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Notes on Chavenage and the Stephens Family

by W. H. S. Davies
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CHAVENAGE HOUSE.

By W. HOWARD SETH-SMITH.

WE have in Chavenage House a very good example of an Elizabethan house of its class.

Chavenage is quite free from the eccentricities of plan so commonly found in this period. It shows the usual developments of the fifteenth century with the great hall in the centre, the kitchen and its offices forming a wing at one end, generally to the north, in order to leave the more sunny aspects for the parlour or dining-room and the family and guests' apartments at the opposite or south end of the hall. The main peculiarity of the Elizabethan planning is the effort at symmetry which is the essence of classic work. This symmetry was probably almost perfect at Chavenage in the first instance, as will be seen by a glance at the plan on which has been shewn the existing walls of the original house (dated on the label termination of the porch 1567) in solid black, the probable plan of the original house by a dotted line, and the additions made probably by Richard Stephens in 1684 by diagonal scoring. The unhappy patchings of 1803 I have merely outlined.

Oftentimes this effort at symmetry resulted in the sacrifice of convenience to dignity, but by no means always. The H form of the plan is an admirable one. The guests' lodgings, or sometimes estate offices, occupied the north-east wing, and the scullery, dairy, &c., the north-west. The family apartments were generally in the south-east range.






The high-pitched gable is another distinctive feature of the Elizabethan period, and replaces the fourteenth and fifteenth century battlemented parapet as at Haddon Hall. Simpler chimneys and chimney caps also take the place of the Tudor elaboration in brickwork.

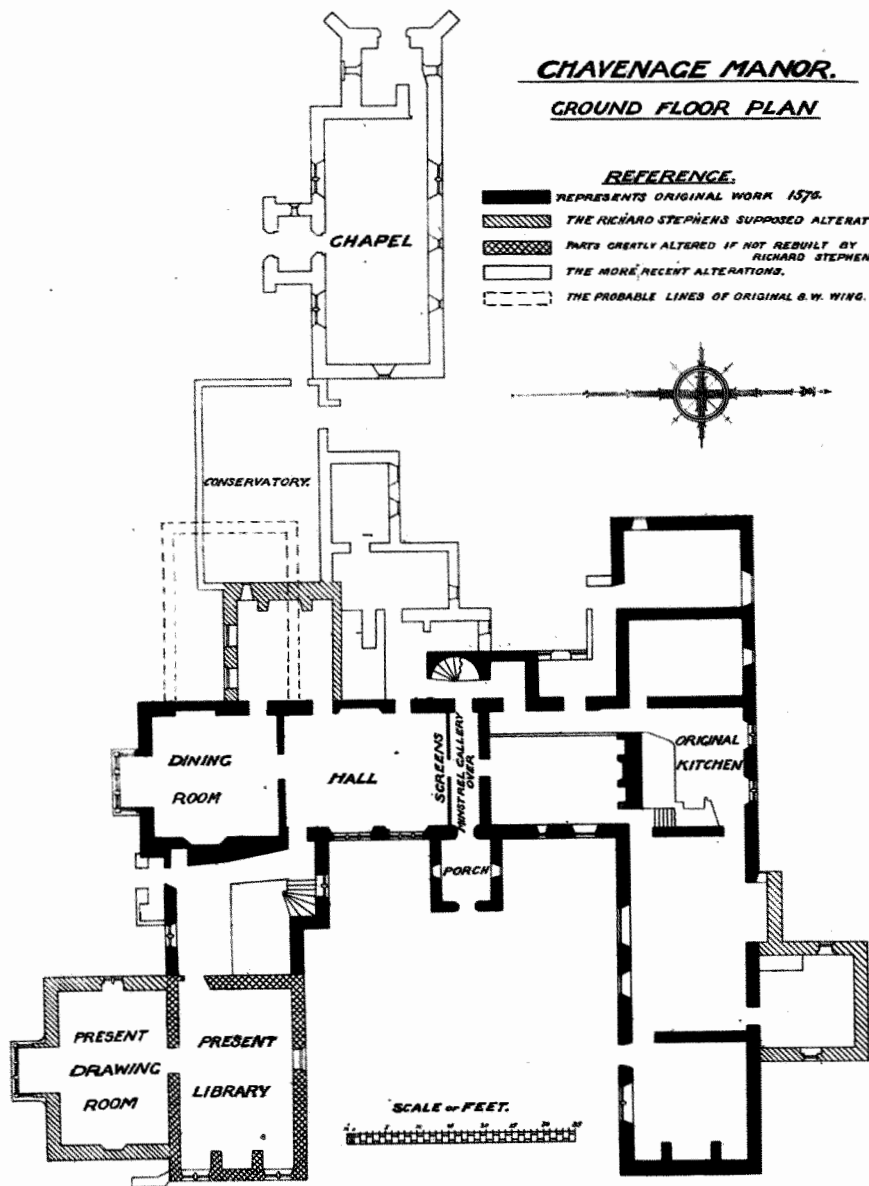
In Elizabethan days the functions of the architect were

