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THE OGLANDER LETTERS FROM KENT

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INTRODUCTION

On a spring day in 1635 Stephen Lennard brought home his bride to Wickham Court in north-west Kent. This was not his first marriage, and he had a son and heir, John, by his second wife Anne, and a daughter, Elizabeth, by his first wife Katherin. The two young children needed a mother to care for them so Stephen had looked around and found his present bride, Anne Oglander; but - as is shown very clearly in their letters - this was to be much more than a marriage of convenience.

Anne had come from Brading on the Isle of Wight, and the collection of Oglander Letters now in the Isle of Wight Record Office¹ graphically illustrates many aspects of life in the seventeenth century, not only on the Island but also in Kent.

The surviving Kentish letters, written by Anne and Stephen to her father Sir John, have been extracted and calendared below. They commence in 1640 and cover the period of the Civil War and Interregnum up to 1655 when Sir John died. The effects of the war as it touched the family naturally come up time and again, so does the other matter of great concern in seventeenth-century England, that of ailments, and their treatment. There are several agricultural references and a fascinating tale of a miracle. The collection has been more broadly treated in an account of the Oglander family² and other background information comes from the Lennard Papers in the Kent Archives Office³ and various documents in the Public Record Office.⁴

Anne Oglander was known as *très belle Anna*, said to be beautiful, apparently intelligent and warmhearted. At the time of her marriage she was twenty-one: Stephen was ten years older. His was only the third generation to hold the manor of West Wickham.⁵ His father Samuel had died comparatively young in 1618, Stephen had been made a ward of court, and money was tight. Although Anne could have had her pick of titled young men, she maintained that the one she wanted was Stephen. Her father let her have her way, but he did insist in 1642 that his son-in-law should apply for one of Charles I's new baronetcies. This not only further confounded the Lennard fortunes but created an opportunity for him to be accused later of supporting the King in the Civil War. Then, in 1643, he was assessed to pay into the City Funds £ 200, if not as an active Royalist, then at least because he did not actively support Parliament. 'The somes are so troublesome' he complained with justification. He was fortunate to be let off by paying 'his sworn proportion' of £ 114.

