

The Hastings Family - Part 2 1480 - 1483

Things were going really well for William, 1st Baron Hastings, of Kirby Muxloe in the early 1480's - he held important positions of power in England and France and was a close friend of the king, Edward IV. He'd been married to his wife, Katherine Neville, daughter of Richard Neville, 5th Earl of Salisbury, since 1462 and she had born him four sons and two daughters, who as far as we know, were born here at his manor house in the village.

Life was busy for him and as well as his important roles in the government of this country, he had embarked on several impressive building projects in Leicestershire - Kirby, Ashby-de-la-Zouche and Bagworth Castles. He wanted to show off his wealth and status and he was granted permission to fortify his manor house here in Kirby, which became the building we now know as 'Kirby Castle'. To do this he brought in Flemish brickmakers who were skilled in a new type of building in red brick. In the years 1480 until 1483 work was progressing well and the castle in Kirby was taking shape.



Kirby Muxloe Castle in 2021 : "The Unfinished Castle"

However, dark days were about to start for William during the latter part of Edward IV's life - the jealousy between William and the Woodville family had been growing. Edward had married Elizabeth Woodville, the widow of Sir John Grey of Groby, in a secret ceremony unbeknown to and without the consent of the "lords of the land". The marriage was condemned because it was known that Edward had made a pre-contract of matrimony with Dame Eleanor Buttele, daughter of the Earl of Shrewesbury. (This fact was later used to denounce Edward's two sons as "illegitimate" during the bid for the throne in 1483 by Richard, Duke of Gloucester).

Suddenly, in March 1483, William's friend, Edward IV's health began to decline and after ten days after becoming ill, he died. His son, Edward V, was only 12 years old at the time and Richard, Duke of Gloucester, was appointed Lord Protector, until Edward was old enough to govern effectively. Preparations were being made for the coronation of the new king but Richard believed that the Woodville's were plotting to murder him and the Duke of Buckingham and of organising uprisings against Richard. He appears to have intercepted some form of communication between the Queen and her son, and on June 10th, "Richard chose to put in motion a plan to destroy the queen and the Woodvilles for ever"¹.

On Friday, 13th June 1483 William, Lord Hastings, attended a council meeting in the Tower of London, which had been called by Richard, Duke of Gloucester, to discuss preliminary arrangements for the coronation of Edward V.

At some point during this meeting, Richard turned on William, accusing him of siding with the Woodvilles and treason. William was given no opportunity to defend himself and was subsequently dragged out onto Tower Green and using the log of a tree that happened to be lying there, he was beheaded with an axe. He was to become the first person to have been beheaded in this way for an 'act of treason' and there is a memorial to him and other famous people who met their death in this way on Tower Green, including Bradgate's Lady Jane Grey.

It is difficult to know the reasons why Richard acted

in this way and many books and articles have been written about the death of William Hastings and Richard's accession to the throne. Many experts have debated the reasons why William, known to have been Richard's loyal and trusted servant, was so harshly treated. Here is the account from the English Heritage information entitled "Lord Hastings, Richard III and an Unfinished Castle" -

"Edward IV's death on 9th April 1483 did not at first appear to threaten Hastings. He favoured the appointment of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, Edward's brother, as Protector, rather than the immediate coronation of the 12 year old Edward V, which was sought by the boy's mother, Elizabeth Woodville. Hastings, having long been

on good terms with Gloucester, seems to have underestimated the latter's ambition until it was too late. Ignoring warnings, he attended the fateful council meeting at the Tower, at which Gloucester accused him of conspiring with the Woodvilles against him. The charge was in all likelihood trumped up - probably because Gloucester knew that Hastings would never countenance any move on his part to seize the throne outright.

Two weeks after Hastings's execution, Gloucester deposed Edward V and was crowned Richard III. The 'Princes in the Tower' - Edward and his younger brother, Richard - were never seen again."

¹ Richard III, Brother, Protector, King.
- Chris Skidmore

Life for the Hastings family after William's death will follow in part 3.

VK

History - How Does It Work?

I decided to write this article after reading, and very much enjoying, Val's article on the Hastings Family in these pages. I have no reason to doubt anything that Val has written, but it prompted me to think about why should we believe "history"?