CHAYENAGE MANOR.

GROUND FLOOR PLAN

REFERENCE.

-  REPRESENTS ORIGINAL WORK 1578.
-  THE RICHARD STEPHENS SUPPOSED ALTERATIONS.
-  PARTS GREATLY ALTERED IF NOT REBUILT BY RICHARD STEPHENS.
-  THE MORE RECENT ALTERATIONS.
-  THE PROBABLE LINES OF ORIGINAL S. W. WING.



generally confined to supplying the plan and a sketch of the elevations, and it was left to the masons, carpenters, joiners, and plumbers to supply the details of their respective departments; but with more general culture came the demand for more knowledge of style and its more refined and accurate expression, hence the evolution of the modern architect out of his prototype the craftsman.

In Chavenage House it is very interesting to note the local preservation of the Gothic work in the details. The section of the window mullions and jambs is hollow, instead of round as was so commonly the case. The labels are all Tudor in section, but this is only what we should expect in a rural district and in a house of modest scale.

EXTERIOR.

There can be little or no doubt that the date 1576 on the label of the porch lintel is that of the erection of the early Elizabethan house by Edward Stephens. The porch doorway has been mutilated, not so many years ago, for insertion of the modern door, and the porch windows were also then inserted for lighting the vestibule thus enclosed.

On a quoin-stone on the south wall of the porch and also on the west of the house are seen the initials of Richard Stephens, which probably mark the date of the extensive alterations in 1684.

The Decorated two-light Gothic windows and plaque over the doorway, as well as various other similar features about the house of the same date, appear to have been brought by Richard Stephens from Horsley Priory, which, having passed by exchange into the possession of Bruton Priory in 1371 after the dissolution of that house, was granted to Sir Walter Denniss in 1553. The many fourteenth century features would excuse one's attributing the house at the first glance to an earlier date, were it not for the abundant evidence of its Elizabethan origin, which a closer view reveals and which is confirmed by history. I am strongly of opinion that

Richard Stephens was responsible for the insertion of all these relics of Horsley Priory.

Set in the Tudor-like splayed stone arch is the original external door of the house. It is in oak, the cross-boarding being riveted together, and the nail-heads forming an ornamental feature externally. We notice in addition to the lion knocker a very beautiful fourteenth century door ring and plate of pierced iron, probably from the Priory. The hinges too are excellent in proportion and design,— in fact the ornamental ironwork on the old doors throughout is one of the most delightful features of the house.

The *demi-eagle displayed*, which forms a graceful gable-finial over the porch and one of the west gables, is the crest of the Stephens family. The Renaissance plaque below it is dated 1702, and is probably from some mural tablet from a church. Mr. Bazeley says: "On the left of the shield is a chevron or, perhaps part of the arms of Catherine Stephens *née* Beale."

The flat lintel to the porch door, with its lozenge ornaments in the panels, is the only piece of original Renaissance design to be found externally. Two small lions' heads and a crown have been inserted under the labels of the window and painted black.