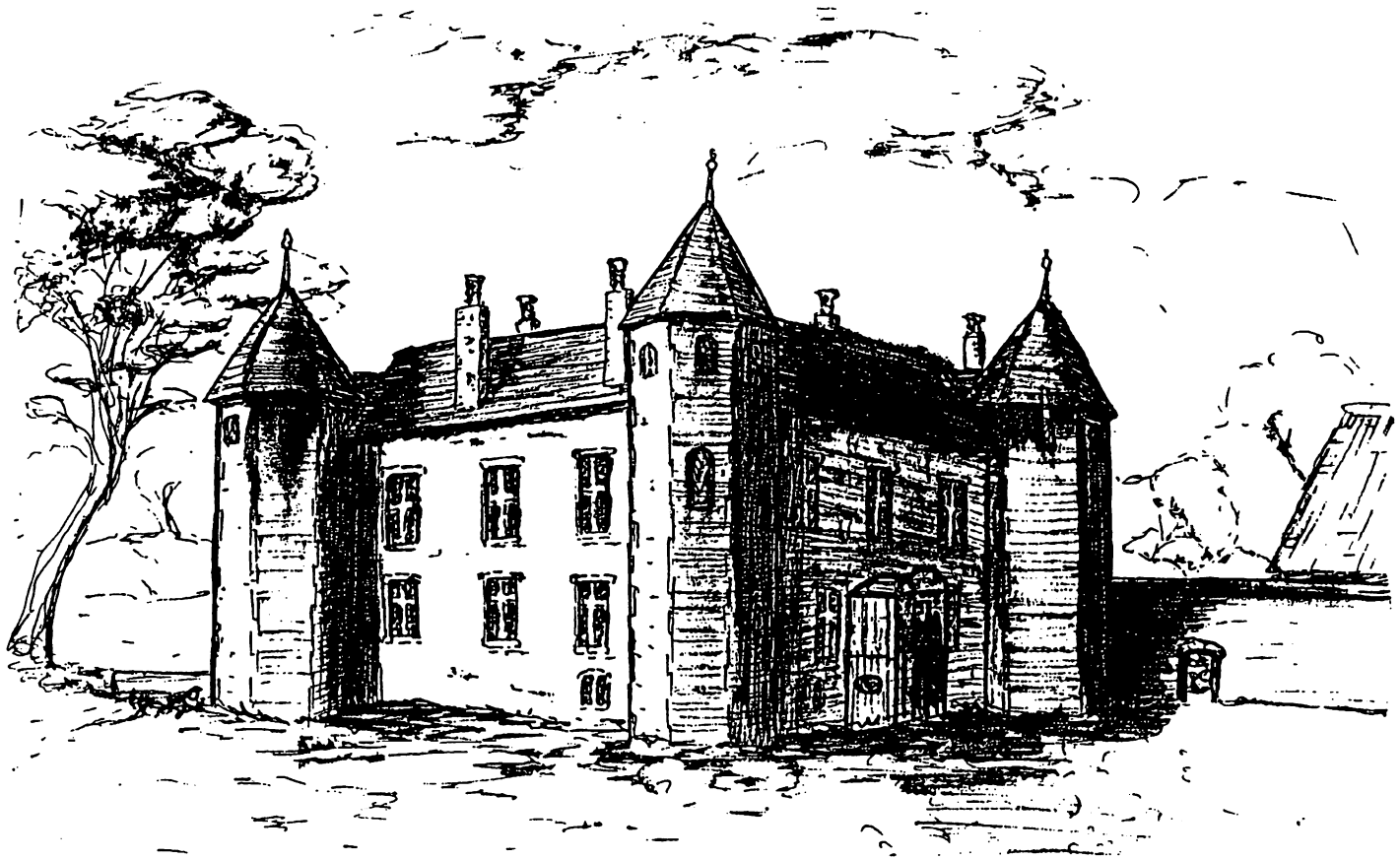


Fig. 4. Wickham Court as it would have appeared in Stephen Lennard's day.

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In the meantime Anne had borne Stephen six children, four boys and two girls. Three had died in infancy, but young Stephen was a sturdy six-year-old, while Francis was a toddler and Nan still a baby. Elizabeth was in her teens, but John had died when he was seven. There were to be another two babies, but of all these children only four would reach adulthood.

At almost the same time that he 'granted' Stephen Lennard his baronetcy, King Charles raised his standard at Nottingham. Parliament took control in the south-east and then began to impose its own taxes; the Assessed Taxes based on the old Lay Subsidies were frequently called in and a heavy burden. The assessments for the parish of West Wickham during 1645-6 amounted to anything from £ 6 up to £ 64 each time; and the Parish Collectors had also the task of commandeering certain necessities for the County Committee or Parliamentary troops, such as horses (for which there was some compensation) and fodder, and a stock of mattresses. Then there were added levies for specific purposes, such as £ 5 towards hiring a guard for the Committee, and on top of all that voluntary contributions were called for 'distressed Christyans' in Ireland and elsewhere. All in all, a heavy drain on the parish and on its lord.

On the largely Royalist Isle of Wight, Sir John Oglander was appointed a Collector. He refused, so was fined £ 1,000 and clapped into the Tower of London. When he had paid this he was allowed to visit West Wickham under open arrest and wrote to Anne's sister 'my son Lennard and my daughter are well - they suffer under the general calamity'. Shortly afterwards he was issued with a pass to proceed with two servants, by coach or horses, via West Wickham to the Isle of Wight. However, he was soon re-arrested and returned to the Tower. This time Anne's mother, Frances, joined him in London - unfortunately, for she died of the smallpox. He was allowed to take her back to Brading on the Island for burial and Anne accompanied him on this sad journey - then he went back to the Tower. In 1646, he was released and the majority of the letters come from the following few years.

Beside all the financial drains, we know of the Parliamentary soldiers who were billeted in the village 'guarding the frontshires' of Surrey against marauding Royalists to 'give the plough peaceable passage at home', as the County Committee minutes put it in September 1646. ⁶ They had a less peaceable effect on their hosts, as is shown by dents in the door of Wickham Court which, tradition says, were made by troopers demanding admittance. They brought other troubles with them, too, as will be seen.

In January 1651, Sir Stephen had further problems when information was laid against him that he had taken arms in the Kentish rising of 1647-48, and also followed the King in 1642 and '43; his estates were to be seized and an inventory made of his possessions. Nevertheless, he was pardoned and his name appears on the list of non-sequestered. After this Anne and Stephen do seem to have been left in peace to continue their lives happily together, Stephen - in spite of continuing ill-health - living on to the age of 75. As for the village, life went on much as usual, as the surviving manorial rolls attest. In the later stages of the Interregnum one or two Wickham men were marked as 'suspect dissidents' but most moved with the times, like the Parish Clerk who was appointed Registrar of burials and marriages under the Commonwealth, then re-appointed Parish Clerk after the Restoration. The parish priest passed muster as a 'painful minister', and the church was not despoiled of its fifteenth-century windows depicting saints - idolatrous as they may have been considered.

