

CRADOCK, AMHERST AND HOWELL: A LINK
BETWEEN THE SELBYS OF IGHTHAM AND SIR
THOMAS BROWNE OF NORWICH

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The gravestone of Jane Dirkin in the central aisle of St. Peter's Church, Ightham, bears her image in brass and on a separate brass tablet an inscription describing her as 'some tyme the wife of John Cradock, gent., by whome she had issue Dorothy, the wife of Richard Amherst, Esq., Nevill Cradock, gent. and Elizabeth, wife of John Howell, gent.' She was buried there on 29th June, 1626, as 'the wife of John Deckyn', about whom nothing more is known.¹ Her previous husband, John Cradock, is otherwise recorded only in a lost register of Luddesdowne, where he was buried on 5th February, 1609.² His wife Rachel had been buried on 26th September, 1601, and he must have married Jane very soon after that: their daughter Dorothy was born by 18th July, 1602, according to her memorial.³ John Cradock's children baptized at Luddesdowne are reported as Katherine (4th September, 1603), Nevill (29th September, 1605) and Elizabeth (12th December, 1607).

Jane's children by John Cradock presumably grew up at Ightham, with which they remained closely connected. Dorothy was married there on 26th March, 1627, to Richard Amherst (1600–64), the son of another Richard (*d.* 1632), who had bought the Manor of Bayhall, Pembury, and was a Serjeant-at-Law. Seven Amherst children were born (six baptized) and three were buried with their grandmother Jane Dirkin at Ightham in the first twelve years of the marriage. The

¹ Register: Kent Archives Office (hereafter KAO), P202/1/1.

² L.L. Duncan, 'Extracts from some lost Kentish Registers', *Arch. Cant.*, xxxi (1915), 178–88. The year is given here in New Style.

³ Pembury, St. Peter's: she died on 18th July, 1654, in her 53rd year.

four more who completed the family included Elizabeth, second wife of Sir Henry Selby (1635–1715).

Elizabeth Cradock married John Howell (1606?–82) in 1633, according to their memorial in the south chancel (Mote chapel) at Ightham; he became a barrister of Lincoln's Inn and Recorder of London and was knighted in 1668. Their first two children, Dorothy (21st September, 1634) and William (19th April, 1636), were baptized there. Their daughter Jane was the childless first wife of Sir Henry Selby and her sister Elizabeth became the second wife of his brother William Selby (*b.* 1633) of The Mote, Ightham.⁴

The association with the Selby family at The Mote had started much earlier. Sir William Selby (1550?–1638), who had inherited the house in 1612 from his uncle of the same name, when making his will in April 1637, ratified a recent settlement of his lands in Kent for which Richard Amherst and John Howell were the trustees.⁵ He left £150 each and a diamond ring to their wives Dorothy and Elizabeth, besides £50 each to their children (William, Richard and Dorothy Amherst, William and Dorothy Howell). Nevill Cradock was to have £150, too, like his sisters.

The will of Sir William's widow, the Dame Dorothy Selby whose bust looks past the recumbent effigies of her husband and his uncle in the chancel of Ightham church, emphasizes the closeness of the association.⁶ Dated 22nd June, 1641, it bequeathed £10 each to Nevill Cradock and his wife Mary and £50 to their daughter Dorothy, Dame Dorothy's god-daughter, to be employed towards her preferment in marriage. Richard and Dorothy Amherst and their eldest son William (her godson) were to be executors and have the residue (out of which they erected her memorial); John Howell and Nevill Cradock were supervisors.

It seems likely that Jane Dirkin brought up her Cradock children at The Mote, or at least under the protection of the elderly, childless Selbys there. It is noteworthy that William and Dorothy were the names chosen for the first sons and daughters of all three couples, Nevill and Mary Cradock, Richard and Dorothy Amherst, John and Elizabeth Howell: at least two were certainly god-children of Lady Dorothy Selby. Perhaps the brasses for Jane Dirkin, recording the burial of a grandchild with her as late as 1636, were paid for out of Sir William Selby's bequests to her children.

⁴ T.C. Colyer-Ferguson, 'A Pedigree of Selby of Ightham Mote', *Arch. Cant.*, xxvii (1905), 30–6.

⁵ Proved PCC 22nd February 1638: Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), PROB 11/176, f. 15.