Turning now to the south of the porch, notice the evidence in the masonry that the three-tier window of hall, the lower lights of which were originally of equal length, have been lowered about two feet as was so frequently the case. This was probably done by Richard Stephens. The reason most likely was that the hall, later on, became less the dining than a reception room, and a view out and more light within were necessary.

It is interesting to speculate on what has happened on the north wall of the original south-east wing. I believe there was a doorway opposite that on the north-east wing, as at Ashton Hall and elsewhere. Extensive alterations to the staircase have undoubtedly been made; probably this south-east wing was rebuilt by Richard Stephens.

The east gable of this south-east wing would seem to support this theory, for the positions of its windows are irregular and their proportion and character out of keeping with the Elizabethan house. The south room, which so completely violates the symmetry of the plan, is probably part of the same alteration, and originally consisted of a ground and first floor like the rest of the house, but has more recently been opened up to the roof and the present ceiling formed. The high windows on the south are mysterious, as they are too low to have served an upper storey. I think they were inserted when the room was heightened, probably at the end of the last century, to prevent the upper part being gloomy, but the want of a look-out on to the lawns led to the insertion afterwards of the square bay-window in the debased Gothic revival type of the end of the eighteenth century.

Note the curious enriched caps of the chimneys, circular on plan over a square shaft.

In the west wall of this addition is another fourteenth century Ecclesiastical window, brought from Horsley Priory. The head and sill are original, but much of it has been restored.

The south-west wing is, I think, also part of the alterations made by Richard Stephens in 1684: the rose-moulded chimney cap again appears, and the even-jointed coping of the gables favours this view. It is, moreover, corroborated by the internal details. The poor bay-window is of course an insertion of the same date as that to the south addition.

The central chimney-stack was originally like the others, but has been spoilt by being rebuilt square.

On the north elevation all is original excepting the large external chimney-stack, probably added when the accommodation of the original kitchen was found insufficient, and the larger apartment in the north-east wing was devoted to this purpose.

The upper two-light window next this chimney-stack was doubtless once a three-light, corresponding to that to the

west of the gable. Its hood-moulding has been cut to build up the chimney-stack, and the quaintly cusped heads to its lights are of a later date than the original house.

The destruction of the early symmetrical plan has happened also on this side of the house by the building out of a room, which appears to be an addition of Richard Stephens' time.

There are no windows in the north-east gable, nor any signs of any having previously existed. We might pretty safely infer that the original south-east gable matched it in this respect.

We notice particularly that there are no rain-water pipes, which with their ornamental cast lead heads generally form such beautiful features in Elizabethan houses. They were probably removed when the present box gutters were formed to carry the rain water (so precious on the top of the Cotswold Hills, where the wells have to be sunk hundreds of feet) to the storage tank; unfortunately these gutters now cross the gables in the most damaging manner.

The interior has been even more altered than the exterior: but if it has lost something in beauty, it is all the more interesting to endeavour to trace the changes which have taken place. To the right as one enters were originally the butteries, and to the left as usual comes the hall; the former have been much altered, but the latter comparatively little. In the fine hall the panelling is of the Elizabethan period, but it has been cut away to form a door into Richard Stephens's south-west wing, and also to insert the later Jacobean screens. The parts so removed one will find somewhat carelessly fitted round the entrance passage. Mr. Bazeley thinks the screens and minstrel gallery belong to Col. Stephens's time, but they appear to me to have been made up later of odd pieces of old work, and never to have been designed as a whole for their position. There is no record when this was done, but I incline to think within the present century. I am informed that the tapestry and much of the glass now in the hall windows were found by the last

owner, Major Chaplin, stowed away in boxes in the attics; some of the glass probably came from the priory, as it is earlier than the house.

The chimney-piece in the hall and that in the drawing-room are extremely fine examples of their style, and would alone make the house well worthy of a visit. They are later than Elizabeth's reign, and were probably added by Col. Stephens. That in the hall bears the Fowler arms, *quarterly azure and or on the first quarter a hawk's lure a and line of the second*. The one now in the drawing-room doubtless once occupied the original room of the south-east wing; it is of the same height as that storey.

The arms of the Stephenses appear in various places; they are *per chevron azure and argent in chief, two falcons rising, and their crest a demi-eagle displayed*.

