

SURREY PEOPLE

Sir Anthony Browne (1487 - 1548)

and

Sir Anthony Browne (1526 - 1592)

First Viscount Montague

Statesmen, Courtiers and Catholic Lords
of the Manor of Send and Ripley
(Otherwise the Manor of Send and Jury)

Sir Anthony Browne (1487 - 1548), only son of Sir Anthony Browne of Betchworth, Standard Bearer of England, and of his wife Lady Lucy Nevill, daughter and co-heiress of John Nevill, Marquis Montacute, and widow of Sir William Fitzwilliam. Sir Anthony Browne was married twice, his first wife Alice (Alys) Gage was daughter of Sir John Gage, K.G., Constable of the Tower. By her he had 7 sons and 3 daughters, his son Anthony succeeded to his father's estate and was created Viscount Montague.

In 1526 Browne was created Lieutenant of the Isle of Man during the minority of Edward, Earl of Derby. In 1528 and again in 1533 Browne was sent into France. On the first occasion to invest Francis I with the Order of the Garter, on the second to attend that King to Nice for conference with the Pope respecting the divorce of Henry VIII and Catharine of Aragon. In 1539 Browne was made Master of the Horse, and in 1540 created a Knight of the Garter.

In 1537 he was present at the christening of the future King Edward VI and was one of the knights who guarded the silver font used on that occasion.

Battle Abbey was granted to Browne in 1538, at the same time he received the Priory of St. Mary Overy in Southwark. The house which he built at Southwark was for generations the London residence of his descendants the Viscounts Montague.

The Manors of Send, Jury and East Clandon, together with Brede, Sussex, which included a considerable part of the town of Hastings, were also granted to Browne. In 1543, on the death of his maternal half-brother Sir William Fitzwilliam, Earl of Southampton, he inherited further estates including the Priory of Easebourne and the estate of Cowdray, both close to Midhurst. Part of the magnificent mansion of Cowdray had already been built by William Fitzwilliam, Earl of Southampton, but much was added by Browne.

In 1540 Browne was sent to the court of John of Cleves in Flanders to act as proxy at the marriage of Henry VIII with Anne of Cleves.

In 1543 he accompanied the Duke of Norfolk in an expedition against the Scots and in the following year, as Master of the Horse, he attended Henry VIII at the siege of Boulogne.

During the last illness of Henry VIII Browne, with good courage and conscience, undertook to tell the King of his approaching end. Henry appointed him guardian to Prince Edward and to Princess Elizabeth, made him one of his executors, and left him a legacy. On the King's death Browne broke the news to the young Prince, and when as Edward VI he made his public entry into London, Browne, as Master of the Horse, rode beside him.

But Browne survived Henry VIII by only one year and died at his house at Byfleet on 6 May 1548. He was buried with great pomp at Battle, under a splendid altar tomb which he had prepared himself.

Browne's second wife was Lady Elizabeth Fitzgerald, better known as "Fair Geraldine". Her two sons died in infancy. After the death of Browne the young widow married Edward Fiennes, Lord Clinton and Saye, Earl of Lincoln, and was buried with him at St. George's Chapel, Windsor.

Sir Anthony Browne was a distinguished courtier and Statesman and appears to have had the full confidence of Henry VIII whose favour he continued to hold despite the fickleness of his Monarch. Notwithstanding his participation in the monastic spoilation of his monarch, he suffered imprisonment in the Tower for his Catholicism, a creed to which his descendents adhered for many generations.

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Anthony Browne, 1st Viscount Montague (1526 - 1592) was the eldest son of Sir Anthony Browne and Alice Gage, daughter of Sir John Gage. He succeeded his father in 1548, inheriting with other property the estates of Battle Abbey and Cowdray in Sussex. Like his father he was a staunch Roman Catholic yet his loyalty to the crown was above suspicion, and he enjoyed the confidence and favour alike of Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth. He was knighted at the coronation of Edward VI, and although he was sent to the Fleet in 1551 for hearing mass his imprisonment did not last long, for in 1552 he entertained the King in sumptuous style at Cowdray House. The young King's records state "At Cowdray, a goodlie house ... where we were marvelously, yea rather excessively, banketted". In the following year Montague's wife, Lady Jane, daughter of Robert Radcliffe, Earl of Sussex, died in giving birth to a son. He afterwards married Maud Dacre and had 5 sons and 3 daughters.

