

MEN OF KENT. I. BOYS OF BONNINGTON

By COLIN MATSON

THE Family of Boys is one of the most ancient and distinguished in England. At the British Museum we can inspect a pedigree which traces the descent of this family from John de Bois, who died in 1096 and can be assumed to have been a follower of William the Conqueror. The names of many men of distinction are to be found upon this pedigree. In this article we are concerned with those branches which settled in Kent and more especially in the south-eastern sector of the county. In the pedigree referred to above the descent is traditional for the first ten generations. But from 1385 the descent is authentic for the several branches concerned. These were based upon the Bonnington Estate, which was recorded in Philipot's *Villare Cantianum*, published in 1659, 'to have been then, and for seventeen previous generations, the seat from whence the numerous and knightly family of Boys issued forth and spread into Fredville, Betteshanger, and other parts of Kent'. In the early years of the seventeenth century there were in the county no less than eight branches of this family, each with its own capital mansion.

This Bonnington—which must not be confused with another of that name situated at a distance of six miles to the west of Hythe—is to be found in the parish of Goodnestone-by-Wingham. Thomas Boys was of Bonnington during the reign of Edward II; and William Boys was seised of his estates at Bonnington and Fredville in the parish of Nonington, when he died in 1507. To his eldest son John he devised Fredville, the larger property; and to his second son Thomas he gave Bonnington, the more attractive estate. In 1666 Bonnington was sold to Thomas Browne: in 1710 it was conveyed to Brook Bridges; and the property is now a part of the Goodnestone Park estate under the ownership of Lord Fitzwalter, the present representative of the Plumptre family. Only a part of the former Boys residence remains; and this is now used as a farm store. The shell of a half-timbered Elizabethan house is still in existence: but the prospect of demolition does not appear to be far removed.

Goodnestone—which, in its turn, must not be confused with another of the same name near Faversham—is an attractive estate village, situated two miles to the south of Wingham, and based upon Goodnestone House and the Church of the Holy Cross. The Georgian mansion is

now occupied by Lord Fitzwalter, who farms the adjoining estate. The thirteenth century church is rich in monuments, including one for Sir John Boys, the Loyalist Cavalier, of whom presently we shall take some note.

In this article it is not proposed to undertake an extensive survey of the Boys Family and its various branches in Kent. It is, rather, the intention of the author to concentrate attention upon certain outstanding members, as a means of introducing them and their homes. The first member to come under our special consideration is Sir John Boys (1535-1612). He was the fifth son of William Boys (d. 1549) of Fredville, and Mary Ringely of Knowlton in the adjoining parish of Chillenden. John Boys became an eminent lawyer: was Recorder of Canterbury: Judge of the Chancery Court for the Cinque Ports: Seneschal to five Archbishops of Canterbury: and was the Founder of Jesus Hospital in that city. He married, but had no issue. His home in Canterbury is said to have been on the site of The Old Dutch House in Palace Street; and his country estate was at Betteshanger, where he was Lord of the Manor. In the north aisle of Canterbury Cathedral we can see the tomb of Sir John, on which his recumbent figure is represented, clothed in seventeenth century legal robes. A portrait of him can be seen in the Mayor's Parlour at the Tower House, Canterbury. In dress and appearance Sir John Boys appears to have been very like Sir Francis Bacon, as that statesman is depicted in an engraving kept in the Print Room of the British Museum. These men were contemporaries and, no doubt, they were well acquainted.

Jesus Hospital is an almshouse, situated in Northgate, Canterbury. It was founded by Sir John in 1599; and he himself drew up the Ordinances under which the Hospital was to be administered. 'Such as be of Kynne to the Founder', and comply with certain other regulations, have a first claim for consideration; after whom all citizens of seven years' residence may apply for admission. This almshouse is controlled directly by a resident Warden; and its administration is under the supervision of a Committee, with the Dean of Canterbury as its Chairman. The condition of the quarters and the comfort of the inmates are a credit to all concerned.

At this stage we will give some consideration to the Boys mansion at Betteshanger. The woodland parish is to be found at a distance of one and a half miles to the south of Eastry; and the mansion and church are in the centre of it. The present house is a large and handsome building in Jacobean style, built of brick and Kentish Rag in 1829 by a member of the Morrice family, and enlarged later by Lord Northbourne. It is now used as a preparatory school for boys, having been founded by Lord Northbourne in 1933. The conditions for such a school are excellent.

The setting of the thirteenth-century church in the gardens of the mansion is delightful; and the building is a gem of its kind. Most of it is comparatively modern; and a deep debt of gratitude is due to the Lord Northbourne, who re-built the old church with such care and good taste in 1871. Original Norman features were retained, and family monuments were maintained, as part of his skilful and sympathetic restoration. The Boys monuments are of especial interest and include those to certain members of the family who are mentioned in this article. Immediately beneath the pulpit are six stone slabs, to represent the original gravestones which were in the centre aisle. The surrounding gardens convey an atmosphere of serenity and peace; and the interior of the church contains interesting mementoes of domestic history. An hour spent in and around this church is a source of keen enjoyment and deep satisfaction.

