

## The Brett Family.

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BY REV. FREDERICK BROWN, M.A., F.S.A.

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THE early history of the Brett family, of White Staunton, is somewhat difficult to elucidate. There can be little doubt that they were descended from the family which gave its name to the parish of Sampford Brett near Williton, and for many generations they held the manor of Thorncombe, in the parish of Bicknoller, which adjoins Sampford Brett. They also held the manor of Pillond, in the parish of Pilton, Devon, near Barnstaple, and two brasses still exist in Pilton Church, one to the memory of Alexander Brett, Esq., who died July 14, 1536, another to Robert Brett, Esq., who died Sept. 22, 1540. This manor was sold to Dr. Wolton, Bishop of Exeter, in the reign of Elizabeth.

A Brett, probably in early times, married a Staunton heiress, but the earliest record that I have met with in reference to White Staunton Manor House is the will of a John Huggyn of White Staunton, dated 1483, which is recited at length, in English, in an Inquisition p. m., dated 1492, in which he requests his feoffees at his decease "to suffer Johan, my wife, to have the occupacion of all the Howsyng above the weste end of the Hall of White Staunton, and the occupacion of the old stable, the kechyn and bakehouse to make her mete, to brewe and to bake as oftyn tymes as nede requireth, with sufficient fewell of underwoode to be had within the Parke of White Staunton, with free comyng ynne and owte to all the foresaid atte all tymys whilst she lyveth soule and unmarried without any interrupcion of myne heyres. Also that my said ffeffes, att my discesse, shall suffer John,

my son and heyre apparent, to have the occupacion of all the residewe of all the said Manor of White Staunton with his appurtenances, yelding and payynge yerly thereof to my said wife, whyls she levyth soule, x marks at iiii times usuall by evyn porcions."

John Huggyn then speaks of his "lands in Briggewater, North Pederton, Bokeland St. Mary, Halle in the parish of Charde, Somerset, and other lands in Dorset, out of which his feoffees are to find 'sustentacion' for his sons Walter and Gyles, then under age, and he directs them 'when that Walter ys of age of xxi yeres, to make a state' of these lands to Walter and Elizabeth, the daughter of John Brytt, late of Thorncombe Manor, whom, by the grace of God, the said Walter shall have to wiffe."

It is impossible to trace out the connection between the Huggyns and the Bretts. I have examined all the Inquisitions post mortem now extant, but I have failed to make out a reliable pedigree. There was a John Brett, Esq., of South Petherton, who married Isabel Walrond, and whose will, in Latin, was proved June 23, 1532. He died issueless, but he bequeaths "to John Walrond 200 sheep in White Staunton, and all his utensils in the capital mansion of White Staunton."

One branch of the White Staunton Bretts settled in London. Robert Brett was a Merchant Taylor, and evidently a man of great wealth. He married Elizabeth Highgate of Essex, and by her had many children. In his will, proved April 26, 1586, he bequeaths "to Mr. John Brett of Whyte Staunton, Somerset, Esq., a ringe of gold of one ounce weight, with a deaths head and two letters graven therein for my name." He was buried in St. Augustine's, London, April 15, 1586. The will of his relict, Elizabeth Brett, was proved by John Brett, her son, October 17, 1599. She bequeaths many valuable legacies to all her children, except to her daughter Katherine, to whom she leaves only "a black gowne." The reason for this difference I discovered in some

curious Chancery Proceedings taken in 1600, by Richard Leigh, citizen and Merchant Taylor, against John Brett, the executor of his father, in which he claimed a share in the legacies of John Brett, senior, "as the husband of Katherine." And John Brett says in reply, that Richard Leigh was an apprentice to his father, and "knowing Catherine's fortune, and that she was very young and easily to be seduced, he sought to obtain her good will, and feed a maid servant in her mother's house, and did, in the absence of her mother, most undutifully and ungodly steal away Katherine and marry her contrary to the wishes of her mother and family, and for that reason Elizabeth Brett only gave a black gowne to her daughter Catherine."

Robert Brett, Merchant Taylor, had four sons. The eldest, Sir John Brett, Kt., of Edmonton, was buried at St. Augustine's, February 3, 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ . He had one son, Owen Brett, of Rowney, Beds, a Royalist, who died 1658, issueless, and five daughters, who all married and had children.