⁶ Proved PCC 18th March, 1642: PRO, PROB 11/188, f. 36.

Nevill Cradock was 'of Kent' in Blomefield's mention of the marriage of his daughter Anne to Thomas Townshend of Horstead, Norfolk.⁷ However, he made his home and career in London, where he and Richard Amherst probably met John Howell. He was of Clifford's Inn at the time of his marriage (30th September, 1630) at St Michael Paternoster Royal to Mary Browne, third daughter of Thomas Browne, mercer, of St. Michael-le-Querne, Cheapside, who had died in 1613 and whose widow Anne had soon married Sir Thomas Dutton.⁸ Mary was a sister of Sir Thomas Browne (1605–82), who settled in Norwich as a physician about 1637. It will be argued that she and her daughters joined him there after Nevill Cradock's death in 1651.

The Cradocks lived in Fetter Lane, in a house that Nevill bought from his brother-in-law John Howell. Their children baptized at St. Dunstan-in-the-West were Anne (18th December, 1635), William (13th January, 1638), Elizabeth (3rd July, 1642), Nevill (30th September, 1645), and John (4th November, 1647).⁹ Nevill Cradock was buried there on 10th June, 1651, a month after making a will in which the poor of Pembury were remembered as well as those of St. Dunstan: he had bought a house and land in Pembury (from Thomas Fissenden) that he left, like the house in Fetter Lane, to his wife.¹⁰ His three sons and three daughters were each to have £200 at 21 or earlier marriage; the eldest son William was to have his chamber at Clifford's Inn; Dorothy, the eldest daughter, should have the £50 given by her godmother Lady Selby and £24 interest on it. The will was written by John Howell, who witnessed it with his wife (Nevill's sister) and his own sister Elizabeth.¹¹

William Cradock had died by 1663, when his brother Nevill was admitted to Lincoln's Inn as heir of their late father;¹² Nevill was called to the bar early, in 1669, at the special request of his uncle Sir John Howell, but then disappears.¹³ (John Howell had been admitted in 1633 as second son of Richard Howell of Longford, Salop, gent., and was not called until four years after Sir William Selby made him trustee of his lands in Kent.) Nevill's surviving son, John Cradock, became a mercer in Paternoster Row, who occurs frequently (more

⁷ F. Blomefield, *History of Norfolk* (1805–10), x, 443.

⁸ N.J. Endicott, 'Sir Thomas Browne as "Orphan", with some Account of his Step-father, Sir Thomas Dutton', *Univ. Toronto Qly*, xxx (1961), 180–210.

⁹ Registers: Guildhall Library, MSs 10,344–5.

¹⁰ Proved PCC 22nd June 1653: PRO, PROB 11/229, f. 223.

¹¹ Original will: PRO, PROB 10/762.

¹² *Lincoln's Inn, Admissions 1420–1799* (1896), 289.

¹³ *Lincoln's Inn, Black Books* (1897–9), iii, 65.

often than any other 'cosen') in Sir Thomas Browne's letters.¹⁴ He was buried on 28th April, 1685, at St. Faith's under St. Paul's, where his three children (Nevill, Frances and Anne) by his wife Elizabeth had been baptized in the years 1675–79.¹⁵

All three daughters of Nevill Cradock moved to Norwich after his death and they all died there. Dorothy, the eldest, was probably a little over 21 when she married (6th December, 1653) at St. James', Clerkenwell, a man who, though only about seven years older than herself, was her mother's brother's brother-in-law.¹⁶ This was Edmund Witherley (1625–66), whose first wife was Hobart Mileham, next older sister of Dorothy (1622–85), the wife of Sir Thomas Browne.¹⁷ Like the Milehams, he was from Burlingham,¹⁸ but he made his home in Norwich, where his first four sons by Dorothy (Edmund, Nevill, Thomas and John) died young.¹⁹ His own death left Dorothy, pregnant again, with two young sons (Thomas and Nevill) and three young daughters (Dorothy, Frances and Bridget),²⁰ two of whom (and a posthumous daughter) survived to figure in the will of their aunt Elizabeth Cradock in 1711.