Doctor John Boys (1571-1625) was the son of Thomas Boys of Eythorne by Christian, daughter of John Serles of Wye. He was educated at King's School, Canterbury, and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, prior to obtaining an M.A. degree and later being elected Fellow of Clare Hall. In 1605 he became a Doctor of Divinity. In 1597 John Boys was presented to the living of Betteshanger; and he continued to hold it for the remainder of his life. At that time the patron was his uncle, the Sir John Boys last mentioned. Archbishop Whitgift presented Boys to the mastership of Eastbridge Hospital and also to the living of Tilmanstone.

In 1619 King James I appointed Dr. John Boys to be Dean of Canterbury, where he remained until his death six years later. Hanging in the study of the Deanery is a half-length portrait of the Dean, dressed in his clerical robes. He was then in the prime of life and looked, as he was, a man of distinction. In the top left-hand corner we can spot the arms of the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury, together with those of the Boys Family. He was a great preacher and a producer of a large collection of publications, including many of his sermons in book form under the title *The Workes of John Boys, Doctor in Divinitie and Deane of Canterbury, Anno 1622*. In the Deans' Chapel we can see his tomb and a monument in which he is shown at work in his study, as he is said to have died. In 1599 John Boys married Angela Bargrave of Bridge near Canterbury; and these two had no issue.

Sir John Boys (1607-64) was the eldest son of Edward Boys of Bonnington, and Jane his wife, who was the daughter of Edward Sanders of Northbourne. He was baptized at Chillenden on 5th April, 1607.

In the early days of the Civil War John Boys was appointed Captain in the Royal Army. In 1643 he became Governor of Donnington Castle, which is situated at about one mile to the north of Newbury in Berkshire and occupied a strategic position in command of the roads from



SIR JOHN BOYS OF DONNINGTON CASTLE
BORN 1607

Oxford to Newbury and from London to Bristol and Bath. Boys spent £1,000 of his own money upon the outer earthen defences, which can be traced at the present day. From the spring of 1644 onwards the Castle was frequently besieged, although it was twice relieved by the King, and the Governor was able to make successful sorties. In March, 1646, upon the King's instructions to make the best terms possible, Boys surrendered upon conditions to the Parliamentary Commander.

On the occasion of the first visit by the King, Boys was knighted and appointed Colonel of his Regiment. As a further reward from his King, who had little left of material value to give away, Boys was granted an augmentation to his family arms by way of 'a crown imperial or, to be displayed upon a canton azure in the dexter corner'.

During the interregnum Sir John Boys was in disfavour: he was fined for his 'delinquency'; and he was imprisoned at Dover Castle for a short time in 1659. After the Restoration in 1660 he held office as Receiver of Custom at Dover, and continued to do so until the year of his death. He died in his home at Bonnington on the 8th October, 1664; and was buried in the parish church of Goodnestone near by. There we can see his tomb, with the Boys arms engraven upon the stone and the augmentation which has been mentioned. The inscription on the gravestone recites the praises of the loyal and gallant Cavalier. Sir John Boys was twice married and had issue five daughters by Lucy his first wife. Two years after his death the Bonnington estate was sold outside the family. His portrait was painted by Van Dyck. It shows the head and shoulders of a handsome Cavalier in the plated armour of his ceremonial uniform. His long wavy hair and lace collar surround a bold and virile face of the type which was portrayed so well by Frans Hals in his 'Laughing Cavalier'.

Robert Boys (1624-1705) was the younger son of Herbert and Mary Boys of Upper Hardres, an agricultural parish which is to be found at a distance of four miles to the south of Canterbury. He was a direct descendant of John Boys (b. 1385) of Bonnington: but, tracing his descent through a younger son, he had no immediate contact with the ancestral estate. We hear of him first as a Yeoman at Kingston in the Elham Valley. In 1954 my wife and I visited this parish; and there we found the local roadman, a grand old character, Luckhurst by name. For thirty-five years he had been Sexton and Churchwarden; and, at the time of our meeting, he was also acting as Co-sequestrator with his opposite number in the neighbouring parish of Bishopsbourne. With loving care he produced from the vestry safe a beautiful old silver chalice and patten, on which was this inscription: '1677. This Cup was changed by Robart Boys, Churchwarden of Kingston.'

In about 1680 Robert Boys moved to Betteshanger, where he became a tenant of the Home Farm under his cousin John Boys, who

was Lord of the Manor and lived at the mansion. Here Robert remained for the rest of his life; and here his descendants farmed for the next three generations. With these conditions in mind we can appreciate the term 'Betteshanger-Tenants', which is applied on the Boys pedigree to this branch of the family. In 1655 Robert Boys was married to Mary, daughter of Thomas and Joane Friend of Northbourne, an adjoining parish. These two had issue five sons and four daughters. William the third son succeeded his father at the Betteshanger Home Farm. Anne the youngest daughter was married in 1701 to her cousin Thomas Boys, then Rector of Betteshanger. He died without issue within eighteen months of the marriage. Six months later his widow was married at Canterbury to John Matson (1671-1731) of Sibertswold. These two have their particular place on the Matson pedigree, as direct line ancestors of the author of this article. Hence his special interest in the Boys family.

