

BENNET OF MORTLAKE, SURREY

The following article was sent in by Les Brown and deals with the family of Bulstrode Whitelocke's first wife. The article appeared in the Barnes and Mortlake History Society's Newsletter in September 1967.

"The Bennet family

At Babraham church, eight miles south of Cambridge, there is a remarkable monument, attributed to Bushnell commemorating Sir Richard and Sir Thomas Bennet. It is thus described by Pevsner in his book on Cambridgeshire in the Buildings of England series:- "Two white, life-size standing figures against a black back-cloth. They are spectrally thin and joyless in their surging Berninesque draperies, one facing us, the other in profile. Their gesticulating also is Berninesque, un-English and in weird contrast to their gaunt faces."

The inscription tells us that they were brothers, both baronets, they lived together, were brought up together at school, university and Inns of Court and they married two sisters, daughters and heiresses of Levinus Monke Esq. Sir Richard died in 1658, Sir Thomas in 1667. The monument was erected by Sir Thomas' son, Sir Levinus.

They were sons of Alderman Thomas Bennet, Sheriff of London, 1613-14, who as early as 1608, owned 99 acres in Mortlake and lived in a house on the north side of the High Street, later known as The Limes. He died in 1620 and his widow was buried in Mortlake church on her death in 1642. His next-door neighbour in Mortlake, at the house later known as Castelnau House, was Levinus Monke, Clerk of the Signet. Thomas' eldest son, Richard, lived at Kew and was the father of Dorothy, who married Lord Chapel. She founded the Capel Charity in 1721, from which the Mortlake Church of England School, together with six other schools, still receives a substantial annual sum.

His second son was Sir Thomas, of Babraham, and his youngest son was Sir Humphrey, who inherited the Mortlake property and died in 1667. Rebecca, one of his daughters, married at Mortlake Church in 1630, Bulstrode Whitelocke, keeper of the Great Seal during the Commonwealth, but died four years later. During their marriage they lived at Mortlake with Mrs. Bennet. The names of various members of the Bennet family appear in the Mortlake Vestry Minute Books between 1608 and 1664."

Several of the Bennet family appear in the Diary of Bulstrode Whitelocke (1605-1675). Mrs. Bennet was Dorothy, sister of Sir Humphrey May and obviously a rather formidable mother-in-law for the young Bulstrode. Rebecca's sister Mrs. Amcotes is also mentioned as being "in the same condition" as Rebecca (i.e. mentally disturbed) and in the care of the same doctor. Bulstrode mentions Rebecca's brother, Sir Humphrey Bennet (1605?-1667) as a Royalist who rescues him from an attack by Royalists in the streets of Oxford during the Civil War. Bulstrode is able to return the favour in 1658 when Sir Humphrey is charged with conspiracy. Bulstrode also mentions his brothers-in-law, the two Baronets whose monument is at Babraham. It is felt that Rebecca's brother, Richard Bennet (1595?-1658) is the Richard Bennet who was shipping haberdashery to Virginia in 1631 [see WFN 5:2:2 (1986)] and who transported Thomas Whitlock (1615-1659) to Isle of Wight Co., Virginia in 1638 [see WFN 4:1:2 (1985)].

Sources: REF176; REF750;