History is not a science and it's not like maths either, but there are similarities. We need to assemble the evidence and come up with theories of what happened. Sometimes, it can be difficult to "prove" that something is true. It may be easier to show that a statement is untrue. When Wikipedia (an "encyclopaedia" on the internet) says that the first son of William Lord Hastings was born in Kirby Muxloe Castle and gives his birth date as 26 November 1466, it is not difficult to deduce that since building records show that our castle was constructed in the 1480's, the statement that the child was born in our castle is untrue. The entry should perhaps better have been phrased as "probably born in the Manor House at Kirby Muxloe", as in Val's article. Pedantic? Who, me?

Well, let's look at another, more contentious, event. There is no doubt that William Lord Hastings was executed, following an accusation of treason by the Duke of Gloucester, later Richard III, but Lord Protector at that time, since the young Edward V was not yet of an age to reign. The questions centre around the circumstances of that execution. When was it and was it preceded by a trial?

The consensus of modern historians seems to be that the execution took place on the day of the accusation, and this is certainly how Shakespeare has it. If that was the case, then we can reasonably assume that there was no trial, since that would have taken time to organise. Some people attempt to justify Richard's action by saying that we cannot judge him by today's standards. My response is to say "Fine. So let's judge him by the standards of Magna Carta (1215), which requires that everyone be entitled to a fair trial".

Returning to the question of "Was there a trial?", I think we can dismiss Shakespeare's account, since it is written as a story and there is no reason to consider that it constitutes evidence. That doesn't make it untrue, just that it's not reliable. Having said that, many people have, in the past, advanced the same view and claimed that Richard III did not have a humped back - it was pure invention by Shakespeare. That was up until a certain excavation in a certain Leicester car park, after which they have "gone quiet" on their theory.

Clements Markham, in his book "Richard III: His Life & Character" describes some evidence about the dates concerned and then says: "We here have evidence that Lord Hastings was not beheaded until a week after his arrest and, as there was no indecent haste, we may assume that there was a trial and sentence by a proper tribunal." Now I should add that Markham was writing at the start of the 20th century and taking an approach that few historians would follow today. He had reviewed the evidence, come to his own conclusions, then written his history to justify his views. The phrase "we may assume that there was a trial and sentence" is

very much in line with this approach. But should we assume? If there was a trial, why have we no evidence of it? Would not Richard have wanted to go to great length to show that he was "following the rules"? Certainly, his enemies made much of this dictatorial style when they claimed that Hastings had been dragged out onto Tower Green and beheaded on the log of a tree that happened to be lying there. If untrue, it would have been simple for Richard's supporters to have produced the records of the court that tried Hastings, some days later, if that *was* what happened. So lack of evidence can be as eloquent as evidence itself. Conan Doyle gets Sherlock Holmes to make this point when he uses a clue of "the dog that didn't bark in the night" to solve a case.

Let's finish with an old chestnut: "Who killed the princes in the Tower?". The princes were Edward V, of whom I spoke above, and his brother. The short answer is that we have no evidence that they were even killed, yet alone by whom if they were. The people who stand accused are Richard III, Henry VII, who was the victor at the Battle of Bosworth, or a supporter of either of the two. Using modern techniques, we can draw on psychological analyses of the contenders for the guilty person, but unfortunately, this eliminates nobody. They were all perfectly capable of carrying out the crime and we can point to numerous executions as evidence. It is interesting to speculate on whether we will ever know the answer. A wooden box containing two small human skeletons was found under a staircase in the Tower in 1674. The bones were widely accepted at the time as those of the princes, but this has not been proven. Charles II had the bones buried in Westminster Abbey. If the bones were to be forensically examined and an accurate date of death determined, then it might exonerate Henry VII, if he would not have had access to the Tower at that time, or Richard III, if he was, by that time, dead. But who knows? Perhaps that is what makes history interesting. We can each have our own theories.

MG



The Princes in the Tower - painted by Sir John Everett Millais in 1878

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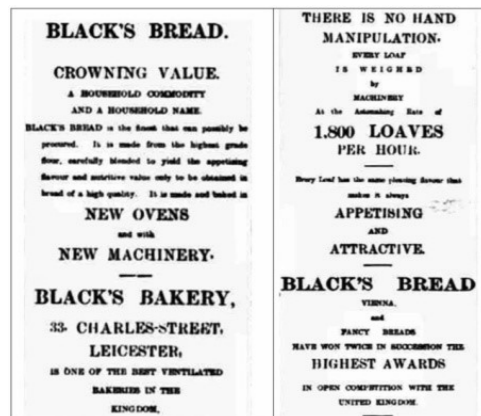
Frears and Black's Bakery

Frears bakery was originally a grocery and bakers shop in Northgate Street Leicester owned by John Russell Frears. John later expanded his business, becoming a cake and provisions merchant and moved to Frog Island. In 1896, he was joined in the business by his son, also John Russell Frears, and a new factory was built for Frears & Son.