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The Oglander letters from Kent, written on paper, are legible and fairly easy to read, especially Anne's. They are written in a hand moving away from a secretary script towards something more italic. Anne uses the thorn (in practice the letter *y*) for *th*, but Stephen does not. Both use *y* in instances where current usage would be *i*, but otherwise much of their spelling of words would be acceptable today.

Each letter below is preceded by its date, the letter *S* or *A* (depending whether it was written by Stephen or Anne) and its reference at the Isle of Wight R.O.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the staff of the Isle of Wight Record Office for their courtesy and assistance.

1. I. of Wight R.O., Newport. Reference: OG.
2. Cecil Aspinall Oglander, *Nunwell Symphony*, 1945.
3. K.A.O. U/312.
4. P.R.O. E179/249.
5. Mother Mary Gregory, The Purchase of Wickham Court by the Lennards, *Arch. Cant.*, lxxix (1964), 16.
6. A.M. Everitt, *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion*, 1966.

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The Letters

24.7.1640 S. (OG.16.169)

Regarding the settlement of further land on Anne, points out difficulties of inheritance which could follow.

29.7.1642 S. (OG.85.81)

Wife and little ones all well now.

An army to be sent to Hull within the week.

'Sir, you were importunate with me for to be made a Baronett, to fulfil your desire for your daughter and her children' Sir Henry Maneringe got the warrant for this signed by the King. Stephen had second thoughts - 'the somes are so troublesome' - and asks for loan of £ 200 to help cover the cost because the Earl of Holland has made 'such accusation' that he cannot get credit.

N.D. 1644 A. (OG.16.163)

Writes to console her father after Lady Oglander's death: 'let not the solitariness of the place nor sad thoughts take any hold upon you, for that were to make me miserable.'

Wishes for his health and thanks him for gift to her daughter (Nan).

5.9.1646 A. (OG.19.4)

Afraid melancholy will make him ill.

The sickness is less in London.

Sir Francis Carey is very ill and not expected to last two months .

Hopes of peace.

5.10.1646 S. (OG.19.5)

Sent net as requested.

No certain news.

All the family well.

19.10.1646 A. (OG.19.7)

Has written three times - letters must have been lost on way.

Attended funeral of the Earl of Essex that day.

Remembers the happiness of seeing her father - would be very happy to see him at Wickham.

Stephen has sent the *hay* (net).

Smallpox in Wickham Street.

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22.10.1646 S. (OG.19.8)

We have both written, and received his letter.
Had sent the net (46 fathoms for 20 d.) three weeks ago.

15.12.(1646) A. (OG.120.22)

Would have visited that summer but had to stay home because of the army.
All reasonably well but the sickness and smallpox are very near; her maid has died of smallpox.

Tries to persuade her father to bring her sister Bridget so that she can have a cure for her lame knee, because she is afraid the Island physicians may do more harm than good.

19.3.1647 A. (OG.19.3)

Stephen had hoped to visit Sir John but had been prevented by business and was unwilling that Anne should go as she was often ill.
Hoped to see him in West Wickham.

27.11.1647 A. (OG.19.9)

Pleased Sir John is well and has received an honour from the King - but distressed the King is imprisoned, especially in 'that place' (Carisbrook Castle).

Wanted to visit at Christmas but Stephen concerned that this might endanger her health; but they intend to enjoy Christmas with Royalist friends for all they grieve for the King.

Glad Bridget has been to London for treatment.

20.1.1648 A. (OG.120.15)

'The condition we are in is very sad'.

Stephen had persuaded Anne she should attend a cousin's wedding - it seems she enjoyed it, and Sir John Evelyn asked after her father.

Stephen's eyes very sore.

10.2.1648 A. (OG.16.171)

All well. Looks forward to seeing him in May at West Wickham.

N.D. ? Aug.1648 S. (OG.80.25)

Has had demand for £ 50 outstanding debt - 'it is a hard time for moneys'. Expects to be able to pay at Bartholemew tide (August 24th).