The coved ceiling of the minstrel gallery is beautifully panelled, as was the hall itself, in all probability, in its earliest days.

We now enter the original dining-room, the panelling of which is dated 1627. This was probably done at the same time as the chimney-pieces were erected. The room has suffered less change than any other on the ground floor: note especially its chimney-piece, which must have been brought from elsewhere, as it is distinctly Tudor in style, and very fine indeed; its panelled over-mantel is still older, and may have been brought from the Priory. The inner jambs and lintel, which give it a heavy appearance, are obviously late additions to accommodate the modern register grate. Possibly no staircase existed in the original south-east wing, that at the end of the screen serving for family and guests to gain access to the upper floors.

Upstairs, we note the woodwork and other details on the south-east and south-west wings, corresponding in date (late seventeenth century) with Richard Stephens's alterations; also the plaster-vaulted priest's cell over the porch, with its carved cornice and armoured door **between it and the bed-**

room adjoining. There is another fine chimney-piece in Sir Philip Sydney's room.

The chapel I believe to have been built by Richard; if so, this will go far to explain the curious assemblage of odds and ends probably brought from the Priory, and built in or perched in all sorts of odd positions in the tower and elsewhere.

Persons residing in the neighbourhood recollect the west door under the tower being used by the public, the south porch giving access to the family seats which were immediately within it.

NOTES ON CHAVENAGE AND THE STEPHENS FAMILY.

BY THE REV. W. H. SILVESTER DAVIES, M.A.,

Vicar of Horsley.

THE interesting manor house of Chavenage was built in the reign of Elizabeth, in the year 1576, by Edward Stephens, a member, Debrett says, of a "very ancient and honourable Gloucestershire family" who then owned the manor. We find his initials and those of Joan, his wife, as well as the above date, on the labels of the hood-moulding on either side of the principal door.

Edward Stephens, who was also lord of the manors of Eastington and Alkerton, would seem to have been very fond of building, for he is said to have built the manor house at Eastington in 1578, *i.e.* only two years afterwards. A plate of the house at Eastington appears in Fosbroke's *Gloucestershire*. It was burnt down in the last century, and levelled to the ground in 1778, and the materials dispersed and sold. In this fire most of the family papers were destroyed. I must mention that there is a tradition among the descendants of the Stephens family that Chavenage was built by Queen Elizabeth's favourite, the Earl of Essex, to receive his royal mistress in on one of her progresses. I venture to think, however, that this can hardly have been the case, as, independently of the testimony of the initials above stated, there is no evidence of Essex ever having owned this property. Possibly he may have persuaded Edward Stephens to build the house with a view to entertaining the Queen, but so far as I can gather Elizabeth never came here. Had she done so, we may be sure that in a house where so many rooms are associated with notable people the room occupied by her would be identified. The Lord Essex whose name appears on one of the doors upstairs was probably the

parliamentary general of that name, and not the "noble traytour," Elizabeth's favourite.

While on this subject it may be well to state that the names of the distinguished persons on the doors of some of the rooms, *e.g.* Sir Philip Sidney, Lord Leicester, Oliver Cromwell, General Ireton, Queen Anne, and others, have been placed there in recent times. Oliver Cromwell never was at Chavenage. A picture of him used to hang in the room which now bears his name, but the room itself was formerly called the "tapestry room." Queen Anne, too, so far as is known, never honoured Chavenage with her presence, but the beautifully carved bedstead and coverlet in the room called after her were given by the queen to her physician, Sir Edward Hannes, whose wife was descended from the Stephens family.

Chavenage was part of the manor of Horsley, which belonged to the priory of Bruton in Somersetshire. There was a cell of this monastery at Horsley, on the south side of the parish church, but of which there are now no remains above ground. It seems to have been a very small foundation, and long before the dissolution of monasteries was without prior or brethren. The manor, however, remained in the possession of the priory of Bruton until the great religious upheaval in the reign of Henry VIII., when it was granted in 1542 to Sir Thomas Seymour, and on his attainder to Sir Walter Denys, of Dyrham, in this county, in 1553, whose son, Richard, sold it to the Stephenses.