Frears Bread Company delivery cart and driver, 1919
Leicester Mercury archive picture

Black's Bread Company was established in 1806 by William Black who was born in Humberstone in 1776. His son John William (born in 1810) is listed on the 1841 census as a grocer at Lower Charles Street. There are two entries in the Leicester Directory. The first is 1827 - William Black, baker and flour seller, and 1846 John Wm Black, baker and maltster of Charles Street. William died in 1857 and John continued to develop the company. John died in 1884 and his daughter Helen Mary and her husband John Edward Faire (another Leicester businessman) ran the company. John Faire became chairman of the company and a new bakery was built on Abbey Lane in 1925.



In 1902 Black's Bakery advertised new machinery and bread ovens, producing 1,800 loaves per hour at the premises at 33 Charles Street.

Frears and Black's Ltd was formed when Frears Ltd amalgamated with Black's Bread Company in 1928 and considerable additions were made to the factory on Abbey Lane at this time. The Abbey Bakeries took its name from the ruins of the old abbey where Cardinal Wolsey died on his way to London. The business was split between the two new purpose-built factories and managed by the grandsons of the Frears founder. The Abbey Lane factory became the bakery and was run by John Newton Frears, whilst the Woodgate premises were run by Charles Russell Frears and became Frears Biscuits Ltd.

Frears Biscuits was an important national and international developer and producer of biscuits with brands which included the ever-popular morning tea, butter fingers, ginger nuts, custard creams and teatime assorted, and can lay claim to Leicestershire's present day importance in the international biscuit and snack foods industry.



The company was well known for their well-designed decorative biscuit tins, which today are collectors' items.

In 1962/3, the company was bought by the American owned Nabisco Inc. and traded as Nabisco

Frears, retaining the traditional Frears brands and introducing others, with Charles Frears as Chairman and Managing Director. Charles died in 1977 and the Woodgate factory closed down in 1983. The company was renamed Jacob's Bakery in 1989. The factory was demolished and an Aldi store now stands in its place.



Frears Biscuit factory in Woodgate

Frears and Black's Ltd., The Abbey Bakery, produced forty-eight varieties of bread daily in 1937 as well as several kinds of cakes and confectionery. Bread baking was a completely mechanical process, with strict control over the mixture. Each batch was numbered and the history recorded. The flour was tested on arrival, in order to decide what blends to use for different kinds of bread. The flour was mixed into a dough and several stages later it was finally shaped and passed through a conveyor into rows of tins, which then passed through a prover. Next, they pass through travelling ovens, with baking taking 44 minutes. In a separate department was the cake bakery, where a divider shaped the dough at a rate of 4,000 rolls per hour, then passed them through the prover and onto the gas fired oven. The cake finishing, with cream, jam and icing, was completed by girls working alongside the conveyor.



40 Electric battery delivery vans were used for short distances, with a group charging plant being used to recharge their batteries. The interior of the vehicles was constructed specifically for the bakery to slide the bread in on loaded trays. The company preferred to supply customers within 25 miles, but for journeys over this distance, motorised vehicles were used.

In 1965 the company was acquired by United Bakeries, part of the Spillers Group.