I am not ungrateful for the tender of any
 requests although I find them not so often as
 I would in respect of the many occasions where
 me when the necessity of providence to the cause
 requireth it for I confess I have had an intention
 and that would to have waited on you in the field
 but these late byers have obstructed my purposes
 how to be from home that harvest byers I know not
 in respect that my former hath sowed many that
 especially have kept harvest to put them off that
 they it not at home to be hired for any money
 and harvest must not be neglected if the weather
 be any thinge warmer ^{after harvest} I have a desire to bringe
 my selfe to waite on you to see whether some other
 waye I have not advertised her for a winter for as she
 cometh so tender ~~that~~ the best gold layeth her up
 for alwaye by me. but if we faile at our intended
 we I will take such order that if god send health
 and byers of you byly of transience may be with out
 danger this next springe of will not faile I hope
 it will be sooner. so if you have not sold your old
 shire of hoggs they are like to prove a very good com-
 modity this year for those that have them in our parts
 they are all left & found me at five carsh of shill
 not have more then will find my horse for my horse
 use when I have for news nothinge partaine but
 a maintenance of this trouble except god in his mercy
 send us that blessinge which it were then more true
 aspect with the perfectment of my requests to you
 I take my leave this time

Wesleyham
 August 7th
 1649

my love & more may be
 tendered to my brother
 by your ad acquaintance
 with you in the field.

Your soon ready to obseve
 your Comaund

Step: Lennard

Fig. 5. A letter from Stephen Lennard. (OG.85.53)

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Report that Fairfax's army is in Southwark - 'pray God send an agreement between them and the City' or they will feel the effects in West Wickham.

3.8.1649 A. (OG.120.21)

'Believe you have heard of the great miracle at Deptford': a girl who had been blind for eight years with King's Evil (scrofula) had been cured - according to reliable witnesses who have known her since childhood.

7.8.1649 S. (OG.85.53)

Had hoped to visit but 'sade tymes have obstructed my purposes' and dare not be away during harvest. Cannot hire the necessary teams because of the dry summer. Will visit after harvest if weather warm but dare not risk Anne's health on a winter journey.

If Sir John has hops in stock now would be a good time to sell; he himself will have barely enough for his own use.

26.8.1649 A. (OG.120.33)

Most distressed, because Stephen had let her prepare for a journey (to the Island) but now says he cannot leave home. He has been accused of supporting the King with money in 1642 and threatened with sequestration; please do not tell anyone.

Has also had trouble with his eyes this summer, also his leg for which he is to go to London for treatment with physic and an 'issue' (or induced ulcer). Is to sell some land to pay his daughter's marriage portion (Elizabeth).

Sorry Sir John finds it difficult to believe the miracle. Was afraid to believe it herself and sent 13 times for confirmation. But 'the woman whose child was cured was a strict Presbyterian, and did not believe that the King (his touch) could cure the Evil, and therefore never carried her to him. . . . she being, that day the King was murdered, on the Exchange, there came a great Independent with a handkerchief dipped in his blood. . . . she desired him to give her a piece. . . . for, by the good report she had heard of him, she had been converted, and believed him to be a saint. . . . it came into her mind how that from St.Paul were brought handkerchiefs and aprons to the sick and they were cured. . . . so using the cloth three times a day, at the end of the eighteenth day she was perfectly cured'.

3.9.(1649) A. (OG.77.9)

Forgive long silence - enforced by a great many unruly guests: soldiers, which have been billeted on them for a month. They have had 200, besides what the parson and the village have. If they stay all winter it will ruin this poor parish. Troops also blamed for two cases of 'sickness' in Beckenham.

Hopes to hear of sister Bridget's marriage. (This took place on 31.10.1649).

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29.7.1653 A. (OG.19.16)

Concerned about the hasty marriage of another sister and suspicious of her husband's financial standing; he is also a Parliament man. Worried about the children of previous marriage - can Sir John get their portions into his own hands? Stephen unwilling to help.

27.1.1654 S. (OG.85.84)

Anne and the children well.

Only news is the unexpected arrival of an heir to their neighbour Sir Humfrey Styles of Langley Park.

March 1654 A. (OG.85.59)

Been very ill since her last treatment and 'had an ill cough and was fallen away' and afraid she had consumption but now very well .

Nan not well since she had measles.

Stephen in London on a course of physick - presents his duty and hopes to visit before Whitsun. She hopes he will let her accompany him if only he would believe she can travel on horseback. Implies a coach would be too expensive.

'I know not what to do with my husband's daughter. She is a great grief to me' - tries to bring her own up better.

Aunt Grimes very well but has not left her chamber all the winter.

Hopes Stephen keeps as little company as possible 'because we would heare as little as we could' of the state of the country.

6.10.1654 A. (OG.85.60)

Tries to persuade her father to send her sister Bridget to London for treatment. Cannot come herself - Stephen very ill with his old trouble, a sore leg worse than ever though at last on the mend.

Thanks Sir John for the lock of his hair which she will treasure.

As for his 'issue' it is quite usual for it to heal under the dressing. If treated with orris or ivy root it should open again, otherwise he should have another made or he will not be well. (The aim was to drain away poisonous fluids).