Spain, he was created a viscount, and chose the title of Montague, probably because his grandmother, Lady Lucy, had been daughter and co-heiress of John Nevill, Marquis Montacute.

Again in 1554 he was made Master of the Horse, and was sent to Rome on an embassy with Thirlby, Bishop of Ely, and Sir Edward Carne, to treat with the Pope concerning the reconciliation of the Church of England to the papal see.

In 1555 he was made a member of the Privy Council and a Knight of the Garter, and in 1557 he acted as lieutenant-general of the English forces at the siege of St. Quentin in Picardy.

On the accession of Queen Elizabeth, Montague lost his seat in the Privy Council, and he boldly expressed his dissent in the House of Lords from the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity. Nevertheless he was employed two years later on a special mission to the Court of Spain as one whom Elizabeth "highly esteemed for his great prudence and wisdom, though earnestly devoted to the Romish religion".

In 1562 he made a forcible and courageous speech in the House of Lords against the act entitled "for the assurance of the Queen's royal power over all estates and subjects within her dominion". Montague opposed the measure, not only on the grounds that the Queen's Roman Catholics were peaceably and loyally disposed, but also as being in itself "a thing unjust and repugnant to the natural liberty of men's understanding".

Montague went on to say "for what man is there so without courage and stomach, or void of all honour, that can consent or agree to receive an opinion and new religion by force and compulsion?".

In August 1552 Edward VI was entertained at Titchfield, and in 1560 the Council entrusted the Earl "as a ward of state", to the care of William More of Loseley Park, near Guildford.

Southampton, who was privately educated, inclined to the Roman Catholic religion, and married into a Roman Catholic family. His wife was Mary, daughter of Anthony Browne, 1st Viscount Montague. The marriage took place in 1565-6 when Southampton was still under age, at Montague's house.

In 1569 he entertained Queen Elizabeth at Titchfield, but his Roman Catholic sympathies had already involved him in the scheme for marrying Mary Queen of Scots to the Duke of Norfolk. This was not the limit of his disloyalty; in 1570 Southampton was arrested and placed in the custody of Sir William More of Loseley, his former guardian. He was again arrested in 1571 having been reported as one of those "with whom Ridolfi most practised". In March 1573 his father-in-law was allowed to confer with him - on the 1 May following he was allowed "more liberty", and on 14 July was permitted to "remain with the Lord Viscount Montague at Cowdray, near Midhurst, Sussex".

Two months before his death he was suspected of harbouring Edmund Campion, Jesuit, papist and intriguer; in 1581 the Earl's house in Holborn was searched by order of the Council.

Southampton died on 4 October 1581 aged 37 years, and was buried in Titchfield church. In his will he left moneys for the erection of the fine monument we see today. He was succeeded by his son Henry, 3rd Earl (1573 - 1624) known to Literature as the patron of Shakespeare.

Montague did not, however, forfeit the favour of Queen Elizabeth for he was chosen one of the 47 commissioners who sat at the trial of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587.

In 1588 when the Queen reviewed her army at Tilbury Fort, Montague was the first to appear on the ground leading a troop of 200 horsemen, and accompanied by his son and his grandson.

Three years after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in August 1591 Queen Elizabeth paid a visit to Cowdray, where she was entertained for nearly a week. This was not the only visit to Cowdray of a monarch. Early in 1538 Henry VIII seems to have paid several visits to the house.

Montague died at West Horsley the year following his sovereign's visit to Cowdray and was buried in Midhurst church. A splendid table-tomb was erected over his remains, but has since been removed to Easebourne church, where he now lies together with the recumbent effigies of his two wives.

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Henry Wriothesley, Baron Titchfield, son-in-law of Viscount Montague, 2nd Earl of Southampton (1545 - 1581) only son of the first Earl, was christened on 25 April 1545, the Earl of Essex deputising for the King as one of his godfathers. He was styled Baron Wriothesley from 1547 until 1550 when he succeeded as 2nd Earl. (The Richmond Herald at the College of Arms informs us there is no family link between Sir William Fitzwilliam, Earl of Southampton (1490 - 1542). The Wriothesley family was promoted to the earldom of Southampton in 1547. It was not unusual in those days for a title to be re-used rapidly by a different family).

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