

THE STORKES, BINGHAMS AND GERARDS OF TRENT: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ORIGIN OF A GLASS ARMORIAL PANEL OF THE LATE 15TH OR EARLY 16TH CENTURY

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The Gerards were one of the best known Dorset and Somerset families, but they owed their connection with Trent and much of their rise in importance to the Storkes, and to one particular marriage, that of Tristram Storke. A glass armorial panel of the 15th or 16th century records this union (Fig. 1). The dexter of the shield shows indisputably a fine stork. The practice of canting in heraldry, using a pun on the person's family name, was commonplace at this period and led without difficulty to identification with the Storkes (fortunately not a common name) of Trent.



Fig. 1 The glass panel of the Storke/Bingham coat of arms (in private possession)

But whose arms did the Storke arms impale? The next step was to find a Storke marriage of an appropriate date. This identification was not quite so simple, but owing to immense family pride and the desire to commemorate antecedents, there were essential clues leading to an identification with the arms of Tristram Storke, who died in 1532, and his wife Alice Bingham.¹

Tristram Storke was the second son of Agnes Inge by her first marriage to a Storke whose Christian name is not recorded. Agnes's elder son, John Storke, held the manors of Trent (Somerset) and Bourton Inge (Oxfordshire), which on his death in 1485 passed to his brother, Tristram.² On the death of Agnes's second husband, Roger Norman, in 1511, Tristram also received the manor of Corton Denham, which was presumably his mother's property, like Bourton Inge, and probably formed part of her marriage portion. Together with lands in Charlton Horethorne and Chilthorne Domer (Somerset) and tenements in Blandford Forum (Dorset), Tristram had inherited a substantial landholding and soon he sought a wife.³

Tristram Storke married Alice, daughter of Robert Bingham, of Bingham's Melcombe in Dorset. The date and place of the marriage are unknown. Tristram died in 1532 when he was 67 or 68 (he was aged 20 years and 6 months when his brother died in 1485 so he would have been born in 1464 or 1465). Alice survived at least until 1547–8; she was probably therefore a good deal younger than her husband at the time of her marriage.⁴ Both Alice's father, Robert Bingham (d. 1524) and his wife, Joan, were buried

at Melcombe, and it was possibly there that Tristram Storke married Alice Bingham.⁵

The marriage produced no sons and so the lands passed to the four heiress daughters and their husbands. Joan, the eldest (d. by 1559), who married Richard Compton, received Corton Denham; Anne, who married William Larder, inherited most of Charlton Horethorne; Isabel, who married Alexander Seymour, from the Seymour family of East Knoyle in Wiltshire, received the remainder of the lands in Charlton Horethorne. To the youngest daughter, Mary, who had married William Gerard, descended the manor of Trent. William Gerard, who witnessed his father-in-law's will in 1531, was left Storke's best cloak, tunic and doublet. Alice, Storke's widow, was left in possession of all the utensils in the manor house which on her death were to pass to her daughter, Mary Gerard.⁶ The Gerards thus became lords of Trent.

It is fortunate that the Gerards had a considerable sense of the importance of family, inheritance, and genealogy. Several generations on from Mary Gerard (née Storke), they produced a notable antiquarian, Thomas Gerard. Thomas Gerard, who lived in the manor house at Trent ('the place that now gives me habitation'), was the author of two major topographical works on Somerset and Dorset: 'A Particular Description of the County of Somerset', completed in 1633,⁷ and a companion volume, the 'Survey of Dorsetshire'. Probably Thomas Gerard knew that Tristram Storke and Alice Bingham were his great-great grandparents – certainly he knew that William Gerard, their son-in-law, was his great-grandfather, from whom he had inherited – but the link between the Storkes and the Bingham is not mentioned in his book. It is only from a surviving monumental inscription between the windows on the north wall of the chancel in Trent church that we find the connection. The lettering is now considerably worn but it was recorded by Collinson in 1791 and reads: 'Here lye buried the bodies of Tristeram Storke, of Trent, esq; and Alice his wife, daughter unto Robert Bingham of Bingham's-Melcomb, esq; which Tristeram dyed the 18th of August 1532, and left four daughters his heyres: Joane, the wife of Richard Compton, esq; Ann, the wife of John Larder, esq; Isabel, the wife of Alexander Seymour, esq; and Mary, the wife of William Gerard, esq.'⁸ (Fig. 2). But although Thomas Gerard did not supply this information, his interest in the armorials and genealogy of local Somerset and Dorset families has made it possible to identify with certainty the Storke Bingham connection. In



Fig. 2 The monumental description of the place of burial of Tristram Storke and Alice Bingham on the north side of the chancel in Trent church

Gerard's 'Particular Survey' the arms of Storke are noted under Corton Denham, those of Bingham under Sutton Bingham. They are for Storke of Charlton Horethorne and Trent: azure a stork proper within a border ermine. The two branches of the Bingham family, unusually, had completely different arms. Those of the Bingham of Sutton Bingham were: ermine on a chief azure three lions rampant or; those of the Bingham of Bingham Melcombe: azure a bend gules cotised between six crosses pate or. Our glass panel impales the latter and so doubtless records the Storke Bingham marriage.⁹