His second son, William Brett, Esq., of Toddington, Beds, had many sons, whom I cannot trace. One of them, however, was Sir Edward Brett, Kt., born 1608. He married Barbara, only daughter of Sir John Fleming, Kt. This Edward Brett was knighted by Charles I at the battle of Lostwithiel, Cornwall, Aug. 31, 1644. He had gallantly, in view of the King, charged the Parliamentary forces, and "received a shott in his left arm, and having brought his men off, retreated to be drest, when the King called him and took his sword which was drawn in his hand, and knighted him on his horse's back." Sir Edward Brett died, s.p., aged 75, Feb. 12, 168 $\frac{2}{3}$ , and is buried in Bexley Church, Kent, where there is an elaborate monumental inscription, recording his military services in behalf of King Charles, and afterwards in the Netherlands, under William, then Prince of Orange. The third son of Robert Brett, Merchant Taylor, was Dr. Richard Brett, a very learned man, Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, and one of the translators of the authorised version of the Bible. He

was Rector of Quainton, Bucks, where he was buried April 18, 1637. There is a long epitaph to him in Quainton Church, in Latin, with effigies of himself, wife and children. It concludes with these quaint lines in English—

Instead of weeping marble, weep for him,  
All ye his flock, whom he did strive to win  
To Christ—to Lyfe;—so shall you duly sett  
The most desired store on Dr. Brett.

In his will, he mentions his books and their titles—they were wonderfully few in number for such an eminent biblical scholar. To his son, Sparke, he bequeaths, “my dors skerlett,” which, I conjecture, means his D.D. scarlet hood. He married Alice, daughter of Richard Browne, sometime Mayor of Oxford. They had four daughters only, one of these married Humphrey Chambers, a puritan Divine, rector of Claverton, Somerset; another married Calibut Downing, vicar of Hackney, Middlesex.

I now return to the owners of White Staunton Manor. John Brett, Esq., was High Sheriff of Somerset, 1579. He married Margaret Ratcliff, relict of John Ackland, Esq. She died Feb. 22, 158 $\frac{2}{3}$ , and there is a monumental inscription to her in the church. His will was proved April 30, 1589. He desires “to be buried in the southeast part of the south Ile, which Ile is to be enlarged in that respect, my son and heir to enlarge the same in such order as I have directed, being so written by mine own hand, if I myself in my lifetime do not enlarge the south Ile, which by the help of God, I, livinge, doe mind to do.” He speaks also of “my grandmother, Thomasine Brytt, of Pillond, Devon.

John Brett, Esq., had six children. One of his daughters, Mary, married Christopher Morgan, Esq., of Maperton, Dorset. She died Jan. 4, 158 $\frac{2}{3}$ , and there is an inscription to her memory in White Staunton Church. He married secondly, Ann Bampfield, and his will was proved by his relict, Ann Morgan, Feb. 20, 159 $\frac{2}{7}$ . Another daughter, Ellinor Brett,

married Nicholas Fry, Esq., of Yearty, Devon, whose will was proved Feb. 7, 1633 $\frac{1}{2}$ . She predeceased him.

One of his sons, Sir Robert Brett, Kt., was of West Malling, Kent, Gentleman Usher of H.M. Privy Chamber and King's Sergeant. He died Sept. 1, 1620, and there is a monument to him in West Malling church. His first wife was Frances Fane. His second wife was Ann Meredith, who afterwards became the wife of Francis Lord Cottington, one of the chief ministers and advisers of Charles I. He was a Roman Catholic. He died at Valladolid, in Spain, June 19, 1652, aged 74. There is a large monument to him in the Chapel of St. Paul in Westminster Abbey.

The eldest son of John Brett, Esq., was Sir Alexander Brett, Kt., knighted at Beddington, Surrey, 1603. He died 1609. His first wife was Ann Morgan, relict of Nicholas Turberville, Esq., who was murdered by his brother-in-law, John Morgan, Esq., for which murder John Morgan was attainted and executed at Wells, January 23, 22nd Elizabeth.

The second wife of Sir Alexander Brett was Ann Gifford, daughter of John Gifford, of Weston-under-edge, Gloucestershire, by Elizabeth, daughter of Sir George Throckmorton, of Coughton. I think it was through this alliance that Sir Walter Raleigh, who married Elizabeth Throckmorton, speaks so often in his correspondence of "my cousin, Sir Alexander Brett." Sir Alexander became one of the trustees for Lady Raleigh. The Giffords were a Roman Catholic family, and Lady Ann Brett was heavily fined for her recusancy in 1610. Sir Alexander Brett died 1609. Lady Ann, his relict, died at Leigh, Surrey, June 20, 1647.<sup>1</sup>