KT



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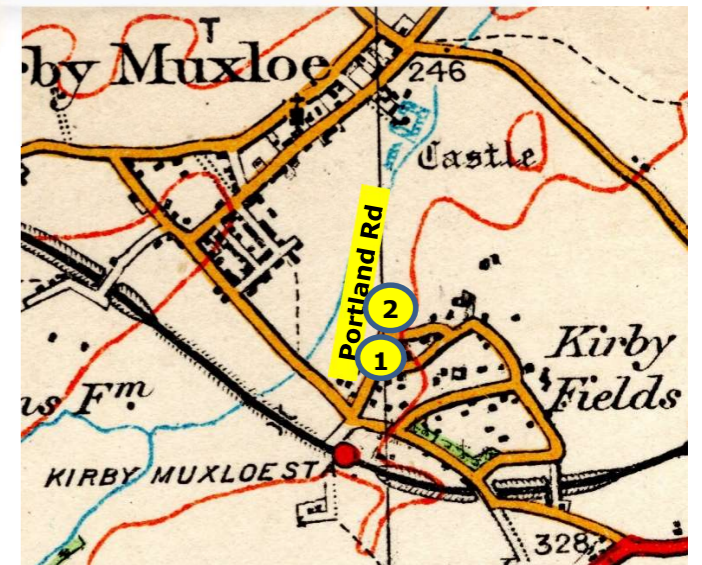
Hi and welcome to our latest KMLHG Newsletter.

Mike Gould (Chair) Val Knott (Secretary)
Kate Traill (Treasurer) Judith Upton (Archivist)
Kerry Burdett

① As we continue our stroll through Kirby Fields, instead of following Forest Drive on its curve to the right, we follow the road in a straight line and come to Portland Road. We presume that Portland Road takes its name from the large imposing house, named Portland House on the left-hand side of the road. An interesting fact came to light a few years ago when we were invited to view the deeds of a large house on Hastings Road. It appears that originally the road had been named "Castle Road", most likely as it had at the time a fine view of Kirby Castle. Some of the houses in the immediate vicinity pre-date the houses on the present Castle Road. When the roads were laid out on the Land Society land between 1898 and 1904, a decision must have been made to change the name of the original Castle Road to Portland Road, thus enabling the name of Castle Road to be used with Church Road and Barwell Road as roads on this new development of mainly terraced houses.

The first house we see now in 1945 is a house named Lowlands. The house was built in the 1920's and is set in 2 acres of grounds. In future times, around 1967, the house will be purchased by well-known local couple Peter and Pam Cooper. They will immediately sell off one of the acres to the side of the house and eventually another house will be built on the land. Peter and Pam will bring up their family in the house and will still be living there in 2021. The gardens stretch down a hill until they reach the recreation ground. At present in 1945, Lowlands is owned by Eric Healey and his wife Madge. They live in the house with Eric's father, Ebenezer Healey and his wife Ethel. Ebenezer is a retired rubber manufacturer, having firstly owned the Lee Healey Rubber company, which was taken over by the John Bull company and finally became part of Dunlop. Eric has a market gardening business and also during WWII has acted as group warden for Leicester North A.R.P.'s. He is listed in the 1939 census as a member of the Leicestershire County Constabulary. It is thought that maybe he served as a reserve police officer. It is believed that this house has been in the Healey family for some years and it is known that the late Mrs Gertie Webster of the well-known Webster family, worked for Ebenezer Healey as a nanny when she first came to live in the village, having previously living in Walsall. The family also employed several other staff to aid with the running of the house and large garden. The next house is Portland House, which originally was the only house on this stretch of road. The house was built in around 1875 and

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is a typical Victorian house will high ceilings and large windows. It is built on a slope similar to Lowlands and has a very interesting cellar. The cellar can be accessed from the hall by taking a normal cellar staircase. However, from the garden at the rear of the house, the cellar can also be accessed by opening large doors and finding it on the same level. There is a very large water tank in the cellar and before piped water was available, this was fed by rainwater, which at one time supplied the whole house with water. It is said that it was also a source of water for the fire brigade. The first occupant was William Dalrymple, a manager of Leicester Provident Dispensary, however by 1901 William had moved on and was living on Main Street. Later occupants are difficult to determine until we find Frederick Brailsford, a director of Fergus Burdett, cardboard box manufacturers, who has lived here from 1920. William is still living at Portland House with his cousin Ruben Usher in the 1939 census. Ruben was a well-known Leicester jeweller with premises on Humberstone Gate. In years to come, Portland house will become a Care home for the elderly.

② We next reach the coach house, which is now called Portland Cottage. It is thought that at one time this building was either the coach house or servants' accommodation attached to Portland house.

Sources: Old Kirby (Muxloe) by Jonathan Wilshere, the late Sally Pettingell (g/granddaughter of John and Amy Hughes).

JU

Our thanks go to Gill Bower for correcting our information about Westleigh in the last Newsletter. The house was only a medical home back in the 1900's, not when Dr Alexander owned it, as we mistakenly said.

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