Robert Boys died on the 12th March, 1705, at the age of 81 years; and was buried in the centre aisle of the parish church. At the base of the pulpit we can see the stone slabs which commemorate the original graves of himself and his wife, Mary.

The next member of this family for our consideration is Doctor William Boys (1735-1805), of Sandwich, surgeon, topographer and historian. He was born at Deal as the son of Commodore William Boys, Royal Navy, and sometime Governor of Greenwich Hospital, by his wife Elizabeth Pearson of Deal. He studied for the medical profession: became a surgeon; and was appointed to attend to the sick and wounded at Deal. After a time Boys moved to Sandwich, and practised there as a surgeon. He became a councillor and jurat; and was Mayor of the town in 1767 and again in 1782.

Doctor William Boys was responsible for a number of antiquarian publications, and was elected F.S.A. in 1776. He has been widely known for his famous *History of Sandwich*, the second part of which was published in 1792. It is an outstanding book, having been produced and edited with great knowledge and ability, and illustrated beautifully by the author himself. In addition to the history of Sandwich, this book is notable for the chapter on natural history and the expert and extensive studies of Richborough Castle. The list of subscribers to the book makes most interesting reading. This *History of Sandwich* is invaluable to any student of the Cinque Port and town; and the author of this article wishes to register his particular gratitude for benefit received.

William Boys was married twice—firstly to Elizabeth Wise of Sandwich, by whom he had two children; and secondly, to Jane Fuller, who bore to him eight children. As men of character, scholarship and enterprise, his sons achieved distinction in the spheres of the Navy, Army, Church, and Medicine. His daughter Elizabeth married John Rolfe, an attorney of New Romney. Both of them died at an early age;

and their orphan babe was adopted by John and Mary Matson of Sandwich. William Henry Rolfe (1779-1859) lived to become a prominent citizen of Sandwich and a noted antiquarian. Doubtless, he came under the influence of his distinguished grandfather. Rolfe was the subject of an article in Volume LXXVI of this Journal. Doctor Boys died in 1805, and was buried in the church of St. Clement in Sandwich. His home was at The White Friars, a delightful example of Flemish gable building situated in New Street.

John Boys (1749-1824) was the only son of William Boys of Betteshanger, and Ann, daughter of John Cooper of Ripple. He was thus the great-grandson of Robert Boys, the subject of our earlier consideration. John Boys succeeded to the tenancy of the Betteshanger Home Farm and became an able and successful farmer, and a famous breeder of South Down sheep. He was the author of various valuable communications to the Board of Agriculture, including 'A General View of the Agriculture of Kent', which was published in 1796.

In 1806 the Boys association with Betteshanger ceased; and John Boys retired to live at Each Farm in the parish of Wingham. Before long the homestead at Betteshanger Farm was demolished; and now there is no trace of it.

On the 18th January, 1774, at Eastry, a marriage was solemnized between John Boys and Mary, eldest daughter of the Rev. Richard Harvey, Vicar of Eastry and Worth. These two had issue twelve children—seven sons and five daughters—eleven of whom were married. At the time of death in her 95th year Mary Boys had living no less than 160 of her direct descendants. Of her sons we can make brief mention of Henry the farmer and breeder of South Down sheep at Malmain Farm in the parish of Eythorne—John the solicitor, genealogist and magistrate of Margate—and Richard the chaplain, who played chess with Napoleon at St. Helena.

Over the south door of the church at Betteshanger we can see a marble tablet, which was erected to the memory of John Boys and Mary his wife. The inscription relates his lineage and emphasizes his services to Agriculture. On the west wall of the parish church at Wingham is another marble tablet with its inscription to the memory of these two notable members of the Boys family.

In addition to those members who have been considered in this article, many other men of distinction have sprung from this family during the nine hundred years of its recorded history. We cannot expand upon them here; and enough has been written for our present purpose. But the author cannot refrain from a brief mention of two gallant twentieth century heroes, who were members of the Betteshanger-Tenants branch of the Boys family. Brigadier-General Roland Boys Bradford (1892-1917) was an outstanding case of a temporary soldier

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in the Great War, who was awarded the Victoria Cross and the Military Cross, and became the youngest Brigadier-General in the British Army. He was killed in action on the Somme in 1917. Commander George Nicholson Bradford was an elder brother of Roland above. On St. George's Day 1918 he was killed at Zeebrugge, and was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for his gallantry in action on The Mole. The distinction of two brothers, each gaining the Victoria Cross, is outstanding. Since the institution of this award in 1856, four cases only have been on record.

The Arms of the Boys family of Kent are: Or, a griffin sable rampant, within a bordure gules. The family crest is: A demi-lion argent, ducally crowned or.

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