Anne Cradock married Thomas Townshend after the death of his first wife, Bridget Le Gros, in 1663.²¹ They lived in the precincts of Norwich Cathedral, but she asked to be buried in St. Peter Mancroft next to her uncle Sir Thomas Browne. So she was (9th February, 1697). Her husband followed her into the same vault (27th January, 1709),²² leaving instructions in his will²³ for a stone with their names and arms that was the subject of correspondence two centuries later.²⁴ Thomas Townshend left ten guineas to his sister-in-law Elizabeth Cradock and £20 to Mary Howell, his wife's cousin and 'Constant Friend', who was also to have portraits of his wife and herself. She was the daughter of Sir John who became the last of the Howell family buried at Ightham, as 'Madam Howell' (6th January, 1711).²⁵

¹⁴ (Ed.) G. Keynes, *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne* (1964), iv.

¹⁵ Register: Guildhall Lib., MS 8,882.

¹⁶ *Register*, Harl. Soc. XIII (1887), 90.

¹⁷ J. Mileham, 'Dame Dorothy Browne and the Family of Mileham of Burlingham', *Norfolk Ancestor*, ii (1982), 104–9.

¹⁸ Register: Norfolk Record Office (hereafter NRO), PD182/1.

¹⁹ Blomefield, *op. cit.*, in note 7, iv, 21, 365

²⁰ Will dated 5th January, proved PCC 18th June, 1666: PRO, PROB 11/321, f. 106.

²¹ Blomefield, *loc. cit.*, in note 7.

²² Register: NRO, PD26/16.

²³ Dated 13th July, 1705, with codicils 27th June, 1707, and 7th August, 1708, proved 21st March, 1709, Dean and Chapter, Norwich: NRO, Wills 1703–08, f. 234.

²⁴ *Notes and Queries*, 10 s., xi (1909), 410, 473–4; xii (1909), 36–7.

²⁵ Register: KAO, P202/1/2.

Elizabeth Cradock, Neville's youngest daughter, was one of the beauties who caught the eye of her cousin Edward Browne (1643?-1708), eldest son of Sir Thomas, at dances in Norwich in January 1664.²⁶ She did not marry, though. Living in the parish of St. Michael at Plea, she asked in her will²⁷ to be buried near Lady Browne in St. Peter Mancroft, as she was (2nd April, 1711). Her major legacies of £100 each to her 'kinsman' (nephew) Nevill Witherley, late of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, his wife and daughter Bridget were accompanied by bequests to his sisters Frances Witherley and Anne Beastland: these were children of Edmund Witherley by Dorothy Cradock. Her portrait was to go to a nephew of Thomas Townshend's. There was also £5 for Robert Bendish, master of Doughty's Hospital in Norwich, who it will be argued, was her step-brother.

The fact that all three daughters of Nevill Cradock lived in Norwich after his death suggests that his widow Mary moved there, close to her brother Dr. Thomas Browne. The hypothesis that she married again in Norwich would explain much, if her second husband was Robert Bendish, Alderman (Sheriff 1663, Mayor 1672), who lived opposite the church of St. Peter Hungate and died in 1693.²⁸ He, who obtained his freedom of Norwich in 1639,²⁹ had a son Robert (baptized on 22nd December, 1641) and a daughter Barbary (baptized 21st February, 1647) by a previous wife, also Mary.³⁰ The younger Robert Bendish, who married Sarah Johnson at Caister in 1666,³¹ indulged in a riotous escapade in London that came to the ears of Sir Thomas Browne in 1679,³² but in 1704 became the master of Doughty's Hospital to whom Elizabeth Cradock left £5 seven years later.³³ Lady Browne referred to her 'Cossen Barbary Bendish' in a letter of 1680.³⁴ Edward Browne was in the house of his uncle and aunt Bendish in January 1664; she gave him a ring on his departure for the Continent in March; five years later his letters home from another tour of Europe offered remembrances to his uncle Bendish 'who, perhaps, is Mayor by this time'.³⁵ These references, like Sir

²⁶ (Ed.) S. Wilkin, *Sir Thomas Browne's Works* (1835-6), i, 45-8.

²⁷ Will dated 11th March, proved 3rd April, 1711, Archdeaconry of Norwich: NRO, Wills 1711, f. 2.

²⁸ B. Cozens-Hardy and E. A. Kent, *The Mayors of Norwich 1403 to 1835* (1938), 94.

