

## THE MONUMENTS OF St MARY'S CHURCH, FAIRFORD - 5

### LADY BRIDGET TRACY (c.1596-1632)



Immediately to the south of the east window, behind the original altar, is the memorial plaque to Lady Bridget Tracy, the wife of Sir Robert Tracy, Lord of the Manor of Fairford before and during the English Civil War.

The Tracy family connection with Fairford started in 1591 when Sir John Tracy bought the manor, John Tame's house and extensive lands in and around Fairford. After John Tame's grandson Sir Edmund Tame died in 1545 the property had passed down through several hands until it was purchased by Sir Henry Unton and John Croke in 1591 who quickly sold it on to Sir John Tracy. Fairford was probably bought to supplement the Tracy's main manor at Toddington, perhaps as a residence for the eldest sons before they succeeded their fathers. However, very soon after he purchased the property Sir John Tracy died and was succeeded by his son, another Sir John.

Sir John's first son, Robert was born in either 1592 or 1593. On 1 August 1615 Robert married Bridget Lyttleton, daughter of the late John Lyttleton of Frankley Court in Worcestershire. John Lyttleton's wife was Merial the daughter of Sir Thomas Bromley, Lord Chancellor of England from 1579 to 1587. John Lyttleton was a Member of Parliament for Worcestershire in the Parliaments of 1584, 1586 and 1597 but in 1601 he was imprisoned for high treason after becoming implicated in the Earl of Essex's conspiracy against Queen Elizabeth. Although his death sentence was commuted, he died in July 1601 while still in the King's Bench prison. Merial spent the rest of her life successfully regaining John's estate, which had been forfeited, and paying off his considerable debts only for it to be lost again during the Civil War.

Sir Robert Tracy played an active part in politics prior to the Civil War and represented Gloucestershire in Parliament in 1620-21, 1625-26 and 1639-40. By 1631 Sir John Tracy had made over the land at Fairford to his son Robert although Sir John still retained the manorial rights. In fact it appears that Robert had been living in the house at Fairford for some years before that, most likely when Robert and Bridget were married in 1615, while his father resided at Toddington. This evidence comes from the Fairford parish registers which have several entries relating to the Tracys, the first one being the baptism

of Sir Robert and Bridget's daughter Frances on 17 April 1627. Their first child, John, was born in 1617 possibly at Fairford but as the parish registers did not start until the last quarter of that year it is not possible to say with any degree of certainty where John was born or baptised.

The Fairford register for 1632 records "The Right Wor'll the Ladie Bridget Tracy the wife of the Right Wor'll Sir Robert Tracye was buried the ffiveth of November". After 17 years of marriage and the birth of at least 10 children (the eldest only 15 years old) it must have been a great blow to Sir Robert and his children, especially as Bridget was still only in her 30s.

Sir John Tracy died in 1648 and was succeeded by Sir Robert who married Dorothy Cocks of Castleditch, Herefordshire some years after Bridget's death. However, the family found itself in financial difficulties as they had been supporters of the Royalist cause during the Civil War and had to sell off their Fairford property in order to pay fines so that they could retain the ancestral home at Toddington. In 1650 the Fairford property was sold to the wealthy Bristol merchant Andrew Barker, so beginning a new and long-running chapter in Fairford's history.

The memorial to Bridget Tracy was set up some years after her death by her daughter Anne the wife of William Somerville of Edston in Warwickshire. The plaque commemorates Anne's mother Bridget, her sister Merial, and her own son Benjamin, all of whom are most likely buried in the chancel. Anne herself was buried in Fairford church on 25 February 1705. The full transcription of the plaque follows:

