

19 May 2009

**KNOLLYS – LEIGHTON: Notes regarding the 1577 portrait of Elizabeth Knollys on display @ Montacute, her marriage to Thomas Leighton and possible identification of a portrait of 'an unknown french noblewoman' as Elizabeth Leighton, nee Knollys**

Dates need clarification and confirmation where possible.

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Portrait on left of Elizabeth Knollys, after George Gower: 1577.  
Source: Montacute<sup>1</sup>

Portrait on the right described by Philip Mould as Portrait of an unknown french noblewoman: [www.historicalportraits.com](http://www.historicalportraits.com): Image Library

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The french influence noted by the firm of Philip Mould regarding the latter portrait may be a consequence of the fact that Elizabeth's husband, Sir Thomas Leighton, served as Governor of Jersey (1570-

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<sup>1</sup> As an interesting aside, Elizabeth Knolly's black hat was displayed at the National Maritime Museum in 2003 in an exhibition curated by David Starkey. Elizabeth also presented Elizabeth I with a 'fayre cap of black vellat' in 1578/9

1609): 'governor of the ifles of Guernfey and Jcrfey, and con-ftable of the tower of London'.

In terms of the wearing of mourning attire, Elizabeth's brother Edward and her brother-in-law, Gerald Fitzgerald, Baron Offaley, both died in 1580. In 1582/3 her eldest brother, Sir Henry Knollys, and her great-uncle of the same name also died.<sup>2</sup> In 1583 her nephew Robert Dudley died. Her mother-in-law, Joyce Leighton nee Sutton, died in 1586. In the context of a large extended Elizabethan family, deaths continued to occur on a frequent basis.

These two portraits are quite interesting in juxtaposition.

Unfortunately, I do not have access to their provenance, and I am working from thumbnail sketches. There is a discrepancy about the nose, but this does not totally negate the identification of the Philip Mould portrait as Elizabeth Leighton, nee Knollys. There are issues of artistic license, two different artists, slightly different angles and a possible time lapse between the two portraits.<sup>3</sup>

Above all else, the sitter has an extraordinary sense of style.

A provenance for the latter portrait which mentions the Talbot, Bolingbrook, Zouch or St. John families would be useful.

Elizabeth's portrait @ Montacute is dated 1577. George Gower painted her sister Lettice in 1585.<sup>4</sup>



Lettice @ Longleat

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<sup>2</sup> If this great-uncle existed. There may be some confusion here

<sup>3</sup> Need to research Gower's noses

<sup>4</sup> Portrait attributed to Gower in the collection of the Marquess of Bath @ Longleat House. 'The border of the gown is embroidered with roses for her father's house and ragged staffs for her husband's'

Who was the artist?

Peake can achieve a limpid luminosity, such as in this 1592 portrait of an unnamed woman below left, which has been attributed to him: qualities which I do not find in his portrait of Elizabeth's sister, Anne Knollys, circa 1582.<sup>5</sup> In fact, it is hard to believe they could be by the same artist.



### **Brief Background regarding the Knollys family:<sup>6</sup>**

Sir Francis Knollys<sup>7</sup> (1512 -19 July 1596) was contracted in marriage circa 1538/40 to Mary Catherine Carey (c.1520/4 -15 January 1568).

Catherine Carey was the daughter of Mary Carey nee Boleyn.

Having served both Henry VIII and Edward VI, Francis and his family lived overseas during the reign of Mary.

On the impending accession of Princess Elizabeth, Francis was appointed to the privy chamber in December, 1558 and his wife was appointed one of four bedchamber women to the Queen. Both Francis and his wife served at the highest levels of the Elizabethan court for the remainder of their lives. The Knollys children were blood

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<sup>5</sup> Peake's portrait of Anne Knollys, circa 1582, is appalling. I would suggest the face and hair may have been retouched/heavily restored. Anne KNOLLYS (B. De La Warr) (c. 1553 - last reported alive 30 August 1608). Married 19 November 1571 Thomas West, 2nd Baron De La Warr: Sir Thomas West (c.1530/1556-24 March 1602) of Offington, Sussex, MP and later the 11th Lord De La Warre. For Leicester, there was an established connection with the Wests through the Duchess of Northumberland's mother. West served in the Netherlands in 1586 and attended Leicester's funeral. Anne was mother to Thomas West, 3rd Baron De La Warr. Anne died 1628?

<sup>6</sup> These are brief notes for the purpose of identifying this portrait and I have further notes regarding the Knollys family which I am happy to share

<sup>7</sup> Pronounced 'Knowles'

relatives of Elizabeth through their mother, Catherine Carey, who was Elizabeth's first cousin.<sup>8</sup>

Lady Knollys nee Carey died at Hampton Court Palace on 15th January 1568 while in attendance on the Queen. She was buried at Royal expense in April in St. Edmund's Chapel in Westminster Abbey.

Towards the end of Elizabeth's reign several of the Knollys children and their descendants pursued an aggressive policy of self-interest, including their surreptitious endorsement and encouragement of James of Scotland. I note also the rebellion lead by Essex, Francis Knollys' grandson and Elizabeth Knolly's nephew. And I note how William, Francis' eldest surviving son and heir, segued through the whole imbroglio and, as treasurer of the household to James I, was raised to the peerage as Baron Knollys and Viscount Wallingford in 1603. Charles I made him Earl of Banbury.

William may have designed and commissioned the Knollys mausoleum @ Rotherfield Greys.<sup>9</sup>

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### **Basic information regarding Elizabeth Knollys, which is precarious at best:**

#### **New Year's Gifts to the Queen:**

Elizabeth Knollys is mentioned in the documentation regarding New Year's Gifts to the Queen (Anno Regni Elizabethae vicesimo, 1577-8: @ Hampton Court, where Mrs Elizabeth Knowlls/Knolls is mentioned as receiving, on behalf of the Queen, a gift of '2 peir of swete gloves, with fower dosen buttons of golde, in every one a sede perle' from the Lady Mary Gray, and 'one peir of perfumed gloves, with twenty-four small buttons of golde, in every of them a small diamond', from the Lady Mary Sidney. In the 1578-9 list, she takes delivery of 'a muffler of purple vellat, enbrawdred with Venice and damaske golde and perle' from the Countess of Kent. In her own right, (as Mrs Elizabeth Knowles) she gives 'a fayre cap of black vellat'. In the 1588-9 list, the Lady Leyton gives a 'waistcote of white sarsnett, ymbrodered around about with a border of eglantne flowers, and ymbrodered all over with a twist of Venis gold', while her husband Sir Thomas Layton, Captienne of Garnsey, gives a 'petticote of white sarsnett, imbrodered round about

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<sup>8</sup> Several of their children married advantageously and the Knollys are progenitors of both Princess Diana and Prince Charles, etc.

<sup>9</sup> See images on Flickr, particularly those extraordinary and evocative photographs taken by Eric Hardy

with a broad border like eglantyne flowers, and all over ymbroidered with a twist of Venis gold, and powderings of carnation silke.' In 1599-1600, Lady Leighton gives 'one kyrtell of white knyttworke, tufted all over with pincke-colored silk', and Sir Thomas Leighton, 'one cloke of blacke networke, flourished with Venice golde, bounde with a lace of Venice silver.'

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