

Elizabeth Greenhill

Prior to the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539, the parish of Abbots Langley had been owned mainly by the Abbey of St Albans and was administered as a system of four manors: Abbots Langley Manor, Langleybury Manor, Hyde Manor and Chambersbury Manor.

According to Revd Raymond Wilkinson's *The Church and Parish of Abbots Langley* (undated, but assumed to have been published in the late 1950s), the Manor of the Hyde was conveyed to Henry Greenhill of Greenhill Grove in the parish of Harrow in 1612. It descended to his son and then to his grandson, both named William. The Greenhills were to become a significant family in the area.

The grandson William married Elizabeth, daughter of William White of London. By her one husband, Elizabeth Greenhill is reputed to have had 39 children, all born alive and baptised, and all single births except one. This is recorded in the *Guinness Book of Records*, 1972. There is a mention of this accomplishment in Journal 3 (Autumn/Winter 1995).

Elizabeth's youngest son, Thomas Greenhill, was born in 1681, shortly after the death of his father. He became surgeon to the 7th Duke of Norfolk and was author of *The Art of Embalming* (1705). At Thomas Greenhill's request, an addition was made to the arms of the family in 1698 to commemorate his mother's extraordinary achievement.

A Thomas Greenhill (we do not know if it is the same one) had a daughter, Anne. Francis Combe married Anne and they lived at Abbots Langley Manor House. There is an attractive 'Kneeling Lady' memorial to Anne Combe in St Lawrence Church.

Returning to Elizabeth Greenhill, Revd Raymond Wilkinson reports that there are two portraits of her still in existence. Back in 1989, Eve Durntall and her late husband Ken went about tracking down one of these portraits. They travelled to Wallingwells, near Worksop, Nottinghamshire. Wallingwells passed to the



Photo (1990) of portrait of Elizabeth Greenhill hanging in the White family residence in Scotland. Photo supplied by Sir Thomas Ashley White, Bart.

White family when Thomas White married the heiress of Wallingwells in 1698 and remained with the family until the 1920s. Today, Wallingwells Hall is divided into apartments and separate residences, but Ken and Eve were put in contact with Sir Thomas Ashley White, Bart., who has a small crayon portrait of Elizabeth Greenhill that hangs in the White Family Residence in Scotland. Apparently there is an inscription on the back of the portrait recording the history of her achievement, signed by a Richd. Ashby. Sir Thomas kindly provided a photograph (shown here) of the portrait for our village records.

This is now thought to be the only surviving portrait of Elizabeth Greenhill, although it is believed that at one time a copy existed at Lowesby Hall in Leicestershire.

While the Abbots Langley parish registers apparently contain many Greenhill entries from the beginning of the seventeenth century until the first decade of the eighteenth century, Revd Wilkinson notes that for the only time from their beginnings in 1538 until the present day there are gaps between 1652 and 1690 – the exact time when the 39 children were being born. It is difficult to be certain whether leaves have been removed. It is also interesting that in Vicar Richard Gee's *The Two Langleys* paper of 1853, referring to the registers he states that he has “found much interest in the frequent examination of these books”, studying the patterns and variation in names, but apparently makes no mention of the Greenhill family. ■

Robin Mann



Front of the oldest part of Wallingwells Hall near Worksop. One of many photos taken during Ken and Eve Durnall's visit of 28th April 1989. Photo: Eve Durnall

Vicar Richard Gee's *The Two Langleys* paper of 1853 can be viewed from the Downloads page of the ALLHS website www.allhs.org.uk.