

THE MONUMENTS OF St MARY'S CHURCH, FAIRFORD - 1

JOHN TAME (died 1500)

ALICE TAME (died 1471)



John Tame is probably the best known of all Fairford's past citizens. He amassed great wealth as one of the most successful Cotswold wool merchants of the late medieval period and it was he who was responsible for the almost complete rebuilding of St Mary's church in the late 15th Century. It fell to his son Edmund to oversee the glazing of the church with the magnificent set of painted glass windows but John Tame had made this possible by providing the framework (and most probably some of the funding) for this internationally-renowned work of art.

It is not known when (or where) John Tame was born but would probably have been between 1420 and 1430. John's father, another John, had property in Fairford but the Tames also had a house (which later became the Swan Inn) in Cirencester which became the focus of their extensive wool and cloth manufacturing business. The Tames owned or leased land in over 40 manors throughout Gloucestershire to provide the raw material upon which their wealth was built. John was a member of the English Company of the Staple (better known as the Calais Staple) which controlled the export of English wool and cloth to Europe, particularly to Flanders, France and Italy.

In 1461 John Tame married Alice Twyniho, the daughter of one of John's many business partners. Over the next few years Alice gave birth to four children: William, Thomas, Eleanor and Edmund, the last-named becoming John's successor and who is buried in the Lady Chapel at Fairford close to his father's tomb. Alice died on 20 December 1471 and John never remarried, spending the next three decades as a widower.

Although Cirencester was to remain important to the Tame's wool business, John Tame probably came to live in Fairford sometime after 1479 when Edward IV granted a lease of the manor to John and his father-in-law John Twyniho. John Tame and his children lived in a house known as Beauchamp or Warwick Court which was situated close to the church in Fairford but a few years before his death John had a new mansion house built, probably on the site of or close to the present-day Fairford House.

By 1490 John Tame had made a huge fortune, ably assisted by his son Edmund who was probably running much of the business by this time. Several of the more successful wool merchants in the Cotswolds and elsewhere in England spent some of their fortunes on the beautification of churches, partly out of religious devotion and partly as a highly visible reminder of their own wealth and importance. John Tame went further than this and had most of the 14th Century church of St Mary's pulled down to be rebuilt in the Perpendicular style. There were special visitations to Fairford in 1491 and 1497 which may have marked the commencement and conclusion of the main rebuilding works. The work was extensive, completely replacing all but the lower part of the tower. The windows must have been glazed during the reconstruction but the windows that we see today were made a few years after John Tame's death.



A rubbing of the brasses of John and Alice Tame in St Mary's church, Fairford

John Tame died on 8 May 1500 having written his will on 28 January 1497 with a codicil just three days before his death. Unfortunately there is no mention in John's will about the rebuilding of the church or the matter of its glazing. He requested that he be buried in the north chapel (now the Lady Chapel) of the church which indicates that it had been completed by 1497. In his will he left £120 'for all manner of charges aboute my burying' which presumably included the tomb situated between the chancel and the north chapel, a prominent position which would encourage intercessory prayers for John's soul. Built of Cotswold limestone the tomb is surmounted by a ledger of Purbeck marble into which are set brasses depicting John Tame and his wife Alice together with the arms of Tame and Twyniho. At their feet is an inscription which reads :

"ffor Jhus love pray for me. I may not pray nowe pray ye. With A pater noster & an ave. That my paynys Relessyd may be"

Around the moulded edge of the ledger stone is a longer inscription on strips of brass commencing at the north east corner, this reads:

"Orate pro animabus Johis Tame Armigeri et Alicie uxoris eius qui quidem Johes obiit octavo die mensis Maij Anno dni millesimo quingentesimo et Anno Regni Regis Henrici Septi sextodecimo et predicta Alicia obiit vicesimo die Mensis Decembris Anno domini millimo CCCC^o Septuagesimo primo quorum aiabus propicietur de. ffor jhus love pray for me I may not pray now pray ye with A pater noster ande an ave that my paynes relessid may be"

The brasses have been identified as being of a style made in a workshop in St Paul's churchyard in London. John Tame's brass (and that of his son Edmund who was knighted in 1516 and died in 1534) are unique amongst those of Cotswold wool merchants in that they are the only brasses that depict the subjects wearing armour rather than civilian clothing.