. His eldest son, Evelyn Robert became 5th Earl in 1900 but was unable to take on his responsibilities due to an unfortunate health failure in his teens and the Estate was administered by a Trust. On his death in 1940, Gervase Evelyn (1881 – 1955) became 6th Earl but he was based in London, where he was a JP and obviously had little interest in Cotgrave. So little, indeed, was his interest that he promptly sold off the whole of his Cotgrave and Clipston land in the grand 1941 sale. He maintained an interest in Thoresby to the extent that, in his will, he left the Hall to his widow who continued to live there even after it's conversion to a luxury hotel but, as Gervase died childless, the Pierrepont male line died out in 1955. Thus ended a long association between the Pierrepont family and the village of Cotgrave though, as we now know, Cotgrave was to change its own nature very considerably towards the end of the twentieth century.