(1). *State Papers*, Charles I, Nov. 28, 1625. Amongst the recusants disarmed within the county of Somerset:—"The Ladie Anne Brett of Whitstaunton, Somerset, widow, a popish recusant—one compleat armour with a lance for a greate horse, one other armour for a lighte horse, three corsletts complete, wanting one vambrace, and another wanting pouldrons, tacks, and vambraces; one targett of prooffe, one breast plate for a lance, one bastard muskett, one calliver, one pistol with a firelocke, one flaske and tutch box, six halberds, twelve poleaxes, one old battle axe, twelve bills, whereof one wanting a staff, three coats of mayle, one buckler, and three old hred pieces. Given to the custodye of John Poulett, Esq., and are all old armes."

They had several children, one of them, Robert Brett, became Prior of the Benedictines on the continent, and died Aug. 12, 1665, aged 68. One of the daughters, Elizabeth Brett, married Sir Humphry Lynde, Kt., another Mary Brett, married Edward Cotton, Esq., and another, Ann Brett, married Edward Keynes, of Compton Pauncefoot; both of the latter gentlemen were Roman Catholic recusants. The eventual heir of Sir Alexander Brett, Kt. (for his eldest son, John Brett, died young), was Alexander Brett, Esq., of White Staunton, aged 25 at his brother's death. He died intestate, Aug. 15, 1617, having married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir William Kirkham, Kt., of Blagdon, Devon, a Roman Catholic recusant. They were the parents of Sir Robert Brett, Kt., the royalist and "papist in arms," born 1615. His property was sequestered, and there is much about him in the Royalist Composition Papers. He seems to have been a hot-headed and turbulent man, and got into all sorts of trouble.

His first wife was Mary, daughter of Richard White, Esq., of Hutton, Essex. She died February, 165 $\frac{3}{4}$ . He married secondly, about 1664, Ursula Watkins. She was buried at Hampstead, Middlesex, March 31, 1671, but in her will she leaves no legacy to any Brett. She was evidently a Roman Catholic.

The following account is extracted from some Chancery Proceedings, which took place 1669 and 1670. It seems that £4000 had been settled by deed, 12th Charles I, on the younger children of Sir Robert Brett by his first wife, to be raised out of the White Staunton estate, the trustees being Benjamin Weston and Edmund Plowden, Esqrs. This sum Sir Robert Brett had neglected or refused to raise, much to the detriment of his younger children. His eldest son, Alexander Brett, took the part of his brothers and sisters, whereupon Sir Robert Brett, his father, behaved most unkindly to him, and "did force him to shift for himself," and apparently turned him

out of the Manor House, and gave him an allowance only of £12 10s., and refused to provide for his other children.

Alexander Brett then "importuned the Trustees," and they brought an action of trespass and ejectment in the King's Bench, 16th Charles II, which succeeded, and they were put in possession of the Manor House by the Sheriff of Somerset. In some depositions taken at Chard, Nov. 2, 1669, and Sept. 20, 1670, William Trot gave evidence that when he was living with Sir Robert Brett, as servant, "he did by order of his master, shut and make fast the door of the Mansion House at such time as they noticed that the Sheriff of Somerset was coming to deliver the possession of the House" to the trustees, and "that the Sheriff's Officers were forced to break open two doors of the said Mansion House, before possession could be had thereof." He also deposed that "the goods which were in the House were turned out, and were taken away by Sir Robert Brett, and the best of them were conveyed to the house of Mr. Hussey, of Hilton, Dorset, and the rest of them were disposed of to several persons for moneys owing to them, being Sir Robert's debts, and others for ready money, the chief writings being carried away to London."

Evidence was also given that Alexander Brett had to the best of his ability provided for his brothers and sisters. Mary Brett, his sister, "was buried at his expense." Richard and Adam, his brothers, "were maintained at Crewkerne, and there tabled and kept at school at his charges for a year and half, at £11 12s. each, besides what it cost him for their apparel." Afterwards "he placed his brother, Adam Brett, an apprentice in London to a linen draper," and afterwards provided for him, "and Richard Brett is maintained since he came from school by Alexander in meat, drinke, apparell, and washing, worth £17 or £18 a year."