This family claimed descent from one Fitz Stephen, the captain of the vessel which brought William the Norman to our shores. His son was captain of the "White Ship" in which the children of Henry I. were drowned.

In the reign of Henry II., Ralph Fitz Stephen and his brother William were joint high sheriffs of Gloucestershire for four years, beginning in 1171, and William Fitz Stephen was high sheriff in 1175, "and so continued thirteen years together."¹

¹ Rudder's *Gloucestershire*.

Another Fitz Stephen, Robert, perhaps a brother of the foregoing, accompanied Strongbow in his invasion of Ireland in 1172.

The pedigree, however, is imperfect until we come to Henry Stephens, in the 16th century, variously described as of Frocester¹ and of Eastington.²

He married Alice, the daughter and co-heiress of Edward Lugg, of Lugwardine in Herefordshire, and had issue Edward Stephens, who bought the manors of Eastington, Alkerton, and Horsley, and, as already stated, built houses at the first and last-named places, in 1578 and 1576 respectively.

He married Joan, the daughter and heiress of Richard (or Edward)³ Fowler of Stonehouse. Her arms (*quarterly azure and or, on the first quarter a hawk's lure and line of the second*) may be seen on the mantelpiece of the hall.

Edward Stephens, who died 22nd October, 1587, had, besides several daughters, three sons: Richard, lord of the manors of Eastington, Alkerton, Fretherne, and Horsley; James, a clothier of Eastington, and Thomas, of the Middle Temple. Thomas, who was attorney general to Prince Henry and Prince Charles, purchased the manor of Lypiatt in 1610 of John Throckmorton, and, by his wife Elizabeth, daughter and co-heiress of John Stone of London, became the ancestor of the Stephenses of Sodbury, Lypiatt, and Cherington. Lypiatt, now the property of Sir John Dorington, Bart., M.P., remained in the Stephens family for five generations, and the tombs of many of them are in Stroud parish church and churchyard.

But to return to Richard, the eldest son of Edward Stephens. By his wife Margaret, daughter of Edward St. Loe, of Kington, Wiltshire, he had, besides other issue, Nathaniel, the member of the Stephens family around whom so much of the historical or (shall I say?) legendary interest of Chavenage is gathered.

This Nathaniel Stephens was born in 1589, and was ten years old at the death of his father. He was M.P. for

¹ Fosbroke. ² Rudder. ³ Rudder.

Gloucestershire in 1628-9, and from 1640-48, and on the outbreak of the civil war zealously espoused the cause of the Parliament, and used all his local influence on that side, raising a regiment of horse, of which he was colonel.

It has been said that the families of Cromwell and Ireton, his son-in-law, were related by marriage to the Stephens family, but I have not been able to discover that this was so, at least until some time after the Restoration, when a Hester Stephens, of the Lypiatt branch of the family, married a first cousin once-removed of the Lord Protector.

The late Rev. R. W. Huntley, of Boxwell, published in 1845 a poem called *Chavenage*, in which he describes Colonel Stephens as giving a reluctant consent to the execution of the King. As many of the members of our Society may not have seen the poem, I will give a brief outline of the story as narrated by Mr. Huntley in the preface to his work.

It happened that Colonel Stephens was keeping Christmas, 1648, at Chavenage, and in the midst of the festivity Ireton arrived at the house to press his instant attendance in Parliament to support by his vote and influence the intended measures against the King. His sister is said to have urged him to withhold his consent, and to have foretold the extinction of his line, should he become implicated in the murder of Charles.

Ireton, seconded by Robert Stephens, the colonel's brother, spent the night in entreating him to comply; and at length, though Nathaniel's feelings were in accordance with his sister's arguments, he allowed himself to be overruled, and, giving a reluctant assent, departed with Ireton.

In the following May he was seized with a lingering sickness, of which he died in the very year of the restoration of Charles II., 1660, after expressing his regret for having participated in the King's death.

Thus far circumstances have the semblance of fact; but upon these a legendary tale has been founded.