²⁹ P. Millican, *The Register of the Freemen of Norwich 1548-1713* (1934), 78.

³⁰ St. Andrew, Norwich, register: NRO, PD165/1.

³¹ Blomefield, *op. cit.*, in note 7, v, 431.

³² Keynes, *op. cit.*, in note 14, 103.

³³ Blomefield, *op. cit.*, in note 7, iv, 448.

³⁴ Keynes, *op. cit.*, in note 14, 159.

³⁵ Wilkin, *op. cit.*, in note 26, 45-6, 56, 189-95.

Thomas Browne's to his 'brother' and 'sister' Bendish in 1679 and 1682,³⁶ are best explained by the supposition that one of Sir Thomas's sisters was the wife of Alderman Robert Bendish – and there is no reason to think that she was any of his other sisters (Anne, Jane, Ellen)³⁷ rather than Mary, the widow of Nevill Cradock.

There is direct evidence pointing to the same conclusion in the will that Sir John Howell, Serjeant-at-Law, started on 29th September, 1680 and signed the following 14th February: he left a ring worth 20s. to his 'good Sister Bendish'.³⁸ In a codicil of 20th September, 1681, he added £5 of plate for his 'Sister Bendish of Norridge', who could only be his wife's sister-in-law. The will shows that few remained of the three sons and five daughters that his wife Elizabeth Cradock had borne in their 49 years of marriage, according to their memorial at Ightham. The surviving son, John, was incapacitated and left to the care of the unmarried daughter Mary; he was buried at Ightham on 14th March, 1694. Dorothy, wife of John Thorncroft, was the only other survivor. Jane and Elizabeth, wives respectively of Sir Henry and William Selby, had already been buried at Ightham. They were joined by their father on 17th October, 1682, and their mother on 19th March, 1683.

The gravestones of the Amherst family at Pembury record a similar mortality in a shorter time. Richard Amherst, who had been baptized there on 17th May, 1600 and had followed his father to Gray's Inn as early as 1612,³⁹ as well as to Oxford,⁴⁰ was buried on 3rd September, 1664, ten years after his wife Dorothy Cradock and their second son Richard.⁴¹ The last of her six sons, stillborn like the first, was buried with Dorothy; so was the eighteen-year-old Isabella. William, the eldest son, has a separate grave on the other side of the chancel: he died on 10th December, 1663, aged 31. The elder of two surviving sons, Charles, inherited Bayhall and left it to his nephew Charles Selby, son of his sister Elizabeth (*d.* 1708), second wife of Sir Henry. The memorials at Pembury were composed by Dorothy, the other surviving daughter (out of five), who was herself buried there in 1712 as the (second) wife of her second cousin Jeffery Amherst (*d.* 1713) of Riverhead. She had witnessed the wills of Sir John Howell and his wife, her aunt.⁴²

³⁶ Keynes, *op. cit.*, in note 14, 103, 139, 221.

³⁷ Endicott, *op. cit.*, in note 8.

³⁸ Admin. to Mary Howell, daughter, PCC 2nd July, 1683: PRO, PROB 11/373, f.

84.

³⁹ (Ed.) J. Foster, *Admissions to Grays' Inn* (1889), 67, 140.

⁴⁰ J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses, 1500–1714* (1891), i, 22.

⁴¹ Registers: KAO, P286/1/1–2.

⁴² Proved PCC 12th May, 1684: PRO, PROB 11/376, f. 59

The blind arms on the gravestones at Pembury are for Amherst impaling Cradock; on that in St. Peter Mancroft, Norwich, for Townshend impaling Cradock. At Ightham the Howell memorial has the tinctures for Cradock (impaled by Howell) as *Argent*, on a *chevron azure three garbs or*. These are the arms recorded for the Cradocks of Yorkshire (originally from Staffordshire), a family in which the name John was usual.⁴³ However, there is no evidence that John Cradock of Luddesdowne sprang from that line. The origin of the man whose offspring linked the Kentish families of Amherst and Selby with Howell and with Sir Thomas Browne of Norwich remains as obscure as that of their mother Jane Dirkin.

⁴³ (Ed.) J.W. Clay, *Dugdale's Visitation of Yorkshire* (1899–1917), iii, 338.