2.1.1655 A. (OG.19.17)

Hopes her husband will give her leave to visit Sir John and her sick sister if the weather is not bad; Stephen is more loving and careful of her health than ever, if possible. Tries to deserve a blessing not many enjoy in these unhappy times.

Sir Humfrey Styles has separated from his wife despite her protestations of faithfulness.

I humbly beseech y^e to pardon mee, & I have not according
 to my duty and desire, written unto y^e truly, I have ben so ill since my
 physick, & I was almost afraid, I was going into a consumption
 for I had an ill cough & was fallen away, but now I thank it is
 gone, & I am very well, but now is not very well, neuer since she
 had y^e mesels, but I hope to get her well againe; my husband has not
 ben very well, he is now in london in a course of physick; hee presents
 his duty to y^e & intends to write on y^e, before whitsontide, & I hope
 hee will let mee goe wth him, it being my greatest desire, but as yet
 hee will not grant it mee; for I could perswade him to believe I were
 able to goe a horsedack (wth I service as much as I possible, I can wth it
 doe) I believe hee would let mee goe, for nothing, but I charge doth
 hinder it, monys being very sarse wth him this hard times, truly
 deare father I should be very joyfull to see y^e heere, if y^e were able to
 take so great a journey, but if it should doe y^e any hurt, it would
 be a perpetuall grieffe to mee; & therefore I desire to wait on y^e, &
 I hope I shall. I most heartily thanke y^e for your for your blessing, it
 being y^e greatest blessing, joy, & comfort, if this world can afford mee
 for since I have y^e happiness to have a father on earth, whom god has
 blessed wth y^e ceast of y^e joys of heauen, I cannot doubt but by your heauen
 by prayers to obtaine y^e like mercie from god; wth ever beseech him to
 give mee to serve for; my husband would willingly by y^e a horse, but he
 did not know your colour, I desire to send mee word wth what y^e will
 have, & hee will doe it: I was very desirous to send y^e some hartichok
 plants but I had none y^e was worth a sending, for a want of a garden-
 ner has spoyled mine. M^r Cole remembers him to y^e my cosen Brograine
 her duty, she has let her house & is going to packam; but she knows
 not wth to doe wth her sonn; hee is a great grieffe to her, & truly my
 husband's daughter is so to mee: I pray god give me graces to take
 warning by them, & endeavour to give mine better breeding; truly
 it is my daily care, to doe it, & I hope god will heare yours & my
 prayers for it, & bless my endeavors; my ante grines is very well but
 she has not come out of her chamber all this winter. I have is
 no news here but wth you heare, a generall misery over all y^e kingdome
 by reason of y^e just judgments of god on us, for our sinns, I prayse
 god my husband doe keepe as much, as hee can from all company, because
 we would heare as litill as possible we could; being desirous to doe nothing
 but only pray to god for mercy, & if all may, send to his glory, & y^e
 spirituall good of this poore kingdome. So humbly craving your
 blessing for mee, & mine I ever am

Deare Father

your most humble most duty
 full, obedient and most
 thankful daughter

desiring y^e to preserve my love to my brothers
 and e. is lxxx

OG 85/59 Anne Lennard

Fig. 6. A letter from Anne Lennard. (OG.85.59).

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14.1.1655 A. (OG.19.15)

Sad at news of Bridget's death. (She was buried at Brading 5.12.54). Glad of legacy although 'nothing can put me more in mind of her'. Enquires whether she left a child. Wishes she could be with Sir John if only she could go a-horseback. Money scarce these hard times.

26.4.1655 A. (OG.85.61)

'Besides these troublous times' Stephen has been ill for almost two months, is now in London on a course of treatment which has made him very weak. Pray for his health. 'My son Holmden' (Elizabeth's husband) and others keep her company while he is away. On Easter Monday celebrated their 20th. Wedding Anniversary with a few friends, and thought of Sir John. 'Truly our marriage love doth daily increase for which I praise God, beseeching him ever to make me thankful for it'.

Sir John died in November 1655. He left this self portrait: 'wouldst thou feign see me, being dead so many years since? I will give thee my own character. Conceive thou sawest an aged, somewhat corpulent man, of middle stature, with a white beard and somewhat big moustaches, riding in black or some sad-coloured clothes over the Downs to take the air, morning and evening. . . . on a handsome middling black horse; his hair grey and his complexion very sanguine. Such I conceive myself and so mayest thou too, if thou hast any desire'.⁷

7. Sir John Oglander, *A Royalist's Notebook*, ed. Francis Bamford, 1935.