Where was this armorial glass in Tristram Storke's day? There are two possibilities. The panel may have been associated with a monument to Tristram and Alice in Trent church. Tristram had wished to be buried in the chancel of St Andrew's church and it is there on the north side that the monumental inscription survives (Fig. 3). Before his death he may already have commissioned a memorial for himself and his wife and it is possible that the Storke-Bingham arms were incorporated in a nearby window. Was there even possibly a chantry with a window that incorporated their arms? Thomas Gerard records that there was a chantry at Trent founded by John Testwood, an ancestor of John Storke, but that it had gone by his time.¹⁰ Trent also boasts a singularly fine house, which was probably built for a chantry priest, to the north-east of the churchyard; it has been dated as 'late perpendicular'¹¹ (Fig. 4). Tristram Storke was remembered in an obit at Corton Denham, almost a generation after his death, and it is very likely that there would have been more elaborate arrangements



Fig. 3 The view through the magnificent screen (right) shows the Storke memorial tablet immediately to the left. The monuments of the Gerards and the Wyndhams and the painted arch can be seen centre at the entrance to the north chapel



Fig. 4 The chantry priest's house

for the commemoration of his soul at Trent itself.¹² By the 17th century, the Gerards, as lords of the manor, had virtually annexed the north chapel for themselves as a place of burial and memorial until the male line died out. When Thomas Gerard died the same fate befell the Gerard family as had affected the Storkes over a century before. There were no male heirs; three surviving daughters inherited as co-heiresses, one of whom Anne, the second daughter, married Colonel Francis Wyndham and the estate came into the hands of the Wyndhams who in turn left their mark on the church in memorials and coats of arms.¹³ The famous 'ornamental' north chapel arch which is illustrated in Collinson and also in Phelps has the coats of arms of all the families entwined in elaborate foliage. There is a triumphalism about this display and Phelps pointed out that the arch was newly embellished by a descendant of the Wyndhams in 1792. Already existing, when this display was commissioned, was the beautiful memorial to Thomas Gerard's wife, Anne (Coker), who died in 1633, erected in the respond of the arch on its east side, as though guarding the entrance to the family chapel. Two resplendent angels hold an extremely elaborate coat of arms illustrating a complex genealogy. Here are the arms of some 24 families who figure in the family tree of the Gerards, including the Storkes (see Fig. 3). In 1874 John Batten recorded a Storke escutcheon in the church, and the arms of Gerard impaling Storke in the Gerard chapel.¹⁴ The Storke association with Trent is perhaps also responsible for two handsome storks to be found on the fine bench ends of c. 1500.

The other possible original location for the Storke-Bingham glass armorial panel is the manor house, where the family lived, and where later the Gerards and then the Wyndhams made their home (Fig. 5). Batten also noted in 1874 that on the ceiling of the parlour in the manor house at Trent were three coats of arms, one of which bore a stork, and it may well be that the union of the Storkes with the Bingham was also marked in a stained glass panel made for the interior of Storke's house. The circumstances of the commissioning of the glass panel will probably remain unknown; the Storkes and Bingham, however, connected with most of the gentry families of Somerset and Dorset, had much to celebrate.

Endnotes

¹ The identification and dating of the panel owes much to David King of Norwich.



Fig. 5 The manor house

- ² VCH A *History of the County of Somerset*, ed. R.W. Dunning, vol. 7 (1999), 88; *Calendar of Inquisitions post mortem 1-12 Henry VII* (HMSO 1898) 1 no. 147 p. 59.
- ³ *Calendar of Inquisition post mortem 1-12 Henry VII* (HMSO 1898) 1, no. 142, pp. 56-7.
- ⁴ Her cousin, Isabel Fitz-James of Bruton, left her her best bonnet and a frontlet of tawny velvet in her will of 1527; *Somerset Medieval Wills 1501-30*, ed. F.W. Weaver, Somerset Record Society 19 (1903), 252. Joan Compton, her daughter, received her best worsted kirtle.
- ⁵ John Hutchins, *History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, 4 vols. (Westminster, 1861-70) 4 (1870), 374.
- ⁶ Somerset Record Office D/D/Ct Book 1 fol. 60, and *Medieval Wills from Wells*, ed. Dorothy O. Shilton and R. Holworthy, Somerset Record Society 40 (1925), 83-4.
- ⁷ *The Particular Description of the County of Somerset drawn up by Thomas Gerard of Trent 1633*, ed. E.H. Bates, Somerset Record Society 15 (1900), 177; and see the introduction on Gerard's life and work.
- ⁸ John Collinson, *The History and Antiquities of*

the County of Somerset, 3 vols. (Bath, 1791) 2 p. 385; and see W. Phelps, *The History and Antiquities of Somersetshire*, 2 vols. (London, 1836) 1, pp. 325–32, 350–1.

⁹ T. Gerard, ed. E. H. Bates, 79–80 (Bingham), 155–6, 176–8, and 201.

¹⁰ T. Gerard, 177. The arms of Testwood are described by Gerard (argent an eagle displayed sable) and he comments that these and many others are in his hall at Trent. The south window in the sanctuary of St John's church,

Glastonbury, incorporates the arms of Storke impaling Testwood.

¹¹ J. Newman and N. Pevsner, *Dorset* (The Buildings of England: London, 1972), 428.

¹² *The Survey and Rental of the Charities, Colleges and Free Chapels, Guilds ... and Obits*, ed. E Green, Somerset Record Society 2 (1888), 144, 325.

¹³ See Collinson, 384.

¹⁴ 'Trent', *SANH* 20 (2) (1874), 113–39, at 126 and 137–8.