When all the relatives had assembled for the funeral, and their several well-known equipages were crowding the court-

yard, the household were surprised to observe that another coach, most splendidly ornamented and drawn by black horses, was approaching the door with great solemnity. When it arrived, the shade of the Colonel clad in his shroud glided into the carriage, and the door instantly closing upon him the coach rapidly withdrew from the house, not, however, with such speed but that there was time to perceive that the driver was a beheaded man arrayed in royal vestments, with the Garter upon his leg, and the Star of that illustrious Order upon his breast. No sooner had the coach arrived at the gateway of the manor court than the whole appearance vanished in flames of fire.

As to the latter part of the story I shall say nothing. Of course Chavenage must have its ghost, like every house laying claim to a respectable antiquity. And certainly it is far better that the ghost should drive away in a carriage and pair than roam about the rooms and passages of the house.

But the historical, or what purports to be the historical, part of the story rests on too slender a foundation to be accepted without question. For I am bound to say that there seems no evidence to show that Nathaniel Stephens had any share in the King's death; indeed, the evidence points rather the other way.

In the first place, we find him, in a speech delivered by him in his place in Parliament only a few months before, speaking of the decapitation of the king as "a strange cuer." He says: "Some speake of a strange cuer: they would cutt of the heade to save the body; but as that is impossible in the naturall body, so it is unlikely in the politicke body."

Again, in a book published in 1660—the year of the Restoration—called *England's Black Tribunnall* giving an account of the King's trial, Stephens' name does not appear on the list of the members of the court that tried him, nor amongst those who were present when sentence was passed.

Further, we find that his eldest surviving son married in 1654 a daughter of Sir Hugh Cholmondeley, of Whitby Hall,

Knight and Baronet, M.P. for Scarborough, who was a staunch royalist.

Sir Hugh had, at first, espoused the cause of the Parliament, but, once convinced that the principles of the Reformation were in no danger, he returned to his allegiance to the King, was made governor of Scarborough, and held the castle for more than a year against the parliamentary forces, his wife attending to the wounded. In 1645, through want of ammunition, he surrendered on most honourable terms and went into exile till 1649, when his brother, Lord Cholmondeley, of Vale Royal, in Cheshire, interceded with the "rulers of the kingless kingdom" and he was restored to his forfeited estates. In June, 1654, Sir Hugh and his lady went to London—no inconsiderable journey in those days—to attend the wedding of their daughter Anne with Richard, the eldest son of Nathaniel Stephens.

It is almost inconceivable that one who had earned for himself the name of "the heroic cavalier" should have sanctioned by his presence such a union, at a time, too, when political feeling ran so high, had Nathaniel Stephens been a regicide!

I am inclined, then, to think that there is grave reason to doubt the historical accuracy of Mr. Huntley's poem, and that if, as has been said, Ireton ever was despatched "to whet the colonel's almost blunted purpose," he returned to London after a fruitless journey.

Nathaniel Stephens married Catherine, daughter of Robert Beale, of Priors Marston, Warwickshire, "clerke of the councele to Queen Elizabeth"—her arms, *sable, on a chevron, between three griffins' heads erased argent, three estoiles gules*, are on the mantelpiece in the hall which was probably erected by her husband.

They had a numerous family—Henry, who predeceased his father and was unmarried; Richard, who succeeded to the family estates; Robert, a sergeant-at-law, who died unmarried; and several daughters, one of whom, Abigail, married, as his second wife, Sir Edward Harley, of Brampton

Bryan, Herefordshire, and was the mother of Queen Anne's minister, Robert Harley, first Earl of Oxford, whose room is still to be seen at Chavenage.

Nathaniel Stephens' eldest surviving son, Richard, as already stated, married Anne, eldest daughter of Sir Hugh Cholmondeley, of Whitby, in July, 1654, and died in 1678, aged 58, leaving a large family.

He was succeeded by his eldest son Nathaniel, High Sheriff of Gloucestershire in 1698, who married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Francis Pemberton, Lord Chief Justice of England, and died in 1732.

