

DELABECHE EFFIGIES AT ALDWORTH

In the village of Aldworth in Berkshire is the 14thC church of St. Mary the Virgin. While the south aisle and chancel are 14thC the nave and tower are 12thC and the font is Norman. Lining the north and south walls of nave and under the arches joining the nave and the south aisle are numerous effigies of one De la Beche family. There are nine of them dating from about 1300 to 1340. Two are ladies in 14thC gowns and seven are knights in armour.

There is one effigy of a couple Sir John and Lady Isabella who were founders of a chapel in the church. The effigies are larger than life size, most being seven feet long and for this reason they have been known and the Giants of Aldworth.

Sir Philip Dela Beche (1250-1329) was a valet to Edward II (born 1284 King 1307-1327). It is known he was a very tall man and was accompanied by a dwarf that accentuated his height. His effigy on the north side is very large and reclining which is unusual at this time. Sir Philip was Sheriff of Berkshire and Wiltshire in 1314 and he and his sons took part in a rebellion against Edward II in 1322. The rebellion failed but they were not executed and were pardoned by Edward III when he came to the throne in 1327. Philip's son Lord Nicholas held positions of power under Edward III as his steward in Gascony, Constable of the Tower of London and custodian of Edward the Black Prince, the first son of Edward III.

Sir Phillip De la Beche married Lady Joan and it is assumed from the seal that she was part of the de la Zouche family. They are known to have had at least seven children, six sons and a daughter Joan. There are effigies of his eldest son John Dela Beche (b.1288) and his wife Isabella de Elmridge. Lord Nicholas Dela Beche, (d.1345) John's younger brother and another son Sir Philip DelaBeche. Sir Philip DelaBeche's wife Joan is the other Lady and lies along the south aisle under a canopy. The last effigy is Sir Philip's grandson John who died in 1340 the son of John and Isabella. Sir Philip was the son of John Dela Beche and grandson of Robert and his wife Idonea the daughter of William de Frethnei.

In 1337 Watlington Manor in Oxfordshire was granted to Lord Nicholas DelaBeche in recognition of his service to Edward III and his role in the education of Edward "The Black Prince" Edward III's eldest son. After Nicholas' death in 1345 the Manor reverted to the Prince. In a 1350 Inquisition Post Mortem there is mention that Reynold son of Herbert held as of the lands late of Margery late the wife of Nicholas DelaBeche in Bradefeld, Berkshire "now in the Kings hand, by service of a third part of a knights fee". Nicholas' married Margery Poynings in 1339

Edmund Dela Beche the fourth son of Sir Philip was born about 1294 and died in 1364. He was an Archdeacon of Berkshire. He was raised in De la Beche Castle in Aldworth and enjoyed an eventful career as a soldier before entering the Church.

It is not yet known if there is a connection to the Roger Dela Beche who's son William shows in the early deeds relating to The Manor of Beches in Wokingham, Berkshire but the two families were contemporaries living the late 1100's early 1200's in the same area of Berkshire.

<http://www.britainexpress.com/attractions.htm?attraction=4266>

<http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=ancestorsearch&id=I44684>

<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/inquis-post-mortem/vol9/pp95-118>

<http://www.berkshirehistory.com/bios/ndelabeche.html>

<http://www.themcs.org/churches/Aldworth%20st%20marys.html>