In a suit which Lady Ursula Brett brought in Chancery against the then trustees for her dower out of White Staunton, they having denied the validity of her marriage, and so of

any deed of dower, many depositions were taken in 1669 at Chard, and from that of the aforesaid William Trot, we learn the circumstances of this second marriage of Sir Robert Brett. He says "he was present when Sir Robert Brett was married to the complainant, who had lived in the nature of a servant upon Mary, the late daughter of Sir Robert, while the said Mary lived with Robert Hussey, Esq., at Hilton, Dorset. They were married in the White Harte Inne in the town of Hindon, Wilts, about four or five years since, this deponent and one Mr. Robert Hussey of Hilton, and several others, being then and there present—that they were so married, as this deponent was informed, by one Gowin, but he was not in the habit of a clergyman or minister, but he did hold a book in his hand, but what book this deponent knoweth not, and used such words, expressions and ceremonies as are usual in marriages within the Church of England, but whether the said Mr. Gowin was a person in ecclesiastical orders according to the laws of the Church of England, this deponent knoweth not, but believes the contrary, neither doth he know where he then, or yet doth live."

So that this second marriage of Sir Robert Brett's was a very clandestine affair, most likely celebrated by a Roman Catholic priest, and so it came to pass that "Lady Ursula Brett, widow, relict of Sir Robert Brett, Kt., late of White Staunton, Somerset, deceased," as she styles herself in her will, ignored the children of the first wife.

Sir Robert Brett, Kt., died August, 1666, most likely on the continent. There is no will of his or administration.

I have followed out all his children, except Richard and Adam, above-mentioned. One of his sons, Robert Brett, became a Jesuit, and died at St. Omer, Nov. 3, 1678. His eldest son, Alexander Brett, born 1633, was buried in White Staunton Church, having died July 1, 1671, s.p. He married at St. Paul's, Covent Garden, Middlesex, in 1657, Mrs. Elizabeth Dickenson, widow, born 1634. She was certainly a



Brett by birth, but I have been unable to discover her parentage, and can only suggest that she was of the Bretts, of Toddington, Beds. She married, secondly, in 1674, Dr. Henry Klee, Doctor of Medicine, bachelor, aged 42, she being about 40. He was buried at St. Paul's, Covent Garden, July 8, 1677.

On the death of Alexander Brett, s.p., his brother, Robert Brett, inherited White Staunton, but he had become a Jesuit Father. He is mentioned in Foley's *Record of the Jesuits*, vol. v. 101, as being mixed up in "the Popish Plot." He is called "Sir Robert Bret, Bart.," but that is a mistake. He died probably at St. Omer, whither he managed to escape, having according to an indenture in the Close Rolls, dated Dec. 2, 1673, conveyed "for a competent sum of money," the whole of the White Staunton property and lands in Winsham, &c., "to Elizabeth Brett, widow of Alexander Brett, Esq., of White Staunton, Somerset."

Mrs. Elizabeth Klee thus became Lady of the Manor, and she was buried as such at White Staunton, Dec. 30, 1713, s.p.

She had two brothers: one Richard Brett, Esq., of Richmond, Surrey, where he was buried 1689. He was a man of great wealth, and high in favour with Charles II. He married Lady Catherine Boyle, by whom he had two daughters, heiresses—Elizabeth, wife of Thomas Dacres, Esq., and Margaret, wife of Charles Bludworth, Esq.

Her other brother was Robert Brett of London, who died 1704, leaving a daughter Ann Brett, who married a Henry Brett, but I know not who he was. All that is known is that Mrs. Elizabeth Klee, by deed, April 24, 1697, conveyed all her estates to trustees for the uses of "her nephew and niece, Henry Brett, Esq., of White Staunton, and Ann, his wife, and unto Alexander Brett, their son and heir apparent." And in another deed, May 24, 1718, Henry Brett, Esq., is described as the executor of the will of Mrs. Elizabeth Klee, but no such will can be found in any Probate Court.

Henry Brett sold the Manor of White Staunton, with other lands, to Sir Abraham Elton, for £11,642. He was buried at White Staunton, Jan. 6, 172 $\frac{8}{9}$ , and his widow, Ann Brett, March 20, 1749. They had eleven children, the baptisms of all of them but one are recorded in the registers. Their eldest daughter, Elizabeth Brett, married Feb. 14, 17 $\frac{16}{17}$ , John Long, mercer, of Taunton, and all the others were buried at White Staunton, except Alexander, born 1695, Ann, born 1697, and Margaret, born 1708, of whose subsequent history I know nothing.

I would merely add that the Sir Alexander Brett, Kt., who took part in Sir Thomas Wyatt's rebellion, and who was executed as a traitor in 1554, was not, I think, in any way connected with the Somerset Bretts, as he was specially condemned to suffer at Rochester or Maidstone. There were many families of the name of Brett in Kent.

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