Nathaniel Stephens left a numerous family and was succeeded by three of his sons in succession, none of whom left any issue: Richard, who died in 1775; Robert, Rector of Eastington; and Henry, who married Ann, daughter of the Rev. Richard Huntley, Rector of Boxwell, Gloucestershire.

Henry, the last of the Stephens family in the direct male line, died at Chavenage, 25th January, 1795, and was buried in Eastington Church, where there is a mural monument erected by his widow.

He left his possessions, after his widow's death, to the descendants of his aunt, Elizabeth Packer, a daughter of Richard Stephens and Anne Cholmondeley.

Elizabeth Packer had married her cousin, John Packer of Shellingford Manor, Berks, whose mother was a Stephens, and their only daughter, Anne, married Sir Edward Harnes, of Westminster.

The sole issue of this marriage, Temperance, a ward in Chancery, eloped with John Willis, of Redlingfield Hall, Eye, Suffolk. This escapade gave rise to a remarkable legal decision, for the Chancellor held that he could not punish the gentleman because, as he rode behind his *fiancée* and on her horse, *she eloped with him, and not he with her!*

Their only surviving son Henry, who first entered the Royal Navy, but was afterwards ordained and became Rector of Little Sodbury and Vicar of Wapley, Gloucestershire, married Jane, daughter of Richard Lubbock, of North

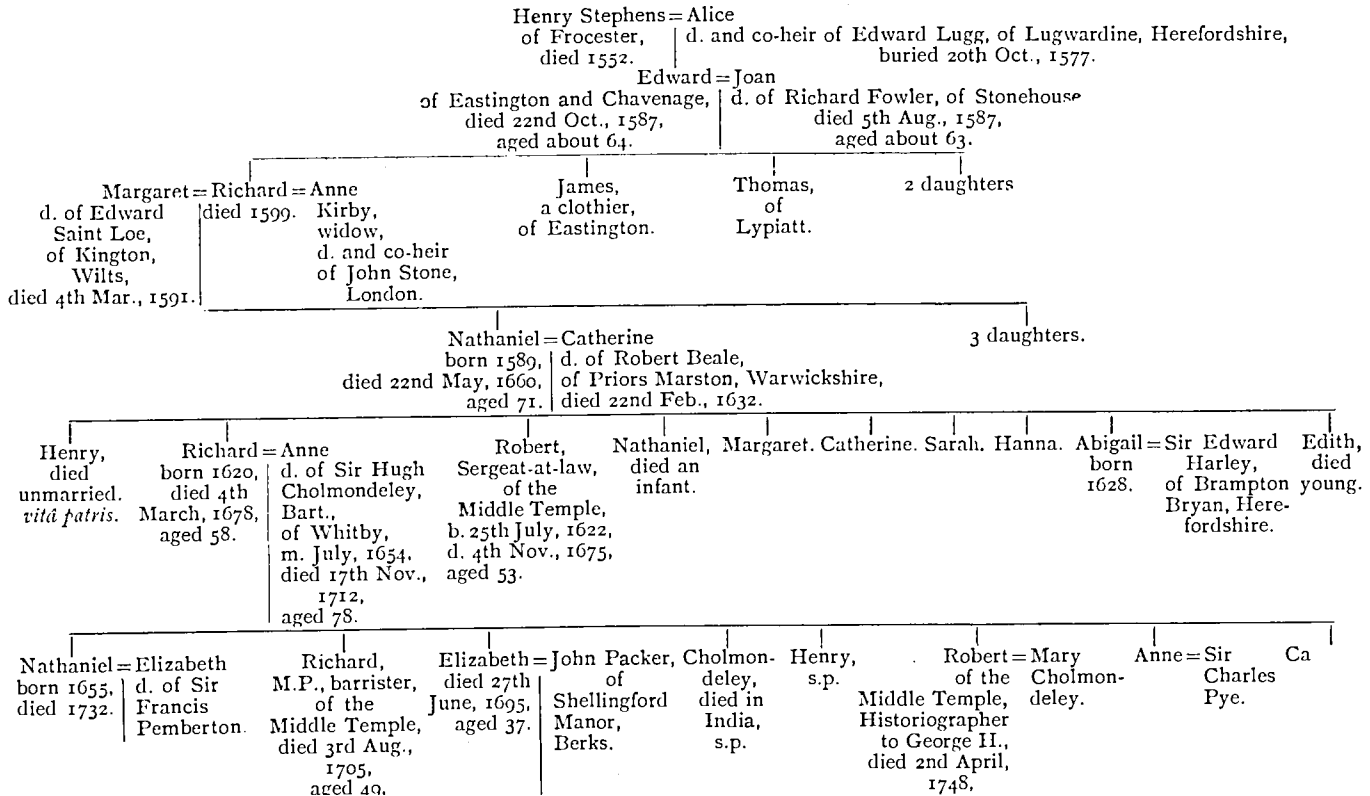
Walsham, Norfolk. They had a numerous family, and their son, Henry Hannes Willis, inherited Chavenage on the death of Henry Stephens' widow in 1801. In accordance with the provisions of his cousin's will he had to drop his own name and arms, and adopt those of Stephens only. He became a monk and died at La Trappe, Normandy, in 1822, making the children of his sister, Mrs. Richmond Shute, his heirs. The manor went first to his nephew, Henry Richmond Shute, who died unmarried in the following year, and then to his niece, Alice Elizabeth Shute, who married the Rev. Maurice Fitz Gerald Townshend, J.P. and D.L., of Castle Townshend, co. Cork, and Vicar of Thornbury, in Gloucestershire. Mr. Townshend took the name and arms of Stephens by Royal License, 30th December, 1826. They had issue a son, Henry John, and two daughters. Chavenage, however, passed into the hands of Mr. Holford, of Weston Birt, and was sold by him in 1891 to Captain Lowsley Williams, its present owner, by whose courtesy our Society was lately enabled to visit it.

Until 1869, the house was full of the old furniture, tapestries, pictures, and china, with other valuable relics and curiosities, but a deplorable sale in that year scattered most of these memorials of bygone times.

One may be allowed to be thankful that, if the manor was to pass from the possession of the family which were its owners for some three hundred years, it should have for its present owner one who thoroughly appreciates the historical memories which cluster round the old house. I cannot finish this short and imperfect account of Chavenage and the Stephens family without expressing my grateful thanks to Mrs. Pierrepont Mundy for her kindness in furnishing me with many particulars about her family and the home of her childhood.

PEDIGREE OF THE STEPHENS FAMILY.

Showing the devolution of the Manor of Horsley.



Richard, bapt. 1698, died 1775, s.p.
 Nathaniel, bapt. 1699, died 1776, s.p.
 Robert, born 1704, Rector of Eastington, s.p.
 Henry = Ann, born 1710, d. of Richard Huntley, Rector of Boxwell, Gloucestershire, d. 18th May, 1801, aged 83. Last in the direct male line.
 Elizabeth. Mary. Catherine.

Anne = Sir Edward Hannes, born 1680, died 1710.
 mar. 1698, died 1701.

Temperance = John Willis of Redlingfield Hall, Eye, Suffolk, died 1764.

Henry = Jane, married 1765, died 4th June, 1791, aged 52.
 d. of Richard Lubbock, of North Walsham, Norfolk, died 10th April, 1798, aged 49.

Henry Hannes, took the name and arms of Stephens, 1801, died 1822, s.p.

Harriot = Richmond Shute, of Iron Acton, Gloucestershire.

Henry Richmond, died 1823, s.p.

Alice = Maurice FitzGerald Townshend, of Castle Townshend, co. Cork, and Vicar of Thornbury, Gloucestershire, took the name and arms of Stephens by Royal Licence 30th Dec., 1826, died 1st March, 1872.

Henry = Jane John Stephens, born 1827, married 1864, died 1869.
 Adeliza Clementina Hussey de Burgh

Geraldine = Pierrepont Henrietta Mundy, Major-General R.H.A.

Alice = Courtenay Gertrude John Vernon, third son of first Lord Lyveden, Rector of Grafton Underwood, Northamptonshire.